

Substantial Rituals    Robert Marino Studio    Fall 2016

*The Construction of Ritual*

*The architecture of the Romans was, from first to last, an art of shaping space around ritual. It stemmed directly from the Roman propensity to transform the raw stuff of experience and behavior into rituals, formal patterns of action and reaction ... This was the inherently Roman way of reducing the chaos of experience to manageable, human measures. It was the root of Roman custom, Roman tradition, Roman discipline, and Roman law.*

Frank E. Brown, *Roman Architecture*, 1965

In every culture the rituals of daily life determine our spaces of habitation. In the same way as Professor Brown suggests it was so for the Romans, so too are our current daily rituals the determinants of our living spaces. For architects working on housing for the masses, these individual rituals must be averaged. The average expression of ritualized life within multi unit housing is one major determinant in the development of a housing typology.

The influences that determine a housing typology fall into broad categories. The political and sociological category has to do with the organization of societies into progressively smaller groups, beginning with the city and ending with the individual. A primary need of each of these groups is a spatial one. Conventions and expected norms play roles in the distribution and organization of space. Rituals at every level dictate progression, security, visibility, and degrees of communality. It will be a goal in the studio to identify a cross-section of American life, to determine its rituals, and to represent it in the most efficient possible way. The designs will therefore naturally evolve from the inside and reveal themselves on the outside. The result cannot be completely knowable at the outset of design. The will to create form by the architect becomes modified by life's necessities. The resulting architecture could then be considered a *Platonic* one, engaged in providing the *ideal* living situation.

There is another kind of ritual at play in the production of housing. Our tactile culture predisposes us to transform materials in a specific way. In the past this had to do with local materials, local tradespeople, and local learned techniques. Our current trends in architecture have to a large extent become globalized. Materials and techniques have become uniformly distributed the world over and *craftspeople* have been replaced with *assemblers*. *Skill* and the necessity for *risk* in construction have become rarities to be avoided by banks and other investors. The studio will embrace this up to date condition by identifying the predominant methods of global construction, and employing them in early stages of design. We will seek the limits of these new construction types by subjecting them to a modernist critique in which efficiency is the paramount quality to be attained.

The studio will analyze the *Torre Velasca*, a small apartment tower in Milan, completed in 1958, designed by BBPR, (Banfi, Belgiojoso, Peresutti, and Rogers.) The project was designed with an entirely modernist sensibility in terms of construction and materials, but with a free sensibility in terms of form, in this case with a clear reference to medieval Lombard towers. It was built of traditional Milanese materials, (brick and stone), and resorted to 19<sup>th</sup> century structural solutions *à la* Viollet le Duc. The design was considered an example of the "Neo Liberty Movement", which was derided as a retreat from the basic principles of the modern movement.

