BIRKHÄUSER

Contents

Ákos Moravánszky

Foreword

East West Central: Re-Building Europe

The Iron Curtain stood for the static immutability of the status quo. "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent" – Winston Churchill told his audience in a famous speech on March 5, 1946. Like most metaphors, the term Iron Curtain has imprinted itself into the perception of reality and was associated with the fortified border, erected to block the movement of people and information between East and West. Architectural historiography followed suit, presenting the history of modernization and modernism in Europe from a perspective determined – and limited – by this political boundary. The imagery produced by the dissolution of the Soviet Union: the "fall," the "lifting" or the "raising" of the curtain, the "breaching" of the wall, is a sign of confusion – regarding not only metaphors, but also underlying assumptions, methods and categories of architectural historiography.

Writing in the 1920s, art historian Erwin Panofsky famously referred to the perspective as a symbolic form. By this he meant that representing reality by means of a cohesive set of rules and symbols would give shape to a specific worldview. The exchange of views between cultures can therefore be studied using examples of visual representations, based on differing concepts of the relationship between observer and reality. When Panofsky gave his seminal lecture on Western perspective, Russian philosopher-physicist-inventor-priest Pavel Florensky wrote a study on the "reverse perspective" used in icon painting. He compared it to Renaissance representations of space in order to point out the differences between the two types of visual representation and their respective philosophical and theological underpinnings.

The exchange of glances as expressed in the German word *Blickwechsel* is a suggestive image: we are invited to switch between the viewpoints of the observer and the observed, so that our image of the world is suddenly no longer taken for granted. The metaphor of the Iron Curtain, however, sug-

gests that after WWII the boundary between the two halves of Europe was hermetic and impermeable, even to the gaze. Western and Eastern Europe regarded each other as their own dark "others": communism and capitalism, divided by the Iron Curtain, were the "Twin Empires" on the mythical map of Europe. Yet, the perfect symmetry of the image eschewed the evidently more complex reality. As an image, the Iron Curtain was able to trigger both Western fear and desire, but actually it was far from being impenetrable. Rather, the Iron Curtain's semi-permeability, which turned it into an osmotic membrane, refuted the supposed symmetry of the East-West division. Contrary to the widespread identification in the West with the concept of Western Europe and its corresponding values, the idea of a shared Eastern European identity has never been popular among the inhabitants of this region. Architects in the East were generally very well informed about the latest developments in Western architecture. One could hardly survive as an architect without having browsed the latest issues of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, *The Architectural Review* or the magazines from Scandinavian countries, all of which were available in the libraries of the large state-owned design offices. The optical metaphor, however, held true: images were floating around but remained disembodied signifiers, as they weren't grounded in personal experience. At the same time, travels of architects and professional organizations from the West to the East intensified during 1970s and 1980s. The lessons that participants drew from such exchanges more often than not depended on their respective viewpoints of the perspective.

The discrepancy between the bipolarity of block-thinking and the more complex and heterogeneous civilizational and political reality of Europe has led historians to develop different concepts to describe the historical identity of European regions more adequately than the East-West dichotomy. The term *Mitteleuropa* has never been merely a geographical term. It was a political one as well, just as East and West were connected with distinct political ideas or concepts. With the active support of intellectuals from the United States and England in the 1980s, Central Europe became a program to affirm a particular identity of the region: politically part of the Eastern Bloc, but without losing its Western cultural orientation – a result of the region's specific historical development and its political affiliations before the war. "The phrase, a peculiar one, a hybrid of sorts, hearkened back to the Cold War period; while it reflected a certain deference to the ideas of Milan Kundera and others, it avoided the outright suggestion that the notion of Eastern Europe was outmoded, essentially a fabrication of the age of Stalin, that it brought together in a single category societies that remained significantly different" – wrote Stephen R. Graubard, editor of *Daedalus*, the journal of

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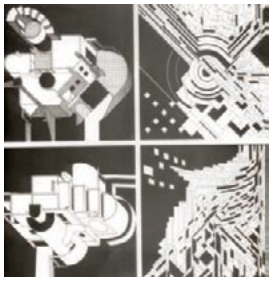

fig. 4 Leonhard Lapin, Isometrics for detached houses, Creation II and III, 1973. Source: Archive of the author.

press.[14] The journal *Werk*, in its 9/1971 issue, published statements about the crisis from the ETH president, who rejected any education in political ideology, from former and recent students, and from Lucius Burckhardt.[15] Was it a coincidence that in the same issue a longer essay by Urs and Rös Graf on the "open form" concept of Polish architect Oskar Hansen was published, quoting Hansen at length and calling for an architecture engaging the active participation of the user? A reader could certainly understand this as a possible response to the questions discussed above.[16]

It was in the midst of such turbulences that Bruno Reichlin and Fabio Reinhart, future assistants of Aldo Rossi, wrote a letter to Bernhard Hoesli in January 1971. They proposed an invitation to Aldo Rossi, whose professorship in Milan had been suspended because of his participation in student revolts. To hire a guest lecturer from Italy, a member of the Communist Party, must have appeared as a risky step – but in fact it turned out to be a brilliant move. Rossi's reputation as a person with a clear political message, who had visited Moscow and East Germany and was impressed by the Karl-Marx-Allee socialist-realist development in Berlin, made him acceptable to the rebellious student body. He shackled them to the drafting table: former revolutionary students spent hundreds of hours drafting cities street by street, as a former student reported.[17] He also made them aware of the significance of history, in the sense that Rossi described it in his notebooks.

I learned about these developments only later, however, when I visited Rainer Senn in Basel the next summer and we went to see Lucius Burckhardt.

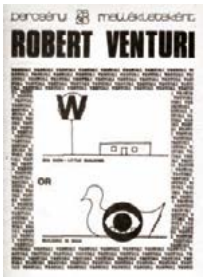

fig. 5 Cover of the journal *Bercsényi 28–30*, issue on Robert Venturi, 1976. Source: Archive of the author.

During the *Lehrcanapé* visit in Budapest, I had no idea about the goals and political underpinnings of the project. I invested my energy into the co-organization of another study trip to Budapest for architecture and engineering students from technical universities and art schools in France, Finland, Estonia, Switzerland and Poland. After a month in the Hungarian capital, a small part of that group took the train to Tallinn, capital of the Soviet Republic of Estonia. The camp and the Estonian trip had been initiated by the Technical University Budapest, so it not only had official blessing but was financed by our school as well.

The Tallinn month was exciting. We worked as bricklayers on the construction site of a sports stadium, and after work we visited young Estonian architects who were not only very knowledgeable about the Anglo-American discourse of postmodernism, but had already realized some buildings, which they called at that time Neo-Functionalist. Soviet constructivism, international modernism and Anglo-American postmodernism had a considerable influence on their work – although, remarkably, Estonian architectural historiography today treats this same group as the "Tallin school of the critique of modernism" [*"Tallinna kooli modernismi kriitika"*].[18]

As the composition of the summer camp suggests, "identity" was a major issue – this probably explains the emphasis on the Finno-Ugric: the Finnish-Estonian-Hungarian component. It was an experimental balloon, an experiment closely observed by the communist youth organization (KISZ) of the university.

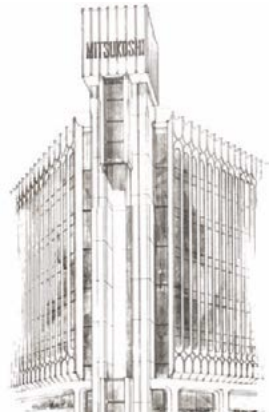

fig. 11 Study for the Mitsukoshi department store in Hiroshima. Image courtesy of Inoue Takeshi.

Hotel in Berlin were motivated by a desire to return to regional styles and local traditions, the means by which they were produced portended a fundamental shift away from national building cultures and towards the globalization of architectural practice. Beneath the neo-Wilhelmine facade of the Grand Hotel and the Baroque fixtures of the Bellevue lay design, engineering, and construction processes that incorporated goods, people, and ideas from Japan, Sweden, Yugoslavia, Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, West Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Greece. In that sense, the two hotels can be read as the loci of a nascent European integration: coordinated, somewhat incongruously, by design professionals from Japan.

Contemporary publications about these hotels tended to elide the transnational dimensions of their production. One women's magazine, for example, published a full-color spread of the Grand Hotel, accompanied by a text that suggested that its superior design was the product of fruitful collaboration between workers hailing from all over the GDR – Berlin, Schwerin,

Cottbus, Karl-Marx-Stadt, Erfurt – who had come together to harness the collective strength of the entire republic in order to rebuild the national capital.[23] Grand Hotel certainly hosted an unusual confluence of architects, engineers and construction workers – but they weren't just from Cottbus and Karl-Marx-Stadt, but also from Tokyo and Thessaloniki. Indeed, the patriotic discourse that surrounded historicist renewal projects is rendered problematic when one considers the syncretic conditions surrounding the genesis of these hotels, which were designed by Japanese and East German architects, and which relied on construction workers from the Balkans to assemble West German technical equipment and prefabricated panels from Scandinavia. Moreover, the hotels catered primarily to foreign tourists and investors. After all, these were so-called *Devisenhotels*: where payment could only be made in hard currency, and which remained beyond the grasp of the average East German. In effect, the visual language of contextualism and the political discourse of national solidarity masked the incipient globalization of East Germany's construction industry. Both projects were built with the publicly averred commitment to the preservation of national culture and local identity – yet their ultimate effect was to accelerate the influx of global capital, migrant labor, and foreign visitors into East German cities.

Endnotes

1 This chapter is part of a larger research project on architectural exchanges between Japan and the GDR. The author would like to thank Kohei Kitayama, Setsuo Maruyama, Tadao Nodeki, Ken Tadashi Oshima, Hiroki Sugiyama, Takeshi Inoue and Osamu Ueno for their critical support during the fieldwork stage of this project. He also thanks Kirsten Angermann, Regina Bittner, Eve Blau, Bruno Flierl, Seng Kuan, Alexander Rehding, Tanja Scheffler, Thomas Topfstedt, Daniel Trambaiolo, Manfred Zache, and Jun Zhang for their helpful comments and suggestions; as well as Sayuri Kakiuchi and Anri Maruyama for their research assistance. The project was funded through the generous support of the Hang Seng Bank Golden Jubilee Education Fund for Research.

2 Hans Modrow et al., eds., *Die DDR und Japan* (East Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1983), 101–102.

3 On the GDR's debt problem see Charles Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1997).

4 Hans-Christian Herrmann, "Japan – ein kapitalistisches Vorbild für die DDR?," *Deutschland Archiv* 39:6 (2006), 1033, 1041.

5 Kazuo Sasagawa, "Vier große Bauprojekte in der ehemaligen DDR: Die schlüsselfertigen Bauprojekte durch [sic] Bauunternehmer Kajima, Tokio, Japan," Lecture at Brandenburg Technical University of Cottbus, June 1999. See also "Cocom: Ein 'Relikt des Kalten Krieges,'" *Der Spiegel* 34 (1988), 80–83.

fig. 4 Giovanni Antonio Antolini, *Foro Bonaparte*, perspective
Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

The Concept of History

One might still wonder why Rossi insisted on classical architectural language for any progressive renewal. Why did he ignore vernacular, regional and popular architecture, which had become a theme among Italian leftist architects at the time?[20] As a Communist, he may have been looking for a revolutionary architecture; it is worth noting that the essay "The Concept of Tradition in Neoclassical Milanese Architecture" appeared in *Società*, which was not an architecture journal but a leftist social and political periodical. In the essay, he ultimately concluded that neoclassical Milanese architecture was "*realista e popolare*."[21]

However, Rossi refused any servile ingratiation to the "people." His notion of *realismo* had nothing to do with the neorealism of postwar Italian filmmakers such as Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio de Sica and Luchino Visconti (although Rossi admired the latter's work). Their films celebrated everyday life and included nonprofessional actors speaking in dialect. Yet Rossi deliberately did not pursue an analogous vernacular or popular architecture. In his essay, he clearly explains that the "history of architecture as cultural history is the history of the upper and literate classes." According to him, the "search for spontaneous or autonomous characteristics in vernacular solutions makes no sense at all."[22]

With this historiographical model of a self-critical rebirth of classical architecture of the upper classes, Rossi was referring less to the popular, somewhat lavish architecture of socialist realism that he had encountered

fig. 5 Giacomo Pinchetti, map of Milan, 1801, including Giovanni Antonio Antolini's design for the unrealized *Foro Bonaparte*.

in Moscow than to Italian neo-Marxist architects of the time. He quoted Antonio Gramsci and, implicitly, Gramsci's materialistic theory of "cultural hegemony," according to which new ideas are born as "renewed expression of the historical development of reality,"[23] – that is, of the existing cultural products. Among these can undoubtedly be counted the classical architectural language that stands for order, logic and outstanding quality of execution. In particular, Rossi referred to Cesare Luporini, a contemporary Italian philosopher who – like Louis Althusser – was one of those intellectuals who tried to link Marxism with structuralism, and was also one of the editors of *Società*. Just two years before Rossi's essay appeared, Luporini had published an essay, "Il concetto della storia e l'illuminismo ["The Concept of History

the perils of an imminent foreign invasion as a serious threat to the integrity of national culture.

What exactly did this indigenous idiom consist of? How did it apply to this specific section of the City of London?

"The Familiar and Cherished Local Scene"

When asked to give his evidence before the inspector at the Guildhall, the architect Roy Worskett, principal architectural witness for the City of London, would speculate at length on this crucial point. For Worskett, the Mansion House Square project suffered from all the defects of the times in which it had been conceived, when "the same architectural expression [had been] repeated worldwide."[31] In the view of the former City Architect of Bath, the Mansion House Square project was to be a test case "of local and national importance," proving "the effectiveness and intentions of conservation legislation."[32] Its subject matter was "not ultimately, nor simply about architecture but […] about the character and significance of the City as a place in which to live and work."[33] In this light, it could only be seen as the largely outdated product of a bygone age, which urgently needed to be reassessed against the backdrop of a radically changed cultural scenario. This one had been significantly marked by the emergence of a new public awareness towards matters of conservation.[34] By quoting Circular 23/77, that "public opinion is now overwhelmingly in favor of conserving and enhancing the familiar and cherished local scene,"[35] Worskett made it clear enough what that changed cultural scenario was about. The City's townscape, a unique urban and architectural quality made up of subtle hierarchies, visual variety and informal spaces, constituted, in Worskett's terms, the quintessence of the City's character.

But was this character a culturally or even nationally determined feature, as David Watkin had seemed to suggest when he claimed that "buildings with monumental porticos like the Mansion House, the Ashmolean [Museum], the British Museum […] if built in the Continent would all have been fronted with monumental *piazzas* approached along axial avenues," further arguing that "rightly or wrongly the English tradition had been different"?[36] Or rather, was this insistence on an alleged genetic code of architecture and urbanism no more than the rhetoric of a polemic that had gone well beyond academic and professional circles, reaching the public at large in widely read magazines and newspapers as well as on TV screens?

"Townscape," a term so frequently used during the Mansion House Square scheme debate, had entered the *New Oxford Dictionary* in 1880. Its possible pseudonym, the expression "urban landscape," was introduced by *The Architectural Review* in an article on "the art of making urban landscape"

fig. 10 "Mansion House Square – Trial of the Century." The 1984 public inquiry seen by *Architects' Journal*'s architectural cartoonist Louis Hellman, showing on the left: the City's defense represented by Marcus Binney (SAVE), a caricatural personification of the "City Character" pictured as a stereotyped London tycoon smoking a cigar, the Lord Mayor of London and the head of the Greater London Council, Ken Livingstone; on the plaintiffs' side, Palumbo, the architectural historian John Summerson, and Richard Rogers; in the middle: the Secretary of the Environment Patrick Jenkin, and Mies's coffin pictured in the shape of a steel and glass tower and displaying the headings "Less Is Mort" (a parody of Mies's renowned aphorism "Less is More") and "Rest in Peace Modern Movement." Source: "Hellman and Diary," *The Architects' Journal*, May 29, 1985, 27. Gift of Louis Hellman ©.

published in January 1944.[37] The term had also been widely employed by members of the *Review's* editorial board, J.M. Richards, Hubert de Cronin Hastings, Nikolaus Pevsner and Gordon Cullen, and adopted in the 1950s in plans promoted by the Civic Trust. During the 1940s, "townscape," a planning practice founded on the application of the eighteenth-century landscape principles of visual surprise, accident and variety, had been the focus of the *Review's* agenda.[38] As has been argued, "townscape was set in direct contrast to continental European ideas of planning and architecture […] it was politically compatible with the English spirit and an English aesthetic based around an appreciation of 'age and quaintness.'"[39] Through the re-elaboration of a viable national tradition, at a crucial time for Britain's postwar reconstruction, a group of architects, planners, historians and critics had attempted to define a theory of vision and design deeply rooted in the English architec-