

An analysis of Colin Rowe's methodological approaches – with particular reference to his 1961 essay on La Tourette – acknowledging dialectic as a creative methodology.

# The methodological approaches of Colin Rowe: the multifaceted, intellectual connoisseur at La Tourette

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In England, the establishment of art history as a professional discipline was consolidated by the foundation of the Courtauld Institute of Art in 1932, and the Warburg Library's move from Hamburg to London the following year due to the rise of the Nazi régime; a political situation that caused the emigration of German-speaking scholars such as Fritz Saxl, Ernst Gombrich and Rudolf Wittkower. Colin Rowe, an influential member of the second generation of historians of modern architecture, was educated as part of this cultural *milieu* in the postwar period, studying at the Warburg Institute in London. In the 'Addendum 1973' to his first published article 'The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa' (1947),<sup>1</sup> Rowe acknowledged the Wölfflinian origins of his analysis – Saxl and Wittkower had studied under Heinrich Wölfflin – and the validity of his inherited German formal methods. This assumption, in the opinion of one of Rowe's students, the architectural historian and critic Anthony Vidler,<sup>2</sup> indicated the 'still pervasive force of the late nineteenth century German school of architectural history in England in the years after the Second World War'.<sup>3</sup>

The impact that the German scholar of Renaissance and Baroque architecture Rudolf Wittkower had on Rowe is well known and widely acknowledged in the academic work of architectural historians.<sup>4</sup> Vidler is one of the contributors who has emphasised Wittkower's influence on Rowe's historical approach to modern architecture, analysing the origin and development of Rowe's thought in his written work from 1945 to 1950. In his chronological study, Vidler established the numerous intellectual debts Rowe owed to his former mentor – including thematic correlations, methodological approaches, modes of historical interpretation and formal analysis – present in Rowe's thesis, *The Theoretical Drawings of Inigo Jones: Their Sources and Scope*, completed in 1947,<sup>5</sup> and two articles published in *The Architectural Review*: 'The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa' and 'Mannerism and Modern Architecture', in 1947 and 1950, respectively.<sup>6</sup>

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*'[...] approaches [to] architectural analysis beyond Wittkower's analytic formalism that Rowe developed after his departure to the United States'*

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This article will focus on methodological approaches for architectural analysis *beyond* Wittkower's analytic formalism that Rowe developed after his departure to the United States in 1951. In particular, it will pay special attention to his critical article, conceived during a three-day visit to the recently completed monastery of La Tourette in December 1960, the result of which was published as 'Dominican Monastery of La Tourette, Eveux-sur-Arbresle, Lyons' in the June 1961 issue of *The Architectural Review*.<sup>7</sup> The monographic nature of Rowe's essay, coupled with the *in situ* analysis of the monastery, can be characterised as a singular work within his theoretical corpus. Vidler, who has already written on Rowe's analysis of La Tourette, considered the by-product of Rowe's essay to be 'one of the most difficult he [Rowe] had attempted', which resulted in 'a long reflection, or meditation, on the potentials of a visual analytic that he had developed since 1947 for a practical, experiential criticism'.<sup>8</sup> The ambiguity and complexity of 'La Tourette' leaves room for interpretation, as evidenced in Vidler's open conclusion, which established parallels between Erwin Panofsky's 'understanding of Scholastic architecture' and Rowe's analogous 'understanding of mannerist architecture'.<sup>9</sup> This article argues that in 'La Tourette', Rowe proposed a methodological union between two previously mutually exclusive concepts, thought and sensation, opening a new door to understanding the work of Le Corbusier and, more importantly, allowing theorists and historians to delve deeper towards the idea of a core of modern architecture.

### Colin Rowe and the American art historical tradition

Within this framework of methodological analysis, another of Rowe's students, first at the University of Texas at Austin and later at Cornell University, Alexander Caragonne, examined closely the brief but crucial episode in the history of architectural education developed at the University of Texas while Rowe was a member of the faculty.<sup>10</sup> In his book, *The Texas Rangers: Notes from an Architectural Underground*, Caragonne evaluated Rowe's contribution to the programme at the university from 1953 to 1956, establishing chronological distinctions within Rowe's writing. The first group of essays, the pre-Texas essays, illustrated the influence of the Warburg Institute, and particularly Wittkower, on Rowe's education during his academic training in England in the late 1940s. This circumstance prompted Rowe to choose a theme that closely followed Warburgian interests as a thesis subject and to use Wittkower's analytic methodology in his written work. The second group of essays, the Texas essays, reflected new interests that Rowe developed in the United States, which Caragonne categorised as the 'Superstructure' and 'Transparency' articles. The former category included Rowe's essays 'Chicago Frame' (1956) and 'Neo-Classicisim' and *Modern Architecture, I and II* (1956-7); the latter was characterised by 'Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal' (1955-6). Caragonne's distinction was significant because it exposed the development of Rowe's architectural discourse during his time in Texas. Rowe's departure to the United States in 1951 was a voluntary emigration motivated by his enthusiasm to learn from the American architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock who, at the time, was teaching at Yale University. Rowe justified the move in 1988 saying, 'I felt way back and I still feel today that I came to Yale, as they used to say, to sit at his feet.'<sup>11</sup>

Rowe's interest in the American art historical tradition was not new. It emerged after two Italian encounters, first in Florence in 1947 and later in Rome in 1950. The former chance encounter was an art historical confrontation between his Canadian travelling companion, Sydney Key, and an employee of a New York art magazine, Libby Tannenbaum – an event that, in Rowe's own words, 'was amusing for me because between Syd and Libby there developed a conversation from which I was completely excluded. [...] I felt myself reduced to utter insignificance'.<sup>12</sup> Even though Rowe described North America as 'odd' following the conversation, this initial encounter planted the seed for his eventual migration. The second chance encounter was with Arthur Brown, an architect who had been Georges Gromort's student at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris. Rowe described him as a 'great connoisseur' with whom he had an 'architectural revelation'.<sup>13</sup> Through their interactions, Rowe realised that Wittkower was not the sole authority pertaining to the subject of the Italian architect Carlo Rainaldi but that, in the United States, the same concern already existed expressed in

a different art historical language.<sup>14</sup> These two unexpected meetings broadened Rowe's mind and directly exposed him to an art and architectural approach that was completely different from the German academic tradition he had learned from Wittkower; a transformative occurrence that made him feel the need for his own experience in the United States.<sup>15</sup>

Rowe's analytical method was expanded in the United States. His first steps were directed by Hitchcock,<sup>16</sup> who initiated the American historical tradition of modern architecture with his book *Modern Architecture: Romanticism and Reintegration*, published in 1929. Rowe considered this to be Hitchcock's best book and the motive that persuaded him to study under Hitchcock at Yale. A year after Hitchcock's death in 1987, Rowe wrote an homage to his American adviser, an essay simply entitled 'Henry-Russell Hitchcock'. This text began with an encounter between Hitchcock and Bernard Berenson, the American art historian who specialised in the Renaissance, at Vallombrosa in 1955, recorded by the latter in his diaries.<sup>17</sup> Rowe imagined the possible conversation that the two Harvard graduates had that day, establishing a methodological confluence between them. The point of connection, he speculated, was Berenson's friend and Hitchcock's professor, the American art historian and medievalist, Arthur Kingsley Porter. Rowe characterised Porter's methodological approach by 'his excessive attention to facts at the expense of generalisations'; an opposition to the German idealism, which was already beginning to fade when Hitchcock was studying at Harvard in the early 1920s. This differentiation between empiricism and idealism caused Rowe to say, 'it must have been Kingsley Porter who had been responsible for the ultimate mental formation of the Russell Hitchcock whom I knew at Yale'.<sup>18</sup>

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**'[...] different ways of relating the history of architecture [...] represented by [...] Wölfflin's pupil Sigfried Giedion and [Henry Russell] Hitchcock, teaching at Harvard and Yale, respectively, when Rowe moved to the States'**

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These different ways of relating the history of architecture were represented by two of the leading historians of the modern movement, Wölfflin's pupil Sigfried Giedion and Hitchcock, teaching at Harvard and Yale, respectively, when Rowe moved to the States.<sup>19</sup> Two decades prior, Giedion and Hitchcock had published works that established them as upcoming scholars in the field of modern architecture. In 1928, in *Bauen in Frankreich, Bauen in Eisen, Bauen in Eisenbeton*, Giedion, the 'Philosopher Historian' as John Summerson labelled him in 1942,<sup>20</sup> clearly guided by ideological objectives, located the roots of modern architecture in the technological and engineering progress of France

of the nineteenth century. One year later, in *Modern Architecture*, Hitchcock accounted for this same evolution within the aesthetic realm. Hitchcock's analytical approach derived from his own first-hand impressions of the aesthetic expression of architecture.<sup>21</sup> He particularly valued one book, *The Architecture of Humanism: A Study in the History of Taste* by Geoffrey Scott. In his opinion, the architecture of the 'New Pioneers', which rested 'more centrally upon aesthetic', was 'the more comprehensible critically to those who are familiar with, if not altogether won to, Geoffrey Scott's theories'.<sup>22</sup> *Modern Architecture* concluded with a revealing late footnote in which Hitchcock acknowledged his personal affection to this 'partial study of the physiological aesthetic of architecture':

As this book goes to press I have learned of the death of Geoffrey Scott. It is more than sad to think that there may now be no further work on architecture from a pen that set forth the subject more brilliantly than has been done since Ruskin. But *The Architecture of Humanism* will continue to hold its place, reminding us of a time when Humanism had a brighter meaning than it has today.<sup>23</sup>

#### **Rowe's ambiguous duality: between the conceptual and the empirical traditions**

After the Second World War, the standard theoretical alternative to *The Architecture of Humanism* was Wittkower's *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, published in 1949. Wittkower himself clarified this in the first page of the book, refuting Scott's misinterpretations. These two works, especially influential in the Anglo-American context after the Second World War, established opposite arguments about Renaissance architecture. As Alina A. Payne has argued, Wittkower's humanism was an 'intellectual configuration' based on Platonic philosophy, Pythagorean mathematics, and Euclidean geometry. In contrast, Scott's humanism was described as the 'body-consciousness of Renaissance artistic production', according supremacy to the 'physical/perceptual moment over the rational/intellectual one'.<sup>24</sup> Scott's book was recommended by Rowe and the Swiss architect Bernhard Hoesli in their design course at the University of Texas, an unexpected move considering Rowe's academic training with Wittkower, whose book was not included in the reading list.<sup>25</sup> Rowe's intellectual stance between Wittkower and Scott, between science and connoisseurship, or, in other words, between German intellectual objectivity and Anglo-American experiential subjectivity, was indirectly expressed in an article published in the magazine *Summa+* in 2001. The text reported the reflections of Argentinian architect Alfonso Corona Martínez on the influence of Rowe's articles on the field of architecture. It included a valuable confession derived from his brief, but significant, epistolary exchange before Rowe's death. In this assessment, made at a time when Rowe was arguably most capable of balancing the entirety of his intellectual spectrum, he argued that there had not been

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#### **'Rowe underwent a methodological change due to his rejection of Wittkower's analytic tradition.'**

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anything written in the second half of the twentieth century within the theory of architecture that was comparable to Scott's and Wittkower's books.<sup>26</sup>

This ambiguous duality in Rowe's analytical approach to architecture has been highlighted by Peter Eisenman. He believed that Rowe underwent a methodological change due to his rejection of Wittkower's analytic tradition. The key rupture was Rowe's move 'from the abstract and conceptual tradition to the empirical tradition'.<sup>27</sup> The greatest sign of this empirical shift was a sudden attraction to an English architecture that he had, before, refused. The architect Edwin Lutyens became a central figure for Rowe. According to the architectural historian David Watkin, Lutyens was the personification of Scott's ideals. He believed that *The Architecture of Humanism* influenced him, especially after having discovered a copy of that book, belonging to Lutyens, signed and dated from December 1914, when the architect was on board the ship that took him to India.<sup>28</sup> Vidler categorised Rowe's use of these two opposite methodological attitudes as 'Rowe's ambiguous relationship' between the professional art history, 'represented by Wittkower and the Warburgians', and the gentleman amateur, 'cultivated by the English school and championed by Bernard Berenson'.<sup>29</sup>

Rowe gradually alternated Wittkower's analytic formalism with novel methodological approaches after his arrival to the United States. Rowe's essay 'Character and Composition; or Some Vicissitudes of Architectural Vocabulary in the Nineteenth Century' (1953-4) indicated, for Eisenman, the 'shift in voice from *Mathematics* to *Composition*', in other words, the 'waning influence of Wittkower and the passing influence of Hitchcock'.<sup>30</sup> The chronological significance of this article was evidenced by Eisenman's effort to determine the time when it was written, which, according to Rowe, was while he was at Yale, fourteen years before its publication in *Oppositions*. The article's shift from the more conceptual aspects of theory to the perceptual evidenced Hitchcock's influence and paralleled the publication of his book *Early Victorian Architecture in Britain* in 1954. This initial American influence on Rowe was palpable during his years teaching at the University of Texas at Austin. Rowe was impressed by the new inquiries that were in vogue at the time at Yale, in particular, in the field of analysis derived from Gestalt psychology. This visual approach was introduced in Texas after Rowe himself recommended candidates from Yale to teach new freshman drawing classes, several of whom were professors who had studied under the tutelage of Josef Albers. One of these professors, Robert Slutzky, who was fascinated with the relationship between architecture and painting, had applied

Gestalt psychology to the visual perception of twentieth-century art, a topic that inspired Rowe and Slutzky to co-write the text 'Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal' during their time in Texas.<sup>31</sup> Rowe's gradual shift in voice was again exhibited through the comparison between 'Mathematics of the Ideal Villa' and 'Transparency', two articles that attempted to unveil the hidden structures behind analysed objects, but from different standpoints; the first from the conceptual and the second from the perceptual. Christoph Schnoor, while studying the role of architectural space in Rowe's essays, stated that 'since Rowe argues at times with Gestalt theories, it may be seen as perceptual, but only in the abstract sense of an analytical perception, an intellectual way of seeing rather than an immediate, sensory perception'.<sup>32</sup> Together with Gestalt psychology-derived analysis, Rowe pursued a perceptual approach but from an empirical standpoint. Rowe's first attempt to put forward an experiential analysis of a body in motion was in 'Transparency', where he described the spatial stratifications that an observer would experience in the hypothetical axial approach to the auditorium of the Palace of the League of the Nations.<sup>33</sup> In his next article, 'Lockhardt, Texas', written with John Hejduk in 1957, Rowe included real subjective descriptions (urban and architectural) of the *promenade architecturale*, started at the central courthouse.<sup>34</sup> These types of analyses based on experiential descriptions were expanded in his essay on La Tourette. It is necessary to deconstruct this work in order to reconfigure a picture of Rowe's intent.

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#### **'La Tourette': the conscious equilibrium of two opposing analytic traditions**

Rowe began the text on 'La Tourette' in the same way that he had begun 'Mannerism and Modern Architecture' ten years previously: with reference to Le Corbusier's Villa Schwob at La Chaux-de-Fonds. The blank panel of its facade once again assumed the primary role within Rowe's discourse, becoming the element of comparison with the blank wall at the north side of the church of La Tourette. Both buildings possessed planar surfaces that, although they 'absorbed' the eye, they were 'unable to retain its attention'.<sup>35</sup> This initial similarity allowed Rowe to establish a chronological framework between Le Corbusier's first building of historical importance and his more recent works. Furthermore, it constructed a coherence of composition and intellectual unity with the stylistic change that the architect developed after the Second World War.

In the following paragraph, Rowe proposed a second comparison; this time, between the 'patterns of organisation' of the Athenian Acropolis and the

'spatial mechanics of the monastery's precinct',<sup>36</sup> which, according to Rowe, was Le Corbusier's subtle attempt at a commentary on Athenian material. This argument was supported by a paragraph consisting of several quotations, all drawn from various chapters of *Vers une Architecture*, in which Le Corbusier discussed the intrinsic relationship that existed between the apparent absence of order of the Acropolis' plan and the surrounding landscape. Part of Rowe's excerpt derived from the chapter 'Three Reminders to Architects: III. Plan'. The passage was an adaptation of the caption that Le Corbusier wrote in regard to a figure from Auguste Choisy's 1899 text, *Historie de l'Architecture*. Le Corbusier used this image to illustrate the experiential reading of the processional route of the Acropolis, the spatial sequence that the Soviet film director Sergei M. Eisenstein labelled 'the perfect example of one of the most ancient films'.<sup>37</sup> Choisy's sequential interpretation played a significant role in the elaboration of Le Corbusier's idea of the *promenade architecturale*. The idea of movement was insinuated in Choisy's image through the discontinuous line that appeared as a central focus, a notion that was expanded in the original volume by figures that revealed the sequential perspectives of the marked itinerary. In this third 'reminder', Le Corbusier established a causal relationship between the conceptual and the empirical: the plan was the generator of architecture, holding in itself the essence of sensation, but the spectator's eye, while in motion, was responsible for perceiving volume and surface. This idea was graphically reinforced by Le Corbusier's axonometric projections extracted from Choisy's book, a graphic resource which, as Yve-Alain Bois pointed out, was 'a mode of enunciating virtual movement',<sup>38</sup> because it stated the temporality of perception without referring to a fixed point of view.

Rowe's brief preamble was followed by an analysis of La Tourette based on an empirical methodology. This was supported by his subsequent narration of the casual visitor's sensory perception as he approached the monastery, the same critical method applied by his friend and pupil, James Stirling, in the essay 'Ronchamp: Le Corbusier Chapel and the Crisis of Rationalism' five years previously, published in 1956. Both authors deliberately selected Le Corbusier's most recent building and their analyses were based on visual perceptions experienced along a *promenade architecturale*, or, in Stirling's words, 'the usual procedure in examining buildings'.<sup>39</sup> This experiential mechanism of analysis had, in Eisenman's opinion, 'gradually become one of Rowe's favourite devices', because it was 'thought by Rowe to be free of an ideological content'.<sup>40</sup> The internal logic of the *promenade* derived from the *in situ* experience of the observer, an empirical observation of partiality without any predetermined general purpose. Eisenman's argument coincided with the idea that Rowe expounded in his 'Addendum 1973', where he recognised the validity of the Wölfflinian method

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because it appealed ‘primarily to what is visible’ and thus, ‘making the minimum of pretences to erudition’.<sup>41</sup>

In his description of the itinerary, or *promenade architecturale*, Rowe incorporated material on the topographical experience of the place, its architectural experience and visual perceptions, as well as optical impressions of a subjective nature, qualified by individual feeling and personal thought. The language used was familiar with physiological aesthetics, including descriptions such as ‘a bastion supporting gesticulating entrails’ and ‘one is obliged to exchange a reliable womb’.<sup>42</sup> This disposition to recognise body images in concrete forms was in alignment with Scott’s complementary principles, which professed, ‘we have transcribed ourselves into terms of architecture’ and ‘we transcribe architecture into terms of ourselves’.<sup>43</sup> A significant insight into Scott’s lasting influence on Rowe became evident from Rowe’s annotated pages from his copy of the 1924 edition of *The Architecture of Humanism*. Schnoor, after examining the Colin Rowe Library at the University of Texas at Austin, emphasised one particular sentence which summarised Scott’s intellectual impact on Rowe: ‘the whole of architecture is, in fact, unconsciously invested by us with human movement and human moods’.<sup>44</sup> This body-centred conception of architecture was articulated by Robert Maxwell, who highlighted that one of Rowe’s changes in architectural education, since his experience at the University of Texas, was that he ‘promoted buildings as people, with fronts and backs’ and he added, with this influence ‘students began saying things like “my building addresses the park”’.<sup>45</sup>

For Rowe, this first section of the article represented the ‘normal way of seeing’ a building, an ‘outside in’ discourse that considered La Tourette as a perceptual structure, exposing the complexities of volumes and surfaces while approaching this ‘*machine à émouvoir*’. In the second section, Rowe proposed an opposite formula with conceptual criteria in mind for the purpose of understanding La Tourette around what were, according to him, criteria for the ‘normal way of making’<sup>46</sup> a building. This ‘inside out’ system of analysis suggested withdrawing ‘attention from the more sensational aspects of the monastery and to consider instead what may be presumed to be its rationale’.<sup>47</sup> The article was a deliberate combination of two opposing methods: empirical-sensational judgement, and conceptual-intellectual judgement, an attitude that Maxwell summarised as ‘the insistence [of Rowe] on seeing architecture at the intersection of thought and feeling’.<sup>48</sup> Rowe’s and Stirling’s consciousness of the sensational and

intellectual qualities of architecture prompted them to analyse both buildings from these two diverse architectural analytical methodologies, with the ultimate aim of explaining the domain of influence of each criterion. In ‘La Tourette’, it was permissible for Rowe to use both methods in tandem. On the contrary, in ‘Ronchamp’ it was only possible for Stirling to use the first of these methods due to the ‘entirely visual appeal’ of the chapel and the ‘lack of intellectual participation’<sup>49</sup> demanded from the visitor.

In this ‘inside out’ section, Rowe returned to his conceptual analyses of the late 1940s. The determining element of the definitive solution for the building was, he argued, subordinated to Le Corbusier’s personal style, rejecting the functional programme as a decisive factor. Rowe insisted that the architect’s individual stylistic unity and coherence was reflected in Le Corbusier’s building, which maintained a consistency with the style of his previous designs. The final result was determined by a formal preference of the architect (Le Corbusier’s insistence on volumetric economy) linked to an abstract category (the ideal form of a Dominican establishment). These aprioristic deductions were, Rowe asserted, connected antithetically to the concrete conditions of location. In other words, a dialogue was established between opposites: between architecture and landscape, between a ‘statement of presumed universals’ and a contrary ‘statement of particulars’, between the ‘idealist gesture’ and the ‘empiricist veto’.<sup>50</sup> The merging of these elements constructed his blueprint for understanding La Tourette and its formal organisation. Rowe also added another immediate cause. La Tourette combined, within a single block, the structural model of the Maison Domino (a sandwich concept) exhibited in the living quarters and the structural schema of the Maison Citrohan (a megaron concept) used in the church: two structural systems that had previously been used independently of one another. Rowe deduced that this unusual combination was the cause of the ‘abnormality’ of the experience to which the visitor had been subjected. La Tourette appeared to be a sophisticated construction, able to ‘charge depth by surface’, to ‘condense spatial concavities into plane’, and to violate a unity of conception by forcing together opposite elements that instigated sensations like those of ‘tension and compression’, and ‘openness and density’.<sup>51</sup>

In 1976, a second, extended version of this article was included in the book, *The Mathematics*

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of the *Villa Ideal and Other Essays*. With the newly abbreviated title of 'La Tourette', this piece began with a note extracted from the first book published by the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditaciones del Quijote* (1914), an 'author whose newly translated works [Rowe] had consumed with a passion'.<sup>52</sup> The quotation dealt with the problem between depth and surface, placing the idea of 'foreshortening' as the ultimate situation where vision merged with intellect. From this perspective, 'La Tourette' was not only an analysis of Le Corbusier's building, it also expressed Rowe's theoretical position regarding the methodology of architectural analysis. Like Ortega, Rowe sought to bridge the dilemma enclosed by vision and intellect by denying the opposition between these two different ways of seeing the world and, therefore, of understanding architecture. The inseparable terms, 'impression' and 'concept', became a formula for exploring the reality of architecture. The proposed collaboration of these two antagonistic methodological approaches provided Rowe with an integrative point of view that enriched the discipline of architectural criticism by uniting Wittkower's and Scott's postulates as well as facilitating the interpretation of this singular work by Le Corbusier.

**Dialectic as a creative methodological philosophy**

The core of Rowe's methodological philosophy was located in *Vers une Architecture*. This second extended version of 'La Tourette' included additional new content extracted from Le Corbusier's book. Rowe added material from the chapter 'Architecture: II. The Illusion of Plans' to complement his initial paragraph, which included information from 'Three Reminders to Architects: III. Plan' and 'Architecture: III. Pure Creation of the Mind'. These three chapters all centred on aesthetic matters, the phenomenon of the *promenade architecturale*, and Le Corbusier's idea that architecture was both sensation and thought. The added quotation refocused the discussion towards a more conceptual discourse that took precedence over the previous sensational one regarding the approach behind La Tourette. Le Corbusier's passion for walls became the key generator of the building, with his consideration of the floor as a horizontal wall and the wall as a vertical floor. This equivalence between horizontal and vertical planes enabled Rowe to apply both methodologies of analysis to the 'vertical floors' and 'horizontal walls' of the monastery. At La Tourette, all elements could be 'referred to two distinct structures of argument'.<sup>53</sup> They could be related to optical desiderata as well as to conceptual requirements. This theory about the parity of

planes made the building a sort of 'dice', allowing it to free itself again from the limitations to which the idealist and empirical methodology had been subjected. This multifaceted methodological stance assumed by Rowe was not accidental, but rather, a deliberate response to the personal attributes of the architect who had designed La Tourette. In Rowe's opinion:

[Le Corbusier] is one of the few architects who have suppressed the demands of neither sensation nor thought. Between thought and sensation, he has always maintained a balance; [...] This is the obvious message; and thus, with Le Corbusier, the conceptual argument never really provides a sufficient pretext but has always to be reinterpreted in terms of perceptual compulsions.<sup>54</sup>

Rowe's article on La Tourette is presented as the text where he intended to clarify a fundamental dilemma that had emerged in his reading of *Vers une Architecture* and that he had denounced a decade earlier in 'Mannerism and Modern Architecture': 'the incapacity to define an attitude to sensation'.<sup>55</sup> The enormous importance that Le Corbusier attributed to the intellectual content of architecture was in direct juxtaposition with the value that he placed on sensory perception in his book. Although the business of architecture, as a plastic invention, was to establish invaluable emotional relationships, it was also an intellectual speculation that reflected thought. Le Corbusier's ambiguity between sensation and thought made it impossible for Rowe to provide an adequate answer to the meaning of words like 'comforting' ('comforting truths') or 'correct' (architecture is 'the masterly, correct and magnificent play of volumes brought together to light'), which could be interpreted indistinctly from an idealistic perspective ('the theory of the Renaissance') or from a sensorial point of view ('the theory of 1900').<sup>56</sup> This unresolved dilemma from 1950 was interpreted in 1978 as an attitude of balance between the two concepts that were inherent to the architect himself. For Rowe, the truly great artistic personalities were capable of reaching this balance in the design process and, ironically Rowe himself achieved a similar equilibrium between empiricism and idealism in his analysis of La Tourette. In the same way that Le Corbusier understood architecture as a 'total invention, which depends exclusively on who designs it',<sup>57</sup> the insightful Rowe proposed that the tools of architectural analysis used to understand the complexities of La Tourette were those that gave an answer to the absolutely personal 'style' of Le Corbusier. As Ortega pointed out:

real things are made of matter or energy; but artistic things – like the character of Don Quixote – are of a substance called style. Each aesthetic object is individuation of a protoplasm-style. Thus the individual Don Quixote is an individual of the species of Cervantes.<sup>58</sup>

**The architecture of good intentions**

The great importance that Rowe attributed to artistic personalities was due to his progressive

rejection of the spirit of the age initiated in the United States, an echo that traces back to ‘Character and Composition’, which Eisenman considered a premonition of the Rowe who rejected ‘modern architecture, the zeitgeist, and all that is purported to be rational and scientific’.<sup>59</sup> The zenith of this position was exemplified in the last book that he wrote as a sole author, *The Architecture of Good Intentions: Towards a Possible Retrospect*, published in 1994. This ultimate contribution to the life of ideas, written following Rowe’s characteristic oblique approach, subtly maintains ties to both Wittkower and Scott. Divided into five chapters, it is characterised by a destructive-constructive structure comparable to Scott’s *The Architecture of Humanism*. Though similar to Scott’s framework, Rowe’s layout was more balanced, where the destructive chapters (‘Epistemology’, ‘Eschatology’) did not ‘overweigh’<sup>60</sup> the constructive ones (‘Iconography’, ‘Mechanism’, ‘Organism’).

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***‘[...] fantasies that had, according to him, become devoid of meaning, held together by prejudice and blind passion.’***

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In the ‘destructive’ portion, Rowe attempted to display and dismantle what he considered to be the constellation of ideas that gave rise to the emergence of a new architecture after 1919, a collection of fantasies that had, according to him, become devoid of meaning, held together by prejudice and blind passion. In ‘Epistemology’, Rowe scrutinised the paradox of two doctrines that remained invisible within the roots of modern architecture: the architect seen as the ‘dedicated servant of technology’ (a positivist argument about the architect as a scientist) and also the ‘executive of the *Zeitgeist*’ (a historicist argument about the architect as a protagonist of the will of the epoch). In ‘Eschatology’, Rowe discussed the fallacy of the modern architect assuming a prophetic role, responsible for the salvation of the twentieth century while severing from the visual chaos of the ‘diseased’ nineteenth century. The objectives of these two chapters paralleled those pursued by Scott through his fallacies: to demonstrate how untenable these misconceptions were, to trace how they arose, and to reveal why they were still accepted. It appears that Rowe concurred with Scott’s observation, that ‘in these matters, it is not enough to argue against an opinion: the opinion will remain unless the roots of it are exposed’.<sup>61</sup>

The third chapter, ‘Iconography’, introduced the ‘constructive’ part of the text. Just as Wittkower had made a decisive contribution by connecting the problem of form and meaning of Renaissance architecture, in *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, Rowe sought to forge a similar path with reference to the earlier twentieth century, unravelling the supposed opposition of modern architecture to the nineteenth-century

impulse towards symbolic meaning. In order to substantiate the idea that modern architecture was not symbolically neutral, Rowe focused on one architect: Le Corbusier. Using Wittkower’s text as a model, Rowe placed Le Corbusier into the role of Leon Battista Alberti and established comparisons that revealed the diverse symbolic content between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries. While Alberti searched for the recovery of antiquity, Le Corbusier searched for a discovery, a standpoint that invoked a ‘dialectic between a highly elevated conception of mechanism and a highly edited conception of antiquity’.<sup>62</sup> As in ‘La Tourette’, where Rowe represented Le Corbusier as the result of a dialogue between thought and sensation, in ‘Iconography’, Le Corbusier remained a product of these two approaches: the ideology of French positivism (engineering) and the influence of Vienna with its theories of pure visibility (aesthetics).

Rowe ended the chapter by alluding to two drawings of ‘opposition’ by Le Corbusier: ‘the face of Medusa and the sun’ (published on the cover of the book) and ‘The Tasks of the Engineer/The Tasks of the Architect’. These images revealed Rowe’s deep-rooted fascination with establishing a dialectic between non-compatible elements, speculating on the product that emerged from their union. It appeared to be the resolution of the last two chapters, ‘Mechanism’ and ‘Organism’, where Rowe defined the lineage of these two title concepts within the French mechanist tradition and its counterpart, the German and Anglo-American organicist tradition, deducing that modern architecture was a composite of both.

The same approach to placing opposing entities side-by-side recurs in several of Rowe’s own texts but, in ‘La Tourette’, this duality is more pronounced because it is interwoven on different levels. First, within the structure of the article, the empirical methodology professed by Scott was complemented by the conceptual methodology supported by Wittkower, equipping architectural criticism with a multifaceted lens that enriched the discipline. Second, through the interpretation of this singular work, Rowe revealed that the Dominican monastery itself was a combination of two opposed structural systems represented by the *Maison Domino* (which emphasised horizontal planes) and the *Maison Citrohan* (which emphasised vertical planes). Third, through the intimate analysis of the building, Rowe offered insights into the nuances of Le Corbusier’s ambiguous personality. This recurring interest in the expression of dialectics was one of the reasons why Rowe experienced such an attraction to Le Corbusier and his architectural work. Through his in-depth analysis, *La Tourette* became central to Rowe’s stimuli, and forged a new way of thinking and understanding into the folds of modern architecture.<sup>63</sup>

This fixation on dialectics comprised the foundation of Rowe’s academic philosophy, as evidenced when he defined the duty of the educator within these same parameters: first, ‘to encourage the student to believe in architecture

and Modern architecture', second, 'to encourage the student to be sceptical about architecture and Modern architecture', and third, 'to cause the student to manipulate, with passion and intelligence, the subjects or objects of his conviction and doubt'.<sup>64</sup> Rowe envisioned this interaction between conflicting ideas as a creative method capable of innovation, a continuous exchange in which both entities retain their individualism but are constantly enriched by their reciprocity, a fluctuation that triggers the creation of new realities. Through this exchange, Rowe unlocked the potential to open innovative pathways within

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*'interaction between conflicting ideas as a creative method [...], a continuous exchange in which both entities retain their individualism but are constantly enriched by their reciprocity.'*

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the conceptual and productive veins of architects, urban designers, critics and theorists of the second half of the twentieth century.

## Notes

1. Published in Colin Rowe, *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976), p. 16.
2. For more information regarding Vidler's interactions with Rowe, see Anthony Vidler, 'Two or Three Things I Know about Him', *ANY*, 7/8 (1994), 44–7.
3. Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), p. 61.
4. Some of the historians that have discussed Wittkower's impact on Rowe are Alina A. Payne, 'Rudolf Wittkower and Architectural Principles in the Age of Modernism', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 53 (1994), 322–42; Monica Centanni, 'Per una iconologia dell'intervallo: Tradizione dell'antico e visione retrospettiva in Aby Warburg', in *L'architettura come testo e la figura di Colin Rowe*, ed. by Mauro Marzò (Venezia: Marsilio, 2010), pp. 59–72; Katia Mazzucò, 'L'incontro di Colin Rowe con Rudolf Wittkower e un'immagine del cosiddetto "metodo warbugiano"', in *L'architettura come testo*, ed. by Marzò, pp. 73–96; Francesco Benelli, 'Rudolf Wittkower e Colin Rowe: continuità e frattura', in *L'architettura come testo*, ed. by Marzò, pp. 97–112; Mollie Claypool, 'The Consequences of Dialogue and the Virgilian Nostalgia of Colin Rowe', *Architecture and Culture*, 4:3 (2016), 359–67; and Vidler in *Histories of the Immediate Present*, pp. 61–104.
5. Rowe began his thesis in 1945 when he was Wittkower's only Master's student at the University of London. The thesis was, in Vidler's words, 'an extraordinary synthesis of historical interpretation derived from Wittkower and formal analysis derived from Wölfflin'. Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present*, p. 66.
6. Rowe had been influenced by Wittkower's previous articles, including 'Michelangelo's Biblioteca Laurenziana', *The Art Bulletin*, 16 (1934), 123–218; 'Pseudo-Palladian Elements in English Neoclassicism', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 6 (1943), 154–64; 'Principles of Palladio's Architecture – I', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 7 (1944), 102–22; 'Principles of Palladio's Architecture – II', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 8 (1945), 68–106; 'Inigo Jones, Architect and Man of Letters', *RIBA Journal*, 60 (1953), 83–90.
7. Colin Rowe was not the only architect who was interested in La Tourette at this time. Alison Smithson and Aldo Rossi also wrote articles referring to this building: 'Couvent de la Tourette, Eveux-sur-l'Arbresle, Nr. Lyon, France', *Architectural Design*, 28 (November 1958), 462; 'Il convento de La Tourette di Le Corbusier', *Casabella*, 246 (December 1960), 4–19, respectively.
8. Anthony Vidler, 'Reckoning with Art History: Colin Rowe's Critical Vision', in *Reckoning with Colin Rowe: Ten Architects Take Position*, ed. by Emmanuel Petit (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 48. This essay was a revised and expanded version of his article, 'Up Against the Wall: Colin Rowe at La Tourette', *Log*, 24 (2012), 7–17.
9. Vidler, 'Reckoning with Art History', p. 52.
10. Branden R. Engel, 'Ambichronous Historiography: Colin Rowe and the Teaching of Architectural History', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 14 (2016), 1–22. This article investigates and brings new light to Rowe's approach to teaching at Texas.
11. Colin Rowe, 'Henry-Russell Hitchcock', in *As I was Saying: Volume 1: Texas, Pre-Texas*, Cambridge, ed. by Alexander Caragone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), p. 21.
12. Colin Rowe, 'Two Italian Encounters', in *As I was Saying: Volume 1: Texas, Pre-Texas*, Cambridge, ed. by Alexander Caragone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), p. 5.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.
14. Rowe thought that Wittkower's article 'Carlo Rainaldi and the Architecture of the High Baroque in Rome', *Art Bulletin*, 19 (1937), 242–313, was the pre-eminent source regarding Rainaldi.
15. Rowe's perception of American culture can be traced through the letters he wrote to his parents during his time in the States. See *The Letters of Colin Rowe: Five Decades of Correspondence*, ed. by Daniel Naegele (London: Artifice Books, 2015).
16. Rowe won a Fulbright scholarship to study with Henry-Russell Hitchcock at Yale.
17. Bernard Berenson, *Sunset and Twilight: From the Diaries of 1947–1958* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1963), p. 399.
18. Rowe, 'Henry-Russell Hitchcock', p. 13.
19. Wittkower had advised Rowe in favour of Harvard, but he instead decided upon Yale due to Hitchcock's position on the faculty.
20. John Summerson, 'The Philosopher Historian', *Architectural Review*, 91 (1942), 126. This text corresponds to the review that Summerson wrote for Giedion's book *Space, Time and Architecture*.
21. A comparison of the types of illustrations that both authors used to explain the same building confirmed their different proposed analyses. Giedion emphasised the construction and

- engineering aspects related to the new building materials with plans, sections, exterior and interior photographs, while Hitchcock, exclusively focused on aesthetic considerations with exterior photographs (of fifty-eight images, only three showed the interior of the building and the rest displayed facades or volumes in isolation).
22. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Modern Architecture: Romanticism and Reintegration* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), p. 236.
  23. Ibid.
  24. Payne, 'Rudolf Wittkower and Architectural Principles', 333.
  25. Scott's book was included in the reading list for the courses Arc. 525 and 526, 1954–5. See Alexander Caragone, *The Texas Rangers: Notes from an Architectural Underground* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), p. 428.
  26. Alfonso Corona Martínez, 'Respe(c) to a Colin Rowe', *Summa+*, 47 (2001), 132.
  27. Peter Eisenman, 'Not the Last Word: The Intellectual Sheik', *ANY*, 7/8 (1994), 68.
  28. David Watkin, 'Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869–1944): The Greatest British Architect?', in *Maestros de la arquitectura moderna en la Residencia de Estudiantes*, ed. by Salvador Guerrero (Madrid: Residencia de Estudiantes, 2009), pp. 236–41.
  29. Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present*, p. 63.
  30. Peter Eisenman, 'The Rowe Synthesis', in *L'architettura come testo*, ed. by Marzo, pp. 49–50.
  31. This connection between modern painting and modern architecture had already been expounded by Hitchcock in *Painting Toward Architecture* (1948). The practical and experimental character of the book was received with open arms by the new academic staff of the University of Texas. Furthermore, Hoesli and Rowe, stimulated by its contents, included the book in the reading list for the courses Arc. 525 and 526, 1954–5. See Caragone, *The Texas Rangers*, p. 428.
  32. Christoph Schnoor, 'Colin Rowe: Space as Well-Composed Illusion', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 5 (2011), 22.
  33. Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, 'Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal', *Perspecta*, 8 (1963), 53–4.
  34. Colin Rowe and John Hejduk, 'Lockhardt, Texas', *Architectural Record*, 121 (March 1957), 202–04.
  35. Colin Rowe, 'Dominican Monastery of La Tourette, Eveux-sur-Arbresle, Lyons', *The Architectural Review*, 129 (June 1961), 401.
  36. Ibid.
  37. Sergei M. Eisenstein, Yve-Alain Bois and Michael Glenny, 'Montage and Architecture', *Assemblage*, 10 (1989), 117.
  38. Ibid., 114.
  39. James Stirling, 'Ronchamp: Le Corbusier Chapel and the Crisis of Rationalism', *The Architectural Review*, 119 (March 1956), 156.
  40. Eisenman, 'The Intellectual Sheik', 69.
  41. Rowe, 'The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa', in *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa*, p. 16.
  42. Rowe, 'Dominican Monastery of La Tourette', 402.
  43. Geoffrey Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism: A Study in the History of Taste* (London: Constable, 1924), p. 213.
  44. Schnoor, 'Colin Rowe: Space as Well-Composed Illusion', 15. Quote extracted from Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism*, p. 213.
  45. Robert Maxwell, 'Mannerism and Modernism: The Importance of Irony', in *Reckoning with Colin Rowe*, ed. by Petit, pp. 30–1.
  46. Rowe changed the word 'making' to 'conceiving' in the 1976 edition.
  47. Rowe, 'Dominican Monastery of La Tourette', 407.
  48. Maxwell, 'Mannerism and Modernism', p. 30.
  49. Stirling, 'Ronchamp', 161.
  50. These two concepts were similar to the two types of forms, the 'generic form' and the 'specific form', developed by Eisenman in his doctoral dissertation two years later at the University of Cambridge, 'The Formal Basis of Modern Architecture'. A facsimile edition was published in 2006.
  51. Rowe, 'Dominican Monastery of La Tourette', 410.
  52. Vidler, 'Reckoning with Art History', p. 48.
  53. Rowe, 'La Tourette', in *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa*, p. 196.
  54. Ibid.
  55. Rowe, 'Mannerism and Modern Architecture', in *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa*, p. 295.
  56. Ibid., p. 296.
  57. Hugues Desalle, 'Le Corbusier: El mensaje en una botella', *Pasajes de Arquitectura y Crítica*, 9 (1999), 71.
  58. José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditaciones del Quijote* (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 1984), p. 87.
  59. Eisenman, 'The Rowe Synthesis', p. 50.
  60. Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism*, p. 259. In the epilogue of his 1924 edition, Scott responded to criticism on *The Architecture of Humanism* and agreed that 'the destructive portion of the book overweighs the constructive'.
  61. Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism*, pp. 259–60.
  62. Colin Rowe, *The Architecture of Good Intentions: Towards a Possible Retrospect* (London: Academy Editions, 1994), p. 53.
  63. For further evidence, see Colin Rowe, 'The Provocative Facade: Frontality and *Contrapposto*', in *As I was Saying: Volume 2: Cornelliana*, ed. by Alexander Caragone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 174–203.
  64. Colin Rowe, 'Colin Rowe: On Architectural Education', *ANY*, 7/8 (1994), 48.

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