

Bezael  
בצלאל  
بتسلييل



Academy of Arts אקדמיה  
and Design أكاديمية للفنون والتصميم  
Jerusalem القدس يروشلیم  
לאמנות ועיצוב

THE SCHOOL OF  
ARCHITECTURE

1 4 / 0 9 / 2 0 2 3

# CONCRETE and POWER

A Tribute to Balkrishna Doshi

Hybrid Symposium at Ahmedabad Textile Mills' Owners House



Le Corbusier / The Mill Owners' Association Building, Ahmedabad, India, 1954. (photo: Akshaya Ramakrishnan)



1 4 / 0 9 / 2 0 2 3

# CONCRETE and POWER

A Tribute to Balkrishna Doshi

Hybrid Symposium at Ahmedabad Textile Mills' Owners House



Le Corbusier / The Mill Owners' Association Building, Ahmedabad, India, 1954. (photo: Akshaya Ramakrishnan)

**It** was only yesterday when we praised and hailed the architecture of exposed concrete: we enjoyed quoting Le Corbusier who said that "The business of Architecture is to establish emotional relationships by means of raw materials" or Alison and Peter Smithson who thought that the concrete architecture "drags a rough poetry out of the confused and powerful forces that are at work". We melted when Rami Karmi shared with us phraseologies such as "The concrete is a material full of darkness". We were impressed by the honesty of concrete, we believed that it is always a "Truthful, honest negative of the formwork to which it was molded"; we endlessly philosophized about the ethics of the aesthetics and the aesthetics of the ethics; we attributed to concrete qualities and values, "not only honesty, directness and righteousness but also dryness, aggressiveness and imperviousness". We contemplated those concrete structures as if they were philosopher stones that have something to tell us. We wrote that "they expressed what we wanted to be, the way we wanted to see ourselves and what we were demanded to be: bare, real, direct, strong, and above all - irreversible."

Some of us made the pilgrim to Marseille, Chandigarh, Tokyo or Brasilia to see with their own eyes their grey wonders. Those who couldn't afford the trip could have easily found their wish in Beer-Sheva, Qiryat-Gat, Ein-Guedi, Nazrat-Ilit or even in Tel Aviv. We wrote articles, essays and books, we organized exhibitions, symposiums, seminars, tours. We signed petitions and protested against damages that might be caused to brutalist masterpieces, we published fiery articles whenever someone dared to paint them or worse to whitewash them. Some of us even wrote or promoted official plans that assured the preservation of those concrete structure forever. Sometimes we even erected such concrete structures for us and our families. It is needless to say: today Béton is bon-ton.

But perhaps it is time to revise our approach to concrete, as suggests the philosopher Anselm Jappe who considers this material as one of capitalism's "flag materials" just as the fossil fuel or plastic. Concrete is today not only bon-ton but above all the most common building material, its use is widespread all over the planet. And even when we don't really see it we know that it is there, somewhere under the ground, behind the claddings or the plasters. We cannot think of our planet's surface without reinforced concrete, this new "Artificial Stone" that turned into the new earth's geological layer. We are addicted to concrete. We cannot do without it.

Strangely, in almost all the countries in the world, concrete is a product of a dubious chain of production in which state-owned or controlled monopolies are responsible for the quarrying, importation and the production of the cement while the quarrying and supplies of the sand are always handled by organized crime monopolies. And even though in most countries of the world sand quarries are illegal, none of those regulations diminishes the use of concrete, on the contrary. Same goes with all the direct and indirect damages caused by this industry which is usually not taken accountable for its impact - the production of cement itself is extremely polluting.

The production and supplies chain is preceded and completed by that of the architecture and of the construction. This universal technology, this absolute abstraction of a material

that could be easily transported in a form of powder but can easily be solidified into the form of a dam, this Unbearable Lightness of the architect who can sit in his office, imagine a wall and draw a double line, or that of the engineer or computer program to calculate it - all these are part of a broader regime. Concrete is transforming our cities into markets and our homes into financial products. It transform societies too, enabling the solidification of capital in unprecedented scales while creating new classes of enslaved migrant workers. If in the past, building sites were places that bring together craftsmanship, creativity and expertise of artists and artisans together, today those places have become alienated, sometimes deadly spaces of exploitation and abuse, bullying and lawlessness.

Since the first half of the 20th century, when it started to be massively used, and in few years, concrete eliminated the use of local materials and led to the extinction of centuries-long construction traditions and technologies. In that it had a major role in transforming the whole world into one concrete country in which the differences between places disappear. The result is equally alienating and sometimes ugly in every place on earth.

But above all: reinforced concrete is the newest construction material. It is in use for a century only. Nobody can really tell if this combination of cement, aggregates, steel and water can hold for centuries and what would really happen during the prolonged encounter of those materials with the sun, the water, the air, during the general movement of things towards the unavoidable entropy. In fact, we already know that concrete does not last forever, as shows the collapse of the famous Morandi Bridge in Genoa discussed by Jappe.

We must admit that although it has been a default option for almost any architecture of our time, at the moment we do not know how to make concrete last. We can no more say that it is too early to tell if concrete would last forever. We already know it will not. It is very likely that all the concrete that we have been pouring in the last century would not hold for another century. We Most of it would be either demolished intentionally or collapse accidentally. But in the mean time, not only we haven't found the means to preserve concrete when it is really needed, we also do not know what to with it when it becomes obsolete, what to do with the debris.

And lastly:

the idea of this gathering emerged in the last conversation that I had with Balkrishna Doshi, at the online India-Israel conference we conducted two years ago, during the Covid 19 lockdown. At the very end of the day I asked him: "and what if we give up concrete?". "You are completely out of your mind", he said to me.

Sadly, Doshi is not here anymore to continue the conversation. But I feel that conducting this debate here, in his city of Ahmedabad, at the Mills' Owners House, one of Le Corbusier's finest concrete projects and one of the most beautiful fruits of his collaboration with Doshi, is in some way a continuation. May this day will be a tribute to his memory.



1 4 / 0 9 / 2 0 2 3

# CONCRETE and POWER

A Tribute to Balkrishna Doshi

Hybrid Symposium at Ahmedabad Textile Mills' Owners House



Le Corbusier / The Mill Owners' Association Building, Ahmedabad, India, 1954. (photo: Akshaya Ramakrishnan)

## Program and Schedule (schedule in Indian Standard Time - GMT+5:30)

Url: <https://bezalel-ac-il.zoom.us/j/85134853252>

0	1	2	3	4	5
10:00 - 10:40	11:00 - 11:50	12:00 - 12:50	14:00 - 15:20	15:30 - 16:20	17:00 - 18:30
<b>Opening session</b>	<b>Material Histories, Material Politics I</b>	<b>Material Histories, Material Politics II</b>	<b>Concrete dystopias, Concrete utopias</b>	<b>Concrete Power</b>	<b>Closing Session - Cancel Concrete?</b>
<p><b>Prof. Els Verbakel</b></p> <p><b>Prof. Neelkanth Chhaya</b></p> <p><b>Sharon Rotbard</b></p>	<p><b>Prof. Gauri Bharat</b> Concrete in India - Origin Stories and Other Mythologies</p> <p><b>Dr. Dotan Halevy</b> Zifzif: Animals, Humans, and the Politics of Sand in Palestine/Israel</p>	<p><b>Dr. Spatarshi Sanyal</b> Labour or Work? - Piercing the veil of concrete and remembering operations in the Golconde Dormitory project, Pondicherry (1935-c.48)</p> <p><b>Dr. Or Aleksandrowicz</b> Pretending to be poor: how Israeli architects covered up capital with exposed concrete</p>	<p><b>Dr. Ronie Parciack</b> When Modernism is Obsolete: Reshaping Formal Visibility in New Delhi</p> <p><b>Dr. Amir Minsky</b> Stairway to Heaven? Concretization and Disintegration in Ballard's High-Rise</p> <p><b>Jennifer Abessira</b> Our tourism</p>	<p><b>Prof. Zvi Efrat</b> Beyond Brutalism – The Ominous Beauty of the Soreq Nuclear Reactor</p> <p><b>Sharon Rotbard</b> From Concrete to Paper: learning architecture from Paul Virilio</p>	<p><b>Prof. Anselm Jappe</b> Concrete – capitalism's massive construction weapon</p> <p><b>Public discussion</b></p>



1 4 / 0 9 / 2 0 2 3

# CONCRETE and POWER

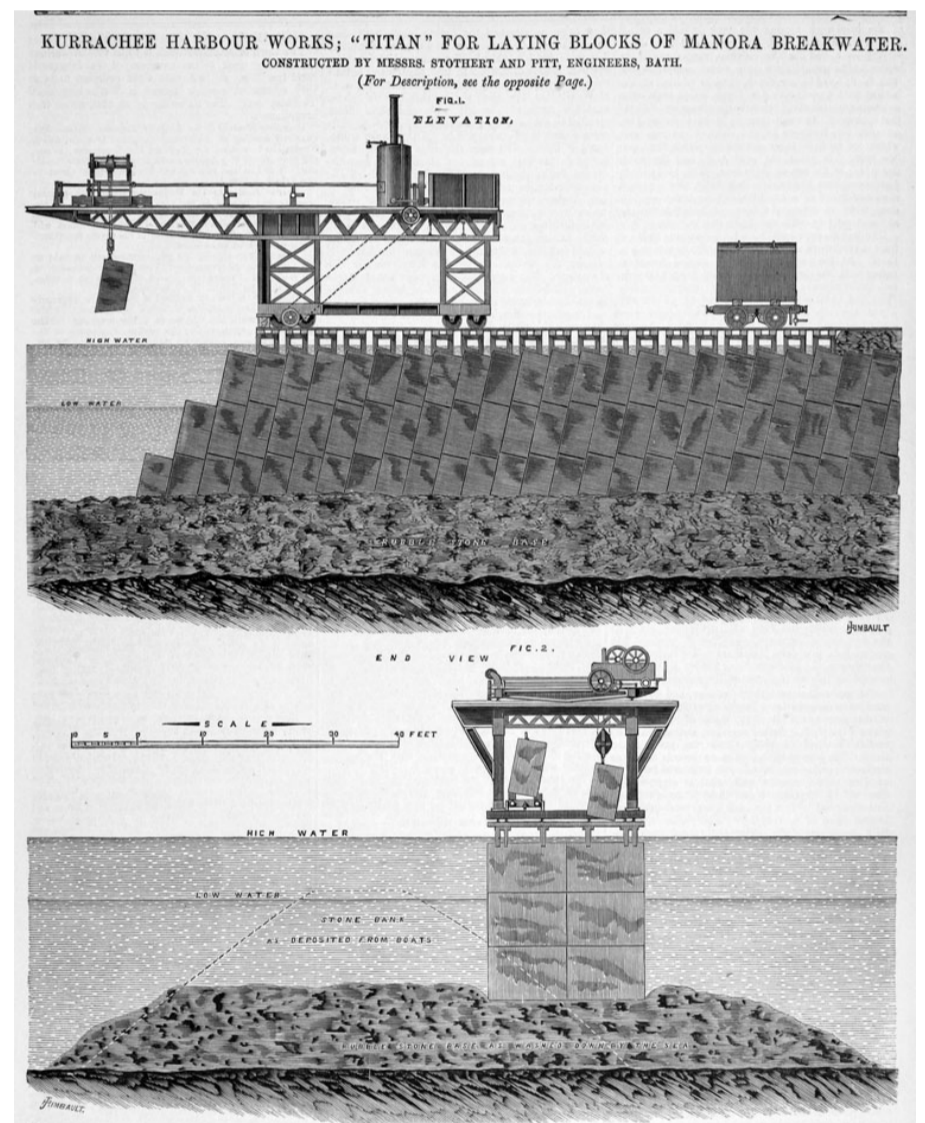
A Tribute to Balkrishna Doshi

Hybrid Symposium at Ahmedabad Textile Mills' Owners House

Prof. Gauri Bharat, CEPT University, Ahmedabad

## Concrete in India - Origin Stories and Other Mythologies

In this lecture, I explore the genesis of concrete usage in India in the late 19 and early 20 centuries. I discuss material ecologies, construction processes and building agendas in sites where concrete was used in unprecedented ways across South Asia. These sites, though historically unconnected, introduced shifts in the ways of building, and thus constitute a complex genealogy of the development of a technological culture. The lecture seeks to highlight this genealogy, particularly the divergent trajectories of innovation and vernacularisation, that constitute a new understanding of technological modernity in South Asia.



1874 - Kurrachee Harbour Works, Titan for laying blocks of Manora breakwater

**Gauri Bharat** is Senior Associate Professor and Program Chair of Architectural History and Theory at the Faculty of Architecture, CEPT University, Ahmedabad, India. She trained as an architect and specializes in interdisciplinary approaches to architectural history. She has authored books on indigenous built environments and on Indian streets, and is currently working on a history of reinforced concrete in India.



1 4 / 0 9 / 2 0 2 3

# CONCRETE and POWER

A Tribute to Balkrishna Doshi

Hybrid Symposium at Ahmedabad Textile Mills' Owners House

Dr. Dotan Halevy, Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem

## Zifzif: Animals, Humans, and the Politics of Sand in Palestine/Israel

The introduction of European cement and silicate bricks to the Ottoman Mediterranean at the turn of the twentieth century made sand the most crucial component of modern Levantine construction. While almost ignored in current research, a host of sources in Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, and European languages testify that this process had far-reaching consequences. Extraction of coastal sand along the Sinai and Levantine coasts and its transportation to the booming construction areas of Cairo and Alexandria, through Jaffa and Tel Aviv to Haifa and Beirut, quickly developed into an insatiable magnet for human labor and animal power. By the interwar period, vast peasant and Bedouin populations husbanding thousands of camels integrated into these urban economies, sharply shifting the cultural and demographic patterns of the coastal plains from Egypt to modern Lebanon. This paper analyzes the consequences of the commodification of sand in the southeastern Mediterranean and shows how it emerged as a site for Zionist competition with Arab workforce, as well as for class clashes between Arab landlords and migrant workers from Sinai, Transjordan, the Hauran, and Beqaa regions. The paper discusses Palestinian and Hebrew literature, poetry, and art, expressing the bodily experience of sand-soaked indigeneity (or the lack thereof), and the imaginative man-animal-nation bonds that animated sand markets. The paper argues that it was through these modern and urban-oriented encounters in sand-quarrying sites that Zionists sought to Orientalize the Levant as an ancient desert wilderness where natural encounters with animals, sunlight, and soil can be experienced and conceptualized.



Sand quarrying in the 1930s, Palestine. Zoltan Klugger collection



**Dotan Halevy** is a Polonsky postdoctoral fellow at the Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem. His research focuses on the culture, society, and environment of the modern Middle East. His doctoral dissertation, titled "*Stripped: Ruination, Liminality, and the Making of the Gaza Strip 1840-1950*," was completed at Columbia University and offers a modern history of the Gaza borderland under Ottoman and British rule. His current project looks at the commodification of sand and the making of the modern coastal plains in the southeastern Mediterranean.



1 4 / 0 9 / 2 0 2 3

# CONCRETE and POWER

A Tribute to Balkrishna Doshi

Hybrid Symposium at Ahmedabad Textile Mills' Owners House

Dr. Saptarshi Sanyal, School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi

## Labour or Work? - Piercing the veil of concrete and remembering operations in the Golconde Dormitory project, Pondicherry (1935–c.48)

It is widely accepted that processes of building with concrete are dependent on the nature of its labour. Yet, this paper engages with the question of how, under certain conditions, the concept of 'labour' itself might be subjected to critical scrutiny. It focuses on the trajectory of a building project, the Golconde dormitory, realised at Pondicherry in southern India, during the first half of the twentieth century. The philosophical underpinnings of the project's patron, a spiritual community (Ashram), whose leaders orientated the building project through an ethic of 'work' and supplied its amateur builders, bore upon the project in unexpected ways. Acknowledging overlaps between the two concepts, the paper therefore moves beyond labour and offers the notion of work to more suitably articulate affective, voluntary, sometimes contested modes of building that transforms the builders themselves.



Golconde Dormitory project, Pondicherry (1935–c.48)



Dr. **Saptarshi Sanyal** is an architectural historian, educator and visual storyteller, and an Assistant Professor at the School of Planning and Architecture, New Delhi. He has also taught at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London, where he conducted his PhD in Architectural History and Theory. Saptarshi's research lies at the intersections of architectural modernity, colonialism and post-colonial studies. Saptarshi has lectured in and conducted workshops in more than twenty-five institutes all over India, and published widely on architectural studies, visual representations of spaces, modern heritage and knowledge systems for over fifteen years, most recently writing for journals such as the *Architecture Research Quarterly* and *Architecture Beyond Europe*.

1 4 / 0 9 / 2 0 2 3

# CONCRETE and POWER

A Tribute to Balkrishna Doshi

Hybrid Symposium at Ahmedabad Textile Mills' Owners House

Dr. Or Aleksandrowicz, Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning at the Technion - Israel Institute of Technology

## Pretending to be poor: how Israeli architects covered up capital with exposed concrete

For more than two decades, between the late 1950s and late 1970s, the application of exposed (or "architectural") concrete in Israeli architecture was omnipresent. Despite being heavily influenced by contemporary architectural fashions that were consciously imported from abroad, this application of concrete was introduced and explicated among local architects as an outcome of special local circumstances that necessitated the adoption of this cheap and locally produced building material. Exposed concrete was portrayed as the material of the poor, as an inevitable default, that local architects were almost forced to adopt because of the alleged absence of more delicate or cheap alternatives. While this may have been true throughout the 1950s, later projects from the 1960s and 1970s showed a much different approach to the application of exposed concrete, which reflected a sense of indulgence in pure ornamentation and excess funding.



Surasky Library, Tel Aviv University . Architects: Nadler, Nadler, Bixon



Dr. Or Aleksandrowicz is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning at the Technion - Israel Institute of Technology. He is an architect, researcher, editor, and translator. He graduated from Tel Aviv University (2002) and wrote his master's (2012) and doctoral (2015) theses at TU Wien. His doctoral study focused on the history of building climatology in Israel and its complex relationship with Israeli architecture. His main research interests are varied and include building science and technology, building physics, urban microclimate, urban history, history of architecture and architectural technology, and vernacular and sustainable architecture. Since 2006, Aleksandrowicz is the editor-in-chief of Architectures series at Babel Publishers, the leading Hebrew book series on architecture and town planning.



1 4 / 0 9 / 2 0 2 3

# CONCRETE and POWER

A Tribute to Balkrishna Doshi

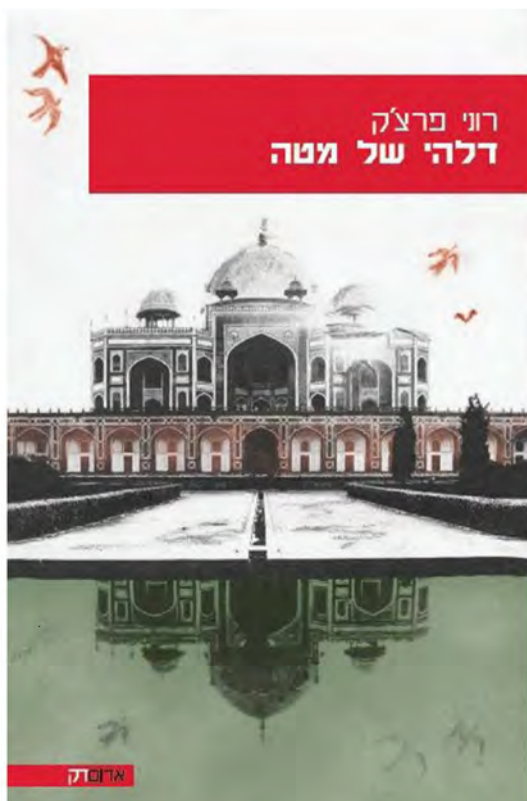
Hybrid Symposium at Ahmedabad Textile Mills' Owners House

Dr. Ronie Parciack, Department of East Asian Studies of Tel Aviv University, Israel

## When Modernism is Obsolete: Reshaping Formal Visibility in New Delhi

This presentation addresses the Indian central government's 2019 plan to revamp and reshape New Delhi's "central vista": India's central administrative area. Originally designed by Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker during the colonial rule, the "central vista" consisted of monuments and government buildings built in the neo-classical style that aimed to introduce modernist tendencies to showcase of the colonial capital.

The new plan, which is currently under way, consists of the construction of new government buildings and a new Parliament House, but also a dramatic transformation in the socio-architectural relationship between the large boulevards and open public areas and the government buildings under guard and supervision. This plan has kindled heated debates on the megacity's formal visibility and the remodeling of the relationship between government and citizens through urban design.



**Ronie Parciack** is a senior lecturer (associate professor) at the Department of East Asian Studies of Tel Aviv University, Israel. She was Visiting Professor in the Dept. of Sociology at the Delhi School of Economics and a Research Fellow at the South Asian Languages and Civilizations (SALC) department at the University of Chicago. Her research interests include the vernacular planes of political theology in India, political and aesthetic aspects of South Asian mass media and popular culture, and Indo-Islamic visual culture. She has published in refereed journals and anthologies, and co-edited special issues of the *Journal of South Asian Popular Culture* and *Zmanim Historical quarterly*. She is the author of: *Popular Hindi Cinema: Aesthetic Formations of the Seen and Unseen* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016) and *Celestial Delhi: Anthropological Gazes at a Megapolis in Transition* (Tel Aviv:



1 4 / 0 9 / 2 0 2 3

# CONCRETE and POWER

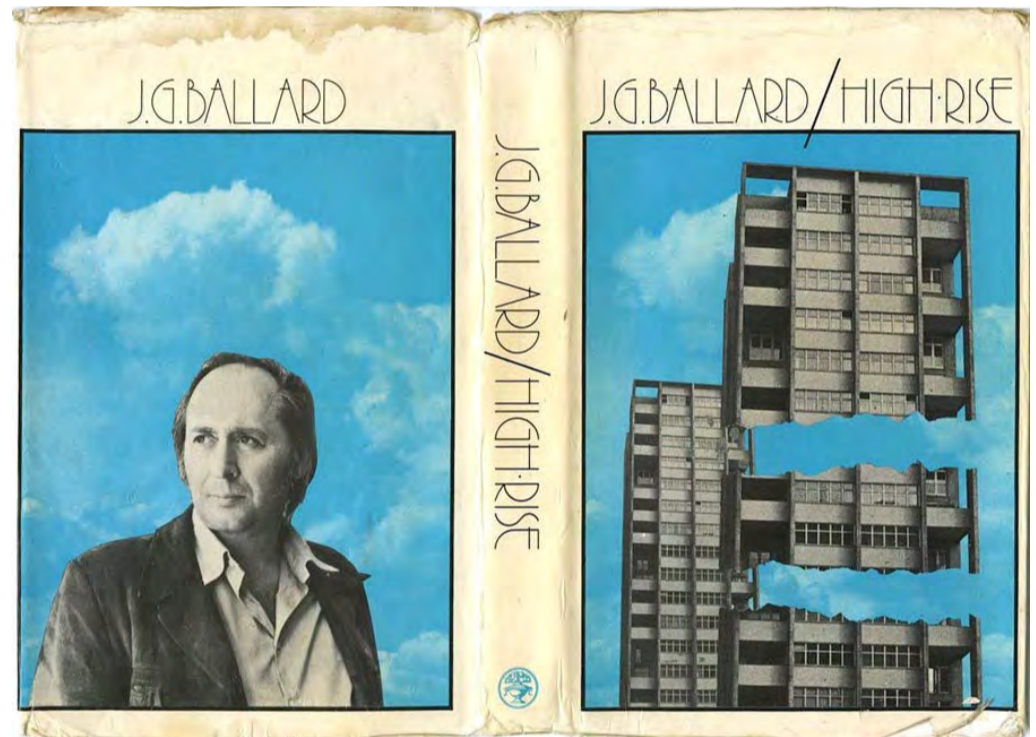
A Tribute to Balkrishna Doshi

Hybrid Symposium at Ahmedabad Textile Mills' Owners House

Dr. Amir Minsky

## Stairway to Heaven? Concretization and Disintegration in Ballard's *High-Rise*

The properties of matter associated with concrete, as a highly durable and even perennial conglomerate, have featured in many modern political cultures: As the cornerstone of national regeneration; as markers of futurism, progress, and masculine prowess; or as the foundations for moral and civic fortitude. Such allegorical attributes play a more ambiguous role in J. G. Ballard's dystopian novel *High-Rise* (1975) – a parable about the descent of a London residential apartment block into mayhem and insanity. The novel's perception of concrete situates it as a substance that supersedes nature and even defies the laws of gravity, enabling the high-rise to "colonize the sky" as a miniature vertical city. Its brutalist architecture, however, which fails to sustain a harmonious and humanly-nurturing environment, precipitates a psychological disintegration that engulfs the building's residents and pushes them beyond the boundaries of civility and civilization. Not merely a social and political cautionary tale on the decomposition of capitalist society and the atomization of the individual within it, or a critique of the diminishing environmental sustainability of the high-rise as an architectural form, the novel also conjures epistemological questions regarding the role of technology, the perception of reality, and the directionality of time in human history, on a spectrum between the concrete and the amorphic, the (allegedly) sane and the schizophrenic.



First edition of J. G. Ballard's novel *High-Rise*



Dr. Amir Minsky earned a PhD in modern European intellectual history from the University of Pennsylvania, and has taught history at universities in the USA and the UAE. His translation to Hebrew of J. G. Ballard's *High-Rise* was published in 2023.



1 4 / 0 9 / 2 0 2 3

# CONCRETE and POWER

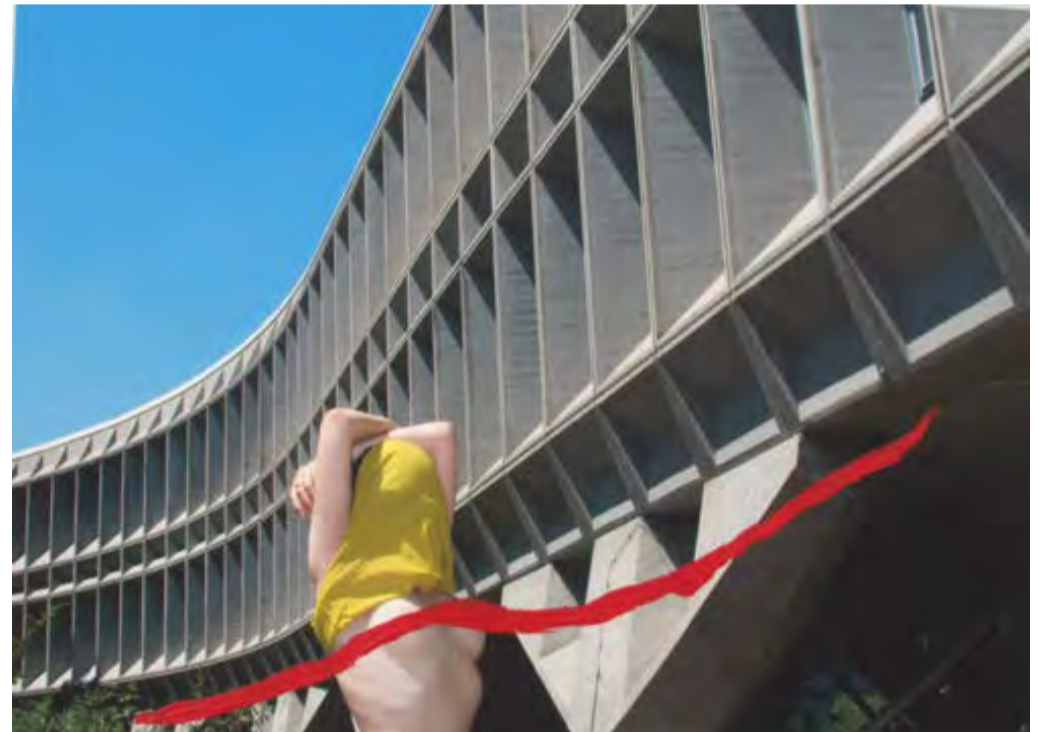
A Tribute to Balkrishna Doshi

Hybrid Symposium at Ahmedabad Textile Mills' Owners House

Jennifer Abessira, <https://www.instagram.com/jenniferabessira/?hl=en>

## Our Tourism

Following Jean-Luc Godard's advice to "confront vague ideas with clear images", the French-Israeli artist Jennifer Abessira and the French film-maker Julien Donada, were engaged in a very particular form of architectural tourism project that brings together humor, photography and brutalist architecture. Those images, taken instantly during the duo's pilgrims to timeless brutalist masterpieces, generate strange relations between the bare and the nude, between the exposed concrete and the exposed body, between the flash of the camera and the flashing of the flesh.



Jennifer Abessira, from "Notre Tourisme" series



**Jennifer Abessira** is a photographer who works in between Tel Aviv and Paris, but the actual site of her art is her Instagram account. She posts her palpable images daily, creating an intimate journal that belongs to the public. Privacy, for her, is not opposed to being in the open. She does not need a "room of her own," a studio in which the world's imposing presence – its noise and flux of images -- could be bracketed [... ] In Abessira's life, her images function as a coordinate-system for managing the formless and chaotic. She has always been attracted to archives and archival work and, in this sense, "Instagram comes in easy, with the simple platform it provides for organizing things." In her Instagram journal, chaos and void do not disappear. They are fully present. But they appear through idiosyncratic modulations of order instantiated by a system of sardonic hashtags: #She Wanted to Die but She also Wanted to Live in Paris / #A Girl is a Gun Peow Peow / #TelAviv Forever / #The Triumph of Vegetation is Total / #Contribution to a Theory of Architecture, etc. Abessira carefully tags her images. Her hashtags are the verbal seams of a multi-levelled visual matrix. Encountering her work, we look at a new atlas of images that dreams of an infinite catalogue while speaking to us in an intensity that cannot be represented. (Text by Hagi Kenaan)



1 4 / 0 9 / 2 0 2 3

# CONCRETE and POWER

A Tribute to Balkrishna Doshi

Hybrid Symposium at Ahmedabad Textile Mills' Owners House

Prof. Zvi Efrat, School of Architecture, Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem

## Beyond Brutalism – The Ominous Beauty of the Soreq Nuclear Reactor

One of the most consequential operations during the Israeli post-1948 State-building process, was the setting up of a military and civilian nuclear infra-structure. This strategic operation, never officially acknowledged, nor denied, by government officials, hence eternally posed as a monumental passive-aggressive specter, required massive construction works and specific engineering and architectural know-how. In this lecture, I will present and discuss the nuclear reactor at Soreq, designed by American architect Philip Johnson in 1956. Though largely invisible to the public eye, it is an exquisitely elegant Béton-Brute monolith, perhaps the most refined Brutalist “piece” built during the formative decades of Israeli Statehood. I will briefly contextualize the reactor within an overall tendency to use brutalist architecture as a dominant signifier of certain State building-types, including para-military structures, and I will offer some comments and questions regarding the architectural care and craftsmanship invested in these primary concrete buildings.



Philipp Johnson, Soreq Nuclear Reactor project, 1956



Prof. Dr. **Zvi Efrat**, Architect and Architectural Historian, is partner at Efrat-Kowalsky Architects and was Head of the Department of Architecture at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem. He holds B.Arch. from Pratt Institute, MA. In Cinema Studies from NYU and PhD in Architectural History and Theory from Princeton University. He has taught and lectured worldwide, published extensively and curated numerous exhibitions. His book, *The Israeli Project: Building and Architecture 1948-1973*, was published in Hebrew in 2004. His book *The Object of Zionism: The Architecture of Israel* was published by Spector Books, Leipzig, in 2018.



1 4 / 0 9 / 2 0 2 3

# CONCRETE and POWER

A Tribute to Balkrishna Doshi

Hybrid Symposium at Ahmedabad Textile Mills' Owners House

Sharon Rotbard, School of Architecture, Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem

## From Concrete to Paper: learning architecture from Paul Virilio

In his own words, Paul Virilio (1932-2018) was first and foremost “a war child”. He was an autodidact who authored one built project, a concrete church in the city of Nevers now classified as a Historic Monument, and many books translated in many languages.

Virilio's path led him from concrete to paper: after the war he discovered the abandoned bunkers of “the Atlantic Wall” erected by the German Army during WW2 all along Europe's Western Coast. Virilio contemplated those heavy, enigmatic monolith structures and saw in them prophecies of the unprecedented forces and dangers which had been unleashed by modern warfare. His insights and discoveries brought him in the beginning of the 1960s to a joint architectural practice with Claude Parent, one of France's most noted architects of his generation. Together they formed one of the first “experimental” practices in Europe, published manifestos and reviews, organized conferences and exhibitions and designed few projects. The partnership ended in a discord when the French Electricity Company (EDF) approached the partnership to commission the design of a series of nuclear reactors. Parent Could not refuse, but Virilio thought that there is a big difference between structures designed to face deadly dangers and structures designed to contain deadly danger, to produce it. Parent was appointed as head of the “Collège des architectes du nucléaire” and designed a series of nuclear reactors that were built all over France. Virilio moved on to paper. He became a writer.



A German Bunker of the Atlantic Wall, Bretagne, France. (photo: Paul Virilio)



**Sharon Rotbard** is an Israeli architect, activist, educator, author and editor, co-founder of *Babel Press*. He is currently serving as Senior Lecturer at the School of Architecture of the Bezalel Academy, Jerusalem.

Among his books: *The Refuseniks' Trials* (Hebrew, 2004), *White City, Black City: architecture and war in Tel Aviv and Jaffa* (Hebrew, 2005, English edition 2015), *Avraham Yasky, a concrete architecture* (Hebrew, 2007), *Neither in Jaffa, Nor in Tel Aviv* (Hebrew, 2009), *The War of Streets and Houses and other texts about the city* (Hebrew, 2021).



1 4 / 0 9 / 2 0 2 3

# CONCRETE and POWER

A Tribute to Balkrishna Doshi

Hybrid Symposium at Ahmedabad Textile Mills' Owners House

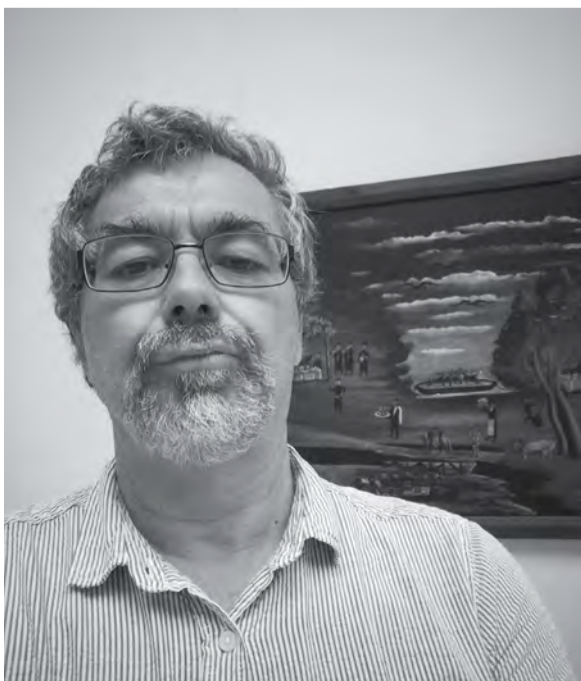
Prof. Anselm Jappe, Fine Art School of Rome

## Concrete – capitalism's massive construction weapon

Concrete, especially in its appearance as reinforced concrete, is not a neutral material, but is strongly linked to the history of industrial capitalism. Unlike plastic or petrol, it has received little criticism until recently – in spite of the sanitary and ecological problems it creates : problems for human health, contribution to global warming, thefts of sand, quick deterioration, waste management, suffocation of the grounds... However, the biggest problem created by concrete might be its « killing » of traditional architectures which were perfectly adapted to human needs. Like an invasive plant, concrete substituted nearly completely any other construction material and technique, replacing skilled workers with a combination of designer-architects, disconnected from the inhabitant's needs, and unskilled workers.



Ponte Morandi after its collapse in August 14, 2018



Anselm Jappe is the author of *Guy Debord* (1993, University of California Press 1999, PM Press 2016), *Les Aventures de la marchandise. Pour une critique de la valeur* (Denoel 2003, La Découverte, 2017, English translation forthcoming with Bloomsbury Press, London), *L'Avant-garde inacceptable. Réflexions sur Guy Debord* (Lignes, 2004), *Crédit à mort* (Lignes 2011, translated as *The Writing on the Wall*, Zero Books 2016), *La Société autophage* (La Découverte, 2017, English translation forthcoming with Common Notions, New York), *Béton – Arme de construction massive du capitalisme* (L'Echappée, 2020), *Un complot permanent contre le monde entier. Essais sur Guy Debord* (L'Echappée 2023). He contributed to the German reviews *Krisis* and *Exit !*, founded by Robert Kurz, which developed the “critique of value”. He teaches at present aesthetics at the Fine Art Schools of Rome (Italy) and has been visiting professor in various European and Latin American universities. He also lectured at the Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales and at the Collège international de philosophie (Paris).