

Schinkel Reverse

Last year the Sangallo clique brought us to Rome. What started as 'Trouble with Classicism' ended as a hypothesis on the architecture of the 'first architectural practice' in central Italy. The radical pragmatism of Antonio Sangallo the Younger gave the elegant travails of his ancestors perspective. The result was not only another Sangallo, but perhaps also a wider more pragmatic (even tongue-in-cheek) classicism. More improvisation and survival than bravado. More entrepreneurial manoeuvre than abstract poetry. We coined it 'Conventional Wisdom'.

This year we will go to Napoli and Berlin, with Schinkel as our guide. If last years enterprise tried to make 'classicism' pragmatic, this year we hope to understand how a romantic obsession with the south could make it if not 'urban', at least territorial. With the building of the Neue Pavilion as an alibi Schinkel was sent to Italy, twice. The accumulation of ideas, urban and landscape elements being inspiration for the endless permutations and transformations of both Berlin and Potsdam, thus turning these places into veritable laboratories. The nascent 'royal' neo classicism by Vanvitelli and others provided the perfect reference for 'welt bildung' in Prussia, but similarly the vernacular casual structures were the perfect reference for a invented 'italianism', which ultimately became the basis for the creation of Siam in Charlottenburg, as a parallel universe of building and landscape.

Schinkel's projects themselves serve as a architectural parallel universe to the political aims of contemporary Prussia, Well documented as they are they here serve merely as a point of reference. Few real discoveries are expected to be made. The density of Architecture is both intimidating and opaque. Schinkel's objects in reality however, tell another story, the space in between (the buildings) serves a the necessary prerequisite for an architecture of only intentions.

The architecture of accumulation thus creates a landscape through accumulation, and through strategically conquering space. Not surprisingly this particular relationship between space and built matter has been an important element in Ungers' own Schinkel obsession/fascination, serving -through his project of the urban villa - as a parallel universe to the conceptual abolishment of everything 'unnecessary' in the 'green archipelago'. Could Schinkel's 'densified ensembles' serve as a model for suburban semi organisation through controlled casualness? In Ungers' reading even mid twenty century Berlin still shared the 'soul' of Schinkel's urban project.

But where did that soul come from? It is easy to connect the architecture of Schinkel's Italian trip to his own architectural endeavours. More interesting perhaps is to understand the spatial complexes. A place where classicism is born both out of high baroque and elegant (and perhaps showy) vernacular could easily serve as the base for a perverted landscape classicism.

So if next two semesters we do Schinkel by doing everything but himself. First we scan and document Italian architecture that makes Schinkel's own, only to use Ungers in the second semester to activate its suburban potential. Reverse Schinkel and you get an urban catalyst.