



Introducing **Modernism's Exposition**

CAED Faculty Meeting 09-12

How did modernist architects seek to participate meaningfully in a uniquely and rapidly defined assemblage of objects, social hypotheses, political interests, urban exigencies, security requirements, etc?

*Model Kitchen, United States
Exhibition, Moscow, 1959*



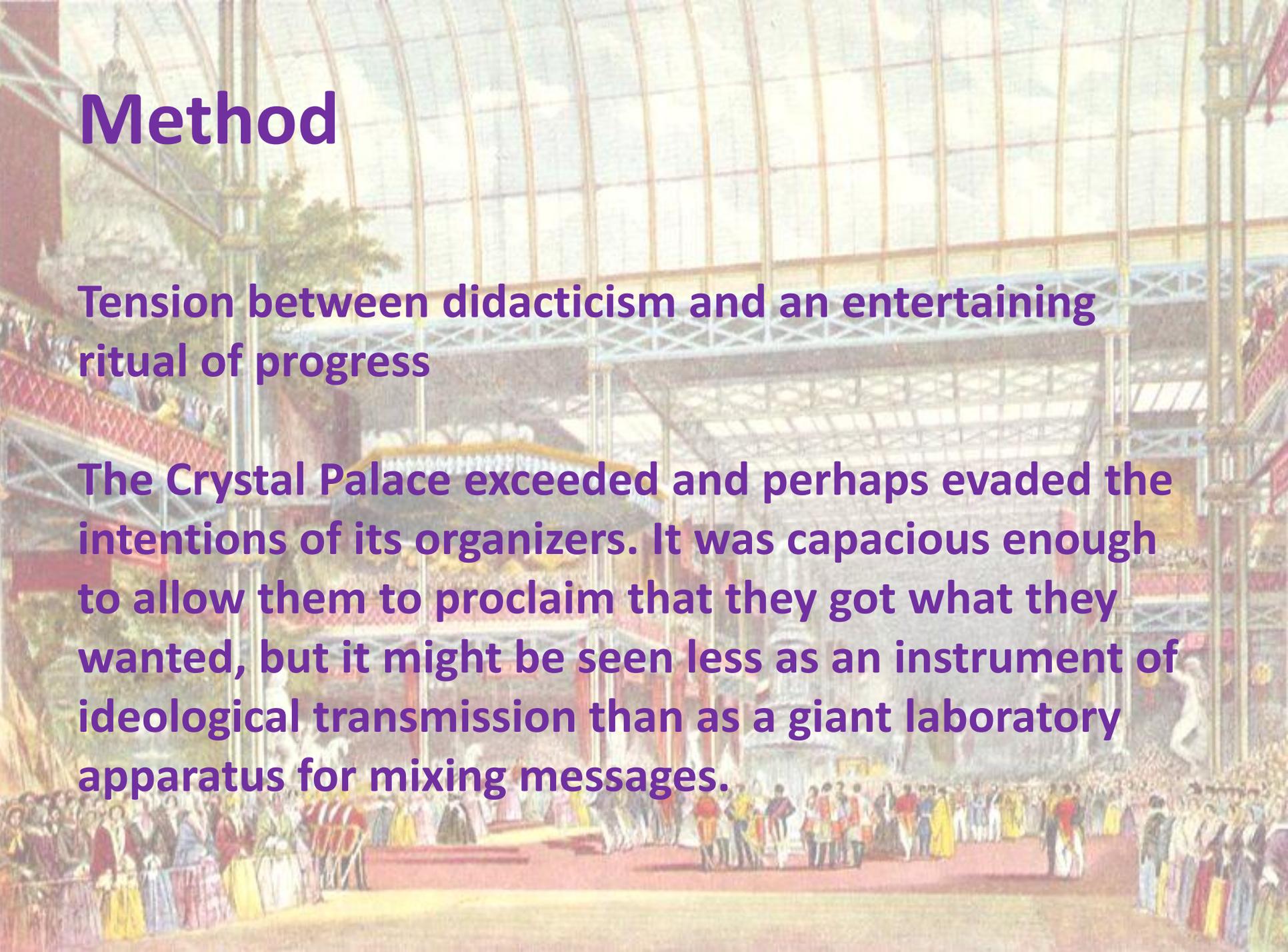
The architects may come on the scene with set views of “the modern,” but that does not mean that their work in these contexts fully communicates those views.

They may miss the mark and discover something partially different through the complex interactions into which their work is inserted.

How does this process work, and how did it affect the reception of modern movements?

Cubist Garden by Rob Mallet-Stevens and couture by Sonia Delaunay, Paris 1925

Method



Tension between didacticism and an entertaining ritual of progress

The Crystal Palace exceeded and perhaps evaded the intentions of its organizers. It was capacious enough to allow them to proclaim that they got what they wanted, but it might be seen less as an instrument of ideological transmission than as a giant laboratory apparatus for mixing messages.

Method

Cultural identity, social groupings, ideology and modern-ness itself are not stable formations that explain the components of each instance of the exposition project.

Instead the work put into each exposition is an example of the constant effort of human and non-human actors required to keep “culture,” “society” etc. in force.

Bruno Latour

We Have Never Been Modern (1993)

Reassembling the Social: an Introduction to Actor-Network Theory (2005)

Method

ANT doesn't ignore established hierarchies or power gradients. It does suggest that energy goes into their maintenance, and that it is important to follow the fine-grain of the stories that are constantly being told about and through that maintenance.

*Columbian Exposition
Midway, Chicago 1893*



Method

Architecture and design have an essential role in expositions, and yet much of the literature treats architecture as a noiseless transmitter of ideology.

In a situation in which innumerable objects, performances and technological wonders claim the viewer's attention, in which all of these actors are potential messages about the world and its modern moment, architecture has to test its semantic potential and develop new communicative abilities, often on the fly.



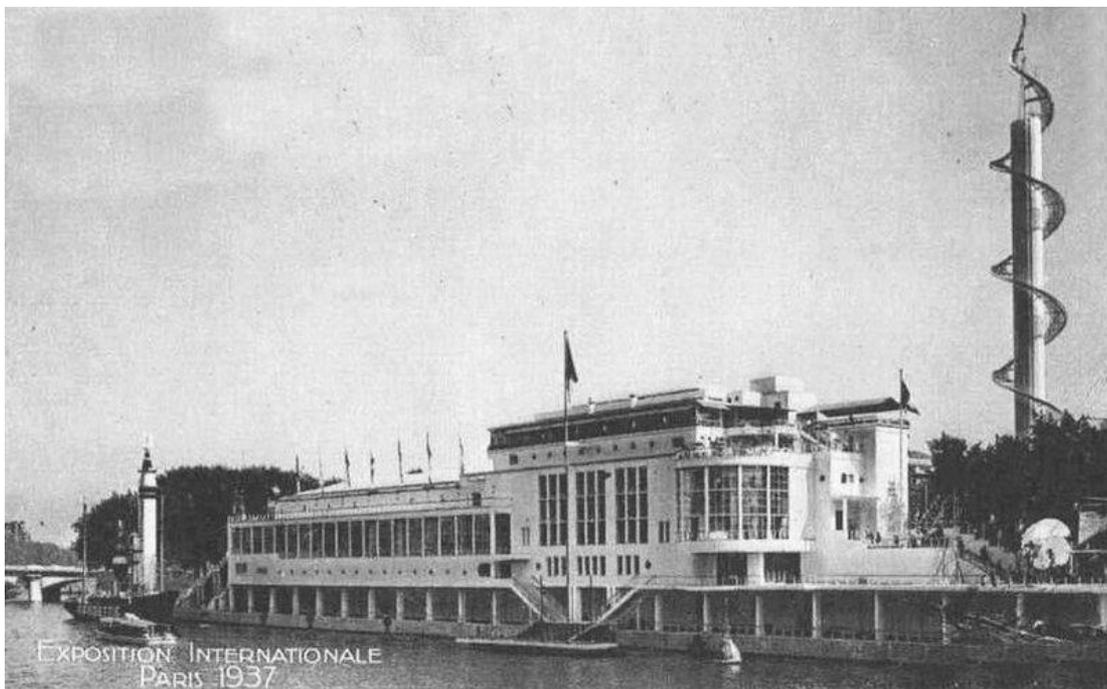


German Pavilion, Paris 1937, Albert Speer

West German Pavilion, Brussels 1958, Egon Eiermann



malerhorn



Paris , 1937





Does architecture need style?

Style is the mannered repetition of an aesthetic theme; it is the inverse of innovation. In taking design's visual means as an end, architects miss the opportunity to let how a building works, or how it is made, inform its appearance. In the wake of countless architectural -isms, there is no need for another short-lived style.

Defining “Style”

Modernists claim to have the “right” style for the times, technology etc.

...or they cross out the term and deny it any currency.

Instead style is understood here as a stabilization of controversies, as a set of visual traits that increase the density of connections between materials, technologies, and stories about social groupings.

Its value is related, not to beauty or durability or conformity to a historical narratives, but to the degree of hybridization it can facilitate.

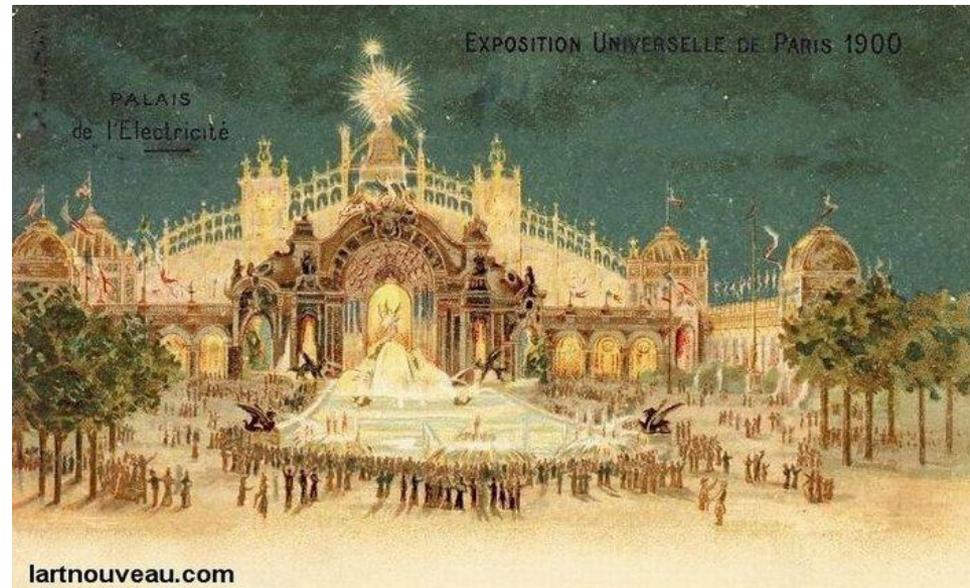
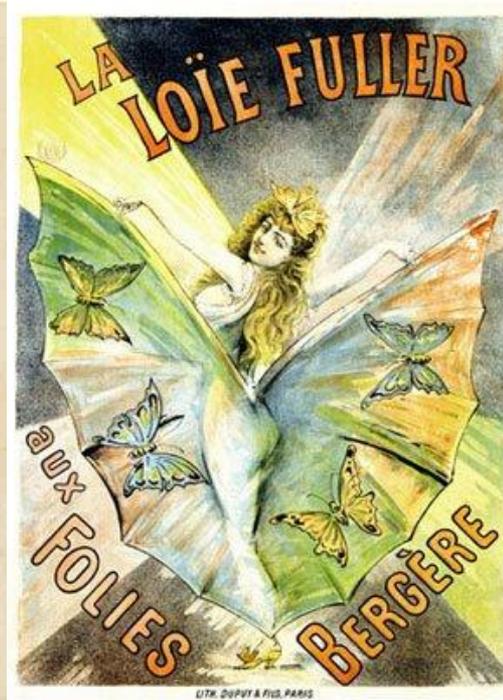


*Danish Pavilion, Shanghai 2010, BIG
RCA Pavilion, New York 1939, SOM*

Paris 1900

Exposition organizers
and avant-garde
designers stumbling
toward the same goal

A seamlessness of
subjective experience in
which line, color and
material provide the
basis for new hybrids





National Feeling

Never simply an argument about abstract form vs. traditional associative styles, because the issues always intersect with concerns about nationality and identity.



Italy

Industrialization in North
Claim to status as
European power (colonial
ambitions in Africa)



Expositions in Turin

1884 – Esposizione Generale Italiana

1898 – Esposizione Generale ed Internazionale d'Electricità & Esposizione Nazionale di Arte Sacra

1902 – Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte Decorativa Moderna

1911 – Esposizione Internazionale delle Industrie e del Lavoro

1928 – Esposizione Nazionale e Mostra Storica Sabauda e della Vittoria



Italian Architecture

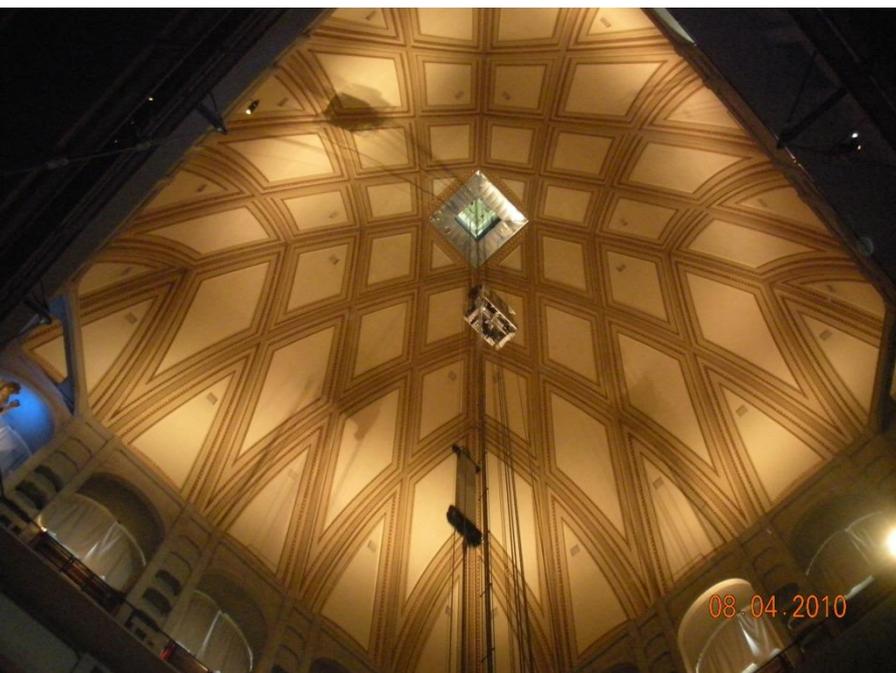
Problems of national definition analogous to “small” countries (e.g. Finland)

Backdrop of Italian cultural legacy that inhibited - but also provided parameters for - experimental practice

Openness in Milan and Turin to influence of European avant-gardes

Problem of an avant-garde using rationalist and structural concepts in a tradition that values drawing, ornament and rhetoric

Expositions as opportunities to play out these controversies



Turin

Urban elite involved in managing transition from royal capital to industrial center focused on autos, bicycles and chemicals

Governing committees of expositions drawn from this elite

Successive expositions held on roughly the same site



L'ILLUMINAZIONE DEL CORSO VITTORIO EMANUELE, la sera del 27 aprile. (Disegno di Ettore Ximenes).





1898

Electricity and relationship
of buildings to electric
lighting

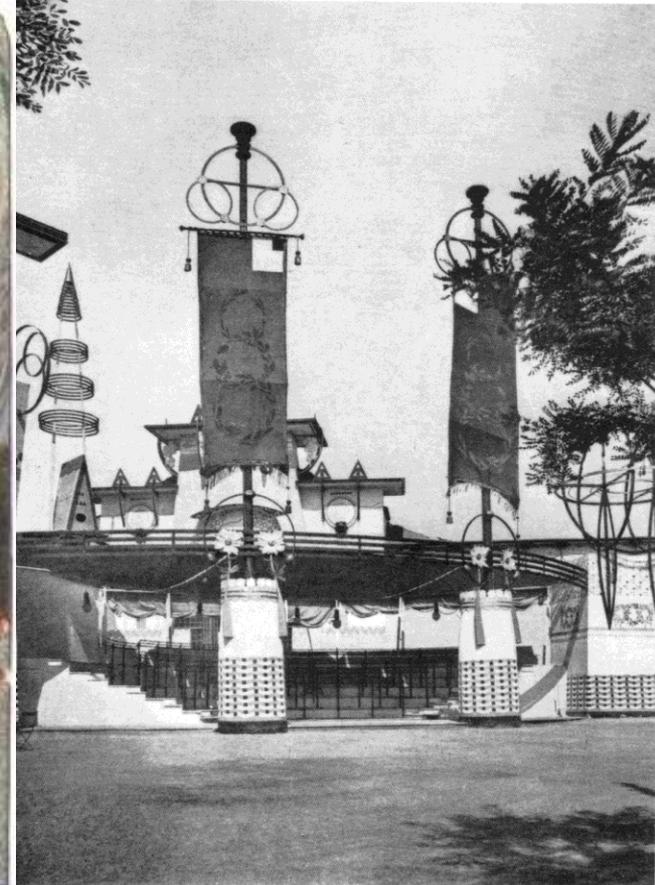
Contrast with church
exposition



1911

Baroque as style representing Turin's claim on national leadership (in contrast with Romanità in Rome and elsewhere)

Suited to construction methods adapted from American examples



1902

Influence of French and German models, effort to educate Italian audience about new art and build support for it among Italian elites.

Committee overlaps with those of 1898 and 1911, as do some of the architects involved



Casa Fenoglio La Fleur

*Raimondo d'Aroco, Project for a
Mosque in Istanbul*





Cat. 65. Veduta della rotonda d'onore



Reception and Controversy

Too German

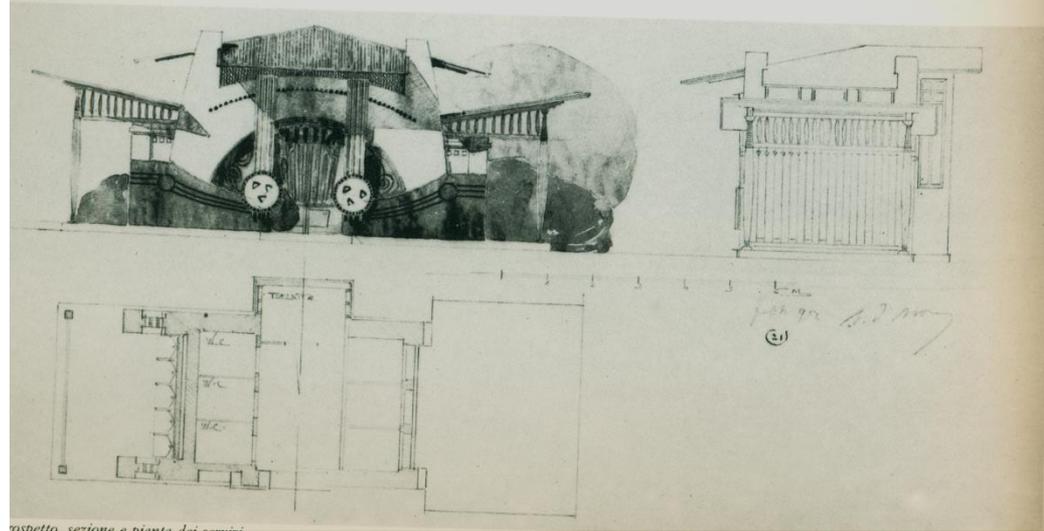
Not resonant of Italian tradition

Too oriental

Too lacking in monumentality



Studio per un padiglione



disegno sezione e pianta del padiglione



D'Aronco's achievement

**Alternative language of
ephemeral building**

**Hybridization of
Secessionist and
Turkish/Byzantine
influences**

**Gave the exposition a
clear graphic identity**