

IMAGINING THE SPACE- IN-BETWEEN

The Elaboration of a Method

Marina Lathouri

“A dictionary begins when it no longer gives the meaning of words, but their tasks.”

Georges Bataille, *L'Informe* (1929)



1



2

1 Entrance of a House in Djenne, photo taken by Aldo van Eyck, 1960 (first published in *Forum* 1959-63)

2 Orphanage Amsterdam, Aldo van Eyck, 1955-60

1 “Major political, territorial and economical upheavals as well as scientific advances at the time laid stress on a greater interdependence of the parts. The problem of co-operation and co-operative action “as a basis for effective international organisation and world peace” underlined the problems of the relation of every part of the world to every other. In August 1945, the text of a draft constitution for a “United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation” was published. The purpose of this organisation was defined in Article I as follows: 1. To develop and maintain mutual understanding and appreciation of the life and culture, the arts, the humanities, and the sciences of the peoples of the world, as a basis for effective international organisation and world peace. 2. To co-operate in extending and making available to all peoples for the service of common human needs the world’s full body of knowledge and culture, and in assuring its contribution to the economic stability, political security, and general well being of the peoples of the world.” In: T. S. Eliot, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1949), p. 12.

The space-in-between, or the “greater reality of the doorstep [i.e., threshold],” as the Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck put it, captures to a great extent the mutations of the architectural debates, which took place after World War II and through the 1950s. In a period of destruction, uncertainty, but also vast number of changes,¹ the imagery and spatiality of the threshold furnished architects with a scale and certain coordinates to interrogate and re-negotiate relationships fundamental to the modern project: between the dwelling unit and the city, the individual and the collective, the formal and the informal, the new and the historical. Transferred from ethnographic studies of forms of living in traditional and small-scale settlements to the core of the architectural debates on the modern city, the realm of the threshold proposed a paradigm. It presented itself as alternative, if not correction, to the rationalistic views and scientific techniques apprehended as characteristic of architectural functionalism. Located within the sphere of the intimate, it expressed the urge to reconsider and stress human agency in the meaningful construction of the world as we see and live and act within it. Passing through a door, how irrelevantly banal came to stand as a condensed expression of human life itself. On a different scale, the one of the city and the region, of geography and history, the macro became nothing but an extension of the micro. [1-2]

Limen (or *limes*), meaning in Latin threshold, doorway or limit, has always been a site for the construction of alternative social and discursive patterns. The term, used to characterise multiple areas and forms of experience, has a long history indeed. While the concept of liminality becomes much celebrated in social and cultural theories, in particular over the second half of the twentieth-century, it does acquire a more profound presence in architecture, since the latter presents itself through the economy and apparatus

of the boundary. Does not the labyrinth, in its archetypal status, betoken the condition of the liminal signifying at once the marking of an enclosure and the description of a route? Between the myth-grounded archetype and the critical construct, the concept of liminality, as Zygmunt Bauman said, is deeply ambivalent. Yet the ways, in which various understandings of it are expressed and materialised, pose questions, which are simultaneously spatial, political, juridical, personal and historical. In the physical world, architecture defines spatial limits, creates material enclosures. It is impossible to design anything without thinking the boundary itself first. But in so doing, conceptual enclosures become manifest as well. What is the space of home, the city, the common, the national, the local, if not attempts to identify and circumscribe areas of interiority and proximity? There is no interiority, however, without the marking of a certain limit, trace of the relationship between here and there, the familiar and the unfamiliar, the inside and the outside, the intimate and the shared. The ways, in which, these instances are marked is necessarily a political question, an interrogation of the politics of inhabitation. This is not to imply a certain political way of appropriating and inhabiting spaces or describing that inhabitation, but an attempt to examine and understand the complex of effects written into the experience of spaces that seem at first isolated from these effects. Nonetheless, to cover all speculations on the significance and multiple functions of the liminal would be beyond the scope of this text. Instead, the enquiry here centres into the ways in which expressions of the liminal re-engaged in the architectural and urban debates of the 1950s, steering and pushing ideas and design practices in new directions, and in fact anticipating recent arguments and emerging issues.

But where is the 'space-in-between' to be located? Can it be delineated and described? What are the material and functional aspects of such space? Does it demarcate an interruption, a transition, meeting of opposite categories or a confluence of material elements, scales, perceptions and experiences? The various readings and uses can hardly be reduced to a single systematic statement. Nonetheless, what pertains in the various interpretive and design strategies is the importance of the principle of relations and a mode of operating from within; hardly a new question, but one that has become central to debates of recent decades.

The term liminal appears in Colin Rowe's and Fred Koetter's *Collage City* problematising the conception of space as undifferentiated plane, upon which, spatial, visual and programmatic elements are laid out.² Though published in 1978, the authors refer to Victor Turner, the British anthropologist who re-discovered the concept of liminality in 1963 and extended it to the roots of human experience. The condition of liminality, in Turner's writings and the anthropological notions of the rites of passage, marks out "actions and reactions between the profane and the sacred," the crossing by the subject (the "passenger") of ordinary customs and daily ritual to open to

- 4 Turner uses the Latin term 'communitas' and not 'community' to distinguish "this modality of social relationship from an 'area of common living'" and denote "a communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders." (Ibid. p. 103)
- 5 "What the present essay is all about. A proposal for constructive dis-illusion, it is simultaneously an appeal for order and disorder, for the simple and the complex, for the joint existence of permanent reference and random happening, of the private and the public, of innovation and tradition, of both the retrospective and the prophetic gesture. To us the occasional virtues of the modern city seem to be patent and the problem remains how, while allowing for the need of a 'modern' declamation, to render these virtues responsive to circumstance." Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge Mass.: The MIT Press, 1978), p. 8.
- 10 Max Ernst, *Beyond Painting* (New York: Wittenborn Schultz, 1948), p. 21.
- 3 "The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial." Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process, Structure and Anti-structure* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 95. See also Arnold van Gennep, *Les Rites du passage* (Paris: Nourry, 1909). Van Gennep shows that all rites of passage or "transition" are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or *limen*, signifying "threshold" in Latin), and aggregation.
- 6 Ibid. p. 49.
- 7 Robert Motherwell, prefatory note to Max Ernst, *Beyond Painting* (New York: Wittenborn Schultz, 1948), p. VI.
- 8 Rowe and Koetter, *Collage City*, pp. 62-63.
- 9 As Rowe stated much later, "there can never be a centre until there is enough pressure on it by the surroundings to make it central." Colin Rowe, *As I Was Saying - Volume 3: Urbanistics* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1995), p. 320. This process, however, to define a formal logic able to give rise to "fluctuations of significance," was initially sketched out in the essay that Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky had at first conceived in the mid-1950s and published in 1964 under the title "*Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal*." The concept of transparency was employed as a technique to open possible readings of material reality. It is worth noting that in 1923 the Gestalt psychologist Wilhelm Fuchs published a paper entitled *On Transparency* (published in English in 1938). In this text, the author discusses the possibility of the simultaneous perception of two objects that are located the one behind the other. Fuchs draws the distinction between the "real" space and a "phenomenal visual space" and indicates the overlapping space, the one shared by both objects as the "critical area," which allows the reconstruction of the visual and spatial field. Wilhelm Fuchs, "On Transparency". In: *A Source Book of Gestalt Psychology*, William D. Ellis, ed. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1938), p. 89.

the unaccustomed.³ Most interestingly, Turner connects the state of being-on-the-threshold with the notion of *communitas*.⁴ “We are presented,” he writes, “in such rites, with a ‘moment in and out of time,’ and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond.” In fact, it is within the ‘betwixt and between’ that “the generic authority of tradition” is effectuated, and it is precisely this temporal dimension, which Rowe and Koetter invested the term *liminal* with. Critical of modern architecture’s “failure to recognize the complementary relationship,” they used the term to depict the city in terms of a fluctuating ground “for the joint existence of permanent reference and random happening, of the private and the public, of innovation and tradition, of both the retrospective and the prophetic gesture.”⁵ Every building is for the authors at once a project of “prophecy” while bringing together “the known, perhaps mundane and, necessarily, memory-laden context from which it emerges.”⁶ Rowe and Koetter imbedded the anthropological approach in the attempt to rethink the city in terms of a “solid and continuous matrix or texture,” within which the building functions at once as distinct object, a ‘figure’ carrying the *Geist* of its time, and part of the ‘ground’, that continuum of spatial, visual and historical relationships, which is ceaselessly activated and transformed by “generations of connotations, associations, sense experiences.”⁷ The city/ground is thus being analysed as a “legible structure” (the “generalised social bond”), which gives “energy to its reciprocal condition, the specific space.”⁸ The multiple interfaces, deliberately unspecific, take centre stage for the user to imagine, negotiate and occupy.⁹ This also explains the use of the term ‘collage’, especially as defined by Max Ernst in his book *Beyond Painting*; a “mechanism” for “the exploitation of the chance meeting of two distant realities on an unfamiliar plane.”¹⁰

The understanding of the city, or indeed any spatial organisation, as layering of formal and material configurations and human associations had been expressed in earlier architectural arguments, merely from a social point of view. Catalysed by the extreme material and human destruction of the Second World War, the urgency of reconstruction in parallel to the on-going process of modernisation, architects in the 1950s turned their attention to the space of human encounter, which, in various expressions, captured the core in the process of reassessing the role of architecture. The shift of perspective transformed previous conceptual assumptions and methods of design on multiple fronts. One of the most critical was that the sense of building embodied in its three-dimensional geometry was gradually combined with the idea of a structure that responds to and extends social and environmental needs. For example, human habitat, the theme of the 1953 CIAM meeting (Congres Internationaux d’ Architecture Moderne), beyond providing a critique of the standardised

- 14 An example, the panels presented by the ATBAT-Afrique team (Georges Candilis, Shadrach Woods, Vladimir Bodiansky, Henri Piot) at Aix, titled "Housing for the greatest number" (*Habitat pour le plus grand nombre*). Settlements in Southern Morocco, the bidonvilles in the outskirts of urban centres are documented and compared with new developments such as the Carrières Centrales implemented by the team in the new districts in Casablanca. The caption of the "La cité verticale" reads: "The casbahs of the Sahara, the ksours, fortified villages in the Atlas mountains, and the collective granaries-citadels all reflect this tendency, according to which the persons live close to one another, respecting the privacy of the families but nevertheless always managing affairs of collective interest by common consent." The documentation of the exhibition has been photographed and the negatives are stored as part of Jacqueline Tyrwitt's archives, gta/ETH. Mentioned in Jean-Louis Cohen, *The Moroccan Group and the Theme of Habitat*. In: *The Last CIAMs*, Rassegna 52 (December 1992), pp. 63-64.
- 11 *Team 10 Meetings*, edited by Alison Smithson (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, inc., 1991), p. 8.
- 12 A. & P. Smithson, *Urban Structuring: Projects of Alison & Peter Smithson* (London: Studio Vista, 1967), p. 29.
- 13 Not a coincidence, the French geographer Max Sorre had published his three-volume *Fondements de la Géographie Humaine* between 1940 and 1952. Max Sorre, *Les Fondements de la Géographie Humaine*. Vol. 1 *Fondements Biologiques de la Géographie Humaine* (1940), Vol. 2 *Les Fondements Techniques* (in two parts 1948 and 1950), Vol. 3 *L'Habitat*, (1952) (Paris: Colin editions). In the 1952 issue of the journal *Urbanisme*, the commentator Gilbert Cautier saw the invaluable of the work in the study of the human condition in its totality, "departing from elementary biological conditions to arrive to the most complex social phenomena." Gilbert Gautier, "Les Fondements de la Géographie Humaine de Max Sorre", *Urbanisme*, No 5-6 (1952).
- 15 A. & P. Smithson, *Urban Structuring: Projects of Alison & Peter Smithson*, p. 29.

and mass-produced dwelling unit, framed the question of dwelling as “a scale,” which, in the words of Team X, “would be really effective in terms of the modes of life and the structure of a community.”¹¹ [3]

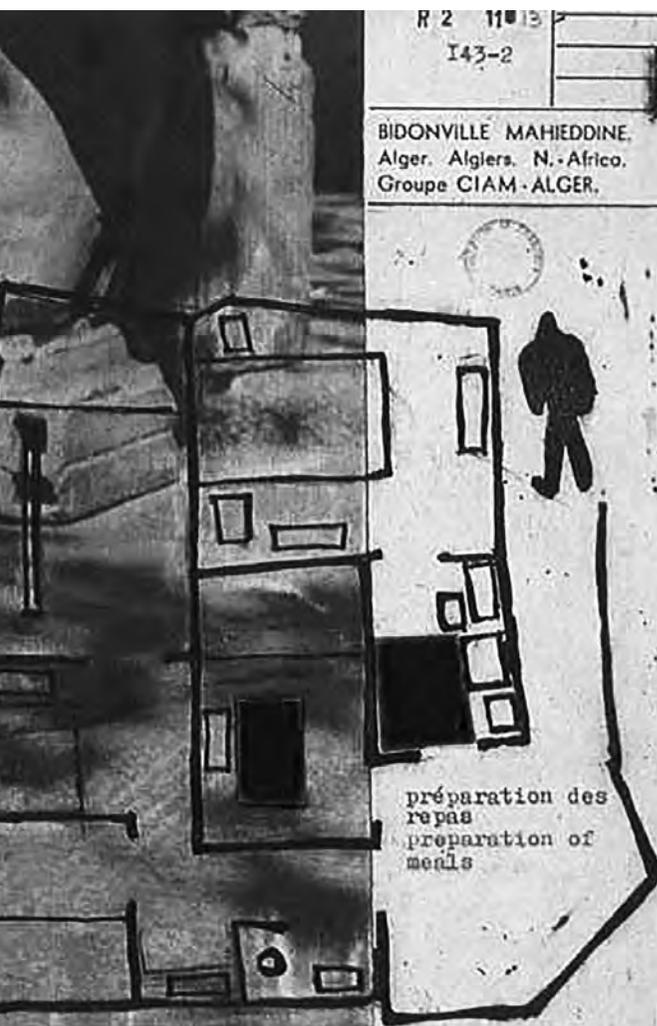
Migrated across disciplines such as ecology and social geography, at that time young sciences, the term *habitat* was used to signify the whole of human relations, and delineated dwelling primarily as place (rather than function) of living embedded in a broader geographical and cultural system. The whole here is not to be understood as an aggregate of distinct objects, fixed identities or forms but an entanglement of operations, forces or events. In these terms, any intervention, from the scale of material detail to the scale of landscape, becomes the locus of certain responsiveness to the existing and the emphasis in the design is placed upon the study of relations between projected forms of living and the conditions – topographical, cultural, social, in which they unfold. As the British architects Alison and Peter Smithson put it, what is important is “the way, in which the new part is organized plastically to give it meaning within the whole complex. As the complex changes with the addition of new parts, the scale of the parts must change so that they and the whole remain a dynamic response to each other.”¹² The aesthetic and social dimension, which is suggested here, is of a very different order restating the part within the whole and the individual within the community.¹³ Paradoxically the striking photographic material of traditional settlements and close-up views of human activities, juxtaposed with diagrams outlining urban growth, project an ethics of seeing, in which the intermingling of the natural, the human and the social, the past and the future are portrayed as aspects of the same project of modernisation and urban evolution.¹⁴ [4]

A similar play with great contrasts in scale is also in place when photographs of children playing in the street are set off against a diagram suggesting expandable infrastructure systems. While these visual and graphic fragments seek to provide an incisive recoding of the quotidian dimensions of space, the emphasis is on a more global and of greater complexity scale of operations yielding interpretations of modernity. For instance, Alison and Peter Smithson, for whom “a town is by definition a specific pattern of association, a pattern unique for each people, in each location, at each time,” introduced the term *cluster* (CIAM 10 in Dubrovnik, 1956) to signify any grouping together with no indication of scale and hence replace such group concepts as house, street, district and city. The groupings described in terms of “a close knit, complicated, often moving aggregation, but an aggregation with a distinct structure”, were according to the architects “as close as one can get to a description of the new ideal in architecture and town planning.”¹⁵ Drawing inspiration from sciences as well as an emerging culture of mass communications, mobility and dynamic processes, the idea and imagery of cluster not only turn the discourse toward infrastructure



- 3 CIAM Algiers Group, Grid panel for CIAM IX meeting at Aix-en-Provence, July 1953. 'La Charte de l' Habitat', was the theme of the meeting, and the rhetoric and iconography are indicative of the desire to reframe the question of dwelling in new terms and produce a corollary to 'La Charte d' Athenes' (1943).

(Re-published in Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism 1928-1960*, The MIT Press, 2000, p.230, and Jean Louis Cohen, *Alger: Paysage Urbain et Architectures, 1800-2000*, Editions de l'Imprimeur, 2003, p.201)





4

- 18 Van Eyck's consideration of the in-between as that, which removes 'the duality of interior and exterior space', the duality of past and future into an expanded 'now' owes a great deal to the philosophical debates of the time. The reference to Sartre's post-war writings and the impact of Henri Lefebvre's book *Critique de la vie quotidienne* (*Critique of the everyday life*), first published in 1947 have been already commented upon in studies of the architect's work. So have they been discussed his immersion in the artistic deliberations of the previous generation such as Kurt Schwitters's collages and interiors of buildings and even James Joyce's writings in which objects and/or words are engaged as in a particular, unique situation. See Francis Strauven, *Aldo van Eyck, The Shape of Relativity* (Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura, 1998). Also Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis, *Aldo van Eyck Humanist Rebel* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1999).

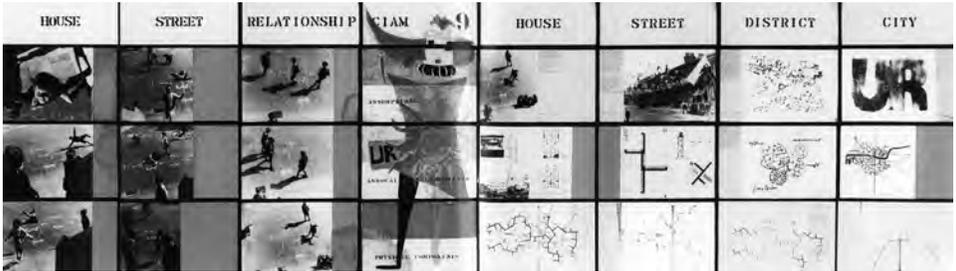
4 **L'Habitat pour le plus grand nombre;** Supplement to *l'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, 1953, Georges Candilis, Shadrach Woods and Victor Bodiansky (et al.)

- 16 "An urban agglomeration composed of separate and differentiated but closely related entities plus a proportionate network of services and appropriate points of crystallization or cores: the whole forming an urban constellation. This does not imply a *predetermined* radial or other pattern, but would develop following the lines of a basic diagram conditioned by broad topographic and economic factors. The physical expression will be that of a free expanding pattern." (Illustrations - solar system including Milky Way) From CIAM X, Lepad, 11 August 1956, Third Report of Commissions A.1. *Formulation of the Charte de l'Habitat*. Bakema Archive, Folder a12.
- 17 Aldo van Eyck, referring to his plan for the Orphanage in Amsterdam, describes the building as "the common ground where conflicting polarities can again become dual phenomena." He concludes: "The time has come to conceive of architecture urbanistically and of urbanism architecturally, i.e. to arrive at the singular through plurality, and vice versa." Aldo van Eyck, "The Medicine of Reciprocity Tentatively Illustrated", *Forum*, v.15, nr 6-7 (April-May 1961).
- 19 In Hannah Arendt's terms, the movement between the realms of the private and the public constitutes the social existence of an individual. In fact, the public realm, according to her, is bound to the place where distance is maintained so that form and structure (relation) may appear. In other words, an aspect of the public can emerge within the distance that enables the articulation of differences.
- 20 Anthropology has often served to sustain various incompatible views of the 'human' or of 'human nature', often seen as a shortcut to establishing the universal rules.

systems and a new visual order; they suggest the architectural project primarily as a process toward the elaboration of a method, which, resolved on to “*plans (structures)*” can “apprehend and extend existing patterns,” but also enables the “possibility of mutation in scale and intention.”¹⁶ [5]

Contemporaneous with the Smithsons, the Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck was more concerned with elementary relations. In his view, the building is primarily “a configuration of intermediary places” to receive “the shifting centre of human reality.” This way of thinking brings the threshold and the most evident aspects of “the greater reality of the doorstep” linked to human experience at the core of the architectural project.¹⁷ Doors, windows, recesses, passages, steps function as markers of the continuity of experience across a zone of transition rather than boundary. It is this instance, expressed in a series of architectural figures that becomes the most active element of the composition, a gestalt that appears to be both inside the building holding it together, and manifestly, outside.¹⁸ These intermediary places not only articulate spatial and visual transition but also receive human transaction. The scale of human gesture and chance encounter, and the scale of the landscape are brought together to configure the built environment as a continuous fabric. It is indicative that in one of his initial drawings for the Orphanage (Amsterdam, 1960), van Eyck begins by sketching out areas of movement and activity. The sketch is not a gesture that encompasses the unity of intention but seems to want to capture a fragment of inhabitable ground, as a means to develop a method of design. That which appears as expression of the spontaneous, and perhaps intentionally imprecise, is but one stage in the process of the development of an architectural and formal system. These intimate topographies become “a statement about territory and occupancy,” while projecting ways of thinking and engaging with the urban, an approach, which, far from assuming a form *a priori*, entails continuous exploration of possible relationships and functional associations rather than adjacent boundaries. [6]

The discourse of the modern transforms to accommodate, or better, to claim the common and the banal, to celebrate the ordinary and spontaneous gestures. This amounts to nothing less than liminality erupting from within the core of primary sociability.¹⁹ Yet, while paying the utmost attention to every instance and encounter, there is a moving back and forth between microscopic details (textures, colours, shapes) and the larger picture (social structures, universal patterns), a form of belonging and a form of global citizenship. Anthropological insights in the theorization of the architectural project, coming from an encounter with a non-Western cultural context become the platform from which to develop a critique of functionalism and instead establish a new universality, the universal rules of the ‘human condition.’²⁰ The question is whether



5

5 Alison and Peter Smithson, "Urban Redefinition" grid, presented at CIAM 9, 1953 (Architectural Design, 1955)

23 Ernesto Rogers was the editor of *Domus* from 1946 to 1947 while Giuseppe Pagano and Edoardo Persico edited *Casabella*. During this period of time, Rogers constantly sought to link the actuality of history and architecture to more complex themes of culture in general. See Tafuri, Manfredo, *History of Italian Architecture, 1945-1985*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1989), pp. 9, 206.

21 John Voelcker, "CIAM Team X Report", in: *Carré Bleu*. In this report, Voelcker discusses the idea of an open aesthetic in relation to the work of Hansen and Jersy Soltan in Poland.

22 Ernesto Nathan Rogers, *The sense of history (Il senso della storia)* (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 1999), p. 62. This text is the opening lecture that Rogers gave for the course of History of Modern Architecture at the Polytechnic School in Milan in 1964/65.

24 Newman, Oscar, *CIAM '59 in Otterlo*, (Stuttgart: K. Kramer, 1961).

25 Focillon, Henri, *The Life of Forms in Art*. (Zone Books, The MIT Press, 1989), pp. 1,6. The original *Vie des Formes* was originally published in Paris in 1934. The first translation into English by Charles Beecher Hogan and George Kubler appeared in 1942

the latter reflects a universal and transhistorical paradigm or it constitutes a disguise for a temporal, political, and culturally specific program. In many ways, architectural narratives seeking to assimilate their techniques to the reevaluation of the human and the local, often fell within the larger discourse on colonial and indigenous forms of modernity.

While the Smithsons and van Eyck resolved their investigations in what they described as “open aesthetic,” in which “form is a master key [...] capable of reciprocating the constant change of life,”²¹ the intuition that the architectural project needs to take into account the historical perspective opened up a slightly different framework in postwar Italy. A “sense of history” was fully propounded in the pages of the magazine *Casabella*. In a series of editorials between 1954 and 1955 (“Responsibility to Tradition,” “Pre-existence of the Environment and Practical Themes,” “The Tradition of Italian Modern Architecture”), Ernesto Rogers (director of the journal between 1953 and 1965) returned frequently to tradition as integral to the now and indeed to modernity itself. According to Rogers, “there is a present that comes from the past and a past still linked to the present.”²² The terms *continuità* (continuity), which Rogers added to the title of the magazine (*Casabella-Continuità*), and *preesistenze ambientali* were set forth as a connecting element between history, existing factors and modern movement.²³ In his view the city is a historical phenomenon (rather than history as element of the city), and any intervention is but an open-ended search, a method of entering into this experience of culture, to ensure the continuity through establishing a discourse on the city as historical phenomenon. As Giancarlo de Carlo pointed out during the last CIAM meeting in Otterloo (1959), history is “the acquisition of an exact knowledge of the problems.”²⁴ It is precisely here that Rogers identifies the validity of the architectural project, which, in his words, consists in a “methodological process” (*processo metodologico*) which aim is to look at the development of the “most salient qualities” (*emergenza più saliente*) of the existing and better capture its “specific essence” (*essenza specifica*).

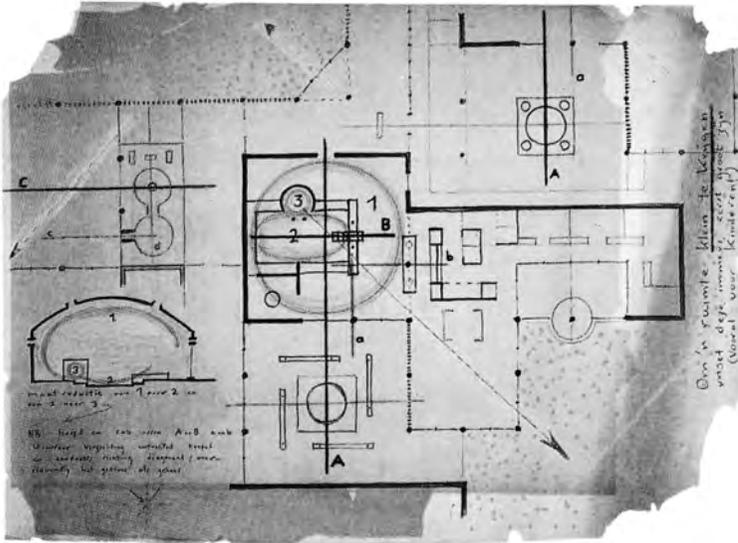
These ruminations may bring to mind Henri Focillon in his earlier study on the history of art and question of style, and in particular, his idea of art as system in perpetual development of coherent forms as well as the idea of history as a superimposition of geological strata that permit us to read each fraction of time as if it was at once past, present and future. A work of art, according to Focillon, is “an attempt to express something that is unique, it is an affirmation of something that is whole, complete, absolute.” Yet, “it is likewise an integral part of a system of highly complex relationships.”²⁵ Therefore forms (alike buildings in Rogers’ discourse) acquire in their stratified evolution a life, which follows its own trajectory and can be generalised only on the level of method.

- 27 "Sculpture in the Expanded Field", in: Krauss, Rosalind, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (The MIT Press, 1986), p. 277.
- 26 Vittorio Gregotti's writings in the late 1960s on the "territory of architecture" (*Il territorio dell'architettura*) extended the above problematic to the scale of geography. For Gregotti, environment is historically transformed and the main function of the production of the territory of architecture is not to establish a synthetic unity but to structure the differences instead. The placing of a story in a certain setting, like the building of a house, a wall, or a road, makes a place habitable, but the place gives solidity, continuity, and perdurability to the life that is lived within it, as well as to the records of that life and ascribes some collective value to this or that spot.
- 28 Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017 [2015]).

How the above ideas can expand to the discourses and practises of today is rather beyond the limitations of this text. The particular arguments discussed, while moving within different registers and referential frameworks, put forward an understanding of the building and the city less in terms of an autonomous form than in terms of a manifold system of relations – perceptual, social, material and cultural, something which seems relevant for today too. It is of course a historical fact that at the heart of these debates there was a desire for the possibility of architecture to negotiate the realm of the human scale set against planning policies, massive implementations of functional premises and the conceptual poverty of architecture in the 1950s. They sought for a method of design capable of forming an expandable spatial and social continuum whilst maintaining a coherent relationship with existing structures and dwelling patterns.²⁶

These questions have been fragmentary and took on various formulations, yet they are indicative of a stance and a method. The concern with how things relate, how they work together shifts the emphasis from the object and the design of the building as a self-contained unit to the consideration of built space as part of a larger territorial, social, visual environment. Expressed in multiple ways – geographic or cultural milieu, pre-existing conditions, historical situation, region, habitat - the category of environment seems to provide a theme that weaves together most of the threads of association suggested. Rosalind Krauss's argument in the essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" (1979) seeks to resume some of these threads.²⁷ For Krauss, sculpture is a "category that resulted from the addition of the not-landscape to the not-architecture." And this happened because these terms ('not-landscape' and 'not-architecture') were to "express a strict opposition between the built and the not-built, the cultural and the natural, between which the production of sculptural art appeared to be suspended." Krauss then argues for an "expanded field" where "there is no reason not to imagine an opposite term – one that would be both landscape and architecture," which she called "the complex." It is precisely the idea of the 'complex' that may throw a different light into the theoretical, design and formal challenges, which many architects in the 1950s encountered in their attempt to graft their strategy onto the existing (no matter how 'the existing' was to be understood and considered), a challenge that remains as great as ever.

What does it mean to rediscover an inhabitable ground in a world order, marked by what Bruno Latour describes as the "New Climate Regime" thinking "'climate' in the broad sense of the relations between human beings and the material conditions of their lives"?²⁸ Proposing the term 'terrestrial' to draw together the human and the natural, the local and the global, Latour writes: "each of the beings that participate in the composition of a dwelling place has *its own way* of identifying what is local



6

6 Orphanage, 1960, Amsterdam, Aldo van Eyck.
Plan-diagram of the central domed space.

and what is global, and of defining its entanglements with the others.”²⁹ If the description of the current scale of being in the world and operating is accurate, the “terrestrial,” or, the “planetary” scale obliges us to reopen inhabitation as a social question while intensifying it through new forms of appropriation of resources and politics of land which do not confuse the latter with what the local is often inflicted upon - identity, patrimony, ethnic homogeneity, national and personal immunity, which allow the erection of all kinds of borders whose mere existence is to exclude. In this context, one of the urgent questions which should be asked is the following: Who and how will define thresholds which might open up the possibility of a different aesthetics, a different politics of inhabiting the Earth.