

Obscure Object of Modernism

This dissertation is submitted for the degree of “Doctor”, abbreviated to “Ph.D.”

by

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All work in this dissertation except those portions covered by footnotes is the original work of the author.

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Abstract

In the last few decades we can find a whole spectrum of different, sometimes even contradictory understandings and interpretations of what is modernism and modernist architecture. It is still not clear whether it was just a brief turmoil that took place in the period between the World Wars and is long gone, was it interrupted by postmodernism in the seventies, or is it still one active process. This makes the cognizance of modernism inconsistent and ambiguous, and many contemporary architects and thinkers find this as an open and acute question. In order to clarify and determine the true agendas of architectural modernism it is necessary to rethink and reexamine its very foundations.

This dissertation is a new investigation and interpretation of what is modernism in architecture and how it can be identified. Charged with the experience of the twentieth century, it reveals and explores the obscure nature of the post-humanist subject/object relationship in arts in general, as well tries to find its equivalence in the contemporary architecture.

It will be argued that at the beginning of the twenty-first century the architecture represents, more than ever before, the dominant medium and vehicle for both theorizing and embodiment of modernism.

Abstrakt

V posledních desetiletích jsme svědky řady různých, občas dokonce i protichůdných, porozumění a interpretací modernismu a moderní architektury. Nejsme si ani zcela jisti, zda to bylo jen krátké bouřlivé období mezi válkami, které je už dávno za námi, nebo zda bylo přerušeno až post-modernismem v sedmdesátých letech, anebo je to stále probíhající proces. Takovýto stav má za následek nekonzistentní a nejednoznačné chápání modernismu a mnozí současní architekti a myslitelé považují toto za otevřenou a palčivou otázku. Za účelem vyjasnění a definování agendy architektonického modernismu je nutné přezkoumat a přehodnotit jeho samotnou podstatu.

Tato disertační práce se věnuje zkoumání a interpretaci toho, co je modernismus v architektuře a jakým způsobem může být identifikován. Na základě zkušeností z dvacátého století tato práce odhaluje a zkoumá obskurnost post-humanistického vztahu mezi subjektem a objektem v umění a pokouší se najít jeho ekvivalent v současné architektuře.

V tezi bude argumentováno, že na začátku dvacátého prvního století architektura představuje, více než kdykoliv předtím, dominantní médium a prostředek teoretizování i ztělesnění modernismu.

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“Unhappily those marvelous places, railway stations, from which one sets out for a remote destination, are tragic places also, for if in them the miracle is accomplished whereby scenes which hitherto have had no existence save in our minds are about to become the scenes among which we shall be living, for that very reason we must, as we emerge from the waiting room, abandon any thought of presently finding ourselves once more in the familiar room which but a moment ago still housed us. We must lay aside all hope of going home to sleep in our own bed, once we have decided to penetrate into the pestiferous cavern to which we gain access to the mystery, into one of those vast glass-roofed sheds, like that of Saint-Lazare into which I went to find the train for Balbec, and which extended over the eviscerated city one of those bleak and boundless skies, heavy with an accumulation of dramatic menace, like certain skies painted with an almost Parisian modernity by Mantegna or Veronese, beneath which only some terrible and solemn act could be in progress, such as a departure by train or the erection of the Cross.”¹ – Marcel Proust

¹ Marcel Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, (London: Vintage Books, 2005), pp. 256-257

Introduction: Apologia for Unhappy Conscience of Architecture

The following dissertation intends to explore, rethink, and reinterpret some of the fundamental principles and elements of modernism, and tries to perceive them as essential qualities of the contemporary architecture. In this sense, the thesis renders modernism as one continuing and still active paradigm which constitutes and manifests itself throughout the past hundred years, although not always clearly. It will be argued that for architecture this entire period is one permanent struggle to define and establish its modernist agenda and to clarify its character in this context. It will also be argued that at the beginning of the twenty-first century architecture represents, more than ever before, the dominant medium and vehicle for both theorizing and embodiment of modernism.

First, let us briefly determine what we understand by the word ‘modernism’, and why there is any need for its reexamination. Modernism, in historically defined sense, marks its beginnings at the end of nineteenth century, culminates in the second and third decade of the twentieth century, and ends with the Second World War. It encompasses a set of cultural tendencies and an array of associated art movements that, in a very radical way, reacts to the turbulent state of society at the time. However, this is only a narrowed and simplified meaning of the word. In the last few decades we can find the whole spectrum of different, sometimes even contradictory understandings and interpretations of this

term. Here, I would rather define modernism as an aesthetic expression of one severe and radical break with several centuries ruling humanism – “the break”, as Frederic Jameson says, “[which] becomes the period in its own right.”¹

The humanism is essentially determined by the Cartesian dualism, the subject/object split, where the subject becomes the intending manipulator of the object and conscious originator of meanings and actions. The subject is an authoritative agent, centralized and unique; while the object is a passive instrument observed and understood only by another, to whose command it is subjected. The crisis of humanism occurs when these roles begin to change and the subject/object relation becomes not so clear and consistent.

Modernism can be defined as a new paradigm, one new body of knowledge or what Michel Foucault would specify as a new *episteme*,² which replaces humanism by the critique of anthropocentric attitude and by the fundamental displacement of subject (man) out of the center of his physical world. This changed subject/object relationship causes one major and dramatic crisis of man; the crisis of determining his purpose and position in the world of objects that surrounds him, and therefore the crisis of his identity. As Ortega y Gasset says, “While the tiger cannot cease being a tiger, cannot be detigered, man lives in the perpetual risk of being dehumanized.”³ Modernism is a state where the subject is no longer the master of the game and where man has to struggle to conceive the reality which would recognize and reflect this condition.

In this sense, the beginning of such kind of struggle, such transformation of consciousness, might be recognized around 1850, with Baudelaire and Poe – those “heralds of modernism”⁴, as Theodor Adorno would describe them – and reaches its climactic stage during the 1920s. However, it does not end shortly after that, as it is

¹ Frederic Jameson, *The Modernist Papers*, (London: Verso, 2007), p. 26

² See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*

³ Jose Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture and Literature*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p.190

⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, (London: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd, 2004), p. 176

generally considered, instead it continues its endeavors, in one form or another, up to the very present.

The main generator of this radical change is the feeling of discomfort, which finds its aesthetic manifestation in the loss of representational reality, loss of order, disintegration of the familiar, dislocation of the meaning, discontinuous narrative, fragmentation, alienation, delirium. And while the arts, like literature, painting, film, music, and others, find the right means to express all these phenomena, architecture is always haunted by the old demons of humanism, never being able to fully and openly consider and pursue the possibility of the world without man as its ultimate subject and master. Architecture always has to accommodate man and to obediently serve his comfort and demands.

This condition leaves the architecture of modernism as one inconsistent and ambiguous cognizance; one unfulfilled promise, or what Habermas calls “an unfinished project.”⁵ Many contemporary architects and thinkers find this as still open and acute question. In this regard, Rafael Moneo claims, “Modern architecture, had never been fully executed, it had never come to incarnate the true spirit of modernity...”⁶ We are in the state of uncertainty and vagueness unable to clearly define our position and priorities. As Rem Koolhaas says, “The irony is that we still don’t know if Postmodernism was the end of Modernism or just an interruption. Was it a brief hiatus, and now we are returning to something that has been going on for a long time, or is it something radically different? We are in condition we don’t understand yet.”⁷

In order to clarify and determine true agendas of architectural modernism it is necessary to rethink and reexamine its very foundations. In the words of Peter Eisenman, “...the theoretical paradigms that have defined the interiority of architecture until now may need to be reconsidered in order to accommodate many possible previously untheorized and

⁵ Jürgen Habermas, ‘Modernity: An Unfinished Project’, *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity: Critical Essays on The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Maurizio Passerin d’Entrèves (edited by); Seyla Benhabib (edited by), (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997), p. 38

⁶ Rafael Moneo, *Theoretical Anxiety and Design Strategies in the Work of Eight Contemporary Architects*, (Cambridge: The Mit Press, 2004), p. 147

⁷ Rem Koolhaas, quoted in Nicolai Ouroussoff, ‘The New, New City’, *The New York Times*, (June 8, 2008)

unauthorized futures, as well as many possible revisions of the past.”⁸ Anthony Vidler also speaks about the urgency for reevaluation of these essential postulates: “we would need to seriously reevaluate the sacred cows of modernity, whose work has become, too quickly, canonical, in order to detect the internal inconsistencies, the still-open questions lurking behind their monographical facades.”⁹

This dissertation is an investigation and interpretation of what is modernism in architecture and how it can be identified. Charged with the experience of the twentieth century, it reveals and explores the obscure nature of the post-humanist subject/object relationship in arts in general, and tries to find its equivalence in the contemporary architecture.

In the light of the new understanding of what are the essential priorities and qualities of modernism, we could, in a different way, perceive and evaluate the entire ontogenesis of architecture in the last century, with the particular regard to those projects commonly labeled as failures. Therefore, this thesis also might be thought of as a certain amnesty for ‘mistakes’ of modernism; an apologia for one century of ‘impersonal’, ‘meaningless’, ‘bore’, and above all ‘inhuman’ architecture – an apologia for its unhappy conscience.

The dissertation is divided into three parts, with the conclusion to follow. The first part, ‘**Dialectic of Discomfort**’, introduces and delineates modernism as one entirely new paradigm. The chapter begins with Nietzsche and his explicit break with metaphysics of humanism, here noted as one symbolic turning-point, and continues with Heidegger and Vattimo who emphasize the meaning and proportions of this break. After this small philosophical introduction, the thesis intends to explain how the end of humanism reflects on architecture. Here, it is necessary to determine two basic things. First, it is important to find a common fund, one mutual denominator, inherent to all art forms of the time. The thesis explores the new position of subject in some of the most representative works of the well acclaimed artists –such as Baudelaire, Joyce, Sartre, Cézanne, Picasso, Malevich,

⁸ Eisenman, Peter, *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings 1963 – 1988*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. xi

⁹ Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism*, (Cambridge: The Mit Press, 2008), p. 199

Rothko, Man Ray, Vertov, and others – and by that it establishes the general notion of the main qualities and agendas of modernist art. Secondly, it is relevant to define in what measure these qualities and agendas are present in architecture, and to clearly and unambiguously distinguish them from the old heritage of humanism. The persistent intention to understand and present modernism as just another *style* in one continuous process of humanism, will be shown in one brief journey through the theoretical interpretations of modern architecture, from the first generation of historians (Pevsner, Giedion, Hitchcock) to some contemporary thinkers. As an opposition to this kind of understanding of modernism, it will be presented Le Corbusier's Notre Dame du Haut – the project that, by using the same instruments of modernism as all other modern arts, puts architecture out of the humanist discourse and makes perfect example of the embodiment of the new metaphysics.

The second part, '**Utopia vs. Delirium**', examines the manifestations of modernism in the large scale urban projects. It juxtaposes two radically different models with entirely opposed approaches to the very same problems of the time. The first model is an idealistic and utopian approach of the European avant-garde, analyzed here through some of the most radical projects by Le Corbusier and Hilberseimer. The second model is utterly pragmatic, but at the same time, chaotic and delirious development of Manhattan. Neither of them is treated as modernism *per se*, but rather it is looked for the qualities and instruments that would reveal the subject/object relationship which they create, and in that way define their true agendas. It will be argued that these two models generate the mechanisms for the development of the modern metropolis, which reaches its culmination in recent accelerated growth of Chinese cities.

The third part, '**Reinventing Modernism**', deals with the condition in architecture at the beginning of twenty-first century and reveals how the work of the most important and influential architects of today is part of, and even contributes to, one coherent narrative of modernism. As an example of such work, theoretical strategies and design processes in some of the most interesting projects of three architects, Peter Eisenman, Rem Koolhaas, and Sou Fujimoto, will be presented and reinterpreted, in regard with analyses made in previous two parts. All three of them explore and render the hidden and obscure agendas of the contemporary society in one innovative and daring way. Their work will be

analyzed in terms of how they use the instruments of modernism and in which way they reinvent and extend the meaning and potential of these instruments. We can find that their projects reveal some essential and constituent elements of the new paradigm and in that way position the contemporary architecture on one common platform with other modern arts, making the unique and meaningful cognizance of modernism.

To make the aims and intentions of this dissertation more clear and to illustrate it in a more explicit and picturesque way, let me use the allegory from one beautiful film by Louis Buñuel, *The Exterminating Angel (El ángel exterminador)*, from 1962. A group of upper-class people attending the dinner party in the bourgeois saloon at one lavish mansion. They are all polite, generous and with perfect manners. The atmosphere is solemn and everything seems comfortable and serene. But as the evening goes on, they slowly begin to realize that something is not quite right. They become aware that they cannot leave this saloon. No matter what they do or how much they try, they cannot cross the doorstep of the room. The absurdity is that in the reality there is nothing that stops them to exit. The doors are wide open, and everything is perfectly the same as when they entered the room a few hours earlier. There is no physical barrier, no logical reason that holds them inside. They are all captivated by some unknown invisible force, which is beyond their power or comprehension. At the same time, no one outside this mansion is able to get in. Everyone stops at the entrance of the courtyard. It is as if there are two parallel worlds which do not belong to the same reality. In order to exit one world and enter the other, one has to surmount a gap; that mysterious in-between space, from the doorway of the saloon to the street-gate. This space is actually the gap between two metaphysics – the old metaphysics of humanism that ceased to exist and the metaphysics of new age. To pass from one paradigm to the other is the ultimate and harshest challenge, even if there are no visible obstacles and constraints which prevent such venture.

In the same way as this group of people from Buñuel's film, the architecture was imprisoned by the old paradigm of humanism, to a greater or lesser extent, almost for the whole twentieth century. The intention of this dissertation is first to recognize and accept the existence of this mysterious uncanny space, depict and render its borders, make it visible, and then to enter into it and try to explore it and understand it. It is necessary for

man to confront with the obscure objects – these “monstrously unfamiliar” objects¹⁰, to use Baudrillard’s term – which are there waiting to be encountered. The thesis also intends to reveal what man has to do and in what way he has to change himself to be able to step into this space and safely exit on the other end.

¹⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 2005), p. 101

1. Dialectic of Discomfort

„Twice two makes four is a cocky young man who stands with hands on hips, barring your path and spitting. I admit that twice two makes four is an excellent thing, but if we are to give everything its due, twice two makes five is sometimes a very charming thing too.“¹ – Fyodor Dostoyevsky

¹ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes from the Underground*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2009), p. 25

1.1. God is dead, but man isn't doing so well himself

— Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place and cried incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God!"— As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? emigrated?— Thus they yelled and laughed.

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" he cried. "I will tell you. We have killed him—you and I! All of us are his murderers! But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? And backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we not hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition?—Gods, too, decompose! God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him!

“How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives,—who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean

ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us—for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto!"

Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners: and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern to the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. "I have come too early," he said then; "my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering—it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds, though done, still require time to be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars—and yet they have done it themselves."

It has been related further that on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there struck up his requiem aeternam deo. Led out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but: "What after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?"¹

— Friedrich Nietzsche

The twentieth century could not be better announced! Like a sad clown in the darkness of a circus tent, illuminated by a single ray of light, while standing before audience, welcoming them and promising something yet unseen and unimaginable, the author of the above quoted paragraph prophetically introduces us into the play that we are still living. The three words in the absurd inclination remain in our ears as a mantra and echo again and again, ruthlessly separating one world that ceases to exist and another that is about to come. Word 'God is dead' are pronounced for the first time by a Nietzsche's Madman in the third book of *The Gay Science (Die fröhliche Wissenschaft - "la gaya scienza")*, in 1882. For Nietzsche this becomes the essence of a doctrine that he impeccably develops until the end of his life. This doctrine reaches its culmination in the book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None (Also sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen)*, published in 1885, and unfinished main work *The Will to Power (Der Wille zur Macht)*. Although absurd and a bit theatrical, these words have decisive influence on the

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), pp. 181-182

future course of Western philosophy. They are presented here as an announcement of the creation of one radically different world, and man's search for his own place in it.

At the beginning let us examine the true meaning of these words. First of all, they are not denying God, neither saying that there is no God at all. Also, they never meant that Nietzsche believed in an actual God who first existed (even lived!) and then suddenly was killed in a literal sense ("we have killed him"²), or died because of his pity for man.³ Equally foolish would be to claim that God is alive! They are not referring to Christianity or Christian God in the strict sense of the word, although they are in direct relation with it. Then, what is the meaning of these words and what is Nietzsche trying to tell us?

According to Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche uses the terms 'God' or 'Christian God' to designate the suprasensory world in general. It is Plato's world of Ideas – a true base of the whole western thinking. By speaking of the death of God, Nietzsche is actually proclaiming the death of metaphysics. He speaks about the end of philosophy as we know it, and about the necessity of creating a new one. Here by the term metaphysics I do not mean a doctrine, let alone only one particular discipline of philosophy, but rather the whole world of suprasensory that involves Ideas, God, the moral law, the authority of reason, progress, culture, and which essentially determines and directs our sensual world. Nietzsche speaks about radical schism between sensual and suprasensual. The world that we live in is utterly changing, a man slowly loses his previous role in it. The two-millennia-old metaphysic of the old world becomes useless. Dead.

In the essay *Nietzsches Wort 'Got Ist Tot'*, published in *Holzwege* in 1950, Heidegger writes: „In the word 'God is dead' the name 'God', thought essentially, stands for the suprasensory world of those ideals which contain the goal that exists beyond earthly life for that life and that, accordingly, determines life from above, and also in a certain way,

² Ibid., p 181

³ "God is dead: of his pity for man hath God died." , from Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Edition Limited, 1997), p. 87

from without.⁴ In the same essay Heidegger further writes: „The pronouncement ‘God is dead’ means: The suprasensory world is without effective power. It bestows no life. Metaphysics, i.e., for Nietzsche Western philosophy understood as Platonism, is at an end. Nietzsche understands his own philosophy as the countermovement to metaphysics and that means for him a movement in opposition to Platonism.“⁵

Nietzsche uncompromisingly presents things as they are. According to his believe it is necessary to create a completely new order of values that will be able to find a meaning in the changes that are coming and are inevitable. He demands activity and first of all thinking! Any metaphysical thinking has to be ontology – otherwise it is worthless. Effort is needed to reach self-consciousness in which man would have his essence. The very metaphysics of the old world tranquilizes man in coziness of his bare existence and stagnation. For Nietzsche that metaphysics is the harshest enemy of thinking, and there is no longer ontology in it. He asks man to bury all previously adopted perceptions of himself, and to abandon the mind that has been celebrated for centuries. His metaphysics is the metaphysic of new values; spiritual columns ready to bear the weight of a new age.

Heidegger identifies this crisis of metaphysics with the crisis of humanism. If we understand humanism as a perspective that places a man in the center of the world and considers him the master of being, how is it possible that the death of God causes the crisis of man? For Heidegger, humanism is a synonym for metaphysics. Humanism exists only as an outgrowth of metaphysics. The position established centuries ago, of man as the central subject, is greatly jeopardized. Heidegger wisely notices that that kind of metaphysic, with man in its center, cannot survive.

Gianni Vattimo, while analyzing Heidegger’s understanding of metaphysics, in his book *The End of Modernity* (first published in 1985) notices „[...] metaphysics may survive as such only insofar as its ‘humanistic’ nature (meaning its reduction of everything to the human subject itself) remains hidden from view. When the reductive nature of

⁴ Martin Heidegger, ‘The Word of Nietzsche: “God Is Dead”’, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1977), p. 64

⁵ Ibid., p. 61

metaphysics instead makes itself explicit, as – according to Heidegger – happens in the work of Nietzsche (in the notion of Being as the will to power), metaphysics has arrived at the moment of its decline, and with it – as can be seen every day – humanism has also arrived at the moment of its decline. For this reason the death of God, which is at once the culmination and conclusion of metaphysics, is also the crisis of humanism. To put it another way, humanity maintains its position as the ‘centre’ of reality, as the current notion of humanism suggests, only through reference to a Grund that verifies this role. St Augustine argues that the God knows the human subject more intimately than that subject knows itself, but this argument has never been a real threat to humanism; on the contrary, as can be historically demonstrated, it has served rather as a means of support for the latter”⁶

From this we clearly see that Nietzsche, as the first radically non-humanistic thinker of our epoch, speaks of the death of God in order to destroy man’s illusion about his own subjectivity. Exclusivity of central position of human in this world is no longer tenable. No matter how painful it may be, it is necessary to confront it as soon as possible. The humanism, as we know it until that point, is not capable to answer to the demands of the new age.

It is important to notice that for Heidegger the crisis of humanism is (not by accident) very closely related to modern technology. For him, technology represents the cause of the global process of dehumanization, which implies the decay of humanist ideals of culture in favor of forming a man on the basis of productive capability. With increase of technological objectivity, human’s subjectivity dissolves.

Gianni Vattimo recognizes two different understandings of this crisis. According to the first, it is necessary to prepare the terrain so that subject could take again the central position. This concept essentially does not bring to question the traditional humanism. It only endeavors to preserve it in new conditions of modernism. Vattimo calls it a nostalgically-restoring tendency. Second, much more radical theory, does not perceive

⁶ Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), p. 32-33

technology as a threat but rather as a challenge. Technology paves its road over the wracks of forms that represent the dawn of humanism. Referring to that, Vattimo further writes: “The new conditions of life created, above all, by the structure of modern city are depicted as an uprooting of man from his traditional setting, or, we might say, from his basis in the organic community of village, the family, and so on. In this process of uprooting, even the well-defined and reassuring horizons of form itself crumble; so that, in a certain sense, the stylistic revolt appears as but one aspect of a larger process implicating an entire civilization.”⁷ Vattimo perceives Heidegger as the most radical proponent of this opinion. For him, technology does not cause the crises of humanism because the triumph of rationalization subverts humanistic values. It causes the crisis of humanism because technology, in representing the embodiment of one new metaphysics, calls humanism to an act of overcoming (*Verwindung*).

With their strong critique of subject, Nietzsche and then Heidegger start a new search for the meaning of man in contemporary society; a search for his new role, in which the goal is not to continue a technological dehumanization, nor to unconditionally surrender to the seductive glitter of its mechanisms, thereby allowing imposition of the very world which those mechanisms pronounce as reality. A man has to change his perception of himself so that he would not become a victim of modern processes, which he alone has started.

Unfortunately, there is no quick and easy way out. As Slavoj Žižek says, referring to Heidegger’s ‘overcoming’ of metaphysics, “the only real way to break the metaphysical closure is to ‘pass through it’ in its most dangerous form, to endure the pain of metaphysical nihilism at its most extreme, which means that one should reject as futile all false sedatives.”⁸ God is dead and man has yet to face the bitter struggle for its own survival, and deal with the uncanniness and discomfort of this hostile new reality.

⁷ Ibid., p.36

⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, (London: Verso, 2008), p. 6

1.2. Make It New

**“Man wends his way through forests of symbols
Which look at him with their familiar eyes.”**

– Charles Baudelaire, *Correspondences*

The man is not prone to changes. Especially with the matters that have existed for centuries and which represent an integral part of his identity, his understanding of himself, which defines his place in the world and his relationship with the things that surround him. Any kind of novelty or distortion of the usual order causes anxiety and restlessness in the least. The man strives to get in to the most comfortable position, and then to keep it as long as possible. In this pursuance, he develops through time the intense anthropocentric comprehension of reality. He becomes the measure of all things and all things exist only for him. In one such world, it is impossible to imagine the meaning beyond of what belongs to man; the extent of his view defines the borders of the world. However, at one point changes happen and man has to face the music. It becomes more and more obvious that the old order of things no longer exists and that is necessary to stand in front of the mirror and clearly see the face of the person in it. The price for such venture is by no means insignificant: it means the end of all comfort.

Nietzsche's harsh critique of subject, uncompromisingly and surgically precisely raised the most sensitive questions of the new age, and made a kind of explosion that left man in distortion impossible to ignore further on. In the beginning of the twentieth century, this radical turnover was manifested in all fields of human doing. All of a sudden, a whole array of various tendencies and movements, with the insatiable need to end the existing conventions and practices, starts to develop. The search for the man's new role and his pre-evaluation becomes necessity and obsession. This eruption of creations makes the new episteme of the epoch, one completely new paradigm – the change which in essence is much more radical than all the preceding ones, even having in mind the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance.

At the beginning of his *La conquête de l'ubiquité*, Paul Valéry writes: "Our fine arts were developed, their types and uses were established, in times very different from the present, by men whose power of action upon things was insignificant in comparison with ours. But the amazing growth of our techniques, the adaptability and precision they have attained, the ideas and habits they are creating, make it a certainty that profound changes are impending in the ancient craft of the Beautiful. In all the arts there is a physical component which can no longer be considered or treated as it used to be, which cannot remain unaffected by our modern knowledge and power. For the last twenty years neither matter nor space nor time has been what it was from time immemorial. We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art." ¹

As in earlier epochs, the change of the spirit of the time is best felt by the artists. And it can be said that they are the first to take over the burden of facing the new age. Their sacrifice is not the minor one — it is the sacrifice which their predecessors never had to even consider. They have to alienate themselves from the society and speak the language which is new and incomprehensible. They renounce their centuries-long role of the entertainers, the role of ones bringing something beautiful to this world, embroidering it and making it more bearable and comfortable. In that way, they willingly give up comfort

¹ Paul Valéry, *Aesthetics*, 'The Conquest of Ubiquity' (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), p. 225

and commodity, brought by the popularity and favor of the wide audience seeking for entertainment. At the same time, they renounce their role of educators and along with this the comfort and all privileges of the reputation and acknowledgments of academic institutions and elites of the system. Instead all of this, they turn to self-salvation, or at least, purely and simply, to the cultivation of their own existence. They enter into the darkest and most intimate parts of their own consciousness in order to face all the fears and desires. They challenge the borders of the new world and examine the relationship with the objects with which they have to share this world.

The necessity of one's own exile and alienation, which is only ostensibly voluntary, can be seen already with Baudelaire in the middle of the nineteenth century. Even before his book *Fleurs du mal* was published, he had been perfectly aware that he wrote the book which from the very beginning had little prospect of becoming an immediate popular success. His manner of presentation cannot be called realism. It shows one purposely distorted imagination at work. Baudelaire speaks the language which is illogical, incomprehensible and contradictory. He introduces one entirely new hero, *flâneur*, which can hardly be perceived as subject. *Flâneur* is a man without the name and although surrounded by bunch of busy people on crowded pavements, he remains invisible and lonely. He represents the integral part of the city; he is an object, which along with streets, buildings, arcades, and passages, makes something what we call the urban life of metropolis. Baudelaire erases what is considered to be the distinct line between subject and object, and by that he moves the man out of the comfortable place of the master of being and introduces him to one unknown and mysterious world, where the old values, hierarchies, and principles do not exist anymore. In this world there are no safe shelters and commodities of the home. Encountered with this vast no man's space, *flâneur* begins his never-ending and meaningless wanderings, and at the same time he starts the construction of the ultimate obsession of the twentieth century – the phenomenon of the metropolis.

The weakening cause of man as a subject, Walter Benjamin sees it in the disappearance of man's aura, or to put it more precisely, in the dispersion of his aura on the world of material objects. "Experience of the aura rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and

man. The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in return. To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return.”² This phenomenon becomes the central point of Baudelaire’s poetics. His whole work is impregnate with a certain feeling of discomfort, one hidden fear, which like a shadow or a specter squirms through his poetry and which can no longer be escaped from.

This feeling is one of the first acknowledgments and testimonies on the weakening of the man’s soul and progressive strengthening of the matter. “The greater Baudelaire’s insight into this phenomenon, the more unmistakably did the disintegration of aura make itself felt in his lyrical poetry. This occurs in the form of symbol which we encounter in the *Fleurs du mal* almost invariably whenever the look of the human eye is invoked. (That Baudelaire did not follow some preconceived scheme goes without saying.) What is involved here is that the expectation roused by the look of the human eye is not fulfilled. Baudelaire describes eyes of which one is inclined to say that they have lost their ability to look.”³ Man gradually equalizes himself with the objects; objects are looking at man in the same way as man is looking at objects.

The reasoning subject, which at least from the Renaissance systematically and analytically explores and explains the natural world, is severely shaken by this sudden turn of the events. His field of perception can no longer offer the integrity; objects seem to distort and almost arbitrarily enter and leave the narrative. In that way, they constantly deny any kind of established meaning. The literature from the period of the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century is one valuable witness of this turmoil. Following the path of Baudelaire, many works depict a man full of doubts and dilemmas in the face of an unimaginable future; a man who becomes surrounded by the objects whose history he can hardly recognize and even have less control over them.

The explicit demonstration of this state of spirit is offered by Sartre in his first novel *Nausea* (*La Nausée*). The main protagonist – in this case named Antoine Roquentin, but who can be any modern man, because this one is by no means different than any other – becomes completely obsessed, no matter how absurd it may sound, with the inconsistency

² Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken books, 2007), p. 188

³ *Ibid.*, p. 189

of inanimate objects. He is no longer capable of perceiving the objects around himself in the usual way through their function, but rather as autonomous units with their own will and with the attributes of subject. These objects exist independently from the role assigned to them by man and from the properties by which they are defined. "Objects should not touch because they are not alive. You use them, put them back in place, you live among them: they are useful, nothing more. But they touch me, it is unbearable. I am afraid of being in contact with them as though they were living beasts."⁴ Antoine becomes completely possessed by these feelings and experiences them as 'nausea'. "Objects are not made to be touched. It is better to slip between them, avoiding them as much as possible. Sometimes you take one of them in your hand and you have to drop it quickly. [...] Then after that there were other Nauseas; from time to time objects start existing in your hand."⁵ To him, nausea is a state caused by the turn of events which radically change the previous hierarchy of relationships, and thus dispute and question his (man's) own existence. He can no longer see himself as the main hero even in his own life. The objects around him exist in the same way he does; and their right to exist is the same as his. "All these objects . . . how can I explain? They inconvenienced me; I would have liked them to exist less strongly, more dryly, in a more abstract way, with more reserve."⁶ At the same time as the objects come to life, the people around him start to lose the qualities of subject. They lose their faces and personalities, and become mere matter in space, without their own will, intention, or consciousness. "A little while ago, just as I was coming into my room, I stopped short because I felt in my hand a cold object which held my attention through a sort of personality. I opened my hand, looked: I was simply holding the door-knob. This morning in the library, when the Self-Taught Man came to say good morning to me, it took me ten seconds to recognize him. I saw an unknown face, barely a face. Then there was his hand like a fat white worm in my own hand. I dropped it almost immediately and the arm fell back flabbily."⁷ The exchange of roles between subject and object, announced earlier by Baudelaire, is more than obvious. This becomes the source of deep uneasiness and anxiety. The modern man can no longer be happy; he is

⁴ Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1964), p. 10

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 122

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 127

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4

doomed to the search for that one place that is really his, which belongs to him, and in which he will once again feel the comfort of the humanism, the warmth of home.

One of the greatest modern homeless is certainly James Joyce. The outcast from his own country at his own will, alienated and alone, Joyce represents the true paradigm of the new man. He puts one challenging and almost impossible task before himself – to find one new Ireland, one new Dublin, truly identical to the real one but at the same time limited only to metaphysical existence. In his quest, he turns to a myth that can be understood as a way of controlling, of ordering, and of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary life. But, Joyce does not stop here. The myth has much deeper meaning for him. It is a space preceding the very construction of the psyche or the subject itself, the ego, personality and the like – the space of pre-individualistic. It is a zero degree of human existence *per se*, a starting point to a new convergence of values, the convergence necessary to put an end to the violent disintegration of values. This is the primary mission of modernism – the lyric embodiment of the new myth that will no longer be based on old heroes and models, which lost their function and relevance in the contemporary society; the myth which will give a new meaning and a new role to man.

Joyce's *Ulysses* is the book that better than any other depicts the essence of the new paradigm brought by modernism. This novel, which can be called 'the new testament of metaphysics', makes clear parallel with its predecessor, 'the old testament', Homer's *Odyssey*. By following Homer chapter by chapter, *Ulysses* deconstructs the generally accepted 'world picture' (or *Weltbild* in Heidegger's meaning of the word), liberates it from mystification and the burden that man is no longer able to carry, and reduces it to its essence which becomes the base for the creation of the new spirit. Joyce's Dublin becomes the whole world. This world is no longer bathed in the light of the warm Mediterranean sun, and painted with the colors of azure seas. There is no endlessly far and unreachable horizon, which hides never seen landscapes and never experienced adventures. Our present, our spirit of the time, are the obscure streets of cold and rainy Dublin; one world already well known and small, too small, already seen and ordinary, without any magic and supernatural beings, rational and objective. Man is no longer Odysseus that sails through wondrous archipelagos, but only Ulysses, average, passive,

and lonely, outcast in his own home, full of fears and unfulfilled desires, and which wanders through alleys and passages of the urban anti-natural landscapes. These landscapes are pure result of human labor. Everything, including seemingly natural grass, trees, our own bodies, is finally produced by human beings. The main theme of both Homer's and Joyce's stories is the search for the lost home. But unlike Homer's, Joyce's search is no longer a sublime and extraordinary battle of epic proportions which inaugurates the ideals and challenges the limits, but the universal quotidian of the epoch, the quotidian taken from an average prewar life.

What makes *Ulysses* so important and one of the cornerstones of modernism lies in what happens beyond the narrative itself. Joyce's form of the novel is absolutely unique and yet unseen. *Ulysses* is a grandiloquent naturalistic recording. The entire plot takes place in the course of eighteen hours of one day (June 16th 1905) and makes text of approximately 800 pages, which can be read in eighteen hours of uninterrupted reading. Therefore, it can be said that the plot itself takes place in the real time. It is the denaturalization of naturalism; a complete deconstruction and disruption of subject in smallest pieces, which are then exposed in their raw and primordial appearance without any prejudice or higher moral instance. Each of eighteen chapters or episodes is written in style different from the previous and in different literary technic (narrative, catechism, monologue, enthymemic, peristaltic, dialectic, hallucination, etc)⁸. Juxtaposing various technics enables for Joyce to perceive from various perspectives in order to reach one objective position. He deprives life of its central and unique viewpoint and replaces it with an infinite number of viewpoints. But Joyce does not only use this method as a tool in the function of the story. What is more important, he uses it to criticize the essence of *style* as such; he disputes the meaning of *style* and exceeds its limits. He overcomes *style* as the unique way of expression of individual and presentation of his perception of the world. There is no Joycean *style*. He is one of the first modern artists to recognize that *style* is less a mark of writer's personality than a reflection of approved linguistic practice of a given historic period. *Styles*, like persons, are interchangeable. This brings in question the role of the author himself. His personal touch is less and less visible in the piece he creates. *Ulysses* is the book that very wittily provokes us to give serious

⁸ Stuard Gilbert's diagram; James Joyce, *Ulysses*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2000) p. xxiii

consideration to the possibility that *anybody* could have written it. Joyce himself often indicates such possibility, claiming that if our words are scarcely our own, then neither are our plots, which can be borrowed from Homer, who may never have existed. In one of his letters he writes, “I am quite content to go down to posterity as a scissors and paste man for that seems to me a harsh but not unjust description.”⁹ This ‘scissors and paste man’ metaphor has more than prophetic meaning in the twentieth century.¹⁰

Herman Broch believes that with Joyce’s overcoming of *styles* the new possibilities are open and different relations are established, which might lead to one new quality. “Viewed technically, Joyce’s stylistic agglomeration is an experiment whereby the subject is lighted up first by one and then by another style, in order to exhaust its possibilities completely and to obtain from it the highest measure of reality, or rather of super-naturalistic reality. Of course this cannot be compared with the musical scherzo which develops a theme in diverse stylistic manners, for here – and the concept of style generally assumes its proper significance only in such surroundings – the subject has grown out of the style, and only through effect and counter-effect of this kind is reality created which is the inner reality of the world. For everything significant comes into being as a result of reflection and symbols, and the original, genuine things are to be found quite as frequently at the end as at the beginning of the row of mirrors. Through recognition of these point – in these connection recognition is a technical one – may be explained the fact that, in a case of Joyce, all problems of style are eventually brought under the domination of language.”¹¹

Here, Broch very clearly notices the supremacy of language over *style*. This diversion of formal relationship may be the key for understanding the essence of Joyce’s novel. *Ulysses* offers Dublin as the allegory of the world; Dublin’s history is the metaphysics of mankind, and its final product and the result is the autonomous whole represented by Bloom. He is no longer the subject “I”, the initiator and agent of endless processes and

⁹ James Joyce, in a letter to George Antheil, Januray 3 1931, *Letters I*, p. 297

¹⁰ It is certainly no coincidence that Walter Benjamin’s greatest ambition was to produce a work consisting entirely of quotations.

¹¹ Hermann Broch, *Geits and Zeitgeist: The Spirit in an Unspiritual Age*, (New York: Counterpoint, 2002), pp. 74-75

changes, but quite definite object called Bloom – ultimately the general “I”, or simply the human. Hardly anything more... However, what Joyce does here is much more complex. He is not the writer who simply places the object under observation and does nothing but describes it. Joyce introduces a new protagonist on the scene, the ultimate narrator – the language. In the moment when subject weakens and is being exiled from the center of all actions, the language is one who takes his role and, as Broch puts it, “creates a unity of representational object and representational means, in the most far reaching sense of the word, a unity which sometimes gives the impression that the object has been overpowered by language, and language by the object, to the point of utter exhaustion, but which nevertheless remains a unity, avoiding all superfluous padding as well as all superfluous epithet.”¹²

The language becomes the absolute; it is raised to the level of the researcher and interpreter of the existence. Even the title of the novel announces a diversion: Odysseus, the hero that guides us through Homer’s epic, gets his own double, the new guide *Ulysses* – the language itself. The very first word is at the same time changed and the same: the manifesto which demands that all unrepeatable must happen again, and shows that all that once has existed equally exists today and has never existed at all. This is only the first indication of Joyce’s play of reification and dereification which impregnates the whole novel. In this play, Mr Leopold Bloom is not the conscious originator of meaning and actions, but rather a manipulated object without his own will, and like Homer’s Odysseus in the land of the Sirens, he sails tied to the mast of his ship unable to change the course. The integrity of the personality is denied to the protagonists of the novel and they are inexorably atomized and broken down into their most minimal unites. They become ‘Miss voice of Kennedy’, ‘Miss gaze of Kennedy’¹³, fragmented to the infinite number of miniature existences which appear and disappear in space. Subject is entirely cast out from the narrative. Joyce abolishes the character’s ‘point of view’ and thus makes the radical depersonalization which removes the author itself from the novel. In this way, he also breaks the connections with the reader. What remains is the materiality of the medium itself - the book. The entire novel is filled with voices and thoughts which do not

¹² Ibid., p. 81

¹³ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2000), p. 337

belong to any of the protagonists, but neither to the author. It is as if the book itself speaks, thinks, and notes the observations and appearances which do not have any importance for the story or for the reader. These notes are sometimes even senseless and they make confusion if we try to interpret them or give them any kind of meaning. It is the language without the speaker or receiver. The language is self-sufficient, it exists without subject – it *is* that subject. This is well noticed by Frederic Jameson who, in one of his analyses of *Ulysses*, writes: “the ground on which the depersonalized textualization of the narrative of Ulysses takes place [is] what one is tempted to call a kind of ‘autistic textualization’, the production of sentences in the void, moments in which the book begins to elaborate its own text, under its own momentum, with no further need of characters, point of view, author or perhaps even reader.”

Mr Bloom reaches Essex bridge. Yes, Mr Bloom crossed bridge of Yessex. To Martha I must write. Buy paper. Daly’s. Girl there civil. Bloom. Old Bloom. Blue Bloom is on the rye.¹⁴

Love loves to love love. Nurse loves the new chemist. Constable 14A loves Mary Kelly. Gerty MacDowell loves the boy that has the bicycle. M.B. loves a fair gentleman. Li Chi Han lovey up kissy Cha Pu Chow. Jumbo, the elephant, loves Alice, the elephant. Old Mr Verschoyle with the ear trumpet loves old Mrs Verschoyle with the turnedin eye. [...] You love a certain person. And this person loves that other person because everybody loves somebody but God loves everybody.¹⁵

“The point I want to make about passages like these, and they are everywhere in *Ulysses*, is that ‘point of view’ theory does not take on them, nor any conceivable notion of Implied Author, unless the IA is an imbecile or a schizophrenic. No one is speaking these words or thinking them: they are simply, one would want to say, printed sentences.”¹⁶

¹⁴ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2000), p. 336

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 433

¹⁶ Frederic Jameson, *The Modernist Papers*, (London: Verso, 2007), p. 148

In the same way as the characters of the novel are fragmented into pieces, the whole *Ulysses* is only one fragment, a single-day book, one insignificant usual day in the life of a few insignificant people in one provincial town. It is the fragment by no means important and with no reason to be remembered – but still one that exists. It exists independently of our will (or even in spite of it) and it is a part of the whole which goes beyond our perception and reason. We are not in the position to perceive the meaning; it is not recognizable, as if it is not even meant for us. The language that speaks up – the ‘printed text’ as Jameson calls it – abounds with an immense length and burden of references which we are simply not able to process. These segments are too vast, or rather they contain varieties of sentences, facts, tones, sounds, too numerous to be organized in the mind into one single unity. Even on the simplest question, as ‘Did he fall?’, that can be answered shortly by *yes* or *no*, Joyce replies with the torrent of information and facts which make the impression of the artificial exactness and completely disables any kind of familiarization or identification with the characters and events:

“Did he fall?

By his body’s known weight of eleven stone and four pounds in avoirdupois measure, as certified by the graduated machine for periodical selfweighing in the premises of Francis Froedman, pharmaceutical chemist of 19 Frederick street, north, on the last feast of the Ascension, to wit, the twelfth day of May of the bissextile year one thousand nine hundred and four of the christian era (jewish era five thousand six hundred and sixtyfour, mohammedan era one thousand three hundred and twentytwo), golden number 5, epact 13, solar cycle 9, dominical letters C B, Roman indication 2, Julian period 6617, MCMIV.”¹⁷

This kind of text that produces an objective representation based mutely on facts and independent of anything human alienates the reader and makes him feel needless and unwanted. The information is presented without a hierarchy of values and it is necessary to make a huge effort in order to distinguish what can be considered as important. But do we have any guarantee that there is something important at all? The fact that the text is written does not necessarily mean that it is intended to be read. In this sense, it disputes its predetermined function. And while the Sartre’s hero, who struggles with the

¹⁷ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2000), pp. 779-780

unbearable nausea caused by the inconsistency of inanimate objects, is always within the framework of narrative, for Joyce that framework does not exist. His work is not based on the representation of being but, in a way, it is the being itself. The object that is in front of us – the book, the language – has the last word, not the author. That object sometimes observes us, but sometimes it has better things to do and observes something else. At the same time, it refuses to be put in the position of being observed. In that way, it deprives us of the right to be the observer, thus, the subject. We are all, willingly or not, doomed to the coexistence with the objects that are beyond our perception of reality and that exist independently of our will. They can refer to us, but also to ignore us. Their existence is no longer necessarily related to ours. The brute facticity of the world suddenly becomes alive. What Joyce is presenting here is ‘a true presence’. The presence that does not always implies man. This is an act of a radical and painful decentering of subject, or consciousness in general, beyond the humanist horizon. *Ulysses* causes a deep uneasiness in the reader. It brings us into the position of discomfort. Precisely this is the ultimate outcome and the true essence of the work, for which Joyce, not without the bitterness, claims: “*If Ulysses is not fit to read, life is not fit to live.*”¹⁸ It is the paradigm of modernism *par excellence*.

It is of the great importance that this newly established dialectic, which entirely differs from the Cartesian model, is inaugurated through art. The poetry, and here I mean art in general, is the best mean for man to define his inner world and to position himself in the outer world in which he lives. Hermann Broch finds this a substantial issue and emphasizing the importance of Homer, as one safe ground on which we have to return and rely on: “If the current epoch has no longer a value center firmly anchored on a theologically based philosophy and ethic, and which could raise language to the level of reliable, binding communication, then language itself must become the mystic value center. [...] At the center of every culture is its theology. But at its beginning is its poetry; thus Homer stood at the cradle of Greek civilization, creator of its language, builder of its

¹⁸ Joyce to Kathleen Murray, on hearing of her mother’s estimate of the novel; interview with Kathleen Murray; quoted in Patricia Hutchins, *James Joyce’s World*, p.139; cited in Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 1959; 1965 Edn., p.551.

myths, poet and philosopher. And in its hand he held the seed of the future.”¹⁹ For Broch, the myth is the final knowledge of the human soul embodied in a lyric expression. The return to the myth – as the primal poetic form which contains all human knowledge about man and nature – enables the creation of the frames for one new metaphysical order which truly reveals the ultimate human existence.

Even more powerful and destructive earthquake than the one in literature occurred in painting. Here, the collapse of one episteme, of one cognizance of the world, and radical shift to the new is most brutally and vividly expressed. The painting is the oldest known mean of representation. If we want to find the first signs of the expression of the human spirit; the remembering of his experiences; and the first ordering of the metaphysical ideas into a kind of epistemology, we would have to go back much further than Homer, up to the Upper Paleolithic (around 35 000 BC), and enter into the Chauvet Cave to look at the magnificent drawings on the cave-walls. These drawings are the first known poetry. This is the beginning of the communication that is beyond the limits of time, which is both the witness and the active agent in the forming of the consciousness. Since that time, the image is talking to us, it is telling a story. The whole world of man is told in stories; in colors and shades, as a means for understanding and creating of the reality in which he lives. Through the time, the image becomes the absolute master of narrative. Even literature learns from the painting how to describe, how to narrate.

This craft of storytelling through visual representation, in which the featured stories are directed to the eye of the observer, reaches its highest peak in the Renaissance. In this period the painting becomes the body of knowledge, the all-knowing container of doctrines that mirrors the reality and produces the representation of something that we might call the truth. In order to illustrate this narrative character of painting – thorough which is manifested the position of man at the time – we can use as an example one interesting literary description, written by José Saramago, of the famous woodcut by Albrecht Dürer (fig.1.1). This woodcut depicts probably the most common theme not only in the Renaissance but in the whole history of painting – the scene of the crucifixion

¹⁹ Hermann Broch, *Geits and Zeitgeist: The Spirit in an Unspiritual Age*, (New York: Counterpoint, 2002), pp.. 57-58

of Jesus Christ. Saramago ingeniously perceives the narrative quality of this Dürer's work, and treats it exactly as a story which can easily be read if we only carefully observe the woodcut.

"The sun appears in one of the upper corners of the rectangle, on the left of anyone looking at the picture. Representing the sun is a man's head that sends out rays of brilliant light and sinuous flames, like a wavering compass in search of the right direction, and his head has a tearful face, contorted by spasms of pain that refuse to abate. The gaping mouth sends up a cry we shall never hear...beneath the sun we see a naked man tied to a tree trunk with a cloth around his loins to cover those parts we call private, and his feet are resting on a piece of wood set crosswise, to give him support to prevent his feet from slipping, they are held by two nails driven deep into the wood. Judging from the anguished expression on the man's face and from his eyes, which are raised to heaven, this must be the Good Thief. His ringlets are another reassuring sign, for it is well known that this is how angels and archangels wear their hair, and so it would appear that the repentant criminal is already ascending to the world of heavenly beings. Impossible to say whether the trunk is still a tree that has been arbitrarily turned into an instrument of torture while continuing to draw nourishment from the soil through the roots, insomuch as the lower part of the picture is covered by a man with a long beard. Richly attired in loose, flowing robes, he is looking upward but not toward heaven. This solemn posture and sad countenance must belong to Joseph of Arimathaea, because the only other person who comes to mind, Simon of Cyrene, after being forced to help the condemned man carry his cross, as was the practice when these executions took place, went about his own affairs, thinking more of a business transaction that called for an urgent decision than of the sufferings of a miserable wretch about to be crucified. Joseph of Arimathaea is that affluent and good-hearted man who donated a grave for the burial of the greatest criminal of all, but this act of generosity will be to no avail when the time comes to consider his beatification, let alone canonization. All he has on his head is the turban he always wears outdoors, unlike the woman in the foreground of the picture, whose hair hangs all the way down her back as she leans forward, enhanced by the supreme glory of a halo, in her case one edged with the finest embroidery. The kneeling woman must be Mary, because, as we know, all the women gathered here have that name, with one exception, she who is also called Magdalene. Anyone viewing



1.1 Albrecht Dürer, *Crucifixion*, c. 1495, (The British Museum, London)

this picture who knows the facts of life will swear immediately that this is the woman called Magdalene, for only someone with her disreputable past would have dared appear at such a solemn occasion wearing a low-cut dress with a close-fitting bodice to emphasize her ample bosom, which inevitably draws the lewd stares of passing men and puts their souls at grave risk of being dragged to perdition. Yet the expression on her face is one of contrition, and her wilting body conveys nothing other than her sorrowing soul, which we cannot ignore, even if it is hidden by tempting flesh, for this woman could be completely naked, had the artist so chosen to portray her, and still she would deserve our respect and veneration. Mary Magdalene, if that is her name, is holding to her lips the hand of another woman, who has collapsed to the ground as if bereft of strength or mortally wounded. Her name is also Mary, second in order of appearance but undoubtedly the most important Mary of all, if the central position she occupies in the lower part of the picture has any significance. Apart from her grieving expression and limp hands, nothing can be seen of her body, covered as it is by the copious folds of her mantle and by a tunic tied at the waist with a coarsely woven cord. She is older than the other Mary, which is reason enough, although not the only reason, why her halo should be more elaborate, at least that is what one would conclude in the absence of more precise information about the privileges of rank and seniority observed at that time. Considering, however, the enormous influence of this iconography, only an inhabitant of another planet, where no such drama has ever been enacted, could fail to know that this anguished woman is the widow of a carpenter named Joseph and the mother of numerous sons and daughters, although only one of her children was decreed by fate, or whoever governs fate, to achieve a little renown during his life and a great deal more after his death. Reclining on her left side, Mary, the mother of Jesus, rests her forearm on the hip of another woman, also kneeling and also named Mary, who might well be the real Mary Magdalene although we can neither see nor imagine the neckline of her tunic. Like the first woman in this trinity, she lets her long tresses hang loose down her back, but to all appearances they are fair, unless it is only by chance that the pen strokes are more delicate here, leaving empty spaces between the locks and thus allowing the engraver to lighten the tone. We are not trying to prove that Mary Magdalene was in fact blond, but simply point to the popular belief that women with blond hair, whether it be natural or dyed, are the most effective instruments of sin. Mary Magdalene, who, as everyone knows, was as wicked a woman as ever

lived, must have been blond if we accept the opinion held, for better or worse, by half of mankind. It is not, however, because this third Mary has skin and hair fairer than the first that we suggest, despite the damning evidence of the first's exposed bosom, that the third is the Magdalene. What confirms her identity is that this third Mary, as she distractedly supports the limp arm of the mother of Jesus, is looking upward, and her enraptured gaze ascends with such power that it appears to elevate her entire being, it is a light that outshines the halo already encircling her head, a light that overpowers every thought and emotion. Only a woman who has loved as much as we believe Mary Magdalene loved could possibly have such an expression, it is she and no other, and thus we rule out the woman standing beside her. This is the fourth Mary, ...²⁰

Saramago is not telling us anything new, he is not saying anything more than it is already presented on the painting. In this sense, he remains entirely in coherence with Dürer. The whole painting is one story with many characters, each of them with its own biography, with its motives and interests. And in the same way as their faces and figures delineated on the woodcut are the parts that form one visual composition, everyone of them illuminates and adds some segments of the story, and makes of it one coherent narrative. Each piece and each detail of the woodcut is in the function of this story. They are all organized hierarchically around one privileged central nucleus, one luminous hero, so that it would be no doubt who is the bearer and the main protagonist of the story. The entire scene is subordinated to his dominance, and through this dominance the unity of the whole visual field is established.

The only person of greater importance than the hero of this story is the one standing against that woodcut and to whom this story is actually dedicated. The ultimate destination and purpose of this whole scene is the viewer. He is the true hero and the higher law. There is irresistible feeling that everything shown on this woodcut actually happened only in order to be told. It cannot even be imagined that one of presented characters is hidden, and thus unclear, or partly out of the frame. This would undoubtedly be the mistake of the narrator. It is even less possible that someone who does not belong to this event suddenly appears, someone who is not one of the protagonists, has no role in

²⁰ Jose Saramago, *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*, (Orlando: Harcourt Books, 1994), pp. 1-4

it, and happens to be there by accident. Not even the main figure, Jesus Christ, is free. He cannot be anywhere, cannot be displayed in the profile view, or slightly obstructed by someone – even he has to obediently play the assigned role, and all that only in order to make the viewer enjoy the full comfort.

During several centuries of humanism, painting passes through the phases, and has the parallel or even identical route as philosophy.²¹ In this sense, it could be said that it evaluates. At the end of the thirteenth century, Giotto puts the whole world in the perspective, and in that way inaugurates one of the main postulates of humanism: clearly determined ‘point of view’. Quattrocento brings painting of the bulk. The scenes are full of bodies and objects depicted in the same plane and with the same level of details, while the perspective is the only instrument that establishes the visual hierarchy. The Renaissance introduces the composition as the new element for creating the geometrical idea of unity. And then chiaroscuro comes into scene. The objects lose their primacy and become subordinated to one higher force that unites them: the magic of the light. The new hierarchy is established, based on the play of light and shadow. The dominance of the light over the objects is even more enhanced with the appearance of Velázquez. He creates one single line of vision which follows the ray of light and around which he revolves the forms and objects. That line of vision does not necessarily point at something, nor has a clearly defined direction. The bulk becomes flattened and does not fix the light, but by letting it floating, it forms the most immediate object: hallow space. After the objects lose their volume and become surfaces, painting itself tends to become planimetric. The figures become less and less recognizable and the painters, instead of painting what they see, paint more and more their experience of seeing. What is important is the impression; the subjective experience of the world and not its universal reality.

From this we can see that from the time of Giotto to the end of the nineteenth century the role of the subject is continuously getting stronger. Over the time, the painting more and more subordinates to man. It starts with the objects from the external world and slowly approaches to man’s inner world, to his feelings and impressions. The painting goes

²¹ Jose Ortega y Gasset analyses the parallel between the philosophy and painting. In his essay *On Point of View in the Arts*, from 1949, he speaks about relations Dante – Giotto, Descartes – Velasquez.

through many transformations during this centuries-long journey. But even though these transformations are very radical in the sense of form, coloring, themes, and even the role of the main hero obviously changes – first that hero is bulk, volume and body, then it is symmetry and composition, then light and shadow, then hallow space, and finally the personal impressions and sensations – what undoubtedly unifies all this phases is their unique relation to the viewer. No matter who is the hero on the painting, he is always in the function of the narrative and exists only in the frames of that narrative. All these depicted worlds, with all their wealth, always reduce to one single point – the point of view. Exactly this is the true essence of humanism. The painting is here only for us; it teaches us, it entertains and comforts us, it takes us on adventures, it shows us unseen places, it speaks instead of us what we would not dare to say, it hides and keeps our most intimate secrets, it records for us and remembers. The observer is the one who enjoys all the comfort of this world and his pedestal can never be called into question. The painting is here only the medium of narration.

And then comes the shift, we will not exaggerate if we say, of epistemological proportions. Paul Cézanne is the first one that disputes the supremacy of the unique viewpoint. He introduces one more point which slightly moves the eye of the viewer and overlaps the two views at the same time. This results with two slightly different simultaneous visual perceptions – one nose-close and other few meters away – which can never fold together in one unified hierarchical visual experience.²² With these shifted viewpoints, Cezanne allows the truth of two different views at the same time. The dominance of the single viewer is destroyed; the central subject is finally decentered.

Going beyond Cezanne, Picasso approaches his subject from many more imagined angles, combining various viewpoints until the final image is scarcely recognizable.²³ For him, the truth exists only as the total sum of perceptions; the sum of views, of which each separately is insufficient and false. In this sense we can also understand his thesis that art is the lie which enables us to realize the truth. In his most characteristic paintings, he

²² Also known as Cezanne's binocular vision.

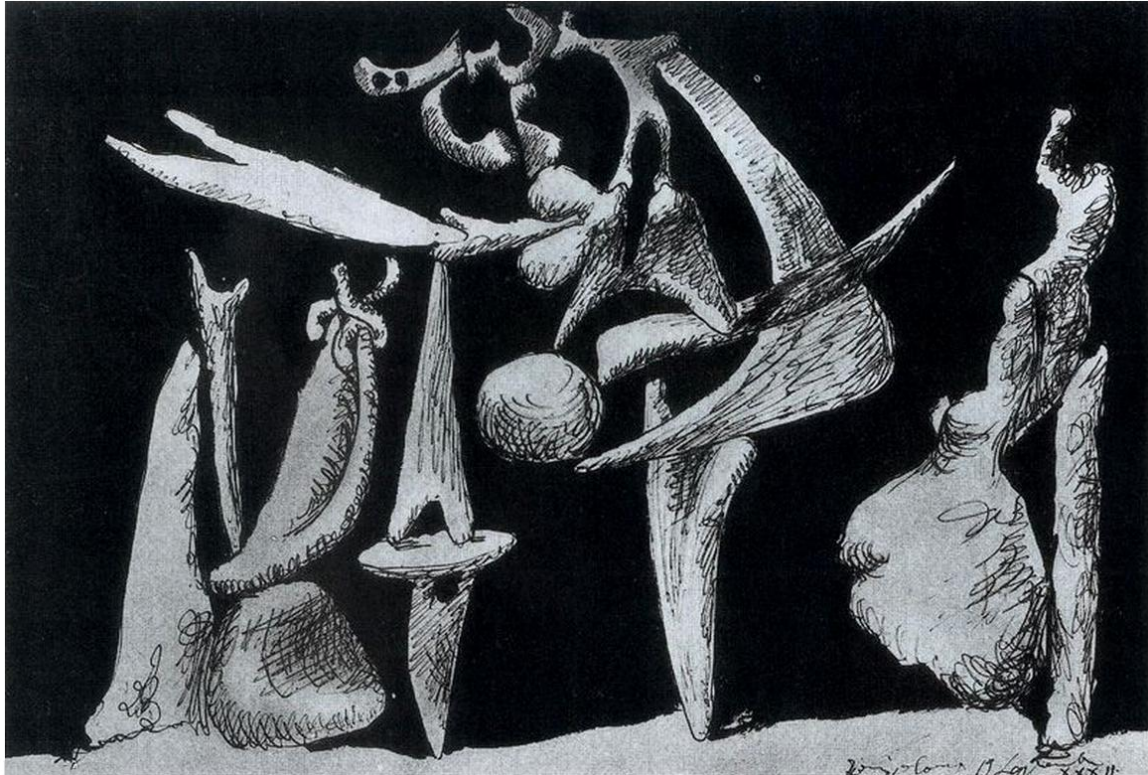
²³ It is important to notice that at same time Albert Einstein, with his *Special Theory of Relativity* from 1905, destroys the long-held belief that basic quantities of measurement were absolute and unvarying. He demonstrates that they depend on the relative position of the viewer.

breaks the closed form of an object and exhibits its fragments – nose, ear, mustache, etc. – in the Euclidean planes. As we have already seen in the examples of Joyce (Miss gaze of Kennedy, Miss voice of Kennedy), the fragments exist entirely independently from the whole and from the contexts of which they should be a part of.²⁴ Here, man cannot be understood as a whole – he becomes the sum of the fragments; the sum of his actions for which he bears the moral responsibility. And at the end, these actions make him, or do not make him, a man. From this we can see that the humanistic perception of man as one universal value is radically disturbed. Man cannot hide himself behind his name or status. His each step is subjected to suspicion and his final outcome is highly uncertain. Man can no longer be entrusted with the great duty of carrying the center of the world in his eye.

Desertion of the clearly defined image about the final recipient; desertion of this higher instance – the one that everything is addressed to and that represents the main purpose of the work itself – is more than obvious in Picasso's painting. In the same way as Joyce's sentences do not consider a possible reader but articulate the narrative of the adventures of Syntax, Picasso's characters are not anthropomorphic figures, but rather catalogs of nouns; fragments with narrative coherence that cannot, unlike more representational Renaissance paintings, be conveyed in the everyday language. It is almost impossible to imagine how Saramago's description of Picasso's *Crucifixion* (fig.1.2) as an introduction to the story of Jesus Christ would look like. It would be absurd to conceive one logical narrative from this painting, mostly because it belongs to one different metaphysical reality, the reality which disputes the very essence of the narrative. Although both Dürer and Picasso refer to the same historic event, and both respect some general knowledge about that event, and even both use the same medium (flat wooden surface, with similar dimensions), their languages are incompatible. These are the languages of two different paradigms. Picasso does not contradict Dürer at any moment. He neither disputes that this event really happened, nor he claims that it happened differently, as did so many authors in the past, always bringing some new understandings and new interpretations. What he says, however, is that this event happened entirely independently from us and regardless of whether we will remember it or understand it. The main difference between these two

²⁴ Questioned on her attitude toward modern art, Gertrude Stein once remarked, "I like to look at it. That is, I like to look at the picture part of it; the other parts interest me much less."

approaches is that Picasso actually does not address us, the viewers. He is not telling any story, and therefore not even Saramago can follow up with his story, as he does with Dürer.



1.2 Pablo Picasso, *Crucifixion*, 1932

And while Picasso at least retains the formal analogy with the paintings from the period of humanism and thus maintains the illusion of some form of narrative, there are tendencies emerging on the scene which even more radically alienate painting from its original aim of representing the object, and inaugurate the absolute abstraction. Hermann Broch interprets this rejection of materiality as the main essence of the time, a true zeitgeist: “now whether Expressionism was searching for purely emotional motives, that is, objectless emotions in the subject, in order to raise them to the position of what was in fact the original object of painting; whether Futurism strove to seize the object cinematographically in purely functional movement as representing dissolution of the spatial world; or whether Cubism simply initiated the search for the abstract object which he hoped to discover in a fixed set of laws governing the painter’s craft and the formation of space – it was in each case a matter of replacing the accidental, empirical object by one

whose deepest roots would reach into the logical as well as into the Platonic idea, all of which was consequence of the action of the Zeitgeist.”²⁵

Kazimir Malevich is certainly one of the most determined and relentless destroyer of all bounds with humanism. He puts himself before the task of creating one entirely new spirituality, which does not only reject the representational but also leads to the state of the complete absence of the object. In one of his very provocative essays, he writes: “I transformed myself in the zero of form and emerged from nothing to creation, that is, to Suprematism, to the new realism in painting – to non-objective creation.”²⁶ What is here crucially important is that this ‘zero of form’ does not only refer to some previous period of the culture or civilization, but to the nature as such. ‘The non-objective’ form and ‘pure plastic painting’, introduced later by Mondrian, has the intention of having absolutely no resemblance to the world of nature, and thus, to the materialistic spirit of the previous periods. The duty of the artist is to create always and only the new. According to Malevich, Dürer is nothing but the clerk that makes the inventory of nature’s property; some fancier of zoological, botanical and archaeological collections.²⁷ And any carved-out pentagon or hexagon is a greater work of sculpture than *Venus de Milo* or *David*.²⁸ Unlike the impeccable portraits of Renaissance, playful scenes of Baroque, or sentimental landscapes of Impressionism, man cannot find anything familiar in Malevich paintings, nothing already seen, nothing what he could perceive as his own, or what he could identify with his own experience and memory. These paintings are the fragments of the world that is not his. Man is suddenly captivated in that world and wanders lost and confused, hopelessly searching for something that he can recognize as a home. In that world, forms are deprived of all meaning and content, they are not representing anything. But, most importantly, they possess life and right to individual existence. Each form is free and, in a way, the world for itself. Before these paintings, man feels as Sartre’s hero

²⁵ Hermann Broch, *Geits and Zeitgeist: The Spirit in an Unspiritual Age*, (New York: Counterpoint, 2002), pp. 83-84

²⁶ Kazimir Malevich, *Ot kubiazma I futurizma k suprematizmu. Novyj zivotopisnyj realizam*, Moskva, 1915, quoted from *Dokumenti za razumevanje ruske avangarde*, (Beograd, Geopoetika, 2003), p. 96; my translation

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 102

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 101

who no longer can rely on his own perception of reality and who is forced, by the inconsistency of inanimate objects, to even doubt and question its own existence.

The black square on the white background²⁹ creates a desert; the desert that waits for its obelisks and which is the new home of the metaphysics of one age that is coming. Only there it is possible – as Dada teaches us – to destroy the deceptions of man made by reason and to recover the natural and unreasonable order. Only there man can reach that zero-ground where he finally confronts with its delusions and where he starts to adjust himself to the world that surrounds him. In this Malevich's desert, to paraphrase Spengler, the last Rembrandt self-portrait will cease to exist even though the painted canvas will remain untouched: there will be no eye which understands such formal language.³⁰ The new age demands a new seeing. The protagonists and characters of the new creations are colors, and as you move through the museum and look at one painting after another, the main heroes prove to be the blue, green, yellow... There is no human face or figure on these paintings. The human body is no longer the measuring unit: transcendental signifier, sign before all other signs, object above all other objects, by which everything is measured and understood. Man is reduced from 'the measure of all things' only to 'the measure of all tailors'.³¹

There is one less known but extremely important drawing by Mark Rothko – which I would dare to call his personal manifesto³² – that very expressively renders this radically different perception of man. It is the new interpretation, or the update, of the famous canon of proportions, Leonardo's *homo vitruvianus* (fig. 1.3, 1.4). According to Rothko, the stress on the rationality, measurement, and proportion – set within the theoretical foundations established by Leonardo – highly jeopardized the very authenticity of the late Middle Ages creations, which are mostly laden by the myth. This drawing, from Rothko's *Composition Book*, is one very direct confrontation with Leonardo's *homo vitruvianus*

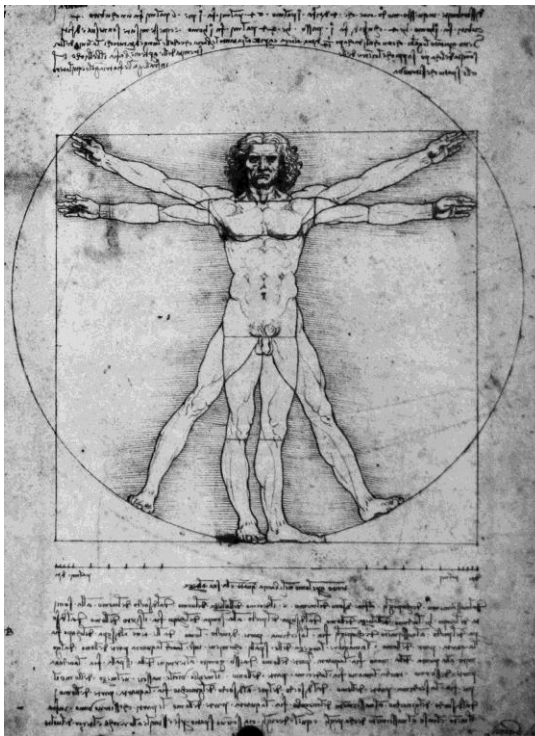
²⁹ In 1915, Malevich created the series of first non-objective paintings, of which *Black Square* is one.

³⁰ Paraphrased from Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, 1918; also quoted by El Lissitzky at the beginning of *Proun*, 1921

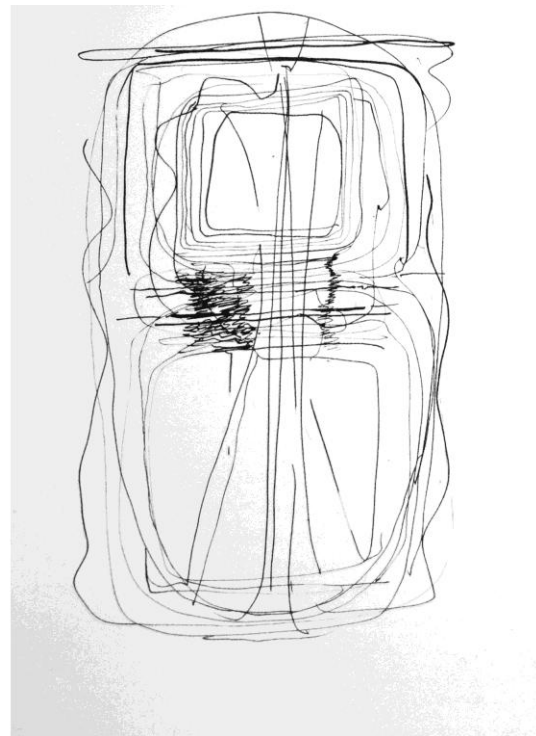
³¹ The paraphrase of Jean Arp words, pronounced at the first public presentation of Dada, in Zurich, 1916.

³² The same year when this drawing is made (1949) Rothko begins to paint his famous floating rectangles paintings.

that becomes an act of almost physical destruction. In Rothko's drawing, the organization of the human body according to the normative use of proportion becomes unrecognizable. Leonardo's figure is replaced by the planes. The form and proportion is replaced by the distortion of the figurative with almost furious hatching. For Rothko, the perfection that Leonardo accomplishes on his drawing are only the lines of the cage of man's rationality in which lies his imprisoned imagination. This cage has to be broken, even by force. The juxtaposing of these two drawings very explicitly demonstrates the triumph of the abstraction over the human matter by – to use Ortega y Gasset's metaphor – “presenting the strangled victim.”³³ We could say that Rothko, in the spirit of the Dadaists, replaces the limitations of human rationality with some higher irrationality.



1.3 Leonardo da Vinci, *homo vitruvianus*, c. 1490



1.4 Mark Rothko, drawing after Leonardo's *homo vitruvianus*, 1949

The 'Vitruvian man' is no longer in the center of the perfect circle. The ideal proportion, symmetry, and harmony are no longer the contours of his home. He enters into the world which is not measured by his image and where he has no power to control his own

³³ Jose Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanisation of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture and Literature*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 23

destiny. The conscious awareness of himself in space and time ceases to exist; all borders of the real are broken, the unconscious is open, nothing is firmed and fixed, and anything is possible. *Ratio* – that ultimate guardian of comfort – has lost all authority, and man is forced into one permanent struggle in which he must repeatedly determine the borders between the animate and inanimate, the real and unreal. And most importantly, once more he has to face the most difficult task of all: he must define the meaning of its own existence.

There is one letter by Joan Miró that offers a perfect illustration of this disturbed state of mind, especially noticeable among artists. It is written as a monologue and addressed to painter's friend, Yvon Taillandier. "For me, an object is alive. This cigarette, this box of matches – they contain a secret life more intense than that of many human beings. When I see a tree, I get a shock, as though it were something that breathes, that talks. A tree is also something human. [...] This bottle, this glass, a big stone on a deserted beach – these are immobile things, but they unleash tremendous movements in my mind. I do not feel that when I see a human being moving around like an idiot. People who go swimming at the beach and who move round touch me much less than the immobility of a pebble. (Immobile things become enormous, much more enormous than things that move.) Immobility makes me think of vast spaces that contain movements that do not stop, movements that have no end. As Kant said, it is a sudden irruption of the infinite into the finite. A pebble, which is a finite and immobile object, suggests to me not only movement, but movement that has no end. In my paintings, this translates into the sparklike forms that leap out of the frame, as though from a volcano."³⁴ In another place in the same letter, Miró identifies the feeling of discomfort as the main driving force of his work: "It's a struggle between myself and what I am doing, between myself and canvas, between myself and my discomfort. This struggle excites and inspires me. I work until the discomfort goes away."³⁵

³⁴ Joan Miró, *Selected Writings and Interviews*, edited by Margit Rowell, (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1992), p. 248

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 249

One of the reasons why painting immerses into the abstraction so expansively and thoroughly is also the appearance of one new medium, first known as daguerreotype and later: photography. If the old endeavors of painting to reproduce the nature realistically as much as possible were not rejected and abandoned, the photography would be the ultimate mean of art which enables to everyone, without any effort, crafts, and knowledge, to reach the mastery of Dürer and Leonardo. However, this new medium waits for a long time until it gets into hands of the true masters that can really test its potential and use it as the instrument for embodiment of the spirit of the time. Only with the appearance of the Dada movement, photography evolves into an art form with the clear aesthetic expression independent from the painting, and becomes one of the main weapons in reexamining and reevaluation of all values in the contemporary society.

In order to strongly influence man's consciousness, Dadaists go further than the simple provocation of the viewer. They want to reach him in the most direct and explicit way, they want to insult him, humiliate, and infuriate. In one of his essays, Walter Benjamin writes, "From an alluring appearance or persuasive structure of sound the work of art of the Dadaists became an instrument of ballistics. It hit the spectator like a bullet, it happened to him, thus acquiring a tactile quality."³⁶ Photography finds the way to speak that precise language. If we look Man Ray's *Marquise Casati* (fig. 1.5) we certainly cannot get impression that it treats the viewer in the manner of humanism – as one privileged hero whom it has to please and obey – but at the same time it is not indifferent to him and it does not ignore him. On the contrary, it is in a direct conflict with the viewer; we could even say, in a certain way. It seems as if the portrait refuses to be observed, as if it has some centrifugal force which does not allow the gaze to remain on it. It is impossible not to notice the strong dose of aggression toward the viewer. Looking at this photography, the feeling of discomfort is so intense that it almost causes the physical pain. At the same time, it possesses an irresistible hypnotic attraction which does not let us to simply turn around, leave, and forget all about it. The face of the young marquise, like Odysseus' Sirens in the bay, allures our gaze again and again, only to reject it in the very next moment.

³⁶ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken books, 2007), p. 238



1.5 Man Ray, *Marquise Casati*, 1922

Man Ray's films also communicate with the audience in the similar way. His *L'étoile de mer*, from 1928, is almost entirely shot through diffused and textured glass and the frames are distorted and randomly out of focus. In this way it is made perfectly clear to the viewer that he is not some privileged higher instance which is here to judge or to enjoy. On the other hand, we cannot say that this viewer is totally rejected and ignored. Occasionally sharp images and fragments, which remotely indicate some story, are there only to repeatedly remind the viewer that he is needless; that he is there only by accident, trapped in someone else's dream, and that he is witnessing something that should be none of his business at all. There is no coherent narrative, only bunch of situations

accompanied by the text in which the protagonists are also treated as objects without the higher agenda or meaning.

The appearance of the film made the possibility to see the reality with one different eye – with the eye that is not human and that is able to deconstruct this reality into the smallest pieces. According to Benjamin, this new circumstance leads to the true explosion of our perception, after which our quotidian cannot remain the same: “Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and our furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling.”³⁷ These ruins, where now we ‘calmly and adventurously’ travel, are the remains of the old metaphysics. In order to perceive them entirely, our human eye is not enough. We need someone else to look instead of us, some new arbiter of the truth.

Dziga Vertov, the unforgettable Russian film director, sees in the film camera one live human eye. For him, the camera (hence the machine) is not only alive like man, but it has certain advantages over him. It is obvious that the nature reveals itself to the camera in one different way than to the human eye. The eye of the camera, Kino-glaz, is not limited by man’s subjective perception; it observes all objects with no ambition to understand or explain them. The kino-glaz does not see the difference between the animate and inanimate, between the important and unimportant, and does not perceive the time as something irreversible and irretrievable which necessarily has to move from the past to the future. Film is the mechanism of the ultimate equalization of subject and object – it treats them both in the same way with no distinction. The camera does not recognize any moral category that man pretends to have. It is the ultimate mean of dehumanization.

Vertov presents film *Man with a Movie Camera* – the film without the screenplay, film set, actors, and even without the intertitles that would give any kind of clarification of the film – as an experiment for creating one absolute language. And from the beginning it is

³⁷ Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken books, 2007), p. 236

quite clear that everything is subordinated to this language. In the first scenes, the film itself shows its own opening: the audience enters into the movie theater, takes its seats, the reels are being set into the movie projector, and the lights fade. Even this indication of the narrative disappears with the first image on the screen. From that moment on, there is no trace of any narrative. We are invaded by the images in which people and objects are nothing more than the recorded light; the appearances without their own will. They are changing on the screen with no logic or sense and their motion and stillness contributes to the dynamic and rhythm of the film. However, the film is not just a document, but it has its own immanent agenda and it subordinates everything to this agenda, and thus shapes the reality. Space and time are fractured in the way that was previously unthinkable to the human eye.

As is the case with Joyce's novels, the author is not the subject, the main observer or interpreter. On the contrary, he is only one of the objects of observation. The film constantly follows its own cameraman. In many moments we see him with the camera how he shoots the scene which was already shown a few seconds ago. The author himself is locked within the discourse and does not have control over his own work. The public is also within this discourse, and we occasionally see them in the movie theater how they react to the same scenes that we are watching as well. The film, therefore, is not necessarily dependent on neither the author, nor the viewers. It is more likely that they are those who are subordinated to the language of film. They are only one of many elements, and the film can do quite well even without them. Here we could remember the innocent 'Ulysses' gaze' captured on mythical undeveloped reels of the very first film shot by the Manaki brothers; the gaze which is neither generated nor experienced by the subject.³⁸ Such gaze, untouched by man, notes the fragments of space and time that can be perceived as the post-humanist condition. Vertov's 'remembered light' on the celluloid tape is equivalent with those Joyce's sentences which are nothing but the printed text

³⁸ According to the story, at the dawn of the age of cinema, Manaki brothers tirelessly crisscrossed the Balkans and shot a few reels of the film, which unfortunately are never developed. This film is lost, but the belief remains that these reels capture 'the innocent gaze' that no one has ever seen, not even the authors themselves. The search for this mythical 'innocent gaze' is depicted by Theodoros Angelopoulos in his film *Ulysses' Gaze*.

deprived of all meaning and logic. The film is perfectly self-sufficient, and it exists entirely independent from man.

Man with a Movie Camera observes its author, its viewers, and it even observes the process of its own creation. The film simultaneously displays the montage of the very scenes and images that we are watching, and in that way it constantly reminds us that all this life revealing in front of us is only a celluloid tape, and there is nothing that exists out of this tape. The metaphysical framework that unifies all these images and makes one whole is the language of the film – the language is the observer, judge, and the only reality. We could easily relate this to Heidegger's motif of the language as the house of being: "language is not man's creation and instrument, it is man who 'dwells' in language."³⁹ And if we take one further step, we might say that language does not necessarily have to be inhabited by the subject. Although, it ostensibly appears as a paradox, the absence of the subject still does not mean that metaphysical framework does not exist.

Vertov, in the same manner as many other avant-garde artists⁴⁰, offers a possible experience of the reality without the reasoning subject – a world picture in which man will no longer be the ultimate originator of meaning. This post-humanist condition introduces a new mental image of the environment that radically differs from the existing. Man is decentered from his position of the master of being, and now he is challenged to face the world of objects that are deprived of all sense and meaning. The high authority of Cartesian dualism is more than disputed and man is no longer protected by his logic and *ratio*. There is no more any certain truth that he can follow, nor the home where he can return to. Man's only relation to this world, the only firm ground on which he can stand, is implacable feeling of discomfort – and this is the true generator and vehicle of the new paradigm; the new episteme that we are referring to as modernism.

³⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, (London: Verso, 2008), p. xiv. Žižek here points to Lacan's interpretation of Heidegger's motif, where Lacan concludes that "psychoanalysis should be the science of language inhabited by the subject."

⁴⁰ We could also mention the music of Debussy and Satie (who dehumanized music by depriving it of the private sentiments and impressions) and the beginnings of atonal music or experimental electronic music.

1.3. Object In Mirror Is Further Than It Appears

„The work of art points man in the direction of new paths and thinks to the future. The house thinks of the present. Man loves everything that serves his comfort. He hates everything that wants to tear him away from his secure and safe position, and is burdensome. And so he loves the house and hates art.“¹ – Adolf Loos

The previous chapter denotes the platform which can be considered as mutual for all arts from the beginning of the twentieth century. Although they are formally and aesthetically very diverse, all avant-garde movements of this turbulent period, due to its new perception of subject/object relation, unambiguously find their place on that platform and altogether form one coherent agenda. This agenda might be defined as the spirit of the time, or ‘zeitgeist.’ Man is exiled from the center of the world and he reacts instinctively in self-defense, and uses art as an instrument by which he constructs his new position and forms the coordinates of the spiritual life which would be in accordance with the new reality. The necessity and urgency of such transformation is more than obvious in intensified manifestation of creativity at the time. Numerous groups, movements, programs, manifestos, declarations and one true eruption of imagination are the best

¹ Adolf Loos, “Architecture”, from Roberto Schezen, *Adolf Loos: Architecture 1903-19032*, (New York: Monacelli Press, 2009), p. 15

evidence of the acute need for the construction of any form of meaning out of the sudden chaos to which man is exposed. Mutual denominator of this agenda, as it is already mentioned in the previous chapter, is the discomfort, caused by disruption of antropocentrism, displacement of subject, and loss of metaphysical shelter provided by the centuries of humanism.

However, one thing is to make a painting that causes uneasiness, animosity and repulsion, or to write a book that speaks in some unknown and unintelligible language, or to make a film that ignores the audience and it is concerned only with its own existence. If man does not want to see or hear that, or if it is too much for his taste, he can simply throw the book away, leave the gallery or the movie theatre. He is perfectly free in any moment to turn back and go home. But what if his own house is also uncomfortable, hostile, and causes repulsion? What if this house ignores its own host, and it is not concerned with his comfort, and it does not satisfy his demands, but has some better things to do? What if it becomes his nightmare, the source of his uneasiness and anxiety? What if the house ceases to be an objekt whose primary purpose is to speak *about* man and instead becomes concerned with its own objecthood? And what if the house ceases to be a shelter; ceases to be a home? Will man, even then, be able to build that house and dare to live in it?

These, by no means easy questions, are put in front of architecture at the end of the nineteenth century. The end of humanism means the radical change in all fields, but no art beside architecture has such hard and almost impossible task. In order to find its place on the platform of the new paradigm, architecture has to strike man with the most brutal and most painful blow. It has to enter into his habitat, into his most intimate chambers, into the place where he feels the safest and most comfortable – and then break all this into pieces. To be consistent and to truly follow the ‘zeitgeist’ means exactly to deprive man of his inherent notion of home, and give him something different instead of that; something that will enable him to be prepared for the changes which are inevitable. The comfortable and cozy house cannot protect us from the flood of the new and it is necessary to replace it with something which is maybe less comfortable, but can withstand the rush of the torrent.

A house and a home shared the same roof for centuries. As early as the fourteenth century, after a huge shift in the triadic relationship between God, man, and nature, man

assumes a centric role in the cosmogony. Architecture welcomes this change with enthusiasm and delight. It immediately starts to evolve spatial conceptions of the anthropocentric society. The old Vitruvius's factual explanation of the conditions in architecture presented in his book *Ten Books of Architecture* – his attempt to catalog what he saw around him, within a conception of what is structural, useful and beautiful – was no longer sufficient. The objects are no longer subordinated to God, but to man. And it is man who has to determine their history and meaning. Architecture has to have a coherent and logic narrative. That is exactly what Leon Battista Alberti does in his book *On the Art of Building in Ten Book*. By writing it as a certain critique or an answer to Vitruvius's virtues *firmitas*, *utilitas*, and *venustas*,² Alberti does not dispute the necessity of these virtues, but indicates their insufficiency. A building not only has to be firm – that implies without saying, or otherwise it would not stand at all – but it also has to look as if it is firm; not only does it have to provide shelter, but it has to look like a good shelter; a column not only has to bear the weight of the building, but with its form and proportion has to give the impression of the consistency with the function that serves. It is mandatory that the objects are addressing man and that they speak the language that he understands. They have to be in accordance with the function and the meaning that is assigned by man. Alberti introduces an entirely new idea into architecture: the idea of representation.

One of the most striking of Alberti's projects, basilica Sant'Andrea in Mantova (fig. 1.6), is an excellent example of this new understanding of the present of architecture in relation with its history. On the front façade of the basilica, Alberti puts the Arch of Septimius Severus – a symbol of men's power and triumph.³ This, until then unthinkable gesture, unambiguously announces the true explosion of the anthropocentric world view, which reaches its full embodiment with Andrea Palladio. By introducing 'a villa' as one dominant typology in the architecture of the time, Palladio undeniably and definitely turns the house of God into the house of man.⁴ No more is there a higher or incomprehensible force that rules nature and nothing is above man's reason and logic.

² Often translated as firmness, commodity and delight.

³ This example is first introduced by Peter Eisenman in his essay *Misreading Peter Eisenman* (1987)

⁴ If we examine the first villas we can see that while Palladio's plan of Villa Foscari (1559) still keeps some remains of the cruciform, it almost dissolves in his latter plan for Villa La Rotonda,(1566), and finally disappears in Scamozzi's plan of Villa Pisani (1575-78).

The Renaissance produces a paradigm that is one universal and fixed body of knowledge, grounded in final and unchangeable truths, such as those of mathematics and music proportions.



1.6 Leon Battista Alberti, Sant'Andrea in Mantova, 1471

Throughout time, architecture changes its formal expression and these changes were always defined and submitted by the rules of something what call *style*. Thus, after the Renaissance comes Baroque with its monumentality, drama and dominance of the light; after that comes Rococo, full of ornaments, bringing playfulness, intimacy and grace; then follows Neoclassicism, proclaiming revival of symmetry, flattering the volume by

exchanging it with straight walls and more austere forms, and introducing the notion of the autonomy in architecture.

No matter how much are these styles different, and no matter how much they contradict or dispute each other, or give impression of radically different world view, they all belong to one same paradigm – to this same body of knowledge which only confirms man in its centric position. By writing the history of architecture, Alberti defines the framework of the metaphysics in which all these styles are part of the narrative which addresses only man. Every change in the formal expression has the role to serve man, to satisfy his needs for beauty and comfort – and at the same time, what is most important, to never leave the frames of the understandable meaning.

Architecture meets the end of humanism with denial and disbelief, and proceeds with the old agenda embodied in Beaux-Arts. The spirit of the new age emerges and tears down the old world in pieces. Architecture does not have any instruments or mechanisms to confront this change. It cannot abandon its humanist mission. It cannot resist serving its beloved host and persists in satisfying his eye. The academia cannot support or accept the changes, because these changes are turned against the academia itself, and they dispute the values which it propagates. But the knowledge and experience that academia can offer are expired – they suddenly became worthless and unenforceable. They are the truths and knowledge of one reality that ceased to exist. This inevitably led to a dead-end street. At the end of the nineteenth century architecture bankrupted both as a discipline and profession!

One quite different and original approach to architecture has to emerge, one which is not burdened with the old rules and canons, and which is initiated outside of the system itself. And thus, the new generation of architects comes from the very margins of society, from one utterly uncomfortable position. They are the outcasts and homeless, mainly with no formal education and out of all academic circles, unrecognized and disputed by institutions and establishment. Their most powerful weapon is the courage and relentlessness in facing the new. These pioneers of modernism – Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, and others – are put before the same task as Alberti was several centuries earlier: they have to find the place and role for architecture in the new

age. They have to deal with the “problem in the demand for totally new methods of building, the problem of new plans adapted to modern life, the problem of an aesthetic in harmony with the new spirit.”⁵ But what is most important, they have to position architecture on the same platform with all other arts – to define the frames and articulate the potential of the discipline within the new paradigm.

From the moment when the first caveman went in the search for the shelter, architecture is associated with man’s existence and survival. The minimum of traditionally necessary conditions of architecture – shelter, support and enclosure – made of it the ultimate humanistic activity. For centuries it was absolutely unthinkable to contradict, challenge, or revise these aspects: a true heresy. This would actually mean the annihilation of the very essence of architecture. At the beginning of the twentieth century, painting has the freedom to be wild and revolutionary, and to confront the problems of the new age. Painting can experiment because it is not dependent on the material means and market. All it takes is that the artist makes his own sacrifice. Unlike painting, architecture has its arms tied. It has no freedom to stand up and recklessly shout the Dadaist slogan: “I don’t even want to know if there were people before me.”⁶ Architecture cannot that easily escape from the role of home-provider – to abandon man and turn itself to its own objecthood.

For centuries, architecture prospered from the fact that its client was also the absolute center of the universe and the master of all meaning. Now, when this client is not all that any more, architecture has to convince him that this new house, which does not treat him with expected kindness and attention, is actually the one that he needs. In order to face ‘the zeitgeist’ and become the integral part of the new *episteme*, but at the same time to keep the appreciation and trust of its only client and financier, architecture has to develop two parallel and essentially contradictory currents that will be presented under the same banner. The first current will deal with the formal and spatial possibilities of the new situation, without compromises and regardless of the consequences. The other current

⁵ Le Corbusier, *The City of To-Morrow And Its Planning*, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2000), p. xxii

⁶ Tristan Tzara, “Manifeste Dada 1918”, Dada 3, from Henri Behar, Michel Carassou, *Dada. Istorija jedne subverzije*, (Novi Sad: Izdavačka knjižarnica Zorana Stojanovica, 1997), p. 81; my translation

will proceed in the social agenda inherited from the humanism, and deal with the practical problems of the mankind.

It is impossible to please and to challenge one's position at the same time. The first thing serves to joy and comfort, while the second inevitably leads to discomfort. This creates the double life, or the schizophrenia of modern architecture. Both sides of this schizophrenic cognizance use the same instruments in pursuing their agendas, but the interpretation is fundamentally different. One such instrument is *tabula rasa*. There is a big difference between *tabula rasa* that nullifies everything but man, and the one that nullifies everything including man. This difference seems to be overlooked or ignored, but it is crucial. It separates two diametrically opposite views. The first *tabula rasa* is the last and desperate attempt to continue humanism, while the other one represents its definite end and the authentic encounter with the new.

In order to defend both these programs simultaneously and present them as one single concept, modern architecture brings itself into one absurd situation in which advocating two opposed positions constantly disputes and disclaims its own ideas and actions. Thus, while it propagates the reduction of meaning and intentional separation of signifier and signified – and in that way reexamines man's position as subject and its relation with object – modern architecture just formally deserts one sentimental and romantic worldview, which obviously ceased to be valid. The ornaments and the symbols of the old age are being replaced with the iconography of the machines, cruise liners, and the praise of the progress. And while the autonomy of the architectural object which serves only to its own objecthood is being announced, architecture is being reduced to a logical derivation from the functional and technological facts, whose ultimate purpose is always to serve man. The result of all of this is just a cosmetic but by no means a real and radical change: the signifier and the signified are slightly separated, but the meaning is still present.

The ambivalent character of the modern architecture at the beginning of the twentieth century retains always present social program which never rejects the anthropocentric attitude. This *alien* in the body of the new paradigm sets before architecture the tasks which are impossible to accomplish. It forces architecture to step into the realm of the utopia, and makes of it the last keeper of the flame of humanism.

In its recent works, Anthony Vidler also speaks about two parallel and contradictory currents rooted in the very being of modern architecture. Although Vidler does not define them in above presented way, what is important for this thesis is that he suggests the possibility of the existence of this dual identity. Vidler emphasizes particularly the fact that the main ideologists and protagonists of the modern movement at that time did not possess the awareness of the existence of these two currents: “For, as projected by Le Corbusier and others in the 1920s, the modern movement was a double-edged machine. On the one hand, it was committed to a modernism of form, embracing all the techniques of collage, montage, and formalism in general in the service of ideology of the avant-garde, whereby a formal strategy should serve a new social order. On the other hand, such a modernism sought a ‘timeless’ relationship with society, based on an abstraction of traditional, nonarchitectural construction; this was seen to go hand in hand with a universalization of the inherited principles of classicism, minus their representation in the classical orders. Thus, it was not seen as a contradiction that a villa might find its *parti* in a transformation of a Palladian type, its formal language in the evocation of Mediterranean peasant houses, and its iconography in motifs taken from ships, planes, and cars. [...] this double vision between the new and eternal, modern and classic, technological and traditional was not entirely clear to its protagonists in 1920s (despite the majority of Corbusier’s writings in *Vers une architecture*)...”⁷ With certain reserve, we could understand this Vidler’s reading of modern movement – presented here as one double-edged machine unconsciously pursuing both modern and classic – as a confusion and disorientation of the new agenda which is torn between modernism and humanism.

The hesitation or inability to make unambiguous and definite break with humanism costs dearly the modern architecture in the later period. Due to this dualism of two currents that can never meet and never intersect, the first generation of historians of modern architecture – lead by Nikolaus Pevsner, Sigfried Giedion, Henry-Russell Hitchcock – are not able to determine one coherent and unique agenda of modernism in architecture. Each attempt of the comprehensive examination of the activities or the formation of the firm platform of modern architecture that could carry all architectural tendencies and include

⁷ Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism*, (Cambridge: The Mit Press, 2008), p. 104

creations of all key figures of that period, always ends with the reduction of the range and potential of the movement, and with dangerous simplification of its program and objectives.

In relation to this problem, Anthony Vidler makes the analysis of the above mentioned historians of modernism. He finds that each of them, in the attempt to present the coherent narrative that includes the whole modern movement, forms a theory and a frame that, as a rule, lack some of the most important architects or concepts without which that period is simply unthinkable: “Thus, Hitchcock, in *Romanticism and Reintegration*, sought the roots of his beloved ‘New Tradition’ in the late eighteenth century, and was uneasy as well as excited by the work of the ‘New Pioneers’, whom he saw as well as at once going beyond and disturbing the rationalism of Frank Lloyd Wright, Otto Wagner, Peter Behrens, and Auguste Perret. Pevsner, in *Pioneers of Modern Movement*, focused on the relations between Britain and Germany, seeing the origins of Gropius’s rational-functionalism in the Arts and Crafts movement and conveniently ignoring the French contribution, while Giedion failed to include more than a mention of Mies van der Rohe in his *Space, Time and Architecture*, preferring instead to leap from the baroque movement to that encapsulated in Le Corbusier’s villas of the 1920s.”⁸

Each of these books tends to construct the criteria for ‘modernity’, and tells the story of its origins and development. The absence of one unifying method or set of undisputed priorities turns each of these books into subjective perspectives with tendency to justify or glorify their own favorites. Therefore they necessarily produced the extremely partial narratives with the gaps impossible to ignore.

One book, however, managed to gather, under the same headline and in same covers, almost all important architects and their projects in the period from 1920 to 1930. Two young historians of art – Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson – travel the world for two years collecting pieces of what they consider to be modern architecture in order to make a publication that would accompany the big architectural exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art. Their final product, well known book *The International Style*:

⁸ Ibid., pp. 6-7

Architecture Since 1922, made crucial impact on later defining and understanding of what modernism has to offer.

In that book Hitchcock and Johnson present a set of rules that one has to follow in order to be included in the framework of what they call a new *style*. As main determinants of that *style* they define three principles: “There is, first, a new conception of architecture as volume rather than as mass. Secondly, regularity rather than axial symmetry serves as the chief means of ordering design. These two principles, with a third proscribing arbitrary applied decoration, mark the productions of the international style.”⁹ With these principles they managed to establish the link between the formal expression of three new leaders – Le Corbusier, Mies, and Gropius – and in that way to create the illusion of one unique language of the new age.

What we might say is that by focusing only on formal characteristics of the buildings they were considered with the rhetoric, without defining or fundamentally understanding the grammar of the language of modernism. The index of their book is the dictionary of that language, and what they say is: if you want to be radical, and if you want to be a hero, than you have to use this dictionary. The most important words in that dictionary are: roof line, pilotis, ribbon windows, white façade, etc. They produced a collection of recipes that teach, not what is modern, but rather how to look modern. With this book Hitchcock and Johnson degrade the enormous potential of a whole new paradigm to a unified set of formal codes that allowed them to label this as a new *style*. They pacified the exploratory content which was very rich and diverse.

This eventually had a great impact on further interpretation and understanding of initial intentions of the projects presented in this book and their significance in relation to history. In one of his essays Peter Eisenman, considering the writings of Philip Johnson, emphasizes Johnson’s contribution to that matter and, in a way, blames him for the general trivialization of modern architecture, especially in United States in later period: “The reduction of modernism to a discussion of style drained out the ideological

⁹ Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Philip Johnson, *The International Style*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1997), p. 36

implications of the European architecture of the twenties and packaged them neatly into a consumable fashion that was to burst rampant onto American scene after World War II. Corporate imagery in the guise of modern architecture inevitably became an object for consumption.”¹⁰

While Corbusier, with his five points and four compositions, examines the possibilities of the new conditions and investigate the limits of human behavior in that conditions, what follows after global popularization of *International Style* has little to do with ambitions and efforts of first modernists. Suddenly everybody wants to be a part of the global trend. That initiates the true eruption of little white square-like houses made according to well known instructions. These new ‘decorated sheds’ had no other ambition but to look like the first modernist buildings. Their only agenda was to be the part of the *style* that they understood as the esthetic expression of the moment. In this way they threaten to dispute and to relativize the importance of those first heroic projects that tried to confront new challenges, and in that way significantly contributed to the critical nature of the discipline.

By framing Corbusier, Mies, Gropius and others in the conventions of *style*, Hitchcock and Johnson definitely started a process of the historicizing of modernism. This process is turned against everything that these architects stand for and it denies the true nature of modernism. Once modern architecture is recognized as a style, it becomes fully assimilated into the art historical canon. It becomes part of Alberti’s narrative – understood as just another baroque, or rococo, or neoclassicism – and in that sense a form of continuation of the ideas of humanism. This brutal displacement of modern architecture out of its avant-garde coordinates and imposition of false labels made a huge distortion, and architecture needed decades to overcome.

Today generally accepted teaching about architectural creations of the first few decades of the twentieth century is established during the 1930s and at the beginning of 1940s by

¹⁰ Peter Eisenman, essey ‘Behind the Mirror: On the Writings of Philip Johnson’, from Peter Eisenman, *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings 1963 – 1988*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 96

above mentioned historians. After the World War II modern architecture already had a status of “history”, it was understood as a dead project that could be susceptible to academicization and reinterpretations.

Anthony Vidler, in his book *Histories of the Immediate Present*, offers excellent analyses of how in the period of 1950s and 1960s is understood and interpreted the architecture from the beginning of twentieth century. Vidler points to a new generation of historians of modernism that sees modern architecture as the obvious and logical continuation of the process which began in some earlier period. They do not consider modernism as one new paradigm, but as a *style* which is firmly rooted in the tradition of humanism. “Whether modern architecture was seen to begin with the baroque, classicism, neoclassicism, nineteenth-century eclecticism, or Art and Crafts revivalism, the floodgates were now opened for a host of competing narratives, a variety of historically based modernisms, and several versions of a possible ‘unity’ of style characterizing the ‘modern’.”¹¹ They believed that everything has already happened, and that what we experience today is just another form of dealing with the old cognitions and the old well known problems.

Thus, the historian Emil Kaufmann cannot imagine modern architecture without the period of neoclassicism, and first of all without Claude-Nicolas Ledoux and his translation of the ideas of Immanuel Kant into architecture. Kant instituted autonomous ethic, and Ledoux laid the foundations of an autonomous architecture. In his work the buildings are assembled and not intimately linked. A part is independent within the frame of the totality. He introduces the pavilion as a natural formal expression of this understanding of architecture. Kaufmann sees Ledoux as a master who set the new principles that opened the way for Le Corbusier and others, whose work crowns the triumph of these principles. His thesis is that modernism emerged in Claude-Nicolas Ledoux in the 1770s and culminated in Le Corbusier. “The resemblance between the epoch of Ledoux and our own is not limited to formal and thematic aspects. This resemblance does not only rest in the fact that in his epoch as our own one sees the new and important problem of the masses emerge as the powerful motive of solutions.

¹¹ Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism*, (Cambridge: The Mit Press, 2008), p. 7

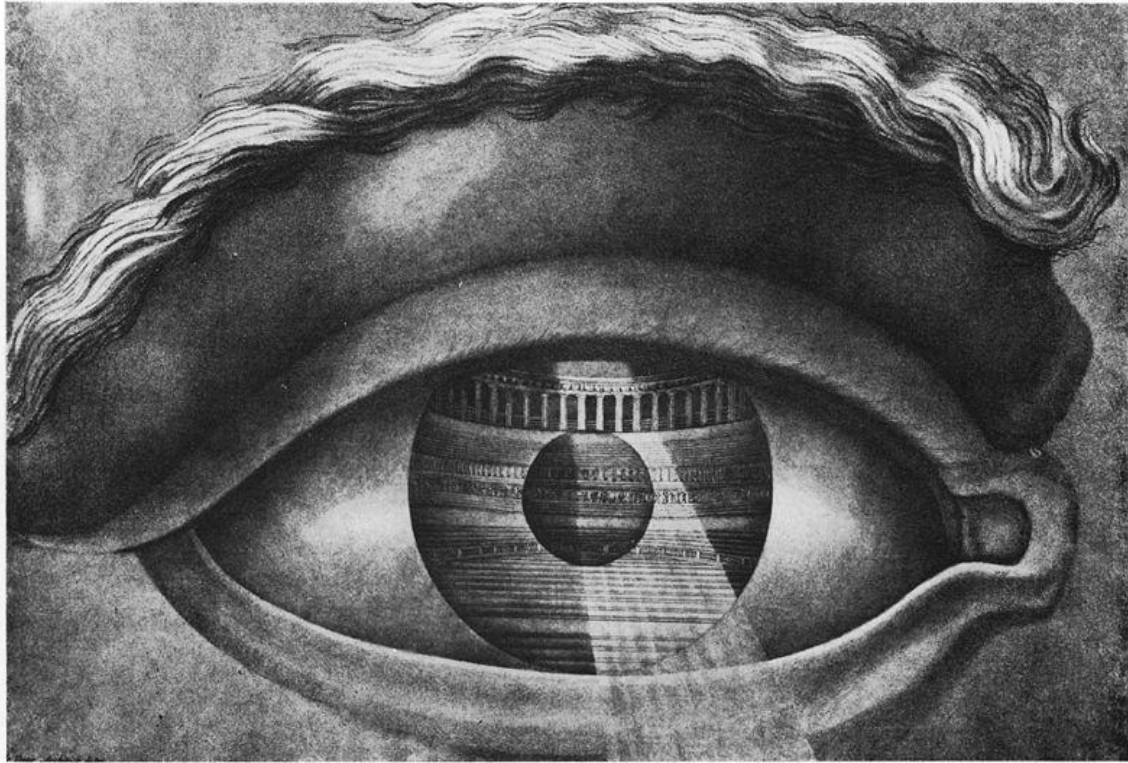
Independently of the new demands of the real, one discerns now as at that epoch a new idealism. It appears in L'architecture of Ledoux as in the writings of Le Corbusier, in the project for the Ideal City as in the Cite Mondiale. It is in the idealism, founded on the new ideas of ethics and law, in which is, in the end, rooted, it seems to us, before 1800 even as today, the renewal of architecture."¹²

It is interesting and symptomatic that Kaufmann never criticizes Ledoux for his distinctly anthropocentric positioning of man, what he displays in his projects in more than an obvious way. We can find the explicit example of such understanding of man in relation to architecture in Ledoux's project for the theater of Besancon, where he is not satisfied with mere rendering of the perspective of the building, but goes further and draws the eye of the member of the audience reflecting the interior of the theatre (fig.1.7). In this way he imposes a hierarchical order and unambiguously emphasizes of who is the subject and the main protagonist. And for Kaufman, that has not changed since the period of neoclassicism. The comfort of the beholder is not threatened in any way.

Another influential historian, Colin Rowe, also develops a model of modern architectural history that is not starting with *tabula rasa*, but has formal precedents in history. Rowe understands modernism as the visual index of spiritual crisis, in a same manner as the Mannerism four centuries before. He analyses Palladio, Michelangelo, and Vignola and sees them as the founders of something that culminates with Corbusier and Mies. Anthony Vidler indicates this relation: "The center of 'Mannerism and Modern Architecture', tough, is an elaborate but succinct reformulation of the history of architecture since the Renaissance in terms that pit the rationalism of structure and the moral ethic of the program against the visual qualities of the eclectic and the picturesque, a tension traced through to the modern movement, split between the demands of reason

¹² Emil Kaufmann, *Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier: Ursprung und Entwicklung der autonomen Architektur*, from Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism*, (Cambridge: The Mit Press, 2008), pp. 40-41

and the satisfaction of the eye. Rowe finds this entire development, together with its tensions, to culminate in Le Corbusier.”¹³



1.7 Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, Theater of Besançon, c. 1800

In his studies Rowe compares Palladio and Corbusier showing that both are based on the belief that right proportions may be expressed in mathematical terms. In both of these architects he finds strong tendency toward ‘Ideal’ and ‘Utopia,’¹⁴ categories that are essentially humanists. For him, the answer to a contemporary practice is the historical and modernist ‘mannerism’ of the neo-Palladian Corbusier. While having strong admiration and respect toward Corbusier, on the other hand, Rowe mocks the essential aspirations and intentions of modernism. Referring to the modernist’s attempt to deprive

¹³ Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism*, (Cambridge: The Mit Press, 2008), p. 94

¹⁴ At the end of his life Palladio writes a book *The Four Books of Architecture*, where he presents his projects, not as how they are built, but how they should have been built. He presents their ‘ideal’ state. In that way, Palladio makes clear distinction between the real and utopian, and even gives certain supremacy to the utopian over the real.

the architectural object of the meaning, he quite ironically remarks: “When, in late 1940s, modern architecture became established and institutionalized, necessarily, it lost something of its original meaning. Meaning, of course, it had never been supposed to possess.”¹⁵ For him architecture always has to possess meaning; it always has to represent. Rowe has fragile tolerance for modern architecture and, for that matter, much of what can be called the modernist thought. Therefore, he imposes seeing Le Corbusier as a late humanist architect – and that image is well received and widely propagated in later period. We had to wait for Peter Eisenman to offer a quite different, non-humanist understanding of Corbusier, and to analyze his, we might say ‘manifesto’, Maison Dom-ino, not in the context of history, but as a self-referential sign.¹⁶

This ambiguous relation to modern architecture is inherent to another famous historian of architecture, Manfredo Tafuri. He also argues that modern architecture is a part of logical narrative deeply rooted in humanist perception of the world. For him the avant-garde tradition is at least six centuries old. In his book *Theories and History of Architecture* he claims: “It would be better to trace the process of development synthetically, returning to its true origin: to the very revolution of modern art in the work of the Tuscan humanists of the fifteenth century.”¹⁷ As the main protagonist of the process that started with Renaissance he indicates Brunelleschi and Alberti. They made the real break with the medieval past in order to construct ‘linguistic code and symbolic system’.

In a similar way as Rowe, Tafuri finds that the representation is something immanent to architecture, and therefore to modern architecture as well, and that it cannot be easily disputed. Tafuri sees modernism as the displacement of referentiality, rather than the loss. He accuses so-called radical or avant-garde experiments to invent “other” architectures, which had turned so quickly into regressive utopias or new forms of ideology. According to him true modernists – Corbusier, Mies and others – do not reject ‘referent’, but just ‘displace’ it. He compares Benjamin’s ‘decline of the aura’ with ‘anguish of the referent’

¹⁵ Colin Rowe, ‘Introduction to *Five Architects*’, from K. Michael Hays, *Architecture Theory Since 1968*, (Cambridge: The Mit Press, 2000), p. 74

¹⁶ See Peter Eisenman’s essay *Aspects of Modernism*

¹⁷ Manfredo Tafuri, *Teorie e storia dell’architettura*, from Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism*, (Cambridge: The Mit Press, 2008), p. 171

in the emergence of abstract art, arguing that “*ward off anguish by absorbing its causes*”¹⁸ cannot bring a form of liberation, and architecture cannot be reduced to that. Although perhaps most radical and complex theoretician of modern architecture, Tafuri essentially does not see modernism out of frames of humanism, and in that sense he is in congruence with above mentioned historians, which altogether create certain interpretation and image of modern architecture.

It is important to mention that these historians, while strongly criticizing the radicalism and certain concepts in program of modernism, at the same time never seriously dispute greatness of the first masters. Instead of questioning them, if nothing, for being the main protagonists of modern architecture, they rather admired and glorified them, arguing that they are, before all, humanists. A symbolic example of this agenda is one of the later texts of Reyner Banham on Mies, named *The Master of Humane Architecture*, where the word ‘humane’ clearly stands for the word ‘modern’.¹⁹ The play of words, in a witty but accurate way, depicts the diversion that this generation of historians advocated.

This clear and unambiguous positioning of modern architecture within narrative of humanism opens the door for a heavy fire of criticism, in the second part of the twentieth century. What follows is a series of almost coordinated attacks from old and some new generations of theoreticians and critics, who feel that modernism failed to accomplish what they understood as its main objective and mission – and, for that matter, it has to be radically changed, or substituted with something new. Nikolaus Pevsner proposes ‘the return of historicism’ and ‘picturesque’ as the solution, Manfredo Tafuri ‘hypermodernism’, Charles Jenks ‘postmodernism’. What is very important here is that all of them attack from the position of humanism. They demand “a new richness and differentiation of character, the pursuit of differences rather than sameness, the re-emergence of monumentality, the cultivation of idiosyncrasy and the development of

¹⁸ Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999), p.131

¹⁹ Reyner Banham, ‘The Master of Humane Architecture’, in catalog for exhibition *Mies van der Rohe: Architect as Educator*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp.13-16

those regional dissimilarities that people have always taken a pride in.²⁰ What they actually demand is the humanizing of architecture. For them, the abstract language of international modernism has failed to gain popular acceptance, and is essentially antihumanist.

It is from this very position that the first generation of modern masters is criticized by Team X. Aldo Van Eyck, together with Alison and Peter Smithson, confronts Le Corbusier, arguing that man cannot identify himself with abstraction, and that architecture has to be more in accordance with human perception and human scale. Architecture has to seek more direct contact with human aspirations. Man has to understand the space that surrounds him, and he has to feel more comfortable in it. In that sense they criticize modernism as not being functional enough; it does not serve man enough.

Denise Scot Brown and Robert Venturi come with even more critical approach. They argue that the pure forms, simplicity, and straight lines of modern architecture are deprived of life. Architecture should be more vivid, complex, and communicate with man in much more direct way. It should amuse, even entertain him. For them modernism is bore. “Blatant simplification means bland architecture. Less is bore.”²¹ Scott Brown and Venturi also, with certain dose of irony, attack modern architects for their inconsistency in ambition to nullify all meaning. They, very often, point out that lack of references from history in works of first modernists is widely compensated with references from ‘industrial vocabulary’. One ornament is exchanged for another. “Early Modern architects appropriated an existing and conventional industrial vocabulary without much adaptation. Le Corbusier loved grain elevators and steam ships; the Bauhaus looked like a factory;

²⁰ J.M.Richards, Nikolaus Pevsner, Osbert Lancaster, and Hubert de CroninHastings, editorial, ‘Architectural Review 101, no. 601’, from Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism*, (Cambridge: The Mit Press, 2008), p. 84

²¹ Rober Venturi, ‘Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture’, from Kate Nesbitt, *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Antology of Architectural Theory 1965 – 1995*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), p. 75

Mies refined the details of American steel factories for concrete buildings.”²² What is interesting here is that Venturi and Brown do not criticize modern architecture for the existence of meaning or referentiality as such – even though abstraction should exclude every meaning by default – but rather that there is less meaning than it should be, and that this meaning that they use is rather naïve, irrelevant, senseless, weak, and in any case boring. Instead they ask for a wider and more open use of the old, even clichés as in Pop Art, in order to achieve new meanings. Only then architecture will be more connected with human. And in that sense Venturi always considered himself to be a mannerist architect.

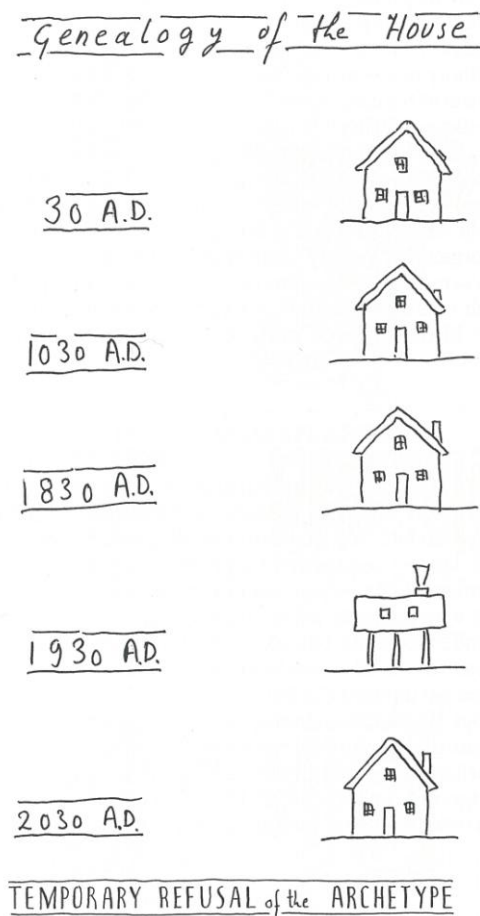
Scott Brown and Venturi made a shift from space, as the primary substance of architecture, to the sign. In that way they neglected the program and emphasized the visual, which is so well accepted in later postmodern architecture. From that point of perspective Charles Jencks writes, a very influential book in that time, *Modern Movements in Architecture* where he summarizes all architectural tendencies in the twentieth century. In his diagram *Evolutionary Tree 1920-70*, from that book, more than two thirds of listed categories are visual categories and not programmatic.²³ In that climate of revival of ornament and clear appeals to the authority of historical architecture comes Venice Biennale in 1980, directed by Paolo Portoghesi, where postmodernism reaches its peak, and firmly establishes itself as the predominant style in architecture. With stress on the visual, communication through signs, constant play of true and false, and compulsion to quote, postmodernism depicts itself far more flamboyant and radical than Pevsner ever imagined his ‘new historicism’. Nothing could be more in opposition with esthetics of pure and rational forms of the first modernists.

This attack on the essence of modernism, and almost aggressive endeavor to put architecture once again in the position of the vehicle for human aspirations, showed that the idea of humanism is more rooted in the consciousness and perception than early modernists could ever predicted. Postmodernist criticism advocated the belief in never

²² Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, ‘A Significance for A&P Parking Lots or Learning from Las Vegas’, from Kate Nesbitt, *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Antology of Architectural Theory 1965 – 1995*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), pp. 310-311

²³ Charles Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture*, (New York: Anchor Press, 1973), p. 28

ending humanism. It is led by the idea that modernism is just an unpleasant period of deviation that has to be ended as soon as possible. For theoreticians as Leon Krier and others, it is nothing more than a ‘temporary refusal of archetypes’ (fig. 1.8).²⁴ From this position, where the highest imperative is to be a humane, it is quite natural and logical to criticize ostensibly antihuman character of modern architecture: for, if it is a part of humanist tradition, why then it is not humane?



1.8 Leon Krier, from *Architecture: Choice or Fate*, 1997

This dramatic misreading of true importance and comprehensiveness of a venture that architecture took at the beginning of the twentieth century brought many distortions and confusion into discipline, but more importantly, it significantly initiated a radical rethinking and reexamination of fundamental principles and motives within modernism

²⁴ Leon Krier, *Architectura – volba nebo osud*, (Praha: Academia, 2001), p. 72

itself. The whole range of historians and theoreticians (some of which are mentioned above) who form something that we can call postmodernist criticism, forced modernism to confront its dual character, and redefine itself so that it would be able to construct the new paradigm for the new age. The 'alien' in the body of modern architecture, that was stronger than ever, had to be rejected, in order to gain credible and cogent position in confrontation with this criticism. Architecture finally had to face its demons from the past, and cease to be the last fortification and guardian of the flame of humanism.

In this light I would like to mention one project that, without a flow, confronts in every aspect these newly emerged tasks, and courageously stands as the true bastion of modernism – it is the well known, and in a way controversial Le Corbusier's chapel Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp. This project, due to its ambiguous character that refuses to be categorized under any of previously established rules, is widely misunderstood and accepted mainly with reserves and not without suspicions in almost all eminent architectural circles at the time. From the very start, Notre Dame du Haut brought numerous polemics and interpretations that tried to define and position this project in relation with current architectural scene. They saw this as the announcement of post-Purism; demise of rationalism; symbiotic relationship between art and architecture (whatever that means!); translation of poetic elements into the architectural oeuvre; formal representation of irrationality of religious and spiritual realms; influence of whitewashed tradition of Mediterranean vernacular and folkloric architecture; crab shell, hands in pray, bunker with gun-openings, airplane wings, dams, boat, bird, hat... The interpretations are many, but all with a common assumption that this represents Le Corbusier's abandonment of principles of high modernism, and the shift to referentiality and a narrative with flamboyant play of meanings.

But, it is quite peculiar that this cheerful small chapel, nothing in a manner of rigid and sterile box-like forms, initiated a strong and bitter criticism from the very critics that propagated desertion from those 'boxes'. One of such critics is Nikolaus Pevsner, who sees Ronchamp as undermining the fundamental principles of the modern movement, and labels it as the 'new irrationalism'; a building whose exterior 'does not convey a sense of

confidence in their well-functioning.²⁵ Another critic, Charles Jencks, accuses Le Corbusier of reducing the potential of architecture after the II World War and that his aesthetic considered architecture to be sculpture in plastic means.²⁶ James Stirling goes even further and disdains Ronchamp as having little to appeal to the intellect, stimuli or analytical context, and rests only upon visual appeal. Although he admits that it is a masterpiece, he is very critical of whether the project contributes to the progression of modern architecture or whether it is simply a ‘mannerized’ piece of what he terms ‘conscience imperfectionism’.²⁷ For Stirling, Ronchamp remains a huge enigma.

All this misreading, criticism, undervaluation, and negligence of this project from the side of postmodernists certainly cannot be a coincidence. In a way, they all infallibly felt that this small chapel actually represents a real danger and fundamentally undermines all their endeavors. What I will argue is that Notre Dame du Haut is *par excellence* heroic revival and reinvention of true modernism. What Le Corbusier managed to accomplish is to once again – in a way he already did some 40 years before – confront man with his most inner fears of the unpredictable and uncertain future, and to challenge his ability to reconsider himself and his position in relation to the objects that surround him.

At the very first glance of the chapel, after climbing a steep track to the top of the hill, we experience a sudden encounter with an unnatural configuration of elements that put us in a state of discomposure that remains long after we leave the village of Ronchamp. While standing before Notre Dame du Haut we do not know what to do with this building. It is impossible to determine in what way this forms communicate with us; what are they telling? And what is the meaning of all this? We feel as if we are listening to the language that we never heard before. Nothing there is like the churches that we used to see and from which we know what to expect. Nothing is obvious in this building, nothing certain. We find ourselves confused and unable to understand what is expected from us. Should I approach the building? Or should I circle around it? Is this the back or the front? Where is the entrance? Or is there any entrance at all? The four façades (fig 1.9), each

²⁵ Nikolaus Pevsner, ‘Pevsner on Art and Architecture: The Radio Talks’, from Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism*, (Cambridge: The Mit Press, 2008), p. 115

²⁶ Charles Jencks, *Le Corbusier and the Tragic View of Architecture*, (London: Allen Lane, 1975), p. 137

²⁷ James Stirling, *Ronchamp: Le Corbusier’s Chapel and the Crisis of Rationalism*, 1956

entirely different from the other, are metamorphosing in the least expected way and greatly contribute to the obscurity of the whole. This prevents us to establish the minimum of comprehension, even in regard to the most simple matters – such as, is there a roof or not; whether it is a compact solid or fragmented; etc. – constantly controverting each our conclusion. Most importantly, we are unable to determine this object in the relation to our body. How do I use this building; how do I consume it?



1.9 Le Corbusier, Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp, 1955, façade: east, north, west, south

What we realize is that our hitherto experience is not helpful to us at all, and that there is no firm ground on which we can stand, or a familiar sign that we can rely on. We feel disorientated and lost. Confronted with this entirely different world, which is not made according to us, according to our rules and our measures, we are in fact being dislocated from our comfort habitat to one utterly alien and unknown territory. With Ronchamp Le Corbusier managed to escape from everything known; from everything that is distorted and deprived by man.

In the book/manifest *Towards a New Architecture* Le Corbusier bitterly claimed: “Architecture to-day is no longer conscious of its own beginnings.”²⁸ In his previous canonical project, Villa Savoy, Le Corbusier returned to the stilt-house of the Neolithic age. But now, he realized that this is not enough. With Notre Dame du Haut he goes even further, up to the caves of the upper Paleolithic age. According to him, “a first proof of existence is a space that we occupied”²⁹, and a first known occupation of space by man are those caves. Only with this return to the most primitive condition of architecture, it is possible to experience the true *tabula rasa* – the condition without the traditional narrative of man and without the sense of conformity and functionalism in humanist terms. “No caveman ever set out to find a two-bedroom cave.”³⁰

There is another, very important and quite obscure, aspect of this chapel that I would like to mention. The whole building is designed and made according to the principles and rules of well known Le Corbusier’s Modulor. This tool, which stands for harmonic proportions of human body, is embedded in every bit of the chapel. Each ostensible randomness or irregularity is a product of tendentious implementation of numerous variations of Modulor. All this foolish dance of windows and openings in the walls; all this ‘magnificent play of masses brought together in light’, contains in itself the proportion that is coded by one single key. This is quite obvious in Le Corbusier’s sketches and drawings, but the visitor of the chapel cannot find that key anywhere. Its presence remains hidden from the eyes of the spectator; it is invisible. And while the use of the Modulor in the process of design can be justified in Corbusier’s residential projects, such as Unité d’Habitation or the convent Sainte-Marie de La Tourette, in Ronchamp it has no practical or any other use, whatsoever. We could say that its main ambition is to be present and absent at the same time; to be a ‘not present presence’. And here we see Modulor in its purest essence – it is the code unknown. It appears that architecture of Notre Dame du Haut is not designed for man, but rather haunted by him,

²⁸ Le Corbusier, *Ka pravoj arhitekturi*, (Beograd: Gradjevinska knjiga, 1999), p. 8, my translation

²⁹ Le Corbusier, *Modulor*, (Niksic: Jesen, 2002), p. 25, my translation

³⁰ Jeffery Kipins, ‘Star Wars III: The Bettle in the Center of the Universe’, from *Investigations in Architecture / Eisenman Studios at the GSD: 1983–85*, (Cambridge: Harvard Graduate School of Design, 1986), p. 46

in a similar way as the caves of Altamira or Chauvet Cave. Building treats man not as its host but as a specter – a ghost from long forgotten past, or even yet unseen future.

We can see here, quite clear, that Le Corbusier displaces subject from its central position of the master of being and puts him in a much more uncertain and obscure place. Forms, with no meaning and no narrative behind them, turn into self-referential objects that exist beyond commonly accepted frames of perceptions. Ronchamp is the project that more than any other explores the limits of the independence of the object from the subject. In this way Le Corbusier makes a definite discontinuation with humanism, and once again develops the mechanism that accommodates opportunities for the valorization of the disappearing individual in the face of the unimaginable future. The 'alien' in the body of modernism is finally rejected. Ronchamp puts architecture out of the humanist discourse, and represents the true embodiment of the new metaphysics.

Modern architecture, reduced by the historians and critics to the formal set of rules bound by the conventions of style, is once again liberated. What is generally considered as Le Corbusier's irrational aberration and betrayal of the ideals that he alone inaugurated some 40 years earlier, is actually a heroic escape from the chains of *style* which is recklessly imposed. All those straight lines, right angles, order, regularity, primal shapes, were just means in the function of one resolute search for a way of correspondence with demands of the new age. When these means became too narrow and limiting, they had to be enriched and expanded. Le Corbusier revealed a whole new field of possibilities and potential that enabled architecture to step into the world that was previously unreachable and forbidden.

After Ronchamp, modernism can no longer be codified as a *style*. It is firmly established as a whole new paradigm, in which the comfort is no longer the ultimate holy goal, and where one simple gaze in the mirror may reflect an object which is not that familiar, and certainly is not as clear and close as we used to see.

2. Utopia vs. Delirium

“It seems that utopias are much more easily achieved than we once thought. Today we are faced with a different and more agonizing question: How do we prevent them from being finally achieved? ... Utopias can be achieved. Life moves on towards utopia. And perhaps a new age is beginning, an age when intellectuals and other educated people will dream up a way of avoiding utopias, and returning to a society that is not utopian, with less ‘perfection’ and more freedom.”¹ – Nikolai Berdyaev

¹ Nikolai Berdyaev, 'Freedom and the Spirit' (1928), quoted from Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, (London: Longman, 1991), p. 214

2.1. Soaring Ambitions

“Let us begin and create in idea a city.” – Plato, *Republic*

Here I would like to return, once more, to duality or ‘double coded identity’ of modern architecture at the beginning of the twentieth century, and try to examine how it manifests, even more clearly, in the large scale projects, that we often refer to as utopian avant-garde. These urban projects, better than any other, render the confused and contradictory character of architecture, which is unable to break loose from the humanist discourse and set an appropriate framework of the discipline that would be able to meet all predicaments of the new age.

At the end of the 19th century the dynamite of the steam engine burst asunder all conventional notions of the city. For the first time since the ancient period the city with more than one million inhabitants emerges, but unfortunately, with its illogical structure, to a great extent incomparable with well organized ancient cities. Over-measured migration of people from the country to the city results in wild accumulation of inhabitants. Civic milieu mutates in unbearable congestion with no basic needs for living. Industrialization demands working power, but it cannot provide them home. A man is forced to make a radical turn in understanding and planning of his environment.

Numerous studies that mainly propagate abandonment of the old cities and building of the new ones spread all over Europe. One of the first solutions comes from Artur Soria y Mate with *Linear city (La Ciudad Lineal)* from 1882, and Ebenezer Howard with *The Garden City* from 1898. These projects offer a model of decentralized city with limited growth of inhabitants, and with the accent on transport and green areas in urban zones. After them comes Tony Granier with his *Industrial City (Une cité industrielle)*, where he developed the zoning concept, dividing the city into four main functions: work, housing, health, leisure. He clearly separates the industrial area from the rest of the city, and tries to develop conditions for exercise, health, and physical well-being of inhabitants, leaving large public area for sports and spectacles in his city.

In the first years after the World War I, several groups of artists in Germany are forming the movements with strong and radical concepts. One of the firsts, Bruno Taut, presents his ideas in theoretical works – at the beginning in very utopian *The Dissolution of the City (Die Auflosung der Stadte)*, and later in more realistic *The City Crown (Die Stadtkrone)*. To him, the cities, that ‘great spiders’, are dead. The ultimate destination of the dissolution of the city would be the idyll of the self-contained neighborhood.

Without any doubt the Soviet Union, or Moscow to be exact, gives the most fertile soil for uprising of the avant-garde in between-war period. Under the euphoria of the recently ended revolution, this area is becoming the true juncture of talents and new ideas. Numerous art schools are being founded. The artists try to impose very skillfully their utopian vision of an ideal world as the ultimate goal of newly-founded state. One of the characteristics of the Soviet architecture from its earliest days was ingenious urban planning. A whole series of projects follows at that time: Anton Lavinsky’s *City on Springs* from 1921, Lazar Khidekel’s *City on Columns* from 1925 (made by the principles of Malevich’s Suprematism), Moisei Ginzburg’s *Green City* from 1930, etc. This period in Russia is marked by the big conflict between urbanists and deurbanists. Both of these groups proclaim their theories as dogmas. According to the urbanists the city is a net of huge buildings for collective living with public services. On the other hand, following the opinion of deurbanists the problem is based on making ‘the communes of dwelling houses’ – light prefabricated buildings, scattered in space.

Coming on the scene at the end of twenties, Ivan Ilich Leonidov presents the unique episode in the history of the modern architecture. By its originality, not only in formal expression, but also in philosophy on which he bases that expression, he brings to question all adopted methods and ideas of urban planning. His concept of urban structure is in strong contrast with models inherited from the past. At the same time he never pops into the later exaggeration of urbanists and deurbanists. Leonidov proposes a model of the linear city that is, although with urban character, at the same time the city in green, and in harmony with its natural surroundings. That is the project for *Magnitogorsk – Socialist City*, from 1930. In this solution there are no tendencies to settle people in vast formicaries. His city is ‘the city of man’, the man for whom the collectivism is a natural choice.

Although, all these projects are innovative and avant-garde in its solutions and formal expression, and with a strong intention to be absolute modern and new, all of them are essentially based on one quite old idea of an ideal city. This idea is first introduced by Plato in his *Republic*, around 380 BC. Plato offers a possible strategy for thinking, for a dialectical construction of models and their intellectual testing. The quest for an ideal city, based on this Plato’s model, becomes highly important in Renaissance, starting with Filarete, Alberti, Leonardo and others, and later continuing with Thomas More and Tommaso Camponella,¹ up to the famous project of Claude-Nicolas Ledoux.

The urban projects from the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century are the last chapter of the narrative that started with Plato. And while they advocate a different norms and different concepts of human living, all projects in that narrative are based on one mutual utopian premise. They are all led by a strong belief that social reforms and most profound ideas of social justice could be achieved by city planning. The utopian cities of the avant-garde offer the architecture as a solution to political problems and economic crises. They are a social thought in three dimensions. These new cities are carefully composed spatial organizations that search for the ideal conditions for man – the conditions that would perfectly accommodate his needs and serve his commodity. In that sense they are, without any doubt, the integral part of the

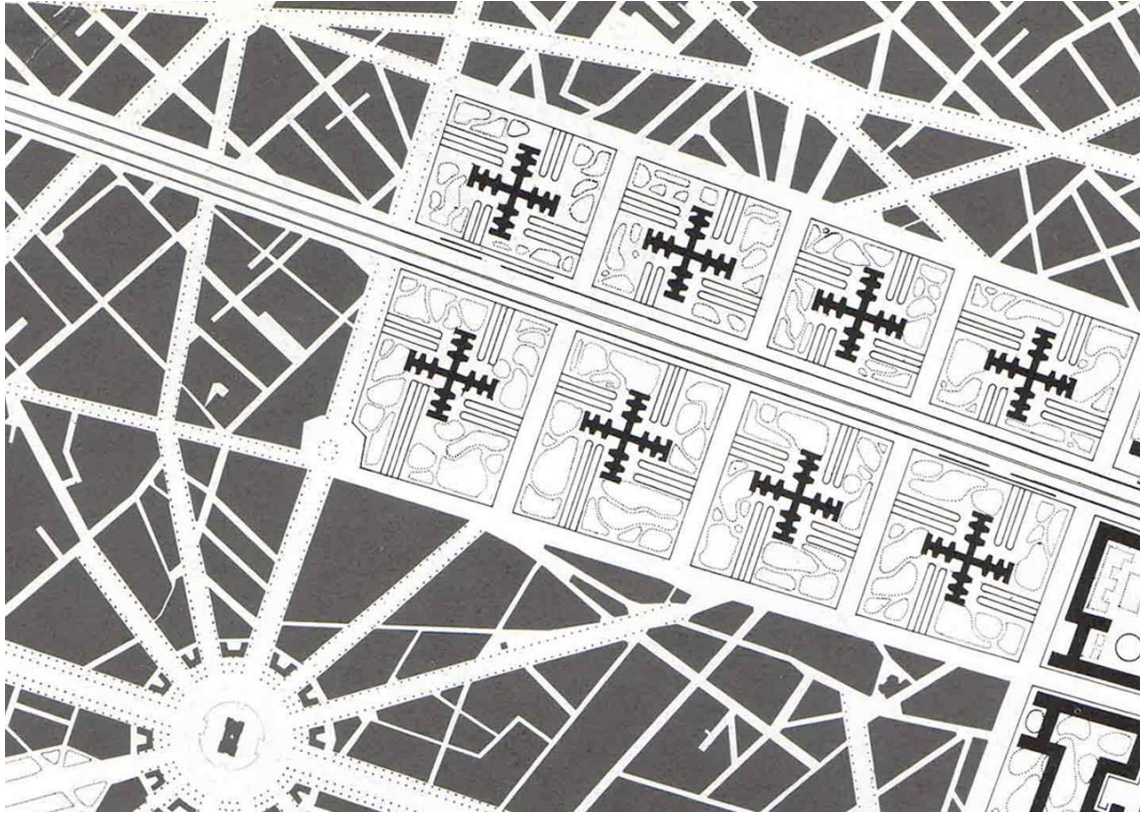
¹¹ Thomas More, *Utopia* (1516); Tommaso Camponella, *The City of the Sun* (1602)

metaphysics of humanism. Heaving said that, at the same time, almost each of these projects contains in itself a certain immanent mechanisms that fundamentally contradict humanist nature and, paradoxically and maybe even unintentionally, dislocates these projects out of previously defined perspective.

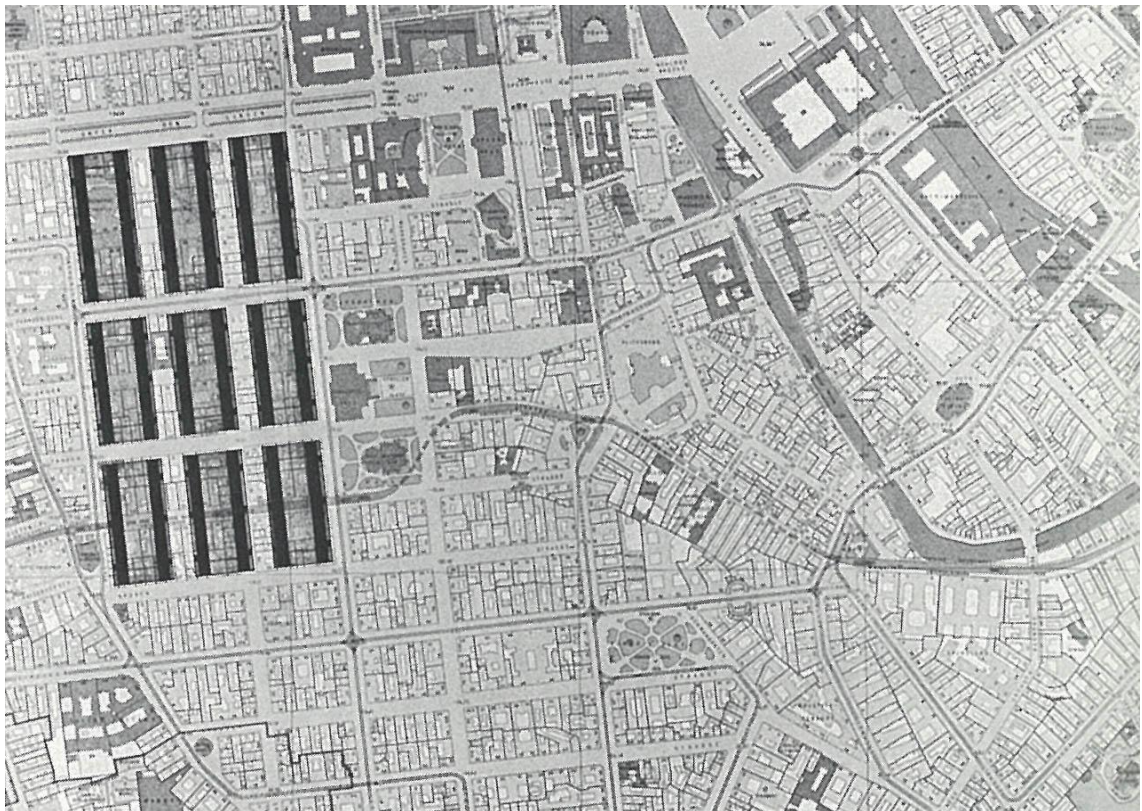
As a perfect example of this ambiguous and contradictory character of the urban concepts of avant-garde I will take a closer look into the two, by all means, extraordinary and highly controversial projects that had a dramatic impact on whole twentieth century. The first one is Le Corbusier's *Plan 'Voisin'*, from 1925 (fig. 2.1), and the other is Ludwig Hilberseimer's *Vorschlag zur City-Bebauung*, from 1928 (fig. 2.2). There are a lot of similarities in approach, philosophy and strategy between Le Corbusier and Hilberseimer, and that is most obvious in comparison of these two urban planes. Both projects emanate from previously developed plans for a gigantic cities – Le Corbusier's *Contemporary City for Three Million Inhabitants (Ville contemporaine pour trois millions d'habitants)* of 1922, and Hilberseimer's *Highrise City (Hochhausstadt)* of 1924 – that are intend to be built on a clear site, without any limitations and independent of historical context or existing conditions. *Plan 'Voisin'* and *Vorschlag zur City-Bebauung* are just parts, almost random fragments, of these utopian metropolises, thrown into the center of two most congested and densest cities of the time: Paris and Berlin.

Plan 'Voisin' proposes a total demolition of a frowzy business quarter, with the area of more than five square kilometers on the right bank of Seine, in the heart of Paris. At that place it is meant to be built 28 'cartesian' skyscrapers (*commercial city*) and blocks of dwellings with 'set-backs' (*residential city*), surrounded with vast green areas and gardens, and bisected by a 'speedway'. The plan accomplishes Le Corbusier's four basic principles for a future city-planning, promoted in the report made to the Town Planning Congress of Strasbourg in 1923: to de-congest the centers of cities, to increase the density of the centers of cities, to increase the means whereby traffic can circulate, to increase the green and open spaces.²

² Le Corbusier, *The City of To-Morrow and Its Planning*, (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2000), p. 100



2.1 Le Corbusier, *Plan 'Voisin'*, 1925, (fragment)



2.2 Ludwig Hilberseimer, *Vorschlag zur City-Bebauung*, 1928

In a similar way as Le Corbusier in Paris, Hilberseimer with his *Vorschlag zur City-Bebauung* makes a frontal attack on the most important district in Berlin, the area between Tiergarten and Museumsinsel. In his proposal Hilberseimer relates the residential and commercial functions by superimposing apartment slabs on commercial volumes in a 600 meter by 100 meter city blocks and coordinating the pedestrian and vehicular traffic specific to each in separate levels. What is interesting is that Hilberseimer starts from the single room as the constituent element of habitation, and then turns it into the block which in its endless repetition forms a city. The result is 18 residential slabs on the top of 3 giant commercial blocks that create a monolithic monotony, without any possibility of irregularity, and without a single tree or grassy area. Hilberseimer's regardless repetitions of basic unite promotes the room into the decisive factor of urban configuration.

Both these projects essentially belong to the same tradition and share the same 'weltanschauung'. Their differences are not fundamental, but rather technical.³ The aim of all their endeavors is to overcome the uncontrolled contingency of existing condition that promise nothing but uncertain future, and to create environment that will give a firm ground, a sense of security, reliability and joy, as well as satisfaction of all basic material needs. "A form of town planning which preoccupied itself with our happiness or our misery and which attempted to create happiness and expel misery would be a noble service in this age of confusion."⁴ The final goal is to provide comfort for man in every possible way. For Le Corbusier "the human scale must always be the ultimate factor in mind of the architect who has to design the immense blocks of buildings which are necessitated by the practical and financial considerations. There must never come a time when people can be bored in our city."⁵ He claims that the old cities are not just dysfunctional but also, and maybe even more importantly, a "depressing elements in our lives."⁶ Hilberseimer goes even further and, in his writings, he much more explicitly propagates anthropocentric perception of reality: "Plan we must, not only economically,

³ Hilberseimer criticizes Le Corbusier's project only for mistake in calculation of possible density of the residential areas and inadequate traffic solution.

⁴ Le Corbusier, *The City of To-Morrow and Its Planning*, (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2000), p. 59

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 238

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 240

but always and primarily for the benefit of man. We should always bear in mind that at the center of all things is man – man who creates everything and for whom everything is created. Our real problem is life itself. [...] Life has cultural as well as material aims. Planning can be one of the means for their realization.”⁷

Le Corbusier and Hilberseimer propose, “...architecture which is direct and free from all romantic reminiscences, in agreement with present daily life, not subjective and individualistic, but objective and universal... Clarity, logic, thoughtfulness will lead to unification.”⁸ But, at the same time, they deliberately maintain a high level of idealism and abstraction that practically insures that their projects will permanently stay in the realm of imagination and fantasy. It is as if they are afraid, maybe even subconsciously, that with realizations of their projects they would lose something that they cannot afford to lose, something that is an urgent necessity – the utopia itself.

This considerably corresponds with Karl Mannheim’s theory, who claims that in the conditions of no utopia – utopia as an ideal place of perfect control and order – man dramatically endangers his self-proclaimed position of the ultimate subject. “The disappearance of utopia brings about a static state of affairs in which man himself becomes no more than a thing. [...] with the relinquishment of utopias, man would lose his will to shape history, and therewith his ability to understand it.”⁹ In this way the utopia becomes the guarantee that man remains the determinate agent in the world processes.

It is clear that both architects develop and use the same formal language in endeavor to formulate their programs. Both projects, *Plan ‘Voisin’* and *Vorschlag zur City-Bebauung*, are conceived by the strict rules of geometry, regularity, right angles, straight lines, precision, calculations, statistics and measurement. They rely only on the sure paths of reason. In almost obsessive urge to escape from confusion, randomness and irrationality,

⁷ Ludwig Hilberseimer, *The New City: Principles of Planning*, (Chicago: Paul Theobald, 1944), p. 166

⁸ Ludwig Hilberseimer, ‘Berlin School of Architecture of the Twenties’, from K. Michael Hays, *Modernism and Posthumanist Subject: The Architecture of Hannes Meyer and Ludwig Hilberseimer*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), p. 255

⁹ Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, (London: Routledge, 1960), p. 236

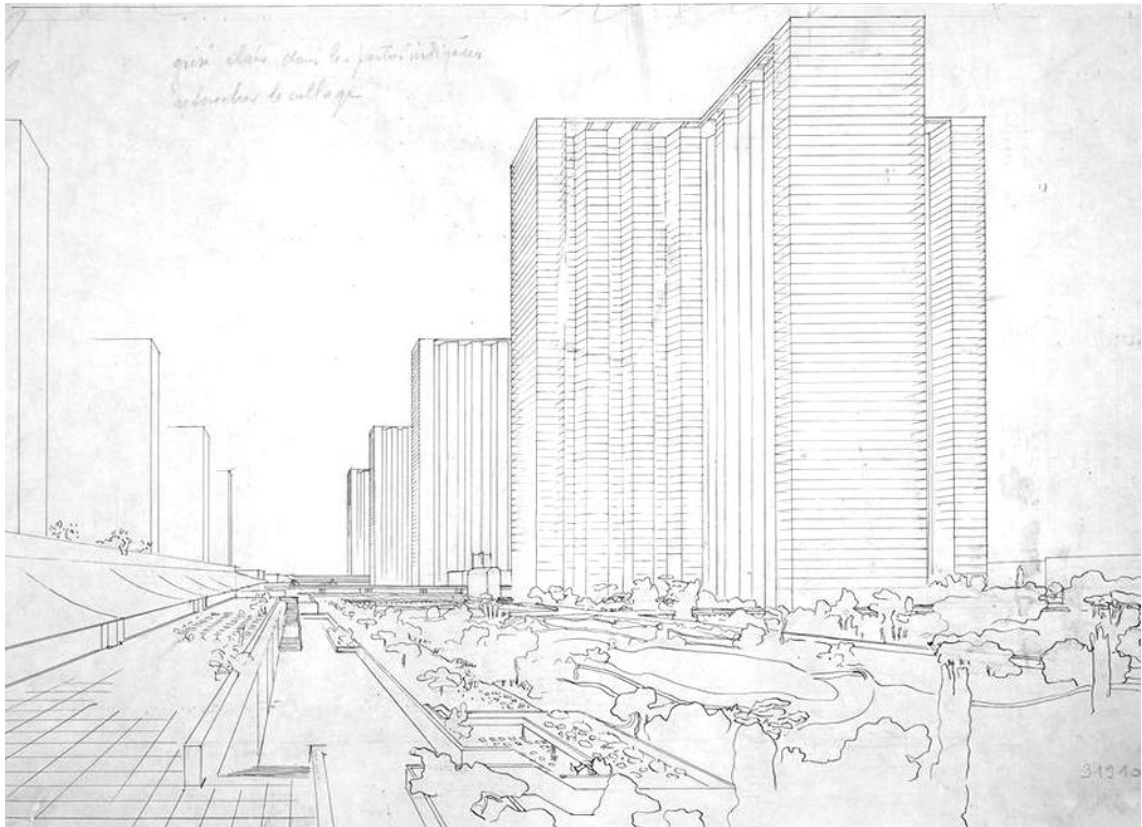
Le Corbusier and Hilberseimer use simple solid bodies – the cube, the sphere, the prism, the cylinder, the pyramid, the cone. The pure compositional elements produce formal clarity that imposes order on chaos, in the most concrete ways. And the chaos is their worst nightmare. “Chaos surrounds us, unformed, but certain to push into form, [...] chaos, the attendant of civilization that brings all manner of frustration to figural formation.”¹⁰ According to them this chaos is a ‘modern slavery’ and freedom could be attained only through order. “I built up an ordered system [...] as would replace with advantage the present chaos to which we are subjected.”¹¹

K. Michael Hays sees this exaggerated tendency towards order and unification as a kind of paranoia. In his book *Modernism and the Posthumanist Subject*, which examines Hilberseimer’s work, he writes: “what seems to structure Hilberseimer’s punctually felt urge to totalize is a kind of paranoia: a paranoia that is all too cognizant of distraction as the fundamental condition of everyday life, all too aware of a world out of control, and that consequently tries to fend off the threatening and destructive identification between the discursive formations of architecture and social reality in favor of some more affirmational construction of the same.”¹² However, what they create is not just an order and pragmatic functionality, as we could easily conclude. What we see in Le Corbusier’s and even more Hilberseimer’s perspective drawings of their urban projects (fig. 2.3 and fig 2.4) is a metropolis as a gigantic molar machine involving large-scale social, technical, and economic systems intercommunicating with architectural elements. But the endless repetition of the same cellular blocks without any climax, without any form of direction, without subjectivity, and even without any trace of error or illogicality, produces an environment that is primarily defined by the absence – the absence of self identity, the absence of closure, the absence of determinate meaning, and what is most important, the absence of subjective interiority of creator or viewer.

¹⁰ Ludwig Hilberseimer, ‘Schopfung und Entwicklung’, from K. Michael Hays, *Modernism and Posthumanist Subject: The Architecture of Hannes Meyer and Ludwig Hilberseimer*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), p. 210

¹¹ Le Corbusier, *The City of To-Morrow and Its Planning*, (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2000), p. 212

¹² K. Michael Hays, *Modernism and Posthumanist Subject: The Architecture of Hannes Meyer and Ludwig Hilberseimer*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), p. 274



2.3 Le Corbusier, *Contemporary City*, 1922



2.4 Ludwig Hilberseimer, *Hochhausstadt*, 1924

What Le Corbusier and Hilberseimer present is not a neutral context, but rather an explicit manifestation of a value judgment. Instead of a healing process, they imply an urban surgery that amputates not just urgent practical problems of the metropolis, but also the very subject that generates these problems. In order to prevent any possible error or malfunction of the system they create the environment that is deliberately deprived of human touch – a self-referential mechanism concerned only with its own objecthood.

In these two projects both architects use architecture not just in a Marxist sense, as a keen edged weapon in the class struggle¹³, but even in a more radical way: they are delineating the new position of subject and producing new categories of experience that might lead to the construction of a new consciousness. K. Michael Hays indicates two basic methods in Hilberseimer's construction of the new metropolitan subject: "First, banality, triviality, and everydayness are now the proper material for a theory of art and architectural production. This much Hilberseimer gathered from dada. A rarefied and autonomous aesthetic is no longer possible in the modern city, whether for pleasurable aloofness or for resistance; instead a practice enmeshed in the everyday lifeworld is demanded. Second, the subject itself, to the extent of its relation with the structure of the everyday, cannot be thought of as autonomous. Objectively structured like a mode of production, the subject is not so much an abstraction as a 'neutrum'. The character of the subject is given from the outside, and contradictorily."¹⁴

In this new metropolis the paternal fiction of humanist thought does no longer exist. In a same way as Joyce tells the story of one object in a course of one day – and in the case of *Ulysses* that object is a human body that happens to be named Mr. Bloom – Le Corbusier and Hilberseimer create a scenario for a movement of a human body in a large urban system. That body is practically an object, which does not have its own free will and only fulfils previously defined program. It is not just that 'the house is a machine for living in'¹⁵, but a man is also a machine; one that performs a function of living. The ideal

¹³ Both, Le Corbusier and Hilberseimer, openly inclined to the leftist and Marxist worldview.

¹⁴ K. Michael Hays, *Modernism and Posthumanist Subject: The Architecture of Hannes Meyer and Ludwig Hilberseimer*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), p. 244

¹⁵ Le Corbusier, *Ka pravoj arhitekturi*, (Beograd: Gradjevinska knjiga, 1999), p. XLV, my translation

resident of their cities is – to describe it in Antonin Artaud’s words – “a walking automaton.”¹⁶ Only in this way the mechanism is really functional and complete.

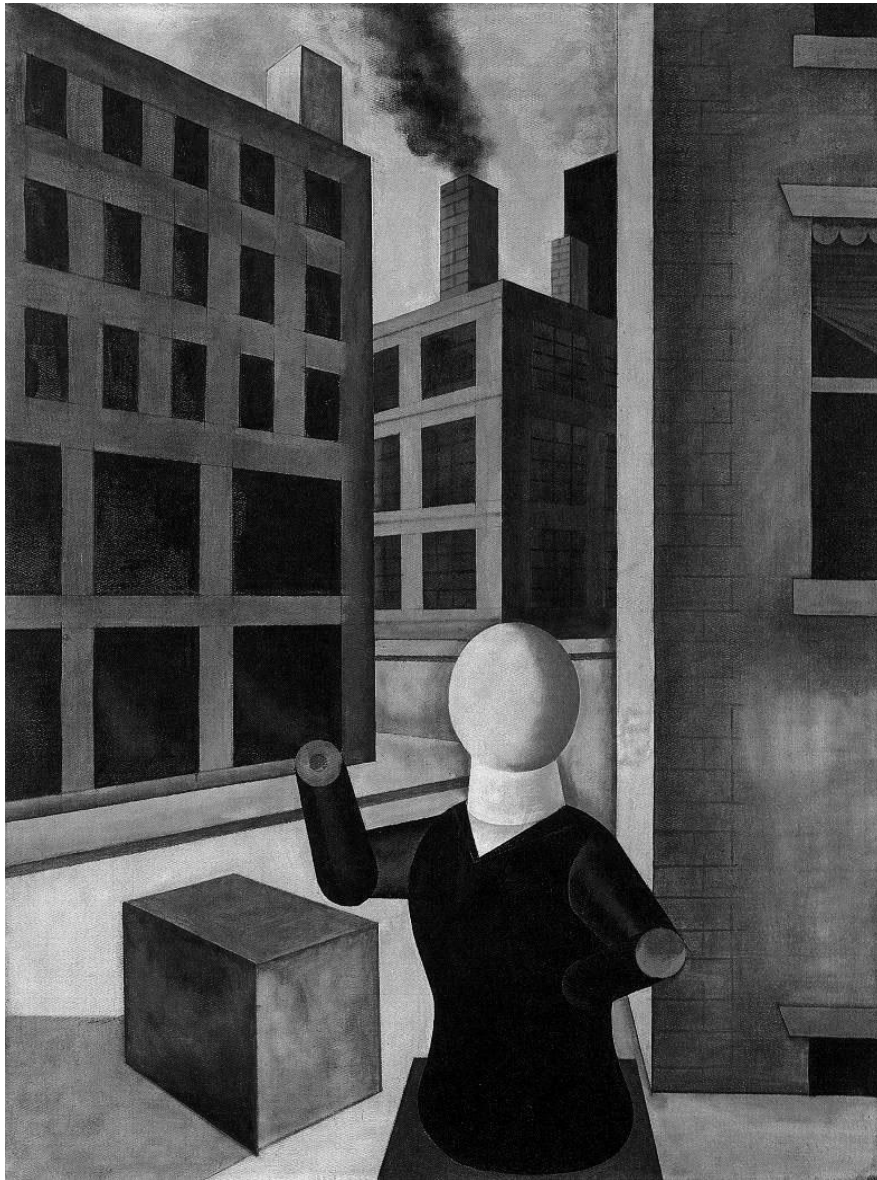
Even Hilberseimer himself, later in his life, admits that *Hochhausstadt* is, in fact, radically dehumanized urban environment: “result was more a necropolis than a metropolis, sterile landscape of asphalt and cement, inhuman in every respect.”¹⁷ There is no place for a Cartesian subject in these cities. This new metropolis constructs a condition with a zero ground of identity; a system in which each person could be a double instead of itself. It reduces a man to the most basic and the most primitive mode of existence, and inaugurates alienation as a necessity; the only possible way of dealing with reality. To put it in a Peter Sloterdijk’s words: “Alienation is simply the mode of being of Anyone.”¹⁸ The post-humanist subject that inhabits these cities is precisely that ‘Anyone’. It is just a repetition of a pattern of certain behavior. It is a faceless man, as depicted in George Grosz paintings (fig.2.5), that like a ghost mindlessly roams through the streets of the cities, and becomes a mere fragment of the quotidian metropolis experience. We could say that here a man is a ‘living dead’; a specter from the metaphysics that no longer exists.

This is what makes Le Corbusier’s and Hilberseimer’s projects truly modernists. They offer ingenious glance into an entirely new world – a world that, although provides all material necessities, does not provide one simple and ostensibly implicit thing – the home. That is an image of a new metaphysics, daringly waiting for a man to confront it.

¹⁶ In 1924 Antonin Artaud wrote: ‘I am a walking automaton’, quoted from Jean Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 2005), p.236

¹⁷ Ludwig Hilberseimer, ‘Entfaltung einer Planungsidee’, from K. Michael Hays, *Modernism and Posthumanist Subject: The Architecture of Hannes Meyer and Ludwig Hilberseimer*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1995), p. 270

¹⁸ Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 385



2.5 George Grosz, *Untitled*, 1920

2.2. How can so much ‘badness’ sometimes lead to a kind of intelligence?

“It is in such space that the pure architectural object is born, an object beyond the control of architects, which roundly repudiates the city and its uses, repudiates the interests of the collectivity and individuals and persists in its own madness. That object has no equivalent, except perhaps the arrogance of the cities of the Renaissance.”¹ – Jean Baudrillard

The projects that were discussed in the previous chapter could be put under the term ‘heroic avant-garde’ – heroic because architects daringly take the responsibility, and by entering into unknown they see the architecture as the solution of the social crisis. They disclaim the possibility of gradual improvement of the old cities and they demand a total transformation of the urban environment. Their common motto could be expressed in Le Corbusier’s well known slogan – “Architecture or revolution.”² The revolution could be avoided by inventing of a new architecture.

¹ Jean Baudrillard, *America*, (New York: Verso, 1990), p. 17

² Le Corbusier, *Ka pravoj arhitekturi*, (Beograd: Gradjevinska knjiga, 1999), p. 225, my translation

What is inherent almost for all European architects at the time is that they consistently reject the idea that the imagination of one planner must work within the existing system. They believe that the world in which they live is expired, and that it should be replaced with a new one, which is radically different and better. They are not subordinating to the reality, neither accepting the conditions of that reality, they are constructing completely new systems. This is radical criticism based on transcendent principles and it implies the solutions only from the outside. These architects' attitude toward architecture is intellectual and idealistic. Their cities are completely alternative societies, intended as a revolution in the politics and economics as well as in the architecture. They represent the triumph of order and rationality over the chaos, despair and delirium.

The vast majority of these projects were never realized. They stayed in a realm of fantasy and far away from reality. There is, however, one urban concept from the same period, which reacts on the same social conditions and it attempts to solve the same problems, but in a radically different way than the above-mentioned. And unlike the European avant-garde projects, it is very real and alive. It is a plan for New York City – or Manhattan, to be more precise. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, Manhattan becomes an incubator of the new culture of Industrial age, with the architecture as a collective experiment of metropolitan life.

It is quite paradigmatic that precisely this city is perceived by the most eminent European architects as a true embodiment of a pure enemy. New York presents everything what they stand against, and what they fear the most. Here I will once again return to Le Corbusier and Ludwing Hilberseimer, as the harshest critics of this city. For them, New York is not only the continuation of the agony of a contemporary city, but it is the ultimate stage of that agony. Hilberseimer sees Manhattan as nothing but 'disorder and chaos' (fig 2.6). He believes that the main purpose of planning is to provide a framework for life; something that acutely lacks in that city. "One wonders how life in all its ways can be maintained in such an over-congested area as Manhattan has become."³

³ Ludwing Hilberseimer, *The New City: Principles of Planning*, (Chicago: Paul Theobald, 1944), p. 157



32. DISORDER AND CHAOS.

2.6 New York, illustration from Ludwig Hilberseimer, *The New City: Principles of Planning*⁴



1923. NEW YORK

The discovery of the New World. It has been made a subject for the poet, inspiring enthusiasm and admiration. As for beauty, there is none at all. There is only confusion, chaos and upheaval. The unexpected reversal of all our ideas excites us, but beauty is concerned with quite different things; in the first place, it has order for its basis.

2.7 New York, illustration from Le Corbusier, *The City of To-Morrow and Its Planning*⁵

⁴ Ludwig Hilberseimer, *The New City: Principles of Planning*, (Chicago: Paul Theobald, 1944), p. 53

Le Corbusier is even more critical of New York, considering it a “despairing city”, even a “cataclysm.”⁶ For him, there is only ‘confusion, chaos and upheaval’ (fig. 2.7). “New York is exciting and upsetting. [...] New York is not beautiful, and if it stimulates our practical activities, it also wounds our sense of happiness.”⁷ Manhattan is “a sort of intensely active form of capital for the mad speculation of private enterprise.”⁸ Although he admits that New York has provided some inevitable means, such as the skyscraper (that noble instrument), it still is, in essence, a “barbarian city.”⁹ It still wears the clothes of pre-mechanical humanity. Le Corbusier’s obsession with Manhattan goes so far that he constantly compares it with his own projects (fig.2.8). Manhattan is always a reference of the exact opposite of what a contemporary city should be and what kind of life it should provide. The main and unforgivable problem of Manhattan is that it is not rational enough; it lacks order and harmony – and with that consequently, what is most important, it lacks freedom. According to Le Corbusier, freedom could only be achieved through order¹⁰, and only then cities will become beautiful and bring happiness.

This harsh criticism towards Manhattan indicates, in a certain way, the significance of the processes that were taking place there at the time. At the beginning of the twentieth century this island becomes the center of the turmoil, but also the laboratory of yet unprecedented explosion of creativity and imagination. Numerous inventions that are produced in that environment dramatically change not only physical image of the city, but also the man himself, his priorities, habits and affinities.

⁵ Le Corbusier, *The City of To-Morrow and Its Planning*, (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2000), p. 45

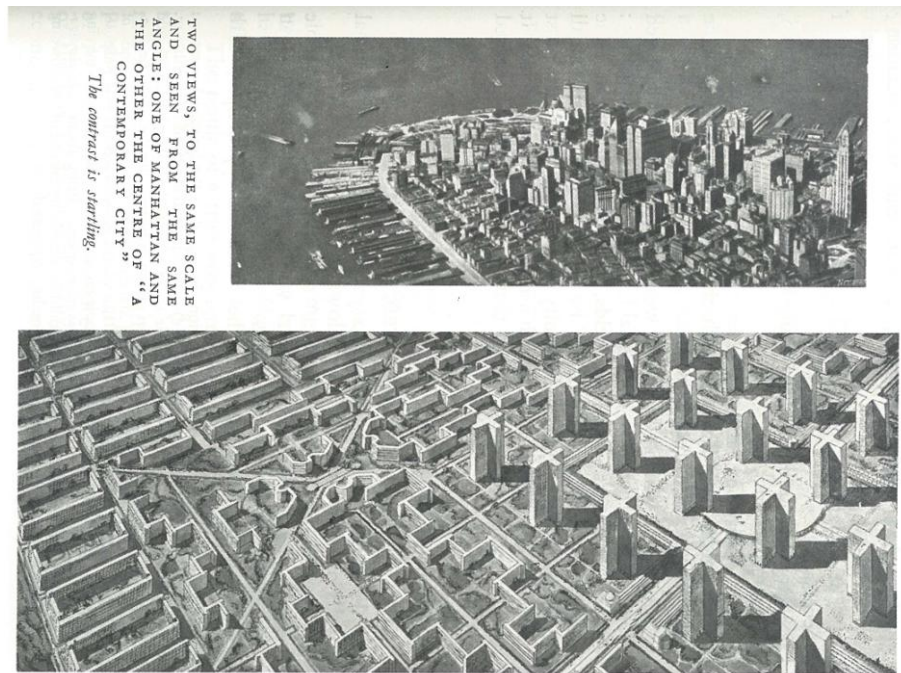
⁶ Le Corbusier, *The City of To-Morrow and Its Planning*, (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2000), p. 63

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 60

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 96

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 76

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 214



2.8 New York and Contemporary City, illustration from Le Corbusier, *The City of To-Morrow and Its Planning*¹¹

The most valuable product of this laboratory is, without any doubt, the skyscraper – the embodiment of the perfect intersection of, by that time, entirely incompatible elements: the ultimate pragmatism and the aesthetic of spectacle. The skyscraper becomes a stage for intellectual and emotional adventure that, by sequence of ingenious solutions, creates ‘the culture of congestion’ – the only possible model of life in the metropolis. This brings an entirely new mode of behavior in which, paradoxically, congestion ceases to be a negativity and flaw, and becomes a kind of a quality, when exceeds a certain limit. To put it in Jean Baudrillard words: “Why do people live in New York? [...] there is no human reason to be here, except for the sheer ecstasy of being crowded together.”¹² This condition does not offers comfort or joy, in the literal sense of the word, but provides the setting required for a readjustment and reconciliation of man’s consciousness with new-emerging reality. Walter Benjamin speaks of the congestion as a necessity of modern man – “a man who plunges into the crowd as into a reservoir of electric energy.”¹³ In crowd people are put in a “position of having to stare at one another for minutes or even hours

¹¹ Ibid., p. 173

¹² Jean Baudrillard, *America*, (New York: Verso, 1990), p. 15

¹³ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken books, 2007), p. 175

on end without exchanging a word.”¹⁴ The culture of congestion creates a mechanism of alienation that enables a man to become a faceless object, deprived of personal identity, and in the same time a part of some abstract whole which now takes the role of the subject.

But it is not the skyscraper alone that made all these radical changes in a perceiving and consuming a world of metropolis. Rem Koolhaas in his theoretical work *Delirious New York* recognizes, through very detailed analyses, the three main elements that crucially influence the development of Manhattan: grid, lobotomy and schism.¹⁵

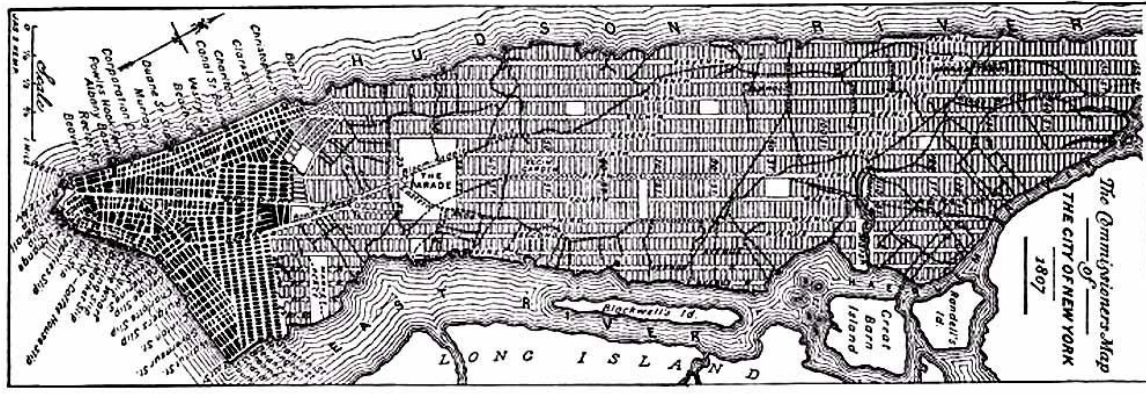
Manhattan's Grid (fig. 2.9) is proposed at the beginning of the 19th century. In spite of its apparent neutrality it implies very rigid intellectual program for the island. In the words of Koolhaas, “it claims superiority of metal construction over reality”¹⁶. The two-dimensional discipline of the Grid creates absolute freedom for three-dimensional anarchy. The whole city is turned into the archipelago of islands, each with equally limited conditions, and each with undreamt potential. Manhattan becomes the Venice of the future – a block becomes an island, a city for itself, which is in the same way as ancient Greek Polis' always in potential war with its own surrounding. That competitiveness and inner rivalry of completely autonomous units leads to real expansion and delirious development. The Grid makes all previous lessons of urbanism irrelevant. Instead of ‘by order bring about freedom’¹⁷, Manhattan generates countless amount of small chaoses, completely independent of each other, and which infallibly obtain an illusion of freedom by pursuing in its own madness. Suddenly, everything is allowed and possible. It turns Manhattan in a perfect playground for capitalistic adventures. Capital needs architecture as a meaningful discourse. The Grid provides condition for an endless specter of various meanings, as long as the supreme meaningless structure itself is respected and unthreatened.

¹⁴ Georg Simmel, quote from Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken books, 2007), p. 191

¹⁵ *Delirious New York* is first published in 1978, by Thames & Hudson

¹⁶ Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1994), p. 20

¹⁷ Le Corbusier, *The City of To-Morrow and Its Planning*, (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2000), p.



2.9 Manhattan's Grid, 1807

The second element that had a dramatic impact on a development of the metropolitan architecture is the lobotomy. In the medical sense of the word, the lobotomy is a surgical interruption of nerve tracts to and from the frontal lobe of the brain that often results, among the other, with the inability of expressing the emotions on the face. Precisely that is happening with New York's skyscrapers. Due to the size of the building, less and less square meters of façade represent more and more cube meters of inner space. The exaggerated disproportion of container and content leads to a brutal severance between the exterior and the interior which now represent two totally separated architectures. One refers to the city and contributes to its visual image, and the other, by the use of modern technology, fabricates and transforms the memories and iconography, and in that way creates the new culture of metropolitan life. This state of architectural lobotomy Jean Baudrillard sees as a perfect environment for a contemporary man, who suffers from the same symptoms as his architecture. "All around, the tinted glass facades of the buildings are like faces: frosted surfaces. It is as though there were no one inside the buildings, as if there were no one behind the faces. And there really is no one. This is what ideal city is like."¹⁸ The city becomes a place of encounter of buildings as well as of people; they live their lives, both buildings and people, almost independent of each other. A skyscraper and a man are fellow citizens; fragments contributing to the same spectacle.

The third element, crucial in the cultural development of the skyscraper, is 'the Vertical Schism'. Koolhaas defines it as "a systematic exploitation of the deliberate disconnection

¹⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *America*, (New York: Verso, 1990), p. 63

between stories”.¹⁹ The interior, entirely autonomous due to the lobotomy, becomes vertically separated in fragments that do not depend from one another, and each of them is evolving according to its own needs, regardless of the whole. Now, the exterior of the building can finally be completely dedicated only to formalism. Eventually, that leads to the skyscraper’s ultimate goal – the maximum congestion in combination with the maximum of light and space, and the beauty in accordance with the maximum income that should be developed. This formula becomes the holy law for all metropolitan architecture in the twentieth century.

These strategies created a prototype of the modern metropolis that stands as a parallel to the abstract European utopias. Instead of the spectacle of surgical cuts, which we can find in projects of Le Corbusier and Hilberseimer, we have here “the aesthetic form of mutation.”²⁰ Its instruments are not necessarily architectural masterpieces, but rather an apparatus for inventing the city life. This fabric of experience reacts on every problem impulsively; utterly pragmatically; in a delirium of improvisation on the stage and in front of everybody; without a clear concept or a vision of the ultimate result. The creators of Manhattan do not disqualify the reality; they are accepting it with all its imperfections, and very devotedly (sometimes even to the point of absurdity) examine its potential. They are acting strictly within already existing system, and they do not tend toward ‘the ideal future’, but rather to ‘the satisfying now’. That random and subconscious immanent criticism of society – relying only on the laws of the market – brought to one unexpected but precious quality. Who could predict that so many mediocre buildings together can generate such a fantastic architectural spectacle?

This city inaugurates an alternative to the traditional way of thinking where everything is subordinated to that beloved subject called man. The mechanisms which are here invented produce a new urban environment that is deprived of any form of anthropocentrism and therefore it is not captivated by the old demons of humanism, and does not suffer of sympathy, solace, or remorse. What we are witnessing is a harsh confrontation with a new paradigm, which designs man in a way that he can fit into this new condition and find his place different than the center of being. Architecture of this

¹⁹ Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1994), p. 105

²⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *America*, (New York: Verso, 1990), p. 23

city is not necessarily human; it even does not pretend to be. It extends beyond the borders of humanism, and opens the realm of possibilities; it enters into an unknown territory, a no man's land. As Jean Baudrillard has written, describing New York architecture: "No, architecture should not be humanized. Anti-architecture, the true sort, the wild, inhuman type that is beyond the measure of man was made here – made itself here – in New York, without considerations of setting, well-being, or ideal ecology. It opted for hard technologies, exaggerated all dimensions, gambled on heaven and hell..."²¹

The new metropolis is a place where we certainly cannot find a cozy, warm home that will provide us security, comfort and joy. Instead, it is a drafty place of uncertainties; a provisional shelter; a terminal and a point of departure; a getaway; an exile... It might as well be Joyce's metaphysical Dublin, furnished with the millions of people in the streets, wandering, carefree, violent, as if they had nothing better to do – and doubtless they have nothing else to do – than to produce the permanent scenario of the city. It is a place for nomads, drifters, vagabonds, flâneurs, orphans, abandoned, homeless and lost; all the fugitives from the old world.

And it is quite prophetic and well fitting that on the southern extreme of the island stands the memorial stone carved with the words: *The impoverished and suffering, the helpless and exiled, let them come to me.*

²¹ Jean Baudrillard, *America*, (New York: Verso, 1990), p. 17

2.3. Brobdingnagian Playground

“We all complain that we are confronted by urban environments that are completely similar. We say we want to create beauty, identity, quality, singularity. And yet, maybe in truth these cities that we have are desired. Maybe their very characterlessness provides the best context for living.”¹ – Rem Koolhaas

The two previous chapters present two different and essentially opposed models of how the modernism explored the possibilities of its large-scale embodiment, in the first half of twentieth century. The strategies that both models produce are the mechanisms for shaping the reality and examining of its potential. But the world that we experience today is not strictly based on either of these two models. None of the models without considering the other one could be taken as an ultimate pattern for a contemporary metropolis. A city that we now have is rather an unexpected and strange encounter of these concepts that results in a kind of a mutation, which is not easy to fully perceive or theorize.

Despite the contradictory elements in its origin – one utopian and ordered, and the other pragmatic and chaotic – what the modern metropolis unmistakably takes from each of

¹ ‘From Bauhaus to Koolhaas’, interview with Rem Koolhaas, *Wired Magazine*, Issue 4.07, (July 1996)

these elements and faithfully maintains is the attitude toward the man and distinctive treatment of subject – from which the discontinuation with humanism is more than obvious. This we may consider as the main substance of Modernism; its true nature, which now manifests itself in unimaginable and even obscene fashion.

The new metropolis plays with the instruments inherited from utopian avant-garde and Manhattan, and in that way establishes the coherent narrative of Modernism, which ingeniously proceeds in its autopoiesis. As the example of continuation of this narrative I would like to mention one project, which plays a quite controversial role in recent history of architecture by being labeled as the end of Modernism. It is the Pruitt-Igoe mass housing project in St. Louis (fig 2.10).

Designed by architect Minoru Yamasaki it was built in 1954, during a period of urban renewal in the U.S., during which slums were cleared and replaced by high-density tower blocks. The complex housed 15,000 people in 2,700 units. By the 1970 it was considered one of the most dangerous housing projects and was slated for demolition. After demolition, that started in 1972 and finished in 1976, complex is widely used as a symbol for the failure of Modernism. Charles Jencks went so far and claimed that this demolition, with its big ‘Boom’, symbolically declared the death of modern architecture: “Modern Architecture died in St. Louis, Missouri on July 15, 1972 at 3.32 pm (or thereabouts) when the infamous Pruitt Igoe scheme, or rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final *coup de grâce* by dynamite.”²

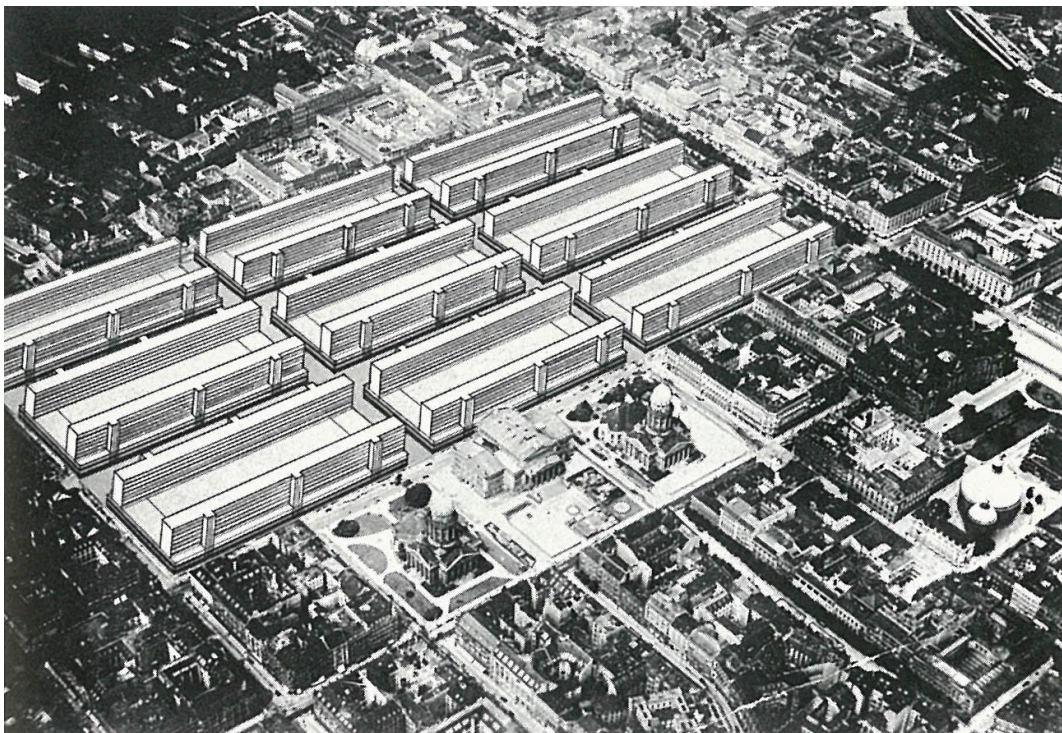
Postmodernist critics took Pruitt-Igoe as a symbol of modernism not because it is a *par excellence* great achievement of modern architecture, for obviously it is not, but rather because of its irresistible, but purely formal, resemblance with iconic projects of European avant-garde that played with *tabula rasa* as its main instrument. One of the obvious doubles of Pruitt-Igoe is certainly a project that is already mentioned here, Hilberseimer’s *Vorschlag zur City-Bebauung* (fig. 2.11), where the visual appearance, at the first glance, seems almost identical. They needed a strong gesture, a big explosion that in a spectacular way points to the erasure of the image that everybody have of modern

² Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977), p. 9

architecture. They raise the meaning of this event to the level of the exact time and place when and where one era ends and other begins.



2.10 Minoru Yamasaki, Pruitt-Igoe, St. Louis, 1954



2.11 Ludwig Hilberseimer, *Vorschlag zur City-Bebauung*, 1928

But what Jencks and other postmodernists could not know is that even 40 years after demolition of the complex the site will still be vacant and abundant. Today a visitor of the Pruitt-Igoe will find a wild urban forest born from decades of neglect. The housing complex is demolished, and now what? What should take place of the episteme that ceases to exist? Certainly, it should be the new one, or at least some previous one. So, where is it?

Precisely this vacancy of site tells us much more about our current condition than we could naively assume. It gently reviles a kind of an obscure quality that indicates how modernism actually functions.

The old cities of the Renaissance had a strong identity and, what Walter Benjamin would called, an alluring aura, because they perfectly combined two fullnesses of being – a city as such and its monuments, where the monuments produced a mental image that integrated the rest of the city in one unique whole. As Anthony Vidler said, “...it was neither the ‘reality’ of the city nor a purely imaginary ‘utopia’ but rather the complex mental map of significance by which the city might be recognized as ‘home’, as something not foreign, and as constituting a (more or less) moral and protected environment for actual daily life. [...] Brunelleschi’s dome was, in this sense, a metaphor, whose physical presence constantly reminded the population of their metaphysical bonds. It took its place at the centre of a ‘memory map’...”³

The modern metropolis produces the exact opposite. It uses a *tabula rasa* as an instrument for dislocation of the memory from the city. First, it literally demolishes the old city and then replaces it with an endless repetition of the one same pattern that by its monotonousness actually disables any possibility of memory. It purifies the signs of any meaning, as Baudrillard says, “For the sign to be pure, it has to duplicate itself: it is duplication of the sign which destroys meaning.”⁴ This is a form of erasure, literal and figural, of the city itself, in favor of an entirely new condition that does not belong to the

³ Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992), pp. 177-178

⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), p. 136

narrative of humanism. The man, who normally has an expectation within a world that potentially exhibits the fullness of being, now suddenly realizes that it turns out to be haunted by absence instead. To quote Vidler again, “the figure-ground city of modernism was founded on the erasure of two fullnesses of being, that is to say on what Peter Eisenman has termed ‘the presence of absence’.”⁵

Postmodernists took demolition of Yamasaki’s Pruitt-Igoe and turned it into a desperate attempt to retrieve fullness of being. However, the reality is that now the site is empty; there is nothing except for the specters of once-present but unfulfilled future. A true irony of the Pruitt-Igoe project is that when the complex was built it was a mediocre architecture, generally insignificant and just one of many, but now when the buildings are gone it become a literal representation of something that is one of the most essential characteristics of modernism – ‘a not present presence’. This vacant site allowed for modernism to fully materialize its most inner desire: to substitute the memories from the past with the memories from the future. And, if we want to be a little bit cynical, it managed to be nostalgic for the events that actually never happened. This is a clear example of how *tabula rasa* is not just a label for a brutal demolition of everything existing, but it is turned into a dangerous and very sophisticated weapon of Modernism. It enables for the metropolis to freely generate not just its physical body, but even more importantly its own memory, which now is no longer necessarily dependent of human ontology.

This profoundly destabilizing mechanism of forgetting, implemented in the general idea of memory, opened the whole range of possibilities for the large-scale development of the new urban structure, which Koolhaas defines as the Generic cities. Suddenly, the city starts to emerge in a pure formal play of repetition of a simple structural module, beyond the control, or even consciousness, of its own creators. Fragment by fragment the forms are composing the reality that is no longer charged with meaning, or interaction of values. As Baudrillard says, “Only form can cancel out value. [...] only form can oppose the exchange of values. Form is unthinkable without the idea of metamorphosis.

⁵ Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992), p. 182

Metamorphosis moves from form to form without the intervention of value. No meaning, either ideological or aesthetic, can be drawn from it. It enters the play of illusion: a form only refers to the other forms with no circulation of meaning.”⁶

The reality appears to be only a collection of fragmented images independent of man and indifferent to his tendency to interpret and rationalize. In this new city man could not be more further from the Alberti’s world of Renaissance, where everything was subordinated to him, and only him. Now the man is dispossessed of its privilege and is no longer the origin of the coordinates, but one point among the others. In this sense Koolhaas defines the Generic city as “the city liberated from the captivity of center, from the straightjacket of identity”⁷, in which we are “...second class citizens in our own civilization, disenfranchised by the dumb coincidence of our collective exile from the centre.”⁸ It seems that the utopia as we once knew is gone and it is relevant to ask if it is still possible at all to orchestrate a coherent (to say nothing of a dignified) civic milieu? „It would require a second innocence to believe, at the end of the twentieth century, that the urban - the built - can be planned and mastered. Too many architects’ ’visions’ have bitten the dust to propose new additions to this chimeral battalion“.⁹ The man is no longer in charge of the critical apparatus; he is no longer in a riding seat in terms of steering or conceptualizing its urban environment.

The place of the most important and dramatic outburst of this new development at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of twenty-first century is certainly China. The cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Chongqing, and others, became gigantic experimental laboratories of social and urban processes. We might say that they took over the role that Manhattan had some hundred years earlier, but in the scale and volume that is incomparable and yet unprecedented.

China re-examines the validity of *tabula rasa* in a way and a range that is unimaginable for U.S. or Europe. It can do what others could not. The well known God-like hand of Le

⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 2005), p. 73

⁷ Rem Koolhaas, *SMLXL*, (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1995), p. 1250

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1249

⁹ Rem Koolhaas, *SMLXL*, (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1995), p. 974

Corbusier hovering over Paris, and threatening to wipe aside the entire district and replace it with glass towers (fig. 2.12), has turned into a mighty hand of Deng Xiaoping above China. Only unlike Le Corbusier, who was just a lucid visionary without a means or conditions to materialize his plans in their fullness, Xiaoping has all the power in the world to execute the biggest urban surgery that the world has ever seen. The words of Louis XIV “We wish it” and “Such is our pleasure” that Le Corbusier often quoted as the ultimate mantra necessary for the radical and uncompromising revolution of the city¹⁰, now in China become the undeniable arguments of capital and power.



2.12 Le Corbusier’s hand above the model of Plan ‘Voisin’

The Olympic Games 2008, in Beijing, were one of the key moments of the most rapid and convulsive urban demolition. By the year of 2005, some 300 000 people had lost their homes to Olympic-related construction.¹¹ The destruction of the city’s vernacular *hutong* fabric, with its narrow lanes and alleys (some of them dating back to the Ming Dynasty), entirely changed not just the face of the city to the point that it became unrecognizable, but also amputated the unique generator of mentality of the people that lived in that city. As Thomas J. Campanella says, “Beijing’s *hutong* were a superlative example of

¹⁰ Le Corbusier, *The City of To-Morrow and Its Planning*, (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2000), p. 302

¹¹ Data and numbers are taken from Thomas J. Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon: China’s Urban Revolution and What It Means for the World*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), p.129

humanistic urbanism, the very antithesis of the sprawling high-rise housing that has blanketed vast areas of urban China in recent years.”¹² In the last few decades 90 per cent of Beijing’s buildings have been razed and replaced.

Urban renewal was equally radical and extensive in Shanghai, where more than half a million people were tossed out of the inner city districts. Their homes are replaced with slabs or towers, designed to meet the demands of the current market forces, regardless of the context or historical heritage (fig. 2.13). More recently the whole Minhang District was cleared, and residents relocated, only to make a way in the city center for the main site of the 2010 World Exposition. This expeditious exchange of the city’s historical fabric with the temporal pavilions that are meant to serve for one exhibition, one show only, perfectly exemplifies the agenda of the new urban mechanism. The expo site can be reasonably linked to a miniature city; it arises and dissipates like a dream, has no settled



2.13 Typical block in Shanghai, emerged in the place of demolished city’s historical fabric, 2010

¹² Thomas J. Campanella, *The Concrete Dragon: China’s Urban Revolution and What It Means for the World*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), pp.148-149

inhabitants, and is populated almost entirely by passersby. The restless, ceaseless change of metropolitan life finds itself reflected in the expo, in exaggerated form. Nothing is certain and nothing can be taken for granted or trustworthy.

Chinese urban renewal and the consequently followed migration of the people have the magnitude of the world war, a colossal exodus, unequalled in the peace time in the human history. In the new world of modernity, the homelessness is the ultimate and inevitable state, an axiom – if you do not leave your home, the home will leave you, and most likely in a quite literal way.

This new condition of no-home, a *tabula rasa* of identity as well as the material habitat, conjoint with the accelerated development, quite unexpectedly opened a whole range of possibilities of modern metropolitan experiences. Freed from regular urban-design conventions and charged with vast pool of cheap construction labor, Chinese cities became an incredible empty canvas for innovations and a flood tide of lucrative commissions for design and planning professionals around the world. But, as Koolhaas remarks, “the absence, on the one hand, of plausible, universal doctrines and the presence, on the other, of an unprecedented intensity of production have created a unique, wrecking conditions: the urban seems to be least understood at the very moment of its apotheosis.”¹³

Subordinated only to its own logic, the new metropolis becomes capable to combine and juxtapose absolute oppositions and contradictions, and bring them in coexistence in a single system, without any critical thinking or value judgment (fig. 2.14). Koolhaas defines this phenomenon as the ‘Photoshop’. “PHOTOSHOP© is a metaphor of what architectural production is becoming: something strictly mechanical, reproducible without thinking, unlimited in terms of all the options that can be combined in a single image, the most decisive way of conceiving the city.”¹⁴ “The city of exacerbated difference”, as Koolhaas calls it, “is not the methodological creation of ideal, but the opportunistic

¹³ Rem Koolhaas, *Great Leap Forward: Harvard Design School Project on the City*, (Koln: Taschen GmbH, 2001), p. 27

¹⁴ Rem Koolhaas, *Mutations*, (Barcelona: Actar, 2001), p. 320

exploitation of flukes, accidents, and imperfections.¹⁵ These unexpected encounters, randomly combined layers of forms and structures, where a glass skyscraper can be stocked in the middle of vernacular settlements, or a dense high rise dwelling put next to rice fields, without any intermediate condition, enables for residence of these cities to experience contrasts and diversities unimaginable in previous times. What was once separated by time and space now is merged and agglutinated in a single image. One can be in the middle of wild nature, but at a same time in a centre of metropolis; simultaneously everywhere and nowhere.



2.14 Shanghai, 2010 – unexpected encounters

The hipper-fabrication of the city, which generates itself in a manic manner, succeeded to reprogram the quality of archetypal urban elements and spaces. The best example is one of the greatest and most famous squares in China, Beijing’s Tiananmen Square. In the last few decades this public space experienced an absolute metaphysical transformation. What was once a city’s social heart, a place where you would see people playing cards and

¹⁵ Rem Koolhaas, *Great Leap Forward: Harvard Design School Project on the City*, (Koln: Taschen GmbH, 2001), p. 29

flying kites, after the period of frenzy erasing and resetting of urban milieu and collective memory, it turned into a no man's land, a void, an open space that could be anywhere, with no articulated meaning, or nostalgia whatsoever. If we are standing or walking in the middle of that vast solemn square we feel as if we are lost in one of Malevich's paintings. We find ourselves in an artificial desert with scattered objects drained of its genuine character and with one obscure twist of aura. It is not that the aura does not exist, but it is dislocated out of our perception, or at least out of the place that it used to be. It exists, only not for us, but for the objects themselves; for their internal discourse. We are the aliens in that space, unable to conceive any form of meaningful or coherent narrative.

Guy Debord defines the spectacle as "capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image."¹⁶ The image of metropolis is undeniably one evident and inevitable consequence of the play of the capital. But to reduce the objects which emerge in these new cities up to the enormous measures only to the spectacle – to some photogenic monumentality intended to impress – would be too easy and incautious. The grandiose size of the buildings, which is rapidly increasing, has its own inner agenda independent of human demands, and even of demands of the market and capital. The bigness is a state that provides autonomy and, what is most important, in that way guarantee existence. It is as if the objects want to escape from the man, to be safe of destruction. They try to provide themselves the life of their own.

"Objects should not *touch*", says Sartre's hero in *Nausea*, "I am afraid of being in contact with them as though they were living beasts."¹⁷ What we are witnessing here is a magnified manifestation of fulfillment of these fears. The inconsistency of inanimate objects culminated up to the undreamt proportions. They are conquering their own freedom, their own 'self-consciousness.' Objects are becoming almost legitimate residents of the cities, usurping their rights and living their own reality parallel to man. The architecture of metropolis is not a part of man's historical representational narrative, but just a self-referential 'printed text' deprived of all origins. The man, sentenced to coexist with these new objects, does not utilize them in a traditional way and does not

¹⁶ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, (New York: Zone Books, 1995), p. 24

¹⁷ Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1964), p. 10

develop a sort of intimacy, but rather treats them almost in a way he would treat some displayed items or models at the exhibition – passing beside them, with curiosity, suspicion and restraint, and always taking good care not to touch (fig. 2.15). “Objects are not made to be touched. It is better to slip between them, avoiding them as much as possible.”¹⁸ (fig. 2.16)

The man is destined to a continuous *dérive*,¹⁹ a labyrinthine wanderings through the city that for him has now turned into a gigantic model, a testing ground. We might understand this as a fulfillment of his secret and maybe even subconscious desires. Modernism has challenged man to confront with his most intimate fears and discomfort. All our reality has become experimental, and as Baudrillard says, “modern man is left to limitless experimentation on himself.”²⁰ This is a generator of the quest for a new meaning and profundity, and a challenge to city and culture.



2.15 Model of the city of Shanghai, Shanghai Urban Planning Exposition Center, 2010

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 122

¹⁹ “One of the basic situationist practices is the *dérive*, a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. *Dérives* involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll.”, Guy Debord, ‘Theory of the *Dérive*’, from *Situationist International: Anthology*, (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), p. 62

²⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 2005), p. 181



2.16 Pudong district, Shanghai, 2010. People are walking on the elevated paths, slipping between the objects, entirely deprived of any possibility of the physical contact, as if they are parts of two separate and independent realities.

3. Reinventing Modernism

“Il faut être absolument modern”¹ – Arthur Rimbaud

¹ “One must be absolutely modern” – Arthur Rimbaud, *Une Saison en Enfer*, 1873

3.1. Tilted Arc

“The relief and design of structures appears more clearly when content, which is the living energy of meaning, is neutralized, somewhat like the architecture of an uninhabited or deserted city, reduced to its skeleton by some catastrophe of nature or art.”¹ – Jacques Derrida

In this last part I would like to point out and, in regard with analyses made in previous two parts, reinterpret theoretical strategies and design processes in some of the most interesting projects of few contemporary architects, of a different generation, that in one innovative and daring way explore and render the hidden and obscure agendas of the modern society. We can find that these projects, all produced in relatively recent period, reveal some essential and constituent elements of the new paradigm, and in that way position the contemporary architecture on one common platform with other modern arts, making the unique and meaningful cognizance of modernism. Peter Eisenman is the first of the architects whose projects are considered.

While still studying at Cambridge, under the tutelage of Colin Rowe, Eisenman perceives the Modern Movement as one not fully realized project, and sets itself a goal to carry out

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 5

the objectives of the movement and bring modern architecture to its fullness. His mission becomes to find again for architecture the ideals of modernity; or as Rafael Moneo puts it: „Modern architecture had never been fully executed, it had never come to incarnate the true spirit of modernity, because of distractions with questions of style and because it had made functionalism its banner. True to an attitude toward life that I won't hesitate to call messianic, Eisenman embarked on the intellectual adventure of rescuing from oblivion the true spirit of modernity.“²

Peter Eisenman speaks on this subject in several of his essays, especially in *Post-Functionalism*, first published as editorial in the 6th issue of *Oppositions* magazine, in 1976. He brings in question, or rather denies, a leading role of the functionalism in modern movement, and defines it as the remains of the metaphysics of humanism that is on its deathbed. In this essay Eisenman says, “...functionalism is really no more than a late phase of humanism, rather than an alternate to it. And in this sense, it cannot continue to be taken as a direct manifestation of that which has been called ‘the modernist sensibility.’”³ In that way he sheds a new light on interpretation of architecture of that period. His rejection of functionalism derives from more essential thought that architecture is not there to provide function or serve in strict utilitarian sense, but, in a same way as all other arts, it is a vehicle of man's exploration and understanding of the world that surrounds him. Architecture does not design for bodies, it design bodies. It is a quest for cognition of what *is* the object; that unclear and obscure neighbor.

But what is that 'modernist sensibility' that Eisenman sees as a new *episteme*? Before I turn to some of his projects I would like to introduce one highly controversial and avant-garde piece of art that, in my opinion, perfectly exemplifies 'modernist sensibility', and that we can use here as a didactic model for reading of some of Eisenman's work. It is a Richard Serra's urban sculpture *Tilted Arc*. Designed and constructed for Federal Plaza, New York, in 1981, only to be brutally and barbarically destroyed and removed by United States government, in 1989, after a long trial (that started almost immediately after the

² Rafael Moneo, *Theoretical Anxiety and Design Strategies in the Work of Eight Contemporary Architects*, (Cambridge: The Mit Press, 2004), p. 147

³ Peter Eisenman, 'Post-Functionalism', *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings 1963 – 1988*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 85

sculpture is made) and harsh insults and degradation of the author and his work (fig. 3.1). One ostensibly simple gesture of a steel curve placed at ordinary public plaza made tremendous change in perception and understanding of this space, impossible for anyone to ignore. Comfortable centric square suddenly became unclear, uncertain. Center is dislocated from the physical center, and as you walk around you are able to locate a multiplicity of centers with no predefined hierarchical order. The space and objects are not constant, but change as you change. As Serra says, “...the viewer does not simply become the subject in relation to the object (the form of most on-going theatre), but instead experiences the time and place of subject and object simultaneously.”⁴ You (viewer) are brought *into* the sculpture; you are sharing the volume of the same space, where the sculpture and you are the content.



3.1 Richard Serra, *Tilted Arc*, 1981



...after destruction, 1989

⁴ Richard Serra, *Writings and Interviews*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p.

This deletion of a clear line between the subject (viewer) and the object (piece of art), and their merge into one interactive and interdependent unity, where they would have almost equal rights, is a quality that makes fundamental distinction between the modern sculpture and the one that has been known for centuries. And to enable this quality to occur it was necessary that both subject and object are physically brought onto the same level; to share the same reality. In regard to this, Serra claims: “The biggest break in the history of sculpture in the twentieth century was to remove the pedestal. The historical concept of placing sculpture on a pedestal was to establish a separation [of the object] from the behavioral space of the viewer. Pedestalized sculpture invariably transfers the effect of power by subjugating the viewer to the idealized, memorialized or elegized theme. As soon as art is forced or persuaded to serve alien values it ceases to serve its own needs.”⁵ For Serra, the pedestal conventionalizes metaphors of content and puts the objects in a discourse of meaning that is out of the concern of art, and makes of them something other than art. Once the pedestal is removed the game of immediate confrontation and introduction with objects is open.

Serra’s sculpture has no utilitarian or pragmatic value; no assumptions of humanistic values that art needs to serve; no considerations about indigenous community and of what ‘they’ consider to be adequate, appropriate solutions; and it is out of any political or ideological agendas. In Serra’s words ‘any use is misuse’.⁶ And precisely this sculpture, this modest gesture, which does not represent or mean anything, initiated and mobilized a horrifying orchestrated chase, a witch-hunt with most bizarre and senseless accusations, and with the strong demand of immediate removal from the plaza. The group of judges, state administrators, critics, media, fall upon the sculpture calling it: “rusted steel barrier”, “the ugliest outdoor work of art in the city”, “responsible for the plaza’s accumulation of graffiti, waste, and litter”, “hostile to the plaza and its context”, “destructive effects on social functions in the plaza”, “the piece of nonsense or garbage”, “an arrogant, nose-thumbing gesture”, “the Berlin Wall”, “the Iron Curtain”, “a scar on the plaza”, “arrogant disregard for the mental well-being and physical convenience of the people”, “a cause of

⁵ Richard Serra, *Writings and Interviews*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 170-171

⁶ Richard Serra, *Writings and Interviews*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 100

the rat problem.” They went so far labeling the sculpture “a terrorist device”!⁷ But the bottom line is that even if any of the above quoted accusations is not really true – and we can be perfectly sure that it is not – what this sculpture did do is that it forced a man to walk around it, and by that jeopardized his god-given comfort and, even worse, forced him to re-value or, at least, to re-think. This was *Tilted Arc*’s biggest crime and the reason, more than good enough, to be destroyed.

Now, if we look at Eisenman’s projects we can find an undeniable similarity in pursuance toward non-utilitarian, non-representational object, which stands autonomous, without any obligations or responsibility to anybody and it is concerned only with its own existence. There is a clear and absolute divorce of form from all reference to association, use, and even materiality. It is not any more that the object (house) has to make an effort to adjust itself to man, to accommodate his needs and satisfy his demands, but a man has to use his power to understand the object and find a model of coexistence.

Eisenman’s buildings only ostensibly aspire to achieve monumentality, firmness and certainty. But in closer inspection, as we approach to the building, we realize that the things are not exactly as they appear. We find out that it is nearly impossible to figure out how to enter the building, because the entrance is not where it seems to be ⁸; the columns and the beams form a grid that sometimes does not support the structure but it is a structure of its own, independent of the building; a spatial enclosure does not necessarily provide a shelter but completes some self-contained entity that remains unclear or hidden to us; we find unexpected column in the middle of a bedroom or dining room, a slot in the floor, etc. It looks like all this autonomous fragments participate in one complex play of contingency, in which man’s presence is not necessarily required. Buildings become self-referential and, in a same way as Joyce’s non-narrative texts, they remove the imposition of the author between the viewer (reader) and the object.

⁷ All these accusations are quoted by Richard Serra in his book, Richard Serra, *Writings and Interviews*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 195-217

⁸ Most radical example of this is Eisenman’s Wexner Center, Ohio State University, in Columbus

It is important to mention that Eisenman's work is highly influenced by French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Derrida teaches us that there is no fixed relationship between the sign and the object. And there is no such thing as an object before all other signs; a transcendental object where signs refer to; the one thing that is before all others and that is more important than all others. In the words of Derrida, "in the absence of a center or origin everything became discourse [...], everything became a system where the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences."⁹ This idea is actually a perfect weapon for an infinite recreation or reinventing of *tabula rasa*. Everything is allowed, and with that knowing Eisenman strikes at the very nucleus and origin of architecture – the house. As Anthony Vidler says, Eisenman destabilizes the house "by attacking all its elements of structure and signification systematically, from roof to the basement, leaving no functional or mental assumptions untouched and stripping, finally, the house of *houseness* and nostalgia."¹⁰

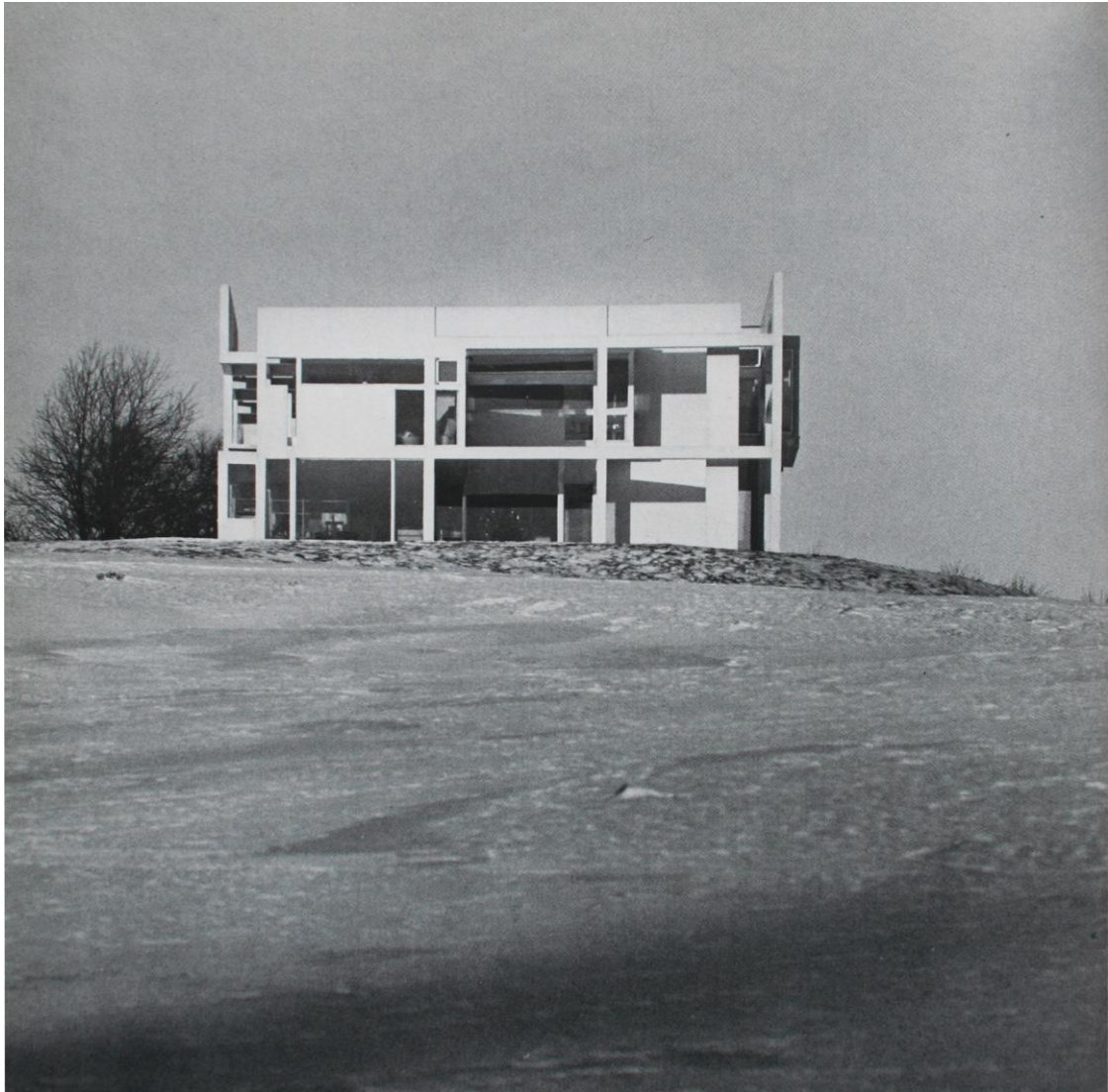
Eisenman designs the whole series of houses, which he calls 'cardboard architecture', that are made as experiments of translating concepts into physical environment. They are conceived as a kind of disturbance or a break in smoothness. The ironic and provocative term 'cardboard architecture' is used to "question the nature of our perception of reality."¹¹ Certainly, one of the most interesting pieces from this series is *House II*, designed for Mr. and Mrs. Richard Falk, in Hardwick, Vermont, in 1970. The first disturbance comes even from a distance, when one is not being able to understand whether this is a real house or just a cardboard model (fig. 3.2). Although made entirely out of the simple elements – columns, beams, slabs, and stairs – and composed in a rational grid, due to its two autonomous but equally important structural systems that create ambiguity of which of them really holds the structure, the object remains unclear, confusing, and perceived as an irregular Gestalt. The house repeatedly produces the conflict in the mapping of the real. None of the elements stands for a mining and do not

⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 280

¹⁰ Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992), p. 119

¹¹ Peter Eisenman, 'Cardboard Architecture', *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings 1963 – 1988*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 28

contribute to representational narrative. Man is forced to constantly question space that he occupies and forms that he confronts. If these objects are not what I think they are, what are they? And why are they where they are? Sentenced to this permanent struggle, one finds himself notably lacking in comfort.



3.2 Peter Eisenman, *House II*, 1970

It is quite interesting and paradigmatic the first encounter of the *House II* with his owner, Mr. Falk. Seeing the house, on his return from Vietnam, he realized that that was by no means what he wanted – and he wanted a cozy ‘Heidi’ house. He realized that he is not at all that radical and open minded he thought he was. The house was too oppressive, too uncomfortable for him. Nonetheless, Mr. and Mrs. Falk did not leave this house, even though they were not lacking money, but instead they did do something radical after all.

They adapted the basement of the house, moved into that basement, and continued to live there for two years, only out of the protest! The house was not subordinated to their needs and treated them as intruders, so they denied to use the house, and therefore lived, not in, but with the house, as if it is its own entity, autonomous and self-conscious, with its own integrity and will. They were in a conflict with the object, as if it is a living being.

In one of the conversations between Richard Serra and Peter Eisenman, regarding the ostensible instability and exploration of the limits of the gravity of Serra's sculptures, Eisenman remarks: "Whether or not the pieces actually fall down, they create the anxiety of the maker and the viewer not being in control. These pieces are interesting to me because they control. The objects have their own power."¹² The *House II* is the absolute master of its own space. Even the owners, Mr. and Mrs. Falk, are actually trespassers, unable to control and really *own* the space. Paradoxically, the house treats them as objects; they are aliens caught in a foreign territory, subjected to unknown rules and will.

We could compare this with Jacques Lacan's variation of Heidegger's motif of language as a house of being, where, for Lacan, man is actually caught in and tortured by language. Slavoj Žižek develops this idea further, saying that: "Man does not dwell in a mere 'prison-house of language', he dwells in torture-house of language: the entire range of psychopathologies deployed by Freud, from conversion-symptoms inscribed into the body up to total psychotic breakdowns, are the scars of this permanent torture, so many signs of an original and irremediable gap between the subject and language, so many signs that man can never be at home in his own home."¹³ What for Lacan and Žižek is a metaphysical category, Eisenman turns into a literal *torture-house*; a real physical experience.

In one of his recent lectures Eisenman more openly and directly describes his agenda as a disruption with traditional and conventional understanding of architecture, and an attempt

¹² Peter Eisenman, 'Interview by Peter Eisenman', from Richard Serra, *Writings and Interviews*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 144

¹³ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, (London: Verso, 2008), p.

to put man out of his comfortable idleness and make him to acknowledge a new reality. “I do believe that one of the ways to get people pay attention to their environments is to disturb them. I do believe that. And I do believe that architecture is not about putting people in a cozy cocoon, but to make them more aware of their physical surroundings. There is nothing worse, for me, than a cozy little suburban house. It drives me out of my mind. I think that architecture, as opposed to practice, is about disturbing status quo; that is not giving the client what they want, but giving them something other than what they want. [...] Architecture is a disturbance.”¹⁴

Another project of the same architect that I would like to mention is of a more recent date and of entirely different scale. It is the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, in Berlin. Even though Eisenman does not consider that project as being reflective or representative of his work¹⁵, this extraordinary piece of architecture, or rather the public sculpture if you will, is an ultimate statement of the new consciousness and ‘modernist sensibility’, at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Positioned in the very heart of Berlin, next to the Brandenburg Gate, and occupying one whole block, this project already casts the shadow of intrigue and inquisitiveness. Memorial is designed as a system of narrow alleys in orthogonal grid, composed out of 2711 gray stone slabs, with the same dimensions in layout (2.38m x 0.95m) but each of a different height, entirely blank with no markings such as names or dates. The whole city-block is turned into the two parallel but different waving fields, one at the surface formed by the tops of the slabs, and the other beneath it, hidden at the bottom, forming the undulate ground level (fig. 3.3).

Once again, as in many other Eisenman projects, the grid plays crucial role, being understood as the conceptual framework in which the physical experience occurs. As K. Michael Hayes says, the grid “systematically reduce the architectural raw material and perceptual data of an organizational scheme to degree zero – the point grid being

¹⁴ Peter Eisenman, lecture at New York Institute of Technology, New York, 25.10.2011, http://www.nyit.edu/index.php/videos/viewer/peter_eisenman/

¹⁵ Peter Eisenman, lecture at Architectural Association School of Architecture, London, 18.10.2010, <http://www.aaschool.ac.uk/VIDEO/lecture.php?ID=1274>

understood as the minimum limit for a work to be called architecture – and [...] generate a limitlessly interpretable, radically contingent, and heterogeneous set of experiences and associations. The grid announces and insists on architectural autonomy and authority, establishing as it does a different spatial order, a distinction, and a separation from the contexts in which it appears.”¹⁶ We can draw the analogy between this grid and the Manhattan’s grid. Both are imposing an ideal and artificial order over the reality, but unlike Manhattan’s grid that serves as accommodation for an infinite amount of the otherness, Eisenman’s grid, offers an exact opposite – the sameness, or rather the unending return of the ‘differently same’. Here the order is pushed to the extreme and it is almost out of the touch with the human reason. It aims to achieve the reduced meaning of the experience that can be paralleled with the meaninglessness of the concentration camps and their systematic and impeccably punctual order. It is a reason brought to the absurd, where it becomes madness.

But regardless of the apparent formal and visual sterility of the concept, the project generates an unexpected range of possibilities and models of how to behave or experience the space. Standing before the Memorial one feels an irresistible magnetic force seducing him to enter; to dive into the gray sea of blocks and start wandering through its obscure and mysterious corridors. And the very second one steps in this maze, the connection with the real world is over. Submerged into artificial environment, one finds himself suddenly lost, alone, unable to predict or control what will occur right before him, and feels disorientated, vulnerable and fragile. Deserted alleys, where people occasionally appear just for a split second like specters, and echoing voices and sounds from undefined direction and distance, create the atmosphere of anxiety, uneasiness and discomfort. It is impossible to find anything remotely like a central point. One is free to go anywhere, but everything looks alike and leads nowhere. It is like experiencing the space of Hilberseimer’s *Hochhausstadt* (fig. 2.4), but condensed and purified up to its ultimate absurd state. Or, like being caught in one of George Grosz’s paintings (fig. 2.5), mindlessly circling in the labyrinth of some abstract and haunted metropolis, and with each step slowly turning into a faceless object.

¹⁶ K. Michael Hays, *Architecture’s Desire: Reading the Late Avant-Garde*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010), pp. 157-160

The gray slabs stand like the ruins of some former or future cognizance. They seem like houses but they are not habitable. In the same way as houses of Pompeii or Herculaneum, they appear abandoned and turned into ghosts, or tombs, simply by virtue of some catastrophic event. They form a haunted ground, but it is never really clear does it belong to something long forgotten, or something that is yet to come. What we are looking for in space and time is to complete the narrative. But the meaning always remains out of our reach, somewhere beyond our consciousness. To paraphrase Žižek, the things seem to be ‘pregnant’ with meaning, but every birth of meaning is an abortion.¹⁷

After visiting the Memorial, Richard Serra called Eisenman, and briefly commented, “Your best work Peter! You know why? No plumbing!”¹⁸ Eisenman managed to create a pure architectural object, which is entirely without function in utilitarian sense, and which produces an internal necessity that is outside of use. The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is ingenious critique of a humanist subject, exposed to a kind of estrangement and alienation. It challenges a man and ‘teaches’ him to understand the space and forms around him, in a situation where he is not the ultimate determinator of meaning – the center to which everything is subordinated.

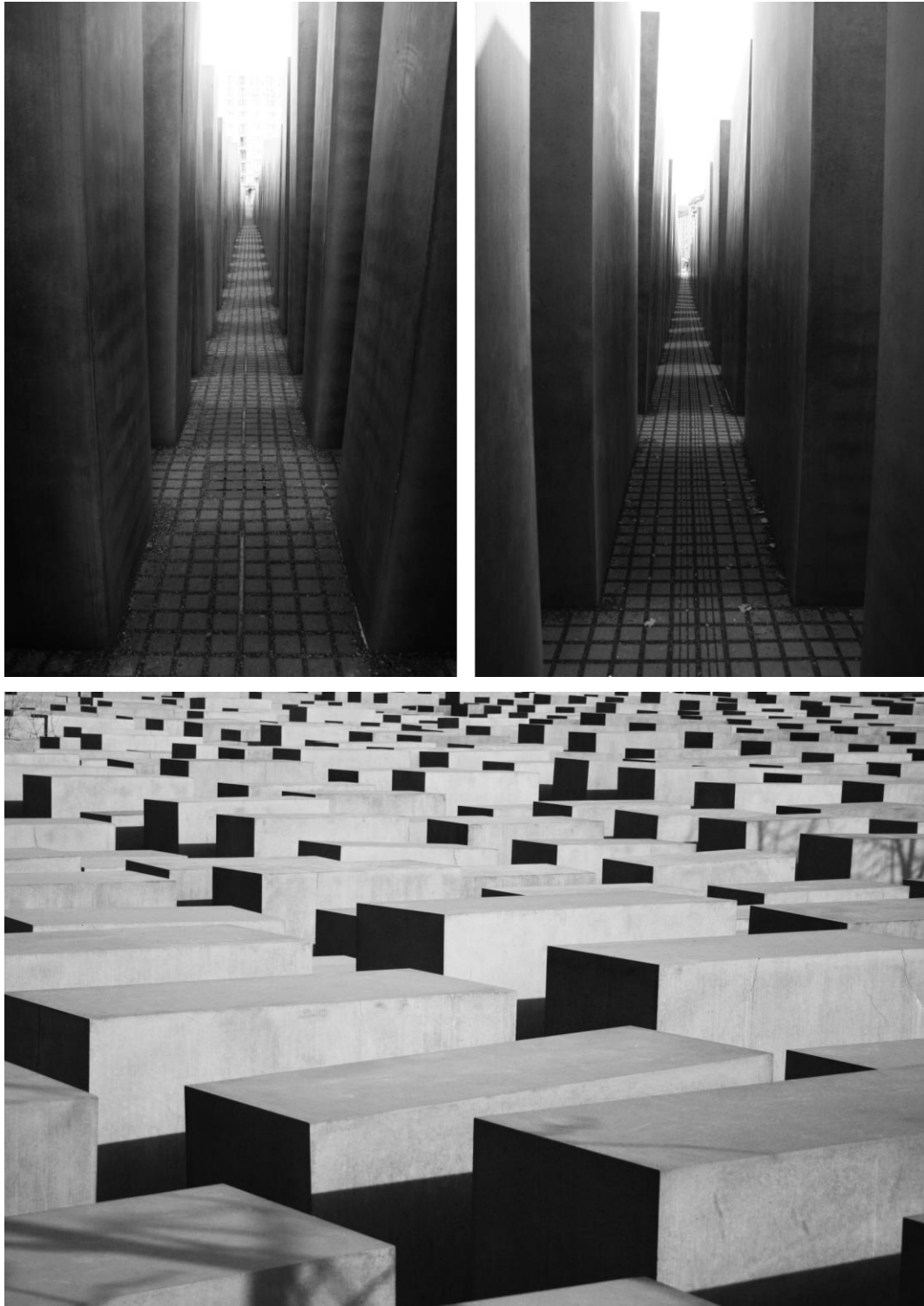
Derrida: “There are no benches in this park! How can people sit down?”

Eisenman: “Jacques, there is no benches to sit down in your text. It is very difficult to ever sit down in your texts, why do you worry in sitting down in my park?”¹⁹

¹⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, (London: Verso, 2008), p.66

¹⁸ Peter Eisenman often quote this in his lectures, one of such is conversation with Jacques Herzog, moderated by Jeffrey Kipnis, at Harvard School of Design, 12.4.2007

¹⁹ Peter Eisenman, lecture at Institute for Advanced Architecture of Catalonia, Barcelona, 10.2.2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LsVIaxPjPLY>. Eisenman is paraphrasing his old conversation with Derrida about his competition project for Parc de la Villette.



3.3 Peter Eisenman, Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin, 2005

3.2. Imponderabilia

“And I would like somehow to find a system so the performance would become life. That is actually becomes just timeless. I don’t want an audience to spent time with me looking at my work; I want them to be with me and forget about time. Open up the space and just that moment of here and now, of nothing, there is no future and there is no past. In that way you can extend eternity. It is about being present.”¹

– Marina Abramović

Another architect that I would like to introduce as a dominant contemporary protagonist and successor of true modernist agenda is Rem Koolhaas. For the past several decades, this sworn avant-gardist is always at the forefront of turbulent processes and turmoil, and plays a crucial role in redefining and revaluing the essential modernist doctrines, and revealing their significance for contemporary society. His work had a dramatic impact on the architectural practice as well as on the theory by introducing many inventive strategies and contagious ideas. But here, I will not try to analyze or get engaged with his entire oeuvre, not even its most prominent and commonly stated qualities. Rather, I would like to consider the one particular aspect in his work, which is less mentioned, emphasized or elaborated, but which I find to be one of the backbones of his body of work; a silent unifier that indisputably keeps all his endeavors in the discourse of modernism. That aspect is ‘the performance’. In the light of previous analyses in this

¹ Marina Abramović, *Artist is Present*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010), p. 211

thesis, I consider of great importance to introduce and acknowledge this aspect as the symptom or manifestation of the new paradigm.

At the beginning of the twentieth century Marcel Duchamp signals the end of the aesthetic principle in art. He takes random 'readymade' objects of no aesthetic merit and by simply adding the usual attributes of a work of art – title, name of the author, date of execution, and viewing public or owner – he turns them into art. Duchamp teaches us that any object can be a piece of art. Performance art goes a step further and tells us something much more provoking and upsetting: those 'readymade' objects can also be the human bodies.

Koolhaas often describes himself as the child of the sixties. This was exactly the period when performance art fully emerged and made a huge disturbance, not only in the art world but in much broader field.² However, before entering into Koolhaas's disclosure and exploration of the performance in architecture, I will introduce a couple of interesting pieces of this art that can be used as a didactic model in reading of the performance strategies. In this way they can be more clearly identified and reflected in the architectural works. I will use the examples taken from the work of one of the greatest living performance artists, Marina Abramović.

In one of the very first and less known Abramović's pieces called *Come Wash With Me*, from 1969, she proposes the gallery space transformed into a laundry with sinks placed around the walls. Before entering into the gallery/laundry, the public is asked to take all their clothes off and give them to the artist. While they are standing and waiting completely naked the artist will wash, dry, and iron their clothes and when they are ready the public can dress again and leave. Unfortunately, the proposal was too offensive and radical for the then public opinion, so it was refused by the authorities and *Come Wash With Me* never came to its realization. Nonetheless, what still makes this piece crucially important is that Abramović attempted to involve the audience into the performance. It

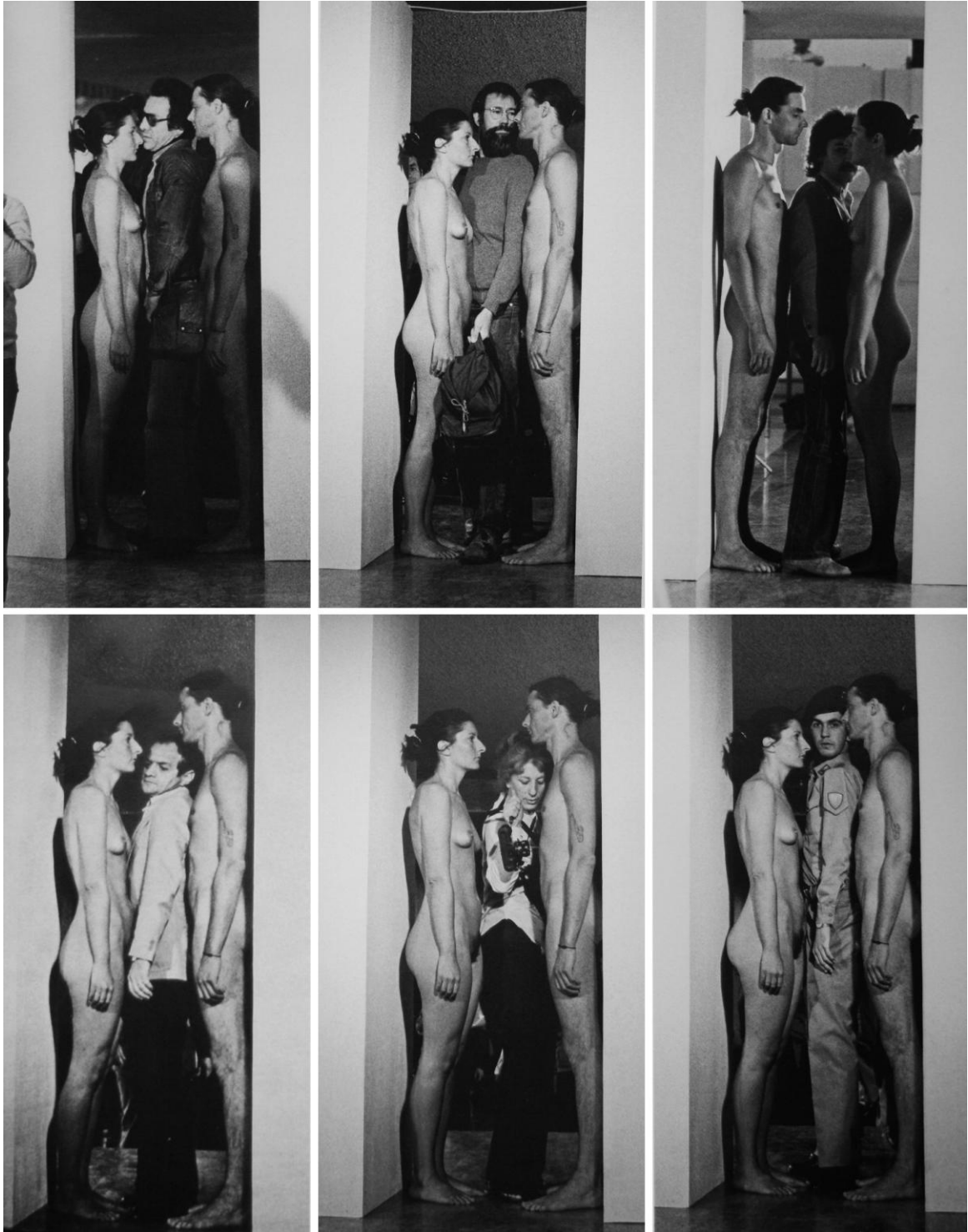
² In the documentary film *Rem Koolhaas: A Kind of Architect*, from 2008, Koolhaas said that the first influence on him from the world of contemporary art came from Yves Klein, even before film directors such as Michelangelo Antonioni and Pier Paolo Pasolini

was not enough that just the artist performs while the viewers remain passive. She invited those passive viewers to intervene and not just anyhow. They are asked to even take the initiative role in the act of performance. They are those who have to publicly expose their bodies and stand naked before everybody, while the artist himself is doing quite boring and most ordinary everyday job (washing, drying, and ironing). In that way the audience becomes the integral part of the piece; a part without which that piece of art does not even exist. Nothing remains outside of the piece; everything is here and now; everything participates in the discourse and confirms the presence.

In another, even more interesting piece, called *Imponderabilia* from 1977, Marina Abramović and Ulay go a step further. This piece consists of two artists, male and female, standing naked in the main entrance of the museum, facing each other. The public entering the museum is invited to pass through. The space between the performers is narrow and each person entering the museum must move sideways, choosing whether to face the male or female performer (fig. 3.4). The physical contact with the naked body of the artist is inevitable. Inside of the museum there was a text on the exhibition wall: 'Imponderable. Such imponderable human factors as one's aesthetic sensitivity / the overriding importance of imponderables in determining human conduct'.³ The text refers directly to the visitor's behaviour on entry. This performance supposed to last for a six hours but it was interrupted and stopped by the police only after 90 minutes. The police deemed it as too obscene.

The performance is requested from the audience in both of Abramović's pieces. But while in *Come And Wash With Me* the visitor is brought to an uncanny and vulnerable state by exposing his body in the most literal way, in *Imponderabilia* a bit more is expected. The narrow void between the artists demands from the visitor to act in a most intimate way. He has to make a decision whether he will turn his body to the man or woman and, in a way, to declare himself. In this ostensibly simple and harmless piece one is forced to expose and publicly present his consciousness, and even go beyond that and confront himself with the subconscious self. The motionlessness and passivity is not an option.

³ Text from the wall is quoted from James Westcott, *When Marina Abramović Dies: A Biography*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010), p. 122



3.4 Marina Abramović and Ulay, *Imponderabilia*, Bologna, 1977

In the work of Rem Koolhaas we can find the strategies and processes that greatly correspond with the above presented agendas of the performance art. Coming from the film background, Koolhaas's first involvement in architecture is initiated by his fascination with Russian Constructivism and its quite inventive approach to the

architectural practice.⁴ Constructivists claim that the real issue of architecture is not about form but about organization of daily life. Their urban block is like a script for a movie, imagining how society could live. What Koolhaas learns from architecture of the constructivists is the sense that more than a visual outcome is to be expected. This idea was quite opposed to then ruling postmodernist's mainly visual and picturesque approach to architecture.

Another important moment is his Manhattan research and the analysis of the Downtown Athletic Club which became a kind of manifesto itself. In the vertical section of this skyscraper, Koolhaas discovers that interdependence between form and use is not necessary. Each platform of the building is entirely different; a world of its own, regardless of what is happening above or below. This concept implies a discontinuity in traditional functional adjacency relationships, and offers a rich variety of experiences juxtaposed in a random manner. As Koolhaas says, "In the Downtown Athletic Club each 'plan' is an abstract composition of activities that describes, on each of the synthetic platforms, a different 'performance' that is only a fragment of the larger spectacle of the Metropolis."⁵ The building itself becomes the generator of diverse and even unexpected activities, rather than the provider of the certain functions.

Koolhaas turned the 'free section' of the Downtown Athletic Club into the design method that he used in many of his later projects. One such project is the competition entry for the Parc de la Villette, from 1982. Here, the park is depicted as a series of horizontal programmatic strips, 50 meters wide, which contain different types of gardens and amusements. What Koolhaas actually did is that he took the model of the 'free section' and by laying it down he made out of it the plan of the park, where each strip acts as a different floor in the building, unique and independent of the others. In that way he eliminated the third-dimension and reduced the project only to pure program. In Koolhaas's words, it is a "density without architecture, a culture of 'invisible'

⁴ In 1966, at the seminar on cinema and architecture at the TU in Delft, Koolhaas met Gerrit Oorthuys, a professor of history and expert on constructivism. Later, they together conducted the research on Ivan Leonidov.

⁵ Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1994), p. 157

congestion”.⁶ As in one performance, the form disappears and what remains is a dense conceptual framework that generates the infinite amount of possible adventures analogous to contemporary daily life. Activities unexpectedly encounter and interconnect, creating chaotic and confusing spatial relations. The visitor of the park, unable to find a perspective axis and orientate in this space of the congested void, is impelled to move. And as he starts his *dérive* through these strips he experiences the permanent state of the landscape change. Diverse and unstable identities of fragmented space constitute a stage for the performance in which the visitor participates as its inseparable element.

The strategy of the performance is even more immanent in OMA’s competition project for Très Grande Bibliothèque de France, from 1989. “The ambition of this project” – writes Koolhaas – “is to rid architecture of responsibilities it can no longer sustain and to explore this new freedom aggressively.”⁷ Once again Koolhaas attacks the two most essential entities of the traditional architecture: form and function. The building is conceived as colossal prism (roughly 75x87m in base and 100m high), made out of one solid (a block of information with all the books, disks and databases) and voids (open public spaces) that are carved out of the solid. These voids play the crucial part in the project, declaring the absence of something inherent and indispensable. The missing part, or rather ‘non-present presence’, becomes the structural element; the implied armature that keeps the unity of the whole, in one quite unexpected way. The voids are the dematerialized formless architecture, uncanny specters, oddly wandering through the building and generating the situations, which provoke unexpected and even unconscious behaviors. One such behavior is voyeurism. Peter Eisenman finds this as one of the essential features of the building, in which the voided space both blocks direct vision and reveals supposedly hidden elements. “The modulation of section creates condition in which space can be occupied by subject who may become a voyeur while hidden from the view of another subject and vice versa. The resultant *coup d’oeil* and peripheral views shift the focus of opticality from the physical object to the subject, who looks through, around, beneath, above, and at spaces, becoming part of a different kind of spatial relationship between subject and object. This imitation of a voyeuristic space is what

⁶ Rem Koolhaas, *SMLXL*, (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1995), p. 937

⁷ Rem Koolhaas, *SMLXL*, (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1995), p. 604

Jeffrey Kipnis calls a *performative discourse*.⁸ Koolhaas's 'strategy of the void' is a mechanism that creates the fragments in the building in which nobody has full control; parts that have no practical purpose or use, and where no one knows what to expect. These are the places where neither the form nor the function is needed in order for architecture to occur. Precisely the acute absence of these elements and the accidental presence of the drifting visitor makes perfect framework for the performance.

The function is always subordinated to man, it always serves. On the other hand, the performance serves no one. It is essentially independent and free, and it can easily be superior even to man. For Koolhaas functionality is something boring, and he is always very eager to explore what role the building really plays, what kind of scenes it triggers, and what it stimulates. There is one building that generously offers opportunity for this kind of adventures, and daringly explores the limits of the architecture in every possible way. It is one of OMA's recent masterpieces: China Central Television Headquarters, in Beijing.

This weird skyscraper instead of aiming toward the sky like all the other decent skyscrapers suddenly decides to twist and starts to chase its own tail. In this way it creates one gigantic loop in the very heart of the former hutong fabric. "The essence of the building" – writes Koolhaas – "is to take the high out of high-rise and to redirect the evolution of the tower to its potential for a social interface."⁹ But this unusual form is not just limited to the search for new patterns in the social and programmatic relations within the content of the building. The loop, in a rather absurd way, continues once existing hutong's labyrinthine alleys and redirects them into the sky. It has no beginning or end. The building acts like an odd Möbius strip enabling for one if walking in one direction to pass throughout the whole building, going up and down, left and right, above and beneath, only to return to the point where he started. It provokes an endless and aimless journey, analogous to one that could have been experienced in the now destroyed maze of

⁸ Peter Eisenman, *Ten Canonical Buildings 1950 – 2000*, (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 2008), p. 205

⁹ Rem Koolhaas, 'Skyscraper: A Typology of Public and Private', from Bernard Tschumi (edited by) and Irene Cheng (edited by), *The State of Architecture at the Beginning of the 21st Century*, (New York: The Monacelli Press, Inc., 2003), p. 75

the old city. We could say that Koolhaas here wittily plays with his old paradoxical theory learned from Manhattan that “destruction is another word for preservation.”¹⁰ The once existing context reappears in an utterly unexpected and bizarre way.

CCTV plays even more interesting role in a wider urban setting. One of the greatest qualities and most important virtues of this building is its unstable identity. CCTV creates a vast panorama of radically different impressions dependent on the point of view of the beholder – a true ‘rashomonian’ adventure of uncertainty, relativity, and doubt (fig. 3.5). It is almost impossible to get a fix on the building’s scale. Seen from the distance, among the generic glass and steel towers, it seems like a child’s toy. From closer range, however, it becomes a giant, fighting with enormous strain to support the weight of the cantilevered body. This erratic character of the building – which from some angles seems weak, unstable, and fragile and from the others triumphal, dominant, and strong – is repeatedly rejecting the logical assumptions and denies to be reduced to one single interpretation or image. There is no datum, no ideal spot, from where the building should be observed; each viewpoint is equally important as any other. It is as if the building does not accept the role of a simple object, made only to be observed by some reasoning subject. Instead, it acts independently of our expectations or needs, and establishes a different kind of attitude toward man; one new relation that goes beyond the old Cartesian duality. If you are standing before the building the form provokes you to move, to walk around. A change in your position provides a change of the identity of the object. You are realizing that both of you are occupying the same space. In that sense, the building acts like some external force that initiates your activity. Suddenly, you are caught and participate in one big performance where the rules or the outcome are never known in advance. CCTV is an inconsistent inanimate object *par excellence*.

¹⁰ Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1994), p. 151



3.5 Rem Koolhaas/OMA, China Central Television Headquarters, Beijing, 2008

Another thing that we should not overlook in this project is again Koolhaas's exploration of 'the strategy of the void'. The form of the building is represented as a kind of cutout from some quondam solid, an unknown whole. It is impossible to neglect the conspicuous and disturbing absence of something inherent and substantial that once was there, and now is forever lost. We perceive this missing part as a still integral element inseparable from the body of the building. Looking throughout the hole of the loop this 'ghost building' almost becomes visible and real. What we see is equally important as what is missing. Both unexpected presence and absence count. What we actually experience is, again, the 'non-present presence'. The building does not end with the borders of its shape, but it continues, spreads into space, beyond measure or comprehension – by its imponderable parts. Koolhaas makes a kind of diversion. He acts as a performance artist who uses architecture instead of his own body.

Speaking of CCTV, I would like to conclude this chapter with a small digression, which can also reveal a certain performative aspect in Koolhaas's work and even more embed his position in the realm of the modernist tradition. From the earliest times, back in 1970s while still writing his *Delirious New York*, Koolhaas was very interested in Salvador Dalí's paranoid critical method (PCM), and its relevance to architecture. The PCM is a surrealist technique that enables one to gain knowledge out of his spontaneous and delirious associations and interpretations. The main ambition of the method is "to discredit the world of reality."¹¹ Dalí uses the PCM in reading of famous Jean François Millet's painting *L'Angelus* (fig. 3.6). The praying couple modestly standing on a barren field is interpreted by Dalí as a moment of sexual tension and desire that could, any second, culminate and turn into the action. After his arrival to New York, impressed by the primordial and violent poetry of the city, he implements the PCM into architecture and continuing with the reference to Millet he treats buildings as the figures from this painting (fig. 3.7). "Each evening the skyscrapers of New York assume the anthropomorphic shapes of multiple gigantic Millet's *Angeluses* of the tertiary period, motionless and ready to perform the sexual act and to devour one another, like swarms of

¹¹ Rem Koolhaas, 'Dalí, the Critical Method & Le Corbusier', from Peter Eisenman & Rem Koolhaas with Jeffrey Kipnis & Robert Somol, *Supercritical*, (London: Architectural Association Publications, 2010), p.92

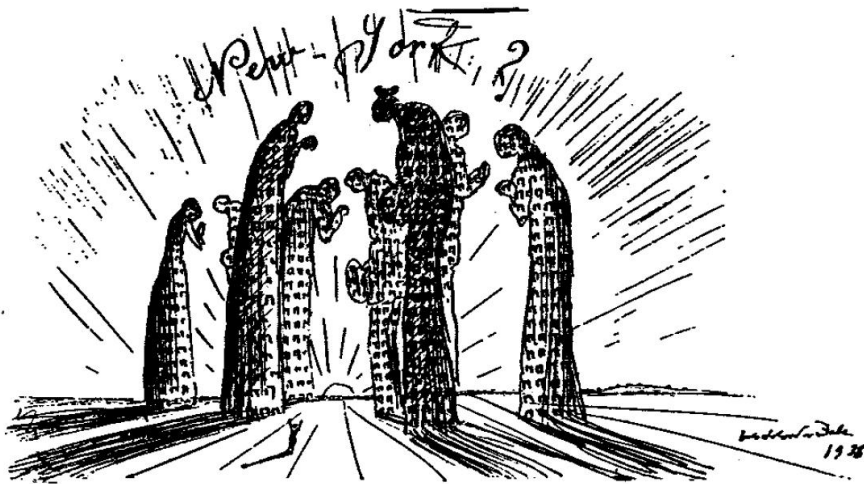
praying mantes before copulation.”¹² Inspired with this Dalí’s idea, Koolhaas makes the whole scenario of episodes from the love life of these skyscrapers. There is one less known but beautiful drawing by Madelon Vriesendorp where the Empire State Building and Chrysler Building are standing in a similar manner as Millet’s couple, but now charged with Dalí’s paranoid vision (fig. 3.8). The skyscrapers are bending towards each other, as if they want to touch, or kiss...

Following Dalí’s PCM and pursuing the delirium of interpretations we could assume that while in New York these two skyscrapers were too distant, too narrowed by the conventions and tied by the imperative of the bachelor culture, so they could not be together. They had to wait for a whole century and travel half the globe, all the way to China, to finally encounter and embrace each other. CCTV could be perceived as the last chapter of this 150 years long saga, which begins somewhere on the empty fields of Netherlands, wanders throughout Paris and Manhattan, and ends in one of the greatest metropolis, in the very heart of Beijing – always unmistakably picking the current center of the world as the stage of its delirious performance.

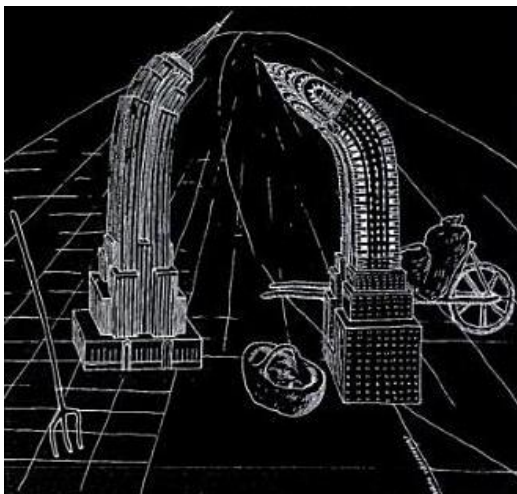
¹² Salvador Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, (New York: Dial Press, 1942), p. 334



3.6 Jean François Millet, *L'Angelus*, 1859



3.7 Salvador Dalí, *New York?*, 1938 (one of many PCM variations of Millet's painting)



3.8 Madelon Vriesendorp, *Manhattan Angelus*, 1976

3.3. Primitive Future House

“The images of caves and vegetation, of clouds and waves which are evoked at the beginning of this second sonnet rise from the warm vapor of tears, tears of homesickness.”¹ – Walter Benjamin

In the previous two chapters I tried to illuminate and depict some of the less obvious but nonetheless essential modernist strategies in the work of two well acclaimed and most influential architects of today. In this last chapter, however, I would like to point to the work of one less known architect, from the younger generation, which in a strikingly inventive and rather venturous way explores the potential of the modernism, and with that reveals and renders its possible domain of action for the future. This rising figure, which time is yet to come, is Japanese architect Sou Fujimoto.

At the beginning of his career, even before he started making actual buildings, Fujimoto establishes and defines for himself a theoretical framework which becomes an experimental playground and a generator for all of his future practice. In order to explore the basic relations between the human body and space he returns to the very beginnings

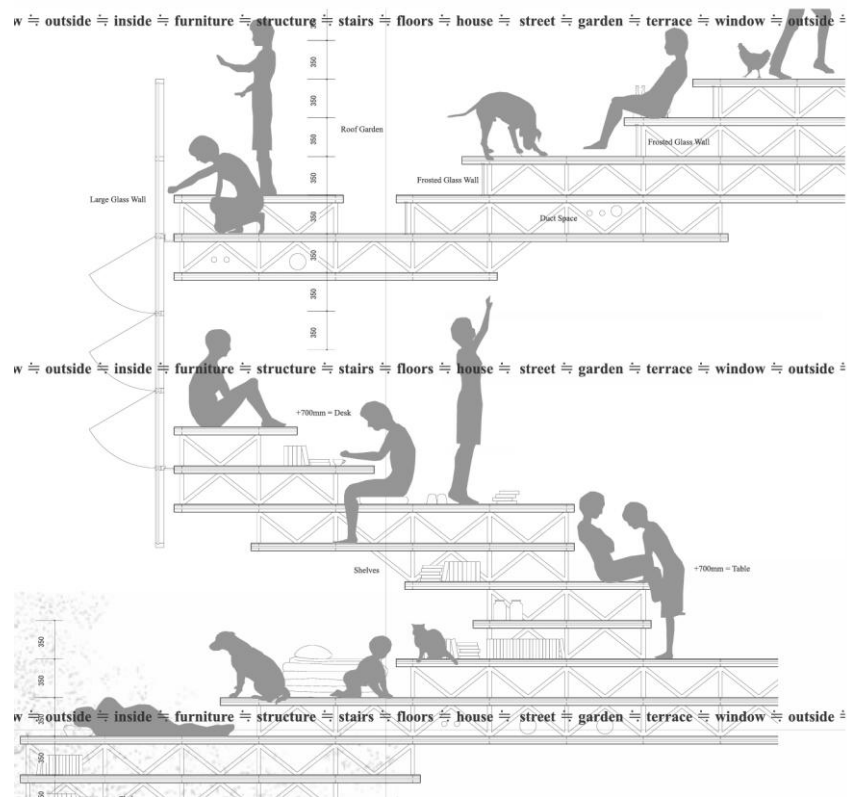
¹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, (New York: Schocken books, 2007), p. 182. (Benjamin is referring to Charles Baudelarie’s *La Vie antérieure*, the second sonnet in *Fleurs du mal*)

of architecture and juxtaposes two essentially opposite archetypal models that he calls the nest and the cave.

The nest is a place designed by the people and for the people. It is subordinated to people's needs and unconditionally responds to their demands. The only purpose of the nest is to accommodate man. Its existence is entirely dependent and conditioned by the existence of man. The nest is something that we may define as a functional architecture. On the other hand, the cave is something neither designed by the people nor for the people. It is a place existing prior to man and absolutely independently of him. A man is free to occupy this space, but in order to use it, he has to adjust himself to existing conditions. He is forced to invent a function in it. In the words of Fujimoto, "a cave is there regardless of people. It is a place that occurs naturally irrespective of whether it is hospitable or inhospitable for person to inhabit. [...] a cave is not functional but it is heuristic. Rather than coercive functionalism, it is a stimulating place in which various activities are enabled. Each day people will discover new usage for the place."² Fujimoto does not consider the functional architecture as necessarily bad, but he finds that a cave-like space is much more interesting. It offers a whole range of creative relationships that produce an incomparably richer experience. This not-designed, not-predefined space encourages a man to explore his environment. It challenges his ability to coexist with the objects that are out of his cognizance and indifferent to his presence.

The first Fujimoto's attempt to translate the cave-like space into the real architecture is his conceptual project from 2001, later known as *Primitive Future House* (fig. 3.8). Fujimoto made this project not as a commission but actually for himself, as a kind of his own starting point; a personal manifest and a prototype for all of his later works. Here we can use *Primitive Future House* as a didactic model for understanding of one design strategy which meets some of the fundamental objectives of the modernism in a quite inventive and entirely new way.

² Sou Fujimoto, 'Primitive Future', *2G N.50 Sou Fujimoto*, (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 30 Jun 2009), p.130



3.8 Sou Fujimoto, *Primitive Future House*, 2001

The house is composed of slabs layered at 35 cm intervals. These slabs are forming a cloud-like playful landscape with a variety of places where one can walk up and down, to sit or lie, in an absolutely free manner. There is no any predefined function. However, if one reacts to the space and makes a certain relation to it a specific function may occur. All of a sudden, each step of these huge and meaningless stairs can be easily turned into a floor, chair, table, bed, shelf, garden, roof, or any other purpose that at a certain moment seems appropriate. We can go even further and say that this game of assigning of functions is not necessarily something exclusively intended for man. As we can see at the diagram (fig. 3.8), the animals, plants, or even some natural phenomena (as wind, rain, sunlight, etc.), are equally invited to explore the space and find a kind of connection with it.

“When *I* use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less”³, says one of those beautiful loony characters from *Alice in Wonderland*. Almost in the same lucid and irrational manner Fujimoto treats the elements of which he composes his architecture. Nothing is previously established or imposed as a rule. Nothing has a determined meaning. A slab becomes a chair only if one chooses to sit on it, and it is a chair as long as he is sitting. The very moment one stands up and leaves – the meaning leaves with him. In Fujimoto’s architecture the meaning emerges only through some concrete situations and actions, and exists only in the presence, as long as these actions last. There is no meaning that is inherited from the past, nor can it be projected into the future. In the world of Fujimoto the meaning is not a permanent category; not fixed, not reliable, not clear. It is a space full of vagueness and impurity. Architecture exists only as an active interaction between two (or more) elements or bodies, and it can be experienced only through certain behavior. The space is not defined as a whole – which is commonly accepted understanding of architecture – but rather by local relationships. This kind of space cannot be measured, drawn, or perceived. It has no clear and visible boundaries or limits. One can never be sure when is the exact moment of entering in and exiting from this space – it just appears and disappears as a mist. It is an imponderable ‘in-between’ space, beyond human reason or knowledge.

³ Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland & Through The Looking-Glass*, (Herdfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2001), p. 223

Fujimoto conceives the house that is not designed for man! Any eventual discomfort that one might feel is gladly welcomed and treated as a tool for the fabrication of the new adventures. This kind of architecture is a radical and ultimate opposition to the functionalism. The *Primitive Future House* can be perceived as a model of unambiguous and definite disruption of all connections with the humanism. The uncanny alien – those hidden remains of the humanism which tortured the modern architecture (in one form or another) for a whole century – is finally removed. What makes this project exceptional and truly modernist is the fact that it offers a possible experience of one world, regardless of, or at least not necessarily dependent on, anything human: pure language without subject.

In the search for the cave-like architecture, Fujimoto invents the house which is not a solid object but rather a translucent territory with the blurred boundaries: a cloud, a mist, a landscape, a forest... And the very idea of the forest as architecture is the motif that Fujimoto repeatedly examines in his more recent projects. He tries to learn from this pre-human condition and see if there is the possibility for man to not just passively coexist with this self-referential external world but also to take an active role and participate in its creation. The project which perfectly exemplifies such kind of thinking and design strategy is Fujimoto's *Forest of Science*, the second prize awarded competition entry for the Centre for the Promotion of Science in Belgrade, in 2010 (fig. 3.9).

Fujimoto introduces the forest as a model for rethinking the architecture. In the book *Primitive Future*, he says, "People can discover a new coordinate system with a space impregnated by chaotic and uncertain elements analogous to, though not to purely imitate, trees and forest."⁴ The forest is a space with utterly ambiguous notion of interiority and exteriority. There is no clear distinction of what is outside or inside. It creates an infinite spectrum of radically diverse spaces and fragments that have no hierarchy or any other established and defined order. The forest also offers the protection in the most primitive and archetypal way. It is a hiding place, a sheltered ground, but at the same time it creates no barriers or restraints. It gives the absolute freedom for one to go in any direction he chooses. There is no right or wrong way; any way is as good as any other. The forest

⁴ Sou Fujimoto, *Primitive Future*, (Tokyo: INAX-Shuppan, 2008), p. 67

generates a kind of highly complex but essentially neutral condition which does not impose nor suggest any program or function which has to be executed. Man can endlessly wander in this complex space surrounded by all sides with a flood of information, the vast majority of which does not even make any sense or significance to him. These information are not addressed to man; he cannot understand their relations or meanings, and they are entirely independent of him. One is free to use them, examine and look for the meaning, or simply ignore them. But the bottom line is that the forest is a world for itself.

These characteristics and qualities of the forest are exactly what Fujimoto tries to create in architecture. And the project *Forest of Science* is one that successfully responds to the challenge. Fujimoto starts from the simple assumption that “architecture is a garden with a roof.”⁵ The whole building is conceived as one garden space covered by a big roof levitating fifteen meters above the ground. The façade of the building is made by transparent glass on all faces, visually open to the user and the passerby. The space is divided by the multiple glass patios encased with trees inside. The glass walls have a double role: firstly, they make the whole building completely transparent, and by that dissolve the clear line between interior and exterior and make impossible for one to perceive and understand with certainty the form of the building; secondly, at the same time they mirror the surrounding greenery and the trees from the patios creating a confusing and delusive merge of the reflection and reality.

The whole concept of the building is actually based on one vivid and striking encounter of two forests. One is the natural forest, gently occupying the interior and making the continuance and the whole with the surrounding park. The other is the artificial forest of information related to the science, the real purpose and content of the building, perfectly analogous with the current global condition, in which we are flooded with the confusingly and non-hierarchically arranged vast spectrum of information, predominantly provided by the means of the electronic medias. Both natural and artificial forest are reflected in the mirror-like surface of the big roof which treats them both equally and creates an illusion of the infinite progression of the processes on which man seems to have no control or

⁵ Sou Fujimoto, *Primitive Future*, (Tokyo: INAX-Shuppan, 2008), p. 101

influence, whatsoever. It is the clash of the two worlds, one primitive and wild, and the other “the absolute simulacrum.”⁶ Everything appears to be impregnate with meaning, but in reality it reveals nothing but its own pure and raw existence. The meaning or the sense of the whole always remains somewhere beyond reason or cognition, entirely unreachable. There are no clear or recognizable objects. Architecture exists only ‘in-between’, as the field of relations between artifice and nature.

Project *Forest of Science* explores a possible condition of a primitive world; the one before, or maybe even after, the existence of human consciousness. Man cannot find any instructions or guidance on how to use this space and how to behave in it. There is no reliable cognitive map that would save him from discomfort and uncertainty. It is a space preceding the very construction of the psyche or the subject itself, the ego, personality and the like – a space of pre-individualistic; a pre-subject condition. Fujimoto’s architecture is a part of, and contributes to, a greater cultural restart – an ultimate *tabula rasa* – which is the zero degree of human existence *per se*, wherefrom starts a quest for a new convergence of values and a new constitution of priorities, enabling an elementary accordance with the reality.

This kind of architecture could be identified with the endeavors of James Joyce, whose texts are the embodiment of the world which does not necessarily imply the presence of man (whether that man is a reader, an author, a viewer, or any other subject). This is the exploration of the radically different conditions of human existence and the creation of the methods, which, as Hermann Broch puts it, “forces man to descend into the meta-logical regions of the unconscious and irrational, to track down the primal moving elements of being.”⁷ By returning to the primitive cave-like forms, Fujimoto tends to recover the long ago lost remembrance of some previous life; of the world in which man coexists with the nature in a more corresponding and respectful way and where he once founded his first home.

⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *America*, (New York: Verso, 1990), p. 114

⁷ Hermann Broch, *Geits and Zeitgeist: The Spirit in an Unspiritual Age*, (New York: Counterpoint, 2002), p. 80

Conclusion

This dissertation presents modernism as one coherent narrative that spreads throughout the entire last century up to the present day, and manifests itself in various forms and aspects, but always with the same inner agenda. This agenda of modernism is conceived and defined by the obscure nature of post-humanist subject/object relationship which displaces man out of the center of the world and considers him to be no longer the master of being.

In order to clarify and understand what modernism in architecture is, what does it do, and how it manifest itself, the above presented thesis analyzes and explores this new relation between subject and object (that is, the relation between man and objects around him) and identifies several potent instruments, or rather weapons, which are used to radically oppose the long-ruling humanism, and to express and materialize the cognizance and poetry of the new paradigm. The true agenda of modernism becomes more perceivable and emphasized when these instruments are put and displayed against the conventional instruments of humanism. Thus, the history and tradition, which are some of the fundamental devices of humanism, can be put versus modernist's *tabula rasa* and immediate present; cultural heritage vs. primitive 'pre-subject' condition; representative narrative vs. abstraction, self-referentiality and non-representativeness; solid form vs. 'non-present presence' and 'strategy of the void'; function vs. performance; scientific

exactness and logic vs. imponderable and haunted space; *ratio* vs. delirium; comfort and coziness vs. disturbance, ‘torture-house’, and cave-like space.

By following and analyzing these instruments of modernist architecture, the thesis tries to render and define the territory of the new metaphysics which is generated by man’s implacable feeling of discomfort. At the same time, it detects some of the ‘aliens’ in this territory: the remains of humanist anthropocentrism, manifested through functionalism, utopian idealism, and the imposition of the formal rules canonized as *style*. The thesis also argues that armed with these instruments, in the same way as architecture of Le Corbusier and Hilberseimer, the contemporary architecture – represented here by the works of Peter Eisenma, Rem Koolhaas, and Sou Fujimoto, as well as by the rapid development of the new Chinese cities – is the ultimate embodiment of this very same new metaphysics.

If we closely observe how these instruments are used in architecture, we can clearly perceive and learn what man had to do, what predicaments he had to encounter, and in what way he had to adjust and change himself to be able to construct the ontology of this new reality. Here, I would like once more to return to the allegory from Louis Buñuel film *The Exterminating Angel*, mentioned in the introduction of this paper. The group of high-class people at the lavish mansion is imprisoned in one room by the metaphysical force of the old world of humanism, isolating them and preventing to participate in the outer reality. The people consume what little water and food is left from the previous night's party. Days pass, and they become less and less polite and generous, and more and more quarrelsome, careless, and hostile. Slowly, the false civilized conventions disappear; the phony masks of courtesy fall, and what is left is the bare and raw existence. The luxurious bourgeois room is turned into the Upper Paleolithic cave – the first known dwelling of man – and they, like real cavemen, slaughter the animals with bare hands and roast them on fires made from floorboards and broken furniture. This group of people performs one cultural restart, the nullification of all imposed values and priorities. They reach the zero degree of history and start fresh all over again, from the very beginning. Only then, after they break all the postulates of the old world into pieces, the metaphysical barriers disappear and they are free to leave the room and experience the reality of one new paradigm.

The process identical to the one depicted in this Bunuel's film is inherent to modernist architecture. Man, once the decisive originator of all meaning, has to abandon the high authority of Cartesian dualism and confront with one strange, unfamiliar, and hostile world with no cozy and warm home that provides security and comfort. He constructs the condition with the zero ground of identity; a system which reduces man to the most basic and the most primitive mode of existence. It is the new urban environment that is deprived of any form of anthropocentrism and therefore it is not captivated by the old demons of humanism. It is one drafty place of uncertainties; provisional shelter, gateway, exile... Modernism is the state where homelessness is an axiom: if you do not leave your home, the home will leave you, and most likely in a quite literal way. Man becomes treated as an object, as an alien caught in the foreign territory and subjected to the unknown rules and will. There is no reliable cognitive map that would help him and save him from discomfort. Man returns to space preceding the very construction of the psyche or the subject itself, the ego, personality and the like, in order to find the new values and invent the new modes of behavior that would enable an elementary accordance with the reality.

This thesis can be read as a brief journey through the twentieth century architecture. However, unlike regular journeys that usually follow one chronological narrative, this one is constructed of ostensibly random illustrations, connected as dots in a connect-the-dots puzzle, to delineate the silhouette of the paradigm of modernism. The thesis aims primarily at solving not a practical problem but a 'conceptual one', and it is motivated by the flawed understanding and misreading of the modernist architecture.

Therefore, this dissertation can be little more than one introduction, one point of reference from which the understanding of this problem may be evolved. Although, it cannot offer the comprehensive knowledge of this immense subject, it can at least serve to denote some relevant issues, and thus make the contribution to thinking and developing the discourse of the modernist architecture and the contemporary art in general.

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