

THE MIT PRESS

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

LONDON, ENGLAND

**HISTORIES OF
THE IMMEDIATE PRESENT**

INVENTING ARCHITECTURAL MODERNISM

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55 Hayward Street, Cambridge, MA 02142.

This book was set in Filosofia by Graphic Composition, Inc.
Printed and bound in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Vidler, Anthony.

Histories of the immediate present : inventing architectural
modernism / Anthony Vidler.

p. cm. — (Writing architecture)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-262-72051-9 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Modern movement (Architecture) 2. Architecture—
Historiography. 3. Architectural criticism—Europe—History—
20th century. I. Title.

NA682.M63V53 2008

724'.6—dc22

2007020845

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

PREFACE

These essays on historians of architectural modernism represent my long-standing interest in the critical relations between architectural history and contemporary design. In this sense, the book is an introduction to the complex set of issues that have bound the history, criticism, and theory of architecture together in the assessment and influences of early twentieth-century modernism. It is a commonplace that history, whether written by architects or by art historians, has always been influenced by contemporary concerns, but this has been especially true in a profession that, since the end of the nineteenth century, has ostensibly jettisoned its relations to history and its "styles" in favor of abstract "form." The gradual historicization of this movement, not to mention its own characterization as "style," has resulted in a wide range of hypotheses as to its origins and consequences, all bound up with the critical reassessment of the effects of modernity and modernization since the 1940s. The early historians of the modern movement were open in their partisan espousal of one form or another of modernism and in their effort to trace its origins to particular historical moments in architecture, whether the baroque or the Arts and Crafts movement. The next generation—the protagonists of this book—coming to maturity after the catastrophe of the Second World War, were less inclined to such unabashed historicism and ostensibly more concerned with historical accuracy, but were, nevertheless, deeply complicit in different ways with architects' efforts to rethink modernism for the second half of the century. Most were equally committed to writing both history and criticism, and all were influential on the

theory and practice of their contemporaries; all were inevitably marked by their own intellectual formation, in reaction to or continuity with their advisors and mentors.

In what follows I have looked at the contexts in which Emil Kaufmann, Colin Rowe, Reyner Banham, and Manfredo Tafuri forged their approaches to criticism and history, analyzing their more significant contributions and touching on specific instances of their contemporary influence. Despite the recent tendency of historians to join with Tafuri in the critique of what he called "operative" criticism, I take the position that such biases are inevitable and a part of the necessary intellectual equipment of the architectural writer. Kaufmann was open in his commitment to Enlightenment values, in the eighteenth century as in the twentieth; Rowe was never hesitant to apply the techniques of mannerist analysis to present design; Banham once wrote: "History is, of course, my academic discipline. Criticism is what I do for money," but it is evident throughout his writings in both fields that the two come together in his strongly held beliefs about technology, popular culture, and the new form of cities. Even Tafuri, turning to history and criticism after his training as an architect and planner, could not help but reveal his preferences, influencing a generation of designers through his theoretical choices and analytical strategies.

My interest in architectural history was stimulated in 1960, at my first (and quite terrifying) tutorial with Colin Rowe in his modernist apartment on Fen Causeway in Cambridge. Handing me a copy of Emil Kaufmann's then recently published *Architecture in the Age of Reason*, he asked, gesturing toward a folio of Colin Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus* lying open on the floor before him: "Well, and what do *you* make of *concatenation*?" This enigmatic question, over which I puzzled for many weeks, succeeded in stimulating my interest in the late eighteenth century and especially in Claude-Nicolas Ledoux. Rowe's subsequent desk cri-

tiques in Second Year studio, where *parti* was layered over *parti* on yellow tracing paper in thick soft-pencil with trembling hand, with his extraordinary visual recall of historic compositions as formal diagrams and potential inspiration, offered object lessons in the tradition of modernist art historical analysis from Heinrich Wölfflin and Paul Frankl to his own teacher, Rudolf Wittkower.

1960, the first year of my studies at Cambridge, also saw the publication of Reyner Banham's *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, a book immediately required by Colin St. John Wilson for his course on the history of modern theory. Banham's enthusiasm for futurism and Wilson's passion for the Dutch de Stijl movement created an excitement in the School of Architecture for research into the forgotten history of the avant-gardes, a history made more immediate by Professor Sir Leslie Martin's personal connection to the prewar *Circle* group, which included Naum Gabo and Ben Nicholson. Supporting this investigation into modernism's roots were visitors from the former Independent Group like Eduardo Paolozzi and Alison and Peter Smithson, together with others including Robert Maxwell, Neave Brown, and James Stirling, who was then occupied with the design of the History Faculty Library. The Smithsons' special issue of *Architectural Design* on the "Heroic Period of Modern Architecture (1917–1937)" in December 1965 summed up modernism for our generation—in some way as a sign of closure, but also of the need for competitive emulation. Against this, the unruly (from Cambridge's staid and strictly modernist point of view) incursions of Archigram, who with my willing help set up their "Living City" exhibit in the front lobby of Scroope Terrace in 1964, provided a healthy sense of utopianism and continuity with the early modern avant-gardes.

From 1960 to 1963, Peter Eisenman, an American doctoral student who taught me how to detail in wood "Japanese style" in the First Year design studio, was developing his own thesis on

the formal analysis of modern architecture under the supervision of Martin and the intellectual stimulus of Rowe. It was Eisenman who, returning to a position at Princeton University, invited me to join him in a yearlong research project on the New Jersey Corridor in 1965, a year in the United States that has since stretched to the present. At Princeton I encountered another British exile, Kenneth Frampton, whose omnivorous and committed engagement with history and contemporary practice convinced me to dedicate myself to the teaching of history and theory. For several years the Analysis and Theory seminars were divided into two, one for the period 1650 to 1900, which I taught, the other from 1900 to the present taught by Kenneth. Such was my introduction to what became my first field of specialization in the eighteenth century.

It was also at Princeton that I first met Manfredo Tafuri, invited as a guest lecturer by Diana Agrest. Over the next several years in Venice, I came to know him as a colleague who, until his untimely death in 1994, stimulated and guided my work, offering his hospitality and introducing me to the group of his students and colleagues at the Institute of History, Istituto Universitario di Architettura in Venice, who have continued as lively interlocutors and friends to the present.

My selection of historians is thus obviously partial and avowedly personal: I have not attempted to treat the field of modernist historiography as a whole, nor do I consider in detail a number of significant contributors to the debates over the role of history—Vincent Scully in the United States and Leonardo Benevolo, Bruno Zevi, and Paolo Portoghesi in Italy would be notable examples of omission. Rather, as a historian and critic trained as an architect, I have been drawn to explore the complexities of my own relationship to the scholarly, critical, and professional disciplines of architecture—disciplines introduced to me by the four writers and teachers considered here. Nor has

it escaped me, as an immigrant to the United States, that three out of the four scholars—Kaufmann, Rowe, and Banham—were to finish their careers here, the first in forced exile, the other two in voluntary emigration.

Acknowledgments

Those who have read, listened to, and discussed parts of this work include Carl Schorske, Kurt Forster, Reinhold Martin, Beatriz Colomina, Mark Wigley, Alan Colquhoun, Robert Maxwell, and Mark Cousins, who offered a stimulating critique in a seminar at the Architectural Association. My thinking on Kaufmann and Giedion was especially sharpened by discussion with Detlef Mertins as he developed his doctoral work at Princeton. I also thank those institutions that asked me to deliver portions of this work in progress, especially the schools of architecture at Yale, Columbia, Princeton, UCLA, and the TU Delft. Preliminary versions of parts of this book were written for the conferences and publications of Anyone Corporation, *Log, October, Representations, Perspecta*, and the University of California Press. I thank their respective editors for their advice. Finally, I want to thank those who read and commented on this book in its first draft as a doctoral thesis for TU Delft and the Berlage Institute, Rotterdam: Weil Arets, Arie Graafland, Michael Hays, Karsten Harries, Michael Müller, Jean-Louis Cohen, and Tony Fretton. I am indebted to Felicity Scott and Spyros Papapetros for their careful reading and comments, and to Cynthia Davidson for her editorial clarity. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine. The book is dedicated to the memory of Ignasi de Solà-Morales, whose critical mind was continually wrestling with these questions and whose friendship sustained my faith in architectural discourse for more than thirty years.

Anthony Vidler
New York
January 2007