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“A Partial Synthesis”: Debates on Architectural Realism

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New Realism's Architectural Provocation

Renowned Italian intellectuals from different disciplines reacted with interest and engagement to the *Manifesto of New Realism*, published in 2012 by Turin philosopher Maurizio Ferraris.[1] That the manifesto had significant resonance also among architects is not surprising, since architecture is 'realistic' in its nature: the physical presence of built works, their visibility and livability, have throughout history been the main engine of reflections, theoretical elaborations and evolution of the discipline.

Goethe's maxim 'one should not search behind phenomena, since they themselves are the doctrine', could apply as a motto for realism.[2] Instead of the abstract commitment to artistic ideals and their theories, realism implies taking a closer look, 'to well inspect' – in Goethe's words – existing things, to dwell on them, to capture their individuality and phenomenological peculiarity.[3]

Indeed Ferraris proposes – in reaction to the anti-realist and de-objectifying perspective of postmodernism – a return to reality, in its various aspects, as the field of a 'possible and legitimate knowledge'.[4] On the basis of the three key categories of 'Ontology', 'Critics' and 'Enlightenment', new realism refers to a stable external world, independent of conceptual schemes and governed by its own laws. It foresees the potential to criticise and transform this world for the better and, lastly, trusts in knowledge as a tool of progress and emancipation.[5]

From this perspective, realism offers in architecture the chance to devise, on the basis of what exists – cities and buildings, theories and projects – a mode of knowledge as deliberate conceptual activity, in continuity with history, but aimed at the future, 'in which each generation can capitalize on the discoveries of previous generations'.[6]

Thus an intense debate between philosophers and architects has more recently aimed to systematise and deepen the inter- and trans-disciplinary moments of this discourse, allowing the notion of realism to emerge as a critical tool in thinking and building.[7]

As proposed by Ferraris, realism 'is a critical doctrine in two senses. In the Kantian sense of judging what is real and what is not, and in the Marxian one of transforming what is not right … In realism, criticism is thus incorporated'.[8]

In this context, the Italian-German discourse on architecture plays a crucial role. If Italian modern architecture shows an extraordinarily strong dependence on German rationalism until the postwar period, conversely,

[1] The controversy on realism began in Italy with Maurizio Ferraris's article 'Ritorno al pensiero forte', *La Repubblica*, 8 August (2011), pp. 36–37 announcing the publication of the *Manifesto* (Bari: Laterza, 2012). As Ferraris writes in the introduction, the title 'New Realism' was established with German philosopher Markus Gabriel for a forthcoming international conference (Bonn 26–28 March 2012). The complete press review, including the series about new realism, published in the German weekly paper *Die Zeit* between April and July 2014, can be found on https://nuovorealismo.wordpress.com/.

[2] Max Necker (ed.), *Maximen und Reflexionen nach den handschriften des Goethe- und Schiller-Archivs* (Weimar: Verlag der Goethe Gesellschaft,1907), no. 575, p. 125.

[3] Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Goethes Werke: Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften I*, vol. 13 (München: C. H. Beck, 1981), p. 227.

[4] Ferraris, *Manifesto*, p. 79.

[5] Ibid., pp. 29–31.

[6] Ibid., p. 56.

[7] Cf. among others: Silvia Malcovati, 'Dal Postmodernismo al Nuovo Realismo. Ritorno all'architettura della città / Von der Postmoderne zum neuen Realismus. Rückkehr zur Architektur der Stadt', in Michele Caja and Massimo Fagioli (eds.), *Nuovi architetti berlinesi / Neue Berliner Architekten* (Firenze: Aion edizioni, 2011), pp. 17–25; Silvia Malcovati et al. (eds.), *Architettura e realismo: riflessioni sulla costruzione architettonica della realtà* (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Maggioli, 2013); Silvia Malcovati et al. (eds.), *Nuovo realismo e architettura della città / New Realism and Architecture of the City* (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Maggioli, 2013); *Serbian Architectural Journal*, monographic issue *Architecture Utopia Realism*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2014); Ullrich Schwarz, 'Warum so autoritär?', *Die Zeit*, no. 17 (16 April 2014); Gen-

Italian architectural theories from the last fifty years have significantly influenced the thinking of German architects and are reflected by the reality of buildings.
Methodologically, these considerations require structuring the discussion into two levels: on the one hand they refer to the relationship between realism and rationalism in the history of modern and postwar architecture, and on the other hand they focus on the German-Italian relationship that finds its peculiar expression in a complex relationship of mutual reference and interpretation.
Both aspects were topics of discussion in an international conference in 2014, whose results, as yet unpublished, will be a constant reference for the argument proposed in this essay.[9]

From Real to Rational: Realism and Rationalism as Origins of Modern Architecture

The understanding of realism in architecture is, from its outset during the late nineteenth century, indissolubly interwoven with the outcomes of rationalism.
If realism, as noted above, refers to what exists, to experience and perception, to the 'concrete' component of reality, then rationalism – with its philosophical origins in the culture of the Enlightenment – refers to reality rather as a world of general elements, laws and rules, formal paradigms and recurring typologies.[10]
In late nineteenth and twentieth century architecture, realism and rationalism appear thus as complementary positions, being adopted in a revisionist perspective by anti-academic movements which encouraged, against historicism and formalism, the proximity of art to the reality of life.[11]
As pointed out by Fritz Neumeyer, the realistic attitude in architecture, or 'the provocation of the real' at the end of the nineteenth century, relativised the normativity of tradition on two opposite, but complementary points of view.[12]
On the one hand, the actual physical encounter with the artworks and buildings of the past – of antiquity but also of the medieval building tradition – broke down classical dogma in favour of the equality of all historical styles. Styles themselves were no longer considered according to a formal criterion, but to more general principles, such as character, construction and purpose.[13] On the other hand, industrialization led to the use of metal structures and glass surfaces in the building industry and to the appreciation of functional buildings, suggesting that a new aesthetics, supposedly appropriate for the new materials, could be attained.
This equivalence of styles and the search for an architectural form suited to technical buildings, are the basis of the dialectic between realism and rationalism.
A building that can be regarded as a forerunner and architectural manifesto of this dialectic in nineteenth century architecture is Schinkel's Bauakademie. Built as a brick–shell between 1832 and 1836, this building heralded a new approach to architecture, both from a technical and

tucca Canella and Elvio Manganaro (eds.), *Per una architettura realista* (Santarcangelo di Romagna: Maggioli, 2015); Paola Gregory (ed.), *Nuovo realismo/Postmodernismo. Dibattito aperto tra architettura e filosofia* (Roma: Officina Edizioni, 2016).

8 Ferraris, *Manifesto*, p. 61 and p. 63.

9 *Die Provokation des Realen. Neuer Realismus und Rationalismus. Eine Deutsch-Italienische Debatte in Architektur und Philosophie/La provocazione del reale. Nuovo realismo e razionalismo. Un dibattito architettonico e filosofico tra Germania e Italia*, Villa Vigoni, Menaggio, 31 March–3 April 2014.

10 Cf. Alan Colquhoun, 'Zwischen Architektur und Philosophie, Rationalismus 1750-1970', in Claus Baldus, Joseph-Paul Kleihues and Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani (eds.), *Das Abenteuer der Ideen: Architektur und Philosophie seit der industriellen Revolution* (Berlin: IBA, 1987), pp. 247–272, extracts in English in Andrew Peckham and Torsten Schmiedeknecht (eds.), *The Rationalist Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014) pp. 15–23. Cf. also Dennis Sharp, *The Rationalists: Theory and Design in the Modern Movement* (London: Architectural Press, 1978).

11 If the term 'rationalist architecture' came to stand for modern architecture, and the modern movement was later seen as opposed to 'functionalism', the constituent elements of the concept were already present in the architectural debate of the late nineteenth century.

12 Cf. Fritz Neumeyer, *Vom neuen Realismus zur neuen Sachlichkeit*, unpublished contribution to the above-mentioned conference in Villa Vigoni, 2014.

13 Cf. e.g. Christian Ludwig Stieglitz, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Baukunst der Alten* (Leipzig: Dyksche Buchh., 1834).

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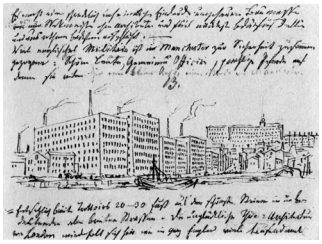

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aesthetic point of view. Schinkel merged historical models, such as the brick Gothic architecture of the Brandenburg March and the pilaster-structured construction of the Renaissance Palazzo, with the design principles of the most modern English factory buildings he visited during his trip to England in 1826 (Figs. 1, 2).[14] The epochal achievement of Schinkel's Bauakademie was to give an artistic and architectural shape to the modern functional building, emphasising construction and encouraging a simple, economical, but powerful facade design. After Schinkel, the issue of the relationship between architectural form and construction became crucial, highlighting the great potential of a realist as well as a rationalist attitude, but also their limitations in a pragmatic and constructional object-oriented perspective.

These limitations have clearly been rejected by the architect and theorist Gottfried Semper. In the book *Der Stil* (1860), his 'practical aesthetics', derived from reality, is not realistic in the sense of a description of facts, but as a cultural practice in the broadest sense, including technique.[15] Uniquely, at a time when construction and material become autonomous formal ideas of architectural objectification, Semper's architectural theory gives precedence to the symbolic dress, namely the spatial shell superimposed on the static solid core.[16]

But his position is constantly interpreted as materialistic: one could say that the entire debate on realism at the turn of the century basically developed from the understanding or misunderstanding of Semper's theories. It is the case of the Viennese architect Otto Wagner, who first put the term 'realism' at the center of an architectural theory agenda, true to the maxim: 'The realism of our time must permeate the nascent artwork'.[17] Nevertheless, Wagner wrote about realism with a typical modernist attitude – based on an equivocal interpretation of Semper's theory – deriving form from construction and allowing the architectural world to emerge exclusively from material and structural conditions – thankfully, only in theory.[18] Wagner's theoretical impoverishment and the internal contradictions of his argument are highlighted by Richard Streiter, who in response to his position gave the most significant contribution to a theory of realistic architecture at that time. Streiter rejected both Wagner's 'tectonic realism' or 'architectural verism', as well as Jugendstil's naturalism,[19] proposing instead a 'healthy realism' characterised by 'truthfulness of expression and more honest solidity of means'.[20] Realism in architecture

14 Gottfried Riemann, *Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Reise nach England, Schottland und Paris im Jahre 1826* (München: C.H. Beck, 1986), p. 244.

15 Gottfried Semper, *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten oder praktische Ästhetik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Verlag für Kunst und Wissenschaft, 1860).

16 Ibid., pp. 381–382.

17 Otto Wagner, 'Antrittsrede an der Akademie der bildenden Künste (1894)', in Otto Antonia Graf, *Das Werk des Wiener Architekten 1841-1918* (Zürich: gta, 1994), pp. 249–250.

18 Cf. Harry Francis Mallgrave, Otto Wagner. *Reflections on the Raiment of Modernity* (Santa Monica: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1993), esp. J. Duncan Berry, 'From Historicism to Architectural Realism', pp. 243–278; Harry Francis Mallgrave, 'From Realism to Sachlichkeit', pp. 281–321; Stanford Anderson, 'Sachlichkeit and Modernity', pp. 323–359.

19 Richard Streiter, *Architektonische Zeitfragen, eine Sammlung und Sichtung verschiedener Anschauungen, mit besonderer Beziehung auf Professor Otto Wagners Schrift „Moderne Architektur"* (Berlin–Leipzig: Cosmos, 1898), pp. 77–96.

20 Ibid., p. 80.

Fig. 1
Eduard Gaertner, *Die Berliner Bauakademie*, Ölgemälde, 1868. (Public Domain as copyright protection period has expired.)

Fig. 2
Karl Friedrich Schinkel, *Cotton mills in Manchester*, 1826 [in Gottfried Riemann (ed.), *Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Reise nach England, Schottland und Paris im Jahre 1826* (München: C.H. Beck, 1986), p. 246].

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does not only mean 'convenience, comfort, healthiness, in a word: *Sachlichkeit'* as the rational-realists were proclaiming: 'the character of a building' – argues Streiter – 'does not have to develop out of its intended purpose only, but also from the environment, from the nature of existing building materials, from the landscape and historically conditioned atmosphere',[21] i.e. from the cultural significance of place and users' culture.
This conclusion came as an epilogue to the debates on realism of the early 1900s. Josef Prestel's committed contribution on 'Realism and architecture', as well as the essay 'Realistische Architektur' by Alfred Lichtwark, failed to add anything new to the discussion.[22] When Lichtwark republished this essay two years later in a collection of his writings, he retitled the essay 'Sachliche Baukunst'. This change, which replaces 'realistic' with 'objective/rational' and 'architecture' with 'construction', represents a significant semantic clarification.[23]

The functionalism of the 1920s *Neues Bauen* follows a concept of reality in which the dialectic of art and life was uniquely focused on a purely rational and objective 'spirit of the time': the modern reality of mechanisation, typification and technique of contemporary industrial production. Adolf Behne describes this transition in an exemplary way in the chapter headings of his book *The Modern Functional Building* (1926): 1. 'No longer a façade but a house'; 2. 'No longer a house but shaped space'; 3. 'No longer a shaped space but designed reality'.[24] This process does not stop with the farewell to historical architectural forms but evolves – especially in the German experience – into what Alan Colquhoun described as 'an extreme schematicism, which transposes diagrams resulting from purely analytical operations into objects of the real, perceptual world' (Fig. 3).[25]
In parallel to this the Italian *Architettura razionale*, strongly influenced by the German masters Gropius, Mies and Hilberseimer and by the Bauhaus teaching method, fitted into the framework of international rationalism.[26] Edoardo Persico speaks, not surprisingly, of the 'frankly European intentions' of early Italian rationalism.[27] Despite this initial dependence on German rationalism, Italian rational architecture – in the interpretation of the Lombard Group 7 and then nationwide one of M.I.A.R – displays

21 Richard Streiter, *Ausgewählte Schriften zur Aesthetik* (München: Delphin-Verlag, 1913), p. 32.

22 Josef Prestel, 'Realism and Architecture', *The architect Wiener Monatshefte for Building and Decorative Arts*, no. 4 (1900), pp. 32–33; Alfred Lichtwark, 'Realistische Architektur', Pan, no. 4 (1897–1898) p. 292.

23 Alfred Lichtwark, *Palastfenster und Flügeltür* (Berlin: Cassirer, 1899), pp. 47–72.

24 Adolf Behne, *Der moderne Zweckbau* (München: Drei Masken Verlag, 1926). Aldo Rossi made reference to this in the book Ezio Bonfanti et. al., *Architettura Razionale* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1974), exhibition cat. of the 1973 Triennale in Milan.

25 Cf. Alan Colquhoun, 'Zwischen Architektur und Philosophie', pp. 247–272, but adding: In the work of 'Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe, however, this schematic formalism was combined with more overt classical tendencies'.

26 Cf. Enrico Mantero, *Giuseppe Terragni e la città del razionalismo italiano* (Bari: Dedalo, 1969) and Silvia Danesi and Luciano Patetta (eds.), *Il razionalismo e l'architettura in Italia durante il fascismo* (Venezia: Edizioni La Biennale di Venezia, 1976).

27 Edoardo Persico, 'Punto e da capo per l'architettura', *Domus* no. 83, (November 1934) p. 6, quoted in Giulia Veronesi, *Edoardo Persico. Tutte le opere (1923–1935)* (Milano: Edizioni di Comunità, 1964), pp. 303–323.

Fig. 3
Adolf Behne, *Der moderne Zweckbau* (München: Drei Masken Verlag, 1926), cover and pp. 148-149.

a specific realist connotation. This connotation manifested itself in the awareness of young architects that it was impossible 'to renew Italian architecture by transplanting German manners, which are noble to be sure, but which are out of place among us'.[28] Instead, it was necessary to strengthen the relationship with history and the local context as constituent elements of the new architecture. 'Tradition' became the keyword of Italian rationalism, in reference to the willingness to root every project in existing reality, involving the city and its monuments.

As a final element of the prewar debate, in response to rationalist formalism, the notion of realism reemerged in theoretical architecture debates in the early 1930s, when the realist formulations proposed on the occasion of the first Congress of Soviet Writers in Moscow in 1934 were proclaimed as an 'official' creative method and then adopted in all artistic disciplines.[29] This transposition was an ambiguous operation caught between idealism and ideology, between innovative research and nostalgic historicism. If, in fact, socialist realism is proposed as a critical tool for overcoming *Sachlickeit*'s functionalism and avant-garde's technicality, it leads, with an amazing logical leap, to the opposite extreme: the most exasperated formalism, an exaltation of past greatness represented as monumentality. The Second World War marked a sharp break in the discourse on realism, resetting the parameters of discussion, with the problem of reconstruction opening up new perspectives in architecture.

From Rational to Real: Postwar Neo-Realist Architecture of Reason

In postwar Germany, the International Style (in the West) and socialist realism (in the East) remained the dominant ideologies, with their respective formal references. Conversely, in the Italian architecture of the 1950s and 1960s a new discourse emerged, which changed the sources of the real with which architects could operate. These sources were no longer found in a normative technological reality outside architecture (the aircraft, the ship, the automobile, industry, technology, etc.), but in architecture itself as a social and cultural reality. Historical continuity, contextuality (for which the 'city' became a key word) and the use of familiar, even popular/vernacular elements became the dominant topics of a new realism. Its figurative language moved away from the compulsory abstractions of modernism, trying to define rationalism as an autonomous architectural tradition. For young Italian architects at the end of the 1950s, the concept of realism became programmatic, a decade later merging with the notion of an 'architecture of reason'.

In 1949, the young Aldo Rossi enrolled at the Architecture faculty of the Milan Polytechnic and began his communist militancy. A trip to Moscow, organised by the party in 1951, had a long-lasting impact on his architectural imagery. In October 1955 he took part in the Communist Architects conference and in the same year he wrote an article with Guido Canella for the *L'Unità* newspaper, which remained unpublished, entitled 'Towards a Realist Architecture'.[30] The article is presented as an 'architec-

[28] Gruppo 7's writings were published in *La Rassegna Italiana* from December 1926 to May 1927, republished in 1935 in *Quadrante*, no. 23 (March 1935) and no. 24 (April 1935), also in Enrico Mantero, *Giuseppe Terragni*, p. 58.

[29] Jean-Pierre Vouga, 'L'architecture et le réalisme socialiste', in *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui*, no. 158 (October-November 1971), pp. 48–53.

[30] Cf. Gentucca Canella and Elvio Manganaro (eds.), *Per una architettura realista*, pp. 20–34.

tural' participation in the ongoing 'discourse towards a realist art'. Its contents and critical approach marked the emerging of a discussion on realism in architecture in Italy immediately after the Second World War, in close connection with what was happening in literature, painting and cinema.[31] Regarding architecture, realism was meant as a way to introduce values such as 'honesty, social commitment, national consciousness', to 'safeguard the morality of the works, although in formal attitudes they continued the frigidity and the hermetism of the rationalist period'.[32] Rossi and Canella are however critical of the exponents of this neorealist architecture – among them Gardella, Albini, the BBPR, Quaroni and Piccinato – whose 'empiric-spontaneous' ideas of realism did not reach, in their opinion, beyond the stylistic choices of using a popular vernacular architectural language, without a true understanding of the structural transformations of the city and territory.[33]
The way towards a new realist architecture, according to Rossi and Canella, was rather to look back to tradition and 'to the models that have proven their ability to interpret the contents of the society that expressed them … to latch on to tradition and recognise its humanist essence, its figurative and emotional connections, that are typical of its expressive language'.[34]

31 The article refers in particular to Luchino Visconti's film *Senso* (1954) and Vasco Pratolini's novel *Metello* (1955).

32 Gentucca Canella and Elvio Manganaro (eds.), *Per una architettura realista*, pp. 23–25.

33 Cf. Bruno Reichlin, 'Figures of Neorealism in Italian Architecture. Part 1', *Grey Room*, no. 5 (Autumn, 2001), pp. 78–101 and 'Part 2', *Grey Room*, no. 6 (Winter, 2002), pp. 110–133.

34 Gentucca Canella and Elvio Manganaro (eds.), *Per una architettura realista*, p. 25.

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Fig. 4
Casabella-Continuità, no. 215 (1957), cover and p. 35.

Fig. 5
Casabella-Continuità, no. 262 (1962), monographic issue URSS, cover and p. 60.

Through this approach, the connection to typical and recurring elements of tradition came to the fore of discussions on architectural realism.

Also in 1955, Aldo Rossi joined the editorial staff of *Casabella-Continuità* magazine, whose former editor had been replaced by Ernesto Nathan Rogers in December 1953. Rogers aimed to overcome the dominant dogma of modernism, founding architecture on the 'sense of history' and the 'world of life' and opening a confrontation in a dialectical key, in the name of continuity, among all instances emerging in Italy at that time, swinging between International Style and neorealist regionalism, functionalism and socialist realism, rational architecture and the so-called 'neoliberty' (Figs. 4, 5).[35] Rogers's position gave rise to sharp criticism in the international debate.[36] However his students, among them Aldo Rossi and Giorgio Grassi, were able to connect to these issues very directly and formulated in those years some of their most significant theoretical contributions, enabling them to obtain their teaching qualifications and build an international reputation.[37]

In Aldo Rossi's course syllabus for the academic year 1970–71 at the Milan Polytechnic, one of the key points concerns the issue of realism in architecture, under the title *The Architecture of Realism: Critical Realism and Socialist Realism*.[38] In this syllabus the reference to Italian neorealism was still present, but further in the background, while a more important role was given to socialist realism, with particular interest – certainly linked to Rossi's biographical events – in architecture in the USSR and the GDR from a Marxist perspective.[39]

The key notions of the syllabus were 'realism and choices of architecture', i.e. 'realism and *Tendenza*'. 'To ask yourself about this problem' means, according to Rossi, 'to consider the problem of the relationship between architectural rationalism and realism: meaning by the first a rational and progressive choice with respect to the autonomous construction of the discipline ...; and by the second a definition of those aspects of the discipline that link it to reality.'[40]

This dual research, between rationalism and realism, which connects architecture with cinema, literature and the visual arts, was well described in the XV Triennale di Milano (1973), curated by Rossi under the title *Architettura Razionale*.[41] The exhibition contained all the shades of Rossi's realistic formulations: from the legacy of the Modern Movement, according to the lesson of Rogers, to socialist realism, through cinematographic neorealism, up to the recovery of 'magic' realism of metaphysical painting in the visual arts, in a composite and varied combination.

This weave is manifest above all in the movie *Ornament and Crime* written by Rossi with Gianni Braghieri and Franco Raggi and presented at the Triennale, where – in a complex assembly of neorealist movie sequences with texts by Adolf Loos, Walter Benjamin, Karl Marx and Hans Schmidt – paintings by Sironi alternate with images of Lenin's funeral (Fig. 6).[42]

Also the article 'For a New Realism in Architecture' by Renato Nicolini, published in *Controspazio* in 1973 as a review of Rossi's Triennale, identified 'the deepest meaning of the exhibition' in its 'clear vocation to realism'. This realism, unlike the 'poor and substantially brief research of postwar realism, soon led to passionate outbursts or mediocre populist myths', was necessarily related to 'European rationalism'.[43]

35 Cf. Gabriella Lo Ricco and Mario Viganò (eds.), *Ernesto N. Rogers. Editoriali di Architettura* (Rovereto: Zandonai, 2009) and e.g. the issues of *Casabella-Continuità*, no. 215 (April 1957), no. 255 (September 1961) monographic issue *Yugoslavia* and no. 262 (April 1962) monographic issue *U.R.S.S.*

36 Cf. Reyner Banham, 'The Italian Retreat from Modern Architecture', *The Architectural Rewiew*, no. 747 (April 1959), pp. 231–235 and Ernesto Nathan Rogers, 'L'evoluzione dell'architettura. Risposta al custode dei frigidaires', *Casabella-Continuità*, no. 228 (June 1959).

37 Cf. Aldo Rossi, *L'architettura della città* (Padova: Marsilio, 1966) and Giorgio Grassi, *La costruzione logica dell'architettura* (Padova: Marsilio, 1967).

38 Gruppo di ricerca diretto da Aldo Rossi, *Programma per l'attività didattica dell'anno accademico 1971–1972*, typescript published in Giancarlo Motta 'Caratteri tipici in circostanze tipiche', in Silvia Malcovati, et al. (eds.), *Architettura e realismo*, pp. 330–331.

39 Ibid., p. 331. Marxist criticism reached Italy in particular through György Lukács's thought. Cf. György Lukács, *Saggi sul realismo* (Torino: Einaudi, 1950); György Lukács, *Estetica* (Torino: Einaudi, 1970). Cf. also Mary Louise Lobsinger, 'That Obscure Object of Desire: Autobiography and Repetition in the Work of Aldo Rossi', *Grey Room*, no. 8 (Summer 2000), pp. 38–61.

40 Giancarlo Motta, 'Caratteri tipici in circostanze tipiche', p. 331.

41 Ezio Bonfanti, et. al., *Architettura razionale*, pp. 57–60.

42 An important contribution in the debate, evident in the Triennale, is certainly the relationship between Aldo Rossi and Hans Schmidt: Cf. Ursula Suter, *Hans Schmidt 1893-1972* (Zürich: gta Verlag, 1993) and Angelika Schnell, 'The Socialist Perspective of the XV Triennale di Milano. Hans Schmidt's Influence on Aldo Rossi', *Candide*, no. 2 (July 2010), pp. 33–72. In 1974 Rossi translated in Italian Schmidt's book *Beiträge zur Architektur*, published in Berlin in 1965: Aldo Rossi (ed.), *Hans Schmidt. Contributi all'architettura. 1924–1964* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1974).

43 Renato Nicolini, 'Per un nuovo rea-

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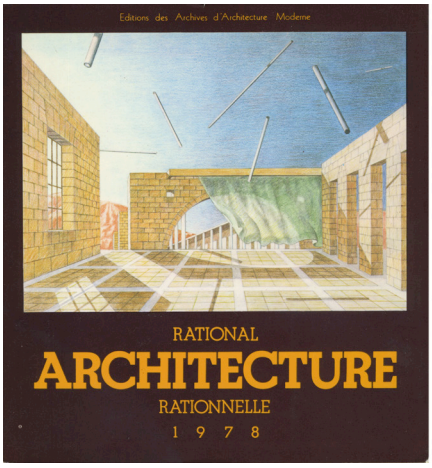

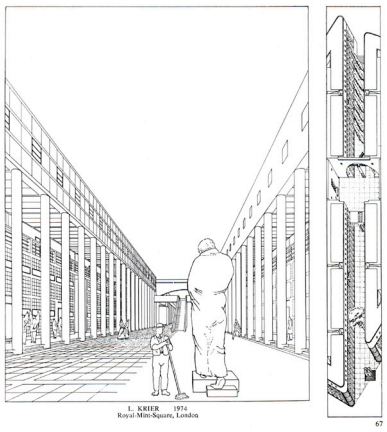

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Fig. 6
Ornamento e delitto, a film for the 15th Triennale Milan, 1973, selected frames.

Fig. 7
Archithese, no. 19 (1976). Monographic issue *Realismus-réalisme*, cover and p. 9.

Fig. 8
L'architecture d'Aujourd'hui, no. 190 (1977), monographic issue *Formalisme-Réalisme*, cover and p. 41.

Fig. 9
Robert Delevoy (ed.), *Rational Architecture Rationnelle: The reconstruction of the European City* (Bruxelles: A.A.M., 1978), cover and p. 67.

Rossi's position was not shared by everyone. In 1975, an issue of the Swiss magazine *archithese*, edited by Stanislaus von Moos and featuring the work of American architects Denise Scott-Brown and Robert Venturi, represented a different point of view. Von Moos defined 'realism' as the attitude of the American anti-modernist architecture of Venturi and Scott-Brown, which emphasises the daily reality instead of the great utopias and considers the project uniquely as an awareness of the real, and not as a possible alternative.[44]

Just one year later, however, in issue 19, the viewpoint of the editorial board seems radically changed, aligned with Aldo Rossi's formulations (Fig. 7).[45] This issue, introduced by Bruno Reichlin's and Martin Steinmann's editorial 'On the Immanent Reality of Architecture', sought a definition of realism connected with the formulations of socialist realism and Marxist aesthetics. Lukács's dialectic notion of architecture as a real fact, stemming from a 'social reality' and at the same time from a 'formal reality', seemed to grasp the specific qualities of realist architecture better than any other.[46] As the socialist realism that developed before the Second World War was opposed to the materialist realism of *Neues Bauen*, in the same way a 'rational' realism, which rehabilitates modernism, flanking it with a new historical dimension, opposed the 'impressionist' realism of American studies. This idea was reconfirmed in 1977 in the monographic issue of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui, Formalisme-Réalisme*, edited by Bernard Huet, with a further decisive turn as Massimo Scolari and Rob Krier moved centre stage and the Americans disappeared definitively (Fig. 8).[47]

After the initial fascination for socialist architecture and neorealist regionalism, at the end of the 1970s Italian realism seemed to identify on the one hand with the rationalist *Tendenza* and, on the other hand, with the rising phenomenon of 'urban reconstruction', which led to the *Rational Architecture: The Reconstruction of the European City* exhibition the following year (Fig. 9).[48]

The rise of postmodernism, celebrated at the first Venice Architecture Biennale in 1980, under the title *The Presence of the Past*,[49] marked the culmination and at the same time the conclusion of the debate. This can be understood clearly by comparing Paolo Portoghesi's liberating essay 'La fine del proibizionismo' with Wolfgang Pehnt's Biennale review on the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* entitled 'Postmoderne als Lunapark'.[50] From that moment on it is difficult to recognise clear theoretical positions: the boundaries faded into a plurality of languages, united by the common label of post-modern or rather 'after-modern' architecture.[51]

From Postmodernism to New Realism: Back to the Architecture of the City

The relationship between Italy and Germany plays an important role in this context, insofar as all these issues became the core of the architectural debate in Berlin – as well as of the building policies – before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. With respect to the modernist legacy,

lismo in architettura', *Controspazio*, no. 6 (December 1973), pp. 15–16.

44 *Archithese*, no. 13 (1975), *Realismus in der Architektur. Las Vegas etc.*.

45 *Archithese*, no. 19 (1976), *Realismus-réalisme*. On the two opposite interpretations of the notion of realism in those years, the 'populist' interpretation of post-modernism, and the 'neo-rationalist' one of the *Tendenza*, cf. Jorge Silvetti, 'On Realism in Architecture', *The Harvard Architectural Review*, no. 1, (Spring 1980), pp. 11–31.

46 Cf. György Lukács, *Estetica*, p. 1210.

47 *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, no. 190 (April 1977), *Formalisme-Réalisme*. Cf. also Léon Krier, 'Qualche idea sul realismo', *Casabella*, no. 420 (December 1976), pp. 20–27.

48 Cf. Léon Krier, 'The Reconstruction of the City', in Robert Delevoy (ed.), *Rational Architecture: The Reconstruction of the European City* (Bruxelles: A.A.M., 1978). In March 1975, the exhibition *Rational Architecture: The Architecture of the City*, took place in London, arranged by the AA School London and curated by Leon Krier as an extension of Aldo Rossi's Triennale.

49 Paolo Portoghesi (ed.), *La presenza del passato. Prima mostra internazionale di architettura* (Venezia: La Biennale di Venezia, 1980).

50 Paolo Portoghesi, 'La fine del proibizionismo', ibid., p. 9; Wolfgang Pehnt, 'Die Postmoderne als Lunapark. Erste Architekturbiennale in Venedig', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (18 August 1980), p. 17.

51 Cf. Heinrich Klotz, *Die Revision der Moderne. Postmoderne Architektur 1960–1980*, exibition cat., DAM (München: Prestel-Verlag, 1984).

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the architectural debate in Berlin focused on the issue of architectural and urban tradition, and in particular on the modernist refusal to deal with the past as a positive resource, as well as on its postmodernist ironic celebration. The issue of realism arose here in all its topicality. What is the reality with which architecture can establish relationships, when the confrontation with its own history is no longer possible as a reference? This opens the field to disciplinary discussions between autonomy and heteronomy, between typological and iconographic interpretations of architecture, between permanence and contingency, between a 'narrative' method that uses the image of the past as a visual and formal device, and a 'rationalist' one, which also looks at historical architecture, albeit not in search of images and allusions, but rather for general and operational design categories (Fig. 10).

In this context, Italian culture of the 1960s and 1970s provided a significant contribution for the Berlin architectural debate, through books and magazines, but also through cultural exchanges, meetings and international exhibitions.[52] After Rossi's Triennale in 1973, with contributions from Oswald Mathias Ungers, Joseph-Paul Kleihues and the Krier brothers, exchanges became intense and continuous, especially with Rossi, Grassi, Carlo Aymonino and Massimo Scolari.[53] In the mid 1970s the discussion reached Berlin, first with the *Sommerakademien* organised by Ungers with Cornell University and the IDZ (*Internationales Design Zentrum Berlin*) in 1977 and 1978,[54] and then with the IBA (*Internationale Bauausstellung*): This extraordinary workshop of ideas, projects and realizations which from 1979 to 1987, under the direction of Kleihues and Hardt-Waltherr Hämer, faced for the first time since the postwar reconstruction the problem of the city and of its architecture, dialectically connecting the main theoretical contributions of the last decades.[55]

IBA's assumptions, with its open and dialectic confrontation including different visions of architecture and the city, served as base for Berlin's 'critical' reconstruction after reunification, under the guidance of

52 Regarding the Italy–Germany relationship cf. Silvia Malcovati, 'Incontri ravvicinati del (terzo) tipo', in Michele Caja, Martina Landsberger and Silvia Malcovati (eds.), *Tipo forma figura. Il dibattito internazionale 1970–1990* (Milano: Libraccio, 2015) pp. 324–335.

53 The Krier brothers, born in Luxembourg, can be included with full rights in the German debate of the 1960s and 1970s: Rob studied architecture in Munich (1959-1964), worked with Ungers in the mid-1960s and teached at the University of Stuttgart; Léon started studying at the University of Stuttgart before abandoning it in 1968 to work in the office of architect James Stirling in London.

54 Oswald Mathias Ungers et al., *The Urban Villa: A Multi-Family Dwelling Type, Cornell Summer Academy 77 in Berlin* (Köln: Studio Press for Architecture, 1977); Oswald Mathias Ungers et al., *Die Stadt in der Stadt: Berlin, das Grüne Stadtarchipel: Ein stadträumliches Planungskonzept für die zukünftige Entwicklung Berlins*, (Köln: Studioverlag für Architektur, 1977), new ed. Florian Hertwek and Sébastien Marot (eds.) (Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2013). Oswald Mathias Ungers, Hans Kollhoff and Arthur A. Ovaska, *The Urban Garden: Student Projects for the Sudliche Friedrichstadt Berlin, Cornell Summer Academy for Architecture 78 in Berlin* (Köln: Studio Press for Architecture, 1979).

55 IBA's theoretical and methodological assumptions are exposed exhaustively in the series of writings edited by the IBA, among which Claus Baldus, Joseph-Paul Kleihues and Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani (eds.), *Das Abenteuer der Ideen*, with the essays by Colin Rowe, 'Kurze Bemerkungen zu Klassizismus, Neo-Klassizismus, Neo-Neo-Klassizismus, etc.', pp. 59–68, Manfredo Tafuri, 'Realismus und Architektur', pp. 131–148, and Alan Colquhoun, 'Zwischen Architektur und Philosophie: Rationalismus 1750-1970', pp. 247–271.

Fig. 10
The Harvard Architectural Review, no. 1 (spring 1980), cover and p. 27.

Hans Stimmann, in which a significantly 'realistic' approach, firmly rooted in the materiality of the city, its form and its more general architectural character, was chosen.[56]

After the generation of the masters – Kleihues and Ungers – received the heritage of modernism and transported it, through the experience of the 1960s and 1970s, up to the IBA, the protagonists of the 'critical reconstruction' are their more or less direct followers, who consolidated with their own thoughts and works this positive and concrete approach to the problems of architecture and the city without fear of recurring to history as a *Vorbild*. In the 1990s, architects such as Hans Kollhoff brought to discussion terms like 'tectonic' and 'solidity', 'convention' and 'adequacy', considered as paradigms of a new attitude to architecture. In this strongly 'urban' attitude, the city becomes an architectural issue and its traditional elements – the street, the block, the square, the house – recover their form and meaning.[57]

For this reason, recent discussions on new realism in philosophy have also developed among architects as an Italian-German dialogue. The notion of realism, at the heart of the discussion 'in philosophy, in politics and in everyday life' through Ferrari's *Manifesto*, has been specifically presented as an antidote both to the open and disenchanted postmodern vision of the world as a system of signs and images to be freely interpreted and transformed, and to the rationalist willingness to find general and absolute laws to shape buildings and space, moving the relationship with the social, cultural, historical and physical reality to the background. 'Once the criticism of postmodernism is completed', Ferraris writes, 'it is time for contemporary philosophy to move to a constructive phase, to "reconstruct deconstruction". This does not mean to return to the order (and which order, by the way?), but to develop a philosophy that strives to give an account of the whole reality, from physical to social reality … the possibilities are produced by the impact of reality, thereby without philosophy having to be reduced to a fragmented vision and give up the duty of providing an overall sense of the real'.[58] From this perspective, it is also possible to speak properly of 'reconstructing deconstruction' in architecture,[59] not in the sense of a restoration, but of a mindset, which sees in the existing reality – buildings, cities, projects and theories – not just something inherently negative, that resists and opposes transformation, but the very source of the possible. Starting 'from the impact of reality' and reacting to its 'provocation', creative possibilities are produced.

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56 Cf. among others Gerwin Zohlen (ed.), *Stadtbau. Dier Stimmann Dekade Berlin 1991–2006* (Berlin: Internationale Bauakademie, 2006).

57 Cf. Hans Kollhoff, *Das architektonische Argument* (Zürich: gta Verlag, 2010, the essays *Die Stadt ist tot. Es lebe die Stadt!* (1992), *Stadt ohne Tradition* (1994) and *Fiktion oder Stadt* (1994).

58 Maurizio Ferraris, 'Quando i filosofi pensano in grande', *La Repubblica*, no. 19 (February 2013), p. 38.

59 Cf. 'Peter Eisenman and Léon Krier. My Ideology Is Better than Yours', *Architectural Design Profile*, no. 81 (1989), issue *Reconstruction-Deconstruction*, new ed. (London: Academy Editions, 1994), and *Arch+*, no. 204 (October 2011), *Krise der Räpresentation*.