

of *non-conventional* communication developed from the reading of the works of Galvano Della Volpe. Geometry, in an acceptance that is declaredly polemical, is individuated — in its *historical* forms — as a fundamental structure of the *rationality* of architecture. The process of planning, as development of a *meaningful* form, is carried out through operations that are both logical-geometrical and logical-historical, inasmuch as these are able to communicate values. Distinguishing between poetics and values actually obtained, we find a limit in the work of GRAU in its incapacity to resolve steadily, in linguistic coherence, its own precedents, whose determined formal — conceptual nature is transcended in symbolic values — ideologically forced in an expressionistic-like procedure, and therefore *apparently* leading to itself by means of an ahistorical substantial universalization of order in architecture: which seems to lead the former Della-Volpean marxism towards structuralist results.

(From « l'Architettura di Roma Capitale »  
1971 - Roma - Golem)

### G.R.A.U.

... The second reason that shifts the axis of interest of this book is to be found in the effects produced by the First Biennale of Architecture held in Venice in 1980. There, under the temporary label of Post Modern, the first broad official international *Pronouncement* was made against the ideology and practice of the Modern Movement; for a revival of History and a renewed continuity with the Past.

*This Pronouncement*, fruit of the cultural intuition of Paolo Portoghesi, marks a date of *no-return* for the history of contemporary architecture and a radical change in the frame of reference of progressive culture.

What are the most visible consequences of this Pronouncement? Above all, the re-emergence of a *legacy of the Modern Movement*, that is presented as a problem that can no longer be deferred following this recognition, as « post modern », of the experimental and eccentric experiences of the last twenty years. A legacy that is positive wherever it is seen with its theories and its languages as one of the styles of the past that needs to be acquired within the « eternal present » of history; a legacy that is negative wherever one ascertains, in the totality of its evidence, that in more than half a century, it has marked with chaos the geophysical order in which we live.

The second consequence of this Pronouncement is the call for an original and renewing style that is capable of absolving the inherited aims; thus a quality of projects and of theories much superior to that recorded in the experimental phase that we have just gone through. It is a call for the development of a style that is so much more a problem to face if one considers that exactly those transgressive experiences so usefully brought together in the undertaking at the Biennale, an instant after having absolved the historical task of killing the hated father, appeared for what they really were: inorganic and needing quite a bit more growth before being able to assume a leading role.

Therefore, while decreeing at Venice the death of the Modern Movement, paradoxically, also the Post Modern Movement died.. A delicate situation was registered; a precarious state of equilibrium whose developments are unpredictable. As with the project for the book, likewise with the partici-

pation at the Biennale, the search for a confirmation and achievement of approval gave use, beyond the pleasure of official recognition, not the peace of a secure identity, but a splitting of our very own image.

It's true that the terms of the comparison are clear and distinct: no longer deformed by a forced confrontation with a past still too near; no longer thrown wide to a historical prospect opening dizzily towards a remote past. Nevertheless, it's true that the sum of theoretical planning and proposals expressed by the GRAU studio continue to suffer a remarkable rejection relative to parallel experiences; yesterday because of the isolation suffered and the consequent lack of cultural rooting; today because of the forced, perhaps inevitable distinction in the post-modern scene between « European area » and « American area ». A division of tasks between these two areas could practically lead to a consequent postponement to a future date, if ever, of every discussion relative to the refounding of a theory of architecture.

Of course, belonging to an area of research would not be in itself a great evil if this didn't present itself, of the two, the most disarticulated, and with a fairly arbitrary relation to History almost dictated by a predestination that emerges from the great pre-existences and by a self-censure that such a predestination doesn't fail, in the end, to produce. Not by chance, the re-emergence of signs connected to the so-called « collective memory », accompanied by a(n) adroit simplification of constituent criteria, has easily assumed both the characteristics of transgression as well as those of didactics. Such simple and evocative forms, already archetypes on which one can work, guaranteed, in fact, a renewed relationship with the Past, without the traumas of the « return to the center » and of the « re-integration of the ancient order »...

... Having finished with the time of « heroic citations », let us look at the city, synthesis and analysis of all historical stratifications; the city, territory that the Modern Movement has connoted, grandiosely and tragically, as a continuous desert disseminating mute objects. Will we succeed in acquiring that vast and projecting dimension, « central but relative », that intuitively we perceive; and that in the re-appropriating and making sacred of the new, will we reconcile the identity of the individual person and the individual construction with their multiplied and collective image?

(From « Isti mirant stella »  
1981 - Roma Ed. Kappa)

### G.R.A.U.

Roman Group of Architects and Urbanists

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## COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING CENTENNIAL 1881-1981.

### THE WORK OF THE G.R.A.U. (ROMAN GROUP OF ARCHITECTS AND URBANISTS) EXHIBITION GALLERY, 100 LEVEL.



### INTRODUCTION BY ALESSANDRA LATOUR

The idea of organizing a New York exhibition of the work of G.R.A.U. originated from cultural exigences as well as from personal motivations.

On a personal level, I had the desire to introduce this group that I recognize as an essential part of my background. First of all, G.R.A.U. is a group of architects who provided me with a continuous point of reference along the path of my architectural education. It is also a group of people with whom I had and still have in common political beliefs and theories of architecture and with whom I have shared the same cultural circle. Finally, they are individuals to whom for years I have felt and continue to feel bound by a profound and rare friendship and who have my unquestioned respect.

On the other hand, I was conscious of the enormous and fundamental contribution by G.R.A.U. not only through their active participation in the cultural events in Italy but mainly through their patient and constant research to construct an architectural language capable of containing and expressing elements of the past, present, and future.

The group, born in 1964, went through those difficult years which were a turning point in Italy on both political and social levels: a change reflected culturally and more specifically in architecture by the enormous transformations and experiments of the new avant-gardes. G.R.A.U. initially founded its « raison d'être » on a profound criticism of the Modern Movement while defining themselves as a group when focusing on an architectural discourse which, through the accumulation of further steps in the research and the contribution provided by the participation to the most advanced experiences in Italy and abroad, was enriched by new contents and meanings.

Against the prevailing functionalism and empirism, G.R.A.U. vindicated art and in particular architecture as an activity of thought, therefore rejecting any illusory specialization while strongly carrying in a request of specificity. Architecture as thought; architecture as field of knowledge; architecture as rational activity where geometry and the module are conceived as the regulating elements. History, for G.R.A.U. as it was for Louis Kahn, becomes « the past as a friend ». It is certainly not a sentimental return to antiquity or the construction of artificial memories. History is the useful instrument for reading the current contradictions as well as the discovery of composing and aggregative laws, the eternal present which contains synchronic evidences, and, finally, that « logical antecedent » capable of defining the architectural value which is opposed to ideology while being beyond any contingency.

### PAOLO PORTOGHESI

... Formed around 1964, not long after the first symptoms of the student protest inside the Italian departments of architecture, the Gruppo Romano Architetti Urbanistici (GRAU) is probably the first group of Italian architects that dissociated itself in a clear and unequivocal way from the legacy of the Modern Movement. The revision proposed by GRAU, a good deal more radical than that of neo-realism and neo-Liberty, invokes as a frame of reference for a critique of the « tradition of the new », not the complex and contradictory reality, of the latter but its « other », that is, the « tradition of architecture », understood in its totality and in particular that line of development that

connects the « classical » moments of western culture.

To assume such an openly challenging attitude with respect to the dominant culture, GRAU was driven by a series of convictions and examples that can be easily synthesized: 1) The conviction that, along with neo-classical and eclectic precedents, modern architecture was an integral part of a cycle: that the « architecture of the bourgeoisie » derived from a marxist interpretation of the events of the Modern Movement. 2) The re-evaluation of the concept of art, stripped of the late-romantic connotations and taken back through historical-materialistic interpretations, guided by the philosophical proposals of the *Critique of Taste* (*Critica del Gusto*) by Galvano Della Volpe. 3)

The architectural experience of Louis Kahn and the self-critical revision of the masters of modern architecture, evident in some of their works of the Fifties.

These premises undermined at the foundation the certainties that had presided over the architectural debate after World War II and were destined to provoke not only a net rejection on the part of the protagonists of this debate (Zevi, Benevolo, Quaroni, etc.) but also even an irritated reaction, temporarily masked as indifference, forcing GRAU for years into a type of clandestinity. This, on the other hand, pushed them to adapt their conviction that the battle for a renewal of architecture called not so much for clamorous affirmations and declarations of principle, as a slow gradual and patient work of research and of reconstruction, beginning from the «eternal present» and from the history of architecture that is considered as a combination of cognitive achievements endowed with a universal value.

From a distance of more than ten years now, the work of GRAU, first subterranean, the evermore clearly emerging, offers a balance sheet of results obtained and streets opened, while the crumbling of the modernist orthodoxy has made the accusations and strategies of isolation no longer useful, revealing tangents and convergences of interest between this sort of research and other experiences born in diverse cultural contexts and in some cases more or less directly influenced by this research.

Having to concentrate in an eloquent formula one of the specific characteristics that emerge more clearly from the research of GRAU, and that gives it an identity and a value, and permits it to authoritatively enter in the debate with the most advanced experiences of the refounding of architecture, I believe it would be worth-while to dwell upon the dialectical unity of the architectural results, on their refound «organic complexity». The constructions and the projects of GRAU (apart from differentiations that permit the singling out in the group work of a creative presence of some autonomous personalities) converge in representing, blended in an achieved equilibrium, an active process, a «doing-making», that is neither additive nor combinatorial, but organic in the sense that Della Volpe ascribes to the word, as also Alberti and his *concinnitas*, in Palladio, and in the observation of Vasari who, when talking about the Farnesina of Peruzzi, used the expression, «not built but born».

Faced with the spreading of a simplistic re-assumption of elementary solids of Euclidean geometry as original and archetypal forms, as matrices of architecture, whose assembly can be lead to the mental act of composing and putting together, GRAU seems to propose a different method by which these forms are not object of single movements, but of intersections, interpenetrations, and reciprocal metamorphoses. To mechanical juxtaposition, the group offers in contrast a process of growing-together in such a way that the different forms are described and observed in their growing together, in their reciprocal conditioning of each other, in their obeying common laws and in their being at the same time creators of laws. It is a lesson of Renaissance architecture that is put into practice beyond the sterile revivalistic operations, making possible, with renewed linguistic instruments, a new exploration in the field of «centrality», of the «translation» of the reciprocal attraction of volumetric unities.

As far as the critical confrontation with history

is concerned, beyond the interrupted effort of the masters, the profound work of Rossi, the experience of GRAU, and the proposals of this writer, the Italian scene presents a hesitant picture, in which an unresolved love-hate relationship with the Modern Movement is expressed. Neither can that be surprising if one thinks that after the Second World War, Italy was the country in which more histories of modern architecture were published; in which, especially the most ideological and tendentious books that had ever seen the light of day in the world were published, dedicated to the reconstruction of the events of architecture after the Industrial Revolution. A sort of guilt complex with regards to the «political difficulties» that the diffusion of modern culture encountered during the Fascist period (mystically magnified to enhance the charisma of the movement) has slowed down, also in newer generations, all the processes of detachment from the tradition of the new based on a Manichean division between progress and reaction...

(From «Dopo l'architettura moderna»  
Ed. Laterza, Bari - 1980)

### G.R.A.U.

Sixteen years have passed since, in its projects, GRAU began to consider itself outside the Modern Movement and the cultural officialdom that sustained it; and a few years less since, in its written works, GRAU has undertaken a theoretical reconstruction of an architectural discipline within a marxist methodology.

The occasion of the participation at the First International Show of Architecture, organized by the Biennale of Venice, offers a favorable moment to clarify the situation from the particular viewpoint of the procedure of our experiences.

Briefly allow us to put forward again some theoretical points that have progressively characterized our work, not by the workings of a mere «riattribution», but, and this really weighs on us, to fully reclaim an ideological dimension of artistic work as a factor in itself significant, always; particularly in this period characterized by the impact of the break with the Modern Movement and by efforts to reconstruct a new better order of human works.

The stages that lead to this radical awareness of ours began from the recognition of the language of architecture as an autonomous language. We proceeded by means of regaining such meaningful categories as geometry, and number, and the original theorization of the plastic module and of the associative law — all these as dialectical structures of the project. And we finally arrived at the problem of meaning and of symbol as spatial metaphor of history, in defining the suffering and hopes of time, for us — of the class struggle.

Within the scope of this problem, resulting from the most vital positions of modern marxism, the discovery of a historical reality which is the eternal present of the evidence before us: logical precedents of the figurative act and of the project; the discovery of nature-history as a dialectical contest that can't be eliminated from the work. The aim, finally, and terrain itself of daily work, in putting together new connections and in establishing new points of reference, is to create a renewed, real unity among all the figurative arts.

The richness and complexity of this theoretical framework, well-woven by the experiences of planning, has had the merit, in our opinion, of allowing us to pass more or less unscathed both through

the straits of a reduced and marginal professionalism (a position that we share, on the other hand, with the majority of young Italian architects), as well as through the artificial paradises of so-called drawn architecture.

Passing unscathed doesn't mean not paying the price, at least in terms of formal equilibrium — as one can verify from our having had an excessive faith in, and paid an excessive attention to, the single organism, the single building; understood, above all, in its strict and palpable wall delimitation; as one can also deduce from the excesses of monumentalism, from the excesses of articulation and plastic development, from the almost programmatic detachment from the immediate physical surroundings.

It's true that, at the same time, the rationalist neo-academia tried to renew its own figurative and ideological baggage with the brainstorm of so — called grand scale urban planning — last desperate resort before absolute silence and the death of art. However, it is likewise true that, as far as we are concerned, the problem is certainly not that of continually keeping distance from the Modern Movement and the International style, but to establish, if possible, our position within the themes defined as Post Modern; contributing, if its definition isn't just a merely comfortable label, to define its contours and historical identity.

...GRAU has always been a mysterious object of the current figurative scene, a little for the radical nature of its positions, a little for the distrustful credit that has been given to its proposals, even also when it has been given. Thus the monolithism and unanimity which appeared abroad, and which we never took the trouble to explain, have been bit by bit interpreted as the effect of purely moralistic positions. The fact is that the point in question (the detachment from and constructive struggle against the Modern Movement) actually left little space to the maturing of positions, figurative and ideological, that were very much differentiated. Furthermore, it was our deliberate intention not to want to constitute a simple figurative movement or school that opposed (for a deliberate and necessary delimitation of adapted figurative language, avant-gardistically) other existing schools or movements: in this case those derived from rationalist language. The plinthe objective, as we have already said, was the refounding of a complete architectural discipline and of the consequent renewed ideological dimension of artistic work. One could say, paradoxically, that all of the experiences of the Post Modern Movement (excepting L.I. Kahn) have already been run through in GRAU, and yet that GRAU constitutes an incoherent sequence of lucid coherencies. That, in order to be able to understand, orient ourselves, and debate within this important phenomenon, albeit contradictory, that is defined as Post Modern, there is no other way for us than that of continuing, non-monolithically, non-unanimously, our very own history. This history is not yet the history of critics, but the open history of languages that, still planning and planning, must find its own identity and its own brightness.

And so it is that, having reaffirmed the common reference point to the theoretical framework and its successive developments, and being conscious of the present state of things, for us, individually, to groups, all together, GRAU must exist.

(From «The Venice Biennale - First International Exhibition of Architecture»  
1980 - Catalogo Electa - Milano)

### MANFREDO TAFURI

... That which appears between the lines of the Dardi project, which takes on greater consistency in those of Manieri, which, in another way Polesello seems to be pursuing, explodes in the work drawings of GRAU. It is the search for a total form, logical to the limits of the most absolute abstraction, closed in its effort of geometrical, allusive self-verification (but only as a result of its refusal of every symbolical-ness) towards a humanistic revival.

Geometry controls itself; without wanting, it burdens itself with metaphysical assumptions; it explores its own rationality; and it is pleased with this. Little does it matter if this apocalyptic bath in the absolute of reason leads to a paradox. We would not agree, however, with those who would underrate the search-research of GRAU.

The insistence by these young Roman architects on the specificity of architectural structuring leads to laboratory experiments; their search for a new rigor ends up, in the project in question, with «non-verifiableness»; their attention to semantic problems translates into an apodictic silence. But they also have the merit of carrying their problem through to the end, a trait shared by a great part of the present architectural culture. The search for a new linguistic institutionality and control of the process of configuration, split from the total process of image formation, and also from its previous co-ordinates, leads directly to the results reached by GRAU for this competition; results to compare with those of Scarpanti, it is said, because they are so completely opposed.

It is useless to cry scandal. GRAU exhibits what is in the inhibited dreams of many architects. The controversial nature of its position is the consequence of an experimental attitude that must be judged in its totality. Many other projects drawn up by the same group indicate formal dimensions that are among the most new and interesting of the Roman climate...

(From «Il Concorso per i nuovi uffici della Camera dei Deputati» - 1968 - Roma E.U.I.)

### G. ACCASTO-V. FRATICELLI-R. NICOLINI

... The split between «ideological values» and «specific values» which Stass came from is rejected by GRAU, in a precise reaffirmation of the *material exactitude* (and therefore ideological-political) of an «artistic language», whose specificity cannot be confined in a kind of *metaphysical thing-in-itself-ness*. In affirming the *cognitive* and *communicative* value of architecture, the program of the group also joins dialectically a radical critique of the *official* cultural structures and of the manipulation of values that these structures *objectively* bring about. The general impossibility to draw new values out by means of the architecture formulated by Stass thus becomes a *particular* consequence of the cultural industry and of the bourgeois scholastic and professional system.

In the project «Determined Abstraction» — presented for a competition sponsored by Parliament — the reference to the *past* (initial debt being to the work of L. Kahn still readable in this form in a preceding project for the competition for the Sports Hall in Florence) is removed from the *lack of precision* of the evocative memory to become a *logical-historical* precedent functional in the *present tendentiousness* of the project as a condition of its *semantical* organic unity, based on a theoretical notion of architecture as a system