

Open Hand, Open Castle

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notes from architecture

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**Le Corbusier's
fragments of actuality**

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This text can in no way be architecture. It can only lie here, before its possibility, before architecture, *before the fact*.

Preferably it has to be understood as a tool to organize the mess, the noise, the overwhelming information and communication screaming silently everywhere—for oneself. As an hypothesis I believe it is about making all of it readable, and so, “productive” for crisis and excess can finally spring out from certainties rather than anxieties.

While every project of architecture is somehow both a thought and an anticipation *on*, the text can only be the formulation of a thought. Consequently an architect writes for making it more precise and ready to be a hidden force in the project. As an hypothesis, it has to be put into practice by the architect, catching the project in between its physical context and its cultural context: *two jaws of the vise*. Hence a potential tool for the reader, and a certain weapon against the author.

After all, building oneself a brief; a kind of study where past facts are taken, fragments of them are tested, and possibly their relevance highlighted.

The term theory is secretly *at stake*, but it is in no way resembling papers that relate to some kind of a “method” for preexisting problems to be solved. The aim is rather to take the opportunity to write around and about; on and from the culture of architecture, as establishing a necessary tool for “authority”, a tool of “power”. Yet a twist is introduced: authority is not at the service of any justification. It is always hypothetical and is used to make one’s own experience the strength of its force, hence a serious tool of self-criticism

allowing the project to become ever active, to become a fragment of a series, an architectural argument. Consequently formulating the necessary strategies for architecture to possibly go beyond its ultimate death after the building's completion, and face the questions of resilience, permanence and transformation. In such a way can we address the *projet de sauvegarde*.

Hence discussing a possible methodology underlying the structure of architecture, understood as a cultural discipline. To do so the *plan obus* is the case study, convening Le Corbusier as its author, and Manfredo Tafuri as its historian. As an unbuilt project, it addresses the organization and strategies underlying a practice.

It is about *how* it is done rather than *what* is done. That does not mean we want to know all of the variants, tests, details, failed perspectives or plans in the archives. A full volume on the *plan obus* in the Garland Collection does not seem appropriate for what is undertaken here. Hence it is more about the intentions, arguments, strategies, hypothesis and studies. All under a continuous research on architecture as ideology.

Eventually this text is a collection of notes and thoughts coming from or wanting to be part of architecture. Its hidden goal wanting to find a new link between the *chose humaine*, the social stance and the culture of architecture.

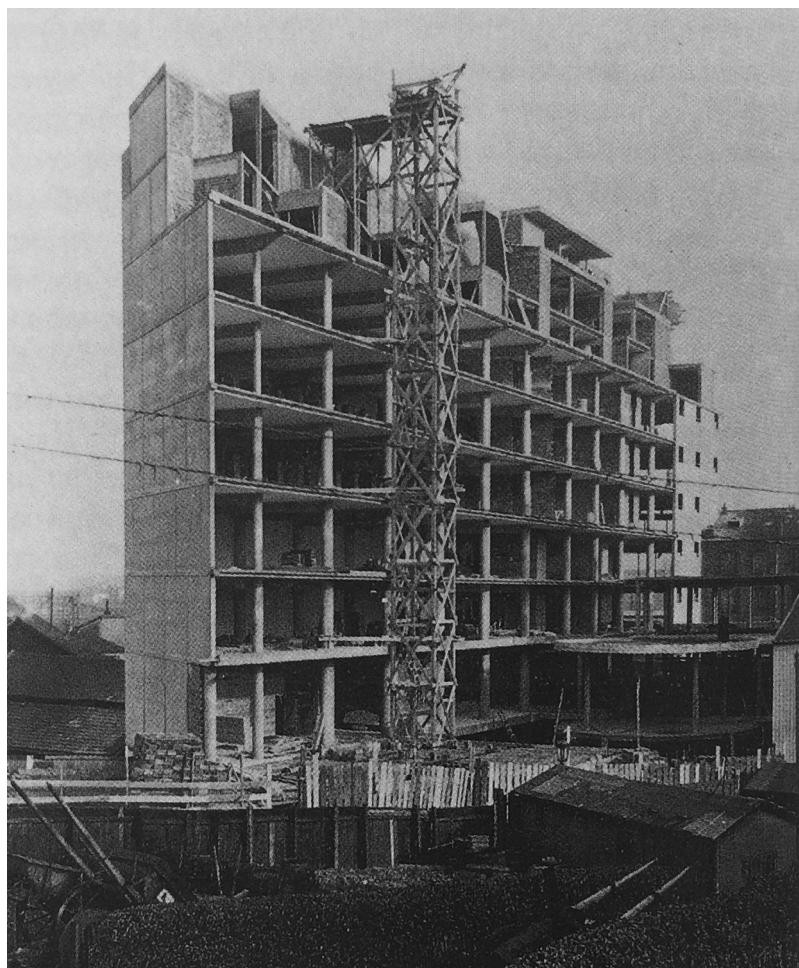
It is a brief for an office to come...and for the project(s) of architecture becoming.

—Vous savez quelle est la différence entre un patron et un ouvrier ? ...

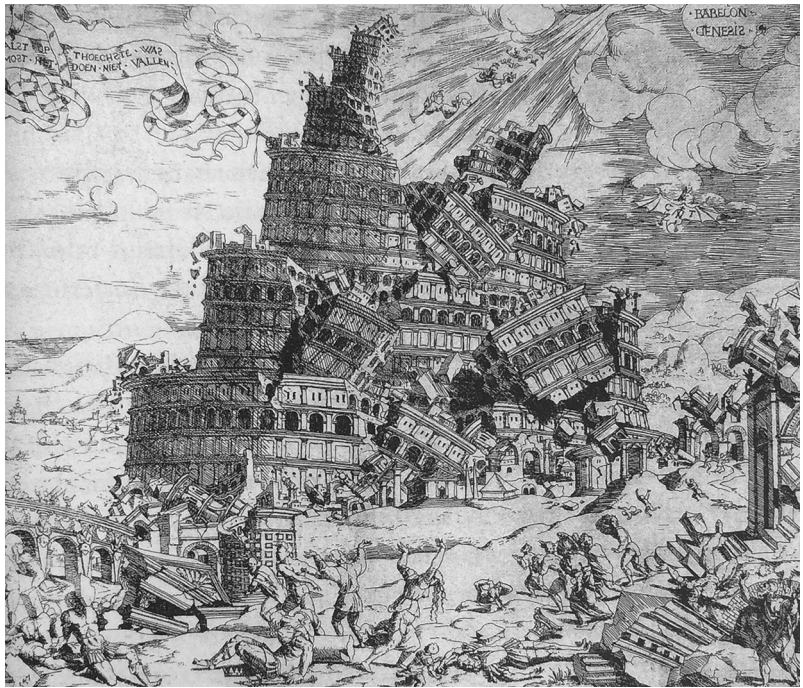
Godard, *Passion*, 1981, 72'20''

Manfredo Tafuri, *The sphere and the labyrinth*, 1980, 276.

“if the long voyages of no return that, from Piranesi to the *Lied von der Erde*, mark the stages of the long goodbye to the ancient homeland of certitudes have enabled us to recognize the necessity of the lie, it would be a grave error to mistake for one’s new “duty” the standing at the edge of the dock to wave goodbye perpetually to the *friend* who is leaving.”



Le Corbusier, *Cité de Refuge*, Paris, 1929–1933.



Cornelis Anthonisz, *fall of tower of babel*, 1547.

G.-B. Piranesi, *Anticita romane iv, veduta di una parte de
fondamenti del teatro di marcello*, 1756-84.



Jean-Luc Godard, *Histoire(s) du cinéma 3*, 1998, Paris:
Gallimard, 99.

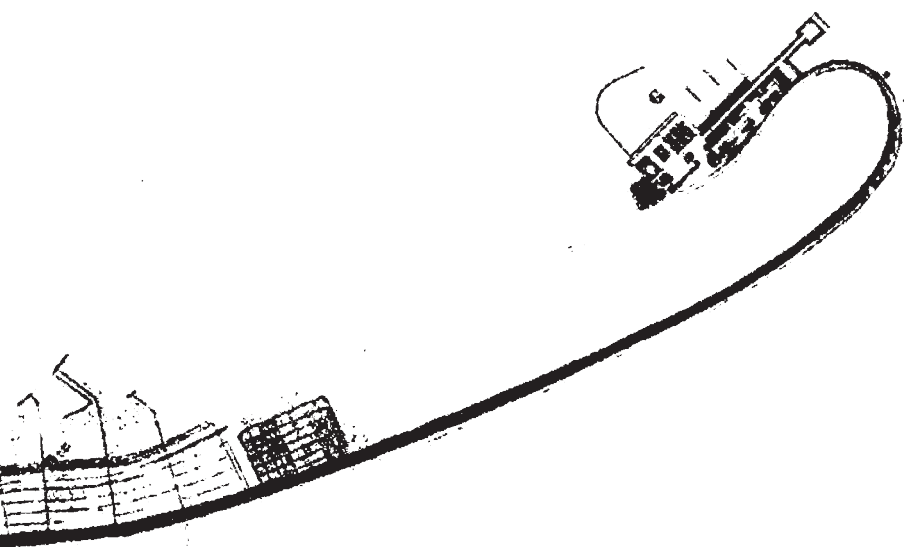


Jean-Luc Godard, *Histoire(s) du cinéma 3*, 1998, Paris:
Gallimard, 101.





Le Corbusier, *Urbanisation de la ville d'Alger, projet A*,
1930.



Open Hand

The *plan obus* for Algiers is known as one of a collection of projects entitled “Urbanisation de la ville d’Alger, projet A, B, C” and follows previous urban plan studies in South America (1929-1930). They occupy the work and thoughts of Le Corbusier’s practice for approximately four consecutive years of research between 1930 and 1934. Project A (*obus*) dates from 1930, while B and C in between 1931-1934. During this period he will elaborate the most advanced hypothesis on modern urbanism from the standpoint of both *ideology*

and the architectural approach on *form*. Hence Le Corbusier will be able to unveil, through the power of the *project* of architecture alone, established narratives and illusions deeply imbedded in the discipline. Manfredo Tafuri's importance in understanding the plan and the architect as such goes without saying for he dedicates—amongst other papers, fragments here and there—his sixth chapter of *Progetto e utopia* to the latter, and will eventually be able to articulate the definitive crisis of modern movement's utopia by means of it.

More generally, the research undertaken by the historian in between the publication of *Teorie e storia dell'architettura* (1968) and his essay "*Machine et mémoire*" (1982) sheds light on the crisis afflicting architecture since the birth of the architect as profession and on important considerations about the question of *form* in architectural discourse. Consequently, constant reference to his work will be made, for we believe it is the most important historian of the twentieth century for always looking at "what an architect could do when certain things were not possible, and what he could do when they were possible."¹ Rather than aiming to add a paper on his colossal

1. Tafuri, Manfredo. *There is no criticism, only history*, in *Design Book Review: DBR*. Berkeley: n. 9, spring 1981, 11.

writings for whom there is little room to navigate, we will secretly take him as an underlying (and necessary) friend, attempting to understand its value for today, as the possibility of a new fact and abuse some of his fragments before injecting them in the project. Hence we see with Tafuri the critical tools to approach contemporaneity; and with Le Corbusier we see the resolution of these tools into architecture. We start to picture a double portrait from where we wish to start and build upon: a discourse about form for today with Le Corbusier & Manfredo Tafuri.

Mieux vaudrait donc accepter la réalité telle qu'elle est et reconnaître à l'historien un rôle dialectique vis-à-vis de l'architecte : même compte tenu de constantes oppositions.²

So ideology and form are convened.

First with care for such notions and sometimes conventions often play the role of being *common places*: “places of exchange” that rightly seem necessary at the beginning but gradually show themselves as places of ambiguities and difficulties that render the intrinsic experience of

2. Tafuri, Manfredo. *Théories et histoire de l'architecture*. Paris: Sadg, 1976, 107.

communication impossible; eventually driving the most dramatic instruments lying at the core of our contemporary anxiousness. Then one needs to embrace these common places and try to resolve their ambiguities for oneself only, in order to build upon them rather than starting from scratch all over again.

For the moment we leave the former notion on the side while on the contrary, and although having been extensively written about, we see in the latter an actuality of the most importance that needs to be tackled on and on. While “form” is commonly understood as “shape” we believe rather the notion as the complex and precise articulation between the *structure of architecture*, the modes of production and its potential symbolic power. It is through this frame only that form will be understood and will guide our observations on the *plan obus*, hence potentially showing its relevance for a discourse on architecture today.

What we see in the series of projects are three formulations around one intension, clearly defined in the project A and expressly readable in the well know “perspectives”, or model pictures carefully framed. An urban hypothesis is proposed and formulates a radical strategy foreseeing the upcoming and uncontrolled developments of big cities. To do this the practice breaks necessarily free from administrative routines and introduce a new scale of dimensions required by contemporary realities.³ Notwithstanding the geopolitical concerns underlying the choice of Algiers as the locus of his operations, we will stick to what the project does in the architectural field for it proves to be a key moment in the development of the architect’s work. Hence the project is addressed as a possible *retroactive manifesto* tackling the European City in the context of the modern movement, its utopia and its underlying models of city expansion.

By virtue of its breaking free, three phases are projected and elaborate the ingredients of the new city-territory scale: first the business district; then housing complexes connected to the latter; and ultimately a viaduct, infrastructural housing slab

3. Le Corbusier et al. *Le Corbusier - oeuvre complète. volume 2*, 1929-1934, 15th edition, Basel: Birkhäuser, 2013, 140.

of 180'000 inhabitants connecting two existing peripheries of Algiers allowing a highway on the roof. Next to it lies existing and necessary elements for the conception of the project. The hills, plains and sea give the geomorphologic specificities on one side, while the casbah along with other existing building fabric make the anthropomorphic qualities of Algiers. The *plan obus* equally deals with these elements as they merely serve as tools *for* or fragments *of* architecture. As a consequence they make an indirect critique of the sources available for the architectural project. Indeed nothing is yet architecture but everything can become architecture (fairly as Pablo Picasso roughly around the same time, would abuse anything passing through his hands from its natural or artificial condition in the production of culture). The hierarchy between the sources will come from a compositional point of view and the reading of their symbolic potential, organizing and staging opposites for eventually overcoming the necessary diagram (the cliché) underlying every urban project. Further on, consequences of such a critique helps the architect to tackle the formulation of a thought on the profession, or the *design* of a strategy overcoming the crisis previously mentioned; namely, the division of labor undertaken since the dawn of modernity.

Rather than denying its fragmented condition, this is made possible by telling the necessary bridges that have to be built between each fragments, between all specializations of knowledge.

“Celui qui touche à l’architecture [...] se doit d’être un impeccable plasticien et un connaisseur vivant et vivace des arts. Aujourd’hui où l’architecte remet à l’ingénieur une part de son travail et de sa responsabilité, l’accession à la profession ne devrait être consentie qu’aux individus dûment dotés du sentiment de l’espace [...]. Privé de ce sens, l’architecte perd sa raison d’être et son droit à exister.”⁴ —1945

Besides the engineering faculties he goes as far as to claim *everything* as an active and necessary part of a process of *re-use*, as powerful tools coming from architectural imagination and projection of space eventually producing some kind of new organizational scheme. The natural environment,

4. Le Corbusier. *L’espace indicible*, in “L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui,” 1946, special issue, 9-17.

“He who deals with architecture [...] has the task of being an impeccable *plasticien* and a living, vital *connoisseur* of the arts. Today, when the architect hands over part of his work and responsibility to the engineer, access to the profession should only be granted to individuals duly endowed with a sense of space [...]. Deprived of this sense, the architect loses his *raison d’être* and his right to exist.”

the vernacular, the whole human environment is understood as necessary sources of intelligence all specific to the way they are produced and Le Corbusier abuses, and reuses, their spatial quality and inject them into an architectural drawing: at the service of *form*, in an eternal process of becoming.

La chose humaine par excellence that was once merely the city is here tried out on some new borders, wanting to be the territory. And for everything that is around *architecture*—its periphery—has always been a source for architecture to use and abuse, inject and transform; the discipline simultaneously spills out of the plot limit arbitrarily containing it. By doing so violent tensions are introduced between the container and the contained; between the permanent and the actively consumed; eventually surpassing its original dialectics. As such the identification of the new laws of tooling leads to resolve its irrationalities and contradictions rather than masking them with superstructural images.⁵ We can only stress the fact we are here talking merely about architecture as a discipline rather than urbanism as an instrument.

5. See Tafuri, *Théories et histoire*, 1976, 54. And Tafuri, Manfredo et al. *Projet et utopie : de l'Avant-garde à la Métropole*, Paris: Dunod, 1979, 107.

Hence the territory is comprised as the result of a collection of contradictory fragments: sometimes resulting from a collective built enterprise, the casbah being the prime example of the city prior to the fragmentation of knowledge—once when *thoughts where asserting life and life activating thoughts*⁶—; or radically opposed to it, from the planning of districts by private and public capitals. Hence the condition of the European City is embraced and the discipline is put to extremes in order to understand *if* and *how* architecture is possible within it.

For understanding Le Corbusier's attitude towards his approach on the city we need to recall his attraction to the nineteenth century agenda in the defense of progress and the dialectics of enlightenment needing full participation of all social classes in order to achieve its faith. Indeed his early studies reveal the fascination for the latter strategies and devices ensuring its project—without ever falling into mere academic and formal exercises—while keeping up with pre-modern tools

6. See Deleuze, Gilles. *Nietzsche*, Paris: PUF, 2020, 16.

of relentless “simplification and will to synthesis”.⁷ As such everyone becomes an “active subject” of the project as the public is sought to participate at every level of the process of its reorganization.⁸ In both of them the *technological device* is taking the role of mediator amongst the parts. Although in different terms we clearly grasp its genealogy. This device, mostly embedded in the structure of the viaduct (the slab), is in continuity with core aspects developed in the project for the salvation army in Paris (1929-1933) in which principles are tested for the formulation of a plan setting rules capable of asserting their logic beyond the boundaries of the plot limit. Ultimately becoming the matrix for possible future developments,⁹ and imposing the rules of architecture to a total “will to planning”. In Paris he was effectively building the fragment of a machine allowing the controlling of exact environments and testing the ability and performance of the *pilotis* as a potential structure capable of introducing spatial hierarchy and quality while allowing reconfigurations for maximum flexibility. And as such there will be very few tools

7. Tafuri, Manfredo. “*Machine et mémoire*”: *The City in the Work of Le Corbusier*, in Brooks, H. A. & Fondation Le Corbusier, *Le Corbusier : the Garland essays*. New York, 1987, 208.

8. Tafuri, *Projet et utopie*, 1979, 105.

9. Taylor, Brian Brace. *Le Corbusier: La Cité de Refuge: Paris 1929/1933*, Paris: Equerre, 1981, 31-32.

manipulated at the core of the objective ensuring the functioning of its “extendability”. More than the controlled environment, it is precisely the *pilotis* that seem to become the fundamental tool paradoxically allowing to create hierarchies in the *plan libre*.

If we go back to the beginning of the use and development of the *pilotis*, we see it first built in the garden of the villa La Roche (1923) grounded in the grass close to a tree trunk supporting the wing. Gradually leaving the pillars for *pilotis* they will be exposed in varying manners: coming out of the closet and embodying a new role of “signifier”. The Pavillon Suisse (1925) will be one of the incomplete examples of it, where columns are theatrically exposed on a platform, *évènement plastique* organized in such a way to insert hierarchy by means of its effect.

It is in the furrow of the investigation of the *évènement plastique* and in the will for giving a pecking order to the territory that the viaduct embodies the minimum *pilotis* and “terrains artificiels” every two floors. As the 1909 theorem of “the utopian device for the production of unlimited numbers of virgin sites on a single metropolitan

location”¹⁰ it shelves maximum “programmatic indeterminacy” and gives a measure to the territory *through size alone*: about 10 kilometers by 60 to 90 meters high. From the salvation army and its perfect machinery for possible extensions, the minimal tools will embody a “complete” technological device, integral fragment of the territory and will be able to resonate with the existing in a “cohesive composition”. What is housed on *obus*’s plateaux is a suggestion of type plans precisely conducted and setting the principles for varying housing units in size and stories. Thus content is merely a diagram, and the inhabitant is asked to participate “from below” building autonomously or through a cooperative, the house of his choice and rightly helps the diagram out of its initial *cliché*. All basic infrastructural needs are planned and build by the state. From the intrinsic nihilism of modernity rises an empty “building” ready to be used in thousand manners and be the “theatre of consumption”.

So in trying to answer the *if* and the *how* architecture is possible within the scale of the territory, a renovation is enabled within the discipline, while sticking to architecture as strict means of the project and as the framework of

10. Koolhaas, Rem. *Delirious New York : a retroactive manifesto for Manhattan*, New York: Monacelli Press, 1994, 83.

these means. The limits of architecture are pushed from within, towards the *plan*—keeping Tafuri as our common ground, the plan is here understood as the overall organization of society leading to a complexity in its conception forcing architects to become mere technicians.

Again, this is possible only through the tools of *design* and paradoxically by both an excess and an economy of the means. For when everything can become architecture, when everything has a potential to be reused, architecture has the obligation of getting extremely precise about where it stands for itself. Only then can participation and reuse be “productive” for design.¹¹ Decisions will be made only by fragments, reducing the tools of design to the precise articulation of the *pilotis*, by shaping ways in which the machine interacts with the existing, and by orchestrating the sum at the service of the architectural artifact, eventually providing a choc of productive *ecologies for architecture*. No decisions are made in the reused parts, understood as *ready-made* hijacked at the benefit of the whole, hence by going far beyond architecture as *object*: architecture as *tableau* in which everything is *shelved*. Rules are set to organize relations and hierarchies between facts at the scale of the

11. Note these are places out of the realm of *decisions*.

territory, allowing at the same time a hypothetical revolution from “below” by offering the stage for any possible actions to occur within the facts. *Obus* explodes the *milieu human* in all four dimensions; questioning construction, historicity, and values; rethinking the organization and distribution of the duos private-public, production-consumption, as Loos would have done with his raumplan at the scale of the city...¹²

Indeed by building precisely on the inner quality of each of these existing fragments, the device reenacts them as necessary sources of intelligence for every element has the possibility to claim its own value and symbolism. But in no way is the fragment seen as autonomous, neither depending on *one* other. They are incomplete.

As such the fragment does not seek a certain kind of “completeness” to be achieved with what is

12. ...and what an impossible pleasure is it to imagine Loos drawing a proposal for *Roma Interrotta* after having pushed the idea of the urban plinth in Chicago. A house for Loos is one that is urban. It has a plinth addressing the city, embodying a cultural affair like the one of the Michaelerplatz; and a cake is placed on top, containing the labyrinth of intimacy. In the United States this house pushed the idea of the urban plinth in grand *American style*...all the inverted urbanity contained in the villas, here exploded; and what a cake...

lying at its periphery. They merely perform better together while at the same time allowing them to exist on their own. It would be naïve to believe their is a fundamental need for the casbah to exist, or the hills, or any other existing condition. It would make them dependent on each other, while they cannot be. They are just lying *there*, as facts, result of human work...as several *deposito di fatica* of Cattaneo. Hence the territory is planned with a fundamental *sentiment d'humanité* believing in each others necessary “solitude”.

“[...] *le sentiment d'humanité ne consiste pas chez moi à me sentir proche de l'homme tel qu'il est, mais à supporter seulement de me sentir proche de lui... Le sentiment d'humanité n'est chez moi qu'une continuelle victoire sur moi-même.*”¹³

“*Fais en sorte que je puisse te parler*”¹⁴

When confronted to each other they compare, stare, overlook, steel or copy their *periphery*. Not

13. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Ecce Homo, Comment on devient ce que l'on est*, Paris: Gallimard, 1974, 32.

“[...] *my humanity does not consist in the fact that I understand the feelings of my fellows, but that I can endure to understand... My humanity is a perpetual process of self-mastery.*”

14. Blanchot, Maurice. *L'attente l'oubli*, Paris: Gallimard, 1962, 20.

forcing but only allowing, or *making available*¹⁵ the latter process of one's own questioning and self-mastery, which fundamentally needs *the* other or rather *an* other in order to be performed. Hence it can finally try to be more complete with itself. A sense of *communauté négative*¹⁶ allowing architecture to get rid of any symbolism and leave the other be.

This is the “new scheme” mentioned previously. And it succeeds only through the use of the technological device capable of conveying a final unitary *image* in which the naturalization of the infrastructure can hence host new symbolic meanings. The role given to the device follows the research set with the abstract technological feature erected on the terrace of Beistegui's penthouse to make an “imaged” connection with the rest of the city.¹⁷ Indeed when Le Corbusier frames the roof in 1929 with high opaque railings he erases all traces of *cityness* with the exception of estranged monumental figures entering the composition together with a baroque fireplace. A collection of

15. Heading towards a new theory of *availability*.

16. Blanchot can only be our best friend in this attempt. See Maurice Blanchot, *La communauté inavouable*, Paris: Minuit, 1983, 9-47.

17. Tafuri, *Projet et utopie*, 1979, 107. And Tafuri, “*Machine et mémoire*”, 1987, 207.

historical facts, deprived of time, in between *la terre et l'éther*. The visual connection to the outside is done merely by a periscope literally picturing the city; conveying its image; allowing to a certain extent a mediation. In Algiers however, a *bridge* is built. The *chose humaine*, the social stance and the culture of architecture find themselves forming a whole through the advent of engineering.

oder:
wenn dann
der Erde Grün
von neuem euch erglänzt¹⁸

However only the obsessive attitude towards synthesis, and the conscious use of abstraction as a tool, allows the architect to concentrate his thoughts on such a simple yet important project. We can recall the appeal for wanting to rationalize the sentimental, find harmony between the polychromic surfaces, inject sculptures as a crucial part of the Villa Mandrot or designing *muralnomads* for the mobile tenants. But when architecture sees its borders extend towards the

18. “or: / When / the Green of the Earth / Will Glisten for You Anew” Huillet, Danièle. & Straub, Jean-Marie. *The Death of Empedocles, or When the Green of the Earth Will Glisten for You Anew*, 1986, 132 minutes, color.

limits of the territory the notion takes a whole new meaning, and architecture is merely the instrument giving measure and order to the sum of human activities as an *external totality*. Not far from it is the *psychogeographic* map; yet whereas they erase all in between in order to intensify relations between the parts, here, it finds itself emphasized and put in tension by the two distinct realities, different “labour of existence” beautifully coexisting in the drawing of the human’s work palimpsest.

By reaching such a high degree of *realism* and precision in the articulation of the structure, the modes of production and the symbolic power, the project shows the explicit potential of form to operate as a positive fact, “authenticating and naturalizing the artificial universe of technological precision”,¹⁹ thus through the *cultural* allowing us to dissolve in the “*natural*”.

But having the modern movement as context for the project to take place “undermines” it all. Here, the sum between the *structure*, the modes of production and the potential symbolic power are still under the spell of architecture. And architecture is still under the spell of Tafuri’s *lie*. The structure not yet being *of architecture* but still of the “building”—at this point a civil engineering

19. Tafuri, *Projet et utopie*, 1979, 105.

structure. Indeed claiming architecture as a mode of production and not merely as the *structure* within the articulation of form is what drives modernity's utopia. Ultimately the project is convened in the "perspectives" only.

Nevertheless if we investigate these "perspectives" and look closely at how the project is communicated by means of them, we see an actual operativeness in their structure, for they convey a potential "*discours par les images*"—here recalling the radical Italian groups of the 1960s. Beyond convincing the inexistent client (more target or scapegoat) images are able, by means of the excess undertaken in the project and by framing its argument, to take the plan out of its diagram, and tackle the discipline. Hence making explicit that a project always faces a double context, the cultural and the physical. As such the perspective becomes an argument in favor or against architecture. In this case, images become "the revelation of a truth" very similar to the one Tafuri was speaking of

when explaining the Piranesian excess.²⁰ So will he rightly be able to claim that it is only in the structure of the perspective, in the way the model is framed and pictured—revealing a precise image showing the argument at stake—that the “reign of necessity fused with that of liberty”.²¹ Thus the rigor of the plan fused with that abusing of higher human knowledge is *realized in the model only, for architecture only*.

Hence the question: but what is actually architecture in the *plan obus*?

—Maybe the *pilotis*; surely the model and the discourse enhanced by the picturing of it.

20. Tafuri, Manfredo. *Per una critica*, in Hays, K. Michale. *Architecture Theory since 1968*, Cambridge: MIT, 2000, 11: “Essentially, it is the struggle between architecture and the city that assumes an epic tone in Piranesi’s Campo Marzio. Here the “dialectics of the Enlightenment” attains an unsurpassed potential, as well as an ideal tension so violent that contemporaries could not grasp it as such. Piranesian excess—like the excesses of libertine Enlightenment literature in other respects—became, as such, the revelation of a truth: a truth that the architectural culture and urban planning of the Enlightenment would hasten, as they developed, to cover up.”

21. Tafuri, *ibid.* 1979, 107. For the English translation see Manfredo Tafuri, et al., *Architecture and Utopia: design and capitalist development*, Cambridge: MIT, 1996 129.

Nowhere else or everything around it, for it enhances a probative argument on modernism, and gets as far as to touch the core problem lying behind, one that will lead fleets of academics sail toward eclecticism. In fact the model is architecture: purple and turquoise shades resembling a cubist tableau on which is painted architecture *sur le motif*. Or the evidence of a thought transmitted to the discipline with all the passion that is found in between work and love. Totality is rendered merely thinkable²² and will only appear as fragments of a larger series of architectural intentions. We wonder if this really is the intention of Le Corbusier, but as said the double portrait seems more interesting for today's affairs around form, for the wrongness of Le Corbusier leads the substance of modern ideology at its pinnacle and makes it explode as a bombshell. By being as close as possible to the reality of the *plan* and paradoxically so fundamentally distant from the modern ideology, the project makes visible the underlying consequences of the modernist agenda abandoning all the necessary ideology belonging to the structure of architecture: leading the architect to its faith, an existence as mere technician. By sheer refusal, ideology is moved to other borders by flanking utopia, or the architecture as a mode of production, the architecture as conveyor of

22. Tafuri, "*Machine et mémoire*", 1987, 212.

symbolism, hence the architecture of “commitment which tried to engage politically and socially”,²³ in a definitive dead end. Clearing the way by a kind of disciplinary tabula rasa, compelling architecture to live beyond slogans.

This “wrongness” eventually allows architecture to recognize itself as one ideology amongst other ideologies, and makes explicit its necessary participation in a bigger system of relations understood as *form*, while at the same time “breaking free” from it.

“Many will be right one day. But it will be a rightness resulting from my wrongness today.”²⁴

Hence it does not have any authority on the articulation of form, nor is it able to act as an external totality on anything, and by being aware that any ideological enterprise is offering its services to the modes of production, these modes turn out to be the precondition for their existence... becoming the *field* of their operations.

23. Tafuri, *There is no criticism*, 1981, 11.

24. Karl Kraus quoted in Benjamin, Walter. *Karl Kraus*, New York: Schocken Books, 1986, 248.

Consequently architecture is allowed to be reorganized as architecture, in all the loneliness it has to embrace.

Living beyond its framework, common places can be set and exceeded, making visible the ways in which an hypothesis can be transferred into practice, and finally capable to address resilient and transformative processes within a field ordered by anticyclical systems.²⁵

Eventually stressing architecture's double: architecture as instrument; and architecture as culture.

25. Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 1996, 133.

Model of project A, 1930.
© Fondation Le Corbusier





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It is thanks to the nature of the project as a self proclaimed commission that the double is reenacted.

Indeed acting more as an artist working on his project allows Le Corbusier to make a twist in comparison to the modern movement and to break free with the administrative routines. Through this take and the whole production underlying the idea, or intension of the project—with hundreds attempts and a full volume in the Garland collection to make it work—, the five years of research summarized

in eight pages of the *œuvre complète* eventually allows to *recognize the lie*. Understanding that the diagram can not be invented and that it is always a given—hence impossible to plan on the side of architecture—does not presuppose that there are no connections between architecture and the latter. On the contrary it is in a necessary relation that will never be denied. In fact, operating within the division of labour will allow him to rethink the whole *structure* of architecture. Rather than architecture taking the form of the field, he will rightly plan its *structure*. Firstly because one must perfectly understand the rules and the distinction between the parts for allowing oneself to define precisely the area where architecture can stand for itself; and secondly because the maximum level of organizing “production”—in this case, architectural “production”—“coincides with the maximum level of *productivité de l’esprit*”.¹ By understanding *form* as an essential condition for architecture to be architecture, he makes it possible, for himself, to pave the way for the reorganization of the cultural

1. Here taking one of the four objectives Tafuri set forth in the beginning of his chapter on Algiers in *Progetto e utopia*, but transferring it on the side of the structure of architecture only, not form in all its complexity, the exercise could be done with all the other three objectives... See Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 1996, 125. Note that the “productivity of the spirit” has been kept in French for keeping in line with Le Corbusier.

discipline of the 20th century while moving away from the arrogant discourse displaying creative iterations of objects and images...As a matter of fact, the image, never fixed, never at the service of legitimizing anything, *can only come*: hence Harald Szeeman could name his exhibition of 1969 *When attitude becomes form*.

Indeed it is after the experience in Algiers, that the first organizational scheme of the practice of Le Corbusier, taken from his experience in Behrens's studio and made operational in the 1910s until the late 1930s, will be radically restructured. He will indeed transfer his idea of "programming production" onto the structure of architecture alone, without having anymore the need to impose any moral value. Alongside his newly founded "Atelier Le Corbusier"—embedding the ideological part of architecture—is formed two separate entities: the "Assemblée des Constructeurs pour la rénovation Architecturale" (ASCORAL); and the "Atelier de Bâtitteur" (ATBAT). The first being in affiliation with the CIAM, portraying the "technician" approach on research, while the latter, "involved in the first major postwar construction projects", is

under the guidance of an engineer² and assumes all the work and responsibility on the structural part, yet gone from the architect's "duties".³

This allows him at the same time to reinforce the discipline as a cultural affair and to work on close and precise relations with its *periphery*; in fact, with what lies outside of the realm of architecture as ideology.

On one hand this eventually allows us to tackle the research on possible symbolic power—symbolism that can not find itself in architecture, and that the constructivists had finally overcome as shown by Tafuri—and on the other to enter in close negotiations with the modes of production, the increasing specialization of knowledge, and the construction trades. Manipulation is potentially enabled—and Loos can be recalled for showing the same attitude, albeit very differently, when working in close relationship with the artisans on the

2. Namely Vladimir Bodiansky. See Gargiani, Roberto & Rosellini, Anna. *Le Corbusier: Béton Brut and Ineffable Space, 1940-1965*. Lausanne: EPFL Press, Routledge, 2011, 3.

3. If we refer to Le Corbusier's text *L'espace indicible*, in "L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui," 1946, special issue, 9-17.

construction site, as to skillfully abuse or surrender their craft, for turning it into architecture.⁴

While in Algiers the field was architecture in which the principle of incompleteness was used to stress the necessary economy of means and the condition in which the fragments of territory were finding themselves orchestrated, here (and merely to show the interspersed continuity rising from asking the ever same question⁵) architecture is one of the fragments populating the field, and the principle is to be found in the discipline itself, as *incomplete architecture*. For it cannot be autonomous, while feeling the necessity to claim its enterprise as a cultural one: understanding architecture as strict means of the project and framework of the means; and organizing the relations with what lies at its periphery as new tools to be reused at the service of the latter. The economy of means we saw in *obus* can be taken back and reenacted to tackle the

4. In addition, on the side of ideology, his direction of the 1918's *Richlinien für ein Kunstamt* could ring a bell when compared with the ambitions of Le Corbusier's synthesis. Yet rather than engulfing everything the former brings together intellectuals artists and critics to write under the same name. Schönberg and Kraus, to name only two of the feast of friends.

5. *How is architecture possible?* Thinking about its structure, doing ever the same, allowing the ever new.

necessity of reusing *non decisional elements*⁶ as integral part of the *project*, allying it with fragments of cultural decisions.

All these principles were already latent in Algiers, and only stress the necessary continuity between all the research that must be undertaken by the architect. *La recherche patiente*. Convening the necessity of authority, for making possible to formulate an argument on architecture, through the artifact, in a series. And the latter is the only place in which an argument makes sense, as the fragment of a bigger research, and can tackle architecture in the most serious, precise and durable way possible.

We start to notice the potential actuality of an architectural approach on *form*.

In order to clearly grasp and explore the relation the vision of architecture has with the realization of architecture—being the whole point behind the question of *form*—, one must address a hypothetical take on the structure of architecture. Having already seen the operative example of Le Corbusier setting

6. If the re-use shows its actuality today, we need to address it, and need to stress the fact that it will in no way be understood as a cultural decision. Hence cultural decisions are only made by fragments.

up his two entities capable of negotiating with the modes of production and the construction trade, we will elaborate on what seems to remain highly actual next to those.

Before going on by defining more precisely the differences lying in the structure, in between the means and the tools, and seeing what stands on the side of architecture as culture or as instrument, we can convene Aldo Rossi, for he makes an important and explicit argument on that matter. To a certain extent prefigured by Le Corbusier's doings after *obus*, *Architecture for museums* written in 1966 tackles the question of the articulation of a design theory⁷ as the "most important and creative moment of every architecture".⁸ Moreover—Rossi continues—"building up a theory [...] is then taken up at the basis of the creative process, as the basis for what one is doing".⁹ By touching upon this question he will discuss the relation a vision has with the making of it, making it enter a verification process allowing to ever go on and never be stubborn. Starting by bringing up a theme, insisting on it and hitting the center, before injecting an architectural decision. Hence the problems are

7. In Italian: *teoria della progettazione*.

8. Rossi, Aldo et al. *Selected Writings and Projects*, Dublin: Gandon Editions, 1983, 15.

9. Rossi, *Ibid.*, 1983, 16.

never a precondition of this process, but rather emerge from it. Eventually rational and irrational are working together. He will then set three points as fundamental for the definition of a design theory: “firstly the study of monuments, secondly the [discourse] on form and the physical world, and lastly the study of the city; or better a new bilateral conception of urban architecture”.¹⁰

In doing so, Rossi helps us to clarify what seems relevant to add to Le Corbusier, by making the clear distinction with what lies inside and around architecture. First of all, what is related to the “autonomy” of the discipline is the study of monuments. Understood as historical facts, they show explicit potential to resonate beyond their historicism and fragments are possible to be re-actualized. Hence stressing a whole genealogy, or cultural toolbox, to be looked upon with a vital abstraction for surpassing all historicism. As a matter of fact the example proves clear with Le Corbusier’s reading of the “French gothic

10. Rossi, *Ibid.*, 1983, 19. “La lettura dei monumenti; il discorso sulla forma dell’architettura e del mondo fisico; la lettura della città, cioè la concezione per molti versi nuova e nostra dell’architettura urbana.” In Rossi, Aldo. *Scritti scelti sull’architettura e la città*, Milano: clup, 1989, 330.

landscape” capable of extracting fragments of actualities later on turned into projects.

Thereafter, without really being part of any means or tools, yet integral part of the structure of architecture, the discourse on form and the physical world sets the focus on the image and potential symbolism—leaving sheer autonomy. Taking advantage on this, we can recall Le Corbusier in his “second era of the machine civilization”, characteristic period of his discourse around form know as the *espace indicible* and allowing the “paper” enter the argument. This text written in 1945 can be used as an example to show the capacity of the text to act, set a context or “metaphorical context” for one’s operations, not yet being architecture. Hence becoming *one jaw of the vise*. In sum a kind of brief putting the emphasis on a *discourse*, reading the surrounding condition of any cultural production, and capable of setting a productive framework for the project. Implying all kind of ideologies populating the field and measuring each other. A kind of context for one’s own operations, making architecture inevitable, yet radically opposed to any totalizing enterprise as the sentence assuming “where there is architecture nothing (else) is possible” makes us believe.

Furthermore it makes a potential connection to symbolical pattern of his time, drawing them *out there*, from actual and pressing topics, before making them potentially available.¹¹ Again it makes clear the use of abstraction that must be used in the text in order to give a direction, in order to leave the room available. Hence, talking about “abstraction” in the realm of the structure only.

Yet for understanding what we mean by the *tools* for the project, following the trajectory *obus* led us to, we need to look everywhere around architecture. This is what we understand by its periphery, and what Rossi coins as the *reading of the city* in the third point for a definition of a design theory. Namely a certain collective fact, thus necessarily distinct from architecture as a *technique*, and that who gives the diagram and possibly inform *types*.¹² As such, and when keeping Rossi as our companion, a *type* is understood as “something that is permanent and complex, a logical principle that

11. In his case, the characteristic nihilism of the 20th century—recalling *l'absence de mythe* of Georges Bataille—and the constant relation with technology in his work.

12. Without wanting to dwell too much in difficult areas, we can ask whether this could allow some kind of potential symbolism... for it can in no case come from the sole point of architecture. Maybe can architecture only make symbolism available to be claimed, wherever that leads...

is prior to form and that constitutes it”.¹³ Even if he sometimes proves to be rather elusive, we find all the precision we need in this case. For it is less on the side of architecture, but nonetheless a tool for architecture to use as the diagram to exceed. Venice’s hospital by Le Corbusier is an adequate incarnation of this. Type is seen as the mediator (replacing the early need for technology to takes this role) and assumes perfect tension between the project and the historical fabric. All from within the structure of architecture rather than having the need for claiming other techniques.

Yet from what we have learned from *obus*, we could go further than the city proper and convene the “whole anthropogeographic landscape”¹⁴ as locus for our periphery. But rather than becoming the “subject on which the reorganization of the cycle of building production must insist”,¹⁵ we make all of it available for reorganizing the tools of architecture, by touching the collection of fragments beyond the sole notion of the “city”: making the

13. Allowing ourselves to make a parallel with *The Architecture of the City*, issued the same year as *Architecture for museums*, and showing quite evidently to be the incarnation of this third point closing the beginning of a design theory.

Rossi, Aldo. *The Architecture of the City*, Cambridge: MIT, 1992, 40.

14. Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, 1996, 126.

15. Tafuri, *Ibid.*, 1996.

“village” or any specific vernacular building mode till late big public and private housing development or technological infrastructures potential sources available for architecture to extract types, re-use and exceed them. Hence in an architectural discourse tackling the territory as new *chose humaine par excellence*. (We could wonder if the research led by Rossi’s laboratory at the ETHZ on the rural constructions of Ticino, has this in mind. Anyway it clearly did not have the impact *cityness* had on the suburban projects of Rossi’s Milanese early years.) Ultimately by finding “other peripheries”, defining them as the tools, and manipulating them through the rigor of architectural means and its genealogy, the project possibly finds the sole place for liberty to take place. Abusing higher human knowledge rather than providing the *right image* for potentially proving to resolve the irrationalities and contractions of the field.

Finally one can see the necessity of putting clear borders between the parts forming the structure of architecture in order to see their productive relations appear. And one understands as well the relation an architectural vision or intention has with the realization of architecture, all bound by a certain cultural strategy. Further understanding

form as the only field of operations, allowing an appropriate organization and planning of the structure of architecture itself, as well as the relations with its periphery. A cultural discourse on the other hand is one that frames the project within its physical context. The architect feeling his own authority is able to see to what extent there is a relation between the vision and the making of it, through strategy.

Eventually realized, an argument is made.

Hence one should merely find strategies, for they are what always stays “contemporary” or modern, ultimately anchoring theory into practice.

While Rossi finds the most creative moment of the architectural project in the formulation of its theory, we could set the following hypothesis, and reclaim utopia in some sense.

Modernism having utopia as the frame for the production of form, led to the “thematic of the boundary intrinsic to forms”,¹⁶ as such showing its impossibility. Yet by seeing its actual power by means of Le Corbusier’s excess in Algiers, we can attempt to flank it in the realm of architecture only. However not to reactualize the radical Italian

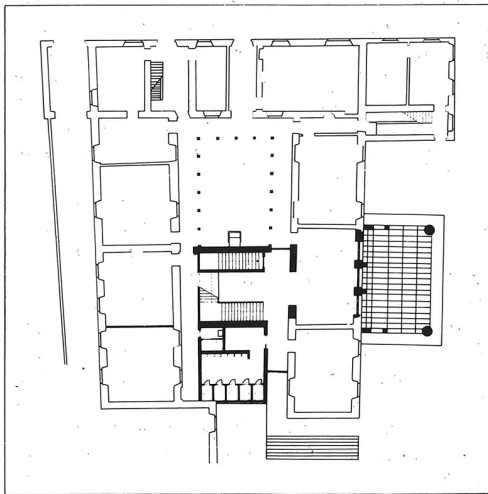
16. Tafuri, Manfredo. *The historical project*, in *The sphere and the labyrinth: avant-gardes and architecture Piranesi to the 1970s.*, Cambridge: MIT, 6.

discourses it themselves, but rather to assert the structure of architecture as an exercise in the *utopia of language*.¹⁷ Hence trying to go beyond the former historical determined crisis,¹⁸ and so making the culture of the project capable of ever being active, for it cannot be fixed in an *image*. Utopia as we said is hence the result of the precise articulation between the *means of* and the *tools for* architecture: in between the rigor of the plan and the abuse of higher human knowledge; in between the cultural decision and the reuse of architectural's periphery. An hypothesis for the fusion of both the reign of necessity and liberty, capable of binding the *chose humaine*, the social stance, and architecture as culture.

Architecture's *ideology* is convinced that architecture is an *instrument* at the service of life.

17. "[...] and not the utopia of language": recalling Tafuri's saying on *obus*. As such language is only hidden in the structure of architecture only. Potentially rendered eloquent to *whoever wanting to hear*, nonetheless having nothing to communicate.

18. Tafuri, *Ibid.*, 1992.



Aldo Rossi, *elementary school de amici*, Broni, 1969-1970.



Aldo Rossi, *Teatro and Santa Maria della Salute*, nc.

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Allumez vos soleils
et portez les dans l'arène,
nous n'aurons enfin plus rien
à se dire,
mais faire ce chant nouveau.

Alexander Wegener
Open Hand, Open Castle. Le Corbusier's fragments of actuality
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Le Corbusier's fragments of actuality



notes from architecture