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«In its implications, the process of selecting a singular aspect of a given architectural project is always the work of a murderer.»

VOLUNTARY MISREADING OF ACCUMULATED TRACES

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In the third chapter of *Complexity and Contradictions in Architecture*⁽¹⁾ Robert Venturi draws on Luigi Moretti's Casa il Girasole to illustrate ambiguity by asking the rhetorical question: «are they one building with a split or two buildings joined?»⁽²⁾ A recent visit of the project oddly confirmed the answer: Casa il Girasole is certainly one single building. The strong duality expressed in the façade results primarily from the pragmatic need to bring light into the atrium and to the set-back circulation system. Undoubtedly, Venturi was aware of these practical reasons. If Moretti's intentions and solutions are irrelevant in *Complexity and Contradictions*, it is because Venturi deliberately ignores them in order to overturn the original meaning of a strong spatial gesture to his advantage. This conscious manipulation of il Girasole's pragmatic necessities reveals the core of Venturi's intellectual mechanism: a progressive thinking that sniffs ahead for evidence in order to shift the foundations of the discourse it is built upon. If you consider the entire publication as a project in itself, by voluntarily misreading an available manifold of accumulated traces, Venturi makes clear how singularities can be used to provoke a rupture with generally accepted meanings and the way they can be reassembled to reach new landings.

*

Surprisingly enough, Luigi Moretti's attitude is, at times, of a similar kind.

In his text *Strutture e Sequenze di Spazi*⁽³⁾, Moretti unveils a constellation of personal encounters with architectures and displays them in an unconventional manner, showing his extremely conscious background and emphasizing the rich conceptual attitude underlying his work. Just as Venturi manipulates towards his own scopes il Girasole, so Moretti isolates a set of spatial experiences, whose ultimate sum appears as a drifted and colourful field upon which his probing intellect carefully moves. The beauty of this process in Moretti's case resides in the complete honesty of its revelations: he programmatically shows the foundations of his take offs and by consciously *detourning* them is capable of landing in a regeneration of those starting blocks.

In *Strutture e Sequenze di Spazi*, Moretti describes with precision the complex spatial sequence of Villa Adriana: «Three volumes, in the natural path's order (...) follow each other with different geometrical figures: a prism at the longitudinal primary axis, a cube and a cylinder. The volume of the portico, (...) smashes itself onto a slightly curved wall and flows towards a narrow passage to end in the large square room. (...) From the majesty of this room, through two narrow passages, hidden in the width of the wall, (...) one ends up in a circular portico with a limited height, but remarkable radius, which encircles a water pond opened to the sky and surrounded by niches, columns, friezes. This sequence of three volumes is constructed around three elementary but precise forms whose effects are certain. The long shot of the portico, the pause in the aula, the cylindrical rotation around the pond. The diversity of geometrical forms is articulated by double narrow passages (...) which generate the natural paths».⁽⁴⁾ To visualise this spatial expe-

rience, Moretti casts gypsum models of the inner volumetry: a conscious isolation of facts. He voluntarily ignores many issues in order to strengthen and put forward only what he needs for his arguments and progress. Merely reflecting on the movements the body experiences while walking through this building, he evidently affirms that space—its conception and its experience—is a logical problem and his main architectural interest.

I Progressive repertoire

Certainly, just as one can look at Moretti's Villa Saracena and get a few glimpses of Villa Adriana, it would be easy to read a few projects of Venturi's in the light of the duality he registered in Moretti's Casa il Girasole⁽⁵⁾. However, we are more interested in exploring the rich meaning of a methodology that consists of isolating singularities and highlighting parts in order to distort the whole. The sum of all these singularities forms a battlefield of traces that from the beginning has been intended as a transient and evolutionary system. This accumulation is by no means a miserable escape from reality; nor is it a confused patchwork of disparate things put together merely because of a certain taste. This accumulation is a progressive repertoire, a personal clinical utilisation of the past in an operative, abstract—and somehow opportunistic—manner, a borderless laboratory in which there is no space for a valued identity or for a common tradition, a continuous and euphoric act of desire whose trajectory carefully moves from a particular element towards a universal energy. By rejecting the neurotic dream of a tranquillised and conflict free existence⁽⁶⁾, every project encircles the potentiality of putting itself into a much larger—and more exciting—discourse. In this way, the redefinition of the single given architectural project is always a pretext to go beyond the particular: the architectural problem is suspended and reformulated and then shifted to become an episode of a larger novel on architecture.

II Displacement and Distortion

The act of defining a self-valid system of stable points can be described as a continuous deconstruction of every glimpse of finitude. Against the total meaninglessness such an attitude would lead to, this methodology looks at traces as elements that have lost their original meaning in order to be destined for other contexts: this set of parts will be reassembled under the same conditions of inexactitude.

In its implications, the process of selecting a singular aspect of a given architectural project is always the work of a murderer. The rationality of this attitude is evident, as is its hygienic force. Only by attacking a previous order can the show go on. Without the violent imposition of a rational attempt, the sum of the precedents would remain a useless box packed with content, but highly chaotic.

Only if the voice of a fragment is reactivated, can the repertoire be described as a progressive manifold. The act of displacement of the trace in time and space—the rupture this deed reflects—and its distortion into something

else, produces new evidences based on the conviction that every theory or spatial experience is a story that could be written anew. By distorting and displacing one establishes order and sets potentialities so that every project can seek to measure the effects that it puts in motion.

III Drifting Remontage

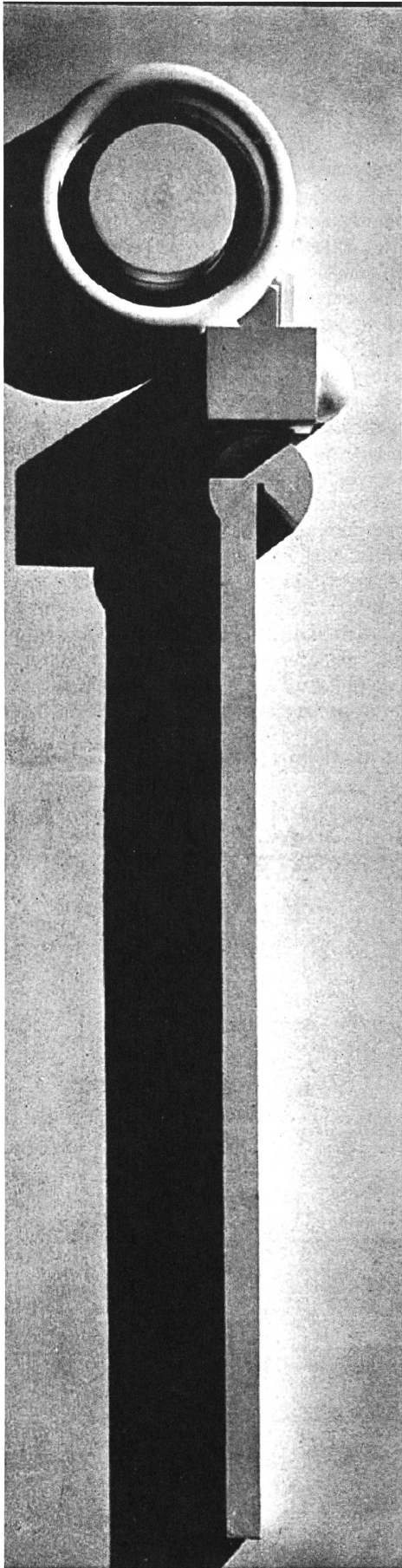
When dividing a unity, traces function as barriers that prevent a never-ending deconstruction from taking place. They allow the project to demand a universality that exists in itself and can be reproduced. This is the moment of maximum abstraction in the entire process. As on a stage, constraints, intuitions and intentions are carefully grouped together. One must renounce the visual memory of the trace—the birth of its nature—in order to move beyond it and make use of it. Habitual moral obligations are put aside so that the exercise of projection can take place in a private redefinition of goals, possible only by true devotion. For the formulation of a new system it is necessary to completely commit oneself to the present and to the conviction that the fleeting universality just attained can only be explained by an eternal sense of becoming. Through a strong subjectivity and a self-valid series of means, traces contribute to the creation of a plausible individual position. However, they never attain the level of moral commands, but rather confirm the validity of every project for the time they are deliberately

misread. Since traces perform as temporary barriers it is likely that they sooner or later will impede the flow: being ready to accept their mutable character is at the core of their fecundity. Once a whole is recomposed, traces are again hidden in the complex body of a self-standing object, representative in itself and somehow emptied of its charged parts. Every time a synthesis is affirmed, a sense of saturation loops out from it; this discontent emerges from the very meaning of a methodology that firstly operates on its own «raison d'être» without any sense of preservation. This process evidently admits struggle to be part of its essence, setting the dynamicity of the traces as a two-faced joker: paradoxically, every project is definitive and provisional at the same time.

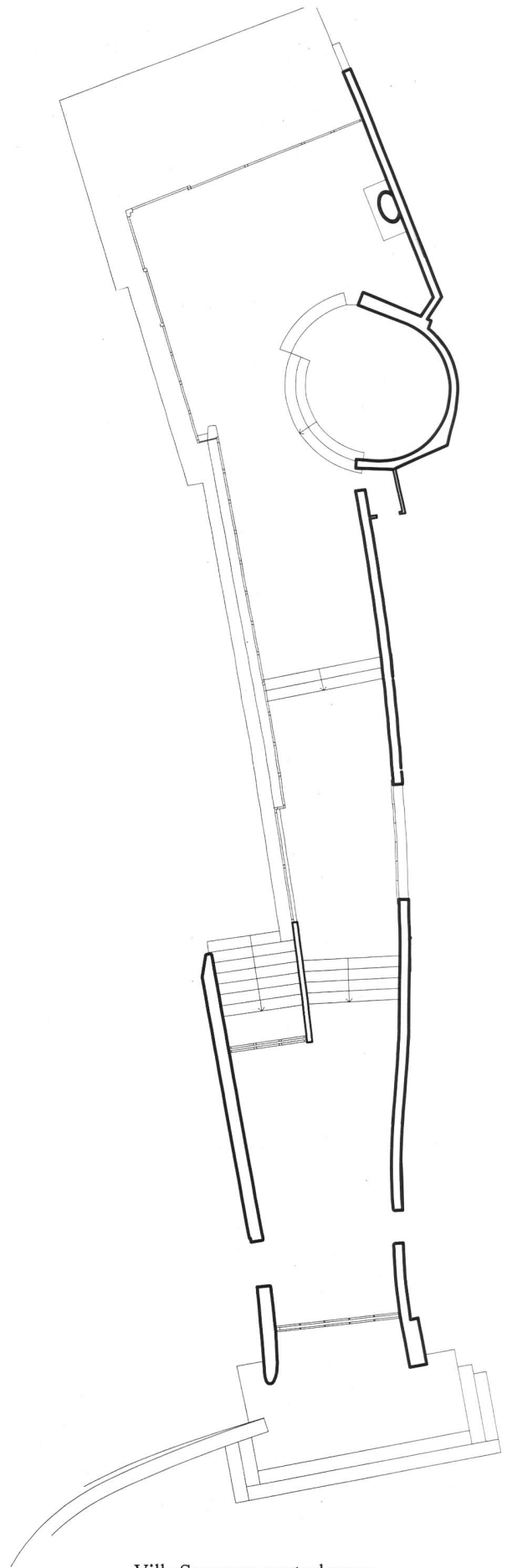
As every phenomenon is possibly the result of a conflictual collision, so is the configuration of that progressive thinking which is put into motion by a sort of native impulse against and within every kind of outside environment. The precise moment in which a trace gets misread defines an unstable equilibrium, maintained by such a duality. The movement between the concrete experience of a certain architectural encounter and its successive remontage triggers an elastic relationship between the physical and meta-physical. By abstraction, one reduces, one excludes, one sets rules, one defines hierarchies and logical relationships and, moreover, one accepts the risk of failure. Autobiographic aspects do not at all exhaust this practice. It is rather the necessity of personal theory that questions the material



Casa il Girasole
Luigi Moretti



Villa Adriana Gypsum Model
Luigi Moretti



Villa Saracena central space
Luigi Moretti

culture of an era to extrapolate possible perspectives and to choose mediums of communication.

At the beginning of *«The Obligation Towards a Difficult Whole»*⁽⁷⁾, Venturi quotes again *il Girasole* as a rare and successful example of inflection in modern architecture. Defining inflection as the way in which the whole is implied by exploiting the nature of individual parts, the partial functioning element, the trace, is the medium through which the whole, as a spider web, weaves relationships with other orders outside itself. Venturi's inflection could be seen as a mere design tool to achieve a certain degree of communication and inclusivity with a specific type of context and inhabitant or between different parts in the integrity of the project itself; or it could be seen as an abstract and progressive strategy. In this way, it is possible to set a self-standing

settlement which forms a fragmentary unity and its imaginative contexts. The misreading of the trace also belongs to the same universe: it is an abstract and progressive way of thinking and doing that projects the unity of the whole beyond its physical boundaries, yet is sensually raised in a specific spatial experience. By inflecting components, every project can metaphysically exist and make sense in every context, certainly because it chooses what to be related with, in time and space.

In this sense the world, intended as a whole, beige and undefined, naturally claims for such an ultra-defensive strategy in which the project, the drifted remontage, can still survive through its main meaning: hunting for the present in a conscious and intimate misreading of a probably never existing common past.