

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Intersecting Itineraries Beyond the Strada Novissima: The Converging Authorship of Critical Regionalism

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While the 1980 Venice Biennale is usually understood as the exhibition that crystallised postmodernism as a style of historicist eclecticism, the event also acted as a catalyst for the eventual convergence of alternative architectural sensibilities and ideas. This article shows how critical regionalism emerged when the physical and intellectual trajectories of British historian Kenneth Frampton and the Greek architects Suzana Antonakaki and Dimitris Antonakakis intersected in the aftermath of the Biennale. Offering an alternative way out of the contemporaneous crisis of modernism, this open-ended and extrovert regionalism that opposed static cultural insularities is thus the discursive footprint of architectural sensibilities travelling through cultures.

## Introduction

Despite the diverging agendas of its curators and participants, the 1980 Venice Biennale went down in history as the event that single-handedly defined postmodernism as an architectural style of historicist eclecticism. In her recent historical account, Léa-Catherine Szacka concludes that this major exhibition, titled 'The Presence of the Past', acted as a hinge in the history of postmodernism (see Szacka 2011: 222–85).<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, it marked 'the end of the beginning' by offering a specific way out of the prolonged impasse of modern architecture after the 1960s. On the other, it simultaneously marked 'the beginning of the end'; Kenneth Frampton's (b. 1930) resignation from Paolo Portoghesi's (b. 1931) invited committee of international critics represented the first discernible schism within a loosely defined group of practitioners, historians and theorists that were only united in their shared critical interest in architectural developments after modernism (Szacka 2011: 270–273). Owing to the scope of her own research, though, Szacka stops short of following this 'schismatic' trajectory further beyond the Biennale's Strada Novissima. It is this baton that I intend to pick up in this article, by retracing Frampton's gradual development of a critical regionalist discourse in the aftermath of his resignation. His eventual recuperation of the article of 1981 by Alexander Tzonis (b. 1937) and Liane Lefaivre on the work of the Greek architects Suzana Antonakaki (b. 1935) and Dimitris Antonakakis (b. 1933), in this theoretical endeavour adds a further transcultural spin to this story, though.

Architecture in Greece in the late 1960s and 1970s was not on the radar of the escalating postmodern debates

of Western European and North American architectural theorists of the time. The turbulent post-war history of the country – including the civil war of the late 1940s and the ensuing political turmoil that culminated in a seven-year military regime (1967–1974) – was an important reason for this absence. Increased state censorship and oppression, along with the nationalistic overtones that accompanied an imposed cultural introversion, meant that the country practically lost contact with the relevant architectural and socio-political developments on the Western European front – and rather crucially so, during one of the most intense periods of critique of the modern project. Six years after the fall of the Greek military junta, the 1980 Venice Biennale clearly recorded this cultural insularity. Rather tellingly, the exhibition did not include any architectural work from Greece (neither as one of the 20 façades in the Strada Novissima, nor amongst the 55 international architectural practices in the 'young generation' section). By 1980, Greek architects had begun to respond to this prolonged introversion by following the most recent developments in their field. The perceived lost ground was only partially covered by the global news pages of *Architecture in Greece* – the major annual review of architecture in the country – in the late 1970s.<sup>2</sup> While this publication allowed for metaphorical travels of the architectural imagination, the first-hand experience acquired through physical travelling held more promise for Greek architects of the period. With the Biennale effectively offering a comprehensive purview of the recent international developments, many architects – including Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis – travelled to Venice to see the exhibition with their own eyes.

At the same time, though, the cultural insularity of the military junta years also meant that modern architecture had followed a diverging trajectory of development in this peculiar Greek context. Could this different post-war development also suggest an alternative contribution to

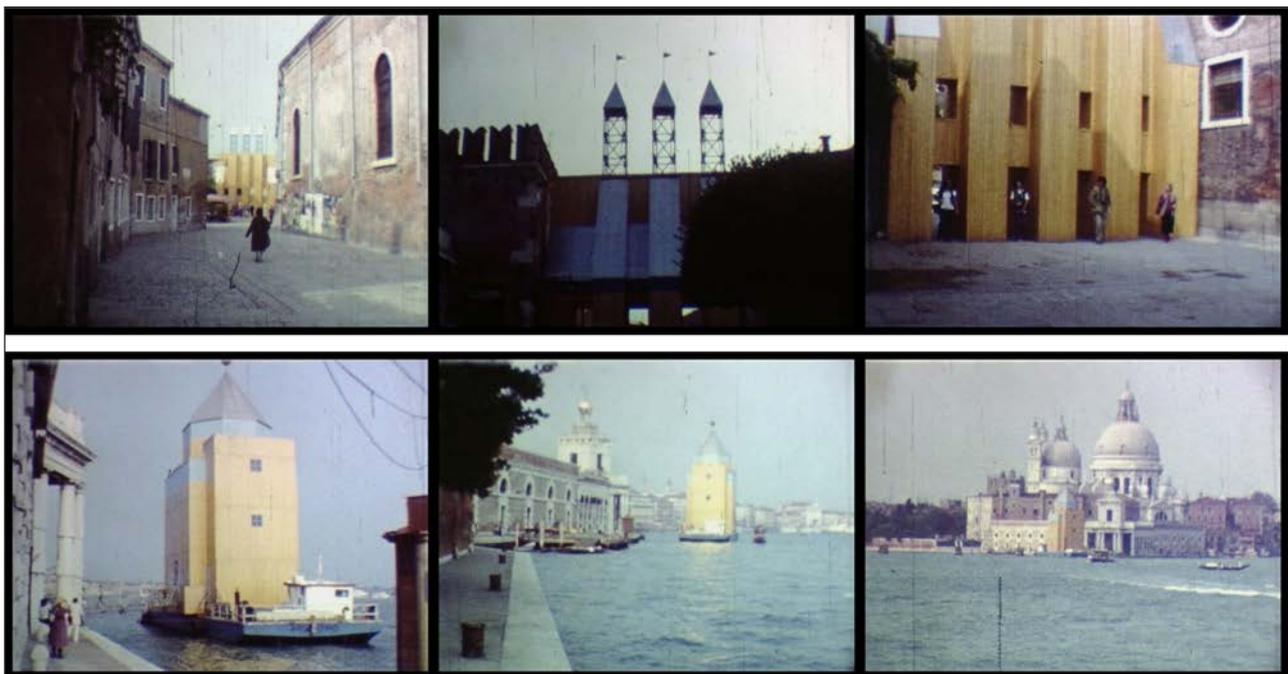
the postmodern debate — another way out of a globally stagnant ‘international style’ modernism? That was probably the most promising factor for Frampton’s recourse to the Greek architectural scene in the early 1980s. In this article, I will retrace the itineraries of Frampton and the two Antonakakis, which eventually intersected and momentarily converged in the formulation of critical regionalism. Starting from the act of travelling as a physical displacement that allowed the Antonakakis to form first-hand impressions from the 1980 Venice Biennale, I will then follow Frampton’s intellectual act of travelling as a displacement of architectural interest from the Strada Novissima to ‘peripheral’ projects. After bringing these initially distinct physical and intellectual trajectories together, I will suggest that their resulting critical regionalism is the artefact of a transculturally converging authorship that also involved the formative histories of these theorists and architects. Far from promoting a static cultural insularity, this regionalism is the discursive footprint of architectural sensibilities travelling through cultures.

### Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis and Their Travelling Architectural Sensibility beyond the Strada Novissima

Little did Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis know that their trip to Venice in 1980 would quickly attract public interest back in their home country. To their surprise, less than a year later, a public screening of the 15-minute video recording from Venice by Dimitris Antonakakis was included in the programme of a special event on postmodern architecture organised by the Association of Greek Architects in Athens (1981).<sup>3</sup> Thanks to the insistence of one of the event’s organisers, Yorgos Simeoforidis (1955–2002), the video

shared the couple’s first-hand impressions of the ‘Presence of the Past’ exhibition with an expanded Athenian audience of students and practitioners (Antonakakis 2013). However, Dimitris Antonakakis’s short film reveals that it was the very act of travelling — rather than the celebrated exhibition — that reinforced their architectural sensibility. With the long history of their own formation in the Greek cultural background colouring their travelling gaze, Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis were at least as eager to explore the architectural environment in which they found themselves as they were to view the Biennale itself.

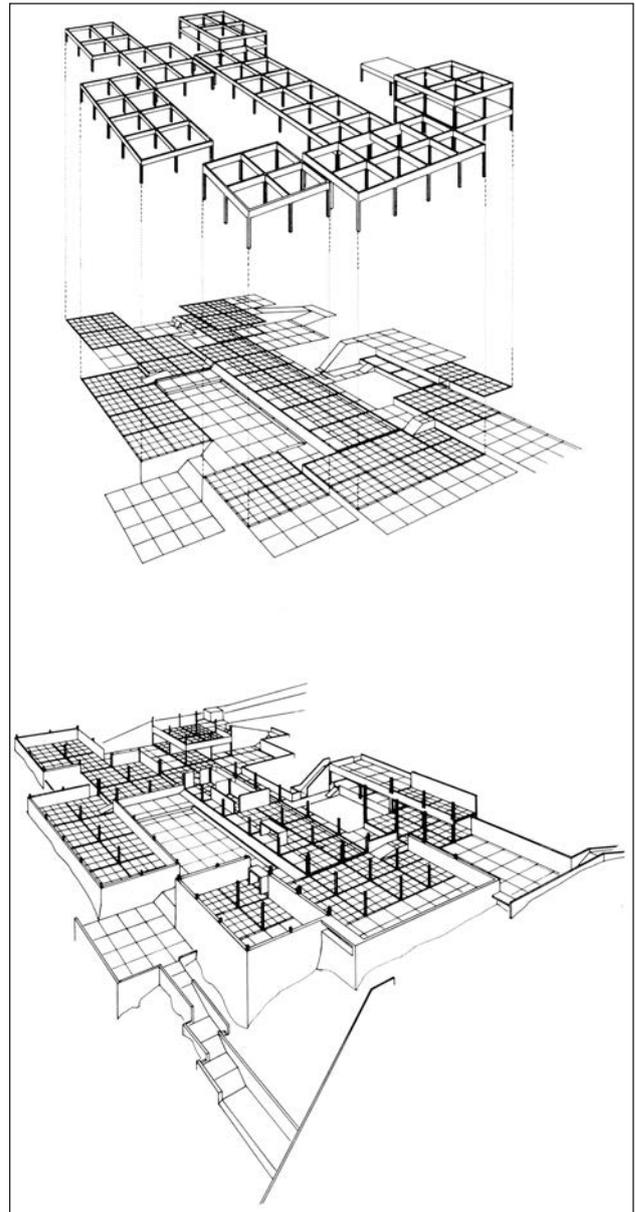
In his video recording, Dimitris Antonakakis pays meagre attention to the exhibition that brought him and his wife to Venice in the first place. Apart from random sightings of Aldo Rossi’s Teatro del Mondo around the Venetian lagoon and his portal to the Arsenale exhibition, no other Biennale-related material appears in his Super-8 film cassette (**Fig. 1**). Were the architects eventually disappointed by the content of an exhibition they considered not worth filming? Dimitris Antonakakis’s intervention at the open debate on postmodern architecture that took place in Athens in 1981 certainly suggests so. Although he attempted to ‘suspend his judgement’ and share ‘images and information’ on the exhibition ‘in the most charitable light possible’ (Antonakakis 1981: 82),<sup>4</sup> he was clearly appalled to witness Charles Jencks’s lighthearted rejection of the interwar modern movement, as well as his indifference to the contribution of Team 10 — especially in regard to the architects’ social role. Even more disappointing was Jencks’s juxtaposition of the classical orders that had nothing to do with ‘life, human activity, [and] the laws of sun and nature’ (Antonakakis 1981: 83). Siding with Gaetano Pesce’s intense public reaction to this ‘most reactionary conception of architecture’, Antonakakis concluded that



**Figure 1:** Selected stills from Dimitris Antonakakis’s original Super-8 video recording from 1980 of Aldo Rossi’s portal to the exhibition and his Teatro del Mondo around the Venetian canals. From the private archive of Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis.

'it is not the modern movement that is to blame for the poverty of the present city and its architecture; it is our own inadequacy to understand, and elaborate upon its main positions towards their evolution' (Antonakakis 1981: 83). This aligned Antonakakis with similar critical reactions expressed by architects of his age who took part in that Athenian debate – whilst the younger generation was more favourable to these postmodern trends. In the broader European context, his comments are also aligned with similar contemporaneous reactions, characteristically summarised in Jürgen Habermas's assertion that 'the project of modernity has not yet been fulfilled' (Habermas 1981: 12).

Such a reaction was consistent with Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis's own formative history. When they visited the 'Presence of the Past' exhibition in Venice, they were already experienced practitioners. After graduating from the National Technical University of Athens School of Architecture in the late 1950s, Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis immediately began working together, along with some close friends and colleagues from their student years, as freelance architects. After a few small-scale private housing commissions, the project that first brought them to the spotlight was the Archaeological Museum on Chios in 1965 (Fig. 2). Like their late student projects, their design bore the mark of their mentor – and former student of Mies van der Rohe – A. James Speyer.<sup>5</sup> Speyer had offered the young Greek architects an 'open interpretation' of the modernist tenets and a disciplined method for staying in control of their architectural designs (Antonakakis 2013), mainly through the systematic use of an organising grid. Two decades later, in 1980, his influence was still evident in the work of Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis. By then, the well-established methods underpinning their design could not easily be challenged by a single architectural exhibition, no matter how major an event the 'Presence of the Past' was heralded to be. In a recent interview, Dimitris Antonakakis recalled 'rejecting the postmodern' after visiting the Strada Novissima, adding that he and Suzana 'never ascribed to the postmodern eclectic logic of a "return of forms"'. For Suzana Antonakaki, 'the postmodern heralded a sort of emancipation from the very strict and ossified dictum of a modernism that imposed restrictions and stereotypes that were very hard for us to escape from'. According to Dimitris Antonakakis, at the start of their architectural career, 'there were words we didn't include in our architectural vocabulary. [...] We were exaggerating in our attempt to follow the established principles of Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe; postmodern theories might have possibly helped us escape from this exaggeration, as they drove us to a re-evaluation of the intentions of the past, though – and not by their specific formal suggestions' (Antonakakis 2013). In other words, while the architects thought that certain critiques of architectural modernism were at least partially legitimate, they did not intend to give up on its fundamental humanist aspirations and aesthetic tenets. However, due to its retrospective nature, this recent exchange reveals more about the ongoing intellectual relationship between the two architects and their



**Figure 2:** Archaeological Museum on Chios by Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis and E. Goussi-Dessyla (1965). Presentation drawings from the private archive of Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis.

positions in 2013 than it explains their actual stance in 1980. Be that as it may, the question remained: how could the past be re-evaluated in a way that would not degenerate into a sterile formal eclecticism that threatened to render the modern project obsolete?

Traces of this itinerary of an alternative re-evaluation of the always present past are already evident in the footage of the abundant architectural stimuli of Venice in 1980. Although he never considered this video important (as he says in the recent interview; see Antonakakis 2013), Dimitris Antonakakis's random record of their travel to Venice offers a rare – unedited and uncensored – entry into his peculiar architectural sensibility in action. Wherever he turns the lens of his camera from buildings and public spaces to random scenes of everyday life (Fig. 3), his architectural gaze is revealed



**Figure 3:** Selected stills from Dimitris Antonakakis's original 1980 Super-8 video recording of everyday life in Venice and its surroundings. From the private archive of Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis.

as both unmistakably modern and highly personal. It is unmistakably modern because it never stops at the superficial characteristics of his subject matter. Whether he is recording Italian vernacular architecture, a Palladian villa, a Renaissance palace, a Baroque or a modern building (**Fig. 4**), his interest lies not in their specific formal features but in the abstract qualities of space and their relations. And it is those typological observations that reflect Antonakakis's peculiar architectural concerns, effectively endowing his video recordings with their highly personal character.<sup>6</sup> He is constantly focusing on details that render architecture as the setting of everyday life – allowing for varying degrees of privacy from the public urban realm, for instance. His interest is especially attracted by minute architectural details that form inhabited thresholds and the gradual transitions from one surface to the other, from the public space of everyday life to the increased privacy of the interior. Featuring prominently in the video, staircases, landings, galleries, windows, tight alleys, balconies, semi-open air spaces, and roofed terraces – in their succession and multiple combinations – reveal Antonakakis's constant interest in an elaborate architectural treatment of these liminal, transitional surfaces (**Fig. 5**). The inhabitation of these

intermediate spaces is usually triggered by minute architectural gestures, such as a strategically positioned piece of mantel that forms a seating space for stopping and resting at the intersection of multiple public trajectories across a building. Conversely, the quality of indoor space is appreciated through features like cross-ventilation and lighting, controlled openings to the public, and sufficient conditions for an open-air everyday life that celebrates the mild Mediterranean climate. On a larger scale, his attention is particularly attracted by the ways in which buildings frame and relate to their adjacent public spaces. His successive recordings of public space as a playground for both children and adults – as well as his interest in the ways in which people appropriate ambiguous pieces of public furniture that invite them to meet – are also very strongly reminiscent of Aldo van Eyck's (1918–1999) and Herman Hertzberger's (b. 1932) similar concerns (**Fig. 3**).

Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis thus returned to the architectural past as it was expressed and materialised in the present of the city itself, with its multiple historical layers of organisation. From royal palaces to vernacular huts, the Venetian buildings that surrounded the two travellers were certainly legitimate sources of



**Figure 4:** Selected stills from Dimitris Antonakakis's original 1980 Super-8 video recording of their architectural safari in Venice and its surroundings, including Andrea Palladio's Villa Foscari "La Malcontenta" in Mira (bottom). From the private archive of Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis.

architectural knowledge in the context of the severe critique of modernism of the period. If they were to offer a way out of the prolonged impasse of modern architecture, though, these buildings – and especially their relations with the public spaces of everyday life – still needed to be interpreted through the lens of a modernist outlook. The past should certainly be revisited – not as 'a neutralised history, which is locked up in the museum of historicism' (Habermas 1981: 5), though, but with the modern eyes that could overcome superficial formal characteristics in favour of typological observations. Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis therefore suggested

that architectural qualities of historical precedents missing from the then prevailing international style needed to be re-appreciated and, rather crucially so, rephrased accordingly in the modern idiom. They thus aspired to a 'presence of the past' for a modern architecture that could evolve beyond the Strada Novissima and its prevalent historicist eclecticism. Their critical reaction to the Biennale reinforced their conviction in their peculiar architectural itinerary. They travelled to Venice to witness the most recent trends, only to reaffirm what they were already pursuing – a regionally informed variant of modernism.



**Figure 5:** Selected stills from Dimitris Antonakakis's original 1980 Super-8 video recordings of architectural details and spaces of note in Venice and its surroundings. From the private archive of Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis.

### **Kenneth Frampton's Intellectual Travels as a Displacement of Architectural Discourse beyond the Strada Novissima**

Like Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis, Kenneth Frampton was also ambivalent in his relation both to the legacy of a redundant modernism and the triumphalist promises for a postmodern pluralist future offered by the Biennale. The event thus served as a starting point for his intellectual pursuit of a theoretical discourse that would help him articulate a way out of this ambivalence. Frampton did not deny that there was a problem with modern architecture; on the contrary, he believed in its serious consideration, hoping that would eventually foster a criti-

cal understanding of the historical predicament of the profession. Intending to consider the latent possibilities for future developments that critical understanding might open up, however, he refused to succumb to matters of 'personal patronage' in a selection process that underplayed other important contributions to the theme of the Biennale – such as the work of Gino Valle (1923–2003), for instance (Frampton 1980a: 2). Voicing his ambivalence, Frampton eventually resigned:

I entertained the illusion that it would be possible for me to keep my distance from the overall ideology of the show by simply writing a critical article

and allowing this to go forward in the exhibition catalogue. I have indeed finished this text. But the critical position it adopts is so extremely opposed to all that could be summed under the category 'post-modernism', that I have realised it would be absurd for me to advance the essay in this context. [...] Indeed it has recently become clear to me that I could only make a public spectacle of myself, by being the so-called critic from within. [...] It is one thing to mount an international exhibition whose theme is to demonstrate the present reaction against the reduced categories of modern architecture. It is another thing to manifest the triumph of an unstructured pluralism through a curiously partisan approach to the apparent procedure of selection and display. (Frampton 1980a: 1–3)

Partly inspired by the Heideggerian notions of place and dwelling and partly by the political twist endowed on them by Hannah Arendt, Frampton was then aspiring to 'a critical theory of building' concerned with the 'creation of place' (see Frampton 1980b: 280–297). A few years earlier, he had already thematised both the ontological and the political implications of the production of place as that of sustaining an active public sphere (Frampton 1974). By defining this opposition between place and production as central in the architectural predicament of the 1970s, he could therefore argue that '[t]he current architectural debate as to the finer stylistic points of Modernism versus Post-Modernism appears to be somewhat irrelevant in th[is] light' (Frampton 1980b: 296). Before the Biennale, though, he was still looking for the right words to concisely articulate his project of acknowledging the problems of the modern project, without giving up on its progressive legacy (Frampton 1974). Following the genealogy of his nascent critical regionalism from 1980 to 1983, I will thus describe Frampton's intellectual trajectory beyond the Strada Novissima as a metaphorical sort of travelling – a displacement and recalibration of international architectural interest from the 'centre' to the 'periphery' of Western cultural production. In doing so, I will also argue that his reportedly 'finished' text for the Biennale catalogue was his first essay on that specific question.<sup>7</sup> My historical investigation therefore supports and further explores Szacka's speculation that Frampton's seminal articles of 1983 on critical regionalism 'developed out of [his] unpublished essay for the Biennale's catalogue' (Szacka 2011: 273).

Because Frampton was an active historian and theorist of the time and had many venues for publishing his work at his disposal – from the journal of the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, *Oppositions*, in the United States, to *Architectural Design* in the United Kingdom – the possibility of him leaving an already finished text of his in the shadows seems slim. I am therefore confident that Frampton's article 'From Neo-Productivism to Post-Modernism' (published in *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, approximately six months after the event) can be considered as the text missing from the 1980 exhibition catalogue.<sup>8</sup> To begin with, the article provides an overview of

the most important architectural developments after the 1960s, while suggesting their classification in four major trends. This is in line with Frampton's preferred interpretation of the exhibition's theme and through it, his aforementioned intention to document 'the present reaction against the reduced categories of modern architecture'. The appearance in the title of the very word 'post-modernism' is another significant clue. In his other contemporaneous texts, Frampton avoided the term, preferring to refer to architectural work in the vein of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown under the rubric of 'Populism'; in a text for the catalogue of an exhibition dedicated to the postmodern, he could not avoid resorting to that term – especially when he also intended to clarify the difference of his own theoretical position through this contradistinction. Last but not least, the context in which the article appears is equally significant. *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui* was one of the major international beacons of modernism and Frampton's decision to finally publish his piece in those symbolically loaded pages could only function as an additional statement about his intent to dissociate from the 1980 camp of Venetian postmodernists.

The article marks the first time that Frampton adds his own regionalist alternative to the four ideologically defined '-isms' of architectural practice: neo-productivism (with its emphasis on technology and its autonomous independence from its immediate context), neo-rationalism (with its emphasis on morphology), structuralism (with its emphasis on anthropology) and participationism/populism (with its emphasis on contextualism). In the final instance, though, his taxonomy breaks down to the polar dichotomy of the Scylla of universal productivism and the Charybdis of kitsch pastiche populism.<sup>9</sup> In the face of these alternatives that are united in their incapacity for place creation, Frampton calls his regionalism both 'realist' and 'neo-constructivist' (Frampton 1981: 5). Clearly alluding to Oriol Bohigas's Catalan manifesto, 'realism' becomes a shorthand for the cultural and socio-political aspirations of Frampton's intellectual itinerary, while 'neo-constructivism' points towards an aesthetic sensibility deeply rooted in the modernist tradition.<sup>10</sup> Vying for the industrialisation of a construction that would simultaneously remain 'in direct response to the needs of the society [architects] live in', Frampton evokes the work of Jean Prouvé to lend credibility to his project (Frampton 1981: 6).<sup>11</sup> This is his way of showing that his architectural discourse is not limited to wishful thinking, but reveals an already existing, yet latent, desirable direction that needs to be further developed (Frampton 1981: 3; 5). His concluding credo offers a still unsystematic mix of crucial features for his later articulations of critical regionalism, comprising 'an authentic if restricted regional movement' that 'retranscribes elements of the vernacular without recourse to pastiche' in an attempt to 'reestablish critical precepts'. Its priorities consist of 'restor[ing] the urban structure in those places where it is still intact', 'identify[ing] those buildings which give form to the shapeless metropolis', 'emphasis[ing] the threshold, [and] making it the most [monumental and] significant element of construction'. It promotes a synthesis of '[r]ational modes of construction

and traditional artisan forms [...] in an intelligent syntax' that allows for 'gradients' in expression, a densification of micro-environments, and the development of the tactile alongside the visual. Accepting 'that architecture is of necessity the culture of the arrière-garde', it also resists 'the cult of the star', 'the self-destructing potential of so-called paper architecture', 'the insidious cult of the image' and 'the media themselves' with their 'capacities to undermine architecture' (Frampton 1981: xlvi, 5).<sup>12</sup>

In a reworked version of the same text published in *Architectural Design* a year later, Frampton (1982d) developed his views of regionalism further, both by enriching his initial architectural anthology (Alvaro Siza, Jorn Utzon, Mario Botta, Luis Barragan, and Tadao Ando) and by elucidating it on the theoretical front. His introductory text (Frampton 1982a) offered another sign of a crystallising position that brought many of the previously loose threads of his trajectories together in a new intellectual whole: from his years of service as a technical editor for *Architectural Design* (1962–1965) to his early 1980s appraisal of architects neglected by the contemporaneous star system, and from there on to the critique of its networks of power that were also behind his withdrawal from the Biennale. In this more elaborate iteration of his regionalism, Frampton added the Greek architect Aris Konstantinidis (1913–1993) to his list of 'figures [...] hidden [...] in the interstices'. Defending his insistence on picking out individual figures, he also noted the transcultural dimension of this regionalism, arguing that '[t]he essence of provincial culture is its capacity to condense the artistic potential of the region while reinterpreting cultural influences coming from the outside' (Frampton 1982d: 82). Only a few months later, he would again praise that 'talented individual' working simultaneously 'in tune with the emerging thought of the time [...] with commitment towards some form of rooted expression'. For this individual produces the expression of a regionalism 'not yet emerged elsewhere', thus bearing wider 'significance for the world outside itself' (Frampton 1983a: 20–21). Unlike the nationalist regionalisms of the recent past, Frampton's aspirations were therefore far from static and introvert. The displacement of interest to 'marginal' 'architectures of resistance' challenged the dominant understanding of cultural transformation as a one-way dissemination of ideas from the hegemonic centre to the dependent periphery. In this light, the historicist eclecticism of the Strada Novissima was problematic, because it circumvented the dialectic nature of this relationship, whilst perpetuating a distorted understanding of cultural transformation (Frampton 1983a: 18).

Frampton's most significant last stops before the systematised articulation of his critical regionalism were Paul Ricoeur's plea in 1961 for a hybrid 'world culture' that should reconcile the needs of 'rooted culture' with the demands of 'universal civilisation',<sup>13</sup> and Tzonis and Lefaivre's seminal article from 1981 on the work of Dimitris and Suzana Antonakakis. With the work by the Antonakakis having now earned its own place in his architectural anthology, Frampton fused his most important formulations of critical regionalism (1983b; 1983c) to add

a final chapter in the revised edition of his 1980 critical history of modern architecture, summarising the main features of this new critical category (1985a: 313–327). Like the Antonakakis, Frampton believed that the severe criticism of modernism should eventually lead to its more sophisticated and sensible development. Critical regionalism was his own attempt at offering a practical opening to a modern architecture of the future that was gradually taking shape in sharp contrast with the Biennale's radical eclecticism. The intersection of his intellectual trajectory with the architectural itinerary of Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis beyond the Strada Novissima thus seems logical in hindsight.

### Traces of Intersecting Itineraries: Critical Regionalism as a Historical Artefact of Converging Authorship

How did the British historian and the Greek architects end up developing these converging reactions to the Strada Novissima and the possible future of modern architecture, though? With history rarely following the homogeneous deterministic paths dictated by logical necessities or historiographical agendas, an answer may be found in the accumulation of coincidences that facilitated this convergence. Moving beyond an abstract overlap of interests and architectural sensibilities, the longer histories of my main protagonists' personal formation – as well as the contingent traces of their random meetings in the course of their literal and metaphorical travels – shed a concrete light on critical regionalism as an artefact of converging authorship.

The architecture of modern Greece was not a novel discovery for Frampton in the early 1980s. As the technical editor of *Architectural Design*,<sup>14</sup> by the mid-1960s Frampton had already hosted an extensive monographic feature on the work of Aris Konstantinidis (in volume five of *Architectural Design* in 1964), whilst Orestis Doumanis (1929–2013), the soon-to-be publisher of the country's annual review *Architecture in Greece*, was also enlisted as the magazine's Greek correspondent (from the first volume of *Architectural Design* in 1965 and onwards). Panos Koulermos (1933–1999) originally brought him in contact with Konstantinidis (Frampton 1986: 120), so Frampton's link with the region was established and continued to grow thereafter.<sup>15</sup> In his work as an editor, Frampton was primarily influenced by Alberto Sartoris's *Elements of Functional Architecture* (1932); thirty years later, Frampton's generation – additionally inspired by Brutalism's 'attempt to find its way in the pursuit of this "lost" continuity of the pre-war modern movement' – would undertake a similar task (Frampton 1986: 118). Frampton's 'encyclopaedic' editorial aspiration resulted in thirty-one issues of *Architectural Design* that covered the globe-spanning development of modern architecture away from the dominant centres of cultural production, including extensive features on non-European territories (like Chile, Brazil and Mexico), and less celebrated architectural practices (from Mangiarotti and Morassuti to Gino and Nani Valle):

It seemed very important that at the early 1960s it was possible – for some architects, at least – to have a direct relation with the city-state or [...] the region they lived in. [...] [W]hen I looked around me as an editor of an architectural magazine, I noticed that a certain level of activity and authenticity was apparent in the work carried out in several provincial cities. [...] [F]or the last 20 years already [...] I had this probably strange interest for cultural work you couldn't find in the so called Anglo-Saxon centres. I then borrowed this unfortunate expression 'critical regionalism' to refer to this sort of work. The expression comes from the extremely interesting article 'The Grid and the Pathway' by Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre. (Frampton 1986: 120)

It is this long-standing interest and long-term relationship with Greece that helps to explain how Frampton in the early 1980s was quick to locate and assimilate an article first published in *Architecture in Greece* – especially when this text is still characterised as 'hiding away in an obscure journal' even from the digitally networked international viewpoint of Vincent Canizaro in 2007 (2007: 11). The Greek publisher Orestis Doumanis stayed in contact with Frampton over the years that followed. Since many of Frampton's articles of note were translated and published in Greek during the mid-1970s and early 1980s,<sup>16</sup> the British historian must have been receiving complimentary copies of the magazine during all these years. But even if he did not actually come across 'The Grid and the Pathway' through his established connection with the major figure of architectural publishing in Greece in the 1980s, he could still have come across it obliquely through his London-based network; selected excerpts from Tzonis and Lefaivre's seminal article – crucially including explicit references to critical regionalism – were also featured in Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis' 'Traces of an Itinerary' exhibition at the Architectural Association in February 1982.<sup>17</sup> Last but not least, Frampton's own 'Production, Place and Reality' was featured in the third issue of *9H* (1982e) that also included a presentation of Antonakakis' mid-1970s Benaki Street apartment building.<sup>18</sup> These three equally plausible options meant that Frampton came across Tzonis and Lefaivre's article sometime in early 1982 – at the moment when his own variant of regionalism was intellectually coalescing.

While building upon their contemporaneous work on Lewis Mumford's question of regionalism (in collaboration with Anthony Alofsin, 1981c), the major strength of Tzonis and Lefaivre's genealogy of regionalisms lay in their socio-political contextualisation within the recent past of modern Greece. In that framework, the work of Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis was contextualised not only in terms of design (and their assumed combination of Konstantinidis's rationalist 'grids' with Pikiou's topographical sensibility of 'the pathway'), but also in terms of a brief historical explication of the socio-political struggles behind them. Frampton thus borrowed the term coined by Tzonis and Lefaivre as a shorthand for a theoretical analysis that inadvertently combined his own crystallising

critical and aesthetic interests of the period. In the final instance, it was this seminal article that allowed him to discuss Antonakakis' architecture in the terms that he himself preferred.

Frampton had already met Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis when he had visited their Benaki Street apartment building in Athens in 1978.<sup>19</sup> Thus, when reading about it through the lens of Tzonis and Lefaivre, Frampton was also in the position to verify their analysis, and include the building in his own architectural anthology, based on his earlier personal experience of the space. Frampton would meet the couple again in Greece, in 1983, at the second international architectural symposium, organised by Dimitris Fatouros and the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki (in collaboration with Roy Landau and the Architectural Association), on Hydra. The symposium marked the first time that Frampton presented the six points of his firmly articulated critical regionalism on Greek soil. In their own presentation, Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis in turn focused on thematic concerns of their architectural design projects – including their 'construction zoning', 'the significance of movement, the "ambiguity" of architecture (A. van Eyck's "twin phenomena")', the use of colour and their interpretation of traditional Mediterranean case studies' (Simeoforidis 1983: 14; see also Dostoglu 1984: 106). In the context of the symposium, Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis' reflection on their own work through these thematic categories thus served as a further elaboration and concrete expression of Frampton's theoretical endeavour. Their reference to sensibilities they shared with Aldo van Eyck also brought a subtle historical depth to the fore; they were implicitly reconnecting Frampton's regionalism with the original Team 10 critiques of modernism. This was what their own 'regionalism' had always been about, anyway: in broad terms, a sort of critical modernism.<sup>20</sup>

This was not the first time the Greek architects had obliquely contributed to the theoretical development of critical regionalism through their own peculiar sensibilities. Having first met Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis during his student years at the National Technical University of Athens in the late 1950s, Alexander Tzonis had remained in contact with them over the years that followed. Even though he moved to the United States to pursue his graduate studies and a subsequent academic career abroad immediately after graduating from Athens, the three of them continued to correspond occasionally. Tzonis thus rose to the occasion when Orestis Doumanis prompted him to write a comprehensive article on the architects' work two decades later (Antonakakis 2013). In a letter to the couple, written in early January 1980, Tzonis thanked them for having sent him a selected body of articles (presumably previous publications of their work)<sup>21</sup> to assist him with his writing.<sup>22</sup> Later in the year, draft typescripts of 'The Grid and the Pathway' started circulating between the authors, the architects and the publisher. With their sporadic corrections, comments and slight modifications, the two architects thus added their own touch to Tzonis and Lefaivre's original manuscript.

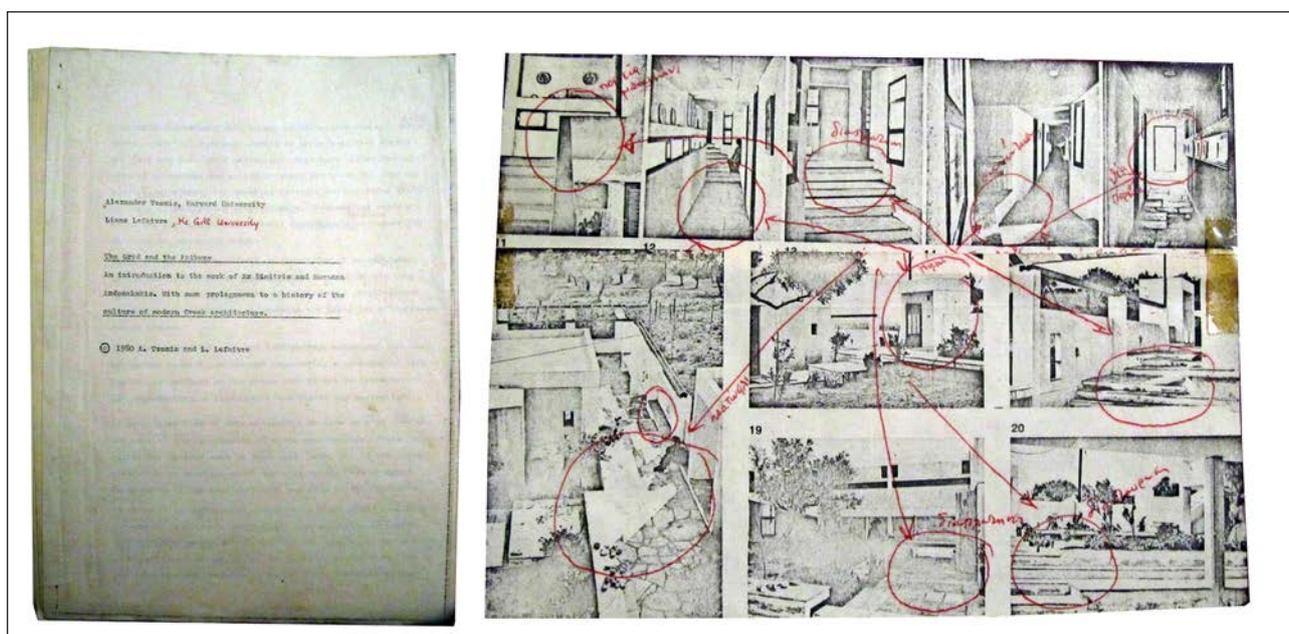
At first glance, Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis' sporadic hand-written notes to Tzonis and Lefaviere's draft typescripts are not that extensive. Their most crucial contribution to the piece thus lies in its visual side. Providing eloquent figures, drawings and photographs to be used as illustrations, Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis implicitly offered their own interpretation of their built projects. By doing so, they added a layer of historical accuracy to Tzonis and Lefaviere's wider reaching theorisations – especially regarding the specific influences that legitimised some of the architects' key design solutions. For instance, they preferred to include images from Aris Konstantinidis's Museum in Ioannina, instead of Tzonis and Lefaviere's proposed – and indeed emblematic – Weekend House in Anavyssos.<sup>23</sup> The rationale behind their choice was that the former project shared affinities with their Archaeological Museum in Chios; the two architects thus considered it specifically more relevant to their own work.<sup>24</sup> For another section of the article, they selected images that highlighted the defining characteristics of their projects – from the relations of indoor-outdoor space and their usually porous boundaries, to their use of thresholds, trajectories and landings as means for an architectural treatment of movement in the spaces they designed (**Fig. 6**). The keywords included in their hand-written notes on the images (pathway-balcony, view-pathway, gateway, threshold, intersection, steps, widening) further emphasised the main concerns behind their designs. Last but not least, their closing illustration presented Atelier 66's design conclusions from their grand research project of the early 1970s on the Cycladic island settlements. Documenting the transitive relations between public and private spaces from the streets to the courtyards, the concise illustration offered a systematic organisation of the architects' main findings that were to inspire their own design projects (**Fig. 7**). In other words, Tzonis and Lefaviere's proposed

organisational thematic of the 'pathway' was already there as a recurring concern in the architects' work – implicit in those diagrams, photographs, designs and keywords, almost as if anticipating its serious theorisation. In a case like this, it is of course very difficult to draw a clear line between the theorists' and the architects' contribution to the development of this discourse; that is why I prefer to refer to the whole process as a case of converging authorship. What is evidently more certain, though, is that by slightly modifying the visual narrative of their architectural gestures and influences, the illustrations selected by the Antonakakis subtly gave rise to associations and meanings that in turn brought Tzonis and Lefaviere's textual observations into a sharper focus, aligned with the architects' sensibility.

Apart from their built work itself and its organisation as a visual narrative, however, the architects' own pursuits of theorising it constitute another, even subtler, strand of their contribution. The deeper origins of this sort of work – especially in relation to the crucial thematic of the 'pathway' – can be traced back to their mature student projects, and their nascent architectural sensibility that was further cultivated through travelling.

Dimitris Antonakakis's student lecture in 1958 was devoted to the island of Hydra. Focusing on the urban layout of the settlement, Antonakakis asserted that the key to understanding it lay in the relationship of the houses to their immediate public space (**Fig. 8**):

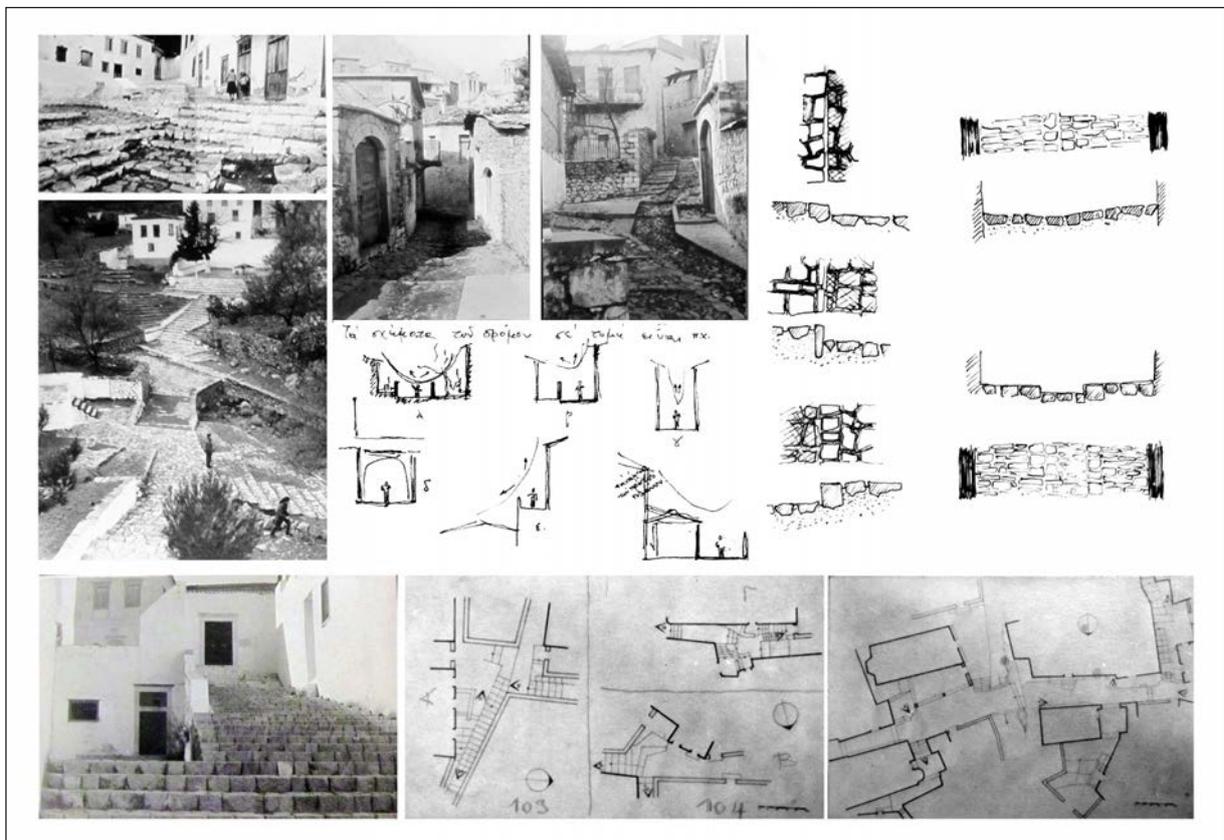
[T]he street and the house are inseparably tied together through a courtyard or a terrace that both isolates the house from the street in terms of circulation and acts as a vestibule. In terms of spatial perception it is the semitone between the house and the street, and in terms of form it blends with the street and the volumes of the houses in



**Figure 6:** A draft typescript of 'The Grid and the Pathway', including Antonakakis' proposed organisation of photographs as a visual narrative. From the private archive of Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis.



**Figure 7:** The concluding illustration from ‘The Grid and the Pathway’ (left) is the systematic presentation of Atelier 66’s conclusions from their grand project of the 1970s documenting the Cycladic settlements. From the private archive of Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis.



**Figure 8:** Characteristic photographs, drawings and sketches documenting Dimitris Antonakakis’s incipient architectural sensibilities from his undergraduate student lecture at the National Technical University of Athens (1958). From the private archive of Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis.

such a way that it moves freely, creating alcoves and overhangs, while its paddock remains free and independent from any standardisation. The courtyard is an extension of the street in the house and a cordial opening of the house to the street. (Antonakakis 1958: 12).

It was this intended association of the public with the private that gave rise to elaborate architectural details – ranging from the decorated doorways that acted as the public faces of inviting houses and their courtyards to the landings that mediated the transition from the street to a courtyard that in turn served as a vestibule (Antonakakis 1958: 12–13). When discussing the most important public spaces of the settlement, Antonakakis also observed the landings that were ‘automatically created’ on the occasions that a street bifurcated (Antonakakis 1958: 19), as well as the ‘[s]tairs that belong[ed] to the street and [the] stairs that belong[ed] to the houses [...] [that were] often built together [...] to such an extent that one [was] led to believe they were made to highlight the house’ (Antonakakis 1958: 20).

Suzana Antonakaki’s study of the architecture of Makrinitsa showed a similar interest in the organisation of public spaces. Discussing the narrow inclined streets of the settlement, she praised the 81 steps and landings that ‘soften[ed] the slope’, while setting the rhythm for pauses in movement (Antonakaki 1959: 6). With her typological analysis of houses extending from plan to section, and from indoor space to the courtyard, she was also especially attentive to architectural details in various scales (**Fig. 9**). Her observations ranged from the general layout to the staircases, and from the emerging relationships between the different levels (always in comparison and contrast with similar examples in Arta, Ioannina, Kastoria, Siatista and other similar settlements in Pilion) to the interior skylights of Byzantine origins that lighted up the space when the windows had to remain shut (Antonakaki 1959: 15).

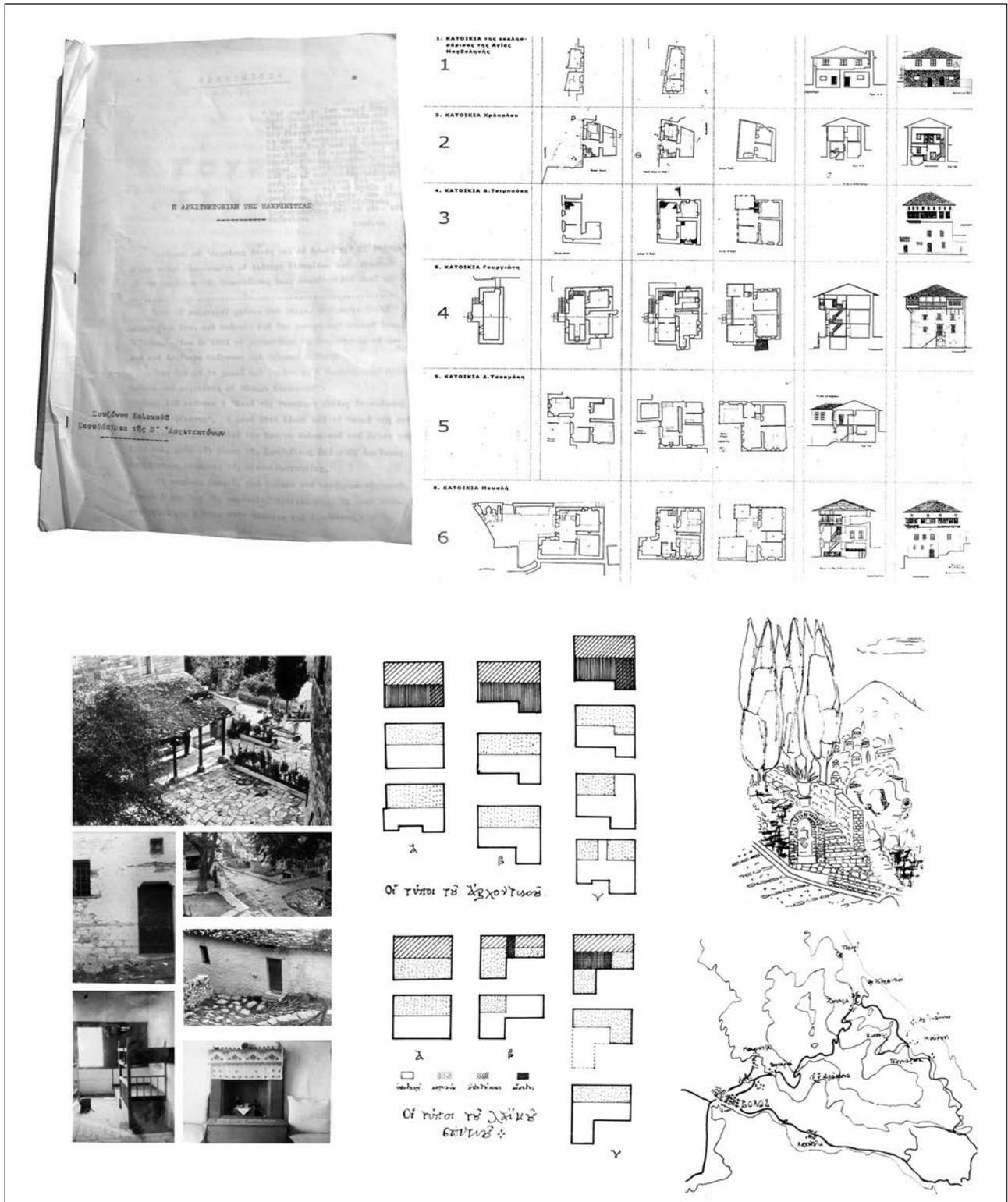
The early architectural travel observations recorded in these student works (as well as their concluding hymns to the ground, and the wordless art of the anonymous construction workers) thus foreshadowed Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis’ future projects – as emerging sensibilities that were to be consciously developed later in their career. Fifteen years later, for instance, in his ‘observations on the boundary’ that brings public and private space in contact (**Fig. 10**), Dimitris Antonakakis asserted that ‘[t]he more one area permeates the other, the more its characteristics influence the other and the easier the transition from one to the other. [...] Semitones are shaped. [...] The complexity of these mutual permeations variegates the trajectory in Public space and endows Private space with an identity’ (Antonakakis 1973: 169–70). While he stressed the architectural need for intermediate spaces that enable the public and private realms to gradually fade into one another, he also discussed the effect of life itself in abolishing hard boundaries – through the transfer of certain public functions and activities in private spaces, and vice versa. He noted that the processes that shape the

boundaries between public and private spaces are ‘a result of human behaviour in relation to specific cultural conditions, social structure, political organisation and institutional frameworks determined by the citizens themselves or others that shape their environment’ (Antonakakis 1973: 171). Published under the Greek military regime in 1973, the statement had undeniable political gravitas. However, it was also a theme that was then much more elaborately explored by Tzonis and Lefaivre in ‘The Grid and the Pathway’. These subtle ways that the architects’ own long-standing sensibilities fed in to the development of a theoretical discourse around their work, therefore, have led me to approach critical regionalism as an artefact of a transculturally converging authorship.

### Architectural and Historical Itineraries beyond Critical Regionalism and the Strada Novissima

As this short historical trajectory shows, an inadvertent side effect of the 1980 Venice Biennale of Architecture was that it served as a major catalyst for the systematic articulation of critical regionalism. This was mainly because the formalist and eclecticist overtones of the exhibition alienated critics, like Kenneth Frampton, and visitors, like Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis. By disagreeing with the perceived direction of the Strada Novissima, the latter apparently reaffirmed their conviction to follow their own peculiar path. Through their work, they remained true to their long-standing, and always developing, architectural sensibility that attempted to offer a different response to the otherwise legitimate contemporaneous critiques of modernism. The exhibition gave the Greek architects an opportunity to reinforce their self-understanding as practitioners whose critical approach to modernism could never degenerate into a form of historical eclecticism. Their understanding was therefore much more in line with the preceding responses of Team 10 – and especially of Aldo van Eyck – to the crisis of modernism. With these sensibilities constantly developing as recurring concerns in the architects’ work, from the short projects of their student years to the large-scale research projects of their professional life, it is difficult to draw the line between their own contributions to Tzonis and Lefaivre’s systematic theorisations in ‘The Grid and the Pathway’.

For Kenneth Frampton, it was the reaction to the scenographic historicism of the Strada Novissima that offered him the opportunity to differ by developing his own theoretical reply to the existing crisis of modernism. He resorted to a sophisticated regionalism that would not give up on the progressive political aspirations and aesthetic formal achievements of modernism. Also inspired by the Brutalist education of his student years and the legitimate Team 10 critique, Frampton could definitely understand the similar critical concerns of Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis. Yet it was Tzonis and Lefaivre’s article that eventually proved to be the ideal mediator between the British historian and the Greek architects. The importance of ‘The Grid and the Pathway’ in this story can hardly be overstated. Offering critical theoretical categories, as well as historical and socio-political contextualisation to Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis’ built work,

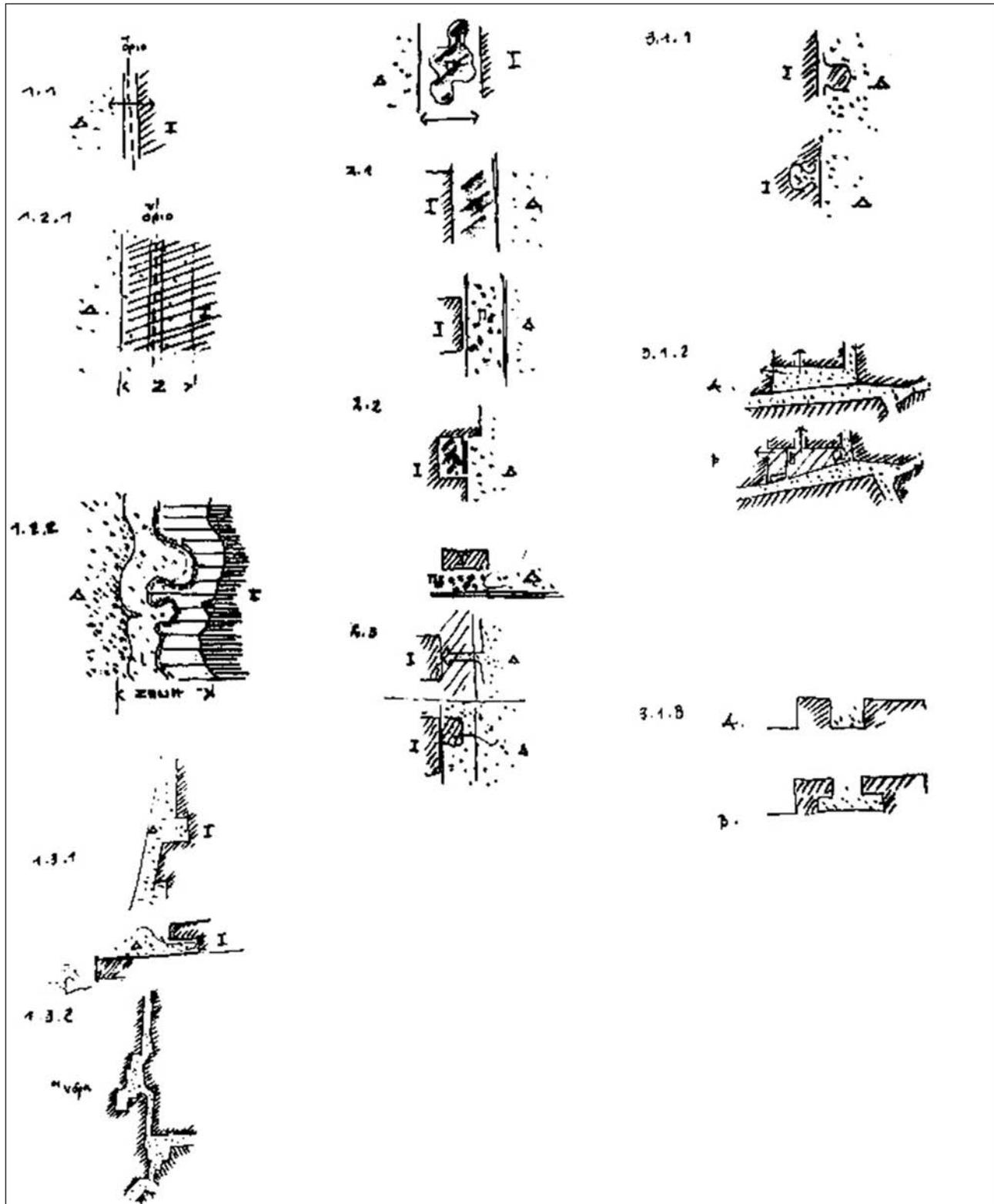


**Figure 9:** Characteristic photographs, drawings and sketches documenting Suzana Antonakaki’s incipient architectural sensibilities from her undergraduate student lecture at the National Technical University of Athens (1959). From the private archive of Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis.

the article gave Frampton the tools he needed to read and understand it as a concrete expression of his own developing regionalist discourse.

It was almost a decade after the Venice exhibition that Spyros Amourgis (b. 1938) organised the first International Working Seminar on Critical Regionalism at Pomona in

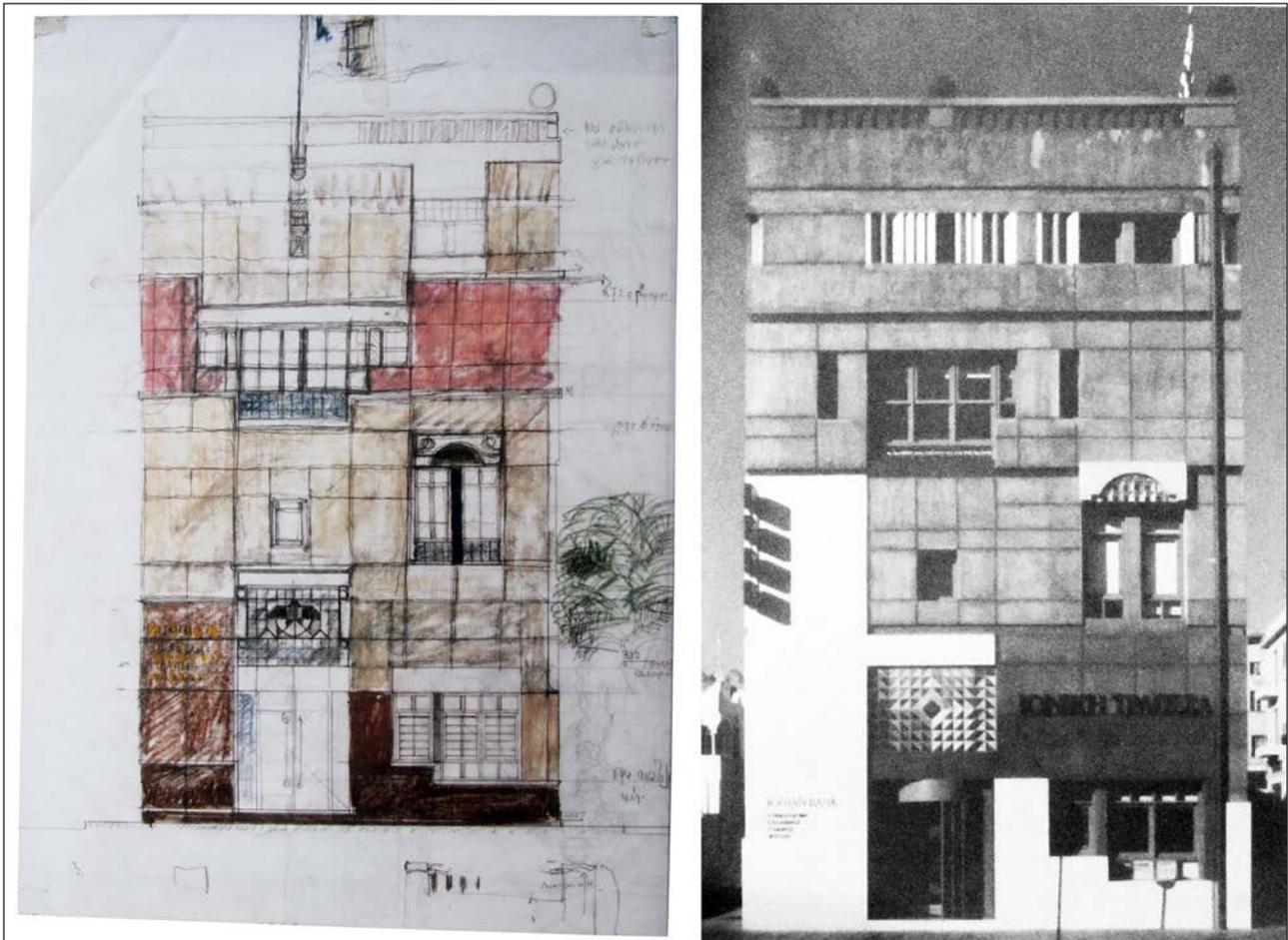
1989. He did so because he firmly believed that, as ‘the most coherent astylistic thesis to emerge in the last twenty years’ (Amourgis 1991: x), critical regionalism was a genuine alternative to a historicism that seemed more and more like a dying reverberating echo of the 1980 Biennale on the American shores. At the end of the decade, it thus



**Figure 10:** Dimitris Antonakakis's illustrations for his 1973 article on boundaries between public and private spaces, and their implications. His lessons from Hydra in 1958 (bottom left) live on in his more systematised architectural thinking fifteen years later. From the private archive of Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis.

seemed that Frampton had managed to convincingly offer his intended alternative to the rising postmodern classicism of the early 1980s.<sup>25</sup> Joined by more than 30 fellow theorists, academics and practising architects, Frampton, Tzonis and Lefaivre could now revisit and further enrich their articulations of critical regionalism (1991).

However, that would also mark Frampton's last serious consideration of critical regionalism, as he apparently did not share Amourgis's enthusiasm. Having already expressed his dissatisfaction with this 'unfortunate' term (Frampton 1986: 120), due to its distorting conservative connotations, and increasingly disillusioned with the



**Figure 11:** The Rhodes branch of the Ionian Bank by Suzana & Dimitris Antonakakis (in collaboration with Annie Platanioti). Façade drawing by Suzana Antonakaki (1984) alongside the final built result (1986). From the private archive of Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis.

progressive political front over the years that followed, Frampton (1995) would eventually turn to tectonic culture, instead – another one of the constantly recurring themes in his earlier work. Building culture and aesthetics thus seemed to gradually prevail over the undeniably stronger socio-political concerns of his theoretical and historical work of the 1970s and early 1980s. It would be therefore left to Tzonis and Lefaivre (2003; 2011) to steadily carry their critical regionalist torch forward – albeit on an increasingly different ‘antimodern’ agenda (Tzonis and Lefaivre 2003: 10).

Back in Greece, at the moment when Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis’ works were globally heralded as flagships of critical regionalism by Frampton, the two architects were designing such projects as the Rhodes branch of the Ionian Bank (1983–86), with a clear touch of postmodern formalism (Fig. 11). Was that just a temporary fluctuation in an otherwise steady trajectory of their critical understanding of modern architecture, or did it also mark a postmodern turn – however minor – that would be thenceforth assimilated in their work? And what would the very word ‘postmodern’ mean in this specific context, given the architects’ own dissatisfaction with the term, at least in theory? While their shared concerns in a clearly postmodern context of the

early 1980s thus brought these ‘critical regionalist’ architects and theorists momentarily together, their actual directions diverged, strongly conditioned by their own past trajectories. And this underlying complexity of the phenomena historians are supposed to address can only serve as a starting point for unravelling a different architectural itinerary beyond both critical regionalism and the Strada Novissima.

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> At the time of writing, Szacka’s PhD thesis is being edited, to be published as a stand-alone book later in 2016.
- <sup>2</sup> Demetri Porphyrios (b. 1949) and Savvas Condaratos (b. 1933), who edited those features for *Architecture in Greece* in the late 1970s, practically served as the most important mediators of the Western European–North American developments of the period in Greece.
- <sup>3</sup> The event was organised by Eleni Portaliou, Yorgos Simeoforidis and other members of the editorial board of the *Journal of the Association of Greek Architects*.
- <sup>4</sup> All translations from the Greek are by the author, unless otherwise noted.
- <sup>5</sup> Speyer was teaching in Athens for three consecutive academic years (1957–60) under a Fulbright

programme. For his retrospective account of this teaching experience, see Speyer (2001: 95–103).

<sup>6</sup> As documented by the video footage, Suzana Antonakaki was taking photographs rather than making videos. Was she also 'ventur[ing] beyond her husband's typological perspective' (Bruno 2002: 373), though? Unfortunately, I have not so far been able to locate her photographs from Venice in the architects' private archive.

<sup>7</sup> While an interview with Kenneth Frampton could have served as an additional source of information about the fate of this unpublished essay for the Biennale catalogue, Frampton did not even 'recall having written' it in the first place, when Szacka interviewed him on 22 April 2009 (2011: 271, n668). Another interview would not therefore add anything significant to the results already yielded by archival research.

<sup>8</sup> For his concise reaction to the exhibition itself after it took place in Venice, see Frampton (1985a: 293; 305; 307–308).

<sup>9</sup> For an elaborate development of his approach to these matters, see Frampton (1982b: 13 and 1982c: 21).

<sup>10</sup> For the aesthetics of constructivism as a strong undercurrent in Frampton's phenomenological thinking and aesthetic sensibility, see also Otero-Pailos (2011: 183–249).

<sup>11</sup> Frampton was an expert on the work of Jean Prouvé; he had already studied his *Maison de Verre* in great detail (1969).

<sup>12</sup> The main elements of Frampton's early formulation of regionalism have been drawn both from the original summary in English and the full text in French.

<sup>13</sup> The Ricoeur reference was initially brought to Frampton's attention by Dalibor Vesely (see Frampton 2002: 59–60).

<sup>14</sup> For Frampton's editorial activity at *Architectural Design* from July 1962 to January 1965, see also Parnell (2011).

<sup>15</sup> A Greek-Cypriot migrant, Koulermos (who also served as the magazine's correspondent for Italy) worked with Frampton at Douglas Stephen & Partners (see Frampton (1983d) for his subsequent reading of his former collaborator's work). Frampton considered Douglas Stephen's and Thomas Stevens's influence as crucial for his 'return to the values of the "heroic period" of the modern movement' (Frampton 1986: 118).

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, *Architecture in Greece* 8/1974: 115–19; 10/1976: 58–64; 11/1977: 102–10; 17/1983: 58–69, as well as *Art + Design in Greece* 7/1976: 16–31; 10/1979: 45–55; 14/1983: 27–32.

<sup>17</sup> Originally held in Delft earlier in 1981, the exhibition was Suzana and Dimitris Antonakakis' first major opening to a European – and potentially international – audience.

<sup>18</sup> For a brief overview of the magazine and its scope, see Diamond (2005). In a recent interview, Elias Constantinopoulos (2014) asserted that Frampton referred to *9H* as standing out from the architectural publications of the period.

<sup>19</sup> Once again, it was Yorgos Simeoforidis who first suggested – and then escorted him to – a visit to the building (Antonakakis 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Not much later, Frampton (1984) would prefer to use the term 'critical modernism' to refer to Tadao Ando's similar vein of work. Be that as it may, the Antonakakis' and Frampton's meeting on Hydra also served as the groundwork for the eventual publication of the next monograph in this series by Rizzoli – this time dedicated to the Greek architects' work (1985b).

<sup>21</sup> Apart from presentations of their most celebrated projects, the Antonakakis' most important published texts up to that date crucially included articles on the problems posed by touristic development in Greece (1971), the points of contact between public and private space (1973), the unforeseen transformations of residential spaces during their inhabitation (1975), and the apartment building in Greece in relation to the role of the architect (1978). This was the bulk of the material that must have been at Tzonis and Lefaivre's disposal at the time they began writing 'The Grid and the Pathway'.

<sup>22</sup> By then, the piece was also meant to accompany the exhibition of their work in Delft (set for 27 October to 4 December 1981) following an invitation by Aldo van Eyck. That explains the almost simultaneous appearance of a translation of 'The Grid and the Pathway' in Dutch (see Tzonis and Lefaivre 1981b). Rather significantly, an exhibition of the work of Dimitris Pikionis was also running alongside the Antonakakis exhibition in Delft. The original plans for these exhibitions also included Aris Konstantinidis, who eventually refused to take part (Antonakakis 2013). In hindsight, this seems like an additional historically contingent reason for Tzonis and Lefaivre's presentation of the work of the Antonakakis as a fruitful combination of the major design tenets of Konstantinidis and Pikionis.

<sup>23</sup> For Aris Konstantinidis's own role in building the reception of this work as emblematic of his architectural oeuvre, see Giamarelos (2014).

<sup>24</sup> The young architects had actually consulted Konstantinidis when designing that Museum in the early 1960s. They had first met him in the late 1950s as students, when they were commissioned to make a model for his Xenia Motel at Meteora project (Antonakakis 2013).

<sup>25</sup> For the most systematic attempt at defining postmodern classicism, see Jencks (1987).

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### Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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