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Building a European Architecture Culture

Vittorio Gregotti's Critical Internationalism

The book *Identità e crisi dell'architettura europea* (1999) can be considered the culmination of the many reflections that Vittorio Gregotti (1927-2020) devoted throughout his career to the issues of internationalism in modern architecture and the construction of a European design trend.¹ The book's release date was not accidental, but followed a few months after similar reflections on the subject of 'Archipelago Europa' in both the last issue of the journal *Rassegna*, which he led, and in Gregotti's farewell issue of the journal *Casabella*, which was entitled *Critical Internationalism*.² In fact, the second half of the 1990s saw the end of the long process of political and economic integration of the European Union, with the creation of the EU institutions established by the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) and the introduction of the single currency for financial transactions (1999) and daily life (2002). A prodigious process of integration, unimaginable until a few years earlier, when the European territory was still divided in two opposing blocs.

Prompted by such events, several intellectuals – from Hans Georg Gadamer to Jacques Derrida, Jacques Le Goff, Massimo Cacciari and Gregotti himself – wondered whether, alongside the political and monetary union of the countries of the old continent, it was also possible to outline the limits, foundations and characteristics of a European cultural identity.³

In response to the question of whether 'the identity of European architecture really exists', Gregotti's book offers a compendium of the structural features of the European territory over the millennia in order to arrive at 'the present condition and its issues', proposing an approach to architectural design – 'architecture as modification' – as a common ground for the exchanges and cultural migrations between the countries and national traditions of the emerging European Union.⁴

Gregotti introduced the concept of 'modification' in the early 1960s, and in the following decades it became the focus of his theoretical and design

1 Vittorio Gregotti, *Identità e crisi dell'architettura europea* (Turin: Einaudi, 1999).

2 Vittorio Gregotti, 'In Our Skies Devoid of Ideas', *Casabella* 630-631 (1996), 2-11; Vittorio Gregotti, 'The Question of the Identity of European Architecture and its Crisis', *Rassegna* 76 (1998), 16-39.

3 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Das Erbe Europas* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989); Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Jacques Le Goff, *La vieille Europe et la nôtre* (Paris: Seuil, 1994); Massimo Cacciari, *Geofilosofia dell'Europa* (Milan: Adelphi, 1994); Massimo Cacciari, *L'arcipelago* (Milan: Adelphi, 1997).

4 Gregotti, *Identità e crisi dell'architettura europea*, op. cit. (note 1), 3, 152.

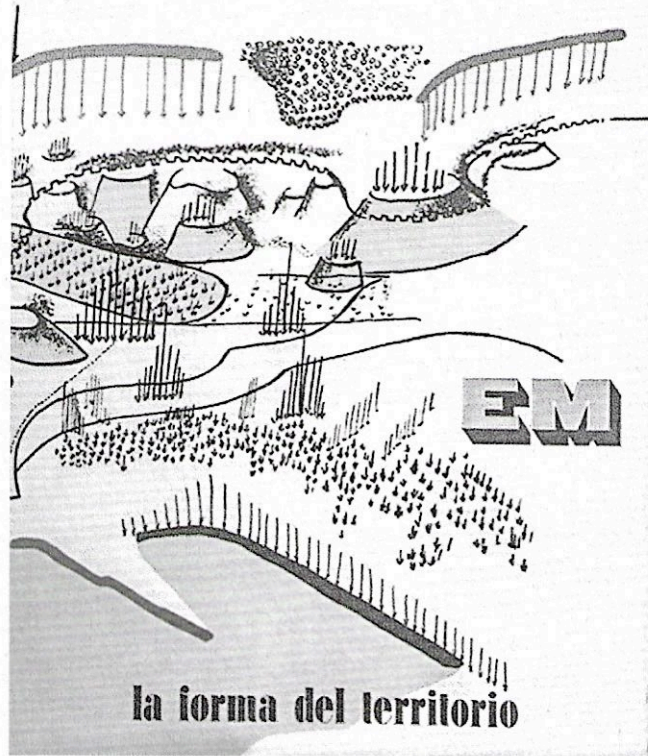
Vittorio Gregotti Il territorio dell' architettura

di cosa è fatta la "cosa" dell'architettura? È la forma delle materie ordinate allo scopo dell'abitare, del produrre e rivelare luoghi come cose: suo compito è dare significato all'intero ambiente fisico: progettare significa quindi ordinare la particolare complessità dei sistemi di materiali di cui è composta l'architettura. Siamo pervenuti così ad un'idea che ci pare centrale per il nostro modo di pensare la progettazione: essere la struttura della progettazione di natura fondamentalmente formale; ogni altro aspetto (stilistico, ideologico, tecnico, economico) è solo materiale, anche se materiale particolarmente orientante. Non rivoluzioneremo mai la società per mezzo dell'architettura, ma potremo rivoluzionare l'architettura: questo comunque è ciò che dobbiamo fare come architetti

Feltrinelli

Vittorio Gregotti, 'Il territorio dell'architettura', 1966

EDILIZIA MODERNA n. 87-88



la forma del territorio

'La forma del territorio', *Edilizia Moderna* 87-88 (1965)

work. He developed and used this concept of 'architecture as modification', particularly during the 1980s and 1990s, to define and promote a European architectural front, which partly explains why internationalism was a founding feature of Gregotti's cultural agenda.

Broadening the Field

Gregotti inherited both his international openness and his interest in a theoretical and design practice linked to the analysis of the historical, geographical and cultural conditions of a place from Ernesto Nathan Rogers (1909-1969), whom he always considered his 'maestro'.⁵ Gregotti worked at the studio BBPR during his years of study at the Politecnico di Milano and, after graduating in 1952, Rogers introduced him to the CIAM meetings, to the editorial staff of *Casabella-Continuità* (1953-1964), and as his teaching assistant.⁶

In the 1950s Gregotti thus had the opportunity to assimilate Rogers's cultural positions, which were widely discussed in the pages of *Casabella-*

⁵ Vittorio Gregotti, 'Ernesto Rogers 1909-1969', *Casabella* 557 (1989), 2-3.

⁶ Gregotti joined Rogers during his editorship of *Casabella-Continuità*, as editor from 1953 to 1955 and editor-in-chief from 1955 to 1963. See: Vittorio Gregotti, *Autobiografia del XX secolo* (Milan: Skira, 2005), 36-37.

Continuità. The goal of these discussions was to find a way for the international design methodology developed by the pioneers and masters of the so-called Modern Movement to play a role in the existing specific historical, geographical and cultural conditions of each country and national tradition. This set of references was defined as *preesistenza ambientali*.⁷ Rogers followed this line to prevent functionalism from becoming a style detached from any possible pedagogical and societal change; a way to ensure the 'continuity' – not the 'crisis' – of the principles of modern architecture.⁸

While it was necessary for Rogers to mix the international rationalist language with the conditions of place, it was equally necessary for the Italian architects to always maintain a certain openness and an international vocation, and thus not to limit themselves to experimenting with an exclusively local or vernacular language. The polemics unleashed by the projects of the Italian delegation at the last CIAMs, and the famous controversy between Rogers and Reyner Banham over the *neoliberta*, bear witness to how narrow such a path was, and how easy it was to raise accusations of a 'retreat from the Modern Movement'.⁹ This stance regarding the continuation of the modern agenda, the need to base the project on specific local conditions, and the ambition to position oneself between national traditions and the international debate were undeniably tied to Gregotti's education and that of an entire generation of young architects who served on the editorial board of *Casabella-Continuità* in the 1950s, from Carlo Aymonino to Aldo Rossi, Gae Aulenti and Giorgio Grassi, to name a few.¹⁰

In the issue of *Edilizia Moderna* entitled *La forma del territorio* (1965) and in the book *Il territorio dell'architettura* (1966), Gregotti further developed Rogers's cultural positions.¹¹ In particular, the notions of 'territory' and 'modification' expanded Rogers's approach to the *preesistenza ambientali*.

The violent population movements from the countryside to Italy's major cities, the uncontrolled growth of the suburbs and the extensive urbanisation of the coasts and tourist sites as a result of the so-called economic miracle – the strong economic and industrial growth that Italy has experienced since the late 1950s – aroused Gregotti's interest and focused his gaze on the urban and territorial scale.¹² Even if the objective of the project was to come up with solutions anchored in the specific situation of a place, the tools of the architect had to expand out of proportion. This expansion was necessary both from a geographical point of view – taking into account the historical, social, economic and productive dynamics not only of the specific site, but also of the surrounding territory – and from a disciplinary point of view, involving the research methods of the historical, anthropological, semiological, economic

7 Ezio Bonfanti and Marco Porta, *Città, museo e architettura: Il Gruppo BBPR nella cultura architettonica italiana 1932-1970* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1973); Maurizio Sabini, *Ernesto Nathan Rogers: The Modern Architects as Public Intellectual* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021). See in particular: Ernesto Nathan Rogers, 'Le preesistenze ambientali e i temi pratici contemporanei', *Casabella-Continuità* 204 (1955), 2-3.

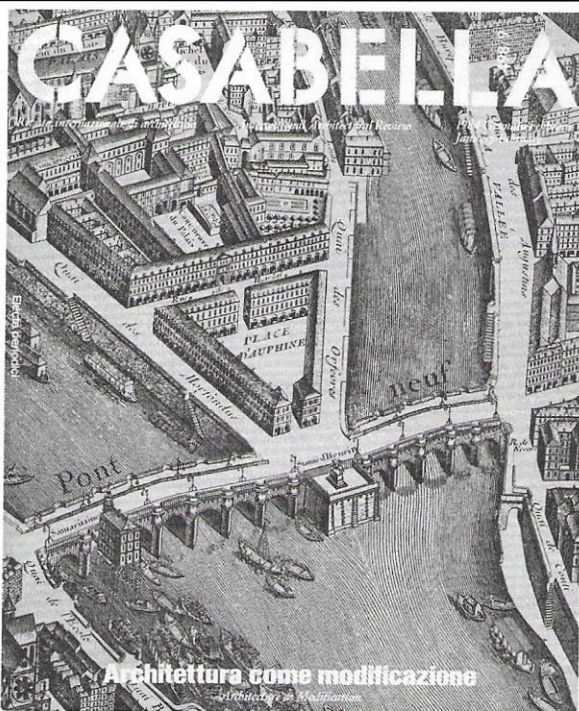
8 Ernesto Nathan Rogers, 'Continuità o crisi?', *Casabella-Continuità* 215 (1957), 2-3.

9 Reyner Banham, 'The Italian Retreat from Modern Architecture', *The Architectural Review* 747 (1959), 231-235; Ernesto Nathan Rogers, 'Evoluzione dell'architettura. Risposta al custode dei frigidaires', *Casabella-Continuità* 228 (1959), 2-4.

10 See for example: Giovanni Durbiano, *I nuovi maestri* (Venice: Marsilio, 2000).

11 'La forma del territorio', *Edilizia Moderna* 87-88 (1965); Vittorio Gregotti, *Il territorio dell'architettura* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1966).

12 Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988* (London: Penguin, 1990), chapter seven.



'Architecture as Modification', *Casabella* 498-499 (1984)



'United States: Another Country', *Casabella* 586-587 (1992)

and other sciences. In order to shape the architectural project as a 'work of modification of the environment', the evidences of the most advanced international discourses had to be applied to the specific case.¹³ Gregotti began to cite and apply the research methods proposed by the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, the long-term historical view of the Annales school and the semiological studies of Ferdinand de Saussure, all of which were discussed several times in *Il territorio dell'architettura*.¹⁴

Even though Gregotti applied this vision to a series of experimental projects for Italian cities and territories in the following years – the ZEN housing district in Palermo (1969-1973) and the new headquarters of the University of Calabria (1973-1979), for example – it is evident how the intent was to establish a two-way relationship between these specific local situations and the most advanced international debates, even beyond the discipline of architecture.¹⁵ On the other hand, in *Il territorio dell'architettura* Gregotti introduced a theoretical position that was not only focused on Italian design culture, but also intended for the international design culture in general.¹⁶

13 Gregotti, *Il territorio dell'architettura*, op. cit. (note 11), 175.

14 Paolo Caruso, 'Analisi antropologica del paesaggio', *Edilizia Moderna* 87-88 (1965), 12-16. See also: Gregotti, *Il territorio dell'architettura*, op. cit. (note 11), chapters 1 and 4.

15 'Quartiere Zen a Palermo', *Lotus* 9 (1975), 6-27; *Il progetto dell'Università della Calabria e altre architetture di Vittorio Gregotti* (Milan: Electa, 1979).

16 The publication of *Il territorio dell'architettura* triggered Gregotti's international fame, and from the second half of the 1960s he was called upon to hold seminars and lectures in Europe, America and Japan.

From the late 1970s, Gregotti expanded this theoretical framework and design approach to build a European cultural front. His texts were rather defensive in tone, in relation to the emergence of two phenomena that he saw as closely intertwined: the rise of financial globalisation and the emergence of 'postmodern' stylistic and historicist shifts.¹⁷

The election of Margaret Thatcher as British prime minister in 1979 and of Ronald Reagan as president of the United States the following year traditionally mark the beginning of a phase of economic and financial liberalism that, combined with information technology and the Internet revolution, ushered in a process of globalisation whose demise we may now be witnessing. The end of the long period of economic expansion and social revolution identified as the *trente glorieuses* also coincided with the decline of a strong national and public commitment to new towns, residential neighbourhoods, industrial buildings and institutional headquarters. These had underpinned the ethos of the modern agenda and its utopia of territorial and social transformation in the first half of the twentieth century and after the Second World War.¹⁸ In contrast, the gradual withdrawal of the state as the preferred reference of architects and urban planners marked the emergence of a transnational private clientele, often interested only in the definition and economic performance of the architectural object.¹⁹ According to Gregotti's analysis, the rise of postmodernity – with its emphasis on the architect's character as an artist – contributed to the withdrawal of architecture from its political role as a critical instrument of society. The discipline began to conform to the strict boundaries set by international economic and financial markets.²⁰

Both phenomena, according to Gregotti, caused the 'a-topisation' of architecture and a certain indifference to the specific characteristics of places and national traditions (or a mimicry and caricatural repositioning of them); these were perceived as obstacles in the definition of buildings to be spectacularly and globally marketed.²¹ Instead, the rise of the global market and the phenomenon of postmodernism resulted in the model of the starchitect, of the artist dedicated to the development of a personal poetry and indifferent to the construction of national or supranational trends – it is no coincidence that the first Pritzker Prize was awarded in 1979.

Gregotti's cultural agenda revolved around a 'critical internationalism' that championed different national traditions within a common theoretical and methodological framework, and thus advocated the opposite. With this

17 See: Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso Books, 1992); Sylvia Lavin, *Architecture Itself and Other Postmodernization Effects* (Montréal: CCA/Spector Books, 2020).

18 Mark Swenarton, Tom Avermaete and Dirk van den Heuvel (eds.), *Architecture and the Welfare State* (London: Routledge, 2014).

19 This phenomenon was recently investigated, taking a look at the case of Aldo Rossi, by Sebastiano Fabbrini, *The State of Architecture: Aldo Rossi and the Tools for Internationalization* (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2020).

20 Gregotti developed this point of view on several occasions. See, for example: Vittorio Gregotti, *L'architettura del realismo critico* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2004), 36-37; Vittorio Gregotti, *Contro la fine dell'architettura* (Einaudi: Turin, 2008), 14; Vittorio Gregotti, *Tre forme di architettura mancata* (Einaudi: Turin, 2010), 5.

21 Davide Ponzini and Michele Nastasi, *Stararchitecture: Scenes, Actors and Spectacles in Contemporary Cities* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2016); Leslie Sklair, *The Icon Project: Architecture, Cities and Capitalist Globalization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

definition, Gregotti intended to emphasise, on the one hand, the need to participate in the international debate, but also the will to do so in a critical manner, without yielding to the homologising forces of the global economic-financial market, but by claiming the historical, cultural and social contribution of the architectural discipline.

Gregotti employed the magazines *Rassegna* and *Casabella*, of which he took charge in 1979 and 1982 respectively, as instruments to explore the richness of the modern tradition and to propagate the applicability of its principles to the situation of the time.²² *Rassegna* explored the national traditions, key moments, forgotten protagonists and peculiar typologies of the 'modern project' – a definition Gregotti always preferred to that of 'Modern Movement', while *Casabella* pointed a way forward for the present and future of the discipline.²³ In both magazines – and it is sufficient to scroll through the indexes to find the proof of this – the privileged space of inquiry was what Gregotti called 'modern Europe'.²⁴ This was the geographical entity studied, as the territory where the works of architects who shared in the legacy of the 'modern project' were committed to its evolution.

Despite the many pages Gregotti devoted to projects by Italian architects (and his own firm), *Casabella* was organised as a purely European magazine. The team of editors was European, as were those who most frequently wrote in it – Oriol Bohigas, Sebastiano Brandolini, Giorgio Ciucci, Jean-Louis Cohen, Alan Colquhoun, Pierre-Alain Croset, Marco De Michelis, Jacques Gubler, Richard Ingersoll, Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani, Carlo Olmo, Joseph Rykwert, Massimo Scolari, Bernardo Secchi, Mirko Zardini – just as the architects that the magazine published and supported. They were not only of the *maestri* generation (Paul Chemetov, Aldo van Eyck, James Stirling, Oswald Mathias Ungers, Gino Valle); they were also younger, but already well-known architects (Henri Ciriani, Rafael Moneo, Alvaro Siza, Luigi Snozzi) and even very young and at the time virtually unknown architects such as Alberto Campo Baeza, Joao Luis Carrilho da Graça, Pierre Louis Faloci, Eduardo Souto de Moura and Guillermo Vazquez Consuegra, to name but a few.²⁵ Moreover, Gregotti described the European architectural world in a pioneering way by expanding it to include countries that were still behind the Iron Curtain in the early 1980s: *Casabella*, for example, published on the work of young architects from the Baltic republics and Czechoslovakia.²⁶

With a certain simplification and naiveté, Gregotti's editorial trend defended Europe as the cradle of the 'modern project' and contrasted it with the commercial and cultural influence of the United States, which was identified as 'another country', where the architectural profession was driven by the

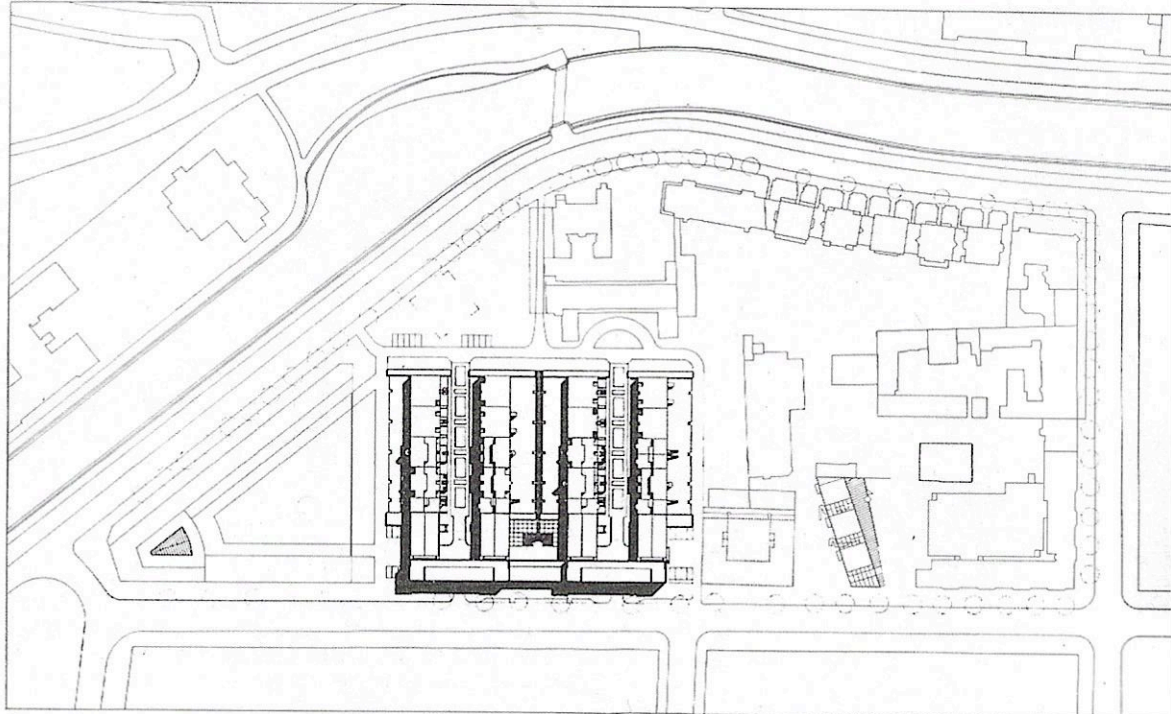
22 See: Guido Morpurgo, 'Il caso Rassegna. Lanomalia della regola', *Engramma* 188 (2022), engramma.it/eOS/index.php?id_articolo=4340; Marco Francesco Pippione, *La Casabella di Vittorio Gregotti* (Milan: Franco Angeli 2019).

23 'Indici 1-50', *Rassegna* 50 (1980).

24 Vittorio Gregotti, 'Appassionata ragionevolezza', *Casabella* 544 (1988), 2.

25 Pierre-Alain Croset and Michele Bonino, 'Casabella 1982-1996: Autour de Vittorio Gregotti et du réalisme critique en architecture', *Les Cahiers de la recherche architecturale et urbaine* 24-25 (2009), 67-86; Marco Francesco Pippione, *La Casabella di Vittorio Gregotti*, op. cit. (note 20), 108. The exceptions certainly include Tadao Ando, Frank Gehry and Richard Meier.

26 See for example: 'Slavoprojekt Liberec Studio SIAL 02', *Casabella* 512 (1985), 4-17; Vladimír Šlapeta, 'Miroslav Masák Czechoslovakia: Architecture at the Crossroads', *Casabella* 577 (1991), 42-58.



Gregotti Associati, Lützowstrasse residential complex, Berlin, site plan, 1985/
woningbouwcomplex Lützowstrasse, Berlijn, situatietekening, 1985

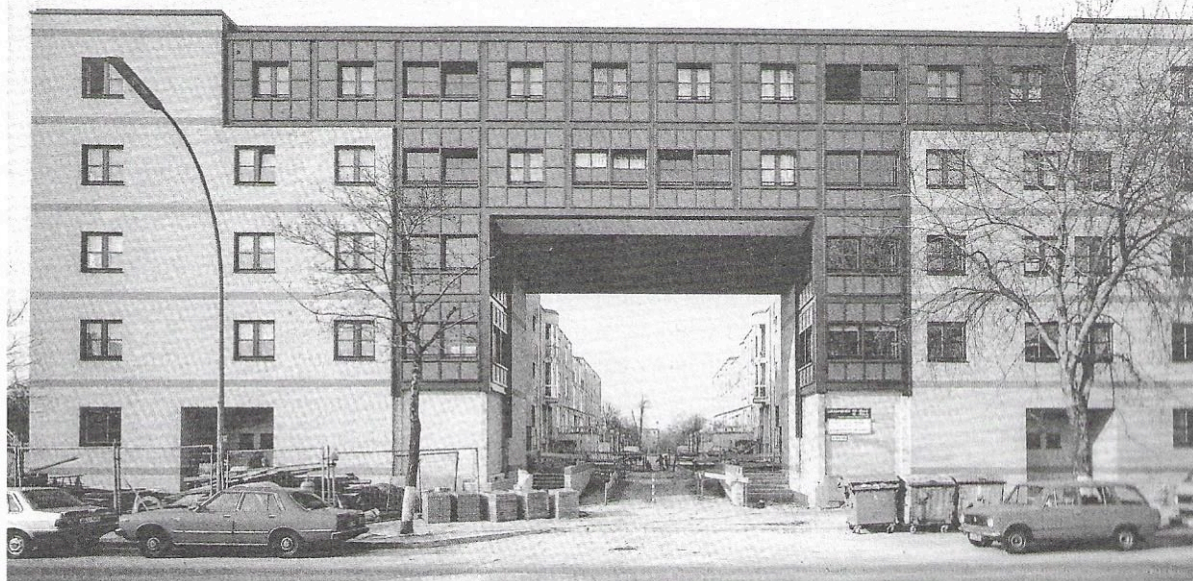
‘myth of success and fame’ and the practice of design was shackled ‘to the logic of economic and political profit’.²⁷ Despite a few exceptions – *Casabella* on several occasions covered the work of Peter Eisenman and Richard Meier, while maintaining a rigid ostracism, for example, towards Aldo Rossi – Gregotti identified the United States as the context in which the link between the global financial market and the political ‘detachment’ of architects was most damaging, while at the same time attempting to realise the editorial and historiographical construction of a Europe where it was still possible to articulate the legacy of the ‘modern project’.

The most significant issue of Gregotti’s *Casabella* – issue 498-499 (1984) entitled *Architecture as Modification* – is paradigmatic of this editorial and cultural project.

Gregotti argued that the European territory as a whole, in contrast to the vast American spaces, was privileged because it had produced not only cities but also landscapes and nature reserves, which had been reworked and reshaped by humans time and again over the millennia. The appearance of the most important cities and the most remarkable buildings and monuments, from the Mediterranean to the Baltic Sea and from the Atlantic coast to the Slavic regions, had been defined since Greco-Roman antiquity by the migrations of artists, architects and workers from different countries.²⁸ A European architect, therefore, must conceive of each project as a thoughtful gesture

27 Vittorio Gregotti, ‘United States: Another Country’, *Casabella* 586-587 (1992), 2.

28 Gregotti, *Identità e crisi dell’architettura europea*, op. cit. (note 1), 53.



Gregotti Associati, Lützowstrasse residential complex, Berlin, view towards one of the courts, 1985/ woningbouwcomplex Lützowstrasse, Berlijn, beeld richting een van de binnenhoven, 1985

that aligns as consistently as possible with the long chain of modifications that every specific portion of the city or territory has undergone in the past and will undergo in the future. According to Gregotti, the architectural culture of modern Europe should be founded:

... neither on a continuity of style and language, nor on a unity of character, nor even less on the unity of geographical place; rather on the ability to build itself on dialogue (and conflict) with places, with conditions, with the other, and to propose, from time to time starting from them, the emergence of a limited and specific truth.²⁹

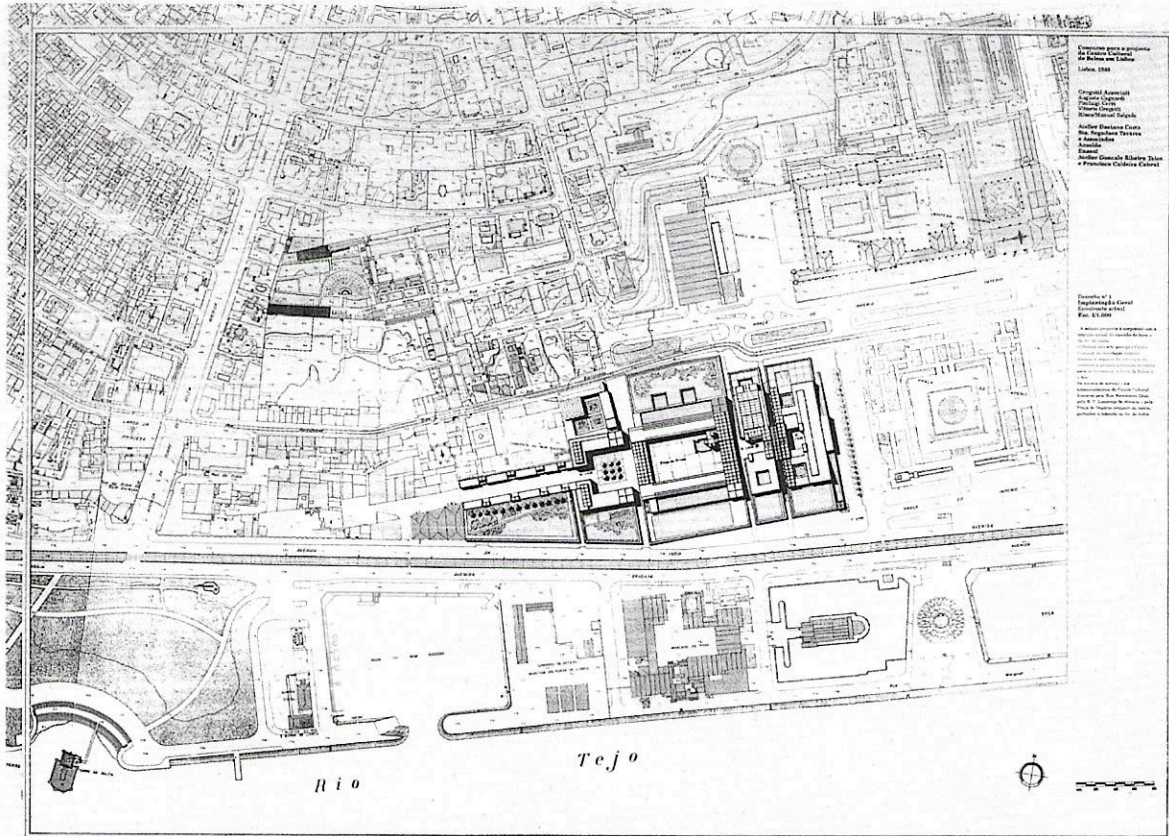
In his editorial Gregotti explained that the project as 'modification' was to be understood in at least two ways: modification of the specific geographic, historical and cultural features of the place, *and* modification 'of the modern, with its long and articulated tradition'.³⁰ That Gregotti's ideas about the 'modification' project as the basis for a new European architectural identity appealed to architects is clear from the list of German, French, British, Italian, Austrian, Spanish and Portuguese architects involved, including Oswald Mathias Ungers, Colquhoun & Miller, Juan Navarro Baldeweg, James Stirling, Heinz Tesar, Gabetti & Isola, Guillermo Vazquez Consuegra, Alvaro Siza, Bozelec, Péliissier, Porcher and Francesco Venezia.³¹

But how should the project as 'modification' be developed? First of all, it is necessary to abandon the 'individual will to power'. The architect has to be 'neither original nor artistic' and does not have to base a project on personal

29 Ibid., 7.

30 Vittorio Gregotti, 'Modification', *Casabella* 498-499 (1984), 7.

31 The only exception was the project for a visual arts centre for Ohio State University by the most European of American architects, Peter Eisenman.



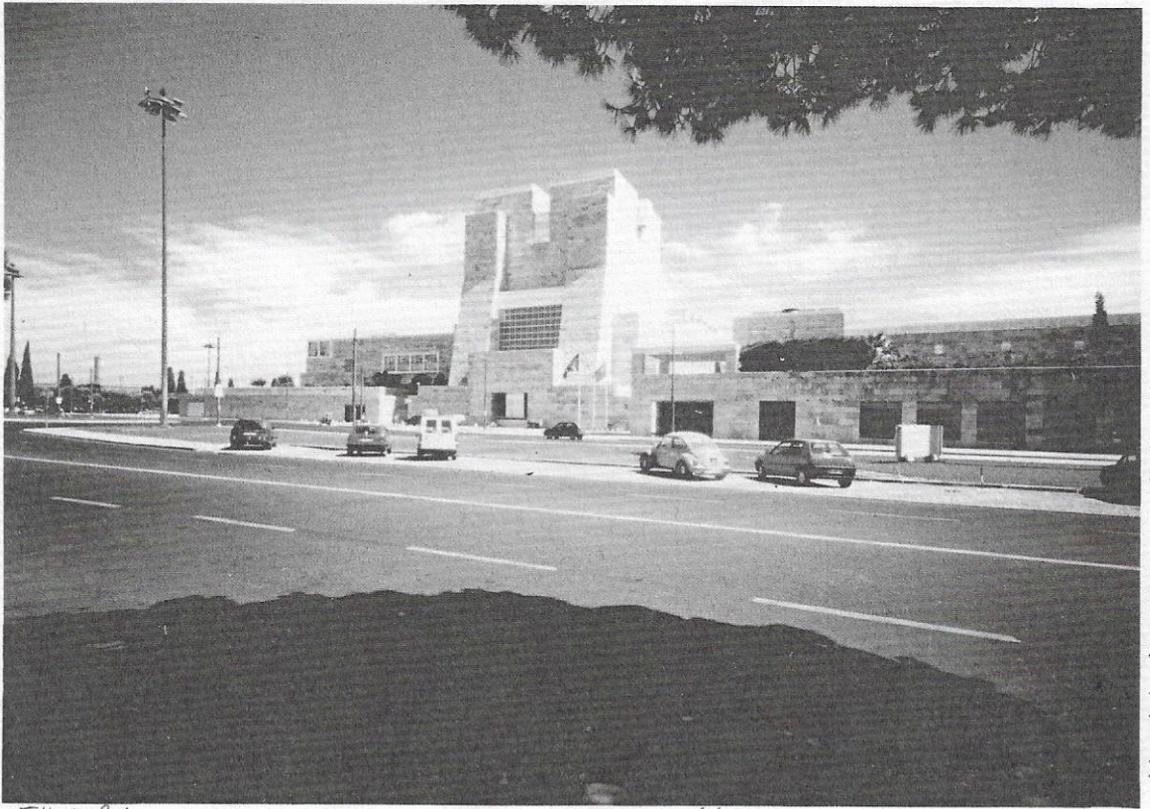
Gregotti Associati and/ en RISCO – M. Salgado, Bélem cultural centre, Lisbon, site plan for the international competition, 1988/
 Bélem cultureel centrum, Lissabon, situatietekening voor de internationale prijsvraag, 1988

poetics, the repetition of stylistic pastiches or the celebration of the most up-to-date construction techniques.³² The architect has to step back, listen to the place and prepare a project that brings out and reinforces the specific characters and the 'shared memory' of the city and the national tradition in which it fits.³³ By 'shared memory', Gregotti meant the respect for the founding characteristics of the site: the building types, the scale and heights of the buildings, the materials traditionally used, the building and street pattern of the neighbourhood, etcetera. In this sense, the definition of the perimeter and the morphological articulation of buildings – what Gregotti called the 'settlement principle' – must be adapted to site-specific conditions and to the principles he selected as cornerstones of the European urban tradition: the alignment on the street as the ordering element of private lots, the architectural intervention as the completion of urban situations that are not fully defined, and the relations between the public space of the city (streets and squares) and the semi-public or private spaces in blocks or buildings (alleys and courtyards).³⁴ Then, the architectural language has to be arranged according to principles of 'simplicity, order, formal clarity, and linguistic rigour', in order

32 Vittorio Gregotti, 'Dieci buoni consigli', *Casabella* 516 (1985), 2.

33 Gregotti, *Identità e crisi dell'architettura europea*, op. cit. (note 1), 3.

34 Vittorio Gregotti, 'Modification', op. cit. (note 27), 5.

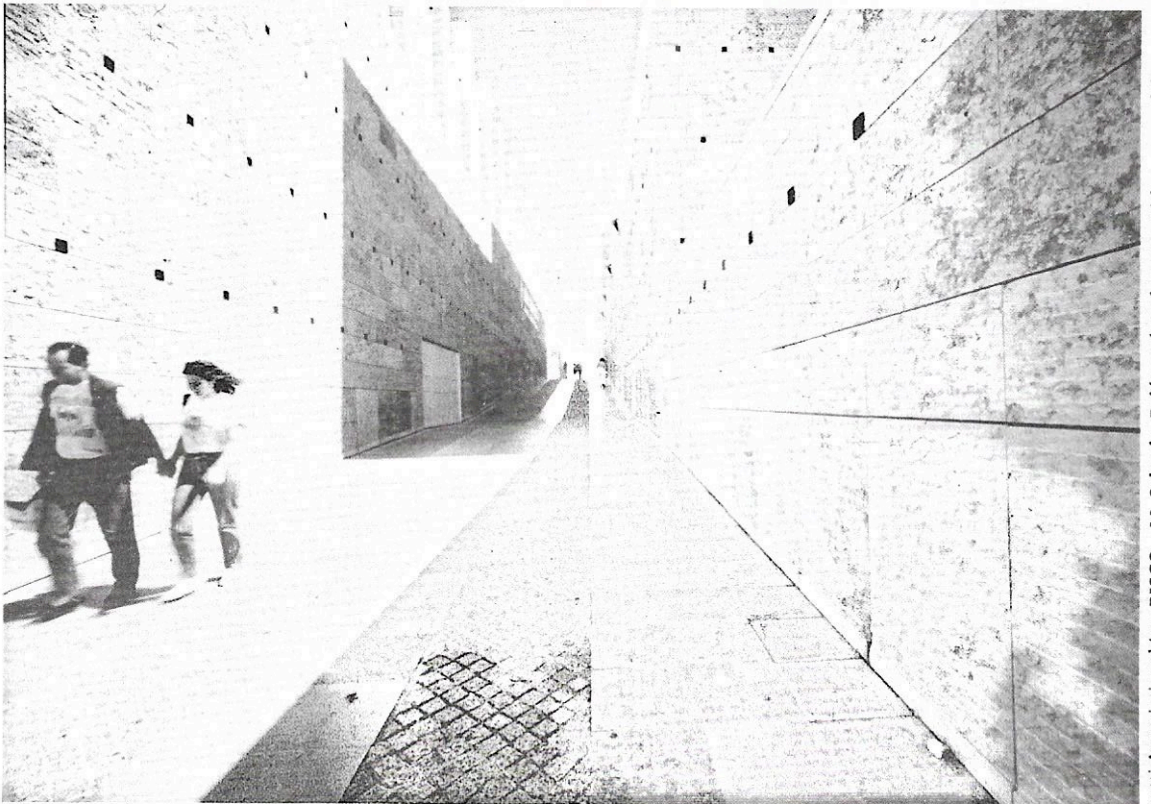


Vittorio Sai

Centro cultural de Belém

1996

Gregotti Associati and/ en RISCO - M. Salgado, Belém cultural centre, Lisbon, view from the north, 1996/ Bélem cultureel centrum, Lissabon, gezien vanuit het noorden



Vittorio Sai

Faja da Belém

1996

Gregotti Associati and/ en RISCO - M. Salgado, Belém cultural centre, Lisbon, one of the public paths, 1996/ Bélem cultureel centrum, Lissabon, een van de publieke doorgangen, 1996

to produce 'as little noise as possible', regulating the buildings as a palimpsest for future modifications.³⁵ The long-term theoretical and design approach to 'architecture as modification' was thus high on *Casabella's* editorial agenda (and especially that of the 1984 special issue). Gregotti used it to introduce 'critical internationalism' to his European colleagues, that is, not only to share the legacy of the 'modern project' and its achievements, but also to elaborate an architectural language based on the specificities of European places and national traditions.

This also explains the distance between Gregotti and Aldo Rossi: in the years when the latter achieved worldwide fame – his work was awarded the Pritzker Prize in 1990 – neither *Rassegna* nor *Casabella* ever published his projects.³⁶ While the positions expressed in *L'architettura della città* (1966) were akin to Gregotti's, from the late 1970s Rossi began to elaborate a language immersed in autobiographical memories and in the repetition of certain graphic and typological solutions that were indifferent to place, making him one of the most celebrated representatives of the postmodern movement.³⁷ This was precisely the approach Gregotti opposed: the architect should not impose his own 'artistic' mark on the site, but should derive the materials of the project from it.

Building Critical Internationalism: Berlin and Lisbon

Gregotti and his collaborators tested 'critical internationalism' on two significant occasions: the Lützowstrasse residential block in Berlin (1984-1986) and the Belém cultural centre in Lisbon (1988-1993).

Gregotti was well aware of the symbolic character of these operations. The design for the Berlin residential complex won one of the competitions organised by the IBA (Internationale Bau Ausstellung), probably the last major European operation designed according to modern ideals in which a public institution involved the international architectural community in the future of the city of Berlin.³⁸ The Belém cultural centre was to house the offices and institutions of the EU during the six-month period when Portugal would assume the presidency of the European Union.³⁹ The two projects were thus not only intended to solve specific urban situations, but were designed by Gregotti as *exempla* of an architecture for modern Europe: as a political entity aware of its history and the tradition of the 'modern project'.

The comb-like shape allows the Berlin residential complex – four parallel buildings joined by a fifth building perpendicular to them – to respect the

35 Vittorio Gregotti, *Le scarpe di Van Gogh: Modificazioni dell'architettura* (Turin: Einaudi, 1994), 46.

36 The only exception was the project for the transformation of the Carlo Felice theatre in Genoa, made with Ignazio Gardella. See: Pierre-Alain Croset and Giacomo Polin, 'I. Gardella, A. Rossi, F. Reinhart: Progetto per la ricostruzione del teatro Carlo Felice di Genova', *Casabella* 502 (1984), 52-63.

37 Fabbri, *The State of Architecture*, op. cit. (note 17).

38 Centro di Alti Studi sulle Arti Visive (Milan), Vittorio Gregotti Archive, Berlin IBA Lützowstrasse 057/1, Relazione per il Senatör für Stadtentwicklung und Umweltschutz della città di Berlino intorno al Piano della Internationale Bauausstellung, 12 December 1981. Regarding the IBA organisation and scope see: Harald Bodenschatz, Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani and Wolfgang Sonne (eds.), *25 Jahre Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin 1987: Ein Wendepunkt des europäischen Städtebaus* (Berlin: Deutsches Institut für Stadtbaukunst, 2012).

39 The Belém cultural centre was designed by Gregotti Associati in cooperation with the Portuguese design firm RISCO, led by Manuel Salgado, whom Gregotti had known since 1974. See: Centro di Alti Studi sulle Arti Visive (Milan), Vittorio Gregotti Archive, Letters, 1974.

alignment on Lützowstrasse. This reinforces its street character in the direction of nearby Lützowplatz and makes the block serve as a regulating element in the ragged urban fabric towards the Spree.⁴⁰ Two imposing portals and a small central door interrupt the façade along the street and give access to three courtyards, each assigned to the dwellings facing it, but also accessible as passages leading to the riverbank. The two lateral courtyards are accessible to traffic, while the middle one is exclusively for pedestrians. ‘The settlement principle’ of the open block is employed not only to complement and reinforce the surrounding urban features, but also for Gregotti’s more personal adaptation of the dichotomy between the strict repetition of the *Mietskasernen* (the colossal residential blocks that defined urban expansion between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) of *Das steinerne Berlin* and the character of the city as an unfinished fragment resulting from the bombings of the Second World War and the wound inflicted on the contemporary city by the Wall.⁴¹

The exterior of the residential complex is austere and pierced by regular small openings, while the dwellings in the courtyards feature more generous openings, bay windows and small terraces. The choice of materials – ochre brick and burnished steel on the street side and a more nuanced pastel-coloured plaster in the courtyards – alludes to the two examples of the modern Berlin tradition that Gregotti greatly appreciated and studied: the AEG Turbin-fabrik (1908-1909) by Peter Behrens and the Siedlung Berlin-Britz (1925-1933) by Bruno Taut and Martin Wagner.⁴²

Similarly, the perimeter of the Belém cultural centre was defined by the need to erect compact ‘walls’ to the north, south and east: the first two to reinforce the character of the rua Bartolomeu Dias and the avenida da India as main urban axes, and the third to raise a compact urban wall to transform the shapeless enclave of the praça do Impero into a true open plaza along the Tagus River.⁴³ The cultural centre thus contributes to the ordering of a piece of the city that had remained without precise definition since the Portuguese World’s Fair in 1940. The scale of the building is similar to that of the nearby monastery of Los Jerónimos, from which the cultural centre borrows both the layout of the courtyard and the cladding material: the pinkish-white limestone from which the historical city and its most distinguished monuments were built.⁴⁴ Belém’s cultural centre resembles an imposing rocky citadel, through which a number of public paths cut. They culminate in two back-to-back plazas surrounded by façade walls with wide openings compared to the outer

40 This residential complex is a small part of a much larger urban project with which Gregotti Associati had won the 1980 IBA competition, which unfortunately was never realised. See: Kenneth Frampton, ‘Building in a War Zone’, *Casabella* 525 (1986), 54-63.

41 See: Werner Hegemann, *Das steinerne Berlin* (Braunschweig: Vieweg, 1988); Oswald Mathias Ungers and Rem Koolhaas, *The City in the City: Berlin: A Green Archipelago* (Zurich: Lars Müller, 2013). Gregotti had already had the opportunity to study the history and urban structure of Berlin when he was invited in 1975 to participate in the seminars led by the Internationales Design Zentrum, see: ‘Berlin: Alt und Neu’, *Lotus* 13 (1976).

42 ‘Brick Walls and Steel Doorways: Residential Building on Lützowstrasse in Berlin’, *Lotus* 48-49 (1986), 199. See also the articles Gregotti wrote in the 1950s about Peter Behrens and German architecture of the 1920s cited in note 11.

43 The successful resolution of the urban problem of the praça do Impero was also acknowledged by Alvaro Siza, ‘Another Italian Architect in Portugal’, *Domus* 738 (1992), 25. Gregotti devoted the issue of *Rassegna* 59 (1994) to the city of Lisbon and its urban history.

44 Pierluigi Nicolini, ‘Fabric and Monument’, *Lotus International* 61 (1989), 25, 27. See also: Gregotti Associati and Manuel Salgado, ‘Centro culturale di Belém’, *Anfione Zeta* 10 (1994).

façades. The plazas give access to the cultural centre, but can also be used for events.

These two projects differ in function, 'settlement principle' and use of materials, but share the same 'architecture as modification' approach. The modification concerns both the physical, typological and urban characteristics of the place, and the modification of the intangible field that forms not only the shared memory of the inhabitants, but also the tradition of the 'modern project' that the architect has to handle. According to Gregotti, the use of materials and nuances in the Berlin project that refer to the famous masterpieces of Behrens, Taut and Wagner, forges the history of the city together with the history of twentieth-century architecture.

With the notion of 'architecture as modification', Gregotti also intended to define the profile of the architect who practiced this method: not an artist – experimenting with personal poetics indifferent to places – but rather a cultivated professional: an architect with the skills to carry out complex and large-scale commissions, but above all an architect endowed with the multi-disciplinary knowledge to read the culture and history of places and to draw from them the essential data that enable the project as a modification of the existing context.⁴⁵

Moreover, the theoretical framework and design method of 'architecture as modification' were proposed by Gregotti as the way to found a 'critical internationalism': to perpetuate and rework the history of European cities and the tradition of the 'modern project', with the aim of building a Europe as an 'archipelago'.⁴⁶ In other words, as a system of islands with clear borders and specific characteristics, but conscious of being part of a shared history and a common network of exchanges. According to Gregotti, the work of the architect has to stand against the homologation and indifference to place imposed by the globalisation of markets and information technology. Projects should instead reinforce specific local conditions and national traditions. Breaking down borders and trade barriers between European countries as a result of the integration process should not lead to similar cultural homogenisation. The 'critical internationalism' Gregotti advocated in his work and projects supported the validity of the 'adventure of difference and specificity'. That adventure created exchanges between different European countries in the past and will continue to encourage it in the future.⁴⁷

45 Gregotti, 'Dieci buoni consigli', op. cit. (note 32).

46 The notion comes from Massimo Cacciari, *l'arcipelago*, op. cit. (note 3). See: 'Arcipelago Europa', *Rassegna* 76 (1998).

47 Gregotti, *Identità e crisi dell'architettura europea*, op. cit. (note 1), 23.

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