

# Peaks and Valleys (by Architecture) in a Flat (Digital) World

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A new world-landscape is emerging, replacing the one we have known for millennia. It is a landscape whose space is increasingly "flat" (Thomas Friedman). And this is good news. Peaks and valleys that make locations inaccessible keeping people apart are levelled off. Distances between locations that separate supply and demand are contracted, 'places' needed for people to interact disappear. At the same time differences between locations that peaks and valleys sustained are eradicated. Within this new world-landscape, where everything is everywhere, the concept of regionalism is a thing of the past substituted by that of globalism. Rooms, buildings, streets, and the very idea of the city—in the sense of the physical spaces for encounter—are traded for the electronic web and hub.

The new landscape is the product of fundamental legal, economic, and political developments of our time whose roots reach deeply into history. From the technological point of view, it is the outcome of a long term process of transportation and communication innovations. Architecture also, more than any cultural expression, has played an important role in this progressive flattening of the world. Not so much by shrinking distances between locations—that has been the role of means of transportation and media of communication—as by suppressing differences between sites around the world. Since the time of the Greeks and the Romans, it developed technologies that made local constraints and idiosyncrasies irrelevant, and exported standardized types and 'international styles' to help expanding states, immigrating institutions, and colonizing enterprises, to establish a legitimate base around the globe, homes away from home, eradicating the 'genius loci'.

On the other hand, (since Antiquity as attested by Vitruvius) parallel to the levelling of regional identities, architecture played an equally important role in promoting the opposite. As much as it enhanced globalism, it enabled regionalism. Recognizing the limits and potentials of local physical and cultural resources, it foregrounded the particular, circumscribed the unique, and celebrated indigenous

inventions and identities promoting a world of emancipation, difference, and diversity.

During its historical evolution, 'regionalist architecture', reacting to pressures of globalization underwent several phases, phases that were often contradictory to each other: the picturesque genius loci (Pope), the romantic nationalist (Goethe) and environmentalist (John Ruskin and Viollet Le Duc), the touristic genius commercialii, and the chauvinistic heimatsarchitektur, to name some of the most significant phases, adopting not only unlike attitudes to design—environmental determinism vs. utopian idealism—but also contradictory architectural strategies—'make-believe' vs. 'strange making'. What was common among all these of phases was the hostility to universal norms and top down standard solutions to human affairs.

During the twentieth century, the dominant trend of flattening the world landscape brought about a world of unprecedented life supporting services and opulence. Yet, very often the idea of a world wide platform based on shared values and the benefits from universality produced also a flatness that was far from perfect. In the midst of general affluence, pockets of the world remained, or even became, environments of pitiable alienating social quality, non-equitable wasteful economy, (Joseph Stiglitz) and poor self-distractive ecology. More importantly, the top down levelling, reducing the peaks and valleys of nature and culture, destroyed diversity creating a non-sustainable world of diminishing choices and declining capabilities for innovation and creativity.

The limitations of flattening (see globalisation) the world led to a new approach (Lewis Mumford) to regionalism. We called this new approach 'critical' in the Kantian sense, reflective rather than adversarial to globalism. The approach overcomes the intractable dilemma having to choose between globalism and regionalism.

The notion of critical regionalism, so urgent recently, was first introduced almost twenty-five years ago.<sup>1</sup> The aim was to draw attention to the approach taken by a number of architects in Europe who were working towards an alternative to post-modernism, the dominant tendency of that period. Post-modernism, as its name suggests, aspired to succeed modernism whose ideals and norms were seen as responsible for the numerous failures that characterized most reconstruction and urban renewal projects realized since World War II. Having pledged to bring architecture out of a state of stagnation and disrepute due to the reductive, technocratic, and bureaucratic dogmas of modernism as well as its indifference—if not hostility towards history and culture—post-modernism enjoyed a meteoric rise. However, within a decade it became clear that most post-modernist buildings, apart from their superficial features, were qualitatively

not much different from their predecessors. With few exceptions—museum buildings, such as the National Gallery in London and private houses in the United States, such as those by Robert Stern—the re-introduction of historical knowledge and cultural issues to design was merely skin-deep. Like its modernist forerunners, most post-modernist buildings continued to impose top-down, reductive and universal formulas on those who utilize them. This was the reason that at the end of the 1970s, when we first identified a number of architects that appeared to produce work that emerged out of the specifics of an individual situation; it seemed to us immensely important to provide a theoretical framework for their presentation. To avoid becoming entangled within the modernist versus post-modernist debate—so fashionable at the time—we endeavoured to shift the focus of the discussion towards what seemed to us a more imperative subject with long-term significance: the modern-anti-modern struggle. Situating it within history, we decided to make use of the term regionalism.

Regionalism was not the term that the architects themselves were referring to. It was a conceptual device that we chose to use as a tool of analysis. To make the argument more accurate and explicit we combined the concept of regionalism with the Kantian concept critical. In particular, the link was intended to distinguish the use of the concept of regionalism, from its sentimental, prejudiced and irrational use by previous generations. The concept of regionalism here indicated an approach to design giving priority to the identity of the particular rather than universal dogmas. In addition, we wanted to underline the presence in this architectural tendency of 'the test of criticism' (Kant), the responsibility to define the origins and constrains of the tools of the thinking that one uses. Despite our warning regarding the objective to employ the concept of regionalism, it was repeatedly misused and distorted. In reality, it came to mean the opposite. Rather than being used critically—even when it was used together with that term—it was transported back to its obsolete, chauvinistic outlook.<sup>2</sup> To clarify the issue, we even publicly suggested that the concept of regionalism should be abandoned and replaced by realism, hereby erasing the middle part of 'region'-alism. Realism was very appropriate in reflecting a commitment to the exploration of the identity of the particular (of each case), rather than to the generalities of doctrines. However, the concept of regionalism is still with us and even more prominent as a term today. The reason for this has to do with the ubiquitous conflict in all fields—including architecture—between globalization and international intervention, on one hand, and local identity and the desire for ethnic insularity, on the other.

The idea of this book is to rethink regionalism within the context of this conflict, as a bottom-up

approach to design, that recognizes the value of the identity of a physical, social and cultural situation, rather than mindlessly imposing narcissistic formulas from the top down. The urgency has less to do with the term as such, but rather with the need within the context of the current ecological, political and intellectual crisis, to further explore and develop the potentials of this design strategy. In response to this need, a dual approach is taken here. On one hand, regionalism is looked at as a long-term historical phenomenon where we identify the emergence and evolution of its means, as well as the shifting targets in the course of history. On the other hand, we examine its present critical stance by way of examples in contemporary architecture.

### **Constructing Temples, Regions and Identities**

The awareness of a regional architecture as an idiom having a distinct identity and being associated with an identifiable group, and having this association used for further manipulating the group's identity, goes as far back as ancient Greece. It was the Greeks that—in the context of the politics of control and competition between their polis and their colonies used architectural elements to represent the identity of a group occupying a piece of land; or the virtual presence of a group among other groups in a Pan-Hellenic institution such as Delphi or Olympia. Doric, Ionic and Corinthian, were not abstract decorative terms. They originated in the concrete historical context of 'fission and fusion' of regions and identities and their use was frequently loaded with complex political meanings, carving supra-regional identities and relations. Thus, Greeks from the Anatolian Miletos founding Naucratis—the first Greek trading colony in Egypt—at about 566 B.C, built their temple dedicated to the colonizing God Apollo using capital motifs, a girdle of hanging leaves and lotus flowers and buds around his neck, whose origin was from their mother city. As opposed to the colonies of southern Italy that utilized a Doric style, a similar motif of palm-like hanging leaves was used by the Greeks originating from Anatolia who established the colony now known as Marseille, in order to represent the identity of their Anatolian origins. When King Attalos II from Pergamon donated the famous stoa to Athens in the second century, he used the same capital—left unused for 350 years—to indicate the Anatolian identity of the donor, indirectly indicating the virtual presence of the group he was to lead. In the countless examples one can site, it is clear that the regional design motifs used across geographical regions do not indicate the identity of their users, as they designate the intention to identify with an existing or constructed group in reference to a real

or fictitious region of origin. The dynamic mentality of the Greeks enabled such constructions, consolidations, re-combinations, and fusions of identity by region of origin using architecture if, where, and when needed.

The most explicit reference to regionalist design in antiquity is to be found in Vitruvius' *De Re Architectura*, a Roman text that introduces the very concept of 'regional' to building and even discusses its political implications. Vitruvius was a materialist influenced by the philosophy of Lucretius. Natural causes and human rationality were to determine architectural form. Thus, for him, 'regional' architecture, a notion that he acknowledges, was shaped by specific external and internal physical constraints. The differences between the 'kinds' of building (genera aedificiorum) one finds going from region to region (regionum) resulted from different physical environments, and the varying characteristics of a house as ordained by Nature (proprietas locorum ab natura rerum ... constituere aedificiorum qualitates ...).<sup>3</sup>

However, in his encyclopaedic generalist manner, Vitruvius moves very quickly from the realm of building, to that of politics. As climate and physical conditions influence buildings so they influence human beings. Consequently, as the physical conditions (natura rerum) in the North dictate an extreme kind of building (with sloping roofs etc.), and the opposite occurs in the South, so do these conditions generate certain types of people. There is an in-between 'temperate' kind of environment that creates temperate architecture and temperate people. This is the environment and architecture that Romans inhabited and build in. This temperate state is superior to the extreme ones, its architecture and people too. They are more balanced, reflecting the stable environmental characteristics of the region they inhabit. This is why Romans have extraordinary qualities of courage and strength through which they overcome the deficiencies of the people of the north and south, presumably Germans and Africans. Thus, the Romans were allocated this 'excellent and temperate region' (temperatamque regionem). In conclusion, the materialist Vitruvius refers to God in order to rule the world (terrarium imperii). Implied here, is that it is as naturally legitimate for the Romans to be deployed around the world to rule as it is appropriate for their architecture to be applied universally. Obviously, Vitruvius's linking of environment, groups and buildings arrives at contradictory conclusions, the political idea of global ruling being the exact opposite of the idea of regional difference, from which he departed. The contradictory conclusions resulted from his contradictory intentions. As a 'natural scientist' he, on the one hand, aimed at understanding and explaining the phenomenon of architecture as it appeared around the world. In developing the concept of 'regio-

nal' he recognized the identity and diversity of various architectures. On the other hand, although his main focus was on buildings, he aspired to be part of the leading Roman intellectuals of his time that were developing a political theory in constructing a Roman hegemonic identity. As a result, the 'natural' category of the regional was subordinated to the ethics-loaded political categories of temperatamque and imperium.

Vitruvius' materialist theory of regional architecture survives as a point of departure in the study of human habitat without its political appendix. Its political connotations endure in cryptoracist, chauvinistic theories of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century architecture. The main idea of regional architecture, however, will be involved in a political context in the construction of group identity, associated less with ruling and more with the reverse process of emancipation.

A thousand years after Vitruvius' text was written a shift occurred, when the Romans were no longer among the herrenvölker (Oswald Spengler). In an ironic twist of history, Roman classical architecture assumes the role of the regional and the local in what is the first political architecture associated with an emancipation movement. The case is presented by the great iconologist, W. S. Heck-scher,<sup>4</sup> in a fascinating article about the peculiar Casa dei Crescenzi building in Rome.

This story involves Niccolò de Crescenzi—a citizen of mid-twelfth century Rome—leader of the 'regionalist' popular republican party which was struggling for the emancipation from the imperial domination by the papal regime. Niccolò decided to employ architectural means in order to manifest his political stance. Thus, using the opportunity of a small palace in the form of a brick tower near Ponte Rotto, he erected for himself the building now known as the Casa dei Crescenzi. Into the facade he integrated fragments of classical Roman buildings in a collage-like manner, most notably a row of half columns that obviously imitate Roman colonnades. To make the patriotic and political meaning of this regionalist architecture a clear statement for the campaign for the freedom of Rome, Niccolò added an inscription in Leonine Hexameters' *Romae veterem renovare decorem*. A similar intent, no doubt, prompted the Orsini family to establish its palazzo on the ruins of the Pompei theater and the Catanei family to implant theirs on the site of the theater of Marcellus.<sup>5</sup>

In the Casa dei Crescenzi episode we see the beginnings of a 'regionalist' architecture—a normative concept versus a 'regional' behavioural one. As opposed to the regional, regionalist architecture is not to be found 'out there', waiting to be identified. It has to be made with the aim of helping the construction of group identity. Regionalist architecture incorporates regional elements in order to

represent aspirations of liberation from a power perceived as alien and illegitimate.

Eventually architectural romanità will triumph, but not in association with the aspirations of the emancipation of the local citizens of Rome. In another twist of history, it will assume the exactly opposite role. It will become the architecture to stand for world domination. It will be adopted to legitimize the princely rule of Renaissance and absolutist Europe by constructing an identity for the despot. It hereby establishes an analogy between the latter and the precedence of the Roman Empire through the use of compositional, typological and decorative elements extracted from its precedent, i. e. Roman monuments. Nowhere else is this idea more overwhelmingly expressed than in the formal classical garden design with its massive leveling of natural regional diversity, its total control in partitioning space geometrically, and populating it with figures alluding icon-logically to the universe of law and order of the Roman Empire.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the regionalist revolt defending bottom-up, individualist and liberal values against top-down, absolutist universalism will be expressed through garden architecture. Despite polemics against dominant architectural and political doctrines in France, the regionalist reaction was geographically initiated in England and came to be known by the rather unfortunate name 'picturesque'.<sup>6</sup> The term was inspired in this story filled with contradictions and irony, by the serene, melancholic and totally apolitical paintings of the French artist Claude Lorrain, who was based in Rome. They could not be more removed from the academic monumentalism of the French garden. As opposed to the well-formed, triumphant formalism of the French architecture and landscape, and drawing from earlier Italian explorations of the unfinished, the wild and the rustic, Claude was preoccupied—even in his most 'heroic' paintings—with landscapes characterized by the presence of ruins, irregularity of composition and the overpowering nature within which human figures both historical or mythological are minimized. It was a kind of painting that appealed to British visitors in Italy who took the work back home with them. Once in Britain, however, the paintings stimulated very different ideas. Their informal mode of composition and their attention to the accidental fed a design paradigm for regionalist architecture expressing the preservation of the particular and the diverse, and the avoidance of the universal and the standard, that was used for political purposes. These assisted a complex of movements that were patriotic, anti-French, anti-absolutist and parliamentary.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly enough, a similar role was played by non-western Chinese paintings of landscapes, which were believed to demonstrate in a similar formal manner, absence of geometric order.

In 1692, William Temple (1628–99), in one of the very first texts of its kind, presented an anti-universalist, anti-classical approach to design, which he claimed he found in non-European gardens:<sup>8</sup>

"I have seen in some places but heard more of it from others who have lived much among the Chinese, a People whose way of thinking seems to lie as wide of ours in Europe as their country does. Among us, the beauty of building and planting is placed chiefly in some certain proportions, symmetries, or uniformities; our walks and our trees ranged so as to answer one another, and at exact distances. The Chinese scorn this way of planting and say a boy who can count to a Hundred may plant walks of trees in straight lines and over against one another, and to what length and extent he pleases. But their greatest reach of imagination is employed in contriving figures, where the beauty shall be great and strike the eye, but without any order or disposition of parts that shall be commonly or easily observed."

This is how he envisaged an alternative way of designing, which owes its attraction to the particular naturally-given qualities of a place, rather than to an imposed order of universal rules:

"there may be other forms wholly irregular that may, for aught I know, have more beauty than any of the others. But they must owe it to some extraordinary dispositions of nature in the seat, or some great race of fancy or judgment in the contrivance which may reduce many disagreeing parts into some figure which shall yet upon the whole be very agreeable."

The manifesto by Anthony Earl of Shaftesbury (1621–83), *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711) is even more explicit and forceful in its anti-absolutist political values that are meshed with anti-classical design principles:

"I sing of Nature's order in created beings, and celebrate the beauties which resolve in thee, the source and principle of all beauty and perfection ... Thy being is boundless, unsearchable, impenetrable. In thy immensity all thought is lost, fancy gives over its flight, and wearied imagination spends itself in vain, finding no coast nor limit of this ocean, nor, in the widest tract through which it soars, one point yet nearer the circumference than the first centre whence it parted. ... The wildness pleases. ... We contemplate (Nature) with more delight in these original wilds than in the artificial labyrinths and feigned wildernesses of the palace. ... the genius of the place, and the Great Genius have at last prevailed. I shall no longer resist the passion growing in me for things of a natural kind, where neither art nor the conceit or caprice of man' has spoiled their genuine order by breaking in upon that primitive state. Even the rude rocks, the mossy caverns, the irregular unwrought grottos and broken falls of waters, with all the horrid graces of the

wilderness itself, as representing Nature more, will be the more engaging, and appear with a magnificence beyond the formal mockery of princely gardens..."

The connection between the formation of the picturesque as a way of designing—foregrounding singular regional characteristics of place—and the development of English nationalism, which forged an English ethnic identity, is undeniable. Central to that is the concept of liberty embedded in an analogy between a freedom of nature to evolve within a certain space, without an outside order imposed on it, and a freedom of a people belonging to a group to think and act without an absolutist or foreign power controlling them. Thus, for Alexander Pope, in his *Essay on Criticism*, 'we brave Britons', as opposed to the servile French—'foreign laws despis'd, kept unconquered and uncivilized'—are the equivalent to the 'mon-strous and mis-shaped' that make up the 'Genius of the Place'. They have been 'consulted' and 'comply with', rather than ordered to applying a 'display of Powers'.

The alliance between an anti-absolutist political and an anti-classical aesthetic programme is even more radical and explicit in the writings of Shaftesbury. Speaking of the new natural order and topographic regionalism, he proclaims enthusiastically:

"Your genius, the Genius of the Place, and the Great Genius have at last prevail'd. I shall no longer resist the passion growing in me for things of a natural kind; where neither Art, nor the Conceit of Man has spoil'd their genuine Order, by breaking in upon that primitive State. Even rude Rocks, the mossy caverns, the irregular unwrought Grotto's, and broken Falls of Waters, with all the horrid Graces of the Wilderness itself, as representing NATURE more, will be the more engaging and appear with a Magnificence beyond the formal Mockery of Princely Gardens."

Pope's call 'we the Britons' identified a collective whole, while at the same time circumscribing a region within which the norms of the universalist, classical canon of composition were overtly and systematically reversed and negated. The uniqueness of the 'situation' was demarcated by placing into the foreground local land characteristics: the 'shape of the land' and the character of its flora. While early eighteenth-century picturesque regionalism stressed spatial strategies to identify an ethnic group, late eighteenth-century regionalism—which could be called Romantic regionalism, pursuing similar political goals of emancipation of a suppressed group—laid emphasis on characteristics of the group related to time, having common ancestors and sharing origins. In this respect, memory plays a significant role and the importance of artefacts rests in their capacity to be custodians as well as stimulations of memory and, as a result, maintain

the identity of a group, the ethnos, its right of existence, and its autonomy as a nation.

We have insisted on the importance of the picturesque movement in relation to the contemporary challenge to develop an approach to architecture that responds to the problems created by globalism and identity and environmental crisis because, as the brief discussion above shows, it is through this movement that the opposition between the top-down and bottom-up approach, as well as the notion of the environment at large, were introduced to design for the first time.

The relation between group emancipation and the construction of identity that appear in germinal form in the picturesque movement in England will come to the fore more forcefully, enriched and articulated in Germany, hereby initiating a new phase termed Romantic regionalism. One of the key texts that were responsible for this evolution and crossover is Goethe's Sturm und Drang manifesto *Von deutscher Baukunst* of 1772.<sup>9</sup> Written when he was only nineteen, Goethe defended the superiority of German Gothic architecture over Classical French architecture. As we are aware of today, this historical claim was mistaken because the first Gothic buildings were indeed French. Nevertheless, this is beside the point because the essence of Goethe's argument was not the precedence of the architecture, but its power to make people become aware of their common past and participate in their collective memory.

Goethe was ingenious, developing a novel frame of mind in architecture in accordance with new nationalist aspirations. In the most technical way possible, he identified a new set of visual values. Explained briefly, he contrasted the medieval Strasbourg Cathedral with the classical canon using a new set of aesthetic criteria. He introduced a temporal experience evoked by the attributes of the materials and the details that evoke an awareness of a collective past. He guided the viewer to an understanding that the cathedrals' violations of the universal (but foreign to the German) canon are unique attributes of a specific object and to a particular region, far from making it an anomaly thus establishing it as a new paradigm enabling the Germans to construct their identity and fulfil their aspirations of emancipation and unification.

The Cathedral first appears to Goethe as an 'astonishing' but 'barbaric mass' of details. But after a night of contemplation—during which he is visited 'in faint divining' by 'the genius of the great master mason', the medieval architect Erwin von Steinbach—Goethe finds other qualities in the Cathedral. It now appears to him as a well-constructed whole (he uses the term *Gestalt* that will later become famous as an aesthetic and psychological category). No longer just a vaguely barbarian product, it is identifiable with a precise regional

and historical origin. Finally, rather than being a cause for shame, it becomes a source of pride for himself and the people it belongs to. As the morning sun touches the Cathedral's facade, Goethe stretches out his arms towards it shouting adoringly, 'this is German architecture, this is ours'. Thus, while the universalist, 'paternalist', classical canon is imposed from the top down—from 'another region of the world'—it produces a 'uniformity' of buildings 'which presses upon the soul'. The cathedral can be admired without any imposition and 'without the need of an interpreter.'

The text establishes three seminal points which defined the path of Romantic regionalism, through the nineteenth and twentieth century up to World War II. The spectator is invited to shed acquired conventions (of the canon) when relating to a building. Instead, Goethe suggests that the spectator focuses selectively on certain attributes of the material fabric of the building. The observer is drawn into an intimate relationship with the building, establishing what we might call an affective affinity between material fabric and himself. A sense of emotional familiarization arises, a state Goethe called 'faint divining': an inexplicable temporal awareness of the past, a past region in space and time, and a past community. The rapport between spectator and building reaches a high point as the spectator becomes aware of his identity as part of a group empowered to become emancipated from a foreign yoke.

Goethe's future development moved away from the regionalist, nationalist themes of this early text. He became a passionate admirer and student of classical architecture and of its universal norms. His universalist approach, on the other hand, included an aim of the study of the world and non-Western products of culture (weltliteratur). However, he also pursued his investigations into the mechanisms of memory and design cues that stimulate it. Thus, in the *Elective Affinities* (*Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, 1809), a later text, he described how past and present become one through design triggers, how 'all these things' (of 'German origin'), old objects or new ones designed 'in the same spirit ... in form and color' direct 'imagination back upon old times', and how they bring spectators into such a state of vivid remembering and familiarity with the object that they 'ask themselves whether they really were living in a modern time, whether it was not a dream ...' gazing 'towards ... a region ... (of) a vanished golden age' (my emphasis added). However, as much as the notion of memory persists, the idea of a lost golden age coupled with the yearning for cultural emancipation for a group of a vanished identity, does not play an important role anymore.

Equally indifferent to the question of ethnic identity was John Ruskin when inquiring about the role of memory and region in architecture in the

mid-nineteenth century. 'There are two strong conquerors of forgetfulness of the men' he asserts, 'poetry and architecture' and between the two, architecture is the 'mightier in its reality', the more potent to bring back to mind a past long lost. 'We may live without architecture,' he writes, 'worship without her, but we cannot remember without her.' But what is this past he was after if it was not a lost ethnic identity? The answer lies in his ideas about architectural practice. It is well known that Ruskin, despite his love of medieval architecture, rejected its restoration. Restoration, even the most skilful, brings the form of a building back in its efforts to be perfectly faithful to the original, cleans the surfaces of the building out of the dirt and distortions of time. But in doing so, it erases the skin which, together with the traces of dirt, carried the human touch of the people that lived next to it or passed along before it. Conservation of buildings of the past rather than restoration, therefore, is what is needed. Yet, Ruskin's suggestions were more than a program for historical preservation. This becomes evident in his analysis of the morphology of the Alps whose shape he admired because it embodied the processes of its formation. Similarly, buildings, whether they are old with 'walls ... long ... washed by the passing waves of humanity', or new with 'decorations ... animated by a metaphorical or historical meaning' expressing 'all that need be known of national feeling or achievement ...' can 'admit ... a richness of record altogether unlimited' and they have that unique 'deep sense of voicefulness'. What Ruskin implied here is the participation in the human, rather than the ethnic community, present but also past, that can take place through the medium of the building.

For Ruskin, emancipation was not aimed against any specific imperial power anymore, even if he was an outspoken critic of the policies of the empire to which he belonged as a citizen and he did approve of the Austrians occupying his beloved Italy. It was 'the present system of political economy'. In *The Crown of Wild Olive* he asserts with bitter irony that the 'political supremacy of Great Britain' is its control over power resources, the 'cheapness and abundance of our coal' which he saw to guide ultimately not only to social disaster but also to environmental catastrophe, 'carbonic acid' leading to 'the sky black' and 'ashes to ashes'.

The malaise of the crisis of community defined outside nationalist confines is also developed in another text by Goethe, the *Elective Affinities*/*Die Wahlverwandtschaften*. (Well known is its impact the text had on Max Weber.)<sup>10</sup> An Englishman arrives in the midst of the hard working Germans busy building a Heimat. He is an expert on the design of country seats. An amateur, rather than a professional, he has already designed such a place for himself, and has travelled widely observing many similar

projects. Asked where he 'considers his 'abode', or 'home' to be, he responds 'in a manner quite unexpected' that he no longer has a home because his son took 'no interest in the place at all' and has gone instead 'out to India.' The son, the generation that followed the 'country seat builders', in other words, has opted for 'a higher use of life' rejecting the local identity and 'region', in favour of a life of mobility and international commercial exchange. 'Who is there to enjoy such places?' the Englishman wonders wistfully in relation to picturesque country seats. 'Only strangers, visitors, curious, restless travellers,' he answers in response to his own question, concluding bitterly that 'we spread ourselves out wider and wider, only to make ourselves more and more uncomfortable.'

### **Regionalism for Propaganda and Commerce**

In the nineteenth century Romantic regionalist ideas were spread out into folklore studies aimed at delineating regional enclaves by identifying buildings with common architectural attributes: a common treatment of site, common spatial arrangement, common materials and common decorative details. On the other hand, there was also an active implantation of new buildings with 'regional' stylistic characteristics to serve as markers to affirm the identity and boundaries of a region and the rights of its appropriation by a group. Towards this end, in case no local architecture was available to serve as a prototype, historical and archaeological studies were carried out to unearth material to construct the necessary regional canon. As a result, archaeology received significant support by such regionalist movements while these movements themselves received assistance for their claims. In the end, the construction of such regional canons—as much as it tried to recruit science—was obliged to mobilize fantasy. That was applied not only to public buildings but also to private ones. In both cases such efforts were mostly linked with the creation of a new nation which was based on ethnicity as well as ethnic-territorial disputes and secessionist 'peripheral' political struggles against 'central' authorities.

This is the professional architecture of the genius commercialii of tourism and entertainment which offers—for a good price—to alleviate the pain of atopy and anomy of contemporary life in as-if settings, simulacra of places, facades, masks of environments offering the illusion of participation in their internal activities. In other words, commercial regionalist works that give the feeling of 'a world being there,' a make-believe regional entity of easy access which not only does not require a 'translator', in the sense of Goethe, to be understood, but also requires no effort to be totally possessed. Like other kitsch works or mass media pro-

ducts, these feed emotions settings and starve rationality. They are an architectural pornography of sorts, targeting the economically privileged in the second part of the nineteenth century, but as we moved into the twentieth, increasingly embraced the masses.

A typical kind of project that utilizes this approach for mass consumption is the National Exposition. These proliferated from the second part of the nineteenth century onwards along with the 'regional style' buildings promoting the sale of 'regional' food and artefacts, one of the most essential and most successful components of their repertoire. One of the most successful products of this development of regionalist architecture was the vast Palace of the Arts by Anibal González for the *Exposición Iberoamericana de Sevilla* in 1929. Regional elements from Bilbao, Santander, Valencia, Madrid among others from the Iberian peninsula are joined together in a pleasant (?). A similar regionalist eclectic strategy was pursued at the same time for the *Exposición Internacional de Barcelona*, which turned out an accumulation of several regional buildings in a kind of global village, rather than a building assemble, as was the case in Seville. However, the Seville Palace of the Arts was not only a commercial project. It was also a political statement and as such it reflected a complex strategy to articulate and give place to a multiplicity of regional identities and to force unity upon them. The building does that very successfully. As Goethe said about the Strasbourg cathedral: the message could be received by the masses without a translator. However, the political use of Romantic regionalism in this case, as in many similar projects of the first part of the twentieth century, have very little to do with the ethnic emancipation movements we discussed before, although it appropriated many of its discourses and emulated a large number of its design strategies. Typically, the Seville palace was intended to advance the nationalist dictatorial plans of Primo de Rivera that had no relation to the emancipatory aspirations of the Spanish regions. Similarly, most politically motivated regionalist buildings of that period employ, like the commercial regionalist ones, highly typified folkloristic motifs aiming at over-familiarized 'vulgar' 'as if' settings, a technique to be adopted by the political populist propaganda and serving as an instrument of cooptation for totalitarian and mostly chauvinistic regimes.

The most extreme case of this post-Romantic and debased regionalist architecture appears during the period of economic and political crisis of the 1930s, threatening the very existence of the basic institutions of modern states. The regionalist reaction against the universalist doctrines of modern architecture was not a resistance against any real central hegemonic power but rather a fictitious

'cosmopolitan' threat subverting the national unity. A neo-tribal, illusionist and true-to-the-race architecture is called forth cultivating genuine hysteria of siege and inspiring a delirious taxonomy of identity and exclusion. It came to be known in Germany as *völkisch* or *heimatsarchitektur*, but similar trends emerged at the same time in large parts of the world where totalitarian regimes had taken over.

At the time that regionalism was losing its strong ties with movements of emancipation, increasingly becoming a launch pad for commercial or chauvinistic campaigns, also in reaction to this mixture of scum politics, convert oppression, and to quote Ruskin, commercial 'lying tongue ... advertisement',<sup>11</sup> a young American Lewis Mumford reconstructs the concept of 'regionalism'. In his book *Sticks and Stones, American Architecture and Civilization* (1924), the first history of American architecture whose title alludes to Ruskin's 1853 masterpiece *The Stones of Venice*, Mumford juxtaposed an approach to architecture he identifies as regionalism to the 'imperial' Beaux Arts architecture whose strong hold was still apparent in the United States thirty years after its apotheosis at the 1893 World's Columbian exposition in Chicago. Mumford accused the architecture of the Beaux Arts as being 'conspicuous waste', 'icing on a birthday cake,' 'putting in a pleasing front upon a scrappy building, upon the monotonous streets and the mean houses,' to cover up the 'new slums in the districts behind the grand avenues,' which he likens to congested human 'sewers'. He considered it to have 'placed a premium upon the mask', the 'imperial facade', 'the very cloak and costume' of an 'imperialist approach to the environment' in support of the policies of the 'holders of privilege in the "capital city" to exploit to their own benefit ... the life and resources of separate regions.' He further accuses it for the 'negligence of the earth,' using the land for 'profitable speculation ... exploitation' rather than approaching it as a 'home', causing 'depletion and impoverishment', and producing buildings that are not 'framed for some definite site and occupants.' The alternative that Mumford proposed was 'regional' architecture; an architecture based on the perception of 'place', derived from 'achievements in science ... experiments in democracy' will 'not be stifled' as they had been in the 'imperial' framework that would 'serve economically' without 'depleting resources' 'for the benefit the capital city'.

What was most significant in Mumford's text was that he succeeded in salvaging the concept of regionalism from the commercial and chauvinistic abuse of it in reframing it in a new context relevant to new realities of the time, relating it to economic and environmental costs of the misuse of resources. This becomes clearer in a series of lectures entitled *The South in Architecture* delivered at the beginning

of World War II, addressing a young audience of cadets who were soon to leave for the battlefield. Interestingly, Mumford chooses architecture for this occasion as his subject. It is fascinating that he decides to be critical and challenging about the state of affairs in America in relation to this topic.<sup>12</sup>

Mumford further develops his definition of regionalism in confrontation to the idea of regionalism by the Nazis in the 'deification of *heimatsarchitektur*'. He is anxious that his critique will not be taken as a suggestion to return to the traditional picturesque or Romantic regionalism in search of the 'rough', the 'primitive', the 'purely local', the 'aboriginal', 'the self-contained'. For this reason he rushes to stress that regionalism is not a matter of using the most available local material ... or 'construction'. Neither is it in conflict with the 'universal'. He argues that regionalist architecture has to overcome the 'deep unbridgeable gulf between the peoples of the earth', which *Heimatsarchitektur* is in fact deepening. At the same time regionalism, as redefined by Mumford, has to help people come to terms with 'the actual conditions of life' and make them 'feel at home'. 'Regional insight' has to be used to defend us from the 'international style', the absurdities of present technology and the 'despotism' of 'the mechanical order'. They all fail to create better social conditions giving 'form and order to a democratic civilization'. 'The brotherhood of the machine,' argued Mumford, 'is not a substitute for the brotherhood' of people. The problem therefore lies not with science or technology but with society, institutions and morality failures.

As we move into the unknown territories of the twenty-first century, the unresolved conflict between globalization and diversity and the unanswered question of choosing between international intervention and identity, are increasingly leading to crises as vital as the threat of a nuclear catastrophe in the middle of the twentieth century. The idea of critical regionalism is to rethink architecture through the concept of region. Whether this is the case of complex human ties or the complex balance of the ecosystem, mindlessly adopting the narcissistic dogmas in the name of universality, leads to environments that are economically costly, ecologically distractive and catastrophic to the human community. What we call the critical regionalist approach to design and the architecture of identity,—not nationalist but the one defined by the value of the singular, that circumscribes projects within the physical, social, and cultural constraints of the particular, aiming to sustain diversity while benefiting from universality. It suggests a complex multidimensional landscape, which, while flattened—a job carried out mainly by the new media of transportation and communication—nurtures, bottom up, the diversity of peaks and valleys—natural, cultural, and social—a job architecture is uniquely equipped to do.



Notes:

- 1 See A. Tzonis and L. Lefaivre, *The Grid and the Pathway*, in *Architecture in Greece*, no. 5, 1981 and A. Alofsin, *Die Frage des Regionalismus*, by M. Andritzky, L. Burckhardt and O. Hoffmann (Eds.) *Für eine andere Architektur*, Vol. 1, Frankfurt: Fischer 1981, pp. 121–34.
- 2 K. Frampton, *Towards a Critical regionalism*, in H. Foster (Ed.) *Anti-Aesthetic*, Port Townsend: Bay Press 1983.
- 3 Vitruvius, *De Architectura*, 2 Vols., Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- 4 W. S. Heckscher, *Relics of Pagan Antiquity in Medieval Setting*, *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 1937–38, Vol. 1, pp 204–20.
- 5 L. Heydenreich, *Der Palazzo baronale der Colonna in Palestrina*, in *W. Friedländer zum 90 Geburtstag*, Berlin 1965, p. 87.
- 6 Christopher Hussey's *The Picturesque*, London and New York: 1927.
- 7 N. Pevsner, *The Genesis of the Picturesque*, *Architectural Review*, Vol. XCVI, 1944.
- 8 *The Gardens of Epicurus* (written 1685; published 1692)
- 9 W. D. Robson-Scott, *The Literary Background of the Gothic Revival in Germany*, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press 1965.
- 10 Herbert, Richard, H. (1978), *Max Weber's Elective Affinities: Sociology within the Bounds of Pure Reason*, *American Journal of Sociology*, 84, 366–85.
- 11 1860, *Unto his Last, four essays on the first principles of political economy*, Essay III
- 12 *The South in Architecture*, New York, Harcourt, Brace & co, 1941.