

Politecnico di Milano
School of Doctoral Programmes
Course with foreign Professors
«Cities and Landscapes: Transformation, Permanence, Memory»
Professors in charge:
Carolina Di Biase - Ilaria Valente - Daniele Vitale

Jean-Louis Cohen

Institut Française d'Urbanisme – Université Paris 8
Institute of Fine Arts – New York University

Rewriting the History of twentieth century Architecture.

With reference to the book

«The Future of Architecture. Since 1889».

2012, 12th of June

Applications / Iscrizioni:

Marina Bonaventura - marina.bonaventura@polimi.it

Organization / Organizzazione:

Laura Balboni, Cassandra Cozza, Francesca Florida, Chiara Occhipinti

Summary / Indice

- 4 **Jean-Louis Cohen**
 Short Biography
 Profilo biografico
- 7 **Architecture's expanded field.**
 Jean-Louis Cohen
- 17 **Bibliography / Bibliografia**
 Main Books and texts by Jean-Louis Cohen
 Principali libri e saggi di Jean-Louis Cohen

Architecture's expanded field

is taken from / è ripreso da

J.-L. COHEN, *The Future of Architecture. Since 1889*, Phaidon, New York, 2012, pp. 12-17.

Jean-Louis Cohen

Short biography

Jean-Louis Cohen was born in 1949 in Paris. Trained as an architect at the École Spéciale d'Architecture and at the Unité Pédagogique n. 6, in Paris; he took a Ph.D. in History at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in 1985.

After having directed the «Architectural Research Program» at the Ministry of Housing, he held from 1983 to 1996 a research professorship at the School of Architecture Paris-Villemin. Since 1993 he is the Sheldon H. Solow Chair for the History of Architecture at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts, and between 1996 and 2005 he has held a chair in town-planning history at the Institut Français d'Urbanisme, University of Paris 8.

From 1997 to 2003, the French Minister of Culture appointed him to create the «Cité de l'architecture», a museum, research and exhibition center to be opened in 2005 in the Paris Palais de Chaillot. Between 1998 and 2003, he was the Director of the Institut français d'architecture and of the Musée des Monuments Français, the two major components of the Cité.

Jean-Louis Cohen's research activity has been chiefly focused on Twentieth century architecture and urban planning. He has studied in particular German and Soviet architectural cultures, and interpreted extensively Le Corbusier's work and Paris planning history.

He has been a curator for numerous exhibitions, including «Paris-Moscou» (1979) and the centennial show «L'aventure Le Corbusier» (1987), both at the Centre Georges Pompidou. He has also conceived with Bruno Fortier the permanent exhibit Paris, «La ville et ses projets» at the Pavillon de l'Arsenal (1988-2003) and, at the Canadian Center for Architecture, «Scenes of the World to Come» (1995). Other exhibitions include 1997 «Les Années 30, l'architecture et les arts de l'espace entre industrie et nostalgie» at the Musée des Monuments Français in Paris (1997), «Casablanca, naissance d'une ville moderne en sol africain», at the Fondation EDF Electra (1999) and «Alger, paysage urbain et architecture» at the Institut français d'architecture (2003).

Jean-Louis Cohen

Profilo biografico

Jean-Louis Cohen nasce a Parigi nel 1949. Studia architettura all'École Spéciale d'Architecture e all'Unité Pédagogique n. 6 di Parigi; nel 1985 discute la tesi di dottorato in storia all'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales di Parigi.

Dopo aver diretto il «Programma di ricerca sull'architettura» presso il Ministero dell'abitazione, dal 1983 al 1996 è professore alla Scuola di Architettura di Parigi-Villemin.

Dal 1993 ha la cattedra Sheldon H. Solow in storia dell'architettura all'University Institute of Fine Arts di New York e dal 1996 al 2005 ha la cattedra in storia dell'urbanistica all'Institut Français d'Urbanisme dell'Università di Parigi 8.

Dal 1997 al 2003 il ministro francese della cultura gli affida il compito di creare la «Cité de l'architecture», museo e centro di ricerca e mostre aperto nel 2005, all'interno di Palais Chaillot a Parigi. Tra il 1998 e il 2003 è direttore dell'Institut Français d'Architecture e del Museo dei monumenti francesi, due dei maggiori centri di ricerca della «Cité».

L'attività di ricerca di Jean-Louis Cohen si è concentrata soprattutto sullo studio della storia dell'architettura e dell'urbanistica del ventesimo secolo. Ha studiato in particolare la cultura architettonica tedesca e sovietica, ha interpretato in modo ampio l'opera di Le Corbusier e ha studiato la storia dell'urbanistica di Parigi.

Ha curato numerose esposizioni, come «Paris-Moscou» del 1979 e «L'aventure Le Corbusier» del 1987, in occasione del centenario della nascita del maestro, entrambe al Centro Georges Pompidou di Parigi. Con Bruno Fortier ha concepito l'esposizione permanente su Parigi intitolata «La ville et ses projets» (la città e i suoi progetti), nel padiglione dell'Arsenale (1988-2003), e l'esposizione intitolata «Scenes of the World to Come» (scene del mondo a venire), nel Centro canadese per l'architettura (1995). Tra le altre mostre ha ancora curato nel 1997 «Les Années 30, l'architecture et les arts de l'espace entre industrie et nostalgie» (anni '30, architettura e arti spaziali tra industria e nostalgia), al Museo dei monumenti francesi a Parigi; nel 1999 «Casablanca, naissance d'une ville moderne en sol africain» (Casablanca, nascita di una città moderna in terra d'Africa), allo spazio EDF Electra; nel 2003 «Alger, paysage urbain et architecture» (Algeri, paesaggio urbano e architettura), all'Institut Français d'Architecture.

Architecture's expanded field.

by Jean-Louis Cohen

William Morris's *News from Nowhere* and H.G. Wells's *When the Sleeper Wakes*, published in 1890 and 1899 respectively, depict a future society – a socialist utopia in the former case, a capitalist Dystopia in the latter – encountered by the novels' protagonists after a long period of sleep. If the contemporary inhabitants of the planet had awakened in the early twenty-first century, they would have been at a loss to recognize not just the cities constellating the world's surface, but also the buildings making them up. Both cities and buildings have undergone fundamental transformations, more so than at any time in the past. Likewise, the quantity of building stock produced since 1900 has surpassed the sum total of that which existed in all previous human history. Not only did the population of urban areas exceed that of the countryside for the first time shortly after the year 2000, but also the very forms of human presence on the face of the earth reflected thoroughgoing changes. In the nineteenth century, the train station and department store joined the house, palace, and temple in the existing inventory of building types. In the twentieth century, office and apartment towers, large housing developments, vast hangars enclosing factories and shopping centers, and a wide variety of infrastructures ranging from dams to airports followed. Contradicting the British historian Nikolaus Pevsner, who famously wrote that «a bicycle shed is a building; Lincoln Cathedral is a piece of architecture»¹, the most prosaic programs came to be considered objects worthy of aesthetic attention. This unprecedented surge in construction was meager compensation for a previously unimaginable level of destruction of natural resources and cultural treasures, the effects of industrialization, urbanization, and war. Architecture's mutations were not limited to the invention of programs responding to the new demands of production and consumption. The field also expanded with the rise of new types and classes of users. Architecture ceased to be a discipline exclusively in the service of the wealthy and began to address broader constituencies, including municipalities, cooperatives, and a wide range of institutions and social groups². It also responded to the breaking down of classical codes, the rejection of historical imitation, and the introduction of

¹ NIKOLAUS PEVSNER, *An outline of European architecture*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1963, p. 15.

² I am alluding here to Rosalind Krauss's seminal essay «Sculpture in the expanded field», October 8, Spring 1979, pp. 30–44.

new materials. Its new relations to technology, the arts, and the city were affected by external conditions as well as by internal ones. At times it had recourse to sources outside the discipline, adopting metaphors based on biological organisms, machines, or language; at other times it found inspiration within its own disciplinary traditions³. In view of all these transformations, it has been impossible to limit architecture's definition in this book to realized constructions. Unbuilt designs, as well as books, journals, and public manifestations embodying the culture of architecture in its broadest sense, have also been taken into account. Indeed, realized buildings are always informed by ideas, narratives, and repressed memories of past projects.

Two thresholds in time

The very delimitation «twentieth century» is open to debate. Rejecting a strictly chronological definition, the present narrative begins with the period from 1880 to 1914. It finds its temporal brackets between the «short century» that the British historian Eric Hobsbawm condensed into the years from 1914 to 1991⁴ and a longer span that places the twentieth century's origins within a continuum that goes as far back as the Enlightenment. This initial moment is characterized by the convergence of industrialization and urbanization, the rise of social democracy throughout Europe, the emergence of the social sciences as disciplinary specializations, and the dissemination of the thought of important philosophers from Friedrich Nietzsche to Henri Bergson. It also coincides with the rise of revolutionary art movements such as Symbolism in poetry and the arts, and Cubism in painting. While the European powers were fighting a war for world domination and orchestrating the triumph of imperialism, designers, and the images of their work, also began to make inroads around the globe, thanks to the unprecedented acceleration of modes of transport and new networks of printed information, which disseminated the cultural norms of the leading nations. A pair of almost contemporaneous events were crucial to this beginning: the Universal Exposition in Paris of 1889 and the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago of 1893. The Paris fair coincided with the climactic moment of European colonialism, while the Chicago fair signaled the emergence of the New World on the international scene. Both events called the very definition of architecture into question, in its purpose – as its addressees became much broader

³ ADRIAN FORTY, *Of cars, clothes and carpets. Design metaphors in architectural thought*, «Journal of Design History 2», 1, 1989, pp. 1–14.

⁴ ERIC HOBSBAWM, *The age of extremes. A history of the world, 1914–1991*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1994.

social groups – as well as its forms. Mass production, of which Fordism became the most significant system of organization, led to the creation of a worldwide market and encouraged the most radical architects to search for new forms consonant with the machine aesthetic. At the same time, traditionalists, who were often no less engaged socially and no less hostile to eclecticism, sought to perpetuate the more comforting archetypes of the past by adjusting them to new demands. Almost one century later – after decolonization, which culminated with Nelson Mandela’s release from prison in 1990, and the end of the Cold War, which was marked by the West’s triumph over the Soviet bloc in 1989 – the winding down of the second millennium appeared to signal the next radical break in the culture of architecture. It is this moment that provides the closing bracket for this book. The automation of processes in a digital age had the effect of modifying the division of professional labor as well as the relationship between the design studio and the building site. The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, completed by Frank Gehry in 1997, was a highly visible exemplar of these new practices while also a demonstration of the potential importance of architecture in urban planning and public policy; together with dozens of other surprising buildings, Gehry’s museum called into question the traditional definition of the architectural object. With architecture firms, clients, and cultural organizations enjoying unprecedented mobility, the rise of a generation of designers hyped by the international media, but initially engaged in theoretical and critical activity and open to Utopian discourse, coincided with a crisis in the social policies that had developed over the course of the twentieth century. Coming on the heels of several generations of architects who had nurtured high aspirations to social transformation, designers at the end of the twentieth century often relinquished to developers and politicians tools that they might have used to achieve substantive reforms. The span from 1889 to 2000 does not divide easily into tidy, self-contained segments. Rather, it is necessary to take into account multiple, overlapping temporalities throughout the century, as suggested by the historian Fernand Braudel in his historical interpretation of the Mediterranean world⁵. Braudel used the architectural metaphor of multidimensional «planes» to describe these multiple temporalities. In twentieth-century architecture they include state policies and their highly volatile configurations; life cycles of institutions and organizations as well as cities and regions, which undergo slow processes of growth and decline; and, most simply, the construction of major buildings and the lives of architects, critics, clients,

⁵ FERNAND BRAUDEL, *Préface*, in *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, Armand Colin, Paris, 1949, p. 14; English version: *The Mediterranean and the mediterranean world in the age of Philip II*, trans. by Siân Reynolds, Harper & Row, New York, 1972, p. 21.

and historians. More fleeting temporalities, in which concepts and ideals appear and disappear only to resurface a few decades later, also play their part. The problem of writing a history of twentieth-century architecture is precisely that of relating these differential rates of temporal change to specific designs and built objects. Given this framework, I have resisted the temptation to write a history of what has been known as the «Modern Movement» ever since Nikolaus Pevsner made a rather partisan identification of its «pioneers» in 1936, celebrating Walter Gropius as its major figurehead⁶. I have also avoided perpetuating the rubric of the «International Style», formulated in 1932 in New York⁷, preferring instead to shape a broader definition of modernity that cannot be reduced to the fetish of novitas, of the new for newness's sake. From this point of view, it was essential not to disregard architectural interpretations of modernity based on conservative or traditionalist concepts, even if they were frequently rejected or ridiculed by militant critics acting, as is often the case, on behalf of the leading architects. Resurgences of classicism and the occasional subversive eruption of the vernacular are part of this bigger picture. Indeed, far from being a rigid category, and even less a sterile one, tradition – though sometimes wholly fabricated – has consistently served as an intellectual stimulant⁸. An exploration of the shifting boundaries between architecture and the related fields of art, urban planning, and technology also proved indispensable for understanding the changing methods of form-giving. The elevated ideals with which radical architects have often identified themselves – such as the machine aesthetic or organicism – needed to be taken into account, along with the effects of the apparently most abstract manifestoes, which have sometimes exerted their influence at a distance of several decades. An attempt has been made throughout the book to identify the visual documents allowing the clearest understanding of these resonances and reverberations. Together with images of completed buildings, sometimes within their urban contexts, pages of magazines, book covers, and architects' portraits help to reconstruct the complexity of continuously changing networks of signs and forms.

The carousel of hegemonies

In the following pages, the different national «scenes» of architecture have been treated as porous to international strategies and debates – as contexts in which the

⁶ NIKOLAUS PEVSNER, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius*, Faber & Faber, London, 1936.

⁷ HENRY-RUSSELL HITCHCOCK, PHILIP JOHNSON, *The International Style. Architecture since 1922*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1932.

⁸ See *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983.

latter were subjected to discussion, modification, and adaption – rather than as territories with impermeable borders. The history of twentieth-century architecture could be written by following the thread – or, rather, untangling the knot – of consecutive systems of hegemony imposed on national and regional cultures⁹. The period under consideration was characterized in crucial ways by recurrent economic and political conflicts between dominant states, including their military consequences. These conflicts had tremendous impact on culture. In 1941 the media tycoon Henry Luce declared that the twentieth century was destined to be the «American Century», following centuries implicitly perceived as «French» and then «English»¹⁰. There is no doubt that the United States exercised considerable influence on architecture – as on many other fields of culture – even before the massive increase in its power following victory over the Axis forces in 1945 and a second triumphal moment at the end of the Cold War¹¹. The vocabulary of architecture faithfully reflected these shifts. After 1945 American terminology supplemented the Italian language of architecture that had emerged during the Renaissance and then was supplemented by French and British terms in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and by German terms in the early twentieth century¹². But the hegemony of this relatively new civilization was not the only thing to have an impact on global architecture. Considering each national scene as a porous rather than closed realm reveals systems of domination of varying types, intensity, and duration, from industrial modes of production to patterns of leisure. National scenes have remained open despite recurrent attempts by authoritarian or xenophobic regimes to shore up their borders. Far from giving way to a homogenizing internationalism, national systems have constantly redefined themselves, shaped by the interplay of internal and external forces. Long before the advent of air travel and new information technologies, the global circulation of ideas and images by way of the steamship, the telegraph, and the mechanical reproduction of pictures – all nineteenth-century inventions – shaped every local scene. These patterns may also be detected within

⁹ I use here the term «hegemony» according to the meaning given by Antonio Gramsci, i.e., as a system of attitudes, beliefs, and values allowing domination: ANTONIO GRAMSCI, *Prison Notebooks*, vols. I and II., ed. and trans. by Joseph A. Buttigieg, Columbia University Press, New York, 1992–96; see also CHANTAL MOUFFE, *Hegemony and ideology in Gramsci*, «Research in political economy», 2, 1979, pp. 1–31.

¹⁰ HENRY LUCE, *The American Century*, «Life Magazine», February 7, 1941.

¹¹ See JEAN-LOUIS COHEN, *Scenes of the world to come: European architecture and the American challenge*, 1893–1960, Flammarion, Paris; Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal, 1995.

¹² See JEAN-LOUIS COHEN, *Le culture della modernizzazione: il balletto delle egemonie*, in *Immagini e temi*, edited by Maria Luisa Scalvini and Fabio Mangone, thematic volume of «Dizionario dell'architettura del XX secolo», Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, Roma, 2004, p. 21–31.

colonial empires, which both reached their apogee and underwent their final collapse in the twentieth century, then were partially perpetuated under postcolonial conditions after 1945. But the relationship of the colonizer to the colonized was never unidirectional, and the hybridization that characterized urban planning and architecture in many colonies, where local themes were assimilated into constructions built by the dominant power, also operated between colonizing nations¹³. The general plan of Chandigarh, capital of the Punjab – initially entrusted to the American architect Albert Mayer, then to Paris-based Le Corbusier – was rooted in town-planning principles that had been perfected by the British. The architecture of the Moroccan city of Casablanca was defined in relation not just to Paris but also to Berlin and Los Angeles, while Buenos Aires contained echoes of Madrid, Budapest, Milan, New York, and Paris.

The continuity of type

On each national scene, the groups competing for dominance in architecture at times indulged in exaggerated polemics in order to consolidate their own «symbolic capital», in sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's sense of the term¹⁴. It was therefore impossible to limit a history of the relationships structuring twentieth-century architecture to a list of aesthetic «influences» – a term I have consciously avoided. Instead, following Hans Robert Jauss, I found it essential to analyze the reception met by works and ideas, as this often redefined the professional identity of architects, even those working at a considerable distance from the buildings they were interpreting and sometimes emulating¹⁵. This book proposes to map the relationships established among theoretical systems, seminal concepts, urban plans, paper projects, and completed buildings. This last, however, along with individual architects, remains the central focus, although, once again, with their local and international reception taken into account. The connection between imagined spaces and built ones was particularly strong in the twentieth century, given that the principal types of structures were often developed in a kind of leap from the shelf of the «ideal project

¹³ See ANTHONY D. KING, *Colonial urban development. Culture, social power, and environment*, Routledge & Paul, London, 1976; and *Urbanism. Imported or Exported?*, edited by Mercedes Volait, Joe Nasr, Wiley-Academy, West Sussex, UK, 2003.

¹⁴ PIERRE BOURDIEU, *Le sens pratique*, Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1980; English version: *The Logic of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice, Polity, Cambridge, UK, 1990.

¹⁵ HANS ROBERT JAUSS, *Toward an aesthetic of reception*, trans. by Timothy Bahti, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1982. In the architectural field, see *La réception de l'architecture du mouvement moderne: image, usage, héritage*, edited by Jean-Yves Andrieux and Fabienne Chevalier, Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, Saint-Étienne, 2002.

library», as identified by Bruno Fortier¹⁶, to the reality of the construction site. The glass towers imagined by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in 1921, for example, were built only in the 1950^s. They then became a tiresome cliché – an easy target for critics advocating «postmodernism» – before being reborn at the end of the century thanks to new technological advances. Likewise, the immeuble-villa conceived by Le Corbusier in 1922, a collective dwelling with individual living spaces, has continued to inspire projects in the third millennium. The machine-building that Antonio Sant’Elia envisioned just before World War I would appear in a modified form in the Centre Pompidou in Paris, while the contorted, biomorphic structures dreamed of by the Expressionists have finally become feasible today in an age when digital modeling has made it possible to break down complex shapes into components that can be calculated and industrially produced.

Historians versus architects, or the problem of inclusion

Until the 1970^s the histories told by Sigfried Giedion, Bruno Zevi, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, and Leonardo Benevolo perpetuated a view of modern architecture that gave priority to the radical character of its innovations. Each narrative carried its own particular biases¹⁷. As early as 1929 Giedion was interested in observing «national constants»¹⁸. By 1941 he spoke of the creation of a «new tradition», a notion Hitchcock had proposed in 1929¹⁹. In 1951 Zevi responded to Giedion by highlighting the historical relationship of architectural culture to politics and surveying a vast array of buildings²⁰. In 1958 Hitchcock described the «reintegration» of the arts of the engineer and the architect; he also preferred to write about buildings that he had actually had the opportunity to visit²¹. As for Benevolo, he placed the development of modern architecture within an optimistic picture of the encounter

¹⁶ BRUNO FORTIER, *L’amour des villes*, Mardaga, Liège; Institut français d’architecture, Paris, 1994.

¹⁷ See MARIA LUISA SCALVINI, MARIA LUISA SANDRI, *L’immagine storiografica dell’architettura moderna da Platón a Giedion*, Officina edizioni, Roma, 1984; PANAYOTIS TOURNIKIOTIS, *The historiography of modern architecture*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1999; and ANTHONY VIDLER, *Histories of the immediate present: inventing architectural modernism*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2008.

¹⁸ SIGFRIED GIEDION, *Nationalitätskonstante*, in «Bauen in Frankreich, Bauen in Eisen, Bauen in Eisenbeton», Klinkhardt & Biermann, Leipzig, 1928, p. 68; English version: «Building in France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferroconcrete», trans. by J. Duncan Berry, Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, Santa Monica, 1995, p. 152.

¹⁹ SIGFRIED GIEDION, *Space, Time and Architecture. The growth of a new tradition*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1941, p. 18; HENRY-RUSSELL HITCHCOCK, *Modern architecture. Romanticism and reintegration*, Payson and Clarke, New York, 1929, pp. 77–149.

²⁰ BRUNO ZEVI, *Storia dell’architettura moderna*, Einaudi, Torino, 1951.

²¹ HENRY-RUSSELL HITCHCOCK, *Architecture: nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, UK, 1958.

between formal and technological invention and social advances²². Twenty years later, but in a similar vein, Kenneth Frampton proposed a «critical history» of the Modern Movement, seeking to prolong its «incomplete project»²³. Soon after, William Curtis took into account the global expansion of modern architecture, a perspective rooted in his own experiences in Asia and Latin America²⁴. In 2002, Alan Colquhoun published a concise survey no less committed to the celebration of modernism than Frampton's²⁵. Reyner Banham, who as early as 1960 saw roots of modern architectural strategies in both Italian Futurism and French Classicism, was among those to propose a more subversive reading²⁶. Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co also analyzed the relationship of aesthetics and politics in twentieth-century architecture, underlining the ideological forces that shaped the field²⁷, which Tafuri had addressed previously in his enigmatic but magisterial *Architecture and Utopia* (1973). Several generations of biographical dictionaries and encyclopedias have allowed readings parallel to those offered by these historical narratives. Recently Adrian Forty attempted, in *Words and Buildings*, to define the semantic field of modern architecture by identifying some of its key terms, whereas Anthony Vidler unveiled the strategies determining many of these founding histories²⁸. Yet few of these works have attempted to reveal the continuities that characterize modern architecture – an often broken thread, but one that runs throughout the episodes discussed in this book. From Giedion to Tafuri to Frampton, these discourses of architectural history have revealed the fact that the supposed autonomy or objectivity of the author is a quasi fiction. Many of these books originated from a commission by a particular architect – in Giedion's case, by Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius – or reflected an intellectual position developed in close contact with architects – in Tafuri's case, with Aldo Rossi and Vittorio Gregotti. Through such relationships, architects have undeniably shaped historians' thinking and writing and at times biased their interpretations. The following pages try to place less emphasis on the

²² LEONARDO BENEVOLO, *Storia dell'architettura moderna*, Laterza, Bari, Italy, 1960; English version: *History of modern architecture*, trans. by H. J. Landry, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1966.

²³ KENNETH FRAMPTON, *Modern architecture. A critical history*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1980.

²⁴ WILLIAM J. R. CURTIS, *Modern architecture since 1900*, Phaidon, London, 1982.

²⁵ ALAN COLQUHOUN, *Modern architecture*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002.

²⁶ REYNER BANHAM, *Theory and design in the first Machine Age*, Architectural Press, London, 1960.

²⁷ MANFREDO TAFURI, FRANCESCO DAL CO, *Storia dell'architettura contemporanea*, Electa, Milan, 1976. English version: [with a somewhat misleading title] *Modern architecture*, trans. by Robert Erich Wolf, Rizzoli, New York, 1986.

²⁸ ADRIAN FORTY, *Words and buildings. A vocabulary of modern architecture*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2000; ANTHONY VIDLER, *Histories of the immediate present. Inventing architectural modernism*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2008.

creativity of incontestable «masters» like Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, and Mies²⁹ than on the sometimes unfairly neglected work of architects who had less heroic careers but have been rediscovered through the publication of a plethora of monographs during the last two decades. The importance of the «masters» of modern architecture needs to be assessed as much through a careful reconsideration of their ascendancy and period of domination as through a celebration of their work. From this point of view – and unlike many of the volumes named above – this book attempts to be as inclusive as possible, within the limits of its format and at the risk of occasionally oversimplifying complex trajectories. I have frequently devoted more attention to the experimental beginnings of architects' careers than to their late periods, when their work often regressed or was simply frozen in place by success and repetition. In order to avoid reproducing the kind of epic narrative with which many previous histories have interpreted the theories and designs of the most innovative architects of the nineteenth century – reducing their immediate predecessors to the dubious status of «pioneers» – I have taken a broad view of the unfolding of architectural modernity. The continuity between the ideals and reform strategies forged during the first decades of the Industrial Revolution and those of the «mature» modernism of the 1920^s cannot be denied. Indeed, a definition of modernity limited to the aesthetic and design precepts of high modernism appears all the more obsolete thirty years after the eruption of the last of several short-lived postmodernisms. Without going so far as to extend the definition of the modern condition to the vast configurations of scientific and political thought explored by, for example, Bruno Latour³⁰, I have ventured beyond the limits of the movements literally proclaiming their own modernity to consider changes brought about by the convergence of the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, and the rise of the nation-state. The adjustment of conservative building codes to the functional requirements of modernization – the objective process of the material transformation of society – belongs to this chronicle as much as do innovations in building typology and form, even if the former respond more to the mandates of state power and capital than to ideals of social reform. It is difficult and perhaps impossible to communicate in a single narrative a spectrum of experiences that thousands of monographs, exhibition catalogs, doctoral theses, and thematic studies have not yet exhausted. Yet by alternating wide brushstrokes with specific details, I

²⁹ Cfr. PETER BLAKE, *The master builders*, Knopf, New York, 1960.

³⁰ BRUNO LATOUR, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes. Essai d'anthropologie symétrique*, La Découverte, Paris, 1991. English version: *We have never been modern*, trans. by Catherine Porter, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1993.

have endeavored to evoke a landscape of recurrent themes and at times to reveal different ways of thinking about the past. Among these recurrent themes is the passionate search by modern architects for an architecture considered to be «rational» – a term that has enjoyed much success over many decades – or in any case to be justified by a rationale related to construction, function, or economy. This search led in extreme cases to a reduction of the conception of «rational» building to little more than the implementation of principles like the provision of optimal ventilation or an alignment guaranteeing maximum sunlight. Another recurrent theme in twentieth-century architecture has been the relationship of architectural programs to the needs of exploited social classes – a subject taken into consideration by professional architects for the first time in history during this period. Throughout the twentieth century, diverse populist movements constantly addressed this subject, whether structurally – for example, in terms of social housing – or aesthetically, by drawing on vernacular rather than «pedigreed» forms. I have aspired to trace projects, alongside the dazzling accomplishments of the «masters» and their trailblazing experiments that claimed to free architecture from the weight of history, that are more reflective of the slow, cumulative, and irresistible process of modernization. During the golden age of Hollywood cinema, the major studios and leading producers categorized their movies as «A», «B», or «C» according to their budget. This narrative, though most often focused on A buildings, was initially written with the intention not to neglect the relationship between the «major» architecture of the most spectacular works and the «minor» architecture of mass production, which constituted the urban backdrop for the monumental projects. The physical limitations of a single volume have constrained this ambition. But if the pages that follow cannot unravel all the mysteries of twentieth-century architecture, they aim first and foremost to be an invitation to discovery and to suggest a framework within which to understand its most characteristic features.

Bibliography / Bibliografia

Main books and texts by Jean-Louis Cohen

Principali libri e saggi di Jean-Louis Cohen

- J.-L. COHEN, MARCO DE MICHELIS, MANFREDO TAFURI, *URSS 1917-1978: la ville, l'architecture / URSS 1917-1978: la città, l'architettura*, [French and Italian edit. / ediz. in francese e italiano], L'Équerre-Officina, Paris-Roma, 1979.
- J.-L. COHEN, MONIQUE ELEB, ANTONIO MARTINELLI, *The 20th Century Architecture and Urbanism: Paris*, A+U publishing, Tokyo, 1990.
- J.-L. COHEN, *Le Corbusier and the Mystique of the URSS. Theories and Projects for Moscow, 1928-1936*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1992.
- J.-L. COHEN, «Bigness» *alla prova del cantiere / «Bigness» and the test of the construction site*, «Lotus international», 86, 1995.
- J.-L. COHEN, *Scènes de la vie future. L'architecture européenne et la tentation de l'Amérique, 1893-1960*, preface by / prefazione di Hubert Damish, Flammarion, Paris, e Centre canadien d'architecture, Montréal, 1995.
- J.-L. COHEN, *Les années 30: l'architecture et les arts de l'espace entre industrie et nostalgie*, Editions du patrimoine, Paris, 1997.
- J.-L. COHEN, *Saper vedere Las Vegas / Knowing how to look at Las Vegas*, «Lotus international», 93, 1997, pp. 96-108.
- J.-L. COHEN, *André Lurçat 1894-1970. Autocritique d'un moderne*, Mardaga, Liège, 1995; It. edit. / ediz. it. *André Lurçat (1894-1970). Autocritica di un maestro moderno*, transl. by / trad. da Silvia Milesi, Electa, Milano, 1998.
- J.-L. COHEN, MONIQUE ELEB, *Paris: architecture 1900-2000*, [texts in French and English / testi in francese e inglese], Norma, Paris, 2000.
- J.-L. COHEN, MONIQUE ELEB, *Casablanca. Colonial myths and architectural ventures*, Monacelli, New York, 2002.
- J.-L. COHEN, *Le Corbusier, 1887-1965. Un lirismo per l'architettura dell'era meccanicista*, Taschen, Köln, 2005.
- J.-L. COHEN, *Mies van der Rohe*, [French, German and English edit. / ediz. in francese, tedesco e inglese], Hazan, Paris / Birkhäuser, Basel, Berlin, Boston, 2007; It. edit. / ediz. it. *Mies van der Rohe*, transl. by / trad. di Cristina Biasini, Laterza, Roma, 2007.
- J.-L. COHEN, *Le Corbusier: una vita nella scrittura*, «Casabella», 803, 2011, pp. 106-108.

- J.-L. COHEN, *Architecture in uniform; Designing and building for the second world war / Architecture en uniforme; projeter et construire pour la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, [French and English edit./ ediz. in francese e inglese], Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal, Québec, Canada, 2011.
- J.-L. COHEN, *The future of architecture. Since 1889*, Phaidon, New York, 2012.