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Vittorio Gregotti

Facoltà di Architettura
(Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia)

Postmetropolis and architecture

Postmetropoli e architettura

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Summary / Indice

Vittorio Gregotti - Short biography

Vittorio Gregotti (born in Novara in 1927), is an Italian architect, urban planner, theorist, critic and teacher.

He qualified at the Architectural Faculty of the Politecnico, Milan, in 1952 and a year later opened his first practice together with Lodovico Meneghetti and Giotto Stoppino.

In 1974 he founded the Gregotti Associati International and, since 1970s, hundreds of projects have been developed in over 20 countries in Europe, the US, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

Full professor of Architectural Composition at the University Institute in Venice, he taught at the Faculty of Architecture in Milan and in Palermo, and he was visiting professor in different European and American universities.

Vittorio Gregotti participated to various international exhibitions. He awarded the *Gran Premio* for his introductory section to the XIII Triennale (Milan, 1964). From 1974 to 1976 he was the director of the *Architecture and Visual Arts* section of the Venice Biennale. Since 1976 he has been member of the Italian Accademia Nazionale di San Luca and since 1995 of the Accademia di Brera, as well. Since 1997 he has been a member of the BDA (Bund der deutschen Architekten) and since 1999 honorary member of the American Institute of Architects.

In 1996 he was decorated with the *honoris causa* degree by the Polytechnic University in Prague and in 1999 by the Faculty of Architecture in Bucharest. In 2000 he was awarded with the golden medal for «Benemeriti della Scienza e della Cultura» by the Italian President of the Republic.

From 1953 to 1955 he was member of the editorial staff, and from 1955 to 1963 editor-in-chief of «Casabella Continuità». He had the direction of major Italian architectural magazines: «Edilizia Moderna» from 1963 to 1965; «Rassegna» from 1979 to 1998; «Casabella»from 1982 to 1996.

From 1984 to 1992 he wrote the architecture column in the weekly magazine «Panorama». From 1992 to 1997 he collaborated with the newspaper «Corriere della Sera» and since 1997 he has been collaborating with the newspaper «la Repubblica».

Vittorio Gregotti - Profilo biografico

Vittorio Gregotti (Novara 1927) architetto e saggista italiano di fama internazionale, si è laureato in architettura nel 1952 al Politecnico di Milano.
Dal 1953 al 1968 ha svolto la sua attività in collaborazione con Ludovico Meneghetti e Giotto Stoppino. Nel 1974 ha fondato la Gregotti Associati International che dagli anni Settanta ha elaborato centinaia di progetti per oltre 20 paesi d'Europa, America, Africa, Medio Oriente e Asia.
Professore ordinario di Composizione Architettonica presso l'Istituto Universitario di Venezia, ha insegnato presso le Facoltà di Architettura di Milano e Palermo ed è stato *visiting professor* in diverse università europee e americane.
Vittorio Gregotti ha partecipato a numerose esposizioni internazionali ed è stato responsabile della sezione introduttiva della *XIII Triennale* (Milano 1964) per la quale ha vinto il Gran Premio internazionale. Dal 1974 al 1976 è stato direttore del settore arti visive ed architettura alla Biennale di Venezia. E' accademico di San Luca dal 1976 e dal 1995 di Brera. Dal 1997 è membro della BDA (Bund der deutschen Architekten) e dal 1999 membro onorario dell'American Institute of Architects.
Nel 1996 gli è stata conferita la laurea *honoris causa* dal Politecnico di Praga, nel 1999 dalla Facoltà di Architettura del Politecnico di Bucarest. Nel 2000 la Presidenza della Repubblica Italiana gli ha conferito la medaglia d'oro riservata ai "Benemeriti della Scienza e della Cultura".
Redattore dal 1953 e dal 1955 al 1963 caporedattore di «Casabella Continuità», ha diretto importanti riviste italiane: dal 1963 al 1965 «Edilizia Moderna»; dal 1979 al 1998 «Rassegna» e dal 1982 al 1996 «Casabella».
Dal 1984 al 1992 ha curato la rubrica di Architettura di «Panorama». Dal 1992 al 1997 ha collaborato con il «Corriere della Sera», e dal 1997 collabora con «la Repubblica».

Webpage / Pagina web
Studio Gregotti Associati http://www.gregottiassociati.it

Conservation and Modernity

(in *Inside architecture,* MIT press, Cambridge (Massachusetts), 1996*, pp. 5-42)*

by Vittorio Gregotti

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This book consists of two parts, which differ in the way questions are posed rather than in contents or materials, and which reflect two symmetrical, equally architectural points of view.

The first part considers some of the conditions surrounding current developments in architectural discourse. Since I am convinced that empirical conditions provide essential material for the artistic practice of our discipline, I consider a discussion of the hierarchy, the nature, and the significance of such conditions to be highly important for architecture.

Some possible ways to use these conditions in the architectural project are discussed in the second part of this book. These methods have been chosen and treated in fragmentary form, as pieces of possible design procedures, but although they do not claim to form a complete theory of architecture today, they do at least present a particular point of view.

Many of the questions that I consider as conditions for a project in the first half of this book become protagonists, as procedures, in the second. There, I describe how conjunctions, disjunctions, and hierarchies place the various materials in an organized and essential relationship with purpose and place, coming together to form an architectural project.

The second half of this book might thus be seen as the enumeration and description of a discontinuous series of design acts that I believe to be significant in the present debate, also from the perspective of their underlying exclusions.

The first part of the book takes the form of a continuous discourse. It proposes a series of connections, including some with issues that other disciplines have considered with much

greater authority. Here, I attempt to present these issues from the point of view of architecture and its dilemmas. The ambiguous notion of conservation runs through the entire first half, which presents its reasons, advantages, and many contradictions in relation to new interpretations and discussions revolving around the theme of modernity.

This part attempts to look beyond the self-legitimizing discussion recently carried on in architectural circles, often in cannibalistic fashion. It proposes to revisit the uneven and uncertain terrain of values and objects that make up the reality against which, beyond which, or for which design projects are formed. Obviously, this return does not seek to approve or justify; rather, the terrain becomes a subject of architectural critique, a starting point for a possible architectural project for understanding and rearranging the present.

The second part, where I consider issues of design practice, also serves to distinguish the significant actions pertaining to our discipline, including the most imaginative, from those belonging to other artistic endeavors.

In the architectural project, the complicated involvement of diverse and often culturally distinct creative forces, as well as the system by which construction information is communicated and the considerable time employed in development and realization, all come together to establish a unique need to produce transformations, within limits that must be known, suffered, and utilized in the project's formation. In fact, I find it impossible to consider my discipline a mere representation of, or a peripheral writing about, what is already there.

Moreover, the issues raised by today's large urban and territorial interventions, as well as by solutions employed for smaller, even minute, strategic modifications, require a talent

for mastering complex issues, which include relationships between fields of expertise and the critical limits of their respective roles, as well as the all-important effort to lay the groundwork for specific projects. Perhaps this is, for architecture, one of the most exhausting, intriguing, and inevitable conditions of our time.

All this should not involve transforming architects into managers or cultural organizers, and certainly not converting them into political racketeers. On the contrary, it involves resisting our expulsion (or self-exclusion, by taking on a purely decorative role) from our own universe of specific expertise, traditionally called upon to give meaningful form to the available techniques for transforming the physical world.

These writings take a form that might a bit pompously be defined as theoretical reflection. This is not a choice but a necessity for our projects. It is not directed against talent; rather, I believe it is an indispensable condition for the cultivation of talent. Many have pointed out how difficult it is to find a suitable platform for the issue of theory that serves our specific problems as effectively as did architectural treatises of the past. Until now, we have failed at this task, and our theoretical reflections have often become a subspecies of philosophy or a simplification of historical or epistemological thought. At some times, such reflections serve as *a posteriori* justification for architectural work. At others, they produce a metaphoric interference between different languages that instead need to maintain open but clear identities in order to communicate.

But this does not mean the problem of theory does not exist. Within the complicated geography of the feeble positions of recent years, it has been easy to surrender to the fatalism of fragmentation, seeing in it a portrait of the infinitely open

interpretations that characterize the disorder of our consciousness, or to react against it by espousing a totally imaginary order.

In spite of the much-discussed crisis of the intellectual, I believe it is more important than ever for today's project to practice the highest possible level of critical reason, which even with its well-known limits should be considered suitable material for construction. This matters also because only critical reason makes it possible to continue with the modern project, to whose incompleteness I here expose myself entirely.

The paths of artistic practice have become decidedly conservative in recent years, whether they have involved retracing the roads of myth and symbol, or, more simply, the praise of common sense, or a wish to reconquer the languages and abilities of the profession and find in them a refuge from uncertainties while at the same time demanding recognition for the rights and seriousness of well-done work. Representation, description, and imitation are receiving close attention again, and many different efforts are seeking to reconnect the threads of every rhetorical tradition. In short, most recent artistic productions of any value display a wish to discard linguistic experiments or structural radicalisms, distancing themselves from any form of avant-garde program.

It should be said that the resurgence of conservation has been greatly aided by the positive meaning that this word has recently assumed as a protector of architectural heritage, of nature, and of historical memory, in opposition to a modernization that demolishes and forgets. This originates largely from a widespread feeling of resistance to the domination of scientific thought, whose task is to continuously surpass the present: what has been done does not matter; what matters is to see what can be done. As Paolo Rossi wrote, to become outdated is for scientific thought not just a destiny but a goal.[1]

Conservation invokes not only memory, but also the fact that the appearance of Picasso's painting does not make that of Poussin obsolete. In other words, conservation demands recognition for the share of eternity (although this expression is largely metaphorical) connected with the idea of artistic

practice, as opposed to the essentially linear concept of progress—one that inevitably abandons its own past—common to all the natural sciences.

Thus in some ways the conservative attitude also invokes the history that joins the human sciences (although this classification has become rather blurred) to tradition and its incessant recovery and reinterpretation.

All this thus has its reasons, but one must understand that these reasons are complex and intrinsically contradictory, especially in relation to the apparent aspirations of the present hypermodern organization of society: an arrangement that strives to eliminate boundaries between the sciences, to be open, anti-ideological, infinitely interpretable and combinable, and above all to avoid horizons and long-term hopes, because they are considered illusions for which it is not worth sacrificing anything of the immediately acquirable.

From this point of view some claim that the crisis of what has been called the modern project, in its comprehensive cultural effort to deal with society rather than belief, is essentially the crisis of an illusion that joins hope and deception, against which it is therefore legitimate to respond, whether with hypermodern or with conservative attitudes.

Some say that this illusion stems mainly from a mistaken belief in the existence of a unitary historical process with definite ends (or one that can be reconstructed as such), combined with the belief that the creative process can encompass movements toward or against this history while remaining connected to it.

But as we know, the discussion regarding the decline of the idea of a unitary historical process started more than a century ago, and it has thus paralleled the formation of modern visual and architectural culture, which itself embodies many aspects of this crisis. It is precisely this discussion, with its groping toward universalism and its critique of established genres, that has helped to destroy the possibility of interpreting the history of culture in a linear and Eurocentric fashion.

But although this ongoing critique has always formed an integral part of the principles of modernity, it has never prevented a continuous production of "histories," albeit according to varying historical hypotheses or to methods that had the partiality of their own interpretations as a central premise. Nor has it prevented the construction of architectures that sprang from a decidedly unitary idea of utopia, while featuring a plurality of interpretations for the very idea of modernity.

In particular, the plurality of modern experience in the specific case of architecture—that is, the existence of several complex lines within the "modern movement"—has been widely discussed ever since the fifties, when it became evident that what had once appeared as a common basis for a modern front was gradually weakening. This discussion also stemmed from the growing difficulty of any legitimating symbolic appeal, including the appeal to the myth of progress as a process of liberation and rationality, which had accompanied the rise of the idea that modernity was a value in itself.

I believe this to be the contradictory but central aspect of the modern age, with which it becomes possible to overturn the current judgment of rigidity and ideological self-limitation that conservatives and hypermodernists have pronounced against modernity. The modern project critiques society rather than forming a natural part of it; that is, it is able to question both the limits of its own arrangement and the relationship between reason and progress. Thus, it encourages the very questions

about the unity of history, systems, and ends that have been presented as the illusions of modernity.

Such questions also raise the possibility of becoming lost in the labyrinth of contradictions opened by critical thought. But that is a different issue, one that inspires neoconservative thought, which imagines it can combat this danger by resorting to the self-discipline contained in the aesthetic norms of tradition.

The modern project contains instead the positive illusion of being able to formulate hypotheses with a clear awareness of their specific limits.

With modernity, we have thus already spent a century in the age of transformation and contradiction, and I believe this is demonstrated by the best architectural productions of the past hundred years.

This should not, however, mean entering an age of total subservience to the interchangeability of interpretations or of indifferent substitutions; it should not imply transforming critical thought into a mere instrument of variation within the overwhelming homogeneity that runs through culture and society.

Mass Homogeneity

The hypermodernists' argument against modernity states that architecture's goal should no longer be the constitution of critical tension, but rather a natural relationship with the tastes of the masses. On the contrary, I believe such taste moves toward the illusion of liberty that accompanies the idea of infinite flexibility, and consequently toward an absence of forms and horizons. This involves an elevation of the illusory private sphere, which

is being extended to public action as a kind of aesthetic of stylistic familiarity—an illusion of identity and belonging that transforms all things into folklore or quaintness, experienced as a supposed antidote against the anonymity of the power that guides it in an intimate solidarity of culture and aims.

The polemic against the reputed ability of art to propose uncomfortable alternatives has also been insistently revisited, using old and inadequate arguments that not even a subtle thinker like Feyerabend escapes:

> Religion, sciences, technologies, and art—says the philosopher—carry the seeds of megalomania within them: when given unlimited power, they become tyrannical. For example our cities where urban planners and architects can do and undo at will, without ever asking the inhabitants whether they like what might forever remain under their noses.[2]

Unlimited power is something that architects and urban planners certainly have less and less of. But more importantly, Feyerabend here underestimates the fact that if his judgment were radicalized, it would probably lead to the disappearance not only of the entire history of architecture, but also of all of the cultural critiques of minorities and opposition groups, and thus the whole of modern culture. I do not think that is what he desires.

At this point we should remember Adorno's famous words, when he spoke about functionalism at the inauguration of the Deutscher Werkbund in 1965: "Architecture worthy of human beings thinks better of men than they actually are." He continued by saying:

> Things are not universally correct in architecture and universally incorrect in men. Men suffer enough injustice, for their consciousness and unconsciousness are trapped in a state of minority; they have not, so to speak, come of age. This nonage hinders their identification with their own concerns. Because architecture is in fact both autonomous and purpose-oriented, it cannot simply negate men as they are. And yet it must do precisely that if it is to remain autonomous.[3]

After almost two centuries of merging creativity and critical conscience as the basis for modernity, it is important to emphasize the present attempt by hypermodern culture to render architectural culture (and not only architectural culture) homogeneous with the social order. It is an imposing and highly significant attempt from which neoconservative creative thought mistakenly believes it can escape by founding its instruments on past traditions of order, hierarchies, and contrasts. Meanwhile, dialectical tension seems to have been lost forever in the triumph of the freedom without horizons found in mass behavior.

In other words, what guides choices as far as architecture is concerned, especially the choices of public institutions, is a form of neofunctionalism that caters to mass behavior, in which the present state of democracy is supposedly represented.

There is an entire body of literature that attempts to describe the behavior of crowds as following very different laws than that of individuals: one needs simply to read a few masterful pieces by Elias Canetti to profoundly grasp that difference.[4] But could it be that today this difference is collapsing to the point that individual behavior, moved by opportunism or the pressure of communication, is starting to coincide with mass behavior?

And what sort of architectural project has been devised to answer the critiques raised by hypermodernists and conservatives?

It is a rather complicated and heterogeneous mixture, elaborated through the collaboration of architects themselves: a little bit of context, but in its most insensitive quantitative or stylistic interpretation; a little bit of modernity in techniques and communication; and perhaps a little tenor's high note here and there to add a touch of "artistry," especially in the form of inconsequential originality which introduces a shade of ineffability into the solution, an ineffability necessary for proving the existence of creative freedom. And above all a great deal of flexibility, which often results in close adherence to the folds of profit; a generous share of that plastic democracy that goes under the name of animation; a dash of inconsequential participationalism. All this is seasoned with a few drops of environmentalist fundamentalism. No definite form: rather, total plasticity and interchangeability of solutions within this context. In other words, no architecture.

The solution is thus never the one that would suit the project and the place, one that would interpret them according to some necessity. It is more likely to be a solution already open to all hybridizations: not the solution that, in its clarity, is able to include and confront authentic differences, but rather a solution that tends to drown such differences in the process of homogenization set in motion by diversity turned into pure ideology.

The ideas and principles that the best part of the modern tradition has striven to put forward in recent years, which

include the principles of contextual relationship, of modification, of belonging, and of limited and specific research, are being used to this end, mixed together with the worst remains of rational functionalism, with the aestheticism of memory (rather than its deep levels of priceless discourse), as well as with the exhibitionistic style of techniques.

If we, moreover, examine even the most glorified aspects of contemporary production, what seems to await us on the other shore, full of creative poverty and unblessed by irony, is the reductionism of the most recent architectural monumentalisms, which attempt to directly represent the junction of powers and techniques, or the architectural metaphor of undue deconstructivist transposition, which represents an attempt to remove all referential content. Together, these reduce architecture to mere decoration.

The fundamental architectural principle of consistency, including consistency between parts, between the exterior and the interior, between content, subject, and meaning, between form and construction, is lost. Even the value of a deliberate inconsistency is lost. The ground for neoconservative positions is thus perfectly prepared and their arrival imminent.

Often today the principle of consistency has become a race toward vulgar practicality (and it seems to me that architectural culture, following the period of refusing professional praxis in the name of the purity of self-referential design, is quickly becoming overly practical). But even where this has not occurred, the idea of consistency appears to be leaning toward such an extreme generalization of functional relationships that it deprives them of the material resistance of aims, techniques, and site, which the project ought to encounter, discuss, and organize.

Without that material resistance, the organization of a project inevitably remains a prisoner of pure market competition and of the narrow range allowed by the relative oscillations of communication, which seem to have ever more rigidly fixed boundaries. Consistency is thus again transformed into something resembling the homogenization of aspirations, language, and behavior. Such homogenization deprives architectural construction of all commitments to alternative representations, except for the temporary originality required by the market. Consistency between practice and theory in architectural form thus comes to be seen as a useless restriction on the apparently decisive aesthetic rules of the novelty of images, or as a mere aid to the goal of being recognized by the market, accepted in its total ineffability.

From this standpoint, the current stylistic fragmentation of architectural positions appears consistent with a condition of diversification that lacks any actual diversity or significant conflict. Such are the results of the homogenization and progressive reabsorption of architectural culture into an architecture that forms a perversely organic part of the portrait of social behaviors.

In Defense

All this is happening in the foreground of yet another difficulty. Today, the dynamics of economic and social systems offer an important (though very unstable) series of great opportunities for physically transforming the environment, while at the same time they are unable to offer any grand horizons for ideals. Meanwhile, for the reasons explained above, architecture is

unable to produce any broad organizational inventions or alternative hypotheses.

It is enough to consider how some themes, developed recently with great vigor, have thus far produced mere traces of any convincing answers. The past twenty-five years, for example, have witnessed insistent talk about issues related to the designability of landscapes, which is considered an innovation for projects on all scales. Undoubtedly, the issue of the historicity of the natural, or the relationship between processes of structural transformation and their aesthetic incorporation, or the contrasts of the internationalization of image-making and production techniques with the idea of place, have all been more effectively discussed in the past few years. But in reality, the notion of landscape has been internally eroded by a blind, frenetic occupation of space, and the neonaturalism that opposes this process is just as harmful to any human idea of landscape. Assimilation, integration, and nostalgia seem to be the only criteria capable of opposing the scattered dispersion and the complete atopicality of interventions, and such opposition is relatively limited.

The same can be said about urban design, which is barely held in check by a weak conscience that attempts to oppose or to reconcile with contextual conditions but never engages them in dialogue. Its most frequent sources of inspiration involve a return to entrenched rules of recomposition, which seem to be the only rules that can present us with the illusion of a great historical tradition and the idea of regulating the current growth of cities. Other inspirations resort to representing the fragmentation of contemporary thought through the fragmentation of form, to the point that the architecture of cities dissolves into communicative immateriality.

Perhaps consistent with conditions dictated by the majority class is the view of cities and territories as collections of independent technical or stylistic objects, a view that accepts processes of economic and image exploitation as conditions without alternatives, and only considers quality as a sum of the individual talents that happen to participate.

Moreover, due to the fragmented divergence of techniques, cultures, horizons, and specialized languages, each step in the realization of a project reveals itself as a fatal betrayal of the principles (weak as they may be) that one has managed to set in motion. At times, the haste and the size of productions lead to an excessive reduction of the rich articulations we have learned from tradition. In contrast with the gradual stratification of historical cities, this need to eliminate all accidents is systematically revealed in the form of inconsistency, or artificially decorative variation, and at times even through imitation of the historical process.

Naturally, this portrayal is consistently negative only in potential. Anyone working in the field of architecture can list numerous incongruities in systems, and thus also the many transformations that might be conceived from the standpoint of the inconsistent homogeneity of the system.

Critical thought is free to express itself, but it has been reduced (or has reduced itself) to superfluity. Therefore, we often face a somewhat contradictory situation: that of working toward the modernization of technologies, institutions, modes of production, and processes of planning and communication, while simultaneously thinking of these procedures as bound to a quality that denies any effort of modernization to take possession of the very principle of quality.

Thus, one is increasingly restricted to a form of literary resistance based on the limits of a specific subject and its

self-referential affirmation, while renouncing any attempt to use the discipline's instruments to describe reality anew.

Even those who try to think of specificity as a new beginning, as a reaffirmation of the primal reasons at the essence of our discipline, are partly mired in this tendency. I do not refer to the recurrent discussions regarding the primitive hut and the origins of architecture, which appear in every ancient treatise and whose history has been masterfully described in Joseph Rykwert's book *On Adam's House in Paradise*.[5] I would rather, to paraphrase Husserl in "The Origin of Geometry," attempt to recover the original meaning of the architecture that was handed down and that continued to have value and to be reshaped while still remaining architecture in all its incarnations: this in order to understand the extent to which this might renew our sense of what to do.[6]

In the present situation, such research into original intentions seems important but remains difficult to practice, because it requires a firmness of purpose that I believe we can neither conceive nor apply.

For us, the issue is the more modest one of constructing some trace of a foundation for an architecture useful to the defense and rearrangement of the present, and also (fatally, from this standpoint) oriented more toward conservation and restitution than toward any future program.

Fortunately, the way that such a defense functions—that is, the way the project is used as conservation and restitution—forms the crucial element that distinguishes it from pure nostalgia and avoids confusion between conservation and conservatism. The space available to it seems to consist of a congenital imperfection regarding this aim; that is, of a deviation from the idea of conservation and resistance that presents

itself as an immeasurable distance. I believe that to inhabit this distance, to choose it as one's place of action, is also the only way to maintain the firm, in some ways hostile, character that marks the tradition of the modern creative project. Its different, oppositional appearance is practiced not out of an intentional or loquaciously subjective bizarreness, but as a logical need in view of the existing conditions, a difference that represents the only kind of common sense that can be practiced.

On the other hand, while the architectural project needs great freedom of thought and expression, it does not require absolute freedom of conditions. Rather, such conditions represent a resistant, irreplaceable material to be criticized and molded by the project itself. My fear is that the articulation and specificity of this material is gradually becoming conventional, assuming the form of a tacitly conditioned freedom that makes it impossible to establish any authentic difference.

I believe that the artistic practice of architecture instead involves an obligation to look at the empirical world in order to modify it, overturn it, and deny it, but also to open a critical dialogue with it. This is perhaps an inopportune dialogue, but one that can penetrate the cracks of this world in order to confront and modify it.

A designer must conceive hypotheses with a passion for the absolute, but also an awareness of their temporary status. It is the awareness of one's own marginality (and sometimes the inability of institutions to recognize the threat posed by this marginal status) that has allowed many modern works to be conceived and realized as forms that *must be*.

Instead, there are some, like Gianni Vattimo, who hold that the "ornamental essence of the culture of mass society, the ephemeral quality of its products, the eclecticism by which it is

dominated, the impossibility of identifying anything essential . . . fully corresponds to the *Wesen* of the aesthetic in late modernity."[7]

Many of the symptoms that I have attempted to describe above undoubtedly converge toward this judgment; however, I cannot recognize any element of this situation that allows us to see some noble survival of architecture in it, even though I do realize that the idea of nobility is, today, a very weak argument.

The reasons behind some of the present neoconservative attitudes also have their roots in such questions, but without providing any convincing answers: the absence of any foundation prevents both a breakthrough toward the future and a creative organization of the present. In other words, this condition seems to resist solution either by the new, which lacks the support of any founding tension and thus takes the purely bizarre form of being different, or by the attempt at radical rethinking which, in turn, is absorbed into the catalogue of the "transitional new." Nor is it possible to resort to memories and traditions, because without any project for the present these merely become a nostalgia for some kind of legitimation.

It is also evident that inside our discipline, more than thirty years of critiquing modern architecture (a necessary and difficult critique that started here in Italy in the early fifties) have led to a series of conclusions that have failed to reconstruct any structure of horizons and perspectives, or even any consistent renewal of instruments or methods.

Wider links have been drawn between the different moments of modernity, clarifying the reasons behind its internal oppositions and tracing the modern tradition all the way back to its origins in the crisis of classicism. That which exists has begun to be considered a value in itself, leading to a concept of

the project as a dialogue with the historical geography of the context. As a result, the concepts of novelty, imitation, function, essence, meaning, and modification have become active elements within the project. But all this has led to no convincing, universal arguments capable of proposing authentic alternatives.

The main issue, however, has involved setting in motion some principles relevant to the constitution of new hierarchies among project materials with respect to the traditional hierarchies of modernism. If reconsidered with enough prudence and balance, an emphasis on these principles might make possible an architecture that would avoid the coarsest errors dictated by professional subservience, or the frenzies that presently replace the authenticity of a poetic profession. But it would certainly not be true to say that all this has led to the constitution of general rules, glorious and durable enough to construct great architecture.

It is this approximation, this rush to take possession of the latest fashion, this productivistic superficiality, that makes it possible to say that the general trait that best characterizes the architecture of these times is not mannerism but caricature, and primarily self-caricature. This expressive category is, of course, absolutely unsuited to our discipline.

First of all, elements of caricature are drawn from the modernist tradition, which is viewed as "that pretty style from the twenties." Or they are hurled against it formally, whether through borrowing from the tradition of the grotesque or through quoting material without any understanding of its sense or origin, a process that involuntarily creates the exaggeration, the overcharging of meanings and their warping with

respect to signs, and the heavy makeup and accentuation of features that often lie at the heart of caricature.

A desire to draw away from this condition, albeit without pointing to any authentic alternative, provides another reason for neoconservative research, which recognizes the features of an absolutely untenable condition of neurotic precariousness.

An important aspect of the present conservative attitude derives precisely from a reaction to this elevation of precariousness into ideology.

The nostalgia for a rule, if not for some aesthetic norm, reappears as a wish to slow down action in order to reflect, a wish to see the work develop slowly and to keep it under control, a desire for solidity and durability of construction.

On the other hand, in view of the crisis of any horizon of meaning that is not opportunistic or cynical, it becomes obvious that the search for a foundation of architectural activity can take the deceptive direction of a return to the individual traditions of the discipline, primarily that of reexamining the capabilities of specific instruments. This strategy focuses above all on a return to professional skills, including the aspect of craftsmanship, and can even involve revitalizing old ideas of dividing the discipline into genres and specifics.

But as far as architecture is concerned, this search should first proceed through a radical rethinking of the notion of the project, which modernity has transformed into the idea of an autonomous productive cycle that embraces numerous human activities, and which is essential for ensuring a complete prevision of the work, as well as of the process by which it will be realized.

In the past half-century, the notion of the architectural project has been the subject of particularly active reflection. This critique (I am thinking especially of Massimo Cacciari) emphasizes the alliance forged over the past two centuries between the words "project," "production," and "progress."[8] This alliance has opposed the other meaning of the word "project," which stresses projection, fervor, tearing away from a situation in order to criticize, deconstruct, and question it; essentially, the idea of freeing oneself from presupposition in order to construct a new understanding, or even a new ontological constitution.

According to this second meaning, project-making in architecture could never be a mere matter of techniques and instruments, but would simultaneously construct a critique of the present and of the horizon of its reorganization.

Thus, the notion of project oscillates between the opposing meanings of domination and liberation, of control and unfolding of differences, of prevision and prediction, of opening toward what might emerge and planning for it.

The process of constructing architecture through a project can, therefore, be considered a quite specific way of thinking. The main difficulty in describing its distinctive and specific features arises from a constant participation by sources of knowledge and ways of thought that differ from and sometimes oppose each other in their references and levels. Examples would be scientific observation, sympathetic understanding, inspirations, tradition, memory, and so forth.

Moreover, scientific and technical thought, with all its increasing importance, has for many years emphasized the value of hypotheses, of conjectures temporarily suited to resolving

and explaining a group of problems, and this has certainly brought scientific and creative procedures closer to each other through their analogous forms of interactive and diagonal thought.

In general, as we know, scientific rationality has affected this century's creative procedures in important ways, as both a formal and a methodological model.

This reasoning leads us to regard an architectural fact as also a problem of knowledge. It becomes less a collection of empirical elements for construction, and more a new thing that moves, interprets, and reorganizes the overall system and theory of knowledge. Still, knowledge is not in the forefront as the central problem of architecture, nor does it define any specific approach.

In architectural processes, the various forms of thought that I have described above seem to remain suspended, like particles that are mixed together but whose diversity can still be recognized. One might suggest that it is this oscillation of nonhomogeneous methods that forms the specific nature of project-making thought in architecture, or even propose that the prevalence of one of these elements over the others—or, more specifically, a varying hierarchy among them—can furnish material for a diversity of architectural solutions.

Still, it is clear that this explanation provides only a negative answer to questions about the specifics of project-oriented thought.

Of course, we might consider the special type of thought that forms the construction of an architectural project solely from the standpoint of the "task of establishing difference." But I believe that although this might be possible for other creative disciplines, architecture carries firmly inscribed within itself

the conditions for constructing something that in no way exists at the starting point of present materials, aims, sites, techniques, and conditions.

As we know, some interpretations tend to see the notion of difference not simply as a liberation from historical time, and from the will of science and technology, but as the very foundation of a conscience able to see diversity as necessary.

But this does not mean "a conscience freed from being useful," or freed from all confrontation with empirical experience; it means an attempt to clarify and describe the conflicts of the present condition. It is true that in order to be transformed into a project such a description must indeed make itself into a foundation for difference, but without presuming to propose that this difference represents a definitive way out of such conflicts.

Thus, the foundation of difference is not simply an attempt to escape from this time of precariousness and poverty, nor is it a proposal for global rationality, which cannot be found today in any form. Rather, the value of difference appears in the creative process above all as a defense of its own possible conception through the intervention of critical reason in what exists.

Returning directly (and perhaps illegitimately) to the question of architecture, this means that the foundation of difference is neither the new, with its presumption of a new beginning, nor an aesthetic utopia, but rather a condition that enables architecture to speak a limited and specific truth.

In other words, I believe that the foundation of architecture and its project are possible only if both the language of announcement and that of technical-scientific possession are abandoned, in favor of deciphering, listening, and critical construction.

Evidently, these reflections seem to suppress any connotation of the project as simply an answer to what exists, abandoned to the fatality of its existence, or as determination and prevision of the future (or perhaps even as a prediction; that is, stabilizing discontinuous points of reference by means of the architectural object). As we shall see further on, prevision and prediction are possible forms of two aspects of production, which start from a certain condition and then tear away from it.

In hypermodern ideology, instead, the notion of the project's aspects of possession, announcement, and the foundation of difference seems to be a prisoner of the present, both in "that ornamental essence of culture" mentioned above and in the infinite interpretability of that same essence, from which, I realize, even this piece of writing itself is not exempt.

But if this were a wholly real condition, the question of the modalities of architectural action would have to be restricted to simple contingencies, and thus to possibility and chance—in fact, to all possibilities and chances.

As the preeminent material and central content of the project, contingency would then claim to represent the specific nature of the project procedure, open to any kind of reason or knowledge, as long as it does not form any horizon or conclusion for the case in question.

Architecture reacts to this situation by taking a conservative direction, by searching for some foundation, sometimes an illusion, sometimes one based on the illusory aesthetic security of tradition and historical legitimation. But since the very traditions on which principles, models, and ideologies are founded have gradually been losing their ability to construct orders that transcend individual events, specific conditions are increasingly emerging as the only possible elements on which to base a project.

Attempts to find legitimation in traditions and history ought to be the main weapons of conservation; instead, they are often a product of the hypermodern transience that generated and then overturned them through transforming the very concept of transience into a myth, which also became a cyclical reconstruction of many traditions. On the other hand, specific conditions have also often come to simulate reality and necessity, reducing the project to a simple response that cannot avoid fishing for the images of its own creation amid the by now crowded and interchangeable system that has been crammed with the rules and symbols of those same traditions.

At this point, the subject that I have (perhaps improperly) called critical reason returns to the surface. This is a highly contractual kind of critical reason, which plays an irreplaceable role in forming a filter that can avert the possibility of anything at all entering into any project whatsoever, thus crowding out the sense and necessity of specific truth.

This critical reason involves the ability to define this question profoundly enough to formulate hypotheses regarding the essence of the transformative relationships that it induces. The presence of these transformative elements then becomes the presence of the surrounding empirical world, that irreplaceable material within which we establish the space to be filled in by architecture. The quality of the architecture then rests on the depth of examination and articulation of that space.

Prevision, Prediction

But the shape of that space is also defined by the ways in which possible previsions, based on interpretations of the specific

situation, intersect not only with collective inclinations and expectations, but also with the ways that such previsions are arranged in varying disciplines: economic, productive, sociological, demographic, and so on.

It therefore becomes necessary to find an architectural incarnation for such previsions and expectations, to reach an agreement on the timing of prevision by the rhythms of different disciplines, and to seek a point of agreement on the duration, speed, and acceleration of such varying previsions. We know that in the past, and also (we imagine) in the future, the changes of various disciplines do not follow a constant rhythm, but are subject to accelerations and arrests that occur in irregular patterns. The division of time with respect to these varying previsions thus presents an irregular surface, where certain issues have experienced sudden surges and setbacks while others have moved more slowly and regularly.

But what place does prevision occupy within the hierarchies of the architectural process, and most importantly, to what extent does prevision participate in the cautious element: that is, in the form of thought that measures before leaping? In other words, to what extent does prevision clash with the idea of prediction, which is the central content of the architectural project, the authentic form of diversification?

I believe that the effort toward prevision is important, vast, and unavoidable at the level of the configuration and articulation of materials, as well as relevant for establishing the idea of action according to a productive perspective. However, I also consider it an insufficient basis for the constitution of the architectural object. Preoccupations about prevision, which have in their own way pervaded the course of project-making, must ultimately disappear into the architectural object.

This disappearance is crucial to the constitution of the object itself. It allows the materials ordered by the project to take the form of architecture, and represents the plane of projection between varying conjectures about the future, although it never equals the sum of these projections.

The distance between configuration and constitution is not bridged by deduction or sudden overturnings; on the contrary, it allows the project to weave itself into time, to be slowly and patiently constructed, until its parts and hierarchies become integral and necessary.

Thus prevision, having become a physical, architectural object, transforms itself into prediction, authoritative and solemn, attracting the path of the future toward its own hypothesis, as well as influencing that future's movements.

Architectural prediction starts from a kind of arrest, a kind of hypostatization of the temporal process. It is prediction in that it introduces a clearly demonstrable and atemporal tension into prevision.

Architecture, therefore, displays the characteristics of a figure that is organized by means of a project. This project applies a series of previsions that tend toward an aim and a conclusion, but that must also stand at a distance from that conclusion in order to pre-speak what cannot be said today in any other way.

The conservative point of view seems to resurface here, taking the form of an apparent need for a deductive leap regarding empirical conditions and the way they produce the decisive act of architectural results. This attitude becomes conservative because within it an empty space emerges between the question and the instrument of art, a space that seems regulated only by the subjectivity that sums up and ineffably refracts the things of

the world. For architecture, however, that space always represents a separation from some condition. It is produced from the dual concrete material of a limited and specific site and goal, and even seems to make limitation and its description into a structural question regarding the possibility of its own constitution.

The Necessary Limit

But if it is true that the question of the project as both production and projection must take specific conditions as the starting point, then architectural prediction becomes concrete on the basis of the criteria by which it defines a situation. The project expands from a point within itself, until it again reaches the hard boundaries of the problem, which may be either close or very distant, and which will have not only spatial but also historical, technical, and political characteristics.

But with the problem of boundaries, we also confront the issue of avoiding imprisonment within their definitions. The issue mainly involves leaving aside the kind of deductive illusions created by those who believe that the project can be guided by a single reading, profound as it may be, of the conditions and context under consideration.

But if it is the architectural interpretation of a situation that introduces and shifts the balance of what exists, that establishes the minimum necessary departure from contextual conditions, and that through this departure grounds the establishment of the space that can be occupied by a specific architectural quality, what then guides the architectural interpretation that allows this departure?

One cannot fail to notice the circularity of this situation, but at the same time it is clearly one of the few dry places in the marsh: a foundation point that is admittedly empirical, but possible, and in that sense necessary.

Modification, belonging, context, identity, specificity, are all words that seem to assume a preexisting reality that should be preserved even while being transformed, that should hand down its memory through traces which themselves are built on earlier evidence. In other words, this reality takes the physical form of a geography whose cult of knowledge and whose interpretation provide the material to support the project.

Despite all attempts to resort to structural interpretations of this material, and thus to histories and symbols that form essences and reasons, it shows itself to be invincibly weak in terms of establishing a project goal that is permeated with a perspective on contingency. At the same time, one necessarily resorts to circumscribing a specific field, and to project-related actions that represent minimal acceptance of generalizations, actions that enumerate and classify only those limited and concrete things contained within the field. But those things are also the symmetrical correspondents of all that remains outside, a measure of the distance and the relationships that are in fact reestablished by each action within the field.

The project as modification of the context places a renewed importance on the historical depth of the present, which is represented in the specific situation. But this often says too little about the direction of the modification, implying that it can be easily deduced from what exists, or that the project will have little trouble extracting the most structurally relevant questions, and thus the main hypotheses that derive from them.

Thus, the proceeding takes on the precarious and conservative form of a new naturalism, whose balance can be upset at any moment by the bursting in of new, unpredictable factors

from a source beyond the contextual field under consideration, an interruption that may impatiently upset the order that had been reestablished through patient fieldwork.

But if the invitation to treat the project as a discourse with what exists is motivated also by a wish to cool down, to let settle, to calm the seeming speed of changing opinions and the resulting redundancy of images by drawing on the potential for resistance contained in the positive inertia of what exists, then it is important to ask ourselves whether a project, thus conceived, is truly capable of transforming the conservative tendency that also emerges from this sentiment.

It is possible that, under present conditions, the project of architecture can only present itself as a process of high maintenance and that the new modernity's project of modification can thus describe only that process. Perhaps, today, we need to gather the scattered fragments of our present and clumsily construct with them our "new churches," as was done in the fifth century, which used fragments of ancient architecture as a construction material that was partly gifted with a discourse, whose existence and importance could be felt intuitively but whose meanings remained unknown, and which was laboriously employed as a material for hypotheses with alternate meanings.

This is not a matter of proposing a new collagelike eclecticism (which, in any case, has already been operating for some time), but of thinking about restitching, repairing, reconstructing, and revealing what exists as a possible quality and content for a new architecture.

Even that which places itself in the ostensible vacancy of the landscape, among the miseries of urban peripheries, as well as that which presents itself as the founding act of a settlement,

can be governed by the essence of what exists; that is, of what we consider to be durable.

Here we need to speak not about the *apex mentis* of the creative process but about the extremely important work that precedes it: choosing, arranging, sowing, digging, scrutinizing, without presuming to capture the whole experience through the project.

For the time being, it is important to gather and classify the debris of what exists, to make it uniformly archaeological, to reconstruct the reasons for its detached and incomplete form as the foundation of any transformation.

In the architectural project, the current issue is not to create a point from which to observe and describe reality, but rather to illuminate the terrain of reciprocal involvement, and to simultaneously choose the level of reality that can be transformed into architectural substance, in the same way that cartography represents not the whole of reality but that part of reality that can be transformed into a geographical description.

We must therefore think of the new architecture as an architecture of expectation, resistance, and interrogation, modest and firm, a conscious prisoner of the previously mentioned process of high maintenance, which provides guarantees for the new need that forms a part of it. This is the only kind of architecture able to decisively lead toward the autonomy of the project-making process, beyond its own rules of action but also through them.

Such resistance must also be directed against accepting a position of servitude, of functional dependence on popular opinion, which increasingly seems to be forcing architecture to take the form of both escapist decoration and mere instrument.

Today we hear frequent discussions of the gradual differentiation and the increasing complexity of the activities that

assume the name of architecture: territorial and urban planning, building construction, engineering, project design, graphics, restoration, classification of environmental resources. They also consider the direct integration of distribution and the market into cycles of production, as well as the history and critique of these different professions. It is unclear whether this represents a voluntary explosion or an authentic need to respond to the proliferation and specialization of activities relating to the project. What is certain is that it raises serious questions about the unity of the discipline and the forms in which it presents itself. This is joined by an ever-increasing complexity within project cycles, driven by a convergence of techniques that include prevision, control, and management of the entire system.

On the one hand, all this is undoubtedly related to an enrichment of the territory and materials of our discipline, to the program that William Morris laid out for architecture more than a century and a half ago: that of giving morphological sense to each act whose consequences lead to spatial transformation of the physical environment. But it also relates to ever-tightening limits on the discipline's zone of structural endeavor, to a marginalizing restriction of the discipline to the field of aesthetics, which then becomes a separate, compensatory space in relation to a social structure where being safe, in its widest meaning, has become a fundamental value, or even an obsession. In other words, this process moves toward yet another version of conservatism.

Advanced Mediocrity

The social background that favors the development of an obsession with safety as an aspect of conservation has been aptly

defined by Hans Magnus Enzenberger as a condition of "advanced mediocrity." This is a highly defined mediocrity, he says, one that expresses "class conflict as practiced by the middle class and by culture to fill spare time"—a culture that comes to resemble a sort of pedestrian zone. "All this," he continues, "is certainly a success: many nightmares have ended but so have some fundamental conditions for creating works of art."[9]

In architecture, where social conditions have more influence over the product than technical and productive ones, an overbearing diffusion of this different version of conservatism is quite obvious, particularly in the articulation of demands and the ideological assurance that governs them. It suffices to mention the new fundamentalist ideas within various lines of ecological thought (as opposed to legitimate stands against a world of disorder and robbery) and the conditions being dictated by the ambiguous concept of quality of life—or, more specifically, quality of the "natural" environment—all of which represent defense and resistance to change. It is true that in ninety percent of such cases the issue involves not change but deterioration. Still, the blind worship of a known reality as the only arrangement worthy of being either reconstituted or altered in an innocently decorative manner leads to a defensiveness bordering on the kind of historicist positivism that considers all that exists to be valuable simply because it exists. Stylistic reconstruction and *anastylosis*, or their mimeses, are used not as pedagogical tools but rather as valid modes of project-making.

One consequence of this is the transformation of the concept of monument from significant testimony to "cultural asset"—that is, something to be preserved so that it can be spent.

In some cases, the cultural resource even becomes the foundation for planning: sometimes to erase the mistakes (real

or supposed) of modernity; at other times, more positively, as a gathering point for structuring a plan around historical and traditional values. This position has all the merits of indisputability that are accorded to any defense of existing values, as well as the limits of conservative good faith.

That progress in architecture sometimes coincides with conservation is, today, probably an inevitable contradiction, but certainly not one without meaning. Nor is it insignificant that institutional apparatuses—when not involved in purely profit-oriented operations—find space for agreement on this terrain, and themselves propose it as a condition for a project.

In the specific practice of composition and its figurative references, there is a clear return to the concept of traditional and finite perspective space, space that is nonetheless full of internal differences and debris, and these differences exhibit the way that space itself is partly shaped by the organization of the project.

The idea of abstraction is dismissed in favor of representation, and of its accompanying tools of drawing, figuration, and professional skill, as well as its measure of narration: nostalgia and memory become preeminent materials. Decoration and ornamental design become subjects of experiment, mainly for their evocative character but also as instruments of figurative mediation between great and small scales, and between building and context, as a form replacing chiaroscuro.

Falsification and noncoincidence seem to acquire not only a renewed legitimacy but also an ability to use unpublished materials. One avoids describing something as it is, substituting instead expressions that refer to what it suggests, in overly literary fashion. Marble appears much more precious when it is imitation marble, because it represents the skill of the craftsman who painted it, the grandeur of the past, an authentic luxury that is not immediately acquirable on the open market. All this also becomes an expression of the sophistication of the project-maker and symbolizes the adoption of an antiegalitarian culture, diversified by groups, where pluralism stems more from tolerant complicity than from a thirst for freedom.

Against Vulgar Pluralism

It should be said that in the present confusion of varying approaches to architecture, the word "pluralism" seems to have assumed a special legitimating role that appears liberating but actually preserves the status of convictions that are too uniformly shared. In the name of complete openness, or of indifference (it is unclear which), pluralism is invoked as a defense against the threats of rigidity and ideological intolerance, and thus simultaneously fosters the present configuration of society, along with the minor chaos and great void that surround it.

But misinterpreted pluralism also transforms casual choices, mere subjective assertions, into false certainties; rather than constructing freedom, it allows repose. It does not eliminate ideology, but only transforms it into an ideology of common sense, of "they say," of "it must seem this way," and even of "it obviously appears this way."

Moreover, this interpretation of pluralism transforms transgressive efforts into mere self-confirmation, into exorcising the obstacle of radical and specific ideas. For all to be different, that is, all different within the same inefficient mode of forming values, seems to be the most direct result of all this.

We are infinitely grateful to pluralism for preventing massacres and coercion, but pluralism also infinitely expands the

reasonable, secure indifference of the empire of apparatuses and astute behavior.

The possibility of expressing an opinion obviously guarantees nothing about its quality; it is a condition that permits, not a horizon that constructs. Moreover, all possibilities need not necessarily be put into practice. On the contrary, the polycentricity of opportunities should accentuate a trend toward responsibility, driven by a hypothetical and ethical desire. Uncertainty ought to increase the ethical weight of choice, but this happens only rarely.

The social advantages of pluralism weaken the obsessive and positive convictions that are indispensable to creative research in artistic practice. In our specific discipline, this brings to the forefront a type of architect that lacks the necessary tensions, an architect without means of travel, with eyes full of dust, whose behavior is determined, and whose work is conditioned, by fear of constructing a position as well as by anxieties about being up-to-date.

In recent decades, praise for the idea of pluralism, and for the values of peaceful coexistence and democratic ethics that are supposed to come with it, has been given a growing emphasis. But although its principles are fundamental to human coexistence, and might be interpreted in the direction of a rational ethic, it remains unclear whether pluralism offers any positive contribution to transforming the dynamics of artistic practice.

How, from a pluralistic standpoint, does one form and legitimize a judgment of quality in architecture, the kind of judgment that divides, accuses, and defends its positions and intentional results?

Does this judgment consider consistency between internal principles and results, thus becoming a strictly internal assessment, or is it the kind of aesthetic judgment that has been a

matter of infinite opinion ever since it became a variable independent of principles and horizons? Is it a judgment of ability in terms of talent and professionalism, an ability that serves a variety of positions? Is it a judgment regarding "harmony and invention," which today means conformity to the invasion of fashion and the contrivance of the day? Is it a judgment of flexibility or firmness, of availability or precision, for the short term or the long?

Not even the principle of mastering construction techniques seems to be a firm point any more, since for some time now architects seem to have abdicated this responsibility in favor of the project as a finished product. This abdication occurs even though the technical quality of the building depends largely on the conditions of the market and the state of advancement of production, rather than on the quality of the project. Even the efficiency of a building's realization seems to lie completely in the efficiency of management and the political opportunity of the architecture-product.

But is this really a condition of pluralism, or is it one where fragments of great ideas that exploded some years ago float in the vast, oily liquid of the management of mass culture? Is this really pluralism—that is, a debate among different principles, ideas, and perspectives—or is it a condition of infinite reinterpretation (which, as we have seen, many consider positive), where not only do the different positions move in continuous reciprocal oscillation, but every principle transforms its own nature indifferently and continuously.

One way or the other, it is clear that the suspension of dialectical reflection we are experiencing profoundly contradicts the pull toward materiality, duration, and stability on which the tradition of our discipline is built. How (and whether) to

prevent this tradition from becoming a mere decoration of the "society of spectacle" (a decoration that has now taken on the name of "design," which in common language means the interpretation of fashion rather than a tradition of method) is an important task, to be carried out without defensiveness or evasion.

We certainly cannot take seriously childish attempts to express the great value of pluralism through the neoformalism of transience and interruption, a true caricature of liberty. Nor can we conceive of architecture as a calligraphy exercise of the avant-garde, or even less turn our eyes toward a consoling and nonrepeatable past.

On the other hand, the paths that return to a rigorous functionality of technique and economy are also precluded, because technique and economy have, pluralistically, become functions of the market, of management, and of the organization of money. They have thrown aside their firm and consistent objectivity, and adopted the variably interpretable notions of investment, image, rebalancing, and global bartering.

Functionality and technique have lost most of their character as mimeses of a rationality that places social and moral rationality before productive rationality; they, too, have adopted the law of opportunity.

The previously mentioned appeal to context, to land, and to their history can instead be read as an attempt to use the opportunities of pluralism in proper and specific fashion, in order to repropose points of reference capable of discontinuous, long-lasting resistance: essentially, an attempt to escape from the intangibility of vulgar pluralism.

This is the present challenge: to oppose vulgar pluralism by building, from the ground and from the site, a new imagination capable of giving essential meaning to the light emitted by the concept of prediction, whose features I attempted earlier to define. But when prediction and antiquity, site and ground, seem to join together in this effort of resistance, in a nostalgic yearning for ideological certainty, then everything becomes approximate, dulled, wrapped in itself, and can make only an illusory (that is, a conservative) appeal to the good old days when artistic practice was in apparent solidarity with a specific social condition. Thus, in the absence of trust in one's own expressive means, one wishes to reappropriate all possible others (as I am likewise doing here), or to return instead, against all *technē*, to a kind of discipline that is wholly autonomous and, in turn, completely illusory. From a certain point of view, a contradictory symmetry thus arises within the conservative attitude: on one hand, a dissemination of purposely ineffable meanings; on the other, a desire for rules of action and judgment that takes the form of an appeal to the strength of tradition.

But conservatism, like all appeals to tradition and all nostalgic yearnings, also forms an aspect of the triumphant culture of escape, of that culture that exists only because it falls short of its own objective, that of looking ahead in order to build a fragment of truth. As Aldo Gargani wrote some time ago,

> The fault of contemporary culture is that, in its project, it is essentially a culture of escape. . . . If the form allows itself to be seen; if upon encountering a new building we find nothing for us, but rather the projective identification of the architect, this is a symptom of a culture of architecture that is a culture of escape.[10]

Whether this culture represents the ideological incarnation of today's dominating majority class is yet another matter, not without consequence, but perhaps for the moment without alternatives.

An advantage to be drawn from this difficult situation may involve the reconstitution of a necessary minority—not the frivolous minority of fashion, nor the obligatory one of poverty, but a minority of choice and of patient discipline.

Such a minority would have none of the glorious characteristics of the great avant-gardes of the past. It would occupy the opposite pole with respect to the phenomenon of reabsorption of neo-avant-gardes, however disguised, by the "homogeneous society"—a felicitous reabsorption that has been conspicuously active for more than twenty years. It would be a patient minority, one able to consider duration without conceit, monuments without monumentalism; a minority capable of deep respect for skills and techniques, without the ideology of a craftsman's leather apron, and without any naive faith in the powers of hypermodern technological society; a minority able to take pleasure in free invention as the necessary solution to a question, not as frivolity. A minority whose acts would respect an economy of expressive means, as well as a simplicity achieved by passing through the complexities of reality without oversimplifying them; a minority capable of continuously constructing a critical distance from reality, above all from an overjustified context; a minority capable of rebuilding within itself the diversity required in a quest for clarity, but without undue pride over the momentary certainties that this produces; a minority that wishes to remain outside of fashion and of image; a minority capable of returning materiality to the embodiment of things.

This minority would of course be in a continually precarious balance, its points of support in danger of being misinterpreted or reversed in meaning. It would be more certain of its own denials than its assertions, and would constantly challenge the commitments of fundamentalists, the fatalism of historicists, and above all those who speak of art with too little modesty.

Definition, measure, integrity of form and construction, identification of the relationship between space and manufactured work, between manufactured work and the land, would be the main instruments in the architecture of this minority.

I admit that this is probably a rather naive portrait, one motivated by those most dangerous of advisers, moral outrage and good intention. It is naive because it is based on the desire for an authentically rational reorganization of the present, something that no one has called for, and also naive in its own nostalgia for the project.

"Let it be," goes a song that has influenced my generation in the past quarter of a century. But to let anything be is, today, no simple or natural matter; it requires the difficult reconquest of a state of readiness that is not at all blind to the contradictions of the world. It is an invitation to become, but not, therefore, to stop being.