

AS A MALL I REALLY LIKE MoMA

The **architecture** of the new MoMA, with its Atrium and outdoor-like interiors, resembles “the architecture of the Mall”. The location of art in MoMA follows the same logic that department stores use for the **classification** of objects: materials, techniques, uses. (Four Floor: Painting and sculpture; Six Floor: Special exhibitions -often the opportunities section.) Just as Bloomingdale’s offers a **Discover India** display, MoMA currently has a “New Architecture in Spain” exhibit. Ideologically MoMA, like a mall, celebrates exhibitions in a very **playful way** (*New Architecture in Spain* is one example, *SAFE: Design Takes on Risk* is another). The mall’s principle is to give the buyer something extra, something in addition to the product bought: the lure of the display. The idea of “an extra” is embedded in Art Malls, such MoMA, the museum goes not only get entertainment, but acquires culture. The culture of the mall supercedes culture. MoMA is a model of - and support for - the phenomenon of the **suburbanization of cities by Modern Malls of Art**. While the architecture of MoMA resembles a suburban mall, the Department of Architecture at MoMA is the first curatorial department devoted to architecture and design in the world, with shows famous for transforming architecture into style. But while **International Style: Architecture since 1933**, by Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock, defined modern architecture, **Light Construction**, 1996, by Terence Riley, decided “who is modern.” In the same way, **Deconstructivist Architecture**, by Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley, was an analysis of construction, and its revival **On Site: New Architecture in Spain**, 1996 Terence Riley’s final curatorial work at the museum, seems to be just a list of constructions.

ON SITE: New Architecture in Spain

What does Terence Riley mean by “New” in “ON SITE: New Architecture in Spain”? In the title “New Architecture in Spain” there is no concept, just context, unless the meaning of “New” is to be defined within the show. “New”, is a word of common but undefined use, since its many different meanings, when held together, undifferentiated, create a sense of ambiguity. The show displays current projects and recently built work in Spain. In its first sense “New” implies the context of time. 1.<“New”:**Recent**. Having been made or coming into being only a short time ago>. In its second sense “New” relates to use. 2.<“New”:**Never used**, untouched or pristine, as in new construction >. These two senses of the word “new” set the conditions that the architecture has to meet in order to qualify for the show. Here “the new” is the filter but not the full criteria for the selection, otherwise the title of the exhibition would be: Recent Architecture in Spain. The exhibition, according to MoMA’s website, promotes two types of work: “eighteen projects, each of which are a major architectural accomplishment completed in Spain within the last few years” and “thirty-five significant architectural projects that are currently in design or under construction.” The fiction of automatic selection falls apart with the thirty-five works, since there are many more than thirty-five “significant” works currently in design or under construction in Spain. Terence Riley tries to elide the question of why one project was selected and another was not with reference to “the new” as a criterion for the selection. However “the new” is the requirement, but not the valuation. It is in the valuation of the word “new,” that Riley’s illusion of automatic selection fails. That the design and construction in the show are recent is a fact, but facts are not a criterion for anything. / “New” is a “positive” word that communicates nice emotions in all its usages, except one—when it means 3.<“New”:**beginner**, as in new at the job learner, a person who is inexperienced at work >. Does Terence Riley consider the new architecture in Spain, an architecture that has lots to learn, and the Spanish architects that he includes in the show, beginners? Or does “new” refer to a newborn architecture in Spain? Or is Spanish architecture considered here a source from which to learn, the beginning of something: its principle. / The Spanish word for beginner, “**principiante**” shares its root with the word “principio,” or principle. In almost all major projects there are clear and coherent strategies but the architecture, as public work, does not carry the weight of meaning. The fear of political changes inhibits the architects from taking political positions and Architecture’s competitions, (while searching for impartiality) promote specialization and the loss of ideological context. This explains the process but does not justify that architects avoid responsibility for the construction. In the case of the thirty-five “significant” projects, all designed by Spanish architects, most of them by commission, the situation is worst. Architecture projects that could be the origin of “an architecture that is another;” projects that not only built the edifice but a new conception of architecture, are so scarce in this exhibition that when they do appear, it seems accidental. In the architecture in

this exhibition principles are mostly absent. This lack of principles on display at MoMA doesn’t reflect the reality of Spanish architecture but rather the reality of the show. / “News” as a noun means 4. <“News”:**broadcasted event** >. Is being in the news the aim of this show? Is the search for “news” Terence Riley’s curatorial line? Or, is it related to the trajectory of the location where the exhibition takes place? Is it the MoMA’s Modern an old-new one? Is a modern art museum the place for news?. Perhaps the “Modern” in the Museum of Modern Art, refers merely to fashion. 5. <“New”:**modern**>. The architecture advertises itself. In fear of being accused of having bad taste, principles and politics are avoided. Those projects “on fashion” are easy to identify because they have been chosen by the MoMA to promote itself, and are literally the ones appearing in the news. Many projects, despite not making the news, are notable in the architecture world. 6. <“New”:**novelty**, new development, not to the use>. Novelty architecture focuses on scientific or technical discoveries, on new construction methods or new materials. —innovation in the architectural world but not innovation in the world, not a revolution. Projects that do not recognize the necessity to create another world. In this sense, their significance beyond the discipline is doubtful./ Few are the projects that actually are a change for the better. <“New”:**different from the former or the old**, fresh >. However, it is in this sense of new, as different from the old, where the real strength of the new is. As the index of change this is the only one that has a philosophico-political agenda necessary to question the existent and to create the future. It is sad to have to ask: Why there are no works in this exhibition that rise against the rules of production and speculation by building islands of resistance in the middle of gated developments? Where are the projects that balance community and autonomy? Where are the projects that give place to unattended human necessities? Always is the time for heroic architecture even if it does not have a place. Cases of poetry and resistance are very rare. Many cases of functional formalism -the program perfectly conventional, is added as an afterthought. / Perhaps the investigation was not sufficiently profound, or perhaps any investigation into Spanish architecture was not deemed necessary, since the function of the thirty-five projects of Spanish architects is not the first priority of the show. Their function is to act as background for the other major eighteen. 7.<“New”:**novice** >. Novice, besides meaning novel, also means one who has been accepted into a religious order but has not yet taken the final vows. Is Terence Riley affirming that the selected individuals have been accepted into the architecture order?. / The exhibition celebrates construction as an exercise, as an occupation, a distracted and continuous conquest. This superficiality, and its celebration, is the greatest sadness. During the last ten years, construction in Spain has been so fierce that the wastelands are considered a monument. Occupation as a means of passing time, and as conquest—a possession of space by force, an aggressive action against “the emptiness”. What is Spain doing in New MoMA? 8. <“New”:**discovery** >. Is Spain a new discovery on process of colonization? Is Terence Riley “discovering” Spain. / The **occupation** of the ground is part of the phenomena of constraint and dispossession that has occurred continually since the beginning of the Spanish Civil War (1936-2006). Spain, dispossessed of its character by a forty-year dictatorship; tortured by the feelings of inferiority germane to the humiliated; lacking self confidence; offers itself again as ground to be possessed. The scale of the offering is such that it could only come about if the dispossession is complete. <A woman (American) told me that wounded by her husband’s (Spanish architect) continuous infidelities, she copulated with each and every member of a basketball team >. The structure of repression swings from the most absolute restriction to the wildest riot. Spain, after many years of dictatorship spent with closed borders, and after years of adaptation to its new democratic state, opens itself to international participation and does so in a measureless, excessive fashion, offering itself in an architecture bid. The scale of the offering is perverse. Perverse because the most formal projects sit in the very location of the political conflict, (Bilbao) and the very same individuals that were part of the long dictatorship advocate radical projects, (Galicia). Fighting terrorism with architecture and the re-fashioning of rightist politics: is this perverse or simply brilliant?. This perversity is diffused by the presence of thirty-five Spanish architects, who serve as a distraction from questions of the political contexts of the eighteen major projects. Those thirty-five projects, in a double perversity and dispossession occupy the ground with a powerful formal presence and apparent political neutrality, as if the political dimension in Spain is an open wound that cannot be touched.