Reflexive Modernism and Weak Thought

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Hermeneutic Level

Modernism in the first half of the last century was dominated by the question of meaning in architecture as an oscillation between the deterministic discourse of functional-constructive rationality (architecture as pure engineering, scientifically justified) and the discourse of artistic subjectivism (architecture as pure art, eminently justified by individual aesthetic genius). Ideology centered on technical science, social emancipation and artistic freedom, archived in anthologies edited by Ulrich Conrad,[1] John Peter,[2] and Joan Ockman,[3] became the target of the counter-ideological discourses irrigated by the whole spectrum of European and American post-war philosophy in the anthologies edited by Kate Nesbitt,[4] Neil Leach,[5] Charles Jencks & Karl Kropf,[6] and K. Michael Hays,[7] where we come in contact not only with a critique of contemporary architectural practice but also with a competition between philosophical discourses which offer architecture inspiration and specific theoretical instruments at the base of this critique: phenomenology, structuralism, poststructuralism, semiotics, pragmatism or neo-Marxist critical theory. The conflict of interpretations concerning such diverse perspectives raises metaphilosophical problems regarding the interpretation of modernity. Reflexive Modernism is recognized in this conflict as a medium of communication between unstable meanings, without the pretense of being determined by science or art, focusing on context, history, community, and transformations of contemporary philosophy. Between these transformations, the so-called *weak thought* as a cultural metaphor describing the predisposition of a group of contemporary Italian thinkers led by Gianni Vattimo,[8] with which the American pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty resonates, has also drawn our attention. The weak thought reflects on modernity in a primarily anti-fundamentalist, non-relativist and pluralistic way. Anti-fundamentalism implies relinquishing the scientific and rationalist foundations of the interpretation of reality. Non-relativism appears as a therapeutic notion of thinking capable of counteracting relativism in the consumerist society and global superficial culture. Pluralism is articulated by cultural opening and criticism of segregation between elitist and mass culture. These aspects encourage decentralized and contextual cultural practices, open to a wider spectrum of meanings.

1 Ulrich Conrads, ed., *Programmes and Manifestoes on 20th Century Architecture* (London: Lund Humphries, 1970).

2 John Peter, *The Oral History of Modern Architecture: Interviews with the Greatest Architects of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1994).

3 Joan Ockman, *Architecture Culture: 1943-1968* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993).

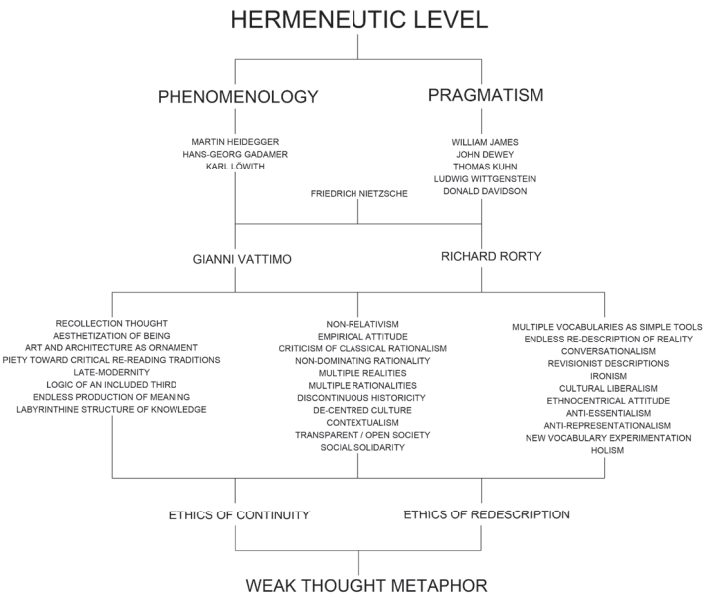
4 Kate Nesbitt, ed., *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965 – 1995* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996).

5 Neil Leach, ed., *Rethinking Architecture: A reader in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997).

6 Charles Jencks and Karl Kropf, eds., *Theories and Manifestoes of Contemporary Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1997).

7 Michael K. Hays, ed., *Architectural Theory Since 1968* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

8 Gianni Vattimo and Pier Aldo Rovatti, eds., *Il pensiero debole* [*Weak Thought*] (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1983).



Rorty suggested a much more modest use of previous vocabularies in philosophy as simple tools for the benefit of social solidarity and liberty, differentiating the aims of the traditions of thinking according to their preoccupation with science, art or politics.[9] Political purposes are those in which the American philosopher recognized himself as a pragmatist who used existing traditions as a toolbox with conceptual instruments, some of which might prove useless or obsolete and others still useful, without neglecting the possibility of inventing new and better tools.[10] His discourse is an anti-universalist philosophical reflection, moderate in criticism, without heroic desire for re-founding culture or other disciplines, which seeks only to reflect upon existing or older traditions so as to suggest interesting possibilities in the future, not just for philosophy but also for other disciplines that can use philosophy as a source of inspiration. Rorty's pragmatism is not a relativist thinking lacking foundations, but a post-Nietzschean reflection with weak metaphysical foundations. The strong framework of traditional philosophical argumentation through analytical perceptions or deductions eroded itself. Instead, recovered or rehabilitated in the post-metaphysical sense was the frame of thought through metaphors. Metaphor no longer appears here as a notion that translates us to a sense other than literal, but becomes an extension of rationality, related rather to *the use of meaning* in a socio-cultural context, not just to the meaning itself.[11] If philosophy can no longer explain from this point of view its neutral thinking schemes for contents provided by other disciplines in their research or social practices, we understand more clearly that philosophy does not provide methods to architecture, but only sources of inspiration and hermeneutical openings of the intellectual horizon. Philosophy is no different than any other artistic, economic or engineering discipline in serving the democratic community with aspirations for social progress.[12] If philosophy can only be regarded as a source of social inspiration at the level of collective goals, then it has a political utility in its details.

9 Richard Rorty, *Pragmatism și filosofie post-nietzscheană* [orig. *Essays on Heidegger and Others. Philosophical Papers II*] (Bucharest: Ed. Univers, 2000), 21.

10 Ibid., 22.

11 Ibid., 26-27.

12 Ibid., 45.

Pragmatism seeks first to highlight the good aspects of tradition, the small projects that have confirmed their social validity, to use them in debates against other systems that have proved themselves wrong and unfair. This conclusion is essential to understand the most important intellectual motivation of reflexive Modernism as compared to that of inaugural Modernism.

Following the accumulation of theoretical texts-based anthologies after 1990, looking at philosophy implies a necessary calibration of concepts more than a differentiation of discourses. In this case, we will consider the notion of concept as any word to which we attach a particular meaning inside a language game, in line with Rorty's pragmatism inspired by Ludwig Wittgenstein.[13] The discourse is the broader narrative and rhetorical structure, in which concepts develop their significance around a goal.

This observation is essential to the historian of architecture who critically reviews 20th century Modernism. The anthologies edited by Ulrich Conrads, John Peter, and Joan Ockman highlight the meta-theoretical disagreement between architecture-as-engineering and architecture-as-art, but also the connection between architecture and political ideologies. In the second anthological series edited by Kate Nesbitt, Neil Leach, K. Michael Hays, Charles Jencks, and Karl Kropf, we are overwhelmed by the post-war reactions to the issue of the significance of modernist architecture: the historiographic interest is predominantly focused on interpretative strategies inspired by the conflict of contemporary philosophical trends. *Explaining* architectural thinking starts with epistemological models and solid foundations of rigorous scientific reasoning that demand immediate solutions to problems and exact verification of the procedures. Instead, *interpreting* architectural culture needs hermeneutical approach and conversation mediated through metaphors, involving interlocutors from different paradigms who have not yet agreed on the same way of *understanding* reality. The metaphysical structure, in which some concepts may be considered acceptable or not, is also the major issue of post-1965 architectural theory. Vattimo and Rorty use the metaphor of weak thought not as a new philosophy that guides the theory and historiography of other disciplines but as a critical perspective on contemporary culture with a therapeutic effect on the modern rupture between the techno-scientific facts and cultural reality. The meta-philosophical anxiety of this disjunction made conservatives escape into the pre-industrial cultural values, rationality and metaphysics, and progressive-minded theorists to continually propose over-technologized utopias. Reflexive modernists will seek refuge neither in the values of preindustrial romanticism, nor in the imagery of futuristic utopias; they may be more interested in phenomenological or pragmatist hermeneutics, inspired by the metaphors of weak rationality and the great anthological resources. The significance of this weakening confronts us with the awareness and acceptance of our limited and constantly changing perspectives and beliefs over reality, behind which we find *marginal truths*.

By reading the architectural anthologies in this hermeneutic framework, we will understand that the problem of truth in the context of multiplication of interpretative strategies faces the difficulty of separating the concrete reality of human dwelling from the imagination projected on the human settlement. In the absence of a mono-dimensional scientific legitimacy for the architectural form, the architectural project can only start from a social context and rhetorical persuasion. In the absence of rational criteria or irrefutable goals of defining beauty in art, we remain only with language games, conflict of interpretations and collective memory in the effort to confront the diversity of cultural values and lifestyles in the consumer society. The architectural project, in order to be recognized and appropriated by a community, must first represent the voice of that community. The architect occupies now a more modest position as a symbolic negotiator, interpreting collective memory and historically settled tastes inside historically constituted communities. It is place and socio-cultural context and not function or technology that are given the primacy in the reflexive practice of Modernism.

13 Ibid., 166.

Historiographic Level

Rorty identifies four types of historiography: (1) reconstruction (rational or historical), (2) "canon-formation," (3) generalist doxography, (4) interference doxography / intellectual history.[14] Although the comment kept the disciplinary limits of philosophy, we will extend the suggestion to the theory of architectural discourse and concepts with which philosophy often intersects through metaphors and common thinking frames.

The historiography of rational reconstruction regards the past as an interlocutor in contemporary issues, imagining how an old concept could become interesting and operative in the current context. In recent history of architecture, the neoconservative movement, disappointed with the failure of modern urbanism, proposes formalistic solutions to post-war repair of the European city through pre-industrial models.[15] Roger Scruton's neo-conservative philosophical principles[16] are eloquent in this model of "discipline calling" by aesthetic taste judgment in historiography. This call returns us to the neo-Kantian and psychological paradigm that shaped the history of architecture in the case of Heinrich Wölfflin[17] and Rudolf Wittkover.[18]

Wölfflin was concerned, on the one hand, with the formal principles of styles and the comparative visual analysis, and on the other hand, with materiality and empathy in accepting the architectural phenomenon by an informed viewer. Wittkover further develops formalist historiography through comparative studies of classical precedents at the levels of irreducible visual structure, fundamental spatial order and typology. At the basis of rational reconstructions, formalism defines the study of the configurations of architectural objects in order to identify similarities and differences between styles, establishing the principles upon which the themes and visual motifs can be transformed logically according to a stylistic strategy, separating the form from its content.

The historiography of historical reconstruction proposes a critical delimitation from the past, making a distinction between how old concepts were understood in their era, and how we now understand them by using more recent concepts for comparison. The historical comparison also presupposes in this case an emphasis on the common features between the historical epochs and on the structural continuity in the essence of forms, with reference to Heinrich Wölfflin and Rudolf Wittkover.

The difference from the previous model lies in the effort to reveal the transition from the principles of Classical architecture to modernist ones, illustrating the continuity, not the rupture between the two paradigms. An example in this sense is the *analogical* way in which Aldo Rossi interprets history.[19] Here we find the foundations of a selective and autonomous historiographical model in which the architect becomes an intellectual practitioner within mass culture. The critique of the modernist city starts from the interpretation of the historic European city (Rome, Athens, Berlin, Paris, Vienna), where architecture is defined as a fundamental and verifiable element of the city's reality. The instruments of interpretation are spatial typology and urban structure. Their persistence and even permanence in time energizes a collective memory that becomes an analogue guide to understand the shape of the

14 Richard Rorty, *Adevăr şi progres* [orig. *Truth and Progress. Philosophical Papers III*] (Bucharest: Ed. Univers, 2003), 185-216.

15 Maurice Culot, "Reconstructing the City in Stone" [1980], in Jencks and Kropf, *Theories and Manifestoes*, 178.

16 Roger Scruton "Architectural Principles in the Age of Nihilism" [1994], in Jencks and Kropf, *Theories and Manifestoes,* 203-206.

17 Heinrich Wölfflin, *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe: das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst* [*Principles of Art History. The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art*] (Munich: Bruckmann, 1915).

18 Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1949).

19 Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City,* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1982).

city, replacing the previous models of historical metanarratives attached to architectural forms (be they classicist or modernist). Until Aldo Rossi, the typology was not considered to be a vector capable of activating the architectural design itself and becoming even the object of design, a catalyst for architectural creativity. Typology operates between modernist utopia and classical reality, becoming the analytical and experimental tool of knowing the multi-layered historical city. The imaginary and the real merge into a new analogical horizon linked to the mnemonic structure of the collective unconscious. Typology, understood as a formal aspect detaching the work of architecture from everyday life through abstraction, is then restored in the material, social and symbolic context of the world by the real aspect of the collective will of dialogue between past and present.

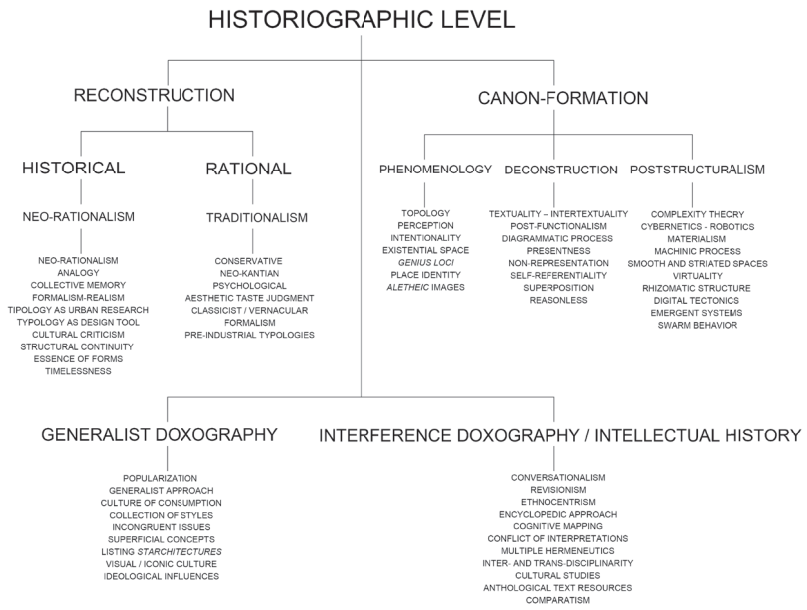
Both the rational and historical reconstructions suppose we agree with the problems of the past, but not with their solutions to these problems, following Rorty's formulation concerning philosophy. In the case of architectural theory, we can say that rational reconstruction presupposes, in part, the acceptance of old solutions for contemporary urbanism and architecture, as in the critical reactions to the failure of modern urbanism: for example, Leon and Rob Krier suggest the application of Neoclassical principles of design and even of architectural orders for repairing the nowadays cities. Instead, historical reconstruction based on the model provided by Aldo Rossi's "Neo-rationalism" was received in Europe as a model of mediation between the Classicist and modernist traditions by situating disciplinary autonomy and typological research above the counter-ideological involvement of architecture, as suggested by historian Manfredo Tafuri.[20]

Tafuri distanced himself from the formal-stylistic preoccupations of his predecessors in architectural history and declared his radical disillusionment in the face of solutions to contemporary city proposed by modernist or postmodernist architects. Through a Marxist filter, he also reveals the complicity of the whole contemporary architecture with the capitalist consumer society state of affairs, stating the impossibility of our profession to activate genuine resistance to the dominant economic system. The critical attribute was legitimately conferred only upon the theoretical practice inspired by Marxist philosophy. Tafuri challenged the historiographical claim of modernist architecture to complete a social destiny, but also the postmodern formalism linked by the superficial values of contemporary consumer society.

Not actually fulfilled by the neo-Marxist theoretical practice, historiography becomes merely a pessimistic witness of an aesthetic landscape disarticulated and reduced to the amount of private language games. Cut off from the metanarratives of emancipation and progress, no longer supported by a common metaphysical basis, this landscape will only be but one of the ruptures and conflicts between discourses and concepts.

This distinguishes the second way of producing historiography, as Rorty described it, namely the canon-formations, which develops interest in conceptual peaks and key characters who disagree with the problems of the predecessors and open entire new discourses in thinking. Through a selection based on their capacity to reverberate in history, a smaller set of concepts are highlighted inside a large but precisely defined paradigm or trend, so that the reader can "jump out" of a paradigmatic peak to another one. Heidegger or Derrida are such peaks in philosophy that create other professional peaks in phenomenology-inspired architectural theory, such as Christian Norberg-Schulz, or in architectural deconstruction, Peter Eisenman. Unlike before, in the setting up of canon-formations the thinker at the top radically criticizes the foundations of thought through meta-philosophical or meta-theoretical approaches, and it is historiography that decides who counts or not in that canon, also highlighting a self-awareness of that specific tradition and a desire of continuation within it.

20 Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976); *Theories and History of Architecture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980).



Norberg-Schulz[21] did not interpret architectural styles but opened a new hermeneutical path inspired by phenomenology to understand the ever-renewed origins of modern architecture. He first brought to light the *topological* relations of architectural and urban forms with suggestive images inspired by the fundamental principles of *Gestalt* psychology that emphasize perception, structural similarities and significance. He then adjusted the theoretical instruments by interpreting the Heideggerian interpretation so as to direct the discourse to the relationship of architecture with its place understood as phenomenon, structure and spirit. In this way, the authenticity of the construction is corroborated by the clarity of the connection between the architectural form and its context, both presented as concrete *things* in the phenomenological sense.

On the other hand, starting from the Heideggerian critique of metaphysics, the deconstruction in Jacques Derrida's philosophical approach has greatly developed the idea that in the discourse there would be no concrete *things* but only *texts*. Any historiographic project with place and dwelling as phenomenological foundations is radically questioned. More than two decades before Jacques Derrida entered in a direct dialogue with Peter Eisenman, the latter, as a doctoral student under Colin Rowe's guidance, developed the thesis of the priority of form in architectural historiography, in which the notions of space or function are ignored, and pure formal language, having its own grammar, is emphasized not only as an autonomous language game but also as a *metaphysically groundless text*. This text translates itself as three-dimensional massing developed on the basis of an autonomous conceptual process, activated by internal forces, deformations and geometrical transformations.[22]

Major examples of Modernism (Le Corbusier, Alvar Aalto, Frank Lloyd Wright, Giuseppe Terragni) are exposed as *syntactic operations* of transforming generic or ideal forms so that they respond to a certain intention and function. Introducing notions of spatial syntax,

21 Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Intentions in Architecture* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1965); *Existence, Space & Architecture* (New York: Praeger, 1971); *Genius Loci, Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980); *Architecture Meaning and Place* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988).

22 Peter Eisenman, *The Formal Bases of Modern Architecture* (Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2006).

Eisenman emphasized the free combination of signs in the architectural text according to some rules set only by the author, suspending the question of the signified aspect of the architectural text.

The main purpose of such an approach was to criticize architectural histories centered predominantly on meanings and moral criteria associated with forms. Eisenman opens a conceptual way of producing architecture through a deconstruction of modernist language, the architectural project becoming the expression of an autonomous theoretical process occupied with the radical critique of the privileged notions of structure, significance, function and technology. Historiography and theory would only consider architecture as a simple "text" or as a coherent set of abstract signs detached from meaning, in which only the syntactic process matters, abandoning the Heideggerian phenomenological concept of *thing*. Rorty did not see a connection between the deconstruction of metaphysics and the so-called "architectural deconstruction" at Eisenman because the role of philosophy was limited to inspiration and instruction, so it could not unilaterally determine the way of understanding an artistic or architectural approach.[23] There could be no obligation in pragmatic vision to use philosophy as a methodology in the activity of other disciplines. Philosophy and theory do not establish the definitive and universal significance of an artistic work. They can only place a work in an interpretative horizon. Here we find the link between phenomenological hermeneutics of weak thought (Hans Georg-Gadamer and Gianni Vattimo as his follower), from which Rorty extracts the dialogical and therapeutic role of philosophy between past and present traditions.

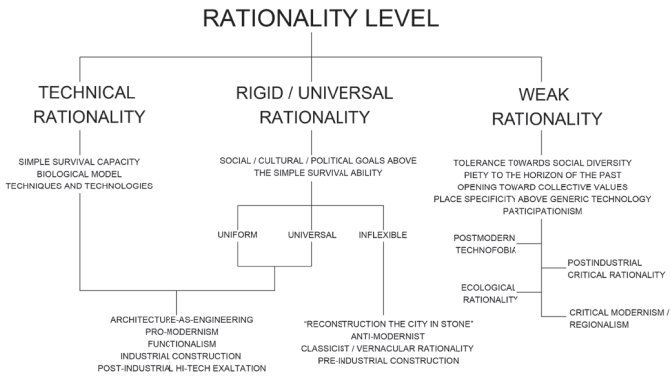
Starting from this last observation common of pragmatism and phenomenology, Rorty opened the way for a more relaxed and nondeterministic way of making historiography as doxography, with both negative and positive significance. In historiography as a *generalist doxography*, the past is manifested through total coverage, imposing common themes for thinkers who have not explicitly proposed those subjects, arbitrarily connecting a specific problem to divergent canons, or imposing canons on an incongruent issue. This kind of historiography appears to be disarticulated if it weren't often just a simplistic way of popularizing ideas. On the other hand, there is also an undisciplined *intellectual historiography / doxography of interferences*, in which the past is investigated in areas of overlapping disciplines, disciplinary-wise unclarified but in no way disarticulated or arbitrary. Here gains importance Rorty's conversationalist model, which is contingent, dependent on specific contexts, with a wider social interest, in which the guiding characters and the disciplinary classification of the activities coordinated by them do not matter so much. What does matter is the practical consequence of the discussed ideas, their direct result in social or cultural life. In conversation, by formulating public opinions, concepts defined by metaphors become the substratum of intellectual exchange, and we consider this a reliable model for our historiographic interpretation.

Rationality Level

Rationality is the second aspect of reflexive modernity, which has been widely debated after 1965, and Rorty understands it in three senses.[24] The first meaning, ethically neutral, refers strictly to the individual / community survival capacity and has a biological model, being associated with the means by which we build objective reality (techniques and technologies). In the architectural context of modernity, we would better associate this meaning to the notion of *technical rationality*. The second meaning establishes social, cultural or political

23 Richard Rorty, Remarks written for the Museum of Modern Art (New York) symposium "2000 Things in the Making: Contemporary Architecture and the Pragmatist Imagination": draft, http://hdl.handle.net/10575/763, last accessed May 21, 2019.

24 Rorty, *Adevăr şi progres,* 114-132.



goals above the simple survival ability and implies what we call a *rigid rationality* with a universal, uniform, inflexible and aggressive attitude towards different and local values. The third significance refers to the *weak rationality* catalyzed by the values of tolerance towards social diversity, devoutness to the past, and opening toward collective values, local aspects, public debate and change of certain beliefs and social customs. For Rorty, technical rationality can be happily interwoven with weakened rationality, abandoning rigid rationality.

Inaugural Modernism has created an ideological juxtaposition between technical rationality and rigid universal principles, and architectural historiography has often been the accomplice of this link. Swiss architectural historian Siegfried Giedion, co-founder of the first International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM) in 1928 and secretary general of the organization until 1956, was one of the promoters of inaugural Modernism under the auspices of strong rationality that excluded marginal or atypical practices. In the CIAM horizon, technology played an essential role in the triumph of modern architecture, finding its expression in the building facades (through the "curtain wall"), and the triumphant technical reason was noted in the works of modernist masters under the blessing of a neo-Hegelian "spirit of time." A chapter in *Space, Time and Architecture*[25] bearing the title "The Demand for Morality in Architecture," explicitly associates moral, hygienic and universal meanings to a rigid architectural rationality, denouncing all urban deviations resulted from less-controlled urban practices. In *Mechanization Takes Command*,[26] the Swiss historian further intensifies his discourse on building technologies which, by replacing all manual activities, consequently determines a new and purified image of architecture and the city. After only 12 years, a new generation of historians will interpret technology in the horizon of consumer society, added to new artistic practices and environmental challenges.

Reyner Banham in *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*[27] explored the inaugural Modernism with a much greater critical engagement. He was the first modern architectural historian who, after the CIAM's dissolution in 1959, and distancing from Giedion, formulated a model of *revisionist history* under "The Second Machine Age" concept. From this point of view, modern architecture was prepared in the seventh decade of the 20th century to abandon the claim of universal rationality in favor of a radical experiment inspired by the arts and only energized with technology, added to an openness to the idea of environmental responsibility.[28] We understand the rapid development of ecological interpretations in historiography as a natural consequence of weakening modernist technical

25 Siegfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1941).

26 Siegfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948).

27 Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (Cambridge MA.: MIT Press, 1960).

28 Reyner Banham, "The Architecture of the Well-tempered Environment" [1969], in Jencks and Kropf, *Theories and Manifestoes,* 234-235.

rationality with the advent of concerns for environmental protection and sustainability in the broadest social sense.[29]

On the other hand, the belief in rational research and the connection of so called "high-tech architecture" to the ideology of progress has not been exhausted after 1970 and decades later. For example, in 1975, Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers[30] fed a faith into an ideology of unconditional support for technology-driven growth. The only trace of criticism detected here regards the flexible planning and design coupled to an enthusiasm in providing intelligent solutions to environmental protection. Ten years later, against the rise of postmodernist technophobia, Richard Rogers[31] restated his strong belief in the potential of modern industrial society and technology only as a tool, not as an end in itself, praising anyway the intrinsic beauty of functionalism and high-tech images in architecture as symbols of progress.

This futuristic imagery has inflamed a radical neoconservative movement, also under the label of rationality, but with the historicist motivation of Maurice Culot's "Reconstructing the City in Stone," according to the pre-industrial model.[32] Culot vehemently rejected the use of non-traditional materials, the methods of production of modern architecture to save the European city, and Leon Krier advocated for a non-modernist "rationality," typologically based on the Classical tradition, capable to integrate both the social use of architecture and the reconstruction of the public domain.[33] This generated again a new reaction of defending Modernism by an appeal to a critical modernity against the traditionalist counter-reaction, coming from an eminent member of the Frankfurt School in philosophy, Jürgen Habermas, disappointed by the Venice Biennale in 1980, curated under the title "The Presence of the Past" by Paolo Portoghesi in collaboration with Charles Jencks, Vincent Scully and Christian Norberg-Schulz.[34]

In the middle of the conflict between the high-tech progressive rationality and the neoconservative rationality of classicist typology, a different type of historiography emerged in our profession after 1980. Inspired both by Martin Heidegger's phenomenology and Jürgen Habermas's critical theory, this revisionist discourse aspired to progress without utopia, rejected a romantic return to the pre-industrial era, and valued place before technical rationality. It is the case of Kenneth Frampton, who concluded the volume *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*[35] with the principles of critical regionalism and an appeal to reflexive practice with ethical precepts on the environment. We also understand this volume as a historical revaluation of Modernism by exposing the *avant-garde – arrière-garde* dialectics. Against neo-Hegelian historians that obsessively identified the "spirit of time" in the Modern Movement, Frampton insisted on the European and American marginal practices based on a *weak rationality* to bring evidence that they had an essential role in the early moments of the inaugural Modernism as an alternative to avant-garde individualism fueled by a *rigid rationality*. Again, we can find here a pertinent model of inspiration when interpreting the large body of readings in William W. Braham and Jonathan A. Hale's anthology, *Rethinking Technology.*[36]

29 James Steel, *Ecological Architecture – A Critical History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005).

30 Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers, "Statement" [1975], in Jencks and Kropf, *Theories and Manifestoes,* 248-249.

31 Richard Rogers, "Observations on Architecture" [1985], in Jencks and Kropf, *Theories and Manifestoes,* 252-253.

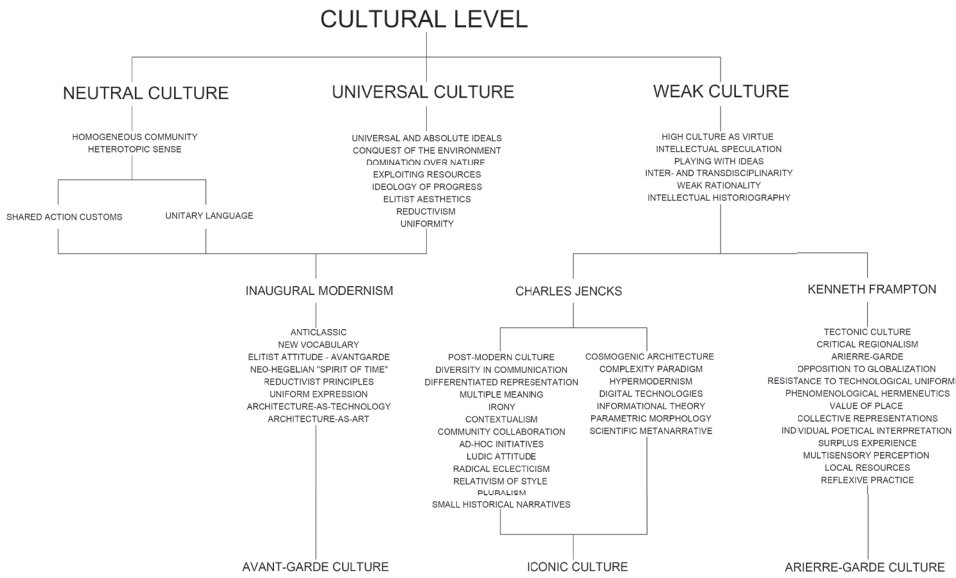
32 Maurice Culot, "Reconstructing the City in Stone" [1980], in Jencks and Kropf, *Theories and Manifestoes,* 178.

33 Leon Krier, "Rational Architecture: The Reconstruction of the City" [1978], in Jencks and Kropf, *Theories and Manifestoes*, 75-76.

34 Jürgen Habermas, "Modern and Postmodern Architecture" (1982), in Leach, *Rethinking Architecture*, 225-235.

35 Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996).

36 William W. Braham and Jonathan A. Hale, eds., *Rethinking Technology. A Reader in Architectural Theory* (London: Routledge, 2007).



Cultural Level

In the pragmatist horizon, Rorty understands culture as a differentiated product of the previously defined rationality types. Technical rationality projects a *neutral culture*, not necessarily a virtue, defined by the action customs shared in a heterotopic sense by a specific community using the same language in communication.[37] Rigid rationality finds expression in a culture that claims to represent the *universal human capacity to conquer the environmen*t, triumphing over nature, exploiting its resources, and dominating it in the name of progress.[38] Weak rationality, instead, produces high culture as a virtue acquired through education along history, first in monasteries and then in universities, to become a preoccupation for intellectual speculation, playing with ideas, inside, between and beyond disciplines.[39] Rorty does not believe that any culture deserves to be preserved or perpetuated in the pragmatist sense. On the one hand, there are harmful and destructive cultures based on commonly shared action habits. Moreover, the exaltation of extremes is noted. One type of exaltation assumes the idea that the power to suppress inferior cultural forms is an indication of superior value, considering an elitist culture captive in a narrow sphere of aesthetic reception as superior to mass culture.

Another type of exaltation implies the undifferentiated defense of any marginalized, suppressed, power-free culture, substituting the universal center with marginality without changing the outdated principles of rigid rationality, considering that only the lack of power is an index of value.[40] Weak culture in the pragmatist sense presupposes a therapeutic solution against harmful cultures and exaltations, weaving a new "intercultural tapestry" by an *articulation between the weak rationality and historiography* as previously discussed. Weak thought no longer seeks the correspondence between a thinking object and an external reality because we can no longer speak of a single universal representation after the erosion

37 Rorty, *Adevăr şi progres*, 116.

38 Ibid., 117.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., 119.

of metaphysical foundations. The formation of meaning occurs through hermeneutical engagement as a process based on conversation, resulting in the transmission of ideas inside a culture, regardless of the discipline in which the enunciations emerge, accepting inherent conflicts and divergences of opinion. The justification of values takes place through social interaction, relevant use in public discourse and can eventually reach provisional consensus.

However, Rorty does not tell us how to decide which of the different vocabularies or models of good practice in competition is better than others, except by comparing their ability to persuade through rhetoric and convince a public in a specific context. He states, though, that it is essential not to confuse in a historiographical or cultural project the individual self-creation with imposing that personal model at a collective level.[41] This becomes even more important in the context of the multiplication of individual models of interpretation of discourses and architectural concepts, in which the confusion between private and collective interests gives the negative side of cultural relativism on the one hand and the claim of the universality of opinions, on the other.

In architectural culture, the ludic ability to manipulate ideas typical for the postmodern atmosphere, added to that of generalizing the model of individual autocreation, find their model after 1965 in Charles Jencks' architectural historiography. Jencks started his criticism from a semiotic base against the inaugural Modernism in volumes such as *Meaning in Architecture*[42] and *Modern Movements in Architecture*,[43] identifying the features of a new architectural culture under the postmodernist notion in his later writings. Until the 1990s, these features are congruent with the Rortian pragmatist model through a tolerant and indulgent attitude, replacing the avant-garde meta-narrative of progress with several small historical narratives: traditionalist, postmodernist, late-modernist and neo-modernist under the motto of "radical eclecticism."[44]

In this new "cultural tapestry" of tolerance and diversity, architecture is capable of communicating with both an elevated public and a mass society, enjoying the benefits of a consumers' society and lax liberal politics. Jencks has interpreted the inaugural Modernism as an elitist, boring, reductionist and uniform culture, while Postmodernism as an antidote encourages the values of diversity in communication, representation of multiple meaning and complexity, transformation of traditions, contextualist attitudes, community collaboration, *ad-hoc* initiatives and ludic attitude. Radical eclecticism also implies the relativism of style and significance, preoccupation for pluralism, variety of images and desire for symbolism. It does not clarify the axiological framework in which we can decide which paradigm or small narrative is better than other in a globalized aesthetic culture.

After the 1990s, disappointed by the loss of architectural meaning in the globalized radical eclecticism, Jencks glorifies the new rising paradigm of complexity in architecture, disseminated through digital technologies and evolutionary theories.[45] In claiming an "emergent consensus that is uniting scientists, theologians, architects, artists, and much of the general public" around the issues concerning "Complexity Theory itself, Chaos science, self-organizing systems, and nonlinear dynamics,"[46] Jencks appears to legitimize now a new *metanarrative* for hyper-Modernism, not so much alongside the previous small historical narratives of a radical eclecticism but rather *against* them. Those small and dispersed historical narratives appear to be obsolete in an age of confusion. The spontaneous and

41 Rorty, *Pragmatism și filosofie*, 303-311.

42 Charles Jencks and George Baird, eds., *Meaning in Architecture* (New York: George Braziller, 1969).

43 Charles Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1973).

44 Charles Jencks, "The Rise of Post-Modern Architecture" (1975) and "Toward a Radical Eclecticism" (1980), in Jencks and Kropf, *Theories and Manifestoes,* 57-58 and 86-87.

45 Charles Jencks, *The Architecture of the Jumping Universe* (London: Academy Editions, 1995).

46 Ibid., 9.

unpredictable evolutionary "jumps" or fractures between incommensurable paradigms make Jencks also claim that

> "[f]or the first time in the West since the twelfth century we have an all-encompassing story that unites all people of the globe, a metanarrative of the universe and its creation. It is quite the most pretentious story ever told because of its explanatory power and because it is true [...]"[47]

Leaving aside the fact that those mysterious "jumps" cannot be scientifically explained in themselves, we notice here, against post-modern relativism, a new fundamentalism: *the value of truth attributed to the complexity sciences themselves*, *implemented in architecture by the new digital technologies, cybernetics and informational theory*. Finally, a "cosmogenic" architecture *represents* a dynamic cosmology,[48] as for example Peter Eisenman's Max Reinhardt House project in Berlin (1993). Without clarifying a philosophical position in the larger cultural field of "non-relativist and post-modern" theorists, his proposal culminate in a *cosmic axiology* and evaluations of the artistic production of modernity by *measuring* the "quality" of organization through numerical values deduced from an algorithmic Complexity Theory.[49] By spreading a prophecy of a better future in architecture through a kind of New Age ideology based on syncretism and Complexity Sciences truths, Jencks's historiography is susceptible for the most severe Rortyian criticism, namely, to see buildings not as "representing" ideas borrowed from other disciplines and claiming one Truth and a single Metanarrative.[50]

In disagreement with Charles Jencks' effort to legitimize *dominant* cultural models such as radical eclecticism and "cosmogenic architecture," Kenneth Frampton develops a more valid model of *cultural resistance* based on critical regionalism and weak rationality.[51] The values of reflexive Modernism in this context, closer to Gianni Vattimo's weak thought and promoting primarily the public interest, are constituted by the ethical attitude towards the built and natural environment, professional resistance to indifferent / non-critical modernization, and mediation through architecture of the relationship between universal civilization and local cultures. Criticism regarded not only the International Style, Postmodernism and deconstruction, but also the populist, dogmatic, romantic or picturesque versions of regionalism. Through phenomenological hermeneutics and without imposing rigid design criteria, Frampton relies on interpreting the modern tradition and encouraging collective representations by individual poetical interpretation in the architectural project. But perhaps the most important concept at the base of this reflexive Modernism model that cherishes marginal practices, independent from a center of discourse in our profession, is "surplus experience" used by Frampton in his early writings inspired by Hannah Arendt's political theory, as synthesized in *The Human Condition.*[52] In 1969, Frampton criticized the reductionism of contemporary architecture subordinated to the imperatives of economic systems centered solely on technology, production and consumption, and suppressing the experimentation of a cultural surplus.[53] He was concerned with the tactile experience of architecture, with emphasis on detail and materiality. The idea of surplus significance in the architectural masterpieces of Modernism is linked to a multisensory experience, with an emphasis on the expressive structure of the building, as for example in the Russian Constructivism and the Brutalist movement in England. Finally, the concept of surplus begins to crystallize by Frampton as a synthesis between "construction" (the building as a

47 Ibid., 7.

48 Ibid., 8.

49 Ibid., 35.

50 Rorty, Remarks written for the Museum of Modern Art.

51 Frampton, *Modern Architecture*.

52 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

53 Kenneth Frampton, "Labour, Work and Architecture" in Jencks and Baird, *Meaning in Architecture,* 151-167

simple shelter) and "architecture" (the significant cultural building), beyond styles. Since that moment, against the inaugural, functionalist and unrefined Modernism, Frampton has proposed a reflexive Modernism liberated from the determinism of function and style, refined by the phenomenological dimension of significant architectural experience and by social concerns. He thus associates the reflexive modern practice with both material aspects (significant details) and a social dimension (the ability to articulate a community life that allows for meaningful public behavior). Architectural historian Jorge Otero-Pailos,[54] lecturing this essay, notes that Frampton blends aesthetic aspects with ethical principles, and the professional practice with the theory of historical interpretation that focuses on the surplus experience. Otero-Pailos actually insists on this concept of surplus experience as the leading thread of all thinking at Frampton, decisive for his idea of tectonic culture as a result of phenomenologically interpreting the works of great modern masters: Frank Lloyd Wright, Auguste Perret, Mies van der Rohe, Louis I. Kahn, Jørn Utzon, and Carlo Scarpa.

From this perspective, the surplus experience does not depend on resource abundance and economic wealth, but on a reality shared by the inhabitants and the uniqueness of constructive details in a specific place. Against the historiographical universality perpetuated by modernists, Frampton's conclusions were finally systematized in the notion of critical regionalism,[55] articulating the idea that any culture of construction is defined both by the condition of its place in a physical / climatic sense and by the economic, political, and social conjuncture.

Inside Frampton's revisionist history, reflexive Modernism elevates place above function and technology. Function and technology were the dominant forces of early Modernism, and place proved to be rather a repressed or even ignored aspect in that inaugural discourse. Therefore, the surplus experience triggered by good practice models that value the condition of place first (topography, context, climate, light) in relation to the idea of tectonic form (refining constructive aesthetics and reinventing the details in order to reflect the particular attitude of a community towards the place where they live) becomes the main operator of an authentic cultural revival.

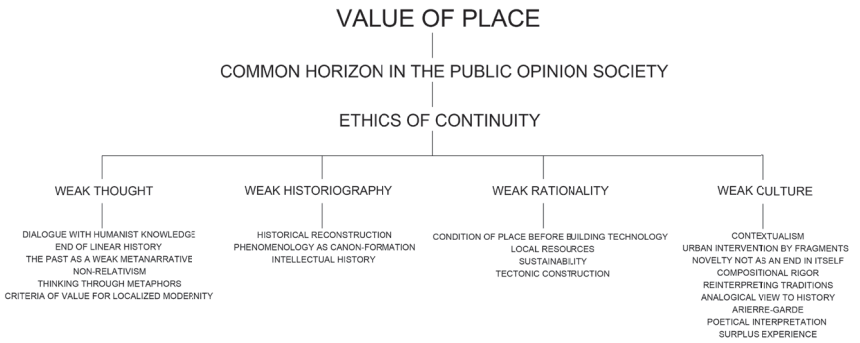
We retain two necessary ethical, anti-relativistic limitations of our interpretation in the phenomenological horizon. On the one hand, opposing globalization and technological uniformity, critical regionalism emphasizes multisensory perception against the "scenographic effects" of figurative Postmodernism and, more recently, digital hyper-Modernism, the latter two endorsed by Charles Jencks. On the other hand, committed to responsible policies that cherish the place-formation and valuing the local resources, labor force and professional community, a reflexive practice from Frampton's point of view is congruent with the notion of *public action* in Hanna Arendt's work.

Conclusions: Reflexive Modernity, Value of Place and Common Horizon in the Public Opinion Society

I believe, first of all, that the *value of place* must be amplified in the center of hermeneutic concerns about reflexive Modernism, while intensifying the phenomenological meanings of dwelling and the pragmatic model of weak culture and rationality. Place is the recessive aspect, eroded following the Modern Movement and that is why it is worthier of attention in the center of a weak thinking. Place stratifies historical values, symbolic aspects, the community and the configurations of existence. Place is a patrimony of materialized forms,

54 Jorge Otero-Pailos, *Architecture's Historical Turn. Phenomenology and the Rise of the Postmodern* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 183-249.

55 Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), 16-30.



shared existential space, a world of recognitions in which cultural judgments, common history, social experience, collective aspirations are intertwined. Place is the paradoxical catalyst for an architecture capable of complying with norms and distancing them from themselves through autonomy and the capacity to resist reductive thinking. Architectural practice that belongs to a place does not separate subject from object in its thought, does not invoke perspectivism, does not objectify, does not emphasize calculation of efficiency and does not accept leveling of the existential space by ideological devices or systemic theories, or by de-territorialized cybernetics of a radical thinking.

Secondly, I think that intensification of hermeneutic concern about place depends essentially on the possibility of reaching a *common horizon in the public opinion*. This horizon in the public sphere engages a conflicting multiplicity of hermeneutics, historiographies, rationalities and cultures. In the absence of a *metaphor of weak thought deep understanding*, we cannot differentiate between divergent discourses and pave the way for *values of continuity* in our dwelling in a phenomenological sense.

Thus, at hermeneutic level, the metaphor of weak thought deep understanding differentiates between discourses by rememorating the past and anthological rereading, discovering latent possibilities in order to define a cultural-historical belonging, and not seeking indications and laws for the present. Weak thought clarifies how architecture is entitled to demand a dialogue with humanist knowledge after the natural sciences hegemony imposed by functionalist ideology, system theory and technological utopia of the city. We distance ourselves from the metanarrative of modernity, we remember the announcement of the end of linear history and we think of the past only as a weak metanarrative, which offers reparative clues and criteria of value for our localized modernity.

At a historiographic level, the call to history has the meaning of a *resumption-continuation* accompanied by a *distortion* of our call to present. Through re-descriptions and conversationalist histories, the metaphor of deep understanding articulates the commitment to tradition, cultural narratives and built traces, stratifying them into the *concreteness of a palimpsest city* and into the *depth of collective memory*. I would emphasize above all that revisionism implies, from my point of view, the articulation of *intellectual history* (conversationalism, comparatism, ethnocentrism) with *phenomenology as canon-formation* (existential space, topology, intentionality) and *historical reconstruction* (typology, analogy, structural continuity). These historiographical types are capable of providing the means of reading an intervention on the site in the framework of an *ethics of continuity*.

Weak rationality is capable to activate a resistance against urban technocracy reductivism and cynicism of global consumer society. Technocracy and consumer society are inert to the necessity of our existential becoming. Counteracting them implies critical selection of building technology in architecture, tectonic construction and ethical attitude of the architect towards place and community. The consequence of weak rationality is a weak culture that

values contextualism, urban intervention by fragments, refusal of aesthetic novelty as an end in itself, compositional rigor, reinterpreting modernist and pre-modernist aesthetic traditions, and analogical view of history.

Finally, I believe that architecture, if constituted as part of the reflexive practice, implicitly bases the conditions of involvement in the common horizon, *orienting and mediating between the levels of historiographic, rational and cultural understanding*. Inaugural Modernism went deeply wrong by trying to attach architecture ideologically to a predefined political and moral instrumental program. Postmodernism pursued by Charles Jencks failed in the attempt to legitimize architecture through a metanarrative based on a scientific model that demands complexity, but which does not constitute the common horizon of cultural consensus and does not resist criticism of phenomenology or pragmatism. *Instead, reflexive Modernism can reconcile instead in the public sphere the discursive aspect of our profession with the spatial and material one*. Its wisdom and practical maturity imply the resistance to the technical instrumentalization of the city through the reparative activation of ethical reflection and the ability to relate itself to the discourse of hermeneutics in the public sphere. In the common horizon of understanding configured by tradition, *defending places*, *enhancing public space* and *strengthening communities* still stand as *desirable values* after the dissolution of the ideological fundamentalisms of the Modern Movement.

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