

***The Invisible in Architecture could be conceived as identity.*** Whether we take this term in its philosophical or its psychological sense, it is the character that people and things give one another, and derive from one another. Since identity takes shape through social intercourse, there are always agreements involved too – invisible agreements.

As an attribute of the individual, identity decomposes into at least two parts: personal identity and ego-identity. Personal identity is based on the perception that someone remains the same as time passes by. It is the idea of identity that we use in everyday life. The ego-identity is more complex, and breaks down into three levels. There is a somatic level, at which a person maintains his equilibrium by adapting to and separating himself from the environment. Then there is a personal level, at which, in the long term, the person integrates his inner world with his experience. Finally, there is a social level, at which the identity is upheld by means of interactions among a group of people with a common geographical and historical background.

The development of identity gains momentum in adolescence, a phase in which the young person has to integrate the *ego-ideal* of his childhood into a coherent picture of the future. The adolescent has to amalgamate the succession of widening perspectives and more intensive experiences into a single whole, at a personal level. At least as important as this is that, at the same time, the collective must furnish the adolescent with an identity at a social level, from which he can draw support and which offers him the possibility of recognition, association and solidarity. Owing to the ever greater prolongation of adolescence, coupled with the breakdown of those authorities that were once the source of permanent values, the formation of identity has become a permanent problem in Western society.

Substantial libraries could be filled with the countless publications that have already appeared on the subject of the identification process at the personal level. The role of the collective identity and the social level has been much less closely studied.

# Identity

The modern process of individualisation seems to be accompanied by the disruption of many traditional codes, values and structures. But at the same time masses of codes, values and structures – in short, a collective identity – is installed in accordance with the laws of the market. A reterritorialisation takes place within a system of state, law, commonality, multinational economy, consumerism and other normalising conditions. These all-pervading identity mechanisms are ignored in the great majority of democratic news and communications media. Still, the actions people undertake stand in an undeniable relation to the dominant collective identity. And when we probe for this relation in an architectural oeuvre, hidden authorisations emerge.

The group-forming, identity-determining forces are perhaps not as obvious as they used to be. The socialising counterpart of individualisation has to make do without all too specific a name. But nameless does not mean irrelevant. The 'identity' vector attempts to address this insight.

Since the Renaissance, and above all since the mid-eighteenth century, there has been a growing tendency to objectivise the purely subjective. As natural science, visual art, architecture and even politics drew the universal, 'divine' rules, so enthusiastically recorded by the humanists, into doubt, and it gradually became acceptable to postulate the relativity of the 'here and now', the great adventure of self-research began. For romantics, the inner world was no longer an uncontrolled morass of vice, but an intriguing and favoured theme. This led, in the late eighteenth century, to the establishment of an introspective tradition that continues to this day. The most intimate private circumstances and feelings are now brought out into the open and exploited. In brief, abstract terms, we can summarise this development as a progression from the 'What do I know?' of Montaigne, to the 'Who am I?' of Stendhal, to the *Ecce Homo* of Nietzsche and the 'Where am I as an author?' of Roland Barthes, to the 'Here I am!' of Oprah Winfrey.



In the footsteps of this tradition, the term identity seems to have gradually become a catchword in various forms of cultural criticism. People refer to ethnic identity, sexual identity, the 'own' identity or the identity crisis of anything under the sun; and this is generally accompanied by the unspoken assumption that identity is a right. In these cases people talk of identity when they have an idea that they are not getting the respect due to them. Whenever the term 'identity' is mentioned, it tends to be associated automatically with an emancipatory cultural politics. Naturally, the dominant culture has its own character too, the peer group also has its own identity, but this is widely accepted as a self-evident matter. People generally place special emphasis on the inalienable identity of the minority, the 'difference', the 'other', and leave the identity of the collective consensus out of consideration.

But, whereas a politicised use of the term identity is frequent, doubts have been cast on the tenability of this concept on a number of fronts. Identity has become a popular theme in psychology, philosophy, art and even science fiction. The issue is invariably whether thinking in terms of identities can still be valid in a post-modern condition, i.e. in an age that places little value on consistency, integrity and responsibility, the keywords of rationalist identity philosophy since Descartes and Spinoza. There is also a rising tension between the former certainty of the need to form a personal identity, and new developments in areas such as pedagogy, communications technology and semiotics which increasingly make the ultimate personal responsibility for behaviour into an either necessary or unnecessary illusion. Pessimistic philosophers of culture warn repeatedly against this erosion, against the decay of the responsible, always-recognisable individual, against chameleonism. However, there are also many theoreticians who see these new facts in a positive light and perceive in them a modernised conception of freedom.

It is in this field of force between self-definition and transgression, between optimism and pessimism, between identity and 'the other', that various forms of angst can emerge. Firstly, there is the panic that arises in the face of new facts, such as discoveries and inventions that radically widen and change our whole world view. Then there is a vaguer sinking feeling aroused by the symbolic dangers that people experience through the decline of existing ideologies. And finally, in the wake of disintegrating belief, there is the fear of an existential hell without any spiritual meaning.

It is in this ethical vacuum that today's debates on cultural, national, ethnic and other identities take place. Nobody wishes to succumb in this vacuum. But neither does anyone seem capable of escaping it by formulating durable criteria.

Identity in architecture, a result of the interaction of space, image and programme, is directly linked to the problems highlighted above. The identities of the designer, the client and the distribution and production process, have their resonance in the project's purpose, location, materials, tectonics, spatial form, cladding etc. The user's identification with this ensemble takes place by recognition and in usage.

Following the rising awareness that architecture is not only a functional and aesthetic phenomenon but also a means of communicating an identity, a lively discussion has ensued on the relation between the meaning of the architecture and its meaning as understood by the public. Since the sixties and the pioneering work of such social psychologists as Alexander Mitscherlich, Kevin Lynch and Klaus Horn, and since the architectural criticism of Colin Rowe, Christopher Alexander and Jane Jacobs, we can no longer believe in the one-dimensional vocabulary of Modernism. Its sterility and lack of identification points were recognised as a psychological deficiency. We might even suggest that architecture's modern project has failed precisely because of this 'less is more' approach. Since identity went hand in hand with a certain level of humanity, and hence a lack of identity with a certain shortage of humanity, it was inevitable that the Miesian idiom eventually came to be the butt of intense criticism.

The failure of Modernism in architecture did not, by the way, come about through logical reasoning. Although the above mentioned theoreticians introduced an accompanying analytical vocabulary, the bankruptcy of Modernism could be linked to a reason more inherent to culture. It became apparent that man was incapable of the voluntary behaviour for which Modernism was

the neutral platform – certainly not while that platform was becoming ever more expressionless, for reasons of financial efficiency. Recognisable, representative identities were supposed to compensate for this ‘expressionless’ character. But such *Ersatz* qualities can only be of restricted value. Passionately wanting an identity raises the gravest suspicions about actually having an identity. In architecture, representation has gained immensely in importance, but the value of architecture for the process of identity formation has clearly not always kept pace. Our individual capacity to form judgements about social and institutional identities is sometimes seriously impaired by the aesthetisation of the architectural object.

**Three strategies and three architects** The work of the architect always has an identity. Users and passers-by derive an identity from buildings; they let their own identities be partly determined by the built structures around them. Since there is an awareness of this dimension in architecture, it is consciously taken up in designs and in criticism. In this respect, we may distinguish three approaches.

**Archaism** Archaism interprets identity as being dependant on locus and on social organism. Using its inherent capacity for differentiation, archaism hopes to do justice to differences while at the same time being able to universalise its claims to validity. Identity constitutes an irreducible entity, but survives by means of differentiation. The attention of the archaist is thus drawn to the unique contacts between one person and another, in relation to unique places. **Lucien Kroll's** attention is drawn to everyday life, with its anthropological character of interaction between individual and group. For him, this is a way of staving off the colonisation of the life-world by technology, specialisation and the commodity culture. Kroll supports a participation in which the future inhabitant discovers (or rediscovers) the architect, the *homo faber*, in himself. He designs complex villages where every building and every residential unit has a face of its own, and where time ‘contributes’ to the design. Here, anarchy and identity go hand in hand.

**Façadism** For façadism, the positive expression of identity is an extremely important matter. Particularly when this tendency works from a radical criticism of the modernist poverty of meaning, it sees the façade as the iconographic means by which architecture can generate identity once more, both for itself and for the public. With this in mind, the façadist incorporates countless cultural references, signs that represent an ‘identity’. **Ricardo Bofill** is largely specialised in giving monumental shapes to squares and boulevards. In his way of doing this, it is not the individual who stands out, but rather a collective self that seeks its expression in dream palaces. The lack of ‘artistic’ identity of the moderns is compensated by a majestic packaging that is meant to offer a psychological foothold. High-quality prefab components make the grandiloquent gesture possible, and bring the historically established emblems of self-confidence within everyone’s reach.

**Fascinism** For fascinism, the coherent identity is dead. The one true identity, the thing identified by a name, is an attribute of a lost ‘classical’ world. Fascinistic architecture confirms the impossibility of such an identity in a post-modern condition. It prefers to offer either a complex, confusing and fragmented atmosphere which is a reflection of our world as it is, or it restricts itself as clinically as possible to the milieu around this confusion. The architecture of the latter kind is hence also a metaphor for the end of metaphor.

**Norman Foster**, in his fascination for the dynamics of the age of communication, is beyond a politics of identity. He creates a cordon sanitaire, a flexible platform, a stately structure built with state of the art technology. It is a transparent architecture that barely gives an identity a chance to consolidate itself – apart from the ‘minimal’ identity that is stimulated in and by the machinery. Foster’s architecture is like the sterile sheet with an aperture that is placed over the patient during an operation, so that the surgeon is not obliged to identify with the object of his technical performance.

For us every building has something unique, something natural that arises from working with its users. The interplay of form, colour and materials forms a harmonious whole in which people occupy a central place. **Ton Albers & Max van Huut**

Within a site, architecture tries to dominate emptiness, but at the same time emptiness dominates the architecture. If a building is to be autonomous and have its own character, not only the building but emptiness itself must have its own logic.

**Tadao Ando**

***The history of forms, the history of architecture of which Modernism and the International Style are part, is the basis on which our architecture erects itself. There it will reintegrate the values of this history. So that the glance comes to rest on it, recognises it, and wonders at the intangible future.***

**Ricardo Bofill**

Transparency today is intrinsic to our perception, buildings need not be built transparent. They must now simplify and solidify.

**Julia Bolles & Peter Wilson**

Picasso said that the best place to learn painting was in the museums, observing and studying what other people had painted. I think that what originality there is in my work lies in my extrapolation of certain aspects contained in the work of others.

**Santiago Calatrava**

What planning as a principle ignores is the synthesising instinct of experience – that the proximity of dissimilar images and events can release architecture from its object status. This may be why most of us feel livelier in cities complicated by the imprint of one reality upon one another.

**Nigel Coates & Doug Branson**

If by identity, in a transgression with respect to its literal meaning, we mean the capacity to be recognisable for the quality and specificity of the message within a complex accumulation of communications, then we are talking about the evidence of a difference.

**Pietro Derossi**

The body is a plastic form, moulded to con-form to the idealised normative body. Prosthesis, here, is de-mechanised, sometimes camouflaged and in fluid exchange with steroids, silicone, spandex and skin. Its programme of completion is replaced by one of mutation.

**Elisabeth Diller & Ricardo Scofidio**

***The appearance of the Hong Kong Bank both inside and out, its internal organisation and the spatial experience that it offered were all defined, ordered and modulated by the structure which supported it and the walls which enclosed it. The design of Stansted Airport gives a compact building which reduces walking distances for passengers and enables them to move through the building on simple linear routes.***

**Norman Foster**

Oriented to the North, the façade of the Joan Miró Library takes on the significance of an architecture meant as container of books.

**Beth Galí**

What I like doing best is breaking down the project into as many separate parts as possible. So instead of a house being one thing, it's ten things. It allows the client more involvement, because you can say, 'well, I've got ten images now, that are going to compose your house. Those images can relate to all kinds of symbolic things, ideas if you've liked, bits and pieces of your life that you would like to recall...'

**Frank Gehry**

I suspect that over the last ten years, I've been simply trying to say two things. First, that my work is abstract by nature because of the geometric compositions that I use, and that it can therefore risk being very obscure in terms of the layman. But at the same time, it has to be figurative enough to allow the layman to participate in it.

**Michael Graves**

Having completed the Shonandai Cultural Centre I realise quite clearly now that I want to create an inclusive architecture that accepts a multiplicity of things rather than an architecture arrived at through reflection and elimination. The idea is to make architecture more realistic through what might be called a 'pop' reasoning that allows for diversity as opposed to a logical system of reasoning that demands extreme concentration. Such an approach represents a shift to a feminist paradigm, in the sense that an attempt is made to raise the consciousness of as many people as possible.

**Itsuko Hasegawa**

What is really in our way, is not the fact that we have to open and close doors, but a specific difficulty that is part of our time. There is this lack of identity...

**Jacques Herzog & Pierre de Meuron**

The essence of a work of architecture is an organic link between concept and form. Pieces cannot be subtracted or added without upsetting fundamental properties. A concept, whether a rationally explicit statement or a subjective demonstration, establishes an order, a field of inquiry, a limited principle.

**Steven Holl**

The shape of a building does not develop out of the material condition of its purpose. A building shall not show its use. It is not an expression of structure and construction, it is not enclosure or refuge.

A building is itself. **Hans Hollein**

The traditional and modernity are not contradictory notions. One can be a modern man of tradition. There is no contradiction. **Leon Krier**

***Isn't it criminal to design places deliberately as mass-produced, cloned, impersonal structures, when the aim is to implement a sensitive, non-regimented upbringing? Do we not have the right to measure the value of the building against its end product, i.e. the behaviour of the users? In other words, what becomes of the children who are taught in one specific environment or another? It seems, in this era that terms itself rational (is it that, or is it simply regimented?) that these questions are never considered. Would that be such a sacrilege?***

**Lucien Kroll**

The street is an intermediary zone where the private interior space of the individual dwelling meets the public exterior space of the road. These two natures interpenetrate, exist in symbiosis, and stimulate each other, creating a zone that can be described as extremely warm and suggestive. This symbiosis of interior and exterior represents a typically Asian attitude. **Kisho Kurokawa**

Buildings have to fit in, have to conform to existing buildings. Nowadays autonomy is seen as a quality, but I think that is because architects are too eager to leave their mark on the situation where they are building. Often it is the case that the more autonomous the building, the worse the situation is. **Lucien Lafour & Rikkert Wijk**

How does one change such a process? How does one bring back the urgency, the immediacy which must have existed at some point sometime, that violence which has to do with breathlessness? Where is the breathlessness in architecture! Why is everybody so full of confidence? Why are people not breathless? Or why are they so out-of-breath for the wrong reason, running from one office to another co-ordinating imbecile data. It is mysterious that architecture's respiration suffers from its in-spiration. **Daniel Libeskind**

Architecture implies the distance between our work and ourselves, so that in the end the work remains alone, self-supported, once it has acquired its physical consistency. Our pleasure lies in the experience of this distance, when we see our thought supported by a reality that no longer belongs to us. What is more, a work of architecture, if successful, may efface the architect. **Rafael Moneo**

My pleasure has never surfaced in looking at buildings, at the 'great works' of history or present of architecture, but rather in dismantling them. **Bernard Tschumi**

In all our projects but particularly in our major museums, we have tried to derive an identity for the building by 'learning from' the site, the city, the campus, and the goals, values and need of our client. This identity turns out to be as complex and contradictory as we are. A multivalent identity that confronts both the collective and the individual, public and private, the present and the future, the rootedness of the institution and the flux of the civilisation, to say nothing of conflicting values and roles within the individual, probably needs a modicum of irony in its make-up to smooth the ride. For us, allusion to many other sources and ways of thought is a means of establishing such an identity, but the allusions are fleeting and themselves multi-layered and they give rise to further questions about meaning.

As for the architect's own identity, the ideal is that the architect too be glimpsed only fleetingly, moving between columns, not like Frank Lloyd Wright in a flowing robe, but in an undistinguished suit high-tailing it from the controversy.

**Robert Venturi & Denise Scott Brown**