THE DIALECTIC FORM
Avant-Garde & Architecture in Aldo van Eyck vs. Alison & Peter Smithson
(1947-1960)
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ABSTRACT (English):

Nowadays there is a lack of clarity and consistency in the relation between architecture and the other arts. In many cases, either the notion of art is dismissed and architecture is driven only by technical means and analytical thinking, or art is superficially used as an inspiration without an understanding of the aesthetic principles that ground it. This research is an attempt to question our current understanding of the role of art in architecture, and modern architecture as a form of art. It looks back into a paradigmatic moment in recent history, where the question was addressed causing the first big crisis of the Modern Movement: the post-war European reconstruction period (1945-1960), when the criticism drafted by Aldo van Eyck & A&P Smithson to the rationalistic tendency of the late CIAM unveiled the fact that the artistic principles that grounded the Modern Movement were falling into oblivion.

Facing the overwhelming task of the European reconstruction, the CIAM architects were having difficulties defining the role of art in architecture, and architecture itself as a form of art. The mainstream of CIAM was considering only the satisfaction of the material needs, relying exclusively in analytical thinking and technical means to do so. From CIAM 6 (1947) to CIAM 9 (1953), Aldo van Eyck and the Smithsons criticized the approach of CIAM for overlooking the emotional aspects of the reconstruction. If architects focused exclusively in analytical thinking to solve the material aspects, overlooking the irrational nature of human behavior, cities would become inhuman. CIAM was obliterating the fact that modern art had grounded the Modern Movement in architecture, and made architects aware of the limitations of rational thinking in architectural design. Within the early Modern Movement an exclusively rationalistic approach was considered irrational.

Van Eyck’s and Smithsons’ understanding of modern architecture as a form of art made them aware of the limitations of a rationalistic approach in architecture. They shared a vision of modern architecture grounded in art; according to which, architecture should rely in technical and artistic means in order to fulfill both, material and emotional needs- two complementary aspects mixed in everyday life. The artistic principles that grounded Van Eyck’s and Smithsons’ conception of architecture can be traced back to the emergence of modern art: from Dadaism to ‘Art Brut’. They were present in their early work: from the exhibitions designs for Cobra and the Independent Group, to their projects on the city such as the Van Eyck’s playgrounds or the Smithson’s Golden Lane project. Art nourished their work in terms of perception and design: The artists’ perception brought them to consider more the emotional aspects of human behavior and to consider architecture’s potential to give room to such behaviors. In order to do so they integrated the irrational means used by artists, such as sensual knowledge, imagination and intuition, in their design process.

Although this research is grounded in historical facts its approach and goal are operative. It drafts a critical-analysis of the parallelisms and divergences between Van Eyck’s & Smithsons’ projects in relation to other arts, while presenting them as modern abstract artworks in order to learn from them. At the same time, it tries to point out aspects of modern art that were overlooked and had resulted determinant for architecture’s later development, such as the transformation of art in commodity foreseen by Dadaists like Duchamp and intellectuals like Walter Benjamin.
The idea of *Dialectical Form* tries to draft a definition of modern architecture as a form of art; grounded in the notion of the modern movement in architecture as an avant-garde movement emerging together with Dadaism, Neoplasticism, Suprematism, etc. in the early Twentieth century, reenacted during the after war period by Aldo van Eyck & the Smithsons (1947-1960). Architecture was conceived as an art form nourished by science, a product of reason & imagination, driven by understanding & intuition, produced by an individual facing society aiming at the satisfaction of material & spiritual needs. The analysis of modern architecture as a Dialectical Form attempts to understand the conditions in which architecture was redefined as a modern art in a paradigmatic moment of history, in order to awake our consciousness, and establish some criteria to reconsider contemporary architecture as an art.
Hoy en día existe una falta de claridad y consistencia en la relación entre la arquitectura y las demás artes. En muchos casos o bien la noción de arte se abandona y la arquitectura es generada exclusivamente mediante medios técnicos y pensamiento analítico, o el ‘arte’ sirve de manera superficial como una inspiración sin entender los principios estéticos que lo fundamentan. Esta instigación es un intento de cuestionar nuestra concepción actual del papel del arte en la arquitectura, y de la arquitectura moderna como una forma de arte. Mira hacia atrás a un momento paradigmático de la historia reciente cuando la cuestión fue tratada produciendo la mayor crisis del Movimiento Moderno: el periodo de reconstrucción Europea (1945-196), cuando la crítica de Aldo van Eyck & A&P Smithson a la tendencia racionalista de los últimos CIAM desveló el hecho de que los principios artísticos que fundamentaron el Movimiento Moderno estaban cayendo en el olvido.

Enfrentados ante la sobrecogedora tarea de la reconstrucción Europea los arquitectos del CIAM estaba teniendo dificultades para definir el papel del arte en las artes en la arquitectura y la arquitectura en si misma como una forma de arte. La mayoría de miembros del CIAM estaba considerando únicamente la satisfacción de las necesidades materiales, basándose exclusivamente en medios técnicos y pensamiento analítico. Del CIAM 6 (1947) al CIAM 9 (1953), Aldo van Eyck y los Smithson criticaron el planteamiento de los CIAM por no tener en cuenta los aspectos emocionales de la reconstrucción. Si los arquitectos se basaban exclusivamente en un pensamiento analítico para resolver los aspectos materiales pasando por alto la naturaleza irracional del comportamiento humano, las ciudades se volverían lugares inhumanos. CIAM estaba olvidando el hecho de que el arte moderno sirvió de base para el Movimiento Moderno en arquitectura haciendo a los arquitectos conscientes de las limitaciones del pensamiento racional en el diseño arquitectónico. Dentro del Movimiento Moderno un planteamiento exclusivamente racionalista era considerado irracional.

Aldo van Eyck y los Smithson entendieron la arquitectura moderna como una forma de arte de manera que fueron conscientes de las limitaciones de un enfoque racionalista en arquitectura. Compartieron una visión de la arquitectura moderna fundamentada en el arte, según la cual la arquitectura debía fundamentarse en medios técnicos y artísticos para satisfacer tanto las necesidades materiales como las espirituales –dos aspectos complementarios mezclados en la vida de cada día. Los principios artísticos que fundamentaros la concepción que tanto Van Eyck como los Smithson tenían de la arquitectura pueden ser rastreados hasta el origen del arte moderno: del Dadaismo hasta el Art Brut. Estuvieron presentes en sus primeros trabajos: desde las exposiciones que diseñaron para Cobra o el Independent Group, hasta sus proyectos sobre la ciudad como las zonas de juego diseñadas por Van Eyck en Ámsterdam o el proyecto de los Smithson para el Golden Lane en Londres. El arte enriqueció su trabajo en términos de percepción y diseño: la percepción del artista les llevo a tener más en consideración los aspectos emocionales del comportamiento humano, y a considerar el potencial existente en la arquitectura para dar cabida a esos comportamientos. Para ello integraron en el proceso de diseño arquitectónico los medios irracionales utilizados por los artistas, como el conocimiento sensitivo, la imaginación y la intuición.
A pesar de que esta investigación se fundamenta en hechos históricos su enfoque y objetivos son operativos. Esboza un análisis crítico de los paralelismos y divergencias entre los proyectos de Aldo van Eyck y los Smithsons en relación con otras artes, presentándolos a su vez como obras de arte abstracto con objeto de aprender de ellos. Al mismo tiempo, se pretenden destacar aspectos del arte moderno que fueron pasados por alto y que resultaron determinantes para el desarrollo posterior de la arquitectura, como la transformación del arte en un bien de consumo anticipada por Dadaístas como Duchamp o intelectuales como Walter Benjamin.

La idea de *Forma Dialectica* intenta esbozar una definición de la arquitectura moderna como una forma de arte; fundamentada en la nocion del Movimiento Moderno en arquitectura como un movimiento de vanguardia de los años veinte (Van Doesburg & Mies van der Rohe), retomada durante el periodo de post-guerra por Aldo van Eyck y los Smithson (1947-1960). La arquitectura fue concebida como una forma de arte por la ciencia, un producto de la razón y la imaginación, conducida por el entendimiento y la intuición, producida por un individuo enfrentado a una sociedad aspirando a satisfacer sus necesidades materiales y espirituales. El análisis de la arquitectura moderna como una Forma Dialectica intenta entender las condiciones bajo las cuales la arquitectura fue redefinida como un arte moderno en un momento paradigmático de la historia, para despertar nuestra consciencia, y establecer algunos criterios para reconsiderar la arquitectura contemporánea como un arte.
Introduction:

“The objective of architecture is works of art that are lived in. The city is the largest, and at present that worst of such works of art”


“The wonderful thing about architecture is that it’s an art – just that. The terrible thing about architects today is that they’re not artists. Worse, they’re semi-artists comfortably engaged in something super. But architecture, I tell you, is neither a semi nor a super art – it is an art”

Aldo van Eyck, 1962 “The Child, the city and the Artist”

Ever since architecture struggled to define itself the question of its relation with the arts has been at stake. Nowadays there is a great confusion about the role of contemporary art in architecture, and it is difficult to find any serious attempt to think about contemporary architecture as a form of art. This research is an attempt to question our current understanding of the role of art in architecture. It tries to provide a new reading of the role played by avant-garde art in the emergence of a new generation of architects during the post-war period: Aldo van Eyck and Alison & Peter Smithson, from 1947 to 1960. Departing from an analysis of the role played by avant-garde art in the World Wars period, I will try to illustrate to what extent the new architecture of the post-war period came out of a dialogue with the post-war avant-garde movements. During, and after the World Wars, artists from the Cobra Group and the Independent Group visited Paris eager to see the exhibitions and the studios of the Parisian avant-garde. The artists from Cobra and the Independent Group were nourished by the Parisian milieu, and back in their countries they continued re-interpreting in their own way the ideas from the pre-war avant-garde art. The architects engaged with these young artists -Aldo van Eyck & the Smithsons- conceived architecture as a form of art in the same way as the architects related with the pre-war avant-gardes -Van Doesburg, Mies van der Rohe among others- had done years ago. To some extent they all conceived modern architecture as a form of art, with specific characteristics that I will try to depict under the term “Dialectical Form”.

This research might be considered a first brief attempt, an invitation, to reconsider historically the Modern Movement in architecture as a form of art bridging pre-war and post-war periods. Ultimately it attempts to analyze the notion of architecture as a form of art in a paradigmatic

1 From As found : the discovery of the ordinary / edited by Claude Lichtenstein & Thomas Schregenberger, Lars Müller. Baden, Switzerland. 2001. P-141
2 See Francis Strauven and Vincent Ligtelij eds. The child, the city and the artist : an essay on architecture : the in-between realm / Aldo van Eyck. Amsterdam: SUN, cop. 2008. P-58
3 COBRA is the acronyms of the cities were the main artists of the Group came from: Karel Appel, Cornelis and Constant from Amsterdam, Christian Dotremont from Brussels and Asger Jorn from Copenhagen. The “Groupe experimental hollandaise”, COBRA-Amsterdam was founded in November 1948 and lasted until 1951. A complete survey on the origins of the group: Willemijn Stokvis, Cobra: la conquete de la spontanéité. Paris: Gallimard ; [s.l.] : V+K publishing, c2001.
5 The expression “Modern Movement” will be used in the widest sense of it as “Modern Architecture”, including architects from what is called “the first and second generation” nevertheless the present survey will try to provide arguments mainly in regard to the second generation, and especially in relation to the work and ideas of Van Doesburg and Mies van der Rohe.
moment of recent history in order to awake our consciousness, and establish some criteria regarding potentialities of art and aesthetics in current architectural theory and design.

During the First half of the Twentieth Century Modern Architecture was historicized and defined as the result of Western-civilization's technological development, a product of analytical thinking and reason: the so-called functionalist architecture. Nevertheless, as the century went by, it became more and more obvious that Modern Architecture had been a result of emotions as much as it was a product of logic.6

Initially, during the 1930s, Modern architecture was defined as a product of "reason and functionalism" (Pioneers of the Modern Movement, N. Pevsner, 1936); emphasizing H.P. Berlage’s notion of architecture as "pure art of utility", architecture was merely presented as the outcome of the "Machine Age", and Modern Architecture was equaled to the propagandistic brand "International Style".7 a Machinenstil.8 Although initially praised, and lately criticized for its rationalism, paradoxically the Modern Movement was always related with the artistic movements taking place either in the late Nineteenth Century (N. Pevsner, 1936), or with the early Twentieth Century avant-gardes (Space, Time & Architecture, S. Giedion, 1941). The main consequence of this historical argument was that architecture started to be conceived "in relation with the arts" but not strictly speaking as an "art in itself". Modern Architecture was defined historically as a technological product, an outcome of reason and analytical thinking. Nevertheless, to argue consistently that the architecture of Loos, Mies or Le Corbusier was an ultimate product of reason resulted from the early attempts quite problematic; Alberto Sartoris’ book Gli Elementi dell’architettura Funzionale (1932) was meant to be entitled Architettura Razionale but it was changed after Le Corbusier’s letter to Sartoris suggesting the word “Functional” instead; Le Corbiser argued: “it is a real fault to be constrained to put the word rational… Instead of Rational say functional”.9 A rationalistic definition of architecture was at odds with its artistic nature- for art as a humanistic form of knowledge relied on the recognition of the limitations of reason, and the use of non-rational means during the creative process. Indeed the artists who remained deaf to the arguments of the historians talked about Modern Architecture in slightly different terms: Hilberseimer depicted his friend Mies as “an artist- not a designer” (Mies van der Rohe, 1959) and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy’s book Vision in Motion (1947) did not hesitate to include architecture among the arts together with poetry, painting, sculpture and cinema.

In the late 1950s while Van Eyck’s & the Smithsons’ revolt was propelling the dissolution of the CIAM, Reyner Banham concluded his dissertation unveiling the lack of “logic”, “reason” and “functionalism” in the architecture of Mies & Le Corbusier- the so-called “second generation”. Banham’s Theory & Design in the First Machine Age (1960) depicted Le Corbusier’s Ville Savoye, and Mies’ Barcelona Pavilion (1928) in Dadaists terms. Certainly the Dadaists ideas were very

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9 See R. Banham “Theory & Design in the First MAchine Age” p.320
present among Banham’s fellow members from the Independent Group: Nigel Henderson, E. Paolozzi, R. Hamilton, and the Smithsons (The Independent Group: modernism and mass culture in Britain 1945-59, A. Massey, 1995). Banham’s thesis tested to what extent the architecture of the Modern Movement, developed within the avant-garde movements during the “First Machine Age”, was a coherent and solid result of “Machine aesthetics”. Nevertheless, whereas Banham lamented the lack of “rationality” and logic in Modern Architecture, Van Eyck’s revolt was grounded on a defense of the non-rational aspects from the architecture of the Modern Movement. To some extent where Banham saw a flaw, Van Eyck identified a main virtue. Van Eyck was completely aware about the flaws of the Gropius’ Bauhaus, for Van Eyck a “stale” and “didactic approach” completely subjective; a criticism he certainly learnt from Tristan Tzara & Van Doesburg. Like the Dadaists, Van Eyck was extremely critical about the artists & architects who professed blind fascination for the idea of progress, and grounded their work on a materialistic fascination for technology. At the same time the Smithsons criticized the “mechanical concept of architecture” that populated European cities with “Rational Architecture”. Whereas Banham’s dissertation –following Pevsner’s ideas– leaned more towards the idea of modern architecture as a technological product determined by art and aesthetics, Van Eyck & the Smithsons were more radical: they understood the non-rational nature of Modern Architecture, and redefine it as a contemporary form of art during the postwar period.

During the late Twentieth Century the mainstream of architects continued to criticize the Modern Movement for a rationalistic functionalism that very few of its protagonists had pursued. Nevertheless, while the non-rational nature of Modern Architecture started to be unveiled it became more obvious that the simplistic narrow-minded reduction, Modern Movement equals “International Style”, was extremely inconsistent and utterly dangerous. During the 1970s the non-rational nature of Modern Architecture was reconsidered: either in political terms by Tafuri’s “Progetto e Utopia”(1973) & “La Sfere e il labirinto: Avanguardie e architettura da Piranesi agli anni’70” (1980), or in a Marxist interpretation of history aware of the flaws of Enlightenment’s “unreasonable reason” as in Frampton’s “Modern Architecture: A critical history” (1980). Up to nowadays a huge amount of research has been done on the Team Ten generation. We find studies that at certain point deal with the Smithsons’ relation with the Independent Group (from A. Massey, 1995 up to Dirk van den Heuvel and Max Risselada, 2004), and Van Eyck’s relation with Cobra (Hertzberger’s 1982, W. Stokvis 2001, and Strauven’s studies on Van Eyck). Nevertheless the most intensive architectural research has been always done on the Team Ten period of both architects, and there is almost no deep research done comparing Van Eyck and the Smithsons.

10 “the lack of technical training at the Bauhaus” See R. Banham “Theory & Design in the First M Achine Age” P-326
13 Originally appeared in Contropiano nº1, 1969 “Per una critica dell’ideologia architettonica”. See also Contropazio issue on Bauhaus, April-May 1970
Moreover, the Team Ten revolt led by Van Eyck and the Smithsons has been historically presented as a paradigmatic shift, a break with the Modern Movement; whereas this research tries to establish a continuity between both periods, the pre-war and the post-war notion of Modern Architecture. In order to do so I focused on the early years of Van Eyck & the Smithsons, especially the time when they were more tied to the artists than to Team Ten. I analyzed to what extent the contact with other artists played a catalytic role in their early work and ideas, or help them to understand the non-rational nature of the Modern Movement as an avant-garde art form, in such a way that they were able to understand that the late CIAM was betraying its principles. Both Van Eyck & the Smithsons reacted vigorously against CIAM, while trying to reestablish a continuity with the early Modern Movement. By doing so they redefine modern architecture as an avant-garde form of art.

But more important than arguing that these young rebels conceived architecture as a form of art is to clarify: what did they mean with the word “art”? And, why did they think about architecture in those terms so fiercely? Why did they think about architecture as an avant-garde form of art?

In order to answer the first question - what did they mean with the word “art”?- the Prelude introduces the aesthetic foundations of modern art conceived as abstract art, providing a philosophical definition that tries to elucidate what did the architects mean when they used the word “art”, and why did they think architecture had the capacity to satisfy spiritual needs. The idea that art had the capacity to satisfy conceptual or spiritual needs can be traced back to the analysis of Art History developed by the Vienna School historians derived from post-Kantian philosophy. The Vienna School enlarged the study of art in terms of functions to an analysis in terms of purpose: a reaction against the followers of Gotfried Semper whose materialist conception of Art History had reduced it to a mere analysis of functions, materials, and techniques. Thereon art was historicized not only according to a materialist notion of function, but also through very specific terms that theorized conceptual and decorative purposes according to pleasure, desire and beliefs. The notion of art grounding Van Eyck’s & the Smithsons’ criticism to functionalist architecture, had its intellectual foundations on a similar criticism drafted by Viennese scholars to the analysis of Art History in materialist terms.

I analyzed three main historians from the Vienna School whose ideas framed the definition of Modern Art as abstract art that Van Eyck and the Smithsons had in mind: Alöis Riegl whose seminal concept of Kunstwollen and his formal analysis of art in terms of purpose resulted very

15 The term Vienna School refers to a school of thought in art history grounded in the ideas of the Viennese historian Alöis Riegl and his immediate followers: Franz Wickhoff, Max Dvorak, Julius von Schlosser. Their ideas were spread by the journal Kunsthistorische Anzeigen founded by Wickhoff in 1904 and continued by Dvorak until 1913 and the journal Kritische Berichte ran from 1927 to 1937 (Edited by Fürst & Friedrich Antal) that published the ideas of a second generation, among them: Sedlmayr, Pächt, Erwin Panofsky, Meyer Schapiro, Ernst Gombrich, Nikolaus Pevsner and Rudolf Wittkover. See the Prelude.

influential for later development of art history, Heinrich Wölfflin’s main thesis « Principles of Art History » (1915)\(^{17}\) according to which changes in the form of beholding produced paradigmatic shifts in artistic production, and Willhem Worringers’s definition of Abstract or Transcendental art;\(^{18}\) this triad defined art’s capacity to satisfy material & conceptual needs steaming from art’s capacity to provide a world picture of reality through intuitive means. The most elevated art: abstract art, was defined a form of knowledge –to some extent rational- it had a ‘logic’, but ultimately driven by intuition, aiming to produce spiritual relief transcending the objects’ materiality. In this sense I defined the notion of Modern Abstract art used by Van Eyck and the Smithsons as a transcendental intuitive logic.

Whereas the prelude answers the question about the definition of art in aesthetic terms - What did they mean with the word “art”? - the first part “Avant-Garde & Architecture” provides arguments to understand why did they think about architecture as a form of art. It tries to illustrate how the young architects conceived architecture as another avant-garde form together with painting, sculpture, photography, etc. To some extent they learnt about modern aesthetics through the influence of intellectuals – R. Banham in the case of the Smithsons, and Carola & Sigfried Giedion in the case of Van Eyck – but they grasped the notion of modern abstract art intuitively, by looking at the art-works, meeting some artists from the pre-war avant-gardes (Dada, De Stijl, etc.), or the young artists from the IG\(^{19}\) & Cobra. Whereas the prelude introduced aesthetics grounding the notion of abstract art, the first part complements this definition illustrating how it was materialized by the artist during the early twentieth century and how it reached the architects milieu during the after-war period. In order to be more specific I pointed out four elements of avant-garde art: Enstrangement, Imagination & Intuition, New Consciousness and the Elementary, present in the architects’ entourage –IG & Cobra- nourishing their work and ideas. Enstrangement, imagination & intuition, the elementary and the notion of the new consciousness are considered in relation with the notion of avant-garde art, since they were essential for the production of artworks that created a paradigmatic shift in art. These were elements present in the paradigmatic shifts produced by the artistic movements of the first half of the twentieth century and they happen to be found in the paradigmatic shift produced by the Smithsons and Van Eyck in the after-war period.

The First part of the research was framed with two paradigmatic events in which the avant-garde elements were present: the Dadaist-Constructivist Congress (1922, Weimar), and Van Eyck’s intervention at CIAM (1947, Bridgewater). Tristan Tzara’s speech at the doors of the Weimar Bauhaus, and Aldo van Eyck’s “Statement Against Rationalism” are presented as paradigmatic events challenging institutions in which the architects were having difficulties to define the role of modern architecture in relation to the arts: the Gropius’ Bauhaus during the early 1920s, when the influence of De Stijl, Dada and Russian Constructivism shattered the school; and the uprising of the young generation of architects at CIAM during the 1950s.


\(^{19}\) I.G. goes for the acronym of the Independent Group.
Now, if Van Eyck’s & the Smithson’s revolt against the rationalistic approach of the late CIAM was grounded on a reenactment of avant-garde art ideas. And, if these young architects aimed at re-defining modern architecture as a form of art according to its foundational principles as an avant-garde form. The question at stake is: How did they manage to do it? And to what extent they were able to overcome the stagnation into which Modern Architecture was?

I would argue they were able to overcome the stagnation into which Modern Art had succumbed, essentially because they were aware of it: they were thinking about the definition of art given by the avant-garde movements of the early Twentieth century according to which architecture was a form of art, together with painting, sculpture and poetry, etc. Architecture was avant-garde in so far as it was conceived as a form of art in itself. That is essentially what they meant with the word “art”, why they thought about architecture as an avant-garde form of art, and why they saw so clearly that such a definition had nothing to do with the technocratic view of the late CIAM; that is why the Team Ten at Doorn re-visited and re-worked the “Athens Charter” and why after Van Eyck’s intervention at CIAM 6 (1947) Le Corbusier exclaimed “Finally the imagination among the CIAM!”

Aldo van Eyck and the Smithsons conceived architecture as a form of art that merged rational and non-rational means in order to fulfill both material & conceptual needs; architecture was an art insofar as its goal was to overcome the current “lack of relationship between man & things”, asking for a new notion of architectural form able to “stimulate human relationships” and therefore “man’s spiritual growth”. Indeed Aldo Van Eyck’s and the Smithsons’ revolt against the analytical and rationalistic approach of the late CIAM was grounded on a reenactment of avant-garde ideas coming from the artistic movements from the early Twentieth Century, specially Dadaism and De Stijl. The dissatisfaction of these architects was motivated by CIAM’s analytic and materialistic approach during the European reconstruction; the main consequence of this approach was a narrow minded conception of architectural forms as the mere outlet of the satisfaction of material functions. Van Eyck and the Smithsons rejected such a “mechanical concept of architecture”, or the notion of Modern Architecture as a Machinenstil, a product of Machine Aesthetics.

I would argue they simply conceived architecture as a form of abstract art; the main aspect shared in common by Modern architecture and the avant-garde movements of the early Twentieth Century was the notion of abstract art, or conceptual art. The architecture of De Stijl, Mies, Van Eyck, and the Smithsons was conceived as a form of abstract art: for them, architecture had the capacity to satisfy the material needs but its main role was to satisfy the spiritual or conceptual needs, architecture was abstract in so far as it was transcendental. The new materials and methods of construction produced by the technological development might had been able to satisfy the immediate material needs of the reconstruction, but were useless satisfying the immaterial, conceptual or spiritual needs: this was the task of art, and indeed it was the main task of Modern Architecture: to convene and combine both the material and the spiritual reconstruction.

20 Statement from a Team 10 meeting at Doorn 1954. See image P.4 in the Prelude. The following quotations on the paragraph are from the same document, or from the report of the meeting. At Bakema Archive. NAI. Rotterdam
Aldo Van Eyck & the Smithsons understood the fact that Architecture had been materialized as a form of art according to the definition of abstract art provided by other arts too literally. They struggled to materialize in architecture what other artists had done, and were doing in other arts; to some extent they were able to do it because they had in mind a deep notion of form; they understood that architecture should struggle to produce its own forms following the principles of modern art, but this did not imply to emulate the figures of a Neoplasticist painting or the shapes of a Futurist sculpture – form in terms of OBJECT. It did not mean neither to simply experiment a Surrealist drift during the design of a project– form in terms of PROCESS. Van Eyck and the Smithsons understood the logic of modern abstract art and their designs followed that logic. Architectural forms were the result of a deep reconsideration of the architectural principles, and formative means according to the LOGIC of modern abstract art. They understood the logic of modern abstract art providing a redefinition of modern architecture in continuity with that of the Modern Movement, basically because it followed the same logic: modern abstract art as a transcendental intuitive logic.

Now the question would be, why should architecture follow a logic determined by other art? Does it really make sense for architects to follow a “logic” that has been developed within the realm of painting, or sculpture? In fact the main problem at that time was that modern art itself was changing. From the end of the First World War to the after-war period, the emergence of consumer societies was changing the conditions of artistic production & perception of the artworks, together with the definition of Modern Abstract art. The young architects remained attached to a notion of abstract art that was getting outdated. In this regard the ideas of Walter Benjamin and the work of Marcel Duchamp are presented as two examples of, an intellectual and a ‘painter’, foreseeing and reacting to the redefinition of modern abstract art. I find this idea may provide some arguments to understand why Van Eyck and the Smithsons were not completely able to overcome their elders, to produce a truly paradigmatic shift.

How could architects reconsider architecture as an art in itself? In order to provide some arguments to answer this question the third part of the research introduces what could be considered the deepest notion of architecture as a form of art, the epistemological. It drafts a critical instance on Van Eyck’s and Smithsons’ notion of architecture as a form of art, trying to argue why their rich architectural production seemed to vanish along the early 1960s. This chapter analyzes to what extent Aldo van Eyck and the Smithsons had an epistemological understanding of architecture as a form of art. And tries to evaluate to what extent they were able to understand the logic of modern art, and reenact a modern notion of architecture as a form of art: to what extent did they manage to produce a deep and truly paradigmatic shift from the Modern Movement. An understanding of architecture as a form of art in epistemological terms implies an awareness of the world picture set out by art as a form of knowledge. Once we attain this level of understanding, by looking at how that world picture mirrors reality, we will be able to know something ultimately true about that reality and create forms accordingly. In this regard a draft example to be analyze is presented: the work of Mies van der Rohe in America; the evolution of Mies’ work from the 1920s –the time he was more close to avant-garde art- to his projects in America during the 1950s is presented as an epistemological shift. Mies is presented as an architectect who achieved an epistemological understanding of form in
architecture which enable him to redefine modern architecture as a form of art in itself. As a draft conclusion I would argue that it seems essential for architects to reach an epistemological understanding of architecture as a form of art—of architectural form—in order to produce a truly paradigmatic shift. In other words, architecture would be avant-garde in so far as it is redefined as a form of art.

The notion of modern architecture as a “Dialectical Form” is an attempt to provide a theoretical definition of modern architecture enabling architects to understand architecture as a form of art; in such a way that we might be able to reach an understanding of architectural forms in epistemological terms, allowing for a true production of avant-garde architecture. The notion “Dialectical Form” is grounded in the historical research presented; linking the notion of architecture as a form of art from the Modern Movement during the World War period, and the one developed during the after-war period by Aldo van Eyck and A & P Smithson. Bridging pre-war and post-war periods I tried to draft a definition of Modern Architecture that might be still valid today. To some extent it is a provocation that challenges two common assumptions: first, that the problems posed during the first half of the twentieth century have been set out more sharply during the second half of the century; and second, that the architectural principles developed by the Modern Movement to face those problems have been truly overcome up to nowadays. In other words it raises the question about the possibility and the existence of a truly paradigmatic shift from the architecture of the Modern Movement up to nowadays.

The last chapter is devoted to the notion of Form. It has been a term widely used in this survey either to introduce the term “art”, or to follow the notion of “dialectic”, but always in relation to its main concern, namely architecture. All arts deal with the production of form in one way or another; hence a contemporary notion of architecture as a form of art entails a theory of form. The categories presented in the second part, conceived as degrees of understanding architecture as a form of art—object, process, logic and episteme—are presented as categories of form. To some extent this final chapter is a reaction towards contemporary reductionist attitudes on the problem of form in architecture conceived merely in terms of figure or shape. It tries to overcome the idea of form in as a three-dimensional object within a perspective field, for science has been teaching us that reality has less and more than three dimensions, while historians have showed us that perspective is in itself a symbolic form. As a draft theory it aims at providing some criteria for a consistent definition of architecture as a contemporary form of art grounded on the historical perspective, the projects and ideas introduced, and the categories defined previously. Hence, although this research departs from a historical analysis it ultimately aims to awake our consciousness about the current potentialities of architecture as a form of art true to the needs of our time.
Prelude_ Vienna School Aesthetics: Modern art as transcendental art

“The human hand fashions works from lifeless matter according to the same formal principles as nature does”
Aloïs Riegl, Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts (1897-98)

“La nature meme ne veut pas de beauté éternelle, par changement continuel de ses formes ella fait naitre incessamment du nouveau dans la création.
Le monde moderne est l’autre moitié de la nature, celle qui vient de l’homme »
Footnote to Malevitch’s Black square in Merz nº8 /9 ed. by K. Schwitters & Lisstitzky (1924)

“Although architecture may ensure more tangible functions, its ultimate function differs in no way from other creative activity. This is to reveal and then stimulate the current that can alone transform existence”
Aldo van Eyck, Intervention at CIAM 6, Bridgewater (1947)

These three statements illustrate how the concerns of the Art Historians in the late Nineteenth Century were present among the avant-garde artists during the World War period, and determined the notion of architecture as a form of art after the war. The work of the Vienna School is important for it influenced the emergence and definition of Modern Art History, the intellectual foundations of Modern Art and Modern Architecture, and to some extent their further development. The term Vienna School refers to a school of thought in art history grounded in the ideas of the Viennese historian Alöis Riegl and his immediate followers: Franz Wickhoff, Max Dvorak, Julius von Schlosser. Their ideas were spread by the journal Kunstgeschichtliche Anzeigen founded by Wickhoff in 1904 and continued by Dvorak until 1913 and the journal Kritische Berichte ran from 1927 to 1937 (Edited by Fürst & Friedrich Antal) that published the ideas of a second generation, among them: Sedlmayr, Päch, Erwin Panofsky, Meyer Schapiro, Ernst Gombrich, Nikolaus Pevsner and Rudolf Wittkover. The criticism of Van Eyck and the Smithsons to the post-war CIAM was grounded in a reenactment of ideas coming from Modern Art that were originally articulated by Riegl and his followers in the early twentieth century: first, all the visual arts -architecture included- did not aim to imitate or reproduce nature, they were the result of a “contest with nature” whose main purpose was not just the satisfaction of practical needs (visual or bodily); and second, architecture as a form of art had the capacity to be transcendental-hence it had the capacity to satisfy conceptual needs and provide spiritual relief.

In the late nineteenth century Alöis Riegl, the intellectual father of the Vienna School, had defined art as a contest with nature; in the first half of the twentieth century abstraction had dominated modern art conceived as “a fruit growing out of man like the fruit out of a plant”23. In the

22 This Prelude and the following research argues the influence of Vienna School in Modern Art and Architecture, for a critical account on its influence on Art History see The Vienna School Reader, Christopher S. Wood ed. Zone Books, New York, 2002.
23 ‘art is a fruit out of man like the fruit out of a plant like the child out of the mother. While the fruit of the plant grows independent forms and never resembles a ballon or a president in a cutaway suit the artistic fruit of man shows for the most part a ridiculous resemblance to the appearance of other things...’ Hans Arp quoted by Robert Melville, see “On some of Arp’s reliefs” in Arp, edited with an introduction by James Thrall Soby & articles by Jean Hans Arp, Richard Huelsenbeck, Robert Melville and Carola Giedion-Welcker. Moma ed., The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1958. p.27.
after war period Van Eyck’s intervention at CIAM 6 (1947) reminded the CIAM architects that architecture shared common purposes with other arts, further on than the mere satisfaction of material needs; this was a concern shared by other members of the old guard such as Le Corbusier, but mainly by the young Dutch and British groups at CIAM, leaded by Van Eyck and the Smithons. They shared a vision of Modern architecture grounded in art, according to which, architecture should rely in technical and artistic means in order to fulfill both, material and emotional needs-two complementary aspects mixed in everyday life. The notion that architecture would be able to transcend its materiality, and satisfy men’s emotional needs was an idea inherited from the analysis of art history developed by the Vienna school. Riegl had been a strong influence for architects like Gropius and Peter Behrens who repetedly invoked Riegl’s thinking. Van Eyck came to know about the Vienna school ideas through Sigfried Giedion’s wife C.W. Giedion; both had studied under Worringer in Bonn and Sigfried had developed his thesis under Wölfflin. The Smithsons did not get into a deep study of history at that time although some of their fellow members at the Independent Group did it: among them Reyner Banham who was educated in the lineage of the Vienna School; Banham developed his famous PhD “Theory & Design in the First Machine Age” under Nicolaus Pevsner who, like the Giedion’s, had studied under Heinrich Wölfflin in Munich. At the same time it is worth to note the strong influence of the Warburg Institute in the London cultural scene and of course the direct influence of R. Wittkover’s analysis of art in the Smithsons.

For the first time in history, the Vienna School aesthetics enlarged the study of art in terms of functions to an analysis in terms of purpose, exerting an enormous influence not only in art history but also in the later development of Modern Art. They provided a new modern vision on the analysis of art derived from post-Kantian philosophy from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche to thinkers from the late nineteenth century such as Konrad Fiedler and Adolf von Hildebrand. It was a reaction against the followers of Gottfried Semper whose materialist conception of Art History had reduced it to a mere analysis of functions, materials, and techniques. The Vienna School historians conceived and analyzed art as a product of the « artistic volition » (Kunstwollen) that drove an individual or a society to manipulate nature according to a specific purpose. At the same time the historical method developed by the early generation of the Vienna School enriched the debate about form in art, and its analysis in terms of perception.

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24 In his intervention at CIAM 6, Bakema defended the notion of architecture as an art and architecture’s capacity to transcend the satisfaction of the mere material needs: « I think that a CIAM architect has the task to help prevent this third world war by means of his artmanship… It can make him feel that the infinity of life can be measured by means of science and art and by means of new dimensions. It can make him conscious of the relationship with unknown things… Architecture is the special science (and art) by means of which the hidden relations between and in the natural things is made clear » From Jaap Bakema Archive. CIAM 6, 1947 g.9-12. Netherlands Architecture Institute


27 Reyner Banham studied under Anthony Blunt at the Courtauld Institute of Art(1946), then Siegfried Giedion, and finally Nikolaus Pevsner for the development of his Phd dissertation. Banham’s Phd advisor, Nikolaus Pevsner, had studied under Wölfflin in Munich before moving to London during the 2nd World War.

Out of the vast richness of the so called Vienna School I will introduce several aesthetic concepts whose influence can be traced to the early aesthetic notions of Aldo van Eyck and Alison and Peter Smithson. The concepts are attached to the art historians that dealt with them: First, Alöis Riegl whose seminal concept of Kunstwollen and his formal analysis of art in terms of purpose resulted very influential for later development of art history; second, Heinrich Wölfflin and his main thesis «Principles of Art History» (1915)\(^\text{29}\) according to which changes in the form of beholding produced paradigmatic shifts in artistic production; and third, William Worringer whose thesis *Abstraction & Empathy* (1907) developed a definition of abstract art that resulted very influential in the development of Modern Art. Worringer’s thesis became popular thanks to artists like Kandinsky and Worringer himself got deeply involved with some art movements like the German Expressionism.\(^\text{30}\)

Indeed to some extent this genealogy of thought arrived to Aldo van Eyck and the Smithsons through the books and personal acquaintance of the Art Historians. But the importance of the intuitive understanding of the aesthetic concerns grasped by the architects by looking at the artworks should not be underestimated. These architects were fascinated by the early avant-garde artists that had explored the intellectual concerns of the historians; at the same time Van Eyck and Smithsons conceived the Modern Movement in architecture as one more avant-garde movement together with Cubism, Dadaism, De Stijl, etc.; the artists had reached to materialize during the World War period something that the Art Historians emerging from the late Nineteenth century were not able and did not aim to conceive or imagine. Now during the after war period the notion of modern art continued to be explored by the painters, sculptors, architects, etc. The Cobra Group in Amsterdam and the Independent Group in London were reenacting the spirit of the World War avant-garde movements within the European reconstruction, the definition of modern art they had in mind was grounded in some of the ideas developed by the historians. (IMAGE P.1: Portrait of Riegl, Wölfflin & Worringer; IMAGE P.1A: Portrait of Wölfflin, Pevsner & Banham)

*Alöis Riegl’s « Kunstwollen »*

Riegl's created the notion of *kunstwollen* within his whole theory of art history providing intellectual criteria to understand art as a form of knowledge. Unlike Hegel’s notion of *zeitgeist*, Riegl’s concept of *kunstwollen* never subordinated art entirely to the spirit, he departed from Hegel’s aesthetics but developed new ideas that conformed a formal method to read art through history. According to Riegl art was not only a product of the spirit, the artists were guided by a *kunstwollen* that governed the artistic production of every period, its practical purposes, and the techniques used:

«...in every period there is only one orientation of the kunstwollen governing all four types of plastic art in the same measure, turning to its own ends every conceivable practical purpose and raw


\(^{30}\) Worringer met Kandinsky in Munich in 1908, and became “an advocate of the expressionist movement, Kandinsky was helped in his search by meeting Wilhelm Worringer. See Mundt “Three Aspects of German Aesthetic Theory” p.306
Kunstwollen was a concept that merged the will of the artist to present things in a way pleasing to the eyes, and the will that guided the artist to look and interpret things according to his desires. Hence desire guiding perception, and pleasure driving production were integrated in the analysis of artistic periods together with ethics and philosophical principles.:

«The plastic kunstwollen regulates man’s relationship to the sensorily perceptible appearance of things. Art expresses the way man wants to see things shaped or colored, just as the poetic Kunstwollen expresses the way man wants to imagine them. Man is not only a passive, sensorily recipient being, but also a desiring, active being who wishes to interpret the world in such a way...that it most clearly and obligingly meets his desires...the character of this will is contained in that which we call the worldview (again in the broadest sense): in religion, philosophy, science, even statecraft and law; as a rule, one of those forms will predominate in every period...»

It could be argue that kunstwollen was a concept that identified and merged: desire, pleasure and knowledge (thinking) as a way to understand the world, to picture the world. Therefore it allowed to theorize the rational and non-rational means in art- and art itself as a form of knowledge that aimed at the satisfaction of both- material and conceptual needs. Art was historized not only according to a materialist notion of function and practical purposes, but also through very specific terms that theorized conceptual and decorative purposes according to pleasure, desire and beliefs.

Riegl searched for the motivations that pushed mankind to produce art trying to understand its purpose: «Why does man creates art? What is the purpose of the work of art?» Analyzing art history in terms of kunstwollen, Riegl came to the conclusion that artists fashioned works from lifeless matter according to the same formal principles as nature does, guided by practical, decorative and conceptual purposes. Departing from Konrad Fiedler’s emphasis on the importance of the artist’s purpose in art, Alois Riegl’s Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts differentiated two variable aspects in the artistic creation: purpose and artistic habit (habitus). The former represented a complete preponderance of functionality when aesthetic effects arised unconsciously and the later the total supremacy of the intent of art (Kunstabsicht), when functionality was a mere pretext for art’s existence. The term function denoted the intention to satisfy basic human needs considered partially bodily, and partially spiritual. The bodily needs those of our senses were divided in two: decorative purposes emerged from the needs that arised from the sense of sight, whereas the needs that arised from the other senses were meant to accomplish practical purposes. The spiritual or intellectual function was considered a conceptual purpose; it aimed at the stimulation of the mind in

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31 See Alois Riegl's “The main characteristics of the Late Roman Kunstwollen” from Late Roman Art Industry (1901). Wood ed., The Vienna School Reader. P.94
32 i.b.i.d. p.95
33 See explanation of Late Roman Art kunstwollen in relation to Sant Augustine’s philisophy, C. Wood ed. p.95
35 Konrad Fiedler had emphasized the importance of the artist’s purpose: “In a work of human origin, only that is essential which is related to the purpose of its creator; everything apart from that purpose is unessential.” His ideas were essential for Riegl’s conception of “Kunstwollen”. See Konrad Fiedler, Ueber die Beurteilung von Werken der Bildenden Kunst 1876. Published in English: “On Judging Works of Visual Art”, 2nd ed., H. Schaeffer-Simmem trans. (Berkeley, 1957). See Mundt “Three Aspects of German Aesthetic Theory” pp. 287-310
order to produce mental images and association of ideas related with superhuman, natural or moral forces.

The importance of conceptual purposes in artistic production was thereon very present in Modern Art. The role of architecture as a form of art capable to satisfy spiritual or conceptual needs was at the very heart of the criticism drafted by the young Dutch architects to their elders at CIAM 6 (Bridgewater 1947). They outlined that architecture like any other modern art, should accomplish its purpose further on than the mere satisfaction of Athen’s Charter four functions; Van Eyck stated: «Although architecture answers more tangible functions, its ultimate function differs in no way from that of painting and sculpture, nor from poetry, music and religion; its object is to reveal the grace of nature through and for men.»36 In the same line of thought Jaap Bakema’s intervention at CIAM 6 emphasized the capacity of architecture, and architects, to prevent a third world war by means of their “artmanship”:

“I think that a CIAM architect has the task to help prevent this third world war by means of his artmanship…New architecture can reform man’s activity in a creative direction…It can make him feel that the infinity of life can be measured by means of science and art and by means of new dimensions. It can make him conscious of the relationship with unknown things…”37

For both architects the idea that architecture’s main purpose should not only be satisfaction of material needs, comes together with a notion of art as a human production through which man establishes a transcendentental relation with nature.

Art had been defined by Alois Riegl as a contest (Wettschaffen) with nature. This definition had two main implications: first, art was always bounded to models of organic or inorganic nature; according to Riegl art was and would always be naturalistic in so far as it depended on nature-conceived in the broadest sense of the word- as something surrounding us and within us: «man cannot transcend nature and world, because he is an integral component of both».38 Second, true art was never conceived as a replication of nature; Riegl grounded his argument in the ideas of Adolf von Hildebrandt and Konrad Fiedler who had stated that art could not be just a tool of designation, but must be seen as the very form of thought, as the creation of thought out of the bodily function of an interaction with reality.39 Hence, illusionist art defeated its own purpose for man will never be able

36 See Aldo van Eyck, “Report concerning the interrelation of the plastic arts and the importance of cooperation” written in Dutch and English by van Eyck for Ciam 6, Bridgewater 1947. It was not published but printed copies were sent to Sigfried Giedion and distributed among CIAM members. From Francis Strauven and Vincent Ligtelijn eds. Collected articles and other writings 1947-1998 / Aldo van Eyck. Amsterdam: SUN, c2008. p.34
37 See Jaap Bakema “Architecture & public opinion: social architecture – new architecture” from Jaap Bakema Archive. CIAM 6, 1947 g.9-12. Netherlands Architecture Institute. The following statements are from the same text.
38 Riegl, Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts. p.298
39 According to Christopher Wood Hildebrandt had started to conceive the works of art as forms in themselves- detached from the existing beings that were meant to represent. See C. Wood ed. P. 24. This argument was also elaborated by Ernest K. Mundt explaining Fiedler’s ideas about the origins of artistic activity. Fiedler used a parallelism of art with language: “Recognizing the significance of that product of our physico-mental organization called language we find the following…If we want to maintain that language can signify something real independently of its linguistic form, that could be made the subject of thought and recognition-then we shall be able to do this only (one) by remaining naive realists who accept reality as given without seeing that they have to recognize it first, and (two) by admitting body and mind to be independent parts of human nature related by subordination. If we want to be serious, however, about the insight that we can never own anything real except as the result of a process the scene of which is laid within ourselves … and if we are convinced that… the mental result and its expression as noticed by the senses cannot be two separate things… then we can only take language to be the form in which we own reality and not as a means of
to imbue organic works with life and movement as nature does, according to Riegl: « the creation of art can never be- and does not seek to be- a direct imitation of nature but rather is a contest with nature; that is, it aims for a certain idea or conception of nature. In art, man re-creates nature as he would like it to be and as it indeed exists in his mind » It could be said that Riegl’s statement paved the way for abstraction in art-conceived as a natural product of man- as it was illustrated in Merz’s issue 8/9 (1924) entitled « Nasci » (Nature in latin). The issue launched by the Hannover dadaist Kurt Schwitters, together with the constructivist artists Lissitzky, included paintings, sculptures, and architecture from different artistic movements: Neoplasticism, cubism, dadaism, suprematism, etc. The magazine opened with Kleiner Brokhaus’ statement « Nature du latin NASCI means devenir, provenier, c’est a dir tout ce qui par sa prope force, se developpe, se forme, se meut »; the issue illustrates how modern abstract art had evolved in different part ways but sharing essential aspects: art was a form of understanding nature – a contest with nature – guided by non-rational means that aimed at «creer l’unite de la forme pratique et de la pure forme spirituelle ». As for Riegl, for the Merz artists’, art was not a matter of beauty but an evolving contest with nature: «La nature meme ne veut pas de beauté eternelle, par changement continucl de ses formes ella fait naître incesantement du nouveau dans la creation. Le monde moderne est l’autre moitié de la nature, celle qui vient de l’homme »

Two decades later the notion of modern art as a transcendental form of understanding through which man establishes a relation with nature was present again in the mind of the young Dutch architects, when Bakema’s stated: “…. Architecture is the special science (and art) by means of which the hidden relations between and in the natural things is made clear” This argument illustrates the idea that modern Architecture should not only be an answer to the more tangible functions but a manifestation of how man relates to nature; as van Eyck made clear in the published version of his intervention at CIAM: “(architecture’s) ultimate function differs in no way from that of any other creative activity, that is, to express through man and for man the natural flow of existence” Nevertheless the notion of architecture as a form of art articulated by Van Eyck certainly inspired by Schwitters was not supported by some of the old guard at CIAM: during the congress van Eyck proposed to send a signed message to Kurt Schwitters who had recently turned sixty,
whereas Le Corbusier and Giedion enthusiastically did it, Gropius and Steiger held back and did not sign it.46

To some extent Riegl’s ideas, developed around the notion of Kunstwollen, together with Worringer’s definition of abstraction in history provided the intellectual background to the emergence of abstract art. At the same time Riegl’s statement that visual arts (painting, sculpture, architecture) had practical, decorative and conceptual purposes, provided the philosophical background to the criticism of functionalist architecture for it only considered the satisfaction of practical needs. If architecture was a form of art, the satisfaction of decorative and conceptual purposes had to be considered as much as the satisfaction of material needs.

**Heinrich Wölflin’s “Principles of Art History”**

Heinrich Wölflin noticed that there was an evolution or change in human perception that could be illustrated through the development of different artistic styles. Moreover, he was able to argue and illustrate with examples how changes in human perception (Beholding) gave birth to new artistic styles. Wölflin’s arguments relied on Riegl’s idea that art was not a mere reproduction of nature, but a contest with nature guided by a *kunstwollen* that was a form of understanding nature. Wölflin conceived forms of representation as forms of beholding, of looking at nature and constructing a reality in our mind – they resulted in some sense forms of knowledge. His ideas were very influential to modern art historians such as C.W. Giedion and Reyner Banham. Wölflin’s argument that perception is an artistic form of knowledge that leads to the production of styles in art paved the way for modern art notions like that of “new consciousness”, embedded in the artistic production of the avant-gardes from Cubism to Neoplasticism.

Heinrich Wölflin’s study of art history focused on the analysis of vision, and developed a formal method to illustrate how forms of beholding changed through time: “beholding is just not a mirror which always remains the same, but a living power of apprehension which has its own inward history and has passed through many stages…47 Wölflin’s main work “Principles of Art History” (1915) analyzed the shift in artistic vision from the sixteenth to the seventeenth centuries through five pair of visual concepts: linear & painterly, plane & recession, closed & open form, multiplicity & unity, clearness & unclearness; all considered by Wölflin as “only forms-forms of apprehension and representation”.48 (IMAGE P.4: Palma Vecchio’s and Tintoretto’s paintings of Adam & Eve)

Art as a form of representation was considered a form of beholding that was a creative act in itself- a creation of the artist’s temperament according to “the style of the school, the country, the race”.49 For Wölflin there is no neutrality in the way we look at things: “…there is no such a thing as objective vision…form and color are apprehended differently according to temperament”

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48 i.b.i.d. p.227
49 i.b.i.d. p.6
The question of what produces changes in human perception brought Wölfflin to introduce arguments coming from Riegl's notion of *kunstwollen*. He enriched the Hegelian notion of *zeitgeist* with Riegl's *kunstwollen*; the will, the desire, the sense of pleasure of the artist is introduced in the formal analysis of art history: "every artistic conception is, of its very nature, organized according to certain notions of pleasure" As in the case of Riegl the neo-kantian thought of Konrad Fiedler and Adolf von Hildebrandt grounded Wölfflin ideas. The artist Adolf von Hildebrandt had defined artistic vision as the apprehension of an idea of form. For Fiedler a true artist did not simply reproduce nature but created something new out of nature that provided us a new way of beholding: "the work of art must take the place of nature. Only then shall we stop seeing art by way of nature and submit to art showing us how nature must be seen," In other words, Fiedler claimed as Riegl or Hans Arp did later on, that art must be «a fruit growing out of man like the fruit out of a plant». The artists showed how nature must be seen, art is a form of knowledge that tell us how, and what we see, following our desires and nourished by our imagination, producing forms constantly, in Wölfflin's words:

"The history of forms never stands still... even when an ornament continually repeated will gradually alter its physiognomy. Nothing retains its effect. What seems living today is not quite completely living tomorrow...every form lives on, begetting, and every style calls to a new one"

For Wölfflin art never aimed at reproducing reality according to reason but it pursued the production of forms according to imagination:

"...at a remarkably early stage, the imagination yields to those effects which do not proceed from the things themselves, but leave the thing out of account- those pictures in which not the individual form of objects and their rational connection convey the impression but what, so to speak, rises an adventitious configuration over the head of the separate form...With this is certainly connected the fact that, in northern architecture, formations were admitted which for southern imagination could no longer be understood, that is experienced"

Wölfflin conceived art as a manifestation of forms of beholding, forms of knowledge to picture reality that illustrated the kunstwollen of a society. He conceived artistic vision as a non-

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50 i.b.i.d. p.16. Wölfflin challenged any simplistic notion of Zeitgeist in the production of styles in art: "Different times give birth to different art. Epoch and race interact...We must first establish how many general traits a style contains before we can give it the name of national style in a special sense. However profoundly Rubens may impress his personality on his landscape...we cannot admit that he was an expression of 'permanent' national character to the same extent as contemporary Dutch art...His art is powerfully affected by a particular cultural current, the mode of feeling of Roman baroque, and so it is he, rather than the 'timeless' Dutch artist, who challenges us to form an idea of what we must call 'period' style." Principles of Art History, The problem of the development of style in later art. Heinrich Wölfflin, 1932. p.9. For an account on Riegl's influence on Wolfflin see Mundt. According to Mundt Wolfflin had approved Kunstwollen as 'effective and fruitful', see Mundt, “Three Aspects of German Aesthetic Theory” p.303

51 He considered painting and sculpture architectural in so far as they could overcome their imitative purpose "Plastic art and painting, in contrast to architecture, are often called imitative arts. This label expresses the difference but neglects the common aspect. As far as imitation goes, plastic art is a kind of exploration of nature, and the artistic activity is bound to it. As long as nothing but this problem has been solved, the created object relates only to existence; it has no independence and cannot stand up for itself against nature. To make the latter possible, the imitative content must be developed further into higher regions and from another point of view which I want to call architectural."Adolf Hildebrand, Das Problem der Form in der Bildenden Kunst, 4th ed. (Strassburg, 1903), p. v. From Mundt p.300


53 See Robert Melville on Arp, p.27.

54 See Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History*, p.230

55 i.b.i.d. p.236
rational form of knowledge constructed by the intellect that produced new forms. He stated like the Neoplasticist did later on, that new forms of art emerge when new forms of looking at things are conceived. De Stijl’s term Nieuwe Beelding (Neoplasticism) was a neologism that merged different words used in Dutch to define the position of the object in relation to the beholder-painter; these different relations were erased in the search for an expression with a static absolute value, a Nieuwe Beelding. A new meaning-value not given by the object, but by the artist’s will to build (English)–beelding (Dutch) a new Beeldend – a new artistic construction of reality. A new way of looking at things that created a new plastic- Neoplasticism; as in Wölfflin’s main thesis, new styles (Stijls) were produced by changes in the way of beholding. Theo van Doesburg, one of the most influential Neoplasticist artist argued that the artist’s way of beholding, what he called “aesthetic experience”, determined the production of form in art: “Formation is direct, unambiguous expression realized by pure artistic means. The content which has to be formed is the aesthetic experience of reality”.56 (IMAGE P.5: Nicolas Poussin “Et in arcadia Ego”)

During the 1950s Wolfflin ideas were introduced in Modern Art and Architecture by a new generation of historians. Regarding the Smithsons, in the London scene it is worth to note the importance of the Warburg institute, spreading the Vienna School approach to Art History. The influence of Wittkover on the Smithsons will be analyzed later on. Nevertheless regarding the presence of Wölfflin ideas in the Smithsons entourage it is worth to point out the approach of Reyner Banham. I would argue that some of Banham’s early ideas were grounded in Wölfflin’s thesis: Banham’s seminal article “The New Brutalism” (Architectural Review, Dec. 1955) and his Phd thesis “Theory and Design in the First Machine Age” (1960). Banham’s article used Wölfflin thesis according to which stylistic shifts in art were produced by changes in the form of beholding; Banham tried to demonstrate that the stylistic development from the architecture of the Modern Movement to that of the New Brutalism had been produced by a shift in the nature of artistic vision. Banham used the architecture of the Smithsons to illustrate his argument; according to him the shift was produced because in the after-war Europe the building was conceived as “an image”: “Every Smithson design has been, obviously or subtly, a coherent and apprehensible visual entity…” Banham introduced the concept of Building as an image in order to illustrate that a shift in the nature of the artistic vision had occurred;57 he drafted his own definition of “image” in Neo-Brutalist terms, opposed to a definition of “image” in classical terms (IMAGE P.6: An illustration of Reyner Banham’s definition of the word image).58 According to Banham the new architectural style, the New Brutalism, was produced by a shift in the in the nature of artistic vision- a new idea of beauty. If Wölfflin had stated that the shift from Barroque to Clasisicism was produced by a change in the forms of beholding

56 From Theo van Doesburg’s Principles of Neoplastic Art (1922) chapter 4 “Expression and Expressional means of the aesthetic experience” p.24
57 It is worth to note at this point the influence of Andre Malraux essay Le Musee Imaginaire included The Voice of Silence was quite important. In May 1. of 1954 a discussion about Andre Malraux’s book took place at the IGA, the speakers included Nigel Henderson and Lawrence Alloway.
58 it means something which is visually valuable, but not necessarily by the standards of classical aesthetics…image may be defined as quod visum perturbat… as being anti-art, or at any rate anti-beauty in the classical aesthetic sense of the word. But what is equally as important as the specific kind of response, is the nature of its cause. What pleased St. Thomas was an abstract quality, beauty- what moves a New Brutalist is the thing in itself, in its totality, and with all its overtones of human association…this concept of image…the manner in which it works in architectural practice … Basically it requires that the building should be an immediately apprehensible visual entity…” See Reyner Banham “The New Brutalism”, Architectural Review, Dec. 1955)
during the Seventeenth century, Banham argued that the shift in the artistic vision from the pre-war to the post-war Europe in the Twentieth century was propelling a new modern style, New Brutalism. In fact the main argument of his thesis, in which he was working at that time, was very similar, namely: that the ultimate shift in aesthetic vision produced from the Nineteenth to the Twentieth century, the *machine aesthetic*, had not been consistently materialized by the architecture of the Modern Movement. According to Banham the architecture of the Modern Movement had failed because it was not true to the new artistic vision of the Twentieth century, for Banham the new *machine aesthetic*. Therefore the *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* had failed because they did not accomplish with Wölfflin’s argument. Of course Banham’s assumption that the architecture of the Modern movement aimed to be that of *machine aesthetic* was inaccurate. Many avant-garde artists like Tzara & Picabia were not concerned with machine aesthetics in the sense used by Banham to support his argument, and some of the great figures of modern architecture always remained reluctant to consider architecture as the materialization of Machine Aesthetics.  

If Reyner Banham could be considered a young art historian related the Smithsons, it was C.W. Giedion who exerted a strong personal and intellectual influence in the other protagonist of this inquiry, the young Aldo van Eyck. C.W. Giedion’s approach in Art History combined the most sophisticated insights from the Viennese School at that time, together with a personal acquaintance of the artist themselves. She had studied under Wölfflin in Munich, who introduced her to the *Principles of Art History*. Later on she studied under Wilhelm Worringer in Bonn where she made acquaintance with her future husband, Sigfried Giedion. Carola completed her PhD under Paul Clement on the German Baroque, whereas Sigfried did it on neoclassical art under Heinrich Wölfflin, both in 1922. In Zurich C.W. made acquaintance with Hans Arp, who introduced her to the most important contemporary artists; she became friendly with Max Ernst, Piet Mondrian, Alberto Giacometti, Kurt Schwitters, Constantin Brancusi, James Joyce, Paul Klee and Antoine Pevsner; and decided to focus her art historical attention primarily on the twentieth century avant-garde.  

C.W. Giedion’s early work, *Modern Plastik* (Zurich, 1937), explained the current situation of modern art as a result of an evolution or change in human perception and awareness that had inspired new plastic forms. This argument was indebted to Wölfflins’ thesis mentioned before according to which stylistic changes in art are produced by changes in the forms of beholding. As Wölfflin had done, C.W. Giedion analyzed Modern Art in terms of Alois Riegl’s *Kunstwollen*. Riegl himself did not give a very specific definition of the term, although she could find it in *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908), the thesis dissertation of C.W. Giedion’s professor, William Worringer:

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59 Banham’s Theory & Design in the First Machine Age does not mention the ideas, or the presence of Tristan Tzara not even once. His name only appears in relation to Adolf Loos building, Tzitar’s house in Paris  
60 Strauven *Aldo van Eyck: the shape of relativity*. p.77  
61 i.b.i.d. p.77-78  
63 Wölfflin’s argument has been explained before. For a relation C.W. Giedion with Wölfflin see Strauven. *Aldo van Eyck: the shape of relativity*. p.76-87  
64 Riegl’s notion of Kunstwollen and its influence in Wölfflin’s text has been explained before. See also the Conclusion of Alois Riegl, *Spätromische Kunstindustrie, (Late Roman art industry, 1901)* and editor’s Introduction in Wood, *The Vienna School Reader: Politics and Art Historical Method in the 1930s*
“By ‘absolute artistic volition’ is to be understood that latent inner demand which exists per se, entirely independent of the object and of the mode of creation, and behaves as will to form. It is the primary factor in all artistic creation and, in its innermost essence; every work of art is simply an objectification of this a priori existent artistic volition”.65

According to Riegl the “artistic volition”, the inner will that moves the artist to create mirrors the world picture of reality developed by a civilization at a given time -man’s relationship to the sensorial perceptible appearance of things- and his perception of everyday life. C.W. Giedion explained Modern Art in similar terms: “That these images are so simple is a direct reflection of our attitude to life. In contrast to that of the preceding age our own signifies the subordination of the individual, and his re-acclimatization to nature and experience. This change implies part of the psychological and social evolutions of our age”.66 According to C.W., a common kunstwollen moved different artists in different corners of Europe to develop a common language; in spite of the wide divergences of idiom among the different artistic movements C.W. Giedion identified a common purpose and a common basic language in all of them.67

We have made our way from Riegl to Wölfflin relating the ideas of both historians to the work of later historians like C.W. Giedion and Reyner Banham and modern artists like Van Doesburg. Wölfflin’s method and ideas integrated some of Riegl’s analysis of art in terms of purpose (kunstwollen). His thesis emphasized the importance of perception in art; it made the artists and art historians aware of vision, the way we look at nature, as a primary tool for the development of new forms in art (Styles). The next historian in the saga, Wilhelm Worringer, developed parallel to Wölfflin’s method, an alternative interpretation of Riegl’s legacy.

**Abstraction and Empathy, Wilhem Worringer (1907)**

Worringer’s definition of abstract art as transcendental art was among the most influential ideas of the Vienna School in Modern Art. His thesis *Abstraction and Empathy* (1907) combined Theodor Lipps theory of empathy with Riegl’s theory of artistic purpose. Worringer’s ideas shared with Wölfflin a common debt to Riegl;68 if Wölfflin had brought Riegl’s kunstwollen to the analysis of “history of art as the doctrine of the modes of vision”,69 Worringer’s analysis focused less in the visual aspects of form and used Riegl’s ideas to provide a solid and global definition of art as a transcendental form of understanding. Worringer’s analysis of the “urge to abstraction” provided a philosophical background to many artists that were developing abstract art at that time; among them Kandinsky who had met Worringer in Munich in 1908.70 Three years later in Munich, Kandinsky

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66 “It is not a form of aesthetic self-indulgence, disdainfully remote from daily life, but a vital creative force intimately associated with the general cultural development of our age” See Carola Giedion-Welcker, *Modern plastic art, elements of reality, volume and disintegration*. English version by P. Morton Shand. Zürich, H. Girsberger, 1937. (p.8-17)
67 Giedion, *Modern plastic art*. p.8
68 In fact Worringer became an advocate of the emerging expressionist movement. See Mundt comparison of Wölfflin and Worringer. Mundt p.305
69 See Wölfflin’s Conclusion p.237
70 Worringer’s text resulted very influential for Kandinsky’s *Concerning the spiritual in art* (1910) and *Der Blaue Reiter Almanach* (1912). See Peter Selz, *German Expressionist painting*, Berkeley, 1957.p.184
made acquaintance of Hugo Ball, one of the founders of the Dadaism in Zurich.\footnote{See John Elderfield’s introduction of *Flight out of time: a Dada diary* / by Hugo Ball; edited with an introduction and notes by John Elderfield; translated by Ann Raimes. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. p.16} Later on the reading of Kandinsky’s *Reminiscences* (Rückblicke) pushed Sergeant Christian Emil Marie Küpper (The future Van Doesburg) to develop abstract painting, lecturing on it during 1915-16, while still in service close to the Belgian border.\footnote{Nevertheless once Van Doesburg discovered the early work of Mondrian in 1915, he positioned Mondrian beyond Kandinsky; he considered the work of Kandinsky limited by the individualist subjectivity of Expressionism. See Michael White, Theo van Doesburg: A Counter-Life. In the Catalogue for the exhibition Van Doesburg & the International Avant-Garde: Constructing a new world. Ed. By Gladys Fabre & Doris Wintgens Hötte. Tate Publishing, London. 2009. See p.68-69} Worring’s thesis spread the notion of modern abstract art as a transcendental intuitive logic that had the capacity to produce spiritual relief- the Modern architecture developed thereon was meant to accomplish similar conceptual purposes.

Worring’s thesis criticized the current idea of art in Europe for it was restricted to the narrow scope of Classical art. Theodor Lipps had defined artistic expression as a product of empathy, “objectified self-enjoyment”.\footnote{Worringer departed from Lipps notion of empathy and contra posed to it the notion of abstraction, for him “These two poles are gradations of a common need, which is revealed to us as the deepest and ultimate essence of all aesthetic experience: this is the need for self-alienation” Abstraction and Empathy, Wilhelm Worring. Ivan R. Dee pub. Chicago, 1997 p. 23-24. All Worring’s quotes are from this book.} If the artist enjoyed a pantheistic relation of confidence with the outer world, his work would be driven by empathy producing Naturalist art, an approximation to the organic of life.\footnote{Not because the artist desired to give the illusion of a living object, but because the feeling for the beauty of the organic form that is true to life had been aroused, and because the artist desired to give satisfaction to this feeling, which dominated the absolute artistic volition. Worring clearly detached Naturalism in art from the mere imitative impulse. See Worring’s Chapter 2: Naturalism & Style. p.27} Worring argued that such a definition of art did not provide an explanation of other forms of art that might be considered the product of equal or higher forms of understanding.\footnote{Worring does not refer in any moment to any kind of modern abstract art, his study referred mainly to Maya, Egyptian art and Cisalpine art} According to Worring, if instead of empathy, the artist experienced the inner wrest inspired in man by the phenomena of outside world, his work would be leaded by an “urge to abstraction”-man’s endeavor to redeem the individual object from the outer world and render it absolute. The result would be Style in art, pure abstraction as the only possibility of repose within the confusion of the world. Art always aimed to redeem the individual object from the outer world; therefore the “urge to abstraction” was the primary impulse in art. Abstraction in art resulted the primitive impulse “before cognition”, before men developed ways of understanding nature. Following Riegl’s argument about the supremacy of conceptual purpose in art, Worring pointed out that abstraction resulted also the most elevated impulse “above cognition”.\footnote{Early in the first part of the book, Worring pointed out the higher consistency of abstraction: “in the urge to abstraction the intensity of the self- alienative impulse is incomparably greater and more consistent. Here is not characterized, as in the need for empathy, by an urge to alienate oneself from individual being, but as an urge to seek deliverance from the fortuitousness of humanity as a whole, from the seeming arbitrariness of organic existence in general, in the contemplation of something necessary and irrefragable. Life as such is felt to be a disturbance of aesthetic enjoyment” p-23-24 Later on he added; “The primal artistic impulse has nothing to do with the rendering of nature. It seeks after pure abstraction as the only possibility of repose within the confusion and obscenity of the world-picture” p.44} In order to illustrate the tendencies to abstraction & empathy Worring used similar
examples to the ones used by Riegl to illustrate the tendency to inorganic & organic forms: the art of the Egyptian aristocracy (Abstract-inorganic) versus Greek art (Emphatic-organic).77

Worringer considered art a transcendental way of understanding grounded in intuition and nourished by imagination. Following Riegl’s definition of art as contest with nature Worringer considered man’s contest with nature ultimately as a way to transcend-to bridge the gap between the thing in the mind and the thing in itself. Worringer presented art as the result of man’s struggle with the outer world. Art was not a matter of representation or seek for beauty, but humankind’s struggle for knowledge from intuition to understanding. Worringer’s thesis operated as Picasso’s Demoiselles d’Avignon analyzing other forms of representation than the ones traditionally admitted as artistic by “European civilization”. Worringer’s drafted his criticism to the European notion of art from the fact that although classical-european tradition perceives the transcendental feeling in art, it overlooks the fact that “in the real core of the process of artistic creation, the activity of form-determining will”78 emerges as a way of understanding, as an intuitive explanation of whose origin man is not able to grasp otherwise. As it has been said, for Worringer, all definitions of art at that time were just definitions of a classical notion of art, naturalist art-as a result of man’s urge to alienate oneself from individual being; art was regarded as a “luxury activity of the psyche, in which it discharges its surplus of vital energy.”79 no more and no less than “objectified self-enjoyment” (T. Lipps). Worringer contra poses to this the phenomenon of “non-classical art, i.e. transcendental art” in which man need for self-alienation did not bring him to escape identifying himself with the object of pleasure. The artists sought deliverance from the fortuitousness of humanity as a whole, from the seeming arbitrariness of organic existence, trying to redeem things from all the illusions of sensory perception, and “…create for itself a picture of things that shifts them far beyond the finiteness and conditionality of the living into a zone of the necessary and abstract”. Therefore art is a form of knowledge, an intuitive form of understanding that seeks for freedom and, universal and permanent values. Transcendental art aimed at “de-organicising the organic”-creating abstract forms liberated from finiteness of life- conceived as the only ones that provided repose to man. Only abstract art was truly able to liberate men and produce a deep spiritual relief.80

Worringer’s conclusion in Abstraction & Empathy drafted a criticism to rationalistic tendencies. Worringer’s emphasized the capacity of abstract art, to bestow happiness as a transcendental way of understanding, that had implicit a recognition of the limitations of rational understanding as a form of knowledge. He ended his thesis by pointing at the higher capacity of scientific knowledge to provide the feeling of assurance that transcendental art had provided before;

77 Riegl differentiated between organic and inorganic tendencies in the production of motifs, but ultimately considered the use of inorganic forms and the tendency to “stylized” forms as the primitive impulse in art: “the primitive artist was not compelled to portray an specific individual...he needed instead to depict a representative of the given species with no intent to individualize...with the prescribed form that was both demanded by the dead material...and latent in the creature itself when motionless. It was only natural...for artists to adopt principles of inorganic nature in their initial efforts to compete with organic nature...as we call it today stylization” As I it has been explained, it is worth to note that Worringer argued in a similar way that the tendency to abstraction in art lead to the production of Style in art. See Riegl Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts p.128
78 See Worringer p.132
79 See Worringer p.132
80 “…these abstract forms, liberated from all finiteness, are the only ones, and the highest, in which man can find rest from the confusion from the world picture. These inter-relationships afford the decisive perspective for the authentic history of the evolution of that human expression of life that we call art” See Worringer p.134
from the Renaissance onwards, understanding broke away from instinct and trusted merely to itself: “Science emerged, and transcendental art lost ground. For the world picture set out by science... now offered man who put his faith in the cognitive capacity of the understanding the same feeling of assurance that the transcendentally predisposed man had reached...” with abstract art.\(^{81}\)

But the First World War exploded and spread over Europe. All the trust put in by western civilization in the world-picture set out by science, together with its idea of progress fell into a big crisis; at the same time modern art movements gave form to abstract art. The world-picture set out by modern science grounded in rational-logic was complemented by a world picture set out by abstract art grounded in what I would call *transcendental intuitive logic*. It tried to bridge the thing in the mind and the object (thing in itself) developing devices to apprehend it, producing spiritual relief.

Worringer’s ideas were very present among artists and architects related with Aldo van Eyck. Van Eyck himself had studied under a follower of Worringer at the ETH Zurich, the architecture historian Professor Linus Bichler.\(^{82}\) Worringer’s arguments about the superiority of abstract art for its capacity to be transcendental and its humanism- criticism to rationalistic tendencies- were present in artists and historian close to van Eyck such as Nelly van Doesburg and Sigfried & C.W. Giedion. Worringer’s differentiation between *empathy* leading to *Naturalism*, and *abstraction* leading to *Style* in art was translated into modern art theory by Theo van Doesburg’s “*Principles of Neoplastic art*” (1922), a very influential book for the young Van Eyck. Van Doesburg stated: “*Every work of art is preceded by an inward or outward experience of reality as dictated by the vital consciousness. The ideal and the material forms of expression correspond to the two modes of experience*” Mirroring Worringer’s thesis Van Doesburg argued that these two modes were: perception confined to the object led by a “*superficial (natural)*” attitude to life producing materialist (naturalist) art, and ideal (abstract) perception that transcends the object guided by a more “*profound (spiritual)*” attitude.\(^{83}\)

(IMAGE P.8: Image used in Van Doesburg’s “*Principles of Neoplastic art*”) Van Eyck’s deep understanding of De Stijl’s ideas on abstraction brought him later on to criticize artistic trends that during the early fifties superficially emulated the abstract art of the early Dadaists and Neoplasticists. He understood the notion of style as a result of the artists’ kunstwollen motivated by the “urge to abstraction”, the argument originated by the Vienna scholars articulated by Worringer, in Van Eyck words: 

> “Everything the architect, the painter and the sculptor makes must necessarily be a reflection of a collective idea if it is to be relevant to civilization. That is why we must sacrifice everything in favour of style...Style is the result of a collective idea; formalism of a limited idea. This current

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\(^{81}\) It is important to note that Worringer used the terms transcendental and abstract. It follows “*The old art had been a joyless impulse to self-preservation; now, after this transcendental volition had been taken over and calmed by the scientific striving after knowledge, the realm of art seceded from the realm of science. And the new art, which now springs to life, is Classical art. Its coloring is no longer joyless like the old. For it has become a luxury activity of the psyche, an activation of previously inhibited inner energies, freed from all compulsion and purpose, and the bestower of happiness. Its delight is no longer the rigid regularity of the abstract, but the mild harmony of the organic being*” See Worringer p.134-135

\(^{82}\) See Francis Strauven, *Aldo van Eyck: the shape of relativity*. p.63-64

\(^{83}\) “*Egyptian art was predominantly ideal. Forms and colours are determined by the degree of inwardness of the vital consciousness...the relationships of the basic forms replace the arbitrary phenomena of the individual natural forms (Egyptian figure). Materialist art prevailed among the Greeks (Greek figure). The external forms of nature replace the basic cosmic forms. This is due to the fact that the vital consciousness of the greeks was very closely tied to the outward forms of nature*” Theo van Doesburg, *Principles of Neoplastic Art*, Bauhaus (Weimar) 1925. p.24-25
sustains our collective idea and finds its expression in style. It is naturally subject to flux: it is in fact flux itself. It follows, that what is style at a given time may become formalism at the next…

It was precisely a student of W. Worringer, C.W. Giedion, who transmitted to the young Van Eyck the idea of modern art as a transcendental art, what she called Plastic Art. Van Eyck said about C.W. Giedion: "She opened my windows – and I haven’t closed them since; she tuned my strings – nor they ever required retuning"

According to CW Giedion art had been an essential part of human culture; a sort of intermediary realm between men the gods, men and nature, life and death; following Worringer’s argument she stated that since the Renaissance the estrangement between art and life steadily produced in men a lack of contact with nature, with religion and its society. According to C.W. Giedion, modern art derived its technique from the classical sources, and tried to reestablish an articulation between the everyday of our society and nature, playing a civilizing role. For her there were two points that all the artistic movements shared in common: first, a rejection of classical anthropomorphic ideals of beauty based on a sensual-sentimental individualist point of view; and second, a search for a more objective human outlook, since artists became aware that the human angle, the human scale, had ceased to be a universal norm. Both arguments: the synthetic view of a common basic language in Modern Art, and the civilizing role that Art played since antiquity connecting man with nature, were very present in Aldo Van Eyck’s thought. In fact he defined conceived modern architecture as the materialization of the common basic language in modern art:

"What has been discovered in the field of form consciousness since Cezanne, by way of Seurat, the early Cubism of 1910-12, the Dadaism of Merz and Cabaret Voltaire, or Blaue Reiter, Suprematism and De Stijl movement was carried over from the realm of painting to that of architecture"

Indeed Van Eyck had considered CIAM as the affirmation of a new consciousness in his intervention at CIAM 6, and always illustrated the civilizing role of art since antiquity through his Otterloo circles in which he argued that the architecture of the Parthenon, the pueblos, and modern architecture were contemporaneous and each one played in a particular manner a civilizing role. (IMAGE P.9: Otterloo circles)

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84 Aldo van Eyck, Report concerning the interrelation of the plastic arts and the importance of cooperation (for CIAM 6, Bridgewater 1947) from Strauven, Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings 1947-1998. p.33
86 Worringer’s ended his thesis by pointing at the higher capacity of scientific knowledge to provide the feeling of assurance that transcendental art had provided before, from the Renaissance onwards, understanding broke away from instinct and trusted merely to itself “Science emerged, and transcendental art lost ground. For the world picture set out by science… now offered man who put his faith in the cognitive capacity of the understanding the same feeling of assurance that the transcendentally predisposed man had reached” with abstract art it follows “The old art had been a joyless impulse to self-preservation; now, after this transcendental volition had been taken over and calmed by the scientific striving after knowledge, the realm of art seceded from the realm of science. And the new art, which now springs to life, is Classical art. Its colouring is no longer joyless like the old. For it has become a luxury activity of the psyche, an activation of previously inhibited inner energies, freed from all compulsion and purpose, and the bestower of happiness. Its delight is no longer the rigid regularity of the abstract, but the mild harmony of the organic being” See Worringer’s conclusión of Abstraction & Empathy. p-135
87 See Van Eyck’s opening speech for the Contant’s exhibition at Le Cannard gallery in Amsterdam (16 February 1951), included in Strauven. Collected articles and other writings 1947-1998 / Aldo van Eyck. p-18
**Prelude’s conclusion**

I provided some historical facts and arguments to link a definition of art -articulated in three main concepts by the Vienna School historians- with the notion of modern art developed by the artists during the early Twentieth Century; a definition of modern art that brought the architects to think about architecture as a form of art. Nevertheless, up to now, the arguments and facts linking aesthetics & art-architecture were presented in order to clarify the three aesthetic concepts introduced; it will be the task of the dissertation itself to develop more precisely the points drafted: first, the idea that modern art as abstract art was grounded in the aesthetic concepts articulated by the Art historians; second, modern architects from the pre-war and post-war period conceived architecture as a modern abstract art, therefore the aesthetic concepts articulated by the Vienna School historians grounded as well the definition of modern architecture. Those three concepts were:

- Art does not seek to imitate nature, art is a contest with nature: a form of knowledge whose main purpose is to satisfy conceptual & bodily needs according to a very specific “artistic volition” (Kunstwollen) that merges rational & non-rational means.
- This “artistic volition” changes in time so does the definition of “art as a contest with nature” – the “world picture” set out by art. Hence, changes in the form of beholding determined changes of style.
- Abstraction is the primary and most elevated impulse in art; it aims at bridging the thing in the mind (mind), with the thing in itself (nature); seeking to transcend it has a higher capacity to provide spiritual relief in men. The will to transcend is what ultimately produces style in art.

These three concepts defined art’s capacity to satisfy material & conceptual needs, steaming from its capacity to provide a world picture of reality through intuitive means; in this sense, art resulted a form of knowledge –to some extent rational - that we could name “Logic”, but at the same time it was driven by intuition, and its main goal was to transcend the objects themselves in order to produce spiritual relief; for these reasons I defined the notion of Modern Abstract art used by Van Eyck and the Smithsons as a *transcendental intuitive logic*.

When Aldo van Eyck and the Smithsons argued that architecture is an art they were pointing at architecture’s capacity to satisfy not just the bodily needs –or CIAM’s four functions- but also very specific conceptual needs they articulated using various terms, such as: identity, human association, human relations, etc. During the Doorn Meetings (1954) Van Eyck and the Smithsons conceived Architecture as the materialization of human relations-associations, the city as a material form out of man’s relation-contest with the environment-nature – illustrated in the Valley section used in the Charte de l’Habitat. (IMAGE P.10: Report of Doorn meeting showing the Valley section for the statement of habitat & diagram developed during the discussion on the Charte de l’habitat)

If Riegl had analyzed the bodily and conceptual purposes in art, Van Eyck & the Smithsons noticed that architecture should satisfied the bodily functions and the spiritual needs of the reconstruction as well. Moreover, architecture was a form of art as painting or sculpture in so far as it had the capacity to be transcendental – it had the capacity to bridge the gap between the thing in the mind and the thing in itself. In a diagram developed at the Doorn meeting an arrow linked “Bridgewater, 1947” - when Van Eyck started his revolt with the “Statement against rationalism”- with
the early avant-gardes: Cubism, Dadaism, L'esprit Nouveau, Futurism, etc. As we can read in the diagram the architects were trying to overcome the urbanism of the 4 functions, and the idea of architectural form as a mere product of function; in the diagram we read: “CIAM 1933 – Charte d'Athenes – analysis of the 4 functions…FORM follows FUNCTION -> TOWNPLANNING ---->
> BRIDGE WATER 1947: Lack of relationship between man & things ask for FORMS stimulating man's spiritual growth -> FORM STIMULATES RELATIONSHIP”

I would argue that the architects who wrote this statement were reconsidering modern architecture as a true abstract art form. As the Vienna School scholars argued, art, abstract art, was meant to be transcendental in so far as it stimulated the relationship between “man & things” – bridging the thing in the mind with the thing in itself- satisfying man’s spiritual needs. Abstraction in art was considered superior to Naturalism for it was transcendental. It was conceived as a transcendental intuitive logic - in its early stages a form of understanding (Intuition), and in its more developed stages a form of knowledge (Logic) - capable of bridging the gap between the thing in the mind (man) and the thing in itself (nature). Modern (abstract) art was meant to fulfill man’s emotional needs for its capacity to approach man to the real sense of things. New ways to look at things produced new forms in art: beholding was conceived as a form of knowledge. The architects of the Modern Movement understood abstraction in similar terms; modern architecture, like modern abstract art, should follow the same logic. Indeed we could argue that these architects were trying to do that.

Certainly influenced by the ideas introduced by the Art Historians modern art emerged and evolved throughout the first half of the Twentieth century. During the early twentieth century some architects understood modern architecture in similar terms and created built environments according to the way in which societies contest with nature, otherwise Van Eyck & the Smithsons would have not traced a line linking 1947 with 1910. Hence their criticism to the post-war CIAM was grounded in a reenactment of ideas coming from Modern Art that were originally articulated by Riegl and his followers in the early twentieth century: first, all the visual arts -architecture included- were the result of a contest with nature, a natural product out of man aiming at the satisfaction of conceptual and practical needs, whose forms changed according to the new rational and non-rational ways of dealing with nature; the second argument embedded in the first was that architecture as a form of art had the capacity to be transcendental-hence it resulted a transcendental intuitive logic- that had the capacity to satisfy conceptual needs and provide spiritual relief.

Lastly I would like to point out the fact that the criticism drafted by Van Eyck and the Smithsons to a materialist-functionalist notion of architecture mirrored the criticism developed by the Art Historians to a reductionist analysis of art in materialist-functionalist terms. Riegl and his followers enlarged the study of art in terms of functions to an analysis in terms of purpose: a reaction against a materialist conception of Art History that reduced it to a mere analysis of functions, materials, and techniques. If Modern Art history and abstract art had explored the nature of will (kunstwollen), perception, the balance between rational & non-rational means trying to complement the world picture set out by modern science, it makes sense that modern architects who conceived
architecture as an art, considered architecture in similar terms; hence reacted vigorously to any rationalistic interpretation of modern architecture.

By tracing a line from Riegl to modern art, the architecture of the Modern Movement and its followers – Aldo van Eyck and Alison & Peter Smithson - I am trying to argue a notion of modern architecture that was not rationalistic, and did not rely exclusively in technological development. The architects that lived through the two world wars always remained skeptical about the notion of "progress". Architecture was considered among the avant-garde movements an essential form of modern art for the reconstruction. In order to illustrate this argument the first part of this inquiry outlines the principles of modern art that determined the paradigmatic shift produced by the architecture of Aldo van Eyck and Alison & Peter Smithson. These principles: *entrangement*, *imagination & intuition*, the *elementary* and *new consciousness*, emerged from Dadaism and were present in the avant-garde art and architecture from the early Twentieth century to the post-war period.
PART 1 - AVANT GARDE ART (1916-1947)
PART 1 - AVANT GARDE ART (1916-1947)

“In 1914 Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, and Man Ray, then in New York, had created dada (hobby-horse) that left nothing to be desired. But great was their distress, for they found no name for it. And because it was nameless, we in Zurich knew nothing of its existence…Dada was against the mechanization of the world. Our African evenings were simply a protest against the rationalization of man. My gouaches, reliefs, plastics were an attempt to teach man what he had forgotten- to dream with his eyes open. Even then I had foreboding that men would devote themselves more and more furiously to the destruction of the earth…”"Hans Arp 88

The first part of this inquiry points out “elements” of avant-garde art present in the architecture of Aldo van Eyck and A. & P. Smithson. It summarizes ideas, characters and events from the early European avant-gardes that were influential in the emergence of later art movements after the Second World War, namely: The Independent Group in London and the C.O.B.R.A. Group in Amsterdam; trying to reconsider to what extent the architects were nourished either by the avant-garde art from the early Twentieth Century directly, or through their relationship with the post-war avant-garde artists.

Among the early artistic movements before the First World War, the emergence of the Dadaist movement is chosen as a point of departure because it had a strong influence among the young artists and architects gathered around those two groups. Several aspects from Dadaism nourished the humanistic sensibility of the young artists and architects during the after-war period: first, the Dadaist spirit of protest against the war, progress, hierarchies, determinism, and pragmatism of western societies; second, their appeal to imagination and non-rational aspects of artistic creation that make us discover reality anew; and third, Dadaism was conceived, and evolved as an international movement that established a dialogue with other artistic movements, nourished by a common ideals- the avant-garde spirit that some intellectuals labeled as the “Great Riot”.

Hence Dadaism serves as a thread introducing the elements from the avant-garde movements that influenced the way of thinking and the early work of Alison & Peter Smithson and Aldo Van Eyck: enstrangement, imagination & intuition, the elementary and the notion of the new consciousness; these are considered “avant-garde attributes” insofar as they were essential for the production of artworks that created a paradigmatic shift in art. These elements were present in the paradigmatic shifts produced by the artistic movements during the first half of the twentieth century and they can to be found in the paradigmatic shift produced by the Smithsons and Van Eyck during the after-war period.

Although Dadaism serves as a quite convenient waybill for this study, I do not mean that the ideas pointed out in this introductory chapter were exclusive from this movement. The early European Avant-gardes had many ideas in common, and established a convoluted dialogued full of subtle variations, in which the slight differences among artworks were as important as the things they shared in common.

0.1. ENSTRANGEMENT

1.1.1 DADA

“Dada wanted to replace the logical nonsense of the men of today by the illogically senseless”

Hans Arp

Hans Arp’s statement points out two main attributes of Dadaism: it is relatively unapproachable, since “they found no name for it,” and it is to a certain extent inaccessible due to its self-conscious ‘lack of sense’. Dada was consciously unapproachable for it was a reaction against any human attempt to establish ‘common sense’. The Dadaist identified “common sense” with the contemporary rationalistic mechanization of the world that had propelled Europe into the war. To some extent the story of Dada is the story of the struggle carried on by artists, intellectuals and architects during the first half of the Twentieth century, against the rationalistic tendency of western society. Emerged during the First World War, and continued thereon; apparently the “movement” as such disappeared, but for many of the artists Dada was not just a movement, it was a spirit- a state of mind who never died: “Dada reste” was Tristan Tzara’s dedication of La main passé to Aldo Van Eyck the 24th of January 1946.

It is relatively difficult to fix the origins of Dada to a specific place and date, to answer the questions, what and when. Dadaist publications gave different places and dates of birth to Dadaism, to some extent they did not care about dates. What was Dada? According to Marcel Janco: “Do not trust anything that calls itself ‘Dada history’ however much be true of dada, the historian to write about it does not yet exist…” Motivated by Marcel Janco’s statement I considered interesting to depart from C.W. Giedion’s conception of Dada, working on the assumption that she strongly determined Van Eyck’s view on it. For the purposes of this research, it is more important to know what Dada meant for the artists, intellectuals, and architects related to this research than to try to elucidate an accurate historical definition of dada, if possible.

It was through Arp that C.W. Giedion came to know what Dada was, and it was precisely C.W. Giedion’s book on Arp where she summarized Dada’s concerns and ideas; according to her, Dada was a movement against society, and the artist itself as a member of it: the Dadaists “were in rebellion against the prevailing moral standards and the ‘official’ taste…parodied their own complicated and pointless everyday life, while the bloated nationalism that surrounded them only led to crises and wars…” The war was senseless but they were optimistic enough to build out of that non-sense an attitude; they used it as a device to criticize both common-sense and the false idea of progress. According to C.W. Giedion the main point of Dada was their “revolt against a rationalistic universal system that had become untenable”, against moral hypocrisy, and the classical ideal of

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90 Marcel Janco, Creative dada in Marcel Janco, and Hans Bolliger Eds. Dada: Monograph of a Movement. Switzerland, A. Niggli, 1957.p.18
91 All the following quotes of C.W. Giedion in this paragraph are from the same text: Carola Giedion-Welcker, Jean Arp. Translation by Norbert Guterman, New York, H. N. Abrams, 1957 p. 7
beauty considering it superficial. Their main device to pursue all this was “the elementary force of ‘thought sprung from fantasy’:

“...these knights-errant of non-sense were also constructive, and strove for a new art and a new life spiritualized and simplified. They radically repudiated ‘universal progress...culture was to be found among the so-called barbarian primitives, and there was real barbarism in our over-organized, bureaucratic and mechanized civilization...revolt against a rationalistic universal system that had become untenable, against the superficial idea of beauty on the classical model, against moral hypocrisy?...the elementary force of ‘thought sprung from fantasy’ in opposition to a view of the world originating in so-called common sense”

But C.W. Giedion did not considered Dada anti-humanistic for being against reason, civilization, or the classical model of beauty, mainly the opposite. For an artist facing the First World War, acting against a rationalistic notion of “reason” was the only way to restore the lost of humanity produced by a universalizing system emerged from the Enlightenment. According to C.W. Giedion the Dada artists intuitively sensed the growing opposition between the ideas of Giambattista Vico and Descartes. The Dadaists wanted to destroy the common perception of reason, to dethrone reason’s vain will to define a universal truth. They used rational and non-rational arguments to show the world that there is no universal reason, and therefore it can’t be the only mean to pursue truth. The Dadaist attitude was to some extent logical, and even rational, facing the war. The artists “destroyed” art, but not for the sake of it, they destroyed “so that the lousy materialists may recognize in the ruins what is essential” said Jean Arp. The Dadaists shattered the so called humanistic principles that propelled Europe into devastation, in order to rebuild a new humanity, a new humanistic perception: “Behind their allegedly nihilistic attitudes lays a profound belief in long-forgotten beauty and humanity” (IMAGE ENS-1: Theo van Doesburg collages, 1923)

“Enstrangement”

« Les choses ne sont pas difficiles a faire, ce qui est difficile, c'est de nous mettre en etat de las faire »
« quand nous ne sommes plus des enfants, nous sommes deja morts »
C. Brancusi

The early Dada-Zurich performances had a certain air of masquerade; the artists were usually disguised with self-made masks of cubist inspiration and primitive aura. Yelling, barking, roaring or reciting stanzas such as “Karawane” the Dadaists aimed at experimenting a feeling of self “enstrangement”, and to project that same feeling to the spectators. The performances were essentially a device to produce such a feeling; for them art was essentially a mean not an end in itself: “...All of them were anxiously seeking ‘the true, buried face of their time, its basic essential features, the cause of its affliction and the possibility of its awakening’ Art should be only ‘an occasion, a method’” For a Dadaists like Hugo Ball, art was a device with a very specific goal, he

92 In words of Hans Arp: “To destroy the swindle of reason perpetrated on man in order to restore him to his humble place in nature” From Carola Giedion-Welcker. Jean Arp. P.8
searched for the true **basic essential** features of our time.  

Certain parallelisms can be traced between the notion of "enstrangement" used by the Russian formalists and the aim of the Dadaists performances. The Russian term 'ostraniene' or "enstrangement" was coined around that time by Viktor Shklovsky in his essay "Art as device":

"By enstranging objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and "laborious". The perceptual process in art has a purpose all its own and ought to be extended to the fullest. Art is a means of experiencing the process of creativity. The artifact itself is quite unimportant."

As for the Dadaists, for Shklovsky art was considered a mean and not an end in itself. Apparently there was no direct relation between the Dada-Zurich and the Russian Formalists; nevertheless Hugo Bäll was very interested in the socio-political ideas emerging in Russia at that time; together with his friend Fritz Brupbacher he had studied the work of Bakunin and Kropotkin.

Hugo Bäll in his personal diary used the word "distantiation" (detachment) as a device to change or our "writing of life", a term that could be related to "ostraniene": «12th March 1916...La distantiation c’est la vie elle-meme. Soyons neufs et inventifs de fond en comble. Changeons chaque jour l’écriture de la vie »

The day after his first performance at the Cabaret Voltaire -when he had read Karawane- Ball was more explicit about his notion of "enstrangement": “C’est dans l’homme que se trouvent les leviers qui permettent de faire sortir notre monde usé de ses gonds. Il n’est nul besoin d’aller chercher un point d’appui à l’extérieur, dans l’univers, comme le faisait ce mecanicien de l’Antiquité »

In Hugo Ball’s clear reference to Arquimedes there is a relation between the conscious or unconscious use of “ostraniene” by the artists and constant references to the child, childhood and play. Hugo Ball saw childhood as an essential reference for artist, a new world of opportunities, a world with its own laws emerging from child’s own fantasy and not dictated by the exterior adult world:

“August 5, 1916- Childhood as a new world, and everything childlike and fantastic, everything childlike and direct, everything childlike and symbolical in opposition to the senilities of the world of grown-ups...Childhood is not at all as obvious as is generally assumed. It is a world to which hardly any attention is paid, with its own laws, without whose application there is no art, and without

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94 The translation of the Russian term ‘ostraniene’ as "Enstrangement" is coined by Benjamin Sher. Previous translations of the term are “estrangement” and “defamiliarization”. See *Translator’s introduction* in Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*. Dalkey Archive Press, Illinois 1991
97 Fritz Brupbacher was a libertarian socialist publisher of the journal Der Revoluzzer and organized leftwing radical roundtables. Hugo Bäll and Emmy Henning met him in an event devoted to the political situation in Russia and joined the weekly roundtable organized by Brupbacher. They were all familiar with the work of Bakunin and Kropotkin. See The Star of the Cabaret Voltaire by Hubert van den Berg in *Dada Zurich: A clown’s game from Nothing* (p.76) from *Crisis and the arts: the history of Dada* / Stephen C. Foster, editor. *Vol.II*
99 i.b.i.d. p.59
whose religious and philosophic recognition art cannot exist or be apprehended...The credulous imagination of children, however, is also exposed to corruption and deformation. To surpass oneself in naïveté and childishness—that is still the best antidote\textsuperscript{100}.

“To surpass oneself...” could be considered a form of “enstrangement”; an “enstrangement” from our consciousness that would bring us to perceive objects anew; a common object would appear “strange” to us, hence the performance had the capacity to bring the perceptual process to its fullest richness. As for Shklovsky for Hugo Bäll art was a mean of experiencing the process of creativity, the artifact itself was quite unimportant.\textsuperscript{101} Hence the early Dada found in the childlike, fool or primitive attitude of their performances not an end in itself, but a mean to elaborate a critical attitude facing a decadent society. It provided them a new sensibility, according to Ball: «...l’art n’est pas un but en soi- cela demanderait une naïvete moins ecornchée- mais nous y voyons l’occasion de formuler des critiques à l’égard de notre temps et de developper une veritable sensibilitè pour cette époque...» \textsuperscript{102}

The development of a true sensibility was the main goal of Dadaists like Hugo Ball; so it was for De Stijl members later on who were seeking for “a new consciousness”. Enstrangement was an intellectual device that conceived form in its deepest sense, for it brought the artists to be consciousness-foreign to the existing objects-forms being extremely critical to them. The Dadaists searched for an understanding of the current \textit{kunstwollen} in order to overcome it, for the war was a clear manifestation that times were changing. Dada, like De Stijl among other avant-gardes, searched for a true manifestation of the new consciousness that would emerge from the war, the ultimate common goal of many artistic movements at that time.

\textbf{Klee, Arp & play}

Within the context of Dada, the work of Paul Klee and Arp was important since their early explorations on elementary forms had a strong influence in post-war avant-gardes. The most obvious is the relation with the Cobra Group and Aldo van Eyck’s notion of the elementary; nevertheless among the artists of the Independent Group, such as Eduardo Paolozzi, the following aspects of Dada had a strong impact as well. The return to the “elemental” was Klee’s primary concern. As for the Vienna School historians, for Klee and Arp, art was conceived as a form of knowledge that explored through endless iterations in which the intuitive- the sense of play- had a paramount role. Klee aimed at a “\textit{culture of pure elements}” a constructive thinking nourished by the “uncorrupted imagery” of the child


\textsuperscript{101} According to Viktor Shkolovsky “If the complex life of many people takes place entirely on the level of the unconscious, then it’s as if this life had never been. And so, in order to return sensation to our limbs, in order to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony, man has given the tool of art. The purpose of art, then, is to lead us to knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition. By “enstranging” objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and “laborious.” The perceptual process in art has a purpose all its own and ought to be extended to the fullest. Art is a means of experiencing the process of creativity. The artifact itself is quite unimportant” Shkolovsky, \textit{Theory of Prose}.p.6

The childlike behavior was an estrangement device that Paul Klee had developed and methodically used on his painting. The Dadaists found in the paintings of Klee an overwhelming example, and a direct source of inspiration for their primitive or childlike art. Klee was in communication with the Dada-Zurich since November 1916, when Tzara asked him for a contribution to the Galerie Dada exhibition. Klee’s contribution to the first three Dada exhibitions (The first two were of artists from Der Sturm: Ernst, Feininger, Johannes Itten, Kokoschka, Kandinsky, etc.) culminated with a great exhibition organized by the art critic Waldemar Jollos. In June 1919 Klee traveled to Zurich to visit the Dadaist in person; he met Tzara, Janko, Viking Eegeling, Hans Richter, and Arp whom he knew since they met in the Moderne Bund (1912). As Marcel Janko accounts, the Dada artists found in Klee’s work an elaborated inquiry in the creative power of children and the primitives: “In his beautiful work we found all our efforts to unravel the soul of primitive man, to delve into the unconscious and the instinctive forces of creation, to discover the pure, direct, creative sources hidden in children. This exhibition was a revelation for us”

C.W. Giedion devoted a book to Paul Klee published in 1952, in which we can find aspects of Klee’s work very similar to the Dadaists concerns. According to C.W. Giedion “Klee developed a form of art which was rooted in the irrational”; Klee’s pursuit for a new language brought him back to the very elements of design but his primitivism derives from premises completely different from those that underlie a child drawing; as Klee wrote on his diary (1909): “If it is true that my work produces at times an effect of primitivism, the explanation lies in the fact that I have disciplined myself to get along with a limited number of levels of reference. It is an economy adopted as an ultimate professional principle, and thus is really the very opposite of true primitivism.” Klee’s primary concern was the return to the elemental in order to develop a constructive thinking in art, a “culture of pure elements”. The child drawings were an exploration and conquest of reality, whereas the artist used them in “conscious transformations marking a return to fundamental elements”. In Klee’s childish paintings, the ultimate goal of the “ostraniene” experienced by the artist behaving like a child is not at all art, but to find in himself his own “uncorrupted imagery” - a return to devices of “pre-logical expression” - created by us and not inherited. According to Klee the child drawings are kept pure and uncontaminated:

“... (The child) draws and paints as it thinks. Its pictures-provided they are kept pure and uncontaminated- are proof of the surrounding world. They have in their spontaneity a code of laws entirely their own. They allude to distant states, profound and tender, long since lost and very hard to

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103 i.b.i.d.p.80: “The great event of the Galerie Dada was the Paul Klee exhibition organized by a friend of ours, Jollos, the art critic. It had an enormous success…” See also Marcel Franciscono, Paul Klee, his work and thought. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991 (p.219-220)

104 Marcel Janco, Creative Dada in Dada. Monograph of a movement. p.26

105 In this regard it is worth to note the importance of Klee’s ideas on Van Eyck’s work. C.W. Giedion was friendly with Paul Klee; in fact Van Eyck met C.W. Giedion in a small Surrealist exhibition at the Gallery Gasser in Zurich which included work by Klee. See Francis Strauven. Aldo van Eyck: the shape of relativity. Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura, 1998. p.76


107 i.b.i.d. p.84

108 i.b.i.d. p.84
recover’…’Perhaps the point at issue is not at all art (here taken in a purely aesthetic sense) but uncorrupted imagery’...

109 The Dadaists discovered in Paul Klee’s paintings the small, the playful, the exploration through endless iterations, and the artist’s neurotic obsession with apparently unimportant things.110 The sense of play as an ultimate state of mind that enhances creativity was very present among the Dadaists. Hans Arp was one of his early promoters; for him, experimentation, play and chance were related as a joyful attitude in the creative process. According to Richard Huelsenbeck Arp was always full of the essential element of a Dadaist spirit, irony.111 Nevertheless Klee’s & Arp’s playful character never lost his basic seriousness. Although Arp acted as sort of counselor of the Dada-Zurich,112 and was always present together with his wife Sophie Taeuber, they never participated very much in the activities of the Cabaret. At that time Arp was struggling with himself to know which direction his work should take though he certainly found certain relief and feeling of lightness in Dada.113 According to Hans Arp the artist had to purify his own imagination in the development of his own language. In a similar way to Paul Klee, Arp explored the primitive and the playful. According to Hugo Bäll the work of Arp was a simplification in search for elementary forms using imagination:

« Lorsqu’il défend le primitif, il pense à la toute première ebauche, qui est abstraite et se refuse à toute forme de complication ultérieure. Le sentiment doit disparaître, tout comme la reflexion qui ne commence que sur la toile. Son amour va au cercle et au cube, aux lignes nettes et incisives… ce qui lui importe, c’est moins la profusion que la simplification…Il voudrait purifier l’imagination et mettre tous ses efforts au service de la découverte non pas tant du tresor de ses images, mais de ce qui les fonde. Il pense donc que les images de l’imagination sont déjà des synthoses. L’artiste qui ne travaille à partir de l’imagination autonome et libre se trompe sur l’originalité. Il se sert d’un matériau déjà agencé et ne réalise donc que des assemblages »114

109 Klee’s statement is from A. F. Geist, Paul Klee, E. Hauswedell und Co., 1948. The last phrase is Hugo Ball’s statement used by C.W. Giedion to express Paul Klee’s ideas. She referred to many modern artists that were exploring the way kids draw and imagine: Boccioni, Franz Marc, and Hugo Bäll. See Giedion-Welcker, Carola. Paul Klee. P.84-85
110 Waldemar Jollos lecture on Paul Klee the 31st March 1917, brought Hugo Bäll to write on his diary: “April 1, 1917- Yesterday Dr. Jollos lectured on Klee…one might also speak of Klee as follows: He always presents himself as quite small and playful. In an age of colossal he falls in love with a green leaf, a little star, a butterfly wing; and since heaven and infinity are reflected in them, he paints them in. The point of his pencil, his brush, tempts him to minutiae. He always remains quite near first beginnings and the smallest format. The beginning possesses him and will not let him go. When he reaches the end, he does not start a new leaf at once, but begins to paint over the first one…” See Ball, Dada a Zurich, p.113-115
111 As Hugo Bäll said the Dadaist is a man who plays and laughs about himself “The playfulness is easily seen in Arp’s work and in his constant experimentation. He was always willing to give a new idea a chance, in art and in life. But underneath, Arp has always possessed…a tremendous singleness of purpose: he never plays and forgets himself playing…” See ‘Looking’ by Jean Arp in Arp. MOMA ed. N.Y., Distributed by Doubleday, 1958 p.12
112 Arp was the most experienced artist among the Dada-Zurich: He had met Braque and Picasso in Paris, took part in Der Blaue Reiter, and through him the young Dadaists gathered at the Voltaire learned about Francis Picabia’s ideas. See Richard Huelsenbeck, Arp and the Dada Movement, in Arp. MOMA ed.
113 “This was the miracle of Dada that it gave all of us the courage to say what seemed to be impossible to convey to anybody, and this courage benefited Arp more than any of us, as he was shy and detached by nature…” See Richard Huelsenbeck, Arp and the Dada Movement, from Arp. MOMA ed. p.19
114 Hugo Ball. Dada a Zurich: Le mot et l’image 1916-1917. p. 18-19
Acting like kids, fools or primitives the Dadaists felt completely free to experiment. The process of “enstrangement” freed their minds, and this freedom made them aware of the artificial constrains imposed by society and the so-called process of civilization. The Dadaist struggled to overcome such constrains for they restricted human creativity; the new consciousness and the freedom to experiment were interwoven in the search for a new language. Common language was their first source of experimentation: poems such as “L’almirall cherce une maison a louer” read simultaneously by Huelsenbeck, Tzara and Janko, or “Karawane” the poems without words by Hugo Bäll. The Dadaists experimented with the most elementary mean of civilization, Language. In this process imagination played an essential role as an intellectual source of creativity parallel to reason.

IMAGE ENS-5: “L’almirall cherce une maison a louer” (1916) simultaneous poem by R. Huelsenbeck, Tristan Tzara and Marcel Janko)

Language

« Je voulais laisser tomber le langage lui-même, ce sacré langage, tout souillé, comme des pièces de monnaies usees par les doigts des marchands. Je veut le mot la ou il s’arrête et la ou il commence. Dada c’est le coeur des mots... Toute chose a son mot, mais le mot est devenu une chose en soi. Pourquoi ne le trouverais-je pas, moi? » Hugo Bäll

Dada was a protest, Dada was against conventions, and therefore Dada’s first enemy had to be language, our ultimate convention, the one that grounds our thinking. Hugo Bäll’s manifesto read the 14th July of 1916 denounced language as a rational wall isolating nations. The word Dada, meant different things in different languages aimed to be international, to gather together:

« Dada a son origine dans le dictionnaire. C’est terriblement simple. En français cela signifie ‘cheval de bois’. En allemand ‘va te faire, au revoir, a la prochaine’. En roumain ‘oui en effet, vous avez raison, c’est ça, d’accord, vraiment, on s’en occupe’, etc. C’est un mot international. Seulement un mot, pris en tant que mouvement... »

The Dadaists abolished conventional language for they considered it the origin of rational thinking, our first home, our first prison, according to Nietzsche: “the prison house of language.” Tristan Tzara’s motto ‘Dada means nothing’ was a statement against meaning, against language conceived as a one-dimensional structure in which the definition of the word is turned into a dogma. The rejection of a system imposed or already given to us was achieved through the process of “enstrangement” as it was performed by the Hugo Bäll in the reading of Karawane the 22nd of June 1916 at the Cabaret Voltaire: Hugo Bäll read Karawane dressed with a cubist costume of shiny red, blue and gold cardboard with a conic stripped hat; he spelled vowels with a sacred melodic cadence

115 As Marcel Janco accounts Viennese professors of psychology “disciples of Jung and Adler” visited the Voltaire to “analyze” them, so when the performance was over the Dada expounded their faith in “a direct art, a magical, organic, and creative art, like that of primitives and children”. Marcel Janco, “Creative Dada” in Dada. Monograph of a movement. p.21
116 The Dadaist from Zurich were inspired by Marinetti’s “Words in freedom” were the words were arranged randomly and mixed with onomatopoeias. All these texts can be found in The Dada Reader by Dawn Ades.
117 Hugo Ball. Dada a Zurich: Le mot et l’image (1916-1917) p.11
118 In the First Dada Manifest, read the 14th July by Hugo Ball at the Cabaret Voltaire. See Hugo Ball. Dada a Zurich: Le mot et l’image (1916-1917) p.9
119 The whole phrase reads: “We have to cease to think if we refuse to do t in the prison-house of language; for we cannot exceed further than the doubt which asks whether the limit we see is really a limit” The quote is extracted from Fredric Jameson’s The Prison-House of Language. Princeton Univ. Press, 1972.p.1
static on the floor, and immerse in the darkness of the scene; suddenly he had the vision of a pale and thrilled child, overwhelmed as witnessing a funeral, tied, trembling and avid to the words of the priest. While shaking slowly his arms Bäll spelled the last stanzas, as the bulb light fades little by little he disappeared immerse in the darkness completely exhausted. 120 “Enstrangement” as a technique to create something of our own, something that really pertains to us, in Bäll’s words:

“Je lis de vers qui n'ont d'autre but que de renoncer au language conventionnel, de s’en debarrasser… Je ne veux pas de mots inventes par quelqu'un d'autre. Tous les mots ont été inventes par les autres. Je reivindique mes propres bêtises, mon propre rythme et des voyelles et des consonnes qui vont avec, qui y correspondent, qui soient les miens » 121

Aloïs Riegl had pointed out that ultimately, art aimed at something more than the representation of nature, and Worringer had articulate that thought into the “urge to abstraction” leading to “conceptual art”; indeed the Dadaists experimented with language as an art form in itself that did not aim at reproducing nature. The image and the word were considered one, and the new images were found in the elementary components of the words, the letters. The Zurich-Dadaist were aware of Marinetti’s “Parole in liberta”; if a phrase is what enabled the vision-depiction of the world through language, the word was detached from the phrase and used with freedom. But unlike the Futurists who still used the word to depict the city, the Dadaist used the “word as such” and the “letter as such” like the Russian formalists had done. 122 Hugo Bäll and Tristan Tzara were aware of the aesthetic manifestations of the Suprematists and Constructivists, works such as Malevich’s Black square (1913). Dada tried to give to the letter the imaginary richness of the spell detached from any conventional sense or meaning. The letters arranged free from any convention would give birth to new kind of phrase, but not for the sake of newness. As I pointed before the Dadaist use of an elementary and recognizable device for us like the letter, in the form of a poem or a performance, is not an end in itself but a mean to awake certain sensibility in the beholder:

(IP NRS-6: Kasimir Malevitch “Black square” Merz nº8/9, 1924) and Kurt Schwitters, Ursonate from Merz nº24, 1932)

“Le vocable, investi de magie, a invoque et engender une phrase nouvelle… suggerent mille idées a la fois sans les nommer, cette phrase a fait ressoner la nature irrationnelle, originellement ludique, mais refoulee, de l’auditeur ; elle a réveillé et fortifie les couches les plus profondes de la mémoire » 123

120 The depiction of Ball’s performance is extracted from his diary, 23th June 1916. i.b.i.d. p.51-52.
121 i.b.i.d. p.10
123 See Hugo Ball. Dada a Zurich: Le mot et l’image (1916-1917) p-48
1.1.2 POST-WAR AVANT GARDES

“All the acquisitions of education and socialization modify man, substitute for his true nature, bit by bit, a sort of borrowed nature which becomes habitual for him, and from which he can no longer successfully free himself. His acquisitions, and habits, work as brakes, which automatically spring into action, independently of his will, and even against his will, as soon as he would like to free himself. It is necessary for him, if he wants to produce a creation of art of some value, to suppress these brakes at least when he wants to, and prevent them from working. Now it is the right of madness to shatter these brakes, to force open the doors of these locks and to precipitate the uprising of his savagery”

Jean Dubuffet, “In honour of savage values” 1951

Once the 2nd World War ended, the city of Paris steadily recovered its artistic activity. Before the Independent Group and the COBRA Group were founded in London and Amsterdam respectively, some of its members visited the French capital. Both groups emerged from the avant-garde art of the war period, facing the socio-political reconstruction of Europe in different ways. Nevertheless, they shared a fascination for Dadaism, Surrealism and Art Brut. The Dadaist estrangement manifested in poems, ready-mades and collages had made its way through the Surrealist’s objet trouvé, and Dubuffet’s Art Brut; “Dada reste” was Tristan Tzara’s dedication to Aldo van Eyck in 1946. Indeed, main aspects of Dada present among the Parisian avant-garde nourished the young IG & Cobra artists: the revolt against established systems of knowledge, and estrangement in the search for elementary principles in art.

The Dadaist revolt led to two different positions in the IG and Cobra facing the emerging consumer society. The transformation of the work of art in commodity had been slowed down by the parenthesis of the two world wars; once the Second World War ended in 1945 it was propelled by the USA economic boom and the European reconstruction. Certainly any strong generalization about the stands of any of both groups risks inaccuracy. Both groups lasted very little, and the divergences among its members were strong. But in general terms it could be said that the IG looked west and the Cobra looked east: The IG was more interested the influence of technology in the everyday life; hence their socio-political agenda welcomed the emerging consumer society. Although some of the IG members criticized the Modern Movement they saw themselves as its followers. Reyner Banham & John MacHale were astonished by the values and technological wonders of American

124 Lecture delivered to the Faculty of Literature (University of Lille, January 10th 1951) on the occasion of the opening an exhibition “Five Little Inventors of Painting (PaulEnd/Alcide/Liber/Gasduf/Sylvocq)” Published with a translation by Kent Minturn in Anthropology and Aesthetics, No. 46, Polemical Objects (Autumn, 2004), p. 259-268
125 The Independent Group was a group of young artists, architects and historians some of whom taught at the Central School of Art, and were all connected with the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. According to William Turnbull the “Epidiascope show” by E. Paolozzi in 1952 might have been the IG first meeting, that same year Richard Lannoy started organizing sessions at the ICA. See David Robbins ed. The Independent Group: post-war Britain and the aesthetics of plenty. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, c1990. p.21
126 COBRA is the acronym for the cities were the main artists of the Group came from: Asger Jorn from Copenhagen, Christian Dotremont from Brussels and Karel Appel, Cornelis and Constant from Amsterdam. The “Groupe experimental hollandaise”, COBRA-Amsterdam was founded in November 1948 and lasted until 1951. See Willemijn Stokvis, Cobra: la conquête de la spontanéité. Paris: Gallimard ; [s.l.] : V+K publishing, c2001.
127 The figure of Le Corbusier was very present among the IG. He inaugurated the first exhibition organized by Richard Hamilton at the ICA. On Growth and Form. Anne Massey, The Independent Group: modernism and mass culture in Britain, 1945-59. Manchester [England]; New York : Manchester University Press, 1995.p.30
consumer society; moreover, the institution around which the Independent Group gathered, the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London (I.C.A.), acted from the early 50s as a “gateway to Europe for American high culture.” The situation was very different in the continent: Cobra had a communist party “aura” led by Christian Dotremont’s strong political convictions, backed by Constant, and Asger Jorn who drafted a strong criticism to functionalist architecture. Although Aldo Van Eyck remained skeptical about Cobra’s criticism to modern art and architecture he enjoyed their proximity. For Van Eyck Cobra had a Dadaist aura not so distant from the spirit of the late De Stijl.

The IG & Cobra shared in common a fascination for similar ideas coming from the early avant-garde. Cobra propelled a radical break and criticism to Andre Breton’s late Surrealism for his tendency to separate the artistic view from political convictions. They shared with the IG a fascination for Giacometti’s surrealism and Dubuffet’s Art Brut. The Dadaism of Schwitters and Duchamp fascinated the IG, whereas some Cobra members brought the Dadaist revolt to the political struggle within the Situationist movement, like Berlin Dada had done years before; as Kurt Schwitters wrote to his friend the Berlin-dadaist Raoul Hausman in 1947: “…il y a des imitateurs, par exemple les lettristes a Paris, qui copient l’Ursonate de Hausman et de moi, et ne nous mentionnent même pas, nous qui l’avons fait vingt-cinq ans avant-eux, et avec de meilleures raisons.” (Image ENS-7: Marcel Duchamp, Fountain 1917; Giacometti’s “Invisible object” 1936; Jean Dubuffet’s Portrait of Michel Tapie, 1948)

Paris 1947

The future members of both the IG and Cobra made acquaintance of the same great figures of Modern Art visiting Paris in the late forties. During 1946 and 1947, many artists from Cobra visited the French capital: Constant, Karel Appel, Cornelle, Asger Jorn and Christian Dotremont. Around that time too Eduardo Paolozzi moved to Paris (1946) and his friends Nigel Henderson and William Turnbull visited him. Two Galleries in Paris gathered together some future members of the IG and Cobra: the Gallery Loeb’s exhibition on Miro (Fall 1946), and the Gallery Drouin’s shows on Dubuffet (‘Le Foyer de l’art brut’ and the portraits exhibition, fall 1947). Nigel Henderson and Paolozzi

128 According to Anne Massey, American interests were channeled into the ICA through Anthony Kloman, brother in law of Philip Johnson (Director of the Architecture department at MOMA and former American cultural attache in Europe), who lectured on Modern Architecture at the ICA in July 1951. Through charitable trust from a MOMA Trustee, Kloman involved the ICA in the Unknown Political Prisoner competition, a propaganda exercise on behalf of the CIA to promote American values. See Anne Massey, The Independent Group. p.64
130 i.b.i.d. p-123
131 See Cobra issues nº1,2 and 4
134 In June of 1948, Dubuffet, along with five others: Jean Paulhan (a writer, linguist, and Editor of the La Nouvelle Revue Française), André Breton, Charles Ration (a Parisian dealer in African art), Michel Tapié (an art critic), and Henri-Pierre Roché (a translator, journalist, and novelist) officially established in Paris La Compagnie de l’art brut, an association dedicated to the discovery, documentation, and exhibition of art brut.
visited Dubuffet’s *Foyer*; and Karel Appel & Corneille visited the portraits exhibition. The other two members of Cobra, Constant Nieuwenhuys and Asger Jorn, had met in Paris at the Miro exhibition in Gallery Loeb (Fall 1946). These facts illustrate how both groups emerged inspired from the late surrealism and found in the first “Art Brut” a clear manifestation of their early artistic concerns.

The artists from the IG and Aldo Van Eyck enjoyed a close and personal acquaintance of the post-war avant-garde artists that strongly impressed their young spirit. As art students, Paolozzi, Henderson and Turnbull met at the Slade School of Art in London; Henderson and Paolozzi shared a strong interest for Surrealist art stimulated by the art collections of Margaret Gardiner and Roland Penrose, friends of Henderson’s mother Wyn Henderson. Thanks to her Paolozzi had his first solo exhibition in 1947. Economically and morally encouraged by the success, he decided to move to Paris in June. William Turnbull was the first to visit him, settling there the following year. During Henderson’s visit to Paolozzi in August 1947 they met at the Hotel de Crillon with Peggy Guggenheim and Hans Arp; who generously invited them to his studio and showed them some of his tips to sculpt shape cuts in wood. The young artists found a great openness from established artists in Paris, according to Paolozzi, “*all the artists he wanted to meet were in the phone book*”. Both friends visited: Braque, Giacometti, Leger and Brancusi studios.

Aldo van Eyck had visited these entire same artists in his several visits to Paris years before. In autumn 1944, shortly after the liberation of France, C.W. Giedion sent Aldo Van Eyck to Paris as “a *delegate of the Zurich Circle*”. He visited Giacometti, Tzar, Pevsner, Vantongerloo, and Brancusi, always lodging in Nelly van Doesburg’s house at Meudon. Aldo returned to Paris very often to visit art galleries and bookshops. He also visited Braque and Leger, and never failed to visit Hans Arp, who lived at Meudon very close to Nelly van Doesburg house.

Among the artists visited by the young artists Brancusi produced either great impact—as in the case of Van Eyck— or disappointment, as in the case of Nigel Henderson. Constantin Brancusi had created a modern language of primitive “aura” that had a strong impact in members of both groups. Van Eyck was completely fascinated with Brancusi and he might have transmitted his enthusiasm to the cobra artists, since some of their earlier sculptures were quite “elementary” totemic images. William Turnbull’s work was also nourished by the *Simplicité* of Brancusi’s work. Turnbull’s sculpture *Sungazer* (1956) for *This is Tomorrow* exhibition held at ICA, or his *Ancestral Totem* (1956) were two contemporary totems that contrasted horizontal and vertical weights with great simplicity, elementary shapes aiming to express lightness like Brancusi’s “Poisson” (1918-28).

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135 Apparently Karel Appel & Corneille arrived to the gallery when the exhibition had already closed, but were lucky enough since the owner allowed them to take a look to the portraits exhibition already on storage.
137 They visited the studios of Brancusi, Leger and Giacometti, and Dubuffet’s Exhibition “Le Foyer de L’art Brut”
138 Peggy Guggenheim was friend of Nigel Henderson’s mother, Wyn Henderson.
139 Walsh, *Nigel Henderson*. P.19
141 Van Eyck constantly quoted Brancusi’s aphorisms: “*La simplicité n’est pas un but dans l’art mais on arrive a la simplicité malgré soi, en s’approchant du sens reel des choses*”. See for example the Report concerning the interrelation of the plastic arts and the importance of cooperation for CIAM 6. See Strauven, *Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings 1947-1998*. p.32. These were included as well in Carola Giedion-Welcker. *Constantin Brancusi, 1876-1957*. Neuchâtel : Editions du Griffon, 1958. p.21
Nevertheless both Henderson and Paolozzi were a little bit disappointed about their visit to Brancusi’s studio, although he had posited in that visit great expectation- as Henderson said: “Good!-another myth in perspective at last!”

(IMAGE ENS-8: The Cobra-Amsterdam (Constant, Karel Appel, Corneille), Aldo van Eyck, A & P Smithson in London. Eduardo Paolozzi and Nigel Henderson in Paris. All photographs are from the late 40s or early 50s & IMAGE ENS-9: Karel Appel *Tall Totem* from 1947, Brancusi’s *Poisson* 1928-1928, and W. Turnbull’s *Sungazer* at *This is Tomorrow exhibition*, 1953)

Indeed Aldo van Eyck’s acquaintance of the avant-garde milieu was more intense than Paolozzi’s and Henderson’s experiences. C.W. Giedion had a close relation with many of the avant-garde artists, and was a great specialist in modern art and wrote some of her earlier books on their work. She introduced Aldo to many of the artists and influenced his vision of Modern Art. Certainly, the young artists from the COBRA Group did not experience such an intense relation with the avant-garde art milieu as Henderson or Van Eyck. Neither did the Smithsons or Banham in the case of the Independent Group. But the influence of Van Eyck in the case of the COBRA Group, and that of Henderson, Paolozzi and Turnbull in the Smithsons and the Independent Group debates, certainly shaped their interpretation and conception of the Parisian art scene, still considered the epicenter of avant-garde art. (IMAGE ENS-10: Giacometti, *Palais a 4 heures*, 1932 and and E. Paolozzi *Proposal for the festival of Britain*, 1951)

“Ready-Made”

“Anything man creates with his hands must automatically be granted the stamp of art”
Alöis Riegl, 1899

“Can one make works which are not works of art?”
Marcel Duchamp, 1913

Duchamp’s first ready-made *Wheel* (1913) marked the beginning of Dadaism in New York, but its controversial criticism to the current idea of art was popularized by his *Fountain* (1917). It could be argued that the logic behind the “ready-made” propelled the emergence of Pop Art in England, and of course it was not the Fountain itself, but the logic behind the artwork -developed in Duchamp’s later works, such as *The Green Box* (1938)- which influenced the Independent Group artists at the ICA.

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142 Letter to Judith Henderson, 28 August 1947, Henderson Collection, Tate Archive. See Walsh, *Nigel Henderson* p.19. Nevertheless in a letter written next day after the visit to Brancusi’s studio Henderson manifested his disappointment after seeing in person Brancusi’s sculptures. According to Paolozzi’s biography the visit to Braque and Brancusi was disappointing for him as well. See Paolozzi’s biography in Claude Lichtenstein ed. *As Found: The discovery of the ordinary*

143 Pierre Alechinsky, an artist from the Cobra Group referred to their visits to van Eyck’s apartment: “When he lived in the center of Amsterdam we never failed to visit him. We were always sure to find some intellectual nourishment at his place, it was like a spring in the desert” Strauven, Aldo van Eyck: The Shape of relativity. note 162 on p.123.

144 From Alois Riegl’s introduction to the second version of his Lecture notes (1899). See Riegl, *Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts*. p.297

When Duchamp made his first ready-made he had no specific idea in mind, maybe just an idea of pleasure and uselessness. It was not intended to be shown it was for his own use: “Something to have in my room the way you have a fire, or a pencil sharpener, except that there was no usefulness. It was a pleasant gadget, pleasant for the movement it gave.” Duchamp had an ironic critical attitude towards the artistic milieu that challenged the current conception and acceptance of what art should be: “…I have disliked this ‘artistic life’ in which I was involved. It is the exact opposite of what I want. So I have tried to somewhat escape from the artists through the library…” The 1917 Independents Exhibition held in the Grand Central Palace (New York) produced one of the most influential events on contemporary art: the rejection of one art piece submitted for the exhibition by the president of the Society’s board of Directors. The piece, R. Mutt’s Fountain, was submitted by Duchamp, but rejected regardless of Arensberg’s passionate defense of it: “A lovely form has been revealed, freed from its functional purpose, therefore a man has clearly made an aesthetic contribution…this is what the whole exhibit is about, an opportunity to allow the artist to send in anything he chooses, for the artist to decide what is art, not someone else” Once rejected, Duchamp took it and brought it to Alfred Stieglitz’s Gallery “291”, who, at Marcel requests, immortalized the art piece in a photograph (See IMAGE ENS-7)

The ideas of Marcel Duchamp arrived to the IG entourage through Nigel Henderson who met him personally several times and owned an original copy of The Green Box (1938). It was through Peggy Guggenheim that Nigel Henderson first met Marcel Duchamp. The young Nigel Henderson had found in Peggy Guggenheim a kind of “fairy godmother” who introduced him to some of the avant-garde artists in Paris around the 30s. Through her, Henderson made acquaintances with Max Ernst and Yves Tanguy, but it was Duchamp who made a greater impression on him. Peggy Guggenheim had first met Duchamp at Mary Reynolds’ house in Paris. It was Duchamp who introduced Peggy to modern art. At that time she could not distinguish one work from another: “He taught me the difference between Surrealism, Cubism, and abstract art. Then he introduced me to all the artists. They all adored him and I was well received wherever I went” Nigel Henderson met Duchamp in one soirée at Mary Reynolds’ flat in Paris. Although unfamiliar with Duchamp’s work, the young Nigel Henderson was knocked out by Duchamp’s personal magnetism and the two fell into easy conversation. This meeting was later consolidated when Duchamp visited London to hang the opening exhibition of Guggenheim-Jeune in 1938 and asked Henderson to help him.
“In that long day I spent with Duchamp a couple of years before the war hanging an
exhibition of Cocteau’s drawings of hands and fingers and boring narcissus-featured androgynes-a
day that both hung in the air forever and passed in a puff of smoke like hashish dream- Duchamp
quietly drew me out and extracted my interest in science and an expression of a wish to fly. He told
me he thought I ought to fly and conserve my interest in science. ‘Throw nothing away’. All said so
gently, ironically, serenely- it was almost like hearing the voice from within”\textsuperscript{153}

According to Walsh, through this informal relation with the artistic milieu in Paris, Henderson
gained the confidence to believe that he could become an artist, and ended up in possession of one
of Duchamp’s main pieces, the Green Box (1934).\textsuperscript{154} Richard Hamilton borrowed Henderson’s copy
of the Green Box and tried to translate Duchamp’s notes through a French-speaking fellow, for a
lecture on the Large Glass at the ICA. The lecture was a disaster since the audience considered
Duchamp’s note a joke, and Hamilton ended up mailing his interpretation of the Green Box notes to
Duchamp, wondering whether he might have misunderstood them. Duchamp put Hamilton in contact
with George Hamilton at Yale; thereon the two of them worked together in the English translation of
the notes for publication\textsuperscript{155}

Duchamp’s ready-mades were a pure manifestation of art as a product of the artists will. If
the Vienna School scholars had emphasized the importance of non-rational aspects in art such as:
will, pleasure, desire, fear. Duchamp’s made out of choice (will) an art in itself, and devoted his entire
oeuvre to explore non-rational aspects of human behavior as the counterpart of rationality, he
argued: “Sense and non-sense are two sides of the same thing. Do you see what I mean?”\textsuperscript{156}
Duchamp stopped looking at nature in order to paint it, and started looking at nature as the emerging
consumer society in New York was looking at it- one in which the choice is extremely important. As I
will explain latter on these ideas propelled in the 1960s a redefinition of what modern abstract art
should be.

Duchamp’s influence in the Independent Group was important. Especially for artists like
Richard Hamilton, John Mchale, and others who developed was has been labeled as “British Pop-
Art”. At the same time Duchamp’s works and ideas had an slightly different interpretation in the
“brutalist” gang within the Independent Group -Paolozzi, Henderson and the Smithsons- as I will try
to illustrate later on. Nevertheless all shared a common fascination for the products of “popular
culture”, and used different types of collages techniques in their works. In fact the first Independent
Group meeting consisted of Eduardo Paolozzi’s collages from American magazines through an
epidiascope at the ICA in April 1952.\textsuperscript{157} As the Berlin-Dadaists had done in the 1920s the IG artists
did collages with “ready-made” material, but they did so in a naïve way, meaning, they were
impressed by the imagery of the ads and the comic strips from USA’s emerging consumer society,
and initially praised in some way “popular art” being less critical with the state of the arts in political terms than the Berlin-Dada.

Marcel Duchamp witnessed in New York how art was being transformed in a commodity, something that in Europe was not so obvious at that time (1917); the submission of a urinary turned upside down signed as if it would be a sculpture was a very Dadaist reaction to the transformation of the conditions of artistic production. Why should artists manipulate matter when there was an entire industry doing it in order to satisfy whatever need imagined? In fact artists could work like architects do assembling industrial elements (ready-mades) but driven not according to the specific need that the element is meant to satisfy but according to his own will. The artist’s choice transforms the object for once it is exhibited in a show it is considered art. Duchamp was bringing Riegl’s thesis to the extreme, for there was nothing in the thing in itself, the object does not aim to transcend, it simply challenged the “cult value” people gave to it.

Four decades after Duchamp’s artworks, A&P Smithson brought into the architectural debate their thoughts about the avant-garde devices of “enstrangement” derived from the “ready-made”. Their text “But today we collect ads” traced the line this research is following, from the Objet-trouve to Art Brut. The Smithsons explained Le Corbusier’s architecture as if it would be a Dadaist mechanism-collage made out of popular art elements:158

“The transformation from everyday object to fine art manifestation happens in many ways; the object can be discovered - objet trouvé or l’art brut - the object itself remaining the same; a literary or folk myth can arise, and again the object itself remains unchanged; or, the object can be used as a jumping-off point and is itself transformed. Le Corbusier in Volume I of his Oeuvre Complete describes how the “architectural mechanism” of the Maison Citrohan (1920) evolved. Two popular art devices - the arrangement of a small zinc bar at the rear of the café with a large window to the street, and the close vertical patent-glazing of the suburban factory - were combined and transformed into a fine art aesthetic. The same architectural mechanism produced ultimately the Unité d’Habitation.”

Dadaism was present due to the IG reenactment of it, the editorial of AD Jan. 1955 devoted to “The New Brutalism” included the Smithsons’ definition of the new style and ended up equaling the influence of American advertising and Dadaism: “1954 has been a key year. It has seen American advertising equal Dada in its impact of overlaid imagery; that automotive masterpiece, the Cadillac…; the start of a new way of thinking by CIAM; the revaluation of the work of Gropius; the repainting of the Villa at Garches?” Our incapacity to recognize at first glance the “vertical patent-glazing of the suburban factory” in Le Corbusier’s Maison Citrohan and the urinary turned upside down in Duchamp’s Fountain are related. Enstrangement is the effect experienced by the artist and the spectator, transmitted by the very act of beholding- an aesthetic experience. Artists and architects were aware that industrial production and consumption were going to determined the nature of the artwork, for art was defined as a contest with nature, nevertheless modern art or modern architecture was not in the machine itself but in the artists’ mind, imagination, choice, all-ready-made in advance.

158 Ark 1: Royal College of art. November 1956
“Objet-trouve”

The emergence of the IG’s battle field, the I.C.A. (Institute of Contemporary Arts), and the landing of Surrealism in London were tied together: according to Roland Penrose the ICA began with the International Surrealist exhibition at New Burlington Galleries in 1936.\textsuperscript{159} It was followed by the already mentioned exhibition “\textit{40,000 thousand years of Modern Art}” in December 1948. 1950- the year that petrol and milk rationing ended in England- marked the emergence of the future Independent Group members’ activity: works at Hunstanton school designed by Alison & Peter Smithson begun that year, Richard Hamilton and Nigel Henderson collaborated in the ICA exhibition “\textit{James Joyce: His life and work}”, and the works of Paolozzi, Turnbull and Hamilton were included at the ICA exhibition “\textit{1950: Aspects of British Art}”. The ICA in London was the institutional platform that gathered the Independent Group members. Some of them had initially met at the Slade School of Art in the late 40s (Nigel Henderson, Eduardo Paolozzi, William Turnbull and Richard Hamilton), whose similar concerns on Modern Art strengthen their friendship mainly after their visit to Paris. Whereas the ICA board members, such as Hebert Read, remained tied to Surrealism and the Bauhaus the IG\textsuperscript{160} members relied on a more Dadaist spirit of criticism.\textsuperscript{161} According to Massey, the IG, the influence of Dada and the philosophy of Logical Positivism and Existentialism, “\textit{arrived at a new understanding of modernism which emphasized the history of science and technology and gloried in the disorder of human existence as opposed to the preciousness of metaphysical art}”\textsuperscript{162}

In a way slightly similar to the Dadaists, the informal and convoluted nature of the IG makes very difficult any categorical statement. For the shake of clarity, the present inquiry focuses on the point of view and concerns of certain members of the IG that where close to Alison and Peter Smithson at the time of the projects analyzed. Hence, initially, it will consider mainly the work and ideas of Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi, with whom the architects worked together in two exhibitions that marked the beginning and the end of the IG, namely, the \textit{Parallel of life and art exhibition} organized at the ICA from the 11\textsuperscript{th} September through 18\textsuperscript{th} October of 1953, and the \textit{This is Tomorrow} exhibition at Whitechapel Gallery in March 1955. The Smithsons and Paolozzi met as teachers at the Central School of Arts in 1951. Together with Nigel Henderson they formed something of a “splinter group” within the IG.\textsuperscript{163} At a certain stage the influence of Richard Hamilton and Reyner Banham will be also considered; among the “theorists” of the IG. Reyner Banham, Tony del Renzio and Lawrence Alloway; this survey focuses mainly on Banham’s arguments for they were closer to the Smithson’s concerns. Among the artists of the IG, the work and ideas of Richard Hamilton are taken into consideration for his early relation with Eduardo Paolozzi and Nigel Henderson (whom he met at the Slade school of art in 1948), and his common concerns with Banham and John Mchale regarding the relation of technology, design and art.

\textsuperscript{159} Massey, \textit{The Independent Group}. p.20
\textsuperscript{160} IG, meaning The Independent Group
\textsuperscript{161} This point is made by Anne Massey in chapter 3, in which she ads that IG also “deconstructed modernist design theory”. Massey, \textit{The Independent Group}. p.33
\textsuperscript{162} Massey, \textit{The Independent Group}. p.33
\textsuperscript{163} Massey, \textit{The Independent Group}. p.79 and p.99
The two years Paolozzi spent in Paris from 1946 to 1947 completely transformed his work and enriched his understanding of Modern Art. Since the mid 40s in London, inspired mainly by the work of Max Ernst, Duchamp, Man Ray and Schwitters, Paolozzi had been exploring the technique of collage in his Scrapbook and other works, such as “Head of Demeter” (1946) or “Nike des Paionios” (1946). Following his friend Raymond Mason, Paolozzi moved to Paris to get away from the “Soft and weak tradition of British art.” His early enthusiasm for the Dadaists was nourished in Paris, where he could study closely their work. He visited the big Surrealist exhibition organized by Breton and Duchamp at the Galerie Maeght (July/August 1947) and discovered the work of Picabia at the Galerie Colette. Fascinated by Picabia’s work, he visited several of his exhibitions, including Picabia’s retrospective “491 50 ans de plaisir” at the Galerie Maeght (March 1948). The work of Picabia particularly impressed Paolozzi who certainly founded in the work of the early Dadaist a free and abstract play with the same elements he had been working on (Image ENS-11: Francis Picabia “Reveil Matin”, 1919 & E. Paolozzi “Nike des Paionios”, 1946).

At that time in Paris, Paolozzi learned about Dadaism from the same source as Van Eyck had done: Tristan Tzara’s personal library and art collection. Tzara’s collection was one of the most interesting private collections of primitive art at that time; it included some of Duchamp’s pieces and covered almost thirty years of Modern Art. Together with Mary Reynolds’ collection it gave Paolozzi the opportunity to study the originals works from the Dadaists. Two main things shocked the young Paolozzi: the reliance on chance and freedom performed by Picabia, Duchamp, Arp, and the irrational-intuitive work materialized in Ernst and Schwitters collages:

“‘Tzara besaß die ‘Chinesische Nachtigall’ von Max Ernst. Sie war ein grobes, starkes symbol für mich’... ‘die meisten dieser arbeiten der frühen Dadaisten und auch von Kurt Schwitters scheinen mir zu laut, manchmal sogar zu infantile und zu albern in ihrem Protest gegen ernsthafte Handwerk-lichkeit und gegen alle kunst...Ich bin, in der Tat, sehr für die kunst’”

But what overwhelmed Paolozzi’s spirit as sculptor was not so much the exploration of the Dadaists’ work, already known for him, but the discovery of Giacometti’s work and personality. During his time in Paris, Paolozzi visited, together with Henderson and Turnbull, Brancusi’s atelier, but unlike Henderson who felt great admiration for the Rumanian sculptor, Brancusi’s work left him indifferent. Paolozzi was a rough man, certainly not a cultivated person with enough interest in non-figurative art to fully appreciate Brancusi’s work, as Henderson or Van Eyck did. Paolozzi’s early works- the collages like “Nike des Paionios” (1946)- relied on the human figure or at least departed

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165 “Picabia hat mich sehr beeindruckt” Paolozzi’s quote from Konnertz. *Eduardo Paolozzi*. p.33
166 Paolozzi’s quote from Konnertz. *Eduardo Paolozzi*.P.36
167 “Hat er in london den surrealismus kennengelernt un sich mit seinen freuden dafür begeistert, so kann er jetzt bei mary reynolds und tzara bedeutende sammlungen dadaistischer sowie surrealister kunst und literatur studieren. Es war ein grobes Glück für mich, ihre (M. Reynolds) umfassende Sammlung dadaistischer und surrealister relikte der vorkriegszeit so ausführlich studieren zu können, besonders alle ihre Beispiele aus Marcel Duchamps früher Arbeit”... die zweite wichtige quelle für paolozzi ist tristan tzara mit seiner bibliothek und kunstsammlung” Konnertz, *Eduardo Paolozzi*. p. 38
168 Paolozzi’s quote in Konnertz, *Eduardo Paolozzi*. P.42. One of the things Paolozzi saw at that time was a room covered by Duchamp with cut outs from National Geographic magazine, “as found” objects and hanging sculptures by Calder important for this inquiry in so far as it may have been influential for the idea of Parallel of Life and Art exhibit: “ Ein raum, der von Duchamp mit Karten aus der amerikanischen Zeitschrift ‘National Geographic’ tapeziert ist, dazu einige Objet trouves und einige sehr verbließende Mobiles von Calder, aus Abfällen hargestellt, wie ich sie nie in Büchern abgebildet gesehen habe. Er machte sie für Freunde. Ein Mobile war aus Propellerblättern eines Flugzeuges zusammengesetzt” Konnertz, *Eduardo Paolozzi*. P.40
169 He saw as well Leger’s “Ballet mecanique”. Konnertz, *Eduardo Paolozzi*. P.47
from it. Paolozzi found what he was looking for as an sculptor- Giacometti’s work was a contest and successful materialization of modern man’s condition – the sculptures materialized not a specific man, not a human being as an object, but a human condition in relation with the space and the objects surrounding him. As Sartre explained (IMAGE ENS-12: Giacometti’s Walking man, 1947, photo by Patricia Matisse; the “Invisible object”, 1936, photo by Man Ray):

“In space, says Giacometti, there is too much. This too much is the pure and simple coexistence of parts in juxtaposition. Most sculptors let themselves be taken by this. Giacometti knows that space is a cancer of being, and eats everything: to sculpt, for him, is to take the fat of space; he compresses space, so as to drain off its exteriority. This attempt may well seem desperate; and Giacometti, I think, two or three times came very near to despair… Once he had a terror of emptiness; for months, he came and went with an abyss at his side; space had come to know through him its desolate sterility. Another time, it seemed to him that objects, dulled and dead, no longer touched the earth, he inhabited a floating universe, he knew in his flesh, and to the point of martyrdom, that there is neither high nor low in space, no real contact between things” 170

The artwork was conceived as the dematerialization of space- a preconceived notion of space; the individual human condition in relation to the space surrounding him. Following Giacometti’s path, Paolozzi struggled to materialize his own portrait of man’s human condition: “my occupation can be described as the erection of HOLLOW GODS”. 171 The artwork was conceived as the dematerialization of a spatial relationship- the individual versus a new challenging notion of space. In order to achieve that purpose the artists re-conceived his own notion of space “enstranging” their beings from the pre-conceived definition of space inherited from the social consensus. As I will try to argue later on, the Smithsons operated in a similar way when they discarded the analytic & functionalist notion of architectural space as a tree-dimensional void, and they thought about it as the place into which human associations are materialized.

“Enstranging” himself from the space surrounding him the artist was able to look anew at things, and re-establish a new relation with the objects outside his mind. In order to do so the Surrealists developed several creative devices inherited from the Dadaist use of chance. The notion of the “Objet Trouve” emerged from Giacometti’s relation with Breton in his early period within the surrealism movement. The “ready-made” was an already crafted object, designed with specific purpose that the artist disrupts by using it in a purpose-free art. The “Objet-trouve” in itself is not important; it is important in so far as its finding plays a catalytic role in the artist’s mind. Breton and Giacometti visited a flea market in which the finding of an ancient sculpture played such a catalytic role, for it aroused Giacometti’s inspiration, giving birth to his sculpture “invisible object” (1936). This idea was developed further by Andre Breton’s “L’equation de l’objet trouve” in which – the state of mind produced by the act of discovery was presented as the main goal of Surrealism:

“A la pointe de la decouverte, de l’instant ou pour les premiere navigateurs une nouvelle terre fut en vue a celui ou ils mirent le pied sur la cote, de l’instant ou tel savant put se convaincre qu’il venait d’etre temoin d’un phenomene jusqu’a lui inconnu a celui ou el commenga a mesurer la portee de son observation, tout sentiment de duree aboli dans l’enivrement de la chance…C’est a la

recreation de cet etat particulier de l'esprit que le Surrealisme a toujours aspire...Aujourd'hui encore je n'attends rien que de ma seule disponibilite, que de cette soif d'errer a la rencontre de tout, dont je m'assure qu'elle me mantien en communication mysterieuse avec des autres etres disponibles, comme si nous etions appeles a nous reunir soudain... »

The device of “enstrangement” travelled in time from the Dadaists’ performances to the Surrealist’s “objet-trouve”. It was reconsidered in architectural design by the Smithsons’ notion of the “As found” object. They were essentially devices that propelled the artist to enstrange himself-intellectual devices that allowed for the creation of art-works in which every-day objects were presented to the spectators unable to recognize them entirely at first glance: “a dismembered lock, toy frog, assorted wheels and electrical parts, a broken comb, a bent fork, various unidentified found objects...” were the matter out of which Paolozzi sculpted. Clearly indebted to K. Schwitters’ Merzbau - whose ideas will be pointed out further on- Paolozzi, Henderson and the Smithsons explored within the IG new “aesthetic experiences” of Dadaist heritage.

Art Brut:

“...I use no make up, I don’t wear one expression on my face and hide another in my heart. I am always exactly like myself...” Folly speaks
Erasmus of Rotterdam
The Praise of Folly, 1510

“Up to now Brutalism has been discussed stylistically, whereas its essence is ethical”
Alison & Peter Smithson,
The New Brutalism, Architectural Design, April 1957

Fools always tell the truth: a fool Dutch was one of the early pioneers in the artist’s rebellion against the transformation of the work of art into a commodity. Van Gogh believed that the peasants were in the right path, and not the city dwellers that went to the art exhibitions; he preferred “the simplicity of the popular color prints to the refinement of contemporary painting, and strove towards a similar simplicity of subject and technique”

Van Gogh escaped from the city for he preferred to paint in the country where he could have more contact with nature; so did Paul Gaugin who escaped from Paris to live with the “savages” in Tahiti. Van Gogh addressed people matters painting humble scenes with rough strokes of paintbrush showing oil’s painting pure texture; he found a sacred and indestructible ideal in the peasant’s shoes, their flowers, their fields, and their rooms that were his own. Unlike Van Gogh or Gaugin who never came back, the modern painters of the 20th century returned back to the city after visiting the “savages”-Klee, Dubuffet, Van Eyck and the Cobra Group: Dubuffet and Asger Jorn visited the north of Africa at the same time (1947) following the path of Paul Klee; Dubuffet returned again in 1948, the same year that Corneille visited North Africa for the first time (Spring 1948); Corneille repeated that same trip together with Aldo & Hannie Van Eyck in

1951. All of them visited the north of Africa but did not stay there for too long, they returned to the “civilized” world and struggle to change it.\textsuperscript{177} “Enstranging” themselves from their condition of civilized citizens, artists and intellectuals, dived into the primitive, the savage, and madness seeking an understanding of aspects of human nature that were being obliterated by the rationalistic approach of Western culture, in Dubuffet’s words:

“All the acquisitions of education and socialization modify man, substitute for his true nature, bit by bit, a sort of borrowed nature which becomes habitual for him, and from which he can no longer successfully free himself. His acquisitions, and habits, work as brakes, which automatically spring into action, independently of his will, and even against his will, as soon as he would like to free himself. It is necessary for him, if he wants to produce a creation of art of some value, to suppress these brakes at least when he wants to, and prevent them from working. Now it is the right of madness to shatter these brakes, to force open the doors of these locks and to precipitate the uprising of his savagery… Art does not have anything in common with the plan of the head or with reason…The only art that deserves its name and which has any purchase, is quite on the contrary the one that applies itself to restore the exact, the total truth of things…”\textsuperscript{178}

If the Zurich-Dadaists had tried to search for truth, and restored humanism protesting against the First World War with the creation of “Dada” out of the irrational, the Art Brut in the post-war Paris operated in similar way. They searched for a true art of their own:

“The things that one produces oneself, and which really correspond to one’s true nature, do not amaze one so much. One makes them without thinking about it and moreover even in secret, simply because one loves them, without glorifying oneself in them and without thinking of looking to them as a source of approbation or profits. I believe that it is in “art brut”…”\textsuperscript{179}

If Paul Klee and the Dadaists searched for devices of “pre-logical expression”,\textsuperscript{180} according to Dubuffet the works of Art Brut were an “appeal to the profound layers of the human being, to the layers of savagery”; hence it is only in “art brut” that the natural and normal processes of the creation of art are manifested in their “elementary and pure state”. Art Brut’s search for elementary means of expression focused in aspects of the everyday life; Dubuffet was inspired by everyday behaviors following the path opened by Schwitters’ Merzbau in which everyday objects were glued into the Merzbau:

“There is in the daily practice of the most common life an education more nourishing than the one found in books. The small necessities and most humble actions, the most elementary exchanges, the simplest comments; conceal, like raw fruits, a species of vitamins, which are the only enriching food; and a work of art has virtue only to the degree that it proceeds from these vitamins,

\textsuperscript{177} This is was the second time Van Eyck visited the North of Africa. During his time at the ETH in Zurich, Aldo made acquaintance of another Dutch student Fulco ten Houte de Lange; in their summer trip after the first academic year they went to Italy and crossed the Mediterranean to Tunisia. See Strauven, Aldo van Eyck: The Shape of relativity. p.64

\textsuperscript{178} Jean Dubuffet, “In honour of savage values”, 1951. Lecture delivered to the Faculty of Literature (University of Lille, January 10th 1951) on the occasion of the opening an exhibition “Five Little Inventors of Painting (PaulEnd, Alcide, Liber, Gasduf, Sylvocq)” Published with a translation by Kent Minturn in Anthropology and Aesthetics, No. 46, Polemical Objects (Autumn, 2004), p. 259-268. All Dubuffet’s quotes are from this text.

\textsuperscript{179} He continued “What is missing in everyone who wants to make art, is in the first place the appeal to do it; and secondly, the knowledge to find ways for it to show itself without refraction. It is not the music, which is always missing or which is no good, it is the flute.”

\textsuperscript{180} See 1.1.1 Klee, Arp & Play
…the artist should feed himself as much as possible with these crudities and the most serious defect of works of art and literature is that they are produced by people not directly fed on elementary life…”

The Dadaist criticism to established systems of knowledge was also present in Dubuffet’s criticism. The notion of art as something associated to culture, in the elitist sense of the word, was questioned by Dubuffet’s anti-cultural position in the text “Asphixiante culture”. Dubuffet’s art Brut emerged from the Dadaist protest against established systems of knowledge; art was being turned into a cultural commodity, and Dubuffet reacted founding “La compagnie de l’art brut » in September 1948, together with Andre Breton, Michel Tapié, and others. “La compagnie” was meant to be a non-profit organization looking for art that emerged out of the cultural circles or institutions. As Duchamp had done sending the Fountain signed by an unknown artist (R. Mutt), Dubuffet’s events at the “Foyer de L’art Brut” gathered around an independent organization the customary institutional art in contrast with pieces of unknown artists – usually alienated mad who didn’t know or care about being branded “artists”. Dubuffet reacted against established art, customary art, the art of the museums and galleries, the art critic and professional artists for they parasitized artistic creation empting it of content. According to Dubuffet the institutions turned art into a commercial activity completely unrelated with the real function of it. The prospect for the exhibition “Notice sur la compagnie de l’art brut” (September 1948) illustrated their intentions; it was a criticism to the transformation of art in a commodity, hence the artists praised art created without any attention to current conventions where spontaneity was valuable for its truthiness.

In the after-war period, Dada’s influence led to a common fascination for the art brut of Dubuffet and Giacometti whose work was giving birth to a new aesthetic. The fascination for the primitive art of the Dadaists and Surrealists was a common influence for the young generation of artists emerging within the IG and Cobra. Primitive art had been a constant reference for many avant-garde movements. The IG members were completely aware of it after Herbert Read’s exhibition at the ICA in London (1948) “Forty thousand years of Modern Art”; the exhibition gathered together primitive art with modern works, such as Picasso’s Demoiselles and Arp’s sculptures, and recognized in the primitive expressionism and creativity values out of which modern thinking could learn. The outstanding exhibition on African art at the “Musee de l’homme” in Paris had gathered young artists from both groups (Cobra & IG) overwhelming their young spirits.

The interest of Cobra in primitive art first emerged from COBRA-Copenhagen; mainly Asger Jorn, and the artists from the Linien Group. In the early forties -motivated by the work published in magazines such as Minotaure or Cahiers D’art- the Danish artists visited the “Musee de l’homme” in

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183 The foyer meaning a social center from old French foier, that means fireplace.
184 According to Herbert Read: “The art of primitive people is no longer to us merely a manifestation of the disgusting idol worship of savage and cannibals. We have discovered in it powers of invention and expression which fill us with amazement and seem to point the way to new forms of art which can combine primitive vitality and vision with modern technique and sensibility…” See Herbert Read’s press conference at the opening of the show. From Herbert Read’s press conference at the opening of the show. See Massey, The Independent Group: modernism and mass culture in Britain. p.25
Paris, in the late 1940s Henderson and Paolozzi visited it as well; according to Henderson, it was "a fine ethnographic collection that eats up anything I've ever seen", an exhibition that both friends visited "again, and then again". Paolozzi together with Henderson attended to Tzara's lectures on Surrealism at the Sorbonne; Tzara himself introduced the young Aldo van Eyck to Surrealist and Dadaist literature (Arp, Breton, Eluard, Péret, Ribemont-dessaignes, himself and others), and to his extensive documentation on non-European art. While both the IG and The Cobra artists found in the praise of primitive art by Dubuffet and the sublime roughness of Giacometti’s sculpture a strong source of inspiration for their work. Surrealism was an art movement from the past that nourished the young artists, but the work of Giacometti and Dubuffet were current masterpieces that explicitly manifested their most intimate ethic and aesthetic concerns. Dubuffet’s search for elementary means in the every day life, his critique to the strong relation between art and high culture, and his search for truth in art certainly may have inspired both: the early manifestations of Pop art in the IG, and Cobra’s communist fascination with the astonishing similarities between popular arts from different cultures.

The work of Giacometti was published in Cobra and his work was included in the second COBRA exhibition at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Liege (1951). Eduardo Paolozzi came to know Giacometti through Tzara and visited his studio several times. Paolozzi’s admiration of Giacometti is illustrated in one of the last sculptures he did in Paris, Forms on a Bow (1949). Dubuffet’s “Art Brut” and Giacometti’s work landed in the IG through the personal experience and work of Henderson, Paolozzi and Turnbull. Paolozzi’s work was considered close enough to Dubuffet’s to included it in Michel Tapie’s book Un Art Autre (1952). Dubuffet himself bought six photographs to Nigel Henderson exhibited at the Milan Triennale and the ICA in 1954, and wrote him to praise and encourage his work. Later on a Jean Dubuffet exhibition opened at the ICA (1955) following Independent Group discussions on his work and Giacometti’s.


185 W. Stokvis referred to Asger Jorn’s and Robert Dahlmann’s article on the Cobra exhibition published in the magazine Nyt Tidsskrift for Kunstindustri, nº1 (Copenhague, jan. 1939, p.5-6). The scandinavian artists were guided by the archeologist P.V. Glob who collaborated with Cobra magazine. See Stokvis, Cobra: la conquete de la spontanéité p.129.
187 See Strauven, Aldo van Eyck: The Shape of relativity. p.98
188 See COBRA magazine nº1, 1949. Giacometti sculptures were published in magazine COBRA nº6, April 1950 with a text by Pierre Alechinsky.
189 "In Giacometti trifft er nun einen kunstler, der seinen Vorstellungen weitgehend entspricht und zu dem er eine persönliche Affinität entwickeln kann. Paolozzi verbringt viel Zeit in Giacomettis Atelier, er sieht ihn bei der Arbeit, hat Zugang zu dessen früheren Werken und rechtlich Gelegenheit, mit Giacometti allgemeine künstlerische Fragen, aber auch über dessen Oeuvre zu discutieren." See Konnertz, Eduardo Paolozzi. p.48
189 Sculpture entitled Concrete (1951), the book included texts from Malraux and works from Dubuffet, Pollock, Alexander Calder and Matta. See Massey. The Independent Group: modernism and mass culture in Britain. p.37
190 See Walsh. Nigel Henderson. p.30. Some of these stressed photographs were collected by Henderson’s friend Francis Bacon who shared certain psychological fragility.
191 See Robbins, The Independent Group: postwar Britain and the aesthetics of plenty. p30-31
Conclusion

During the after-war period the Parisian recovered its role as arts capital gathering the avant-garde artists at that time. Attracted by this artistic milieu, artists from Cobra & the IG visited the studios and the exhibitions of the artists that nourished their own reinterpretation of modern abstract art back in Amsterdam & London. Both groups shared a notion of “avant-garde” art grounded in abstract art articulated in the early 20th century that continued to be developed by a rich variety of artists in different ways. The fact that both groups of young artists visited the same exhibitions illustrated the fascination of these young artists had for what was left from Dadaism and Surrealism and emerging artists like Giacometti and Dubuffet. The acquaintance of consolidated artists such as Brancusi, Arp, and Tzara, together with the younger artists such as Giacometti and Dubuffet marked a transition from Dadaism to Art Brut very present in both groups of artists onwards. In fact in COBRA-Copenhagen emerged almost parallel to Dubuffet’s Foyer, not as much as a criticism to the market of Galleries and Museums lest numerous in Copenhagen of course, but in its formal aspects and the experimentation with the art of fools, primitives and kids.

In this regard the “device” of enstrangement was very present among the Cobra artists: bringing them to “paint-behave” like fools, kids, primitives, not for the shake of it but because their fresh-naïve nature was not contaminated yet by the bourgeoisie common sense. As I will illustrate later on they somehow followed the path of Klee conceiving artistic creation as a research on the devices of “pre-logical expression”, in which experimentation played a key role; and they shared these early experiments with Aldo van Eyck who was in fact an intellectual mentor of the young Cobra-Amsterdam.

Concerning the Dadaist influence, the strong ties of Duchamp with the Independent Group members made a difference. The “As found” object was considered as an “objet trouvé” catalytic in the creative process, but at the same time as a “ready-made” charged with irony, double-meaning and the cultural criticism of the Dadaists. Besides, there are the more obvious divergences on the political stance of both groups; the Cobra departed from a strong Communist ideology and defined itself trying to be as cohesive, international and organized as a Communist party, whereas the Independent Group could not have been less formal, and didn’t think of themselves as a group, enjoying the welfare state economical improvement while fascinated with “American culture”

Nevertheless it is worth to point out that E. Paolozzi, N. Henderson and the Smithsons were initially as small group within the convoluted IG. They worked out together an aesthetic that was meant to be labeled Neo-Brutalism. An aesthetic true to the found objects for they remained identifiable, true like the Smithsons’ water pipes and drainage system uncovered, opened to us in their school at Hunstanton (1949-54). Bringing Mies truthfulness of structure one step further, the “ready-made”, the “found-object” moved the Smithsons to present not only pillars, beams, or brick “as found” but also cables, water pipes; every possible element should remain unveiled, true to itself:

“There is a story about Berthold Brecht, that once asked a stage carpenter to fix up a curtain track in his New York apartment; the man did it beautifully, and with its mode of operation discreet and hidden: Brecht told the man to take it down and fix it so its rail and string were exposed: ‘I want to see how it works’. We should like to be aware how such a thing works, but not necessarily to see it work (Neither necessarily did Brecht; this is simple a parable), for our view the invention of the
formal means, whereby, without display or rhetoric, we sense only the essential presence of the mechanisms supporting and servicing our buildings, is the very heart of present-day architecture. 193

Certainly the spirit, the idea behind that eroded word, Brutalism, was not just a matter of “showing the frame structure” or leaving the pipes visible as in Van de Velde’s Haby Barber Shop (Berlin, 1901). 194 It was an ethical positioning of the architects facing the transformation of the artwork - and architecture itself- in a mere commodity; their ultimate goal was to overcome the “mechanical concept” of functionalist architecture, and the regressive tendency of new garden cities; Brecht’s rough & elementary stages were a mean to fight capitalism not an end in itself- so were the naked water pipes and pillars in the Smithsons’ buildings.

Now, regarding the notion of “enstrangement”, what is important is the fact that the devices used by the architects challenged the rationalistic approach in architectural design. The Smithsons worked together with Paolozzi and Henderson in exhibitions such as the Parallel of Life & Art (1953) in which they operated with devices such as enstrangment -as I will argue in detail in the Chapter 2.2. Process. As I argued along this chapter, the device of enstrangement in modern art evolved from the enstrangement of the object in the Dadaist ready-made, to the enstrangement of the subject in the surrealist drift (and found-object), or the enstrangement of oneself that brought Dubuffet to draw like a kid or a fool. A process that Paolozzi and Henderson came to know personally from avant-garde artists gathering in Paris after the World War period; the Dadaist collage enstranged objects of the every-day life in Shklovsky terms

“By enstranging objects…the device of art makes perception long and “laborious”. The perceptual process in art has a purpose all its own and ought to be extended to the fullest. Art is a means of experiencing the process of creativity. The artifact itself is quite unimportant”

Something Henderson, Paolozzi & the Smithsons experienced in the design of Parallel of Life & Art. It was difficult to identify the image-what you were looking; as we can see in the images the exhibit challenged the viewer’s relation to the images spatially but also conceptually. And more important: the artists departed from principles of modern aesthetics and re-interpreted the Surrealist’s exhibitions performing a Dadaist three-dimensional collage using the device of enstrangement, establishing visual relations between the forms of nature and the forms created by man without providing any logical argument (very Dadaist); the object was enstranged its perception made long and laborious. Moreover, at that time, while they were gathering images for the exhibit and hanging around with Paolozzi, Henderson, and the IG people, the Smithsons were able to turn these non-rational means into an architectural design which entailed a new vision of the city. Visiting the poor neighbourhoods of Bethal Green with their friend Nigel Henderson, the Smithsons might have experienced a sort of “enstrangement” when they “found” the kids playing in the street – an image that brought them to re-discover the street. The Smithsons’ explored the idea of the “found object”, the kids playing in the street brought them to rediscover the street. The “As found” element of the city that was considered in relation to the other elements of the city: house, street, district, city.

1.2 IMAGINATION & INTUITION

1.2.1 DADA, SURREALISM & IMAGINATION

« Reduire l'imagination a l'esclavage, quand bien meme il y irait de ce qu'on appelle grossi` erement le bonheur, c'est se derober a tout ce qu'on trouve au fond de soi, de justice supr` eme. La seule imagination me rend compte de ce qui peut tre, et c'est assez pour lever un peut le terrible interdit...»

Andre Breton

Manifeste du Surrealisme, 1924

“...My gouaches, reliefs, plastics were an attempt to teach man what he had forgotten- to dream with his eyes open. Even then I had foreboding that men would devote themselves more and more furiously to the destruction of the earth…”

Hans Arp, 1958

The praise of imagination as a form knowledge can be traced back to the naissance of modernity, Dante's Divine Comedy reads: “O imagination, you who have the power to impose yourself on our faculties and our wills”. Indeed imagination was and has been historically preserved as a precious form of knowledge alternative to reason-from Dante's Comedy, Erasmus's Praise of Folly, or Spinoza's criticism to Cartesianism; it had a revival in the German romanticism of Novalis, who was an important reference for the founder of the Cabaret Voltaire, Hugo Ball.

In modern thinking imagination was reintroduced, either as mean of communication with our inner world-soul (C. Jung's method), or as an instrument of knowledge following alternative channels to those of scientific knowledge (Freudian analysis). In art, the transition from Dadaism to Surrealism was marked by the strong influence of psychology and psychiatry.

Surrealism emerged from Dada and relied on the value given to the unconscious by Freud; Following the Dadaist denounce of the constraints exerted on imagination by the process of civilization, and the materialist idea of progress Andre Breton argued in his 1st Surrealist Manifesto (1924): “Cette imagination qui n'admettait pas de bornes, on ne lui permet plus de s'exercer que selon les lois d'une utilite arbitraire »

The Manifesto, opened with a strong critique to the rationalistic tendency of modern societies that relied on empiricism, and immediate usefulness:

“...Elle est garde par le bon sens. Sous couleur de civilisation, sous pretexte de progres, on est parvenu a bannir de l'esprit tout ce qui se peut taxer a tort ou a raison de superstition, de chimere; a proscrire tout mode de recherche de la verite qui n'est pas conforme a l'usage »

In an open reference to Freud, Breton praised the free ride of imagination when we dream, for it provides freedom to our inner will. Propelled by the implosion produced by Tzara's Dadaist gang arriving to Paris after the exile produced by the 1st World War, Breton's definition of Surrealism

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195 Hans Arp, 'Looking' in Jean Arp, Moma, 1958
196 This quote is from Italo Calvino, Six memos for the next millennium. Vintage Books (Random House Inc.). New York. 1993. p.82
197 Freud's Studies on hysteria (1895), The Interpretation of Dreams (1900) and Introduction to psychoanalysis (1917) together with Jung's Psychology of the Unconscious (1912) marked a new era in western civilization conception of folly, dreams, imagination and human behavior not strictly determined by reason. Dada was a protest against the war and established systems of values
199 i,b.i.d. p.20
certainly found many opponents and was criticized: indeed Freud did not show any interest in Breton’s interpretation that the subconscious was better than conscious mind;\textsuperscript{200} at the same time Surrealism was severely criticized by some Dadaists like Francis Picabia for being “a poor imitation of Dada”. In any case, Surrealism as an international movement with its epicenter in Paris, spread many ideas coming from Dadaism, explored further its experimentation with imagination & intuition in the creative process.

The early Dadaist performances, poems, paintings and collages emphasized the use of imagination in the creative process. The Dadaist evenings were a protest against the excessive rationalization of man and an exploration in new artistic means, commonly considered as primitive or childish. In this exploration the Dadaist did not discarded reason as opposed to imagination, but rescued imagination’s capacity to steal man away from the outer world carrying him off into an inner one, in which he could find devices of “pre-logical expression” and rebuild his own uncorrupted language; a new language created by him and not inherited, as Arp claimed: “…My gouaches, reliefs, plastics were an attempt to teach man what he had forgotten- to dream with his eyes open…”

Imagination was considered by both Dadaism & Surrealism as a key faculty of human knowledge to achieve pure abstract works: as a result they developed techniques based in the use of chance, randomness, and spontaneity to create abstract artworks: collages, automatic drawings, etc. (See image ENS-4: \textit{Papier dechires}, 1916-17)

Reason through the scientific outlook and its technical application for commercial and military purposes provided western civilization with power over the whole world. The struggle for power among the European nations brought the continent to devastation as reason and its technical apparatus became a mere device to obtain economic benefit or power. The Dadaists ironically criticized this behavior, as Theo van Doesburg expressed in his Dada manifesto, \textit{Wat ist Dada?} (1923): “Le Dadaiste reconnait a l’homme quelques valeurs positives: l’instinct de domination et le besoin de s’entre-devorer les uns les autres”\textsuperscript{201} The artists witnessing this disaster could have blamed on “human will”, human evil-nature; but although they criticized humankind with irony, essentially they remained optimistic towards human capacity to recover its humanity. For this purpose they found in the child and the primitive a point of departure to ground their experimentation. From there, every artist developed his own personal device, his own variation on the same theme: imagination, chance, non-sense or the so-called “irrational” and later on the “surreal”, were just devices to challenge their own preconceived logic & aesthetics in art.

Among the artist who praised imagination Arp represents a key figure for two reasons: first, he was one of the first artists among the Dadaists to praise the power of imagination to balance rational thinking; and second, he used his imagination –and pushed other artists- to created artworks in which he ironically criticized the blind fascination of some avant-garde artists-like the Futurists- with machinery. Reason and mechanization were seen by Arp as dangerous agents that blinded human sensibility. In the same way as machines, symbols of western “civilization” were turned into a bitter joke in the work of Raoul Hausman, Picabia, Duchamp. (Image IM-1: The Dadaists making fun

\textsuperscript{200}Andre Breton visited Freud in Viena (1921). See Tompkins. \textit{Duchamp: A Biography}. p.262
of/with machines: Francis Picabia “Portrait of a young American girl in a State of nudity”. 1915; Francis Picabia and Tristan Tzara making fun of the Futurists, Journal de L’instantaneisme nº19, October 1924) Arp criticized the rationalistic tendencies who had brought artists to a blind fascination for technical development; according to Hugo Ball, Arp’s simplistic elements arranged according to chance aimed at “purifier l’imagination et mettre tous ses efforts au service de la découverte non pas tant du trésor des images, mais de ce qui les fonde”. Hugo Bäll in his diary talked about Arp’s personal struggle to balance the excessive “rationalization” of Western’s world insight using imagination. Arp’s struggle to develop his own language emerged from a sophisticated notion of imagination; for him it was more important to discover and understand the sources of our imagination than to focus in the image itself as an end result.

The life and work of H. Arp represented a continuous struggle to evolve, and redefine abstract art as it was being explored by the different avant-garde movements, he was present from the beginning of Dadaism at the Voltaire to the preparation of CIAM 6 (1947); for this reason his contribution is difficult to classify by the historians as simply Dadaist, or Surrealist, Constructivist, or Elementatist, etc. He personified C.W. Giedion’s notion of the avant-garde movements as a “Great Gang” fighting modern-rationalistic attitudes—running away from “classifications”, indeed his imagination “…n’admettait pas de bornes…” (IMAGE IM-2: Hans & Sophie Arp, Duo-Collage 1918; Hans Arp, Mountain-Table-Anchors-Navel, 1926; Hans Arp, Human concretion 1935)

202 « Si l’ai bien compris, ce qui lui importe c’est moins la profusion que la simplification...Il voudrait purifier l’imagination et mettre tous ses efforts au service de la découverte non pas tant de trésor de ses images, mais de ce qui les fonde. Il pense donc que les images de l’imagination sont déjà des synthésés. L’artiste qui travaille a partir de l’imagination autonome et libre se trompe sur l’originalité. Il se sert d’un matériau déjà agencé et ne réalise donc que des assemblages » Hugo Ball about Hans Arp, 1st Mars 1916. Ball, Dada a Zurich, Le mot et l’image.p.18-19
1.2.2 ALDO VAN EYCK & IMAGINATION- A collective enterprise

“Arp asked me to make a series of pen and ink drawings based on pencil sketches his late wife Sophie Taueber had made: he wanted them to illuminate poems of his he wished to publish. I worried about my interpretations whenever her pencil lines were vague and ambiguous, but Arp waved my anxiety saying that I should regard what I was doing as cooperation- the effort of two people, not one, this time: that was how it should be in art – the way one day it will be, he said”

Aldo Van Eyck, 1981

“Enfin l’imagination entre les CIAM !”
Le Corbusier after Aldo van Eyck’s intervention

CIAM 6, 1947

Aldo van Eyck conceived Intuition and imagination as the true faculties of cognition present in different realms of knowledge: art (humanities), and science. He reintroduced the importance of imagination in architectural design during a key period of crisis for modern architecture, in which the rationalistic approach was taking over CIAM. Although initially Van Eyck’s concerns were understood and supported by some key members of the old guard -such as Le Corbusier and Giedion- it was the younger generation of architects, who ultimately backed him and reacted more vigorously to the rationalistic tendency of late CIAM.

Van Eyck’s praise of imagination was not only grounded in the ideas of the avant-garde artists, it was an essential part of his early education in poetry & philosophy. Van Eyck’s father P.N. van Eyck was a prominent figure in Dutch literature; a cultivated writer, journalist and poet who had studied Spinoza deeply, and introduced his son very early to the study of philosophy & poetry. In his twenties Van Eyck got deeply impressed by both, the poetry Blake and his father (Specially his collected poems published in 1940, “Verzen”), and the philosophy of Spinoza’s Short Treatise. Later on his interpretation of Spinoza’s philosophy was strongly determined by C.W. Giedion -who had learnt about the Dutch philosopher from Wölfflin. There were two main ideas coming from Spinoza that grounded Van Eyck’s aesthetics: first the concept of Deus sive Natura, according to which the divine essence is implicit in all expressions of life; and second that “scienzia intuitiva” is the highest form of knowledge, far superior to sensory knowledge (’illusion) or rational knowledge (’belief). The “scienzia intuitiva” was conceived as a form of knowledge that arised from the fusion object and subject, in what Spinoza called “clear knowledge”: “We call that clear knowledge which comes not from being convinced by reasons, but from being aware of an enjoying the thing itself. This goes far beyond the others”

Hence Van Eyck’s praise of imagination in relation to the avant-garde movements during his first intervention at CIAM was grounded on his firm believe that abstract art, and the achievements of “The New consciousness” were the result of an ultimately superior form of knowledge superior to sensory and rational knowledge. He opened his intervention at CIAM 6 (Bridgewater)referring to the New consciousness and ended it praising imagination:

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203 From Ex Turico aliquid novum, in Strauven ed. Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings. p.21
204 This argument is made by Francis Strauven. See Introduction to Chapter 2: Strauven, Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings. p.30
205 Both C.W. Giedion and Van Eyck’s father studied Spinoza and transmitted their points of view to the young Aldo van Eyck. For a detailed account on the influence of P.N. van Eyck and Spinoza on Van Eyck’s thought see “The intellectual world of P.N. van Eyck” in Chapter I. Youth and education. Strauven. Aldo van Eyck: the shape of relativity
“A new consciousness has begun to permeate mankind. Although this new consciousness, this new approach has probably been latent for a very long time, it is only during the last 50 years or so that its nature has begun to reveal itself through the creative activity of a small group of men ranging from architect to poet and from astronomer to biologist...imagination is the only common denominator between man and nature. It is the only faculty with which we can receive and transmit the new spirit...without imagination we are decomposing corpses.”

In this regard it is clear that Van Eyck conceived architecture as a form of art in which imagination played an important role; in fact for the published version of his intervention entitled “Statement Against Rationalism” he opened emphasizing the importance of imagination: “The old struggle between imagination and common sense ended tragically in favor of the later...CIAM knows that the tyranny of common sense has reached its final stage...” Van Eyck warned the CIAM about the negative results of the rationalistic approach; we assume that his notion of imagination was very much attached to that of the avant-garde movements because he continued his speech reintroducing the avant-garde notion of “new consciousness”, the merging of life and art:

“A new consciousness is already transforming man’s mind. During the last fifty years or so...CIAM is first and foremost an affirmation of this new consciousness. The achievement of men like Le Corbusier, Mondrian or Brancusi compels us to believe, surely, that we are indeed approaching a brighter era; one in which grace is expressed in life as it is in art”

Van Eyck reminded CIAM that its origins and spiritual foundations relied in the avant-garde art. Considered not as an end in itself, but as a mean for the development of a new consciousness, and the expression of grace; architecture played an essential role to materialize grace in the design of human environments, hence architecture should never be considered as an isolated object, an end in itself.

Aldo van Eyck closed his intervention questioning CIAM’s rational and mechanistic conception of progress in the design of human environments “Does CIAM intend to ‘guide’ a rational and mechanistic conception of process toward an improvement of human environment? Or does it intend to change this conception?” Van Eyck’s intervention was immediately backed by Le Corbusier who jumped in the debate exclaiming: “Enfin l’imagination entre les CIAM” This moment is important for several reasons: First, the fact that imagination was defended as an essential aspect of modern architecture questions any definition of the architecture of the Modern Movement as rationalistic, meaning strictly rational. And second, the criticism to the rationalistic approach in this period run parallel to the criticism on the influence of analytical thinking; one of the main aspects shared in common by the Team 10 during the CIAM 9 (1953) was their rejection of the

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207 First and last sentences from Van Eyck’s intervention at CIAM 6, Bridgewater 1947 from Strauven ed. Collected articles and other writings 1947-1998 / Aldo van Eyck, p.40-41
208 This and the following quotes of Van Eyck intervention at CIAM 6 are from Statement against rationalism, in Strauven ed. Collected articles and other writings 1947-1998 / Aldo van Eyck, p.42
209 Francis Strauven and Vincent Ligtelijn, Introduction to Chapter 2, i.b.i.d. (p.30) Certainly the crucial importance of the imagination for Aldo van Eyck emerged from the influence of his father, the poet and philosopher Pieter Nicolas van Eyck (1887-1954). P.N. van Eyck conception of imagination as the most important faculty of cognition was developed in his most fundamental essay “Critical research and imagination” and is based on Spinoza’s notion of “scientia intuitiva”. See Strauven, Francis. Aldo van Eyck: the shape of relativity. Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura, 1998. (p.49-55)
analytical/functionalist mentality that continued to dominate the CIAM, despite some post-war renewal claims such as Van Eyck’s intervention at CIAM 6.210

The CIAM’s analytical approach was limited to the measurable and functionally analyzable problems, narrowing down the scope of consciousness and reasoning faculties able to act upon reality. Imagination was a mean to achieve a new sense of order that was needed in order to face the reconstruction: a new sense of harmony. In this regard it is elucidating to consider Le Corbusier’s speech at CIAM 6, since it illustrated some of the future concerns of the Team 10, while at the same time was grounded in a pre-war De Stijl’s idea, namely the need to develop a new consciousness in order to achieve a new harmony:

“La chose don’t il s’agit, la chose qui doit advenir, c’est la re-formation de la conscience individuelle...L’HARMONIE est le grand mot du temps present: mettre toutes les choses en harmonie ! Faire regner l’harmonie sur toutes choses ! et, ce faisant, faire éclore, Faire éclater, Le phenomene poetique ! Et cela est une entreprise collective... C’est un individu qui s’adresse a des freres. Car l’oeuvre commune est, a l’heure de sa naissance, tenue par les mains de quelqu’un qui en a la responsabilite. Cet homme s’adresse a l’inconnu. Mais a des inconnus qui existent, Qui sont la, Qui attendent. Et pour qui L’EMOTION, L’ART sont aussi necessaires que l’eau et le pain...L’harmonie resultera de la reformation meme de la conscience individuelle”211

The non-measurable needs were as necessary as the measurable ones; this will be one of Team 10’s claims. Now the non-measurable needs will be satisfied as a result of a new sense of harmony that it was meant to be achieved. But harmony was conceived as, essentially, a collective enterprise, and would only be possible as the result of a collective awareness; the goal of art would them: to awake the consciousness of every individual in order to achieve a collective new consciousness, that ultimately would bring harmony to our existence. And this was precisely the project of De Stijl- according to Mondrian in that point art will be unnecessary: “Art is only a substitute while the beauty of life is still deficient. It will disappear in proportion, as life gains in equilibrium”212

(IMAGE IM-3: Mondrian, Composition 5 1919 & Mondrian, Composition 1942.)

210 See Strauven, Aldo van Eyck: The Shape of relativity.p.244.
211 Le Corbusier’s intervention at CIAM 6, Bridgewater, 1947. Bakema Archive. NAI. Rotterdam
1.3 NEW CONSCIOUSNESS:

“CIAM is first and foremost an affirmation of a new consciousness”
Aldo van Eyck, CIAM 6 (Bridgewater, 1947)

1.3.1 NIEUWE BEELDING & DADA

When Aldo van Eyck stated at CIAM 6 that “new consciousness has begun to permeate mankind” he was talking about a new perception of space/time developed in science, the arts, and of course architecture- realms of human knowledge in which nature was revealing to man in a new way. From the early stages of De Stijl, to its later development in the hands of Theo van Doesburg, the neoplasticist idea of “new consciousness” was presented as a manifestation parallel to other artistic movements -such as Dadaism- and scientific theories- such as Schoenmaekers mathematics. Nevertheless, whereas Mondrian remained reluctant to evolve the early formulation of De Stijl, Van Doesburg took the leadership of the movement in the 1920s and established intense contacts with other artists in Germany, France, Italy, etc; he was specially shocked by Dadaism and Einstein’s Theory of Relativity- for according to him both challenged the existing pre-conception of space & time (Euclidean space)- they were an ultimate manifestation of the “new consciousness”. In fact one of the most paradigmatic projects representatives of De Stijl, the “Maison d’Artiste” (1923, designed with C. Van Eesteren) can be explained as an early attempt to materialize in architecture a new notion of space-time relationships steaming from the avant-garde movements & science. The project in itself was important as a paradigmatic expression of the “effort moderne”, nourished by a new awareness of space-time relationships. To some extent Van Eyck’s enthusiasm for relativity in relation with the notion of modern architecture followed the path opened by Neoplasticists artists such as Van Doesburg. For years, Aldo van Eyck used Van Doesburg’s “counter-compositions” drawings not to illustrate a specific “modern project”, but to illustrate the new perception-conception of space-time relationships steaming from the “new consciousness”.

The term Neoplasticism -coined by Mondrian and Van Doesburg- was a translation of the term Nieuwe Beelding, a Dutch neologism that was meant to express the perception/construction of the “new consciousness” as it appeared in the first point of De Stijl’s Manifesto (1918): “1. There is an old and a new consciousness of time. The old is connected with the individual. The new is connected with the universal. The struggle of the individual against the universal is revealing itself in the world-war as well as in the art of the present day” The word beelding was a neologism coined by Schoenmaekers coming from his theosophist mathematical theory published in Principles of Plastic Mathematics (1916); Schoenmaekers influence on Mondrian was strong; several of the terms used by De Stijl, and an extensive reference to opposites (internal-external, horizontal-vertical,

213 Aldo van Eyck, Intervention at Ciam 6, Bridgewater 1947, from Strauven ed. Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings p.40
214 The main argument of this chapter according to which a “new consciousness” of space & time propels artistic and scientific discoveries is indebted to Prof. Yehuda E. Safran who developed it in relation with architectural design in a Seminar entitled: 12 Dialogical & Poetical Strategies, taught at GSAPP, Columbia University.
216 Dr. M. H. Schoenmaeker was a Dutch mathematician embedded in theosophical philosophy whose major works Het nieuwe Wereldbeeld (‘The New Image of the World’) and Beeldende Wiskunde (‘The Principles of Plastic Mathematics’) had been published in 1915, and 1916. See Frampton. Modern Architecture: A critical history. P.142
representation-expresion) are to be found in Schoenmaekers book- as Van Doesburg accounted in 1929.217

“This fundamental idea we expressed in the word Gestaltung [Dutch: beelding] in the sense of creative achievement. The word Gestaltung had been revalued; it meant for us superrational, the a-logical and inexplicable, depth coming to the surface, the balance of interior and exterior, the spoils of the creative battle we fought against ourselves. A new terminology came into existence (note: Mondrian’s method of expression was based for the greater part on the new philosophy of Dr. Schoenmaekers “plastic mathematics”)

The Nieuwe Beelding (Neoplasticism) and the new consciousness of time claimed by De Stijl Manifesto was the same thing. The Nieuwe Beelding is a new consciousness of language, a new consciousness of our perception of space, hence a new consciousness of time. Schoenmaekers analyzed the relation between the writing and the visual, raising the question “How is it that many Modern fine artists come to talk and write about their work?” and claimed for a new art that expressed a “new insight into relative objectivity” a new art “without words”. Taking mathematics as a key example he argued that thought could not exist independent from perception. I would argue that the Neoplasticist notion of Nieuwe Beelding was a new plastic-thinking that came after a new perception of the individual in relation to the outside, to outside nature, to the universal. The consciousness of man should be more concern with universal values than with individual ones. The new perception of space merged in the term Beelden (Image), several Dutch verbs that have to do with the perception of the image and its representation: Verbeelden, to imagine or represent (Ver means twist, change, hence refers to imagine creating your on fantasy), Inbeelden, to imagine (In meaning in, when the fantasy is provided by someone to you), Uitbeelden, to express or represent (Uit means out, hence implies a more expressionistic representation) and Afbeelden, to depict or to represent (Prefix Af meaning to separate, to take away). Hence the several terms summarizing subtle variations in the whole process of perception-knowledge-expression are synthesized in one word. The Nieuwe Beelding departs from the universal; outside-inside is perceived as a continuum, the linguistic differentiation: Verbeelden ≠ Inbeelden ≠ Uitbeelden ≠ Afbeelden is dismissed Verbeelden = Inbeelden = Uitbeelden = Afbeelden in a continuum. Ver, In, Uit and Af were prefixes defining the position of the object in relation to the beholder-painter, these different relations are erased in the search for an expression with an static absolute value, a Nieuwe Beelding. A new meaning-value not provided by the object, a non-figurative meaning provided by the inner volition of the artist willing to build (English) - bilden (German) – beelding (Dutch) a new Beeldend (plastic, provocative) for a new world.219

The experimentation and evolution of the concept of Nieuwe Beelding in Mondrian and Van Doesburg were different. Mondrian remained faithful to the horizontal-vertical compositions, and explored dynamism within those constrains only later on moved by the surrealist dynamism of 1940s

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218 Hubert F. van den Berg, The Import of Nothing. p. 132
Manhattan (See IMAGE NC-1: Mondrian, Broadway Boogie Woogie, 1942-43). Initially Van Doesburg's paintings remained faithful to the static horizontal-vertical values of "pure" Neoplasticism, but as he got more involved with Dadaist ideas and Albert Einstein's new Theory of Relativity during the 1920s he began to merge Neoplasticism & Dadasim: he introduced more dynamic-relative values into his painting and poetry. For Van Doesburg's alter ego, the Dadaist poet I.K. Bonset, the role of the Dadaist's acceptance of the "non-sense" ("onzin") was not just ordinary madness, but a "conscious deviation of a standard, which has rusted and turned into a dogma"; it was the necessary precondition for the creation of new values (nieuwe warden). A "true disorder" substitutes an "untrue order"- a first step towards a "true order" for a "new world".220 The term Nieuwe Beelding integrated into a continuum the different positions of the object in relation to the beholder or painter, aiming to produce an expression with a static absolute value, a Nieuwe Beelding. If according to relativity accelerated motion and being at rest in a gravitational field area were identical, Van Doesburg turned the Neoplasticist dualism individual-universal into space-time terms, hence interior=exterior & yes=no. In his Dadaist manifesto 'Wat is Dada?' published in De Stijl (1923) Van Doesburg referred to Einstein as a fellow Dadaist, and negated evolution & change (See IMAGE NC-2: "O exponential n" poem, 1917):

"Dada nie l'évolution. Tout movement suscite un counter-mouvement de force egale, ils s'annulent l'un l'autre. Rien ne change fondamentalement. Le monde demeure toujours pareil à lui-même. Dada abolit le dualisme couramment admis entre materie et spirit, entre homme et femme, et cree ainsi l'indifferenzpunkt, un point situe au-dela de la conception humaine du temps et de l'espace »221

This statement is important for us because the will to bring perception to an 'indifferenzpunkt' was the main goal of Dadaist's "enstrangement" as I argued in Chapter 1.1, in Hugo Bäll words:

"C'est dans l'homme que se trouvent les leviers qui permettent de faire sortir notre monde usé de ses gonds. Il n'est nul besoin d'aller chercher un point d'appui à l'extérieur, dans l'univers, comme le faisait ce mécanicien de l'Antiquité »222

Dada provided an arquimedean point, the 'indifferenzpunkt' in such a way that artists were aware of their current conception of tridimensional space as nothing but a world picture that we create: 'Dada acquiert la capacite de mettre en mouvement le point de vision et de distance fixes qui nous tient prisonniers de nos representations (tridimensionnelles) illusoires'. For Van Doesburg, Dada provided a new perception of time, unveiling a new perception of space, the fourth dimension:223

220 All these are quotes from I.K. Bonset's collection of aphorisms "the Other Face" ("Het andere gezicht" published in De Stijl in June-August-September 1920) van den Berg makes this point. See Hubert F. van den Berg, The Import of Nothing. p.117
221 See Theo van Doesburg, Wat is Dada? (La Haye, De Stijl, 1923) in Archives Dada: chronique. Marc Dachy, ed. Paris: Hazan, c2005.(p.361) The term 'indifferenzpunkt' is a clear reference to Nietzsche, though it could be interpreted as well as a reference to the device of "enstrangement" used by Dadaists (See Chapter 1.1)
222 Hugo Ball, 8th August 1916. See Hugo Ball. Dada a Zurich: Le mot et l'image. p.59
223 One of the important connections with Dada was Van Doesburg's concern with the expression of a fourth dimension. One of the central arguments in Wat is Dada? is that of counter-movement: 'every movement causes a counter-movement of equal strength and the two cancel each other out' (p.10). By negating the duality of mind and matter, Dad creates a point of indifference beyond man's understanding of space and time. We are therefore no longer imprisoned in a three dimensional world, as Dada is able to mobilize the optical and dimensional viewpoint. In this connection Van Doesburg claims: 'Dada is one of the most powerful manifestations of the 4th dimension transposed into the subject' (Wat is Dada?, 11) See, Dada, Van Doesburg
There is no evolution –if yes=no then past=present- no dualism; every yes implies a no, insofar as every movement causes a countermovement of equal strength; the new consciousness of language, space, and time as constructions of the mind provided the artists a vantage point- an 'indifferenzzpunkt' from which a new aesthetic conception could be born, or at least attempted. In this sense the new consciousness is achieved by "enstranging" ourselves -challenging our pre-conceived consciousness of time & space.

Van Doesburg attempted to materialize these ideas into architecture together with Cornelis van Eesteren, a young Dutch architect who attended the Constructivist-Dadaist Congress organized by Van Doesburg in Weimar;225 one of his contributions to the Maison particulière project with van Eesteren were a series of drawings entitled “Counter-construction (Analyse de l'architecture)” dated from 1923, the same year than the Dada manifesto ‘Wat is Dada?’ was published in De Stijl; as I will explain further Van Doesburg’s “tour” in Germany was very intense Berlin, Düsseldorf, Weimar (Bauhaus), etc. reinforcing the kinship with other avant-garde artists German Dadaists (Hanna Hoch, R. Haousman, Hans Richter) and Russian Constructivists visiting Germany (as Lissitzky)

(Image NC-3: Helma Schwitters, Nelyl van Doesburg, Kurt Schwitters and Theo van Doesburg with the issue of DADA 4-5 (Jan. 1923); Theo van Doesburg drawing “Counter-construction (Analyse de l’architecture)” 1923; and Nelly van Doesburg, Mondrian and Hanna Höch (1923))

From the design of the Maison Particulier (1923) Van Doesburg developed a series of ‘analytical studies for the application of color to architecture’. This idea was brought one step further the next year by Van Doesburg & Van Eesteren again in the Maison d’Artiste (1924), in which the countermovement was materialized in a centrifugal-centripetal spatial distribution breaking the rigidity of the tridimensional cube-the Euclidean space; for Van Doesburg the rotating volumes anchored to the stair-case worked as a structural core, challenging the Newtonian laws of gravity that were constraining architects to design mere “cubic architecture”, in Van Doesburg words:

« …La nouvelle architecture est anti-cubique, c'est-à-dire que les différents spaces ne sont pas comprimés dans un cube fermé. Au contraire, les différentes cellules d'espaces (les volumes de balcons, etc., inclus) se développent excentriquement, du centre à la périphérie du cube, par quoi les dimensions de hauteur, de largeur, de profondeur, de temps, reçoivent une nouvelle expression

225 The Dadaist-Constructivist Congress held at the doors of the Bauhaus (Weimar, 1922) was Van doesburg’s provocation to Gropius who remained reluctant to accept Van Doesbourg’s approach in architecture. I will deal more in detail with the Congress in Chapter 1.4 The Elementary. One of the earliest accounts on the Congress was in Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Vision in Motion. P. Theobald. Chicago.1949. One of the latest accounts with historic details about it is Van doesburg tackles the continent: passion, drive and calculation by Doris Wintgens Hötte, in, Gladys Fabre Doris Wintgens Hötte Eds. Van Doesburg & the International Avant-Garde: Constructing a new world. 2009.
plastique. Ainsi, la maison moderne donnera l’impression d’être planée, suspendue dans l’air, de s’opposer à la gravitation naturelle »

The three dimensions, length, height and depth (x, y, z) were re-conceived together with the fourth (Time) materialized through a rotational composition developed in height: a spiral distribution of the spaces, following the centrifugal movement of the artist walking up the stairs, is counter-balanced by the centripetal strength of the structural core that holds the structural slabs.

(Image NC-4: Cornelis van Eesteren and Theo van Doesburg, Plans 1st, 2nd, 3rd floor, Maison d’Artiste, 1923)

The spiral movement has an endless history in architecture, and it was present in the cover of Mecano n° 4-5 (1923), both in the shape of a circular saw and a propeller machine. These illustrations by I.K. Bonset invite us to think that Van Doesburg’s fascination with machine aesthetics should not be taken too literally, as Reyner Banham did. I would rather argue that machines were represented as means, not ends in themselves for considering Van Doesburg’s notion of abstract art as Hegelian is misunderstanding the deep notion of abstract art (See Prelude).

(Image NC-5: Mecano nº 4/5 (1923) and Van Doesburg & Van Eesteren “Axonometric projection (Architectural scheme)” 1923)

The saw has a very Dadaist “destructive-constructive” role, and the propeller is able to provide a new view for its centrifugal-centripetal static-dynamism rose architectural design above the rationalistic-cubic “existenz minimum”. The spatial distribution according to time was seen as the aesthetic manifestation of Einstein’s theory superseding Newton’s gravitational law. Van Doesburg traced a parallelism between logic and geometry. Dada’s negation of the contradiction principle (Aristotle) brought Van Doesburg to challenge the Euclidean space after the new scientific discoveries. Van Doesburg interest in science emerged together with the foundation of De Stijl and his interest in Dadaism:

“Since his time in Weimar-since 1921, then- he had resumed his study of literature on the theory of relativity and the fourth dimension, which had started to interest him back in 1917… They reached their first climax in the counter-constructions of the Maison Particuliere and the Maison d’Artiste”

(Image NC-6: Van Doesburg & Van Eesteren model of the “Maison d’Artiste”, elevation from 1923 and “Construction des couleurs dans la 4eme dimension de l’espace-temps » from 1924, Paris)

In 1924, Van Doesburg did drawings stressing the spatio-temporal aspect: ‘Constructions des couleurs dans la 4eme dimension de l’espace temps’ or simply ‘Construction de l’espace-temps’. Van Doesburg found a representation of the fourth dimension in the Tesseract developed


by the British mathematician Charles Howard Hinton (1853-1907); the Tesseract—also called an 8-cell or regular octachoron—is the four-dimensional analog of the cube, hence the tesseract is to the cube as the cube is to the square. At this time Van Doesburg shared his thoughts with his Dadaist friend the dadaist artist Hannah Hoch (See Image NC-7: Theo Van Doesburg Tesseracts):

“...On May 21 1925 he wrote to Hannah Höch in Berlin: ‘artistically I have been developing a schematic representation for the new space. Have now acknowledged the tesseractic space as the only universal space in which to express form (including film). I am quite sure that mathematical and lucid knowledge is needed, and that all film, architecture, Proun, etc. experiments, no matter how interesting, are based on aesthetic speculation’”

Thereon Van Doesburg explored the possibilities of modern architecture as a form of abstract art, following J.J.P. Oud’s idea that “…the development of a ‘Style’ without architecture was nonsense”. He attempted to do it while merging different artists and avant-garde movements under the banner of De Stijl, as I will argue in the next chapter. In this regard the merging of Constructivism & Dadaism under De Stijl provided together with the notion of the “new consciousness” that of the “elementary”, in short: if the “new consciousness” was the pre-condition, the “elementary” was its main goal, the path was the Nieuwe Beelding.

The “new consciousness” of time steamed from artists’ hope—and will—to reconstruct Europe after its devastation. The new consciousness was the prerequisite for a new construction; the Nieuwe Beelding merged both processes and was felt by some Dutch artists as a transnational manifestation happening in other nations, in other “artistic movements”—even among their war enemies—like Germany. The New Beelding materialized in art a New Vision (L. Moholy-Nagy) a new notion of space-time relationships parallel to science. The Maison d’Artiste in itself was important as a paradigmatic expression of the “effort moderne”, and the aspirations of the avant-gardes in architecture. For years, Aldo van Eyck used Van Doesburg’s “counter-compositions” drawings not to illustrate a specific “modern project”, but to illustrate the new perception-conception of space-time relationships steaming from the “new consciousness”.

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230 Charles Howard Hinton’s main work was A New Era of Thought (1888. Swan Sonnenschein & Co. London) The book analyzes the implications on human thinking of the fourth dimension and develops the idea of the Tesseract cubes a model to get a four dimensional perception as a basis of four dimensional thinking.  
1.3.2 THE NIEUWE BEELDING AFTER DE STIJL

The Smithsons & the Dutch avant-garde

“Holland is unique in Europe, in that its younger architects are scarcely influenced at all by Le Corbusier or Mies van der Rohe. That is due to the extraordinary long shadow cast by Theo van Doesburg…the only real influence on Dutch architecture to-day”

Peter Smithson, 1954

I finished the chapter devoted to “Imagination & Intuition” with Le Corbusier’s statement at CIAM 6: “…L’harmonie resultera de la reformation meme de la conscience individuelle.” Along the previous pages I have tried to argue how the idea of harmony searched by the Neoplasticists steamed from a new way of looking at things, and conceiving space-time relationships, the New Consciousness. This new way of looking at the world and struggle to give a response in architectural terms—according to contemporary needs—was clearly manifested by Van Eyck in the Otterlo meetings (1959), and included by the Smithsons in the opening of Team’s 10 Primer:

“There was a time not so long ago when the minds of men moved along a deterministic groove; let’s call it a Euclidian groove. It coloured their behavior and vision, what they made and did and what they felt. Then…some very keen men, with delicate anthenae-painters, poets philosophers and scientists most of them—jumped out of this groove and rubbed out the deterministic patina off the surface of reality…Our unbounded gratitude is to them: to Picasso, Klee, Mondrian, and Brancusi; to Joyce, Le Corbusier, Schönberg, Bergson and Einstein; to the whole wonderful gang. They set the great top spinning again and expanded the universe—the outside and the inside universe. It was a wonderful riot”

Van Eyck had been the Team 10’s representative closest to De Stijl in all terms, and the Smithsons always showed a great admiration for the Neoplasticist ideas in architecture. They were aware of Doesburg’s “long shadow” and the legacy Dutch Dadaism while they shared Van Eyck’s concerns about the contemporary urgent need to re-think the functionalist-euclidean notion of architectural space.

One of the first articles published by Peter Smithson in Architectural Design Magazine (August, 1954) was on Dutch Modern Architecture. Peter Smithsons’ report not only mentioned Van Doesburg’s legacy, and Van Eyck’s Playgrounds, but also C. van Eesteren’s notion of the city “as a living Schwitters, a great developing mutating organism” although they ultimately criticized the built solutions adopted; according to P. Smithson the “flat-blocks” patterns seemed incapable of “providing any sort of framework for life”. It is worth to point out the fact that Peter Smithson wrote the article one year after the Parallel of Life & Art exhibition and the CIAM 9 (1953). Indeed they knew about K. Schwitters Merzs for it had been important reference for E. Paolozzi. Peter Smithson’s metaphor of the city as a mutating organism in relation to Schwitters’ work makes a lot of sense since the year before they had designed Parallel of Life & Art exhibition together with N.

235 Their friend the sculptor E. Paolozzi was very influenced by Kurt Schwitters and Max Ernst work. See as well the Uppercase nº2 on the work of Kurt Schwitters. Theo Crosby ed. Whitefriars. London. 1959.
Henderson and E. Paolozzi as a Dadaists tree-dimensional collage. As I will explain in Chapter 2.2 (Process) within the IG context -for the sculptor, the photographer and the architects- the New Consciousness was strongly determined by technical means like photography; and their approach was strongly determined by Moholy-Nagy’s *Vision in Motion*, 1947 (See IMAGE NC-8: Images from Peter Smithson’s report on Modern Dutch architecture & IMAGE NC-9: Dutch Dadaism published in the IG milieu)

But in relation with the notion of “new consciousness”, the main argument in common between the Smithsons & Van Eyck was the urgent need to balance the materialistic notion architectural space; conceived up to then as the mere materialization of the new construction systems, in Peter Smithson’s words:

“New architecture is the expression of a new relationship between men and man-made universe. More and more a building is made from elements, each of them having their own relationship to total space…development of spatial conception id of the same value as the development of construction and prefabrication methods.”

A&P Smithson included this statement in their polemical publication of the Team 10 thinking, the Team 10 Primer. Aldo van Eyck strongly criticized the Smithsons’ biased edition, nevertheless for the purpose of this chapter it is worth to note the fact that the Smithsons’ Primer opened with Van Eyck’s words:

“There was a time not so long ago when the minds of men moved along a deterministic groove; let’s call it a Euclidian groove. It coloured their behavior and vision, what they made and did and what they felt. Then…some very keen men, with delicate anthenae-painters, poets philosophers and scientists most of them- jumped out of this groove and rubbed out the determininistic patina off the surface of reality…Our unbounded gratitude is to them: to Picasso, Klee, Mondrian, and Brancusi; to Joyce, Le Corbusier, Schönberg, Bergson and Einstein; to the whole wonderful gang. They set the gret top spinning again and expanded the universe- the outside and the inside universe. It was a wonderful riot”

Now, the main reason why the Smithsons opened the Primer with Van Eyck’s statement is because they shared with him the firm belief that the “Non-Euclidian” notion of space was still contemporary to them; hence it was their task to bring it into architecture. Both reacted against an approach to the European reconstruction conceived strictly in material terms, and grounded in the outstanding technical development produce by the war; it was their task to point out the need of a new “spatial conception” guiding construction, and to achieve it. The optimal structure developed for Hunstanton by R.S. Jenkins (Ove Arup) based on the Plastic Theory of bending (A method developed at Cambridge Univ.) had to be accompanied with a contemporary notion of architectural space.237 “In space there is too much” said Giacometti,238 he had carved and carved matter, seeking

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236 Peter Smithson, Discussion, Architectural Design, November 1958. Included in Team 10 Primer, Alison & Peter Smithson eds.
238 See Sartre’s statement in chapter 1.1.2: “In space, says Giacometti, there is too much. This too much is the pure and simple coexistence of parts in juxtaposition. Most sculptors let themselves be taken by this. Giacometti
for the “elementary form” able to portrait human condition at his time. As I will argue in following chapters the Smithsons as well searched for “elementary forms” to construct a “new” notion of architectural space.

**Aldo van Eyck & The Nieuwe Beelding**

One of Van Eyck’s main achievements was to follow the path opened by the Dutch pre-war avant-garde trying to provide an enriched notion of space & time in architectural terms. Of course for him this task was not reduced to the arts, strictly speaking, for science and philosophy were among the forms of knowledge aiming at these same goals. Nevertheless architecture shared with other arts aspects relatives to the production of form that could enrich architectural practice. And it was precisely from the specific nature of architecture that Van Eyck re-articulated the modern movement’s notion of space & time into a new consciousness of space-time relationships in the architectural realm: place & occasion

Van Doesburg’s conception of *Nieuwe Beelding* as a new perception of time and space in relation to architecture was very present in Van Eyck’s practice and theory. Van Eyck’s deep understanding of Van Doesburg’s ideas came after his acquaintance of Van Doesburg’s wife, Nelly van Doesburg, and the architect Cornelis van Eesteren. Van Eyck made acquaintance with Cornelis van Eesteren in the mid 1940s when he had come to met Sigfried Giedion in Zurich. Van Eyck was very close to Van Eesteren in his early years of practice and worked under him in the Amsterdam Council for the design of the Playgrounds; it was Van Eesteren who invited Van Eyck to CIAM 6 (1947); and it was precisely Van Eesteren’s & Van Doesburg’s *Maison d’Artiste* (1923) the project that provided Van Eyck one of his favourite images to illustrate the notion of modern architecture: Van Doesburg’s ‘Counter-construction’ used in the Otterloo Circles for CIAM 9 (1959). Van Eyck referred to Van Doesburg drawing in a lecture at Delft as follows:

“It could have been a Mondrian, it could have been a formula by Einstein, it could have been E=mc2, it could have been a Picasso painting of 1911, it could have been many things, it could have been a bit of Finnegan’s Wake…But there it is, as a kind of symbol of change and movement. Of the continuum if you like, of the fourth dimension: the Non-Euclidean concept of everything. Just a different behavior, a different movement”

Aldo van Eyck used Van Doesburg’s “counter-compositions” drawings not to illustrate a specific “modern project” in fact it was a representation of a “formless” architecture. Van Doesburg’s and Van Eesteren’s manifesto *Towards a plastic architecture* had as a first purpose to eliminate “all knows that space is a cancer of being, and eats everything: to sculpt, for him, is to take the fat of space; he compresses space, so as to drain off its exteriority. This attempt may well seem desperate; and Giacometti, I think, two or three times came very near to despair…Once he had a terror of emptiness; for months, he came and went with an abyss at his side; space had come to know through him its desolate sterility. Another time, it seemed to him that objects, dulled and dead, no longer touched the earth, he inhabited a floating universe, he knew in his flesh, and to the point of martyrdom, that there is neither high nor low in space, no real contact between things” Jean-Paul Sartre, “La Recherche de l’Absolu », in Les Temps Modernes (Paris), vol. III, no. 28, 1948, pp. 1153-1163.

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238 See Strauven Aldo van Eyck: The shape of relativity p.99
concept of form in the sense of a fixed type”; form was conceived not just in terms of “object” but as a “logic” derived from the perception of space-time relationships. All the aspects outlined in the manifesto pointed out a perception of space as a continuous solid-void:

“5…space is strictly divided into rectangular surfaces…the surfaces have a direct connection with infinite space”, “6…the concept of monumental independent of large and small…everything exists on the basis of interrelationships”, “7…the elements that architecture consists of (surface, line and mass) are placed without constrain in a three-dimensional relationship”, “8…done away with the separation of inside and outside…open ground-plan…”, “9. The new architecture is open…the two-dimensional spatial composition fixed in a ground-plan will be replaced…Euclidean mathematics will be of no further use – but with the aid of calculation that is non-Euclidean and takes into account the four dimensions everything will be very easy”

In Van Doesburg’s “counter-compositions” the axonometric-Euclidean perspective of the building is transformed in a non-Euclidean drawing: inside-outside, walls and rooms flow into each other and overlap as in the stream of consciousness illustrated by any paragraph of Finnegans Wake. Indeed, some early versions of the Otterloo circles included statements like: “When is architecture going to bring together opposites qualities and solutions?” It might sound quite Doesburg for statement indeed challenged logic as much as I.K. Bonset’s “coexistence of opposites”: « De chaque ‘oui’, Dada voit le ‘Non’ correlatif. Dada est oui non » (I will develop this argument further in the Appendix – The criticism to cognition as a paradigm shift: Dada & Constructivism: a coexistence of opposites?)

Another essential element for the configuration of space for Van Doesburg was color. In the Counter-constructions color, conceived as the ultimate manifestation of light-the central element of relativity- takes an active part in expressing the spatial relationships (point 14th of the manifesto). In a similar way Van Eyck explored the potentiality of color -shaping-creating space- with a painter, Constant; together Van Eyck & Constant designed an interior, and created the notion of “Spatial Colourism”; they did a manifesto criticizing the architects who kept “color passive”, and reduced the “enormous space-creating potential of color” to an “accident”. Van Eyck and Constant established an analogy between painting and architecture: they argued that “color is nothing but the color of form and form is nothing but the form of color”, hence architects and painters should work together in order to surpass both architecture (form) and painting (color) “towards a higher organized plastic quality where color and spatiality are unthinkable the one with the other”.242 (IMAGE NC-11: Aldo van Eyck, Purple-Blue Room with painting by Constant)

In the late 1940s and early 1950s Van Eyck’s relation with Cobra was intense and might have nourished his designs for the Playgrounds in some aspects I will tackle further on; although the influence of Cobra in Van Eyck should not be overestimated, I think it is important to consider that Van Eyck’s relation other artists –painters, sculptors, poets- brought him to clearly differentiate the specific role of the architect in the materialization of the Nieuwe Beelding, and the things in common.

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241 Towards a plastic architecture Theo van Doesburg (1924) from Ulrich Conrads, Programs and manifestos from 20th century architecture. MIT pres, Cambridge, Mass. 1971. p.78-80. See also the text Vers une Construction collective from Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren (Paris 1923). First published in De Stijl n° 6-7, 6th year (serie XII, 1924)

Van Eyck’s early explorations with color as a common plastic element of architecture & painting had been articulated by Van Doesburg & Van Eesteren in Towards a plastic Architecture (1923); although new architecture was indeed “economic” and “functional” its main purpose was “plastic expression” color was considered another architectural essential for the plastic expression: “… every architectural element contributes to the attainment on a practical and logical basis of a maximum of plastic expression, without any disregard of the practical demands” Again we can appreciate how modern architecture placed the conceptual purpose-“plastic expression”- over the bodily purpose-function for “a new consciousness [had] begun to permeate mankind”.

But whereas the early modern architecture aimed at conceptual purposes (plastic expression) and practical demands thinking in terms of space & time relations, Aldo van Eyck during the 1950s did so reconsidering contemporary architecture in terms of place & occasion. From the early 1950s to the early 1960s Van Eyck evolved architecture’s goal to achieve plastic expression and practical demands by redefining the notions of space and time in architectural design. As he clearly stated in The Child, the city and the Artists (1962):

“Space experience is thus the reward of place experience. Construction, form and material should therefore never be egocentric…If I say ‘space represents the appreciation of it’, my purpose is again to dethrone abstract properties attributed to it academically. Place is the appreciation of space…Now space-meaning need not be preordained or implicitly defined in the form. It is not merely what a space sets out to effect in human terms that gives it place value, but what is able to gather and transmit.”

Van Eyck was dethroning abstract properties attributed to space in the academies, and tried to challenge as well the linear notion of time in architecture. According to him extremely time in architecture conditioned by visual perception, while he was concerned with the possibilities of architecture to enhance “continuity” and “simultaneity” of time beyond the limits of “visual perception”. Architects thought about time in abstract & metronomic terms negating its ultimate subject, men, and negating its “transparency”. The “transparency of time” stemmed from a perception of the present as a “temporal span experience, shifting in the continuum of consciousness where past and future converge,” such an understanding of the present came from relativity, and merged past and future in what he called the “sense of duration” defined as “the temporal span experience man carries with him in time”. In general terms van Eyck tried to challenged the existing preconception of time in architecture for it was excessively abstract and narrowed down design skills. So in order to be specific he tried to break the linear-mechanical notion of time in relation to memory as something from the past, and to develop specific terms dealing with time in architecture, as the already mentioned “sense of duration”, but also memory and anticipation. (See Image NC-12: Aldo van Eyck’s Otterloo circles, 1959)

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244 See The Child, the city and the artist: an essay on architecture-the in-between realm (1962) Ligtelijn, Vincent & Francis Strauven eds. SUN. Amsterdam. 2008. p.67
245 See Ligtelijn & Strauven eds. The Child, the city and the artist p-74
246 These notions were widely developed in the Chapter 4. The Interior of Time-Memory and anticipation- The Kaleidoscope of the mind from: Ligtelijn & Strauven eds. The Child, the city and the artist p.74-87
Lastly I would like to point out some aspects in common between Van Eyck & the Smithsons in relation with the notion of space and time; although the deepest intellectual insight of Van Eyck made a difference I would argue all shared in common essential aspects. First, the criticism to the simplistic and superficial emulation of the notion of space coming from abstract painting/sculpture that brought “Modern Architecture” to: a narrow-minded idea of architectural space as the negative of the volume, and a linear notion of time -regardless the discovery of relativity- with a blind fascination in technological progress. And second, a rejection to “abstract” notions of space & time in architectural design, instead they tried to consider architecture in terms of place and occasion; consequently they did not look at people “functioning” –working, living, circulating or recreating- but kids playing in a contemporary playground, the milkman walking up the stairs, two lads rambling around the borough… (See Image NC-13: Images from Forum nº 12, 1959/60)
1.4 ELEMENTARY:

“…I am becoming primary, do you mind?”
Piet Mondrian, 1910

1.4.1 DADAISM & CONSTRUCTIVISM: MODERNITY, NOT PROGRESS

The “new consciousness” to which Van Eyck referred at CIAM emerged from core of the early 20th century avant-gardes as a new consciousness of space-time relationships in terms of perception (aesthetic experience) and creation of new forms in art (Gestaltung). The theorization of space perception in modern art was carried on by several artists who developed new ideas about the new means of modern “aesthetic experience” and “the elementary expressional means” in the visual arts. The “elementary means” of an art were considered the basic means in terms of perception and materialization; to some extent they were essential values, permanent and unchanged throughout history. In this sense the notion of the elementary emerged from a culture of resistance to the techno-scientific notion of progress in art, while at the same time aimed at developing a consistent and contemporary definition of painting, sculpture and architecture as forms of art. The notion of the “elementary” evolved from the early experiments of Dadaist poetry, to its materialization in the architecture of De Stijl and Mies’s “Elementary Gestaltung”.

The struggle for abstraction in art emerged parallel to a strong skepticism towards the techno-scientific notion of progress for it was strictly focused on the material development of society; hence abstract art remained doubtful about the supremacy of reason, and was anti-materialist in so far as it gave more importance to the spiritual-conceptual improvement. It could be argued that the discrepancy about the supremacy of material or spiritual purposes in art brought to a double split Western-European art: first between Dadaists and Futurists during the late 1910s (Zurich), and later on, between Suprematists and Constructivists in the early 1920s (Berlin). In general terms it could be argued that; whereas the Constructivists determined to “take possession of reality” saw the world strictly “through the medium of technology”, and “their works represent(ed) a transition to utilitarian architectonic structures”;248 the Dadaist, and the Constructivists attached to Malevich’s Suprematism, criticized the emphasis given to “material progress”, and developed an abstract art based on the use of “elementary means of expression”.

Dadaism vs. Futurism: present vs. future

The early Dadaist gathered in Zurich did not reject the art from the past, mainly the opposite. As it has been argued in the chapter devoted to “enstrangement”, the “elementary manipulation of the materials” pursued by the Dadaists artists found an early manifestation in poetry inspired by the avant-garde literary figures of the late Nineteenth century (See “Language” from Chapter 1.1.1

247 Piet Mondrian quoted by Til Brugman in her article “Piet Mondriaan omstreeks 1910” in the catalogue of the 1946 Mondrian exhibition in the Amsterdam Stedelijk Museum. From Strauven and Ligtelijn ed. P.177
“Enstrangement”). The eponymous name of the Cabaret Voltaire illustrates the Dadaist identification with the satiric attitude of the Enlightenment and its main protagonist, *Candide*. Right after the inauguration of the Cabaret, Hugo Ball referred not only to Voltaire, but to Rimbaud and to Baudelaire in his personal diary. Tristan Tzara’s *Dada Manifesto* (1918) claimed: “I love ancient art for its novelty. It is only contrast that connects us with the past” Hence although the Dadaist can be considered a radical avant-garde movement, such an attitude emerged from an understanding of modern literature from the Enlightenment to the Romanticism. Nevertheless the main difference with previous artistic movements was the Dadaist emphasis on abstraction in art, conceived as the creation of modern elementary forms.

In fact the split of Dada-Zurich with Futurism took place because Marinetti did not embrace abstraction, and remained attached to representational means; at the same time Marinetti’s Futurism was extremely fascinated with machinery and technological development. Initially Ball’s invitation to the Voltaire was open to all kind of artists; many of their contemporaries such as Apollinaire, Kandinsky and Marinetti collaborated in the first and only issue of the *Cabaret Voltaire* (1916). The Zurich Dadaists certainly found an inspiration in Marinetti’s revolt and borrowed certain techniques developed by the Futurist such as the “Brutism” and the simultaneous poem; nevertheless whereas the Futurist used “Brutism” to simulate the multiple stimuli from the city, the Dadaists use it as a provocative experiment on the idea of simultaneity. According to an early Dadaist such as Richard Huelsenbeck, they dismissed Futurist art for being too realistic. Abstraction in art was the cornerstone of Dada-Zurich who unlike the Futurists placed art over the machine, according to Bäll: “L’abstraction est devenue l’objet de l’art. Un principe formel en detruit un autre ou: la forme détruit le formalisme. En principe, le siècle abstrait a été surmonté. Le grand triomphe de l’art sur la machine” Hence they rejected the Futurists for being too realistic in their fascination with machinery turning art into political propaganda. The most radical Dadaists, like Picabia or Duchamp, criticized the Futurists' fascination for technology; Picabia’s journal *Cannibale* no.2 (1920) showed a picture of him with Tzara in a car with the statement: “Revolutionary Gentlemen, your ideas are as narrow minded as those of a ‘petit bourgeois from Besançon’” (See IMAGE IM-1) Marinetti’s Futurist Manifesto from 1909 had praised a “roaring racing car” as more beautiful than the “Winged Victory of Samotrace”; the Dadaists made fun of him for they considered

249 The Cabaret was already named Voltaire before the Dadaists came in. Nevertheless the Dadaists kept the name for it represented the optimist humanist painfully disillusioned as he witnessed and experienced great hardships in the world

250 «15 juin 1916. Je ne sais si, en depit de tous nos efforts, nous pourrons aller plus loin que les sauvages et que Baudelaire ; si malgre tout, nous ne restons pas que des romantiques... » Bäll’s diary refers not only to Voltaire but also to Rimbaud. See Hugo Bäll, *Dada à Zurich. Le mot et l’image* (1916-1917).p.44.

251 In the first issue of the *Cabaret Voltaire* Tristan Tzara’s refers to Mallarme’s “A Throw of the dices” in the simultaneous poem “The admiral seeks a house to rent”. See Robert Motherwell ed. *The Dada painters and poets: an anthology*.


253 “Through Tzara we were also in relation with the futurist movement and carried on a correspondence with Marinetti... We regarded Marinetti’s position as realistic, and we were opposed to it” Richard Huelsenbeck, *En Avant Dada: A history of Dadaism* (1920) in Motherwell, *The Dada painters and poets*. p. 24.

254 From the 13th april 1916. Ball was depicting Arp’s ideas about abstract art. See Bäll. *Dada à Zurich*.p.31

their vision too naïve and simplistic. Picabia openly manifested his opposition to the evolutionary point of view of the Surrealists in the cover of the last issue of the magazine 391 (1924): “Journal de L’instantanéisme”: “L’instantanéisme ne veut pas de hier, L’instantanéisme ne veut pas de demain… L’instantanéisme ne croit qua aujourd’hui, L’instantanéisme veut la liberté pour tous… L’instantanéisme ne croit qu’au mouvement perpétuel…” (See image 26) Although respectful with some art from the past, the Dadaists rejected any system of hierarchies, and understood that man could be imprisoned by his future as easily as he had been imprisoned by his past -through ages- hence they only trusted the present; all along his Dada Manifesto (1918) Tzara criticized the established systems of knowledge for they constrained freedom:

“…abolition of memory: Dada; abolition of archeology: Dada; abolition of the prophets: Dada; abolition of the future: Dada; absolute and unquestionable faith in every god that is the immediate product of spontaneity: Dada… Freedom: Dada Dada Dada, roaring of tense colors, and interlacing of opposites and of all contradictions, grotesques, inconsistencies: LIFE”

After moving to Paris with Picabia and Arp, Tzara had made acquaintance with Van Doesburg who invited him to the Dadaist-Constructivist congress in Weimar (September 1922); at the doors of the Bauhaus, facing some of the faculty and students, Tristan Tzara stated: “… Dada is not at all modern. It is more in the nature of a return to an almost Buddhist religion of indifference… Dada is immobility.” The Dadaists rejected social conventions (Past) and the fascination for technology (Future) since both enslaved their minds, hence in order to be free they remained unpredictable and in constant contradiction-spontaneity was their modus operandi.

The appraisal of the present and the rejection of the evolutionary idea of “progress” were not exclusive from Dada; it was a point of view shared by artists that conceived abstract art as a search for elementary forms. The notion of elementary in art gathered together artists who witnessed Dada-Berlin stepping into political activism in an open dialogue with Russian Constructivists. Among the Constructivists some of the less interested in radical-political activism joined the Dadaists and explored through their work the “elementary” in art. An illustrative example was Lissitzky’s collaboration with Schwitters in Merz magazine, with Hans Richter and Mies van der Rohe in G magazine, with Arp in Kunstismen, and Van Doesburg in De Stijl; there was a “branch” of Constructivists artists that was against a political interpretation of the avant-garde extremely fascinated with the idea of material progress; Merz’s second issue from 1923 included the Manifest Proletkunst against “political” art signed by Schwitters, Arp, Van Doesburg, Tzara and Christoph Spengemann:

“Art is a spiritual function of man, and its object is to free him from the chaos of life (from its tragedy). Art is free in the use of its own means, but is subject to its own internal laws… no real difference exists between paintings showing the imperial army led by Napoleon and the Red Army led by Trotsky… The art that we grant is neither proletarian nor bourgeois, inasmuch as it undertakes to influence culture in its structure, without letting itself be influenced in turn by social conditions.”

256 in Motherwell The Dada painters and poets. p.78 & p.81-82
257 i.b.i.d. (p. 246-247) I.K. Bonset, Van Doesburg’s alter ego told the story of Tzara’s visit to “the house of sick artists Bauhaus” in the Chroniek-Mecano nº Red, October 1922. See The Dada Reader: a critical anthology by Dawn Ades (p.267). For a detailed account of the Constructivist-Dadaist congress see Jane Beckett, Van Doesburg and De Stijl in Sheppard Ed. Dada: studies of a movement
Van Doesburg: From Dada to the elementary

“Elementary and universally intelligible principles on visual art must be established-which is what is attempted here”

Theo van Doesburg, Principles of Neoplastic Art, 1922

Dadaist and Neoplasticists evolved plastic art to the realm of pure abstraction, and they conceived pure abstraction as the exploration of elementary forms. Whereas the Cubists, Futurists and Expressionists remained attached to representational means from the early 1910s, in the early 1920s the merging of Dada-Berlin and Russian Constructivism wanted to “take possession of reality” through “political” action. Nevertheless, parallel to the artistic volatility in Berlin the artistic position of some artists remained out of either the “representational” means or political aspirations; instead, they continued to explore the elementary means-forms and materials-in poetry, painting, sculpture and architecture bringing abstraction to its limits.

Initially the term elementary was attached to the exploration with raw materials in abstract art. According to Tzara’s 1918 Manifesto “(constructive artists) don’t want to give an illusion by the means of colour on canvas, but work directly in iron, wood, glass, etc…” At that time pure abstraction was being developed by Mondrian’s early Neoplasticism reducing the means of painting to horizontal and vertical lines and primary colors applied in the canvas in such a way that the traces of the brush were still visible; hence abstraction rejected “representation” in it whole sense for Mondrian’s strokes wanted to make clear that it was just “painting applied with a brush over a piece of fabric” (IMAGE EL-1: Macel Janco sculpture, 1917; Moholy-Nagy’s Nickel-Plastik, 1923; and Mondrian’s painting 1942-44)

Abstraction was conceived as a search for the elementary means that were essential for every visual art (painting, sculpture, architecture) regardless the material purposes; therefore the task of representing nature in painting or sculpture (decorative-visual purpose), or the mere satisfaction of the bodily functions (bodily purposes) in architecture, were either dismissed or considered secondary. The elementary expressional means of painting, sculpture and architecture aimed at making the work of art independent, free, and true to itself. In Principles of Abstract Art, Van Doesburg argued very consistently the idea that every work of art should seek for beauty with its own means: “The (truly exact) work of art is a metaphor of the universe obtained with artistic means…the great step forward made by the exact formative work of art consists in the fact that it

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p.141. Kurt Schwitters had already attacked political art in his article “Merz” in Der Ararat, 1921.
261 This point was made by A.B. Nakov who argued that the “emphasis [is] placed on the formal creative aspects of the materials themselves”, Annely & David Eds. Dada - Constructivism: the Janus face of the twenties. Juda. Annely Juda Fine Art, London, 1984.
262 A tragic example of the typical misunderstanding between the Neoplasticist notion of “non-figurative”-abstract painting with a narrow minded idea of abstraction was Max Bill’s re-painting of an original Mondrian painting for he thought it was not “well finished”: “When Max Bill returned a Mondrian he had borrowed from C.W. [Giedion] for an exhibition, Aldo [Van Eyk] noticed to his dismaythat the Swiss constructivist had considered it necessary to paint over the original to produce a uniform, neutral surface” See Francis Strauven, Aldo van Eyck: the shape of relativity. Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura, 1998 (Footnote p.86)
achieves equilibrium by pure artistic means and these alone.” He defined abstract art as a rigorous intuitive method that pictures reality as science does aiming at being “objective and universal”: “We reject all subjective choice of forms and are prepared to use objective, universal, formative means.” a contest with nature that operated by “reciprocal cancelling out of means borrowed from nature”: position, dimension, proportion, and color. The elementary expressional means of painting, sculpture and architecture were developed out of an artistic interpretation of Cartesian three-dimensional space. Painting, sculpture and architecture were reduced to harmonic determined relations of position, dimension, proportion, and color (IMAGE EL-2: Spread of Van doesburg’s text showing the Neoplasticist’s “elementary expressional means” for the visual arts). Van Doesburg’s Principles articulated clearly our current notion of space, either as the negative of the volume in sculpture, or as a positive (elementary) expressional mean in architecture. Departing from Mondrian’s work he developed a clear and consistent formal theory based on the principles of abstract art providing examples of its materialization in painting, sculpture and architecture. The main goal of the exploration with elementary expressional means was what Mondrian called “formative harmony” a Neue Gestaltung was created “to give truth in the way of beauty... The work of art becomes an independent, artistically alive (plastic) organism in which everything counterbalances everything else” (IMAGE EL-3: Spread of Theo van Doesburg’s Principles of Neo-plastic Art, illustrating the use of elementary expressional means in painting, sculpture and architecture).

The idea of “elementary expressional means” coined between 1915 and 1917 became extremely important for Van Doesburg; by the end of his life “L’elementarisme” governed all his artistic production: texts, paintings and architecture. At a first sight Van Doesburg’s atelier at Meudon (1930-31) - the last building designed by the founding member on De Stijl - could be interpreted as a rejection of some of the earlier Neoplasticist experiments. Nevertheless it could be argued that it was mainly the opposite: it was the logical evolution from Neoplasticism from conceptual (abstract) painting to a consistent materialization of a “style” in conceptual architecture. To some extent none of De Stijl’s “architects”: J.J.P. Oud, Rietveld, Van Doesburg... and later on, Van Eyck, ever abandoned the search for a true contemporary architecture conceived as a form of art. The atelier in Meudon, like the late architecture of Rietveld, the great masterpieces of Oud, and the early work of Van Eyck, were a logical evolution of De Stijl principles.

Parallel to the emergence of De Stijl’s painting and architecture, Van Doesburg explored the elementary means of language in poetry inspired by the Dadaists experiments. From the “X-Beelden” (“X-images”, 1920) poems in which words are loosely tied to objects and meanings, he evolved to the “Letterklankbeelden” (“Letter-sound-images”, 1921) poems in which letters are arranged without meaning “according to its abstract sound values” (Both I.K. Bonset’s poems were

263 Theo van Doesburg, Principles of Neoplastic Art, 1923, p.33-34
265 Next chapter will develop more specifically the influence of the scientific outlook in De Stijl’s ideas
266 Mondrian’s quote from Theo van Doesburg, Principles of Neoplastic Art, 1923
267 Here the term “style” is used in Worringer’s interpretation of it as the consequence of the “urge to abstraction” in the artist’s kunstwollen. The term conceptual-abstract is used in the sense defined by A. Riegl in the Prelude.
268 See Hubert F. van den Berg, Theo Van Doesburg’s De Stijl, and Dada p.132
published in De Stijl nº11 Nov. 1921) At the same time Van Doesburg published his first public discussion on Dadaism, the article “Dada” in the Nieuwe Amsterdammer. Around that time as well, De Stijl published IK Bonset’s “Het andere gezicht”, stating:

“Dadaism- When behind ‘non-sense’ a sense is hidden, which is a deeper than that of the standard, ‘non-sense’ is not only allowed but even necessary. Thus Dadaism will create new supersensible [or: transcendental] standards”


The search for elementary forms brought van Doesburg to break away with the strict purism of Mondrian, first joining the Dadaists, and later on the Constructivists. The Dadaists pamphlet Mecano gathered: Moholy-Nagy’s sculptures and reliefs, Raoul Hausman’ collages (Head of Tatlin in Mecano, Red, 1922) drawings from Picabia, Max Ernst, statements of Mondrian, etc. (IMAGE EL-5: Images from Mecano red, blue, yellow) Van Doesburg’s will to merge Dada and Neoplasticism probably was a manifestation of a common commitment to avant-garde abstract art. The critical spirit aroused among the artists together with an exploration of the elementary means of expression; to some extent their idea of abstract art was overcoming the perception of form –paintings or sculptures -in terms of object; for Van Doesburg the idea behind Mondrian’s composition, M. Ernst’s drawings or R. Hausmann’s collages was one and the same thing: abstract art was an intuitive form of knowledge aiming at establishing relations between the things in themselves and our minds – abstract art was a transcendental form of understanding- the path to cover was the search for the elementary. Aldo van Eyck had original issues from Mecano, and certainly enjoyed to quote Mondrian’s statement about Max Ernst “Max, vous savez il fait la meme chose que moi mais dans l’autre cote du monde”.

If the merging of Dada & Neoplasticism had brought abstract art to a radical exploration of elementary means in poetry and painting, the encounter with Russian Constructivism provided a totally new perspective. The political activism of Berlin-Dada (Hausmann) merged with the Soviet art “landing” in Berlin during the early Twenties brought Suprematist’s ideas to “Western” Europe. Two main exhibitions exerted a great influence in Berlin’s artistic milieu: the exhibition organized by Ivan Puni in Der Sturm gallery (1921), followed by the big exhibition of Soviet Art held at the van Diemen Gallery on Unter den Linden including the work of Lissitzky, Gabo, Pevsner, Rodchenko, and others. The Constructivist’s idea of “art as organization of one’s entire existence” had brought the exploration with elementary expressional means to emulate science’s will to provide a world picture of reality.

269 In Mecano, no. 4-5 Bonset attacks as well the Neo-Classicist and Paul Klee. See Hubert F. van den Berg. The Import of Nothing. P.115-116
270 probably given to him by Van Doesburg’s widow Nelly van Doesburg
271 This is why for Van Eyck a painting by Miro was equal to a Mondrian: “Mondrian or Miro? After all, Mondrian and Miro...were in the first place both partisans of the same great riot and against the same outworn hierarchy of values...In Miro the world was made relative within one man, in Mondrian man was made relative within the world. Now the first would be inconceivable without the second, and vice versa...That is why I say Mondrian and Miro” Speech for the award of the 1962 Sikkens Prize. Translation of a speech held in the Amsterdam Stedelijk Museum, on 3 November 1962. In Strauven and Ligtelijn ed. Aldo van Eyck: Collected writings. p.169
272 As Tafuri pointed out “Puni’s atelier-as Hans Richter also recalls-became one of the most important centers of artistic encounters: Eggeling, Richter, Ehreburg, Shkolovsky, Hausmann, and Nell Walden met there periodically and wrote about it” See Tafuri, The Sphere & the Labyrinth. p.131-132
The term "elementary art" appeared for the first time in 1921: Raoul Hausmann, Hans Arp, Puni and Moholy-Nagy had published in De Stijl the manifesto “Aufruf zur Elementaren Kunst”. The notion of “Elementaren Kunst” (Elementary Art) was developed throughout the early Twenties within a network of artists and publications in central Europe: ABC, Zenit, Ma, Veschi/Gegenstand/Object, G magazine, and Merz. In most of them Dada and the early Constructivism of Malevich’s group in Petrograd had a strong presence. The leading figure of abstract art in Russia had been K. Malevitch; who together with I. Puni, M. Menkov, I. Kliun, K. Boguslavskaya and Rozanova “led the struggle for the freedom of objects from the obligations of art”. One of the earliest manifestations of the Suprematists had been the “0.10” exhibition (Petrograd, 1915-16) and Malevich’s text “From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism. The New Realism in Painting” Malevich published this essay in which he summarized his point of view about abstraction, conceived as a non-figurative realism grounded in the idea of non-objective art- meaning simply “that in Suprematism things, objects, etc. are not treated”; the text presented Suprematism as a criticism to previous academicism seeking for a true art, conceived as a non-figurative creation of our own; a product of our contest with nature through non-rational means, in Malevich’s words:

“I have transformed myself in the zero of form and dragged myself out of the rubbish-filled pool of academic art…In art there is a need for truth, not sincerity. Things have disappeared like smoke; to gain the new artistic culture, art approaches creation as an end in itself a domination over the forms of nature. The square is not a subconscious form. It is the creation of intuitive reason. It is the face of new art…Before it, there were naïve deformities and copies of nature. Our world of art has become new, non-objective, pure…Everything has vanished…These forms announce that man has gained his equilibrium by arriving from a single reasoning to one of double reasoning. Utilitarian reasoning and intuitive reasoning…(My emphasis)”

Soviet art overwhelmed Western-Europe: Suprematist art presented itself as a realist art driven primarily by intuitive reasoning in seek for truth. It offered Van Doesburg’s entourage a radical materialization of art as a form of knowledge capable of creating a world picture of reality alternative to the one provided by science and technology. The avant-garde congress held in Düsseldorf (29-31 May 1922) gave birth to a resolution published in De Stijl n°4 (April 1922) signed by Van Doesburg, Lissitzky and Richter stating:

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273 Malevitch continued “non-objectivity in general has nothing to do with it. Suprematism is a definite system by which the movement of color passed along the long path of its culture” from “Suprematism” in the catalogue of the “10th State exhibition: Non-objective creation and Suprematism” Moscow April 27, 1919 exhibiting the work of: V. Stepanova, Ivan Kliun, K. Malevich, M. Menkov, L. Popova, Olga Rozanova, A. Rodchenko, N. Davidova and A. Vesnin. Patricia Railing ed. Malevich on Suprematism : six essays, 1915 to 1926. Iowa City : University of Iowa, Museum of Art, 1999.p.45

274 “From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism. The New Realism in Painting” 3rd edition pub. Mikhail Matushchin’s press, The Crane (Zhuravl). Although dated “Moscow 1915”, it was published in Nov. 1916 with two illustrations—a black square and a black circle. Malevich closed this essay mentioning the group of Suprematists following the “0.10 The last futurist exhibition of paintings” Petrograd, Dec. 1915- Jan. 1916. See Railing. Malevich on Suprematism.

275 This argument has been widely developed by Andrei B. Nakov; according to him the criticism to the idea of progress came together with the criticism to the logic of history as a realization that relied upon the technological advances produced by the development of the pure sciences. Andrei B. Nakov, Dada gives me an intolerable ‘malasie’ in Dada - Constructivism: the Janus face of the twenties. Annely & David Juda Ed. Juda Fine Art, London, 1984. All the references to Nakov arguments are extracted from this text
“...2. Building, which means organizing one’s means into a unity (Gestaltung) is all important for us; 3. This unity can be achieved only by suppressing arbitrary subjective elements in the expressional means; 4. We reject all subjective choice of forms and are preparing to use objective, universal, formative means...”

Hence modern abstract art was conceived as an “organization of one’s entire existence, in the same manner as science and technology”. The elementary forms of Lissitzky’s Prouns were published in the cover of De Stijl nº 6 June 1922, together with Hans Richter’s texts on film; the issue included as well a text and Dadaists poems from Van Doesburg’s alter egos -I.K. Bonset, and Aldo Camini; Van Doesburg’s text “Contre les artistes imitateurs” - illustrated with a white square – reads: “La vie se manifeste comme de la nature et de l’espirit. L’art s’occupe de la vie. Le propre sujet de l’art (en generale) es l’unite. L’unite de la nature et de l’espirit est la realite”

Van Doesburg argued that art from the past focused on the “exterior form” (visible) whereas modern art focused on “interior nature (non-visible, meaning the spirit)”. The artist must seek for “unity or harmony” struggling to create a “culture of the inner form” through counterbalanced relations, “rapports equilibres des contrastes vers une unite plastique”. Every art uses its own means: colour for painting, volume for sculpture, and space for architecture; in such a way that the work of art becomes a real, and independent object. Van Doesburg was redefining Neoplasticism in Suprematist’s terms as the “revelation de l’unite: nature-spirit”.

According to this logic architecture was the most suitable art form to achieve the avant-garde goal: an art form in which the “unity or harmony” takes place uniting our inner-world spirit, with the nature, the world outside our body. Hence Van Doesburg and the artists who shared his approach - gathered in Germany at that time- went to visit the most “Modern” school of architecture, the Bauhaus. Dadaist and Constructivist gathered together under the banner of Doesburg’s Neoplasticism at the doors of the Gropius Bauhaus (Weimar, Sep. 1922). Van Doesburg, Lissitsky, Hans Richter, Karel Maes and Max Burchard signed the manifesto of the “Union Internationale des Constructeurs Neo-plastiques” appeared before the Congress in De Stijl nº8 (August 1922). According to the text, artists should work united for the union was "economic"-optimal gathering different points of view- a modern method of organization. The artists considered themselves “constructeurs” aiming at a new conception of life according to modern times; they used “elementary expressional means” (“moyens d’expression elementaires”) according to objective modern means of working; Neoplasticism was redefined as “ce qui par ses consequences reforme essentiellement la vie reelle (inclusivement l’invention et la decouverte de nouveaux materiaux) Chaque objet un progress”. Essentially they aimed at solving practical problems conceiving art as a mean that

276 Manfredo Tafuri’s statement. The argument is partially developed by Tafuri in “USSR- Berlin, 1922: From Populism to ‘Constructivist International’”
277 De Stijl nº 6 June 1922 The following quotes from Van Doesburg are from the same text
278 Van Doesburg’s plan to “conquer” the Bauhaus has been widely discussed. According to Doris Wintgens account, this was his second visit to the Bauhaus, the first one took place in the summer of 1921: he threw parties for students and masters and during March 1922 delivered at his studio at Weimar (outside the Bauhaus) private De Stijl lessons opened to Bauhaus’ students. Although the course was publicized at the Bauhaus students were said to be impeded to assist or told that De Stijl course was dangerous by Bauhaus faculty. See Van Doesburg tackles the continent: passion, drive & calculation, by Doris Wintgens Hötte, in Fabre, Van Doesburg & the International Avant-Garde
mirrored science in its objectivity and capacity to improve human habitat: “Cette internationale n’est pas le resultat de quelque sentiment humanitaire: idealiste ou politique, mais celui du meme principe amoral et elementaire sur lequel la science et la technique sont basees”

The consequences of the Constructivist-Dadaist congress will be analyzed further on, for now it is important to point out the fact that these artists aimed at mirroring the world picture set out by science by means of their art. Their immediate goal was not the “material” transformation of reality emulating applied technology but certain kind of “elemental” objectivity that characterized pure science and of course had grounded technical developments.

In this regard the Soviet influence was extremely important for they have already witnessed the limitations of a strictly materialist-functionalist interpretation of abstract art serving the established powers; this was illustrated by the fact that Van Doesburg’s *Principles of Neoplastic Art* was published that same year than De Stijl’s issue devoted to Suprematist art. At the same time Van Doesburg’s attitude towards Gropius Bauhaus illustrate the DIALECTIC between De Stijl’s objectivity and rigor on the one hand, and the Dadaists praise of non-rational aspects of creativity. Van Doesburg’s “attack” to the Bauhaus tackled both: first, on the one hand he criticized Gropius for its lack of objectivity and rigor; according to W. Gropius Bauhaus aimed at “bundle all creativity in the arts into a unity, the reunification of all disciplines in the field of artwork as the inseparable components of a new art of building”. Van Doesburg interpreted Gropius attempt as “a consistent elementarization of architecture”, that was accepted, but criticized his approach for it was failing due to a lack of “system” and “objectivity”; resulting in an untested attempt at innovation leading to extravagances. And second, on the other Van Doesburg invited Tristan Tzara to the Bauhaus where he delivered a speech criticizing “the house of sick-artists”, presenting Dadaism as an alternative non-rational attitude to the subjective-expressionist approach of J. Itten and the recently hired professor W. Kandinsky.

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279 De Stijl nº 9 Sep. 1922 included Malevich’s “black square” in the cover, Suprematists paintings of Puni, Popova and Rodchenko.

280 Van Doesburg accounted “when I, during my first visit in 1920, asked the director in which way he planned to realize the collective Bauhaus-idea, I was greatly surprised to learn that he absolutely rejected the notion of collective building and ‘left every-body free to work whatever way he fancied’ This was, of course, bound to result in excesses. Although very many things have changed and improved since that time, and machine-made products rather than hand-made ones were extolled, this lack of system is the basic cause for the Bauhaus’ scanty positive or original results in a period of five years” From “Teaching at the Bauhaus and elsewhere: From copy to experiement” Vol.2, nº10 October 1925, pp-363-366.

281 Van Doesburg criticized Itten’s outdated methods used in the ateliers (stone sculpture, glass, steel, wall painting) based on the arts &crafts tradition.

282 Indeed Van Desburg’s attack has been interpreted as a personal revolt of Doesburg against Gropius for he had hired Kandinsky instead of him. That same year Paul Klee and Oscar Schlemmer were hired (1922). See special issue of Controspazio on the Bauhaus, specially “the dark side of Bauhaus” by J. Rykwert on J. Itten and R. Banham “Il vangelo dil Bauhaus” and T. Maldonado “Ancora il bauhaus” April-May 1970
Van Doesburg attempted to conquer the Bauhaus for he firmly believed that the ultimate goal of De Stijl’s ‘elementary art’ was the creation of a modern style in architecture.283 At that time Van Doesburg’s explorations in architecture crystallized in several projects with Van Eesteren: the Maison d’Artiste and the Maison particulier (1923), a competition for small shopping centre (1924), and the Citte Circulation (1924-29), apparently inspired in Tristan Tzara’s ideas. The Citte Circulation was meant to be called “systeme Tzara” -a reaction against centralized urban plans like Le Corbusier’s “Ville contemporaine” with a de-centralized layout of rotating squares. There are two interesting aspects of the project in relation to the “dialectic” mentioned before: first, the already mention centrifugal-centripetal movement of the Maison d’Artiste manifested in the tower plans developed in horizontal creating a continuous network; and second, programmatically the rigidity of the higher network contrasts with the ground, left completely free in terms of circulation and devoted to more enjoyable use as a green area.284 The design seems to literally manifest the co-existence of non-rational Dadaism on the ground level, emerging from nature, and the “objective” values materialized “above naturalistic reality” -with a windmill pattern- widely used by Neoplasticists painters. Nevertheless this early -and almost naïve- approach to architectural design evolved to more “elementary” solutions as Van Doesburg faced the construction of his projects.

IMAGE EL-8: Citte Circulation (1924-29). See also IMAGES NC-4-5-6: Van Doesburg & Van Eesteren “Maison d’Artiste”, 1923

As I argued before the intense dialogue established with other avant-garde forms- among them Russian aart- brought Van Doesburg to change his approach to abstract art, as it was manifested in his paintings and architecture. On the one hand abstract art became more "elementary" in so far as it seek for harmony with more simple and "objective" values, as in the “Counter-composition VI” 1924-25 (See IMAGE EL-9) Interestingly enough that sort of "elementarism" was an excessive complication for Mondrian; Van Doesburg’s use of diagonal lines produced a definitive rift between both artists. But as he explained in his article “Painting: from Composition to Counter-Composition” (De Stijl 73/74 , 1926/7) the diagonals were not a rejection of the vertical-horizontal pure values but a simple act of rotation.285

Parallel to this evolution in painting, from 1922 to 1930, Van Doesburg’s architecture evolved towards an elementary simplicity of forms; from his early experiments with Van Eesteren to his last project, the studio at Meudon: we can see how the geometry of the studio is much more simple and

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283 Apparently it was J.J.P.Oud who persuaded Van Doesburg before founding “De Stijl” about the fact that the development of a modern “Style” without architecture was non-sense. See the article by Peter Smithson, The Work and writings of J.J.P. Oud, in Architectural Design, 1961

284 “The most radical solution to congestion in old cities, Van Doesburg contested, was to break open the walls of streets, let light and air make use of the third dimension in order to rise literally skywards…not in the manner of the American skyscrapers which left street-fronts and (two dimensional) traffic trenches intact, but by suspending blocks of flats in a four-pillar structure…Van Doesburg’s ‘traffic city’ did away with the street network and opened up the city on all sides…The entire project…presupposed a new attitude on the part of its future inhabitants. The ground floor, the ground itself, was reserved for every kind of traffic moving in every conceivable direction, and for parks…The suspended block created more free space and eliminated the encroachment of the ‘frontal city’…” See Ever van Straaten. Theo van Doesburg : painter and architect. The Hague : SDU, 1988.p.184-185

285 This point was developed in Michael White’s text Theo van Doesburg: A Counter life, in Fabre, Van Doesburg & the International Avant-Garde. p.74
colorless than the Maison d'Artiste. While designing “Citte Circulation”, and before the project at Meudon, Van Doesburg collaborated with another Dadaist, Hans Arp, in two projects: the Aubette cafe (1928-29), and several versions of the Arp-Doesburg atelier (1927). The Aubette Café, in which Sophie Arp took part as well, was an outstanding example of interior design, in which he had for the first time the chance to create the elementary architecture he had in mind (IMAGE EL-10 & EL-11: Aubette Café (1928-29) by Theo van Doesburg with Hans & Sophie Arp)

Van Doesburg’s designs evolved from a colorful and structurally sophisticated “early Neoplasticism” to an austere-monochromatic and structurally simple- “elementary architecture” materialized in both: the Atelier at Meudon (1927-30), and the Concrete art paintings (1929-30). Van Doesburg and Arp used the name concrete in order to avoid the misleading connotation of the word “abstract”, as an abstraction of a “figurative” image that we identify with the real object.286 Later on in 1951 Aldo Van Eyek used Arp’s term and referred to Mondrian, Van Doesburg, Malevich, Lissitzky and Pevsner as the “non-figuratives”.287 (IMAGE EL-12: “Art Concrete” letters and studies for “arithmetic composition”, and “Arithmetic composition I” (1930) & IMAGE EL-13 & EL-14: Van Doesburg Studio at Meudon, 1927-30)

Compared to the Maison d’Artiste the artist’s studio surprises us for its simplicity of forms: the isometric perspective manifests objectively two cubes, one slightly elevated above the other providing a covered (front) and un-covered terrace (back); the access from the back walking up the stair enters the house by a central corridor deserving both sides (main room, cabinet and toilet) ending up in the studio area; from the studio we can either descend to the ground level or go up to the rooftop. The studio was the last architectural manifestation of the “Elementarisme”, as it was defined by Van Doesburg in the text “painting & sculpture: elementarisme” (1924-27)288 published with the project. The “Elementarisme” was a logical evolution from Neoplasticism of an abstract art notion as a “contest with nature”; it was based in the coexistence of positive & negative values-matter & spirit, fast & slow, active & passive- a continuous psicological –not political- revolution against the established systems at work. Therefore architecture was not any more considered an art-for art and architecture are, according to Van Doesburg, completely incompatible; nevertheless an essential recipe was clearly stated in order to produce it: the elementary principles applied to architecture tried to finish with the arts & crafts tradition, methods, and decoration, aiming to produce an “elementary architecture” free from aesthetic intentions.

286 Concretion was defined by Arp in the following terms: “…Concretion signifies the natural process of condensation, Hardening, coagulating, thickening, growing together. Concretion designates the solidification of a mass. Concretion designates curdling, the curdling of the earth and the heavenly bodies…” See ‘Looking’ by Jean Arp in Arp. MOMA ed. N.Y., Distributed by Doubleday, 1958 (p. 14-15) 287 In the opening speech for a Constant exhibition Amsterdam Van Eyck uses the term abstract talking about work of the group Creatie. He criticizes it for being a misunderstanding of the true principles of Neo-Plasticism, and considered the work of Constant like that of Mondrian: “He is concrete, just like Mondrian. He is, like Mondrian, not abstract!” See Constant and the abstracts in Collected articles and other writings 1947-1998 / Aldo van Eyck. Francis Strauven and Vincent Ligtelijn eds. Amsterdam: SUN, c2008 (p.66) 288 From De Stijl, vol. VII, num. 78, p.82-87
It is quite probable that the young Aldo van Eyck lived in Van Doesburg’s studio when he made acquaintance of the avant-garde artists living in Paris after the war. According to F. Strauven in 1944 C.W. Giedion sent Aldo to Paris with messages for Giacometti, Tzara, Pevsner, Vantongerloo, Nelly van Doesburg and Brancusi; later on Aldo returned to Paris several times always lodging in Meudon with Nelly van Doesburg “who soon came to call him ‘my son’.”

Although Van Eyck’s notion of the elementary in architecture certainly followed Van Doesburg’s path he found in Brancusy’s work and aphorisms a very refined notion of “elementarisme” articulated in slightly different way with the term “Simplicite”; in Van Eyck’s words:

“…There are few things of which I am so convinced as the necessity of achieving an universal reduction of everything toward the elementary; not only the elementary in form but also, and above all, the elementary in content. When Brancusi says that “La simplicite n’est pas un but dans l’art, mais on arrive a la simplicite malgre soi, en s’approchant du sens reel des choses» what he means by simplicite is what I mean by elementary. We have come to a point where a start has to be made on elementary expression…”

Brancusi’s statement can be found in C.W. Giedion book on him, and in De Stijl nº7 (1927) published by Van Doesburg; the issue included Brancusi’s works and aphorisms together with Mondrian’s Composition (1922) in the cover, and Van Doesburg’s manifest of the Elementarism.

Brancusi’s aphorism was used by Aldo Van Eyck in the Report concerning the interrelation of the plastic arts and the importance of cooperation- prepared for CIAM 6 (1947) ; Van Eyck’s text opened with Arp’s statement “Art concret est un art elementaire”: Arp defined it as an art that aimed to transform the world, save man from vanity, simplify his life, and re-identify man with nature. In the text for CIAM 6 Van Eyck claimed that art should reveal the elementary relying on imagination

“Form should be a medium not an end. The difference between limited forms and elementary forms lies exactly in this distinction. The former merely tickle the primary senses, which explains their universal popularity: the later penetrate the infinite resources of imagination, the only faculty with which we are able to receive and transmit style or grace…”

(IMAGE EL-15: De Stijl issue nº7 (1927) Mondrian’s composition (1922), Brancusi’s sculpture (1926), and Human Concretion(1935) by Hans Arp):

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289 See Strauven’s Aldo van Eyck: The shape of relativity. P.98
291 De Stijl nº7 (Year 7th, Serie XIII – 1927)
292 The text was not published but printed copies were send to Sigfried Giedion and other CIAM members. The text was written before Van Eyck’s intervention at CIAM. Together with Van Eyck’s “Statement against Rationalism” summarizes Van Eyck’s early critc to CIAM’s rationalism. See, Strauven, Collected articles and other writings 1947-1998 / Aldo van Eyck (p.32)
293 According to Strauven by “Grace”, Aldo van Eyck “meant the beauty of natural behaviour in animals and mankind, in the flight of a bird or a gracious gesture”. See footnote nº3 Chapter 2 “Advocate of the avant-garde in post-war CIAM (1947-1953). See, Strauven, Collected articles and other writings 1947-1998 / Aldo van Eyck
The most important aspect of the notion of the elementary in art was the fact that it introduced in modern architecture an idea of FORM in terms of logic. Abstract art evolved from Cubism and Futurism still attached to objects to a Dadaists and Neoplasticists non-figurative art that overcame the notion of form in terms of object. Western European art welcomed the new language and solid consistency of Soviet non-objectivity for they brought a notion of form in terms of logic, and art was conceived as a natural product out of modern times’ own logic. Van Eyck’s expression “limited forms” was a reference to a naïve narrow minded understanding of form in terms of object or process whereas his notion of “elementary form” relied in a deep notion of form as an intuitive logic whose purpose was approach to the real sense of things: the “elementary” is not a goal in art, but its achieved by approaching to the real sense of things.

“...La simplicité n’est pas un but dans l’art, mais on arrive à la simplicité malgré soi, en s’approchant du sens reel des choses…”

From Dada to Constructivism (Suprematism) -merged within Neoplasticism- the avant-garde notion of the elementary erased the “rationalistic” separation between form-content; it aimed to transcend the ultimate artificial construction of rationalism, the discontinuity object-subject. Hence avant-garde art was ultimately conceptual in so far as it was transcendental -it wanted to transcend bridging the gap between the thing in the mind and the thing in itself- modern art was ultimately a transcendental intuitive logic. At the same time, the “Elementarisme” in its logical evolution from Neoplasticist painting to Elementary architecture was an abstract art notion -a “contest with nature”; it emerged as a DIALECTICAL co-existence of positive & negative values- matter & spirit, fast & slow, active & passive- a continuous revolution against the established systems at work. Art was avant-garde insofar as it was in continuous renovation-revolution; could architecture then be considered avant-garde art?
1.4.2  C.W. GIEDION & MODERN ART: Van Eyck’s notion of the Elementary

The relation of Van Eyck with the Giedions began around 1942; when Aldo Van Eyck made the acquaintance of C.W. Giedion in a Surrealist vernisage, in which he acquired his first painting, an Yves Tanguy composition (1938). C.W. Giedion introduced Van Eyck to the core of the modern artists living in Zurich and Paris: Giacometti, Tzara, Leger, Braque, Pevsner, Vantongerloo, Nelly Van Doesbourg, and Brancusi; at the same time, her wide knowledge and deep intellectual insight shaped Van eyck’s conception of modern art: “Carola Gideon-Welcker…She opened my windows – and I haven’t closed them since…” Among the artists that Van Eyck met in Paris, Brancusi, Arp and Tzara shook his sensibility more deeply. Arp encouraged Van Eyck to make a series of ink drawings from Sophie Täuber’s sketches, stressing the necessity of cooperation among the artists, an idea that Van Eyck will carry on in the architectural realm. (IMAGE EL-16: Brancusi, Tristan Tzara with others at Brancusi’s studio; First page of Tristan Tzara’s La Main passé dedicated to Annie van Eyck “Dada reste” in Zurich 1946.)

Tristan Tzara’s spontaneity and rebel spirit was very present in Van Eyck’s ideals, Tzara’s motto “Juste ce qu’il faut de souterrain entre le vin et la vie” a dedication for Van Eyck’s one-year old daughter was widely used by Van Eyck for subsequent publications on architecture. Tzara dedicated also Annie van Eyck’s copy of “L’Homme approximatif”, with a Max Ernst quote: “L’oeil toujours neuf au detour des choses”. For a radical Dadaist like Tzara the spirit of continuous curiosity and childlike fascination should be constantly renewed; although the Dadaist as a group had been dissolved into the surrealism movement or spread in different corners of Europe, Tzara reminded the young Van Eyck that Dada’s spirit was still alive: “Dada reste” was Tzara’s dedication of “La main passé” to Van Eyck the 24th of January 1946, Zurich.

But the artist who shook Van Eyck’s spirit more was Brancusi: “For us, Brancusi was the summit of what art could mean”, both for his personality and his work. Certainly the studio of the Rumanian artist in Paris was one of the epicenters of the Paris avant-garde, where he received the visit of his close friends like Duchamp and Tzara (IMAGE EL-16). For the young Van Eyck Brancusi’s atelier had certainly the special aura of a timeless capsule overcrowded of sculptures illuminated by the skylights, as Van Eyck stated: “I wish you could have seen Brancusi unveiling his gleaming bird and fish. He really unveiled the timeless mystery and splendor of heaven and ocean”.

Among the artists that van Eyck met in Zurich through C.W. Giedion, it was also R.P. Lohse, with whom for many years Van Eyck established an on going dialogue on the relations between art

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294 See Strauven, Aldo van Eyck: The shape of relativity. P-82
295 From “Ex Turico Aliquid novum” Strauven, Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles. p.18
296 “…he wanted them to illuminate poems of his he wished to publish. I worried about my interpretations wherever her pencil lines were vague and ambiguous, but Arp waved my anxiety aside saying that I should regard what I was doing as cooperation- the effort of two people, not one, this time: that was how it should be in art- the way one day will be, he said. I was flattered, eased and a lot the wiser…the Alsation poet…” i.b.i.d.p.19
297 i.b.i.d.p.21
298 This point is made by Van Eyck himself and Strauven.i.b.i.d.p-20
and architecture. Lohse had come to know Van Eyck’s work in 1948, when the magazine Bauen+Wohnen\textsuperscript{300} runned by Sigfried Giedion and Richard Paul Lohse published Van Eyck’s conversion of a tower room in Löffer house (Zurich 1944-45).\textsuperscript{301} Lohse painting had evolved from an early Suprematism into a Neoplasticism charged of rhythm after he saw Mondrian’s Broadway Boogie-Woogie (1942-43). The work of R.P. Lohse was strongly admired by C.W. Giedion. According to her: “What carries Lohse beyond the foundation of highly-developed systematics and methodical consistency is the genuine poetical sensibility he is filled with”\textsuperscript{302} From Dadaists to Neoplasticists. Van Eyck experienced the co-existence of complementary opposite points of view in Modern Art. He referred to all of them in Giedion’s terms as the “Great gang” and illustrated their strong solidarity, referring to anecdotes such as Mondrian’s answer to a provoking question at the opening of a Max Ernst show in New York: “Max, vous savez, il fait la meme chose que moi, mais dans l’autre hemisphere”\textsuperscript{303}

C.W. Guideon’s view

C.W. Giedion not only introduced Van Eyck to Modern artists, but to some extent shaped his early conception of Modern Art. C.W. Giedion published several books on artists that Van Eyck quoted constantly, such as Brancusi, Klee and Arp. In fact many of Van Eyck’s quotes of these artists are to be found in C.W. books.\textsuperscript{304} Several of the concerns she summarized in Modern Plastik (Zurich, 1937) are to be found in Aldo Van Eyck’s work and theory as well:

First, C.W. Giedion introduced Modern Plastik Art with a very simple statement: “Plastic art is \textit{VISIBLE} and \textit{TANGIBLE}. It is derived from the formation of actual bodies”; following Riegl’s definition for C.W. Giedion art was the result of a “\textit{contest with nature}”. She conceived the artwork as a being, and referred to it as a “body”; it might be a figurative or non-figurative artwork but was after all a product of man’s nature “\textit{Man becomes thing-like, the thing becomes man-like}”\textsuperscript{305} She did not understood abstract art as an “abstraction” from nature, but mainly the opposite, she relied on the elementary notion of art as “a fruit of man”, in Arp’s words: “\textit{Art is a fruit out of man like the fruit out of a plant like the child out of the mother...}”\textsuperscript{306} The second important aspect of Giedion’s conception was the emphasis placed on the power of imagination and intuition in the artistic creation emerging from Dada & Surrealism. For her both movements shared in common capacity to fuse individual & community through the work with elementary objects of the everyday life:

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{10} From “Ex Turico Aliquid novum” in Strauven Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings. p.16.
\bibitem{11} C.W. in Richard Paul Lohse Festschrift, Niggli, Teufen, 1962.
\bibitem{12} From “Ex Turico aliquid novum” Francis and Vincent Ligtelijn P.19 Another anecdote that illustrates the solidarity between artists is tell by Van Eyck in the opening speech for the Van Doesburg exhibit. In Rotterdam: “…at a gathering in Zurich in honour of Van Doesburg, someone thought he could please Van Doesburg by running down Picasso at the table. Van Doesburg immediately stood up and gave Nelly a sign, upon which they left together…” See On Van Doesburg, I.K. Bonset and De Stijl. In Francis and Vincent Ligtelijn Brancusi’s motto “\textit{La simplicité n’est pas un but dans l’art mais on arrive à la simplicité malgré soi, en s’approchant du sens reel des choses}” in Modern Plastik p.12 and in Carola Giedion-Welcker. Constantin Brancusi, 1876-1957. Editions du Griffon, 1958. Van Eyck’s quotes on Arp are found as well in Carola Giedion-Welcker. Jean Arp. New York, H. N. Abrams.1957
\bibitem{11} C.W. giedion quote in Strauven. Aldo van Eyck, The Shape of relativity. p.79
\bibitem{10} The text was first published in the magazine Transition Magazine in 1932, in a piece called ‘Notes from a Dada diary’. Included in: Arp. Moma.1958. See the text by C.W. Giedion, On some Arp Reliefs
\end{thebibliography}
“Dadaism created a metaphysic of banality by discovering the plastic vitality that emanates from nameless or unnoticed things, and their unsuspected powers of self-expression...Surrealism dissolves the wall between our inner and outer life. It permeates dreams with reality and reality with dreams, confronting or fusing the psychical and the physical, the conscious and the subconscious, the individual and the community...”

Among the Dadaists Giedion was fascinated with the originality of Arp’s elementary organic forms “identical beneath their mutations, which he uses as symbols of a single pre-existing master-form” According to Giedion, Arp was giving form to a common elemental prototype always present that emerged according to nature’s own rhythm; it could be found in a snowflake, a stone, or in the works of man: “All Arp’s work mirrors a state of cosmic flux. Movement is conveyed by the suggestion of growth into shape, or by the rhythms of ebb and flow” This conception was very present in Van Eyck early ideas about art and architecture summarized in the “Report concerning the interrelation of the plastic arts and the importance of cooperation” for CIAM 6 (Bridgwater, 1947) in which he stated:

“Art should always be natural, it should produce its own forms naturally instead of reproducing those of nature artificially...Art should reveal the elementary whether the elementary be complex or not”

What is important about Van Eyck’s point is the context in which he argued it. The young Van Eyck is reminding to the CIAM members an essential component of Modern Art that was being obliterated: at that time, the “international style” of the Modern Movement was being reproduced emptied of content-literally “abstract” forms populated the new boroughs of European towns; whereas Van Eyck is pointing out simply the new consciousness should drive the Nieuwe Beelding towards the “elementary”. Instead of reproducing forms artificially emulating abstract paintings or sculptures architecture should produce forms according to its own logic- uniting men and its community with nature, the environment.

The search for elementary forms was ultimately related with the Dadaist obsession about the co-existence of elementary opposites. Hans Arp referred to the Dadaist period in Zurich in Blakian terms « Nous aspirons à un ordre nouveau qui put retablir l’equilibre entre le ciel et l’enfer » In Modern Plastik Art, C.W. Giedion refered to Brancusi, Joyce and Klee as artists in which life constantly vibrates within a double aspect of the heavenly and the hellish “Scarceley do we hear the angel singing, than the demons start pinching. According to Brancusi, ‘God and the Devil are not separate beings, not fixed either here or there, but exist everywhere and at once” And lastly I mentioned how Van Doesburg’s “Elementarisme” equaled matter & spirit, the positive & the negative conceiving them as united. A beautiful example of how Aldo van Eyck articulated these notions was the already mentioned issue Forum nº12, devoted to the twin phenomena, “Night & Day”; the magazine illustrated with an eclipse the co-existence of twin phenomena in nature; images of old cities during the day (Hadhramaut), and new cities at night (New York), were contrasted illustrating the different behavior of its inhabitants - a pedestrian street in a sunny afternoon & the speed of the

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307 See C.W. Giedion, Modern plastic Art.1937
309 See C.W. Giedion, Constantin Brancusi.p. 196.
310 See final part of the previous chapter .1.2.2. Aldo van Eyck & The Nieuwe Beelding
traffic lights at night. The city was presented as the ultimate architectural event of nature in which both, night and day, the sun and the moon co-exist, an eclipse of opposed but complementary human behaviors. (IMAGE EL-17: Cover of Forum nº12 “Night & Day” 1959/1960)

Van Eyck designed architectural spaces in which the co-existence of two opposite & complementary situations took place: places where you could feel both inside & outside the building at the same time; Van Eyck used the Smithsons notion of the “doorstep” to illustrate an architectural space where the kid feels both outside and inside his house: images from vernacular architecture showing a child sitting on the doorstep of his house311 that we could contrast with the picture of play-pool areas the Amsterdam orphanage (1955-60)

(IMAGE EL-18: A child sitting on the doorstep of his house from Forum 8 (1959) and kids at the play-pool areas of Van Eyck’s Orphanage in Amsterdam (1955-60))

One important aspect of that image relates the “elementarisme” and the notion of time (previous chapter). Van Eyck’s notion of time was illustrated with the Otterlo Circles showing the Parthenon, the pueblo village and Van Doesburg’s drawing co-existing in time; a slightly similar idea grounded C.W. Giedion’s synthetic vision of Modern Plastic Art in relation with time. According to her Plastic Art was an essential part of human culture that connected men with nature and the universe spatially and temporally; for her: painting, sculpture, and architecture were materializations of analogous space-time perceptions that co-exist; primitive art and Modern Art were united for they aimed at the same values and were all co-existing artwork in our present world.312 Van Eyck’s notion of the “transparency of time” in relation to architecture was certainly indebted C.W. Giedion’s aesthetics; and her vision of art as a form of knowledge that created a different world-picture of reality in every age, but according to certain “elementary” material and spiritual needs that ultimately united mankind in space and time. (Image EL-19: Images from C.W. Giedion Modern Plastik Art (1938) showing ancient sculpture and a traditional table in contrast with modern sculpture from Brancusi and Giacometti; see also IMAGE NC-12: Otterlo Circles, Aldo van Eyck (1959))

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311 Forum 8 (1959)
312 Giedion considered that movements analogous to visual arts happened in other aspects of culture such as poetry, music, philosophy and physics According to C.W. Giedion the last scientific discoveries in Physics "radically modified our conceptions of space, time and motion; and …mass… now considered as a factor conditioned by speed "This is direct allusion to the relativity’s theory, very present as well in Van Eyck’s theory. Quote from Modern Plastik art p.17
1.4.3 MIES VAN DER ROHE: Elementary Architecture

“CIAM extended the inherent weaknesses of the Bauhaus climate-teutonic, stale, didactic derivative – instead of its strength. I was laughed at when I mentioned Schlemmer and Klee at Bridgewater. Only Moholy and Breuer (atrocious architect) and Herbert Bayer were allowed. And no Mies, oh no, no Mies! Too near De Stijl, and the Bauhaus hates De Stijl because it got what it stood first hand from Van Doesburg and some Russians passing by”

Aldo Van Eyck, Letter to Giedion on the dissolution of CIAM

Undated manuscript, obviously written shortly after 10 Dec. 1960

The notion of the elementary gathered together the mainstream of avant-garde artists during the late 1920s in Germany, and produced one of the most outstanding examples of modern architecture: the work of Mies van der Rohe. As opposed to De Stijl’s architects who developed modern architecture out of the influence of abstract painting, Mies’ did not seek to emulate the experiments on the elementary carried on by painters or sculptors; he understood the logic of abstract art, the notion of the elementary, the Dadaist appraisal of the present, and created contemporary “abstract” architecture according to its own logic. In the late 1950s Ludwig Hilberseimer’s text “K. Malevitch & the Non-objective world” explained Mies’ achievement as a materialization of Malevich’s “non-objective” art; while denounced how Mies’ buildings were being emulated without understanding its inner logic. Mies’ notion of architecture as a form of abstract art was completely misunderstood as rationalistic, functional and a mere matter of building details & techniques. Bur Mies architecture sought for truth and objectivity as much as Mondrian’s paintings; it was grounded in the spiritual more than in the material as a true abstract art, and achieved new forms in which architectural space was completely redefined- where the inside equaled the outside insofar as less is more.

Theo van Doesburg’s fascination with Constructivism was due to the fact that both Neoplasticism & Constructivism shared a very ambitious goal: to “take possession of reality”. Avant-garde conceived as the merging of art & life, or better, art in life; that was the task faced by J.J.P. Oud and Theo van Doesburg when they created De Stijl: architecture as a form of abstract art:

“Van Doesburg was a painter and I persuaded him of the fact: that the development of a ‘Style’ without architecture was non-sense. He knew hardly anything of architecture and so I tried to do in architecture what he tried to do in painting”

De Stijl architecture was born out of Oud’s architectural interpretation of Mondrian’s ideas in painting: “Houses on the beach” (1917), and a Factory (1919); nevertheless after some years Oud struggling to materialize in architecture the forms from the canvases, Oud changed his thoughts:

"After having worked some years along the lines I discovered in the projects I have mentioned. I became convinced that I had to be after something ‘else’. That I was working in a more or less limited form-problem whilst in truth I was seeking for a problem of universal life. At that moment my work turned on corresponding lines to another direction and I left De Stijl. The members

313 Included in: Strauven, Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings. p. 209
315 Letter to Peter Smithson (Summer 1957) in Peter Smithson, Metz & Co – Amsterdam – Deen Haag: Modern Architecture in Holland, in Architectural Design, August, 1961. The concern of art’s relation to life remained of paramount importance for De Stijl’s artists. In 1937 Mondrian’s text Plastic and pure plastic art stated: “Art is only a substitute while the beauty of life is still deficient. It will disappear in proportion, as life gains in equilibrium” See Frampton. Modern Architecture: a critical history.p.148
of De Stijl however continued with the form problem I had put before them. That is what I had to do with De Stijl at a certain time. (IMAGE EL-20: J.J.P. “Houses on the beach” (1917) and interior design by Theo van Doesburg with G. Rietveld’s furniture (1919)):

Oud’s raised the question at stake: the development of a modern style in architecture was not a matter of emulating abstract painting. If modern painters sought to create universal -true or objective- abstract forms using the elementary expressional means of painting, architects should do the same within its own realm: architects should them, not merely emulate the FIGURES created by abstract painters & sculptors in order to produce abstract architecture, properly speaking. These ideas were present after the war in Van Eyck’s criticism to the idea of “the integration of the arts” fostered by CIAM; for it was grounded in the assumption that it will ultimately culminate in a sort of total art. Following Oud, Van Eyck argued that painting, sculpture and architecture were three phenomenal realms each of them with its own means, nature, and autonomy:

“…architect, space is for you; sculptor, plasticity is for you; painter, colour is for you – in this great whole! Hocus pocus – and there goes autonomous painting, there goes autonomous sculpture, there goes autonomous space! Of course we are waiting for the super-dish, the pot in which everyone sociably stirs together, but which is never ready to eat…”

Peter Smithson’s answer to J.J.P. Oud’s letter in the late 50s illustrates how both, old and new guard, agreed about the necessity to reconsider architecture as a form of art; Smithson’s letter was published together with one of Oud’s lasts texts (“Jahrbuch 1957”) in which Peter Smithson argued: “It is necessary to notice the purely functional form, the industrial design is not enough for an overall picture of today’s town. A new art-form is necessary in building today”

Nevertheless both P. Smithson and J.J.P. Oud had learnt De Stijl’s lesson: architects should define by themselves architecture as an abstract-conceptual art -with its own logic- regardless the materializations achieved in poetry, painting and sculpture. They should not be tempted to emulate the “figures” of Modern painting but to understand the logic behind it- form in terms of logic, not as a mere object. If modern art was a transcendental intuitive logic grounded in the notion of the elementary, architecture should be its materialization in the construction of human environments.

Mies van der Rohe: Architecture as an elementary Abstract Art

The story of the evolution of the “elementary” in modern art during the first decades of the Twentieth Century illustrates the emergence of pure abstraction -conceptual art- as a non-rational world picture set out by the avant-gardes. Ludwig Hilberseimer’s “Observations on the new art” (1923) summarized the struggle of modern art since Gaugin to “represent an intuitive picture of the world”.

Hilberseimer pointed out the fact that the Dadaists’ aim was very different from that of pure Constructivists who pursued the construction of a new reality literally based on “objectivity”:

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316 Letter of J.J.P. Oud to Peter Smithson (Summer 1957) included in the article by Peter Smithson, The Work and writings of J.J.P. Oud, in Architectural Design, 1961
317 It follows “…One must not forget – the future does not judge us by our ordinary efforts but by the peaks of our achievements. We now need the new psychological beauty, the new drama in architecture so as to be able to take in the future a worthy place in the sequence of cultures” See the article by Peter Smithson, The Work and writings of J.J.P. Oud, in Architectural Design, 1961
Constructivism is the logical consequence of the cooperative working methods of our time. Thus it has an objective rather than subjective basis... He finished the article by pointing at Dadaism as a phenomenon “parallel to Russian Suprematism” and praised it over Constructivism for it seek for “truth”; and Malevich had defined Suprematism’s goal in the same terms when he referred to the Black square painting as follows:

"...In art there is a need for truth, not sincerity...art approaches creation as an end in itself domination over the forms of nature..."

"...The forms of Suprematism, the new realism in painting, are already proof of the constructions of forms from nothing, discovered by intuitive reason...These forms announce that man has gained his equilibrium by arriving from a single reasoning to one of double reasoning" (my emphasis)

Indeed Mondrian’s Neoplasticisms had the similar aspirations, since it focused more on truth and less on “objectivity”; it conceived the artwork as a true natural creation of man, and rejected art as a mean of representation. Malevich’s Black square represented nothing it was a manifestation of an intimate “sensation of non-objectivity” aiming “to express the feeling of rhythm”. A creation of “intuitive reason”: a DIALECTICAL rational-non-rational new consciousness that according to Hilberseimer had bought to its limits abstract art- “exhausted the possibilities of non-objective art.” (See IMAGE EL-22 & IMAGE P-2)

The presence of Malevich’s “black square” within the merging of Dada & Constructivism in Europe gave birth to a notion of “elementary art” closer to Suprematism than to pure Constructivism: it was grounded more in the seek for truth than in objectivity, a result of “intuitive reason” more than an exclusive product of reason; purposeful, though in some aspects non-utilitarian- even some Constructivist masterpieces such as Tatlin’s Tower were considered the work of an artist not of an engineer- they were non-utilitarian constructions. Malevich’s square was published in Dadaists magazines as a clear silent statement of the common ground of contemporary art movements A creation of “intuitive reason”: a DIALECTICAL rational-non-rational new consciousness that during the 1920s Modern abstract art was at its height, while at the same time avant-garde artists from different nations and movements gathered together publicizing a common notion of art. Apart from the magazines: De Stijl, ABC, Zenit, Ma, and Veschi/Gegenstand/Object, there were two outstanding publications that gathered the work of avant-garde painters, sculptors, poets and architects: first, the G magazine (“Zeitschrift für elementare Gestaltung”) edited mainly by Hans Richter and Mies van der Rohe, whose third issue opened with Mies project for a skyscraper in Berlin followed by texts and works from the artists at the Constructivist-Dadaist Congresses

319 It follows “...It accepts the fact that art like the whole of life is rooted in society. It seeks for elements in the manifestations of our industrial age. Mathematical clarity, geometric severity, purposeful organization, rigorous economy and the most exact construction are not only technical but also eminently artistic problems. They constitute indeed, the essence of our epoch..." ibid, p-351
323 See Hilberseimer “Observations on the new art"
Dusseldorf and Weimar, together with Hilberseimer, Man Ray, and George Grosz; and second, the Dadaist magazine *Merz* edited by K. Schwitters; *Merz* n°1 (1923) included Malevich black square in the cover, and the issue n°8/9 entitled “NASCI-Nature” edited in collaboration with Lissitzky gathered the work of: Braque, Mondrian, Leger, Lissitzky, Man Ray, Schwitters, Malevich’s “Black square”, Tatlin’s “Tower for the third international” together with projects from J.P.Oud and Mies project for a skyscraper in Berlin. (IMAGE EL-23: G mag. n°1 & IMAGE EL-24: Merz n°8/9 )

Abstraction in painting and sculpture entered the realm of architecture through the notion of the elementary. Architects struggled to find elementary expressional means inherent to the art of building: architecture. Up to 1924 Mies van der Rohe had been designing within the classic standards of the epoch (Mosler House, Berlin 1924-26). At that time only the Dutch Oud and Rietveld had built exploring the achievements of abstract painters. Mies’ project for a skyscraper (1921), published with J.J.P. Oud’s house, were early explorations of modern architects into the realm of abstract art; which in the case of Mies lead to a paradigmatic masterpiece of modern architecture: the Barcelona Pavilion.

As I argued in the Prelude *Merz* n°8/9 presented abstract’s art materialization of Riegl’s motto “art as a contest with nature”. Along the issue Modern Abstract art was presented as a natural product out of men contesting nature. As Van Doesburg pointed out at G n°1, abstract art was a product of the intellect not the emotions- an intellectual-conceptual product (Worringer’s definition of abstract art); a form of knowledge based on intuitive reasoning –DIALECTICAL; seeking for truth with a certain degree of objectivity, but ultimately aware of the non-rational aspects governing it (DADA). Mies’ & Richter’s articles at G n°1 invited us to learn from contemporary methods of production –bau; but they clearly emphasized how these methods had to be guided by culture- high ideals- and not just by the mere satisfaction of material needs (comfort); hence the question at stake was not how to build a house (bau-a-haus), but how to develop FORMATIVE means (Gestaltung) able to satisfy the material and spiritual needs- according to our present conditions, as Mies said: “The fundamental reorganization of the housing problem is urgent”. The search for the ELEMENTARY was the path proposed to find the FORMATIVE means required; and these had been explored in various realms of “culture”. The G magazine illustrated the technological means at our disposal – Peter Behrens warehouse- while illustrated the result of elementary formative means developed by painters and sculptors –Mondrian, Tatlin, Schwitters, etc. Mies’ buildings and Oud’s house were presented as early architectural manifestation of Elementary abstract art.

(See IMAGE EL-25: Mies van der Rohe, Project for a brick country house (1923); Mosler House, Berlin 1924-26 & IMAGE EL-26 : Mies van der Rohe’s projects showing ground floor plan & view: Josef Esters house (1927-30); Mies van der Rohe, Barcelona Pavilion (1929); Tugendadt House and Mosler House, Berlin 1928-30))
The work of Mies van der Rohe was a paradigmatic example of modern architecture redefined as an abstract form of art. As I tried to illustrate previously, his work emerged from the avant-garde movements and to some extent he was able to materialize in his buildings the logic of abstract art. Avant-Garde art aimed at merging art & life. Among the avant-garde movements I focused on the emergence and development of De Stijl for it was grounded in the firm belief that a modern artistic style without architecture was senseless. It was architecture’s logical role to materialize the aspirations of abstract art in the design of new human environments. Abstract art was conceived as a transcendent intuitive logic; transcendent, since it tried to bridge the thing in the mind and the object (thing in itself) producing spiritual relief; an intuitive logic, a form of knowledge that provided an intuitive world picture of reality and satisfied conceptual needs precisely for its capacity to approach men to the real sense of things seeking the elementary: “...La simplicité n’est pas un but dans l’art, mais on arrive à la simplicité malgré soi, en s’approchant du sens reel des choses…”

Abstract art was the result of a new consciousness -an intellectual labour- contesting with nature, seeking for true and or objective values. Modern Architecture emerged parallel to abstract art, but essentially its forms relied on the achievements made in other arts. I would argue most of these aspects were present in Mies’ great achievement, I do not mean he was the only one, but he certainly was a paradigmatic example that will serve us to stop talking about “Avant-Garde & Architecture” and introduce the second part of this survey “Avant-garde Architecture”.

Mies’ architecture was Avant-Garde for it reconceived architecture itself as a form of abstract art. Following the path of abstract artists Mies’ architecture resulted as well the product of a transcendent intuitive logic; it aimed at the satisfaction of conceptual & bodily needs merging rational & non-rational means in the design process. A DIALECTICAL form of knowledge based on both, intuition and reason—“intuitive reasoning” in Malevich’s words. As Mondrian’s Neoplasticism seek for truth, but as any Dadaist was ultimately aware of the non-rational aspects governing human behaviour. Mies’ early concern was to develop FORMATIVE means (Gestaltung) able to satisfy the material and spiritual needs- according to present conditions. The search for the ELEMENTARY was the path proposed to find the FORMATIVE means.

(See IMAGE EL-27: Mies van der Rohe project for the offices of Ron Bacardi in Cuba published in AD November 1958 and Malevich’s “black square” (1916) from Merz nº 8/9 “Nasci-Nature” published in 1924)
Appendix I - The criticism to cognition as a paradigm shift:

During the first half of the Twentieth Century the two world wars had brought artists and architects twice to face the same problematic: namely, how to re-construct? At the same time, both wars represented a crisis of values & knowledge in Western civilization, hence the question: Do we really know what we are doing? Aroused twice. The question about our capacity to know aroused parallel to the need of spiritual and material reconstruction. In other words both questions: Do we know? and, how could we rebuild Western civilization? Were posed at the same time. In this sense the criticism to cognition and the need to re-define architecture as a form of art were interwoven. To establish a straightforward parallelism between pre & post Second World War conditions is senseless. Nevertheless, since one of the purposes of this research is to balance a biased notion of Modern Architecture as rationalistic, I will try to outline the fact that in both moments people raised the question “Do we know?” in slightly but similar ways: first, I will introduce briefly arguments supporting that modern abstract art produced a paradigmatic shift insofar as it criticized our capacity to “know” challenging the principles of classical logic, current social conventions, definitions of space-time and language in itself. In this regard many artists found in Dadaism a sort of liberating way of thinking and making art.

Now the question is: what has to do this Dadaist revolt with architecture? In order to answer this question I considered quite convenient to revisit in parallel two events: Tristan Tzara’s Lecture at the doors of the Bauhaus (Weimar, 1922), and Van Eyck’s intervention at CIAM 6 (Bridgewater, 1947). The main reason: both events were indeed “criticism to cognition” that propelled paradigmatic shifts. The Bauhaus was not the same any more after Van Doesburg gathered Constructivists and Dadaists under the banner of De Stijl at its doorsteps; while Van Eyck’s criticism to the late CIAM unveiled its deep flaws and contradictions inaugurating its final period and dissolution. Both statements are weirdly gathered together to reconsider art’s role as a form of knowledge that unveils intellectual flaws- challenges our current (conventional) capacity to know. Being this one of its main virtues in order to produce- or at least made manifest- paradigmatic shifts in human knowledge.

Dada & Constructivism: a coexistence of opposites?

“I write a manifesto and I want nothing, yet I say certain things and in principle I am against manifestoes, as I am also against principles… I write this manifesto to show that people can perform contrary actions together while taking a fresh gulp of air; I am against action; for continuous contradiction, for affirmation too, I am neither for nor against and I do not explain because I hate common sense…”

Tristan Tzara. Dada Manifesto 1918

The Dadaist’s criticism to rationalistic cognition was clearly manifested in their challenge of conventional language through conscious contradiction. For a Dadaist it is possible to say yes and no at the same time- the co-existence of two things at the same time in the same place was Dada’s first challenge of the current conception of temporality- It dismantled the conventions of language,
our first prison, and it was the first step towards dismantling the convention of time, our ultimate prison.

The dialogue between two or more contradictory or opposed states of being emerged from the Dadaists challenge of the classical principles of logic, such as Aristotle’s principle of contradiction. For a Dadaist it was possible to predicate at the same time, and in the same sense, the absence and the presence of the same quality, as Tristan Tzara said: “…Order = disorder, ego = non-ego, affirmation = negation: supreme radiations of an absolute art. Absolute in the purity of ordered and cosmic chaos”.324

The Dadaists played as well with the Law of identity, according to which an object is the same as itself: \( A \equiv A \); to some extent this law was challenged by any artist who gives himself a new name, and it was brought to an extreme by some Dadaists like Theo van Doesburg or Marcel Duchamp, who had several identities. Such a schizophrenic condition of the artists was mirrored in the evolution of the different artistic movements at that time, and to some extent, reflected the identity crisis of Europe.325 It was through dialogue, friction, agreement and disagreement that the different artistic movements appeared, evolved, and shared a common identity- such a fact was early identified by C.W. Giedion who talked about all of the avant-garde artists as “the great riot.”326 Later on, the synthetic-logic labor of the historians and the unapproachable distance that time places between our sensibility and the sensibility of past times tends to present those artistic movements more isolated or independent than they really were. The pseudo-scientific will to create categorical definitions of Dadaism, Neoplasticism, Constructivism, etc. makes more difficult to understand that two isms might have been different, but complementary, and even one and the same thing for the artists that took part in them. Certainly it was not the first time in history that art challenged the classical principles of logic, or the current perception of time and space, but the extraordinary thing about the Dadaist artists is that they were completely aware of what they were doing.

The co-existence of opposites represented a very human condition that was present in many avant-garde artists like Duchamp, Mondrian, Klee, and of course Van Doesburg. The challenge of the Principle of Identity brought to some artists to develop work in completely different directions, nourished by the co-existence in time of two apparently opposed states of being in the same person. Among them, one of the most extravagant characters we can find at that time is Christian Kupper: alias Theo Van Doesburg, Neoplasticist artist founder of De Stijl, alias I.K. Bonset founder of the Dadaist magazine Mecano, and Aldo Camini, Dadaist-italian poet. Van Doesburg’s wife Petronella Petro adopted the name Nelly van Doesburg and the Dadaist alias Petronella van Moorsel as well. It is worth to note that in 1920, the same year that I.K. Bonset “was born” somewhere in the Netherlands, Rose Selavy (Marcel Duchamp alter ego) “was born” in New York; as Duchamp clearly

324 Tristan Tzara, Manifesto 1918. It is interesting to point out that the Dadaist revolt happened while when relativity was enounced (1905-12), and Saussure developed his Course in General Linguistics (1906-13), published in 1916. Many artists before had searched for that nothingness of meaning (Hölderlin), and many other found it through their will to express opposites at the same time, as Tzara stated in his Dada Manifesto (1918)
325 Certainly, the ongoing co-existence of opposite beings or nations (similar but different), with strong character, great sense of identity, and great ideas, it is a very European condition and defines its identity. Such a dialogue between love and strife of two opposed states was characteristic of the wide array of artistic movements emerging in Europe during the two world war periods.
326 See Carola Giedion-Welcker, Modern plastic art, elements of reality, volume and disintegration (English version by P. Morton Shand, Zürich, H. Girberger, 1937), and Contemporary sculpture: an evolution in volume and space. New York, G. Wittenborn 1955
stated: “Sense and non-sense are two aspects of the same thing and the non-sense has the right to exist. Do you see what I mean?”


Even the most rigorous Neoplastici st, Piet Mondrian, appreciated the Dadaists ideas. In fact he introduced Van Doesburg to Parisian Dadaism, and Mondrian himself expressed publicly his sympathy for the Dada family and signed several letters in 1920 as “Piet-Dada”; after all he had stated that “The principles of the contrary [should] dominate the entire work.” Nevertheless Mondrian always rejected the Dadaist play with the “laws of chance” as a creative device; His rejection of Dadaist arbitrariness, and the fact that he did not favor an increasing literary involvement of van Doesburg in Dadaism-at the expense of his engagement in the visual arts- is a possible explanation for Van Doesburg’s creation of his alter ego, I.K. Bonset. Mondrian’s character stricter than Van Doesburg’s would allow for certain irony in a joke, but not for a deviation from the elementary principles of De Stijl; in fact, in the late 1920s, Van Doesburg’s acceptance of dynamic forms in his paintings produced the final rupture between the two. But at the same time it is that at some point he considered his work “similar” to the Dadaist’s drawings of Max Ernst; as Van Eyck argued: “I recall here what Mondrian at a Max Ernst show in New York told a journalist who was putting the usual provoking questions. This: ‘Max, vous savez, il fait la meme chose que moi, mais dans l’autre hemisphere’”

In other cases the co-existence of opposite’s states of being was less extravagant and is manifested only through the work of an artist completely integrated in the academia, as in the case of the Bauhaus professor Paul Klee. Some of his paintings at that time such as Separation in the evening (1922) illustrated the co-existence of opposites that might happen in one being as it happens in nature. Light’s double nature as wave and quantum as illustrated by Einstein’s relativity challenged Euclid’s geometry, and certainly might have inspired Klee’s painting at that time, The Architecture of the plane (1923). Klee was striving between a rational exploration in the nature of geometry and light- inspired by the late scientific discoveries- and non-rational (“pre-logic”) explorations with childish painting as illustrated in The Puppet theater painting (1923).

(IMAGE AP-2: Paul Klee’s The Puppet theater & The Architecture of the plane (1923), and Separation in the evening (1922))

The challenge of space/time notions carried on by Neoplasticism (“new consciousness”) was present as well in Dadaist poems & statements playing with “co-existence of opposites”: if yes equals no, past may equal future; past and future, knowing and not knowing are then linked by our

329 This point is made by Hubert F. van den Berg in Theo Van Doesburg’s De Stijl, and Dada (p-119). Some other members of De Stijl had peripheral contacts with the Dadaism “Vilmos Huszar’s participation in the 1923 Dada-Tounées, Corn Van Eesteren’s participation in the Dada-Constructivist Congrese in September 1922 and contributions to Mecano in 1922-23, and Mondrian’s jokey signature ‘dada Piet’” in Dada, Van Doesburg and De Stijl, Jane Beckett. See Sheppard, Dada: studies of a movement.
330 See Hubert F. van den Berg, Theo Van Doesburg’s De Stijl, and Dada. P119-120
331 See Frampton’s chapter on De Stijl in: Frampton. Modern Architecture: A critical history.
332 See ‘Ex Turico Aliquid novum’. Strauven. Aldo Van Eyck in Collected articles and other writings.p.19
immediate and fleeting present. But past, we do not certainly know the past, we just remember, and this remembrance is inaccurate; we have a memory, but is strongly shaped by our relatives, and dictated by the institutions of our time; hence not past neither future, but only the present: *spontaneity* was the Dadaist device in its search for freedom.

Tristan Tzara’s Manifesto, *La premiere Aventure celeste de Monsieur Antipyrine* (1918), detached Dadaism from Futurism negating evolution or change. Tzara welcomed the co-existence of two opposite states and disliked the future: “*it is for and against unity and definitely against the future; we are wise enough to know that our brains will become downy pillows that our anti-dogmatism is as exclusivist as a bureaucrat that we are not free yet shout freedom*”333. As early as in 1919 Van Doesburg had come to know Tzara’s Manifesto and *Vingt-cinq poèmes* (Both from 1916) as well as four issues of the *Dada journal* (Zurich 1917-19).334 Van Doesburg and Mondrian agreed completely about the importance of the co-existence of opposite conditions in their philosophy and painting; the conflict between individual-universal was a problem to face as it was stated in the 1st De Stijl Manifesto: “*The conflict of the individual and the universal is reflected in the world war as well as in art today*”,335 while Van Doesburg defined De Stijl’s method in the following terms: “*the formative idea is given direct and actual expression by continual cancelling out of the expressional means: thus a horizontal position is cancelled out by a vertical one, similarly dimension (large by small) and proportion (broad by narrow)…*”.336

But as it has been argued Van Doesburg carried this method further than Mondrian, when he decided to merge both De Stijl & Dada; Van Doesburg’s visit to Paris on 17th March 1921 was a clear example since he visited both, Mondrian and Tzara, separately. This visit was of paramount importance for Van Doesburg; up to that date he had known Dada only through publications; Tzara confirmed Van Doesburg’s view that the essence of Dadaism consisted in negation for the purpose of generating mystical insight, as IK Bonset stated: “*Yes and No- No is the strongest stimulus to Yes*”.337 Lastly, Van Doesburg’s third alter ego: Aldo Camini was born in De Stijl (1921)338 as a synthesis of Dadaist ideas and “metaphysical painting” and literature;339 Camini also criticized the Futurists and welcomed the co-existence of yes & no: “*Every hypothesis is simultaneously false and correct, Yes and No, one and the same… Dada the abstract concrete messiah of our time*”340.

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333 Tristan Tzara, *Manifesto of Mr. Antipyrine* (1918) See Tristan Tzara: Seven Dada Manifestoes in Motherwell *The Dada painters and poets : an anthology*, p-75
334 Letter to his friend the poet Antony Kok. See Hubert F. van den Berg, Theo Van Doesburg’s De Stijl, and *Dada* p.111
335 The Dadaist use of “enstrangement” and the co-existence of opposites was merged in De Stijl third point of the Manifesto: “*The new art has revealed the substance of the new consciousness of the age: an equal balance between the universal and the individual*” Art was conceived as a device that provides a new consciousness of being through the creative process or the act of beholding. De Stijl Manifesto from 1918
336 Theo Van Doesburg, *Principles of Neo-plastic Art*, P-33
337 From *Het andere Gezicht* (Published in De Stijl n°4, April 1921). All these arguments were developed by Jane Beckett in *Van Doesburg and de Stijl*, in Sheppard ed. *Dada: studies of a movement*.
338 i.b.i.d. p.11 Following Tzara who went there on July 1920, propelling the emergence a Italian Dada magazine Bleu (G. Cantarelli, A. Fiozzi, J. Evola). Van Doesburg contacted and collaborated with the magazine (Himself and I.K. Bonset) and visited Italy in 1921
339 Van Doesburg interest in metaphysical painters coincided with his growing connection to Dada, he compared Gerrit Rietveld chair with Giorgio De Chirico’s painting “Solitude”. See Jane Beckett *Van Doesburg and de Stijl*, in Sheppard ed. *Dada: studies of a movement*. p.12
The co-existence of Dadaism and Neoplasticism was brought one step further with the arrival of Soviet-Constructivism coming from Berlin; while at the same time it propelled a reactionary protest against the academicism of Gropius’ Bauhaus conducted by Van Doesburg: the Constructivist-Dadaist Congress (Weimar, Sep. 1922). As it has been argued, during the early 1920s the influence of Soviet Constructivism coming from Berlin gathered together Dadaists and Van Doesburg’s Neoplasticism. Van Doesburg moved from Paris to Weimar pursuing De Stijl’s main goal, architecture; since 1919 he had been in contact with the Bauhaus professor Lionnel Feininger, and the German Dadaists: Raoul Haussman and Hannah Höch. Höch’s Klebebilder collages illustrated a fusion of metaphysical content and mechanical analogy and influenced strongly Van Doesburg. To some extent they were similar to Kurt Schwitter’s Merzbau. And in both cases involved the very Dadaist polarity deconstruction-reconstruction: the free destruction of old images allowed for a new reconstruction of the pieces in the creation of new images. (IMAGE ENS-1)

The Berlin Dadaist work was widely published in I.K. Bonset’s Mecano (1922) a “journal for the distribution of Neo-Dadaist conceptions and spiritual hygiene” devoted to Van Doesburg’s own Dadaist-constructivist understanding of the machine age, Dada propaganda and criticism to the intellectual and artistic establishment.341 At that time Van Doesburg had hoped for an appointment as a teacher to the Bauhaus, however the expressionists Lothar Schreyer and Kandinsky got the positions instead, hence Mecano launched a campaign against the expressionist tendency of the Bauhaus, the “Balance of the State of the Bauhaus in Weimar” signed by van Doesburg, Mondrian and Cornelius van Eesteren denounced how De Stijl was being excluded from the Bauhaus.342 Van Doesburg attempts to be admitted by Gropius culminated in the “International Congress of Constructivists and Dada” (Weimar, Sep. 1922) in which Tzara speech summarized the Dadaists criticism to the Bauhaus principles; from the very first lines Tzara’s words clearly illustrated the tense situation: 343

“Ladies and Gentlemen: I don’t have to tell you that for the general public and for you, the refined public, a Dadaist is the equivalent of a leper. But that is only a manner of speaking. When these same people get close to us, they treat us with that remnant of elegance that comes from their old habit of belief in progress. At ten yards distance, hatred begins again…” 344

At this point I would like to jump ahead in time from Weimar 1922 to Bridgewater 1947. From the Dadaist-Constructivist Congress to the Congress International de Architecture Mondiale (C.I.A.M.) In order to draft some parallelisms between both interventions: Tristan Tzara’s at the Bauhaus, and Van Eyck’s intervention facing the CIAM old guard; I would find a strict analogy between the two senseless, but I think it is important to outline some aspects in common: first, the

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341 Only four issues of Mecano were published in 1922 (Blue, red, yellow and 4/5).
342 See Hubert F. van den Berg, Theo Van Doesburg’s De Stijl, and Dada p.142
343 The main participants include: Bauhaus member allied with De Stijl in Weimar (Max Buchhart, Peter Röhl, Harry Scheibe, and Walter Daxter) the splinter-group from Düsseldorf (Hans Richter, Werner Graeff, El Lisitsky, Moholy-Nagy, and Alfred Kemeny), two of Van Doesburg’s Stijl course students (Hans Vogel and Bernard Sturzkoop), Cor van Eesteren, and the Dadaist Hannah Höch, Kurt Schwitters, Hans Arp and Tristan Tzara. See Hubert F. van den Berg p.154 and Beckett p.17
344 All the following quotes from Tzara are from the same text, Lecture in Weimar 1922, in: Motherwell. The Dada painters and poets : an anthology.p.246-251
“aura” of revolt, for both were reactions against “established systems”; and second, both unveiled the criticized institutions that were more or less betraying its foundational principles – its “raison d’être” – at least according to the revolutionary fraction; and third, the betrayal is due essentially to a rationalistic attitude.

Hence it is no surprise that both statements were in one way or another “Statements against rationalism”; Tzara’s lecture at the Bauhaus, like any other Dadaist statement, was against the rationalistic approach and the idea of modernity strictly related to “progress”; at the doors of a “modern” institution- the Bauhaus- Tzara said: “…You are mistaken if you take Dada for a modern school, or even for a reaction against the schools of today… There is no logic. Only relative necessities discovered a posteriori, valid not in any exact sense but only as explanations…”

Tzara presented Dadaism as “not modern” emphasizing their struggle against human blind faith in “logic”, and pointed directly to the Bauhaus faculty as “modern masters”. In the same line Aldo Van Eyck’s “Statement Against rationalism” was delivered facing the paradigm of established modernity in the late 50s, the CIAM; while in denounced its rationalistic attitude: “The old struggle between imagination and common sense ended tragically in favor of the later…CIAM knows that the tyranny of common sense has reached its final stage…”; Tzara denounced the so called “intelligence” as a hierarchical value, an institution that pursued rational work: “…Intelligence is an organization like any other… It serves to create a state of hierarchy. To set up classifications for rational work… fortunately life is something else and its pleasures are innumerable. They are not paid in the coin of liquid intelligence…” Following S. Giedion’s remarks Van Eyck denounced hierarchical values “…The deplorable hierarchy of artificial values upon which contemporary existence has come to rest is beginning to totter…”

Tzara claimed for spontaneity as a product of human free will that really represents us, and valued life over art:

“…What we want know is spontaneity. Not because it is better or more beautiful than anything else. But because everything that issues freely from ourselves, without the intervention of speculative ideas, represents us…Art is not the mot precious manifestation of life…Life is far more interesting. Dada knows the correct measure that should be given to art: with subtle perfidious methods, Dada introduces it into daily life, and vice versa. In art, Dada reduces everything to an initial simplicity…”

In the same way, Van Eyck valued everyday life over architecture, and claimed for imagination as a spontaneous creative device that helps us to overcome outworn values dictated by “common sense”, If Dada reduced “everything to an initial simplicity”, Van Eyck presented the elementary as architecture’s main goal-to stimulate a “universal revaluation towards the elementary”; the elementary requirements of man’s environment over functional architecture:

“Although architecture… answers very tangible functions, ultimately its object differs in no way from that of any other creative activity… the more tangible functions-those implied by the word functionalism- are only relevant in so far as they help us to adjust man’s environment more accurately to his elementary requirements”
Both criticized a group of intellectuals, artists and architects that were loosing the point; modern art had spiritual purpose merging art & life as the ultimate aesthetic expression of a “new consciousness”. Van Eyck reminded the old guard: “…CIAM is first and foremost an affirmation of this new consciousness… one in which grace is expressed in life as it is in art” This New Consciousness as it was unveiled by the avant-gardes was an state of mind- a device towards a new sensibility- able to enrich a new conception of life; the Nieuwe Beelding as an end in itself, was useless; Tzara argued:

“Dada is a state of mind. That is why it transforms itself according to races and events. Dada applies itself to everything, and yet it is nothing, it is the point where the yes and the no and all the opposite meet, not solemnly in the castles of human philosophies, but very simply at street corners, like dogs and grasshoppers… Like everything in life, Dada is useless… Dada is without pretension, as life should be” (my emphasis)

Lastly, according to Van Eyck the question at stake was to balance two opposites, common sense & imagination: “The old struggle between imagination and common sense ended tragically in favor of the later” Imagination and common sense, reason and Dada. Tzara brought the microbe of Dada, “where the yes and no meet”, at the doors of the Bauhaus and ended his statement with a last clarification:

“Perhaps you will understand me better when I tell you that Dada is a virgin microbe that penetrates with the insistence of air into all spaces that reason has not been able to fill out with words or conventions.”

Tristan Tzara was pointing at art’s role as a form of knowledge that unveils intellectual flaws, and challenges our current (conventional) capacity to know. Being this one of its main virtues in order to produce- or at least made manifest- paradigmatic shifts in human knowledge. Van Eyck’s last question pointed in the same direction asking CIAM architects to challenge a convention they were taking for granted- the rationalistic & mechanistic approach: “Does CIAM intend to ‘guide’ a rational and mechanistic conception of process toward an improvement of human environment? Or does it intend to change this conception?”

(See IMAGE AP-3: Pictures from Constructivist-Dadaist Congress at Weimar 1922)

Aldo van Eyck’s “Statement against rationalism” Ciam 6 (1947)

Facing the overwhelming task of the European reconstruction, the CIAM architects were having difficulties defining the relation of architecture with other arts: architecture as a contemporary form of art. The mainstream of CIAM was considering only the satisfaction of the material needs, relying exclusively in analytical thinking and technical means to do so. From CIAM 6 (1947) to CIAM 9 (1953), Aldo van Eyck’s intervention criticized the approach of CIAM for overlooking the emotional aspects of the reconstruction. If architects focused exclusively in analytical thinking to solve the material aspects, overlooking the irrational nature of human behavior, cities would become inhuman. Moreover, CIAM was obliterating the fact that modern art had grounded the Modern Movement in architecture, and made architects aware of the limitations of rational thinking in architectural design.
Aldo van Eyck presented modern architecture as a form of art emerging from the spirit of the avant-garde movements in the texts he prepared for CIAM 6: the “Report concerning the interrelation of the plastic arts and the importance of cooperation” printed and distributed to the CIAM members previous to his intervention, the “Statement against Rationalism” (Van Eyck’s edited version of his intervention), and the text “We discover style” (Wij ontdekken Stijl his first article published in Forum magazine, March 1949). These documents represented Van Eyck’s “statement against rationalism” in which he clearly defined modern architecture as an avant-garde art in which “conceptual purposes” prevailed over “bodily purposes”, and imagination prevailed over reason.

Two years after the 2nd World War ended, CIAM 6 took place at the Arts Centre in the eighteenth-century Castle Street (1947 Bridgewater, England). Why Bridgewater? According to Sigfried Giedion “…the answer is simple enough. CIAM is a working congress and needed to go into rustication away from the distractions of a great city” Europe’s main metropolises were facing the reconstruction after the devastation produced by the 2nd World War (1939-1945) in which over 60 million people died. Certainly a continental city – like Dresden for example- would have not been a comfortable meeting place for such elegant gentlemen as Walter Gropius or Le Corbusier; indeed among the reasons why these well dressed architects did not held the CIAM in the continent was the fact that it was very difficult for them to face the overwhelming task of reconstructing Europe, physically and morally. Such an enormous challenge required not only good planners, builders, architects or bureaucrats, but courage to face the real problem, and wisdom to reconsider the human values that brought Europe and the world into such a big crisis. (IMAGE AP-4: Aldo van Eyck, C. van Eesteren and J. Bakema at CIAM 6, Bridgewater 1947)

Giedion’s demand to reconsider the CIAM beyond the socio-economic and planning issues suggested a reconsideration of architecture’s foundational values in western civilization: its role as a form of art. Giedion’s concerns for CIAM 6, which “Stirred the whole congress”, propelled a concluding resolution in which CIAM recognized that technological and industrial development should be placed under control by a sense of human values. This was a shared concern, Jaap Bakema at the preparatory congress in Zurich had submitted a proposal in which he emphasized the capacity of a free conception of space, to activate values as social justice, freedom and

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345 All included in Chapter 2 –Advocate of the avant-garde in postwar CIAM (1947-1953). Strauven. Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings. p.33
347 The conflict had produced atrocities such as the Nazi’s holocaust killed over 6 million people, the Allies mass bombing of civilian areas, including Tokio and Dresden, the soviet Gulags, and the United States nuclear bombs over Nagashaki and Hiroshima, the soviet mass rape of german women or Operations such as Keelhaul, Katyn, the expulsion of Germans from areas outside the territory of post-war Germany and post-war Austria. See Eric Hobsbawm, The age of extremes: a history of the world, 1914-1991. New York : Vintage Books, [1996]
348 In the introduction to the publication of the Congress entitled A Decade of Contemporary Architecture (1937-1947) S. Giedion summarized the states of the arts in the whole world without mentioning the word “war” not even once in the book- the grief must have been certainly deep. See Giedion, A Decade of Contemporary Architecture.
350 hence CIAM new intentions were “To work for the creation of a physical environment that will satisfy man’s emotional and material needs and stimulate its spiritual growth”. i.b.i.d.p.118
cooperation.\footnote{Jaap Bakema was at time a delegate of young Dutch architects. Strauven. Aldo van Eyck: The shape of relativity. footnote 159 on p.122} This concern was not new at CIAM, it emerged from the spirit of \textit{La Sarraz} 1928 aiming at “satisfy[ing] the spiritual, intellectual and material needs of present day-life”.\footnote{La Sarraz declaration CIAM, 1928. From a brief summary done by the Team 10 at Doorn meetings while discussing the Charte de l’habitat. Bakema Archive. NAI. Rotterdam}

Van Eyck’s intervention was important because it articulated clearly common present concerns to old and new generations; while at the same time reintroduced essential principles from avant-garde art that had felt into oblivion. Regarding the state of the arts at that time Van Eyck considered more important to redefine architecture’s -human- values, than to jump straight ahead to deal with socio-economic or planning issues. Indeed the “ethical” concerns were inherent to avant-garde art aesthetics, and so it was initially for the modern movement in architecture.

Concerned with these issues, S. Giedion had re-introduced into the CIAM debates the question of architecture and the arts; for Van Eyck the answer was clear, art and architecture had a common goal: “Although architecture may ensure more tangible functions, its ultimate function differs in no way from other creative activity”\footnote{Architecture conceived as an art that shares C.W. Gledion conception of Modern Art as a whole} Van Eyck identified the CIAM as such, with Modern Art’s major goal, the pursuit of a new consciousness: “CIAM is first and foremost an affirmation of a new consciousness”. The idea of a new consciousness was present in almost all the Modern Art movements, some of them articulated it in its early principles, like \textit{De Stijl} first manifest; Neoplasticism-like Dadaism or Surrealism- wanted to disrupt the entire static hierarchy of values upon contemporary society was still based, aiming at a civilization in which more natural and elementary forms of existence took place; in Van Eyck words, a civilization in which “grace was expressed in life as it was in art.”\footnote{“Although this consciousness… has probably been latent for a very long time, it is only during the last 50 years that its nature has begun to reveal… The immediate result of this fundamental current has been to disrupt the entire static hierarchy of values upon which contemporary existence was and still is based…” Strauven. Aldo van Eyck Collected articles and writings. p.40.}

Van Eyck asked the CIAM to be critical with the ends that society aimed at, in the firm believe that architect’s role is not just the design of nice means to pursue whatever goal, but has to commit himself to imagine and rationally define those goals:

“Does CIAM desire to direct and control the purely mechanistic and commercial attitude of improving human environment, regarding it as a true characteristic of our time and the time to come? Or does CIAM desire to transform this attitude, i.e. to criticize the background against which it projects its activity?”

For Van Eyck the reason why CIAM did not question the current values-the “purely and commercial attitude of improving human environment”- was related with the very human blind acceptance of what is commonly considered “common-sense”: “…the age-battle between common sense (static) and imagination (dynamic) was lost by the latter…” According to common-sense the architects should take for granted their duty: to “direct and control the purely mechanistic and commercial attitude of improving human environment”. Nevertheless Van Eyck is not asking to go against common sense; he is merely outlining that common sense is neither pointing in the right direction, nor going to solve the problems at stake- only imagination is able to do it. Van Eyck praised imagination in the widest sense of the word as it was praised by the Dadaists-not as fantasy.
to escape reality—but as an active instrument for the free production of ideas.\footnote{See “Chapter 1.2. Imagination & Intuition”} A source of “elementary forms”, considering those forms mediums not ends, as Dadaist or Neoplasticist had claimed.\footnote{See “Chapter 1.1. Enstrangement”}

Lastly he pointed to the “elementary” as an element to reconsider, a “value” worth pursuing, and a category of “form”. Van Eyck’s idea of the elementary was very tight to Brancusi’s notion of “simplicité”: “La simplicité n’est pas un but dans l’art mais on arrive a la simplicité malgré soi, en s’approchant du sens reel des choses” As in Brancusi’s notion of ‘simplicité’, Van Eyck’s notion of the “elementary” was related to our intimate nature—forms emerging spontaneously from us—driven by “a priori” irrational means:

“Form is a medium, not an end. The difference between limited forms and elementary forms lies exactly in this distinction. The former merely tickle the primary senses, which explains their universal unpopularity: the latter penetrate the infinite resources of imagination, the only faculty which we are able to transmit style or grace.”\footnote{See “Report concerning the interrelation of the plastic arts and the importance of cooperation”. This was a clear reference to De Stijl’s spirit—see also the text “We discover style”. The Report was written in English and Dutch, but Van Eyck did not mentioned the word Style (Stijl) in his intervention, but it was included in the Report and entitled Van Eyck’s first article for Forum Magazine, “We discover style”; maybe because a straight reference to De Stijl ideas would have not been welcomed at CIAM.}

It was through a rational intuitive—DIALECTIC—process in which imagination played a major role that a style (Stijl) was created, a style whose ultimate function was the transmission of grace—merging art & life—through architecture. A style—a product of artist’s “urge to abstraction”—emerged out of a redefinition of modern architecture as a form of abstract art.

Van Eyck reminded the late CIAM that modern abstract art had produced a paradigmatic shift insofar as it had questioned our capacity to “know”; artists challenged established systems of knowledge, classical logic, or current social conventions, in order to create a better world. Van Eyck questioned the capacity of a rationalistic-mechanistic approach to reconstruct Europe—to solve the problem of improving human environments. Van Eyck’s pointed out CIAM’s flaws asking architects to challenge conventions—to redefine architecture as an art form according to contemporary needs as it had been done before. During the 1950s he and the younger generation struggled to redefine modern architecture as an art form according to its foundational principles. The next part of the present survey will try to analyze to what extent they were able to do it.
PART 2 – AVANT GARDE & ARCHITECTURE (1947-1960)

“Children of darkness got no wings,
   This we know we got no wings,
Stay, dramatic figures tethered down,
   By weight of cloth and fact,
Crystal or funeral got no hope
For us that knows misventure…”

Dylan Thomas 10/1931
Buffalo Notebook
PART 2 – AVANT GARDE & ARCHITECTURE (1947-1960)

The first part of this enquiry drafted a definition of modern abstract art as an intuitive transcendental logic out of which modern architecture emerged; the definition was articulated with four elements from avant-garde art present as well within the architect’s milieu after the war: estrangement, imagination & intuition, new consciousness, and the elementary. The main hypothesis of this survey argues that Aldo van Eyck & the Smithsons produced a paradigmatic shift in architecture grounded in the notion of art materialized by the early avant-garde movements; and they did so while establishing a dialogue with other artists close to them (Cobra & IG). In order to do so, this second part tries to analyze to what extent the definition of modern abstract art was present in the early architecture of Van Eyck and the Smithsons (From 1947 to 1960). In what degree the avant-garde elements analyzed previously -estrangement, imagination & intuition, new consciousness, the elementary- were present in their projects. If these elements of avant-garde art were present within the early work of Van Eyck and the Smithsons, it could be argued that the paradigmatic shift produced by their architecture was a result of a redefinition of modern architecture as a form of art.

The first part drafted a picture of the avant-garde artistic movements exploring rational and non-rational of creativity: from the negative condition of Dada to the search for harmony of Neoplasticism; trying to illustrate how modern architecture came out of this dialectic in the work of Van Doesburg’s De Stijl and Mies van der Rohe; two great figures of avant-garde architecture that had strong influence in the early work of Van Eyck & the Smithsons respectively.

Up to now I focused on the dialectical character of modern art, the second part will continue to do so, but introducing categories of form. The first part essentially drafted a definition of modern abstract art as a transcendental intuitive logic pointing out its dialectic nature: between rational (Logic) and non-rational (Intuitive), material & spiritual needs. As I said, the main hypothesis argues that Aldo van Eyck & the Smithsons produced a paradigmatic shift in architecture grounded in the definition of avant-garde art-abstract art. Hence the second part will try to analyze to what extent the notion of modern abstract art -as an transcendental intuitive logic- was materialized by Van Eyck & the Smithsons in their projects. How deep they understood the notion of art and to what extent they were able to produce architectural forms accordingly. If we understand deeply any given definition of art, we would have a deep understanding of how artistic forms are produced.\footnote{358 When I use the term understanding I am referring to its rational & non rational condition; what is commonly known as “understanding” implies a conscious awareness of cause-effect relations; I would refer as well to intuitive -non-conscious- forms of understanding} The second part introduces three categories of form -object, process, logic- trying to illustrate to what extent the architectural form was conceived in a deeper sense: from a superficial understanding in terms of object, to a deeper understanding of form in terms of process, and logic. The Smithsons’ and Van Eyck’s notion of architecture as a form of art is presented in three categories of understanding, from a superficial to a deep understanding of architecture as a form of art in terms of: object, process and logic. Working in the assumption that if the architect has a deep understanding of the definition of art at a given time he will be able to develop a more consistent definition of architecture as a form of art.
2.1 OBJECT
2.1.1 ALDO VAN EYCK & COBRA (1949-51)

“…what strike us more about the period [1950-1970] is the extent to which the economic surge seemed powered by technological revolution. To this extent it multiplied not only improved products of the old kind, but quite unprecedented ones, including many which had been virtually unimagined before the war…the Golden Age rested on the most advanced and often esoteric scientific research, which now found practical application within a few years…Three things about this technological earthquake strike the observer. First, it utterly transformed everyday life in the rich world and even, to a lesser extent, in the poor world…Compare to 1950 the share of natural or traditional materials – wood, metal treated in old-fashioned ways, natural fibers or fillings, even ceramics – in our kitchens, household furnishings and personal clothing has gone down dramatically…For technological revolution entered consumer consciousness to such an extent that novelty became the main sales appeal for everything from synthetic detergents (which came into their own in the 1950s) to laptop computers. The assumption was that ‘new’ equaled not just better, but utterly revolutionized…Second, the more complex the technology involved, the more complex was the road from discovery or invention to production, and the more elaborate and expensive the process of traversing it…Third, the new technologies were overwhelmingly, capital-intensive and…labour-saving, or even labour-replacing. The major characteristic of the Golden Age was that it needed constant and heavy investment and, increasingly, that it did not need people, except as consumers…All the problems which had haunted capitalism in its era of catastrophe appeared to dissolve and to disappear…”

Eric Hobsbawm

The Cobra Group appeared right after the “era of catastrophe” when a group of young artists tried to overcome the artistic isolation in which they felt in Amsterdam. Whereas the IG in London looked at USA’s emerging consumer society with a politically disengaged approach, the Cobra artists were politically engaged and looked east (U.S.S.R.); they established contacts with other artists in Brussels and Copenhagen and adopted a strong critical attitude towards some early symptoms of capitalism in their societies. Aldo Van Eyck was at some point engaged with the Amsterdam group during its short period: he was an important intellectual reference for the group, and designed for them two exhibitions in Amsterdam (1948) and Liege (1951). Van Eyck was doing in architecture, what Cobra was doing in painting, sculpture, or poetry: they were reenacting the avant-garde spirit, and the Cobra exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum (1948) was their most paradigmatic contribution.

Cobra: beginnings, ideology, journal & exhibition. These four stages will illustrate along the chapter the short-lived avant-garde movement with omnipotent aspirations; while it will provide a transition from the realm of art to that of architecture through an exhibition. The exhibition as an artistic event -as art in itself- had paramount importance throughout twentieth century; here the event

359 Eric Hobsbawm. The age of extremes: a history of the world, 1914-1991. New York : Vintage Books, [1996] Pp.264-267. There was another main aspect of this period: The Cold War; thought is not considered of great importance for it had not such a great impact in the everyday life until the 1970s: “In effect, the World situation became reasonably stable soon after the war and remained so until the middle 1970s, when the international system and its component units entered another period of lengthy political and economic crisis.” I.b.i.d. P.228
it is considered as an object in which the concerns of painters, poets, sculptors and architects met; the painter faces the arrangement of a three dimensional space as an artistic manifestation spreading out of the canvas, whereas the architect understands the primacy of spiritual and conceptual purposes over the mere bodily ones. The exhibition is chosen as a project in which the relation art & architecture is analyzed in terms of object for it is an architectural event in which the rationalistic boundary built by architects between form and content is blurred by the spell of art.

Cobra was born in Scandinavia in the late 1930s, found itself in Paris around 1948, was at its height in the Amsterdam exhibition (1949), and died in the Liege exhibition (1951). International indeed, it was born emulating the Parisian avant-gardisme and turned into political activism throughout the artistic movements born out of it- like the International Situationist in the 1960s. Its influence over Van Eyck should not be overestimated, although the freshness and consistency of their work and ideas are worth to be reconsidered in relation to the architect’s work; for Cobra’s criticism to Mondrian’s rigid translation of objectivity into an orthogonal balance of lines and colour certainly grasped Van Eyck’s attention. (IMAGE OB-1: C. Dotremont measuring Van Doesburg’s Composition X in Van Eyck’s house, 1949)

C.O.B.R.A. beginnings

Cobra was born in Scandinavia; the artists working relatively isolated in Copenhagen departed from some ideas and works from the Parisian artistic scene, and developed their own interpretation of Modern Art. Later on, they established a dialogue with artists in Amsterdam and Brussels who had developed their own language nourished by similar artistic principles coming from Paris. The main characteristic of the Scandinavian Cobra was their inquiry in the artistic processes grounded in non-rational means; they were interested in the creative process of kids, fools, ancient and popular art because they found that reason-in itself-was not governing their creative impulses. They believed that the art of the kids, the fools and ancient art or popular art had a common ground insofar as it aimed at the expression of elementary ideas. In this process, imagination, intuition and certain kind of rational understanding were interwoven in man’s struggle to understand the world and provide an explanation, an illustration of it.

The story of Cobra-Copenhagen can be traced back to 1893, when an important exhibition on Gaugin and Van Gogh took place in Copenhagen propelling the foundation of the first modern art group in Denmark, the Nabister Group. It was followed by the cubist group Lundstrom, and the Group Linien, whose first big exhibit in Sep. 1937 joined Henry Heerup, Sonja Ferlov, Egill Jacobsen, Egler Bille, Richard Mortensen, and the young Asger Jorgensen (Asger Jorn). The strong influence of Kandinsky led Asger Jorn to Paris, where he met Fernand Leger and worked with him on the decoration of Le Corbusier’s Palais des Temps Nouveaux (1937). This experience marked the beginning of Jorn’s strong rejection of Le Corbusier’s “Espirit mathematique” and “functionalist” architecture; instead, he enjoyed the less rational approach of Arp, Miro, Ernst and

360 “Centre International de Documentation sur L’art d’avant-garde”, a congress held in Paris from 6-8 November 1948.
Paul Klee. The work of artists such as Miro or Arp, together with the strong influence of magazines like *Cahiers d’Art* or *Minotaure*, brought many Danish artists to visit the Musee de L’homme in Paris. The visit to the overwhelming primitive art collection marked Asger Jorn’s fascination for ancient art, and the beginning of his search for pure-elementary means in painting. (IMAGE OB-2: Asger Jorn inventing his own language: Asger Jorn (*Notebook drawings from 1940, Composition 1940* and *The Blessed beast 1951*)

The early Scandinavian artists followed the path opened by Modern Art movements -Dadaism, Cubism, Surrealists- exploring primitive art, and the sources of creativity in kids and fools. In *Helhesten* nº1, Ejler Bille’s text “*Du fondement actuelle d’un art createur*” praised the creativity of child drawings: “*Tandis que les plus petit des enfants possede encore le rythme vital d’ou procede l’art, l’adulte l’a perdu*”. At the same time, the strong influence of the psychiatrist Sigurð Naesgard led the group to understand that creativity in adulthood was always related to a certain psychological unbalance. Interested mainly in the way fool’s creativity operates, *Helhesten* published the work of the Psychiatrist Dr. Helge Kjemin’s, “*The Psychology of inspiration*” (1942). These facts illustrate to what extent the early Scandinavian Cobra were researching in the sources of creativity that do not emerge from rational knowledge, but relied in the pre-logical basic means of kids mind or in the non-logical means of fools’ minds, a “*rythme vital*” mainly grounded in imagination and intuition. (IMAGE OB-3: House of the art collector Mme. Elise Johansen gathering paintings from the artists from “*Host*” and *Helhesten* nº1 launched by in 1941)

The search for elementary means in painting, the fascination for ancient art and the drawings of kids or fools were points in common shared by the early *Cobra* from Scandinavia with Dubuffet’s *Art Brut*. For the most part, the artists who became members of the Cobra Group in Denmark exhibited their work in the annual exhibition of the artists association, *Host* (1934-1950). These artists were: Else Alfelt, Ejler Bille, Svavar Gudnason, Henry Heerup, Egill Jacobsen, Asger Jorn, Carl-Henning Pedersen, and Richard Mortensen (IMAGE OB-4: “Host exhibition at Copenhague Nov.-Dec. 1948.) Their gathering place was the house of the art collector Mme. Elise Johansen. Emulating the French magazine *Minotaure*, Asger Jorn launched in 1941 the magazine *Helhesten*; according to Jorn his main goal was to “*presenter dans des articles objectifs une image de relation unissant l’art aux autres secteurs de la vie culturelle...articles consacres a l’archeologie, a la literature, au theatre, au cinema, et a la musique*” (See IMAGE OB-3) The name of the magazine Helhesten (hell-horse)- a three-leg beast that announces dead- was a clear illustration of the group’s concerns for primitive art. Their research on primitive & ancient art was guided by the archeologist P.V. Glob; they looked at Viking & medieval Scandinavian art, mainly frescoes in churches of small villages. The Scandinavian artists looked back at their past to find their own sources to create their own

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362 i.b.i.d. p.123
363 i.b.i.d. p.129
364 *Helhesten*, 2nd year, nº1. 30 Oct. 1942, p.6. Several articles were devoted to child drawing by Carl-Henning Pedersen and Jens Sigsgaard. See Willemijn Stokvis, *Cobra: la conquête de la spontanéité*, p.129
365 See the article of the Psychiatrist Dr. Helge Kjemin on *Helhesten*, December 1942: “...Il aparait q la source d’inspiration d’un artiste est en realite la meme que celle dont procedent les representations delirantes et les hallucinations de certains malades mentaux... ».See Willemijn Stokvis, *Cobra: la conquête de la spontanéité*, p.130
366 Asger Jorn editorial from *Helhesten* nº1.i.b.i.d. p.129
367 *Helhesten* nº 5-6 11 Nov. 1944. i.b.i.d. p.129
elementary language, an art of their own.\textsuperscript{368} The interest in ancient European art was shared by Dubuffet, who in the text "In Honor of Savages values" had pointed out that Europeans had "borrowed" Classical art from the Greeks, who themselves borrowed it from the Egyptians; according to Dubuffet this was an art foreign to the "European race, who is a savage and tempestuous man, does not express himself at all in our classical art". In the text Dubuffet encouraged artists to seek the true buried face of European art in its early primitive manifestations, and defined this "new" art as Art Brut:

"I believe that it is in "art brut"-in this art which has never stopped being made in Europe parallel to the other kind, this savage art to which no one pays any attention, and which very often does not suspect that its name is art-that one can on the contrary find authentic and living European art."

(IMAGE OB-5: Jean Dubuffet, Metro (1943) and Carl-Henning Pendersen, Le Devorant (1939))

Cobra and Dubuffet searched for elementary expressional means in painting exploring the sources of creativity in art from alienated mad, primitive mean, and the naïve imagination of the child. But Dubuffet's main argument: his strong criticism to the "Culturization" of art and the transformation of the work of art in commodity was not emulated by the early Scandinavian artists; the criticism will be carried on later on by Cobra (Copenhagen) artists, like Asger Jorn, during the 1950s.

\textbf{C.O.B.R.A. foundation}

For Cobra, the work in freedom departing from imagination ran parallel to their fascination for popular art inspired in Communist ideas. The Cobra artists related the aesthetic resemblance among popular-primitive artworks from different nations -mainly in European- with the Communist idea of workers’ & peasants’ international unity. Cobra-Belgium, led by Christian Dotremont, appeared after a split with the Surrealist movement in 1947; the group was mainly formed by poets -strongly influenced by G. Bachelard- since after the two World War Belgium lacked any tradition in painting or sculpture. The Surrealist exhibition held in 1947 at Galerie Maeght (Paris) propelled the split in the Surrealist movement. Andre Breton’s late Surrealism -detached from politics- clashed with Christian Dotremont’s Surrealism, very attached to Communist ideas. Unlike Breton –who spent the war period exiled in New York- the younger generations that lived the occupation of Paris remained tied to the communist ideas nourishing the French resistance during the occupation; Dotremont’s text Surrealisme Revolutionaire (Les Deux Soeurs n°3, Feb. 1947) criticized strongly Breton’s Surrealism for its religious mysticism. A year later Dotremont published the magazine Le Surrealisme Revolutionaire (Summer 1948) including Tzara’s « Le Surrealisme et l’apres-guerre », paintings from Asger Jorn, and other Danish, Czechs and Dutch artists.\textsuperscript{369}

The Cobra-Amsterdam emerged from the friendship of Karel Appel and Corneille who met in the Amsterdam academy (1943-44); they both shared an early fascination for Van Gogh, the German expressionists; their common ground was enlarged after their visit to Paris in 1947 where they both

\textsuperscript{368} as Hugo Ball said "…Je ne veux pas de mots inventes par quelqu’un d’autre. Tous les mots ont ete inventes par les autres. Je reivindique mes propres bêtises…" See Chapter 0.1.6 DADA & LANGUAGE. Hugo Ball. Dada a Zurich: Le mot et l’image (1916-1917), p.51-52.

\textsuperscript{369} See Stokvis, Cobra: la conquête de la spontanéité. p.158
admired the work of Dubuffet. Appel was especially fascinated with Picasso's primitivism, whereas Corneille discovered the power of imagination in Klee and the Surrealists (Breton, Eluard and Aragon) after his visit to Budapest in 1947. 370 The Dadaist praise of imagination as a pre-logical device for creativity and the fascination for the primitive were two concerns shared in common between Cobra-Amsterdam and Van Eyck. The Cobra Amsterdam came to terms when Karel Appel and Corneille met Constant Nieuwenhuys through Aldo Van Eyck. Van Eyck had met Constant in spring 1947, when Constant knocked on Van Eyck's door and asking him to see his Miro's painting. 371 Constant had just arrived from Paris, where he had visited the Miro exhibition at the Galerie Pierre Loeb making acquaintance of Asger Jorn. Thereon Constant, met very often with Appel and Corneille at the Social Work office. They decided to create an experimental art group, “REFLEX, Groupe experimental Pays-Bas”. 372 The first exhibit of the group was held at the Santee Landweer Gallery, after a speech of the poet Louis Tiessen although it was completely ignored by the press. This young avant-garde in Amsterdam felt enclosed and isolated from the artistic debate going on in Europe, so they decided to establish contacts with the exterior. 373

(See IMAGE OB-6: Constant, K. Appel and Corneille in 1947; Reflex nº 1 with a drawing from Corneille, & Reflex nº 2 with a woodcut from Jacques Doucet, Karel Appel in his studio, Amsterdam 1947)

The International COBRA Group was founded after a split with the Surrealist group at the “Centre International de Documentation sur L'art d'avant-garde”, a congress held in Paris from 6-8 November 1948. The Belgium Dotremont, the Danish Asger Jorn and the Dutchs Appel, Corneille and Constant decided to create their own group for they did not want to dissociate their artistic point of view from their political convictions; in general terms the group welcomed surrealism, but rejected Breton’s apolitical position, and the Parisian formalism of the “Salon des Realites Nouvelles”. 374 The main points in common shared by these artists were: a certain leftwing socialist idealism, a rejection of aesthetic norms imposed by civilization for they constrain human creativity, and a strong enthusiasm for what they called “Experimentation”; the term was included in the name of the group “COBRA Groupe experimentale” illustrating the importance they gave to the spontaneous use of imagination in the creative process.

C.O.B.R.A. journal

“L'imagination est le moyen pour connaître la réalité”
Cobra nº4, p.21

The strong determination of the young group of artists to become an international movement followed the creation of the Cobra journal and the celebration of three international exhibitions in

370 Stokvis, Cobra: la conquête de la spontanéité, p.166
371 See Strauven Aldo van Eyck: The Shape of relativity, p. 123
372 They will publish as well the magazine Reflex; the first issue included Constant first Manifesto of the group only signed by him since it was not supported by all of them. Nevertheless the text included the agreement of the tree members to cooperate with the foreign artists Asger Jorn and Christian Dotremont. The magazine will include the work of the poets Jan G. Elburg, Gerrit Kouwenaar and Lucebert (Lucebert J. Swaanswijk). Soon after Cobra Amsterdam will enlarge including the artists: Theo Wolvecamp, Anton Rooskens, Jan Nieuwenhuys, Eugene Brands. See Stokvis' chapter La Naissance du Groupe experimentale en Hollande.
373 Stokvis, Cobra: la conquête de la spontanéité p.176
374 i.b.i.d.p.208
Brussels, Amsterdam and Liege. The idea of the journal was that every city issued a number: the first issue was conceived in Copenhagen, the rest of them (n° 2,3,6,7, and 10) in Brussels, except for the 4th, which was published in Amsterdam as a catalogue for the exhibition. The journal was the broadcasting platform of Cobra ideology. The wide array of collaborations makes it difficult and inaccurate to summarize its content. However, it is important to point out some relevant ideas to be found in the Cobra Journals: their strong critique to Breton’s surrealism, their vision of art as a “fight” in which ethics and aesthetics were interwoven, a strong leftist-communist aura, their praise of experimentation conducted by desire as an essential device in art, related with their interest in art emerging from elementary sources of creativity- the artistic creativity of kids, the spontaneous manifestations of alienated mad, and the almost equal forms of expression in popular art from different countries.\textsuperscript{375} As I will argue further on some of these concerns were shared within the IG group: the search for the elementary values in art –coming from the early avant-garde movements- and ultimately manifested in Art Brut’s criticism to the cultural market, and their firm believe in the ethical implications of aesthetics, as the Smithson’s argued: “Up to now Brutalism has been discussed stylistically, whereas its essence is ethical”\textsuperscript{376}

All these concerns in the articles published in Cobra such as the “Discours aux pingouins” by Asger Jorn in Cobra n°1, and Constant’s “Ce notre desir qui fait la revolution” in Cobra n°4, and Christian Dotremont’s “Le grand rendez-vous naturel » in Cobra n°4. Cobra’s 1st issue was published in Copenhagen and edited mainly by Asger Jorn alone; it included his text “Discours aux pingouins. L’automatisme” in which Jorn analyzed Breton’s automatic writing from the point of view of “dialectic materialism” unveiling its contradictions. According to Jorn, automatic writing could never be an exclusive act of the psyche, since writing itself was physical act; not even the “automatisme psychique” inside the human brain could be considered, strictly speaking, purely psychological; according to Jorn from a Marxist-materialistic point of view “la pense est une pense de la matiere…on pense necesariament a quelque chose », hence he criticized the Surrealists for relying on dreams-on the “oniric”- with a very specific purpose; Asger Jorn instead, praised purposeless art aiming exclusively at the satisfaction of our most intimate desires:

« La fonction reelle de la pense est de trouver les moyens propres a satisfaire nos besoins et desirs. Plus preoccupe du fonctionnement que de la fonction de la pensee et faussant meme son fonctionnement, le surrealisme de Breton ainsi que le fonctionalisme architectural ont commence sur une base idealiste... »\textsuperscript{377}

Jorn’s “Discours aux pingouins. L’automatisme” argued for spontaneous expression and experimentation out of any sort of rational control. He identified the bourgeoisies with the kind of control exerted with reason “notre but est d’echapper au regne de la raison, regne de la bourgeoisie, pour aboutir au regne de la vie.” The false idealist & metaphysical conception of the bourgeoisie’s moral & aesthetics, was confronted with Cobra’s true moral value -“l’instinct de nos besoins” -and the true aesthetics- “L’expression de nos desirs”. Whereas for the bourgeoisie, aesthetics and moral

\textsuperscript{375} Hence, the primitive, the childish and the popular were seen elementary in so far as they related to the origin of culture and civilization.


\textsuperscript{377} See Asger Jorn “Discours aux pingouins. L’automatisme”. All the references to Jorn are from this text. Cobra n°4, p.8
values were not only distinct but dramatically isolated, for Jorn’s materialistic point of view, aesthetics & moral conform a dialectic situation:

“le but de l’art est d’abord moral et ensuite esthetique-meme lorsque le desire devient besoin ! elle passe ainsi du general a l’individuel du besoin au desire, de la morale a l’esthetique »

In this regard Jorn’s arguments were parallel to Van Eyck’s praise of non-rational means enhancing creativity, his strong criticism to rationalistic attitudes for they restricted freedom, and to “functionalist architecture” for its utilitarian narrow-minded notion of purpose.

(image OB-5: Cover of Cobra nº4 (1949) by Constant, text from the archeologist P.V. Globt on the Scandinavian “Guldgubber” and Asger Jorn’s painting)

Cobra nº4 was issued as a catalogue for the exhibition designed by Van Eyck held at the Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam, 1949); the catalogue with a striking cover entitled “La putain de classe” opened with Constant’s text “C’est notre desire qui fait la revolution”. With a revolutionary tone, similar to that of Jorn’s discourse, Constant denounced the failure of Western culture in providing & satisfying human “elementary” needs; in fact this was Constant’s main argument for a revolution: “la satisfaction de notre desir elementaire, c’est la revolution ». Following Jorn’s argument, Constant argued that the satisfaction of our needs moves us to discover our desires through experimentation, the ultimate condition for knowledge; he criticized the individualism of current society, for it focused on “artistic production” instead of “artistic creation”; the former being a mere reproduction of existing knowledge, whereas the later was the making of something unknown: “La culture actuelle, individualiste, a remplace la creation par la production artistique qui n’a produit que signes d’une impuissance tragique, que les cris de desespoir de l’individu enchaine par les interdictions esthetiques...Creer c’est toujours faire ce qui n’était pas encore connu ».

If Asger Jorn criticized Breton, Constant dismissed the “emptiness” of Mondrian’s abstract paintings for their lack of true spontaneity:

«...Alons remplir la toile vierge de Mondrian meme si ce n’est qu’avec nos malheurs. Le malheur ‘est-il pas preferable a la mort... ?...Telle est notre reponse aux abstraits... leur espontaneite est celle de l’enfant revolte, qui ne sait pas ce qu’il veut, qui veut etre libre, sans pouvoir se passer de la protection de ses parents...mais etre libre, c’est comme etre fort : la liberte ne se manifeste que dans la creation ou dans la lutte, qui au fond ont le meme but : la realisation de notre vie...Nous sommes condamnes a l’experimentation par les memes causes qui acculent le monde a la lutte... »

The Cobra artists witnessed the world as a fight, and proclaimed art as a fight pursuing the satisfaction of human elementary needs. In this regard it is interesting how they relied on the imagination of the child. Cobra nº4 included texts and drawings of kids mixed with the poems and paintings of the artists. (image OB-6: Cover of Cobra nº4 (1950) , C. Dotremont’s text “C’est notre desire qui fait la revolution”, cover of the catalogue of the Amsterdam exhibition, & image OB-7: Kids texts included in Cobra nº4, illustrating Constant’s text text “C’est notre desire qui fait la revolution”)

All three extremes, the strong violence, the fight and the naïve-childish condition co-exist. The hardness of the Dutch reconstruction after the war was taking place, while at the same time a new generation was growing enjoying peaceful times in the playgrounds -designed by Aldo Van Eyck-

378 All the quotes from Constant are from this text appeared in Cobra nº 4. 1950. p.3-4. Constant’s text was published after Louis Tiessen’s speech at the 1st Dutch Cobra exhibit. Stokvis. Cobra: la conquête de la spontanéité. p.175
flourishing in the empty plots of Amsterdam. For both Cobra and Van Eyck, the child was present as a reference & the labor of the moral and physical reconstruction. The texts and drawings published by COBRA praised the fresh creative insight and the natural spontaneous simplicity of child’s expression; Cobra learnt from the kids drawing as Van Eyck learnt from the kids playing, for drawing and playing was considered one and the same thing. Another important element in common between the Dutch Cobra and the early concerns of Van Eyck was the search for the “elementary” values in art: the importance given to formal experimentations, running parallel to a research on artworks from other periods -for they may provide a different time perspective- and places –for they may express a common current notion of space- that we may desire to challenge.


**C.O.B.R.A. the exhibition**

“*Nous pensions que nous allions a conquerir le monde*”
Aldo Van Eyck, conversation with W. Stokvis, 1965

“*En art pas de politesse – l’art c’est du désir brut*”
Cobra journal nº4, p.16

Although Van Eyck was never fully engaged with COBRA-Amsterdam he was very close to them during the short life of the movement; later on he always remained sympathetic to its members. Van Eyck was older and more cultivated than them. The relevance of Van Eyck’s relation with Cobra does not rely in any specific idea or artwork influential for him, but in the fact that he witnessed with the painters, poets and sculptors the avant-garde spirit from the pre-war movements: the Dadaist spirit of revolt against established hierarchies of values, and the criticism to rationalistic approach in art & architecture; Van Eyck’s flat was a rendez-vous place for Cobra: the image of Dotremont measuring Van Doesburg’s Composition-Countercomposition X illustrates the open and friendly dialogue of Van Eyck with Cobra. Although Cobra criticized De Stijl & Surrealism with arguments that Van Eyck probably did not share, he was open minded enough to consider Cobra as an opposed but complementary component of the same reality: the “Great Riot” (IMAGE OB-1: C. Dotremont measuring Van Doesburg’s *Counter-Composition X* in Van Eyck’s house, 1949; Theo Van Doesburg, *Counter-Composition X*, 1924)) He valued the spirit of these young poets and artists, who, by virtue of their narrowness, were able to bring anew the avant-garde spirit revitalizing the artistic debate in the Netherlands. Cobra’s critique of Mondrian was not new for Van Eyck; he had learned it from one of the De Stijl members, Theo Van Doesburg; his double condition as Neoplasticist fellow of Mondrian, and Dadaist fan of Tzara was very familiar to Van Eyck. In fact, I would try to argue all along this theses that Van Eyck’s redefinition of Neoplasticism was closer to Van Doesburg’s than to Mondrian’s; this would explain not only Van Eyck’s acceptance of Cobra’s critique of Mondrian, but also his design for the “*International Cobra Exhibition*” at the Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam, 1949).

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381 i.b.i.d. p.124-125
The first artistic event gathering the Cobra artists together was the annual exhibition held in Copenhagen, Host (November 1948). Thereon the COBRA movement held three exhibitions during its short existence: 19-27 March 1949 in Brussels, 3-28 November 1949 in Amsterdam and 6th October to 6th November 1951 in Liege. Nevertheless, the one in Amsterdam, the “International Exhibition of experimental art” is considered the first public manifestation of COBRA. Aldo Van Eyck’s set for the exhibition certainly resembles Neoplasticist composition; According to F. Strauven, by doing a De Stijl composition of the paintings for the exhibit Van Eyck:

“Incorporated the vitalistic expressions of the experimental into Mondrian’s geometry of the universal. In so doing, he not only remained faithful to both Cobra and De Stijl, but he also raised the Cobra experiments above their one-sided instinctivism. By confronting the impulsive experiments of Cobra with their converse, by uniting them with their antipode within the new reality, De Stijl’s universal’s ‘aesthetics of relations’, he confirmed them as an integral part of that reality.”

The fact that Van Eyck did a Neoplasticist display-composition similar to Mondrian’s paintings, for a group of artists that criticized Mondrian is striking. But if we think about Van Doesburg’s merging of Neoplasticist’s seek for harmony and Dadaist’s revolt the whole layout for the exhibit and the events during the exhibit Van Eyck’s design makes a lot of sense. The entrance room welcomed the visitors with Constant’s painting “Barricades” 1949, a huge canvases painted explicitly for the exhibition after Van Eyck’s proposal, with two figures one of them holding a sickle, a clear illustration of Cobra’s political agenda. Following the entrance room there was a tiny room filled with a huge steel cage in which filled with poetry from the group; illuminated with gloomy lights the big “cage” contained fragments of poems mixed with quotes from Dotremont, Marcel Havrenne and Lenin, a tiny sculpture by Corneille “L’Arbre de vie”, and a bottle filled with Andre Gide’s poems crumpled- in the wall the poets wrote a clear rejection of Gide’s work “Il y a un Lyrisme que nous abolissons”.

Certainly such a welcome sequence of rooms for the exhibition had nothing to do with the rigorous order of Mondrian’s harmonic compositions, but it was essentially operating under the Dadaists’ aesthetics of shock. After the tiny room filled with poetry the third room expanded into a big space in which paintings and sculptures covered walls and floor in a continuous composition. In fact the importance given to poetry in the set of the exhibition is at odds with its depiction as a Mondrian-Neoplasticist set, since Mondrian always discouraged Van Doesburg’s to experiment with poetry or literature for he did not consider them truly Neoplasticist. Hence it could be argued that the layout of the exhibition was closer to Van doesburg’s experiments merging Neoplasticism & Dadaism.

(See IMAGE OB-10: Plan of the exhibition, Constant’s Barricade 1949, the “Cage aux poètes”, current photograph of Cobra Museum (Amsterdam))

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382 The Cobra artists exhibited at the Stedelijk Museum thanks to the contacts of Eugene Brands, a member of the Dutch Cobra, with the Museum’s director at that time, Willem Sandberg.
383 Strauven. Aldo van Eyck: shape of relativity. p.125
384 Stokvis. Cobra: la conquête de la spontanéité. p.242
385 See chapter 0.1.6 Dada &Constructivism: The co-existence of opposites. And: Hubert F. van den Berg, Theo Van Doesburg’s De Stijl, and Dada. P.119-120
Certainly once we look and consider the set for third room, we can think about a Neoplasticist composition in a continuous plane from the floor to the walls. The analogy of this continuous plane with a Mondrian painting is almost unavoidable; in fact there was a paradigmatic example of De Stijl’s principles applied into architecture that may provide an interesting comparison: the Aubette café designed by Van Doesburg with Hans & Sophie Arp (1928); the project was certainly well known for Van Eyck, and if we turn upside down the interior views of the small dance hall and compare it with Van Eyck’s distribution of the canvas in the exhibition, we may find a funny and striking similarity (IMAGE OB-11: Images of the dancing room turned upside down (Theo van Doesburg project for the Aubette Café in Strasbourg, 1928) and Van Eyck’s layout) The canvases in the exhibition were arranged in a continuous composition along floor & walls, while in the Aubette’s dance rooms the ceiling & walls formed as well a balanced continuous composition.

The whole set for the exhibition materialized the Dadaist’s “co-existence of opposites” as it was personified by Christian Emil Marie Kupper: on the one hand a Neoplasticist’s balanced composition (Theo Van Doesburg, the painter), and on the other a Dadaist room filled with poetry and protest (I.K. Bonset, the poet). Indeed the opening of the exhibition on the 3rd of November (1949) had a strong character of protest. While Watutsi drum music filled the room with rhythm Dotremont gave a defiant speech in which he argued against “Le bourgeois endormi qui deambule sur les sentiers battus par la tradition.”386, and criticized Western art for its hypocrisy, “Occident’s lie”. Cobra did not recognize any previous aesthetic conception and grounded their work in the “subconscious and the Eros”. As Aldo Van Eyck recounted: “Il regnait une humeur militante et Dadaiste parmi les artistes. En meme temps, l’atmosphere etait tendue-on avait trop peu dormi. C’etait noir de monde. On savait deja que la catalogue etait interdit”387

The Dadaist aura of the event reached its heights days after the exhibition during Dotremont’s speech in a literary evening on the topic of experimental literature; it had impact on the press, and provided a whole controversy to the exhibition. The most Dadaist thing about the event was the fact that the scandal itself was produced by a misunderstanding; Dotremont’s speech in French alluded to archeological excavations of the USSR in the Aral Sea, and some people among public who did not understand French reacted furiously thinking that Dotremont’s speech was a sort of Communist manifesto. Dotremont continued his speech protected by Corneille, Constant and Van Eyck in front of him; among the public, an angry visitor arguing against Dotremont was thrown out of the room by Van Eyck and Constant. Dotremont continued impassively while some Cobra members sang L’international, the socialist anthem.

Dotremont’s speech was not at all a Communist manifesto but the second part of his text entitled “Le Grand Rendez-vous naturel” published in Cobra nº6; Dotremont traced a parallelism between the Soviet Union research on archeological sites of old civilizations Chwaresmiennes in the Aral Sea and the research and experimentation developed by Cobra. Like the soviets archeologists who searched for the ancient traces of civilization, the cobra artists searched the deep traces of

387 See the chapter devoted to the Cobra Amsterdam exhibition. Stokvis. Cobra: la conquête de la spontanéité.
man: “les traces que le sable du desert formaliste a effacees”; for him both were researches on sensibility—the sensibility of previous civilizations, of the unconscious and the subconscious, a research on pleasure:

“il en va ainsi des recherches sur la sensibilité, sur l’inconscient et le subconscient, il en va ainsi des recherches sur le plaisir (le plaisir qui va des mains aux yeux, et des yeux a tout l’esprit) dont les tableaux, les sculptures ici reunis dans cette exposition son d’excellentes exemples.”

As for the Dadaists or De Stijl, for Dotremont art’s essential goal is to awake our consciousness about reality-existing norms & conventions that may be outdated or senseless:

“La cause profonde du scandale me semble etre l’avachissement general du sens critique, tel que l’on peut passer tout a la fois pour reactionnaire, dilettante, titiste, trotskyste, stalinien lorsqu’on défend une position qui ne s’inspire pas directament des « si vous n’etes pas pour nous, vous etes contre » de la politique mais qui reste soucieuse au contraire de ne pas couper artificiellement la culture, l’art, la peinture, de la vie sociale. Une position elle-meme experimentale, une position qui refuse d’etre faite, qui se fait, que nous aimons mieux definir par notre CONSCIENCE que par les stupides et confortables formules du guide des convenances morales, ideologiques, et esthetiques...”

Many aspects of Dotremont’s speech brings us back to the early avant-garde manifestations during the war period. According to Dotremont both the Soviet Union research and the Cobra research had taken place during a war: the 2nd World War, in the case of the archeological survey in the Aral, and the current “Cold-war,” emerging at the time of the Amsterdam exhibition. According to him the artist’s & the archeologist’s activity do not seek directly the transformation of the world, but it would be an indispensable result of their activity. As the mainstream of avant-garde movements the Cobra painting drafted a criticism to representational means in art, it is essentially abstraction out of the artists’ will: “parce qu’elle n’est pas signe devenu objet, ni objet devenu signe... elle n’est pas illusion mais tache, elle n’est pas dessin mais crachat”. As Dadaism had done Dotremont criticized “Naturalisme” -for it is a reduction of reality to a mere illusory representation- and the “Old-Surrealisme” of Dali or Magritte praising the Miro, Ernst and Tanguy-closer to Dada. And lastly Dotremont detached Cobra from the superficial manifestations of “Abstract Art” proliferating at that time, since they operated with a logic very similar to “Naturalisme”, reducing reality to “une panoplie, reduit la vie interieure a ce qui loin d’etre sa ‘structure’ est le coffrage que la raison voudrait lui imposer”.

What is important about Dotremont’s attack of « abstract art » is that he identified Cobra art with people’s will to transcend the subject-object relation; while at the same time pointed at the aesthetics of the every-day life- people. For Dotremont, the “abstract painting” did not manifest “L’intervention vivante du peintre, ni la vie spontanee de la matiere, ni la dialectique naturelle de la vie interieure et de la vie objective.” According to Dotremont, « La ‘peinture abstraite’ est celle que ferait Julien Benda, ce n’est pas celle que fait le peuple »

Hence we could say that COBRA wanted to redefine art as a transcendental intuitive logic, as form of understanding through which man establishes a relation with nature. It was a

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389 i.b.i.d.p.1
transcendental form of understanding in so far as they aimed at transmitting “the living intervention of the painter” (“L’intervention vivante du peintre”), the spontaneous life of matter (“la vie spontanée de la matière”), and the “natural dialectic of inner life and objective life” (“la dialectique naturelle de la vie interieure et de la vie objective.”). And it was an intuitive logic in so far as it was concerned with the exploration of the striking parallelisms between the phenomena of nature and those of popular art or human spontaneous action. Cobra nº2 opened with the statement: “Pour un art naturel, comme le bris d’une vitre ou la croissance d’une ville”\(^\text{390}\) and Cobra nº3 traced parallelisms between scientific images – a cell formation from a video developed at the “Institut national de Cinematographie scientifique de France” - together with an image of a traditional puppet from Indonesia\(^\text{391}\) (IMAGE OB-12: Image from Cobra nº2 and Image from Cobra nº3 establishing parallelism between forms in life and art)

**Form & object**

The most important aspect in common between Cobra’s and Van Eyck’s ideas was their notion of form in relation with abstract art. The Cobra artist’s rejected abstract painting for it was not at all a true natural product out of man; they considered equally regrettable the excessive rationalism of naturalist art and that of “inorganic” abstract art. They considered their paintings more abstract than Mondrian’s for they were less informed by deterministic laws. Why should we consider the orthogonal straight line more “objective” than a curve done by a child-like gesture? Cobra understood abstraction in art as the result of primitive impulse “before cognition” but unlike the Vienna School professors did not considered pure abstraction—“before cognition”—more elevated (See Prelude, W. Worringer: *Abstraction & empathy*). Why? Simply because they considered reason less powerful than imagination: “L’imagination est le moyen pour conaitre la realite”\(^\text{392}\)

Both Cobra and Van Eyck, praised imagination as the main device to re-conceive art during the European reconstruction—certainly the image of the child materialized the spiritual rebirth after the war. The work and ideas of Van Eyck and Cobra learnt from the natural spontaneous simplicity of kid’s behavior as the Dadaist’s had done. Another important element in common between Cobra and Van Eyck was the search for the “elementary” in art, since both analyzed the things in common among modern art, primitive art, and art out of “Western civilization”—make or built by people. A main consequence of this search was their criticism to the current state of the arts, dominated by rationalistic tendencies, explicitly manifested by both either at CIAM or at the Stedelijk Museum.

Regardless the supremacy of one thing or the other - reason or imagination – it is clear that Cobra, as an avant-garde movement continued with the never ending task of providing an intuitive world picture of reality; out of which emerged a criticism to the notion of form in painting in terms of figure, or object. Considering the form of a painting in terms of object we could not certainly argue that a painting or an “exhibition layout” is more “objective” or “true” than other. We cannot understand that object isolated, for it never was and never will be. Hence, any consideration of form

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\(^{390}\) Cobra nº2, 21st March 1949. Brussels  
\(^{391}\) Cobra nº 3, Brussels  
\(^{392}\) Cobra nº4, p.21
in terms of object is senseless, if we want to know something about an artwork, or if we want it to transmit something to the others. We could argue indeed that in terms of object Van Eyck’s layout for the Cobra exhibit looks like Van Doesburg’s dance-rooms for the Aubette café, but it won’t tell us anything about the objects themselves; they were rooms within a sequence of rooms arranged according to a logical sense and is that logic what determined the final result, a figure. My first conscious attempt to challenge the notion of form in terms of object was to present an exhibition as an object of analysis; by doing so I wanted to challenge the notion of architectural object as an enclosed three-dimensional space out of time, materialized as a response to specific functions.
2.2 PROCESS
2.2.1 PARALLEL OF LIFE & ART (1953)

“…only by transcending the specialization in the process of intellectual production – a specialization that, in the bourgeois view, constitutes its order – can one make this production politically useful; and the barriers imposed by specialization must be breached jointly by the productive forces that they were set up to divide. The author as producer discovers…his solidarity with certain other producers who early seemed scarcely to concern him”

Walter Benjamin, The Author as producer (1934)\textsuperscript{393}

The Cobra Group shared essential things in common with the Independent Group: both groups were nourished by the Parisian artistic scene from the 1940s, both criticized late Surrealism being more sympathetic with Dadaism: its spirit of revolt, its deep concern & questioning of modern human condition, and to some extent the experimental approach to art. Both Cobra & the IG emerged in proto-consumer societies -food rationing was still taking place- and the artwork had not been transformed yet into a commodity; but they both had witnessed in Paris Giacometti’s attitude towards it, and Dubuffet’s criticism to the cultural market: their firm believe in the ethical implications of aesthetics; in this sense it is important to point out how their search for “elementary” values pointed in similar directions: the everyday life of common people, ancient-primitive values, a “culture of resistance” to the state of the arts; facing the moral reconstruction of Western civilization, both groups of artists were inspired by early avant-garde art, and pursued a deep exploration of human condition and creativity.

Another point in common between Cobra and the IG was their concern with the exploration of other realms of knowledge parallel to art. Certainly, previous famous journals of Modern Art had been introducing some ethnographical and sociological research, like “Cahiers d’Art” or the journal “Document”. In Cobra and certainly in the IG, this parallelism was enlarged to other realms of knowledge. The Cobra journal included the work of Poets, painters, sculptors and writers, together with striking images from biologist and archeologist (P.V. Glob). A similar welcoming attitude of the scientific explorations in relation to art took place among the Independent Group member, and found an early manifestation in the exhibition “Parallel of Life and Art” (1953); moreover, the Cobra Group was also concerned with the exploration of the striking parallelisms between the phenomena of nature and those of popular art or human spontaneous action.\textsuperscript{394} (See IMAGE PRO-1: Photograph from the Parallel of Life & Art exhibition by Henderson, Paolozzi & the Smithsons (Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1953))


A modern notion of Art:

“Technical inventions such as photographic enlarger, aerial photography, and the high-speed flash have given us new tools with which to expand our field of vision beyond the limits imposed on previous generations. Their products feed our newspapers, our periodicals and our films, being continually before our eyes; and thus we have become familiar with material, hitherto inaccessible”

Text from the Catalogue of Parallel of Life and Art Exhibition, ICA, 1953

The Parallel of Life and Art exhibition (11th September through 18th October 1953) happened in the early stages of the IG’s activity within the ICA (Institute of Contemporary Arts, London). It took place among many other events organized by these young artists and intellectuals that were revisiting ideas & works of modern art. In 1953, apart from Parallel of Life & Art several exhibitions took place: an exhibition on the paintings and drawings of Le Corbusier, the exhibition “Wonder and Horror of the human head” organized by Roland Penrose, and the exhibition on the Dadaist, Max Ernst. At the same time R. Banham organized a course of seminars entitled “Aesthetics Problems of Contemporary Art” challenging the conservative approach of the ICA in the analysis of art’s relation with science & design. The Parallel of Life & Art exhibition was a result of mutual concerns of the artists Eduardo Paolozzi, Nigel Henderson and the architects Alison & Peter Smithson revisiting ideas from Modern Art and Modern Architecture. The Smithsons had just arrived from the CIAM meeting at Aix-en-provence in summer of 1953 were they used Henderson’s photographs to show the flaws of CIAM’s theoretical assumptions in urban design. The Parallel of Life & Art exhibition not only represented an illustration of the potentialities of current technical inventions in the realm of visual arts, but also questioned the value of the image as a work of art, and its function in society. Parallel of Life and Art departed from principles of modern aesthetics and re-interpreted the Surrealist’s exhibitions performing a Dadaist tridimensional collage of images

After their experience in Paris, Paolozzi and Henderson were revisiting some foundational concerns of modern art that provided ideas for the exhibition. Some publications had special impact in Henderson such as Gyorgi Kepe’s Language of vision (1944): according to Kepes the aim of the artist should be a sort of “sociobiological synthesis” achieved through experimentation; for him:

“…without experimentation there can be no discoveries and without discoveries no regeneration. Although the research work of the artist is rarely systematic as that of the scientist they both may deal with the whole life, in terms of relationships, not of details”

397 A&P Smithson presented their version of the CIAM grid including of Nigel Henderson photographs to illustrate how the richness of community life in the poor areas of London relied in the use of street, an urban element that had been dismissed by the mainstream of Modern Architecture. Certainly at that time the relation among them was quite close, according to Peter Smithson initially Eduardo Paolozzi and his wife were going to join them to the CIAM meeting see Peter Smithson, Team Ten Primer
Henderson understood that artistic research was developed establishing relationships through experimentation; at that time he was doing so with photography inspired by the Dadaist x-ray photographs, such as Man Ray’s or Christian Schad’s, (IMAGE PRO-2: Christian Schad’s Schadographe from 1919 and Nigel Henderson’s cover of the Architectural Review from May, 1951.) As a result of his experiments Henderson invented a new kind of photographic manipulation, the “Stressed photographies”. (IMAGE PRO-3: Nigel Henderson, “Stressed photograph of a street scene in italy”, c. 1951; Nigel Henderson “Stressed photograph” of bathers owned by Francis Bacon) If artistic development was based on experimentation, and the establishment of relationships, that is precisely what the Parallel of Life and Art exhibition did; the artists established visual relations between different aspects of life, outlining the formal resemblance between biological forms and ancient art, in Henderson words:

“*Ideas Latent in the exhibition:*

1. …
2. Visual analogies from man made to nature made objects as it might be from knitting to the vertical cross section of a plant stem/mosaic-tissue / tour plan to tissue interlocking image of a Paul Klee drawing- a hand print- to basket work – an electron micro-photo of a metal alloy surface- Jackson Pollock – guillemot’s egg markings – streelines in analysis- the folding of rocks – to klee again & so on
3. The special visual discoveries of photography x-ray: instantaneous high speed and the rest
4. The changed conception of the nature object brought about by the objective scrutiny of the photo-process”

Henderson’s notes on the exhibition revealed how architects, sculptor and photographer merged scientific objectivity -characteristic of Neoplasticism-Constructivism- with intuitive-dadaist’s means-trying to challenge art. The artists wanted to layout a Malraux’s imaginary Museum: “We might call it the imaginary museum extending andre Malraux term beyond art…Museum without walls”, while the method employed merged the approach of “a SCIENTIFIC investigator and CREATIVE agent”. Gathering & exchanging images from their scrapbooks “…Headings grew apace ART NATURE STRUCTURE STRESS all empirically derived from the material”, while the artists were unable to articulate why that image – that objet trouve- had grasp their attention. Indeed the merging of Dadaism & Constructivism methods had been explored since the 1920s by an artist that exerted great influence in the exhibit, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. One of the most important publications of modern art that grasped Henderson’s attention was L. Moholy-Nagy’s book *Vision in Motion* (1947). Moholy’s book was a very complete account of his personal view on different arts: Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Cinema, Poetry, etc. He defined Vision in Motion in the following terms:

“…Vision in motion is seeing moving objects either in reality or in forms of visual representation as in cubism and futurism. In the latter case the spectator, stimulated by specific means of rendering, recreates mentally and emotionally the original motion. Vision in motion is simultaneous grasp. Simultaneous grasp is creative performance-seeing, feeling, and thinking in relationship and not as a

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399 Nigel Henderson “Notes on Parallel L & A”. Henderson Archive (9211.5.1.7). Tate Britain. London  
400 i.b.i.d. The following quotes are from the same text.  
series of isolated phenomena. It instantaneously integrates and transmutes single elements into a coherent whole. This is valid for the physical vision as well as for the abstract.\textsuperscript{402}

Henderson freely cited Moholy-Nagy’s Vision in Motion as a key reference point for his work. Moholy-Nagy’s idea of Vision in Motion as a “simultaneous grasp”, and the act of “creative performance-seeing and thinking”, implied the co-existence of two relatively opposite actions in time and space. Such a challenge of the traditional principles of Logic was one of the main Dadaists contributions to art.\textsuperscript{403} Dada & De Stijl defined Modern Art as a “new consciousness”, hence awareness was conceived in itself a creative phenomena a “creative performance-seeing, feeling and thinking” in the eye of the artist.\textsuperscript{404} Moholy’s definition of Vision is directly related with the new consciousness of space-time that: “integrates and transmutes single elements into a coherent whole”. Indeed the correlation of the single to the whole in a new conception of space-time was one of De Stijl’s main concerns, as we can read in the third point of their manifesto: “The new art has brought forward what the new consciousness of time contains: a balance between the universal and the individual”.\textsuperscript{405}

As for Moholy-Nagy, for Henderson, the main problem in art was to balance reason and intuition, understanding and imagination, several layers of the process of perception-creation together in a proper balance. For Henderson the main problem of his generation was: “to bring the intellectual and emotional, the social and technological components into balanced play, to learn to see and feel them in relationship”.\textsuperscript{406} As Victoria Walsh points out, Henderson concerns were similar to Moholy-Nagy’s who wrote:

“Institutional grasp has to be coordinated with the emotional. The spectator must be prepared to sense the underlying meaning of the artist’s approach not as a ‘verbalizable’…Later; after he (the spectator) liberates himself from traditional vision, he will be able to apprehend this emotionally and intellectually…”

The integration of intellectual & emotional knowledge was very important for both insofar as it determined a balanced dialogue between society’s technological development & humanistic concerns. As Henderson wrote in his notebook of 1951: “the problem of our generation is to bring the intellectual and emotional, the social and technological components into balanced play, to learn to see and feel them in relationship”\textsuperscript{407} As Walsh notes, Henderson’s experiments with photography dealt not only with the formal representation of the movement but also with the viewer’s relation to such images. This is a very important point for the conception of Parallel of Life and Art, because at the exhibition the artists were challenging precisely that, the viewer’s relation to the images spatially and conceptually, integrating the use of photography in the modern art, and rethinking modern art’s definition accordingly. Henderson’s notes read:

“…Objet trouve. Ambiguity. Plastic organization. Revelation of Form. Wanted the public to get this respond tot the visual image. To refresh to stimulate the sense of wonder. Some of our photos were essentially of a photo of nature. We owe such a visual experience to the cameras we

\textsuperscript{402} See Walsh. Nigel Henderson. p. 20-47 All quotes from Henderson and Moholy are extracted from this text
\textsuperscript{403} See Chapter Dada & Constructivism: The co-existence of opposites
\textsuperscript{404} See Prelude on H. Wolfflin’s thesis
\textsuperscript{405} Fragments of De Stijl manifesto were included in Moholy-Nagy’s book together with Theo Van Doesburg’s images of the Tesseract cube, paintings and an account of the Dadaist-Constructivist Congress held in Weimar in 1922. See László Moholy-Nagy, Vision in motion. Chicago, P. Theobald, 1947
\textsuperscript{406} 1.10.51 Notebook, Henderson Collection. Tate Archive. See also Walsh. Nigel Henderson. p. 20-47
\textsuperscript{407} i.b.i.d.p.1
owe time lapse (explain) to the movie camera. There you have the intention anyway to try to show the impact of photography, the scope the big burden the medium carries so resiliently-photography which Daguerre defined as...A chemical & physical process in which gives nature the ability to reproduce herself. To try to suggest a maximum of interrelationships to excite the sense of wonder & promote an intuition of order.408

Therefore the challenge to the spectator’s perception was spatial but mainly conceptual. In its spatial layout the exhibit might have been inspired by Herbert Bayer’s Diagram of 360° of Vision, in Moholy-Nagy’s book; but the great challenge was conceptual-visual, since the artists were gathering together photographs from the newspapers (The photo of Jackson Pollock at work from Times magazine) with reproductions of their own works (Paolozzi’s Plaster Blocks, 1952); this meant that the photograph of the original was shown instead of the original for it had the same visual-value (See IMAGE PRO-4: Herbert Bayer, Diagram of 360° field of vision, 1935; Andre Malraux; A & P Smithson’s Perspective drawing). The original was substituted by the image, as Andre Malraux already had pointed out in his essay “Le Musee Imaginaire”;409 To some extent Malraux’s ideas provided historical ground for the re-creation of ready-mades: the ancient figures were not considered initially artistic objects, but it was the act of choosing & contemplating them what turn them into artistic masterpieces; hence artist could do the same with any other object from the everyday-life. The original is substituted by a reproduction and this reproduction is considered of equal value than the photographs that we can find in the journals, plus no matter if the object in itself was meant to be an art piece, our act of choosing it turns it into art. The Dadaist use of “ready-mades” by the IG artists followed Dubuffet’s criticism to the cultural market, since the “images” created by and for the layman, of equal value as an artwork.

But the most important aspect of the exhibition-stated in the catalogue- was the strong influence that technical devices had in the ways of beholding everyday life. As it has been pointed in the Prelude, Wölfflin’s main thesis Principles of Art History (1915) argued that changes in the way of beholding were of paramount importance producing stylistic shifts:410 changes of style were produced by changes in the nature of artistic vision. Years later, W Benjamín criticized this approach for it did not consider the social upheavals manifested in the changes of perception.411 Benjamin had arrived to this conclusion after intense debates with the Berlin Avant-Garde in the 1920s, and was especially interested in Moholy-Nagy’s ideas.412 I would argue that the Parallel of Life & Art exhibit,
was unconsciously following Benjamin's argument imbedded in Moholy’s book; after all the artists were pointing at a current social upheaval –mass consumption of images- was changing their vision of LIFE & ART. Departing from aesthetic concerns aroused by the early avant-gardes the Parallel of Life and Art exhibition made manifest the influence of visual means in perception. The artist departed from principles of modern aesthetics and re-interpreted the Surrealist's exhibitions performing a dadaist three-dimensional collage.

“On Growth & form” and “Parallel of Life and Art”

The first ideas for the Parallel of Life & Art exhibition came out of D'Arcy Thompson's book On Growth & Form (1917), and were developed in two very different ways by the IG members: the first interpretation was carried on by Richard Hamilton quite literally in the exhibition “On Growth & Form” (ICA,1951), while Henderson, Paolozzi & the Smithsons developed a different interpretation two years later in the Parallel of Life and Art exhibition nourished by ideas from Avant-Garde art.

Before becoming an artist Nigel Henderson had studied biology; in the late 1940s when he decided to become an artist he immediately thought about art in relation to the biological depictions of the structural order of life. Henderson & Richard Hamilton shared these concerns and had been talking about the idea for an exhibition; it was Eduardo Paolozzi who at that time in Paris drew their attention to D’Arcy Thomson’s book, “On Growth & Form”. Henderson & Hamilton contacted the ICA and started working on a proposal. Nevertheless Hamilton ended up organizing and designing the exhibition on his own. His written proposal pointed out the fact that artistic creation was very different from natural creation –how nature crease forms- and wondered how artists could take advantage from new techno-scientific means to do so. Hamilton's final layout for the exhibition performed a visual catalogue of images from biology a quite literal interpretation of D’Arcy's book; the exhibition had a “mechanistic” approach carried on further in the following exhibit, Man Machine and Motion (May 1955 Hatton Gallery, Newcastle): it illustrated the “mechanization” of human body according to the means of mobility; the arrangement of the exhibit literally followed the categories drafted by D’Arcy in the second chapter of the book. Hamilton’ mechanistic interpretation of D’Arcy's book might have been very much determined by Banham’s ideas- who at that time was

413 There was a second edition of the book in 1942 probably the one read by the IG artists.
415 He also identified Thompson’s book as the impetus behind the show: “…the visual interest of this field, were biology chemistry, physics and mathematics overlap, was considered an excellent subject for presentation in purely visual terms. The laws of growth and form pertaining to the processes of nature are quite contrary to the processes of artistic creation. However complex the form (Accepting Thompson’s hypothesis) it is the result of very precise physical laws; the complexities of art on the other hand, are the products of involved psychological processes. Nevertheless, the painter and the sculptor have much to gain from the enlargement of their world of experience by an appreciation of the forms in nature beyond their immediate visual environment. It is the enlarged environment opened by scientific studies that we would reveal for its visual qualities”. See Walsh Nigel Henderson p.27
analyzing modern art & architecture in terms of “Machine Aesthetics.” Indeed both Banham & D’Arcy had conceived architecture in mechanistic terms: “…In Aristotle’s parable, the house is there that men may live in it; but it is also there because the builders have laid one stone upon another. It is a mechanism or a mechanical construction…” (See IMAGE PRO-5 & IMAGE PRO-6)

The second interpretation of D’Arcy Thompson’s ideas carried on by Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi was more conceptual; they seemed more interested in D’Arcy’s reading of science as a world picture of reality that establishes relations between man and the elements of nature. D’Arcy Thompson criticized the fact that biology in order to explain the phenomena of the living world had been unsuccessfully driven by a search of a “final cause” and a “teleological concept of end”. For D’Arcy both readings were interwoven: the teleological, and the interpretation of nature as a mechanism; he argued: “like warp and woof, mechanism and teleology are interwoven together, and we must not cleave to the one nor despise the other; for their union is rooted in the very nature of totality…” D’Arcy’s praised Galileo and Newton theories for they enabled us to correlate phenomena of the universe - Newton’s gravitational theory did not concern with the purpose of an apple falling from a tree but related its movement to the movement of the stars:

“…To correlate our particular phenomena with more and more of the physical phenomena around…So to weave a web of connection and interdependence with what the schoolmen called a ‘ratio cognoscendi’, though the true ‘ratio efficiendi’ is still enwrapped in many mysteries. And so handled, the quest of physical causes merges with another great Aristotelian theme-the search for relations between things apparently disconnected, and for ‘similitude in things to common view unlike’…The search for differences or fundamental contrasts between the phenomena of organic and inorganic, of animate and inanimate things, has occupied many men’s mind, while the search for community of principles or essential similitude has been pursued by few…”

D’Arcy Thompson drew a criticism to experimental sciences such as biology for its teleological approach, and defined the labor of the scientist as the establishment of relationships between the phenomena of the organic and the inorganic in order to understand nature in their wholeness. As we have seen the emergence of abstract art as a contest with nature aimed at providing an intuitive world picture mirroring that of science; in the terms employed by D’Arcy to depict scientific labor Van Eyck referred to Mondrian:

“…Mondrian (said): ‘The culture of particular form is approaching its end. The culture of determined relations has begun’. So he was no longer concerned with things themselves, but with their connections, with the relation between one thing and another…He had to reveal this elementary

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417 Banham seems to have exerted a particular influence on Hamilton at this stage…Only four months before Man, Machine and Motion opened at the ICA, he [Banham] spoke on American car styling at one of the IG’s more informal meetings (Borax, or the Thousand Horse-Power Mink’ 4th March 1955), and on the day the show opened to the public, he delivered a lecture to the general ICA audience called 'Metal in Motion' - a version of his IG talk…” Graham Withman, The IG: Postwar in Britain and the aesthetics of plenty. ICA, London 1990
418 D’Arcy Thompson’s, On Growth and Form. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge (Great Britain). p.6
419 “Time out of mind it has been by way of the ‘final cause’, by the teleological concept of end, of purpose or of ‘design’ in one of its many forms (for its forms are many), that men have been chiefly wont to explain the phenomena of the living world…” See D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson, On Growth and Form. P.4
420 See D’Arcy Thompson’s. On Growth and Form. P.7
421 i.b.i.d.p-9
relationship without the things themselves. The era of pure relationships begins: not for the things, but for the world between them.”

The IG artist did a similar thing but using the photographic image as an “elementary expressional mean”; if the Neoplasticists had established relations between the horizontal & the vertical, dimension & color, the IG artists -through the exhibition set and choice of images- aimed at establishing relationships between cells, humans and the stars, as a way to describe their vision of nature. They understood how science and art had evolved as parallel forms of knowledge- world pictures of reality- trying to understand (contest) nature, as we read in Henderson’s notes:

“ART HISTORY size of a Van Eyck in Ghent Bruges...ANATOMY...Why didn’t I want to do these things... PERSPECTIVE... On eye. Fixed in time & space... Galileo... Life room/heads bodies & Legs... Tatty drapes... Bored model... Fine renaissance drawing done with so much conviction – such passion- round the walls. Why? Because (as I later realized) Artist was taking part in the contest of this period. Anatomy. Renaissance... Harvey circulation of the blood. 17th century... Rubens method... Upshot effect feeling of... inferiority/perfectionism... Rather borrowed a camera to satirise old model. Very confused. Quick pen knee pad – a an axe – psyche... Dead ground... Having camera. Started using on own environment. Wife sociologist. Bethnal Green- homogeneous streets people signs walls faces no training. Kindness of photos/film”

Henderson’s anarchic statement depicts stages of art history in which artists took an active role in the “contest with nature”; from the Renaissance onwards, art had evolved from being a naturalistic “contest with nature” to a modern abstract art as a transcendental intuitive logic-a world picture of reality. Now photography, film and Henderson’s new life in Bethnal Green (East London) were pushing him to use the camera: photography as “painting for a scientific age” challenging abstract art on canvas. (IMAGE PRO-6: Images from D’arcy Thompson’s “On Growth & Form” and Nigel Henderson Stressed photograph,1950):

“Just showed me CAMERA had been developed by the painter. To try to objectify his SCRUTINY/ Durer/Holbein (busymen)/Leonardo/Vermeer/Constable/DEGAS (camera-obscura)... Painter/photo/painter/photog cross. Fertilisation whole time. Marcel Duchamp nude descending the stair. Modern Art school influenced by the camera/book – painting for a scientific age.”

Enstrangement

« 3 stoppages étalon : Du hasard en conserve... La mariée mise a nu par ses célibataires meme pour écarter le tout fait, en série de/dans tout trouve... L’écart est une opération... »

Rrose Selavy, Green Box, 1938

The device of enstrangement was the essential element from avant-garde art that made possible Parallel of life & Art exhibition. As I pointed out in previous chapters it arrived to the IG’s milieu through the artworks and ideas of the Dadaists, among them: M. Ernst, Kurt Schwitters, and Marcel Duchamp. Out these three artists I would point out Duchamp’s work for was one of the first Dadaist to use the device of enstrangement to challenge himself, the spectators, and the cultural

422 Aldo Van Eyck, Constant and the abstracts in Strauven ed. Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings p. 64-67
423 Nigel Henderson “Notes on Parallel L & A”. Henderson Archive (9211.5.1.7). Tate Britain. London
market, while at the same time his work was a reflection on the impact of new technical means – photography and film. As I argued up to now these were two essential aspects of avant-garde art tackled by the Henderson, Paolozzi and the Smithsons in the *Parallel of Life & Art* exhibition.

Within the Modern Art movements, it was Dadaism, the strongest reference for the mainstream of the Independent Group artists. The artists closer to the Smithsons, Nigel Henderson, Eduardo Paolozzi, and to some extent Richard Hamilton, were re-visiting the ideas and work of the Dadaists; the work of the young IG artists was first published in the “Uppercase” magazine (edited by Theo Crosby) together with Dadaists artworks & texts from IK Bonset, Kurt Schwitters, and Duchamp. After Henderson’s split with Hamilton on the exhibition related with “On Growth & Form”, Henderson continued working on it meeting Paolozzi regularly at the ICA bar during the 1950s. The first draft design for the exhibition showed their work in parallel: the plaster works of Paolozzi -resembling biological formations on stone- were contrasted with Nigel Henderson experiments with different materials exposed to photographic development -performing cell-like structures. In a second study the work of both was mixed while the spectator’s scale and position in relation to the panels started to be considered. The artists were considering exhibiting only their own work for they considered their art an illustration of the “phenomena of organic and inorganic”, but in the final display their work was not very present; only two photographs by Henderson were included: a photo-image of coffee grounds by Henderson, and a photo of Paolozzi’s sculpture, *Plaster Blocks* (1952). (IMAGE PRO-8: Nigel Henderson & Eduardo Paolozzi (Untitled) “Studies for Parallel of Life & Art” (1952)

In April 1952 the first meeting of the Independent Group took place. It was Eduardo Paolozzi showing images from his scrapbook with an epidiascope, in which no clear argument was articulated -NO LOGIC- just rough images, in Henderson’s words:

“I remember the prints steaming and peeling and the heavy sighs of Eduardo, and the fairly sarcastic attacks of reyner banham; but I got this point in to reyner when he was mustering the film and he took all this in extremely good part, as one would expect him to do. I, of course, empathised very much with Eduardo at that time. It was a visual matter, and the very explicit terms in which people like Reyner Banham, john machale, in another way perhaps Richard Hamilton – all aspects, perhaps, of a rather intellectual set of terms – expressed themselves I could admire, but I felt they tended to leave out as much as they put it. What I thought uniquely valuable in eduardo’s contribution (though he was no mean articulator, but used , I thought, to get a bit muddled in his terms) was sheer drive and virility, the gut reaction, which was missing on the English scene. I valued it enormously, and I wanted to see it have his head. Parallel of Life and Art sprang out of the bringing together by Eduardo of the Smithsons…”

(IMAGE PRO-9: E. Paolozzi’s Scrapbooks from the late 1940s early 1950s)

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424 According to Massey whereas the ICA board relied more on Surrealism and the Bauhaus “...the Independent Group deconstructed modernist theory and re-evaluated the work of the Dadaists...” See Massey Chapter 3 “Growth and from: the founding of the Independent Group.


It was indeed a very Dadaist performance, no logic argument, not even words, just the “heavy sighs of Eduardo” as in a Dadaist’s phonetic poem. We can notice how Henderson relates this event with Bethnal Green and the meetings regarding the exhibition, in which no logical argument was articulated. After Paolozzi’s show the Smithsons joined the exhibition team and the design process changed completely. According to Henderson’s account it seems as if they would have gathered more or less intuitively “ready-made” images. There was discussion on the images but no logical argument, they brought forward material & images that they were reading or had found, that seemed significant to them, pushing it through a scrutiny before the others to see how they reacted, in Henderson words:

“Parallel of Life and Art sprang out of the bringing together by Eduardo of the Smithsons, whom he’d met at the central school, and myself. He brought them out to Bethnal green, and we took a shine to each other, and thought that is we had regular meetings and brought forward material that we were reading or found, that seemed significant to us, we would push it through a scrutiny before the others and see how they reacted. This way we built up quite a body of images and a certain amount of comment, and at the end of a year, maybe a little less, there was quite a lot of work, and I’ve no doubt one of us approached roland, to see whether the thing could be presented as an exhibition; we had already decided we’d like to see photography as a medium to hold on the whole thing together. It was ok.ed. I think we all felt people were a bit nervous of us, that perhaps we were thought to be a bit harum-scarum, unsure of our ground. We felt this nervousness and fought it off: it was a brake on the adventure, because it was an adventure, one couldn’t pre-figure the form it would take. We felt we had quite a head of pressure, we wanted to find the expressive terms of it as we went along. We were probably hanging the material for about two or three days, and were trying to get it into a kind of spider’s web above the heads of people, because the room had to be used for lectures during the exhibition; by the time we’d strung up an awful lot of wire and hooks and got out of line and back into line and so on, we’d built up a pretty good nervous tension, which continued right up to the point when we decided that this was all we could and we had to face the comments. But ultimately they could not pre-figure the form it would take.” 427

The set was certainly a “Museum without walls” but the artists, unlike Malraux, considered images from different realms apart from art; in fact for the final set of the exhibition the artworks from the artist were almost dismissed. Indeed at first sight the “aesthetic aura” of the images presented was influenced by Dubuffet’s “Art Brut”, but the way it was arranged, the process was that of an unconscious intuitive Dadaist collage.

427 Nigel Henderson interviewed by Dorothy Morland 7.8.1976. Nigel Henderson archive. Tate Britain. London. There is also a manuscript by Nigel Henderson on the exhibition I was not able to find but quoted Victoria Walsh in Nigel Henderson. P.92. “We had for some time been interested in exchanging images from our own private ‘imaginary museums’. You will remember that this is the way in which Andre Malraux discusses the assemblage of photographic material in printed form, gathered together from many points scattered in space and time, and representing the creative work of artists of all ages and civilizations. In our own case, however, the contents of these museums extended beyond the normal terms of art to include photographs produced for technical purposes. We often found that this exchange resulted in confirmation of our beliefs that we had happened upon something significant, that others too responded in the same way to the visual impact of a particular image. Up to a point, that is, we found that we had a common working aesthetic, although we could none of us formulate a verbal basis for it. Eventually, we decided to pool the material we already had and to continue to collect more in an attempt to elucidate what we had in common and the nature of the material moving us. At this point certain groupings began to declare themselves… these terms… then began to play back on our selection and condition the choice of further images”
The most important thing about the exhibition was that the PROCESS itself provided the form “…one couldn’t pre-figure the form it would take…”; while the argument itself emerged out of the design PROCESS and the perceptual PROCESS, since there was no pre- or post-established argument. The process of spreading images on a notebook or the floor is carried on into a room. The Parallel of Life and Art exhibition had no explicit argument, the reason why those specific images were selected was not given. The establishing of general principles of relationships between particular and general phenomena might be a common goal of science and art; the way they search for and establish them is different - in this case it was intuitive - satisfying a conceptual purpose not yet articulated - and visual in an “enstanging” manner— satisfying a decorative purpose.

There were two great Dadaists well skilled in the techniques of collage, and “enstranging” devices that were an important reference to Paolozzi and Henderson: Kurt Schwitters and Marcel Duchamp. Within the Dadaist artists, I would like to stress the importance of Marcel Duchamp’s works and ideas in the Independent Group.428 As it has been pointed out in previous chapters it was Nigel Henderson who had helped Duchamp in the setting of a Surrealist exhibition at the Galerie Guggenheim-Jeune in London.429 Apparently Henderson and the Smithsons tried a similar strategy to that of Duchamp weaving a spider web between the images but they failed. (IMAGE PRO-10: Man Ray photograph Dust Breeding, 1920 and Marcel Duchamp’s installation “Sixteen miles of string” for the exhibition “First papers of surrealism”, New York, 1942)

Henderson, who referred to the Parallel of Life and Art exhibition as a “small portable museum” owned a copy of Duchamp’s Green Box (1934) that was being translated into English by Richard Hamilton.430 Duchamp’s Green Box was a limited edition of 300 copies published in October 1934 by Rrose Sélavy (Duchamp’s alter ego). It contained “93 documents (photographs, drawings and manuscripts notes of the years 1911-15) as well as a plate in color” related with Duchamp’s painting, The Bride stripped by her bachelors, even-The Large Glass (1915-23). According to Hamilton the box supplemented the painting and a “complete appreciation of the painting is impossible without some knowledge of its contents”.431 The Green Box included the instructions for the painting of the Bride, and photographs such as Man Ray’s “Dust breeding” which resembles an aerial view of a cultivated area, and points at a parallelism between an inorganic elements behaving as an organic one432

As I pointed out in previous chapters Duchamp was one of the earliest Dadaist experimenting with enstrangement (See Duchamp’s Fountain, 1917.Image ENS-7). The process of

428 R. Hamilton pointed out the influence of Duchamp for the IG at that time: “I’d seen the green box at Roland Penrose’s house in Hampstead. Nigel Henderson took me to Roland’s house when I was still a student at the Slade…Anthony Hill was another person also thinking about Duchamp at that time –we were all beginning to think about Duchamp as a seminal figure-and somebody proposed that we should have a seminar on Marcel Duchamp” Edited version of Richard Hamilton’s tape about “Growth & From” interview by Dorothy Morland 955.1.14.3 1977-78?
429 See Chapter 0.2.2. The Independent Group and Modern Art.. Henderson’s account to Dorothy Morland in 1976 previously quoted. See also Walsh. Nigel Henderson.p. 97
430 For the English translation of the Green Box Duchamp put in contact Richard Hamilton with a French professor, George Heard Hamilton.
432 This argument is substantially developed by Walsh p.97
perception in art is brought to its fullest by the transformation of a “mass consumption” ready-made object into an artwork. Henderson, Paolozzi & the Smithsons operated with the photographs of their scrap-books as Duchamp did with the Urinary- they both turned it upside down and presented it as an artwork in order to stimulate the spectator’s “sense of wonder”; in Henderson’s words:

“Objet trouve. Ambiguity. Plastic organization. Revelation of Form. Wanted the public to get this respond tot the visual image. To refresh to stimulate the sense of wonder. Some of our photos were essentially of a photo of nature. We owe such a visual experience to the cameras we owe time lapse (explain) to the movie camera.

There you have the intention anyway to try to show the impact of photography, the scope the big burden the medium carries so resiliently- photography which Daguerre defined as…A chemical & physical process in which gives nature the habilit y to reproduce herself. To try to suggest a maximum of interrelationships to excite the sense of wonder & promote an intuition of order.”433 (my emphasis)

Henderson’s notes for the exhibit explicitly referred to Duchamp’s Nude Descending the Stair, he understood perfectly how Duchamp was trying to challenge-overcome photography with painting; or simply tried to redefine modern abstract art (painting) facing the mechanical reproducibility of the image (Something I will argue further on). Duchamp’s Large Glass operated as photography with captions gathered and edited as an artwork, the Green-Box.434 The key purpose of Duchamp’s Green box was to challenge the conception of the artwork and the spectator’s relation to it. Among the manuscripts notes in the box we can read: “Perdre la possibilit e de reconnaitre 2 choses semblables, 2 couleurs...2 chapeaus, 2 formes que arrivent...impossibilite de memoire visuelle suffisante pour transporte d’un semblable a l’autre...”435 Duchamp’s notes dealt precisely with what the IG artists did: placing images with certain resemblance - such an aerial photograph of an archeological site and a cell formation - challenging the viewers capacity to recognize them.436 (IMAGE PRO-11: Duchamp’s Green Box, 1934)

The Parallel of Life & Art exhibition was a tridimensional collage of images without argument - no explanatory text was included in the catalogue- just a list of the images with their reference. Enstrangement is at work: after seeing the images it is difficult to recognize what is it- a strange cell formation? No, it is just an aerial photo of a city. Other images are easily recognizable nevertheless you may feel as if there is something of the previous image in the image you are looking at now; though you are not able to immediately state the reason why you find a resemblance….You find more resemblance between the façade of the Un building and a cell formation than with the image of Egyptian architecture showing a column….Hence a contemporary architectural form-surface-

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433 Nigel Henderson “Notes on Parallel L & A”. Henderson Archive (9211.5.1.7). Tate Britain. London
434 I will develop this argument further on it was basically drafted by R. Krauss’ essay “Notes on the Index I: Seventies Art in America” October nº3 (Spring 1977)
435 From the original copy of Duchamp’s Green Box exhibited at the Philadelphia Museum of Modern Art Notes taken by myself
436 The following note deals as well with the establishment of relation between different facts or situation and the illustration of such relations: “Etant donnes 1º la chute d’eau 2º le gaz d’eclairage. Nous [déterminons] les conditions, du repos instantané (ou apparence allegorique) d’une succession [d’un ensemble] de faits divers semblant se necessiter l’un l’autre par des lois, pour isoler le signe de la concordance entre, d’un part, … Repos (capable de toutes les (?) excentricites innombreables d’autre part, un choix de possibilites legitimes par ces lois et aussi les occasionnants.” Transcribed from the original copy of Duchamp’s Green Box at the Philadelphia Museum of Modern Art.
appearance is more related with a biologic tissue – with the image we obtain by looking at the tissues with a microscope - than the image of other piece of architecture. Hence we may argue that the categories under which we – rationally name order things - do not correspond to what we experience visually? Indeed the Smithsons will dare to break rationalistic categories after this experience. (IMAGE PRO-12 & IMAGE PRO-13)

It was difficult to recognize the image in the photograph at a time in which photographs were used to depict, easily recognize nature; the Dadaist’s device of enstrangement is at work abstraction is achieved enstranging objects from the everyday life: the setting, established parallelisms between images with a common “aesthetic”, but coming from different realms, being certainly difficult to recognize, clearly argue, and relate images to one another. Following Dadaism the exhibition erased the boundaries between the phenomena of life and what is commonly considered art - aiming at uniting both “life and art”:

“…abolition of memory: Dada; abolition of archeology: Dada; abolition of the prophets: Dada; abolition of the future: Dada; absolute and unquestionable faith in every god that is the immediate product of spontaneity: Dada… Freedom: Dada Dada Dada, roaring of tense colors, and interlacing of opposites and of all contradictions, grotesques, inconsistencies: LIFE\(^{437}\)

Later on the avant-garde goal of merging art & life was pursued by the Smithsons in the architectural realm. In The exhibition has been defined as form provided by the creative process that is its content, for both “warp and woof” are considered one and the same thing: a Dadaist three-dimensional collage that established visual relations between the forms of nature and the forms created by man without providing any logical argument (very Dadaist). Hence with the design for the \textit{Parallel of Life & Art exhibition} the Smithson’s materialized the definition of art given by the artists of the IG not as a mere production of objects, but as the establishment of relations between the objects (Images) and the real World - art as a \textit{transcendental intuitive logic} that establishes relations between the thing in our mind and the thing in themselves – understood in its global sense as nature; according to Henderson the original title for the exhibit was: “\textit{Parallel of Life & Art Exhibition of Landscape, science & art “. Art & Science drafted intuitive & rational world pictures of reality, and Landscape-architecture was its ultimate materialization; indeed Parallel to the achievement of their friends, the Smithsons explored the intuitive means of art in architecture providing a new vision of the city with the Golden Lane competition entry (1952) and a re-definition of architecture as a true avant-garde form with the \textit{Golden Lane Grid} presented at CIAM 9, 1953; out of which a new generation of Modern Architects emerged:

“I don’t know how this kind of mythologizing takes place, but I remember Peter Smithson told me years afterwards he went to some CIAM Congress or something of the kind in Tokyo, I think, certainly in Japan. He was invited to speak and took along a lot of documentation of Parallel of Life and Art, and he said when he got back I wish you’d been there, we got a standing ovation from the young people, who really seemed to twig it, and feel for it\(^{438}\)}

\(^{437}\) Tristan Tzara \textit{manifesto 1918}  

\(^{438}\) N. Henderson interviewed by Dorothy Morland. 7.8.1976. Henderson Archive. Tate Britain. London
2.2.2 **GOLDEN LANE GRID (CIAM 9, 1953):**

“De même que les murs, les colonnes, etc., sont les éléments dont se composent les édifices, de même les édifices sont les éléments dont se composent les villes”

Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand, 1802

“Up to now Brutalism has been discussed stylistically, whereas its essence is ethical”

A & P Smithson, 1957

While working on the Parallel of Life & Art exhibition with N. Henderson & Paolozzi, the Smithsons’ ideas on art may have changed substantially. Talking about the exhibition Henderson accounted their meetings in Bethnal Green, discussing about their ideas and the images for the exhibition. Art was not any more a matter of a single object-artwork but an intuitive logic establishin relations between men and nature; the Smithsons to explore its implications in the architectural realm.

Departing from the Dadaist ready-made and the Surrealist “found object” the Smithsons developed their own rational-intuitive design process ultimately theorized in the notion of the “As found”. Together with Nigel Henderson they saw the kids playing in the street and they rediscovered the street - the “As found” element of the city - that was re-considered in relation to the other elements of the city: house, street, district. Instead of thinking about the city as the gathering of (objects) monuments, they saw the city as the materialization of the relations between these elements in terms of “human associations”. The fact that while looking at the city architects focused either on the analysis of the streets or the analysis of the buildings could be simply considered an esthetic choice, but it was indeed an ethical one; an ethical choice which is aesthetic implications and a very specific idea of form imbedded. If the architectural tradition focused on the buildings for they shaped the streets, whereas the Smithsons re-introduced an ever existing but unconscious concern about the street as a form - as an element-ary element of the city. There were no objects to look at in Mondrian paintings, the relations established between “elementary expressional means” were the form itself, the thing to look at – not the solid “object”, but also the void, the relation between solid & void for object & space, solid & void were considered one and the same thing. Therefore the “house – street – relationship” conceived by the Smithsons as a solid-void relationship was extended to the formation of the city “house – street – district – city” = “Solid – Void – Void – Solid?” It could be simply argued that after a nice walk with Nigel Henderson around Bethnal Green the “architects discovered the value of the street” but the most important thing to say is that they saw it because they already had in mind a deep notion of form, rich and complex in its simplicity.

(IMAGE PRO-14: Painted ceiling for Ove-Arup office in London, 1952, E. Paolozzi; Drawing for the CIAM GRILLE (CIAM 9) 1953 by A & P Smithson; photograph of kids playing in Bethnal Green by N. Henderson)

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The image of the Golden Lane project, with E. Paolozzi drawings on the left, and Henderson’s photograph on the right, wants to illustrate the nature of the artists’ potential influence on the Smithsons: Paolozzi as a rough & sullen producer of free-hand drawings, and Henderson’s photographs telling to the Smithsons where to look at. The artists’ sensibility awakened the Smithsons’ consciousness about the life conditions of the working classes; together they developed an aesthetic with its own elementary expressional means: the “found objects”. Moreover, the intellectual background of Judith Henderson (Nigel’s wife) provided an experimental-objective foundation to the Smithsons’ ideas on the city. Nevertheless, the influence of artists or sociologist should not be overestimated; their main achievement was to understand their role as architects facing the recent developments in painting, sculpture, photography; they understood avant-garde art and redefined architecture accordingly, developing their own re-definition of modern architecture as a form of art.

**Ideas from a group within the Independent Group**

The intellectual background of the Henderson’s enriched the Smithsons’ perspective in two main aspects: the sociological and the artistic. Nigel Henderson’s wife, Judith Henderson, was a sociologist working for the London survey in the working-class neighborhood of Bethnal Green (London), whereas Nigel had made acquaintance of avant-garde artists throughout his life and was at that moment struggling to find its own language in photography as an artist.

The work carried on by Judith Henderson within the London Survey was important in order to provide a sociological foundation to the Smithsons’ ideas about the city. The Sociological studies in East London were gathered in “Family & Kinship in East London” by Willmott & Young. Two main aspects of sociological studies were present in the Smithsons’ ideas: first, the relationships between the individual and the community; the first part of the book analyzed “Kinship on Bethnal Green” and focused every chapter on a different aspect of “kinship”: “Chapter 2. Where people live… Chapter 5. The kinship network… Chapter 7. Kinship and community”. Bethnal Green was presented as a network of different degrees of human association (family-kinship-community-neighborhood…) related to the street, the “turning”, and the district: “The village of the borough…Sometimes a person’s relatives are in the same turning, more often another nearby turning, and this helps to account for the attachment which people feel to the precinct, as distinct from the street, in which they live…” Hence the Smithsons’ depiction of the city in diagrams of voluntary/involuntary association was completely meaningful. Mondrian’s statement “The culture of particular forms is approaching its end, the culture of determined relations has begun” found a sociological foundation in which architecture played an important role, it served as a catalyst element of “human associations” (See IMAGE PRO-15: Diagrams “Cluster. Diagram of voluntary/involuntary association”, and “Cluster. Diagram of complexity of association”, 1951)

The second important aspect of the sociological studies is that pointed out the importance of the street as a place. It serves as an intermediary element between private and public life, in which the neighbors do a whole array of activities becoming an extension of the house:

“...Home and Street...Most people meet their acquaintances in the streets, at the market, at the pub or at work. They do not usually invite them to their houses...Where every front door opens to street or staircase, and houses are crowded on top of one another, such an attitude helps to preserve some privacy against the press of people. The exclusiveness in the home runs alongside an attitude of friendliness to other people living in the same street..."442

It was Nigel Henderson who first looked at the kids playing on the streets of Bethnal Green and took pictures of them. The Henderson’s were suffering from an “acute lack of money and the misery of rationing"443 when they moved to the deprived area of East End. Nigel’s work on abstraction influenced by L. Moholy Nagy’s was nourished by the re-discovery of how people live: “My wife and I knew we could experience alienation in the working class environment. Perhaps this feeling intensified the feeling I had that I was watching live theatre... like an audience of one in a public theatre of All. My neighbours appeared to be living out their lives in response to some determined script. These rituals were formal, very strong and coercive to me [and] because of their unfamiliarity exotic...'Limitation of means create style' said the painter Georges Braque of painting. I found this true of life around me recognizing a poetic homogeneity in the patient tired faces of people and houses and pavements; a savage humility begotten of limited means, I thought."444

Nigel Henderson depicts the feeling of “enstragement” bringing him to the re-discover the humble every-day life where he expected to find his own language- style; as I argued the device of enstrangement results a mean to materialize the “urge of abstraction” leading to the production of style in art.445

A&P Smithson literally witnessed Henderson’s ‘modus operandi’ during their visits to his house in which they discussed about the Parallel of Life & Art exhibition. E. Paolozzi met A&P Smithson at the Central School of Arts (London) and introduced them to Henderson in 1951. Peter Smithson recalled the “absolutely incredible” walks with Henderson in East End (London). Alison Smithson retrospectively described Henderson as “the original image-finder", while Peter Smithson observed that “a walk with Nigel is to see the inanimate as animate, and these weird business of opening...other people’s eyes to see- to have an affection between objects and people” Indeed the device of enstrangement – like “watching live theatre” – enhanced his natural sensibility - the eye, the smell - the empathic willingness (predisposition) that enabled him to perceive, and find – the objet trouve , the street. (See IMAGE PRO-16: Henderson's photographs from Bethnal Green):

“'Accident'- Let’s have it in inverted commas, please. Accident, the subtle prompter in the wings of the unconscious- no friend to the BRASH- the coarsely confident or possibly? The VISUAL ENGINEER. Accident the great humbler...What we call SELECTIVE ACCIDENT to be good must function like the object trouvé- a chance set of “found” phenomena bringing about an order which you might ideally wished/invented to create from scratch. It is a question of RECOGNITION”446

442 See the first chapter of the book “Kinship on Bethnal Green” from “Family & Kinship in Est London” by Michael Young & Peter Willmott
443 Walsh p-49
444 Nigel Henderson manuscript from Walsh p-49
445 See Prelude on Worringer
446 Undated notebook from Henderson collection. Tate archive. See Walsh p-53
Drifting around Bethnal Green Henderson experimented the feeling of personal “enstrangement” opening his spirit to recognize in the objects his own concerns. The recognition of the “objet trouve” was an act of re-identification with oneself. His pictures of the kids playing in the streets were used by the Smithsons to illustrate their idea of re-identification. The city had been considered according to four functions - living, working, recreation, circulation; now the Smithsons tried to overcome these categories re-identifying the street: instead of considering it as a mere circulation space it had been re-considered as a recreation space following the kid’s example. To some extent it could be argued that the Golden Lane project presented together with their idea of re-identification was materialized following the kid’s drawing on the street; Henderson’s images illustrated the kids playing, drawing on the street and –like the Cobra artists were doing- they learnt something out of it: they draw over the existing fabric of the city a continuous street in the air (See IMAGE PRO-16: A & P Smithson CIAM Grille, 1953; Henderson photograph; Smithsons’ drawing-collage showing the planned construction process of the Golden Lane)

The Golden Lane project

“Each generation feels a new dissatisfaction, and conceives of a new idea of order.

This is architecture…”


The Smithsons’ project aimed at re-defining the street as an “element” of the city- the street conceived not an enclosed object but an open form, and the result of a process in time. It was a project that reacted against the figurative tendencies: which emulated forms from the recent past, what they called, “rationalist architecture”; or from the ancient past, the “garden city movement”. It was a project designed around the “void”, the community space -the street-in which the object in itself (the building) was quite unimportant; it is important in so far as it establishes relations between the neighbors in the community (small scale) and spreads over the city (medium scale). While drifting with Henderson around East End the street it was not seen any more as a street =circulation space; but as a theatre, a playground, a ball room, a dinning room, a funeral parlor – a place in which things happened-human associations took place. The architects understood the street as a “Form” – a relational space in which things happen- a place not an object.

A & P Smithson’s project was a reaction against the “Garden city movement” and the “rational architecture movement” that tried to overcome the academicism into which modern architecture had turned: “the architecture of the academic period which followed the great period of cubism, and dada, and De Stijl, of the Spirit Nouveau. This was the period of the minimum kitchen and the four functions, the mechanical concept of architecture” The Smithsons praised the “great period” of the early avant-gardes and were completely “dissatisfied” with the misinterpretation carried on by “rational architecture”, and the regressive tendencies of the “Garden city movement”;

447 Charte d’Athènes at CIAM 49, 1933
449 See A & P Smithson “The Built World: Urban re-identification” published in Architectural Design June 1955. p-185. All the quotes from the Smithsons are from this text; I refer mainly to this text for it was the earliest and most complete depiction of the project. See also a later though interesting text on the project in Uppercase 3 : [Alison & Peter Smithson] / designed & edited by Theo Crosby. London : Whitefriars, [1959]
according to the Smithsons their dissatisfaction was due to the inadequacy of “either of these movements to provide an environment which gives form to our generation’s idea of order...Why is it we cannot find for each place the form of our generation?” The architects were criticizing the current tendency to emulate the “forms” from the past, instead of struggle to find contemporary forms adequate to current needs. Present had to be faced and given form - as the Dadaist or Mies had claimed “Not yesterday, not tomorrow only today can be given form”.

The labor of the reconstruction was being aggressive in so far as it demanded formal solutions able to establish a dialogue with the existing urban fabric at different scales:

“...A form must be found for the house which is capable of being put together with others of a similar sort so as to form bigger and equally comprehensible elements which can be added to existing villages and towns in such a way as to revitalize the traditional hierarchies and not destroy them. The relationship of the country and the town, the bank and the house, the school and the pub, is conveyed by the form they take. Form is an active force, it creates the community, it I life itself made manifest”

The ambition of the Golden Lane project was to create a form that provided space for the establishment of “human associations” at different levels. This intention was clearly illustrated in the section of the building, in which almost one fourth of it was devoted to community space (the street), plus one third of the house section was devoted to a potential semipublic-space (Balcony) (See IMAGE PRO-18 & PRO-19) In a Mondrian painting it was a matter of balance between the elements: position, dimension, proportion, and color determined by horizontal & vertical lines; whereas in the project - position, dimension, proportion- determined the spatial relationships created by the architectural elements: buildings, decks, partitions, etc.. Nevertheless it is worth to note that regardless the mathematical accuracy, and the rigorous use of specific geometric forms, the Smithsons’ were completely aware of the unavoidable arbitrariness of any existing solution (IMAGE PRO-20):

“We must try and find out what way this basic contact should take place, how many houses should be put together, what should be their shared facilities – the value equivalent to the village pump: continually questioning the arbitrariness of existing solutions.

This is the basic step of the ecological approach to the problem of habitat: the house is a particular house in a particular place, part of an existing community, and it should try to extend the laws and disciplines of that community. In the Unite d’Habitation at Marseilles, Le Corbusier has almost fallen over backwards trying to establish a definite relationship between the ‘individual and the collective’

450 “What we want now is spontaneity. Not because is better or more beautiful than anything else. But because everything that issues freely from ourselves, without the intervention of speculative ideas, represent us...” Tristan Tzara. See Chapter 1.4. The Elementary

451 See Chapter 1.4. Elementary – Van Doesburg: From Dada to the elementary

452 Later in the 1990s they stated “In the old tradition, the street outside the house is the first point of contact where children learn for the first time of the world outside. Here are carried on those adult activities which are essential to everyday life (shopping, car cleaning, scooter repairs, letter posting, etc.)-THE STREET. Re-identifying man with his environment cannot be achieved using historical forms of house grouping (streets, squares, greens, etc.), as the social reality they represent no longer exists. The Golden Lane idea, a multilevel city with residential streets-in-the-air, is an attempt at another housing grouping. From the multilevel street, people are in direct contact with the larger range of activities which give identity to their community-THE DISTRICT” from A&P Smithson. The Charged void: Urbanism. The Monacelly Press Inc. New York, 2001
Le Corbusier struggled to relate “individual & collective” as De Stijl had aimed: “a new balance between the universal and the individual”\textsuperscript{453} and of course, the Smithsons conceived and compared the *Golden Lane* in relation to the *Unite* trying to bring some of its elements one step further: the interior street of the unite provided “an enclosed world of neighbors”, whereas the outside street of the *Golden Lane* was more generous in its dimensions, and was conceived as an extension of the house connecting with the outside in its transversal and longitudinal section (See IMAGES PRO-18-19-20).\textsuperscript{454} The *Golden Lane* tried to re-create the life of the street level at a certain height: abandoning the idea of the flat for that of a row house, providing balcony’s at the “elevated street” level with views over the landscape, instead of a garden at the ground level: “…wide ‘decks’ or covered streets which would give to the inhabitants a place for the children and the leisurely back-chat of urban street life. The family dwellings had outdoor space in the form of yard-gardens which gave directly off these decks’, thus the family could contribute to the architecture of the street. The streets were to be joined up in a continuous network in an attempt to deal with the problem of the really big city…”

The Unite was an isolated icon in the landscape, whereas the *Golden Lane* was a continuous building integrated with the urban fabric of the city; its public space reached almost every part of the building, and the elevated deck touched the ground if necessary. The continuous deck level and the semi-public balconies provided room for the street-life as in the traditional street; although it is worth to note that it was a solution conceived only for high dense areas: “…in small places multi-level solutions are absurd, for no one wants to lose touch with the earth if he can avoid it…” \textsuperscript{455} The street was perceived as a “place” where things happen, and not as a mere circulation “space”: architecture was meant to establish a “unity between the built form and the men using it”, and had inherent in it a new notion of architectural space in terms of place in which Van Eyck was working on.\textsuperscript{456} The street was not just an object that satisfied bodily functions; the Smithsons had experienced a certain feeling of “enstrangement” while drifting in East-end when they run into an “object-trouve” -the street: an object which is not an enclosed spaced but an open shape catalyst of relations between the built form, and the men using it. Grounded in their architectural “objet-trouve” they drafted a new definition of architecture: a form aiming at the satisfaction of conceptual needs

\textsuperscript{453} De Stijl manifesto, 1918
\textsuperscript{454} “The street is an extension of the house; in it children learn for the first time of the world outside the family; it is a microcosmic world in which the street games change with the seasons and the hours are reflected in the cycle of street activity” Alison & Peter Smithson “Ordinariness and light”. Originally written in 1952
\textsuperscript{455} The kind of street life the Smithsons aimed at reproducing in the “street in the air” was nicely depicted by Henderson’s account of the life in the streets of East End: “Our cloth-capped man on his bicycle lives in the more compact geography, working near the living house, trading in the street or living over his small shop in a day to day economy without larder stores and credit accounts. A watch-repairer works in his window abutting the street in the medieval craftsman’s way. The empirical articles of his trade are scattered around him in an organic order, obedient to the logic of his seeing fingers. One shop front crowds another in that bizarre interplay of trade and sign that contributes to the complex texture of the city. Funeral parlour and Ice cream parlour share the universal symbiosis and, from the windows niche, the prurient headstone of an angel reassures us that in the midst of death we are in life” See Victoria Walsh, Nigel Henderson.
\textsuperscript{456} See Aldo van Eyck differentiated between a rationalistic notion of space & time, instead he proposed to conceive the architectural space in terms of place and time in terms of: occasion, duration, and memory. See section: *Aldo van Eyck & The Nieuwe Beelding*, in chapter 1.3.2. The Nieuwe Beelding after De Stijl
such as “association” or “identity” that mirrored the main goal of avant-garde art merging art & life: “…architecture as the direct result of a way of life.”

Form & process

The forms we create are determined by the design process carried on; a process that can be conceived in terms of perception and materialization (consciousness and craft). This chapter aimed at illustrating how the process of consciousness and craft may determine form - pointing at the possibility of conceiving form as a process. The design process can be divided two stages: the visualization in our imagination, and its materialization through craft. The visualization of forms is determined by our perception of the world; the craft, the materialization, is equally determined by a process of perception-consciousness while the “making” takes place. A classical example of form in terms of process Although the Golden Lane project & grid were done by 1953 the Smithsons developed different versions & ideas on it up to the late 1990s; they reworked the street in the air idea in different projects for years, out of which the Robin Hood Gardens was the most clear example.

We have seen how the process of consciousness is important: the streets were there before -and people as well- but the Smithsons, and most of the architects at that time got use to both, did not care, and did not see. That is why New Brutalism was an ethical matter, and not simply a matter of style: “Up to now Brutalism has been discussed stylistically, whereas its essence is ethical”. The conscious visualization of objects is determined by our perception of the world, and ultimately by our will; the eye of the architect was used to the see street, and thought about it as a mere circulation space. In order to challenge existing pre-conceptions of this kind the device of “enstragement” is of paramount importance for it brings us to visualize and see thins anew being conscious of aspects we did not grasp before.

Indeed we see what we want to see and we imagine out of what we see. The subconscious determines the conscious but through making the conscious feeds back the subconscious. Hence Form emerged as the result of a process, not merely in terms of craft-design but mainly in terms of the active role of “consciousness” in time. As an object, in terms of figure, the Golden Lane project looks like a Unite d’Habitation scaled down with an outside corridor; indeed the idea of an outside corridor was not new. Nevertheless as it was presented at CIAM, the Smithsons’ Grille represented a paradigmatic shift for it presented new categories-elements for urban design –house, street, district, city – conceived in terms of human associations, together with a new idea of form steaming from the design process: on the left of the grille the process of consciousness through “enstrangement”, the kids playing in the “circulation space” seen by the architect from the “door-step” of the house, - witness from the stands his perception is awaken by the “theater-performance” of the kids –it is a street or a playground? It is both at the same time. On the right of the grille the process of materialization: the row entitled “House” presents the kid –drawing or playing? – the project view over the existing fabric – the plans of the house- and the continuous childlike drawing “chalked upon

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458 i.b.i.d.
the existing urban fabric. In the second row “the street” is presented again as a performing space: the picture of the current street on the ground is followed by a plan of the new street in the air – the childlike drawing has been rationalized into an orthogonal plan. The third row presents “the district”, as a clustering formation of a streets network with a name attached to them (office, craft, factory, ceremonial); as if at this level a zoning-function would be needed. Hence the Golden Lane project had embedded a new notion of UR-the city that emphasized the URban nature of architecture as a place in which human associations take place – a political form in which ethics & aesthetics met in so far as it is the materialization of human relations. In this sense architecture was redefined as a form of art following the principles defined by the avant-garde.
2.3.1 ALDO VAN EYCK: ARCHITECTURE & THE ARTS

"What has been discovered in the field of form consciousness since Cezanne, by way of Seurat, the early Cubism of 1910-12, the Dadaism of Merz and Cabaret Voltaire, or Blaue Reiter, Suprematism and De Stijl movement was carried over from the realm of painting to that of architecture. So the painter is relieved of the one sided duty (initially necessary and therefore meaningful) to suppress his need for direct expression in favor of purely formal experimentation. This duty will continue to apply to the architect for a long time to come: for the sake of man and the reality of life he will have to continue his laborious struggle with form...but the painter has always been a very different sort of animal. He is concerned with direct and pregnant physical expression; he makes form subservient to this urge”

Aldo van Eyck, 1951

How could it be possible to create “Style” after De Stijl? Certainly not simply emulating Neoplasticists shapes in new designs, but essentially understanding the logic behind De Stijl project, and reconsidering it in contemporary terms; and that is precisely what Aldo Van Eyck did. He followed the path opened by the early avant-gardes, and struggled to develop a logical evolution of modern abstract art ideas on architecture-grounded on the achievements of Neoplasticist’s such as J.J.P. Oud, G. Rietveld, Van Doesburg, and C. van Eesteren. Van Eyck understood that a true Neoplasticist architecture was not a matter of emulating OBJECTS; such as the rectangular shapes of Mondrian’s paintings, or Vantongerloo’s sculptures; he visited Nelly van Doesburg living at the House-Studio in Meudon designed & built by Van Doesburg before his death; Van Eyck used Van Doesburg’s Counter-construction drawings (1923) to explain his notion modern architecture; nevertheless he understood that the PROCESS of mimicking a Mondrian painting with a three dimensional spiral of colored cubes around a staircase, was not De Stijl’s main achievement (Van Doesburg & Van Eesteren, Maison d’Artiste, 1923). There was a “LOGIC” behind the avant-garde movements-behind modern abstract art- that rebelled against the “deterministic…Euclidian groove”, a logic that was being obliterated and turned into something “sterile and academic – literally abstract”. Van Eyck understood the project of modern abstract art so he was aware of the limitations of rationalistic tendencies in modern architecture- so were Loos, Le Corbusier, or Mies. According to Van Eyck architects should “stop fondling technique for its own sake – stop stumbling after progress” and use both technical and artistic means to fulfill material and emotional needs. For him architecture was an art, simply that:

“The wonderful thing about architecture is that it’s an art – just that. The terrible thing about architects today is that they’re not artists. Worse, they’re semi-artists comfortably engaged in something super. But architecture, I tell you, is neither a semi nor a super art – it is an art”

459 Aldo van Eyck, Constant and the Abstracts, opening speech for the Constant exhibition at Le Canard gallery in Amsterdam on 16 February 1951. See Ligtelijn and Strauven. eds. Collected articles and other writings. p.64

460 See Chapter 1.4. The Elementary, 1.4.1-Dadaism & Constructivism: Modernity not progress, section: Van Doesburg: From Dada to the elementary (Images EL-13-14)

461 See Chapter 1.3. The New Consciousness, and Image NC-6

462 In the text, Is architecture going to reconcile basic values? (Talk at the Otterlo Congress in 1959). Edited by Van Eyck in 1961): See, Strauven & Ligtelijn Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings. P.202 The following quotes from Van Eyck are from this text

463 Van Eyck used this statement several times: At the conclusion of the Otterlo Congress in 1961. See “The moment of realization” Strauven & Ligtelijn Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings. p.205; and in the book “The child, the city and the artist”, see Francis Strauven and Vincent Ligtelijn eds. The child, the city and the artist : an essay on architecture : the in-between realm / Aldo van Eyck. Amsterdam: SUN, cop. 2008. P.58
Inspired by the early abstract paintings by Modrian, De Stijl concluded: “...a development of a style without architecture was non-sense...”\textsuperscript{464}, notions such as “the elementary” aimed to enrich life with art, according to Modrian: “art is only a substitute while the beauty of life is still deficient. It will disappear in proportion, as life gains in equilibrium”.\textsuperscript{465} In this regard I would argue that the most important contribution of De Stijl to modern architecture was the idea that abstraction in architecture – a “non-figurative” architecture – could be achieved only with architectural means. Abstract-transcendental art bridged the thing in the mind (kunstwollen) and the thing in itself (nature) producing non-figurative forms (squares or child-like drawings); nevertheless the production of forms in architecture was determined by the thing in itself (nature- man’s behavior); Van Eyck’s conclusion was that architecture, in order to be transcendental, should be the materialization of man’s elementary behavior.

**Art & Architecture**

There are four main elements coming from the avant-garde art that Aldo van Eyck had very present at the time when he designed the playgrounds:

First, the COBRA’s appraisal of experimentation was parallel to Van Eyck’s struggle to redefine architecture itself as a form of art through experimentation; according to Van Eyck the main difference between architecture and other visual arts, was the fact that architects should suppress their need of direct expression in favor of purely formal experimentation. Whereas the artist makes form subservient to his urge in order to “express”, the architect must devote to “

 purely formal experimentation”. If we consider the fact that COBRA defined themselves as “Groupe Experimentale”, and Constant’s text for the catalogue of the Cobra exhibition “C’est notre désir qui fait la révolution” argued that the artists were “...condamnes a l’experimentation par les memes causes qui acculent le monde a la lutte…”\textsuperscript{466}, it could be argued that experimentation was a process in common for both Van Eyck and Cobra. Formal experimentation was conceived as the struggle to find shapes according to our needs: whereas the artists’ needs might be purely emotional in the case of the architect the needs have a different nature not only emotional but also material.

Second, experimentation was an intuitive process mainly nourished by imagination; and It was imagination-not fantasy- the key element to create “new” things out of the existing reality, for it will allow us to show things that otherwise would remain invisible; in Van Eyck words:

“Art has always been born out of reality just like everything else. Reality certainly does not go back to reality just like that… Something else is needed for that. Imagination, not fantasy. It is with imagination that Courbet, Mondrian, Schwitters, Constant and Corneille approach reality, show us real wonders that would otherwise have remained invisible…”\textsuperscript{467}

\textsuperscript{464} Letter from J.J.P. Oud to Peter Smithson, Summer 1957. See The Work & writings of J.J.P. Oud, Feb. 1957
\textsuperscript{465} Modrian, Plastic & Pure plastic Art 1937. From K. Frampton, Modern Architecture: A critical history. P-148
\textsuperscript{466} “...Alons remplir la toile vierge de Mondrian meme si ce n’est qu’avec nos malheurs. Le malheur ’est-il pas preferable a la mort... ?...Telle est notre reponse aux abstraits...mais etre libre, c’est comme etre fort : la liberte ne se manifeste que dans la creation ou dans la lutte, qui au fond ont le meme but : la realisation de notre vie...Nous sommes condamnes a l’experimentation par les memes causes qui acculent le monde a la lutte... » See Cobra nº 4. 1950. p.3-4.
\textsuperscript{467} Aldo van Eyck “Corneille and the Realists, 7 Nov. 1951” Strauven & Ligtelijn Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings p-70 Van Eyck’s first public defense of Cobra’s use of imagination was his Manifesto in defense of Karel Appel’s wall-painting, Questioning Children 1949: “Whoever prefers the miracle of reality to the banality of illusion; the natural to the surrogate...elementary to material perfection; whoever uses his
Third, architecture -as modern painting or sculpture- was not an abstraction from nature but a reality that ultimately cannot remain in the realm of artistic abstraction, but has to deal with the social reality where it may find its “inner strength”.\(^{468}\) Van Eyck was completely opposed to the simplistic emulation of abstract shapes and figures carried on by the artists gathered around the journal *Structure*\(^{469}\); he understood that the experimentation carried on by modern abstract art had to be continued in terms of a deep notion of form. Van Eyck stated his position against the “abstraction” in vogue with two speeches defending the art of Cobra as “abstract”, and criticizing the superficial notion of abstraction. He re-introduced Arp’s and Doesburg’s notion of “Concrete Art” in order to explain that the purpose of Mondrian, Miro, Ernst or Constant was essentially the same. His argument was beautifully articulated in the opening speech for the Constant exhibition at *Le Canard* Gallery in Amsterdam (16 February 1951):

“...I can understand well Constant’s rejection of what currently presents itself as abstract. Because this rejection is essential both to his own work and to the development of painting as such...Abstract artists have come to be closer to the conjurers. That's why their work has become so meaningless...it is not constructive, so does not contribute to a formal language, but is a parasite of it. They [referring to the Structure journal group] are ‘truly’ abstract not so Mondrian, Van Doesburg, Malevitch, Lissitzky, Pevsner... But what does a painter, sculptor or architect do with this formal language, without a view of the new dimension from which it emerged and which it should manifest? In this case he uses the formal language as a trifle... not to come close to reality but to avoid it...Without an awareness of reality the artist is a producer of artifice...Constant...He is concrete, just like Mondrian. He is like Mondrian, not abstract!...Mondrian: ‘The culture of particular form is approaching its end. The culture of determined relations has begun’. So he was no longer concerned with things themselves, but with their connections, with the relation between one thing and another...He had to reveal this elementary relationship without the things themselves. The era of pure relationships begins: not for the things, but for the world between them......\(^{470}\)

Van Eyck defended a notion of art as a transcendent form of understanding the reality (transcendental intuitive logic). According to which, the “awareness” of that reality (the New consciousness) was the essential element to produce a pure abstract art: concerned with the establishment of new relations between the things, and therefore between the outside world (nature) and our own consciousness (thing in the mind).

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\(^{468}\) “Architecture is not an abstraction but a reality. Its inner strength lies in social equilibrium, while its constructive essence is determined by quite different factors, plastic, technical or biological...” Theo Van Doesburg, “Futurism between whim and revelation: The Manifest of Sant’Elia” Het Bouwbedrijf vol.6, nº9, April 1929, p.179

\(^{469}\) The magazine *Structure* was founded in 1958 by the Dutch artist Joost Baljeu gathering artists from different countries: Dick van Woerkom (Dutch as well), Charles Biederman (USA), Jean Gorin (France), Anthony Hill, Kenneth & Mary Martin (England); the Swiss Max Bill & Richard Paul Lohse occasionally collaborated. Aldo van Eyck strongly criticized their misinterpretation of De Stijl principles. See Aldo vna Eyck “Speech for the award of the 1962 Sikken prize” in Strauven & Ligtelijn Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings. For an account on the Structure mag. see Jonneke Jobse, De Stijl Continued – The Journal Structure (1958-1964), 010 Publishers, Rotterdam 2005.

\(^{470}\) Aldo van Eyck, *Constant and the abstracts*. Opening speech for Constant exhibit at *Le Canard* Gallery in Amsterdam, 1951. See Strauven & Ligtelijn ed. Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings pp.64-67
The artists, using his imagination, must search for a formal language that can tell us something about the structure and rhythm of his world view. Such a new view turned into a painting or a sculpture is a “broader transformed reality” that is created anew: an extension of the reality that existed before, “an extension, an intensification of reality”.\(^{471}\) According to Van Eyck if we suppress excessively our inner will in order to make something that looks like “abstract-painting”, or like something that already exists (that is recognizable), we are betraying ourselves: for being to realistic.\(^{472}\)

The fourth and main aspect rescued from the avant-gardes and re-interpreted by Van Eyck was the notion of the “elementary”. According to Van Eyck the main purpose of experimentation in architecture was to search for the elementary in terms of human behavior. Van Doesburg’s “elementarisme” was reconceived by Van Eyck in relation with Brancusi’s idea of “simplicity”. As a value, the elementary pointed at permanent aspects of human behavior regardless time & space according to essential aspects of human behavior in every culture or place. This idea was manifested in Van Eyck’s designs for the Amsterdam playgrounds: grounded in avant-garde principles, and inspired by the current experimentation of his Cobra friends, he designed non-figurative elementary architectures (real) responding to en elementary behavior, play.

**Playgrounds (1947-55)**

"Play, play, play... until the things fall in place!"

Yehuda E. Safran, *Collected Aphorisms*

Van Eyck’s designs for the playgrounds were a beautiful solution to a difficult task during the process of reconstruction after the war, and their beauty emerged from their simplicity. The playgrounds can be interpreted as a wise response to the uncivilized irrationality of the war; by giving room to one of the most essential, non-rational, and civilized behaviors of mankind: play.

Following the Dutch humanistic tradition inaugurated by Erasmus in the XVth century, in the XXth century Johan Huizinga pointed out the fact that our societies were more ruled and determined by certain kind of emotional means, than by those that can be considered the result of rational thinking. If Erasmus had crowned *Folly* as the ultimate ruler of mankind, Huizinga’s “*Homo Ludens*” (1938)\(^{473}\) transferred the crown to *Play*, one of *Folly’s* most civilized descendants. Therefore, when Aldo Van Eyck had to face the problem of giving room to such a non-rational behavior, he was able to do it with certain easiness, since that succinct province of *Folly* had already been explored by the Dutch humanist tradition. Moreover, if there is a fundamental element in play, that is, fun; an attitude

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\(^{471}\)See the text: *Corneille and the realists (Opening speech for the Corneille exhibition at Martinet & Michels Gallery), Amsterdam, 7th November 1951*. See Strauven & Ligtelijn ed. Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings. p.68-70

\(^{472}\) In Van Eyck words: “After all, everyone who is genuinely creative knows that the difference between what he wants to express because an inner need, and its direct recognisability, must somehow divide his loyalties. Some opt for what they want to express and neglect the recognisability. Others opt for recognisability but neglect what they thought they wanted to express...”ibid. p-69

deeply exploited by the Dadaists facing the war, like Hans Arp—whom Van Eyck had come to know very well.474

Another essential thing Arp taught to the young Van Eyck was the importance of cooperation in art;475 something Van Eyck may have experienced designing the playgrounds. The playgrounds have to be understood as a process within the framework of the European reconstruction; therefore as a result of Dutch-society’s will to rebirth after the war, spiritually and materially. The Town Planning division of the Public Works Department in Amsterdam was directed by Cor Van Eesteren, and of course played an important role in the materialization of Van Eyck’s designs.476 Back to Amsterdam after the war, Van Eyck got a position in the municipality thanks to the recommendation of the Giedions and the support of Nelly van Doesburg. Cor van Eesteren, a former member of De Stijl, offered Van Eyck a position of architectural designer in the Town Planning division in Amsterdam; he started working in the department ruled by Van Eesteren in October 1946. Van Eesteren became a young member of De Stijl when at the Dadaist-Constructivist Congress held in Weimar (1922), was asked by Van Doesburg to join the group. Aldo van Eyck had a great consideration of him as former member of De Stijl, and they got along very well, as Strauven accounts: “they often sought each other out at the end of the day to exchange ideas – ‘In for some Stijl?’ Van Eesteren would ask…”477

At the same time, during his early period designing the playgrounds, Van Eyck took part in the Cobra exhibitions and became a sort of intellectual mentor for the Dutch Cobra. In March 1951, after designing the Cobra exhibits in Amsterdam (1949) and Liege (1951), together with his wife, the Cobra artists, Corneille, and others,478 Van Eyck visited the Algerian Sahara. Following maybe the steps of Paul Klee for whom both friends had great admiration, Van Eyck experienced the escape of western civilization pursued by modern artists since the time of Gaugin. But Van Eyck’s travel was different, for it was taking place after Gaugin’s paintings or Picasso’s Demoiselles d’Avignon; after the elementary plastic means of primitive cultures had been used to reenact modern art giving birth to Cubism, or some forms of Dadaism. At the moment when Van Eyck travelled to Africa, he was using those same principles of modern art to reenact modern architecture in the design of the playgrounds; in the Algerian desert Van Eyck understood that he was using the idea of the “elementary” (According to Arp), or Brancusi’s notion of ‘simplicité’, while he witnessed that “the elementary” was clearly present as well in the architecture of the Algerian desert. When Van Eyck

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474 Arp was kindly depicted by Duchamp in the following terms: “...L’element le plus important apporte par Arp est l’humour sous sa forma la plus subtile, l’especes de conception fantasistse qui conferent au movement Dada sa vivacite exuberante qui l’oposa aux tendances purement intellectuelles du cubisme et de l’expressionnisme...” Marcel Duchamp depiction of Hans Arp, 1949, see Marcel Duchamp: Duchamp du signe. Ecrits reunis et presentes par Michel Sanouillet et Paul Matisse. P-185
475 See 0.2.3 C.W. Giedion, Van Eyck & Modern Art. Mainly Van Eyck’s quote “Arp asked me to make a series of ink drawings based on pencil sketches his late wife Sophie Täuber had made...Arp waved my anxiety away saying that I was doing as cooperation- the effort of two people, not one, not one, this time: that was how it should be in art- the way one day will be...” See, Ex Tunco alkid novum in Ligtelijn and Strauven. Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings. p-21
476 Within the Van Eesteren team at the municipality apparently the idea of providing playgrounds came out from Jaacoba Mulder. See Liane Lefaivre, “Space, place and play” in Aldo Van Eyck, the playgrounds and the city, Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum; Rotterdam : NAI Publishers, c2002. p-40
477 Strauven. Aldo van Eyck: the Shape of relativity. p.100
478 Among the them also Herman Haan and his wife and Ben Deurne, vehicle mechanic. See Strauven. Aldo van Eyck: the Shape of relativity. p.144
arrived to Timoudi he found a grave that looked like his sandpit designed for the playgrounds inspired -as I will argue later on- in Brancusi’s or Arp’s work. He found architecture shaped by the sunlight of the desert resembling Brancusi’s sculptures which had been “shaped” by the sunlight descending from the skylights as well. Van Eyck found himself as a Tanguy’s shapeless surrealistic form in the middle of nothingness; he understood the fact that if modern art had traveled backwards in time in the search of elementary forms, his designs for the playgrounds were experiencing that same travel in time, inspired by the artistic means to an “architecture of the elementary”. (IMAGE LO-1: Sandpit, Jacob Thijsseplein playground (1949) and grave near Timoudi; IMAGE LO-2: Yves Tanguy Composition (1938), Aldo & Hannie in the Tademait (1951). Marabout of Sidi Aissa in Ghardaia )

Although the playgrounds have to be understood as a result of cooperation, Van Eyck’s contact with Rietveld or the influence of Cobra should not be overestimated. The design of the playgrounds was a first intuitive draft materialization of several personal ideas. Certainly, Van Eyck’s early vision of modern architecture was nourished by a deep understanding of art principles. Although it is possible to relate ideas or conceptual/formal devices from certain painters or sculptors with Van Eyck’s designs; I am neither arguing this was a conscious design process nor stating that Van Eyck equaled architecture to painting or sculpture. For Van Eyck, the boundaries between painting, sculpture and architecture were clear. Although the principles were the same, and both art and architecture pursued complementary ends, the ways to convey it were completely different in each art form. The playgrounds were a very simple and fresh architectural design, nourished with ideas coming from art with a complete awareness of the limitations of architecture.

The elementary & the logic of determined relations

Aldo van Eyck faced the task of giving room to a behavior that is a product of imagination, a behavior whose specific needs you cannot foresee and is not fixed. In order to accomplish such a task he developed a design strategy that established relations between elementary forms and the existing site. In order to address the unpredictable child behavior Van Eyck noticed that the elements should be indeed, elementary: “It must be elementary in that it must be respond to the child’s elementary inclinations and movements (the later does not completely cover the former) and activate his imagination”479 These elementary forms whose use was not strictly determined by its shape were basically geometrical forms that had nourished the architecture of Western civilization; our everyday life architecture has imbedded those forms created as a result of human action. (IMAGE LO-3) At the same time Van Eyck witnessed how these elementary forms could be found in other civilizations. Therefore the forms he was using had something archetypical that transcended the boundaries of Western culture; the only thing in common was man. Van Eyck believed that the architecture he had seen in Timoudi could not “have been so different in UR 5000 years ago”.480 He found in those villages time capsules in which forms had been “frozen in time” under the heat and extreme conditions of the Sahara desert. Something similar happened at Brancusi’s studio in Paris, where the artist worked steadily for years shaping slowly the stones according to rhythms dictated by the

479 Aldo Van Eyck, After a heavy snowstorm. Brief for a 12-day student project – Washington University, St Louis, 1961. In Strauven and Ligtelijn eds. Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings. P.110
480 Aldo Van Eyck article “Building in the Southern Oases” Forum, 1953, no. 1, p.28-37
sunlight coming from the skylights. The heat and the sun dictated the action of the inhabitants of the Sahara as the light and the cold dictated the sculpting of Brancusi, for years and years (IMAGE LO-4: Some of Aldo van Eyck’s playgrounds (1947-55) vs. several versions of La Muse endormie (1909-26) by Brancusi; portrait of James Joyce by Brancusi, 1929)

Van Eyck designed according to Mondrian’s motto: “The culture of particular form is approaching its end, the culture of determined relations has begun” The Elementary forms were arranged according to a logic of determined relations. As in a Mondrian or a Suprematist painting in which “things, objects, etc. are not treated”\(^{481}\); the elementary means –lines & colors- were arranged according to “harmonic determined relations of position, dimension, proportion, and color”.\(^{482}\) Van Eyck arranged the elementary archetypes according to harmonic determined relations of BEHAVIOR determining its position, dimension, proportion and MATERIAL (See IMAGE LO-5: Dijkstraat playground (1954) by Aldo van Eyck) Van Eyck placed according to the site conditions, first the biggest element - usually the sand-pit – according to which he placed the next element, and so on… no linear logic can be found in the designs developed from 1947 to 1955.\(^{483}\)

Van Eyck’s designs were based on a “logic of determined relations” that lasted for years - very similar to Brancusi’s carving and polishing of the stones - an architectural manifestation of Brancusi’s “methode de travail concentrique”. C.W. Giedion’s book on Brancusi analyzed the creative method of the sculptor on the Chapter on “L’œuvre. Méthodes de travail concentriques. Elaboration de la forme elementaire”. She explained Brancusi’s evolution of L’oiseaux sculpture as a concentric work towards an elementary form:

« Au lieu de proceder par definition anatomique, il s’agissait de creer un ensemble de formes sugestives et muables. Rythme general, mouvement decisif, intensite du volume ramene au minimum essentiel- tout le reste est sacrifie a cette exigence fondamentale « \(^{484}\)

The head of « La muse endormie » evolved from 1909 to 1926 from a rough naturalistic half-polished stone to an elementary soft, rounded, and polished volume in which very simple traces from the sculptor achieved a great result in terms of the perception of the piece (aesthetic experience); for example, when you look at the sculpture placed in the center of the IMAGE LO-4 it takes you some time to “see” the “eyes” and the “nose” like soft clefts on the rounded stone- then you notice that what you are looking at is not simply a ball like stone but a “head”. In a similar way the simple geometries of the elements of the playgrounds evolved in their form and arrangement according Van Eyck’s understanding of kids’ behavior. The elementary forms of different materials established a dialogue with the existing; the geometrical figures were combined in different ways as Brancusi combined the pedestals of his sculptures - different materials stone, bronze, wood, and different elementary forms combined: cross, circle, oval. (IMAGE LO-5)

\(^{481}\) See “Suprematism” in the catalogue of the “10th State exhibition: Non-objective creation and Suprematism” Moscow April 27, 1919

\(^{482}\) See “Chapter 1.4. Elementary – Van Doesburg: From Dada to the elementary”

\(^{483}\) Prof. Francias Strauven carried on several formal analysis of the plans and apparently did not find any linear-logic governing the whole design of the 60 first Playgrounds Van Eyck designed between 1947 to the 1960s

The design of the playgrounds was concentric in so far as it was the same topic under different circumstances; the earlier designs for Zaanhof, 1948 and Jacob Thijsseplein, 1949 were based on regular grids according to regular sites (IMAGE LO-6), whereas the irregular sites of Koningstraat and Zeedijk produced free compositions (IMAGE LO-7); an spiral-like process in time in which plots, like stones, are carved responding to a “function” (play) manifested in endless forms of “behavior”.

The parallelism between Brancusi’s method and Van Eyck’s design illustrates a non-linear process grounded in a critic to rational-purposeful thinking. How come Brancusi spent 10 years to finish an sculpture? Essentially because his “notion” of time was different from the notion of time in common people. It is impossible to know to what extent Van Eyck carried in mind an specific idea in relation to Brancusi’s work; indeed that would be at odds with my main argument, the paramount importance of non-deterministic–intuitive processes in design.

The new Nieuwe Beelding

Van Eyck was completely convinced about the need to redefine modern architecture as a form of art. The legacy of De Stijl was very present in Van Eyck’s character, ideas, and work. In the same way that Van Doesburg stroked the Bauhaus “academics” merging of Constructivism & Dadaism, Van Eyck shocked the artist R.P. Lohse for his split character as “Surrealist” and “Constructivism”: “But Aldo, you are a split person! You consist of Miro and Mondrian and these two wage a continuous fight in your inner self!”485 The essential element in common between Mondrian & Miro was De Stijl’s New Consciousness (See Chapter 1.3. New Consciousness); it had already been carried on into the architectural realm by the Neoplasticist’s pioneers before the Second World war, now Van Eyck was decided to take the baton from them (IMAGE LO-8)

As I argued Van Eyck performed the doubled split character -merging Dadaism and Neoplasticism- in the design for the Cobra exhibition; and if we compare Van Eyck’s design for the Cobra exhibition (Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam 1949), and the early playgrounds, we can find similarities from the point of view of their compositions: In both, the exhibition and the playgrounds, Van Eyck organizing the space playing with the scale of a very simple geometric form: The rectangular shape of the canvases -and the platforms on the floor- for the exhibition, and a rectangular composition of colored tiles to organize the playgrounds. The canvases had different sizes in the exhibition, so did the rectangles in Zaanhof playground, or the circles in Jacob Thijsseplein playground. Most of the paintings were very small in comparison with the rooms; Van Eyck asked Constant and Appel to make some paintings in a bigger format, so he would be able to play with a stronger variety of the scales- distances and alignments- with the paintings. As he was experimented in the design of the playgrounds: “playing” with the scale of a simple element lead to a bigger freedom in the distribution. “Playing” with the contrast of the object in relation with itself -the scale of the painting or a circle- led to a “play” in the relation of every object with the others. The rhythm of scale and the rhythm of distance were tied together (See IMAGE LO-9)

485 See F. Strauven. Aldo van Eyck: The Shape of relativity.p.96-97
Van Eyck was not alone in the reenactment of the avant-garde legacy, but faced a complete obliteration of De Stijl’s ideas by the functionalist tendency of “de 8 en Opbouw”; even Rietveld’s legacy was considered outdated and bygone for his lack of technical knowledge, nevertheless Van Eyck’s polemic character always praised the Neoplasticist’s contribution to modern architecture.\textsuperscript{486} Van Eyck’s view and struggle to redefine modern architecture was shared in some aspects by young architects such as Jan Rietveld, Wim van Bodegraven, Jaap Bakema, and of course the former De Stijl members: Van Eesteren and G. Rietveld (See IMAGE LO-10)

Van Eyck evolved the forms of post-war functionalism into a new redefinition of architecture as an avant-garde art. His work evolved from Neoplasticist’s compositions and architectural solutions strongly determined by the current functionalist’s forms such in the Nagele Schools (1954-56) to a new language materialized in projects such as the Amsterdam Orphanage (1955-60), and the Church in The Hague (1964-69). It could be argued that he created an imaginative and logic evolution of the avant-garde principles manifested in the late period of De Stijl. Van Eyck’s materialization of the “new consciousness” was achieved through several ideas coming from the avant-garde period very much influenced by De Stijl: the Search for harmony through rhythm, the balance of “opposed” values - universal-particular, individual-collective, inside-outside, open-close – the use of “elementary forms”, the search for non-hierarchical organizations, and the use of color (materiality) to qualify the space –color determines form (See IMAGE NC-11 Aldo van Eyck & Constant, “Spatial Colourism”)\textsuperscript{487}

All these issues were developed by Van Eyck in several projects. There was a compositional element used for the materialization of those ideas very present since his early projects: the centrifugal-centripetal composition around a square.\textsuperscript{488} It was materialized for the first time in the Entrance Sign for the maritime exhibition in Rotterdam (1950), a project commissioned to Van Eyck by Bakema after his visit to the Cobra Exhibition.\textsuperscript{489} Van Eyck’s design certainly shared in common an “idea of space” explored at that time by the Swiss artist R.P. Lohse in his drawings; at the same time it reproduced the centrifugal-centripetal spiral movement raising upwards that Van Doesburg & Van Eesteren used in the design of the Maison de Artiste, 1923 (See NC-4-5-6).\textsuperscript{490} According to F. Strauven, Aldo van Eyck and R. P. Lohse held countless discussions not only on the potentiality of merging surrealism and constructivism: “but also on the relations between art and architecture, on possible analogies between the two and, especially, on the possibility and the extent to which the vision constructive art formulated in the flat plane might be transposed into architectural space.”\textsuperscript{491} (See IMAGE LO-11: R.P. Lohse, Gradation from yellow to orange, 1950 & Aldo van Eyck entrance Sign for maritime ex.1950).

\textsuperscript{486} This was made clear in Van Eyck’s design for the exhibition of Dutch architecture at the 9th Milan Triennale in 1951. Van Eyck & Jan Rietveld (G. Rietveld’s son) designed the layout for the exhibition winning the Gold medal. See Strauven. \textit{Aldo van Eyck: The Shape of relativity}. p.188

\textsuperscript{487} See Chapter 1.3.1. Nieuwe Beelding & Dada. Last section on Aldo van Eyck’s and Constant’s “Spatial Colourism”

\textsuperscript{488} He used it in the early projects and later on became a very popular in its simplistic version as the “wind-mill pattern”, when “structuralist architecture” was branded \textsuperscript{489} i.b.i.d. P.184

\textsuperscript{490} There was an intense dialogue between R.P. Lohse, Bakema and Van Eyck. See Strauven “Bakema and the Pendrecht project (1949-1951) i.b.i.d. p.219-222

\textsuperscript{491} i.b.i.d. p.97
Van Eyck developed further the centrifugal-centripetal spatial organization in two projects with Jan Rietveld: the first was a detached house (Damme house 1951-54), in which the architects emulated the spiral distribution of the *Maison de Artiste*, but opened the living room and the circulation spaces to the sunlight and ventilation (See image 91: Damme house 1951-54 by Aldo van Eyck and Jan Rietveld). In the second project, the dwellings for the Elderly in Slotermeer (1951-54), the windmill pattern appears in the urban plan design creating two interconnected open squares; the windmill pattern moving along the site in shifting centers was used by Van Doesburg for the non-hierarchical urban layout: the Citte Circulation (See IMAGE EL-8, Chapter 1.4. Elementary)

Van Eyck had the first chance to develop his ideas about the city in the proposal for the new town in Nagele (1952-54): a new settlement in the new polders region reclaimed from the Zuiderzee. After a very controversial first phase from (1947-49) the second phase of the project was developed by a team of old & young architects from “de 8 en Opbouw”. The plan, in hands of the old generation of “De 8” had developed a solution mainly determined by M. Kamerling. Apparently some aspects of the main idea provided by Van Eyck in the first phase remained: the idea of an open centre, a residential belt and a solid wind mill around it; for the new phase Aldo combined the proposals of the new team -with “no new design of his own”- out of which the team work started. Van Eyck developed a design of centrifugal centers around an open center that very much determined the final solution; although the final project was not built according to the plans. (IMAGE LO-14: “de 8” CIAM X grid sheet nº1 and Van Eyck diagrams 1948-1956)

Nevertheless, the project as it was presented for CIAM X (1956) materialized Van Eyck’s ideas about architecture as a form of abstract art. Following De Stijl principles the design seeks for harmony, and is more concerned with the establishment of relations between elements than with the overall-shape defining a strict or definitive figure, in Van Eyck words:

‘Mondrian: ‘The culture of particular form is approaching its end. The culture of determined relations has begun’. So he was no longer concerned with things themselves, but with their connections, with the relation between one thing and another...He had to reveal this elementary relationship without the things themselves. The era of pure relationships begins: not for the things, but for the world between them...’

As it was illustrated in the CIAM grid the project was the materialization of the relations established between the elements of the village, the relation was considered between the village and the outside: “D. District-core, core-dwelling”, from the smaller elements in the village to the

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493 The city of Nagele was one of the new settlements in the Wieringermeer, the first Zuiderzee polder to be drained (1927-30). It was supposed to be designed as a traditionalist village, but the protest of “de 8 en Opbouw” pushed the Wieringermeer Board to commission “de 8” a project for Nagele. There was a first phase of the project developed from 1947 to 1949 by almost all the members of the Dutch CIAM group “De 8” – Van eyck among them. The plan came into a standstill, G. Rietveld and other members were disappointed about the result until the Wieringermeer Board announced that the village should have a larger population hence the project should be redone. For a complete account on the development of Nagele see “Nagele project, first phase (1947-1950)” and “Nagele project, second phase (1952-54)” in Strauven. *Aldo van Eyck: The Shape of relativity*. pp.170-181 & pp.230-237
landscape: “E. Individual dwelling-dwelling group, dwelling group-central green, central green-
polder”; and between urban and natural elements: “F. Central green-wood, dwelling group-dwelling 
group” The previous notion of the city center as a paved urban element is substituted by a “large 
central green” that grooves woods and places for fun, repose and seclusion; hence the central green 
and the “encircling dwellings” aiming at spiritual “unity in spite of spiritual discrimination.” The project aimed at the balance between “the universal and individual” pointed in De Stijl’s manifesto 
(See sheet nº1: the image of two human figures with a village inside with Max Jacob’s motto “Le 
monde dans un home, tel est le poete moderne” The “universal in the “individual”) In this sense Van 
Eyck’s design was an attempt to redefine modern architecture as a form of abstract art: it aimed at 
the satisfaction of the spiritual needs above the material needs, and materialized with architectural 
elements the harmonic balance-of position, proportion & color of Mondrian paintings- creating a 
place, not a “space” (IMAGE LO-15: “de 8” grid for CIAM X (1956) sheets nº2,3,4)

The most important thing about the project is the fact that illustrates Van Eyck’s clear 
understanding of De Stijl’s logic. It was not simply a matter of figures from a painting resembling 
buildings on a plan as in Bakema’s Pendrecht & Kleine Driene project; in these projects R.P. Lohse 
found a certain emulation of his paintings but this would be a mere conception of form in terms of 
object. As Hilberseimer argued Mies’ plans were notational systems while Mondrian’s paintings were 
self-contained works of art: we have to analyze these images in terms of logic.

After the Smithsons had introduced the idea of architecture as the materialization of “scales 
of association” between the individual and the community (CIAM 9, 1953) Van Eyck presented the 
design of the village as a manifestation of the “relations” between the individual and the village. The 
forms were determined by these relations as much as they were determined by the specific 
“function” each element was meant to accomplish. It was not a matter of orthogonal forms versus 
rounded, for as we can see in the early diagrams the village was drawn as a circle, after all for Van 
Eyck, a Mondrian and a Miro painting were the same:

“Mondrian or Miro?...After all Mondrian and Miro ...were in the first place both partisans in 
the same great riot and against the same outworn hierarchy of values. With his plastic imagination 
Miro fascinatingly breached the suffocating fossilization that makes any form of metamorphosis 
impossible (It is a dog? Miró: Yes. Or is it a goose? Miro: Yes. Or it is a child? Miro: Yes). He 
breached the bastions behind which every phenomenon entrenches itself in isolation...in his own 
way he discovered the ‘interior of seeing’: In this way everything ends up back in man, like the 
animals in Noah’s ark. ’Le monde dans un home, tel est le poète moderne’, said Max Jacob...In his 
Neoplasticism, Mondrian broke splendidly through the smothering fossilization of a world where one 
closes itself off from the other. In this universality all the contraries were put in balance. They freed 
themselves from the rigid bastion of their ‘particular’ form and restrictive meaning in order to enter 
into reciprocal, i.e. ‘pure’ relationships with each other. In Miro the world was made within one man, 
in Mondrian man was made relative within the world. Now, the first woud be inconceivable without 
the second, and vice versa.” (See IMAGE LO-8: Doesburg, Mondrian, & Miro)

496 Sheet nº4 i.b.i.d. p-59
Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings 1947-1998
Another interesting idea steaming from Nagele was Van Eyck’s play with the scale of the figures-forms used in the drawing of the urban village: the wind-mill pattern or the centrifugal-centripetal movement. Van Eyck used the rotational composition at the urban scale and at the scale of the buildings: the three schools designed by Van Eyck and H.P.D. van Ginkel (1954-56) The solution adopted for the village produced a non-hierarchical cohesion between various centers achieved by placing the buildings in a windmill pattern around a shifting center (See General-plan in sheet n°2, and Detail-plan in IMAGE LO-15).498

Following this principle the schools were organized along a corridor that gets wider forming a square deserving the classrooms in a rotational movement; in the distribution areas (squares) the ceiling rises up with a skylight in its center (See IMAGE LO-16: Nagele urban plan vs School plan and current interior view of the distribution area in form of a square) We could argue that in terms of space & behavior there is a three-dimensional play-relation between the elements: we get into the class the ceiling goes down, the teacher looks taller, we get into the classroom the ceiling goes high the teacher looks smaller, the window looks taller, the window sill get lower, the window is a door – the door is a window (See IMAGE LO-17) Indeed Van Eyck clearly stated he was exploring the possibilities of what he called "harmony in motion": a spatial harmonic rhythm, as R.P. Lohse had done in his paintings Koncretion I (1945-46) and Koncretion III, 1947 (See IMAGE LO-18-19):499

“In search of the further principles of a new form language, the Swiss painter Lohse discovered the aesthetic meaning of number. Imparting rhythm to the similar, he has managed to disclose the conditions that may lead to the equilibration of the plural. The formal vocabulary with which man has hitherto imparted harmony to the singular and particular cannot help him to equilibrate the plural and the general. Man shudders because he believes that he must forfeit the one in favour of the other; the particular for the general; the individual for the collective; the singular for the plural; rest for movement...movement, as Lohse shows, does not necessarily imply chaos...Fearful of the monotony of number, repetitive elements in town planning are often needlessly combined into themes..."460

Van Eyck identified a “new form language” needed in order to face the problems aroused by the European reconstruction process. Nevertheless for him the current problem of big-scale interventions -and the influence of technical processes- was essentially an aesthetic problem. Van Eyck conceived architecture as a form of art therefore the problem had to be solved creating a new formal language able to satisfy current needs:

“In order that we may overcome the menace of quantity now that we are faced with ‘l’habitat pour le plus grand nombre’, the aesthetics of number, the laws of...‘harmony in motion’ must be discovered. Projects should attempt to solve the aesthetic problems that result through

498 Francis Strauven explains how these aspects were present in Bakema’s second version for the Pendrecht project (1951) in which Van Eyck “recognized an approach that converged with a number of his own intentions” See Strauven. Aldo van Eyck: The Shape of relativity. p.221
499 According to Van Eyck “...two of his paintings in particular have been in my mind as though engraved there, almost since they were made around 1946. I have written and spoken about them on various occasions...Harmony in motion I called it. Surely the future lies in these beautiful pictures” From “Ex Turico Aliquid novum” in Strauven. Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings. In relation to the “aesthetics of number” see Strauven. Aldo van Eyck: The Shape of relativity. p.255
500 See Aldo van Eyck, Lohse & the aesthetic meaning of number (Forum, June 1952), in Strauven. Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings
standardization of constructional elements; through the repetition of similar and dissimilar dwelling within a larger housing unit.\(^{501}\)

Van Eyck’s redefinition of the “new consciousness” aimed at solving problem of “l’habitat pour le grand nombre” with a new aesthetic that searched for harmony through rhythm. He continued with the avant-garde project of redefining architecture as a form of abstract art: able to balance “opposed” values - universal-particular, individual-collective, inside-outside, open-close – creating “elementary forms” and non-hierarchical organizations. The centrifugal-centripetal movement-rhythm of his early projects aimed precisely at that: it could be considered open-close and static-dynamic. Indeed Van Eyck followed Van Doesburg’s attempt to materialize in architecture the principles of relativity: if De Stijl had aimed at mirroring in the visual arts the scientific world picture provided by Schommaenkers or Einstein, Van Eyck’s attempted to continue such a task redefining architecture as a form of art: he understood art as a form of knowledge capable of providing an intuitive world picture of reality. Hence Brancusi’s portrait of Joyce – a concentric spiral- was present in Van Eyck’s designs, not only as a simple arrangement of elementary geometries in a centrifugal-centripetal movement, but as a notion of form that related outside-inside, the big and the small, the many and the few materializing these relation according to the common element in all of them: man’s behavior.

The Amsterdam Orphanage 1955-1960

“When are architects going to stop fondling technology for its own sake – stop stumbling after progress? ...The wonderful thing about architecture is that it’s an art – just that. The terrible thing about architects today is that they’re not artists. Worse, they’re semi-artists comfortably engaged in something super. But architecture, I tell you, is neither a semi or a super art – it’s an art.”

Aldo van Eck, “The Child, the City and the Artist” 1962\(^{502}\)

“The oak is felled in the acorn”…“A pome’s a building on a page”

Dylan Thomas\(^{503}\)

The Amsterdam Orphanage followed the path traced by Van Eyck’s early explorations on the development of a new “Stijl”. In 1954, the year he designed the Nagele Schools, Van Eyck got a commission to build the Amsterdam Orphanage. From January to May 1955, Van Eyck developed a brilliant design that materialized the aspirations of a new architectural avant-garde. Aldo Van Eyck’s design & ideas reenacted the avant-garde principles summarized in the first part of this inquiry. There was something wired in that form (Enstrangement), it was not the result of Dutch functionalism but a product of Imagination, it aimed the avant-garde’s aspiration of merging art & life: a result of a New Consciousness of space & time and the individual vs. the universal; an elementary form, the counterform of it’s inhabitants behavior. It was a work of modern art.

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\(^{503}\) “The oak is felled in the acorn” is from the ‘Ballad of the Long-legged Bait’ in Deaths and Entrances (1946); “A pome’s a building on a page” is from the poem ‘Praise to the architects’ from the Buffalo Notebook (7\(^{th}\) July 1933). The word ‘pome’ might come from Joyce’s Pomes Penyeach (1927); it was a jocular version of the word ‘poem’ often used by Thomas and his friends, sometimes satirically but more often with informality. ‘Pomes’ were written by ‘potes’ and bound into almost wafer-thin volumes of ‘potry’. From Daniel Jones ed. Dylan Thomas: The Poems. J.M. Dent & Sons ltd, London.1971.
The aerial view grasped the architect's attention world-wide, while the view from the road resulted—an and results—of an estrange familiarity (IMAGE LO-20). The same goes for the interior, while you enter the building through the central courtyard, you feel inside-outside; while you get into the building’s “interior street” paved like outside, you feel outside-inside. While looking at the “elements” scattered all around in the communal spaces of the Children Units it takes a while to recognize “what is this for?” or “what is that for?”; the challenge is bigger when you face the “festive hall”, the “puppet theater”, or the “circular dips”. I would argue the device of “enstrangement” is at work; the perceptual process is brought to its fullest, it is difficult to “recognize” the elements of the building at first sight. They result bizarre for they have very specific purposes according to the kids’ behavior, the elements did not emulate existing interior distributions but were designed according to a specific behavior; while the different areas in the building resemble but are different. There were eight departments, each marked by one large cupolas in which the children lived in aged groups; all departments, service spaces and rooms for special activities give onto a large interior street—an “intermediary place” that tried to break away with the concept of “spatial continuity” and the tendency to erase the articulation between spaces-places. These sort of “in-between” places were precisely the ones that produced & produce the feeling of enstrangement; why? As the in-between places provided something strange to us: “the common ground where conflicting polarities can again become dual phenomena”504 (See IMAGE LO-21)

Van Eyck did not conceive the Orphanage as an iconic “public facility” satisfying the program requirements; he did not try to provide a “new image” of modernity to the suburban area of Amsterdam behind the Olympic stadium. No, that would have been a mere product of a pragmatic reasonable architect. Instead For the design of the Amsterdam Orphanage Van Eyck attempted to provide a “house” for 125 children, it was meant to be a strange house.

What do kids need to live in such a big house? In order to answer this question reason might not provide a fruitful answer, it was more a matter of imagination & intuition. To ‘conceive’ the needs & forms required by the children living in, asked for imagination—not mere reason: a puppet theater, a house inside the playing area, play-pool areas outside & inside; the in-between places where polarities can co-exist, become dual phenomena. (See IMAGE LO-22)

When Aldo van Eyck faced the challenge of designing a big-house for “small” people he departed from De Stijl’s principles articulated in the First manifesto:

1. There is an old and a new consciousness of time. The old is connected with the individual. The new is connected with the universal. The struggle of the individual against the universal is revealing itself in the world war as well as in the art of the present day.

2. The war is destroying the old world with its contents: individual domination in every state

3. The new art has brought forward what the new consciousness of time contains: a balance between the universal and the individual…505

504 See Aldo van Eyck’s text: The medicine of reciprocity tentatively illustrated (Introductory article to the publication of the Amsterdam Municipal Orphanage, in Forum mag. April-May 1961) See Strauven & Ligtelijn. Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings. P.319. The following quotes from Van Eyck are from the same text.

505 “Manifest I of De Stijl”, in De Stijl, vol.2, nº1, November 1918, p.4. Signed by Theo van Doesburg, Robert van’t Hoff, Vilmos Huszar, Antony Kok, Piet Mondrian, Georges Vantongerloo, and Jan Wils.
Van Eyck opened the presentation of the Orphanage's design as follows: “The plan attempts to reconcile the positive qualities of a centralized scheme with those of a decentralized one…The plan attempts to provide a built framework …for the dual phenomenon of the individual and the collective…(my emphasis)”; for Van Eyck to reconcile universal & individual, individual & collective was essential in order to provide a “place” for the “great number”, a house for 125 children. The Dadaist had already accepted co-existence of opposites (polarities) and turned into their artworks: from the Dadaist poems read by two or three characters reading different stanzas (“L’Almirall cherche une maison a louer”, Tzara who wrote his 1918 Manifesto “…to show that people can perform contrary actions together while taking a fresh gulp of air”,506 and of course IK Bonset and/or Van Doesburg who argued: “De chaque ‘oui’, Dada voit le ‘Non’ corrélatif. Dada est oui non”507, while he was designing the Maison de Artiste with Van Eesteren (1923). Following Van Doesburg’s explorations of relativity principles in the arts the co-existence of opposites aimed at challenging preconceived notions of space & time, reinterpreted by Van Eyck in terms of place & occasion:

“…unity-diversity, part-whole, large-small, many-few, inside-outside, open-closed, mass-space, constancy-change…diversity is only attainable through unity; unity only through diversity…
Internal street…I arrived at the conclusion that whatever space and time mean, place and occasion mean more, for space in the image of man is place and time in the image of man is occasion…”508

Van Eyck re-articulated the modern movement’s notion of space & time into a new consciousness of space-time relationships in the architectural realm: place & occasion. Van Eyck aimed at transforming modern architecture into a true abstract art—a transcendental intuitive logic—following the discoveries of relativity in science and art, architecture should overcome deterministic thinking; Van Eyck argued (following the previous statement): “Split apart by the schizophrenic mechanism of deterministic thinking, time and space remain frozen abstractions…” which is only possible “…through the acknowledgement of relativity. Relativity implied the recognition of the subject…subject & object have cheerfully merged together. In art similar polarities were reconciled…”; indeed modern art as I argued was conceived as a transcendental intuitive logic, it was transcendental for it merged subject & object. (See IMAGE LO-23)

Aldo van Eyck materialized in a building his explorations on form carried on since his early designs for the Amsterdam playgrounds: the architectural form conceived as the materialization of the elementary in terms of behavior. After almost a decade of practice Van Eyck had noticed how buildings designed thinking about space as something abstract produced essentially that, spaces not places. The rationalistic separation object-subject had negative consequences in architectural design since architects thought about the spaces they designed as something detached from them and therefore detached from reality, when they were built these spaces were of course “detached” from the existing- destined to cause loss of identity, isolation, and frustration; people will perceive those forms as what they are “detached” from the existing-no places.

506 See Appendix I. Tzara wrote: “I write a manifesto and I want nothing, yet I say certain things and in principle I am against manifestoes, as I am also against principles… I write this manifesto to show that people can perform contrary actions together while taking a fresh gulp of air; I am against action; for continuous contradiction, for affirmation too, I am neither for nor against and I do not explain because I hate common sense…”


508 See Strauven & Ligtelijn. Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings. p.317
The new consciousness of the reciprocity individual vs. collective (object vs. subject) would make us aware of the relations established among people (individual-individual, individual-collective, collective-collective); it would be the task of the architect to design places in which these relations could take place: the architectural form would be the materialization of human relations- architecture would be the “mirror” reflecting those behaviors; in Van Eyck words: “Cities should become the counterform of man’s reciprocally individual and collective urban reality”

The Orphanage was the counterform of the elementary relations between the kid and the city of Amsterdam; the city related to the building through a street providing access to it; the street access opened into an entrance courtyard, the courtyard opened into an ‘interior street’; the ‘interior street’ deserved either into the inside of a ‘department’ or to the outside-inside –the covered playroom- which opened to the Department’s courtyard –outside but still inside. Getting into the interior of the Department from the ‘interior street’ we could step into the sunken section surrounded with toys -more inside- and even more inside stepping into the “small brick house”; nevertheless at the doorstep off the small brick house we would be able to see the street outside- the city of Amsterdam. The building achieved elementary: the counterform of the kids behavior was materialized. The elementary is not a goal in art, but it is achieved in spite of oneself, approaching to the real sense of things (See IMAGE LO-23):

“…La simplicité n’est pas un but dans l’art, mais on arrive a la simplicité malgré soi, en s’approchant du sens reel des choses…”

The materials used for the construction of the building followed the logic of the elementary. A key element relating inside-outside (kid-city) was the ‘interior street’; according to Van Eyck: “I wanted the child’s behavior and movement in it [the building] to remain as vigorous as they are outside. No sudden curbing of spontaneity this side of a narrow doorstep; no living room manners here. So, the materials used in this interior street differ in no way from those used outside” (See IMAGE LO-24)

The stone tiles for the floor, rough brick walls inside-outside; the elementary in terms of behavior, was materialized in elementary geometries and materials: light & rain shaped the height of the cupolas and the skylights, air moved in cross ventilations thanks to the patios; wind shaped enclosed patios: playing areas outside in this windy neighborhood. The elements of nature–rain, sun, wind…people- shaped elementary geometries: architecture emerged “a contest with nature”. Nevertheless we all know how it ultimately emerged out of Van Eyck’s mind is a mistery; as Brancusi said “It is not the things that are difficult to make, but to put ourselves in the condition to make them”509 in order to do so Van Eyck followed Brancusi’s advice: “Direct cutting is the true road to sculpture”, like we all do, he just drew, the rest is a mystery (See IMAGE LO-25)

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Aldo Van Eyck’s design & ideas reenacted the avant-garde principles summarized in the first part of this inquiry. The Amsterdam Orphanage followed “Stijl”. It aimed the avant-garde’s aspiration of merging art & life: It represented at the same time a criticism to the functionalist misinterpretation of the avant-garde principles materialized in the early architecture of the Modern Movement; it was a criticism to deterministic cognition for it was a building in which non-rational human behavior was form, inside & outside, open & close co-existed as Tristan Tzara’s “ego & non ego….affirmation & negation”. The building re-interpreted the elements of the avant-garde creating a new form; architecture was conceived as a transcendental intuitive logic: it was transcendental in so far as Van Eyck tried to polish elementary forms by understanding (approaching) to the real sense of elementary behavior; the process was intuitive for no “pre-form” or deterministic “regular matrix” or idea of program restricted Van Eyck’s drawings. To a certain extent it could be argued that form emerged as a logic that harmonized the conceptual and bodily purposes of the artist’s kunstwollen; the logic of modern abstract art- a transcendental intuitive logic in which “subject & object have cheerfully merged together”. Redefining modern architecture as a form of abstract art Van Eyck’s design inaugurated a new architectural avant-garde: it was avant-garde insofar as it provided a new definition of architecture as a form of art:

“...The wonderful thing about architecture is that it's an art – just that"
2.3.2 A & P SMITHSON: THE ART OF BUILDING

“Style is a problem that I think has been completely neglected…In the key year of 1913 there were the beginnings of four distinct architectural styles: Constructivism, de Stijl, Purism, and Bauhaus. Each of these movements had an attitude and a complete, comprehensive plastic system, that is what used to be known as style. The schools and institutes, the academies of today, do not teach style. They make no approach to the problem of architecture: they make an approach to technology, to technique, but the central problem of creating an actual architecture they ignore.510

Peter Smithson, 1957

During the early after-war period both the Smithsons and Van Eyck faced indirectly or directly the same question, namely: How could it be possible to create style? Such a concern, the problem of the development of Style in art, was being addressed by artists, architects and art historians from the IG within the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. The relation of the Smithsons with E. Paolozzi, N. Henderson, R. Hamilton, R. Banham, W. Turnbull, etc, was important for it helped them to understand avant-garde art, and brought them to develop their own notion of architecture as a form of art. These artists were dealing with ideas coming Dadaism, Futurism, and the artistic debate of the 1910s that were reintroduced in the architectural debate of the after-war period by the Smithsons & Banham; these produced a paradigmatic shift in architectural thinking and practice that had as one of its major consequences the dissolution of the CIAM in 1959.

A & P Smithson understood the logic of avant-garde art in a very different way than Van Eyck; It could be said that Van Eyck was more aware of the influence that avant-garde art was having in his work, than the Smithsons; unlike Van Eyck who came from a very cultivated background, the Smithsons had a humble education and did not have such a strong intellectual formation; their understanding of art & aesthetics was more intuitive and at the same time their spirit was more sensitive to any influence. A clear example of it was the striking difference between two pavilions designed in 1956: the futuristic “House of the Future” (1956)- in the line of thought of R. Banham and Richard Hamilton - followed by the Brutalist “Patio & Pavilion” presented with E. Paolozzi & Nigel Henderson at the exhibition This is Tomorrow (1956). Apparently the Smithsons’ did not understand how much avant-garde art (Dada) influenced them until years later.511

In fact architects were having problems to define the role of art in architecture and architecture’s role as a form of art; a redefinition of terms like “aesthetics”, “plastic”, “form”, was of paramount importance for the Smithsons in their early period. Facing on the one hand the outworn “rationalist” & “Garden cities” architecture, and on the other, the interesting artworks by their Independent Group fellows, the Smithsons’s felt an obvious “dissatisfaction” with current architectural thinking & practice that pushed them to rebel against the CIAM. This chapter continues analyzing to what extent a deep understanding of modern art at a given time helped the architect to develop a more consistent definition of architecture as a form of art. I start analyzing the first building designed by the Smithsons (Hunstanton School) before they got fully involved in the IG debates,

510 Peter Smithson from the debate at RIBA after R. Banham lecture “Futurism & Modern Architecture”; read before the RIBA on 8th January 1957, published on RIBA Journal February 1957
511 Information provided by Max Risselada to whom Peter Smithson confirmed the strong influence of Dada and the avant-garde in a conversation during the preparation of the exhibition “Alison & Peter Smithson: From the House of the Future to a house of today” held at the Design Museum in London, 2003.
ending the chapter with the Economist building; it is considered the first masterpiece in which the Smithsons developed a language that was not inherited from any great figure or academy but his own:

“If academicism can be defined as yesterday’s answers to today’s problems, then obviously the objectives and aesthetic techniques of a real architecture (or a real art) must be in constant change. In the immediate post-war period it seemed important to show that architecture was still possible, and we determined to set against loose planning and form – abdication, a compact disciplined” 512

Hunstanton & Humanism

“Dr. Wittkover is regarded by the younger architects as the only art-historian working in England capable of describing and analysis buildings in spatial and plastic terms, and not in terms of derivation and dates…one of the few people outside the profession who see buildings as works of art…(my emphasis)”

A&P Smithson, 1952 513

A & P Smithson did not design the Secondary School at Hunstanton as a “New Brutalist” building. The label was attached to it afterwards for the shake of propaganda and polemics; thereon architects focused more in the discussion of what the word meant than on what architecture should be. Hunstanton was a first exploration of the Smithsons’ understanding of architecture as a form of art nourished by the Warburg Institute studies on the renaissance: R. Wittkover’s “The Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism” (1949), and C. Rowe’s “Mathematics of the ideal villa” (AR March 1947). 514 I would argue the influence of Mies’ in the design of Hunstanton has been historically overemphasized; indeed in terms of constructive solutions the steel frame and brick work were characteristic of Mies’ ITT projects in Chicago, and at first glance the symmetrical disposition of the courtyards and the general layout of the plan may seem analogous to the Smithsons’ design. Nevertheless it could be argued as well that the Smithsons aimed at a revitalization of architecture as a form of art: they were looking at the Renaissance plans -Palladio, Alberti, Bramante- while urged to materialize their designs according to the current means, they run into Mies’ technical solutions. Both looked alike for both were built at the same time in history looking at the same eternal values according to which architecture is a form of art; an art with a conceptual purpose prevailing over the satisfaction of the bodily needs, according to Yehuda E. Safran:

“Mies’ conception of the IIT building was both radical and conservative. It was radical because it accepted the forces of science and technology but it acknowledges the scientific character without being scientific, the technical means without being technological. It is conservative

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512 From “Thoughts in progress: The New Brutalism” by A&P Smithson, AD 1957
513 A&P Smithson “Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism”, R.I.B.A. Journal, February 1952. 1949 marks a critical year: the publication of Rudolf Wittkover's book on the renaissance, the Eames’s House, Alvar Aalto’s town hall in Säynätalo- all these are formative influences when you’re young…Wittkover’s book presented a perspective of the Renaissance that was completely new to my generation” Peter Smithson in “Smithson Time”, Peter Smithson & Hans Ulrich Obrist. 2000
514 Rudolf Wittkover Studies were originally published in 1949 as volume 19 of the studies of the Warburg Institute. All the references to Wittkover are extracted from Rudolf Wittkover “Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism” Alec Tiranti ed. London 1962. For a complete and contemporary account on the influence of the Warburg Institute in architectural discourse, mainly Wittkover, Rowe and Banham, see Anthony Vidler, Histories of the immediate present, MIT press. 2008
because it does not only admit of its use and function but is founded on the eternal law of architecture: order, space and proportion.\textsuperscript{515}

The reading of Wittkover's studies on the Renaissance in contemporary terms brought the architects to consider architecture purely as a form of art—through which a new form of spatial order and relations of proportion is materialized—"a new idea of order."\textsuperscript{516} According to Wittkover the forms of the Renaissance church had "symbolical value", for its central-symmetrical plans did not accomplish better its function than the traditional Latin Cross plan. Several aspects outlined by Wittkover in his book on the Renaissance were present in Hunstanton, and served as foundational principles for their ideas: the primacy of conceptual purposes over bodily ones, the "doctrine of the mathematical correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm", the consideration of the church in relation with the universe, the austerity and simplicity of forms, and the manifestation of the framing structure in the building.

The design for Hunstanton was grounded in the Smithsons' early concerns on the purity of forms and materials more that in the satisfaction of the bodily needs of teachers and students. Compared to Van Eyck's consideration of the kids' behavior in the design of Amsterdam playgrounds, the Smithsons statements in the report submitted with the competition emphasized a "compact and economical plan", and did not show a great sensibility towards the teenagers "habitat"; they seemed to be more interested in a harmonic arrangement of the plan, and the equal distance from the classrooms to the staircases, than in the creation of a comfortable habitat for education; certainly a glass-walled classroom did not invite to concentration, mainly if it looked into green-courts to which students could not access (See image 102).\textsuperscript{517} During the 1950s, the concern for human habitat in contemporary terms (place, person, activity) determined most the Smithsons' projects,\textsuperscript{518} nevertheless we could argue that Hunstanton design was not concerned with those issues, or the "scales of human association" whatsoever. The design searched for an economy of form and materials very much determined by the centrifugal distribution around the main hall, the courtyards, and in the upper floor- the staircases placed at the corners deserving centrifugally to three classrooms each. The main argument of Wittkover's text presented as main goals of Renaissance's architecture the harmonic proportion and mathematical unity.\textsuperscript{519} "Alberti's program of the ideal church" had nothing to do with the function of the church in terms of use, for Alberti it should be the noblest building of a city of a staggering beauty; beauty was defined according to harmonic proportion in which all parts were harmonically related "like the members of the body."\textsuperscript{520} The formal symbolic fascination for the mathematical order of Palladio's plans was turned into applied mathematics in the Smithsons' design; the formal purity of platonic forms, into a formal simplicity of

\textsuperscript{515} Yehuda E. Safran, Mies van der Rohe, Blau ed. Lisboa, 2000. p-100
\textsuperscript{516} "Each generation feels a new dissatisfaction, and conceives a new idea of order" A&P Smithson, "The Built World: Urban Reidentification" AD, June 1955
\textsuperscript{517} "No doors open onto the green-courts, only hopper windows for ventilation, as no children's movement is to be there; the green courts are light areas, quite free from noise". A&P Smithson’s statement report submitted with the competition. See A&P Smithson The Charged Void: Architecture. P.40
\textsuperscript{518} "our intention has always been - consciously since the Doorn Manifesto in 1954- to turn architecture towards particularity... of place person, activity: the form to arise from these..." Peter Smithson, 1997. Statement from The Charged Void: Architecture. P.11
\textsuperscript{519} See mainly Part IV. The problema of harmonic proportion in architecture
\textsuperscript{520} Wittkover, "Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism" P.7
optimized structures. Indeed both Mies and the Smithsons adhered the Pythagorean concept “All is number”, whereas Mies was guided by St. Augustine and the Smithsons by Wittkover.

But if we consider Hunstanton plan the Smithson’s rigid distribution was very far from the free arrangement of partitions within a free-plan that characterized Mies. Nevertheless certain resemblances are easy to trace between Hunstanton plan and the projects used by Wittkover to illustrate his arguments: like the Convent of the Carita (Venice, 1561) – From Palladio’s Quattro Libri; as in Hunstanton many of these plans were organized around courtyards with staircases placed in the corners deserving upper floors; at the same time Hunstanton presented a “classical” aspect in the arrangement of the rooms for there are almost no corridors and rooms are interconnected.

(See IMAGE LO-27 & 28: Montage showing Hunstanton vs. Convent of the Carita (Venice, 1561) in Wittkover “Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism”; and analysis of proportions based on the √2 of Hunstanton’s plans and elevations)

The doctrine of the mathematical correspondence between the microcosm and the macrocosm -present from the medieval epoch- was reenacted during the Renaissance; according to Wittkover:

“The belief in the correspondence of microcosm and macrocosm, in the harmonic structure of the universe, in the comprehension of God through the mathematical symbols of centre, circle and sphere—all these closely related ideas which had their roots in antiquity and belonged to the undisputed tenets of mediaeval philosophy and theology, acquired new life in the Renaissance, and found visual expression in the Renaissance church”

In the original competition program for Hunstanton there was a requirement for a headmaster’s house; the Smithsons designed a house that emulated classical plans used in Wittkover's book (See IMAGE LO-29: Headmaster's house (Hunstanton) vs. image from J. Gwilt, Rudiments of Architecture, 1826); it was presented as a microcosm of the macrocosm for: “… it had, in miniature, the same spatial organization as the school itself. As was said at that time…the “microcosm of the macrocosm”

Palladio’s notion of the relation between micro & macro, universe and man through a building, certainly may have determined the Smithsons’ theories on the city, according to Wittkover: “…Palladio’s statement on the macrocosm-microcosm relation between the universe and the temple: “We cannot doubt, that the little temples we make, ought to resemble this very great one, which by His immense goodness, was perfectly completed with one word of His”-we have an epitome of what Renaissance church builders endeavored to achieve: the centrally planned church was for them the man-made echo or image of God’s universe and it is this shape which discloses “the unity, the infinite essence, the uniformity and the justice of God”

521 The first publication of the project in Architectural Design September 1953 was purely technical illustrating the optimization of material from pipes to beams, presenting the all-welded structure as an application of the “plastic theory of bending” developed at Cambridge University. Mies design for the S.R. Crown hall at the IIT (Chicago) had also an all-welded beams system.

522 Renaissance artists firmly adhered to the Pythagorean concept ‘All is Number’ and, guided by Plato and the neo-Platonists and supported by a long chain of theologians from Augustine onwards they were convinced of the mathematical and harmonic structure of the universe and all creation” Wittkover p.27

523 Wittkover. “Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism” p.29

524 The Charged Void: Architecture. P.47

525 Wittkover. “Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism” p.23. Of course the macro-micro was as well embedded in Van Eyck’s paradigmatic statement “Tree is leaf and leaf is tree – house is city and city is house –
The idea of micro & macro was clearly present in current scientific & artistic debates: in the “Parallel of Life & Art” exhibition plans of ancient villages were presented as cell formations; while in the sociologic studies in which Henderson’s wife was working at Bethnal Green analyzed kinship according to the architectural condition from the micro (doorstep) to the macro (street, district, city)- it makes sense the Smithsons related the street (micro) to the city (macro) through the built form; for Palladio architecture was meant to materialize harmonic relations (geometry) according to certain scale systems; for the Smithsons architecture should materialize harmonic relations (kinship) according to “scales of association”. Certainly Palladio kept an eye on god whereas the Smithsons never loose their faith in human kinship.

There are some characteristics of Hunstanton design that defined “Brutalism” and were present as well in Wittkover’s depiction of Palladio’s architecture. One of the most “Brutalist” attributes of Hunstanton, the austerity and simplicity of forms, was hinted in Palladio’s works:

“Palladio himself tackled the problem of the centralized church at the end of his life. His little church at Maser with the austerely classical portico follows the prototype of the most perfect ancient centralized building, the Pantheon. In plan a complete circle with chapels in the four axes, the cylinder is vaulted by the tranquil heaven of the semi-circular dome. And by excluding Bramante’s drum, Palladio managed to build up the interior from the two basic forms cylinder and semi-circle. The walls are white, there are no paintings and decoration consists of statuary.526

The simplicity of forms and finishings was made manifest, together with the geometrical structure of the building. At Hunstanton School pillars and beams showed the framing structure, while the pilasters and mouldings of S. Maria delle Carceri were not simply decorative, but showed the geometrical structure of the building; about Giulano da Sandallo’s S. Maria delle Carceri (1485) Wittkover stated:

“The ratios are as simple and therefore as evident as possible. The depth of the arms, is half their length and the four end walls of the cross are as long as they are high, i.e. they form a perfect square. The entirely flat and plain surface of the walls and arches is framed by the pilasters and simple mouldings in the joints of the building, where the two surfaces meet. This structural skeleton is built in dark sandstone (pietra serena), while the walls themselves are given a white coat. Thus the dark articulations together with the white walls enhance the lucidity of the geometrical scheme.”527

Hence the geometrical structure of the building was made manifest framing the clean white walls in which no decoration was permitted (See IMAGE LO-30: Hunstanton exterior view showing the “framing structure” vs. interior view of Giuliano da Sangallo’s Sta. Maria delle Carceri )528

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526 Wittkover. “Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism” P.24-25
527 Wittkover. “Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism” P. 19
528 As we have seen in previous chapters Reyner Banham used Giuliano da Sandallo’s building to illustrate his own definition of “New Brutalism”. Interestingly enough, we could find striking similarities between the principles of “New Brutalism” drafted by Banham’s article in AR (Dec. 1955) and the ideas developed by Wittkover’s book: as we have just pointed out the clear exhibition of structure is shared in common, the austerity in the construction claimed by Palladio was brought one step further with the valuation of materials ‘as found’, and Banham’s emphasis on the “image”-defined as “what affects the emotions”- followed the Palladio’s primacy of conceptual purposes over the bodily ones.
All the attributes accounted up to now may help us to reconsider Hunstanton as a project in which a notion of architecture as a form of art was reenacted by two pragmatic and sensitive young architects. The most important aspect of Hunstanton was not its ‘Brutalism’, or how much Wittkover’s ideas influenced the Smithsons’ design; the most important aspect is that it represented a contemporary example of architecture, conceived as a form of art, according to its own aesthetic principles and conceptual purposes. It was also a starting point in the reenactment of avant-garde ideas that the Smithsons begun to understand during the construction of the building. The Smithsons won the competition for “Hunstanton Secondary Modern School” in the summer of 1950; that same year E. Paolozzi and N. Henderson were meeting regularly at the ICA bar to talk about art and their ideas about exhibitions. A&P Smithson signed the contract to build Hunstanton in February 1951 and the works began in March 1951, at that time the Smithsons were teaching at the Central School of Art in London were they met E. Paolozzi. Paolozzi introduced the Smithsons to N. Henderson, the same year he was taking pictures around East End trying to recover from his nervous breakdowns. Certainly the acquaintance of Henderson, Paolozzi, Hamilton, and the rest of the IG members brought the Smithsons’ to re-define his notion of architecture as an art form according to the principles of avant-garde art. Walking with Henderson around East End the Smithsons re-discovered the street, rambling on the site-work of their first building with Paolozzi and Henderson they may have discovered in the quality of the materials “as such” their own “objet trouve”- named “as found”.

Again the device of “enstrangement” was at work: there is a sort of delay in our capacity to recognize a room while visited during its construction; the Smithsons made use of this form of enstrangement produced by the perception of a machine at work; frozen in time- pipes, drainages, structure, frames- were exhibited as if the built work had not finished yet; as in the dawn of modern art, when Rodin left the stone work unfinished -or Bertolt Brecht designed a stage:

“There is a story about Berthold Brecht, that once asked a stage carpenter to fix up a curtain track in his New York apartment; the man did it beautifully, and with its mode of operation discreet and hidden: Brecht told the man to take it down and fix it so its rail and string were exposed: ‘I want to see how it works’. We should like to be aware how such a thing works, but not necessarily to see it work (Neither necessarily did Brecht; this is simple a parable), for our view the invention of the formal means, whereby, without display or rhetoric, we sense only the essential presence of the mechanisms supporting and servicing our buildings, is the very heart of present-day architecture”

(IMAGE LO-31: Henderson’s photographs of Hunstanton & Image 107: Soho House)

The device of enstrangement was at work, together with the return to the elementary, the criticism to rationalistic approach – the obliteration of the four functions – a new consciousness emerged in the Smithsons’ mind; they aimed at a reenactment of the early avant-garde principles - Dada, De Stijl…- in order to redefine architecture as a form of art – as a contest with nature: a transcendental intuitive logic that provides a world picture of reality mirroring the work of scientists

528 1951 was also the year of CIAM VIII “The Core” held at Hoddesdon (England) that same year the exhibition “On Growth & Form” organized by R. Hamilton was inaugurated with a speech by Le Corbusier
529 The pictures were presented in 1953 with the Golden Lane Grid to illustrate the Smithsons’ ideas about architecture
530 Enstrangement was one of Brecht’s major devices used in his Epic theater. The quotation is from A & P Smithson, Without rhetoric; an architectural aesthetic, 1955-1972 / Alison and Peter Smithson. Cambridge, Mass., M.I.T. Press [1974, c1973] p.14
and other artists. The Smithsons’ statement for the Soho House (Colville Place, London 1952) designed right after Hunstanton reads:

“It is necessary to create an architecture of reality. An architecture which takes as its starting point the period of 1910- of De Stijl, Dada and Cubism- and which ignores the waste land of the four functions. An art concerned with the natural order, the poetic relationship between living things and environment. We wish to see towns and buildings which do not make us feel ashamed, ashamed that we cannot realise the potential of the twentieth century, ashamed that philosophers and physicists must think us fools and painters think us irrelevant” 532

Hunstanton represented a naïve example of the Smithsons’ understanding of architecture as an art, but the design did not address the problem of form in its deeper sense; form was merely conceived in terms of object – determined by a geometrical composition. Architecture as a materialization of human habitats was not their concern until the acquaintance of the artists brought them to understand architecture as an art-form in a deeper sense. With the acquaintance of Henderson & Paolozzi in 1951 the Smithsons’ witnessed in the artists work a contemporary manifestation of some avant-garde principles that ultimately brought them to reconsider architecture as a contemporary form of art. To some extent they conceived form in a deeper sense during the construction of the building, form in terms of process: the materialization and the materiality of the architectural elements were merged. The construction of the building was made manifest showing the materials “as found”; an idea developed further in their project for the Soho House, 1952 (IMAGE LO-32). Thereon -nourished by the IG activity- the Smithsons’ understood the logic of avant-garde painting, sculpture, and aesthetics, while developing their own notion of architecture as a form of contemporary art. (See Chapter 2.2 on the “Parallel of Life & Art” and the “Golden Lane Grid” (1953))


From the early fifties to 1956 the Smithson’s witnessed an intense activity within two different realms: the IG’s meetings & events that catalyzed in the exhibition “This is Tomorrow” (1956), and the revolt of the Team Ten that propelled the dissolution of the CIAM in the 10th congress at Dubrovnik. The re-thinking of the avant-gardes legacy within the IG certainly may have nourished the Smithsons’ arguments -drafted during the intense Team 10 meetings. Positioning themselves as architects within the IG debates may have brought them to understand the relation art & architecture in terms of logic. Hence their designs did not simply transposed the aesthetic of Henderson’s photographs into “brutalist” architecture or emulate the figures drawn by Paolozzi: they understood the logic of avant-garde art, and developed their own definition of architecture as avant-garde form grounded in very similar concerns than their Dutch fellow, Aldo van Eyck.

In April 1952 at the ICA Paolozzi delivered the “Epidiascope lecture”, what could be considered the first meeting of the Independent Group; 533 Paolozzi showed his collages in which “the visual wasn’t introduced and argued (in a linear way) but shoveled, shrivelling in this white hot maw of the epidiascope. The main sound accompaniment that I remember was the heavy breathing and painful sighing of Paolozzi to whom, I imagine, the lateral nature of coonncetdness of the

533 See Chapter 2.2.1 Parallel of Life & Art, section Enstrangement
images seemed self-evident, but the lack of agreement in the air must have been antagonistic and at least viscous”. Reyner Banham had not been invited but gatecrashed into the lecture and according to Henderson reacted “vociferously” to Paolozzi’s show; Paolozzi’s performance resulted too Dadaist for Banham engineer’s mind, according to Turnbull “the show was a revelation…Magazines were an incredible way of randomizing one’s thinking (one thing the independent group was interested in was breaking down logical thinking)”. While a Max Ernst show opened at the ICA the Smithsons’ designed with Paolozzi Ronald Jenkin’s office at Ove Arup; Paolozzi’s random arrangement of the wall-paper, the free thick traces of lines resembled the free-hand drawing of the Smithsons’ “cluster-city” (1952-53) presented the following year at CIAM; in fact Eduardo & Freda Paolozzi were going to join the Smithsons in their tryp to Aix-en-provence (See IMAGE PRO-14: E. Paolozzi, Painted ceiling for Ove-Arup office in London, 1952)

There was little collective activity among the IG members until August 1952, when Banham took on the “leadership” of the group organizing several events: a series of lectures revisiting notions of space, form, proportion & symmetry “aesthetic problems of contemporary art” (1953); a symposium on Paul Klee’s pedagogical sketchbook, and “Non-formal”; and informal gatherings on Sunday mornings at Banham’s house. The first public presentation of the IG took place on 13th June 1953 with R. Banham’s lecture on Le Corbusier projects from 1924-52. Right after the Smithsons went to CIAM 9 in Aix-en-provence (July, 1953) to present the Golden Lane Grid; when they returned, in september 10th, Parallel of Life & Art” opened at the ICA. During 1954 the frenetic activity around the ICA continued: Henderson, Paolozzi & Dr. Patrick Collard lectured on “Patterns of Growth”, Le Corbusier’s Modulor was discussed, and R. Banham proposed lecture series on “Books and the Modern Movement” -including one on Pevsner’s “Pioneers of the Modern Movement”; although in 1954 Banham ceased to convene the IG the intensity of events and interactions among the artists did not decrease until “This is tomorrow” exhibition held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in (8th of August – 9th Sept. London, 1956)

During that year the Smithsons created two very different pieces of ephemeral architecture: the “House of the Future” designed for the “Ideal Home exhibition (London, March 1956) and the “Patio & Pavilion” with Henderson & Paolozzi for “This is tomorrow”. These two pavilions can be explained as the materialization of two different ways of thinking about modern art & architecture within the IG: the Futuristic “Machine Aesthetic” praised by R. Banham, and the Dadaist “Brutalist Aesthetic” of Henderson & Paolozzi

The Smithsons’ “House of the Future” was strongly influenced by the “Machine aesthetic” of R. Hamilton’s works and R. Banham’s ideas. As I mentioned in previous chapters (2.2.1 Parallel of Life & Art) The interest of Hamilton D’Arcy Thompson’s On Growth & Form and Guideon’s

535 Reyner Banham had joined the ICA as a student member while he was working on his PhD under N. Pevsner and worked as editor at the Architectural Review See David Robbins, The Independent Group: postwar Britain and the aesthetics of plenty. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, c1990.p-20.
537 November 1956 publication of A&P Smithson “But today we collect ads” in Ark 18
Mechanization takes command in relation to art inspired his own visual survey of man’s relationship with the machinery of movement, the exhibition Man Machine and Motion (May 1955, Hatton Gallery, Newcastle); while conceiving the exhibit, he did the Transition paintings (1954) illustrating a car movement). Right before the opening of the exhibit R. Banham’s article Machine Aesthetic (AR April 1955) opened with F.T. Marinetti’s statement: “A racing car… is more beautiful than the Winged Victory of Samotrace”\(^{538}\), according to Graham Withman:

“Banham seems to have exerted a particular influence on Hamilton at this stage…Only four months before Man, Machine and Motion opened at the ICA, he [Banham] spoke on American car styling at one of the IG’s more informal meetings (Borax, or the Thousand Horse-Power Mink’ 4\(^{th}\) March 1955), and on the day the show opened to the public, he delivered a lecture to the general ICA audience called ‘Metal in Motion’- a version of his IG talk…”\(^{639}\)

(See IMAGES LO-31-32)

Banham’s view was important for it provided an early theoretical interpretation of the Modern Movement in relation with the avant-gardes; the Smithsons benefited initially from Banham’s cunning insight, although later on they suffered his criticism.\(^{540}\) Banham identified the materialization of “Machine Aesthetics” as the modern movement’s “raison d’etre”; he expected from the architects a logical-pragmatism, and coherence of an engineer, or a Marketing director from Ford Company; while at the same time he praised Sant’Elia’s capacity to give plastic form to his ideas about architecture as a mechanism (AR, May 1955): “What gives an architect his place in the family tree of the Modern Movement is the manner in which he gives plastic form to certain basics assumptions about architecture and mechanism…”\(^{641}\) Banham’s view was more rationalistic than the artists’ at the IG,\(^{542}\) and very enthusiastic about futurism; to such extent that he literally erased Tristan Tzara –the Dadaist who stated that Dada was not modern – from his historical account of Avant-garde art and architecture: “The Theory & Design in the First Machine Age”. Nevertheless Banham shared with the Smithsons a firm conception of architecture as a form of art. Banham’s article on Sant’Elia praised his Futurist Manifesto in which architecture was essentially presented as an art:

“(1) futurist architecture consists of precise calculation, boldness and simplicity, concrete, steel, glass and lightweight materials (2) that it is not, for all that, merely an arid combination of practically and utility, but remains an art…”

But the points praised by Banham were mainly points 5 & 6: “(5) that just as the ancients drew the inspiration for their arts from the world of nature… so we should draw ours from the mechanized environment we have created (6) that architecture must be understood as the art of disposing the forms of a building according to finite and stable laws.”\(^{543}\)

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538 See Machine Aesthetics AR April 1955. In 7\(^{th}\) June 1955 – Banham’s lecture: Metal in Motion with the IG at the ICA
541 Peter Reyner Banham “Sant’ Elia” , Architectural Review, May 1955
542 For example, the deterministic thinking brought Banham to consider the laws of economy as different from those of nature “…the demands of economic production do not…follow the laws of Nature, but those of economics…” See Machine Aesthetics AR april 1955 p.227
543 Peter Reyner Banham “Sant’ Elia” , Architectural Review, May 1955. It is worth to note that Van Doesburg criticized Sant’Elia for being “exclusively a creative artist…averse to all rationalism…the manifest actually is directly opposed to the principles of a new, anti-aesthetic, constructivistic architecture. His designs are above all lyrical, just like those by Le Corbusier. This architectural lyricism fits in neither the plastic architecture which was developing since 1916 from the Dutch ideas about style, nor with the rationalist-functionalist architecture from the north…”Theo van Doesburg “Futurism between whim and revelation: The Manifest of Sant’Elia”
Hamilton studies for ‘Hommage a Chrysler Cop.’ (1957), and his article ‘Hommage a Chrysler Cop.’ (AD mag. March 1958) run parallel to Banham’s fascination for “roaring cars”. As it has been argued both may have grounded their ideas not only in the artistic avant-gardisme of Marinetti but also in the radical criticism to the lack of scientific consistency in biological studies deployed by D’Arcy’s On Growth & Form. Indeed Banham’s Theory and Design in the 1st Machine Age (1960) criticized architects for their lack of consistency and imagination developing a true “Machine Aesthetic”, like that of Sant’ Elia’s architecture.

The notion of architecture as a “machine for living” was not knew. D’Arcy Thompson’s On Growth & Form, widely read and discussed by the IG fellows already pointed out Aristotle’s parable in which the house is presented as “mechanism, or a mechanical construction”. And that is precisely what the Smithsons attempted to materialized in their proposal for “The House of the Future” (March 1956) nourished by the reenactment of avant-garde futurism within the IG; in fact right after the Smithsons presented the design at the Ideal Homes exhibition R. Banham lectured on Futurism at the ICA (21th Feb. 1956).

The Smithsons’ forecast of the “future” dwelling was presented as a “cave” made out of “fibrous plaster” in which the rooms were disposed contiguous to each other as in the Palladian plans or: “…as in a cave, the skewed passage which joins one compartment with another effectively maintains privacy” – a privacy difficult to achieve in terms of noise; nevertheless the Smithsons justified the use of “fibrous plaster” for it “reduces noise”, which is not true since the reflective surface of plastic does not absorb noise. The House of the future was presented as a futuristic machine for living: the pre-cast elements were built using a grid system as in Hamilton’s paintings (See IMAGE LO-31); the grid was also present in D’Arcy’s analytical drawings of Hydroids, and was meant to aggregate the houses covered by a warped roof (See IMAGE LO-33: House of future aggregation and Hydroids, D’Arcy Thompson’s, On Growth and Form).

Up to nowadays we have witnessed how these convoluted non-carthesian shapes have to be built using a catherine grid. Indeed the problem of tradition versus technology was at stake, D’Arcy’s book pointed at their co-existence: “Still, all the while, like warp and woof, mechanism and teleology are interwoven together, and we must not cleave to the one nor despise the other; for their union is rooted in the very nature of totality” Banham addressed the dualism “Technology & tradition” in the article Stocktaking article (AR March 1960), whereas the Smithson materialized this dualism with the “Patio & Pavilion”, according to them: “Many of the ideas in Patio and Pavilion... had already been explored in the Spring of that same year in the House of the Future... Patio and Pavilion was a pavilion in a patio. The House of the Future was a patio encapsuled by its pavilion.

published in Het Bouwdedrijf vol. 6, no.9, April 1929. From Theo van Doesburg complete essays from Het Bouwdedrijf: 1924-1931, pp. 225-230
544 D’Arcy Thompson’s, On Growth and Form, p.5
545 “The house of 25 years hence will be different, not only in itself, but in the way it is arranged within the framework of the community” A & P Smithson, “House of the Future at the Ideal Homes Exhibition”, Architectural Design, March 1956
But the “Patio & Pavilion” steamed from slightly different sources, it was the result of previous explorations on ideas coming from modern abstract materialized the Parallel of Life & Art exhibition (Sep. 1953) Departing from this exhibition and their Golden Lane project the Smithsons continued their struggle to give form to their idea of modern abstract art in architecture; their project for Sheffield University (Feb-Sep. 1953) developed further the Golden Lane’s idea of the “street in the air”, in which the built form is the result of a relation (Association), but much more brilliantly.548

Parallel to Henserson’s & Paolozzi’s explorations on “pattern groth” in art & science the Smithsons developed their own interpretation in architectural terms. In 1954, Henderson, Paolozzi & Dr. Patrick Collard549 lectured on “Patterns of Growth”; while the Smithsons developed further their previous idea of scales of association according to the growth of human settlements: from 1953 to 1956 they developed 5 project proposals for the 4 socio-geographic conditions of P. Guedes’ Valley section -isolated house, village, town & city; each project was presented as an answer to a site condition, with a “development pattern”. (IMAGE LO-34: Valley section Diagram)

During the Team 10 meeting at Doorn (29th Jan 1954), Smithson introduced the idea of building according to the site condition, illustrated with the Valley section. John Voelker, J. Bakema, Aldo van Eyck, H.P.D. van Ginkel, and Hovens-Greve liked the idea, and all agreed in the fact that CIAM’s “functional analysis” was misleading, and architecture based on “the four functions” inappropriate; in Bakema words the “charte d’Athenes is too much work of Stiger, too little of Corbu”; Van Eyck argued “too much: science contra emotion… dadaisme never dived in science, but combined art and life…”. The Smithsons’ concerns on architecture as an expression of “human associations” were mirrored by the Dutch concern on identity & relationships:

“Bakema: believe in the significance of architecture for creating new relationships. The power of imagination has been lost. What can imagination do in this way. Your own identity you have to find in any environment (physically or socially, house or prison). New term of architecture is: relationship. Many architects with great capacities come to decorative architecture because of lack of connosseur of relationship and identity… van Eyck: our task much more difficult than that of the older generation: formulate the next step, the relationship550

Hence Dutch & British agreement dismissed La Charte d’Athenes for it tended “to produce towns in which vital human associations are inadequately expressed”; the young architects presented the Charte de l’habitat produced during the meetings on 29-30-31 January 1954 at Doorn:

“1) It is useless to consider the house except as a part of a community owing to the interaction of these on each other (2) We should not waste our time codifying the elements of the house until the other relationship has been crystallized (3)"Habitat" is concerned with the particular house in the particular type of community (4) Communities are the same everywhere 1-detached house

548 The project was praised by R. Banham’s text “The New Brutalism” in which he criticized previous projects from the Smithsons. See R. Banham The New Brutalism” AR dec. 1955. According to A&P Smithson: “Connection is the generation of Sheffield”See A & P Smithson, The Charged Void: Architecture, p.108
550 Jaap Bakema notes from the first meeting at Doorn during the morning of the 29th Jan 1954. Bakema Archive. NAI Rotterdam
They can be shown in relationship to their environment (Habitat) in the Geddes valley section (Geddes section with pyramid of “scales of association”) (6) Any community must be internally convenient – have ease of circulation. Density must increase as population increases…(7) We must therefore study the dwelling and the groupings that are necessary to produce convenient communities at various points of the valley section (8) The appropriateness of any solution may lie in the field of architectural invention rather than social anthropology”

In order to illustrate their capacity for “architectural invention” the Smithsons developed the projects for the valley section; in which architecture responded to the socio-geographical logic of the site, aiming to express adequately human associations: the first project was Burrows Lea farm (Shere, UK, 1953-55) an isolated house surrounded by a circular earthwork presented as an emulation of a Castle in Norfolk although the plan owed a lot to Palladio’s villas (See IMAGE LO-35).

For the village they presented the “Galleon houses”, conceived as a “village unité” in itself, and the “fold houses” that were meant to create a “village infilling all around” the existing fabric; both projects were very “elementary” or “brutalist” variations of the brutalist “Soho-House” intended to provide an alternative to the standardised suburban houses while respecting the existing architecture & landscape (See IMAGE LO-36)

The most innovative projects were the ones presented for the town & the city in which the ‘street’ articulated the inside & outside space working –in Van Eyck’s words- as an “in between realm”; the proposal for the town, “the close houses”, was organized around an interior street at the ground level with open porticos to the yards; while the proposal for the city, the “Crescent houses” provided a new-improved version of Golden Lane’s “street in the air” uncovered adopted a corbelled shape to get a maximum amount of sunlight; Aldo van Eyck liked very much both proposals and published the last one in Forum no9 (1959) These last projects presented a “new system of streets” according to the new means, and all of them addressed the design of the dwellings in terms of relationships: relations among the housing units, and between the house and its extensions; the word used by Peter Smithson to express those relationships at the Team 10 meeting (La Sarraz, 1955) was the word, HABITAT:

“As a result of the discussions the 10th [CIAM] Congress will concentrate on ‘HABITAT, the problem of Inter-relations’

Habitat is a question of relationships of the dwelling and its extensions, within the settlement as a whole.

When the form is right the relationships of the dwellings with each other, with the shops and schools, the offices – factories and fields can be felt"551 (IMAGE LO-37)

Architecture was conceived as a form of abstract art insofar as it was a materialization of human relations, in such a way that the form created manifested it- it could be “felt”- form transcended itself; architecture was conceived as a materialization of the relationships established

551 It follows “To say that relations exist between the parts of a settlement, when the organization and form of the parts is not different from their organization and form when they are in isolation or in a different relationship is an illusion…The immediate task is the building of a new scale units in which the complex of relationships whether of the tiny village or the great city can find realization and which can form a new starting point” A&P Smithson, 30th Sep. 1955. Reunion of council and Team X. Chateau of La Sarraz. 7-11th Sept. 1955. Peter Smithson Archive, NAI (Rotterdam)
between men and things, men and nature, city and nature-isolated house, village, town, city: a form of abstract art.

As I have argued the notion of modern abstract art the Smithsons had in mind steamed from the IG milieu. Before going to the Team 10 meeting at La Sarraz, the Smithsons may have witnessed the Jean Dubuffet exhibition held at the ICA (March 1955), the discussions on Giacometti (April, 1955), or the debate “Dadaists as non-Aristotelians” (With A. Hill, J. Machale, D. Holms, T. del Renzio, in June 1955) or the discussion about Marcel Duchamp (19th June 1956 with R. Hamilton, A. Hill and Colin St. John). While at that time they were thinking about another exhibition with the artists Henderson & Paolozzi; apparently the idea of the “This is Tomorrow” exhibition was under discussion from winter 1955 to 1956, and the Smithsons’ designed the pavilion in March 1956, while the “House of the Future” was exhibited.552

The aim of the exhibition was to explore the potentiality of “the large scale artwork”553; indeed as we saw in the projects up to now the Smithsons conceive architecture as a large-scale artwork; artists and architects agreed in the general idea and the architects provided the elementary framework:

*The method of work has been for the group to agree on the general idea and for the architects to provide a framework and for the artist to provide the objects*

As in the avant-garde notion the architectural form is conceived not as an object, but as a framework -in van Eyck words “the elementary in terms of behavior”. The Smithsons designed the most elementary framework -a sort of Malevich’s black square- to start from scratch after “killing” Modern Architecture in Dubrovnik (CIAM X, 1956). The elementary architecture of Le Corbusier’s Cabannon (1952) was emulated by the Smithsons with the same proportions and materials (wood-panels and ‘ondulite’ roof); the pavilion was inscribed within a squared patio covered with mirrors, what for? To provide an endless perspective like in Cap-Martin. Indeed the patio was full of sand and the “elementary” gravures, scultures, and collages of Henderson, and Paolozzi. Only wheels and a table were brought inside, no chairs, though they were used by the group members in the portrait for the catalogue: the four artists sitting on different chairs placed on the street. (See IMAGE LO-38-39) If the ‘static’ stool was turned into a ‘dynamic’ Wheel (1913) by Duchamp in an “enstranging” object, “Patio & Pavilion” was an “enstanging” environment simply because it “represented the fundamental necessities of the human habitat in a series of symbols”.554 (See IMAGE LO-40)Enstrangement, the criticism to cognition—“modern dwelling”, the elementary or Brancusi’s “simplicité”, were present in the artists’ reenactment of the avant-garde principles: The Patio & Pavilion.

Modern abstract art—“concrete art”—produced fruits “out of man like a fruit out of a three” that did not resembled anything; the artist aimed at establishing relationships between him and nature in order to transcend to produce “spiritual growth”—art was conceived as an intuitive form of knowledge- a transcendental intuitive logic. To some extent the Smithsons’ notion of architecture as the materialization of human relationships-habitat through which men find their identity, was a redefinition of architecture as a TRUE abstract art, a transcendental intuitive logic.

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552 A & P Smithson. The Charged Void: Architecture, p.178
553 i.b.i.d.
554 i.b.i.d.
At Doorn, a diagram developed with the "Charte de l'Habitat" (See IMAGE LO-41: Diagram) traced a line from "1910: L'esprit Nouveau, Dada, Stijl, Futurism, Constructivism" to the “Charte de L'Habitat”. It stated: “[The] lack of relationship between man and things asks for FORMS stimulating mans spiritual growth”; whereas for the Charte d’Athenes "FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION" for the Charte de L'Habitat “FORM STIMULATES RELATIONSHIP”

The Smithsons criticized the rationalistic approach of late CIAM, they believed that the architectural solutions to the problems of modern cities could be found in "the field of plastic invention" rather than in economics;\(^{555}\) they believed that the mainstream of Modern Architects still grounded on “classical aesthetics” and did not truly manifested a modern aesthetic, in Peter Smithson’s words:

“A discipline of growth has to be evolved- do a certain thing and it influences something else somewhere. It is pragmatic – not Cartesian: it doesn’t lay out a city in advance in great parallel lines, but it grows from point to point and it follows the flow of communications. It responds to a new scale of motor-ways, it responds to a new sort of social set-up and it doesn’t place much value on classical aesthetics…If you think back to the pioneer days of modern architecture you will see that the Hilberseimers’ and the Le Corbusiers’ and the Gropius’ were producing Ideal Towns in the Renaissance sense, in the sense that I have discussed previously, that their aesthetic was in fact the classical aesthetic, one of fixed formal organization…”

Following the late Neoplasticism they aimed at a “new realism” in architecture departing from the principles of abstraction: a “new consciousness” in which architecture answered to the conceptual and the bodily needs with objectivity:

“…Our current aesthetic and ideological aims are not ‘castles in the air’ but rather a sort of new realism and new objectivity, a sort of radicalism about social and building matters…As to pragmatism, I regard this as not laissez-faire but as a process of creative growth under a certain sort of discipline . But this discipline has to be developed in a new way. In the situation where the architect takes responsibility between the client and the community, he reinterprets the needs of the client in terms of the community structure so that the community structure becomes more comprehensible…”\(^{556}\)

They did not simple stated these things-as ‘castles in the air’- but managed to design a building which materialized their notion of architecture, and the architecture of the city as a form of art, according to what their ideas; a building in which they took responsibility between the client and the city of London, reinterpreting the needs of the clients in terms of the “community structure”-conceptual needs- so that the “community structure” became more comprehensible: the Economist building.

\(^{555}\) In Peter Smithsons’ words: “whether the solution lies within the actual field of architecture itself, which is a thing which CIAM in its beginning always rejected (It thought that in the long run the truth lay in economics. It would seem now perhaps that the truth, as far as town constructions, might even lie in the field of plastic invention rather than in the field of economics)…”See Planning today, a discussion with William Holford, Arthur Ling and Peter Smithson, Architectural Design, June 1957

\(^{556}\) of course Sir William Holford remained skeptical about Peter Smithson’s will and answered him: Holford: I think that if we take Smithsons’ thesis that the architect must assume responsibility for standing between the client’s megalomania…and Society, then the architect must obviously be what he was considered in the days of Palladio–l’uomo universale… this conscience, this idea as to what society really is and wants…nobody can in fact comprehend the whole town, even from an airplane…” i.b.i.d.
The Economist's “void”

“In all urban developments nowadays, the governing consideration is the permitted plot ratio— that is, the ratio of the total floor area of the buildings to be erected to the area of the site on which they are built. In this case the permitted ratio is 5 to 1. In theory, the whole site could be covered with a building five storeys high. Or the same amount of floor area can be provided by going up high on one part of the site, leaving the rest free, in which case the possibilities are further restricted by the angles of light to neighboring buildings and by an overall height limit. Mr. and Mrs. Smithson’s plan makes a decided choice of the latter alternative. Not only does this make it possible to lift up a good proportion of the accommodation provided to where it will enjoy unrestricted light, but it also makes possible to open up a large part of the site for use as a small piazza, open to the public.”

The Economist, July 15th, 1961

The economist building could be considered a work of modern art; a materialization of the Smithsons’ notion of the ‘architecture of the city’ as a work of art. Right after the Economist was built they were quite clear about which should be the goal of architecture: “The objective of architecture is works of art that are lived in. The city is the largest, and at present that worst of such works of art.”

Indeed their design for the Economist aimed at being a work of art that could be inhabited. As I have tried to argue up to now, their notion of modern art emerged from the ‘core’ of the avant-garde movements: abstract art as a transcendental intuitive logic. Architecture was then, conceived as an intuitive logic driven by reason & imagination, aiming at satisfying the material & conceptual needs, establishing a balance between individual & community, city & nature. The Economist building was a result of that logic and for that reason it pleased Aldo van Eyck; he was aware that -as the Orphanage he had just built- the Economist building was bringing modern architecture one step further: it was an artwork avant-garde architecture because it redefined modern architecture as a form of art.

As The Economist journal outlined the most important element of the project was the piazza. A space in between the city and the building. The Smithson broke the dense compact and closed urban-block liberating the 64% of the ground floor to public use. By opening a piazza the architects pushed themselves to provide a ‘place’ for the city in between the buildings; in fact the ‘sense of place’ was provided essentially by the buildings – apart from a bench, and the way the access to piazza is resolved. The forms of the buildings determined each other in their relation with the street they conform- St. James, Rider, or Bury St.- while in relation the piazza and the other two buildings; as in Van Eyck’s favorite quote from Modrian: ‘The culture of particular form is approaching its end. The culture of determined relations has begun’ (See IMAGE LO-42) As in a Mondrian composition the establishment of relations was more important than the things in themselves; the buildings do not ‘represent’ anything in themselves, and they lack sense when we ‘isolate’ one of them —think about

557 The text follows “The penalty of such a plan (if indeed it be a penalty) is quite a high tower. This has hitherto been thought alien to London. But opinions are changing very rapidly; and we believe it will not be long before the double advantage of space at ground level, and of light up above, produce a complete revolution in the accepted canons of British urban architecture”, from the article “A New Home for the Economist” in The Economist, July 15th, 1961.

isolating’ a red squared piece of canvas from a Mondrian painting. The Economist piazza is the result of a ‘culture of determined relations’ searching for harmony-using ‘universal’-objective proportions (See IMAGE LO-44)

The Economist piazza was designed as a public place conforming an ‘in-between’ realm inhabited by the citizens in various ways at different times. The piazza connected St. James St. & Bury St., something completely unreasonable & unnecessary, because Rider St. at ten meters distance from the access to the piazza, already accomplished that ‘function’. The piazza provided the main access to the Economist building-the highest tower- and the residential building, both facing Bury St.; the residential building is exactly like the higher tower but scaled down one-half- very Mondrian & Arp, objective and almost a joke; the third building on the corner of St. James & Rider St. hosted the Martin Banks but does not have a main access to the piazza; while the Economist & the residential building established a direct dialogue with the inner piazza the Martin Banks was essentially facing the streets outside. The ground plan of the residential and the Economist building provided a covered public space enlarging the use of the piazza during the rainy days: in the piazza you feel inside the buildings quite outside, while under the porches you feel more inside being outside; when you enter the buildings you can see clearly outside through the glass wall, you are inside feeling outside. Inside & outside, city-piazza, piazza-building, building-piazza were articulated through in-between places, in Van Eyck’s words: “the common ground where conflicting polarities can again become dual phenomena”

As in Van Eyck’s Orphanage the materiality of the building challenged ‘conflicting polarities’ merging the dual-phenomena building-piazza, mass-void, hence façade and floor have the same finishing, limestone; the rough brick wall of the existing Boodle’s Club was preserved contrasting with the new white limestone used for the floor of the Piazza and the buildings façade: the empty and the mass have the same material for they were considered one and the same thing.

The Economist piazza was a work of modern abstract art: seeking for harmony in which determined relations among the elements was more important than the thing in itself; the thing in itself transcended its materiality through the establishment of relations –between the things in the mind and the things in themselves; in architectural forms this should be achieved-according to Van Eyck-essentially thinking about the architectural space in terms of place and time in terms of anticipation, duration and memory. The Economist piazza was -and is- a place inhabited by the Londoners and the people inhabiting the buildings themselves (See IMAGE LO-43); while it is perceived entirely as a place as you walk through the piazza, or walking in it sitting down getting up going out, or getting in the building and going out to smoke a cigarette, in Van Eyck words: “Place is the appreciation of space...Now space-meaning need not be preordained or implicitly defined in the form. It is not merely what a space sets out to effect in human terms that gives it place value, but what is able to gather and transmit”

See Aldo van Eyck’s text: The medicine of reciprocity tentatively illustrated (Introductory article to the publication of the Amsterdam Municipal Orphanage, in Forum mag. April-May 1961) See Strauven & Ligtelijn. Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings. P.319. The following quotes from Van Eyck are from the same text.

The architectural space conceived as a place provides a “sense of duration” defined by Van Eyck as “the temporal span experience man carries with him in time” carried on from the overall design to the technical solutions of the façades, similar but not the same, and the material of the piazza & the façade.561

How is this achieved? As I argued with a logic of determined relations searching for harmony with elementary means: behavior as I just pointed out, and geometry- ‘universal’-objective proportions. Looking at the plan of the project we can perceive elementary forms: three chamfered squares; a simplicity of forms developed out of a regular grid, and √2 proportions (similar proportion than Hunstanton); the distance between the buildings has √2 proportion, being 1 the side of the big tower with a squared plan; while the residential tower is one half of The Economist tower. The elementary simplicity of the proportions was complemented with the elementary roughness of the materials in the piazza: the pre-existing rough brick wall, and the new white Portland limestone. It is important to note the fact that for the façade and the floor the Smithsons used ‘roach bends’ of limestone instead of bends of ‘good stone’: they used the stone “rejected” by the neo-classical architects such as Christopher Wren, and Lutyens. The Smithsons used a white limestone considered up to then as ruby waste stone; it came from “roach” beds of Portland Island that were full of cavities – mould casts of what was once solid, three dimensional forms of bivalves (clams and oysters) or gastropods (marine snails): “After a stuffy meeting what better relief than a walk to view the relicts of the Jurassic seas of some 150 million years ago, exposed for all to see in the continuous surfaces of a most distinguished building”.562 (See IMAGE LO-45 & LO-42)

Enstrangement again? It takes a while to recognize the gastropods & clams lying on London’s pavement or exhibited at the building’s façade. The material used to create a ‘place’ a ‘common ground where opposites co-exist (become ‘dual phenomena’) provided a time-consciousness- architecture with a simple-elementary gesture was the materialization of a new consciousness of time: a place, a piazza, not ‘a space’ with “relicts of the Jurassic seas of some 150 million years ago”; the architects had simply followed their early ideas manifested at the Parallel of Life & Art exhibition (1953): there was a concordance between the micro & the macrocosmos manifested in scientific & artistic forms of knowledge.

According to Van Eyck the “paving” was a key element; indeed, the Economist piazza like the ‘interior street’ a the Amsterdam Orphanage established a continuity between one thing and another, in Van Eyck’s words. :

“…it is a marvelous plan. The in-between place-the actual door-will become one…proves you can’t split architecture and urbanism. You see the three elements as ‘volumes dans l’espace’ are inconceivable without the detail invention. The elements are as it were reciprocally familiarized with the participant…The intermediary place [not a space]…piazza and building are one. This is very important – I mean the paving. Detail every bit – and do it better than the Seagram plateau…”563

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561 See Section: Aldo van Eyck & The Nieuwe Beelding in Chapter 1.3. New Consciousness.
562 Informative pamphlet from The Economist building.
Van Eyck praised the Economist piazza over Mies’ Seagram plateau, for neither Van Eyck nor Peter Smithson enjoyed simplistic skyscrapers, or architecture exclusively designed for businessman, in Van Eyck’s words: “extreme flexibility lead to false neutrality.”

After “Patio & pavilion” the void -the charged void- was the main concern of the Smithsons: architecture’s capacity to transcend its materiality- architecture as a form of abstract art; during the 1950s they developed several projects in which the relations established between the elements were more important than the elements themselves out of which The Economist was their most successful attempt. Van Eyck made it clear, a Dadaist yes=no, void=empty: “piazza and building are one”, although it was not one building, it was three-like C. Kupper’s alter egos. Architecture aiming at satisfying the material & conceptual needs, was able to establish a balance between the citizen and the city (individual & community), while relating through its materiality the individual & the universal, De Stijl: “3. The new art has brought forward what the new consciousness of time contains: a balance between the universal and the individual…”

It was not simple a matter of providing an ‘modern-headquarters-icon’ but to produce a piece of urban fabric, a place people can inhabit. A form of art grounded in rational and non-rational means, in A&P Smithson’s words:

“You may ask what are the characteristics of the New Modern Architecture. Well, I think that it is a pragmatic rather than old style rational. Its basis is a sort of active socio-plastics. As to its imagery, the magic having flown from the rectangle if is much freer in its use of form, more rough and ready, and less complete and classical. Technologically it accepts industrially produced components as the natural order of the architect’s vocabulary, not as something special or magical that will do the architect’s work for him”

A form of knowledge aiming at certain degree of objectivity but sensitive and pragmatic enough to don’t try to explain everything with reason. Aware of our incapacity to know, they relied on imagination and reason to create FORMS that satisfied conceptual and bodily needs: “The objective of architecture is works of art that are lived in”. Indeed their design for the Economist aimed at being a work of art that could be inhabited; it was precisely the manner in which the building responded to the way people lived -or could live- in the city what made it a work of modern abstract art; in fact it materialized what Van Eyck expected of a city: “Cities should become the counterform of man’s reciprocally individual and collective urban reality” (See IMAGE LO-46-47)

564 See Strauven and Ligtelijn, Aldo van Eyck: Collected Articles and other writings. p.212.
565 See the projects: Berlin Hauptstadt (March-Nov. 1957), Wokingham Infants School (Summer-Autumn 1958), the Churchill College for Cambridge (Jan.-March 1959)
566 Christian Kupper alter egos were: Theo van Doesburg, IK Bonset, and Aldo Camini
567 “Manifest I of De Stijl”, in De Stijl, vol.2, nº1, November 1918, p.4. Signed by Theo van Doesburg, Robert van’t Hoff, Vilmos Huszar, Antony Kok, Piet Mondrian, Georges Vantongerloo, and Jan Wils.
568 AD, March 1958 “Europe/USA”, 1957. Peter Smithson
Form & Logic

Van Eyck and the Smithsons understood the logic of modern art, and were able to materialize it in some of its buildings from the late 1940s to 1960. These buildings represent a curious continuity between pre-war and post-war modernity they felt themselves in some way as part of the modern movement 570 but at the same they tried to bring it one step forward. Van Eyck & the Smithsons were able to redefine modern architecture because they understood the architectural form in terms of logic: architectural forms were determined, were the result, of a very specific logic; the logic behind the modern architecture of Van Eyck and the Smithsons was the logic of modern (abstract) art.

Van Eyck & the Smithsons understood modern architecture as a true form of abstract art, and criticized the late CIAM for developing a superficial “literally abstract” interpretation of it. Two publications summarizing their ideas around 1960s, started with a clear reference to modern (abstract) art: Aldo van Eyck’s The Child, the City & the Artist (1962) and the Smithsons’ Team 10 Primer (1962); Van eyck’s intervention in Otterloo (1959) was used by the Smithsons to introduce the Team 10 Primer; it opened with a clear reference to C.W. Giedion’s “Great Riot”: the artists, scientists and intellectuals who overcame the deterministic “euclidian groove”, from “…Picasso, Klee, Mondrian and Brancusi; to Joyce, Le Corbusier, Schönberg, Bergson and Einstein; to the whole wonderful gang” 571 it followed:

“Modern Architects have been harping continually on what is different in our time to such an extent, that even they have lost touch with what is not different, what is always essentially the same. This grave mistake was not made by the poets, painters and sculptors. On the contrary, they never narrowed down experience. They enlarged and intensified it; tore down not merely the form-barriers as did the architects, but the emotional ones as well. In fact the language they evolved coincides with the emotional revolution they brought about…The language architects evolved, however, and this after the pioneering period was over, coincides only with itself and is, therefore, essentially sterile and academic – literally abstract.” 572

Van Eyck & the Smithsons were able to redefine modern architecture, to produce a paradigmatic shift because they understood the logic of modern abstract art and materialized in architecture. In order to do so they redefined the architectural notions of space and time according to that logic. The misinterpretation of the principles of the Modern Movement, the superficial emulation of Abstract painting/sculpture brought architects to reduce the notion of architectural space to the negative of the volume, while time was conceived linearly regardless the discovery of relativity, with a blind fascination in technological progress; as a result while form was a narrow minded consequence of Cartesian three-dimensional space and material needs “form followed function”. (See IMAGE LO-41) But Van Eyck & the Smithsons understood this had absolutely nothing to do with the modern project: with modern science and art, with modern architecture.

571 A&P Smithson. Team 10 Primer p.559
572 Aldo van Eyck: intervention during the Otterlo meeting, and opening text of the Team 10 Primer. p.560. Similar paragraphs can be found in: Aldo van Eyck, The Child, the city and the artist: an essay on architecture-the in-between realm (1962).
Hence they rebelled against the tergiversation of what made architects modern architects and cities, modern cities to live in. They departed from avant-garde art principles and developed their own notion of modern architecture according to the logic of modern abstract art; it was essential to redefine the: the goals, and the means. The goal was not to satisfy the material needs –understood in terms of functions- but the material & conceptual needs –understood in terms of human behavior & habitat. The means were not simply reason and new technical developments applied to architecture, but mainly non-rational means which had conformed architecture as an art form according to modernity & humanism. “Space & time” were then ‘abstract categories’ from philosophy, mathematics and physics, that were over determining architectural thinking; that is why the Smithsons and Van Eyck preferred to talk about the architectural space & time in terms of “place” & “occasion, memory, duration…”; they looked at the every-day life of people because by looking at it you see the limitations of any rationalistic world picture: you see people behaving according to faith, feeling and, every now and then reason; while you witness how past-present-future merge in the every-day life of a city in which ‘classical’, ‘popular’, and ‘modern’ times co-exist. The architecture of the city is the ultimate result of that logic.
Appendix – Marcel Duchamp & Walter Benjamin: Modern Abstract Art vs. Technological reproducibility

“Technological reproducibility of the artwork changes the relation of the masses to art”
Walter Benjamin, The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility (Paris, 1935)

“Today works of art, suitable packaged like political slogans, are pressed on a reluctant public at reduced prices by the culture industry; they are opened up for popular enjoyment like parks”
Adorno and Horkheimer, The Dialectics of Enlightenment (Amsterdam, 1947)

Throughout the Second part of the present survey I analyzed to what extent the work and ideas of Van Eyck & the Smithsons redefined architecture as form of abstract art. I tried to illustrate how the architects understood the logic of modern art, and how they were able to re-create that logic in their design process, in their conception of architecture as an art form. Nevertheless, as Adorno & Horkheimer pointed out in 1947, social conditions were changing the nature of the artwork, and the way people perceived it: hence the social function of art was changing. Some intellectuals like Walter Benjamin tried to understand why and how this change was taking place, which were the consequences, and therefore, how the artist-intellectual should face them. At the same time, some artists like Duchamp, provided a response through his artworks, while Van Eyck & the Smithsons tried to face the similar problems in the architecture. The intellectual questioned the capacity of modern abstract art to be “transcendental” facing mass production & consumption, the painter withdrew into a “pure negation” of painting and art practice, and the architects tried to provide a response grounded in a notion of art that was getting outdated: the pre-World-War notion of modern abstract art was changing, facing the emergence of consumer society in ‘Western civilization’.

Modern abstract art aimed to “transcend” grounded on the capacity of the artwork’s aura to produce spiritual relief in the beholder: the “aura” of being a ‘unique’ and ‘permanent’ object provided the artwork its capacity to transcend; but according to W. Benjamin this was going to change; how could modern art remain abstract-transcendental if it was turned into a commodity for mass consumption? Technological reproducibility, the proliferation photography and film was changing the conditions under which the artwork was produced by artists, perceived by people: notion of art. Walter Benjamin analyzed the artwork’s current condition, giving examples of contemporary artists - like the Dadaists- who were changing the nature of the artwork reacting to technological reproducibility. Out of the Dadaists I outlined the work of Duchamp for three reasons: first, he challenged the condition of abstract art using technological reproducibility as operative model for abstraction; second, by doing so he withdrew art into “pure negativity” – breaking away with the avant-garde project of merging art & life; and third, Duchamp’s ‘redefinition’ of avant-garde art as ‘pure negativity’ exerted great influence in future generations of artists & intellectuals in the USA propelling a new definition of modern art: post-modern art.

Lastly I will briefly point out how Van Eyck and the Smithsons faced the impact of technological reproducibility in architecture. Neither Duchamp nor Benjamin exerted great influence in the young architects, they remained faithful to the avant-garde’s project of merging art & life trying to face the transformation of architecture into a commodity for mass consumption. They struggled to
provide ‘l’habitat pour le plus grand nombre’\textsuperscript{573}, and reacted vigorously against any attempt to withdraw architectural practice into “pure negativity”, mimicking the logic of “post-modern art”.

\textbf{Walter Benjamin: Modern art facing technological reproducibility}

The Vienna School historians had focused on the analysis of art in terms of purpose, and their research had influenced the development of modern abstract art. While this notion of art emerged and spread over Europe W. Benjamin and M. Duchamp were concerned with the impact of new technical means of reproducibility, photography and film, in the current notion of art;\textsuperscript{574} and how these new means were changing completely the conditions of artistic production, and ultimately its definition. Benjamin’s approach was certainly grounded in Riegl’s notion of Kunstwollen, nevertheless he criticized the analysis of art carried on by him and his followers, for not taking into account the “social upheavals” manifested in the changes of perception; in Benjamin’s words:\textsuperscript{575}

\begin{quote}
“The scholars of the Viennese school Riegl and Wickhoff, resisting the weight of the classical tradition beneath which this art had been buried, were the first to think of using such art to draw conclusions about the organization of perception at the time art was produced. However far reaching their insight, it was limited by the fact that these scholars were content to highlight the formal signature which characterized perception in late-Roman times. They did not attempt to show the social upheavals manifested in these changes in perception – and perhaps could not have hoped to do so at that time. Today, the conditions for an analogous insight are more favorable.”\textsuperscript{576}
\end{quote}

Whereas the Vienna School historians had analyzed art in terms of the artists’ will – Kunstwollen- W. Benjamin tried to understand how “social transformations”, such as the mechanical reproduction of images, was changing the perception/reaction of the artworks, and the notion of art. Benjamin tried to analyze “the way in which human perception is organized”, and how the medium in which it occurs is conditioned by history. According to the Vienna School historians, art was able to produce spiritual relief in man–satisfying his emotional needs- aiming to transcend the thing in itself, rendering the object absolute: either driven by empathy producing naturalist art, or driven by abstraction producing conceptual art. Nevertheless Benjamin noticed that the way people searched

\textsuperscript{573} Van Eyck, “In order that we may overcome the menace of quantity now that we are faced with l’habitat pour le plus grand nombre, the aesthetics of number, the laws of what I should like to call ‘Harmony in Motion’ must be discovered” Aesthetics of Number, Statement made at CIAM 9, Aix-en provence, 1953. See Strauven. Aldo van Eyck: The Shape of Relativity.p.255.  
\textsuperscript{574} Duchamp worked in close collaboration with Man Ray and Benjamin’s essay was nourished by the debates of the G group gathered in Berlin in the early 1920s. The artists of the group included: Mies van der Rohe, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Hans Richter, Raoul Hausmann; Benjamin along with his wife Dora Sophie Pollak and Ernst Schoen moved at the fringes of this community. Benjamin took part in the debates held in artists’ ateliers across Berlin. For Benjamin, Moholy-Nagy’s theorization of the relations among technological change, production of new media forms, and the development of human sensibility was very important. See the Editors’ Introduction, in Michael W.Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin ed. Walter Benjamin: The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media. The Belknap Press, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.), London (England), 2008.  
\textsuperscript{575} For a more developed argumentation of Benjamin’s ideas in relation to Riegl see Michael W. Jennings “Production, Reproduction and Reception” in Michael W.Jennings ed. Walter Benjamin: The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media.  
for the satisfaction of these emotional needs was changing completely due to the new forms of technical reproducibility of the image, photography and film. The decay of the “aura”, the devaluation of the “here and now of the artwork”, and its authenticity -conceived as the physical duration and the historical testimony related to it- were being “jeopardized by reproduction”. The “mass existence” of the artwork was substituting its “unique existence”. According to Benjamin the masses aimed to transcend by reproducing the image:

“The desire of the present masses to get closer to things, and their equally passionate concern for overcoming each thing’s uniqueness by assimilating it as a reproduction…the reproduction, as offered by illustrated magazines and newsreels, differs unmistakably from the image. Uniqueness and permanence are as closely entwined in the later as are transitoriness and repeatability”.577

The masses did not look at the image as an authentic ‘thing in itself’ giving value to its “uniqueness” and “permanence”, instead they appreciated the image as a “reproduction”, characterized by its “transitoriness” and “repeatability”.

According to Benjamin the “decay of aura” was leading to a new notion of art. The “unique value of the ‘authentic’ work of art” had initially its basis in ritual, securalized since the renaissance in the “cult of beauty”; it reacted to the advent of photography with the doctrine of “L’art pour l’art”, hence modern art emerged as a “negative theology” that rejected any social function or definition in terms of representational content. Art was freed from “is parasitic subservience to ritual” – paradoxically “the work reproduced becomes the reproduction of a work designed for reproducibility”.578 If the criterion of authenticity ceased to be applied to artistic production, the whole social function of art changed.

Challenging Riegl's notion of “art as contest with nature” Benjamin pointed out how art had a new social function that could not be defined in traditional terms. Instead of an analysis in terms of purpose (Riegl), Benjamin thought about the artwork in terms of value.580 Benjamin considered art history as an illustration of the two polarities within the artwork itself: the artwork’s cult value, and its exhibition value. He considered that reproducibility had increased enormously the “scope for exhibiting the work of art”, producing a quantitative shift between the two poles, and ultimately leading to a qualitative transformation of the artwork. According to Benjamin if prehistoric times had placed exclusive emphasis on the cult value, during the Twentieth Century “through the exclusive emphasis placed on its exhibition value, the work of art becomes a construct [Gebilde] with quite new functions”. Primitive art could be considered a “first technology” based on the notion of the ritual, involving many human beings, producing results valid once and for all; whereas the art of the machine age -what Benjamin called “the second technology”- reduced human intervention; it

577 “The authenticity of a thing is the quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin on, ranging from its physical duration to the historical testimony relating to it. Since the historical testimony is founded on the physical duration, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction, in which the physical duration plays no part. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object, the weight it derives from tradition” Benjamin, The Work of Art. p.22
578 Benjamin, The Work of Art.p.23
579 Benjamin, The Work of Art. P.24
580 Benjamin addressed the question of the political uses of art from a foundation in Marxist Theory and his reading of Riegl. As Michael W. Jennings pointed out in the Editors’ Introduction, of Walter Benjamin: The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media.
resulted wholly provisional and “operate(d) by means of experiments and endless varied test procedures”. According to Benjamin the “second technology” should not be analyzed from the standpoint of the first; he proposed a reconsideration of Riegl’s definition of “art as a contest with nature”, instead current art was see by Benjamin as “an interplay between nature and humanity”:

“…the second technology as ‘mastery over nature’ is highly questionable, since it implies viewing the second technology form the standpoint of the first. The first technology really sought to master nature, whereas the second aims rather at an interplay between nature and humanity. The primary social function of art today is to rehearse that interplay.”

Benjamin analyzed the impact of this new notion of art in relation with photography and film, pointing out the Dadaists work for it emulated the effects produced by film. According to Benjamin, “In photography, exhibition value begins to drive back cult value”; portrait remained the last entrenchment of cult value: “the cult of remembrance of dead or absent loved ones”. Nevertheless, as the human being withdrew from the photographic images, the exhibition value showed its superiority to cult value: photographs were essentially historical evidences implemented with captions. In our everyday life, in magazines, and journals, the photograph and the caption were linked: the way the image is exhibit conditions the perception of the artwork. According to Benjamin following the logic of photography this condition was manifested in film: “The directives given by captions to those looking at images in illustrated magazines soon become more precise and commanding in films, where the way each image is understood seems prescribed by the sequence of all the preceding images”.

The influence of the new means of technical reproducibility in Modern Art was clear in the Dadaist collages, the Merz sculptures or paintings. According to Benjamin by gluing photographs, or train tickets into their artworks the Dadaists strained after effects which could be easily achieved in film “The Dadaist attempted to produce with the means of painting (or literature) the effects which the public today seeks in film.” The Dadaists “attached much less importance to the commercial usefulness of the artwork than to the uselessness of those works as objects of contemplative immersion” By seeking to achieve this uselessness thorough the degradation of the materials they wanted to annihilate the aura in every object they produced. While looking at a Dadaist Collage, the concentration, the “contemplative immersion” for evaluation, was impossible to achieve; instead of “bourgeoisie contemplation” the Dadaist seek for a sort of distraction [Ablekung] guaranteed by making the artwork the center of scandal, outraging the public.

581 Benjamin follows in the note: “This applies especially to film. The function of film is to train human beings in the apperceptions and reactions needed to deal with a vast apparatus whose role in their lives is expanding almost daily. Dealing with this apparatus also teaches them that technology will release them from their enslavement to the powers of the apparatus only when humanity’s whole constitution has adapted itself to the new productive forces which the second technology has set free. Second Technology is a system in which the mastering of elementary social forces is a precondition for playing (das Spiel) with natural forces…because this technology aims at liberating human beings from drudgery, the individual suddenly sees his scope for play, his field of action, immeasurably expanded…For the more the collective makes the second technology his own, the more keenly individuals belonging to the collective feel how little they have received of what was due them under the dominion of the first technology. In other words, it is the individual liberated by the liquidation of the first technology who stakes his claim. No sooner has the second technology secured its initial revolutionary gains than vital questions affecting the individual – questions of love and death which had been buried by the first technology- once again press for solutions” Benjamin, The Work of Art.p.26.27

582 Benjamin, The Work of Art.P.27

583 Benjamin, The Work of Art.P.38
Marcel Duchamp: Photography as an operative model for abstraction

Indeed, Duchamp’s Dadaists performances during the late 1910s wanted “to outrage” the new bourgeoisie in New York. As a true Dadaist Duchamp explored the notion of shock in ready-mades, but what is important is the fact that works such as *Fountain* (1917) made fun of the artwork’s “ritual value” challenging his condition as an “object to be exhibited”-its “exhibition value”. As Benjamin said, in photography the exhibition value drove back the cult value, it becomes historical evidence with political significance, indeed when the *Fountain* was rejected from the exhibition it was brought to Stieglitz’s Gallery, photographed, and published.

(Image A2.1: Spread from the The Blind Man nº2 showing Duchamp’s *Fountain* (Beatrice Wood ed. in association with Marcel Duchamp and Henri-Pierre Roché, May 1917))

Since his early paintings like *Nude Descending the stair nº2* (1912) Duchamp was concerned with the moving image; that same year he started paintings related with “*The Large Glass*” (1915-23), and writing notes for its execution, it was going to be his last painting. According to R. Krauss, since the late 1910s Duchamp’s work explored photography as an operative model for abstraction. In order to make her point Krauss illustrated how Duchamp was the modern artist “who first establishes the connection between the index (as a type of sign) and the photograph” Krauss essay “Notes on the Index I: Seventies Art in America” (1977) unveiled to what extent Duchamp’s art was an exploration on the attributes of photography and film within the realm of abstract art. R. Krauss’ interpretation of Duchamp’s work was grounded in W. Benjamin’s idea: Dadaist artists emulating new means of technological reproducibility; it will serve us to illustrate the reaction of modern painting & sculpture facing photography, film and the reproducibility of the artwork after the 2nd World War.

(Image A2.2: Nude Descending the stair nº2, Marcel Duchamp (1912); Anemic Cinema, 1926 by Rrose Sélavy (Duchamp), Man Ray & Marc Allegret; Man Ray’s Photograph of Marcel Duchamp with his Rotary Glass Plates Machine (in motion), 1920.)

One of the examples used by Krauss to illustrate her argument was Duchamp’s, *Tu M’* (1918); according to Krauss, Duchamp’s painting portrayed several ready-mades emulating the technology of the camera: “…the readymades themselves are not depicted. Instead the bicycle wheel, the hatrack, and a corkscrew, are projected onto the surface of the canvas through the fixing of cast shadows”. If Benjamin argued, the “portrait” was photography’s last entrenchment of cult value, Krauss’ essay pointed out how Duchamp signified the objects “by means of indexical traces” trying to emulate Man Ray’s photograms. Duchamp abandoned the trench of avant-garde painting: *Tu M’* (1918) was his last painting on canvas. (See IMAGE A2.3: Marcel Duchamp, *Tu M’*, 1918)

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585 See Rosalind Krauss “Notes on the Index I: Seventies Art in America” October nº3 (Spring 1977) and Notes on the Index II: Seventies Art in America, Part 2’ October nº4 (Fall 1977)
586 This argument was developed by Krauss. “Notes on the Index I: Seventies Art in America” p.70
587 This was a technique widely used by the Dadaists as Christian Schad, Hannah Hoch, Moholy-Nagy during the 1920s; and later on by Nigel Henderson in the early 1950s
Following his experimentation with photography as an operative model for abstraction, Duchamp conceived his last painting as a self-portrait over a transparent glass, *The Bride stripped by her bachelors, even (The Large Glass)* 1915-23; the painting could be interpreted as a logical consequence of previous explorations carried on with Man Ray on photography and moving images.\(^{588}\) Man Ray’s rayograms (photograms) were created by placing objects exposed to lighting over photographic paper, the images obtained were physical indexes. Both Duchamp and Man Ray had explored that same technique with dust instead of light, as we can see in Man Ray’s photograph *Elevage de poussiere*, 1920. Duchamp “painted” the glass by fixing the accumulation of dust, a physical index of time passing by. One last aspect of *The Large Glass* in relation to photography was the fact that Duchamp kept, gathered and issued the notes for the painting; Krauss used Benjamin’s argument about the role of captions attached to photographs to illustrate how Duchamp’s “notes” for the Bride -The Green Box, 1938- operated as “captions” of the painting since they were indispensable to interpret it. Duchamp was using ‘attributes’ of photography to make his last painting: a painting to be interpreted with ‘captions’, materialized in a transparent material, turned translucent through the fixation of matter (dust); in Krauss words:

“If Duchamp was indeed thinking of the Large Glass as a kind of photograph, its processes become absolutely logical: not only the marking of the surface with instances of the index and the suspension of the images as physical substances within the field of the picture, but also the opacity of the image in relation to its meaning. The notes for the Large Glass form a huge, extended caption, and like the captions newspaper photographs, which are absolutely necessary for their intelligibility, the very existence of Duchamp’s notes- their preservation and publication- bears witness to the altered relationship between sign and meaning within his work.”\(^{589}\) (See IMAGES PRO-10-11, Chapter 2.2.2 & Image A2.4: Marcel Duchamp, The Large Glass 1915-23)

Now what is important about Duchamp’s abstraction was the fact that the painting operated like a photograph, like a “physical index”, whereas the mainstream of abstract paintings still operated as symbols. Facing photography & film Duchamp noticed that art’s unique way to survive-unique meaningful value- was to turn into a sign, an index; he tried to bring abstraction one step further by tracing signs, indexes. Unlike symbols the indexes established their meaning through a physical relationship to their referents, marks or traces of a cause, and that cause is the object they signify.\(^{590}\)

Early Modern art had rejected representation -naturalism in art- for it was less suitable to “transcend” than abstract art (non-representational). Abstract artists created artworks that were in themselves, and did not represent anything, but still remained symbols; hence insofar as they were symbols they remained a representation. The mainstream of Dadaists collages, Neoplasticist paintings and Constructivist sculptures remained in some way attached to the symbolic potential of “abstraction” conceived as a “fruit out of man like a fruit growing out of a tree”; Mondrian’s painting

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\(^{588}\) The photographer Man Ray had portrayed Duchamp as Rrose Selavy and worked with him in the movie *Anemic Cinema*

\(^{589}\) See R. Krauss. “Notes on the Index I: Seventies Art in America” P.74-77

\(^{590}\) In Krauss words: “As distinct from symbols, indexes establish their meaning along the axis of a physical relationship to their referents. They are marks or traces of a particular cause, and that cause is the thing to which they refer, the object they signify…physical traces (footprints), medical symptoms, the shifters” R. Krauss explains the notion of the shifter in the note “3. The shifter is Jakobson’s term for that category of linguistic sign which is ‘filled with signification’ only because it is ‘empty’. See R. Krauss. “Notes on the Index I: Seventies Art in America”. P.69
Victorie Boggie Woogie (1942-44) referred to a jazz song, it had a musical condition, it symbolized still concerned with the cult value of the artwork; we can see the traces of the brush in the monochrome surfaces, claiming for authenticity, seeking for uniqueness and permanence, “aura”. But Duchamp tore down the last remnant of representational art, its role as a symbol, instead he simply traced signs.

Duchamp’s art did not aim to transcend by providing “aura”- “uniqueness” and “permanence”- to his artworks. Duchamp’s work operated with the values that according to Benjamin characterized film’s & photography’s reproducibility: “transitoriness” & “repeteability”. (Image A2.5: Mondrian, Broadway Boogie Woogie, 1942-44; Marcel Duchamp Boite-en-valise, 1935-41). He continuously tried to drive back the “cult value” of the artwork focusing on its “exhibition value”: The Fountain (1917) was transitory, it was photographed, published and up to today reproduced; The Large Glass (1915-23) operated as photography relying on its “exhibition value” as a transparent painting; The Green Box (1938) operated as a caption of the Large Glass, and several copies of it were issued; the same goes for the Boite-en-valise (1935-1941), another “small portable museum” reproduced in several copies that challenged the nature & need of a museum to exhibit the artwork. After the Boite-en-valise (1935-1941), Duchamp withdrew and devoted secretly to build in his apartment from 1946 to 1966 his last work, “Etant done”. (Image A2.6: Image A2.6: Marcel Duchamp, Ètant donnés : 1º la chute d’eau, 2º le gaz d’éclairage, 1946-66)

Duchamp & the American Neo-Avant-Garde: Modern Art as ‘pure negativity’

Duchamp challenged the condition of abstract art using means of “technological reproducibility” as an operative model for abstraction. By doing so he propelled modern art into “pure negativity” breaking away with the avant-garde’s ‘project’ of merging art & life. Duchamp’s redefinition of avant-garde art as ‘pure negativity’ exerted great influence in a new generations of artists & intellectuals in the United States from the 1950s onwards; new abstract art was theorized in the USA by a new generation of artists & historians strongly determined by the Frankfurt School and French Structuralism: modern art was redefined as “pure negativity”- post modern art.

One of the earliest examples of Duchamp’s influence in the Neo-Avant garde scene in America is the work of Robert Rauschenberg & John Cage during the early 1950s.591 As Brandon Joseph pointed out Robert Rauschenberg’s early works were very influenced by Duchamp. Rauschenberg’s White canvases (1951) were explorations on painting as “physical indexes”, just like Duchamp’s last canvas, Tu m’ (1918); according to John Cage the White Paintings were to receive airborne particles, he also depicted the Large Glass in relation to the idea of “silence” and nothingness certainly present in his own work and Rauschenberg’s White paintings (IMAGE A2.7: R. Rauschenberg, White painting 1951; John Cage, 4’ 33”, 1952. Score in proportional notation, 1953.):

“Looking at the Large Glass, the thing that I like so much is that I can focus my attention wherever I wish. It helps me to blur the distinction between art and life and produces a kind of silence in the

work itself. There is nothing in it that requires me to look in one place or another or, in fact requires me to look at all. I can look through it to the world beyond” 592

Abstract painting was rejecting not only the representational role of painting but also any symbolic role, withdrawing into “pure negativity”; this path was followed as well by modern sculpture which evolved from 1920s according to the observations of Benjamin on the decline of classical sculpture. Benjamin had predicted the decline of classical sculpture in modern art, due to the change in the notion of art produced by film. According to Benjamin the state of Greeks’ technology compelled them to “produce eternal values in art”; whereas in our times, film had an artistic character so much determined by reproducibility, that it has given crucial importance to a quality of the artwork which Greeks would have considered marginal: namely its capacity for improvement. According to Benjamin, film’s quality of improvement is linked to its renunciation of eternal values, in Benjamin’s words:

“The film is therefore the artwork most capable of improvement. And this capacity is linked to its radical renunciation of eternal value. This is corroborated by the fact that for Greeks, whose art depended on the production of eternal values, the pinnacle of all the arts was the form least capable of improvement-namely sculpture, whose products are literally all of a piece. In the age of the assembled [montierbar] artwork, the decline of sculpture is inevitable” 593

If we consider the evolution of modern sculpture from the 1920s up to the 1960s we could think Benjamin was right. One of the first attempts to explain the evolution of Modern sculpture during that period in relation with Benjamin’s ideas was R. Krauss’ essay “The Sculpture in the expanded field” (1978). Departing from Benjamin’s forecast -“the decline of sculpture” & “decay of the “aura”- Krauss explained the evolution from Classical to modern sculpture as a progression from the “Logic of the monument” to its negation. Modern sculpture from Rodin, to Brancusi had steadily broken with the classical notion sculpture –“the logic of the monument”- operating with its “negative condition”; in Krauss’ words: “entramos en el arte moderno… que opera en relación con esta perdida de lugar, produciendo el monumento como abstracción, el monumento como una mera señal o base, funcionalmente desubicado y fundamentalmente autorreferencial” The radical abstraction of Brancusi’s “Origin of the World” (1924) presented the parts of the body as fragments, and integrated the basement in the artwork easily removable, functionally dislocated, self-referential. According to Krauss the “negative condition” of sculpture was brought to its limits by Rober Morris’ Installation at the Green Gallery (1964) or his reflective boxes (Untitled, 1965), in which sculpture assumed its inverse logic, pure negativity: neither landscape nor architecture. (Image A2.8: August Rodin, Balzac, 1893-98. Constantin Brancusi, The Origin of the World, 1924 & Image A2.9: Robert Morris, Installation at the Green Gallery (1964) and Untitled (Reflective boxes), 1965)

Departing from the “pure negativity” of R. Morris ‘sculptures’ from the 1950s, Krauss explained the works of R. Smithson, Heizer, Serra, de Maria, Le Witt, Nauman, in the early 1960s. According to her the explorations of the artists were explorations on an “expanded field” of pure negativity: “neither landscape nor architecture”. She used a diagram developed by Structuralist theory to

illustrate how new sculpture operated either as complete negation “no-landscape & no-architecture”, or in realms in-between its negative & positive condition: landscape & no-landscape, like Robert Smithson’s Spiral (1970), what she called “Marked Sites”; or architecture & no-architecture, like Sol Lewitt’s Cubes; and so on…(See IMAGE A2.10: Diagrams used by Rosalind Krauss to illustrate the idea of the expanded field & Image A2.11: Robert Smithson’s Spiral (1970), Alice Aycock’s Labyrinth (1972), Sol Lewitt’s Cube)

Krauss’ analysis on post-modern American art made manifest avant-garde’s withdrawal into “pure negativity”. A path opened by Duchamp’s challenge of abstract art facing photography, film and the technological reproducibility of the artworks. New avant-garde art did not aimed at merging art & life through its capacity to transcend, its “uniqueness” and “permanence”; instead, art withdrew into “pure negativity” operating with the values characterizing technological reproducibility, film & photography: “transitoriness” & “repeteability”.

Art & Architecture after Duchamp

At some point during the first half of the Twentieth century different art forms gathered in different but similar artistic movements aiming at merging art & life facing the material & spiritual reconstruction of Europe. The will to rebirth soon emerged during the First World War in the Dadaists cabarets, together with the criticism to the rationalistic inhuman attitude that had propelled the war; together with the “negativity” manifested by avant-garde artists from Picasso, to Mondrian who wanted to kill-negate-art in order to reborn again. Architecture as a form of art was part of that “Great Riot” seeking for a new sense of “harmony”, in De Stijl’s words:

“The object of this magazine will be to contribute to the development of a new sense of beauty…”

At the same time modern architecture integrated the avant-garde’s “negativity”, the non-rational nature of art, its rejection of established hierarchies, or systems of knowledge. In this process the early work of Aldo van Eyck and the Smithsons has been presented in continuity with the pre-World-War II attempts to merge the positive-constructive attitude of movements such as Neoplasticism, and Constructivism (Suprematism), with the negative-destructive nature of Dadaism, Futurism and Surrealism. But, unlike Duchamp or the Neo-Avant-Garde artists working in USA inspired by him, the Smithsons & Van Eyck would have never accepted to withdraw into “pure negativity”

Although the work of Duchamp had been an important member for the Dadaists it is worth to note the little impact of Duchamp’s work & ideas in Aldo van Eyck and the Smithsons. Duchamp had gone to New York in the 1910s for he felt the same kind of “dissatisfaction” in the artistic milieu of Paris than Peter Smithson felt in the architectural milieu in London during the 1950s. In fact Peter Smithson went to Manhattan, but he had difficulties to understand it and felt uncomfortable – he depicted with certain contempt USA’s east coast architecture in his “Letter to America” (AD March

In fact Duchamp exerted a great influence over the mainstream of the IG artists—mainly in Richard Hamilton—while Banham’s *Theory & Design in the First Machine age* (1960) only considered Duchamp’s cote as Cubist’s painter, and the Smithson’s never mentioned his work. Aldo van Eyck writings covered more than half a century— he was probably the architect more concerned about art in the after-war period—nevertheless he never referred, or mentioned Duchamp. Neither him nor C.W. Giedion devoted too much attention to Duchamp; in fact her book “Contemporary Sculpture: An evolution in volume & space” (1960)—an enlarged version of *Modern Plastik Art* (1937)—only showed Duchamp’s ready-made Bottle-rack (1914) comparing it to R. Haousman’s Mechanical Head (1919-20); according to Giedion the Mechanical Head:

“…ridicules the shattered Greek ideal and the mechanized man of today who lives on ‘ready mades’. This world had already been discovered in 1912 by Marcel Duchamp, and apart from the joke, it reveals the expressive power of simple forms. In its composition, the object, transferred from the utilitarian to the irrational sphere, acquires an entirely new force of expression. In being considered solely for its form it seems to take on a new and absurd intensity. ‘What we call Dada is tomfoolery in the void in which all great questions are involved… a game with shabby remains’ (Hugo Ball, Zurich, 1916).”

C.W. Giedion analyzed Duchamp’s work influenced by Riegl’s notion of bodily (utilitarian) & conceptual purposes in art. Nevertheless Duchamp’s attitude facing the evolution of art in society was difficult to understand deeply if it was analyzed strictly in the terms used by the Vienna School, in terms of purpose—the artist’s will. As I mentioned before, Duchamp’s concerns and explorations were focused on the relation with the spectator, and the social apparatus, the reaction of the masses towards art, art in terms of ‘value’; in fact Duchamp’s ready-made wanted to level down the importance given to the artist’s will, since the *ready-made* was meant to be interpreted by the spectator in a free way.

If that logic was translated into architecture the architectural form should be suitable to be interpreted in a free way by its inhabitant, hence the architects were freed from considering human behavior in their design process; this is something neither Van Eyck nor the Smithsons would have never accepted. The young architects had denounced how the modern architecture of late CIAM faced the emergence of “technological reproducibility” relying in an analytic and rationalistic approach. Van Eyck remained very critical to “technological reproducibility” and the Smithsons tried to deal with it at some point—“house of the future”, “appliance houses”—both were concern with the problem of *l’habitat pour le plus grand nombre*. Nevertheless, they both remained attached to the idea that the artwork was able to transcend its materiality producing spiritual relief, meaning stimulating human relations-associations. Architects should neither impose any specific function

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596 “When asked what type of reaction the ready-mades were intended to provoke, Duchamp replied that after an initial moment of ‘disorientation’ came an effect of ‘connotation-meaning that according to the observer’s imagination, he can go into any field or any form of imagination and association of ideas he wants, depending on his own reactions. In other words, my reactions were not to be his reactions at all. It was a sort of catalytic form in itself, ready to be accepted by everybody, or to be interpreted by the different temperaments of all the spectators’” Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde, Brandon W. Joseph. The MIT press, 2007, P.66
597 Van Eyck, “In order that we may overcome the menace of quantity now that we are faced with *l’habitat pour le plus grand nombre*, the aesthetics of number, the laws of what I should like to call ‘Harmony in Motion’ must be discovered” Aesthetics of Number, Statement made at CIAM 9, Aix-en provence, 1953
through their designs nor withdraw into “negate” their task of providing room to certain behaviors; in Van Eyck words: “Extreme flexibility of this kind would have led to false neutrality, like a glove that becomes no hand because it fits all hands”

Although Van Eyck & the Smithsons were to some extent concerned with the impact of “technological reproducibility” they did not accepted the values characterizing film & photography - “transitoriness” & “repeteability”- but still seek for “uniqueness” & “permanence” in architecture. Both were concerned with aspect relatives to the authenticity of the object- its identity; Van Eyck’s notion of configurative design was specially concerned with preserving the “uniqueness” of the architectural form facing mass production; Van Eyck’s configurative design aimed to produce “dwelling types which do not lose their specific identity when multiplied, but on the contrary, actually acquired extended identity and varied meaning once they are configurated into a significant group…”

Benjamin had sharply questioned the capacity of the artwork to retain its “value” in terms of aura – its “cult value”- facing massive reproduction, photography and film industries. But Van Eyck and the Smithsons still believed that their architecture should bear a “cult value”—an aura- that would provide an “identity”; their affinity with vernacular & classical architecture - Parthenon, Diocletian palace, Palladio, Dogon, Pueblos or British cottages- steamed from their firm believe in the artwork’s “aura”: the capacity of architecture to transcend its material condition.

Van Eyck & the Smithsons remained attached to an avant-garde notion from the first half of the century that was getting outdated for it aimed at something very difficult to achieve: to defend architecture’s capacity to transcend its materiality- architecture as an art-form from Benjamin’s 1st technology- aiming at values such as “permanence” and “uniqueness”. While the technological reproducibility of architecture, its transformation into a commodity for mass consumption during the emergence of consumer societies in the ‘Western World’ was dominated by “transitoriness" & “repeteability". In the 1960s architecture was getting out of balance: either over-determined by the overwhelming influence of Technical means turning into an uncritical profession serving the economic apparatus, or withdrawing into a “self-referential pure negativity”; as K. Frampton depicted:

“No account of recent developments in architecture can fail to mention the ambivalent role that the profession has played since the mid 60s –ambivalent not only in the sense that while professing to act in the public interest it has sometimes assisted uncritically in furthering the domain of an optimized technology, but also in the sense that many of its more intelligent members have abandoned traditional practice, either to resort to direct social action or to indulge in the projection of architecture as a form of art. As far as this last aspect is concerned, one cannot help regarding it as the return of a repressed creativity, as the implosion of utopia upon itself”

598 Aldo van Eyck, The medicine of reciprocity tentatively illustrated. Ligtelijn & Strauven. Collected articles and other writings: Aldo van Eyck
599 According to Van Eyck: the “Project should attempt to solve the aesthetics problems that result through the standardization of constructional elements; through the repetition of similar and dissimilar dwellings within a larger housing unit; through the repetition of grouping such housing units, similar or dissimilar; through the repetition of such housing groups, similar or dissimilar (Theme and its mutation and variation)” Strauven p.255The Child...“...multiplying dwellings in such a way that each multiplicative stage acquires identity through the significance of the configuration at that stage. I say, through the ‘significance’ of the configuration in order to make it clear that it is not merely a matter of visual form...but of significant content transposed through structural and configurative invention into architecture” Aldo van Eyck. The Child, the city and the artist: an essay on architecture-the in-between realm (1962). Ligtelijn, Vincent & Francis Strauven eds. SUN. Amsterdam. 2008. p.162-164
PART 3 – THE DIALECTICAL FORM

Architecture as a form of art?
3.1 EPISTEME:

3.1.1 ALDO VAN EYCK vs. A&P SMITHSON: Modern architecture as Abstract Art

“In the new design, that which is alike for all people is more important than their differences”

Gerrit Rietveld

“CIAM was founded when the creative period was virtually over and its aim was to popularize the concepts of the pioneers for predominantly social reasons...Everything has so changed since the nineteenth twenties that the solutions evolved at that time are no longer valid and we are forced once again to rethink our attitude and to invent new forms and new techniques”

Alison & Peter Smithson, 1957

At this point we have made our way from the early twentieth century to the after war period. I have tried to trace a line of argument from the emergence of the avant-garde movements during the 1910s, to the revolt of the young architects propelling the end of the CIAM in the late 1950s. Van Eyck and the Smithsons came up with a contemporary definition of architecture as a form of art reenacting some aspects of the avant-garde movements from the war period; and they did so nourished by the artistic movements in Amsterdam & London during the after-war period: the Cobra Group and the Independent Group respectively. As it has been argued, they took over the legacy of the avant-garde art movements redefining modern architecture according to new values, and needs of the European reconstruction.

Following Rietveld’s statement I tried to point out aspects in common between Van Eyck and the Smithsons in order to illustrate their will to continue with the modern project in architecture, “the new design”. They both rebelled against the rationalistic-mechanistic approach of the late CIAM: from Van Eyck’s Statement against rationalism at CIAM 6 (Bridgewater, 1947) to the Smithsons’ statements presenting Golden Lane Grid at CIAM 9 (Aix-en-provence, 1953); they both criticized either the rationalistic tendencies- functionalist-“mechanical” notions of modern architecture- or any regressive tendencies like the garden City movement, historicism, and later on Post-modern architecture. They were able to rebel against any tergiversation of the modern art principles in architecture because they understood the logic of modern art. They witnessed the reenactment of avant-garde art taking place within the Independent Group and the Cobra Group. As architects they joined painters, sculptors, poets, and intellectuals in young artistic movements rebelling against the state of the arts after the war, nourished by the avant-garde from the early Twentieth Century; in their spirit of revolt they were closer to Dadaism than to Surrealism, while both felt a great admiration for De Stijl’s attempt to merge art & life materialized in the paintings of Mondrian, the furniture and projects of J.J.P. Oud, Rietveld, and Van Doesburg’s project of merging Constructivist-positivism, with Dadaist-negativity under the banner of the Nieuwe Beelding.

Several elements of avant-garde art were present in the early work and ideas of Aldo van Eyck and the Smithsons. They both felt admiration for early avant-garde movements, and several ideas

601 Statement included in Forum n°7, Sep. 1959, “The story of another idea”. It was a quote from “CIAM dissolution” included in A. Smithson. The emergence of Team 10 out of CIAM. AA London, 1982.p.77.
602 Included by Ligtelijn & Strauven. Aldo van Eyck: Collected Articles and Other writings. p.224.
603 Aldo van Eyck quoting G. Rietveld see Strauven. Aldo van Eyck: The shape of relativity. P.228
604 The functionalism of the Rational Architecture Movement or the mechanical concept of architecture as A & P Smithson argued in “The Built World: Urban Reidentification” AD, June 1955.p.185
steaming from the pre-war period were being reenacted by the post-war movements in Amsterdam (Cobra) and London (IG):

First, the modern art’s appraisal of non-rational means such as imagination & intuition in the creative process, and the consideration of apprehension as a creative process in itself: the device of “enstrangement”, the “enstrangement” from the everyday life of Bethnal Green that brought Henderson and the Smithsons to look anew at life in the street, to re-discover the street in modern architecture; the Smithsons used photographs as objets trouves showing everyday-behavior in order to awake our consciousness; it became a common practice among the Team 10 presentations to introduce the projects departing from a “poetic image”.* Aldo van Eyck and the Smithsons shared a notion of architecture as a humanistic discipline in which rational and non-rational means merged: reason & imagination, understanding & intuition, humanistic respect & spirit of revolt against outworn values; a dialectic I will articulate further on under the term, Dialectic Form.

Second, the firm belief in the fact that modern architecture was ultimately the manifestation of a new consciousness as it was manifested in the art of De Stijl. A new consciousness in which values like grace or harmony should be expressed in life as they were expressed in art: merging art & life was a task in which architecture could play a major role as an avant-garde form.

For both, Van Eyck and the Smithsons, architectural forms played a catalytic role in the establishment of human associations (Smithsons) or relations (Van Eyck); if Mondrian had argued: “The era of particular forms is approaching its end the time of determined relations has begun”, the young architects thought about the architecture of the city in terms of relation-association among its elements –house, street, district, city-instead of the city as a gathering of monuments or a “machine” for living-working-circulation-recreation. The new consciousness of space & time was reinterpreted in architectural practice redefining the categories space & time into notions more related with human behavior: place & occasion-memory-duration. Although the terms were articulated by Van Eyck, the Smithsons together with Henderson & Paolozzi had explored the potential of non-linear concept of time perception in the IG’s debates and exhibitions (Parallel of Life & Art, 1953); while their works and ideas aimed to reintroduce the sense of place in architecture, as it was manifested in the projects for the Valley section. Van Eyck really appreciated the Smithsons’ projects in which the ‘street’ as an essential element of the city was redefined in modern terms (The “Close” and the “Crescent houses” for the Valley section presented at CIAM X, 1956).** They both conceived modern architecture as a form of abstract as the materialization of human relations or associations trying to balance the interests and needs of the individual vs. the universal, city and nature, the

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* The early Team 10’s projects were always presented departing from an “identification image, a poetic image…” See Strauven. Aldo van Eyck: The Shape of relativity p.259
** See Chapter 2.3 Logic image LO-37. In this regard it worth to mention that some differences of approach emerged between British and Dutch; the British understood the ‘hierarchy of human associations’ more as a conceptual framework where projects should take place, whereas the Dutch viewed the hierarchy as a “comprehensive model” to design new settlements; while the British “regionalist character” was more respectful with the topology of existing villages the Dutch projects were deployed in “the neutral emptiness of freshly reclaimed polders”; and whereas the Smithsons wanted to develop “new forms of habitat” or “new patterns of community”, the Dutch were concerned with the exploration of relationships achieved with existing dwelling types. See Strauven. Aldo van Eyck: The Shape of relativity p.267
citizen and the city – seeking for a new sense of beauty; for the Smithsons “new idea of order” in Van Doesburg’s words from 1918: “All art irrespective of the period in which it appears, can be called modern, as soon as harmony, the essence of beauty, appears in complete accordance with the intrinsic ways of art.”

Although the Smithsons admired the Dutch legacy of Van Doesburg, Mondrian, and Rietveld, obviously Van Eyck was more acquainted with the deep potential of De Stijl’s ideas and defended its legacy confronting Dutch modern-rationalist architecture; to some extent Van Eyck continued with Van Doesburg’s idea: De Stijl’s architecture as a materialization of ideas on relativity; modern art as a world-picture of reality mirroring science in which ‘a priori’ conflicting approaches – Dadaism & Constructivism- could co-exist; Modern physics mirrored the Dadaists’ challenge of the classical logic according to which yes=no, in Tzara’s words:

“... I write this manifesto to show that people can perform contrary actions together while taking a fresh gulp of air; I am against action; for continuous contradiction, for affirmation too, I am neither for nor against and I do not explain because I hate common sense…”

Van Eyck had learned from Dadaism to “hate common sense” while he searched to reconcile conflicting polarities in architectural terms; inspired by Henderson’s photographs of kids playing at the “doorstep” of their homes -used by the Smithsons’ in the Golden Lane Grid (1953)- Van Eyck develop the idea of the “in-between realm”: a place were conflicting polarities –yes & no, inside & outside- could become “dual phenomena”. Architecture could provide a place and not simply ‘space’, by allowing conflicting polarities to co-exist as dual phenomena: those places conformed an “in-between realm”. This idea was meant to be manifested with the doorstep in between house & street, to street & district, district & village-town, to the doorstep between city & nature. (See IMAGE EP-1)

Whereas the co-existence of opposites in terms of space was manifested in the ‘doorstep’ image, the co-existence of opposites in terms of time was illustrated with Van Eyck’s Otterlo circles (1959); The left circle showing the Parthenon, the pueblo village and Van Doesburg’s drawing illustrated the fact that classical, traditional and modern architecture co-exist in the present, in Van Eyck words: “the contemporaneousness of the past” since all three: the classical sense of harmony, the non-euclidean concept of space and time, and the “logic” of the vernacular -according to which a “Tree is leave and leave is tree”- may co-exist in the present life of a city.

Although the Smithsons were initially less cultivated, and intellectually less powerful, they shared in relation to time in architecture some of Van Eyck’s concerns. Essentially the skepticism towards futuristic-mechanistic utopianisms that tended to rely on progress, a linear notion of time, and technological improvement as an end in itself; of course they flirted with ‘futuristic prototypes’

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607 Van Doesburg’s Klassiek-barock-modern (1918) translated and quoted by Van Eyck in Forum nº7, Sep. 1959, “The story of another idea”.
609 In Van Eyck words: “I recall here what Mondrian at a Max Ernst show in New York told a journalist who was putting the usual provoking questions. This: ‘Max, vous savez, il fait la meme chose que moi, mais dans l’autre hémispHERE’ ». See Ex Turico aliquid novum. Ligeltiijn & Strauven. Aldo van Eyck : Collected Articles and Other Writings. P.19

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(The “House of the Future” 1956) in their early period for it was a common interest among the IG members. Nevertheless they calmed down their enthusiasm after that try, and veered towards a less ‘futuristic’ fascination as it was made manifest in the “Patio & Pavilion” (1956) analyzed previously; in fact their very British respect for “tradition” was manifested in architectural terms in their projects for Valley section CIAM X (1956) in which they merged modern architecture with “vernacular” English cottages, qualified by the modern Dutch as “indulged in sentimental regionalism”.

Another element of avant-garde art present in the early work and ideas of Aldo van Eyck and the Smithsons was the notion of the Elementary in architecture. It was articulated during the 1920s by artists -painters, sculptors, poets, photographers, architects- and intellectuals, and made manifest in magazines such as G, Merz, etc. I would argue that the notion of the elementary gestaltung, as it was ‘built’ by Mies van der Rohe, was present in the aspirations of the young Smithsons when they built Hunstanton, whereas their design ideas steamed more from the Renaissance. Nevertheless the elementary in terms of form and construction was present in the Smithsons’ New Brutalism from their Soho House (1954) to the Patio & Pavilion (1956) and the Economist (1959); *Patio & Pavilion* was an installation with elementary means, a roof, and inside and outside; the first ‘static-machine’, the chair, was present in the group picture, while the first ‘dynamic-machine’, the wheels, was scattered all over the pavilion (See IMAGE LO-40 in Chapter.2.3.Logic); in the architectural realm this was manifested in the austerity and simplicity of forms of their Brutalist aesthetic. In short, it could be argued that their elementarism from Hunstanton to the Economist departed from the elementary gestaltung -or better- elementary bau of Mies, but integrated the rough aesthetics of scarcity from *Art Brut*.

The notion of elementary architecture in terms of form was brought one step further when Van Eck re-considered the elementary in architecture essentially in terms of behavior. If the elementary bau of Mies was present in the Smithsons, Van Eyck developed a notion of the elementary more endebted to Van Doesburg and Arp, re-conceived it in terms of behavior inspired by Brancusi’s notion of simplicite:

“…La simplicite n’est pas un but dans l’art, mais on arrive a la simplicite malgre soi, en s’approchant du sens reel des choses…”

Van Eyck would argue then that architecture would approach the real sense of things by aiming at the elementary in terms of behavior. He used Van Doesburg’s idea of the elementary in painting -the Counter-composition- to argue that architecture should be behavior’s counter-form; this idea together with De Stijl’s will to balance the individual & the universal (art & life) would bring Van Eyck to state:

“Cities should become the counterform of man’s reciprocally individual and collective urban reality”

Van Eyck & the Smithsons believed in the capacity of architectural forms to facilitate-stimulate human relations-associations providing an identity. Architecture understood merely as the

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611 Strauven. Aldo van Eyck: The Shape of relativity. p.268
612 See Aldo van Eyck, *The medicine of reciprocity tentatively illustrated* (Introductory article to the publication of the Amsterdam Municipal Orphanage in Forum April-May, 1961) See Ligtelijn & Strauven, eds. Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings.p.318
satisfaction of material functions was unable to provide identity, a sense of place, the “feeling that you are somebody living somewhere” as Peter Smithson said. Architecture should be the counter-form of human behavior in order to be able to provide a sense of identity. This was the main argument shared in common by the Smithsons, Van Eyck (and the mainstream of the Team 10); it was illustrated in the diagram apparently developed during the Doorn meetings (See IMAGE EP-2). In the diagram an arrow links the early avant-garde movements: “Cubism, L’Esprit Nouveau, Dada, De Stijl, Futurism…” with 1947, CIAM 6 at Bridgewater. The “simultaneous action” of the period between 1910 and 1933 was linked with the “simultaneous action” between 1947 and “now” (January 1954). The arrow drafted a ‘bridge’ over the CIAM period, in which the analysis of architecture in terms of four functions –living, working, circulation, recreation- followed the pioneers motto “form follows function” leading to “townplanning”. Whereas the young architects tried to overcome the urbanism of the 4 functions, and architectural form as a mere product of ‘function’, by pointing at the fact that architectural forms had the capacity to stimulate man’s spiritual growth; forms had the capacity to transcend their materiality stimulating human relations:

“Lack of relationship between man & things ask for FORMS stimulating man’s spiritual growth…FORM STIMULATES RELATIONSHIP”.

The notion that architecture should be the counter-form of human behavior (relations) in order to provide a sense of identity, was working on the assumption that architectural forms had the capacity to “STIMULATE RELATIONSHIP”; that is to transcend its materiality. The idea that a form, an artwork had the capacity to transcend its materiality, and the conviction that this was the essential-the highest aspiration of art- was articulated by the Vienna School historians grounded in post-kantian philosophy; it was made popular and provided a philosophical background to an idea that was already in the modern artists’ minds at that time: the idea that art aiming to transcend its materiality was superior -it responded to more elevated impulses, than the art that did not aim to do so, namely naturalist art. This is why I presented the architecture of Van Eyck and the Smithsons as a form of modern abstract art, because the idea that the “Lack of relationship between man & things” could be resolved with “FORMS stimulating man’s spiritual growth” was grounded on the philosophical assumption that “FORM STIMULATES RELATIONSHIP”, which was essentially argument of modern abstract art: what I defined as a transcendental intuitive logic.

Modern abstract art aimed to transcend, while it was form of knowledge grounded in reason – logic- but also nourished by imagination, and driven by non-rational forms of understanding – intuition. Architecture as an art was a transcendental intuitive logic: a form of modern abstract art, just that:

Van Eyck: “The wonderful thing about architecture is that it’s an art – just that. The terrible thing about architects today is that they’re not artists. Worse, they’re semi-artists comfortably engaged in something super. But architecture, I tell you, is neither a semi nor a super art – it is an art”

A&P Smithson: “The objective of architecture is works of art that are lived in. The city is the largest, and at present that worst of such works of art”

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613 Statement included in Forum nº7, Sep. 1959, See Ligtelijn & Strauven. Aldo van Eyck: Collected Articles and Other writings. p.223
3.1.2. EPISTEMOLOGICAL CRITICISM

Departing from the aesthetics from the Vienna School I tried to illustrate how the idea that an artwork has capacity to transcend - the "Lack of relationship between man & things" - was drafted by the historians while materialized by the avant-garde movements especially in painting and sculpture, with some outstanding examples of architecture. But this idea pertained to a world that was disappearing, after all it was a mere intuitive world picture set out by artists & intellectuals: modern art as a transcendental intuitive logic.

Through the chapters of this second part I have analyzed how architects established a dialogue with artists. How the architect can design inspired by a painting (OBJECT), moved by a method used by a fellow artist (PROCESS), or trying to bring one step further in the architectural realm the ideas developed by painters, sculptors, poets, etc. (LOGIC). From a mere superficial apprehension of art to its understanding as a form of knowledge whose inner structure is related to architecture. I have illustrated how Van Eyck & Smithson arrived to a deep understanding of these categories: OBJECT-DEVICE-LOGIC. Nevertheless, both Van Eyck and the Smithsons, assumed that the world-picture set out by abstract art -as a transcendental logic that fulfilled man's emotional needs- could be mirrored in architecture, and its object- the elementary in terms of behavior-translated into architecture; working on the assumption that if art arrived to the elementary by approaching the real sense of things, the same logic would give birth to a materialization of elementary human behavior; an induction whose validity is problematic.

Modern Abstract art, as a logic, was essentially conceived and materialized in painting & sculpture, and later on translated into architecture -the emergence of De Stijl has been presented as a clear example. To some extent it was a logic 'imported' to architecture from abstract painting & sculpture. In some way they believed that Abstract art, transcendental art, had the capacity to approach men to the real sense of things fulfilling man's emotional needs: the artwork's capacity to transcend. Therefore if architecture operated with the same logic, the object produced would have the same attributes.

But the 'logic' of abstract painting and sculpture operated under conditions of production and perception: a canvas hanging on a wall, and a piece of material placed over a platform, to be seen at home or exhibited in a gallery or a museum, which were very different from the conditions of production and perception-consumption of architecture. Some artists were not taking into account -or remained consciously blind- to the fact that new means of technical reproducibility, photography and film were going to change the conditions of production and perception of the artwork – Mondrian; whereas others artists did an attempt –Duchamp- resulting more influential for the further development of modern art. Van Eyck and the Smithsons were to some extent aware of the changes in the production of architecture –mass production, industrialization - but they remained unaware of the changes in the perception-consumption of architecture. To some extent it happened to

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architecture the same that happened to painting: the ‘exhibition value’ was driven back the ‘cult value’, the ‘value’ given by people to architecture’ aura (uniqueness & permanence) was changing. This is was an essential ‘behavior’ of modern consumer societies to which neither Van Eyck nor the Smithsons were able to provide a counter-form.

The artists inherited the same flaws than the aesthetics theory grounding their ideas. As Benjamin had pointed out the conditions -the “social upheavals”- manifested in the changes of perception should be taken into account, because the conditions of production of the artwork changed the relation of the masses to art: the value given to the artwork by people, and therefore the capacity of the artwork to transcend. Whether we still aim to transcend or not is other issue, whether we still believe in the object’s capacity to transcend its materiality or not, it is essentially a matter of faith or will.

The attempt of artists like Duchamp to bring abstract painting one step further produced a complete change in the LOGIC under which modern abstract art operated. Duchamp redefined the logic of modern abstract art trying to respond to the new conditions of artistic production and perception; in order to do so new forms of painting and sculpture were achieved, from the Large Glass, to the Etant Done. It could be argued that he produced an EPISTEMOLOGICAL break, and he was able to do so because he understood and explored the potentialities of the art form in epistemological terms.

Aldo van Eyck and the Smithsons understood the logic of modern abstract art and were able to redefine modern architecture as an abstract form of art, but they did not challenge the definition of Modern art as a transcendental intuitive logic provided by modern painting or sculpture, they took it for granted. Van Eyck & the Smithsons redefined architecture’s own logic according to an artistic logic mainly determined by modern painting and sculpture –that of the “Great Riot”- but did not conceive the architectural form in EPISTEMOLOGICAL terms. The fact that the definition (or understanding) of art as transcendental art - as it was defined -a transcendental intuitive logic- was determined by the conditions of production and perception of society, and it was ultimately arbitrary. Both Van Eyck and Smithsons inherited a definition of art provided by the avant-garde movements and did not challenged it. They lacked an understanding of architecture as a form of art in epistemological terms, a sort of critical consciousness of the fact that world picture set out by art may change. They understood the logic that governed abstract art, but not how this logic mirrored certain reality. In fact the notion of abstract art as it was understood in Europe was being challenged by the work of a new generation of artists migrated to the United States, the world had changed completely and so had done art.

Or to put it in other words, it was ultimately a product of a kunstwollen, the “artistic volition” of a period.
“The airplane appeared not because of the socio-economic conditions, but only because the sensation of speed and movement looked for an outlet and in the end took the form of an airplane.”

K. Malevich “On new systems art/statics & speed – Suprematism” 1919

“The building of civilization is not simple, since the past, the present, and the future have a share in it. It is difficult to define and difficult to understand. What belongs to the past cannot be changed any more. The present must be affirmed and mastered. But the future stands open-open for the creative thought and the creative deed.

It is against this background that architecture arises. Consequently, architecture should only stand in contact with most significant elements of civilization. Only a relationship that touches on the innermost nature of the epoch is authentic. I call this relationship a truth relationship. Truth in the sense of Thomas Aquinas: as adaequatio intellectus et rei, as congruence of thought and thing.”

Mies van der Rohe, 1960

If Duchamp’s challenge of modern abstract painting had led him and his Neo-Avant-Garde followers to “pure negativity”, during that same period in USA, the work of Mies van der Rohe provided an example of an EPISTEMOLOGICAL break in architecture. Artists like Duchamp took into account the changes in the conditions of artistic production, perception-consumption of the artwork, while remained aware of art’s purpose. Duchamp had brought abstract painting to a “negation of painting”; modern abstract art was at the ‘doorstep’ of “pure negativity” with the Large Glass, but Duchamp did not bring abstraction too much further: he withdrew, and left us a mysterious “Etant done”. Although Duchamp explored the limits of “negativity” he never crossed over into “pure negation” but he was able to produce an epistemological shift redefining modern art. I would try to argue how Mies in architecture something similar but in a different way.

The non-rational nature of Mies’ architecture found an early interpretation in the book written by his friend Ludwig Hilberseimer, Mies van der Rohe (1959) published in Chicago. Right after that, Hilberseimer wrote the introduction to the first English translation of Malevich’s “Non-objective world”; along the text he reconsidered the influence of Russian Suprematism during the 1920s in modern art, and ended drafting a parallelism between Malevich’s paintings and Mies’ architecture; in the article, Hilbersimer reproduced some arguments drafted in the text, Observations on the new art (1923) in which he praised the ideas of Malevich’s over ‘pure’ Constructivism.

“Constructivists saw the world through the medium of technology…They worked directly toward the solution of new problems of materials and form. Their works represent a transition to utilitarian architectonic structures.”

The most striking aspect of Hilberseimer’s text is not his depiction of Constructivists materialism but how he presented the work of Malevich as opposed to it praising his “simplicity” and “essentiality”. Hilberseimer pointed out the fact that Malevitch’s non-objectivity:

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618 L. Hilberseimer, Mies van der Rohe. Paul Theobald & Co. Chicago. 1956
“...was opposed not only to any combination of art with utility but also to all imitations of nature. His aim was pure art and his own non-objective art in most radical. He insisted that art and the feelings which generate it are more basic and meaningful than religious beliefs and political conceptions. Religion and the state, in the past, employed art as a mean of propaganda to further their aims. The usefulness of works of technology is short-lived but art endures forever. If humanity is to achieve a real and absolute order it must be founded on eternal values, that is, on art. A Doric temple is not beautiful today because it once served a religious purpose. This purpose no longer exists. Its form originated from a pure feeling of plastic proportions and it retains its vitality and validity for all time. We are no longer aware of the original purpose of the temple but we admire it as a work of art.”621

Malevich’s thoughts on the conceptual purpose of art could make us think about Riegl’s ideas; the reference to architecture was an analogy extracted from his latest ideas in painting: the “sensation of non-objectivity”, according to which the artists left the “world of will and idea”, the reality in which they lived, in order to order to express a feeling of rhythm that becomes content, in Malevich words:

“a kind of timidity bordering fear when I was called upon to leave the world of will and idea in which I had lived and worked and in the reality of which I had believed. But the blissful feeling of liberating non-objectivity drew me into the ‘desert’ were nothing is real but feeling and feeling became the content of my life. This was no ‘empty square’ which I had exhibited but rather the sensation of non-objectivity.”622

According to Hilberseimer, Mies van der Rohe was doing in architecture what Malevich had done in painting.623 If J.J.P. Oud or Van Eyck lamented the current emulation of De Stijl forms- the lack of a current true art form - Hilberseimer as well complained about the current imitators of Malevich and Mies who failed to grasp the essence of their work:

“Malevich’s great influence brought about a kind of inflation and cheapening of his established values. Suprematism was so simple that everybody could imitate it and a trend toward mechanical painting developed... But do we not have a similar inflation in architecture today? Mies van der Rohe made a break with tradition as decisive as that of Malevich. Many of his imitators copy his forms without understanding their meaning – Mies van der Rohe’s simplicity also seems so easy to imitate. This work of his, however, which seems so effortless is, in actuality, the result of unremitting and painstaking labor. Mies’ imitators, however, failing to grasp the essence of his work, turn it into a fashion but then soon tire of it and try to escape from it into a world of ever-changing fancy.”624

If I have presented Van Doesburg’s projects as the logical evolution of De Stijl’s notion of the elementary, Mies’ “elementary gestaltung” could be interpreted as the logical evolution of Malevich’s “non-objectivity” in the realm of pure -abstract- architecture. According to Hilberseimer, Malevich took the elementary mean of painting “color”, and ground on it his painting: therefore the “color concept” was static and the “concept of form” became dynamic;625 Mies departed from the

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621 i.b.i.d. p. 82
622 i.b.i.d. p. 83
623 Hilberseimer accounted how Malevich’s ideas shocked a former disciple of Marc Chagall, Lissitzky, who spread non-objectivity throughout the West, producing the encounter of Dadaists & Constructivist (Suprematists), the story of elementarism we have gone through. i.b.i.d. p.83
624 i.b.i.d. p. 83
625 As opposed to Mondrian in which “forms are static while the colors constitute the dynamic element” i.b.i.d. p. 83. Malevich depicted Suprematism as follows: “It has become clear to me that new frameworks of pure
elementary mean of architecture “the material” (brick, steel, etc.), and ground on it his architecture; the “material concept” was static and the “concept of space” was dynamic. Mies understood that what is figure in painting is space in architecture -less in terms of material was more in terms of space. (See IMAGE EP-4 & EL-26)

Hilberseimer’s text on Malevich was written two years after the same editorial (Paul Theobald & Co) had published his book on Mies van der Rohe; Hilberseimer’s book explained Mies architecture in similar terms to the ones employed introducing Malevich’s “Non-objective world”. Following the principles of abstract art -as they were defined by the Vienna School- Mies architecture was presented as a product of a “spiritual purpose”; his architecture relied on the “material and rational elements”, but it was the “spiritual alone” that determined its expression:

“Architecture depends on the materials, techniques and structures of a given time-material and rational elements-but it is the spiritual alone that determines its particular expression. The essence of architecture, then, is always apart from, but never in conflict with the conditions and means that produce it. As the embodiment of a spiritual concept and the expression of creative ability, it states what is eternal in an age and in the people of that age.”

According to Hilberseimer in Mies’ architecture: “The simplicity he strives for, which seems so effortless, is the result of unceasing though painstaking work. Thus he is enabled to realize his intuition and to create architecture characterized by extraordinary refinement” As in Malevich’s Black square it was a product of “intuitive reason”. Mies had witnessed in the 1920s Berlin the Dadaist’s, hence he was completely aware that the search for truth should rely on intuition. If Malevich sought for truth with the elementary material of painting –color- Mies was presented by Hilberseimer as an artist grounded in the elementary mean of architecture –construction- seeking for truth:

“He is an artist- not a designer, not an inventor of ever-changing forms, but a true master builder. His architecture emerges from the nature of the material and is the embodiment of truth and harmony. Its beauty, to use S. Augustine’s words, is the splendor of truth”

Naturalist art had been dismissed by modern abstract artists for it wanted to be “true to nature” in a subjective way, whereas abstract art aimed at being “true to itself”, true to its means, “objective”. Although Hilberseimer presented Mies architecture as an “objective architecture based on technology” he was aware of the fact that “the usefulness of works of technology is short-lived but art endures forever”- aware of the criticism drafted by Suprematism to the ‘material’ aspirations of Constructivism. Therefore following Suprematism, the quality of Mies architecture, did not lie in the “mastering of structure” but in the “harmonious order” established between the elements, in Hilberseimer’s words:

color-painting should be created, constructed at color’s demand; and, secondly, that color should leave the painterly mixture and become an independent factor… The system is constructed in time and space, independently of all aesthetic beauties, experiences and moods for realizing the latest achievements of my ideas, as knowledge” See “Suprematism” in the catalogue for the “10th State exhibition: Non-Objective creation & Suprematism”

Hilberseimer, Mies van der Rohe.p.12
“...his architecture emerged from the nature of the material and is the embodiment of truth and harmony…”  

Mies project for a skyscraper in Berlin (1921) was included in Merz nº8/9 “Nature” together with J.J.P. Oud’s project (See IMAGE EL-24. Chapter 1.4.3 Mies van der Rohe & Non-objectivity). If Oud had struggled to do in architecture what Van Doesburg was doing in painting, Hilberseimer’s book confirmed Mies’ parallel struggle: “What Mondrian did in painting, with the means of painting, Mies van der Rohe does in architecture with the means of architecture. He aims, like Mondrian at the spiritual”  

But Hilberseimer differentiated Mondrian’s paintings from Mies plans for the very simple reason that plans were notational systems, whereas the paintings were “self-contained works of art”. Mondrian worked with color, lines, etc... and Mies worked with bricks, beams, etc. both have imbedded an idea, a vision of space.

Mies understood architecture’s relation to painting and sculpture in epistemological terms because he understood abstract’s art own logic as a picture of the modern world, but did not tried to emulate its logic within the architectural realm. He struggled to create a definition of architecture as a form of art out of its own logic: as an intuitive world-picture of reality that while seeking for truth, aiming to transcend its nature, remains aware of the fact that his role is nothing more (or less) that mirroring society’s conditions of production and perception of architecture as an artwork, but according to his own rational and non-rational purposes.

Mies “maximum effect with minimum means” or the paradigmatic famous motto attributed to him “Less is more” could be interpreted at this point in two different ways. One is the historically accepted, linear from less to more, leading into functionalism. The other interpretation is static and understands Mies statement as a co-existence of opposites challenging logic- Less=more and more=less, for Mies’ architectural space challenged its traditional use outside=inside=outside. A definition of architecture in its own (abstract) terms emerging as a dialectic understanding merging reason & imagination, as in Malevich’s statement:

“...from a single reasoning to one of double reasoning. Utilitarian reasoning and intuitive reasoning…”

It materialized in architectural terms Tzara’s ‘logic’: “...order=disorder, ego=non-ego, affirmation=negation: supreme radiations of absolute art. Absolute in the purity of ordered cosmic chaos…”

As the Dadaists did Mies rejected “…all aesthetic speculation, all formalism…” If Tzara’s Manifesto 1918 praised the present and spontaneity: “…what we want now is spontaneity. Not because is better or more beautiful than anything else. But because everything that issues freely

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629 L. Hilberseimer, Mies van der Rohe, P. Theobald (Chicago), 1959. p-12  
630 i.b.i.d. Chapter 5: Space concept, p-40  
631 In Van Eyck’s words: “Is not about the opposition between horizontal and vertical as such, nor is a matter of the white, black, grey, red blue or yellow, but about the way these things speak of a very special dimension. Not the fourth, but Mondrian’s dimension!” In Aldo van Eyck’s Speech for the award of the 1962 Sikkens Prize. From Strauven and Ligtelijn p.177  
633 Tristan Tzara, Dadaist Manifesto 1918. See Motherwell. The Dada painters and poets: an anthology  
from ourselves, without the intervention of speculative ideas, represents us…” Mies van der Rohe claimed for creations according to the present conditions in order to be a true manifestation of us:

“…not yesterday, not tomorrow, only today can be given form. Only this kind of building will be creative. Create form out of the nature of our tasks with the methods of our time.”

The logic of non-objective art brought into the architectural realm brought Mies and Hilberseimer to a rejection of architecture’s relation with any other visual art searching within architecture itself “elementary” principles. (See Chapter 1.4.Elementary, IMAGE EL-27) Mies van der Rohe understood that architect’s purpose –his will to satisfy material & spiritual needs- was determined by the conditions of artistic production of architecture, by how architecture was perceived, consumed and valued as an artwork but also as commodity. The work of Mies van der Rohe may serve as a draft-inaccurate example of architecture conceived in epistemological terms, as a form of art in itself: emerging independently from any foreign logic, but completely aware of the past, its present role, and its artistic nature. He brought architecture almost to the limit of its negative condition: reducing architecture to an elementary gestaltung satisfying the material needs, while aiming at the congruence of thought and thing materializing an essential spiritual need: man firm belief in the capacity of things and/or himself to transcend materiality:

“…architecture should only stand in contact with most significant elements of civilization. Only a relationship that touches on the innermost nature of the epoch is authentic. I call this relationship a truth relationship. Truth in the sense of Thomas Aquinas: as adaequatio intellectus et rei, as congruence of thought and thing.”

Like Aldo van Eyck or the Smithsons, Mies understood architecture as form of art but unlike the young architects who interpreted modern abstract architecture as the materialization of human relations (associations) seeking to provide identity to its inhabitants, Mies did not care that much for the “everyday” behaviour of people. He brought the negative condition of abstract architecture –its negation of the satisfaction of material needs- to its limits. A clear example of Mies’ attempt to bring “negativity” to its limits reducing architecture to its elementary means was his project for Ron Bacardi in Cuba, 1958. It was not a product of function, not even of the elementary behaviour of the business man meant to inhabit the building for the project was recycled as a museum for the New National Gallery in Berlin, 1962-1968. Mies’ artworks aimed to transcend not by being the counter-form of a specific human behaviour like Van Eyck or the Smithson, Mies also believed in architecture’s capacity to transcend its materiality simply by being truth to itself, a “congruence of thought and thing”: Mies architecture aimed to challenge the most elementary rationalistic behaviour, the separation between thought and thing, by pointing at the most elementary human behaviour, people’s faith in their capacity to transcend their materiality.

635 i.b.i.d.
3.2. CONCLUSION:

3.2.1 AVANT-GARDE ARCHITECTURE

“4.12. Propositions can represent the whole reality, but they cannot represent what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it- the logical form
To be able to represent the logical form, we should have to be able to put ourselves with the propositions outside logic, that is outside the world”

Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, 1921

To be truly avant-garde architecture must be redefined as a form of art. In order to produce a radical paradigmatic shift in architecture, we have to reach an epistemological understanding of architecture as a form art; the architectural form—a piece of furniture, a building, or a city—should be conceive not as a mere object, not as the result of a design process according to certain academic tradition or specific technology, not as a pre-determined logic operating according to foreign rules while saying “this is could be architecture”. The architectural form producing the epistemological break raises the question “Is this architecture?” while it provides the answer “this is architecture”; the architectural project raises the question—challenges the current logic—and gives a answer redefining architecture’s logic as a form of art.

I illustrated how the ideas—the definition of art—produced by the Vienna School historians determined the emergence of avant-garde art. Among the avant-garde movements modern architecture emerged; it was conceived as form of art a product out of a “contest with nature” aiming to transcend materiality. Modern Abstract art could be defined as transcendental intuitive logic aiming at the satisfaction of bodily and conceptual needs, driven by reason and imagination.

I pointed out elements from avant-garde art—enstrangement, imagination & intuition, the elementary, the new consciousness - considered essential for the production of artworks that created a paradigmatic shift in art. These were present in the paradigmatic shifts produced by the artistic movements of the first half of the twentieth century, while they can be found in the work produced by the Smithsons and Van Eyck during the after-war period. Outlining the strong influence of these avant-garde elements in architecture I wanted to point out the fact that the modern movement was conceived, together with the other artistic movements, as an avant-garde art. Hence any serious consideration of it as a “rationalistic” movement is misleading. It could be said that the paradigmatic shift produced by the Smithson’s and Van Eyck’s early work and ideas, was very much produced by their understanding of Modern art principles coming from the Vienna School, art as transcendental art, what I have called a transcendental intuitive logic; a definition of art materialized by the different artistic avant-garde movements during the war period.

The fact that the Smithson’s and Van Eyck’s paradigmatic shift did not produce a deeper transformation in architecture—their last most important projects were done in the early 60s—could be

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related with the fact that their architectural theory relied on a notion of art from the 1920s that was getting outdated. They lacked an understanding of architecture as a form of art in epistemological terms, a sort of critical consciousness of the fact that the world picture set out by art may change; in order to truly conceive architecture as an art form we have to be aware of those changes, and while doing so, position ourselves, redefine our role, our devices, and our aims according to those changes.

We have to understand art as a world picture that mirrors reality produced by a logic that is different from that of science but equally helpful for us. Helpful because it provides an understanding of how man produces and consumes with non-rational means a form of knowledge whose ultimate aim is condemned to fail, namely approaching the thing in itself.

Helpful if we understand art not only as the production of one individual but as a social product. Art as a social product whose capacity to transcend is conditioned by the social apparatus that produces it; and we understand not only the definition of art produced by a society at a certain time. But also the fact that such a definition mirrors a reality. Therefore by looking at how art mirrors that reality we can learn something from it; being always aware of the limitations of art, and acting within the specific realm of architecture consequently, and according to its own logic in artistic terms. According to our own understanding, but not conditioned by any logic foreign to it. I would raise the question about the possibility of conceiving the architectural form in EPISTEMOLOGICAL terms: to what extent is it possible that architecture’s own logic defines what art is? Architecture would be a true avant-garde in so far as it is able to re-define itself as a form of art.
3.2.2. THE DIALECTICAL FORM: Modern Architecture as a form of Art

“The existence of experimental method makes us think we have the means of solving the problems which trouble us; though problem and method pass one another by”

Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, 1953

My criticism to Aldo van Eyck and the Smithsons does not mean to devaluate their legacy, but to provide arguments to understand the why these two great figures were not able to continue producing masterpieces such as the Orphanage or the Economist, and the ambiguous condition in which architectural practice found itself in 1960, depicted by professor Frampton in the following terms:

“No account of recent developments in architecture can fail to mention the ambivalent role that the profession has played since the mid 60s –ambivalent not only in the sense that while professing to act in the public interest it has sometimes assisted uncritically in furthering the domain of an optimized technology, but also in the sense that many of its more intelligent members have abandoned traditional practice, either to resort to direct social action or to indulge in the projection of architecture as a form of art. As far as this last aspect is concerned, one cannot help regarding it as the return of a repressed creativity, as the implosion of utopia upon itself.”

Either “assisted uncritically in furthering the domain of an optimized technology” or abandoning “traditional practice” seems as if modern architecture got out of balance leaning towards each of its “conflicting polarities”: the rationalistic tendencies conditioned by a deterministic-rational approach, or the radical utopian-idealism propelled by imaginative fantasy completely detached from the ‘reality’ on which it stands. Obviously these two “conflicting polarities”, as I am depicting them right now, are inaccurate depictions of a much more convoluted condition in which neither black nor white existed but a rich variety of subtle variations of grey. Whether we agree or not with the tone- with the amount of reason or imagination driving each extreme- I have tried to made manifest along this survey the fact that the dialectic between both polarities was an inherent condition to the definition of modern architecture itself. And I think it is important to recognize the double nature of architectural design-thinking in order to not fall into any of these polarities again, simply because they lead to death ends: they are grounded in a world picture of reality able to depict only one side.

The term dialectic is essentially pointing at the double condition of architectural design-thinking produced by reason & imagination as forms of abstract thought, and driven by understanding &

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640 Hence the expression “Dialectics” is not used in the Hegelian sense, but in terms of a “pairing association”; two elements that have the unity of the same consciousness (unity of sameness); a pairing that may overlay each other with a certain transfer of sense, an apperception of each according to the sense of the other. E. Husserl, Cartesian Meditations: An introduction to phenomenology. Martinus Nijhoff. Boston-The Hague.1960.p.112-113

640 E. Panofsky “The history of art as humanistic discipline” 1939-40
intuition as forms of ‘practical’ thought—relating causes with effects—in architectural design-thinking. Indeed I would propose to merge design & thinking considering them one and the same thing, complementary forms of craft essential form architectural production.

I have depicted a biased story of modern architecture trying to unveil the non-rational nature of modern architecture for two reasons. First, because when I started this research I had doubts about the current rejection of architecture as a form of art; and second, because the more I looked back in history the more I found that modern architecture was conceived by some of its most paradigmatic figures as a form of art. To unveil the non-rational nature of modern architecture was to unveil its conception as a form of art was. When I depict architecture as an art I am essentially unveiling its humanistic nature; humanism, conceived essentially as a product of reason, but completely aware of the limitations of rational thinking, beautifully depicted by E. Panofsky:

“It is not so much a movement as an attitude which can be described as the conviction of the dignity of man based on both, the insistence on human values (rationality & freedom) and the acceptance of human limitations (fallibility and fraility) from this two postulates resulting responsibility and tolerance”641

Essentially I witnessed the dehumanization of contemporary cities as a consequence of the architect’s obliteration of architecture as a form of art; the architecture of the city was the result of irresponsibility and intolerance exclusively conducted by a rationalistic mentality aiming at a totalitarian model of justice, which essentially has produced a stifling decrease of individual freedom. A very comfortable response of contemporary architects consists on blaming on the ‘rationalistic’ approach of modern architecture and its ‘rationalistic’ legacy for the failure of modern architecture: the incapacity of modern architecture to provide a response to the problems of the city; nevertheless the more you look closely to modern architecture the more you see how critical ‘modern architects’ were with rationalistic tendencies, while the more you see yourself today as a rationalistic architect—Caliban unable to recognize himself in the mirror.

There was a moment in time when Europe had no other choice, but being critical with rationalistic tendencies, for they were bringing the continent into devastation. Modern art emerged out of the First World War as a humanist response aiming to restore the sense of humanity, which is essentially why this survey went back to the 1910s although its subject matter was apparently the post-war period (1947-1960). This dissertation departed from the dialectic inherent in Dadaism between destruction & construction; outlining the positivistic position of some of the Dadaists who thought about it as an artistic movement of revolt that, like the war, destroyed the established systems, while at the same time created the opportunity of constructing a new-better society. This avant-garde movement emerged not as a mere utopian whim, but as a form of knowledge that wanted to provide an explanation—or an interpretation—to a devastating reality, namely the First World War; in its negative aspects Dada simply mirrored the existing reality, while in its positive aspects it aimed at reconstructing spiritually modern man.642

642 In overall terms as it has been argued it remained loyal to the mainstream of humanistic values of Western civilization
But if Dada was “against established systems of hierarchy” by no means architecture could be strictly considered as Dadaist, for historically, buildings, the architecture of the city, had been ultimately the manifestation of the established ruling powers; only within the Eastern European Dadaist close to the Communist revolution, architecture was temporally conceived as a potential active agent of the avant-garde revolution. The gathering of Russian constructivist and Dadaists under the banner of Van Doesburg’s Neoplasticism in front of the Weimar Bauhaus- the modern school of architecture- served as an example of the attempt to integrate in architectural practice the negative & positive condition inherent in avant-garde art. The image of Dadaists establishing a dialogue with architects clearly illustrates the fact that modern architects found something very attractive to them in these young radicals, something that modern architecture was obliterating: its humanist condition. Either driven by rationalistic academicism, or idealist expressionism, architecture was getting out of balance unable to recognize the limitations of reason, or driven by the subjective whims of imagination turned into fantasy. If avant-garde movements aimed at merging art & life restoring a new sense of harmony & beauty after the war, indeed architecture could play a major role, but in order to remain truly avant-garde it had to remain critical to the ruling powers that tended to give priority to the satisfaction of the material needs.

Aldo van Eyck rebelled against the approach of CIAM grounded in the idea that the modern movement in architecture was essentially another avant-garde movement -together with Neoplasticism, Dadaism, Constructivism, etc; therefore architects had to be critical with the rationalistic determinism of ruling powers. While at the same time, out of the negative criticism to the established systems of hierarchies, architects had a social responsibility- ethics and aesthetics merged; modern architecture in its positive aspect was an affirmation of the New Consciousness: as a form of art it was the materialization of human relationships, providing the background in which reason and feelings where made manifest in freedom.

The dialectic aims at merging the positive and negative aspects of the avant-garde art: the positive projection of modern art movements aiming at the materialization of a political ideals through architecture, conceived as the materialization of human behavior and the current conditions of artistic production; the negative projection would remain critical to any aspect of the current state of the arts whatsoever, would tend to continuously reconsider the role of the architect –his capacity of maneuver- within the conditions of production of architecture as a form of art: questioning the validity of established “logics” & values from any system of hierarchies: state, public opinion, … or any form of knowledge apart from architecture itself.

If you ask an architect nowadays why he looks at art, he might answer that he looks either for inspiration and/or freedom. Indeed the relation with the “artists” will make the architects aware of the limitations of rational means in the design process, so the architect will be moved to explore the non-

643 As it was interpreted by C.W. Giedion following mainly Hugo Ball’s and Arp’s vision of Dadaism. See Chapter 1.0.1. Dada
rational means used by art, what we commonly express as looking for inspiration in art. At the same time the "artist" can make us aware of the arbitrary and artificial constrains imposed by society in our practice, hence we will search for in “art” what we don’t have in “architecture”, we search for freedom. But if we do that we will be in great danger for we may adopt-import from the internal logic of that art, basic assumptions that may narrow down our view, and/or contradict or restrict the internal logic of architecture as a practice.

The dialectic between reason and imagination experienced within the individual runs parallel to the dialect experienced by the individual facing its collectivity. A dialectic between the thoughts of the individual and the artificial social-determinism of a collectivity that usually is not so reasonable. If architects have to accomplish a social role, and architecture is conceived as a form of art- to be the materialization of human relationships - several questions arise: First, Do we really believe that architectural forms have the capacity to transcend its materiality?; and second, if so, to what extent the architectural form should respond to the current material needs since they change so rapidly? And, to what extent the architectural form should respond to any spiritual need - if I do not believe man has a ‘spirit’- and I do believe ‘conceptual’ needs change plus ultimately do not rely on material things?

This where we are, and this is where the question of architecture as a form of art – as a dialectic form- turns into a question of what do we understand as architectural form. The question of believing or not in the capacity of forms to transcend its materiality might be related with the notion of form you have in mind: If you conceive form merely in terms of object you might believe in the capacity forms has to act upon human behavior, but superficially.

But the more you conceive form in deepest sense, in terms of process or logic, the more you are aware of the elementary forms of behavior intrinsic to certain architectural forms. You become so aware of it that you are able to express it in rational terms, but it is precisely that rational awareness want prevents you from conceiving more deeply the notion of form. The logic inherent in human behavior, or the logic of art itself will change and you will have more difficulties to identify that change: your previous knowledge hinders your perception, the knowledge you cipher into arguments (reason): you have to rely on other forms of knowledge. Any epistemological shift will rely on non-rational means and would bring the negative condition of art to its limits but not completely; allowing always the positive nature to restore the damage –Caliban should always allow Ariel’s rebirth.

Mies van der Rohe brought the negative condition of architecture as a form of art to its limits, but not completely. Both Van Eyck and the Smithsons truly believed that architectural forms had an enormous capacity to transcend its materiality that is why Van Eyck stated: “Cities should become the counterform of man’s reciprocally individual and collective urban reality”\(^ {644}\) Mies van der Rohe was less enthusiastic about “elementary” human behavior than the young architects, nevertheless he considered an essential “elementary” behavior of people’s every-day life for centuries; a behavior

\(^{644}\) See Aldo van Eyck, The medicine of reciprocity tentatively illustrated (Introductory article to the publication of the Amsterdam Municipal Orphanage in Forum April-May, 1961) See Ligtelijn & Strauven, eds. Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings.p.318
which is not driven by reason, namely man's belief in his capacity to bridge the thing in the mind with the thing in itself:

“...architecture should only stand in contact with most significant elements of civilization. Only a relationship that touches on the innermost nature of the epoch is authentic. I call this relationship a truth relationship. Truth in the sense of Thomas Aquinas: as adaequatio intellectus et rei, as congruence of thought and thing”645

However the essential questions at stake will always remain unanswered: How far should we bring “negativity” to be able to invent solutions to solve today problems? How far do we have to position ourselves “outside logic that is outside the world”? and, Where do we find the fulcrum & the bar to move it?

Contemporary Architecture as a form of art: Formative elements

The more we believe in the capacity of architectural forms to transcend its materiality, the deeper we may consider form in architecture. If form is merely conceived in terms of shape or figure, as an object, we will address to it mere superficial attributes transcending its form: material functions. The form of a chair is extremely conditioned by its material function, and we might tend to think that, indeed the chair has the capacity to transcend its materiality according to an elementary behavior, to sit down; nevertheless if we look closer to thousands of chairs, and we simply sit down on some of them, we may end up agreeing with Adolf Loos’ statement: “How difficult is to find a comfortable chair, and how easy is to find a new one?”646

The more you conceive form in a deeper sense the more you are aware of the fact that a preexisting object, a process, or a logic is determining the architectural form you are producing. An new uncomfortable chair might be a re-shaped copy of a previous uncomfortable chair, or it might have been the result of a new design method following the last technological or aesthetic trends obliterating the fact that people sit down on chairs; indeed you may be aware of the fact that other cultures, simply do not shit down, and therefore there is a very specific ‘western’ logic according to which a ‘chair’ is a chair (A=A)

Why should contemporary architecture be conceived as a form of art? To be aware of how much is your design determined by a previous object, process, or logic: to be able to make people see that they might not need a chair any more. Certainly to overcome outworn values, for only a reconsideration of architecture in itself as an art will provide new-old answers to old-new problems. Architecture would be a true avant-garde in so far as it is able to re-define itself as a form of art wondering if it make sense to picture a reality which might not exist any more.

Object, process, logic, episteme could be conceived as notions of form in architecture; or mainly the opposite, the architectural form could be conceived in terms of object, process, logic to able to think about architecture truly as a form of art. And if at some point the architectural form happens to be redefined in epistemological terms, then, and only then we will witness it is avant-garde: when architecture is redefined as an art according to its own logic.

**The need of a formal theory in architecture**

In order to reconsider architecture as an art, according to its own logic it is important to understand form in terms of object, process, and logic; to be able to redefine architecture’s own logic as an art, we previously need to understand how architectural forms are the emulations of previous objects, determined by a design and/or production process, and ultimately the result of a logic.

If this logic is carried out of the Dialectic balance I mention before –a balance ultimately determined by the time we live in- we have to be able to identify how much the intrinsic logic of architecture is over-determined by a logic foreign to it. A clear example of a logic inherited from techno-scientific thinking is the rationalistic separation between form & concept in architecture; because in most of the cases it results an artificial separation product of rationalistic determinism, Enlightenment's separation between object & subject. In fact Mies van der Rohe did challenge such assumption seeking for the “congruence of thought and thing”, what he considered the definition of truth:

“…architecture should only stand in contact with most significant elements of civilization. Only a relationship that touches on the innermost nature of the epoch is authentic. I call this relationship a truth relationship. Truth in the sense of Thomas Aquinas: as adaequatio intellectus et rei, as congruence of thought and thing”

Truth understood as the congruence of thought and thing was the most significant element of civilization, and the essential element of civilization to be considered by an architect to design according to present needs.

The current crisis on essential human values as truth is manifested in the extraordinary influence of the artificial separation between form and content in architecture. Object & subject, form and content are complete detached by reason in our ever-day life, that architects stubbornly-rationally seek link them, glue them, and stick them together again. Since apparently there is no truth in “Western World”, no architect is going to dare to seek for it in architecture: truth as the “congruence of thought and thing”, the essential element of civilization to be considered by an architect to design according to current needs.

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Nowadays we tend to think about form merely in terms of object; the main consequence of this is the necessity to fill-in that empty form with a content: the object-form must have a content-concept. Hence the question arises: What is the concept of your project? But if we conceive form in a deeper sense we might wonder if the division object-content does really makes sense. We may come to the conclusion that the separation between form & content, is ultimately arbitrary, artificially inherited by architects from the social condition of the object. This was precisely what the Dadaist ready-made aimed to challenge: the social condition of the mass produced object (urinary), and obviously the social condition of the artwork (sculpture).

The rationalistic separation between object & subject grounded the separation between form & content in architectural theory-practice. Hence the natural continuity viewer-view-world is disrupted, we think in terms object-subject; and we think-assume that such a discontinuity is real, but it is not. Art always dealt with the continuity viewer-view-world. Trying to isolate form & content in art is senseless. If we consider Form over Content we will end making “L’architecture dans le Boudoir”: “pure negativity”; whereas if we consider Content over form we will produce rationalist architecture (functionalism) or its contemporary manifestation: “Programmatic architecture”. Lacking a formal theory of architecture Form has been enslaved by program.

**Theory**

I will try to draft some ideas aiming at a contemporary definition of architecture as a form of art. A formal theory is needed to compensate the current imbalanced condition of architecture, excessively focused either on programmatic aspects of architecture or architecture in terms of shape-figure. The development of a formal theory is needed in order to develop a critical theory that will separate architecture from the rest of disciplines. In order to provide us an approach to architecture that would prevent its subservience to any other discipline.

The conception of architecture as a dialectical form tries to establish a draft theory of architecture in terms of design process. The idea of form is conceived as a dynamic method, never as an esthetic object. Is against any short of simplification of the problematic question, what the study of architecture should be is not an aesthetic theory a methodology, or a conviction. It does not set on truth but tries to overcome error.

The object of the formal theory of architecture is that which makes a given work a work of architecture, apart from the socio-economic premises, philosophical aesthetics or ideological theories. Form results in spite of and not "due to" those circumstances. Its inner strength rejects the artificial mixing of disciplines and concerns outside architecture itself.

The notion of architecture as a dialectical form tries to bridge the artificial discontinuity created between form and content. The dialectic between reason and imagination experienced within the individual runs parallel to the dialect experienced by the individual facing the artificial social-determinism of a collectivity. architecture ultimately results a material product of this struggle, a dialectic form. The notion of Dialectic is introduced in terms of a “co-existence of opposites” as a
reaction against the object/subject discontinuity artificially imposed- a form of discontinuity that ultimately has led to an architectural notion of form/content equally misleading. The dialectic is categorized in tree levels that correspond to a deeper-radical notion of form:

- **Objectual**: Form as an object
- **Operative**: Form as a technique, points at the ways we have to act upon the existing in terms of perception, sensual knowledge versus thought.
- **Logical**: Form as a logical knowledge that allow us to provide a world-picture (science & art) determined by our capacity to argue (reason) and imagine (imagination)
- **Epistemological**: Form as a collective construction. The material-form of the relation among the individuals and individual versus the collectivity; it determines what is true or not, what you are allow or not allowed to do. In the relation objective/subjective values it determines our notion of space-time and leads to our notion of object (material)/subject (spirit)

Such a Dialectic produces –in every stage- forms that are either practical (utilitarian-materialistic) or poetic (non-utilitarian-spiritual), having each of them a very specific function. Architecture results an art when it produces form -perhaps not alone, it may produce other things- but ultimately form. Form being no longer shape-figure, a three-dimensional envelope, but a complete thing, something dynamic, not-self-contained with any correlative. Form is considered a product of this dialectic that argues for a unity-continuity form-content.

The definition of modern architecture as a Dialectic Form is grounded in the conviction that it was an avant-garde art form nourished by techno-scientific thinking; modern architecture as a Dialectic Form as *scientific poetics* is an induction built from a hypothesis grounded in historical research. That evidence is that Modern Architecture has a dialectic nature that has to be unveiled and reenacted for it has proved to be effective. First, the poetic nature of Modern architecture (Twentieth Century Architecture) has to be unveiled so the imbalance produced by the current “analytical” interpretation of it will be leveled down. As a consequence the deterministic thinking that has dominated architectural practice will start to disappear.

Specific features of the art of architecture have to be studied, in order to do so an understanding of forms as poetical & practical should be reenacted. Form is defined as a technique grounded in analytical and poetical thinking-design. Nowadays form is mainly considered in “practical” terms – over determined by the satisfaction of bodily functions (Program); obliterating the fact that Program is itself composition-figure- it predetermines the design. The devices of programmatic construction are devices of style, program defines and determines a form, producing a lame form for it lacks poetic thought.

Hence the analytical-artificial division subject-object leading to a narrowed down conception of form as a receptacle filled with content brings to a naïve consideration of the subject as capable of: either filling shapes with content, or producing a figures out of content, which is program. Either form is thought in terms of shape or form is considered as a product of program – which is turned into a compositional device, a lame designing tool. In this process a scientific consideration of form is overlooked and any consideration of architecture as a form of art is completely dismissed.
Both strategies work on the wrong assumption that a differentiation between form & content is convenient - it may be not- and it is ultimately possible, which is doubtful. Whenever architecture relies on programmatic concerns turns to deliver a blind faith on predetermined use, what bad-modern-architecture considered “function”. It overlooks the fact that ultimately it is human behavior - and not program- the natural subject of architecture’s practical concerns. These architects lack any poetic thought – they are mainly driven by analytical thinking dismissing any consideration of architecture as a form of art.

On the other hand the architects that simply consider form in terms of shape lack a deep understanding of poetics’ capacity to explain how form functions – they try to avoid the fact that shape is a manifestation of form. These architects consider architecture in relation to art in a superficial way without understanding the aesthetic principles that govern art. These architects may consider architecture’s relation with art, but not truly architecture as a form of art.

As a result, in both situations architecture’s intrinsic logic is overshadowed by the overwhelming powerful logic of capitalist-consumer society. In the former (when architectural form is determined by program) the work of architecture is over-determined by an already drafted content which is “composition” in itself. A pre-designed game-board in which the architect is allowed to play with certain maneuvers and figures and these alone; laws dictated by the whims of different kind of political constructs (an academy, a company, a business, a dictatorship or a “raison d’etat”, an ideal of “justice”, “freedom”, “to save the world”, or simply people’s behavior). Facing this situation some architects look at art in a desperate search for true freedom and inspiration. Both positions work on the assumption that the purpose of a new form is to express new content, which is completely wrong:

“Architecture, based on intellectual labour, is first and foremost built upon a system of gift exchange. We become the receivers of the work of our predecessors, and our task becomes the production of an architecture that may well mean a gift to our descendants. To say that every age finds itself mirrored in the present is also to say that the present will be reflected in the future. Thus the exchange of gifts is at work: between our forebears and ourselves, between us and our descendants. Ezra Pound’s belief, that “all ages are contemporaneous,” entails the abolition of time as a negative system of measurement, a system that most often sentences thoughts and creations to the oblivious quarters of the outmoded. We live in the multiplicity of times and places. Everything is contemporaneous.\textsuperscript{650}”

\textsuperscript{649} which may imply a self-determined content if it is a shape rightly used, but shape has a self-determined use of material

\textsuperscript{650} Cristobal Amunategui, All ages are contemporaneous. From Potlatch: A journal of the Potlatch Lab for Art & Architecture at the GSAPP, Columbia University nº 1. New York. Fall 2010
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PART 1 - AVANT GARDE ART (1916-1947)

1.1. ENSTRANGEMENT:

1.1.1 DADA:
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1.3.1 NIEUWE BEELDING & DADA


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1.4. THE ELEMENTARY:

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Appendix I - The criticism to cognition as a paradigm shift:

PART 2 – AVANT GARDE & ARCHITECTURE (1947-1960)

2.1 OBJECT

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3.1 EPISTEME:

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3.2 THE DIALECTICAL FORM:

3.2.1 CONCLUSION: Avant-garde architecture


3.2.2 THE DIALECTICAL FORM: Modern Architecture as a form of Art

THE DIALECTIC FORM
Avant-Garde & Architecture in Aldo van Eyck vs. Alison & Peter Smithson
(1947-1960)
TESIS DOCTORAL - IMAGENES / IMAGES

Juan-Luis Valderrabano-Montaños. Arquitecto. 2010
Dep. Proyectos Arquitectónicos E.T.S.A.M.
Co-Director: Juan Herreros Guerra. E.T.S.A.M.
Co-Director: Kenneth Frampton. GSAPP Columbia University
Alöis Riegl whose seminal concept of Kunstwollen and his formal analysis of art in terms of purpose «Late Roman Art Industry» (1901), resulted very influential for later development of art history; Heinrich Wölfflin and his main thesis summarized in «Principles of Art History: The problem of the development of style in later art» (1915), according to which changes in the form of beholding produced paradigmatic shifts in artistic production; Willhem Worringer with Carola & Sigfried Giedion in Davos 1915. Worringer’s thesis Abstraction & Empathy (1907) influenced strongly artists and art historians, like Kandinsky or the Giedions.

Portrait of Heinrich Wölfflin, Nicolaus Pevsner and Reyner Banham. N. Pevsner studied under Wöllfin in Munich before moving to London during the 2nd World War, he published a very influential survey on the emergence of modern architecture “Pioneers of the Modern Movement” (1936). Reyner Banham studied under Anthony Blunt at the Courtauld Institute of Art (1946), then Siegfried Giedion, and finally Nikolaus Pevsner who was the director of his PhD dissertation Theory & Design in the First Machine Age (1960).

Cover of Merz nº8/9 edited by Lissitzky and Kurt Schwitters; Malevitch square as the ultimate expression of Russian Suprematism and Constructivism was published together with Cubist, Dadaists, and Neoplasticist paintings, sculpture and modern architecture.
The architecture of Mies van der Rohe and J.P. Oud illustrated the idea of art as natural product of man. J.P. Oud project in Amsterdam and Mies van der Rohe project for a skyscraper in Berlin together with an ink drawing of a bone showing its cell structure.

According to Wölfflin a development from a plane into a recessional representation took place «...the sixteenth century, recognised the combination of forms in plane as a principle, and this principle of composition in the plane was dropped by the seventeenth century in favour of a definitely recessional type of composition» «Principles of Art History» p.73. It is important to note that Wölfflin clearly admits that the artist's will (Kunstwollen) has changed from period to period.
Explaining this figure Van Doesburg argues that the artist was interested in expressing aesthetic purposes than about natural forms, he follows “…Since these formative means have made their appearance as the principal visible factor, everything in painting, sculpture, and, to some extent, in architecture which has no immediate place among the purely expressional means has been relegated to the background” Theo van Doesburg “Principles of Neoplastic Art” (1922) p-31-32

The word image in this sense is one of the most intractable and the most useful terms in contemporary aesthetics…”A great many things have been called ‘an image’- S.M. della Consollazione at Todi, a painting by Jackson Pollock, the Lever Building, the 1954 Cadillac convertible, the roofscape of the Unite at Marseilles, any of the hundred of photographs in Parallel of Life and Art…” The New Brutalism (Architectural Review, Dec. 1955)
IMAGE P.7: An illustration of Worringer’s “Abstraction and Empathy”: the “urge to abstraction” gives birth to abstract art (inorganic) and leads to the production of Style; versus empathy, “objectified self-enjoyment” that leads to Naturalist art. Nevertheless the purpose of both is ultimately to transcend one’s being and understand the thing in itself.

Image P.8: In order to illustrate the difference between material and spiritual attitudes in art Van Doesburg used these two images in “Principles of Neoplastic art” (1925). Riegl had emphasized the art of Egyptian aristocracy as Conceptual art, and Worringer used it to illustrate the artist’s “urge to abstraction”. At the same time Riegl defined Greek art before Alexander the Great as a “contest with transitory matter” a prelude to later development of Greek and Roman art whose purpose was not exclusively a conceptual one.
Image P.9: Aldo van Eyck (Otterloo circles, 1959) In order to illustrate the difference between material and spiritual attitudes in art Van Doesburg used these two images. Riegl had emphasized the art of Egyptian aristocracy as Conceptual art, and Worringer used it to illustrate the artist’s “urge to abstraction”. At the same time Riegl defined Greek art before Alexander the Great as a “contest with transitory.

Image P.10: Report of Doorn meeting (January 1954) showing the Valley section for the statement of habitat and a diagram developed during the Team 10 meeting at Doorn (1954). It was found at the Bakema archive together with drafts versions of the Charte de L’habitat, and a summary of the Charte d’Athenes. It traces an arrow connecting 1910 (L’Esprit Nouveau, De Stijl, Dada, Futurism, and Constructivism) with CIAM 6 Bridgewater (1947) where it states: "...Lack of relationship between man and things asks for FORMS stimulating spiritual growth...FORM STIMULATES RELATIONSHIP..."
0.1. ENSTRANGEMENT

1.1.1 DADAISM AS A HUMANISM

IMAGE ENS-1: I.K. Bonset the Dadaist alter ego of Theo van Doesburg signed these two collages entitled, *La matière dénaturalisée. Destruction 2* (1923) and *Reconstruction* (1922). The Dadaist collages illustrated the spirit and the process of destruction and reconstruction so important for DADA.

IMAGE ENS-2: Hugo Bäll and Sophie Taeuber with costumes by Marcel Janco, Cabaret Voltaire, Zurich, 1916.
IMAGE ENS-3: *Murder* (1913-16) and *War destroying the Country* (1914) by Paul Klee. These drawings were probably exhibited together with the work of Der Sturm. From C.W. Giedion. Paul Klee The Viking Press ed. New York, 1952. p.27

IMAGE ENS-4: *Papier dechires* (1916-17) by Hans Arp. Cover of Forum n° 10 (1953) including Paul Klee’s drawing *Mittelalterische Stadt* (1924, from Aldo & Hannie van Eyck collection), and a small and large plan of a farm from Camerun. The issue published for the first time Aldo van Eyck’s Amsterdam playgrounds together with Constant’s text *Spatial Colourism*. 
L'amiral cherche une maison à louer

Poème simultané par R. Huelsenbeck, M. Janco, Tzara

The Vienna School had defined art as a contest with nature and abstraction in art superior to Naturalism for it aimed at more elevated practical and conceptual purposes. Two explorations in elementary forms in painting and poetry in which art is conceived as a contest with nature, art’s own logic and not a representational mean. Kasimir Malevitch “Black square” from Merz nº8/9 (1924) (Edited Kurt Schwitters & Lissitzky, 1924). The last phrase of the footnote reads: The modern world is the other half of nature, that which derives from man and Kurt Schwitters Ursonate from Merz nº24 (1932)
The evolution of Dadaist’s “Enstrangement”: the “ready-made” as a “enstrangement” from the object (Marcel Duchamp, Fountain 1917), the “objet-trouve” (Giacometti’s “Invisible object” 1936) as a “enstrangement” from the subject (oneself, similar to Hügo Ball’s reading of Karawane). Lastly, Jean Dubuffet’s Art Brut (Dubuffet’s Portrait of Michel Tapie, 1948): madness is presented as a liberating device to stimulate our imagination, folly is presented as an “enstrangement” device.

The Cobra-Amsterdam (Constant, Karel Appel, Corneille), Aldo van Eyck, A & P Smithson in London. Eduardo Paolozzi and Nigel Henderson in Paris. All photographs are from the late 40s or early 50s.
IMAGE ENS-9: Karel Appel *Tall Totem* from 1947, Brancusi’s studio with the sculpture *Poisson* (1928-1928), and W. Turnbull’s *Sungazer* at *This is Tomorrow exhibition* (1953)


IMAGE ENS-12: Giacometti’s *Walking man* (1947, Photo by Patricia Matisse) & the “Invisible object” (Around 1936, photo by Man Ray)

1.2 IMAGINATION & INTUITION

IMAGE IM-1: The Dadaists making fun of/machines: Francis Picabia “Portrait of a young American girl in a State of nudity”. Illustration for the journal 291, nº 5-6. July-August 1915; Francis Picabia and Tristan Tzara making fun of the Futurists “The exhibitionists intoxicated by an excessive use of the car”, and Picabia’s statement “…Sirs the revolutionaries, you have narrow minded ideas as a tiny bourgeoisie from Besançon” in the last issue of the journal 391 entitled Journal de L’instantaneisme nº19, October 1924; Cover with Marcel Duchamp as the boxer Georges Carpentier.


IMAGE IM-3: Mondrian, Composition 5 1919; Mondrian, Composition 1942.
1.4 NEW CONSCIOUSNESS:

1.4.1 NIEUWE BEELDING & DADA

IMAGE NC-1: Piet Mondrian, Broadway Boogie Woogie, 1942-43. Boogie Woogie was a style of piano-based blues mainly associated with dancing popularized by the Carnegie Hall concerts in the late 1930s early 40s.

IMAGE NC-2: O exponential n, IK Bonset 1917. AN example of Van Doesburg’s experimentation with Dadaist poetry; if numbers and formulas had the capacity to render the abstract concrete he thought “it is equally possible to me to record the experience of the universe qualitatively as well as quantitatively in a chemical or mathematical formula without harming the higher demands of poetry”. This poem served that purpose and fits the theme of the relativity of time and space.

(hey hey hey/ have you experienced it physically/ have you experienced it physically/ have you ex PER lanced it PHYSIC ally/ 11=—space and —time/ past present future/ the behindeaready/ the hedgepodge of nothingness and appearance/ little tattered almanac/ that one reads upside down/ MY CLOCK STANDS STILL/ ZIG-ZAG/ chewed-up cigarette butt on the WHITE NAPKIN/ moist brown/ decomposition/ SPIRIT/ 346 HIRED AUTO/ ATHWART/ trembling barren center/ caricature of the ponderous weights/ electric man/ rose and gray and deep winered/ the fragments of the universe i find in my tea)
IMAGE NC-3: Helma Schwitters, Nell van Doesburg, Kurt Schwitters and Theo van Doesburg with the issue of DADA 4-5 (Jan. 1923); Theo van Doesburg drawing “Counter-construction (Analyse de l'architecture)” 1923; and Nelly van Doesburg, Mondrian and Hanna Höch (1923)

IMAGE NC-4: Cornelis van Eesteren and Theo van Doesburg, Plans 1st, 2nd, 3rd floor, Maison d’Artiste, 1923: a spiral distribution of the spaces, following the centrifugal movement of the artist walking up the stairs, is counter-balanced by the centripetal strength of the structural core that holds the structural slabs.

IMAGE NC-5: Mecano nº 4/5 (1923) and Van Doesburg & Van Eesteren “Axonometric projection (Architectural scheme)” 1923. The saw has a very Dadaist “destructive-constructive” role, and the propeller is able to provide a new view for its centrifugal-centripetal static-dynamism rose architectural design above the rationalistic-cubic “existenz minimum”. The spatial distribution according to time was seen as the aesthetic manifestation of Einstein’s theory superseding Newton’s gravitational law.
IMAGE NC-7: Theo Van Doesburg Tesseracts with arrows indicating centripetal and centrifugal movement in four-dimensional space (ink on tracing paper, both 19.5cm x 24.9 cm); Van Doesburg Collection, R.B.K. (AB 4857 and AB 4858)

IMAGE NC-8: Images from Peter Smithson’s report on Modern Dutch architecture: Rietveld's house (1923); The Van Nelle factory (1930) by Van der Vlugt & Brikman; Rotterdam after the blitz with the Dudok store – one of the buildings left standing is in the centre; House by Van der Borek (and Bakema) for himself (1954)

IMAGE NC-10: Axonometric projections (architectural scheme) – Counter construction (Construction of colors) – Counter construction (Architectural analysis) 1923, C. Van Eesteren & Theo van Doesburg.

“Yes. Carry me along, taddy, like you done through the toy fair! If I seen him bearing down on me now under whitespread wings like he’d come from Arkangels, I sink I’d die down over his feet, humbly dumbly, only to washup. Yes, tid. There’s where. First. We pass through grass behush the bush to. Finn, again! Take. Bussofithe, mememormee! Till thousandsthree. Lps. The keys to. Given! A way a lone a last a loved a long the.”

IMAGE NC-11: Aldo van Eyck, Purple-Blue Room with painting by Constant, Amsterdam Stedelijk Museum, 1952. Constant published his own version of “Spatial Colourism” in Forum nº 10, 1953 (See cover in IMAGE ENS-4) next to Van Eyck’s 1st publication of the Amsterdam Playgrounds.

IMAGE NC-12: Aldo van Eyck’s Otterloo circles, 1959: Van Eyck said about the left circle: “These things exist in the present. It is not a question of that these things do not exist in the present. The Parthenon, Van Doesburg’s drawing, the Pueblo’s village, whatever you like, they exist in the present. They have travelled into us. They have managed to travel into your mind. That’s to say. I am concerned with the contemporaneousness of the past... I just want to say that, to tell you that, because it is the only way of course, to open your mind. Make it into an interior to allow the past to be telescoped into it. This sketch says nothing else. It says the time has come to reconcile things we have regarded as being incompatible.”

Ed. by D.C: Apon, J.B. Bakema, G.C. Boon, Aldo van Eyck, Joop Hardy, Herman Hertzberger & Julian Schrofer
1.4 THE ELEMENTARY

1.4.1 DADAISM & CONSTRUCTIVISM: MODERNITY NOT PROGRESS

IMAGE EL-1: Marcel Janco’s “Construction 3” (Published in Dada 1, 1917), Moholy-Nagy’s Nickel Plastik sculpture (Published in Mecano “Blue” 1923) and detail of Mondrian’s Victory Boogie-Woogie (1942-44). In all three the materiality of the elements used was emphasized—no effort was made by the artist to hide the true nature of the material itself; the pursuit of “elementary expressional needs” was related with the use of “elementary expressional MEANS”, meaning “raw materials” true to themselves.

IMAGE EL-2: Spread of Theo van Doesburg’s Principles of Neo-plastic Art illustrating the elementary expressional means of painting, sculpture and architecture. Mondrian’s ideas were developed out of a scientific interpretation of nature; Cartesian three-dimensional space determined our spatial thinking in terms of position, dimension and proportion, whereas blue, red, and yellow were considered the basic colors to work out of darkness according to the theories of light spectrum.

IMAGE EL-3: Spread of Theo van Doesburg’s Principles of Neo-plastic Art illustrating the use of elementary expressional means exemplified in painting, sculpture and architecture. Theo van Doesburg Composition (1921), G. Vantongerloo Sculpture III (1919), and Van Doesburg & Van Eesteren Maison d’Artiste (1923)
IMAGE EL-4: “Letter-sound-images” & Hans Richter Film-composition (De Stijl nº11 Nov. 1921) and Jewelry in Amsterdam by G. Rietveld, (De Stijl Feb. 1922)

IMAGE EL-5: Drawings from F. Picabia (Mecano Yellow), Drawing from M. Ernst, Head by Raoul Hausmann with Mondrian’s statement “Les tentatives de plastique nouvelle sont encore dominees par l’espirit anciant tant que l’espirit nouveau n’est pas concient dans l’homme. Celui-ci se sert de ses creations nouvelles a l’ancienne maniere. La vraie plastique parait par ‘mutation’ quand l’‘evolution’ a fait son oeuvre » bellow « Nous ne combattons pas seulement contre le nu en painture, mais aussi contre tous les imbecillites naturalistes en forme des genetaux. Au Boudoir avec ces transformations sexuelles et ces combinations erotiques ! (Marques, Klee etc.)” Below L. Moholy-Nagy “Relief S” (Mecano Blue) and Raoul Hausmann “Head of Tatlin” (Mecano Red)
IMAGE EL-6: Exhibition by Ivan Puni in Berlin; Exhibition “0.10” in Petrograd (1915-16) showing the work of K. Malevitch, I. Puni, M. Menkov, I. Kliun, K. Boguslavskaya and Rozanova; cover of Malevitch’s text “From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism. The New Realism in Painting”

IMAGE EL-7: Dusseldorf, 29-30 May, International avant-garde Congress, from right to left: Raoul Hausmann, Franz Seiwert, Theo van doesburg, El Lissitzky, De Pistoris, Nelly van doesburg, Hans Richter, etc. Covers of De Stijl June, August & September 1922 showing Lissitzky’s Proun, the manifesto of the “Union Internationale des Constructeurs Neo-plastiques” and Malevich’s “black square” respectively
Citte Circulation (1924-29): “The most radical solution to congestion in old cities, Van Doesburg contested, was to break open the walls of streets, let light and air make use of the third dimension in order to rise literally skywards…not in the manner of the American skyscrapers which left street-fronts and (two dimensional) traffic trenches intact, but by suspending blocks of flats in a four-pillar structure…Van Doesburg’s ‘traffic city’ did away with the street network and opened up the city on all sides….The entire project…presupposed a new attitude on the part of its future inhabitants. The ground floor, the ground itself, was reserved for every kind of traffic moving in every conceivable direction, and for parks…The suspended block created more free space and eliminated the encroachment of the ‘frontal city’…” See Ever van Straaten. Theo van Doesburg : painter and architect. The Hague : SDU, 1988.p.184-185

Theo van Doesburg “Counter-composition VI (1924-25)

Aubette Café (1928-29) by Theo van Doesburg with Hans & Sophie Arp. “Caveau dancing” at the basement level by Hans Arp, and stair by Arp and Van Doesburg.
IMAGE EL-11: Aubette Café (1928-29) by Theo van Doesburg with Hans & Sophie Arp. Views & plans from the small dance hall and the Cinema-Dancing by Theo van Doesburg.
IMAGE EL-12: “Art Concrete” letters and studies for “arithmetic composition”, and “Arithmetic composition I” (1930)

IMAGE EL-13: Van Doesburg Studio at Meudon (1927-30)
IMAGE EL-14: Van Doesburg Studio (1927-30) as it was published in De Stijl's last issue Jan. 1932
1.4.2 C.W. GIEDION & MODERN ART: Van Eyck’s notion of the Elementary

IMAGE EL-16: Brancusi, Tristan Tzara with others at Brancusi’s studio; First page of Tristan Tzara’s La Main passé dedicated to Annie van Eyck “Dada reste” in Zurich 1946.

IMAGE EL-17: Cover of Forum n°12 “Night & Day” 1959/1960 with D.C. Apon, J.P. Bakema, G. Boom, Van Eyck, Joop Hardy, H. Hertzberger and Jurriaan Schrofer; photograph of New York at night and Hadhramaut during the day)
1.4.3 MIES VAN DER ROHE & NON-OBJECTIVITY

IMAGE EL-18: child sitting on the doorstep of his house from Forum 8 (1959) and kids at the play-pool areas of Van Eyck’s Orphanage in Amsterdam (1955-60)

IMAGE EL-19: Images from C.W. Giedion Modern Plastik Art showing ancient sculpture and a traditional table in contrast with modern sculpture from Brancusi and Giacometti. See Image 9 (Prelude) Aldo van Eyck’s Otterloo Circles (1959) showing ancient and traditional architecture in contrasts with Van Doesburg’s Counter-composition of the “Maison d’Artiste”, 1923.

IMAGE EL-20: J.J.P. “Houses on the beach” (1917) and interior design by Theo van Doesburg with G. Rietveld’s furniture (1919)
IMAGE EL-21: Malevich’s Black square in the cover of Merz n° 1 (1923), and Veschi/Gegenstand/Object. Tatlin’s tower in Merz n° 8/9 (1924) with the statement “C’est ici qu’il faut resoudre le probleme le plus ardu de la culture : creer l’unite de la forme pratique et de la pure forme spirituelle. De meme que l’équilibre des parties – le triangle – caracterise mieux la Renaissance, la spirale caracterise mieux notre esprit »; G issue from March 1926 with Malevich’s painting and aerial view over Manhattan.

IMAGE EL-23: G mag. n°1: the cover shows the elevation of Mies’ skyscraper for Berlin behind a traditional building; Arp’s ink drawings and poem; Kurt Schwitters reciting poems illustrated together with a Merzbau sculpture; Theo van Doesburg’s Composition with a text: “C’est le spiritual, l’abstrait complet qui exprime precisement ce qui est humain, alors que ce qui est sensitive n’atteint pas encore la hauteur de ce qui est intellectuell et par consequent doit etre consideré comme appartenant a un degré inferieur de la culture humaine. L’art ne doit pas emouvoir le coeur...Toutes les émotions du sentiment doivent être ramenées à des proportions pures de l’espace »; Mies’ drawing of Berlin’s project illustrating Hans Richter text “G, » including a paragraph in english, french and russian saying: « Civilization and the supreme technical products are not sufficent to garanty the existence of men. Without culture and high ideals than those of the comfort civilization must fall. The G collects materials for a possible culture”; a warehouse by Peter Behrens and Breest & Co. illustrating Mies’ article “Industrial Construction”; last page of Mies’ article claiming “The fundamental reorganization of the housing problem is urgent”
The magazine opened with Kleiner Brokhaus’ statement « Nature du latin NASCI means devenir, provenir, c’est à dire tout ce qui par sa propre force, se développe, se forme, se meut » ; Malevich’s Black square with a footnote : «La nature même ne veut pas de beauté éternelle, par changement continu de ses formes elle fait naître incessamment du nouveau dans la création. Le monde moderne est l’autre moitié de la nature, celle qui vient de l’homme » ; Mondrian’s Composition ; K. Schwitters’ Merz painting and statement « L’art c’est la forme. Transformer c’est changer la valeur » ; Hans Arp’s « Rectangles according to the laws of chance” 1916 ; J.J.P. Oud’s house in Rotterdam with Oud’s statement “L’esprit vivifiant d’une époque et non les formes traditionnelles forment la direction à son art. C’est ainsi que la tendance du développement architectural nous offre un architecture qui en réalité est plus attachée à la matière qu’autre fois, mais qui en apparence la dépasse de beaucoup. C’est une architecture qui se déploie librement en pleine lumière, en une clarté organique de la forme » ; Mies’ project for a skyscraper in Berlin 1919 ; Tatlin’s tower with footnote : « C’est ici qu’il faut résoudre le problème le plus ardu de la culture : créer l’unité de la forme pratique et de la pure forme spirituelle... » (See Prelude IMAGE P.2)
IMAGE EL-25: Mies van der Rohe, Mosler House, Berlin (1924-26), and Project for a brick country house, 1923)

IMAGE EL-26: Mies van der Rohe’s projects showing ground floor plan & view: Josef Esters house (1927-30); Mies van der Rohe, Barcelona Pavilion (1929); Tugenhadt House and Mosler House, Berlin 1928-30). Mies’ evolution towards elementary Gestaltung: from the Esters’ house in which bearing walls enclose the interior spaces to the Tugenhadt House, in which –following the Barcelona Pavilion- Mies reduced the presence of bearing walls; merging interior spaces among them and creating his characteristic play inside-outside.
The work of Mies van der Rohe as a paradigmatic example of modern architecture redefined as an abstract form of art; Mies' early concern Elementary Gestaltung was brought to its limits in the late 1950's with this project. The Dadaist- Constructivist's negativity reduced architecture to its elementary means - steel-framed roof over pillars & glass; regardless "functional-program" since the project, initially a headquarters office was "recycled" as a Museum (Berlin Neue-Kunst Gallery); very Merz.
Appendix - The criticism to cognition as a paradigm shift:


IMAGE AP-2: Paul Klee’s *The Puppet theater & The Architecture of the plane* (1923), and *Separation in the evening* (1922)

IMAGE AP-3: Different moments of the Constructivist-Dadaist Congress at Weimar, 1922. According to L. Moholy Nagy: “The constructivist living in Germany “Theo van Doesburg (1), El Lissitzky (7), Max Burchartz (6), C. van Eesteren (8), Alfred Kemeny (9), Hans Richter (5), and myself, called a congress in October of 1922, in Weimar. Arriving there, to our great amazement we found also the Dadaist, Hans Arp (4) and Tristan Tzara (3). This caused a rebellion against the host, Doesburg, because at that time we felt in Dadaism a destructive and obsolete force in comparison with the new outlook of the Constructivists. Doesburg, a powerful personality, quieted the storm and the guests were accepted to the dismay of the younger, purist members who slowly withdrew and let the congress turn into a Dadaist performance. At that time we did not realize that Doesburg himself was both a constructivist and Dadaist writing dada poems under the pen name of I.K. Bonset, No. (2) is Mrs. Nelly van Doesburg, No. (10) Lucia Moholy” From Vision in Motion by L. Moholy-Nagy (Paul Thoebald Pub. 1947)
IMAGE AP-4: Aldo van Eyck, C. van Eesteren and J. Bakema at CIAM 6, Bridgewater 1947
2.1 OBJECT

2.1.1 ALDO VAN EYCK & COBRA (1949-51)

IMAGE OB-1: C. Dotremont measuring Van Doesburg’s Counter-Composition X in Van Eyck’s house, 1949; Theo Van Doesburg, Counter-Composition X, 1924)

IMAGE OB-2: Asger Jorn inventing his own language: Asger Jorn (Notebook drawings from 1940, Composition 1940 and The Blessed beast 1951)

IMAGE OB-3: House of the art collector Mme. Elise Johansen gathering paintings from the artists from “Host” and Helhesten n°1 launched by in 1941

IMAGE OB-6: Paintings from Karel Appel (Questioning children painting on wood, and wall-painting both from 1949 and Desert man 1950); Constant, K. Appel and Corneille in 1947; Reflex nº 1 with a drawing from Corneille, & Reflex nº 2 with a woodcut from Jacques Doucet, Karel Appel in his studio, Amsterdam 1947.

IMAGE OB-5: Cover of Cobra nº1 (1949) by Constant, text from the archeologist P.V. Globt on the Scandinavian "Guldgubber" and Asger Jom’s painting
IMAGE OB-6: Cover of Cobra n°4 (1950), page with C. Dotremont’s text “C’est notre désir qui fait la révolution”, and original cover of the catalogue of the Amsterdam exhibition, Jan Elburg’s collage “Mutilation obscene” from Titian’s “Venus d’Urbin”

IMAGE OB-7: Kids texts included in Cobra n°4, below Constant’s text text “C’est notre désir qui fait la révolution”

IMAGE OB-8: Photograph of child drawing in the street from Cobra n°10 (Autumn 1951); Kids playing in Van Eyck’s Zaanhof playground (1949). Kids drawing from COBRA n°4 (1949)
IMAGE OB-9: Images of the Cobra exhibit at the Stedelijk Museum showing (from left to right) rooms 3-4 and 5-7. Photograph of Cobra paintings displayed nowadays at the Geemente Museum (The Hague)
IMAGE OB-10: Plan of the exhibition displayed at the Stedelijk Museum showing rooms 1-7, image of 1st room with Constant's Barricade 1949, the room 3 with the "Cage aux poètes", and the poets pointing at the inscription on the wall "Il y a un lyrisme que nous abolissons". Current photograph of Barricades and k. Appel's Men & beasts (1949) at the Cobra Museum (Amsterdam)
IMAGE OB-11: Images of the dancing room turned upside down (Theo van Doesburg project for the Aubette Café in Strasbourg, 1928) and Van Eyck’s layout.

IMAGE OB-12: Image from Cobra n°2 and Image from Cobra n° 3 establishing parallelism between forms in life and art.
2.2 PROCESS

IMAGE PRO-1: Photograph from the Parallel of Life & Art exhibition by Henderson, Paolozzi & the Smithsons (Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1953) manipulated substituting the original images by images extracted from Cobra issues (n°1-2-3-4 & 6); bellow the original photograph of the exhibition.
2.2.1 PARALLEL OF LIFE & ART (1953)

IMAGE PRO-2: Haousman “Head of Tatlin” vs Paolozzi’s Human Head, Anna Hoch’s Collages vs. Paolozzi’s % Henderson’s collages; Christian Schad’s Schadographe from 1919 and Nigel Henderson’s cover of the Architectural Review from May, 1951.

IMAGE PRO-3: Nigel Henderson, “Stressed photograph of a street scene in Italy”, c. 1951; Nigel Henderson “Stressed photograph” of bathers owned by Francis Bacon

IMAGE PRO-5: 1951- On growth and Form exhibit. At ICA org. by Hamilton; painting by R. Hamilton: Perspective, 1951
IMAGE PRO-6: Since 1953 Hamilton was planning an exhibit on “a visual survey of man’s relationship with the machinery of movement” after reading Guideon’s Mechanization Takes Command. In 1954 started his Transition paintings; image of April 1955 – Banham’s article Machine Aesthetic AR magazine opening with Marinetti’s statement: “A racing car... is more beautiful than the Winged Victory of Samotrace” The 7th June 1955 Banham delivered a lecture on his article at the ICA entitled “Metal in Motion”. In May 1955 - Man Machine and Motion exhibit by R. Hamilton took place at the Hatton Gallery, Newcastle, showing “The mechanical conquest of time and distance [through] the structures which man has created to extend his powers of locomotion…” Press release of Man Machine and Motion, 23 June 1955, ICA archives.

IMAGE PRO-7: Image from D’arcy Thompson’s “On Growth & Form” & Nigel Henderson Stressed photograph, 1950
IMAGE PRO-8: Nigel Henderson & Eduardo Paolozzi (Untitled) “Studies for Parallel of Life & Art” (1952)

IMAGE PRO-9: E. Paolozzi’s Scrapbooks from the late 1940s early 1950s

IMAGE PRO-10: Man Ray photograph Dust Breeding, 1920 contained in Marcel Duchamp’s The bride stripped bare by her bachelors, even (the Green Box) 1934; and image from Marcel Duchamp’s installation “Sixteen miles of string” for the exhibition “First papers of surrealism” organized by Andre Breton and “his twine” Marcel Duchamp for the Coordinating Council of French Relief Societies, New York, 1942.
IMAGE PRO-11: Duchamp’s Green Box, 1934 (An original copy was owned by Nigel Henderson); Detail from the original copy of the Green Box at the Philadelphia Museum of Art: "« Etant donnés: 1° la chute d’eau, 2° le gaz d’éclairage...Nous déterminerons les conditionn, du repos instantané (ou apparence allegorique) d’une succession d’un ensemble de faits divers semblant se nécessiter l’un l’autre par des lois, pour isoler le signe de la concordance entre, d’un part, ...Repos (capable de toutes les (?) excentricites imnombrables d’autre part, un choix de possibilites legitimees par ces lois et aussi les occasionnant »
IMAGE PRO-12: Images of Parallel & Art exhibition in the darkness, an imaginary museum without walls: "Calligraphic writing-Scientific images (x-ray & microscope, strength lines )-Architecture plans-aerial views-façade and Egyptian ruin-Modern art –klee & Kandinsky, Picasso-Primitive art – mostly human representations skimo mask-Photograph of Rugby players and boxers- x-ray of car-moving picture of a man biking-pieces of a machine...It is definitively difficult to recognize the object, the first question that comes to you mind is what is this? Although you are looking to a photograph, and usually you can easily recognize what you are looking at when you are looking at a photo (parallelism of abstract art and this kind of images). The original title was "Parallel of Life & Art Exhibition of Landscape, science & art". Photographs of the room at night illuminated with lights pointing at the images erases the walls hence it is a museum without walls and the images are like floating (like the ymay float in your mind) and it is difficult to recognize where is the ground when you are looking at them. Modern Abstract art as a transcendental intuitive logic establishing relations between man & nature.
2.2.2 GOLDEN LANE GRID (CIAM 9, 1953):

IMAGE PRO-14: Painted ceiling for Ove-Arup office in London, 1952, E. Paolozzi; Drawing for the CIAM GRILLE (CIAM 9) 1953 by A & P Smithson; photograph of kids playing in Bethnal Green by N. Henderson


IMAGE PRO-16: Nigel Henderson photographs in Bethnal Green (1949-1953). The images illustrated different activities taking place in the street. The image of kids playing in the street was used in the Urban Reidentification Grille for CIAM 9 (1953). It illustrated a very rich & controversial term for Van Eyck & the Smithsons, “The doorstep”. For Van Eyck the “doorstep” was the place outside & inside at the same time for him illustrated the architectural form- the “in between realm”
IMAGE PRO-17: A & P Smithson CIAM Grille, 1953. Detail of the Golden Lane project over the existing fabric of the city; Henderson photograph-Smithsons drawing-collage showing the planned construction process of the Golden Lane

IMAGE PRO-18: Photograph of tenement near St. George’s-in-the-East by Peter Smithson 1951; Section drawings for the Golden Lane project by A & P Smithson 1953
IMAGE PRO-19: Plans of the houses, elevated section and view from the Balcony

IMAGE PRO-20: A & P Smithson diagrams for Golden Lane; Theo van Doesburg Composition & Paolozzi’s painted ceiling for Ove Arup offices; A & P Smithson plan of Golden Lane competition entry, deck level. Mondrian on Max Ernst “Max vous savez, il fait la même chose que moi mais dans l’autre côté du monde...”
Image 85: Le Corbusier’s Unite d’Habitation versus A & P Smithson’s Golden Lane: Discontinuous-Isolated-done vs. Continuous-integrated-in progress; Main corridor=no dialogue with street vs. Main corridor = street; Painting vs. Collage
2.3 LOGIC:

2.3.1 ALDO VAN ECK: ARCHITECTURE AND THE ARTS

IMAGE LO-1: Sandpit, Jacob Thijsseplein playground (1949) and grave near Timoudi (photo A. van Eyck, 1951)

IMAGE LO-2: Yves Tanguy, Composition (1938) first painting in the collection of Aldo & Hannie Van Eyck. Aldo & Hannie in the Tademait (1951). Marabout of Sidi Aissa in Ghardaia (photo by Van Eyck, 1951) Van Eyck found architecture shaped by the sunlight of the desert resembling Brancusi’s sculptures which had been “shaped” by the sunlight descending from the skylights as well. Van Eyck found himself as a Tanguy’s shapeless surrealistic form in the middle of nothingness; he understood the fact that if modern art had traveled backwards in time in the search of elementary forms, his designs for the playgrounds were experiencing that same travel in time, inspired by the artistic means to an architecture of the elementary
IMAGE LO-3: Arp “Three constellations of the same forms, 1942”; Sophie Täuber-Arp “Relief Rectangulaire, 1927/38”; Aldo van Eyck elements for the playgrounds

IMAGE LO-4: Some of Aldo van Eyck’s playgrounds (1947-55) vs. several versions of *La Muse endormie* (1909-26) by Brancusi. No linear logic can be found in the design of the hundreds of playgrounds by Van Eyck. I would argue he developed a *logic of determined relations* inspired in De Stijl’s notion of abstract art- a non linear design strategy that- like Brancusi’s carving and polishing of stones- lasted for years…Portrait of THE writer from the “Great Riot”, James Joyce by Brancusi, 1929
Dijkstraat playground (1954) by Aldo van Eyck: the sandpit—where the smaller kids play—placed far from the road, its triangular shape allows for circulation, while determines the zig-zag rhythm in the distribution of the elements; the zig-zag is interrupted at the end where steel frames act as fences; these "fences" do not prevent kids from running into the road by CLOSING the space but simply by ALLOWING them to play. A fence can prohibit or permit: if it "PROHIBITS" human nature will try to challenge it jumping across, if it "PERMITS" human nature will enjoy it.

Different materials used by Van Eyck in the sequence of elementary archetypes vs a sequence of elementary archetypes conforming a Brancusi’s sculpture at MOMA.

As in a Mondrian painting in which "objects" were not treated, the elementary means—lines & colors—were arranged according to harmonic determined relations of position, dimension, proportion, and color. Van Eyck arranged the elementary archetypes according to harmonic determined relations of BEHAVIOR determining its position, dimension, proportion and MATERIAL.
IMAGE LO-7: Aldo van Eyck, playgrounds in Zaanhof, 1948 and Jacob Thijssplein, 1949 vs. Mondrian Composition A, 1932

IMAGE LO-8: (Down-up from left to right) Theo van Doesburg Counter-composition X, 1924 (Owned by Van Eyck) vs. IK Bonset, Reconstruction, 1922 (The year in which the Dadaist-Constructivist Congress took place at the doors of the Bauhaus in Weimar); Mondrian, Composition A (1932) vs. Joan Miro, Personages and dog before the sun, 1949): “But Aldo, you are a split person! You consist of Miro and Mondrian and these two wage a continuous fight in your inner self!” R. P. Lohse
Van Eyck in the set up of the exhibition. Zaanhof playground, view and plan (1948, built 1950); the same view of room 4 and Jacob Thijssenplein playground from 1949. The canvases had different sizes in the exhibition, so did the rectangles in Zaanhof playground, or the circles in Jacob Thijssenplein playground. Most of the paintings were very small in comparison with the rooms; Van Eyck asked Constant and Appel to make some paintings in a bigger format, so he would be able to play with a stronger variety of the scales-distances and alignments- with the paintings. As he was experimented in the design of the playgrounds: “playing” with the scale of a simple element lead to a bigger freedom in the distribution. “Playing” with the contrast of the object in relation with itself -the scale of the painting or a circle- led to a “play” in the relation of every object with the others. The rhythm of scale and the rhythm of distance were tied together.

Van Eyck believed the essential Dutch contribution to modern architecture should be traced back to De Stijl movement, he considered G. Rietveld the leading living exponent. This gesture had at that time a polemic character since the ‘functionalists’ tendency among CIAM tended to consider De Stijl outdated.
IMAGE LO-11: R.P. Lohse drawing *1950 and Aldo van Eyck entrance Sign for maritime ex.1950*. Van Eyck’s design certainly shares in common an idea of space that was being developed at that time by the Swiss artist R.P. Lohse, while it materialized the “wind-mill” pattern in a centrifugal-centripetal spiral movement raising upwards as in Van Doesburg’s & Van Estereen’s *Maison de Artiste*, 1923 (See NC-4-5-6)

IMAGE LO-12: Damme house 1951-54 by Aldo van Eyck and Jan Rietveld vs. Pencil drawing by R.P. Lohse, *Color groups around centers* (1952). The architects emulated the spiral distribution of the *Maison de Artiste*, but opened the living room and the circulation spaces to the sunlight and ventilation. See IMAGES NC-4-5-6

IMAGE LO-14: Van Eyck concept diagrams from 1948 showing the “new village” above vs. the old village bellow; Van Eyck concept drawings from “de 8” grid for CIAM X showing the new & old village; “de 8” CIAM X grid sheet n°1 with Van Eyck diagrams 1948-1956: The “core” of the village as in Van Eyck’s original concept remained an open green space, the schools were located in the west area, the shops spread over the internal ring enhancing its significance as a centre
“de 8” grid for CIAM Congress in Dubrovnik (1956) the sheet nº3 has the word “relation” outlined in red, and the sheet nº4 has the green forest at the center of the village outlined in red: the project was the materialization of the relations established between the elements of the village, the relation was considered between the village and the outside: “D. District-core, core-dwelling”; from the smaller elements in the village to the landscape: “E. Individual dwelling-dwelling group, dwelling group-central green, central green-polder”; and between urban and natural elements: “F. Central green-wood, dwelling group-dwelling group” The balance between “the universal and individual” aimed by De Stijl’s manifesto and materialized in the harmonic balance of position, proportion & color in Mondrian paintings was attempted by Van Eyck aiming at the same values with purely architectural means.
IMAGE LO-16: Nagele urban plan (1948-58) vs School plan (1954-56): The solution adopted for the village produced a non-hierarchical cohesion between various centers achieved by placing the buildings in a windmill pattern around a shifting center; following this principle the schools were organized along a corridor that gets wider forming a square deserving the classrooms in a rotational movement; in the distribution squares the ceiling rises up with a skylight in its center. Below: current interior view of the distribution area in form of a square and a classroom.
IMAGE LO-17: Views of Nagele School in the late 1950s showing windows that are in fact doors.

IMAGE LO-19: Images of Nagele School and the village nowadays
IMAGE LO-20

IMAGE LO-21: Elements in the Orphanage

IMAGE LO-22: Kids in the Orphanage
IMAGE LO-23: Plan showing the interior street; Detailed plan of 4-6-year-old department showing: “the common ground where conflicting polarities can again become dual phenomena”… the architectural form conceived as the materialization of the *elementary* in terms of behavior…
I wanted the child’s behavior and movement in it [the building] to remain as vigorous as they are outside. No sudden curbing of spontaneity this side of a narrow doorstep; no living room manners here. So, the materials used in this interior street differ in no way from those used outside.
The plan attempts to reconcile the positive qualities of a centralized scheme with those of a decentralized one...The plan attempts to provide a built framework ...for the dual phenomenon of the individual and the collective... (my emphasis); for Van Eyck to reconcile universal & individual, individual & collective was essential in order to provide a "place" for the "great number", a house for 125 children. The Orphanage was the counterform of the elementary relations between the kid and the city of Amsterdam.
IMAGE LO-26: Exterior views of the Amsterdam Orphanage today; now it is an office building for several companies
2.3.2 A & P SMITHSON: THE ART OF BUILDING

IMAGE LO-27: Spread of Wittkover’s “Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism” (Plates section); Hunstanton School, 1949 plans as they were published in AD Sep. 1954. As in Hunstanton the Palladian plans were organized around courtyards with staircases placed in the corners deserving upper floors, at the same time Hunstanton presented a “classical” aspect in the arrangement of the rooms for there are almost no corridors and rooms are interconnected.
IMAGE LO-28: Montage showing Hunstanton plan proportions of the first floor plan (over the colonnades of the main hall) and the cloister from Convent of the Carita (Venice, 1561) – Palladio’s Quattro Libri- as it appeared in Wittkover “Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism”

IMAGE LO-29: In the original competition program for Hunstanton there was a requirement for a headmaster’s house; the Smithsons designed a house that emulated classical plans used in Wittkover’s book: for example it shares certain similarities with an image from J. Gwilt, Rudiments of Architecture, 1826
IMAGE LO-30: Hunstanton exterior view showing the “framing structure” vs. interior view of Giuliano da Sangallo’s Sta. Maria delle Carceri

IMAGE LO-31: Henderson’s photographs of Hunstanton
Above, section and right, plans and elevation of the project for a house in Soho by Alison and Peter Smithson, referred to by Mr. Scott in his letter quoted on the facing page.


IMAGE LO-32: Antonio Sant’Elia’s drawings from the early 1910s published in R. Banham’s article on Sant’Elia, AR May 1955; Richard Hamilton ‘Study for Hommage to Chrysler Cop.’ (1957)

IMAGE LO-34: Valley section Diagram as included in Doorn Manifesto for CIAM meeting in Doorn Jan. 195

IMAGE LO-35: A&P Smithson, Lea farm (Shere, UK, 1953-55); it was presented as the PROPOSAL 1 from a series of 5 examples of settlements for the Valley section presented at CIAM X, 1956

IMAGE LO-36: PROPOSAL 2 (the 'hamlet'): a ‘village unite’ forming a series of “Galleon houses” presented as an alternative to the standardised suburban houses- it emulated the way houses were nested in the country site; PROPOSAL 3: the village – not different from the ‘hamlet’- but intended to merge within the cohesive fabric of existing villages while remaining ‘modern’- it is worth to note its massive wall two stores high marking the access while serving as a wind-break
PROPOSAL 4: the “Close houses” for the town were low-rise houses linked with an ‘interior street’, and the access to the house is through a ‘portico’ – a small covered courtyard; Aldo van Eyck liked this solution of an ‘interior street’ and ‘in-between realms’ inside-outside the house; PROPOSAL 5: the “Crescent houses” 12th storey residential building (180 dwellings); a giant mark in the cityscape curved to reduce the shadowed casted by the building while permits the environmental continuity in the ground floor, an all houses receive direct sunlight. Van Eyck liked specially the fact that you could see the building while walking in the ‘street in the air’: a gesture the Smithsons reproduced in the Robin Hood Gardens

IMAGE LO-38: The plan of the pavilion designed by the Smithsons for the exhibition “This is Tomorrow” (1956) and Le Corbusier’s Cabannon (Cap Martin 1952) have the same proportions
IMAGE LO-39: Images from “Patio & pavilion” (A&P Smithson, N. Henderson, E. Paolozzi) for the “This is Tomorrow” exhibition 1956

IMAGE LO-40: Marcel Duchamp “Wheel” 1913 vs. Patio & Pavilion 1956 & Le Corbusier’s Cabanon at Cap-Martin (1952): If the ‘static’ stool was turned into a ‘dynamic’ Wheel (1913) by Duchamp in an “enstranging” object, “Patio & Pavilion” was an “enstanging” environment simply because it “represented the fundamental necessities of the human habitat in a series of symbols”: outside-inside, covered-uncovered, static-dynamic, wheels-chairs. Enstrangement, the criticism to cognition—“modern dwelling”, the elementary or Brancusi’s “simplicité”, were present in the artists’ reenactment of the avant-garde principles.
IMAGE LO-41: Diagram developed during the Team 10 meeting at Doorn (1954), found in Bakema archive together with the Dorn Manifesto drafts, and a brief of the Charte d’Athenes. An arrow is traced connecting 1910 (L’Esprit Nouveau, De Stijl, Dada, Futurism, Constructivism) with CIAM 6 Bridgewater(1947) where it is stated: “...Lack of relationship between man and things asks for FORMS stimulating spiritual growth...FORM STIMULATES RELATIONSHIP...”
Model, Site Map and ground plan of The Economist Piazza: the Smithsons’ proposal broke the dense compact and closed urban-block. 64% of the ground floor was opened to the public. The residential building was designed one half smaller than the Economist tower.

People inhabiting The Economist piazza: A journalist going to the journal (of course), a journalist talking on the phone while smoking a cigarette, a bike-messenger having a break, two tourists crossing by while a journalist is having lunch (Spring 2010) For other ways of inhabiting the piazza see M. Antonioni’s film “Blow Up”
IMAGE LO-44: Typical plan and Section across the Economist & Martins Bank buildings showing grid and proportions; isometric perspective and typical plan without grid.

IMAGE LO-45: Photograph of the Limestone used for The Economist piazza and façade nowadays (full of cavities – mould casts of what was once solid, three dimensional forms of bivalves (clams and oysters) or gastropods (marine snails)) vs. an image that could well be exhibited at the Parallel of Life & Art exhibit.
IMAGE LO-46: Photographs of The Economist Building in the 20th Century
IMAGE LO-47: Photographs of The Economist Building nowadays
3.1 EPISTEME:

3.1.1 ALDO VAN EYCK vs. A&P SMITHSON: Modern architecture as Abstract Art

![Diagram Image EP-1: As a diagram it simplifies a lot the convoluted nature of the notions of space & time in modern architecture. Nevertheless it aims to illustrate roughly the pre-war conception of architectural space in terms of Cartesian-three dimensional space and time as a linear progression from past to future; this deterministic-Cartesian approach was related with a deterministic-materialist notion of the architectural form as the result of the satisfaction of material needs -4 functions. The 1960s version of the relation between space-time and form was reconceived in architectural terms by Van Eyck & the Smithsons: instead of ‘abstract’ space preferred to provide a place for people “to provide identity, a sense of place, the “feeling that you are somebody living somewhere” as Peter Smithson said.2 In order to do so they considered the present, the everyday-life – nor the future, neither the past- but the present; the architectural form was meant to be the result of a deep understanding of human behavior, from the way people sit-down at the table to the way they live in the city, in Van Eyck’s words: “Cities should become the counterform of man’s reciprocally individual and collective urban reality”3

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2 Statement included in Forum nº7, Sep. 1959, See Ligtelijn & Strauven. Aldo van Eyck: Collected Articles and Other writings. p.223
3 See Aldo van Eyck, *The medicine of reciprocity tentatively illustrated* (Introductory article to the publication of the Amsterdam Municipal Orphanage in Forum April-May, 1961) See Ligtelijn & Strauven, eds. Aldo van Eyck: Collected articles and other writings. p.318
Image EP-2: Diagram developed during the Team 10 meeting at Doorn (1954). It was found at the Bakema archive together with drafts versions of the Charte de L’habitat, and a summary of the Charte d’Athenes. It traces an arrow connecting 1910 (L’Esprit Nouveau, De Stijl, Dada, Futurism, and Constructivism) with CIAM 6 Bridgewater (1947) where it states: “...Lack of relationship between man and things asks for FORMS stimulating spiritual growth...FORM STIMULATES RELATIONSHIP...” The notion that architecture should be the counter-form of human behavior (relations) in order to provide a sense of identity, was working on the assumption that architectural forms had the capacity to “STIMULATE RELATIONSHIP”; the idea that an artwork had the capacity to transcend its materiality was articulated by the Vienna School historians: the idea that art aiming to transcend its materiality was superior than the art that did not aim to do so. This was the essential argument of modern abstract art, what I defined as a transcendental intuitive logic. Modern abstract art aimed to transcend, while it was form of knowledge grounded in reason (logic) but also nourished by imagination and driven by non-rational forms of understanding (intuition). Architecture as an art was a transcendental intuitive logic: a form of modern abstract art.
3.1.2 MIES VAN DER ROHE: Modern Architecture as Non-objective Art

Image EP-4: Mies van der Rohe: Project for a brick country house, 1923; square House, 1951; Theo van Doesburg, Composition and Mondrian Composition 5, 1919 both published in G mag. n°3 (June 1924) ed. By Hans Richter with Gräff, Kiesler and Mies van der Rohe in the redaction team