# Architecture as a Margin within the Negotiation between Reality and Utopia

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## The Margin as the Difference between Discipline and Non-Discipline

In the Seventies, Karl Popper introduced the definition of an "abstract cultural world" (the third world) which was, curiously enough, as real as the physical one.[1] This world is defined by the Austrian philosopher as "the state of discussion or the state of a critical argument; and, of course, the contents of journals, books, and libraries,"[2] consequently – *de facto* – we all live in the cultural world, and this lays the foundation for every subject's point of view resulting in the comprehension of objective and material reality. Nowadays, it is quite clear that Architecture, at least intended as a cultural discipline, can significantly influence the definition of this kind of double reality. In fact, if this world is the result of human mind, including language, scientific theories, ideas, religions and works of art, it is quite obvious that architecture helps to shape the experience of this world too. Nonetheless, only some buildings reflect cultural values. If we consider contemporary cities, metropolises and megalopolises all over the world, it is quite difficult to find buildings that are able to contribute to the definition of the "third world." These urban realities are conceived as examples of generic architecture, sometimes interrupted by literally spectacular buildings: an almost infinite series of generic design, only occasionally interrupted by some rare examples of urban entertainment.

Ultimately, the issue regarding the cultural value of architecture poses an ontological problem summarized by a question that is the most infamous and at the same time the most common one for an architect: what is architecture? Of course, the search for a suitable answer to this question is far beyond the aim of this paper and it would require the discussion of this issue from a historical perspective, mentioning theories such as the "imitation theory" and others relating to formalism, aesthetics and politics. Attempts to solve this issue would require the consideration of so many materials, from both the academic and the professional branches of architecture. However, it is possible to discuss the possibility of identifying the boundary – the margin – between what architecture is and what it is not. When does an object acquire a "cultural" value? Where is the margin between Architecture and Building?

In this sense, it is interesting to refer to art theory, which, as a discipline, has a way longer bibliography on this issue than architectural theory. More specifically, Arthur Coleman Danto has developed a theory – usually referred to as "Aboutness" – that can explain the possible definition of architecture's margin. In his famous paper "the Art world," Danto defines art as whatever art schools, museums, and artists get away with.[3] In this sense, the margin between what art is and what it is not is institutional, rather than aesthetic or formal.[4]

Referring to Danto's theory, it might be possible to define the margin between what architecture is and what it is not in a similar way. Indeed, an object acquires an artistic value based on a general

1 Karl R. Popper, *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

2 Popper, *Objective Knowledge*, 107.

3 Arthur Coleman Danto, "The Artworld," *Journal of Philosophy* 61, 19 (1964), 571-584.

4 Danto's theories predicted the development of the so-called "Institutional theory of Art," which, thanks to scholars like George Dickie or Howard S. Becker, took Danto's theory to its extreme.

consensus on its quality, just like architecture: a building has architectural qualities when the scientific community agrees upon certain qualities. Consequently, if we share the same opinion on some aspects of a project as culturally relevant, then we have found a common definition of what Architecture actually is. Again, if we go back to the concept of the "Generic" architecture, and if the whole architectural community agreed upon the cultural value of this condition, then what we currently regard as just "buildings" may turn into valuable architectural expression.[5]

### The Margin as Daydream

From this institutional point of view, in order to be regarded as a form of architecture, any building must embody certain qualities, whether formal, aesthetic, technological or conceptual. These qualities can be expressed in more or less self-referential modes, but they will always need the appreciation of the external world (scientific or not) to be fully highlighted. In this context, this cultural reference system could be intended as Ideology (in Tafuri's words[6]) or, more properly, as Utopia. The use of these two words is not a rhetorical trick, for they are key concepts for the understanding of how architecture always refers to a cultural world, of which it becomes an expression, or from which it takes inspiration for ideas and concepts in order to produce valuable meaning. For instance, the 20th century avant-garde had to break with the past, creating both diachronic and synchronic "utopian" new beginnings for the worlds of art. On the one hand, the avant-garde questioned the pre-industrial society as in the case of many architectural experiments of that time, while, on the other hand, it also attempted a break with the bourgeois culture (as with Duchamp's ready-mades, the most striking case being the urinal turned into his famous "Fountain", 1917). These attempts tried to generate a Utopia based on an ideological construct: a brand new society for mankind. Consequently, movements such as Futurism, Dadaism, De Stijl and Constructivism can only be fully understood as artistic expressions involved in the definition of political utopias, aiming at what Manfredo Tafuri called the "mechanization of the universe."

Futurism and Constructivism tried to give an aesthetic to the new industrial world, Neoplasticism intended to develop the poetics of the new modern society. These projects and artistic expressions ultimately suggested shapes in the form of positive expressions of ideas and ideologies taking part in the construction of an "absolute" value embodying the kind of cultural values mentioned before. Moreover, this kind of embodiment can be discussed when composition relies on abstraction. In this case, the process of de-figuration acts as a vehicle to demonstrate the presence of an absolute implying concepts like infinity, divine, or "the end of history." However, even though these projects are particularly important for the understanding of the relationship between architecture and Utopia, and the embodiment of cultural values, the attempts to realize an ideal world have been more intermittent over time than it is often thought. In fact, a project can also be a critical design rather than just the expression of positive values embodying a kind of negative utopia as its cultural margin.

The most famous example of this kind of critical agenda is the so-called "radical architecture" of the Sixties and Seventies. In those decades, generations of architects all around Europe were figuring out different ways of rethinking architecture from a dramatically radical point of view. Constant Nieuwenhuys tried to design the informal city of post-capitalist society, Archigram turned architecture into a mediatic object, designing projects mixing the languages of avant-garde and mass culture, journals and cartoons. In Austria, architects like Hans Hollein, Walter Pichler and Wolf D. Prix rejected rationalism, replacing it with an irrational way of design; in Prix's words, they were using a "madness with method."[7] In Italy, groups like UFO, Gianni

5 Recently, architects such as Rem Koolhaas have already brilliantly started a re-discussion of this argument in the attempt of giving some sort of values to these buildings.

6 Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia, Design and Capitalist Development* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1986), 76.

7 These words were used by Prix in a public debate with Eric Owen Moss and moderated by Peter Trummer entitled "Madness and Method" at the Institute of Urban Design in Innsbruck on the 24th of November 2015.

Pettena or Ugo La Pietra mixed design, performance, art and architecture in a trans-disciplinary and provocative "open field", while Superstudio and Archizoom tried to sweep away the idea of modern architecture.

As far as the topic of the margin is concerned, it is particularly interesting to focus on the works of Superstudio, and particularly on their "Continuous Monument." In this case, the architectural project is a true margin between reality and the critique of society or, with a more suitable Marxism-related expression, it is a "critique of ideology." In this project, we see a mega-shape that is over-imposed on reality: an object that cuts buildings and breaks mountains, defining its own utopian content. This project, defined by its authors as a "moderate utopia," was conceived as an architectural work able to "regain [architecture's] full power […] appearing as the only alternative to nature."[8] These words reveal a particularly interesting idea of "moderate utopia." First, from a historical point of view, since it draws a demarcation line between Superstudio and Archizoom; then, and more importantly for the purposes of this essay, because it shows how the project is regarded as an actual alternative or, going back to Popper's ideas, as a piece of the "third world." Indeed, the difference among the works of Superstudio and those of Archizoom lies in the different level of radicalism. While Superstudio's agenda consisted of the construction of a moderate utopian world, Andrea Branzi and Archizoom tried to destroy the idea of architecture by redefining its own disciplinary basis, exactly as Kazimir Malevich had tried to rethink the content of painting with his "white square on white canvas," or as John Cage recorded a track of four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence as a manifesto for a new concept of music. Nonetheless, the *Continuous Monument* is still an interesting project, albeit "moderate," since it creates a territory with no history and no future, which does not belong to any particular place: a utopian design which imagines an alternative life where people can finally, and ironically, enjoy consumerism.

Another extremely important project for the understanding of the margin as a conceptual and narrative device is one of the early works of Rem Koolhaas where he copes with a utopian (or rather dystopian) project: "Exodus, or the voluntary prisoners of architecture." This project, designed with Madelon Vriesendorp and Zoe Zengelis in 1972, is conceived as a story represented with eighteen illustrations. Beyond these extraordinarily crafted eighteen drawings and collages, it is interesting to focus on the project's narrative content, which is clearly explained in its title. In this building (which is rather a piece of the city than just an object), people live in a kind of alternative and utopian society. To live here, the inmates must give up their individuality, and allow themselves to be persuaded by the collectivist and communalist authorities that rule over this alternative world. For example, in this place everything is structured, controlled and organized so strictly that, in order to keep the number of the inhabitants under control, a severe birth control system is applied. The key issue for the understanding of this project, which formally refers to the *Continuous Monument* and features numerous architectural quotations, is its narrative nature. Emmanuel Petit also notices that, due to the narrative properties of the project, it can be described as a "self-sustaining simulation"[9]: a design reflecting the architects' submission to a "discipline" which is nothing less (or more) than a myth. In this sense, "Exodus" is particularly interesting because it actually discusses the notion of "margin" between what architecture is and what it is not. It ultimately shows us how this discipline is a comprehensive world, and how architecture is always connected with a utopic content. In Rem Koolhaas' words:

> "architecture is a dangerous mixture of omnipotence and impotence in the sense that the architect harbours megalomaniac dreams that depend upon others, and upon circumstances, to impose and to realize those fantasies and dreams."[10]

8 Both quotes are taken from Superstudio, "The Continuous Monument: an Architectural Model for Total Urbanization" (1969), in Peter Lang and William Menking, *Superstudio, Life Without Objects* (Milan: Skira, 2012),122.

9 Emmanuel Petit, *Irony, or, the Self-Critical Opacity of Postmodern Architecture* (New Haven: Yale Books, 2013), 196.

10 Rem Koolhaas, in Petit, *Irony, or, the Self-Critical Opacity*, 193-194.

Yet, despite the importance of these projects, such designs are daydreams. In other words, by discussing the disciplinary status of architecture, they investigate the definition of the boundary between architecture and building (thus trying to answer the ontological question rhetorically escaped before), implementing utopian aspirations without entering the material world. While the avant-garde of the first half of the century had positive aspirations (such as revolution), the projects of Archizoom and Superstudio, characterised by a critical approach, designed imaginary worlds – daydreams – that are not a proper utopia. Eventually, it is possible to analyse another kind of architecture intended as a margin, which actually mediates between the utopian needs of architecture and its material requirements.

### The Margin as the Ideal

As clearly explained by Isaiah Berlin, the main problem of Utopia lies in the impossibility of achieving an absolute by means of a single solution, as a revolution leading to a new and perfect social order. In fact, history has proven that this promise has always been broken because the solution of a problem always results in new and unexpected needs and requirements. And the same thing happens when the old problems are forgotten and (occasionally) solved. Even after a revolution, we shall always have to cope with new and unexpected issues.[11] Indeed, any utopian architectural project can be read from this point of view: a maniacal attempt to find an absolute, or an alternative truth. As a matter of fact, the obsessiveness and deficiency of these projects is readable enough in the development of architecture in the eighties, when post-modern culture has moved the focus from words like "Utopia", "Radical" and "Revolution" to "Irony," "Contradiction" and "Discipline." Nonetheless, it is still interesting to understand utopianism as a whole distinct process promoting the production of content, whether positive or negative. In fact, in order to define its own agenda, a critical project requires the presence of an enemy. As explained by Frederic Jameson: "For the utopian remedy must at first be a fundamentally negative one, and stand as a clarion call to remove and to extirpate this specific root of all evil from which all the others spring."[12] In this sense, the enemy of Superstudio was modern architecture, Hans Hollein's was Adolf Loos, while Archizoom's was architecture itself.[13] For this reason, these projects should not be analyzed with a positive expectation, as if they might have led to the creation of happy worlds. The confusion arises from the formal properties of these projects, which inevitably show images, drawings, collages and shapes. However, these drawings must be read negatively, as the a-temporal architecture of an era culminating with the defeat of the enemy: a true daydream. Moreover, given the impossibility to guarantee that a given utopian preoccupation will strike the mark, history has also recently fashioned these projects into models for pretty drawings and collages that could win competitions and be published in specific and fashionable magazines and websites. Nonetheless, there is still a history of these projects that could negotiate the aspiration of criticising reality within the real, in a kind of dialectic and, if we will, paranoid manner.

For example, walking through the streets of London, you will find yourself in a world populated by po-mo buildings, high-tech architectures, suppositories transformed in skyscrapers, and any other kind of post-modern fantasy. Surprisingly enough, within this touching and chaotic pastiche, you might find yourself in another world. In fact, right behind the museum of London, it is possible to see six concrete towers highlighting the existence of another reality: the Barbican Centre (1982). This huge complex is particularly interesting because it reminds of a world that is real and still

11 Isaiah Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal," in Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (London: John Murray Publishers, 1990), 1-20.

12 Fredric Jameson, "The Utopian Enclave," in *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), 10.

13 Archizoom used these words to describe their agenda: "fine ultimo dell'architettura moderna è l'eliminazione dell'architettura stessa" that is to say: "Modern architecture's final aim is the elimination of architecture itself." In Paola Navone and Bruno Orlandoni, *Architettura "radicale"* (Segrate: G. Milani, Documenti di Casabella, 1974), 7.



Fig. 1. The Barbican Centre, The Lakeside Terrace at the Barbican Centre from the top of the stairs to Defoe Place

serviceable today, in a completely different urban context. Built in a city area destroyed by the Nazi bombing during the Second World War, this complex and multi-functional structure is still one of the most impressive projects characterizing the culture of the Great Britain's post-war welfare policies. The Barbican, designed by Chamberlin, Powell & Bon, features a stunningly complex program, first and foremost because it is an ambitious housing estate: a complex of thousands of apartments, cultural institutions, public facilities and stores connected by elevated walkways (Fig.1).

Interestingly enough, both the program and the form of this project can be regarded as references to a utopian world. In terms of program, the wide range of apartment typologies is even more impressive than their quantity: a huge amount of flat types ranging from small studios to large family apartments located in the towers. To this end, it is worth stressing that the architectural choice was not driven exclusively by the need for differentiation (historically one of the most important design issues), but also by a political and social agenda. In fact, the inhabitants were supposed to move from one typology to the other as they climbed the economic ladder. Just like James G. Ballard's *High-Rise*, the Barbican was intended as an independent world where the inhabitants could live, change apartments, spent their spare time and work: a small city with its own community or, using a German word, a "Gemeinschaft." Moreover, the structure's shapes reflect the idealist nature of this project. In fact, from a formal point of view, the Barbican can be described as a fortress: from the inside, this complex features various buildings and gardens arranged on multiple layers of blocks, while from the outside, the Barbican looks like an impenetrable castle. This element is particularly interesting because, by incorporating walls and hidden entrances, this design prevents the passers-by to imagine the internal aspect of the building. Additionally, together with these physical defensive solutions, the architects have also used formal elements in order to emphasise the symbolism of the fortress. Chamberlin, Powell and Bon included some poetic references to the old city walls of London, which run through the site. Some examples are provided by the semi-circular shapes used as visual motifs that recall medieval architecture, as well as by the vertical openings on the external façade of the Barbican, which remind of the loopholes of the ancient English castles. Given these references, it might be easy to define this project a realized utopia, but, at the same time, this would be a mistake. In this sense, it is worth mentioning a text published in the "magazine for Barbican Residents" in December 2015, where Lawrence Williams, the editor of the magazine, writes as follows:

> "How opportune it thus was to have drawn to our attention, via a post on barbicantalk, an article in Norwegian Shuttle's inflight magazine which was indeed entitled 'Concrete Utopia' […]. I think Barbican residents will find much to agree with in what is mostly a paean of praise for the complex. But Utopia? I suppose a pertinent description for the Barbican in that Utopia was the title of a book by Thomas More, published in 1516. However whether our society could be described as a perfect one as his book suggests, is something of an idealistic exaggeration. But obviously a form of Utopia is how others see us, which is rather gratifying and suggests the planners at least got many things right here." [14]

Curiously enough, Williams' words recall Reyner Banham's assumptions on mega-structures, even if Banham did not consider the Barbican as a proper megastructure because of its style and morphology, which, in his opinion could not be compared to "pioneering" structures such as Park Hill in Sheffield. In order to identify the relation between Utopia and Reality within the Barbican, it is nonetheless interesting to refer to Banham's ideas. According to him, describing such structures with the word "Utopia" is rather superficial (as if the meaning of Utopia were similar to "visionary"), because these projects, unlike utopia, are not charged with the task of inventing a new social order. These architectures, in fact, try to find a compromise between the needs and the constraints of their time, without losing the aspiration to take part in the construction of a broader cultural imaginary. According to Banham, these projects should be described as ideal rather than utopian. Therefore, we can regard the Barbican and other projects such as Kisho Kurokawa's project for an agricultural city or the urban centre in Cumbernauld as manifestoes for an alternative urban reality, in the real and material world. To this end, it should be noted that the British historian compares this type of architecture to the Renaissance ideal cities as a proof of their non-utopian content: projects with an ideal content, but at the same designed and based on geometric patterns.[15] Consider Filarete's project of Sforzinda (1464), for example: the predominance of geometry over the narrative content is clear and evident. Whereas the utopian/dystopian projects of Superstudio and Koolhaas focused on the narrative content, ideal projects such as Sforzinda are based on the use of geometry in order to define the margin between their idealist program and the built environments. Filarete opted for an eight-point star inscribed in a circle to delimitate his vision, while the architects of the 20th century idealist projects used linear buildings, forms of agglomerations, walls and formal limits. In this case, the margin is the form itself. In these projects, architecture acts as the margin between the ideal and reality; it is actually the physical border between two different worlds. Ultimately, this idealist aspect of the Barbican can be intended – recalling Michel Foucault's theory – as a Heterotopia: a physical approximation of a utopia applied to the built reality. Therefore, like in Foucault's theory, a mirror is the perfect metaphor for the duality between reality and non-reality, the Barbican embodies the duality between utopianism and material reality.[16]

### The Margin as "Architectureness"

If the mediation between reality and idealism is the key point for the understanding of heterotopian projects such as the Barbican, how is it possible to discuss the idea of the margin in disciplinary terms for other kinds of architecture, which are neither utopian nor ideal? This question might seem trivial, but it should be remembered that if the *idea* of architecture relies on a social consensus, then this question becomes really important today, given the complete absence of both Utopias and visionary idealisms in the contemporary world; therefore, how could the "margin" – intended as a disciplinary concept – be described? Moreover, if we consider again the question posed at the beginning of this essay (Where is the margin between Architecture and Building?) we must find something on which the majority of architects could agree, in spite of

14 Lawrence Williams, "Barbicania, As others see us," *Barbican Life, the Magazine for Barbican Residents* 12, 4 (2015), 5.

15 Reyner Banham, *Megastructures. Urban futures of the recent past* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976).

16 Michel Foucault, "Heterotopias," in Anthony Vidler, Michel Foucault, and Pamela Johnston, "Heterotopias," *AA Files* 69 (2014).

different interpretations. Therefore, it is not possible to address specific topics such as formalism or politics in a strict sense, but these two main categories could be used instead in order to find a more generic issue. After all, since any space may acquire a political and cultural content (at least metaphorically) by staging an idea of the world (a kind of operation which is both political and formal), it might be possible to investigate theoretically the margin between the cultural values of a space and its utilitarian dimension.

Sometimes architecture can literally embody political values. In fact, as stressed by Francesco Marullo, Albert Kahn's design for Henry Ford's factories promoted the generation of the "state of production." His design technique was based on the development of rational configurations intended for social integration in a sophisticated and functionalist manner. These factories relied on what Marullo calls – referring to Rem Koolhaas – "typical plans": spaces that are coherent, flexible and, more importantly, reproducible.[17] Furthermore, architecture can also embody cultural values even in non-utopian shapes. For example, Charles Jencks defined in 1973 what he called the "American Camp" as a "sensual, homosexual sweetness"[18] of architectural expression and the Italian architecture of the Sixties as

> "the outgrowth of the Milanese Borghese culture, the economic miracle, overripe Catholicism and the Italian love for the saccharine – the "sweet life" – dolce vita. In fact probably the best portrayal of this movement comes from movies like Pasolini's Theorem (Christ as the fornicator of Milanese nouveaux riches who nevertheless may spout Marxism) and of course Fellini's Dolce Vita itself (with the statue of Christ in benediction being shuttled over Italian superblocks by a spluttering helicopter)."[19]

Obviously, these are interpretations of architectural tendencies and, as such, must be taken with a pinch of salt. Nonetheless, it is evident that the architectural forms discussed by Jencks have contributed to the construction of the same imaginary (whether sexual, artistic or social) which Jencks uses for his critical observations. Moreover, it is possible to investigate the way in which architecture can even build its own reality by means of disciplinary tools.

In this respect, Pier Vittorio Aureli describes Aldo Rossi's work as the attempt to define the "autonomy of architectural poiesis in the form of the reinvention of categories such as typology and place."[20] The most thought-provoking aspect in this description is the use of the world "reinvention", meaning that, according to the Italian theorist and architect, Rossi's peculiarity is not just the use of normative typologies, but rather their re-invention. Rossi does not imitate typologies; he re-discovers them every time he develops a project. Moreover, Rossi tried to theorise a rational language based on the re-invention of the architecture of the Enlightenment, thus developing his own design techniques and theory. Of course, Rossi's work is just one of the possible examples; in fact, it is quite obvious that this condition is not a prerogative of the Italian architect. If we examine the history of architecture, we may discover that all the cultural projects are based on hermeneutic approaches based on the re-invention of something taken from the past or from trans-disciplinary references. To mention a few, Leon Battista Alberti reinvented the rules of architecture by the recodification of ancient Rome's architecture, Giovanni Battista Piranesi reinvented the Egyptian style in order to develop his anarchist design methodology, Le Corbusier reshaped composition by mixing the Parthenon with the airplane and, more recently, Greg Lynn used scientific concepts in order to re-develop the architectural theory of complexity, while Aureli reinvented the Italian radical approach of the Seventies. This paper then proposes to theorize the concept of the margin not just as "otherness," as in the cases of Superstudio's and Koolhaas' daydreams, or as idealism as happened with the Megastructures. Herein, the margin

17 Francesco Marullo, "Architecture and Revolution, the Typical Plan as Index of Generic," in *The City as a Project*, ed. Pier Vittorio Aureli (Berlin: Ruby Press, 2014), 216-260.

18 Charles Jencks, *Modern Movements in Architecture* (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 53.

19 Ibid., 53-54.

20 Pier Vittorio Aureli, *The Project of Autonomy: Politics and Architecture within and against Capitalism* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 55.



Fig. 2: Aldo Rossi, Ambiente Showroom, Tokyo, Japan, 1991

is described as the "word" characterizing the whole concept of architecture. Consequently, Architecture itself may act as margin.

In other words, the margin between building and architecture can be found in the "architectureness" of a project. For example, while Colin Rowe[21] regards utopia as a thought leading to intolerance, suppression and ultimately violence, submitting a purely formalist interpretation of architecture supported by its own language, other architectural theorists, like Christopher Alexander or Oswald Mathias Ungers, have thought about similar issues using a wide range of metaphors for the developing of architecture's content.[22] It is worth mentioning the famous theory of estrangement developed by Viktor Šklovskij. This theory can be summed up as the poetic process which makes us perceive a common reality as if it were uncommon: an aesthetic revelation. From this point of view, architecture should drive people out of their routine lives by making the familiar look strange (or even weird) and offering different perspectives on reality by removing the conventional, the formulaic, and the positivistic stereotypical. Going back to Rossi's case, his projects are particularly interesting because they feature elements quite familiar from the point of view of an outsider, such as a child, but erasing their conventional status and presenting them as if they were seen for the first time. For instance, his square windows cannot be considered just as functional elements, since they are "windowy" windows: they change our traditional perception of their essence. Is it then possible to define the margin as the difference between conventional and unconventional? In other words, is it possible to define the margin as the quality allowing a building to estrange reality from the traditional perception of reality? (Fig.2)

Besides Rossi's windows, it is easy to find many other examples of estranging architectural specificities within the history of architecture. For example, Peter Eisenman, Robert Venturi or Frank Gehry have defied the conventional concepts of typology, composition or drawing, even

21 Colin Rowe, "The Mathematics of the Ideal villa," *Architectural Review* 101 (1947).

22 More specifically see: Oswald Mathias Ungers, *Morphologie: City Metaphors* (Köln: Walther König, 1982) and Christopher Alexander, *Notes on Synthesis of Form* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964).

though with completely different techniques. Eisenman's hanging column in the Wexner Center in Columbus, Ohio aims at changing people's perception of columns and structure, Venturi has given a new cultural value to decorations and kitsch elements, while Gehry has estranged the reality of architecture by the construction of techno-expressionist fantasies.

In this context, Viktor Šklovskij's theory is particularly interesting, because he stated that the poetic traits of "art" have a strong political value. In his "Sentimental'noe puteshestvie" (a "Sentimental Journey") written in 1923, Šklovskij compares the estrangement with the revolution. In this text, the Russian scholar who theorised the "estrangement", connects the de-familiarization process with the strangeness of routine which identifies "the difference between revolutionary life and ordinary life" and, consequently, during the revolution, "life became art."[23] This issue is particularly relevant, because, as stressed by Lucy Sargisson, estrangement plays a structuring role for utopianism, since it favours the development of criticism of any Utopia.[24] By comparing the estrangement to the political condition of the post-revolutionary Russia (not yet Stalinist, at least in its worst political consequences), Šklovskij highlights the possible political value of aesthetics in our material world. This conception of "estrangement" as a poetic displacement of content with its own political matter is important because it metaphysically affects the comprehension of the margin. In fact, if the "architectureness" of architecture lies in the possibility to estrange conventionality, then it also defines it from a disciplinary point of view. In fact, architecture can be regarded as the margin among worlds, words and ideas.

Therefore, if the idea of architecture is developed by the human mind since it is based on the institutional and social consensus, the disciplinary definition of architecture refers to a perceptual and conceptual sphere. Finally, as the architectural value of Rossi's windows lies in their "windowsness," can the quality of architecture be defined as the margin between architecture and the architectural? If the answer is positive, then architecture is a matter of difference.

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**Fig. 2:** Wiiii, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/56/Ambiente_Showroom.jpg, © https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/

23 Viktor Šklovskij, *Sentimental Journey: Memoirs, 1917–1922* (1923), translated by Richard Sheldon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970), 271.

24 Lucy Sargisson, "Strange Places: Estrangement, Utopianism, and Intentional Communities," *Utopian Studies* 18, 3 (2007), 393-424.