

Steen Eiler Rasmussen, *Experiencing Architecture.* Beyond Modernity by the Medium of Perception without Manifesto

“In spite of all the popular monographs on outstanding modern architects, such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier, and in spite of the scholarly works on great architects of the past, no modern publication deals with the intrinsic elements of this essentially unpopular art [architecture]. This gap has been filled by Steen Eiler Rasmussen.”¹ With these words the well-known Berlin art historian and urban planner Paul Zucker defined in his review, with flattering tones, the uniqueness of a book published in 1959 and entitled “Experiencing Architecture”.

In 1988, when an exhibition at the School of Architecture in Aarhus celebrated the Danish architect’s career, the catalogue underlined that Steen Eiler Rasmussen (1898–1990) belonged to “that rather small group of architects who have not only written books about architecture but also designed buildings that have actually been built. Others, like Le Corbusier, Aldo Rossi and Robert Venturi (to name a few international leaders) are also to be found in this little group of architects who have both written and built.”² Unlike most of them, Rasmussen is not exactly the “academic type”, not having felt the need “to theorize about his own works or to document his own theories by actual buildings”.³ Therefore, it seems necessary to highlight that his thinking is not only in relation with the immediately preceding architectural culture but also with respect to the following one suggesting an alternative path to the rigid opposition between modernity, intended as a stereotyped ‘International Style’, and the postmodern era.

Since giving a general picture of Rasmussen’s wide-range activities is not the aim of this writing, we will introduce just a few biographical notes trying to find the sources of his not straightforward theoretical approach.⁴

Rasmussen attended the Danish Royal Academy of Fine Arts for only two years (1916–1918) and started practising profession at a very early age. De-

1 Zucker 1961: 357.

2 Nielsen and Tømsager 1988: 43.

3 Ibid.

4 Heath/Aage et al. (eds.) 1988: 93–97, Rasmussen 1988: 11–24.

5 Rasmussen won three important competitions at only 21 years old, among his most significant projects we must remember the "Fingerplan proposal" for Copenhagen (1948) and the Housing development plan for Tingbjerg (1944), he also was employed by the Town Planning Department of the Municipality of Copenhagen (1932-'38) and held important positions in administrations.

6 Raynsford 2005: 425.

7 "Biographical notes" 1988: 93.

8 Raynsford 2005: 432.

9 Ibid.: 433

10 Braghieri 2006: 17.

11 Raynsford 2005: 421, 445.

12 Braghieri 2006: 9.

13 Zucker 1961: 358.

spite his brilliant debut and having been responsible for important projects during his career,⁵ he became mainly known as a lecturer and an architectural writer. By the Twenties he started to pursue with great rigour aesthetic principles on architecture and, thanks to the art historian William Wanscher, he got to study *RaumGefühl* namely the links between psychology and urban space as significantly explained in Erich Brinckmann's teaching on Rome.⁶

After his first tours to Rome and Naples (1923),⁷ travels and some important acquaintances became the favourite proof for these matters. German culture had great influence on his arguments; when he was claimed as a lecturer by the Danish Royal Academy of Fine Arts accepting a formal invitation, he decided to meet Brinckmann in Cologne and started to follow his lessons. Nevertheless, in order to maintain always a critical approach towards theory, he planned to visit directly those towns and places described by the German historian from a perceptive point of view.⁸ Highly significant was moreover the visit to Paris in 1926 where, accompanied by the urban planner Werner Hegemann, he met Le Corbusier having the opportunity to expand his horizons of contemporary architecture while in the new-built town of Pessac he found, behind the modern look of the buildings, the compositional principle of 'coloured surface'.⁹

Rasmussen developed also an interest for 'real things', that is a functionalist attitude towards craftsmanship and a particular affinity to the works by Heinrich Tessenow as he himself remembered on the occasion of receiving the "Heinrich-Tessenow-Medaille"¹⁰ (1973). London, where he stayed between 1927 and 1928 for a lectureship, became the suitable city for cultivating this 'sense for domesticity', while Delft was the ideal town to investigate light effects through the depicted scenes in the Dutch paintings and the Flemish city with its built environment.¹¹ From travels Rasmussen had always grasped the hidden spirit of cities and places transferring it in his writings.

The book written at the peak of his career, subject of this article, derived from this sophisticated mix of theory and practice. As observed by Nicola Braghieri, the title of the Danish Edition published in 1957 *Om at opleve arkitektur* (translating as "living architecture") was slightly different from the American version which gave it the notoriety. In fact, after the last revision of the whole book, the title had been changed putting in foreground the main focus of research: the phenomenological reading of architecture.¹² As underlined by Paul Zucker, this book is distinguished by two reasons: 1. expressive clarity, so as to make architecture understandable even to a child and therefore appreciated by both students and teachers, and 2. inclusivity:

"[...] many laymen are able to enjoy spontaneously the Lever House and the Whitestone Bridge in New York on the one hand and the Parthenon on the Acropolis and St. Peter's in Rome on the other. But they are mostly unaware that it is the same category of art in both instances which they experience."¹³

The structure organised in ten chapters and recalling a wide range of theoretical topics (such as ‘rhythm’, ‘proportions’, ‘scale’ and ‘volumes’) makes however this work, at a glance, similar to a modern treatise. Starting from Rome and the historic city with its buildings and churches, the architect carries on the cultural legacy by Paul Zucker, Werner Hegemann and the tradition of urban studies in general (dating back to Camillo Sitte, Erich Brinckmann, formerly Hermann Maertens), but at the same time he widens the discourse on architectural experience embracing the whole environment.

Furthermore, as Zucker mentioned, old and modern buildings share the same chapters without any prejudice of the author (see for instance the comparison between Trevi Fountain in Rome and Frank Lloyd Wright’s Fallingwater to explain the contrast between natural and built forms) and—when necessary—buildings are alternated with artefacts appearing familiar to the reader including everyday life scenes and sometimes ludic situations or even ordinary objects (like Wedgwood porcelain cups to explain soft shapes).

Methodological approach is undoubtedly unconventional for a book of architectural theory, so are the means by which Rasmussen decides to express it. Like his language, the *mise en page* looks very simple and the book is printed in paperback version since its first edition¹⁴. Images are always placed step by step with the text: black and white photos, plans and schemes partly redrawn by the author (as you can see for example in fig. 06) remind of a travel diary.

14 Braghieri 2006: 7.

Rasmussen and the problem of Architectural education

The first edition of the book was published in Danish language in 1957 but just two years later it was translated and published by the MIT press depicting the “modulor” on the cover. Then it crossed the American borders and spread in England, in Spain as *Experiencia de la arquitectura*, in Germany in 1980—and in full Tendenza cultural climate—as *Architektur Erlebnis*. In France, more faithfully with respect to the original title, it was translated as *Vivre l’architecture*, and we can find even editions in Japanese, Turkish, Arabic, Polish and Italian. In 2014 the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts included it on its website among the top ten publications of the year in third place between Daniel Libeskind’s *Line of fire* (1988) and *The eyes of the skin. Architecture and the senses* (1996), written by the Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa¹⁵.

15 <https://kadk.dk/en/news/top-ten-september-2014>

Nowadays, some recognize it as a classic, others as a text of great educational value but—despite its great international popularity and the prestigious “American Institute of Architects prize” awarded in 1979¹⁶—*Experiencing Architecture* is not one of the most acclaimed books in the critics’ influential entourage. Only Paul Zucker and a few others seem to have grasped its value nor does it seem to have enjoyed great popularity among post-World War II architecture studies.¹⁷

16 Odermatt 1981.

17 Anthony Raynsford has recently contributed to enlighten Steen Eiler Rasmussen in his Phd thesis, see Raynsford 2005.

Fred Kaplan has recently defined 1959 as “the year everything changed”,¹⁸ a watershed index of a series of social and economic changes that were definitively starting the world “as we know it today”.¹⁹ In the architectural and ur-

18 Fred Kaplan, 1959: *The Year Everything changed*, New Jersey, John Wiley and Sons, 1, quoted in Laurence 2014: 9.

19 Ibid.

20 The generation of new architects such as Alison and Peter Smithson, Aldo Van Eyck, Jaap Bakema, Georges Candilis, Shadrach Woods, Giancarlo de Carlo.

ban planning field, the end of the Fifties—even if not so abruptly as a watershed—mark the starting point of a critical phase in which the end of the CIAM and the empowerment of a new architectural generation enlightened profound scissions among architects.²⁰ The younger architects distanced themselves from ‘modern orthodoxy’, becoming aware of the failures of the functional city planning in the present monotony of urban suburbs, and more generally raised the problem of re-establishing the foundations of architectural discipline trying to provide alternative tools and interpretations.

21 Rasmussen 1959.

The American version of *Experiencing architecture*, which came out that same year,²¹ seems to be detached from this polemic climate, being the mature work of an architect who, at about the age of sixty, had been an established professional in Denmark boasting a large number of publications including in-depth studies of urban history such as *London the Unique city* (1937) and *Towns and buildings* (1951) in addition to the never ever re-published *Nordische Baukunst* (1940), a text which sparked attention on Swedish and Danish architecture and their affinities outside the Scandinavian borders.²²

22 “Biographical notes” 1988.

Rasmussen is not known to have ever attended CIAM conferences, he rather extended his teachings to the American audience where Walter Gropius’ learning methods were being criticized. In 1953 Kevin Lynch and the Hungarian György Kepes invited him to MIT, in the same year the landscape architect Christopher Tunnard (who was taking ahead a sort of ‘crusade’ against the dominant modernist approach in urban planning) called him to Yale.²³ Before arriving in the USA, the Danish architect prepared a series of nine lectures, the basis for the future book *Experiencing Architecture*.²⁴

23 Raynsford 2005: 411–12.

24 Braghieri 2006:9.

For him, the problem of teaching architecture had become a priority since the 1920s and ‘the method’ played a crucial role both to convey architectural contents and to overcome conventional critical readings mainly focused on stylistic issues when not on chronological considerations.²⁵ With this work he also met a new need, that of reawakening public interest towards a profession difficult to understand by non-experts: “Today, in our highly civilized society”²⁶—Rasmussen writes in the introduction—“the houses which ordinary people are doomed to live in and gaze upon are on the whole without quality. We cannot, however, go back to the old method of personally supervised handicrafts. We must strive to advance by arousing interest in and understanding of the work the architect does” or rather “in all modesty to endeavour to explain the instrument the architect plays on”.²⁷

25 Referring to the manuscript titled “On the teaching of historic styles”, preserved in the archives of the Royal Danish Academy and mentioned in Raynsford 2016: 544.

26 Rasmussen 1959: 7.

27 Rasmussen 1959: 8.

Experience

The book therefore begins with Rasmussen's arduous attempt to initiate the reader into the way in which “we perceive things around us”.²⁸ Wondering what experience is, he recalls the primary physical contact with places (or better with the surfaces that define them) describing a scene he watched during a stay in Rome:

28 Ibid.

“The enormous church of Santa Maria Maggiore stands on one of Rome’s seven famous hills. Originally the site was very unkempt, as can

be seen in an old fresco painting in the Vatican. Later, the slopes were smoothed and articulated with a flight of steps up to the apse of the basilica. The many tourists who are brought to the church on sight-seeing tours hardly notice the unique character of the surroundings. They simply check off one of the starred numbers in their guide-books and hasten on to the next one.”²⁹

29 Rasmussen 1959: 16.

The photos of Carlo Rainaldi’s curved rear façade and the staircase are conceived as full pages images accompanying the text on some children playing ball. The bouncing back and forth of the ball, from the top onto the staircase, makes the experience particularly intense and while the tourists visit the monument casually, the children spontaneously learn to test vertical and horizontal surfaces through the articulation of the ground. Rasmussen frames that anecdote with a kind of a ‘good savage theory’:

“In his helplessness, the baby begins by tasting things, touching them, handling them, crawling on them, toddling over them, to find out what they are like, whether friendly or hostile.”³⁰

30 Rasmussen 1959: 16.

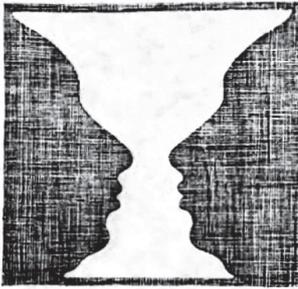
This idea of the primary encounter of the body with an ‘above’ and a ‘below’ recalls some topics which are at the basis of the nascent philosophical field of phenomenology and which, however, have not yet appeared structured in architectural terms. In fact, in his *Phenomenology of perception* (1945),³¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty affirms that primordial physical experience is significant because through the memory, it fixes the origin of our notion of ‘top’ and ‘bottom’. Even if these two extremes can be inverted every time the body changes position, what remains imprinted on our memory is the first impact closely linked to our way of ‘being in the world’:

31 Merleau Ponty 2005.

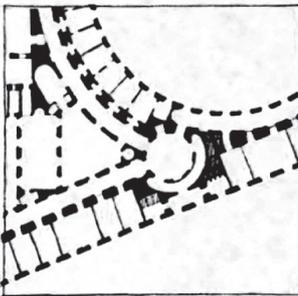
Fig. 1 S. Maria Maggiore, Rome, The ball game on the top step of the stairway, (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen)



V. KÖRPER, RAUM
UND FLÄCHE



Eine Vase = zwei Gesichter



Vom Polizeihof: Grundriß



Faaborg-Museum

Fig. 2 Körper, Raum und Fläche,
(Rasmussen 1940)

33 Rasmussen 1959: 48.

34 Ibid: 46.

35 Arnheim 1974, (first edition 1954): 223. “Edgar Rubin identified a number of such factors. He found, for example, that the surrounded surface tends to be seen as figure, the surrounding, unbounded one as ground. If we perceive the stars as sparkling in front of the dark sky, they conform to Rubin’s rule. If we see them as pinholes, the sky becomes the figure and the bright heavens assumed to exist beyond become the ground. We note that when the surrounded shapes are seen as ground, both planes involved in the figure-ground situation become boundless.”

“We must not wonder why being is orientated, why existence is spatial, why [...] our body is not geared to the world in all its positions, and why its co-existence with the world magnetizes experience and induces a direction in it. The question could be asked only if the facts were fortuitous happenings to a subject and an object indifferent to space, whereas perceptual experience shows that they are presupposed in our primordial encounter with being, and that being is synonymous with being situated.”³² (fig.1)

The perception of form: solids and cavities in architecture

Arguments become more specific when Rasmussen enters the field of ‘space’, a term that sounds abstract and generic unless it is understood in the meaning of the German word “Raum’ which has the same root as the English ‘room’ but a wider meaning. You can speak of the ‘Raum’ of a church in the sense of the clearly defined space enclosed within the outer walls [...]. The Germans speak of RaumGefühl, wearing the sense or conception of the defined space.”³³ An essential condition for the architectural space is the presence of the oppositional qualities of ‘full’ and ‘empty’, as well as ‘internal’ and ‘external’: “In the first instance it is the stone mass of the cathedral which is the reality; in the second the cavities within the mass.”³⁴ (fig.2)

Two dimensions provide a first key to understand ‘Raum’: for years Rasmussen had observed the well-known paradox of the vessels exemplified by the Danish psychologist Edgar Rubin, a black and white set of forms which by virtue of the particular relationship between ‘figure’ and ‘background’ creates new ambiguous and reversing configurations. In fact, the simplest way to visually perceive ‘Raum’ is through the elementary structure of the ‘line’ and the visual experience becomes more intense if the closed line (figure) distinguishes from a surrounding (background). When the boundaries of the figure are contiguous, the phenomenon that Rudolf Arnheim defines as “contour rivalry”³⁵ is generated. Rasmussen extends the issue to architectural examples:

“In this book I use the word space to express that which in three dimensions corresponds to ‘background’ in two dimensions, and cavity for the limited, architecturally formed space.”³⁶

In two chapters of the book (“solid bodies and hollow spaces” and “effects of solid bodies and hollow spaces”) the author sets forth the thesis of two opposite approaches in architecture which derive from the different way of interpreting the relationship between solids and empty elements and that have dominated historically: “structure minded” (more inclined to structure) and “cavity minded”³⁷ (more prone to enclosed empty spaces)—the structure of the cathedral of Beauvais and Saint Peter’s in Rome, with “the numerous vaulted cavities and internal niches”, correspond to these two opposing conceptions.

Rasmussen’s attention therefore focuses on some examples taken from Roman architecture particularly congenial to make the ‘solid bodies’–‘hollow

spaces' relationship explicit and to dispel some myths deriving from a purely stylistic and a priori knowledge.³⁸ Porta Santo Spirito by Antonio da Sangallo is a clear example of harmony through a rhythmic alternation of “concave and convex forms”³⁹ due to a precise balance in which the eye can enjoy the passage from solid to concave volumes, while Porta Pia, designed twenty years later by Michelangelo, presents the tension of contrasting details: “tensely coiled volutes, a hanging garland and a large white inscription plate”⁴⁰ force the observer to a greater active effort. By means of these different pictures we can understand the opposition between a “classic” and a “mannerist” approach. (fig.3)

However, inhabiting certain ‘enclosed spaces’ and observing “how you are naturally lead from one to the another”⁴¹ is the only tool to overcome the paradox between inside and outside and thus recompose the isolated fragments of perception. The focus then shifts to the city and parts of the city, using the Nolli map as an overall ‘Gestalt pattern’:

“On it the house blocks are indicated by the dark hatchings and in between the narrow streets form a weird, light pattern. But not only the streets and squares are shown in white; also entrance courts and church interiors appear as light cavities in the ‘dark mass’.”⁴²

From this map, destined to become iconic and to be charged with further meanings in the following decades,⁴³ Rasmussen extrapolates examples which, in the universe of signs, make the relationships among concavities, convexities and the necessity of places particularly significant.

Rasmussen’s attention is firstly captured by Palazzo Massimo alle Colonne. (fig.4) In this quite exceptional Renaissance building by Baldassarre Peruzzi, the entrance does not protrude towards the street but is turned inside out, dark and set back, while the curved façade is an interesting ‘adaptation’ to the original road conditions. The internal spatial sequence is a continuous alternation of cavities of different shapes and proportions:

“From the loggia a stone passageway leads to a little court where the same contrast of cavity and columns is repeated. The two sides of the tiny court are formed by a colonnade with a barrel vault, again a cavity, which here is pierced by three light openings cutting obliquely into the cylindrical surface of the ceiling. From this court a new stone passageway leads to a smaller court of different character and from there through dark archways to the rear street.”⁴⁴ (fig.5)

Similar composition strategies were—in completely different circumstances—adopted in the neoclassical buildings of the Danish master Carl Petersen for the Faaborg Museum and by Aage Rafn for the Copenhagen Police Headquarters in which Rasmussen finds the same building principle of ‘reacting forms’. The latter—already described in detail to explain the phenomenon of the ‘spatial sequence’ in *Nordische Baukunst*⁴⁵—is now compared with

36 Rasmussen 1959: 48.

37 Ibid.

38 On the relationships between Rasmussen and Baroque architecture and his debt to the *Einführung*, see Raynsford 2015: 173–184.

39 Rasmussen 1959: 57.

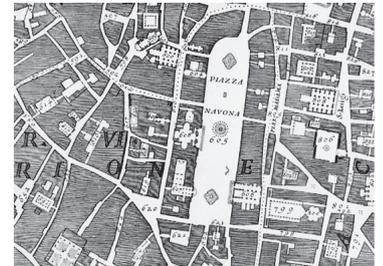


Fig. 3 Nolli map, (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen)

40 Rasmussen 1959: 58–59.

41 Ibid.: 33

42 Ibid.: 62.

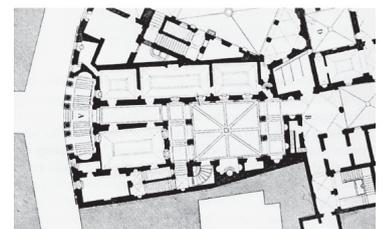
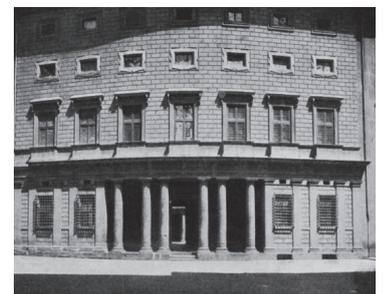
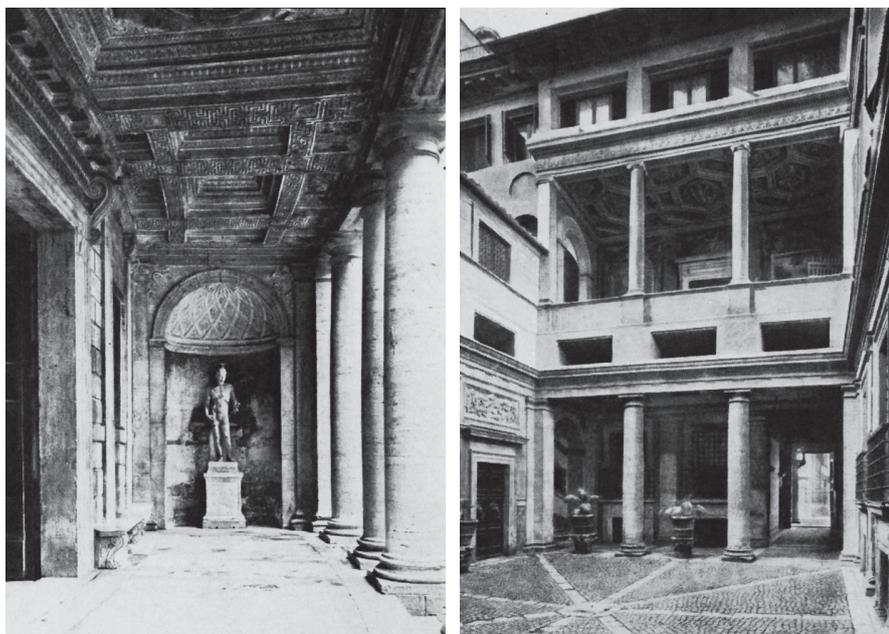


Fig. 4 Palazzo Massimo alle colonne Rome, main front and plan, (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen)

43 To cite a few examples: Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown in *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972) used this plan and its ‘gestalt properties’ to explain the relationship between public and private space. In 1978 Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter published it in *Collage city*, and in the same year the map was used as study material for the International Workshop “Roma Interrotta” which took place in Rome. See in detail Führ 2018: 117–147.

Fig. 5 Palazzo Massimo alle colonne, Rome, views of the entrance and the court (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen).



44 Rasmussen 1959: 62.

45 “Der Polizeihof hat wie das Faaborg-Museum die Monumentalität eines Tempels [...] Es ist indes kein Zufall, daß die Nische so hoch und das Bildwerk so klein, sondern bezeichnend für die Übertreibung der Kontrastwirkungen. Die kleine Figur ist tatsächlich eine Kolossalstatue, die die Nische grandios wirken lassen soll. Es [ist] kaum umgekehrt: die Nische läßt die Figur kleinlich erscheinen. Die Nische an sich ist eine Erweiterung des Raumes, der konkave Abschluß einer Folge von Monumentalen Räumen.“ (Rasmussen 1940: 101)

46 Rasmussen 1959: 78.

47 Ibid.: 69-71. Page 69 must be compared with Brinckmann 1922: 22. The drawing of the square in front of Santa Maria della Pace is probably a reworking on Brinckmann’s published map (Raynsford 2005: 393-394). We should consider in addition affinities between Rasmussen’s approach and the way in which Rudolf Arnheim looks at the reactions of active and passive forces in sculpture (using schemes with converging or diverging arrows) and in Borromini’s Sant’ Ivo alla Sapienza in Rome, (Arnheim 1974: 245).

48 Ibid.: 39-43 and Brinckmann 1921: 6-9. Raynsford mentions this fact as significant in Rasmussen’s theoretical view (Raynsford 2015: 173).

Roman architecture along with other buildings that symbolize modernity such as the interior of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Johnson Wax Company, whose forms, “curves which change from concave to convex”, work against each other.⁴⁶ The example of Erich Mendelsohn’s Mossehaus in Berlin, where contrasting window shapes ‘attack’ the full mass of the building as if they were part of a Baroque façade, proves Rasmussen’s ability to deal with very different styles and cultural scenarios.

What struck Rasmussen most, is the large number of squares in Rome that respond to perspective purposes, such as S. Carino, S. Andrea delle Fratte, Trevi Fountain or Spagna and, among these, the complex of Santa Maria della Pace in particular. (fig.6) In this case the square with the church’s façade as a backdrop recreates the spatial conditions of a ‘theater’, an urban scenography where certain viewpoints are specified—according to a precise baroque design intent—to compress the observer inside a totally external stage where the masses themselves appear to be moving.⁴⁷ (fig.7) The square is thus transformed into a fascinating theatrical machine which, however, represents an exception to more homogeneous urban contexts where the viewpoints are potentially infinite. Not only written words, but visual representation plays a crucial role in conveying this spatial concept, and the not insignificant fact that the plan which accompanies Rasmussen’s argument is endowed with arrows indicating the best trajectories and privileged views to create the Baroque spatial effect. This kind of representation would be probably misleading to explain the main square of a little German town like Nördlingen! Rasmussen obviously did not share the visual obsession of Erich Brinckmann who in *Deutsche Stadtbaukunst in der Vergangenheit* sought a correspondence between the organic plan of Nördlingen and a photo shot. The only way to understand that kind of space is to enter it by capturing “the air of the place” because “Nowhere do you stop and say: it should be seen from here!”⁴⁸

Rome and Baroque architecture as a common ground, convergences and divergences

The investigations in the first part of the book, besides getting to the root—as has already been mentioned—of German *Raumgestaltung* culture and in the studies of *Städtebau*,⁴⁹ both part of the academic ‘cultural baggage’, also do connect the book to some of the most active and influential architects of the 1950s and the 1960s. In a historical period, that was profoundly marked by the crisis of modernity and its values, the historic city and Rome in particular, both in Italy and abroad, played a vital role for architecture becoming one of the favourite objects of investigation for architectural theory once again.

In *Architecture as space. How to look at architecture* published for the first time in 1948 in Italian,⁵⁰ Bruno Zevi poses the methodological problem of how to explain architecture by focusing on the study of ‘space’ in its architectural meaning and hence in the sense of ‘enclosed space’.⁵¹ Zevi traces this issue through the various historical periods up to the present day. In this journey, Ancient Rome with its “reservoirs, tombs, aqueducts, arches; the powerful spatial conception of the basilicas and baths” represents an unprecedented “morphological encyclopedia” which inspired Christian architecture its richness of spatial articulations, followed by gothic metrics and then by a new sense of volume in the Renaissance, centred on human measure.⁵² It is with Mannerism, that masses reach a state of tension and in the Baroque that they fulfil that “consequent polyphonic union” at the base of the modern spatial conception in which the paradox between “inside” and “outside” tends to become weaker.⁵³ However, according to Zevi the spatial unity can only be perceived with physical experience .

It is significant that Michelangelo’s Saint Peter’s basilica is chosen as demonstration object. Zevi starts by showing a traditional plan (that one of Bonanni),⁵⁴ which has the defect of being too detailed, then resorts to numerous schemes, Gestalt interpretations, to highlight different elements of the organism—wall edges, the interior, the exterior, vaults in projection...—, all of them with wireframe lines and black and white backgrounds.⁵⁵ Selective operations where ‘space’ as a whole still remains elusive in the absence of real experience and a time factor: “each of these interpretations expresses a real element of the space created by Michelangelo, but each is incomplete in itself”, however, for Zevi each scheme represents a useful contribution “in

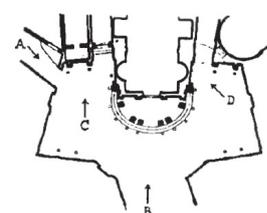


Fig. 6 Santa Maria della Pace, Rome, view B, plan, (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen).

49 *Städtebau* like *Raumgestaltung* is a word strictly linked with German culture. Quite differently from the modern term ‘town planning’ it has a more general meaning that we could translate as the three-dimensional art of organizing houses, buildings, streets and greenery for public purposes (see Camillo Sitte and Joseph Stübben theories).

50 Zevi 1993.

51 Zevi specified: “Architecture, however, does not consist in the sum of the width, length and height of the structural elements which enclose space, but in the void itself, the enclosed space in which man lives and moves”, Zevi 1993: 22

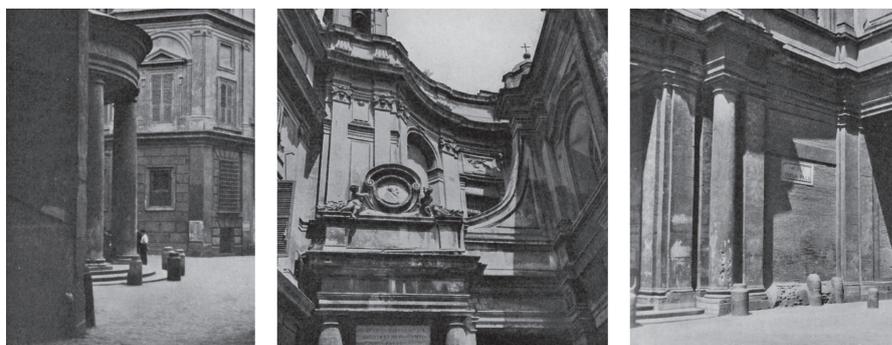
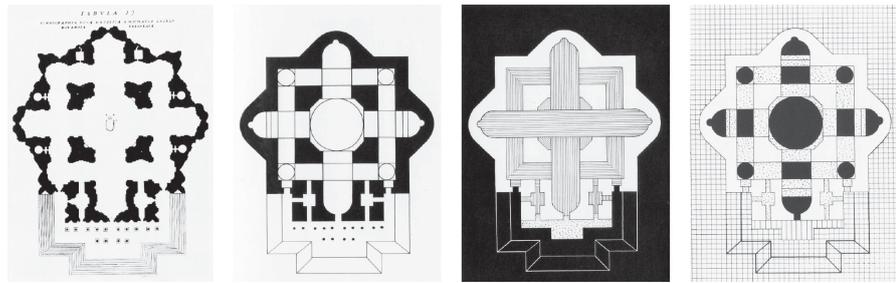


Fig. 7 Santa Maria della Pace, Rome, views A, C, D, (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen).

Fig. 8 Saint Peter, Rome, Bonanni plan and Zevi's schemes, (Zevi 1993).



teaching and learning how to understand space and how to look at architecture by analyzing and discussing the means we have than if we merely neglect the problems they offer.”⁵⁶ (fig.8)

52 Zevi 1993: 79.

53 Ibid.: 134. On the Baroque in Zevi, see Dulio 2015: 185–193

54 Ibid.: 47.

55 Ibid.: 37–39.

56 Ibid.: 52–53.

57 Moretti 2019a: 99.

58 Moretti 2019b: 127.

59 About Moretti's theories and research, see Reichlin 2010: 19–59.

60 Moretti 2019b: 123–152.

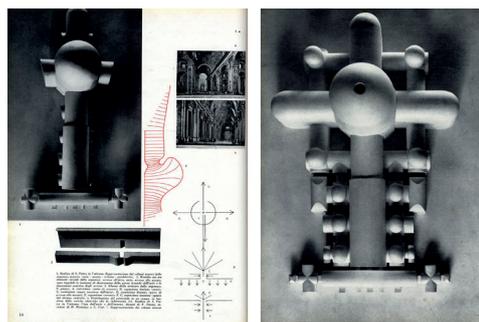
61 Ibid.: 147.

A few years later, in some fundamental contributions to the magazine *Spazio* (1950–1953), Luigi Moretti would recognize the importance of Baroque forms almost as an antidote to the violent standardization and banality of a certain contemporary architecture. In this sense, Rome offers a unique scenario to his observations: “because with the sun at its peak, there is a disappearance of shapes in the shadows and a splendour unknown elsewhere”⁵⁷.

Moretti partly devotes his writings to the ‘autonomous matter of space’, like “Ostendorf, Schmarsow, or the limpid Brinckmann, recently Zevi”⁵⁸ had tried to do before him, but—as he stated explicitly, and with a certain satisfaction—using new types of plaster models he discovered its ‘stereotomy’ for the first time. The models volumetrically represented ‘the void’ and he also introduces schemes to ‘parameterize’ the form of the space according to fixed categories established (like chiaroscuro, plasticity, density of matter...)⁵⁹

For Moretti, as for Rasmussen, the passage through different degrees of spatiality, each one with its own role, remains the privileged way to understand the values of architecture. In “Structures and sequences of spaces”⁶⁰, perhaps his most famous writing, he penned an essay on method. Some descriptions fully demonstrate the volumetric meaning of the voids for a dynamic perception: in Villa Adriana they are arranged in a ‘crescendo’, while in the Bramantesque and Michelangesque Saint Peter’s basilica, the sequence is obtained by the contrapuntal disposition of “thresholds”, “pressures”, “constraints”, “expansions”, reaching a universal value where the vacuum is comparable to a fluid or a semi-solid mass, in respect to which architecture is a complex “hydraulic system of sluices”.⁶¹ (fig.9)

Fig. 9 Saint Peter, Rome, plaster models and spatial diagrams, (Moretti 1952–1953).



Apart from the theoretical positions of Zevi and Moretti, historical Italian architecture and Rome in particular was once again considered a destination for study outside Italy especially in British and US cultural contexts: some fundamental essays by Colin Rowe were published in *The Architectural Review* such as “Mannerism and Modern Architecture” (1951), and “The Mathematics of the ideal Villa” (1947) where the well-known parallelism between Villa Stein and La Malcontenta—mentioned by Rasmussen in the chapter “Scale and Proportion”⁶²—appeared. As is known, Louis Kahn won the ‘Rome prize’ in 1950 and Robert Venturi was appointed as a ‘research fellow’ at the American Academy a few years later (1954–1956).⁶³ Seven years after *Experiencing Architecture*, the book *Complexity and Contradictions* came out, acclaimed by Vincent Scully as “probably the most important writing on the making of architecture since Le Corbusier’s *Vers une Architecture*, of 1923”,⁶⁴ and (not surprisingly) Michelangelo’s ‘contradictory’ Porta Pia was on its cover. (fig.10)

Venturi’s “gentle manifesto”, although written from a demystifying perspective towards the Modern and imbued with pop culture, partly shares Rasmussen’s research slant, that of considering architecture with a new “pluralistic” and “phenomenological” approach.⁶⁵

If “less is more” is the exclusive Miesian motto, Venturi’s inclusivity brings together architectures rich in ambiguities, distortions, irregularities and spatial intricacies that were previously excluded. Concerning the opposition between an ‘inside’ and an ‘outside’ Venturi goes further, rediscovering the value of the ‘façade’ as an alternative to the ‘curtain wall’—a choice to which only a few modern architects have adhered—and that of a Baroque architecture full of formal devices, such as the front of Santa Maria della Pace which enjoys the well-balanced rhythmic alternation of concave and convex spaces.

Another concept that might be inspired by Rasmussen’s thinking is that of “cavity” which Venturi further develops by placing it in correlation with that of “function”. The “Baroque piers” in the chapel of Frésnes are “extreme examples of double functioning elements which are structural and spatial at once”.⁶⁶ Here the voids are incorporated into the structure and differ from the main space by charging the secondary rooms with new meanings. A potential that Venturi’s master Louis Kahn had already marked explaining the concept of “servant space”.⁶⁷ (fig.11) The Gestalt ambiguity between interior and exterior is therefore transformed in design opportunities for in-between spaces which take on an autonomous value according to different degrees of openings. A close connection between the meaning of architecture and movement subtly emerges:

“in equivocal relationships one contradictory meaning usually dominates another, but in complex compositions the relationship is not always constant. This is especially true as the observer moves through or around a building, and by extension through a city”.⁶⁸

62 Rasmussen 1959: 110–113.

63 About Venturi’s tours in Rome and Italy, see Costanzo 2015 and Sessa 2020.

64 In the late 1950s, Rasmussen was also visiting professor at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, where he met David Crane and Robert Geddes. Führ remembers that Rasmussen’s book had had a certain diffusion thanks to Walter Crane, thus reaching Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, see Führ 2018: 121.

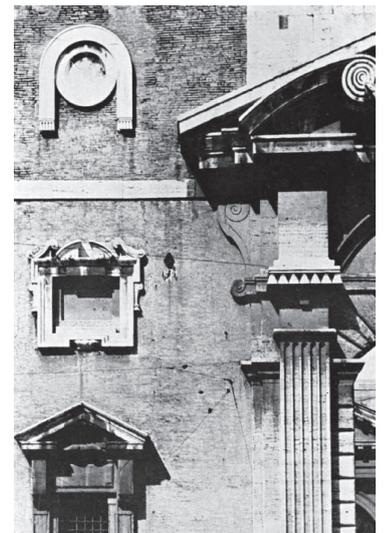


Fig. 10 Porta Pia, Rome, detail, (Venturi 1977).

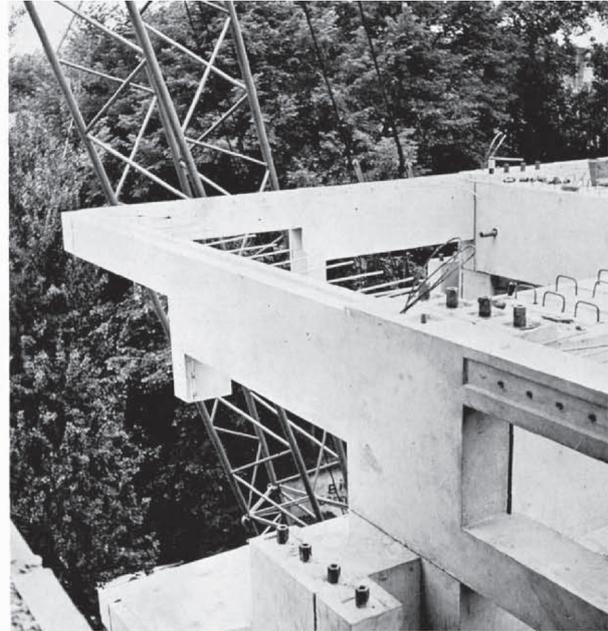
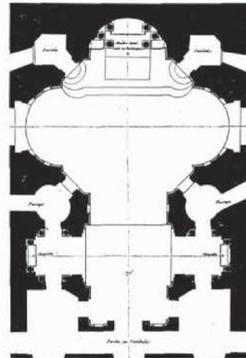
65 Scully 1977: 9

66 Venturi 1977, (1966 first.ed.): 36.

67 Venturi 1977: 82, see also Kahn 2007: 272.

68 Venturi 1977: 32.

Fig. 11 Double functioning spaces and structures: François Mansart, Chapel, Frésnes, plan; Louis Kahn, Richards Medical Research Building, University of Pennsylvania, detail, (Venturi 1977).



69 During the Fifties, György Kepes and Kevin Lynch co-directed the project “The Perceptual Form of the City”. Kepes and Sibyl Moholy Nagy, both of whom immigrated to the US from Germany, had researched and experimented on the relationship between the city and mobile perception for a long time, see Stierli 2009: 82.

70 Kepes 1961: 2.

In the subsequent research studies, Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi replaced the generic movement of the subject by the study of “paths in sequence” enhanced by the use of the film and videotape techniques as in the cultural climate of the MIT many protagonists were interested in the relationship between the shape of the city and moving cars, including György Kepes and Kevin Lynch.⁶⁹

Materiality of architecture, tactile perception and beyond

In 1961, György Kepes criticizes in *Carré Bleu* the insufficiency of the scientific means to define visual effects, declaring that ability to see things must in fact collide with the object that possesses “its dimensions and properties in terms of lighting, space, the shape of textures, rhythm, a richness and quality to be experienced”.⁷⁰ (fig.12)

Rasmussen, too, manages to combine these typical themes of the new Bauhaus ‘visual didactics’, of which Kepes was one of the leading exponents,⁷¹ with a historical legacy subtracted from the rigid laws of manuals and books of architectural theory. Chapters on the “rhythm”, “surface”, “daylight” and “colour” form the second part of the book as a completion of the subject’s perceptual process, revealing other aspects of the experience of architecture. The façades of Venetian houses, seen from the canals as coloured carpets, are presented as proof that there is a third possibility⁷² of conceiving architecture as an alternative to solid masses and hollow spaces:

“convex forms give an impression of mass while concave ones lead to an impression of space. In Venice we learn that buildings can be formed so that the only impression they give is of planes.”⁷³ (fig.13)



Fig. 12 Doge Palace, front ; Venetian anonymous palace, (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen).

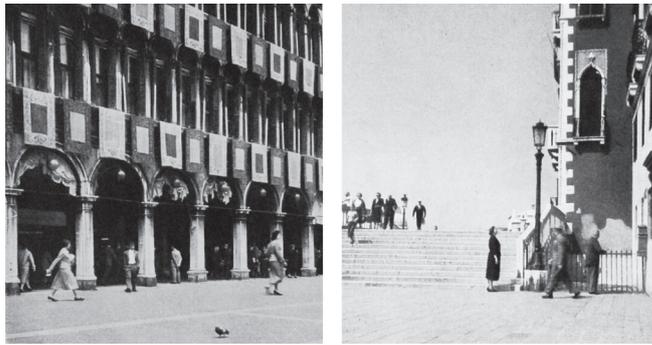


Fig. 13 St Mark's Square and corner of Palazzo Danielli, Venice, (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen).

For Rasmussen, it is only with Le Corbusier, however, that the spatial revolution was achieved because in his architectures the “surface” element is transformed into something totally abstract, subtracting any constructive value from the building. Already in one of his long essays written after his visit to Pessac in 1926, Rasmussen had identified the origin of this approach in abstract and cubist painting: if you place a painting by Ozenfant and the window of the vestibule of the Auteuil villa side by side, it is clear that ‘plasticity’ has been totally abandoned; the figures of the surfaces and relative edges break up and then recompose themselves simultaneously, as Le Corbusier described in his own words.⁷⁴

A visual condition very close to what Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky in the mid-1950s defined as the concept of “phenomenal transparency”: “recognizing the physical plane of glass and concrete and its imagery (through scarcely less real) plane that lies behind it, we become aware that here a transparency is effected not through the agency of a window but rather through our being made conscious of primary concepts which ‘interpenetrate without optical destruction of each other’.”⁷⁵ (fig.14)

In *Experiencing Architecture* Rasmussen goes further because, if this way of ‘breaking’ the volumetric box belongs to the art world, a maturation in constructive terms follows. In the thin diaphragms of Mies van der Rohe, in fact, the sense of weight and the natural evidence of materials such as “plate glasses, stainless steel, polished marble, costly textiles, fine leather”⁷⁶ are em-

71 By 1959, Rasmussen corresponded with influential figures such as Kevin Lynch, György Kepes, Rudolf Arnheim and William Wurster. See Raynsford 2005: 369.

72 Regarding this concept see also the chapter “Körper, Raum und Fläche”, (Rasmussen 1940: 111–128).

73 Rasmussen 1959: 91.

74 “Für mich ist hier die Fensteröffnung das wichtigste Element, deshalb habe ich ihre Oberkante als Oberkante der Brüstung weitergeführt” (Rasmussen 1926: 381).

75 Rowe and Slutzky 1963: 50. Different conceptions of transparency have been theorized at the Bauhaus, on this topic see Steinert 2019: 81–98.

76 Rasmussen 1959: 96.

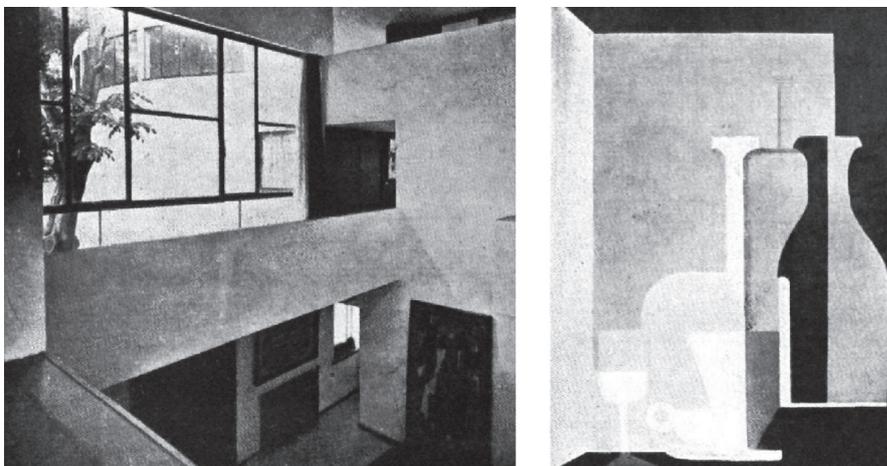


Fig. 14 Le Corbusier, House in Auteuil; Amédée Ozenfant, Still Life, (Rasmussen 1926).

77 Rasmussen 1959: 97–98.

phasized and not conceived as abstract figures. Moreover, the modern way of resolving space—without separation between inside and outside – unexpectedly refers to the great Renaissance tradition of perspective: “There is in the tendency [of Mies van der Rohe’s architecture] something corresponding to the architectural fantasies of the early Renaissance. Their creators also shunned the closed room where peace and quiet could be found, producing instead unending vistas of rooms opening into each other.”⁷⁷

78 Ibid.: 24.



Fig. 15 Baskets from the Cherokee Reservation in North Carolina, (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen)

79 Ibid.: 162.

In the first chapter, in addition to his memory of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rasmussen recalls that every kind of material that one deals with, presents recognizable qualities that are transmitted to the touch (“impressions of hardness and softness, of heaviness and lightness, are connected with the surface character of materials”).⁷⁸ A refined description of pavements, asphalt strips, cobblestones, follows accompanied by evocative photographs of various streets in different countries (Great Britain, Holland, Switzerland) in black and white and under grazing light.

The author deals with constructive features of the material more directly in the chapter of “Textural effects”. (fig.15) Rasmussen defines texture as the origin of construction, and without mentioning Semper, he describes a series of processes in order to demonstrate how a technique has influenced the final look of an artefact and vice versa. According to this interpretation, a wicker basket made by Cherokee Indians, the native American custom of making pots by rolling clay coils back and forth, “the rounded, spray-painted body of the automobile”⁷⁹—whose shape is formed by different mechanical parts—, are all derived from the same original principle. (fig.16)



Fig. 16 The art of forming fine pottery, New Mexico, (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen).

80 Ibid.: 176.

Architectural creativity is also inseparable from the technique. Walls and road pavements can be the subject of multi-material chromatic experiments (combining different colours with scale or contrast effects) and tactile experiences (enhancing the rough surface of a stone, the roughness of concrete, or the surface grain of wood).

A creativity that the most intransigent modern architects who love perfect forms—despite Bauhaus precepts aimed at developing a tactile education in its students through experiments—seem to have forgotten but that Rasmussen’s brilliant pupil Arne Jacobsen instead proves to have. For the cladding of the Stelling House in Copenhagen, he works with four materials (“painted iron, glazed tile, chromium-plated metal and glass”) and their combination “shows the same conception of urban architecture as that demonstrated in the Regent Street houses in London with their smoothly painted facades”.⁸⁰ (fig.17) Even the most common brick masonry produced by a poor technical tradition in terms of elements (mortar and bricks) has led to an incredible variety according to cultural contexts: the joint can be struck, flush, extruded, with very diversified effects, the brick can take on different colours according to the cooking, enhancing the composition itself. Moreover, the visual field can change depending on the variability of daylight as happens for the Baker House by Alvar Aalto.⁸¹ (fig.18)

81 Ibid.: 164–165.

82 Rasmussen 1940: chapters “Handwerk und Zweck” and “Der Klump” (specific on the art of masonry in Denmark).

Rasmussen’s descriptions somehow suggest an idea of a ‘built environment’ which takes its origin from *Baukunst* studies⁸² and interests in the ap-

plied arts.⁸³ The empirical approach towards the physical object, on the other hand, without reaching such radical picturesque tones, is similar to the English one expressed by Gordon Cullen through his “casebooks” published since 1949 in *The Architectural Review* and then collected in *Townscape* (1961).⁸⁴ For Cullen, the city reserves a “plastic experience”, a continuous journey between “voids”, “explosions”, “closures”, “contrasts”, “reliefs”, in which different static and dynamic positions are occupied, expressed through a multiplicity of dualisms and neologisms such as “hereness” (the ‘sense’ of here). Read in this light, urban spaces produce a series of effects in the user that are experienced in sequence as “enclaves”, “enclosures”, “focal points” and “truncations”, while “colours”, “materials”, “textures” help to define the “character of the city”. To understand the strength of a texture, according to Cullen the relationship with the floor has a “primitive” and “intuitive” meaning:

“The floor must be considered an equal partner with the buildings and by the nature of its levels, scale, texture and general property, produce the effect of sociability and homogeneity. But it cannot do this without itself having power to move the emotions (otherways it remains a no-man’s land, a dull spot in a bright scene. It is no good running a slab of concrete between buildings, and, since it is continuous, hoping for homogeneity). The floor must contribute its own unique type of drama”.⁸⁵

Traditional streets, for instance, are covered with cobbles and stones, thus, our walking produces different qualities and tactile nuances according to the textures; similarly, if you look at the walls in the countryside or in the English towns, you will notice a great wealth of traditional architecture in the display of colours, materials and patterns. (fig.19)

It is significant that in the simple material-colour relationship, Rasmussen—like Cullen—identifies a particularly strong urban value that connotes the normal architecture of everyday life (sometimes a bit ‘folk’), such as the vernacular houses painted red in the countryside of Sweden and Norway, suggesting the path of tradition not necessarily as the only one but as the only one possible to imagine in most cases: “It is obvious that there is an inexplicable link between materials and colour.[...] The dwelling is still part of the landscape. If there is yellow stone in the locality, the houses are very likely to be yellow of that stone. And if they have plastered walls, it is sure to be yellow plaster derived from the local yellow sand.”⁸⁶

But “Can architecture be heard?”⁸⁷ The question which opens the last chapter may perhaps seem anomalous, unsettling, or even subtly subversive. Therefore, it is necessary to take a step back: in the chapter on “rhythm”, the author not only distinguishes between properties of the object and the subject but also takes into account “time” as a necessary factor to grasp it. The term “rhythm” itself does not belong to architecture but is borrowed from music, of which the author has been a great lover since his childhood⁸⁸, and from dancing (thus from activities requiring an active effort by the user). Getting

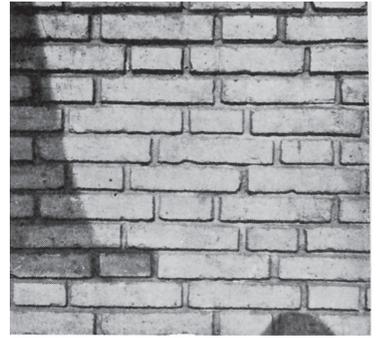


Fig. 17 Knud Hansen, Modern masonry; Medieval masonry, Roskilde Cathedral, Denmark, (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen).

83 In 1932 Rasmussen arranged the exhibition “British Baugkunst” at the Museum of Decorative Arts in Copenhagen and the following year published a little catalogue, (Thomassen 1988: 25).

84 The title of the book comes from the essay “Townscape” published by Igor the Wolfe (pseudonym of Hubert de Croning Hastings) in *The Architectural Review* magazine in 1949. The book is not only a collection of articles but also the final result of the long editorial synergy in which James Richards, Hubert de Croning Hastings, Kenneth Brown were involved. For a complete work on the architect, see Gosling 1996.

85 Cullen 1964 (1961 first edition): 128.



Fig. 18 Alvar Aalto, Baker House at MIT, (Photo: ryan_d_cole 2007, <https://www.sosbrutalism.org/cms/15891909>, CC BY-ND 2.0, viewed 18/01/2021).

86 Rasmussen 1959: 216–217.

87 *Ibid.*: 232.

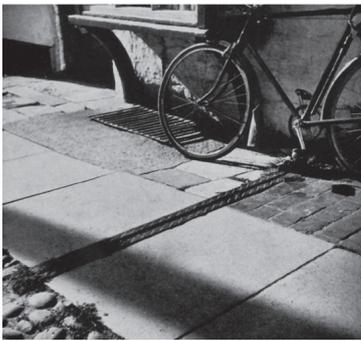
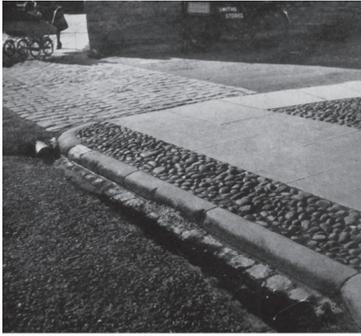


Fig. 19 Traditional pavements in British towns, (Cullen 1964).

88 In an interview, Rasmussen recalls piano lessons and Shakespeare’s plays among the significant experiences of his childhood, (Rasmussen 1988: 12–13).

89 Rasmussen 1959: 136–137.

90 Ibid.: 148–149

91 “Evolutionary tree 1920–2000”, published in Jencks 2000: 77.

92 Among the various studies on this topic, see Otero-Pailos 2010. In this book phenomenology is analyzed as an emerging problem since the 1960s, by comparing the contributions of Jean Labatout, Charles Moore, Robert Venturi and Kenneth Frampton.

93 It is remarkable that both *Towns and Buildings. Described in Drawings and Words*, and *London the unique City*, are mentioned by Aldo Rossi in *L’architettura della Città* See Rossi (1966): 98, 264, 216–217.

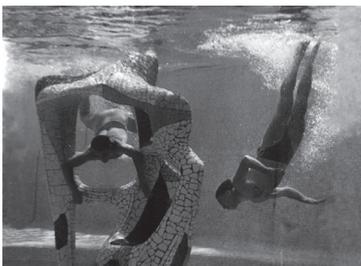


Fig. 20 Giulio Minoletti, Swimming pool, Monza, (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen).

in tune with “rhythm” means straining the eyes to observe the “slight variations of a façade”, testing the different orientations of the Spanish Steps (defined “the Polonaise”)⁸⁹ or even following the modern and “free” forms of the Giulio Minoletti’s swimming pool in Monza.⁹⁰ Similarly, “daylight” is not a property of the object—architecture does not lighten!—(fig.20) but is perceived by the moving subject in observing how it enters from the ceiling or from the walls and, once again, it represents the result of different specific architectural choices depending on climates and construction conditions. The Dutch houses caught in their intimacy and domestic essence by the painters Jan Vermeer and Pieter de Hooch are a good example. “Listening” also lies within this framework of experiences and testifies, through a close relationship with the shape of space, the need and therefore the transition to a hermeneutics of architecture that includes all the senses, overcoming the primacy of vision and the retinal impression compared to other ways of physical involvement. (figs.21–22)

Both ‘child of its times’ and timeless—some final considerations

It is difficult to historically locate *Experiencing Architecture*, and almost always when it comes to theoretical tools of design, historiographic categories appear insufficient. We could reasonably think that Rasmussen would probably occupy a very hybrid place in the evolutionary tree through which Charles Jencks fixed the different ‘isms’ of the twentieth century and its protagonists.⁹¹ With respect to the ‘orthodoxy’ of the Modern, Rasmussen proposes an alternative way starting from an education in architecture and taking into account history as ‘the whole of history’ without distinctions between what is contemporary and what is not, or between one style and another (the word style rarely appears). Certainly, in the non-linear process of post-war architecture, research on perception and phenomenology have assumed an important role bringing together very different protagonists since the 1950s and 1960s (including Bruno Zevi, Luigi Moretti, Robert Venturi, and we could also name Christian Norberg-Schulz and others) who had made the combination of text, image and visual principles the main tool to convey this approach.⁹² Rasmussen is to be included among these, since he bridges the German tradition of *Ein-fühlung* and *Gestalt* with a new way of looking at historical architecture and more specifically at the Baroque—actually not particularly appreciated by the followers of the International Style as intended by Henry-Russell Hitchcock.

Conceiving the city as a basis for architectural education, he also prepared the cultural ground to those postmodern architects looking back to Sitte, Hegemann and other theoreticians as pivotal references both in urban studies and in the culture of architectural design.⁹³

At the same time, his approach could be defined ‘functionalist’, although not in a straightforward way. The Danish architect, enjoying that ‘cultural lag’ relative to the Bauhaus culture typical of countries like Sweden and Denmark, accepted the modernist trend keeping always alive a great curiosity towards vernacular constructive traditions as one can understand in the way

in which his descriptions of architectural masterpieces are interspersed with artefacts, uses, and habits of different geographical contexts. Putting the focus on ‘tradition’ as a material culture and refusing any stylistic definition Rasmussen frames his arguments with a local and international bifocal lens, partly inserting himself in the long trend that since the 1950s has focused on the redemption of the architectural culture of the so-called ‘regional’ contexts, finding canonization only after Frampton’s six points for a ‘critical regionalism’,⁹⁴ with an almost definitive schism from a more ephemeral ‘post-modern’ such as what appeared in the *Strada Novissima* exhibition curated by Paolo Portoghesi in 1980.⁹⁵

This ‘fascination’ with ordinary architectures also portrayed by several personalities (like Hermann Muthesius, Adolf Loos, Heinrich Tessenow, Kay Fisker) as Kenneth Frampton observed, has also played an important role in the nascent postmodern debate between Germany and Switzerland started with the exhibition held in Munich “Die andere Tradition. Architektur in München von 1800 bis heute“ (1981).⁹⁶

Finally, Rasmussen’s perception based method of analysis goes beyond conventional investigation tools, anticipating farther theoretical positions, such as that of Steven Holl, who together with the Finnish Juhani Pallasmaa, in the Nineties took up a research project on the ‘truth’ of architecture including all the expressions of the body in motion strengthening the active role of the ‘senses’ in architectural experience. An approach well documented in Pallasmaa’s book *The eyes of the skin* (2007) where he mentions the Danish architect as a significant antecedent⁹⁷.

Author

Guia Baratelli graduated in architecture from the University of Florence in 2011. She has taken part in several architectural competitions and has practiced in Rome. She attended the International Master Architettura|Storia|Progetto in 2012–2013 and gained her PhD degree in 2017 at Roma Tre University, Department of Architecture for which she currently works as a Teaching Assistant. Her research involves investigating the historical, critical and constructive dimension of projects particularly from between the two World Wars and Modern architecture. Her articles and essays have been published both in national and in international journals. <https://uniroma3.academia.edu/GuiaBaratelli>

Literature

Arnheim, Rudolf (1974): Art and Visual Perception. A Psychology of the Creative Eye, Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Braghieri, Nicola (2006): “L’uomo che amava gli orologi a cucù”, introduction: in: Steen Eiler Rasmussen: Architettura come esperienza, Bologna: Pendragon, 7–20.

Brinckmann, Erich (1921): Deutsche Stadtbaukunst in der Vergangenheit, Frankfurt am Main: Frankfurter Verlagsanstalt.

Brinckmann, Erich (1922): Plastik und Raum als Grundformen künstlerischer Gestaltung, München: R. Piper & Co Verlag.



Fig. 21 Jan Vermeer, The Music Lesson.



Fig. 22 Pieter de Hooch, Maternal care.

⁹⁴ Starting from the definition of “critical regionalism” coined by Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis (1980), Frampton developed his own theory. In 1981, in *L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui*, he already wrote about an architectural strand “synthesis of rational modes of construction and traditional artisans forms [...] in an intelligent syntax that allows for ‘gradient’ in expression, a diversification of microenvironments, and the development of the tactile alongside the visual.” (See Frampton 1981: 2–7) His basic principles became the concrete starting for what can be considered his manifesto (Frampton 1983: 16–30).

⁹⁵ The 1980 Venice Biennale, *The Presence of the Past*, was a hinge between the criticism toward modern assumptions which marked the Sixties and the beginning of a new era more clearly defined as ‘Postmodern’ and highly featured by eclecticism; Frampton, not sharing this theoretical position, resigned from the curatorial team (Szacka 2016: 109–119).

⁹⁶ See Steinmann 1985, Frampton 2015: 7–8.

⁹⁷ In 1993 Steven Holl, Juhani Pallasmaa and Alberto Perez Gomez published the book *Questions of perception: Phenomenology of Architecture*. In *The eyes of the skin* (1996 first edition), Pallasmaa points out the contemporary architects Peter Zumthor, Alvar Aalto and Glenn Marcutt as consistent with this approach, (Pallasmaa 2007: 50, 70–71), see also Wegerhoff 2016: 119–137.

Costanzo, Denise (2016): “I Will Try My Best to Make It Worth It’. Robert Venturi’s Road to Rome”, *Journal of Architectural Education*, no. 70 (2): 269–283.

Cullen, Gordon (1964): *Townscape*, London: The Architectural press.

Dulio, Roberto (2015): “From Michelangelo to Borromini: Bruno Zevi and Operative Criticism”, in: Andrew Leach, John Macarthur, Maarten Delbeke (eds.): *The Baroque in Architectural Culture, 1880-1980*, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 185–193.

Frampton, Kenneth (1981): “Du Néo-Productivisme au Post-Modernisme,” *L’ Architecture d’ aujourd’hui*, no. 213: 2–7.

Frampton, Kenneth (1983): “Towards a Critical Regionalism. Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance”, in: Hal Foster (ed.): *The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Washington: Bay Press, 116–30.

Frampton, Kenneth (2015): *L’altro Movimento Moderno*, Milano: Silvana Editoriale.

Führ, Eduard (2018): “Black and White Thinking,” in: Sebastian Feldhusen, Eduard Führ (eds.): *Public Space in Architecture, Cloud-Cuckoo-Land. International Journal of Architectural Theory*, vol. 23, no. 37: 115–147. https://cloud-cuckoo.net/fileadmin/issues_en/issue_37/article_fuehr.pdf (September 15, 2020).

Gosling, David (1996): *Gordon Cullen. Visions of Urban Design*, London: Academy Editions.

Heath Ditte, Lund Jensen Aage et al. (eds.) (1988): in: Steen Eiler Rasmussen. *Architect. town planner, author (exhibition catalogue)*, Aarhus: The School of Architecture in Aarhus, The Foundation for the publication of Architectural works, “Biographical notes”, 93–97.

Jencks, Charles (2000): “Jencks’s Theory of Evolution. an overview of twentieth-century architecture,” *Architectural Review*, vol. 208, no. 1241: 76–79.

Kahn, Louis (2007): “Architecture Is the thoughtful Making of Spaces”, in: Joan Ockman (ed.): *Architecture Culture 1943–1968. A Documentary Anthology*, New York: Rizzoli International, 271–272. (First published 1957 in: *Perspecta*, no. 4: 2–3.)

Kepes, György (1961): “Considérations sur les arts visuels”, *Carré bleu*, no. 2: 2.

Laurence, Peter L (2014): “Modern (or Contemporary) Architecture circa 1959”, in: Elie G. Haddad, David Rifkind (eds.): *A Critical history of contemporary Architecture 1960–2010*, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 9–29.

Merleau Ponty, Maurice (2005): *Phenomenology of perception*, London: Routledge.

Moretti, Luigi (2019a): “Discontinuità dello spazio in Caravaggio”, in: Orsina Simona Pierini (ed.) (2019), *Spazio. Gli editoriali e altri scritti*, Milano: Marinotti, 84–103. (First published 1951 in: *Spazio*, no. 5: 1–8.)

Moretti, Luigi (2019b): “Strutture e sequenze di spaz”, in: Orsina Simona Pierini (ed.) (2019), *Spazio. Gli editoriali e altri scritti*, Milano: Marinotti, 122–152. (First Published 1952/53 in: *Spazio*, no. 7: 9–20.)

Nielsen, Hans Peter Svendler and Tømsager Svein (1988), “The architect”, in: Steen Eiler Rasmussen. *Architect. town planner, author (exhibition catalogue)*, Aarhus: The School of Architecture in Aarhus, The Foundation for the publication of Architectural works, 43–51.

Pallasmaa, Juhani (2007): *The eyes of the skin*, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Odermatt, Bruno (1981): “Architektur Erlebnis“, (book review), in: *Schweizer Ingenieur und Architekt*, no. 27–28: 635.

Otero-Pailos, Jorge (2010): Architecture's Historical Turn. Phenomenology and the Rise of the Postmodern: Minneapolis - London: University of Minnesota press.

Raynsford, Anthony (2005), Sites of lost dwelling; the figure of the archaic city in the discourses of urban design, 1938-1970, Phd dissertation, vol.1, Chicago, Illinois.

Raynsford, Anthony (2015): "From spatial feeling to functionalist design contrasting representations of the baroque in Steen Eiler Rasmussen's 'Experiencing Architecture'", in: Andrew Leach, John Macarthur, Maarten Delbeke (eds.), The Baroque in Architectural Culture, 1880-1980, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 173-184.

Raynsford, Anthony (2016): "Provoking the 'Thingness' of History: The Anti-Teleological Hermeneutics of Steen Eiler Rasmussen", in: Robert Corsen, Sharon Haar (eds.), ACSA Annual meeting, no.104: 543-548. <https://www.acsa-arch.org/chapter/provoking-the-thingness-of-historythe-anti-teleological-hermeneutics-of-steen-eiler-rasmussen/> (September 15, 2020).

Rasmussen, Steen Eiler (1926): "Le Corbusier. Die kommende Baukunst?", Wasmuths Monatshefte für Baukunst und Städtebau, no. 9: 378-393.

Rasmussen, Steen Eiler (1940): Nordische Baukunst, Berlin: E. Wasmuth.

Rasmussen, Steen Eiler (1957): Om at opleve arkitektur, København: G.E.C. Gads.

Rasmussen, Steen Eiler (1959): Experiencing Architecture, Cambridge: MIT Press.

Rasmussen, Steen Eiler (1988): "Foreword", in: Steen Eiler Rasmussen, architect, town planner, author (exhibition catalogue), Aarhus: The School of Architecture in Aarhus, The Foundation for the publication of Architectural works, 11-24.

Reichlin, Bruno (2010): "Figure della spazialità. Struttura e sequenze di spazi versus lettura integrale dell'opera," in: Bruno Reichlin, Letizia Tedeschi (eds.): Luigi Moretti Razionalismo e trasgressività tra Milano tra barocco e informale, Milano: Electa, 19-59.

Rossi, Aldo (1978): L'Architettura della città, Milano: clup.

Rowe, Colin and Robert Slutzky (1963): "Transparency, Literal and Phenomenal", Perspecta, Vol. 8: 45-54.

Scully, Vincent (1977): "Introduction", in: Venturi, Robert (1977, [1966 firsted.]): Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 9-11.

Sessa, Rosa (2020): Robert Venturi e l'Italia. Educazione, viaggi e primi progetti 1925-1966, Macerata: Quodlibet.

Steinert, Tom (2019): "Transparency," Wolkenkuckucksheim, vol. 24, no. 39: 81-98.

Steinmann, Martin (1985): "Die Tradition der Sachlichkeit und die Sachlichkeit des Traditionalismus", Archithese, no. 4, 1985, 2-8.

Stierli, Martino (2009): "In Sequence. Cinematic Perception in Learning from Las Vegas", Hunch, no. 12: 76-85.

Szacka, Lea C. (2016): "Criticism From Within. Kenneth Frampton and the Retreat from Postmodernism," OASE, no. 97: 109-119. <https://oasejournal.nl/en/Issues/97/CriticismFromWithin> (September 15, 2020).

Thomassen, Ole (1988): "Steen Eiler Rasmussen, man and myth," in: Steen Eiler Rasmussen. Architect, town planner, author (exhibition catalogue), Aarhus: The School of Architecture in Aarhus, The Foundation for the Publication of Architectural Works, 25-42.

Venturi, Robert (1977): Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, New York: The Museum of Modern Art.

Wegerhoff, Erik (2016): "Neue Sinnlichkeit. Postcritical Issues Regarding an Architecture of Sensuousness", Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation, History, Theory, and Criticism, vol. 13, no. 2: 119–137.

Zevi, Bruno (1993): Architecture As Space. How to look at architecture, New York: Da Capo press.

Zucker, Paul (1961): "Rasmussen. Steen Eiler. Experiencing architecture. New York, 1959", The journal of aesthetics and art criticism, no. 19: 357–358.

Figures

Fig.1 S. Maria Maggiore, Rome, The ball game on the top step of the stairway (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen).

Fig.2 Körper, Raum und Fläche (Rasmussen 1940).

Fig.3 Nolli map as shown in Rasmussen 1957 (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen).

Fig.4 Palazzo Massimo alle colonne Rome, main front and plan (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen).

Fig.5 Palazzo Massimo alle colonne, Rome, views of the entrance and the court (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen).

Fig.6 Santa Maria della Pace, Rome, view B, plan (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen).

Fig.7 Santa Maria della Pace, Rome, views A, C, D (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen).

Fig.8 Saint Peter, Rome, Bonanni plan and Zevi's schemes (Zevi 1993).

Fig.9 Saint Peter, Rome, plaster models and spatial diagrams (Moretti 2019b).

Fig.10 Porta Pia, Rome, detail (Venturi 1977).

Fig.11 Double functioning spaces and structures: François Mansart, Chapel, Frésnes, plan; Louis Kahn, Richards Medical Research Building, University of Pennsylvania, detail (Venturi 1977).

Fig.12 Doge Palace, front; Venetian anonymous palace (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen).

Fig.13 St Mark's Square and corner of Palazzo Danieli, Venice (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen).

Fig.14 Le Corbusier, House in Auteil; Amédée Ozenfant, Still Life (Rasmussen 1926).

Fig.15 Baskets from the Cherokee Reservation in North Carolina (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen).

Fig.16 The art of forming fine pottery, New Mexico (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen).

Fig.17 Knud Hansen, Modern masonry; Medieval masonry, Roskilde Cathedral, Denmark (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen).

Fig.18 Alvar Aalto, Baker House at MIT (Photo: ryan_d_cole 2007, <https://www.sos-brutalism.org/cms/15891909>, CC BY-ND 2.0, viewed 18/01/2021).

Fig.19 Traditional pavements in British towns (Cullen 1964).

Fig.20 Giulio Minoletti, Swimming pool, Monza (Rasmussen 1957, courtesy of Una Canger and Ida Nielsen).

Fig.21 Johannes Vermeer, The Music Lesson (Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=22127311>).

Fig.22 Pieter de Hooch, Maternal care (Public Domain, <https://hart.amsterdam/collectie/object/amcollect/38663>).

Recommended Citation

Guia Baratelli

Steen Eiler Rasmussen, *Experiencing Architecture. Beyond Modernity by the Medium of Perception without Manifesto*

In: Wolkenkuckucksheim | Cloud-Cuckoo-Land | Воздушный замок,
International Journal of Architectural Theory (ISSN 1430-3863), vol. 26., no. 42,
Identifications of the Postmodern. Representations and Discourses, 2022, pp. 99–121.