

Prospects for a Critical Regionalism

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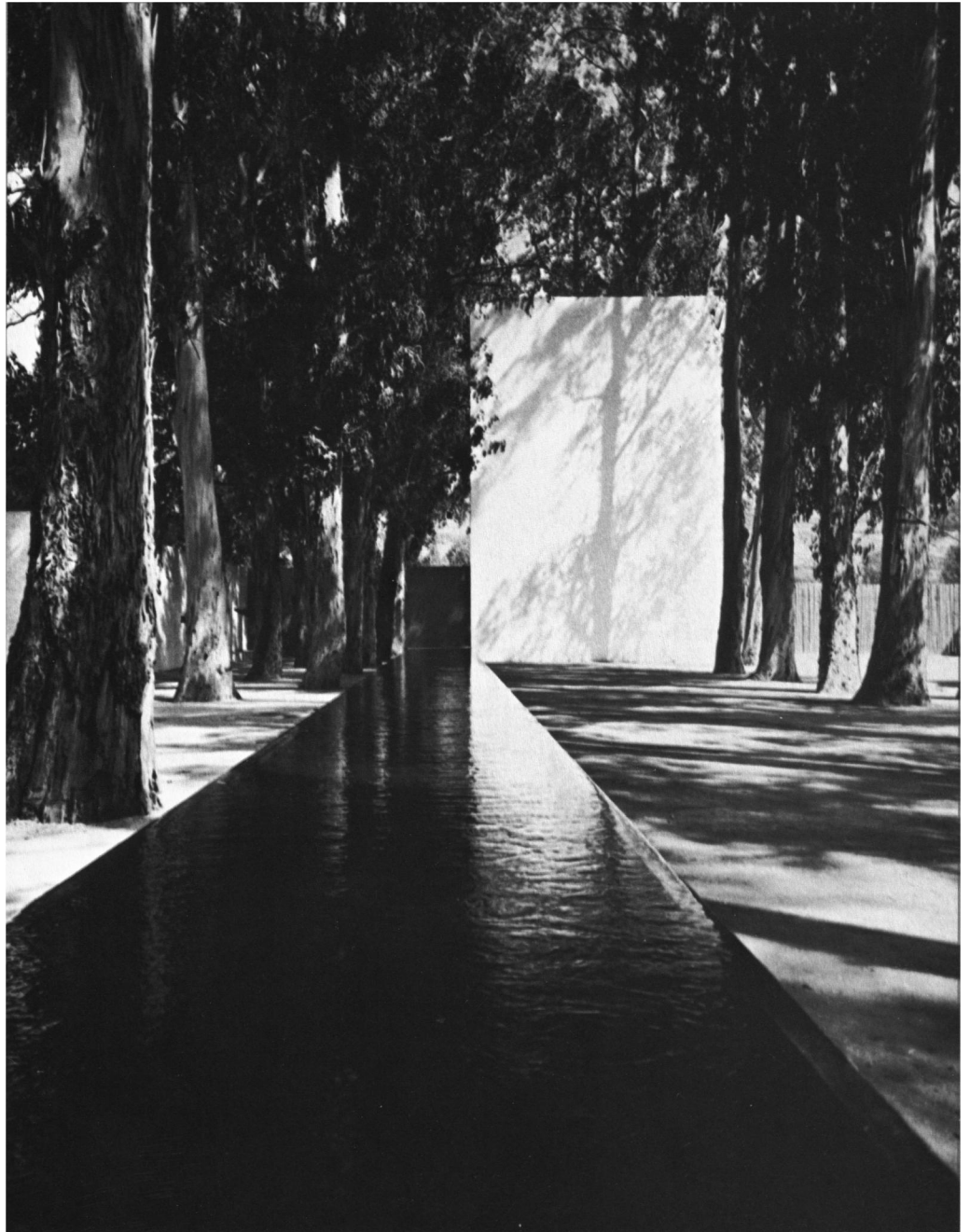
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Prospects for a Critical Regionalism



Luis Barragan, Las Arboledas,
1961.

The phenomenon of universalization, while being an advancement of mankind, at the same time constitutes a sort of subtle destruction, not only of traditional cultures, which might not be an irreparable wrong, but also of what I shall call for the time being the creative nucleus of great civilizations and great cultures, that nucleus on the basis of which we interpret life, what I shall call in advance the ethical and mythical nucleus of mankind. The conflict springs up from there. We have the feeling that this single world civilization at the same time exerts a sort of attrition or wearing away at the expense of the cultural resources which have made the great civilizations of the past. This threat is expressed, among other disturbing effects, by the spreading before our eyes of a mediocre civilization which is the absurd counterpart of what I was just calling elementary culture. Everywhere throughout the world, one finds the same bad movie, the same slot machines, the same plastic or aluminum atrocities, the same twisting of language by propaganda, etc. It seems as if mankind, by approaching *en masse* a basic consumer culture, were also stopped *en masse* at a subcultural level. Thus we come to the crucial problem confronting nations just rising from underdevelopment. In order to get on to the road toward modernization, is it necessary to jettison the old cul-

tural past which has been the *raison d'être* of a nation? . . . Whence the paradox: on the one hand, it has to root itself in the soil of its past, forge a national spirit, and unfurl this spiritual and cultural revindication before the colonialist's personality. But in order to take part in modern civilization, it is necessary at the same time to take part in scientific, technical, and political rationality, something which very often requires the pure and simple abandonment of a whole cultural past. It is a fact: every culture cannot sustain and absorb the shock of modern civilization. There is the paradox: how to become modern and to return to sources; how to revive an old, dormant civilization and take part in universal civilization. . . .

No one can say what will become of our civilization when it has really met different civilizations by means other than the shock of conquest and domination. But we have to admit that this encounter has not yet taken place at the level of an authentic dialogue. That is why we are in a kind of lull or interregnum in which we can no longer practice the dogmatism of a single truth and in which we are not yet capable of conquering the skepticism into which we have stepped. We are in a tunnel, at the twilight of dogmatism and the dawn of real dialogues.

Paul Ricoeur

1

Paul Ricoeur, "Universal Civilization and National Cultures", *History and Truth* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1961) pp. 276, 283.

The term critical regionalism is not intended to denote the vernacular, as this was once spontaneously produced by the combined interaction of climate, culture, myth and craft, but rather to identify those recent regional "schools" whose aim has been to represent and serve, in a critical sense, the limited constituencies in which they are grounded. Such a regionalism depends, by definition, on a connection between the political consciousness of a society and the profession. Among the pre-conditions for the emergence of critical regional expression is not only sufficient prosperity but also a strong desire for realising an identity. One of the mainsprings of regionalist culture is an anti-centrist sentiment—an aspiration for some kind of cultural, economic and political independence.

The philosopher Paul Ricoeur has advanced the thesis that a hybrid "world culture" will only come into being through a cross-fertilization between rooted *culture* on the one hand and universal *civilization* on the other. This paradoxical proposition, that regional culture must also be a form of world culture, is predicated on the notion that development *in se* will, of necessity, transform the basis of rooted culture. In his essay "Universal Civilization and National Cultures" of 1961, Ricoeur implied that everything will depend in the last analysis on the capacity of regional culture to recreate a rooted tradition while appropriating foreign influences at the level of both culture and civilization. Such a process of cross-fertilization and reinterpretation is impure by definition. This much is at once evi-

dent, say, in the work of the Portuguese architect Alvaro Siza y Viera. In Siza's architecture Aalto's collage approach to building form finds itself mediated by normative typologies drawn from the work of the Italian Neo-rationalists.

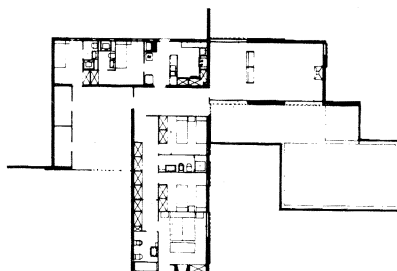
It is necessary to distinguish at the outset between critical regionalism and the simplistic evocation of a sentimental or ironic vernacular. I am referring, of course, to that nostalgia for the vernacular which is currently being conceived as an overdue return to the ethos of a popular culture; for unless such a distinction is made one will end by confusing the resistant capacity of Regionalism with the demagogic tendencies of Populism. In contradistinction to Regionalism, the primary goal of Populism is to function as a *communicative or instrumental sign*.² Such a sign seeks to evoke not a critical perception of reality, but rather the sublimation of a desire for direct experience through the provision of information. Its tactical aim is to attain, as economically as possible, a pre-conceived level of gratification in behavioristic terms. In this regard, the strong affinities of Populism for the rhetorical techniques and imagery of advertising is hardly accidental.

On the other hand, Critical Regionalism is a dialectical expression. It self-consciously seeks to deconstruct universal modernism in terms of values and images which are locally cultivated, while at the same time adulterating these autochthonous elements with paradigms drawn from alien sources. After the disjunctive cultural approach practised by Adolf Loos, Critical Regionalism recognizes that no living tradition remains available to modern man other than the subtle procedures of synthetic contradiction. Any attempt to circumvent the dialectics of this creative process through the eclectic procedures of historicism can

only result in consumerist iconography masquerading as culture.

It is my contention that Critical Regionalism continues to flourish sporadically within the cultural fissures that articulate in unexpected ways the continents of Europe and America. These borderline manifestations may be characterized, after Abraham Moles, as the "interstices of freedom."³ Their existence is proof that the model of the hegemonic center surrounded by dependent satellites is an inadequate and demagogic description of our cultural potential.

Exemplary of an explicitly anti-centrist regionalism was the Catalan nationalist revival which first emerged with the foundation of the Group R in the early Fifties. This group, led by J. M. Sostres and Oriol Bohigas, found itself caught from the beginning in a complex cultural situation. On the one hand, it was obliged to revive the Rationalist, anti-Fascist values and procedures of GATEPAC (the pre-war Spanish wing of C.I.A.M.); on the other, it remained aware of the political responsibility to evoke a realistic regionalism; a regionalism which would be accessible to the general populace. This double-headed program was first publicly announced by Bohigas in his essay, "Possibilities for a Barcelona Architecture,"⁴ published in 1951. The various impulses that went to make up the heterogeneous form of Catalan Regionalism exemplify, in retrospect, the essentially hybrid nature of an authentic modern culture. First, there was the Catalan brick tradition which evidently dates back to the heroic period of the *Modernismo*; then there was the influence of Neoplasticism, an impulse which was directly inspired by Bruno Zevi's *La poetica della architettura neoplasticista* of 1953 and, finally, there was the revisionist style of Italian Neo-Realism—as exemplified above all in the work of Ignazio Gardella.⁵



1
J. A. Coderch and Jesús Sanz,
Casa Catus, Sitges,
Barcelona, 1958, plan.

2
Casa Catus, exterior.



The career of the Barcelona architect J. A. Coderch has been typically Regionalist inasmuch as it has oscillated, until recent date, between a mediterraneanized, modern brick vernacular—Venetian in evocation—apparent, say, in his eight-storey brick apartment block built in Barcelona in the Paseo Nacional in 1952–54 (a mass articulated by full-height shutters and overhanging cornices), and the avant-gardist, Neoplastic composition of his Casa Catus completed at Sitges in 1957. The work of Martorell, Bohigas and Mackay has

3

Abraham Moles, "The Three Cities", *Directions in Art, Theory and Aesthetics*, ed. Anthony Hill (London: Faber and Faber, Limited, 1968), p. 191.

2

Jan Mukařovský, *Structure, Sign and Function* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 228. Perhaps I am overstating the case. However, Mukařovský writes: "The artistic sign, unlike the communicative sign, is not serving, that is, not an instrument."

4

O. Bohigas, "Posibilidades de una arquitectura Barcelona", *Destino* (Barcelona, 1951). See also O. Bohigas, "Diseñar para un público o contra un público", in Seix Barral, *Contra una arquitectura adjetivada* (Barcelona, 1969).

5

See Ignazio Gardella's Casa Borsalino Apartments built in Alexandria in 1951.

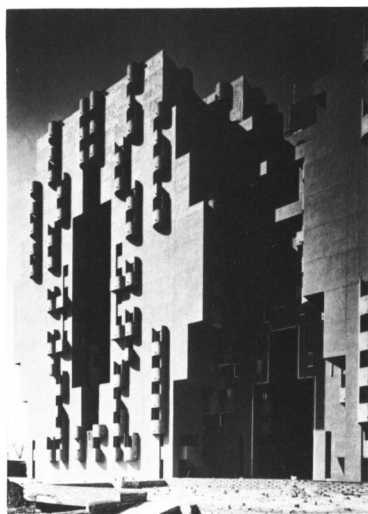
tended to oscillate between comparable poles; between, on the one hand, an assumed brick vernacular close to the work of Coderch and Gardella⁶ and, on the other, their Neo-Brutalist public manner; this last being best exemplified in the technical rationalism of their Thau School built in the suburbs of Barcelona in 1975.

The recent deliquescence of Catalanian Regionalism finds its most extreme manifestation in the work of Ricardo Bofill and the Taller de Arquitectura. For where the early work of Bofill (for example, the Calle Nicaragua apartments of 1964) displayed evident affinity for the re-interpreted brick vernacular of Coderch, the Taller was to adopt a more exaggerated rhetoric in the Seventies. With their Xanadu complex built in Calpe (1967), they entered into a flamboyant romanticism. This castellated syntax reached its apotheosis in their heroic, but ostentatious, tile-faced Walden 7 complex at Saint-Just Desvern (1975). With its twelve-storey voids, underlit living rooms, miniscule balconies and its now disintegrating tile cladding, Walden 7 denotes that delicate boundary where an initially sound impulse degenerates into an ineffective Populism—a Populism whose ultimate aim is not to provide a liveable and significant environment but rather to achieve a highly photogenic form of scenography. In the last analysis, despite its passing homage to Gaudi, Walden 7 is devoted to a form of *admass* seduction. It is architecture of narcissism *par excellence*, for the formal rhetoric addresses itself mainly to high fashion, and to the marketing of Bofill's flamboyant personality. The Mediterranean hedonistic utopia to which it pretends collapses on closer inspection, above all at the level of the roofscape where a potentially sensuous environment has not been borne out by the reality of its occupation.

Nothing could be further from Bofill's intentions than the architecture of the Portuguese master Alvaro Siza y Viera, whose career, beginning with his swimming pool at Quinta de Conceicad, completed in 1965, has been anything but photogenic. This much can be discerned not only from the fragmentary evasive nature of the published images but also from a text written in 1979:

Most of my works were never published; some of the things I did were only carried out in part, others were profoundly changed or destroyed. That's only to be expected. An architectonic proposition whose aim is to go deep . . . a proposition that intends to be more than a passive materialisation, refuses to reduce that same reality, analysing each of its aspects, one by one; that proposition can't find support in a fixed image, can't follow a linear evolution. . . . Each design must catch, with the utmost rigour, a precise moment of the fluttering image, in all its shades, and the better you can recognize that fluttering quality of reality, the clearer your design will be. . . . That may be the reason why only marginal works (a quiet dwelling, a holiday house miles away) have been kept as they were originally designed. But something remains. Pieces are kept here and there, inside ourselves, perhaps fathered by someone, leaving marks on space and people, melting into a process of total transformation.⁶

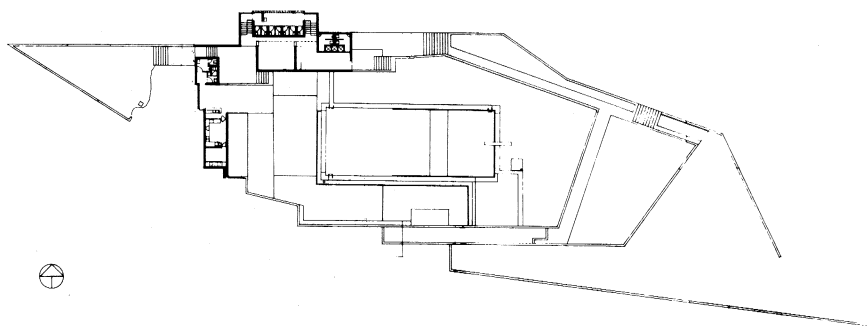
It could be argued that this hypersensitivity toward the fluid and yet specific nature of reality renders Siza's work more layered and rooted than the eclectic tendencies of the Barcelona School for, by



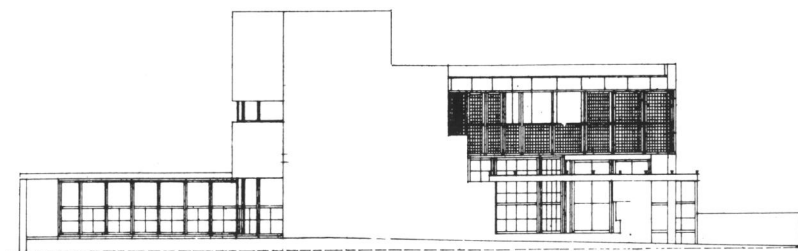
3
Ricardo Bofill, Walden 7, Saint-Just Desvern (near Barcelona), 1975.

6
A. Siza, "To Catch a Precise Moment of Flittering Images in All its Shades", *Architecture and Urbanism*, Tokyo, no. 123, December 1980, p. 9.

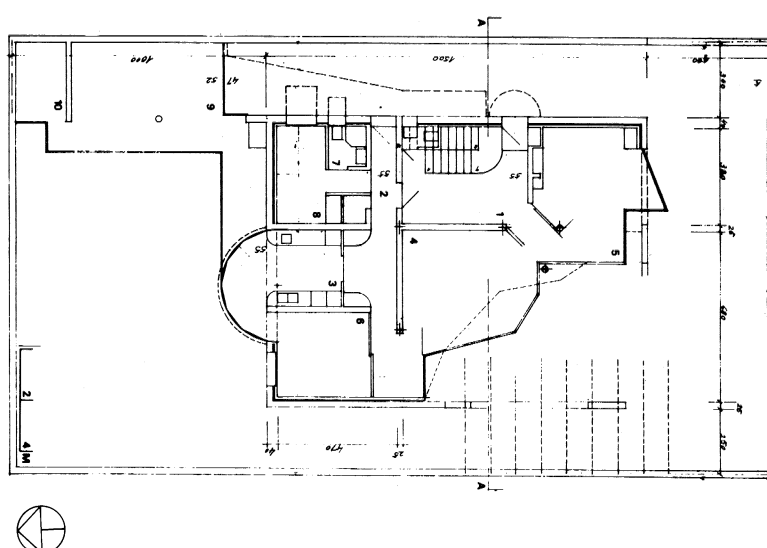
4
Alvaro Siza y Viera, Quinta de Conceicad, Matosinhos, Portugal, 1958-65, plan.



5
Siza y Viera, Bires House,
Povoa do Varzim, 1976,
elevation.



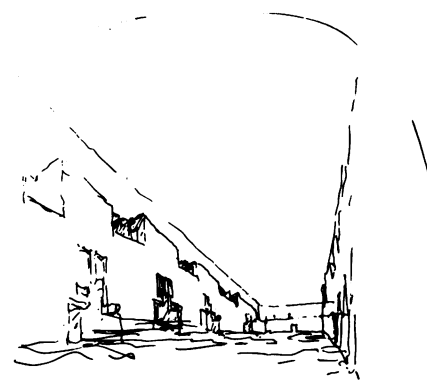
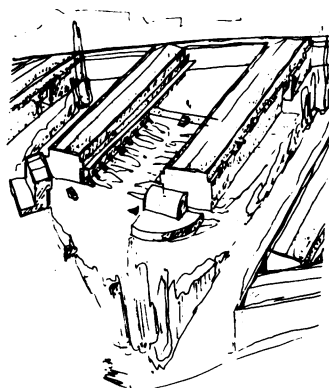
6
Bires House, plan.



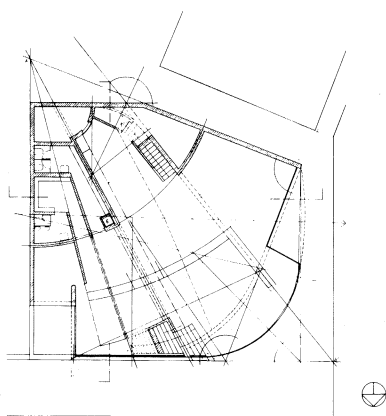
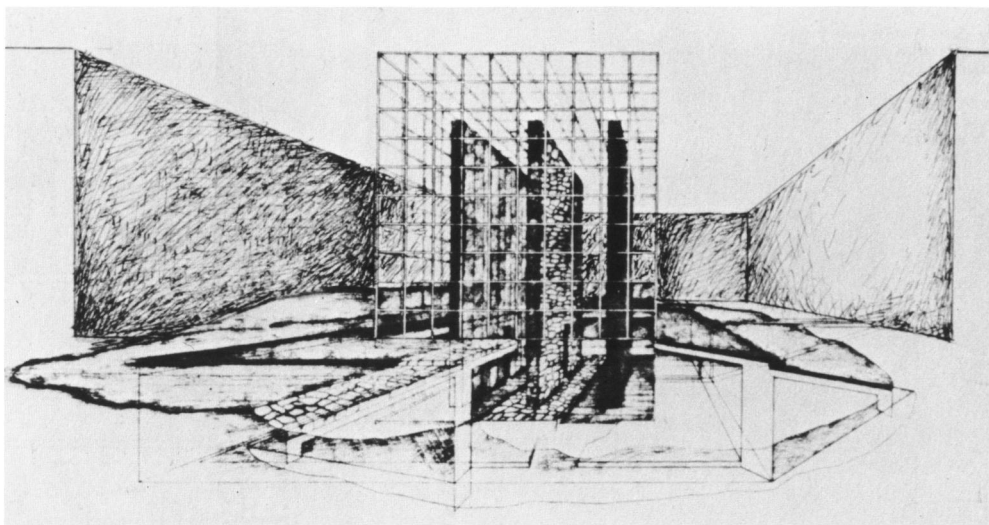
taking Aalto as his point of departure, he seems to have been able to ground his building in the configuration of a given topography and in the fine-grained specificity of the local context. To this end his pieces are tight responses to the urban fabric and marinescape of the Porto region. Other important factors are his extraordinary sensitivity towards local materials, craft work, and, above all, to the subtleties of local light—his sense for

a particular kind of filtration and penetration. Like Aalto's Jyvaskyla University (1957), or his Saynatsalo City Hall (1949), all of Siza's buildings are delicately layered and inlaid into their sites. His approach is patently tactile and materialist, rather than visual and graphic, from his Bires House built at Povoa do Varzim in 1976 to his Bouca Resident's Association Housing of 1977. Even his small bank buildings, of which the best is probably

7
Siza y Viera, Bouca Residents
Association Housing, Porto,
1977, sketches.



9
Raimund Abraham, House with
Three Walls, project, 1972-75.



8
Siza y Viera, Pinto Branch Bank,
Oliveira de Azemeis, 1974.

7
Emilio Ambasz, *The Architecture of Luis Barragán*
(New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1976) p. 9.

the Pinto branch bank built at Oliveira de Azemeis in 1974, are topographically conceived and structured.

The theoretical work of the New York-based Austrian architect Raimund Abraham may also be seen as having latent regionalist connotations inasmuch as this architect has always stressed place creation and the topographic aspects of the built environment. The House with Three Walls (1972) and the House with Flower Walls (1973) are typical ontological works of the early Seventies, wherein the project evokes the oneiric essence of the site, together with the inescapable materiality of building. This feeling for the tectonic nature of built form and for its capacity to transform the surface of the earth has been carried over into Abraham's recent designs made for International Bauausstellung in Berlin, above all his recent projects for South Friedrichstadt, designed in 1981.

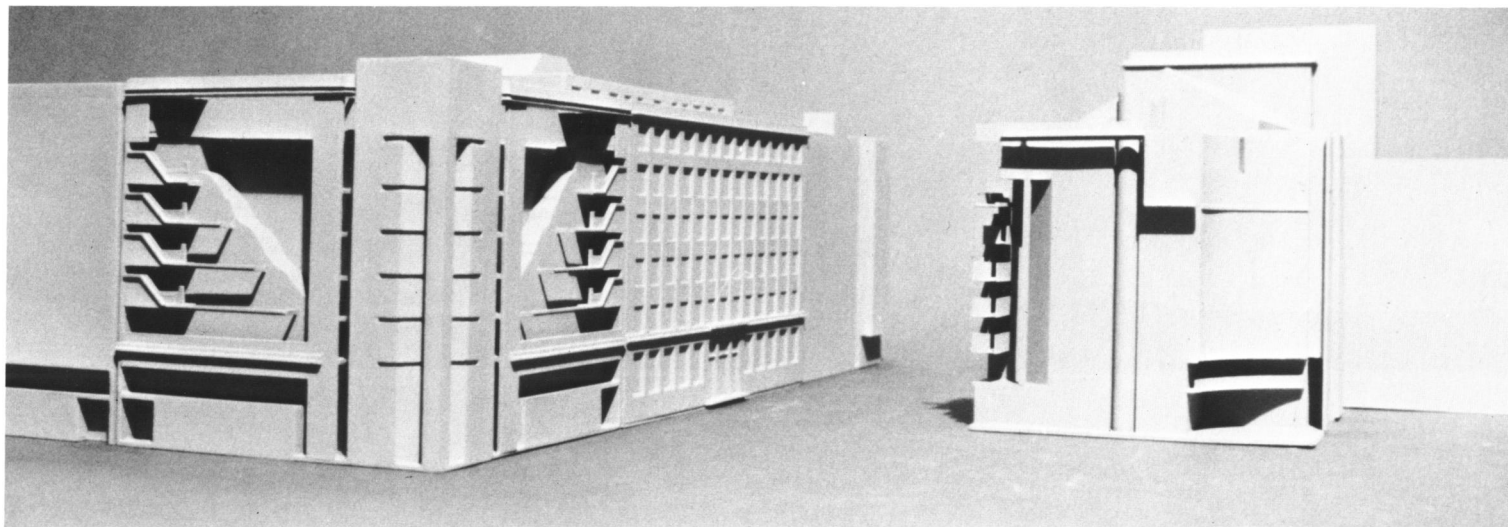
An equally tactile but more specifically regionalist approach is obtained in the case of the veteran Mexican architect Luis Barragán, whose finest houses (many of which have been erected in the suburb of Pedregal) are nothing if not topographic. As much a landscape designer as an architect, Barragán has always sought a sensual and earthbound architecture; an architecture compounded out of enclosures, stelae, fountains, water courses, color saturation; an architecture laid into volcanic rock and lush vegetation; an architecture that refers only indirectly to the Mexican colonial *estancia*. Of Barragán's feeling for mythic and rooted beginnings it is sufficient to cite his memories of the apocryphal *pueblo* of his youth:

My earliest childhood memories are related to a ranch my family owned near the village of Mazamitla. It was a *pueblo* with hills, formed by houses with tile roofs and immense eaves to shield passersby from the heavy rains which fall in that area. Even the earth's color was interesting because it was red earth. In this village, the water distribution system consisted of great gutted logs, in the form of troughs, which ran on a support structure of tree forks, 5 meters high, above the roofs. This aqueduct crossed over the town, reaching the patios, where there were great stone fountains to receive the water. The patios housed with stables, with cows and chickens, all together. Outside, in the street, there were iron rings to tie the horses. The channeled logs, covered with moss, dripped water all over town, of course. It gave this village the ambience of a fairy tale.

No, there are no photographs. I have only its memory.⁷

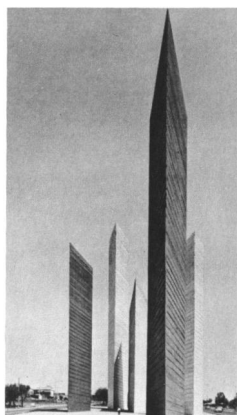
This remembrance has surely been filtered through Barragán's life-long involvement with Islamic architecture. Similar feelings and concerns are evident in his opposition to the invasion of privacy in the modern world and in his criticism of the subtle erosion of nature which has accompanied postwar civilization:

Everyday life is becoming much too public. Radio, T.V., telephone all invade privacy. Gardens should therefore be enclosed, not open to public



10

Raimund Abraham, Universal Corner Building for a City Block, International Building Exhibition, Berlin, 1984, competition project, 1980-81, model.



11

8

C. Banford-Smith, *Builders in the Sun: Five Mexican Architects* (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., 1967) p. 74.

11

Luis Barragán with Mathias Goertiz, Satellite City Towers, 1967.

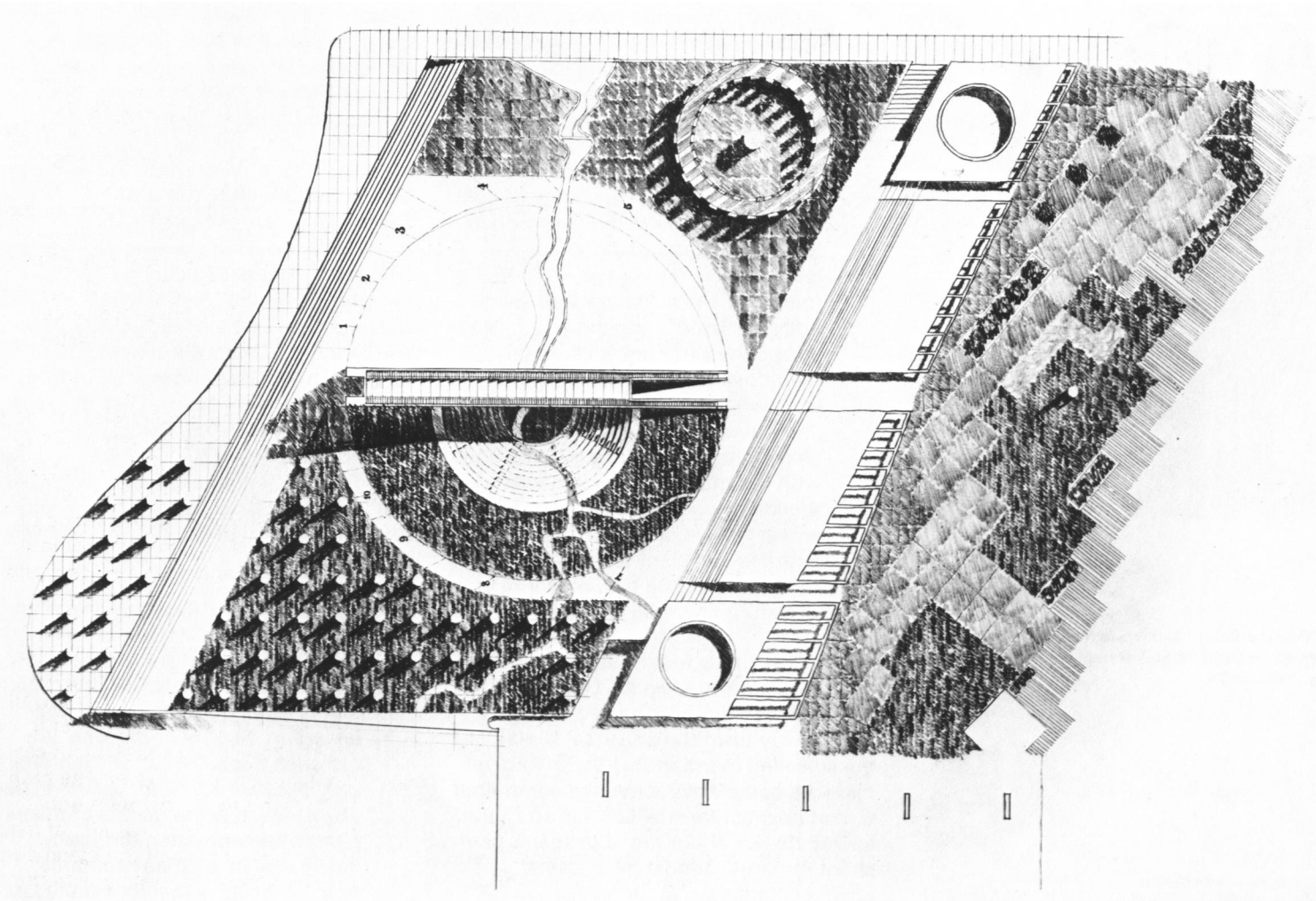
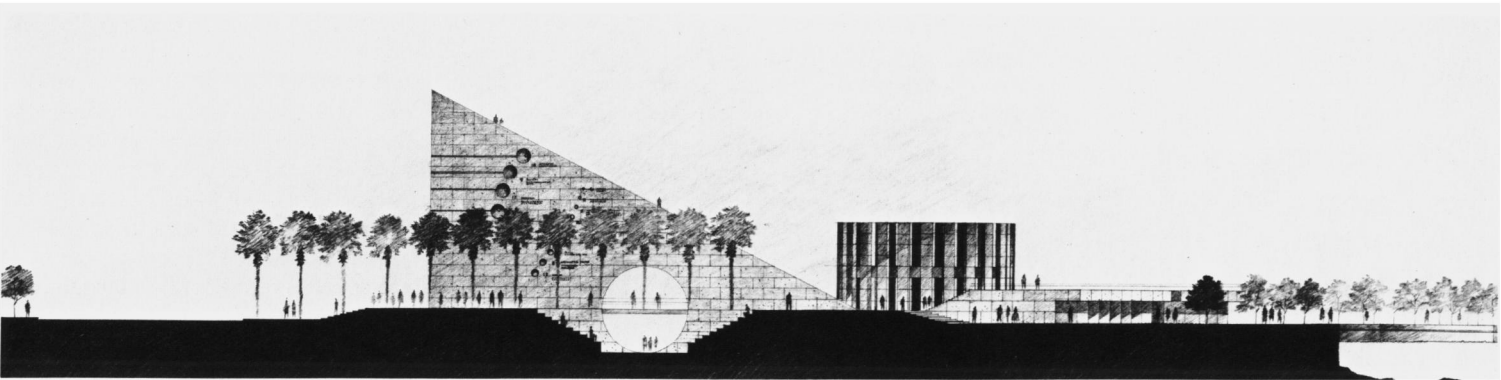
gaze. . . . Architects, are forgetting the need of human beings for half-light, the sort of light that imposes a tranquility, in their living rooms as well as in their bedrooms. About half the glass that is used in so many buildings—homes as well as offices—would have to be removed in order to obtain the quality of light that enables one to live and work in a more concentrated manner. . . . Before the machine age, even in the middle of cities, Nature was everybody's trusted companion. . . . Nowadays, the situation is reversed. Man does not meet with Nature, even when he leaves the city to commune with her. Enclosed in his shiny automobile, his spirit stamped with the mark of the world whence the automobile emerged, he is, within Nature, a foreign body. A billboard is sufficient to stifle the voice of Nature. Nature becomes a scrap of Nature and man a scrap of man.⁸

By the time of his first house and studio built in Tacubaya, Mexico D.F. in 1947, Barragán had already made a subtle move away from the universal syntax of the so-called International Style. And yet his work has always remained committed to that abstract form which has so characterized the art of our era. Barragán's penchant for large, almost inscrutable abstract planes set in the landscape is perhaps at its most intense in his garden for Las Arboledas of 1961 and his freeway monument, Satellite City Towers, designed with Mathias Goertiz in 1967.

Regionalism has, of course, manifested itself in other parts of the Americas; in Brazil

in the 1940s, in the early work of Oscar Niemeyer and Alfonso Reidy; in Argentina in the work of Amancio Williams—above all in Williams' bridge house in Mar del Plata of 1945 and more recently perhaps in Clorindo Testa's Bank of London and South America, built in Buenos Aires in 1959; in Venezuela, in the Ciudad Universitaria built to the designs of Carlos Raoul Villanueva between 1945 and 1960; in the West Coast of the United States, first in Los Angeles in the late 1920s in the work of Neutra, Schindler, Weber and Gill, and then in the so-called Bay Area and Southern California schools founded by William Wurster and Hamilton Harwell Harris respectively. No-one has perhaps expressed the idea of a Critical Regionalism more discretely than Harwell Harris in his address, "Regionalism and Nationalism" which he gave to the North West Regional Council of the AIA, in Eugene, Oregon, in 1954:

Opposed to the Regionalism of Restriction is another type of regionalism; the Regionalism of Liberation. This is the manifestation of a region that is *especially in tune with the emerging thought of the time*. We call such a manifestation "regional" *only because it has not yet emerged elsewhere*. It is the genius of this region to be more than ordinarily aware and more than ordinarily free. Its virtue is that its manifestation has *significance for the world outside itself*. To express this regionalism architecturally it is necessary that there be building,—preferably a lot of building—at one time. Only so can the expression be sufficiently general, sufficiently varied, suffi-



12
Wolf Associates, Fort
Lauderdale Riverfront Plaza,
competition entry, 1982, site
plan and elevation.

9
Harwell H. Harris, "Regionalism and Nationalism",
*Student Publication of the School of Design, North
Carolina State of the University of North Carolina at
Raleigh*, Volume 14, No. 5.

10
Description submitted by Harry Wolf Associates on
September 3, 1982 for the Fort Lauderdale Riverfront
Plaza Competition.

ciently forceful to capture people's imaginations and provide a friendly climate long enough for a new school of design to develop.

San Francisco was made for Maybeck. Pasadena was made for Greene and Greene. Neither could have accomplished what he did in any other place or time. Each used the materials of the place; but it is not the materials that distinguish the work. . . .

A region may develop ideas. A region may accept ideas. Imaginations and intelligence are necessary for both. In California in the late Twenties and Thirties modern European ideas met a still developing regionalism. In New England, on the other hand, European Modernism met a rigid and restrictive regionalism that at first resisted and then surrendered. New England accepted European Modernism whole because its own regionalism had been reduced to a collection of restrictions.⁹

Despite an apparent freedom of expression, such a level of liberative regionalism is difficult to sustain in North America today. Within the current proliferation of highly individualistic forms of narcissism—a body of work which is ultimately cynical, patronising and self-indulgent rather than rooted—only two firms today display any consistent sensitivity towards the evolution of a regional culture which is both specific and critical.

The first example would be the simple, site-responsive houses designed by Andrew Batey and Mark Mack for the Napa Valley area in California; the second would be the work of the architect Harry Wolf, whose work, which has so far been largely restricted to North Carolina, is designed out of Charlotte. Wolf's sensitivity to the specificity of place has perhaps been most intensely demonstrated in his recent competition entry for the Fort Lauderdale Riverfront Plaza. The description of this work at once displays both a feeling for the specificity of the place and a self-conscious reflection on the locus of Fort Lauderdale in history.

The worship of the sun and the measurement of time from its light reach back to the earliest recorded history of man. It is interesting to note in the case of Fort Lauderdale

that if one were to follow a 26 degree latitudinal line around the globe, one would find Fort Lauderdale in the company of Ancient Thebes—the throne of the Egyptian sun god, Ra. Further to the East, one would find Jaipur, India, where heretofore, the largest equinoctial sundial in the world was built 110 years prior to the founding of Fort Lauderdale.

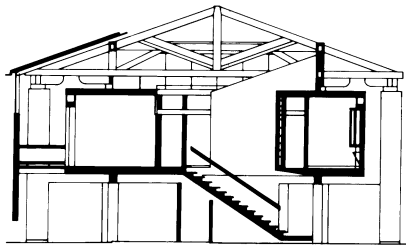
Mindful of these magnificent historical precedents, we sought a symbol that would speak of the past, present and future of Fort Lauderdale. . . . To capture the sun in symbol a great sundial is incised on the Plaza site and the gnomon of the sundial bisects the site on its north-south axis. The gnomon of the double blade rises from the south at 26 degrees 5 minutes parallel to Fort Lauderdale's latitude. . . .

Each of (the) significant dates in Fort Lauderdale's history is recorded in the great blade of the sundial. With careful calculation the sun angles are perfectly aligned with penetrations through the two blades to cast brilliant circles of light, landing on the otherwise shadowy side of the sundial. These shafts of light illuminate an appropriate historical marker serving as annual historical reminders.

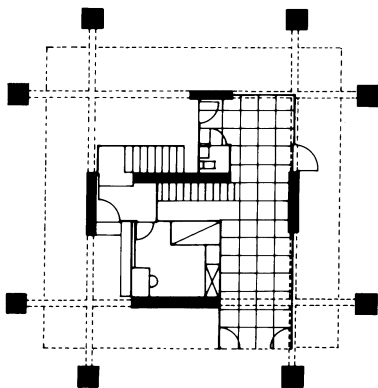
Etched into the eastern side of the plaza, an enlarged map of the City shows the New River as it meets the harbor. The eastern edge of the building is eroded in the shape of the river and introduces light into the offices beneath the Plaza along its path.

The River continues until it meets the semicircle of the water court where the river path creates a wall of water even with the level of the Plaza, providing a sixteen foot cascade into the pool below. The map follows the river upstream until it reaches the gnomon where, at map scale, the juncture of the blade and the river coincide exactly with the site on which the blade stands.¹⁰

In Europe the work of the Italian architect Gino Vallé may also be classified as critical and regionalist inasmuch as his entire career has been centered around the city of Udine, in Italy. From here Vallé was to



13
Gino Valle, Casa Quaglia,
Sutrio, 1956, section.



14
Casa Quaglia, plan.

make one of the earliest post-war reinterpretations of the Italian Lombardy vernacular in the Casa Quaglia built at Sutrio in 1956. Throughout the Fifties, Vallé dedicated himself to the evolution of an industrial format for the Lombardy region. This development reached its zenith in his Zanussi Rex factory built at Pordenone in 1961. Aside from this, he was to extend his capacity for a more richly-textured and inflected regional expression in his thermal baths, built at Arta in 1964 and in his project for the Udine Civic Theatre submitted one year before. Regionalism, as we have seen, is often not so much a collective effort as it is the output of a talented individual working with commitment towards some sort of rooted expression.

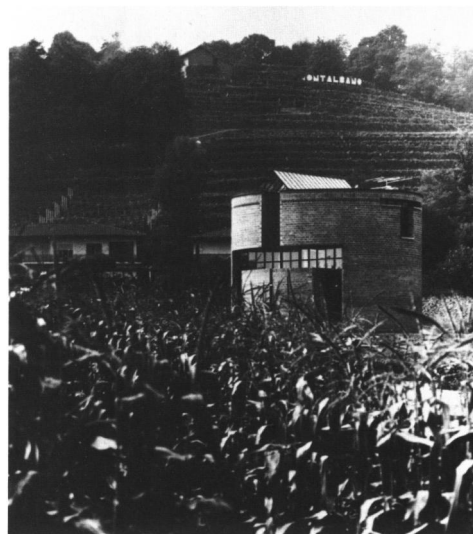
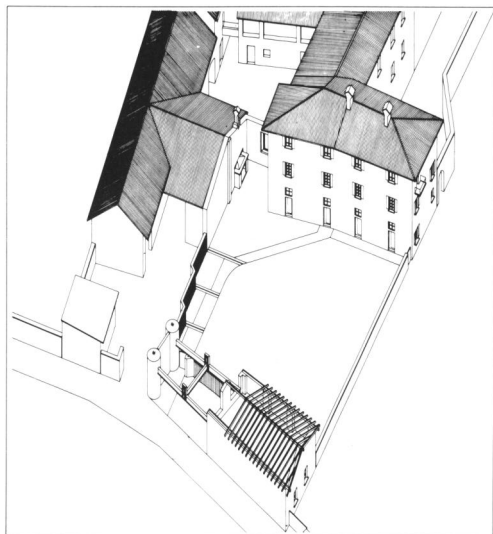
Apart from the Western United States, Regionalism first became manifest in the post-war world in the vestigial city-states of the European continent. A number of regional architects seem to have had their origins in this middle ground in the first decade after the war. Among those of the pre-war generation who have somehow remained committed to this regional inflection one may count such architects as Ernst Gisel in Zurich, Jørn Utzon in Copenhagen, Vittorio Gregotti in Milan, Gino Vallé in Udine, Peter Celsing in Stockholm, Mathias Ungers in Cologne, Sverre Fehn in Oslo, Aris Konstantinides in Athens, Ludwig Leo in Berlin, and the late Carlo Scarpa in Venice. Louis Kahn may also be considered to be a regionally-oriented architect inasmuch as he was to remain committed to Philadelphia, both as myth and reality, throughout his life. It is symptomatic of his concern for preserving the urban qualities of downtown Philadelphia that he should show the central city area as a citadel; as a sector walled in like Carcassonne by an auto-route instead of a bastion and studded on its perimeter with cylindrical parking silos instead of castellated towers.

Switzerland, with its intricate linguistic and cultural boundaries and its tradition of cosmopolitanism, has always displayed strong regionalistic tendencies; ones which have often assumed a critical nature. The subtle cantonal combination of admission and exclusion has always favored the cultivation of extremely dense forms of expression in quite limited areas, and yet, while the cantonal system serves to sustain local culture, the Helvetic Federation facilitates the penetration and assimilation of foreign ideas. Dolf Schnebli's

Corbusian, vaulted villa at Campione d'Italia on the Italo-Swiss frontier (1960) may be seen as initiating the resistance of Swiss regional culture to the rule of international Miesianism. This resistance found its echo almost immediately in other parts of Switzerland, in Aurelio Galfetti's equally Corbusian Rotalini House, in Bellinzona and in the Atelier 5 version of the Corbusian *béton brut* manner, as this appeared in private houses at Motier and Flamatt and in Siedlung Halen, built outside Bern in 1960. Today's Ticinese Regionalism has its ultimate origins not only in this pioneering work of Schnebli, Galfetti and Atelier 5, but also in the Neo-Wrightian work of Tita Carloni.

The strength of provincial culture surely resides in its capacity to condense the artistic potential of the region while reinterpreting cultural influences coming from the outside. The work of Mario Botta is typical in this respect, with its concentration on issues which relate directly to a specific place and with its adaptation of various Rationalist methods drawn from the outside. Apprenticed to Carloni and later educated under Carlo Scarpa in Venice, Botta was fortunate enough to work, however briefly, for both Kahn and Le Corbusier during the short time that they each projected monuments for that city. Evidently influenced by these men, Botta has since appropriated the methodology of the Italian Neo-Rationalists as his own, while simultaneously retaining, through his apprenticeship with Scarpa, an uncanny capacity for the craft enrichment of both form and space. Perhaps the most striking example of this last occurs in his application of *intonocare lucido* (polished plaster) to the fireplace surrounds of a converted farmhouse that was built to his designs at Ligrignano in 1979.

Two other primary traits in Botta's work may be seen as testifying to his Regionalism; on the one hand, his constant preoccupation with what he terms *building the site*, and, on the other, his deep conviction that the loss of the historical city can only now be compensated for on a fragmentary basis. His largest work to date, namely his school at Morbio Inferiore, asserts itself as a micro-urban realm; as a cultural compensation for the evident loss of urbanity in Chiasso, the nearest large city. Primary references to the culture of the Ticino landscape are also sometimes evoked by Botta at a typical level. An ex-



15
Mario Botta, Farmhouse at
Ligrignano, 1978-79.

16
Mario Botta, Casa Rotunda,
Stabio, 1981.

ample of this would be the house at Riva San Vitale, which refers obliquely to the traditional country summer house or *rocoli* which was once endemic to the region.

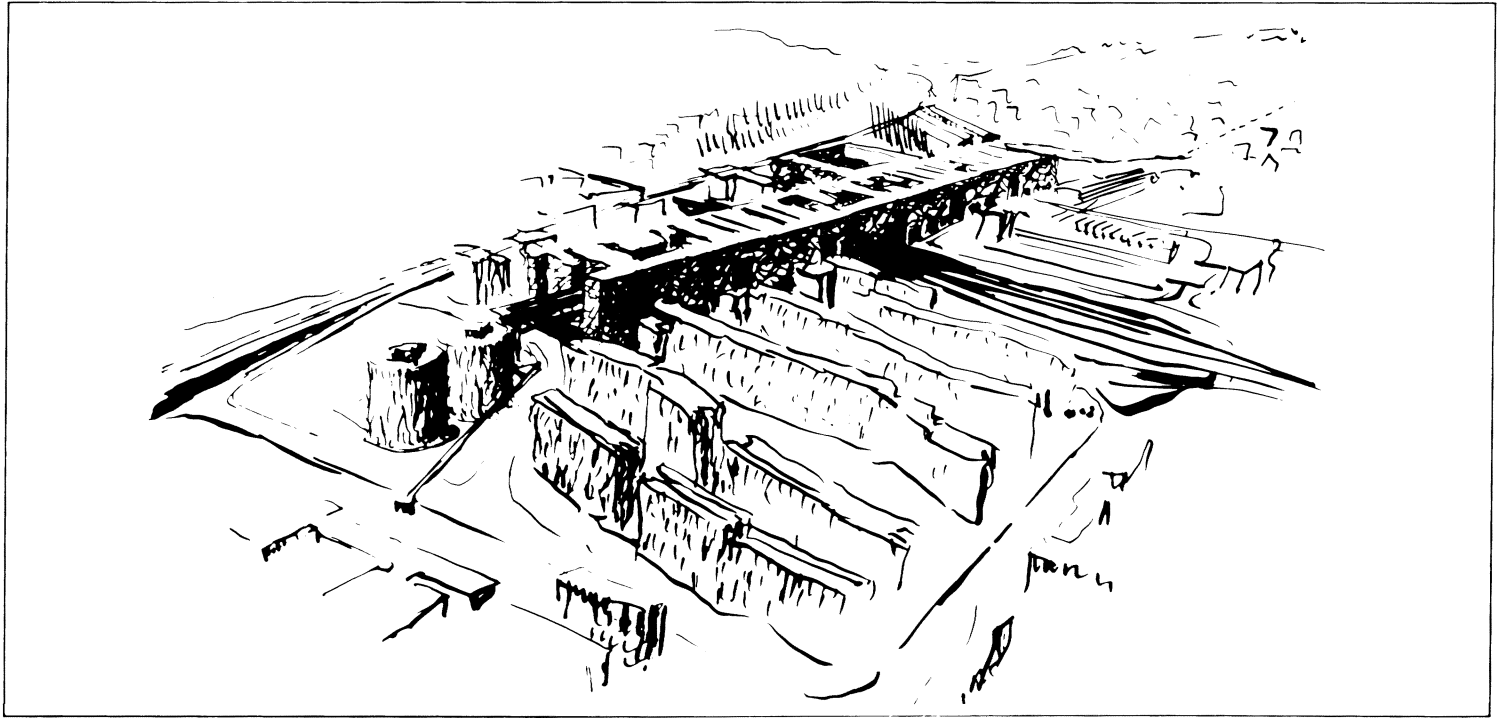
Aside from this specific reference, Botta's houses often appear as markers in the landscape, either as points or as boundaries. The house in Ligorretto, for example, establishes the frontier where the village ends and the agrarian system begins. The visual acoustics of its plan stem from the gun-sight aperture of the house which turns away from the fields and towards the village. Botta's houses are invariably treated in this way, as bunker-belvederes, where the fenestration opens towards selected views in the landscape, thereby screening out, with stoic pathos, the rapacious suburban development that has taken place in the Ticino region over the past twenty years. Finally, his houses are never layered into the contours of a given site, but rather "build the site"¹¹ by declaring themselves as primary forms, set against the topography and the sky. Their surprising capacity to harmonize with the still partially agricultural nature of the region stems directly from their *analogical* form and finish; that is to say, from the fair-faced, concrete block of their structure and from the silo or barn-like shell forms in which they are housed, these last alluding to the traditional agricultural structures from which the form derives.

Despite this demonstration of a convincing, modern, domestic sensibility, the most critical aspect of Botta's achievement does not reside in his houses, but rather in his public projects; in particular

in the two large-scale proposals which he designed in collaborative with Luigi Snozzi. Both of these are "viaduct" buildings and as such are certainly influenced to some degree by Kahn's Venice Congress Hall project of 1968 and by Rossi's first sketches for Galaratese of 1970. The first of these projects, their *Centro Direzionale di Perugia* of 1971, is projected as a "city within a city" and the wider implications of this design clearly stem from its potential applicability to many Megalopolitan situations throughout the world. Had it been realized, this regional center, built as an arcaded galleria, would have been capable of signaling its presence to the urban region without compromising the historic city or fusing with the chaos of the surrounding suburban development. A comparable clarity and appropriateness was obtained in their Zurich Station proposal of 1978. The advantages of the urban strategy adopted in this instance are so remarkable as to merit brief enumeration. This multileveled bridge structure would have not only provided four separate concourse levels to accommodate shops, offices, restaurants, etc., but would have also constituted a new head building at the end of the covered platforms. At the same time it would have emphasized an indistinct urban boundary without compromising the historic profile of the existing terminus.

In the case of the Ticino, one can lay claim to the actual presence of a Regionalist School in the sense that, after the late 1950s, this area produced a body of remarkable buildings, many of which were collectively achieved. This much is clear, not only from the diversity of Botta's own collaborators but also from

11
Vittorio Gregotti, *L'Architettura come territorio*. Botta took his notion of building the site from the thesis that Gregotti advanced in this book.



17

12
Tadao Ando, "From Self-Enclosed Modern Architecture Toward Universality", *The Japan Architect*, no. 301, May 1982, pp. 8-12.

associations which took place without his participation. Once again credit is due to the older generation such as Galfetti, Carloni, and Schnebli, who frequently collaborated with younger architects. There is no room here to list all the architects involved, but some idea of the scope of this endeavor may be obtained from the fact that the Ticinese "school" comprised well over twenty architects who were variously to build some forty buildings of note between 1960 and 1975.

It is hardly surprising that Tadao Ando, who is one of the most regionally conscious architects in Japan should be based in Osaka rather than Tokyo and that his theoretical writings should formulate more clearly than any other architect of his generation a set of precepts which come close to the idea of Critical Regionalism. This is most evident in the tension that he perceives as obtaining between the process of universal modernization and the idiosyncrasy of rooted culture. Thus we find him writing in an essay entitled, "From Self-Enclosed Modern Architecture toward Universality,"

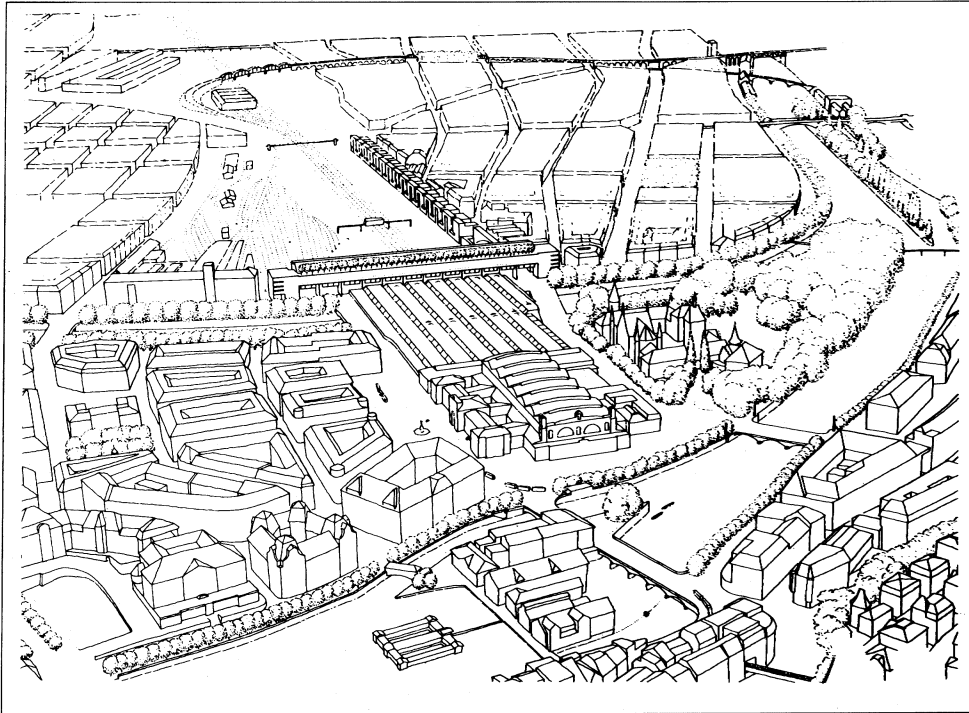
Born and bred in Japan, I do my architectural work here. And I suppose it would be possible to say that the method I have selected is to apply the vocabulary and techniques developed by an open, universalist Modernism in an enclosed realm of

individual lifestyles and regional differentiation. But it seems difficult to me to attempt to express the sensibilities, customs, aesthetic awareness, distinctive culture, and social traditions of a given race by means of an open, internationalist vocabulary of Modernism . . .¹²

As Ando's argument unfolds we realize that for him an *Enclosed Modern Architecture* has two meanings. On the one hand he means quite literally the creation of enclaves or, to be specific, court-houses by virtue of which man is able to recover and sustain some vestige of that time-honoured triad, — *man, nature, culture*— against the obliterating onslaught of Megalopolitan development. Thus Ando writes:

After World War II, when Japan launched on a course of rapid economic growth, the people's value criteria changed. The old fundamentally feudal family system collapsed. Such social alterations as concentration of information and places of work in cities led to overpopulation of agricultural and fishing villages and towns (as was probably true in other parts of the world as well); overly dense urban and suburban populations made it impossible to preserve a feature that was formerly most characteristic of Japanese resi-

17
Mario Botta and Luigi Snozzi, New Administrative Center at Perugia, competition entry, 1971, sketch.



known. Still they are capable of stimulating recollection of their own innermost forms and stimulating new discoveries. This is the aim of what I call closed modern architecture. Architecture of this kind is likely to alter with the region in which it sends out roots and to grow in various distinctive individual ways, still, though closed, I feel convinced that as a methodology it is open in the direction of universality.¹⁵

What Ando has in mind is the development of a trans-optical architecture where the richness of the work lies beyond the initial perception of its geometric order. The tactile value of the tectonic components are crucial to this changing spatial revelation, for as he was to write of his Koshino Residence in 1981:

Light changes expressions with time. I believe that the architectural materials do not end with wood and concrete that have tangible forms but go beyond to include light and wind which appeal to our senses. . . . Detail exists as the most important element in expressing identity. . . . Thus to me, the detail is an element which achieves the physical composition of architecture, but at the same time, it is a generator of an image of architecture.¹⁶

That this opposition between universal civilization and autochthonous culture can have strong political connotations has been remarked on by Alex Tzonis in his article on the work of the Greek architects Dimitris and Susana Antonakakis, entitled, "The Grid and Pathway," in which he demonstrates the ambiguous role played by the universality of the *Schinkelschuler* in the founding of the Greek state. Thus we find Tzonis writing:

In Greece, historicist regionalism in its neo-classical version had already met with opposition before the arrival of the Welfare State and of modern architecture. It is due to a very peculiar crisis which explodes around the end of the nineteenth century. Historicist regionalism here had grown not only out of a war of liberation; it had emerged out of interests to develop an urban elite set apart from the peasant world and its rural "backwardness" and to create a dominance of town over country: hence the special appeal of histor-

dential architecture; intimate connection with nature and openness to the natural world. What I refer to as an Enclosed Modern Architecture is a restoration of the Unity between house and nature that Japanese houses have lost in the process of modernization.¹³

In his small courtyard block houses, often set within dense urban fabric, Ando employs concrete in such a way as to stress the taut homogeneity of its surface rather than its weight, since for him it "is the most suitable material for realizing surfaces created by rays of sunlight . . . (where) . . . walls become abstract, are negated, and approach the ultimate limit of space. Their actuality is lost, and only the space they enclose gives a sense of really existing."¹⁴

While the cardinal importance of light is present in theoretical writings of Louis Kahn and Le Corbusier, Ando sees the paradox of spatial limpidity emerging out of light as being peculiarly pertinent to the Japanese character and with this he makes explicit the second and broader meaning which he attributes to the concept of a self-enclosed modernity. He writes:

Spaces of this kind are overlooked in utilitarian affairs of everyday living and rarely make themselves

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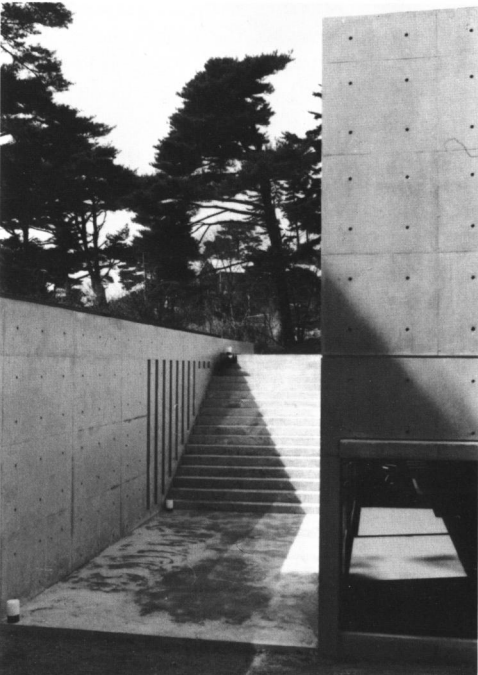
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Tadao Andô, *The Japan Architect*.

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Tadao Andô, *The Japan Architect*.

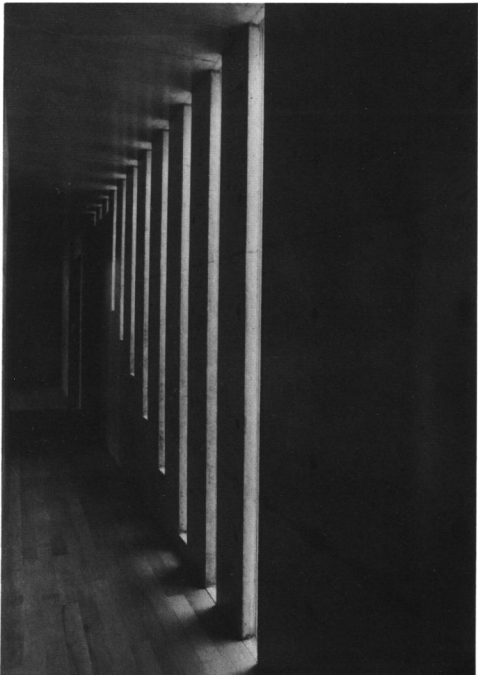
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Tadao Andô, *The Japan Architect*.

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Tadao Andô, *The Japan Architect*.

18
Botta and Snozzi, Zurich
Railway Station, competition
entry, 1978.



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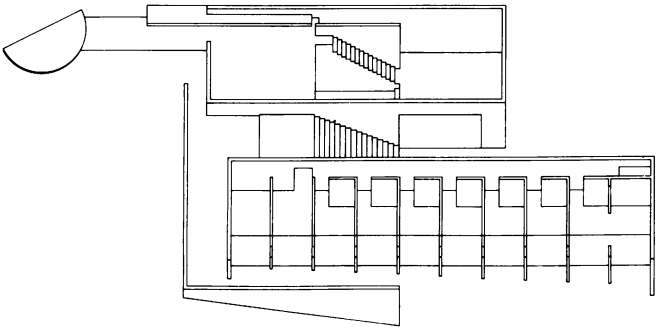
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Tadao Andô, Koshino
Residence, 1981, plan
projection.

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Koshino Residence, courtyard.

21
Koshino Residence, interior.

22
Koshino Residence, living
room.



19

17

Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre, "The Grid and the Pathway: An Introduction to the Work of Dimitris and Susana Antonakakis, with Prolegomena to a History of the Culture of Modern Greek Architecture", *Architecture in Greece*, no. 15, 1981, pp. 164–78.

icist regionalism, based on the book rather than experience, with its monumentality recalling another distant and forlorn elite. Historical regionalism had united people but it had also divided them.¹⁷

While the various reactions which followed the nineteenth-century triumph of the Greek Nationalist, Neo-classical style varied from vernacular historicism in the Twenties to a more thorough-going modernist approach which, immediately before and after the Second World War, first proclaimed modernity as an ideal and then directly attempted to participate in the modernization of Greek society.

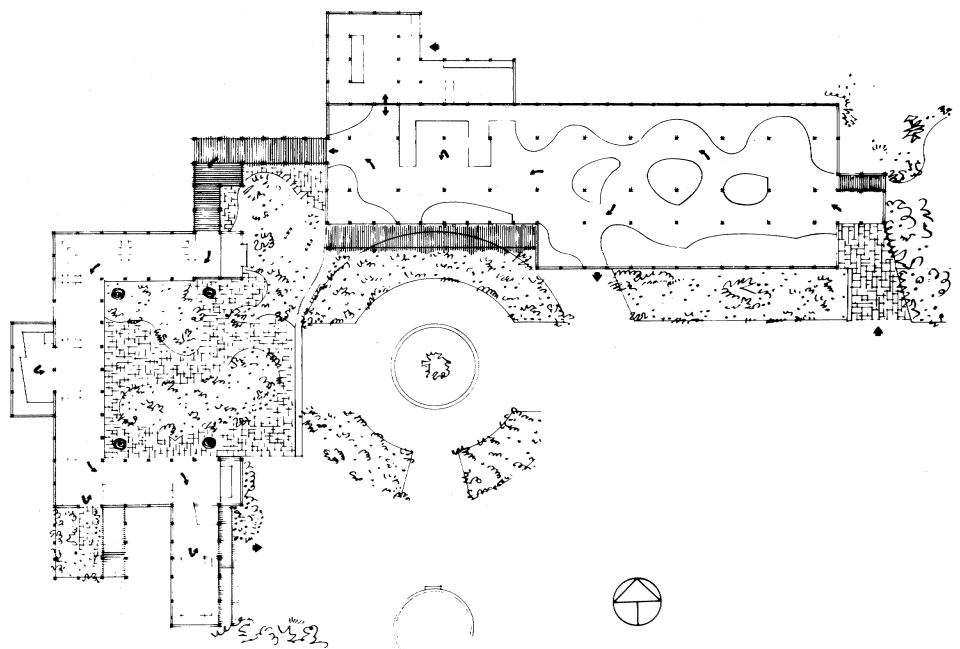
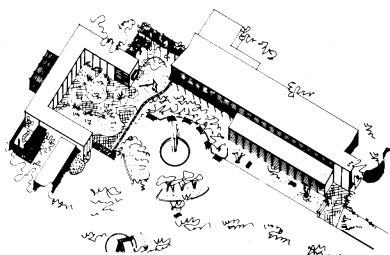
As Tzonis points out, critical regionalism only began in Greece with the thirties projects of Dimitri Pikionis and Aris Konstantinidis, above all in the latter's Eleusis house of 1938 and his garden exhibition built in Kifissia in 1940. It then manifested itself with great force in the pedestrian zone that Dimitri Pikionis designed for the Philopappus Hill, in 1957, on a site immediately adjacent to the Acropolis in Athens. In this work, as Tzonis points out:

Pikionis proceeds to make a work of architecture free from technological exhibitionism and compositional conceit (so typical of the mainstream of architecture of the 1950s) a stark naked object almost de-

materialized, an ordering of "places made for the occasion," unfolding around the hill for solitary contemplation, for intimate discussion, for a small gathering, for a vast assembly.

To weave this extraordinary braid of niches and passages and situations, Pikionis identifies appropriate components from the lived-in spaces of folk architecture, but in this project the link with the regional is not made out of tender emotion. In a completely different attitude, these envelopes of concrete events are studied with a cold empirical method, as if documented by an archaeologist. Neither is their selection and their positioning carried out to stir easy superficial emotion. They are platforms to be used in an everyday sense but to supply that which, in the context of contemporary architecture, everyday life does not. The investigation of the local is the condition for reaching the concrete and the real, and for re-humanizing architecture.¹⁸

Unlike Pikionis, Konstantinidis, as his career unfolded, moved closer to the rationality of the universal grid and it is this affinity that now leads Tzonis to regard the work of Antonakakis as lying somewhere between the autochthonous pathway of Pikionis and universal grid of



23
Dimitri Pikionis and Aris Konstantinides, Garden Exhibition, Kifissia, 1940, plan and axonometric.

19

Tzonis and Lefaivre, *Architecture in Greece*.

Konstantinidis. Are we justified in seeing this dualism as yet a further manifestation of the interaction between culture and civilization, and if so, what are the general consequences? Tzonis writes of Antonakakis' work and of critical regionalism in general that: "... (it) is a bridge over which any humanistic architecture of the future must pass, even if the path may lead to a completely different direction."¹⁹

Perhaps the one work of Antonakakis which expresses this conjunction of grid and the pathway more succinctly than any other is the Benakis Street apartment building completed to their designs in Athens in 1975; a building wherein a concept of labyrinthine path-movement, drawn from the islands of Hydra, is woven into the structural fabric of a rationalist grid—the ABA concrete frame which sustains the form of the building.

If any central principle of critical regionalism can be isolated, then it is surely a commitment to *place* rather than *space*, or, in Heideggerian terminology, to the nearness of *raum*, rather than the distance of *spatium*. This stress on place may also be construed as affording the political *space of public appearance* as formulated by Hannah Arendt. Such a conjunction between the *cultural* and the *political* is difficult to achieve in late capitalist society. Among the occasions in the last decade on which it has appeared on

more general terms, recognition should be given to the development of Bologna in the Seventies. In this instance, an appraisal was made of the fundamental morphology and typology of the city fabric, and *socialist* legislation was introduced to maintain this fabric in both *old* and *new* development. The conditions under which such a plan is feasible must of necessity be restricted to those surviving traditional cities which have remained subject to responsible forms of political control. Where these *cultural* and *political* conditions are absent, the formulation of a creative cultural strategy becomes more difficult. The universal Megalopolis is patently antipathetic to a dense differentiation of culture. It intends, in fact, the reduction of the environment to nothing but commodity. As an abacus of development, it consists of little more than a hallucinatory landscape in which nature fuses into instrument and vice versa. Critical Regionalism would seem to offer the sole possibility of resisting the rapacity of this tendency. Its salient cultural precept is 'place' creation; the general model to be employed in all future development is the *enclave*—that is to say, the bounded fragment against which the ceaseless inundation of a place-less, alienating consumerism will find itself momentarily checked.