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## **ABSTRACT**

### **THE ARCHITECTURE OF RICARDO PORRO: QUESTIONS OF FORM AND CONTENT**

**by  
Mariano Alemany**

The architecture of Ricardo Porro, a contemporary Cuban architect residing in France, is studied through an examination of its form and content. The aim of this study is to gain a clearer understanding of his work in its relation to historical and current tendencies in architecture.

Both aspects of form and content are explained and critized. Form is examined via Heinrich Wofflin's five opposed pairs of dynamisms. Content is explored through Ricardo Porro's five aspects of content.

The form of Porro's work manifests eclectic influences which resist classification. The content of his architecture is imbued with symbolism. A constant and distinctive characteristic of his work since 1960 is that it exhibits a symbolic content embodied in a collagist technique of form.

**THE ARCHITECTURE OF RICARDO PORRO:  
QUESTIONS OF FORM AND CONTENT**

by  
**Mariano Alemany**

**A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of  
New Jersey Institute of Technology  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Architecture**

**School of Architecture**

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APPROVAL PAGE

THE ARCHITECTURE OF RICARDO PORRO:  
QUESTIONS OF FORM AND CONTENT

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This thesis is dedicated to  
Elena, Gabriela, and Ricardo

*Traduttori traditori*

*Et l'unique cordeau des trompettes marines*  
--Guillaume Apollinaire

*PORRO UNUM EST NECESARIUM*



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## PREFACE

Aside from the two Schools of the Arts built in Cuba during the early sixties, the work of Ricardo Porro is unknown to most American architects. This essay is intended to make available to an American audience a critical examination of Mr. Porro's work. His work consists not only of buildings which have been erected in Cuba, France and Liechtenstein, but also of numerous unbuilt projects. Ricardo Porro is not only an architect but also a painter, sculptor and cabinetmaker. He has also written various articles on architecture which have been published in European journals and, most importantly, he has published two books: Oeuvres/ Obras 1950-1993 (Works 1950-1993), which is a portfolio his architecture with descriptions and commentaries; and Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu (The Five Aspects of Content) which is his theory of architecture. In addition Mr. Porro has implemented his didactic method in his role as professor at various schools of architecture in Cuba, Venezuela, France, and currently in Austria.

Hence, Ricardo Porro is active not only as a builder but also in other spheres of architecture. His opinions and beliefs on art and architecture have been made known through his books and in his articles, most of which have been written in French or in Spanish. This author has translated both of his books, Oeuvres/Obras: 1950-1993 and Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu. These translations are contained in the appendices.

Since this is a critical essay of the work of Ricardo Porro--the first to extensively present a critical analysis of his work to date, and certainly the first comprehensive essay about his work to be made available to an English speaking readership--it is advised that the reader become familiar with his work via the drawings, photographs and translations provided for him in the appendix before reading the critical analysis. Recently the internationally circulated architectural journal, *Architecture and Urbanism*, published an article on the work of Mr. Porro which is valuable for the drawings and color

photographs of his projects and for the article entitled, "An Architectural Autobiography of Ricardo Porro" in the March 1994 issue. Naturally the best way to get to know his work is to visit his buildings and to hear Porro discuss his views about them. Yet, if one is unable to obtain this direct experience, one must fall back on other less vivid primary sources as a way of getting to know Porro's architecture, namely through drawings, photographs and the articles written by him and about him.

The author interviewed Ricardo Porro in his home in Paris, visited his office, and visited three of Mr. Porro's buildings in Paris accompanied by him. Some of the interviews and conversations with the architect were taped. These amount to approximately fifteen hours of conversation covering his views on art and architecture, a discussion of his works and also that of others. These first-hand experiences have been incorporated into the critical analysis.

Yet this raw data about Ricardo Porro's work acquired through an investigation of the primary sources cited above is insufficient to bring about a critical examination of his work. Therefore, the literature which has accumulated over the years about Mr. Porro's architecture has been examined. For the most part it seems that the critics's demonstrate no real understanding of his work on account of their focus on just one project and because of their emphasis on the formal characteristics of his projects without an examination of their content. Many of the articles are merely descriptive and expository. Various attempts have been made by many critics to force him into a category such as 'organic', 'expressionist', 'sculpture-architecture', 'socialist', etc. Porro's theory of architecture, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, has not been critically commented by architectural historians. Undeniably, the points of view expressed by Ricardo Porro in his text are crucial for an understanding of his work for it contains the theory upon which he claims his practice is based.

It is always the case that in a critical analysis of a work of architecture certain aspects or viewpoints are emphasized at the expense of others. Hence the method

adopted to examine a work of architecture will have a preponderant effect on the interpretation of a work. The understanding and appreciation of an architect's work will be quite different if one applies to it a technical interpretation, a social-economic interpretation, a philosophical-religious interpretation or any other interpretations which have been used and promulgated by architectural historians and art critics. From these numerous possibilities the author has selected the method and focus which he has found to be most fruitful in giving the reader an understanding of Mr. Porro's total production and to open the way for further inquiries about his work: an analysis of the form and content of the work of Ricardo Porro.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The title of this essay, The Architecture of Ricardo Porro: Questions of Form and Content, reveals the two aspects that will be examined, namely form and content. 'Form' is to be examined through an application of Heinrich Wofflin's Principles of Art History 'Content' shall be examined using Mr. Porro's own book, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu. While examining his work utilizing these principles, the principles themselves will be described and analyzed.

The first edition of Heinrich Wofflin's Principles of Art History appeared in German in 1915. The English translation of this work was first published in 1932. This text appeared after his other writings on art history, Renaissance and Baroque (1888) and Classic Art (1899). These texts are not concerned with a judgment of value; rather they are concerned with the establishment of the classification of style in art and the way in which historical transformations of style may be explained. The abstract principles examined in Principles of Art History--the five opposed pairs of dynamisms--represent Wofflin's mature thought on the history of art with reference to painting, sculpture and architecture.

These five opposed pairs of dynamisms (to be explained in turn as they are applied to the work of Ricardo Porro), are applicable not only to the Renaissance and Baroque periods of architecture in Europe but also to any other culture or historical period. Wofflin himself was aware that the schema discussed in his work has universal applications. In his foreword to the Principles he states: "Yet the schema has proved applicable even as far as the domains of Japanese and old Nordic art." <sup>1</sup> In his

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<sup>1</sup> Heinrich Wofflin, Principles of Art History (trans. M. D. Hottinger). Holt, New York, 1932, p. viii.



conclusion he reiterates this view: "There is classic and baroque not only in more modern times and not only in antique building, but on so different ground as Gothic." <sup>2</sup>

For Wolfflin, art is representation, not presentation. His interest when analyzing a work of art is in discovering the artist's mode of representation. The universal forms of representation prevalent during any given period in the history of architecture are, according to Wolfflin, the result of that period's mode of perception.<sup>3</sup> Artists working within a certain period are bound within a given framework of possibilities. As Wolfflin indicates in his Introduction, "Every artist finds certain visual possibilities before him, to which he is bound. Not everything is possible at all times. Vision itself has a history, and the revelation of these visual strata must be regarded as the primary task of art history."<sup>4</sup>

Wolfflin maintains a cyclic view of art history. According to him a classic style is followed by a baroque style which in turn is followed by a classic style and the whole cycle repeats itself always in that order. He does point out, however, that these period divisions are not clear-cut. "In the old form, the new is already contained just as, beside the withering leaves, the bud of the new already exists."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, he recognizes that the change from baroque to classic does not mean a return to the original point of departure but instead implies a spiralling development.<sup>6</sup> What makes for the transition from one style to the other is, according to Wolfflin, a certain familiarity and satiation with the established modes of representation of that period. As Wolfflin remarks in his conclusion, "The development... will only fulfill itself where the forms have passed from hand to hand long enough or, better expressed, where the imagination has occupied itself

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.231.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 13

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

with form actively enough to make it yield up its baroque possibilities."<sup>7</sup> It is a matter relating to increasing the difficulty of visual perception as he points out: "Now it is well known that all art in advancing seeks to make the task of the eye increasingly difficult; that is to say, when once the problem of lucid representation has been grasped, it will come about of itself that certain difficulties are placed in the way of perception, and that the spectator, for whom the simple has become all too transparent, finds an interest in the solution of the more complicated problem."<sup>8</sup>

In Wolfflin's writings, in addition to discussing period styles (classic or baroque), he also holds the notion of a racial or national style. These national characteristics, he sustains, are constants which modify the period style. He expounds this ideology of racial differences in statements such as the following: "There is a definite type of Italian or German imagination which asserts itself, always the same in all centuries."<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, he makes other pronouncements such as: "There is a Germanic imagination which certainly passes through the general development from plastic to painterly, but still, from the very beginning, reacts more strongly to painterly stimuli than the southern."<sup>10</sup>

However, whereas the five opposed pairs of principles are clearly defined and seem useful and comprehensive for an analysis of form, other aspects of Wolfflin's ideology remain less tenable. One such aspect which is more difficult to rationally comprehend or to believe in on account of an examination of historical phenomena is Wolfflin's insistence on the cyclic nature of art history. Various writers have negatively criticized Wolfflin on this point. Two such texts which question the validity of this hallmark of Wolfflin's philosophy are Arnold Hauser in his book entitled The Philosophy of Art History, and Michael Podro in The Critical Historians of Art which examines the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 235.

contributions of 19th century German philosophers to the development of art history. The following quotation from Hauser's book shall summarize the essence of the nature of the objection:

Merely to assert that on the expiration of one stylistic period a contrasting period begins tells us nothing; for one style is not taken to have expired until the contrasting style is already in the ascendant. The ever-different variations in the process of intensification, decadence, and change which we observe between the contrasting poles simply do not fit into any formula. Were the change of style "logically" conditioned, we should find the maturity of one style going hand in hand with the infancy of the next. This is by no means always the case. There are numerous examples of a style outliving its proper span, lingering on unfruitfully, becoming ossified and academic, producing nothing but sequels, in a word, refusing to yield to the alleged law of antithetic development<sup>11</sup>

Another disagreement with regards to Wofflin lies in his implicit belief that the *Zeitgeist* of a given period limits the artist to one possibility of expression or of taste. Certainly history, particularly in the twentieth century, has shown that there are simultaneously multiple movements some which have more elements akin to the classic, others more akin to the baroque. Furthermore, the return to a classic style from the baroque is not convincingly argued in Wofflin's text.

Yet another objection to Wofflin is that each of the arts may be seen to develop historically at different paces. While painters may be at one stage of development, architects may be at another (usually lagging behind). However, Wofflin's analysis leads one to believe that art, sculpture and architecture all follow the same stage of development as inseparable wholes.

One last remark concerning the rejection of another one of Wofflin's principles is with regards his notion of a racial or national style. In the manner described by Wofflin this may be interpreted as racist. Wofflin does not make clear whether this national style is genetically, linguistically, politically, or culturally determined. However, for practical

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<sup>11</sup> Arnold Hauser, The Philosophy of Art History. The World Publishing Co., Cleveland, 1967, p. 129-130.

purposes one may construe it as somewhat along the lines of a national tradition which is a constant said to be present by many observers in a given country or region. In the twentieth century with the creation of various ethnic subgroups and cultural cross-fertilization, however, this notion of a national style becomes increasingly difficult to detect and is perhaps only capriciously or prejudicially applied to the work emerging from individuals from certain cultural backgrounds.

Therefore, from Wolfflin's Principles of Art History, what has been extracted for application to an examination of the form of Ricardo Porro's work are his five opposed pairs of dynamism. These shall prove necessary for the creation of an armature of critical understanding that will enable a comparison of Mr. Porro's work to that of other architects and movements both past and present. These concepts do not claim to be exhaustive of an understanding of his work. Certainly aspects such as the materials and methods of construction employed by Mr. Porro, the structural efficacy of his buildings, life safety issues and a multitude of other aspects pertinent to an overall appreciation of his buildings are left uncovered. These may become the tasks of future researchers of Mr. Porro's work.

Another circumstantial reason may be given for the selection of the exploration of form in Porro's work via Wolfflin's principles, as well as for the title and general outline of this essay. In 1960, at the age of 35, Ricardo Porro was a professor at the School of Architecture at the Central University of Venezuela. There he gave a conference which became a published work entitled Forma y Contenido en Wright (Form and Content in [the Work of Frank Lloyd] Wright). In this brief ten page publication he performs a critical analysis of Wright's work by first applying the principles set forth in Wolfflin's Principles of Art History<sup>12</sup>, then through an examination of the content<sup>13</sup> of his work via

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<sup>12</sup> Ricardo Porro, Forma y Contenido en Wright, Coleccion Espacio y Forma, Caracas, Sep. 1960. The following excerpts, translated by Mariano Alemany, are presented to demonstrate Porro's adherence and use of the Wolfflinian schema of formal analysis:

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"I propose to examine two aspects of the work of Frank Lloyd Wright: form and content."

"We find that Wolfflin's definition of classic space and baroque space (which he applied to the spaces of the Renaissance and of the Baroque) is very enlightening and that it can be applied to the architectural spaces of all periods since architecture across the centuries, oscillates between classic periods or movements and baroque periods or movements (or formative as Goethe called them)."(p. 3)

Following this very brief argument for his selecting Wolfflin to discuss the form of Wright's work, he goes on to list Wolfflin's five pairs of dynamisms. He does not, however, explain them. He takes for granted the reader's familiarity with them. Whereas the study is supposed to be an analysis of the form and content in the work of Wright, he constantly makes reference to other twentieth century architect's such as Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe which he uses to establish a differentiation between their work and that of Wright. Ordinarily, the analysis and discussion come before the conclusion. However, in Porro's case, as illustrated by his essay, the conclusion is given beforehand. Hence, immediately after listing Wolfflin's five pairs of dynamisms, he asserts: "Space in Wright in accordance with this scheme is baroque or unlimited, as the space of Le Corbusier of the rationalist period is classic or limited."(p. 4)

Porro introduces the terms "unlimited" and "limited" space without first defining them. His application of Wolfflin's principles to the work of Wright is quite cursory as may be seen from the following example, the application of Wolfflin's concept of "multiplicity vs. unity", which is here quoted in full:

"The fourth principle "multiplicity vs. unity". In classic architecture there is an aggregation of forms which maintain their individuality, although they preserve a harmony with the whole. In the baroque the parts fuse together in the whole.

"If we analyze Le Corbusier's Salvation Army building one feels a pure volume in the back and a series of other harmonious volumes which are added on. The composition has a mechanistic sense. Each volume has its own proportions.

"Instead, in Wright the interdependence of each element is such that not only can it not be conceived of as isolated but also at times separated from the whole, it even seems in poor taste. In the Museum of Non-Objective Art in New York, the Guggenheim, Wright takes as module the circle and based on this element conceives the whole design.

"The bronze circles which he places in the sidewalk which surrounds the museum, the ornamental details of the patio (which many criticize when they see them in the photographs which isolate them from the whole), the elevators, the dome, everything has an extremely close relationship. No element can be understood outside of the whole. Wright's sense of architecture is absolutely unitary."(p. 6)

The above is Porro's treatment of this principle of "multiplicity vs. unity" quoted in its entirety. After discussing each one of Wolfflin's five points in a manner quite similar to the above example, he arrives at the following brief and definitive conclusion:

"Hence we see, that space in Wright, if we refer it to the Wolfflinian scheme of classic-baroque, always falls within the concept of baroque space."(p. 7)

what may now be considered the germinal composition of what would in 1993 become his published theory of architecture, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu. His interest and application of Wolfflin's principles is longstanding. It constitutes an important part of the didactic program which he implements on his students. Yet nothing has ever been written about his work which exploits the clarity and precision inherent in Wolfflin's five opposed pairs which Porro constantly employs when discussing a work of art.

After discussing form in Porro's work--i.e., shape, volume, arrangement, etc.--via an application of Wolfflin's principles to determine what unique combination of the five opposed pairs of dynamisms are apparent in his work and determining their tendency to classic or baroque aesthetic principles, the second half of the essay will be an exploration of the content manifested in his work.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Porro's analysis then turns to examine the content in Wright's work. He begins in the following way:

"Let us now leave the analysis of form in order to briefly study the content in the work of Wright.

I believe that the definition of content becomes clearer if we separate it into mediate content and immediate content.

The immediate content would be the expression of what the building is, of the function that it realizes, and of what is lived within it. The mediate content would be the expression of the historic moment in which man lives. It is in this sense that architecture, like all art, is a symbol."(p. 8)

Already in the above example may be found two of what would later become the five aspects of content in architecture. As the following example will illustrate, Porro's discussion of these aspects of content are quite sketchy. He formulates a conclusion without first passing through a discussion or an analysis. The following quotation constitutes the sole commentary on the immediate content in Wright's work:

"The immediate content in Wright's architecture is always evident. The house with character, i.e., the house which faithfully expresses its forms of life that it carries within, is one of the fundamental principles. It is interesting to study the house that he constructed for the toy manufacturer, Sol Friedman. There he expressed not only the life within the house but also the personality of the man who lived in it."(p. 8)

Porro's discussion of the mediate content begins by stating that, "The mediate content is naturally less obvious." (p. 8) He does not elucidate why this is so. Instead he begins to cite a plethora of historical events, tendencies in science and art and a sketchy discussion of vitalism and dynamism. There is no subsequent discussion of form or of content or of the interrelation between the two in the work of Wright.

An examination of content is necessary to gain a fuller understanding of architectural design. An analysis of form alone does not account for the why and wherefore of the form. Form is a vehicle of expression. Form is but the plastic means that the artist uses to say the things that are important to him. What these things are and how they are said and other such considerations may be categorized as the contents of a work.

Among the texts dedicated to an analysis of content some focus above all on the symbolic aspect of architectonic expression; others discuss the work in terms of its expression of social structures. Their contribution to an understanding of architecture is of great interest. Yet a more general analytical framework seems necessary which will enable one to attain a better comprehension of the relations between the various types of content found in a work of architecture.

This analytic framework for the study of Porro's architecture will be provided by Porro himself. His theory of architecture, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, contains the five categories that he has set up to examine the content of a work of architecture. These will be explained and criticized in turn as they are applied to his oeuvre. (An English translation of the text is provided in the Appendix B.)

Porro's text is not a chronologically organized history of architecture. It is fundamentally his exposition of what he deems to be the points worthy of analysis to obtain a comprehensive view of the content in any building of any architectural period. Before commencing his analysis of content, in his introduction, he aims to define art and architecture, the nature of beauty, the role of the artist and to define form and content in a work of art. It will be found that many of his conclusions are derived from the views expounded by other art historians and philosophers. Yet it is on these foundations that his analysis of content rests. He 'tests' his five points by applying them to diverse examples of buildings in the history of architecture much in the same way as Wolfflin illustrates his five opposed pairs through an examination of art ranging from the 15th to

the 18th century. However, Porro does not restrict himself to any given period; he applies his concepts to Gothic cathedrals, Baroque buildings and twentieth century works.

The five aspects of content which Ricardo Porro studies in his text are: 1) immediate content, 2) persuasion, 3) tradition, 4) superimposed image, and 5) mediate content. Each one of these is, in turn, explained and applied to various works of architecture. Admittedly, form and content are inseparable. Porro recognizes this in his remarks in his introduction: "Although logically inseparable, for this study I will separate them for the sake of convenience and I will devote attention to content."<sup>14</sup> In this essay too, form and content will be examined separately insofar as that is possible. In the conclusion the interrelation of the two will be discussed.

As previously mentioned, the five points of content that he discusses are based on his general considerations and assumptions which he announces in his introduction. Among these is his definition of architecture which begins with a distinction between shelter (or construction) and architecture. His point of departure, which he quotes in his text, is Nikolaus Pevsner's view on this matter which he makes clear from the outset in his introduction to An Outline of European Architecture: "A bicycle shed is a building; Lincoln Cathedral is a piece of architecture. Nearly everything that encloses space on a scale sufficient for a human being to move in is a building; the term architecture applies only to buildings designed with a view to aesthetic appeal."<sup>15</sup> Hence, Porro states, "Architecture begins where the aesthetic element becomes evident."<sup>16</sup>

The concept of beauty is examined by Porro in his introduction where he draws various definitions from the history of aesthetics to express his own views. His debt to

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<sup>14</sup> Ricardo Porro, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu. Institut Francaise d'Architecture, Massiomo Ripostati Editeur, 1993, p. 41 (Appendix B, p. 424).

<sup>15</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, An Outline of European Architecture. Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1964, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> Porro, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, p. 11 (Appendix B, p. 404).



Plato, Nietzsche and Heidegger and to the German idealist current in general is recognized by Porro as constituting an important segment of the basis upon which his own ideas are founded. Hence Porro, as Nietzsche, recognizes two extremes of beauty: the Apollonian, which is the Platonic definition of beauty, as being the splendor of the truth and the Dionysian, the splendor of the dark forces of the world. Porro concludes his discussion on beauty by saying: "These two forms of beauty are possible in art. One cannot favor one more than the other. That depends on the period or the artist's sensitivity, as history shows. In contrast with the first, the second gives the sensation of chaos, of overflow. But it is only true in appearance because, in fact, the Platonic principles of the first one apply just as much to the second: precision and accuracy are necessary in one case as well as the other."<sup>17</sup> This postulation of two distinct, bipolar definitions of beauty shows much in common with Wölfflin's distinction between the classic and baroque styles. Unfortunately, Porro does not further develop this concept in the remainder of his text.

Porro has a monomaniac interest toward meaning in art and architecture. In his writing and in his conversations he often uses the terms meaning, content, expression and signification interchangeably. For him art must have meaning if it is to be called art. He vehemently attacks those critics that deny meaning to a work of art, or that if indeed one attributes a meaning to it, it bears no relevance to other spheres of experience, save perhaps to the aesthetic. His passionate insistence on this topic leads him to denounce such critics as ignoramuses incapable of delving beyond the surface of things as his remarks demonstrate: "[The meaning or content of a work of art] is an essential dimension of all works. It is often ignored or denied because it is rarely evident. As with the sciences, art need study and initiation. This is not for neophytes."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 23-24 (Appendix B, p. 414).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 26 (Appendix B, p. 416).

Mere construction is unable to satisfy man's need for meaning. Indeed, this position is taken up by other contemporary architectural historians such as Christian Norberg-Schulz. In his book, Meaning in Western Architecture, Norberg-Schulz indicates this repeatedly, as in the following pronouncement: "This is the true purpose of architecture, to help make human existence meaningful; all other functions, such as the satisfaction of mere physical needs, can be satisfied without architecture."<sup>19</sup> Although in his writings Porro does not make any explicit reference to Norberg-Schulz's views, he is sympathetic to this stance--indeed, it lies at the root of his operational definition of architecture. The one sentence definition that Porro has coined is, "Architecture is the creation of a poetic framework for the action of man."<sup>20</sup> If one compares this definition again to Norberg -Schulz's observations on the essence of architecture, one may discover the two to be quite similar: "The purpose of a work of art is to conserve and communicate experienced existential meanings.....In other words, the experienced meanings constitute from the very outset an *existential space*, which forms a framework for man's actions."<sup>21</sup>

Porro's final statement in his introduction says, "If, for Holderlin, poetry is 'to transmute the world into words', for me, architecture is to transmute the world into spaces of life."<sup>22</sup> These poeticized spaces for life are what constitute architecture, according to Porro. Architecture is both form and content constituting an inseparable whole. The themes manifested in a work of art may be placed in two general categories, according to Porro. For him, "The work of art is the sensible expression of the great collective drama or of the eternal problems of humanity, indeed of the two at the same

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<sup>19</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, Meaning in Western Architecture. Rizzoli International Publications, p. 226.

<sup>20</sup> Porro, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, p. 37 (Appendix B, p. 423).

<sup>21</sup> Norberg-Schulz, Meaning in Western Architecture, p. 223.

<sup>22</sup> Porro, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, p. 37 (Appendix B, p. 423).

time."<sup>23</sup> The particularities of a work of art come about from the spatio-temporal conditions in which the artist produces his work. Porro reiterates his views on the subject: "Art... goes to the bottom of things because it expresses the world where the artist lives, the most noteworthy problems of this moment of civilization, or rather, it expresses the eternal problems of man."<sup>24</sup>

These "eternal problems of man" are the content of a work of architecture. How they are expressed in a building is the subject of Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu. The themes which to Porro seem the most fundamental are: Eros and Thanatos, nature, God, Man, good and evil. In addition, among some of the themes of our times mentioned by him are: the dynamism, mechanization, vitalism. Porro briefly discusses these themes in his introduction and discovers in diverse examples of architecture these themes to be present. He does not negate that other themes have inspired or may inspire works of art; however, he finds that many of the others may be found to be subordinate to the fundamental ones which he lists. The nature of these themes will be commented on in the section of this essay dealing with content. The degree to which Porro's intentions to express these themes and the observer's ability to visually unravel them in his work will be discussed.

At the end of Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, Porro comments upon the content of some of his work. However, the reader will note that his examination of his own work is not performed in a systematic fashion. It is not a point by point analysis. The tone may be said to be self-aggrandizing, which is not surprising, as may be gathered from his remark in his article "An Architectural Autobiography of Ricardo Porro": "It has been claimed that my pride is greater than my intelligence (no mean measure in my unhumble opinion)."<sup>25</sup> Therefore, a more systematic and less partial examination of his work shall

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 36 (Appendix B, p. 422).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 32 (Appendix B, p. 419).

<sup>25</sup> Ricardo Porro, "An Architectural Autobiography of Ricardo Porro", *Architecture and Urbanism*, March 1994, No. 282, p.60.

be executed in this essay. His theoretical constructs for the study of content in architecture shall be explained, discussed and criticized before applying them to his works. Yet this examination of content will not simply be a revelation of the creator's intentions, as may be said to be the case in Porro's self-examination of his projects, but rather an investigation as to whether his intentions are made clear and the possibility of other or multiple interpretations of content in his work.

Before proceeding with the analysis, an overview of Ricardo Porro's architectural projects will be made in order to determine which projects will be focused on in this work. His work, like that of any other practicing architect, consists of both built and unbuilt projects. However, in Porro's case, the unbuilt projects are much more numerous than his built works. This may be due in part to Porro's unflinching attitude to compromise his ideals in order to win competitions (which is the typical means of commissioning public works in France) and his resistance to accommodate his views to the clients's expectations. For the purposes of this essay, it would be best to focus on the built projects as these reveal a greater amount of information thus making for a more ample analysis. However, unbuilt works will be brought to bear on occasion if they instill greater clarity to the matters under discussion. This essay will restrict itself to discussing only those projects which appear in Oeuvres/Obras 1950-1993, which is a portfolio of his work containing observations by him in French and Spanish which this author has translated into English to facilitate the English speaking readers's understanding. In addition, a couple of the projects presented in the article on Porro which appeared in the March 1994 issue of *Architecture and Urbanism* will also in some occasions be referred to.

As previously mentioned, Porro's unbuilt work is vastly more numerous than his built work. Shortly after graduating from the School of Architecture at the University of Havana, he built four houses in the early 50s, two of which appear in his Oeuvres/Obras (figs. 1.1 and 1.2). Three of them have a markedly Miesian influence. The functionalist

ideology of the Bauhaus had permeated architectural taste and design in the avant-garde circles of Cuban architecture, as it had worldwide during that period. Ricardo Porro classifies his work in Oeuvres/Obras into six distinct periods for what he considers to be meaningful subdivisions of his stages of development. In regards to these early projects dating from the 1950s he recognizes that he had not yet come into his own style. Hence he entitles this first stage "Tentonnements/Ensayos" ("Essays", in the sense of "attempts"), and he concludes by saying, "I did not yet know the power of the poetic image."<sup>26</sup>

His 'second stage' he entitles "The Euphoric Moment of A Revolution". In this section he presents two built projects commissioned by the new regime shortly after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. These are the School of Plastic Arts (figs. 3.1 to 3.14) and the School of Modern Dance (figs. 4.1 to 4.10), both dating from 1961 to 1964 when they were completed. Here it may be agreed that Porro comes into his own style. These two projects received much publicity in the international architectural journals. Just as the projects reached completion, Ricardo Porro chose to exile himself from his country of birth and to seek a new life in what he considers his intellectual and spiritual continent: Europe. There he settled in Paris, France. There he still lives today with his wife, a multilingual translator, and his daughter, a student of fashion design, in an apartment replete with works of art, his own and that of others, which have accumulated over the almost three decades since his departure from Cuba.

These and other biographical notes need not take up too much room in this essay unless they are found to be relevant to the discussion of form and content in Porro's work. Undeniably their relevance may be found. Such biographical and psychological indagations into the personal life of the artist constitute for Porro the sixth aspect of content, which he denominates as, " ...the phantasms of the creator. What profound

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<sup>26</sup> Porro, Oeuvres/Obras. Institut Francaise d'Architecture, Massimo Ripostati Editeur, 1993, p. 18 (Appendix A, p. 223).

elements of his personality are expressed in the work of the artist and cause him to, necessarily, adopt one point of view or another?"<sup>27</sup> He recognizes that idiosyncratic aspects of the artist's psyche have an effect in the way that the artist transmutes reality in his work of art: "Reality is expressed by the artist, but it changes through the soul, although his vision of reality is as personal as his neurosis or his equilibrium."<sup>28</sup> Yet he chooses not to focus his attention on this aspect of content because, "This essential aspect presents many great difficulties to be thoroughly examined in the framework of architecture."<sup>29</sup> Therefore, he does not broach the subject; instead, he concentrates on only five aspects of content. This essay will likewise not broach the subject. The topic is indeed worthy of interest, as Sigmund Freud's study of Leonardo Da Vinci is of interest. It is a topic which lends itself to future investigations.

Since his arrival in France in 1966 until 1990 Ricardo Porro had no new buildings built. Year after year he entered architectural competitions and participated in many projects alone or in conjunction with other architects but no commissions to build came about. Elements found in these unbuilt projects will be seen to reemerge in his built works. There was, however, one exception during those years. He was commissioned by a longtime friend who is a financier to construct for him a building to house his offices and his collection of paintings in the Principality of Liechtenstein (figs. 8.1 to 8.6). The design for this project began in 1969. The building was completed in 1974. This office building/exhibition hall has been named by Porro "The Gold of the Rhine".

Since his arrival in Paris Porro has devoted himself to teaching architecture at various universities in Europe. He also turned to painting, sculpture and cabinetmaking. Even today with his busy schedule and the demands of his prospering architectural practice, he finds time to devote to these activities.

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<sup>27</sup> Porro, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, p. 41 (Appendix B, p. 424).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41 (Appendix B, p. 424).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41 (Appendix B, p. 424).

The last segment of Ricardo Porro's Oeuvres/Obras he entitles "L'Action/La Accion" ("Action"). He once again became active as a builder at the start of this decade. Since 1986 he became associated with Renaud de la Noue, a young French architect, who, after two years of devoting himself to archeological digs in Jordan, was invited by Porro to collaborate with him in various architectural competitions. At that time Renaud was only 28 years old. They worked out of Porro's home. Shortly thereafter they formed a partnership and opened a small architectural firm in Paris. Part of Porro's change of luck with regards to building may be attributed to his association with this talented young architect. Besides the differences in their ages, they differ in many other respects. Whereas Porro is loquacious, de la Noue is laconic. Porro's idealism is tempered by his partner's practicality. Renaud de la Noue is hard working and dedicated but he loses interest in a project once it has been established that it will not be built. He is knowledgeable in the technical aspects of construction, adept in controlling costs and skilled in overcoming difficulties presented by the building boards. Moreover, he shares in Porro's views that a building has to have meaning, and asserted when he was interviewed by the author that, "Art is beauty and signification."

In addition, on account of Renaud de la Noue and the three draftsmen employed by the firm, particularly the talents of Juan Luis Morales, a young architect arrived from Cuba two years ago, the graphic communication of the idea has improved. An examination of Porro's projects through the years will reveal that the presentations that he drew himself depict a great deal of feeling--they are very expressive, at times cartoon-like--but lack the necessary rigor to convince prospective clients of their potential of being built efficiently and economically. Instead, the more recent presentation drawings done by the hand of Renaud de la Noue and Juan Luis Morales seem more convincing and yet retain their lively quality on account of the coloring and personages added to them by Ricardo Porro (for example, compare figs. 10.1 to 10.4 to figs. 31.1 to 31.4).

This enhancement of the presentation drawings may in part explain why Porro has recently had greater success in obtaining commissions.

The projects completed by the Porro & de la Noue team include thirty residential dwellings in Stains (a suburb of Paris) completed in 1990 (figs. 24.1 to 24.11), the College Elsa Triolet (figs. 26.1 to 26.13), a high school in Saint Denis, completed in the same year, and another school for 600 students, College Fabien (figs. 28.1 to 28.17), in Montreuil, France, completed in 1993. These buildings, particularly the College Elsa Triolet, have received critical acclaim in European journals. Hence the inertia to convert drawings into buildings has been overcome. Ricardo Porro now with his partner Renaud de la Noue are active producing the working drawings for the barracks of the Republican Security Force in Velizy (figs. 32.1 to 32.3), a commission they obtained through a winning entry for a competition from the French Ministry of Interior. The firm is also currently in the process of obtaining new commissions while firmly adhering to their design philosophy.

From the above listing of Porro's completed buildings one may note that four of them have been educational institutions: the schools of the arts in Cuba and the two 'colleges' in France. The first two were completed in the early sixties; the last two were completed in the early nineties. In between there were numerous unrealized projects. Hence these four schools will be the focus of the critical discussion of form and content in the work of Ricardo Porro. Other of his projects, both built and unbuilt, will also be examined whenever they prove relevant to the discussion.

The topic of form and content in the building type 'school' is sufficiently focused. The four schools serve to illustrate Porro's architectural production during two distinct moments of his life. These four schools together with the unbuilt works spanning the period in between provide for an ample and extensive discussion. Due to the lack of incisive and in depth critical writings that have been produced to date on this architect,



little inter-critic dialogue has been established. Hopefully, this will change as a more wholistic image of the architect's work emerges.

## CHAPTER 2

### AN ANALYSIS OF FORM IN THE WORK OF RICARDO PORRO

This section will examine the form of Ricardo Porro's architecture, particularly the four schools he has built during his career, through an application of Heinrich Wölfflin's five opposed pairs of dynamism. These four schools are the School of Plastic Arts (figs. 3.1 to 3.14) and the School of Modern Dance (figs. 4.1 to 4.10) both built in Cuba during the early sixties and the two 'colleges' built in the Parisian suburbs of Saint Denis and Montreuil, College Elsa Triolet (figs. 26.1 to 26.13) and College Colonel Fabien (figs. 28.1 to 28.17), respectively, in the early nineties. These buildings will be examined in light of the five points in Wölfflin's text following the manner in which he has ordered them. The five opposed pairs of dynamisms are: 1) the linear vs. the painterly, 2) plane vs. recession, 3) closed vs. open form, 4) multiplicity vs. unity, 5) clearness vs. unclearness. By determining what unique combination of these five points the buildings exhibit one may be able to formulate a premise regarding the degree to which Porro's architecture may be classified as classic or baroque. This will allow for formal comparisons to be made with respect to other architects, both historical and contemporary, thereby assisting in the placement his work within the history of architecture. However, it should be noted, that the application of Wölfflin's principles does not aim at making value judgments on a piece of architecture. Nor is that the intent of this essay. Rather the aim is to arrive at a better understanding of the essential elements lying at the root of Porro's mode of perception.

The quest of this method is to arrive at a clearer understanding of what is one of the most fundamental aspects of a work of architecture: the treatment of space. Space is not an abstract and indeterminate void in the case of architecture. The experience of space in and around a building as perceived by an observer is determined by many factors

including, of course, the relationship of solids and voids, in addition to other elements such as textures, light, shade and shadow, depth, etc. It is not merely a quantitative element determined by measuring sticks or surveying instruments, but a perception obtained from the interplay of the different elements listed above. Porro defines space as, "The relationship between the positions and qualities of bodies."<sup>30</sup> He went on to express it in simpler terms, that "In architecture space may be defined as the environment in which one lives."<sup>31</sup> Hence both factual material presences, the voids created by them and the attribution of values to both and their interrelationships go into the making of this definition.

It should be noted that Wolfflin's text does not give the treatment of space the preeminence that it deserves. It focuses too much on the facade of buildings at the expense of discussing the interiors, particularly the architect's manipulation of space. One of his disciples, Paul Frankl, recognized this deficiency in Wolfflin's text as well as his lack of undivided attention to the topic of architecture since Wolfflin's book also covers painting and sculpture. Therefore, Frankl wrote a book entitled Principles of Architectural History in which he analyses four basic elements (space, corporeality, light, and purpose) in buildings dating from the beginning of the Renaissance to the end of the nineteenth century. Whereas Wolfflin distinguishes between two bipolar opposites, classic and baroque, Frankl classifies the buildings within the historical period of his focus into four distinct phases. However, irrespective of the many insightful observations made in Frankl's text<sup>32</sup>, Wolfflin's text remains unparalleled in offering clear definitions

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<sup>30</sup> Ricardo Porro as quoted by Mariano Alemany, "An Interview with Ricardo Porro" May-Jun. 1995 (unpublished manuscript and audio-cassette recordings).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> An important consideration regarding space in architecture is made by Frankl which is of value to or understanding of the sense in which it will be employed in this essay. In his chapter entitled "Visible Form" he states: "To see architecture means to draw together into a single mental image the series of three-dimensionally interpreted images that are presented to us as we walk through interior spaces and round their exterior shell. When I speak of the architectural image, I mean one mental image." (Paul Frankl, Principles of

and well defined parameters to distinguish between two distinct ideas of beauty, the classic and the baroque. Furthermore, while Frankl's text addresses the issue of content in buildings, yet its coverage of that aspect remains insufficient.

### 2.1 Linear vs. Painterly Elements

Heinrich Wofflin made the distinction between the linear and painterly styles as follows: The first term, linear, refers to the classic style; the second term, painterly, refers to the baroque style. In the former the outline is stressed; in the latter the edges remain unstressed. This emphasis on outline in the linear style produces the perception of solid, tangible bodies. In the case of the painterly emphasis is on the visual as opposed to the tactile. The quality of being static, solid and enduring belong to the linear style. The painterly style, on the other hand, seeks beauty in movement. Wofflin synthesizes the distinction of the two thus: "The great contrast between linear and painterly style corresponds to radically different interests in the world. In the former case, it is the solid figure, in the latter, the changing appearance: in the former, the enduring form, measurable, finite; in the latter, the movement, the form in function; in the former, the thing in itself."<sup>33</sup> Wofflin restates this definition of this general principle with respect to his discussion of architecture: "...two totally different architectural effects are produced according to whether we are obliged to perceive the architectural forms as something definite, solid, enduring, or as something over which, for all its stability, there plays an apparent, constant movement, that is, change."<sup>34</sup> These are the essential differences between terms of the first opposed pair.

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Architectural History, p. 142) This 'one mental image' is developed in the observer's mind as he circulates through the building and takes in views of the building from various angles and from varying distances and recollects these in his memory to form one unified *Gestalt*. This and not a room by room analysis will be the sought for element in our analysis.

<sup>33</sup> Wofflin, Principles of Art History, p. 27.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

In this exposition of the central features of the first pair of opposed dynamisms one may detect the remnants of what has been termed 'empathy theory' in art history. In his doctoral dissertation, Prolegomena zu einer Psychologie der Architektur, Wolfflin employs the view of empathic projection towards a discussion of art. In The Critical Historians of Art Michael Podro observes that this view "...came to mean endowing inanimate objects with a sense of body posture and mood."<sup>35</sup> In his Principles this theoretical assumption undergoes transformation, as pointed out by Michael Podro: "Without Wolfflin himself seeming aware of it, he transforms the basis of critical or aesthetic understanding from the model of empathic identification to another model, the model of seeing in what is literally present the suggestion of what is not."<sup>36</sup> In light of this explanation one may come to a better understanding of Wolfflin's comments regarding the static or dynamic elements that he believes the observer capable of witnessing. Architectural matter--i.e., brick walls, marble columns, etc.--are, by their physical nature, static. Hence to perceive these elements as either being solid and static as opposed to depicting movement and flux presupposes the viewer's familiarity with the history and evolution of architectural form. Otherwise, a naive observer would be incapable of noting, for example, that a pediment is broken unless he had recourse to knowing the 'original' shape of this formal element.

The first of Porro's buildings to be examined is the School of Plastic Arts (figs. 3.1 to 3.14). This building designed shortly after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution represents a drastic change from the houses that Porro had built in the early fifties (figs. 1.1 and 2.1). Porro had an opportunity during the mid fifties to get a first-hand look at the construction of Le Corbusier's Ronchamp. Even today he admires that building for its sculptural richness capable of eliciting a strong emotional response on its visitors. He

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<sup>35</sup> Michael Podro, The Critical Historians of Art. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1983, p. 100.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

had always admired the centrifugal and what he considered baroque spaces (according to Wolfflin's definition of that term--unlimited space) of Frank Lloyd Wright's houses. Hence he felt compelled to set aside the precepts of functionalism and its formal clichés in search of finding a formal and spatial conception capable of a more poignant symbolic content.

From an observation of the plan of the School of Plastic Arts (fig. 3.1), perhaps the most salient characteristic that emerges is that there is a reign of the curvilinear element. However, one may note the presence of a markedly contrasting orthogonal element covering a significant portion of the plan. Whereas the elliptically shaped spaces of various sizes which contain the painting and sculpture studios have been strung along the serpentine hallways, the engraving studios and administrative offices have been allotted rectangular shaped rooms. This counterpoint of curvilinear and rectilinear forms serves to make the experience of the curves more conspicuous as a result of the contrast and to create an urban atmosphere in which distinct elements establish a dialogue or a discord due to their proximity, according to Porro.

Furthermore, there seems to be no underlying grid; rather there is free arrangement of forms. A steady, even rhythm is established by the pilaster in the meandering hallways and on the sides of the domes (figs. 3.6 and 3.11). The corporeal elements surround a central void, the central piazza of the school. The repetitive elements give cohesion to the composition. These and other general observations derived from an observation of the plan, while obvious and generally agreed upon, are merely descriptive. They must be incorporated into a critical commentary on the forms.

A listing of the separate elements that make up the building--elliptical shaped Catalanian vaults, pilasters, gargoyles, patios, piazzas, skylights, etc.--may be individually examined to determine to what degree they share in the classic or baroque sense of beauty. The painterly style of the baroque deals with enriched and embellished form. The individual forms in this building may be said to be quite plain, mostly all are

made of the same color brick or of unornamented concrete or stucco surfaces. The gargoyles and pilasters are all of the same unadorned shape and equally spaced (fig. 3.11). It does not establish an intricate rhythm; instead it may be said to be a classic rhythm of great predictability.

In the painterly style of the baroque we are told by Wolfflin that, "figures become more intricate, motives entwine, the order of the parts is more difficult to grasp."<sup>37</sup> In the classic style the reverse is true: forms are separated and clearly distinguishable. This may be said to be the case with regards to the individual parts that constitute the building: a clear separation between the various elements allows each form to be perceived in a clearly defined outline. Hence an examination of the individual corporeal elements which organize the school reveals these as classic.

Nevertheless, an examination of the treatment of space in this composition indicates that interior and exterior spaces are not clearly demarcated. Space is allowed to flow freely among the different parts of the building and out into the landscape. Space itself becomes a subject of the composition. These immaterial entities--the piazzas, patios and the semi-enclosed space under the snake-like hallways--mean just as much as the material objects which guide and shape them. So whereas with reference to the details the composition reveals itself as classical, the grander overall scale hints of a participation in the painterly style of the baroque.

As the visitor walks through and around the various spaces of the school he is constantly confronted with new visual experiences. This everchanging appearance may be witnessed by the multitudinous possibilities of elevations, not one quite like the other, sometimes giving the impression that it is a different building. Only the bird's eye view perspective (fig. 3.3) or aerial photographs (fig. 3.4) of the school are able to convey the *Gestalt* of the building in a single glance. Yet this *Gestalt* is never experienced by the

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<sup>37</sup> Wolfflin, Principles of Art History, p. 65.

viewer on the ground in one sweeping view. Only birds and people in aircraft have that privilege. Hence the building's capacity to offer multiple images to the spectator is a definitive trait of baroque architecture for, according to Wolfflin, "Every reproduction remains inadequate, because even the most startling picture in perspective represents only *one* possibility, and the interest lies just in the inexhaustibility of the possible pictures."<sup>38</sup>

However, baroque architecture not only provides multiple and everchanging images to the beholding subject; it is interested in manipulating the views at the subject's disposal so as to create certain privileged views. The various views should lead to a culminating conclusion. Although Porro claims that the culmination of the building is to be found in the central piazza, particularly in the papaya shaped fountain (fig. 3.12 and 3.13), the building's circulation system does not assure that the spectator will be able to arrive there. Porro allows for great freedom of movement in and around the building. The three funnel-like entries to the building (fig. 3.5) present no hierarchy which attempts to encourage a choice of path on the visitor. Hence, there is no fixed sequence of depth penetration that is established. As a result, the effects of a grand culmination to a series of distinct visual experiences can not be satisfied.

Creating the appearance of a living form out of inanimate masonry is a key objective for Porro who conceived this work in anthropomorphic and sensual terms. He wished for the building to vibrate with life. In this he shares with the baroque's sense of beauty, as identified by Wolfflin, "The feeling for the beauty of that all-pervading mysterious movement which... at the same time meant life."<sup>39</sup> Abandoning the classic style's notion of pure form and perfect proportion, the building instead is intent on manifesting an anthropomorphic element via a dynamic system of circulation, flowing forms derived from human anatomy, and dramatic changes in lighting all deployed with

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 28.



the intention of producing the impression of all-pervading movement. However, this tendency is stunted by the classic style in which the constituent parts of the building have been articulated.

Ricardo Porro's use of employing human anatomy as a form-giving and organizing principle in his architecture may perhaps result from certain biographical elements. It may be hypothesized that his interest developed on account of his father being a surgeon. Before switching to architecture, Porro had begun his studies to become a physician. Whether or not there is any truth to these arguments is yet to be determined. An answer to Porro's anthropomorphic predilections may instead be found by studying the work of one of his most admired predecessors in the history of architecture: Michelangelo.

Michelangelo did not adhere to the established precepts acknowledged by most architects of the Renaissance, as well as those of later periods, of the means of deriving architectural forms from the human body. Whereas fifteenth century architectural theoreticians converted the proportions of the human body into either mathematical or geometrical formulae and then applied these to the design of their buildings, Michelangelo used human form in a more direct manner, bypassing the necessity for mathematical abstraction. As pointed out by James Ackerman in The Architecture of Michelangelo, "His association of architecture to human form was no longer a philosophical abstraction, a mathematical metaphor. By thinking of buildings as organisms, he changed the concept of architectural design from the static one produced by a system of predetermined proportions to a dynamic one in which members would be integrated by the suggestion of muscular power."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> James Ackerman, "The Architecture of Michelangelo" in Harold Spencer, ed., Readings in Art History, Vol. II. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1969, p. 110.

This concept of designing the building like an organism is prevalent in Porro's work. (It shall be examined more closely in the discussion of the "Superimposed Image").

Anthropomorphism can be detected in his other three schools as well: The School of Modern Dance (figs. 4.1 to 4.10), College Elsa Triolet (fig. 26.1 to 26.13), and College Colonel Fabien (figs. 28.1 to 28.17). In the case of the two 'colleges' in France it may be said to be more zoomorphic. In the School of Modern Dance, designed and built during the same time as the School of Plastic Arts, the anthropomorphic tendency is also present, although not as obvious.

The School of Modern Dance has certain similarities in its spatial organization to its contemporaneously built School of Plastic Arts. Both Cuban schools were built using the same materials and methods of construction: terra-cotta bricks and the ubiquitous Catalonian vaults. These choices resulted from the scarcity of other building materials at the time in that country. In fact the vaults are constructed with little or no steel reinforcement. Antique construction methods were employed although the vaults are of a greater size than most of the historical examples.

The similarity in the spatial organization of the two schools results from the repetitive use of the vaults and the prominent and elongated corridors which serve to link the buildings's functions. Whereas in the School of Plastic Arts the lines are more sinuous and sensual, the spaces in the School of Modern Dance are more angular and evocative of tension (compare fig. 3.1 to fig. 4.1). The architect's desire to develop an urban space is evident in both. Porro comments on his intention in his commentary: "I preferred to get the image of a city in which communication of people is essential and I didn't want a lonely building in the middle of the field."<sup>41</sup> In both projects there appears to be the image of a cloister or of a fortress in that the activity revolves around a central

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<sup>41</sup> Ricardo Porro in Toshio Nakamura "Ricardo Porro's Androgynous Architecture", *Architecture and Urbanism*, March 1994, No. 282, p. 8.

courtyard. Yet the space is not closed in. It leaks out and connects the building to the landscape.

Here again in the School of Modern Dance one finds a lack of embellished form. Brick and concrete are employed in a very rustic manner with no relief or surface patterning. The octagonally shaped vaults contain an ascetic interior space devoid of all material ornament (fig. 4.10). These interiors's sole ornamentation may be said to be the diffused light which forms patterns on its floors and walls as it comes in through the screens. These screens were commonly used in colonial homes of Cuba. (Many American architects, however, may associate them with those popularized by Edgar Durrell Stone; however, this is not the case). The way in which light is modulated in these rooms may be said to fall on painterly ground. Wolfflin makes the observation that, "Light and shade, which cling to every form, become a painterly element at the moment at which they seem to have an independent import apart from the form."<sup>42</sup>

As in the School of Plastic Arts, the School of Modern Dance's overall composition presents multiple views to the observer. However, its constituent parts--the domes, screens, pilasters, etc.--are clear and well delineated. The angularities of the composition create visual dissonances as, for example, the manner in which the rectilinear elements of the window screens clash against the rounded vaulted surface of the ceiling in the dance studios (fig. 4.10). The studios in this school seem to entrap the space in a more severe manner than in its sister school. Again, there is no clear procession leading to a culminating space. The sense of "beauty in flux" typical of the painterly style is provoked in this composition by the restlessness of the angular forms placed at odd angles to each other (figs. 4.4 and 4.8). The resulting residual spaces are rather oddly shaped.

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<sup>42</sup> Wolfflin, Principles of Art History, p. 66.

It should be noted that the two schools built by Porro on what used to be the golf course of the Havana Country Club were commissioned by the Cuban government and formed part of a project to erect a total of five schools on that site fig. (3.2). Porro was put in charge of the entire operation. He took two schools for himself. The others he assigned to two Italian architects that he had met while in Venezuela. The School of Ballet and the School of Music he assigned to Vittorio Garatti. The School of Drama he assigned to Roberto Gottardi. The School of Ballet was completed. The School of Music was partially completed. The School of Drama was not realized. The architects agreed as to the construction methods and materials to be used but beyond that they were free to create at their own will. Although they worked independently, they shared the same work space. It is surprising to see the formal similarities between the various schools. Although Porro claims that each architect worked independently, the similarities in their works seem to indicate that there probably existed some sharing of ideas. The work was produced very rapidly. Manpower and resources were scarce. Porro urged the other two architects to finish their designs because he sensed that the new government would eventually order the project stopped. He worked very rapidly and was able to complete his two buildings.

It may be on account of the scarcity of building materials and governmental pressures exerted on him during this time that the project seem to lack certain finishing touches necessary to make its details more supportive of the grand idea. Be that as it may, one can only comment on what was actually built. These limitation in resources are an omnipresent condition in the field of architecture. How the architect copes with them is but another facet of his professional competence.

Twenty-five years elapsed until another one of Porro's schools was erected, this time in Saint Denis, France. The College Elsa Triolet is a high school for 600 students. He designed this building in conjunction with Renaud de la Noue, his partner.

Three years afterwards, in 1993, Porro and de la Noue completed another school, College Colonel Fabien in Montreuil, France. This too is a school for 600 students. Both of these schools have received critical acclaim in various European journals.

The exteriors make extensive use of brick, concrete and stucco (figs. 26.4 and 28.8). Many prefabricated components are exploited to reduce cost. As far as cost would permit, decorative brickwork was employed in their facades. Many of the interiors employ exposed wood beams (fig. 26.13). The buildings, on account of the use of brick on their facades, on account of their scale, and on account of their siting to promote public use spaces (figs. 26.1 and 28.1), are well integrated into their respective neighborhoods. In contrast to the two Cuban schools, these Colleges are situated in an urban environment.

Unlike the Cuban schools with their wide openings to the outdoors and the semi-enclosed corridors connecting the various domes that serve as classrooms, the two colleges may be said to be more unified in a continuous building without central spaces open to the outdoors. This may be due in part to their urban siting and for purposes of protection against the Parisian climate. However, the curvilinear element, though not as exaggerated as in the School of Plastic Arts, is present in both, as are the contrasting rectilinear elements.

Their organization in both cases may be described as two wings which converge in an entry hall (figs 26.2 and 28.2). . These entry halls are, for their limited size, very grand spaces of a spatial richness impossible of being appreciated through photographs (figs. 26.7 to 26.10 and figs. 28.13 to 28.17). In terms of measurable area and volume, they may be said to be quite small. However, perceptually they give the impression of being much larger on account of the numerous vistas obtainable from there: out to the courtyard in the rear, to one wing and to the other as well as to the projecting balconies of the upper floors reachable through curving staircases which give the space an ascending motion (fig. 28.17). The entry hall is indeed the privileged point of view

offered to the spectator. Yet unlike baroque works of the 17th century which have a whole sequence of spaces leading up to the culminating space of the building, here the visitor is struck with the magnificence of the entry hall immediately after opening the entry doors placed underneath the sculptural overhangs of zoomorphic inspiration (figs. 26.6 and 28.9).

Light, shade and shadow plays an important part in this building, particularly in the entry hall. In both cases the use of stained glass gives the entry hall an other-worldly look which is a shocking contrast after coming in from the sun drenched street. Here again is an aspect of the painterly. The stairs and balconies in the entry hall have a floating aspect on account of their concealed or diminished points of support. This illusionistic tactic is part of the baroque aesthetic, what Wolfflin regards as, "A triumph of seeming over being."<sup>43</sup> It is in the interiors, Wolfflin notes, that painterly architecture finds its climax.

The most significant view in classic architecture is the frontal view. This is by no means the case in these colleges nor in the Cuban schools. Every side of the building is developed. The elevational drawings are able to impart only a very limited understanding of the building (fig. 26.3 and figs. 28.6, 28.7). One is only capable of forming a clearer conception of the building by travelling through it and around it. Porro's buildings offer many surprises to the visitor. Narrow corridors often open up into large spaces or courtyards. There is a drama of light between the sparsely lit and the bright spaces. However, this multitude and variety of spatial and visual offerings may be said to be at times organized in a labyrinthian manner. There is no clear progression to a culminating point as was the case with traditional baroque architecture. Nonetheless, the overall compositions do give the impression of a ceaseless flow. In this respect it may be said to share in the baroque's sense of beauty.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

However, the individual constituent elements of the building often are articulated in the classic style. One is capable of distinguishing one form from another. There is very little fusion of forms. The surfaces are typically plain and unornamented. Hence there is a conflict of sorts between the building's static classic components and the overall spirit of movement felt as one explores the building which constantly displays itself differently to the viewer.

With regards to this pair of opposites, the painterly manifests itself in the overall form whereas the individual sub-elements are markedly linear. The architect proclaims himself as an admirer of the baroque and describes his approach to design as following the baroque's space conception. In an article in *World Architecture* about the College Elsa Triolet, the following appeared: "Porro describes his approach as 'anticlassical'. He explains, 'classical architecture works to enclose and limit space; here we are trying to create unlimited space, without evident boundaries.'"<sup>44</sup> One cannot blindly accept his observations. Although elements of the painterly style of the baroque are found to be present in the overall composition of his buildings, the linear element of the classic is present as well in some of the individual components that constitute the whole.

## 2.2 Plane vs. Recession

Another distinction between the classic and the baroque styles is that in the former the composition is said to be of the plane type whereas the latter is in the recessional type. In architecture, Wolfflin points out that the plane style seeks stratification in planes, i.e., that the composition is ordered in parallel strata producing a series of planes. The perception of depth in such compositions is the result of such plane sequences. The baroque style, on the other hand, avoids stratification in planes; instead, it aims at more extreme recessional effects by intensifying the perspectives in depth. Wolfflin's

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<sup>44</sup>Carl Gardner, "School of Ecstasy", *World Architecture*, vol. 2, no. 8, issue no. 12, 1991, p. 67.

discussion of these opposed terms presupposes the existence of an imaginary picture plane which is either emphasized or discounted by the architectural elements. The plane style urges the viewer towards frontal views. In the classic style depth is perceived as a series of layers parallel to this predominant frontal view. The baroque, instead, urges the observer towards sideways views which undermine the importance of the frontal view and urges the visitor to movement. This movement, in turn, produces a series of images, each of them confirming or contradicting the viewer's impression of the building. Hence, baroque compositions do not settle into frontal views but instead emphasize depth through more pronounced recessional effects than do classic compositions.

As one approaches a building the distinction between the plane or recessional type of organization already starts to become evident. This aspect by itself is not an unequivocal predictor of the rest of the building; however, an examination of whether the approach route is laid out frontally or obliquely to the facade is an important consideration when determining if the overall composition participates in classic or baroque principles of organization. The frontal approach emphasizes plane; the oblique approach emphasizes recession. Hence, the discovery of planar and/or recessive elements in the four schools built by Porro will be able to provide further insight about the architect's preferred mode of perception.

The School of Plastic Arts and the School of Modern Dance are both situated in what used to be the golf course of the old Havana Country Club (fig. 3.2). The two buildings share the site with the other three schools designed by Gottardi and Garatti. They are sufficiently far away from each other so as not to permit for a visual dialogue. This permits for divergent forms of expression in the two schools. Their siting on this vast area of greenery sparsely covered with trees allows visitors to view the buildings in the round as they approach the site via automobile or bus. Permeability in these buildings is omnidirectional. There are several ways to enter and exit these buildings (figs. 3.1 and 4.1). The landscape and the topography was left mostly untouched in both



of these schools. The external space was allowed to flow freely within the implied interior enclosure formed by the buildings. Thus, the notion of frontality or of a principal facade is not applicable to these multifaceted buildings whose urbanistically designed spaces open up into the landscape. Hence, by providing the viewer with a multiplicity of oblique views and multiple possibilities of approach, the two buildings may be said to be of the recessional type.

However, Porro does create a monumental main entrance for both of these buildings. These provide a visual cue which persuades the visitor to orient himself and proceed along a path headed towards the gateway. These monumental gateways are not, however, arrived at by broad and lofty paths. In the School of Plastic Arts, for example, the principle entrance is made up of three arched vaults of slightly varying proportions which curve away from the viewer (fig. 3.5). These are approached via a sinuous path.

These arched gateways project out from the rest of the composition so as to grab the visitor (figs. 3.3 and 3.4). From afar they appear to emerge from the level ground. Yet upon approaching this entrance the spectator discovers that several steps lead down to an small amphitheater-like space shaped by three intersecting ellipses (figs. 3.1, 3.2, 3.3). From this open-air antechamber the visitor may then choose one of the three gateways to continue his approach towards the building's inner entrails. Yet, upon entering any one of the three, the spectator finds that the pathways are interconnected, the pilasters that visually define them allow for passage from one path to another at any time during the procession (fig. 3.1). The central serpentine tunnel, however, frames a part of the building's inner facades facing the courtyard which is well lit by natural daylight. Hence, this light at the end of the central tunnel (which is discovered to be upon reaching it, only a short segment of a tunnel) serves to entice the visitor in this direction. Nonetheless, his freedom of movement choice remains.

The marked non-frontal difference between the foreground and background elements of the building approach together with the marked difference in the darkness

experienced in the approach versus the anticipated light at the end of the tunnel are means used by the architect to state direction and intensify the perspective in depth. In addition, the surprise of finding a level change as one approaches and of finding various possibilities to the approach route with multiple orientations obliterate the notion of flatness associated with compositions of the plane type. As Wolfflin explains, "The baroque does not intend the body of the building to settle into definite views. By rounding off the corners, it obtains oblique planes which lead the eye on."<sup>45</sup> The use of light employed by the architect is another means used to further enhance the sense of recession. As Wolfflin points out, "...By means of light he creates more speaking relations from front to rear, he places caesurae along the stretch; in short, the spatial facts are artificially accentuated to produce a more intense recessional effect."<sup>46</sup>

It should be noted that these observations are particularly difficult to grasp from the photographs: Isolated pictorial images are unable to provide the viewer with the spatial sequences that one encounters upon approaching, entering and circulating through the building; they are unable to convey the expectation and surprise experienced by the visitor, the subtleties and nuances of the light, the overall relations of the spaces, not to mention the non-visual properties inherent in the architecture. In buildings which share in the aesthetics of the baroque style, the difficulty presented by their study through photographs becomes particularly evident. The same may be said of such buildings in terms of gaining an understanding of them through planimetric drawings. This characteristic of the baroque is recognized by Wolfflin. Of the baroque building he declares that, "It reckons from the outset with a series of pictures, and that is due to the fact that beauty no longer resides in purely planimetric values and that recessional

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<sup>45</sup> Wolfflin, Principles of Art History, p. 119-120.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

motives only become fully effective by the change of standpoint."<sup>47</sup> This, of course, is only possible by experiencing the architecture directly.

The School of Modern Dance possesses multiple points of possible penetration (fig. 4.1). However, one is singled out as the main entry and approach route. The plan reveals a break in the walls which envelop one side of the building. Three distinct paths converge in the angular elevated entry court reached by ascending a few steps. The arched vaults at the entry curve away from the viewer thereby urging towards views beyond and to the sides (fig. 4.7). The vaults and their supporting pilasters each turn to face a different direction. Along the central path one of the pilasters blocks the path of approach and forces the visitor to one side or the other. The whole produces a sense of tension and disorientation from the onset of arrival. This departure from the frontal position and turning away in different angles is characteristic of the recessional. It urges to sideways views, many at the same time. Yet this analysis is not yet conclusive.



The College Elsa Triolet in Saint Denis provides an excellent example of how a building contributes to the making of spaces for public gathering in the urban fabric. The rear and sides of the building partially surround a playground (fig. 26.1). The sides of the building facing the street maintain the street wall but also create two plazas--one on the side of the rue Paul Eluard, the other on the side of rue des Moulins Gemaux--which become linked under the overhang which signals the entrance to the building (fig. 26.6). Curving lines of brick paving lead the visitor towards the entry (fig. 26.1). The facade on the side of the rue Paul Eluard curves in the direction of the entrance (fig. 26.4). The 'fins' at the side of this facade are perceived as foreshortened as one approaches the building. Frontality is avoided by this curving gesture. The diagonality of the 'fins' interplays with the frontality of the wall from whence they emerge. As Wolfflin points out, "The

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

beveling of the corners and their ornamentation with figures does not, in itself, mean baroque, but when the diagonal plane is combined in *one* motive with the frontal plane, we stand on baroque ground."<sup>48</sup>

The same may be said of the main entrance which does not reveal itself to the visitor until he has traversed the plaza that serves as a forecourt (another typically baroque element). As the visitor faces the entrance he is urged towards sideways as well as upwards views (fig. 26.6). The placement of the architectural elements at various angles to the viewer destroys the sense of a flat plane and enhance the sense of depth.

The school in Montreuil, College Colonel Fabien, also provides a plaza at the entry (fig. 28.1) by allowing the two wings which make up the building to angle inwards thus pointing to the entrance demarcated by the lofty decorative overhang (fig. 28.9). As one approaches the building along the street, the space opens up in the plaza to receive the visitor (fig. 28.8). Here again the rhythm of the fenestration and the curving of the roof beam assist in conducting the visitor to the entrance. Some of the windows pop out from the facade, which is angled away from the viewer, to face the viewer perpendicularly. Here again there is a play of the diagonal elements and the frontal plane used to emphasize the recessional effect. The rear of the building employs pilasters placed at various angles and rounded corners as means of urging the eye on. The various forms visually intersect thereby taking away from the importance of the plane. This, Wolfflin points out, is another tactic employed by the baroque: "Forms are covered and cut across, and hence there arises the interest of recession."<sup>49</sup> This intensification of perspective in the building contributes to providing the viewer with multiple, changing views. It may be said to contribute to the impression of the building as a living form, again stressing the architect's intention to create the sense of a living organism out of inanimate matter.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

In the examples examined of the approach to these schools the sense of recession brought about by the articulation of the facade, the modulation of light, the treatment given to the pavement pattern and other such manipulations result in providing the spectator with multiple views. However, the baroque demands more than just multiple views as is evident from an examination of Wolfflin's text. In his chapter entitled "Plane and Recession" he also points out to the necessity for the architectural elements to state direction. Through this statement of direction the viewer is invited to form a unified image read over spatial depth. Typically baroque spaces lead to some sort of culminating view or event. In late baroque architecture of the 18th century the multitude of optical impressions which the visitor gathers by walking in and around the building typically lead to a point in the building where a sense of completion, of culmination, is arrived at from which a unifying whole vision is obtained.

If one examines Porro's four aforementioned schools in light of this characteristic of the late baroque style one shall discover that the profusion of images do not lead to a culminating, wholistic vision. There is an endlessness, a circularity of optical impressions which is obtained through depth penetration. Countless surprises are encountered but the unifying image is not prescribed by the architecture. Hence the building may be read as an open text where the narrator--i.e., the architect--is not sufficiently forceful in dictating the main thrust of his argument--i.e., enforcing that each and every visitor be exposed to the same set of images in the same sequence and that these culminate in a wholistic vision of the edifice as taken in from one spot as prescribed by the architectural articulation. This multiplicity of unending images resulting from the visitor's freedom to circulate along his chosen path sacrifices the visual climax associated with mature baroque works.

Nonetheless, it may be argued that unlike the labyrinthian paths which surprise and at times confuse visitors moving towards the interiors the interiors of the two Cuban schools, the two French schools do provide a point from which the entire architectural

image may be seen in all its dynamism and as a complete whole. This point is placed at the entry lobby in both the case of the College Elsa Triolet and of the College Colonel Fabien (figs. 26.7 to 26.10 and figs. 28.12 to 28.17). The lobby may be said to be the grand space in both of these schools. Assuredly everyone who enters the building is awed by the sudden change of space, light and dynamism of the various movement systems upon entering through the main doors. Yet this sudden impact of visual images does not have a focus. Multiple visual stimuli vie for the viewers attention: the curving and spiralling staircases, the light coming through the stained glass, the texture of the pavement, etc. in the case of College Fabien; the balconies overhead, the stained glass, the tiny amphitheater, etc. in the case of College Elsa Triolet. All of these visual stimuli compete for the viewers attention. Certainly one gets an impression of the multitude of things to be found in the building, the multitude of possible directions to venture towards and explore--one is incited to movement: to take in all of the drama of the space as well as to travel through the yet unknown parts of the building; however, there is no point from which a unified formal conception may be arrived at.

Furthermore, the grand space of baroque buildings is seldom placed right at the entrance as is the case in both of these schools. Usually it is arrived at after proceeding along a prescribed processional route. Porro's buildings do not settle into definitive views as is indeed the case of the baroque. However, all of the rooms in the school, even the repetitive set of classrooms, are different in some way. This drive towards more and different visual images is indeed a hallmark of the baroque; however, this ceaseless profusion of visual images which do not culminate at any one point differ from baroque tendencies.

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If one examines the details of the two Cuban schools one may discover yet another way in which the buildings depart from the recessional type of the baroque and instead abide by the planar, classic type of organization. The series of uniform, equally

spaced pilasters which support the vaults of the corridors in the School of Plastic Arts (figs. 3.6 and 3.11) is a decisively classic tendency which reinforces the organization of space in parallel strata. In the case of the School of Modern Dance, however, the pilasters at varying intervals turn at different angles and vary in their spacing (fig. 4.8). This is more in keeping with the baroque. Yet if one examines what little surface decoration there is in these buildings, one may conclude that these do not reinforce the sense of depth as is typically the case of baroque ornamentation.



In summary, as regards the opposed pair of plane versus recession in the four schools that have been examined, the buildings are not organized as a series of stratified planes. Through the means discussed it intensifies the perspectives in depth and urges the viewer to movement. However, multiple possibilities of movements are open to the visitor. The profusion of optical impressions obtained through depth penetration do not culminate at a prescribed point from which a sense of whole is obtained. Clear directionality and sequenced vistas typical of the baroque are not to be found in these works. In addition, some of the building details appear as counterproductive to the goal of baroque recession.

### **2.3 Closed vs. Open Form**

The exploration of form in Ricardo Porro's architecture can now be examined through the precepts of closed and open as it applies to his work. Wolfflin also refers to closed and open form by the terms tectonic and a-tectonic. Wolfflin indicates that the basic distinction between classic closed form and baroque open form in architecture is the contrast between the limitation and completeness of closed compositions and the limitless and apparently unfinished aspect of open compositions. Whereas the closed form gives the impression of repose, the open form gives the impression of dynamism and movement, of greater tension and restlessness. Wolfflin makes a further

fundamental distinction between the two styles: "...The tectonic style is the style of strict arrangement and clear adherence to rule: the a-tectonic style, on the other hand, is the style of more or less concealed adherence to rule and of free arrangement."<sup>50</sup>

Wolfflin's statement regarding "adherence to rule" in the case of the classic and "less concealed arrangement to rule" displayed in the baroque is an important principle in distinguishing between closed and open form. However, he fails to explain or define in his text what this "rule" is. Are they the "rules" of architectural composition inherited from Vitruvius or Alberti or perhaps of some other theoretician? Is it some set of rules governing architectural composition or the use of proportions? It is not explained by him what these rules are. Hence how a classic building adheres to these rules remains unexplained. Even more obscure is his notion of 'concealed adherence to rule' in baroque buildings. Although this obscurity arises in Wolfflin's delineation of the distinctive traits of the two styles, the rest of his distinguishing remarks and general observation on this pair of opposed dynamisms serve to differentiate between them.

In examining the difference in this third pair of opposed dynamism once again it is noted that a primary part of the distinction deals with the baroque's sense of beauty in flux. Many other distinguishing remarks are scattered throughout the chapter on closed and open form; however, these may be said to be subordinate to the above mentioned fundamental characteristics. Specific cases will be brought to bear as the analysis of Porro's architecture proceeds. However, before advancing to that, some of Wolfflin's deficiencies in undertaking his analysis and a proposal to remedy them should be indicated.

Wolfflin's primary focus in his discussion of this pair of opposed dynamism (as well as throughout his text) is the building facade, not the spaces of the building.<sup>51</sup> A

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>51</sup> Paul Frankl in Principles of Architectural History already criticized this aspect of Wolfflin's work and attempted to place greater emphasis on the discussion of space in architecture. While not adopting Frankl's schema, an examination of space and not



distinction between closed and open form as it refers to the space of architectural compositions must be formulated to serve as a preliminary definition to guide the rest of the discussion. Classic closed space has clearly defined limits given by the enclosing planes. On the other hand, in baroque open space the limit is not easily detectable--it gives the impression of being unbound. This results in part from the varying design methods. Closed compositions tend to emerge from preconceived volumes--the 'pure prism' of rationalist architecture. They are designed from the outside in. Contrary to this, baroque open compositions are designed from the inside out. They are the antithesis of the preconceived form. Space in closed compositions is static; in open compositions, flowing.

The impression of flowing space which characterizes open compositions is to be found in all four of Porro's school buildings. The flowing of space in these buildings becomes apparent through an examination of their sinuous circulation system which many times does not only serve as a corridor but becomes a place to be occupied in its own right (figs. 3.1, 4.1, 26.2, 28.2). The circulation system links the inside to the outside of the building not only through doorways which allow the free flow of visitor but also through the fenestration which, in addition, serves to punctuate passage. This image of flowing space is accomplished by the circulation system horizontally across the same ground plane as well as vertically in the two French schools through the deployment of free-standing staircases and suspended balconies in the lobby space which visually link the lower and upper stories of the buildings (fig. 26.7 and 28.17). In the two Cuban schools (and to a lesser extent in the two French schools) the outer walls of the buildings serve to conduct the space out into the landscape. The circulation system is but one element that serves to abolish static and self-contained space and instead grants the visitor the sensation of freedom of movement. This is one key aspect of baroque space

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merely the building's corporeal elements is deemed necessary before proceeding with the analysis.

conception as Wolfflin points out: "...To transform the impression of the strictly bound into the impression of the freer."<sup>52</sup>

The distribution of forms as displayed in the plans of all four schools may be said to be freely arranged (fig. 3.1, 4.1, 26.2, 28.2). The forms are not by any means fitted into the plan according to a grid system. The vertical and horizontal directions do not dominate the composition. The forms are not organized around a central axis. Neither are they symmetrically arranged. Thus the total distribution of the forms in plan do not display any adherence to what may be said to be the 'rules' by which classic compositions are organized. Instead the total organization of the various forms which make up the building is asymmetrical and displays a centrifugal flow of spatial and corporeal elements. This tendency is much more pronounced in the two Cuban schools, perhaps on account of the lack of restraints imposed by their rural siting.

The overall spatial organization of the four schools does not disclose an adherence to the use of clearly delineated geometrical figures such as the circle or the square. The elements in the plan do not conform to any preestablished proportioning system. Their free arrangement may be said to stem from the architect's intuitive ordering resulting from his method of designing in the initial stages by using clay models. This intuitive method of designing may be parallel to the manner in which other baroque architects, notably Bernini, have gone about making their designs. Wolfflin points out that when Bernini erected the great tabernacle in St. Peter's he declared that, "...He owed the successful solution to a chance inspiration (*caso*). He meant by that he could not appeal to any rule, but one is tempted to complete the remark by saying that he was aiming at that beauty of the form which looks adventitious."<sup>53</sup> The impact of Porro's design method will be examined in a much later part of this essay. He always designs from the inside to the outside. He begins his designs by first addressing the functions of

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<sup>52</sup> Wolfflin, Principles of Art History, p. 152.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

the building and its siting. In his clay models he visualizes the interior spaces which in turn shape the exterior form of the models.

Of the four schools being considered, the College Colonel Fabien may be viewed as departing from the apparently lawless arrangement of forms. The plan of the building reveals two fundamental components, two rectangular shaped segments at an angle to each other (figs. 28.2 to 28.5). Yet if one departs from the plan view offered by the drawings and instead examines the building three dimensionally by standing in front of it, one sees that the geometric purity displayed in plan is dissimulated through the sweeping rooflines and flowing form of the facade and its ornamental elements (fig. 28.8).

In the interiors of the two schools built by Porro in the 1990s the space is rendered indeterminate by the introduction of balconies, free-standing staircases and supporting elements which interpenetrate the lobby space. In addition, the use of fenestration in classrooms which open up into small courtyards or out into the playground obscure the impression between inside and outside.

The same cannot be said with regards to the Catalan vaults which enclose the classrooms like isolated bubbles in the two Cuban schools (figs. 3.14 and 4.10). There, aside from the skylights, the space seems self-contained. Therefore, a distinction is made between the open form of the overall configuration of the buildings and the closed form which manifests itself in some of the buildings's components.

In addition, with regards to the use of the ellipse in the School of Plastic Arts (fig. 3.1), it should be noted that although it is well known that the baroque prefers the ellipse to the circle due to its dynamic qualities resulting from its having a major and a minor axis, this dynamism or propulsion towards movement inherent in the form is defeated by the architect's intention of having the placement of the object of study underneath the zenith of the vault rather than at the terminus of the major axis as was the typically the case were the altar was placed in baroque churches having such a plan. This may also serve to illustrate the fact that architecture is best understood only when one knows the

activities for which the building was designed. Also it should be mentioned that the engraving workshops and administrative offices of the School of Plastic Arts display a very rectilinear, self-enclosed form in contrast to the other freer curvilinear elements that make up the majority of the building. The architect claims that this contrast was introduced to enhance and augment the viewers perception of open space by contrasting it to the closed space cells of this segment of the building. Be that as it may, this segment retains a close similarity to the Private houses that Porro built during the 1950s (figs. 1.1 and 2.1). Yet this element may be said to introduce tension into the composition.

An element of tension pervades many of Porro's buildings. This is certainly an element common to baroque architecture, which Wolfflin nominates as "...an art of passionate tension."<sup>54</sup> Wolfflin emphasizes that, "In the proportions themselves, however, the tense, the unsatisfied, gradually supplants fully harmonised repose."<sup>55</sup> In the overall composition of the building as well as in some of the details this tension may be experienced. The expression of this tension is a conscious intent on the part of the architect to make manifest the content of his buildings.

In the School of Modern Dance this tension is felt as a result of the angular shapes which oppose each other at odd angles, by the termination of outdoor spaces in sharp corners, by the apparently incongruous placement of various of its details. The pilasters surrounding the buildings and corridors at times break their uniform regularity by pointing at different angles (fig. 4.8). In the School of Plastic Arts the three arches at the entry are all of slightly different proportions (fig. 3.5), visually appearing to be tilting slightly, all of this contributing to the sensation of the unsatisfied. The same tension is felt on perceiving the facade of the College Colonel Fabien through the observation of the two wings which come together at the entry hall, further emphasized by the two overhangs at the entrance (fig. 28.9). In this building one of the 'branches' of the 'tree of

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

life'--the column to the right of the entrance--displays itself as an incongruent element, on account of its curvilinear shape and white color, which contrasts with the gridded rectilinear frames of the windows and the red color of the bricks. In the College Elsa Triolet the disparate placement of the windows in the entry hall (fig. 26.6) as well as in the rear facade (fig. 28.10) contribute to the overall tension which is a breaking away from the viewer's visual expectations.

A whole series of these elements which contribute to the overall feeling of tension in the building may be enumerated and described. However, there are certain elements that are found not to contribute to this tension. For example, in the School of Plastic Arts, the placement of the piers at regular intervals produces a simple, harmonious rhythm (fig. 3.6). The same may be said for the surface treatment of his facades which in all four schools consists of brick, concrete and stucco with little or no ornamentation. The manner in which the architect employs these materials is unlike that transformation which Wolfflin points out occurred in the baroque, namely that, "Material seems everywhere to have become softer."<sup>56</sup> However, the overall configuration of Porro's buildings may be seen to share in the softening of form of the baroque. The egg-shape vaults and the serpentine hallways in the School of Plastic Arts shows evidence of this softer form (fig. 3.4). In the two French schools while the exteriors display a certain severity, the interiors show a softness and twisting of forms. The School of Modern Dance, however, stresses tension at the expense of the sinuous (fig. 4.3).

The use of color in Porro's buildings may be seen to counteract the limitless form and beauty in flux sought by the baroque. In all of the four schools examples of pure oppositions of color, a trademark of classic architecture, display themselves. The color clearly distinguishes among the building's parts in a way which serves to limit their flow. In the School of Plastic Arts, for example, the white band of the lower edge of the vaults

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

clash with the red of its supporting pilasters thereby making the two elements visually separate, distinct, discontinuous (fig. 3.13). Using more recent examples one may examine the interiors of the two French schools to discover a flat, unadorned use of white alongside red brick (figs. 26.4 and 28.8). This use of color can by no means be classified as baroque. It may be said to detract from the buildings's baroque tendencies.

In this examination of closed and open form in the work of Ricardo Porro one may then form the supposition that the tendency exhibited in the organization of the overall project is towards open form and open space as brought out by the observations of free arrangement and flowing of spaces. Yet this tendency is contravened by various of the constituent forms that make up the building. Hence, not only do the baroque elements themselves contribute towards the overall tension of the building, but the contraposition of classic and baroque elements may also be seen to add to that tension. When Wolfflin wrote Principles of Art History the term "Mannerism" had not yet been coined by art historians. In the sense that Porro's architecture has baroque leanings which are held back by classic forms, his architecture may be said to be mannerist. Certainly his being a man of the twentieth century and having started his career following the principles of rationalists architecture, it is not strange to find the insertion of classic elements in an otherwise baroque conception.

Open form is part of the baroque's sense of beauty to be found in movement. This movement meant living form for the baroque. As Wolfflin points out, "Living beauty no longer resides in the limited, but in the limitless form."<sup>57</sup> This belief is quite in keeping with Porro's notion of anthropomorphic composition. His School of Plastic Arts, most notably in its centrifugal arrangement and repetition of elliptical and serpentine elements, has that unfinished look, a semblance of an organism growing, expanding.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

This predilection for living forms in architecture may be found not only in the late Gothic and mature style of the Baroque period, but also in twentieth century styles such as expressionism and 'organic' architecture. Yet whereas both the Gothic and the Baroque developed over generations and its stylistic characteristics may be clearly delineated, the terms 'expressionism' and 'organic' are more vague and wide ranging. The work of many of the so-called expressionist architects has been termed organic. Naturally, individual works would need to be examined in order to properly draw this conclusion. However, it may be found that many of these expressionist or organic buildings display an analogous similarity to living organisms. They bear a resemblance to baroque form on account of their flowing line and free arrangement. Yet neither the so-called 'organic' nor the expressionist architects formed a unified group with shared viewpoints regarding their compositions. These terms have been used to group various architects emerging at various time periods and cultural milieus which oppose the rationalist views of, particularly, the International Style. Porro too opposes the rationalist principles derived from the International Style and the Bauhaus. He claims to have developed an Oedipus complex with regards to Walter Gropius whom he met in the School of Architecture at the University of Havana and later in Venice shortly after beginning his career as an architect. Many observers of Porro's work will be drawn to categorize his work as expressionist or organic due to its inspiration in anthropomorphic form or on account of certain formal similarities to Expressionist works.

#### **2.4 Multiplicity vs. Unity**

The contrast between multiplicity and unity, also called multiple unity and unified unity, is ultimately, in Wolfflin's words, "The contrast of seeing in detail and seeing as a whole."<sup>58</sup> In the articulation of classic compositions, "...the figures are developed as absolutely independent parts, and yet so work together that each seems governed by the

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 155

whole."<sup>59</sup> The baroque, on the other hand, welds the figures into a homogeneous mass.<sup>60</sup> In order to bring about the endless flow of the baroque, Wolfflin points out, "...two elements interact in this baroque unity--the cessation of the independent functioning of the individual forms and the development of a dominating total motive."<sup>61</sup> Wolfflin's observations on multiplicity and unity again make use, as in the previous pairs already examined, of the differing tastes of the two styles: the classic's preference for the static and the baroque's predilection for movement. Movement may be said to be the dominating total motive to which the individual constituent entities are subordinated.

The analysis of form in the work of Ricardo Porro shall proceed by attempting to discover in what unique way his work may be said to display the characteristics of multiplicity an/or unity as those aspects are manifested in his four school buildings. Yet first, it should be noted that whereas Wolfflin's discussion of this opposed pair of dynamisms centers on the elements of architectural mass (facades, both interior and exterior, and the elements which constitute them--columns, cornices, pediments, etc.) he unfortunately obviates a discussion of space which is so essential to a discussion of architecture. Hence the examination should explore not only the corporeal form of the building but also the modulation of space. Therefore, multiplicity as it applies to space will be said to refer to isolable space cells versus unity which shall refer to spatial flow and interconnections of spaces. Hence it is a difference between contained, static space and flowing space which gives rise to the impression of movement.

Certainly it may be agreed that in all four schools the systems of circulation are flowing and give the impression of movement. Space in these circulation spaces flows incessantly and leads the eye on. This aspect of Porro's buildings may be said to partake in multiple unity in that the various movement systems fuse together to form a unified

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 158.



whole. Yet if one examines the different offshoots to which these movement systems lead to--i.e., the various rooms--one may discover in them elements in their spatial development which run counter to baroque unity. This becomes particularly noticeable in the two Cuban schools. The vault covered classrooms are perceived as isolable space cells (figs. 3.14 and 4.10). These interior spaces are self-sufficient both in plan (fig. 3.1 and 4.1) and experientially by the viewer occupying them. The flow of space occurring in the upper portion of the rooms do not provide the adequate visual connection to the rest of the spaces so as to provide for a sense of fusion. In the two French schools the creation of individual and separate space cells which emerge from the primary system of circulation is also found to occur. For example, as one arrives at the library of the College Elsa Triolet and closes the door leading in from the corridor, the space becomes a self-contained entity identifiable with the rest of the spaces only on account of the similarity of materials and fenestration (fig. 26.13). It is a room with its own center, the stairwell enclosed in a cracked cylinder, that has no spatial connection (other than a standard doorway) with the rest of the building. It may be considered, at least in terms of the spatial impression, a building in its own right.

A more marked example of how certain elements seem to have been developed independently in the composition, thereby creating a multiplicity, may be seen in the School of Plastic Arts. A substantial portion of the building--the engraving studios and the administrative offices--is organized into rectilinear, rectangular units which tightly close up the spaces. These orthogonal forms may be seen as intruders in the otherwise curvilinear, free-form arrangement of the composition (fig. 3.1). Furthermore, the height and color of these orthogonal components whose facade faces the piazza with the fountain are in stark contrast with the other forms that enclose on the space (figs. 3.3 and 3.4). Here is a case where the parts do not combine in a unity but instead preserve their independence as is the case of multiple unity. This case does not conform to unified unity either. The figures do not weld into a homogeneous mass. The two entities clash

as though the work was done by two separate hands. It has the disparate quality of a twentieth century form of art: the collage. (Certainly historical precedents for this type of collage technique exists in the history of architecture much prior to the twentieth century. In the architecture of the Christian reconquest of the Iberian peninsula, for example, there are numerous examples of Catholic churches of differing style (Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque) were grafted into the existing structure of Moorish mosques.) The magnitude of this design decision in Porro's work cannot be overlooked as a mere incongruent detail within the whole composition.

Porro claims that these orthogonal elements were introduced to make the curvilinear, flowing aspect of the rest of the composition stand out more saliently by the contrast. One of his thematic obsessions has always been the depiction of the clashing of opposites. Certainly the whole building could have been conceived and built following the organic principles of the overall form. However, he interjects the dissonance of curvilinear and rectilinear elements which result in a composition in which both multiplicity and unity are to be found. It is a Mannerist conception. It should be noted that already in one of the houses he designed, the Villa Ennis built in Havana in 1953 (fig. 2.1), seven years before he began his project for the schools of the arts, curvilinear and rectilinear elements coexisted in tension within the whole of the composition. The Miesian grid organization in this case dominated the whole while certain organic components, an influence from Le Corbusier's Ronchamp, he claims, found their way in somewhat disruptively.

A better understanding of his contradictory use of classic and baroque form in the same composition may be gained by examining one of his unbuilt projects, La Maison de la Culture (The House of Culture) in Paris (figs. 7.1 to 7.4), which he designed with Andre Mrowiec in 1967.<sup>62</sup> Here various anthropomorphic forms--hands, buttocks,

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<sup>62</sup> Ricardo Porro, *Oeuvres/Obras*, p. 40 (Appendix A, p. 253).

breasts, etc.--are scattered like a surrealist *exquisite corps* within a gridded but stylized metal structural system reminiscent of the vast space enclosure in Mies van der Rohe's 1953 project for a Convention Center in Chicago. In this case moving parts abound in the structure as well as palpitating anthropomorphic parts. The two clashing forms--the anthropomorphic parts and the metal frame--are the means employed to express the content of the work: man versus technology. Porro indicates with reference to this work that, "It is the image of man imprisoned by a technological world."<sup>63</sup>

One may attempt to explain these discordant and contradictory relationship in the form of Porro's work by referring to Robert Venturi's concept of 'superadjacencies' as presented in Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture. Although Porro's School of Plastic Arts antedates the publishing of Venturi's text of 1966 by a few years, nonetheless it may serve to elucidate this discussion. Superadjacencies are defined by Venturi as "...the superimpositions of various elements."<sup>64</sup> He, of course, gives various examples. A very clear example which specifically refers to the use of contrasting curvilinear and rectilinear elements in the same composition is that of the Empire-style Chair.<sup>65</sup> He makes the following comments on superadjacencies: "Superadjacency is inclusive rather than exclusive. It can relate contrasting and otherwise irreconcilable elements; it can contain opposites within the whole; it can accommodate the valid non sequitur; and it can allow a multiplicity of levels of meaning, since it involves changing contexts--seeing familiar things in an unfamiliar way and from unexpected points of view."<sup>66</sup> With reference to the stylistic mediums in which superadjacencies manifest

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 40 (Appendix A, p. 253).

<sup>64</sup> Robert Venturi, Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1990, p. 56.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

themselves, Venturi concludes: "All Mannerist and Baroque facades involve superadjacencies and interpenetrations on the same plane."<sup>67</sup>

Hence, one may be able to qualify the juxtaposed rectilinear and curvilinear elements in Porro's work as superadjacencies to use Venturi's term. Therefore, one may go on to qualify this not as opposing classic and baroque elements, but rather a mannerist or baroque work on account that, according to Venturi, superadjacencies find their place in these styles.

However, if one examines Wolfflin's text, one discovers that his views seemingly denounce Venturi's concept of superadjacencies. He indicates that all of the parts of the baroque building need to support the total motive--the drive towards movement--and that the part is not independent but subordinate to the whole. In his unyielding stress of the necessity towards movement in baroque architecture, Wolfflin would view the orthogonal elements as counteracting the movement displayed by the rest of the composition. However, if one allows the opposition to that movement as a means of making that movement all the more apparent, then one may consider it as a supporting and subordinate element of the total motive.

It may be argued also that the total motive need not be the expression of movement. It may be a more complex motive, a motive arising from the content that Porro wishes to express in some of his works. Clearly if baroque form aims at the impression of freedom and life and if classic form counteracts that tendency, then a project such as Porro's House of Culture expresses those two opposing tendencies. Hence the primary motive may be found in the content of the work which is the opposition of man and machine. The total motive is thus well realized using contradictory forms.

If attention is focused on particular components of the building complex it is again noted that these seem to follow a tectonic articulation which distinguish them as

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

independent elements unsubordinated to the total motive. One may point to the pervasive piers which mark the simple, continuous rhythm in the School of Plastic Arts. Their tectonic form and color make them readily separable from the elements they support. The same may be said for the gargoyles which emerge from the wall in a distinctly horizontal opposition to the verticals (fig. 3.11). The complete equality of the spaces which these piers and gargoyles delimit contributes to the creation of homogeneous parts. All of these may be interpreted as examples of classic multiplicity.

In addition, the baroque tends to emphasize individual parts of a building. The various parts which make up the building emphasize a certain directionality. In baroque buildings the movement is in many instances the proverbial 'upwards and towards the center' directionality brought about by differences in height, rhythm and other formal means to emphasize the building's entrance. Wolfflin acknowledges that in the baroque, "the series of equivalent parts is replaced by a decided predominance of the middle, there lie the strongest plastic and dynamic accents, the crest of the movement swelling from the sides."<sup>68</sup> As Wolfflin points out, "...the tendency to the salient point is always present in the baroque: the effect tends to be gathered into a main motive which holds the secondary motives in permanent dependence, but for all that is dependent on these accessories and of itself alone can have no meaning."<sup>69</sup> Historically the baroque has demonstrated an emphasis on the middle of the building; however, what seems essential is not that the middle is stressed but rather that there is a culminating point which is stressed. This culmination need not necessarily be in the middle. In both of the French schools the elements of the building's facade lead the eye on to the entrance. In the College Elsa Triolet the entrance is accentuated by its height and plastic treatment (fig. 26.6). The roofline, pavement and rhythm of the windows are designed with the objective of leading the viewer's attention to this point. The elevation from the rue Paul

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<sup>68</sup> Wolfflin, p. 191.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 190-91.

Eluard shows how the shape of the roof of the library on the far left mimics the bird-like aspect of the entry overhang (fig. 26.3). In the College Fabien the entry is again emphasized by the overhangs (fig. 28.9). The walls angle in towards this point (fig. 28.8). The roof line sweeps down in this direction. Past the entry doors one enters the lobby, the culminating point of the building's interior.

If instead one searches to discover a decidedly salient point in the School of Plastic Arts, one will have difficulty finding it. The various breast shaped domes each call out for attention. The snake-like vaulted corridors wind incessantly in and around the form without leading one to a culminating spot. Porro claims that the culminating point of the composition, the key to the work, is the papaya shaped fountain in the central piazza (figs. 3.12 and 3.13). However, the architectural elements are not employed to accentuate this spot or to lead the visitor there due to the freedom offered in selecting various paths. The fountain stands as an isolated element in the composition. Even its color is like that of the rest of the complex. This and other previously mentioned elements make the two Cuban schools, in spite of their formal exuberance, less baroque than the two French schools.

In the School Elsa Triolet, Porro was able, within the constraints of the limited budget, to design and build some of the furnishings. These are not conceived as isolated pieces but designed so as to contribute and integrate themselves with the formal qualities of the rooms for which they were produced. In the school's library, for example, the magazine racks and bookshelves are designed so as to emphasize the roundness of the cylinder containing the staircase visible through a vertical fissure (fig. 26.13). In the baroque, Wolfflin tells us that, "...the entire furniture is so blended into the whole that we cannot even imagine the single object isolated."<sup>70</sup> This opportunity for furniture design

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

and the incorporation of painting and sculpture into a building is one of the ideals that Porro aspires to but seldom realizes on account of financial constraints.

For Porro painting, sculpture and architecture should ideally complement and complete their interconnected contents. Hence in his completed buildings and most notably in his unbuilt projects there are sculptural elements that integrate themselves to the total work. In the College Elsa Triolet on the plaza leading to the entry he placed the sculpture of an open book with a dove emerging from it which, he claims, holds the key to the building's content (fig. 26.4). In the School of Plastic Arts this key is provided by the fountain of the papaya (fig. 3.12 and 3.13). One needs to look at his unbuilt projects for a more dramatic integration of sculpture within the architectural whole. The project for a library (figs. 18.1 to 18.3), a competition he entered with Philippe Louget, Jean Robein, and Jean-Francois Dechoux in 1980<sup>71</sup>, as well as his project for a primary school (figs. 14.1 and 14.2) in 1976<sup>72</sup> are revealing of this tendency which he has only minimally been able to realize in his built works as a result of budget constraints. What little sculpture he has done in his buildings has usually been done at cost or out of his own pocket.

Porro's drawings and descriptions of his unbuilt primary school (fig. 14.1 and 14.2) reveals the use of anthropomorphism used in a direct manner. The exterior facades of the classrooms are given the form of children's faces. Hands serve as benches. The sculpture in this project is an integral part of the architectural composition. Many of them serve an architectural function, e.g., facades, benches. They are not isolated elements but only make sense when perceived within the whole.

If one examines some of Porro's furniture and sculpture, one will note in many of the examples the baroque sense of unified unity. His anthropomorphically shaped chair, 'La Mamma' (fig. 34.1 and 34.2) dating from 1973, which is in his apartment is an

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<sup>71</sup> Porro, *Oeuvres/Obras*, p. 96 (Appendix A, p. 291).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74 (Appendix A, p. 288).

excellent example of flowing form were all the parts are subordinate to the whole. Many of his sculptures reveal a sense of stroboscopic movement reminiscent of Futurist works (figs. 46.1 to 46.3, 47.1, 48.1) . In many of these works the parts cannot be read separately from the whole.

These examples of furniture and sculpture serve to show how Porro's intentions towards baroque forms are realized in pieces of small, manageable size in comparison to buildings. However, the general drive toward baroque form in his buildings many times breaks down as when examining the building details. (The static, self-contained nature of many of these has been already discussed.) In addition, it seems that Porro is quite willing to use contradictory forms in his compositions for the aim of carrying out a certain content in his works. Hence, in his designs, formally cohesive properties are often violated for thematic concerns he wishes to express. These reveal themselves as incongruities in his work for viewers who dwell on the architecture's formal aspects while disregarding its content.

This discussion of multiplicity and unity in the work of Ricardo Porro shows that his work at times manifests both of these tendencies in adjacent elements in the composition. This complicates the ability to classify his buildings as either classic or baroque in their totality. The term 'Mannerist' may be offered as an avenue of possible classification. Yet without a clear definition of this term it turns out to be *flatus vocis*. Certainly his work deviates from the examples by which Wolfflin illustrates his concepts for these derive from the Renaissance and Baroque periods in architecture. Porro is well familiar with all of the 'ism' that have sprung up in the realm of art in this century and their compositional techniques. One may offer various theories to explain the apparently contradictory nature of his forms. One may discuss them in light of Venturi's concept of superadjacencies. Or perhaps one may view the composition as 'collage'. Or perhaps one may accuse the architect of carelessness with regards to developing the details so as to support the main motive of the whole.



## 2.5 Clearness vs. Unclearness

The last of the five opposed pairs of dynamisms, clearness versus unclearness (also referred to as "absolute clearness" and "relative clearness") is a recapitulation of the previously examined opposed pairs with the focus on the question of clarity. Towards the end of the chapter entitled "Clearness and Unclearness" Wolfflin points out to the reader that the aim of the chapter was "...to recapitulate former discussions from the standpoint of clarity. In every chapter the baroque standpoint meant a kind of obscuring."<sup>73</sup> In the beginning of the chapter he introduces the basic distinction as regards to clarity between classic and baroque art as follows: "For classic art, all beauty is meant exhaustive revelation of the form; in baroque art, absolute clearness is obscured even where a perfect rendering of facts is aimed at. The pictorial appearance no longer coincides with the maximum of objective clearness, but evades it."<sup>74</sup> The qualities of baroque art already discussed--its painterly style, depth in recession, open form, unified unity--all contribute and make up what Wolfflin in a paradoxical manner claims to be the sense of baroque beauty, "...a clearness of the unclear."<sup>75</sup>

Wolfflin explains this drive towards relative clearness in baroque art through his cyclical view of art history and his theory of a history of vision. The tendency to make the perception of form once mastered more difficult is claimed by him to bring about the changes from classic to baroque styles. Wolfflin affirms that, "Now it is well known that all art in advancing seeks to make the task of the eye increasingly difficult; that is to say, when once the problem of lucid representation has been grasped, it will come about of itself that certain difficulties are placed in the way of perception, that the picture form

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<sup>73</sup> Wolfflin, Principles of Art History, p. 224.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

becomes complicated, and that the spectator, for whom the simple has become all too transparent, finds an interest in the solution of the more complicated problem."<sup>76</sup>

With regards to architecture this transition in style is not a mere change that takes place over a period of time in the details--e.g., whether pilasters become doubled or whether pediments become broken--but rather a change in the overall principles of composition resulting from the new concept of beauty. The details emerge in response to this new quest, Wolfflin claims. Again Wolfflin denotes the baroque's sense of beauty in movement and in life. He argues his claim as follows:

Once renaissance architecture had seemed to find an ultimate expression for wall and joint, for pillar and beam, for supporting and supported members, came the moment when all these formulations were felt to be rigid and lifeless. The change does not take place sporadically in details: the principle is changed. It is not possible--so ran the new creed--to set up anything as finished and ultimate, the life and beauty of architecture lies in the inconclusiveness of its appearance, in the fact that, eternally becoming, it approaches the spectator in ever new pictures.<sup>77</sup>

One may be tempted to view Ricardo Porro's development in his use of architectural form as commencing in the clear, classic style and then transforming more and more into baroque unclarity. Certainly his designs for private houses in Cuba done in the 1950s show a clear outline and clear spatial organization using pure, geometric volumes typical of the rationalist current of twentieth century architecture (fig. 1.1 and 2.1). Only later, beginning with the two schools of the arts in the 1960s is there encountered an overall organization of form which is more inconclusive and indeterminate. Therefore, it is possible to argue along these lines in conformance with Wolfflin's cyclical view of art history where the individual's development may be said to be explained by the same historical principles. Porro's development may be seen to fit into this schema. Many other architects may be seen to have developed on the same lines, from the clear to the unclear--Le Corbusier, for example. Yet just as many other

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 221-222.

artists and architects may be seen to follow a reverse path of development, or perhaps to waver between clearness and unclearness throughout their careers. Eero Saarinen, for example, with his concept of "the style for the job", may be seen to change his style from one project to the next. In the same way Porro develops a different formal language as necessitated by the demands of each of his projects. He does not feel obligated to be organic in all of his projects. "If I have the need to do something inorganic, I do it", Porro admits. "I change from one building to the next", he adds.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, he will not leave behind him any movement or school. However, his legacy to his students is his firm conviction that a building must express a content, that it is not mere quotation or invention of forms--a syntactic exercise. Hence, this protean form of his projects makes affirmations concerning the style of his work difficult to construct on account of the exceptions which arise.

Regarding the issue of clarity in Porro's architecture, what may be termed 'unclear' in the case of his four schools is their overall organization. His forms and the circulation in his buildings is such that it creates an indeterminate, mobile appearance. Multiple views of the building constantly impress themselves on the viewer. An objective justification for this spatial layout is not discoverable. However, the compositions display a constant, unceasing movement, not a movement conducing to a culminating conclusion as is the case of the baroque. In this respect the unclearness may be said to be disturbing. Wolfflin distinguishes between the "conscious unclearness" of the baroque and the "unconscious unclearness" of the primitives. Porro's work may be said to be of the latter form in that it does not abide by the baroque's promise of a revelation of the whole building from a privileged point. It is a never-ceasing unclearness with regards to the overall composition.

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<sup>78</sup> Ricardo Porro as quoted by Mariano Alemany, "An Interview with Ricardo Porro", May-Jun. 1995.

If instead attention is focused on certain details, it may be noted that their painterly style, closed form and multiple unity contribute to making them clear components within an overall composition that appears unclear. Almost all of Porro's sub-elements are radically clear and of good silhouette--i.e., they are well understood as separate, static, self-contained elements without reference to the whole. The edges of his piers are clear cut in the two Cuban Schools, for example (fig. 3.11 and 4.9).

Furthermore, his use of color makes his sub-elements all the more clear. Wolfflin makes the point that, "According to the principles of classic art, colour subserves form.... Colour articulates the picture, seen as a whole, into its component parts, and the colour accents are also the factual accents of the composition."<sup>79</sup> On the other hand he states that, "...The real baroque only sets in when colour has on principle been relieved of the obligation to illuminate and elucidate form."<sup>80</sup> Porro's work shows little gradation in the use of color: the red of the brick, the white of stucco, the grey of cement, the brown of the exposed wood beams in the ceilings. The violent clash between the red of the brick and the white of the stucco promote the perceived separation--multiple unity--of the elements thus making them clearer. The mottled, speckled use of color typical of the High Baroque is nowhere to be found in his work nor is the rich and varied texture of materials.

Intersections are another baroque tactic used to produce the sense of the unclear. As Wolfflin points out with regards to this affinity of the baroque: "It does not see one form in front of another, the intersecting in front of the intersected, but enjoys the configuration which is yielded by the intersection."<sup>81</sup> Naturally intersections appear in all buildings but it is the quality of baroque intersections that they incite movement in the spectator so that multiple images arise as a result of them, not merely two frontally

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<sup>79</sup> Wolfflin, Principles of Art History, 203.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p.203.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

understood distinct elements but a new image resulting from the intersection. In the Cuban schools the ubiquitous piers stand squarely before the white band above them (fig. 3.13 and 4.4). Many elements do not intersect but only gently touch each other. In lobby of the College Elsa Triolet, however, a sense of the unclear develops from the intersections of the balconies, stairways and supporting elements (figs. 26.7 to 26.9).

The juxtaposition of clear and unclear elements within the same composition is a theme which Porro performs consciously in many of his compositions. In his discussion of the French tradition in Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, he indicates that historically many compositions have exhibited a rational plan from whence irrational elements emerge on the rooftop. He cites Chambord and Le Corbusier's buildings among the examples. He has designed some of his projects consciously adhering to these examples. In a competition he entered with Miguel Acosta in 1983 for the School of Dance at the Paris Opera<sup>82</sup> (figs. 22.1 to 22.4), his design demonstrates how on a firm, rational, geometric base are superimposed dynamic, pirouetting roofs.

Wolfflin indicates that before unclarity is arrived at clarity must be mastered. The French, Italian and various other European traditions are ancient as compared to the traditions of the Americas (excluding, of course, American Indian traditions). Cuba in the 1960s was a nation which had enjoyed scarcely more than half a century of sovereignty. Its architecture consisted basically of colonial copies of European traditions (as shall be seen when discussing "Tradition" in the second half of the essay). When Porro builds the School of Plastic Arts he attempts for the first time in history to develop the groundwork for a Cuban tradition. In so doing he has no precedents in architecture. Hence, following Wolfflin's arguments, that familiarity with a form must result before its transformation, it may be said that Porro was struggling with this new form for the first time in the similar way that Brunelleschi was a pioneer with classical form. It should be

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<sup>82</sup> Porro, Oeuvres/Obras, p. 124 (Appendix A, p. 310).

observed that there existed a strong presence of the baroque in Cuban architecture although this was an imported model. This baroque, however, employed a set of forms derived from the classical language of architecture. Porro was using forms which vastly deviated from these in their formal qualities. In any event, after leaving Cuba, Porro never again turned towards a development of this Cuban tradition that he had initiated. There were no further developments or refinements of this new experimental form.

These stylistic changes from one work to the next do not allow for a clear and methodical understanding of the development of his forms. In some projects he uses forms derived from the Gothic, in others from the 'degenerate' classical forms of the Baroque, yet in others a historical precedent is difficult to pinpoint. In order to distinguish unclarity it is necessary to know what is understood as clear. In the case of Renaissance and Baroque the task was made simpler in that both made use of such classically derived forms as column, pediment, entablature, etc. The elements in many of Porro's compositions are sometimes difficult to name. For example, the five curving white planes that extend from the central stylized doric column in the center of the little 'amphitheater' in the lobby of the lobby of the College Elsa Triolet and wind up resting on the short stubby piers after being perforated by egg-shaped openings through which the balconies pass are particularly difficult to denote by any name, let alone describe or compare to historical antecedents (fig. 26.10). Therefore, to make judgments of clarity or unclarity about the novel becomes particularly difficult.

In summary, Porro's work is seen to vary from project to project regarding the degree of clarity or unclarity. Within the same project the overall configuration manifests itself as unclear. Yet this unclarity is unlike the baroque unclarity delineated by Wolfflin. In Porro's buildings the incessant movement tends not to lead to a culmination. The sub-elements in his compositions display a clear silhouette. The presence of both classic and baroque elements results in an impression of tension.

## 2.6 Premises About the Form of the Work of Ricardo Porro

Through the close application of Heinrich Wölfflin's categories of visual analysis as contained in his Principles of Art History to the four schools built by Ricardo Porro it has been possible to discover some of their similarities and differences as well as their variance with both the classic and baroque styles. An examination of some of his unbuilt projects has been instrumental for bringing out these formal differences more dramatically. While adhering to the distinctive characteristics of the two styles as brought out through Wölfflin's formal schema, these have proved to have certain limitations which limit one's understanding. Nonetheless, their clarity and focus on the stylistic distinctions has provided a tool for examining the works's formal qualities. However, the formal qualities of Porro's work as examined through Wölfflin's categories fail to conform with the two established categories, classic and baroque. Hence a point is arrived at in which certain elements of his work may be said to share in the classic manner of formal organization whereas other aspects of his work may be said to take part in the baroque's sense of beauty.

Using Wölfflin's schema reveals that Porro's work is neither fully classical nor fully baroque with regards to Wölfflin's five opposes pairs of dynamisms and the examples he uses to illustrate these.

With regards to Wölfflin's first pair of opposed dynamisms, linear versus painterly, the overall organization of Porro's buildings has leanings towards the painterly style on account of the flowing free arrangement of forms. However, many of the constituent elements in his buildings, both corporeal and spatial, have clear-cut tangible boundaries, definite separations and may be said to be concerned with the tangible as opposed to the visual qualities. Hence, such aspects as the overall circulation and arrangement of the forms in the composition may be said to be painterly in contrast with the sub-elements which distinctly share in the aesthetics of the classic.

Turning to plane versus recession, the same occurs. The plane mode of organizing space as a succession of elements parallel to the picture plane is the dominant treatment given to the sub-elements. The overall composition of the buildings, however, is more that of baroque recession. Yet this recession does not establish privileged viewpoints or aim at a culmination in the sense that is associated with baroque works.

With reference to closed and open form one sees in Porro's buildings a tendency to organize space from the inside to the outside unlike the classic tendency to organize space within a preestablished static geometric enclosure. There exist a flow of space from the inside to the outside in the overall composition. However, if one examines individual rooms of his buildings one may note that these are isolable space cells which do not permit the eye to wander freely. Again the sub-elements are seen to be of a tectonic character.

An examination of Porro's sub-elements in his buildings shows that they are complete, self-sufficient units. There is little fusion of form to be found by examining his sub-elements. His use of color further accentuates their separation. Yet the systems of circulation in his buildings are flowing and give the impression of movement. However, this continuous movement does not accentuate certain aspects of the buildings nor does it lead to a climax as occurs in the baroque.

With regards to the last paired examined, clearness versus unclearness, again it is found that the sub-elements are of the first term, classic, in that they have clearly defined edges and are of good silhouette. Yet the overall layout of the various forms that make up his buildings may be said to be unclear. The buildings may be said to present the viewer with an inexhaustible set of images. The buildings by no means completely reveal themselves to the observer at first glance. They are full of mystery and tension. Yet at every step in exploring these buildings the sub-elements readily reveal themselves in their classic distinctness.



On account of the overall organization and atmosphere of these buildings a tendency towards the baroque may be said to be present. The sub-elements, however, lead one to conclude that this is not the case. The sub-elements display an affinity with the classic sense of beauty for they are static, complete and display a clear outline. Hence one is presented with a case in which both classic and baroque elements are present in the same composition. None of the buildings presented by Wolfflin in his text to illustrate his categories of visual analysis display this paradoxical coming together of elements said to belong to two divergent styles within the same work. Wolfflin was careful in his selection of his examples. Yet the examples of Porro's work which have been studied seem to present both classic and baroque tendencies. This is by no means unusual. Many other works of the twentieth century may be said to exhibit both classic and baroque characteristics. As previously stated in the introduction, the application of Wolfflin's principles can reveal what unique combination of the five opposed pairs of dynamisms are present in Porro's work. Analysis reveals that the overall composition has many elements in common with the baroque and that the sub-elements display an undeniably classic style. Wolfflin's text is unable to assist in categorizing or understanding this phenomenon in which elements from both styles appear to be present. Hence a hypothesis as to why this is found to occur must be formulated.

One may hastily conclude that Porro's carelessness or lack of attention to detail accounts for the presence of classic sub-elements within the overall baroque form of his buildings. These classic sub-elements may be seen to run counter to the baroque's sense of beauty in movement. Or it may be argued that the restful nature of these classic elements was distraught by its organization into a seemingly chaotic overall organization. It has been pointed out that the overall composition aims at an unending movement. This may be criticized in view of the baroque's demand for accent and culmination. If one adheres to a Wolfflinian explanation to account for these phenomena one will only conclude by saying that the buildings show an attempt towards the baroque which has

been thwarted by the interpolation of classic sub-elements. This condemnatory conclusion resulting from the purely formal examination resulting from the application of bipolar terms only lead one to reject the work on account that it does not accommodate itself within either the definition of classic or baroque. Some critics being content with this conclusion would simply reject the works examined on account of their not being accomplished according to the dictates of neither one of the two styles. Yet if one remains intent on discovering why it is found to participate in both styles (or perhaps in a different as yet unnamed style) one must continue the inquiry by leaving Wolfflin's precepts behind.

The concept of "collage" might be employed as a means to explain this apparent incongruity between the overall baroque style of organization and the classic style displayed by the building's sub-elements. But little does that tell us other than the work appears to have been done by two different minds. It does not explain why it was done in the manner that it was. A reason for this intent is not offered by this concept either. To say that he used a collage technique in his designs without yet having examined the content of his work is a facile way of assimilating his work to a common and established practice in twentieth century design. This does little to impart a greater understanding of his work.

In the analysis found in the section entitled "Multiplicity vs. Unity", the notion of "superadjacencies" proposed by Robert Venturi is suggested as a means of explaining the apparently contradictory relationships discovered to be present in Porro's architecture. After defining the term and quoting from Venturi's text the possibility was offered that Porro's work could indeed be classified as baroque (or perhaps mannerist) on account of it exhibiting these superadjacencies. Yet using Venturi's critical constructs to account for the presence of classic and baroque elements (according to Wolfflin) in Porro's work seems like an opportunistic employment of a term developed by Venturi for his own devices, useful it is true, but which in this case seems to be a forceful way of bypassing

this most salient element in Porro's work and concluding that it is merely a characteristic of baroque or mannerist art. However, other critics may find this a viable explanation worth pursuing further. Instead other explanations which may turn out to be more plausible are offered.

Previously the possibility had been hinted at in passing that Porro's work could be Mannerist. In Wolfflin's analysis of classic and baroque art--i.e., in the art of the Renaissance and the Baroque periods--in his Principles of Art History, the text used to examine form in Porro's work, he is quite careful in his selection of examples from the multitude available to him. Notably he neglects the works produced in the second half of the 16th century and concentrates instead on 17th century examples to illustrate his discussion of baroque art. This time period which Wolfflin fails to discuss, the second half of the 16th century, is now generally referred to as "Mannerism". Wolfflin and his generation were not familiar with this term. This term was used to refer to works from a period that could not really be considered Renaissance nor Baroque, a period in between the two styles, was first used by Walter Friedlander in a lecture in the year 1914. It was published in 1925 and translated into English in 1957 under the title Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism in Italian Painting. It was Nikolaus Pevsner in 1946 who first applied the concept of a Mannerist style to architecture in an article entitled "*The Architecture of Mannerism*". An examination of Pevsner's exposition of his concept of Mannerism may cast some light on the understanding of the presence of contradictory elements said to be present in Porro's architecture.

Mannerism in its widest sense is applied to the various arts to denote an excessive or affected adherence to a distinctive manner. Mannerism is characterized by each artist's personal interpretation of the rules of composition. Historically the term has been employed to the some of the work of Michelangelo, of Tintoretto and of El Greco among the many artists whose works dates between 1525 and 1600. Originally the term was derogatorily applied. The precise significance of the term remains problematic and will

vary according to the critic using it. The term was originally coined in reference to painting. Therefore, Pevsner's sense of the term will be adhered to in order to avoid vague and contradictory notions when examining if certain mannerist elements are present in the architecture of Ricardo Porro.

Mannerism uses flowing and rigid elements in the same composition. Pevsner points to these discrepancies in his article: "...Mannerist art is full of contradictions: rigid formality and deliberate disturbance, bareness and overdecoration...."<sup>83</sup> The presence of static, rigid sub-elements placed within a composition which displays free arrangement of forms has been noted. The overall composition is not organized symmetrically and aims at continuous movement.

Yet this movement is at times hampered by the placement of static forms on the viewers path. Movement may occur in varying directions within the building. It does not lead to a climax. The intent is on continuous movement. This seems to fit in with another characteristic of Mannerism as pointed out by Pevsner: "...the insistence of the Mannerist on discordant motifs and contradictory directions everywhere."<sup>84</sup>

The lack of accent or culmination in Porro's buildings which display an unresolved tension and a continuous movement contradicted by the presence of static elements is unlike the placidity of the classic or the agitation of the baroque. Instead, this characteristic may be said to be Mannerist for as Pevsner points out, "...in the Baroque a turbulent struggle and a triumphant end, in Mannerism an intricate and conflicting pattern, and no solution anywhere."<sup>85</sup>

Another characteristic of Mannerism is the avoidance of the impression of weighty masses. In contrast to the impression of weight and sturdiness of the corporeal elements that make up the two Cuban schools, resulting in part from the outright display

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<sup>83</sup>Nikolaus Pevsner, *"The Architecture of Mannerism"* in Harold Spencer, ed., Readings in Art History, Vol. II. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1969, p. 146-147.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

of arcuation and trabeation used throughout the two buildings, the interiors of the two French schools show a less weighty, floating aspect partly due to their indirect expression of structure. This floating aspect may be seen in the College Elsa Triolet in the manner in which small cubes serve as the capitals of the short wedge shaped pilasters which support the thin perforated curved planes which in turn support the curving balconies (figs. 26.7 to 26.9). The forward tilt of the pilasters also serves to increase the sense of precariousness. The apparent solidity of the walls is contradicted by the concentration of windows placed in a random order which take up a substantial amount of wall area. The perforations of the windows reveal the thinness of the walls and the light filtering in through the stained glass further serves to dematerialize the interior, to diminish the weighty aspect of the corporeal elements. The windows do not reveal any signs of support such as sills or lintels (fig. 26.6). Similar observations may be made in the interior of the College Fabien. There the spiralling upward motion of the staircases may be seen as contributing to the overall impression of weightlessness (fig. 28.17). The smooth texture of the white stucco seems much lighter as compared to the brick surfaces. Yet when these brick surfaces are seen suspended above one's head their impression of weight produces in the viewer an uneasy feeling.

"This denial of expressing strength to carry as well as weight of load is one of the most significant innovations of Mannerist architecture,"<sup>86</sup> Pevsner points out. He goes on to note that, "...the architect designs with seemingly thin materials which never look strong enough to associate with them the carrying force of the human body, nor even look massive enough to associate with them the weight of matter pressing down under the force of gravitation."<sup>87</sup> This Mannerist style is something other than that found in the Renaissance or in the Baroque. Pevsner argues that, "It lacks the robustness of the

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

Baroque as well as the serenity of the Renaissance."<sup>88</sup> Hence the weightlessness of the interiors of the two French schools may be seen to share in the characteristics of Mannerism.

One of the fundamental characteristics of Mannerism, that of "...precarious instability instead of repose..." pointed out by Pevsner in his article, is pervasive in Porro's overall organization of his buildings. The overall organization of his buildings--the buildings's footprint, the loose manner in which the forms are organized within them, the undulating and dynamic rooflines, the multiple images presented to the viewer, the flowing nature of main arteries of circulation which communicate the inside with the outside--may all be said to contribute to a sense of beauty found in movement. However, the static, clearly defined, and complete nature of the various sub-elements in Porro's buildings instead share in a sense of beauty in repose. The excesses of the overall composition bear a contradictory relationship to the rigidity of the sub-elements. This may be seen to contribute to tension with no final solution.

The aforementioned observation regarding the opposition of the overall building and its parts may be seen to have a similar but reverse relationship to Pevsner's observation regarding Mannerist architecture. Pevsner observes that, "This tendency to excess within rigid boundaries is one of the characteristics of Mannerist space."<sup>89</sup> However, in Porro's buildings the boundaries, i.e., the footprint and overall shell as well as the organization of the rooms in them, are not static and rigid. On the contrary, they are flowing and freely arranged. Instead it is the sub-elements, the individual rooms, the piers, etc., which are rigid and static.

Hence while displaying the same opposition of the excessive and the rigid within the same building, Porro does so in a manner opposite to that of historical examples of Mannerism. That is to say, Mannerist works from the second half of the sixteenth

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

century would employ elements corresponding to what Wolfflin would denominate as baroque forms within an overall classic whole. Porro, contrarily to the Mannerists, incorporates classic sub-elements in an overall baroque whole. Both, however, lead to instability and unresolved tension.

Thus far the premises that have been proposed have not taken into account the content of Porro's work. The content of one of his works--that of the House of Culture--as a means of assisting in the explanation of the apparent contradiction of so-called classic and baroque elements had been briefly examined in a previous discussion. It will be seen that the Baroque period had its own set of preoccupying thematic concerns. The portrayal of extreme states of feeling, of ecstasy, death, the sense of the infinite are just some of the themes developed through symbols and allegories in painting, sculpture as well as in architecture. The portrayal of two polar themes was quite popular in the Baroque age, as was the suggestion of the endlessness of time and the infinity of space. The portrayal of two polar themes, for example, may be seen as bringing about

## CHAPTER 3

### AN ANALYSIS OF CONTENT IN THE WORK OF RICARDO PORRO

The at times vehement rhetoric that the reader will confront when reading Porro's text, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, is in keeping with the tone encountered in the writings and manifestos of countless other twentieth century artists and architects, Futurists, Expressionists, Neoplasticists, just to name a few. And certainly in Towards a New Architecture, one of the most widely read texts on architectural theory, Le Corbusier, one of the most notable of twentieth century architects (and publicity men), voices his dissatisfaction with conditions in architecture at the time of his writing in 1923 right from the first sentence of his introduction where he states that, "A man of the eighteenth century, plunged suddenly into our civilization, might well have the impression of something akin to a nightmare."<sup>90</sup> Throughout his book appears the leitmotif, "Eyes which do not see."<sup>91</sup> Yet he is optimistic. He heralds the coming of a new epoch in art and society. Porro does not. He merely looks to the past to point out that significant works of architecture (in his opinion) always dealt with meaning. He insists on preserving meaning as central and essential to a work of architecture.

Le Corbusier, like Porro and so many other practicing architects and theoreticians, believes in looking to the past in order to find confirmation for his views and providing answers for the future. Le Corbusier says that, "Culture is the flowering of the effort to select. Selection means rejection, pruning, cleansing; the clear and naked emergence of the Essential."<sup>92</sup> Indeed it is the aim of the vast majority of architectural texts, treatises, manifestos or publications by whatever other name of individuals or

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<sup>90</sup> Le Corbusier, Towards a New Architecture. Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1986, p. v.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 138.



groups of individuals from diverse aesthetic currents to discover, define, point to, and promulgate what to them constitute the "essentials". It is this drive to search for and be guided by these "essentials" that may be said to be the essential feature of the multitude of diverse movements that have sprung up during this century. Each movement has its own monomania. Porro's monomania is fixated on the content of architecture.

Porro's writings are an attempt to outline, define and illustrate how meaning may be systematically studied in a work of architecture. His texts Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu and Oeuvres/Obras appear translated into English for the first time in the appendix of this text. The first work is his theory of architecture, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu (see Appendix B, pp. \* ); the second is a portfolio with written descriptions and commentaries about his built and unbuilt projects, Oeuvres/Obras: 1950-1993 (see Appendix A, pp. \* ).

It should be noted that to date there has not been any published critical commentary on Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu which was published by Porro in 1993. However, it should be known that the germinal ideas for this text had already been developed by Porro as early as 1960 when he published Forma y Contenido en Wright (Form and Content in [the Work of Frank Lloyd] Wright). In his conversations and in his teachings since then he has refined and promulgated his firm belief in the content of architecture and the manner in which it may be analyzed. The effect that Porro's conversion to the ideas that he now professes have had on his work may be seen to be quite striking through a comparison of the obvious stylistic differences between the private houses that he designed in the 1950s to the School of Modern Dance, the School of Plastic Arts and the other work that he has produced since then.

Porro's text covers a wide range of topics in art and architecture. He discusses and attempts to define art and architecture, the notion of beauty, bringing to bear a slue of philosophers and art historians in the process. He also discusses the role of the artist and architect. Porro's discontent with what he perceives to be the dehumanization of Art

follows in Jose Ortega y Gasset's thinking that the sorry state of Art and society has been brought about by the upsurge of mass man who imposes his will and right to vulgarity everywhere. Content in a work of art is expression or meaning. This meaning is not passively received. It requires active participation on part of the observer. Hence a short attention span (as is commonly observed in museum visitors who whiz by works in a matter of seconds) is not conducive to a reception of meaning. The viewer must draw on his life experiences, his knowledge, his familiarity with history. In a society in which mass man, devoid of a sense of history and cultural values, reigns supreme the predicament for the establishment of a visual dialogue with a work of art in order to arrive at its content is seen to wane.

Among the proponents who concord with Porro regarding the necessity for meaning in art to touch upon the eternal problems of Man are Andre Malraux and Christian Norberg-Schulz. In The Voices of Silence Malraux states: "Every authentic work of art devotes its means (even the most brutal) to the service of some part of Man passionately or obscurely sponsored by the artist."<sup>93</sup> Quite contrarily to George Santayana who emphasized the pleasurable aspect of art, its quality of provoking delectation, Malraux counters by saying that "...true arts and culture relate Man to duration, sometimes to eternity, and make him something other than the most-favored denizen of a universe founded on absurdity."<sup>94</sup> Norberg-Schulz also stresses meaning as a basic human need and that meaning is to be provided by architecture. He states: "If we study architecture as the history of meaningful forms, we will also discover man, nature and God. Thus we will learn who we are, and be helped to take a stand, and thus architecture becomes a mode of existence."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Andre Malraux, The Voices of Silence. Paladin, Frogmore, St. Alban's, 1974, p. 525.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 525.

<sup>95</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, Meaning in Western Architecture, p. 220.

In view of these lofty ideals it should be remembered that architecture differs from the other plastic arts in that it is first and foremost a functional art. A building is constructed to fulfill some practical purpose. Porro clearly recognizes this when he says: "Every building has a utilitarian function; it is the *sine qua non* condition that provides the architect's frame of work."<sup>96</sup> However, while fulfilling this necessity for providing sheltered space to make possible some given social function, Porro does not revert to the train of thought prescribed to by so-called "functionalist" architects. Instead he says:

Among the arts, architecture is, perhaps, the most difficult to do because of the dialogue that must be established between the organization of life in the building and the space created as an aesthetic act. The architect's task is to romanticize the life in buildings. Writing this, I think of Novalis's definition: "The world must be romanticized. By giving an elevated significance to what is commonplace, a mysterious aspect to what is banal, the dignity of the ineffable to what is known, and an aura of infinity to what is finite, I romanticize."<sup>97</sup>

Hence Porro defines architecture as "...the creation of a poetic framework for the actions of man."<sup>98</sup>

All architecture involves the interrelation of form and content so, according to Porro, the content of architecture must be determined by the great collective dramas as well as by the concerns of a moment of civilization. The latter aspect of content he discusses in the aspect which he calls "mediate content". The great collective dramas or what he also refers to as "the problems inherent to the human condition"<sup>99</sup> are discussed by him in the introduction. He lists them thus: "Eros-love, death, nature, God, man, evil."<sup>100</sup> After devoting a paragraph or so to each of the preceding themes listed to discuss their historical significance and their manifestation in representative works of art which he selects to illustrate each one, he concludes by saying: "There are surely other

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<sup>96</sup> Ricardo Porro, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, p. 16 (Appendix B, p 408).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 37 (Appendix B, p. 423).

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 37 (Appendix B, p. 423).

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 32 (Appendix B, p. 419).

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 32 (Appendix B, p. 419).

themes inherent to human life that have inspired works of art. Those seem to me to be the most fundamental and the most permanent in their representation."<sup>101</sup>

Since the above listed themes are claimed by Porro to be the determinants of the content of architecture, his own as well as that of others throughout history, it is worthwhile to comment on these issues that he claims pervade before examining his five aspects of content--his methodology for exploring the content in architecture.

The first question raised by this finite list is their universality. Are these themes indeed said to be a concern for men of all ages and of all times? Porro would respond affirmatively. The question should be perhaps be relegated to a philosopher or perhaps to a cultural anthropologist. However, from the point of view of the Judeo-Christian Western tradition, these themes may indeed be considered universal. Beyond these bounds their universality becomes questionable.

These topics presented by Porro are fundamentally ontological questions. Content in art does not attempt to define these questions--they are by nature undefinable--but merely points to them. However, various *Zeitgeists* have dwelled on different ontological questions. If one, for instance, were to ask a Buddhist what the problems inherent to the human condition are, he would be likely to produce the following list: disease, old age, and death. Death is among those concerns listed by Porro. It may be argued that the other two concerns expressed by the Buddhist may be subsumed under the main category "death". Questioning individuals from a different cultural, religious, or philosophical provenance may uncover a different set of concerns. Yet if one were to be content with this list of six fundamental themes of mankind, or at least momentarily acknowledge that they indeed constitute the fundamental nature of content for the sake of proceeding with an examination of Porro's argument, then the nature of each one should be elucidated.

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36 (Appendix B, p. 422).

The first problem of the human condition listed by Porro is "Eros-love". He discusses the carnal or profane nature of love which leads man to reproduction of the species. He also discusses the spiritual or sacred facet of love which leads him to spirituality. He speaks of these two aspects of love which mix to produce states of ecstasy. He also mentions perverse love--love mixed with other emotions. For each of these he cites historical examples of how these various forms of love find expression in art. These examples range from Indian temple sculptures depicting the gods and goddesses in the act of coitus to Renaissance allegorical paintings as well as literary/philosophical works such as Plato's Symposium. It is significant that he employs the term "Eros" for this associates the notion of love to the particular significance given to it by Sigmund Freud. Eros, the life-force, is the polar opposite of Thanatos, the death instinct. In Eros and Civilization Herbert Marcuse remarks that, "[Freud's] metapsychology, attempting to define the essence of being, defines it as Eros--in contrast to its traditional definition as Logos. The death instinct affirms the principle of non-being (the negation of being) against Eros (principle of being)."<sup>102</sup>

Notably then is Porro's second topic of universal concern: Thanatos or death. Probably no other problem in the human condition has been the subject of man's creative imagination. Death is the termination of physiological processes as well as the cessation of consciousness. Fear is associated with death: fear of suffering, fear of non-existence. Hope of an afterlife is present in many religions. Porro does not even make these general observations regarding this topic. He does however make vast generalities about how death is expressed in art. For example he says: "All Egyptian art is based on the passage from death to the afterlife. Death is a constant in the Spanish mentality and, without a

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<sup>102</sup> Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud. Vintage Books, New York, 1962, p. 113.

doubt, the great art of the country is centered around this theme, but on its terrifying aspect."<sup>103</sup> His comments regarding death are very brief, generalized and incoherent.

Porro then goes on to discuss the third topic: nature. He does not, for instance, mention how nature was perceived as basically evil during the Middle Ages or about the emerging interest in nature as a subject in and of itself that came about with landscape painting. Instead, in a short paragraph he tries to drive the idea of the universality of a particular aspect of nature, the mountain, and how this element is expressed in architecture as a pyramid. He hints at the universality of this tendency by pointing out how various cultures built pyramids. However, he does not indicate how and why these were treated differently in each instance. He states, to one's amazement, that Brunelleschi's Pazzi Chapel is also a representation of nature in a more geometric fashion<sup>104</sup> but fails to indicate in what manner it accomplishes this.

The issue of the sacred, of divinity, is also listed as a central and reoccurring theme in the history of mankind. Porro suggests that this theme may be a synthesis of all the others. He suggests that, "In fact, one could say that art is only the history of the relationship between God and man--between the 'world below' and the 'world above'."<sup>105</sup>

His reference to 'above' and 'below' remind one of that great Chaldean initiate, Hermes Trismegistos, who teaches in his *Tabula Smaragdina Hermetis*: 'As above, so below'. Porro points to Art's relationship to religion throughout the ages. He recognizes the severing that has occurred between the two in the West since the end of the 18th century but fails to indicate in this section how the sacred has continued to manifest itself in art since then. He points to one element, the sky, whose representation in art has almost always had religious implications.

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<sup>103</sup> Ricardo Porro, *Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu*, p. 34 (Appendix B, p. 420).

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34 (Appendix B, p. 420).

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34 (Appendix B, p. 420).

Porro reveals through his writings, conversations and actions his adherence to Catholicism. Many of the images and symbols in his work are derived from Christian iconography. However, since his childhood he has had a fascination with world mythology, particularly Greek, and an interest in religion in general. These find their way into his work as well. His definition of art is closely tied to sacral adoration. He writes that, "The artist draws from history the most outstanding events and makes a true transubstantiation in the work of art."<sup>106</sup> He explains by saying, "I intentionally use religious terms to talk about art because art comes close to sacral adoration."<sup>107</sup> His belief in God is central aspect of his thought. It has an impact on all of his productions and formulations. Hence, for example, when he was interviewed by the author, in discussing the role and nature of artists he firmly stated that, "There is no creative artist who does not believe in God. There is no creator without an absolute. A creator without an absolute is not a creator."<sup>108</sup> These types of sophistic arguments and unshaken views are typical of Porro. They may be said to grant his work a strong thematic consistency. He, like most other artists, has his own set of obsessions. Perhaps his greatest goal is to manifest this sense of 'as above, so below' in his architecture. He conceives of man as a microcosm, as having been created in the image of God. Hence, in quite a literal sense, his greatest goal in the field of architecture is said by him to be to create a city in the form of a man.

Porro begins his discourse on the theme of by stating: "Man himself, this microcosm, has come to the scene and has been represented, whether to affirm his flesh or deny it."<sup>109</sup> Already it is seen in his treatment of this theme the presence of his Catholic background and outlook. He demonstrates an interest in man from a religious

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 26 (Appendix B, p. 416).

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 36 (Appendix B, p. 422).

<sup>108</sup> Ricardo Porro as quoted by Mariano Alemany, "An Interview with Ricardo Porro", May-Jun. 1994.

<sup>109</sup> Ricardo Porro, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, p. 34 (Appendix B, p. 421).

as well as a psychological perspective. He indicates that man's most intimate problems and fantasies have found their way into artistic expression not just with the advent of Freud's discovery of the unconscious and the Surrealists's colonization of that province but throughout the ages.

He recognizes this aspect of content in the work of art--the expression of the artist's private phantasms--but does not include it as one of the five aspects of content in his text on account that it has not yet been incorporated into the domain of architectural theory.

It is significant that Porro lists the last of what he considers to be the great themes of mankind as "the problem of evil" and not as "the problem of good and evil". This displays a certain pessimistic attitude on his part. He makes reference to the depiction of this topic in art as being possible both through concrete representations of evil in the form of demons as well as of the human depravity and horror represented through literary means by De Sade and Dostoevski or on paintings by Goya and Picasso. The problem of evil presupposes the duality, good and evil. Such dualities are prevalent in Porro's work. He takes delight in setting up the balance of opposites in his work, Eros and Thanatos for example, or Janus. Such dualities in western philosophy may be traced back to Heraclitus.

These six themes which have been discussed are the themes that have been present in great works of art throughout the ages. Indeed, it is their representation of these themes that make them universal. Art for Porro is a way towards knowledge of the human condition. It is a way of expressing the human condition. This knowledge, however, is only open to those prepared to establish a visual dialogue with the work of art, be it a painting, a sculpture, or a building. In conversation with the author, Porro remarked, "Art is not made for the masses. They only receive a sense of the prettiness of the form. The essence of the work of art is not received by the masses; it is received by



he who understands."<sup>110</sup> This argument which he presents is, of course, circular. In addition, it may be perceived to denote an elitist and ethnocentric stance towards artistic sensibility and interpretation.

Other contemporary architects have been concerned with this issue of communication by means of their buildings. There is a concern nowadays with what has been termed the 'narrative content' of a work of architecture. Yet the views on this subject are diversified. Some architects have developed a visual language which is rather personal and esoteric. Others have endeavored to present narratives that are more readily accessible to the general public. James Wines of the architectural firm SITE, Inc. wrote an article entitled "*Narrative Architecture*" in which he discusses this issue of narrative from his perspective. In his pluralistic attitude he proposes among other means of narrative architecture that the architect produce buildings based on his own personal experiences or anecdotes. This is indeed far removed from an attempt at universality. He also lists other forms of deriving content such as: "Buildings which reveal their own evolution (or biography of process) as the final message," or "Buildings which draw on ideas and images generated by mass media."<sup>111</sup>

The "quotation of form" or historical reference of historicist architects as well as a content based on popular culture lie outside of Porro's views which regard content as solely based on the great themes of mankind. His themes and elitist view on this subject stem from his strong sense of history, and knowledge of the classics in literature and philosophy. Themes taken from other art forms such as literature constitute an important influence in Porro's work. He makes this clear in his article, "*An Architectural Autobiography of Ricardo Porro*", where he states: "Architecture cannot be seen in isolation and I have been as much if not more influenced by philosophy and literature.

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<sup>110</sup>Ricardo Porro as quoted by Mariano Alemany, "An Interview with Ricardo Porro", May-Jun. 1994.

<sup>111</sup>James Wines, "Narrative Architecture", *Architecture and Urbanism* (extra edition), Dec. 1986.

Joyce, Proust and Mann, Dante or Shakespeare have given me as much as any architect."<sup>112</sup> This is in keeping with Porro's romantic desire to poeticize architecture.

Hence for Porro, unlike other contemporary proponents of so-called 'narrative architecture', the subject of architecture should be the expression of Man's eternal problems, a topic proper to philosophical discourse. Yet as Ernst Cassirer points out in An Essay on Man, "To poeticize philosophy and to philosophize poetry--such was the highest aim of all romantic thinkers."<sup>113</sup> Hence, the great philosophical questions become the true subject matter for art, as Cassirer points out: "The infinite had been declared to be the true, indeed the only, subject of art. The beautiful was conceived as a symbolic representation of the infinite."<sup>114</sup> This view of the world upheld by Romanticists is adhered to by Porro as well.

Having examined what Porro claims constitutes the content to be found in the architecture of all times as well as in his own, one may turn to the systematic analysis that he employs to study this aspect of a building, i.e., its content.

With regards to the interrelation between form and content, Porro comments: "It is in form that content is realized; one connected to the other forms a whole. Hegel expresses that when he writes, 'What is beautiful is only beautiful insofar as there is a balance between the idea and its objective representation.' Although logically inseparable, for this study I will separate them for the sake of convenience, and I will devote attention to content."<sup>115</sup>

These five aspects of content are defined and developed through historical examples in Porro's text. He discusses each of the five in turn in the following order: 1) immediate content, 2) persuasion, 3) tradition, 4) the superimposed image and 5) mediate

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<sup>112</sup> Ricardo Porro, "An Architectural Autobiography of Ricardo Porro", *Architecture and Urbanism*, March, 1994, No. 282, p. 63.

<sup>113</sup> Ernst Cassirer, An Essay on Man. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1972, p. 156.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>115</sup> Ricardo Porro, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, p. 41 (Appendix B, p. 424).

content. Deviating somewhat, the five points shall be discussed in the following order: 1) tradition, 2) immediate content, 3) the superimposed image, 4) persuasion, 5) mediate content. Each shall be explained and criticized in turn and applied to selected examples of Porro's work.

### 3.1 "Tradition"

Before examining the tradition or traditions in which Porro's buildings participate, it is important to indicate how Porro defines the term 'tradition' with reference to architecture. In the section of his text entitled "Tradition" he devotes only two pages to introductory remarks on the subject before he goes on to explore three distinct traditions: the French, the Roman, and the Dutch. Due to the lack of development and clarification of the term "tradition" the definition is vague and certainly open to questioning and criticism. Nonetheless, the essential remarks on this topic shall be gathered so as to form an operational definition of the term so that it may be applied to Porro's architecture. The shortcomings, concerns and doubts stemming from the brevity of this definition shall be pointed out. The central elements which make up his concept of tradition in architecture are as follows:

In Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu Porro states that tradition is a supra-individual element: "The spirit that marks the culture of a people is a way of doing something that varies according to the relationship between man and his environment and the man-to-man relationship: the organization of the group, their beliefs, their nourishment, their history. All these elements create psychological constants in men of a specific region."<sup>116</sup> Hence, within a given culture, "Tradition would be the element of this culture that would characterize any creative act."<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 71 (Appendix B, p. 440).

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 71 (Appendix B, p. 440).

Tradition, Porro observes, is not a fixed constant; instead, as he points out, "...it can evoke and become enriched with new elements and increase its formal vocabulary. But very often, traditions show a taste toward certain forms that are tied to the very origin of the tradition, and that taste remains a nostalgic attachment."<sup>118</sup>

Porro is careful to distinguish "tradition" from "folklore" and to point out that following a "tradition" does not entail mere copying of architectural features. He makes this point thus: "True tradition does not engage in demagoguery and does not need to copy the architecture of the past, that would be academism; true tradition is always creative: while it innovates, it conserves certain things which connect it with the past."<sup>119</sup>

There are traditions which have long been dead and traditions which have not yet been born. Porro cites the Egyptian and the Greek tradition as examples of dead traditions. He remarks that, "A tradition ends when the local culture weakens...."<sup>120</sup> On the other hand, he explains, "It can be said that a tradition is born at a given moment in a country when the local culture has characteristics strong enough to find their expression and continuity."<sup>121</sup>

Porro distinguishes between 'traditions' and 'movements' or 'schools'. Such geographically widespread movements as the Romanesque, Gothic, or Baroque, Porro affirms, are singularly manifested in each country and reflect the traditions of the local culture. Hence, he says, "The Gothic is certainly a European movement, but it is not the same everywhere. If there is a French Gothic, there is a Spanish and an Italian, each one with the mark of its country."<sup>122</sup>

After making these cursory remarks on tradition, Porro goes on to illustrate how tradition, one of the five aspects of content that may be discerned in

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 71 (Appendix B, p. 440).

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 70 (Appendix B, p. 440).

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 71 (Appendix B, p. 440).

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p. 71 (Appendix B, p. 440).

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 71 (Appendix B, p. 440).

architecture, is manifested in the French, Roman, and Dutch cultures. It should be noted that Porro does not hold this aspect of content to be a *sine qua non* condition of architecture. Only the mediate content is held by Porro to be a *sine qua non* condition.

Tradition is one of the five elements of artistic content discussed by Porro which may find expression via artistic form in an artistic medium. It is the manner in which cultural tradition manifests itself as artistic form. When he speaks of tradition, Porro is speaking about cultural tradition. Hence an examination of cultural tradition becomes a prerequisite to an understanding of artistic tradition. This, then, requires an investigation of cultural tradition and a definition of this concept.

The investigation of cultural tradition lies primarily in the sphere of cultural anthropology. In this branch of learning, culture is generally defined as the standards of a way of life. The most general types of standards may be summed up as: 1)ideas, 2) institutions, 3)material things--how they are used, and the relations to production. These standards that constitute culture may be analyzed at various levels or with regards to various parameters--i.e., social, geographic, economic, historic, etc.. Porro's treatment of cultural tradition has as its primary focus the predominant national cultural tradition. The examples from art and architecture which he uses to illustrate how this tradition finds expression in form respond to what he posits to be the predominant national cultural tradition.

Yet within nations there exists various sub-cultures. A nation, although a unified political whole, may not necessarily share in the same historical tradition. As an example, one may observe the various cultural traditions which exist within the United Kingdom which is made up of England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. Although politically unified, there remain various cultural differences. Also there always exist in any culture "imported" cultural traditions or imported artistic traditions. Certainly artists such as Hieronymus Bosch and Domenikos Theotokopoulos commissioned by Philip II came to Spain with their own traditions. In such cases it may

be explored to what degree their works influenced the native tradition or perhaps how their style was influenced by the native tradition or by the demands of their patrons.

Hence, cross-fertilization brought about through peregrinations, commerce, conquests and other forms of human exchange have shaped the character, or as Porro calls it, the "spirit", that marks a culture or a people of a given nation at a specified time. Porro sketchily outlines what the fundamental cultural constants are for a certain nation from his own perspective and then follows with an examination of how these have been expressed in the architecture. Hence, the first thing needed to establish the degree to which the artistic tradition reflects the cultural tradition is to examine the validity of the fundamental elements which are said to constitute that tradition. This analysis lies in the province of cultural anthropology, not of architecture. In the architectural examples which Porro chooses he omits those which do not conform to the cultural tradition or which may be said to have evolved from other cultural traditions.

Porro, in his analysis of tradition, is concerned with national tradition. Hence, the use of the term "nation" merits a brief discussion as to how it is being used. In his book Man the Measure, Erich Kahler examines the use of this term: "Usually the term *"nation"* is very carelessly employed. It is applied to ancient peoples as well, to the Egyptians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Jews. This is incorrect and inexact, as a nation has a definite social structure of its own, with special features and premises that were non-existent before the founding of the French nation. All the ancient peoples were either tribes and tribal states or sacred city-states. This means that, in all essentials, they were based on religion, and, accordingly, their particular religion; their characteristics were rooted in religion and first expressed in terms and forms of religion."<sup>123</sup> Hence the importance of sacred as opposed to secular principles as forming the essential traits of the culture of a people should be noted as regards to early civilizations. Kahler then

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<sup>123</sup> Erich Kahler, Man the Measure. George Braziller, Inc., New York, 1956, p. 193.

defines "nation" thus: "A nation is a temporal community, based on physical geography, folk character, on homogeneous living, on institutions and cultural forms that evolve from the combination of specific popular stocks with the specific conditions of a country."<sup>124</sup> Kahler then goes on to define tradition: "The sum of the profane customs and achievements of such a community gradually develops a body of instinctive memories, a *tradition*, and this tradition becomes religious in its profound significance. It is in itself the profane religion of a nation replacing the ancient particular religion, it is a religion for the every-day of mundane existence."<sup>125</sup>

One may certainly differ from the above given definitions cited from Kahler; others may certainly be proposed. Yet the necessity to fix the term "tradition" is of utmost importance to a subsequent understanding of the manner in which it is deployed. Porro fails to fix the terms that he subsequently uses in his discussion of tradition perhaps taking for granted that the reader possesses an understanding of its significance similar to that which he holds. However, this lack of precision obscures his argument.

Porro may have been influenced by Heinrich Wofflin in his formulations regarding national tradition as one of the elements of content to be discovered in art and architecture. In Principles of Art History Wofflin indicates that in addition to the period style--i.e., Renaissance or Baroque--should be added the national style which is the expression of the spirit of a nation. Wofflin predicted that, "The time will soon come when the historical record of European architecture will no longer be merely subdivided into Gothic, Renaissance, and so on, but will trace out the national physiognomies which cannot quite be effaced even by imported styles."<sup>126</sup> Wofflin held that, "...the modes of vision are refracted by nationality. There is a definite type of Italian or German imagination which asserts itself, always the same in all centuries."<sup>127</sup> Wofflin proposed

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>126</sup> Heinrich Wofflin, Principles of Art History, p. 235.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 235.

that Germanic art showed a greater predisposition towards the a-tectonic style than Italian art with its preference for the tectonic, for example.

Yet whereas Wolfflin's comments regarding national style pertain to modes of perception, Porro's distinctions between the national traditions is concerned with certain underlying psychological constants, what he refers to as "...a certain spirit which manifests itself in the forms."<sup>128</sup> Hence, he claims, that an examination of the history of architecture of a given national tradition will reveal the architectural tradition of that nation as "...a way to organize space, a comparable taste for certain forms."<sup>129</sup> His argument proposes that a certain perpetuity of thematic content manifests itself in these forms and spatial organizations.

Porro examines three national traditions in his text: the French, the Roman, and the Dutch. He first examines the French tradition because he claims that at present it is the closest to him.

The essence of the French tradition, according to Porro, is its adherence to reason. This rationalism, he points out, may be traced back to the origins of Scholasticism in the 11th century. Porro makes reference to Erwin Panofsky's Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism which discusses the parallels between the organization of the *Summa* and the spatial organization of the Gothic cathedrals. Clarity and hierarchical organization are cited as the key elements in both *Summa* and cathedral. He indicates that this tendency towards the rational which began in France during the Middle Ages has persevered into the twentieth century: "This spirit, which is the fruit of Scholastic thought, will shape the inner world of all French people and forge their way of thinking and mold an attitude towards life, which brings out the best that France has produced."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Ricardo Porro, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, p. 70 (Appendix B, p. 439).

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70 (Appendix B, p. 439).

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74 (Appendix B, p. 443).



After this initial supposition that clarity and rationality constitute the regulating principles of the French tradition, it is clear that all cultural manifestations which do not fit into this scheme will not be subsumed under it, or, in Porro's case, will be omitted. He cites historical examples which conform to his initial supposition, such as Chambord which he cites as an example which, some centuries after the rise of Scholasticism, still adhered to the rational foundations of geometry. With regards to the seemingly irrational appearance of the turrets which crown the chateau of Chambord, Porro comments: "This top part of the building has an irrational appearance but all excess is contained by the geometry of the base: it is a game between the rational and its opposite where the rational triumphs."<sup>131</sup> He again observes this phenomenon in the architecture of Le Corbusier. In the Villa Savoye, for example, Porro notes that "...the prism is topped with the volumetric freedom of the roof-garden."<sup>132</sup> Besides there is the rationalism inherent in Le Corbusier's urban planning and his principle that a house is a machine to live in. Porro observes this same principle of a rational base crowned by irrational elements in the architecture of Parisian townhouses where the regularity and rational organization of the facades is contrasted with the irrationality of the chimneys and dormers. So he concludes that, "Although styles and periods change, the structure of Scholastic thought remains and, with it, the geometry of the axes as a representation of thought..."<sup>133</sup>

Porro cites Rene Descartes, whose Discourse on Method and development of analytic geometry perpetuate the rationalism of the French tradition in the 17th century. Descartes conceived of Man as the possessor of a special rational faculty. Just as Panofsky makes a parallel between Scholasticism and the Gothic cathedrals, so Porro establishes a parallel between Descartes and Versailles: "The Cartesian spirit is illustrated in architecture by a grandiose example: the chateau, gardens and urbanization

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 74 (Appendix B, p. 443).

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 80 (Appendix B, p. 447).

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 74 (Appendix B, p. 443).

of Versailles."<sup>134</sup> The geometry in which the palace and grounds are arranged represent this rationality. The axes which go on uninterrupted to the horizon constitute a leitmotif of the French tradition. In addition, Porro points out: "All the elements are rendered geometrically, including the trees: geometry totally subdues nature. The manner in which the garden is organized by applying the analytical-scholastic spirit reminds us of the structure of the *Summa*: theology has disappeared, and the very structure of thought is expressed in this monarchical absolute."<sup>135</sup> Hence Porro accounts for the continuity of the same rational spirit in a culture whose origins were based on religion but later became secularized.

More recently, in the mid 19th century, the city planning of Paris by Baron Haussmann under the regime of Napoleon III revert to the same principles found in Versailles. Paris, too, is made up of primary and secondary axes, *rond-points* and axes which flow uninterrupted to the horizon. As Porro points out, "The geometry of these axes, the way in which the spaces are dissected, the structure of the city itself, with its central and secondary points derived from the first, its divisions and subdivisions, remind us again of the thinking in the *Summa*. The conception of the city is similar to that of Versailles and also similar to the structure of the spaces of the cathedral."<sup>136</sup>

In this manner, by selecting prime examples from French architecture and urbanism, Porro illustrates the continuity of the French tradition which, having passed through the diverse historical movements--Gothic, Baroque, etc.--still adheres to a pervading spirit which he calls rationalism. Hence, although the forms and styles through the ages vary, the architecture of France manifests its content in a predilection for certain modes of organization which respond to the necessity for rational order.

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 74 (Appendix B, p. 444).

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 76 (Appendix B, p. 444).

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 78 (Appendix B, p. 446).

A historical examination of architecture will reveal many new buildings are based on older buildings. This fact constitutes an important aspect of tradition. The materials and methods of construction employed in older buildings as well as their formal organizations are repeated in innumerable permutations in newer buildings which in turn serve as models for even newer buildings. This is done at worst for lack of inventiveness on the part of the architects or perhaps on account of the security which established modes of design offer. Yet also one of the reasons for reviving certain aspects of the architecture of another age or of gaining inspiration from the architecture of other places is due to the architects's desire to encompass in their work the values and meanings which they associate with the given tradition in which they participate.

Yet underlying this participation in a tradition is the architects's judgments and beliefs concerning the cultural tradition which is emulated and their interpretation of the thematic content of the forms used in that architectural tradition. Thereby it may be said that each architect, architectural critic and architectural historian establishes, based on his beliefs, the distinctive elements which constitute what is then termed an architectural tradition. Hence, in this case, one may see how one architect, Ricardo Porro, who also becomes architectural theorist and historian in his text, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, has interpreted the French tradition and pointed to those elements which he considers distinctive and essential to it. His esteem for this tradition will be witnessed by the fact that he proudly claims that many of his buildings participate in it. The following examination of his two Colleges in the suburbs of Paris will reveal to what extent they are found to participate in this tradition and in what manner they do so.

The College Elsa Triolet (completed in 1990) (figs. 26.1 to 26.13) will be the first of his buildings examined to see how this aspect of content, tradition, is expressed. In the text accompanying the drawings and photographs of this building in Porro's Oeuvres/Obras the following comment regarding the building's participation in the French tradition appears: "...the verticality, the play of lights, the presence of lights, the

presence of colored glass are an homage paid to the Abbot Suger and to Pierre de Montreuil, who gave us the neighboring basilica of Saint Denis, the world's first Gothic construction."<sup>137</sup> In addition, Porro noted the influence of the brick cathedral at Albi. Porro also pointed to the ornamental brickwork of the neighboring houses as a reason why he used brick (with some ornamental patterning as the budget permitted) as a means of linking the building to its site. Yet another model cited by Porro--yet another 'tradition' at play in this college--is the urbanism of Venice, not in its detail but in its fluidity of urban spaces.<sup>138</sup> This may be seen in the flowing circulation system in the school's interior and in the setting up of two interconnected plazas (figs. 26.1 and 26.2).

These observations and comments made by Porro regarding his building's participation in the French tradition, demonstrate the vast degree of separation between the sources that he refers to in commenting on the French tradition and of the elements in his building which may be said to participate in the French tradition. Furthermore, the sources that he employs in developing his concept of the French tradition, such as, for example Erwin Panovsky's Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism, are greatly diluted and simplified.

The observer of the College Elsa Triolet may discover yet other elements stemming from other traditions. In a review about the school written by Carl Gardner which appeared in the British journal, *World Architecture*, he finds other historical references such as the semi-circular "feather" pattern of brick on the facade which he ascribes to an Aztec or Mayan influence.<sup>139</sup> In addition, many find a similarity to the work of Antoni Gaudi. However, although Porro admires Gaudi's architecture, he also has closely studied the work of Michael de Klerk and other Dutch expressionist architects

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<sup>137</sup> Ricardo Porro, *Oeuvres/Obras*, p. 156 (Appendix A, p. 329).

<sup>138</sup> Observations and comments made by Porro to Mariano Alemany in "An Interview with Ricardo Porro", May-Jun. 1994.

<sup>139</sup> Carl Gardner, "School of Ecstasy", *World Architecture*, vol. 2, no. 8, issue no. 12, p. 66.

during the past couple of decades. Many formal elements in his latest works may be found to have an affinity with those used by architects of the Amsterdam school. This architecture, by the way, is far removed from the rationalism of the French tradition to which Porro alludes. Instead, the irrational elements in these works may be considered as precursors to Surrealism.

Such undeniably French movements which occurred in this century, such as Surrealism or the Existentialism expounded by such Frenchmen as Jean-Paul Sartre or Albert Camus, are not referenced by Porro as constituting part of the French tradition. Their siding with the irrational elements in man makes it difficult to include them as part of the French tradition if such a tradition is categorized as being primarily rational.

Indeed, by Porro's own account and by those of the observers and critics of his work, his buildings may be said to exhibit multiple influences. Although the historical references are not blatantly direct, yet there is a certain spirit in his work which may be said to participate in not one but several traditions. Yet before determining if indeed his work takes part in multiple traditions, an examination of the presence of the French tradition in his buildings constructed on French soil is befitting.

Porro's own comments regarding the building's participation in the French tradition make reference to two specific aspects of that tradition: the Gothic style and the ornamental brickwork of the facades of the vernacular architecture of Saint Dennis. Hence in designing his building he takes cues from the surrounding buildings. This is not at all unusual. It may be postulated that his buildings located on urban sites follow tradition more literally than do his buildings located in rural sites. That is to say, his urban projects display a closer affinity to the traditional formal elements of the architecture that surrounds them whereas his projects located in sites that are more removed from closely packed urban developments display a more poetic interpretation of tradition--(e.g., the School of Modern Dance, the School of Plastic Arts, the vacation village in Vela Luka are all situated in rural areas).

Yet it remains questionable whether in the case of the College Elsa Triolet the verticality of the building which he emphasizes through the pilasters crowned by semi-circular elements with water spouts which bear a distant similarity to the flying buttresses and gargoyles of Gothic cathedrals (fig. 26.4), the use of colored glass (fig. 26.6) again echoing the use of stained glass in the cathedrals, and the minimal use of ornamental brickwork corresponding to that of the neighboring vernacular architecture suffice to establish a link to the French tradition. Porro's building may by no means be classified as a revival style. It is questionable if the building's formal aspects are sufficiently similar to the formal elements of the historical buildings that surround it so as to allow the viewer to perceive that parallel. Porro would argue that his building manifests the spirit of the French tradition not through the copying of architectural features of past styles (as is done by certain architects that are labeled "historicist") but instead by the perpetuation of themes that connect it to the past which are enriched through new and innovative formal elements. In contrast to most post-Modernist architects, Carl Gardner observes, "Porro's method is subtle synthesis, not loud quotation."<sup>140</sup>

At the core of the French tradition, Porro has stated, there is rationalism. There is the use of geometry as a regulating principle and the employment of clearly pronounced axes as organizing principles. Yet in the Elsa Triolet school these elements are nowhere to be found. Instead, the flowing, restless appearance of the facade tamed by the rhythmically organized brick buttress and standardized use of fenestration (fig. 26.4) seems to convey more the feeling of the irrational element which tops the geometric regularity of the plans which follow in the French tradition.

In addition, by Porro's own admittance, the school's design is not solely indebted to the French tradition; there is an influence emerging from the organization of urban

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

spaces in Venice as well.<sup>141</sup> This, perhaps, is not readily recognized by most viewers; however, after being informed of this presence by its creator, one is likely to look for it and perhaps find it. Ricardo Porro, like any other artist, approaches a project with a whole set of intentions, some of which he is conscious of and other which do not become conscious. He or other observers of his work are likely to discover intentions, similarities, and influences which were not perceived at the time of the building's creation. The likelihood that the viewer may be able to discover the creator's intentions depends in part in his sharing the same cultural background and aesthetic predispositions as the creator. Yet certainly unexpected interpretations of the work may result. The work may in fact have multiple meanings. In the case of a viewer who is uneducated regarding cultural traditions the task of interpretation of the work becomes virtually impossible. Such a viewer would only be able to relate the work to his limited ahistorical experiences. Indeed such a viewer would miss out on obtaining the message contained in this aspect of content called tradition.

On the other hand, if the creator's references are too esoteric or based on very personal interpretations of a cultural tradition, his intentions at conveying a content based on tradition will remain inaccessible save to perhaps a few individuals. Also the tendency of many critics to establish connections to a cultural tradition based solely on the superficiality of architectural features can be misleading. Many historical examples of architecture may share certain formal similarities but stem from totally divergent cultural traditions and embody different meanings. For example, I. M. Pei's pyramid in the Louvre and the pyramids of Ghiza share little in common save for their pyramidal form.

Regarding the College Colonel Fabien in Montreuil, no comments about the building's tradition appear in Porro's writings nor did he comment on this aspect of the

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<sup>141</sup>Ricardo Porro in Mariano Alemany, "An Interview with Ricardo Porro", May-Jun. 1994.

building's content during his interview with the author. He did, however, point to the use of brick again on account of the prevalent use of this material in the vernacular architecture surrounding the school. Yet it shall be seen later, in the section dealing with another aspect of content, that of the superimposed image, that tradition itself is one of the themes of this work. For, as Porro points out, history is one of the themes expressed in this project. As Porro notes in the commentaries to his projects appearing in the March 1994 issue of *Architecture and Urbanism*, "For us architecture is a language, and from a poetic point of view, we tried to express one of the eternal problems of humanity: living in a world of contradictions. After all, history is contradiction."<sup>142</sup> These issues will be more closely examined in the section entitled "The Superimposed Image". For now, it suffices to say that many of the issues discussed with respect of the College Elsa Triolet also apply to Colonel Fabien on account of various formal similarities.

As Porro has pointed out, there comes a moment in the history of a people when the autochthonous culture arrives at a level of maturation which allows it to find its expression and continuity. Yet this expression, as exemplified by the cultural tradition to be examined next, does not develop simultaneously and at the same rate in all the arts. Some may exhibit evolvment at a faster rate of others which perhaps remain undeveloped on account of certain influences which shall be examined.



There is a project done by Ricardo Porro in the early 60s which he claims gave rise to a new tradition in architecture. That project is the School of Plastic Arts in Havana. Porro claims that this building's content expresses the emergence of the Cuban tradition. Cuba was, together with Puerto Rico, the last of the Spanish colonies in the Americas. It was freed from Spain after the Spanish-American war. Hence, its history as an independent nation is less than a century old. Its written history commences

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<sup>142</sup>Ricardo Porro, "15 Works", *Architecture and Urbanism*, no. 282, Mar. 1994, p. 48.



with Columbus's arrival there in 1492 and its colonization shortly thereafter. Unlike other Latin American nations, the aboriginal peoples of the island--the Tainos and Siboneys--moved out or died off shortly after the conquest. Hence neither the Indian racial features nor the aboriginal culture are manifested in the Cuban peoples. Instead, two principal cultures found their way into the island: the Spanish and the African. A large mestizo population resulted from the marriage of these two cultures, ethnically as well as culturally. People from other parts of Europe and the Middle East also arrived at the island. Chinese also arrived. These latecomers were generally absorbed by the mainstream of the population.

Such cultural elements became manifest as distinct emergent traditions in the arts such as music and dance as well as literature. The mainstream of the population participated in and supported these arts. The country's elite, however, clung on to imported European models in the arts and looked down upon popular native forms of expression. In the realm of architecture, the elite, of course, were the wealthy patrons for which architecture was built. The buildings constructed during colonial times and into the twentieth century followed the models and tastes of Europe.

Of all the arts in Cuba it is music which undoubtedly first emerged as a distinct national tradition which incorporated African rhythms and European melodies in a unique blend. Although the music of the Yoruba people of Nigeria was preserved as the ritual music which accompanied the rites of the Santeria religion and European trained musicians continued the European classical music tradition on the island, a unique Cuban tradition emerged. It was not the *rumba*, the *habanera* or the *son*--it was the *danzon*, which most notably made use of European instrumentation such as the flute, violin and piano which performed baroque derived melodies atop of a rhythmic base carried out by the African derived percussion. This music was heard and enjoyed by all spheres of Cuban society. The dances that accompanied this music also evolved into a distinctly national style.

In art a distinctively Cuban subject matter as well as stylistic treatment began to emerge, though not at the same pace of development as music. The paintings of Carlos Enriquez, such as *El rapto de las mulatas* (*The rape of the mulattas*)(1938), has a marked erotic (and violent) content. Wifredo Lam eroticized the Cuban landscape in his paintings. Another painter of Cuban origin, Francis Picabia, a proto-surrealist, would produce a work, as observed by the contemporary Cuban poet and art critic, Carlos M. Luis, "...totally devoid of rigid aesthetic criteria, who would let slip into his work something which has always called so much attention to the Cuban: '*el relajo*', that is to say, a slackening of the serious packaging of things, in favor of an interpretation of life devoid of all seriousness."<sup>143</sup>

This manifestation or engagement of the above term, '*relajo*', is present also in the literature of the island, in the novels of Guillermo Cabrera Infante, for example. The work of Alejo Carpentier, classified as magic-realism by many critics, also displays an affinity towards the expression of eroticism. Yet perhaps nowhere is this all-encompassing eroticism more prevalent than in the person and the work of Jose Lezama Lima, as is pointed out by Carlos M. Luis in his essay "Eros Lazamiano". Ricardo Porro admires the work of Lezama Lima and knew him personally.

Not only in the sphere of literature but also in the popular poetry and song lyrics this erotic charge may be found to be an ever-present element of Cuban culture. As Porro points out in his essay "Cuba y Yo" ("Cuba and I"), "Cuba is not rationalistic, the oneiric is the constant."<sup>144</sup> Examples of some of these popular lyrics, many of which predate the founding of the Surrealist movement, points to the pervasive predilection towards the oneiric in that culture.

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<sup>143</sup> Carlos M. Luis, "Eros Lezamiano", *Ujule, Revista de Arte y Literatura*, no. 1-2, Summer-Fall 1994, p. 58.

<sup>144</sup> Ricardo Porro, "Cuba y Yo", *Escandalar*, vol. 5, no. 1-2, Jan.-Jun. 1982, p. 154.

Yet an examination of the architecture of Cuba will reveal that, unlike in the other arts, there is a conspicuous absence of the oneiric and of the erotic. Architecture is an art patronized by the elite whose outlook on life lies outside of the tendencies exhibited by the popular culture. A history of Cuban architecture will reveal the impact of European architecture on the island. The first fortifications built on the island were designed by Italian engineers. The first churches built there were designed by Spanish priests based on Spanish baroque models. The houses were built by Andalusian masons following the traditions of their land. Later these prototypes were adopted as models by Cuban born builders. Later still, the architecture may be seen as an interpretation of an interpretation. In the early part of the 20th century the first Cuban architectural firms emerged. The founders of these firms were for the most part Cuban architects who had studied in the United States, especially at Columbia University. They brought with them the Beaux Arts tradition and various forms of eclecticism. Also there were various forms of 20th century interpretations of Cuban colonial architecture. Yet all of these forms of architectural expression may be classified as modifications of a precedent, through the use of traditional materials and methods of construction, and/or direct quotation of architectural form. It may be added that 20th century movements such as Art Deco and the International style also found their way into the architecture built in Cuba. The "concept" of the Cuban tradition and attempts to give architectural form to the Cuban cultural tradition had been neglected.

The Cuban revolution of 1959 displaced the interests of what had been the country's elite, and made possible in its origins, before it too became bureaucratized, new opportunities for experimentation in architecture. Among these experiments was the building of five schools of the arts supervised by Ricardo Porro. It is in his School of Plastic Arts that the Cuban tradition in architecture, Porro claims, is given expression for the first time.

There is, of course, much more to the Cuban tradition than the erotic and the oneiric which has been referred to. Porro recognizes this but isolates this erotic and oneiric aspect which he believes to be a psychological constant of Cuban culture. He realizes that "there is so much in every tradition that it is impossible to express it all in one work. And there is much also in Cuba. What there is of a liberating feat. Important, hymn and flag and Marti have nothing to do with me."<sup>145</sup> Hence Jose Marti, the Cuban patriot and poet idolized by the Cuban people, is replaced from the pinnacle of Porro's personal pantheon by the Jose Lezama Lima. As Porro states in his essay, "Cuba y Yo", "Nothing is so universal and so Cuban as the greatest man to be born in Cuba: Jose Lezama Lima."<sup>146</sup> Porro compares Jose Lezama Lima to James Joyce in that they both took the local culture to a universal plane. This also is Porro's intention in the School of Plastic Arts.

In addition, Porro draws from traditional Cuban architecture for his inspiration in this project. While disregarding the neoclassical and neogothic styles which find expression in many 19th century buildings, he turns to what may be said to be the dominant architectural style which has characterized most of the island's buildings since colonial times: the baroque.

The baroque style of architecture came to Cuba via the southern region of Spain, Andalusia. Therefore, the Churrigueresque style which became promulgated in other parts of Latin America (such as Mexico) did not find its way to Cuba. As pointed out by Joaquin Weiss in La Arquitectura Colonial Cubana (Cuban Colonial Architecture), "As opposed to the over-ornamentation, to the effects of chiaroscuro, and to the nervous vertical accent of these [Spanish] models, the Cuban constructions are distinguished by their cubic form and their thick and plain walls, over which functional elements strongly stand out, while the voluminous roofs soften the rigidity of the walls in their transit to the

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

sky line and produce a general effect of repose with their tendency towards horizontality."<sup>147</sup>

Hence, Porro refers to the style of architecture derived from Spain and modified in Cuba as a "moderate creole baroque".<sup>148</sup> He indicates that, "The Spanish harshness is lost in the sensual.... The mystic and the tragic of the Spanish baroque have no prevalence in Cuba.... There only arrives the diminished form, simplified and sweetened."<sup>149</sup>

These architectural precedents in Cuba are linked together with the erotic element of Afro-Cuban culture. As Porro affirms, "Much in the Negro rite is sex. It is like the coitus of man and the earth.... And if the White is sensual, the Negro is frankly sexual, and this sexuality permeates all.... The more sifted sensuality of the White and the more candid sexuality of the Negro give that oneiric and sensual baroque which at times arrived at a paroxysm."<sup>150</sup> This syncretism of the White and Black elements of Cuban culture--the same ones that produced the mulatto--produce, according to Porro, a sensuality and a sexuality that is everywhere felt in Cuba. It is the expression of these constants which Porro attempts in his School of Plastic Arts. As Porro states, "This work wanted to be the image of the Cuban Eros, which touches the Eros of all men...."<sup>151</sup>

Porro believes that his School of Plastic Arts is baroque in the Wolfflinian sense. He states: "I parted from the baroque of Cuban architecture to arrive at another which falls fully in that which Wolfflin defined."<sup>152</sup> He does not elaborate as to the parallels between his work and Wolfflin's definition of the term baroque. However, he goes on to say: "From the entry arches that like funnels suck in to the game of continuous relations

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<sup>147</sup> Joaquin E. Weiss, *La Arquitectura Colonial Cubana*, Editorial Pueblo y Educacion, Havana, 1985, p. 16.

<sup>148</sup> Ricardo Porro, "Cuba y Yo", *Escandalar*, vol. 5, no. 1-2, Jan.-Jun. 1982, p. 154.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

which never closes, there is a movement which at times infinitizes itself or going in other directions turns into a snake that bites its tail. One plays at the continuous, at that which never stops. All in a constant coming into being and to describe it is impossible, one has to see it and walk it, here enters the ineffable."<sup>153</sup> This continuous movement without accent or culmination, it will be recalled, is unlike the baroque described by Wolfflin. It may, however, be termed neo-baroque.

There are other elements derived from Cuban architectural precedents to be found in the School of Plastic Arts. Porro comments on these: "But there are also the secondary courtyards where one feels Camaguey and the architecture of *tinajones*<sup>154</sup> of my infancy."<sup>155</sup> To this should be added the similarities of the spatial organization of the school to the traditional colonial houses of Cuba, particularly those of the Camaguey province, organized around inner courtyards. As pointed out by Joaquin Weiss, "Since the 17th century... the patio had been the principal element of the distribution, the focus of family life and the principle element of lighting and ventilation in the Cuban house."<sup>156</sup>

Yet all of these formal and organizational elements are at the service of the content which Porro wishes to instill in his work, the expression of Eros, which he deems appropriate for a school of the arts. As he explains: "All of us, whether we be in Australia, Sweden, Senegal or Cuba, carry within us these two poles, Eros and Thanatos. Eros is life and a school of art can be no other thing than gestation, fecundation."<sup>157</sup> To this aim Porro will use other aspects of content, such as "the superimposed image" and "persuasion".

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>154</sup> tinajones: (Pl. of tinajon): Large round earthen vessels autochthonous to the Camaguey province of Cuba which were traditionally used to collect rainwater.

<sup>155</sup> Ricardo Porro, "Cuba y Yo", *Escandalar*, vol. 5, no. 1-2, Jan.-Jun. 1982, p. 156.

<sup>156</sup> Joaquin E. Weiss, *La Arquitectura Colonial Cubana*, Editorial Pueblo y Educacion, Havana, 1985, p. 22.

<sup>157</sup> Ricardo Porro, "Cuba y Yo", *Escandalar*, vol. 5, no. 1-2, Jan.-Jun. 1982, p. 156.

Still other elements deriving from precedents other than Cuban may be seen in this work by Porro. Porro cites the spirit of the urbanism of Venice as an influence in his organizing the spaces of the school. In the interview with the author he referred specifically to the city in the island of Burano where clothes are hung outdoors, food is oftentimes prepared outdoors, women sew outdoors, pets wander through the outdoor spaces--these examples all point to a prolongation of the interior spaces to the outdoors. For Porro this represents the most convivial of spaces. Hence through the development of patios and plazas interconnected to the school's interiors he attempted to catalyze human communication.

Although not mentioned by Porro, the configuration pattern of the School of Plastic Arts bears a similarity to the organization of West African villages. Similarities in the round or oval shape of the rooms and the configuration of these units around a central court may be seen in Bushman or Musgum villages. This has been noted by such critics of his work such as Alberto Ferrari<sup>158</sup> and Joseph Rykwert<sup>159</sup>. The materials and methods of construction--that of Catalonian vaults--derive from yet another tradition, that of Catalonia.

Hence in this one work, the School of Plastic Arts, one may witness that not one but several cultural traditions are manifested. This may be so if one fixates upon the derivation of the various forms which make up the composition or their possible associations with preexisting forms. Porro does not intend to merely quote historical styles in his composition or to bring together diverse styles into a unified whole. Rather his intent is to transpose an aspect of the Cuban cultural tradition which existed in a different context, that of music and poetry, into the context of architecture. His attempt is to take the context of the Cuban cultural tradition to a universal context. Yet in

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<sup>158</sup> Alberto Ferrari, "L'immaginazione al potere", *Casabella*, no. 386, Feb. 1974, p. 30.

<sup>159</sup> Joseph Rykwert, "L'Opera di Ricardo Porro", *Controspazio*, ano ii, no. 3, Mar. 1970, p. 4.

attempting to do so, he incorporates, by his own admittance, elements deriving from other cultural traditions. Therefore, the observation made by Jose Lezama Lima in a dedication of one of his books to Ricardo Porro, is quite apt at recognizing this confluence of influences in the young architect's work: "To Ricardo Porro, who unites the cloister, the *tinajon* and the ogive."<sup>160</sup> Hence in his aspiration to create for the first time a Cuban tradition in architecture, Ricardo Porro attempts to combine and transcribe the sensuality which he finds inherent in the Cuban baroque and the erotic nature of Afro-Cuban music and dance to which may be added other non-Cuban sources of inspiration, all coming together in a collage-like fashion to form a distinctive architectural style which he claims to be expressive of the Cuban tradition, and to elevate these to a universal form of expression. In this manner Porro attempts to create what he refers to as an architecture adapted to man. As he stated when recently interviewed: "An architecture adapted to man is an architecture which explains and expresses him, in which Man can recognize himself. The building and the city should return to Man the image of his own history, of his values and even of his fantasies."<sup>161</sup>



However, Porro's work done in Cuba in the early sixties is an isolated instance of this attempt to give expression to the Cuban tradition in architecture. Yet, many critics, unfamiliar with his subsequent work, and on account of the great publicity received by Porro's projects in the early years of the Cuban revolution, insist upon the eroticism of his architecture. Yet after his departure from Cuba three decades ago, Ricardo Porro has not reverted to any conscious efforts to express the Cuban tradition. Projects which have gone up in Cuba since then have not perpetuated the tradition which he initiated; rather they have followed the style of Modernism and Post-Modernism. Ricardo Porro does not

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<sup>160</sup> Jose Lezama Lima as quoted by Ricardo Porro in "Cuba y Yo", *Escandalar*, vol. 5, no. 1-2, Jan.-Jun. 1982, p. 156.

<sup>161</sup> Ricardo Porro as quoted by Mariano Alemany in "An Interview with Ricardo Porro", May-Jun 1994.



feel it appropriate to design buildings which express the Cuban tradition outside of the island of Cuba. He opines instead that the tradition expressed by a building should be in response to the environment in which the building is situated. As he stated in an interview which appeared in a Venezuelan publication: "When one arrives at a country one has to submerge oneself in it and to try to do what the country is. When I have had projects in Iran, I try to penetrate inside what Iran is, to do an Iranian project. One thing is the personal stamp and another is the spirit of the country. I believe in tradition, in the soul of a people, that one has to respect. The architecture which I did in Cuba I cannot do in France."<sup>162</sup> This in part may account for the lack of thematic continuity in the work of Porro.

The examples provided by two of Porro's unrealized commissions in Iran, Villa Teheran (1975) (fig. 11.1) and Villa Ispahan (1975) (figs. 12.1 to 12.6) illustrate how Porro adapts his architecture to the cultural tradition in which his buildings are sited. In both of these projects religious iconography is used as a means of linking the building to the site. In the case of the Villa Teheran, it is an iconography derived from ancient Persian mythology; in the Villa Ispahan, the image of the Garden of Eden is the central image to which all forms become subordinated.

Other examples in which the project is linked to the site's mythological and/or historic past may be observed in many other of Porro's projects. This propensity of his towards the mythic may be traced back to his childhood years, as he explains in his article, "An Architectural Autobiography of Ricardo Porro", particularly through his absorption at a young age of Greek mythology and the wondrous tales of "A Thousand and One Nights".<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Ricardo Porro in an interview with Maria Teresa Novoa and Yamandu Botella, "Siete arquitectos en medio del S.A.L.: Arquitectura para la integracion Latinoamericana", *Inmuebles*, 2nd year, no. 11, May 31, 1993, p. 69.

<sup>163</sup> Ricardo Porro, "An Architectural Autobiography of Ricardo Porro", *Architecture and Urbanism*, no. 282, Mar. 1994, p. 60.

Hence, the linking of the project for a vacation village (1972) to its site in Vela Luca in the island of Korcula in Yugoslavia (figs. 10.1 to 10.4) is established via the mythical connection of the Argonauts who supposedly colonized the island. The "superimposed image" of a giant submerged in the water stems from this mythological association.

Likewise, in his office building and exhibition hall in Liechtenstein (figs. 8.1 to 8.6), completed in 1974, the cultural tradition which Porro claims is manifested by the building arises from mythical and historical sources. It is by no means a quoting of the vernacular architecture of this small principality. In this project the source of inspiration and the tradition which Porro desires to manifest is that of the Rhinegold. Yet in addition, he also makes reference to the heritage of Austrian rococo architecture, on account that Liechtenstein was once a part of Austria. To these may be summed what Porro terms "...different levels of intentions in the building."<sup>164</sup> These include the mythical figure of Prometheus as well as the historical figure of Paracelsus and the alchemists. In addition, Porro makes reference to the Nietzschean superman. Hence, this building has purported multiple links to the cultural tradition of Liechtenstein. Yet how these esoteric references and intentions become manifest in the building's architectural form is a question to be explored further on when discussing the "superimposed image" in the work of Porro. The question remains as to what degree the observer is capable of gathering this multiplicity of historical and mythological references which Porro intends to imbue in his buildings.

In the examples that have been presented one may witness that Porro typically does not adhere to any one tradition in his projects but rather freely takes, as though through free association, from as many traditions as he feels are necessary to support the thematic base of his project. When interpreting a cultural tradition, Porro extracts from it

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<sup>164</sup>Ricardo Porro, "15 Works", *Architecture and Urbanism*, no. 282, Mar. 1994, p. 24.

certain elements and combines these with other elements, at times foreign to the tradition. These various manifestations may be categorized as one of montage or collage. The resulting form of his projects may be interpreted in this manner resulting from his subjective eclecticism of forms derived from historical examples but stylized to suit his purposes. By subjective eclecticism it is meant that Porro quotes and modifies historical precedents, sometimes quite superficially, and mends these together to form a cohesive whole in which the individual constituent elements may, upon close examination, still be identifiable, yet their significance has been altered on account that they have been removed from their original context. The various distinct elements have been assembled together to form a greater whole in which their individual identities lose themselves.

Other architects have historically and even today made an attempt to establish a link between the project and the site via historical and/or mythological allusions. For example, in Steven Holl's Berkowitz-Odgis house in Martha's Vineyard completed in 1985, a literary connection is made with the site which was an important whaling center in the 19th century. Hence, the architect established a connection to certain passages in Herman Melville's literature.<sup>165</sup> Adherence to just one literary reference is difficult enough in accomplishing legibility of the reference in the architecture without complicating matters by incorporating multiple references. In this example, as in Porro's or in that of others who have attempted to base their projects not in the current existing tangible reality but instead on cultural, literary and religious traditions, the connection may not become obvious unless the observer is familiar with the historical and literary antecedents to which the project responds. Furthermore, the manner in which these elements are transcribed to the architecture must be handled with great care so as not to be overly literal on the one hand or exceedingly far removed on the other for otherwise the meaning may be said to become lost in the translation from one art form to another.

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<sup>165</sup> Thomas Fisher, "A Literary House", *Progressive Architecture*, Dec. 1988, p. 62.

Yet as pointed out by Bernard Tschumi, who in following Jacques Lacan's concepts regarding the lack of cause and effect relationship between the signifier and the signified, states that, "...the architectural signifier does not represent the signified."<sup>166</sup> Porro may be said to be an architect who follows in the vein of *classical realism* which, according to Tschumi, "...attempts to give all forms expressive value..."<sup>167</sup> However, according to Tschumi, "...any 'new' architecture implies the idea of combination, that all form is the result of a combination."<sup>168</sup> Hence, according to Tschumi, there is no inherent meaning in architectural form; whatever meaning there may be said to be is a function of the observer's projected meaning or, in the case of Porro, the architect's intended meaning. Hence, multiple interpretations may be arrived at, each one in turn subject to interpretation. The concept of "tradition" is but one of the items open to interpretation. Ultimately, it too may be seen as the result of combination. Hence, Tschumi considers the architect primarily as "...an inventor of relations".<sup>169</sup>

Porro most certainly display a degree of combination and permutation reminiscent of collage. However, whether Porro does so consciously or not is questionable. He gives no verbal indication that he resorts to this technique.

Porro's buildings do not display the participation to the French Rationalist tradition which Porro expounds in his text, and show even less resemblance to such a tradition in accordance with Panovsky's observations on this theme. At best, certain elements derived from Gothic architecture, such as buttresses, stained glass and gargoyles, although stylized *a la Porro*, can be classified as elements deriving from the forms found to occur and reoccur in French architecture. Certain thematic leitmotifs, such as axes ending in infinity, may be said to be the sole elements found in some of his

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<sup>166</sup> Bernard Tschumi, Architecture and Disjunction, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1994, p.221.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 180-181.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

buildings, such as the apartments in Stain (figs. 24.10 and 24.11), which conform in some sense to the characteristics of the French tradition of which he speaks. However, even if these elements are to be considered as significant elements of the French tradition, their conjunction with other elements derived from other traditions obscure their participation within the French Rationalist tradition. Hence, in conclusion, what Porro writes of is not what he builds (although he insistently may think so).

In other examples, such as the two unrealized projects for houses in Iran--Villa Teheran (1975) (fig. 11.1) and Villa Ispahan (1975) (figs. 12.1 to 12.6), if indeed there is an adherence to tradition it is difficult to discover it by examining the formal similarities between Porro's designs and the architecture of Persia. In these examples, the link to tradition is established not via the building traditions native to a region but instead through an allusion to the mythological and/or historical tradition of the region. Porro selects and isolates a particular aspect of this 'non-visual' tradition in order to translate these into form.

An exaggerated example of this tendency is to be found in the previously mentioned project for a vacation village in Yugoslavia (1972) (figs. 10.1 to 10.4). The anthropomorphic forms exhibited in this project bear no resemblance whatsoever to the building traditions of this area of the Adriatic. Instead, just as Porro did in the case of the two Cuban schools, the link to tradition arises via a 'translation' of other cultural elements (mythical in the case of the vacation village) into architectural form. While not perpetuating the formal elements of the tradition, and perhaps even making use of formal elements derived from other traditions, it certainly gives rise to original formal compositions. The viewers knowledge of these 'non-visual' tradition, i.e., history, mythology, etc., is necessitated in order to establish a link between the building and the tradition to which it alludes to via its material form.

Nevertheless, Porro's discussion of tradition follows in a long tradition which may be traced back to ancient Egypt: making reference in his works to tradition and to other

aspects of culture, such as the eternal problems of man, and, in general, to insist that architecture must have meaning, Porro recognizes, may not be his own discovery, for as he states, "...I hesitate to call it my own since I am convinced that it had been used at least since the building of the Egyptian pyramids."<sup>170</sup> This tradition has endured into the twentieth century. However, now more than ever before, with the questioning of the nature and definition of art and architecture, the basis of this ancient tradition has become suspect by the newly developing critical 'traditions'. Only time will tell what will become of this humanist tradition. However, it shall be recalled that there have been numerous revolutionary episodes in other spheres of culture. The basis of religion, for example, has been scrutinized, criticized and rejected by many in modern times. Nonetheless, there are still mystics in the twentieth century.

### 3.2 The "Immediate Content"

This aspect of content, the "immediate content" is the term employed by Ricardo Porro to refer to the subject matter of a work of art, whether it be painting or architecture. Of all the aspects of content this, he claims, is the most immediately understandable. It serves as a starting point for a deeper understanding of the work. Porro indicates that the immediate content corresponds to what Erwin Panovsky called "...the primary meaning of the natural."<sup>171</sup> An examination of Panovsky's writings, such as his introduction to Studies in Iconology, show that the term actually used by Panovsky is "primary or natural subject matter".<sup>172</sup> According to Panovsky, the process of identifying visual stimuli (line, shape, color, etc.) as representations of natural objects (plants, animals, buildings, etc.) and in turn identifying their mutual relations constitute the first step towards an

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<sup>170</sup> Ricardo Porro, "An Architectural Autobiography of Ricardo Porro", *Architecture and Urbanism*, no. 282, Mar. 1994, p. 63.

<sup>171</sup> Ricardo Porro, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, p. 44 (Appendix B, p. 426).

<sup>172</sup> Erwin Panovsky, Studies in Iconology, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1962, p. 5.

iconographical description of a work of art. The successful identification of what Panovsky calls "artistic *motifs*" makes possible the subsequent iconographical analysis and interpretation of a work of art.<sup>173</sup>

Porro employs the term "immediate content" to refer to the subject matter of a work of art in that this, he determines, "...is the closest to us, it is the most immediately comprehensible."<sup>174</sup>

Porro builds up his definition through examples-- first through paintings, then through architecture. He cites various sites of worship from various times and places: St. Sabina, Reims Cathedral, Guimard's Synagogue, Ronchamp, Mies van der Rohe's ITT Chapel. After briefly describing each building, he makes the following general observation: "In most cases, the theme of temple is clearly manifested in the form. In that of Mies van der Rohe, that function is not expressed: it is a glass prism like the other buildings he has constructed in that region."<sup>175</sup>

Consequently, he formulates a definition of immediate content: "I would say that the immediate content exists in a building where its program, its function is expressed in its form."<sup>176</sup> It should be noted that he stipulates that this aspect of content is not a *sine qua non* condition of architecture. He goes on to discuss the formal results of the presence of this aspect of content or, said in another way, the formal manifestations that reveal this aspect of content. Porro states: "If the immediate content is visible, the building has not only a volumetric richness displaying each internal function but its forms psychologically aid the spectator in associating them to their function. The suggestive sense that of each form contributes to make clear its functionality, that is to say the intrinsic expression of the building."<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p. 5 and 14.

<sup>174</sup> Ricardo Porro, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, p. 44 (Appendix B, p. 426).

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 46 (Appendix B, p. 427).

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 46 (Appendix B, p. 427).

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p. 46 (Appendix B, p. 427).

Thus, it may be said that the degree to which a building expresses its inner life-- its function, its program-- is the degree to which the immediate content is expressed. When a building does not disclose its function to an observer, its immediate content is not apparent. It may be gathered from these statements that the viewer's interpretation of the visual stimuli provided by the building will play a decisive role in his determination of the presence or absence of this aspect of content. This interpretation will be based on past experience, the viewer's personal as well as cultural past.

Porro recognizes this in discussing the notion of an archetypal image of a building. He states that, "There is an archetypal image with which we associate certain buildings. The immediate content compares the building to this first image."<sup>178</sup> Porro does not elucidate the meaning of 'archetypal image' in his writings. It does not appear to be employed in the way that Carl Jung would use the term to refer to something lying in the collective unconscious but rather to traditional forms that have become associated with certain functions in a building. Nor is he using the term in the way practiced by Aldo Rossi who repeats the same so-called archetypal images in projects with differing functional programs.

The idea about the derivation of the immediate content from traditional forms is hinted at when Porro discusses how the pediment in the ancient Greek house became the symbol of house. In turn, the pediment was used in the temple, to designate it as the House of God. He makes reference to Palladio with respect to this evolution in the use of the pediment. He upholds Palladio's houses as prime examples which manifest the immediate content.

His discussion of immediate content overlaps a discussion of what in many circles of architectural criticism is often referred to as hierarchy. For example, he discusses the size and lavishness of rooms in accordance to the program for which they were designed.

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 48 (Appendix B, p. 427).



This may be seen to fall under a discussion of hierarchy. Also, this discussion overlaps Alberti's contentions regarding what he termed decorum.

The degree to which spaces demonstrate their usage is not solely determined through their physical dimensions. Porro suggests that other elements such as light may signal the hierarchy of spaces. For example, in discussing the Market of Les Halles by Baltard, he comments: "A diffuse light reinforces the impression that no point is more important than another."<sup>179</sup>

Porro cites Aalvar Aalto's buildings, particularly the House of Culture in Helsinki, as examples where the immediate content is clearly manifested. He says with reference to Aalto: "One of the pillars of his aesthetic is to express the internal life of his buildings."<sup>180</sup> This may be conceived as a certain 'sincerity' of expression in his architecture. On the other hand, he cites Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye and Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion as buildings which do not manifest the immediate content, i.e., their exterior form does not manifest their inner workings.

Hence Louis Sullivan's dictum, "Form follows function" may be applied, Porro attests, to those buildings where the immediate content is evident. Although Sullivan made this pronouncement, he was by no means the first architect to follow in these principles which have been known and applied since antiquity. Alberti with his notion of *decorum* had already preached about how there was a hierarchy of building types, how building types such as a temple should employ more lavish ornamentation than the house, and how, in turn, the different rooms in a building should make apparent their hierarchical importance according to their size, form and ornamentation.

The architects of the Enlightenment, Ledoux and Boullée for example, had put into practice the notion of *une architecture parlante* whereby the building's theme and function was advertised in its formal configuration and ornamentation. A more extreme

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 54 (Appendix B, p. 425).

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., p. 56 (Appendix B, p. 431).

example is to be found in their roughly contemporary colleague, Jean Jacques Lequeu, in the exorbitant specimen of a barn depicted in the form of an immense cow executed in an overly realistic (surrealistic?) fashion.

Yet even in the architecture of the United States, the so-called archetypes, or what may preferably be considered building types resulting from an adherence to a national tradition, make the identification of a building's function (in most cases, though not all) effortless for the observer. Often this national tradition is carried over from one culture to the next. For example, in the United States, an innumerable number of government buildings and banks have made use of elements inherited from the classical tradition such as Corinthian columns, pediments, egg and dart mouldings, etc. Although the associations to the worship of deities and of sacrifice symbolized by the building's ornamentation is no longer in the mind of the American observer, still the style is associated with buildings having a particular type of function associated with official business.

In the 1960s Robert Venturi expounded his notion of the decorated shed. The building facade is capable of announcing (currently as well as historically) the theme or activities occurring in a building--a building whose spatial organization and content may at times resemble that of a shoe box. The implications of this have been pointed out by Alan Colquhoun in Essays in Architectural Criticism where he states that, "They lead to the assertion that architectural meaning has become irretrievably separated from its substance."<sup>181</sup> This has been taken to an extreme in the form of enormous billboards which announce their message of the building's internal life in a manner readily accessible to the vulgate in the work of SITE, Inc.

On the other hand, the buildings of Mies van der Rohe from the time of his Farnsworth House and the buildings on the ITT campus and other such examples which

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<sup>181</sup> Alan Colquhoun, Essays in Architectural Criticism: Modern Architecture and Historical Change, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1981, p. 151.

depict what critics have nominated "universal space" show little or no indication of the building's functions or of how the spaces are to be used. The facades of these buildings do not reveal their inner life (except through the fact that through their huge expanses of glass one may see the activities taking place inside). These buildings lend themselves quite readily to modified usage over time. In today's society where the building's spatial organization is oftentimes dictated by purely practical and economic concerns devoid of the traditional symbolic content it is the functional necessity for flexibility in usage which is stressed. Hence, as pointed out by Alan Colquhoun, "The modern type is the loft building, not the uses which can be fitted into it, and there can therefore be no question of space and structure becoming representational."<sup>182</sup>

The transient nature of today's cultural institutions work counter to the attempt to identify the architecture with the program, or, in Porro's terms, to invest a building with an immediate content. Indeed, in contemporary society the occupants and the usage given to buildings are seen to change rapidly over time. Buildings which were designed with extreme specificity with regards to accommodating a determined set of programmatic elements necessitate greater renovation in order to accommodate new and different programs. Bernard Tschumi repeatedly points to this in Architecture and Disjunction:

In no way can architecture today claim permanence of meaning. Churches are turned into movie houses, banks into yuppie restaurants, hat factories into artists' studios, subway tunnels into nightclubs, and sometimes nightclubs into churches. The supposed cause-and-effect relationship between function and form ("form follows function") is forever condemned the day function becomes almost as transient as those magazines and mass media images in which architecture now appears as such fashionable objects.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>183</sup> Bernard Tschumi, Architecture and Disjunction. The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 216-217.

Not only in contemporary architecture but also in historical examples the relation between function and form in buildings has not been a causative one. Contrary to our current ethnocentric beliefs, the functional and formal characteristics held to be constants in houses have not always been so. As Edward T. Hall points out in The Hidden Dimension that, "...rooms had no fixed functions in European houses until the eighteenth century."<sup>184</sup>

Other critics which maintain a naive view of society as having a certain permanence in its values and institutions expound the necessity for each building to look like what it is supposed to be. Rudolf Arnheim in The Dynamics of Architectural Form maintains the view that, "...in a well-designed building there is a structural correspondence between visual properties and functional characteristics. Similar functions should be reflected in similar shape; different functions in different shapes."<sup>185</sup> This he deems necessary not only for practical reasons but also as part of architecture's ability to restore balance to humanity: "For the architect this means that to the extent he succeeds in reinforcing the deep-seated spiritual connotations inherent in all the simple aspects of domesticity, he is contributing to the healing of a split in our civilization."<sup>186</sup>

For Porro the immediate content is more than just having the building's form hint at its functions. According to Porro, "...the inner life [of buildings] must be poeticized. That is what I call the immediate content."<sup>187</sup> Thus the immediate content of building is not only the architectural expression of its social functions but also in turn to give meaning to human existence. Consequently, loft-type spaces would be antithetical to Porro's purposes.

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<sup>184</sup>Edward T. Hall, The Hidden Dimension, Doubleday & Co., Inc., New York, 1969, p. 104.

<sup>185</sup>Rudolf Arnheim, The Dynamics of Architectural Form. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1977, p. 205.

<sup>186</sup>Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>187</sup>Ricardo Porro, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, 186 (Appendix B, p. 497).

Following Panovsky's model for the interpretation of a work of art, it will be agreed that iconographical analysis and interpretation is dependent on the observer's capacity to perceive the primary or natural subject matter or, using Porro's nomenclature, the immediate content. To say it another way, a blind man cannot analyze the symbolism and meaning of Jan Van Eyck's *Wedding Portrait* because he cannot see the oranges and the candle and the clothing and the physiognomy of the personages represented in the painting. It is quite obvious that first it is necessary to be able to see what is being depicted in a work of art before being able to formulate an interpretation.

There are cases where the intentions of the artist or architect to depict a given object is rendered in a manner which is not readily identifiable to most observers. If the representation of the natural object or subject matter of a work of art is unable to be identified then this hinders any further delving into the iconographical analysis of the composition.

Such may be said to be the case in some of Porro's buildings, most notably perhaps with regards to his Office Building and Exhibition Hall in Liechtenstein (figs. 8.1 to 8.6). In order to arrive at the intended meaning which Porro ascribes to this work the observer first needs to identify the object that is being depicted. However, it is questionable that the viewer will be readily able to grasp the image of the object which is intended by Porro in this composition without resorting to a clue given by him. With reference to this building which Porro poetically refers to as "The Gold of the Rhine", he states in his Oeuvres/Obras: "The site and the program of the project imposed on me the image: physical gold, mythical gold. I conceived the work as three gigantic fingers that try to grab a golden energy."<sup>188</sup>

Porro made a small scale sculpture in plaster of the three fingers which he used as a conceptual model for the building (fig. 39.1). In the sculpture the fingers are readily

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<sup>188</sup> Ricardo Porro, Oeuvres/Obras, p. 46 (Appendix A, p. 258).

identifiable. Yet in translating the concept from sculpture to building, the fingers become rather difficult to identify (figs. 8.1 to 8.6). In this example Porro seems to confuse his subjective interpretation of the given forms of his composition with what he believes to be universally communicable elements, which, as it is speculated, remain incommunicable to most observers.

It seems unlikely that a group of Nursing students, trained as they are in human anatomy, or a group of architecture students--or even professors of architecture--would be able to make this association about fingers and a golden energy even after a long and detailed examination of the building. No statistical data has been compiled to determine this. The figural representation of three fingers is not obvious. At the other extreme there is the risk of making this figural element too obvious, as in the case of Lequeu's cow.

In his book An Essay On Man Ernst Cassirer comments on the necessity for universal communicability in a work of art: "Aesthetic universality means that the predicate of beauty is not restricted to a special individual but extends over the whole field of judging subjects. If the work of art were nothing but the freak and frenzy of an individual artist it would not possess this universal communicability. The imagination of the artist does not arbitrarily invent the forms of things. It shows us these forms in their true shape, making them visible and recognizable."<sup>189</sup>

The second part of Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu is entitled "The Content in Some of My Works". In this section Porro examines the five aspects of content in architecture in three of his buildings: The School of Plastic Arts, The School of Modern Dance and the building in Liechtenstein. The analysis is not systematic; neither is it critical. It is rather brief and sporadic. He jumps around from discussing one aspect of content to another and oftentimes glosses over some of them. A good case in point is his

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<sup>189</sup> Ernst Cassirer, An Essay on Man, p. 145.

treatment of the immediate content as it pertains to the three aforementioned works.



In the School of Plastic Arts the elliptical Catalanian vaults which contain the workshops are configured around various open spaces-- piazzas or courtyards (fig. 3.4). This formal model was developed according to Porro in order to "...suggest an atmosphere of community."<sup>190</sup> The notion that courtyards are architectural elements which promote and inspire social gathering is commonly agreed upon. In the essay entitled "The Persistence of Formal Patterns" Alexander Purves asserts with reference to the courtyard: "It is expressive of the need of human beings to group together-- to form a community-- for mutual benefit or exchange."<sup>191</sup>

In order to press on with the conceptualization of the school as a city, Porro introduces the tunnel-like serpentine arcades which serve as avenues of circulation connecting the various workshops and offices of the complex. The three gateways and the covered paths emerging from them conduce to different points in the building (figs. 3.1 and 3.5). The visitor to the building is free to chose any one of the three paths or to get off the covered path at any point. Porro indicates, however, that the path from the entry is to lead to the central piazza which contains the papaya fountain (fig. 3.13) which, he claims, holds the key to the composition. However, it is possible that the visitor may wander through various other parts of the building before arriving at what Porro considers to be its culmination.

The workshops are grouped in pairs with a small vaulted room serving to connect them (fig. 3.1). This interstitial space reveals its immediate content through its form and location. It is used as a storehouse for materials.

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<sup>190</sup>Ricardo Porro, *Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu*, p. 160 (Appendix B, p. 492).

<sup>191</sup>Alexander Purves, "The Persistence of Formal Patterns", *Perspecta, The Yale Architectural Journal*, no. 19 The MIT Press, 1982, p. 142.

All of the workshops are virtually identical (save for their size) as seen from the exterior. Hence, there is no telling which may be used for sculpture and which for painting. The engraving studios are not located in the elliptical rooms but rather in rectangular rooms as are the offices and lecture halls.

Porro indicates that he approached the project from the idea of the workshops. The object of study was to be located in the center of the elliptical space and around it the students would gather. Porro declares that he selected the ellipse instead of the circle on account that the former was more dynamic. However, if the object of study is intended to be located in the middle this runs counter to the dynamic quality of the ellipse as well as to the manner in which a space of this shape has traditionally been used. In the Baroque period, for example, the elliptically shaped church typically had its altar located at the terminus of the long axis. Borromini's San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane is one such example. However, Porro does not exploit the fact that the ellipse has two axes. The entry to the elliptical rooms is located noticeably off of the short axis (fig. 3.1).

Attempts to apply Porro's concept of the immediate content to his work reveal that oftentimes there is no match or apparent logic between his stated intentions and the actual building as observed. His notion of immediate content does little to augment the understanding or appreciation of his work. There is little in the immediate content that can assure the viewer that his building (or any building) is indeed a school. Certainly an appreciation of the hierarchy of the spaces results from their placement and size in relation to each other. Even architecture which attempts to be prescriptive may be disrupted by different occupancies and customs. The building designed by Porro for the School of Plastic Arts may some day be used for an art gallery, a museum, army barracks, or even as a research facility for specialized studies of mammary glands. As Bernard



Tschumi emphasizes: "Function does not follow form, form does not follow function-- or fiction for that matter-- however, they certainly interact."<sup>192</sup>



This one example which has been examined, The School of Plastic Arts, should suffice to illustrate the subjective nature of attempting to guess at a building's functions based on the formal and spatial characteristics that it displays. A building is best understood in relation to other buildings as well as through an analysis of the relations which exists between its various parts. There are numerous archetypal themes in architecture. These may be categorized into two basic organizational patterns: the linear and the centric. A multitude of variations result from these. However, these archetypal forms cannot be presumed to signify with any degree of specificity a given function. People determine function through their actions. A building may be said to be more or less conducive to certain functions on account of its size, shape, arrangement of rooms, lighting, heating and ventilation, in sum, all of those corporeal and non-corporeal elements said to make up architecture.

With regards to what many have referred to as "archetypal" themes in architecture, Alexander Purves comments: "The origin of a particular form is beyond understanding. We can, however, observe the persistence of forms. Those that persist do so because they resonate so strongly in the experience of human beings that they are chosen again and again. Clear reasons for these choices cannot be articulated because such motives make up an elusive web of conscious and unconscious needs, desires, and associations."<sup>193</sup>

Any discussion of the archetypal would necessitates an examination of what Porro refers to as the sixth aspect of content, that which deals with the psychological nature of

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<sup>192</sup> Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction*, p. 255.

<sup>193</sup> Alexander Purves, "The Persistence of Formal Patterns", p. 138.

the artist. While Porro mentions this aspect, he resolves not to expound upon it no matter how briefly.

### 3.3 The "Superimposed Image"

Of the five aspects of content the superimposed image is perhaps the most central to an understanding of Ricardo Porro's architecture.

Throughout Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, and perhaps most notably in the section devoted to "The Superimposed Image", the form and content of Porro's text may be found to assimilate some of the tendencies present in his architecture. His text appears as some type of concise encyclopedic collage--i.e., a compendium consisting of a paste-up of fragments from the history of art, the history of civilization, philosophy, theology, numerology, mythology, aesthetics, literature, anthropology, all linked together through his associations of perceived similarities, juxtapositions, rather than through a rational and systematic ordering and classification. The compilation of these fragments all lead up to an exposition and explanation of his work in the concluding part of the text entitled "The Content in Some of My Works".

The sources which constitute these fragments are at times mentioned in the writing itself. Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, however, does not contain notes or a bibliography. At times, certain observations may be surmised to derive from other sources but they have been re-interpreted and enmeshed within the text and interrelated with other views. The lack of a bibliography and the cursory treatment given to fundamental issues on which Porro's discussions and observations are made make it difficult for the reader to discern the development and underlying assumptions from which his commentaries stem in the same way that this process is complicated when one observes a collage which is composed of fragments deriving from diverse un-referenced sources.

It is not through an exposition and discussion but rather through a listing of examples that Porro embarks on the issue of the superimposed image. Example upon example from the various periods of architecture and urbanism follow at times without seemly transition until the last example is arrived at. The conclusion is conspicuously absent.

Given these characteristics of his writings, the essential remarks concerning the nature and domain of the superimposed image shall be presented as extracted from his writings, followed by discussions of the subject emerging from other sources as a means of clarifying the concept of the superimposed image before setting out on a critical analysis of the evidence of this aspect of content in his work.

Porro considers two forms of the superimposed image to be possible. These two forms are 1) the symbol, and 2) the figurative image. He discusses each one separately.

The first discussion addresses the symbol: "Thanks to symbols, man expresses realities that are not directly perceptible or masks a reality that he does not want to bring to light. Symbols are already present in the most distant origins of man. It is man's need to take hold of a world that escapes him and of saying what he does not have the right words to say. It is a way to open the mind to more distant realities."<sup>194</sup>

The multiple meanings that a symbol may have is also addressed by Porro: "A symbol can represent several things at the same time and permit several levels of interpretation: by their very structure, symbols have multiple meanings. It is the range of these meanings that make up the truth of the symbol. Its interpretation depends on all the elements that surround it, the other symbols as much as the other levels of meaning contained."<sup>195</sup>

After discussing the symbolism of the sphere, the square and the center through such examples as St. Mark's Square in Venice and Ledoux's Salt Works of Chaux, along

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<sup>194</sup> Ricardo Porro, *Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu*, p. 96 (Appendix B, p. 45).

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97 (Appendix B, p. 456).

with a discussion of the symbolism of numbers, Porro turns to a discussion of the figurative image. However, no definition or distinguishing remarks concerning these two forms of the superimposed image are offered other than the following: "...if the symbol is more abstract, the figuration, in its form, makes reference to the concrete."<sup>196</sup> Several examples are again given without addressing the theory behind it. He does, however, constantly address the great themes of mankind which are referred to by the superimposed images.

The tremendous familiarity with the symbols and myths of various cultures is illustrated by the flowing and unexpected connections which Porro makes in his writing and conversation when discussing matters of signification. This may be illustrated by a brief excerpt from an interview with Porro by this author where a discussion concerning the symbolism of the cow transforms itself into a discussion of other symbolic matters: "...there is nothing more nutritional than the cow. And the sky is nutritive. And the sky is female, or it is male. One never knows. In Egypt the sky is female."<sup>197</sup> From this point Porro turns to a discussion of the horns of Isis and of Io. This uninterrupted flow from one thing to another displays the associations which are only possible on account of his unparalleled interest and awareness of symbolism.

Some writers use the term symbol as a synonym of sign. Both are entities which stand for something else. In order to be efficient a sign must have only one meaning. "The sign is a semiotic expression, a conventional abbreviation for a known thing."<sup>198</sup> A symbol, on the other hand, may have multiple meanings. These may vary according to their context. Symbols escape static definition and are perhaps expressible only in terms of themselves. A symbol has meaning beyond that which is communicated by its

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p. 112 (Appendix B, p.464).

<sup>197</sup> Ricardo Porro as quoted by Mariano Alemany, "An Interview with Ricardo Porro", May-Jun. 1994.

<sup>198</sup> Juan-Eduardo Cirlot, Diccionario de simbolos. Editorial Labor, S.A., Brcelona, 1981, p. 37.

superficial characteristics. That a symbol may evoke an emotional reaction is one of the things which distinguishes a symbol from a sign. As pointed out by Mircea Eliade, "The symbol reveals certain aspects of reality--the deepest aspects--which defy any other means of knowledge. Images, symbols and myths are not irresponsible creations of the psyche; they respond to a need and fulfil a function, that of bringing to light the most hidden modalities of being."<sup>199</sup>

The derivation and notion of the term 'superimposed image' is not explained by Porro. However, an examination of the writings of Juan-Eduardo Cirlot in his introduction of Diccionario de simbolos (Dictionary of Symbols) is revealing of the sense in which this term 'superimposed image' is employed. Cirlot states that, "Symbolism *adds* a new value to an object or an action, without taking away from its proper, immediate or "historical" values."<sup>200</sup> Cirlot maps this symbolic world as "...the intermediate realm between concepts and physical bodies."<sup>201</sup> The symbol is universal and particular at the same time. As Cirlot points out, it is "...universal, since it transcends history; particular, for corresponding to a precise period."<sup>202</sup>

The connection established by symbols between distinct objects of thought is explained by Cirlot: "Whereas natural science establishes relations between "horizontal" groups of things, following Linnaeus's system of classification, mystic or symbolic science launches 'vertical' bridges between those objects which find themselves in a same cosmic rhythm, i.e., whose situation is in "correspondence" with that occupied by another "analogous" object, but belonging to a different plane of reality; for example, an animal, a plant, a color."<sup>203</sup> Hence, in symbolism that which is not visibly present--the invisible

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<sup>199</sup> Mircea Eliade, Images and Symbols. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1991, p.

<sup>12</sup>  
<sup>200</sup> Juan-Eduardo Cirlot, Diccionario de simbolos, p. 14.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., p. 31-32.

or spiritual order--becomes analogous to the material world through the symbol. As Cirlot points out, "...the dominant factor is always of a polar character, linking the physical and metaphysical worlds."<sup>204</sup> This analogy between the interior and exterior worlds is well illustrated by the threefold principle of the *Tabula smaragdina* which consists of 1) the unity of the source or origin of both worlds, 2) the influx of the psychic world on the physical world, and 3) of the material world over the spiritual.<sup>205</sup>

The multiple meanings which a symbol may possess is recognized by Porro and used to his advantage as he stated in a recent interview: "I often like to play with the ambiguity of symbols, with the various valences of a symbol."<sup>206</sup> At times he constructs more than one narrative from the set of symbols that he employs in a work of art. Sometimes other viewers discover other meanings which he had not realized at the time of his designing the work. This ladens the work with multiple layers of meaning, not one of which may be said to possess greater truth than another.

However, Porro is not an inventor of symbols. He always draws from the pool of conventional symbols--some from other cultures and others quite ancient. He deplors the notion of inventing a symbol on account that it runs counter to the definition of a symbol. As he explained in an interview: "The symbol is always a convention. The symbol is always logical. If it were created by me it would not be a symbol."<sup>207</sup>

In his role as a professor of architecture, both as lecturer and as studio critic, his didactic method is distinguished by his zeal to transmit culture to his pupils by enumerating and explaining the relations between art and the history of thought. The superimposed image plays a preponderant role in this relationship.

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 35-36.

<sup>206</sup> Ricardo Porro as quoted by Mariano Alemany, "An Interview with Ricardo Porro", May-Jun. 1994.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

Before examining the superimposed image as it pertains to Porro's large-scale work--his architecture--it would be best to start by examining his small-scale work--his furniture and sculpture to examine the manner in which he explains his design intentions with reference to the superimposed image.

The superimposed image of his dining room chair (fig. 35.1), for example, is explained by him thus: The Trinity in a halo of three overlapping planes with the cosmic egg in the center from which part twelve rays, where twelve is the number of the cosmic cycle, the divine principle beneath which part vertical elements like the rain. The rain is grace.<sup>208</sup> In the case of another chair designed by him in 1973 quite appropriately called "La Mamma" (figs. 34.1 and 34.2) the anthropomorphic features are quite obvious and give the sensation to the occupant of sitting on mother's lap.

Whereas the first chair makes use of the symbol, the second chair employs the figurative image. Porro explains that the figurative image results when the elements in the work themselves are the image or symbol of another reality. Hence he suggests that the columns in a Gothic cathedral are figurative images of the forest. The building in its totality may be a figurative image as, for example St. Peter's basilica with the arms and head of the church. Porro cites Bernini as one of the architects who always made much use of the figurative image. With regards to the use of the symbol, he cites Borromini. In the case of these two great Baroque architects as in his work, the symbol and/or the figurative image is a convention. These conventional meanings are learned through 'initiation' in the broadest sense of the word--meaning through experiences and absorption of one's culture, or through study of books and dictionaries of symbolism.

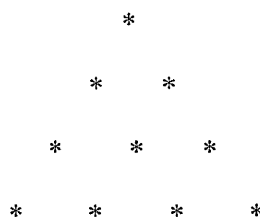
The number symbolism of Porro's chair may be studied in greater detail in one of his sculptures which makes use of the tetractys of the Pythagoreans (fig. 38.1). Such number symbolism is conceived as a manifestation of the divine--number as giving order

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<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

to the universe--by St. Augustine, who integrates Christianity with the knowledge derived from paganism. St. Augustine points out that "...the beauty of certain visual proportions derives from their being based on the simple ratios of the first tetractys."<sup>209</sup> This number symbolism was prevalent throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and constitutes part of the Encyclopedic tradition as pointed out by Jean Seznec in The Survival of the Pagan Gods: "This "sacred mathematics", a renewal of Pythagoras, would itself account for the integration of mythology in the encyclopedic system of knowledge."<sup>210</sup>

In Porro's sculpture, the tetractys, a figure by which the Pythagoreans made their oath, may be seen to be organized in this manner:



Porro explained the manner in which the superimposed image operates in this work as follows: "This is a symbol of totality for it has ten, it participates in four, participates in seven, participates in three. That is to say, it participates in totality. Of 4 because it is earth; of three because it is God; of three because it is time; of 4 because it is space; and then seven because it is the full cycle.

"The figure is a veiled totality which is a theme of alienation. Nine are blinded by the veil. One breaks through it and looks terribly fixedly to the outside. He is cursed by

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<sup>209</sup> Otto von Simson, The Gothic Cathedral. Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1964, p. 22.

<sup>210</sup> Jean Seznec, The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance in Humanism and Art. Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1961, p. 124.



the gods as indicated by the three hands pointing down on him. The hand signal is a popular Mediterranean gesture which signifies a curse."<sup>211</sup>

Following this description Porro mentions that this work is loosely based on Thomas Mann's story of Mario the Magician. Its theme is alienation as well as the non-alienation of a superior spirit who is able to see the terrible of this world. The veil is the symbol *par excellence* of alienation.

One of a series of diabolical Trinities (fig. 43.1) corresponding to what may be termed the end of Porro's atheistic period, dating from approximately 1970 to 1975, is the following, as described by Porro: "It is a diabolical Trinity: the Son with the egg that emerges from the mouth like Logos; the hand of the Father who curses Him; and the Holy Spirit is a sick black bird."<sup>212</sup> (Another response may be that it is like a creation and a destruction at the same time for the newly emerged egg would break upon striking the ground.)

Biblical themes and personages are given a certain emphasis and placed in a context by Porro which at times lies outside of what may be considered Christian orthodoxy (figs. 36.1, 41.1, 42.1, 43.1, 44.1, 45.1). The sculpture of the head of St. John the Baptist lying below the voluptuous headless torso of Salome (fig. 42.1) plays with the theme of Eros and Thanatos. As Porro affirmed during the interview with the author, "In all my work there is a sense of Eros and Thanatos."

The erotic element at times is predominant; at other times it is the thanatic. It is the thanatic which is predominant in the work which is contained within a large wooden case fastened by very sadistic looking metal fasteners inside of which one may see a headless multitude where the sex is very potent (figs 49.1 and 49.2). The image is produced by suspending the sculpture in mid air next to a mirror which repeats the image

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<sup>211</sup> Ricardo Porro as quoted by Mariano Alemany, "An Interview with Ricardo Porro", May-Jun. 1995.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

infinitely. On the backside of the case the cut off head is seen to emerge upside down through a hatch at the floor level.

Eros and Thanatos may be seen as an opposition. The theme of oppositions is also prevalent in Porro's work such as the sculpture of Janus, intended as a study for a column in an unrealized project for a house (*La Maison Au Janus*, 1978) (fig. 17.3)<sup>213</sup>. As Porro affirmed during a recent interview: "The notion of what is Janus, what is the equilibrium of the opposites is something that also has been fundamental in me from the philosophers who have influenced me tremendously, such as Heraclitus who said: 'The name of the arc is life, but its work is death'."<sup>214</sup>

His sculpture of Adam Giving Birth to Eve (figs. 40.1 and 40.2), recently completed during the summer of 1994, again displays his obsession with duality, opposition and the Heraclitan sense of the identity which underlies all opposition. An excerpt from his unpublished manuscript entitled "Lettre a un jeune architecte" ("Letter to a Young Architect") casts some light on the significance of the superimposed image in this work: "You have the totality of the human being in you, and that is comprehensible because in the soul of every creator there is man and woman but they are like Adam before he gave birth to Eve, before God divided them in two."<sup>215</sup>

The theme of opposition is found also in his paintings. One of them entitled "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" (fig. 36.1) after William Blake's poem depicts a head with a long neck frontally. A scorpion hangs from the mouth. Porro explains the symbolism thus: "She is the Madonna, she is celestial. The scorpion is a creature from the deepest

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<sup>213</sup> Ricardo Porro, *Oeuvres/Obras*, pp. 90-95 (Appendix A, pp. 290-293).

<sup>214</sup> Ricardo Porro as quoted by Mariano Alemany, "An Interview with Ricardo Porro", May-Jun. 1995.

<sup>215</sup> Ricardo Porro, "Lettre a un jeune architecte" ("Letter to a Young Architect"), unpublished manuscript, 1984.

recesses of the earth, from the darkness, the chthonic. The saliva emerging from the mouth is like the celestial fecundation. It is the marriage of Hell and Heaven."<sup>216</sup>

A sculpture of a head with a scorpion on top of it is the image of fecundation through the brain (fig. 49.1 foreground). The egg shaped droplet emerging from the mouth is like an ejaculation of Logos.

Another sculpture, again responding to the theme of love, is Diotima (figs. 46.1 to 46.3), Socrates's instructress in the art of love, as referred to by Socrates in the Platonic dialogue The Symposium. Porro spoke of this work thus: "She is in an attitude of teaching. Like love in its depth--because love begins by being an appetite for beauty and passes on to physical love. But physical love is reduced to reproduction. And from reproduction comes the problem of the perennial and the perennial is the love of eternity. Hence I made her with a head which gives the sensation of turning and looking upwards as a sense of eternity. As if it were a movement to look at what may be eternity; in that is reduced Catholic love which is love of eternity."<sup>217</sup> The stroboscopic motion suggested by the turning head is reminiscent of the Futurists's technique used to depict movement.

Yet in other sculptures of heads it is a certain taste for Pathos which is expressed. According to Porro it represents the horror of the second half of the twentieth century--the five minutes before the apocalypse which never arrives.

More examples of Porro's small scale work--i.e., his paintings, sculptures, and furniture--can certainly be listed. More detailed descriptions and analyses of them can certainly be given. However, it should suffice to stop here for the aim is to discover the themes and problems which arise from these works and their accompanying descriptions as a means of better confronting the issues present in his architecture with regards to the superimposed image. The examples examined, with minor exceptions, are all figurative.

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<sup>216</sup> Ricardo Porro as quoted by Mariano Alemany, "An Interview with Ricardo Porro", May-Jun. 1995.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

It is the figurative image that predominates in his work more so than the symbol. The images are not naturalistic; they are stylized. The figurative image, of course, also has a symbolic content. In his architecture the figurative image will be encountered repeatedly, sometimes in a very direct manner, as in the application and integration of sculpture to his buildings.

The images and symbols employed are not his unique creation. They are taken from established sources and recombined in his work. Pop images do not find their way into his work. His images are reservedly derived from universal mythological sources, particularly those of the Western tradition, as well as Biblical sources and from Catholic iconography. Themes from literature and philosophy also find their way into Porro's work as is admitted by him: "Architecture cannot be seen in isolation and I have been as much influenced by philosophy and literature. Joyce, Proust, Mann, Dante or Shakespeare have given me as much as any architect."<sup>218</sup>

The superimposed image in these works examined according to Porro's explanation all deal with the eternal themes of mankind or the problems of a moment in civilization. Yet it remains questionable as to whether the viewer would be able to arrive at the same conclusions without recourse to his commentaries. A viewer who is ignorant of the content of Plato's Symposium, who is not familiar with the character of Diotima and her teachings would not be able to obtain the message that Porro intended. Such a viewer would only see the image of an obese woman with a distorted face (figs. 46.1 to 46.3).

Similarly someone unfamiliar with the symbolism of the cosmic egg and the number 12 would perhaps think of Porro's dining room chair (fig. 35.1) as a ceremonial piece of furniture to be used for the consumption of bacon and eggs. As factitious or fictitious as these comments may be, nonetheless it is probable that some untrained

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<sup>218</sup>Ricardo Porro, "An Architectural Autobiography of Ricardo Porro", *Architecture and Urbanism*, March 1994, p.. 282, p. 63.

observer may arrive at these premises. And someone who is familiar with the sources from whence Porro's images and symbols emerge may not arrive at the same vision as he. Here the questions concerning individual differences in the perception and interpretation of symbols and images arise. These matters of iconographical interpretation have been discussed by Erwin Panovsky and Rudolf Wittkower.

Iconography is concerned with the meaning of works of art. The process whereby meaning may be discovered is outlined by Erwin Panovsky in his introduction to Studies in Iconology first published in 1939. The process may be divided into three stages:

1) primary or natural subject matter; 2) secondary or conventional subject matter; 3) intrinsic meaning or content.

The first stage of iconographical interpretation, primary or natural subject matter, concerns a pre-iconographical description of a work of art. Hence, the primary visual stimuli needs to be interpreted by the observer in order to discern the objects and events represented. For example, in a work composed from lines, colors, volumes, etc. there may be said to be a representation of a four legged animal and if so is it a horse, a mule or a cow? Or is the couple represented a man and a woman dancing or are they two men wrestling? According to Panovsky, "The world of pure *forms* thus recognized as carriers of *primary* or *natural meanings* may be called the world of artistic *motifs*. An enumeration of these motifs would be a *pre-iconographical* description of the work of art."<sup>219</sup>

The second step of iconographical interpretation, secondary or conventional subject matter, is explained by Panovsky thus: "...we connect artistic *motifs* and combinations of *artistic motifs* (*compositions*) with *themes* or *concepts*. *Motifs* thus recognized as carriers of a *secondary* or *conventional* meaning may be called *images*, and

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<sup>219</sup> Erwin Panovsky, Studies in Iconology. Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1983, p. 5.

combinations of images are what the ancient theorists called '*invenzioni*'; we are wont to call them *stories* or *allegories*. the identification of such *images*, *stories* and *allegories* is the domain of iconography in the narrower sense of the word."<sup>220</sup>

The third stage of iconographical interpretation, intrinsic meaning or content, is explained by Panovsky as follows: "The discovery and interpretation of these '*symbolical*' *values* (which are generally unknown to the artist himself and may even emphatically differ from what he consciously intended to express) is the object of what we call *iconography in a deeper sense*: a method of interpretation which arises as a synthesis rather than as an analysis. And the correct identification of the *motifs* is the prerequisite of a correct *iconographical analysis in the narrower sense*, the correct analysis of *images*, *stories*, and *allegories* is the prerequisite of a correct *iconographical interpretation in a deeper sense*...."<sup>221</sup>

The threefold process may be stated in other terms such as 1) representational meaning, 2) thematic meaning, 3) multiple meanings. Nevertheless, by whatever name these steps are referred to, the complications on the way to interpretation are many. Panovsky recognizes and points to these complications as does Rudolf Wittkower in his essay "Interpretation of Visual Symbols" which was first published in 1955.

Rudolf Wittkower parts from the postulate that "...all perception is interpretation."<sup>222</sup> Hence, the first step towards interpretation of symbols, the interpretation of what Panovsky refers to as the primary or natural subject matter, cannot be accomplished unless the object represented brings to mind the original. And of course, this is further complicated if the viewer is not familiar with the original object being depicted. As Wittkower points out, "Representational meaning can not be

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>222</sup> Rudolf Wittkower, Allegory and the Migration of Symbols. Thames & Hudson, New York, 1987, p. 174.

understood unless the objects or events shown by the artist belong to the general human experience of the recipient."<sup>223</sup>

Furthermore, there is a paradoxical problem which presents itself which encumbers the achievement of the first step of interpretation. The detail of a work of art cannot be interpreted unless the whole is understood. However, only through an understanding of the details can the whole be understood.<sup>224</sup> Wittkower points to this paradox but does not explain how the viewer resolves the issue. Nonetheless, the complications that may arise in this first step are obvious and multiple. Further complications lie ahead for those who achieve this first step towards iconographical interpretation.

After the objects and events depicted in a work have been identified by the viewer, the interpretation of secondary or conventional subject matter is also complicated by the viewer's knowledge, or lack thereof, of his culture or of the culture which is referred to in the work in question. As Panovsky points out iconographic analysis "...presupposes a familiarity with specific themes or concepts as transmitted through literary sources, whether acquired by purposeful reading or by oral tradition. Our Australian bushman would be unable to recognize the subject of a Last Supper; to him, it would only convey the idea of an excited dinner party."<sup>225</sup> However, as Panovsky is quick to point out, "When it comes to representations of themes other than biblical stories or scenes from history or mythology which happen to be known to the average 'educated person', all of us are Australian bushmen."<sup>226</sup>

Arrival at the third stage of interpretation is not an easy task. It is only accomplished by a privileged few according to Wittkower, who comments that, "The

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>225</sup> Erwin Panovsky, Studies in Iconology, p. 11.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

circle of the initiated narrows further when we turn to the third category, multiple meaning: it is accessible only to a relatively small and often very small minority of contemporaries and to the scholar who carefully scrutinizes the past and builds up his evidence....<sup>227</sup>

In general it should be stated that the superimposed image of his more 'private' work--furniture, sculpture, paintings--varies from that in his public work, i.e., his buildings. For whereas the former tend to depict his nightmares, the latter depict his dreams. Porro's recognition of architecture as a public art and his respect for the building users inhibits him from imposing upon them his nightmarish visions in an outwardly recognizable way. Hence the themes of Pathos and of diabolical Trinities (figs. 43.1 to 45.1) are not to be found in his buildings but only on the walls of his home and in the art galleries.

However, his obsession with the human body--with anthropological images--does find its way into his architecture. It is a persistent theme found in many of his works, most notably in *The School of Plastic Arts* (1960-1965) (figs. 3.1 to 3.14) and in the project for a Vacation Village in Vela Luca, on the island of Korcula, Yugoslavia (1972) (figs. 10.1 to 10.4). Joseph Rykwert touches upon the subject of human anatomy in his essay "L'Opera di Ricardo Porro" (1970) where he approximates Porro's thought to the neoplatonic dictum, "Nihil in intellectu quod non prius in sensu". Rykwert indicates that, "The body is our only truly efficacious instrument to understand the world."<sup>228</sup>

As previously seen when examining 'Tradition', the *School of Plastic Arts* is Porro's attempt to translate the sensuality of Cuban baroque architecture and the sensuality of the Negro rites into an architecture which combines both elements of Cuban culture and to give rise to a Cuban tradition in architecture. Porro refers to this project as

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<sup>227</sup> Rudolf Wittkower, *Allegory and the Migration of Symbols*, p. 181-182.

<sup>228</sup> Joseph Rykwert, "L'Opera di Ricardo Porro", *Controspazio*, ano II, no. 3, Mar. 1970, p. 4.



"the city which becomes Eros."<sup>229</sup> This is one of the eternal themes of mankind that Porro wishes to bring out through the superimposed image which at the same time gives material form to the element from the Cuban tradition which Porro has isolated--sensuality and sexuality--and attempted to elevate to a universal level. As Porro comments: "This is the expression of an act of love with the earth, that is female. I conceived the Ateliers as a woman's breast and in the center of the piazza I placed a sculpture that takes the form of a fruit (the papaya) which has an implication for Cuban peoples of a female's sex."<sup>230</sup>

Hence in this work the 'key' to the interpretation according to Porro is to be found in the fountain in the shape of a huge stylized papaya which assimilates some of the formal characteristics of the vagina (figs. 3.12 and 3.13). The domes are like enormous stylized versions of female breast with the nipples denoted by the skylights (figs. 3.3, 3.4, 3.8). In plan (fig. 3.1) the building appears like a convoluted version of the female reproductive system. Indeed, even the long leafed vegetation which surrounds the building gives the image of pubic hairs, Porro claims.

Hence the most salient elements which distinguish a woman from a man--vagina and breast--are the elements used to represent the whole woman. The part is used to represent the whole. This would be equivalent to the form of metaphor used in literature called synecdoche. These scattered parts of female anatomy constitute the most salient features of the building. In this there is something similar to the surrealist's *cadavre exquis*.

The use of color also reinforces the theme by becoming a metaphor for what in Cuban mythology incarnates sensuality and sexuality: the mulatta. Porro points to the

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<sup>229</sup> Ricardo Porro, *Oeuvres/Obras*, p. 24 (Appendix A, p. 227).

<sup>230</sup> Ricardo Porro, "15 Works", *Architecture and Urbanism*, Mar. 1994, no. 282, p. 8.

use of terra-cotta colored brick--"...its reddish color which with the patina is nearly the color of the mulatta. (fig. 3.13)"<sup>231</sup>

The metaphorical use of color in this building is quite direct. However, in an article entitled "Couleur et architecture" ("Color and architecture") Porro discusses the various cultural manifestations and manner in which various architects throughout history have used color in their buildings. Here again one may note the reliance on classical antiquity as a source for Porro's symbolism: "The symbolic implications of the colors are also important: the seven colors of the rainbow correspond to the seven heavens, the seven planets, the seven notes of the scale."<sup>232</sup>

Yet amidst Eros there lurks Thanatos. Opposition, a reoccurring theme in Porro's architecture, is present in this project. The symbolism of the papaya is not only Eros but also Thanatos if it is interpreted as a rotting fruit. Diana Rowntree has pointed out in her review of the School of Plastic Arts that, "At the very heart of this squirming organism, Porro has stopped the movement by inserting a cluster of rectangular spaces."<sup>233</sup> This may be interpreted as the presence of Thanatos among Eros.

These interpretations will make no sense to an observer who is incapable of believing that architecture has the right to resemble something other than a building. Obviously the symbolic narrative is only able to emerge through the viewer's active participation. Unless the viewer makes an effort to decipher the superimposed image the architect's intentions will remain unknown to him.

Meanings other than those intended by Porro may be discovered. Porro points to some possible other meanings in his interview. For example, the elliptical domes may not only be seen as female breast but also as eggs (fig. 3.4). The symbolism of the egg is

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<sup>231</sup> Ricardo Porro, "Cuba y Yo", *Escandalar*, vol. 5, no. 1-2, Jan.-Jun. 1982, p. 156

<sup>232</sup> Ricardo Porro, "Couleur et architecture, une longue histoire", *Architecture Interieure*, no. 171, May-Jun. 1979, p. 65.

<sup>233</sup> Diana Rowntree, "A Cluster of Bubbles", *Architectural Forum*, vol. 124, no. 1, Jan. 1966.

universal. William Lethaby states in Architecture, Mysticism and Myth that, "The egg, firmly and widely accepted as a symbol of life and creation, becomes an emblem of resurrection and new life..."<sup>234</sup> This symbolism is quite appropriate for a school of the arts as well as a means of representing the 'mediate content', the aspect of content said to unite a work of architecture to a specific moment of civilization. This moment is the time shortly after the triumph of the Cuban revolution. Hence the symbolism of the egg is deemed appropriate.

However, it is difficult to detect certain elements to which Porro refers to in his discussion of this project. The exuberant, syncopated rhythm of the rumba is not to be found in the static, equally spaced piers which mark the a continuous unmodulated rhythm throughout the paths of circulation (figs. 3.6 and 3.11).

Many times Porro has used the image of man as a fundamental element of his architecture. This, he claims, derives from his sense and admiration of humanism--a German as well as an Italian humanism has led him to that. For Porro, as for the architects of antiquity, man is a microcosm of the universe. Porro declared in an interview with the author that, "Man himself is a mandala--he is conceived in the image of the cosmos."<sup>235</sup> This sense of an architecture in the image of man is most explicitly developed in his project for a Vacation Village in Vela Luca on the Island of Korcula, Yugoslavia (1972) (figs. 10.1 to 10.4).

In this project and as far back as the time when he designed the School of Plastic Arts in the early 60s, something that he had read years before while still in architecture school got sway over his mind: it was Paul Valery's Eupalinus ou l'Architecte. Yet whereas the fictional character in this story tells how he had designed his temple by employing the mathematical proportions of a girl he had known, Porro applies the

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<sup>234</sup> William Lethaby, Architecture, Mysticism and Myth, George Braziller, New York, 1975, p. 266.

<sup>235</sup> Ricardo Porro as quoted by Mariano Alemany, "An Interview with Ricardo Porro", May-Jun. 1994.

anthropomorphic impression directly without recourse to the one-step removed process of translating the anatomical features of the human body into mathematical proportions. The anthropomorphic features are rendered in all their fleshiness and sensuality, although stylized and distorted.

Porro makes a connection to the site based on its historical/mythical past. The myths say that the island was colonized by the Argonauts and that nearby islands were refuge to the Harpies. Parting from these mythical tales, Porro explains his design intentions: "...I wanted to create the image of a mythic being, a giant emerging from the water, each part of which would be subsumed into the composition from afar, like a painting by Arcimboldo..."<sup>236</sup>

Arcimboldo, it will be recalled, is perhaps best known for his portraits which seen from afar display all the features of a man quite realistically; however, seen from close up what appeared to be a man turns out to be a series of fruits and vegetables arranged as in a still life. Several of his paintings are displayed in the Louvre. His works were admired by the surrealists and considered pre-surrealists along with those of Bosch, Blake and Carroll.

In this unrealized project, each programmatic function was assigned a logically corresponding portion of the human anatomy (figs. 10.1 to 10.4). Hence, as Porro explains, "...the administration would be the head; the restaurant the stomach; the labyrinth playground the intestines; the social gathering areas the hands; the amphitheater the pubis; and the pier the penis."<sup>237</sup> In the interview with the author Porro suggested that this project was a sort of self-portrait, a remark denoting a certain narcissism, a quality which he upholds and commends to other artist.

The approach route to the vacation village was to be by sea. It was the view on this approach route that gave the image of a man (fig. 10.2). Once on the island the total

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<sup>236</sup> Ricardo Porro, "15 Works", *Architecture and Urbanism*, Mar. 1994, no. 282, p. 77.

<sup>237</sup> Ricardo Porro, *Oeuvres/Obras* p. 54 (Appendix A, p. 272).

image disappeared and then only at times would one be able to see the human anatomy, such as the hands (fig. 10.4). This approach of designing the city as a complete whole to which nothing else need be added was adopted by Porro on account that this was a resort not foreseen to expand. Had it been an urban development he would have approached the problem differently (as may be seen in the urban renovation in the Parisian zone of La Plaine Saint Denis<sup>238</sup>) (fig. 29.1).

Interestingly, the anatomical features are not only topical but internal as well. The internal organs such as stomach and intestine appear side by side the external features such as the hands and the head. The sex is vastly emphasized. The labyrinth, contrary to Porro's intentions, might be interpreted as a vagina thus rendering the image of a hermaphroditic giant. The presence of this image of a man disappears as one approaches and circulates through the village. The form transforms as one penetrates it--it vanishes and only a memory of it is left. This is evidence that not the form itself but rather the visual perception of the form determines the content of the superimposed image.

The use of anthropomorphic shapes is quite prevalent in another one of his projects: "The House of Culture" (figs. 7.1 to 7.4) in Paris done in collaboration with Andre Mrowiec in 1967, shortly after Porro's arrival to France. Here the anthropomorphic images appear opposed to a machine age aesthetic. Porro describes this project thus: "In this project there are pieces which seem to be pieces of the human body: hands, breasts, torso... as though trapped in an enormous machine. Within them [the body parts] there are various functions: theaters, conference rooms. All lies below a metallic structure with elements that move like kinetic sculpture."<sup>239</sup> For Porro the superimposed image is that of "...man imprisoned by a technological world."<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> Ricardo Porro, "15 Works", *Architecture and Urbanism*, Mar. 1994, no. 282, p. 92.

<sup>239</sup> Ricardo Porro, *Oeuvre/Obras*, p. 40 (Appendix A, p. 258).

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40 (Appendix A, p. 258).

In this project the opposition of the organic and the inorganic is explicitly stated in the architecture. The tendencies towards opposition of rectilinear and curvilinear are taken to their maximum expression in this project. Form responds to the necessities of content, of the superimposed image. The superimposed image, in turn, is determined by the form. The two are inseparable.

The improbability of the images presented in "The House of Culture" project displays an affinity with Surrealism. Alberto Ferrari emphasizes this surreal element in Porro's architecture in his essay "L'immaginazione al potere" ("Ricardo Porro: Fancy in Power"), especially with respect to this project. In it he states, "The key to a correct interpretation lies... in the anatomical improbability with which internal organs and limbs roll among and mix with other objects (like the drawers in Salvador Dali's human torso)."<sup>241</sup> Ferrari recognizes, unlike various other critics who emphasize the organic character of Porro's work, that, "In effect he uses right angles and straight lines just as much as curves and interrupted lines. He uses them to create unfamiliar bodies, clashes and deliberate dissonances."<sup>242</sup> These characteristics suggested by Ferrari are in keeping with the traits displayed by the architecture of mannerism.

To be able to build a city in the image of a man is Porro's greatest aspiration in architecture by his own admission. The closest that he has gotten is in his unrealized project for a vacation village in Yugoslavia. However, he had previously designed a building with aspirations towards an urban space in the shape of a woman--The School of Plastic Arts. Among his projects one also discovers a building in the image of a man which predates his project for a city in the image of a man by two years: "La Maison des Jeunes" (fig. 9.1), a project for Vaduz, Liechtenstein, dating from 1972. The figurative image of this project--"...a succession of inclined planes which shape the body of a young

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<sup>241</sup> Alberto Ferrari, "L'immaginazione al potere" ("Ricardo Porro: Fancy in Power"), *Casabella*, no. 386, Feb. 1974, p. 31.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

man with an exploding chest and the head and hands in flight"<sup>243</sup> --responds to the events of a certain moment of civilization: the various rebellions of the youth that took place during the 1960s. The building is approached from a road located on a plane elevated from the site; therefore, the image of a man is clearly seen on the approach but disappears as one arrives and enters the building. In this project as in the project for Yugoslavia the image of a man is formally stated in a direct and explicit manner. The various elements of the human anatomy also find an unmistakable formal correspondence.

Other projects make a sculptural use of the human figure. That is to say, realistic sculpture depicting people is applied and integrated to the building (e.g., fig. 20.1). In his project for a primary school in Marne-la-Valle (figs. 14.1 and 14.2) done in 1976, a project dedicated to his deceased son, anthropomorphism appears in a very direct manner as may be seen from the perspective drawings in which children's faces line the corridors and are at the same time the facades of the classrooms (fig. 14.2). Gigantic hands serve as benches. These were intended to be done in concrete. However, the building's sections (fig. 14.1) negate the lyricism of the perspective drawings.

The pervasive use of the figurative image may respond to his interest and practice as a sculptor since sculpture's traditional subject matter (as well as the subject matter of Porro's own sculptures) is the human form. Hence the structure of his buildings is at times disguised--it does not become a significant constituent element of the superimposed image. Although Porro did not actively engage in making sculptures until about 1970, his design method of using clay models may be seen to be quite sculptural.

Other architects of the twentieth century have also played with the figurative image of the human body in their architecture. Vincent Scully notes the presence of the figurative image in Le Corbusier's project for the Palace of the Soviets (1931): "Le

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<sup>243</sup> Ricardo Porro, *Oeuvres/Obras*, p. 50 (Appendix A, p. 270).

Corbusier... attempts to unify the scattered masses by conceiving of them as forming a body, with a head, shoulders, waist, and hips, so that in plan an under-image, like a piece of African sculpture, curiously emerges."<sup>244</sup> This biomorphic ordering is nothing new. It may be seen in the architecture of Michelangelo and in that of the ancients. Porro merely continues in this tradition which conceives of buildings as organisms.

Some of his more recent projects do not display the anthropomorphic element so overtly. In his building in Liechtenstein, which he poetically refers to as "The Gold of the Rhine" (figs. 8.1 to 8.6), the image intended by Porro is that of "...three enormous fingers that grasp an immaterial golden energy."<sup>245</sup> His erudite narrative may result quite recondite to most viewers. The superimposed image is multiple according to Porro's account: "The fingers of a giant that descend from the mountain remind us of Nietzschean superman. The gold is also light, fire, image of knowledge. Everything evokes Prometheus, the Titan who descended from the mountain to give knowledge to mankind. The work is an image of financial capitalism of the seventies, but it is more than anything an homage to Germanic culture."<sup>246</sup> Hence by his account, the superimposed image represents one of the great themes of mankind, a moment in civilization and participates in a certain tradition--that of the Austrian rococo.

One may question if the superimposed image which Porro intends is registered by the viewer--indeed, not just an 'average' viewer but an extraordinarily cultured one well versed in mythology, philosophy and the history of art. One may question whether the perception of three fingers and a golden energy is attained by the viewer. This would correspond to what Erwin Panofsky designates as the first step towards an iconographical interpretation of a work--the level of pre-iconographical description which he calls *primary* or *natural subject matter*. This is a necessary first step towards a

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<sup>244</sup> Vincent Scully, *Modern Architecture*, George Braziller, New York, 1965, p. 43.

<sup>245</sup> Ricardo Porro, "15 Works", *Architecture and Urbanism*, Mar. 1994, no. 282, p. 24.

<sup>246</sup> Ricardo Porro, *Oeuvres/Obras*, p. 46 (Appendix A, p. 263).



further delving into the meaning of a work. A viewer incapable of arriving at this stage would never be able to make the associations with Nietzsche or Prometheus or Paracelsus. Whether Porro is successful at making the building's content known via its forms is a question which each individual viewer will have to answer for himself. There may be other meanings which the viewer finds in this work. There may be viewers who resist 'playing the game' of iconographical interpretation and hence derive a satisfaction purely from the building's forms to which they deny any representational meaning. Yet for those who do make an attempt to decipher the meaning of the building, the task is not an easy one. As Heinrich Wofflin points out, "It is true, we only see what we look for, but we only look for what we can see."<sup>247</sup>

Wofflin in discussing the development of form in the history of art states: "Now it is well known that all art in advancing seeks to make the task of the eye increasingly more difficult; that is to say, when once the problem of lucid representation has been grasped, it will come about of itself that certain difficulties are placed in the way of perception, that the picture form becomes complicated, and that the spectator, for whom the simple has become all too transparent, finds an interest in the solution of the more complicated problem."<sup>248</sup>

This theory of an advancing difficulty of perception in the history of art is also agreed to by Arthur Koestler. In The Act of Creation he posits that, "The history of art could be written in terms of the artist's struggle against the deadening cumulative effects of saturation."<sup>249</sup> Yet whereas Wofflin refers to the progressive complication of form, Koestler discusses the superimposed image, the iconographical interpretation of a work. He states that,

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<sup>247</sup> Heinrich Wofflin, Principles of Art History, p. 230.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>249</sup> Arthur Koestler, The Act of Creation, Dell Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1973, p. 336.

The intention is not to obscure the message, but to make it more luminous by compelling the recipient to work it out himself--to recreate it. Hence the message must be handed to him in implied form--and implied means 'folded in'. To make it unfold, he must fill in the gaps, complete the hint, see through the symbolic disguise. But the audience has a tendency to become more sophisticated with time; once it has mastered all the tricks, the excitement goes out of the game; so the message must be made more implicit, more tightly folded. I believe this development towards greater economy (meaning not brevity, but implicitness) can be traced in virtually all periods and forms of art.<sup>250</sup>

In his building at Liechtenstein, "The Gold of the Rhine" (figs. 8.1 to 8.6), Porro certainly seems to follow this tendency towards delivering his message in a more implied form. Yet this message runs the risk of remaining a soliloquy never reaching the public if it remains excessively codified.

Throughout the history of the visual arts there has been a drive to give concrete form to abstract thought. This is accomplished by the use of symbols, what Porro calls the superimposed image which encompass the symbol and the figurative image. In fact, as E. H. Gombrich accurately observes, "...art was once the servant of symbolism and not symbolism the servant of art."<sup>251</sup> In speaking of the art of the Middle Ages, Emile Male confirms this view through his essay, "Medieval Iconography", in which he states that, "...medieval art was before all things a symbolic art, in which form is used merely as the vehicle of spiritual meaning."<sup>252</sup> Even more recently various architects have professed an adherence towards the necessity for architecture and symbolism to be united. William Lethaby cites innumerable historical examples throughout his book, Architecture, Mysticism and Myth which advocate his premise about architecture, namely that, "As the pigments are but the vehicle of painting, so is building but the vehicle of architecture,

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid., p. 337-338.

<sup>251</sup> E. H. Gombrich, "The Use of Art for the Study of Symbols" as it appears in Psychology and the Visual Arts, ed. by James Hogg. Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1969, p. 154.

<sup>252</sup> Emile Male, "Medieval Iconography", as it appears in Readings in Art History, Vol. I, ed. by Harold Spencer, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1969.

which is the thought behind form, embodied and realized for the purpose of its manifestation and transmission."<sup>253</sup>

Yet there is a marked difference between the way that symbols are used and conceived of today as to when they were used in medieval times. Otto von Simson in The Gothic Cathedral explains this difference: "For us the symbol is an image that invest physical reality with poetical meaning. For medieval man, the physical world as we understand it has no reality except as symbol."<sup>254</sup>

Porro and others like him who follow in the romanticist as opposed to the rationalist current insist on the necessity of symbols in architecture. This reaction against the rationalist positions and the exigency to invest architecture with a symbolic content is voiced by the architectural theorist and historian Alberto Perez-Gomez in Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science where he declares that, "...symbolization is a profound human need and is indispensable for the perpetuation of culture. Man's humanity depends on nothing less than his ability to come to terms with the infinite in terms of the finite, precisely through symbols, whether totems or magnificent churches."<sup>255</sup> However, he laments that samples of meaningful architecture have been meager over the last two centuries.

In the twentieth century many architects have been preoccupied with the necessity for an architecture which is not just an empty carapace of form but a bearer of meaning. Le Corbusier in his writings and in his buildings certainly gives evidence of this. In his article entitled "Purism" (written jointly with Ozenfant) he states: "An art that would be based only upon primary sensations, using uniquely primary elements, would be only

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<sup>253</sup> William Lethaby, Architecture, Mysticism and Myth, George Braziller, New York, 1975, p. 1.

<sup>254</sup> Otto von Simson, The Gothic Cathedral, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1964, p. xvi.

<sup>255</sup> Alberto Perez-Gomez, Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1988, p. 323.

a primary art, rich, it is true, in geometric aspects, but denuded of all sufficient human resonance: it would be an ornamental art."<sup>256</sup>

The series of statements quoted here in rapid succession all agree with and cast light on Porro's stance regarding the use of the superimposed image in architecture. He lists such architects as Senmut (Queen Hatshepsut's architect), Hadrian (the Roman Emperor), Isidorus of Miletus and Anthemius of Tralles (the architects of Hagia Sophia), Michelangelo, Borromini, Ledoux, Gaudi, Frank Lloyd Wright, Rudolf Steiner--all of them belonging to what he considers a current of romantic architects. At the end of this list, he lists himself.<sup>257</sup>

In an interview conducted by Patrice Goulet, "Defense et illustration du romantisme", Porro outlines and defends romanticism in art and architecture. This stance appears to run counter to his professed adherence to the French Rationalist tradition which he discusses in the section dealing with "Tradition" in Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu. He states that, "The poet, like the romantic architect, always takes reality and exalts it, the exaltation of the world is his reality; he renders the occult obvious."<sup>258</sup> One may well wonder how Porro can claim to be both a Romanticist and an adherent to the French Rationalist current.

In the above cited three evening interview with Patrice Goulet, Porro explained and defended his views on Romanticism. The first evening he discussed his views on the particular characteristics that constitute a romantic artist. The second evening he listed the most significant architects of romanticism (a partial list appears two paragraphs above). The third evening he expounded his convictions about romanticism's saving

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<sup>256</sup> Le Corbusier and Ozenfant, "Purism" as it appears in Modern Artists On Art, ed. by Robert L. Herbert, Prentice Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., p.62.

<sup>257</sup> Patrice Goulet, "Defense et illustration du romantisme: trois soirees avec Ricardo Porro:", *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 224, Dec. 1982, pp. 4-6.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, p. lvii.

grace. On account of Porro's pervasive use of the term 'romanticism', an examination of his conception of this term is deemed necessary.

Romanticism, Porro proclaims, "...is an aesthetics of freedom."<sup>259</sup> By this he means that the romanticist is a man who does not submit to preestablished rules or viewpoints. He cites as an example Giordano Bruno, who was declared a heretic on account of affirming the plurality of systems and the infinitude of the material world. He was the first to speak of the ellipse. Porro states that, "From his thoughts would emerge the baroque."<sup>260</sup> This is in keeping with Wolfflin's remarks about the baroque, namely its hidden adherence to rule.

Porro refers to a certain taste for the impossible as a characteristic common to the romantic artists of all times. He makes the following quotation: "'He who measures the air can live in death and die in immortality.'" In writing these words, the great Cuban poet, Jose Lezama Lima thought without a doubt about the romantic poet. To measure the air cannot be but the ambition of a romantic...."<sup>261</sup>

Another characteristic of the romantic is that he is a rebel: "The romantic cannot accept reality, the world in which he lives, fatality, nor the society which surrounds him."<sup>262</sup> Of course, this same characteristic of the romantic may be expressed in psychological terms (thus removing all its romanticism) as a socially maladjusted individual.

Yet another characteristic he ascribes to the romantic artist is of flight and nostalgia, both of these which have death as their object. In addition, the romantic is a visionary. "The romantic loves nature passionately, yet the forest, for him, is always something mysterious, and reality is filled with the possibilities of the unreal."<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., p. lvii.

Perhaps a more surprising characteristic is that, "Yet all romantic artists are unbelievably rational: they 'see' countless implications within rationality which the others cannot see."<sup>264</sup> This 'vision' of the romantics is accomplished through suffering. Porro does not provide any further explanations about how the romantic may be said to be rational. However, his belief that indeed romanticism is rational may provide a link to French Rationalism. The philosophy which accompanied the art of romanticism is traceable to the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau and of Emmanuel Kant. As indicated by Francis Claudon in The Concise Encyclopedia of Romanticism:

The possibility of perceiving a coherent representation of the world does not alter the fact that the world as it is in itself is not the world as reflected in the human mind. Here is the measure of human greatness: man builds his world by organising his knowledge; but herein also lies the proof of the mysterious and ideal nature of the world. Romantic ideology is an ideology of the irrational because it must first find... the rational proof of its own abstraction..... Nothing, outside man himself, can decide for him what his choice as a free man should be. No external or superior law may govern him; his dignity is embodied in his rational freedom to want things for their own objective qualities, in other words, in submission to the categorical imperative.<sup>265</sup>

This emphasis placed on self-reliance and on the breaking away from preestablished rules and dogmas gave way to the need for originality of expression through the invention of new symbols. As pointed out by Hugh Honour, "Similarly, [the Romantics] rejected the notion that symbolical images had codified meanings laid down in emblem books. They felt free to use symbols either in traditional or new ways, to give personal significance to those which had been long familiar, or to find others to express the constant preoccupations of the human spirit."<sup>266</sup>

Contrary to these tendencies to invent new symbols or to ascribe new significations to old symbols, Porro is a traditionalist: he draws from the established

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid., p. lvii.

<sup>265</sup> Francis Claudon, The Concise Encyclopedia of Romanticism, Chartwell Books, Inc., Secaucus, NJ, 1980, p. 21.

<sup>266</sup> Hugh Honour, Romanticism, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1979, pp. 17-18.

repertoire of symbols. Although he does not invent new symbols, he does combine symbols in new ways thereby amplifying or altering their meaning through their association.

Porro's definition and characterization of the romantic artist and romanticism may be interpreted as a self-portrait, or as an idealized self-portrait. The characteristics that he list can certainly be projected unto the material evidence of buildings of various periods and cultures. Whereas the artists of the Romantic period--that period lasting from about 1770 to 1850 which manifested itself as a reaction against the Industrial Revolution and Classicism--projected their thoughts and feelings on nature, Porro attempts what may be referred to as a 'romantic criticism' of art history and of his own work. In the case of romanticism, individuality conditioned both the creation of the work of art and the response of the spectator.<sup>267</sup> This upholding of romanticism may be seen as Porro's attempt to situate himself within the history of architecture, as the current spokesman of a 'tradition' which knows no bounds in time or geography.

Interestingly, this gives rise to the notion that art history may be organized by thematic as opposed to formal similarities. This, then, would make it possible for the architecture of the Emperor Hadrian to be placed in the same 'chapter' with the architecture of Antoni Gaudi not on account formal similarities but due to the thematic similarities which Porro ascribes to them.

What Porro's notions about romanticism and the historical Romantic movement have in common is that both believe that artists are individuals gifted with an extraordinary intuition and that through this intuition they can arrive at certain supreme values through the expression of their deepest thoughts and feelings. Similarities in this approach may be found in the work of the Symbolists and the Expressionist which

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<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

followed at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century who also ventured to give formal expression to an 'unseen reality'.

Although some of the architects admired by Porro have been categorized as Expressionist, it seems ineffectual to attempt to classify him in this vein although certainly some similarities in his work to those of Expressionist architecture will be found by those who insist on this approach. First of all, there never was a well defined Expressionist school of architects. The term 'Expressionist' has been used by architectural historians in retrospect.<sup>268</sup> In painting the term tends to denote a certain tendency for the artist to express his personal ideas and feelings. In architecture many of the Expressionists's fantastic designs show a disconcern with function. As pointed out by Lionel Richard, "It was their projection of the architect's inner need to create, grafted on to a desire for a collective transformation of the world, in order to restore man's vital dynamism, which had to intervene in the design before any concern about its function."<sup>269</sup> Porro's designs, on the other hand, have as their starting point an analysis of function. Porro's architecture is not a revolt against tradition as had been the case with many of the so-called Expressionist architects. An examination of various Expressionist works, such as Rudolf Steiner's Goetheanum, will reveal a definitive and intent use of mathematical proportion.<sup>270</sup> Such is not the case with Porro's architecture. Expressionist heralded the coming of new materials and techniques, such as Bruno Taut's obsessions with glass. Porro's architecture uses by and large traditional construction materials and methods. In these and many other respects Ricardo Porro's architecture may be said to differ from that of the Expressionists.

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<sup>268</sup> Wolfgang Pehnt, Expressionist Architecture, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1973, p. 9.

<sup>269</sup> Lionel Richard, The Concise Encyclopedia of Expressionism, Chartwell Books, Inc., Secaucus, N.J., 1978.

<sup>270</sup> Carl Schmid-Curtius's geometrical schema for the plan of the first Goetheanum as it appears in Wolfgang Pehnt, Expressionist Architecture, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1973, p. 142.



However, in terms of the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms employed in the architecture of those individuals who have been classified as Expressionist, such as Antoni Gaudi, a similarity may be said to exist. However, it is perhaps in the architecture of the "School of Amsterdam"--in such buildings designed with close attention to programmatic and functional aspects as contrasted to the capricious drawings which disregarded programmatic elements of an Expressionist such as Hermann Finsterlin--in which certain formal characteristics and patterns of organization Porro's buildings may be said to resemble. The roofs of Porro's buildings may be seen as a formal element which provides a dynamic and unifying value to his buildings. In the "School of Amsterdam" the roofs played a prominent role in the aesthetics of their architecture. In the book entitled Expressionist Architecture Wolfgang Pehnt points out that, "Powerful roof structures were used again and again in the architecture of the school of Amsterdam to draw together a variety of different functions into one homogeneous building."<sup>271</sup>

Porro's affinities with Expressionism may well be debated. On one hand, certain formal similarities between his architecture and that of expressionist architects who used organic and zoomorphic forms may be found. Yet on the other hand, it is not his inner and personal vision which he attempts to express in his buildings but instead certain universal themes of mankind through the use of conventional symbols. Porro's thematic and formal approach to his work is much more eclectic than that of his expressionist predecessors. Facile and forceful classifications of a given artist into a particular movement run counter to an understanding of his distinguishing characteristics. Yet these desires by some to classify Porro's work in a pre-existing scheme must be pointed out on account of some of the reviews of his work that have been published to date or commented on by some observers. While sharing some of the characteristics of the picturesque with expressionism, not even the most outrageous of Porro's creations reach

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<sup>271</sup> Wolfgang Pehnt, Expressionist Architecture, p. 192.

the fantastic extremes of some Expressionist works. Porro's architecture, particularly his more recent work since he became associated with Renaud de la Noue, remains quite intent on the construction materials and methods necessary in order to convert the drawings and models into completed functional buildings. Nonetheless, one may still experience a certain awe when looking at the drawings and then seeing the actual built project, as is also the case with many expressionist works.

Another current into which many observers may be predisposed to categorize Porro's work, perhaps on account of his pervasive use of symbolism in his buildings, is that of Symbolism. It should be recalled that Symbolism emerged primarily as a movement in art and literature during the last two decades of the 19th century. Yet Symbolism's prime concern was with the expression of states of interior feeling. Symbolist artists were concerned with inventing new symbols. Hence, as is pointed out by Robert Goldwater in Symbolism, with regards to the Symbolist artist: "...his desire for newly meaningful equivalents with which to replace worn-out images leads him to hidden, personal metaphors."<sup>272</sup> Yet as previously indicated, Ricardo Porro does not attempt to invent new symbols; he draws his images from the learned and established iconographical repertoire.

Perhaps another connection may be made between Ricardo Porro's architecture and another movement which emerged in the second decade of the twentieth century: Surrealism. However, it should be noted that the works produced by this movement were in the realms of literature, painting and sculpture. There were no surrealist architects associated with this group which revolved around Andre Breton. The referential connections made in such work have a meaning with respect to the unconscious mind. Images and symbols were brought together in unexpected associations. Through this 'other' symbolic reality--surreality--they sought to represent the reality of dreams and

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<sup>272</sup> Robert Goldwater, Symbolism, Harper & Row, New York, 1979, p. 43.

unconscious states of the mind. Hence, the symbol was the means of making the unconscious mind accessible to the conscious mind.

Certain architects such as Antoni Gaudi have been labeled surrealists or precursors of surrealism in retrospect on account of the pervasive use of symbols in their architecture. One may be tempted to categorize Porro's architecture as surrealist based on his use of symbols and the manner in which these become associated in his architecture in a collagist manner. Certainly the collage was one of the preferred vehicles of expression used by the surrealists. Through collage they brought together fragments of distinct realms of reality so as to produce the 'spark' of unexpected associations. Yet at least a decade before the surrealist began to use collage to exalt the irrational element made possible through the employment of glued fragments, the analytic cubists had used the same method to achieve quite different effects. They employed collage as a rational means of making the referent to reality more tangible by using an actual fragment directly cut out of reality and applied to their compositions.

The use of the collage technique is evident in Porro's work in that his forms and themes are derived from a diverse number of at times seemingly incompatible sources. These fragments lose their original identity by being placed in a new context in which they become interrelated. However, although the fragments may still be identified as fragments through careful observation, yet the 'seams' between the fragments are carefully disguised so as to form a unified whole. The fragments are not exhibited as isolated parts; an effort is made to integrate them into the whole composition--to make them subordinate to an overall thematic and formal concept.

Nonetheless, a surrealist element may be said to exist in many of his works. The project for a Hotel Complex in San Sebastian<sup>273</sup>, Spain (figs. 5.1 and 5.2)--a competition done in collaboration with Andre Mrowiec in 1964--is Porro's attempt to give form to the

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<sup>273</sup> Ricardo Porro, *Oeuvres/Obras*, p. 30 (Appendix A, p. 253).

nightmarish realities of the Spanish Civil War, of the feeling of anguish expressed in Picasso's "Guernica". In sum, the project aims to express the presence of Thanatos, an element which Porro finds to be a constant of Spanish art. The multiple images which Porro enumerates in this project--explosion, the floor plan in the form of a chthonian scorpion, the ghost ship on the roof containing the swimming pool (suggestive of the last initiatic voyage from which there is no return--the final voyage of death), the crutches serving as the building's support--these and perhaps others may be found by a heedful observer. Still, in this project dating from the mid-sixties, the observer may note a formal similarity to many contemporary projects which have been denominated "Deconstructivists". If so, this project predates the deconstructivist aesthetic by more than two decades.

Hence in Porro's architecture one may note an assimilation to various modern movements on account of formal similarities or on account of his theoretical principles regarding the use of the superimposed image as it is manifested in his design intentions. Such attempts at labeling may be further pursued and perhaps successfully so by emphasizing or omitting certain characteristics of his work. Indeed certain aspects of his architecture may be said to participate in or derive from some of the tendencies exhibited in Symbolism, Expressionism and Surrealism but it cannot be said to fall fully into any one of them. Porro himself prefers to discuss his work as belonging to the Romantic lineage. His lack of adherence to preestablished rules as evidenced by the intuitive association of historical forms which become so stylized so as to make them almost unrecognizable from their model is one such romantic characteristic. However, he deviates from the Romanticists (as well as the movements which follow in this anti-rationalist current-- Symbolism, Expressionism, Surrealism) in that he aims to express the universal (and not the personal) through conventional symbols rather than through newly invented symbols. Furthermore, since the building's function is his point of

departure for his compositions, the superimposed image may be seen as subordinated and limited to this rational component of the design.

In his more recent projects done in cooperation with his partner Renaud de la Noue the superimposed image continues to be of fundamental importance for the projects's design. Two projects, both completed in the early part of this decade, the College Elsa Triolet and the College Colonel Fabien shall serve to illustrate the continuation of symbolism and the figurative image in his recent work.

The explanation which Porro ordinarily gives for the superimposed image in the College Elsa Triolet (figs. 26.1 to 26.13) is that of the dove which historically has symbolized knowledge, the holy spirit, and more recently, peace. Indeed this zoomorphic image may be detected by most observers. Furthermore, it may be said that the building users generally agree that the school presents the image of a dove. Hence, it has become a generally agreed upon precept which is reinforced within a certain sociometric network. The mayor of St. Denis even had an official plaque put up in the thoroughfare created by the two plazas which connect the two streets which reads "Passage de la Colombe" ("Lane of the Dove").

Nonetheless, Porro discussed possible meanings which he associates with this building. He discussed the presence of the image of a mountain (which means fire as well as earth), of a wave (which means water), and of the dove (which means air). Hence, the superimposed image is a totality of the four elements.<sup>274</sup> The whole responds to an eternal theme of mankind which is knowledge. As pointed out by Porro and mentioned in Teresa De Montis's essay which discusses the superimposed image in this school, "There is a clear allegorical intent in the Elsa Triolet College: it is announced by a

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<sup>274</sup> Ricardo Porro in Mariano Alemany, "An Interview with Ricardo Porro", May-Jun. 1994.

column ending in an open book, on which a dove is alighting with outspread wings, an image that serves as the interpretive key to the entire structure."<sup>275</sup>

Discussing some of the iconography of the building's interior, Porro pointed out the five beams supported on the single stylized Doric column (fig. 26.10) as symbolizing man, for five makes reference to the two arms, two legs and the head. The cut-out in the beams in the form of an egg is a symbol of life and follows from the association with the dove (fig. 26.7).

Other interpretations are of course possible. One may perhaps conceive of the image of a dragon or of the plumed serpent Quetzalcoatl. Such an interpretation, however, could only be made by someone familiar with the native Meso-American religious tradition. Thus the interpretation depends on the observer's projections based on his experience and expectations. (Was not Hernando Cortez thought to be the incarnation of Quetzalcoatl by the Aztecs who expected this god's return from the east?)

Marie-Christine Loriers in her review of this school building for the French journal *Techniques & Architecture* begins her observations in this way: "This strange edifice with the beak of a bird, the carapace of a tortoise, the skeleton of a whale, and the dignity worthy of a chapel..."<sup>276</sup> After discussing the building and its other possible interpretations, including those alluded to by Porro, she concludes: "Each can find his own interpretation, the most important thing is that the basis for suggestion is there, and evidently so, to spark off a dialectic game."<sup>277</sup>

This comment is in keeping with the multiple valences of a symbol which permit for multiple readings of the same building. It is a flattering affirmation of a statement made by Walt Whitman which Porro frequently quotes thus: "The greatest poet is not he who has done the best, but he who suggests the most. He not all of whose meaning is at

<sup>275</sup> Teresa De Montis, "Ricardo Porro", *Materia*, no. 10, 2nd quadrimester, 1992, p. 47.

<sup>276</sup> Marie-Christine Loriers, "Ricardo Porro: College Elsa Triolet a Saint-Denis", *Techniques & Architecture*, no. 394, Feb.-Mar. 1991, p. 40.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

first obvious, but he who leads you much to think, much to believe, much to complete in turn."

Yet by using the superimposed image of the dove to signify peace, Porro is not defining the concept of peace. His purpose is not to define nor can he. He can only express the thing or concept signified with a metaphor. The metaphor is the vehicle of expression capable of superimposing and uniting the various levels of knowledge. It is this dynamic, flowing reality which is given expression via the images and symbols which the observer needs to decode and verify so as to arrive at the same intuition from which Porro had previously parted and made 'palpable' through the symbols inherent in the forms of his building.

In the notes which accompanied the photographs of his other recently completed school, College Colonel Fabien in Montreuil (figs. 28.1 to 28.17), which appeared in *L'architettura*, the Italian journal directed by Bruno Zevi, Porro provides the following comments: "In our opinion, architecture is a language. And, from a poetical point of view, we tried to express one of the eternal problems of humanity: we live in a world of contradiction. According to Heraclitus the two notions of life and death are integrated. Hegel too thought that contradiction is the drive of history when he was developing his theory of thesis, antithesis and synthesis which becomes thesis again and so on..."<sup>278</sup> Hence the fragment from Heraclitus, "The name of the arc is life, its work death", becomes the theme of this building to which the superimposed images refer.

The Hegelian image of history is given material form in the College Colonel Fabien. A school is a cultural building and history is a great part of culture; therefore, the image of history is deemed appropriate for a school. This integration of the opposites is suggested by the two zoomorphic forms emerging from the two distinct wings which make up the building (figs. 28.8 and 28.9). The heads of the beasts rise above the

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<sup>278</sup>Ricardo Porro, "Collegio Fabien/Fabien College, Montreuil", *L'architettura*, anno xxxix, no. 9, Sep. 1993, p. 624.

entrance (fig. 28.9). On the pavement by the entrance a figure of the Ying-Yang made with red and black brick again denotes the equilibrium between the opposites. Porro discusses other images which reinforce this theme: "In the entrance hall the structure is a mythical tree; the tree of life, which is animated by the light coming through the colored glass. On the back facade, the two roofs of the dining room and the covered playground are in the form scissors as a reference to the Greek Parques [Latin: Parcae; Greek: Moerae] that cut the string of life."<sup>279</sup> In addition, one will observe that one of the 'branches' of the tree of life appears as a white surface which disrupts the rectilinear geometry of the windows on top of the entrance (fig. 28.9). This element, however, may be read as a 'branch' from the interior of the entry hall (fig. 28.13). The stained glass windows on that surface were referred to in an interview with the author as being "the eye of God."

The multiplicity of symbols and the various significances that may be attributed to each one may perhaps be best understood if they are all interpreted conjointly. Porro has suggested that architecture is a symbolic language; however, he has not explained the 'grammatical properties' of it, although he no doubt is aware and adheres to the rules of syntax which have been proposed by iconologists.

One such set of syntactical rules of symbolism has been outlined by Juan-Eduardo Cirlot in the introduction to his Diccionario de simbolos (Dictionary of Symbols). An understanding of these rules will serve as a possible model for the viewer to pursue an iconographical interpretation of Porro's work and provide an avenue for a better understanding of his design intentions.

Symbols in a composition do not occur as isolated entities but rather interact among themselves thus making possible an overall symbolic interpretation. The individual symbols and their interconnections provide for a syntax of symbols which may

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid., p. 624.



proceed in the following four different ways as outlined by Cirlot: "a) *successive mode* (the placement of a symbol next to another; their meanings are not combined, nor even related among themselves); b) *progressive mode* (the meaning of symbols is not mutually altered, but represents the different stages of a process; c) *compositional mode* (the symbols are modified by their proximity and give rise to complex meanings, i.e., a combination rather than a mixture of their meanings is produced); d) *dramatic mode* (interaction of the groups; all of the possibilities of the aforementioned groups are integrated)."<sup>280</sup>

The syntax of symbols becomes progressively more complex by means of their combinations and interactions as one proceeds from the *successive mode* to the *dramatic mode*. This progressive drive towards complexity can be compared to Wolfflin's observations about the drive towards ever greater and more challenging complexity. The *compositional mode* and *dramatic mode* may be termed the 'baroque' style of symbolic syntax following Wolfflin's use of the term baroque. The symbolic elements in these two latter modes do not function in isolation but instead interact with other symbols thus gaining their true and complex meanings from their being fused to form a whole symbolic message.

The presence of each of these four syntactic modes may be found in Porro's work. Yet particularly the presence of the *compositional mode* and of the *dramatic mode* may be seen to operate in his works. Contiguity is the basis of associations. Making an analogy to literature, it would seem that the symbolic elements are arranged in the form of parataxis (arranged contiguously without an indication of logical relationships) as opposed being arranged in the form of hypotaxis (where some elements are subordinated to others). On account of there not being any clausal predication, all symbols may be

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<sup>280</sup> Juan-Eduardo Cirlot, Diccionario de simbolos, p. 46.

said to lie on the same level. Hence, more than just one distinct and authoritative reading is possible.

Hence in a building such as the College Colonel Fabien, the viewer must rely on his memory to form the associations which result from the various visual stimuli which may be interpreted as symbols as he wanders around the exterior and interior spaces of the building. If he is capable of intuiting the repeated symbolism of life and death he will be able to arrive at the concept of opposition. In the entry sequence, the Ying-Yang which appears in the pavement at the entrance may be said to provide the key (fig. 28.2). Yet naturally, the viewer's familiarity with the various valences attributed to the symbols (not to mention his ability to recognize the architectural elements as symbols) will be a determining factor in his deciphering of the work.

Hence, in a building such as the College Colonel Fabien one may find the image of objects and forms which derive from diverse cultural backgrounds (e.g., Ying-Yang from the orient, Tree of Life from the Bible) as well as from diverse spheres of human experience, from the spiritual as well as the banal (e.g., scissors). These elements, however, have all been integrated within one composition. As a result, their meanings have been altered due to their associations. The presence of a symbol or a set of symbols suggests and promotes the significations of other symbols or set of symbols so as to arrive at a coherent overall symbolic message.

One such reading of the College Colonel Fabien would be as follows:

As a starting point, the large and distinctly represented symbol of the Ying-Yang appears in red and black brick at the entrance (fig. 28.2). In an unequivocal manner, this symbol signifies the antipodal dualistic forces in dynamic equilibrium. Precisely what forces the Ying-Yang is said to represent depend on the other symbolic elements found in the building.

The two overhangs (fig. 28.9), one over the other placed by the entrance, may be interpreted as stylized figures of horses or, more specifically, dragon-horses. These

mythological creatures are symbols of the cosmic energy in its primordial form.<sup>281</sup> Their connection with the Ying-Yang is established via the Chinese legend which tells of the Chinese emperor Phuc-Hi who, in the third millennium B.C., saw these fabulous animals carrying the octagon with the trigrams from the I-Ching and the Ying-Yang sign.<sup>282</sup>

These two overhangs may also be interpreted as horses (as opposed to dragon-horses). In this case, the horse may be seen as a symbol of the cyclic movement of life. Hence, Neptune's horses also symbolize the cosmic energies. A pair of horses is also a reference to Janus and to the duality of life and death as symbolized by a white horse and a black horse.<sup>283</sup> (Porro fails to deploy color as a persuasive means of reinforcing this valence of the symbol. Both 'horses' are of the same color). Jung also associates horse with water; hence the connection to Neptune.<sup>284</sup> On account of their great speed, the horses can also signify the wind and the sea foam.<sup>285</sup> Horses and their implied movement are also a reference to the fourth dimension.

The top of the front facade of the College Colonel Fabien may be interpreted as waves (figs. 28.6 and 28.8). Following the meaning ascribed to waves in China one may find that these may be considered the dwelling place of dragons as well as symbol of purity. These two apparently contradictory meanings may be explained as follows: on account of the undulating shape of the waves, these are associated with dragons; on account of the color of the white foam, these are associated with purity.<sup>286</sup> Also the whiteness may be associated with the Yang. On account of their placement atop the building bordering the sky, the waves may be interpreted as the superior sea that the ancients believed in. The sea is a transitive element between the formal (earth, solid) and

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<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 340.

the non-formal (air, gases). hence, by analogy, the sea is a transitive element between life and death. It is the source of life and the end of life as well.<sup>287</sup>

The whole building as seen from the outside, and certainly some parts more notably than others, is reminiscent of a ship (figs. 28.8 and 28.10). The ship may be interpreted as a symbol of death. It may also be interpreted as a "...symbol of the body or 'vehicle' of existence."<sup>288</sup>

In the entry lobby (figs. 28.12 to 28.17), next to the main entrance, stands a column from which emerge curvilinear beams. This column may be interpreted as the Tree of Life. It has four branches with cut-outs that may be interpreted as fruits. Fruits are symbolic of the life-death dualism.<sup>289</sup> (This concept of the 'Tree of Life' could have been better executed had Porro differentiated its shape, texture and color from that of the other columns that stand in the entry hall. The only differentiation is that the column has 'branches' whereas the others do not.)

The roof which covers the terrace in the rear is split in two parts, each of which terminates in a sharp point (figs. 28.2 and 28.10). These elements may be interpreted as scissors or as lobster claws. The scissors may be read as an attribute of the Fates who use this instrument to cut the thread of life. However, it may be also read as a symbol of conjunction, like the cross. Therefore, it may be read as destruction or as creation., life or death.<sup>290</sup> The lobster in Christian iconography is a symbol of destruction.<sup>291</sup>

These different symbolic elements interact to emphasize the life-death duality which is central to human existence. Some of the valences of the symbols were obviated whereas others were focused on account of the associations and interactions produced between the various symbols. Although some of the symbols have a marked origin in a

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid., p. 298.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., p. 381 and p. 232.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., p. 442.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., p. 267.

given culture or religion, their meanings revolve around the same universal theme: the opposition of life and death.

In the symbolic interpretation appearing above, the difficulties encountered in translating the meanings of symbols produced through their interaction may be witnessed. Whereas the written account of the symbolic valences at play and their interaction are necessarily fixed by language, and only one element can be described and explained at a time, experientially, the spectator obtains a message from the superimposed image which is much more 'compact' and of a deeper and non-static significance.

Yet other readings are possible. For example, a reading which is based more on the principles of Christianity would tend to see the ensemble as the struggle between good and evil. In this instance, the horse-dragons and the lobster would be representative of evil.

This assemblage of objects and forms into a single composition permits for the attribution of symbolic values to them which, in isolation would retain a meaning quite different from that made possible through their association. The bringing together of such diverse elements brings to mind the compositional technique employed by the collagists. J. H. Matthews in his book Languages of Surrealism points to the possibilities opened up by the collage which bypasses reason and experience: "Assaulted by the scissors, these bits and pieces are usually recognizable for what they used to be; only long enough, though, to make us realize that they are not at present what we took them for. They have become elements in transition, moving out of their past identity toward a new one. The latter emerges only in the magic relationship that--thanks to the collage method--it now bears to others torn from the content of the commonplace."<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> J. H. Matthews, Languages of Surrealism, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 1986, p. 146.

In his search for architectural form Porro not only examines the architecture of the past and performs a creative misreading of it but he also examines the historical, literary and philosophical tradition and takes elements from these which he attempts to translated into architectural form. From this vast pool of images and symbols he proceeds to construct his own unique and original collage. Yet once a given element has been divorced form the overall structure to which it once belonged it takes on a new meaning. As pointed out by P. Adams Sitney in Modernist Montage, "Once a stylistic, generic, or syntactical element has been isolated, it becomes the matrix for generating new works."<sup>293</sup>

This overwhelming concern with the superimposed image is repudiated by the writings and buildings of many of the Deconstructivists architects. However, it should be noted that the work of some of the architects whose work has been classified as Deconstructivist display a tendency towards perpetuating this aspect of content in their buildings. Frank Gehry, for example, frequently makes quite conscious use of the superimposed image in his projects. His own house in Santa Monica (1978) is replete with marine imagery. Yet contrary to Porro, Gehry relies ostensibly on personal associations and on quotidian materials in order to present these images. Whereas Porro intends the superimposed image to lead to the great themes of mankind or a moment of civilization, Gehry's aims are different. His aim in this project, as expressed by Macrae-Gibson, may be said to aspire to "...detaching the instant of perception from memory."<sup>294</sup>

If one examines Porro's commentaries about his buildings, be it in the text of his Oeuvres/Obras, or in any of his articles and interviews appearing in the various journals, one will note that without exception the crux of his discussion is the superimposed image. This is the issue that he always readily volunteers to discuss not only in his work

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<sup>293</sup> P. Adams Sitney, Modernist Montage: The Obscurity of Vision in Cinema and Literature, Columbia University Press, New York, 1990, p. 2.

<sup>294</sup> Macrae-Gibson Gavin. The Secret Life of Buildings: An American Mythology for Modern Architecture, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1988, p. 8.

but in that of others as well. Some of his comments regarding the superimposed image as it pertains to of the work of some twentieth century architects may surprise the reader on account that this topic is rarely ever discussed with reference to their architecture.

Porro begins his discussion of the superimposed image in the twentieth century by examining the School of Architecture at ITT designed by Mies van der Rohe, an architect whose use of symbolism would seem to most readers to be of little concern perhaps on account of the numerous critical essays which have been produced about his work which focus on the spatial and technological innovations of his architecture. However, Porro's 'reading' of this building reveals the superimposed image to be in effect. His observations part from a tangible and visible fact--that of the building's facade--which he describes thus: "The beams which support the large slab are four in number and divide the facade into six parts."<sup>295</sup> Based on this evidence he constructs his interpretation:

The symbol of the Earth is found in the number 4 and in the number 6, the symbol of the creature and the Creator in a balance again found in the seal of Solomon formed of two opposing triangles: it is cosmic unity. The balance of opposites corresponds to the original Neoplasticism of Mies, the play of the always orthogonal horizontals and verticals tending to perfect equilibrium. In this sense, the four structural elements imply totality, Earth having become technological, and incorporates the number 6, symbol of the opposites in balance. These elements manifest the triumphant technology brought about by balance and perfection.<sup>296</sup>

Porro's discussion of the architecture of Mies van der Rohe serves as an excellent example to illustrate his monomaniac interest in the superimposed image. This example also serves to illustrate what may be termed his "invented symbolic content" as applied to a work of architecture. One may question if Mies consciously intended this symbolism. Be that as it may, one will never be able to tell whether the symbolism ascribed to the building by Porro originated unconsciously. The Jungian explanation expressed by

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<sup>295</sup> Ricardo Porro, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, p. 106 (Appendix B, p. 462).

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., p. 106 (Appendix B, p. 462).

Aniela Jaffe indicates that, "Consciously or unconsciously, the artist gives form to the nature and values of his time, which in their turn form him."<sup>297</sup> Hence it is pointed out that, "...a true symbol appears only when there is a need to express what thought cannot think or what is only divined or felt...."<sup>298</sup>

In light of the pronouncements of Jungian psychology it becomes questionable to what degree Porro's interpretations of his own work are of value if the workings of his unconscious mind remain inaccessible to him. Furthermore, it may be proposed that his disclosure of the superimposed image may be a disservice to his public since it represents but one interpretation and not the total of interpretations that may be derived from the work. Porro's public may be inhibited from investigating the meaning of the superimposed image in his work since he offers it to them gratuitously.

Each and every element of Porro's architecture cannot be said to constitute part of the superimposed image. Some of the elements are purely functional and inert in their participation to the symbolic message(s) intended by the building. Others may be seen to run counter to Porro's intentions or of the spectators attempt at iconographic interpretation. In some cases the 'bearers of meaning', i.e., the elements that may be said to contribute to the content of the superimposed image, are not the distinctly architectural elements--the spaces that constitute the buildings--but instead ornamental elements, sometimes sculptural in nature. Yet it is sometimes through minutia that Porro attempts to reinforce the meaning of the superimposed image. The success of his attempt to make manifest a given iconographic content may be seen to depend on the building's overall ability to persuade the viewer of this aspect of content. Hence the efficacy of the aspect of content that Porro denominates "persuasion" will be seen to have a bearing on the ability of the architecture to transmit its intended message.

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<sup>297</sup> Aniela Jaffe, "Symbolism in the Visual Arts", as it appears in Carl G. Jung Man and His Symbols, Doubleday & Co., Inc., Garden City, N. Y., 1964, p. 250.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.



### 3.4 "Persuasion"

Persuasion. Webster's Dictionary defines it as, "The act of persuading; the act of influencing the mind by arguments or reasons offered, or by anything that moves the mind or passions, or inclines the will to a determination."

Persuasion need not be verbal. Visual stimuli is at times much more potent. For example, in 1907 President Theodore Roosevelt ordered a world tour of the Great White Fleet. It served to persuade the world of America's naval power and was thereby instrumental in dissuading potential military aggression aimed at the United States.

Persuasion is aimed at a particular individual (or group of individuals) with a particular aim (or aims) in mind. Its effectiveness may be predicted but can only be confirmed after the fact. The field of persuasion is most closely associated with politicians and advertising agencies but upon examination it will be found to serve an important role in art and architecture as well.

Ricardo Porro recognizes the role played by persuasion in architecture. He lists "Persuasion" as one of the five aspects of content. Porro distinguishes between two forms of persuasion. The first consists of making the occupant use the building in a certain way or to act in a certain way. The second form of persuasion consists of convincing the viewer of a certain idea, be it political, religious or commercial. The architect will use all formal means at his disposal in order to convince the occupant of the purpose and/or ideas he has at heart.<sup>299</sup> Hence persuasion aims to actively shape the behavior of building occupants--their actions as well as their ideas and emotions.

Porro fails to explain the workings of persuasion in architecture in the text of Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu. In the section dealing with persuasion (as in all the other sections) he illustrates the concept via examples. He does, however, make the following remark: "All means that are available to the architect may be employed to transmit these

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<sup>299</sup> Ricardo Porro, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, p. 60 (Appendix B, p. 434).

ideas in the clearest way possible, psychological means included. The architect must be an expert on the expressive possibility of the language of vision in order that everything be explicit and without ambiguities.<sup>300</sup> These cursory remarks are followed by example upon example drawn from various well known buildings in the history of architecture. Yet it should be pointed out that clarity and lack of ambiguity which Porro refers to in regards to visual expression run counter to the symbol syntax examined in the previous chapter in which it was noted that symbols are modified through their association and give rise to complex meanings.

This drive to shape human behavior through architecture has been put into practice and discussed by numerous architects throughout history. The writings of Richard Neutra in Survival Through Design discuss the effect of architecture on the occupants. Neutra cites the extreme example of a 'fun house' in an amusement park as an environment capable of eliciting a marked behavioral and emotional responses on the visitor. He also discusses some of the requirements needed to maximize the occupants's physiological and psychological well being. These include not only the size, shape and relations of the rooms but also furniture, lighting, ventilation and various other items.<sup>301</sup>

Throughout history one may find extreme examples of buildings and spaces designed so as to persuade the occupants of negative and horrific thoughts and emotions. In recent history the Nazi concentration camps may be cited as an example. Yet even in this extreme case it will be found that these buildings were incapable of vanquishing the indomitable hope and spirit of some of its occupants.

Persuasion presupposes a cause and effect relationship. In the case of architecture, it presupposes that the architectural elements may cause a given effect on human behavior--be it the regulation of motor behavior, such as causing the occupants to

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid., p. 60 (Appendix B, pp. 434).

<sup>301</sup> Richard Neutra, Survival Through Design, Oxford University Press, New York, 1954, pp. 150-151.

proceed along a certain path, or the eliciting of an emotional response, be it happiness or sadness, or the urging to adopt a certain idea. However, within the same architectural environment different people will take notice of different visual stimuli. Furthermore, their response to these stimuli will vary according to the differences in their physical and emotional make-up. Hence the architecture may attempt to constrain or encourage certain behaviors but cannot dictate them. Extreme examples such as bobwire fences are most efficacious in keeping occupants in but cannot dissuade them sufficiently so as not to attempt to leap the fence. A man who has been on his feet all day and is very tired and wants to sit down will find the slightest horizontal projection in a building capable of accommodating his buttocks suitable as a chair. These examples serve to illustrate the fact that although the architect may use various formal elements at his disposal to shape human behavior, nonetheless, certain unexpected behaviors will always result.

The channeling of traffic and the invitation to enter buildings is one of the most concrete forms of persuasion with regards to architecture. Porro discusses the entry sequence and the subsequent movement towards the altar in various churches. In regards to the more illusive facet of persuasion--that of bringing the occupants to believe in a certain idea--he discusses the architectural and iconographical elements of certain baroque churches which persuade the occupants to devotion and ideas of the mystical.

Porro concludes that, "In spite of numerous examples which can illustrate this aspect of architecture, persuasion is often absent from the intentions of the artist and does not constitute a *sine qua non* condition to the architectural creation."<sup>302</sup> However, it may be argued that the other aspects of content--namely, tradition, immediate content, superimposed image, and mediate content--will not become evident to the observer unless this aspect of content, persuasion, is brought into play. It is through persuasion that the viewer may become convinced that the building participates in a certain

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<sup>302</sup>Ricardo Porro, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, p. 69 (Appendix B, p. 439).

tradition. It is through persuasion that the viewer may become convinced that the building manifests its inner life. It is through persuasion that the viewer may become convinced of the meaning of the superimposed image. It is through persuasion that the viewer may become convinced that the building is an expression of the culture that made it.

Repetition is one of the methods whereby persuasion may take effect. Yet first it must be made clear what the intention is--what the architect is trying to persuade the occupants of. Once this is established then all architectural means, down to the smallest detail, should be used to persuade the occupants of the meaning of the total work.

When details are left unattended they may run counter to the overall persuasive thrust. Hence, for example, in the Cloisters Museum of Medieval Art in New York, the entire building attempts to persuade the visitor that he is in a medieval cloister. The architectural materials used have been artificially aged in order to match those which were shipped over from actual medieval monasteries in France and Spain and reassembled. Even the plantings and the music heard in the monastic gardens reinforce the idea that this building assembled on American soil in the twentieth century is a medieval cloister. However, when the visitor sees modern locks on some of the doors, it may be enough to break the spell.

Hence, any deviation from the main persuasive thrust is capable of defeating the purpose strived for. A focused aim which is reinstated in the whole and in the parts may be said to be the key to effective persuasion. Porro cites the Las Vegas casinos as an example of persuasion where the aim is to encourage the visitors to gamble.<sup>303</sup> (Another contemporary example of a focused and effective use of persuasion may be found in the Dolphin and Swan Hotels completed in 1990 by Michael Graves and Alan Lapidus. In this vast project the key note is luxury and entertainment. This tone is followed through

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 69 (Appendix B, p. 439).

in all the building spaces without any deviation or opposition. Although the symbols used in this example may be considered simplistic, nonetheless, the communication of the message is effective perhaps on account of its simplicity).

However, when the message or aim that the architect wants to persuade the visitors of is multiple or more complex, persuasion becomes a more difficult matter to attain. Multiple aims may lead to competing persuasive messages which may lose their effectiveness on account that the viewer may interpret them as being contradictory.

In Porro's School of Plastic Arts (figs. 3.1 to 3.14), the visitor is persuaded of the superimposed image of a city (as opposed to an isolated building on the landscape) on account of the various interlinked pavilions, the winding covered paths reminiscent of arcaded streets, and the courtyards which remind one of piazzas. Yet Porro wishes to persuade the visitor by bringing to his mind a certain idea, that of Eros. Through the use of anthropomorphic shapes reminiscent of the female form as may be seen in the overall design he tries to persuade the viewer of this. Yet the rectilinear forms which run counter to the sensuality of the curvilinear forms may be said to run counter to his persuasive intent.

In the article entitled "Ricardo Porro: College Elsa Triolet a Saint Denis", Marie-Christine Loriers cites Porro's comments concerning this building's aspect of persuasion: "I wanted to give dignity to this place of learning; so that when the child came in, he would be treated as a lord... I wanted to offer the dignity of the unknown."<sup>304</sup> This commendable desire to persuade to this effect is put into effect by Porro through the architectural elements, starting with the grandiosity of the entry hall (figs. 26.7 to 26.10) and carried through by making the spaces distinctive and well apportioned according to their use. Yet these generalities fail to inform one of the effectiveness of the persuasive intent. The architecture cannot preclude, for example, the vandalistic tendencies of some

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<sup>304</sup> Ricardo Porro as quoted by Marie-Christine Loriers, "Ricardo Porro: College Elsa Triolet a Saint Denis", *Techniques & Architecture*, no. 394, Feb.-Mar. 1991, p. 44.

of its occupants. Hence this aspect of persuasion may be relegated the status of a design intention where through the use of architectural elements the designer aspires to certain persuasive ends.

Persuasion may be said to be operative in bringing about a conviction in the observer that the building is linked to the site on account of its participation within a certain tradition. In the case of the College Elsa Triolet one may question if the minimal use of brick decorative patterns (on account of budgetary constraints) is sufficient to convince the viewer that the building participates in the tradition of ornamental brickwork found in the buildings around this area. One may also question if the Gothic elements that this building is said to exhibit are salient enough so as to persuade the viewer to think that the building participates in the Gothic tradition of Saint Denis. The superimposed image of the dove is certainly reinforced enough in the building's facade through its various features, yet one may question if the rectilinear fenestration runs counter to these persuasive attempts (figs. 26.3 and 26.4). In the various rooms the image of the dove disappears all together. This lapse in the details may be said to reduce the building's capacity to reinforce its predominant image as seen from the outside.

However, persuading the occupants to use a space in a certain way becomes apparent in the entry hall of the College Elsa Triolet. Here, a form recognizable as a small scale version of an amphitheater surrounds a small elevated platform which is accessed via a short set of stairs (fig. 26.10). The center of attention is emphasized by the stylized doric column from which emerge the five curving beams. The reader may note that in the preceding description given of this space certain assumptions have already been made. First of all, the circular stairway which surrounds the depressed floor level has been identified as a small amphitheater or gathering area where one can watch a performance or watch each other 'perform'. This in itself shows the degree to which persuasion to use a space in a certain way has been effective. On account of identifying

the architectural elements that constitute this space with that of a prototype--the amphitheater--a convincingly persuasive usage of the space has been established. Hence, what may in a most objective way be described as a succession of concentric planes, each of a fixed width and decreasing from the point of zero elevation, the main floor level, by fixed intervals of say approximately one foot, it may then come to be regarded as a wide concentric staircase, and finally, the alternative program (which the architect intended) of an 'amphitheater' or gathering area comes about by means of persuasion.

The notion of having the occupants use the building in a certain way and to convince them of certain thoughts or feelings is quite in keeping with Porro's definition of architecture: "Architecture is the creation of a poetic framework for the action of man."<sup>305</sup> Yet this notion presupposes a group of occupants in which all are responsive to the same persuasive message on account of their shared cultural values. Furthermore, it presupposes that the building will continue in existence throughout the years serving the same functions and programmatic needs for which it was designed. If these conditions are not met, then the whole argument for the need of this aspect of content, persuasion, suddenly brings about little if any conviction. This may be illustrated by one's imagining the Church of San Andrea al Quirinale being used as the headquarters of Il Duce.

By Porro's own admission, persuasion may superimpose and confuse itself with other aspects of content.<sup>306</sup> Hence, at times a certain aspect of a building may be said to make reference to the immediate content and to persuasion simultaneously. What aspects constitute persuasion and persuasion directed towards what end may be said to be a subjective judgment made by an observer who is called upon to make such an observation.

A room within a building may certainly be said to promote certain types of behavior on account of its size and configuration and to constrain others. The invitation

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<sup>305</sup> Ricardo Porro, *Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu*, p. 37 (Appendix B, p. 423).

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62 (Appendix B, p. 434).

and entry sequence to a building may be suggested by elements in a building's facade. The values and ideas of the occupants may be manifested via the architecture and the art and symbols incorporated therein. Yet ultimately each and every occupant will make his decision as to how to use the space and of what ideas to dwell upon while in that space.

Persuasion may serve to catalyze certain behaviors or to predispose the occupants to certain feelings or ideas. It may attempt to do so through consistent repetition ranging from those in the grand scale to the small scale details. If the details do not reinforce the grand scheme of things, it is likely that the intent will be discarded as a farce--as an unconvincing stage set. Yet a well constructed stage set where details have not been overlooked may indeed make it possible for certain 'dramas' to occur, i.e., that the space promotes or persuades the users to sociably interact and to carry out certain actions as well as to convince the users of certain ideas.

Some examples of incongruities in the details of Porro's architecture have been cited as inhibitors to persuasion. These may have resulted from lack of attention to detail, the limitations imposed by the budget or perhaps, most notably, on account that Porro attempts to persuade the viewer of not just one clear message but of many unclearly inter-related ideas. This may be the result of his collagist technique of composition. Porro takes elements from various cultural sources to make an architecture in which he intends to have multiple meanings. These multiple sources find their expression in what at times become contradictory forms. Hence the establishment of one clear persuasive message is not easily arrived at by the viewer.

Persuasion, it has been pointed out, posits a causal relationship between the viewer and the architecture. In his discussion of the five aspects of content as they pertain to his buildings, Porro seldom discusses the mechanics of this causal relationship said to occur with regards to persuasion. Users change over time and the same users change their mind from day to day. Effective persuasion aims at overcoming changes to the manner in which a building is used. For example, if a building such as the College



Elsa Triolet were to be converted into an office building, the entry hall with its mini-amphitheater should still prove to be a place preserved for purposes of gathering, on account of its markedly persuasive component to this end.

Hence persuasion may be seen as an element that goes well beyond the observed functional reality. Persuasion is an element that does more than just accommodate for certain functional necessities. It is the 'excess' of the building. It is what makes the building not just a shelter but a work of architecture. Persuasion is needed in order for the observer to perceive the other aspects of content that Porro proposes. Persuasion is necessary for the effective reading of the immediate content--to make the spectator aware that the inner life of the building is expressed on the outside. Persuasion is needed to make the spectator aware that the building participates in a given tradition. Persuasion is needed in order to

establish the authenticity of the superimposed image--to convince the viewer of the ideas symbolized by the superimposed image. Persuasion is needed even in order to establish the existence of what Porro call the "mediate content", that aspects which refers to the beliefs and preoccupations of the culture and the time that produced the building. The mediate content can not be, as Porro claims, a *sine qua non* condition of architecture unless the persuasive component is capable of bring this forth. Hence effective persuasion will be able to accomplish the reading of the four other aspects of content. It may be said that without persuasion there is no architecture. There may be intents to make architecture, but no real architecture that can be experienced by the viewer.

Certain effective persuasive elements may be pointed out in the four schools built by Ricardo Porro. Yet in each case, elements that run counter to the persuasive intent may be pointed out.

In the School of Plastic Arts the elliptical domes of the workshops have a skylight in the center. The light coming into the space from above marks a central location in the space. This persuades the occupants to gather around this central point or, as Porro

would have it, to place the object of study in the center. However, the ellipse is not a centric space as is a circle; it has a primary and a secondary axis. This implication to movement, however, is contradicted by the focus on the center.

The serpentine hallways which connect the workshops become more persuasive as a means of indicating circulation on account that they are covered and that passage is marked by the uninterrupted rhythm of the pilasters (fig. 3.6). The plaza is persuasive as a gathering space on account of its size and of it being surrounded by porticos (fig. 3.1). The papaya fountain in the middle serves as a focus to the irregularly shaped space (fig. 3.13). It persuades one that there is a center.

The pervasive use of soft and curvilinear shapes persuade one of the sensuality of the spaces. However, the harsh edges of the pilasters and gargoyles, and the rectilinear geometry of the offices and engraving workshops dissuade the observer of this impression. To what degree one may be persuaded that this constitutes an opposition is debatable. Certainly the elements of the female anatomy, highlighting its sexual function, serve to persuade one of the aspect of Eros. However, there is nothing that says "Thanatos" on account of a contrasting rectilinear geometry. There needs to be greater persuasion in order to achieve this. The architectural elements need to identify and reiterate the presence of Thanatos in order for the viewer to be persuaded of this presence. Otherwise, the architectural elements that run counter to the overall sensuality may be read as 'neutral', i.e., not carrying the message of sensuality, or worse still, as detracting from that reading without providing an alternative.

The creation of various pavilions surrounding a central plaza is an effective means of reinforcing Porro's intended superimposed image of a small city in both the School of Plastic Arts and the School of Modern Dance (figs. 3.1 and 4.1). The walls that surround these two schools persuade the users to enter through the main entrance which is clearly marked in both cases.

In the School of Modern Dance, the angularity and the awkward placement of the forms in relation of one to the other persuades the viewer of a certain chaos or tension or nervousness (figs. 4.1, 4.3, 4.8). The tall building at one end of the complex housing the auditorium does little to persuade the viewer of its immediate content or to reinforce the idea of tension provoked by the other elements on account of its blank huge blank wall (fig. 4.6).

In the Dance school one is also persuaded to circulate through the covered walkways (particularly on days when the sun is very hot or when it is raining). The repetition of forms and of materials in both Cuban schools serves to persuade the spectator that these are all part of the same building.

In the School Elsa Triolet, which has been dubbed "The Dove", the image of a bird is reinforced by the overhang in the form of a beak signaling the entry (fig. 26.6), by the smaller bird seen in the elevation facing the Rue Paul Eluard (fig. 26.3), and by the 'wings' seen from the elevation facing the court in the rear (figs 26.11 and 26.12). In addition, the 'feather' elements in the elevation facing the Rue Paul Eluard (fig. 26.4) reinforce the notion of a bird. A comical sort of persuasion of this image of the bird is found in the pavement of the rear court: there a tail of a bird has been painted on the ground (fig. 26.1).

However, how is one to ascertain that the bird is indeed a dove? The red color of the brick could suggest that it is a cardinal. The floor plan (fig. 26.2) can suggest that it is a dragon. At the entrance to the small plaza fronting the Rue Paul Eluard, Ricardo Porro placed a statue of a white bird emerging from a book (fig. 26.5). This isolated element, he claims, is to provide the key to the interpretation. However, its effectiveness cannot be said to be very persuasive. In any event, it is not part of the building but an isolated sculptural element which does not interplay with the building elements.

The red gridded rectilinear windows on the facade facing the Rue Paul Eluard (fig. 26.4) do not serve a persuasive function. They seem quite arbitrary; another style of window could have been selected without adding or taking away from the building's persuasive thrust. This is an example in which the details do not reiterate the persuasive message that the architect wishes to effectuate. All architecture breaks down at some point in the details. Yet the details are the means used to reinforce through repetition the persuasive intent of the whole.

The participation of the College Elsa Triolet as well as the College Colonel Fabien in the French tradition is not sufficiently persuasive so as to convince the viewer of its participation in that tradition. However, the entry hall in both schools, on account of their apparent size, privileged location allowing views into other parts, and special use of lighting, including stained glass, persuades the viewer that he is entering into a grand ceremonial space (figs. 26.7 to 26.10 and figs. 28.13 to 28.17).

The curving facade of the school facing the Avenue Colonel Fabien (fig. 28.8), however, is persuasive in that it guides the spectator towards the entrance which is denoted by the two overlapping overhangs (fig. 28.9). The slightly projecting wavy roof of this facade convinces one of the unity and dynamism of the building.

The examples just examined should convince the reader of the necessity for persuasion in order for there to be architecture. It is through persuasion that the architect's intents become manifested. Persuasion, then, may be seen as the 'excess' which stimulates the occupants to use the building's spaces in a certain manner and to entertain some ideas suggested by the building's elements. However, not all of the elements which constitute a building may be said to be persuasive. Yet when certain elements or details do not reinforce the persuasive thrust established, these should then be considered as detriments to persuasion and hence detriments to the 'excess' which make the architecture.

Porro fails to explain persuasion in relation to the eternal themes of mankind. These universal themes are transmitted through the superimposed image. Only by persuading the spectator of the veracity of the superimposed image can the universal themes come to occupy the spectator's mind. Hence persuasion, when linked to the great universal themes becomes trans-historical.

### 3.5 The "Mediate Content"

Of the five aspects of content which Ricardo Porro discusses in Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, this aspect of content, the mediate content, he claims is the only one which is a *sine qua non* condition of architecture. Porro states that, "In an architectural work, the mediate content would mean the expression of the historic moment where it is realized."<sup>307</sup> Porro goes on to assert that, "A work of architecture is the expression of its historic moment. I do not wish to say that it must express all aspects of this moment, but it must become a powerful image of a collective event."<sup>308</sup>

Said in other terms (which Porro does not employ in his text), one may venture to say that the mediate content is the expression of the *Zeitgeist*. Porro indicates that certain historical periods have expressed the totality of the spirit of the times, such as the Gothic architecture of the middle ages. Nonetheless, he realizes that the architecture of the 19th and 20th centuries does not express such a totality on account that there is no longer a homogeneous culture. He deplors most contemporary architecture on account that "...it repeats without any imagination the themes of the first half of the century."<sup>309</sup> However, he recognizes the current validity and prevalence of these themes which he goes on to list.

The three themes which Porro discusses and illustrates are: "dynamism"; "the technology of the period and the product of the machine"; "vitalism". Undoubtedly there

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., p. 122 (Appendix B, p. 469).

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., p. 122 (Appendix B, p. 469).

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., p. 123 (Appendix B, p. 469).

are other current themes. In his interview with this author Porro discussed other current themes such as revolution and alienation. However, the three above listed are the only ones he presents in Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu. For each of these three Porro cites various philosophers, scientists and literary figures who have made explorations and declarations about these topics. Afterwards, he illustrates these by drawing from examples of the history of art and architecture. The presentation may be seen as a collage of fragments pasted together through a sort of intellectual free association. A summary of each of the three themes shall be presented in turn followed by a critique of the concept of mediate content and of the presence of this aspect of content in Porro's work.

In the section which deals with the theme of dynamism, Porro makes reference to the various technological advances in transportation, such as the train, the automobile and the airplane in addition to other inventions such as the camera and motion pictures which have modified modern man's notions about time and space. He makes reference to the cyclical and linear notions of time which have appeared during the ages and of the various symbols that have traditionally been used to represent time. He discusses the various notions of time and the manner in which these have been given plastic expression in painting, sculpture and architecture. For example, with reference to the notion of time as a sequence of instants, he cites Trajan's column; instantaneity he finds in impressionist painting; time as a succession of moments he finds to be depicted in the work of the Futurists; for the notion of time as duration he turns to the writings of Marcel Proust and in architecture to the photomontages of the interior of Aalvar Aalto's Finnish Pavilion.

However, it is the aspect of time which he denominates "simultaneity" that is of prime concern to him, the one which he finds most current and most deserving of his efforts to represent it in his architecture as will be seen later. Of simultaneity he says the following: "It is the possibility of two or several events entering into a unique and

synchronous perception in a single and same act of the mind."<sup>310</sup> Porro points to Albert Einstein's exposition of the fourth dimension as having provided the basis for a new conception of the universe. Simultaneity, Porro points out, finds its way into the various arts. In literature, with James Joyce's Ulysses; in painting, with Picasso's Cubism as well as in the work of the Futurists; in motion pictures with the films of Eisenstein. He distinguishes between the work of the Cubists and the work of the Futurists thus:

In Cubism, the artist moves around the model and perceives the image from all angles simultaneously. These different moments are then superimposed and presented as a simultaneous image of these movements.

In the work of the Futurists, however, the space-time image is accomplished not through the moving viewer but rather through the moving object before a stationary observer. It is the movement of the object that is depicted in the Futurist composition.

When discussing simultaneity in architecture, Porro turns to the work of Frank Lloyd Wright for his example. Interestingly, in a short twelve page essay entitled Forma y Contenido en Wright (Form and Content in [the Work of Frank Lloyd] Wright) written by Porro in 1960 while he was a professor of architecture at a university in Venezuela, he discusses some of the same issues about the dynamism of Wright's architecture. With reference to Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie Houses, Porro indicates that, "...he accomplishes this dynamic sense by forcing the viewer to move around the object and to perceive it in all its facets. This dynamism is continued through the entrance and leads the viewer to move through the splendid architectonic passages of its interiors."<sup>311</sup> In Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu it is Wright's 'Falling Water' which he uses to exemplify the virtuosity of superimposed movements in architecture.

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid., p. 132 (Appendix B, p. 476).

<sup>311</sup> Ricardo Porro, Forma y Contenido en Wright, Espacio y Forma, Facultad de Arquitectura y Urbanismo, Universidad Central de Venezuela, Caracas, Sep. 1960, p. 12.

It should be noted that already in 1960 the germ of Porro's Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu appears in his brief essay on the work of Wright. He discusses the form of Wright's work through Heinrich Wolfflin's five opposed dynamisms. These are not discussed in Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu since the focus of that text is on the content in a work of architecture. Of the five aspects of content discussed, two already appear in germinal form in his essay dating from 1960. These two aspects are immediate content and mediate content.

It is curious to note that in Forma y Contenido en Wright Porro makes reference to Le Corbusier's 'Villa Savoye' as another example of dynamism in architecture. However, thirty-three years later with the publication of Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu he refutes the notion that 'Villa Savoye' is an expression of the space-time continuum as opined by Sigfried Giedion in Space, Time and Architecture.<sup>312</sup>

Porro concludes his discussion of dynamism with a presentation and discussion of a project of his dating from 1982 for the Paris Opera School of Dance. This project shall be examined later after a discussion of the other two themes of the twentieth century--technology and vitalism.

Porro's discussion of "The technology of the period and the product of the machine" begins once again with a discussion of Le Corbusier's 'Villa Savoye' in which he perceives "...an image of the object constructed in an assembly line, it is the object produced by the machine, more than the machine itself that is important."<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> For the particulars regarding Porro's objections the reader is referred to his comments which appear in Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, pp. 138-139 (pp. 96-97 English translation). Sigfried Gideon's discussion of Le Corbusier's 'Villa Savoye' appears in Space, Time and Architecture, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1982, pp. 525-530 and 554-555.

<sup>313</sup> Ricardo Porro, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, p. 142 (Appendix B, p. 482).



Then, in discussing the architecture of Mies van der Rohe, he indicates that this at "...uses as principle content the subordination of man to technological ion."<sup>314</sup> He admires the architecture of Mies but deplores that of his imitators.

From this point on the discussion of the theme of technology turns into a ciation of the current state of affairs in architecture. Porro, concerned as he is with g, indicates the message that he believes to be present in what he considers ctions not worthy of the name architecture. He grieves that, "The only meaning form the current massive architecture is that man, as a thinking, feeling being, no natters. If there is a message here, it comes from persuasion--to consume more, ore."<sup>315</sup>

He directs these accusations to the politicians, investors, speculators and the so- modern architects all of whom show a concern with the quantitative aspect at the of quality. In sum, he accuses not only the promoters of capitalism but also their counterparts. He also accuses the schools of architecture which censor humanist The aesthetic basis of this architecture consists of quoting forms which through etition have become devoid of meaning, Porro adds.

He traces this current state of affairs to the Calvinistic and iconoclastic tendencies n architects like Adolf Loos. Yet in Le Corbusier's pure prisms and smooth mented facades he also finds a legacy of Loos. His attack is also focused on the , most notably on Walter Gropius whose message he claims "...represents the end ividual impulses and the creation of an architecture that is easy for all in a few

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lence, other than a series of protestations, Porro explains little of the way that gy and the machine may become themes expressed by a viable architecture.

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1. 142 (Appendix B, p. 462).

2. 144 (Appendix B, p. 483).

3. 147 (Appendix B, p. 485).

However, he then turns to a theme in which he delights and which reacts against technology and the machine: the theme of vitalism.

Vitalism represents for Porro "...man's tendency to assert himself as a living, sensual being."<sup>317</sup> Its precursors may be traced back to romantic literature, the Pre-Raphaelites and the 'Arts and Crafts' movement in England. He cites the work of such Art Nouveau architects as Horta and Guimard, as well as Frank Lloyd Wright as having living forms in their architecture.

In addition, he also cites a pessimistic tendency in what he calls the vitalist movement. It may be found in the work of Antoni Gaudi and in the works of the Expressionists.

Porro concludes his discussion of vitalism as well as the chapter on the mediate content by discussing what he believes to be the central theme in a work which he has always admired: Ronchamp. The central theme of this work by Le Corbusier, Porro upholds and explains, is anguish.

Having thus reviewed Porro's collage-like text and extracted from it its most salient explanatory remarks (embedded within a multitude of examples) concerning the mediate content in twentieth century architecture, one may then turn to examine the evidence of this aspect of content in Porro's architecture and to comment on the feasibility of mediate content and the critical notions surrounding it.

Perhaps the most notable element in Porro's discussion of the mediate content is the absence of fragments of writing from current sources or the explicit reference to a living architect and his work. Gaudi, Horta, Le Corbusier, Wright, and Aalto have all long been dead. The same may be said of the writers Mann, Joyce, and Proust. A discussion of mediate content--that is, a discussion of the social and cultural forces expressed in a work of architecture--must of needs examine the sources of the moment of

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<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147 (Appendix B, p. 485).

civilization in which a work is produced, not just the sources which preceded it. Hence, an analysis of today's mediate content would necessitate a discussion of the theories and work of the writers, painters and architects living and producing today. However, reference to their works and their ideas are nowhere to be found in Porro's writings. Therefore, on account of this notable omission, his discussion of the mediate content becomes suspect.

This author's examination and search of the books in Porro's library at his home in Paris was unable to uncover any of the writings or monographs of contemporary architects. Books by or about Eisenman, Tschumi, Hejduk, Graves, Ando, Hadid, Isozaki or any of the other living architects whose works are well propagated through journals and academic circles at schools of architecture were conspicuously absent from his shelves. However, as is to be expected, he possesses an extensive collection of the works which may be classified as 'the classics' in literature, philosophy, art, and architecture: Rilke, Goethe, Holderlin, Balzac, Flaubert in literature; Plato, Hegel, Heidegger, Marx in philosophy; Michelangelo, Leonardo, Di Chirico, Picasso in art; Wright, Asplund, Gaudi, and his disciple Jujol in architecture. These are just a few examples of the books which make the man. And his bibliography on symbolism and myth is quite extensive as is to be expected. One may encounter such titles as Rene Gilles, Le symbolisme dans l'art religieux; Jacques Trescases, Le symbolique de la mort ou hermeutique de la resurrection; Titus Burkhardt, Symboles; Frazer's The Golden Bough and several works by Joseph Campbell.

The above listed may be said to be some of the sources that he 'raids' for fragments for the construction of his 'collages'. Like any other artist Porro has lacunae in his understanding and appreciation of current cultural conditions. Yet these lacunae seem to come about as a result of vehement resistance against certain sources which he considers decadent and uncouth. He focuses only in what he insistently believes to be sources of value for his marked humanist thought.

Also of note is the marked absence of any publications dealing with popular culture or 'low culture' (as differentiated from 'high culture'). This pertains to all spheres of the arts. Among his collection of recorded music Bach, Beethoven, Wagner, and Brahms figure prominently. Yet there is a conspicuous absence of rock, jazz, or Latin American popular music. Nor are contemporary composers of *musica seria* such as Steve Reich and Philip Glass present on his music shelf.

The issues pertaining to feminist and minority works in art and literature so much discussed in the academic spheres of the United States are of no consequence to Porro. He does not own any of their texts. He is outside of this realm which so much perturbs current academia in America.

Hence, the scope of Porro's knowledge (as demonstrated by the books in his library, through his writings and through the interviews and conversations with this author) may be said to be quite traditionalist, one may be inclined to suggest that he is quite elitist. His unflinching interest in antiquity, the classics and humanist culture leads him to reject and despise any current cultural manifestations which run counter to the sacrosanct principles inherent in his definition of art.

It is curious to note that with regards to the theme of technology and the machine

he does not venture to discuss the revolutions in communication and information brought about by such inventions as the computer. He does not have a computer at home. The computer at his office is operated by Renaud de la Noue. Apparently Porro has not yet been initiated into the information age nor does he display motivation to do so.

The mediate content is supposed to deal with the current historical moment. Yet all of the themes that Porro discusses are pre 1930. One may well wonder where is World War II, the Holocaust, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Cold War, the media explosion, the French Existentialists, Space exploration, the Economic Depression, the drug craze and all of the other significant events in the history of mankind since the era

of the Charleston. They are simply not addressed in his treatment of the mediate content nor are they referenced in his architecture.

Yet these themes and issues pointed to--pop culture, the modern exchange of information, feminism, minority issues, the various experiments currently being performed by artists--do not enter into his discussion of the mediate content of today's world. This vast lacuna may indeed constitute an impairment to an understanding of the current state of affairs. Yet it may be said that his intentional resistance to absorb and become familiar with these matters is what makes it possible for him to maintain his stance. The absorption and appreciation of such current tendencies would likely make him cease in his productions as they have been or perhaps send him in new and as of yet unexplored directions. Only time can tell.

Interestingly, although he points to his adversaries he does not indicate who he considers among the living architects to be his 'allies' (other than perhaps his students among which Pascal Marchant commands his admiration). Surprisingly when this author asked Porro to list the architects which he most admired, there was not a living one among the midst of the dead men which he listed. A similar enquiry posed by Patrice Goulet in an interview with Porro in 1982<sup>318</sup> produced similar results.

The fundamental supposition inherent in the notion of mediate content--i.e., that architecture is the expression of the moment of civilization in which it is produced--is that the creation of the architect necessarily expresses certain aspects of his cultural environment since he is an individual in society and he is shaped by societal forces.

Mediate content also implies the existence of a *Zeitgeist*. Yet if indeed there is a *Zeitgeist* which is expressed through contemporary architecture and urbanism, its description according to many contemporary commentators on the current state of affairs

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<sup>318</sup>Patrice Goulet, "Defense et illustration du romantisme: trois soirees avec Ricardo Porro", L'Architecture d'Aujord'hui, no. 224, 1982, p. lxiv-7.

is quite different from that of Porro, as may be inferred from the following excerpt from Bernard Tschumi's Architecture and Disjunction: "The city and its architecture lose their symbols--no more monuments, no more axes, no more anthropomorphic symmetries, but instead fragmentation, parcellization, atomization, as well as the random superimposition of images that bear no relationship to one another except through collision."<sup>319</sup> Hence in the eyes of these critics, Porro holds steadfast to retrograde notions concerning architecture's role in today's world.

Yet it will be noted that the mediate content (as well as the other four aspects of content) is reliant on the viewer's interpretation. Therefore, the mediate content cannot be said (as Porro claims) to be a *sine qua non* condition of architecture. Its legibility is dependent on another aspect: persuasion. Hence the interpretation of the mediate content of a historical work of architecture will depend on the observer's knowledge and beliefs concerning the time during which the piece of architecture was built. As pointed out by Spiro Kostof in A History of Architecture: "Architecture is a medium of cultural expression only to the extent that we are able to absorb its messages. And these messages are elicited through the questions that are preoccupying us today. The way we interpret the culture of a period or a nation through its architecture may tell us as much about it as about ourselves."<sup>320</sup>

Consequently, the contemporary critical reviews of a work of architecture may be vastly different than the critical reviews of the same work a century or more from now. Following this vein, it may be said that mediate content is the fictional account of cultural conditions stated in peremptory non-fictional writing. In Marxist terms the mediate content of a work may be explained as the manner in which it is said to embody certain superstructure myths.

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<sup>319</sup> Bernard Tschumi, Architecture and Disjunction, p. 218.

<sup>320</sup> Spiro Kostof, A History of Architecture, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985, p. 19.

When discussing the mediate content Porro emphasizes the aspects of a civilization concerning the sphere of thought--spiritual concerns, the problems and aspirations of a culture--and fails to refer to issues concerning the material conditions of the society which in the case of architecture find their most direct expression in the materials and methods of construction. Hence, when one examines Porro's School of Modern Dance, for example, the fact that the construction of this building was made almost entirely of brick and using construction techniques of ancient derivation is quite telling of the economic conditions in Cuba shortly after the revolution. These facts constitute a salient aspect of that historical moment in that country.

If one were to address this concept of mediate content as it concerns the archeological excavation of an ancient city, the material aspect of the mediate content--i.e., the materials and methods of construction--would be without a doubt the starting point for subsequent investigations regarding the expression of the historic moment in which the building was realized. Indeed, the material evidence will provide a clue as to the building's place in the chronology of that civilization.

However, Porro's discussion of the mediate content is reserved to discussing the themes which are said to preoccupy the people of a certain moment in civilization. In his own works it is the expression of these themes, usually through the employment of the superimposed image, with which he is interested as may be seen in some of the examples to be presented next.

The School of Modern Dance was built between 1960 and 1964 on what was the site for the exclusive Havana Country Club before the triumph of the revolution. Although Porro does not point it out, the school's siting in what used to be a zone reserved for the affluent members of society is in itself quite revealing of the mediate content, namely the triumph of the proletariat and the persecution and/or voluntary (almost compulsory) exile of the aforementioned members. That such an extravagant set

of buildings was allowed to be built on those grounds is also indicative of the government's mood at that time as contrasted to its later regimentation.

In the text of his Oeuvres/Obras Porro explains the mediate content of the School of Modern Dance as follows:

In it I wanted to express two very powerful sentiments produced by the first stage, the romantic stage, of a revolution: the exaltation, the collective emotional explosion, but also the anguish, that which leads one to a state of strong internal tension, of agony in the etymological sense of the word (struggle, combat). The entrance and the dance classrooms are images of the exaltation. The fragmented domes which cover them appear to be inflated by an expansive force. But on passing through the portals that lead to and surround the plaza, the angles of the columns point to different directions, breaking the order and provoking disorientation, anguish. The theme, the "mediate content", is here the evocation of a specified historical moment.<sup>321</sup>

Naturally, a visitor to Porro's school who ignores the episodes of Cuban history and who believes that Cuba is some sort of an island paradise would be incapable of comprehending the mediate content of this building as explained by Porro. The legibility of the anguish and agony is dependent on persuasion. If persuasion is not effective of convincing the spectator of these social conditions said to have been present in that historical period, then the mediate content cannot be said to be present. Hence one encounters once again the descriptions given by Erwin Panovsky and Rudolf Wittkower concerning the process and difficulties concerning iconographical interpretation.

In the last part of Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, in the section entitled "The Content of Some of My Work", Porro gives yet another description of the mediate content of the School of Modern Dance: "At the end of the plaza is a theater, on top of which I placed a belvedere. Seen from above, I wanted the building to give the impression of a glass that could be broken into a thousand pieces with a single punch. To me, it was another image of the revolution."(fig. 4.3)<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> Ricardo Porro, Oeuvres/Obras, p. 26 (Appendix A, p. 242).

<sup>322</sup> Ricardo Porro, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, p. 178 (Appendix B, p. 495).



Although difficult to gage, this image seems to have had a hold of Cuban collective thought at the time on account that a few years later the Cuban cinematographer Tomas Gutierrez Alea at the end of his film "Memorias del Subdesarrollo" ("Inconsolable Memories")--a film which quite self-consciously employs a collage technique--depicts a scene during a moment at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis in which the protagonist holds a glass ornament in one hand and a rod in another.<sup>323</sup> The tension and the anguish produced by the anticipation of the shattering of the glass serves as a metaphor of the political conditions of the time. Motion pictures may be considered as the contemporary depository of the collective unconscious.

With regards to the other contemporaneously built school, the School of Plastic Arts (fig. 3.1), Porro makes the following remark concerning the mediate content: "The shape of the workshops not only evokes an image of a woman's breast, but also the roundness of an egg, symbol par excellence of life about to spring forth. What image could better express what is alive at the moment of exaltation when the revolution restored life to an entire people?"<sup>324</sup>

Although the School of Plastic Arts and the School of Modern Dance were conceived of and built at the same time it will be noted that the expression of their mediate content differs dramatically. Whereas the School of Plastic Arts manifests a certain optimism towards the revolution, the School of Modern Dance expresses a pessimistic view of the same historical event: the Cuban Revolution.

In addition, if one admit Porro's description of the mediate content expressed by these two buildings, it will be noted that it is expressed by what Porro refers to as the superimposed image. The superimposed image may be gained through the buildings's form. The form does not alter. However, the same superimposed image is an expression

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<sup>323</sup> Tomas Gutierrez Alea, "Memorias del Subdesarrollo" ("Inconsolable Memories"). El Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematograficos (ICAIC), 1968. (97 min. B&W film).

<sup>324</sup> Ricardo Porro, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, p. 170 (Appendix B, p. 493).

of the mediate content (if interpreted as eggs) as well as of eroticism (if interpreted as breasts). In addition, these very same Catalan vaults, Porro claims, express the immediate content. One may even add persuasion. Hence one encounters the same object as expressing three or perhaps even four distinct aspects of content if one follows Porro's description. The form does not alter; the interpretation of the form does.

Furthermore, it will be noted that the mediate content in the School of Modern Dance is much more significant than this same aspect in the School of Plastic Arts in which the primary concern seems to be with the expression of one of the great themes of mankind: Eros. Such comparisons, however, have their basis in interpretation.

Interpretations at times may be much more vigorous in their spoken or written narrative form than in the actual form of the building. A case in point is Porro's project for the School of Dance of the Paris Opera in Nanterre (figs. 22.1 to 22.4), a competition he entered in 1983 with Miguel Acosta who was then one of his students. An observation of the drawing showing an aerial view of the building will reveal the roofs in the shape of giant pinwheels (fig. 22.1). The plan reveals a series of squares and rectangles placed on elevated platforms (figs. 22.2 and 22.3). Wanting to convey the concept of the dance via the example of the pirouette, the design intentions developed so as to give the building the impression of rotating movement and thereby give expression to the concept of dynamism.

An excerpt from Porro's description of this project in which he attempts to give expression to the themes of dynamism and simultaneity should be able to provide the reader with the necessary source material so that he may be able to establish a comparison between the words and the drawing and venture to determine which of the two he finds more dynamic. The following is Porro's description of the project:

The roofs are placed like a swastika. The well-emphasized center is the fixed point that all traditions agree to designate symbolically as the pole, since the world rotates around it. Like a wheel, it is a symbol of movement around an immobile center--the principle from which

movement originates. Starting with this principle, it is the whirlwind of the creation, the symbol of life, of currents of energy. A whole series of rotations can be found in our project.<sup>325</sup>

In this project the same themes taken up by the Russian Constructivists and the Futurists is developed. This theme of the fourth dimension is, of course, pre 1930. Although Porro refers to the shape of the roofs as swastikas, they resemble more huge toy pinwheels. Although the swastika is an ancient symbol of India (as well as of many other cultures) which signifies movement, in the times since 1930 the swastika became a nefarious symbol signifying the Third Reich. This historical moment is still in the minds of many individuals alive today.

The theme of simultaneity is again present in one of Porro's projects completed in 1993: the College Colonel Fabien in Montreuil. The description of this aspect of content as given by Ricardo Porro and Renaud de la Noue is as follows: "We also wanted to express problems that are particular to our century. One of these is what Einstein presented in his theory of relativity: simultaneousness. The building seems to be moving, and the movement defines the space, and the notion of time. It does not move in one direction, but in many directions at the same time, in no time. On the facades, windows become arrows, the bow windows explode, and the two big beams at the top of the building are pivoting, going up and down. Most of all, the movements made by the staircase of the entrance hall give the notion of simultaneousness. There is no concordance between the three flights of stairs. Their movements do not follow one another, but are different and yet simultaneous." (fig. 28.17)<sup>326</sup>

One may wonder if any observer could have given a better description of the presence of the mediate content in this building. The function of a critic may be considered to be that of describing, pointing, explaining, and judging the work of an

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid., p. 140 (Appendix B, p. 481-482).

<sup>326</sup> Ricardo Porro, "15 Works", *Architecture and Urbanism*, no. 282, Mar. 1994, p. 48.

artist. It may be that Porro has assumed the roles of both artist and critic in the pages of the architectural journals. If one reads the articles that have been written about him in the various journals one may note that even when he is not quoted directly by the writer, the critics's writings tend to display his influence. The bibliography contained in this work list all of the writings that have appeared about Porro and his work to date. Interestingly, the negative remarks directed towards his oeuvre are few and far between. Yet it will be noted that some of those who may be considered the greatest architects of this century were also great publicity men.

To conclude the examination of the mediate content yet another project done by Ricardo Porro and Renaud de la Noue dealing with the issue of simultaneity and the fourth dimension: the theater/office building at Gentilly dating from 1990 (figs. 31.1 to 31.4). The shifts in the vanishing point, the *trompe-l'oeil* atop the main entrances (fig. 31.3 and 31.4) and the changes in scale all work to give the building a sense of tension and dynamism. The shifting of the planes of the facade are reminiscent of the Futurists technique for depicting the movement of an object--a sort of stroboscopic effect. Yet the distinct development of each of the facades brings to mind the cubists sculptures were the same object is viewed from various angles simultaneously. The overall composition of this building may be said to be quite baroque in that it seeks beauty in flux.

The graphic presentation of the project may be seen to have improved since Porro became associated with Renaud de la Noue. One may compare the drawings of the theater/office building at Gentilly (fig. 31.1 to 31.4) to those for the School of Dance of the Paris Opera in Nanterre (figs. 22.1 to 22.4) to confirm this. Hence now conviction of the mediate content may result more from the drawings than through the written description.

It may still be too soon in time to make declarations concerning the mediate content in Porro's architecture. How the stamp of contemporary culture impresses itself on his work may perhaps be differently seen by future generations. His writings may

influence one's perception of his work. Yet architecture does not exist in a vacuum. The other arts, including criticism, influences one's opinions about architecture. Without the historical and critical writings on the palace of Knossos, for example, one's understanding of that ancient ruin would be quite limited. Yet genuine appreciation of architecture may be said to take place without an interlocutor--just the observer and the building. Hence, Porro's comments concerning his buildings are to be found in his texts for those wishing to consult them. His buildings, however, stand with no accompanying text. Nevertheless, one's previous knowledge, experience and expectations--the 'texts' one carries around always--have a definitive impact on the interpretations formulated.

### **3.6 Premises About the Content of the Work of Ricardo Porro**

Ricardo Porro's architecture has been examined using the five aspects of content that he sets forth in his text Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu. While the content of his work has been examined through the application of his five points, the five points have been discussed and criticized. The insistence on the expression of the eternal problems of mankind and of the current issues of the times noted by him as the themes worthy of expression in a work of architecture has also been presented and criticized. Through this analysis it has been found that Porro is not necessarily the best critic of his work. A vast separation has been found to exist between his theory and his practice. Yet a common element is seen to be present in both his buildings and his writings: an eclectic collage method.

Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu is a text full of direct and indirect references to philosophers, historians, painters, architects, art critics and art historians, poets and novelists, iconologists, etc. All of these references intermingle and juxtapose one another superimposed by Porro's commentaries. At times the references are vastly simplified or distorted on account of the fragment's relation to proximal parts of the text. Porro seems to take for granted the reader's familiarity and/or adherence to the beliefs

which he expounds. There is little explication of the terms used. He develops his concepts mainly through a succession of amassed examples. The text lacks the necessary clarity, lack of ambiguity and precision necessary for effective persuasion. Porro's text lacks the lucidity and encyclopedic organization as may be seen in comparing it to William Lethaby's classic text, Architecture, Mysticism and Myth, (which Porro indicates he has not read), which shares the same concern with symbolism.

Persuasion is the key aspect of the five aspects of content. However, Porro does not list the persuasive tactics to be employed or how these are to be deployed. He does not indicate that persuasion (and not the mediate content) is the central most important aspect necessary to convince one of the presence of the other four aspects of content.

Persuasion establishes hierarchy. Persuasion may be said to be present when there is a focus, an emphasis, a repetition in the whole and in the parts which make up the whole. However, inconsistencies in the parts in relation to other parts and to the whole have a detrimental effect on persuasion and, so it follows, on the whole. The ambition to achieve multiple goals is a difficult challenge for persuasion to overcome.

That is why Morris Lapidus may be one of the greatest practitioners and teachers of persuasion. His goal in designing a hotel is a simple twofold aim: "...to make people enjoy themselves, and to be financially viable for the people who own them."<sup>327</sup> The simplistic means employed in the designing of a storefront so as to persuade passersby to enter and explore the store consist of such persuasive tactics as bright lights and the fanciful decorations which have come to be known as "cheese holes" and "woggles"--shapes with no deep meaning and significance which simply draw attention to themselves thus drawing in customers. The persuasive end in these storefronts and hotels is, of course, the stimulation of a consumerist and hedonistic culture.

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<sup>327</sup> Alan Lapidus commenting on his and his father's (Morris Lapidus) design philosophy in an interview with Heinrich Klotz appearing in John W. Cook and Heinrich Klotz, Conversations with Architects, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1973, p. 155.

Porro's ambition to convey the eternal themes of mankind is not as simple an undertaking as the above example, of course. Yet in both the same notion of persuasion applies. In many instances the persuasive shift is not placed in the spaces that make up the building but in ornamental elements which constitute isolated fragments within the whole composition. In addition, the building details such as those most noticeable on the facade and the interior, precisely those that allow for the continuation of interior space towards the exterior, namely windows and doors, are of an ordinary commercial type which lack the character needed in order to reinforce the persuasive thrust which the architect intends and which is manifested in the other parts of the architecture.

Although Porro's selection of the superimposed image may be quite fitting to the nature and function of the building, although the mediate content that he intends to express may be considered thought provoking, although the building's inner life is meant to be expressed in the forms which constitute the building (the immediate content), and although it may be claimed that the building follows in a certain tradition, these aspect of content will remain illegible unless the persuasive aspect is adequately executed. This means, to repeat it once again, that the grand conception be made plain in all parts of the building and not merely in a selected few. That through emphasis, repetition, associations, and consistency of parts to whole and whole to parts the persuasive aspect is brought forth in order to elucidate and convince the spectator of the architect's intent.

Persuasion goes beyond function--it is the 'excess' that creates the architecture.

The superimposed image for Porro consists of the symbol and the figurative image. Most of the time he employs the figurative image. Porro does not invent symbols. He draws from the vast source of universal symbols and figurative images so as to integrate several of these in his compositions. Their valences are seen to alter due to their relations.

The human figure and dissociated anatomical parts are used in many of his projects--the School of Plastic Arts (figs. 3.1 to 3.14), the Art Center in Liechtenstein

(figs. 8.1 to 8.6), the vacation village in Yugoslavia (figs. 10.1 to 10.4), the Youth Center in Liechtenstein (fig. 9.1), for example. This stems from his notion of man as a microcosm. All of his painting and sculpture is figurative.

In observing the work of other architects Porro may be said to project unto their buildings a symbolic content which may at times appear to be quite removed from the designer's intentions. Hence it is observed that Porro requires a very small dose of persuasion in order to become convinced of the presence of symbolic content in a work, in that of others or in his own.

Several romantic themes such as the initiatic voyage, the forest, and extreme states of feeling are intended in a repeated number of his projects. The latter may be said to belong also to the repertoire of Baroque themes. In addition, his projects repeatedly deal with such Baroque themes as duality, the portrayal of mixed emotions, the endlessness of time and the infinity of space.<sup>328</sup> These themes are by no means new. They have been addressed by countless others. As has been pointed out, the thematics expressed in Porro's work and discussed in Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu are all pre 1930.

The countless difficulties encountered in the interpretation of the superimposed image have been discussed. The levels of interpretation that Porro reaches with some of his work seem to lie beyond the material evidence that he presents to his viewers. Porro's interpretations may be seen as a sort of intellectual free association. The spectator, no matter how knowledgeable he may be of the different valences of the symbols, can only go as far as persuasion permits.

The term 'superimposed image' may be interpreted as implying that the figurative image or symbol is superimposed on the architecture. Indeed this may be seen to be the

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<sup>328</sup> John Rupert Martin, "The Baroque from the Point of View of the Art Historian" as it appears in Harold Spencer, ed., Readings in Art History, Vol. II, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1969, pp.174-179.



case in many instances. In many instances it is not the space that forms Porro's buildings which is said to present the superimposed image but rather a corporeal element or decoration which, together with other such elements, is said to convey the symbolic message. Yet in all great architecture, be it the Pantheon, Hagia Sophia, or Falling Water, it is the spaces themselves as seen in the light that are the prime conveyors of the superimposed image. The corporeal elements and the ornamentation serve to reinforce the symbolic content of the space. This is not so in most of Porro's architecture.

The mediate content was found not to be a *sine qua non* condition of architecture. If it is not witnessed it cannot be said to be present. It is persuasion that allows the mediate content to be 'seen'. The mediate content may be said to be the manner in which the building expresses the *Zeitgeist* of the period when it was designed and constructed. With the multitude of tendencies and the multitude of 'movements' in the various spheres of culture, contemporary buildings can only present but a limited aspect of man's current concerns.

Porro's discussion of the mediate content is by no means up to date. Important issues and events of the last fifty years have been totally left out of his discussion. His buildings and unbuilt projects repeatedly reflect a concern with themes that were prevalent at the beginning of the century with the Futurists and the Russian Constructivists, such as dynamism, simultaneity and the expression of the fourth dimension.

As with the superimposed image, with the mediate content one encounters difficulties with the interpretation. The mediate content is not expressed through a separate and distinct entity of the building. It too is expressed via the superimposed image. It is simply an expression of an aspect of the *Zeitgeist* expressed via symbolic elements in the building. And as with the superimposed image (which expresses, according to Porro, the great themes of mankind), the mediate content is dependent on the effective use of persuasion for its success--i.e., for it to become legible to the viewer.

The issue of tradition was seen to concern not only the aesthetic traditions of architectural forms and the organization of space, but also of certain concepts and beliefs in a society said to be constants. Hence tradition for Porro is not quotation of historical forms but rather the perpetuation of a certain 'spirit'.

Porro's claims that his two school buildings in France (figs. 26.1 to 26.13 and 28.1 to 28.17) follow in the French tradition--a tradition that he indicates is marked by rationalism--was found untenable on account of the lack of substantial quotation of form or 'spirit' belonging to that tradition and, in addition, on account of his incorporation of elements derived from other traditions thereby contaminating whatever traditional elements which may be claimed to be present. The elements that he claims are supportive of the buildings's participation in the French tradition were found upon analysis to be so far removed from their originals so as not to permit the necessary association in the viewer's mind that would permit him to arrive at such a conclusion.

In the two Cuban Schools (figs. 3.1 to 3.14 and 4.1 to 4.10), particularly in the School of Plastic Arts, Porro attempts to give rise to a Cuban architectural tradition which was non-existent at that time (and not since developed) by translating and transcribing certain elements which he isolated from other spheres of Cuban culture, namely the music and dance of African derivation and what he terms "the sensuality of the creole baroque".

In this he demonstrated a great originality and pioneering spirit. However, shortly after the completion of the schools he fled the country and never again attempted to give expression to this tradition.

Tradition may be linked to non-material aspects of a culture. For example, in Porro's project for a vacation village in Yugoslavia (figs. 10.1 to 10.4), the urban plan developed in accordance with the traditions of the legends said to have taken place in the vicinity of the project's site. Although the formal features of his urbanism for this village in no manner resemble the architecture of that geographical zone, the forms evolve as a

response to an intangible aspect of that culture--or rather what Ancient Greek culture ascribed to that geographical area--the myths of the Argonauts and of mythological giants.

The last of the five aspects of content, the immediate content, is the means through which a building expresses its inner life. A building need not necessarily do so, however. In most of Porro's architecture he does make an attempt to do so. Persuasion needs to be put into effect in order for this to be effectively achieved. Through the establishment of what is typically referred to in architectural circles as 'hierarchy' in the spaces through their size and ornamentation, this aspect of content may be said to come about. Yet the superimposed image also can come to the assistance of the immediate content by making a certain building or a certain space within a building 'read' like what it is destined to be. This notion was adhered to by French architects of the Enlightenment such as Boullée and Ledoux with their concept of *une architecture parlante*.

Given the transient nature of buildings and their occupants in contemporary society, many architects have opted to create buildings and spaces which allow for adaptation to other functions over time. Bernard Tschumi's arguments about the impossibility of permanence of meaning in contemporary architecture pointed to the changing uses given to buildings over time. This aspect of content, the immediate content, seems to overlap with Porro's notions regarding persuasion in that it too deals with suggesting possible uses to the occupants. These uses are, after all, what constitutes the inner life of a building. Persuasion is seen as necessary in order to allow the viewer to ascertain the building's functions based on its formal and spatial characteristics.

In summary, the content of Porro's work is primarily symbolic. It is through symbols--corporeal and/or spatial elements in the architecture--that his buildings manifest their inner life, their participation in a tradition, and the expression of timeless and/or current themes. These symbols become legible through effective persuasive

means. The symbolism of his work may be said to be baroque in that, in addition to expressing many of the themes popular with baroque architecture, their syntax is complex--i.e., the symbols are not read independently of one another but instead through their interactions within the whole their individual valences come forth. This symbolic content is assembled in a collagist manner where symbols derived from various cultural sources are brought together. Through their associations with other symbols, their fundamental and traditional significations may at times become transmuted. Porro's themes and their expression via symbols may be said to be eclectic for it borrows and 'stylizes' themes and symbols deriving from the most diverse sources. These eclectic elements become *Porroesque* on account of the novel arrangement and relations he assigns to them in their new environment.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE FORM AND CONTENT IN THE WORK OF RICARDO PORRO

The formal qualities of Porro's work cannot be said to fall fully within either one of Wolfflin's categories. It is neither fully classic nor is it fully baroque. The overall organization of his buildings was determined to be baroque. The constituent elements were determined to be classic.

The overall organization of Porro's buildings was deemed to be painterly; the sub-elements, linear, for these have clear-cut, tangible boundaries.

The overall building was seen to take part in baroque recession, but this had no privileged viewpoints or culminations as in the examples discussed by Wolfflin. On the other hand, the sub-elements were seen to be composed of a succession of elements parallel to the picture plane.

The individual rooms in Porro's buildings were seen to be isolable space cells. The corporeal sub-elements were classified as tectonic whereas the whole of the composition was classified as a-tectonic. In the overall composition there was found to be a flow of space between the interior and the exterior.

The circulation in Porro's buildings is flowing; it gives the impression of continuous movement but with no climax as is expected with the baroque. The individual sub-elements, however, were seen to be self-sufficient and complete unto themselves. Color further emphasizes this separation.

In the most revealing of Wolfflin's five pairs of opposites, clearness vs. unclearness, the overall layout of his buildings was found to be unclear. The building presents the viewer with an inexhaustible set of images. The sub-elements, to the contrary, have well-defined edges and possess a good silhouette.

The application of Wolfflin's principles indicated that the overall organization of Porro's architecture displays a tendency toward the baroque for its sense of beauty is to be found in flux whereas the sub-elements of his architecture have an affinity with the classic sense of beauty since they are static, of a clear outline and complete unto themselves. Therefore, according to Wolfflin's principles, Porro's architecture is seen to possess both classic and baroque elements.

This led to the formulation that his architecture was like that of Mannerism, for several aspects of Porro's architecture shared similarities with the architecture of this period. Mannerism, like Romanticism, is characterized by the fact that each artist develops and interprets the rules of composition. Mannerism is characterized by flowing and rigid elements within the same composition. Discordant leitmotifs often appear. This is quite evident through an examination of Porro's buildings and unbuilt works.

Yet a change may be said to have taken place between the architecture that Porro produced while in Cuba and the architecture that he has been recently producing twenty-five years later. The Cuban works seem quite heavy and corpulent. The outright display of the arcuation and trabeation in the two Cuban schools (figs. 3.1 to 3.14 and 4.1 to 4.10) contrasts with the indirect exposure of the structure of his two French schools completed in this decade (figs. 26.1 to 26.13 and 28.1 to 28.17). The French schools are seen to have a floating aspect, specially as perceived in their interiors (figs. 26.7 to 26.10 and 28.12 to 28.17). This is another Mannerist characteristic. His current buildings also exhibit a precarious instability. This too is a Mannerist trait. As Nikolaus Pevsner says with regards to Mannerism: "It lacks the robustness of the Baroque and the serenity of the Renaissance."<sup>329</sup>

In both his work dating from the sixties and his current work, the flamboyance of the overall composition has a contradictory relationship with the rigidity of its sub-

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<sup>329</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, "The Architecture of Mannerism" as it appears in Harold Spencer, ed., Readings in Art History. Vol. II, p. 146.

elements. This brings about a tension in his work which does not arrive at a final resolution.

Mannerism displays a tendency toward excess within rigid boundaries. The same but inversely may be said regarding Porro's work. His architecture is made of freely arranged forms where the elements are rigid and static. Hence, the term Mannerist is not suitable to describe his work on account of the differences noted and also due to the fact that the Mannerist period refers to that intermediate historical period between the Renaissance and the Baroque. Instead, the term neo-mannerist is deemed more appropriate as a means of categorizing the form of Porro's architecture.

The content present in Porro's work has an undeniable interrelationship with the form of his work. His method of designing a project will allow for a view of the incipient relationship of the two aspects, that of form and content.

Porro has a well-established method of beginning his exploration of a design for a building. He always starts with analysis of the building's program and functions. He does this through 'bubble diagrams' which he places on the diagram of the site. He examines what functional possibilities are possible in the given site. He creates a series of these diagrams. After doing so, he begins to analyze what images are possible and what images are not possible. Then, after selecting one of the diagrams, he begins to transcribe it into a clay model to see what it looks like three-dimensionally. He does the same with the other diagrams. While making these clay models he imagines the building's interiors. After choosing one of the several possibilities that he has explored, he then determines what image is possible and starts to develop it, to articulate it. Hence this may be seen to be a sculptural process. The first models are very sculptural, but they are sculptures with a potential possibility of being converted into architecture.

From this point, in order to examine the rest of the development of this germinal idea, one of Porro's projects may be examined--that of the College Elsa Triolet in Saint Denis. In this project he began by questioning and visualizing the concept of an 'entry

hall'. He also began to solve one of the project's functional requirements: there had to be free access between the two streets (fig. 26.1). Given the configuration of the site, he began to determine at what point the connection between the two streets would be made. He decided to create a plaza at both ends next to the streets to be connected. The two plazas would be connected by a short lane. Thus far, all of Porro's design efforts are concentrated in finding the solution to a functional problem.

Already at this stage he also begins to think about the building's significations. Given that the functional requirements produce a building with two wings, he then questions this concept of 'wings' as it relates to a school which is a building of culture. Once the concept of a bird, specifically of a dove, comes to his mind, he then thinks about its possible significations and the manner in which the building's form could further reinforce this concept.

It should be noted that in his recent projects, Ricardo Porro works on his designs right from the beginning with his equal partner of the firm, Renaud de la Noue. They claim to have an identity based on principles and fundamental points of view, namely of the necessity for the building to function while possessing beauty and signification.

Having established a given image as the preponderant image for the project--the dove in the case of the College Elsa Triolet--the two partners then proceed to continue making clay models and also begin making sketches.<sup>330</sup>

At times he explores other possibilities or blends together elements from two or three different possibilities. This tendency evidences the collage technique that has been

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<sup>330</sup> It should be noted that Ricardo Porro does not save the preliminary clay models that he makes. He does not save the preliminary sketches either. Mariano Alemany while in Porro's home found a sketch of Villa Ispahan (figs. 12.5 and 12.6) dating from 1975 which had been hidden away in back of one of his shelves. This is the only preliminary sketch which appears in this work to illustrate the development from rough sketch to working drawings. Interestingly, for someone who does not save his preliminary sketches, Porro was very satisfied to see this finding.



referred to, except that in this case the sources which form the collage are derived from elements that have been manipulated by Porro.

When asked during an interview if the clay model suggested the image or if the image dictated the shaping of the clay model, Porro answered thus: "The spirit of an artist, so as not to say the genius of an artist, lies in knowing what image goes with what thing. And no one can teach you how to do that."<sup>331</sup>

After having decided upon the image, then the rest becomes a matter of articulating and refining the project. It should be noted that the graphic communication of Porro's projects has greatly improved since he became associated with Renaud de la Noue. The drawings done by Porro show a certain similarity to the sketches of some of the Expressionist architects (e.g., figs. 12.5, 17.2, 18.1). This expressionistic tendency has now been curbed by more refined and carefully calculated drawings which give a better sense of the scale, the materials and the structure hence making them look more buildable. Porro adds the 'finishing touches' to these presentation drawings, usually done by Renaud or by one of their draftsmen, by adding his stylized figures, color and dynamic skies (e.g., figs. 33.1, 31.3, 31.4).

Whereas many of Porro's projects from the ten year period spanning from 1972 to 1982 (figs. 9.1 to 20.2), most of which he did solo or with his students as collaborators, may be seen to be most organic and sculptural, the recent projects, especially those which have been built (the apartment building at Stains (figs. 24.1 to 24.11), the College Elsa Triolet (figs. 26.1 to 26.13) and the Colonel Fabien (figs. 28.1 to 28.17)) show a more restrained use of organic and sculptural forms. The projects dating from the seventies--such as the vacation village in Yugoslavia (figs. 10.1 to 10.4), the Gonzalo School (figs. 14.1 and 14.2), and the Library at Villeneuve-D'Asq (figs. 18.1 to 18.3)--display a formal and thematic daring similar to that of the Expressionist architects. In many of these

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<sup>331</sup> Ricardo Porro as quoted by Mariano Alemany, "An Interview with Ricardo Porro", May-Jun. 1994.

projects the formal elements were designed to be made of concrete poured in unique custom-made formwork. The anthropomorphism is expressed in these designs in a direct (and exaggerated) manner. The construction cost of these projects and their extravagance may have been one of the factors that prevented juries from issuing him the commission to build.

If these projects are compared to the private houses that Porro built while in Cuba, the difference will seem formidable. In the Villa Armenteros dating from 1950 (fig. 1.1), the Miesian influence giving rise to the orthogonality and minimalism are quite evident in the plan. Porro comments of this work in his *Oeuvres/Obras*: "The Armenteros House is an old man's project. Young men have to dare to make mistakes..... I did not dare to be who I was. I did not yet know the power of the poetic image."<sup>332</sup>

In the following project, the Villa Ennis dating from 1953 (fig. 2.1), the baroque elements begin to make their way into Porro's composition. Yet at this point, he has not yet discovered the "power of the poetic image". This would not come about until his first big commission, that of the two schools of the arts in Cuba (figs. 3.1 to 3.14 and 4.1 to 4.10).

Although Porro claims that he approaches each project differently and that he does not have a consistent style but that it varies in accordance with the demands of the project, one may find evidence to the contrary, particularly in his more recent projects with Renaud de la Noue. In the two French schools as well as the projects which are currently underway to being built--the urbanism of the Chaudron Quarter of La Pleine-Saint Denis (fig. 29.1), and the military barracks at Velizy (figs. 32.1 to 32.3)--certain persistent thematic and formal elements may be detected.

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<sup>332</sup> Ricardo Porro, *Oeuvres/Obras*, p. 18 (Appendix A, p. 223).

The elements of the spatial organization of the two French schools, for example, both consist of two long linear buildings intersecting at an entry hall (figs. 26.1 and 28.1). The entry hall in Porro's projects always seems to be aggrandized (figs. 23.2, 32.2, 26.7 to 26.10, 28.12 to 28.17). The 'culmination' is right at the entrance. This is quite unlike the spatial organization prevalent in the Baroque period. Certainly a parallel may be established with Michelangelo's "Mannerist" Laurentian Library in that it is the entry which receives the greatest amount of embellishment. Yet it may also serve as a comment on contemporary society in which the ceremonious procession which provided for chambers and antechambers leading to a grand space has been reduced to a sort of instant gratification. Certainly the placement of this grand room right at the entry is quite a contrast for the spectator just coming in from the outside. It also serves to orient the visitor by providing a privileged viewpoint for the rest of the building.

The stylistic elements of Porro's building details, such as his columns surmounted by cubic capitals (fig. 28.17) or those that have an element reminiscent of fingers in a hand to hold up the ubiquitous overhangs of his architecture which usually demarcate an entrance are seen in many of his recent works (fig. 28.9), as are also the 'cut-outs' in his curvilinear beams (figs. 28.12, 33.1, 26.7).

The thematic content of Porro's work currently seems to be fixated on the depiction of the fourth-dimension in architecture as may be seen in his Theater/Office Building Complex in Gentilly (figs. 31.1 to 31.3), in the College Colonel Fabien (figs. 28.1 to 28.17) or in the creation of axes that give the impression of going off into infinity such as he did on a small scale in the apartment house at Stains (figs. 24.1 to 24.11) or on a larger, urban scale, in the urbanistic project for the Chaudron Quarter of La Pleine-Saint Denis (fig. 29.1). Symbolic oppositions also find their way into his projects over and over again in various forms. These symbolic contents have an impact on the neo-mannerist form of his work. Indeed it may be said that mannerism is the ideal formal vehicle for such symbolic content.

Yet other stylistic influences cannot be overlooked as playing a large role in his current architecture--the development of what now seems to have become a more 'standardized' style on account of the repeated usage of certain thematic contents and their accompanying forms which have become leitmotifs. One such influence is the architecture of the School of Amsterdam. The ornamental use of brick to create curvilinear walls, and the ubiquitous presence of the dramatic, continuous, overhanging roofs which give coherence to the otherwise disparate elements of the composition have been incorporated as a frequently selected fragment in Porro's 'collages'.

Certain symbolic or formal aspects of an abandoned project resurface in new projects. The theme of duality and the symbol of the Ying-Yang of the unrealized project for the Janus House of 1978 (fig. 17.1) find their way into a built work in 1993--the College Fabien in Montreuil (fig. 28.2). The desire to create an unending axis in an urbanistic project said to express the French tradition is a persevering desire which finds its fulfillment in the urbanistic project for the Chaudron Quarter (fig. 29.1) project currently underway. The uplifted roofs of the unrealized project for the School of Dance for the Paris Opera (figs. 22.1 and 22.4), dating from 1983, are finally realized in built form in the two French Schools (figs. 26.6 and 28.9). The 'branches' of the Tree of Life of the College Fabien (fig. 28.12) may be found in another set of 'tree-columns' from a project which predates it by almost twenty years: the "Garden of Paradise", i.e., the Villa Ispahan (figs. 12.4). The perpetuation of certain formal and thematic elements may be discovered in many other examples.

However, Porro's distinctly sculptural and anthropomorphic style has not been forgotten by him. In a project which may yet become realized, "La Haute-Ile" Park design which he undertook in 1986 shows the anthropomorphic elements rendered in quite a realistic manner and inserted into the 'natural' man-made landscape (figs. 25.1 to 25.3).

One may perhaps attempt to apply another aesthetic category to the work of Ricardo Porro in order to account for his collage-like compositions which bring together objects and ideas from different areas of human experience. Hence the term "Grotesque" may be applied to his work as an attempt to better understand these characteristics. It should be noted, however, that the term "Grotesque" has undergone many modifications since it was first used in Italian as the term *grottesco* "...to designate a certain ornamental style which came to light during the late fifteenth-century excavations... which turned out to constitute a hitherto unknown ancient form of ornamental painting."<sup>333</sup> However, as Wolfgang Kayser points out in The Grotesque in Art and Literature,

By the word *grottesco* the Renaissance, which used it to designate a specific ornamental style suggested by antiquity, understood not only something playfully gay and carelessly fantastic, but also something ominous and sinister in the face of a world totally different from the familiar one--a world in which the realm of inanimate things is no longer separated from those of plants, animals, and human beings, and where the laws of statics, symmetry, and proportion are no longer valid.<sup>334</sup>

Porro's bringing together through the collage method such distinct spheres together, such as body part and machinery as he does in a project such as *The House of Culture in Paris* (1967) (figs. 7.1 to 7.4) may be seen as a phenomenon with a precedent and a name: Grotesque. This fusion of organic and mechanical elements within the same composition remains part of the much evolved current in aesthetics denominated 'Grotesque'. However, its ability to shock may not be as great anymore, as Kayser comments, "this technical outlook is so familiar to modern man that he has no difficulties in devising a "technical" grotesque in which the instruments are demoniacally destructive and overpower their makers."<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Wolfgang Kayser, The Grotesque in Art and Literature, McGraw-Hill Book Co., New York, 1966, p. 19.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

As in the paintings of Giorgio Di Chirico, where "Sharp lines and smooth geometrical surfaces have been superimposed upon organic life"<sup>336</sup>, so in Porro's School of Plastic Arts (fig. 3.1) the same is seen to occur: the rectilinear sub-elements and the orthogonal buildings near the core bring about this mixture of the 'organic' and the inorganic so characteristic of the Grotesque.

Although the above examples of Porro's architecture may be observed to be described by this partial definition of the Grotesque, yet there are other defining elements of this aesthetic current which clearly demonstrate that his design intentions lie outside of this definition. It should be observed that, as Kayser points out, "The creator of grotesques... must not and cannot suggest a meaning. Nor must he distract our attention to the absurd."<sup>337</sup> Porro's design intentions as a self-proclaimed romanticist lead away from the absurd and attempt to achieve universal meaning. Hence, his work (or at least his design intentions) violates this aspect of the definition. However, as pointed out by Kayser, "...the word "grotesque" applies to three different realms--the creative process, the work of art itself, and its reception...."<sup>338</sup> Hence, according to the latter, some may be predisposed to classify Porro's work as "grotesque".

Be that as it may, there is one element that is conspicuously absent from Porro's text, Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu. Humor. A serious tone is maintained throughout the book which praises the sublime and condemns the mediocre. However, if Porro's architecture is examined instead of his writing, then humor may be seen to appear at times. It is agreed that Porro uses the poetic image, allegory, and stylization in his figurative paintings, sculptures and in the sculptural elements which constitute part of his architecture. In his book The Act of Creation, Arthur Koestler points to the three domains of creativity--Humor, Discovery, and Art--and indicates that these "...shade into

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<sup>336</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

each other without sharp boundaries."<sup>339</sup> To aid his discourse, Koestler constructs a 'trptych' which here appears slightly modified and abbreviated:

<b>bathos</b>		<b>pathos</b>
comic simile ↔	hidden analogy ↔	poetic image
	satire ↔	social analysis ↔
caricature ↔	schematization ↔	stylization <sup>340</sup>

These three primary forms of expression can be subsumed under the heading 'superimposed image'. The possibility that an intended poetic image will be interpreted as a comic simile or that the stylization of one of Porro's figurative images will be interpreted as a caricature may be said to exist. The response will vary according to the spectator's frame of mind, as pointed out in Koestler's book: "When 'consciousness is unawares transferred from great things to small'--which Spencer regarded as the prime cause of laughter--the result will be *either* a comic or an aesthetic experience, depending on whether the person's emotions are of the type capable of participating in the transfer or not. The artist... walks on a tightrope, as it were, along the line where the exalted and the trivial planes meet...."<sup>341</sup>

Indeed Porro, by due of his condition as a romantic, just as occurs with other romantics--(e.g., Amado Nervo (the Mexican poet), or perhaps Richard Wagner, or even in some of Edvard Munch's paintings)--the solemnity of his desire to express the "great themes of mankind" by means of the superimposed image, particularly the figurative image, lies at the verge of that subtle distinction between the sublime and the comic, i.e., on the side of pathos, "stylization"; on the side of bathos, "caricature".

The content of Porro's work, it has been said, is dominated by the use of symbol. However, it should not be overlooked that the starting point for his designs, as previously mentioned, is the building's function. This and not any of the other five aspects of

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<sup>339</sup> Arthur Koestler, The Act of Creation, Dell Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1964, p. 27.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

content is for him the real *sine qua non* condition for architecture. The establishment of a rational working order between the different spaces of the building--in plan and in three-dimensions--may be seen to be his starting point. This aspect then, and not any of the five aspects which he discusses in Les Cinq Aspects Du Contenu, may be said to 'limit' or 'refrain' certain manifestations of symbolic content.

Another realistic condition may be said to determine which of his projects gets built: the monetary budget. However, it is admirable to see what Porro was able to do with an extremely limited budget when he designed and built (without exceeding budget) the apartment house in Stains (figs. 24.1 to 24.11). Yet these budgetary constraints may be seen to affect his design decisions, particularly with respect to that most important aspect of content which serves to make the other four aspects possible: persuasion. If Porro's projects are seen to fail in the sense that the manner in which he describes them are more interesting or profound than the actual built work, it is on account of the lack of emphasis given to this aspect of content, persuasion.

The most recent work produced by the Porro & de la Noue team exhibits formal characteristics that have already become systematized to a degree. To the form of their work may be ascribed the term neo-mannerist as a means to better comprehend it and relate it to that of other contemporary architects as well as to painters and architects of the historical period between 1520 and 1625. The resulting formal contradictions may be seen to result from the interrelation of form and content. The architecture of the Porro & de la Noue team is one of symbolic content. This symbolic content is expressed through symbols whose meaning is modified from their proximity thus giving rise to complex meanings. The expression of dualities via the symbolic content is often embodied in contradictory, neo-mannerist forms.

To these neo-mannerist tendencies may be added certain practical lessons learned from the Expressionist architects, particularly those of the Amsterdam School, such as Porro's alteration and incorporation of their formal and organizational elements. The



buildings produced by the Porro & de la Noue team may be said to employ the collage technique both in their neo-mannerist form as well as in their symbolic content. Porro, in fact, being so well read in the 'classics' and in mythology, can easily effectuate the insertion of a theme, personage or symbol derived from a vast source of knowledge which is termed 'high culture'. The transposition from one art form to another, i.e., the giving of architectural form to a mythological or philosophical subject, for example, is another avenue which brings about the transfer of a schema between disjoint realms. Yet it is to be noted that the 'seams' between objects derived from different matrixes of existence are well disguised by Porro so that the effect is not one of the 'spark' produced by surrealist metaphor but a sense of unity created through the symbolic content which embraces such contradictions so as to form a wholistic narrative.

The work of Ricardo Porro, Renaud de la Noue, and the work those who were his students at the School of Architecture at Lille may be able to bring about an interest in such neo-mannerist architecture imbued with a symbolic content if they continue to build. For twenty-five years Porro did not (with the exception of the one building in Liechtenstein) build anything. Now that he has once again started to build, the images, symbols and desires accumulated through all those years of inactivity as a builder suddenly spring forth. Contrary to his beliefs, a definitive style may be emerging: symbolic content embodied in neo-mannerist form.

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Note: The peculiar and unorthodox idiosyncrasies of Ricardo Porro's punctuation, capitalization, syntax and division into paragraphs have, for the most part, been preserved in the translation.

## APPENDIX A

RICARDO PORRO: WORKS 1950-1993

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## 1. ESSAYS

### **What Matters is the Void**

I was twenty-four years old when I made my first work, the Armenteros House. Today I look at it, as the other houses of that period, as the formal searches of a young man who lacked the culture which allows one to go to the depth of things. The Armenteros House is an old man's project. Young men have to dare to make mistakes. I searched for perfection and equilibrium. I wanted to attain the Platonic vision of a Mies van der Rohe who resorts to a minimum of means to make one feel the space. What matters is the void. I did not dare to be who I was. I did not yet know the power of the poetic image.

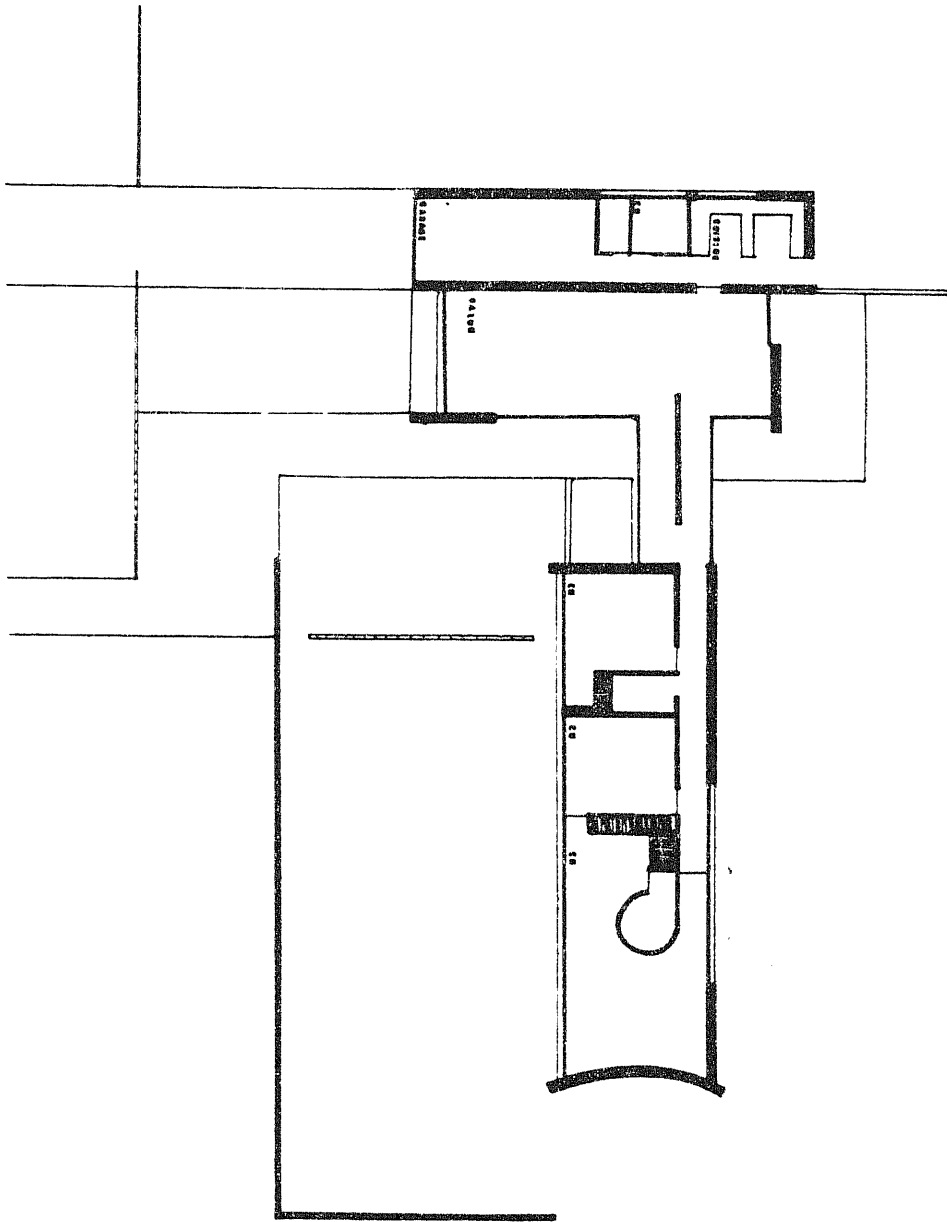


Figure 1.1 Armenteros House, Havana (Cuba), 1950: floor plan

### **In Search of Lost Roots**

At the time when I made this house, I had other concerns. I wanted to analyze the essential elements that define a country's tradition. I wanted to see how one could express, without folklore or archaism, what in it is universal. Although in this work one clearly feels the influence of Le Corbusier's project for Ronchamp, what I proposed for myself was to immerse myself in the Cuban tradition, with its sense of the baroque, its sensuality and its unique manner of treating the spaces.

ENNIS HOUSE, HAVANA (CUBA), 1953.



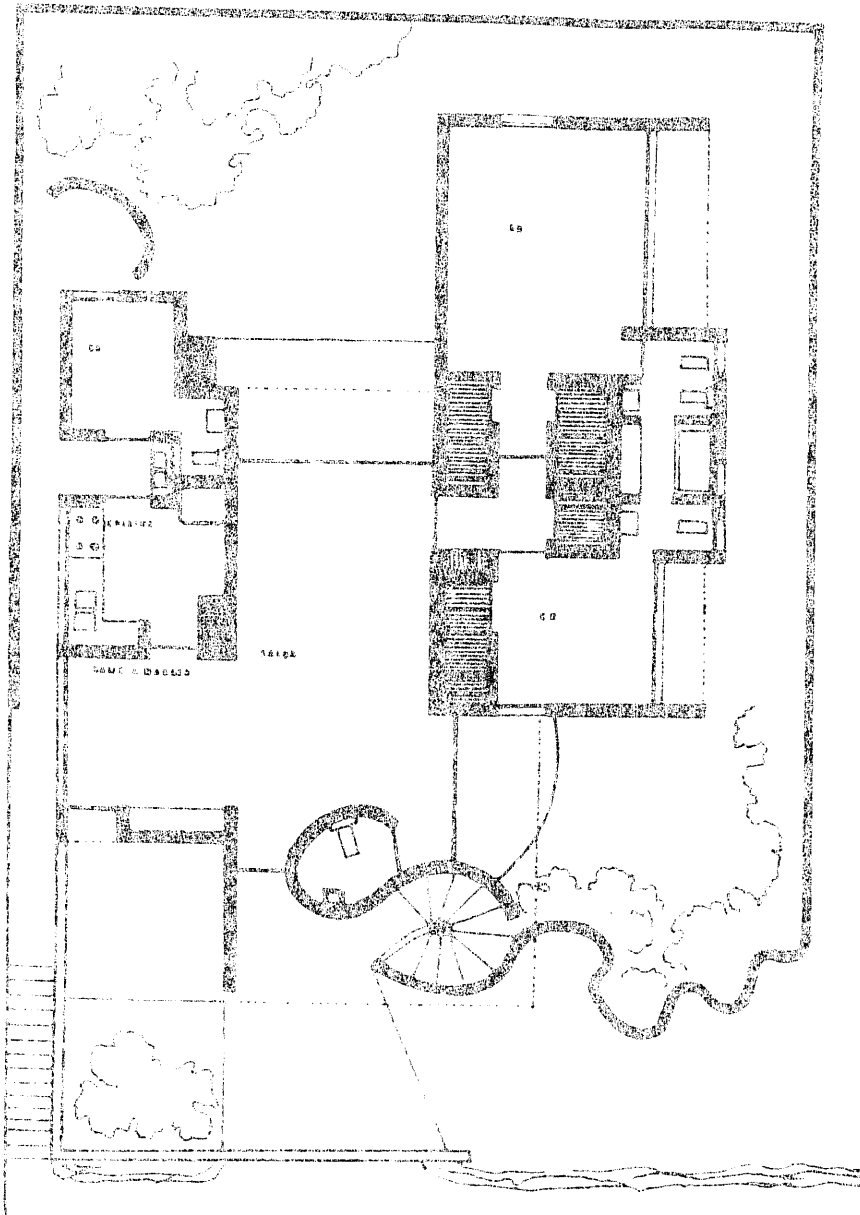


Figure 2.1 Ennis House, Havana (Cuba), 1953: floor plan

## 2. THE EUPHORIC MOMENT OF A REVOLUTION

### Eros in the City

Here I wanted to exalt the Negro side of our tradition, never before present in Cuban architecture. All in Cuba--the dance, the music, life--has a marked erotic charge. It comes to us from Africa, and it is not only sex but also fertility and creation. The succession of curves, the sensual forms, the earthen materials, evoke a human and feminine presence: the entrance funnel, the narrow street, the great plaza with gates around which arise the workshops, built like arena theaters, with the object of study illuminated by the light from the zenith of the dome which is treated as a female breast. The profuse vegetation with long leafed plants, like pubic hairs, sensually wrap the building. In the plaza is the fountain, a sculpture that reminds one of the papaya (the vulva in popular language). I also wanted that the school be a city, with places to work, dream, stroll, meet (influences of Venice?). Everything is organized in urban spaces that culminate in the plaza. The School of Plastic Arts is the city which becomes Eros.

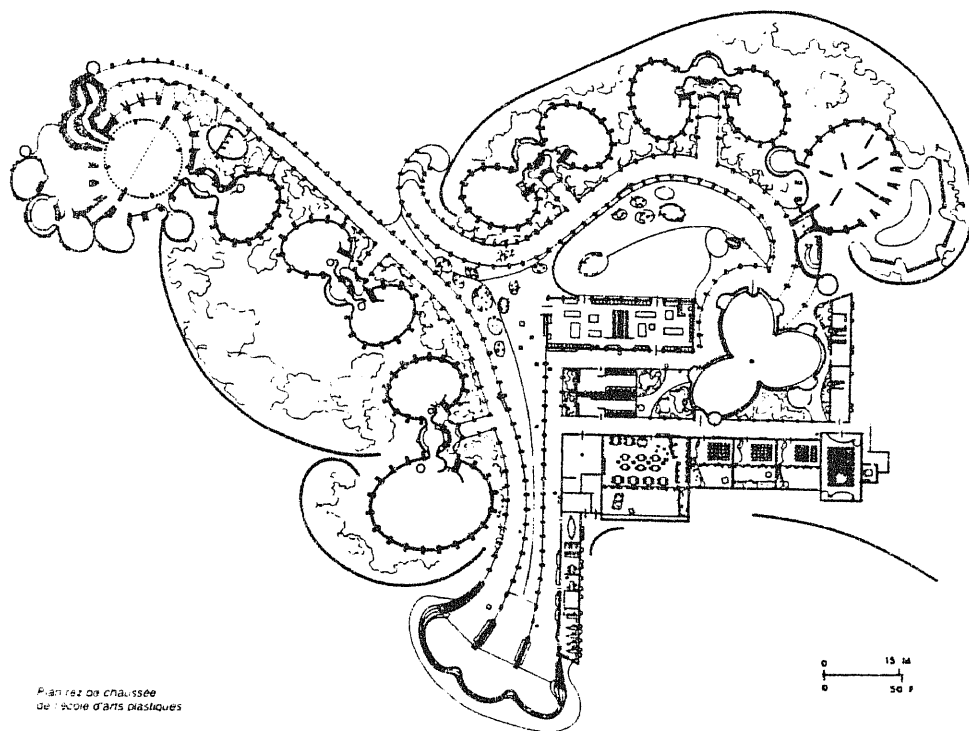


Figure 3.1 School of Plastic Arts, Havana (Cuba): floor plan

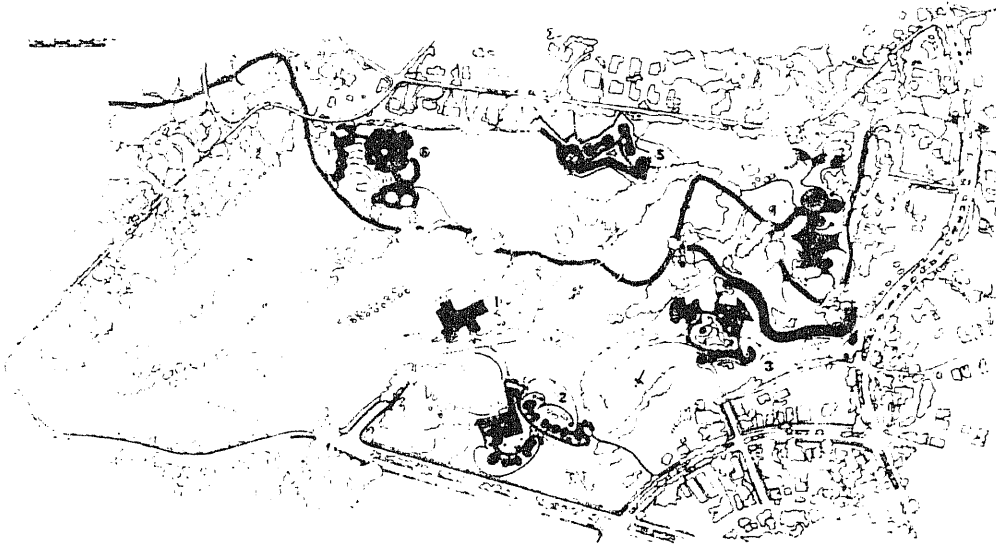


Figure 3.2 Site plan showing the five schools of the arts, Havana (Cuba)

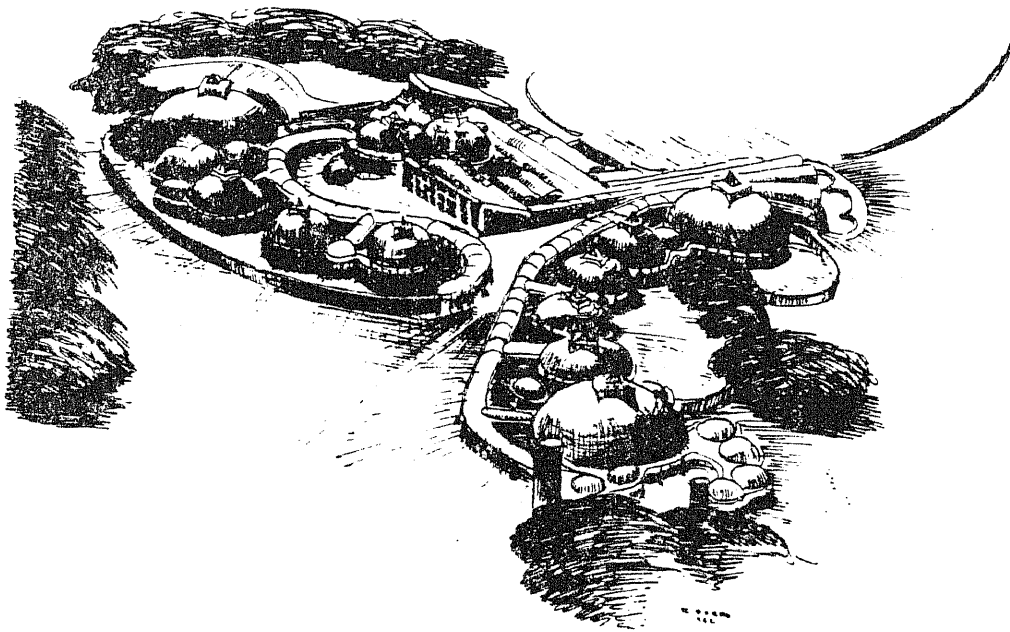


Figure 3.3 School of Plastic Arts, Havana (Cuba) 1960-1965: bird's eye view perspective

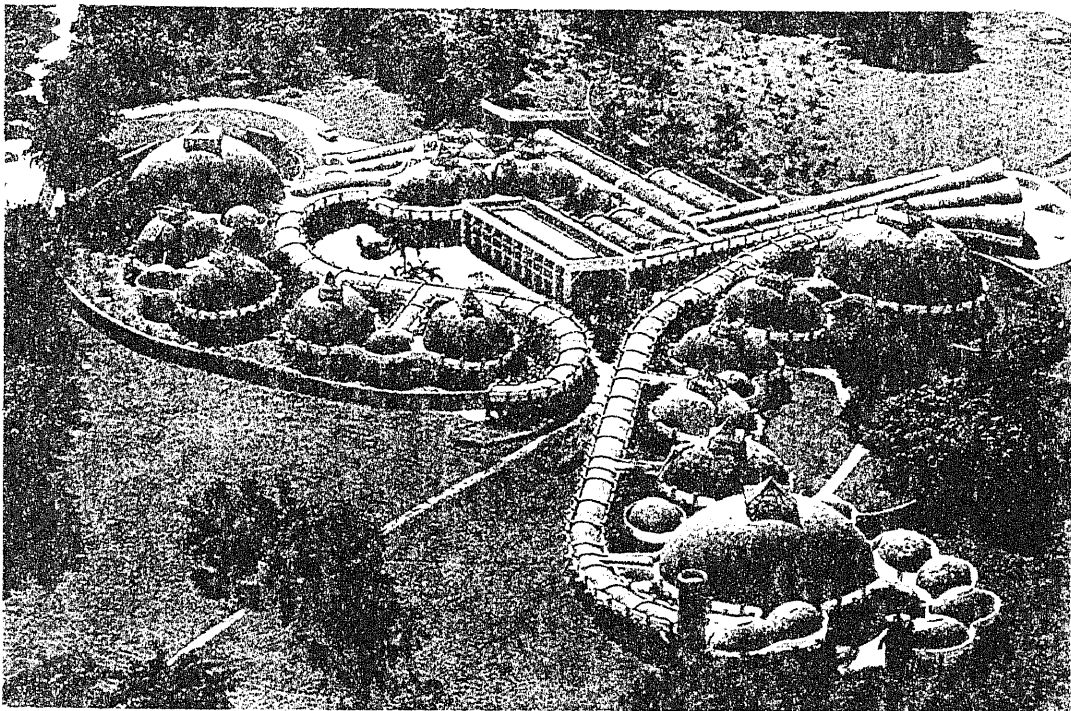


Figure 3.4 School of Plastic Arts, Havana (Cuba) 1960-1965: aerial photo

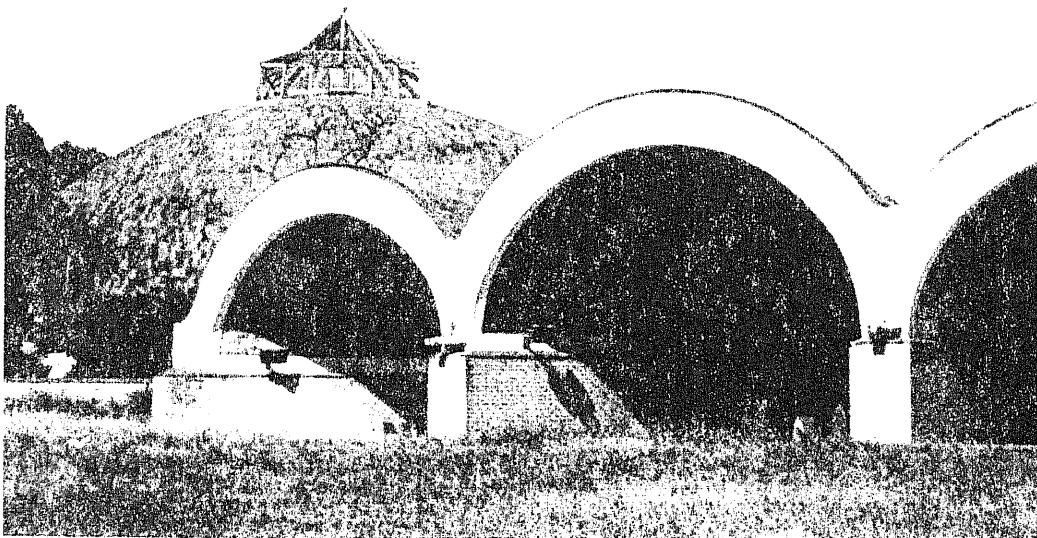


Figure 3.5 School of Plastic Arts, Havana (Cuba) 1960-1965: photo of main entrance

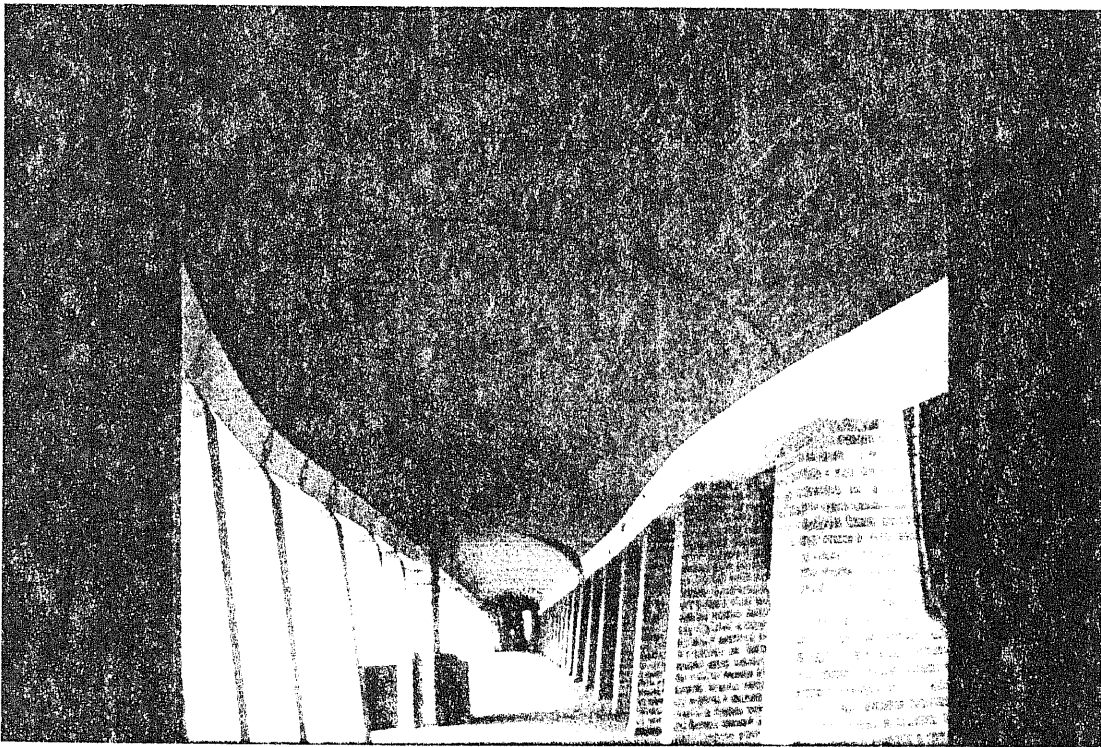


Figure 3.6 School of Plastic Arts, Havana (Cuba) 1960-1965: covered walkways



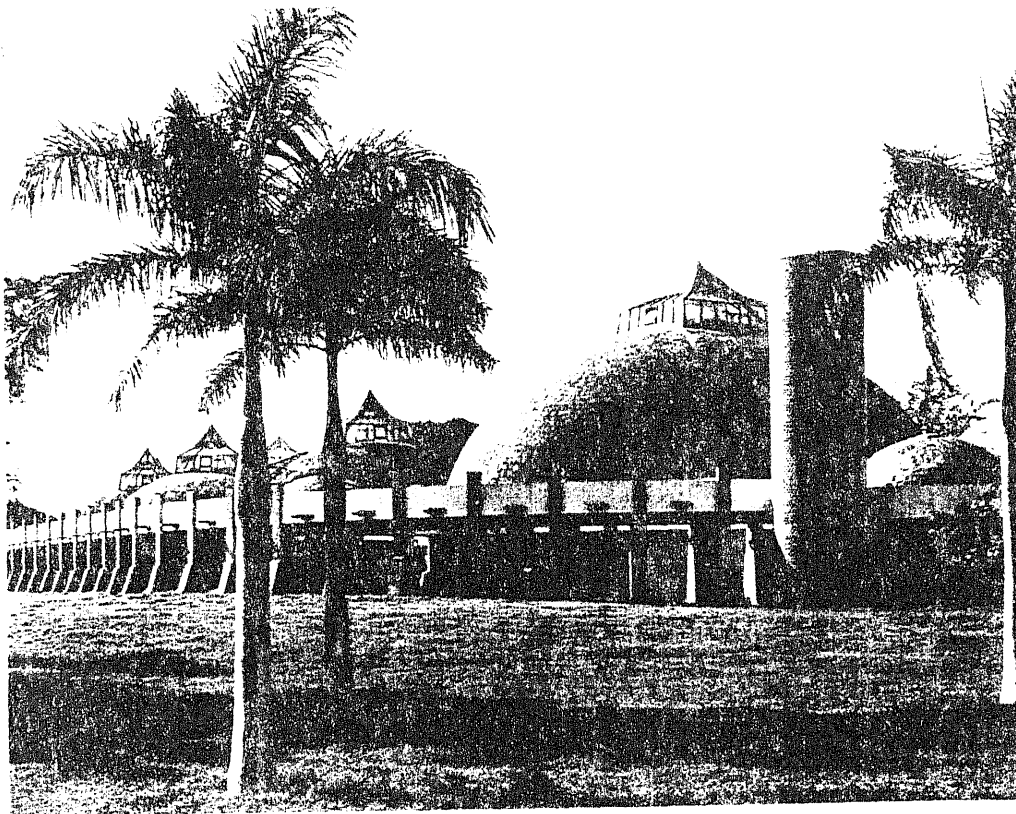


Figure 3.7 School of Plastic Arts, Havana (Cuba) 1960-1965: photo of exterior

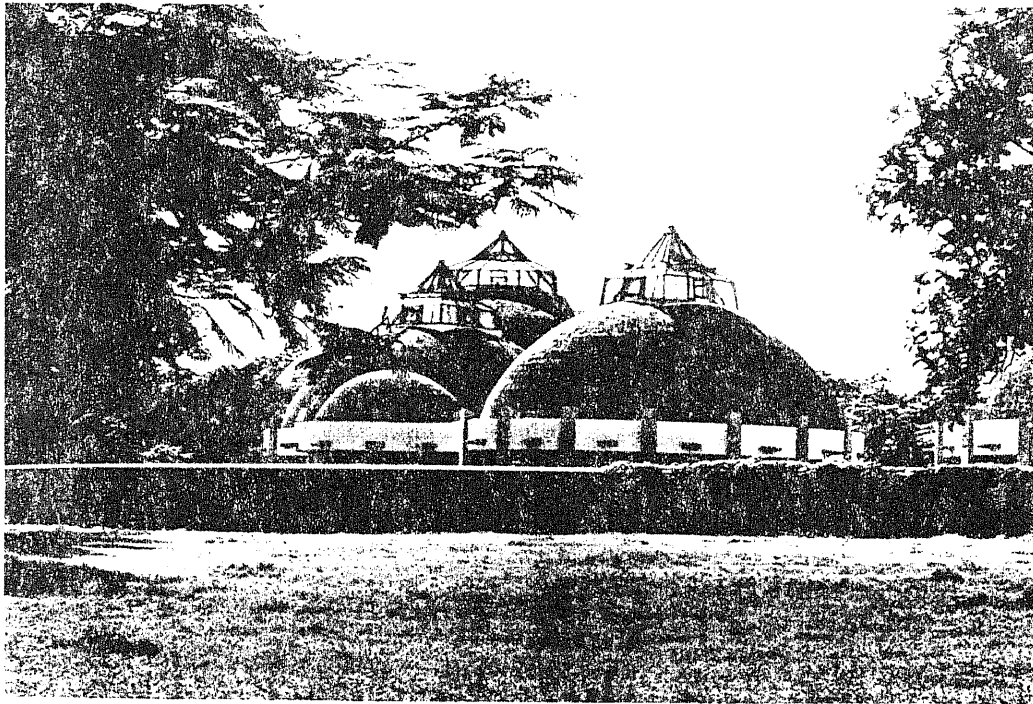


Figure 3.8 School of Plastic Arts, Havana (Cuba) 1960-1965: photo of exterior

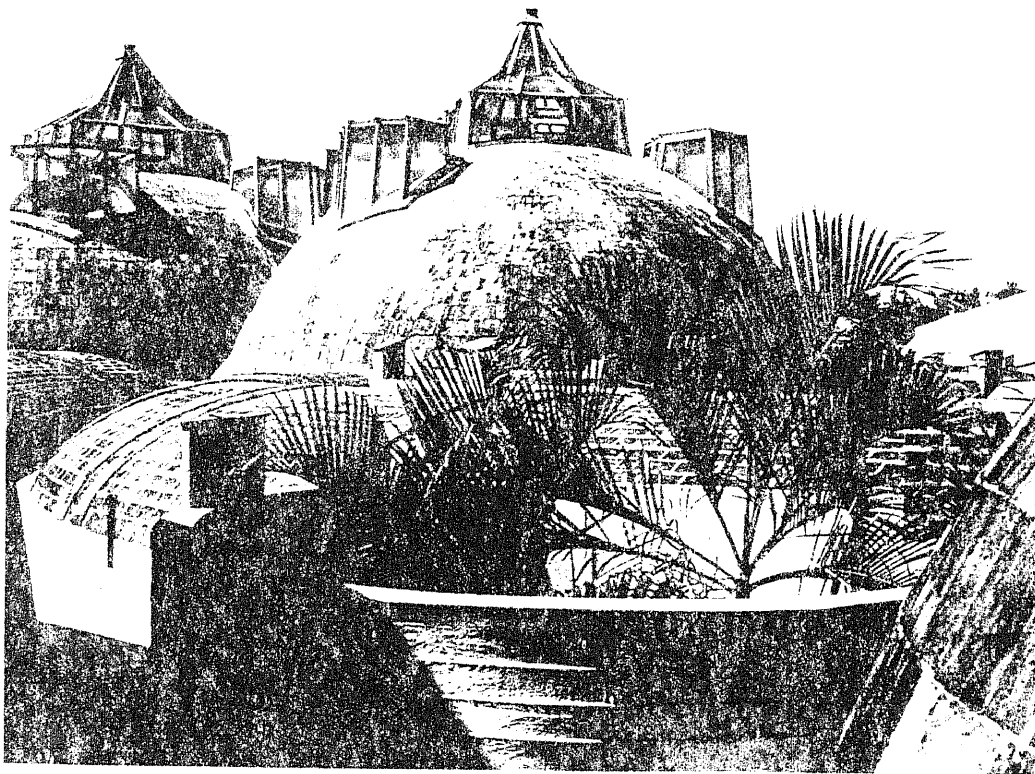


Figure 3.9 School of Plastic Arts, Havana (Cuba) 1960-1965: photo of exterior

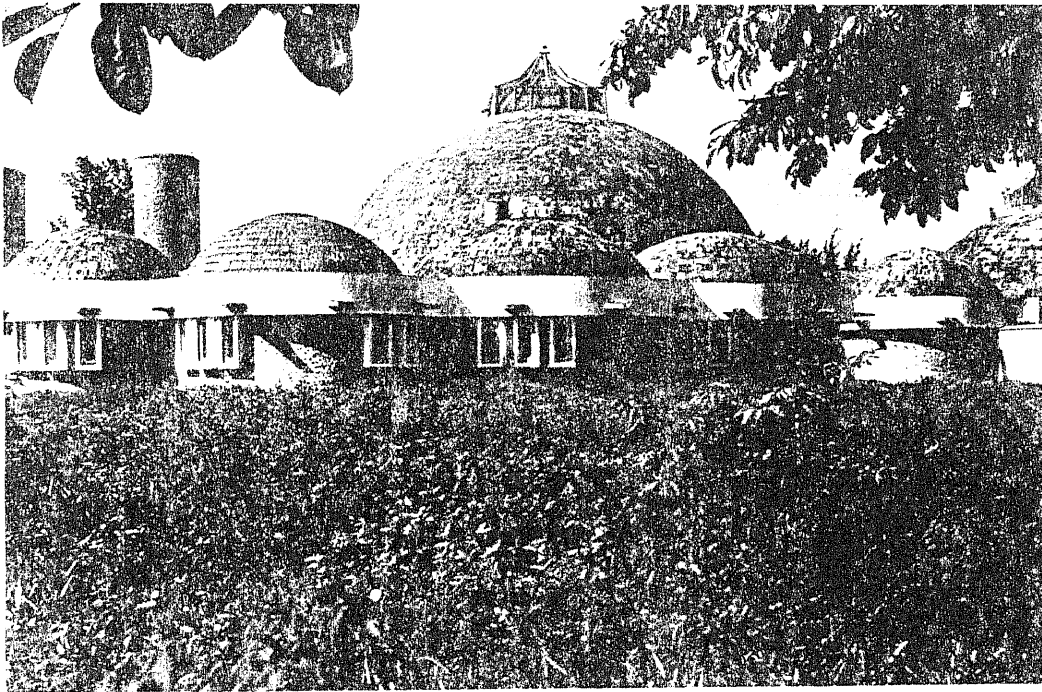


Figure 3.10 School of Plastic Arts, Havana (Cuba) 1960-1965: photo of exterior

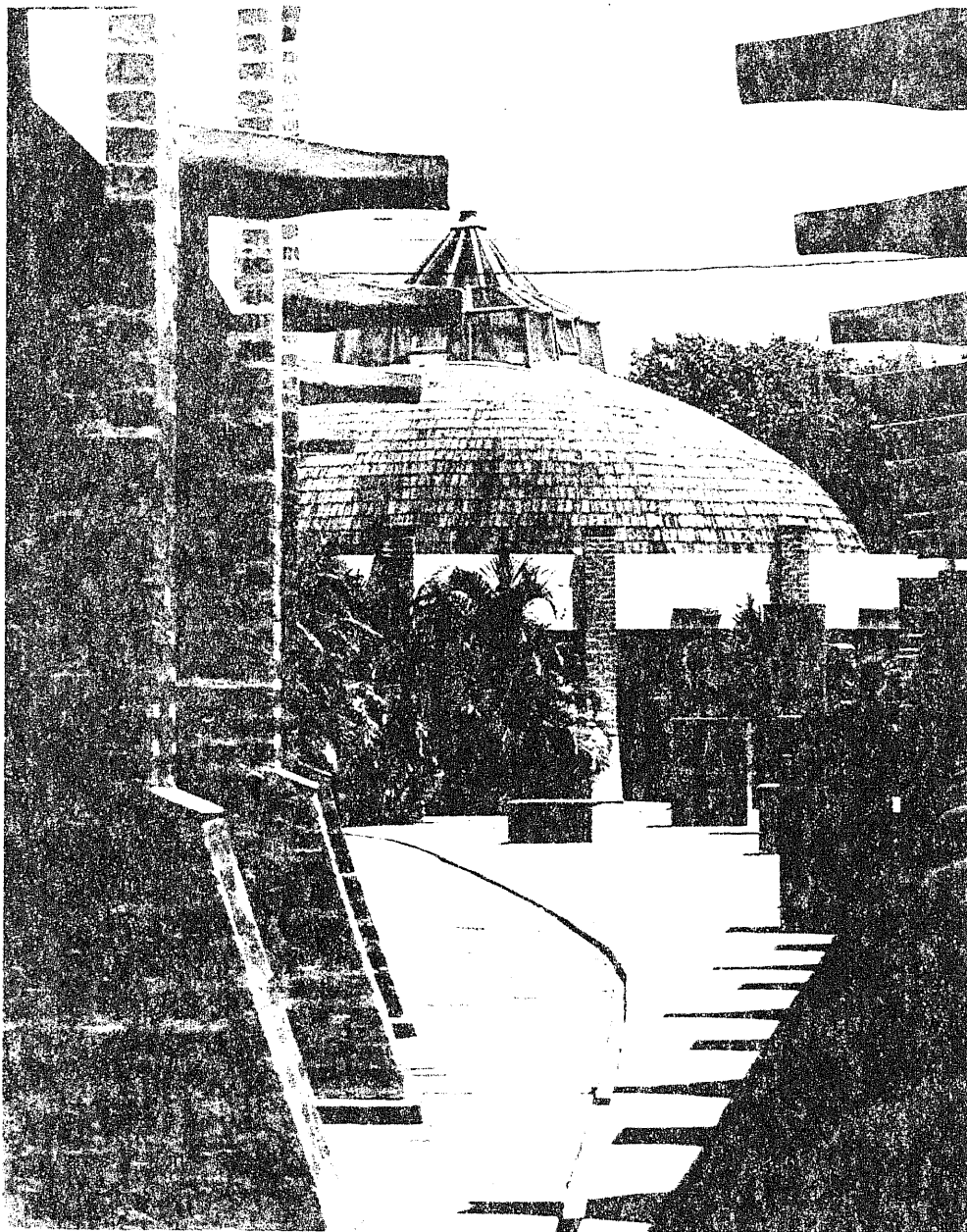


Figure 3.11 School of Plastic Arts, Havana (Cuba) 1960-1965: photo of courtyard

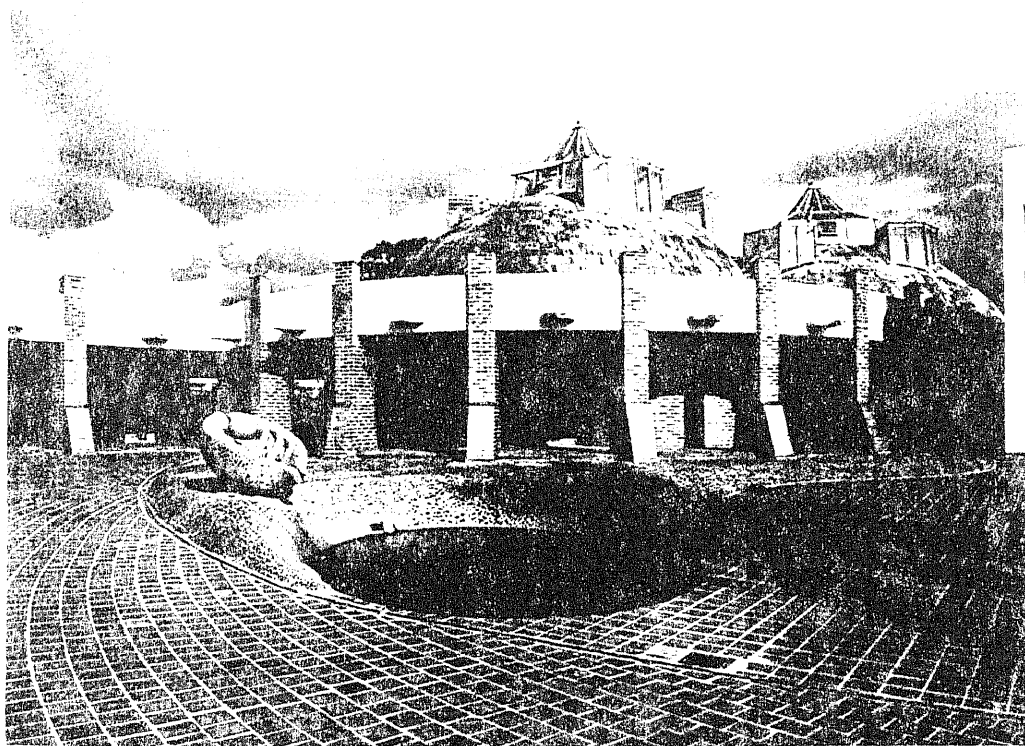


Figure 3.12 School of Plastic Arts, Havana (Cuba) 1960-1965: courtyard with papaya fountain

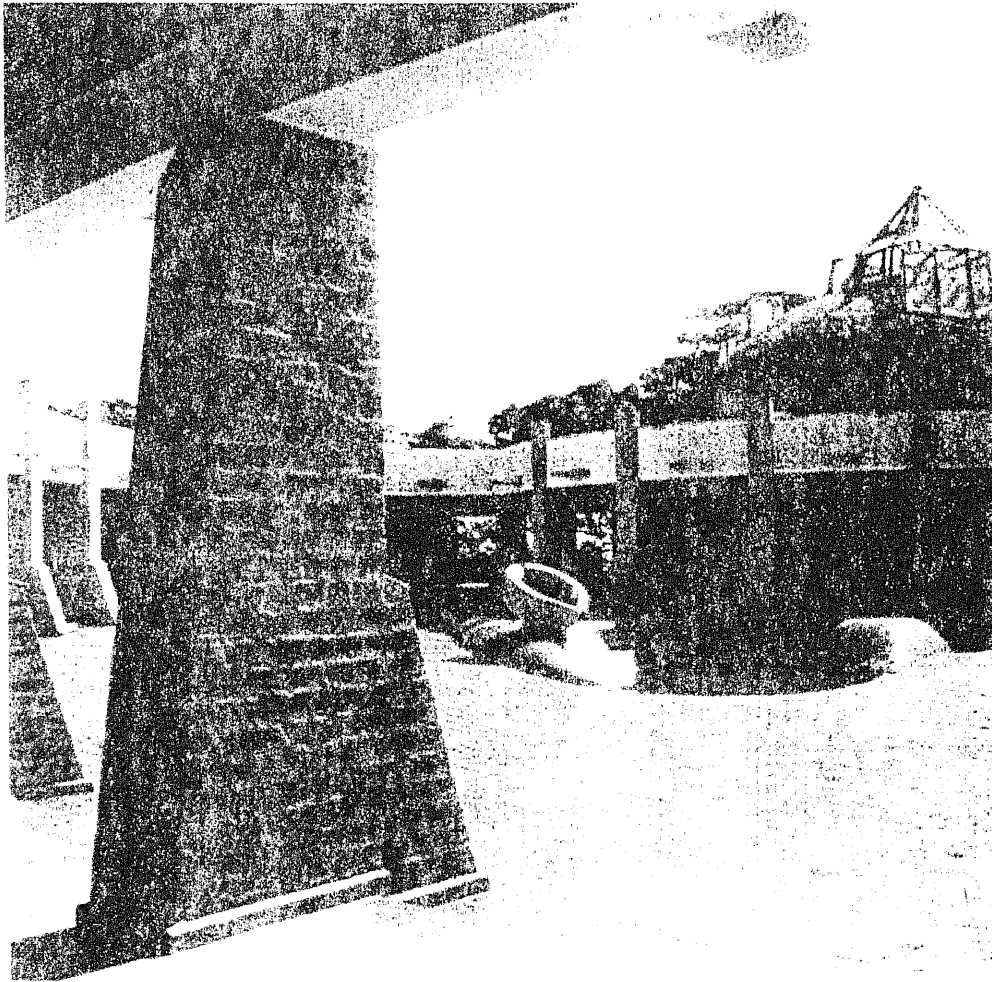


Figure 3.13 School of Plastic Arts, Havana (Cuba) 1960-1965: courtyard with papaya fountain

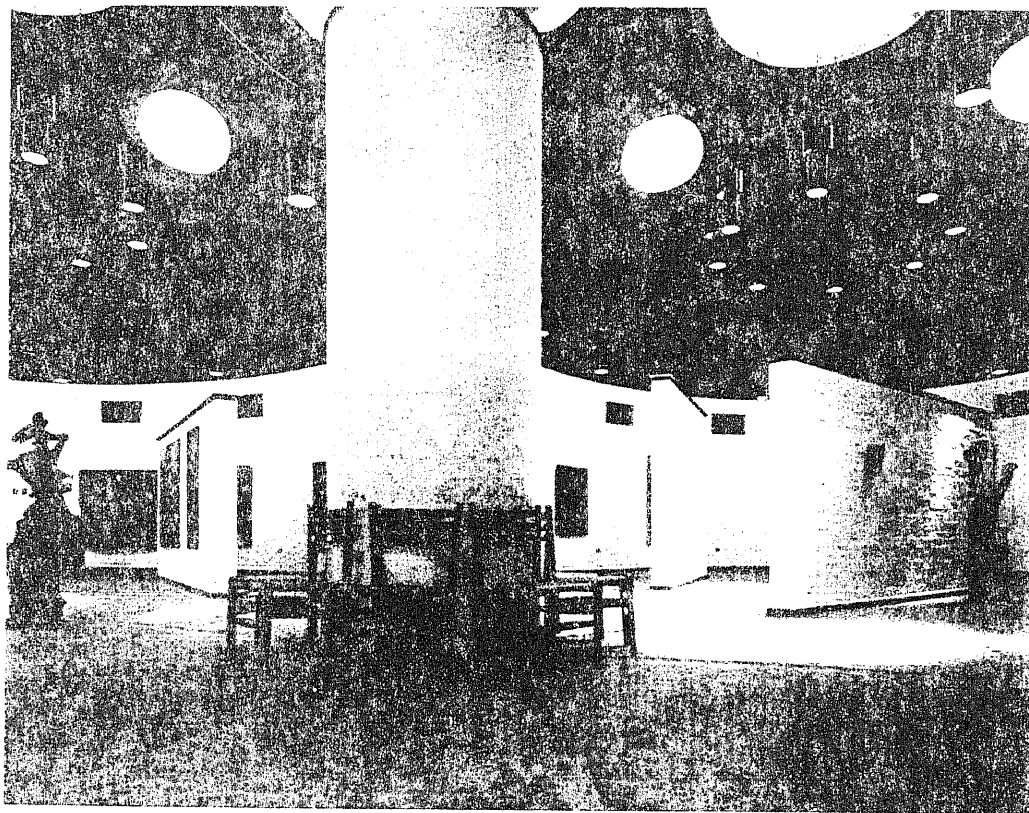


Figure 3.14 School of Plastic Arts, Havana (Cuba) 1960-1965: photo of interior



### **The Romantic Moment of a Revolution**

This building, like that of the School of Plastic Arts, is structured like a city. In it I wanted to express two very powerful sentiments produced by the first stage, the romantic stage, of a revolution: the exaltation, the collective emotional explosion, but also the anguish, that which leads one to a state of strong internal tension, of agony in the etymological sense of the word (struggle, combat). The entrance and the dance classrooms are images of the exaltation. The fragmented domes which cover them appear to be inflated by an expansive force. But on passing through the portals that lead to and surround the plaza, the angles of the columns point to different directions, breaking the order and provoking disorientation, anguish. The theme, the "mediate content", is here the evocation of a specified historical moment.

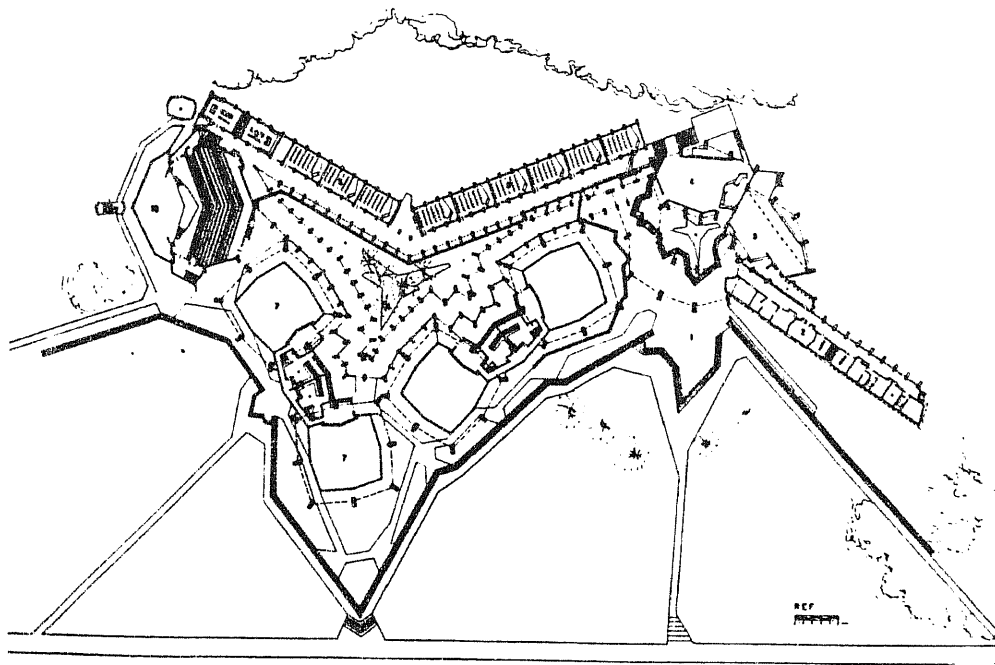


Figure 4.1 School of Modern Dance, Havana (Cuba) 1960-1964: floor plan

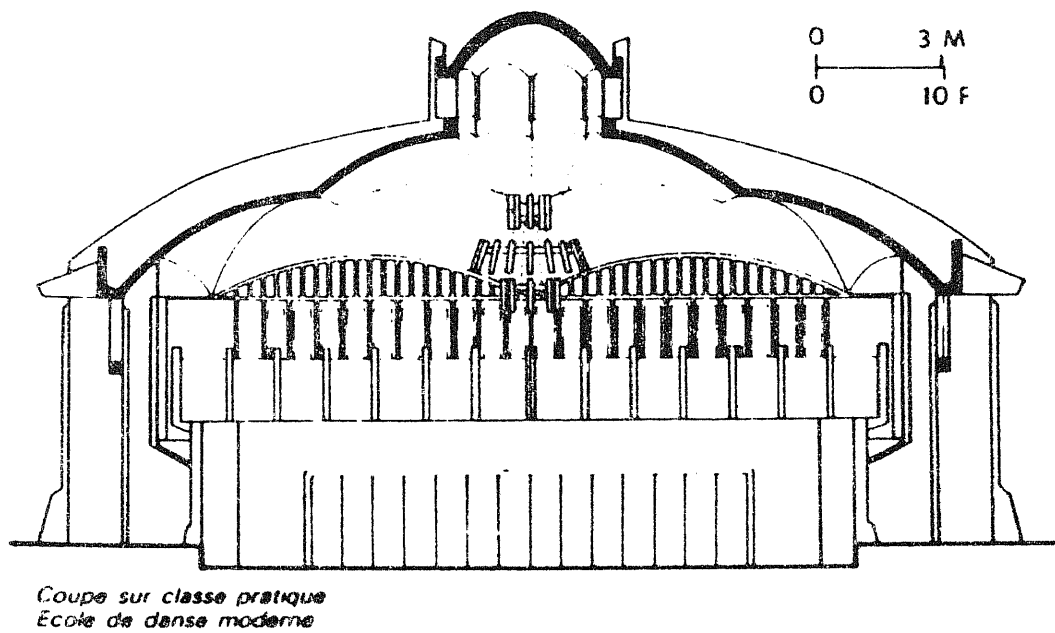


Figure 4.2 School of Modern Dance, Havana (Cuba) 1960-1964: section through dance studio

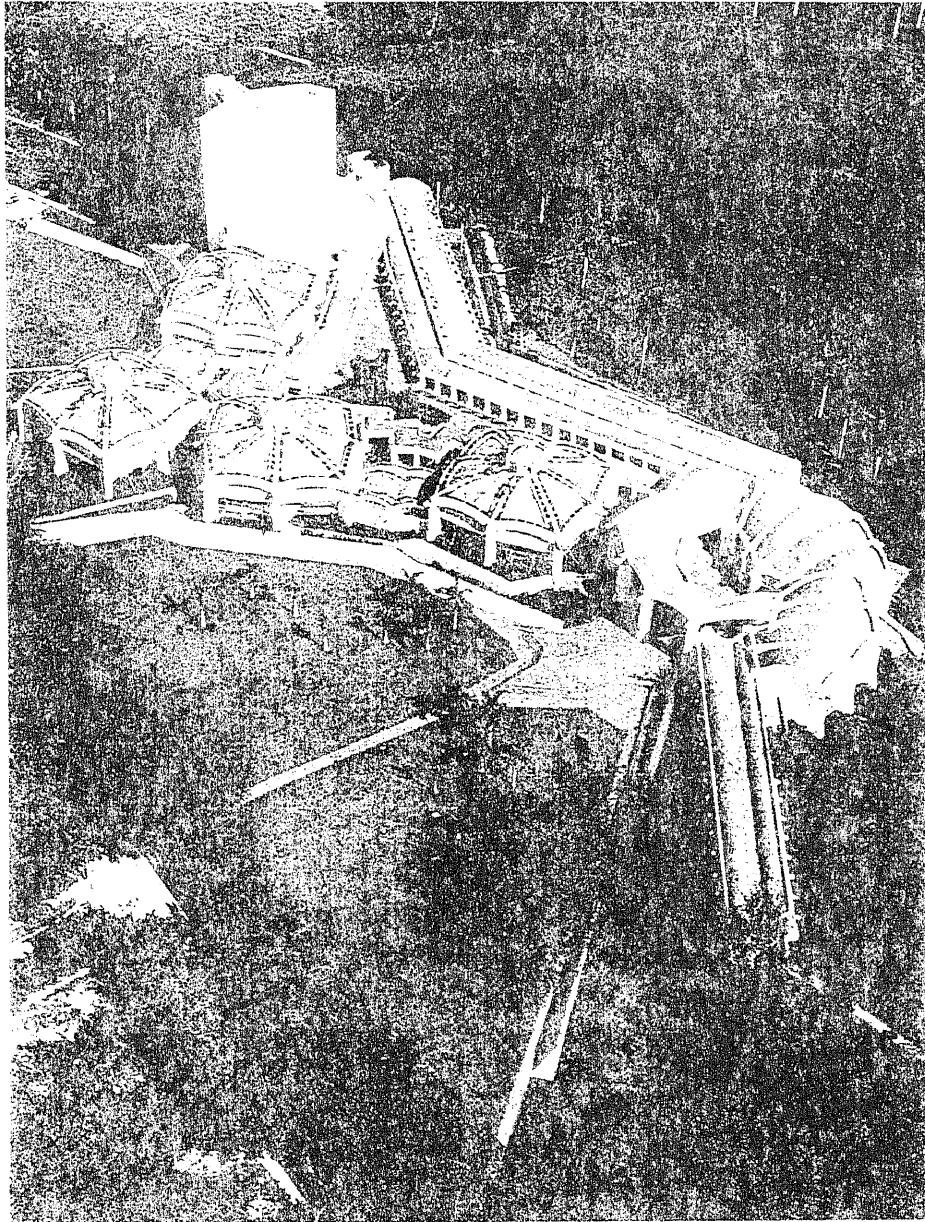


Figure 4.3 School of Modern Dance, Havana (Cuba) 1960-1964: aerial photo



Figure 4.4 School of Modern Dance, Havana (Cuba) 1960-1964: partial aerial view

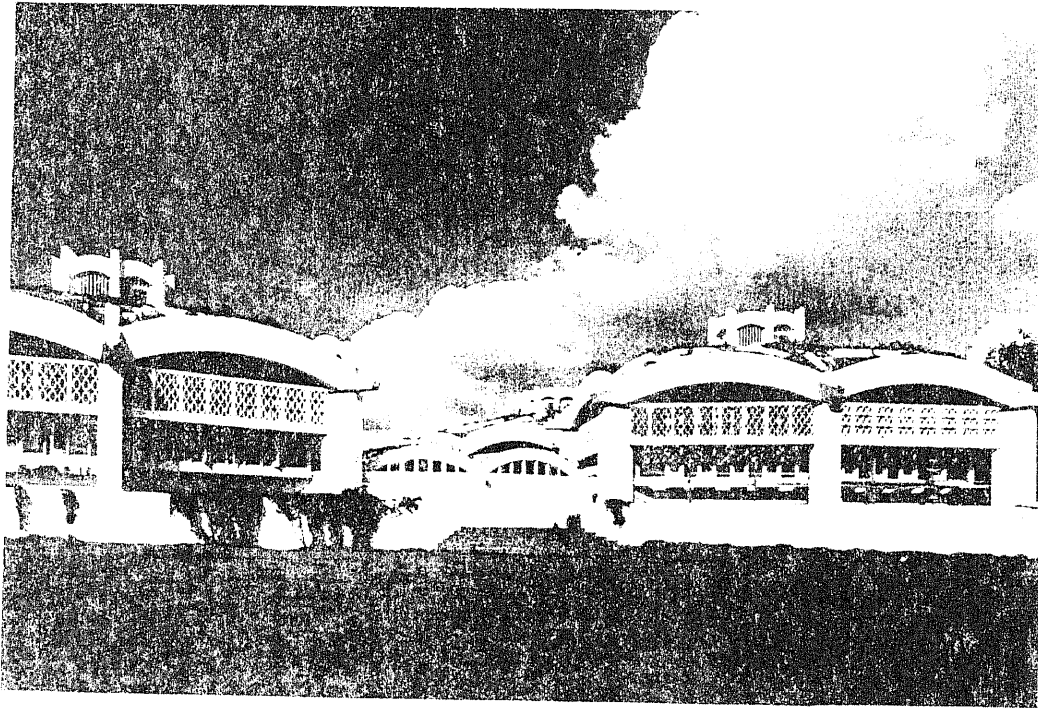


Figure 4.5 School of Modern Dance, Havana (Cuba) 1960-1964: photo of exterior

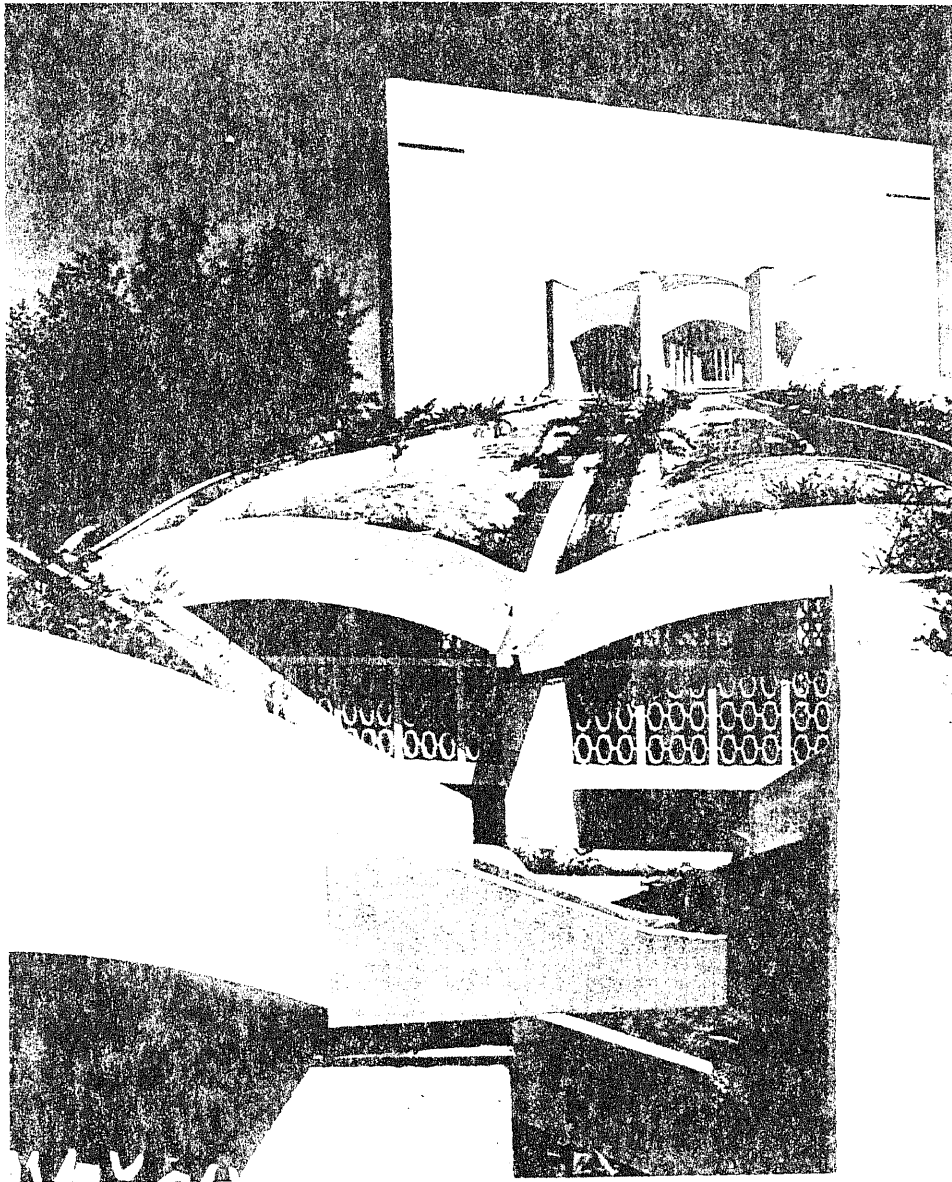


Figure 4.6 School of Modern Dance, Havana (Cuba) 1960-1964: close-up of domes with exterior wall of theater in background

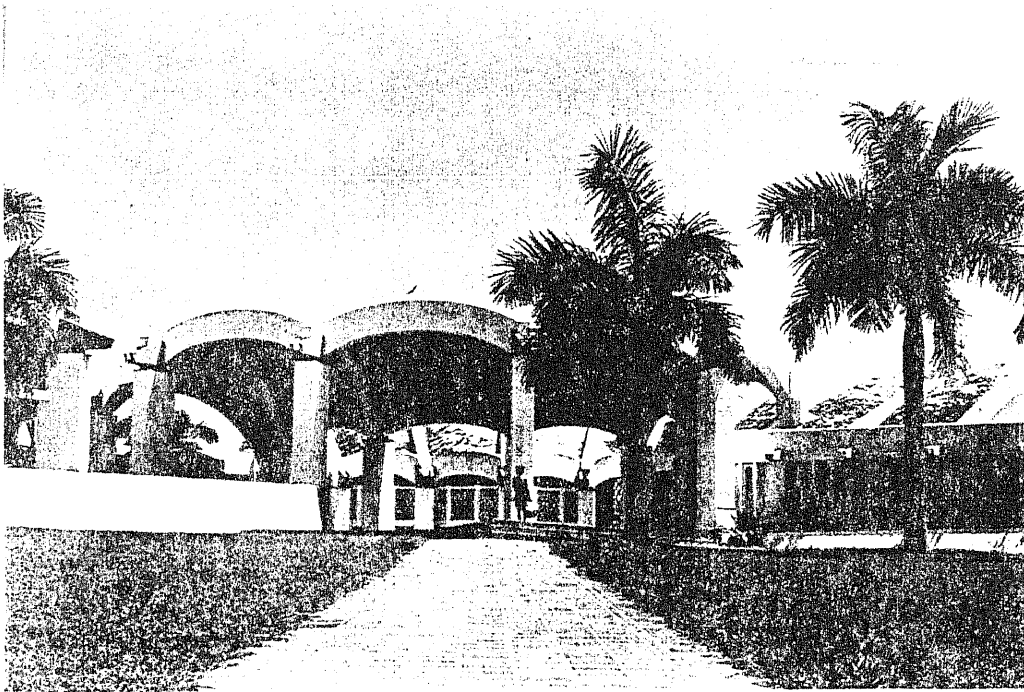


Figure 4.7 School of Modern Dance, Havana (Cuba) 1960-1964: photo of main entrance



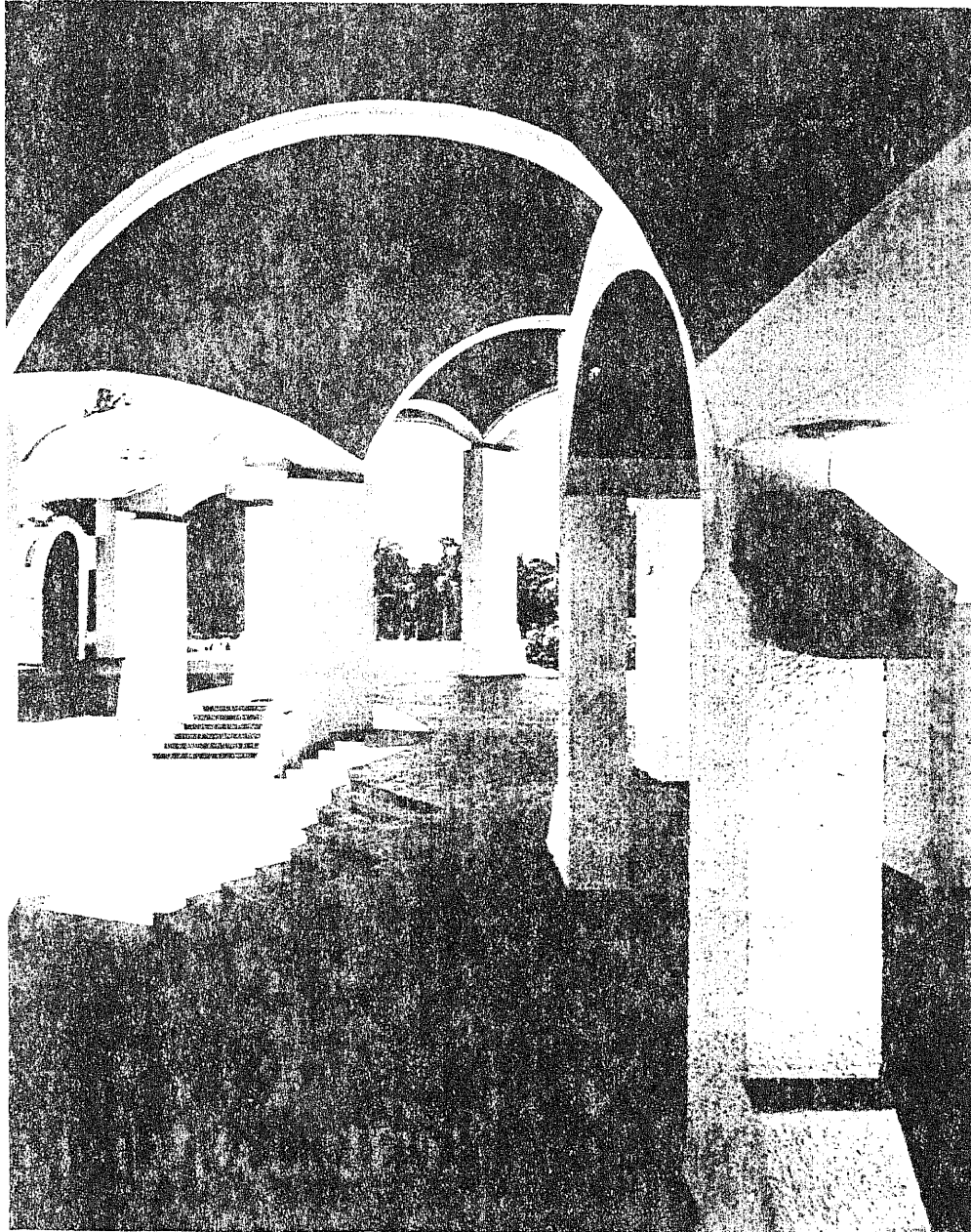


Figure 4.8 School of Modern Dance, Havana (Cuba) 1960-1964: photo of pilasters and covered walkways

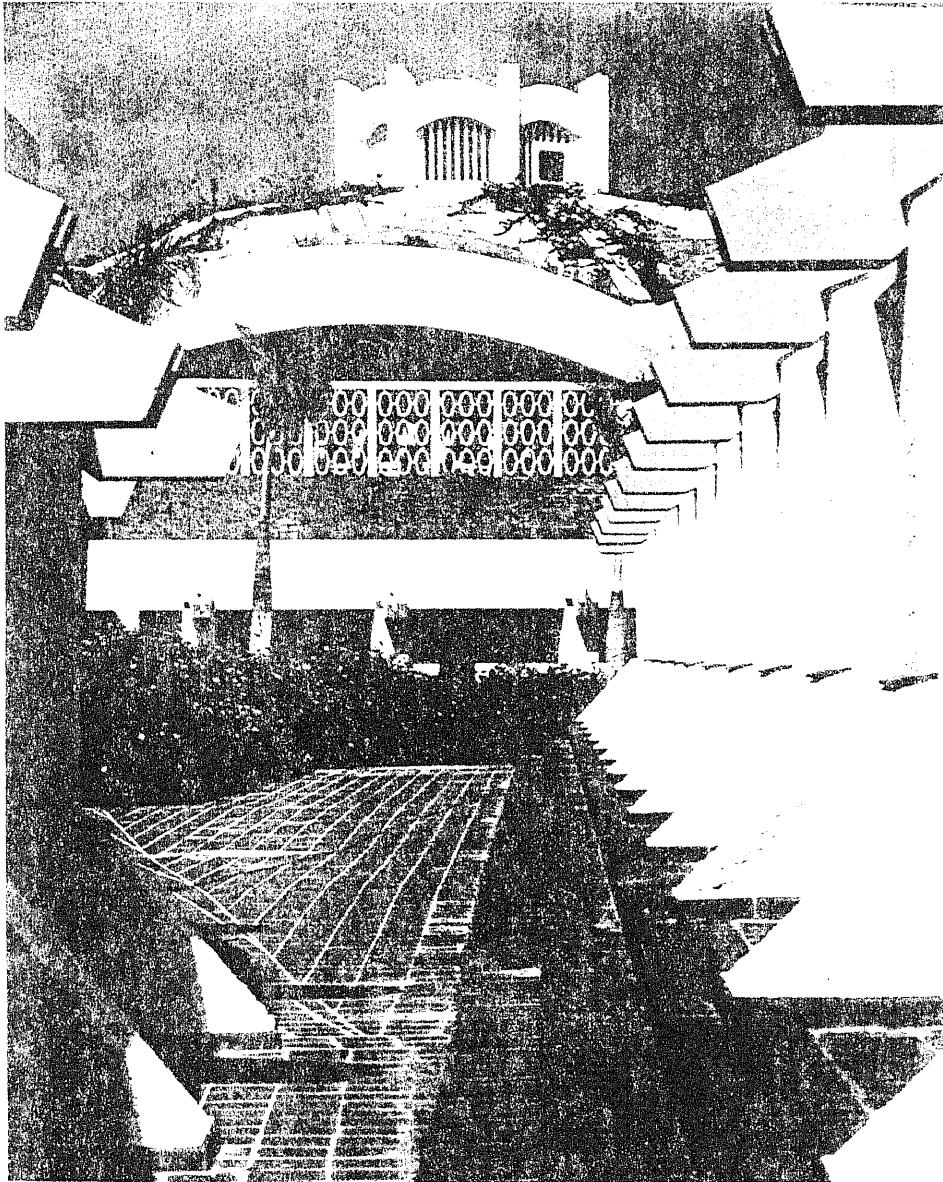


Figure 4.9 School of Modern Dance, Havana (Cuba) 1960-1964: partial view of courtyard

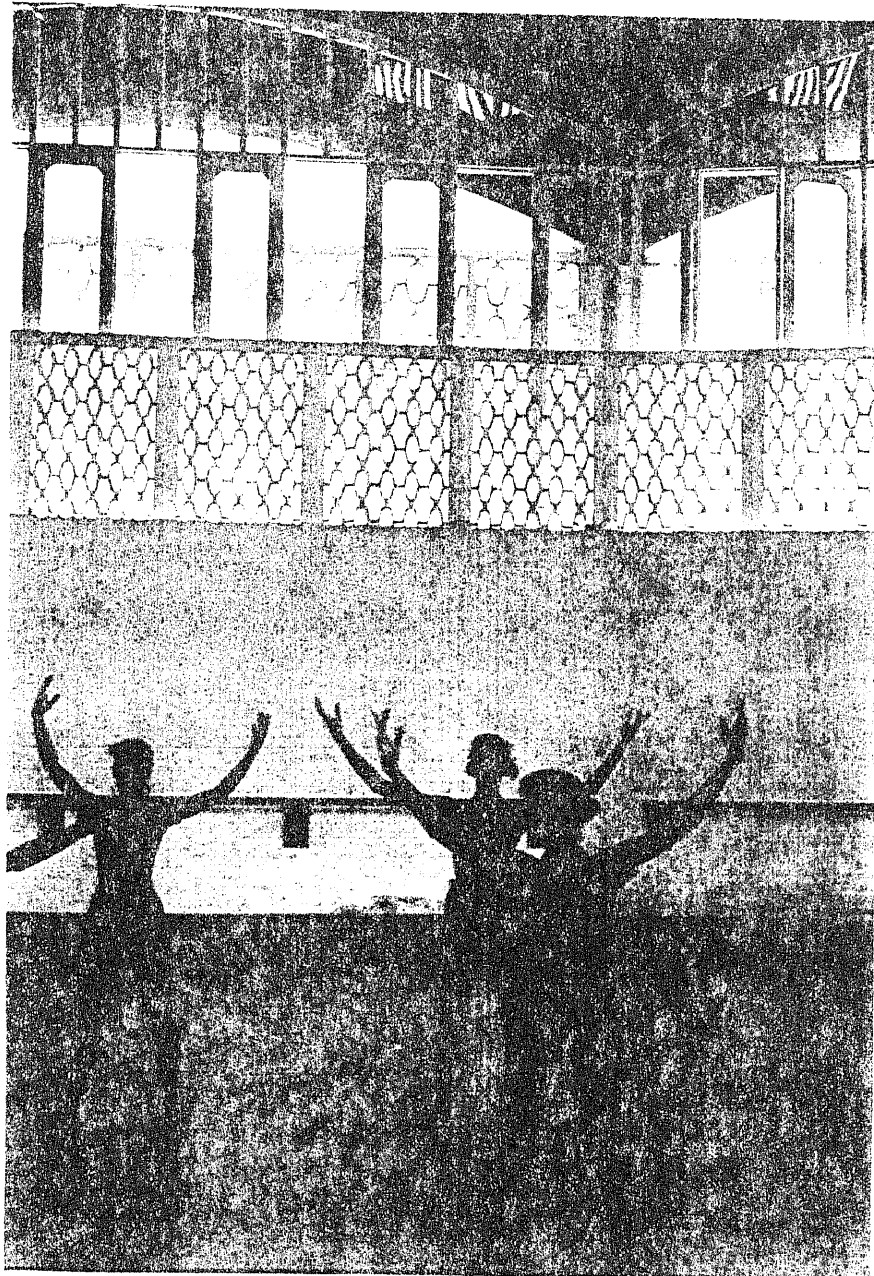


Figure 4.10 School of Modern Dance, Havana (Cuba) 1960-1964: photo of interior of dance studio

### 3. THE RETURN TO EUROPE

#### The Presence of Thanatos

A project for Spain: How can one not think of the Civil War, in the image of Guernica given to us by Picasso with the destruction of the form? To this luxury hotel complex with pool, theater and entertainment centers, we wanted to bring the presence of Thanatos, so central to Spanish tradition. The images multiply: the entry elements burst out like an explosion, the floorplan reminds one of a scorpion, the tall part of the building looks like a ghost ship. And once again, the building becomes a city.

HOTEL COMPLEX, SAN SEBASTIAN (SPAIN)  
COMPETITION WITH ANDRE MROWIEC, 1964.

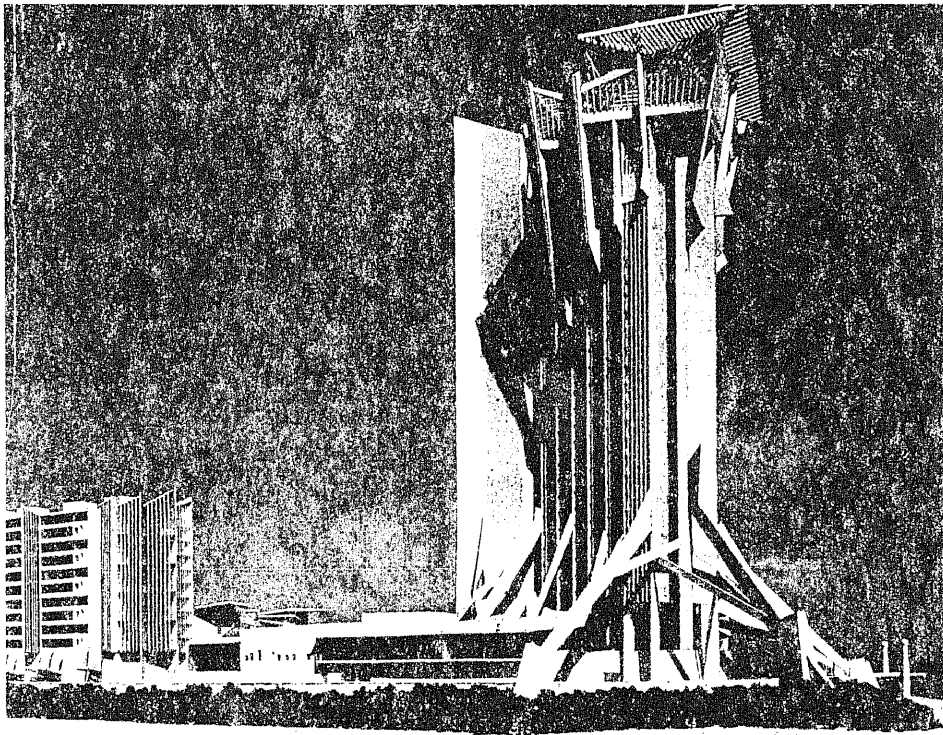


Figure 5.1 Hotel Complex, San Sebastian (Spain) 1964: model

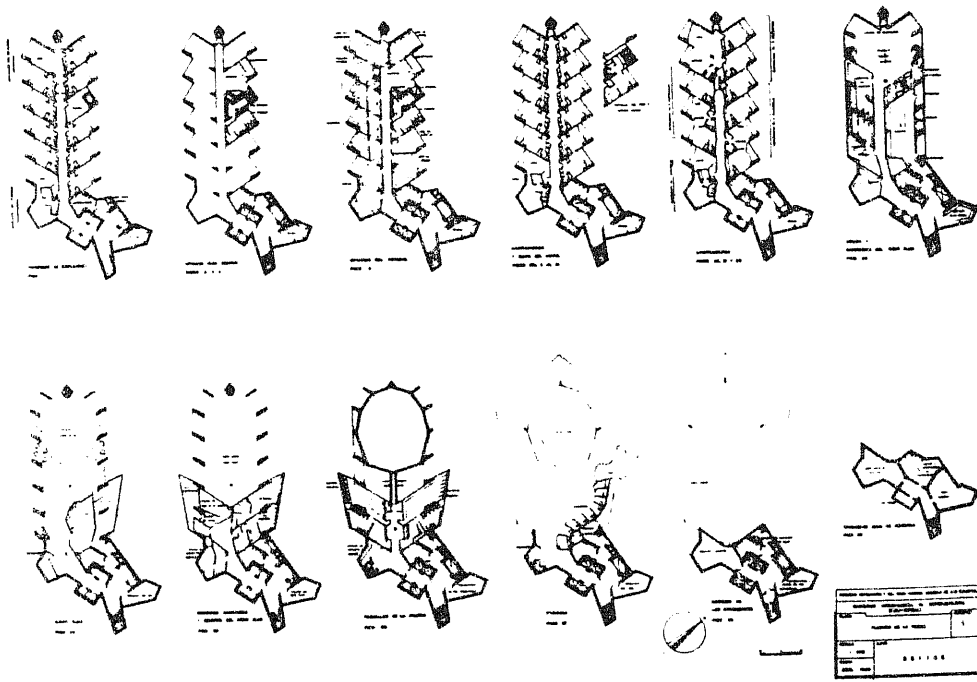


Figure 5.2 Hotel Complex, San Sebastian (Spain) 1964: floor plans

### **Reason and Madness**

In the project for the university and in the neighborhood which surrounds it, we proposed to give an image of the great spaces of Paris in a much smaller ground. The urbanism is structured around three plazas united by a central axis from which emerge secondary axes. This axuality and hierarchy of spaces is characteristic of this city, an expression of French Cartesianism. As in the streets of Paris, the facades occur in an ordered manner and appear to control the profusion of forms of the roofscapes, image of the triumph of reason. But it was not about making a copy. Everything is reinterpreted in a personal work expressed in another language. The buildings can be vertical or they can incline backwards or forward. It is a distorted Paris.

UNIVERSITY, VILLETANEUSE (SEINE-SAINT DENIS),  
COMPETITION WITH ANDRE MROWIEC, 1966.

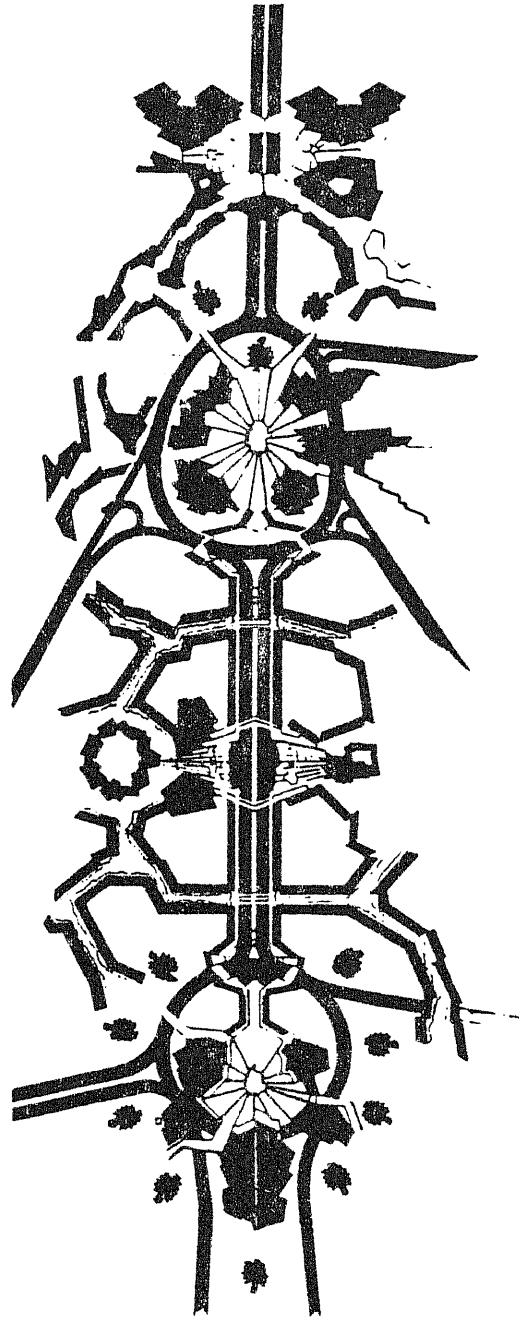


Figure 6.1 University, Villeteneuse, 1966: site diagram



### **Man and the Machine**

In this project there are pieces which seems to be pieces of the human body: hands, breasts, torso... as though trapped in an enormous machine. Within them there are various functions: theaters, conference rooms. All lies below a metallic structure with elements that move like kinetic sculpture. One enters through a narrow conduit, a type of esophagus which leads to the great room of the lost steps. In the center of this space there is a soft sculpture, integrated to the floor, which is to have a rhythmic movement, like a beating heart. It is the image of man imprisoned by a technological world.

HOUSE OF CULTURE, PARIS 20th, PROJECT  
WITH ANDRE MROWIEC, 1967.

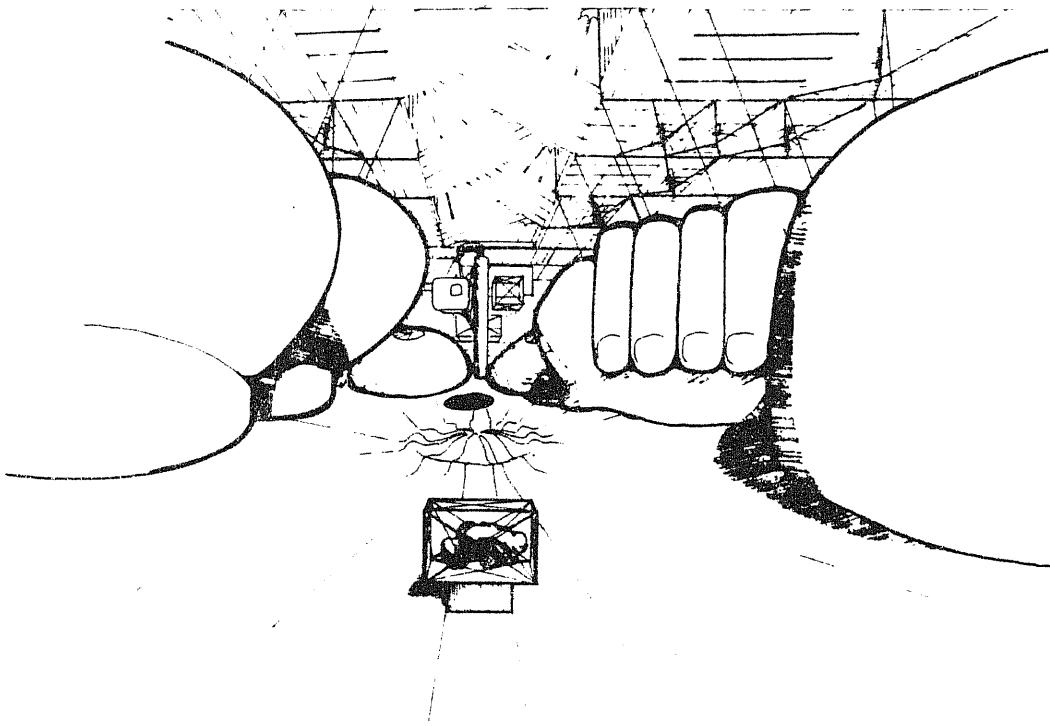


Figure 7.1 House of Culture Project, 1967: perspective of interior

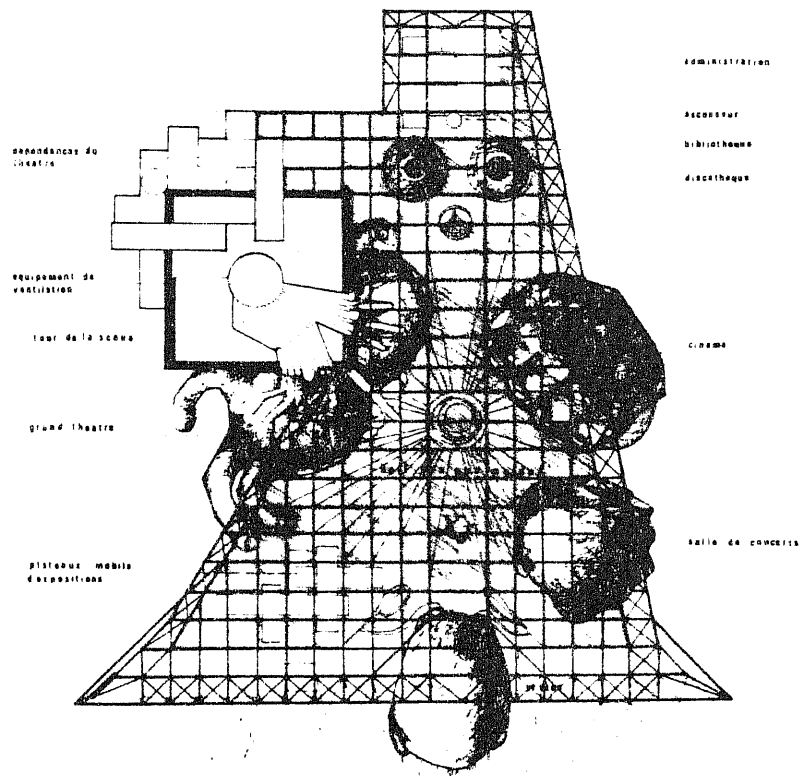


Figure 7.2 House of Culture Project, 1967: roof plan



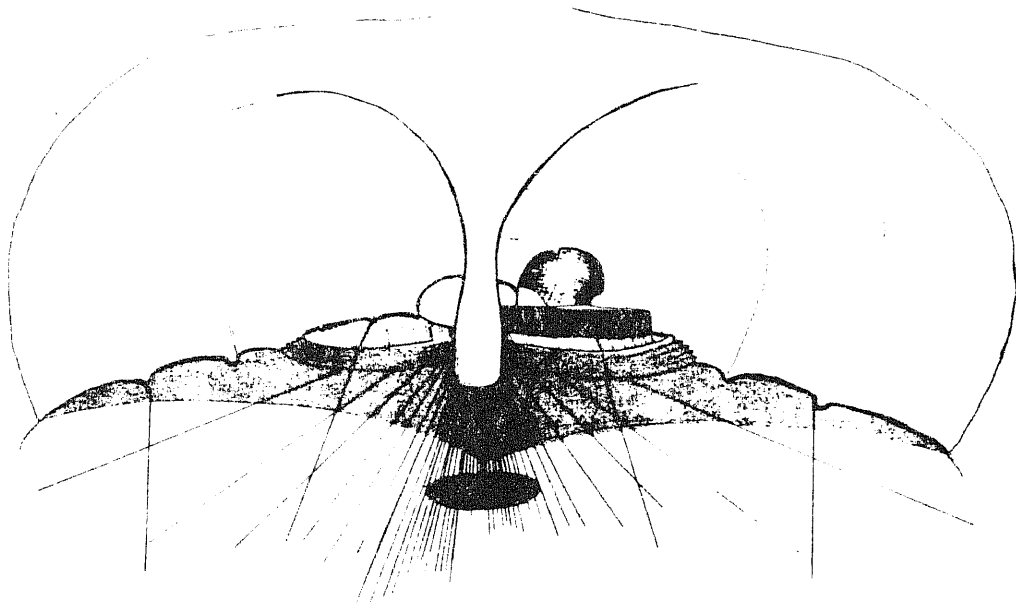


Figure 7.4 House of Culture Project, 1967: perspective of interior

### **The Gold of the Rhine**

I was asked to develop a project for an office building and an art gallery for a private collection. The small principality is an important financial center. The site is on the side of the mountain which dominates Vaduz. Further above is the ancient castle of the prince, below runs the Rhine, river of the myth about the gold. Paracelsus the alchemist frequently passed through those parts. The site and the program of the project imposed on me the image: physical gold, mythical gold. I conceived the work as three gigantic fingers that try to grab a golden energy. There are hanging elements of anodized aluminum which should have oscillated in the wind (it was prohibited by city ordinances), and that today create a movement with the variations of their reflections on the golden glass. The fingers of a giant that descends from the mountain remind us of Nietzschean superman. The gold is also light, fire, image of knowledge. Everything evokes Prometheus, the Titan who descended from the mountain to give knowledge to mankind. The work is an image of financial capitalism of the seventies, but is more than anything an homage to Germanic culture.

ART GALLERY AND OFFICES, VADUZ (LIECHTENSTEIN), 1969-1974.

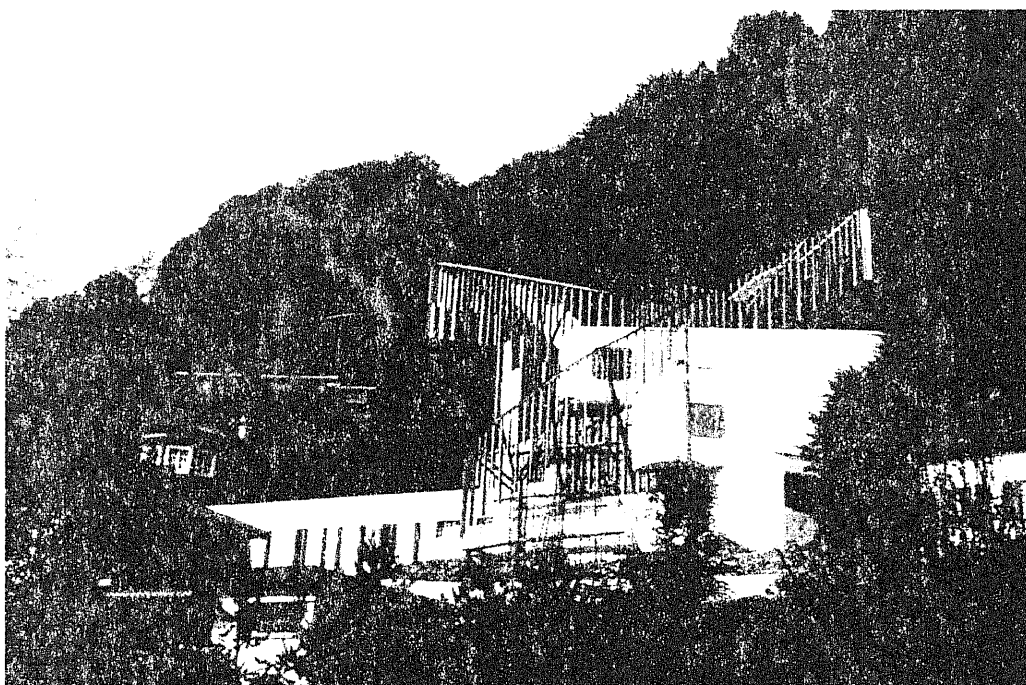


Figure 8.1 Art Gallery and Offices, Vaduz (Liechtenstein) 1969-1974: photo of building in its site

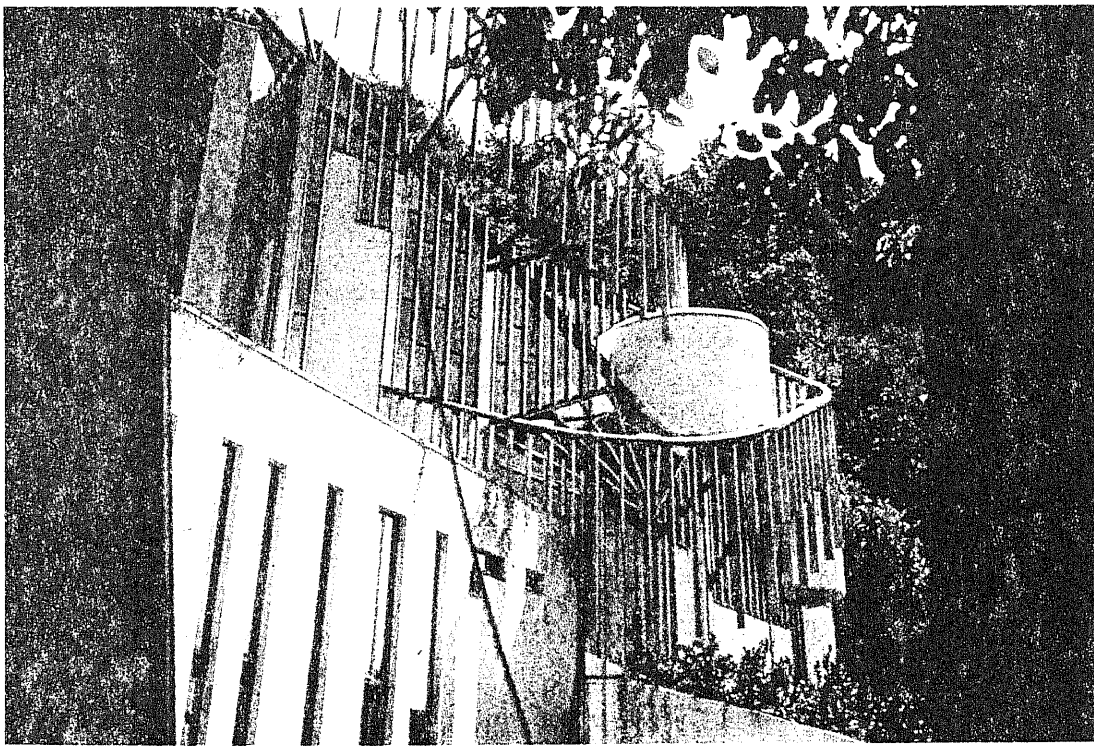


Figure 8.2 Art Gallery and Offices, Vaduz (Liechtenstein) 1969-1974: close-up photo of exterior



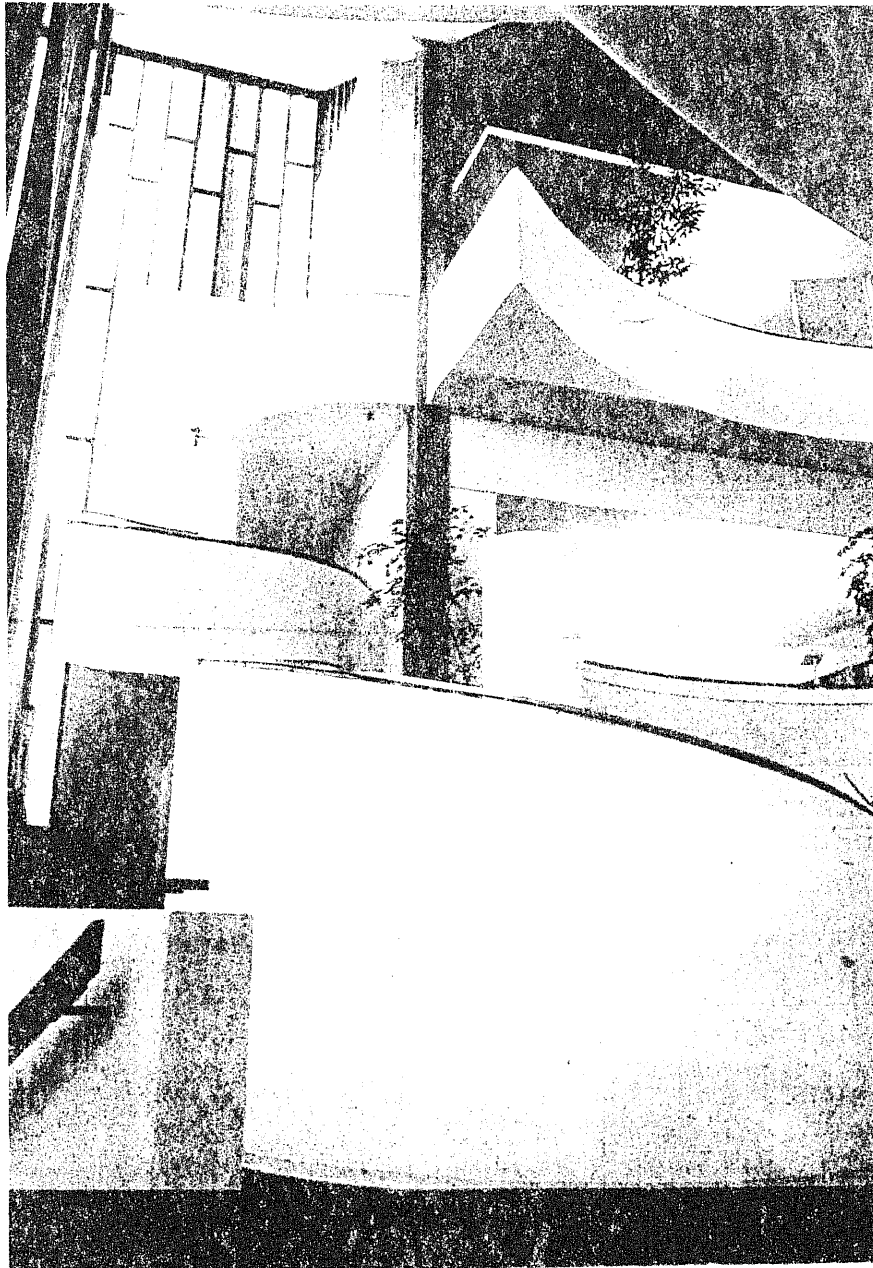


Figure 8.3 Art Gallery and Offices, Vaduz (Liechtenstein) 1969-1974: photo of exhibition hall

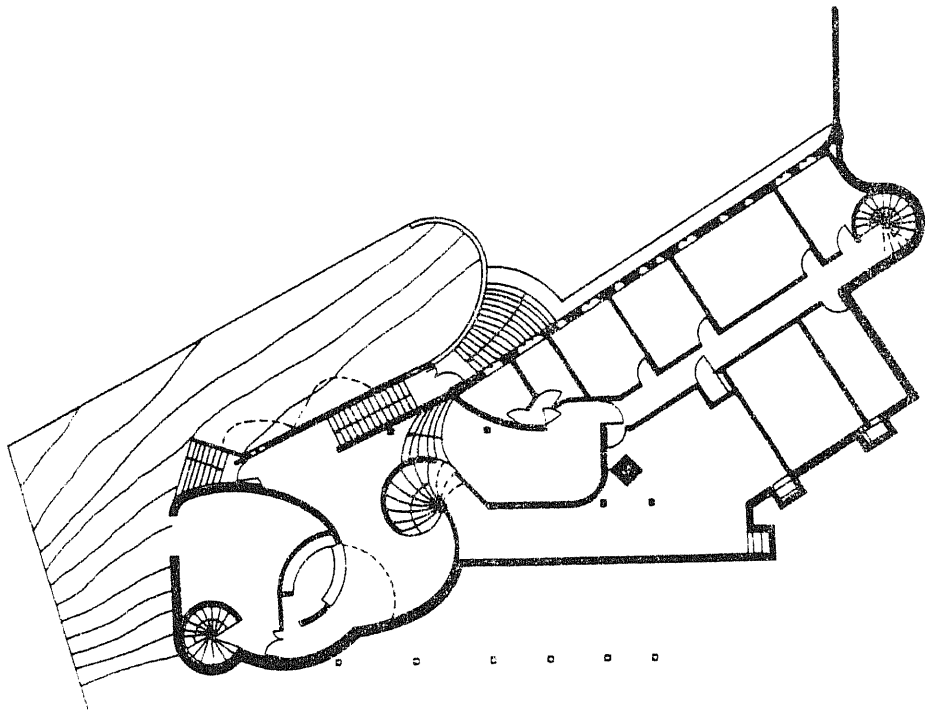


Figure 8.4 Art Gallery and Offices, Vaduz (Liechtenstein) 1969-1974: ground floor plan

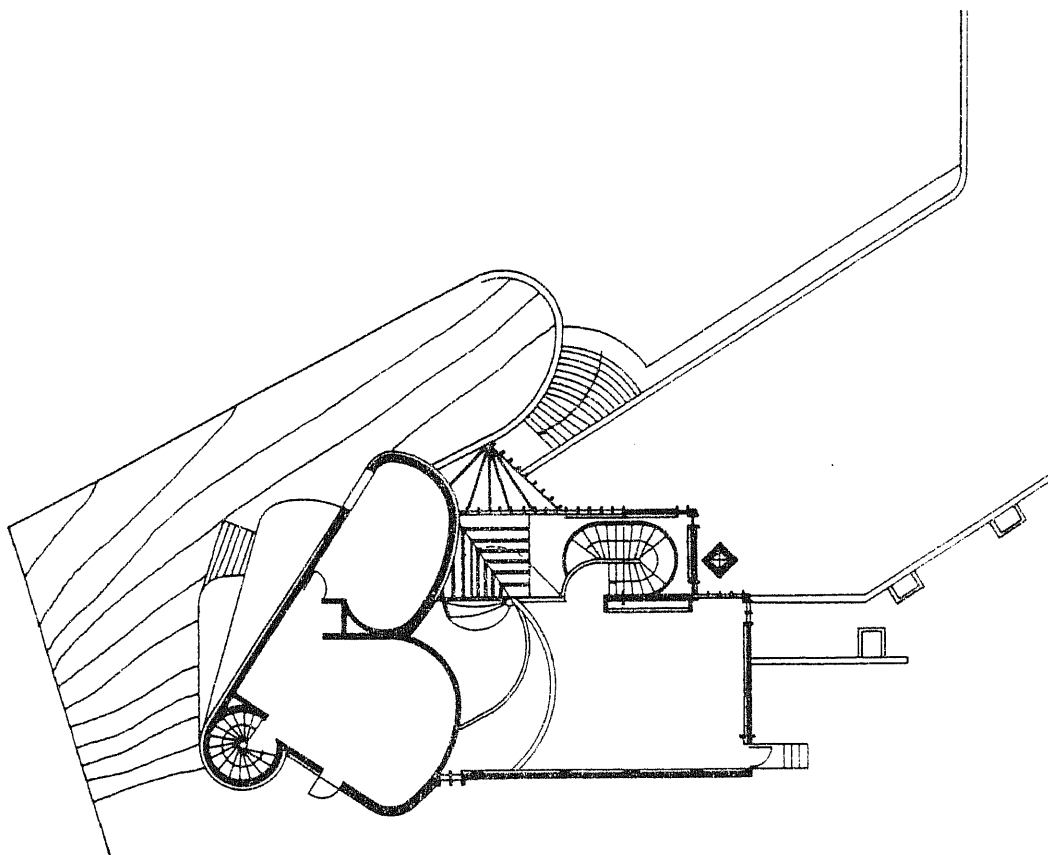


Figure 8.5 Art Gallery and Offices, Vaduz (Liechtenstein) 1969-1974: second floor plan

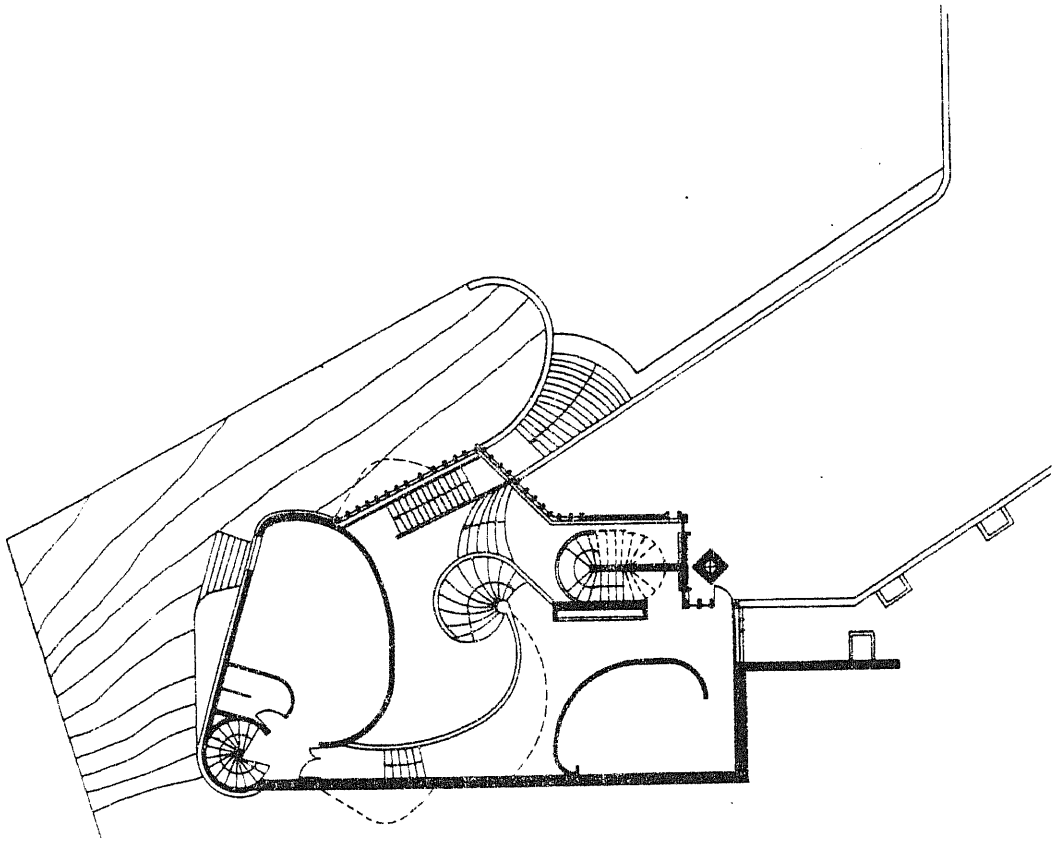


Figure 8.6 Art Gallery and Offices, Vaduz (Liechtenstein) 1969-1974: third floor plan

### **The Explosion of Youth**

How can one plan a youth center a little after 1968 without remembering the rebellion of youth that took place almost simultaneously in so many countries? That is why I wanted to add to the program's functions (a multipurpose room and a game room that could serve as theater stage, two workshops and various conference rooms) an expressive image of that desperate romanticism of those youths. The site is on the border of a park next to the Rhine, at a level lower than the access road and surrounded by mountains on both sides. Hence, it was easy to view it from the surrounding and above all from above, which gave especial importance to the roof. I conceived of it as a succession of inclined planes which shape the body of a young man with an exploding chest and the head and hands in flight. It is the young man, rebel and dreamer.

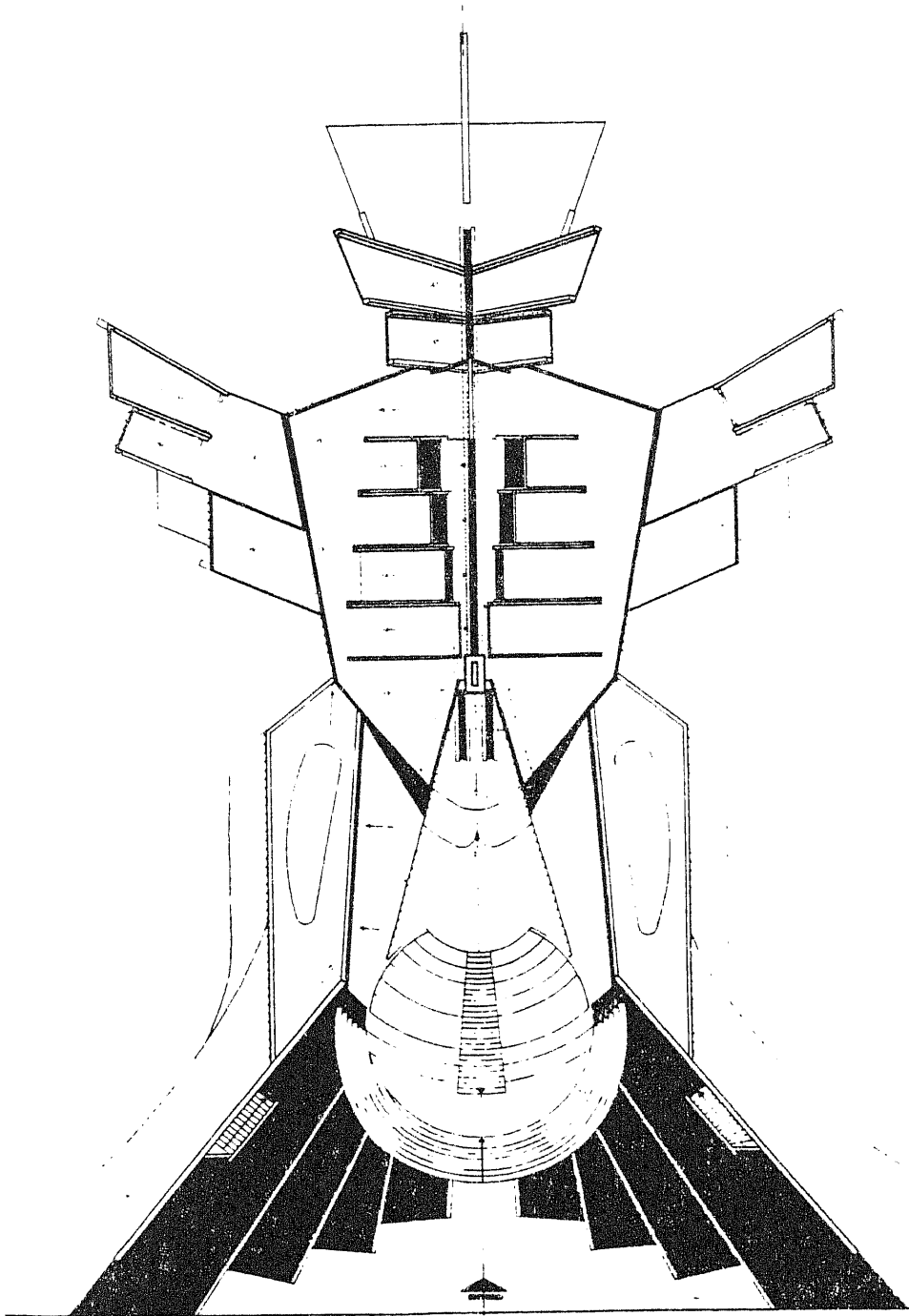


Figure 9.1 Youth Center, Vaduz (Liechtenstein), Project, 1972: roof plan

### **The City Becomes a Man**

The landscape of the bay of Pitivine, with its hills descending towards the sea and the stone walls of the vineyards, give the impression of a giant half submerged in the sea. It is a land of myths. It is said that this island was colonized by the Argonauts and the neighboring islands were refuge to the Harpies. I wanted to respect the spirit of the land but I had to construct a town, with housing, services and a port. I thought of a mythical giant coming out of the water, formed by constructions which, seen from afar, would compose it like a painting by Arcimboldo. The administration would be the head; the restaurant the stomach; the labyrinth playground the intestines; the social gathering area the hands; the amphitheater the pubis; and the pier the penis. In the main plaza, the houses are shaped like a fragment of a torso (shoulder and chest)... And the city became man.

RESORT COMMUNITY, VELA LUKA, ISLAND OF KORKULA (YUGOSLAVIA),  
COMPETITION, 1972.

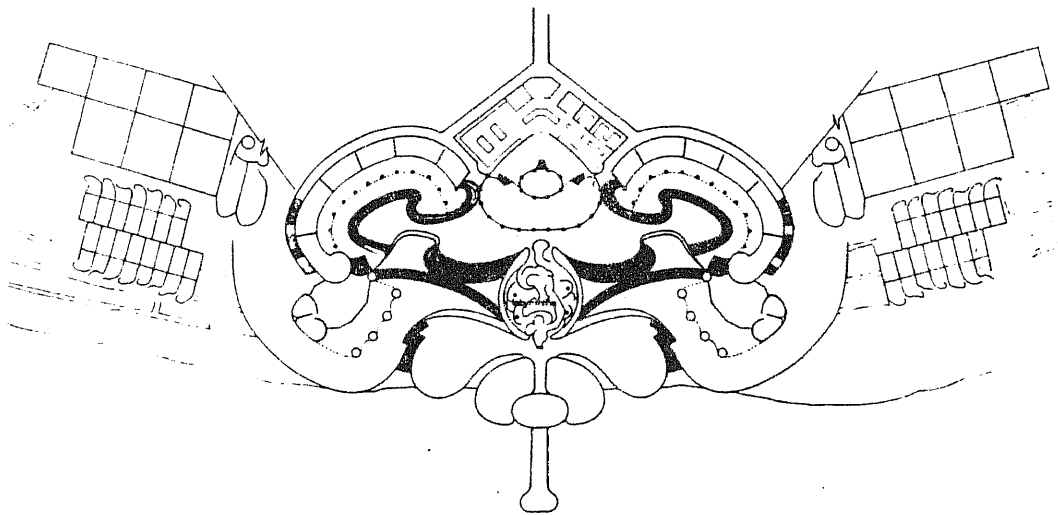


Figure 10.1 Resort Community, Vela Luka, Island of Korkula (Yugoslavia), 1972: site plan



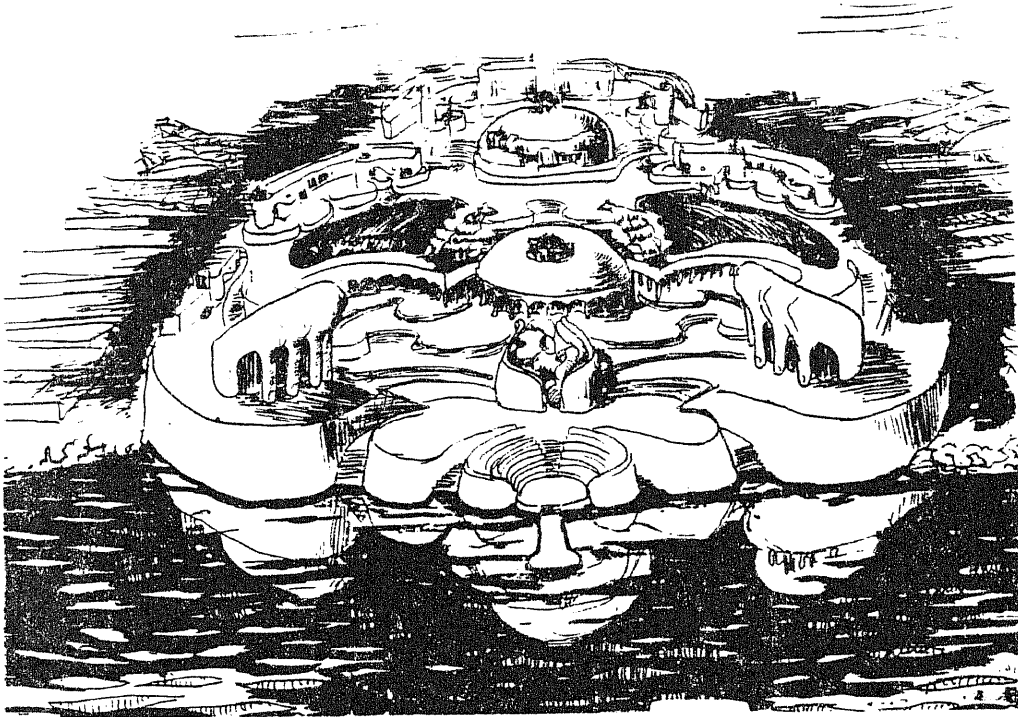


Figure 10.2 Resort Community, Vela Luka, Island of Korkula (Yugoslavia), 1972: aerial perspective

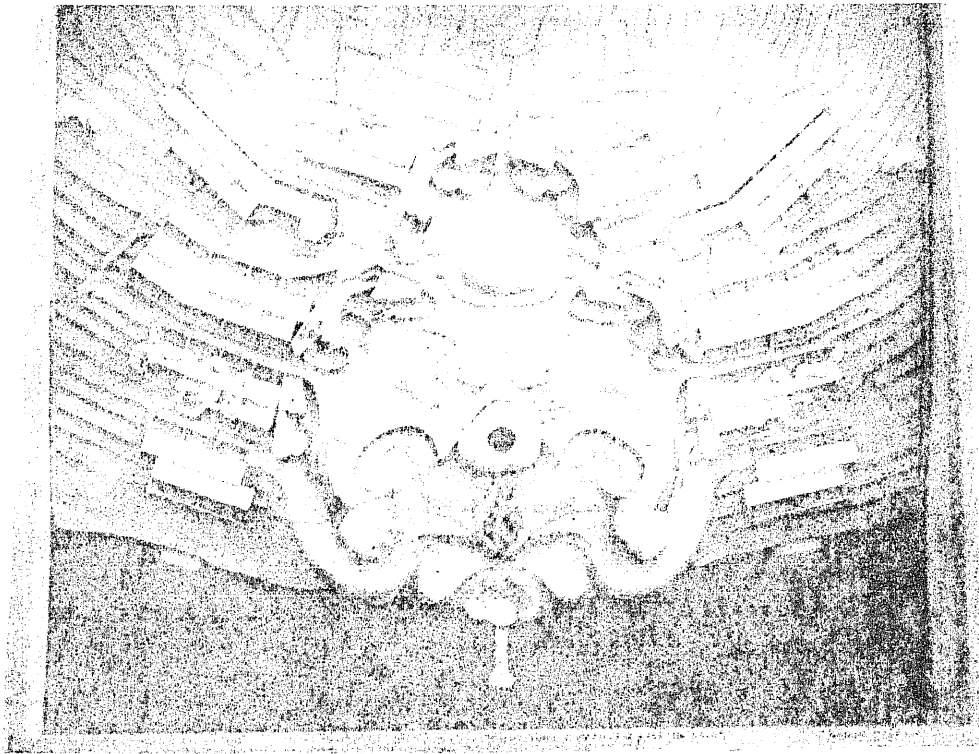


Figure 10.3 Resort Community, Vela Luka, Island of Korkula (Yugoslavia), 1972: site model

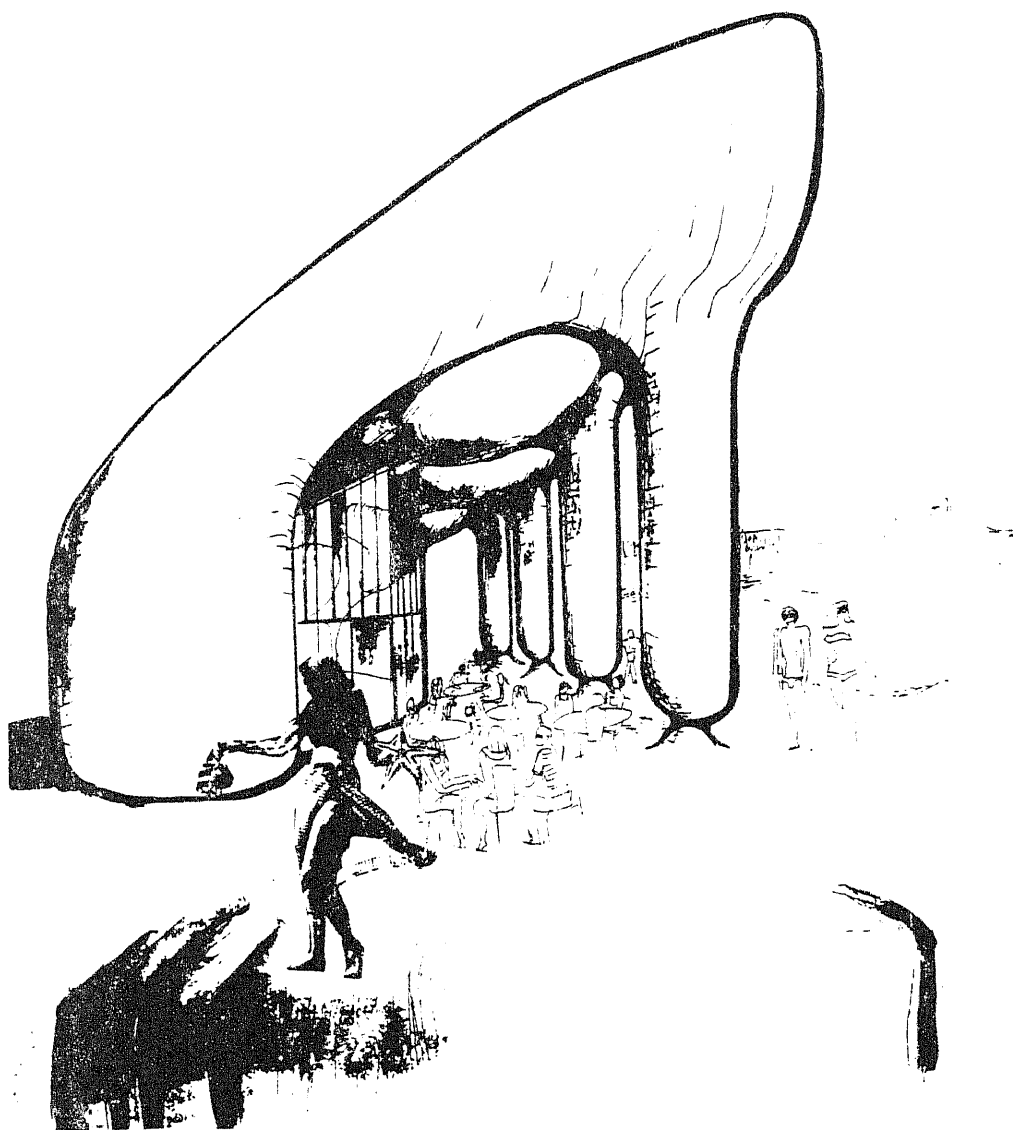


Figure 10.4 Resort Community, Vela Luka, Island of Korkula (Yugoslavia), 1972:  
perspective of social gathering area

### **The Bull-Bird**

I was impressed by the sculpture of the winged bull, symbol of the celestial forces, that with which such frequency is seen in the architecture of ancient Persia. In the project of four identical houses for Teheran, the front facade is the figure of a bull and the rear facade, which looks to a small garden and pool, is the figure of a bird. In the living room I returned to the themes of a cosmic symbolism: the plan is organized around the chimney, navel and center of the world, the step between heaven and earth.

HOUSE, TEHERAN (IRAN), PROJECT  
WITH ASGAR MAHAVAR, 1975.

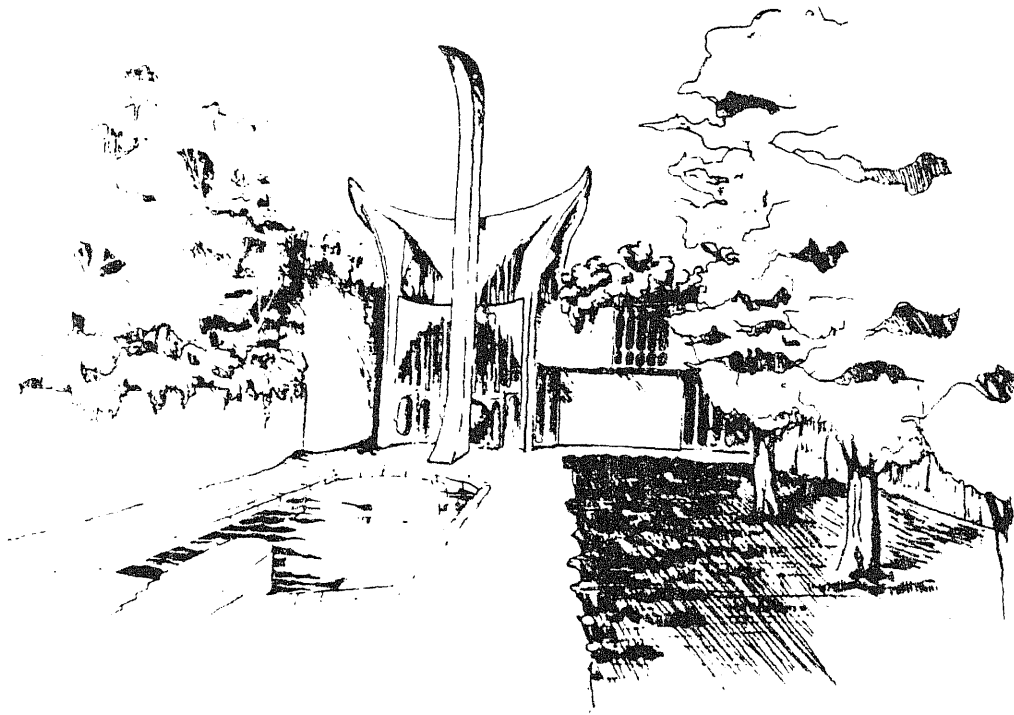


Figure 11.1 House, Teheran (Iran), Project, 1975: perspective of rear facade

### **A Garden of Paradise**

A family from Ispahan wanted to build themselves a house in a garden surrounded by high walls on a site on the outskirts of the city. For this oasis I planned a "Garden of Eden" retaking the image of the forest, much employed in antiquity by the Egyptians and the Persians, and which characterizes many mosques. The roof, sustained by a forest of columns, is covered with vegetation. The rooms, symmetrically disposed around a central space, open up towards patios, and a planted bank of earth protects the walls. The house appears to fuse with nature (and takes advantage of the thermic isolation which this affords it). In the center of the great living room, the central column is the "Tree of Life". From there emerge four small channels, which symbolize the four rivers of Paradise. The service zone is at the opposite end of the entrance, on the same axis.

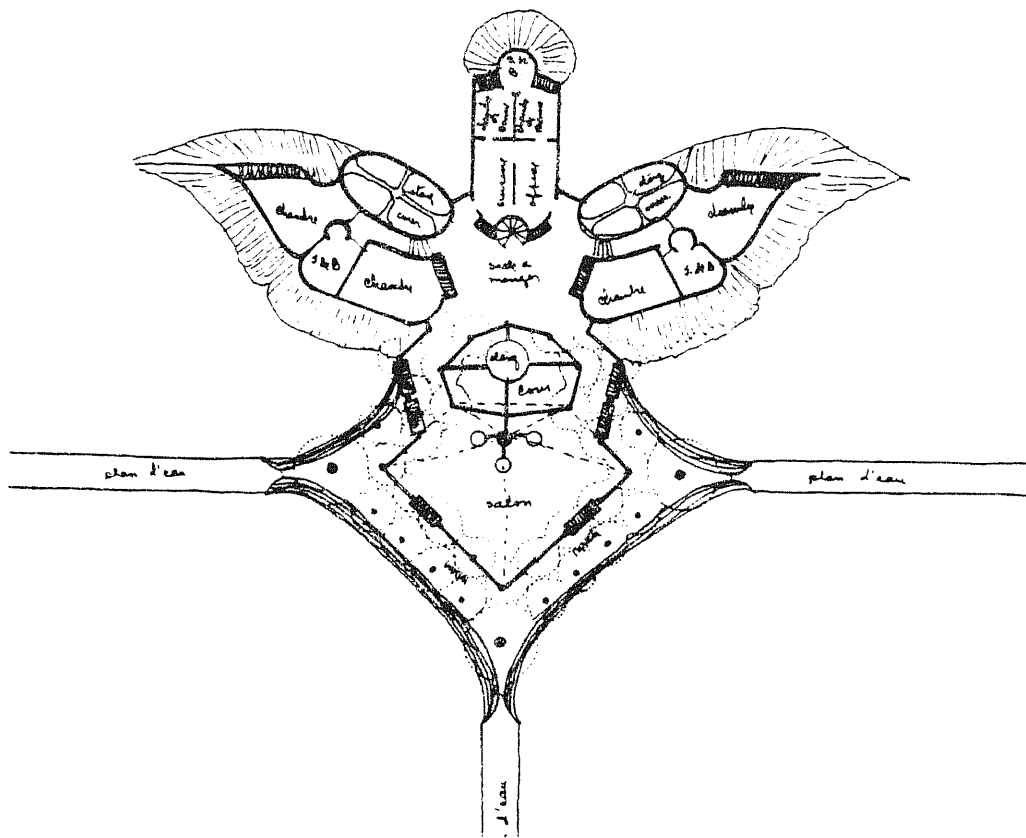


Figure 12.1 House, Ispahan (Iran), Project, 1975: floor plan

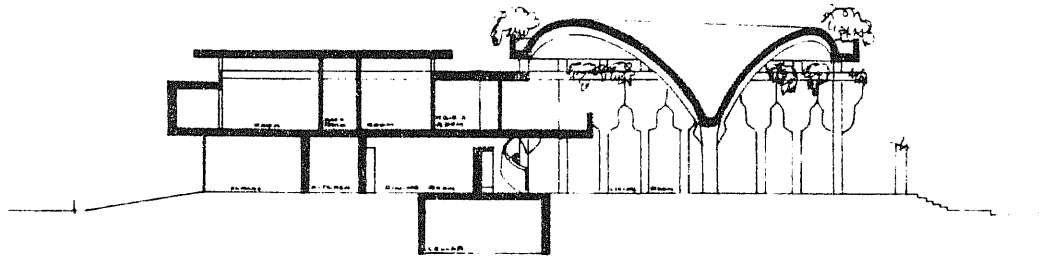


Figure 12.2 House, Ispahan (Iran), Project, 1975: section



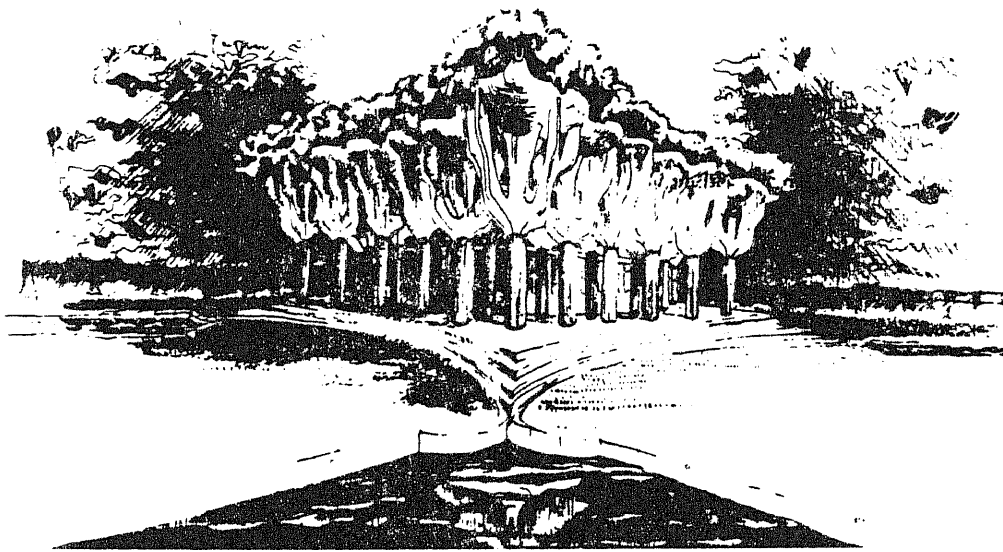


Figure 12.3 House, Ispahan (Iran), Project, 1975: exterior perspective of living room

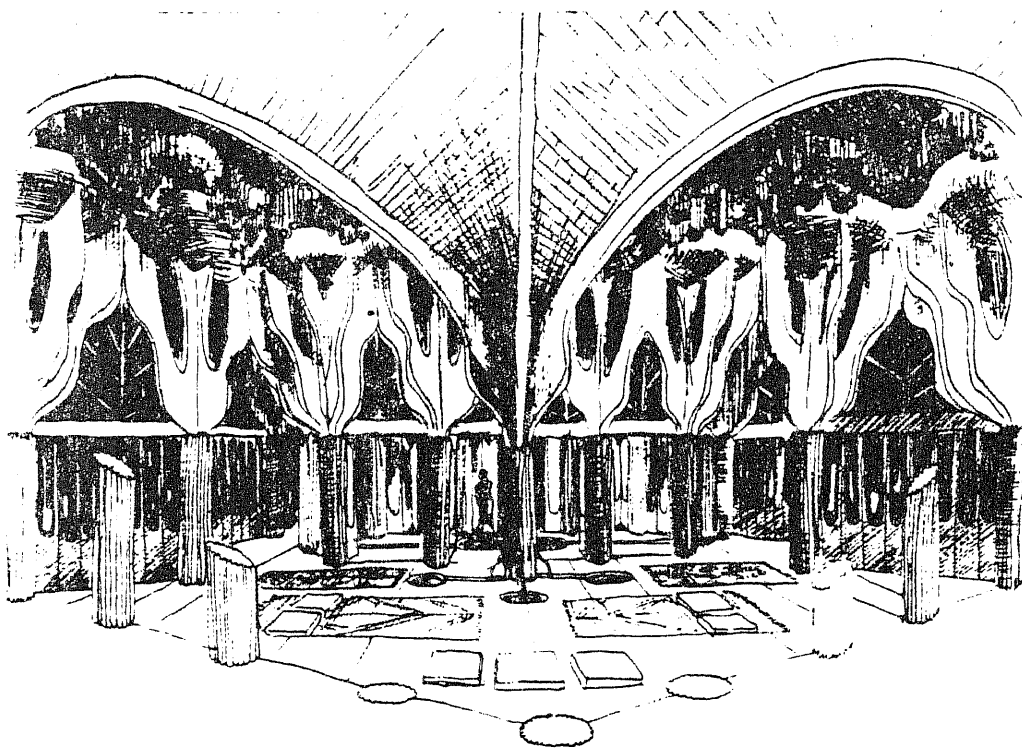


Figure 12.4 House, Ispahan (Iran), Project, 1975: interior perspective of living room

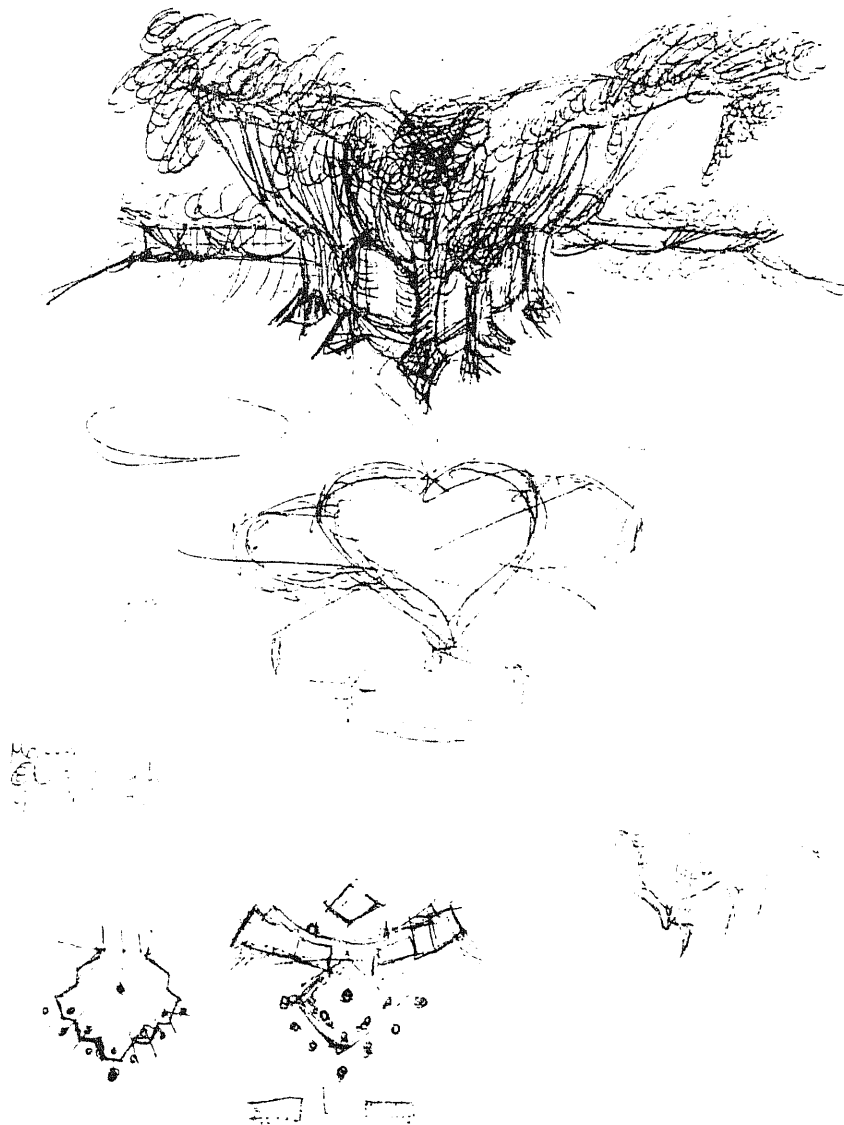


Figure 12.5 House, Isfahan (Iran), Project, 1975: preliminary design sketches of exterior and plan

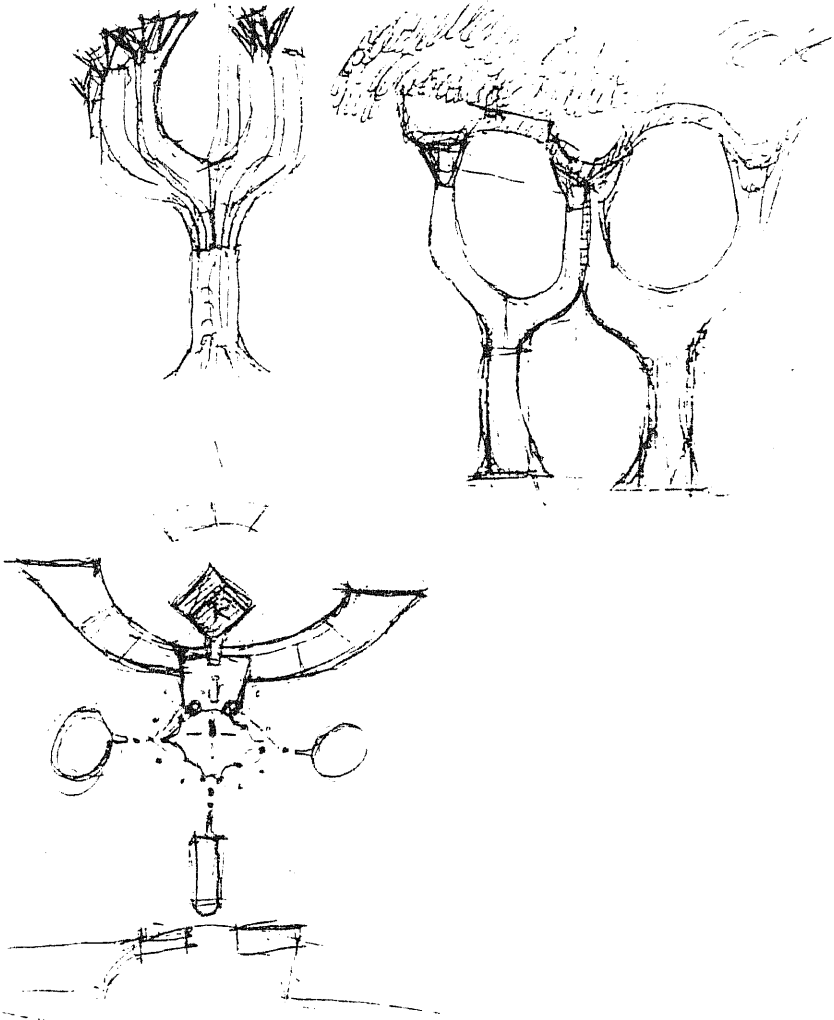


Figure 12.6 House, Ispahan (Iran), Project, 1975: preliminary design sketches of columns and plan

### City and Nature

The project consists of a fifty hectare site which lies at the border of Paris. In a residential zone next to an industrial building by Baltard, we shaped the contours so as to suggest the body of a woman in bas-relief. The 19th century iron building appears to drive into her. The struggle between the organic and technology which frequently one wants to subordinate the human being. Taking advantage of the canals which exist in the terrain we created a square plaza with a building in the shape of a pyramid from which part the four mythical rivers. The industrial zone to the northeast isolates the rest of the site from the neighboring highways. These buildings are not seen from the park which continues on the planted soil embankments which rise to the height of the roofs.

URBANISM PROJECT FOR LA VILLETTE, PARIS 19,  
COMPETITION WITH JEAN-CLAUDE LEONARD, PIERRE JUNG, GERARD  
FAIVRE AND AMIN KABBAJ, 1976.

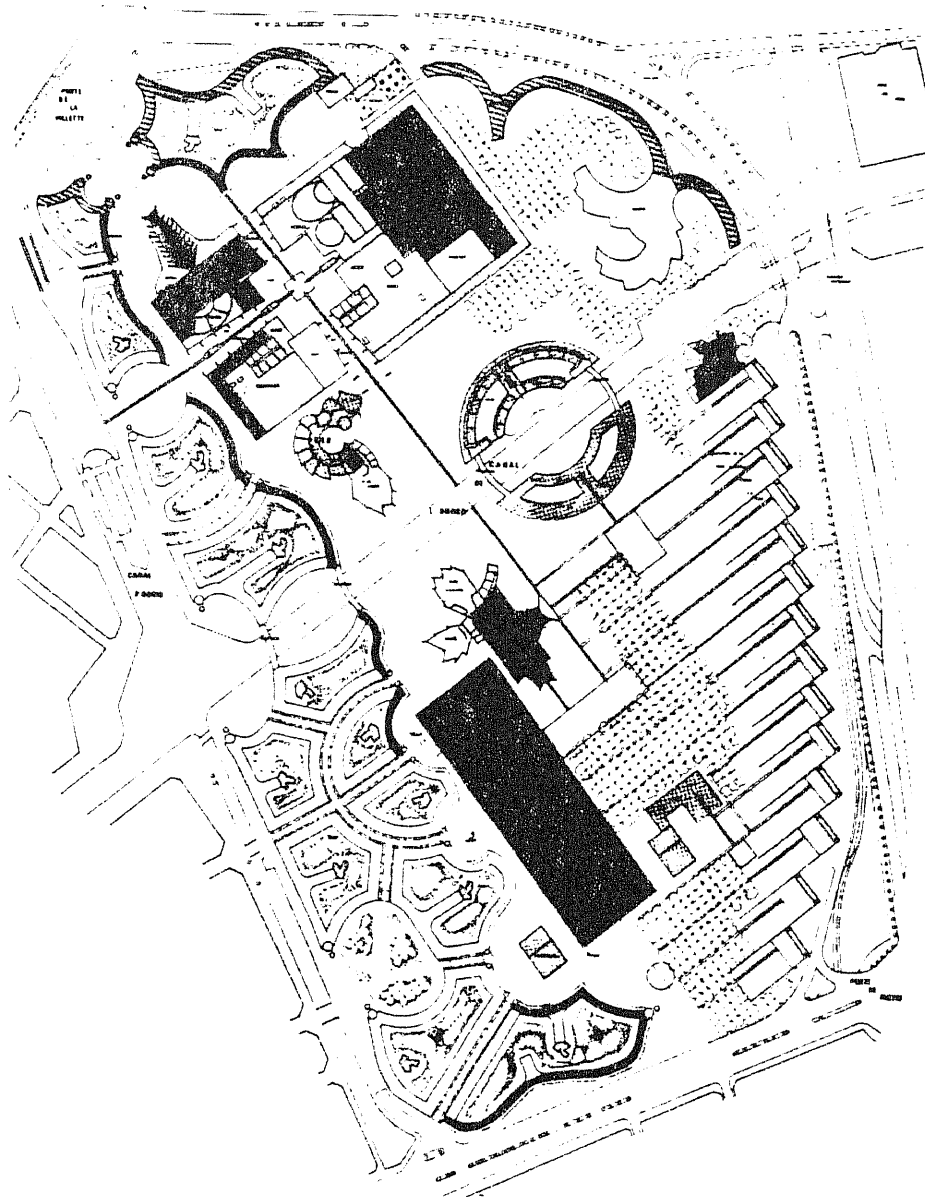


Figure 13.1 Urbanism Project for La Villette (Paris), 1976: site plan

### Gonzalo School

This competition gave me the possibility of expressing a very personal and profound sentiment. I dedicated the project to my son who died. It is for me like the "Totenkinderlied" of Mahler in music. Once again, I wanted to give the school a variety of spaces and routes like those of a city. A small passage--a narrow street--leads to the entrance where we find the sculpture of an open book with a painting by Albert Bitran--knowledge and poetry. In a first patio, the plaza, the exterior curves of the classrooms transform into children's faces (carried out in concrete with a unique mold), the fountain makes water surge between the hands of children and the stairs of an outdoor theater rise and lose themselves in the infinite. The Gonzalo School is city, it is image of life.

PRIMARY SCHOOL, MARNE-LA-VALLEE (SEINE-ET-MARNE), COMPETITION, 1976.

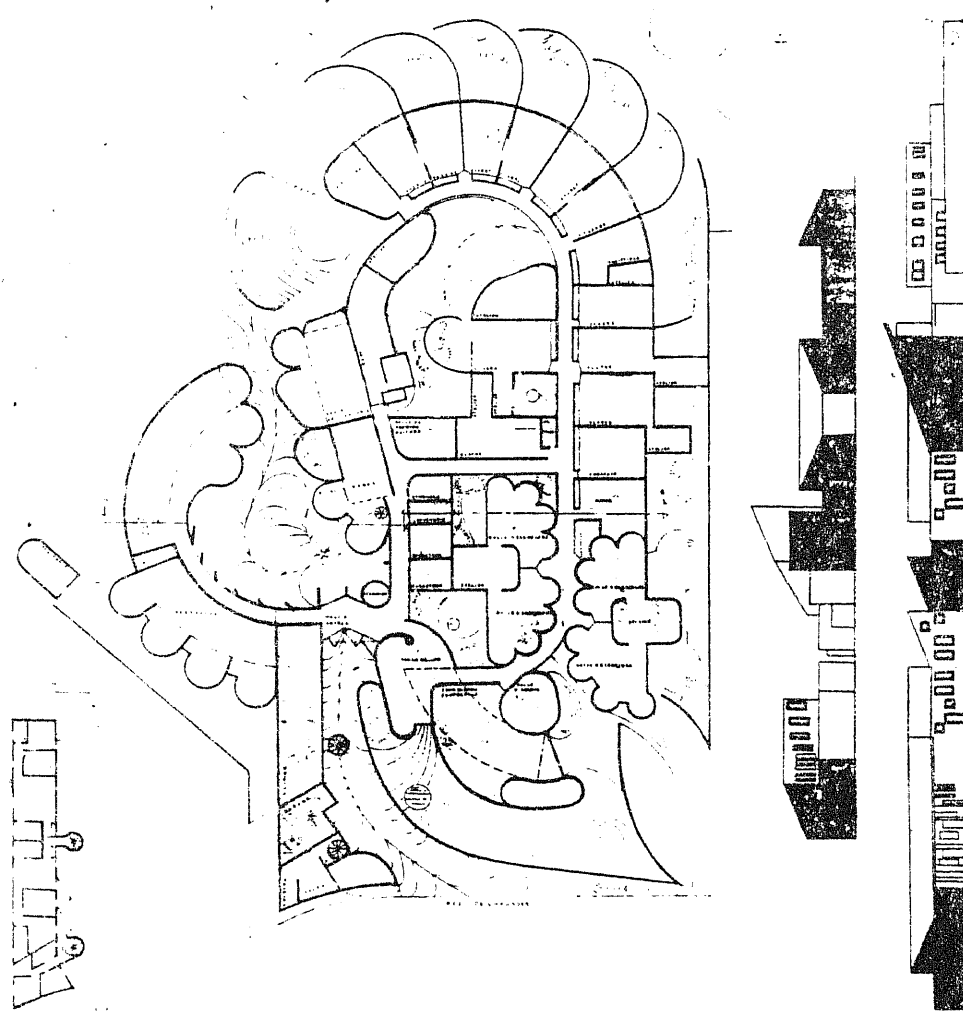


Figure 14.1 Primary School, Marne-La-Valle, Competition, 1976: plan and sections



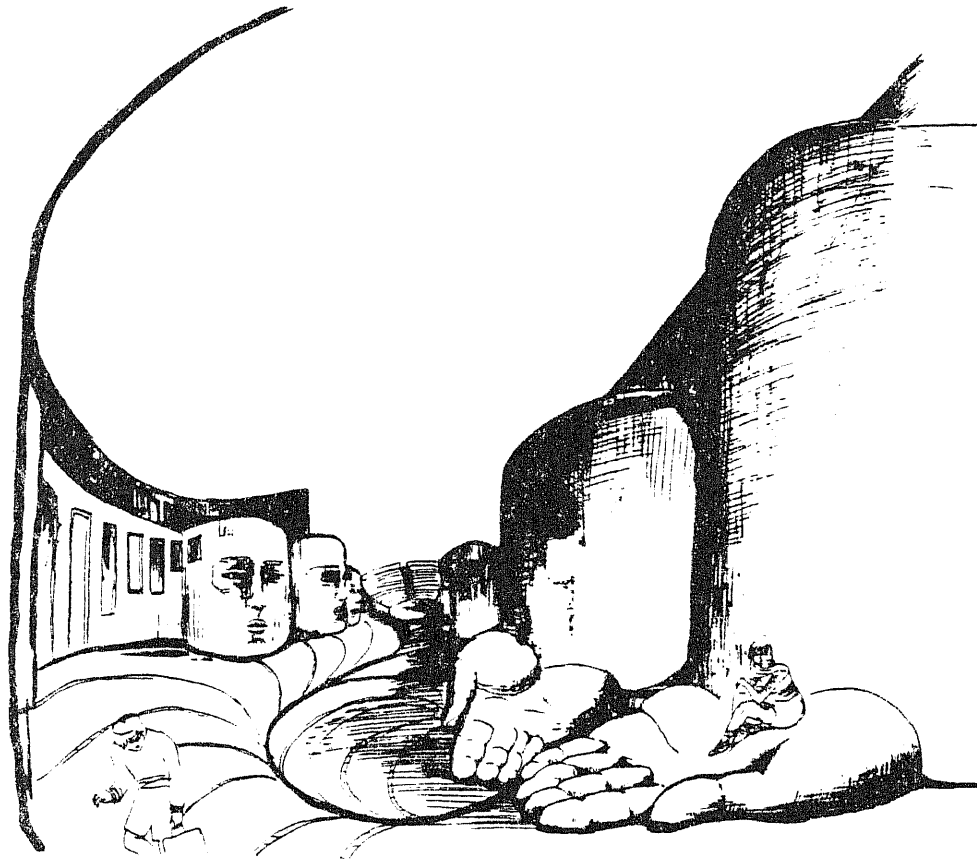


Figure 14.2 Primary School, Marne-La-Valle, Competition, 1976: perspective of inner courtyard

#### 4. THE CRISIS

##### **Rochefort, Military City**

Since 1939, the wars do not cease. The potentiality of destruction of the arsenals place us at the border of the precipice. In a city of defensive military tradition such as Rochefort, I conceived of this neighborhood as an expression of reason in crisis and as a scream of alarm against militarism and violence. I also point to another destructive element, the regimentation of the citizens, not only in the armed forces but also in the out and out regulations, the deification of technics and the blind faith in what can be counted and measured. The buildings close up the space. There appear torsos of men in military formation all around the great central plaza. In the continuous facades the windows are like racks for arms and the vertical elements of concrete make the roofs appear to be arms set on end like bristles. In the background, the inclined columns of the library make us think of a Parthenon which collapses.

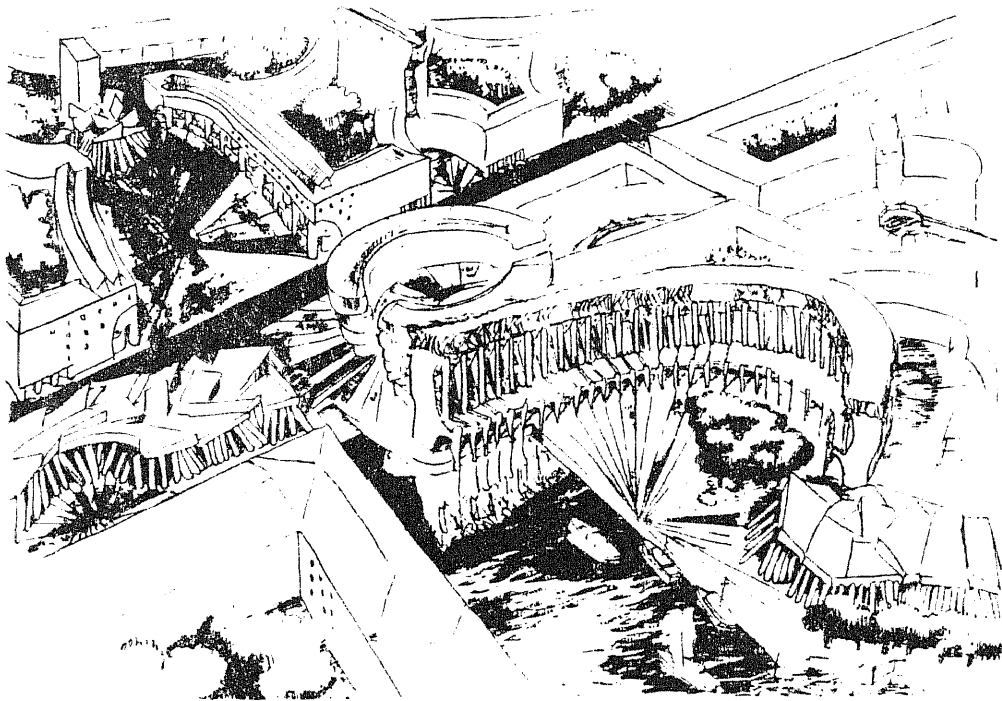


Figure 15.1 Urbanism, Rochefort, Competition, 1978: bird's eye view perspective

### **A Landscape in the City**

The L shape of the site and the urban zoning laws left little freedom for the architects. We decided to give the impression of major dimensions underlying the limitations of the plot of land. We wanted to give an image of nature. The street, dorsal spine of the project, was treated as a mountain landscape. Towards both sides the inclined walls open up to give way to the stairs, secondary axes which lead directly to the apartments. The rear facade which faces the garden echoes the trees with forms that are an image of the forest. The design of the social center evokes the form of a flock of birds in flight. The symbolism of the forms is evident. The rhythms are varied (street, stairs) and create diverse movements. The form of the roofs, alternating between curves and pointed forms, reinforce the illusion of the resemblance to nature.

"THE FOREST", URBAN DWELLINGS, CERGY-PONTOISE  
(VAL-D'OISE), COMPETITION WITH JEAN ROBEIN, JEAN FRANCOIS DECHOUX  
AND AMIN KABBAJ, 1978.

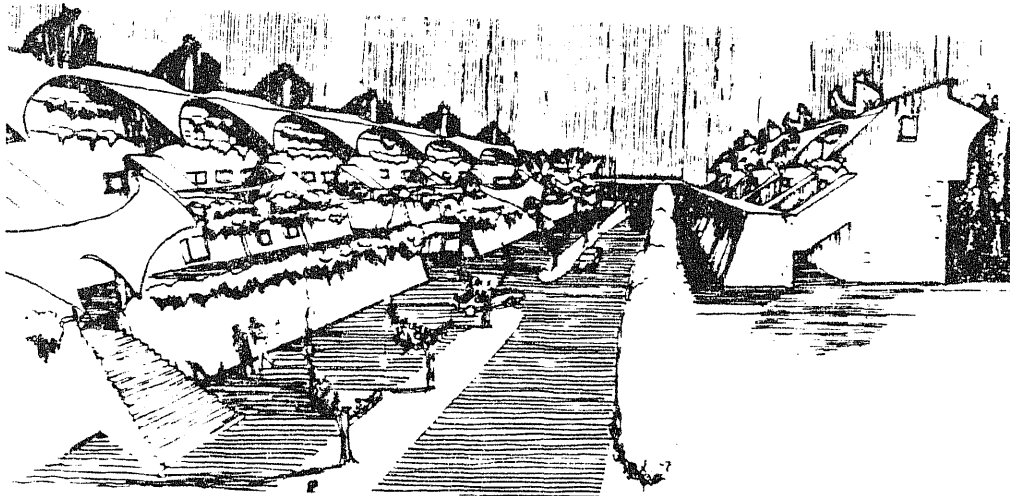


Figure 16.1 “The Forest”, Urban Dwellings, Cergy-Pontoise, Competition, 1978:  
perspective view down a central street

### The Janus House

This double house (Two identical houses on the same site) is under the sign of duality. It develops as an ascending spiral around a court which culminates at the height of the chimney. The form of the roof gives the ensemble the aspect of a mythical animal. The form of the nautilus (lovable animal) also becomes with the form of the exterior pillars, a scolopendra (aggressive animal). The capitals of the eight columns of the living room are heads of Janus, god of two faces that look in opposite directions. In the central court, the foundation is back to back to the exterior wall of the chimney (fire, water). In the small court at the entrance the pavement depicts a Ying and a Yang.

HOUSE, METZ (MOSELLE),  
PROJECT WITH JEAN ROBEIN, 1978.

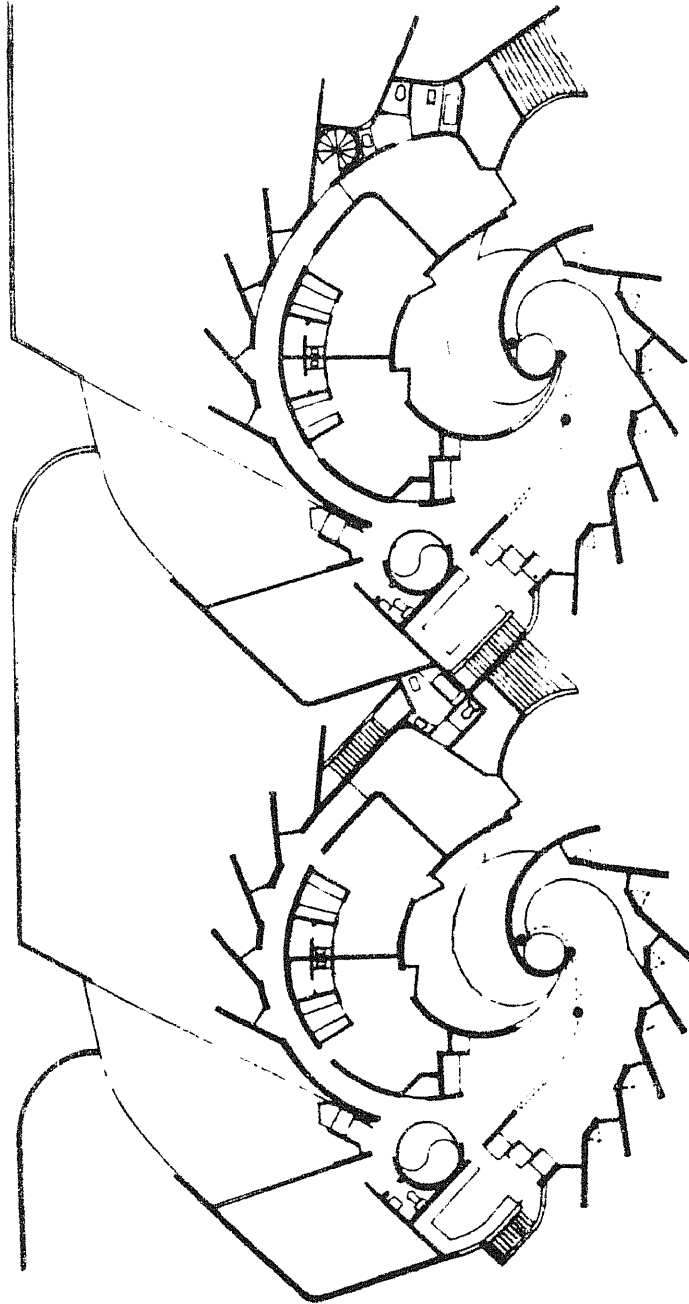


Figure 17.1 Janus House, Metz, Project, 1978: floor plan

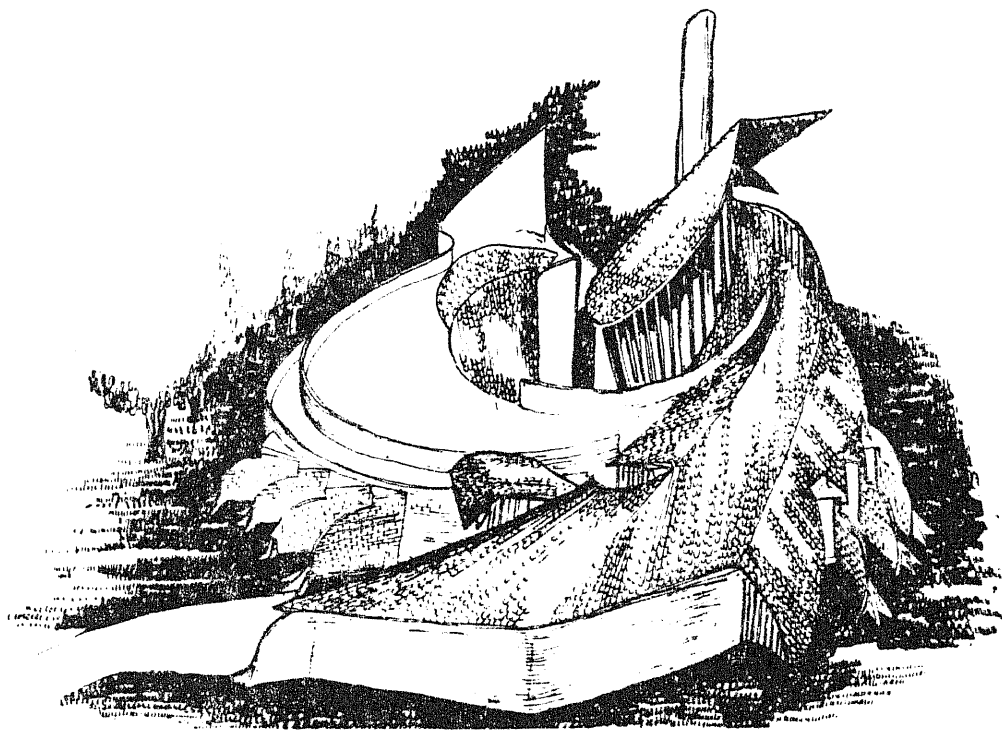






Figure 17.3 Janus House, Metz, Project, 1978: sketch of interior

### **The Fountain of Knowledge**

The library, such as was demanded by the program, is back to back to a theater constructed in concrete which is shaped like a cube. When thinking about the project, there came to mind a phrase by Flaubert: "All in the world is made to end up in a book". Seen from the park in front of it, the rear facade is like a book lying in nature. The domes of the entry have the shape of an open book and the roofs of the reading rooms to both sides appear as mountains. From the book comes forth a fountain like a tumultuous river which finishes in a whirlpool which sinks down as though to reach the center of the Earth. In the entrance, above a column, there is a dove, repeated on the capitals of the reading room. There also a flame is sculpted over the chimney. It is the presence of the Holy Spirit, the presence of spirituality and of knowledge. For me what this project expresses has much to do with Rilke's poem, "Graveness".

LIBRARY, VILLENEUVE-D'ASQ (NORTH),  
PROJECT WITH PHILLIPPE LOUGUET, JEAN ROBEIN AND JEAN-FRANCOIS  
DECHOUX, 1980.

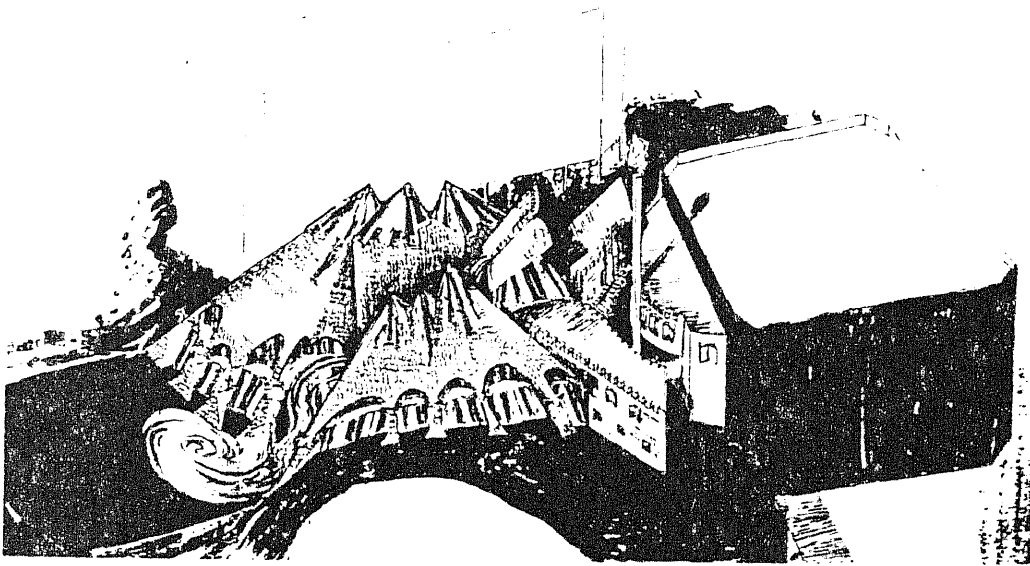


Figure 18.1 Library, Villeneuve-D'Asq, Project, 1980: bird's eye view of exterior

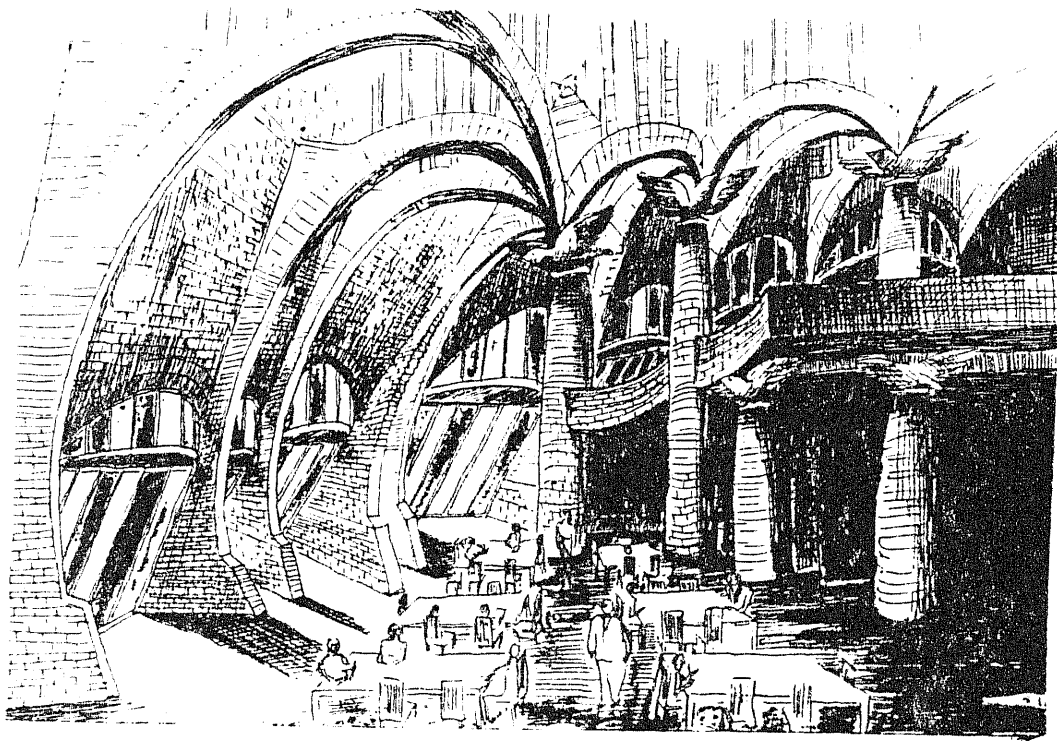


Figure 18.2 Library, Villeneuve-D'Asq, Project, 1980: sketch of main reading room

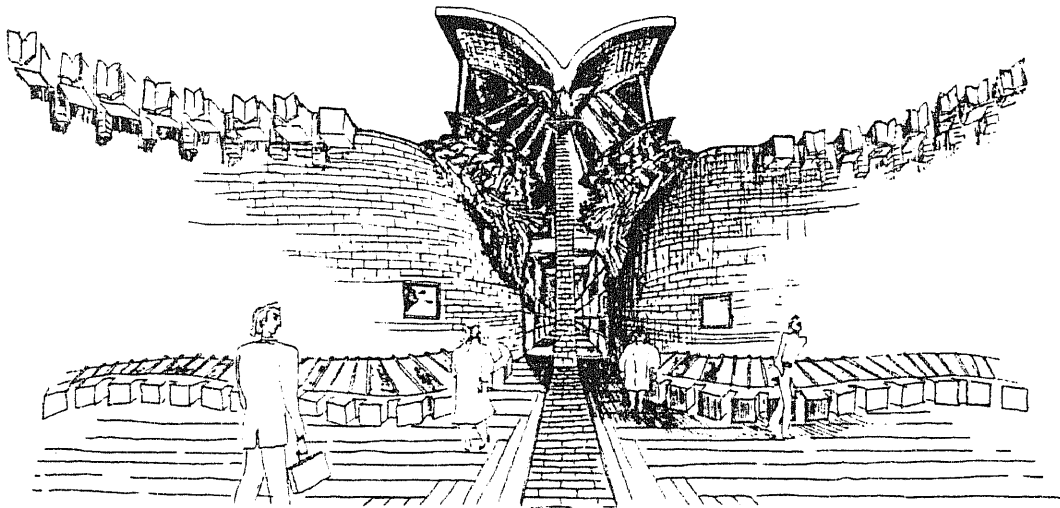


Figure 18.3 Library, Villeneuve-D'Asq, Project, 1980: sketch of main entrance

### **Apocalyptic Project**

To dispose freely of this site for construction is already the result of a crime: the destruction of the buildings of Les Halles by Baltard. For this mutilated space in the heart of Paris, we proposed the image of ruins, of a world falling apart. We evoked that sensation of the end of the world which has so many times accompanied us in this second half of the twentieth century. It is an apocalyptic project as is indicated by the Angel on the capitals.

LES HALLES QUARTER, PARIS 1st,  
COMPETITION LAUNCHED BY THE SYNDICATED OF ARCHITECTURE,  
RICARDO PORRO AND RENAUD DE LA NOUE, 1980.

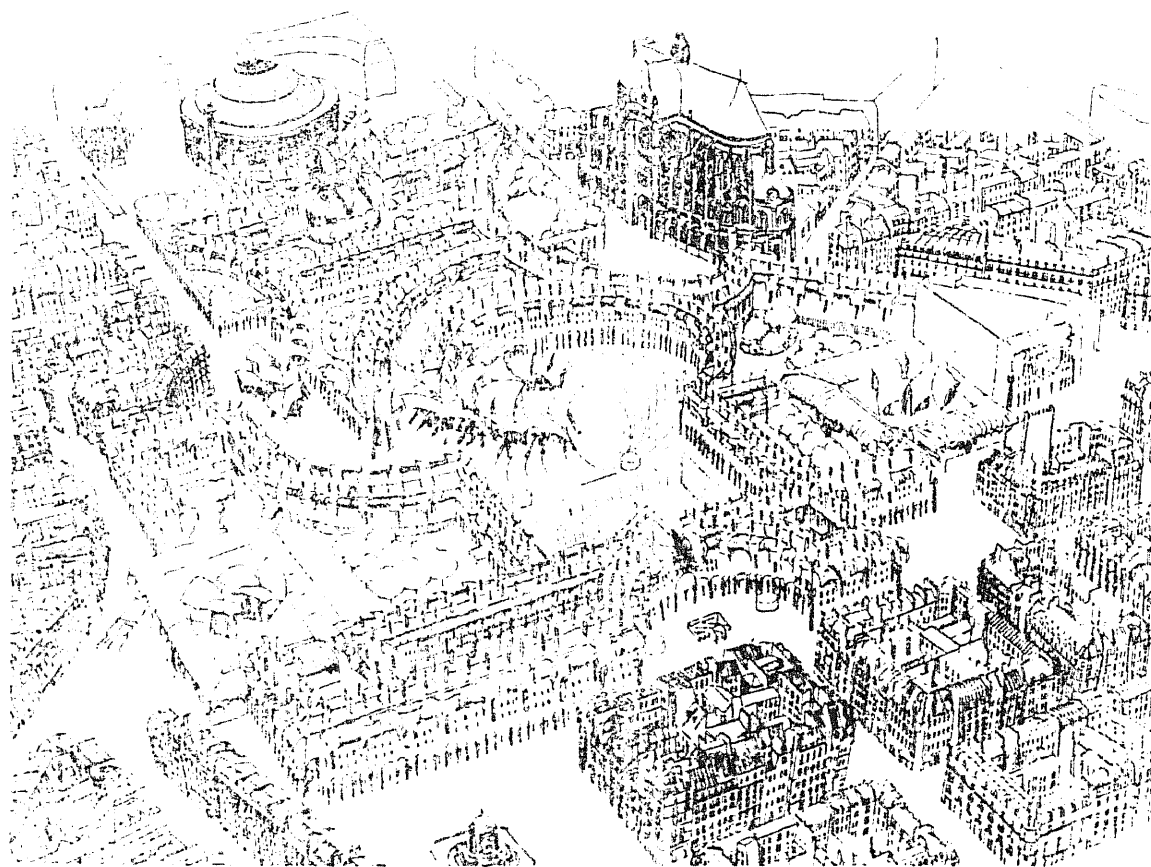


Figure 19.1 Les Halles Quarter (Paris), Competition, 1980: bird's eye view of site

## 5. HOPE

### The Apocalypse

In this competition one was given the opportunity to present more than one solution. We studied two projects. In both the dwellings are organized around a central plaza. The entrance, in the shape of a narrow street, passes underneath the open portico in the building facing the exterior street. In the first project (pessimistic), in the top of the roof of the central building which descends abruptly towards the plaza, there appears the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. They appear to ride down this ramp to submerge themselves in a world of flames. The sensation of fire is given by the roofs of the buildings which surround the plaza, set on end by elements imbricated among one another, thus creating a violent vibration. Atop the exterior facade one may see a row of heads that remind one of the personage that has the lamp in his hands in Picasso's *Guernica*.

HOUSING, CALAIS (PAS-DE-CALAIS)  
COMPETITION WITH PATRICK FIDELLE AND PATRICK CARDON, 1981.



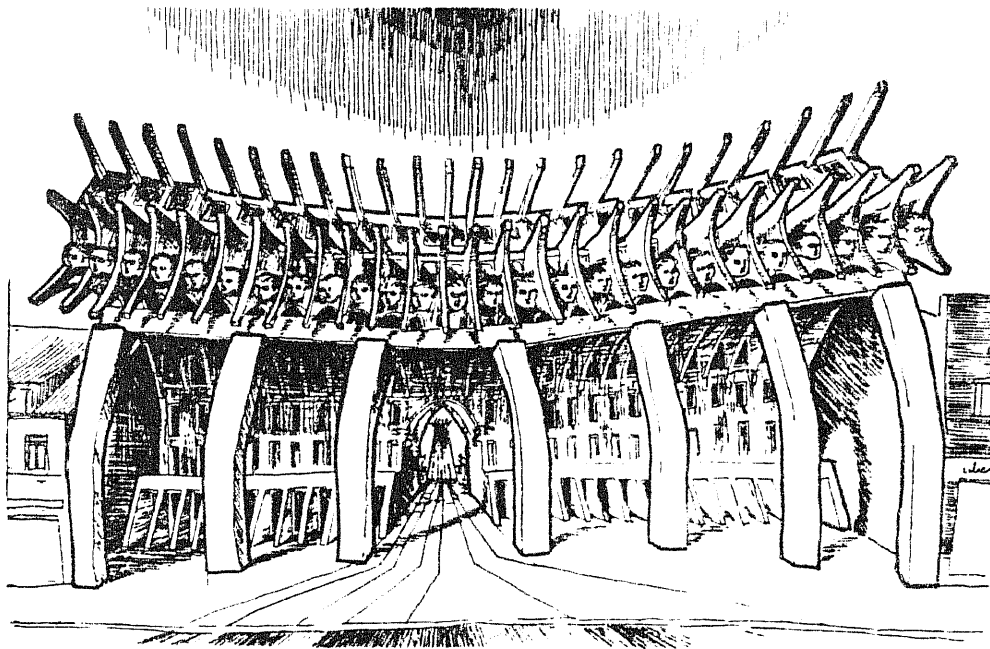


Figure 20.1 Housing, Calais, Competition, 1981: sketch of entrance (pessimistic project)

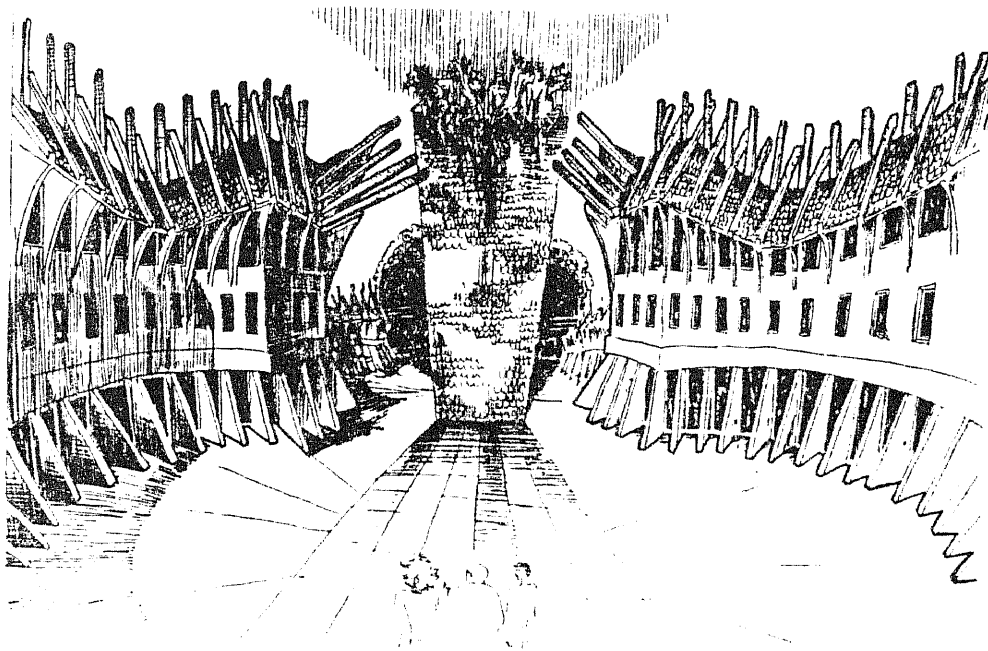


Figure 20.2 Housing, Calais, Competition, 1981: view of central building from plaza  
(pessimistic project)

### **The Ascent to Heaven**

The second project (optimistic) gives an image where spirituality triumphs. The entrance beneath the portico allows one to see the perspective of the plaza. The central building develops at various levels, forming steps which descend and continue in a staircase which loses itself in a conical crater. From the facade of the upper floors emerges another staircase which ascends as though it went to heaven. They are images of Dante's Inferno and Paradiso, but here the ascending movement dominates.

HOUSING, CALAIS (PAS-DE-CALAIS),  
COMPETITION WITH PATRICK FIDELLE AND PATRICK CARDON, 1981.



Figure 21.1 Housing, Calais, Competition, 1981: general view (optimistic project)

### **Dynamism and Tradition**

The simultaneity of various visions of an object, of different rhythms or movements are a reference to the world that was revealed to us by Einstein, and a constant of the art of our century. In this project we are inspired by the movement of the dance. The roofs of the dance classrooms suggest rotation around an axis, as in a pirouette. Simultaneously, the volumes and the forms create another tension that incites one to travel through the building, parting from a central semi-urban space and following an always ascendent trajectory with a very different direction. In addition, we wished to pay homage to Chambord, the splendid castle on the Loire, essence of French architecture. Above a rational geometric base there rises the calculated disorder of the roofs.

SCHOOL OF DANCE OF THE PARIS OPERA,  
NANTERRE (HAUTS-DE-SEINE),  
COMPETITION WITH MIGUEL ACOSTA, 1983.

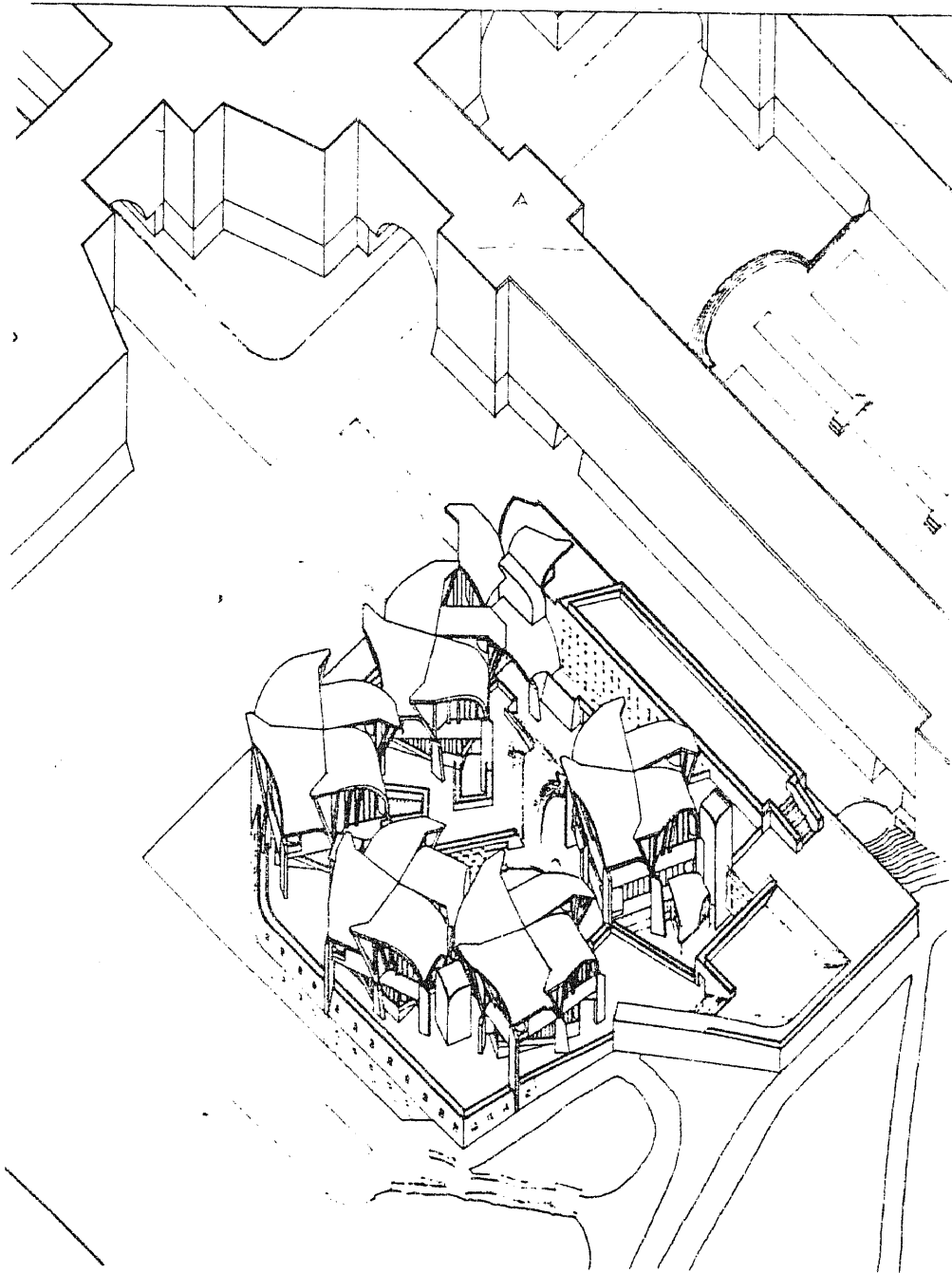


Figure 22.1 School of Dance of the Paris Opera, Nanterre, Competition, 1983: bird's-eye view perspective

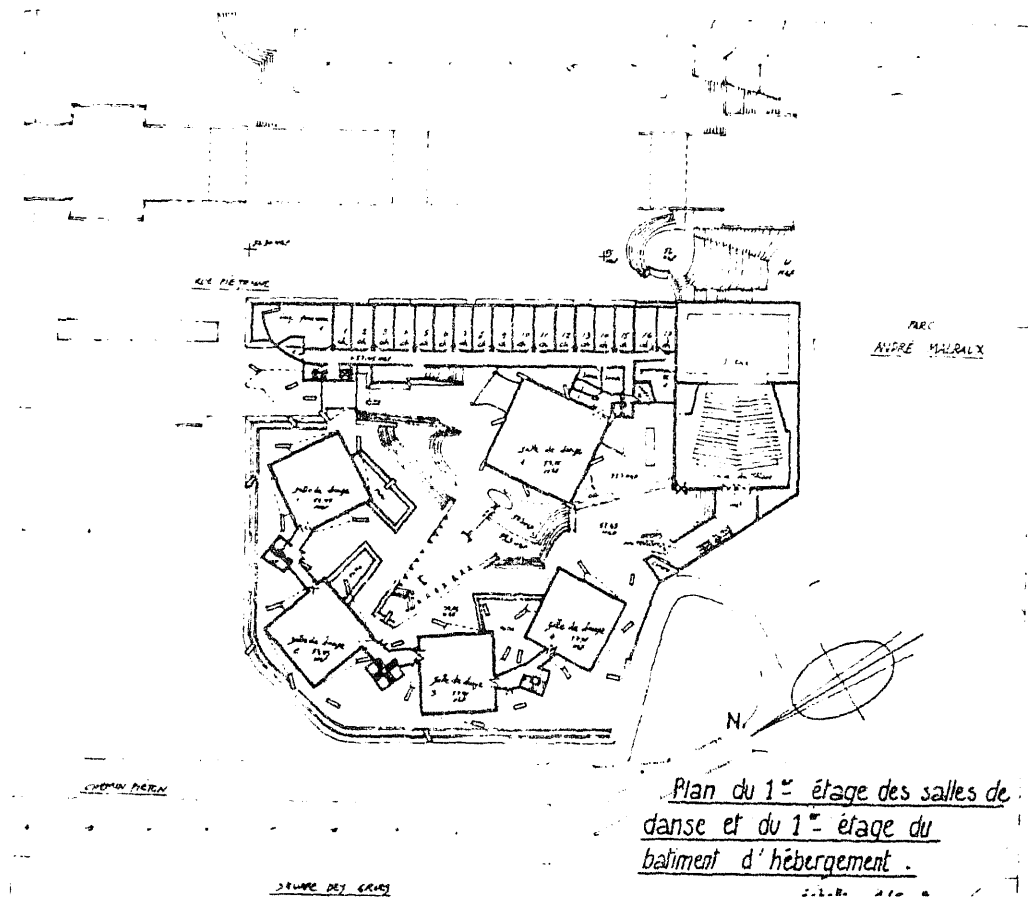


Figure 22.2 School of Dance of the Paris Opera, Nanterre, Competition, 1983: ground floor plan

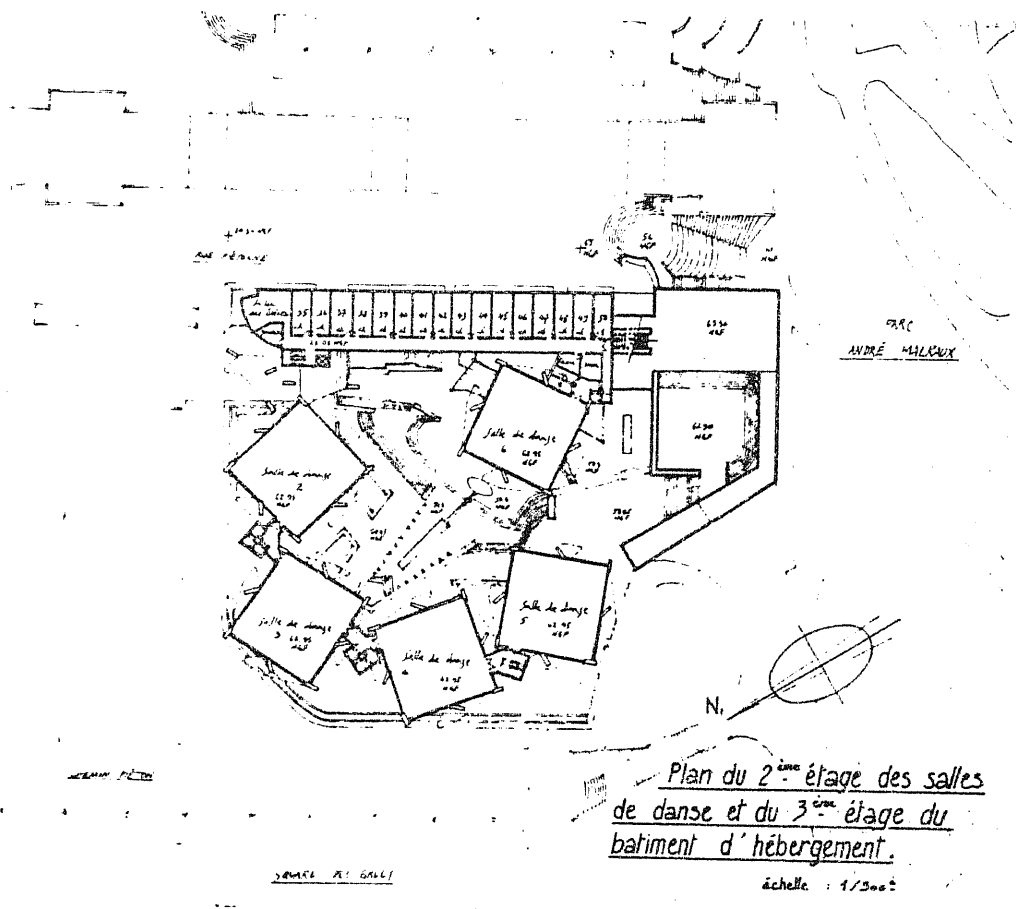


Figure 22.3 School of Dance of the Paris Opera, Nanterre, Competition, 1983: second floor plan



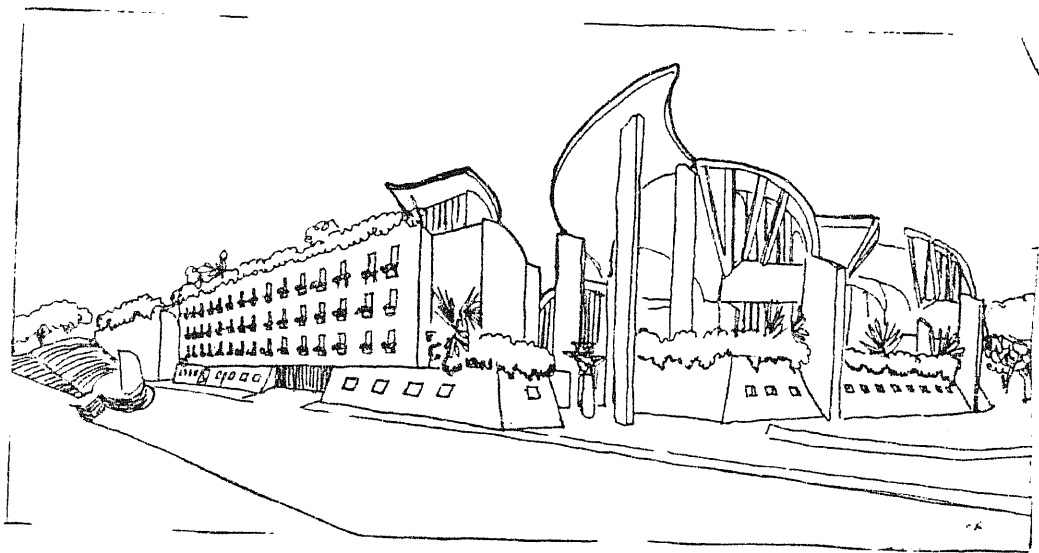


Figure 22.4 School of Dance of the Paris Opera, Nanterre, Competition, 1983: exterior perspective

### **In Earth as it is in Heaven**

The competition asked for a project for a site across from the lateral facade of the basilica of St. Denis, work of Pierre de Montreuil: small undertaking! How do you establish a dialogue? In the Gothic cathedral where everything elevates towards God, we wanted to create a counterpart with a horizontal movement which from a certain point inclines towards the ground. The facade which faces the basilica repeats the vertical rhythm of the cathedral's columns and buttresses using totally different and contemporary forms. In the interior, there is a grand central space several stories high with a strong ascending movement, but it is not the pure movement of the Gothic. The visually complex game of the stairs which cross this space, and the forms of the capitals, create a multiplicity of movements that criss-cross and superimpose each other. We are heirs of the Gothic but we live in another world.

EXTENSION OF THE TOWN HALL, SAINT-DENIS  
(SEINE-SAINT-DENIS),  
COMPETITION WITH JEAN-MARIE CHOQUELLE, 1985.

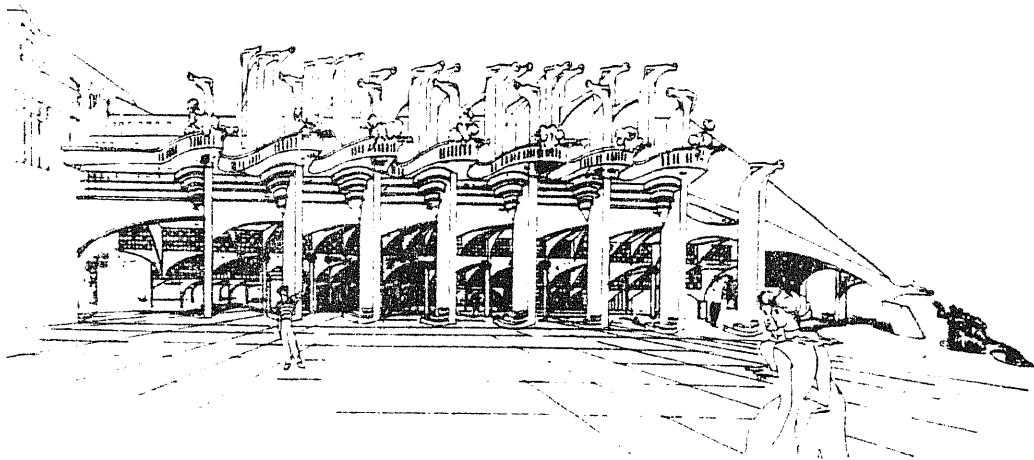


Figure 23.1 Extension of the Town Hall, Saint-Denis, Competition, 1985: exterior view

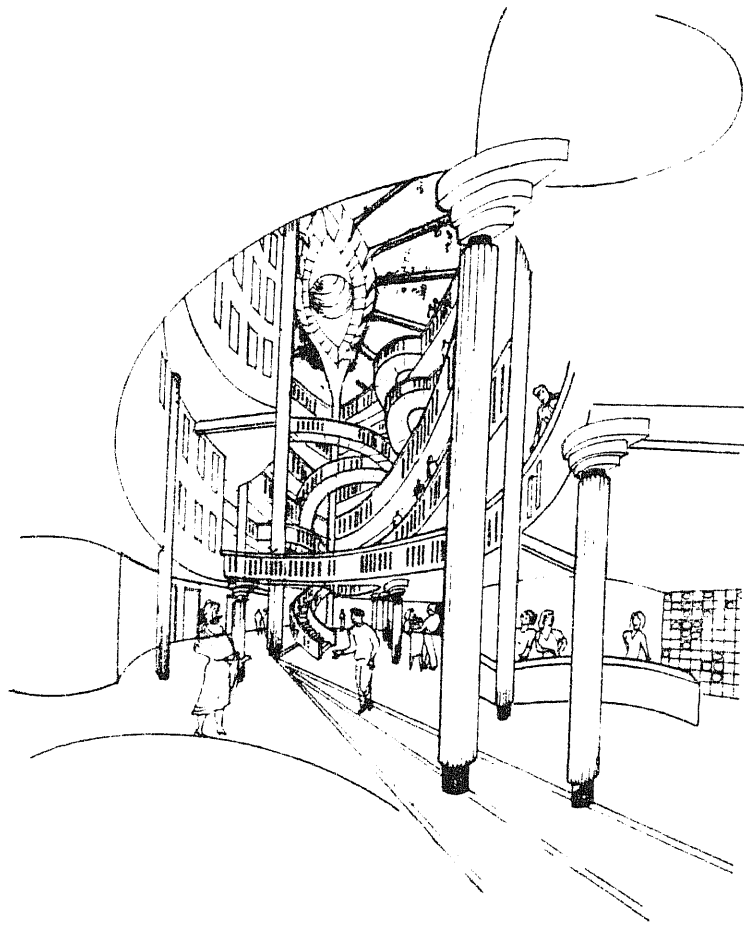


Figure 23.2 Extension of the Town Hall, Saint-Denis, Competition, 1985: perspective of entry hall

## 6. ACTION

### Breaking the Limits

These dwellings for workers had strict limits in so far as the available surface area. Thirty apartments had to be fitted in a trapezoidal plot a few meters away from the railroad tracks. We wanted to create an urban space and transcend the real dimensions of the project. From the street, the portico invites one to penetrate in the small elliptical plaza (a form with cosmic connotations), where the symbol of infinity has been drawn. The space culminates in a *trompe-l'oeil*, a staircase which suggests that the space prolongs itself towards the exterior. The apartments surround this plaza; each one has its independent entrance. The facades with their walls, their pilasters, and their varied apertures create a vibration that contributes to the notion of unlimited space.

HOUSING, STAINS (SEINE-SAINT-DENIS),  
RICARDO PORRO AND RENAUD DE LA NOUE, 1986-1990.

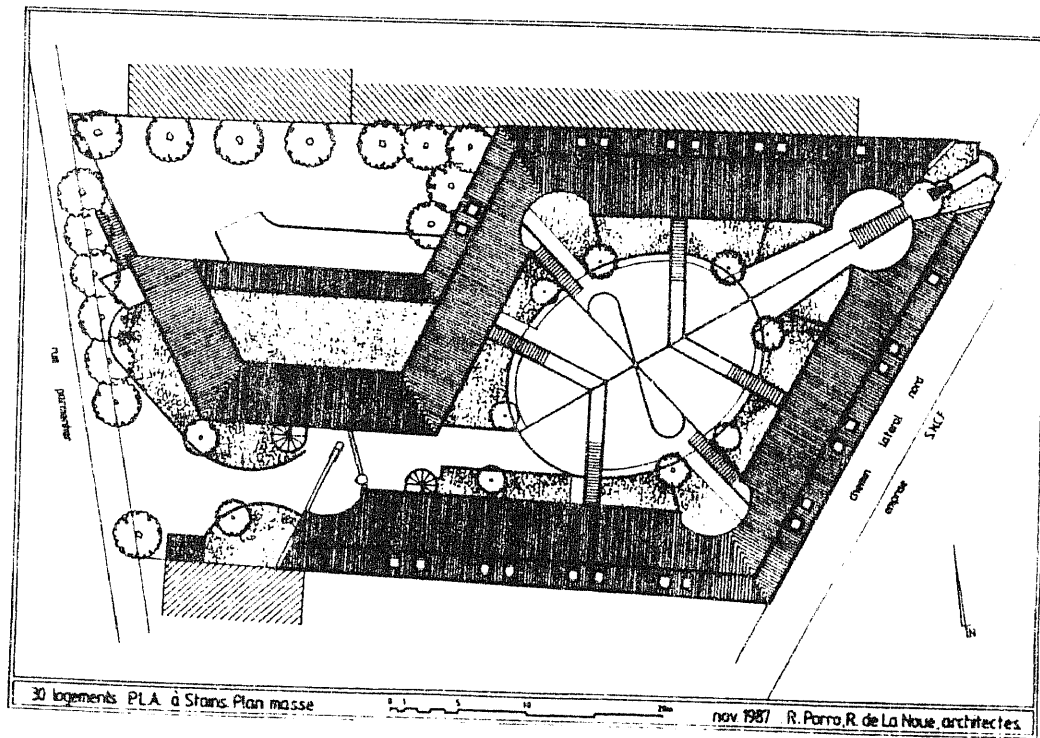


Figure 24.1 Housing, Stains, 1986-1990: site plan

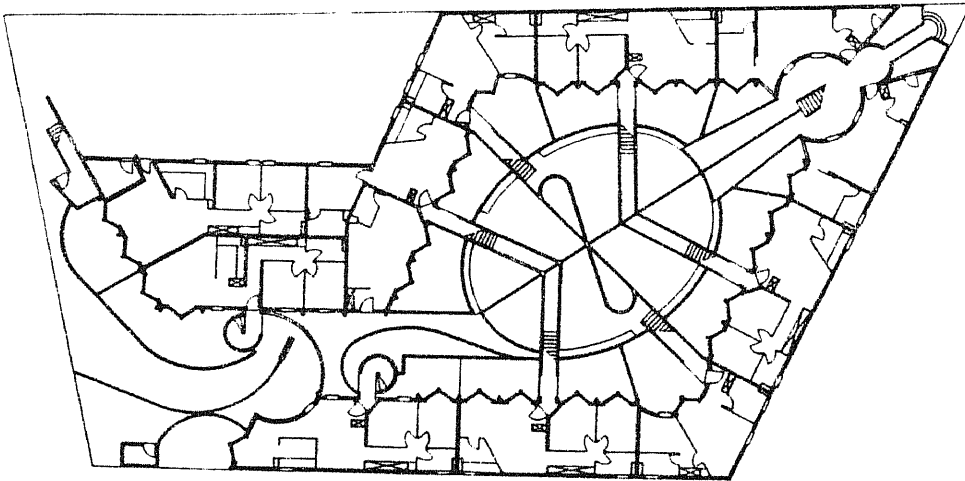


Figure 24.2 Housing, Stains, 1986-1990: ground floor plan

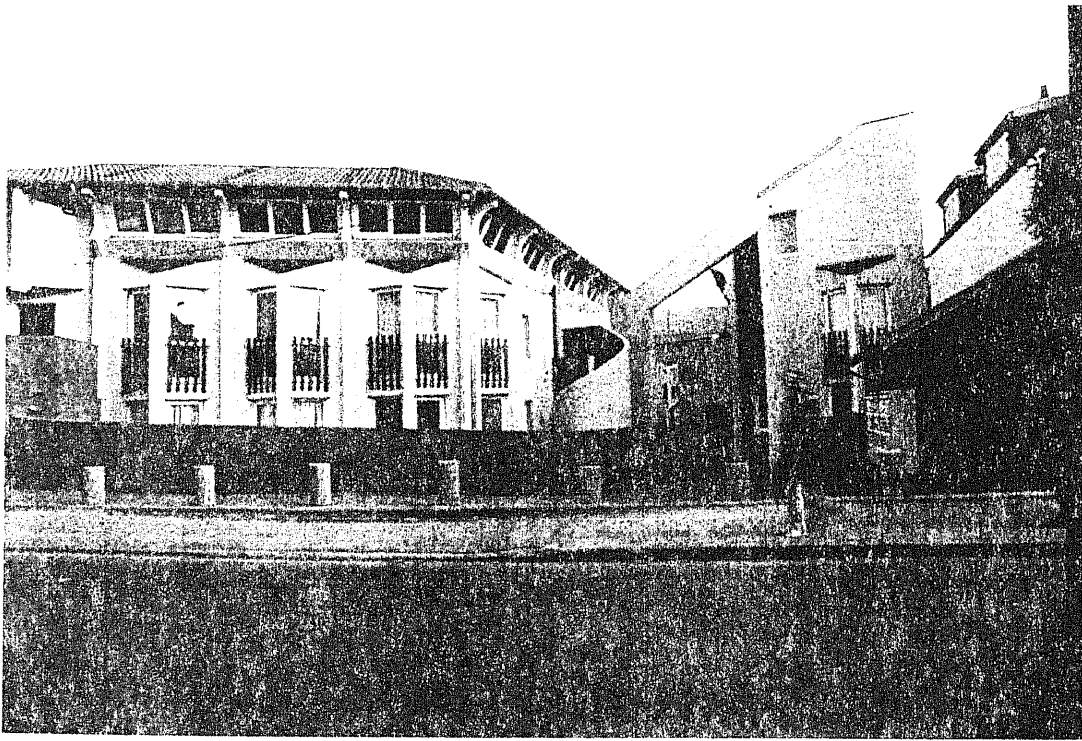


Figure 24.3 Housing, Stains, 1986-1990: photo of facade facing Rue Parmentier



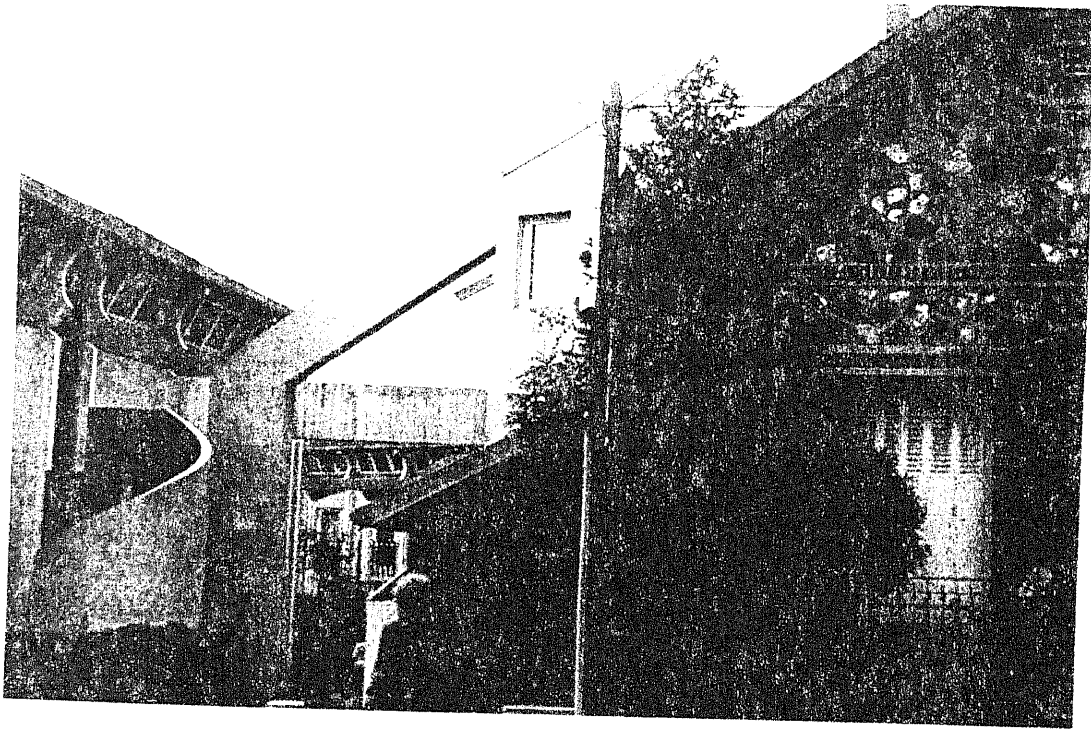


Figure 24.4 Housing, Stains, 1986-1990: photo of entry to inner court

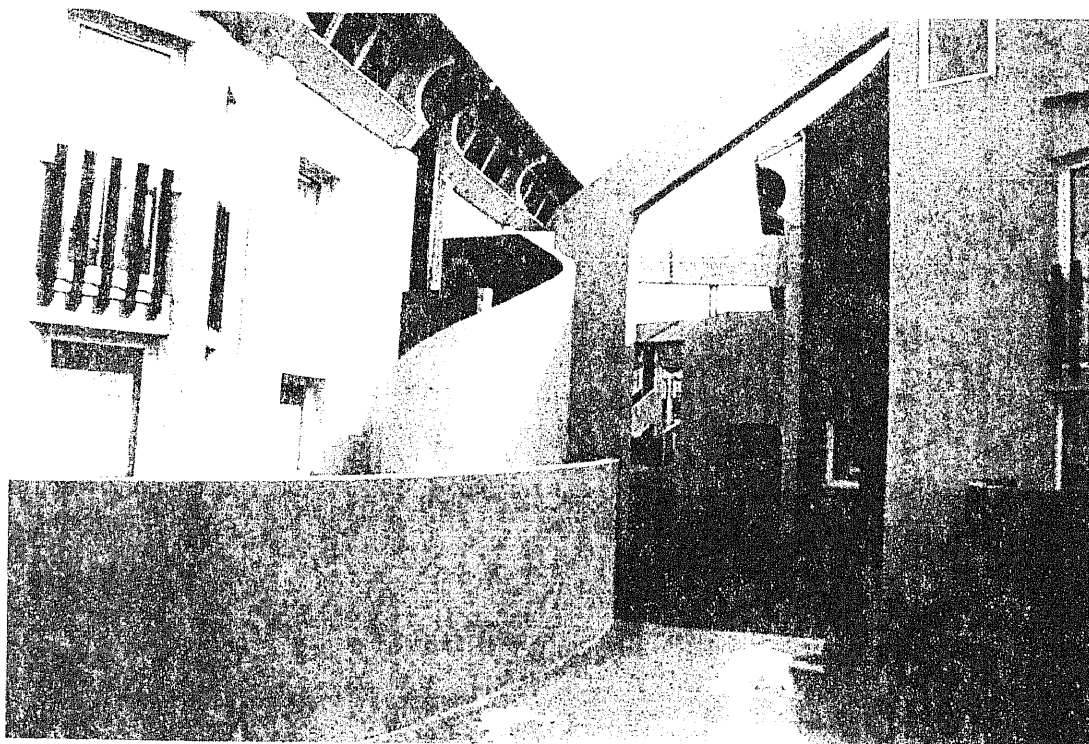


Figure 24.5 Housing, Stains, 1986-1990: photo of entry to inner court

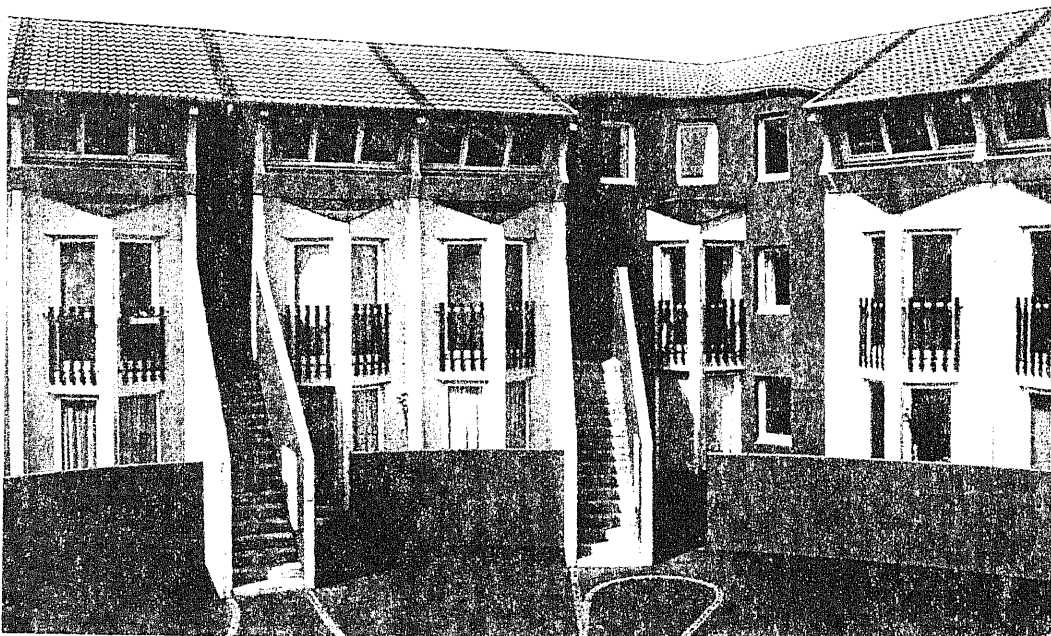


Figure 24.6 Housing, Stains, 1986-1990: photo of facade facing inner court

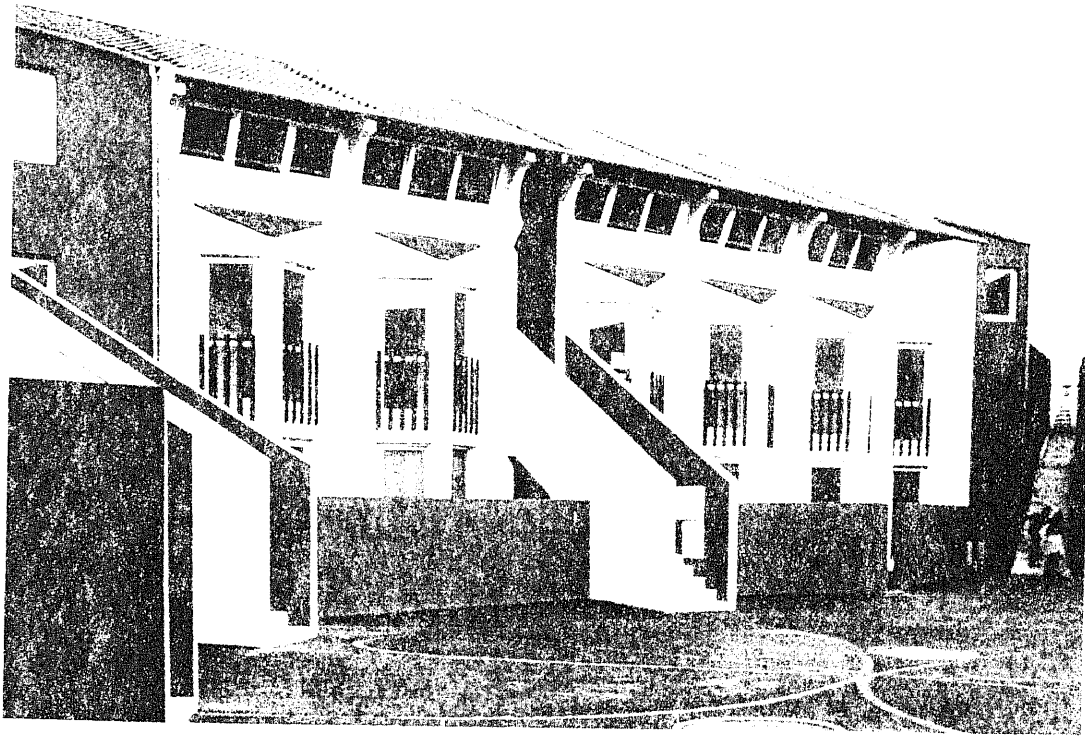


Figure 24.7 Housing, Stains, 1986-1990: photo of inner court

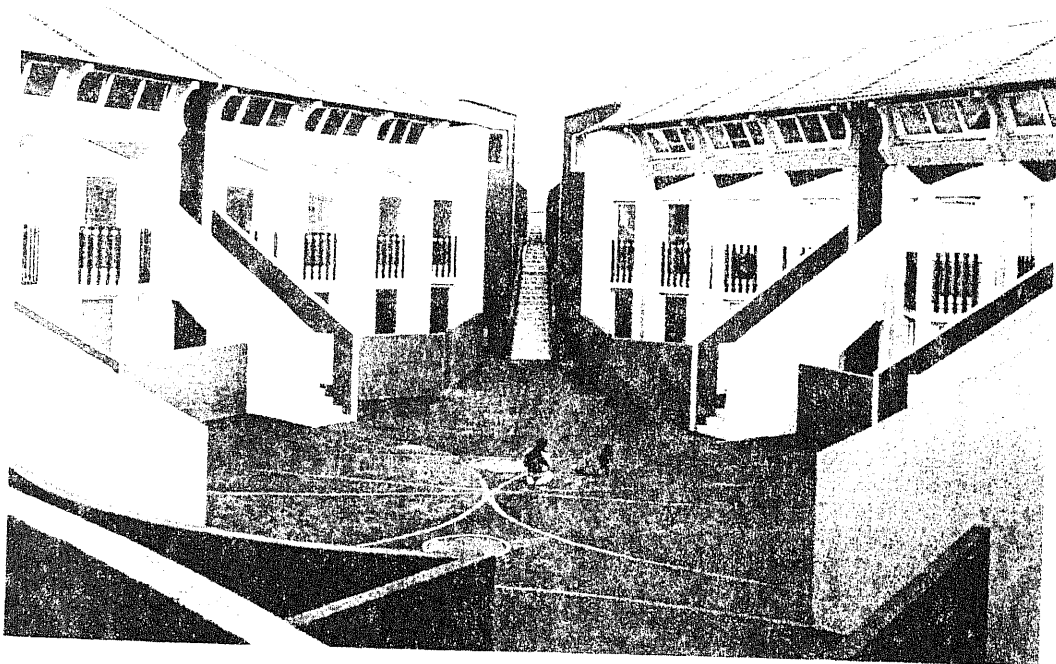


Figure 24.8 Housing, Stains, 1986-1990: photo of inner court

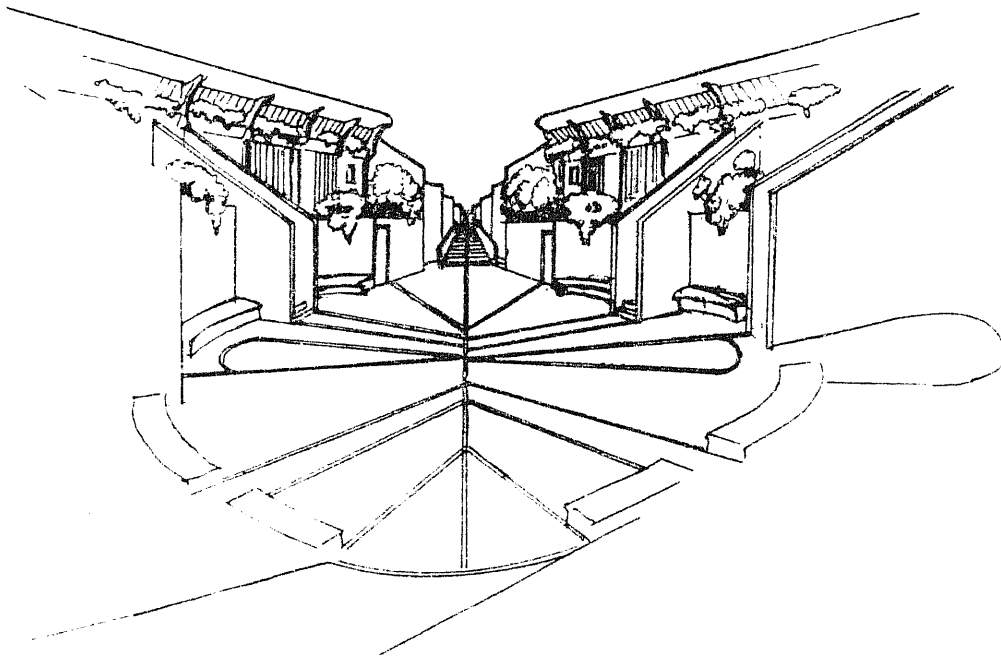


Figure 24.9 Housing, Stains, 1986-1990: perspective of inner court

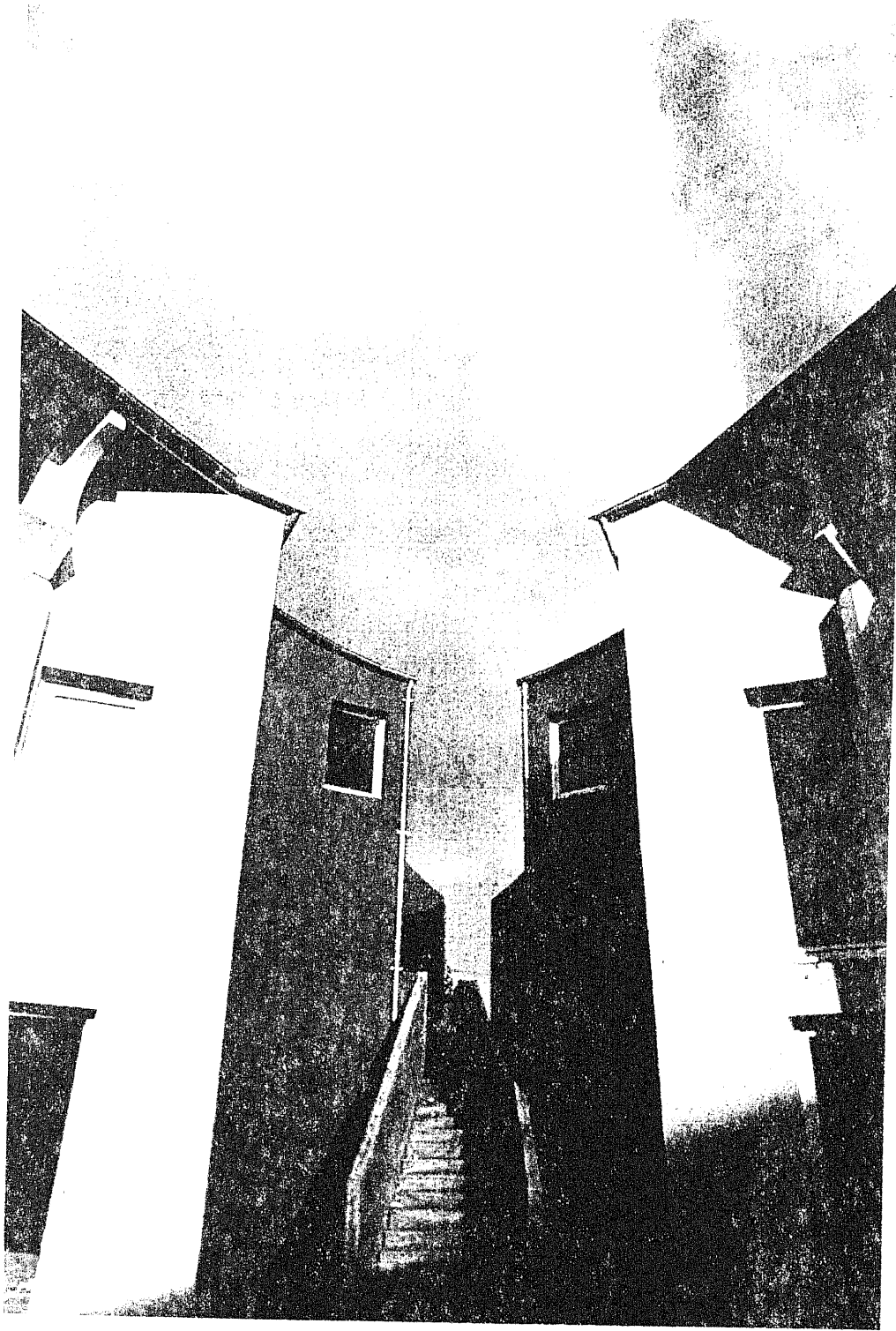


Figure 24.10 Housing, Stains, 1986-1990: photo of *trompe-l'oeil* staircase



Figure 24.11 Housing, Stains, 1986-1990: photo of Ricardo Porro in inner court



### **Evocation of Bomarzo**

We played with the idea of a romantic garden. There is a series of pyramids covered with vegetation, like the seven hills of Rome, and artificial lakes at two levels with a waterfall where a restaurant in the shape of a boat appears to be at the point of falling. In the "archipelago", a labyrinth of canals, mythical place, there emerge hands from generous Nature. Heads, feet that are reflected in the water. It is an homage to Bomarzo, that crazy and marvellous Italian garden.

"LA HAUT-ILE", PARK, NEUILLY-SUR-MARNE (SEINE-SAINT-DENIS), RICARDO PORRO AND RENAUD DE LA NOUE WITH JEAN MAGERAN AND ELISABETH MORTAMAIS, CONSULTATION, 1986-2000.

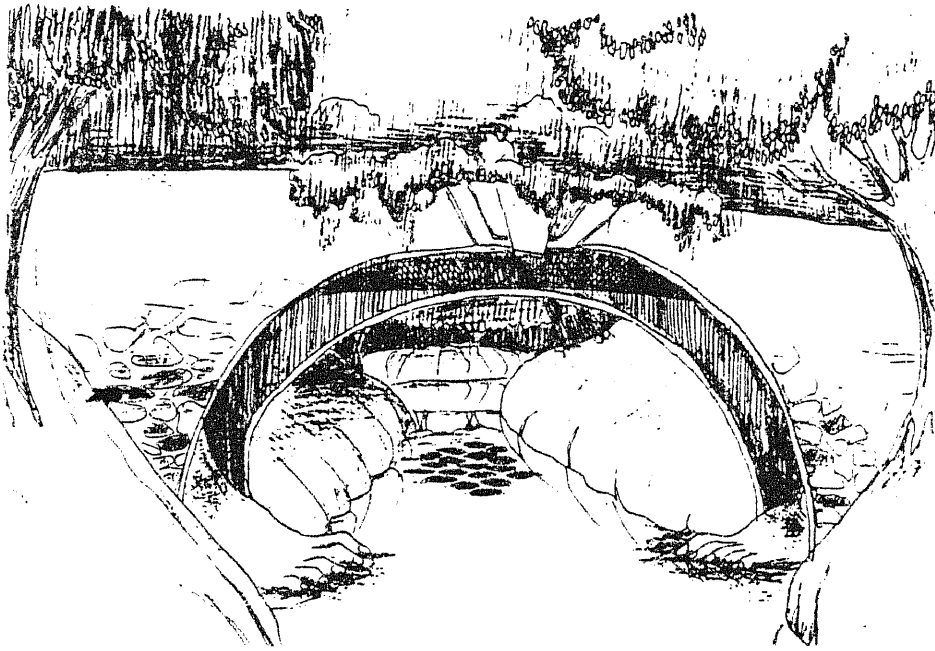


Figure 25.1 “La Haute-Ile” Park, Neully-Sur-Marne, 1986-2000: sketch



Figure 25.2 “La Haute-Ile” Park, Neully-Sur-Marne, 1986-2000: sketch

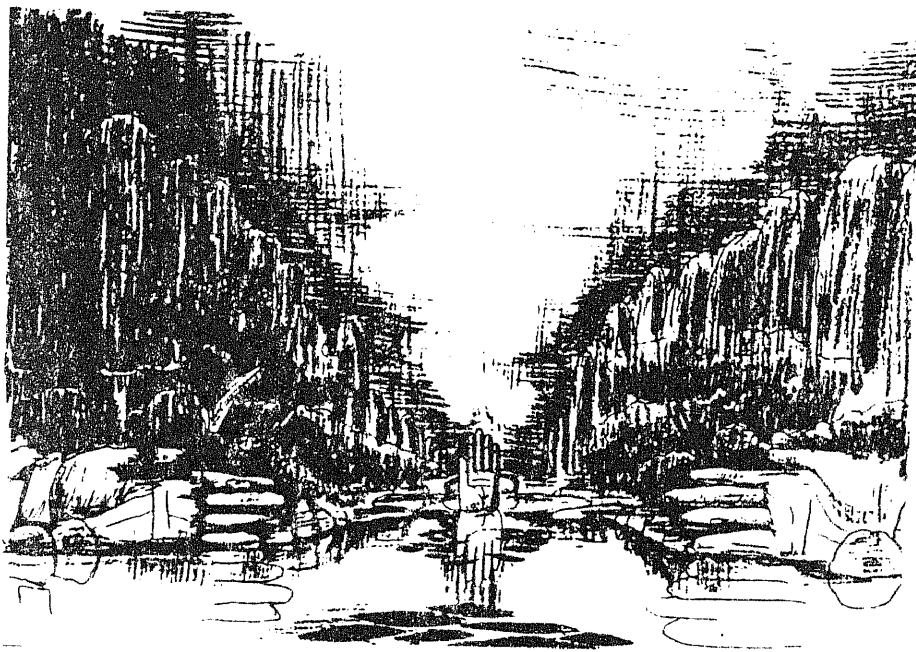


Figure 25.3 “La Haute-Ile” Park, Neully-Sur-Marne, 1986-2000: sketch

## The Dove

The study of the school's functions made us select as a solution a building with two wings united by the space of the entrance which also serves as a forum. The image of the dove emerged spontaneously. It is an ancient symbol of knowledge and this is a school. The plan takes on its form and the roofs rise--like a bird taking off in flight--until the head which covers the entrance. Past the door, one enters a space of great height crossed over by hallways that will serve as balconies during performances. It can be thought of as the inside of an organism. In addition, the verticality, the play of lights, the presence of colored glass are an homage paid to the Abbot Suger and to Pierre de Montreuil, who gave us the neighboring basilica of Saint Denis, the world's first Gothic construction. The building creates a new urban space with two plazas linked together joining one street to another.

"THE DOVE", ELSA TRIOLET SECONDARY SCHOOL,  
SAINT DENIS (SEINE-SAINT-DENIS),  
RICARDO PORRO AND RENAUD DE LA NOUE  
COMPETITION, 1987-1990.

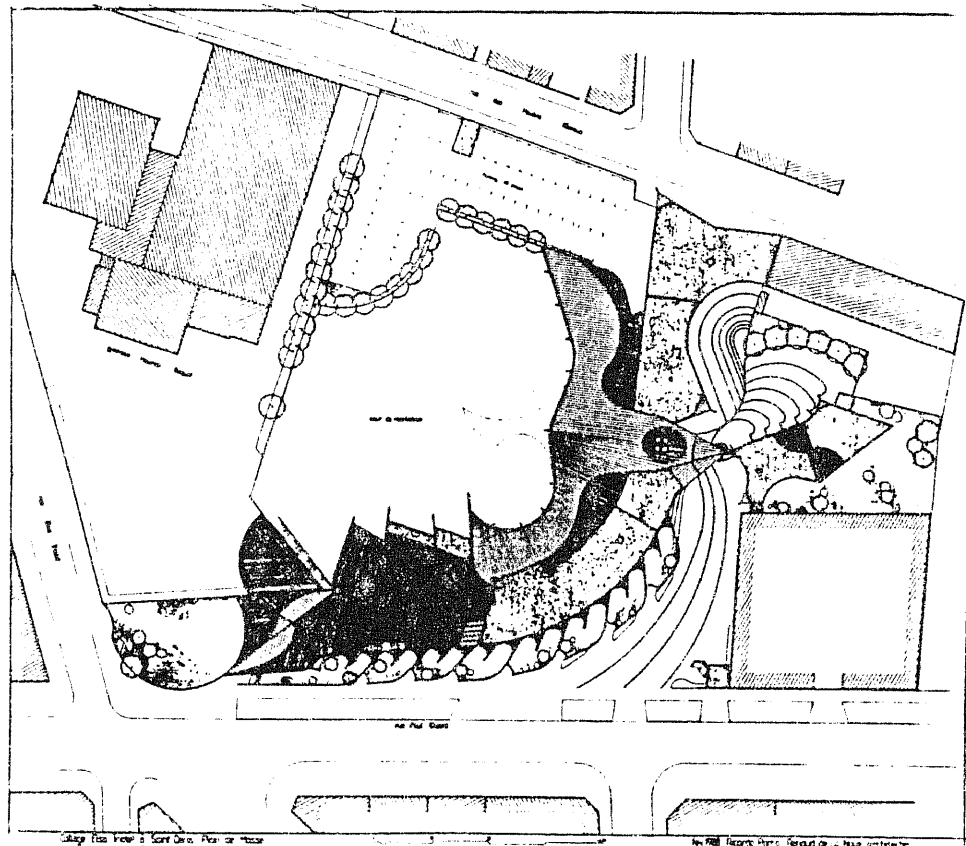


Figure 26.1 “The Dove”, Elsa Triolet Secondary School, Saint Denis, 1987-1990: site plan

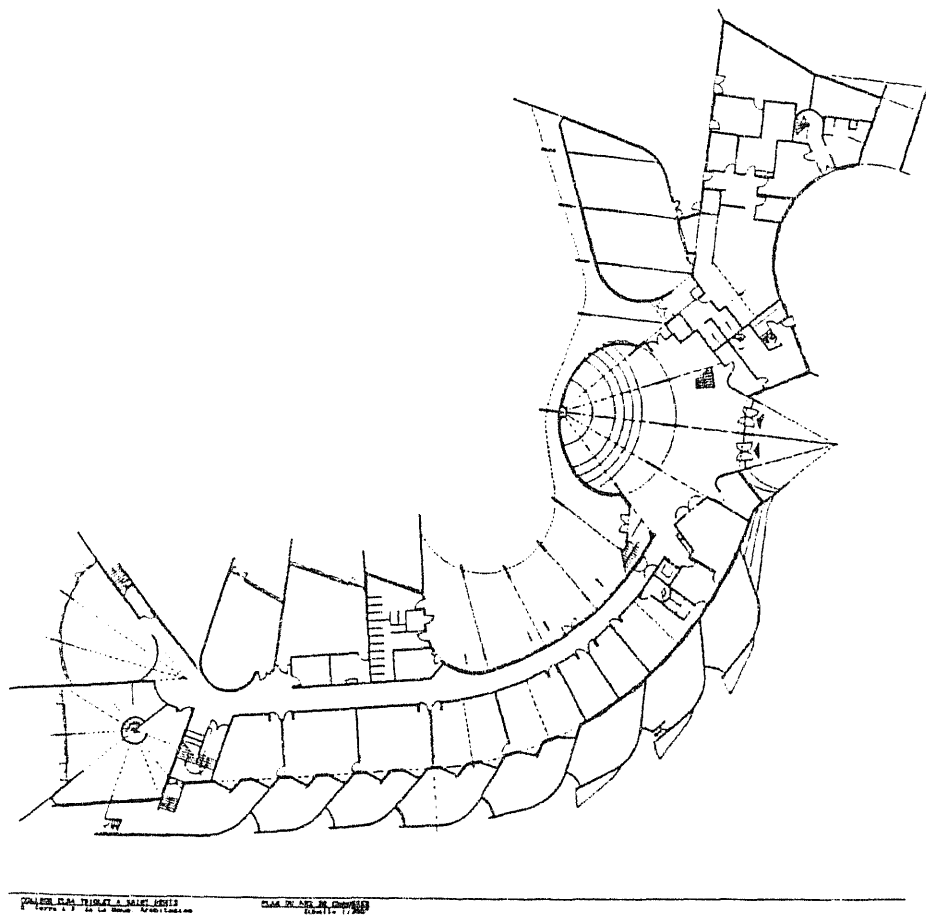


Figure 26.2 "The Dove", Elsa Triolet Secondary School, Saint Denis, 1987-1990: ground floor plan

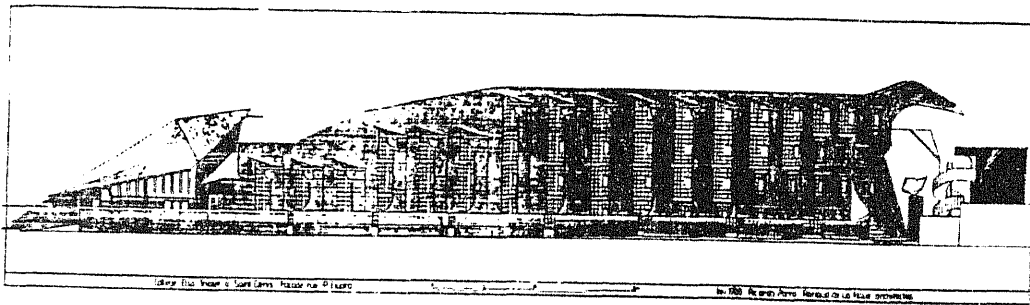


Figure 26.3 “The Dove”, Elsa Triolet Secondary School, Saint Denis, 1987-1990:  
elevation facing Rue Paul Eluard



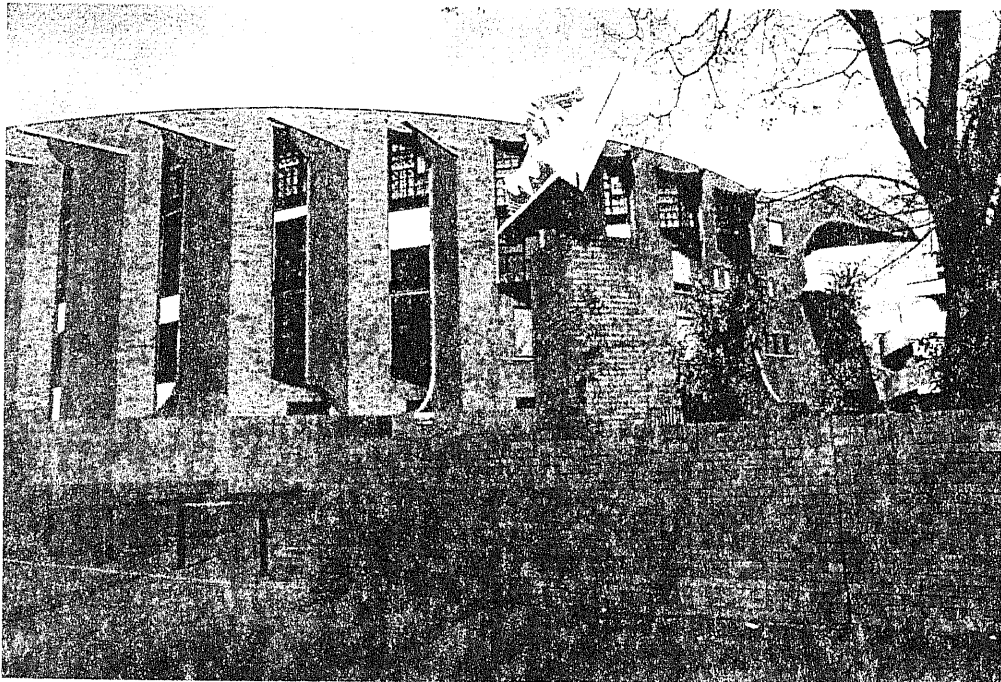


Figure 26.4 “The Dove”, Elsa Triolet Secondary School, Saint Denis, 1987-1990: photo of facade facing Rue Paul Eluard with sculpture of dove emerging from book in foreground

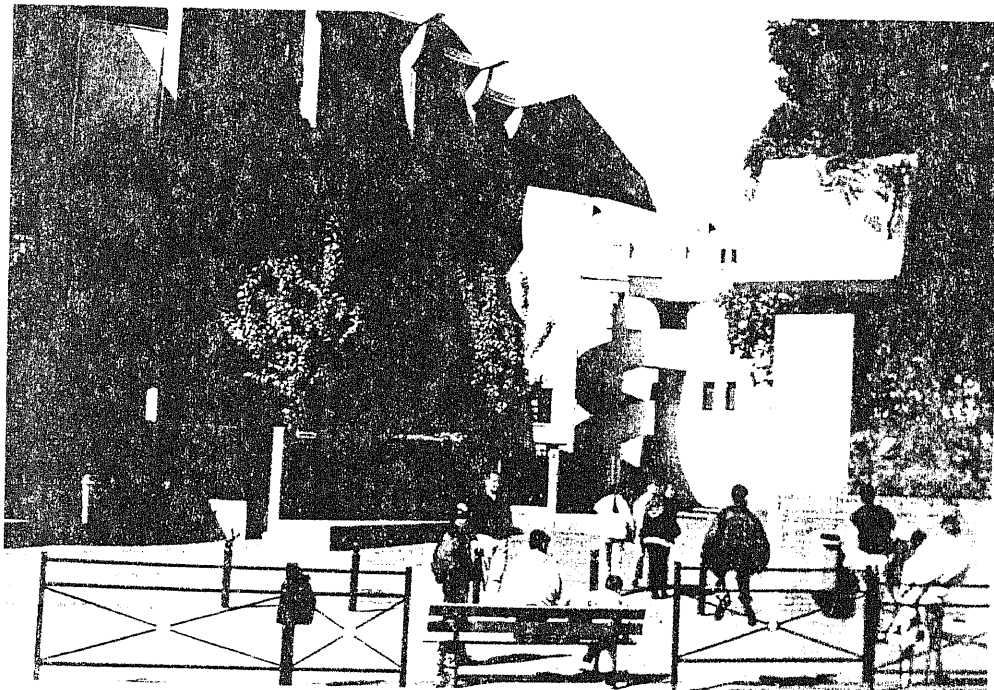


Figure 26.5 “The Dove”, Elsa Triolet Secondary School, Saint Denis, 1987-1990: photo of plaza facing Rue Paul Eluard with sculpture of dove emerging from book in foreground

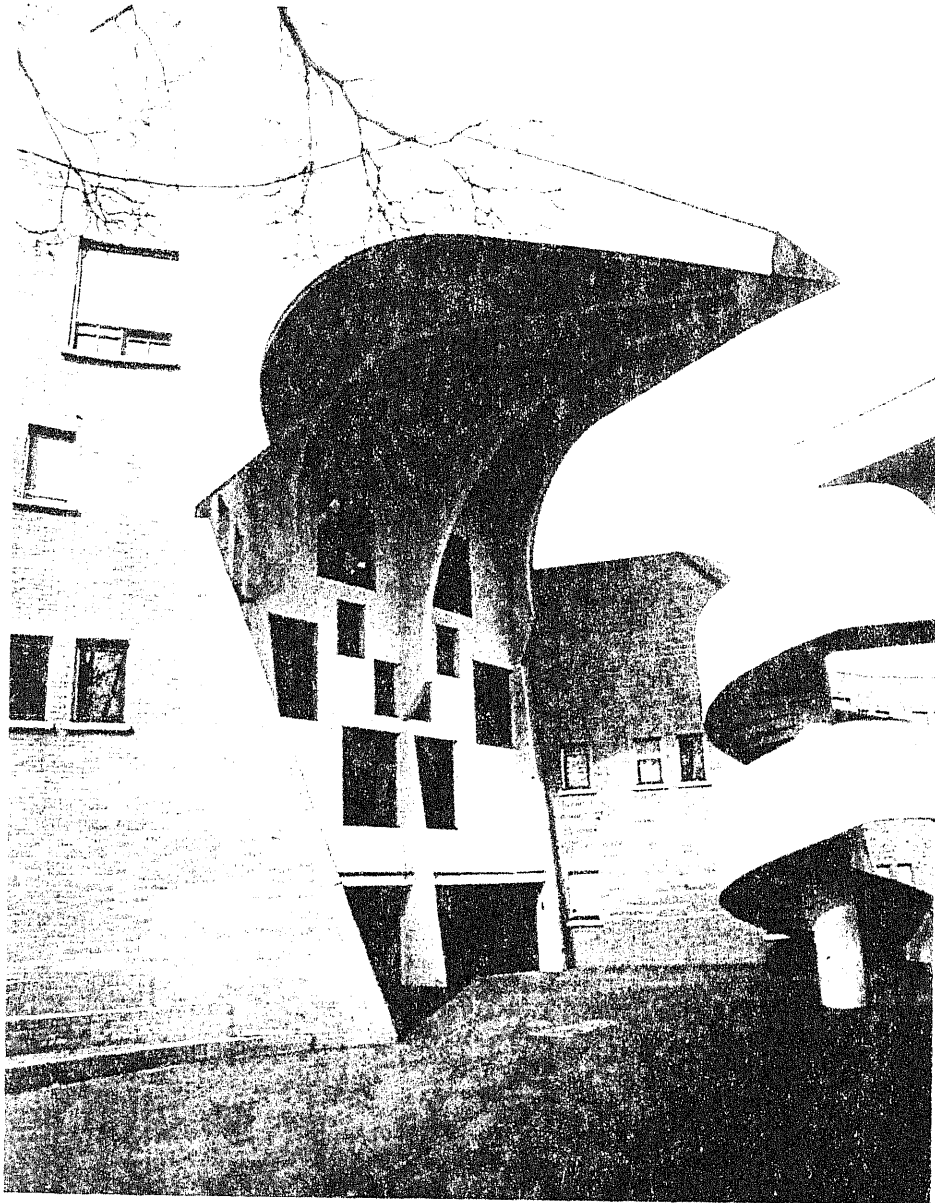


Figure 26.6 “The Dove”, Elsa Triolet Secondary School, Saint Denis, 1987-1990: photo of entrance

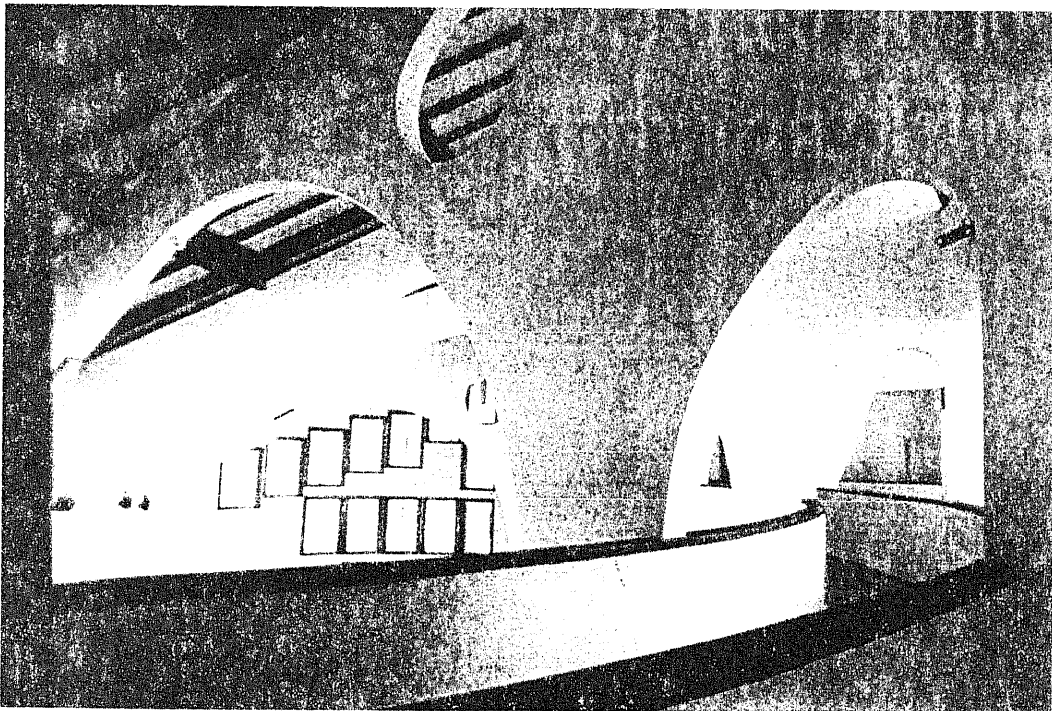


Figure 26.7 “The Dove”, Elsa Triolet Secondary School, Saint Denis, 1987-1990: photo of entry hall

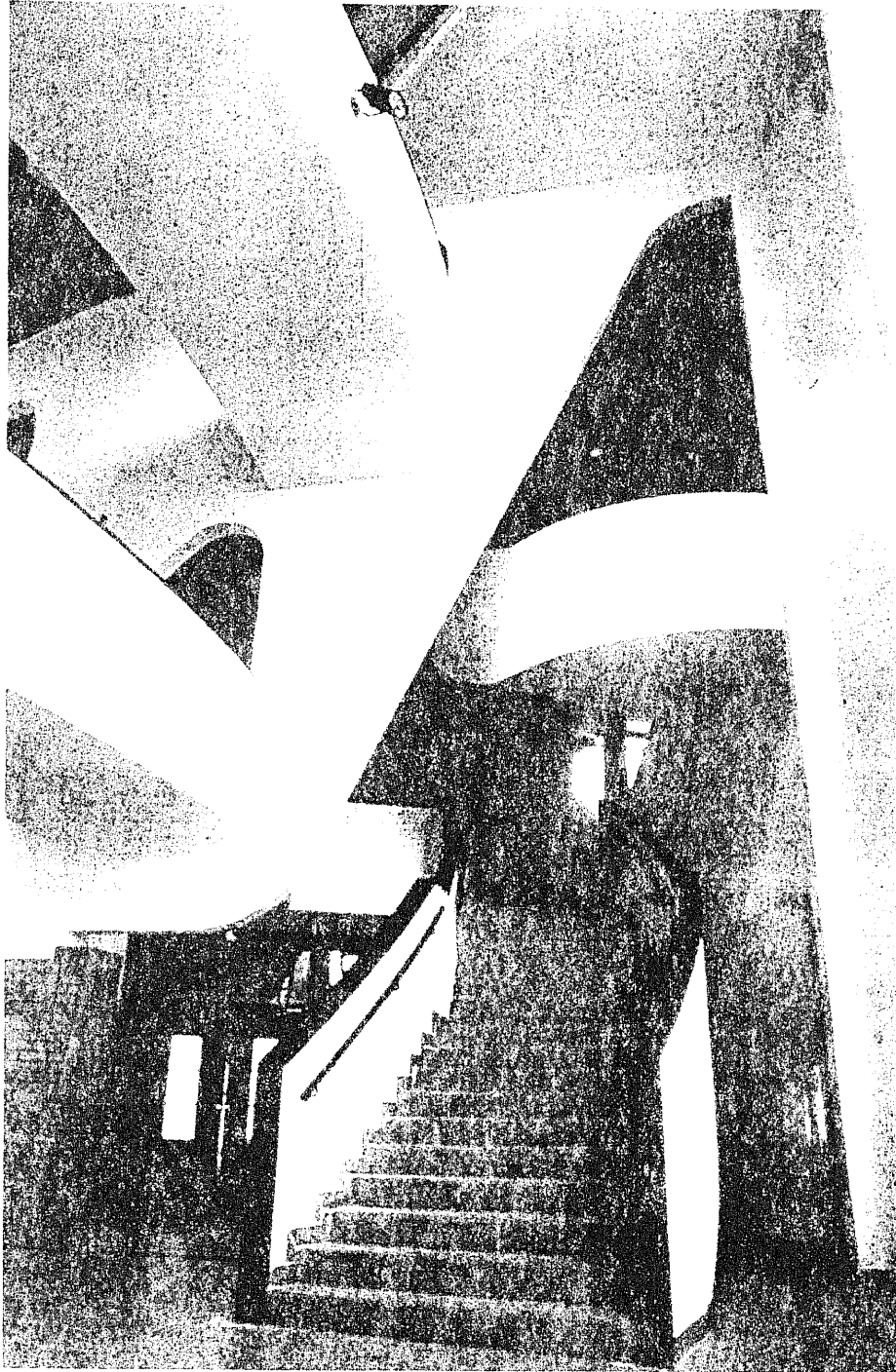


Figure 26.8 “The Dove”, Elsa Triolet Secondary School, Saint Denis, 1987-1990: photo of entry hall

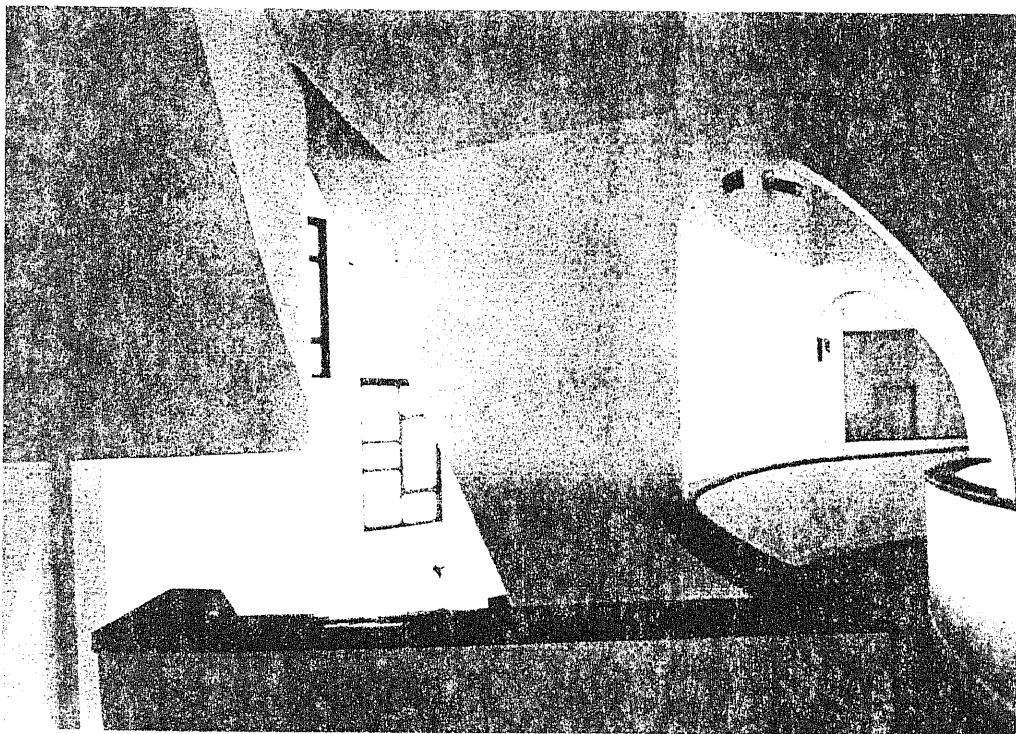


Figure 26.9 “The Dove”, Elsa Triolet Secondary School, Saint Denis, 1987-1990: photo of entry hall

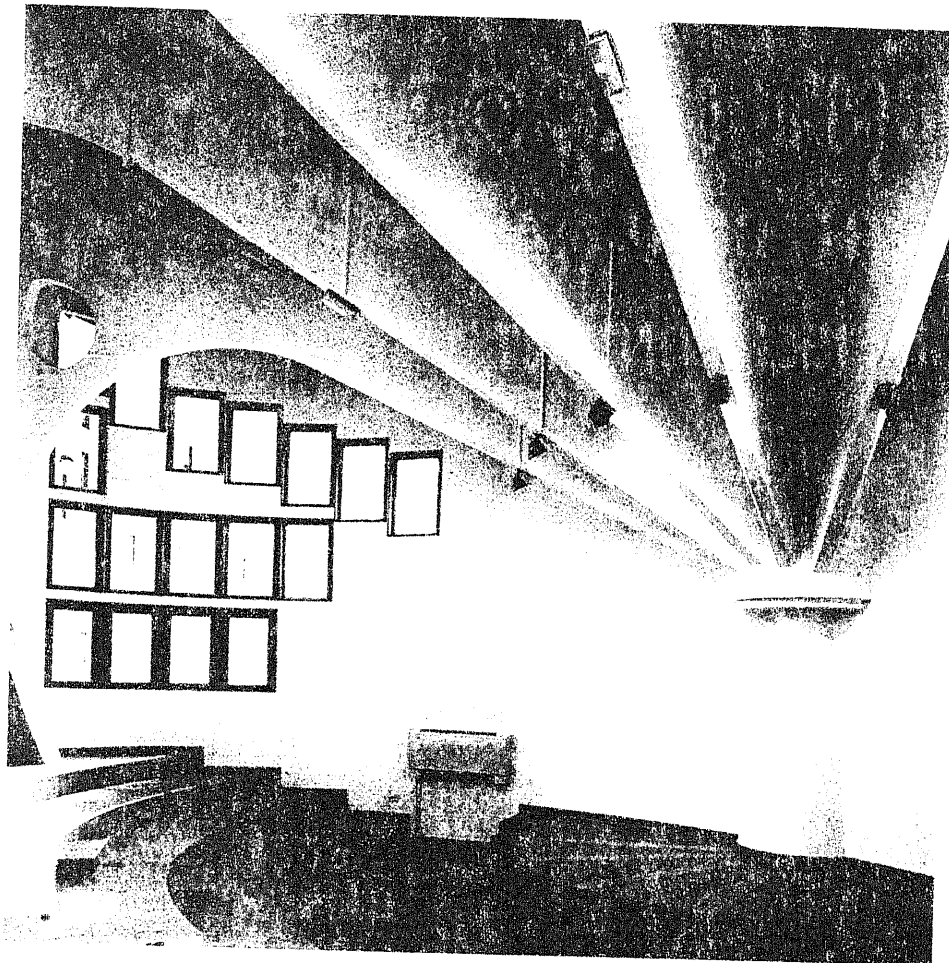


Figure 26.10 “The Dove”, Elsa Triolet Secondary School, Saint Denis, 1987-1990: photo of mini-amphitheater in entry hall

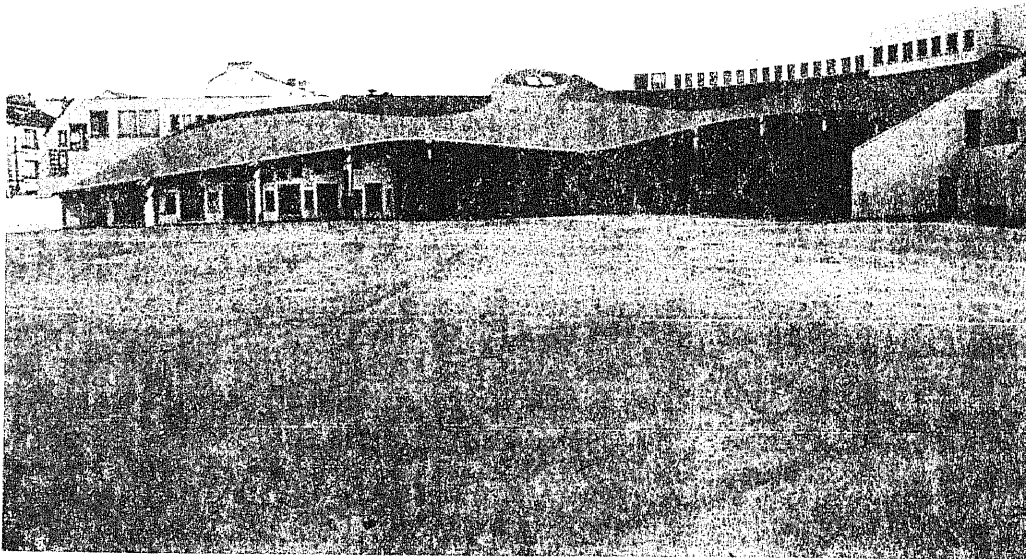


Figure 26.11 “The Dove”, Elsa Triolet Secondary School, Saint Denis, 1987-1990: photo of facade facing playground area



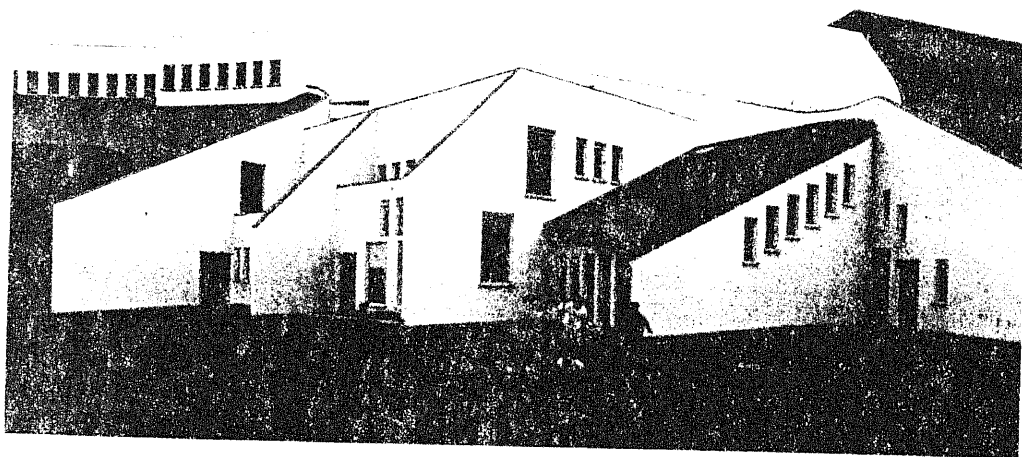


Figure 26.12 “The Dove”, Elsa Triolet Secondary School, Saint Denis, 1987-1990: photo of facade facing playground area

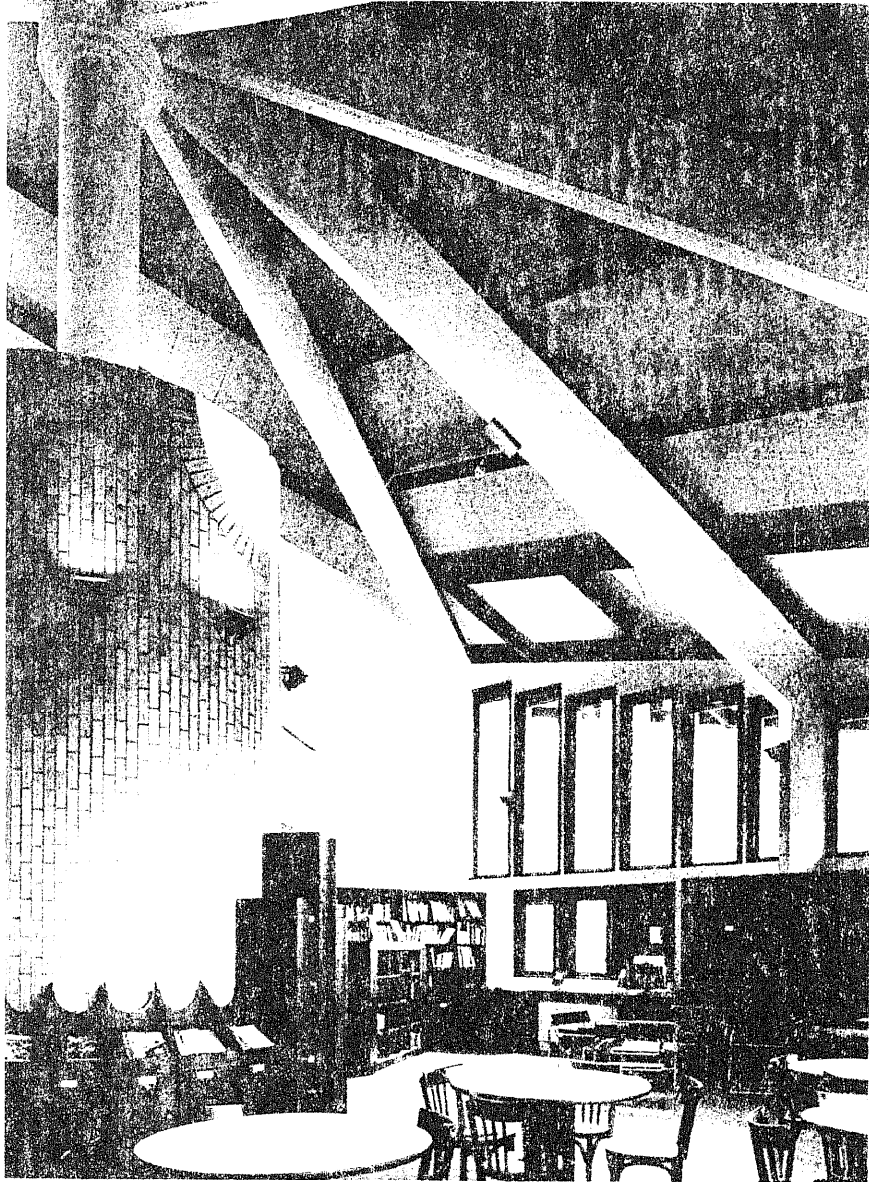


Figure 26.13 “The Dove”, Elsa Triolet Secondary School, Saint Denis, 1987-1990: photo of library

### **The Scorpion**

An association wants to invite a great artist for one year to work in the best conditions. He will be "The Ambassador of the Beautiful". The project includes a house for him and a cultural center. Bordering the ruins of the castle of the Counts of Savoy, the new building resembles a scorpion, an animal from the depth of the earth. But in the central space, there is a collection of symbols evoking the passage from the depth of the earth toward heaven.

"THE EMBASSY OF THE BEAUTIFUL", LE BOURGET-DU-LAC (SAVOY), RICARDO PORRO AND REANUD DE LA NOUE, PROJECT, 1988.

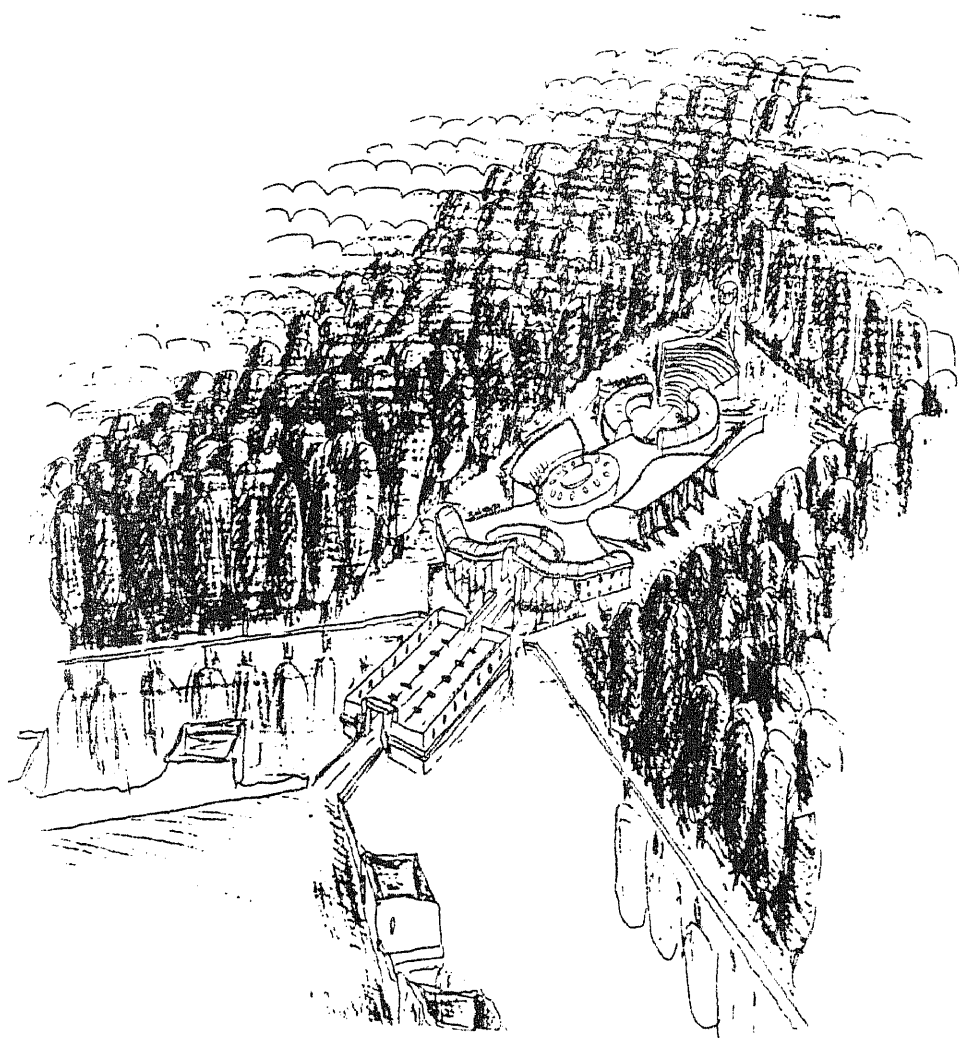


Figure 27.1 “The Embassy of the Beautiful”, Le Bourget-Du-Lac (Savoie), Project, 1988:  
bird’s-eye view perspective

### **The Ying and the Yang**

The Colonel Fabien Secondary School consists of two volumes--they are fundamentally two blocks--and each one suggests an animal (the heads are sculptures integrated at the end of two beams). The male raises himself up over the female so as to cover her. They represent the philosophical conception of the union or integration of the opposites (Heraclitus, Hegel...). Under the heads on the floor, the ancient Chinese symbol of the balance of the opposites. The entry hall becomes a tree of life; in the rear facade, the shape of the roofs suggests to us the shape of the scissors of the Parcae. Life-Death, but the symbol of the entrance tells us that it is the cycle of life.

COLONEL FABIEN SECONDARY SCHOOL, MONTREUIL  
(SEINE-SAINT-DENIS), RICARDO PORRO AND RENAUD DE LA NOUE,  
1990-1993

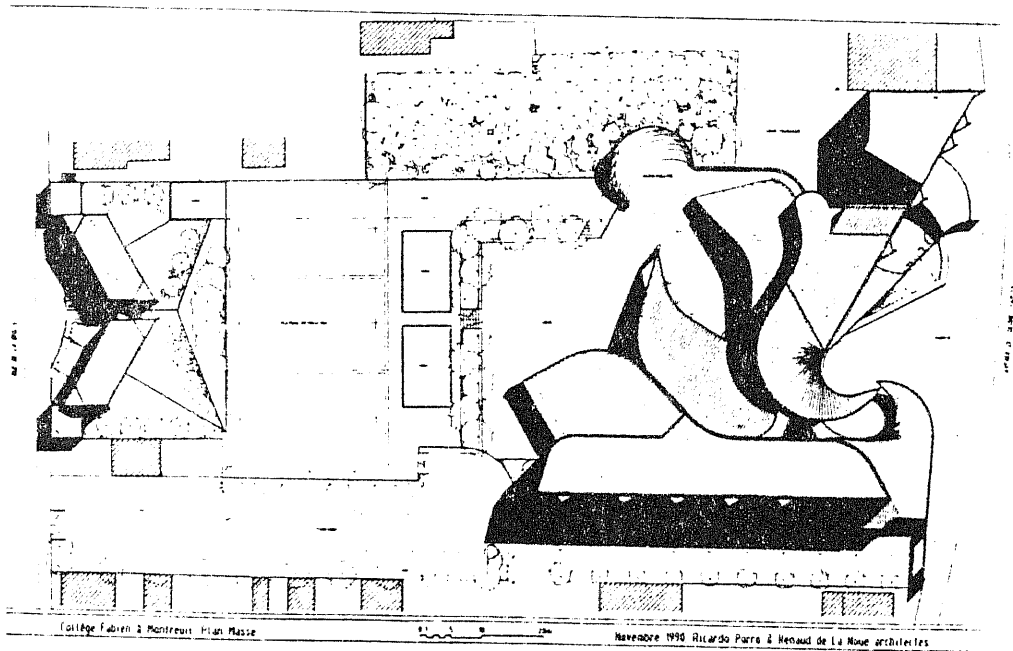


Figure 28.1 Colonel Fabien Secondary School, Montreuil, 1990-1993: site plan

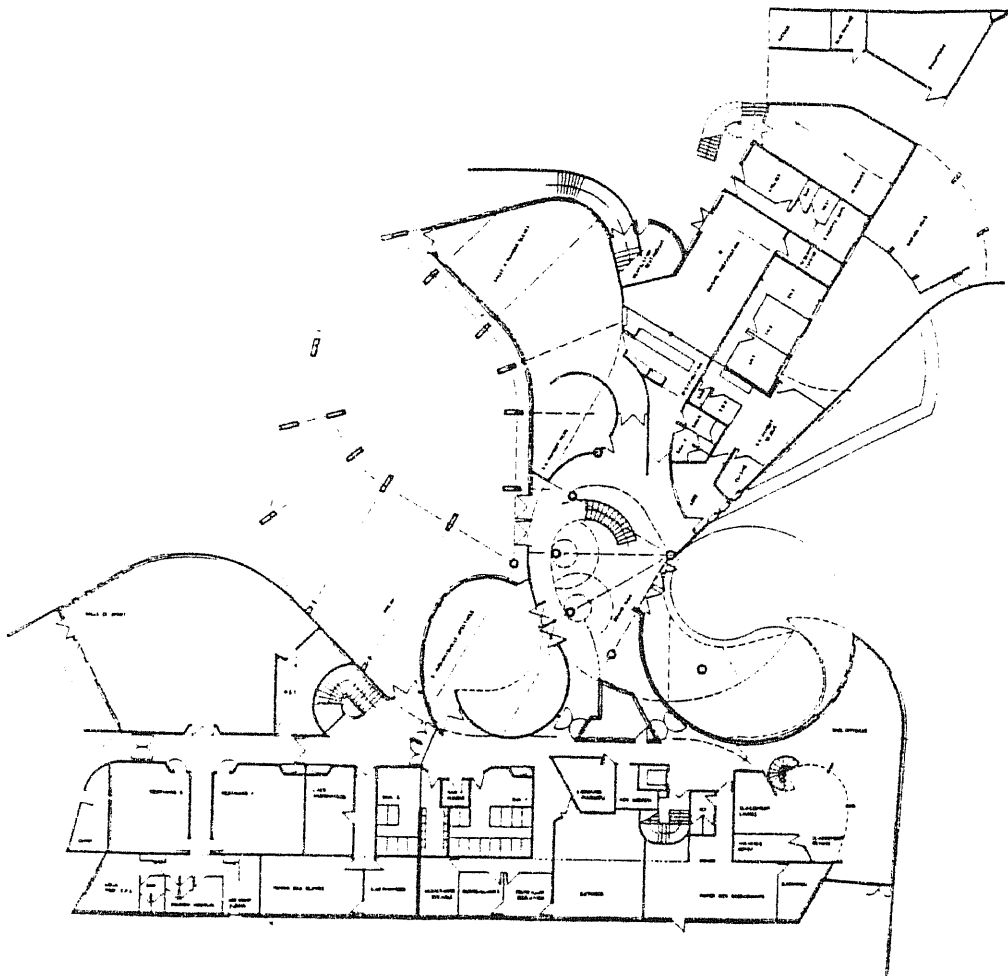


Figure 28.2 Colonel Fabien Secondary School, Montreuil, 1990-1993: ground floor plan

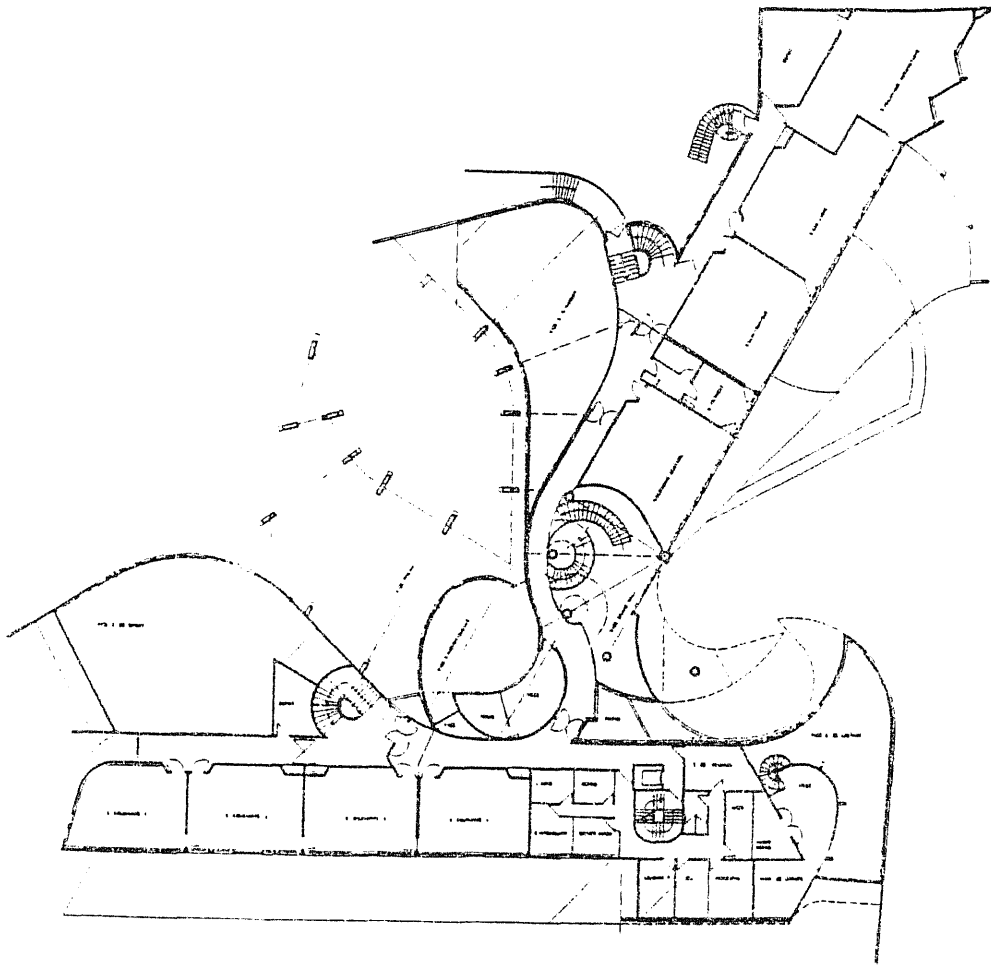


Figure 28.3 Colonel Fabien Secondary School, Montreuil, 1990-1993: second floor plan



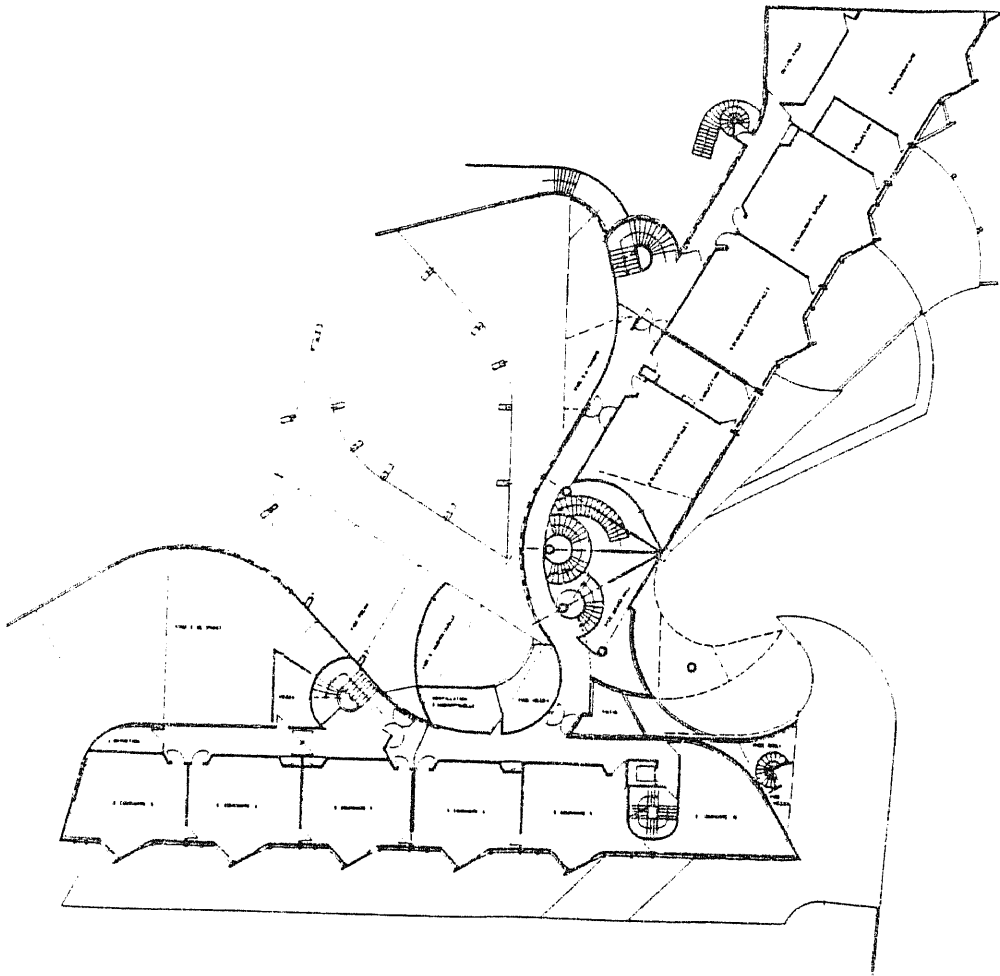


Figure 28.4 Colonel Fabien Secondary School, Montreuil, 1990-1993: third floor plan

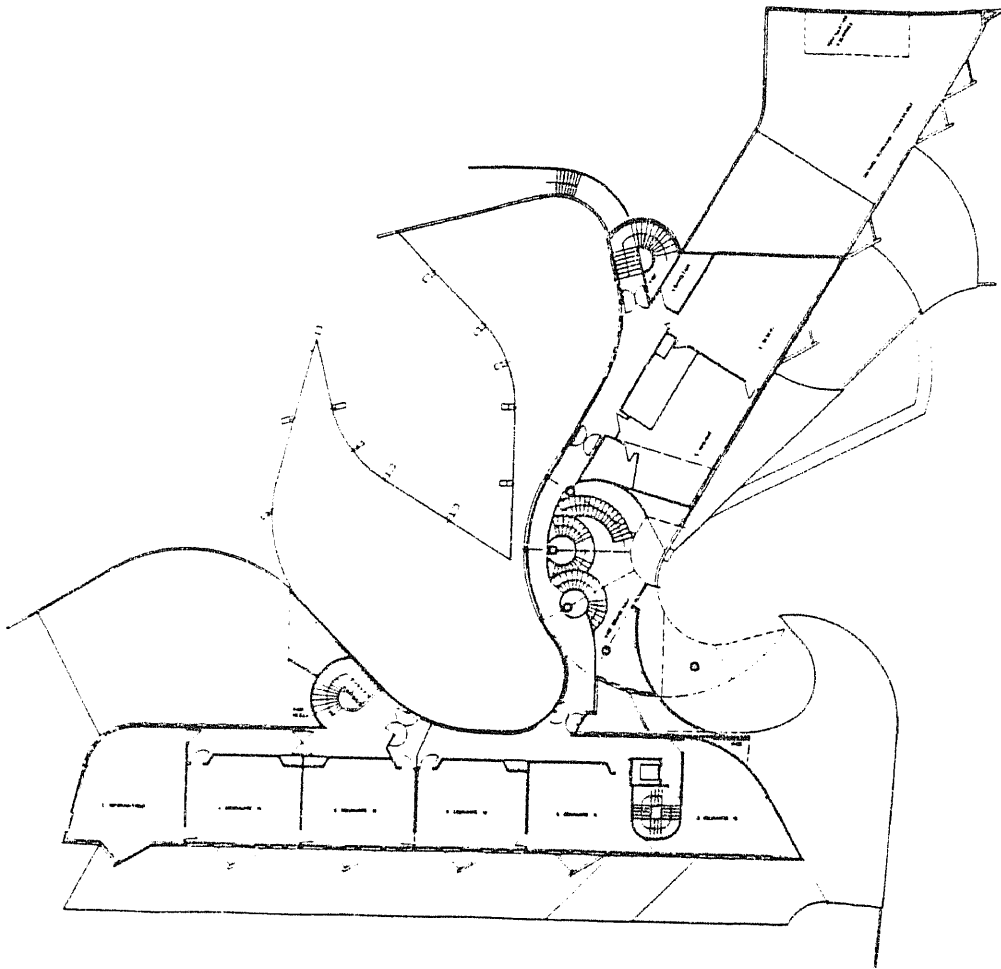


Figure 28.5 Colonel Fabien Secondary School, Montreuil, 1990-1993: fourth floor plan

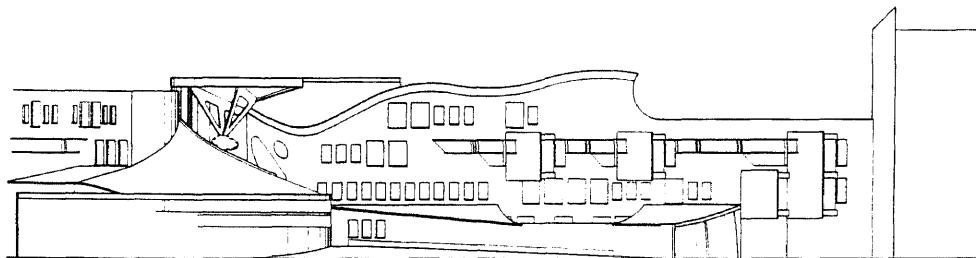


Figure 28.6 Colonel Fabien Secondary School, Montreuil, 1990-1993: elevation facing Avenue du Colonel Fabien

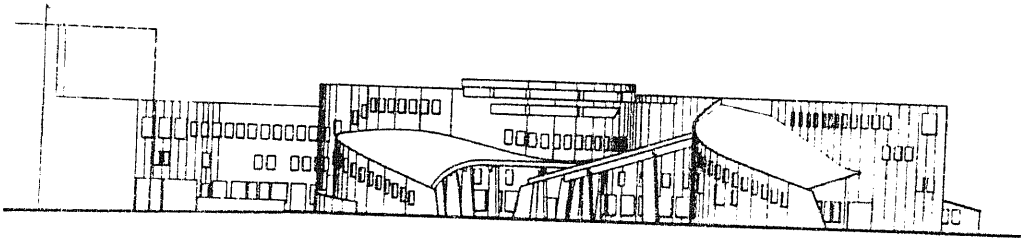


Figure 28.7 Colonel Fabien Secondary School, Montreuil, 1990-1993: elevation facing playground

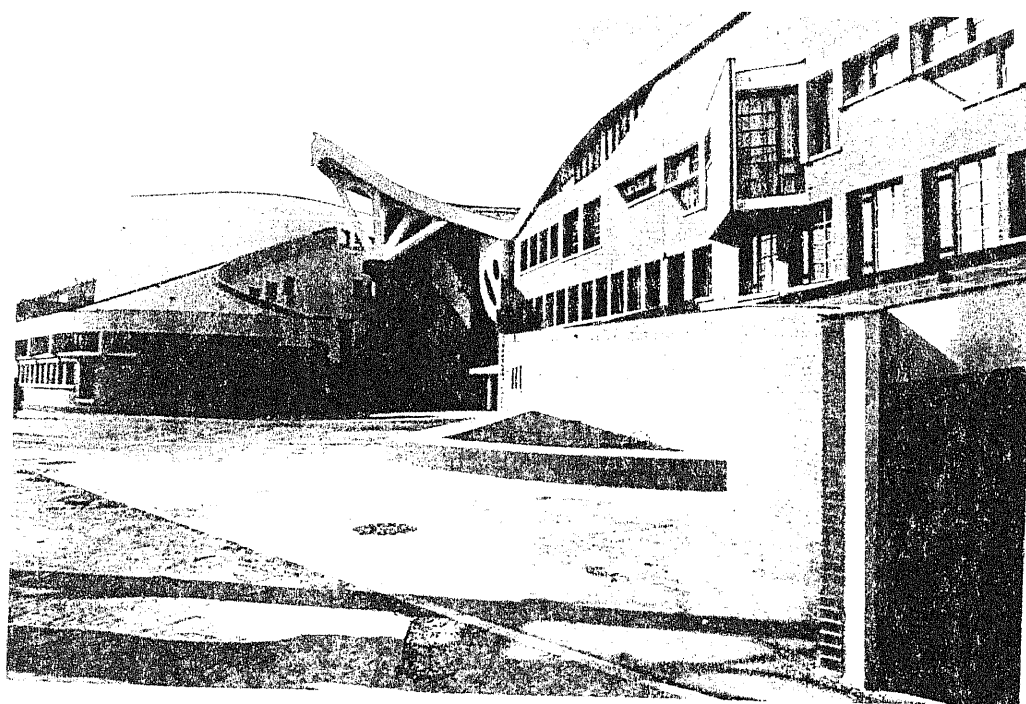


Figure 28.8 Colonel Fabien Secondary School, Montreuil, 1990-1993: photo of facade facing Avenue du Colonel Fabien

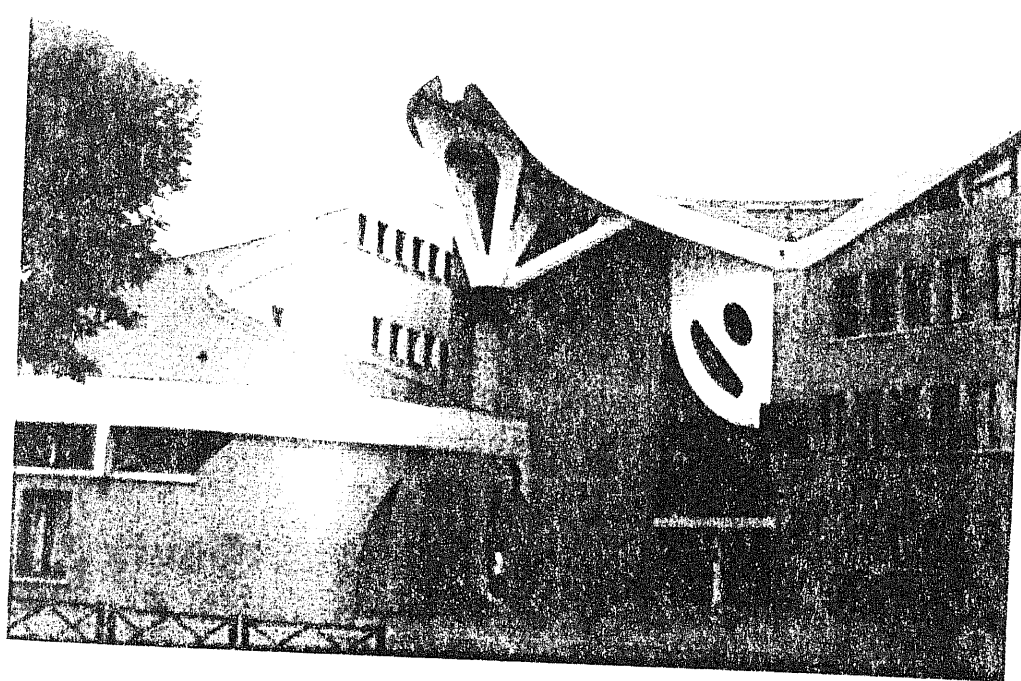


Figure 28.9 Colonel Fabien Secondary School, Montreuil, 1990-1993: photo of entrance

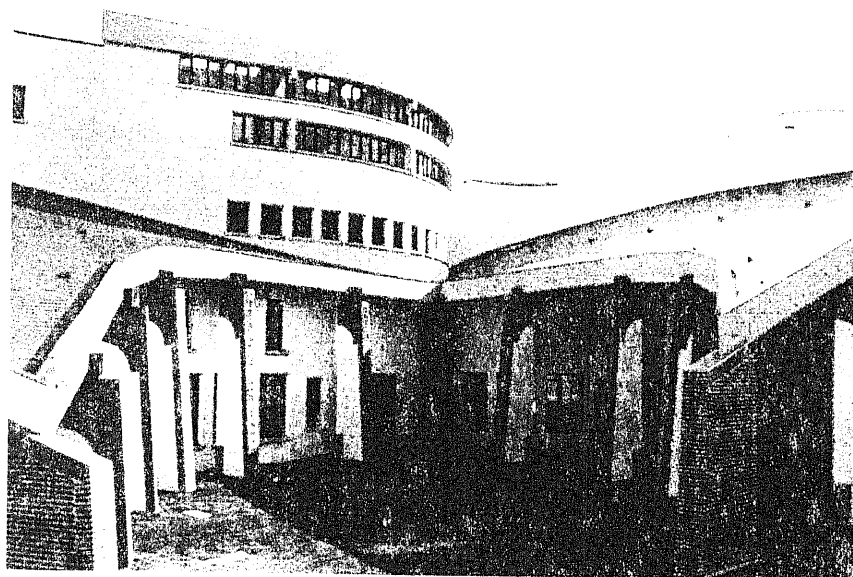


Figure 28.10 Colonel Fabien Secondary School, Montreuil, 1990-1993: photo of facade facing playground

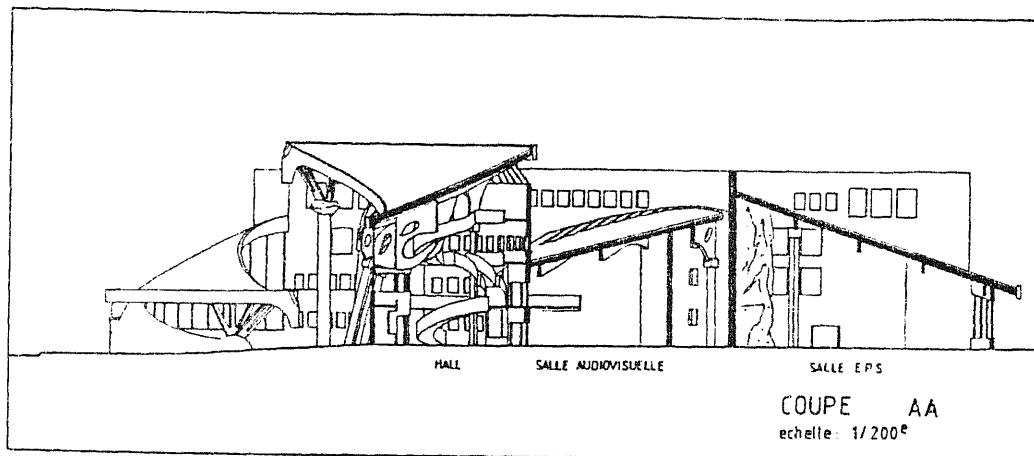


Figure 28.11 Colonel Fabien Secondary School, Montreuil, 1990-1993: section



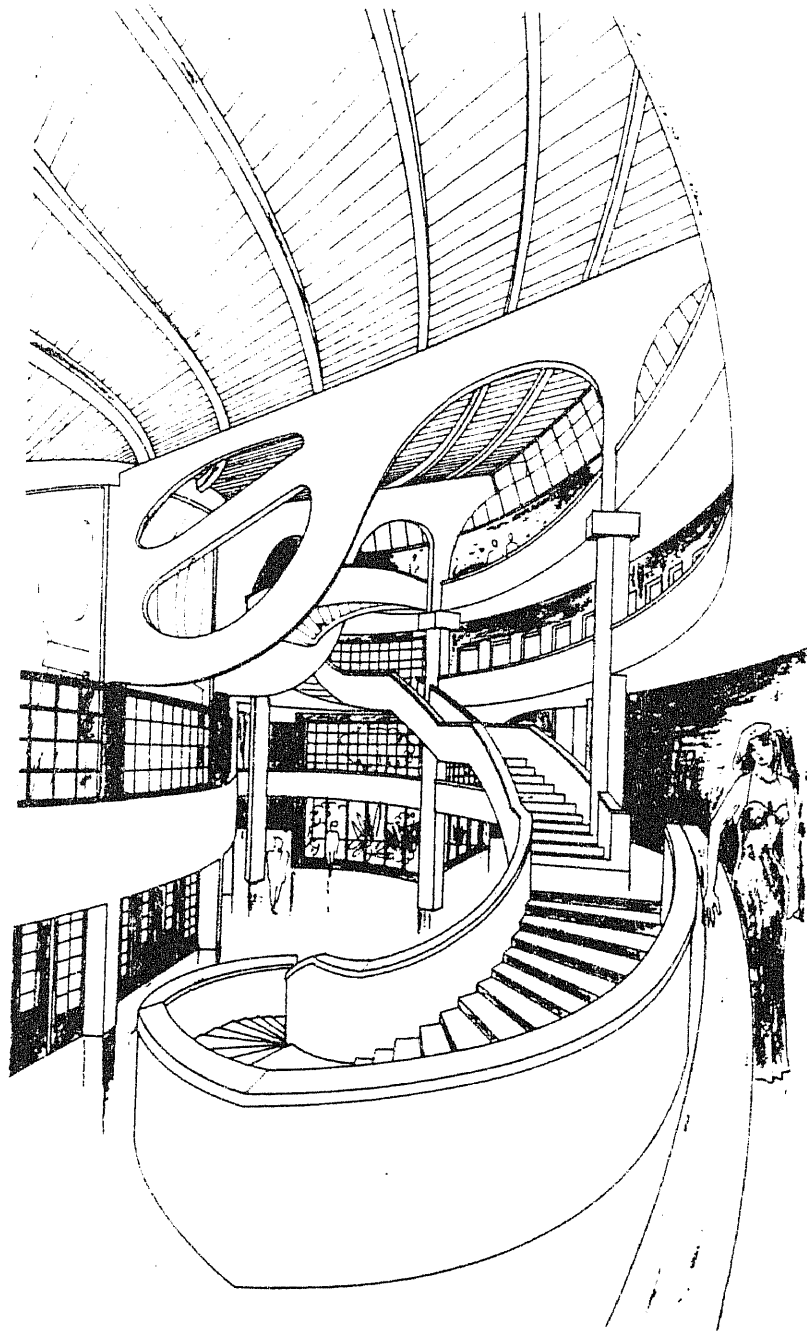


Figure 28.12 Colonel Fabien Secondary School, Montreuil, 1990-1993: perspective view of entry hall from second floor balcony

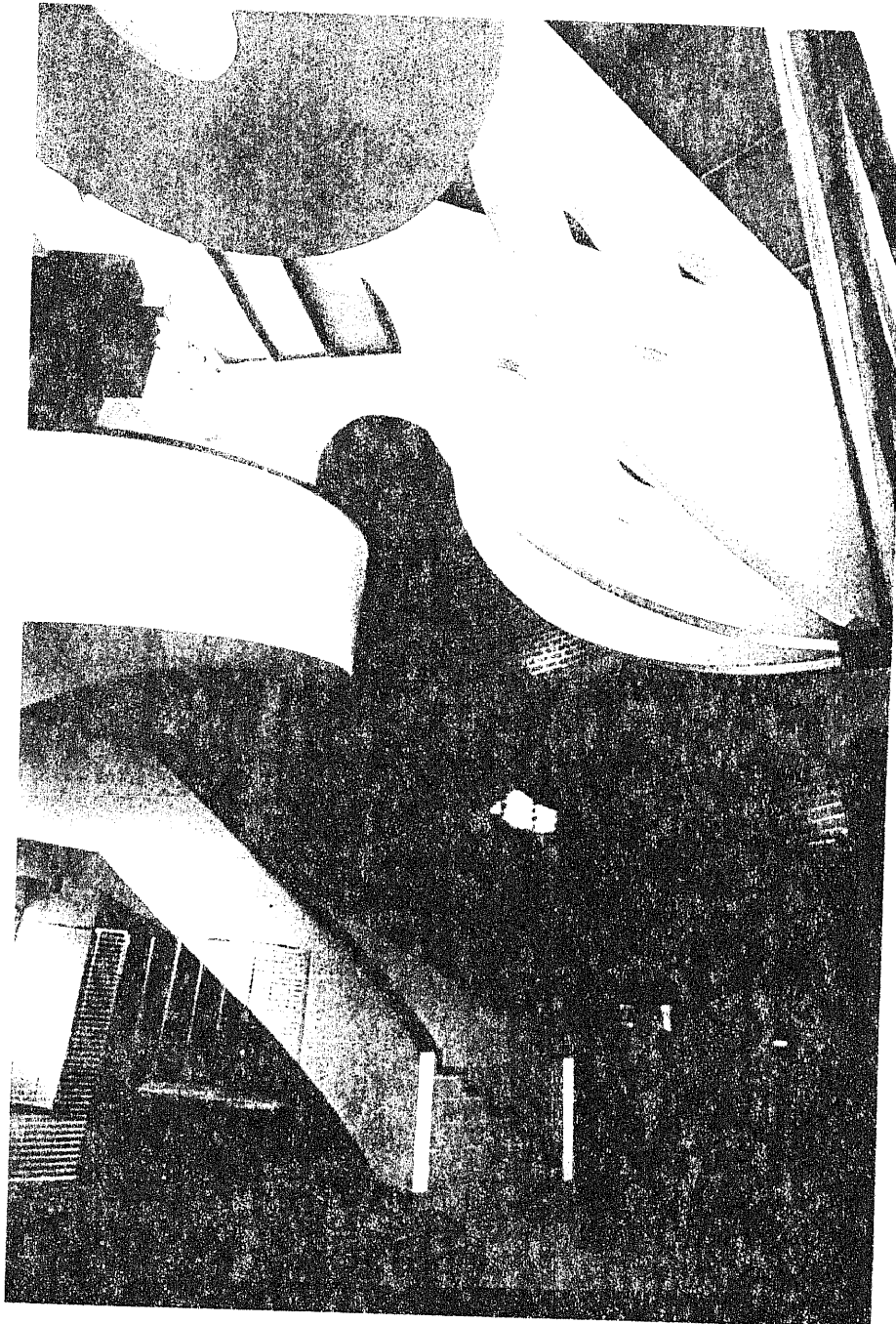


Figure 28.13 Colonel Fabien Secondary School, Montreuil, 1990-1993: photo of entry hall

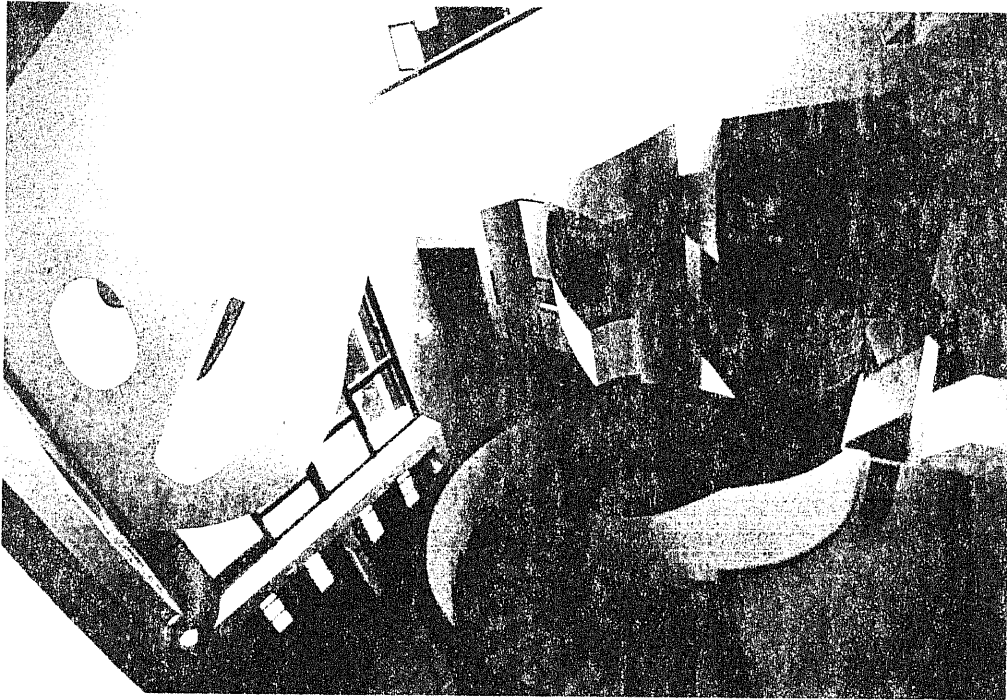


Figure 28.14 Colonel Fabien Secondary School, Montreuil, 1990-1993: photo of entry hall

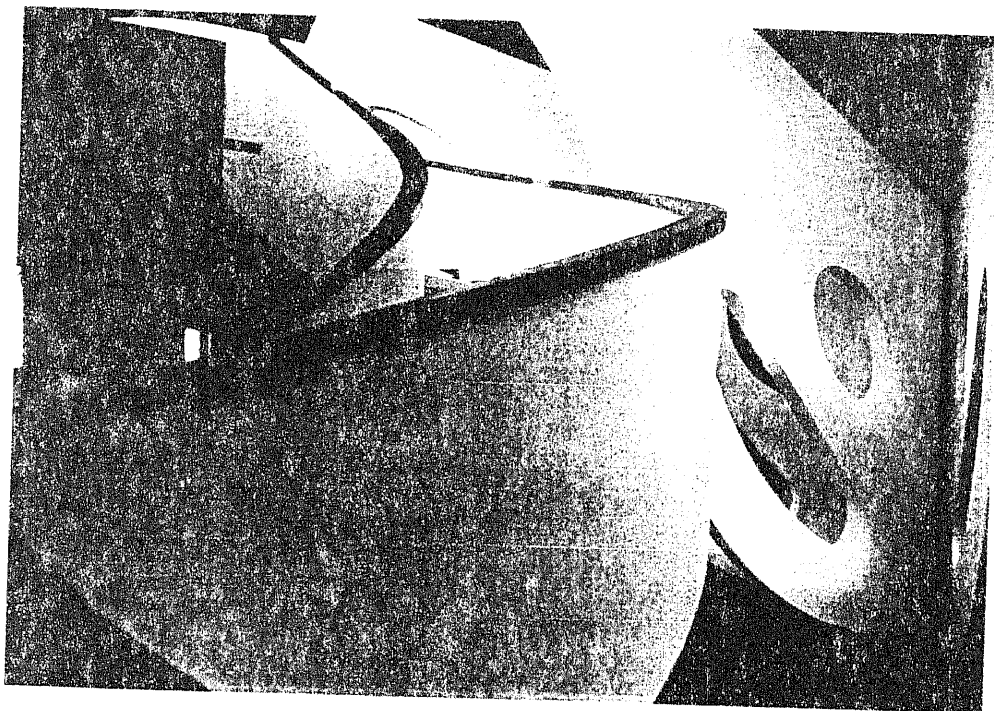


Figure 28.15 Colonel Fabien Secondary School, Montreuil, 1990-1993: photo of entry hall

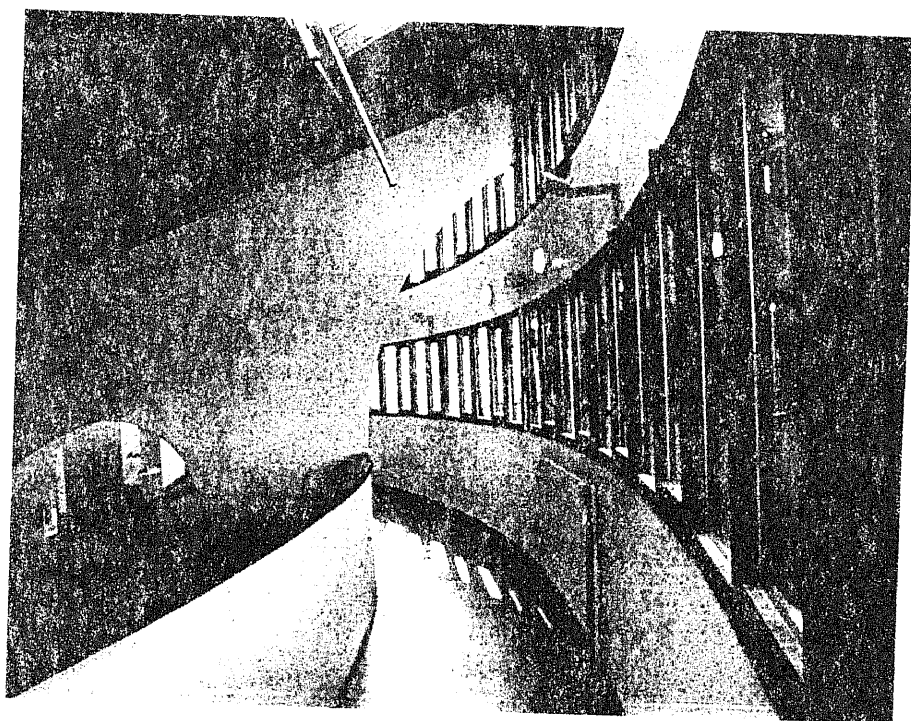


Figure 28.16 Colonel Fabien Secondary School, Montreuil, 1990-1993: photo of entry hall

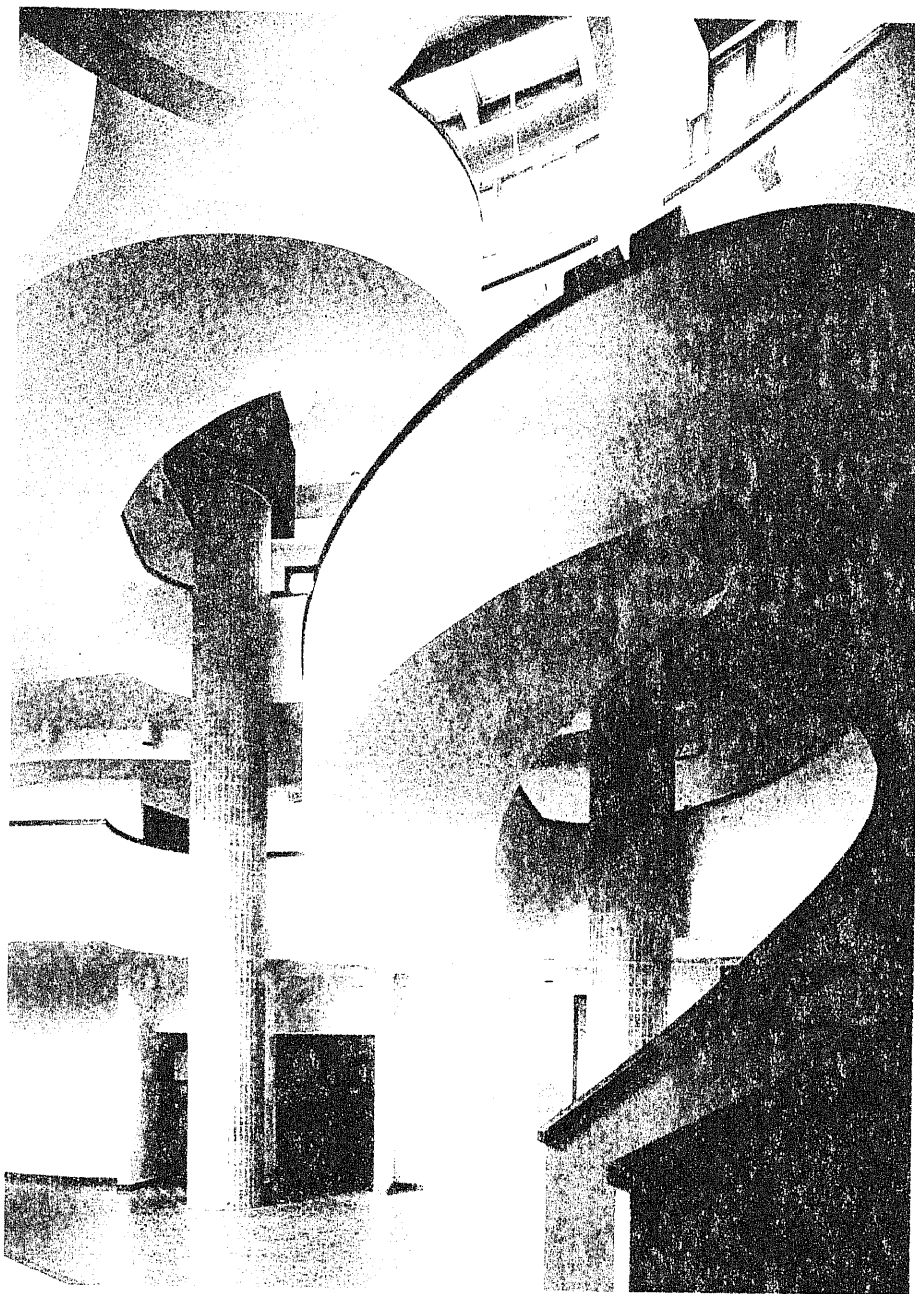


Figure 28.17 Colonel Fabien Secondary School, Montreuil, 1990-1993: photo of entry hall

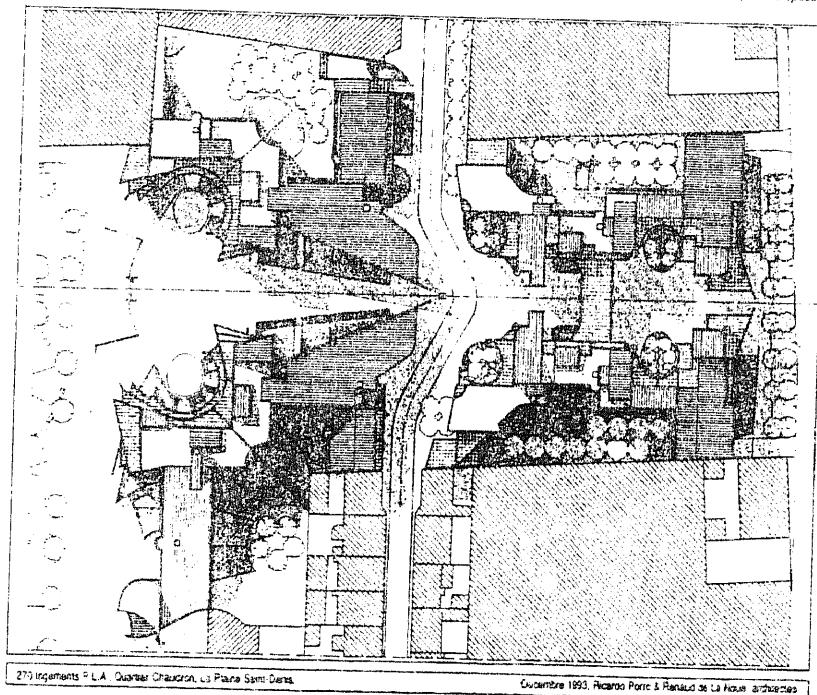
### City and Tradition

The project was made for an industrial zone to the north of Paris. There is a school, a performance hall and a social activity center already constructed which need to be integrated in the new structure. As in the 1966 project for Villetaneuse, we wanted to reinterpret the spirit of the streets and the grand spaces of Paris, reflection of the French tradition, in the urbanism and the architecture. In this neighborhood for pedestrians, after passing a plaza with offices and housing, one passes to a street of apartment buildings that leads to the square plaza of the performance hall. From there the axis breaks which crosses an oval plaza surrounded by dwellings and passes in between craftsmen's workshops, that we have placed in a shape which creates the illusion of a longer perspective, to get lost in the infinite. It is the beginning of the axis that in Paris unites the Louvre with the Arch of Triumph as found in so many other urban spaces in France.

CHAUDRON QUARTER, LA PLAINE-SAINT-DENIS  
(SEINE-SAINT-DENIS)  
RICARDO PORRO AND RENAUD DE LA NOUE,  
COMPETITION WITH PASCAL MARCHANT, 1990.



270 logements P.L.A., Quartier Chaudron, La Plaine Saint-Denis, Vue Perspective depuis le parc



270 logements P.L.A., Quartier Chaudron, La Plaine Saint-Denis.

Octobre 1993, Ricardo Porric & Renaud de La Houle architectes

Aménagement du quartier Chaudron à la Plaine Saint Denis.  
 Maître d'ouvrage: Le Logement Dyonisien.  
 Concours: Aout 1990, Projet Lauréat.  
 Aménagement Urbain, 300 logements, 15 000 m<sup>2</sup> de bureaux et activités.

Figure 29.1 Chaudron Quarter, Le Plaine-Saint-Denis, Competition, 1990: perspective view from the park (top) and site plan (bottom)



### **The Illusion of Reality**

In all of our projects, we try to give everyone who lives in our spaces the possibility of feeling like an actor in a great play. Our architecture is spectacle, theater such as Calderon's "The Great Theater of the World". We want to take the spectator to the world of the marvellous. This project expresses the duality between the real and the unreal with a game of trompe-l'oeil both inside and outside the building. From the same point, one can see various trompe l'oeil, with different vanishing points, which creates a simultaneity of different spaces, like in the Cubist paintings of Cezanne, Braque or Picasso. In the interior, it is also the metaphysical image similar to the cities of Giotto or De Chirico.

PERFORMANCE HALL, DRANCY (SEINE-SAINT-DENIS),  
RICARDO PORRO AND REANUD DE LA NOUE,  
COMPETITION WITH JEAN-MARIE CHOQUELLE, 1990.

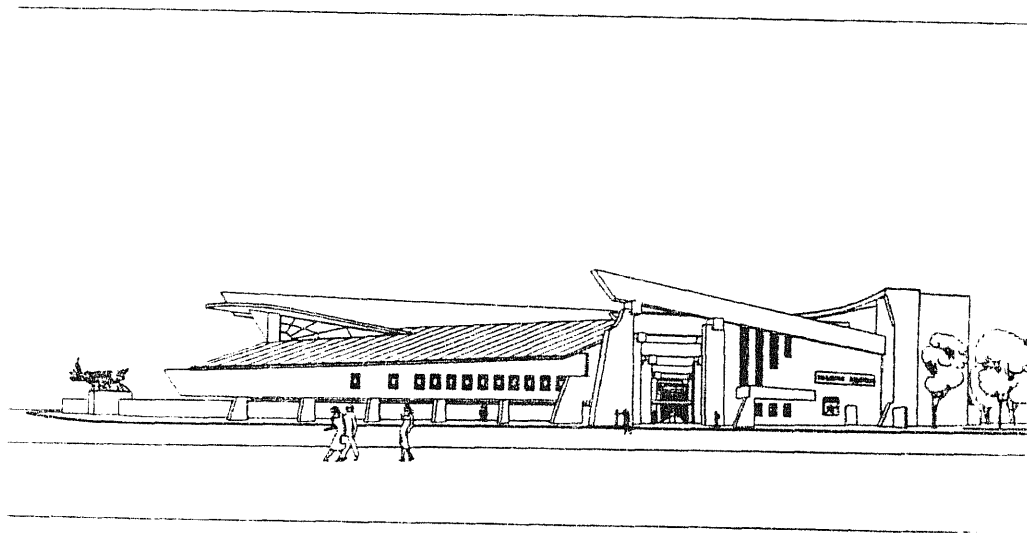


Figure 30.1 Performance Hall, Drancy, Competition, 1990: perspective

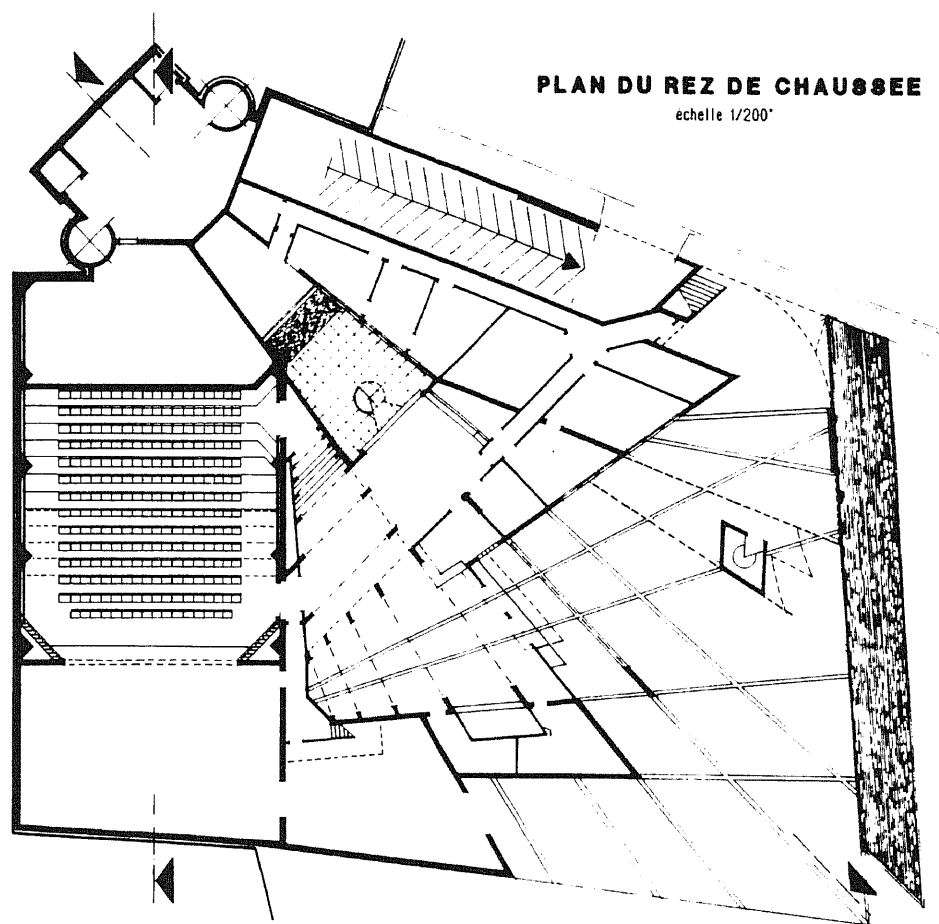


Figure 31.1 Theater/Office Building, Gentilly, Competition, 1990: ground floor plan

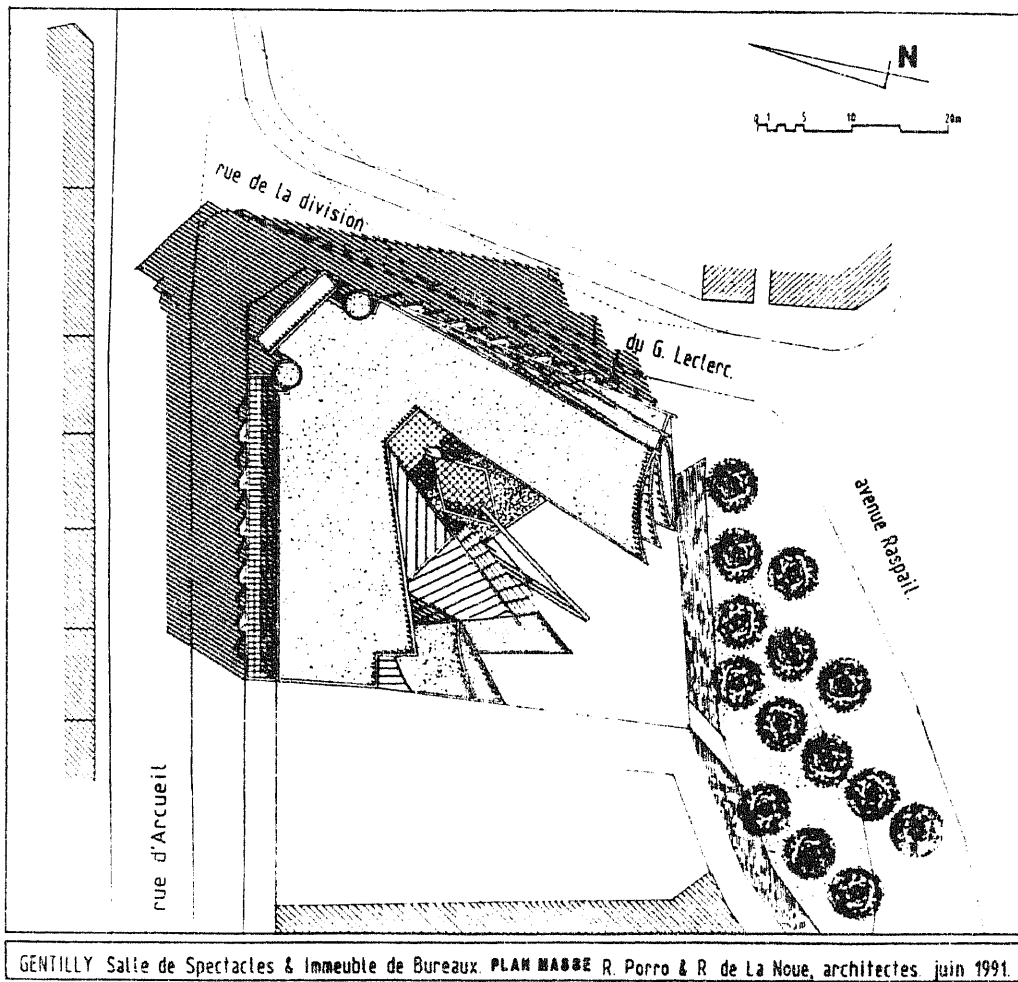


Figure 31.2 Theater/Office Building, Gentilly, Competition, 1991: site plan

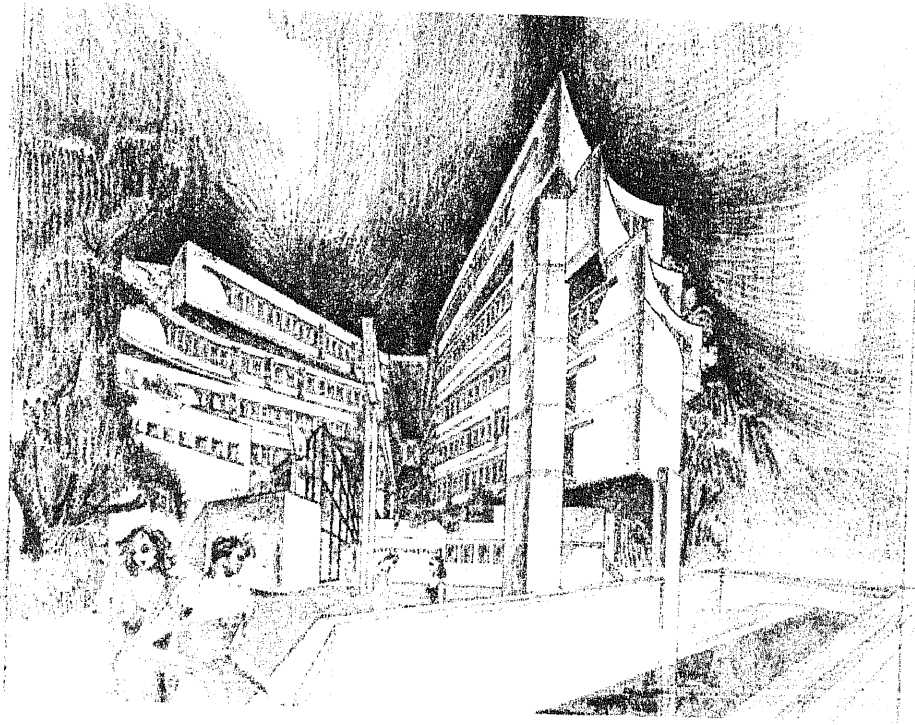


Figure 31.3 Theater/Office Building, Gentilly, Competition, 1991: perspective of entrance to offices

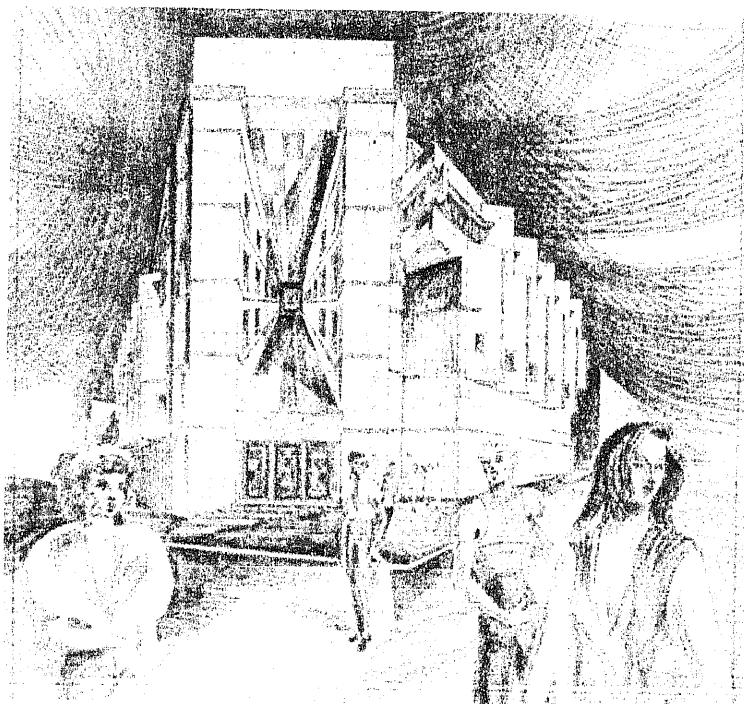


Figure 31.4 Theater/Office Building, Gentilly, Competition, 1991: perspective of entrance to theater

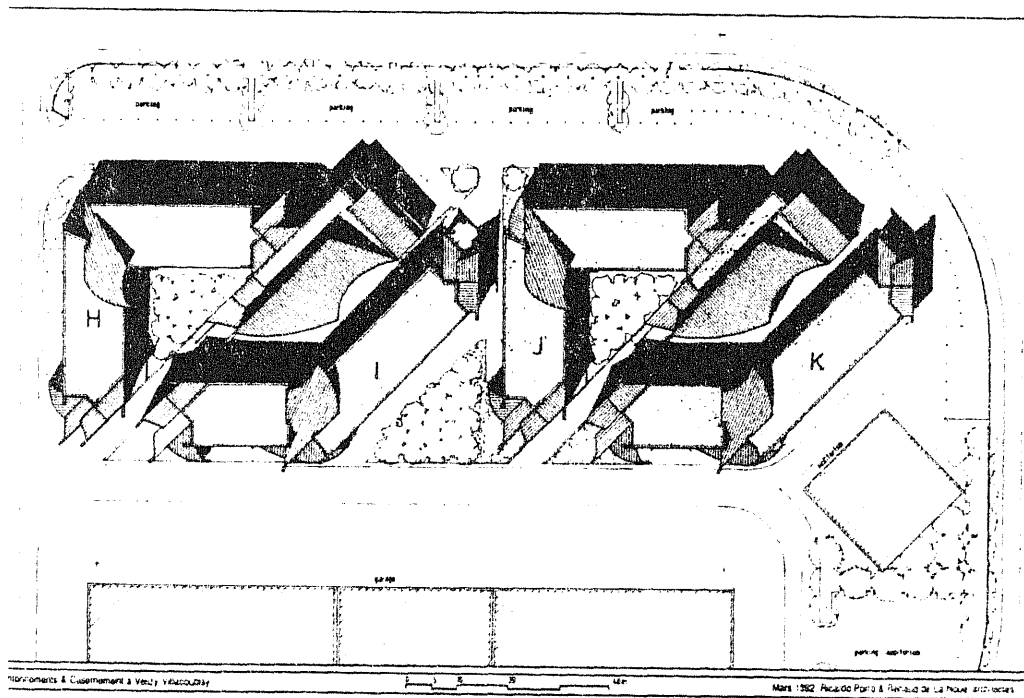


Figure 32.1 Barracking of the Republican Security Force, Velizy, Paris, 1991: site plan

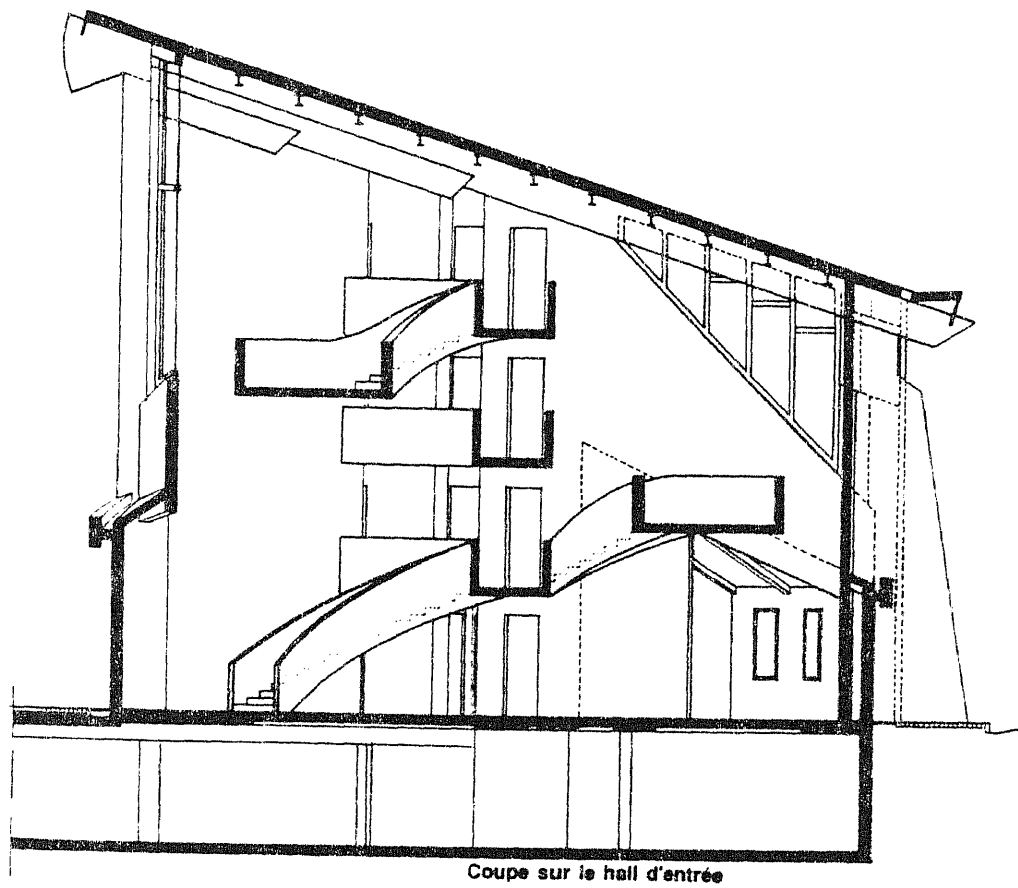


Figure 32.2 Barracking of the Republican Security Force, Velizy, Paris, 1991: section through entry hall



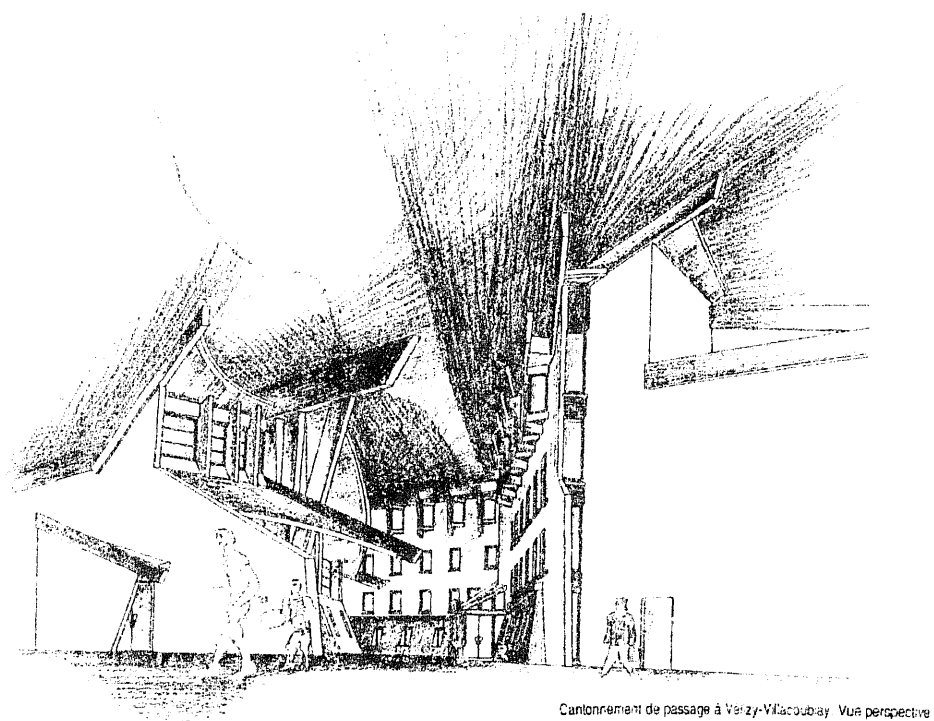
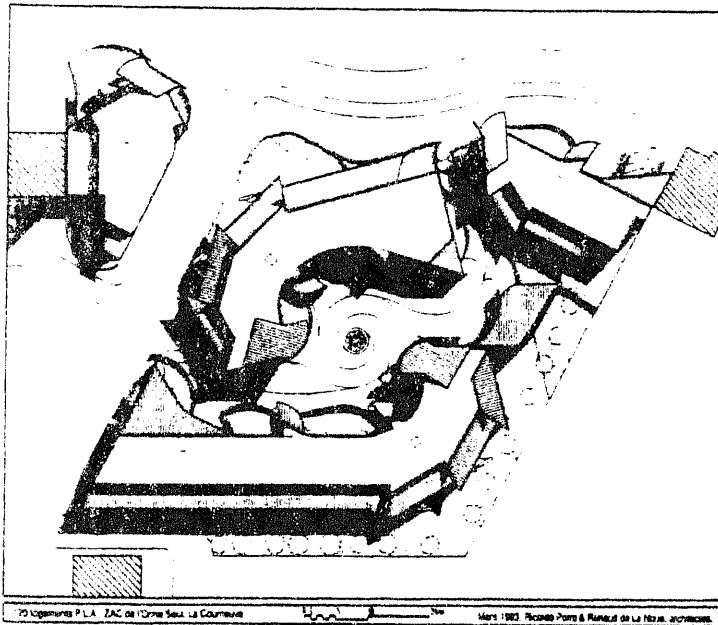
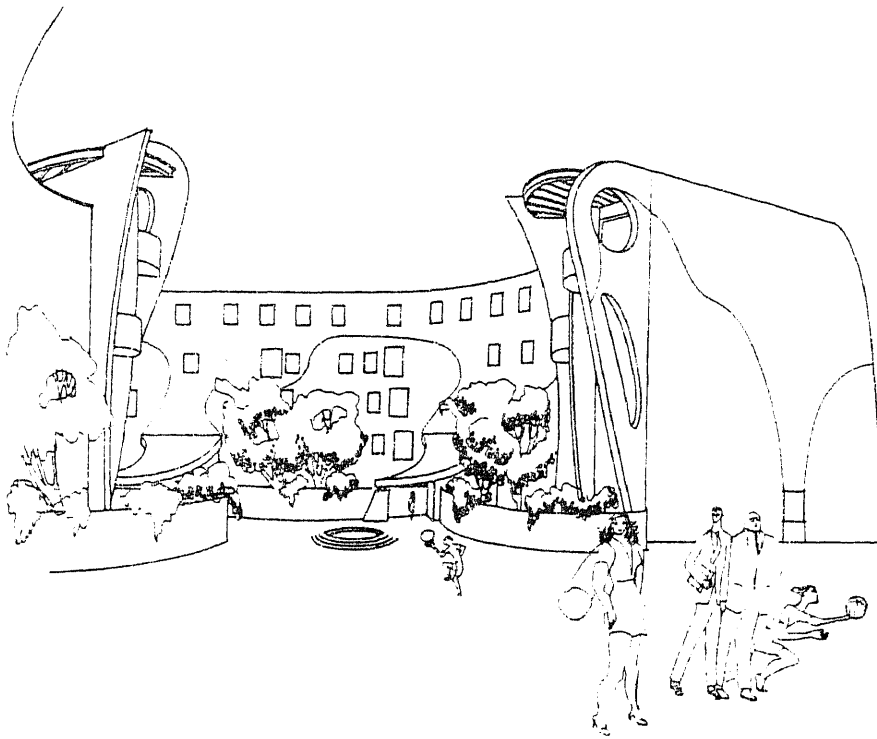


Figure 32.3 Barracking of the Republican Security Force, Velizy, Paris, 1991:  
perspective



120 Logements à La Courneuve  
Sodedat 93

Figure 33.1 120 Housing Units in La Courneuve, 1993: perspective of inner court (above); site plan (below)

nom **PORRO**  
 prénoms **RICARDO**  
 né le **3 NOV 1925**  
 lieu **N'im porte ou**  
 profession **Architecte, sculpteur**  
 domicile **67 Rue Vergniaud**  
**Paris XII**



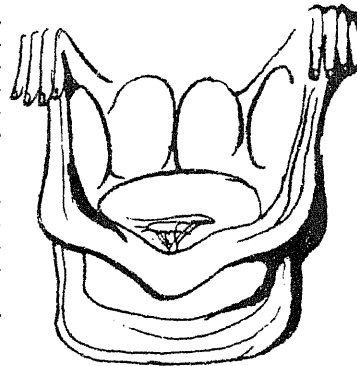
réalisations principales

**ECOLÉS D'ART DE LA HAVANE**  
**CENTRUM FÜR KUNST Liechtenstein**  
**Village pour la Yougoslavie**  
**Maison de jeunes pour Vézuz**  
**Exposition au Musée d'Art**  
**Moderne à Paris 1969**  
**CONTEMPORANES - Rome 1973**

message libre

**HOMO QUODAMONDO OMNIA**

Maison des Arts et de la Culture de Créteil  
 exposition "siècle-poème" 21/01 - 01/03 1975



date de création

1973

signature



nom de l'œuvre  
**La Mamma.**

Figure 34.1 Chair: 'La Mamma', 1973: drawing

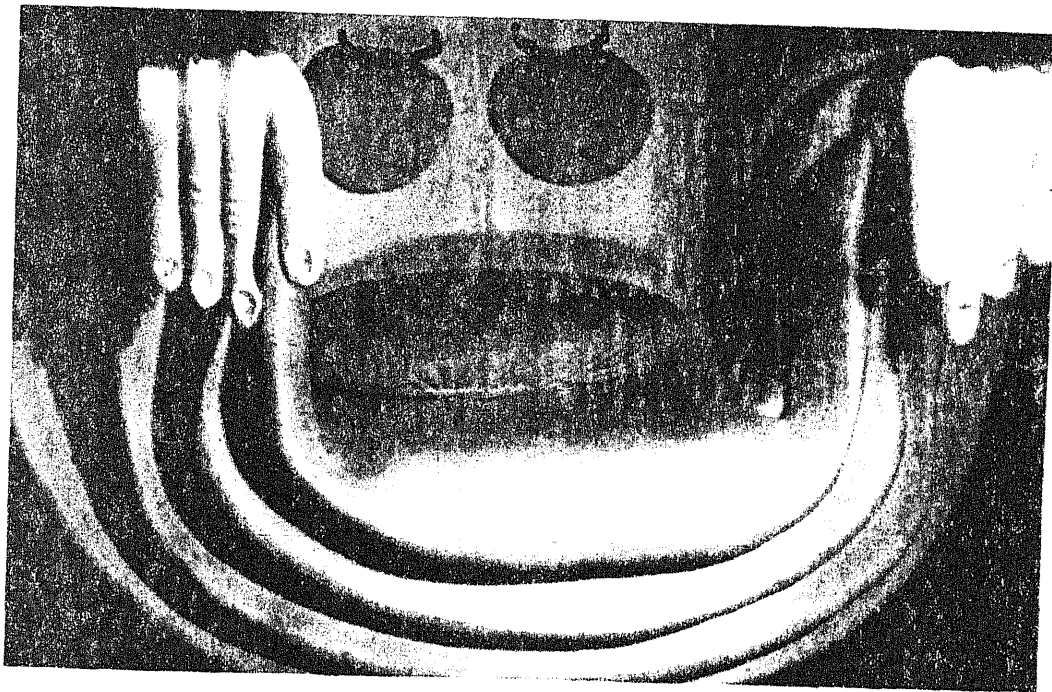


Figure 34.2 Chair: 'La Mamma', 1973: photo

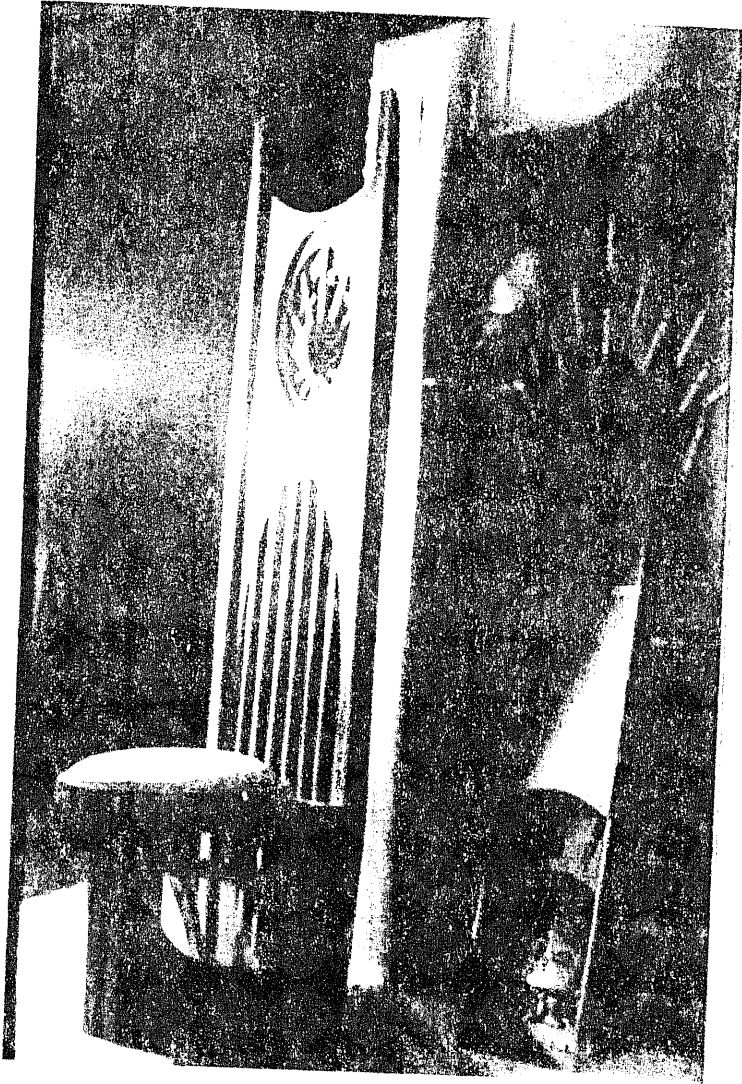


Figure 35.1 Dining Room Chair (in the background: backside of 'Headless Mass')



Figure 36.1 Painting: 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell'

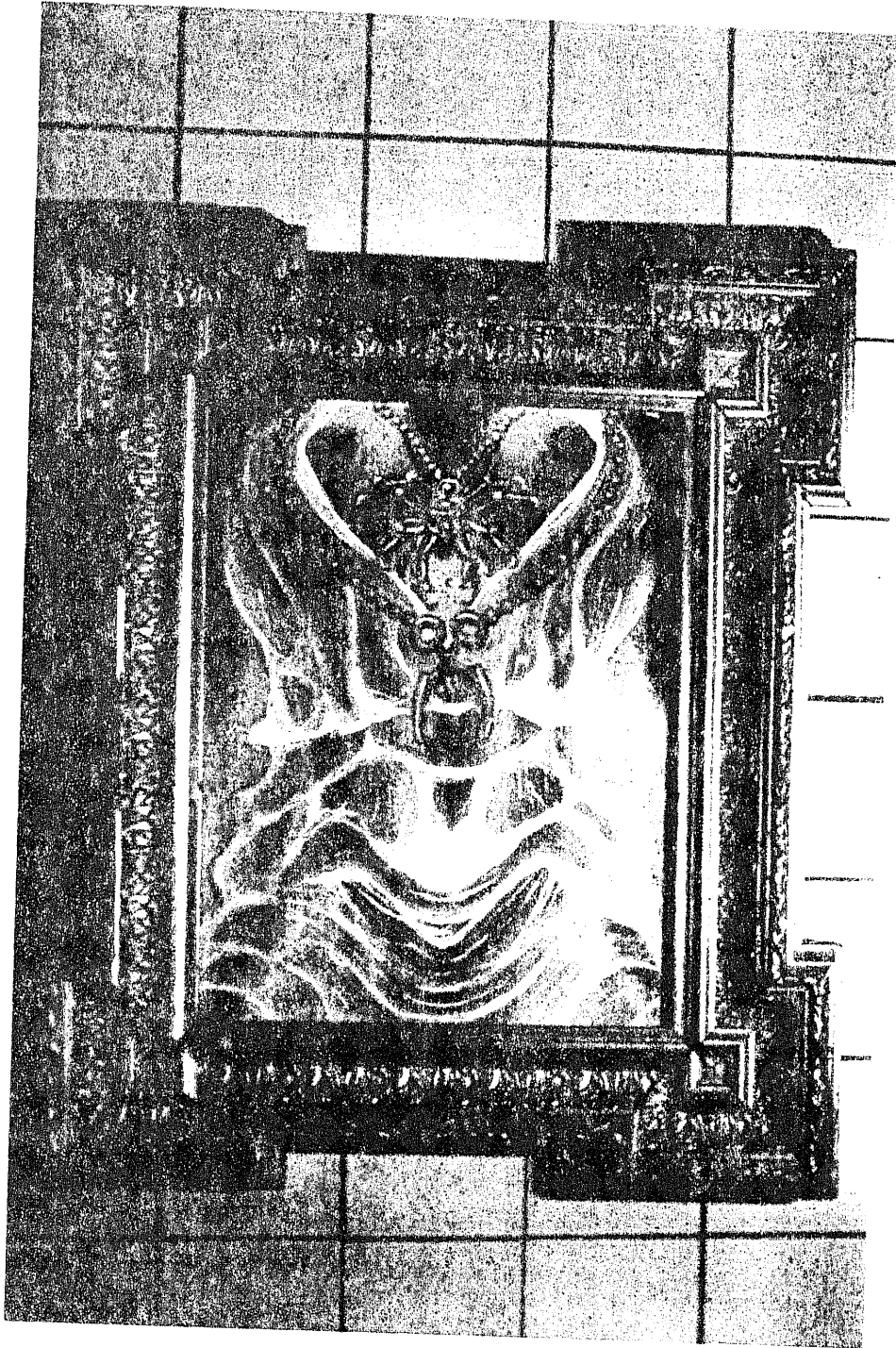


Figure 37.1 Painting: Female torso with scissors and spider

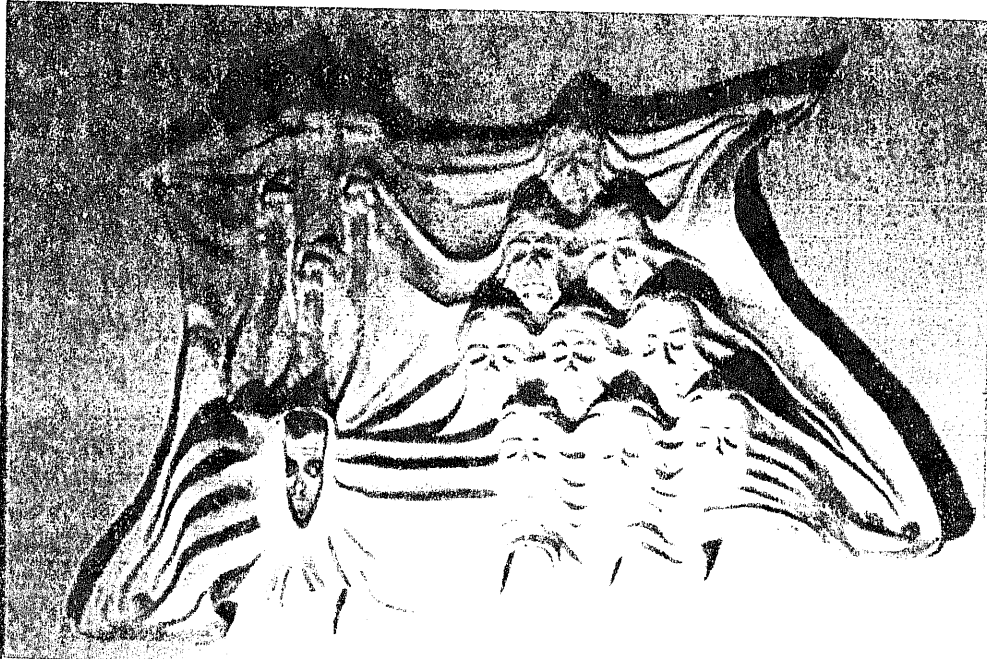


Figure 38.1 Sculpture: Tetractys of Veiled Mass (Alienation)



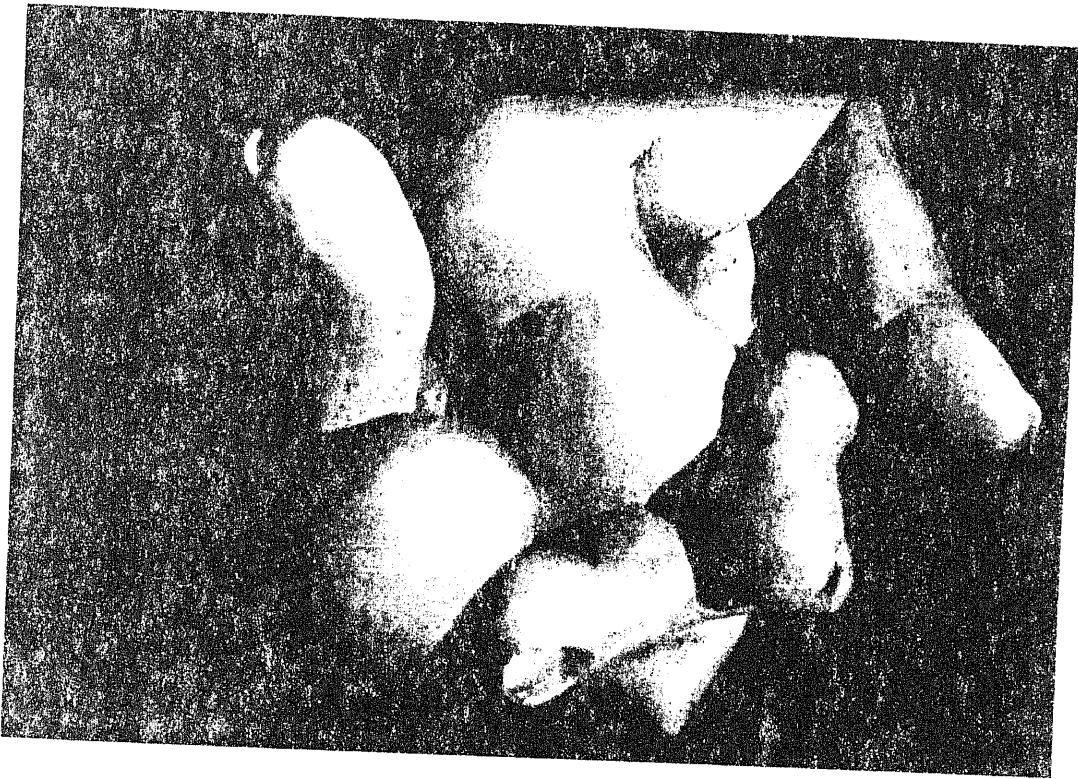


Figure 39.1 Sculpture: Hand

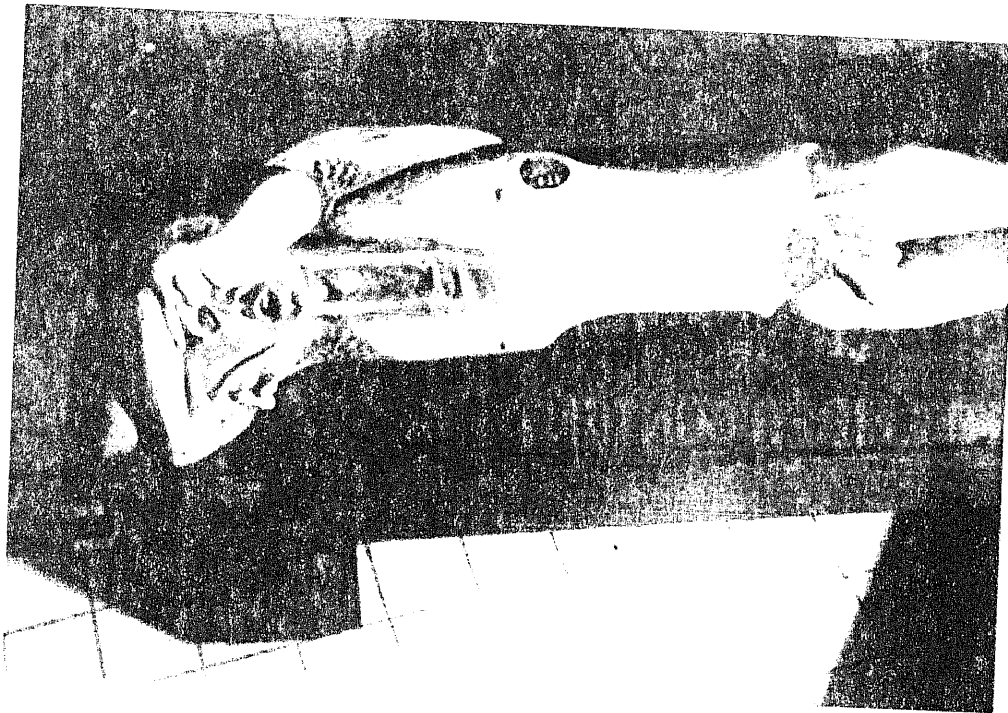


Figure 40.1 'Adam Giving Birth to Eve'

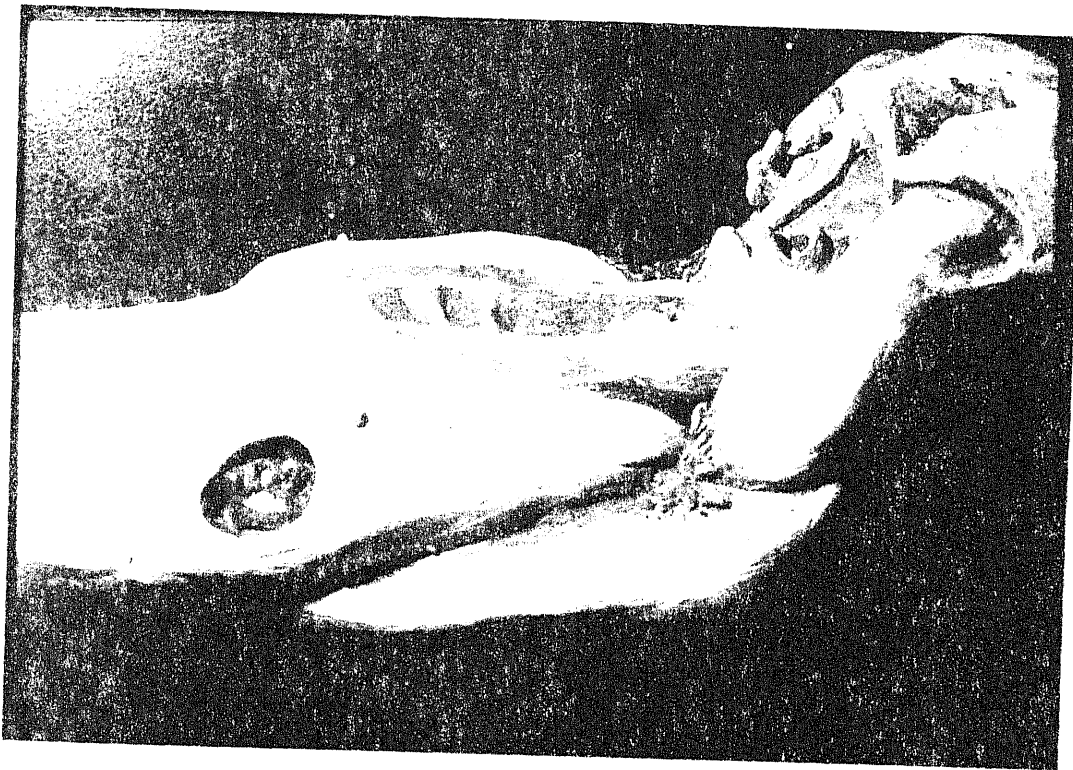


Figure 40.2 Sculpture: 'Adam Giving Birth to Eve' (close-up view)

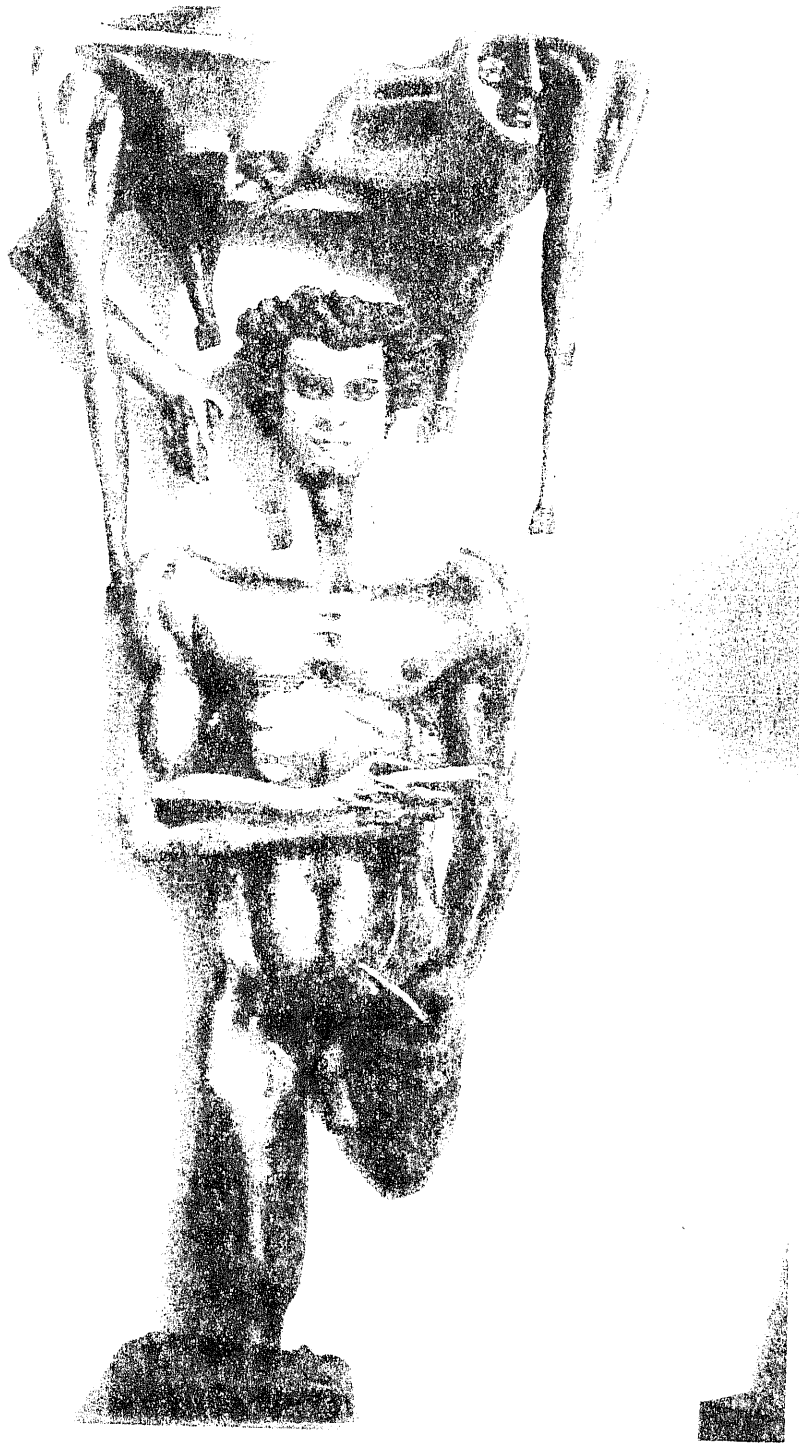


Figure 41.1 Sculpture: St. John the Baptist with the Beast of the Apocalypse

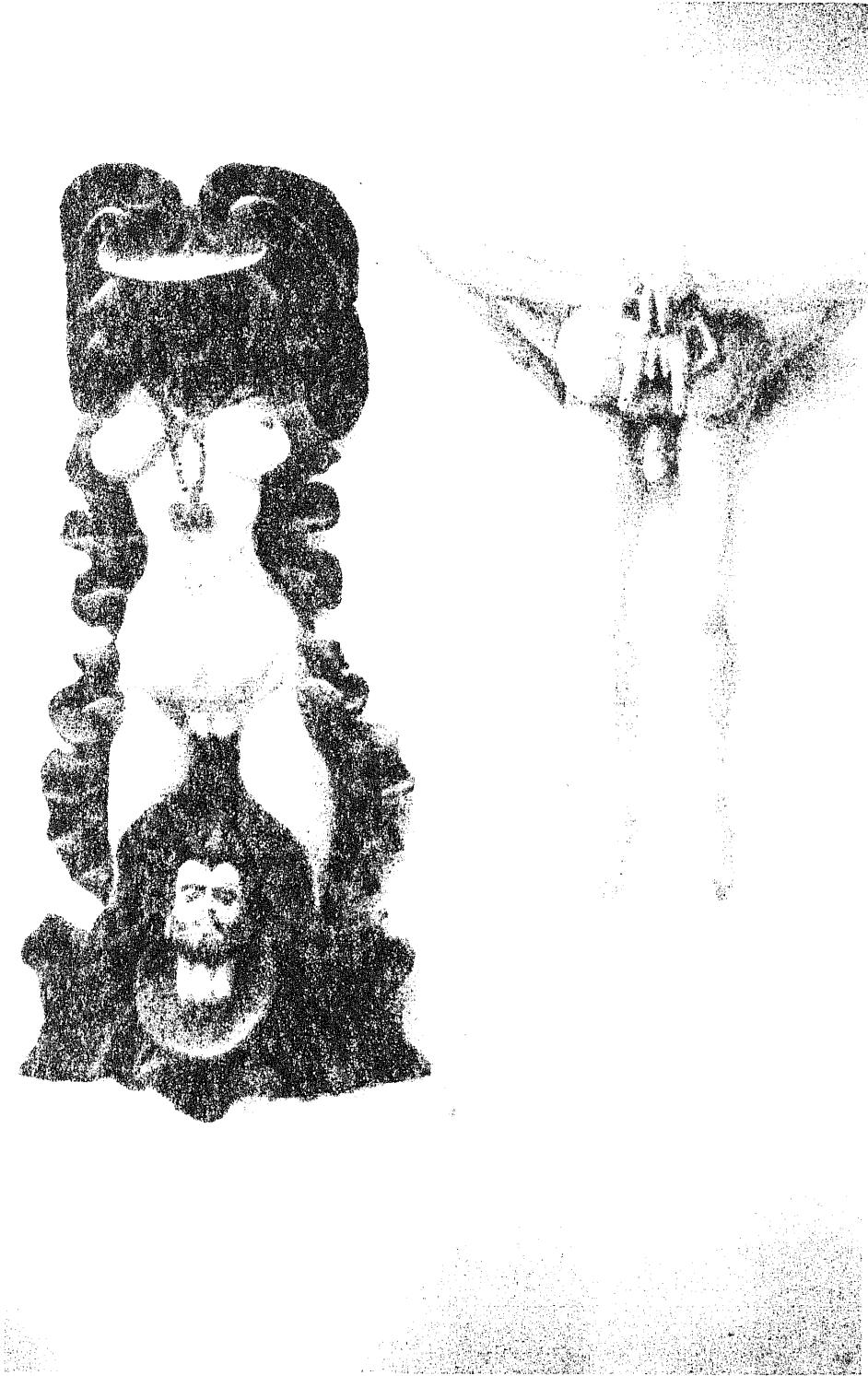


Figure 42.1 Sculptures: The Head of St. John the Baptist Beneath the Torso of Salome (left); Crucifixion (right)



Figure 43.1 Sculpture: Diabolic Trinity I



Figure 44.1 Sculpture: Diabolic Trinity II

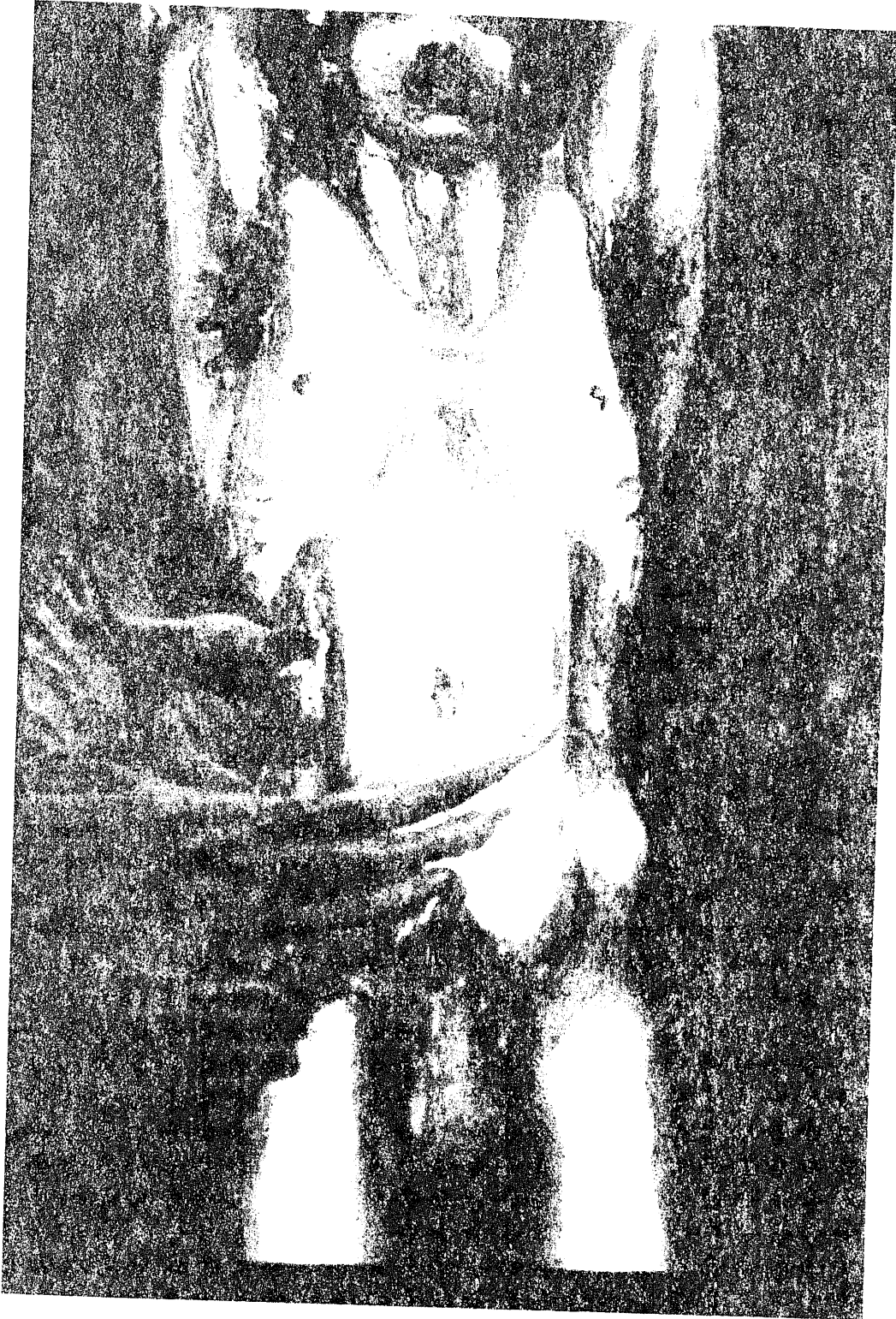


Figure 45.1 Sculpture: Diabolic Trinity III, detail



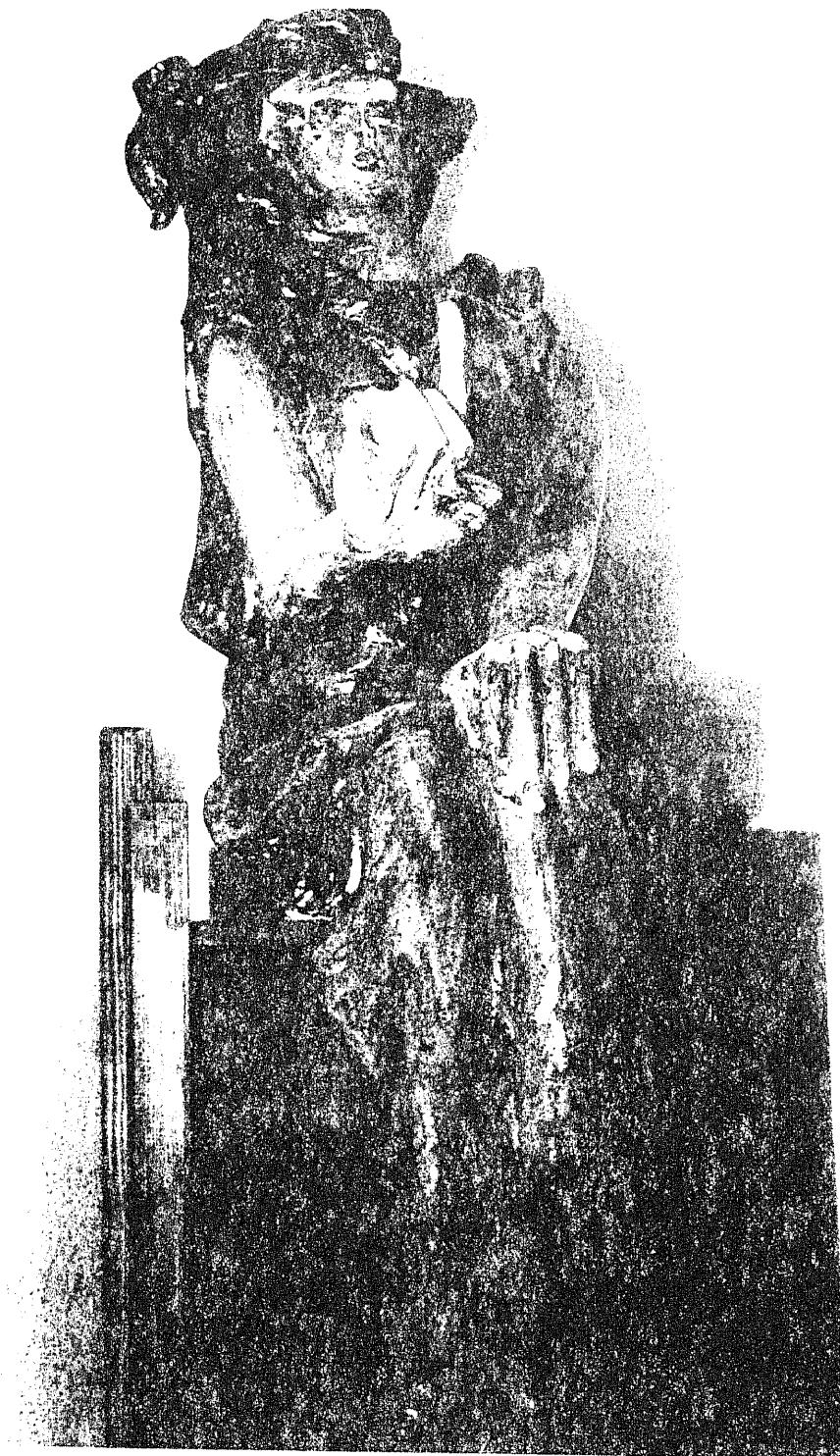


Figure 46.1 Sculpture: Diotima



Figure 46.2 Sculpture: Diotima (close-up view)



Figure 46.3 Sculpture: Diotima (close-up view)

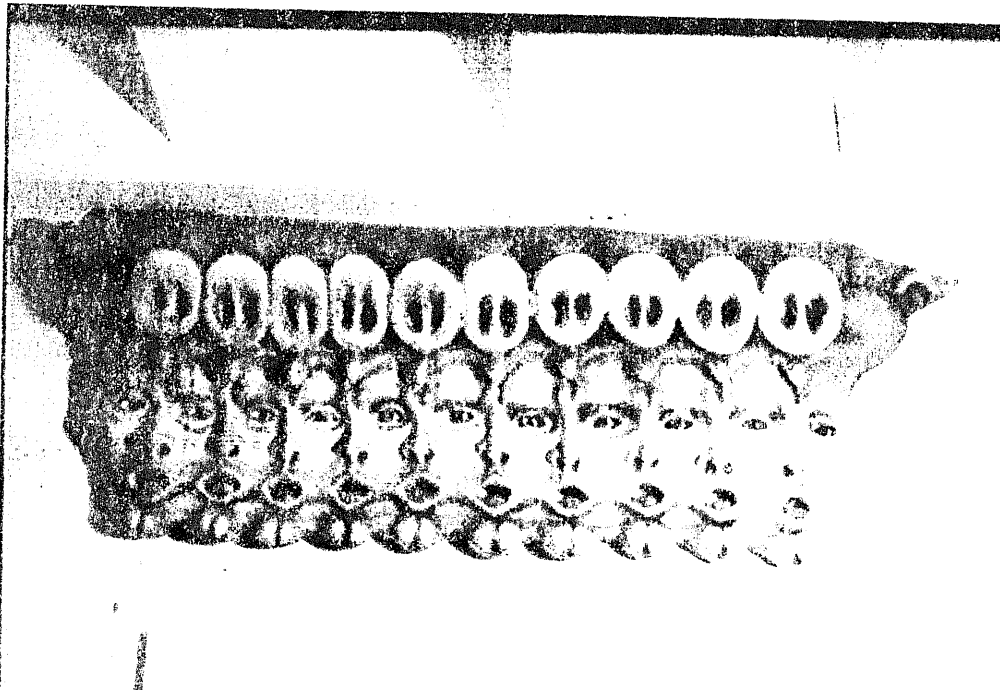


Figure 47.1 Sculpture: Overlapping Repetitive Faces with Pig Snouts

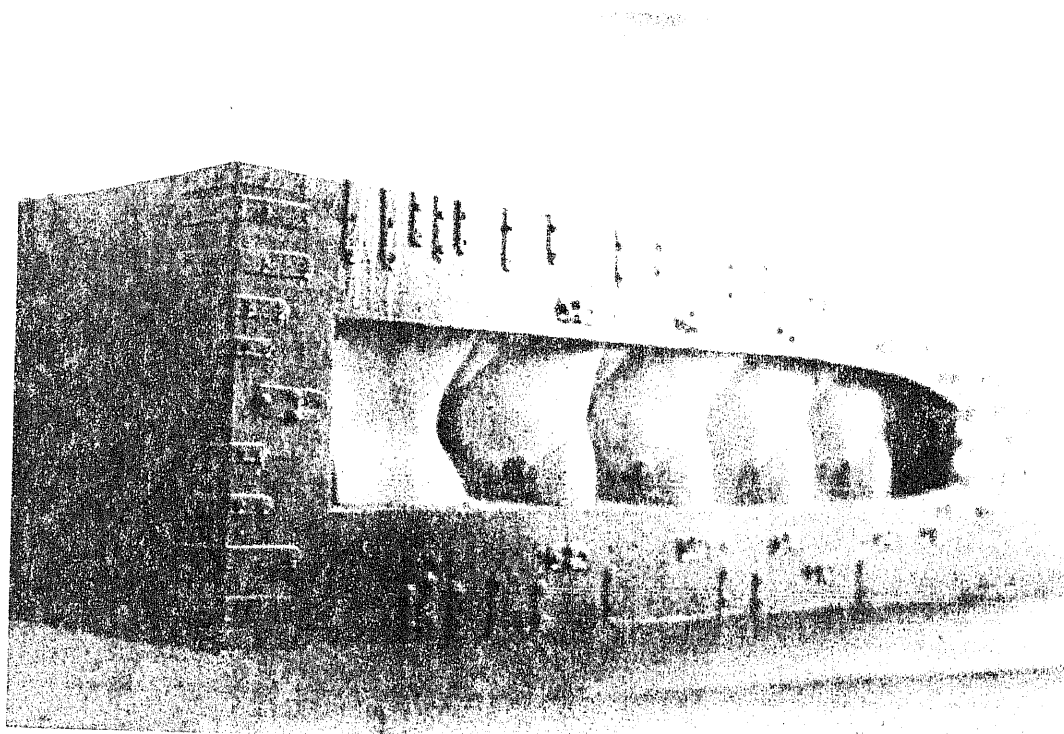


Figure 48.1 Sculpture: Repetitive Mass of Pubes



Figure 49.1 Sculptures: Headless Mass (background); Head fecundated by Scorpion (foreground)

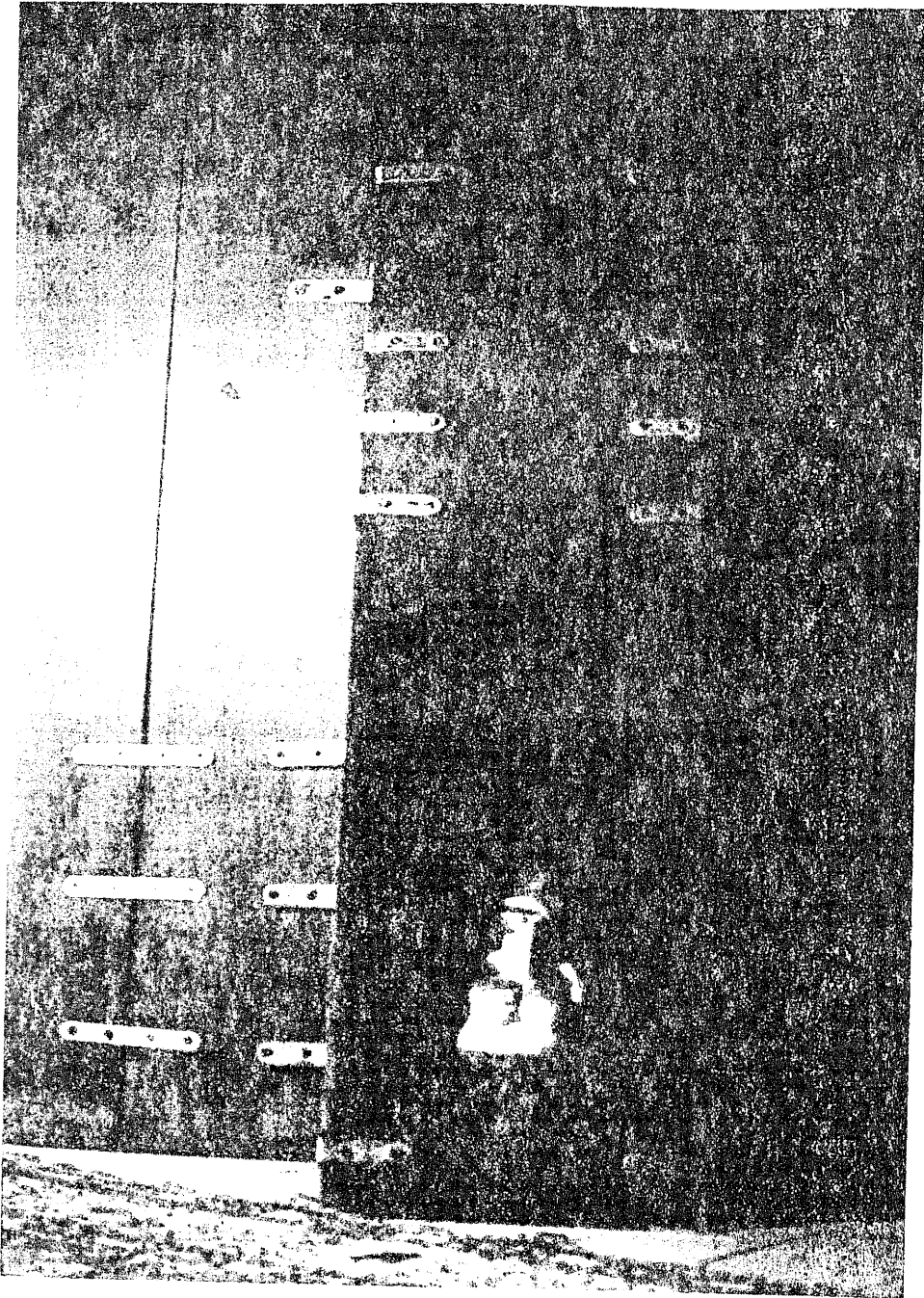


Figure 49.1 Sculpture :: Headless Mass (rear view showing head emerging upside down through hatch at bottom)

## APPENDIX B

### RICARDO PORRO: THE FIVE ASPECTS OF CONTENT

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## INTRODUCTION

Our life unfolds amidst constructed space, since we spend almost twenty-four hours out of twenty-four hours in a building or a town.

The greatest part of our existence is a daily confrontation with architecture. In fact, pure nature most often comes into our lives during brief vacation periods. We are unaware of everything about architecture when we use this term. Common sense sees nothing beyond its utilitarian aspect. Alas, a building is "a machine for living"... No doubt, a building is constructed to be used, to facilitate life; but yet, it is something more. The Parthenon was certainly not conceived as abstract space, like a painting of Mondrian in three dimensions. It had one function: it was a temple dedicated to Athena.

Construction for the sake of construction is a rarely exploited concept. I know of few examples of buildings constructed for conceptual gratuitousness. There are some examples, such as the German pavilion that Mies van der Rohe presented at the Barcelona exposition in 1929. In this case, the architect decided on purely abstract spaces in order to present an architectural object of the industrial period, as perceived in Germany. No actual project or photographs were shown; only orthogonal plans that illustrate a brilliant play on space. This example remains a single exception.

The first characteristic of a building is that it must be useful for something. This is indisputable; and the least one asks of an architect is to conceive a building that is adequate for its usage, so that it can be inhabited easily. This principle is the basis of all construction. But architecture is more ambitious than this first functional stage; it goes farther than that. Not only is the uninformed public unaware of it, but unfortunately also those who claim to be cultured.

Whatever the geographic origin of intellectuals who get together, one will quickly learn by their conversations that they have read Proust, Joyce or Kafka and are capable of commenting on their works in a relatively intelligent fashion. The same is true for

painting; they will discuss the abstract or the figurative, new expressionism or any current trend. They know what is current in this area. The same is true for cinema and music. But when current architectural problems come up, they will exchange meaningless misconceptions, and the conversation will reveal their ignorance of what architecture really is.

Definitely more serious is the fact that this phenomenon is also often observed among architects themselves. They cannot be accused of not knowing the current trends which the specialized journals publish. They have read them, and, without getting down to the core, will know how to point out the formal details, nothing more. It is only because of this fashionable architectural language that Le Corbusier was copied in his time. The same happened with Louis Kahn: to some degree, buildings inspired by his style were constructed everywhere. That was the case for Archigram, Mies van der Rohe or, worse yet, what came from the Bauhaus. Today, we are witnessing a rebirth of the rationalism of the 30s, or imitations of Archigram or a return of Neo-classicism. All that shows the creative impotence of contemporary architects.

There is a considerable distance between the architect-administrator, the architect-businessman, and what I call the true architect; they are two different worlds.

It is true that the playing field of our trade is quite varied. A man equipped with a degree in architecture can work on city planning, make decisions on their growth, know how to lay out industrial areas, residential areas and highways. His work will be shared with experts on the economy, the EDF, sewers, roadways, etc. The list is without limits. In this field, he is a technician like any other, which has nothing to do with artistic pursuits.

After this general planning stage, he could also be led to the idea of urbanization, conceptualizing a residential district. To do so, extensive technical knowledge is necessary, without which such work would be undeniably inconceivable. But since the

architect creates with volume, he goes beyond the two-dimensionality of the layout plan and really

acts as an artist. He begins to compose urban spaces. By creating these spaces with his forms he yields to the significant form, and, at this point, fully enters what I call architecture.

Evidently, all the objects which enter the area of architecture are of the architect's domain. Most of the great architects that I know of have done furniture; there is sometimes more architectural creation in a table, an armchair or place settings than in a building. For example, the extraordinary furniture of Van de Velde: Here, the creator often goes farther in the making of furniture than in his architectural conceptions. The creative field of the architect goes from the more general to the particular, from city planning to cutlery. But in the framework of this book, my thoughts are solely limited to architecture.

Architecture begins where the aesthetic element becomes evident. Construction, when it is a work of art, becomes architecture. In the introduction of An Outline of European Architecture, Pevsner begins as follows: "A bicycle shed is a building; Lincoln Cathedral is a piece of architecture. Nearly everything that encloses space on a scale sufficient for a human being to move in is a building; the term architecture applies only to buildings designed with a view to aesthetic appeal."

I would even say that a bicycle shed, if conceived as a work of art, is also architecture; indeed of a very good variety! Architecture is therefore a work of art or it is not architecture. I do not mean to say that it will always be of high quality: there are masterpieces and there are minor works. It is precisely this participation in the notion of art which makes a construction a work of architecture.

So, we come upon a difficult question of human thought: what is a work of art?

Numerous are the philosophers who have treated this problem and numerous the answers that are available to us.

In effect, aesthetics is a branch of philosophy and one of its fundamental activities

is to define art. All the great thinkers have done it. In the light of some among them, I will present my own concept of a work of art, since my thoughts on architecture are rooted in this legacy.

The first notion that should be addressed is that of the harmony of the world of the man who conceives the work of art. The creator, the artist, acts as a Pantocrator: he is a god, for he establishes an essential order among the elements of his work, as does God with the universe, or with the creation of man, who is a microcosm. Materialization into Beauty becomes possible when the harmony of all the parts combine with the perfect relationship of all the parts to the whole, and of the whole to the parts, "that is decidedly necessary to consider the existence of the arts, of all the arts, as similarly concomitant with the commensurability of the very large and the very small, not only one with respect to the other, but with regard to the generation of just measure. That if this commensurability does indeed exist, the arts also exist, and if the arts exists, said commensurability exists."

Indeed, for Plato, Art is measure: "The art of measure is universal and relates to all things." For him, the search for the just medium is essential. Excess is horror. He adds that art is a "techne".

Aristotle combines the two elements: there are a measure and means suitable for the "techne". In book XIII of his Metaphysics, he cites the three canons of beauty that are essential to the foundations of art: "The principal forms of beauty are order, symmetry and the definite, and this, above all is how mathematical sciences appear."

Another element according to Aristotle that is connected to the idea of creation is sound reasoning: "Art is a state that concerns a creation that includes reasoning. The lack of art, on the contrary, is a state that concerns a creation which includes a false

reasoning." Without a doubt, in all works of art, there is emotion and reasoning. this way of apprehending the Beautiful is widespread in Greek thought.

A neo-Platonist like Plotinus analyzes in his Enneid the same aspects as fundamental principles: "Visible beauty is a symmetry of parts some with regards to others and with regards to the whole; to this symmetry are added beautiful hues; beauty in beings as in all the rest, is their symmetry and their measure: for whoever thinks in this way, the beautiful being will not be a simple being, but only and necessarily a compound being; moreover, this whole being will be beautiful, and each of its parts will not be beautiful in themselves, but will combine, so that the whole being will be beautiful. However, if the whole is beautiful, indeed its parts must also be beautiful; certainly a beautiful thing is not made of ugly parts, and all that it contains is beautiful. Beauty is therefore found in this being, when it is brought back to unity and surrenders to all its parts and to the whole. But when it is found in an individual and homogeneous being, it gives the same beauty to the whole."

This same idea is still defended in the Renaissance by the great architect Alberti: "Beauty is a kind of harmony and accord among all the part to form a whole that is built according to a fixed number, and in a certain relation and order, like symmetry, the highest and most perfect law of nature."

All the aspects that we have mentioned--the right proportion, measure, the harmonious relationship between the parts and the whole, precision--are fundamental for the work of art to yield to Beauty. But there is yet another notion which we have not yet discussed and which is essential particularly in architecture: space. I will define space as the relationship between positions and qualities of the body. It is precisely in his space that the different aspects attain place and value. It is in the three dimensional environment that objects are arranged.

Naturally, the definition of space implies the void and the solid. It is not the void, but the relationship of object to object, volume to volume, plane to plane, line to

line, or any combination whatsoever that makes space and, in it, the precision of measure. This relationship varies from one art to another.

In painting, it is the relationship in the plane of the canvas of the different elements to each other and their relationship with the boundary of the frame.

First, I will consider an abstract canvas because of the value of its flat surface; Miro, for example, for example, for the clarity of the demonstration more than for my personal tastes. We see a series of lines and planes of color very precisely arranged, each element with each color. There is a well established relationship among all the elements. If one were to even slightly modify one of their positions, the concept of space on the canvas would be different. The ordering of the elements obeys Miro's concept of the soundness of composition. In this example only the plane surface is exploited; no depth is sought. He excludes all idea of perspective, whatever its form.

"*Item perspectiva* is a Latin term which means crossing vision", Durer reminds us. For him, the painting is constructed starting with the section of the visual pyramid. With the notion of vanishing point, where the size of the objects is modified from the closest to the farthest, the painting becomes an open window to look through to see what is painted. But the notion of space is always tied to the relation of the elements among themselves and to the limits of the picture plane. This is then the idea of measure, of perfect mean, of exact proportion, where beauty plays an essential role.

In *The Baptism of Christ*, of Piero della Francesca, space is conceived starting with a series of volumes: the characters and the architecture. Although the representation of depth is important, it is the relation of the elements in the painting which shape the space, whether it be the illusion of the empty space inside of the relation of lines to colors.

With Michelangelo, in *The Last Judgment* of the Sistine Chapel, the perception of space becomes more complex. The volumes, the solids, the proximity of the flesh of the characters provoke a new vision: another relation between void space and solid space.

The notion of time may be linked to that of space, which gives a new form of representation. This is the case with the cubist paintings of Picasso, in which the painter no longer looks at the object from a single fixed point but shifts and looks from several angles of view. It is beginning with that experiment that the spatial problem is brought forth into the twentieth century. On the other hand, the total space of the plane surface is born of the relation between the position and quality of what is in the picture, as I said before.

In sculpture, space is a relationship among volumes and their position with relation to the spectator who can move around, turn around, when the sculpture is not a bas-relief.

The group *The Family* of Henry Moore, in the Museum of Modern Art of New York, has very stylized volumes. The man and the woman give the impression of forming a knot around the child. The relation of these very rounded volumes, without too many realistic details, creates empty spaces between them; according to the position of the spectator, this relationship changes into a series of forms that provoke a curious sensation of spatial continuity. But the voids exist as a relation of the solids.

The same spirit is observed in the sculptures of Rodin where the spectator's mobility is demanded and where the voids formed between the solids are essential. In sculpture, as in painting, it is from the precise relation of volumes among themselves that beauty is born.

In architecture, space accompanies life, defines the place of life. The architect creates a relationship among solids, among the materials that will surround man's activity. Every building has a utilitarian function; it is the *sine qua non* condition that provides the architect's frame of work. It is therefore an absolute necessity to organize life correctly: the least demand is that the building be functional.

Starting from there, all elements of architecture are organized. It is the relationship of the elements around human activity that form the space of the

architecture. The space is three-dimensional as in sculpture, but it is the space where one moves, where one lives. The space of sculpture is linked to observation and not to the rhythm of life. That is not to say that architects cannot equally take a sculptural approach, that is possible. Gaudi is in close touch with sculpture while doing feat architecture at the same time.

The beauty of a building is, in large measure, due to the precise location of each element. The concept of measure is as important as it is in the other arts. The entire Platonic definition comes into play here.

Beauty demands precision: the displacement of a few centimeters of a single element which composes the space suffices to break the spell and make the work fall into the banal. Precision is essential even in Bavarian rococo which aims to give the impression of an atmosphere of utter imprecision. It is impossible to achieve this imprecision without the rigorous placement of each element.

However important measure, precision, and proportion may be, they do not suffice to define the work of art. For them not to be crystallized like a treatise on mathematics, much more than measure is needed: the artist is needed. In Plato's Ion, Socrates says to the young actor: "Indeed, as I said just now, this is no art in you to speak well about Homer; no, some divine power is moving you, such as there is in that stone which Euripides called the "magnetic" but which most people call the stone of Heracles. This stone attracts iron rings, so that they can do the same as the stone does; they attract other rings so that sometimes there is a whole long string of these rings hanging together, and all depend for their power on that one stone. Or, equally in this way, so the Muse by herself, or what certain men call Divinity, not only inspires people herself but through these inspired ones others are inspired and dangle in a sting."

Plato speaks of the artist as possessed by a god at the moment of creation and this possession has never changed throughout the history of art.



"For the poet is an airy thing, a winged thing, a holy thing, and he is not capable of creating until he becomes inspired and loses his head and his own spirit is no longer in him! So long as he goes against this possession, no human being is capable of creating or of vaticinating. Not by art, then, do they make their poetry with all those fine things about all sorts of matters (like your speeches about Homer) not by art but by effect of a divine grace; therefore, the only poetry that each one can make is what the Muse has pushed him to make! One dithrambs, one hymns of praise, one songs for dance, one epic, one iambics, but in every other kind each one of them is a failure! For not by art do they speak those things, but by divine power, since if an art taught them how to speak well in one kind, they could do it also in all the other kinds. Therefore Divinity takes the mind out of the poets and employs these men to his service for vaticination and as divine seers; because he wishes us to know that not those we hear, who have no mind in them, are those who say such precious things, but Divinity itself is the speaker, and through them he shows his meaning to us."

The artist is for Plato like an enlightened one, like a visionary. He receives grace, inspiration from beyond. The work of art must produce the same magic effect as the exhortation of a mystic like St. John of the Cross, bewitching, incomprehensible to many but of an incredible magical charge. The artist can only produce when he is in a state of possession, of delirium and his work must transmit that state. I think that the act of creation is a mythical experience; the situation of the artist is like that of a Theresa of Avila in ecstasy.

If art need this infusion of passion that inspires, as Homer said of love, to achieve a work of art, there is a profound reasoning that is impossible to deny. The work of art is, without a doubt, a fruit of intelligence, even if it seems irrational on the outside like the imaginary. Nothing goes farther in the world of the unconscious than the work of Gaudi, whereas his manner of reasoning is perfect. We have already seen before the connection that Aristotle made between art and sound reasoning. When he deals with tragedy, he

introduces a complementary notion. His definition is as follows: "Tragedy is the imitation of a good action, which is complete and of a certain length, by means of language made pleasing for each part separately; it relies in its various elements not on narrative but on acting, and which, through pity and fear, brings about the catharsis of similar emotions."

Catharsis is precisely the word used by Freudians to designate the moment when the patient has an emotional outburst and expresses everything that he has buried within himself. Catharsis means purification or purgation.

If it is a purgation, it is the release of an overflow of effects. If it is purification, the work of art becomes an operation where the intellect is purified of impure emotions. It then has a moral character.

On one hand, there is excess, while on the other hand, there is asceticism. The first seems indispensable to me: every work of art must play with ecstasy, the possession of Dionysus.

In The World as Will and Representation, Schopenhauer defines beauty as a catharsis for the spirit, adding that the world is the elaboration of the human spirit. All is in man's own consciousness; and the will, a cosmic force, is where reality is found.

For Schopenhauer, the will is the thing in itself; it is neither the subject that perceives nor the thing perceived but what manifests them both. Beauty, in its cathartic sense, separates us for a time from a sense of desire and from the troublesome gratification of this desire which, for him, are linked to the condition of man. Art frees the human being from his anguish: "All these productions are surely the great advantage of being the pure work of the ecstasy of the moment, of the inspiration of the free impulse of genius, pure without intention." He was referring to the first sketches of a painter inspired before creating the painting, or to the melody, which is only the rough outline of a musical work, the first flight of inspiration in which the greatest intensity is already perceived.

Hermann Broch, who felt close to Schopenhauer, takes one of his statements: "Every act of knowledge is only the will of knowledge. All one attains is nostalgia." Based on this he developed his ideas on art: "Profound relationship between the phenomenon of art and the phenomenon of eroticism, profound relationship of each of them with sacral adoration, all three sacred." And immediately, he studies the problem of ecstasy as a form of manifestation of the will. The will which is a kind of energy in nature, the absolute, God: "The rhythm of the self accelerates, its movement becomes freer, more unified, purer. Ecstasy is a state of inebriation of the will that can, as such, be considered as a purer form under which the will manifests itself and as a repression of suffering. Ecstasy becomes sensual delight, beauty. The crystal that forms freely can be considered as the ecstasy of the stone, the accession to the purity of its essence. All of man's ecstasy can be interpreted in this way: the development of his self in its purity." The artist experiences beauty first and is capable of transmitting it later to the spectator.

Referring to art, Freud said that "the true enjoyment of the work comes when our soul is relieved of certain tensions."

Art must produce what Freud calls "preliminary pleasure", or "seduction premium". In his article "The Literary Creation and the Daydream" of 1908, he analyzes the problem of the artist, who subdues the egotistical nature of the daydream in making changes while obscuring it. The artist thus tries to seduce us through aesthetic pleasure. Does not the ecstasy mentioned come partly from the image of self that the artist develops in purity? "If he finally rises above himself, above his personality, above his will, above all will, in this case, it is the sentiment of the sublime that fills him; he is in a state of exaltation (*Erhebung*) and it is because of it that the object that causes this state is called sublime (*erhaben*)." (Schopenhauer)

In a dialogue in the style of Plato where Heidegger talks with a Japanese student, they speak of a Japanese aesthete, Count Kuki, who described the "iki". For me, this definition is also part of the concept of ecstasy. He said that the *iki* was "the sensible

radiance through whose irresistible rapture something suprasensible manages to show through."

Ecstasy is an irresistible rapture provoked by the work of art when a metaphysical concept manifests itself. In this book, it is understood that I am only interested in the beauty of great art and not in the sensation of prettiness, which cannot produce the sublime.

Schopenhauer defined prettiness as follows: "That which stimulates the will by directly offering to it what flatters it, what satisfies it." In other words, for me, what does not go to the extremes. On the other hand, the sublime becomes the object of pure contemplation. It rises above what might interest the will.

One often confuses the pretty with the beautiful and this confusion is largely fostered by the officials and politicians of the world, whatever the system. Most of the time and in most countries, the banality of the pretty is supported. Now, I insist, every work of art is of great beauty, or it is not a work of art.

What is beauty about? Two definitions seem good to me and apply to works of art of opposing minds. The first is Platonic: beauty is the splendor of truth or the splendor of divine goodness which is reflected in creation, one of the elements of the Neo-Platonic love circuit. This movement of God towards the world and of the world toward God, that Massilio Ficino explains in the game of the Three Graces, is identified by three names: because it begins with God and comes back to him, it is first Beauty (*Pulchritudo*); it captivates the world and is Love (*Caritas*) and, because it comes back to its source, it is Pleasure (*Voluptas*). And so, beauty is an emanation from God, a sort of light that passes through the angelic spirit, then through the *Anima Mundana*, into the cosmos through the soul, to nature, the material. It is the beauty that is closest to the archetype, the materialization that is closest to the idea; a form of beauty with the sonorities of the music of the spheres. It is linked to reason: the beauty of the just mean,

classic beauty. The paintings of Piero della Francesca, *Santa Maria della Consolazione* in Todi, illustrate this first definition.

The second one is entirely different from the preceding one. It is the splendor of the dark forces of the world. It concerns a sulphurous beauty, troubled, uncomfortable and awkward to look at. It has the sound of Pythia in a trance or of Saint Paul on the road to Damascus, or even of Faust who descends to hell kicking left and right. The creator of this type of work does not receive the light of Apollo, he is possessed by Dionysus. It is the beauty of the retable of Issenheim of Matthias Grunewald or of Gaudi's *Casa Battlo*, or even the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. It is the anticlassical beauty *par excellence*.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche brings forward two poles, the Apollonian and the Dionysian. These two tendencies sometimes walk in parallel, as is the constant since the 18th century. These two forms of beauty are possible in art. One cannot favor one more than the other: that depends on the period or on the sensibility of the artist, as history shows. In contrast with the first, the second gives the sensation of chaos, of overflow. But it is only true in appearance because, in fact, the Platonic principles of the first one apply just as much to the second: precision and accuracy are necessary in one case as well as the other.

Up to now, we have not discussed the meanings of the work of art. But art is also a language; the work of art communicates and sends messages. It is a trap into which fall certain artists and art critics who exalt the purest plastic qualities without taking into consideration the problems of communication of the work. Benedetto Croce said that what a poem makes us feel are two constant and necessary elements: a complex of images and the sentiment which enlivens them. Based on Virgil's *Aeneid*, Croce saw a series of images that cannot be told as a simple story or a serial. There are a series of characters, of things, of attitudes, of gestures, of joys or sadness: "Through these images passes a sentiment, which is ours like the poet's, a human sentiment of sad memory, of

shuddering horror, of melancholy from homesickness, of tenderness, of a kind of infantile pity that could suggest reviving things already dead, this toy formed by a religious devotion *la parva troia, la pergama simulata magnis, la arentem xanthi cognomine riuum*: something impossible to express in logical terms, that only poetry can explain...." "From this point poetry cannot be called neither sentiment, nor image, nor the sum of the two elements but "contemplation of the sentiment" or "lyrical intuition" or, that which is the same thing, "pure intuition", pure of all historical and critical reference, reference to the reality or unreality of the images of which it is composed and capturing the pure palpitation of life in its ideality." If The Aeneid is retold according to journalistic rules, there will be no poetic result. Magically, it is the sequence of images connected to "pure intuition" that create poetry. The poem's point of departure is in life.

What we just said about poetry applies in the same manner to painting, sculpture, music and architecture. In all these arts there operates the choice of elements magically linked together by this lyrical intuition.

As Croce says, the artist is not a philosopher, even if real ties unite art and philosophy. The philosopher transcends the image while the artist sees inside. St. Beuve, in her way, pinpoints this difference and this connection: "The sentiment of art implies a living and intimate feeling of things. While most men limit themselves to surfaces and appearances, while so-called philosophers recognize and discover a "je-ne-sais-quoi" beyond phenomena without being able to determine this "je-ne-sais-quois", the artist, as he is endowed with a separate sense, is calmly engaged in feeling under this apparent world the other all-interior world that most are unaware of and whose existence philosophers limit themselves to ascertaining; he witnesses the invisible game of forms and sympathizes with them as with souls; he has received at birth the key to symbols and intelligence of the figures; what seems to others to be incoherent and contradictory, is to him only a contrast in harmony, a distant harmony on the universal line. He himself soon

enters this great concert and, like the bronze vases of the theaters of old, he marries the echo of his voice and the music of the world."

Art creates a dialogue with that which surrounds it. It nourishes itself from the inner world of the artist and from the world in which he lives. For a philosopher like Dewey, art is the preeminent way of understanding the bond between man and his environment. For him, the philosopher must use the experience of the work of art to understand pure experience: "The first great consideration is that life goes into an environment, not precisely within, but because of the environment, through interaction with it...", "Experience, that is the result, the sign and reward of his interaction of the organism and the environment, in its entirety, is a transformation of interaction into participation and communication..." "Art is the living and concrete proof that man is capable of restoring, and therefore in the framework of meaning, the union of the senses, need, impulse and action characteristic of the human creature."

"The refusal of meanings in art is generally founded on the assumption that the kind of worth (and meaning) that a work of art has is unique and that it is not connected to the contents of other modes of experience except aesthetic."

Here we stumble upon a difficult and delicate problem of communication of the work of art: its meaning, its content. It is an essential dimension of all work. It is often ignored or denied because it is rarely evident. As with the sciences, art needs study and initiation. This is not for neophytes. I would like to use an example: the *Mona Lisa* of Leonardo Da Vinci. When we look at this painting, apart from its formal beauty, we could say to ourselves: "Here is a grandmother who had herself photographed in a Swiss landscape!" And yet, what a world of meaning is hidden behind this apparent banality.

Clearly, every work of art is a form-content unity. The content is inseparable from the form. But content is, above all determined by the problems that are raised by the great collective dramas, a moment of civilization. The artist draws from his historical instant the most outstanding events and makes a veritable transubstantiation in the work

of art. I might add that the authentic creator is the cultured man. All this demonstrates with evidence that the reading of a work of art demands training, apprenticeship; that implies that one studies the language of a work of art as one studies the mathematical theorems, with laws and methods. One does not access the work of art, its profound meaning, immediately.

Another reason is put forth by Heidegger in his essay entitled *On the Origin of the Work of Art* concerning the meanings of the work of art: "The work publicly communicates something else, it reveals something else to us, it is allegory, something else is brought together in a work of art. The work is symbol. The allegory and the symbol supply the framework in whose perspective the characterization of the work of art moves for a long time."

Without a doubt, one must be able to understand what it symbolizes; one must be able to enter into this complex world and read its meaning thanks to form. For Heidegger form means "the spatial distribution of particles of matter arranged in a determined shape. It is arrangement which, as form, goes farther in the conception of space. Order and meaning form an indissoluble whole."

But Heidegger works on the most fundamental aspect of the meaning of the work of art based on one of Van Gogh's canvasses: "It is the disclosure of what the product, a peasant's pair of shoes, is in truth. This entity appears in the blossoming of its being. The blossoming of the being... we say truth and think little enough in using this word. If there occurs in the work a disclosure of a being (concerning what and how it is), then there is here an occurrence, a happening of truth which is at work... The essence of art would therefore be to put to work the truth of the being... Truth is sometimes timeless and supratemporal. The work of art opens up in its own way the being of beings. The opening up, that is to say the deconcealing, that is to say the truth the truth of the being happens in the work. Art is truth setting itself to work. The work, as a work, sets up a world. The work keeps open, the opening of the world... the world is the opening that



opens the whole amplitude of simple and decisive options in the destiny of a historical people... What corresponds to the real is true; what is in truth is real... Beauty is a form of blossoming of the truth." Albrecht Durer is close to this point of view when he writes "for in truth, art is in nature, he who can wrest it from her, has it."

For illustration purposes, I will use, in the manner of Heidegger, the example of the Greek temple *par excellence*: the Parthenon.

This temple rises above of the city, at the top of a rock that comes up out of the landscape, the Acropolis. It is an important landmark in Athens. This prominent location sets the Parthenon at the highest point of the city, enclosed by strong ramparts, towards which all eyes are focused.

Its image is of a colonnade around an enclosed space, where the statue of the goddess Athena is found. She is the goddess of Reason who, in The Oresteia of Aeschylus, glorifies the just mean and abhors excess.

The temple is the just proportion, the perfect proportion. Not any excess. Let us take a look at a column and its doric capital and its weight-support relation: there is a force that comes from above and descends on the soft mass of the capital; there is a force that goes up the massive column, which is larger on the bottom, narrower at the top. The descending force and the ascending force by the shaft of the column balance themselves at the narrowest point. This equilibrium is an expression of the horror of excess. In the same way, the *Discobolus* of Myron brings back his disc and stop for just an instant, to throw it immediately afterward. It is this point between the two contrary movements that give the extraordinary sense of balance to the sculpture. In the Parthenon, the balance is resolved at the point of convergence of the contradictory rising and descending forces.

The temple is the house of God; it is the image of the hall, the most important space of the Greek house. The temple is the archetype of the house, that can almost be expressed by a Platonic essence, that is to say the idea brought into play. The proportion is ideal (equally ideal in the sense of the idea). There is without a doubt a strong

implication between the temple and the goddess of intelligence: the glorification of Reason. And God knows to what point Ictinos conceptualized the image of reason! During that period of Greek civilization, rationalism is essential.

The Greek gods are of flesh and bone, like men, and are the archetypes of their virtues and of their vices. I am not saying that the temple is an image of man, but it is an idealized image of the house of man since it is the house of god. It is sacred in giving to this word the definition of Goethe: "It is what unites the souls."

The temple is an implementation of truth; truth because it is sacred, because it expresses the most profound spirit of the Greek culture with a vibrant sensibility. The temple is communication and experience because, between it and the man of Athens, there is interaction. The Parthenon is poem. It is essential. It is what Broch says of music: the echo of All.

Art, in this truth, goes to the bottom of things because it expresses the world where the artist lives, the most noteworthy problems of this moment in civilization, or rather it expresses the eternal problems of man. The artist places himself at the center of the world and becomes, in his humanity, the central problem of the work of art. In the two cases, there is transfiguration because there can be a work of art.

I will discuss the first aspect later: the historical problems as a source of inspiration for the artist. On the other hand, I will concern myself with the problems inherent to the human condition. I will discuss six among them, by turn: Eros-love, death, nature, God, man, evil.

Eros, which manifests the amorous side of man, determines what is more physical in him and leads to his reproduction or to a total spirituality. The most purely physical eros finds its expression in art. It is what we see in the temple of Kadjuraho in India (without speaking of the religious implications), or in *The Sleeping Satyr* of the Hellenistic period, or the *Venus* of Sprengrer in the 18th century or even in the designs of Bellmer in the 20th century. Love can be Platonic: whether it be an appetite for beauty

or a search for immortality. These two aspects are found in The Symposium. The Neo-Platonists of the Renaissance express it through the loving movement of God toward the world and of the world toward God.

This theme has found the most diverse expression in the sculptures of Michelangelo, Botticelli's *Primavera*, Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love*, the love of God of Bernini's *St. Theresa* in which passion and physical love become mingled with such an intensity that the ecstasy comes close to death. Pure and sublimated love finds its expression in the French Gothic virgins. Love can sometimes reach perversity. The examples are above all furnished by literature. That is the case of Liaisons dangereuses of Choderlos de Laclos where love and crime mix as in the novels of the Marquis de Sade. From the love poems of ancient Egypt to today, love has been a constant in the work of art.

Opposed to eros, death. In Paleolithic times, men buried their dead near fire as if to communicate to them the warmth that is indispensable to life. All Egyptian art is based on the passage from death to the life after death. Death is a constant in the Spanish mentality and without a doubt the great art of that country is centered on that theme, but on its terrifying aspect. Death likewise appears in the German tradition, but in a sublimated form, hidden in nature. This opposition is evident in the canvasses of Picasso and in the reading of Goethe in *The King of Aulnes*. Death is an essential question of man.

There is a logical rapport between man and nature, and the artist has always tried to represent it in any way. A pyramid is not something other than a mountain, for example. It is found in India or in Mexico or in the crossing of Romanesque naves, or in the Robie House of Frank Lloyd Wright: the mountain is there.

The mosque of Cordoba is naught but a forest. And the Pazzi Chapel is likewise, in a more geometric fashion, a representation of nature.

The third theme could be a synthesis of all the others. Indeed, one could say that art is nothing but the history of the relationship between God and man. Between the "world above" and the "world below" the relationship changes from one era to another as the relationship between man and the beyond changes. The strongest theme of art has been its relationship with the divine absolute. Even though this absolute has become somewhat remote since the end of the 18th century, one cannot deny that it manifests itself in other respects.

The sky offers two aspects whose creation has been mastered: the sky as an element of nature, or rather as an element of passage to the world of the blessed. Its representation has almost always had religious implications.

Man himself, this microcosm, has been placed on the scene and has been represented whether to affirm his flesh or deny it. What quantity of expressive possibilities this inexhaustible theme has given, such as the representation of ghosts or that of the inner downfall! The 20th century, with the discovery of psychology by Freud, has opened a considerable field to art: surrealism which unmask the most secret phantasms of the unconscious, expressionism with all the emotional explosion of man, his anguish, his agony. But this is not recent. Don't the Gothic gargoyles reveal some of the hidden problems of the creator? When Freud becomes interested in the work of Leonardo da Vinci, he tries to reveal the most intimate problems of this great man.

The last great theme that I wish to take on is the problem of evil in the world. It suffices to look at the capitals of Vézelay to see that the most important issues to the sculptor were torture, horror, crime, and maliciousness in the world. The presence of the prince of this world is almost general in the sculptures for the year 1,000 until the beginning of the 13th century. But the 18th century also represented it in an extraordinary fashion by Sade, Choderlos de Laclos, Diderot; at the end of that century and at the beginning of the 19th century by Goya and later by Dostoevski with The

Possessed or Crime and Punishment. Picasso's *Guernica* expresses all the horror of our century.

There are surely other themes inherent to human life which have inspired the work of art. Those seem to me to be the most fundamental and the most permanent in their representation.

We have just surveyed more than two thousand years of philosophic thought to close in on the definition of the work of art. Before broaching the subject of what is properly said to be architecture, I would like to try my own definition of the work of art, which is partially inspired by Hegel.

The work of art is the sensible expression of the great collective drama or of the eternal problems of humanity, indeed of the two at the same time. Art is one of the ways to archetype the world. It is a transfiguration of the world which is not pure mimesis. Art is, rather, a transubstantiation.

I intentionally use religious terms to talk about art because art comes close to sacral adoration. Art is as difficult to understand as the mystery of the Trinity. Referring to the formulations dear to Croce, I can say that art is not history. History records reality whereas art transcends reality to lead it to a surreality, that of the potent image. Art is not a science although it can express the great scientific currents of the times; mathematics are often found in art but they are magically transcended by "pure artistic intuition"; this is equally the case with physics. Art is not a fashion. It is neither a gadget nor an amusement and the artist does not aim to please. Art is not sentimentalism but an expression of sentiments. Art is not pedagogic; it is not a discourse. Art should not be confused with practical action even if the architect should take it into account.

Among the arts, architecture is perhaps the most difficult to do because of the dialogue that must be established between the organization of life in the building and the space created as an aesthetic act. The architect's task is to romanticize life in buildings. Writing this, I think of one of Novalis's definitions: " The world should be romanticized.

By giving an elevated significance to what is commonplace, a mysterious aspect to what is banal, the dignity of the ineffable to what is known, and an aura of infinity to what is finite, I romanticize." This definition pleases me because it is by starting with a respect for the life of man that the architect organizes his work. Architecture is the creation of a poetic framework for the action of man. To make architecture is an act of romanticism.

I use the word poetry to define architecture as a work of art because, as Heidegger wrote, "the poem tells of the world and the earth, the field of their combat and also the place of all proximity and of all estrangement from the Gods."

If for Holderlin poetry is to "transmute the world into words", for me architecture is to transmute the world into spaces of life. It is an act of truth.

## FIRST PART

### THE FIVE ASPECTS OF CONTENT

The enchantment of the work of art resides in the perfect symbiosis of content the form; form goes with content as content goes with form. Pasternak said in his autobiography that "the music of the word is not an acoustical phenomenon and does not consist in the euphony of the vowels and consonants taken separately, but in a relation between the meaning of the phrase and its resonance". It is in form that content is realized; one connected to the other forms a whole. Hegel expresses that when he writes that "what is beautiful is only beautiful insofar as there is a balance between the idea and its objective representation." Although logically inseparable, for this study I will separate them for the sake of convenience, and I will devote attention to content.

In architecture, one can discern five aspects in content: what I call immediate content, persuasion, tradition, the superimposed image, the mediate content.

I could add to this list a sixth aspect: the phantasm of the creator. What profound elements of his personality are expressed in the work of the artist and cause him to, necessarily, adopt one point of view or another? For example, did Palladio have an over-sensitive Oedipus complex or not? Freud would have to do the same work with him as with Leonardo da Vinci. Leon Battista Alberti wrote as follows about the painter: "The inventor of painting must be Narcissus who metamorphosed into a flower. In fact, what is painting, if not to capture the entire surface of a wave with the help of art?" Reality is expressed by the artist but it is metamorphosed through his soul, although his vision of reality is as personal as his neurosis or his equilibrium. It is all the inner riches that are expressed in the work of art. This essential aspect presents many great difficulties to be thoroughly examined in the framework of architecture. I will therefore not broach this subject, but dedicate this study to the five aspects already mentioned.

## 1. The Immediate Content

I will observe in turn five representations.

The first is a mosaic in the church of St. Sophia in Istanbul. From the first glance, I see that there is a woman with a child seated in a frontal position; the eyes are inordinately underlined by very thick black lines; the golden background gives off a strange supernatural light. This light, the hieratism of the bodies, all reflect the Byzantine vision of the world.

The second is a Madonna of Cimabue. It is also a woman with a child. One notes a certain three-dimensionality. A certain amount of tenderness flows from this woman and evokes the image of mother while the previous one is all imperial. The more elongated and also more stylized body is an expression of the Italian 14th century.

Let us observe a Madonna of Botticelli: in the *Tondo du Magnificat*, a woman with a child is surrounded by five angels that crown her. The background is a landscape that fades into the horizon. The figures are well modelled in a static position. There is no mobility. The world is measurable and the perspective is perfect. The human being is represented in the plenitude of physical beauty. Botticelli is the clear expression of the ending of the 15th century. the reconciliation of man and the world; man, splendid, is the center of the world.

If I now look at this woman with two children by Renoir, I see that the painting is created by superimposing little spots of paint. Each of those spots is combined with the one next to it, this gives a strange vibration of lights which can only be reproduced at a certain time of day, and not at another time. It is a fleeting instant of the light on the objects and the people.

One encounters this strange optic effect of synthesized spots of colors after 1870 until the 20th century. The time represented in this instance is of the 19th century and Renoir is representative of his time.



The last piece to examine is a detail of Picasso's *Guernica*. It is also about a woman and child, but this time of a dead child. What is strange is that the eyes are drawn as if they were viewed from different points; it is the same for other facial traits and for the body. The whole has lost its sense of depth and looks on the canvas as if all these points of view were simultaneously superimposed. The conception of space and time here blend with the other representations.

Each representation we have analyzed is related to the world that produced it but, among them, they have one thing in common: woman and child. That is what Panovsky called the primary meaning of the natural. In certain instances it will be the Virgin, in others, a citizen who is promenading or a common woman during the Spanish Civil War who weeps for her dead child. That is the theme of the painting: the woman and her child or her children. I call it the immediate content because it is the closest to us, the most immediately comprehensible. One could make the same analysis in architecture.

The church of St. Sabina in Rome is paleochristian; it is the poverty and simplicity of the times when the Empire having died a new vision of the world imposes itself: Christian humility.

The cathedral of Reims is conceived around 1200. It is a vertical impetus towards God, expressive of the triumph of Scholasticism.

The plant forms of Guimard's synagogue affirms the primacy of life against the machine--recreation of a movement of the end of the 19th century.

The church of Ronchamp by Le Corbusier suggests violent movements through a series of twisted shapes, to the heavy roof which drags its weight toward the base, finally by the tension in the stained glass windows of the walls. It expressed aspects of the world of the post-war.

The chapel of Mies van der Rohe for ITT in Chicago, which is a glass box in a metallic structure, is a true product of technology.

Each of those places of worship is expressed in a clear language. St. Sabina is the image of a time which demanded newer formal means. There is a notion of space that only this period could give rise to. Reims has a different expressive form which expresses the Gothic world. Guimard in his synagogue is at the heart of the vitalist context at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. And Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe, a formal world adequate to deal with the problems of their time.

In most cases, the theme of temple is clearly manifested in the form. In that of Mies van der Rohe, that function is not expressed: it is a glass prism like the other buildings he has constructed in that region.

I would say that the immediate content in a building exists in a building where its program, its function is expressed in its form. If the immediate content is visible, the building has not only a volumetric richness expressing each internal function but its forms psychologically aid the spectator in associating them to their function. The suggestive sense of each form contributes to make clear its functionality, that is to say the intrinsic expression of the building. If we ask a child to draw a house, he will draw the archetype of a house that corresponds to his cultural universe; in Europe, in general, he will draw a big roof with double slopes and a chimney. This is the Platonic image of the idea "house", in the same way that a church would have for the child a bell, a large nave and perhaps a cross in some part of his drawing.

There is an archetypal image to which we associate certain buildings. The immediate content compares the building of this first image. Like the poem of Gertrude Stein *A rose is a rose, is a rose*, in the expression of the immediate content, a church is a church, is a church and a house is a house, is a house... And a museum does not look like a refinery nor an office building a temple, nor a train station look like Notre Dame in Paris.

The church of San Clemente in Rome is an excellent example of the immediate content. The brick exterior, quite simple, makes us understand, from the first glance, the importance of the entrance thanks to the insistence of the arch of the door which indicates, in an obvious way, the passage from the exterior to the interior. Through the door, one enters into a court delimited by arcades, the cloister, which, as in the tradition of ancient churches, is brought out to the exterior by a wall of the same height. The nave, then, becomes a very important volume with a double slope roof in tiles. From the exterior, the internal functions are identifiable by the volumes and, in the interior, the elements of the architecture adapt themselves perfectly to their functions.

In the nave, a slow rhythm is created by the succession of columns and arches. In the back, a great niche surmounted by a half-dome receives the representation of the sacred. But there are two functions in this church: clerical and monastic, which is read in the interior distribution of the building with the nave for the congregation and the choir for the monks. The rhythm toward the altar is interrupted at the point where the choir begins: there are five archways from the entrance to that point and five beyond that. The interruption reveals the change in function. All the architectural elements are on a human scale to demonstrate the separation from the world of ancient Rome with superhuman dimensions and to underline a voluntarily expressed poverty, which detaches itself from the riches of the country. It is not that in the pictorial representation of the sanctuary that the scale suffers a change. The representation of the figures supports a distortion, it slightly exaggerates the details to signal passage toward the spiritual world which detaches itself from the physical: the form and the function go towards the same way. The space totally expresses the pure functionality of the church and all the architectural details are conjugated to clarify it.

The ancient Greek house was conceived in a way to express though the volumes all of the internal functions from the most the least important among them. An entry court served the rooms of main importance. In the back of the court, the hall was bigger

since it represented the space for gathering and for receptions. This space could not have the same expressive value as the rooms. Therefore, its roofing and pediment were elevated, on the side of the court, to thus confer a special dignity with relation to the other parts of the house. This pediment with its columns becomes more and more the symbol of the house. Consequently, there is nothing astonishing about the Greek temple, all its parts enriched it, we have seen previously, the temple itself is the symbol of the house, that of god. In the ancient Greek habitat, the importance of spaces is clearly signaled and the immediate content becomes obvious.

Palladio, in the 16th century, was being shaped in the humanist spirit: he studied the world of ancient Rome and he had a passion for ancient Greece. During this period, the Venetian merchants were in an economic crisis and the powerful families of Venice turned to agriculture and wanted to turn their new field of activities as profitable as possible. Palladio, with his extreme intelligence, created a new form of architecture for all these new "gentlemen-farmers". He would create veritable units of production, where ornament had little place. The living quarters were at the center and on to both sides, the units of production. Palladio gives more emphasis to the central part where the owners live: it is not only at the center but also more notable.

In the Villa Barbaro at Maser, one re-encounters the spirit of ancient Greece. In the center, there rises a beautiful pediment with four columns. The pediment signals the lordly house.

On one side and the other, in a more rhythmic fashion, and more modest are the two service wings which shield the agricultural products and the animals. The living quarters are more elevated, offering a view of the surrounding fields. This was a perfect setting for these Venetian mariners turned country squires. In the back on the entry axis, a nymph with Greek gods recalls the humanism of the owners. As it was said by Ackerman, it unites two worlds, that of aristocratic life and the productivity of the countryman. This play of Palladio created a new fashion of conceiving villas which he

repeated with some variations like the villa Emo or Badoer, Trissino or Thiene. In all those villas, the immediate content is perfectly expressed.

If we observe Notre Dame in Paris, it would be easy to understand what presided over its construction. To begin with, the principal nave takes the shape of a cross and is elevated with relation to the aisles. Circulation occurs through the aisles and their chapels as well as through the ambulatory.

All this puts into evidence the value of the cross and its value which underlines the architecture itself. The clarity of the structure makes its functioning explicit. All the elements are clear (open spaces--flying buttresses) and contribute in bringing to light the manifest function of church: spring towards the heights, spring towards God.

With the 19th century, the industrial revolution had changed all the aspects of life. Many new programs in architecture imposed themselves and many models of the past began to disappear. Paris began to fill itself with train stations, factories, office buildings; of large indoor marketplaces made their appearance to permit shopping for all the city with greater comfort. Baltard was given a new problem to resolve with the usage of economic materials produced by the factory: Les Halles. The French political stupidity in matters of architecture has demolished them.

The central structure of the building corresponds to the most logical manner for loading and unloading the merchandise: a central road in the dorsal spine with the secondary roads like a fishbone. The entrance of these two axes of circulation is signaled by a great arch. The metallic elements give rhythm to the circulation thereby assuring a continuity. The roof of the central structure is double sloped, its central portion is slightly higher than the surrounding than the pavilions to emphasize the axis of continual circulation. The pavilions for sales each have a central space for pedestrian traffic; each pavilion is of the same importance although destined for different sales. A round trip of the space though the center and the extremities would indicate the mobility of each person making its purchases on the interior.

A diffuse light reinforces the impression that no point is more important than another; the transparencies obtained by the materials contribute in making even more clear this structure which emphasizes all of its functions. The manner in which the circulation is indicated, as also the non-differentiation of the pavilions, provides us with the principle of life in the building, that is to say its immediate content.

In the first decade of the 20th century, Frank Lloyd Wright expressed the internal life of his buildings by their forms. One of the most beautiful examples is the Isabel Roberts house in Chicago, belonging to the period of the "prairie houses". The space of the house gives the sensation of parting from one point and developing orthogonally. The center of the house is the chimney, the fireplace. The fire becomes the core of all the space, the center of the house.

All the functions are organized around this chimney which stands out from the house and signal the point around which the family gathers. Thanks to its two levels, the sitting room is magnified, thus giving this area of meant for gathering a palatial look. All the other rooms have low ceilings. The slopes of the roof start from the chimney. Its generous forms present a link with the traditional houses and the protective function of the ancient roofs. The notion of house is perfectly underlined; the dwelling becomes a potent image of the house itself. The internal function is plainly visible from the exterior through its rich volumetry, as if the interior space pushed out toward the exterior. The long exterior walls create a tension towards the important point of entry. In this house as in all those constructed at this period by Wright, all the spaces demonstrate their usage.

One also finds this play of the immediate content in the architecture of Aalvar Aalto. One of the pillars of his aesthetic is to clearly express the internal life of his buildings. Aalto built in Helsinki the House of Culture. Two elements were essential in this building: a great auditorium and the party's offices.

The part of the auditorium takes on a free form, very organic, which tries to make the maximum use of the site to give the interior the largest area possible. All of the

exterior form reveals the internal organization of the space; even the projection booth and the arrangement of the audience are visible in its external form.

In the interior, the structural elements slope and signal the stage; the linear elements of the roof also point toward the stage; the surface of the wall of each side create a play which leads to the same point. Tensions in the space lead the spectator's eye towards the culminating point of attention. The external forms of this part of the building are curved, organic.

On the other hand, the part of the offices adopts another formal system. The offices, dealt with the same importance, occupy a rectangular building which is not differentiated from any other administrative building if not for certain care that was given to the external details on its outside. Perhaps Aalvar Aalto seems to privilege the details to the detriment of the whole. In spite of the pergola of a well conceived piece between the two buildings, the relationship between the offices and auditorium is not the best. Aalto has preferred to sacrifice the general composition for an honesty of expression of the functions.

Let us take another example from Aalvar Aalto: The Polytechnic School of Otaniemi. The most important place is given to the amphitheaters, meeting room of the students, while the classrooms are dominated by a very sloped volume. These are equal in importance and are constructed on the same horizontal plane. It reveals a great balance between the simplicity of the horizontal line and the richness of the sloped volumes. Inside the amphitheaters, the structure emphasizes the conference room, as the stage is emphasized in the auditorium of the seat of the Communist Party in Helsinki. In the example of the Polytechnic School, the immediate content also finds a clear expression.

Sullivan's slogan on functionalism, "Form follows function"--which he did not always apply to his own work--could also be applied to the architects whose work we

have just analyzed, in that the immediate content is made obvious in their buildings. But this aspect of content is not a *sine qua non* condition of architecture.

In the Villa Savoye, Le Corbusier chose the formal principle of the pure prism. With the strip windows on all sides, the principle of pilotis is employed so as to place the prism above. Parting from this prism, the internal spaces are shaped from the exterior.

If Frank Lloyd Wright starts from the interior toward the exterior as if his houses give the impression of space which projects from the inside to the outside, Le Corbusier, instead, starts from the outside which he rationally conceived to reach the inside. The exterior of the Villa Savoye does not express the richness of the life of the building. This conception does not mean that the Villa Savoye is devoid of meaning but that it is not expressed by the exterior.

Mies van der Rohe is an abstract architect. In his Barcelona pavilion, he created a series of floating spaces carried by a series of vertical and horizontal planes of a perfect orthogonality. All the style is in this architecture. But contrary to the other buildings in this exposition, his pavilion showed nothing, except a technical perfection elevated to the Platonic idea, pure technicality. That is another aspect of content that we will analyze, because the Barcelona pavilion like the Villa Savoye are of a capital importance for the movement of modern architecture on account of their richness of meanings.

## **2. Persuasion**

This aspect of content is found most often associated with painting and sculpture. The need to persuade leads the architect to reach out beyond his limits to murals or statuary. One could say that persuasion exists when the architect tries to convince the viewer of to make better use of the building through a certain action. All the formal means will be employed so that the space may suggest this. The architect will develop a psychology of space to convince one of "better living".



Another form of persuasion exists when the architect attempts, by employing all expressive means, to convince one of a certain idea, be it a political idea, religious or even commercial. All the means that are available to the architect may be employed to transmit these ideas in the clearest way possible, psychological means included. The architect must be an expert of the expressive possibilities of the language of vision in order that everything be explicit and without ambiguity. Our first chosen example is one of the great Byzantine churches of Ravenna: St. Apollinaire.

Upon entering St. Apollinaire, one is struck by a rhythm which accelerates and which is provoked by the repetitions of arches and columns as well as the series of men and women represented on the mural mosaics on both sides of the nave. The characters are upright, huddled together in a hieratic position, which produces a nearly cinematographic vision. The movement towards the altar is produced; and the person who enters the church is felt transported by this accelerated spatial movement. Everything has its conclusions in the absolute where the altar is the symbol. These are the same intentions that we observed in the church of San Clemente in Rome.

We have analyzed Aalto, in the previous chapter, the interior of the auditoriums of the seat of the Finnish Communist Party and of the Polytechnic School; there also, we could discuss persuasion because all the attention is concentrated on the stage or on the lecturers. This demonstrates to what point the different aspects of content could be superimposed and confused.

In the Gothic cathedral of Reims the expressive problem is entirely different. The interior and exterior of the church are treated with the least possible materials: the very fine ribs form the space; the entire building is formed of lines which point toward the sky; the pointed elements are formed of arrows which contribute to give this sense of elevation; even the angels's wings on the buttresses emphasize this impression as do the tracery elements of the portals. Here the walls become lines, they do not give the impression of being solids but instead of being immaterial filters. The three portals, are

comparable to those at Saintes although they have pointed arches instead of semi-circular ones. In the same way, a succession of arches in perspective creates a tension toward the interior. Less tragic decorative elements invite one to enter: here, it is the gentleness of the Virgin at the pier of the door. The church invites then in its entirety to a spiritual ascension, save for the horizontal movement which leads toward the door and invites the spectator to enter. This persuasion to enter, which we have seen in Notre Dame of Saintes, becomes a leitmotif in French Gothic. But it was not only in during the Middle Ages that this method was used; we will find it again in the buildings of the 20th century.

This is the case in a shop created by Frank Lloyd Wright in San Francisco. He, who was always fascinated by the Gothic cathedrals, turns to the example of Notre Dame of Saintes and uses an identical system. The shop presents itself in the following way: a great blind wall in bricks, which does not let one guess at the interior; looking at the building from the right, below, a horizontal line created by points of light guides one to the entrance tunnel. As in the romanesque portico, a superimposition of brick arches produces the same effect. The line, which comes from the lower part of the facade, turns and enters the building in a continuous movement.

After the arches, the glass and metal tunnel follows the rhythms toward the inside and reveals the internal space by its own transparency. If once and for all other stores are open and show their internal space, here Frank Lloyd Wright, while playing with space in such a brilliant fashion, closes all the facade and at the same time indicates a strong and intelligent movement to enter, so that the persuasive effect is even more powerful.

For the exposition of Decorative Arts of 1925, in Paris, Melnikov constructed the pavilion of the USSR which is the best realization of the Constructivist movement in architecture. Melnikov did the opposite of Mies van der Rohe at the Barcelona exposition. He used the spirit of persuasion to invite passersby to enter and view the first realizations of Soviet socialism. Melnikov had received his directives for the conception

of his pavilion: "We must give the idea of what are new way of Soviet life is, opposed to the riches and luxuries other countries is the freshness and originality of the artistic creation of our revolutionary era... The pavilion must express which one forms of the USSR..." To follow these instructions, Melnikov used the dynamism expressed in the paintings of Malevitch and the sculptures of Tatlin: a dynamism of diagonal tensions which is a constant in the principal Soviet painters and sculptors of the period and which are also visible in the images of Eisenstein's *Potemkin*.

The strong diagonal tension becomes the spatial structure of the building and determines the entrance: the hammer and sickle forming an arch of triumph indicate a rhythm which is followed by the successive small roofs. Just as the Gothic portals lead the spectator through certain religious ideas, the sign of the hammer and sickle here creates the same persuasion; sign and rhythm try to lead the visitor to the idea of communism. The latter, besides, has evident religious connotations if one does not forget that the word religion comes from the word *religare* which implies a strongly unifying idea.

The second aspect of persuasion does not consist of trying to force the spectator to act a certain way but to bring him to believe in an idea, be it religious, political or commercial. The last example also participates in this manner of approaching persuasion: if it is foremost to incite the visitor to enter the building which is treated, it is equally the means of convincing him of the triumphal march of communism.

The richest example to illustrate this facet of persuasion is the baroque. The religious authority wanted to provoke a change in lifestyle in according with their principles. They wanted at all cost to awaken devotion. To do this, they must of needs create a new iconography of the lives of the saints in churches to show examples and encourage the faithful to imitate them. The way of the sky is opened to these new heroes. All the plastic means of architecture must incite the faithful to turn toward these intermediaries between the earth and heaven. It must absolutely provoke awe and

impetus. That is why an art which stimulates piety, which pushes the faithful to believe in the miracle is necessary; an art that must produce wonder, a truly fervent attitude. It seeks to valorize mysticism.

Bernini's church, San Andrea al Quirinale in Rome can illustrate the matter. From the exterior, by placing itself in front of the church, the first characteristic of persuasion is manifested: on both sides of the porch, two curved walls lower than the building invite the visitor to enter; around the entry door itself, the architectural elements create a double tension: the simultaneous impression of exiting and of entering. But the intention of entering the building, suggested by all of its elements, is dominant.

In the interior, the intention is entirely different. It aims at convincing us of the reality of the supernatural.

The altar is situated at the back of the oval nave, in a chapel where the spectacular lighting effects make clear the representation of the martyrdom of Saint Andrew; the latter is surrounded by sculpted angels who float in a luminous space. Above the altar, vertically, is found a sculpted representation of the soul of the saint ascending; the dome itself, in the form of rays of light which come from above, spread a celestial light. It is golden and in its zenith an opening is made whence the circumference is decorated with little angels representing the entrance to the heavens; at its highest point, the Holy Spirit culminates. The entire church offers martyrdom and the ascension of the soul the most realistic of representations. Bernini has employed all possible sensory elements to convince the spectator of the reality of the scene.

We will illustrate the second aspect of persuasion through another example, borrowed from the 20th century. The crematory of Stockholm, a brilliant work by Asplund and Lewerentz.

Building and landscape form an indissoluble whole: one cannot be explained without the other. The artificial landscape was remodeled as into a work of art. A sensation of space without limits unfolds. As in Versailles, everything gives the

impression of losing itself into infinity; but here the landscape is marked with melancholy and sadness. Let us begin the inscription with the exterior of the cemetery: surrounding it is a great wall of gray stones which takes one to an opening where an inclined road rises gradually. To the left, a wall encloses the spaces of the tombs where the cremated bodies are kept. Almost to the end of the incline there rises to the right a black cross which at the same time gives a Christian sense to the whole space and symbolizes death.

The road immediately behind the cross reveals an entry hall. The roof of this hall is made up of four slopes inclined from the outside toward the inside thereby creating a court open to the sky. At the center there is a sculpture which represents the culminating point of the drama. The sculpture represents in its lower part a dead person; then, through a series of bodies reveals itself more and more, it suggests a succession of instants after death to the final moment where the sculpture with its arms upraised accomplishes passage through the opening of the patio toward the sky. If we return to the right of the entrance, we will see the landscape descend from a hill toward the center with high intensity where the drama unfolds. Asplund wanted a movement of the whole space toward this point of passage from one life to the other. This is a very beautiful example of architecture used to manifest that there is a life after death and to also use all of nature at the disposal of this passage. In the architecture of our century, the crematory of Stockholm is, from the point of view of the persuasive aspect, exemplary. It could have also served well to illustrate the immediate content: all the functions are perfectly hierarchical and understandable form whatever point one looks at the building.

Curiously, in the 20th century, one may observe the effect of persuasion in the buildings which have nothing to do with what I call a work of art but in the constructions with a commercial purpose. In New York, one cannot say that the buildings which surround Times Square are masterpieces; but they interest me here on account of their gigantic advertisements which oftentimes cover many floors. Therefore, it is not the

buildings which create the space but the lighted billboards, which give rise to the urban space through their intensity. The space is moving, changing with the uncertain movement, more or less intense depending on the moment, of the billboard advertisements. This is, in the urban space of New York, a trait of a most interesting character. So many gathered vulgarities succeed in producing a new aesthetic. One could pursue the analysis of persuasion through totally different examples such as Las Vegas: one cannot imagine the craftiness and subterfuge used to encourage the clients to give in to the temptation of gambling. Of course here, the vulgar aspect greatly surpasses the aesthetic intention.

In spite of the numerous examples which can illustrate this aspect of architecture, persuasion is often absent from the intentions of the artist and does not constitute a *sine qua non* condition to the architectural creation.

### 3. Tradition

This third aspect of content, tradition, quite often unites artists among themselves. When, in a discussion, it is a matter of knowing whether Strausburg is a German or a French city, or whether Toledo is the most Spanish city in Spain, one thinks that a certain spirit manifests itself in the forms. If, in discussing painting, it is said that El Greco breaks away from the Byzantine tradition and reattaches himself to Spain, it is because there is something in his painting which can be called Spanish.

One can speak of Roman architecture, of the characteristics common to the Pantheon and to Bramante's San Pietro in Montorio, or between the thermae of Diocletian and St. Peter's church. There are common elements in these examples, a way of organizing space, a comparable taste for certain forms.

When I speak of tradition, I do not speak of folklore: it is not a matter of getting into a type, or of copying popular architecture. True tradition does not engage in demagoguery and does not need to copy the architecture of the past, that would be

academism; true tradition is always creative: while it innovates, it conserves certain things which connect it to the past.

It is a supra-individual element. The spirit that marks the culture of a people is a way of doing things which varies according to the relationship of man and his environment and the man-to-man relationship: the organization of the group, their beliefs, their nourishment, their history. All these elements create psychological constants in men of a specific region.

Tradition would be the element of this culture that would characterize any creative act. The Gothic is certainly a European movement but it is not the same everywhere: if there is a French Gothic, there is a Spanish and an Italian, each one with the mark of its country. One sees very well the differences between the town hall of Rouen and the palace of the Doges in Venice, as well as the differences between the cathedrals of Sienna and of Ulm.

If the Gothic represents an international current toward a moment in western civilization, it has singular characteristics in each country that reflect the local culture. From this point of view, one could also observe the differences between the Farnese palace and Chambord, or again, between Horta and Sullivan.

It can be said that a tradition is born at a given moment in a country when the local culture has characteristics strong enough to find their expression and continuity. If there are very ancient traditions like the Chinese or the Roman, there are more recent ones like that of the United States.

A tradition ends when the local culture weakens: this is the case with the ancient Egyptian and Greek traditions, in spite of their longevity and power. Tradition is not obligatorily static, it can evolve and become enriched with new elements, increase its formal vocabulary. But very often, traditions show a taste for certain forms that are tied to the very origin of the tradition and that taste remains a nostalgic attachment.

To carry on the analysis while illustrating what has just been said, I will use three examples: first the French tradition, the Roman tradition, finally the Dutch tradition.

### The French Tradition

I have chosen to deal with the French tradition first, since it is the closest to me at the present time. It was the time when the most severe crises of feudalism were being faced. The French tradition began when markets came into being and the people dependent on the nobility freed themselves.

If Paris became the political capital of France, it also asserted itself as the intellectual center. Important trends of thought emerged at the end of the 11th century and at the beginning of the following century: the problem of the relationship between reason and faith and the origin of Scholasticism with Lanfranc, Anselme du Bec, Gilbert de La Porree and Abelard. If this school originated in Paris, so did Gothic architecture, with the cathedral of Saint Denis of the Abbe Suger. Since French tradition is based on this thought, I will briefly recall the great lines of that tradition. In 1088, Berenger de Tours was already a rationalist. He considered reason to be superior to authority, denied transubstantiation and, with his book De corpore et sanguini Domini, plunged into heresy. In the 12th century, St. Anselme du Bec invented the ontological argument, according to which God is the greatest object of thought and if an object of thought does not exist, what does exist is superior, and therefore God exists. This argument was only validated by theologians with St. Thomas Aquinas.

Scholasticism began toward the 11th century with Roscelin and his student, Abelard, professor at the Paris Cathedral School. In his book Sic et Nunc, he sets out to demonstrate the existence of God. The important thing is not to know if he succeeded, but to see that the revelation no longer seems to be enough for him. He wants to establish this truth starting with reason. The great French rationalism is there, and with him, the foundation of the best French tradition.



The period favors the affirmation of the individual: man is no longer as serf and can become independent; the Crusades upset the social order; markets become important; towns grow and are no longer organized around the fortified castle. Man is no longer willing to accept recognized ideas without making them his own through his own thought. This rationalism that imposes itself like a leitmotif in all artistic creation finds a good definition in the *principium importans ordinem ad actum* of Thomas Aquinas: the principle rules the act. All French art is rooted in it.

In Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism, Panovsky draws a noteworthy parallel between thought of the *Summa*, the theology of St. Thomas, the Scholastic book *par excellence*, and the spatial structure of the cathedral. It is a question of the influence of the *Manifestatio* on artistic creation. Thomas Aquinas said that "the sacred doctrine also serves as human reason, not by proving faith, but by clarifying everything that is promoted in this doctrine." Panovsky, explaining the Gothic style, speaks of the beginning of the French tradition.

One always looks for the regulating principle. One looks for the hidden god, but the god is the element of reason! Everything is rational discourse (it is not strange that at this time one strays from Plato to question Aristotle), and the hierarchical organization of the ideas of rationalism are expressed in the hierarchical organization of the spaces of the cathedral. From the most important element, the central nave, to the side chapels when passing by the ambulatory, continuous space is organized from the highest point to the lowest, while at the same time maintaining a close relationship among the different parts. Rational order is in the image of that of the *Summa* which regulates all Christian knowledge. Its organization according to the governing principles that one tries to demonstrate and the rational divisions made in translate themselves in the cathedral by this rational clarity of the subdivision of spaces. The principle of clarification for the sake of clarification manifests itself in the possibility of deciphering the internal structure. The exterior follows this same logic. This subordination between principal

and secondary space is achieved by the concept of continuous space where the division into parts and into parts of parts to arrive at unity. The image would be like an upside-down tree: a structure where the minimum of matter is divided and subdivided like a trunk into branches, the branches into smaller branches and the branches into leaves. This structural clarity is the key element of the aesthetic of the cathedral. Everything becomes linear until all volumetric material is rejected. The wall becomes a stained-glass window that tells the sacred history. The notion of clarity is reinforced by the importance of a transcending light that illuminates the cathedral and shows up the structure of the pillars even more which, starting with the unity of the base, is divided and subdivided like a tree. In the geometry of the stained-glass windows, one scene follows another to illustrate the Scriptures through images. The tympana also respond to a linear reading and the superimposition permits a reading from left to right, then from top to bottom. Every cathedral is a book.

This spirit, which is the fruit of Scholastic thought, will shape the inner world of all French people and forge their way of thinking and mold an attitude towards life which brings out the best that France has produced.

Some centuries later, the same rationality is expressed in the chateaux of the Loire. In Chambord, for example, one finds the rational foundation of geometry in the rectangular bases of the donjons, a prism with cylinders; inside, the space is organized around two axes whose double staircase is the central point; the last floor of the chateau is organized like a village, and the roof reflects the metaphor of a madness, a whim of the most exuberant variety, thanks to the play on turrets. This top part of the building displays an irrational appearance but all excess is contained by the geometry of the base: it is a game between the rational and its opposite where the rational triumphs.

Although styles and periods change, the structure of Scholastic thought remains and, with it, the geometry of the axes as a representation of thought, *primum importans ordinem actum*. French thought pursues this line with Descartes, who had laid the

foundation of analytic geometry: the determination of a point on a plane by the measure of the distances to two orthogonal lines. In Discourse on Method, Descartes uses systematic doubt to bring everything into question, even his own existence, but there, he arrives at what he cannot deny: "I think,...", which enables him to affirm "...therefore I am". Starting with the self as a thinking being, he arrives at the proof of the existence of God by the concept of perfectibility. The Cartesian spirit is illustrated in architecture by a grandiose example: the chateau, gardens and urbanism of Versailles.

The concept of rationality obtained by an austere geometry creates a centralized urban space, starting with the chateau shaped like a telescope: in the center, the axis of the chateau, which went up to Paris and two secondary axes, which evoked a radiant image in plan. Starting from this absolute point, space is lost in infinity: rationality is led to infinity. On the garden side, the geometry is imposing, there is a central part that goes forward and two others are slightly set back. Starting from the center, a great axis leads the space of the architecture to the horizon through water schemes. All the elements are rendered geometrically, including the trees: geometry totally subdues nature. The manner in which the garden is organized by applying the analytical-scholastic spirit reminds us of the *Summa*: theology has disappeared, and the very structure of thought is expressed in this monarchical absolute. The principal and secondary axes, by yielding to the great central axis that leads to infinity, create a spatial structure of an extraordinary rigor.

The expression of French rationality is given everywhere by Le Notre, by the spatial hierarchy that is a reminder of the best precedents of the Gothic cathedrals. In Versailles, the irrationality of the roof of Chambord was abandoned: it is the triumph of the most rigorous geometry, image of the rational.

Versaille could also serve as a fine example of persuasion. The entire palace is decorated with elements that evoke the sun. Let us not forget that the sun is already seen as the center of our planetary system. The entry hall relates completely to the sun: in

fact, everything is organized so that the avenue of Paris and the two other avenues that start from the square give the impression of radiance. On the garden side is the frog fountain: the sculpture represents Leto, mother of Apollo and Artemis, and lover of Zeus, trying to escape the anger of Hera and being refused the water that she asked of the peasants: she complains to Zeus, who transforms the peasants into frogs.

The whole fountain is this metamorphosis that reminds the courtiers of the dangers of ingratitude. All the power of political persuasion was perfectly obtained in this way.

Paris, in its evolution through the centuries, and in particular in the drawings of Haussmann, reverts to the same principles. In the center, the buildings of the Louvre are arranged in the shape of a telescope, like the chateau at Versailles. Starting from this point, passing through Carrousel's triumphal arch, the Tuileries and the Champs-Élysées, the central axis is lost to infinity. In the garden of the Tuileries, the same spirit of taming nature can be found: geometry is applied everywhere and tames nature. The Place de la Concorde, a square with an obelisk, constitutes a second center: from there an axis formed by the Rue Royal leads to the Madeleine on one side and on the other, to the Chamber of Deputies. Parallel to that, another axis starts from the Invalides and leads to the Ministry of the Interior, passing through the avenues Churchill and Marigny between the Petit and Grand Palais running along the Élysée. One then finds another central point on the Champs-Élysées: the *rond-point* of the Champs-Élysées where several streets and avenues part out like rays; finally, farther on, the Arch of Triumph of the Étoile, marks the point from which all the avenues radiate out. Thanks to the slope of the Champ-Élysées, the space seems to follow on to infinity under the Arch of Triumph.

In the axis of the Boulevard Sebastopol, which leads from Chatelet to the Gare de l'Est, there is found, on the other side of the Seine, the Boulevard Saint-Michel, which leads to the Observatory; secondary points and axes lead to the Sorbonne, to the Pantheon, from Montparnasse to Saint-Germain.

The geometry of these axes, the way in which the spaces are dissected, the structure of the city itself, with its central and its secondary points derived from the first, its divisions and subdivisions, remind us again of the thought of the *Summa*. The conception of the city is similar to that of Versailles and also similar to the structure of the spaces of the cathedral.

The architecture of Paris furnished another principle close to the conception of Chambord. That is to say, of a strict base controlling the intemperance of the roofing; this can be seen, for example, on the Ile Saint-Louis: a sufficiently smooth facade surmounted by a roof of great formal richness with dormers and chimneys on a steeply inclined slope. This spirit is found again as a constant in French architecture until the first half of our century. As a matter of fact, Paris is built on this principle and the 16th district of the city is conceived at the beginning of the century in this way, even if the taste of the time demanded the curved form everywhere. The ground floor was dealt with freely, the central part, more regular, more controlled, and all the formal richness was in the upper part. Art Nouveau was also done in this way.

Le Corbusier continues the tradition. Although born in Switzerland, his mentality was shaped in France. It is frequently said that his style of architecture is international. As far as I am concerned, I maintain that he is part of the strictest French tradition. It is true that he made some models that he supposed would apply to any climate or country, but with the exception of the church of Ronchamp, all his architecture is in the French tradition. He has some points in common with the Encyclopedists: an optimistic reason, a deep faith in the salvation of the world, thanks to the application of rational principles, notably in the structuring of cities and houses; society may be saved by applying syllogism to urbanism.

Let us take the example of the house: according to the principle of the machine to live in, the house must function as a machine. Man must be able to circulate freely everywhere; the corridor passageway is abandoned, cars are separated from pedestrians,

resulting in the house on pilotis, which opens up the ground floor. Geometry is the rules for all the rest: some regulating outlines, excessive classicism. Architectural language is cast aside, the elements of composition are reduced to a minimum; the pure prism that floats in space is proportioned by the golden number; to increase its value, it is separated from the ground; a richness of forms can be given to the housing units in their upper part where their collective services are found, in order to better appreciate the pure prism. Architecture does not integrate itself with nature. If Le Notre subordinated nature to geometry, Le Corbusier makes his architecture absolutely independent of nature, unlike Wright. A principle that precedes life, even if, with using completely Aristotelian logic, one tries to make it derive from life. All of Le Corbusier's aesthetic is derived from this principle: rationalism searches for the stability behind all mobility.

One may take the example of the Villa Savoye in which his aesthetic probably finds its strongest expression. The rationalism of the house is evident: a geometry replaces the axes, even if a beam indicates the direction of the entrance. From the formal point of view, the Villa Savoye resumes the schema of the Chambord chateau: a geometrically strong base, and the imaginary aspect in the upper part; here, the prism is topped with the volumetric freedom of the roof-garden. It is the same spirit that can be observed in the Salvation Army building--where the prism superimposes the freer elements of the entrance--and in the Marseille block. Le Corbusier has again resumed a principle of the French tradition and has interpreted it with much creativity. He has taken his rationalism a bit everywhere, even to India, where he says he was inspired by Indian architecture, but his buildings reveal the French tradition.

#### The Roman Tradition

Precedents of Roman architecture might be found in the Greek, from which Rome gets its sources. The Greek sign of the temple is found again in Rome. The rectangular form of the temple and the tholos were adopted when Rome began. A certain rapport

exists between Greece and Rome like that which exists in the 20th century between Europe and the United States. Greece is still present in the temple of Fortuna Virilis with its rectangular plan and the free-standing columns of its facade, which form an entry portico. The same with the temple of the first century before Jesus Christ, that of Vesta, which is shaped like the tholos. In these two examples, the Roman tradition did not formulate itself. It has not yet invented its language. The first signs of the Roman tradition are more visible in the urban layout.

The layout of Rome, which was determined by the augur, is a square crossed by two axes which cut each other at a right angle, which is connected with the concept of *templum*. Varron distinguishes the celestial *templum*, the terrestrial and the subterranean. The first is a circle like the last, naturally divided into four parts. For the Etruscans, the circle was divided into sixteen parts. For Plutarch, early Rome would not have been square, but circular. The *cardo* and the *decumanus* would be connected to the orientation rite of the town. The *cardo* would have been laid out toward the middle, creating a north-south axis, and the *decumanus* would have been laid out perpendicularly from its center. The center would have been the *mundus* that belonged to the chthonian rite. The *mundus* is dug out in the center of the primitive city of Palatine: it is a hole that communicates with the underworld divinities. But what is more important is the notion of the cross, because, like the square, it is the symbol of the earth and the most globalized of the symbols. The spatial orientation is, in the east-west axis, marked by the rising and setting of the sun; temporal orientation is indicated from the north-south axis. These two orientations put man in contact with the immanent world. From the center, the *mundus*, one can trace the third axis, which connects the chthonian and the uranic world. It is the total orientation of man. The function of this cross is synthesis and measure: heaven and earth are joined in it. It is a symbol of the assembling of the universe and of vertical communication; it is the center of the world but its center implies ascent and descent. It is not only the pole of the world but also the totality of the world.

The first principle to analyze in the Roman tradition is Rome's notion of universality. The axuality of Rome is visible everywhere: the two axes in the basilica go in the same direction as those of the creation of the town or even the Forum, which was conceived according to the same principle of urbanism. Rome was the world.

Universality as a principle is omnipresent. The vault and the arch are Roman elements *par excellence*, but especially the dome. Philolaus considered the world as a sphere with fire in its center; in Persia, in Zoroastrian times, altars of fire were installed on a podium under a dome where the fire was lit. the circle, as analyzed by Hautecoeur, is a solar symbol; circular, with its square funerary chamber in the middle, Hadrian's tomb, with its conical shape at its summit, is the symbol of the connection between the underworld, earth and the cosmos. The Coliseum has cosmic implications where the oval and the circle converge. Again, according to Hautecoeur, the Pantheon is a solar dome, since its axis is orientated to 175 degrees: as a matter of fact, the birth of Caesar was marked by a comet that appeared in this section of the sky, and its axis corresponds to the first of April--holiday of Venus--ancestress of all Romans--at sunrise. The Pantheon is divided into sixteen areas like the Etruscan temples: fifteen niches and the door, each niche harboring the statue of a god. In the dome are 28 spindle-shaped reliefs, like the number 7 of the planets multiplied by the number 4; in the center, the open oculus represents Zeus, ether, or perhaps the sun. The interior of the Pantheon is the image of heaven. therefore, the cosmos is a fundamental constant of Roman tradition. It is not unique.

Janus is one of the most ancient gods and also the most important of the Roman pantheon. God of gods first, he becomes the god of transitions and of passage from the past to the future; he is the god of the Gates. God has two heads, he directs all birth, that of the gods, of the cosmos, and of man. Because he has two heads and only one body, he is unified duality. The duality of Janus (Geminus) is another characteristic that is present everywhere in Rome. The aforementioned 16th division of the Pantheon is the door of



Janus. Outside, before the door, is a temple figuration placed exactly where the altar should have been. Therefore, the door of Janus leads to the Pantheon in the cosmic dome.

Two twins, the children of Leda, called the Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux, came out of the same egg, one from the sperm of Zeus and the other from the sperm of Tyndareus, husband of Leda. Therefore, the first is immortal and the second, mortal. When the second was dying, the first one asked his father to make his brother immortal. Zeus offered them a constellation to be divided as follows: six months of life, and six months as a star. Like the sun, Castor and Pollux die each day, descending into the underworld of the dead, and then rising to the sky. They represent the two hemispheres, and the Pythagoreans considered them as the symbol of universal harmony. The Dioscuri are also unified duality.

They were as popular as the twin founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus, unified under the She-Wolf. The twins are the foundation of the city like the two axes, the *cardo* and the *decumanus*.

Duality is again found in the construction of the temple of Venus and Rome in Rome, which was attributed to Hadrian like the Pantheon that he reconstructed. They are like two temples, joined from behind by the altar section and unified into a single body by the exterior colonnade. Venus, goddess of love, is the ancestress and protectress of Rome. It is said that Rome had two names: Roma to the public, and a second name, Amor--Roma spelled backwards--symbolizing Venus, the goddess of love. These two aspects again lead us to a unified duality.

When walking through ancient Rome, one could start from the Coliseum with its cosmic appearance; facing it is the temple of Venus and Rome, then the Basilica of Constantine with its double axiality, and one immediately arrives at Christianity with the church of Cosme and Damian, Christian duality.

This notion of duality is most often linked to the cosmic aspect, the universalism expressed in the best examples of all Roman architecture. This is the case with the baroque, which is the style that left its mark the most in Rome after the Empire.

The circle and cosmic dome become dynamic in becoming an ellipse. The vision of heaven is more and more important. With Copernicus, one discovers that the Earth is not the center, but that it is the Sun, the movement of the planets, the movement of the Earth, to finally end with the discovery of the elliptical orbits.

The baroque goes from the circle to the ellipse. The latter becomes the element *par excellence* of the architecture and urbanism of this period. The double axuality of the ellipse and its decentering, two foci that come together, that constitute the formal principle. Tradition is based on these two aspects: cosmos and unified duality.

La Piazza del Popolo is a good example of this traditional line: two axes centered on the obelisk, which gives the impression of the center of the world and also of a unifying element of the elliptic plan. The two very similar facades of two churches affirm this concept of duality by the axis of the street which leads the space to infinity, a characteristic of baroque space.

This same idea is found again in St. Peter's Piazza of Bernini, the same elliptical form, where two foci are represented by the two fountains unified by the obelisk, which marks the center of the ellipse by re-creating a center of the world, in the same way as the *cardo* and *decumanus*.

In the church of San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, Borromini could not give the building the desired dimensions. He had to use psychological astuteness to magnify the dimensions and give the feeling of grandeur where it did not really exist. Borromini constructed the vault as an ellipse with a series of raised geometric forms that give an unbelievable sensation of elevation. The vault has cosmic implications as in the best Roman tradition. At San Andrea al Quirinale, Bernini also builds a gilded elliptical dome and gives it a radiant image at its center. As in the preceding case, it is cosmic.

The third aspect is the notion of grandeur. All in Rome is built in the scale of the Empire. The scale of the buildings is larger than the human scale. Universalism, duality and imperial grandeur constitute the three elements which, together, have produced the best examples of Roman architecture.

### The Dutch Tradition

The true Dutch tradition begins in the 17th century and at the beginning of the following century, when the country becomes the most liberal of Europe. A bourgeois system is established, while the neighboring monarchies reach the heights of monarchical absolutism. From that time on, Holland became the land of exile and refuge for dissidents from neighboring countries.

Holland was a country of merchants who had to struggle incessantly against the invasion of the waters. For this marshy country, water is the primary menace. It was necessary to construct canals and windmills, to pump out excess water as well as to build dikes, dry out and clean up the land so that it could be cultivated and to protect the agriculture and residences from invasion by the sea. Only with organization and precise regional planning could such a project be successful. The discipline needed for this undertaking created a spirit that will very quickly be the ruling master. Administrative bodies controlled the growth of the towns and strictly planned urbanism. In a country where all is necessarily built and planned, life is wise and orderly.

At the end of the 16th century, a bourgeois democratic order was established that quickly made Holland the most socially advanced country; it also became as prosperous as it had been poor and inhospitable. The Protestant pragmatism and bourgeois organization were characteristic of the country's spirit. The Dutch become skillful businessmen. The Amsterdam stock exchange made this city of canals the great business center of Europe. The banks were strong and the country profited from this spirit of foresight. Therefore, the Dutch bourgeois became the antithesis of the noble, unlike the

Spaniard, who brought back gold from his conquests and looked down on commerce. Intense work, orderly activities and foresight made this water-laden country grow.

Flying at a low altitude, the tulip fields display an orthogonal order of perpendicular planes, one in relation to the other: the image is the same when standing before a Mondrian painting.

The spirit of order produced painters as great and as varied as De Hooch and Vermeer. Contrary to the French, Italian or Spanish painter, who chose to represent great battles, great ideas or religious images, in the 16th century, the theme of the Dutch painters will be the daily life of the bourgeois at his home. The aristocratic absolutism disappeared and yielded to the peaceful indoor images, of family life where order reigned.

From the formal point of view, orthogonality is the sense of absolute balance: all is precise, neat, and clear; mystery has disappeared. The composition is almost always resolved by verticals and horizontals that establish a fundamental equilibrium; if one line is inclined in one direction, the other is inclined in the opposite direction, which balances it. In the 20th century, Mondrian, the best painter of Neoplasticism, pursued this tradition. This man, who at eighteen years of age vacillated between painting and preaching, pursued, as Dora Vallier writes in *l'Art abstrait*, "an ethical dream with aesthetic means". All his painting is the search for a superior order, of an absolute balance. With the austerity of the Protestant puritan, Mondrian, although a Theosophist, shows painting reduced to its simplest expression: horizontals, verticals and planes of color that are almost always pure. The evolution of his painting manifests his abhorrence of disorder and his rejection of nature, which disappeared more and more, resulting in abstraction.

Absolute balance and rigorous orthogonality are in Dutch architecture and urbanism. In Amsterdam, one can observe a medieval point of departure resembling that of Zurich; then, one sees that the later development is carried out from the extremely

structured foundation of the canals, compared to which the Venetian scheme evokes a sensation of true chaos. In Amsterdam, the parallel canals form a hemicycle and perpendicular axes go towards the center: Amsterdam is a spiderweb where all is clear and visible. An almost modular structure imposes itself on the city. Some administrative buildings are culminating points, the rest is made up of bourgeois houses that are similar enough in size and form, like words with the same semantic value. They are not large, but narrow and tall, placed next to each other. Their facades are flat, and only the upper parts of the sloped roofs are decorated. The characteristic of the house is in the structure of the brick facades, where verticals and horizontals are balanced around the entrance door in a way that is a reminder of the paintings of Mondrian and of those of Vermeer.

These same traditional elements are present in the architecture of the Cafe de Unie that Oud constructed in Rotterdam: a flat facade separated into rectangular surfaces with a profound sense of balance. With some variations, it is the same spirit that inspired the architecture of Rietveld's Schroder House in Utrecht: the rationalist prism is broken up into a series of orthogonal planes and of vertical and horizontal lines that float in space, a freer variation of the same Dutch tradition.

Another aspect of the Dutch tradition is the concept of the remote, of unlimited spaces. This feeling is evident in the paintings of marine landscapes; but it is also present in the representation of interiors.

The Dutch interior gives a strong impression of a measurable universe, of limits, of the finite. But if we observe the paintings attentively, in particular those of the 17th century, we often see that the reference to the far-off is present or implied. Among these people, sailors travel the sea to develop commerce. The theme of the letter, so dear to these painters, is repeated; the maps on the walls of rooms contrast with the limit of the internal space depicted. In spite of the orthogonal structuring of the painting and the valorization of the planes so dear to Vermeer and De Hooch, the sense of elsewhere erupts in the painting. With Rembrandt, it is the taste for unlimited space which prevails.

If the notion of the remote is not present in the architecture of the 17th century, the taste for the baroque, on the other hand, is present, sometimes timidly, as in church towers. Architecture burst forth there. In the 20th century, De Klerk's project for a residential quarter in northeast Amsterdam is one of the best examples of the tradition. The expressionism of De Klerk will produce an architecture opposed to Neoplasticism. The concept of the house is indeed present in this architecture and the large, tiled Dutch roofs are in evidence. But he sometimes distorts the houses, he compresses them, as in the example of the angled post office building. All the rest is full of references to the sea, another way of depicting the elsewhere; even in his way of placing the bricks, of shaping certain windows, he evokes the waves: the orthogonal order disappears, to the benefit of other expressive problems of the country which are quite ancient. The theme of the waves is also dealt with in his southern Amsterdam project, where he mixes in signs of movement with the distortion of houses which incorporate the buildings into one of the fundamental themes of the 20th century.

Another expressionist architect inherits from this tradition: Van der May. When he constructs a building for ship outfitters, he quite naturally uses the theme of the sea to shape the sculptures of the facade, the decor of the entrance hall and the stairs: an unfolding of waves.

In a different manner and in opposite creative ways, architects as different as Oud, De Klerk and Van der May were nurtured by the same tradition.

#### **4. The Superimposed Image**

Architecture is associated with something that is built but it has the right to resemble something other than a building.

What the poet does through poetic license can be done in the same way by the painter, the sculptor and, *last but not least*, the architect, who can play with figurations.

Two forms of superimposed images are possible: the symbol and the figurative image, that I will study in turn.

### The Symbol

Thanks to symbols, man expresses realities that are not directly perceptible or mask a reality that he does not want to bring to light. Symbols are already present in the most distant origins of man. It is man's need to take hold of a world that escapes him and of saying what he does not have the right words to say. It is a way to open the mind to more distant realities.

Let us take the symbol of the number 4, which is associated to the square, the cross, the cube. Very early, man organizes his space by perpendicular axes (the east-west course of the sun and, or many, the direction of the polar star and its opposite, north-south). These axes divide the Earth into four sectors. The king has often been called the master of the four seas, of the four suns and of the four parts of the world, to show the extent of his power, the totality of his power. The number 4 is the number symbol of the Earth, of the sensible universe, and of space as we have seen with the Roman *cardo* and *decumanus*.

In the Apocalypse, this number suggests the idea of universality. To represent this idea would be difficult enough; besides, the power of the symbol originates from this difficulty. The truth of the symbol becomes obvious in its logic. As J. Chevalier writes in his work on symbols: "The imagination is not the madwoman of logic, she is the twin sister of reason."

Let us see through one example how logic is manifested in a symbol: that of the rain. It is considered as the symbol of the influences of heaven on the earth. earth is fertilized by the rain, as are women (see Zeus transformed into golden rain to make Danae fertile) and animals. But rain is also connected to the symbol of the fertility of the

mind, of spiritual influences. It is a lunar symbol. Its fertilizing aspect quite naturally makes rain, in the hierology, the representation of sperm, one of the sexual symbols.

A symbol can represent several things at the same time and permit several levels of interpretation: by their very structure, symbols have multiple meanings. It is the range of these meanings that makes up the truth of the symbol. Its interpretation depends on all the elements that surround it, the other symbols as much as the other levels of meaning contained.

Mircea Eliade says that "symbols, myths and rites reveal a limit situation of man and not only a historical situation; limit situation, i.e., what man discovers in becoming aware of his place in the universe". Limit situation and historic situation, the latter turns to history of religions to understand the symbol because, as Jung has shown, it is rooted in the times remote from the history of humanity.

We saw before, while studying Rome, the image of the sphere: the sphere gives a third dimension to the symbolism of the circle. The circle and the sphere are the sign of the unity of the principle, therefore, of the sky and its cyclical movements. The central point, according to Plotinus, is "the father of the circle". It manifests the relationship between God and his creation. The circle is the symbol of the heavenly cycles, thanks to its zodiacal implication; it is, by this slant, linked to the concept of time. the sphere is, like the circle, the symbol of the sky in a circular movement, the cosmic sky connected to Earth.

If the sphere is superimposed on the square, it represents the Earth-Heaven totality. In The Symposium, Plato states that before the division, the original man was a sphere, as was the universe in his Timaeus: "With regard to form, He [the Creator], gave [to the universe] what suits him and what to him is co-natural; now, to the living who must envelop in himself all that is alive, what may be suitable as a figure that which includes in the self all figures; also it is in the shape of a sphere, the center equidistant from all points on the surface that surround it and work around it: that which is, of all the



figures, the most perfect and most completely similar to itself; for he decided that there is a thousand times more beauty in the similar than in the dissimilar."

to illustrate another form of symbolism, I will use the example of the Piazza San Marco in Venice. The piazza is organized asymmetrically. Three principle spaces are connected. The first, with the Palace of the Doges and the Library of Sansovino, begins with two columns toward the lagoon and ends in the island of San Giorgio. The second, which is larger, is developed perpendicularly to the first and consists of St. Mark's church as the culminating point. The third is situated to the north of the church. These three spaces have a very different plastic significance. If one considers the totality of the space as a group of forces going in all directions, one can say that there is a starting point from which all forces spring forth (the starting point of the square is found at its center). In this place, there is the tower that is like a hinge of all the space in the piazza. This tower with a rectangular base is topped with a pyramid and these together take the shape of an obelisk whose symbolism can be linked to the pyramid. The first image that the pyramid evokes is that of the hill that emerged from the primeval waters when the world was created. It is, therefore, a way to symbolize existence, but also the center of the world. It is the point nearest the Earth and the Sky, the support of God. The triangle symbolizes the feminine sex and the pyramid, the Earth-Mother. According to Matyle Ghyka, the pyramid has the originality of captivating, in its crystalline and abstract rigidity, a dynamic impulse that can be regarded as the mathematical symbol of living growth.

The moment when this tower is erected on the Piazza San Marco, it becomes a center of the world, with all the symbolism connected to it. Venice, during that period, was one of the richest states, practically invulnerable because of its location, its commercial spirit and its fleet; it was the link between the East and the West. By the symbol of this tower, Venice therefore distinguishes itself as the center of the world, the tower is itself at the plastic center of the piazza, the center of the city. Other symbols are connected to it: that of the Earth-Mother, which illustrates its location; that of the lion of

St. Mark, which symbolizes the city; and that of Justice, the two figures on the piazza and facade of the palace. As a point of departure from which this space is organized, the tower logically symbolizes all these concepts.

Another example is the industrial town--the salt-works of Chaux--constructed by Ledoux in 1775. The basic form chosen by Ledoux was the circle: the town had to radiate from the center of the circle by a rigorous geometry which links it to another aspect of content, the French tradition. Inside the circle, Ledoux had placed four monumental columns, thereby creating two axes, in the manner of the Roman *cardo* and *decumanus*, inserted in the circle. "An immense circle opens and takes shape before my eyes; it is a new horizon that shines with all colors. The powerful star boldly looks at nature and makes feeble humans lower their eyes. You are not afraid, productive activity, to pass the burning line, mother of all resources, nothing can exist without you, were it not misfortune: you spread the influence which gives life, you enliven arid deserts and melancholy forests."

This "immense circle" that Ledoux talks about is the heart of the industrial town where salt was produced. Strangely, and contrary to a more modern vision of urbanism, Nicolas Ledoux places at the center of the circle the house of the employer and immediately behind, the carriages and stables of the manager and, on both sides, the factory buildings; then the buildings for the salespeople, workers, coopers, and blacksmiths. A grassy area and a large avenue separate this first circle from the rest of the town that radiates around this center. Avenues connect the town to the Loue river and the forest of Chaux in a north-south direction; another leads perpendicularly to the village of Arc-et-Senans, from east to west. The communal buildings, so typical of the urbanism programs of the 18th century, are installed at the beginning of this last avenue.

The symbolism is clear. First of all, it concerns the center, which has held a position of great importance in all ancient civilizations. Guenon says of the center that "it is above all the origin, the starting point of all things; it is the main point, without form or

dimension, and therefore invisible, and consequently the only image that can be given to primordial unity. Everything radiates from this point, the same as unity produces all numbers without otherwise changing or affecting their essence." "It is, at the same time, the idea of the center. The point. It is the principle, the state of pure being, and the space that it fills by its very radiation, without which this space would only be privation and nothingness, it is the world to the fullest extent of the word, the group of all beings and all states of existence that constitute the universal manifestation."

Therefore, this point in the center of the circle would be the principle, and the circle would be that of the world. In Ledoux's case, the central point is distinguished in an even stronger way by situating, on top of the employer's house, a pyramid with all the symbolism that we have just seen in connection with Venice. The central point has been used in very ancient civilizations as a representation of the Sun, because it is the "heart of the world", and this reference exists precisely in the quote from Ledoux that we have just given. The symbolism of the cross refers to the action of the principle in be the bosom of creation. The vertical and horizontal are connected to the concept of balance, of opposites resolved. The four equidistant columns of the proprietor's house emphasize again the symbolism of the number 4 as a symbol of Earth, of the totality of the created. Ledoux, therefore, places the employer as a principle, symbol of the world, there where the industrial work is done. The French Revolution signals the end of the autocracy and the arrival to power of the bourgeoisie.

At the entrance of the central circle, on the north-south axis, is another symbolic element: there rises a portico with six doric columns, of a great classicism; it is the image of the return to Greece, the image of reason, in conformance with the spirit of the Encyclopedist. Behind is a niche that endows the portico with another symbolic dimension: the image of the natural in the figure of uncut stones and of springs; thus, Reason is superimposed on Nature.

Immediately after this entrance, in front of the employer's house, where the image of reason is found: the six columns of the facade of the house are formed by stones alternately square and cylindrical. The effect is that of a strange vibration, as if they were seen reflected in water. The image of reason symbolized by the order of the entrance becomes here reason reflected upon, reason in crisis. Ledoux shows, in the salt-works of Chaux, the Reason-Nature duality typical of the period and, at the same time, the crisis of rationalism.

If Ledoux has an equivalent in literature, it is the Marquis de Sade: in his book The 120 Days of Sodom a very strict rational structure dominates in the choice of the four principle characters, the secondary characters, in the concept of the chateau, and in the unfolding of the action throughout the work; at the end, on the contrary, is the debacle, the horror and the death through sex. Sade and Ledoux play with similar meanings: the violent explosion of the irrational in the very interior of a very rational structure shaped in the image of reason.

To show the symbolism of the 20th century, I rely on the School of Architecture constructed by Mies van der Rohe at the Illinois Institute of Technology. It is a vast, completely free, undivided space; a floating space, characteristic of Mies van der Rohe's conception. Several functions are joined together there: the school's ateliers, an exhibition hall, the library and administration offices. The functions that must be separated from the latter are placed in the basement, where there is no aesthetic search. The building does not seek to express its internal life, the immediate content is excluded.

The work is conceived to survive after the function of the School of Architecture has ceased to exist; only the aesthetic function remains, the search of a perfection in which Mies abandons all that remains of the romanticism of the Barcelona pavilion. It is a symmetrical composition of great classicism that reflects Mies's own formula, *less is more*. The steel structure divides the glass facade, creating highly refined proportions. These elements become the key elements of the architecture. The technique is pushed

forward and glorified. It is the idea (in the Platonic sense of the term) of technique. The beams which support the large slab are four in number and divide the facade into six parts.

The symbol of the Earth is found in the number 4 and in the number 6, the symbol of the opposition of the creature and the Creator in a balance again found in the seal of Solomon formed of two opposing triangles: it is cosmic unity. This balance of opposites corresponds to the original Neoplasticism of Mies, the play of the always orthogonal horizontals and verticals tending to perfect equilibrium.

In this sense, the four structural elements imply totality, Earth having become technological, and incorporates the number 6, symbol of opposites in balance. These elements manifest the triumphant technology brought about by balance and perfection.

The way in which Mies makes the inner life of the building subordinate to a perfect space, which glorifies the industrial elements, is the subordination of man to the created object.

With Mies as with Ledoux, symbols are not an end in themselves, but are a means, through language, to achieve a more complex expression.

Christianity has given to art an extraordinary richness charged with multiple meanings. The facade of the cathedral of Burgos, like many others, has three doors. The number 3 symbolizes intellectual and spiritual order in God, in man, and in the cosmos. For the Christian, it is divine unity, the three persons in one. According to Guenon, it is the symbol of the three functions of the king of the world who is represented by Christ, king, priest and prophet, the functions of the three Magi united in the newborn Jesus. But these three doors imply, above all, the concept of divinity.

On the central door a pediment added later is shaped like a triangle. On the tympanum, one may see, in a circular form, the representation of the seal of Solomon, i.e., two inverted triangles that form a six-pointed star. It is one of the fundamental symbols of hermetic thought.

Fire, water, air and earth make up the ensemble of the elements of the universe. The star functions in the same way; i.e., by the play of opposites. here, the seal of Solomon is a synthesis of opposing elements. The seal harbors several possibilities. Each point can represent a metal with gold at the center. But one could have, in place of the six metals, six planets with the Sun as the center.

The alchemists only thought to obtain a change from the imperfection of the exterior toward the perfection of the center. The seal, by the triangle, is deified and, above all, as mentioned before, by the number 6, we have the opposition of the creature and the Creator in balance. In the Apocalypse, the number 6 represents sin. The Antichrist will be branded with the number of the beast, 666, the number of adversaries. Six is also the number of the Biblical Hexameron: it is the creation, the mediatory number between the principle and the manifestation. The notion of principle, from which all emanates, is well emphasized in the seal of Solomon in the cathedral of Burgos. The center, which radiates, is there. By raising the eyes, one can see a rose-window in the center of which is again found the seal of Solomon. Without a doubt, the rose-window is linked to the symbolism of the center of all things, which directs movement without participating itself; referring to an expression of Aristotle, it is the immobile mover. It is a derivation, according to Guenon, of the symbolism of the wheel. In both cases, the derivation implies the concept of a principal point, the pole around which everything moves. Clearly one thinks of Christ, king of the world, who establishes order and balance at the same time. It is balance and harmony that are expressed by the seal of Solomon from this central point. It is the supreme principle from which the stained-glass of the rose-window gives the reflection. Above the rose-window, there is a line of six sculpture, curiously divided by two pointed arches. In the tympanum of each pointed arch, there are three holes: the duality of the seal is found here. On the sides there are windows arranged in pairs. We have therefore two towers with mountain-like forms and the rising sun in the center of the rose window. If we look at the most ancient

temples, such as those of Egypt, we find this same principle: two pylons that represent the two cliffs on both sides of the Nile and on the lintel of the door the representation of the rising sun.

The most ancient traditions of the temples are expressed in the cathedrals. The rose window is also a solar symbol, a manifestation of divinity, source of life. The sun radiates in space from the main point. It is the symbol of the resurrection and immortality.

The sacred is represented on the facade of the cathedral by a series of symbols. At the crossing of the transept, is again found the symbolism of the center represented in the vault by an eight-pointed star. It evokes the eternal life as well as the resurrection of Christ and of man. The number eight is, *par excellence*, a number of transition: baptisteries had an octagonal plan since baptism is a passage, an initiation. The representation of the number eight indicates the metamorphosis of the square into a circle; it is a symbol of the intermediary between two elements: the winds in space are the intermediaries between the Earth and the sky; the Tower of the Winds in Athens is built on an octagonal plan.

### The Figurative Image

This second part evidently has points of contact with the first. But if the symbol is more abstract, the figuration, in its form, makes reference to the concrete. One can render a building as a gesture, or its appearance can call to mind an attitude or someone, or it can represent something that exists. Perhaps the final goal is not to represent a concrete object but to create a metaphor to reinforce the mediate content that we will discuss next.

In the example of the pyramids, the Egyptians went from the form of the mountain to a pure geometry. We have already referred to the synagogue of Pennsylvania built by Frank Lloyd Wright: he gets his inspiration from the mountain of

light in the Old Testament. He represents the mountain geometrically, but less abstractly than the Egyptians and not as simply, because he is not concerned with simple forms. He creates a concrete base from which a metal and glass mountain rises up, and where the reflection of light is as important in the daytime as it is at night. therefore, even if the figuration is impossible in the synagogue--the religion prohibits it--Wright finds a figurative image for the building ensemble.

In baroque art, the need to explain messages has produced extraordinary figurations, as in St. Peter's church in Rome. A long list of architects left their mark there: Bramante, Rafael, Peruzzi, Sangallo, Michelangelo, Maderno, and finally, Bernini, 'Le Bernin', who was asked to create a large square capable of accommodating the crowds in front of the church. He decides to play with what already exists, while giving new meaning to the ensemble; therefore, each element with a different meaning modified the meaning of the whole. He conceived the whole as a human being: Michelangelo's dome becomes the head; the facade of Maderno, the torso; the balcony where the Pope blesses the crowd is the heart; and the colonnade that he adds produces the effect of two arms that embrace. The figuration is not on the human scale, since the major idea is to represent the universality of the church: the Mother Church, as a gigantic human being, is able to receive the entire world.

Gaudi, one of the most extraordinary architects of the history of architecture, is also one of those who wanted to and best knew how to play with figurations: the Casa Battlo, for example, with its representation of monster. The roof of the house is an enormous carapace of a monstrous animal, the attic is cartilaginous, the geometry is hidden. The facade is covered with elements that give the sensation of scales, at the base of the building are bones, and the balconies are shaped like an eye socket. In Barcelona, it is popularly called "the house of bone". the Battlo house becomes a heap of superimposed figurations that lean toward the tragic Spanish tradition as well as the spirit of the period.



Another architect of the same period, Victor Horta, does not use zoomorphic forms like Gaudi, but vegetable figurations. The iron columns of his own house are shaped like plants, with long leaves and very sensual movements. Everything on the inside is organic. The spaces continue into each other through sinuous ornamentation always resembling the vegetable. Even the walls have linear ornamentations which lengthen the shape of the leaves. The chandeliers are flowers or plants, and above the stairway, he multiplies, by a play of mirrors, these effects *ad infinitum*. Horta uses the image of the vegetable and conceptualizes the space according to a relationship of very organic lines.

It is interesting to note that the Gothic cathedrals furnish some good examples of figuration. The inside of the cathedral of Reims uses the figurative image in the same way.

The cathedral of Strasbourg is an image of nature where the first great Christian cycle took place: the birth of Christ into the world is a moment of the affirmation of nature. One could have represented nature symbolically, but this is not the case. On the facade are buds coming out of moldings, all of whose fillets are vegetable figures in full bloom. Near the main door, two pillars and angled moldings are decorated in the same way. On the same door, extremely delicate elements also represent buds. When one enters the building, the representation of a forest is clear. The way of organizing the pillars, split into ribs, evoke an image of French or German forests; each pillar becomes a tree in the image of the trunk, which is divided into branches, these intersect each other in the vault of the central nave. At one of the side entrances, on the sculpture of the martyrdom of St. Lawrence, the flamboyant figuration becomes clearer. One gets the feeling of a profusion of branches cut with an axe; moreover, some are already cut. It is already the period of the Gothic where the style becomes more naturalistic and baroque at the same time. one finds the same spirit in the vaults of the chapels of Ingolstadt, where figurative imitation goes farther.

Mendelsohn's Einstein tower in Potsdam furnishes another example of the use of the figurative image. The tower captures the posture of the sphinx. The way the ground floor is placed in relation to the tower evokes the shape of the sphinx. The top, with its dome, looks like a head, which explains the function of the tower which is an observatory where one explores the mystery of the cosmos. The sphinx, this crouching lion with a human head, is symbolically the guardian of forbidden thresholds; he listens to the song of the planets, he watches at the border of eternities. He has symbolized the ineluctable: we certainly think of the enigma of the Sphinx of Oedipus. The sphinx is mystery. This image is therefore appropriate for the theme of explorer of the cosmos which is evoked by an observatory.

In the 20th century, Rudolph Steiner built a boiler-house near the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland. The most apparent function of a boiler-house is to heat; with a minimum of elements, a chimney and a space close to the ground, it succeeded in creating a powerful image. A chimney has an obvious masculine connotation. So does fire, while water has a feminine connotation. Here, one plays with fire. In this project, the erect penis is a very clear image. The chimney takes the form of a tree trunk. The tree is also a sexual symbol with a persistent connotation of life. The tree of life was planted in the middle of the garden of Eden and four rivers flow from it. It designates the heart of man but also indicates the cross. Tree and cross rise up in the center of the Earth, because it designates the center of the world. In the case of the boiler-house, one establishes a superimposition of the tree image and the phallic image associated with fire.

At the beginning of the 1970s, I did a project for the village of Vela Luca, a small town in the island of Korcula in Yugoslavia. The site is a bay inside a larger one, where the village is located. It is a very evocative place, because of terraced hills for the cultivation of vineyards; the softness of the hills suggested to me the image of a man half immersed, his knee or shoulder visible: vision of an anthropomorphic nature. The

island, colonized by the Argonauts, according to legend, is a land of myths, and I wanted to work with this spirit.

Travelling between the town of Vela Luca and this village is done by boat, since the view from the sea was more significant than from the road. The project had to include housing projects proposed by artists from different European countries. The urbanism and the central square were assigned to me.

The site itself inspired the image to be given to the project: the figure of a mythical man coming out of the water, the village tracing the form of this giant as in a painting of Arcimboldo. Each building had to have its own personality, and seen from afar, all would constitute the man, as Arcimboldo did with fruits or with vegetables.

The project for residences installed around a square facing the sea was propitious. At the very top of the hill was a parking lot and on the seashore, a wharf for boats. It is through all these buildings that I tried to convey the meaning of my project: the administrative area coincides with the head, the restaurant with the stomach, the social areas with the hands; a labyrinth at the center of the square corresponds to the intestines, the amphitheater with the pubis, and the wharf with the sex organ. The houses around the square that form the silhouette of the giant had to be equally incorporated into my project. To play with the general image, I conceived the houses as parts of the torso outside: the shoulder, the armpit and the chest of a man. Inside, in the area for the living room and dining room, I wanted a cosmic symbolism around the fireplace, to evoke the sensation of a microcosm that is man himself and who can have the entire cosmos inside him. There, I worked as a sculptor to complete the meaning; the place for the fire would be treated as a navel: the fireplace, held up by metal braces, would be a cube and the duct would be in the shape of a ladder. On the ceiling, a shape evoking the image of the udder of a milk-giving cow as a symbol of fertility; she is celestial as a cloud swollen with fertilizing rain. Even the Vedas give a cosmic and divine meaning to the cow: "The cow is Heaven, the cow is Earth." In this precise case, I use its heavenly symbol. In the

center of the floor, the navel had a chthonian meaning; the cube above the fireplace and on the cube a staircase, the ensemble forming the axis of the world from the center to the sky. In the udder, there was a glass-covered orifice that coincided with the fountain on the terrace, in which one could see an image of the higher sea that Ancients believed in. Each house around the beach was an image of the anthropocosmos outside of man, and inside, the symbolism of Earth and of Heaven, a human microcosm.

### 5. The Mediate Content

I contrast it with the immediate content. In an architectural work, mediate content would be the expression of the historic moment where it is realized. The immediate content need not be expressed, as we have seen in Mies van der Rohe's School of Architecture at IIT; persuasion may be absent, as in the case of Brunelleschi's Pazzi Chapel. With regards to tradition, we see that Le Corbusier's project in India is not connected with Indian tradition, and Aalto's Maison Carree does not take the French tradition into account; if there is a symbolism in the houses of Aalto, it is well hidden. As for figuration, this same architect neither uses it for the small parthenon of Jyväskylä, for which he manifests much humor, nor for the Finnish pavilion of New York. None of these aspects of content is vital to the existence of architecture. On the other hand, mediate content is a *sine qua non* condition of architecture. A work of architecture is the expression of its historic moment. I do not wish to say that it must express all aspects of this moment but it must become a powerful image of an authentic collective event.

Certain works of the past expressed the totality of the culture of the times, as in the Gothic cathedrals of the Middle Ages. On the other hand, in the 19th and 20th centuries, the notion of a totally outstanding element, of an absolute, disappears. The different aspects of our civilization offer a multitude of expressive possibilities. Architecture was weakened from the standpoint of expression and, for the most part, it repeats without any imagination the themes of the first half of the century. These

themes, which developed a continuity since the industrial revolution are always current. These are the themes that I will deal with now, without delving into each one in detail, however.

### Dynamism

The first of these themes is dynamism. Indeed, since the industrial revolution, the notion of time has changed. With the invention of the train, the notions of distance as well as the mentality of men changed. Men perceive the world through speed that no one could believe imaginable until that time. The automobile, the airplane, and then the rocket were the following stages of this march toward speed. The notion of movement in space is henceforth part of the mentality of men in developed countries. In industry, the assembly line demands the synchronization of the movements of man with those of the machine. Experts calculate the movements of the worker to achieve maximum productivity. Chaplin in *Modern Times* depicts with humor and sarcasm the drama of man fighting against this adaptation. A mechanism, that of the photograph, captures life in its instantaneity. Even in fundamental sciences, the search continues on the path of space-time unity: in Einstein's formula, speed intervenes in the relation between energy and mass. The space-time continuum appeared in his theory of relativity. In daily life, the problem of time in space is also a major concern; one thinks of the pedestrian who must constantly calculate his course and the speed of his course in order to pass in front of a car travelling at a given speed. In the 20th century, the importance given to time is indeed one of the expressive problems of our century. Let us look at some of its definitions.

Pascal, in his work, Of the Geometric Spirit tackles the problem of his definition: "Time is of this nature, who will be able to define it? And why try, since all men conceptualize what is meant when speaking of time, without being more specific." The definition given by the dictionary, Le Petit Robert, is more explicit: "Undefined milieu

where changing existences seem to unfold irreversibly; events and phenomena in their succession." In Webster's Dictionary, we find this definition: "The measured and measurable period during which an action, a process or conditions exist and continue."

Our life has a time limit that distinguishes it from the beyond, which is eternal. Human time is finite, as opposed to the infinite divine time; the first is a brief fragment, the second, eternity. The Greek myths, in their wholistic vision, found in Chronos the representation of Time. When he cuts the testicles of his father Uranus, he dried up the source of life when they fell into the sea. They gave birth to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Besides, Chronos devours his own children. The feeling of duration begins with him.

Of all the symbolic representations of Time, the most celebrated is, without a doubt, that of the old man carrying a sickle. It is used throughout the history of art. Another symbol of Time is represented by the serpent who bites his tail, Ourouboros. By its circular form the serpent is seen as a cyclical symbol and, because it bites its tail, effects a transmutation of life and death: life, because it is a sexual symbol of self-fertilization, and death because the serpent injects itself with its own venom; death comes out of life, as life comes out of death.

The Ouroboros is also depicted as a wheel, which evokes the image of movement toward infinity. It is the animator of the universe and, in giving life, creates duration.

The hourglass, by the constant and regular fall of grains of sand, symbolizes in the best way the time that passes. It marks a cycle in time.

The 20th century did not use these kinds of symbols, but used other clever methods to express time. If we analyze the various aspects of time, we can approach it through one of the simpler concepts starting with three elements: present, past and future. Janus, which we have already mentioned, expresses this idea well, since he looks at the past with one of his two heads, and at the future with the other.

St. Augustine said that "the present is three-fold. The present is the only dimension that really exists. The past is the memory of a present. The future is a present expectation." Without a doubt, for him, time has a subjective character: the soul is the place where time passes.

However, to analyze the aspects of time as interpreted in art, is an activity that reveals the greatest riches if approached from these four aspects: succession, becoming, duration and simultaneity. Each of these aspects is expressed in our everyday language: succession: "Day after day"; becoming: "I saw it but I did not recognize it"; duration: "I did not see time pass"; "This moment seemed unending for me"; simultaneity: "and at the same time..."

Succession consists of a sequence of instants that follow each other in an irreversible order. Thus, a line that describes a movement (series of points) can be a symbol of time.

The sequence of instants that are connected is present in the decoration of Trajan's column in Rome; a spiral represents an uninterrupted continuity of deeds in bas-relief. The tympanum of the cathedral of Strasbourg provides another example: a bas-relief tells the story of Christ in a continuous fashion.

Instantaneity is found in impressionism. Hauser in Social History of Art, analyzed the great dynamic revolution that impressionism started before cubism. Impressionism gives only minor importance to immediate content, the theme of the painting becomes secondary. Instead, the painter's major concern is the moment, a very precise moment of the day when light has a particular tonality. When Monet paints a series of pictures of the cathedral of Rouen, it is not the cathedral that matters, but the light that brightens it at a precise moment; the space is fixed, the painter, immobile, only the light changes: it becomes the most important element of the painting. The surface will no longer have its eternal color as it did during the Renaissance; it breaks up into blotches done by the brush, strokes that the eye reconstructs; it is light decomposed and

recomposed. The painting becomes atmospheric. In this case, the painting no longer depicts continuity, but an instant that is measured, which would be a point between two other points of the line that we just discussed.

A succession of moments can be observed in the paintings of Severini, in which a line of movement is split up into very brief moments that follow one another; or again in the *Nude Descending a Staircase* of Duchamp, where only the stages connected to the movement are visible.

In architecture, this form of linear succession is found in the train station of Rome. A curved roof element leads from the entrance toward the platforms with successive breaks; the platforms themselves continue the movement of the architecture by the acceleration of the departing trains. In the lobby, the beams are interrupted by stained-glass windows, with a formal aspect like that of Balla's paintings.

The second aspect of the analysis of time, becoming, is already described by Heraclitus, and we approach this aspect using his own words: "For souls, to die is to change into water; for water, to die is to become earth; and from the earth comes water, and from water comes the soul..."

"Immortal mortals; mortal immortal; our life is their death and our death, their life..." "One cannot go down the same river twice, nor touch a perishable substance twice in the same state, because through the promptness and swiftness of the transformation, it disperses and comes together again, or rather, neither again nor after: at the same time that it reassembles and withdraws, it suddenly arrives and goes away."

The permanent change of all things, illustrated in Ovid's Metamorphoses, does not appear to be a central theme for the philosophers until the beginning of the 19th century.

"Everywhere, the most motley of crowds; when a thing disappears, another takes its place at once." (Hegel). His whole philosophy analyzes history like a dialectic movement. He is concerned with moments of passage. He writes: "Change from change, it is a reversal, the leap of a change to another qualitatively different one. It occurs when



a certain degree of quantitative modification from the first change is reached. The growth of quantity brings about the mutation of quality."

"Inversely, any (quantitative) modification takes place by the repeated addition of units, of quantitative singularities. The progressive lowering of the temperature of water causes at zero degrees a change into a solid form, at one-hundred degrees, a change into vapor."

"Technically, it is by operating on the quantity of a change that one obtains that of quality."

The same concept of the dialectic movement of history, but seen from the standpoint of materialism, is at the heart of a philosophy that has had a decisive influence on our century: Marxism.

Time as a coming into being is a series of transformations linked together. We are fascinated by the spectacle of metamorphoses that occur everywhere at an accelerated rhythm in our daily life, in nature that surrounds us and in all fields of knowledge.

The concept of coming into being, so much in evidence in the current world, is particularly well exploited in the boiler-house of the Goetheanum, were we have already analyzed the phallic element that becomes a tree. There is an obvious relation between Steiner's own house and this boiler-house. The house takes the form of a flower still in bud form; this image is manifest in the shaping of the roof. The facade is in the axis of the Goetheanum. But this building opens up through the roof in an almost gestural manner: it gives the sensation of someone raising their arms, as in an attitude of opening up to the cosmos; this is quite visible on both sides of the upper part of the facade. The roof is rounded like a skull. In philosophy, Steiner compares the position of a palm leaf to something opening up to the cosmos and the flower bud in relation to the earth. From the first, one passes to the second, from the closed element to the open: that is coming into being.

Another example is provided by the crematorium of Asplund, which we have already introduced. All of nature's surrounding space leads to the entrance hall where, by incorporating the plastic arts of Carl Mies, a sculpture at the central point represents, stage by stage, an elongated dead person rising up until he passes through the opening of the roof. That expresses the passage of one life to another: a coming into being.

Duration is a way of contrasting time lived and "real" time. For Bergson, it involves the time felt instead. In the memory, the conscience establishes a continuity between past and present: "It (duration) is memory but an inner memory of the change itself, a memory that prolongs the before into the after and prevents them from being pure instantaneities, appearing and disappearing in a present that would be continuously reborn. A melody that we listen to with eyes closed, thinking only of it, is to nearly coincide with this time that is the very fluidity of our inner life; but it still has too many qualities, too much determination and it would first be necessary to efface the difference between the sounds, then do away with the definitive characters of the sound itself, only to retain the continuation of what comes before, in what follows and the uninterrupted transition, undivided multiplicity and succession without separation to recover fundamental time."

For Bergson, each moment of our life corresponds to a moment of our body and all the surrounding material that would exist at the same time. He extends this duration to the whole of the world, indeed even to the universe, which would be a trait of union among the individual consciousness.

Art can express time as duration. In Remembrance of Things Past, Marcel Proust superimposes the present and the time of memory. A feeling--taste, sound--revives a past. We feel the time flow. Another example is in the work of Richard Strauss, *Death and Transfiguration*, where the moment of death permits a remembrance of the past. All is contained in this musical moment.

In The Magic Mountain, Thomas Mann expresses duration by the play between real time measured by a clock and the time felt inside of the young man lost in the snow.

Di Chirico, in his painting, *The Conquest of the Philosopher*, introduces an original representation of time experienced. A cannon with two balls points toward an opening of a building. On the top of the painting sits a clock under which a train passes, which is a reference to his father's profession. Everything evokes the image of Chronos, also near to the choragic monument of Carystos at Delos. At the foot of the cannon are two artichokes, like twins, which refer to Castor and Pollux, but also to Di Chirico and his own brother. The hour of the clock and the hour of the shadow do not coincide. The chimneys in the background recur like sexual elements. All is placed in an empty, static world where nothing seems to happen. Di Chirico expresses here the problem of inner time, the communion of the past and of the present, which is duration. This vision is none other than his inner infinity.

This sensation of duration was found again in Alvar Aalto's Finnish pavilion at the New York Exposition in 1939. The upper part of the building, with its continuous curves where the mural photographs are, integrated to the architectural space, illustrate the country. The middle part shows the populace after work and the lower part displays the local products. One feels the totality of a country, a collective activity conveyed by images linked together like the notes of the melody that Bergson talked about, like a continuous unity made of sounds that seem to continue on in the infinite perspectives of Finnish nature. The photomontage and the objects evoke the pulsation of the country. The movement of the spectator in this organic space is structured so that he will perceive its true to life.

The third aspect of time is simultaneity. It is the possibility for two or several events of entering into a unique and synchronous perception in a single and same act of the mind.

Einstein is the man who changed the concept of physics: "The world of physical occurrences, called a very limited "world" by Minkowski, is naturally in four dimensions in this sense of the spatio-temporal because it is composed of individual occurrences, each one of which is determined by four numbers, namely three coordinates of space,  $x$ ,  $y$ ,  $z$  and a coordinate of time,  $T$ . In this sense, the world is also a continuum, for there exists, for each occurrence any number whatever of "similar" occurrences (realized or imagined), whose coordinates  $x$ ,  $y$ ,  $z$ , and  $T$  differ as little as desired from the coordinates  $x$ ,  $y$ ,  $z$ , and  $T$  of the first occurrence considered." The notion of a fourth dimension in more than three axes, height, length, width, the inclusion of time as an inseparable element of space, has invaded all actual life and thought; a new manner of conceiving the universe has emerged.

Universal reality consist of relative and mobile points of view and the observer, although attempting to find the unity of an impersonal time, is subject to different internal duration. Consequently, there is no absolute reference mark, no privileged system, so the observer cannot know if his system is in motion or at rest. The concept of different perceptions of time, which are capture in a single and same act, constitutes what is called simultaneity. Let us take an example: a person takes a walk, a river flows in another direction, a bird flies in yet another direction. The displacement of each of these three elements occurs for each at its own speed; moreover, the walker perceives his own inner duration. however, his awareness takes in the three moments: he has the experience of simultaneity.

The literature of the 20th century offers us with an admirable example of simultaneity: Joyce's Ulysses, a recapitulative book of our times. Hermann Broch said of this work that it was "the totality of 'this daily universal life of the period' impossible to capture in its infinity with infinite facets, which contains the spirit of the period and its already almost inconceivable visage."

Ulysses tells of a day in the life of an ordinary petit bourgeois before 1914, Leopold Bloom. He learned about the events of his time through newspaper headlines. The day of June 16, 1904, during which one accompanies him from nine in the morning to three in the morning, only reveals the banal life, of an equally banal existence. his wife, Molly, is as banal as he and Stephen Dedalus, the intellectual. Bloom gets up, prepares Molly's breakfast, leaves for work, goes to a burial, to the public baths, has lunch, continues his work, dines at a restaurant, meets Dedalus, then walks along the beach; at the end of the evening, he meets Dedalus again, goes to a brothel, leaves with Dedalus and goes to his conjugal bed. These eighteen hours of his existence are described in more than twelve-hundred pages, more than seventy-five per hour, more than one page per minute. In this game, the time of the reader is different from the real time of the book, the two being considered simultaneously. There is also present a reference to Homer's *Ulysses*: the long years that bring him from his initiatic voyage to the promised land; the different moments of the day in the book in these two terms of different spatial coordinates. All these accounts viewed simultaneously constitute the expression of this aspect of space-time. As regards Joyce's book, Broch said: "Always it is simultaneity which matters. It is the synchronism of infinite possibilities of cutting the symbolic object into facets. One feels everywhere the effort to capture and intertwine with chains of symbols what must be expressed simultaneously, as much as possible, the infinity of the elusive nature where the world rests and which constitutes its reality." To do this, Joyce makes language explode, he reinvents it.

In painting, the example that imposes itself is Picasso. In effect, Picasso does not see his model from a single point of view. He takes Cezanne's ideas much farther. He begins to move around the model to see it from different points of view; he takes these different instants and superimposes them, then presents the simultaneous image of these movements. Picasso will exhaust this method. He will go from a volumetric to an atmospheric painting, then planimetric, to the inclusion of the object which is no longer

painting, to an organicity, and finally to the emotional outburst. He exploits this image of the fourth-dimension in all of its consequences, but the basis of what he uses in painting is close to Joyce's method in literature. He succeeds in expressing the space-time continuum. Futurism also expressed this vision of the space-time image. Contrary to the cubism of Picasso, it is the object that moves while the spectator remains immobile; two aspects close to the idea of fourth dimension.

The constructivism of Gabo and Pevsner suppresses the principle of the figurative object and leave only lines and planes which intersect in space. Eisenstein, in *Potemkin*, conceives his film as a game with time that beginning at a very slow pace and building to a crescendo until the revolt and the following resting point, with the scene of the sailor, dead on the beach. Another crescendo comes in after the town revolt and causes the rhythm to accelerate until the famous staircase scene; another stop, then preparation for battle, the rhythm accelerates and builds until the end, where all the sailors make the cause of their comrades their own. Three crescendos, three rhythm accelerations form the structural framework of the film. Through this aspect, Eisenstein's film is close to the constructivists's preoccupation with dynamic expression.

In architecture, it is Frank Lloyd Wright who played with the fourth dimension in the most extraordinary way, in particular with *Falling Water*. What a quantity of superimposed movements at the same time! As in all of Wright's work, a central nucleus, where the chimney is located, rises up forcefully from the ground to raise itself toward the heights. Starting from this nucleus, a whole series of geometric forms appears in a strong horizontal and orthogonal movement. In this work the conception of space is unlimited. The violent movement starting from the central nucleus is therefore easy to read. Since Wright conceives of the landscape as a work of art that must be finished, he considers his house as a mountain, with its pyramidal silhouette, and goes back to the concept of the center of the world, thanks to the two orthogonal elements. He situates this house on the ground in a very particular manner. He places it on a river that ends in

a waterfall, although its real movement, the speed of the water and that of the fall, contrast with the virtual movement of the different elements of the house which come out and rise up. The river is a fundamental and inseparable element of his architecture, as is the waterfall: two movements are opposed, that of the chimney, of fire that rises toward the sky, and that of the waterfall, which goes down toward the ground. Evidently, these two movements are rooted in an ancestral symbolism, the opposites and the play on the four elements.

When arriving by the road, the space and the elements of the architecture cause a movement that draws the spectator around the house toward the place of the entrance; from there, the relationship of the bodies leads him naturally to enter and then, thanks to the continuity of spaces, he is taken away in a spiral toward the large, outside terrace. When looking at this house, one thinks of the superimposition of the symbolic planes that Broch mentioned. As a matter of fact, through its stone part, it is a continuation of nature; its glass and concrete parts evoke an image of the technology engendered by the machine, it has the aerodynamics of airplanes. The fourth dimension of Einstein is truly present in this remarkable architecture.

In his work Space, Time and Architecture, Giedion cites, as an expression of this space-time continuum, the Villa Savoye of Le Corbusier. He said that the visitor would have to move around the pure prism and look at it from all points of view, as did Picasso with his model, to simultaneously see the inside and outside. In reality, the impeccable geometry of the Villa Savoye does not incite movement, the prism is static, and no sign of mobility is suggested. Giedion based his remark on the absence of axuality, the absence of principal and secondary facades. As for me, I arrived at the conclusion that on the outside of the building, the problem of representing the fourth dimension is not connected to the meaning of the building. If one looks attentively, one sees a beam that forms an axis toward the entrance door. Then, with two columns and a beam, Le Corbusier creates a portico, which provides an axis to the Villa Savoye and makes

Giedion's proposal difficult to support. If there is a rough outline of the fourth dimension, it is found on the inside: the superimposition in the entrance hall of the staircase, with its spiral stairs and the ramp in a straight line; there are signs of the mobility of space, which suggests a simultaneity of movement.

But one cannot say that the issue is the veritable expressive problem of the Villa Savoye, which is otherwise full of strong meanings.

In 1982, with one of my students, Miguel Acosta, I did a project for the Paris Opera School of Dance in Nanterre, a competition requested by the Ministry of Culture. We had conceived our project with a simple plan on the ground floor, where the administration, classrooms, the school and coat rooms are located, all with small patios that brighten and ventilate the whole. Above are the dance rooms and the dormitories. The platforms of the ground floor and first floor are connected by steps and, to obtain a square of greater significance, two dance rooms are superimposed. Lodgings are to the left of the entrance.

We wanted to inscribe ourselves in the French tradition, the meaning of which has already been analyzed using the example of the chateau of Chambord: rigorously simple base and an expansion of forms in the development of the upper parts. Our building also had the apparent madness of the Gothic cathedrals with the hidden god. To the rationality of the base and prism of the rooms is opposed the movement that touches all the other elements. To poeticize the function of the school, we chose the notion of the pirouette proper to the dance. By superimposing the larger dance rooms onto the smaller ones, we imagined a twisting effect giving the impression of a rotating movement from bottom to top which is emphasized by the inclination of the pillars.

The roof is placed like a swastika. The well-emphasized center is the fixed point that all traditions agree to designate symbolically as the pole, since the world rotates around it. Like the wheel, it is a symbol of movement around an immobile center, the principle from which movement originates; starting with this principle, it is the



whirlwind of the creation, the symbol of life, of currents of energy. A whole series of rotations in different places can be found in our project.

Another aspect is visible from the entrance. A series of vaults induces a longitudinal movement which, from the entrance, runs through the length of the project, arrives at a dance hall in the middle of the central area which, by its own movement, shapes it to go up through a series of esplanades and disappear toward the infinity of the sky. This is an example of simultaneity.

#### The Technology of the Period and the Product of the Machine

Since the beginning of the 19th century, a great theme has been exploited; that of the machine or of technology. It is found in the mediate content of the works of Baltard, Paxton, and Labrouste, where space is formed by the relationship of different elements of iron. In the Villa Savoye, in the way in which it becomes an image of the object constructed in an assembly line, it is the object produced by the machine, more than the machine itself, that is important. Le Corbusier said that the house was a machine for living; in reality, it becomes the expression of its image as an industrialized product that has lost all decorative aspects, perfectly smooth with large, strip windows. There is a desire to eliminate everything that is superficial and expensive. The visual result is that of a product that one can reproduce in numerous examples; all reference to life is suppressed. It is not surprising that the Villa Savoye does not express immediate content: it does not have the lived-in appearance of a Wright or Aalto house; it could have been anything other than a house.

On the other hand, the aesthetic of Le Corbusier's pure prism on pilotis is of universal value to him an applicable to any architectural case.

The Heidi Weber foundation in Zurich, that Le Corbusier built as a museum for his work, was conceptualized as a car; all the parts are metal and were made in a factory.

It is among the works of Mies van der Rohe that buildings expressing the perfection of technology are found, especially in his American period. We will not reexamine the previously mentioned IIT School of Architecture in Chicago. Mies van der Rohe uses as principle content the subordination of man to technological perfection. He reduces the New York skyscraper to its minimal expression in the Seagram Building. The great buildings of New York, rich in form and extraordinary decorative detail, are stripped to the maximum; what remains is only a metal structure of beautiful bronze color and of glass of the same color. There is no more than the evidence of the precise steel structure and a porch-roof above the entrance, which constitutes the only decorative element of the building.

Unfortunately, this mode of expression was a great success among architects who had no spirit of invention.

Human space is considerably impoverished, breaking up the harmonious atmosphere of our cities. The so-called "modern" constructions gave the towns an atmosphere of tedium.

The only meaning derived from the current massive architecture is that man, as a thinking, feeling being, no longer matters. If there is a message here, it comes from persuasion, to consume more, to sell more. People are piled into the "housing units" and it is forgotten that man is a creature of emotions and feelings; he lives somewhere, he eats, he also dreams, and his inner desires are as important as his material wants.

The quantitative aspect became fundamental at the expense of quality. One forgot to what extent man can be helped and stimulated by the emotional charge of the space of where he lives and the space of the city. His expression of emotion resonates in the architecture that surrounds him. There is a consensus to understand only the laws of quantity: politicians, investors, speculators; and architects easily bend to the requirements of whomever is making the demands, and in schools of architecture, there is a tendency to suppress more and more the students's interest in humanist culture to

glorify emptiness. In the 20th century, aesthetics became an exercise in which forms repeated themselves without making any sense. Who is responsible for this downfall?

In the first place, the unbridled spirit of speculation of our period. The possibilities of getting rich through real estate speculation are considerable now, with a growing population in increasing need of housing. The so-called "modern architecture" is the best that narrow-mindedness can come up with to profit the most. If my first attack is aimed at the promoters of capitalism, it is also aimed at most socialist officials who have been seduced by this spirit and have finally come to deeply admire the society of consumption; after the bourgeois academism of Stalin, it had to keep up to date, and the new academism of modern architecture, the worst of it, was adopted. If the great minds come together, so do the small ones. Capitalist promoters and socialist bureaucrats arrive at the same conclusion and the current architecture of the Moscow suburb greatly resembles that of the Parisian area.

It is important to remember that some of those who contributed to this phenomenon are among the great names of modern architecture.

Loos is the first who comes to mind. he loved austerity in architecture, which easily made the best of his Calvinist spirit, so well that he suppressed an expressive aspect of extreme importance: ornament. The entire sculptural side of Art Nouveau, which is totally incorporated into architecture in order to clarify its meaning, is abandoned. His slogan against the ornament, "to decorate is to destroy", had the impact of a quasi-religious expression among architects.

Sullivan's aforementioned slogan on functionalism, "form follows function", which we have already cited, also received an extraordinarily favorable reaction.

Even Le Corbusier, whose great talent produced remarkable buildings, contributed to this state of mind. His soul of a man of illustration will make him stick to principles thanks to which he feels capable of saving society. Starting with this idea of maximum profit of space, of its functionalism, he arrives at a series of aesthetic

principles that he gives as a philosopher's stone of architecture: the pure prism (legacy of Loos), the building on pilotis, the independent structure, the strip window, the smooth wall with no projecting detail (legacy of Loos) and, worse yet, the principles of his urbanism. The "well-oriented" prisms floating in an indefinite space which reject the street, and the "housing units", used by all the architects, have given us the suburbs of our great cities. Paris, which received the most direct legacy of Le Corbusier, has probably been the scene of the most aberrant examples of architecture and urbanism. The man who created one of the most beautiful buildings of our time--Ronchamp, where the greatest freedom is expressed--has bequeathed the most constraining principles: those that won the battle of modern architecture.

To succeed in creating industrial art, which is easily produced by the machine, the Bauhaus creates a whole mystique around the machine, establishes foundations so that, when some forms of architecture that can be adapted to industry are used, the architecture is not distasteful. Although the Bauhaus counted among its peers professors as prominent as Klee, it is not he, however, who will transmit the legacy, but a mediocre, although intelligent, architect: Walter Gropius. Even though magazines put his name at the top, Gropius's message represents the end of all individual impulses and the creation of an architecture that is easy for all in a few lessons. In this struggle, an architect as extraordinary as Wright, who opened up through his principles a very rich path, loses the battle in the United States to the advantage of Gropius who, because of the war, came to direct the architecture department at Harvard.

#### Vitalism

I call this the third great theme of our industrial era, because it represents man's tendency to assert himself as a living, sensual being. In the last century, man, overwhelmed by the machine, tries to escape this environment that crushes him and begins to play with his lost paradises. It is already a reaction against the machine as an

agent of progress. Romanticism is a movement of revolt, a return to better times. In the 18th century, philosophy was already vacillating between rationalism and irrationalism, and its art, between the very rigid classicism and the unrestrained picaresque. Goethe said that romanticism embodied the principle of sickness because it saw only tension, contrasts, psychic imbalance, the morbid side of the period. On one hand, the machine develops the mechanical side of man; on the other hand, sensitivity is freed, and individualist exaltation begins.

From romantic literature, in passing through the Pre-Raphaelites, one ends up, during the course of the second half of the century, in a design movement in reaction against the machine, "Arts and Crafts" with Ruskin. He glorifies the periods when more balanced human communities existed, such as at the end of the Middle Ages; artists attack the machine and attempt to go back to handicraft. With the nostalgia for a paradise lost, they try to go back to a spontaneous Gothic architecture, that is the "Arts and Crafts" movement. They begin to express the immediate content of architecture and to find a rich volumetry outside of classical principles. The result is a picturesque style that is easily integrated into the romantic taste. It is also a return to spontaneity, an escape from the violence of machines.

If Morris begins this movement in design, Webb and Shaw pursue it in architecture in England and Richardson in America. This romanticism goes on later, as will be seen with Berlage's Stock Exchange in Amsterdam and Ragnar Ostberg's City Hall in Stockholm.

Parallel to this artistic movement, a whole scientific current gives evidence of a same interest for life, whether it concerns Lamarck's work in biology or the great works in psychology that signal the approach of Freud's work on the unconscious.

During the last decade of the 19th century, a sufficiently strong vitalist movement tries to express life such as it is. Some remarkable architects, such as Horta in Brussels,

Guimard in France, Lars Sonk in Finland and, in quite a personal way, Wright in the United States, include living elements in their architecture.

At the same time, Bergson represents in philosophy modern man's reaction against Platonic classicism; he tries to express the sentiment of life, which would for him be an impulse that breaks the resistance of matter, a duality between instinct and intellect. For him, the intellect only perceives the inorganic solid that breaks up into fixed times and space; it does not understand life and its only results are geometry and logic. On the other hand, the domain of intuition is what he calls duration, defined as the form that assumes our conscious state when our self allows itself to live, when it restrains the separation between the present state and the preceding states. Bergson tries to define the notion of life, and especially the sentiment of this life in man.

The subject that Gide deals with in The Immoralist, written in 1901, is life such as it is. He describes a couple who go toward the south; as they go toward the sun, the woman, who is in good health, becomes sick and dies, whereas the man who was ill, recovers his health and strength. The scandalous aspect of the book when it appeared hardly affects us any more, but its most significant aspect remains: vitalism, the way that Gide affirms the preeminence of life. It is this same vitalism that is expressed in architecture. To account for this vital impulse, Horta creates interior spaces through lines that represent vegetable elements; Lars Sonk, in Helsinki, decorates with fetal shapes, and Wright, in the United States, reestablished the man-nature relation. Wright's house incorporates itself into the life of man while emanating from nature at the same time, as if it had sprung forth, and thus reestablishes a continuity with it. All these architects assert life and create an architecture of optimism. On the other hand, Gaudi enters into the Spanish tradition; he introduces his monsters in his architecture in the Casa Battlo, for example, which belongs to the vitalist movement. This pessimist tendency is superimposed on vitalism from the period before the war of 1914. One finds it in Death in Venice by Thomas Mann, it is also found in the emotional outburst that is expressed in

the distortions of expressionist paintings. In the path opened by research in psychology, expressionism valorizes anguish as well as pessimism. The house of Steiner gives the effect of a dwelling that might have been twisted, as if the architect only saw the habitual world through his exacerbated emotiveness. This period is also marked by research on new forms of religion: Kandinsky and Mondrian were keenly interested in esotericism, especially in Theosophy, from which they derive their theory; Rudolf Steiner, one of the best architects of the period, and also the creator of a new religion: Anthroposophy.

Steiner founded an Anthroposophical community in Dornach and constructed with a group of architects the most important building of the village, the Goetheanum. Even if he denies the symbolism, Steiner uses it in his building where he tries to express his spiritualism according to his own words: "The meaning of our search: to mold the living work into our building. It must be a living language."

Two images form a fundamental image to him: the forces of the Earth and those of the Sun: "Everything that is earthly comes from the surface of the Earth, and moving away from the Earth, converges to form a point. But man was equally aware of being connected to the Sun. The rush of solar energy toward the Earth was represented in arranging line forces in another way. The Sun, in turning around the Earth, sends its rays to Earth. This time, the point of the line was below, since the Sun apparently turns around the Earth." The Goetheanum takes the form of solar forces and the house opposite Steiner's takes the shape of forces from Earth. The Goetheanum is also gestural: it takes the shape of a man raising his arms and with his head to the sun; for Steiner, man's contact with the cosmos was of capital importance. The distortion of forms to express the gesture is evident; at the same time they give evidence of the spirituality of the emotional explosion of the times.

This affirmation of life is also found in the expression of Scandinavian humanism, of the egalitarian democracy of these northern countries. Aalto humanizes all ideas received from the Bauhaus and gives us a humane architecture where man feels at

ease: the ideal setting for the man smoking his pipe in his comfortable armchair, his dog at his side. It concerns the humanism of the petit bourgeois, which was very important during that period.

At the same time, after the second World War, Le Corbusier utters a cry of anguish in the church of Ronchamp. He questions his own principles. He, too, burst onto the emotional scene, but by becoming existentialist. Le Corbusier twists his volumes: the pure prism, the pilotis, the strip window, all are in crisis, as well as the factory-made object. The classicism of Le Corbusier disappeared, solid volumes burst forth in certain points, a violent spatial tension is produced from the inside toward the outside.

All existential thought finds a magnificent expression in this work. The altar is no longer the place where everything ends up, all forms exert pressure where the visitor is found, it is he who is singled out in space, and the altar retreats to the background. Anguish manifests itself in the entire space. The very heavy roof has the opposite effect of the Gothic roof, which rises; this one sags. To give this sensation of falling, it does not touch the walls that support it. The roof falls on the head of the spectator. The side walls combine to compress the space: the feeling produced is that of solitude, without notion of the beyond. The center is the anguished man in solitude and also with his responsibility vis-a-vis himself. To me, Ronchamp is an expression of the existentialism of the post-war period in France, of the absence of the absolute in the atheistic sphere of influence of the period. Ronchamp is, *par excellence*, an atheist church.

From the standpoint of the expression of time, I believe that it is the only example where Le Corbusier plays with the problem of simultaneity. First, the wall pierced by the stained-glass: each opening creates an effect where the vanishing point is never the same. It gives the same sensation of slight displacement as Cezanne's still-lives.

This wall produces the same effect both inside and outside. The fourth dimension is expressed there. Other aspects of dynamism are visible. The walls have violent,



spasmodic movement; on the inside, each wall pushes toward the center of space, which accentuates the most important expressive aspect of the place, anguish.

## SECOND PART

### THE CONTENT IN SOME OF MY WORKS

After this long road in search of a definition of the work of art in architecture, I would like to use three examples of my own work to illustrate my purpose. I will first study the two schools of Havana and then a museum in Liechtenstein.

At the beginning of the Cuban Revolution, in 1961, the Cuban government commissioned me to build art schools in Havana. It wanted to see the greatest beauty blended with the greatest novelty. The program called for five schools: the Music School and the Ballet School were assigned to Garatti, an Italian architect; the School of Drama, to Gottardi; the School of Plastic Arts and the School of Modern Dance were assigned to me, as well as the complete supervision of the project.

This commission took place at the most romantic period of the revolution before it became regimented; an ephemeral moment when the marvellous can become commonplace and the imagination marries freedom.

#### 1. The School of Plastic Arts

I began the study of this project based primarily on the idea of the workshop. The school had to serve three disciplines: sculpture, painting and engraving. Each workshop was conceptualized as a theater in the round where students could move around the object of study. The shape of the circle was linked to this idea, as in a Roman theater. But I preferred the ellipse to the circle which to me was, at the same time, more dynamic and more propitious to the play of spaces. Between two workshops is a storehouse for the materials.

The whole ensemble was conceptualized as a city being incorporated into the landscape of the old golf course of the Havana Country Club. I did not want to give the student the impression of a building isolated on a landscape but, on the contrary, I wanted

to suggest an atmosphere of community. This is why I chose the city as a first figurative image.

Through a tunnel-like passageway, one entered into a narrow street bordered with arcades. All circulation went through this street, which leads to a large plaza. The idea of circulation is coupled with that of promenade. The image of the city is followed by a second equally strong image, that of eros. Each workshop was covered by a brick vault topped with a point that gave the impression of a woman's breast. The whole town became the image of a woman's breast, the image of eros, by reason of the multitude of dome-breasts. At arriving at the central plaza, one discovers a fountain that I sculpted, having been inspired by an exotic fruit, the papaya, metaphor of the female sex organ and the whole building became sexual. Why sexualize in this way.

In Cuba, there is a White tradition that is sensual and baroque in the image of the entire island. The Blacks, who make up a large part of the population, have never produced any architecture. On the other hand, they produced a popular music and poetry that express a certain erotic idea that is repeated constantly. It is particularly true with a popular dance, the rumba, which is a way of mimicking the rooster mounting the chicken, a lascivious dance. This tradition emerged anew at the time of the revolution, even though it did not yet receive a mode of expression. The implication of Eros in primitive religions is much greater than the male-female relationship. It is also the way of planting the earth, which is transcribed as a coitus between man and the earth: a whole profound meaning emerged from the crucible of this notion of Eros. This is the sense I wanted to give to the School of Plastic Arts. The building expresses, therefore, an anthropomorphism with the concept of the breast and female sex organ. In the garden, very delicate, long plants evoke the image of hairs. In this context, eros imposes itself as an immediate expressive problem because it belongs, at the same time, to the Cuban tradition and the range of the fundamental problems of man for the same reason as death, evil, God, etc. In establishing a series of constant rhythms among the columns and the

gargoyles, I wanted to invite the spectator to move constantly; he cannot remain in a static attitude while the entire building suggests movement; the rhythm naturally leads him toward the interior where his won eros is revealed.

The shape of the workshops not only evokes an image of a woman's breast; it suggests the roundness of the egg, symbol *par excellence* of life about to spring forth. What image could better express what is alive at the moment of exaltation when the revolution restored life to an entire people?

The building had to show its heritage of the tradition because the tradition makes it possible to be in touch with all the problems of mankind. In Cuba, there was a tradition of baroque architecture. It was not a matter of a baroque-style ornamentation as found in Mexico or Peru, but rather of a certain play of spaces, like a *trompe l'oeil*, a sensuality brought about by light coming through venetian blinds and stained-glass windows. I wanted to continue that baroque in my architecture: all the forms act as if they were body movements.

The construction material chosen was terra-cotta in brick form. It is everywhere: on the ground, on the walls, in the vaults. This material was chosen for its warmth, but especially because its color is like that of the mestizo, the very coloring of the Cuban people. Thanks to the terra-cotta, the building can appear to age, not because of deterioration, but because of the natural appearance of living things that change with time.

## **2. The School of Modern Dance**

This school was done at the same time as the one for plastic arts. It originates from another kind of expressiveness; it is more tense and less sensual. I wanted to play with a problem that was fundamental to me at that time: to express the feeling of experiencing this growing revolution. Is not the revolution one of the great themes of the 20th century? The mediate content was going to play with this theme of revolution. But how?

Here, it is the concept of the dance room which constitutes the focal point. It is conceived as a vast space, enclosed by a wall. When the dancer moves, his movement is reflected in the architecture, and makes the vaults blow up because the impulsive force of the dancer makes them swell up too much. From a central position, the centrifugal force of the dancer reverberates toward the walls and windows.

Here, I wanted to express immediate content, i.e., what lives and palpitates inside these spaces. The general idea of the dance school is the same as the one for the school of plastic arts: the city. I used the same figurative image.

First, there is an entrance before going into the small, open courtyard; from there, a narrow street leads to a plaza. From the entrance, one can see that the vaults explode, swell and dilate. One is struck by the feeling of something bursting, as if a strong blast of air were lifting the vaults until they ruptured. There, I wanted to represent this feeling of exaltation that was prevalent at the beginning of the revolution; this power to unite in one square an innumerable crowd of people merely with the emotion generated by the idea of revolution. The idea of an explosion is the first image that I wanted to convey.

The second idea is expressed by the plaza, which opens up from the narrow street. The pillars and gargoyles, very different from those of the first school, create an impression of agony, a certain feeling of anguish: pointed, angular, chaotic pillars. This fundamental aspect of the revolution is the feeling of walking at the edge of a precipice, of feeling the threat of constant danger: it is a feeling of anguish. The painting of El Greco taught me how to transcribe this feeling to my architecture. In effect, although a figure appears to be very calm, a certain instability and anxiety is perceivable. When approaching the canvas, countless small angles can be seen in the painting. These angles cause this disturbance and transform the expression of calm into anguish. In the school of dance, after the exaltation of the entrance, anxiety comes into play in the background, on the inside.

At the end of the plaza is a theater, on the top of which I placed a belvedere. Seen from above, I wanted the building to give the impression of a glass that could be broken into a thousand pieces with a single punch. For me, this was another image of the revolution.

The same mobility is again found in this building, the same dynamic movements conveyed in smaller recesses. And all these movements are superimposed in the single glance of the spectator who feels them simultaneously. That constitutes the basic expressive context of this dance school. The construction of these two buildings was started in 1961 and finished in 1965.

### **3. The Art Center of Liechtenstein**

I arrived in Europe after leaving Cuba. I was commissioned to build an art center in Liechtenstein. A cultured financier wanted to put his offices and personal collection of paintings in one building. He wished that from the entrance to the building, before reaching the offices, one would pass through a museum.

The building was conceived in three parts: on the lower floor were offices for rent; on the next floor, a large exhibition hall which served as an entrance hall to the financier's offices immediately in the back.

The general idea was for this building to be in the image of the country. Liechtenstein is a small country between Austria and Switzerland, an Eldorado of the 20th century, where large amounts of capital were brought together to form an important business center.

It is this aspect of the country that I wanted to express first and foremost. It is why I chose, as a figurative image, three fingers of a giant trying to grasp a golden energy. It is a double image for me: Liechtenstein as Eldorado and the current neocapitalism. All this gold was energetic.

Two formal principles served as a development structure for the building: an organic part represented by the three fingers and a part in aluminum, like a golden-green mirror. This aluminum part was conceived from very thin, linear suspended elements that are superimposed on the lines of the windows, these are reflected in the mirrors of the walls and move with the wind. This device conveys a real sensation of this energetic world which dematerializes in becoming a large mass of light when the three fingers are inserted into this kind of golden rain, into this energetic gold. The two systems combine in a strong contrast with each other: one massive, fleshy part opposite another energetic, dynamic part.

There are other even more powerful implications. The building is near the Rhine. Here, one must remember one of the great Germanic myths, which is the gold of the Rhine. It was said that the Nibelungen came from St. Gall, a nearby town. This reference to the gold of the Rhine exerted over me a great fascination to the extent that the gold for the building became an essential reference. It fit in with Liechtenstein in a very vital way.

Another aspect also left its mark on the project. Liechtenstein is a country which was traversed by the alchemists. Paracelsus passed through there frequently. That brings forth another factor as important as the preceding one as a basic element of the country: the transformation of gold. Moreover, the three fingers are those of a giant coming out of a mountain. To me, something important about the Germanic culture is expressed through this element: the superman of Nietzsche who descends from the mountain. On the other hand, gold has a relation with fire; for example, gold is a symbol of fire to the Chinese. When I bring these two elements together, the three fingers and the fire which refers to Prometheus. He is the giant who gives fire to man; he is also Nietzsche's superman, whose three fingers touch the golden energy: fire, image of knowledge, idea of the Holy Spirit. Alchemy is none other than the spiritual transformation of man so that

he can reach the higher spiritual levels. All these elements are incorporated into the project of the building.

It cannot be forgotten, however, that Liechtenstein is a new country. It was created by a great Viennese family. Therefore, the great Austrian rococo tradition is in the background. This was on my mind. This Parnassian tradition aimed to convey the image of an imaginary, oneiric, fabulous world like the monastery of Melk, for example. It was a source for this fairy-like and poetic world that I wished to transmit to this building.

These three buildings, quickly presented, have in common some characteristics that appear to me fundamental to the creation of a work of art.

All three start from one function. The fundamental point being that the inner life of the building is essential, the inner life must be poeticized. That is what I call the immediate content.

Tradition is fundamental. In the two art schools, it is the Cuban tradition that is expressed, especially in the School of Plastic Arts, where it allowed me to open up to broader expressive problems. In Liechtenstein, as we have just seen, it is the Austrian tradition centered on the rococo that was the source of inspiration, where Mozart has a square in his honor, as if Mozart were the essence of Austria.

I always exploit the superimposed image such as, for example, the anthropomorphism of the School of Plastic Arts. If there is a figurative image, one must think of the image of the city, of the image of the glass that breaks in the School of Modern Dance.

As the presentation of these buildings was able to show, the mediate content is omnipresent in my architecture because it is in my architecture that all these vital elements are integrated.



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