

Distance as Space: Casting Marginality Out

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If the first histories of architecture did not address space by naming it as such, the concept operated under cover—suggested by terms like order, rationality, proportion, rhythm, harmony—and was turned into a powerful epistemological tool. Not only did it distinguish the “good” from the “bad,” but it came to differentiate between architecture and non-architecture. From Seroux d’Agincourt (1783/1823) to the 1901 edition of Banister Fletcher’s A History of Architecture, its referentiality had been progressively refined, associated with the norms and principles of architecture. Meanwhile, its misconception, deriving by a defective use of its substitutive terms and by an excess of decoration, came to be associated with non-canonical architecture. For describing the wide categories of “Gothic” and “Arab” architecture, previously unconsidered, Seroux referred to their “particularités bizarres et monstrueuses,” while Fletcher defined the non-Western styles by stressing their appeal for decoration. For Fletcher, these were “non-historic” architectures, an exclusion that designated them as incapable of dealing with Reason (as remarked by Gülsüm Baydar in 1998) and, thus, unclassifiable as architecture. This paper examines how architectural historiography cast its peripheral territories even further away by assessing their production in terms of space. In doing so, it tackles the notion of “distance” both as the gap between two points (where one is perceived as central) and connected to the idea of measure. By deriving marginality from the conceptualization of space, my aim is to question the notions of order and rationalization (used to define space) as conveyors of (implicit) violence, expressed by the very act of exclusion (following Rousseau’s Discourse on Inequality, 1754).

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If “peripheral” cultures were left aside by the historiographical discourse of architectural surveys, this happened not only because of their geographical marginality, but mainly because they failed to fit into the shared canon. Such an elision was clearly a matter of physical distance, which induced intellectual myopia. But was distance, differently pondered, responsible as well for deciding what was non-canonical?

I argue in this paper that the discipline of architectural history forged its discourse by assessing its objects—most often understood as “monuments,” a rising notion at that time—in terms of space, succeeding thus to cast even further away its peripheral territories. I then reformulate the question posed above: is the canon a matter of orders? Or is it primarily a matter of order? By deriving marginality from the conceptualization of space, I interrogate the notions of order and rationalization (employed to define space) as conveyors of (implicit) violence, expressed by the very act of exclusion.

Seen through this lens, the history of architecture, founded as a discipline at the beginning of the nineteenth century, appears as the history of staging space. In this fundamental equation, the concept of space plays a double role, defining the very essence of architecture and, on its basis, sketching a geographical taxonomy of its legitimacy.

In my analysis, I use the notion of “distance” as both a methodological tool and an epistemological element. I will explore the discourse of architectural historiography without any pretention to deliver an exhaustive picture of the different tides and drifts stirring its dynamics through more than the two last centuries. Moreover, I will take recourse to shortcuts, assuming that the backdrop is already known.

Preamble: On Space and its Meanings

Space was not addressed as such in the first histories of architecture, just as it had not been discussed in the architectural treatises. However, the idea of space was already present, prefiguring the concept allusively referred to through terms like order, rationality, proportion, rhythm, harmony. Its shaping took place progressively and was closely related to the forging of yet another key-concept for the era of modernity, that is, historicity—as if the entry in the swirl of this latter concept, as framed by the Hegelian philosophy of history, required a specific spatial framing for its development. Both space and historicity embraced an exclusive logic, leaving outside their boundaries

those cultures and territories that did not comply with or did not rise to their principles. That was a paradox, given the fact that both concepts emerged as powerful epistemological tools for assessing the expanding horizons of modernity.

The conceptualization of the history of architecture thus paralleled the switch in theorization of the discipline's principles, pursuing intertwined paths. But before looking into that, I would like to briefly consider two well-known discourses—the Abbé Laugier on the primitive hut and Rousseau on the origin of inequalities among mankind—whose input on space was fundamental for the further development of the discipline.

Marc-Antoine Laugier's revisiting the notion of primitive hut in his *Essay on Architecture* (1753) represented one of the most important steps in conceptualizing space. Though apparently adhering to the Vitruvian trope of the origins, Laugier brought a new insight, looking at the "rustic hut," as he called it, as the very model of architecture "upon which all the magnificences [...] have been imagined."¹ He praised its capacity to create typologies as a model—"Never was a principle more fruitful in its consequences"—but also its essential nature, revealing the logic of architecture: "it is in the essential parts that all the beauties consist [...], all the licenses [...] in the parts introduced by need [...], all the defects [...] in the parts adjoined by caprice."² If Laugier's interpretation presented the hut as a norm of procedure,³ then it meanwhile induced a clear hierarchy in apprehending what architecture is in terms of normative space, referring indirectly to the importance of the canon. Laugier's reflections on the evolution of the discipline, in the beginning of the book, implicitly state that the normativised space/procedure was materialized at its best by the perfect forms invented by the Greeks, which degenerated afterwards due to "the barbarity of succeeding ages, [that] created a new system of Architecture, wherein unskillful proportions, ornaments ridiculously connected and heaped together, presented stones as paper work, unformed, ridiculous and superfluous."⁴

Two years after Laugier's *Essay* was first printed, another text tackled space as an essential matter, but in a completely different manner. Its author, the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, employed a similar Vitruvian description—albeit much more elaborate—of the origins of architectural artifacts as a key argument for understanding (social) inequality. Rousseau was not interested in architectural typologies, but in the consequences triggered by the discipline delimitating spaces: "The first man who, having enclosed off a piece of land, got the idea of saying 'This is mine' and found people simple

1 Marc-Antoine Laugier, *Essai sur l'architecture* (Paris: Duchesne, 1753). For the English edition, I have used *An Essay on Architecture in Which Its True Principles are Explained and Invariable Rules proposed for Directing the Judgement and Forming the Taste of the gentleman and the Architect* (London: T. Osborne and Shipton, 1755), 12-13.

2 I used here the French original text, 14, as the English version omitted part of the phrase. The translation is mine.

3 See Barry Bergdoll, *European Architecture 1750-1890* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 12.

4 Laugier, *Essay on Architecture*, 4. The English translation rounded the edges of Laugier's harsh critique: "La barbarie des siècles postérieurs (...) fit naître un nouveau système d'architecture, où les proportions ignorent, les ornements bisarrement configurés & puérilement entassés, n'offroient que des pierres en découpures, de l'informe, du grotesque, de l'excessif" (4).

enough to believe him was the true founder of civil society.” But this society, as further explained the philosopher, was far from embodying a community, being originally based on discrimination: “What crimes, what wars, what murders, what miseries and horrors would someone have spared the human race who, pulling out the stakes or filling in the ditch, had cried out to his fellows, ‘Stop listening to this imposter. You are lost if you forget that the fruits belong to everyone and the earth belongs to no one.’”⁵

At a first glance, there is no correspondence between the two texts, the Vitruvian myth of architectural origins left aside. And, undoubtedly, Laugier and Rousseau addressed different issues and with different aims. Nevertheless, both made their point by conceptualizing space, designating it as a fundamental element for thinking architecture and, in the same time, for existing in the world. In both discourses, spatial conceptualization and the affirmation of its primacy induced automatically a form of exclusion—from a declared canon/from a supposed community—engendering thus an act of violence, acknowledged or not.

Shaping Distance

The hut turned out to be a central concept for thinking architecture in the century to come, and even more so in the first half of the one to follow.

In Quatremère de Quincy’s *Encyclopedia of Architecture* (first published in 1788), the hut was bestowed an important place, a whole article being dedicated to it.⁶ Certainly, Quatremère considered the hut, in the entry on “Architecture,” as the paradigm of the Greek temple, but his interest in the object had been most probably motivated (also) by a belief in a history of architecture embracing two spheres: the art of building, “common to all the nations and the peoples,” and the very art of architecture, specific to the Old Greeks and furtherly adopted “by the entire modern Europe.”⁷ If, on the one hand, this approach expanded the field of architecture, on the other it created an unmistakable hierarchy within it. This hierarchy was reinforced by the contextualization of the architectural act, subjected, according to Quatremère, to a series of influences (climatic, social, political, moral...), a modelization which furthermore broadened the understanding of the architectural field. But while enlarging the latter by acknowledging its complex mechanics, Quatremère operated a clear-cut separation

5 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men*, trans. Ian Johnston, The University of Adelaide, online at https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/r/rousseau/jean_jacques/inequality/complete.html.

6 Quatremère de Quincy, “Architecture,” *Encyclopédie méthodique*, vol. 1 (Paris/ Liège: Panckoucke/ Plomteux, 1788), 382-86.

7 Quatremère, *Encyclopédie méthodique*, vol. 1, iii.

between canonic architecture (derived from an ideatic archetype) and all other (alternative) forms of building, influenced by more or less controllable factors.

If the hut could have been a common denominator, undeniably related to “the earliest dwellings resulted from necessity,”⁸ it could not actually pretend to be a universal model. As Quatremère explained, its shape, materials and, above all, building principles corresponded only to agriculture civilization, the most advanced of all and whose apex was the Greek culture. Unable to build such a hut, which was to become the very paradigm of the art of architecture, hunter-gatherer civilizations were *a priori* excluded from the canon. What appeared in his discourse as mere categorization, formed, meanwhile, the nucleus of an exclusive historiography.

8 Quatremère, *Encyclopédie méthodique*, vol. 1, 382.

Quatremère described the hut in terms of “type” and “inflexible rule,” the sole form able to “straighten all the depraved uses, all the vicious deviations” induced by a blind imitation.⁹ He employed the word *écart* to designate the “vicious deviations,” a term whose primary meaning indicates a distancing (implying also an emotional distantiation). As a matter of fact, the notion of distance was present in the *Encyclopedia* through several implicit and explicit occurrences. On the one hand, distance was expressed temporally, as in the different ages of the studied societies, some being still in their childhood, some other having already attained maturity. Temporality situated these far-away territories even further away, like in the case of Indian and Chinese architectures, both being considered close to origins—Chinese architecture, with its roofs reminding one of the Nomads tents, being the closest to “the primary traces and the primitive ways of inhabiting,” and Indian architecture being the “production of an ignorant instinct” related to the “primitive manner” of conceiving underground dwellings.¹⁰ On the other hand, distance was expressed spatially, the different entries in the *Encyclopedia* striving to depict a large architectural *oikumene* and to describe the specific character of each of its lands.¹¹ For Quatremère, “character” was in close connection to “type,”¹² as both notions implied—etymologically, but also metaphorically (especially for the second)—the idea of imprint, of an active matrix. By using this subtle correspondence, Quatremère suggested his belief in the importance of causality and predispositions.

9 Quatremère, *Encyclopédie méthodique*, vol. 1, 386.

10 Quatremère de Quincy, *Dictionnaire historique d'architecture* (Paris: Adrien Le Clère et Cie, 1832), vol. 1, 376-82; vol. 2, 10-17.

11 This architectural *oikumene* was merely sketched in the *Encyclopédie*, to be extensively developed in the *Dictionnaire historique*.

12 There are specific entries dedicated to these two notions in the *Encyclopédie* (“character,” vol. 1, 477-521; “type,” vol. 3, 543-45) and the *Dictionnaire historique* (“character,” vol. 1, 302-308; “type,” vol. 2, 629-30). In these entries, Quatremère uses both notions in relation to each other.

From this perspective, distance appeared as the degree of separation between “good” characters and “bad” characters. The article on “Barbarity” perfectly demonstrated this distinction:

the ferocity attributed by the Greeks, and afterwards by the Romans, to the manners of certain populations, is equaled in art by a “rudeness of invention” or “an outrageous arrogance of style”, often beyond force and grace, which “attempts more to astonish than to please.”¹³ As for architectural occurrences, the word “barbarous,” as Quatremère pointed out, was “given to edifices composed of an utterly gigantesque style whose outrageous forms repel the eye by the shocking affectation of an immoderate force or by the bizarre composition of discordant details.”¹⁴ Terms like “outrageous,” “gigantesque,” “immoderate,” and “discordant” implicitly referred to (and transgressed) an accepted canon, revealing the distancing suggested by the “vicious deviations”—the distance between the (original) model and its various conversions. It was this distancing that was responsible for the alteration of character—the “bad” character—or for its total absence. Quatremère illustrated distancing from the “good” character by two architectural examples, both developed under extreme conditions: while in Asia, the heated head of its populations imagine a frenzy of “bizarre productions” and “monstrous creations”; in Northern Europe, architecture is able to copy different styles, but is deprived of particular character.¹⁵

What is to be understood is that for Quatremère, character was not only a means for analyzing architecture but (also) a matter of morals. Paralleled to the human character, architectural character might have suffered from unfavorable conditions, but the deviations that it engendered revealed, nevertheless, deeper dysfunctions.

Theorizing and Historicizing Distance

Seroux d’Agincourt, who shared a number of convictions with Quatremère, articulated them in a historical approach, shaping the architectural *oikumene*.¹⁶ While his *History of Art through Monuments* reduced the epistemological field enlarged by Quatremère, by taking out the “art of building,” it certainly nuanced the understanding of architectural production through the ages: Ancient Greece still embodied an unmovable canon, but other territories were scrutinized—with more or less acuity, given the absence (as Seroux explained) of any preexisting discourse—in order to suggest how art evolved. Inspired by the biological taxonomy of the time, Seroux historicized the evolution of architecture by delivering a complex picture of typologies, an illustration of the monuments articulating his history. By doing so, he implicitly enforced the role of space as

13 Quatremère, *Encyclopédie méthodique*, vol. 1, entry on “barbarian,” 209.

14 Quatremère, *Encyclopédie méthodique*, vol. 1, entry on “barbarian,” 210.

15 Quatremère, *Encyclopédie méthodique*, vol. 1, 495, 496. Certain aspects discussed by Quatremère in relation to the notion of character anticipated Alois Riegl’s future theory of values of the works of art, in his *Modern Cult of Monuments* (1903).

16 *L’histoire de l’art par les monuments depuis sa décadence au IV^e siècle jusqu’à son renouvellement au XVI^e* (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1810-23).

a central epistemological element for defining architecture, as his history both mapped the geography of the discipline and exemplified its production through types.

Seroux thus opened a path for a different understanding of architecture, one emphasizing tectonics (already tackled by Quatremère). Tectonics provided a criterion for categorizing the enlarged field of the discipline by distinguishing between a production of volumetric and solid typologies (comparable to what Quatremère designated as the “art of architecture”) and a production of decorative patterns (as in the Nomads tents, thus closer to the textile realm). This differentiation was to lead to an unambiguous hierarchy in terms of perceiving both architectural creation and its territories.

Within this discourse, Gottfried Semper’s theory on the fundamentals of architecture shed a different light on the matter, nuancing the historical perception while reframing the theoretical background of the discipline. The way he analyzed the Caribbean hut, exhibited at the London 1851 Universal Exhibition, brought a shift in pondering the origins of architecture as well as its aims. By stating that “until the Romans, architecture [wa]s subjected to a clothing principle,”¹⁷ Semper dethroned Laugier’s hut, which was the theoretical model of the canonic Greek temple, thus establishing a common denominator for all architectures, disregarding their geography. Moreover, by displacing the focus from the notion of model to the importance of the (symbolic) conceptualization of architecture, he dismissed the hierarchy between (built) space and decoration. Nevertheless, in spite of this anthropological approach, Semper did not unsettle the existing taxonomy of architecture, as he discussed its different geographical artefacts in terms of their proximity to the origins of the discipline.¹⁸

This complexified taxonomy found its fulfilment in Fletcher and Fletcher’s *A History of Architecture*, a survey which became a model of spatialization and typologization of historiographical information.¹⁹ Its fourth edition (1901) formalized in a clearer manner this complex modelization, integrating the “tree of architecture,” which illustrated the parallel evolution of what Fletcher called “historical” and “non-historical styles.” The graphic scheme of the “tree of architecture” resumed the few previous taxonomic attempts and improved them by representing the causality at stake in producing architecture. The conditions invoked by Quatremère—geography, geology, climate, religion, social and political, history—became the roots of the tree whose branches imagined the architectural

17 Gottfried Semper, “Projet d’un système de théorie comparative du style,” in *Du Style et de l’architecture. Ecrits 1834-1869* (Marseille: Parenthèses, 2007), 157-59. The original title was “Entwurf eines Systems der vergleichenden Stillehre,” November 11, 1853.

18 Semper, “Le développement du mur et la construction murale dans l’Antiquité,” in *Du Style et de l’architecture*, 181-90. The original title was “Entwicklung der wand und Mauerkonstruktion bei den Antiken Völkern.”

19 Banister Fletcher and Banister F. Fletcher, *A History of Architecture for the Student, Craftsman and Amateur Being a Comparative View of Historical Styles from the Earliest Period* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1896).

styles discussed in the survey. All the short, non-productive branches represented the “non-historical styles”—Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Central American, and Saracenic—that is, the architectures that “developed mainly on their own account and exercised little direct influence on other styles.” Considering that their study “need not interrupt the story of the evolution of European Historical Architecture,” Fletcher placed them in a separate small section “for greater clearness to the student.” This separation was a solution by default, as Fletcher believed that the very “position [non-historical styles] should occupy in a History of Architecture [wa]s, however, a matter of doubt.”²⁰

20 Fletcher, *A History of Architecture* (1901), 437.

But there was another reason why “non-historical” styles were cast out of history and this had to do with their non-relevance for the conceptual thinking of architecture. “From an architect’s point of view, these non-historical styles can scarcely be so interesting as those which have progressed on the solution of constructive problems, resolutely met and overcome, as was the case in Europe,” wrote Fletcher, adding: “in India and the East, decorative schemes seemed to have outweighed any such problems.”²¹ A dichotomy of structure-ornament was thus installed, implicitly dictating the boundaries between the inner and outer worlds of architecture and thus controlling access to the first.²²

21 Fletcher, *A History of Architecture* (1901), 438.

22 Gülsüm Baydar Nalbantoğlu, “Toward Postcolonial Openings: Rereading Sir Banister Fletcher’s *History of Architecture*,” *Assemblage* 35 (1998): 6-17.

This dichotomy was not a matter of centers and peripheries, as indirectly proved by Charles Thompson Mathews’ *The Story of Architecture: An Outline Of The Styles In All The Countries*.²³ Writing on “The Mahometan or Saracenic Style,” two examples left aside in Fletcher’s first edition (published the same year), Mathews concluded: “in a word, *constructively* the Arabs were little more than copyists; as *decorators*, they were almost second to none. For nothing can be less inspiring than an Arab house shorn of its ornament; few sights more moving than a mosque or *alcazar* tricked out in all the exuberance and splendor of Saracenic carving and colour.”²⁴ As a good American, Mathews included also in his survey the architecture of his country-home, attempting to change its perception as being “new and inartistic.” His insistence on “vertical architecture” or high building,” belonging “more properly to the province of engineering,”²⁵ would lead Fletcher to situate American architecture on the very top of his evolutionary tree, thus turning a periphery into a leading model thanks to its abilities with structure.

23 Charles Thompson Mathews, *The Story of Architecture: An Outline of the Styles in All the Countries* (New York: Appleton and Company, 1896).

24 Mathews, *The Story of Architecture*, 259.

25 Mathews, *The Story of Architecture*, 456.

Alois Riegl provided a theoretical interpretation of the structure-ornament dichotomy. In his *Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts*, published posthumously, he considered form and surface

as fundamental elements of the work of art. He distinguished between form and its integrant part, the “objective surface,” as being “essential,” and the “subjective surface,” as being “but an illusion produced by the sight.”²⁶ Riegl believed that Islamic art was not only the sole case where form was not essential, but that it resorted to artistic rules for eliminating it. Muffled under organic decoration, form was reduced to the subjective surface, thus going back to the beginnings of art: the absolute surface. He echoed Semper, stating that, in spite of its undeniable esthetic qualities, Oriental applied art was deprived of “intellectual beauty.”²⁷

26 Karl M. Swoboda and Otto Pächt (eds.), *Historische Grammatik der bildenden Künste* (Graz: Böhlau, 1966). I have used here the French edition, *Grammaire historique des arts plastiques* (Paris: Klincksieck, 2003), 121-23.

27 Semper, “Projet d’un système de théorie comparative du style,” 164-65.

A new vision of alterity emerged from these intertwined historiographical discourses. Difference (distancing) was no longer assessed in terms of “civilization”—peoples too far away from central models and, often, also trapped in a temporal backwardness—but as a doctrinal matter: structure over decoration, form over surface, intellectuality and rationality over a disorderly thinking. Architecture versus non-architecture.

A Brief Epilogue: Coping with Distance

From the theoretical ground, this dichotomy would pervade the common conception of (geo)cultural facts. This affected the writing of architectural histories of/in the peripheries, notions like decorativeness and barbarity being accepted and conveyed as distinctive marks.

The visual taxonomies of universal exhibitions contributed to such a discourse. In 1867, in Paris, the prolific ornamentation of the Romanian pavilion on the Champ de Mars prevailed over the architectural features of the building that inspired it. The reason was twofold: the Romanian committee proposed as their model two highly decorated churches, and the French architect Ambroise Baudry, in charge of the design, reinforced their decorativeness when interpreting them. When copying the torsaded towers of the main model (the Episcopal church in Curtea de Argeş, 1512-1526), Baudry changed the orientation of their twist, seeing them as a mere ornament and thus ignoring their role in the ensemble composition.²⁸

28 Carmen Popescu, *Le style national roumain. Construire une nation à travers l’architecture 1881-1945* (Rennes: Presses universitaires du Rennes, 2004), 39-43.

The same logic of decorativeness legitimated the discourse of the Bulgarian delegation at the CIHA congress in 1933 in Stockholm. Striving to define national art, the theme of the congress, the Bulgarian scholars saw the specificity of their ancient architecture in its decorativeness: this latter differentiating it from the founding Byzantine models, while

“freeing” it from the constraints of space.²⁹ The statement might seem surprising, as it situated the Bulgarian art on the side of “non-architectures,” but the positioning was entirely assumed by the local scholars who, moreover, described their ancient art as being part of the “barbarian architectures after the great migrations.” In the same congress, barbarians were invoked as well by the Hungarian representative in relation to Romanian art. The Hungarian historian presented his country as a sentinel between the Occident and the Orient, where lay “the sterile steppe of the Christian Orthodox art.”³⁰ The metaphor of the steppe, reminding one the biological categorizations developed in the nineteenth century to compare art territories with fertile or arid lands, represented an indirect way for denouncing—through its flatness—the lack of structure of the neighboring Romanian architecture. As a matter of fact, the thorough efforts of typologization deployed by Romanian architectural historiography might be seen as a reaction against such attacks.³¹

To return to the distinction between centers and peripheries, space and flatness, typology and decorativeness had thus become commonplace for addressing, explicitly or not, a geo-cultural position and a sign of artistic quality.

No (More) Distance? Instead of Conclusions

When invoking “barbarians” at the CIHA congress in Stockholm, the Bulgarian delegation emphasized their vitality and their capacity to create new forms of art.

Though expressed in a very different milieu, far from the daring scene of the artistic avant-gardes, this idea echoed the formal and intellectual interest in primitive cultures. Such a positioning, embraced by all the forms of art, praised irrationality and its various derivatives, the strange versus the straight, the surreal versus the real. Questioning the very essence of space and time, this had prepared the path for reassessing historiographical distance.

In architecture, in less than three decades, from the 1920s to the 1950s, different steps were undertaken which led to a flattening of space and to reducing distances. They all reassessed the “art of building” through various approaches—an interest in irrationality and in meta-reality, a trade of history with memory—thus proclaiming the vernacular not as a sub-category of architecture but as its valuable counterpart. Several collaborated in undertaking this historiographical mutation: artists—like Asger Jorn, who militated against the tyranny

²⁹ Alexander Rachénov, “Traits communs à l’ancienne architecture bulgare et à l’architecture barbare d’Occident à l’époque suivant les invasions,” *Actes du XIII^e Congrès International d’Histoire de l’Art*, vol. 1 (Stockholm: Le Comité Organisateur du Congrès, 1933), 68-69.

³⁰ Tiberius Gerevich, “L’art national de la Hongrie,” *Actes du XIII^e Congrès International d’Histoire de l’Art*, vol. 1, 50-51.

³¹ See Carmen Popescu, “La ‘spécificité’ comme remède à la jeunesse des nations. Naissance du discours sur l’art national en Roumanie,” *Revue de l’Art* 173, no. 3 (2011), 59-67.

of space imposed by Western visuality, and advocated for bidimensionality and irrationality; philosophers—like Martin Heidegger, who famously argued in favor of a meaningful architecture; architects—like Bernard Rudofsky, who helped to “officialize” vernacular; art historians—like Sybil Moholy-Nagy, who defended it in terms of materiality and transmitted tradition, or like Sigfried Giedion, who rehabilitated regionalism and thus preparing an unprecedented extension of the architectural geography.

Further on, the relativism propelled by the postmodern turn would bring a radicalization of the anti-space attitude by embracing a simultaneity of contrasting temporalities and by considering ordinariness and junk space in the architectural discourse.

Historiographically speaking, all these approaches, superimposed on a progressive globalization, led to a reassessment of the centre-periphery questions. Addressed from different perspectives, related to an anthropological understanding—the architect becoming an ethnographer³²—and to the rise of postcolonial studies, this reconfiguration played out mainly in the reduction of historiographical and epistemological distance. This was precisely the attempt of all writing that flourished around the concept of critical regionalism, coined by Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre and theorized by Kenneth Frampton. In turn, architectural surveys paralleled this constriction of distance by a geographical complexification, mirrored in different attempts, from Kostof’s *A History of Architecture* (1985),³³ introducing the notion of “built environment,” to Ching, Jarzombek and Pakrash’s *Global History of Architecture* (2007),³⁴ explicitly attempting to wipe out the boundaries between “historical” and “non-historical” architectures.

But does such a complexification actually reduce distance? Or does it simply disguise it with new perspectival tactics? The authors of *A Global History of Architecture* defended their position by affirming that their approach builds on the notion/process of globalization, considering it as “an unexpected opportunity to rethink the production of knowledge.”³⁵ But how different, *mutatis mutandis*, is their chronological and geographical slicing of history exemplified by major buildings from Seroux’s *History of Art through its Monuments*, which was ground-breaking at its time?

In the world of globalized histories of architecture,³⁶ space appears to have lost its hierarchical pretensions, being turned

32 Hal Foster “The Artist as Ethnographer,” in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 171-203.

33 Spiro Kostof, *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

34 Francis D. K. Ching, Mark Jarzombek and Vikramaditya Pakrash, *A Global History of Architecture* (Hoboken, NJ: J. Wiley and Sons, 2007).

35 Mark Jarzombek, “Architecture: The Global Imaginary in an Antiglobal World,” *Grey Room* 61 (Fall 2015), 111-21. The article, included in the special issue “A Discussion on the Global and Universal,” responds to the criticism formulated by Daniel Bertrand Monk and Andrew Herscher in an essay that tackles the topic of the entire special issue, “New Universalism: Refugees and Refugees between Global History and Voucher Humanitarianism,” 71-80.

36 See the 21st edition of *Sir Banister Fletcher’s Global History of Architecture*, ed. Murray Fraser (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

into an inclusive, federating entity. But on closer inspection, this inclusiveness, which more closely resembles an unqualified space (to paraphrase Giorgio Agamben's distinction between *zoe* and *bios*), is still articulated by the insidious tool of distance.