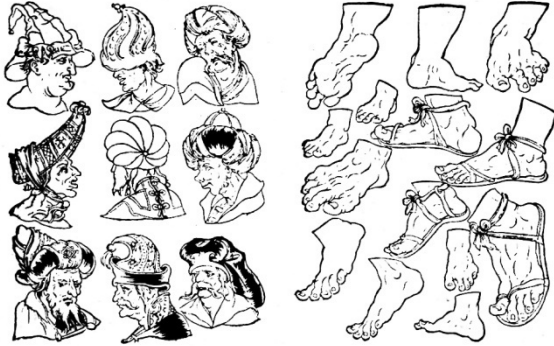


**invisible
conversations**

A PLAY BY
ASHLEY BOOTH KLEIN



There has been a tear in the time continuum, and we find ourselves in the midst of five men:

Two conversations ensue (between the living and the dead)...

Adolf Loos and Massimo Cacciari speak of architecture, the life it embodies, and the social effects it devises, while Jorge Silvetti and Manfredo Tafuri speak of their theories based on the methodological analyses of criticism in congruence with the approach of semantics to formal language.

Both conversations are mediated by Naom Chomsky, acting in the former as libertarian socialist, and in the latter as scholar of linguistics, (and in both cases possessed by the spirit of Architectural Reason).

CONVERSATION I
(ON ARCHITECTURAL REFORM)

Chomsky In what sense is the historical presence of architecture corporeal and how can its analysis account for the effect of memory as an informant of experience?

Loos Architecture arouses sentiments in man. The architect's task therefore, is to make those sentiments more precise. The room has to be comfortable; the house has to look inhabitable. The law courts must appear as a threatening gesture towards secret vice. The bank must declare: here your money is secure and well looked after by honest people.

The architect can only achieve this if established a relationship with those buildings, which have hitherto created the sentiment in man. For the Chinese, the color of mourning is white; for us it is black. Consequently it would be impossible for our architects to produce a happy atmosphere with the color of black.

Chomsky But how does architecture become? The role of society relative to both the architect and the individual seems adversarial, is the architect to reconcile the conditions inculcating this role? Explain your perceptions of man's relationship to the built world today, or rather, in your respective times.

Cacciari What we are concerned with here is the practical result of the analysis of form, or the a priori conditions of possibility, of *dichterisch wohnen*, or "poetic dwelling". This result should be kept "pure" of any form of nostalgia or utopian transcendence. Of interest here are only the conditions and the phenomenology of *undichterisch wohnen*.

Do we dwell poetically today? Heidegger is quick to point out that Holderlin does not speak of the real conditions of modern dwelling. He adds that the poetic taking of measure is foreign to us today, and that our only intuition of poetry enables us to experience the fact that today we dwell in a totally unpoetic world: *undichterisch wohnen der Mensch*. But the reversal of this condition is explicitly hoped for. The attention turned upon the poetic permits hope.

Chomsky Loos, you posed the question, “Does it follow that the house has nothing in common with art and is architecture not to be included amongst the arts,” to which you replied, “That is so”. You both seem to believe purpose prescribes voice and that this voice is distinguishable as artistic or not.

Cacciari Eupalinos expresses the original, tectonic meaning of architecture. Building in *poiesis*. There exist mute edifices— constructions and lodgings; and there exist edifices that speak; but there are others still—and they are the most rare—which sing.

Loos Only when the great misunderstanding that art is something, which can be adapted to serve a function, has been overcome, only when the deceitful catch phrase of “applied-art” has disappeared from the vocabulary of the people, only then will we have the architecture of our period. The artist needs only to serve himself; the architect must serve the population at large. But the amalgamation of art and craft has caused both of them, as well as humanity, infinite damage.

For this reason, humanity no longer knows what art is. It persecutes the artist with senseless rage and thereby prevents the creation of the work of art. Every hour humanity commits a monstrous sin, one that cannot be forgiven, the sin against the

Holy Spirit. Murder and robber, everything can be forgiven. But the large number of Ninth Symphonies which humanity has prevented in its blindness by persecuting the artist will not be forgiven; Humanity will not be forgiven for thwarting God's plans.

But he who knows that the purpose of art is to take man further and further, higher and higher, to make him more like God, understand that to give art a material function is a profanation of the highest order. Man will not leave the artist alone because he has a respect for him and the crafts are unable to develop freely, I being burdened under the weight of man's idealistic demands.

Chomsky Cacciari, you seem to be critical of Loos' belief that architecture can only become poiesis in sepulchral monuments. And you have asked, "Is this an appeal to pass beyond the listening wait? Is it a real possibility?" You seem to suggest dwelling be subject to artistry, while Loos, you advocate the separation of art from craft, in appeal to a social reformation in the hands of the bourgeois.

Cacciari Although "classic" dwelling is acknowledged to be henceforth impossible, the idea of city as organism remains possible: a Plant growing from the root of the architectural-urban planning of Logos. The idea of such a Plant represents the imperative, the Sollen, of metropolitan organization.

Loos I preach to the aristocrats. I allow decoration on my body, if it provides a source of pleasure for my fellow men, then they are also my pleasures. I suffer the ornament of the Kafir, that of the Persian, that of the Slovak's farmer's wife, the ornaments of my cobbler, because they all have no other means of expressing their

full potential. We have our culture which has taken over from ornament.

The absence of ornament has raised the other arts to unknown heights. Beethoven's symphonies would never have been written by a man who walked around in silk, velvet, and lace. The person who runs around in a velvet suit is no artist but a buffoon or merely a decorator. We have become more refined, more subtle. Primitive man had to differentiate themselves by various colors, modern man needs his clothes as a mask. His individuality is so strong that I can no longer be expressed in terms of items of clothing. The lack of ornament is a sign of intellectual power. Modern man uses ornament of past and foreign cultures at his discretion. His own inventions are concentrated on other things.

CONVERSATION II (ON ARCHITECTURAL CRITICISM AND SEMANTICS)

Chomsky It appears as though both of you perceive architectural criticism as a formal language and your intent to interpret its logic via methodological analysis which would allow you to discern the value of an architecture under examination. Your work codes and decodes in the same way that semantics provides interpretations of formal language, in the strict sense that an interpretation is a mapping of the atomic elements of a language into a domain of interpretation so as to provide enough information to evaluate all the sentences in the a language, or at least in the theory under question.

Silveti To begin with, it is clear that much of what is produced today in architecture consists of a discourse that comments on other already constituted architectural discourses: that is, the very special case of metalanguage in which both discourse belong to the same practice; architecture commenting on architecture, architecture “speaking” of itself.

One way to clarify the concept of metalanguage in relation to our subject is to classify the range of possible object-languages; that is to say, the codes or elements that can be referred to or commented on by the metalanguage, for example, the metalanguage may refer to or comment on the formal codes; it may also refer to the functional codes, that is the set of systematized, normalized functions (the program) and the uses they promote. Because they are the most conscious codes of modern architecture both of these seem to have been rather thoroughly explored. But it is also possible to be conscious of a commentary on the rhetorical codes of themselves.

Tafuri We must, however, keep in mind that any analysis which attempts to grasp the structural relationship between the specific forms of the architectural language and the world of production of which they are a part must do so by violating the object of analysis itself. Criticism, in other works, sees itself constrained to adopt a “repressive character” if it wishes to be free of that which is beyond language; if it desires to bring upon itself the cruel autonomy of architectural writing and if, after all, it wishes the “mortal silence of the sign” to speak. As has been acutely pointed out, to Nietzsche’s question “Who speaks?” Mallarme has answered, “The work itself.”

This would apparently exclude any attempt to question the language as a system of meanings whose discourse it is necessary to reveal. And where contemporary architecture poses, ostentatiously, the problems of its meaning, we must look for the signs of a regressive utopia, even if these signs mime a struggle against the role of language. This struggle is apparent if we see how, in recent works, the compositional strictness oscillates precariously between the forms of “comment” and those of criticism.”

Chomsky Silvetti, you used some of Levi-Strauss’ comments on Duchamp’s ready-mades to describe the “tests” which your idea of “criticism from within” had to pass. Specifically, you used these words from Strauss: “You then accomplish a new distribution that was in the realm of the possible but was not openly effected (in the primitive condition of the object). You make then, in one sense, a work of learning, discovering in that object latent properties that were not perceived in the initial context; a poet does this each time he uses a word or turns a phrase in an unusual manner.” Could both of you explain your theories on the relationship of criticism to the process of making and its relevance to the search for the

genesis of meaning? How does its criticism compare with evaluation or commentary?

Silvetti For the moment, we need only to make clear that the “realm” of criticism has traditionally been divided between opposing modes: one that tried to evaluate the degree of “fitness” or non-fitness” of a solution to a particular architectural question and another that attempts to see both the question and that solution as parts of a larger historical, cultural, or ideological process. The former, typical of architectural journals and chronicles, is mainly concerned to “evaluate facts,” it is in the end trapped within its own ideological perspective.

This kind of critical discourse constitutes in most cases an obstacle for theory, and should perhaps be better termed “technical” or “evaluative” criticism. The latter is related more to historical and scholarly endeavors and has theory, to which it is prolegomena and constant check, as its final aim. This is indeed the only discourse that can safely claim the name of criticism in that it enjoys the more “comfortable” situation of being distanced from the act of making.

Tafari As we have said regarding comment and criticism: the form of comment is a repetition in the desperate search for the genesis of the sighs; the form of comment is a repetition in the desperate search for the genesis of the signs; the form of criticism is the analysis of the function of the signs themselves, a task possible only after one has renounced the search for the allowed meaning of the language.

Chomsky And how does criticism extend beyond itself into the language of architecture as transformable historical expression?

Silvetti Such classifications as Tafuri's, which polarize the objects of analysis into categories that are too broad, thus erasing significant differences, or into trivial labeling systems as in the case of the originally amusing but now boring chromatic grouping into "the whites," "the grays," and "the silvers" (a taxonomy which has retarded any serious understanding of the problem of architecture as a language), are in the end still frustrating themselves. Further treatment of the subject seems warranted, if not for no other reason than because there has been no systematic discussion of the nature of "criticism from within" and its relation to a more general "return to language."

As yet I do not know what mechanisms and operations it uses or how it differs from other types of work on language. Indeed to test and evaluate Tafuri's macroscopic, yet generalizable level, describing certain mechanisms and operations, which I hope will alter enable me to establish the role that such "criticism from within" might play today in the development of architecture in its relation to theory, criticism, and ideology.

In terms of mechanisms of transformation, we can differentiate clearly between "criticisms from within" and mythification. "Criticisms from within" is a signifying system in which the content is in itself a signifying system; that is to say, the form and the content of the original object are both in turn, the content of another form (the transformed object). Mythification, conversely, institutes a new signifying system in which its form remains almost untransformed, but by subtle accents, a new content covers the object. The respective effects can also be seen as dichotomous: criticism generates opaqueness, intrigue, questioning, subversion; mythification generates transparency, complacency, naturalization, and conformism.

Tafari The simple analysis of architecture, which obliges one to speak of it in terms of its language, would be description pure and simple. Such an analysis would be unable to break the magic circle that the work in question draws around itself, and it would therefore only be able to manipulate within its limits the selfsame process that generated the work, thereby repeating its axioms. The only external referent of such an “internalized” reading would be found in the gaps inherent in the linguistic object itself. Thus this “doubling” created by criticism must go beyond merely constructing a “second language” to float about the original text, as Roland Barthes speaks of it.

Chomsky It seems as though both of you have conceded, architectural rhetoric is a metalanguage, a discourse built on another discourse, but what does this suggest for architecture as a practice? Does this suggest an objective for architecture to procure?

Silveti The effectiveness of “criticism from within,” or what you call architectural rhetoric, does not necessarily depend on ironic manipulations of architectural codes. Rather, the critical effect depends on a subversion of known meanings and on the production of knowledge itself, and to that end no rhetorical operation, per se, can offer guarantees.

Perhaps what is most promising about this type of criticism is precisely the awareness that we will not gain from it access to objective, scientific knowledge (a task that returns to the discipline where it belongs: history), but rather that through it we may aim at unfolding the imaginary-symbolic universe that architecture simultaneously proposes and represses. The clear objective of such criticism should be the production of a kind of “qualified

knowledge," even if short-lived, which will emerge as an "apparition" against a background of transparent, myths.

Tafuri It is clear then that to place architectural ideology into the production cycle, albeit as a secondary element, is quite simply to overthrow the pyramid of values which are usually accepted in the consideration of architecture. Once such a judgment standard has been accepted, however, it will be quite ridiculous to ask in which way a linguistic choice or an element of structural organization will press or anticipate a "more free" way of life.

There exists, however, an underground current, which as such is removed from the architectural disciplines—from form to reform—which perhaps may overcome certain ambiguities. In fact, at least one new tendency is discernible among all these various attempts—a role for the "new technician" immersed within those organizations which determine the capitalistic management of building and regional planning, not as a specialist in language, but rather as a producer.

The revolutionary struggle is not between capitalism and the spirit, but between capitalism and the proletariat.

Dialogue of the characters Massimo Cacciari, Adolf Loos, Jorge Silvetti, and
Manfredo Tafuri extracted and adapted from:

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