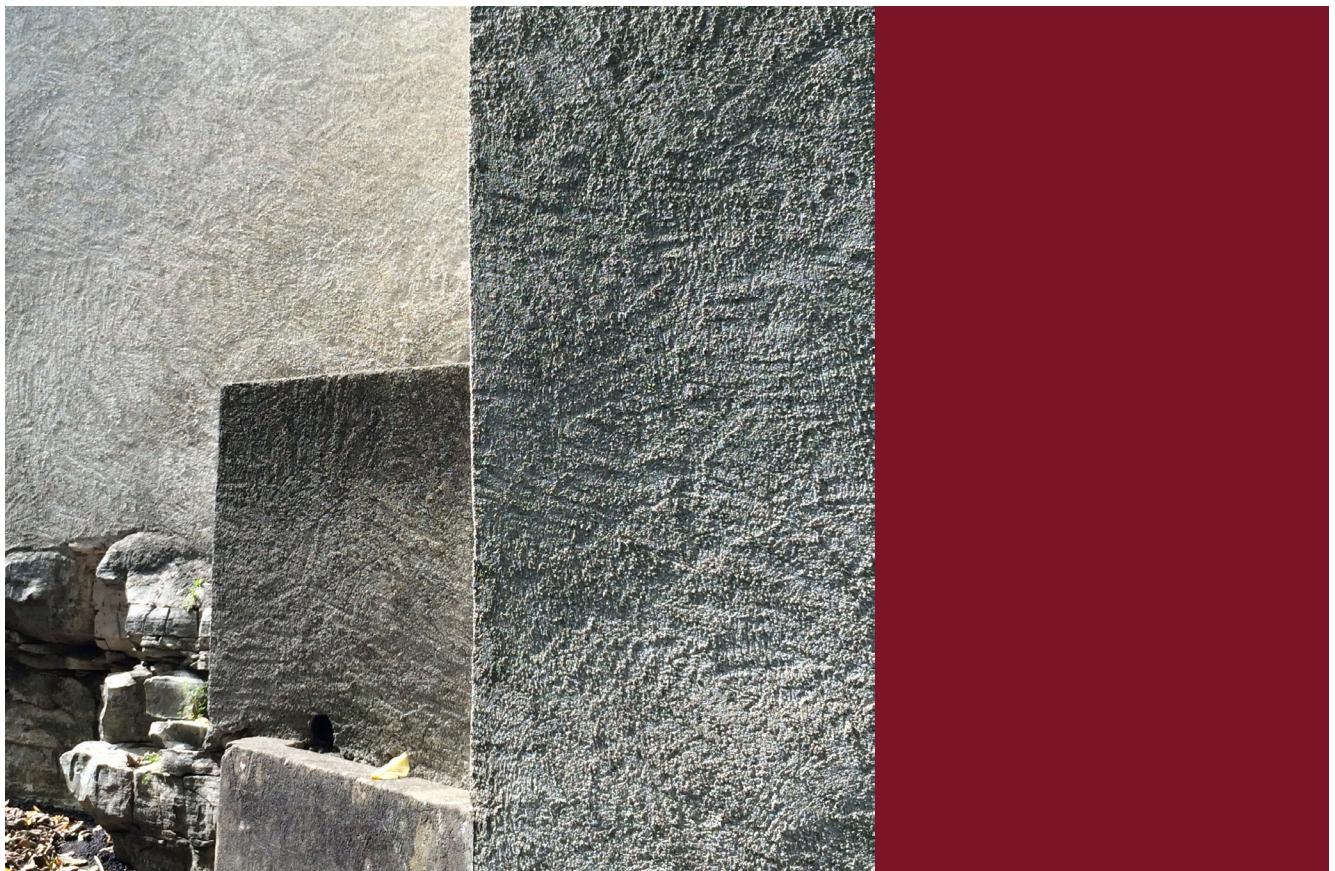


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"A Partial Synthesis": Debates on Architectural Realism



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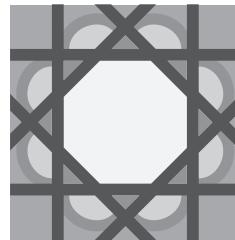
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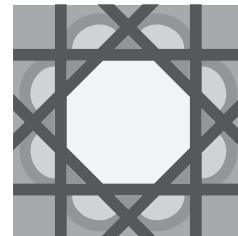
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"A Partial Synthesis": Debates on Architectural Realism

Editorial Irina Davidovici	3
Realism and Rationalism: An Italian-German Architectural Discourse Silvia Malcovati	5
In Search of Socialist Truthfulness: Debates on Realism in Soviet Architecture in the 1930-1950s Maria Silina	16
Auf der Suche nach Klarheit. Zum Realismus im Werk des Schweizer Architekten Hans Schmidt. Kathrin Siebert	28
Immagini della forma Il realismo di Asnago e Vender tra pittura e architettura. Giulio Bettini	46
A magic-real gap in architecture Carolina Dayer	59

Editorial

Irina Davidovici
ETH Zurich



bfo-Journal
2.2016

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Addressing the theme of architectural Realism, the second issue of the peer-reviewed academic journal *bfo-Journal* explores various ideological and historical instances that circumscribe this powerful, yet ambivalent aesthetic category. Anchored in literature and painting, the historical art movement of Realism that dominated art production in France between the 1840s and the 1870s was defined by Linda Nochlin as the ‘truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world, based on the meticulous observation of contemporary life’.¹ Bruno Reichlin presented Neo-Realism in 1950s Italian cinema and literature as ‘a surgical examination of matters of society, an almost documentary attention to the everyday, an adherence in thought and language to the social origins and personalities of the characters, a more-or-less direct criticism of current society and morals’.² The shift between these definitions indicates that, during the twentieth century, Realism became an increasingly politicised vehicle for varied, sometimes contradictory ideologies.

Realist architecture exists inasmuch as architecture is representational; by definition it pertains to representational arts – literature, painting, film – whereas architecture is ultimately anchored in reality. The paradox of Realism is that, in its attempt to conceptualise reality, it becomes excessively intellectualized and further isolated from it. As K. Michael Hays noted, architectural Realism is subject to ‘two contradictory claims, one aesthetic and one epistemological’, the former setting the work apart in ‘a realm of heightened aesthetic intensity,’ the latter connecting it to a particular historical and cultural situation and deriving its value from its response to this context.³ Alan Colquhoun placed this category at the charged boundary between architecture as ‘self-referential system’, with its own traditions and value systems, and as a ‘social product’ shaped by wider social and economic circumstances. Realism could only be understood as a ‘dialectical process, in which aesthetic norms are modified by external forces to achieve a partial synthesis’.⁴

The five scholarly articles featured in the current issue add to this debate three case studies of Realism in specific historical and cultural contexts, bracketed by two surveys discussing the wider circulation of independent, in fact contradictory, understandings of Realism. Silvia Malcovati’s comprehensive essay examines cultural exchanges and imports between the Italian and German Realist discourses from the nineteenth century until the twenty-first, testifying to the notion’s continued relevance. In relation

¹ Linda Nochlin, *Realism. Style and Civilisation*, (Baltimore: Penguin, 1971), p. 13.

² Bruno Reichlin, “Figures of Neorealism in Italian Architecture” (Part 1), in: *Grey Room*, no. 5 (2001), p. 80.

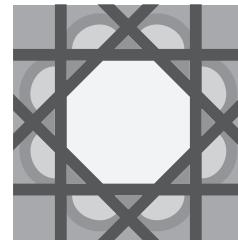
³ K. Michael Hays, ed., *Architecture Theory since 1968*, p. 254.

⁴ Alan Colquhoun, “Rules, Realism, and History,” in: *Essays in architectural criticism: Modern Architecture and Historical Change* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1981), pp. 67, 74.

to Socialist Realism, Maria Silina investigates the influence of critics and theorists on the Soviet artistic and architectural production in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. Katrin Siebert examines the influence of Socialist Realism in the work of Swiss architect Hans Schmidt, while Giulio Bettini investigates the theoretical and pictorial manifestations of Realism into the Milanese architecture of Mario Asnago and Claudio Vender. Finally, Caroline Dayer applies the Italian and German cultural dialogue to an examination of Magic Realism, from its origins in the works of Franz Roh and, in literature, Massimo Bontempelli, extending to the architecture of Mario Ridolfi and Carlo Scarpa. We hope that, viewed as a corpus, these five essays further the understanding of architectural Realism as a ‘partial synthesis’ of aesthetics and epistemology, the theory and the practice of architecture.

Realism and Rationalism: An Italian-German Architectural Discourse

Silvia Malcovati
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New Realism's Architectural Provocation

Renowned Italian intellectuals from different disciplines reacted with interest and engagement to the *Manifesto of New Realism*, published in 2012 by Turin philosopher Maurizio Ferraris.¹ That the manifesto had significant resonance also among architects is not surprising, since architecture is 'realistic' in its nature: the physical presence of built works, their visibility and livability, have throughout history been the main engine of reflections, theoretical elaborations and evolution of the discipline.

Goethe's maxim 'one should not search behind phenomena, since they themselves are the doctrine', could apply as a motto for realism.² Instead of the abstract commitment to artistic ideals and their theories, realism implies taking a closer look, 'to well inspect' – in Goethe's words – existing things, to dwell on them, to capture their individuality and phenomenological peculiarity.³

Indeed Ferraris proposes – in reaction to the anti-realist and de-objectifying perspective of postmodernism – a return to reality, in its various aspects, as the field of a 'possible and legitimate knowledge'.⁴ On the basis of the three key categories of 'Ontology', 'Critics' and 'Enlightenment', new realism refers to a stable external world, independent of conceptual schemes and governed by its own laws. It foresees the potential to criticise and transform this world for the better and, lastly, trusts in knowledge as a tool of progress and emancipation.⁵

From this perspective, realism offers in architecture the chance to devise, on the basis of what exists – cities and buildings, theories and projects – a mode of knowledge as deliberate conceptual activity, in continuity with history, but aimed at the future, 'in which each generation can capitalize on the discoveries of previous generations'.⁶

Thus an intense debate between philosophers and architects has more recently aimed to systematise and deepen the inter- and trans-disciplinary moments of this discourse, allowing the notion of realism to emerge as a critical tool in thinking and building.⁷

As proposed by Ferraris, realism 'is a critical doctrine in two senses. In the Kantian sense of judging what is real and what is not, and in the Marxian one of transforming what is not right ... In realism, criticism is thus incorporated'.⁸

In this context, the Italian-German discourse on architecture plays a crucial role. If Italian modern architecture shows an extraordinarily strong dependence on German rationalism until the postwar period, conversely,

¹ The controversy on realism began in Italy with Maurizio Ferraris's article 'Ritorno al pensiero forte', *La Repubblica*, 8 August (2011), pp. 36–37 announcing the publication of the *Manifesto* (Bari: Laterza, 2012). As Ferraris writes in the introduction, the title 'New Realism' was established with German philosopher Markus Gabriel for a forthcoming international conference (Bonn 26–28 March 2012). The complete press review, including the series about new realism, published in the German weekly paper *Die Zeit* between April and July 2014, can be found on <https://nuovorealismo.wordpress.com/>.

² Max Necker (ed.), *Maximen und Reflexionen nach den handschriften des Goethe- und Schiller-Archivs* (Weimar: Verlag der Goethe Gesellschaft, 1907), no. 575, p. 125.

³ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Goethes Werke: Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften I*, vol. 13 (München: C. H. Beck, 1981), p. 227.

⁴ Ferraris, *Manifesto*, p. 79.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 29–31.

⁶ Ibid., p. 56.

⁷ Cf. among others: Silvia Malcovati, 'Dal Postmodernismo al Nuovo Realismo. Ritorno all'architettura della città / Von der Postmoderne zum neuen Realismus. Rückkehr zur Architektur der Stadt', in Michele Caja and Massimo Fagioli (eds.), *Nuovi architetti berlinesi / Neue Berliner Architekten* (Firenze: Aion edizioni, 2011), pp. 17–25; Silvia Malcovati et al. (eds.), *Architettura e realismo: riflessioni sulla costruzione architettonica della realtà* (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Maggioli, 2013); Silvia Malcovati et al. (eds.), *Nuovo realismo e architettura della città / New Realism and Architecture of the City* (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Maggioli, 2013); *Serbian Architectural Journal*, monographic issue *Architecture Utopia Realism*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2014); Ullrich Schwarz, 'Warum so autoritär?', *Die Zeit*, no. 17 (16 April 2014); Gen-

Italian architectural theories from the last fifty years have significantly influenced the thinking of German architects and are reflected by the reality of buildings.

Methodologically, these considerations require structuring the discussion into two levels: on the one hand they refer to the relationship between realism and rationalism in the history of modern and postwar architecture, and on the other hand they focus on the German-Italian relationship that finds its peculiar expression in a complex relationship of mutual reference and interpretation.

Both aspects were topics of discussion in an international conference in 2014, whose results, as yet unpublished, will be a constant reference for the argument proposed in this essay.⁹

tucca Canella and Elvio Manganaro (eds.), *Per una architettura realista* (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Maggioli, 2015); Paola Gregory (ed.), *Nuovo realismo/Postmodernismo. Dibattito aperto tra architettura e filosofia* (Roma: Officina Edizioni, 2016).

⁸ Ferraris, *Manifesto*, p. 61 and p. 63.

⁹ Die Provokation des Realen. Neuer Realismus und Rationalismus. Eine Deutsch-Italienische Debatte in Architektur und Philosophie/La provocazione del reale. Nuovo realismo e razionalismo. Un dibattito architettonico e filosofico tra Germania e Italia, Villa Vigoni, Menaggio, 31 March–3 April 2014.

¹⁰ Cf. Alan Colquhoun, 'Zwischen Architektur und Philosophie, Rationalismus 1750–1970', in Claus Baldus, Joseph-Paul Kleihues and Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani (eds.), *Das Abenteuer der Ideen: Architektur und Philosophie seit der industriellen Revolution* (Berlin: IBA, 1987), pp. 247–272, extracts in English in Andrew Peckham and Torsten Schmiedeknecht (eds.), *The Rationalist Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014) pp. 15–23. Cf. also Dennis Sharp, *The Rationalists: Theory and Design in the Modern Movement* (London: Architectural Press, 1978).

¹¹ If the term 'rationalist architecture' came to stand for modern architecture, and the modern movement was later seen as opposed to 'functionalism', the constituent elements of the concept were already present in the architectural debate of the late nineteenth century.

¹² Cf. Fritz Neumeyer, *Vom neuen Realismus zur neuen Sachlichkeit*, unpublished contribution to the above-mentioned conference in Villa Vigoni, 2014.

¹³ Cf. e.g. Christian Ludwig Stieglitz, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Baukunst der Alten* (Leipzig: Dyksche Buchh., 1834).

From Real to Rational: Realism and Rationalism as Origins of Modern Architecture

The understanding of realism in architecture is, from its outset during the late nineteenth century, indissolubly interwoven with the outcomes of rationalism.

If realism, as noted above, refers to what exists, to experience and perception, to the 'concrete' component of reality, then rationalism – with its philosophical origins in the culture of the Enlightenment – refers to reality rather as a world of general elements, laws and rules, formal paradigms and recurring typologies.¹⁰

In late nineteenth and twentieth century architecture, realism and rationalism appear thus as complementary positions, being adopted in a revisionist perspective by anti-academic movements which encouraged, against historicism and formalism, the proximity of art to the reality of life.¹¹

As pointed out by Fritz Neumeyer, the realistic attitude in architecture, or 'the provocation of the real' at the end of the nineteenth century, relativised the normativity of tradition on two opposite, but complementary points of view.¹²

On the one hand, the actual physical encounter with the artworks and buildings of the past – of antiquity but also of the medieval building tradition – broke down classical dogma in favour of the equality of all historical styles. Styles themselves were no longer considered according to a formal criterion, but to more general principles, such as character, construction and purpose.¹³ On the other hand, industrialization led to the use of metal structures and glass surfaces in the building industry and to the appreciation of functional buildings, suggesting that a new aesthetics, supposedly appropriate for the new materials, could be attained.

This equivalence of styles and the search for an architectural form suited to technical buildings, are the basis of the dialectic between realism and rationalism.

A building that can be regarded as a forerunner and architectural manifesto of this dialectic in nineteenth century architecture is Schinkel's Bauakademie. Built as a brick–shell between 1832 and 1836, this building heralded a new approach to architecture, both from a technical and



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aesthetic point of view. Schinkel merged historical models, such as the brick Gothic architecture of the Brandenburg March and the pilaster-structured construction of the Renaissance Palazzo, with the design principles of the most modern English factory buildings he visited during his trip to England in 1826 (Figs. 1, 2).¹⁴ The epochal achievement of Schinkel's Bauakademie was to give an artistic and architectural shape to the modern functional building, emphasising construction and encouraging a simple, economical, but powerful facade design. After Schinkel, the issue of the relationship between architectural form and construction became crucial, highlighting the great potential of a realist as well as a rationalist attitude, but also their limitations in a pragmatic and constructional object-oriented perspective.

These limitations have clearly been rejected by the architect and theorist Gottfried Semper. In the book *Der Stil* (1860), his 'practical aesthetics', derived from reality, is not realistic in the sense of a description of facts, but as a cultural practice in the broadest sense, including technique.¹⁵ Uniquely, at a time when construction and material become autonomous formal ideas of architectural objectification, Semper's architectural theory gives precedence to the symbolic dress, namely the spatial shell superimposed on the static solid core.¹⁶

But his position is constantly interpreted as materialistic: one could say that the entire debate on realism at the turn of the century basically developed from the understanding or misunderstanding of Semper's theories. It is the case of the Viennese architect Otto Wagner, who first put the term 'realism' at the center of an architectural theory agenda, true to the maxim: 'The realism of our time must permeate the nascent artwork'.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Wagner wrote about realism with a typical modernist attitude – based on an equivocal interpretation of Semper's theory – deriving form from construction and allowing the architectural world to emerge exclusively from material and structural conditions – thankfully, only in theory.¹⁸ Wagner's theoretical impoverishment and the internal contradictions of his argument are highlighted by Richard Streiter, who in response to his position gave the most significant contribution to a theory of realistic architecture at that time. Streiter rejected both Wagner's 'tectonic realism' or 'architectural verism', as well as Jugendstil's naturalism,¹⁹ proposing instead a 'healthy realism' characterised by 'truthfulness of expression and more honest solidity of means'.²⁰ Realism in architecture

¹⁴ Gottfried Riemann, *Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Reise nach England, Schottland und Paris im Jahre 1826* (München: C.H. Beck, 1986), p. 244.

¹⁵ Gottfried Semper, *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten oder praktische Ästhetik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Verlag für Kunst und Wissenschaft, 1860).

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 381–382.

¹⁷ Otto Wagner, 'Antrittsrede an der Akademie der bildenden Künste (1894)', in Otto Antonia Graf, *Das Werk des Wiener Architekten 1841–1918* (Zürich: gta, 1994), pp. 249–250.

¹⁸ Cf. Harry Francis Mallgrave, Otto Wagner. *Reflections on the Raiment of Modernity* (Santa Monica: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1993), esp. J. Duncan Berry, 'From Historicism to Architectural Realism', pp. 243–278; Harry Francis Mallgrave, 'From Realism to Sachlichkeit', pp. 281–321; Stanford Anderson, 'Sachlichkeit and Modernity', pp. 323–359.

¹⁹ Richard Streiter, *Architektonische Zeitfragen, eine Sammlung und Sichtung verschiedener Anschauungen, mit besonderer Beziehung auf Professor Otto Wagners Schrift „Moderne Architektur“* (Berlin–Leipzig: Cosmos, 1898), pp. 77–96.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 80.

Fig. 1

Eduard Gaertner, *Die Berliner Bauakademie*, Ölgemälde, 1868. (Public Domain as copyright protection period has expired.)

Fig. 2

Karl Friedrich Schinkel, *Cotton mills in Manchester*, 1826 [in Gottfried Riemann (ed.), *Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Reise nach England, Schottland und Paris im Jahre 1826* (München: C.H. Beck, 1986), p. 246].



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does not only mean ‘convenience, comfort, healthiness, in a word: *Sachlichkeit*’ as the rational-realists were proclaiming: ‘the character of a building’ – argues Streiter – ‘does not have to develop out of its intended purpose only, but also from the environment, from the nature of existing building materials, from the landscape and historically conditioned atmosphere’,²¹ i.e. from the cultural significance of place and users’ culture. This conclusion came as an epilogue to the debates on realism of the early 1900s. Josef Prestel’s committed contribution on ‘Realism and architecture’, as well as the essay ‘Realistische Architektur’ by Alfred Lichtwark, failed to add anything new to the discussion.²² When Lichtwark republished this essay two years later in a collection of his writings, he retitled the essay ‘Sachliche Baukunst’. This change, which replaces ‘realistic’ with ‘objective/rational’ and ‘architecture’ with ‘construction’, represents a significant semantic clarification.²³

The functionalism of the 1920s *Neues Bauen* follows a concept of reality in which the dialectic of art and life was uniquely focused on a purely rational and objective ‘spirit of the time’: the modern reality of mechanisation, typification and technique of contemporary industrial production. Adolf Behne describes this transition in an exemplary way in the chapter headings of his book *The Modern Functional Building* (1926): 1. ‘No longer a façade but a house’; 2. ‘No longer a house but shaped space’; 3. ‘No longer a shaped space but designed reality’.²⁴ This process does not stop with the farewell to historical architectural forms but evolves – especially in the German experience – into what Alan Colquhoun described as ‘an extreme schematicism, which transposes diagrams resulting from purely analytical operations into objects of the real, perceptual world’ (Fig. 3).²⁵

In parallel to this the Italian *Architettura razionale*, strongly influenced by the German masters Gropius, Mies and Hilberseimer and by the Bauhaus teaching method, fitted into the framework of international rationalism.²⁶ Edoardo Persico speaks, not surprisingly, of the ‘frankly European intentions’ of early Italian rationalism.²⁷ Despite this initial dependence on German rationalism, Italian rational architecture – in the interpretation of the Lombard Group 7 and then nationwide one of M.I.A.R – displays

²¹ Richard Streiter, *Ausgewählte Schriften zur Ästhetik* (München: Delphin-Verlag, 1913), p. 32.

²² Josef Prestel, ‘Realism and Architecture’, *The architect Wiener Monatshefte for Building and Decorative Arts*, no. 4 (1900), pp. 32–33; Alfred Lichtwark, ‘Realistische Architektur’, *Pan*, no. 4 (1897–1898) p. 292.

²³ Alfred Lichtwark, *Palastfenster und Flügeltür* (Berlin: Cassirer, 1899), pp. 47–72.

²⁴ Adolf Behne, *Der moderne Zweckbau* (München: Drei Masken Verlag, 1926). Aldo Rossi made reference to this in the book Ezio Bonfanti et al., *Architettura Razionale* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1974), exhibition cat. of the 1973 Triennale in Milan.

²⁵ Cf. Alan Colquhoun, ‘Zwischen Architektur und Philosophie’, pp. 247–272, but adding: In the work of Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe, however, this schematic formalism was combined with more overt classical tendencies’.

²⁶ Cf. Enrico Mantero, *Giuseppe Terragni e la città del razionalismo italiano* (Bari: Dedalo, 1969) and Silvia Danesi and Luciano Patella (eds.), *Il razionalismo e l’architettura in Italia durante il fascismo* (Venezia: Edizioni La Biennale di Venezia, 1976).

²⁷ Edoardo Persico, ‘Punto e da capo per l’architettura’, *Domus* no. 83, (November 1934) p. 6, quoted in Giulia Veronesi, *Edoardo Persico. Tutte le opere (1923–1935)* (Milano: Edizioni di Comunità, 1964), pp. 303–323.

Fig. 3

Adolf Behne, *Der moderne Zweckbau* (München: Drei Masken Verlag, 1926), cover and pp. 148–149.

a specific realist connotation. This connotation manifested itself in the awareness of young architects that it was impossible ‘to renew Italian architecture by transplanting German manners, which are noble to be sure, but which are out of place among us’.²⁸ Instead, it was necessary to strengthen the relationship with history and the local context as constituent elements of the new architecture. ‘Tradition’ became the keyword of Italian rationalism, in reference to the willingness to root every project in existing reality, involving the city and its monuments.

As a final element of the prewar debate, in response to rationalist formalism, the notion of realism reemerged in theoretical architecture debates in the early 1930s, when the realist formulations proposed on the occasion of the first Congress of Soviet Writers in Moscow in 1934 were proclaimed as an ‘official’ creative method and then adopted in all artistic disciplines.²⁹ This transposition was an ambiguous operation caught between idealism and ideology, between innovative research and nostalgic historicism. If, in fact, socialist realism is proposed as a critical tool for overcoming *Sachlichkeit*’s functionalism and avant-garde’s technicality, it leads, with an amazing logical leap, to the opposite extreme: the most exasperated formalism, an exaltation of past greatness represented as monumentality. The Second World War marked a sharp break in the discourse on realism, resetting the parameters of discussion, with the problem of reconstruction opening up new perspectives in architecture.

From Rational to Real: Postwar Neo-Realist Architecture of Reason

In postwar Germany, the International Style (in the West) and socialist realism (in the East) remained the dominant ideologies, with their respective formal references. Conversely, in the Italian architecture of the 1950s and 1960s a new discourse emerged, which changed the sources of the real with which architects could operate. These sources were no longer found in a normative technological reality outside architecture (the aircraft, the ship, the automobile, industry, technology, etc.), but in architecture itself as a social and cultural reality. Historical continuity, contextuality (for which the ‘city’ became a key word) and the use of familiar, even popular/vernacular elements became the dominant topics of a new realism. Its figurative language moved away from the compulsory abstractions of modernism, trying to define rationalism as an autonomous architectural tradition. For young Italian architects at the end of the 1950s, the concept of realism became programmatic, a decade later merging with the notion of an ‘architecture of reason’.

In 1949, the young Aldo Rossi enrolled at the Architecture faculty of the Milan Polytechnic and began his communist militancy. A trip to Moscow, organised by the party in 1951, had a long-lasting impact on his architectural imagery. In October 1955 he took part in the Communist Architects conference and in the same year he wrote an article with Guido Canella for the *L’Unità* newspaper, which remained unpublished, entitled ‘Towards a Realist Architecture’.³⁰ The article is presented as an ‘architec-

²⁸ Gruppo 7’s writings were published in *La Rassegna Italiana* from December 1926 to May 1927, republished in 1935 in *Quadrante*, no. 23 (March 1935) and no. 24 (April 1935), also in Enrico Mantero, *Giuseppe Terragni*, p. 58.

²⁹ Jean-Pierre Vouga, ‘L’architecture et le réalisme socialiste’, in *L’architecture d’aujourd’hui*, no. 158 (October-November 1971), pp. 48–53.

³⁰ Cf. Gentucca Canella and Elvio Manganaro (eds.), *Per una architettura realista*, pp. 20–34.

tural' participation in the ongoing 'discourse towards a realist art'. Its contents and critical approach marked the emerging of a discussion on realism in architecture in Italy immediately after the Second World War, in close connection with what was happening in literature, painting and cinema.³¹ Regarding architecture, realism was meant as a way to introduce values such as 'honesty, social commitment, national consciousness', to 'safeguard the morality of the works, although in formal attitudes they continued the frigidity and the hermetism of the rationalist period'.³² Rossi and Canella are however critical of the exponents of this neorealist architecture – among them Gardella, Albini, the BBPR, Quarini and Piccinato – whose 'empiric-spontaneous' ideas of realism did not reach, in their opinion, beyond the stylistic choices of using a popular vernacular architectural language, without a true understanding of the structural transformations of the city and territory.³³

The way towards a new realist architecture, according to Rossi and Canella, was rather to look back to tradition and 'to the models that have proven their ability to interpret the contents of the society that expressed them ... to latch on to tradition and recognise its humanist essence, its figurative and emotional connections, that are typical of its expressive language'.³⁴

³¹ The article refers in particular to Luchino Visconti's film *Senso* (1954) and Vasco Pratolini's novel *Metello* (1955).

³² Gentucca Canella and Elvio Manganaro (eds.), *Per una architettura realista*, pp. 23–25.

³³ Cf. Bruno Reichlin, 'Figures of Neorealism in Italian Architecture. Part 1', *Grey Room*, no. 5 (Autumn, 2001), pp. 78–101 and 'Part 2', *Grey Room*, no. 6 (Winter, 2002), pp. 110–133.

³⁴ Gentucca Canella and Elvio Manganaro (eds.), *Per una architettura realista*, p. 25.



4



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Fig. 4
Casabella-Continuità, no. 215 (1957), cover and p. 35.

Fig. 5
Casabella-Continuità, no. 262 (1962), monographic issue URSS, cover and p. 60.

Through this approach, the connection to typical and recurring elements of tradition came to the fore of discussions on architectural realism.

Also in 1955, Aldo Rossi joined the editorial staff of *Casabella-Continuità* magazine, whose former editor had been replaced by Ernesto Nathan Rogers in December 1953. Rogers aimed to overcome the dominant dogma of modernism, founding architecture on the ‘sense of history’ and the ‘world of life’ and opening a confrontation in a dialectical key, in the name of continuity, among all instances emerging in Italy at that time, swinging between International Style and neorealist regionalism, functionalism and socialist realism, rational architecture and the so-called ‘neoliberty’ (Figs. 4, 5).³⁵ Rogers’s position gave rise to sharp criticism in the international debate.³⁶ However his students, among them Aldo Rossi and Giorgio Grassi, were able to connect to these issues very directly and formulated in those years some of their most significant theoretical contributions, enabling them to obtain their teaching qualifications and build an international reputation.³⁷

In Aldo Rossi’s course syllabus for the academic year 1970–71 at the Milan Polytechnic, one of the key points concerns the issue of realism in architecture, under the title *The Architecture of Realism: Critical Realism and Socialist Realism*.³⁸ In this syllabus the reference to Italian neorealism was still present, but further in the background, while a more important role was given to socialist realism, with particular interest – certainly linked to Rossi’s biographical events – in architecture in the USSR and the GDR from a Marxist perspective.³⁹

The key notions of the syllabus were ‘realism and choices of architecture’, i.e. ‘realism and *Tendenza*’. ‘To ask yourself about this problem’ means, according to Rossi, ‘to consider the problem of the relationship between architectural rationalism and realism: meaning by the first a rational and progressive choice with respect to the autonomous construction of the discipline ...; and by the second a definition of those aspects of the discipline that link it to reality’.⁴⁰

This dual research, between rationalism and realism, which connects architecture with cinema, literature and the visual arts, was well described in the XV Triennale di Milano (1973), curated by Rossi under the title *Architettura Razionale*.⁴¹ The exhibition contained all the shades of Rossi’s realistic formulations: from the legacy of the Modern Movement, according to the lesson of Rogers, to socialist realism, through cinematographic neorealism, up to the recovery of ‘magic’ realism of metaphysical painting in the visual arts, in a composite and varied combination.

This weave is manifest above all in the movie *Ornament and Crime* written by Rossi with Gianni Braghieri and Franco Raggi and presented at the Triennale, where – in a complex assembly of neorealist movie sequences with texts by Adolf Loos, Walter Benjamin, Karl Marx and Hans Schmidt – paintings by Sironi alternate with images of Lenin’s funeral (Fig. 6).⁴² Also the article ‘For a New Realism in Architecture’ by Renato Nicolini, published in *Controspazio* in 1973 as a review of Rossi’s Triennale, identified ‘the deepest meaning of the exhibition’ in its ‘clear vocation to realism’. This realism, unlike the ‘poor and substantially brief research of postwar realism, soon led to passionate outbursts or mediocre populist myths’, was necessarily related to ‘European rationalism’.⁴³

³⁵ Cf. Gabriella Lo Ricco and Mario Viganò (eds.), *Ernesto N. Rogers. Editoriali di Architettura* (Rovereto: Zandonai, 2009) and e.g. the issues of *Casabella-Continuità*, no. 215 (April 1957), no. 255 (September 1961) monographic issue *Yugoslavia* and no. 262 (April 1962) monographic issue *U.R.S.S.*

³⁶ Cf. Reyner Banham, ‘The Italian Retreat from Modern Architecture’, *The Architectural Review*, no. 747 (April 1959), pp. 231–235 and Ernesto Nathan Rogers, ‘L’evoluzione dell’architettura. Risposta al custode dei frigidaires’, *Casabella-Continuità*, no. 228 (June 1959).

³⁷ Cf. Aldo Rossi, *L’architettura della città* (Padova: Marsilio, 1966) and Giorgio Grassi, *La costruzione logica dell’architettura* (Padova: Marsilio, 1967).

³⁸ Gruppo di ricerca diretto da Aldo Rossi, *Programma per l’attività didattica dell’anno accademico 1971–1972*, typescript published in Giancarlo Motta ‘Caratteri tipici in circostanze tipiche’, in Silvia Malcovati, et al. (eds.), *Architettura e realismo*, pp. 330–331.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 331. Marxist criticism reached Italy in particular through György Lukács’s thought. Cf. György Lukács, *Saggi sul realismo* (Torino: Einaudi, 1950); György Lukács, *Ese-tetica* (Torino: Einaudi, 1970). Cf. also Mary Louise Lobsinger, ‘That Obscure Object of Desire: Autobiography and Repetition in the Work of Aldo Rossi’, *Grey Room*, no. 8 (Summer 2000), pp. 38–61.

⁴⁰ Giancarlo Motta, ‘Caratteri tipici in circostanze tipiche’, p. 331.

⁴¹ Ezio Bonfanti, et. al., *Architettura razionale*, pp. 57–60.

⁴² An important contribution in the debate, evident in the Triennale, is certainly the relationship between Aldo Rossi and Hans Schmidt: Cf. Ursula Suter, *Hans Schmidt 1893–1972* (Zürich: gta Verlag, 1993) and Angelika Schnell, ‘The Socialist Perspective of the XV Triennale di Milano. Hans Schmidt’s Influence on Aldo Rossi’, *Candide*, no. 2 (July 2010), pp. 33–72. In 1974 Rossi translated in Italian Schmidt’s book *Beiträge zur Architektur*, published in Berlin in 1965: Aldo Rossi (ed.), *Hans Schmidt. Contributi all’architettura. 1924–1964* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1974).

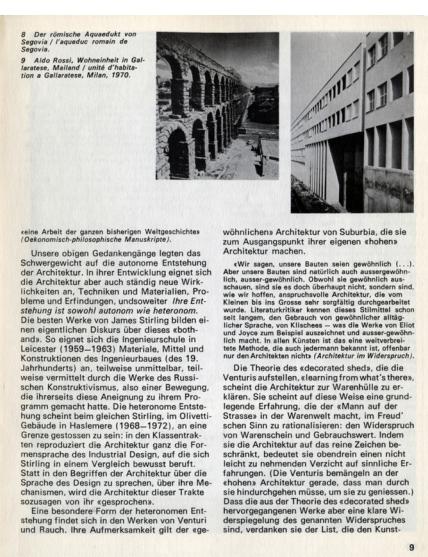
⁴³ Renato Nicolini, ‘Per un nuovo rea-



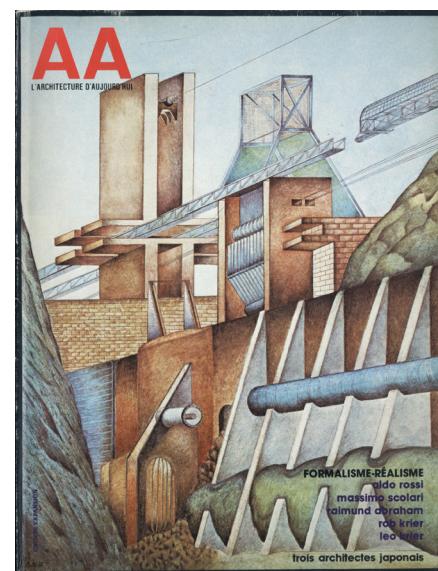
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Fig. 6
Ornamento e delitto, a film for the 15th Triennale Milan, 1973, selected frames.

Fig. 7
Archithese, no. 19 (1976). Monographic issue *Realismus-réalisme*, cover and p. 9.

Fig. 8
L'architecture d'Aujourd'hui, no. 190 (1977), monographic issue *Formalisme-Réalisme*, cover and p. 41.

Fig. 9
Robert Delevoy (ed.), *Rational Architecture Rationnelle: The reconstruction of the European City* (Bruxelles: A.A.M., 1978), cover and p. 67.

Rossi's position was not shared by everyone. In 1975, an issue of the Swiss magazine *archithese*, edited by Stanislaus von Moos and featuring the work of American architects Denise Scott-Brown and Robert Venturi, represented a different point of view. Von Moos defined 'realism' as the attitude of the American anti-modernist architecture of Venturi and Scott-Brown, which emphasises the daily reality instead of the great utopias and considers the project uniquely as an awareness of the real, and not as a possible alternative.⁴⁴

Just one year later, however, in issue 19, the viewpoint of the editorial board seems radically changed, aligned with Aldo Rossi's formulations (Fig. 7).⁴⁵ This issue, introduced by Bruno Reichlin's and Martin Steinmann's editorial 'On the Immanent Reality of Architecture', sought a definition of realism connected with the formulations of socialist realism and Marxist aesthetics. Lukács's dialectic notion of architecture as a real fact, stemming from a 'social reality' and at the same time from a 'formal reality', seemed to grasp the specific qualities of realist architecture better than any other.⁴⁶ As the socialist realism that developed before the Second World War was opposed to the materialist realism of *Neues Bauen*, in the same way a 'rational' realism, which rehabilitates modernism, flanking it with a new historical dimension, opposed the 'impressionist' realism of American studies. This idea was reconfirmed in 1977 in the monographic issue of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui, Formalisme-Réalisme*, edited by Bernard Huet, with a further decisive turn as Massimo Scolari and Rob Krier moved centre stage and the Americans disappeared definitively (Fig. 8).⁴⁷

After the initial fascination for socialist architecture and neorealist regionalism, at the end of the 1970s Italian realism seemed to identify on the one hand with the rationalist *Tendenza* and, on the other hand, with the rising phenomenon of 'urban reconstruction', which led to the *Rational Architecture: The Reconstruction of the European City* exhibition the following year (Fig. 9).⁴⁸

The rise of postmodernism, celebrated at the first Venice Architecture Biennale in 1980, under the title *The Presence of the Past*,⁴⁹ marked the culmination and at the same time the conclusion of the debate. This can be understood clearly by comparing Paolo Portoghesi's liberating essay 'La fine del proibizionismo' with Wolfgang Pehnt's Biennale review on the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* entitled 'Postmoderne als Lunapark'.⁵⁰ From that moment on it is difficult to recognise clear theoretical positions: the boundaries faded into a plurality of languages, united by the common label of post-modern or rather 'after-modern' architecture.⁵¹

From Postmodernism to New Realism: Back to the Architecture of the City

The relationship between Italy and Germany plays an important role in this context, insofar as all these issues became the core of the architectural debate in Berlin – as well as of the building policies – before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. With respect to the modernist legacy,

lismo in architettura', *Controspazio*, no. 6 (December 1973), pp. 15–16.

⁴⁴ *Archithese*, no. 13 (1975), *Realismus in der Architektur. Las Vegas etc.*

⁴⁵ *Archithese*, no. 19 (1976), *Realismus-réalisme*. On the two opposite interpretations of the notion of realism in those years, the 'populist' interpretation of post-modernism, and the 'neo-rationalist' one of the *Tendenza*, cf. Jorge Silvetti, 'On Realism in Architecture', *The Harvard Architectural Review*, no. 1, (Spring 1980), pp. 11–31.

⁴⁶ Cf. György Lukács, *Estetica*, p. 1210.

⁴⁷ *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 190 (April 1977), *Formalisme-Réalisme*. Cf. also Léon Krier, 'Qualche idea sul realismo', *Casabella*, no. 420 (December 1976), pp. 20–27.

⁴⁸ Cf. Léon Krier, 'The Reconstruction of the City', in Robert Delevoy (ed.), *Rational Architecture: The Reconstruction of the European City* (Bruxelles: A.A.M., 1978). In March 1975, the exhibition *Rational Architecture: The Architecture of the City*, took place in London, arranged by the AA School London and curated by Leon Krier as an extension of Aldo Rossi's Triennale.

⁴⁹ Paolo Portoghesi (ed.), *La presenza del passato. Prima mostra internazionale di architettura* (Venezia: La Biennale di Venezia, 1980).

⁵⁰ Paolo Portoghesi, 'La fine del proibizionismo', ibid., p. 9; Wolfgang Pehnt, 'Die Postmoderne als Lunapark. Erste Architekturbiennale in Venedig', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (18 August 1980), p. 17.

⁵¹ Cf. Heinrich Klotz, *Die Revision der Moderne. Postmoderne Architektur 1960–1980*, exhibition cat., DAM (München: Prestel-Verlag, 1984).



10

the architectural debate in Berlin focused on the issue of architectural and urban tradition, and in particular on the modernist refusal to deal with the past as a positive resource, as well as on its postmodernist ironic celebration. The issue of realism arose here in all its topicality. What is the reality with which architecture can establish relationships, when the confrontation with its own history is no longer possible as a reference? This opens the field to disciplinary discussions between autonomy and heteronomy, between typological and iconographic interpretations of architecture, between permanence and contingency, between a ‘narrative’ method that uses the image of the past as a visual and formal device, and a ‘rationalist’ one, which also looks at historical architecture, albeit not in search of images and allusions, but rather for general and operational design categories (Fig. 10).

In this context, Italian culture of the 1960s and 1970s provided a significant contribution for the Berlin architectural debate, through books and magazines, but also through cultural exchanges, meetings and international exhibitions.⁵² After Rossi’s Triennale in 1973, with contributions from Oswald Mathias Ungers, Joseph-Paul Kleihues and the Krier brothers, exchanges became intense and continuous, especially with Rossi, Grassi, Carlo Aymonino and Massimo Scolari.⁵³ In the mid 1970s the discussion reached Berlin, first with the *Sommerakademien* organised by Ungers with Cornell University and the IDZ (*Internationales Design Zentrum Berlin*) in 1977 and 1978,⁵⁴ and then with the IBA (*Internationale Bauausstellung*): This extraordinary workshop of ideas, projects and realizations which from 1979 to 1987, under the direction of Kleihues and Hardt-Walther Hämer, faced for the first time since the postwar reconstruction the problem of the city and of its architecture, dialectically connecting the main theoretical contributions of the last decades.⁵⁵

IBA’s assumptions, with its open and dialectic confrontation including different visions of architecture and the city, served as base for Berlin’s ‘critical’ reconstruction after reunification, under the guidance of

⁵² Regarding the Italy–Germany relationship cf. Silvia Malcovati, ‘Incontri ravvicinati del (terzo) tipo’, in Michele Caja, Martina Landsberger and Silvia Malcovati (eds.), *Tipo forma figura. Il dibattito internazionale 1970–1990* (Milano: Libraccio, 2015) pp. 324–335.

⁵³ The Krier brothers, born in Luxembourg, can be included with full rights in the German debate of the 1960s and 1970s: Rob studied architecture in Munich (1959–1964), worked with Unger in the mid-1960s and taught at the University of Stuttgart; Leon started studying at the University of Stuttgart before abandoning it in 1968 to work in the office of architect James Stirling in London.

⁵⁴ Oswald Mathias Ungers et al., *The Urban Villa: A Multi-Family Dwelling Type, Cornell Summer Academy 77 in Berlin* (Köln: Studio Press for Architecture, 1977); Oswald Mathias Ungers et al., *Die Stadt in der Stadt: Berlin, das Grüne Stadtarchipel: Ein stadt-räumliches Planungskonzept für die zukünftige Entwicklung Berlins*, (Köln: Studioverlag für Architektur, 1977), new ed. Florian Hertwek and Sébastien Marot (eds.) (Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2013). Oswald Mathias Ungers, Hans Kollhoff and Arthur A. Ovaska, *The Urban Garden: Student Projects for the Südliche Friedrichstadt Berlin, Cornell Summer Academy for Architecture 78 in Berlin* (Köln: Studio Press for Architecture, 1979).

⁵⁵ IBA’s theoretical and methodological assumptions are exposed exhaustively in the series of writings edited by the IBA, among which Claus Baldus, Joseph-Paul Kleihues and Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani (eds.), *Das Abenteuer der Ideen*, with the essays by Colin Rowe, ‘Kurze Bemerkungen zu Klassizismus, Neo-Klassizismus, Neo-Neo-Klassizismus, etc.’, pp. 59–68, Manfredo Tafuri, ‘Realismus und Architektur’, pp. 131–148, and Alan Colquhoun, ‘Zwischen Architektur und Philosophie: Rationalismus 1750–1970’, pp. 247–271.

Fig. 10
The Harvard Architectural Review, no. 1 (spring 1980), cover and p. 27.

Hans Stimmann, in which a significantly ‘realistic’ approach, firmly rooted in the materiality of the city, its form and its more general architectural character, was chosen.⁵⁶

After the generation of the masters – Kleihues and Ungers – received the heritage of modernism and transported it, through the experience of the 1960s and 1970s, up to the IBA, the protagonists of the ‘critical reconstruction’ are their more or less direct followers, who consolidated with their own thoughts and works this positive and concrete approach to the problems of architecture and the city without fear of recurring to history as a *Vorbild*. In the 1990s, architects such as Hans Kollhoff brought to discussion terms like ‘tectonic’ and ‘solidity’, ‘convention’ and ‘adequacy’, considered as paradigms of a new attitude to architecture. In this strongly ‘urban’ attitude, the city becomes an architectural issue and its traditional elements – the street, the block, the square, the house – recover their form and meaning.⁵⁷

For this reason, recent discussions on new realism in philosophy have also developed among architects as an Italian-German dialogue. The notion of realism, at the heart of the discussion ‘in philosophy, in politics and in everyday life’ through Ferrari’s *Manifesto*, has been specifically presented as an antidote both to the open and disenchanted postmodern vision of the world as a system of signs and images to be freely interpreted and transformed, and to the rationalist willingness to find general and absolute laws to shape buildings and space, moving the relationship with the social, cultural, historical and physical reality to the background. ‘Once the criticism of postmodernism is completed’, Ferraris writes, ‘it is time for contemporary philosophy to move to a constructive phase, to “reconstruct deconstruction”. This does not mean to return to the order (and which order, by the way?), but to develop a philosophy that strives to give an account of the whole reality, from physical to social reality … the possibilities are produced by the impact of reality, thereby without philosophy having to be reduced to a fragmented vision and give up the duty of providing an overall sense of the real’.⁵⁸ From this perspective, it is also possible to speak properly of ‘reconstructing deconstruction’ in architecture,⁵⁹ not in the sense of a restoration, but of a mindset, which sees in the existing reality – buildings, cities, projects and theories – not just something inherently negative, that resists and opposes transformation, but the very source of the possible. Starting ‘from the impact of reality’ and reacting to its ‘provocation’, creative possibilities are produced.

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⁵⁶ Cf. among others Gerwin Zohlen (ed.), *Stadtbau. Dier Stimmann Dekade Berlin 1991–2006* (Berlin: Internationale Bauakademie, 2006).

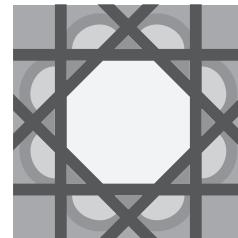
⁵⁷ Cf. Hans Kollhoff, *Das architektonische Argument* (Zürich: gta Verlag, 2010, the essays *Die Stadt ist tot. Es lebe die Stadt!* (1992), *Stadt ohne Tradition* (1994) and *Fiktion oder Stadt* (1994).

⁵⁸ Maurizio Ferraris, ‘Quando i filosofi pensano in grande’, *La Repubblica*, no. 19 (February 2013), p. 38.

⁵⁹ Cf. ‘Peter Eisenman and Léon Krier. My Ideology Is Better than Yours’, *Architectural Design Profile*, no. 81 (1989), issue *Reconstruction-Deconstruction*, new ed. (London: Academy Editions, 1994), and *Arch+*, no. 204 (October 2011), *Krise der Räpräsentation*.

In Search of Socialist Truthfulness: Debates on Realism in Soviet Architecture 1930–1950

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'Le réalisme socialiste vient de la base constituée d'écrivains ou de théoriciens; il n'est pas artificiellement imposé par des fonctionnaires de la culture.'

These were the opening lines of *Formalisme-Réalisme*, a special issue of the journal *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* published in 1977.¹ The editor, Bernard Huet, argued that socialist realism, being human oriented, is the only alternative to a formalism born on the ill-fated premises of the avant-garde. While pointing at the drawbacks of socialist realism – neoclassical repetitiveness, theoretical reductionism, pan-Russian chauvinism – he nevertheless stressed that it was created by Soviet theorists and writers, and not defectively implanted by Party functionaries.² In the decades that followed, several approaches to untangle the reasons for the introduction and use of socialist realism by different agents were proposed. For instance, Danilo Udovički-Selb sought to reconstruct a way to socialist realism by differentiating between the multiple directions in Party leadership that patronized various artists groups.³ The idea of direct State and Communist Party intervention, however, still dominates current scholarship and its emergence is linked to traditionalism and revivalist historicism.⁴ Without questioning the repressive method of its introduction, Catherine Cooke found a precise function of the socialist realism method as an invention of images of radiant and vital architecture that were able to transmit ideological messages from those in power to city dwellers.⁵ The question of origins aside, I will directly address the role of art critics in maintaining the currency of socialist realism in the architectural domain. I will argue that though art theory of the 1920s and 1930s permitted art critics to speculate on realism in architecture, the expert circles did not show any interest in it until Party resolutions came into the play. As a result, I will show how critics reconfigured their arguments in describing the development of architecture during the formative years of the socialist realist doctrine in the 1930s to make it more apt to the socialist reality, but not the methodology of their analysis. Formalist art theory persisted until the 1950s, when a new wave of political campaigns in art and culture erased any methodological references to art philosophy that nourished thinkers of the 1920s and 1930s.

To support my argument I will first briefly point at the notion of style in architectural criticism in the 1920s and the early 1930s. Second, I will concentrate on the introduction of socialist realism into architectural debates in the 1930s. To do so, I will trace two main discussions of that

Note on Transliteration and translation:
Whenever possible, the transliteration of Russian names and titles complies with the Library of Congress standard. The only exception to that rule pertains to familiar names that have acquired a recognised English spelling. Unless specified, translations are by the author.

¹ Bernard Huet, "Formalisme-Réalisme," *L'Architecture D'Aujourd'hui*, 190 (1977), p. 35.

² Huet, "Formalisme-Réalisme" (see note 1), pp. 35–36.

³ Danilo Udovički-Selb, "Between Modernism and Socialist Realism: Soviet Architectural Culture under Stalin's Revolution from Above, 1928–1938," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 68, no. 4 (2009), pp. 466–495.

⁴ Anders Aman, *Architecture and Ideology in Eastern Europe during the Stalin Era: An Aspect of Cold War History* (New York: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 49–57; Alessandro de Magistris, "Realisms in Soviet Architecture from the 1930s to the 1950s," in Matthew Cullerne Bown, Matteo Lafranconi, and Faina Balakhovskaya (eds.), *Socialist Realisms: Soviet Painting, 1920–1970* (Milan: Skira, 2012), pp. 173–181.

⁵ Catherine Cooke, "Beauty as a Route to 'the Radiant Future': Responses of Soviet Architecture," *Journal of Design History*, 10, no. 2 (1997), pp. 137–160.

time: the so-called ‘synthesis of arts debate’ which sprang up in 1934 and the campaign against formalism and naturalism, which arose in 1936. In the final part, I will outline how political campaigns in art were mirrored in architectural practice in the late Stalinist (1946–53) and the de-Stalinisation (1954–61) periods.

Debates on Architectural Style in 1920s Criticism

To trace the path of socialist realism to becoming a Party-sanctioned art theory, I should touch on the notion of architectural style. In the 1920s, style was one of the most popular terms in artistic manifestos and art critical texts.⁶ It was viewed as a typical image of an epoch, and opened up opportunities to discuss the actual social dimension of architecture. This is exemplified in a seminal treatise of Soviet architectural avant-garde, *Style and Epoch* (1924) by Constructivist artist Moisei Ginsburg (Fig. 1). According to Ginsburg, elements of style possess a genetic nature, both in terms of productive abilities and historic evolution that cannot be made up arbitrarily:

Only a spark of creative energy born of modernity and producing artists capable of working not in whatever style they like but only in the innate language of modernity, reflecting in the methods of their art the true essence of the present day, its rhythm, its everyday labour and concerns, and its lofty ideals – only such a spark can generate a new flowering, a new phase in the evolution of forms, a new and genuinely modern style.⁷

This notion of style was shared by the majority of Soviet architectural activists, such as Pavel Novitskii, dean of the famous *Vkhutemas* (Higher Art and Technical Studios) in 1926–30, who, speaking of style, referred to Broder Christiansen, Paul Frankl, and Gottfried Semper, seeing it as a ‘unity and organized nature of varied elements’ that cannot be invented.⁸ Architectural theory was a matter of special and very ambitious concern in socialism. New cultural institutions were founded in the USSR to establish a coherent science of the humanities. One of them was the State Academy for Creative Sciences (GAKhN, 1921–29) with Aleksander Gabrichevskii as the most prolific architectural theorist of his time. In 1923 he had created a theory of architecture based on a formalist analysis of space, intensively using structural symbolism elaborated by Alois Riegl and Gottfried Semper’s findings in materialist history of habitual spaces.⁹ He also saw architecture as a product of reflexology, instincts, the evolution of species, as well as unconsciousness and erotic impulses, being at the same time inspired by Hegelian idealism, differentiating absolute mass as *inorganic sculpture* (obelisks, ziggurats) from space as negative architecture (caves).¹⁰ He insisted on the teleology of architectural development, which ‘ideally requires an equal relationship and mutual organization between the capsule and what is encapsulated, mass and space.’¹¹ A decade later, when socialist realism was introduced, Party leaders

⁶ Mikhail Fabrikant, “Priznaki stil’ia,” *Iskusstvo* (GAKhN), III, no. 1 (1927), pp. 7–15.

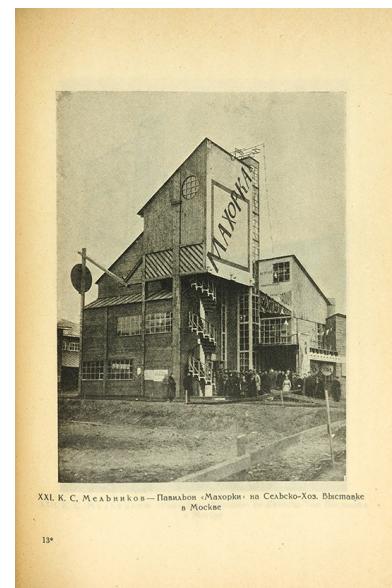
⁷ Moisei Ginzburg, *Style and Epoch* (New York: MIT Press, 1982), p. 47.

⁸ Pavel Novitskii, “Stroitel’svo sotsializma i stil’ sovremennoi arkitektury,” *Pechat’ i revol’utsiia*, 2 (1928), p. 61.

⁹ Alexander Gabrichevskii, “Prostranstvo i massa v arkitekture,” *Iskusstvo* (GAKhN), 1 (1928), pp. 292, 307–308.

¹⁰ Gabrichevskii, “Prostranstvo i massa” (see note 9), p. 293.

¹¹ Gabrichevskii, “Prostranstvo i massa” (see note 9), p. 307.



XXL K. S. Melnikov — Павильон «Махорка» на Сельско-Хоз. Выставке в Москве

139

Fig. 1

Page from Moisei Ginsburg’s *Style and Epoch* with an image of Konstantin Melnikov’s Makhorka Pavilion at the 1923 All-Russia Agricultural Exhibition in Moscow. (Photo: Library of the Academy for Fine Arts, Moscow).

would repeat the main arguments of Constructivists and art historians, proclaiming architectural style as a reflection of needs and features of the modern socialist era and looking for a harmony of mass and space in socialist buildings. However, the very context of the above-mentioned theories – the enthusiasm of Constructivists to reframe modern society according to the secure and scientifically verifiable new science of architecture, as well as the quest of art historians to furnish practice with up-to-date theory – would soon be radically reframed by Party-inspired repressive campaigns.

Introducing Socialist Realism in the Early 1930s

At the beginning of the 1930s, three events occurred that launched an implementation of socialist realism into Soviet architecture. First of all, in February 1932 the Soviet government announced that none of the proposed projects to build an ambitious Palace of Soviets were satisfactory and that they privileged neoclassical design. ‘Monumentality’, ‘simplicity’, ‘coherence’, and ‘elegance’ were favored in order to express the ‘grandeur of our Socialist reconstruction.’¹² This agenda represented the direct intervention of Party authorities into the professional domain.

Secondly, the Decree of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik party On Restructuring Literary Artistic Organizations in April 1932 liquidated independent artistic groups in order to avoid their ‘isolation from the political tasks’ and to pursue the creation of a universal Soviet culture.¹³ Experiments and theory-making were completely converted into the bureaucratic, Party-controlled process.

Finally, in 1934 at the All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers socialist realism was proclaimed to be the only desirable method of artistic work.¹⁴ The Statute of the Soviet Architects’ Union in 1937 echoed this decision and considered socialist realism in architecture as the ‘harmonious union of the ideology and truthfulness of the artistic concept with the closest possible correspondence of each building to the technical, cultural and practical demands made on it’.¹⁵

The formula did not differ greatly from the above quoted habitual definitions of style in the 1920s, but these were direct instructions to use neoclassical style which was required to further the quest of architects and critics. An article by Alexei Nekrasov on ‘Realism in Architecture’ in the prestigious *Architecture of the USSR* magazine in 1934 is an example of intellectual confusion caused by a violent intervention of Party activists into the domain of professional expertise (Fig. 2). Nekrasov followed an early work by Alois Riegl titled *Stilfragen* where the latter analysed naturalism and realism in depicting floral and animal motives in architecture.¹⁶ Then Nekrasov switched to a more formalist framework by saying that ‘One must look for realism in that organization and perception of space which permeates architectural mass.’¹⁷ This question of space and its organization had already been studied by Nekrasov several years earlier, in 1928. Indeed, his observations on historical Space Development from Ancient Egypt to the harmony of mass-space relations in the Ancient

¹² Ivan Matsa, Lidiia Reingardt, and Lazar’ Rempel’ (eds.), *Sovetskoe iskusstvo za 15 let. Materialy i dokumentatsiya* (Moscow: Ogiz-Izogiz, 1933), p. 552.

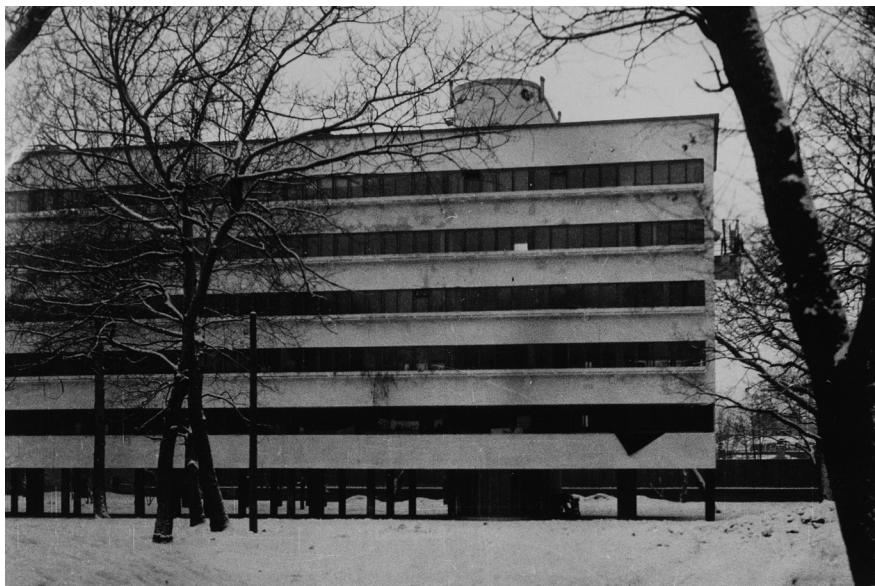
¹³ Matsa, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo* (see note 12), pp. 644–645.

¹⁴ “Ustav soiuza sovetskikh pisa-telei SSSR,” *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 3 September 1934.

¹⁵ “Ustav soiuza sovetskikh arkitekto-rów SSSR,” *Arkitekturnaia gazeta*, 23 July 1937.

¹⁶ Alexei Nekrasov, “Problema realizma v arkitekturě: v poriadke obsuzh-deniiia,” *Arkhitektura SSSR*, 1 (1934), pp. 52, 54, 56.

¹⁷ Nekrasov, “Problema realizma” (see note 16), p. 52.



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Greek architecture were commonplace in early modern architectural thought, and equally shared by avant-garde artists like Moisei Ginsburg and academics like Aleksander Gabrichevskii.¹⁸ Summarising his observations in both the 1928 and 1934 articles, Nekrasov emphasised the infinite nature of modern architectural space, opened equally to outer space and underwater depth with its glass walls and flat roofs, as well as general urge of Western civilisation towards rationalisation.¹⁹ But while in 1928 these features of contemporary buildings were seen positively, in 1934 they had become problematic. Nekrasov indicated the abstract nature of new architecture and the intolerable lack of tactility embodied in architectural masses that kept them from harmony. In the 1934 article he landed on the notion of realism that associates with the mass, tactility, and haptic qualities of walls and the human body. It was time, Nekrasov proclaimed, to turn to Antiquity in order to regain the plasticity of architecture.²⁰ This was a significant and alarming shift: as a result, art critics who had been modelling features of the new architecture by using an up-to-date art historical lexicon turned instead to existing models of the past, applying them to the future development that became deterministic.

Synthesis of Arts as a Sign of Socialist Realist Architecture

A key question in defining socialist realist architecture was posed in 1934: to what extent can a pure architectural surface visualise the Socialist essence of architecture (Fig. 3)? The answers were given during numerous presentations and meetings of architects and artists, such as at the Art in Architecture conference held in Moscow in 1934. All the participants followed an idea of the necessity of figurative sculptures and ornaments that were thought of as twofold emblematic references to socialist reality, as well as the crucial element of mass that would harmonise architectural space.

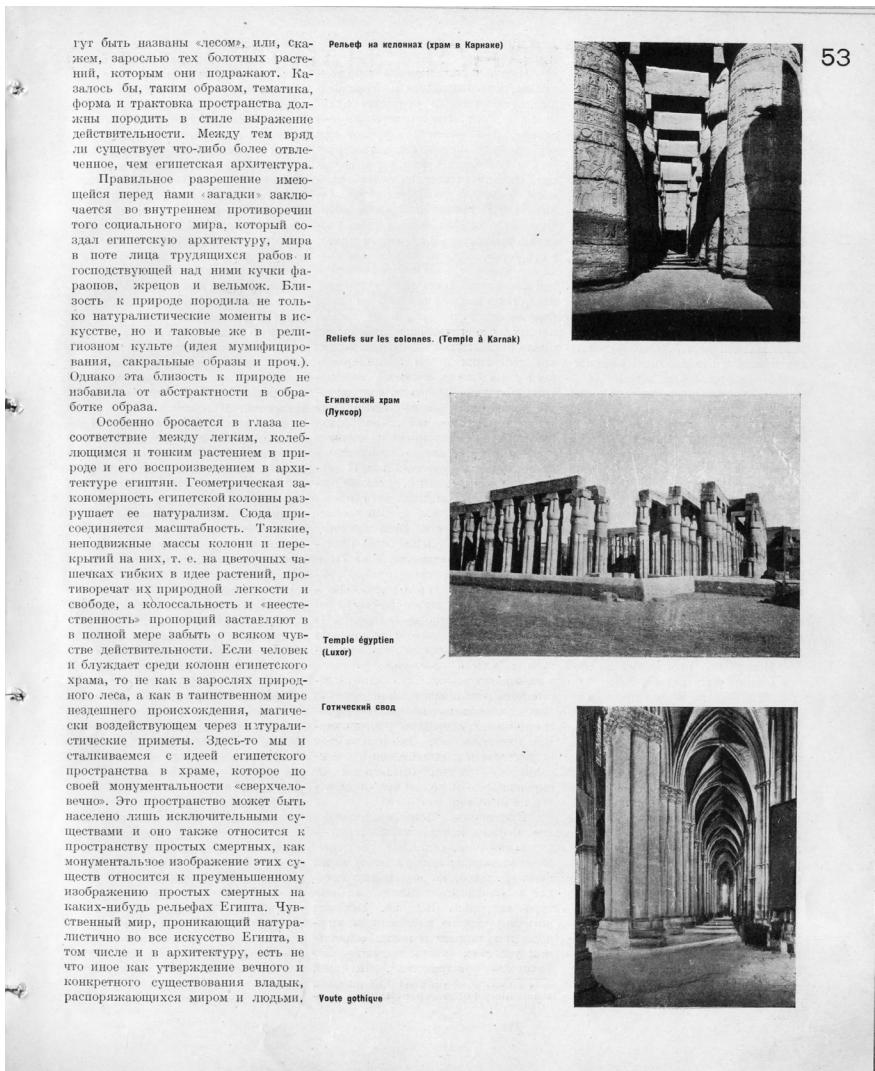
¹⁸ Alexei Nekrasov, "Puti arkhitektury: k probleme stil'a sovremennoi arkhitekturny," *Pechat' i revol'utsia*, 4 (1928), pp. 70–75.

¹⁹ Nekrasov, "Puti arkhitektury" (see note 18), p. 71.

²⁰ Nekrasov, "Problema realizma" (see note 16), p. 58.

Fig. 2

Moisei Ginsburg, Ignatii Mil'nis,
Narkomfin building, Moscow, 1930.
(Photo: Library of the Academy for Fine
Arts, Moscow).



3

One of the most influential artists of the period, theorist and follower of optical psychophysiology in art in Soviet Russia, Vladimir Favorskii, referred in his talk at the 1934 conference to the ‘truthfulness’ of architectural composition, which he equated to realism. He contrasted both of them to the arbitrariness of decoration, the criticism of the latter being routinely associated with eclectics of Russian and European architecture of the nineteenth century.²¹ Another prominent Soviet art historian, Mikhail Alpatov, supported the idea of truthfulness in architecture and turned to structural symbolism, taking Ancient Egypt as classical example, the architecture of which was illusionistic but not constructive.²² The truthfulness of the constructive and material parts of architecture were thought to oblige other arts, such as sculptures and murals, to be equally self-referential – painting should avoid illusionism, sculpture should express plasticity of the architectural organism, but should not destroy the wall.²³ In short, the visual symbolism and hierarchical understanding of applied and free-standing objects, among other traditional art historical modes of thinking on mass and space, were the most common arguments to justify the historicist retreat of modern Soviet architecture (Fig. 4).

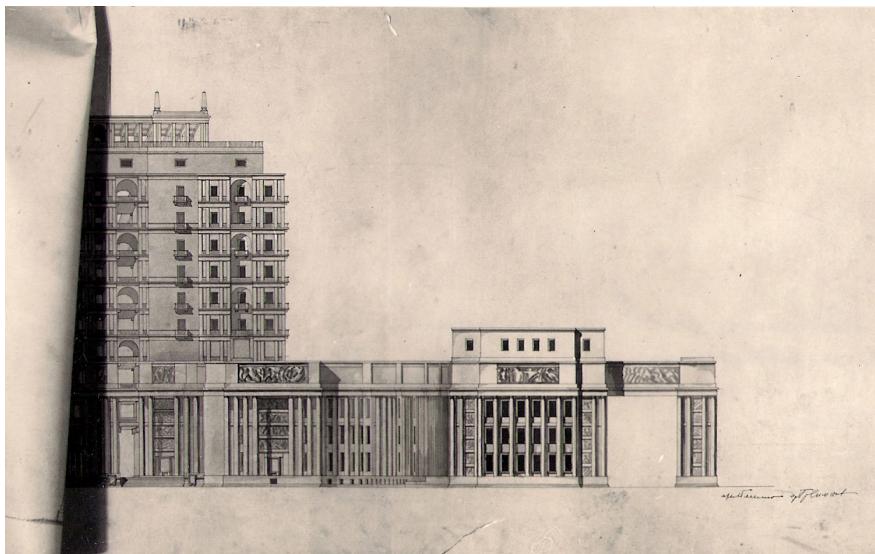
²¹ Vladimir Favorskii, “Zhivopis’ i arkitektura,” in Mikhail Zhitomirskii, *Voprosy sinteza iskusstv. Materialy pervogo tvorcheskogo soveshchaniia arkitektorov, skul’ptorov i zhivopiscev* (Moscow: Ogiz–Izogiz, 1936), p. 44.

²² Mikhail Alpatov, “Problema sinteza iskusstv v khudozhestvennom nasledstve,” in Mikhail Zhitomirskii, *Voprosy sinteza iskusstv* (see note 21), p. 23. This example was elaborated by Alois Riegler, see Margaret Olin, *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegler’s Theory of Art* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), p. 61.

²³ David Arkin, “Arkitektura i problema sinteza iskusstv,” in Mikhail Zhitomirskii, *Voprosy sinteza iskusstv* (see note 21), p. 16; Vera Mukhina, “Zakony tvorchestva, uslovia sotrudничества,” in Mikhail Zhitomirskii, *Voprosy sinteza iskusstv* (see note 21), p. 95.

Fig. 3

Alexei Nekrasov’s article “Realism in architecture”. In: *Architecture of the USSR magazine*, 1 (1934). (Photo: Library of the Academy for Fine Arts, Moscow).



4

Architectural theories and their reliance on historical examples were in mutual consent with architectural projects of the mid-1930s. The limited number of apartment blocks and public building that were built during the 1930s were generously furnished with figurative sculptures, images of workers, and Party and State symbols, incorporated to appeal directly to the socialist viewer and be visually distinguishable from fallacious bourgeois architecture.²⁴ As a result, the late Stalinist period was exemplified in neoclassical buildings such as the Moscow metro of 1935–1954 and the Red Army Theater of 1934–1940, that also followed pattern of straightforward symbolism of exuberant figurative decoration (Fig. 5). Since then and until the collapse of the USSR architectural sculptures, murals, and mosaics were seen as elements that made the entire building socialist realist.²⁵



5

²⁴ Maria Silina, *Istoriia i ideologija: monumental'no-dekorativnii relief 1920-1930-h godov v SSSR* (Moscow: BuksMart, 2014), pp. 98–105.

²⁵ Natalia Davydova, "Strastnoe slovo khudozhnika. L. Polischuk, S. Scherbinina," *Dekorativnoe iskusstvo SSSR*, 2 (1980), pp. 18–19.

Fig. 4

Alexander Gegello, Project for the Palace of Technology in Moscow, 1933. (Photo: Archive of the Academy for Fine Arts, Moscow).

Fig. 5

Moscow, Kievskaya underground station, 1953. (Photo: Archive of the Academy for Fine Arts, Moscow).



6

Campaign against Formalism and Naturalism in Architecture

The notion of realism became even more important for Party art critics after 1936, when the repressive Campaign against formalism and naturalism was launched with the quest for a new style suitable for Socialist culture. Formalism meant constructivism in architecture and was harshly criticised for its abstract thinking, which was said to be distant from the social needs of modern society.²⁶ Another claim was that Constructivists refused to consider architecture as art, which was seen as a crime against common people longing for beauty.²⁷

Beginning in 1936, the opposition of socialist realism and formalism expressed in constructivist projects of Moisei Ginsburg and Ivan Leonidov, as well as the highly original designs by Konstantin Melnikov, became pronounced in a clear way: architects needed to elaborate a notion of socialist realism in architecture, avoiding formalism in its constructivist version (Fig. 6).²⁸ The imperative to do so was soon reinforced by harsh political repression of Party leaders like Leon Trotsky (1879–1940), Nikolai Bukharin (1888–1938) and many others, a move that coincided with the anti-formalist Campaign.²⁹ Many of the artists who had collaborated with the accused politicians were jailed, murdered, or committed suicide, while others lost their commissions and recognition and were forced to survive on the breadline. In those years any accusation, be it creative profile or association with a repressed person, could result in imprisonment.³⁰ This immediate threat destroyed the creative atmosphere, encouraged a lack of solidarity and increased self-censorship among Soviet architects, which, in turn, led to the wide dissemination of Party slogans in professional debates.

Already by 1937, the terms ‘formalism’ and ‘naturalism’ were being mentioned only as undesirable traits that had to be exterminated in socialist realist practice. It was symptomatic that Party-affiliated critics and activists avoided listing visual characteristics of socialist realism, insisting on a habitual contemporary notion of style as a set of characteristic features of an epoch. The officially recognized definition of realism read as follows:

²⁶ *Protiv formalizma i naturalizma v iskusstve* (Moscow: Ogiz–Izogiz, 1937), pp. 56–59, 59–62, 62–70.

²⁷ Otakar Mácel, “Zur Theorie des sozialistischen Realismus in der Architektur,” *Archithese*, 19 (1976), p. 43.

²⁸ “Protiv formalizma, uproshchenichestva i eklektiki. Obshchemoskovskoe soveschanie arkhitektorov. Rech K.S. Alabiana,” *Arkhitekturnaya gazeta*, 23 February 1936.

²⁹ Oleg Khlevnyuk, *Politburo: Mechanizmy politicheskoi vlasti v 1930-e gody* (Moscow: Rospen, 1996), pp. 187–234.

³⁰ Valentina Tikhanova, “... za otsutstviem sostava prestuplenia...,” *Panorama iskusstva*, 3 (1990), pp. 6–30; Olga Roitenberg, *Neuzheli kto-to vspomnil, chto my byli... Iz istorii khudozhestvennoi zhizni. 1925–1935* (Moscow: Galart, 2008).

Fig. 6

Red Army Theatre by Karo Alabian, Vasilii Simbirtsev et al., Moscow, 1934–1940. Postcard, 1983 (Photo: Library of the Academy for Fine Arts, Moscow).

Socialist realism in architecture means the harmonious union of the ideology and truthfulness of the artistic concept with the closest possible correspondence of each building to the technical, cultural and practical demands made on it. [...] The socialist realist method is not defined by any firmly delineated formal characteristics or techniques, and it therefore does not reject the techniques of any of the styles of the past, where these are progressive and provided they are skilfully and creatively applied to the modern conditions in which the socialist nations are developing.³¹

It is noteworthy that in this Party-sanctioned definition, the notion of style was replaced by a notion of method. There were constructivists who had first posed a problematic question of style and method in the 1920s which was now being adopted by promoters of socialist realism in the 1930s.³² Indeed, in articles published in *Modern Architecture* magazine, Moisei Ginsburg argued that architecture is a function of the epoch and socially meaningful form. The architect's mission is to study and scientifically justify the main labour and social activities in the buildings, and consequently study questions of movement, house equipment, hygiene, etc. Architects must absolutely avoid the canonisation of forms, according to Ginsburg, and constructivism must be seen as a method, not a style, as rationalising social needs presupposes ever changing forms of architecture.³³ These ideas were echoed in the debates on socialist realism, but not to Ginsburg's benefit. The ambiguity in the definition of socialist realism was allowed to manipulate artists and can be seen as a repressive instrument in managing the professional community. Ultimately, it segregated art critics from architectural practice, disturbing any strong association of theoretical findings and social needs.

One of the unfortunate examples of a new conjuncture in art theory and practice is Aleksander Gabrichevskii's work of the 1940s. In 1944 Gabrichevskii, who had been accused of formalism in 1936, gave a talk in the prominent Moscow Architectural Institute (MArkhI) under the title 'Realism in Architecture'.³⁴ There he avoided any of the references to the formalist analysis of space that he used in his earlier works. In an attempt to justify realism, he focused on the observation of nature as primary basis of the architect's work. Thus, talking about the importance of details in architecture, he referred to Ruskin's example of the perception of a rock's surface, changing as one approaches it.³⁵ Like Nerkasov in 1934, Gabrichevskii retreated into naïve realism, popular in architectural theory of the 1870s and 1880s, while still being unable to turn completely away from his formalist formation. For example, he talked about Ancient Egyptian architects who built pyramids in a realist way – contrasting their sharp silhouettes to the vast plain desert.³⁶ The same views on natural laws in architectural composition were promoted by his colleague and friend Ivan Zholtovskii, who used organicist analogues in his educational courses and built intensively decorated representative official buildings for prominent Soviet functionaries (Fig. 7).³⁷ The reintroduction of direct

³¹ "Ustav soiuza sovetskikh arkitektorov SSSR," *Arkitekturnaia gazeta*, 23 July 1937.

³² *Pervii vsesoiuznii s'ezd sovetskikh pisatelei. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow: Gos. Izdatelstvo, 1934), p. 712.

³³ Moisei Ginsburg, "Konstruktivizm kak metod laboratornoi i pedagogicheskoi raboty," *Sovremennaya Arkhitektura*, 6 (1927), pp. 162, 164; Moisei Ginsburg, "Itogi i perspektivy," *Sovremennaya Arkhitektura*, 4–5 (1927), p. 112.

³⁴ Alexander Gabrichevskii, *Morfologiya iskusstva* (Moscow: Agraf, 2002), pp. 494–511, 835.

³⁵ Gabrichevskii, *Morfologiya iskusstva* (see note 34), p. 503.

³⁶ Gabrichevskii, *Morfologiya iskusstva* (see note 34), pp. 502–503.

³⁷ Selim Khan-Magomedov, *Ivan Zholtovskii* (Moscow: C.E. Gordeev, 2010), pp. 276–281.



7

Fig. 7

Ivan Zholtovskii, Residential building, Moscow, 1934. Page from the 1950 album XXX years of Soviet architecture. (Photo: Library of the Academy for Fine Arts, Moscow).

naturalism witnessed an ultimate segregation of art concepts of the 1930s and 1940 from social agenda in Soviet housing.

A new period of repressions in artistic and scientific spheres started in 1946 with the second wave of the anti-formalist campaign and the 1951 campaign against comparative method in literature and Western culture in general (the anti-cosmopolitan campaign) that deepened the gap between the social dimension of architecture and the theory that was thought to support it.³⁸ All these actions, seemingly distant from the architectural domain, resulted in a total denial of references to bourgeois modernist philosophers of formalist or idealist formation. Realism was now seen as a philosophical doctrine and a coherent aesthetic theory elaborated by Marx and Engels, as well as their followers, including prominent Soviet Party leaders such as Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin.³⁹ This is evi-

³⁸ Pavel Druzhinin, *Ideologija i filologija. Leningrad, 1940e gody. Dokumental'noe issledovanie* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2012).

³⁹ Mikhail Lifshits, *K voprosu o vzgliadakh Marks'a na iskusstvo* (Moscow: Gos. izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1933); Mikhail Lifshits (ed.), *Lenin o kulture i iskusstve* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1938). For a comprehensive overview of Marxist-Leninist aesthetics, see Katerina Clark, "Marksistsko-leninskaia estetika," in Hans Günter and Evgenii Dobrenko (eds.), *Sotsrealisticheskii kanon* (Saint-Petersburg: Akademicheskii prospect, 2000), pp. 352–361.



Fig. 8

Page from Aldo Rossi's "Une éducation réaliste". In: *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, No. 190 (1977), p. 39. (Photo: *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*).

denced in a 1952 book titled *On the Realistic Basics of the Soviet Architecture* by one of the late Stalinist Party activists in architecture, Mikhail Tsapenko. In reviewing socialist architectural criticism, all theories introduced by architects were criticised, such as one by Nikolai Ladovskii, who worked on the premises of Gustav Fechner's *Entfühlungstheorie*, or by Moisey Ginsburg as a follower of Wilhelm Worringer, Alois Riegl, and Henri Bergson. The 1920s works by Aleksander Gabrichevskii were also declared perverse, despite the fact that he had already made a forced shift from Hegel and Semper to naïve naturalism with formalist rudiments.⁴⁰ Various campaigns in the late 1940s resulted in an elimination of all possible parallels of Soviet art theory to Western origins. This segregation both from historical references and up-to-date international criticism was deepened during the post-Stalinist era in the course of the Cold War, and even now the set of imaginable links to Western philosophy and art theory are extremely limited, and educational programs in humanities remain characterised by isolationism (Fig. 8).⁴¹

Results of Political Campaigns in Architectural Theory and Practice

Although openly aimed at the humanisation of architecture, the critiques of formalism in the repressive Party-sanctioned campaigns of 1936 and 1948 did not lead to an introduction of more intuitive approaches to social issues in urban planning and housing. The majority of the population lived in barracks and communal apartments, as was in case of Leningrad, where by 1951 there resided 3.3 families per apartment.⁴²

The situation seemed to be changing radically with de-Stalinisation process in 1954, when neoclassical fashion was considered a sign of totalitarian rule and blamed for the failure of socialist mass housing. At the All-Union Conference of Builders, Architects, and Construction Industry Workers in November 1954, Party leaders expressed concerns over the high rates of buildings containing non-rational and exuberant use of decorative elements.⁴³ Within a year, this demand to get rid of Stalinist decorations became a Party decree.⁴⁴ The results were controversial, as the desire for accelerated construction lead to, among other things, paradoxically poor variations of ready-made constructions, an extremely low quality of building materials, and disregard of human needs.⁴⁵ During the 1970s and 1980s, Soviet architects followed the usual path in criticising Western architectural practices embodied in postmodernism.⁴⁶ At the same time, however, their own trajectory of development from the rigid system of the early post-Stalinist years prompted the same concerns on the alienation of form and context, made by Western European architects and critics of the postwar generation (Aldo Rossi, Alan Colquhoun), who turned to Realism in architecture.⁴⁷ In the 1970s Soviet architects, still guided by a limited Party lexicon, attempted to reconsider the notion of socialist realism in architecture, but this attempt attracted little serious attention, as its reductionist agenda remained attached to Stalinist era. Human-oriented rethinking of the mass housing and social dimension of socialism

⁴⁰ Mikhail Tsapenko, *O realisticheskikh osnovakh sovetskoi arkitektury* (Moscow: Gos. Izdatelstvo, 1952), pp. 128, 133–139, 139–141.

⁴¹ Vadim Bass, "Formalnii diskurs kak poslednee pribezhishche sovetskogo arkitektora," *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*, 137, no 1 (2016), cited after <http://www.nlobooks.ru/node/6998> (accessed May 18, 2016).

⁴² Blair A. Ruble, "From khrushchev to korobki," in William Craft Blumfeld and Blair A. Ruble (eds.), *Russian Housing in the Modern Age: Design and Social History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 235.

⁴³ "Prodolzhenie rechi tovatishcha N.S. Khrushcheva," *Pravda*, 28 December 1954, pp. 3–4; "Iz stenogrammy Vsesoiuznogo soveshchaniya po stroitel'stvu. Moskva. 30 noiabria – 7 dekabria 1954," in *Estetika ottepeli. Novoe v arkitekture, iskusstve, kul'ture* (Moscow: Rossppen, 2012), pp. 412–416.

⁴⁴ "On elimination of excesses in design and construction," Resolution of Central Committee and USSR Council, 4 November 1955, cited after <http://www.sovarch.ru/postanovlenie55/> (accessed May 18, 2016).

⁴⁵ Andrei Gosak, "V ritme vospomina-nii," *Arkhitekturnii Vestnik*, 86 (2005), pp. 42–7; Blair A. Ruble, "From khrushchevki" (see note 42), pp. 232–270.

⁴⁶ Andrey Gosak, "Vmesto togo chtoby pouchatj...," *Arkhitektura*, 13, 523 (1982), p. 7. On the relationship towards postmodernism, see Richard Anderson, *Russia: modern architectures in history* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015), pp. 247–280.

⁴⁷ Kenneth Michael Hays (ed.), *Architecture theory since 1968* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), pp. 246–253; 254–261; Irina Davidovici, *Forms of Practice: German Swiss Architecture 1980–2000* (Zurich: gta Verlag, 2012), pp. 241–251.

also failed to emerge after the collapse of the USSR, due to a rise of profit-oriented capitalism.⁴⁸ The disregard of a social agenda in urban planning and mass construction can partially be explained by the disillusionment in the Communist intellectual legacy. Since the 1990s, socialist realism has been considered as an invented term that describes only the darkest time of Stalinist repressions in the domain of art.⁴⁹ Socialist realism, being non-existent, made many sure that not only had architectural methodology failed to survive in the Soviet Union, but that it is also absent in modern Russia due to a lack of historical tradition of architectural criticism and urban sociology. The study of the successful but silenced – or failed and neglected – attempts of Soviet-era architects to integrate modernist and post-modernist social agenda into Party-regulated mass construction are imperative to Soviet architectural history today.

Conclusion

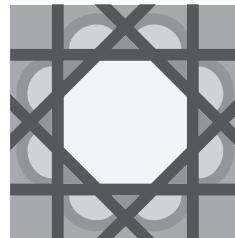
The introduction of the notion of realism into Soviet artistic life provides a poignant example of how politically-driven interventions into professional, practical and art critical expertise operated in the domain of architectural theory, and how they reshaped the social agenda in architecture. As has been shown in the examples of Nekrasov's and Gabrichevskii's works, art theory that served to describe changes in architectural style was turned into the prescription of architectural development on its way to socialist realism. The definition of style, elaborated by Moisei Ginsburg in his study of Constructivist architecture, was not significantly changed while being transferred into official formulas of socialist realism. In practice, however, the key question of the 1920s on the socialist essence of architecture shifted from a social agenda to the necessity of figurative sculptures and murals seen as signifiers of socialism, as the debates on synthesis of art of the 1930s have shown. In the de-Stalinisation era, architecture returned to modernism, banning the historicism of the previous decades and celebrating the long-awaited integration into the European stylistic agenda. But this unity was only fictional, as no criticism of modernist formalism in its Soviet version was possible. While the re-actualisation of realism debates in the 1970s Western discourse gave way to the postmodernist search for more intuitive and sustainable approaches to architecture, Soviet professionals were guided by the State to using a Cold-War inspired lexicon and producing prefabricated, sub-standard apartments. Until now, due to the disillusion in Communist initiatives that were performed poorly and forcefully, the socialist agenda in architecture, its failures, and its efforts, remain obscure and unrecognised.

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⁴⁸ Nina Krasnaia, "Zhilaia sreda v ee sotsial'nom i gradostroitel'nom soderzhanii kak predmet arkitekturnogo i dizainerskogo tvorchestva," in Tatiana Malinina (ed.), *Massovoe zhilishche kak ob'ekt tvorchestva. Rol' sotsial'noi inzhenerii i khudozhestvennikh idei v proektirovaniu zhiloi sredy. Opyt XX i problemy XXI veka* (Moscow: Buksmart, 2015), pp. 525–545.

⁴⁹ Evgenii Dobrenko (ed.), *Izbavlenie ot mirazhei. Sotsrealism segodnia* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1990), pp. 6–27.

research: ‘Art theory and museum display in the USSR of the 1920s and the 1930s’, ‘Heritage of Post-Soviet public spaces in Moscow’, ‘Theoretical debates on Realism in Soviet art criticism’. Most recently she participated in conferences in Europe and Canada (CRASSH – Cambridge; CAS – Calgary), and co-organized a panel on ‘Art and Social Practice in Eastern Europe after Socialism’ (UAAC-AAUC, Montréal). She submitted a number of articles to RACAR, *Cultures & Musées*, and many other journals.



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Auf der Suche nach Klarheit. Zum Realismus im Werk des Schweizer Architekten Hans Schmidt.

Kathrin Siebert
ETH Zürich

«Realismus ist das Sehen und Aussprechen der Widersprüche in der gesellschaftlichen Struktur einer Zeit – zu deren Überwindung.»¹

Einleitung

Die Frage nach dem Sozialistischen Realismus beschäftigte den Basler Architekten Hans Schmidt (1893–1972) während seiner Schaffensperiode in Moskau von 1930 bis 1937 und prägte sein Denken weit über diese Jahre hinaus. Dass es Schmidt dabei stets darum ging, die Widersprüche seiner Zeit zu erkennen und zu formulieren, um sie zu überwinden wird dieser Beitrag exemplarisch für die Phase seines Aufenthalts in der Sowjetunion zeigen. Ebenfalls wird deutlich werden, dass dies nicht im Sinne des Sozialistischen Realismus war. Schmidt war als Mitglied der Spezialisten-Gruppe von Ernst May (1886–1970) vom sowjetischen Staat berufen worden, um an der Planung und dem Bau der im ersten Fünfjahresplan geforderten neuen Industriestädte mitzuwirken. Er war somit Teil des privilegierten Staatsapparates. Sein Ausländerstatus führte gleichzeitig zu einer gewissen Distanz gegenüber dem System. Seine intensive Auseinandersetzung mit der Situation vor Ort ist nach aussen hin weniger sichtbar, tritt jedoch in seinen persönlichen Reflexionen deutlich zutage. Weil hier kritische Überlegungen eines beteiligten Aussenstehenden offenbar werden, ist eine nähere Betrachtung von übergeordneter Bedeutung. Der Philosoph Boris Groys plädiert in seinen Arbeiten über die Kultur der Stalin-Ära immer wieder für eine sensible Differenzierung der Widersprüche zwischen der Innenperspektive und der Aussenwahrnehmung. In den Gedankengängen, die Schmidt in der Sowjetunion entwickelte und in den Diskussionen, die zwischen ihm und seinem Umfeld in der Schweiz geführt wurden, sehe ich einen Ansatz in diese Richtung.²

Hans Schmidt ist als Architekt des Neuen Bauens in der Schweiz fest in der Forschung verankert. Seine theoretischen Reflexionen sind jedoch weniger bekannt und reduzieren sich meist auf die von ihm selbst zusammengestellten und 1965 publizierten *Beiträge zur Architektur*, ein Kompendium von knapp fünfzig veröffentlichten und unveröffentlichten Texten aus dem Zeitraum zwischen 1924 und 1964.³ Darüberhinaus befinden sich in seinem Nachlass Hunderte von bisher nicht beachteten Schriftstücken.⁴ Schmidt versuchte zeitlebens, seine architektonische Position zu durchdenken und kritisch zu reflektieren. Nicht zuletzt dieses

¹ Vgl. Georg Schmidt, *Naturalismus und Realismus* (1958), in: Ders., *Umgang mit Kunst. Ausgewählte Schriften 1940–1963*, Olten 1966, S. 27–36, hier S. 35.

² Vgl. Boris Groys, *Die gebaute Ideologie*, in: Peter Noever (Hg.), *Die Tyrannie des Schönen. Architektur der Stalin-Zeit*, München/New York 1994, S. 15–21.

³ Hans Schmidt, *Beiträge zur Architektur 1924–1964*, Berlin (Ost) 1965.

⁴ Der umfangreiche Nachlass von Hans Schmidt wird hauptsächlich im gta Archiv an der ETH Zürich bewahrt. Kleinere Teilbestände befinden sich im Bundesarchiv in Berlin und im Institut für Raumbezogene Sozialforschung (IRS) in Erkner.

kritische Denken veranlasste den italienischen Architekturtheoretiker Manfredo Tafuri in seinem 1972 veröffentlichten Nachruf, Schmidt als radikalen Architekten zu bezeichnen.⁵ Die Verbindung zwischen Hans Schmidt und dem sozialistischen Realismus, insbesondere in seiner zweiten Basler Schaffensphase im unmittelbaren Anschluss an seinen Aufenthalt in der Sowjetunion, wurde erstmals von dem Schweizer Architekturhistoriker Martin Steinmann thematisiert.⁶ Steinmann lässt Schmidt sprechen, wenn es um die Frage des Realismus geht. So verweist er auf die spezifisch Schmidtsche Aneignung der Formen der Vergangenheit, welche die Verbindung von Entwurf und Ausführung betont. Schmidt greife also nicht ein Stilelement, sondern eine Methodik auf. Steinmann baut diesen Ansatz zu einer Ideologie der Arbeit aus, die bei Schmidt in besonderer Weise hervortrete und dessen Realismus charakterisiere: «Die Arbeitsform ist für Schmidt kein ausschließlich materieller, sondern gleichermaßen ein ideeller Faktor.»⁷ Der soziale Auftrag der Architektur war für Schmidt in erster Linie durch wirtschaftlich vertretbare Bauformen zu erfüllen. Tafuri definiert den Realismus von Schmidt nicht als einheitliche Tendenz, sondern vielmehr als «Haltung, die sich außerhalb der bewußt gezogenen Entwicklungslinien ausdrückt und reproduziert.»⁸ Wenige Jahre nach Schmidts Tod meldete sich auch Aldo Rossi diesbezüglich zu Wort. Rossi definiert Schmidts Realismus als Rationalismus, der nichts mit Ästhetik oder Moral, nichts mit Lebensweise zu tun hat, sondern die einzige konsequente und folgenrichtige Antwort auf die real existierenden Probleme sei.⁹ Die Schweizer Kunsthistorikerin Ursula Suter publizierte 1993, anlässlich des hundertsten Geburtstages von Schmidt, einen umfangreichen Werkkatalog seines architektonischen Schaffens.¹⁰ Begleitet wird der kommentierte Katalog von Aufsätzen namhafter Forscher und Zeitgenossen von Schmidt. In ihrem Beitrag über die Basler Schaffensphase knüpft Suter an die genannten Positionen an und definiert Schmidts Realismus mit der konsequenten Beziehung zwischen Technik und Form.¹¹ Der Sozialistische Realismus von Schmidt sei nicht als Ausführung einer fremden ästhetischen Doktrin zu verstehen, sondern Ausdruck seines eigenen Realismus.¹²

Die Schaffensperiode zwischen 1930 und 1937 ist immer noch ein kaum bearbeitetes Feld in der Forschung über Hans Schmidt. Ursula Suters These aufnehmend, möchte ich in meinem Beitrag zunächst der Frage nachgehen, wie Schmidt diese entscheidende Phase der Architekturgeschichte vor Ort erlebte, wie er die Debatten um die drängenden Architekturfragen wahrnahm und beurteilte, worin der von Suter festgestellte «eigene Realismus» Schmidts in dieser Situation konkret bestand, und inwiefern dieser von der offiziellen Definition abwich. Anhand von Quellen aus Schmidts Nachlass werden seine Denkprozesse sichtbar. Zudem wird die Diskussion zwischen Schmidt und seinem persönlichen Umfeld in der Schweiz in die Darstellung einbezogen, soweit sie sich rekonstruieren lässt und für die Frage nach dem Realismusbegriff relevant ist. Diese Diskussionen, die bis in die Ebenen des *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM) hineinreichen, reflektieren ansatzweise die von Groys eingeforderte Aussenwahrnehmung des Geschehens. Die

⁵ Manfredo Tafuri, Hans Schmidt – ein ‘radikaler’ Architekt, in: *Werk* (1972), H. 10, S. 552.

⁶ Martin Steinmann, Zur Frage des Sozialistischen Realismus, in: *Werk* (1972), H. 10, S. 553–556.

⁷ Martin Steinmann, Zur Frage des Sozialistischen Realismus, in: *Werk* (1972), H. 10, S. 553–556, hier S. 555.

⁸ Manfredo Tafuri, Realismus und Architektur. Zur Konstruktion volksbezogener Sprachen, in: Claus Baldus und Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani (Hg.), *Das Abenteuer der Ideen. Architektur und Philosophie seit der industriellen Revolution*, Ausst. Kat., Berlin 1984, S. 131–148, hier S. 123.

⁹ Aldo Rossi, Einleitung zu Hans Schmidt, *Contributi all’architettura*, Mailand 1974, dt. Übers. in: Hans Schmidt, *Beiträge zur Architektur 1924–1964* (Reprint), Zürich 1993, S. X–XXI, hier S. XIII.

¹⁰ Ursula Suter, *Hans Schmidt 1893–1972. Architekt in Basel, Moskau, Berlin-Ost*, Zürich 1993.

¹¹ Ursula Suter, Form als soziale Bedeutungsträgerin. Die beiden Basler Werkphasen von Hans Schmidt im Vergleich, in: Dies., *Hans Schmidt 1893–1972. Architekt in Basel, Moskau, Berlin-Ost*, Zürich 1993, S. 27–52, hier S. 36.

¹² Ursula Suter, Form als soziale Bedeutungsträgerin. Die beiden Basler Werkphasen von Hans Schmidt im Vergleich, in: Dies., *Hans Schmidt 1893–1972. Architekt in Basel, Moskau, Berlin-Ost*, Zürich 1993, S. 27–52, hier S. 43.

Analyse des Schmidtschen Realismusbegriffs aus der Innenperspektive steht jedoch im Vordergrund. Sie ist für das Verstehen und Einordnen seines Werkes grundlegend. In Verbindung mit seiner politischen Überzeugung wird hier exemplarisch eine jener linksintellektuellen Positionen deutlich, die in der Forschung bisher wenig beleuchtet, deren Betrachtung jedoch immer wieder angemahnt worden ist.¹³

¹³ Vgl. Winfried Nerdinger, „Anstössiges Rot“ Hannes Meyer und der linke Baufunktionalismus – ein verdrängtes Kapitel Architekturgeschichte, in: Werner Kleinrüschkamp (Hg.), *hannes meyer 1889–1954. architekt urbanist lehrer*, Berlin 1989, S. 12–29.

Die Situation in der neuen Welt

Zu Beginn der 1930er Jahre vollzog sich in der Sowjetunion eine entscheidende Wende vom fortschrittlichen zum traditionellen Bauen. Seit der Revolution 1917 bis zur Entscheidung durch Stalin 1932 hatten verschiedene ästhetische Ansätze in dem politisch neu formierten Land parallel existiert. Vor allem die progressiven Ideen der jungen sowjetischen Avantgarde strahlten in die westliche Welt und sendeten eindeutige Signale eines gesellschaftlichen und ästhetischen Neubeginns. Das provozierte und sprach diejenigen unmittelbar an, welche nach einem neuen Ausdruck für das zu dieser Zeit sich stark verändernde Bauwesen suchten. In der westlichen Welt ermöglichten neue Produktionsweisen und neue Materialien wie Beton, Stahl und Glas sowie neue Denkansätze und Bauaufgaben die Option auf eine tiefgreifende Veränderung des Bauens. Nach dem Ende des ersten Weltkrieges schien auch in Westeuropa eine Neuorientierung in verschiedenen Richtungen möglich und es herrschte, bedingt durch die Auswirkungen des Ersten Weltkrieges, eine vorerst moderate Aufbruchstimmung.

Programmatisch wurde in den ersten Jahren des Bestehens der Sowjetunion das Bild einer gänzlich neuen sowjetischen Welt evoziert. Während die avantgardistischen Ideen meist visionäre Utopien auf dem Papier blieben, sollte in den 1930er Jahren im grossen Massstab und vor allem real gebaut werden. Die Situation vor Ort war schwierig, da mehrere gesellschaftliche und wirtschaftliche Umwälzungen gleichzeitig stattfanden. Nach Lenins Tod im Jahr 1924 und partiintern Machtkämpfen um dessen Nachfolge setzte sich schliesslich Josif V. Stalin durch. Als erste entscheidende Massnahme erklärte er die Planwirtschaft für verbindlich. Seit 1928 galt der erste Fünfjahresplan. Im Zuge dessen sollte sich das Land von einem Agrarstaat mit feudalistischen Strukturen in einen Industriestaat mit sozialistischer Prägung wandeln. Dazu wurden in Windeseile umfangreiche Aufbaupläne für verschiedene Industriestandorte entwickelt und die Landwirtschaft, die bis anhin den Staat wirtschaftlich getragen hatte, wurde durch Enteignungen kollektiviert. Diese parallel vollzogenen Veränderungen waren umstritten und risikoreich. Stalin wollte jedoch keine Zeit verlieren und setzte sie mit allen ihm zur Verfügung stehenden Mitteln um. Er setzte damit ein deutliches Zeichen seiner Macht. Stalins Entscheidungen führten schon zu Beginn der 1930er Jahre zu einer tiefen innenpolitischen Krise. Der Repressionsapparat wurde kräftig ausgebaut und die erste grosse Terrorwelle erfasste das Land. Zwangsumsiedlungen

und Deportierungen der Landbevölkerung wurden zur Normalität. Besetzungskolonien, deren Insassen als Zwangsarbeiter eingesetzt wurden, waren die Kehrseite dieser Politik, die Millionen Menschenopfer forderte.

Architektur ist Ideologie

Der Schweizer Hans Schmidt kam im Spätherbst des Jahres 1930 ohne grosse Vorbereitung in der Sowjetunion an.¹⁴ Gerade erst hatte er aufgrund der Wirtschaftskrise und Regressforderungen, die als Tribut für allzu experimentierfreudiges Bauen zu leisten waren, seine Bürogemeinschaft mit Paul Artaria (1892–1959) auflösen müssen. Das Angebot dieser enormen beruflichen Herausforderung in einer gänzlich anderen Welt kam ihm nicht ungelegen. Vermittelt hatte sie der Holländer Mart Stam (1899–1986), den Schmidt aus gemeinsamen Tagen in Rotterdam kannte. Stam hatte von 1924 bis 1928 zusammen mit Schmidt und Emil Roth (1893–1980) in der Schweiz die programmatiche Zeitschrift *ABC. Beiträge zum Bauen* herausgegeben. Als freier Architekt war Stam seit 1928 für das Neue Frankfurt tätig, welches unter der Federführung von Ernst May seit 1925 entstand.¹⁵ Schmidt hatte sich zu dieser Zeit mit einigen experimentell errichteten Wohnbauten einen Namen als führender Vertreter des Neuen Bauens in der Schweiz gemacht.¹⁶ May war im Frühjahr 1930 von der sowjetischen Regierung beauftragt worden, eine kleine Gruppe von Spezialisten zusammenzustellen, um die städtebauliche Planung der neuen Industriestandorte zu leiten. Mitte Oktober traten Schmidt und seine 18 Kollegen unter der Leitung von Ernst May ihren Dienst in Moskau an. Etwa einen Monat später versicherte Hans Schmidt in einem Brief an seinen Bruder Georg in der Heimatstadt Basel bestes Befinden.¹⁷ Er berichtete, dass fast alle Mitglieder der Gruppe im selben Haus wohnen würden, und dass er und seine Frau sich mit den Stams eine 4-Zimmerwohnung teilten. Die Unterbringung im Büro sei noch nicht endgültig geregelt, aber sie hätten schon sehr viel Arbeit: «gleich eine ganz grosse sache: eine stadt von 120 000 einwohnern im ural.»¹⁸ Es handelte sich hier um die Planung von Magnitogorsk, als erste Modellstadt des Sozialismus ein Vorzeigeprojekt ersten Ranges.¹⁹ Schmidt berichtete diesbezüglich auch von Spannungen innerhalb der Gruppe: «es kostet stam und mich noch einige mühe, uns mit unseren ideen gegen den frankfurter geist durchzusetzen. zum teil hat ja auch m. nicht sehr glücklich ausgewählt, aber das wird sich schon finden.»²⁰ Die Gruppe stand unter enormen Druck, sowohl von innen als auch von aussen. Der sowjetische Staat erwartete nichts weniger als die Lösung für Stadtpläne von bisher nicht gekanntem Umfang. Das mehr oder weniger einheitliche Rezept für die Stadtplanung bestand für die Gruppe May in der Anwendung der Grundsätze des Neuen Bauens, wie Licht, Luft und Sonne für die in Zeilen angeordneten Häuserreihen, die systematische Trennung von Industrie und Wohngebieten sowie die rationelle Organisation des Verkehrs und der Bauausführung.

¹⁴ Hans Schmidt, «Sieben Jahre Sowjetunion (Erfahrungen und Erlebnisse)», Ms., 25 S., 1945, gta Archiv, S. 4.: «Ich erhielt im Herbst des Jahres 1930 [...] die Anfrage, ob ich bereit sei, mich für fünf Jahre als Architekt für Städteplanung und Wohnungsbau in den Dienst der Sowjetunion zu verpflichten.»

¹⁵ Vgl. Werner Möller, *Mart Stam 1899–1986. Architekt, Visionär, Urbanist*, Tübingen 1997 und Claudia Quiring (Hg.), *Ernst May 1886–1970*, München 2011.

¹⁶ Vgl. Haus Colnaghi-Abt 1927, Haus Schaeffer 1927–1930, Haus für alleinstehende Frauen ‚Zum Neuen Singer‘ 1927–1930, Haus Huber-Zweifel 1928–1930. Diese Bauten sind ausführlich beschrieben im Werkkatalog von Ursula Suter: Ursula Suter, *Hans Schmidt 1893–1972. Architekt in Basel, Moskau, Berlin-Ost, Zürich 1993*. Die Wohnhäuser entstanden in Bürogemeinschaft mit Paul Artaria.

¹⁷ Georg Schmidt (1896–1965) studierte Philosophie, Literatur und Geschichte und promovierte 1927 über ein geschichtsphilosophisches Thema. Seit 1927 war er als Assistent für Ausstellungen des Gewerbemuseums in Basel tätig. Er betätigte sich rege als Kunstkritiker und war Mitglied des Schweizerischen Werkbundes. Ausserdem unterrichtete er seit 1929 an der Gewerbeschule in Basel. Ab 1939 war Georg Schmidt Direktor der Kunstsammlungen Basel und machte auf sich aufmerksam durch sein aktives Interesse an der so genannten entarteten Kunst. Er schrieb grundlegende Arbeiten über Künstler wie Georges Braque, Piet Mondrian, Hans Arp, Paul Klee, Marc Chagall und Oskar Schlemmer. 1958 wurde er Professor für Kunstgeschichte an der Akademie der bildenden Künste in München.

¹⁸ Brief von Hans Schmidt an seinen Bruder Georg, Ts., 1 S., Moskau, 17.11.1930, gta Archiv.

¹⁹ Vgl. Thomas Flierl, *Standardstädte. Ernst May in der Sowjetunion 1930–1933. Texte und Dokumente*, Berlin 2012.

²⁰ Brief von Hans Schmidt an seinen Bruder Georg, Ts., 1 S., Moskau, 17.11.1930, gta Archiv.

Bis zum Ende des Jahres 1931 war die Richtung der ästhetischen Entwicklung in der Sowjetunion weitgehend unklar. Progressive und reaktionäre Kräfte stritten kräftig miteinander.²¹ Im Ausland wirkte noch stets das oben beschriebene progressive Bild der Avantgarde. Die Tatsache, dass Ernst May, der sich in Frankfurt ausschliesslich dem Neuen Bauen verpflichtet hatte, mit dem Auftrag der strategischen staatlichen Stadtplanung bedacht worden war, schien den Weg in die fortschrittliche Richtung zu bestärken. Für die Umsetzung des ersten Fünfjahresplans wurden ausländische Produktionsmittel, sowohl Mensch als auch Maschine, in grosser Zahl ins Land geholt.²² Verschiedene Spezialisten, aber auch einfache Arbeiter wurden verpflichtet, da man selbst noch nicht genügend ausgebildete Fachkräfte in allen notwendigen Bereichen im Land hatte. Schmidt analysierte rückblickend den besonderen Stand der Architekten unter den anderen Ingenieuren und betonte dezidiert die ideologische Aufgabe der Architektur.²³ Schmidt sah die Architektur nicht nur an sachliche Voraussetzungen gebunden, vielmehr beinhaltete Architektur auch geschichtliches Erleben und Ideologie als Ausdruck der gesellschaftlichen und politischen Verhältnisse. Diese Abbildfunktion der Architektur war seine persönliche Überzeugung, seine materialistische Grundhaltung, mit der Schmidt hoffnungsvoll in die Sowjetunion reiste und die er fortan unabirrt in verschiedenen gesellschaftlichen Systemen weiter verfolgte.

Das Andere – Einführung abendländischer Kultur in der Sowjetunion?

Die Widersprüche und Herausforderungen, mit denen die westlichen Fachleute in der Sowjetunion konfrontiert waren, beschrieb Schmidt anschaulich mit einer Anekdote aus eben diesen ersten Wochen:

«Mein holländischer Kollege hatte einen Entwurf für die Stadt Magnitogorsk fertiggestellt. [...] Er legte den Entwurf einer Gruppe junger Studenten, Komsomolzen, die von uns ihr Berufswissen erlernen sollten, zur Kritik vor. ‘Gewiss’ – lautete der Bescheid – ‘das ist alles sehr rationell und wohlüberlegt. Aber es ist im Grunde doch nur so, wie es Ford machen würde, wenn er aus wohlverstandenen eigenem Interesse das Beste für seine Arbeiter bauen würde. Bei uns aber ist es nicht Ford, der baut, sondern die Arbeiter bauen für sich selber. Darum suchen wir etwas Anderes.’»²⁴

Hier klingen schon kommende Fragen und Veränderungen an, aber auch ebenso die unklaren Vorstellungen, die man bezüglich eines noch zu definierenden ‘Anderen’ hatte. Auch Stam konnte für den konkreten Fall Magnitogorsk spontan keine befriedigende Antwort finden. Im Vorfeld hatte bereits ein offener, landesweiter Wettbewerb stattgefunden, dessen Ergebnisse das gesamte Spektrum der modernen zeitgenössischen städtebaulichen Ideen spiegelte. Keiner der Wettbewerbsbeiträge und anschliessenden Auftragsarbeiten konnte jedoch für die Ausführung

²¹ Vgl. Elke Pistorius (Hg.), *Der Architektenstreit nach der Revolution. Zeitgenössische Texte Russland 1925–1932*, Basel/Berlin/Boston 1992.

²² Vgl. Dietmar Neutatz, *Träume und Alpträume. Eine Geschichte Russlands im 20. Jahrhundert*, München 2013; Manfred Hildermeier, *Geschichte der Sowjetunion 1917–1991. Entstehung und Niedergang des ersten sozialistischen Staates*, München 1998 und Harald Bodenschatz und Christiane Post (Hg.), *Städtebau im Schatten Stalins. Die internationale Suche nach der sozialistischen Stadt in der Sowjetunion 1929–1935*, Berlin 2003.

²³ Hans Schmidt, «Sieben Jahre Sowjetunion (Erfahrungen und Erlebnisse)», Ms., 25 S., 1945, gta Archiv, S. 4.

²⁴ Hans Schmidt, «Sieben Jahre Sowjetunion (Erfahrungen und Erlebnisse)», Ms., 25 S., 1945, gta Archiv, S. 5.

überzeugen. So erwartete man also fast ein kleines Wunder von den Weitgereisten, die innert weniger Wochen – ohne Kenntnis der örtlichen Bauwirtschaft – eine solide Planung liefern sollten. Stams schematische Reihung, bestehend aus einer einheitlichen und streng Nord-Süd orientierten Planung mit nahezu endlos sich wiederholenden Wohnzeilen, wurde 1931 umgehend realisiert. Die Kritik am Gebauten fiel jedoch so heftig aus, dass der eilends herbeigerufene ungarische Architekt und Gropius-Schüler Fred Forbat (1897–1972) im Sommer 1932 den Plan nochmals überarbeitete. Forbat organisierte die Zeilenbauten nun in Quartalen mit einem akzentuierten Zentrum. Doch auch diese Planung, welche sich der Kritik öffnete und sich vom strengen Konzept der Vertreter des Neuen Bauens löste, wurde langfristig nicht akzeptiert. Die Spezialisten für das Neue Bauen gerieten schnell zwischen die Fronten. Schmidt kommentierte die beschriebene Szene aus den Anfangstagen lakonisch: «Nun – es hat uns Vieles zu schaffen gemacht, dieses Andere – und übrigens auch den russischen Kollegen.»²⁵ Denn anders als Adolf Loos (1870–1933), der mit seiner etwa zwanzig Jahre zuvor in Wien erschienenen Zeitschrift *Das Andere. Ein Blatt zur Einführung abendländischer Kultur in Österreich* genaue Vorstellungen davon hatte, wie dieses Andere aussehen sollte und wo die Vorbilder zu suchen seien, hatte man in der Sowjetunion bisher noch kein klares Bild einer zukünftigen Kultur, beziehungsweise Architektur entwickelt.²⁶ Zu dringend waren bis anhin die Fragen der Grundversorgung und der politischen Stabilisation dieses riesigen Landes gewesen.

Materialismus als geistige Haltung

Hans Schmidt setzte sich nach seiner Ankunft intensiv mit der Innenperspektive dieser neuen Welt auseinander. Er lernte die russische Sprache, studierte die Schriften von Marx, Engels, Lenin und Stalin und wollte erst die noch so gänzlich unbekannte Welt verstehen: «ich muss eben abwarten, bis ich einmal drankomme. man wird hier überhaupt erst wesentliches leisten können, wenn man ganz in die verhältnisse eingedrungen ist.»²⁷ Zunächst sass er jedoch als Einer von Vielen in einem staatlichen Projektierungsbüro und leistete, was von ihm erwartet wurde.²⁸ Schmidt fühlte sich als Mann ohne Namen und war mit seiner beruflichen Positionierung nicht zufrieden. Er verrichtete eher technische Arbeiten und sehnte sich nach mehr Verantwortung, vor allem aber nach dem Kontakt zur Bauausführung. Die notwendige Verbindung zur Praxis war schon in den 1920er Jahren sein Credo gewesen und nun, angesichts der tiefen Kluft zwischen den Planern im Projektierungsbetrieb und den tatsächlichen Verhältnissen auf den oft mehrere Tagesreisen entfernten Baustellen, vertiefe sich dieser Grundsatz. Sein Bruder Georg bestärkte ihn: «sicher aber wird deine sachliche überlegenheit letzten endes entscheiden.»²⁹ Wie ernst es Hans Schmidt mit der Verständigung und dem Verstehen der Verhältnisse vor Ort war, zeigt seine Artikelserie über die sowjetischen Verhältnisse, die er 1931 im Basler *Vorwärts*, einem kommunistischen Wochenblatt, publizierte sowie seine umfassende Analyse des russischen

²⁵ Hans Schmidt, «Sieben Jahre Sowjetunion (Erfahrungen und Erlebnisse)», Ms., 25 S., 1945, gta Archiv, S. 5f.

²⁶ Das Andere. Ein Blatt zur Einführung abendländischer Kultur in Österreich: geschrieben von Adolf Loos, 2 Hefte, Wien 1903.

²⁷ Bei seinem Bruder Georg bestellte er ein Jahr nach seiner Ankunft ideologische Grundlagenliteratur: «würdest du in der unionsbuchhandlung verschiedene bücher für mich bestellen und hersenden lassen, die ich hier nicht bekommen kann. es sind folgende schriften: internationaler arbeiterverlag: marx-engels, komm. manifest, engels, entwicklung des sozialismus von der utopie zur wissenschaft, marx, lohnarbeit und kapital, marx, lohn, preis und profit, lenin, staat und revolution, neuer deutscher verlag: lenin, der imperialismus, stalin, probleme des leninismus, schliesslich eine gute ausgabe des kapitals von marx.» Vgl. Brief von Hans Schmidt an Georg Schmidt, Ts., 3 S., 10.2.1931, gta Archiv.

²⁸ Brief von Hans Schmidt an Georg Schmidt, Ts., 4 S., 28.5.1931, gta Archiv.

²⁹ Brief von Georg Schmidt an Hans Schmidt, Ts., 4 S., 18.5.1931, gta Archiv.

Bau- und Wohnungswesens, die er bereits 1932 in einem Sammelband zur sowjetischen Wirtschaft vorlegte.³⁰ Schmidt war es ein Bedürfnis, den Kollegen im Westen seine Innenperspektive zu vermitteln. Während bei seinen sensiblen Zeitzeugenberichten aus dem Alltag das Narrative im Vordergrund stand und er ausufernd erzählte, schlug er in seinen Ausführungen zu den wirtschaftlichen Verhältnissen einen sachlichen und analytischen Ton an. Diese zwei unterschiedlichen Ebenen seiner Rezeption charakterisieren seine Wahrnehmung und sein Interesse. Zugleich zeigen sie die Intensität und Tiefe seiner Auseinandersetzung mit der Situation vor Ort.

Durch den Briefwechsel mit seinem um drei Jahre jüngeren Bruder Georg öffnete sich für Hans Schmidt einerseits das Fenster zur alten Welt, andererseits vermittelte ihm Georg ein Bild von der Außenwahrnehmung seiner neuen Welt. In Georg hatte er einen Bewunderer und Kritiker zugleich, mit ihm konnte er seine Situation intellektuell reflektieren. Weder Georg noch Hans waren zu diesem Zeitpunkt Mitglied der kommunistischen Partei. Aber beide fühlten sich dem Klassenkampf auf geradezu idealistische Weise verpflichtet, seit sie 1918 den Generalstreik in Basel erlebt hatten: «In Russland schien uns die endliche Überwindung dieses heillosen Gegensatzes in Gang gekommen zu sein.»³¹ Sie diskutierten ideelle und berufliche Entscheidungsfragen trotz der räumlichen Entfernung mitunter intensiv. Liess Georg, der angehende Museumsdirektor, beispielsweise das Stichwort Materialismus fallen:

«im übrigen ist mir auch hier der ewige eiertanz um den kern der sache herum furchtbar qualvoll. ich muss alles indirekt sagen und damit auch meine hauptfunktion, das anbohren und abrökeln der bürgerlichen begriffe und vorstellungen ausüben. es dreht sich mir innerlich alles um den kampf gegen den idealismus und für den materialismus.»³²,

so antwortete Hans kurze Zeit darauf: «materialismus bedeutet gerade das bewusstsein der konkret wirklichen dinge und vorgänge.»³³ Beide erklären hier – sich jeweils an Marx orientierend – ihren Begriff vom Materialismus und es wird deutlich, wie sehr dabei jeder in seiner eigenen Gegenwart verhaftet war. Während es Georg noch um das Überwinden der bürgerlichen Begriffe und Vorstellungen ging, konnte Hans schon von einer neuen gesellschaftlichen Ordnung ausgehen und sah der Entwicklung in der Sowjetunion zuversichtlich entgegen.

Abkehr vom Neuen Bauen

Das oben von Hans Schmidt angeführte, noch nicht näher definierte «Andere» trat im Februar 1932 im Zuge des Wettbewerbsentscheides zum Sowjetpalast für alle Welt deutlich und kurze Zeit darauf erstmals namenlich als Sozialistischer Realismus in Erscheinung.³⁴ Der Juryentscheid des offenen Wettbewerbs zum Sowjetpalast zeigte die ästhetische Neu-

³⁰ Vgl. Hans Schmidt, Das Bau- und Wohnungswesen, in: Gerhard Dobbert (Hg.), *Die rote Wirtschaft. Probleme und Tatsachen*, Königsberg/Berlin 1932, S. 187–203 und auszugsweise abgedruckt Hans Schmidt, Bau- und Wohnungswesen in Rußland, in: *Die neue Stadt* (1932), H. 5, S. 111–113. Im Basler *Vorwärts* erschienen insgesamt fünf Artikel: «Die Antwort der Geschichte» am 27.8.1931, «Der neue Weg» am 27.10.1931, «Altes und neues Moskau» am 2.11.1931, «2500 Kilometer nach Osten» am 11.11.1931 und «Die Kulturaufgabe des Sozialismus» am 14.11.1931.

³¹ Vgl. Georg Schmidt, Soziologische Kunstgeschichte?, in: Ders., *Umgang mit Kunst. Ausgewählte Schriften 1940–1963*, Olten 1966, S. 13–18, hier S. 13.

³² Brief von Georg Schmidt an Hans Schmidt, Ts., 4 S., 18.5.1931, gta Archiv.

³³ Brief von Hans Schmidt an Georg Schmidt, Ts., 4 S., 28.5.1931, gta Archiv.

³⁴ Der Begriff des Sozialistischen Realismus wurde in der Sowjetunion erstmals 1932 in einer Literaturzeitschrift verwendet. Vgl. Iwan M. Gronskij, Literaturnaja Gazeta, 23.5.1932, zit. nach: Wolfgang Klein, Realismus, in: *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe. Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*, Bd. 5, Stuttgart/Weimar 2003, S. 149–197, hier S. 179.

orientierung deutlich an. Als demonstratives Zeichen für die Abkehr von der Moderne gewannen drei nicht moderne Entwürfe. Hans Schmidt beobachtete das Geschehen aufmerksam und notierte besorgt: «Die Frage der architektonischen Form befindet sich im Zustand grösster Unklarheit.»³⁵ Auch öffentlich bezog er nun Position. Im Sommer 1932 erklärte Schmidt in der Zeitschrift *Die Neue Stadt*, der Nachfolgerin der Zeitschrift *Das Neue Frankfurt*, welche als Plattform des Neuen Bauens und der CIAM fungierte, den Kollegen im Westen seinen Blick auf die Entscheidung, die er sogleich als programmatisch bestätigte.³⁶ Nach der Bekanntgabe des Wettbewerbsresultates zum Sowjetpalast zu Beginn des Jahres liefen insbesondere die westlichen Vertreter der CIAM Sturm. Sie sahen ihre Ideale in Gefahr und meinten, korrigierend eingreifen zu müssen.³⁷ Ein Brief des Vorstandes der CIAM an Stalin persönlich gibt davon ein bezeugtes Zeugnis.³⁸ Schmidt, vor Ort in Moskau, fühlte sich als aktives Gründungsmitglied der CIAM vom eigenmächtigen Handeln seiner Kollegen übergegangen und war damit nicht einverstanden.³⁹ Zudem befürwortete er ausdrücklich den ursprünglich für das Jahr 1932 in Moskau geplanten CIAM Kongress als wichtige Plattform für eine gegenseitige Verständigung und den inhaltlichen Austausch. Schmidt versuchte zu vermitteln. Er plädierte für Objektivität und die Besinnung darauf, das Neue Bauen nicht als fertige Erscheinung, sondern als einen Prozess anzusehen, der mit allen sozialen, politischen und technischen Erscheinungen eines Kulturganzen aufs engste verbunden ist.

Schmidt sah die Entwicklung des Neuen Bauens in enger Verbindung mit der Entwicklung des Kapitalismus, aber zugleich auch in Abhängigkeit von den gesellschaftlichen Bedingungen. Das eigentliche Programm des Neuen Bauens – die absolute Einheit von Kunstform und technischer Form – konnte in der Sowjetunion nicht verwirklicht werden, da dafür eine entwickelte Technik benötigt wurde. Die soziale Idee hingegen, Wohlstand für alle zu produzieren, liess sich in der Sowjetunion durchaus umsetzen. Schmidt war bereit, den Rückschlag des Neuen Bauens in der Sowjetunion angesichts der gegebenen Bedingungen zu akzeptieren. Er beharrte jedoch auf der Richtigkeit des eigentlichen Ziels: kein Stilwechsel, sondern eine grundsätzlich neue Auffassung von den Aufgaben des Bauens.⁴⁰ Hier kommt noch einmal ganz deutlich Schmidts persönliche Maxime zum Ausdruck. Er wandte sich von Beginn an vehement gegen eine ästhetische Definition des Neuen Bauens. Die Stilfrage stand für ihn nie zur Diskussion. Für ihn waren der auf Wirtschaftlichkeit bedachte Bauprozess und eine rationale Methode des Bauens von übergeordneter Bedeutung. Nicht alle seiner Kollegen waren mit dieser Ausrichtung einverstanden, wie schon der Streit mit Le Corbusier (1887–1965) beim Gründungstreffen der CIAM 1928 in La Sarraz zeigte. Le Corbusier wollte hier seine «Fünf Punkte» als einheitliche gestalterische Formel für das Neue Bauen einbringen, wogegen sich Schmidt und Stam erfolgreich zur Wehr setzten.⁴¹ Schmidt war überzeugt von seiner Sicht, die ihn auch in Bezug auf die Entwicklung in der Sowjetunion zuversichtlich stimmte. Er ging davon aus, dass die sowjetischen Architekten eines Tages zur Besinnung kommen würden und dem Bauprozess und der Methodik

³⁵ Hans Schmidt, «Die Aufgaben der Sowjetarchitektur und die Mitarbeit der ausländischen Spezialisten», Ms., 3 S., 1932, gta Archiv, publiziert in: Ders., *Beiträge zur Architektur 1924–1964*, Berlin (Ost) 1965, hier S. 88f.

³⁶ Hans Schmidt, Die Sowjetunion und das neue Bauen, in: *Die Neue Stadt* (1932), H. 6/7, S. 146–148.

³⁷ Vgl. Aus den Beschlüssen der Delegiertenversammlung in Barcelona, in: *Die Neue Stadt* (1932), H. 2, S. 45.

³⁸ Vgl. Brief an Stalin, 20.4.1932, abgedruckt in: Martin Steinmann (Hg.), *CIAM, Internationale Kongresse für Neues Bauen, Dokumente 1928–1939*, Basel 1979, S. 124f. und Erklärung an den Internationalen Kongress für Neues Bauen. Generalsekretariat, in: *Die Neue Stadt* (1932), H. 6/7, S. 146. Ein weiterer Brief an Stalin ist datiert auf den 28.4.1932, gta Archiv.

³⁹ Vgl. Erklärung an den Internationalen Kongress für Neues Bauen. Generalsekretariat, in: *Die Neue Stadt* (1932), H. 6/7, S. 146.

⁴⁰ Hans Schmidt, «Die Sowjetunion und das neue Bauen», Ts., 3 S., 1932, gta Archiv, publiziert in: *Die Neue Stadt* (1932), H. 6/7, S. 146–148 und in: Ders., *Beiträge zur Architektur 1924–1964*, Berlin (Ost) 1965, hier S. 92ff.

⁴¹ Vgl. Martin Steinmann (Hg.), *CIAM, Internationale Kongresse für Neues Bauen, Dokumente 1928–1939*, Basel 1979.

ihre eigentliche Aufmerksamkeit schenken würden. Für Schmidt bedeutete dies konkret die Hoffnung, dass – sobald es die technischen und personellen Voraussetzungen zulassen würden – die Industrialisierung des Bauens auch in der Sowjetunion das eigentliche Ziel sein würde. Es dauerte jedoch noch mehr als zwanzig Jahre, bis dieser Gesinnungswandel tatsächlich einsetzte, denn vorerst galt in der Sowjetunion die Doktrin einer nicht näher definierten nationalen Form in Verbindung mit einem situativ angepassten traditionellen Bauen. Jenseits aller gestalterischen Fragen existierte auch ein Interesse am typisierten Bauen, an standardisierten Grundrissen, um der immensen Baumasse zumindest ansatzweise Herr zu werden. Planungen und Wettbewerbsbeiträge von Hans Schmidt und vor allem ein Blick in die richtungweisende Architekturzeitschrift *Architektura SSSR* zeugen von diesem stetigen Bedürfnis.⁴²

Was ist richtig?

Der stilistische Bruch mit den Ideen des Neuen Bauens führte bei jenen Kollegen, die nicht ideologisch interessiert waren, zur Rückkehr in den Westen. Mit der Machtergreifung Hitlers im Januar 1933 befand sich jedoch auch diese Welt inzwischen in einem grundlegenden Wandel. Hans Schmidt blieb in der Sowjetunion. Zu tief war er davon überzeugt, nur hier einen wirklich nützlichen Beitrag für den Aufbau einer neuen und besseren Gesellschaft leisten zu können. Inzwischen war er zusammen mit Stam für den Aufbau der Stadt Orsk am südlichen Ende des Urals verantwortlich, und setzte sich nicht mehr nur planerisch, sondern auch intellektuell mit der Situation auseinander.⁴³ Die bange Frage «Was ist richtig?» stellte er sich selbst nach einem turbulenten Jahr. War er im Sommer 1932 noch einigermassen zuversichtlich gewesen, so sah er ein Jahr später einer wenig befriedigenden Realität kritisch ins Auge:

«Die letzten Arbeiten unseres Projektierungsbüros zeigen deutlich, dass wir uns auf dem Wege zur Restauration befinden, zur Restauration des alten überwundenen Begriffs der äusserlichen, angeklebten Architektur, der abgestandenen Form der alten Zinskasernen, der Strasse mit Parade- und Hoffassaden. Wir erhöhen die Stockwerke und verkleinern die Fenster, wir kleben Konsolen unter die Balkone und Steinquader an die Sockel – alles der Architektur zuliebe. Aber wo haben die Partei und die Regierung davon gesprochen, dass der Weg zur Architektur über überflüssige Gesimse und Ornamente zu gehen habe?»⁴⁴

Mit erstaunlicher Klarheit analysierte Schmidt die Situation, beurteilte die Rolle der Partei und kritisierte die Interpretationen der Architekten. Seine Interpretation – die logische Einheit von Material und Form zu erkennen und zu gestalten – sah er noch nicht verwirklicht. Frustriert zog Schmidt sein vorläufiges Fazit: «Inzwischen helfen wir uns damit nach Stilen zu suchen. Das ist für mich dasselbe, wie wenn wir nach einer neuen Religion suchen müssten.»⁴⁵ Wiederum wird deutlich, dass Schmidt mit-

⁴² Vgl. Hans Schmidt und Margarethe Schütte-Lihotzky, Wettbewerb für Standardwohnungen (1934), in: Ursula Suter, *Hans Schmidt 1893–1972. Architekt in Basel, Moskau, Berlin-Ost*, Zürich 1993, S. 214f., Hans Schmidt, Standardisierung von Kücheneinrichtungen, in: *Architektura SSSR* (1937), H. 9, S. 46ff. und Typenprojekte für Wohnhäuser, in: *Architektura SSSR* (1937), H. 11, S. 11–59.

⁴³ Hans Schmidt, Wie ich arbeite, in: *Architektura SSSR* (1933), H. 6, S. 36f.; Ders., «Prinzipien meiner Arbeit», 30.11.1934, Ts., 2 S., gta Archiv und in: Ders., *Beiträge zur Architektur 1924–1964*, Berlin (Ost) 1965, hier S. 101f.

⁴⁴ Hans Schmidt, «Was ist richtig?», Ms., 2 S., 1933, gta Archiv, publiziert in: Ders., *Beiträge zur Architektur 1924–1964*, Berlin 1965, hier S. 90f.

⁴⁵ Hans Schmidt, «Die Architektur an der Schwelle des zweiten Fünfjahresplanes» (Fragebogen) und «Die Architektur an der Schwelle der zweiten pjatiletka» (Antworten zum Fragebogen), 2 Ts., 1 S., Ts., 2 S., 1932 (Fragebogen), 12.10.1932 (Antworten), gta Archiv, publiziert unter dem Titel *Die Architektur an der Schwelle des zweiten Fünfjahrsplanes*, in: Ders., *Beiträge zur Architektur 1924–1964*, Berlin (Ost) 1965, hier S. 86f.

nichten an Stilfragen interessiert war. Diese verortete er im Bereich des Religiösen, was für ihn als überzeugten Materialisten eine Sache des Unmöglichen war. Schmidt erkannte durchaus den breiten Interpretationsrahmen, den die ideologischen Vorgaben der Partei beinhalteten. Für ihn war die Mehrheit der gebauten Ergebnisse jedoch schlichtweg inakzeptabel, da sie nicht eine innere Kohärenz, sondern eine Maskerade zeigten.

Sozialistischer Realismus als neue Kultur

Im Frühjahr 1934 wurde der Begriff des Sozialistischen Realismus im Statut des Schriftstellerverbandes inhaltlich präzisiert und in der *Prawda*, der massgebenden Tageszeitung, veröffentlicht.⁴⁶ Dieser Definition zu folge sollte die wahrheitsgetreue, historisch konkrete Darstellung der Wirklichkeit in ihrer revolutionären Entwicklung gezeigt werden. Zugleich sollten die werktätigen Menschen im Geiste des Sozialismus ideologisch umgeformt und erzogen werden. Auch diese vermeintliche Präzisierung blieb reichlich unkonkret. Deutlich wurde jedoch die angestrebte ideelle Verbindung der Bereiche Kunst (Realismus) und Gesellschaft (Sozialismus). Der Sozialistische Realismus sollte in einem motivierenden, positiven Sinne für den Aufbau des sozialistischen Staates werben und ihn propagieren. Ein ebenfalls für 1934 geplanter Allunionskongress der Bauschaffenden sollte für den Bereich der Architektur Klarheit im Umgang mit der gewünschten Methode bringen.⁴⁷ Dieser Kongress wurde jedoch immer wieder verschoben und fand erst im Juni 1937 statt. Schmidt stellte sich die Frage nach dem Realismus in der Architektur unmittelbar im Anschluss an die ersten offiziellen Erklärungen 1934: «Man spricht jetzt sehr viel vom Realismus in der Literatur – Wie steht es aber mit dem Realismus in der Architektur?»⁴⁸ Bemerkenswert ist, dass Schmidt in seinen Überlegungen nicht den Begriff Sozialistischer Realismus verwendet, sondern allein vom Realismus spricht. Dies kann als Indiz gesehen werden, dass er sich noch immer an Marx orientierte und versuchte, für sich einen Begriff vom Realismus in der Architektur zu definieren, welcher zugleich dem Marxschen Begriff des Materialismus gleichgesetzt werden kann. Materialismus und Realismus sind diesem Verständnis nach identisch. Das Erbe der Vergangenheit zweifelte Schmidt zu keiner Zeit an. Selbst in seinen radikalsten Texten der 1920er Jahre betrachtete er die fortschrittlichen zeitgenössischen Entwicklungen als logische Konsequenz der Geschichte.⁴⁹ In verschiedenen Dokumenten nach 1934 findet man immer wieder den gleichen Kerngedanken von Schmidt wonach es in der Architektur der Vergangenheit stets wesentlich gewesen sei, für den technischen, funktionellen und politischen Inhalt der architektonischen Aufgabe einen einheitlichen und realen Ausdruck zu finden. Die Berücksichtigung dieser realen Bedingungen führt dann automatisch zu einer realistischen Architektur.⁵⁰ Deutlich erkennbar ist hier wiederum sein materialistischer Ansatz Marxscher Prägung, der sich an den realen Bedingungen orientiert und nicht, wie Lenin es forderte, der Realität das Geistige überordnet.

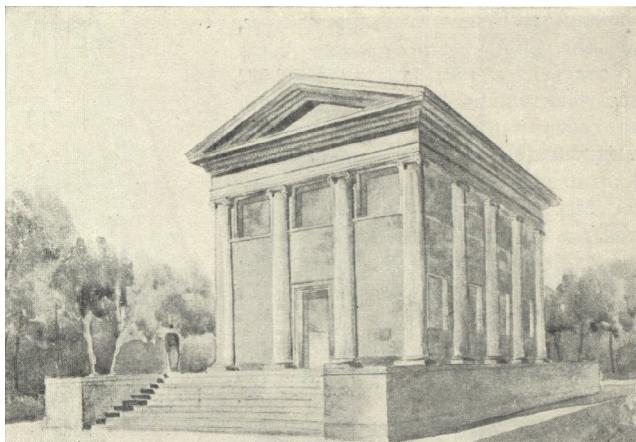
⁴⁶ Statut des Verbandes Sowjetischer Schriftsteller, in: Hans-Jürgen Schmitt/Godehard Schramm, *Sozialistische Realismuskonzeptionen. Dokumente zum 1. Allunionskongreß der Sowjetschriftsteller*, Frankfurt a. M. 1974, S. 389–395 und in: *Prawda*, 6.5.1934.

⁴⁷ Karl Schlögel, *Terror und Traum. Moskau 1937*, München 2008, hier S. 313 und Hugh D. Hudson, *Blueprints and Blood. The Stalinization of Soviet Architecture 1917–1937*, Princeton 1994, hier S. 170ff.

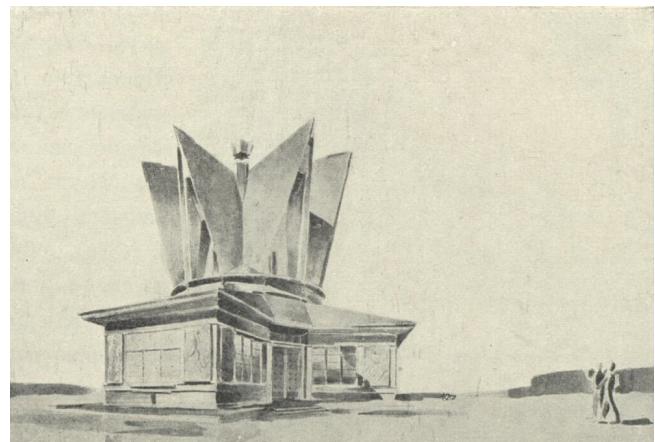
⁴⁸ Hans Schmidt, «Architektonische Reise», 2 Ms., 4 S., 3 S., dt. und russ., 1934, gta Archiv.

⁴⁹ Hans Schmidt, *Das Bauen ist nicht Architektur*, in: *Das Werk* (1927), H. 5, S. 139–142.

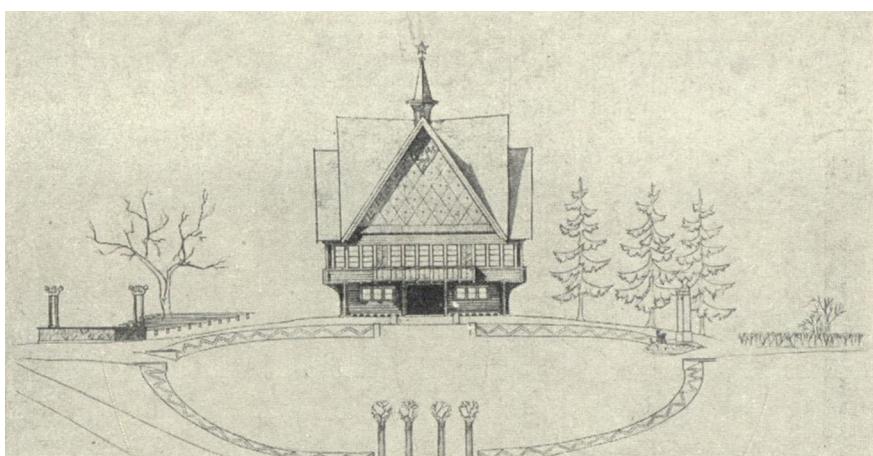
⁵⁰ Vgl. Hans Schmidt, «Architektonische Reise», 2 Ms., 4 S., 3 S., dt. und russ., 1934, gta Archiv und ausserdem Ders., «Über den Formalismus (Beitrag zu einer Diskussion im Gorstrojprojekt)», 2 Ms., 5 S., 6 S., russ., dt., undatiert (1930/1937), verm. 1934, gta Archiv und in: Ders., *Beiträge zur Architektur 1924–1964*, Berlin (Ost) 1965, hier S. 105f.



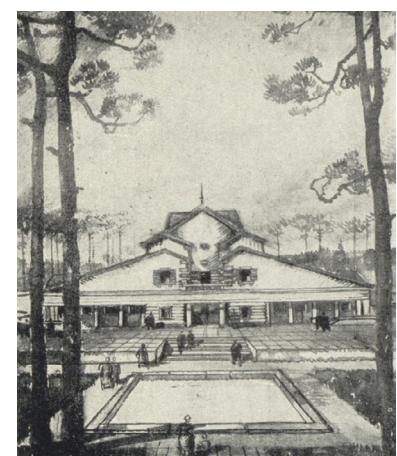
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Die seit 1934 kursierende Stalinsche Formel «national in der Form, sozialistisch im Inhalt» bot den Architekten reichlich Potential für Interpretationen, Denunzierungen und Machtspielen.⁵¹ Zwar liessen das Ergebnis des Wettbewerbs zum Sowjetpalast (1932) und die prämierten Wettbewerbsbeiträge für die neuen Metrostationen sowie auf städtebaulicher Ebene verschiedene Bebauungsvorschläge für neue Plätze oder Quaianlagen und schliesslich der Generalplan zur Rekonstruktion Moskaus (1935) eine eindeutig historisierende Richtung erkennen. Welches historische Gewand jedoch zu wählen sei, schien reine Ermessenssache des jeweiligen Architekten und wurde anschliessend von den Kritikern oder von Stalin selbst wiederum nach Gusto für gut oder schlecht befunden. Boris Groys erinnert in diesem Zusammenhang an das wichtigste Prinzip des dialektischen Materialismus in seiner leninistisch-stalinistischen Fassung: das so genannte «Gesetz der Einheit und des Kampfes der Gegensätze».⁵² Demnach hätten zwei sich widersprechende Aussagen gleichzeitig ihre Gültigkeit. Das erklärt ansatzweise die Widersprüchlichkeit, mit der gebaut und anschliessend über das Gebaute geurteilt wurde. Logische Widersprüche bildeten – gemäss diesem Materialismus – den realen Konflikt der gegensätzlichen geschichtlichen Kräfte ab, welcher den Kern des Lebens ausmache. Nur die innerlich widersprüchlichen Sätze seien lebendig und damit wahr. Diese Haltung war für Schmidt, der die innere Kohärenz und eine logische Einheit von Material und Form anstrebe,

Abb. 1

A. Kirilov, Kulturhaus für eine Kolchose für 100 Personen, Ansicht, 1935.
Abb. aus: *Architektura SSSR* (1936), H. 3, S. 44.

Abb. 2

I. P. Antipov, Kulturhaus für eine Kolchose für 100 Personen, Ansicht, 1935.
Abb. aus: *Architektura SSSR* (1936), H. 3, S. 45.

Abb. 3

O. A. Voutké, Kulturhaus für eine Kolchose für 100 Personen, Ansicht, 1935.
Abb. aus: *Architektura SSSR* (1936), H. 3, S. 47.

Abb. 4

A. Benoi, Kulturhaus für eine Kolchose für 350 Personen, Ansicht, 1935.
Abb. aus: *Architektura SSSR* (1936), H. 3, S. 49.

vollkommen indiskutabel. Er orientierte sich weiterhin am Marxschen Denkschema. Für ihn blieb die Empirie (Wirklichkeit) dem Geist (Ideologie) übergeordnet und nicht umgekehrt. Er blieb der vorsozialistischen Form des Realismus im Marxschen Sinne treu. Damit stand Schmidt im Widerspruch zur geforderten Doktrin. Nun ging es nicht mehr um Objektivität, sondern um Parteinahme für die Sache des Sozialismus wie es Lenin bereits 1908 formuliert hatte und wie sie nun ausdrücklich eingefordert wurde.⁵³ Das Schmidtsche Plädoyer für Objektivität aus dem Jahr 1932 war damit obsolet und wurde durch den Zwang zur Parteilichkeit absurdum geführt.

Methode statt Formalismus – Sozialistischer Klassizismus in der Architektur

Das einzige historische Gewand, welches Hans Schmidt akzeptieren konnte, war das klassizistische. Er blieb seinen Überzeugungen treu, indem er weiterhin das Bauen als Prozess betrachtete. Für ihn waren weniger die stilistischen Mittel – das Pathos der klassischen Architektur – als vielmehr die Methodik von Interesse. Er sah in der Architektur primär die Verwirklichung einer hohen Gesetzmässigkeit, die in einer bestimmten Organisation und Harmonie zum Ausdruck kam. Schmidt besann sich auf die Wurzeln seines Architekturstudiums in München und Zürich und bezog sich auf die Architektur um 1800 wie sie ihm durch seine Lehrer Friedrich von Thiersch (1852–1921), Karl Moser (1860–1936) und Hans Bernoulli (1876–1959) vermittelt worden war.⁵⁴ Er erinnerte sich:

«Als ich meine Arbeit als Architekt begann, begeisterte mich die französische Architektur des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts. Diese Architektur zeichnete sich, verglichen beispielsweise mit der italienischen oder deutschen Architektur, durch ihre Strenge, Zurückhaltung und Logik aus. Als grundlegendes Kriterium der Architektur galt den Theoretikern dieser Epoche der Begriff der *convenance* (Angemessenheit).»⁵⁵

Als sein Mentor Karl Moser im Februar 1936 starb, nahm Schmidt dies zum Anlass, einen kleinen Erinnerungstext zu schreiben. In diesem Text wird deutlich, wie Schmidt durch Moser geprägt wurde und wie sehr er ihn verehrte. Ebenso wird deutlich, dass Moser gerade nicht den stilistischen Kanon des Klassizismus vermittelte hatte, sondern vielmehr die dem Klassizismus innewohnende Methode, die Architektur als künstlerische Einheit zu betrachten.⁵⁶ Schmidts Beitrag zu einem offenen, landesweit ausgeschriebenen Wettbewerb für die Typenprojektierung eines Kulturhauses in einem Kolchos aus dem Jahr 1935 spiegelt genau diese Haltung. Es handelte sich – verglichen mit den Bauaufgaben und Größenordnungen, die in Moskau nachgefragt wurden – um ein eher marginales Projekt. Jedoch entsprach die Nutzung und die geplante serielle Herstellung verschiedener Typen ganz seinen persönlichen Zielsetzungen

⁵¹ Zit. nach Hugh D. Hudson, *Blueprints and Blood. The Stalinization of Soviet Architecture 1917–1937*, Princeton 1994, hier S. 171. Hudson bezieht sich auf ein den Allunionskongress vorbereitendes Protokoll vom 4.11.1934.

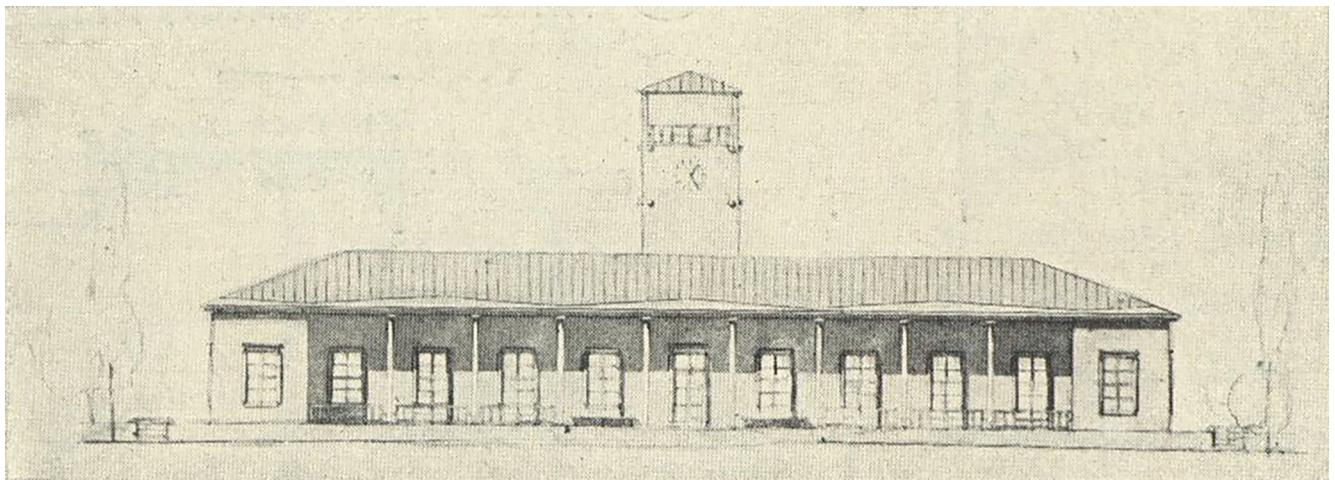
⁵² Boris Groys, Die gebaute Ideologie, in: Peter Noever (Hg.), *Die Tyrannie des Schönen. Architektur der Stalin-Zeit*, München/New York 1994, S. 15–21, hier S. 18.

⁵³ W. I. Lenin, *Materialismus und Empiriokritizismus. Kritische Bemerkungen über eine reaktionäre Philosophie*, Moskau 1908.

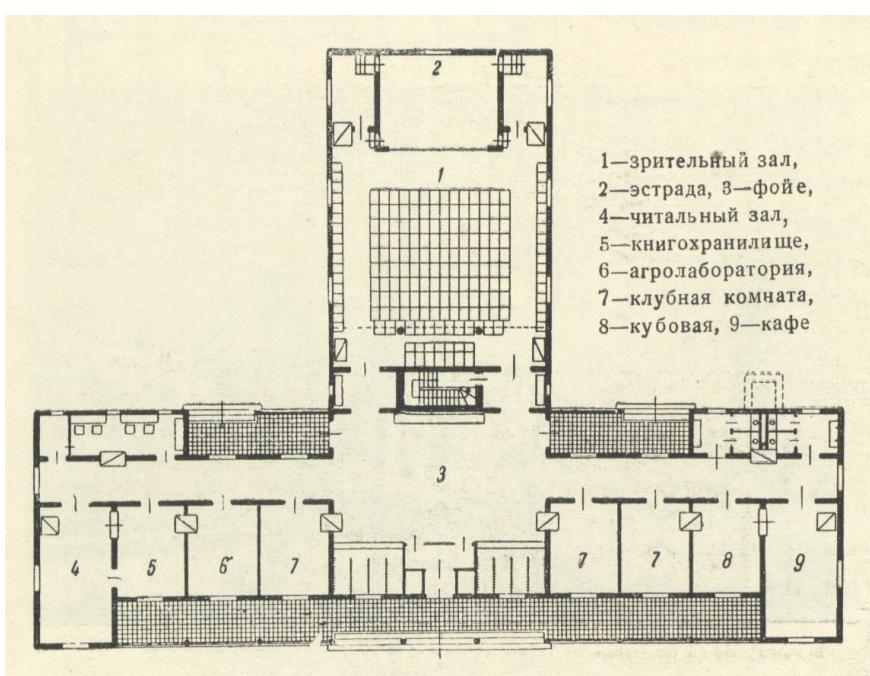
⁵⁴ Paul Mebes (Hg.), *Um 1800*, 2 Bde., München 1908; Friedrich Ostendorf, *Sechs Bücher vom Bauen*, 3 Bde., Berlin 1913–1920 und Heinrich Tessenow, *Hausbau und dergleichen*, Berlin 1916.

⁵⁵ Hans Schmidt, «Über den Formalismus (Beitrag zu einer Diskussion im Gorstrojprojekt)», 2 Ms., 5 S., 6 S., russ., dt., undatiert (1930/1937), verm. 1934, gta Archiv und in: Ders., *Beiträge zur Architektur 1924–1964*, Berlin (Ost) 1965, hier S. 105f.

⁵⁶ Hans Schmidt, «Erinnerung an Karl Moser», Ts., 2 S., 1.12.1936, gta Archiv.



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6

im Hinblick auf ein industrielles Bauen und die soziale Relevanz der Architektur. Schmidt entwickelte eine der Bauaufgabe, dem Klima und den materiellen Bedingungen angemessene Gestaltung, welche Logik und Gesetzmässigkeit harmonisch vereint (Abb. 5 und 6). Die streng symmetrische Anlage mit ihrer schlichten Formensprache vereint klassizistisches und traditionelles Bauen zu einer betont zurückhaltenden, ländlichen Architektur. Der Entwurf wurde 1936 zusammen mit weiteren Vorschlägen (Abb. 1, 2, 3, und 4), unter anderen von André Lurçat (1894–1970) und Iwan I. Leonidow (1902–1959), in der massgebenden Fachzeitschrift *Architektura SSSR* publiziert (Abb. 7 und 8).⁵⁷

Für Georg Schmidt in Basel war die positive Rezeption des Klassizismus wenig nachvollziehbar. Während Hans in Moskau versuchte, die Gegebenheiten vor Ort zu verstehen – immer wieder mahnte er seinen Bruder Georg, man könne die Lage nur begreifen, wenn man einmal vor

Abb. 5

H. Schmidt, Kulturhaus für eine Kolchose für 180 Personen, Ansicht, 1935.
Abb. aus: *Architektura SSSR* (1936), H. 3, S. 48.

Abb. 6

H. Schmidt, Kulturhaus für eine Kolchose für 180 Personen, Grundriss, 1935. Abb. aus: *Architektura SSSR* (1936), H. 3, S. 48.

⁵⁷ R. J. Khiguer, Gesamtsowjetischer Wettbewerb für ein Kulturhaus einer Kolchose, in: *Architektura SSSR* (1936), H. 3, S. 44–48.

Ort gewesen sei – erkannte Georg aus der Ferne ganz andere grundlegende Widersprüche. Georg war zutiefst überzeugt von der Idee eines demokratischen Sozialismus, der einen friedlichen Übergang zum Sozialismus anstrehte, sich an Marx orientierte und die Auffassungen Lenins nicht teilte. Er proklamierte sozialistische Ideen öffentlich, wie beispielsweise im Frühjahr des Jahres 1936 vor dem Zürcher Ingenieur- und Architektenverein.⁵⁸ Ausserdem trat er – ebenso wie Hans – vehement für ein «stilloses» Bauen ein, für ein Bauen, welches Stilfragen überwindet und sich auf die drei entscheidenden Merkmale Konstruktion, Material und Gebrauchswert konzentriert.⁵⁹ Auf dem Weg zum «stillosen» Bauen waren für Georg Schmidt nicht ästhetische oder wirtschaftliche Fragen entscheidend, sondern gesellschaftliche. Hier kommt ein klarer Unterschied zur Sprache: Für Hans Schmidt, den Architekten, war Wirtschaftlichkeit stets der entscheidende Faktor. Georg seinerseits befürwortete zudem eine Abkehr vom Zwang zum Repräsentativen. In der äusseren Gleichheit sah er eine Option auf innere Freiheit und Unabhängigkeit. Angesichts der sowjetischen Kehrtwende zum Pathos der klassizistischen Architektur überkamen ihn tiefe Zweifel. In dem von Stalin angeordneten stilistischen Wandel erkannte er die Manifestierung eines gesellschaftlichen Wandels. Da für Georg Schmidt der antikisierende Klassizismus der nachgriechischen Architektur als Ausdruck von antidebaktratischen Staatsmächten galt, sah er durch die Anwendung des Klassizismus die Ideale des demokratischen Sozialismus in Gefahr. Für ihn lag die Vermutung nahe, «daß Rußland den demokratischen Sozialismus verraten und daß sich dort ein neuer Klassenstaat gebildet habe».⁶⁰ Mit der sowjetischen Rückkehr zum Stil geriet seine Russlandbegeisterung, die auf dem Geist der Avantgarde der 1920er Jahre fußte, ins Wanken. Der Idee eines demokratischen Sozialismus blieb er treu.

Industrialisierung als Aufgabe des Architekten

Im Juni 1937, wenige Tage vor Schmidts endgültiger Rückreise in die Schweiz, fand der schon seit 1934 geplante 1. Allunionskongress der Bau-schaffenden statt. Im Säulensaal des Gewerkschaftshauses in Moskau – die angestrebte Methode schon räumlich zelebrierend – wurde nun, im 20. Jubiläumsjahr der Revolution, der Sozialistische Realismus auch für die Architektur als grundlegend und verbindlich erklärt.⁶¹ Auf dem Kongress waren 418 Delegierte und 17 offizielle ausländische Gäste anwesend.⁶² Der Architekt Karo Alabjan (1897–1959), Generalsekretär des Organisationskomitees, hielt die Eröffnungsrede. Alabjan hatte bereits ein Jahr zuvor einen wegweisenden Artikel mit dem programmatischen Titel «Gegen Formalismus, Schematismus und Eklektizismus» veröffentlicht, in dem er selbst in alle genannten Richtungen pauschal kritisierte und auch seine Kollegen ausdrücklich zu gegenseitiger Kritik ermunterte.⁶³ Er forderte die Berücksichtigung nationaler Traditionen, sprach aber auch das Problem zu hoher Baukosten sowie mangelhafter Arbeitsorganisation an. Unter den wenigen Abbildungen findet sich der oben erwähnte Kulturhaus-Entwurf von Leonidow, der als formal verurteilt

⁵⁸ Vgl. Georg Schmidt, Hand und Maschine, in: *Werk* (1936), H. 16, S. 169–173.

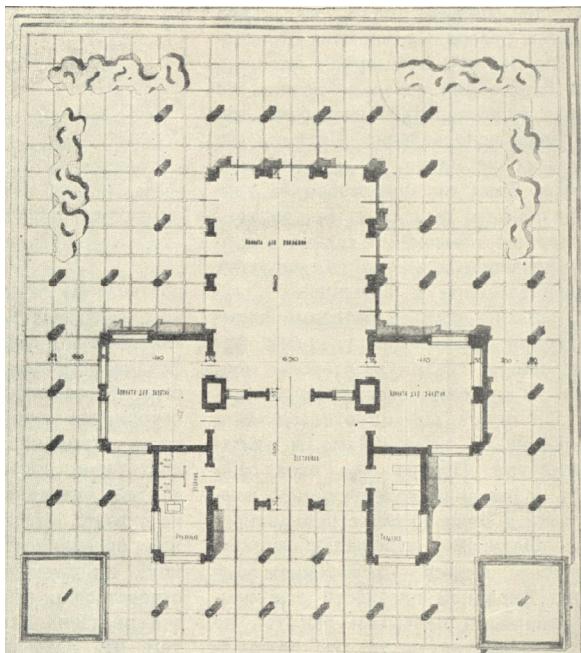
⁵⁹ Vgl. Georg Schmidt, Gebrauchsgerät, in: *Moderne Bauformen*, 31 (1932), S. 479–490.

⁶⁰ Vgl. Georg Schmidt, Soziologische Kunstgeschichte? (1962), in: Ders., *Umgang mit Kunst. Ausgewählte Schriften 1940–1963*, Olten 1966, S. 13–18, hier S. 14f.

⁶¹ Vgl. *Architektura SSSR* (1937), H. 7/8, hier Abb. S. 56.

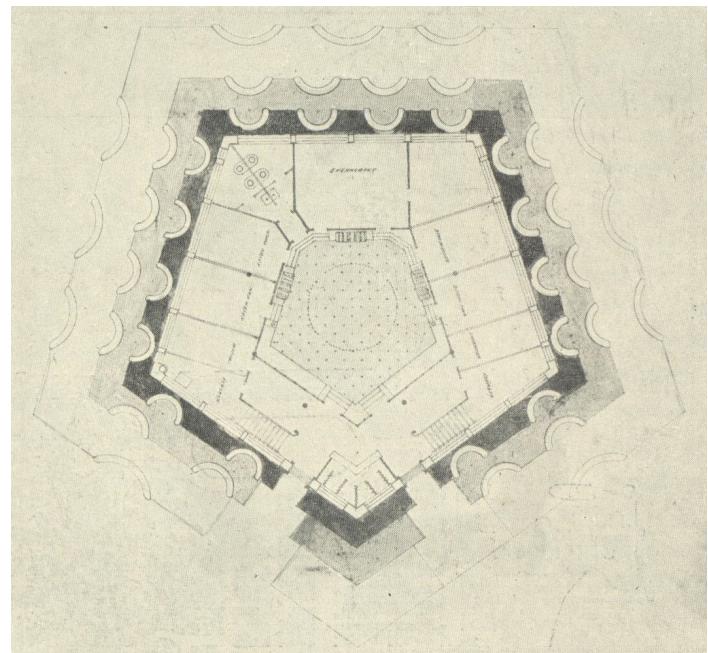
⁶² Karl Schlögel, *Terror und Traum. Moskau 1937*, München 2008, hier S. 309.

⁶³ Karo Alabjan, Gegen Formalismus, Schematismus und Eklektizismus, in: *Architektura SSSR* (1936), H. 4, S. 1–6, Abb. S. 3.



7

wurde (Abb. 8). In seiner Eröffnungsrede auf dem Kongress berichtete Alabjan über das aktuelle Baugeschehen. Er rechnete erneut scharf ab mit dem Formalismus und plädierte für eine neue Bewertung der sowjetischen Architekturgeschichte.⁶⁴ Die Architektur sollte der Leitlinie des sozialistischen Realismus folgen: «der Meisterung des klassischen Erbes, wie des Besten der zeitgenössischen Architektur».⁶⁵ Auch Hans Schmidt bereitete einen Beitrag für diesen Kongress vor. Einer nachträglichen Notiz auf dem Manuskript seiner Rede ist zu entnehmen, dass «nach dem Weggang von May» die «übrig gebliebenen Mitglieder der Gruppe» nicht zu diesem Kongress eingeladen wurden.⁶⁶ Scheinbar hatte Schmidt nicht nur mit einer Einladung, sondern auch mit der Möglichkeit einer Meinungsäußerung gerechnet. Der für den Kongress vorbereitete Text trug den Titel «Die Industrialisierung und die Aufgaben der Architekten».⁶⁷ Schmidt fasste hier seine Ideen zur Industrialisierung des Bauwesens in der Sowjetunion zusammen und analysierte die politische und technische Bedeutung der Industrialisierung sowie deren Bedeutung für die Architektur und die Architekten. Schmidt forderte, dass der Architekt sowohl zum Organisator und Wirtschafter des Bauvorganges werden müsse als auch zum ideellen Leiter der Industrialisierung. Abschließend skizzierte er die Perspektiven der Industrialisierung. Schmidt proklamierte «die Hausfabrik als höchste Form der Industrialisierung», denn erst die Hausfabrik beseitige die Differenzen zwischen Projektierungs- und Bauarbeit und stelle den Architekten in das Zentrum des Produktionsprozesses.⁶⁸ Der sowjetische Architekt Mossej Ginzburg (1892–1946), ehemals bedeutender Konstruktivist, Erbauer des Narkomfin-Gebäudes und nun Leiter der Arbeitsgruppe für Typisierung, durfte auf dem Kongress über die Industrialisierung des Wohnungsbaus referieren und trat damit in kritische Opposition zum Tenor der Tagung.⁶⁹ Das industrielle Bauen wurde als notwendige Problematik erkannt, stand aber zu dieser



8

⁶⁴ Karl Schlägel, *Terror und Traum. Moskau 1937*, München 2008, hier S. 309f.

⁶⁵ Hugh D. Hudson, *Blueprints and Blood. The Stalinization of Soviet Architecture 1917–1937*, Princeton 1994, hier S. 191 und 193.

⁶⁶ Hans Schmidt, «Sieben Jahre Sowjetunion (Erfahrungen und Erlebnisse)», Ms., 25 S., 1945, gta Archiv, hier S. 4.

⁶⁷ Hans Schmidt, «Die Industrialisierung und die Aufgabe des Architekten», Ms., 8 S., 18.4.1937, gta Archiv, publiziert in: Ders., *Beiträge zur Architektur 1924–1964*, Berlin (Ost) 1965, hier S. 110–114.

⁶⁸ Hans Schmidt, «Die Industrialisierung und die Aufgabe des Architekten», Ms., 8 S., 18.4.1937, gta Archiv, publiziert in: Ders., *Beiträge zur Architektur 1924–1964*, Berlin (Ost) 1965, hier S. 110–114.

Abb. 7

A. Lurçat, Kulturhaus für eine Kolkhoz für 100 Personen, Grundriss, 1935. Abb. aus: *Architektura SSSR* (1936), H. 3, S. 44.

Abb. 8

I. I. Leonidow, Kulturhaus für eine Kolkhoz für 180 Personen, Grundriss, 1935. Abb. aus: *Architektura SSSR* (1936), H. 3, S. 48.

Zeit noch deutlich im Hintergrund der offiziellen Diskussionen. Rückblickend stellte Schmidt fest, dass man erst in den letzten Jahren vor dem Zweiten Weltkrieg begonnen hätte, der Entwicklung der Bauindustrie grössere Aufmerksamkeit zu zuwenden. Er prognostizierte in den letzten Kriegstagen:

«Man hat damals den direkten Kurs auf das amerikanische Vorbild eingeschlagen und wird sicher, wenn einmal der Rückschlag des Krieges überwunden sein wird, auch auf diesem Gebiet zu erstaunlichen Resultaten kommen.»⁷⁰

Seine Prognose bewahrheitete sich langfristig. Doch erst mit dem Tod von Stalin sollte ein umfassendes Umdenken in diese Richtung möglich werden.

Kritik am Sozialistischen Realismus

Die direkte Auseinandersetzung mit dem Entstehen des Sozialistischen Realismus bestärkte Hans Schmidt in seinem persönlichen Realismus. Dieser Realismus entsprach – und hier beziehe ich mich nun auf eine Formulierung seines Bruders Georg – einer geistigen Gesinnung und keinesfalls einem künstlerischen Mittel.⁷¹ Während der Sozialistische Realismus in den offiziellen Reden und Statuten abstrakt blieb und sich die Diskussionen in der Architektur auf Form- und Stilfragen konzentrierten, versuchte Schmidt, seine Position zu formulieren. Er forderte den Aufbau der Architektur als Methodik, welche die architektonische Gestalt sowie die Architekturformen auf eine systematische Analyse gründete, um dann den Entwurf als die einfachste, lakonischste und angemessenste Lösung zu formulieren und zwar unabhängig von der äusseren Form.⁷² Sein Realismus war ihm eine innere Überzeugung. Diese Gesinnung liess er jedoch nur ansatzweise öffentlich verlauten. Er formulierte sie vorsichtig und an der Sache selbst, beispielsweise wenn er in Artikeln – die in der massgebenden Architekturzeitschrift *Architektura SSSR* erschienen – seine Arbeitsweise erläuterte (1933), über Interieurs schrieb (1934) oder Strassen analysierte (1936).⁷³ Schmidts Auffassung vom Realismus wich von der offiziellen Lessart insofern deutlich ab, als er Stilmix und Fassadenmaskeraden scharf verurteilte. Zwar referierte auch er unmittelbar auf den Klassizismus als Denkmuster, warnte jedoch vor einem schändlichen Rückfall in die Manier des 19. Jahrhunderts. In seinen Texten über Karl Moser und Adolf Loos konnte Hans Schmidt seine persönliche Haltung überprüfen, indem er seine Vorbilder analysierte.⁷⁴ Schmidt erkannte die Widersprüche, die sich in der Sowjetunion entwickelten, konnte aber keinen regulierenden Einfluss nehmen. Ihm blieb schlussendlich nur der Weg zurück. Seine Texte zeigen deutlich, dass er die zeitgenössische Architektur durchaus kritisch wahrnahm. Hätte er seine Kritik öffentlich ausgesprochen – wie es Georg Schmidt in dem eingangs genannten Zitat forderte –, so hätte ihm das leicht zum Verhängnis werden können. Stalin war zu jener Zeit geradezu auf der Jagd nach Andersdenkenden und Abweichlern.

⁶⁹ Karl Schlögel, *Terror und Traum. Moskau 1937*, München 2008, hier S. 311; zur Biographie von Ginzburg vgl. Elke Pistorius (Hg.), *Der Architektenstreit nach der Revolution. Zeitgenössische Texte Russland 1925–1932*, Basel/Berlin/Boston 1992, hier S. 167.

⁷⁰ Hans Schmidt, «Sieben Jahre Sowjetunion (Erfahrungen und Erlebnisse)», Ms., 25 S., 1945, gta Archiv, hier S. 6.

⁷¹ Vgl. Georg Schmidt, Naturalismus und Realismus (1958), in: Ders., *Umgang mit Kunst. Ausgewählte Schriften 1940–1963*, Olten 1966, S. 27–36, hier S. 29.

⁷² Hans Schmidt, «Über den Formalismus (Beitrag zu einer Diskussion im Gorstrojprojekt)», 2 Ms., 5 S., 6 S., russ., dt., undatiert (1930/1937), verm. 1934, gta Archiv und in: Ders., *Beiträge zur Architektur 1924–1964*, Berlin (Ost) 1965, hier S. 105f.

⁷³ Hans Schmidt, Wie ich arbeite, in: *Architektura SSSR* (1933), H. 6, S. 36f., Ders., Neue Architektur und Wohninterieurs, in: *Architektura SSSR* (1934), H. 7, S. 16–26; Ders., Die Architektur der Strasse, in: *Architektura SSSR* (1936), H. 6, S. 37–45.

Nach seiner Rückkehr in die Schweiz reflektierte Hans Schmidt seine Erfahrungen in der Sowjetunion, nunmehr als Aussenstehender des Systems:

«Man spricht in der Sowjetunion von einer Kunst des Realismus, d.h. von einem den heutigen Sowjetmenschen bewegenden und bildenden Inhalt. Eine solche Kunst kann weder aus der abstrakten schönen Form, noch aus dem reinen Naturabbild, dem photographischen Naturalismus bestehen. Sie fordert die innere gesellschaftliche, geschichtliche Wahrheit, nicht bloss eine scheinbare äussere Wahrheit.»⁷⁵

Hier treffen sich die Gedanken der beiden Brüder Schmidt wieder. Beide versuchten, weit über die Zeit bis 1937 hinaus, dem Begriff des Realismus inhaltlich nahe zu kommen. Während Hans jedoch an der inneren Kohärenz und dem Wahrheitsanspruch des Realismus festhielt, löste sich Georg von den überkommenen bürgerlichen Begriffen wie er es sich in den frühen 1930er Jahren vorgenommen hatte. Dem Realismus käme es Georg zufolge, ebenso wie Hans es formulierte, auf die innere Wahrheit und die Erkenntnis der Wirklichkeit an. Dem Idealismus hingegen gehe es um eine Erhöhung der Wirklichkeit. Der Naturalismus schliesslich – auch hier würde ihm Hans zustimmen – strebe nach äusserer Richtigkeit, nach dem perfekten Abbild. Georg, inzwischen renommierter Direktor der öffentlichen Kunstsammlungen in Basel und Professor für Kunstgeschichte an der Akademie der bildenden Künste in München, ging nun einen Schritt weiter und kombinierte diese drei Begriffe neu. Er entwickelte so ein zeitlich verblüffend unabhängiges Begriffs- und Wertesystem. Den sozialistischen Realismus definierte er 1959 wie folgt: «was in Russland, Italien, Frankreich und Ostdeutschland ‘sozialistischer Realismus’ heißt, ist das genaue Gegenteil von Realismus, ist ‘idealistic Naturalismus’».⁷⁶ Er sah deutlich einen Widerspruch zwischen künstlerischem Mittel und Gesinnung, zwischen äusserer Richtigkeit und innerer Unwahrheit. Das was als Sozialistischer Realismus in Erscheinung trat – in seinem Vokabular «idealistic Naturalismus» – bezeichnete er als Kitsch.⁷⁷

So weit ging Hans Schmidt nicht. Seine Idee des Sozialistischen Realismus orientierte sich an den offiziellen Erklärungen und Begriffen. Er versuchte vielmehr, da er sich in das System einfügen wollte, einen eigenen Umgang mit dem Gegebenen zu finden, seine Prinzipien darin zu integrieren und weiterzuverfolgen. Der Realismus von Hans Schmidt, verstanden als Haltung (vgl. Tafuri) und Methode (vgl. Steinmann) in der Auseinandersetzung mit der Wirklichkeit (vgl. Rossi), schloss die Möglichkeit des industriellen Bauens nie aus, wie auch in seinem Referat für die 1. Allunionskonferenz 1937 deutlich wird. Seine Schritte vom Neuen Bauen der 1920er Jahre zum Sozialistischen Realismus und dem traditionellen Bauen der 1930er und 1940er Jahre, bis hin zum industriellen Bauen in den 1950er Jahren waren für ihn einzelne Etappen auf dem Weg zum eigentlichen Ziel. Schmidt begründete das industrielle Bauen aus der Tradition heraus als eine in der Vergangenheit begonnene Entwicklung, die

⁷⁴ Hans Schmidt, «Adolf Loos», Ms., 4 S., ca. 1934, gta Archiv und Ders., «Erinnerung an Karl Moser», Ts., 2 S., 1.12.1936, gta Archiv sowie Ders., «Adolf Loos», 11.2.1941, Ts., 2 S., Ms. 1 S., gta Archiv, publiziert in: Ders., *Beiträge zur Architektur 1924–1964*, Berlin (Ost) 1965, hier S. 62f.

⁷⁵ Hans Schmidt, «Kulturelle Probleme der Sowjetunion», Ts., 18 S., 10.1942, gta Archiv.

⁷⁶ Vgl. Georg Schmidt, Naturalismus und Realismus (1958), in: Ders., *Umgang mit Kunst. Ausgewählte Schriften 1940–1963*, Olten 1966, S. 27–36, hier S. 27 und 35.

⁷⁷ Vgl. Georg Schmidt, Kampf dem Kitsch. Versuch einer Definition, in: Ders., *Umgang mit Kunst. Ausgewählte Schriften 1940–1963*, Olten 1966, S. 60–69.

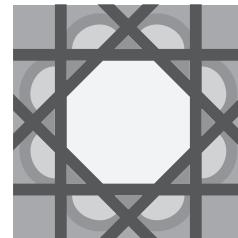
notwendig einer Vollendung entgegen schreitet. Deshalb konnte Schmidt mühelos Tradition und industrielles Bauen in Einklang bringen. Der Realismus als geistige Gesinnung, die Schmidt bereits zur Zeit seines Studiums entwickelte, in die 1920er Jahre trug und in den 1930er Jahren in der Sowjetunion festigte, fußt in seiner unmittelbaren Auseinandersetzung mit der Realität. Da er Gesellschaft, Produktionsprozess, Material und Form in logischer Einheit verbunden sah, sind seine traditionellen Wohnbauten der 1940er Jahre in Basel – die auf den ersten Blick zumindest formal aus dem Rahmen zu fallen scheinen – für ihn nur konsequent. Alles andere wäre Formalismus gewesen und dem hatte er ja schon in den späten 1920ern abgeschworen. Auch den Wechsel in der Architektursprache nach Stalins Tod 1953 konnte Schmidt mühelos akzeptieren, denn es war eben nicht nur ein Stilwechsel, sondern auch ein Methodenwechsel. Es war der Wechsel hin zu *seiner* Methode und zu jenen Ideen, die er seit den 1920er Jahren verfolgte. Die 1932 prognostizierte «Besinnung» war nun endlich erfolgt. Auf der 2. Allunionskonferenz in Moskau 1954 wäre sein Referat von 1937 mehr als passend platziert gewesen, doch auch an dieser Konferenz nahm Schmidt nicht teil. Er zog jedoch für sich die persönliche Konsequenz und folgte im Januar 1956 einem Ruf als Chefarchitekt am Institut für Typung in Ostberlin, um endlich seinen Traum von der «Hausbaumaschine» im grossen Maßstab zu verwirklichen.⁷⁸ In der DDR wurde er nicht müde, tatsächlich auf die bestehenden Widersprüche der realen Bauproduktion hinzuweisen, um diese zu überwinden – gerade wie es Georg Schmidt etwa zur selben Zeit theoretisch einforderte. Hans Schmidt verfolgte *seinen* Realismus, der auf einem marxistischen Verständnis des Begriffs Materialismus basierte, radikal. Eine Radikalität, die über das eingangs von Tafuri zitierte kritische Denken deutlich hinausreicht. *Sein* Realismus hatte mit dem sozialistischen Realismus stalinistischer Prägung nur wenig gemeinsam. Doch beinhaltet *sein* Realismus eine interessante Lesart materialistischer Ideen: Wie hätte Stalins Architektur ausgesehen, wenn er Hans Schmidt als Berater gehabt hätte?

⁷⁸ Hans Schmidt, «Die Industrialisierung und die Aufgabe des Architekten», Ms., 8 S., 18.4.1937, gta Archiv, publiziert in: Ders., *Beiträge zur Architektur 1924–1964*, Berlin (Ost) 1965, hier S. 110–114.

Kathrin Siebert hat nach ihrem Architekturstudium in Erfurt und der praktischen Tätigkeit in Rotterdam und Delft, ein Studium der Geschichte und Theorie der Architektur an der ETH in Zürich absolviert. Anschliessend studierte sie Kunstgeschichte an der Universität Zürich. Parallel dazu war sie als Volontärin an der Graphischen Sammlung der ETH Zürich und als wissenschaftliche Assistentin am MAS Geschichte und Theorie der Architektur am Institut gta an der ETH tätig. Von 2009 bis 2015 arbeitete sie als Assistentin und Dozentin am Lehrstuhl für Geschichte des Städtebaus am Institut gta und leitete Lehrveranstaltungen sowie Forschungsprojekte. Seit 2014 arbeitet sie im Rahmen eines SNF-Forschungsprojekts über Massenwohnungsbau im Wohlfahrtsstaat und in der Planwirtschaft an ihrer Dissertation über Hans Schmidt.

Immagini della forma Il realismo di Asnago e Vender tra pittura e architettura

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Nel 1961 Ernesto N. Rogers¹ definisce come «scongelamento dello stile moderno» l’operato delle ultime generazioni di architetti, occupati da tempo a «recuperare il senso della storia»². Nello stesso testo l’autore osserva come la rottura con il passato, postulata dal Movimento Moderno, ha alienato l’architettura dall’ambiente reale a cui essa appartiene e nota con piacere come i più giovani architetti, lui compreso, cerchino di invertire questa rotta³. La necessità di realismo nell’architettura, ovvero di legarla alla realtà alla quale essa nel tempo ha sviluppato la propria appartenenza, implica il confronto con il linguaggio architettonico della realtà in questione, essendo questo in ultima analisi l’elemento decisivo per l’osservatore. Un confronto al quale il Movimento Moderno sembra rispondere elusivamente, ponendo l’attenzione sul meccanicismo tra forma, funzione e costruzione; fondando così un sistema espressivo definito da Rogers come «aperto», dagli imprevedibili esiti formali⁴. Ben diverse sembrano invece le sorti nel caso della nuova architettura invocata dall’autore, che presuppone una limitazione – data dalla realtà stessa – del linguaggio espressivo. In questo contesto il confronto con gli aspetti formali si pone quindi come inevitabile. Le parole di Rogers, limitandosi a descrivere – per quanto brillantemente – il problema, non definiscono univocamente un nuovo sistema formale, o una via verso esso. Sebbene egli scriva che «bisogna che della cultura architettonica si attualizzi soltanto l’essenza, evitando di riecheggiare le apparenze formali»⁵, non entra in merito all’aspetto della forma. Sembra essere quindi un circolo vizioso quello in cui si muove Rogers: da una parte la necessità di recuperare ciò che il Movimento Moderno per lungo tempo ha ignorato, dall’altra la reticenza a confrontarsi sul piano della forma con la cultura architettonica del passato, aprendo così le porte ad astrazioni o a vacui formalismi storici. Egli stesso mette in guardia dagli eccessi di formalismo additando il movimento «neoliberty» italiano⁶. La strada intrapresa da Rogers negli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta, testimoniata dalle opere che egli realizza con lo studio BBPR, tende invece ad una astrazione degli elementi espressivi del passato. Uno sguardo ad alcune di queste realizzazioni dimostra come il linguaggio sviluppato sia in grado di superare il meccanicismo tra forma e funzione del Movimento Moderno, integrando il contesto e la storia, con operazioni principalmente sulla scala dell’oggetto architettonico, della sua «silhouette», come esemplificato dall’effetto anti-moderno e richiamante la città storica della volumetria della torre Velasca a Milano del 1958⁷. Su scala più minuta le opere dei BBPR fanno invece fatica ad esprimere un legame diretto con espe-

¹ Ernesto Nathan Rogers (1909-1969), architetto, fonda nel 1932 con Gian Luigi Banfi, Lodovico Barbiano di Belgiojoso e Enrico Peressutti lo studio di architettura BBPR, la cui opera maggiore conosciuta è la torre Velasca a Milano del 1958. È stato direttore delle riviste *Domus* (1946-1947) e *Casabella* (1953-1965), membro del CIAM (1947-1959) e professore in diverse università.

² Ernesto N. Rogers, *Il passo da fare*, in «Casabella» 251 (maggio 1961), pp. 1-4, qui p. 2.

³ L’interesse di Rogers per un’architettura in grado di legarsi alla realtà è rintracciabile sia negli edifici che realizza con l’ufficio milanese BBPR che nelle sue lezioni. Vedi a proposito: Ernesto N. Rogers, *Esperienza dell’architettura*, Torino 1958.

⁴ Rogers descrive il Movimento Moderno come caratterizzato da un «metodo che ha tentato di stabilire nuove e più chiare relazioni tra i contenuti e le forme entro la fenomenologia di un processo storico-pragmatico, sempre aperto [...].» Ernesto N. Rogers, *Continuità o crisi?*, in «Casabella», 215 (aprile-maggio 1957), pp. 3-4, qui p. 3.

⁵ Rogers 1961 (come nota 2), p. 3.

⁶ Si vedano le opere realizzate a Torino da Roberto Gabetti e Aimaro Isola come la Bottega di Erasmo del 1956 e con ogni probabilità intese nella critica all’«interesse per il Liberty» in: Rogers 1957 (come nota 4), p. 4.

⁷ Questo esame vale anche per altri edifici milanesi dei BBPR come la Chase Manhattan Bank (1958-1969) o il complesso residenziale del Santo sepolcro (1961-1968).



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rienze architettoniche conosciute all’osservatore: elementi come il tetto o i cornicioni vengono astratti, quasi fino a perdere la riconoscibilità con il modello storico. Inoltre essi vengono innestati su strutture architettoniche che a fatica li sanno accogliere (vedi immagine 1). Questi edifici sono in grado di fondare una nuova tradizione in «continuità»⁸ con il passato, ma non in diretto contatto con esso. Possiamo essere d’accordo con Rogers quando scrive che «è illusorio credere che il bisogno di immagini, sempre più sentito, affinché le nostre rappresentazioni significhino contenuti comunicabili, possa essere risolto accettando le figure del passato, perché con esse si soddisfa, tutt’al più, lo stimolo dei ricordi, ma non si creano i simboli della nostra esistenza»⁹, ma vogliamo sottolineare come il confronto con la forma della cultura architettonica del passato sia di vitale importanza nella domanda del realismo posta dall’autore.

⁸ Rogers impiega spesso il concetto di «continuità» nei suoi testi per definire il rapporto della nuova architettura con il passato e dal 1958 cambia il nome della rivista *Casabella*, di cui è direttore, in *Casabella Continuità*.

⁹ Rogers 1957 (come nota 4), p.4.

Immagine 1

BBPR, edificio in piazza Statuto, Torino
(da Ezio Bonfanti, Marco Porta, *Città, museo e architettura*, Firenze, 1973)

L'astrazione della tradizione

L'accenno di Rogers alle «figure del passato» potrebbe indicare i tentativi di rielaborazione del Movimento Moderno condotti in Italia tra le due guerre. Negli anni Venti la divulgazione del modello razionalista europeo, come le rassegne proposte da Gaetano Minucci su *Architettura e arti decorative* tra il 1926 e il 1928¹⁰, o la *Prima Esposizione Italiana di Architettura Razionale* organizzata dal Gruppo 7 nel 1928 a Roma, vengono accompagnate da vive critiche sulla mancanza di «tradizione», e per questa ragione secondo gli autori di difficile realizzazione nella penisola. Diversi saranno gli esisti di questo dibattito, tra i quali due appaiono importanti da sottolineare. Da una parte vogliamo evidenziare la posizione di Marcello Piacentini, che – pur senza definire una linea chiara – si batte per uno sviluppo dell'architettura razionale in grado di esprimere la cultura del bacino mediterraneo. Nella sua recensione alla *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs* di Parigi del 1925 egli critica la nuova architettura basata sul «fattore economico» e incapace di accogliere il passato, indicando la necessità di «tener conto di quello che esiste (...) in armoniche consonanze d'ambiente»¹¹. Piacentini realizzerà questo suo ideale in diverse opere, tra le quali ricordiamo piazza della Vittoria a Brescia (1927–1932), dove egli ammicca alla città storica sia sul piano volumetrico, con una composizione modulata, sia su quello architettonico, innestando archi alle aperture e serliane nei portici. Sembra che la tradizione trovi posto in una citazione astratta delle forme, che solo per erudita conoscenza possono venir percepite come tali e che segnerà gran parte della produzione architettonica italiana sotto il fascismo¹². Dall'altra parte segnaliamo – con maggiore coerenza nella sua ricerca – Giovanni Muzio. Il suo articolo *Alcuni architetti di oggi in Lombardia* del 1931 presenta diverse opere in linea con i suoi interessi e descrivendone i caratteri nota come «(...) anche per l'architettura s'impose un ritorno al classicismo, in modo analogo a quanto avveniva nelle arti plastiche e nella letteratura (...) ben inteso nessuna pedissequa copia o elaborata contaminazione ma libera scelta di ispirazione»¹³. Le realizzazioni di Muzio si contraddistinguono per una astrazione degli elementi storici diversa dalla via piacentiniana e in grado di rielaborarli in una personale figuratività. Il ruolo dell'architetto come artista nella riproposizione di forme del passato prende così grande importanza in quella che attraverso l'operato di diversi architetti diverrà la via italiana al razionalismo europeo. Il riferimento alle arti plastiche è qui illuminante. Come fa notare Edoardo Persico su *Casabella* nel 1935 «pare che oggi in Italia l'architettura, almeno con taluni artisti d'avanguardia, ispiri ad annettersi il gusto della pittura metafisica: questo indirizzo è forse destinato a costituire il motivo forse più originale di un'architettura italiana»¹⁴. Il legame tra architettura e avanguardie pittoriche sembra così gettato e torneremo in seguito sui dettagli di questo rapporto. La via intrapresa da Muzio sembra però avere un limite nel comprendere gli elementi della tradizione come «addizioni» alla struttura architettonica (denotata da una moderna «sincerità e bontà del materiale»¹⁵). Ed è forse questo che Rogers intende indicando di «evitare le apparenze formali» che stimolano solo il ricordo, senza essere

¹⁰ Minucci propone due rassegne sull'architettura razionalista europea: nel 1924 sull'architettura olandese e nel 1926 un numero doppio su edifici industriali. Vedi: Cesare de Seta, *La cultura architettonica in Italia tra le due guerre*, Napoli 1998, p. 120.

¹¹ Marcello Piacentini, *Prima internazionale architettonica*, in «Architettura e arti decorative», 7 (1928), pp. 554–555.

¹² Innumerevoli sarebbero gli esempi in linea con il caso bresciano realizzati sia dallo stesso Piacentini e che da altri architetti, per i quali l'analisi supererebbe i limiti di questa ricerca. Lo stesso valga per il rapporto tra tradizione e fascismo in architettura.

¹³ Giovanni Muzio, *Alcuni architetti d'oggi in Lombardia*, in «Dedalo», vol. IV, fasc. 15, 1931, pp. 1082–1119, qui 1085.

¹⁴ Bruno Reichlin, *I prospetti inquietanti di Asnago Vender*, in: Cino Zucchi, Francesca Cadeo e Monica Lattuada (a cura di), *Asnago e Vender, l'astrazione quotidiana*, Milano, 1998, p. 13.

¹⁵ Muzio 1931 (come nota 13), p. 1096. In merito all'«addizione» di elementi storici nell'opera di Muzio si vedano a Milano le facciate dell'università Cattolica (1932) o del palazzo dell'arte (1935).

parte integrante dell'architettura. È possibile individuare un'altra via, che sappia accettare il confronto con la forma e metterla in discussione per rielaborarla integralmente?

Pensare concretamente

Sin dagli anni Trenta Mario Asnago e Claudio Vender¹⁶ sono immersi nella loro intensa attività professionale e meno inclini di Rogers alla scrittura, ciò nonostante sembrano volgersi a temi simili. Di grande interesse è anche la loro opera pittorica – sulla quale torneremo in dettaglio – che accompagna la loro attività come architetti. Il loro rapporto con la cultura architettonica sopra delineata è di difficile definizione. In un'intervista Claudio Vender afferma:

«non facevamo parte dell'avanguardia, ma abbiamo assimilato le lezione del movimento moderno pur all'interno di un nostro specifico modo di intendere l'architettura. (...) Il nostro riferimento era ai modelli classici (il rinascimento) e quindi certi rigidi statuti razionalisti erano mediati da una riflessione costante sulla storia dell'architettura e da un'attenzione alla cultura figurativa d'avanguardia dell'epoca (metafisica e astrattismo)»¹⁷.

Una posizione quindi non d'avanguardia nel dibattito e che pone i due architetti lontano dalle eroiche ridefinizioni teoriche dell'architettura italiana tra le guerre. Nella critica dell'epoca questa posizione sembra essersi risolta in una tanto entusiastica quanto poco analizzata lode alle qualità figurative delle loro opere che ritroviamo in diverse riviste: nell'articolo di Raffaello Giolli sull'ultimo numero di *Casabella-Costruzioni* del 1943¹⁸, sulle innumerevoli pubblicazioni promosse da Giò Ponti su *Domus e Stile*¹⁹ o su *Case d'oggi* del 1936²⁰. In quest'ultimo caso la pubblicazione dell'edificio in viale Tunisia di Asnago e Vender, giustapposto a quella dell'università Cattolica di Giovanni Muzio e di casa Rustici di Terragni e Lingeri, ne dimostra – come fa notare Cino Zucchi – la «cosciente astensione formale che ne rende difficile la collocazione all'interno delle diatribe sullo stile del tempo»²¹. Sembra che l'astensione di Asnago e Vender dalla discussione dell'epoca abbia influenzato la critica sul loro lavoro fino ad oggi. Nelle pubblicazioni più recenti infatti il lavoro critico sembra fermarsi alla citazione della loro attività pittorica, innalzata quasi a schermo dietro cui proteggersi dalla apparente indescrivibilità delle loro opere. Renato Airoldi definisce nel 1981 su *Casabella* «purista» il razionalismo di Asnago e Vender²² e cinque anni più tardi affermerà che «è assai probabile che Asnago e Vender nel comporre le loro facciate e nel disegnare i loro interni guardassero più all'astrattismo che al razionalismo, più alla pittura che all'architettura. Progettavano da pittori»²³. Interesse riconosciuto e approfondito nel metodo da Bruno Reichlin, che nota come «i prospetti di Asnago e Vender sembrano piuttosto rispecchiare la sensibilità del pittore, che investe e satura la tela centimetro per centimetro, accentuando qui e smorzando là, ritornando in basso e riequilibrando

¹⁶ Mario Asnago (1896–1980), Claudio Vender (1904–1986), architetti con sede a Milano dal 1926 al 1971, realizzano numerosi edifici a Milano e dintorni.

¹⁷ Cino Zucchi, Francesca Cadeo e Monica Lattuada, *Asnago e Vender. L'astrazione quotidiana*, Milano 1998, pp. 51, 54.

¹⁸ Raffaello Giolli, *Architetture che fanno quadro*, in «Casabella-Costruzioni», n. 191–192, pp. 36–42. Oltre all'allusione nel titolo all'effetto pittorico delle opere presentate, Giolli si sofferma sulle qualità teatrali e da film, rinunciando esplicitamente a indicazioni tecniche o al posizionamento di Asnago e Vender nel panorama dell'epoca.

¹⁹ Nei suoi articoli Ponti presenta le opere del duo milanese come esempio di espressione del tempo, senza mai addentrarsi in una descrizione critica della loro costituzione. Per una indicazione delle pubblicazioni si rimanda alla bibliografia di Giulio Bettini, *La città animata. Milano e l'architettura di Asnago e Vender*, Milano 2016.

²⁰ Vedi ad esempio: «Case d'oggi», n. 12, dicembre 1936, p. 7.

²¹ Zucchi, Cadeo e Lattuada 1998 (come nota 17), pp. 21, 52.

²² Renato Airoldi, *Il razionalismo purista di Asnago e Vender*, «Casabella», 468, 1981, p. 4.

²³ Renato Airoldi, *Asnago e Vender uno stile senza tempo*, in AA. VV., *Asnago / Vender Architetti*, Como, 1985, p. 18.

in alto, che non l'approccio ordinatore dell'architetto»²⁴. La sopracitata frase di Vender ci pone di fronte al rapporto tra la pratica pittorica del duo milanese, la loro architettura e le avanguardie figurative tra le due guerre. Una domanda finora poco sviluppata ma di grande importanza, in parte analizzata nel prezioso contributo di Matthias Bräm sul procedimento compositivo dei due, che sembra essere fondamentale per comprendere il loro interesse per l'aspetto formale dell'architettura in relazione a modelli del passato²⁵. Interesse che sembra essere antagonista a quello sviluppato da Rogers. Vediamo come sorvolando i caratteri compositivi di alcune loro opere milanesi. Già nelle prime realizzazioni Asnago e Vender mettono in discussione il rapporto meccanicistico del Moderno tra forma e funzione, orientandosi verso un altro tipo di equilibrio, molto più personale, connotato da incongruenze tra la composizione della facciata e le funzioni retrostanti, dimostrando in questo modo il loro interesse per la “forma” percepita dell’edificio nello spazio urbano. Questi disturbi operano unicamente a livello della composizione di aperture, aggetti e rientranze, sbilanciando gli impaginati e facendo così percepire le facciate non più come scansioni di finestre, ma come figure²⁶. Inoltre le proporzioni impiegate per le aperture rimandano alla tradizione della finestra degli edifici milanesi del Settecento²⁷, dimostrando un’intenzione di continuità storica nelle loro opere non ostante il linguaggio modernista.

Dopo la pausa dettata dal secondo conflitto mondiale le loro composizioni si arricchiscono con l’inserimento di gronde, cornici, sbalzi e aggetti, che sembrano rimandare ad un mondo di forme riecheggiante situazioni urbane di matrice vernacolare²⁸ che solo apparentemente sembrano opposte alle espressioni urbane più dotte. Ad una più attenta analisi infatti si nota come proprio questi elementi –come recupero della città storica attraverso cornicioni, canali di gronda e falde di tetti visibili dalla strada – siano in grado di creare situazioni urbane riconoscibili e riavvicinare così l’architettura all’ambiente reale a cui essa ha appartenuto, in linea con i suggerimenti di Rogers. Osservando gli elementi sopra elencati in alcune opere di Asnago Vender, si nota come questi non siano stati semplicemente copiati dalla tradizione vernacolare e inseriti formalmente nelle composizioni (fenomeno dal quale Rogers ammoniva), ma reinterpretati per permetterne l’integrazione in architetture contemporanee. Se il tetto a falde della torre di piazza Statuto a Torino dei BBPR del 1961 indica un’operazione compositiva di tipo additivo, sovrapponendo un tetto in tutto e per tutto ricalcante la tradizione ad un reticolato in cemento armato (immagine 1), nelle realizzazioni milanesi di Asnago e Vender – come in via C. da Forlì (completata tra il 1958 e il 1962, immagine 2), via G. Rossini (1962, immagine 3), via A. Verga (1964, immagine 4), piazza Ss. Trinità (1969, immagine 5), via della Signora (1970, immagine 6) – questo elemento viene volta per volta modificato nella sua espressione e integrato in modo specifico nell’architettura. Lo sviluppo di questo rapporto (qui trattato in merito ai tetti e ai canali di gronda, ma riferibile anche a molti altri elementi espressivi) può essere rintracciato paradigmaticamente nella ben documentata serie di disegni preparatori dell’edificio per abitazioni e uffici che i due architetti realizzano all’angolo di viale

²⁴ Reichlin 1998 (come in nota 14), p. 8.

²⁵ Matthias. Bräm, *Entwurfsverfahren in der Architektur von Mario Asnago und Claudio Vender*, in: Flora Ruchat-Roncati e Andrea Casiraghi (a cura di), *Milano – Architetture/Mailand – die Bauten: Beiträge zur Vorlesung Architektur VIII, Sommersemester 1995 und 1997*, Zürich 2003, vol. 2, pp. 7–26.

²⁶ Si vedano gli edifici a Milano in via G. Govone 37 (1934), viale Tunisia (1935), via Euripide 9 (1935), via Euripide 1 (1937) e via Albricci 8 (1939).

²⁷ In merito al rapporto sviluppato da Asnago e Vender tra forma e funzione, nonché al loro impiego di forme della tradizione milanese, si rimanda a: Bettini 2016 (come nota 19), pp. 53–56, pp. 31–47.

²⁸ Definiamo come *vernacolare* l’insieme delle forme cresciute come stratificazione di abitudini che nel tempo si sono cristallizzate in forme riconoscibili e portatrici di un’identità. Lo stesso fenomeno può essere definito *organico* o *implicito*. Si vedano a proposito le definizioni date da Alexander come «non autocosciente» (in: Christopher Alexander, *Note sulla sintesi della forma*, Milano 1967, p. 40) e da Sitte come «in natura» (in: Camillo Sitte, *Der Städtebau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen*, Wien 1889, pp. 60–61).



2



3



4



5



6

L. Majno e via G. Rossini del 1962²⁹. Si tratta di grandi schizzi di facciate in due dimensioni a carboncino colorato su lucido, di norma in scala 1:50, dalla sorprendente dimensione (immagini 7 e 8). L'integrazione del tetto inclinato nella composizione architettonica viene studiato in diverse formulazioni, tastando il potenziale dell'attico arretrato nel concludere il volume sulla strada. Da una prima versione, studiata in diverse varianti e caratterizzata da una atetonica facciata con finestre a filo, conclusa da un sottile attico vetrato con un filiforme tetto inclinato, ne viene sviluppata una seconda dalla composizione molto più classica e tettonica, dove il tetto inclinato è visibile dallo spazio urbano solo su via Rossini, generando un potente fatto architettonico con il solo impiego di una falda asimmetrica e del canale di gronda appeso (immagini 9 e 3). Gli schizzi degli alzati sembrano rendere solo in parte l'architettura che dovrà essere realizzata; nonostante il loro alto grado di dettaglio, la "figura" dell'edificio sembra essere difficile da codificare, il disegno si risolve su un piano, negando la percezione di aggetti volumetrici o arretramenti, permettendoci solo di indovinarne la geometria. Questa percezione disattende le attese di un disegno architettonico, per sua natura di carattere codificato – rimandante per segni ad una realtà tridimensionale – e senza un valore come opera a sé. Sembra invece di trovarsi di fronte ad una rappresentazione di un edificio già esistente, reinterpretato quasi in forma pittorica. Bisogna subito allontanare la tentazione di descrivere le opere dei due architetti come quadri, in quanto l'osservazione dal vivo di un qualsiasi edificio realizzato dimostra come le facciate non siano quasi mai disposte in modo da essere percepite frontalmente e quindi alla stregua di un dipinto. Quello che i due architetti sembrano cercare è invece un rapporto diretto con l'opera nella realtà tridimensionale, quasi come se fingessero una presenza del progetto nella realtà per poterla studiare attraverso il mezzo pittorico. In pittura infatti la rappresentazione non è codificata come quella architettonica e si risolve come oggetto indipendente dalla realtà tridimensionale, rievocandola senza l'impiego di ulteriori codici oltre all'occhio dell'osservatore. Il parallelo con la pittura sussiste quindi sul piano metodologico, su come la realtà può essere analizzata, compresa e riproposta in pittura. La scala stessa sembra essere una delle ragioni di questo fenomeno, basti pensare al significato del gesto nel disegnare una finestra francese in una facciata in scala 1:50 (dalle dimensioni di circa 2.5 per 4.5 centimetri); non si tratta di un movimento che comprende solo il polso, come lo si conosce nel disegno architettonico, ma deve coinvolgere l'intero avambraccio, similmente al gesto pittorico.

Queste osservazioni non sorprendono, considerando che Asnago e Vender hanno seguito i corsi di pittura parallelamente a quelli di architettura all'Accademia di Brera tra il 1918 e il 1922³⁰. La loro passione per questa disciplina è stata coltivata per tutta la vita a lato dell'attività come architetti. L'opera pittorica di Mario Asnago ha avuto diversi successi, venendo riconosciuta in numerose mostre³¹. Come testimonia un collaboratore di lunga data dell'ufficio, Asnago e Vender hanno sempre progettato in modo bidimensionale, concentrandosi sulle rappresentazioni su grande scala e appendendole in ufficio alla stregua di dipinti³². Sembra

²⁹ Vedi in merito la serie di disegni pubblicati in: Federico Brunetti (a cura di), *Asnago e Vender. L'edificio di via Rossini a Milano. Un palinsesto del moderno*, Milano 2014, pp. 76–81.

³⁰ Vedi: Zucchi, Cadeo, Lattuada 1998 (come nota 17), pp. 209–210.

³¹ Si contano mostre di Mario Asnago a Milano alla Galleria *Il Milione* nel 1948, 1950 e 1953; alla Galleria *Il Camino* nel 1949; a Chiasso alla Galleria *Mosaico* nel 1967 e a Busto e Rho tra il 1970 e 1971. Vedi: Agnoldomenico Pica (a cura di), *Mario Asnago. Quarant'anni di pittura (1940–1980)*, Monza 1982, pp. 7–8.

³² Vedi: Bräm 2003 (come nota 25), p. 12.

Immagine 7

M. Asnago, C. Vender, edificio in via Rossini 8, Milano. Disegno di studio per la facciata su via L. Majno, data sconosciuta ©Archivio Asnago-Vender architetti

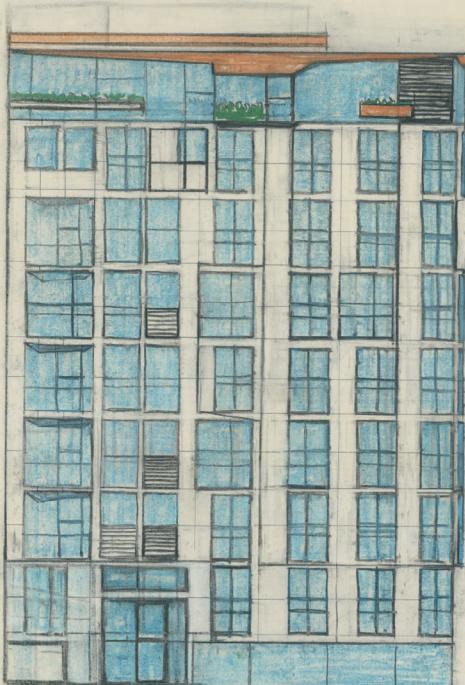
Immagine 8

M. Asnago, C. Vender, edificio in via Rossini 8, Milano. Disegno di studio per la facciata su via L. Majno, data sconosciuta ©Archivio Asnago-Vender architetti

Immagine 9

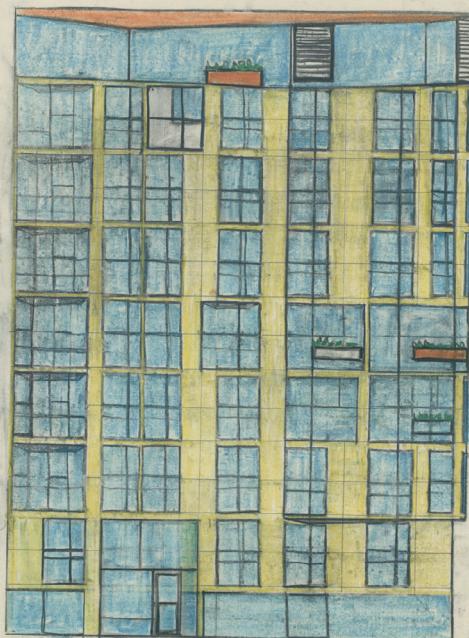
M. Asnago, C. Vender, edificio in via Rossini 8, Milano. Facciata su via G. Rossini, 1962 ©Archivio Asnago-Vender architetti

ESCLUSO

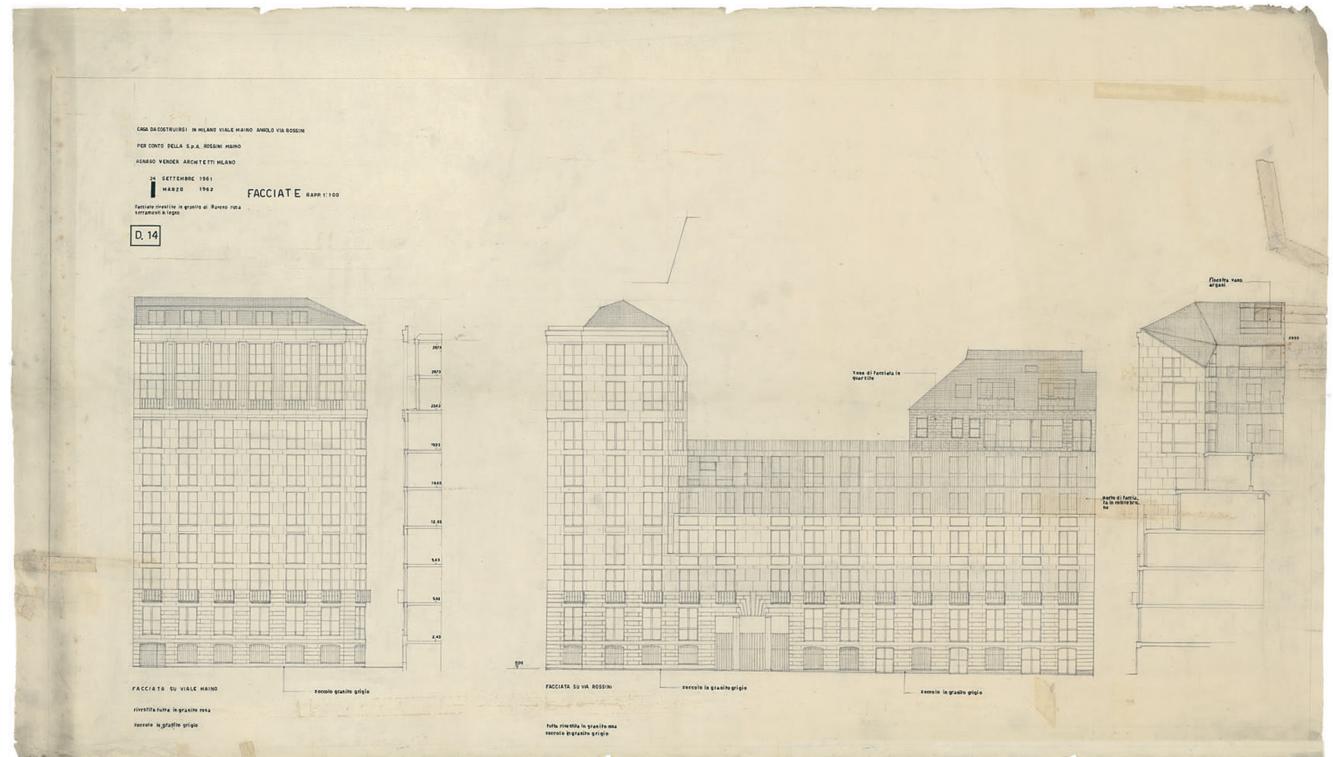


7

SCELTO



8



9

quindi che parte della loro passione pittorica abbia trovato un fruttifero impiego nella progettazione. Nel rintracciare il percorso realista intrapreso da Asnago e Vender è di grande aiuto approfondire cosa abbia significato per i due architetti confrontarsi con l'applicazione di alcune prassi pittoriche nella loro architettura.

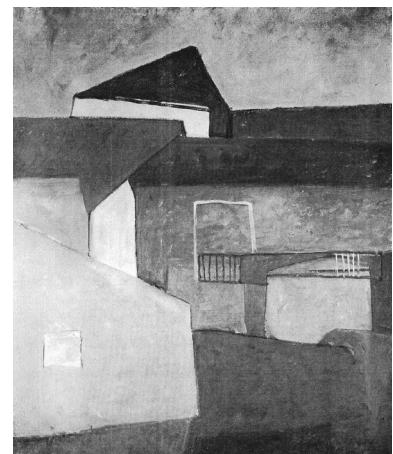
In confronto alla tradizionale metodologia di progettazione dell'epoca, basata sul disegno e lo schizzo, la pittura offre ai due architetti un approccio diverso al progetto. Come visto in precedenza, in pittura il risultato ottenuto sulla tela vale come opera a sé stante, obbligando così l'autore a confrontarsi con la *necessità* di trasporre una realtà tridimensionale conosciuta su una superficie bidimensionale in un codice non aprioristicamente definito (e qui sta la grande differenza in paragone al disegno architettonico), che deve raggiungere un senso concluso. Osservando alcuni quadri realizzati da Mario Asnago, notiamo come nella personale ricerca di uno stile espressivo, egli non si orienti verso un realismo naturalista per ritrarre la realtà, ma esplori i limiti di composizioni a prima vista astratte e con poca tridimensionalità, che si rivelano a una più attenta osservazione ricche di citazioni di elementi conosciuti richiamanti una presenza tridimensionale. Nel suo quadro *Paese* del 1958³³ (immagine 10), tra astratte macchie di colore (tetti? campi? strade? pareti?), troviamo i seguenti elementi: una linea che definisce un rettangolo per una finestra, una superficie triangolare per una sporgenza, linee per una porta e una ringhiera. Questi elementi riconoscibili vengono contraddetti dall'insieme del quadro; le linee della ringhiera vengono spezzate da superfici di colore, la superficie bidimensionale del tetto si protrae fino all'aggetto. L'effetto realizzato è quello di una latente percezione reale, in cui l'osservatore riconosce gli elementi del quotidiano, disturbata dalla composizione generale, dove questi elementi vengono contraddetti.

Questo effetto è rintracciabile anche nelle realizzazioni di Asnago e Vender, in particolare negli elementi architettonici impiegati dal dopoguerra. Le superfici dei tetti, le linee dei canali di gronda, le posizioni delle finestre e dei singoli aggetti volumetrici sono in contraddizione con la volumetria, la silhouette o la sagoma degli edifici. In via della Signora (1970, vedi immagine 6) l'andamento della linea di gronda del tetto suggerisce una rientranza, mentre il volume dell'edificio in aggetto definisce una sporgenza. L'osservatore si ritrova di fronte ad architetture che parlano una lingua conosciuta, fatta di finestre dalle proporzioni richiamanti la città storica, triviali canali di gronda, tetti inclinati e cornicioni, contraddetta – e in questo modo arricchita – dall'intera composizione.

È quindi chiaro che l'intento di Asnago Vender non è quello che lo storico dell'arte Georg Schmidt definisce come «naturalismo integrale», quanto un – sempre usando la sua definizione – «realismo anti-naturalista», il quale necessita un progressivo smontaggio degli elementi del naturalismo mantenendo e rafforzandone il realismo³⁴.

³³ Di questo quadro è reperibile solo una rappresentazione in bianco e nero apparsa sul bollettino della galleria *Il Milione* di Milano nel marzo del 1959.

³⁴ Georg Schmidt, *Naturalismus und Realismus*, in: Georg Schmidt, *Umgang mit Kunst*, Olten 1966, pp. 27–36, qui p. 32.



10

Immagine 10
Mario Asnago, *Paese*, 1958 (Il Milione, Bollettino della Galleria del Milione, Milano, 42 1952).

È di fondamentale importanza allontanare quindi il «naturalismo» come mezzo per un'espressione realista e riconoscere come il realismo pittorico non cerchi la rappresentazione più fedele alla forma, quanto la forma che meglio è in grado di porre l'osservatore di fronte alla realtà in sé³⁵. Questo procedimento è fondamentale, siccome presuppone una modificazione della realtà per poterla trasmettere ed evita ogni tipo di approccio teorico, dovendo nei fatti trovare risposte per risolvere la rappresentazione e confrontandosi quindi con la forma.

Si potrebbe affermare che è dunque la novità di una percezione, data dalla sua distorsione, ciò che ci permette di volgere l'attenzione al fenomeno e quindi percepirllo coscientemente.

L'architetto e teorico Christopher Alexander, studiando la genesi della forma, ha riconosciuto questo fenomeno e afferma: «sono gli 'allontanamenti dalla norma' in grado di far risaltare la forma per antitesi, ponendo il problema alla nostra attenzione»³⁶. E più avanti: «in un insieme, le incongruenze sono i dati primari dell'esperienza»³⁷. Riconosciamo questo interesse nelle composizioni di Asnago Vender: lo spostamento di alcune finestre, le smagliature degli allineamenti, la distorsione delle proporzioni sospendono localmente il significato dei singoli elementi, che portano l'osservatore a non riconoscere le forme per quelle che nel tempo si sono impresse nella sua memoria e in questo modo lo obbliga a guardarle con più attenzione e a *vederle*. Un fenomeno che deve prima essere avvenuto nel pittore (o nel nostro caso, architetto) e che venne riconosciuto da Monet nella sua celebre frase in cui desidera tornare a veder dopo essere stato cieco, per poter guardare la realtà come se fosse la prima volta³⁸. Oltre al lato aneddotico questa osservazione dimostra come sia necessario esercitare lo sguardo per poter comprendere la realtà, prima di poterla riproporre in una forma diversa.

Con questo problema si confronta anche l'architetto Amos Edallo, che nel 1946 pubblica una dettagliata ricerca sugli insediamenti rurali, destinata ad arricchire il bagaglio delle nuove generazioni di architetti chiamati all'opera di ricostruzione postbellica³⁹. Nell'ottica dell'autore gli insediamenti rurali hanno sviluppato *in natura* sistemi urbani che mantengono la loro validità anche oltre l'esperienza del Moderno. Sembra che il suo interesse si rivolga verso la definizione razionale di ciò che ha mosso la formazione degli insediamenti (orientamento, distribuzione, altezza) e che serviranno da supporto per nuove interpretazioni contemporanee. Significativo come egli scelga un'opera di Asnago Vender per esemplificare il suo intento, mostrando il modello rurale e la sua rielaborazione ad opera dei due architetti per l'insediamento di Torrevecchiapia presso Milano del 1937. Il limite del metodo razionale seguito da Edallo si manifesta nello studio di elementi su scala più minuta come gli utensili e il mobilio rurale. Per questa serie di oggetti ordinari egli non propone schemi tipologici, ma loro fotografie, in cui essi vengono rappresentati isolati e denominati con l'articolo («L'attaccapanni», «La sedia», «Il fuoco»⁴⁰). Questo procedimento porta gli oggetti del quotidiano alla nostra attenzione, ren-

³⁵ Linda Nochlin, *Il realismo nella pittura europea del XIX secolo*, Torino 1979, p. 4.

³⁶ Alexander 1967 (come in nota 28), pp. 29–30.

³⁷ Alexander 1967 (come in nota 28), p. 34.

³⁸ Nochlin 1979 (come in nota 35), pp. 7–8.

³⁹ Vedi: Amos Edallo, *Ruralistica. Urbanistica rurale. Con particolare riferimento alla valle padana*, Milano, 1946, pp. 284–285, pp. 308–309, pp. 340–341, pp. 350–351.

⁴⁰ Edallo 1946 (come nota 39), pp. 350–351.

dendoli dei veri e propri archetipi, e dimostra l'impossibilità di descrivere razionalmente – dall'esterno – la loro essenza o le modalità di una possibile reinterpretazione nel presente. Ed allo dimostra quindi come quello che viene vissuto come *realità* si discosti a tal punto dall'essere intellegibile, da poter essere trasmesso e compreso solo come ritratto di un oggetto esistente nel passato-presente, in attesa di essere così capito dall'interno e trasportato in una nuova forma nel presente-futuro. Si tratta quindi di confrontarsi non intellettualmente con il problema, ma attraverso un procedimento che sappia integrarne la forma e così intelleggerla.

Come indicato da Vender nell'intervista suddetta, il loro interesse figurativo era centrato sulle esperienze della metafisica e dell'astrattismo. Due prassi pittoriche nelle quali è riscontrabile un procedimento di osservazione e elaborazione della forma simile a quello appena descritto. I due architetti non hanno avuto contatti con queste avanguardie all'interno dell'Accademia di Brera, dove vigeva un insegnamento poco progressista, ma l'ambiente milanese era all'epoca a tal punto denso di discussioni sulla pittura da sembrare inverosimile che essi non ne fossero a conoscenza. Tra il 1918 e il 1921 viene pubblicata la rivista *Valori plastici*, promossa tra gli altri da Carlo Carrà e Giorgio de Chirico, con lo scopo di rinnovare la pittura italiana. Nella rivista vengono presentati diversi pittori europei, accompagnati da testi critici e da esempi di nuova pittura in Italia⁴¹. I testi redatti da Carrà per la rivista troveranno forma compiuta nel libro *Pittura metafisica* del 1919. Interessante notare come questa pubblicazione esca un anno dopo *Oltre il cubismo* di A. Ozenfant e E. Jeanneret (Le Corbusier) e come i due libri trattino temi simili⁴². Nel testo francese viene indicata l'osservazione di oggetti comuni per un ritorno a forme semplici (dopo l'esperienza cubista si potrebbe definire sintetiche) e a impiegare l'occhio come mezzo di «induzione, analisi, elaborazione e ricostruzione»⁴³. In modo simile Carrà invita a volgere lo sguardo alle «cose ordinarie», di riconoscerne l'intima architettura e di sintetizzarle in ciò che egli definisce «l'immagine della forma»⁴⁴.

Questa definizione coglie a pieno il processo creativo che stiamo descrivendo: la capacità di saper vedere ciò che di ordinario la realtà ci propone e di saperla distillare in una nuova immagine sul piano formale-expresivo (e non critico-intellettuale). In questo modo è possibile avvicinare l'osservatore alla realtà conosciuta, senza riproporla in modo naturalistico, ma creando delle coscienti rotture, in grado di trasmettere il messaggio.

Gli accorgimenti qui osservati portano sia in pittura che in architettura al fenomeno di visione che Linda Nochlin definisce come «immediato, ma non istantaneo»⁴⁵. Fenomeno osservato anche da Paul Klee che lo sintetizza come «l'arte non riproduce il visibile, bensì rende visibile»⁴⁶. Un interesse simile è anche riscontrabile a Milano tra i pittori del movimento Novecento, che nel periodo di formazione di Asnago e Vender si condensava attorno alla critica d'arte Margherita Sarfatti, tra i quali Achille Funi, Ubaldo Oppi e Mario Sironi. Nelle loro opere ritroviamo le stesse

⁴¹ Troviamo rubriche con tavole di dipinti su Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Fernand Léger, Theo van Doesburg. Tra gli italiani: Carlo Carrà, Giorgio Morandi, Giorgio de Chirico.

⁴² L'ambiente parigino era per la redazione di *Valori Plastici* ben conosciuto: non solo viene pubblicizzata la rivista *Esprit Nouveau*, ma lo stesso de Chirico era all'epoca di ritorno dal suo soggiorno sulla Senna.

⁴³ Le Corbusier, Amédée Ozenfant, *Oltre il cubismo*, Milano, 2011, p. 44.

⁴⁴ «Non realtà plastiche allo stato iniziale, ma l'immagine della forma che ha lumi così fieri da arrestare la realtà stessa». Carrà, *Pittura metafisica*, Milano, 1919, p. 206.

⁴⁵ Nochlin 1979 (come in nota 35), p. 92.

⁴⁶ Nochlin 1979 (come in nota 35), p. 148.

operazioni di astrazione «sintetica» (così definita dalla stessa Sarfatti⁴⁷) dei soggetti rappresentati⁴⁸. Le affinità tra i procedimenti pittorici dell'epoca e quelli impiegati nelle architetture e nei dipinti da Asnago e Vender ci permettono di affermare che il clima pittorico degli anni venti ha avuto un'influenza sui due architetti⁴⁹. Anche se non abbiamo testimonianze dirette⁵⁰, basti osservare i soggetti rappresentati e il loro modo di scomporli e ricomporli in pittura nei quadri di Mario Asnago, composti da bottiglie, sedie e termosifoni. La testimonianza raccolta da Bräm sul procedimento di analisi, scomposizione e ricomposizione attraverso la pittura nel quadro di Asnago *Radiatore* (1977) ne è un'ulteriore prova⁵¹.

Tra esplicito ed implicito

Gli elementi osservati, impiegati da Asnago Vender nelle opere dal dopoguerra in poi, hanno in gran parte un'origine che abbiamo definito vernacolare; sviluppatasi da una stratificazione di abitudini, che si manifesta in una forma. L'impiego di simili elementi in un'architettura che nasce da un progetto implica una contraddizione fondamentale: voler far capo ad un sistema esplicito per esprimere dei fenomeni sviluppatisi implicitamente. È a questo punto che il lavoro sulla forma è di grande aiuto. Come scrive Christopher Alexander, il «concreto» – quindi il pensiero esplicito – è un buon mezzo per raggiungere diverse necessità in una risposta, ma non è la risposta in sé⁵². Se il mezzo è quindi隐含的 (implicito) è importante notare come la scelta del soggetto, la sua rielaborazione e riproposizione sono comunque soggetti a un'analisi critica ed esplicita. Le osservazioni fin qui raccolte non vogliono quindi giustificare un impiego di operazioni esplicite come arte per l'arte o come unico mezzo per raggiungere un realismo in architettura. Al contrario la loro applicazione ha come scopo sì quello di dimostrare l'efficacia di un approccio formale nella domanda del realismo in pittura, ma non può evitare l'analisi critica. Ci troviamo quindi di fronte alla necessità di mediare tra l'impeto artistico (cogliendone la forza della metodologia) che Asnago e Vender ci sanno proporre e l'importanza della lucidità dell'analisi come osservata nelle parole di Rogers.

Si tratta di due visioni diverse di realismo così come viene definito dal secondo dopoguerra in avanti. Rogers era coinvolto nel CIAM (Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne) dal 1947 e ha vissuto i periodi di discussione iniziati dal Team Ten negli anni cinquanta sulla rivalutazione dell'irrazionale, della tradizione e della riconoscibilità nell'architettura. Un realismo che opera in gran parte con la tecnica del montaggio, dove gli elementi osservati vengono giustapposti mantenendo intatte le loro forme⁵³. Ne è d'esempio in Italia il quartiere Tiburtino, progettato e realizzato sotto la direzione di Ludovico Quaroni e Mario Ridolfi tra il 1949 e 1954, dove tetti spioventi, gronde, dettagli di finestre e tipologie della tradizione popolare italiana vengono collezionati e riproposti invariati in nuove composizioni⁵⁴. La strada intrapresa da Asnago e Vender invece sembra mantenere l'interesse per la sintesi figurativa delle avanguardie

⁴⁷ Vedi la citazione di M. Sarfatti in Elena Pontiggia, Nicoletta Colombo e Claudia Gian Ferrari (a cura di), *Il Novecento milanese. Da Sironi ad Arturo Martini*, Milano, 2003, p. 11.

⁴⁸ Nonostante le affinità il movimento del Novecento si distanzia da quello della metafisica e dalle idee di *Valori Plastici*. Il richiamo fatto da Carrà a Giotto o il ritorno a una classicità passata proposta da de Chirico viene criticato dai novecentisti tra il 1919 e 1920, invocando una nuova pittura caratterizzata dalla sintesi, lontana da ogni tipo di copia del passato. Vedi a proposito: Pontiggia, Colombo e Ferrari 2003 (come in nota 48), pp. 9–30, qui 17.

⁴⁹ L'interattività tra pittura e architettura non è qui un *novum*. Va ricordata l'analisi delle origini del movimento moderno dalla nuova concezione spaziale offerta dal cubismo proposta da Siegfried Giedion nel suo libro *Space, time and architecture* del 1941.

⁵⁰ Oltre alla citata intervista a Vender, Cino Zucchi segnala incontri sporadici tra Vender e Carrà, oltre che accennare al contatto dei due architetti con la Sarfatti a metà degli anni Venti. Vedi: Zucchi, Cadeo e Lattuada 1998 (come nota 17), p. 51, p. 211.

⁵¹ Vedi Bräm 2003 (come in nota 25), p. 17.

⁵² Alexander 1967 (come in nota 28), p. 75.

⁵³ Si veda a proposito l'interessante osservazione sul procedimento realista degli Smithsons in: Elli Mosayebi e Christian Inderbitzin, *The picturesque - Synthese im Bildhaften*, Zurich, 2008, pp. 39–47.

⁵⁴ L'osservazione di Bruno Reichlin sulla poca importanza data dagli autori del quartiere Tiburtino alla forma architettonica, ponendo l'accento sul lato sociale, dimostra come per gli architetti la domanda sulla forma si limitasse ad una scelta da un catalogo vernacolare dato a priori. L'autore lega il metodo progettuale al cinema neorealista dell'epoca e al realismo russo in architettura, tema che in questa sede non può essere sviluppato oltre e si rimanda a: Bruno Reichlin, *Figures of Neorealism in Italian Architecture (part 1)*, in «Grey Room», 2011, 5, pp. 78–101.

degli anni venti anche nel dopoguerra. È lecito pensare che la discussione sulla riconoscibilità dell’architettura iniziata negli anni cinquanta abbia loro permesso maggior libertà espressiva, non è però rintracciabile un cambiamento nel metodo adottato.

Asnago Vender nel contemporaneo

Il potenziale dell’approccio sviluppato da Asnago Vender non sembra aver trovato grande risonanza nell’architettura contemporanea. Nonostante l’interesse per i due architetti è da decenni in costante aumento, le analisi fatte sembrano limitarsi a registrarne la capacità figurativa senza entrare nel merito dei suoi meccanismi⁵⁵. Si potrebbe affermare che l’ispirazione per le figure della loro architettura sia maggiore di quello per il loro metodo; interesse riscontrabile in diverse opere contemporanee, ricordiamo in Italia gli edifici di abitazione a Porta Nuova di Cino Zucchi Architetti (2015), ispirati all’edificio di Asnago e Vender su piazza Santissima Trinità (1968) e all’estero la torre per abitazioni e albergo a Zurigo realizzata da Diener e Diener (2011) come declinazione della facciata di via Albricci 10 (1958) del duo milanese.

Uno sguardo all’odierna attività progettuale svizzera sembra rendere inevitabile un paragone tra i temi sopra descritti e le necessità espresse dalle più giovani generazioni di architetti, nel fondare la propria prassi progettuale su un contatto con la realtà, connotandola con diversi nomi: dall’analogia alla referenza, dall’ispirazione figurativa al *midcomfort*⁵⁶. Sembra che il contatto con la realtà sia una costante anche nel fare architettura del contemporaneo e che parte di esso si svolga proprio lungo i confini qui descritti studiando il dopoguerra italiano tra sintesi pittorica e analisi critica. Sembra spontaneo chiedersi dove ci si trovi oggi: abbiamo sovra intellettualizzato il problema, apparentemente risolto dando nomi e creando regole progettuali, astraendo la realtà in forme che non significano più nulla; oppure la stiamo copiando naturalisticamente come compensazione per la mancanza di basi teoriche? Qualunque sia la risposta, uno sguardo al lavoro svolto più di cinquant’anni addietro ci può aiutare a trovare nuove risposte ad un problema che, nonostante il passare del tempo, non sembra essere sostanzialmente cambiato.

Giulio Bettini (1982), ha studiato architettura al Politecnico federale di Zurigo (ETH), ha lavorato a Milano, Lisbona e Zurigo. Ha ricevuto lo stipendio di ricerca della Federazione Architetti Svizzeri (FAS), pubblicato in «La città animata. Milano e l’architettura di Asnago Vender» (Milano/Zurigo, 2016). Si è occupato dell’architettura del dopoguerra italiano e di Asnago e Vender su *Werk, Bauen+Wohnen*.

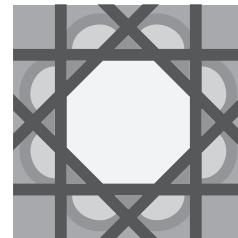
È attualmente attivo come architetto a Zurigo e all’Accademia di Architettura di Mendrisio.

⁵⁵ La prima monografia di Airolidi, Mantero, Monestiroli, Albertini e Novati, *Asnago/Vender architetti* (Como, 1986), propone il primo registro della loro opera, solo in parte documentato con piani e immagini e senza proporre un inquadramento storico, ma osservando con attenzione gli effetti delle loro espressioni. La fondamentale monografia di Zucchi, Cadeo e Lattuada, *Asnago e Vender. L’astrazione quotidiana* (Milano, 1998), ha portato l’intera opera dei due architetti al pubblico e ha offerto un primo posizionamento storico del loro lavoro. La pubblicazione di Caruso e Thomas, *Asnago Vender and the construction of modern Milan* (Zurich, 2014), ha il grande pregio di portare all’occhio facciate e dettagli fino ad ora mai rappresentati in questa scala, non entra nel merito del lavoro dei due architetti e propone una dubbia correlazione storica tra la concetto di «continuità» di *Casabella* proposta da Rogers (vedi nota 8) e l’operare dei due architetti, che – come abbiamo dimostrato – sembra essere antitetica. Un interessante sguardo all’edificio di Rossini e all’opera del duo milanese è offerta da Massimo Novati e Monica Lattuada in *L’edificio di via Rossini a Milano. Un palinsesto del moderno*, Milano, 2015. Gli autori accennano al loro fare architettura «da pittori», purtroppo senza entrare nel merito (p. 29).

⁵⁶ Si veda a proposito la metodologia progettuale «analogia» proposta da Aldo Rossi, portata nel mondo accademico svizzero al Politecnico federale di Zurigo negli anni 1972–1974. Questa è stata sviluppata nel pensiero e nell’operare da diversi architetti dando origine alle ultime generazioni di prassi progettuale del «Midcomfort» (Miroslav Sik), basato sulla «referenza» o nel procedimento di «constructing the historic present» (Adam Caruso). Si veda in merito: Ákos Moravánszky, *Analogien und Attitüden*, in «Analoge Architektur – Die Lehre», TEC21, 37–2015, pp. 28–3; Lukas Imhof, Miroslav Sik, *Midcomfort. Wohncomfort und die Architektur der Mitte*, Wien, 2014; Adam Caruso, *Whatever Happened to Analogue Architecture*, in «AA Files», 59 2009, pp. 74–75.

A Magic-Real Gap in Architecture

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‘Now down you go in the Ocean’s folding gulfs
to visit father’s hall – the Old Man of the Sea –
and tell him all. I am on my way to Olympus heights,
to the famous Smith Hephaestus – I pray he’ll give my son
some fabulous armour full of the god’s great fire!'¹
Thetis in *Homer*, Book XVIII

The cultural history of technology simultaneously narrates a subliminal history of magic. With the skilled smith Hephaestus harnessing Achilles’ shield to battle Hector, we find testimony of a magical artefact that emerges from great craftsmanship and performs through a combination of spiritual invocations taken from occurrences of everyday life. Earth and sky, human interactions in love and war, and scenes of dance are depicted in the shield, representing a world that promises to protect the great warrior. The very condition of everyday life brought forth through technological means contains the strength to shield humankind. Consequently, it is not just the invincible metal that protects Achilles, but the stories conjured within it. In Hephaestus’s words, Achilles’s shield will prompt ‘any man in the world of men [to] marvel at [it] through all the years to come – whoever sees its splendour.’² The emergence of wonder appears in the shield through five layers of metal made by Hephaestus [*poiei*] ‘with all his craft and cunning’ [*daidala*], ‘a world of gorgeous immortal work.’³ As Alberto Pérez-Gómez has stated: ‘The principal value of *daidala* is that of enabling inanimate matter to become magically alive, of reproducing life rather than representing it.’⁴ Therefore, if someone fights Achilles, they are in fact fighting against an enacted cosmos carried within his armour.

Under the auspices of such a story, technology can be understood as that which comes alive through making [*poeisis*] and concealed wonder [*thauma*.⁵ Homer never explains the reasons behind the shield’s depicted scenes. The details of the narrative focus on the precision of its craft and the accuracy of the stories ornamenting the artefact, without necessarily reasoning a clear connection between them. A gap is created between the shield’s factual and fictive nature, a gap that is left unassigned to fixed meanings, so it remains active as a productive place for thinking even to this day. In addition, technology, with its physical and metaphysical qualities, presents itself in the story as working for and with humankind, instead of being opposed to it. Technology, seen as an aid to improve life

¹ Homer, *The Iliad*, Trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), Book XVIII, p. 472.

² Ibid., p. 482.

³ Ibid., p. 483.

⁴ Alberto Pérez-Goméz, ‘The Myth of Daedalus’, *AA Files*, no. 10 (1988), p. 50.

⁵ Indra Kagis McEwen, *Socrates’ Ancestor* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1997), p. 55.

through skilled craftsmanship and wonder, was at the core of *daidala* objects.⁶ These were also applicable to the products of Daedalus, the first architect.

Looking into Homer's story not only seems relevant for understanding earlier notions of technology, but conceivably also more important, it offers a window to reflect upon today's practices and their relationship with it. Despite the succeeding displacement of magic as historically inherent to world-making, the twentieth century saw its revival through many expressions and theories.⁷ Notions of speed, machines in charge of someone else's life, remoteness and the overpowering new reach of communications raised an unthinkable set of conditions that was often described as magical.⁸ The technological revolution that occurred in the nineteenth century, exacerbated after the First World War, introduced notions of 'remoteness' and 'distance' within everyday life. This paradoxically created, at least marginally, an awareness towards its material and intimate aspects, which would be described as 'magic'.

Quotidian Encounters

A particular consideration of everyday life as key to reveal the invisible through art appeared in 1924 in Germany with 'magic realism', a term coined by the artist and critic Franz Roh.⁹ Expressing that 'as early as the First World War a countermovement developed, one of those retardations which history likes to throw in as a breathing spell when we have experienced too many innovations', Roh celebrated the fact that the 'charm of the object was rediscovered'.¹⁰ In a manifesto, the art critic discussed the work of several artists looking at everyday life in order to 'celebrate the mundane and overturn the abstractions of Expressionism'.¹¹ In the work of artists like Georg Schrimpf, Roh suggested that the magical 'palpitates and hides behind reality'.¹² In order to develop his argument, he questioned the role of objects, finding an agency in both the objects of our everyday life and our own perception of them, in how they affect reality.¹³ In other words, he distinguished between *how* reality is represented and *how* its representation allows us to see reality anew, emphasising the anti-positivist principle that reality is constructed and not given. For Roh, 'if all matter consisted of minute abstract particles intrinsically in motion, then it was declared to be astonishing, even miraculous, that given such fluctuations, matter should crystallise and solidify into what we can call things'.¹⁴ Rejecting the artistic imperative of extraordinary or divine events as distanced from the creative act, Roh inferred that the magical is already part of the real and the practice of looking closely and precisely at common events, normally taken as non-relevant, is what allows one to encounter the very heart of reality's mysteries. By nature oxymoronic, magic realism was founded on the duality of two seemingly different realms – reality and magic – precisely in order to open up a field for wonder and reflection rooted in an apparent 'unimportant' and 'given' occurrence: everyday life. Roh outlined the new formative human of this

⁶ Ibid., pp. 41–58.

⁷ 1900's Occultism and Symbolism, later Magic Realism and others.

⁸ Timothy Campbell, "Infinite Remoteness": Marinetti, Bontempelli, and the Emergence of Modern Italian Visual Culture, *MLN (Modern Language Notes)*, 120, no. 1 (2005), p. 112 (Italian issue).

⁹ Franz Roh, 'Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism', in Lois Zamora Parkinson and Wendy B. Faris, (eds.), *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 17.

¹⁰ Franz Roh, *German Art in the Twentieth Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968), p. 112.

¹¹ Roh, 'Magic Realism' (see note 9), p. 20.

¹² Ibid., p. 21.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Roh, *German Art*, p. 113.

period as one who reconciles constructivist ideals ‘with a greater respect for reality, with a closer knowledge of what exists, of the objects he transforms and exalts.’¹⁵ He described the magic real artist as one who not only contemplates and knows, but also acts.¹⁶ Relying on both theory and practice, magic realism attempted to expose something hidden within the world. Derived from thought, the object is meaningful and acts upon the perceiver only insofar as the perceiver is experiencing it.¹⁷ In this sense, objects are not just ‘there’ and I am ‘here’, but we are as we experience each other.¹⁸

In relationship to technology Roh addressed two key issues. On one hand he embraced the notion of precision, so skillfully attained through the performance of machines, suggesting however that such precision should be implemented by the human eye and hand. By slowing down the process of seeing and carefully re-constructing what is already there, precision had the capacity of revealing what was hidden. Paintings such as *Laying Girls on Greenery (Liegende Mädchen im Grünen)* by Georg Schrimpf were able to express a dream-like quality that was simultaneously familiar and uncanny.¹⁹ On the other hand, he supported the use of the machine for the work of art through the use of photography. In the exquisite 1929 publication *Photo-eye*, comprising seventy-six photographs, Roh curated the work of artists who had been able to ‘photo-re-make’ the world by attaining something unique from it.²⁰ Roh, who was also a skilled photographer, portrayed some of his own ideas in rarely discussed photomontages where he overlapped scenes of everyday life of the city or domestic settings with carefully constructed portraits, such as in an untitled piece from 1928 owned by the Museum of Modern Art in New York.²¹ In this gelatin silver print, an image of a tunnel with passing bikers and an interior scene of a female model photographed from above are fused together, offering a complex perception of exterior and interior space. The art critic proposed: ‘only when the creative process achieves its goal from the inside out can it generate new views of reality, which is at most built in pieces, never imitated as a whole.’²² The intention was not imitation; rather it was to present reality anew based on concrete perceptions of the world.²³ The scholar Pepper Stetler has pointed out that while ‘perspective traditionally aligns vision and knowledge, eye and mind, this photograph ruptures this relationship. In other words, Roh juxtaposes a system of perspective with features that disrupt it, shifting its meaning into realms of imagination, dream, and desire.’²⁴ Another common technique that Roh performed to question reality through representation was to make negative prints of photographs, evoking a distinct sense of light and shadow that allows us to see the photographed object anew. Roh saw the juxtaposition of seemingly opposite forces as a method of searching for unknown geometries and associations. These encounters already constituted a way of working and thinking in a magic-real way.²⁵

From its origins in post-war Germany, the 1927 Spanish publication of Roh’s essay in Madrid’s *Revista de Occidente* signaled the birth of magic

¹⁵ Roh, ‘Magic Realism’ (see note 9), p. 23.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ In describing a scene of apples on a table, Roh recounted his captivation as not merely sensational nor merely formal. Instead, he expresses that, ‘I am overcome by a much wider amalgam of colors, spatial forms, tactile representations, memories of smells and tastes; in short, a truly unending complex that we understand by the name of *thing*.’ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁸ This notion is also at the core of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s work on perception. Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Collin Smith. (New York, Routledge, 1958)

¹⁹ Image URL: <http://onlinekatalog.staatsgalerie.de/detail.jsp?id=C9159C7F4496A97715C-5CB089A4F023&img=1>.

²⁰ In an opening essay he makes clear: ‘they are photographs in which we wish nothing to be moved, raised or levelled, no part to be either materialized or dematerialized, etc.’ Franz Roh, *Foto-Auge = Oeil et photo = Photo-eye* (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag F. Wedekind, 1929), p. 15.

²¹ Image URL: <https://www.moma.org/interactives/objectphoto/objects/83888.html>.

²² Roh, ‘Magic Realism’ (see note 9), p. 24.

²³ Roh gives the example of Georg Schrimpf, an artist who used to paint landscapes and other scenes inside a room without any models or sketches. Schrimpf believed in rigorously representing the scene as if it were real but without imitating it, although closely looking at all the details as the painting was being constructed, remembered and becoming ‘familiar’ in a magic real form since it was not exactly a copy of something out there, and yet it seemed to be, at the same time that it was conceived in isolation. Another example Roh gives is the work of Alexander Kanoldt who constructed landscapes out of Italian cities. Roh emphasizes the importance of opposites to emphasize the various methods for discovering a magic-real apprehension of the world. Ibid.

²⁴ Pepper Stetler, ‘Franz Roh and the Art History of Photography’, in Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg (eds.), *Modern*

realism on the international stage.²⁶ Its publication into another language opened up territory for many artists and writers to become acquainted with new ideas gestating at the time. Although magic realism as a movement in art did not span a great length in time, it opened up an immense territory within literature that remains present to this day.²⁷

Inside Stories

Magic realism as a literary movement first appeared in Italy in the publications of the Lombard writer Massimo Bontempelli. Holding similar principles as Roh, as well as some uniquely Italian notions, Bontempelli believed that magic realism was an invitation to re-write the reality of everyday life and to find the magical within. While the threatening changes of modernism worried many artists, writers, and particularly architects, Bontempelli saw magic realism as an apparatus to construct and reveal myth and as a vehicle by which cultures could evolve from the past without ignoring it.²⁸ In 1926 he introduced magic realism in his literature journal '*900*', *Cahiers d'Italie et d'Europe*. Published in French as well as in Italian, the journal was an attempt to disseminate more broadly the work of Italian writers and other international figures such as James Joyce, Ramón Gómez de la Serna and Virginia Wolf.

'*900*' exposed the ideas contained within magic realism. The effort to discover and perhaps save reality from positivist definitions could only be attempted from an artistic perspective – in literature, art, music and architecture.²⁹ Bontempelli thought that a new art form could emerge from the intimacy between what was assumed to be reality and the fantasy practiced through one's imagination. He claimed imagination to be 'the instrument to liberate ourselves from the repetition of the old and create an atmosphere that favours the new'.³⁰ For Bontempelli, imagination was the only instrument capable of enriching reality.³¹ His goal has been understood as a desire to create a world of fantasy, not only borrowing the objectivity of the natural world, but emerging from it.³² Although not an architect, he nevertheless referred frequently, throughout his various works, to the field of architecture as the locus for magic realism to perform and to remain over time. In architecture, however, magic realism was never officially proclaimed as a movement.

The notion of magic in architecture was more literally expressed several years later, in 1936, by Austrian-American architect Frederick Kiesler, in a short volume entitled *Magic Architecture*. In this piece, Kiesler equates Magic Architecture with 'the expression of the creativeness of man', as 'an architecture of contact, not of separation'.³³ Just like Roh and Bontempelli, the emergence of this magic realm also related to everyday and 'every-night' reality. For Kiesler, *Magic Architecture* does the most with the least and 'holds a balance between the two extremes of man a) desire for the machine b) the denial of science'.³⁵ Again ambiguous in its definition, the element of magic contests assumed orders and prin-

Photographs: The Thomas Walther Collection 1909–1949 Object: Photo, An Online Project of The Museum of Modern Art. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2014).

²⁵ Roh, 'Magic Realism' (see note 9), p. 27.

²⁶ Magazine directed by philosopher José Ortega y Gasset.

²⁷ From the work of Gabriel García Márquez to the contemporary writer Isabel Allende, magic realism in literature has remained actively present in the world through the work of multiple Latin American authors.

²⁸ Massimo Bontempelli, *Realismo Magico e altri scritti sull'arte*. Ed. Elena Pontiggia (Milan: Abscondita Srl., 2006), p. 21. All translations by the author.

²⁹ *Studi Novecenteschi*. Quadriennale di storia della letteratura italiana contemporanea, 12 (Padova: Marsilio Editori, 1975), p. 249.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Bontempelli, *Realismo Magico* (see note 28), p. 30.

³² Estelle Gilson in the preface to *Separations*, citing a review in *The New York Times* on Massimo Bontempelli. Massimo Bontempelli, *Separation: Two Novels of Mothers and Children*. Trans. Estelle Gilson (Kingston, New York: McPherson & Company, 2000), p. 8.

³³ Frederick J. Kiesler, *Selected Writings*. Ed. Siegfried Gohr and Gunda Luyken (Stuttgart: Verlag Gerd Hajte, 1996), p. 34.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

ciples, and exists in a realm of wondrous performance. After the Second World War, Kiesler further developed the relationship between magic and architecture through an unpublished manuscript, recounting the story of human dwelling and exploring building technologies from the most primitive forms of shelter to postwar constructions.³⁶ Once again, after the major social shock of violent nature, magic was seen as way to cope and perhaps re-discover a lost sense of vitality. However, the architect also posses the role of magic as an art form residing essentially in the being of the conscious man. He explains that ‘without the belief in the magic power of creation, both civilization and culture are unthinkable. Magic is the mother of invention. And every invention is a tool for increased power of the human being, down and up the scale of his make-up’.³⁷ Within such a premise, Kiesler seizes magic and technology as ontologically tied to the cosmos of humankind. The architect also points out that it is the relationship between the unknown and the known that has allowed magic to feed into men’s curiosity. This is proven, he believes, by the fact that magic and experimentation have always gone hand in hand.³⁸

In the same year Kiesler wrote his piece *Magic Architecture*, the German cultural critic Walter Benjamin published the pivotal essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, in which he critically addressed the role of technology in art, the dominance of the machine and some of its cultural implications. Curiously, in his essay Benjamin opposed the work of the magician to that of the surgeon, in order to establish the dichotomy between the painter and the cameraman.³⁹ He concluded that ‘the destruction caused by war furnishes proof that society was not mature enough to make technology its organ, that technology was not sufficiently developed to master the elemental forces of society.’⁴⁰ In light of this thought, if technology is understood as a form of language and, as he has stated, all language is a form of magic, then perhaps the surgeon and the magician are responsible to join forces and confront the dichotomous space of scientific thinking and magic making together.

Particularly in architecture, in doing what builders once used to make, machines transfigured the role of the ‘maker’ into an ‘operator.’ What then becomes the role of the architect in this transfiguration of the craft? As the aura of the twentieth-century builder disappears, it perhaps creates room for the architect’s material imagination to engage in extracting an aura that includes the machine but does not submit to it.

Performing Magic

In Italy, the place where magic realism and architecture were first paired in a critical juxtaposition, post-Second World War architects also aspired to reflect upon ideals of the renewed society in every aspect of their work.⁴¹ In Gio Ponti’s view, for example, Italians needed to love materials, use them and support their technical and aesthetic qualities in order to extract maximum results.⁴² In 1946 Mario Ridolfi published the *Manuale dell’*

³⁶ Archives of American Art, *Lillian and Frederick Kiesler papers, Magic Architecture*, box 23, folder 19.

³⁷ Ibid. 1/1, chapter one, p. iv.

³⁸ Ibid. 1/2, chapter one, p. iv.

³⁹ Artistic production begins with figures in the service of magic. What is important for these figures is that they are present, not that they are seen. Walter Benjamin, *The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility and other writings on media*. Ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 25.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 42.

⁴¹ Terry Kirk, *The Architecture of Modern Italy, vol. II: Visions of Utopia, 1900–Present* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), p. 145.

⁴² Ibid., p. 159.

Architetto, an architectural manual intended originally to be a book of standards for Italy's reconstruction.⁴³ However Ridolfi, having illustrated many plates himself, interpreted the manual as a collection of juxtaposed details and architectural examples that had little to do with building standards per se. According to scholar and architect Marco Frascari, Ridolfi 'converted the *Manuale dell'Architetto* into a unique contribution of tectonic norms,' where 'craftsmanship is the invention of solutions not from abstract notions but discovered while working; solutions suggested by a comprehension of the organic nature of the material and the specificity of design problems.'⁴⁴ For Ridolfi, an architect's immersion into making is what brings forth architectural inventions. He stated that, 'Pupils should learn to represent objects in such a way that they can be reconstructed ... I tell them that they should see the opaque objects as if they are transparent. They should learn to see also beyond them to be able to draw them in a constructive manner.'⁴⁵ In addition to his commentary on acquiring a 'new' vision, Ridolfi also thought that architects, much like Hephaestus, had the challenge to bring things to life. In a published letter, he states that the 'difficulty is in finding the just measure of the individual parts ... the willingness to give life to things almost to make them to breathe, to try to make them speak.'⁴⁶ For Ridolfi, architecture seems to have been close to magic, a form of practice that acts upon matter through a focused use of technology, aiming at an outcome that can be manifested in diverse and rich ways. The purpose of magic is that the action towards a subject results in its very re-enaction, i.e., it brings a new life to that which it addresses.

The Venetian architect Carlo Scarpa, a close friend of Ridolfi,⁴⁷ remained on the periphery of modernism's turmoil in Italy, although he was well aware of the work of several of these iconic figures, including that of Bontempelli.⁴⁸ Often referred to as *Il Mago* by some of his colleagues, Scarpa appears as one of the architects who addressed issues of technology through the lenses of magic tangentially to thoughts previously discussed in this paper. His work, as well as testimonies from work assistants, indicate the architect's cunning use of the machine while trying to extract a hidden potential of the materials performing with and through it. Erstwhile collaborator Carlo Maschietto recounts that Scarpa's vast cultural knowledge allowed him to extend the work towards that which was improbable.⁴⁹ His interest in designing the most banal details of the architectural project, from a handle to a shadow, usually provided the total work with a sense of elevated complexity.⁵⁰ One of the many examples of this can be found in a small detail found in his Brion Cemetery project, located in San Vito d'Altivole, and built between 1968 and the architect's death in 1978.

The entrance corridor to the burial complex consists of a concrete structure that creates an intimate gate within the old cemetery (Fig. 1). After walking a few steps up and upon arrival into the main level of this corridor, one notices that the concrete floor is made from individually cast concrete pavers contained within steel frames. It becomes evident that

⁴³ Manual Images URL: <http://ffmaam.it/collezione/mario-ridolfi#mario-ridolfi>.

⁴⁴ Marco Frascari, 'The Drawings of a Reflective Architect,' unpublished essay written in Washington Alexandria Architecture Center, Virginia Tech, p. 4.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 4–7.

⁴⁶ Mario Ridolfi, 'Lettera di Mario Ridolfi', *Controspazio*, 3 (1977), p. 3, quoted in: Marco Frascari, 'A Quasi-Necessary Cacotechnology: Few Happy Thoughts on Architectural Imagination and Facture', *Architectural Theory Review*, 10:2, 1–11 (2009), p. 9.

⁴⁷ Marco Frascari expresses the strong friendship between the two in many of his papers, including in 'The Well-Tempered drawings of a Reflective Architect' (see note 44).

⁴⁸ Scarpa mentioned Le Corbusier's works many times in his lecture and interviews. He admired the Swiss architect and knew his work well. He also collected several Italian journals of the time. Franca Semini, *A Lezione con Carlo Scarpa* (Venezia: Cicero, 2010).

⁴⁹ Sandro Giordano, *Il mestiere di Carlo Scarpa : collaboratori, artigiani e committenti*. Doctorate Thesis, IUAV: Istituto universitario di architettura di Venezia, 1984, p. 26. Translation by the author.

⁵⁰ Guido Guidi and Antonello Frongia, *Carlo Scarpa's Tomba Brion = La Tomba Brion di Carlo Scarpa* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011).



1

some of the pavers are purposely left without any fixed attachment to the subfloor structure, thus creating a play of subtle sounds, especially on the right side of the corridor that gives access to the water pavilion (Fig. 2). The purposeful imprecision of the ground achieved by highly precise technology (refined steel frames and poured concrete) plays a key role in the experience because it emphasises the spatiality of the corridor. Once the sounds of the ‘mis-placed’ ground resonate, the height of the space is enacted and as one moves into the space, each sound seems louder and deeper thanks to the narrowing corridor. The acoustic reverberations act in complicity with two more details that elucidate Scarpa’s magical approach towards technology. The first one directs our attention towards the realm below the floor. The loose pavers, resonating louder as one moves into the corridor, reveal a hollow presence underneath that is filled with water and connects to the yet invisible pond on the other side of the structure. This begins to reveal the nature of the wall’s foundation that, while invisible to us, becomes present through an aural experience allowed by its design. The perforated concrete wall that allows water beneath the floor is dematerialised at the strongest structural points in order to allow a loftier experience where it appears the most solid. (Fig. 3).

The second detail directs our attention towards the realm above the floor. Embedded in the concrete ceiling, a play of timber strips creates a particular rhythm (Fig. 4). Through the evidence in drawings, we discover that Scarpa spent a great deal of time focusing on this particular detail. The execution was made possible through two opposite qualities. On one



2

Fig. 1

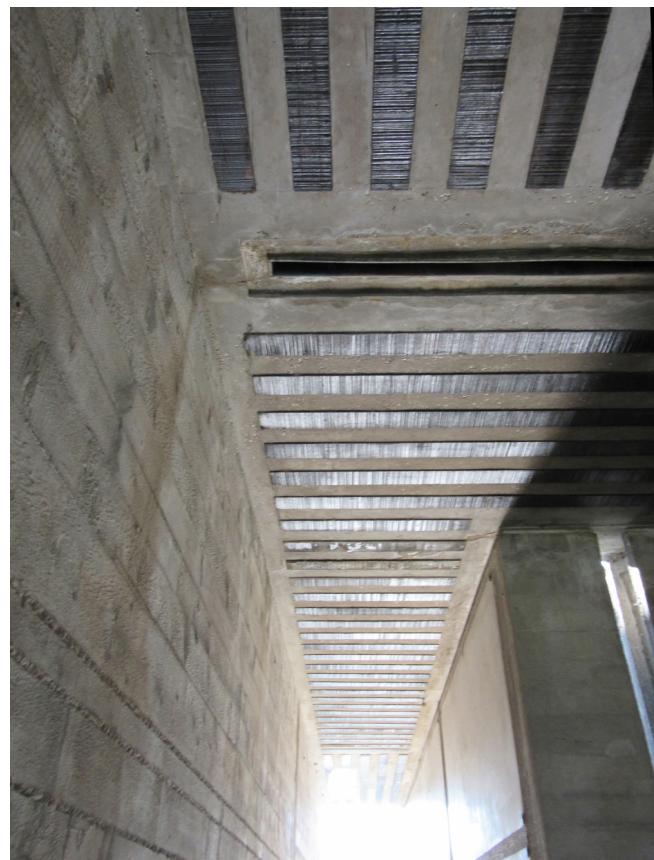
Carlo Scarpa, Brion Cemetery, San Vito D’Altivole, 1978: Entry from old San Vito D’Altivole cemetery (C. Dayer)

Fig. 2

Carlo Scarpa, Brion Cemetery, San Vito D’Altivole, 1978: Concrete floor with steel frame edges at entry corridor (C. Dayer)



3



4

hand, the precision of placing the timber inserts on the ceiling requires high quality craftsmanship in the formwork and pouring execution. On the other hand, each piece of refined and precisely cut wood was submitted to a process of ‘disruption’ created by using a table saw with a worn out blade that would create, at each cut, uneven markings in the two faces of the timber. While the side that is hidden within the concrete is sharply constructed, the exposed one is made ‘wrongly’ so that its texture, through the indirect light reflections in the corridor, becomes particularly visible. The timber is finished with brown polished paint that enhances the various uneven and parallel lines created by the machine. One of Scarpa’s close collaborators from the Afondillo Carpentry recalls that Scarpa’s excellent performance was due to the advanced technological equipment that he selected, to skilled mastery, and the value of the materials employed.⁵¹ He remembers Scarpa’s fascination with modern machines, but highlights that his major concern was with the quality of materials.⁵² The subtle details described here are a small demonstration of Scarpa’s approach to the use of technology, where the gap between the predictability of the machine and the unexpectedness of the material serve to enhance the total performance and embodiment of the architectural project.

In light of this approach to technology, it seems natural to wonder about the questions and opportunities that the overpowering use of digital tools poses in the twenty-first century. In 2001, American architects Billie Tsien and Tod Williams described the materials used in the now-demolished

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 67–68. Translation by the author.

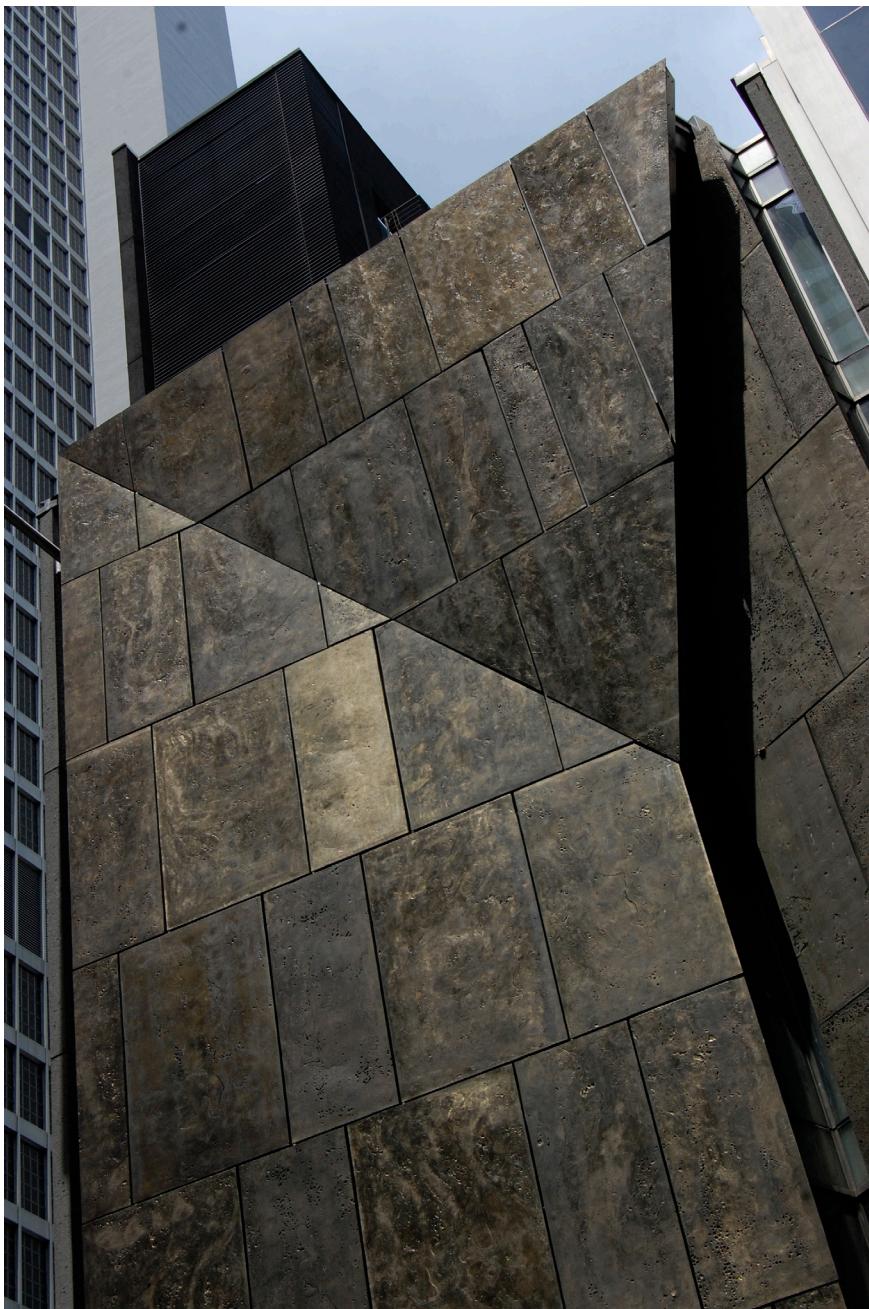
⁵² Ibid.

Fig. 3

Carlo Scarpa, Brion Cemetery, San Vito D’Altivole, 1978: Corridor wall, floor and water pool to the side and underneath of corridor (C. Dayer)

Fig. 4

Carlo Scarpa, Brion Cemetery, San Vito D’Altivole, 1978: Concrete ceiling with wood incrustations (C. Dayer)



5

Folk Art Museum in New York as a combination of ‘the common and the magical’⁵³ (Fig. 5). The timber floors of the main gallery spaces were built with fir logs that had been submerged in the Ruby Lake for more than a century, before being unexpectedly discovered by a scuba diver.⁵⁴ The mysterious origin of the wood seems attuned with the subject of the collection, culturally significant artifacts of American folk art. The precious discovery allowed the uncut planks of the floor to be around 16 feet long. For this building, the architects also used a very particular and unique facade material called tombasil, consisting of metal panels made of an alloy of copper, zinc, manganese and nickel (Fig. 6). The alloy was poured on two different custom-made molds, one in concrete and another in steel.⁵⁵ The ‘common’ and the ‘magical’ are expressed in the museum through the elevation of typical materials into an exquisite state of transformation

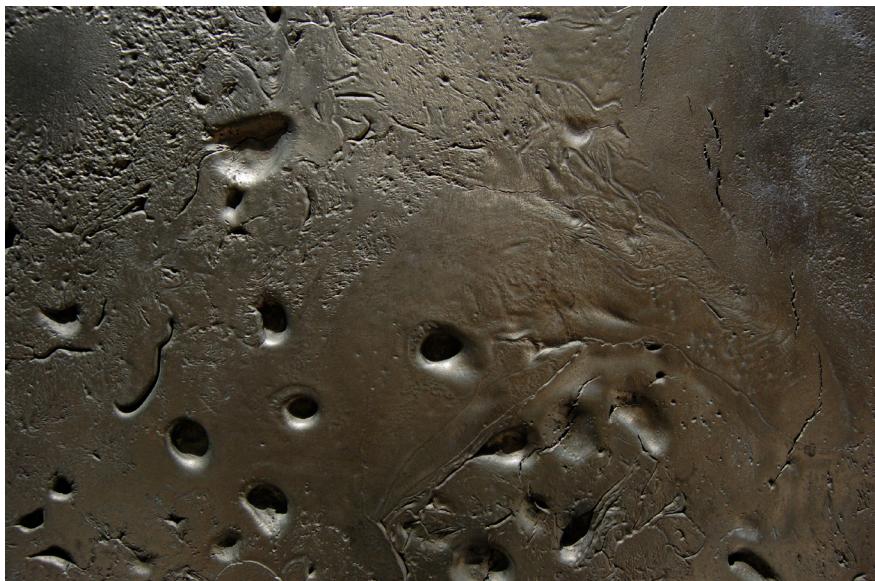
⁵³ Tod Williams and Billie Tsien in arcspace.com, (2003), <http://www.arcspace.com/features/tod-williams-billie-tsien/american-folk-art-museum/> (accessed June 2016).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ *Graphis, The International Journal of Design and Communication*, 59, no. 344 (2003), p. 89.

Fig. 5

Billie Tsien and Tod Williams,
American Folk Art Museum, New York,
2001-2014: Façade (C. Dayer)



⁵⁶ Billie Tsien, *UCLA Alumni*, <https://alumni.ucla.edu/stories/billie-tsien-m-arch-77/> (accessed June 2016).

6

that is not only shaped by technologies, but by the histories hidden within them. In a lecture given at UCLA, Billie Tsien expressed her ‘love’ for ‘the rediscovery of what is really there all along; the primal connections we all have with water and sky’.⁵⁶ Reminiscent of magic-real notions, her thought re-opens a gap for the unpredictable to emerge within the results-oriented determinism so present in current practice.

While technological events of the twenty-first century are proving to be proficient at highly controlled systems, even when claiming to be ‘behaviour responsive’, the necessity for keeping open the gap between defined and undefined qualities at multiple levels seems of urgent relevance. Architecture understood as magic-real suggests the opening of a gap towards horizons that can still haunt us.

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Fig. 6

Billie Tsien and Tod Williams,
American Folk Art Museum, New York,
2001-2014: Façade detail (C. Dayer)