Session 4
International Modern

Moderator: Professor Ricardo Castro

Before and Beyond the Modern: Japanese Society, Culture, and Design

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Any discussion of the survival and re-birth of Modern architecture begs the question "what is Modernism?", a question problematic enough in itself. Yet when we consider Modernism's pervasiveness in non-Western countries the question becomes much more difficult, for it demands consideration of its social corollary: the more fundamental query of "what is Modernity?" This paper will attempt to illustrate, with reference to traditional and contemporary Japanese architecture, how a number of qualities of Japanese society and culture problematize our definitions of these terms. A rethinking of our preconceptions of Modernity and Modernism can suggest how it might be that Modernism is still with us when so many of the values on which it is based – values of Modernity – have been called into question. Much of what will be discussed below may also be manifested in other societies of the East and South, from Korea and China to Latin America. The focus on Japan is merely a starting point.

Japan has long challenged preconceived notions of Modernity. By remaking itself into a great success at many aspects of the Modern game it became arguably the first non-Western nation to successfully rebuff European and American domination. What is interesting however is the extent to which Japan is not and was not a merely Modern culture. Japan today has been characterized by different commentators as a pre-, post-, or even trans-Modern society, though one engaged in many aspects of the Modern project. A debate continues in the social sciences about whether we are today in a condition which can be described as one of High Modernity – a more pronounced, accelerated, or accentuated version of the Modern condition – or of Post-Modernity – *post* some kind of paradigm shift which has produced a qualitatively different way of and view of the human experience. Whatever stance one takes on this issue, it is clear that Modernity is not what it once was, and has not been for a long time. For the purposes of argument, I will use the term "Post-Modern" to refer to contemporary social and cultural characteristics, generally at odds with the rationalizing project of Modernity, which some commentators term "postmodern" and others see as still embedded in the Modern condition. As will be seen, many of these qualities are arguably indigenous to Japanese culture and are manifested in material culture both traditional and contemporary. We will begin, however, by looking at some examples of Japanese society and design which might be considered Modern.

Modern Before: historical and cultural roots of Modernity in Japan

In the late 1860s the ports of Japan, after over two centuries of isolation, were thrown open before the determination of the United Kingdom and United States to include its markets and resources in their expanding empires of industry and capital. This began a swift process of social and industrial "Modernization". Within a few decades Japan had produced modern industries, defeated a European power in war, colonized many of its neighbors, and embarked on the Pacific War. Though utterly defeated this time, it rapidly became a leading manufacturing and economic power and, for a period toward the end of the last century, was hailed as a new, more successful paradigm for economic success. In significant ways it had mastered the Modern game and arguably outdid its Western mentors in the process. The reasons for Japan's rapid acceptance of many strategies of Modernity are complex, but in short it can be argued that Japan in the 1860s was in many ways already Modern. It was a sophisticated, highly urbanized society with a highly educated population and a leadership of which certain factions, reacting to political and social stresses internal to the country, were poised to initiate

sweeping change. While the definition of Modernity is a contentious issue, there is no question that a rationalization related to technological development and social control is an essential part of it. This aspect of Modernity in Japan, evolving during two centuries of isolation from what are usually considered the "Modern", Western, countries, stemmed in part from a cultural disposition which embraced the rationalization and perfection of materials and human behaviour, and in part from political events producing developments in knowledge and technology paralleling those in Europe.

One example of the historical process of rationalization is the systematization of the building industry, which occurred in the 17th century as part of major social & political restructuring undertaken by the Tokugawa Shoguns to consolidate their hold on power. This included the publication of carpenter's manuals and pattern books (previously techniques had been handed down as secrets through the apprentice system), the specialization of trades, and the development of a universal system of details, measures, and materials[1]. Similar projects were undertaken to systematize weights and measures and systems of land measurement[2]. Projects such as these, it is argued, predisposed the country to accept mass-production, standardization, and industrialization; they can be considered proto-industrial. They were roughly contemporaneous with similar schemes to rationalize knowledge and technique in Europe which formed an integral part of the emerging Modern project there.[3]

But these historical events built on a culture which already demonstrated a clear leaning toward the perfection of organization of behaviour and of technique. Examples include the consciousness of minute detail in ritual including ritualized processes of making and acting (*kata*) in the arts, whether those of design or war; the social and pedagogical discipline demanded of apprentices in almost any traditional field and in many fields today; and the emphasis on cleanliness and purity in a culture where a single word expresses the two concepts "clean" and "beautiful". Discipline, precision, accuracy, control at the micro-level are all examples of what Modernity does to the actions of the individual. These "Modern" qualities were already present in Japan and had been privileged by religious, social, and cultural attitudes for centuries. They were among the characteristics which made the Japanese population useful to both indigenous and foreign-based powers of capital and industry.

Just one aspect of the highly rationalized material culture evolving out of this history and this ethos is the *tatami*-based system of design, about which much has been written. Japan developed, hundreds of years before European industrialization, a design system based on incremental additions of a standardized unit. It shares more with the industrial module – a single, repeating unit which rationalizes growth – than it does with the Western Classical module, which is based on the division of a unity. It is flexible and pre-fabricated. The dimensions of this unit, which once varied from region to region, were rationalized and nationalized to meet the needs of proto-industrial development during the period described above. A unit originally based on the dimensions of the human body became systematized instead to meet political and economic ends[4]. Like the design system, Japan was in many respects ready for Modernity, and its material culture spoke about many of the issues with which Modern architects were obsessed.

Among the qualities of Japanese architecture praised by Western visitors such as Wright, Gropius, Taut, and Antonin Raymond were those of flexibility, cleanliness, clarity, simplicity, and rationality. These qualities seemed to embody almost presciently the vision of Modern architecture as a manifestation of the forces of production and movement which had been set in motion by the Modern age and, simultaneously, a transcendence of those forces in a form which spoke of the eternal and the universal: uniting process, change, and eternity. To an extent, the very definition of what makes a Modern architecture became infused with a (partially) understood sense of what is Japanese architecture.

Beyond-Modern qualities of Japanese society and culture

While Western architects did express a recognition of the spiritual and historical aspects of Japanese design, this was almost always articulated in terms of the honesty and rationality inherent in it[5], often to the detriment of its other qualities. These qualities include those described by Junichiro Tanizaki who refuted the Enlightenment in literal terms in his work "In Praise of Shadows", lauding the dimness, darkness, vagueness and opacity of traditional culture[6]. The cultural obverse of these qualities are those praised by Kisho Kurokawa, and almost always denigrated by early Modern observers, manifested in works such as Nikko Mausoleum, and in art forms such as *kabuki*: exaggeration, spectacle, polychromy[7]. Mainstream

Western appreciation of these other aspects of traditional Japanese design, even to this day, tends to emphasize their pre-Modern qualities of ritual, handicraft, and tradition. These same qualities, however, have an aspect which is arguably Post-Modern. Likewise Japanese society has many characteristics, arising out of indigenous social traditions, which arguably exemplify the condition of Post-Modernity. To make such an argument is complicated by the fact that commentators can not quite agree on what are Post-Modern qualities, but they debatably include non-logocentrism, eclecticism, the privileging of play over efficiency, culture over science, aesthetic over function, surface over depth, commoditization raised to high art, nature as artifice, intermingling of subject and object, the equivalence of high and mass culture, a sense of continuity with the past if only as a source of "visual mirages"[8], and an interest in irony, pastiche, allusion, ephemerality, spectacle and parody.

A rationality with boundaries

In fundamental ways Japan's acceptance of Modernity was always limited. *Touyou no doutoku, seiyou no gakugei* "eastern ethics and western science" was one of the slogans used to promote the opening of the country in the 19th century. Such watchwords did not just reflect an attempt to control politically and socially the process of modernization, though that was one of their purposes, they reflected a fundamentally anti-Enlightenment thesis. The Enlightenment's was a totalizing view of the world in which there was to be consistency between conditions of knowledge and of society.[9] In European terms, one could not separate technological modernization from modernization of society and of the individual. Japan is an inheritor of an epistemological framework which is non-totalizing. According to this model, newly acquired, alien, knowledge can be accumulated without restructuring the entire system of traditional knowledge. The result can be the rapid accumulation of new knowledge; this served well Japan's project of modernization. The multiplicity, hybridity, and open-endedness of this attitude toward knowledge parallels the Post-Modern rejection of the failed Modern attempt to totalize the world.

An illustration of this difference can be found in a comparison of the modular and organizational system of the tatami with that of Western architecture. Neo-classical architecture, one can argue, embodies the principles of a totalizing rationalism, in which any addition is made consistent with the existing system, is foreseen by it, must be incorporated in the original scheme. The space of Modern architecture is also totalizing: it implies a homogenization of space and the extension of one rational order to infinity. In classical Japanese architecture, in contrast, additions are irregular and loose, and unlike Western classical and industrial modules they do not accord with an overall plan of the same rational order as the unit. This is not to say that there are no principles of design beyond a localized rigour. There are, but their application and importantly the evaluation of the results is of a different order. The way of designing, like the system of knowledge, is loose and open-ended. Both have a hybrid, eclectic quality manifested in material culture in many ways, for example in the grafting on of Western spaces to residential architecture a century ago, and the embedding of traditional tatami-matted spaces in "Western style" residences in Japan today.

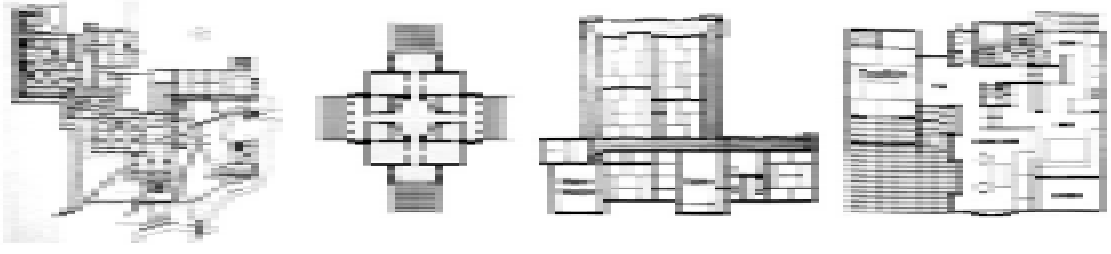

Figure 1, L to R: Katsura Villa (17c); Villa Rotunda (16c); West-in-East (19c), and East-in-"West" (20c) hybrids

A space beside rationality

Implicit in this Asian epistemology, and this relates to animist religions like Shinto, without a highly structured intellectual framework, and Zen Buddhism, which is decidedly anti-intellectual, is a de-privileging of reason, of logo-centrism and of meta-narratives. Grand rationalizing systems are replaced by local ones, rationalism at the small scale, with defined objectives - what has been termed a teleological rationalism. If scientific knowledge is not privileged as the dominant mode of knowing the world, aesthetics becomes a more important mode of knowing. A situational emotionalism, not reason, becomes privileged as the mechanism through which this knowing takes place.[10]

Within this kind of epistemological framework there is no, or a weak, demand for reason to, as Barthes puts it, "*pierce* meaning"[11] , to carry through to the totality of the world. It is fine if there is an inconsistency between form and content, between the way one acts and the way one is, between the detail and the general. Experiential worlds do not have to be systematized with the technological. There can be, and is, a breach between different paradigms of knowledge. In contrast, the totalizing project of Modernity, the attempt to rationalize all, implied a consistency, an organic relationship, between form and content, between behaviour and the inner workings of the soul, between what one was and what one did, what is inside (content, function, self) and what is outside (form, behaviour); and a rationality common to the two. Architecturally this relationship was articulated in the dictum "form follows function". The Japanese, and also Post-Modern, condition contradicts this fundamental tenet of Modernity relating the content to form, within to without. There is an implicit gap, a discontinuity, between the two.[12]

It has been argued by many Japanese architects that one of the characteristics of "Japanese Space", traditional or contemporary, is the accommodation of ambiguity and multi-valency in intermediary spaces, the physical corollary of this gap[13] . A common example from traditional design is the *engawa*, or verandah, a space of indeterminate function which intermediates between in and out, between built form and nature. This kind of sensitivity toward a "gap" is well illustrated in the Tanikawa House by Kazuo Shinohara, whose work like that of many of his contemporaries rejected the technical focus of the Metabolists, which they equated with the interests of the Japanese technocracy. Instead their interest was in small, intimate projects. This building is at first glance Modern: it displays its structure clearly, abstractly, and it does not make overt reference to the past – in fact the diagonal bracing and cathedral ceiling contradict principles of traditional construction. Yet it is also most un-Modern. It has as its signature element a so-called "summer space", an intermediary, sectionally irregular space between inside and outside. It is a space which implicitly turns Modernity on its head and within which according to one critic "illogical functions emerge from the gap between (the) slope and the geometric space".[14] This space appears to be purely utilitarian, yet it is functionless. It absurdly occupies most of the building footprint. It makes subtle if distorted reference to traditional typology: its floor of bare earth suggesting the kitchen floor of a traditional farmhouse or the entry hall (*genkan*) of a traditional residence. It is a contemporary, but ambiguously Modern/Post-Modern, work which suggests the simplicity and austerity of much traditional architecture. It is simple and shell-like, a

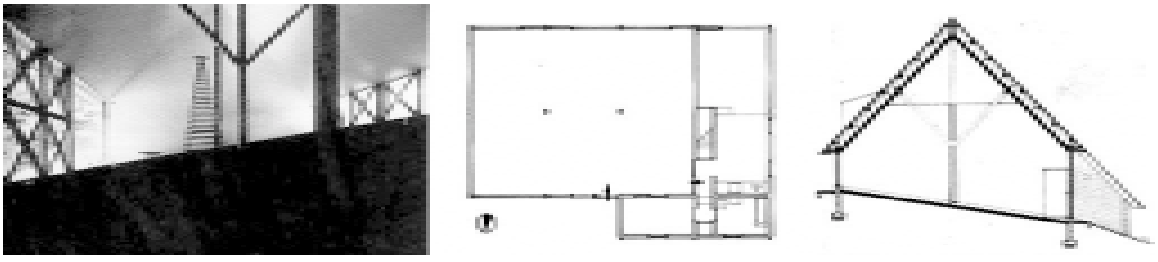

Figure 2: Tanikawa House, Naganohara, Gumma Prefecture (1974)

structure within which a spirit of a different order can emerge.

A space within rationality

Freedom within structure is a crucial concept in Japan. Social ties are highly structured but the inner life much less so, a phenomenon related to conceptions of identity deriving from Confucianism (the self is social), versus Shinto/Taoism (soul or spirit wells up spontaneously from an inner nature).[15] There is an inherent tension between the requirement to act in accordance with prescribed social norms, and one's personal desires. The conflict between conformity to rules and an emotional/spiritual life which is arguably freer than that of the West, because less structured, is one of the factors which produces an indulgence in Play. The Japanese word for "play" is *"asobi"*, and like the English word it indicates, as well as indulging in fun, the mechanical sense of "play"- the slight tolerance necessary to allow the parts of a structure to work as intended, the gap or give necessary to allow movement. Game playing, hiding behind masks, indulging in fantasy, parody, irony, pastiche, and camp are means by which this necessary condition is achieved. The popular cityscape which has been produced to accommodate this ludic attitude is a collage of visual diversions, entertainments, and spectacles. It has been described by one sociologist as "an aesthetic that fluctuates between pure functionalism and fun"[16], a description which underlines the hybridity of a built environment which is neither clearly Modern nor Post-. Play is reinforced by the Japanese language and writing systems which are well-suited to the expression of ambiguity, multiplicity of meaning, simultaneous perception of phenomena, vagueness, and what one might describe as linguistic collage: all of which imply an order of knowledge different from that of linear logic.[17] One aspect of this is the idea of mixing codes, of quotation, and of referencing the past. Such referencing, in varying degrees of subtlety, is a staple in a popular culture which collages the past as well as the future in a manner which is not merely nostalgic and escapist. It is also critical – as recent popular films such as the animated *Princess Mononoke* and *Metropolis* demonstrate.

Parody, irony, language games imply criticism, even the negation of meaning, yet it has been said that in Japan "formal characteristics of postmodernism … (including) eclecticism and the mixing of codes, parody, playfulness, repetition, celebration of surface, 'depthlessness', coexist within a culture still committed to the preservation of meaning, especially of the collectively situated type."[18] Japan has been described as a Utopian society, one in which there is a great investment in the idea of a collective project – hardly a characteristic of Post-Modernity. There is a faith in authenticity and sincerity expressed in popular culture which leads at times to a literalness of imagery – literalness being perhaps characteristic of accessible, mass culture – which has a precedent. Kisho Kurokawa cites the term *mitate*, which according to him means a transposition of thematic materials from one genre of art to another, frequently in a more literal fashion than in Western art and in a manner which comes close to parody.[19] The result is an art, and there are many examples in Japanese popular culture, which walks the line between parody and homage, criticism and indulgence, magic and realism. So hand in hand with a play of meaning which is implicitly critical of the social

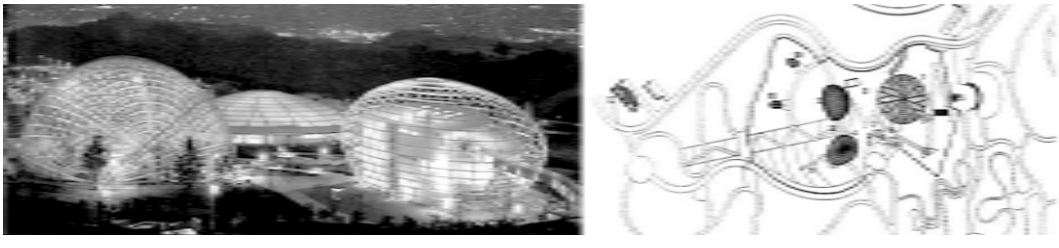

Figure 3: Yamanashi Fruit Museum, Yamanashi Prefecture (1992-1995)

project is a directness, a taking of things at face value, which can seem naïve but is not.

A space for society

A work of architecture which I believe illustrates such accessibility, literalness and playfulness is the Yamanashi Fruit Museum by Itsuko Hasegawa. Hasegawa is a complex, sophisticated, and critical architect. Yet the image which ties together this project is, simply put, a bowl of fruit. One cannot imagine a more literal image for such a program, a more direct, straightforward, uncritical *parti*. And in this lies the problem of assigning a "style" to the work. It epitomizes Venturi's definition of a "Duck" – the High Modern building become virtual sculpture – to the point of absurdity[20]. Yet unlike the typical High Modern building it uses an imagery which is easily accessible to a mass audience, as does the kind of architecture which many "postmodern" designers advocate. And unlike much "postmodern" architecture it neither talks down to its audience nor whispers wry jokes to a knowing cultural elite backstage. It speaks directly to both high and mass audiences with an imagery which is both subtle and accessible.

Accessibility is integral to Hasegawa's work. She has explicitly opposed her approach to that of the generation of Modernists preceding her, working as elite *auteurs*. Her projects tend to be generated out of extensive consultation with local residents, as a multilogue rather than a monologue. This approach is always locally directed, specific to a place and a community – arguably Post-Modern. Yet it also speaks of a Utopianism which is consistent with the idealism of much Modern design. And it engages with a social context in a manner which suggests a firm acceptance of the validity of social meaning. According to Hasegawa the most important issue with which her architecture attempts to engage is communication. By this she means not information flow per se, though the form of the project does suggest the flux of an information society, but the flow of relationships. In Japan "communication" very often refers to the mediation of harmonious human relationships through discourse rather than the transmission of positive data. And the assumption is that those relationships and to a great extent the society which they bind together (even though, as Hasegawa is aware, it is an unstable society) are valid.

This approach reflects a Japanese obsession with relationships, an obsession stemming from an extremely dense social context and also from Buddhism. The reflection of these relationships in built form – the carefully poised harmony of simultaneously similar and dissimilar elements - suggests a historical imagery beyond the literal image of the bowl of fruit. The following argument may seem to be based on a too-literal formal analogy. It is literal, but it draws on the shared conceptual issue of inter-relationships. The epitome of artificial nature in Japanese design tradition is the *karesansui* or "whithered mountain water" garden. The rock garden embodies the Buddhist principle that the world is an illusion, a flux, in which nothing is solid, all is relationships. It is no garden in the normal sense of the world, no plants, but an interconnection between inanimate objects, a relationship and a space in which a life which transcends life is generated – and by appreciation of which the observer, or participant, can also achieve a kind of transcendence. One might contrast the life generated out of the inanimate in the rock garden with the death generated out of life in the still life, a

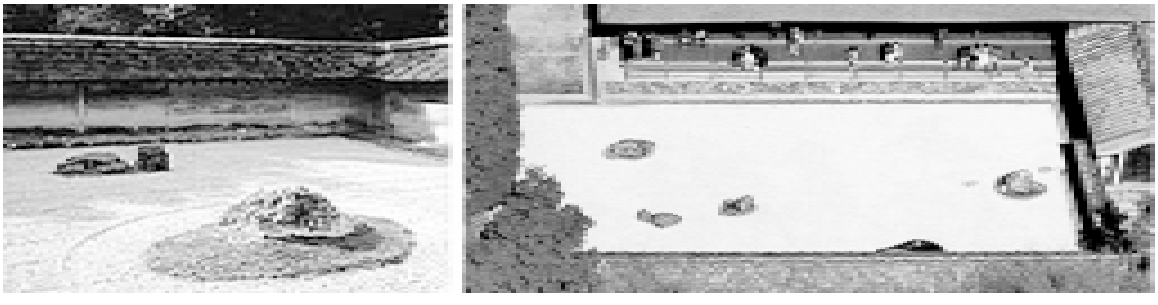

Figure 4: Ryouanji Garden (1499)

genre of Western but not Japanese art – which also tends to involve bowls of fruit. This genre involves the stilling, stopping, of life, its preservation for eternity and the implicit warning that the observer will not be so preserved. It implies a withdrawal from the world rather than a joyful participation in its sad beauty, and an object/subject relationship of artist to nature and world, rather than an interaction of subject and object, artifice and nature.

So the imagery of the bowl of fruit proves to be both simple, direct, almost facile; yet complex and many-layered. It achieves many of the goals of "postmodern" design but maintains a faith in Modernism. Its attitude toward technology is also Modern. It makes its technical aspect an integral part of the design – it is not a "decorated shed". The Fruit Museum actually revels in its technology: its irregular, non-Euclidean glass and steel forms would be impossible to execute without some of the most sophisticated computer technology. Yet it contradicts the identity of form and function, and privileges the emotional, illogical, and ludic over the rational. It does not imply as does much Modern design (and Modernity itself) the separation of Man from, and his domination of, Nature. The Fruit Museum suggests instead a Post-Modern New Nature, part nature, part artifice.

Like the Tanikawa house it makes reference to the past, though an oblique reference made more complex by the fact that both works are quoting a tradition which shares much with Modernism, for example in the relationship between structure and content, permanence and change. Hasegawa has described the role of architecture as a "container for the movement of society"[21], a metaphor which echoes Corb's "machine for living in", a neutral vessel for the flow of life. Yet it is an attitude inherent in traditional Japanese design, in which "The reality of the room is its void…and the reality of the teacup is its hollowness… Vacuum is all-potent, because it grants infinity of use and freedom of movement, both in spirit and material."[22] In this architecture structure frames the void within which flows another order of knowledge and experience. In Hasegawa's architecture, the container mediates the rapid changes underway in Japan and other post-industrial, Late- or Post-Modern societies.

Such works are neither clearly fish nor fowl. There may be similar examples in the West, but they are interesting in the Japanese context because they arise out of a social, cultural, and industrial tradition which contradicts many of the precepts of Modernity without being simply pre-Modern. Even today this social context overturns an assumption which is at the heart of the Modern project, that the West's technical and industrial superiority drives the development of the rest of the world.

Local roots of global Post-Modernity

Arguably, the society which produced a design culture so well-suited to the accommodation of the Post-Modern in Modernism also produced a culture of capital and industry which itself is a significant factor in the production of Post-Modernity out of Modernity. Jameson has described the Post-Modern condition as "the cultural logic of late capitalism"[23] which emerges as a consequence to changes in the way we work, in the economic and industrial conditions around us. Many of the economic and manufacturing strategies characteristic of the late capitalism and industry were adopted from Japanese models of labour and production. These include attention to detail, groupwork vs in-sequence assembly by specialized workers, "just in time" delivery, outsourcing, the emphasis on image, aesthetics and the production of desire in marketing, a highly volatile fashion cycle, selling of services rather than goods; and the marketing of tradition, nostalgia and simulacra[24]. What we have is, in addition to a cultural influence on the West (art, religion, entertainment), a more recent economic and industrial impact of the East onto the West which has been a major influence in the restructuring of the Western countries along Post-Modern lines. It is a turning around, then, of the idea that a Modern and inherently Western science will reform the world in its own image; now another framework plays a significant role in restructuring the West into something much richer and stranger than the Enlightenment vision.

Modernism beyond Modernity

We return to the theme of our conference, the survival of Modernism and, implicitly, Modernity. The Modern project to rationalize the world in one system of knowledge bore within it the seeds of its own destruction. Modernity's grasp brought together and superimposed disparate cultures and world views – the forcing open of Japan in the 1860s and the subsequent impact of Japanese art on Impressionism is an example – in what David Harvey refers to as a "time-space compression"[25] which ultimately defied a homogenizing

rationalism. It is this condition in which we still live. If Post-Modernity is the Modern condition stripped of rationalism, deprived of the coherence it derived from a faith in science and the meta-narrative of the rational ordering of the world, how can Modernism in architecture, which takes as one of its primary assumptions the privileging of rationality in our attempts to engage with the world, continue to be valid in more than just an economic sense? How can a movement which derives so profoundly from a faith in rationality continue to be viable in a society which has lost that faith?

If there is a way, it is through a recognition of the limitations of rationality and an accommodation of other modes of knowing in the rational space of Modernism. Japan offers a social and cultural model in which reason's limits are acknowledged, indeed underlined; yet reason, and the respect for the technical, are given their place. This is manifested in work which does not facilely contradict the tenets of Modernism but manages to transcend them by, in the spaces within and around technical accomplishment, addressing issues which go beyond those with which the Modern movement was prepared to engage. These issues include irrationality, accessibility, the integration of nature and artifice, the acceptance of absurdity with truth, magic with realism, and a utopianism which is also ludic.

Thus works which, at a stylistic level, might be identified in many respects as Modernist can serve purposes which are more subtle and which engage with our High- or Post-Modern social and experiential condition. They imply and accommodate not the reformation of non-Western cultures along the lines of a knowledge system born out of the West, but a reformation of global society along a multiplicity of lines from all points of the compass. While there may be other reasons why Modernism still survives, this is the reason that it can still be interesting.

Notes:

1 Kisho Kurokawa, *Rediscovering Japanese Space* (Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1988)
2 John Whitney Hall, *Japan from Prehistory to Modern Times* (Rutland and Tokyo: Tuttle, 1992)
3 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge MA & Oxford: Blackwell, 1990)
4 Heino Engel *Measure and Construction of the Japanese House*, (Rutland and Tokyo: Tuttle, 1985)
5 For example Antonin Raymond's writing on the Japanese house, which emphasizes its "exteriorization of an idea" – an expression which seems to be an imposition of the Modern form-content relationship discussed below – and purity: "(matter)…is at all times subservient to an idea…matter only exists as a symbol of spiritual truth…", suggesting a sense of material/spiritual relationship deriving from Christian Europe rather than from Japan. (Antonin Raymond, *Antonin Raymond: His Work in Japan 1920-1935* [Tokyo: Nakamura, 1936], 17)
6 Junichiro Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows,* (Stony Creek CT: Leete's Island Books, 1997)
7 Kisho Kurokawa, *Rediscovering Japanese Space*, (Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1988)
8 Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism" in *New Left Review* 146: 53-92
9 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*
10 John Clammer, *Difference and Modernity: Social Theory and Contemporary Japanese Society* (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1995), 65
11 Roland Barthes, *The Empire of Signs*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 72
12 according to Frederic Jameson for example the "Depth Models" (inside / outside hermeneutic model; dialectic of essence and appearance; Freudian world of latent and manifest; existential model of authenticity and inauthenticity; semiotic opposition between signifier and signified) have been repudiated by contemporary theory. (Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism")
13 This claim is usually made with the implication that it is produced out of cultural attitudes and sensitivities which some, actually many, Japanese commentators assume to be exclusive to Japan. I do not share this assumption.
14 David B. Stewart, *The Making of a Modern Japanese Architecture*, (Tokyo and New York: Kodansha International, 1987) 254, 274
15 John Clammer *Difference and Modernity: Social Theory and Contemporary Japanese Society*, 7
16 Ibid., 56
17 Ibid., 41-42
18 Ibid., 42
19 Kisho Kurokawa, *Rediscovering Japanese Space*
20 Robert Venturi et. al., *Learning from Las Vegas,* (Cambridge MA and London: The MIT Press, 1977) 87-104
21 Itsuko Hasegawa in Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Itsuko Hasegawa Interview, Tokyo* (http://www.eyebeam.org)
22 Heino Engel, *Measure and Construction of the Japanese House*, 69
23 Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism"
24 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 285 - 302
25 Ibid., 260-307

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Seeing Through Franco Albini
Domestic Modernity in Rationalist Italy

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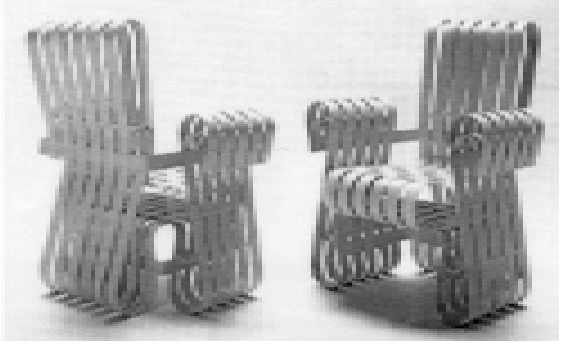
Four Observations

Even a cursory glance at a range of works by Franco Albini, including ornament, furniture and building plans, suggests his influence on the works of later and better known architects. I do not intend to argue that Gehry, Koolhaas, and Johnson were knowledgeable about Albini's work, but through closer inspection of selected projects I want to suggest the currency of the ideas and talents of this lesser known modern architect.[1]

As a designer with a lasting legacy, Albini's work deserves more critical consideration, which I hope to advance through studies of his museums, housing, interiors, furniture, private and public commissions, and teaching. His prolific career extended from pre-war rationalism to post-war progressive modernism located in Italy with few exceptions. In this paper, I will look specifically at his domestic interiors from the early 1930s through the 1950s. This subset of his work is of interest in the context of this conference for at least three reasons. First, the dwelling is the domain of architecture that has most resisted modernization, especially in North American popular culture. Secondly, Albini and partners' most important design contributions during the post-war period, evident in their public museum commissions, reflect the influence of his pre-war domestic experiments in interior design. He initiated themes in these minor projects that require modern transparency and love of craft.[2] Finally, the nature of the *modern room*, largely subverted by the breakdown of the box and the elimination of the wall in seminal modern icons, is intact in Albini's interiors and works to reinforce the room as the unit element of architecture.

Manfredo Tafuri credits Albini with leading the way in one of the architectural breakthroughs of his generation: modern museum design. Tafuri recognizes his "houses of art" for achieving equilibrium between novel space and exhibition function, and between memory and innovation. Albini produced Italy's first white box gallery in the Palazzo Bianco in Genoa. The 16th century palace on the Renaissance Strada Nuova houses a civic museum collection of historic artifacts. Tafuri also noted Albini's extraordinary contribution in the example of the Treasury of San Lorenzo Gallery built just after Palazzo Bianco (1950) in the same city. Characterizing

Albini's "Gaia", Albini's "Margherita"



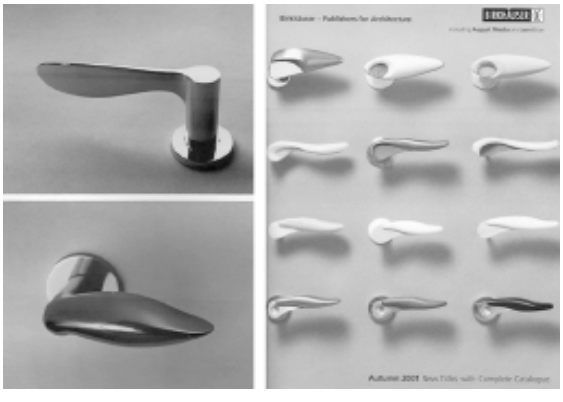
Frank Gehry's "Power Play"

what he calls "magical abstraction" in Albini's rationalist sensibility, Tafuri writes:

> *Albini managed to sublimate the esoteric nature of his referents. The dialectic between spaces, the variations of light, the dialog between the glass cases and the ambiguous suggestiveness of the interconnected organisms articulated one of the most original ingredients of Albini's poetics: a surrealism all the more subtle in that it was resolved in technically faultless vocabulary. Albini's 'buried architecture'" possesses its own language. Isolated from the external world, it elicits a dialogue between technological elegance—a further tool for achieving supreme detachment—and forms. This dialogue exalts an unreal dimension: the dimension to be precise, of abstraction as 'suspended image.' It was the same abstraction that characterized Albini's interiors: ephemeral containers for magically transported historical objects. … Albini created masterpieces of representational virtuousity and dreamlike suggestiveness. His lyricism resided in the erect, suspended, and reinforced frames… Albini's severity alludes to an absent without ever becoming tragic.*[3]

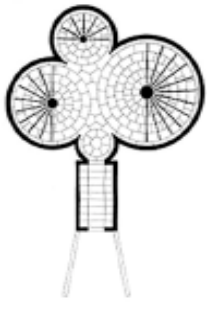
How does Albini's work offer poetic alternatives to the purity of enigmatic modern minimalism and the abstract transparency characteristic of International Style architecture? Like many from his generation in Italy, Albini produced furniture, interiors, exhibitions, affordable housing and spaces of high culture using a variable palette of modern materials and methods of construction with careful attention to craft. His cultural frame of reference from futurism to *arte povera* supplied a decidedly different conceptual background from Colin Rowe and Robert Slutsky's understanding of cubism as the heritage for modern architecture. Albini's architectural language was more directly shaped by his identification with the rationalists with whom he was trained and collaborated, including Gardella, Persico, Pagano, and Palanti, during the 1930s and early 40s. His unique contributions become progressively apparent in his post-war projects, produced first on his own, then later with his partner, Franca Helg. Their later projects demonstrate a fresh freedom from the stylistic dogma of pre-war rationalism, revealing a perpetuation of his own motifs developed during the prior period. Albini effectively interiorized transparency. He entered pictorial space to weaken and enrich the literal language of the abstract void. By focusing within, he explored new uses of ephemeral materials with emerging technologies, maintained privacy as an urban imperative, and established a recurring tension between the artifact and the room. Albini's use of glass and fabric employed for horizontal and vertical layers offered sophisticated variations of spatial transparency, that part of contemporary architecture that cannot be suppressed.

As a material practice, the work of Franco Albini embodied a pluralist language of transparency all his own yet also belonging to the Italian *tendenza*. Albini produced numerous installations, exhibition interiors, trade fair pavilions and temporary constructions inspired by the theories and practices of the Milanese school. His insistence on subdividing a large room with scaffolding-like steel or wood armatures provided a measuring device to break down the scale of monumental



Albini's door handles 1954, Koolhaas' door handles 2001

Franco Albini's Treasury of San Lorenzo in Genoa, Italy
1950-52



Phillip Johnson's Painting Gallery in New Canaan, CT
1965

spaces. His featherweight columns served to support displayed subjects at eye level with directed sources of light. At the same time, and while teaching in Venice and Turin, Albini produced urban mass housing and began to receive more important commissions. He worked for industry and cultural ministries, and built large residential quarters. Yet among his theoretical interiors, including one realized for himself, are some of his most compelling projects suggesting the role of the good modern room as the elemental unit of new architecture. Characteristic of Albini's poetic pragamatism is his fearless delight in textures, patterns, colors, materials and light. Selected articles of furniture, two experimental rooms, and several domestic interiors will be considered here to exemplify Albini's use of non-utopian relational transparency and from which the following observations about his work can be made:

1. Internalized transparency refocuses attention away from Miesian exterior/interior phenomena to interior/interior spatial relations that maintain separation between public and private domains while exploiting weightlessness, transparency of displays, and visual connectivity within.
2. The composition of "pure space" is mediated in favor of deferential treatment of the container to the contained, where a weakening of edge is sought to privilege the contents of the room and its perceiving subject over abstract form.
3. Careful negotiation of radical form and modern materials within historic structures transcends ideals of simple purity or erasure to realize more complex themes with non-standardized assemblages.
4. Tectonic solutions for built spaces exhibit conviction in the empirical role of materials. Detail precision and craft are essential to the diagrammatic clarity, legibility, and endurance of his work.

La Casa all' Italiana and first tendencies

The intellectual and social climate that produced Franco Albini was fascinating and complex, albeit contradictory and beyond full analysis here. Fascism evolved into a regime under Mussolini's dogma that sought to "nationalize" Italian social, family, and cultural life.[4] Therein, the modern dwelling provided a paradigm and became the primary site for revolution of the Italian lifestyle. Open to continuous scholarly investigation are questions about the predominance of nationalism vs. international influences in the quest for progress among the Italian design community. Yet there exists little doubt that the nationalist fervor and patriotism that persisted to shape discussions of the *tendenza* directed the intentions of prominent designers leading to and during the war.[5] Journals flourished in provoking the battle between false opposites of tradition vs. transition and reflected the culture's anxiety in the flux of change. Writings and exhibition fairs paralleled building design in the search for national identity. Edoardo Persico, antifascist architect and critic, wrote: "The greatest obstacle to the integral affirmation of Rationalism in Italy was the inability of its theoreticians to pose rigorously the problem of the antithesis between national and European taste." [6]

Modernization in Italy suggested scientific and technological progress, which eventually rationalized the dwelling as both a formal and an economic construct. Throughout the 1920s, before terminology such as the "new dwelling," "exitenz-minimum" or "machine a habiter" were common in Italy, foreign models brought scientific principles for organizing domestic life with influences on hygiene, family size, and women's roles. [7] Milanese architect Gio Ponti published his essay entitled "*La Casa all'Italiana*" in the first issue of the journal *Domus* in 1928 in which he distinguished the modern Italian house from its neighbors north of the Alps. He claimed that Italy's mild climate diminished the need for distinction between inside and outside, consequently forms and materials are often continuous. Probably responding to European influences and to the Rationalists manifesto published the prior year, Ponti insisted that the "new spirit" should not focus on what was purely functional but attend to "spiritual comfort," over pragmatic practicalities. Maristella Casciato has identified Ponti's three primary concerns in the evolution of the modern Italian house regarding aesthetic, social and technical programs all aimed at the sense of style.[8] Ponti's focus on lifestyle was considered bourgeois by the progressive young architects of the *Gruppo* 7, since it ran counter to the rationalists' 'adherence to logic and order.'[9] Terrragni's controversial *Novocomum* apartment building in Como in 1929 was quickly recognized as a tangible example of rationalist principles, yet only its façade as built presented alternatives to the traditional Italian apartment building. Its interior rooms were not published and probably without significance in defining a new dwelling type. Enrico Griffini provided architects

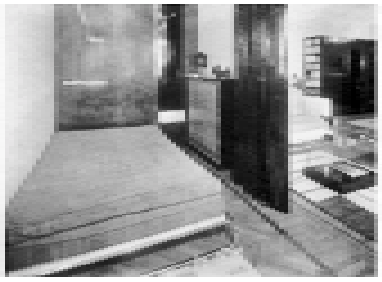
with a manual of new domestic form in his outline of principles entitled *costruzione razionale della casa* in 1931 and applied his proposals in collaboration with *Gruppo* 7 members.[10] Yet the most influential ideas about the modern Italian house were disseminated via the exhibition for a vacation house sponsored by *Societa' Edison*, the *Casa Elettrica*.

Produced for the IVth Biennale in Monza in 1930 by several members of *Gruppo* 7 ; Figini, Pollini, Frette, Libera, and Bottoni, the *Casa Elettrica* was the first truly glass house, programmed for domestic inhabitation, and realized only a year after the Barcelona Pavillion.[11] The exhibition house was streamlined, economical, and efficient, with special emphasis placed on dining, for which Bottoni designed an assembly line of production, distribution, and collection. The machine-like kitchen was not visible to diners who were served from blind revolving doors. The *sala da pranzo* (dining rooom) was part of the open central room that separated day and night zones in the dwelling. The entire room expanded upward toward clerestory windows and outward with a vista linked to the landscape through a continuous glass wall. A dark curtain could be drawn to isolate the dining area from the *stanza di soggiorno* (living room).

Albini's beginnings: interior transparency and domestic relations

Albini had completed his architectural studies at the Politecnico di Milano only one year prior to the Monza Biennale. In forthcoming exhibitions, Albini would contribute to three experimental shows and realize several domestic interiors during the same decade. These projects trace the evolution of his transitional motifs for the modern room. For the Vth Triennale in1933, Albini participated with 6 architects on a team headed by Giuseppe Pagano to produce the four-story steel frame house. Persico singled out the project for 'providing practical solutions to national problems.'[12] On the third floor, the *sala da pranzo* was separated from the corridor by a veil-like transparent curtain. During the same year, Albini transformed an artist's studio into a studio apartment with a single room accommodating functions of sleeping, writing, sitting and eating. Albini used black waxed sailcloth to isolate the bedroom nook, while a smoked glass and metal partition flanked the dining table made of black glass. The dark materials afforded greater visual privacy in a compressed area, while their glossy surfaces reflected light.

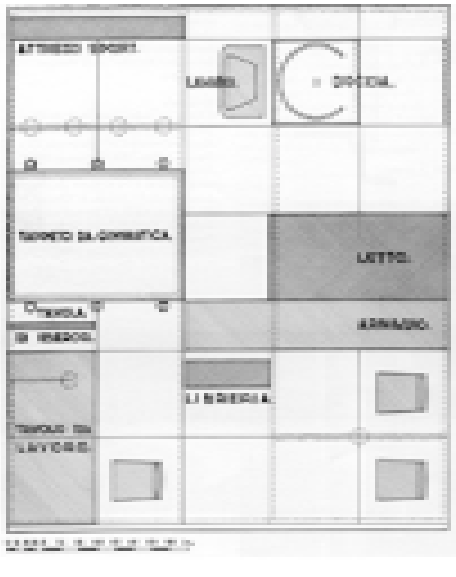
In 1936 the VI Milan Triennale was coordinated by Giuseppe Pagano, whose interest in rationalist functionalism and mass production guided his selection of young colleagues for commissions in the exhibition.[13] Albini was charged along with Giancarlo Palanti and Renato Camus to design a "Room for a Man." In 1940 for the VII Triennale, Albini alone designed the "Living



Room of a Villa."[14] Both designs exhibit the nature of a stage set with curtains and perceptively contrived parameters. Each space had a floor grid and a bilateral division of juxtaposed programs as if to separate daily life into dialectic domains. The mind and body of the monastic individual where polarized in "Room for a Man." A black transparent curtain suspended between the two areas addressed the ambiguity of separating mind and body. The room was 5 meters tall, forming a square end elevation. At 4 meters high a delicate white grid delineated an airy ceiling above eye level. The square end wall was faced in rough-cut stone, as though the earth's surface had slid sideways and upwards to ground the "body" end of the room, giving depth to the scenic backdrop. Wood was used for closets and shelving, but fully refined and finished as part of the technologically-precise machined, rather than organic, domain. The bed was suspended above all other activities to float as in a dream. A see-through book-wall spanned from floor-to-faux ceiling, suspending books on glass shelves. The *libreria* was slid off the grid into the "mind" zone of the room and was the only element positioned symmetrically and on center within the space.

In his next series of domestic commissions, Albini used the stair as both section organizer and expressive motif to accentuate linear movement along slipping boundaries. Horizontal pliability (curtain) shifted attention to diagonal thrust (stair). The profile of the stairway composed the room's end elevation for the Villa Vanzetti in 1935 (Como), while at the Vanzetti apartment (Milan) the next year, Albini opened the risers. For Villa Pestarini (1936-38) Albini suspended Carrara marble treads while opening the risers, balustrade and adjacent wall, to integrate dynamics of movement and light. A similar marble ramp stair later organized Albini/Helg's San Agostino Museum in Genoa. Albini's stairs proved a flexible medium for material and tectonic composition and the lyrical suspension of weight.

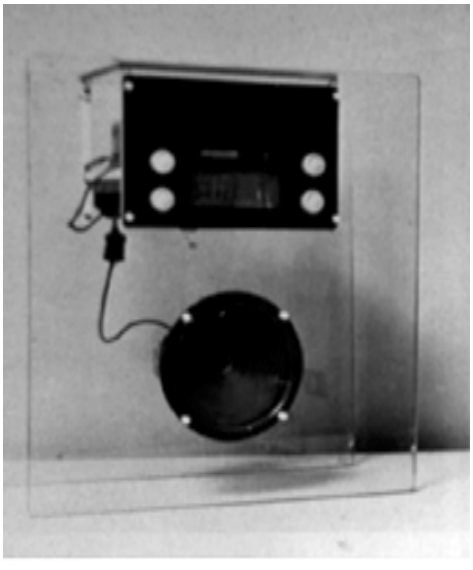
His fluency with the language of Italian Rationalism guided Albini to manipulate the rules of mass and gravity within phenomenally transparent space. Employing veils, curtains, sheers, glass shelves and tables and his own furniture, he explored possibilities that lie between phenomenal and literal layers marked with ephemeral boundaries. But he largely avoided the polemics of compromised privacy and interaction with the city or the voyeur. His internalized subdivisions suggested a psychological rather than sociological journey from here to there, as he simultaneously compressed activities of body and mind, culture and nature, and the organic with the man-made. His rapt attention to the artifact and its position within the space served his play of whimsical alignments and suspension structures challenging the rigors of point, line and planar geometries. Two pieces of furniture produced between 1938-40 characterize his serious playfulness where pragmatics embrace reality to form poetry. Each design also demonstrates Albini's

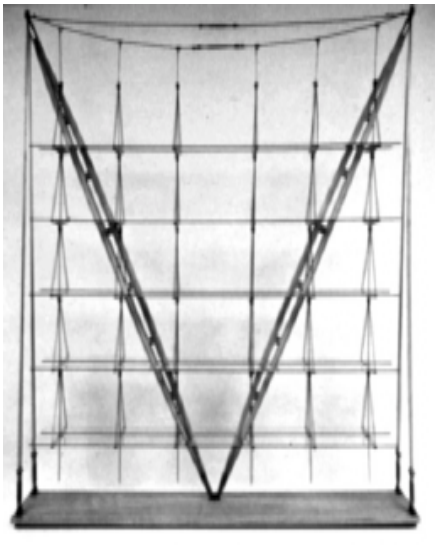


transparent aesthetic and flawless attention to detail and craft.

Albini's radio places the operational necessities of speaker and transmitter into a naked body.[15] The essence is revealed as the designer addresses only what is his domain and leaves technology to exist on its own, resulting in a visually dynamic dialog between opposites. Two planes of Securit glass hold the perceptually heavier rectangle over the circle, both of which appear suspended in air, allowing sound, music, and voice to emerge as if floating into the room. His tensile bookshelf called "*Veliero*," or sailboat, was designed for his own apartment.[16] At once poetic and pragmatic, the piece of furniture is both an artifact and a transparent wall extending the room's space. The balanced 'V' is formed by two brass-tipped wood tensile columns that support suspended glass shelves. The bookshelf is more stable when loaded with books, which can stand, lie flat or remain open. Even the base slab is detailed to appear not to rest on the ground, heightening the tension and gravity as dynamic elements of form. Each artifact states Albini's thesis that there are no passive objects. Predominant in his later museums, relational transparency depends upon the dynamic interaction of a room with its contents. A static, universal container of objects or bodies is not Albini's idea of modern space. The room as the unit element of architecture is thereby defined as a closed container of controlled proportions with subdivisions of varying degrees of permeability and visual penetration of the functions and forms within.

Albini's furniture appears in his own 1940 apartment design accompanied by his transparent curtains-as-walls. Designed between the two Triennale projects, Albini's Milan apartment displays leitmotifs observed in his



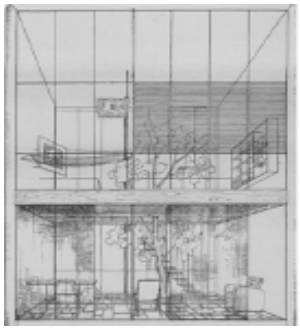


theoretical projects, and includes his transparent radio, bookshelf and glass-topped tables.[17] In addition, he introduced a single floor-to-ceiling white steel rod to support frameless paintings at eye level and overhead light fixtures. The apparatus, borrowed from his installations, reduced the repetitive frame to a single instrument. In the context of a small apartment the intervention appears to be inspired both by the need for more exhibition space than wall surfaces allowed and the opportunity to float such weighty subjects as Madonna and Child. He also introduced a means to dematerialize the wall surface while transforming a traditional functional form into a modern one. Sheer white curtains hang the entire dimension of the outside walls reaching corner-to-corner and suspended from ceiling to floor with concealed hardware. The effect of veiling the entire wall was to reduce the quantity and cool the quality of window light while making an ethereal planar edge. Windows appear more distant as framed views yet detached from the public realm, while the wall is rendered ambiguous focusing attention inward. An opaque azure interior curtain in the salon is positioned perpendicular to the outside wall to provide separation between dining and living functions but maintaining openness and flexibility. The pair of curtains adds color and texture while respecting the desire for privacy from within and beyond. Albini is comfortable combining modern abstract elements and textures with antique furnishings and artifacts, foreshadowing his radical encounters after the war when he is commissioned to house historic collections in revitalized monuments and to intervene with modern themes in historic churches and palazzi.

In the same year, Albini produced the experimental interior acclaimed by the critics as the only example in the VII Triennale capable of defining principles of modernity.[18] Like his previous Triennale statement, "Living Room for a Villa," (*soggiorno per una villa*) was composed using a gridded frame to provide perspectival structure in plan and section. In this scenario, the 6 x 7 bay plan was divided exactly in half as two 3 x 7 bays and demarked to represent exterior and interior spaces using different floor materials and set pieces. The section was also bifurcated with a mid-level platform made with open-spaced wood slats, suspended over the "indoor" half of the room and from which two swinging chairs were suspended into "outdoor" space. Transparencies of all sorts and materials merged interior and faux exterior space for a sublime domesticity reflective of Ponti's earlier *la casa all'italiana* depiction. Glass was again used only horizontally as reflective table surfaces "inside" and as the floor of the outdoor "ground" where glazed panels were supported by a metal grid over grassy terrain. A tree and stair connected the two levels in section. Beneath the platform an aviary made of tensile span netting brought birds indoors. Light passed between the slats of the platform shadowing the zone underneath. A hammock and swing chairs, cantilevered bookshelf,

suspended stair treads that did not touch the ground, and "natural" and man-made elements defined the lightweight sensuousness atmosphere of Albini's ideal space for living.

In 1949 Albini was invited to Genoa and eventually awarded four prestigious museum commissions by the director of the cultural ministry for the city, Caterina Marcenaro.[19] Marcenaro had significant insight regarding the Italian *tendenza* along with the authority to intervene on several monuments in a relatively conservative cultural environment. It was her responsibility to revitalize bomb-damaged historic sites in the city center for the purpose of accommodating medieval and Baroque collections held by the municipality. She found sympathy in Albini who shared her aims to modernize the experience of viewing the historic collections. Marcenaro awarded him projects for the Palazzo Bianco, recognized throughout Italy as the introduction of the essential white gallery box into museum design, the Palazzo Rosso (1952-60), the Treasury Museum under the Cathedral of San Lorenzo (1952), lauded by Tafuri, and later the San Agostino Museum (1963-79).[20] Of particular interest regarding the problem of the architecture of the modern room, Albini also designed Marcenaro's apartment in the reconstructed penthouse or "attico" of the 17th century Palazzo Rosso. Since interventions in the existing palazzo and apartment buildings were restrictive, especially where the plan and structural walls were largely in tact, Albini was left little freedom to redefine the overall building form. However in the domestic space for the director, vestiges of his earlier ideas, reconceived after rationalism's popularity had waned, provides further



insight into his strategies for magical poetics that transcend the functions of a well-designed room.

The bomb-damaged original roof of the palazzo had already been reconstructed by Mercenaro's predecessor before she attained oversight of Genoa's artistic patrimony. Prior to 1954 Albini removed the new "historic" roof and replaced it with low concrete beams spanning a compressed open volume. Marcenaro's apartment, therefore, received minimal exterior light and sat too high above the street for views of the narrow *viccoli* (alleys) outside. Detached from the city, she was indeed physically joined to her museum since the semi-public apartment linked directly to the semi-private public gallery sequence, paradoxically added to a formerly domestic palace. She had become a part of the building that defined her profession and her life, which were inseparable. Marcenaro's space was neither claustrophobic nor oppressed by the history on which it was supported. Albini repeated his suspension of artifacts and furniture, choreographed as protagonists woven into sublime modern space, using a web of

delicate "*allestimento*" or finish details made from black steel tensile members. Once again, overcoming weight is thematic and can be seen in visual relationships of floating objects, including the fireplace hearth and cap, which defy gravity and allow unobstructed views across rooms. The loft stairs and fireplace hover but do not rest, and antiquities are married to modern motifs.

Conclusion: just the beginning

The persistent question that accompanied the search for a unique Italian modern design in the early years can be seen in Albini's modern dwellings. If a distinctive Italian character exists, Albini's response to *la casa all'Italiana* was overtly influenced by both the rationalists 'logic and order' and Ponti's call for attention to style, design, and spiritual comfort reflected in Albini's recurrent motifs. Pre-war isolation and social realities of the war's aftermath served to provoke Italian architects pressured by new needs and economic constraints as catalysts for their maturing complex modern language. Umberto Eco affirms the significance of *Italianita'*(Italianness) during the modern Italian metamorphosis:

> *"An Italian character does exist. The first is a transhistorical characteristic that relates to 'genialita' (ingenuity) and 'inventivita' (inventiveness)…and consists in our ability to marry humanist tradition with technological development. What has undoubtedly acted as a brake on our culture, the predominance of the humanistic over the technological, has also permitted certain fusions, eruptions of fantasy within technology and the technologization of fantasy. Secondly, Italy is a country that has known enormous crises, foreign domination, massacres, and yet (and for this reason) has produced Raphael and Michelangelo….what often fascinates foreigners is that in Italy economic crises, uneven development, terrorism accompany great inventiveness."*[21]

For Albini, the 'new spirit' awakened every dimension of everyday life. Even product design in Albini's hands becomes architecture, not only because he defines space with furnishings, but because his objects speak poetically, linking function to fantasy. The most prosaic programs invited dream-like buoyancy and magical abstraction. His stairs dangle in suspension preferring never to touch ground. Artworks float, sometimes framelessly, challenging the weight of their baroque subject matter to complement the relational tension of the object to the space and the inhabitant to the dwelling. Albini's motifs suggest a plethora of models in response to function, material, site and scale. While many modern masters aimed for the great building as the elemental unit by erasing spatial subdivisions, Albini sought and defined the modern room. With the loss of the formal room went scale, surface, and proportional relationships of interior space. Mies van der Rohe's architecture linked the detail to the building as a whole and effectively collapsed the room. Albini designed not only many worthy details but saw them crafted to create a poetic architecture of a new social order. His ingenuity and inventiveness are everywhere apparent as his design work grows to maturity after the war.

Notes:

1 Although I know of no scholarship that has connected Philip Johnson to the work of Franco Albini, this project gives cause to believe that Johnson was aware of and interested in Albini's work during Johnson's own peak, when he learned the language of transparency from Mies. His 1965 Painting Gallery buried on the grounds of the New Canaan estate bears a striking similarity in plan to the *tholos* diagram of Albini's crypt. Beyond the plan similarities of four circular rooms with identical radii, its location underground and the floor paving graphics render the similarities between galleries uncanny. [While this possible relationship is the subject of another research project, it is worth noting here since Johnson's works of architecture are far better known and have received more critical attention than those of Franco Albini.]

2 Many of Albini's projects were continued by his office, led by Franca Helg, Marco Albini, and Antonio Piva, after his death in 1977. See *Franco Albini 1905-1977*, Antonio Piva and Vittorio Prina (Milan: Electa, 1998).

3 Manfredo Tafuri, p. 50. *History of Italian Architecture 1944-1985* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989).

4 David Horn, *Social Bodies, Science, Reproduction and Italian Modernity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

5 Dual forces were at work in the determination to identify aesthetic trends and forms that maintained the thread of Italian tradition. *Italianita*', those quintessential qualities that define and distinguish being Italian, and *mediterraneita*', that which is culturally unique to southern European geography and climate, were recurring themes in the struggle to direct emerging new forms of architecture, and in particular, modern dwelling in fascist Italy.5 *Aggiornamento* called for bringing Italian architecture up to date with other progressive European theory and practice.

6 Dennis Doordan, *Building Modern Italy, Italian Architecture 1914-1936* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988) p. 111.

7 Taylorization and fordism introduced through venues such as the Fourth International Congress on Household Economy held in Rome in 1927 served the social programs of the regime. Management of the household was linked to the well-being of the family which supported parallel directives regarding the education of the housewife and the efficiency of domestic organization. See Maristella Casciato "The 'Casa all'Italiana' and the idea of modern dwelling in fascist Italy," *The Journal of Architecture* Vol 5 Winter 2000, pages 335-353.

8 Casciato p. 338.

9 In December 1926, *Rassegna Italiana* published the manifest of Italian Rationalism signed by seven young architecture students form the Milan Politechnic. The members of the Gruppo 7 were Ubaldo Castagnoli (later replaced by Adalberto Libera), Luigi Figini, Guido Frette, Sebastiano Larco, Gino Pollini,Carlo enrico Rava, and Giuseppe Terragni. Doordan p. 45.

10 Doordan, p. 112.

11 The central glazed façade allows the interior to extend outside to the lakefront, much like the spatial intentions in the later Farnsworth House by Mies van der Rohe and in Philip Johnson's New Canaan house. But the glass is actually a pair of planes housing a greenhouse inside. Doordan pp 60-63.

12 Doordan p 119.

13 Stephen Leet, "Pagano and Temporary Architecture of the Triennale," *Franco Albini 1934-1977 Architecture and Design,* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1990). pp. 24-25.

14 *Franco Albini 1905-1977,* "Stanza per un uomo, VI Triennale di Milano, 1936," pp. 86-87, and "Stanza di soggiorno per una villa, VII Triennale di Milano, 1940," pp. 145-147.

15 Piva and Prina. "Apparecchio radio trasparente," p. 110.

16 Ibid. Liberia 'Veliero,'" p. 123.

17 Ibid. "Appartamento Albini. Via De Togni, Milano, 1940," pp 140-142.

18 Ibid. "C. Zanini in 'Costruzioni Casabella' del 1941 definisce l'ambiente di Albini come l'unico esempio che mostra 'principi di modernita'…" p. 145.

19 Piero Bottardo, current director of the Palazzo Rosso Museum, and Clario di Fabio, director of Albini's later San Agostino Museum in Genoa, have each written about Marcenaro addressing her term as *sopritendente di beni culturale* from 1949-1971. They consider the architect's and curator's early decisions and problems in the historiographic analysis and response in *"Una protagonista della scena culturale genovese fra 1950-1970:Caterina Marcenaro fra casa e musei."*di Fabio, and "*Palazzo Rosso dai Brignole-Sale a Caterino Marcenaro: luci ed ombre di un caposaldo della museologia italiana*," by Bottardo. Original unpublished papers provided to author.

20 Tafuri addressed Albini's achievements of museology as high points that unleashed repression during this period, and specifically credited Albini's contribution to the renewal of museum design whose themes ranged "from the 'civil' role of form to the encounter between memory and innovation." Manfredo Tafuri, *History of Italian Architecture 1944-1985* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989) p. 49.

21 Umberto Eco, "You must Remember This…." in Guggenheim Museum catalog for the exhibition "*The Italian Metamorphosis 1943-68*" (New York: The Soloman R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1994) by Thomas Krens. p. 3.

From the Internal to the Radical: Autonomy and Alterity in the Local Modern

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"The alterity, the radical heterogeneity of the other, is possible only if the other is other with respect to a term whose essence is to remain at the point of departure, to serve as *entry* into the relation, to be the same not relatively but absolutely"
Emmanuel Levinas

"The other is inside or outside, not inside and outside, being part of our interiority while remaining exterior, foreign, other to us. Awakening us, by their very alterity, their mystery, by the in-finite that they still represent for us. It is when we do not know the other, or when we accept that the other remains unknowable to us, that the other illuminates us in some way, but with a light that enlightens us without our being able to comprehend it, to analyze it, to make it ours"
Luce Irigaray

Abstract
This essay attempts to revise/reformulate, and what I will argue, as a radicalization, the principle of autonomy. After reviewing the philosophical basis and the historical development of the principle of autonomy in the emergence of the modern movement and its essential performance in the philosophical discourse of the avantgarde and neo-avantgarde movements, this essay then focuses on a discussion of an unexplored dimension/ramification/rhyzome in the evolution of the concept of autonomy.

I propose that the radicalization of autonomy is an advance state in a conversion processes, evident in a series of architectural projects produced between 1948 and 1958 designed by Henry Klumb. Henry Klumb, F.L.Wright's collaborator from 1929 to 1933, arrived to the island of Puerto Rico in 1944. Immersed in a historical turning point within a trascendental political and social processes, embodied in the modernization, descolonization and the new constituition of Puerto Rico, Henry Klumb became a protagonical figure in the articulation of an architecture for the new political status. The emergence of the new status, based on reaching autonomous political plateau, permitted the intellectual debate and ideological atmospheres for the redefinition of this central principle in the formulation of a new modernity. The architectural ideas of this architect, transformed the autonomous condition of the modernist axioms in a wide range of his projects.

A series of three projects, the Faculty Recreational Center (1948), Klumb's own house (1948) and the Student Center (1948-1958) reflect a transformation in the aesthetic and ethical considerations of architectural formation in relation to the cultural, political and physical context. These projects in particular manifest three intensities of autonomy, as a result of radical changes in his attitude towards the notion of context. In this series of projects, autonomy, as a concept and as an ideology, neither is privileged nor neglected, but rather it becomes an experiment in itself. The radicalization of autonomy will be analyzed in reference with a framework of three levels of intensitiy: *Internal Autonomy*, *Exchangable Autonomy* and *Radical Autonomy*. Instead of becoming a process that negated exterioties and differences, Klumb's radicalization of autonomy directs one towards the recognition and reconsideration of Alterity.

Mostmodernism

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Architecture is stifled by custom.
Le Corbusier, Vers Une Architecture [1]

The ostensible purpose of this conference, to examine why modernism refuses to die, cannot be achieved without consensus on the meaning of the word. Lewis Mumford noted that the Renaissance City is a myth: the Renaissance was a few individuals of uncommon genius, whose isolated works became the model for several centuries of imitation. Indeed, anyone who has traveled in search of the Renaissance knows what hard, but rewarding, work it is seeking out its icons. We can say the same of modernism. The real thing is hard, but rewarding, to find. Still modernism by any definition that includes a skeleton of steel or concrete, freestanding columns, open floor plan, the "façade libre", a skin with free arrangement of windows — is all around us, generic, dull, bland, devastating. At the campus of a typical state university, an architect's achievement is likely to be subordinated to the demands of facilities management, and "vision" superceded by the pragmatics of maintenance and economy known as value engineering. Financial rewards go to the architects who keep their practices focused on business, and their efficient participation in a production process. Archibusiness is to architecture what agribusiness is to the small farm. Like the computer and automobile industry, modernism has become a fundamental part of our global economy, a river of money springing from the confluence of power. Modernism prevails; it will die when it is no longer profitable. Modernism may indeed outlast the continued relevance of architects as a species related to its production. Frank Lloyd Wright once said modestly of himself: "it's been five hundred years since there's been a genius in architecture, it will be five hundred more till there's another." Surely in discussing modernism's persistence we need to acknowledge genius, hard work and inspiration — but to be accurate we need to create a second category for the "other" modernism too ubiquitous to be dismissed, too insistent to be ignored.

The universal beneficence that the pioneers of the Modern Movement foresaw in the industrialization of the means of production has been usurped by the corrosive effect of the economics of late capitalism. The power of commercialization has induced the widely held cynicism that the soul of architecture today is its economics. Modernism is a *product*; its early utopian social agenda exchanged for the profit motive implicit in a society that often appears to value consumerism over social responsibility. Projects of great importance to the built environment—public buildings, universities, schools, churches, malls and shopping centers are increasingly assembled from internet catalogs by architect specifiers with ever fewer real choices. Undistinguished as architecture, but notable for their reliance on pro-forma realities, critical path schedules and mass production, I will refer to them as "mostmodernism" throughout this discussion since these unpublished, unheralded examples of modernism represent the preponderance of built works, professional fees and opportunities available to architects today. The agencies of the status quo appear more powerful than the agents of change. Their interactions are complex, but at the intersection of the various spheres of influence are mostmodernism and the consumer. Without question, architects of passion and skill make socially conscious, environmentally responsible works of sensitivity and grace everyday. When considered in context of the contribution the construction industry makes to the gross national product, however, 1.6 *trillion* dollars in 2001[2], it is clear that we are losing the battle for the built environment. It's just math. The Gehrys, Koolhaases, Cutlers and devoted practitioners, large and small, have a positive effect, but are relatively invisible against the

onslaught of mostmodernism. I am thinking of outgoing President Eisenhower's 1961 speech warning the nation to beware the insidious power of the military industrial complex "the total influence—economic, political, even spiritual—that is felt in every city". What of the insidious power of the financial/industrial/construction/government and academic complex that perpetuates mostmodernist thinking and practice that has been proved wrong on every main point?

By law, architects are involved in the design of most of the environments we inhabit. Paradoxically, many people, even men and women of sensitivity, intellect and education, have never experienced a work of "real" architecture as defined by its academics and glossy publications. This is the plight even of the privileged that live in wealthy suburbs, shop at prosperous malls, work at a thriving corporations, holiday at exclusive locales. Mostmodernism is ubiquitous substitute. Foam and stucco froth, medieval-towered or Italianate big box retail dominate the landscape from New York to LA. At its worst, this process appropriates and decontextualizes historical architectural forms, mimicking the most salient characteristics of the original, often resulting in self-satire, unintentional parody, urban and suburban cross-dressing, the dominance of the box, geometrical absurdities, poison technologies, dysfunctional systems, and the irrational acceptance of life in a built environment largely unexamined. Perhaps this is the manifest destiny of the bourgeoisie, cultural homogenization, generic place and cyberspace. If you're part of the system it's hard to point fingers, but we have everything to gain from being judgmental. In a capitalist society, the cash register is the real ballot box; we vote every time we spend a dollar. Well, there's a market for this mostmodernist stuff, this is an idea many people have "bought" into, and others, not so fortunate, dream about. They seem to be happy living in their little utopias, driving from point A to B in their leather lined SUVs with the music on and air conditioning blasting. The vote is in, and mostmodernism is the clear winner. Wasn't that the point of modernism, the achievement of a democratic ideal through economic and technological determinism?

Critics, including myself, don't seem to appreciate that the modernist utopian vision has been realized; we're left standing outside the plate glass window looking in. We're raving at the sky like the guy on the street corner in rags who lives in a cardboard box (a medium, incidentally, still not fully explored for its value as temporary housing). The modernist dreams of efficiency, standardization and mass-production have been realized. Modernism, with some iterations and transformations, has achieved a near pervasive hegemony like unto a utopia in its ability to create exclusive environments. Chandigarh, Disneyworld, and the local mall share a piece of the utopian vision: they offer an alternative to messy "reality". "Exclusive" housing, shopping, resorts and office blocks offer convenience, security and freedom from anxiety. Exclusivity is a characteristic common to class "A" office space, suburbs, business parks, islands and all utopias,

		2001 I	2001 II	2001 III	2001 IV
1	National income without capital consumption adjustment	8,078.7	8,106.6	8,055.7	7,972.8
2	Domestic industries	8,068.8	8,075.5	8,044.2	7,937.6
3	Private industries	7,026.3	7,019.6	6,974.4	6,857.4
4	Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	109.5	113.7	113.8	118.6
5	Mining	75.2	73.7	68.4	68.8
6	Construction	439.2	441.5	444.1	435.8
7	Manufacturing	1,182.5	1,157.7	1,133.3	1,075.3
8	Durable goods	613.6	606.4	604.9	567.8
9	Nondurable goods	489.1	501.4	488.3	478.3
10	Transportation and public utilities	545.2	542.6	535.8	496.1
11	Transportation	240.6	241.3	238.5	226.8
12	Communications	153.5	152.6	150.5	137.1
13	Electric, gas, and sanitary services	151.1	148.7	146.8	132.5
14	Wholesale trade	463.0	457.9	458.8	452.7
15	Retail trade	683.8	680.8	681.8	686.1
16	Finance, insurance, and real estate	1,595.7	1,567.8	1,542.1	1,578.5
17	Services	1,856.0	1,864.8	1,886.4	1,861.8
18	Government	1,042.4	1,055.9	1,069.9	1,080.2
19	Rest of the world	9.9	30.9	11.5	35.2

Table 6.1C. National Income Without Capital Consumption Adjustment by Industry Group [Billions of dollars]

fictional or non-, from Thomas Moore's original Utopia to Butler's Erewhon to B.F.Skinner to the Shaker settlements in America. Exclusivity ensures the utopia its primacy by removing the utopian space from the intrusion of reality. Corbu's utopian vision for Paris proposed the obliteration of its historic context. Although the Left Bank remains, the set of logics that generated it have been neutralized, such that the Left Bank must be considered outside of the context of modernism rather than the other way around. Utopia admits neither complexity nor contradiction, proffering rather a hyper- or surreality in which nothing is moot; substituting the absolute for the imperfect, the universal for the difficulties of the specific. Exclusivity ensures a rigid degree of self-control by controlling the means of perception, limiting the possibilities of internal contradiction and therefore the creation of critical viewpoints in opposition to it. And there's money in it.

Most troubling is that the technology of industrialization has failed to produce a healthful built environment while despoiling the natural one. Like the sorcerer's apprentice, the would-be master of modernism's knowledge is incomplete. He has only half the magic. The concepts, ideas, partis, and formal poetry that feed the creative idealism of the future practitioner soon give way to the systematic and efficient manufacture, delivery and assembly of most modern buildings. Not all, but most. Although the Bauhaus educational program still prevails in North American schools, the former emphasis on understanding the nature of materials and the ritual of their connection has ceded to a system so efficient that architect students need "awareness" rather than knowledge of construction methodology to meet graduation requirements from accredited schools. The Bauhaus taught that you had to understand the "nature" of a material before you could design with it. What is the nature of vinyl, plastic laminate, EIFS, or any other synthetic building material? Industrialization not only divorced architecture from hand craftsmanship, but also from an understanding the discrete processes involved in the correct execution of every trade on the job site. Despite heightened awareness and an increasingly complex regulatory environment, the practitioners of mostmodernism continue to ignore environmental concerns with the conspicuous consumption of land and energy. Sustainable design concepts will reduce the quantity of polluted water, despoiled environment and lost habitat that plague the developed planet. One can hope for improvement as we shift toward a post-industrial state with greater emphasis on holistic planning and ecological determinism. Unfortunately the shift in the Western World toward the post industrial state has in many cases simply shifted the industrial event to developing countries with less restrictive environmental covenants. The famous inner harbor in my city of residence, Baltimore, is sedimented with chromium and other pollutants discharged from the former Allied Chemical Company plant. When regulatory and development pressures made the plant uneconomical, it was simply dismantled and shipped, piece by piece, to South Korea. Let's hope that modernism will be transformed into a benign (if not inspired) form before, piece by piece, it covers the rest of the planet.

Notes:

1 Le Corbusier, Towards a New Architecture, trans. By Frederick Etchells, Praeger Publishers, New York, seventh edition, 1974, first published by the Architectural Press, London, 1927.

2 Source: United States Bureau of Economic Statistics