

SAN ROCCO zero/ **Innocence**

SAN ROCCO is a magazine about architecture.

SAN ROCCO does not solve problems. It is not a *useful* magazine.

SAN ROCCO is neither serious nor friendly.

SAN ROCCO is written by architects. As such, SAN ROCCO is not particularly intelligent, or philologically accurate. In SAN ROCCO, pictures are more important than texts.

SAN ROCCO is serious. It takes the risk of appearing naive.

SAN ROCCO appears four times a year.

SAN ROCCO will last 5 years. As a result, there will be no more than 20 SAN ROCCOs for the single five-year plan.

San Rocco is the name of a place in Monza - not a nice place. Giorgio Grassi and Aldo Rossi engaged in a design competition for this place in 1971. The project was not built; ordinary housing blocks were built instead.

A few negligible drawings of the San Rocco project have survived in old monographs, along with a black-and-white photograph of the competition model. It is a picture taken from above of the white plaster model. Close to the buildings there is a large label in relief lettering that casts dramatic shadows and reads "MONZA SAN ROCCO scala 1:500".

San Rocco was the product of the collaboration of two young architects. San Rocco did not contribute to the later fame of its two designers. It is neither "standard Grassi" nor "standard Rossi". Somehow it remains between the two, strangely hybrid, open and uncertain, multiple and enigmatic.

The purity and radicalism of the design does not involve any intolerance. San Rocco suggests an entirely new set of possibilities. It seems to be the beginning of a new type of architecture, or the first application of a new - and happy - design method that has not been developed further.

San Rocco proposes the possibility of reusing architectural traditions that lie outside of private memory (contrary to Rossi's usual approach) without erasing personal contributions (contrary to Grassi's usual approach). In San Rocco, common does not mean dry, and personal does not mean egomaniacal. San Rocco seems to suggest the possibility of an architecture that is both open and personal, both monumental and fragile, both rational and questioning.

This condition (the *innocence* of San Rocco) has arisen in other instances in the history of architecture. It would be possible to compile a list of examples of this unlikely, generous, vulnerable and *innocent* architecture.

Innocent architecture is not utopian architecture, nor is it *architecture de papier*. *Innocent* architecture is always meant to be built, and sometimes is. In its *innocence*, it is *serious*.

Innocent architecture is not experimental. *Innocent* architecture is not open-ended. It involves (stubborn) ambition. Its results are evident, but at the same time they are not entirely available or applicable.

Innocent architecture is not completely effective. Somehow it does not work; it is not ripe or stable. It is unfinished, either literally (like the Olympeion) or conceptually (like the Villa Garzoni). If built, it can easily be destroyed (e.g. Ito's White U). It is more promising and more disappointing, more daring and more incomplete, more dangerous and more paradoxical. What is discovered is not immediately present, but rather displaced, or somehow postponed. The formal resources are not immediately available.

Innocent architecture is enigmatic. You do not understand if it is inspired or idiotic. It is architecture by Prince Myshkin.

Most of the time the innocence of these architectural episodes is the product of a collaboration (e.g. Rossi and Grassi, Burnham and Root, Meyer and Wittwer, Diotallevi, Marescotti and Pagano, and Figini, Lingeri, Pollini and Terragni...). Something remains unclear, open to further development. What the architects discover here seems to lie beyond their goals; it is somehow greater and not completely under their control - weak yet promising, brave yet naive. The designs are ones whose ambition was somehow too daring; they are buildings that never really found legitimate heirs to the colossal risks they ran.

Innocent architecture seems to belong to an extremely ample formal tradition. The family of precedents (and of descendants) of the Monadnock Building and the White U seems to be larger than the family of precedents of any other project by Ito or Burnham. Because of its promising lack of clarity, it is easier to agree with its innocent beginnings than with its pedantic development (so it is easier to go along with the church on Wiedner Hauptstrasse than later work by Hollein, and and it is easier to accept the Frankfurt Ethnological Museum than Kollhoff's later works).

Innocent architecture is not big. It is either colossal or small (or both, as in the case of the Zeebrugge sea terminal).

Innocent architecture is not complicated. Much like a toy, it is made of just a few pieces. Price's aviary in The Regent's Park is an example of a design that reaches *innocent* architecture's greatest acceptable degree of technological complexity.

Innocent architecture is white (e.g. the White U or the *balneario* in Jaú) or, at least, pale (the Indiana Avenue Studios).

Here San Rocco 0 presents a provisional list of fragile traditions that we would love to continue.

Cases:

Olympeion, Akragas, (480 b.C. - 406 b.C.)

The Olympeion was huge (56.30 x 113.45 m). Its columns measured 4.05 metres in diameter) and 18.2 metres high. It was never completed.

The Olympeion was not a Doric temple. So what was it? What kind of experiment was the Olympeion? Was it just a "bigger" temple? And, if so, is a change in scale enough to produce a change in the overall meaning of a work of architecture? (Provisionally, we would say YES.) Was the Olympeion a (missed) opportunity for Greeks to discover the existence of (internal) space? Was the Olympeion a first, monstrous step towards generating architecture? Is the

ugliness of the Olympeion a necessary punishment for having abandoned the pure realm of sculpture in order to enter the dirty realm of architecture?

In the end, no matter what Goethe's opinion may have been (Girgenti, Wednesday, 25 April 1787), we like the Olympeion.

J. B. V. Artigas, Balneario de Jaú, 1975

If you look on Google for a bird's-eye view of the small town of Jaú, you will see a perfect ring over a formless bunch of swimming pools to the east. This white, circular UFO that touches the ground with its three rounded legs is the *balneario* of Jaú. A *balneario* is a bathing resort, a sort of stand-in for the beach that allows you to experience the beach lifestyle even if you are 300 kilometres from the coast. Somehow typical of the state of São Paulo, *balnearios* are beaches without the beach, the ultimate *paulista* act of faith in an entirely artificial environment that is completely independent from nature. It is also something that people in Rio will never stop laughing about. The white Modernist structure floats on the water like a spaceship, giving voice to the Brazilian renaissance. As Artigas himself has said, "Do índio ao brasileiro de hoje o que queremos é ser modernos, enquanto moderno puder significar, como eu imagino, qualquer coisa diferente de subdesenvolvido." In the end, Brazil is the only truly modernist country: on its flag appears the phrase "ORDEM E PROGRESSO".

J. B. Bakema and C. Weeber, Dutch Pavilion, Expo '70, Osaka

Gamera vs. Jiger: the final battle between these titans took place at the Osaka Expo site, at the climax of the Metabolist orgy. Dressed up in a shiny, tight-fitting, silvery-orange suit, the Dutch Pavilion stands on guard, ready to play its part in the fight. Its energetic, rising spiral movement is ready to explode as powerfully as a Shoryu-ken (Ryu's Rising Dragon Fist in the Street Fighter video game). Sipping a beer while looking through the periscope, old Captain Bakema and his comrade-in-arms Weeber peer slyly at the horizon from the mast of their sturdy ship. Ready, steady, fight!

P. Bottoni, Villa Muggia, Imola, 1936-1938

Once upon a time in Imola there was a country house. The house was transformed into a hunting lodge in the 18th century. Then the building fell into ruin. Just a few rooms, a salone with columns and frescoes on the vaults and a monumental stairway remained. In 1936 Piero Bottoni designed an impressive transformation of the old lodge into a Modernist villa. The old, monumental stairway led to a bare wall with no openings on the upper level except for an enigmatic door. Below the level of the door, two large, Modernist windows introduced a brand new underworld. The 18th-century salone floated on top of this new ground level, suspended and perfectly useless. A bridge spanning from the monumental entrance to the rest of the house cut the lower level at a height of roughly 2 metres, thereby preventing any possibility of using both levels. By cutting the old pavement, the salone was transformed into a precipice, a dried moat spanned by a fragile drawbridge. The Villa Muggia takes the form of a Turandot castle. It is easy to imagine the spoiled daughters of the Muggia billionaires waiting for the hesitating, clumsy knights of the mediocre Italy of the 1930s to cross the drawbridge and rescue them. But the story actually ended tragically: when Fascism went from ridiculous to miserable, the Jewish Muggia had to leave the villa in 1943. The villa then became a local headquarters of the SS and was subsequently bombed by the US Air Force in 1944. Further demolition occurred immediately after the war. Now the complicated ruins of the villa (possibly the most

radical, surreal design of Italian Modernism) wait in a silent, provincial garden.

Burnham & Root, The Monadnock Building, Chicago, 1889–1891

The Monadnock Building is a fossil of an extinguished species, an austere "cliff of brickwork" (Sullivan) that resists any change. The Monadnock was the last building to be designed by the partnership of Daniel Burnham and John W. Root, who died in 1891. In Burnham's later work there is nothing like the Monadnock. The Monadnock seems to refer to an obscure, fantastic – and in a way very American – past. The Monadnock seems to come out of the unhistorical world of John Milius's *Conan the Barbarian* (consider its strange combination of structural anachronism, an abundance of *materia*, an Indian name and "Egyptian" details). The unbelievable mass of the Monadnock's walls (they are 1.83 m thick at ground level) and the crystal-like sound of the name seem to refer to a rock, a mountain, or a primitive aggregation of minerals. In the 16 stories of dark brick that comprise the Monadnock, matter seems not to need form, but rather to possess an autonomous, irreducible one: "the form of matter alone" or "the form of matter before the intervention of form". This dark, crystallized matter seems to be the very substance of which the city is made, the ultimate substratum of urban architecture.

I. Dotallevi, F. Maressotti and G. Pagano, "La città orizzontale" (The Horizontal City), Milan, 1940

A brand new society as far as the eye can see. As flat and chilling as the view of undulating wheat fields. As exact and reproducible as a chemical formula. An endless matrix of ideal-family seeds sown in urban fields freshly turned over and freed from land speculation (actually, this place is at the centre of Milan!). Pigeonholed as if placed within the methodical cabinet of an obsessive entomologist, dwellers' interrelations are strictly classified and prefigured on the basis of physical quantities: singles, couples, 3-person families, 4-person families, and so on... There are no frills here.

F. O. Gehry, Indiana Avenue Studios, Venice, California, 1981

Like bottles in a Morandi still life, the greyish-pinkish Indiana Avenue Studios stand on a bare plateau. What emerges is the space between the things, the naked purity of the plane on top of which they are located. Gehry presents a sculptural and American reinterpretation of Morandi's investigation of shadows, positions and relations. If Morandi repeatedly described the spaces between bare walls in the north Italian countryside, the Indiana Avenue Studios describe the particular space trapped between the objects of the American suburbs. With the Indiana Avenue Studios, Gehry discovered the possibility of investigating the American suburban landscape from a spatial point of view (which is contrary to Venturi's purely iconographic investigation). The Indiana Avenue Studios appear as a delicate reinterpretation of Morandi's research but in a completely different context. The displacement is incredibly promising and challenging, yet Gehry, unlike Morandi, did not insist. The humble beauty of the Indiana Avenue Studios (particularly the amazing beauty of back view) is completely lost in the miserable Gehry of the 1990s.

H. Hollein, Wiedner Hauptstrasse Church, Vienna, 1966

What kind of architecture might this be? Where is the church? Where is its main entrance? And why are there all these strange cars? The structure looks like a

reduced example of the suspended monolithic cities depicted in Hollein's earliest collages. Instead of increasing the scale of daily objects to abnormal dimensions, the church seems to reverse the operation in an act of extreme miniaturization. More than a church (at least in Fischer Von Erlach's sense of the word), it looks like a temple for urgent evening prayers, or an altar, or similar tool, for unheard of drive-in ceremonies. Or is it - and this is the worst case scenario - a dry, armour-plated "angel-like" sculpture, with its pyramidal vest, the imperfect symmetry of its wings and the irritating LeCorbusian plasticism of its "head"? In the end, no work by Hollein of this kind was ever built.

T. Ito, The White U, 1976 (demolished in 1997)

The White U was a house for mourning.

Like the Wittgenstein House and the one in Bernhard's *Korrektur*, the architect built the White U for his sister. Unlike the Wittgenstein House, however, the White U is not the brother's only architectural work, and unlike in *Korrektur*, the sister did not die before the house's completion and the brother did not commit suicide immediately afterward.

Toyo Ito built the White U in 1976 for his older sister, who had just lost her husband to cancer. The sister and her family had been living in one of Tokyo's high-rise apartments. Following the husband's death, the widow requested a house for her and her small daughters where they could enjoy close contact with the soil and plants that their former home had lacked. The widow and her architect-brother therefore found a plot for sale next to the brother's house, the same site on which the widow had lived before she had gotten married.

The White U was demolished in 1997. Twenty-one years after the completion of the house, the family could not stand the White U anymore. The first one to move out was the older daughter. All of her many pets had utterly refused to be left alone in the enclosed courtyard. Then the mother moved to a smaller flat. The youngest daughter was the last to move out.

The White U had consisted of only one long, bent corridor, with the girls' rooms and the mother's bedroom at opposite ends. In the White U, the bent corridor included all of the "public" spaces of the house (living, dining etc.). It was not possible to see the entire extension of the bent corridor, and the long, fluid space had no fixed border. Space just vanished behind a curved wall.

A strange, melancholic, Japanese neoclassicism seems to be apparent in the White U - something of Tessenow, and of Vignola; maybe it is the U-shaped plan, or maybe the whiteness. The White U seems to be the beginning of a possible wall architecture by Ito, something completely different from his later works of steel, pillars and beams. If the later Ito is Ito-light, the White U suggests the possibility of an Ito-heavy, but still with the same delicacy.

H. Kollhoff, Ethnological Museum, Frankfurt am Main, 1987

There's a rumor going around the suburbs of Venice: someone has been saying that a retired *vaporetto* captain bought one of the boats on which he used to ferry tourists and Venetians around the Lagoon and then took the thing up a minor inland waterway, eventually reaching his private house, which is somewhere in the countryside. The old captain is said to have managed to have taken the boat out of the water and to have put it on top of his house, where it must still be,

partially inhabited. No one knows what the hell his wife thought about this provincial, Fitzcarraldian enterprise.

Hans Kollhoff did the same kind of thing. Of course, being a cultivated intellectual, he managed the undertaking in an seemingly less naive way, but he still did the same thing: he entered the competition for the extension of the villas housing Frankfurt's Ethnological Museum and presented a design for a new, independent building to be placed in the garden behind them. He reapplied the footprint of one of those villas (let's call it contextualism) and extruded it to produce three levels. On the top of this base, he brutally placed a monumental shape that clearly resembles a (military) ship, or at least the hull of one. This ship "symbolically penetrates into the space between the villas", pointing to the river and the skyscrapers of the financial district.

Kollhoff adds (and we have to ask, Is he really innocent?) that "the villas are unaffected by the development, which in this way recognises their historical importance", although his own drawings dramatically show that the villas are completely overwhelmed by the new museum. And that's not all: like in a sci-fi movie of the seventies, a graphical grid defines every surface, from the completely glazed roof to the solid, slightly sculpted sides, which were apparently to be entirely covered with mirror-glass (a stealth-bomber strategy?). The building floats, hostile and proud, as if it were suspended in a primitive act of rebellion: *Jeder für sich und Gott gegen alle*.

Kollhoff carefully avoids imposing any explicit reference on the shape, thus leaving its symbolism as suspended as the shape itself, floating in the air. Is it really a ship, in the end? Like one of the primitive canoes of the ethnological collection? For Argonauts of western Germany? Or is it an anvil, perhaps, the one which sounds at the beginning of *Heimat*, screaming "Home" to the Teutonic soldier coming back from the Great War?

H. Meyer and H. J. Wittwer, Petersschule, Basel, 1927

Among an almost infinite supply of "communist" architects, Meyer and the others of the ABC group seem to be the only ones who were capable of deriving aesthetic power directly from political commitment. Why do they seem so convincing as "communist" architects? They are much more convincing than Constructivists, not to mention members of later movements. Is it only because of their unbelievable biographies? Or is there actually something in the forms, in the designs themselves that speaks of an unheard of freshness, a generous bravery, a crazy over-abundance of hope? What is it that makes the Petersschule "communist"? Or better, why is the Petersschule the first thing that comes to mind when we think of "communist" architecture (even though Meyer's political involvement only began later)? Is it the monumentality associated with the technology (which is actually relatively simple, and just out of proportion with respect to the needs of a small school)?

The Petersschule seems to be monumental in the same way as "electrification" is monumental in Lenin's famous definition "Communism is Soviet power plus electrification". Why is this architecture, which claims its purely functional organization, so monumental and so representative? And representative of what? Why does all this desperately honest commitment to sacrificing aesthetic principles for the sake of political goals wind up producing only aesthetic consequences? Why does "communist" architecture, contrary to its own agenda, discover such impressive aesthetic potential?

OMA, Sea Terminal, Zeebrugge, 1989

In the end, Zeebrugge sea terminal would have been such a small building - the smallest colossal building in the world. It probably would have been somehow disappointing if it had ever been built.

Actually, it was a toy - a Dalì version of Leonidov's Lenin Library, maybe the only OMA design in which the influence of Dalì was really effective. And then there's the fact that it was to be carried out in Belgium, which is the final proof of how surreal the enterprise was.

C. Parent and P. Virilio, Church of Sainte Bernadette du Banlay, Nevers, 1966

Sainte Bernadette is a church that seems like a Nazi bunker, just a concrete casting with no windows and no doors that was named after a miller's daughter from Lourdes.

The very first work made by *Architecture Principe* - the group founded by the young architect Claude Parent and the city planner Paul Virilio - Sainte Bernadette is the manifesto of a new architectural theory, the *fonction oblique*. According to the authors, the church doesn't express any representation of religious spirituality: as a project for a supermarket, it's just about providing solutions for the human activities that transpire inside the space. According to Virilio, the bishop who consecrated the church was muttering to himself, "What a ghastly thing! Amen! What a ghastly thing! Amen!" The priest then turned towards the bishop and said: "Monsignor, this is not an exorcism! It is a consecration!"

R. Piano and M. Arduino, "Cantiere Aperto", TV Programme for Rai2, 1978

Paris, circa 1973. Ferreri is shooting *Touche pas à la femme blanche* in the lunar void of the Les Halles construction site. The troops of Marcello Mastroianni, the conceited general of the "Obtuse Progress Army", are defeated in battle by few brave metropolitan "Indians". Renzo Piano, who is working at the Beaubourg construction site a few steps away, is overlooking the battle, and comprehends the deep reasons behind the war: people felt excluded and uneasy in front of the wild run of a technological revolution that had acquired an overwhelming scale and complexity. A few years later, in 1978, Piano has the opportunity to run a TV program on the state-owned Italian TV channel Rai2. The title, "Cantiere aperto", is revealing and clearly states his intentions and interests. Every topic he chooses and explains to the audience - from French Gothic cathedrals to a reconstruction project for a part of the Friuli region devastated by a violent earthquake in 1976, and from the pitched roof to the birth of the Centre Georges Pompidou - allows him to talk about the central theme of his early works: the powerful interaction of knowledge, technology and democracy. The Gothic cathedral construction site is thus introduced as an innovative and interdisciplinary research centre where, for the first time, workers were free: there was no slavery, and craftsmen shared responsibilities and knowledge. The project was a tool on an urban scale that was capable of involving and literally containing the entire population and that introduced modern processes and practices, such as modularity and reversibility. Returning to our own time, in order to fill the technological gap and allow citizens to be once again the effective producers of their own built environment, Piano explores the opportunity of participation in the form of friendly, movable devices applying modern materials and machinery. Technical education goes hand in hand with a deeper awareness of society and politics. Everyone can directly

experience building and learn how to build thanks to a few simple gestures and resources. Everyone can be a pioneer. From bolts to freedom. Everybody can be educated via a new, progressive technology: television.

C. Price, London Zoo Aviary, The Regent's Park, London, 1962

The aviary is a building for flying inhabitants - a giant, Fulleresque toy filled with Indian and African birds.

As requested in the brief, the aviary was to be large enough to permit free flight and have a viewing path through the space rather than around it. The public passage thus takes a zigzagging route along the length of the space so that birds may be viewed from above as well as from below. A large volume was created by supporting wire mesh with tension cables, which were in turn stretched over a series of triangulated frames of tubular aluminum. These frames are carried by wires on shear legs at either end, thus creating a "tensegrity" structure.

The aviary is architecture freed by the obsession of the plan. It gives an idea of an experience of space that is not limited by movement on horizontal planes (which is something we take for granted when we speak of so-called architecture). Strangely enough, this liberated architectural work, finally freed from the oppression of the plan, is actually a cage.

J. Sansovino, Villa Garzoni, Pontecasale, 1540

"Sansovino's villa in Pontecasale, on the other hand, was something apart. Away in the Adige delta, soaked by rain and fog and battered by sun, it represented a beautiful aberration in the evolution of architecture that was to have no progeny. Sansovino envisaged the country villa that he built for the Garzoni family in the later 1540s as a rural palace of noble dimensions. Like the other villas in the Venetian tradition, it has the familiar central loggia and side blocks, but it is somehow too aulic for the country, like a Doge at a swimming hole."

James S. Ackerman, *Palladio*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth (UK), 1966

K. F. Schinkel, Radziwill Hunting Lodge, Antonin, 1822

The little castle for King Radziwill in Antonin, Poland, is amazingly isolated within the rich oeuvre of Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Schinkel - who was normally in favour of a polite classicism - pushed his system beyond its limits here, thus creating a structure that offers an unexpectedly modern and very speculative spatial configuration instead. Schinkel was asked to design a wooden hunting lodge within the forest. He organized his design around a central, more or less 15-metre-high, freestanding chimney that functions as the spatial centre of the building. The chimney - the only stone element in the house - is shaped in the form of a gigantic Doric column (and is decorated with 24 deer antlers!) and functions both as a fireplace and as structural support. Around the column a four-story octagonal hall with open galleries is organized, giving access to four three-story wings with sleeping rooms and thereby resulting in a cross-shaped floor plan for the castle. The work generates a lot of questions but offers few answers: Why did Schinkel (a master of the empty space) fill the middle of the castle and the octagonal hall with a megacolumn? And why did he decide to design from the inside to the outside? Was the public image of the project less important than the feeling of being inside it after a hunting expedition? And why did Schinkel (a master of homogeneous spaces) decorate the

chimney as a Doric column and thus isolate it so much from the rest of the structure by making an object out of it? Was there a hidden agenda? Imagine a burned-down hunting lodge that leaves behind a freestanding Greek column in the middle of the Polish forest...

_G. Terragni, L. Figini, P. Lingeri and G. Pollini, Brera Academy (Project 1), Milan, 1935

In the end, the design was too light, and too much steel was needed (considering contemporary sanctions against Fascist Italy). The courtyards were too small (actually they were not courtyards), and the building was too close to the old Brera palace. So, no building. Then Terragni/Lingeri and Figini/Pollini had a fight. The second (1938) and third (1940) designs are not particularly interesting: they are heavy, obvious, very generic Modernist/Fascist Italian architecture of the 1930s and '40s.

Still, the Brera Project 1 remains. A collective work. Lighter, happier, simpler. No rhetoric, no pretentious "poetry", no "purism", no "futurism", no provincial "modernism", no provincial "classicism", no "Sant'Elia", no "symbols", no "fascism as a house of glass" - Terragni's talent without Terragni's intellectual mediocrity.