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RADICAL MODERNS

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MODERN QUESTIONS, RADICAL QUESTIONS

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Marcelo Tramontano: Carlos, I would like us to begin by conceptualizing the notion of Modern, consolidated in the period between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and its evolution until the mid-twentieth century, corresponding to the timeframe proposed by this V!RUS edition. I propose to consider what was like to be modern at that time, in a broader sense, with the background of the fact that this notion begins to be built during the Renaissance, at the beginning of the so called Modern Times. After the revolutions of the seventeenth century and the consolidation of scientific and technological thinking of the eighteenth century, with what kind of conceptions of Modern and modernity are we dealing in present day?

Carlos Martins: First, I would like to thank the invitation of V!RUS and say that I found the idea to dedicate an edition to the Radical Moderns rather pertinent or, if we would like, to Radical Modernity, precisely for what you have just exposed. One of the difficulties of speaking on Modern and Modernity is its timeframe. We are talking about what exactly? Of a process which begins in the Renaissance? In fact, we learned in high school that the Modern Age begins in the sixteenth century. Here, today, we will talk about a phenomenon that occurred a century ago, and at high school we learned that this moment is already located in the Contemporaneity, not Modern anymore.

I think, then, correct to remember Thomas Kuhn and his idea about scientific revolutions. The idea is that every revolution has a dimension of denial and overcoming. But also, the central thesis of Thomas Kuhn is that scientific revolutions have a much larger dimension of permanence than of change, and that it is important to investigate and understand both dimensions. I find it very relevant to focus on this new, radical modernity at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, because it is a qualitatively new stage of a process, which actually begins in the



sixteenth century marked by two fundamental questions. One is the beginning of a scientific reasoning, and the claim that science should be incorporated into everyday life. As we know, from the History of Architecture, this claim strikes at the very scope of the arts - the claim of science as an integral element of artistic production. To stay at the most banal example: the incorporation of the perspective as a rational and scientific mechanism of representation. Or, to give another example, even conventional, in the History of Architecture: the use of the calculation in the design of the famous dome of Santa Maria Del Fiore.

The second fundamental question that marks the idea of Modern, starting from its origins in the sixteenth century, is the geographical expansion of the world. It supposes the beginning of what much later will be called globalization, with huge impact on everyday life. We could, for example, try to imagine what the Europeans were eating at the time of the discovery of America. From this on, it has been a process of diversification, including at this level of food, and also their counterparts: the knowledge goes to travel, food goes to travel, diseases begin to travel and the whole problem of the indigenous people of America, for example, is extremely marked by all this. In this double sense, the extension of the known geographic scale and of the incorporation of science as a constitutive element of all spheres of social life, including artistic and architectural ones, what exactly happens? What is the quality leap, what is the difference that arises, in my opinion, at that particular moment which is the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century?

First, there is the incorporation of a process that comes from the nineteenth century - the so-called Industrial Revolution - the incorporation of scientific knowledge as a transforming element, on a scale hitherto unheard of, to everyday life. If, until then, one could also think of the old Marxist scheme of infrastructure and superstructure, in which science would be the superstructure, in the nineteenth century this is reversed. Science becomes the infrastructure. Knowledge of electricity and knowledge in chemistry become central elements and driving force of a set of transformations that have a brutal impact on everyday life. It is very interesting to note, in this particular moment, the shift from an industrial city to something else, more difficult to define, which is the modern city, the great city, the metropolis. This is not precisely the classical industrial city of Friedrich Engels' description. In this shift, there is a double movement; on the one hand, the emergence of new disciplines: new scientific knowledge, emergence of history throughout the nineteenth century, but especially of sociology, or of the so called sociologies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In particular, the emergence of something that begins to establish itself as urban sociology, together with the emergence of the need to apply scientific knowledge in order to understand the mode of operation of the society and the perception, increasingly stronger and clearer, that the new forms of life of this new society are essentially urban life forms.

This shift is crucial. Quantitatively, it only is expressing itself later, perhaps in the mid-twentieth century, in the moment when the population of the planet as a whole becomes predominantly urban. However, the first signs of this process are already visible at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century. On the other hand, there is a movement in parallel to this one, which is introduced by another discipline, then also newly created, which is the History of Art. Art History tends to show a process by which artistic manifestations go with a certain relentlessness, to a fundamental novelty, at least in the recent history of a thousand years earlier, that is the emergence of abstraction.

Thus, there are two movements that depart from different sides to come to a common conclusion: that this new type of society, whose *locus* is a new type of city, which is



neither the traditional city or the industrial city, is a modern city. For some it will be the metropolis and to others it is the *Grossstadt*, the big city, metropolitan or not. It has a fundamental attribute which is the idea of abstraction. Abstraction in different levels. Abstraction understood as a denaturalization process. There are, of course, many authors working this process, but it is possible to point out two of them. Wilhelm Worringer, a major reference in Art History, points to a path of artistic production, of the will of art that goes from proximity to nature to a process of abstraction. On the other hand, Georg Simmel, especially in the essay "The Metropolis and mental life", understands this process as an increasingly denatured life. What is the sense? Denatured both within the space and the time contexts. According to the reading proposed by sociology or political economy, the denaturalization of space and of time is a process of changing conditions of everyday life, an immediate consequence of the fundamental characteristic of modern society, which is monetization.

The monetization, money as fundamental support of social relations, carries, in this reading, a process of abstraction of qualities. This is identified in both sociological studies then in various cultural events. In the literature, it appears with great force, for example, in the book of Robert Musil, depicting the Vienna of the early twentieth century, whose symptomatic title is "The man without qualities." This means that the individual ceases to have qualities in the sense of what is inherent in his person, his family origin, his religion, his beliefs, and becomes simply occupying positions. A position in which fundamental elements disappear, that would qualify his role in the communities where he lived until then. That is, his family background does not matter anymore, his religious conviction, but it matters his position in society, and it is defined by that element, abstract by definition, which is money.

The essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" draws attention to the fact that the fundamental characteristic of this new social *locus* - the modern city, which is not, I insist, the industrial city - is, on the one hand, the abstraction, and on the other hand, a central contradiction between the affirmation of the subject autonomy, the individual, as never had been in history, and also the idea of free will, the idea that you are absolutely master of your life. You marry who you want and not who your family or social determinants establish. This is the time of full affirmation of modern subjectivity, the individual statement, which comes from the illustrated tradition. But also, it is when one realizes that this is an insoluble and central contradiction with an interdependence among individuals, as it also never had had in history. Never the individual had been so dependent on other people to provide his own material and mental life. He is no longer able to produce his own food, or his clothing, and so on.

A key feature of this contradiction is the abstraction of social relations, especially about the relations with time. There is no more the so called natural time. There is the clock. It marks a time so arbitrary and conventional that a government can decide that, from now, people should delay their watches because it is an hour less. It is symptomatic that in some of the most iconic works of architecture of that time, for example the Fagus Factory, the highlight is the clock. The clock becomes a central element because it is regulating people's lives. People's time is denatured. They are no longer up to work when the sun rises, or returning from work when the sun goes down. Coming rain, sunshine, whether winter or summer, there is an abstract determination. Is it seven o'clock? It depends. If the government decides so, it is not seven, but eight o'clock. In a world map with the definition of time zones, this issue is clearly marked. There is denaturalization of space too, because there are not anymore conditions to move around in the big city through natural references. It is not like going anymore over to the bakery of Mister Joaquim, there to turn right, walk up to the pharmacy of Mister Stephen and arrive at where you wanted to go. To move



in urban areas now requires a set of conventional rules, therefore denatured. Going to the street that has an "X" name, without being necessary to know the origin of that name, seeking the house number "y" and going up to the whatever apartment number "z". Today, it is about obeying the GPS.

But what other attributes have this new *locus*, so called - perhaps in the absence of a better expression - the modern city? In addition to abstraction, the contradiction between the assertion of subjectivity and of absolute individuality, and the increasing interdependence among people, it is marked by a hypertrophy of sensory stimuli. In fact, this new town, which is no longer the industrial city, is extremely noisy, extremely malodorous, and marked by a number of visual stimuli that literally would fry our brain if we had to pay attention to all of them. That is, it is a city of people increasingly deaf, that reduce their olfactory and visual sensitivity by physiological defense mechanisms: when exposed to high levels of noise for a long time, the ear, physiologically speaking, has mechanisms that reduce the sensitivity in order to protect the body.

This poses a dilemma, and here we come to the modern radicals, at least thinking in the context of artistic production, from architecture to urban planning, painting, poetry, music. The dilemma is this: is there still the possibility of making art in this new *locus*? Is it still making sense in composing, if a musician, a composer, conductor, has to address to an increasingly deaf audience? What sense is there still in painting, sculpting or making architecture, if people, as a matter of physiological self-defence, block their visual capability? What sense is there in making architecture, if people enjoy this city and live there for a protection that eventually became known as 'distract perception'? There is, then, a situation in which arises, perhaps for the first time since the Renaissance, an apparent radical impossibility of performing any artistic activity. Composing for the deaf, paint for the blind who "self-blind" themselves, making architecture in a world where perception is distract: by definition, people do not look where they are passing by.

This puts a new perspective. When we talk about radical moderns, or in modern movement, or in modern architecture and urbanism, we should stop thinking of them as a style, or as a set of responses to a situation. Because the limits of the terms "modern movement", "modernism", "modern art and architecture" are very clear and it is therefore necessary to consider the diversity of their internal manifestations. What allows me to call "movement" to demonstrations as distinct from each other as Suprematism, Futurism, Expressionism and Surrealism? Why can I call all of it Modern? How can I put them all in the same conceptual drawer? My hypothesis is that what such events have in common - and then we come to the idea of radical moderns - are not the answers but the fact that they are facing the same questions. Basically: is it possible to still make art in this new world? And other questions that arise immediately from this: if I want to state that it is possible, if I'm willing to pursue this possibility, then how is this art? It certainly cannot be the art of previous centuries. A musician as Stravinsky cannot put himself in the same situation as Mozart, Beethoven, Mahler. Why is it so? Because there is another radical aspect in this whole process, which is the emergence of a completely new and unknown character so far in history: the crowd.

The crowd is the sociological fact that demarcates the disruption of this moment of the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, in relation to previous moments. The crowd is not common people, not mass. The crowd is the best essential contradiction of the expression of the individual who asserts his autonomy and, at the same time, is totally interdependent. The crowd is where the individual is absolutely lonely. It is the space of solitude. But the crowd is at the same time,



character and recipient of the artistic production of that moment. The crowd also set itself as audience. Until then, artists had not exactly an audience. When Mozart composed one of his pieces, he knew it would be first presented at the hall of Bishop "X". He even knew the forty people who would be there, and knew what a certain Countess "Y" would like it or not. The musician had therefore a direct relationship with its audience. The emergence of this new character which is the crowd, and that in the context of the arts, is expressed as audience, introduces a brutal difference in artistic production. The artist does not know who are the people to whom he intends his production. He does not know who will buy a record, who will buy a book, or who will post on its wall a poster.

Then we have a situation that requires radicalism. Radicalism, first, to ask if art is still possible. Second, to say that yes, it is still possible. And in that case, having to answer the question: how will it be? How should be this art which need to realize that people are increasingly blind, deaf, that they are an undifferentiated mass, that they are not anymore people, but a crowd or audience? How to address them? What needs to change in the production of art, or what needs to be understood as art so I can say that art is still possible, it still has room in this new world, this new society? Hence a first consequence, of which one hears so often and goes unnoticed, is the idea that modern art is self-reflective. And self-reflective means what? It means that it has to ask itself how it operates, in order to respond to the new given condition, that of the crowd, of the audience, or in other words, of the idea of universality.

It is a pretension, and pretension as the needed two-ways of this radical modernity: it is the prospect of speaking to the entire planet. In this process that begins in the sixteenth century, the turn from the late nineteenth century to the twentieth century is a key milestone because it is when the capitalist mode of production - which rose by the evolution from mercantile, industrial, and so on - reaches the point that some call Imperialism, whose main issue is that, for the first time in human history, it covers the entire planet. It is the first time in a hundred thousand years of human existence, in which there is a mode of production that organizes the most distant and disparate regions of the planet. This poses an additional problem. The idea of universality was, even then, a mere abstraction, a mere spiritual building: 'I think that all men are born equal and therefore are endowed with a common attribute to all that is the reason.' Okay, this is what illustration tells us. However, beyond this common substrate - the reason - now there was another fundamental element: all men in the world are incorporated in the same production process, although differently, uneven and combined. The rubber tappers in the Brazilian state of Acre are participating in a process that has to do with the automobile industry, as the petrol, as the steel industry. Therefore, universality is no longer an abstract concept and becomes a real challenge.

In Art, this is one of the major problems of the moment. How to talk the same way to people scattered in different countries with different histories, who speak different languages, in different cultural traditions? It is also there from where comes, in my opinion, the theme of abstraction. We seek to understand what, in different artistic languages, could be the essential manifestation, able to be understood by any human being, anywhere on the planet, regardless of their culture, of their literary education, pictorial, and so on. The theme of abstraction emerges as a possible answer to this. It does not come by reverie of the artists. There is an effort - going back to the beginning of the conversation - to bring reasoning, precision and logic of scientific and technological production, in this case of the industry, into the artistic procedures. This is not only to incorporate science to artistic procedures. It also happens, and the most direct example is the development of gestalt psychology, which deals with the trend to set up a complete form from the simple presentation of some of its details.



It is the attempt to establish or to verify, through perception, the existence of certain directly physiological processes that do not depend on the cultural background.

There is a bet, in this case, the fact that this is a scientific instrument to reach this potential universality of artistic communication. On the other hand, as I said, during this process throughout the nineteenth century, science was no longer a superstructure and became infrastructure. This means that science is being increasingly technological, being part of the industrial fabrication process. It is so for Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe - at the same time seen as a problem and a possible solution. Because if I want to address myself to the crowd and if I want to do a work that has universal validity, I need this work physically to reach the crowd. Hence, there is the subject of technical reproducibility, so the issue of production in series and the possibility of industrialization.

Given this broader framework of determinations, the radicalness of these Moderns of the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century lays, to say so, in the courage with which they faced these questions: is it possible to still make art in this world? And if it is possible, how is this art? How it takes into account both the fact that their audience is diverse, that individuals have their limitations and their sensitivity decreased, searching for ways of communication, seeking languages able to overcome the specific physical conformations? How to communicate a visual message to a sector of humanity that has not gone through the perspective training experience, or in other words, that did not understand the perspectival representation as natural? The first thing - and Gestalt helps - is to show that it is not natural, but constructed. A native of Borneo, when observing the representation that we traditionally make of a cube, does not see the cube. So how does he observe?

This helps to understand, for example in the pictorial case, the interest of these radical moderns in non-Western forms of representation. In the case of Cubism and Surrealism, passing practically through all the pictorial movements, there is a huge interest in African Art or so called primitive art. Nothing allows us to say that those masks, or sceptres, or thrones were for African, Amerindian and Asian seen as Art in the sense that the West defines it. It is defined as something apart from everyday life, which demands a different fruition attitude of the daily attitude, which has a certain sanctity. Why this interest of Picasso and Cubism in general, or Surrealism for these objects? Because another system of representation and expression is shown that does not meet the Eurocentric view of perspective as a culturally naturalized representation form.

Why the interest of musicians engaged in this process of radical renewal, to rethink their discipline from the so called popular manifestations? Stravinsky, when visiting Cuba, reported that he was going through the streets frantically making musical notations of the rhythms he heard, and at one point he writes in his diary: "At one point I gave up because it was too complex, it was too sophisticated to incorporate."

Speaking of Modernity or Radical Moderns, is to speak of the necessary addressing of some fundamental questions, but also to recognize that, pictorially, architecturally, musically, the answers have a huge diversity. It is possible, however, to identify some common fundamental strategies. One is called the shock strategy. If the denatured condition of man's life in the modern city is the lack of attention, a distraught route, therefore the first thing to do is to draw his attention. This means necessarily to provoke a shock. At the launch of the Rite of Spring, at the Paris Opera, for an audience used to traditional music, this shock is at the beginning of the musical play: a strong rhythmic percussion that can only be perceived as pure barbarism by that audience. What have you thinking, in the Paris Opera, before the Parisian audience,



playing a brutal eardrum that seems to come from Africa or Cuba, or the distant Soviet muzhiks? The shock of the strategy is a "pay attention!", a "please, listen to me!".

Marcelo Tramontano: Would it be possible to identify that in architecture too?

Carlos Martins: In architecture, the shock strategy involves several dimensions. The suppression of the ornament is one of them. My reading of the abolition of ornament is less coming from the world of ethics, which states that ornament is over. I do not think it is a purist choice. I see in it at least an essential dimension, which is the shock strategy. People were so used to seeing ornamental manifestations indicating that a space was noble, possibly indicating their function - 'if this building has Doric columns, this should be a court' - and suddenly they see something they can not decode immediately, which forces them to stop and... look. The shock is therefore a key strategy. This moment, when all artistic production is being forced to redefine itself, is marked, in the case of architecture, by a movement that socially proposes a redefinition of its status. In addition to asking who your audience is, how to operate, and so on, it proposes itself to be another thing it was not until then. And one of the components of this other thing, this new status is the claim itself as knowledge about the city. In a central and radical way.

The vindication, by architecture, of the condition of a knowledge about the city has a history. It is the story of the struggle, throughout the nineteenth century, with doctors, lawyers, sanitary engineers, which raises a need of redefining the professional market. But in addition, this vindication proposes the incorporation of rationality and accuracy of the industrial world as an update condition of architectural action to reach this new audience, which is the crowd. It is claimed also that it is the responsibility of the architect to look at the organization of social life, which is reflected not only formally but in the discussion and definition of the architecture program. Perhaps this is one of the aspects to whom less attention is paid when talking about the architecture of that period. In the documentation of the first CIAM [the International Congresses of Modern Architecture], you can see that this is practically the first time that architects find themselves in the obligation to also think as sociologists. It builds then a set of essential questions for architecture that never were before important, about the new role of women in the social transformation process, on how to reorganize the housework. No wonder the kitchen theme becomes central. Of course the issue of housing in the new big city scale is decisive. But then the interesting thing is that the architecture at least tries to claim that it cannot be separate from each other the view of the internal organization of the house and the view of the organization of the whole city.

Marcelo Tramontano: This crowd that emerges at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century as a protagonist in social life and in urban areas, will be subject, throughout the whole century, of several developments such as, for example, mass communications. I think, especially, in a series of post-World War II events that marked the 1960s, as the formulation of theories that sought to deal with the complexity, posed by the expansion of the scope and variety of transmitting information. If, on the one hand, these media have never been politically neutral, on the other hand they helped society to see themselves as such. Also from there probably derive concepts that we have today about the city, among them the belief that the active participation of such crowd in decisions about urban life is desirable. I think here in the speeches that validate the so-called citizen manifestations, the idea of creative cities, among others. From your speech, I wonder how we could relate that role from the crowd in the city in the early twentieth century to this active participation stimulated today. What historical processes, started back there, crossed



the twentieth century, being set one hundred years later a situation where it is desirable, perhaps, that even the role of the city planner should be shared with the crowd? I would like to hear you on that.

Carlos Martins: There are here two distinct and important issues. First, these Radical Moderns were thinking their relationship with the crowd and with the city, or more precisely, with the idea of cultural industry within the historic absence of something that becomes decisive in the middle of the century, which are the mass media. This was not clear at the beginning of the century. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the mass media were the cinema, radio and the press. There was no television, and obviously there was nothing even remotely like the Internet and new technologies of communication and information. This is important because another element is introduced in the relationship between the cultural producer and the crowd in the mid-twentieth century that redefines it radically, which is the cultural industry. With a number of impacts including on the valuative dimension.

In 1991, the second centenary of the death of Mozart, it was noticed that it had become very difficult to know whether we should continue to call his music "erudite", at least in the opposite sense to "popular". Mozart is absolutely merged into the cultural industry, which introduces a nondifferentiation of value that is very complicated from the point of view of radical modernity. Certain aspects, that for the radical moderns were a problem to face, are raised and valued positively. I am thinking of the issue of the Situationists. The idea of deambulation, which ultimately is the idea of distraught perception - that for radical modernity is a problem - becomes transformed into a value and another possible form of apprehension, understanding and appropriation of urban space, for example.

The introduction of mass media and the cultural industry causes that the own idea of crowd goes through a transformation in social terms. From the specific point of view of architecture and its attempt to establish itself as planning agent, it seems for me quite relevant and productive the reading proposed by [Manfredo] Tafuri. In the specific case of the Vanguards, this reading is, for me, very stimulating. Tafuri says it makes no sense to think that modern architecture or the modern movement went into crisis in 1950 or 1960. He says that the real crisis of architecture and modern urbanism occurs in 1929. Why? All this construction of a new status of architecture that is claimed as knowledge about the city, as a rigorous technical-scientific knowledge, would ultimately constitute what he calls "the utopia of plans", based on the idea that with a rigorous technical knowledge, it would be possible to control the development of the city. Controlling the development of the city is, of course, to control the development of the productive forces. He says this goes definitely in crisis starting by 1929 because in the Western world there is the Keynesian planning and, in the communist world, the introduction of the five-year plans. So, Tafuri says that at that time the architecture passes of its intention - or pretention, or utopia - to be the planning agent to turn itself one of the planned objects. It is the economic planning that will determine the process of expanding cities and their internal organization. So here we have two moments and two important issues to think about the question you propose.

Marcelo Tramontano: Despite the radical way that they defied these complex issues put in front of them, in your opinion, what the radical moderns of the early twentieth were not able to handle with?

Carlos Martins: They were not able to handle with the emergence of a radically new process of communication, in the way in which the capitalist production process absorbed and instrumentalized what was, at first, a reaction to it. The rationality of



art and of architecture was a reaction to the irrationality of the capitalist system. And the capitalist system absorbed, swallowed, agglutinated, anthropophagically ingested this capacity of reaction by means of the cultural industry. According to a Tafurian perspective, the rug was pulled out much earlier. It is not anymore the architect, nor the coordinator of a multidisciplinary team that simply relies on a State conceived as interested in the common good, who will be the main promoter or organizer of the planning process. He happens to turn himself to be a patient, a particular element of this process.

That said, why continue, a hundred years later, to look into this moment? I would say that not just because it is important to learn about the ability the artistic production had at that moment to face a world, a society, a radically new city. Let us remember the symbolic and material weight of the First World War, incisive in this case. As we read texts of the late 1910s and early 1920s, it is amazing to see how strong was the idea that World War I "killed" the old world: 'it's over!, the world is no longer anything like that, the values are not anymore the same, the organization is not anymore the same'. The war also kills materially the expression of this world - the cities - although on a smaller scale than World War II. But, symbolically, this process of destruction of the world and therefore the idea that there is a new world are fundamental features of this entire generation. The new world has the most diverse ideological manifestations. The new world is both the communist utopia, for some, as it is, in its borders, the utopia of a technical and constructive rationality that avoids the revolution, for Le Corbusier. For him, it is necessary to build to prevent the revolution; for Hannes Meyer, it is necessary to build in order to carry forward the revolution. Anyway, the idea of the new world is a central idea to which they all have to answer.

Perhaps this is one of the elements that presents us the need to re-look at this moment. Especially because of the current emergence of new information and communication technologies, because of the financialization process that we barely call globalization. I would say that art and architecture are again called to the challenge of rethinking their status. The questions 'What is architecture?', 'What is painting?', 'What is music?' are asked again today. What are the architectural processes in view of the world of virtual realities? Should we deny them? Incorporate them? How to work it? What is architecture in this new phase of universalization and financialization? What is architecture and what is city? What is landscape? What are those islands built in coconut shape in Dubai? This is what? This is architecture? This is landscape? This is geography? Where are we?

In his book "S, M, L, XL", Rem Koolhaas reflects on the scales in a way that seems to me interesting. He says that one of the difficulties of thinking architecture today is that we no longer know what it is, because in practice it is a lot of things ranging from interior design to design in more general terms, including Town Planning. How can a single discipline take account of all this? And he says it maybe time to leave the accessory and whining and focus on what is essential, on the decisive, the strategic. For him, this is the large scale. For him, it is to claim again the architecture as knowledge about the city. I would say that this is an issue that is today placed for architecture, worldwide. Architecture is called to rethink what is its purpose because it does not seem reasonable that a discipline still claim itself as a disciplinary body of knowledge covering from the design of a spoon to the planning of the metropolitan area. The idea of a method and a support from a the technical perspective that accounts for all formal problems, that is, to give shape to a spoon as well as to a metropolitan area obviously cannot hold out anymore.



But if it is not that anymore, then what it is? What justifies that our professional regulation says that we are responsible for interior design to urban planning? Is this possible? Does it make sense? Koolhaas thinks not. Paulo Mendes da Rocha also thinks not. These characters, with so different trajectories, have one thing in common: they depart from a modern view. With very different trajectories, but drinking at the source of modern radicalism, they come to very similar conclusions. Koolhaas says it is necessary to focus on what is strategic, i.e., the large-scale, and Paulo Mendes da Rocha says that man does not inhabit the house because the house is only a device: man inhabits the city. This idea that man inhabits the city refers to the question you presented earlier. It means the dilemma of recovering the valuation of public space, in a society where the public and private dimensions are increasingly undifferentiated. What are the possible strategies for recovering public space, the space conceived as our main sphere of action? How to give form to something that, from the standpoint of social substrate is increasingly formless, or at least increasingly difficult to delimit?

In the works of Paulo [Mendes da Rocha] and, in general terms, those of the so called *paulista* architecture - and speaking in *paulista* architecture is already talking about a moment when the poetic reflection of architecture tries to deal with these changes and this new situation - draws attention the way they work in order to tighten the idea of a clear boundary between public space and private space. In the houses of Mendes da Rocha, the asphalt goes until the first stair of access to the house. What is the limit? Where does the house end and starts the town? If I do not know what the boundary between public and private is, how can I enhance the public space? Where is the public space, where does it end? Either way, these questions can only be thought from the assumption that we may be placed in front of a need for a redefinition of the architecture status.

Marcelo Tramontano: I would like to add some wood into this bonfire in order to think what could be the conception of modernity today, under the light of the gene, which we situated in the early twentieth century and of its developments over the century. On the one hand, you spoke of the change of time and space concepts, the ways in which they were understood then and were changed over the century, including due to the wars. On the other hand, another question you pointed out is the relationship between the public and the private, whose borders were becoming less clear. From the 1960s and 1970s, computerization will act more forcefully precisely on these two conceptual pairs - time and space, public and private - in relation to life in the city, in relation to architecture concerns and also to the arts, cinema, literature. How to rethink modernity today, within this computerized context, with all these questions, considering the hybrid spatiality made possible by digital media?

Carlos Martins: Hard to say. Perhaps it is less difficult to start by saying how not do anymore, or what are the limits of this production of a hundred years ago. What - of the poetics, of definition and affirmation of a new status - was lost, and has no more condition of validity? This obviously does not mean adhering to the idea of postmodernity. But what substantial qualitative changes take place in modernity so that this radical modernity of the early twentieth century has lost some of its supports? I think one of them is the question of visuality. Let me explain.

If the commitment to abstraction is a key bet, the idea of an architecture that communicates universally by abstraction goes into crisis in the early 1940's when one realizes, to utter despair of modern radicals, that the so called crowd does not like it. The crowd is unable to understand it. They like the classical architecture, which they can decode. The first warning of this difficulty is the famous joint text of



[Fernand] Léger, [Siegfried] Giedion and [Josep Lluís] Sert, "Nine points on monumentality," which claims a radical reversal of a basic assumption of modern architecture, of the modern architecture movement. Until then, the current idea is the one that [Lewis] Mumford sums up saying that if something is monumental, it is not modern, and if something is modern, it is not monumental. Sert, Giedion and Léger place the first wedge saying that without thinking a new monumentality, not traditional, but modern, the challenge and the ultimate goal of speaking to the crowd are lost in advance. It was therefore necessary to add to the idea of building the city a fifth function. Not just to inhabit, to move, to work and enjoying leisure, but also to build the supports of an urban sociability. They said that if architecture could not present itself as a discipline and produce objects and works that promote a sense of identification, of belonging, it would be bankrupt in its own historical project. That is where comes up the idea of civic center. Besides being great and functional to inhabit, to work, to move in and having leisure, the city must have spaces referring directly to the public space, whose function is to stimulate the idea of belonging. Its inhabitants need to feel identified with this city, this place, this building, this monument.

Moreover, even though the subject of abstraction was placed, there is a certain figurativeness in modern radical architecture. And this figurativeness is no longer the traditional one of orders, ornaments, and so on, but of the mechanical world. The city of [Antonio] Sant'Elia, the construction projects of [Le] Corbusier, Mies [Van Der Rohe] at its limit, is not naturalistic, but there is a figurativeness. It parts from the base that does redefine the social life and this base is the industry, still in its mechanical manifestation. What Constructivism, Futurism, Le Corbusier himself and Mies [Van Der Rohe] do is to bring this figurativeness to architecture. The architecture, if we can say so, within its appropriate limits, represents a mechanical world understood as something that is transforming and configuring society.

Today, what is for us the problem in the passage, starting in the mid-twentieth century and increasingly strong? This idea was presented to me by Sophia Telles. The problem is that the technological base that is reorganizing our social life is invisible, it is electronic, it belongs to the nano scale. How can I figure an electronic world? I can carry out an analogue procedure, draw circuits, but the circuit is just a material support in a process that is actually invisible. How to make visible, how to assume as default of visibility what is invisible? This is an intrinsic problem of the discipline. How does it do that? In part, I think, it is this impossibility that makes room for things like the Postmodernism of the 1980s: not an European postmodernism, in the sense of [Aldo] Rossi, but in a more figurative postmodernism in the sense of [Robert] Venturi. A postmodernism which asks itself: how to take as the basis for the material world, given the impossibility of figuring a mechanical world, and given the impossibility of figuring the world of digital technology, which is by definition invisible? This is not for free that we are talking about a set of phenomena or proposals from a hundred years ago, and we are no longer talking about a set of proposals from twenty years ago, which disappeared from the scene. Who still remembers Leon Krier? And it is not only of postmodernism but also about the so called deconstructivism. It is also a return to the craft, to the profession, because it is also concerned with recovering the geometrical procedures. That is, the architecture is having a huge difficulty to relate to what is outside to it.

I would say, this is a reason to look at this process of a hundred years ago. Obviously not to repeat the same answers, but to understand how a set of changes in social and technological context forced the architecture to rethink its status. Work Sociology makes a distinction, which might be useful in this case, between what it calls profession and occupation. It says that occupation is something that takes place in a



very direct way of the process of technical expertise of labor. Nobody invented a production engineer, or, today, a hedge funds manager. These occupations derive directly from the technical process of specialization of labor. Already the profession, in this aspect of work sociology, much depends on the capacity and strength, even symbolic, by the holders of a certain knowledge to convince society of its importance and value. This is the question we face in our daily lives: what is the difference between an architect and a civil engineer? Why, after all, I have to hire an architect, if a civil engineer can do the same things? No wonder we often find the answer to this in the form of campaigns. They need to explain that 'if you hire an architect, in contrary to what you were imagining, you will save money because the architect does it in a more rational way', and so on. The profession is marked by this condition of having to convince the society about what is its function and its role.

That is what, ultimately, we can call a statute. Because architecture has to convince society of what is its role and social function. I do not know if there are many other professions or areas that permanently put as theme of reflection of events: "What is our social function?". Administrators are not asking this, not production engineers, hedge fund operators, or geologists are not wondering this, but we are. These are symptoms that, in fact, at this moment, architecture needs to look back to ask what it wants to be and what it thinks are the conditions to convince society of what it can be.

Marcelo Tramontano: There is then a question at least intriguing. At the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, the claim of architects to participate in the production process of the cities was successful and, over the century, including in Brazil, the importance of this participation was not lesser. We may recall, for example, that in the 1940s, the IAB [Institute of Architects of Brazil] organized discussions involving society and the Government about the process of the verticalization in big Brazilian cities. The position of these architects was essentially grounded in modern ideals. However, if today we have to ask what an architect is for, would it mean at the same time to admit that the modern luggage he brings with him, his tools to confront contemporary problems, can also no longer serve?

Carlos Martins: Let us think. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the organizing theme of cities belonged to the engineers, to health workers, physicians, lawyers, and the architecture claimed to get into that discussion. In industrial processes, mass production, and so on, the architects were also not there. These were subjects of engineers, economists, of the Fordism discussion, of Taylorism. Architects not only laid up claim to enter this discussion, but more than that, they claimed for themselves a central role in the process. They claimed and managed to do it with relative competence. There was a certain social agreement, the result of a convincement that it was up to architects to do it. I think this observation is central to wonder if architects today are willing to claim again a redefinition of their role.

Or are we satisfied of how especially the financial dynamics assigns us into a role? Was it us, the architects, who claimed, in the 1980s and 1990s, that our central role should be the realization of unique objects, specimens, able to turn themselves into brands - trademarks - of the urban development? Producing skyscrapers, important museums, was it us who claimed this role? Was it the discipline that claimed that role, or it happened due to the acceptance of something imposed by a dynamic defined outside the scope of the discipline? Was it the architecture that put an understanding of the international development process of the years 1980, 1990, or, if you will, to the 2008 crisis, as a process of competition between cities? Or else, have architects accepted a subordinate role in something called Strategic Planning, which in fact, was being defined outside the disciplinary context? I think, besides



looking what happened a hundred years ago in a general way, it is also relevant to this monitoring that you are asking to, more rigorously, about what were the multiple manifestations of the so-called crisis of modern architecture. How architecture was behaving and reacting to face a profound change in the professional solicitations? To what extent we did not transform necessity into virtue? To what extent to do 'Guggenheims' did not become something that architecture took over - the idea of a single work, which is more a brand than an object - wrapped in the discourse that it is valuing public space, when in fact, it is completely debatable? The Agbar Tower is a public space? Why? Even the [museum] Guggenheim [Bilbao] is a public space? They are private spaces, private institutions. That was the tendency of architectural production over the last twenty or thirty years. With the idea of the star system added to it, the architect does not produce more works: he produces brands and is himself a brand. Much more than might have been Gropius or Mies [van de Rohe]. So I think your question is central, and I have the impression that it is not enough just to look at one hundred years ago to answer it. It is necessary to examine in what ways the famous and infamous crisis of modern architecture from 1950 or 1960 was constituted.

Both in the sphere of disciplinary knowledge, as in the context of disciplinary production, which are different things. At the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, perhaps in the architectural activity, it can be identified an effort to incorporate to its internal procedures, some standards, knowledge and, above all, a rationality and a precision that comes from outside. It comes from mathematics, mechanics, and science in general, from the rationality of industrial production. It seeks to bring it in and make it as constitutive of the architectural way of thinking, theorizing and making architecture. From the 1960s onwards, architecture returned to establish strong relationships with external disciplines to it, which were changing. We passed from semiotics to proxemics, linguistic, after to the value of land... On the path of teaching and theoretical production of architecture of the 1960s until now, there is a beautiful article from Françoise Choay. UNESCO organized in the mid-1990s, a symposium to make a kind of state of the art of the Arts. Françoise Choay writes on architecture and she makes a recovery of all external disciplines architecture was trying to be supported by. I would say that perhaps a fundamental difference between this process and the process of the early 1920s is that, at that moment, they were not trying to be supported, but to bring these disciplinary contributions within the operating logic of architecture. It is not what happened from the 1960s until now. We were trying to find the answers that architecture could no longer offer, either in semiotics, either in linguistics, either in the value of land, or in urban sociology. I think there is a deadlock today. I do not believe that it is sustainable to continue reaffirming the social role that the CAU [Council of Architecture and Urbanism] tells us that we have. We do not, and from the point of view of teaching, we have no possibility at all to honestly educate someone to do all this. Now: who do we want to form?

Marcelo Tramontano: This would be my next question!

Carlos Martins: In the [Brazilian Federal] academic exchange program 'Science without Borders', architecture is allocated to a set of disciplines called creative economy: cinema, design... We can say that with a certain provocative intent, as follows: architecture was allocated to a set of knowledge areas or activities whose basic dynamics are the added value by way of the unnecessary.

I would say to begin with, that today, architecture needs to solve out if it wants to be part of the creative economy or if it wants to go back to being knowledge about the city. And the answers I am hearing, from people I respect a lot, are as varied as



possible. Some answer me with the utmost conviction: "Of course, it's creative economy!". Our friends from over a hundred years ago would have been horrified by this response. But maybe it is correct. At the same time, it is very strong among us, especially in this [architecture] school [IAU-USP], but not only in ours, the idea that we keep trying, or wanting to go back to being a knowledge about the city. When you speak in public space, in an ethical dimension of appreciation of the public space because it is the valorisation of citizenship, we are talking about citizenship and not consumption. We are talking about knowledge of the city and not on creative economy. I would say that today's architecture does not have a crisis: it has a dilemma.

Marcelo Tramontano: On this education issue, would we be giving the priority in training professionals able to deal with the urban, with the public, with emerging complexities, together with the society, as it has been claimed in the streets and social movements, or are we training people to deal with the knowledge of that disciplinary field and a profession that depends, first of all, of the professional architect? Or, if we prefer, how would it be possible to combine the two things, in your opinion?

Carlos Martins: This is another key issue and I think, we have not made a balance of all that concerns the relationship between planning and participation. In architecture, this issue also has some three decades, at least. It is the core of international debate with [Christopher] Alexander, with the idea that it is needed to abandon a given authoritarian dimension of architecture, which imposes spatial conditions and, in doing so, it imposes a way of life, ignoring who will suffer this way of life. This criticism claims retroactive effectiveness and value. There are several recent studies showing how the housing complexes of the 1950s had an authoritarian and imposing dimension that ignored the cultural context and socio-economic status of their residents. That perspective gained momentum in the 1980s and 1990s, with the idea of appreciation of the so-called urban social movements. It was the moment of theorizing that demands of a population are demands addressed to the city. This is not anymore about strikes for wages. More recently, we have, on a global scale, a massive claim for the public space, the preservation of squares or for urban mobility. It is clear that this demand is gaining a lot of strength, and it is necessary to evaluate to what extent it presupposes to give up a technical and specific knowledge. The limit of the idea of participation, of the idea of horizontality in decision making on urban space and on physical space, involves the dissolution of the architect's role? Does it imply that it ceases to exist as such? Or is it necessary to rethink a rebalancing between these two dimensions?

This is one of the central questions, which is open to a redefinition of the architecture status. It is not just about a choice between creative economy or knowledge about the city. But look, if the alternative is a knowledge about the city, we get back to the question: what differentiates knowledge about the city from the architect - not only in relation to whom we compare ourselves traditionally, i.e. economists, demographers, engineers, and so on - to a knowledge about the city from citizens? Because if they do not differentiate, then it is meaningless to claim a knowledge about the city. We are citizens and as citizens we enter the horizontal decision-making and participation process. I think this is part of this dilemma.

Marcelo Tramontano: Carlos, one last question before this whole picture we have drawn here: does the future look promising for you?

Carlos Martins: I am a historian. Therefore, it is for me unavoidable to take into account the reference from which we started: a century ago. A century ago, the



average life expectancy in Europe was somewhere around 55 years. In the wonderful peak of the Renaissance, it was 37 or 38 years. Today, our average life expectancy in a country that does not have a so developed sanitation and public health system, like Brazil, it is 70 and something years. We never had so much hunger and misery, but also we never had such a production of wealth. So without accepting or remaining deceived by a positivist view of progress, we live better than before. This is a statistically possible statement. My generation was marked by the possibility of a cataclysmic disruption that was placed in the event of nuclear war. Today, this seems very distant, but for my generation it was absolutely significant. At some point, one of the two madmen could push the red button. Today, the hypothesis of a nuclear cataclysm to destroy the planet 35 times is not anymore considered. On the other hand, it is put, with increasing clarity, a deepening of the enormous inequalities. The latest new is a group of IMF economists saying that all economic policy from the 1980s onwards generates inequality. So the answer to your question: it depends.

It depends on at what level of the pyramid one is. Surely, there is a breakthrough and an improvement from a statistical point of view, relative to the average income and average life expectancy, but on the other hand, there is the threat of an increasingly brutal deepening of inequality: unequal access to all, not only to education and health, but also access to the city. There is the weight of the 'slumming process' and to return to the question of knowledge about the city, maybe we can make here a parallel with the industrial city. An industrial city reform process begins in the mid-nineteenth century, when people realize that at that level of population concentration and lack of sanitation, a very suitable way for epidemics contamination was created. This becomes a social problem when people realize that epidemic is democratic. It contaminates the worker, probably first, because he does not have good physical condition and has less resistance, but it will also contaminate the boss and his family.

Today, we have a contemporary epidemic, a manifestation of the deepening of obscene inequalities in the form of urban violence. It is the urban violence that affects us today, not all in the same way, but it has the potential to affect all of us, regardless of the social scale of the pyramid, where we are. This is what defines, ultimately, the limits to this utopia which it is not possible to give up, which is the idea of the appreciation of the public space as a condition, as a required substrate to citizenship. That is the question that arises today, and that makes it difficult to answer unequivocally to your question. It is no longer an exclusive issue of architects. If there is no political and social process in order to reverse the trend of dismantling of the welfare State - ongoing since the 1980s - the wealth accumulation process of the famous 1% of the world population which owns 65% of the wealth of the planet, and its consequence, which is the production of a growing legion of poor, there will be no space for architecture. Or at least, it will not have room for architecture in the dimension we want to rescue, which is the one committed to citizenship, with the public space. We will be entrenched among architectural anti-beggar devices and armoured vehicles.

Walking in downtown Sao Paulo is nowadays terrifying. They are public spaces that seek to avoid the presence of any citizen and, in particular, this curious thing that is the homeless, which seems to me to be a topic on which we should reflect more. The recent episode of the cold wave in the city of Sao Paulo opened a very interesting discussion. The most immediate criticism is that the city does not offer shelters in sufficient quantity. But some ethnographic studies, and even journalists through interviews, realized that many people do not want to go to shelters. It is curious, because the very word homeless indicates 'lack of', 'absence of', a person 'without a home'. The homeless can be someone who decides to inhabit the city. Of course there



are economic constraints such as the lack of money to return home. Often the homeless is not a homeless: he has a house in outskirts distant of downtown but cannot return home because he has no money to pay for a two-way bus ticket every day.

We know that the number of homeless in the richest country in the world is increasing. The number of homeless today in major US cities is much higher than twenty or thirty years ago. This fact also puts us a central question at the idea of resuming the centrality of urban public space that is 'who is the urban audience?'. We can no longer consider an abstract audience as a hundred years ago. There is then a challenge to think about and, again, to think about the dynamics of participation and planning. That is, to recognize the right of the citizen to express an opinion on the locus in which he develops his life and at the same time, to claim that architecture is a specific knowledge. There is a balance to be constructed, and it probably cannot be made exclusively either on one side or on the other.

Does the future seem to me promising? I think that having a future is already extraordinarily promising. And it would be extremely promising if we can recover an idea of future. Once in [the TV show] *Roda Viva*, someone asked Paul Francis why Rio de Janeiro, in the 1950s, had been so exuberant from an intellectual point of view, with bossa nova, film, literature, architecture. And from the peak of his extraordinary moodiness, Francis replied: "Oh, I do not know, maybe because it was the last time we believed we could have succeeded." I have remembered it a lot in recent years because there was again a period, a few years ago in which we believed, as a country, we had gone back to succeed. We were thinking on reducing processes of the absurd social disparities, on social inclusion processes, we thought in an international insertion of Brazil in a different way, not as subaltern, in a line of South-South policy, among many other things. Today, in recent months, I have been asking myself if we are not, as a country, finally giving up the chance to succeed. Ultimately, we are giving up to the possibility of thinking about the future. At the moment, I am very afraid that we people, as a country, will give up having a future.