Views on Art and Architecture
A Conversation

Arranged by John E. Burchard—
with the participation of Pietro Belluschi, Harry Bertoia, Reg. Butler, Eduardo Chillida, Jimmy Ernst, Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, Richard Lippold, Walter Netsch, Irene Rice Pereira, and José Luis Sert.[1]

BURCHARD: Are the present relations between art and architecture, or art and the city, less rich than they have been in other great periods?

BERTOIA: No, they are as rich today as in any other time. They may be even richer, "in the sense that we have a greater vocabulary of forms and relations, certainly not in the sense of unity. Great periods attained higher levels of unity . . . the element of time had a tendency to condense and preserve those forms and relations which gave a greater unity. The irrelevant, if any, disappeared. Whereas today the irrelevant is still with us."

NETSCH: Whether less or more is not so important as that the present relations could be much richer.

CHILLIDA: These relationships are not so close as they have been in some privileged periods of the past.

BELLUSCHI: "Our generation has not succeeded too well in integrating the Arts of Painting and Sculpture with Architecture, because they no longer convey or explain literary ideas, but are more intent on the discovery of more fundamental but less obvious visual relationships. They wish in fact to contrive personal esthetic images of the kind of universe which science is progressively unveiling to our perceptions."

GROPIUS: "Yes, and this is precisely the reason why our period cannot be called 'great' in a cultural sense. For the average man a problem like the relation between art and the city hardly exists, not, anyway, to an extent that would engage his personal interest and willingness to let it take precedence over more immediate material and practical considerations."

PEREIRA: "I feel that today there is hardly any relationship between most contemporary art and architecture." If architecture means a "structural network of relationships which give dimensionality, form and a physical objective content to space,

then, I would say that, in practically all cases, contemporary art, in particular painting, is the antithesis of structural form. Whereas, architecture is a building and formulating process, which requires intellection; present day art, and this is regrettable, has been concerned with the dissolution and fragmentation of form, structural relationships and space.

"In other words, unlike architecture, most painting today has no underlying structural framework within which to construct an object. Inasmuch as structural and form-giving properties are essential for conveying meaning and content, it would seem to me that representation in the visual arts has become a pictorial expression of a flat concrete abstractiveness.

"More precisely, contemporary art, in most cases, fragments the object and negates space. There is merely a dynamism in action and a dissolution of structural form. Architecture is a dynamic of relationships which involve space, give objective reality to structural form; and, within the form, is content and meaning."

BURCHARD: Most of us do seem to agree that these relations are not as rich as they have been in the past or as they might be now. Let us ask, then, "Does it matter?"

GROPIUS: Yes. "Historic examples of a rich relationship between architecture and the arts are extremely meaningful, since they present a challenge and an incentive for us to become more articulate in our own period."

PEREIRA: "I do feel that historical grandeur is meaningful. The qualities of elegance, beauty and order endow an age with inspiration and heightened sensibilities. Ideals and goals of perfection continuously bring consciousness to higher syntheses with the evolution of thought and knowledge. Without these universal qualities both art and architecture are impoverished; originality and the great individual are missing. It is a great loss to an historical period when these universal qualities are lacking."

NETSCH: Extrapolation of historical grandeur may be valuable to history. Let future history decide how well we have done. Our solutions should be for active participation and an interpretation of our culture.

BERTOIA: "If this has any importance, it is only as a measure of comparison and perhaps it would be of interest to point out the differences and similarities, but I don't think it would contribute to our capabilities to deal with present relations."

LIPPOLD: "The truly creative man has faith in his time."[2]

REG. BUTLER: There is no absolute reason for collaboration and it should not be treated as a moral imperative. A mural may be a very poor solution to a problem which was perhaps

vital in the seventeenth century and which has little meaning today. Men like Mies van der Rohe have a perfect right to their classic simplicity and economy.

The arts may be either harmonious or complementary. There are many permissible sculptural activities, such as the provision of textures, nonfunctional elements, etc., "but I do not think you can expect the contemporary sculptor to involve himself in a kind of dilution of aesthetic vitality in his work in order that it may fit happily on to the surface of a stressed skin concrete building or fit into the general disposition of mass which the average building represents today. If you want to use sculpture as such, as opposed to making use of sculptural decoration, I think you have to face the preoccupations which are in the minds of contemporary sculptors, and they are as strong as those in the minds of architects. Sculptors are concerned with the creation of a statement made in inanimate matter which can be regarded as a living thing . . . which is so sensitive and vibrant with the quality of living being that you will get that horrible effect of a crucifixion if it is attached to a building. . . .

"Any architect who wants to use sculpture should not sit down, scratch his head and conjure up some kind of stylised device which fits in in some way with the conception of contemporary architecture. Use sculpture as it comes, when you like it, and when you do not like it do not worry; carry on without any sculpture, because you get rid of the moral imperative which says you ought to have sculpture and you ought to have painting."[3]

BURCHARD: Let us assume now that the relations are not rich enough and that it does matter; then we might ask who or what is to blame. Is it perhaps because there are no common visual symbols any more?

BERTOIA: There are plenty, "but they are not substantiated by a common unity of thought."

NETSCH: We have them, but they are hard to perceive in our complicated society, and more frustrating for the creative artist to reveal. . . . Our artists are well related to the world of space and science, and our symbols will not appear common until later.

BURCHARD: In the absence of other comments and in my understanding of some common symbol which would require it to be both current and clear, it seems to me we may take it that this is one of the difficulties, unless we want to say that visual symbols are no longer necessary. Is there perhaps another difficulty, that we lack any dominant social goals?

NETSCH: Probably so. We overemphasize our dramatic larger-than-individual cultural contribution, i.e., technology. We have

a more diffuse and greater opportunity for petty self-expression at the expense of critical evaluation. As a society we feel no awesome premonition of doom, everlasting punishment, nirvana. Our cities are no longer dramatic social magnets save in economic terms and in the most urbane cultures; yet our art is either historical or in museums, not in squares and churches—not in the suburbs. We have more leisure time, with even more expected, and our recreation is spectator-oriented. We lack individual patrons to support artists over a period of years, with resulting creative continuity and hopeful opportunity. Our political cultural goals are confused between the individual and the group. The economics of our time does not include art as a necessity, and economics dominates our general culture. We fear controversy and dislike to be thought radical in a conservative society. We lack critical appreciation or any desire to have our work evaluated before its public appearance. Creative artists generally occupy a secondary social position. Thus historically we may be looked on as another example of a fragmented group in a fragmented world—another example of diffusion. With isolated exceptions, this is no doubt the true picture today. But it need not be our fate. Architecture and art have gone against the current before.

BERTOIA: "A dominant social goal is strongly lacking. This may produce more varied relations but not necessarily any cohesion. At best they are discontinuities in a matrix of inertia."

LIPPOLD: "Naturally, the chief requisite for the architect and artist is an agreement on the forces which unite them in spirit in a given age, and further unite them with all men alive at the same time. This demands the same faith of both. There is no need to describe again the nature of our mid-twentieth century sources of faith, because they have been discussed thoroughly before and ought to be in the blood of anyone who is wholly alive in our age of space-yearning and dematerialization. It is anyone's privilege to rebel at the evil aspects of our time and to yearn for previous faiths or await a happier future. I believe the artist and the architect cannot afford the luxury of such escape techniques."[2]

GROPIUS: "I believe that if we as a people cannot evolve a clearer picture of our common objectives and unite our moral forces behind their realization, the desire of the architect and artist to create unity will remain thwarted, and his individual contributions towards beauty and order will remain isolated. Only when a social or spiritual goal has become clearly identified in the mind of a society does it become the inner substance of its works of art. Lacking such a common objective we have, as often as not, come to accept the substitute of a preconceived formal pattern, superimposed on the living tissue of human

activity, to achieve at least an external order in place of plain chaos. But such order is of a precarious character, easily uprooted and soon ignored when it remains unabsorbed by life and inexpressive of its real motives.

"But if our democratic societies have, so far, not shown enough unity of purpose and, therefore, few convincing manifestations of general cultural significance, the authoritarian societies have, in spite of strong directional control and forcible drive, contributed nothing at all to a new visual interpretation of this century. All-embracing ideas can apparently be instilled by an act of will, but they cannot be made to flower into art by decree. Culture grows from the grass roots or not at all, and when it does it creates unity in diversity, the very climate for a close relationship between all the arts."

BURCHARD: Perhaps we have such precise techniques of communication now that we really don't need visual expositions any longer?

NETSCH: "As long as we have eyes, a heart, and the eternal questions, we have a need for visual exposition—when we no longer wish to see, to think or to ask, we have no need for the many things that make us 'the fortunately endowed animal.' "

GROPIUS: "A visual symbol is a dramatic shortcut, understood instantly and intuitively, in contrast to literary prose, which logically enlightens the intellect step by step. Neither way of expression can ever be dispensed with since each reflects different aspects of human nature."

BERTOIA: "Increased literacy does not remove the need for visual messages. To my mind, literacy should increase the need for the visual expressions, provided we do not accept substitutes, namely, one medium of expression for another. . . . Man's deepest thoughts perhaps remain unexpressed, but he surely can exercise his intelligence in choosing, among the various media, the one best suited in coming closest to what he wants to say."

LE CORBUSIER: "Spare us from deceptive lessons upon the walls of our public buildings. The newspapers can do this task —they come out every day: the technical papers do it too—they can be filed away! Four hundred years have passed since Gutenberg performed his labours! This would be a confusion of motives: things would become out of scale. Everything, good and bad, has a right to be communicated to the public—but in a suitable form."[4]

BURCHARD: Does any of us think that we can blame the difficulty on the determined overindividualism of the painters and sculptors?

BERTOIA: Does this mean the artist of today is of a different breed from the equivalent of the "great" days? No. By all counts he is still a human being. If he behaves differently it

serves only to indicate the age of specialization, if not the "lack of a dominant social goal."

PEREIRA: "In the 'great' days, for instance the Renaissance, artists and architects were preoccupied with a new world-view; man and nature; a new humanism. 'Conformity' in this sense was a general or universal concept within which the artist's intellectual curiosity and senses were stimulated. Today artists are expected to mature within a preconceived theory or style. This preconceived theory is not created by the artist (who has become quite inarticulate) but by external demands, pressures and authorities who try to figure out what the artist is doing and then impose the style or form within which they expect the artist to mature.

"However, it is my feeling that contemporary architecture makes a positive contribution to the understanding of this age—love of techniques, collective living, organization, light and air, etc. Whereas, the visual arts show a dissolution of thought and the disintegration of the object and consciousness."

NETSCH: The search for technique and a calligraphy for our culture has clearly been individually approached, and probably the fractured aspect of our visual society has made this inevitable. The lack of historic participation has certainly made us rusty. But there is disappointment in talking to a well-known painter, to discover that he has no interest in participating in architecture because he feels his work is too personal. He thinks Brancusi or Giacometti might have participated because they were less personal. This unwillingness to participate is certainly a serious barrier to the richest collaboration. But I would still want to foster such individuality while limiting participation to those who I believed wished to speak.

LIPPOLD: I believe that there must be three-way collaboration between architect and artist and public. Any one can fail. "I have also, alas, frequently heard from sculptors the complaint that a true collaboration makes the sculpture nearly invisible, or forfeits it to the scale and mathematics of the building. To this I can only answer: 'Hurrah!' As in a love affair, when sacrifice of one's self to love itself opens new worlds of understanding of the human condition, so, I believe, the ascetic artist, by bending his forms to the master proportion and social creed expressed in a good building, can fulfill his social destiny."[2]

BELLUSCHI: "Non-objective Art, in my mind, is trying to define new kinds of order in the apparent chaos of human life. Modern Architecture in a way has traveled a parallel road."

GROPIUS: "One of the bequests of the nineteenth century which handicaps us today is the obsession with the idea that individual genius can only work in exalted isolation, a view which was quite foreign to other periods. It prevents the public

from understanding the new efforts at collaboration among architects, and between architects and artists, and constantly throws us back into unwarranted jealousies and confusions. Slow and painful are the attempts at seeking points of contact again after the long alienation between the different branches of the arts, and artists and architects cannot be blamed if they do not want to rush into this development unguardedly."

BURCHARD: I would have intensified the last question had I thought it would serve a useful purpose. I might have suggested that the dominant themes of today circle around truth-searches of science and the hope for benign applications of technology as much as they did around a Last Judgment in the thirteenth century. I might have suggested that the artists who worked with questions of the Last Judgment had more than a purely intuitive understanding of the theology involved and what the society needed to be told. I would then have added that I cannot think of an artist or architect of my acquaintance (and there are some good ones) who is not really an ignoramus about science and confused about technology, and rather proud of it. Then I would have asked why we should trust a purely intuitive understanding of science. But this would have opened up an entirely different range of issues, which might well be debated another day. Let us turn away from the poor artists and sculptors and ask the other question. Are our architects unduly arrogant, egocentric, or even autocratic, and is it this that leads them to disdain the use of the other arts and ignore the aspirations of the other artists?

BERTOIA: "If it is the autocracy of Le Corbusier, we have the best fusion of the architect, the sculptor, the painter, etc. If it is the autocracy of Mies, we have the greatest possible unity of form. If it is the autocracy of Wright, we have the best relationship of man-made to nature-made brought into harmony. If we have the autocracy of all three and many more, then we have much variety, but may find ourselves searching for unity. These examples of autocracy in architecture do not exclude the other arts. Here is ground for thought."

NETSCH: "Many artists and architects claim that our culture has no place for art in architecture. I think this means a lack of critical courage, an unwillingness to be counted; or a lethargy and conservatism which prevents the architect from including art in his concept. Good contemporary architecture denies nothing positive and in creating space accepts art."

GROPIUS: "If architects should have deluded themselves and others into believing that they hold positions of autocratic leadership, they cannot be living in the world *I* know. Anybody who has undertaken to steer a client toward architectural solutions which would transcend the merely practical and econom-

ical approach knows that he will have his hands full without trying to add proposals for collaboration with painters and sculptors. If he has such intentions, he is usually forced to hide them carefully in the beginning for fear of alienating his client right from the start. When he has finally succeeded in breaking ground, it may be too late to incorporate the artist's work organically into the whole concept. It does not normally occur to a client to look upon the architect as the natural ally of the artist and to accept his leadership as the coordinator for all the arts. His education has never offered him such insights, and it is hard to re-educate him to see things in their proper perspective after he has spent a lifetime disregarding artistic values and responsibilities."

BELLUSCHI: Modern Architecture (traveling the parallel road with modern painting and sculpture) "has found that the way to give transcendent quality to a building is to emphasize its structure and to manipulate its space sequences rather than to introduce sensuous externals as it was done in the past. The result is that the architect tends to regard with impatience and as an intruding element any work which tries to speak for itself in a place where every part is meant to be a clear, self-sufficient declaration. This is particularly true when we observe that any statement the modern artist makes is meant to be a unique expression of his personal world which must be heard on its own terms as his own 'message of discontent.'

"This fear of a confusion of voices trying to be heard has made integration between the so-called Visual Arts and Architecture a most difficult task. Only the artist-architect, as one man, could succeed in this work of integration—or perhaps a rare combination of two men whose enthusiasm is born at the same time and as a shared experience. But this kind of collaboration is rare. We must admit that pure, uncompromising Architecture is not at ease with Art, even if thirsting for it, because Art will seldom add; much more often it will detract from the purity of the architectural idea."

LIPPOLD: "To my astonishment, however, some of the seemingly most important architects to-day do not exhibit this faith [in their times] when they ask artists to collaborate with them whose work forms a most striking contrast of form and material, and denies the technological and spacial concepts of the buildings in question. I can only consider such lack of faith as pathetic as I would the use of Greek or Egyptian carvings on the portals of Chartres in order to assure its architect that it would not take off for Heaven!"[2]

ERNST: "Architectural expressions have always given the appearance of merely following the influences of other art forms. And there is no reason to believe that this impression

will change. No serious artist will use such an argument to downgrade architecture, because he knows that the area of public responsibility is heavier on the architect than on the artist, that the experiment in architecture is by far the more courageous because it becomes immediately public. Unlike the artist, the architect cannot discard privately any of his finished work. The architect, on the other hand, should not assume that this larger burden of immediate public responsibility entitles him to cast painting or sculpture in the same mold. It is this latter 'autocracy' which is rightfully resented even by those artists who do not object to architecture calling itself one of the arts.

"Almost all of the artists of my acquaintance are uninhibited in the opinion that most architects are deliberate in their apparent contempt for painting and sculpture; that architects seem to consider it a sign of professional weakness if their work is in need of artistic addenda; that some of them consider the artist a mere mechanic who is to carry out a visual idea for which the architect could not spare the time of execution.

"I cannot deny that more often than not I am given to similar opinions, but I must admit that I am at a loss to present any constructive plan or alternative to bring about a better working relationship. It would be folly for any artist to insist on individuality on the one hand, and to pretend on the other that a realignment of the professions is possible on the basis of a general all-inclusive plan. It will not do to deny that the more the architect takes on the character of the independent artist, the more difficult the relationship between the two must become. The situation could be resolved if the architect were content to be a benign coordinator who impersonally oversees the technical assembly of materials to fill an existing physical need for shelter. But surely no artist could expect this of another creative individual. And he would certainly consider it to be a worthless endeavor to be a part of an effort that can only result in mediocrity."

LE CORBUSIER: "The real builder, the architect, can construct the most useful building for you, because he knows most about volumes. He can in fact create a magic box enclosing all that your heart desires. Scenes and actors materialise the moment the magic box appears; the magic box is a cube; with it comes everything that is needful to perform miracles, levitation, manipulation, distraction, etc. The interior of the cube is empty, but your inventive spirit will fill it with everything you dream of—in the manner of performances of the old Commedia dell' Arte."[5]

BURCHARD: It is possible also to blame the clients, the customers,

the public taste, the public frugality in the arts, the destructive influences of technology, but it is refreshing to note that none of you really wishes to stress these handicaps. Most of you admit they are there, but you seem to think them less important than the more fundamental questions already discussed, although Walter Gropius consistently asks for education, education, and education. In spite of your restraint in the argument, I hope any citizen who happens in on this discussion will think about what he himself is doing or has done to encourage a better architectural-artistic world. I would expect him to be ashamed if he can bring himself to be candid. The modern Pericles seems hard to find. But whether or not this is so, shall we end on a pessimistic note? In other words, can any one suggest that there is anything to be done?

ERNST: "All talk of finding a level on which to 'integrate' the various arts to make them more 'meaningful' is Utopian. Utopia presupposes mediocrity, conformity, and the prohibition of dreams.

"The obvious solution to any contemplation over the relationship between art and architecture appears to be no planned solution at all. The best course is to allow for continuing wider divergence, if that is what the various individual creative ways indicate. Magnetism, if any, can exist only between individual practitioners and not between the professions generally. In each case, the degree of domination, or lack thereof, can only be determined by component parties to an idea."

LIPPOLD: "A finished building with its sculpture, painting, and other 'adornments,' stands most successfully when it is 'incomplete,' waiting, like a poem, to be read. If the picture presented to the user is so complete as to exclude him, to be looked at from a distance, every detail of space, scale, and equipment so complete in itself that it substitutes for the man who would enter, then I believe that a true collaboration of 'three' has failed. . . .

"It simply means that the artist cannot embrace only the building or only the spectator. . . . Technically, he must place the scale of his work just above the scale of the man who sees it, and indicate thereby the scale of the architecture with which it works. He must also attach his work so tightly to the building, in similarity of proportion, material, and technique, that try as he might, the user cannot pry it loose (visually) and thus is forced to move through the sculpture or painting to the building, and of course, back down through it again to himself, experiencing in such unified, proportional relationships the place of all forms in our cosmic entity. . . .

"The architect's responsibility in this is simply to allow the artist to achieve this double rapport, neither asking him to

isolate his work from both building and user, nor asking him to substitute it for the user, or for weak areas in the design of the building."[2]

SERT: "The works of the great creators of modern art are not shown in the places of public gathering, and are only known to a select few. Our best artists are divorced from the people. Their works go from their studios to the homes of wealthy private collectors, or to the deep-freeze compartments of the museums. There they are catalogued and belong to history. They join the past before they meet the present."[6]

TAYLOR: "The notion of building as a kind of exhibition place for painting and sculpture is an undesirable one."[7]

GROPIUS: "I had a correspondence with Jean Gorin. He feels the same as I, that it is not enough to call in a number of famous artists and hand them out this or that spot in the building to be filled with a work of art. True collaboration must start from scratch, the members of the group stimulating each other, conceiving the idea in mutual exchange as the builders of the old cathedrals who were living at the site devoting their life to the task. Time was not of the essence. They changed and rebuilt until they were convinced that it was good enough. Consider, for example, the open letter Gorin wrote on 6th March 1956." A translation and paraphrase might read as follows:[8]

Del Marle said in 1952 that the question was no longer one of ornamental polychromy, something decorative, something fundamentally sensory, which would harmonize with the styles of the centuries, but rather one of an architectural polychromy, sprung from the newest evolutions of painting and architecture, a modern polychromy, characterized by rationalism, the flagrant sign of our period.

Architectural polychromy was not to be considered as an adjunct to architecture, to be more or less necessary at will; it could not let the color stand in a secondary position vis-à-vis the plan. Indeed, it did not relate to the plan but rather to space. It was not enough to put plaques of color on asbestos cement.

The synthesis of the arts cannot consist in putting sculpture and painting in appropriate architectural locations or even natural ones, even when they are very appropriate, because that is, when all is said and done, nothing but the program of a museum. We believe that the true synthesis of the arts is to be found in the architectural work itself and commences from the first stages of the conception. This was not what was done at UNESCO. Many works of art were commissioned but they were not integrated into the architectural work. Even though the execution of the work was arrested for a long time no sculptors were invited to collaborate with a view to realizing a true and constructive unity, a synthesis of the arts, as it has just been defined.

BURCHARD: It is no doubt the view of most artists and of a few architects such as Gropius that the synthesis will never be achieved until it is attempted from the beginning. This too is my view. But the difficulties are many and severe, as we are reminded by almost every collaborator. Indeed, most architects and most artists seem to think they are too many and too severe. It can all be summed up perhaps by a statement from—

CHILLIDA: "This problem of integration of the arts is generally badly focused. It is not a matter of adding anything to the architecture. It is rather a matter of making architecture more open to the other arts from the start or early conception of the project. Architecture, painting, sculpture, etc., are the result of different creative forces, and perhaps a careful analysis of these creative forces will be the way to obtain a closer integration in the work that is only a plastic expression of those forces.

"In a rose, for example, the function of form and color, etc., is something that originates in the seed.

"The real collaboration aiming at the total integration of the arts should result from an equilibrium of forces. I believe that this equilibrium may not be a plastic equilibrium.

"Isn't it a miracle, for example, the integration, if we can call it that, of the eyes in the face of a human being? There is something that can be an equilibrium between the physical and spiritual dimension. Volumes and surfaces find themselves balanced not by what the eyes are but by the things they do. I believe that what concerns us is the task of men who give a color to the things they look at, who see in the objects they look at, according to the images they already have inside them."

REFERENCES

1 Most of the discussion is taken from private communications by the various participants. Where they have not been paraphrased, the comments are included in quotation marks. Quotations from other, printed sources are identified by independent references.

2 Richard Lippold, "Three in One," *Balance* [National Institute for Architectural Education, 1957], *4,* 6-7.

3 In a discussion, "Architecture and the Other Arts," held at the R.I.B.A., 7 January 1958, and published under that title in *The Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects,* February 1958, *65*: 118-119.

4 Le Corbusier, "The Core as a Meeting Place of the Arts," in *The Heart of the City* (CIAM 8), edited by J. Tyrwhitt, J. L. Sert, and E. N. Rogers (New York: Pellegrini and Cudahy, 1952), p. 48.

5 Le Corbusier, *op. cit.,* p. 52, caption to Figure 50.

6 José Luis Sert, "Centers of Community Life," in *The Heart of the City,* pp. 14, 16.

7 Basil Taylor (discussion), *The Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, op. cit.,* p. 122.

8 Jean Gorin, *La Synthèse des Arts Majeures, Est-elle Possible?* (Mimeographed copy in the possession of Walter Gropius.)