

Saturday, 16 June
9.00-11.45

Track: Mediations
Room: *National Library, Main Conference Hall*

COMING BACK TO HAUNT YOU: THE HISTORY OF REJECTING HISTORY IN ARCHITECTURE

Session chair: Mari Hvattum, Oslo School of Architecture and Design

At least since the mid-nineteenth century, architects and architectural theorists have routinely rejected history. From Heinrich Hübsch's insistence on a contemporary style to Le Corbusier's fantasies about the tabula rasa, the idea of architecture's absolute contemporaneity has long been something of a commonplace. And yet, history crops up in surprising ways in the midst of attempts to exorcise it. Alois Riegl, for one, while insisting that art and architecture belongs to its time, also conceded that no time could reach 'aesthetic fulfilment' by its own means alone. Riegl's argument is intriguing. The past, by virtue of its otherness, provides something that contemporary culture, with its seamless conformity to the *Zeitgeist*, is incapable of providing. The present, it seems, needs history to constitute itself qua contemporaneity.

The involuntary presence of history in nineteenth- and twentieth-century architecture is the topic of this session. Studying the history of history's rejection, we invite scholars to explore the multifarious ways the past comes back to haunt any attempt to reject it. The spectre takes many forms. Karl Bötticher, for instance, was one of the many nineteenth-century architects who insisted that architecture had to respond strictly to the conditions of the present. In an interesting twist, however, Bötticher included the past—its beliefs, material culture, and accumulated experience—as a constituent factor of the contemporary era, thus smuggling history back into the equation. The insistence on contemporaneity, then, comes with its own particular historicity, like the way James Joyce made Leopold Bloom's day into a vehicle of history or T.S. Eliot insisted on tradition as the very precondition for the modernist break with the past.

PAPERS:

The Great Labyrinth: Schinkel's Struggles Against History

Emma Letizia Jones, ETH Zürich

Between the 1820s and early 1830s, the Prussian architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel made several attempts to produce a tectonic ideal born of an architecture without any 'style'. These attempts, according to Schinkel's own assessment, were all failures. Around 1835, he produced a piece of writing intended for publication in an architectural textbook for students, but which remained only in the pages of his notebook. This text contains one of the most candid confessions in architectural literature, for it not only highlights the deep insecurities of an architect assumed to be at the peak of his career, but also reveals his fraught relationship to the question of history. Schinkel's philosophical position laid out in the text leads him to seek new expressions of form that can reflect absolute, Idealist principles. But in conflating ideal architecture with its historical referents, Schinkel inadvertently traps himself in a double bind, in which history presents itself at every turn in the futile search for the new and the universal.

This paper investigates Schinkel's text as an expression of his imprisonment in the 'labyrinth' (as he called it) of style: his attempt, first, to escape it, and then – as he felt this was impossible – his resignation toward historicism in later projects, and his disowning of his own radical earlier work ('I fell into the error of pure radical abstraction'). It will also touch on the emancipation from historicism of Schinkel's own pupils, who were ironically liberated in their search for the 'new' by technological advancements beyond their control: a luxury never afforded to Schinkel himself.

The paper juxtaposes Schinkel's unpublished text with his built works and works on paper, as a means of exposing both the discrepancies between the architect's theory and

his practice. These oppositions not only highlight Schinkel's unresolved confrontations with the labyrinth of style, but also serve to position the quest for the 'new' in architecture as a central concern of Schinkel and his Idealist contemporaries in early nineteenth century Berlin. Yet, as will be shown, the attempt to liberate form from its historically established incarnations remained for Schinkel beset by the intrusion of pre-established historical narratives; a feedback loop only to be repeated by the early twentieth century modernists in their own attempts at a similar kind of emancipation.

The Modernity of Rejecting Modernity in Architecture

Richard Wittman, University of California at Santa Barbara

This paper presents an inverted example of the phenomenon described in the panel brief; one in which it was modernity that was rejected in favour of history, but in which the modern stubbornly returns as the foil that allows the historical to constitute itself as such. This example thereby illuminates the deeper phenomenon at work in the dynamic described in the brief, namely, the mutual reinforcement of past and present in the historicist perspective.

The example concerns the initiatives to highlight Rome's Christian material heritage launched by Pope Pius IX upon his return to the city following the suppression of the 1848-1849 Republican uprising. Aimed at reconfirming Rome's providential Christian status, this work involved several major church restorations, particularly targeting Paleochristian and medieval buildings, as well as the foundation of a Commission of Sacred Archaeology charged with excavating and publicizing Christian antiquities. Ostensibly rooted in the antipathy of the Catholic leadership towards the social, political, and philosophical developments of the previous half-century, this concerted emphasis on the Christian past presented itself as drawing a veil of oblivion over a modernity that it implicitly locates elsewhere. Yet as these various initiatives unfolded after 1850, the problem of how to handle the new elements associated with these works was consistently resolved in favour of a modern treatment. This was true for architectural elements and for the frescos that sometimes replaced unsalvagable old ones, as well as for the shelters built to protect newly excavated ancient Christian sites. This paper will argue that the evident modernity of these new elements was necessary to heighten the historical 'depth of field' in which the ancient features adjacent to them were seen, illuminating their present relevance with a clarity often lacking in the Romantic historicizing frames typically deployed in such situations in the 1820s or 1830s.

Riegl's Untimely Walls

Lucia Allais, Princeton University

Every time Alois Riegl's work is re-examined, his argument about the multiple temporalities of aesthetic modernity is illustrated with a new set of artefacts. Piranesi's etchings of overgrown Roman ruins dominated the pages of the English translation of his 'Modern Cult of Monuments' in 1982. More recent commentaries have featured fragments of ancient Greece, or the remnants of recent monument wars. Yet even as all the minor genres that Riegl studied have been unearthed—from Dutch group portraits to belt buckles, from baroque cupolas to Assyrian bas-reliefs—one kind of artefact in the Riegl catalogue has remained stubbornly untimely: the wall. Painted and sculpted walls, and in particular late-medieval mural paintings and late-Roman bas-reliefs, were crucial support for Riegl's ideas. Yet they have fallen through the cracks between his two historiographic personas. In architecture Riegl is a prophet of monumental values, and of their spatialization in twentieth century architecture. In art history Riegl is a prophet of visuality whose analyses prefigured the cerebral, relational, structured, or patterned qualities of modern art.

In this paper I address Riegl's walls as hybrid and untimely media. I focus on the walls Riegl visited as an inspector for the Austro-Hungarian empire in 1897-1903. These walls are hard for us to appreciate today because—to speak Riegl's language—their 'distance from our taste' has remained so vast. Yet by encountering their shallow murality, and their shifting dimensions of illusionistic depth, we find Riegl's definition of aesthetic

modernity: a condition where sensorial distance vis-a-vis an artefact is not only a perceptive factor in its formal appreciation, but a position from which the epistemology of multiple temporalities is made available.

Collage/Camouflage: Mies's and Reich's Strategies to Engage the Past

Laura Martínez de Guereñu, IE School of Architecture and Design, Madrid-Segovia

When Mies selected the site for the German Pavilion at the International Exposition of Barcelona (September 1928), the eight Ionic columns framing it across the Plaza de Bellos Oficios were not yet there. They would not be placed there until December 1928, after Mies had already been working on the Pavilion project for three months. Mies responded to the enfilade of classical columns by incorporating them as architectural signs of the past and composing a collage with the Pavilion's modern architectural elements (free-standing metalwork screens, cruciform chrome plated columns, an empty display case). During its ephemeral existence of eight months (May 1929–January 1930), the Pavilion would be seen across the eight Ionic columns, completely transforming the boundaries between its interior and exterior.

Mies and Reich designed another 16,000 square metres of exhibition spaces to accommodate the products of 350 German industries, inside the eight Noucentista Palaces that Spain had made available to Germany free of charge. In these interiors, which Mies knew well from his first visit to Barcelona in June 1928, Mies and Reich camouflaged the columns and entablatures of historical styles and transformed the Noucentista spaces into modern, unadorned, and consistent environments full of chromed display cases.

This paper will explore and compare the two different reactions that Mies and Reich had to the unexpected presence of history, both in the form of the eight Ionic columns framing the Pavilion site (collage) and the Noucentista spaces (camouflage). It will reveal what the narrow lens of tabula rasa modernism has impeded us from understanding: that Mies and Reich's free-plan layout and abstract architectural elements emerged in an engaged conversation with the past.

Specters of Modernism

Mari Lending, Oslo School of Architecture and Design

Jacques Derrida's 1993 book on hauntology, *Specters of Marx*, was also an enlightenment-inspired political meditation on loss and mourning. This paper will revisit Derrida's theory on spectral moments with an eye to architectural historiography, taking as its point of departure a plaster cast drama that unfolded at Yale University in the mid-twentieth century.

'Too much history leaves little room for work', Josef Albers claimed in the essay 'Historisch oder Jetztig?' ('Historical or Contemporary?'), published in 1924 while he was still teaching in Weimar. Traditional art and architecture education was 'at least three hundred years behind the times', all about 'note-taking and copying', while the Bauhaus aimed at reintegrating art education and practical action 'into harmony with the actual demands of contemporary life'. This neat teleology Albers would rehearse and refine inexorably, yet his revulsion with 'retrospection' and 'backward-looking' reached its most dramatic expression when he, in 1950, in person, exorcised the biggest collection of plaster cast at any American university. A decade later, Paul Rudolph came across 200 casts that had survived Albers' iconoclasm, and mounted these exquisite nineteenth-century objects across his 1963 Art & Architecture Building at Yale University, creating an unforeseen constellation of cast concrete and plaster casts, and not least a striking chronotope and a ghostly polychronic spectacle.

Ghosts are characterized by being out of place, as well as by distorting conventional conceptions of time. Ghosts haunt, in a Derridean mannerism, by being a '*non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present*', producing movements that rely on

disjointing, disjunction, and disproportion. Furtive and untimely, the apparition of the specter evokes discourses of violence, melancholy, and fantasies about the future that have also left their mark on the history of architectural modernism.