Vers une Architecture, Complexity and Contradiction, S, M, L, XL

Three Bibles of Architecture?

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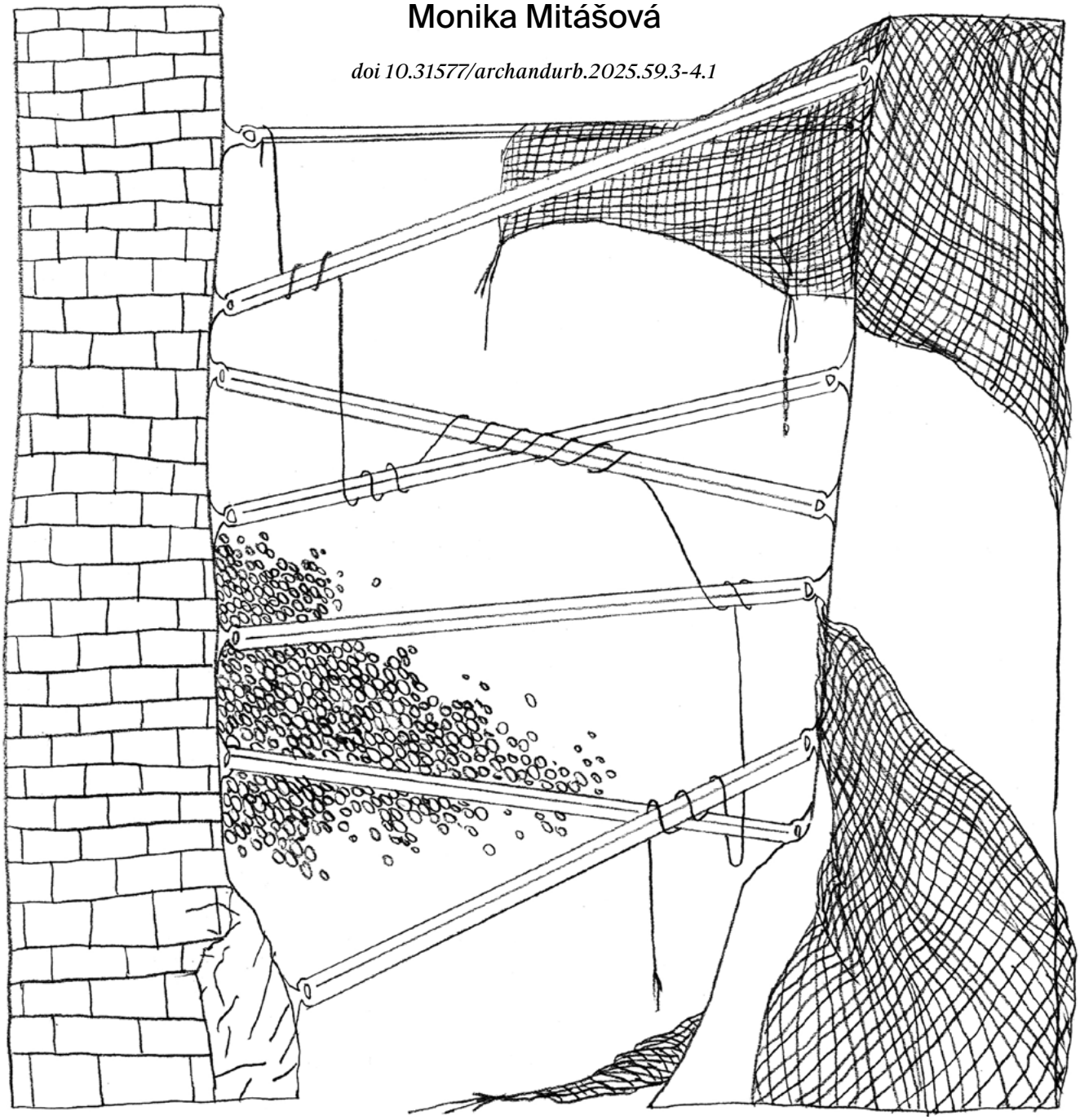

The article analyzes and compares Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture*, Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction*, and Rem Koolhaas's *S, M, L, XL*, considering the nature of their manifestness and biblicality reflected in past and present writings in both canonical and de-canonical, sacralizing and desacralizing ways. The three architectural writings under discussion are interpreted as approaches to the categories of utopian manifesto, gentle manifesto, and finally retroactive manifesto, or implicit-explicit (multi)manifesto. None of the three books interpreted is a "pure manifesto". Like the Bible, they are multi-genre volumes; similarly, in all three texts, not only do diverse genres and modes of writing – ranging from journalistic to scientific, theoretical, and literary – intersect and interrelate, but they also bring into dialogue varied ways of thinking and practicing architecture, all while maintaining a past-present-future orientation.

Since its publication in 1923, the manifesto-theoretical work *Vers une architecture* has been the subject of extensive reflection and commentary across texts, architectural projects, and built realizations, ranging from affirmative endorsements and critical engagements to outright rejections. These responses have taken various forms, from reassessments and reappraisals to acts of devaluation. This paper explores these interpretive trajectories, focusing in particular on the canonization – or even sacralization – of *Vers une architecture*, as well as its desacralization, within recent and contemporary architectural discourse.

The question is: what individual programme (or even theory?) do the various authors use to interpret the book? Do they approach Le Corbusier's projection of modern architecture and urbanism as a project of the past, as closed, finalised and no longer topical, or in other cases as a project that invites or demands updating, or even as a project of the future, open to upcoming shifts and transformations? In this context and for this paper, I am particularly interested in how Le Corbusier's programme-theory appears in the longer perspective of book-length commentaries that interpret it from an architect-urbanist's own authorial, creative perspectives, with overlaps into critical and possibly programmatic (though not always theoretical) thinking, oscillating between traditional de-canonising and de-sacralising interpretations opened toward untested, different approaches.

Finally, what do these commentaries and interpretations of *Vers une architecture* actually mean when they ascribe a biblical character to the book? Apparently, they do not mean it to be simply a piece of writing, something written down (*biblos*), or even that it takes the physical form of a book or a letter (*biblion*). They refer here to the set of two contrasting books of the Old and New Testaments, to the union of the nonunifiable. Besides, they might recall the effort to link the two Testaments typologically, so that events in the New Testament are foreshadowed in the Old Testament and Christ's genealogy can be traced from the forefathers of the Old Testament to the family unions in the New Testament. Moreover, they also relate to a multi-genre formation that combines texts on the genesis of the world, on its history, together with prophetic and psalmic texts, as well as books written by sages and kings. Furthermore, this body of books and laws is not only a canon (a word that etymologically has its own architectonic connotations: a standard, a carpenter's ruddled line, a measuring rod) but also represents a disparity between the protocanonical, canonical, and non-canonical Old Testament and New Testament texts. Therefore, it would be worth considering also the implications of equating the books to be discussed here with the Bible, whether the Old Testament or the New, or the attempt to canonize them, while taking into account heresies, sometimes even being considered as a single whole.

I no longer recall when or where I first encountered the painting *St. Jerome Reading Rem Koolhaas' S, M, L, XL* (1997) by Madelon Vriesendorp – artist and first wife of Rem Koolhaas – but I do remember that the architect Imro Vaško, who has served as a regular critic at various Slovak and international schools of architecture since the 1990s, already referred to Koolhaas' book *S, M, L, XL* (1995) as "the Bible of architecture" at the time of its initial publication.[1] It was only later, during joint seminars with the architectural theorist Marian Zervan and students at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava, as well as at the Department of Theory at the Faculty of Architecture, Brno University of Technology, that I came to realize that not only various texts by the critic Charles Jencks, but also the preface by Vincent Scully to the book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966; second edition 1977), and Jean-Louis Cohen's introduction to the American edition of *Vers une Architecture* (2008) contain multiple biblical references: to canons and the prophets, to the gospels of (new) architecture, to the Old and New Testaments, and to the Holy Writ itself. In the introduction to the American edition of *Vers une architecture*,[2] already published in the two issues of the journal Oppositions devoted to Le Corbusier in the 1980s, Jean-Louis Cohen, the inciter of this translation, wrote that this book both mediates Le Corbusier's early experience and experiences with architecture and, on the other hand, presents the young author's formulation of his own creative programme, thus turning the architect-student into a "historian, critic, discoverer, and prophet".[3] Additionally, Cohen cited statements both by Scully and Reyner Banham commenting upon and evaluating the book, concluding that the two favourable evaluations of the book by these authors can already serve as indicative of the book's "canonical status".[4] It is only at the end of the introduction, where Cohen discusses the reception of the book in various countries outside the United States, that he quotes one of the most active contemporary promoters of *Vers une architecture* in the Netherlands, a fellow participant in the Amsterdam School movement: Alfred (correctly Albert) Boeken, who corresponded with Le Corbusier and published texts about him in the Dutch architectural press from the early 1930s onwards. In these he wrote, among other things, that three of Le Corbusier's texts, *Vers une architecture, L'art decoratif d'aujourd'hui* and *Urbanisme* represent "three gospels of designers".[5] This characterization of Le Corbusier as the prophet of (new) architecture repositions *Vers une architecture* as a form of euangelion [εὐαγγέλιον], literally "the good news" in Ancient Greek, proclaiming a vision of modern architecture for the modern individual, who seeks through architecture and the construction of cities for both old and emerging communities to forge new relationships among nature, culture, and technology.

Boeken's commentary addressed Le Corbusier's three major books; in this paper, however, my focus lies on a different triad – *Vers une architecture* and its two subsequent, programmatic, manifesto-like successors. What unites all three books when read from this perspective is their enduring role, both at the time of their publication and repeatedly over time, as sources of historical, theoretical, and, in Le Corbusier's case, philosophical commentary. Frequently, they are regarded as among the "Books of books" within the literary culture of architectural modernism, and in some readings, even of postmodernism and supermodernism. This is exemplified by the aforementioned painting of St. Jerome, which portrays the hermit as a *monachós*, an exegete, and the first translator of biblical texts into Latin (the *Vulgate*), shown reading Koolhaas's *S, M, L, XL*. Notably, the artist places the ascetic reader outside the traditional interior settings of a rock cave or study, giving him nothing but an open book and a red cloak, deliberately omitting conventional iconographic elements such as the skull (held in one hand or placed on a table), the lion at his feet, and the writing implements in the other hand. Instead, Jerome – depicted with a halo and in the act of reading – is rendered as the patron saint of translators and universities, using a lightly Pop Art-inflected painterly style to offer a visual exegesis of *S, M, L, XL* as a prophetic volume of architecture for the near – and perhaps more distant – future, or even its moment of emergence.

Finally, all three aforementioned books are linked by their all having been written (respectively in 1923, 1966, and 1995) during turbulent periods shaped among other factors by the crises, ruptures, and reversals of the 1920s, 1960s, and 1990s: moments marked by social and personal revolts and revolutions. Each book also engages, in its own way, with the question of method – whether by embracing, critiquing, or rejecting it – and in doing so, each to some extent raises the issue of prediction, or even assumes the prophetic task of offering it. Yet, these books take different approaches to the form of a manifesto: from *Vers une architecture*, which can also be read as a utopian text articulating a theoretical perspective on the architecture of the modern era and its space, to *Complexity and Contradiction*, defining itself as a gentle manifesto with excursions into architectural history and a search for architectural meanings with the promise of a settlement with space, to *S, M, L, XL*, which is actually the "second generation" of a retroactive manifesto after Koolhaas's first work, *Delirious New York*. In contrast, it represents an implicit-explicit (multi)manifesto and a search for the promised implicit theory of "Bigness" in contemporary architecture and urbanism. We might also ask: what and how – in the eyes of readers and commentators – makes these three books canonical projections-manifestations of a new architecture? What kind of "sacred" or heretical texts did they become in their own time, and what do they cease to be in critical commentaries? Not to mention the question: did these books, at the time of their writing and (multiple) subsequent publication, herald of a future architecture through "pure manifestation", avoiding any dialogue with history and theory? And if they were in dialogue with them, how?

The three books discussed here are often regarded as a constellation of singularities: unique works within the oeuvres of their respective authors. Yet a closer reading reveals not only their divergences and affinities, but also the diversity of their authorships and modes of conception. Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction* in Architecture, for instance, emerged from a series of university lectures and his study residency in Italy during his Rome Fellowship. The book was shaped in dialogue with his studio colleagues and collaborators, including his wife, architect Denise Scott Brown, as well as external interlocutors such as the historian Vincent Scully – who also contributed the foreword – and Scully's wife, Marion, who assisted in putting the book together. In contrast, the authors of Vers une architecture as well as *S, M, L, XL* compiled their books from combinations of previously published journal texts and newly written material. Their initiating and organizing medium was the written word in relation to both still and moving images – for Le Corbusier, notes, manuscripts, published articles, collections of sketches and photographs; for Koolhaas, an archive of texts and projects, photographs, newspaper and magazine reproductions as well as film works. By contrast, the initiating and organizing medium of Complexity and Contradiction was a lecture accompanied by projected images, shaped further through the author's discussions with other thinkers. Besides, Koolhaas's book *S, M, L, XL* involved a long-running debate with Canadian graphic and environmental designer Bruce Mau, who had already collaborated on the book's conception. While Delirious New York originated as a dissertation research project begun in Manhattan, S, M, L, XL was a systematic critical reflection on the crisis in the OMA studio (allegedly caused by the high rate of non-commercial projects) and essentially divided the office into a design studio (OMA) and a research-publication-archiving group (AMO) with both separate and joint activities. The work on all three books was also the result of travel to explore the architecture and urbanism of other cultures: *Vers une architecture* draws on Le Corbusier's travels to Greece and Italy (Rome) while also representing a Le Corbusier-esque form of evangelisation with many lectures around the world; similarly *Complexity and Contradiction* is the result of the architect's Italian journey and residency in Rome that took place before his study trip to Las Vegas. *S, M, L, XL* was written in Rotterdam as well as during Koolhaas and Mau's joint global travels during the five years of its preparation. Yet these were not the only sources: the authors and author teams worked both with a range of diverse scholarly and transdisciplinary sources and with sources from the mass media and popular culture.

Similarly, one could consider the genres or multi-genres of all three books. Venturi stated explicitly in the introduction that his book is both "an attempt at architectural criticism and an apologia".[6] He perceived criticality in art in a manner analogous to that of the American-born British poet and playwright T. S. Eliot, who regarded criticality as a vital component of creativity – not only in the arts, but also in historiography and philosophy.[7] Creation consists for him largely of "sifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing: this fearful toil is as much critical as it is creative".[8] Criticality applied by an experienced and capable writer to his own work is, according to Eliot, the most vital, the highest form of criticism. Its tools are analysis and comparison, and Venturi draws on Eliot's grounding of criticism in relation to creation. Venturi's interest lies in comparing contemporary architecture with historical works in the context of both European and American architectural traditions and their updating. For tradition, as he quotes Eliot, cannot be inherited; he assumes "the historical sense" as an experience not only of "the pastness of the past" but also "of its presence". Eliot's author writes not only for themself and their generation, but also "with the feeling, that the whole of the literature of Europe […] has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order".[9] This makes the writer both traditional and aware of "their moment" in history: this "simultaneity of timeless and temporal". And Venturi constructs his architectural comparisons and analyses so that his book speaks not only of the contemporaneous but also of the past in relation to the contemporaneous – not considering that it should be a visionary book, and if so, then to the extent that "the future is inherent in the reality of the present".[10] Moreover, Venturi wanted to talk "about architecture" and not "around it": not to create a utopian manifesto of architecture, but to rethink it. This aim is also evident in the key terms that can be found in the books discussed in this paper. While in Le Corbusier's case it is *modénature* that invariably combines, in architecture in general but equally in new architecture, the newly natural with the cultural and the technical into a unique artistic arrangement, with Venturi it is mainly ambiguity or with Koolhaas the "delirious" "Bigness", itself a referral to the sacred undertone of monumentality or the sublime (elusiveness, awe and reverence) with an apocalyptic mood.

Venturi's gentle manifesto

In the introduction to the second edition of *Complexity and Contradiction* (1977), Venturi also reflects on the reception of the first edition. Allegedly, his critics' analogies between contemporary complex and contradictory architecture and its historical antecedents – such as Mannerism, Baroque, Rococo, and even some late works by the founders of Modernism –led to parodies of Venturi's analytical and comparative methods. However, Venturi embraces these methods and recontextualizes them within his own work, which he does not expand in subsequent editions. Venturi prefers "our chaotic reality" of the events of the spring of 1968 in both Europe and the US to the universalizing, techno-optimistic, and computational "fairy stories" of the 1960s. Yet it is precisely the future-aimed perspective of his project comprised of complex and contradictory architectural works – born

in the past, hence also at a time of historical ruptures and reversals – that is still underestimated today, when *Complexity and Contradiction* is considered above all as a statement of historicizing (eclectic) postmodernism – an extremely simplistic response. In part, drawing on texts of the literary scholar Cleanth Brooks, a representative of the American New Criticism movement developed since the mid-1950s, Venturi argues in favour of complexity and contradiction as necessary preconditions for the emergence and operation of literary, artistic as well as architectural works. He returns to the preference in poetry for ambiguity and paradox over simplicity in a lengthy quotation from Brooks's characterization of the poet in *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (1947).[11] In dialogue with a book by the English poet and literary scholar Sir William Empson, Venturi differentiates "seven types of ambiguity" in architecture as well. Additionally, he later cites Brooks where he interprets the literary work of the English poet John Donne by pointing to the tradition of differentiating on the basis of the logical conjunction "both-and" as well as the inclusive disjunction "either-or" – as opposed to the exclusive disjunction, i.e., the alternation, in other words (and borrowing a term from logic) "xor".[12] Without both conjunction and inclusive disjunction, it could also represent a binary opposition (a pair with one common property and one opposing property), not a complex whole, which is as important to Venturi as the aforementioned notion of ambiguity: "An architecture which includes varying levels of meaning breeds ambiguity and tension."[13]

Venturi therefore established the foundations of his approach to criticality through a dialogue with both the contemporary architecture of the 1960s and architectural history, as well as what he perceived to be unorthodox modern architecture,[14] while simultaneously engaging in a debate with the New Criticism in literary studies. And although Venturi did not develop close reading strategies for architecture – that is, an interpretation of architecture centred on the work itself, regardless of its contexts – as Peter Eisenman did, he also set the stage for him in the sense that he discovered, created and reassessed Brooksian ambivalences and paradoxes in 1960s architecture and across history. Further evidence is supplied in how Venturi distinguishes between unorthodox and orthodox modernism in the work of his predecessors, including Le Corbusier's texts, projects and buildings. Venturi cites the 1927 English edition of *Vers une architecture* in two instances within his book, providing full source references; in a third instance, he appears to quote Le Corbusier without citing the source. His first explicit reference to Vers une Architecture occurs in the opening chapter, titled "Nonstraightforward Architecture: A Gentle Manifesto", which begins with the now-famous declaration: "I like complexity and contradiction in architecture."[15] He defines and characterizes these qualities in comparison to their perceived counterparts: he quotes Frank Lloyd Wright, a precursor of modernism, from Edgar Kaufmann's *An American Architecture* (1955), where Wright articulates visions of "simplicity" of modern architecture. Venturi then juxtaposes this with a citation from *Vers une architecture*: "And Le Corbusier, co-founder of Purism, spoke of the 'great primary forms' which, he proclaimed, were 'distinct […] and without ambiguity'".[16] Here, ambiguity signifies not only the presence of dual or multiple meanings, but also the inherent ambiguity embodied by the complex and contradictory totality of architecture.

The second instance in which Venturi appears to quote Le Corbusier occurs in Chapter 6, titled "Accommodation and the Limitations of Order: The Conventional Element", where he asserts that "'There is no work of art without a system' is Le Corbusier's dictum."[17] However, he apparently quoted Le Corbusier from memory, or perhaps in a compressed or conflated form – similar to many traditional statements popularly attributed to figures such as Mies van der Rohe ("God is in the details"), Adolf Loos ("Ornament is a crime"), or St. Augustine ("Beauty is the brilliance of truth"), none of which were, in fact, explicitly uttered in these words in their texts. In *Vers une architecture*, Le Corbusier discusses multiple systems – the natural system, the system of thought or knowledge, the compositional and proportional system ("Modulor"), among others. However, I was unable to locate the above-mentioned "dictum" relating a system directly to a work of art – neither in the original French text nor in the English translation cited by Venturi, and certainly not in more recent English editions. However, *Vers une architecture* does contain Le Corbusier's statement: "More and more, constructions and machines arise with proportions, with a play of volumes and materials, such that many among them are true works of art, for they entail number, which is to say order."[18] And this "order" could also be understood as a "system" in connection with the work of art discussed by Venturi. In more recent translations, the above-mentioned formulation echoes very loosely, perhaps, Le Corbusier's reflections: "Where does the emotion come from? […] From a plastic system whose effects encompass every element of the composition."[19] Or: "An era creates its own architecture, which is the clear image of a system of thought."[20] Many times, however, Le Corbusier also writes about how the architect is the creator of "the order" or the whole ("The architect, through the ordonnance of forms, realizes an order that is a pure creation of his mind"[21] or "Contour modulation[22] is a pure creation of the mind; it calls for the plastic artist."[23] Somewhere in this tension between system and order/ordonnance/orderliness and the whole of the work of plastic art, too, Venturi's quasi-quote might have its origins, regardless of which specific idea or text by Le Corbusier may have given birth to it.

Venturi favours bipolar and indeterminate arrangements forming "difficult wholes" over systems; he similarly prefers these to triads, which he regards as "simple wholes". Yet above all, he contends that ordering allows for both control and spontaneity, including improvisation.[24]

In contrast to Mies van der Rohe's efforts to transform the "desperate confusion" of the early modern period into a relatively harmonious architectural order/ordonnance/orderliness, Venturi aligns himself with Kahn's approach of the late modern period, an era marked by complex relations between modernism and postmodernism: "By order I do not mean orderliness."[25] Order, as an eventful quality, permits the inclusion of confusion and enables movement beyond the confines of fixed, stabilized orderliness, advancing instead toward dynamic systems.

For the third time – and for the second time citing a specific passage from *Vers une architecture* –, Venturi quotes Le Corbusier in Chapter 9 of "The Inside and the Outside". After quoting Greenough, Thoreau, and Sullivan, he writes: "Even Le Corbusier has written: 'The plan proceeds from within to without; the exterior is the result of an interior'."[26] Venturi's preference, however, was for a complex and contradictory architectural work that clearly differentiates its interior from its exterior. In this regard, he aligned himself with architects such as Alvar Aalto, Aldo van Eyck, Paul Rudolph, and Louis Kahn, yet additionally he argued that some of Le Corbusier's early and late works embodied this approach, in contrast to the early work of Mies van der Rohe. Venturi critiques Mies's dictum "Less is more" by emphasizing that the architect determines *how* to solve problems rather than which problems to address or ignore. When confronted with unsolvable challenges, Venturi contended, architects express them through an unorthodox, inclusive architecture – one that accommodates fragments, contradictions, improvisation, and the inevitable tensions that emerge between these elements. According to Venturi, in some of Mies's and Johnson's villas and residential pavilions, the imposed simplicity – what he terms "forced simplicity" – has devolved into "oversimplification." Here, the building becomes a diagram of life's oversimplified functions, embodying an abstract "either-or" logic. Where complexity cannot underpin *simplicity*, what results instead is mere *simpleness*, which, in Venturi's view, leads ultimately to bland architecture. Over-simplification ("blatant simplification") then leads to "bland architecture". In this case, "less is a bore". Yet "[t]he best twentieth-century architects have usually rejected simplification – that is, simplicity through reduction – in order to promote complexity within the whole. The works of Alvar Aalto and Le Corbusier (who often disregards his polemical writings) are examples."[27]

In addition to the cited quotations, Venturi offers extensive commentary and interpretation of Le Corbusier's early and later projects and realizations throughout most chapters of his book, highlighting the tensions, inconsistencies, and contradictions between Le Corbusier's early texts and both his early and late architecture. Venturi's analysis is notably more nuanced and pluralistic than that of many other commentators and critics of Le Corbusier. Through this approach, he simultaneously de-canonizes and re-canonizes Le Corbusier's oeuvre, framing his projects and buildings as continuations of historical modes of complexity, contradiction, and ambiguity. These qualities, Venturi suggests, presage their present and future manifestations, incorporating both the aforementioned inclusions and the "difficult wholes". From Venturi's perspective, some of Le Corbusier's works are integral to that movement and transformations of "complexity" across architectural history, which Venturi sees as "[…] a continuous strain seen in such diverse architects as Michelangelo, Palladio, Borromini, Vanbrugh, Hawksmoor, Soane, Ledoux, Butterfield, some architects of the Shingle Style, Furness, Sullivan, Lutyens, and recently, Le Corbusier, Aalto, Kahn, and others."[28] He demonstrates this by analysing, comparing, and interpreting Le Corbusier's buildings – especially those designed and completed in post-World War II India. The exceptions to this rule are the early Villa Stein and especially the Villa Savoye: this pair of villas is discussed not as canonical realizations of the Five Points of modern architecture, but canonized precisely as the starting points for the vetting, testing, and transcending of the Five Points across Le Corbusier's entire oeuvre. However, Venturi is also aware of the risks and limits of such a presentist reinterpretation of the past in the light of the contemporary events of the 1960s, when, in relation to Le Corbusier's previously quoted statement about the relationship between the system and the work of art, he states: "In recent architecture Le Corbusier in the Villa Savoye, for example, accommodates the exceptional circumstantial inconsistencies in an otherwise rigid, dominant order. But Aalto, in contrast to Le Corbusier, seems almost to create the order out of the inconsistencies, as can be seen in the Cultural Center at Wolfsburg."[29]

Venturi compares the Villa Savoye to Le Corbusier's later Shodhan House in Ahmedabad, which he considers ambiguous and as such an example of a non-exclusive "yet". Shodhan House is a "closed yet open cube": a cubic building enclosed at the corners, whose surfaces are randomly marked on its front, back and side walls/facades with large openings. Compared to the Shodhan House, the Villa Savoye is "simple outside yet complex inside".[30] Thus one could go on with comparisons, de-canonizations and re-canonizations of Le Corbusier's works, including La Tourette or the Palace of Justice in Chandigarh: according to Venturi, they have a complex program and form and at the same time represent coherent, powerful wholes, in contrast to the multiplicities and articulation of the Palace of Soviets in Moscow or the Cité de Refuge de l'Armée du Salut in Paris. Along with these, Venturi also comments on Le Corbusier's Algerian project of residential buildings with elevated highways located on their flat roofs, relating it to both Kahn's architecture of viaducts and the "collective form" described in Fumihiko Maki's texts and works. "All of these have complex and contradictory hierarchies of scale and movement, structure, and space within a whole. These buildings are buildings and bridges at once."[31]

Venturi attributes a similar sense and meaning to the ways in which Kahn and Le Corbusier used bifunctional and polyfunctional elements in buildings. The brise-soleils in Marseille's Unité d'Habitation are, according to Venturi, structures placed before the building envelope: they represent enclosed balconies and brise-soleils at the same time. "Are they wall segments, piers, or columns?"[32] he asks. And Kahn's clusters of columns, in turn, he interprets as shifts of "rhythmically complex columns and pilasters of Baroque architecture",[33] a reference he could equally apply to Aalto's clustered columns. Venturi forms these and other longer or shorter r/evolutionary series, family lines, and analogies between works of both the ancient and recent past, as well as early and late unorthodox modernism and the present, with prospects for the future. He also comments on how Le Corbusier combined *objets trouvé* and mass-produced items (such as Thonet chairs, cast-iron radiators, etc.) with custom-designed furnishings in his projects, embodying both assemblages of objects associated with traditional and ritualized modes of living together with newly created items that could be situated in any global context. In Le Corbusier's Ronchamp Chapel, a 19th-century wooden statue of the Virgin Mary is exposed in a niche-display case in the façade of this new pilgrimage sanctuary, creating unexpected connections and arrangements between the building and the sculpture, as well as new, unverified ways of conducting ceremonies or individual prayer in and around the chapel, while connecting the building with the landscape – not only in terms of space, but also in terms of place.

In the seventh chapter of "Contradiction Adapted", Venturi offers interpretations of several additional buildings by Le Corbusier. While in the Villa Savoye he draws attention to how one column is extended and another entirely omitted from the orthogonal grid to facilitate circulation and create free space, in the Assembly Building in Chandigarh he again focuses on the columns – this time within two nested volumes: an outer orthogonal structure and an inner hyperbolic form. The layout of the columns of the inner, embedded hyperboloid does not conform at all to the orthogonal grid of the columns of the circumferential body, and vice versa – this juxtaposition of contradictions between the columnar layouts of the two embedded bodies Venturi calls "violent and uncompromising" – the vital, even brutal, thrust of the non-elemental form of the rotational solid into the elemental cubic form in both ground plan and section. He quotes Kahn here again: "It is the role of design to adjust to the circumstantial."[34] In his interpretation of Le Corbusier's late work, Venturi goes so far as to say: "Le Corbusier today [1966] is a master of the eventful exception, another technique of accommodation."[35] And in the following, eighth chapter of "Contradiction Juxtaposed", he analogously interprets the Mill Owners' [Association] Building in Ahmedabad as a residential structure defined by a grid of floors and brise-soleils violently interrupted by a pause – a rupture in the front façade (a void) – that permits frontal access via a diagonal ramp and staircase.[36] In terms of interventions and the incursion of contradictions into otherwise homogeneous arrangements, he also analyses the contrast between the main and side entrances in one of Le Corbusier's early works, the Villa Stein.[37]

These and other interpretive strategies employed by Venturi, addressing both orthodox and unorthodox statements from *Vers une Architecture* in tandem with his analyses and comparisons of Le Corbusier's works, constitute a "difficult whole" in themselves, marked by reversals, tensions, inconsistencies and ambivalences in interpretation. If we were to ask about the forces that initiate them, Venturi himself aptly characterized it: "Architecture is evolutionary as well as revolutionary. As an art it will acknowledge what is and what ought to be, the immediate and the speculative."[38] Architecture, then, emerges as both evolutionary and revolutionary in contemplations – real and potential/hypothetical alike – encompassing both the realized and speculative design decisions of Le Corbusier and other architects throughout history and into the present. Similarly, Le Corbusier's dichotomy of "architecture or revolution" is recontextualized by Venturi within a non-exclusive framework, aligning it instead with the notion of architectural (r)evolution. He critiques and de-canonises an architecture founded on exclusive disjunctions, oversimplified order and reductive simplicities: challenging both the ideas and built works of orthodox modernism, while ambiguously rethinking those concepts and architectural realizations that modernist orthodoxy deemed extra-canonical or even uncanonisable. What Venturi canonises is an architecture that is inclusive, transhistorical, and transcultural – setting the stage also for Koolhaas's "globalizing" architecture and "delirious" "Bigness". Thus, if anything gains new ground in Venturi's renewing canon, it is above all the ambiguity of unorthodox modern buildings. In his close reading, Peter Eisenman later formulates another seminal concept, critical of ambiguity, which becomes, in the Derridean sense, a prerequisite not only for every ambiguity and multivocality, but also for profound differentiation: the concept of undecidability with its critical potential.

In his introduction to the first edition of *Complexity and Contradiction* (1966), historian Vincent Scully wrote that it is a very American and consistently pluralistic book: "Yet it is probably the most important writing on the making of architecture since Le Corbusier's *Vers une Architecture*, of 1923. Indeed, at first sight, Venturi's position seems exactly the opposite of Le Corbusier's, its first and natural complement across time."[39] Compared to that, Scully considers *Towards an Organic Architecture*[40] (1950), written by the Italian architect and historian Bruno Zevi, to be, at most, a "partial complement" to Le Corbusier's *Vers une Architecture*. He justifies this on the grounds that Zevi's work is based on the ideas and works of other authors – especially those of Wright. Zevi is therefore not a designing, implementing and writing architect like Le Corbusier, Venturi and later Koolhaas. Yet

Scully's other statements also show that he does not even consider Zevi's book a "most necessary antidote" to the vulgarised contemporary responses to Le Corbusier's ideas and their simplifications.[41] Still, Zevi's books are singular contributions to rethinking the role of space in the birth of architecture; in this sense he is a Spatialist. Compared to that, Venturi, already in *Complexity and Contradiction*, begins to formulate a polemic against Spatialism – an argument he later develops with Denise Scott Brown in the chapter titled "Space as God" in Learning from Las Vegas: "Perhaps the most tyrannical element in our architecture now is space. […] [S]pace is what displaced symbolism. […] It's space and light […] our aesthetic impact should come from sources other than light, more symbolic and less spatial sources."[42] This admonition could also be seen as an appeal to quit the idolatry of space. However, Scully does not take into account the preparations for this appeal. In 1977, Venturi stated at the beginning of the preface to the second edition of Complexity and Contradictions that he had written his book as a practicing architect "responding to aspects of architectural theory and dogma of that time." Thus, he links his polemic with Spatialist "dogmas" with his interest in the contemporary discussion of semiotics and the formulation of a different project of architecture as a system of communication, hence positioning his book among the attempts at "an analysis of what seems to me true for architecture now, rather than a diatribe against what seems false".[43] On the one hand, he is looking for an "antidote" to Spatialism, and on the other, he is concerned with the manifestation of ambiguity as a guarantee of multivocality: after all, this is how Ernst Gombrich uses the term in his book *Art and Illusion*, published in 1960. In this sense, the "gentle manifesto" is part of the anti-Spatialist critique of modernism, of the semiotic "turn" in architecture, and in terms of manifesto texts it also sets the stage for Koolhaas's Delirious New York – a retroactive manifesto – as well as for *S, M, L, XL* – an implicit-explicit (multi)manifesto.[44]

Koolhaas' implicit-explicit (multi)manifesto

In the text *Recent Koolhaas* (1996), the American critic and curator Jeffrey Kipnis quotes himself in so as to write wearing the mask of a "frustrated critic, retreating to mythic platitudes": "'There is no other way to put it; Koolhaas is the Le Corbusier of our times'."[45] His hypothesis, meanwhile, is that Koolhaas's main concern is rethinking the relationship between architecture and freedom or liberty. The question then is what this provocative comparison of the prophet of international utopia to the prophet of global dystopia actually means (neither Venturi's interest in *topos* nor his critique of *atopia* interest Kipnis). In *Delirious New York*, Koolhaas stages a fictional delirious encounter in Manhattan between Dalí and Le Corbusier "whom I'm incredibly sceptical of but still admire".[46] Yet in striving for freedom, according to Kipnis, Koolhaas does not seek "a total reinvention of the discipline" (like Eisenman and his Institute), nor is he explicitly critical: "Koolhaas's work never resists authority; it sabotages authority from within." In this sense, this architect's work is supposedly radical and yet "removed from the tradition of the avant-garde".[47] In doing so, he also responds to the founding works of modernist architecture – those of Mies van der Rohe on the one hand and Le Corbusier on the other – but his intent is to *disestablish* both past and current authorities, political governance, as well as unwelcome conventions in society and culture. Kipnis also calls such a hypothetical reconstruction of Koolhaas's method *reductive disestablishment*. What would this mean for Koolhaas's retroactive manifesto *Delirious New York*? It articulates a paradox: whereas Le Corbusier wrote a programmatic manifesto text about Manhattan but never built it, the American modernists built a new Manhattan, yet never wrote a manifesto for it. Koolhaas responded to this paradox by both dismantling Le Corbusier's utopian manifesto-texts on one hand and on the other by understanding Manhattan as a "built manifesto" of new architecture that needed to be written retroactively at a time when utopian manifestos were no longer being written (1978). And like Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction*, the conclusion of Koolhaas's *Delirious New York* contains OMA's studio projects for Manhattan. Thus, from being a declaredly retroactive manifesto, it also becomes a futuroactive, hybrid one: a retrospective-perspectival, built-projective programmatic text. In it, Koolhaas de-canonises Le Corbusier's manifestoes, polemicising in particular with his ideas and proposals as he quotes them from the original text of *La Ville Radieuse* (1964), from the translation called *When the Cathedrals Were White* (1947), from Le Corbusier's author's report on his part of the United Nations Headquarters in New York (1947), and from the American daily press (1935); tellingly, nowhere in this text is *Vers une architecture* quoted anywhere.

In contrast, the book *S, M, L, XL* mentions absolutely none of Le Corbusier's texts.[48] Here, Koolhaas alludes to the architect solely through references to passages from *Delirious New York*. However, *S, M, L, XL* includes a glossary running through the entire book, which he quotes Dalí's critique of Le Corbusier under the letter S in the entry "SANK".[49] Koolhaas thus indirectly criticizes Le Corbusier's programs and works in this way, using Japanese Metabolists when he quotes Maki.[50] He only addresses Le Corbusier directly in his own characterization of the city-state of Singapore in the second half of the 20th century.[51] Much as the skyscrapers of Manhattan were interpreted in *Delirious New York* as the built manifesto of the new American architecture, realised long before Koolhaas wrote it down in the form of a textual manifesto of Manhattanism, Singapore is presented in *S, M, L, XL* as the built "manifesto" of the new global architecture of "Bigness": "As a manifesto of the quantitative, Singapore reveals a cruel contradiction: huge increases in matter, the overall effect increasingly unreal"[52] – which now needs to be articulated and written down.[53] As such, *S, M, L, XL* articulates the action programs of *Bigness, or the problem of Large*[54] (1994) – not just for Singapore, but for any world megalopolis

that "does not seem to deserve" a manifesto. Instead of Le Corbusier's five points of modern architecture (anchored in theoretical reasoning and unified by the notion of *modénature*), Koolhaas proposes five theorems of Bigness, notably lacking any coherent theoretical framework and instead unified by Bigness itself as an operative notion.[55]

This raises the question: can certain systematizing and generalizing frameworks nonetheless be reconstructed? For instance, one might discern such frameworks in Koolhaas's conception of Bigness as a disruptive force that challenges both the integrity of the architectural "Whole" and the idea of architecture as a self-contained, "Real" work. Bigness, in this sense, operates through mechanisms of *disassembly* – breaking apart the formal and conceptual unity of the architectural object – and *dissolution*, loosening established bonds within architectural composition and reconfiguring them into transforming hybridities. These practices generally gesture toward the emergence of a happening architecture – both actual and virtual – generated within a dynamic field of forces and articulated at a new, expanded scale (Big Data). Moreover, it is worth noting that in his five theorems, Koolhaas also identifies five distinct breaks that Bigness brings about, both in relation to architecture as a discipline and to the architectural work as such:

1) the break with discrete and fixed architectural scales (the emergence of a continuous scalar spectrum, akin to a fractal);
2) the break with traditional compositions based on horizontal pedestrian movement (longitudinality) and their pausing (centrality) and the birth of large-scale layouts based on mechanized and automated shuttle movement – transporting people vertically and diagonally (lift, elevator, escalator, moving ramp);
3) the break with the equivalence between the façade/envelope of the building and its distant core and vice versa (the break with transparency) and the emergence of inside-outside hybrids: the continuous surface, the fold;
4) situating Bigness/Large beyond good and evil (the break with morality) and the birth of posthumanism;
5) the severing of the ties between Great Architecture and urban tissue (the break with context, the rejection of autonomy) and the birth of quasi-institutions, quasi-objects and quasi-subjects as actors in a network of agents (actor-network theory). A neutral, generic space of "zero-degree creatorship emerges.

The "followers" of Big/Large Architecture are indeterminate, transcending their "predecessors": the megastructures of European urban architecture of the late 1950s and 1960s, the *urbanisme spatiale* of Yona Friedman (1958), whose "city in the sky" could, according to Koolhaas, spread endlessly like a horizontal "metallic blanket" hovering above the Earth's surface, avoiding direct contact with the ground and thus evading the necessity to confront or define its *rightful* place within the terrestrial context. This "city in the sky" is, in his view, a hybrid of the "criticism as decoration" of the city. This is reminiscent of Beaubourg in Paris (1972), which for Koolhaas is in turn too demonstrative and thus falls short of the neutrality of American skyscrapers. Yet these de-canonised precursors of Bigness clearly influenced Koolhaas's revolutionary generation of May '68, which adopted two "lines of defence" against them: it implemented both the "dismantlement" of architecture and its "disappearance" into the mass media and virtual reality. The first strategy leads to the fractalization of the architecture and thus to the incorporation of the part into the whole, to the transformation of the particular into the *systemic*. By fragmenting the program into its smallest functional particles, Koolhaas argues that a "perversely unconscious revenge" occurs – one that challenges the traditional *form-follows-function* doctrine, which has historically shaped, and continues to influence, the content of architecture.[56] As for the second strategy – the disappearance of architecture in communication media, including computer media: since the 1960s, architecture in mass media, but also in science and philosophy, has been thought of as the "first 'solid that melts into air'" through the effects of "demographic trends, electronics, media, speed, the economy, leisure, the death of God, the book, the telephone, the fax machine, affluence, democracy, the end of the Big Story…"[57] Architecture has been disappearing from actual time and space, and contemporary innovators are experimenting with virtual reality, re-generating past (and future?) possibilities of architecture in a "simulated virtuality" – "where fascism may be pursued with impunity?" as Koolhaas already asked in the years of this book's compilation (1990–1995).

The Whole and the Real ceased to be possible in architecture at the end of the millennium, he argues, as a result of the pursuit of "reorganization, consolidation, expansion, a clamoring for megascale". The preoccupied architectural profession proved incapable of responding to the profound social and economic transformations that might have offered an opportunity to restore its diminishing credibility. The result has been an absence of reflection, documentation, manifestation as well as theoretical discourse regarding Bigness. In the author's view, Bigness theory should also answer the question: "what is the maximum architecture can do?" Or why Bigness is "architecture's most debilitating weakness"? And moreover, why are "Big mistakes […] our only connection to Bigness"?[58] Despite the connection to the mistakes caused by Bigness, at the turn of the millennium, architecture has the potential to "reconstruct the Whole, resurrect the Real, reinvent the collective, reclaim maximum possibility". And Koolhaas concludes his reflection on the relationship of Bigness to the Whole and the Real by stating: "Only through Bigness can architecture dissociate itself from the exhausted artistic/ideological movements of modernism and formalism

to regain its instrumentality as a vehicle of modernization. […] Bigness destroys, but it is also a new beginning. It can resemble what it breaks."[59] This is a rather explicit "implicit" manifesto of the new architecture of Bigness. Yet has it, to date, acquired any an accompanying theory?

Koolhaas then proceeds as if to re-canonise Venturi's gentle manifesto.[60] The functions or programmes in progress, in the state of their making, interact with each other and can co-create new events. In this sense, does Bigness also have the nature of an alchemical experiment? Indeed, as Koolhaas declares: "Bigness is where architecture becomes both most and least architectural: most because of the enormity of the object; least through the loss of autonomy – it becomes an instrument of the forces, it depends."[61] Bigness also transcends (the architect's, the maker's) signature, as it capitulates to technologies, engineers, suppliers, manufacturers, politicians, and other (natural, cultural, and technical) actors. "It promises architecture a kind of post-heroic status – a realignment with neutrality."[62] But it also continues to be acted upon by what Bigness misses.[63] In concluding this implicit-explicit manifesto of his, Koolhaas articulated Bigness as initiating both a new architecture and a post-architectural landscape (the break with architecture?) in which architecture will emerge by both maximizing and diminishing: blurring or even scraping away layers like the images in Richter's paintings, generated by both superhuman and extra-human forces. This force will "both undermine and reinforce" architecture much like Koolhaas's implicit-explicit manifesto, which is both a categorization and a cataloguing of all that is to be avoided and included in thinking about and designing the emergence-perishing of modern architecture. In doing so, Koolhaas thinks of *S, M, L, XL* almost as Scully thinks of *Complexity and Contradiction*, that is, as "a series of fragments" and yet also as a "pretension of a novel".[64] It could also be read as an "aspiration to a theory" in a multiplicity of other genres, but most of all aspires to the "architectural novel".

Conclusion

To what, precisely, do the above commentaries and interpretations of the triad *Vers une architecture – Complexity and Contradiction – S, M, L, XL* refer when they attribute to these works the status of a biblical canon? It turns out that the preposition *Vers / Towards* – connoting directionality and orientation – carries within it the imprint of a biblical imperative or vectoriality, while simultaneously alluding to carpentry, or more broadly, to the origin of architecture as a pursuit of the *arché* through *techné*. Is complexity then also a multivectoriality? And is Bigness, with its allusions to fractality and folds, merely another version of multivectoriality, or does it instead evoke monumentality – something unmanageable by human faculties and therefore an object of awe and reverence – and thus, in this sense, embody a concealed, peculiar, desacralized sacredness? By analogy with the unification of the Old and New Covenants into a single biblical corpus, these three manifestos, each in its distinctive manner, mediate between the laws of old and new architecture. The ongoing chain of interpretations that seeks the genesis of contemporary architecture positions this trio of books as the triadic focal points in a continuous process of de/canonisation and re-canonisation of architectural emergence – a process that, despite all the apocalyptic visions, appears far from conclusive. Le Corbusier reflects on architecture's emergence through new relations among nature, culture, and technology within the architectural work (*modénature*); Venturi addresses the rise of complexity and contradiction inherent in these ambiguous and multivocal relations (ambiguity); and finally, Koolhaas treats newly acquired unfathomability (Bigness).

Finally, it becomes evident that none of the three books analysed is – as this reading reveals – a "pure manifesto". Like the Bible, they are multi-genre volumes. In all three, not only do diverse genres and modes of writing, from journalistic to scientific, theoretical, and literary, intersect and interrelate, but they also bring into dialogue varied ways of thinking about and practicing architecture, all while maintaining a past-present-future orientation. Le Corbusier, in his *Vers une architecture,* reflects not only on behalf of himself and his work or humanity and its creations at large, but also reconstructs and interprets the thought and practice of the ancient Greek architects and non-European builders, extending his contemplation to people yet unborn and architectural works yet to be realized: "Like man, like drama, like architecture. Not to assert with too much confidence that the masses give rise to their man. A man is an exceptional phenomenon that repeats at lengthy intervals, perhaps by chance, perhaps according to a cosmographic rhythm [65] yet to be determined."[66] In addition to the biblical vectoriality articulated across multifaceted contexts, it is primarily the evident engagement with the birth, genesis, and demise of modern and contemporary architecture – where the dynamic interplay of cosmos and chaos resonates – that imparts vividness and interpretive vitality to all three books analysed here.

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1 I was inspired to reflect on this trio of books by the art historian Rostislav Švácha's invitation to consider the reception of *Vers une architecture* on the occasion of the centenary of its publication. I presented the paper at the colloquium *100 let Za novou architekturu*. 1923–2023, organized by Jiří Tourek (Faculty of Humanities, Charles University) and Rostislav Švácha at the FH CU building in Prague-Libeň on Saturday, 14 October, 2023. The published version is an edited and expanded iteration of that presentation.

2 COHEN, Jean-Louis. 2008. Introduction. In: Le Corbusier. *Toward An Architecture*. 2nd edn. London: Frances Lincoln Limited Publishers, pp. 1-78.

3 Cohen, J.-L., 2008, p. 1.

4 Cohen, J.-L., 2008, p. 1.

5 Cohen, J.-L., 2008, p. 54.

6 VENTURI, Robert. 1977 [1966]. Introduction. In: *Complexity and Contradiction*. 2nd edn. New York: Museum of Modern Art, p. 13.

7 Venturi cites the publication ELIOT, Thomas Stearns. 1932. *Selected Essays 1917-1932*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., p. 13. In another text, T. S. Eliot distinguishes three types: the "philosophical" critics who write within the field of philosophy; the "historical" critic, who engages primarily with history; and finally the "poetic" critic, for whom may be said, as Eliot writes, "The poetic critic is criticizing poetry in order to create poetry". See ELIOT, Thomas S. 1999 [1920]. Perfect Critics. In: *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. New York: Bartleby, p. 12. In light of this typology, Venturi might be understood as an "architectural" critic, Le Corbusier also as a "painterly" critic, and Koolhaas as both a "journalistic" and "filmmaking" critic. What unites them is a shared disposition toward critical polemic.

8 Venturi, R., 1977, p. 13.

9 Venturi, R., 1977, p. 13.

10 Venturi, R., 1977, p. 14.

11 "His task is finally to unify the experience. He must return to us the unity of the experience itself as man knows it in his own experience. . . If the poet. . . must perforce dramatize the oneness of the experience, even though paying tribute to its diversity, then his use of paradox and ambiguity is seen as necessary. […] He is rather giving us an insight which preserves the unity of experience and which, at its higher and more serious levels, triumphs over the apparently contradictory and conflicting elements of experience by unifying them into a new pattern." In: Venturi, R., 1977, p. 20.

12 Although Venturi includes the term contradiction in the title of his book, he does not employ it within the structure of the square of opposition; rather, he operates implicitly within the realm of propositional logic, relying primarily on the conjunctions "and" and "or" in the formulations "both-and" and "either-or", which point to relations of equivalence, non-exclusive disjunction, and exclusive disjunction.

13 Venturi, R., 1977, p. 23.

14 "The tradition 'either-or' has characterized orthodox modern architecture: a sun screen is probably nothing else; a support is seldom an enclosure; a wall is not violated by window penetrations but is totally interrupted by glass; program functions are exaggeratedly articulated into wings or segregated separate pavilions. Even 'flowing space' has implied being outside when inside, and inside when outside, rather than both at the same time. Such manifestations of articulation and clarity are foreign to an architecture of complexity and contradiction, which tends to include 'both-and' rather than exclude 'either-or'." In: Venturi, R., 1977, p. 23.

15 Venturi, R., 1977, p. 16.

16 Venturi, R., 1977, p. 16.

17 Venturi, R., 1977, p. 41.

18 Le Corbusier, 2008, p. 147.

19 Le Corbusier, 2008, p. 235.

20 Le Corbusier, 2008, p. 147.

21 Le Corbusier, 2008, p. 92.

22 "Contour modulation" is a problematic translation of Le Corbusier's term *modénature*, which no longer refers merely to the modulation of profiles and similar formal elements, but instead articulates a plastic conception of linking the axes of nature, culture, and the human into a singular artistic whole. The translation appears to rely more on the historical tradition of the term's meaning than on its conceptual evolution in Le Corbusier's usage.

23 Le Corbusier, 2008, p. 232.

24 "A valid order accommodates the circumstantial contradictions of a complex reality. […] It thereby admits 'control and spontaneity,' 'correctness and ease' – improvisation within the whole. It tolerates qualifications and compromise. There are no fixed laws in architecture, but not everything will work in a building or a city. The architect must decide, and these subtle evaluations are among his principal functions." In: Venturi, R., 1977, p. 41.

25 Venturi, R., 1977, p. 41.

26 Venturi, R., 1977, p. 82.

27 Venturi, R., 1977, p. 18.

28 Venturi, R., 1977, p. 19.

29 Venturi, R., 1977, p. 41.

30 Venturi, R., 1977, p. 23.

31 Venturi, R., 1977, p. 34.

32 Venturi, R., 1977, p. 36.

33 Venturi, R., 1977, p. 36.

34 Venturi, R., 1977, p. 45.

35 Venturi, R., 1977, p. 48.

36 "Le Corbusier supplies a rare modern example of juxtaposed contradictions in the Millowners' Building in Ahmedabad. From the important approach from the south, the repetitive pattern of the brise-soleil invokes rhythms which are violently broken by the entrance void, the ramp, and the stairs. These latter elements, consisting of varying diagonals, create violent adjacencies from the side and violent superadjacencies from the front, in relation to the rectangular static floor divisions within the boxlike form. The juxtapositions of diagonals and perpendiculars also create contradictory directions: the meeting of the ramp and stairs is only slightly softened by the exceptionally large void and by the modified rhythm of the elements at that part of the façade." In: Venturi, R., 1977, p. 56.

37 Venturi, R., 1977, pp. 56 and 68.

38 Venturi, R., 1977, p. 42.

39 SCULLY, Vincent. 1977 [1966]. Introduction. In: Venturi, R. *Complexity and Contradiction*. 2nd edn. New York: Museum of Modern Art, p. 9.

40 ZEVI, Bruno. 1950. *Towards an Organic Architecture*. London: Faber & Faber Limited.

41 "Le Corbusier, exercising that side of his many-sided nature which professed Cartesian rigor, generalized in *Vers une Architecture* much more easily than Venturi does here, and presented a clear, general scheme for the whole. Venturi is more fragmentary, moving step by step through more compromised relationships. His conclusions are general only by implication. Yet it seems to me that his proposals, in their recognition of complexity and their respect for what exists, create the most necessary antidote to that cataclysmic purism of contemporary urban renewal which has presently brought so many cities to the brink of catastrophe, and in which Le Corbusier's ideas have now found terrifying vulgarization." In: Scully, V., 1977, p. 9.

42 VENTURI, Robert, SCOTT BROWN, Denise and IZENOUR, Steven. 1988 [1972]. *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*. 9th edn. Cambridge/London: MIT Press, p. 148.

43 Both quotes Venturi, R., 1977, p. 14.

44 I will not address here the book KOOLHAAS, Rem. 2016. *Vers une architecture extrême: entretiens.* Marseille: Éditions Parenthèses, p. 91. Although it paraphrases the title of Le Corbusier's book and is frequently referred to as a "book of manifestos," it was originally composed in 1991, based on a series of interviews conducted with students at Rice University in Houston. As such, it belongs to a different genre and serves a different purpose than the books considered in this selection.

45 KIPNIS, Jeffrey. 1996. Recent Koolhaas. *El Croquis*, 79 (1996), pp. 26–37, here p. 26.

46 See KOOLHAAS, Rem and OLUNKWA, Emmanuel. 2022/2023. An interview with Rem Koolhaas. In: *Magazine for Architectural Entertainment*, 33, pp. 110–125. Available at: https://www.pinupmagazine.org/articles/emmanuel-olunkwa-rem-koolhaas (Accessed: 29 November 2025).

47 All three citations Kipnis, J., 1996, p. 27.

48 In terms of built projects, he references only two of Le Corbusier's Parisian villas, located near the construction site at the Bois de Boulogne, where Koolhaas designed and realized the Villa dall'Ava.

49 "Le Corbusier also made a disgraceful mistake: never will reinforced cement be used on other planets. Le Corbu, Le Corbubu, Le Corbi, Le Corba, Le Corbo dead, Le Corbousier died by drowning. Yes! Yes and yes, he sank like a stone, the weight of his own reinforced cement pulling him down like a masochistic Protestant Swiss cheese." In: KOOLHAAS, Rem and MAU, Bruce. 1998 [1995]. *S, M, L, XL*. 2nd edn. New York: Monacelli Press, p. 1114.

50 Fumihiko Maki quoted by Koolhaas: "Le Corbusier limits generative human qualities in urban architecture to 'air,' 'green,' and 'sun' while exponents of group form find a myriad of suggestive activities to add to that list." In: Koolhaas, R. and Mau, B., 1998, p. 1051.

51 "In the late sixties, Singapore architects – savagely synthesizing influences of Le Corbusier, the Smithsons/Team X, self-consciously Asian speculations derived from Maki, a new Asian self-awareness and confidence – crystallized, defined, and built ambitious examples of vast modern socles teeming with the most traditional forms of Asian street life, extensively connected by multiple linkages, fed by modern infrastructures and sometimes Babel-like multilevel car parks, penetrated by proto-atriums, supporting mixed-use towers: they are containers of urban multiplicity, heroic captures and intensifications of urban life in architecture, rare demonstrations of the kind of performance that could and should be the norm in architecture but rarely is, giving an alarming degree of plausibility to the myths of the multilevel city and the megastructure that 'we,' in infinitely more affluent circumstances, have discredited and discarded." In: Koolhaas, R. and Mau, B., 1998, p. 1073.

52 Koolhaas, R. and Mau, B., 1998, p. 1077.

53 "What the transformation of the island needs is a manifesto. Instead of the master plan, with its rigid procedures and emphasis on controlling the built, the UN experts propose 'to guide, accelerate, and coordinate public development' under the umbrella of a more fuzzy guiding concept, which will be decomposed in action programs […]." In: Koolhaas, R. and Mau, B., 1998, p. 1027.

54 Koolhaas, R. and Mau, B., 1998, p. 494.

55 1/ Beyond a certain *critical mass,* it becomes impossible to organize buildings or building complexes through a singular or coordinated set of architectural gestures. The components appear isolated, yet they are not fragments; rather, they participate in a shared relational system that constitutes the whole. 2/ The elevator and related technical innovations (enabling automated circulation within buildings) establish mechanical, rather than architectural, relationships between individual parts. They articulate *null*, introducing the void of the classical architectural repertoire. "Issues of composition, scale, proportion, detail are now moot. The 'art' of architecture is useless in Bigness." 3/ In Bigness, the distance between the core and the envelope increases to the point where the façade can no longer reveal what happens inside. "The humanist expectation of 'honesty' is doomed. […] Where architecture reveals, Bigness perplexes; Bigness transforms the city from a summation of certainties into an accumulation of mysteries." 4/ "Through size alone, such buildings enter an amoral domain, beyond good or bad." 5/ "Together, all these breaks – with scale, with architectural composition, with tradition, with transparency, with ethics – imply the final, most radical break: Bigness is no longer part of any urban tissue. It exists; at most it coexists. Its subtext is fuck context." In: Koolhaas, R. and Mau, B., 1998, pp. 495–502.

56 In place of the disappointment brought by diagrams that promise a rich orchestration of chaos yet ultimately reduce activities to fixed positions (probably not meaning here the diagrams that describe the operative forces within a dynamic field generating potential future configurations of the design), and in contrast to the wilderness of *montage* that architects once sought to tame with almost comical pedantry and rigidity, Bigness introduces "programmatic hybridizations / proximities / frictions / overlaps / superpositions". In: Koolhaas, R. and Mau, B., 1998, p. 506.

57 Koolhaas, R. and Mau, B., 1998, p. 508.

58 All three citations Koolhaas, R. and Mau, B., 1998, pp. 509–510.

59 Koolhaas, R. and Mau, B., 1998, pp. 510–511.

60 "Through contamination rather than purity and quantity rather than quality, only Bigness can support genuinely new relationships between functional entities that expand rather than limit their identities. The artificiality and complexity of Bigness release function from its defensive armor to allow a kind of liquefication; programmatic elements react with each other to create new events – Bigness returns to a model of programmatic alchemy." In: Koolhaas, R. and Mau, B., 1998, pp. 511–512.

61 Koolhaas, R. and Mau, B., 1998, p. 513.

62 Koolhaas, R. and Mau, B., 1998, p. 514.

63 "Not all architecture, not all program, not all events will be swallowed by Bigness. There are many 'needs' too unfocused, too weak, too unrespectable, too defiant, too secret, too subversive, too weak, too 'nothing' to be part of the constellation of Bigness. Bigness is the last bastion of architecture – a contraction, a hyper-architecture. The containers of Bigness will be landmarks in a post-architectural landscape […]." In: Koolhaas, R. and Mau, B., 1998, pp. 515–516.

64 Rem Koolhaas introduced his newly published 1995 book *S, M, L, XL* in a recorded lecture; OMA. 1995. Presentation on how S, M, L, XL intends to both undermine and simultaneously reinforce architecture. *OMA* [online]. Available at: https://www.oma.com/lectures/s-m-l-xl (Accessed: November 2025).

65 In the original *la fréquence*, in the earlier English translation "pulsation".

66 Le Corbusier, 2008, p. 205.