

## *Pars Destruens*

1968–1973

If the social and political events of 1968 made manifest the outlines of an architectural crisis of confidence, it certainly did not offer much in the way of details or explanation. In fact, if one simply looks at the professional journals and published texts of around this time, one might be hard pressed to find any evidence of a rupture with past practices. For instance, Vittorio Gregotti concluded his *New Directions in Italian Architecture* in 1968 with a chapter on the student revolts within Italian schools of architecture, but none of his illustrations suggested a pending break with the modernist tradition. In Europe the most significant project on the boards in 1968 was the complex planned for the Munich Olympics of 1972, a design of Günther Behnisch in collaboration with Frei Otto. Similarly, Robert Stern ended his *New Directions in American Architecture* of 1969 with Paul Rudolph's project for Stafford Harbor, Virginia – fully within the mainstream of high modernism. In the same year, Louis Kahn, with buildings going up in Exeter, New Haven, Fort Worth, and India, was representing the Philadelphia School, while one of the busiest offices in the United States, Kevin Roche, John Dinkeloo and Associates, was overseeing the construction of Memorial Coliseum and the Knights of Columbus complex in New Haven. If there was one omen suggesting the demise of modernism in 1969 it was the passing of Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe – the last two “masters” of the gilded pantheon.

But journals and books do not always tell the story, particularly in that the principal divide that came out of 1968 was a generational one. Moreover, it was a divide that would oppose the ideological platform of high modernism, not with a unifying counter-strategy but rather with a fragmentation of theory, tentative starts and stops in how, indeed, one

could proceed. There was also a sharp political and cultural divide that separated North American and European theory in the years surrounding 1968, which can be illustrated by reviewing the contrary positions of Robert Venturi and Aldo Rossi. Both published important books in 1966 in which they voiced their quiet dissatisfaction with the status quo. Both continued to develop their ideas over the next few years, and both, subsequently, would lead identifiable schools of thought that – by the middle of the 1970s – could be characterized as distinct branches on the sprouting tree of “postmodernism.” Nevertheless, the two schools were radically at odds in their theoretical underpinnings.

## Venturi and Scott Brown

Robert Venturi was the first to establish his credentials as an apostate. He received his architecture degree from Princeton in 1950 and, after stays in the offices of Oscar Stonorov, Louis Kahn, and Eero Saarinen, he won the Rome Prize in 1954 and embarked on an extended residence in that city. He entered private practice in Philadelphia in 1957 and within a few years had carried out a number of small commissions, among them the design of his mother’s house in Chestnut Hill (1959–1964), the North Penn Visiting Nurses Association (1961–1963), and the Guild House (1961–1966). Equally important for his development was his connection with the University of Pennsylvania, where in the early 1960s he taught one of the first courses on theory within an American architectural program. From his notes for this class he composed a preliminary manuscript for a book in 1963, and three years later, after revisions, it was published by the Museum of Modern Art under the title *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*.

The book, which aspired to be a “gentle manifesto,” is more complex than a first reading might suggest. To start with, it is a composite humanist tract drawing upon the recent work of Louis Kahn and Alvar Aalto, the anthropological perspective of Aldo van Eyck, the semiotic interests of Tomás Maldonado, the sociology of Herbert Gans, as well as Venturi’s own fascination with both mannerism and the relatively recent phenomenon of pop art. It opens with a plea for a mannerist phase of modernism, which he articulates through a set of formal or compositional maneuvers drawn in part from literary theory. These are strategies for injecting complexity and contradiction into design, which he explains in chapters with such titles as the “Double-Functioning Element,” “Contradiction Adapted,” and “Contradiction Juxtaposed.”

Another novelty of the book is its heavy reliance on historical examples, many of which are mannerist and baroque buildings from Italy and the United Kingdom. They serve to buffer his case for visual complexity and ambiguity, and this use of history to support a contemporary case for design was unusual at this time. Still another aspect of the short book is its frank, polemical tone. In an often cited example, he subverts such high-minded modernist clichés as Mies van der Rohe’s reported adage, “Less is more,” by playfully responding “Less is a bore.” Then again, his examples, repeatedly drawn from architects like Kahn and Aalto, testify to the fact that his rejection of “the puritanically moral language of orthodox Modern architecture” was by no means unconditional or even considerable at this date. Moreover, Venturi presents his (often perceptual) arguments for a mannerist phase of modernism with a certain literary aplomb.

But the book on occasions also betrays what would become Venturi’s evolving thought. In scattered places in the later chapters, the theme of formal ambiguity is conjoined with sub-themes that are lurking, as it were, within the text. One is his fondness for “rhetorical” or “honky-tonk” elements drawn from popular culture. Venturi justifies their incorporation into a new and more inclusive architecture first on the basis of their (pop-art inspired) realism and second as a gesture of social protest against a political system currently engaged in an unpopular war.<sup>1</sup> Another sub-theme to emerge is Venturi’s incipient populism. For instance, in arguing against Peter Blake’s comparison of the chaos of “Main Street” with the orderliness of Thomas Jefferson’s campus at the University of Virginia, Venturi insists that not only are such comparisons meaningless but they also raise the question of “is not Main Street almost all right?”<sup>2</sup> It is a scarcely subtle challenge to modernist sensibilities with regard to the postwar emphasis on large-scale planning and compositional order, and Venturi’s concluding sentence of the book reveals that he was already on the verge of adopting a more radical position with respect to the issue: “And it is perhaps from the everyday landscape, vulgar and disdained, that we can draw the complex and contradictory order that is valid and vital for our architecture as an urbanistic whole.”<sup>3</sup>

It is around this time – in 1965 or 1966 – that the formidable influence of Denise Scott Brown also becomes evident. This Zambian-born architect, together with her husband, Robert Scott Brown, had come to the University of Pennsylvania in the late 1950s to study under Kahn. Robert died in a tragic accident in 1959, but Denise advanced her interest in urban studies by taking courses with David Crane, Herbert Gans, and Paul Davidoff, among others. Prior to coming to Philadelphia, she had attended the Architectural Association in London and thus had a front-row seat for

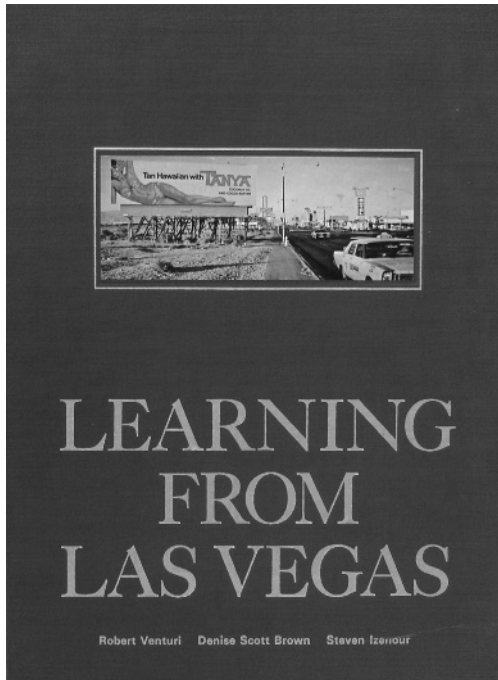
the “New Brutalist” phenomenon of the mid-1950s. It was in part this critical perspective (a gritty antipathy toward high modernism) that she brought to Penn, and after joining the faculty she collaborated with Venturi in the course of theory between 1962 and 1964.

The following year Scott Brown took a visiting position at the University of California at Berkeley, where she co-taught a course with the somewhat controversial urban sociologist Melvin Webber. In a now classic essay of 1964 he had taken to task the axiom that cities should be organized around a central downtown hub or regional center. He pointed to the transformation taking place in communication patterns – the fact that many businesses interact not locally but nationally or globally – and argued that in the future it will be these electronic patterns (not such traditional features as urban spaces) that will become “the essence of the city and of city life.”<sup>4</sup>

Scott Brown, together with Gordon Cullen, responded in 1965 with several articles under the title “The Meaningful City,” which analyzed the city under the four themes of perception, messages, meaning, and the modern image. What united these analyses was the idea of a “symbol,” which was at heart a criticism of the city as envisioned by postwar planners. In the view of Scott Brown, planners were failing to understand urban forms and the symbolic way in which most inhabitants read them: “We do not lack for symbols, but our efforts to use them are unsubtle and heavy handed. In the planning offices of most cities even this much is not achieved, and the situation goes by default.”<sup>5</sup> This focus on urban communication was the new perspective that Scott Brown offered Venturi – when the two architects married in the summer of 1967. From this juncture their writings and ideas became a collaborative effort.

Venturi’s populism and Scott Brown’s urban focus first became evident in a joint studio the two taught at Yale in 1967, which considered the redesign of a subway station in New York City. In the following year, as much of the world was descending into chaos, the two architects offered their Yale students a studio on “The Strip” in Las Vegas. The results were first published in two essays that appeared in 1968, and together they formed the cornerstones of their book *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972).

In the first essay the two chided modern architects for their elitist and purist displeasure with existing conditions, and especially the commercial vernacular of the city. In their view, the professional establishment was pretentiously abandoning the tradition of iconology and thereby standing aloof from the “architecture of persuasion.” Comparing their recent trip to Las Vegas to the revelation architects traditionally experience when visiting the historic squares of Italy, Venturi and Scott Brown made their point in an overtly controversial way:



**Figure 1.1** *Learning from Las Vegas*, by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, published by The MIT Press, © MIT 1972.

For young Americans in the 1940s, familiar only with the auto-scaled, grid-iron city, and the antiurban theories of the previous architectural generation, the traditional urban spaces, the pedestrian scale, and the mixtures yet continuities of styles of the Italian piazzas were a significant revelation. They rediscovered the piazza. Two decades later architects are perhaps ready for similar lessons about large open space, big scale, and high speed. Las Vegas is to the Strip what Rome is to the Piazza.<sup>6</sup>

In their second essay of 1968, Scott Brown and Venturi drew their famous distinction between the “sign which *is* the building” (the duck) and the “sign which *fronts* the building” (later to be named the decorated shed). They candidly expressed their preference for the latter, if only because it “is an easier, cheaper, more direct and basically more honest approach to the question of decoration; it permits us to get on with the task of making conventional buildings conventionally and to deal with their symbolic needs with a lighter, defter touch.”<sup>7</sup> The implications of this preference for their own practice would, of course, be immense, but so too would their well-defined break with modernism’s technological vision. Actually, they

emphatically made this last point in the final pages of *Learning from Las Vegas* by countering Mies van der Rohe's "symbolically exposed but substantially encased steel frame" with John Ruskin's "once-horrifying statement" that architecture is but "the decoration of construction."<sup>8</sup>

Such sentiments would not go unchallenged, but interestingly the push-back came not from established modernists but from younger architects of the same generation with competing views. In 1970 the Argentine painter Tomás Maldonado, who some years earlier had pioneered courses on communication at the Hochschule für Gestaltung at Ulm, responded sharply to such ideas by insisting that the neon signs of Las Vegas represented neither a populist act nor a condition of visual richness but rather "chit-chat," a "depth of communicative poverty" that simply pandered "to the needs of casino and motel owners, and to the needs of real estate speculators."<sup>9</sup>

An even more pointed rebuttal appeared in 1971 in a special bilingual issue of Italy's leading journal, *Casabella*, a number that was orchestrated by Peter Eisenman. Scott Brown was appropriately allowed to set the stage with an essay entitled "Learning from Pop," in which she expanded the lesson plan of Las Vegas by noting that architects should also study "Los Angeles, Levittown, the swinging singles on the Westheimer Strip, golf resorts, boating communities, Co-op City, the residential backgrounds to soap operas, TV commercials and mass mag ads, billboards, and Route 66."<sup>10</sup> Another part of the new curriculum is the beloved suburban home and its owner's quaint touches of respectability: sweeping lawns, decorative plantings, driveway gateways, columns, and coach lamps beside the front door (her Yale studio of 1970 was entitled "Learning from Levittown"). Architects should come here to learn, she continues, in part because of the massive failure of urban renewal programs in America, in part because of the liberal culture of elitism that rules the profession. Scott Brown counters with a defiant populist stance:

The forms of the pop landscape are as relevant to us now, as were the forms of antique Rome to the Beaux-Arts, Cubism, and Machine Architecture to the early Moderns, and the industrial midlands and the Dogon to Team 10, which is to say extremely relevant, and more so than the latest bathysphere launch pad, or systems hospital (or even, *pace* Banham, the Santa Monica pier).<sup>11</sup>

Scott Brown's relatively brief polemic was rejoined by much lengthier remarks by Kenneth Frampton, which picked up where Maldonado's earlier criticisms had ended. With opening citations by Hermann Broch, the Vesnin brothers, Hannah Arendt, and Herbert Marcuse – as well as some

particularly gruesome photographs of an automobile accident by Andy Warhol – Frampton counters her main contention with great seriousness:

Do designers really need elaborate sociological ratification *à la* Gans, to tell them that what they want is what they already have? No doubt Levittown could be brought to yield an equally affirmative consensus in regard to current American repressive policies, both domestic and foreign. Should designers like politicians wait upon the dictates of a silent majority, and if so, how are they to interpret them? Is it really the task of under-employed design talent to suggest to the constrained masses of Levittown – or elsewhere – that they might prefer the extravagant confines of the West Coast *nouveauriche*; a by now superfluous function which has already been performed more than adequately for years by Madison Avenue? In this respect there is now surely little left of our much vaunted pluralism that has not already been overlaid with the engineered fantasies of mass taste.<sup>12</sup>

Frampton further rejects the values of a society that gauges its standard of living by its automobiles, television sets, and airplanes, and it is ultimately the critical theory of the Frankfurt School that he embraces as well as the ideas of Clement Greenberg – where the role of the artistic avant-garde is precisely to resist capitalist culture and its seemingly inevitable production of kitsch.

## Rossi and Tafuri

Rossi's thought during these same years displays a similar antipathy toward modernist ideals, but from a very contrary perspective. The Milan native received his architectural training at that city's Polytechnic University in the 1950s, and, while still a student, he was invited by Ernesto Rogers to write for *Casabella-continuità*. Altogether, Rossi penned 31 articles, which included book reviews and essays on both historical and topical issues, such as the Neoliberty phenomenon. In the early 1960s he began his academic career, and in 1965 he joined the faculty at his alma mater in Milan. His architectural output in the first half of the decade was minimal, with his most important projects being the Loosian-inspired Villa ai Ronchi (1960) and the monumental fountain for the city-square at Segrate (1965). The latter, with its generous cylindrical support and extruded triangular pediment, announced his fascination with primary forms, very much in the reductive tradition of the Marc-Antoine Laugier.

Rossi's turning point, on the theoretical front at least, was his book of 1966, *L'architettura della città* (architecture in the city). The study has several important (mostly Marxist) antecedents, among them studies by

Giuseppe Samonà, Leonardo Benevolo, and Carlo Aymonino.<sup>13</sup> As with Venturi's contemporary effort, Rossi's book injects a breath of freshness into the otherwise languid discourse of the mid-1960s. Based on the work of a number of French geographers, it is a scholarly study as well as a sustained argument against many of the tenets of modern planners. Rossi's mission, as he later describes it, is nothing less than a search for the "fixed laws of a timeless typology."<sup>14</sup>

The specific focus of Rossi's book is the European city, the city defined by its architectonic elements or cultural physiognomy. Such an emphasis leads to an exposition of critical terms endowing each city with its lived "consciousness" – notions such as artifacts, permanences, monuments, memory, and locus. Collectively, they are the primary elements of a city that allow it to persist over time and are the source of ritual and the city's collective memory. The notion of typology is also central to Rossi's argument. In this regard he follows the lead of the neoclassicist Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy, who had defined "type" as "not so much the image of a thing to be copied or perfectly imitated as the idea of an element that must itself serve as a rule for the model."<sup>15</sup> For Rossi the need to return to these timeless urban types becomes his leading argument – both as an alternative to practices of design inspired by the Athens Charter and to his critique of "naive functionalism." Advocates of the latter view, Rossi argues, divest architectural form of its autonomous value by reducing design to a programmatic scheme of organization and circulation, a practice that Rossi likens (invoking Max Weber) to a commercialization of urban design. The idea of a traditional type, by contrast, allows historical considerations back into architecture, for it is that which (in its recovery of such things as cultural monuments) is both vital and closest to architecture's "essence." And even though Rossi does not explicitly make a case for recalling pre-industrial or eighteenth-century urban design strategies and forms, the suggestion is at least implied and will be developed by others.

In the same year in which *L'architettura della città* appeared, Rossi was teaming with Giorgio Grassi to produce the competition design for San Rocco Housing in Monza, the first of his larger typological schemes. Grassi also followed upon Rossi's effort in 1967 with his book *La costruzione logica dell'architettura* (The logical construction of architecture). It too aspired to be a "genealogy of rationalism," that is, "a scientific study of architecture and the classification of its elements" on a "rational and transmittable basis."<sup>16</sup> Grassi took his idea of a typological manual back to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century handbooks of Pierre Le Muet, Charles-Etienne Briseux, and Roland Fréart de Chambray, but his formal explorations



lay closer to the housing and urban typologies of Heinrich Tessenow, Ludwig Hilberseimer, and Alexander Klein – early modernists whose work was little known at this time. These efforts by Rossi and Grassi were undertaken with the aim of imposing on architecture a “stabilization” of its formal types. Thus, by 1967 a basis had been laid for a new direction for Italian theory, and what remained was simply to give this foundation – from a critical perspective – a precise political calibration. The year 1968 provided the perfect occasion and the medium was Manfredo Tafuri, who, at the start of the year, had moved to Venice to take the chair at the Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia (the IAUUV), the city’s architectural school.<sup>17</sup> Within a few years he would forge a Milan–Venice axis with Rossi.

Tafuri arrived in Venice amid a highly charged political atmosphere. In the winter and spring of 1968 the architecture school was being occupied by students, who were denying the faculty (including Tafuri) entry to the school. Massimo Cacciari, Francesco Dal Co, and Cesare De Michelis had recently formed the critical journal *Angelus Novus*, which was exploring the writings of the Frankfurt School as well as the socialist architecture of the 1920s. Cacciari and Dal Co were also involved with *Contropiano*, a Marxist journal that was challenging the institutional structure of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) from a position on the left. The staff of *Contropiano* included the well known activists Alberto Asor Rosa, Mario Tronti, and Antonio Negri – the last two of whom were at that moment engaged in a furious debate over tactics.<sup>18</sup>

Tafuri brought with him his first critical study of contemporary architecture. In its understated but transparent political tone, *Teorie e storia dell’architettura* (Theories and history of architecture) today seems to situate itself between the revolutionary theories of Georg Lukács and the analytic detachment of Walter Benjamin. Indeed, one of the book’s intentions was to draw a parallel between the political situation of the 1920s and contemporary thought. The leitmotif for Tafuri is the term “operative criticism,” a concept that refers to those critics who read history as an explanation of more recent trends – that is, those who cull and misread the past through the use of convenient ideological judgments serving the present. The word “ideology” is also laden with political import. The Marxist term signifies the false “class consciousness” of the bourgeoisie (religious, cultural, aesthetic) that prevents the proletariat from attaining true consciousness of its revolutionary potential. Tafuri’s contention, in essence, is that the books of many modern histories had been cooked, because, in short, the architects of the 1920s had failed in their revolutionary ambitions.

Tafuri supports this contention with his notion of instrumentality: how criticism has since become a tool for ideological or false theorizing.

In surveying recent architecture theory, from Peter Collins to Aymonino, he finds the persistent desire of many to impose more scientific methods of analysis through the application of such strategies as structuralism, semiology, and typological research. And whereas he admits such methods do actually hold out some promise, Tafuri is quick to dismiss the tacit bond between capitalism and the semantic gamesmanship of many modern-day writers (Venturi) who embrace historical notions like “ambiguity” in order to justify their own design preferences.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, Tafuri wants to affirm history’s autonomy or theoretical separation from contemporary practice, and calls for this to be done not only out of intellectual embarrassment over the distortions through which so many historians have interpreted the past but also out of a sense of impotency in the face of capitalism’s advanced development. Today the historian’s role is not to explain away the crisis by resorting to the past, but actually to intensify or increase the current malaise. The historian must address the anguish of the present but of necessity with a note of intellectual despair. In later reminiscing on this period of the late 1960s, Tafuri invoked the paradigm of Francis Bacon’s *pars destruens* – the “negative part” of the inductive process that seeks to liberate the mind from errors.<sup>20</sup>

As Tafuri settled into Venice, his political views advanced. In 1969 he penned for *Contropiano* an essay entitled “Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology,” the first of four critical essays that he wrote for this journal. Here he brings the problem of architecture’s false consciousness into sharper political focus, because – in his “psychoanalysis” of the previous two centuries – he rejects the slightest possibility of modernist optimism or utopian salvation. The analysis begins with the eighteenth-century theorists Laugier and Giovanni Battista Piranesi, both of whom, Tafuri insists, set the current crisis in motion: the latter with his celebration of the “fragment” that displaced the baroque insistence on the whole. In Tafuri’s fast-paced chronology, the utopian projects of the nineteenth century also failed miserably, as this century exhibited only “the unrestrained exhibition of a false conscience that strives for final ethical redemption by displaying its own inauthenticity.”<sup>21</sup> The twentieth century fared no better, and even the “heroic” resistance of the avant-garde movements of the 1920s receives little praise in Tafuri’s analysis. This is because whether the strategy was De Stijl’s programmatic control of artistic production or the Dadaists’ “violent insertion of the irrational,” the endgame was always the same. In a prescient remark that highlighted changing architectural perceptions, he argued that all efforts to resist the capitalist order were usurped or drafted into the service of secular capitalism, that is, “large industrial capital – makes architecture’s underlying ideology its own.”<sup>22</sup>

What this travesty bodes for architecture in 1969 is obviously nothing good. If Tafuri in his dialectic does not go so far as to reiterate Hegel's insistence on the death of architecture, the zeitgeist of finality nevertheless still haunts the present, even for those political activists temporally buoyed by the illusion that they are enjoying a brief "moment in the class struggle." Kurt W. Forster perhaps best encapsulates the severity of Tafuri's indictment by noting "the fundamental impossibility of any meaningful cultural action within the historical confinement of the present."<sup>23</sup> This is the case, Tafuri argues, as much for the "polyvalent images" of Venturi as it is for the "silence of geometries" of Rossi. Architecture, barring the unlikely revolution, is now stripped of its revolutionary appeal.

In 1973 Tafuri expanded this essay into his popular book *Progetto e utopia*, translated into English as *Architecture and Utopia*. He now fortifies his Rorschach method of analysis with the sociological theories of Weber, Benjamin, and Karl Mannheim, as well as the "negative thought" of his friend Massimo Cacciari. In this new and depressing light, Dada's "desacralization of values," or Benjamin's "end of the aura," can no longer be seen as irrational processes because their "destruction of values offered a wholly new type of rationality, which was capable of coming face to face with the negative, in order to make the negative itself the release valve of an unlimited potential for development."<sup>24</sup> The two design strategies that he sees currently unfolding – semiology and compositional formalism – both fall under "capital's complete domination" and are doomed in a revolutionary sense. If semiology's search for symbolism is simply an acknowledgment that architecture has already lost its meaning, the formalist approach of architects like the "New York Five" is similarly fated to be consumed by the market forces of commercialization. The architect and critic have but one role to play, which is "to do away with impotent and ineffectual myths, which so often serve as illusions that permit the survival of anachronistic 'hopes of design.'"<sup>25</sup> Architecture, even more ruthlessly than Venturi had suggested, is thereby shorn of any and all meliorist intentions.

## The Milan Triennale

From such a starkly nihilist perspective, it is clear that Venturi and Scott Brown's populist embrace of Las Vegas could not be interpreted by Tafuri as anything other than a capitulation to capitalist forces, but within a few years Tafuri's censure of Rossi would become tempered. In 1969 Aymonino invited Rossi to design his first major building, the Gallarate, a housing complex outside Milan. Rossi responded with a type of "corridor



**Figure 1.2** Aldo Rossi, Gallarate, Milan, Italy. Image courtesy of Alessandro Frigerio.

housing” displaying extreme prismatic rigor: two buildings supported on narrow fins running sequentially 182 meters in length, narrowly gapped, and fitted with squared window openings. Whereas Tafuri at first seems to have been taken back by Rossi’s De Chiricoesque inspiration – “frozen in spaces abandoned by time” – he later nearly praised “the sacred precision of his geometric block” for remaining “above ideology and above all utopian proposals for a ‘new lifestyle.’”<sup>26</sup> Rossi’s selfless sacrifice, better yet, abandonment, was, of course, exceeded by the architect’s otherworldly yet much applauded primitive typology for the expansion of the San Cataldo Cemetery in Modena, the first designs for which appeared in 1971. Here the primeval silence of the forms seems entirely appropriate for people who, in the words of Rafael Moneo, “no longer need protection from the cold.”<sup>27</sup>

Rossi, in fact, was able to offer an explanation for such designs when he was named architectural curator of 15th Triennale of Milan, which took place in 1973. The exhibition was an architectural extravaganza that made the reputations of many young designers, and in retrospect the most important event was the exhibition catalogue itself, *Architettura razionale*

(Rational architecture), which would now serve as a manifesto for a new movement. Rossi opened the polemic by championing typology and rationalism not as some vague response to the complex problems of today, but rather as “a more concrete way of working.”<sup>28</sup> Another section of the catalogue featured excerpts from the writings of Ernesto Rogers, J. J. P. Oud, Adolf Loos, J. A. Ginzburg, Giorgio Grassi, and Hans Schmidt – all to buffer the case for a latter-day typology taking its inspiration in part from the spirit of the 1920s. The heart of the catalog, however, was Massimo Scolari’s essay, “Avanguardia e nuova architettura (Avant-garde and new architecture),” which sought to position historically the new rationalist movement, now to be known as *La Tendenza* (the trend).

Scolari traced this new “critical attitude” to the urban debates of the 1960s in Italy as well as to the circle of architects involved with *Casabella-continuità* and the Milan Polytechnic, which included Rossi, Ernesto Rogers, and Vittorio Gregotti. If Rossi’s book of 1966 becomes the defining moment for *La Tendenza*, the political events of 1968 brought the issues into sharper focus. Tafuri’s anti-utopian insistence on architectural autonomy, for example, allows him to be seen as “one of the most passionate ‘planners’ of the *Tendenza*.”<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Rossi’s typological “process of essentialization” defines the pivotal point at which both the neo-avant-garde’s denial of disciplinary discourse and architecture’s “bourgeois” contamination are overcome by a “*global refounding of architecture*.”<sup>30</sup> This is true because Rossi’s “rigid world with few objects,” like the historiography of Tafuri, no longer allows the possibility of advanced technological thinking, and indeed the architect now must be selective in turning to any recent modernist sources. Through such an ideological backdoor enter such seemingly inexplicable works as East Germany’s “New City” at Halle and East Berlin’s Karl-Marx-Allee – planning types now approved for contemporary appropriation, presumably for reasons of their political coloration alone. More generally, *La Tendenza* becomes defined by its strict ties to historical types (not specific forms), its focus on the city, its urban morphology, its monumentality, and indeed by the way it values prototypical or Platonic form.<sup>31</sup>

If the neoclassical architect Etienne-Louis Boullée would have concurred whole-heartedly with such sentiments, not all critics in the early 1970s were willing to go so far down the path of rationalist austerity. The historian Joseph Rykwert, someone who had long-standing ties to Italian architectural circles, provided one of the few stinging retorts to Rossi’s and Scolari’s contentions: “So that’s it, then. Architecture may stay alive as long as she stays dumb. Dumb and beautiful maybe, but dumb. Those of us who refuse this condition are sternly set aside.”<sup>32</sup>

## The IAUS and the New York Five

Still another sign of the discontent manifesting itself during these polemically active years can be found in the efforts of Colin Rowe and Peter Eisenman. Rowe had initially studied architecture, but after a wartime accident he enrolled at the Warburg Institute in London 1946, where he turned his focus to history under Rudolf Wittkower. While still a student, he wrote his influential essay, “The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa” (1947), which compared the composition of Palladio’s Villa Malcontenta with Le Corbusier’s Villa Stein at Garches.<sup>33</sup> The essay helped to popularize the style of Le Corbusier in a country that would soon become obsessed with him as both an architect and a person. Yet Rowe, like many of his peers, was also looking toward America and in 1952 he traveled to Yale to take courses with Henry-Russell Hitchcock. Thereafter he traveled extensively within the United States and by chance, in 1953, he was offered a teaching position at the University of Texas at Austin.

The timing and location was propitious. The school’s new director, Harwell Harris, had been lured to Texas from his practice in Los Angeles with the mandate to build a first-rate program.<sup>34</sup> The old and new faculty – among them Bernard Hoesli, John Hejduk, Robert Slutzky, Lee Hirsche, John Shaw, Lee Hodgden, and Werner Seligmann – would, because of their innovative curriculum and unique emphasis on visual and formal complexity, become known as the “Texas Rangers.”<sup>35</sup> The Rangers, however, began to go separate ways in 1956, when Harris left Texas for North Carolina State University. Rowe taught briefly at Cornell University before returning to England and Cambridge University, where he became a lecturer between 1958 and 1962. In the last year he accepted a professorship at Cornell, where he created an urban design program that remains his legacy.

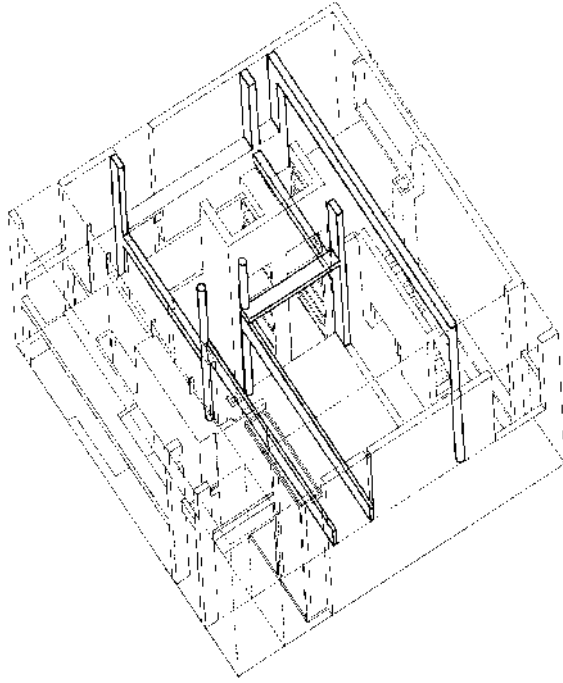
It was at Cambridge that Eisenman met his mentor. The Newark native had attended Cornell University in the early 1950s and, after working in a few offices, had enrolled at Columbia University in 1959. The following year he received a fellowship to study Gothic architecture at Cambridge. Rowe and Eisenman befriended one another and it was Rowe who guided Eisenman on summer architectural tours of the Continent in 1961 and 1962, during which time Eisenman was introduced to the first group of Italian “Rationalists” from the late 1920s and early 1930s, in particular to the work of Giuseppe Terragni. This latter became one focus of Eisenman’s doctoral dissertation, “The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture,” which was accepted by Trinity College in 1963.<sup>36</sup>



**Figure 1.3** Giuseppe Terragni, Casa del Fascio, Como, Italy. Image courtesy of Frans Drewniak.

Although the dissertation was a very early work of Eisenman, it nevertheless set the tone for many of his deliberations over the next two decades. He completed it just after Christopher Alexander had finished his dissertation and it shares a similar positivistic spirit, although it derives from the theories of Rowe. The latter's idea of "transparency," which he had earlier fashioned with Robert Slutzky, had effectively suppressed the semantic dimension of architecture in favor of a more abstract and conceptual analysis of visual form.<sup>37</sup> Eisenman, in turn, sets out to devise a theory deriving entirely from the analytical properties of form itself. These properties include such things as volume (where space resides), mass, surface, and movement. Notions such as "syntax" and "grammar" also play heavily into his discussion, and it marks the start of his long-standing aversion to everything related to symbolism. Terragni's Casa del Fascio features prominently in his analysis, as the cube's abstract laying of planes becomes central to his conceptual diagramming of hidden axes, recessed planes, and vectors. In effect, Eisenman was searching for a purely rational reading of form.

Upon returning to the United States, Eisenman joined the faculty at Princeton University and, together with Michael Graves, founded the



**Figure 1.4** Peter Eisenman, House I, Princeton, New Jersey (1967). Courtesy of Eisenman Architects.

Conference of Architects for the Study of the Environment (CASE) in 1964, a group that initially included Henry Millon, Stanford Anderson, and Richard Meier (a cousin of Eisenman).<sup>38</sup> Others who later were involved with the group included Kenneth Frampton, Jacquelin Robertson, Mario Gandelsonas, Tom Vreeland, Anthony Vidler, John Hejduk, and Charles Gwathmey. Robert Venturi and Vincent Scully were invited to the first CASE meeting in 1964, although they left the event when their differences with others became apparent. The success of CASE varied over the years, but one important event orchestrated by Eisenman was the exhibition “Five Architects,” which took place at the Museum of Modern Art in May 1969. Its significance, however, would not be known until a few years later.

Even before this date Eisenman had become less enamored with CASE, and in 1966 he approached Arthur Drexler, the director of architecture at the Museum of Modern Art, and proposed the creation of a new institute to study urban problems – a crisis visibly manifest in the urban conflagrations of this time. Drexler turned to the museum board, and two of its trustees provided start-up funds for the new organization. Thus, in October 1967, the



Institute of Architecture and Urban Studies (or IAUS) was legally born, with Eisenman serving as its director and Drexler as the chairman of the board. The IAUS was a multifaceted enterprise from the beginning. On one front (and only in the first years) it was a non-profit urban think-tank that solicited monies from private and governmental agencies for the study of the urban environment. In another and more consistent way, it served as a center for theoretical research and planning – a graduate school in effect, in which faculty from schools in the Northeast would hold visiting seminars or teach one or more days a week. The IAUS also hosted symposia and exhibitions, as well as founding a critical journal. All of this was taking shape in 1967, as Eisenman received his first architectural commission, and from this time forward, the two – his practice and theory – would become interchangeable.

The Barenholtz Pavilion in Princeton (1967), better known as House I, forged this interdependence.<sup>39</sup> Eisenman drafted remarks in 1969 to explain his design intentions, and the underlying theme was the germinating idea of “cardboard architecture,” a term that had been used in a pejorative sense by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1931 to refer to the planar and detail-less architecture of Le Corbusier.<sup>40</sup> Eisenman, however, embraced the term and offered the intention “to shift the focus from our existing conception of form in an aesthetic and functional context to a consideration of form as a marking or notational system.”<sup>41</sup> Rosalind Krauss later characterized this intention by noting that Eisenman “wanted to unload the physical envelope of all function (this column ‘means’ support) and all semantic associations (brick ‘means’ warmth, stability, etc.). In their place he entertained the notion of the ‘model’ as a way of generating form, of exploring ideas, quite apart from the necessities of real structure or the properties of real material.”<sup>42</sup>

Hence, cardboard architecture for Eisenman came to refer to the logical, generative operations related to form, operations in themselves devoid of meaning except on an abstract level. In House I, for instance, he employed three strategies to give prominence to these “deep structures” (now appropriating a term from Noam Chomsky).<sup>43</sup> One was the attempt to delimit conventional meanings through the use of whites or neutral colors and flat textures. Another was to mask the structure, in this case by making some columns and beams non-load-bearing. At the same time, these false structural signs were to call attention to the underlying conceptual structure of the design, sometimes by revealing ambiguities, sometimes by their very absence. Thus, if Le Corbusier in his Villa Savoye had employed certain forms symbolically to recall the details of ocean liners, Eisenman sought out a syntactic organization of forms (a grammar, if you will) in which all semantic references or symbolic allusions are rigorously precluded.

Several essays Eisenman wrote in the early 1970s developed these ideas in greater depth. In one article written for *Casabella* in 1970, Eisenman drew upon his dissertation to argue that just as Le Corbusier (with his metaphors to modernity) had shifted design sensibilities from pragmatic (functions and structural) to semantic (symbolic and iconic) concerns, so Terragni's Fascist headquarters in Como had moved architecture into a syntactic realm, specifically by the organization of its facade "as a series of vertical planes articulated in such a way as to define a single frontal plane, the spatial order seen as recessional from this frontal reference."<sup>44</sup> In another essay from this period, Eisenman offers his strategy of "conceptual art" specifically as a conceptualized response to Venturi's embrace of "pop art."<sup>45</sup> All of these efforts owed much to Rowe and Slutzky's notion of phenomenal transparency.

Eisenman was also the instigating force behind the exhibition catalogue *Five Architects: Eisenman, Graves, Gwathmey, Hejduk, Meier*, which appeared in a small run in 1972.<sup>46</sup> Of course, the exhibition "Five Architects" had taken place in 1969, and it was conceived principally as an event for the architects to display their work and elicit critical remarks from other CASE members. All were young architects, professionally speaking, although Richard Meier had been in practice since 1963. Michael Graves and Charles Gwathmey had received their first commissions in the late 1960s, and the former "Texas Ranger" Hejduk participated with his drawings for House 10, the Bernstein House, and One-Half House. The book contained several important essays, among them pieces by Frampton, Rowe, and Eisenman.

Frampton's essay, "Frontality vs. Rotation," helped to establish his place within American critical theory. He had been trained at the Architectural Association in the early 1950s, or in the heyday of New Brutalism. And although he studied for a while under Peter Smithson, his initial sympathies were closer to the ideas of Richard Hamilton, John Miller, Alan Colquhoun, and Reyner Banham. In the first half of the 1960s he had worked in the office of Douglas Stephen and Partners and served as the technical editor of the journal *Architectural Design*. In 1965, at the instigation of Eisenman, Frampton joined the faculty at Princeton University, where he also befriended Maldonado. It was the latter's political orientation (inspired by the Soviet realism of Hannes Meyer) that fitted best with Frampton's own radicalization in the late 1960s, during which time he assimilated the ideas of Adorno, Marcuse, and Arendt. These authors reveal that, in his theoretical outlook at least, Frampton was never in line with the formalist concerns of Eisenman, even though the latter (sometime around 1965 or 1966) encouraged him to become "the Sigfried Giedion of the group."<sup>47</sup>

In his essay for the book, which was an expansion upon his earlier remarks, Frampton undertook a quite conventional analysis of the group's designs by considering the overriding strategy as the imposition of grids, entries, frontality, diagonal axes, and the every-present "theme of erosion." He recognized Wrightian compositional motifs in Hejduk's House 10 and Terragni's influence in Eisenman's House I, yet he was less forthcoming in elaborating upon "certain syntactical references to Le Corbusier" found in the work of the other three architects. Instead, he preferred to relate Meier's Smith House and Graves's Hanselmann House, for instance, to Marcel Breuer's design for the Gropius House of 1938 and even to American shingle-style homes of the late 1880s.<sup>48</sup> One almost senses his political unease at the fact that he was witnessing a full-blown "neo-modern" revival shorn of any political ideology.

Yet Rowe, who had since drifted from the circle of Eisenman, seized precisely this issue in the most pointed terms:

For we are here in the presence of what, in terms of the orthodox theory of modern architecture, is heresy. We are in the presence of anachronism, nostalgia, and probably, frivolity. If modern architecture looked like this c.1930 then it should not look like this today; and, if the real political issue of the present is not the provision of the rich with cake but of the starving with bread, then not only formally but also programmatically these buildings are irrelevant.<sup>49</sup>

Gathering steam, Rowe proceeds to unravel the ideological trappings of modern theory around 1930: its location at the "matrix of eschatological and utopian fantasy," its formulation as an objective response to "a compilation of recognizable empirical facts," and most importantly, the architect as the passive midwife to history, operating as it were under this "Positivist conception of fact" and "Hegelian conception of manifest destiny." Rowe also characterizes high modern theory as a "constellation of escapist myths" and concedes that its central "socialist mission" has since "dissolved in the sentimentalities and bureaucracies of the welfare state."<sup>50</sup> What this aporia says about the reincarnation of early modernist forms in 1972, Rowe concludes, is simply revival: a faddish replication of forms from modernism's heroic era, yet now stripped of any pretense of a new and better world.

Such analysis, however candid, would in no way impede the growing fame of the New York Five as a recognizable entity, or the growth of the IAUS. The latter's journal, *Oppositions*, made its debut in September 1973, and the three founding editors – Eisenman, Frampton, and Mario

Gandelsonas – were quick to establish a varied and high level of discourse.<sup>51</sup> The journal's inaugural editorial defined its goal to be one of "critical assessment and re-assessment," addressing itself toward "the evolution of new models for a theory of architecture."<sup>52</sup> The earlier issues display an alliance along a critical front with Rossi and Tafuri – no doubt in part due to the New York Five's participation in the Milan exhibition in 1973. Some of Rossi's designs were introduced to the North American audience in one early issue, while Tafuri's influential essay, "L'Architecture dans le Boudoir," became his first text translated into English.<sup>53</sup> Here Tafuri characterized the reductive experiments of Rossi and Eisenman as an "architecture of cruelty" – that is, an approach to design that, in its retreat from the functional and social concerns of the real world, could be equated with the libertine sadism of Marquis de Sade. Among others connected with the Milan–Venice axis to contribute articles were Francesco Dal Co, Giorgio Ciucci, Massimo Scolari, and Georges Teyssot. The journal, throughout its notational run of 26 issues (until 1984), therefore composed a wide-ranging tapestry of historical, theoretical, and critical issues, and its chief merit lay in the fact that it was the first American journal of critical substance.