IN MEMORIAM

Stanford Anderson (1934–2016)

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This is my simple advocacy: the fruitfulness of recognizing the strengths and the claims of, on one side, our theories and conventions, that should not be held dogmatically, and, on the other, the realities, that are in some ways obdurate but often remarkably and fascinatingly malleable. To seek to live only a life of the mind at one pole, or of materiality at the other, or of coercive power from either, is to impoverish one's self, one's discipline, and one's smaller or greater community.[1]

Stanford Anderson was an architect, teacher, historian, urbanist, and critic of architecture (Figure 1). From the start of his career he studied the relationships of culture and society with design, seeking to refine a theoretical framework for understanding the architectural discipline, its constraints and potentials for supporting and enhancing life. Through sustained and probing studies of Peter Behrens, Hermann Muthesius, Le Corbusier, Alvar Aalto, Eladio Dieste, and others, Stan examined design with an architect's precision and a scholar's rigor. He identified himself as a member of the generation contending with postwar reactions against modernism; his historical, theoretical, and critical work can be interpreted as an energetic and unrelenting defense of architecture as a rational endeavor and of modernism as a liberating force.

Born in Minnesota, Stan was raised in South Dakota before returning to Minnesota for an undergraduate degree in architecture. He earned a master's degree in architecture from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1958 and

Figure 1 Stanford Anderson (photo courtesy of Nancy Royal).

conducted dissertation research on Behrens supported by a Fulbright Fellowship in Munich in 1961–62, receiving a doctorate from Columbia University in 1968. In 1962–63 Stan taught at the Architectural Association in London. He was then invited by Henry Millon to join the architecture faculty at MIT in 1963, and together they created MIT's pioneering doctoral program History, Theory, and Criticism

of Architecture and Art (HTC), established in May 1975. Stan directed the program from its inception through 1991, when he became head of the Architecture Department, a position he held through January 2005. During his more than fifty years at MIT, Stan developed fruitful ties with a number of leading institutions, from the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in New York, where he was resident fellow 1970–72, to the College of Architecture and Urban Planning at Tongji University in Shanghai, where he was honorary professor at the time of his death. In 2004 the American Institute of Architects and the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture awarded him the Topaz Medallion for Excellence in Architectural Education, the highest distinction honoring an individual who has made outstanding contributions to the teaching of architecture.

In the mid-1960s Stan began articulating a historiographical and epistemological position intended to redress a malaise he identified in architecture practice. He perceived a degeneration of modernism into a relativistic rootlessness that had led to decorative stylism in the work of such architects as Philip Johnson. Stan sought to find a position that would anchor the discipline of architecture in a rational discourse, but one avoiding technological reduction of architecture to problem solving—a point of view that he believed falsely interpreted the history of modernism as that of pure functionalism. From this initial concern with contemporary practice, Stan developed an evolving epistemological approach drawn from the philosophy of science and with implications for reinterpreting the history of architecture. History, then, was to be used as a critical tool within architectural discourse, as a means to promote the growth of knowledge within the discipline, distinguished from the art historical project on the one hand and precedent-seeking historicism on the other.

Key to this endeavor was a keen awareness of what Stan first called the semiautonomy of architecture and later renamed quasi-autonomy. In a series of essays written in the mid-1960s, he argued repeatedly against any form of historical determinism as an explanation for the generation of architectural form, whether based on social conditions, technology, or an interpretation of the zeitgeist.[2] Yet he firmly held that history as a source of architectural knowledge should not be jettisoned. Instead, a critical analysis of history could be construed as necessary for structuring an understanding of the world. Tradition and convention are essential to such understanding, he held, but neither should be deterministic or authoritarian. Rather, they should remain open to change, subject to rational challenge through critical historical examination. Drawing first on Karl Popper's social theory of tradition and soon after on Imre Lakatos's theory of research programs, Stan offered architectural history a model based on those theorists' approaches to reconstructing the growth of knowledge in science. Like scientists, architects work from a hard core of assumptions (traditions, conventions) from which they develop hypotheses that are tested through their designs. Forms are not generated as inevitable solutions to clearly stated problems; rather, there is a reciprocity between problem and form such that solutions may themselves stimulate reformulation of goals. In analyses of Le Corbusier's Carpenter Center at Harvard University, Gerrit Rietveld's Schröder House, and Peter Eisenman's numbered house series, among other examples, and in particular at the 1969 exhibition *Form and Use in Architecture* at MIT, Stan illustrated the quasi-autonomy of architecture by demonstrating the fluidity of the relationship between form and function, where forms may engender unanticipated uses and the same uses may be served by varying forms. He argued that De Stijl and Le Corbusier's Five Points projected new ways of conceiving form, space, and light fundamental to the development of the architectural discipline while they simultaneously implied new uses and meanings for architecture with potentials that could be deployed beyond those they initially served. The historian pays heed, then, not simply to internal disciplinary developments but also to the social constraints and opportunities that limit and enable those developments, to the ways of living that architecture itself permits, and to the reconfigurations, both internal and external to the discipline, that ensue over time. The plan of Savannah became Stan's touchstone for exploring these ideas in urbanism as he convincingly demonstrated how the layout of the city's wards fostered anticipated and unanticipated use.[3] Over the following decades, he expanded on this historiographical approach, rehearsing with increasing conviction and nuance the reciprocity of relations among history, ideas, society, and architectural practice, and calling attention to the tension between architects' commitment to disciplinary autonomy and the inevitable necessity of response to external conditions both enabling and constraining.[4]

In the 1980s, Stan again argued against the reductionist interpretation of modernism as functionalist, now promulgated by apologists for postmodernism, by applying his concept of semi- or quasi-autonomy. The Villa Savoye, he proposed, "'makes a world' that does not determine, but does allow us to live and think differently than if it did not exist."[5] In the work of Adolf Loos, Le Corbusier, Aalto, and Louis Kahn he found architects whose recognition of the "potentials and joys" of architecture belies any determinism from function; instead, their practice of architecture reveals new potentials for living.[6] He turned to the concept of "critical conventionalism" to indicate "conventions and their systems of authority and self-perpetuation as *semiautonomous*: neither completely determined by the reality within which they exist, and therefore beyond criticism, nor so completely arbitrary, so unrestricted by any

constraints on their explanations that, once again, criticism has no hold."[7] Through a sustained consideration of vernacular architecture as a conceptual model for the relationship between society and its artifacts, he explored tradition and convention once again, this time interrogating architectural practice as it negotiates between social memory and disciplinary memory.[8] In recent years, he found new ways to express the nature of thinking both in and through architecture, parsing what architecture alone can contribute while nonetheless acknowledging the necessity that architecture engage the social.[9]

The theoretical positions revisited here in brief found consistent application in Stan's historical research. His topics grew from his deep engagement with the early phases of modernism that he had encountered in his groundbreaking research on Peter Behrens. That had disclosed the complexities of Behrens's distrust of positivist technology and science as he found aesthetic expression for the modern condition of industrial society.[10] A series of studies focusing on figures such as Muthesius, Heinrich Tessenow, Loos, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe subtly dissected the various meanings of *Sachlichkeit* to reveal the distance between a pure functionalist conception and a *sachliche Kunst* that responded to the needs of modern life by creating a cultural milieu.[11] More recently, he turned his attention to two architects who exemplified a principled and reasoned approach to architectural research: Alvar Aalto, in whose "methodical accommodation of circumstance" Stan found a rationality misunderstood by the apologists for modernism; and Eladio Dieste, whose continuous quest for tectonic innovations Stan distinguished from the superficial pursuit of novelty.[12] Shortly before his death, Stan received a copy of the book he coedited on Jean Krämer, head of Behrens's atelier during the decade of Behrens's most significant work, a study that happily returned him to the subject of his initial research.[13] He was planning to write a book on the history of CASE, the Conference of Architects for the Study of the Environment, which from 1964 to 1969 had provided Stan and likeminded architects an intellectual platform.[14] That missing project would have subjected his own history and historiography to the very critical reflection he had so fruitfully practiced throughout his career.

Notes

1. Stanford Anderson, "Quasi-autonomy in Architecture: The Search for an 'In-Between,'" *Perspecta* 33 (2002), 37.

2. Stanford Anderson, "Radical and Relativistic Attitudes towards Architectural Design," *Connection* (Dec. 1964), 7–15; Stanford Anderson, "Architecture and Tradition That Isn't 'Trad, Dad,'" in *The History, Theory and Criticism of Architecture*, ed. Marcus Whiffen (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1966), 71–89; Stanford Anderson, "Problem-Solving and Problem-Worrying" (lecture delivered at the Architectural Association, London, Mar. 1966).

3. Stanford Anderson, "Studies toward an Ecological Model of the Urban Environment," in *On Streets*, ed. Stanford Anderson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978), 267–336; Stanford Anderson, "The Plan of Savannah and Changes of Occupancy during Its Early Years: City Plan as Resource," *Harvard Architecture Review* 2 (1981), 60–67; Stanford Anderson, "Savannah and the Issue of Precedent: City Plan as Resource," in *Settlements in the Americas: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Ralph Bennett (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993), 110–44.

4. Stanford Anderson, "The Presentness of Interpretation and of Artifacts: Towards a History for the Duration and Change of Artifacts," in *History in, of, and for Architecture*, ed. John E. Hancock (Cincinnati: School of Architecture and Interior Design, 1981), 49–57; Stanford Anderson, "Types and Conventions in Time: Towards a History for the Duration and Change of Artifacts," *Perspecta* 18 (1982), 108–17, 206–7; Stanford Anderson, "Architectural Design as a System of Research Programmes," *Design Studies* 5 (July 1984), 146–50.

5. Stanford Anderson, "The Fiction of Function," in *Putting Modernism in Place: Rowlett Report*, ed. Malcolm Quantrill (College Station: Texas A&M University, 1985), 31.

6. Stanford Anderson, "The Fiction of Function," *Assemblage* 2 (Feb. 1987), 18–31.

7. Stanford Anderson, "Critical Conventionalism in Architecture," *Assemblage* 1 (Oct. 1986), 7.

8. Stanford Anderson, "Memory in Architecture/Erinnerung in der Architektur," *Daidalos* 58 (Dec. 1995), 22–37; Stanford Anderson, "Memory without Monuments: Vernacular Architecture," *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 11, no. 1 (Fall 1999), 12–22; Stanford Anderson, "The Vernacular, Memory, and Modernism," in *Vernacular Modernism: Heimat, Globalization, and the Built Environment*, ed. Maiken Umbach and Bernd Hüppauf (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005), 157–71.

9. Stanford Anderson, "Thinking in Architecture," in *ptah 08 Yearbook*, ed. Esa Laaksonen (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Academy, 2009), 72–86; Stanford Anderson, "Rational Reconstructions and Architectural Knowledge" in *Architecture in the Age of Empire/Die Architektur der Neuen Weltordnung*, ed. Kristian Faschingeder, Kari Jormakka, Norbert Korrek, Olaf Pfeifer, and Gerd Zimmermann (Weimar: Universitätsverlag, 2011), 163–75.

10. A revised version of the dissertation was published as Stanford Anderson, *Peter Behrens and a New Architecture for the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000).

11. Stanford Anderson, "The Legacy of German Neo-classicism and Biedermeier: Behrens, Tessenow, Loos, and Mies," *Assemblage* 15 (Oct. 1991), 62–87; Stanford Anderson, "*Sachlichkeit* and Modernity, or Realist Architecture," in *Otto Wagner: Reflections on the Raiment of Modernity*, ed. Harry Mallgrave (Santa Monica, Calif.: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1993), 322–60; Stanford Anderson, introduction to *Style-Architecture and Building-Art: Transformations of Architecture in the Nineteenth Century and Its Present Condition*, by Hermann Muthesius (Santa Monica, Calif.: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1994), 1–42.

12. Stanford Anderson, ed., *Eladio Dieste: Innovation in Structural Art* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004); Stanford Anderson, Gail Fenske, and David Fixler, eds., *Aalto and America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2012).

13. Stanford Anderson, "The Atelier of Peter Behrens, 1908–1918," in *Jean Krämer, Architect, and the Atelier of Peter Behrens*, ed. Stanford Anderson, Karen Grunow, and Carsten Krohn (Weimar: Weimar Verlag, 2015).

14. An initial exploration of the history of CASE appeared in 2013: Stanford Anderson, "CASE and MIT: Engagement," in *A Second Modernism: MIT, Architecture, and the "Techno-Social" Moment*, ed. Arindam Dutta (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013), 578–651.