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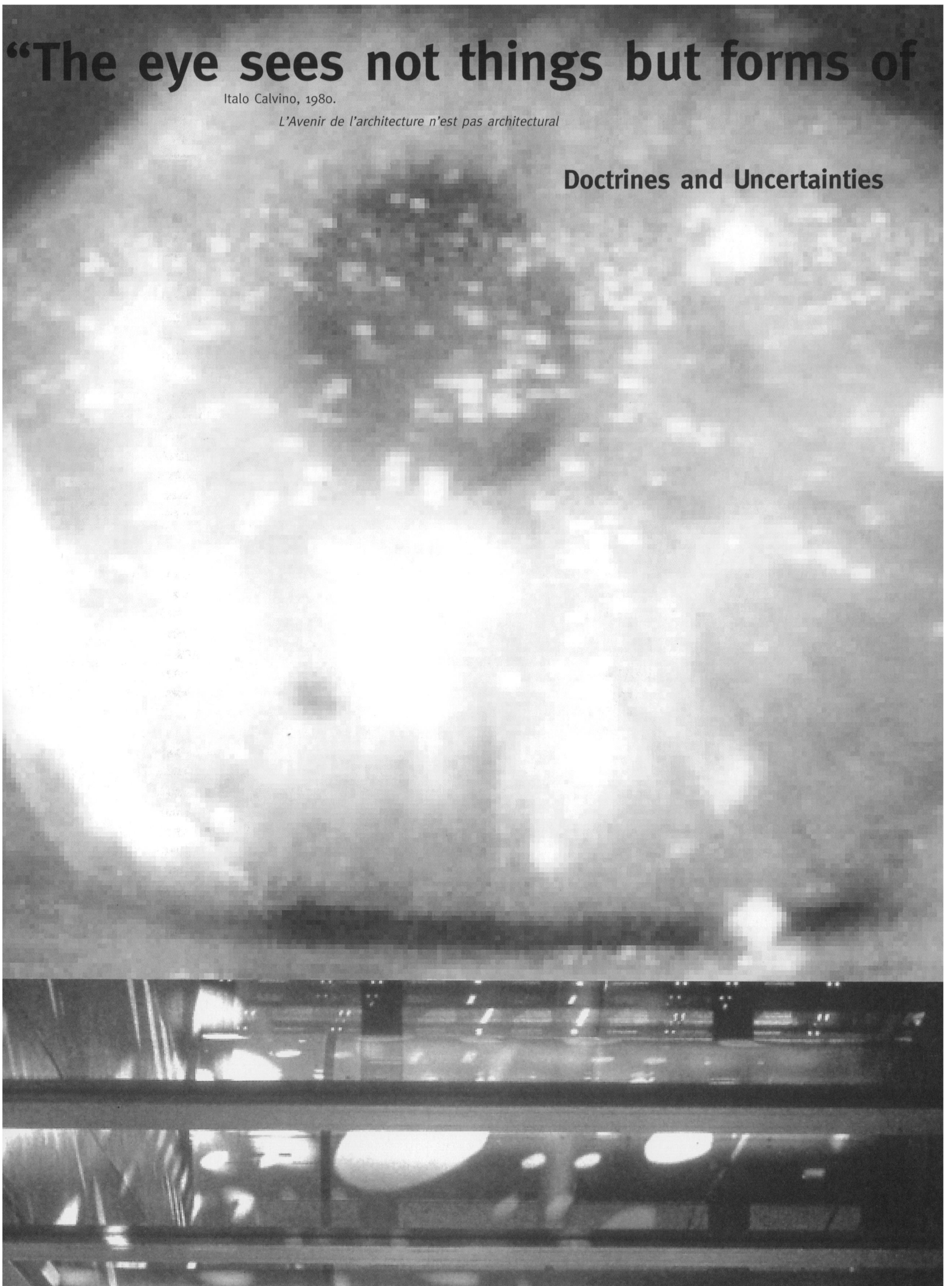
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“The eye sees not things but forms of

Italo Calvino, 1980.

L'Avenir de l'architecture n'est pas architectural

Doctrines and Uncertainties



things which signify other things.”

Architecture today is still the art of choosing the formal vocabulary of

With few exceptions, Architecture is sad, monotonous, and

unsurprising.

Jean Nouvel

The Moderns never cease to hark back to their CORBU, grey and fat. The Rationalists make their final stand before surrendering. The Technocrats no longer dazzle anyone with their feats in tow. The Nostalgics are afraid of losing their memory and make us cry over the lost charms of the 17th-century city. The Formalists obsess over the triangle, the circle, or the square, depending on their genetic determinism or a bad encounter not discovered by their psychiatrists.

The skillful, correct, and wonderful game of volumes no longer amuses anyone.

The city suffocates, grows fat and flabby in the so-called peripheral zones. The circulation is poor. The bad cells are spreading. The heart is ill. The limbs are tingling.

In these circumstances, Architects have perfectly understood that Architecture was not accessible to the people and decided not to speak about architecture any longer except among themselves in order, so they say, to deepen their inner knowledge.

They speak so much of architecture that they no longer speak about anything else. The others (non-Architects), no longer hearing anything said about architecture, speak about everything else. When an Architect hears someone else (a non-Architect) speak about architecture, he treats him as an incompetent and advises him to speak of something else.

When someone else hears Architects

This has nearly turned out badly for them because other people were no longer calling on the Architect for building.

Fortunately, the Law came to the rescue of the unfortunate Architect in decreeing that henceforth only the Architect could build for other people, which the Architect totally accepted, being able to build calmly, without any surprises, and in complete legality. As a way to deliver him from every anxiety (the solitude of the Artist in the face of his empty building site is absolute), the Legislator strongly advised him to heed his prescriptions. Thus, the Architect, reassured and guided, henceforth follows the few recipes written today in the wretched menu of the government cafeteria. Mistakes are no longer his fault. As long as he follows the Civil Code, mistakes are the fault of the Administration.

Architects then discussed the matter and became divided. The greatest number of them, respectful of the Established Order, have decreed that the urban and periurban [suburban] chaos was not of their doing and that their

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Toward a Number of Architectures – A Parodic Anti-Manifesto in Favor of a Pluralist Architecture:

I love architectures to be

I love them as one loves an epoch or civilization. As a revealing sign of savoir-faire and of esthetic and practical preoccupations. I love them above all as an instant of imagination turned into stone. I also love them as realistic intentions. As the result of an act of will and mastery. As the statement of a proposition which knew how, in order to exist, to have itself admitted. I love them as illustrations of the dated possible. I judge them as witnesses of economic and cultural consensus.

I am ready to love more of them. Pure and impure ones. Virtuous and whorish ones ...

Spontaneous and sophisticated ones. Nude and well-dressed ones. Proletarian and bourgeois ones. Provided that they be alive!

I am afraid

Let us leave Frankenstein his bride. Provided that they be tolerant! Slave in search of mistresses, this does very little for me.

As for the rapport of the sadomasochistic type and those who impose their way of life and perpetually show off their strength, no thank you! As long as they are intelligent! ... one gets tired even of bimbos! If they are witty, that's all right! If they are cultured and do not show off their knowledge, I will listen to them. If they are knowledgeable, I will pay them a visit and interest myself in their discoveries. And while I'm at it, I prefer beautiful ones. It seems that this is no longer in fashion, but I can't help myself!

When I say beautiful, I do not

no more than ... what I want to say is one with the charm and minor yet engaging faults of someone like Barbra Streisand, for example. I do not like to imagine them as systems or as robots made of the same interchangeable parts and well programmed to answer some limited ques-

one building in a thousand. It could collapse tomorrow without making many

intelligent and unmistakable.

of mummies and things brought back to life!

speaking of architecture, he does not understand a word of

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necessarily mean Marilyn Monroe,

people cry. profession consisted above all in covering one's expenses and coming in on time with a technically reliable product. Certain Architects took refuge on their planet of paper, in their utopias of the future or past, taking themselves for a PIRANESI or BOULEE.

A minority (acting as is right and proper) have decided to await the Great Evening which would, miraculously, make everything possible once again.

There remain the Don Quixotes, the hot-blooded ones, those who think

I am that way for all the reasons which flow from the pernicious preceding statement.

And, against the windmills, the winds, the City Halls, the swamps, the urbanocrats, and above all those with a doctoral degree in Architecture,

The solution is not hidden in the codicils of ALBERTI, PIRANESI, LEQUEUX, or LEDOUX. The key is not in knowing in whose wake to follow, which master to worship, which architecture to impose, or which architects to excommunicate. Architecture can no longer be that which it claims to be, some kind of "art of organizing space" or some "skillful game of volumes." Architecture can no longer be one building in a thousand financed by adoring patrons or the authorities in search of style. Architecture must go beyond its borders, overturn its elitist guardians, and stop being a privilege that no social revolution will ever abolish. It is the role of architects to liberate their muse.

For this, one must express oneself by every means, principally by that which
it and advises them to speak of something else.

is built. One must echo an entire culture, and draw from an entire civilization. The example of the modern movement is significant in this regard. Is it the history of Architecture which inspired it? Or was it the industrial revolution, or FOURIER and PROUDHON, followed by KANDINSKY, MONDRIAN, KLEE...?

Architecture can no longer be the simple visual quest for beauty (for many years artists, those who work with form [plasticians], painters, sculptors, photographers, filmmakers, musicians, and poets have gone beyond aesthetic value alone to accompany, supplement, and replace it with the quest for signification).

From now on, Architecture must

Architecture should speak, tell, and question at the cost, if necessary (and it often is), of technological purity, the constructed tradition, and the conformity of references to cultural models (whether they be of classical or modern origin).

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tions. I prefer to think of them as unique and bringing with them the qualities and defects inscribed in their genetic heritage. I imagine them as fragile and mortal, in need of love, care, and attention. **With, like everyone, an uncertain**

I love them for themselves, for their singular personalities. I have a weakness for cool ones, sensitive to the esthetic of the times, influenced by literature, comic books, television, movies, photography, and the artistic creation of the hour. Making discerning use of all aspects of their life in order to make it easier and make themselves happy, with up-to-date electronic

I predict that the

devices and the most recent inventions. I am interested in intellectual ones, those who know how they are made and who ask themselves existential questions: Where am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going? I love those who organize themselves to exploit to the fullest their qualities and their faults, conscious of the importance of their subconscious.

I do not despair in knowing many of them. From one to another, I take upon myself the quarrels and am the champion of pluralism. To one and the other, I add still others. To black and white, I add all the colors, nuances, ornaments, and motley hues. They are only valued for being alive, tolerant, and different. Rather than taking out one or the other, or one and the other, I choose among the others in each city and port on the spot. With a number of them, it's more of a sure thing.

Jean Nouvel - Extracts from a lecture at the Centre Georges Pompidou, January 1992:

If asked to define architecture today, we would have to begin by saying what it does not do. In

modern times, architecture wanted to create the world. It failed through overambition, without properly understanding that the world does not belong to the architect, but the architect to the world;

Nouvel

destiny linked to chance and to the community to which they belong.

future of architecture is not Architectural.

Signify.

Architecture should address itself to the spirit more than to the eye and
 In order to do this, all means are good ones: symbol, reference, metaphor,
 sign, decoration, humor, game, irony, plagiarism, innovation, tradition,
 style.... All words are permitted if they are useful in the sense given them
 and if they are understood.

From this point of view, the future of architecture is

... who are going to live in the space that he defines. What he
 says, what he chooses to say, is at least as interesting as his way of say-
 ing it. The content of the architectural message is no longer something to
 be chosen from history, as if architecture were a literary author of the 17th
 century, choosing his drama from mythology or ancient history.

*without understanding that architecture modifies
 and extends the world through the defeat of
 chaos, an adventure into the involuntary. The
 architecture of each era must reinvent the tools of
 its evolution, together with other disciplines which
 share the same characteristics. For an architect to
 embark on an adventure of such magnitude
 involves familiarity with thought.*

How is the Architect going to choose what he is going to say? Is he always
 going to repeat himself like an obsessed artist? Only the consciousness of

*It is never easy to plunge into philosophy or to
 organize thoughts. For my part I have always
 worked by displacement. In philosophical terms,
 I'm told one should talk about concept migration.*

It is not by our inner knowledge that we

context, the knowledge of the milieu in which he constructs, can permit him
 to find a real sense. That is to say, a physical, historical knowledge of this
 milieu – the consciousness of the possibility of evolution during the life
 expectancy of the proposed building – and a human knowledge – how the
 milieu is felt by those who live in it, what is expected of the building to be
 created, whether there is a suitable balance between the program and its
 social vocation....

*In the work of Michel Foucault I've found a num-
 ber of procedural rules and exploratory methods.
 In particular, I appreciated the values of the order
 of discourse – of discontinuity – exteriority,
 specificity, and inversion as effective methods of
 investigation; and the idea of developing rules of
 formulation which lead to a concept.*

The sense of this preliminary dialogue, of this “participation” so disparaged
 by some and so demanded by others, lies precisely here.

*Today, I am attempting to take this research fur-
 ther. After Foucault, I found the work of Deleuze
 and Guattari interesting and a little disturbing –
 particularly their latest book, Qu'est-ce que c'est
 que la philosophie? They explained things which
 have been familiar to me for ten years, but in a
 much more precise, highly involved, and intelligent
 way. But they speak of concept, precept, and
 effect, while I was talking about concept, sensa-
 tion, and emotion. And on reading that the notion
 of concept is reserved for philosophy I realized
 that this was perhaps a misuse. Then I read that
 “there is no such thing as a simple concept. Every
 concept has an indeterminate number of ele-
 ments ... it is a multiplicity.” When I read that a
 concept “has an irregular form, defined by the
 number of its components, that each concept has
 a past and a future and may be considered as the*

Gathering information and verifying hypotheses in order to orient one's
 choices constitute the necessary condition for creating an architecture. But
 this condition is far from being sufficient. Integrating the givens does not
 imply finding the solution. Refusing to integrate them implies refusing to
 answer to them.

It is in these preliminary dialogues that the Architect has the greatest chance
 of finding a social sense, a common sense to what he is going to edify.

It is characteristic of the Architect-Artist to deny this. His own satisfaction
 is the criterion of Good. His is the only solution.

How does taking into account a request limit the quality of the architectur-
 al response? Let us be done with this bad process which would have it that
 an architect who integrates a precise request abdicates his knowledge and
 “cuts his wings.” It is often in the request that

*the architect finds the response
 point at which its composing elements coincide
 and are condensed,” I understood that this could
 be applied to a purely architectural concept. That
 there could be a link between the world of philos-*

On this level, the future of architecture is democratic

But let us talk of the context, of the environment in which the project is sit-

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translate a living civilization rather than a heritage.

more literary than architectural, more linguistic than formal.

will undo the crisis of architecture.

uated. Does this context permit a sensible response? Does the urban and suburban [periurban] jumble still permit the architectural object to find a sense? If not, what good is it to think about architecture? Can one content himself with creating isolated art/architectural objects in making an appeal to an architectural knowledge which is less and less shared?

If architecture becomes this means to convey ideas and

Today, architecture stops at the object (taken in the sense of unity and mastery of the work or the working). Should one not consider as a preliminary architectural problem the rapport to be created between several masteries of the work?

Therein lies one of the principal architectural problems — outside the domain of the competence acknowledged for architects and on the other side of the administrative barrier.

It is a problem of power,

Under this essential aspect, the future of architecture is urbanistic.

The field of architecture should stretch to include the spatial organization and definition of the vocabulary of the new neighborhoods, to the orientations to be given to urban modifications. There, where the rules of urbanism are in force, where the technocratic norms apply, where the censor of good taste reigns, architecture no longer carries except by mistake. Well, then, what is to be done?

Construct. In the most significant way. In 90 percent of ... the nature of what it should or could have been. Here are some personal examples. When you are asked to construct in a lot of the worst type (with all the same consummate houses), surround your house with an embankment two meters high and drive it into the soil so that it recreates its own landscape. When someone wants to make you make a pastiche with a seated dog, in order not to deface the landscape, make an invisible, pedestrian, chameleon-like house with rusty steel and a chestnut tree overgrown with vegetation. When you are refused a building permit and are obliged to carry out some modifications, mark them all in red on the constructed house. If you are made to work with an industrialized and repetitive model, use a single element and number from 1 to 3000 on the front.

People will object, telling me that these attitudes are of little interest to the man in the street and are difficult to comprehend. If the story told were so simplistic, that would be true. But it is not easy to escape from the question posed by this attitude in relation to the context. It is an architectural reading at different degrees which is carried out. The author (architect) should know that his book (object) will be read, seen, and decoded [decrypted] by a very large audience.

The characteristic of a strong architecture is to be

Where are these positions in architectural thought situated today? Some people call them post-modern. Under certain aspects (the different codes of possible readings, eclecticism, irony), they probably are. But does there exist

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ophy and the world of architecture, even if an architectural concept differs in that its aim is not formulation, but fabrication, its aim is to attain reality. The question of reality brings us back once again to an exploration of the physical world.

When a philosopher says that philosophy proceeds by concept, science by prospect, and art by precept and effect, he is drawing our attention to the prospect, to that which science can contribute. Heidegger's provocative statement comes to mind: "Science doesn't think." That's not what it's there for.

One sometimes doubts when one sees the state of mathematics today, with its ingenuity, its strategies or the theories surrounding falsification, for example, presented as a kind of prototype novel, as it were, stories where points of passage can be read.... One realizes, then, that similar methods of exploration could well have a relevance to architecture.

Seeing the images which can be produced by fractals — an iterative mathematical process leading to infinity and an infinity of forms — or the geometry of meaning suggested by Thom's catastrophe theory, one suddenly realizes that the ideography generated by science is an extraordinary foundation for image makers such as us architects. Science supplies the conditions in which ideas can change. It provides the material and the spark which kindle philosophy and art as well as art on the borders of all of these disciplines.

For the architect of course, a man working with reality, it is the everyday applications of science which are useful. The evolution of technology and technical procedures and the contribution of new materials endowed with incredible properties are, so to speak, grounds for a reappraisal. In its relationship with science and its applications, architecture aims for synergy of performance.

signify space, then the architect is a man who says (with

and architecture is weak.

the cases, we must take positions that are critical, instigative, accusatory,

read by all and to resist this reading, to be sufficiently profound to guard a little

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a post-modern thinking? I do not think so. For me, at present, the post-modern is defined by a process of elimination. Those who are post-modern are the ones who are not pre-modern and who are not modern. The pre-modern ones are those in love with Quincy de Quatremere, those from the Versailles school who reverently make everything from the window to the garden in the French style, the doctrinaire ones who prophesy that the laws of estheticism and architectural knowledge are going to overturn economic phenomena, those who preach a European city with arcaded plazas and triumphant obelisks, the carvers, copiers, and masters. The modern ones are in line, the repetitive ones, the square ones, the boxes, the socio-social ones, the legitimate offspring of Corbu, the bastards of Mondrian, the involuntary supremacists, the simplifiers, those with a limited outlook, the vocabulary amnesics who have forgotten words from other centuries.

the constructed as language) and who speaks to those

Here a new factor intervenes in the evolution of our discipline, a factor which, historically or critically speaking, is rarely considered: if architecture integrates this synergy of performance, its relationship with modernity is no longer one of uncritical wonderment. Technical prowess, once the guiding light for architects of heroic modernity, has lost its value as a symbol. The role of the engineer loses none of its power, its nobility, or its prestige. But today we no longer want to see the workings. Architecture has to be a force of its own; to be guided by something other than contingencies and the harsh realities of construction.

There remain the others, the

Those who formulate three ideas at once, who remember, who actualize, who decorate, who denounce, who keep their distances, who laugh, who multiply the signs, whose eyes fill with tears, who mix together cultures, memories, hopes, despair, and fantasies.

Philosophy, science, and art are all indispensable impure ones.

foundations for the conscious development of a true work of architecture. It is important to remember that the evolution of ideas, of science and the arts, is not without consequence for architecture. With this in mind, in what direction should architecture evolve?

questioning, and ironic. Each building should provoke a question on ...
late their epoch.

mystery and also to give rise to some questions without hope of an answer.

*"The Arab World Institute" montage, text and photograph
Paris, France, 1981-1987
detail view of interior*

NOUVEL, Jean. French. Born 12 August, **1945**. Educated at The École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, **1966**; DLPG Degree, **1974**. Co-founder of the Movement of French Architects "March 1976," **1972**; Co-founder of the Architectural Union and one of the key organizers of the International Consultants for the Development of the Paris Halles, **1979**; Founder and Artistic Director of the Architecture Biennial, part of the Paris Biennial, **1980**. Merger with Emmanuel Cattani of all activities and projects, **1988**. Vice-President of the French Institute of Architecture, **1991**. Exhibitions: Paris Universal Exhibition, **1989**; "Les Chemins de la Liberté" (The Road to Freedom) Competition, **1983**, Paris, La Villette Biennial, **1985**; Paris, CCI Exhibition, "Chemin du Virtuel" (The Road to the Virtual) Study, **1987**; Paris, French Institute of Architecture, **1987**; Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou, "Les Années 50" (The Fifties), **1988**; Paris, Hauts de Seine, "Les Lumières de la Ville" (The City Lights), **1989**; Paris, Arab World Institute, "Égypte, Égypte," **1989**; Barcelona, Spain, "Jean Nouvel - College of Architecture" Nouvel-Cattani, **1990**; Austrian Biennial, Expo 95, Nouvel-Cattani Competition, **1991**; Paris Austerlitz Station, "Georges Boudialle" Nouvel-Cattani, **1991**; Nara, Japan, Workshop for Architecture Nouvel-Cattani, **1992**; Tokyo, Japan, "La Métropole selon Jean Nouvel" Nouvel-Cattani, **1992**. Awards: Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters, **1983**; Silver Medal of the Academy of Architecture, Doctor "Honoris Causa" of the University of Buenos Aires, and Winner of the Grand Prize of Architecture, **1987**; Aga Khan Prize, honorable mention, **1987**; Winner of Silver Square for the Arab World Institute, **1987**; Prize for the Best French Building, **1987**; Creator of the Year, **1987**; Architectural Record Prize for the Hotel St. James, **1990**. Address: Jean Nouvel, 4 Cite Griset 75 011 Paris, France

