

Critical Regionalism

505 Humanities

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Thakur School of Architecture and Planning

Critical Regionalism is a direction of modern architecture, which functionally takes into account regional characteristics in the design.

Critical regionalism strives for a re-localization of modernism and is thus a late countermovement to the so-called International Style.

The addition of "critical" serves to distinguish it from backward-looking trends such as historicism and Heimatstil on the one hand, and the decorated facades of postmodern architecture on the other.

Critical Regionalism is an architectural approach that attempts to remedy indifference to the place where the modern architectural object is situated. Through the use of the forces of context, it aims to enrich the significance of architecture.

Critical Regionalism is considered as one of the forms of postmodernism, in architecture.

Kenneth Frampton is a British Architect and was born in 1930. After a short period of working as an architect in London in the 1960s, he started to teach and write at Columbia University. Instead of taking an active role in building, preferred to be in a theoretician side. Additionally, he studied about history of architecture.

*Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an
Architecture of Resistance*

Culture and Civilization

"Twenty years ago the dialectical interplay between civilization and culture still afforded the possibility of maintaining some general control over the shape and significance of the urban fabric. The two last decades, however, have radically transformed the metropolitan centers of the developed world. What were still essentially 19th-century city fabrics in the early 1960's have since become progressively overlaid by two symbiotic instruments of Megapolitan development rise and the serpentine freeway. The former has finally come into its own as the prime device for realizing the increased land value brought into being by the latter. The typical downtown which, up to twenty years ago, still presented a mixture of residential stock with tertiary and secondary industry has now become little more than a *burolandschaft* city-scape: the victory of universal civilization over locally inflected culture."

The Rise and Fall of the Avant-Garde

Frampton states that the movements in the architecture in the mid-19th century, with the starting of industrial process and Neoclassic form, was the reaction to the tradition part to the modernization as the Gothic Revival and the Arts-and-Crafts ideas take up a categorically negative attitude

Critical Regionalism and World Culture

“The fundamental strategy of Critical Regionalism is to mediate the impact of universal civilization with elements derived *indirectly* from the peculiarities of a particular place. It is clear from the above that Critical Regionalism depends upon maintaining a high level of critic self-consciousness. It may find its governing inspiration in such things as the range and quality of the local light, or in tectonic derived from a peculiar structural mode, or in the topography of a given site.”

The Resistance of the Place-Form

In architectural work, architects must study very well contextual features instead of acting it as a free standing object. It should be adapted the characteristic of place. According to Frampton, the physical space of region and the place where the communication between people are not the same things. When applying critical regionalism to the design, architects should consider the idea that there is no limitation of physical space and the characteristic of place cannot be consisted of an independent building. Spaces may be created by enclosing however its borders should be the beginning of the place instead of its ending. The spatial organization of a building should be solved in terms of its relation between exterior qualification of place such as; its entrance, exits, and the circulation.

Culture versus Nature: Topography, Context, Climate, Light and Tectonic Form

“Critical regionalism necessarily involves a more directly dialectic relation with nature, more than abstract, formal traditions of modern avant-garde architecture allow.”

Frampton is analyzing the necessity of these two element while creating an architectural structure that associates local culture and the qualities of the landscape. While creating architectural structure on the natural environment, both these two elements should be merged with each other in order to achieve relationship between its concept, rather than a create a free standing object. The geographical characteristics and the cultural legacy will be decisive in the ecology, climate, and the symbolic aspect of place. That's the creating the "place-form" balance between natural environment and the cultural legacy identifies societies.

The Visual versus the Tactile

“Critical Regionalism seeks to complement our normative visual experience by readdressing the tactile range of human perceptions. In so doing, it endeavors to balance the priority accorded to the image and to counter the Western tendency to interpret the environment in exclusively perspectival terms.”

According to Frampton, both visually and both the other senses' experiences should take a part while designing. That cooperation between the all senses makes architecture deeper and unique. This concept supports the usage of all materials which target all senses and that will allow variable emotional reactions.

Characteristics

Critical Regionalism does not attempt to identify the modern vernacular, but rather to identify recent regional 'schools' whose main purpose has been to reflect the limited constructional elements on which they were based and served.

It is a local manifestation that attempts to assimilate and reinterpret the recent process initiated by the modern movement and yet consider local cultural, economic and political independence. In short, an antithesis between root culture and universal civilization.

These characteristics were punctual and generally emerged in places where the International Style failed to establish itself definitively

Another important factor is the attention paid to local materials, craftsmanship, and the subtleties of local light.

Critical Regionalism is therefore a marginal practice that, while refusing to abandon progressive aspects, rebukes the inhuman architecture that privileges the aesthetics and the dominant culture so modernized. But it does not do so in a utopian way. And in an environment where the architect tries to be bigger than his work, the regionalists put more emphasis on the territory where the work was inserted. Against the tendency of the 'universal civilization' that privileges air-conditioning, they make light, the terrain, the climatic conditions, the bases that would sustain the project.

They make the visual aspect a secondary characteristic, as they emphasize the tactile aspect, the different temperatures in different environments, as well as the aroma, the sounds, the ventilation and even the finishing of the floors and walls that are invitations to the touch. This involuntarily provokes sensory, posture, psychological, etc. changes. They rigorously try to appropriate external references, both formal and technological, but without leaving aside what is local.

Key Architects:

- Alvar Aalto
- Mario Botta
- Charles Correa
- Rainer Greschik
- Alvaro Siza Vieira
- Peter Zumthor
- Bernardo Bader
- Rafael Moneo
- Glenn Murcutt
- Juhani Pallasmaa
- Raj Rewal
- Luigi Snozzi
- Jørn Utzon
- Aris Konstantinidis

Projects

Säynätsalo Town Hall, Alvar Aalto, 1952

The design of this iconic community center was a turning point in Aalto's architectural career and represented his successful attempt at capturing the essence of Finnish architecture whilst embracing modernism. This unique design was derived in part from the traditional European 'town square' typology, consisting of a courtyard and tower. Aalto built upon the vernacular language by incorporating staggered and asymmetric volumes that echoed modernist principles of design.

Aalto's choice of brick further illustrates the relevance of the Town Hall within the critical regionalist dialogue. His rejection of the modernist obsession with glass, steel, and concrete is evident in this choice.



Olivetti Showroom, Carlo Scarpa, 1958

The tectonic properties of the Olivetti Showroom portray Scarpa's extraordinary eye for detail and his ability to juxtapose the old with the new. Scarpa employed modern manufacturing techniques to give traditional Venetian crafts a new lease of life in the era of industrialization. His masterful use of concrete and glass with classical materials like ivory, marble, brass, and copper encapsulates his distinct approach to modernism.





Marie Short House, Glenn Murcutt, 1975

This project was Glenn Murcutt's first attempt at employing Australian vernacular practices to provide environmentally sustainable design solutions. Conceptually, it is inspired in part by Mies' glass and steel box, and in part by Henry David Thoreau's principle of permanently being in contact with nature.

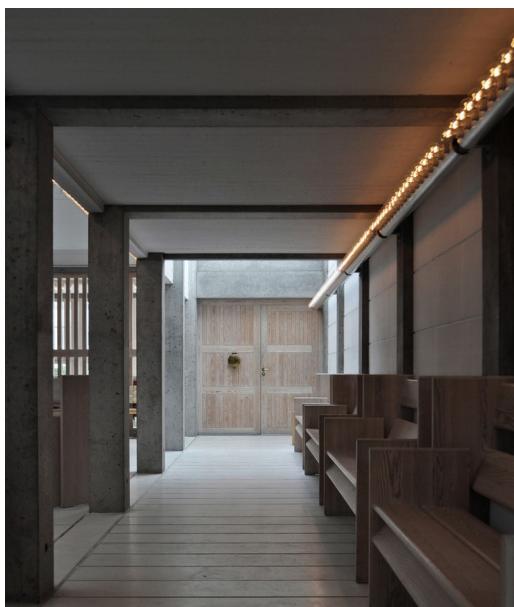
Murcutt studied shelters were designed by Aborigine Australians and their shading and ventilation strategies in detail. He then adapted these to the contemporary needs of his clients. In the Short House, simple strategies like lifting the living space off the ground and providing open-ended ventilation through the roof are used alongside complex louver systems.



Bagsværd Church, Jørn Utzon, 1976

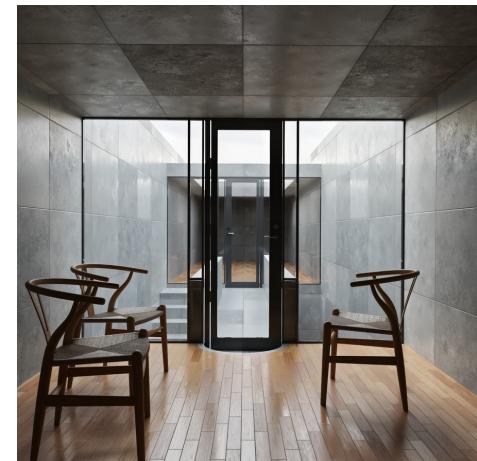
the Bagsværd Church exemplifies Kenneth Frampton's writings on critical regionalism. Much of its popularity stems from its architectonic quality, a result of Utzon's mastery of Danish construction combined with oriental precedents.

Frampton described the church as "*a self-conscious synthesis between universal civilization and world culture*". The plan of the church, obtained from the Old Testament, is the universal aspect of the design which is transformed by its materiality and form. Another aspect of Frampton's theory that is highlighted in this project is the supremacy of natural elements within the design, as opposed to artificial elements. The unique internal geometry of the space interacts with natural light to create a distinct atmosphere.



Azuma House, Tadao Ando, 1976

Tadao Ando attempted to resolve complex conundrums: that of regionalism and modernity, extravagance with a limited expense, and preservation of the natural world in a chaotic urban setting. One of the first projects of the revered architect, Azuma House resembles a long and narrow concrete box that is divided into three sections internally. The middle section takes the form of an uncovered patio that provides the occupant with a rare experience of the natural world, unperturbed by the busy city.



The Malagueira Housing Project, Alvaro Siza, 1977

Located in Evora, Portugal, the Malagueira housing project was conceived as a social housing scheme amid a housing crisis in 1973. Evora has a rich architectural heritage, with numerous monuments and temples dating back to the Roman era. This Roman influence on the city's local vernacular deeply impacted Siza's design. The 'duct wall' that transported all services at Malagueira was evidently inspired by the Roman aqueduct.

Another factor that contributed to the conception of this remarkable scheme is the undulating topography of the site. Siza never looked at a site as a white leveled plane. In this aspect, and in his ability to synthesize the past and the present, Alvaro Siza was a key proponent of critical regionalism.

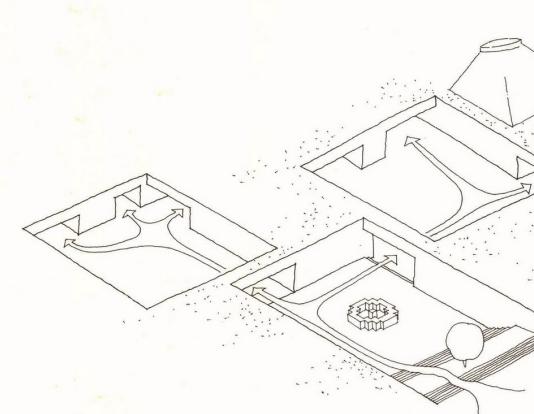
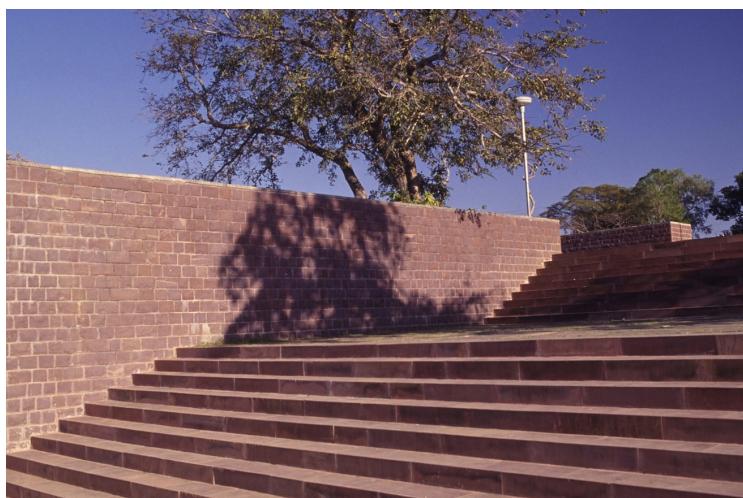
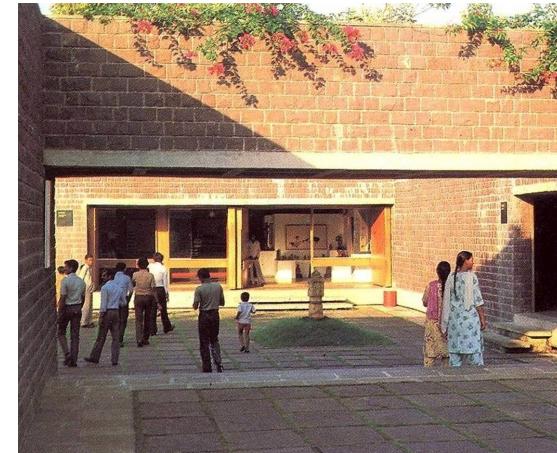
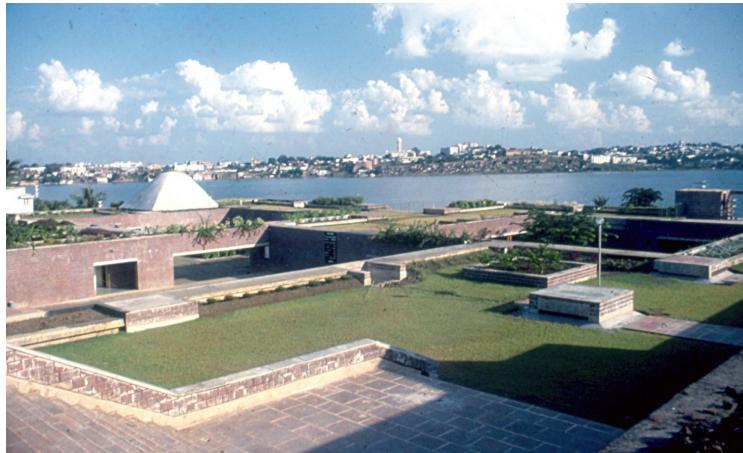




Bharat Bhavan, Charles Correa, 1982

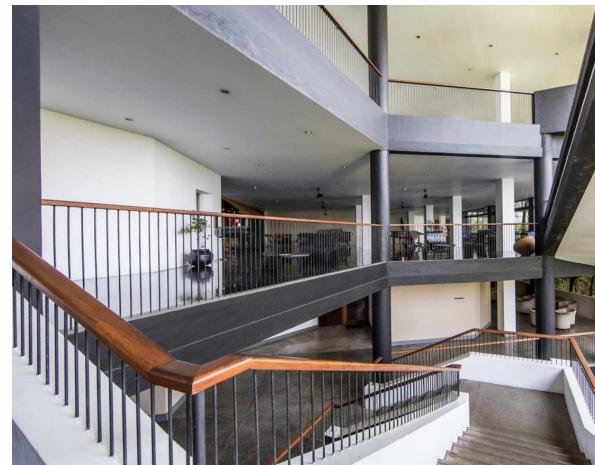
In describing Charles Correa's work, David Adjaye said: *"His vision sits at the nexus defining the contemporary Indian sensibility and it articulates a new Indian identity with a language that has a global resonance"*. This is particularly highlighted in the Bharat Bhavan owing to its early period of conception. The design put forth an alternative to the European modernism brought to India by Le Corbusier.

The central idea of the scheme combined the Corbusian concept of the 'architectural promenade' with the religious idea of the 'ritualistic pathway', which is a traditional component of Hindu temples.



Kandalama Hotel, Geoffrey Bawa, 1991

Known as the predominant figure behind "Tropical Modernism", Geoffrey Bawa redefined modernism within the South-East Asian context. Kandalama Hotel was one of his later works in Sri Lanka which exemplifies his design philosophy. The site of the hotel overlooks the ancient Kandalama Tank and was selected by Bawa himself. It is no surprise then, that the site plays an integral role in Bawa's design. Rising from the edge of the rocky outcrop, the Kandalama Hotel blends into the landscape.



Reference Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbGKo-HARqs>

<https://www.archdaily.com/966401/re-evaluating-critical-regionalism-an-architecture-of-the-place>



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