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## Tracing the Avant-Texte of Architectural Theory: The Paul Felix Case

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### Abstract

This article attempts to dissect the production and use of architectural theory in its formative stage. Instead of reproducing the fixed canons of architectural theory, based upon the publications of celebrated authors, it tries to unravel the coming-into-being of architectural theory as a field. Specifically, this article will concentrate on the theoretical ideas of Paul Felix (1919–1982): a Catholic, Belgian modernist architect, and a professor of architectural theory at the Katholieke Universiteit (KU) Leuven from 1952 to 1978. Felix will be studied not through his pioneering modernist architectural designs or through his limited published work, but by looking at his day-to-day work — archiving, reading, and teaching — which remains a relatively untapped and yet relevant context in intellectual history. By developing a textual exegesis of a well-thumbed key text of Felix' course, the 1968 text *La fonction et le signe* by the Italian thinker Umberto Eco (1932–2016), this article will redirect the predominant focus on canonical texts of architectural theory to the work of those actors who were foremost not in producing but consuming theory.

### Introduction

Whereas the modernist architect Paul Felix (1919–1982) is a minor figure to the English-speaking world, in his home country, Belgium, he is recognized as one of the main advocates of a post-war architectural modernism. He was trained as an engineer-architect at the KU Leuven (1937) and started his architectural practice right after the Second World War in 1945. In his modernist buildings, Felix reduced architecture to its bare essence. For example, his designs for the Clarisse convent in Ostend (1957), the educational centre in Dworp (1964–1973), and the municipal swimming pool in Ostend (1968–1973) are praised for their functionality, simplicity, and constructive honesty in the use of concrete and local masonry. A Catholic modernist as well, Felix saw it as his moral duty to build for the community by designing for everyday use.<sup>1</sup>

Felix was first of all a respected architect who contributed to the local Belgian architectural culture. But he was also an architect who read, who was intellectually challenged by some remarkable books that came his way, and who was driven by an urge to understand and disseminate this knowledge. From 1952 to 1978, he combined his architectural practice with a position as an architecture professor at the Faculty of Applied Sciences at the KU Leuven.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Geert Bekaert and Francis Strauven, *Bouwen in België: 1945–1970* (Brussel: Nationale confederatie van het bouwbedrijf, 1971), 311.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 67, 311.

## An Archivist-Author

When Felix was appointed as the successor of his former mentor Emile Goethals (1886–1951), he decided not to move to the city of Leuven but to stay at his place of birth Ostend, the largest city on the Belgian coast.<sup>3</sup> Leaving Ostend on the morning train, he left the place where he had set up his architectural office and where he was well-known in Catholic circles<sup>4</sup> (Figure 1). Even with the newly inaugurated North–South railway link through the centre of Brussels, commuting between the provincial towns of Ostend and Leuven took almost half a day of travelling. Felix, however, took advantage of these moments of disconnectedness from both practices and used them to read articles on issues which dominated the post-war architectural discourse, making abundant notes and ordering his thoughts. Often getting on the train in Leuven without a notebook, he would even use the back of student papers to make sketches for his architectural projects in progress. Back in his apartment and architectural studio in Ostend, he would store all documents.<sup>5</sup> Later, his son Marc Felix sorted his manuscripts into thematic files and gathered these in more than fourteen brown boxes containing syllabi, programs, meeting reports, memoranda, exams, studio assignments, course preparations, letters, doodles, sketches, and highly processed magazine articles.<sup>6</sup> Although Felix did not publish much, he seemed to have stored these proofs and drafts for a generation to come. How should we characterize this figure, who did not gain international repute through building or writing, yet was continuously seeking to quench his intellectual thirst?

Thinking foremost as a pedagogue and not as an author, Felix mostly did not aspire to circulate his ideas outside the classroom. Very few of his texts were ever published, and they do not represent any cutting-edge thinking.<sup>7</sup> Nor did Felix master the art of self-promotion, like his notable example Le Corbusier (1887–1965), who rose to the status of *monstre sacré* of the modernist movement. Felix's self-image rather was deeply humble. He saw both the architect and the teacher as servants who contributed to the well-being of the community.<sup>8</sup> As a professor of “the old guard,” he had taken it as his mission to guide his students to “true architectural knowledge,” initiating them to the principles of a Christian, Flemish life ideal. He did so not by writing himself, but through two other “textualizing activities”: the act of reading or consuming theory and the act of teaching or disseminating theory in the classroom.

As the usual stereotype of the architect-theoretician does not apply, the Paul Felix case should be framed as a “minor historiography.” In such historiographical endeavour, agency is given to “ordinary” people and attention is paid to what has often been considered as trivial and inconsequential source material.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Emile Goethals was professor of “Architectural and Urban Composition,” “Civil Architecture,” and “Construction Legislation” from 1930 to 1951 at the KU Leuven.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Herman Parret, professor emeritus at the Higher Institute of Philosophy, the KU Leuven, 5 February 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Felix and his family moved to this building in 1958. The apartment and architectural studio were located on the upper two stories.

<sup>6</sup> Other documents concerning Felix's teaching career are stored at the University Archives of the KU Leuven.

<sup>7</sup> During his career, Felix published a small number of articles, among which the most important are “Kunst in ons leven,” *Jong Volksche Front* 1, no. 1 (1934): 10–11; “Moderne Architectuur,” “Le Corbusier en de Unité d'habitation te Marseille,” “Moderne architectuur in de Nieuwe Wereld,” *West-Vlaanderen* 6 (1954): 263, 269, 282; “De woning in de moderne architectuur,” *West-Vlaanderen* 4 (1957): 203; “De programmahervorming in de afdeling architectuur,” *Onze Alma Mater*, 1 (1969): 28–34. Apart from these musings on the current state of architecture, Felix engaged in some literary circles. He belonged to the *Universitas* periodical from 1932 to 1937, was editor of some theme issues on modern and sacred architecture of the journal *West-Vlaanderen* during the 1950s, and was a collaborator for *Tijdschrift voor Architectuur en Beeldende Kunsten* (1966–1969).

<sup>8</sup> Bekaert and Strauven, *Bouwen in België*, 313.

<sup>9</sup> Sigurdur Gylfi Magnusson and David Olafsson, *Minor Knowledge and Microhistory: Manuscript Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (Abingdon, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2016).

Although many accounts have shown the value of listening to those voices that have been obscured by and from history, minor historiography also holds a danger, as the architecture historian Joan Ockman warned: “The lapidary task of opening up the past can fatally contaminate the historian’s work and make it into mere revisionism, a proliferation of new interpretations and pantheons as questionable as the previous.”<sup>10</sup>



Figure 1: Paul Felix in a KU Leuven parade, next to his colleague Georges Pepermans. 1967.  
Photo by Marc Felix. Courtesy of Family Archives Paul Felix, Ostend.

In order to profile this architect-educator acting in a local Belgian context and within a specific timeframe, we will study his day-to-day work — archiving, reading, teaching, and reforming — which, as the intellectual historian Edward Baring rightly argued, remains a relatively untapped and yet immediate context in intellectual history.<sup>11</sup> This article, in other words, will recreate the working conditions in which Felix came to develop his ideas and look into the means by which he communicated them with his students. But how to disclose this dense material? In the end, can it be made readable?

<sup>10</sup> Joan Ockman, “Reinventing Jefim Golyscheff: Lives of a Minor Modernist,” *Assemblage* 11 (1990): 97.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Baring, *The Young Derrida and French Philosophy, 1945–1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

### Entering the Classroom through the Avant-texte

The classroom has seldom been studied as a locus of intellectual production and dissemination. This article argues that this setting is part and parcel of the transfer of theoretical ideas to future students, all the more so when the teacher before them is a practising architect rather than a publishing theorist. To understand Felix's intellectual process, one methodological question supersedes all: how can we respond to the "haunting silence" of teachers' work in historical documents and consequently to the inaccessibility of past classrooms?<sup>12</sup> Over the last few decades, historians of education have undertaken considerable efforts to restage these former classroom practices and rituals of school life, which, however intangible, were active and full of sounds.<sup>13</sup> Building on their insights, this article looks at the documents on which Felix collected and stored pedagogical knowledge. These miscellanea of a professor's desk, or the so-called "little tools of knowledge," form the material traces of essentially intangible events.<sup>14</sup>

By concentrating on the course excerpts and preliminary notes that preceded and supported Felix's classroom performance, we will uncover the tropes and aporias of Felix's thought system. Instead of giving completeness and coherence to a fragmented body of archival material, this article takes into consideration Felix's searching and at moments faltering encounter with theory. It will unravel how his reading and studying affected his teaching which, as we know, had to unfold as the architectural students' categories of perceiving and knowing started to fundamentally alter. From the mid-1960s on, the collapse of the modern movement, the disillusionment with social reform in the profession, and the need to develop a more pluralist identity politics, led to the (re)shaping of educational programs, periodicals, and building projects.<sup>15</sup>

This article will do this by subjecting Felix's documents to a textual exegesis. In its technical meaning, exegesis is the art of observing and analysing a text or artefact by examining how its creator shaped and modified his or her source materials and put them together. The study of post-war architectural theory, all too often revolving around only canonical texts, can profit from this method.<sup>16</sup> An exegetical gaze can reveal how theoretical narratives on architecture functioned *before* they were frozen into authoritative books and articles or disseminated to a wider public. At the same time, such a gaze can help demonstrate how these same texts, after they started to circulate, were appropriated through marginalia inserted by readers, rendering the cultural acquisition and even the impact of ideas upon the readers more important.

To cover this ground comprehensively, the article is divided in four parts. Before delving into the Felix archives and stepping into the classroom, this article will first look at how Felix was remembered by his contemporaries. He was labelled a "spiritual formalist" and a "pedagogical reformist." Although these labels are necessary to understand Felix's attitude toward architecture and its teaching, a glance through the manuscripts, notes, and reports that the educator made in preparing to teach will foreground another

<sup>12</sup> Ian Grosvenor, *Silences and Images: The Social History of the Classroom* (New York: Lang, 1999); Karen A. Krasny, "Prophetic Voices: Three Books to Encourage Us to Listen beyond Historical Silence," *Curriculum Inquiry* 36, no. 1 (2006): 93–106.

<sup>13</sup> Grosvenor, *Silences and Images*; Ian Grosvenor and Martin Lawn, *Ways of Seeing Education and Schooling: Emerging Historiographies* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2001). Paul Smeyers and Marc Depaepe, *Educational Research: Material Culture and Its Representation* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Peter Becker and William Clark, *Little Tools of Knowledge: Historical Essays on Academic and Bureaucratic Practices* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> Alexander Caragone, *The Texas Rangers: Notes from an Architectural Underground* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995). Joan Ockman, ed., *Architecture School: Three Centuries of Educating Architects in North America* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012). Beatriz Colomina, Craig Buckley, and Urtzi Grau, *Clip, Stamp, Fold: The Radical Architecture of Little Magazines, 1960 to 1970* (New York: Actar, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Rajesh Heynckx and Tom Avermaete, *Making a New World: Architecture & Communities in Interwar Europe* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012).

image of Felix in the second part of this article. Underlying his course on architectural theory was a continuous reassessment of both functionalism (the idea that form has to follow function) and formalism (the idea that form is autonomous).

Thirdly, this article will examine Felix's attitude as a reader by focusing on one specific colourful and well-thumbed manuscript which stands out in his archive: Felix's annotations on the 1968 text "La fonction et le signe" [The Function and the Sign] by the Italian thinker Umberto Eco. As this article will show, the "micrologics" at work in this manuscript preceded by a decade the remarkable rise to prominence of Eco's thinking in early 1980s Flanders.<sup>17</sup> This article will demonstrate that Felix read the text through a specific lens, searching for new frames of reference after the collapse of architectural modernism and simultaneously responding to the needs of a Catholic intellectual climate.

In the fourth part, this avant-texte offers a window into Felix's teaching practice. It will help in profiling Felix as an intellectual at work, performing the subject matter in the classroom.

### A Spiritual Formalist and a Pedagogical Reformist

In a 1971 interview with the architectural historian Francis Strauven, Paul Felix made a lachrymose statement when describing his education at the KU Leuven in the early 1950s:

When I was a student there existed in Belgium (except maybe in La Cambre about which I'm not very well informed) basically no architectural education of any value. Schools: Vitruvian orders. Our response: pseudo-modern architecture, horrible functional boxes, superficially inspired by Dudok. We were completely caught up in the clutter.<sup>18</sup>

Felix's account is in many ways revealing. First, it brings to light his ideological and educational roots. Being overtly Catholic in a society that was vertically segmented into "pillars," according to different religions or ideologies (each organizing health care and education), Felix not surprisingly was out of tune with what was taught at the architectural school La Cambre in Brussels. From its founding in 1926, Catholics perceived La Cambre as a socialist bulwark. Nevertheless, Felix, who in a 1954 speech defined beauty in the best Thomistic tradition as an educational path to God,<sup>19</sup> was self-critical during the interview: architectural education in his own "pillar" had been far from coherent, nor was it adequate.

Indeed, in the early 1950s, around the time Felix started to teach, professors of architecture at the Faculty of Engineering in Leuven promulgated the structural use of concrete, while at the same time being completely insensitive to the aesthetic role it could play in the modern era.<sup>20</sup> This approach naturally resulted in the "pseudo-modern" student work that Felix disliked so intensely. What is apparent in the interview with Strauven is Felix's belief in educational formation. The 1971 sentence "when I was a student," implied that during the two preceding decades he had tried to eliminate an old educational culture. Even his quite broad architectural oeuvre was understood as a statement with pedagogical value. At the time that students at Flemish architectural departments were blinded by the uncritical and uninspired production of right angles, flat roofs, and glass walls, the critic K.N. Elnó (1920–1993) wrote that

<sup>17</sup> Cornelis Verhoeven, *Lof van de micrologie: een voetnoot bij Plato's Politeia* (Baarn: Ambo, 1982).

<sup>18</sup> Geert Bekaert and Ronny De Meyer, *Paul Felix: 1913 architectuur 1981* (Tielt: Lannoo, 1981), 22.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Felix, *Hedendaagse monumentale architectuur*, lecture delivered at the "Provinciale Cultuurdagen van West-Vlaanderen," Bruges, 28 November 1954. Bekaert and De Meyer, *Paul Felix*.

<sup>20</sup> For more information on his predecessor Joris Helleputte (1852–1925), see Jan De Maeyer et al, *Joris Helleputte: architect en politicus 1852/1925* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998). For more information about Emile Goethals (1886–1951), see <https://inventaris.onroerenderfgoed.be/dibe/persoon/7006>.

Felix's modern buildings incarnated a true modernism, an "unusual usualness," as they skilfully combined a personal approach with programmatic ideals.<sup>21</sup>

Second, when assessing his roots in the 1971 interview, Felix showed how later events were influenced by how he had experienced his own education. His lamenting on the lack of teachers offering clear and consequent guidance sketched a specific sort of self-portrait, that of a "Mängelwesen," someone who from the start of his career had been forced to overcome a defect. Yet, as his colleague and friend Geert Bekaert argued, Felix succeeded in producing a neutral modern architecture in touch with reality precisely because of his education and Catholic background. Besides his subscribing to the Catholic dictum "innover selon la tradition" ("innovate according to tradition") and thus cultivating a disgust for star architecture, the rational design theory which had marked his education was important. Felix was, according to Bekaert, a "spiritual formalist."<sup>22</sup>

A spiritual formalist and a pedagogical reformist — thanks to what sympathetic critics wrote about him, Paul Felix is remembered as such. For the researcher trying to understand architect-pedagogues who taught and worked in the post-1945 world, these labels are, at first glance, very helpful. Seeing Felix as a formalist would put him alongside those who believe that architectural form in itself is to be pondered as a semi-autonomous question that might be informed by other factors (function, technology, materials, etc.) but that nevertheless necessitates a careful consideration also from a purely aesthetic point of view. The characterization of Felix as a formalist is not, however, corroborated by the documents in his archive. His self-understanding and the ideas he taught in the classroom did not accord with a formalist stance. What, then, were the interpretative predispositions of Felix's teaching practice? What exactly were the key ideas propelling his highly prized pedagogical reformism?

### **Toward a Course of Architectural Theory**

When Felix was appointed at the KU Leuven in the early 1950s, he was in charge of different courses, such as "Free-Hand Drawing," "Architectural Drawing and Measurement," "Architectonic and Urban Composition," and "Civil Architecture." When put in chronological order, the various course documents and preparations he produced early in his teaching career offer an initial understanding of Felix's move from the studio toward the classroom, the place where architectural theory was taught. While his early courses still built on his beaux arts-inspired formation and stressed the demonstrative logic of displayed images, his later courses were taught at a more abstract and textual level. In the rare instances that he used images and actual cases to support his arguments in the classroom, he handed them out as under-exposed black-and-white copies (Figures 2–4).<sup>23</sup>

By changing the title of his course "Architectural Composition" to "Architectural Theory" in the early 1960s, Felix distanced himself from the composition-driven studio mentality he had grown up with. He argued that the conventional teaching of Leuven focused too much attention on autonomous formal problems.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, for him, the term "architectural theory" became synonymous with a non-doctrinal, systematic approach of gathering information on human social activities, which deeply affect the built environment.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Elnø, K.N. "Paul Felix—'Zonnelied'," *Streven* (1959), 140.

<sup>22</sup> Bekaert and De Meyer, *Paul Felix*, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with André Loeckx, 24 February 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Introduction by Paul Felix to his course "Architectural Theory," 1963. Paul Felix archives Ostend, Box U8 – File 13.

<sup>25</sup> This was described by Felix in an introduction to the second part of his course "Architectural Theory" in 1963. Paul Felix Archives Ostend, Box U8 – File 13. This position was defended in several memoranda and meeting reports, such as a memorandum of 1968 in Paul Felix Archives, Box U3 – File 1. A meeting report of the educational committee from 1977 on the aims of his course is in Box U6 – File 11.

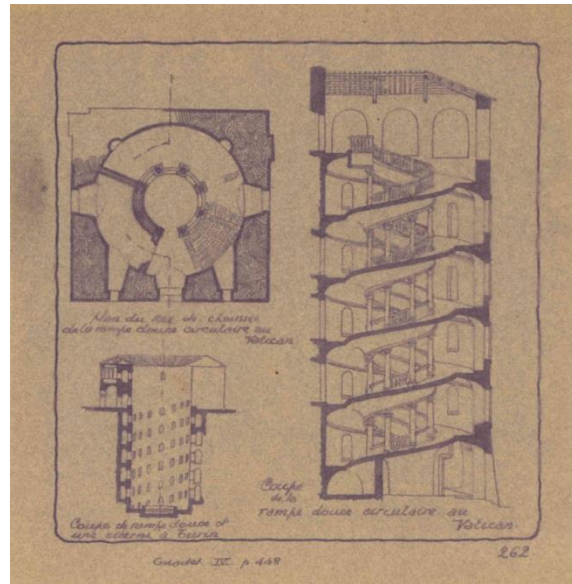


Figure 2: Image from Felix's course "Architectural Composition."  
Courtesy of Family Archives Paul Felix, Ostend. Box U7 – 1952-1957, File 6.

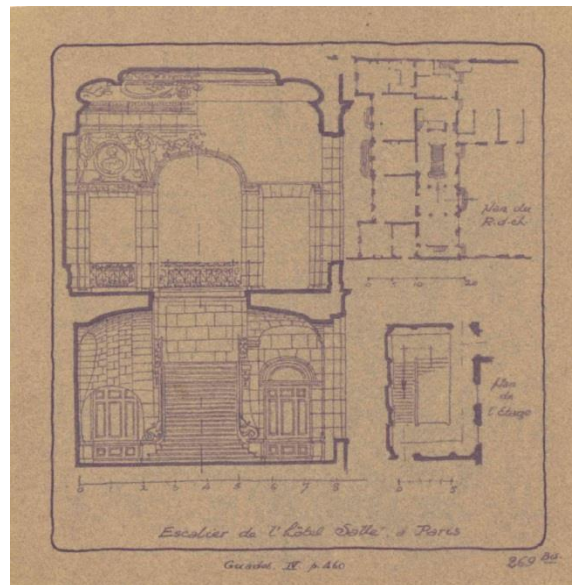


Figure 3: Image from Felix's course "Architectural Composition."  
Courtesy of Family Archives Paul Felix, Ostend. Box U7 – 1952-1957, File 6.

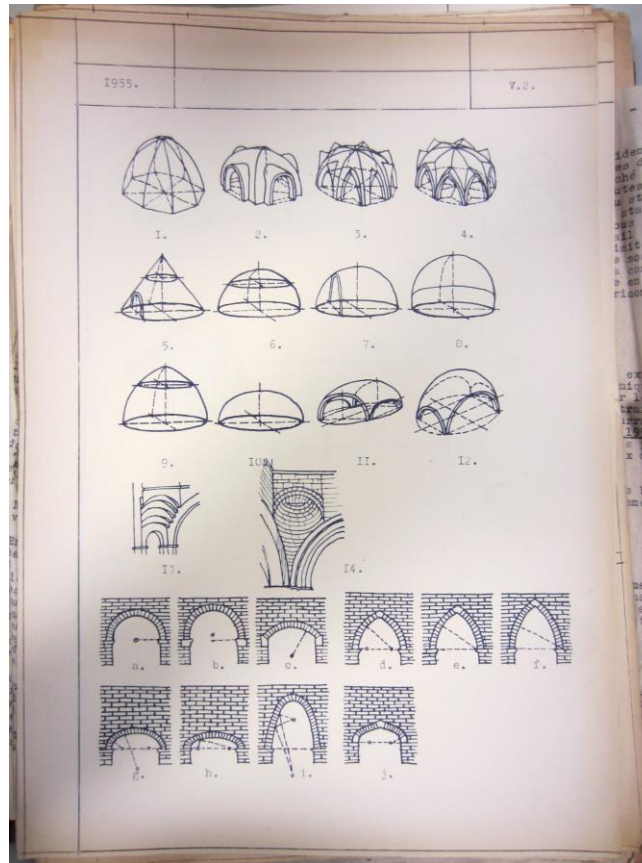


Figure 4: Image from Felix's course "Architectural Composition."  
 Courtesy of Family Archives Paul Felix, Ostend. Box U7 – 1952–1957, File 6.

The change from "Architectural Composition" to "Architectural Theory" is significant, not just in the Leuven context, but also internationally. It is part of a more general tendency to recognize the importance of theory as an indispensable part of architectural culture. Indeed, this is a period in which architectural theory slowly began its rise as an academic discipline in its own right. During the reign of modernism in architecture, architectural theory was a somewhat implicit part of architectural discourse. Only rarely was it identified as a specific domain with its own questions, methodologies, and paradigms. Furthermore, the consolidation of architectural theory coincided with a deep identity crisis in modernism. A multitude of voices led to a wide divergence of critical positions.<sup>26</sup> Although the question of how to relate to the production of the pre-war modern movement dominated the architectural discourse in the 1950s and 1960s, Felix picked up elements of these international discussions without strongly identifying with any of these new paradigms.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> These different positions are outlined in the chapter "Het Functionalisme en zijn schaduw" in Hilde Heynen, André Loeckx, Lieven De Cauter, and Karina Van Herck, *"Dat is architectuur": sleutelteksten uit de twintigste eeuw* (Rotterdam: Uitgeverij 010, 2001), 699. See also *The SAGE Handbook of Architectural Theory* (London: SAGE Publications, 2012). It is telling indeed that Joan Ockman's anthology of the post-war period is called *Architecture Culture 1943–1968*, whereas the subsequent volume by K. Michael Hays is called *Architecture Theory Since 1968*.

<sup>27</sup> In his course "Architectural Theory" in 1973, he discussed Lance Wright's article "Robert Venturi and Anti-architecture," *Architectural Review* 153 (April 1973): 262–4. Paul Felix archives, Box U10 – 1971–1974, File 8. Other



## Conceptual Catalyst

Whereas this major shift toward theory in Felix's teaching career is rather easy to discover in the archival materials, much more difficult to find is what El-Bizri calls the "conceptual catalyst" of his teaching.<sup>28</sup> What was the conceptual basis on which arguments were built before they were disseminated in the classroom? A glance through the various course documents kept in Ostend reveals how the conceptual underpinnings of Felix's ideas depended on a dominant information policy of accumulation and condensation. By gathering diverse points through quotation and reformulation, Felix gradually built up arguments against a strict modernist paradigm, which he constantly reformulated in the different courses he taught.

From the early 1960s to the late 1970s, his courses were truly "contaminated" with the discussion on the formal and functional qualities of architecture. In the course "Architectural Composition" of 1968, for instance, he warned against the "l'art pour l'art" ("art for art's sake") attitude which presented the architectural form as a showpiece.<sup>29</sup> Ten years later, he persisted in his claim that when one reduced architecture to its formal qualities, one was inattentive to the human presence.<sup>30</sup> Most of his theoretical courses are prompted by this disapproval of how these culturally loaded, vexed concepts of form and function had been narrowed down in architectural discourse.

Felix's attacks on functionalism emerged in tandem with his questioning of formalism. By stressing the relation among function, form, and environment or context, Felix condemned modernism for its reductive, utilitarian functionalism as well for its lapse into mere aestheticism, even blind, unthinking formalism. In one vision document on the development of the research on architectural theory, Felix claimed that architecture was in crisis and therefore was in urgent need of a guiding theory.

One way to overcome this crisis, according to Felix, was to look backward and interrogate the basic premises of the modern movement, as the influential architectural theorist Charles Jencks (b. 1939) had done. Another way was to shift one's focus from form and function and dig into the "meaning" of architecture, by deriving insights from the disciplines of social sciences, psychology, economics, political sciences, and semiotics in both the curriculum and research.

This myriad of documents, in other words, displays a sort of family tree or "stemma codicum" within the Felix archives. Felix's accumulation of arguments seems to have functioned as a device to develop a more or less consistent conceptual line, based upon a criticism of the relation between form and function in architecture.

## An Avid Reader

### The Eco Manuscript<sup>31</sup>

Attaching importance to this theoretical turn, and set on a search to find answers to the form–function dichotomy, Felix found food for thought in the work of, among others, a "rising" author, Umberto Eco

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debates he was most likely aware of through his numerous collection of contemporary magazines on architectural theory.

<sup>28</sup> Nader El-Bizri, "Creative Inspirations or Intellectual Impasses? Reflections on Relationships between Architecture and the Humanities," in *Humanities in Architectural Design: A Contemporary and Historical Perspective*, ed. Soumyen Bandyopadhyay, Jane Lomholt, Nicholas Temple, and Renée Tobe (London: Routledge, 2010), 123–35.

<sup>29</sup> "Architectonic Composition," 1968. Paul Felix archives Ostend, Box U8 – File 15.

<sup>30</sup> "Architectural Theory," 1977–1978. Paul Felix archives Ostend, Box U9 – File 2.

<sup>31</sup> The term "manuscript" is used here to refer to the heavy annotations that Felix made on the pages of Umberto Eco's *La structure absente* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1972). See "Metamorphoses" below.

(1932–2016).<sup>32</sup> In Felix’s fourteen brown boxes, an undated copy of the book *La structure absente* [*The Absent Structure*] stands out. In the margin, Felix noted the year, 1972, which appears to be the first time he introduced the manuscript in the classroom. Striking in its multi-coloured markings, the manuscript is a compelling trace of how Felix, during many train journeys, on weekends at home, and at his holiday residence in the French Le Lavandou, had been rereading and annotating the ideas of the Italian semiotician (Figures 5 and 6).<sup>33</sup>



Figure 5: Felix at his work and reading desk in his apartment in Ostend. Date unknown.  
Courtesy of Family Archives Paul Felix, Ostend.

In his courses on architectural theory, Felix especially relied on one section of Eco’s *La structure absente*, “La fonction et le signe” [The Function and the Sign].<sup>34</sup> With this text, originally written in Italian in 1968 and published in French in 1972, Umberto Eco, then primarily a historian of aesthetics and sociologist of mass media, gained importance in the field of architectural theory.<sup>35</sup> In his lengthy text, Eco applied his general semiotic theory to architecture.<sup>36</sup> He differentiated between two different levels of communication in architecture: “denotation” and “connotation.” With the term “denotation,” Eco pointed to the intended and inherent function of a specific architectural object (e.g. stairs denote the function of ascending or descending), whereas “connotation” referred to symbolic meanings of architectural objects (e.g. double

<sup>32</sup> In his courses on design theory, Felix also referred to acclaimed authors to strengthen his arguments. For example, he referred to Geoffrey Broadbent, who played a major role in the theorizing of environmental design in the 1970s and Amos Rapoport (b. 1929) who emphasized the mutual interaction between people and the built environment.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Marc Felix, 03 April 2014.

<sup>34</sup> A similar exegetic analysis could be made for other texts that Felix used in the classroom, for instance, by Broadbent or Rapoport. We nevertheless focus on the Eco manuscript, as it marked a verifiable shift of focus in Felix’s teaching career.

<sup>35</sup> Umberto Eco, *La Structure Absente* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1972), 259–318.

<sup>36</sup> Neil Leach, ed., *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 173.

stairs indicate grandeur and ceremony). Both denotation and connotation depend upon cultural “codes” or the collective ways of understanding these objects (if you had never learned what stairs were, you would not recognize their function upon first encounter).



Figure 6: Felix’s work and reading desk in his holiday residence in Le Lavandou, France. Date unknown. Courtesy of Family Archives Paul Felix, Ostend.

In the text, Eco goes on to question how these codes shifted throughout history (for example, generating quite different interpretations of the symbolic meanings of specific styles), and how contemporary architects can deal with them. His ultimate argument is that architectural codes are always relying on — while still possibly critical of — social and cultural codes, and hence cannot be considered fully autonomous. This differentiates architecture as much from autonomous art (which is far less dependent upon existing codes) as from mass media (which can only reinforce, but not criticize, existing codes). In the 1970s, semiotics was increasingly seen as a key discipline for the study of cultural phenomena, since these could be considered to be driven by systems of signification and communication, that is, as language systems.<sup>37</sup> The insights from the founding fathers of semiotics — Ferdinand De Saussure, Charles Morris, Charles Peirce, and Noam Chomsky — were soon applied to the field of architecture. The architectural writer Geoffrey Broadbent even explicitly turned to semiotics to overcome the misuse of words such as “functionalism” by architects and critics: “This misuse is itself sufficient reason for looking more closely at the language they use; at the relationships between buildings, the concepts which are used in discussing them, and the words by which those concepts are defined.”<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Kate Nesbitt, *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory, 1965–1995*, 1st ed. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 32–27, 109–40.

<sup>38</sup> Geoffrey Broadbent, “Building Design as an Iconic Sign System,” in *Signs, Symbols, and Architecture* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 1980), 124.

Broadbent as well warned about the many ramifications of semiotics. Whereas one would derive insights from the school of de Saussure, another would turn to Peirce's sign theory and still others to Chomsky's generative grammars. Nevertheless, most architects at that time were introduced to semiotics more indirectly, through the work of the architectural theorists Charles Jencks and George Baird. Whereas their text *Meaning in Architecture* (1969) provided the best known and most accessible source, Felix rather took up Eco's text as the one most instructive for his students.<sup>39</sup> Arguably this was a good choice, since, according to later commentators, Eco provided "the most convincing contribution to a semiotics of architecture."<sup>40</sup> And, as Marvin Trachtenberg noted, the widely divergent architectural expressions which arose from the 1960s until the 1980s might well have found inspiration, if not a conceptual centre, in Eco's work. Cedric Price, the Smithsons, Reyner Banham, Archigram, Team 10, the Metabolists, Kevin Lynch: all these individuals and groups acting in the 1960s:

... encountered high modernism obsession with the timelessly perfect architectural object of desire with a vision of architecture as a process, and to devise new conceptual and methodological strategies that would allow buildings and city-planning schemes to evolve with changing user and technological needs through time.<sup>41</sup>

### Metamorphoses

The text on which Felix made his annotations is not a complete version of the full section in Eco's book. To make the text manageable for his students, he reduced the section's sixty pages to forty-five, which became part of the students' reader — leaving out passages that referred to other parts of the book or that were not absolutely crucial to follow Felix's argument. His own version of these excerpts had become a heavily worked extraction. By marking the pages with red, blue, and green ink, Felix appropriated the spaces in and around the margins. At these moments, as Eco argued in 1992 while thinking of the readers of his texts, the text became "a machine conceived for eliciting many interpretations," generating "a dialectic between the intention of the reader and the intention of the text."<sup>42</sup> And as the linguistics theorist Irène Fenoglio noted, the physical markings or "metamorphoses" on a text can illuminate these many interpretations of its reader.<sup>43</sup>

Consequently, a thorough scan of the well-thumbed Eco manuscript can help disclose Felix's intellectual processing of the text. In particular, the annotations reveal Felix's cognitive work as an avid reader. The many-coloured underlinings, crossed-out sections, and numerous marks not only give the text a graphic density, they also serve to structure the text or to highlight specific issues. We can discern four strategies:

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<sup>39</sup> Charles Jencks and George Baird, *Meaning in Architecture* (London: Barrie & Rockliff/Cresset Press, 1969). Yet, Felix was familiar with the early work of Charles Jencks. He purchased *Modern Movements in Architecture* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), in which Jencks had already formulated the necessity of a "conscious architectural language," at least four times for the faculty library.

<sup>40</sup> André Loeckx and Karina Van Herck, "De queeste van de architectuursemiotiek," in Heynen, Loeckx, De Caeter, and Van Herck, *Dat is architectuur*, 807.

<sup>41</sup> Marvin Trachtenberg, *Building-in-Time: From Giotto to Alberti and Modern Oblivion* (Yale: University Press, 2010), xvii.

<sup>42</sup> Umberto Eco, "Reading My Readers," *Modern Language Notes* 107 (1992): 827.

<sup>43</sup> Irène Fenoglio, "Textual Genetics and Manuscript in Word Processing. A new Definition of the Text?: Essay on the avant-texte of a short story by Pascal Quignard," *Belgian Journal of Linguistics* 23, no. 1 (2009): 46.

1. *The graphic amplifier*. The white circles on Figure 7 show how Felix highlighted important passages by using typographical symbols such as arrows, brackets, bold lines, and backslashes. Treating the text as a visual element, Felix in this way built up his own non-verbal communication system in the margins. Gary A. Olson, in a critique of the essayist tradition which takes little to no account of the layout of a page as a key to understanding the writer's thoughts, has described such typographical symbols as forms which produce units of discourse.<sup>44</sup>

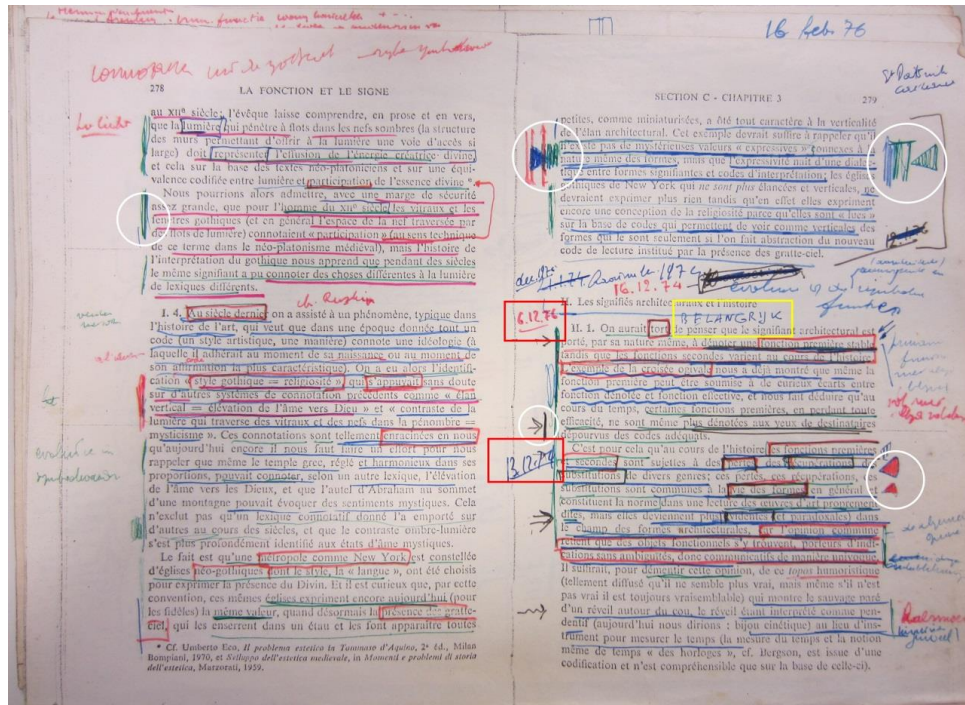


Figure 7: Manuscript *La structure absente*, pages 278–9.  
Courtesy of Family Archives Paul Felix, Ostend. Box U13 – File 1.

2. *Colour*. Striking in this manuscript is the extensive colour-coding of the text. Felix here applied one of the basic principles of educational technology: by highlighting sections in the otherwise greyish monolithic blocks of text, he structured his own study process. These colours improve the readability, break up long segments of text, offer orientation points to the reader, and tie ideas together. Felix, in other words, was a studying reader. As well, the use of colour gives a temporal dimension to the text. When Felix started reading, he took a blue pen to highlight the most important passages and words. Resuming his reading activity after a break, he continued making remarks with a red pen. The colours thus visualize the different moments at which Felix took up the text.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Gary A. Olson, *Rhetoric and Composition as Intellectual Work* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), 197.

<sup>45</sup> Manuscript *La Structure Absente*, 278–9. Paul Felix Archives Ostend, Box U13 – File 1.

3. *Underlining and blotting out.* By underlining, Felix typographically emphasized what he interpreted as the most important aspects of the text. Similarly, he blotted out sections to express his dissent with the text<sup>46</sup> (Figure 8).

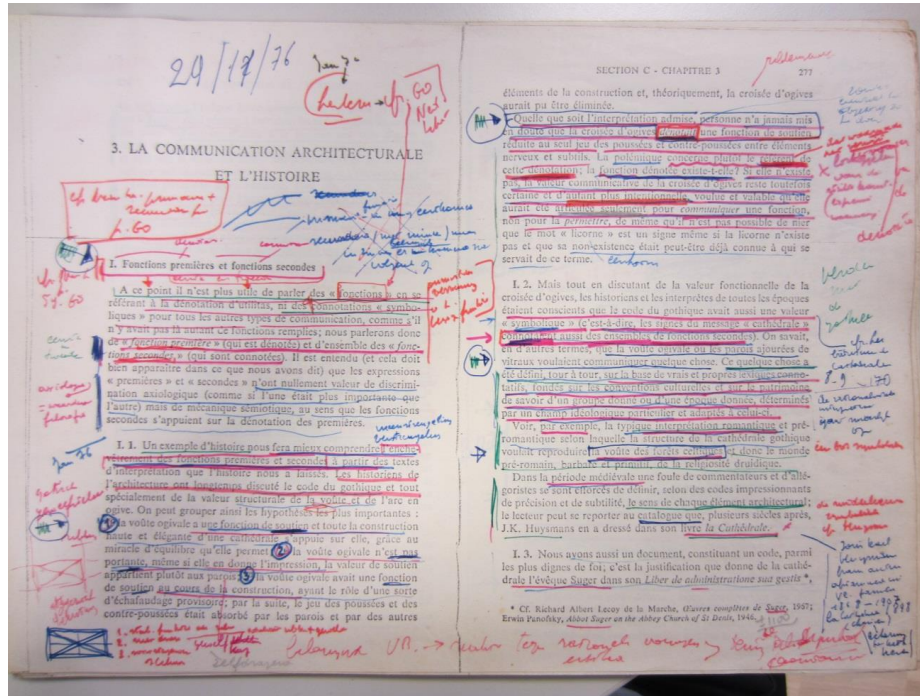


Figure 8: Graphic notations, underlining, and blotting out. Manuscript *La structure absente*, pages 276–7.

Courtesy of Family Archives Paul Felix, Ostend. Box U13 – File 1.

4. *Graphics.* Figure 9 shows Felix’s sketch of Oscar Niemeyer’s National Congress of Brazil at the top of the page. The quick drawing reveals Felix’s background as an architect. Sketching, a fundamental skill needed for visualizing architectural ideas and realizations, played a pivotal role in architectural education. It was not merely an illustration, but a means to understand architecture. Just like the graphic markers in the text, the sketch operates as a visual strategy for interpreting textual information.

Next to graphic markers, a second cluster of “metamorphoses” can be found in Felix’s insertion of notes. Felix used every single blank space on the page to make additional notes in the margin.

1. *The label.* In clearly visible block letters, Felix wrote “IMPORTANT” (in Dutch: *Belangrijk*) under the heading “Les signifiés architecturaux et l’histoire” (indicated by the yellow box on Figure 7). Felix was especially drawn to the parts in the text where Eco had made direct references to architecture; this explains why he familiarized himself with only this specific section in *La structure absente*.

<sup>46</sup> Manuscript *La Structure Absente*, 276. Paul Felix Archives Ostend, Box U13 – File 1.

2. *Translations.* Even though Felix was used to working in a French-speaking environment — the KU Leuven was bilingual until its division in 1968 into French- and Dutch-speaking parts — he translated obvious terms in the margin. <sup>47</sup> More than once, Felix conscientiously looked up the meaning and translation of words. He translated, for instance, the French word “rhétorique” as “eloquent persuasiveness” (In Dutch: *welsprekende overtuigingskracht*). Although he correctly situated the word in the discipline of communication studies, Felix overlooked the deeper understanding of the concept as a broad discursive strategy. For Eco, the persuasive power of rhetoric was foremost non-verbal. Rhetoric, and by extension semiotics, is the “means by which other people can determine behaviour” and therefore is situated in a political realm. <sup>48</sup> Felix, unaware of this embedding of the term, was satisfied with the general translation that he had found in his dictionary.

3. *Repetitions.* Most significant are the many annotations in the margin that are often near-verbatim repetitions of the key idea expressed by Eco: architecture is a communicative act that evolves in time.

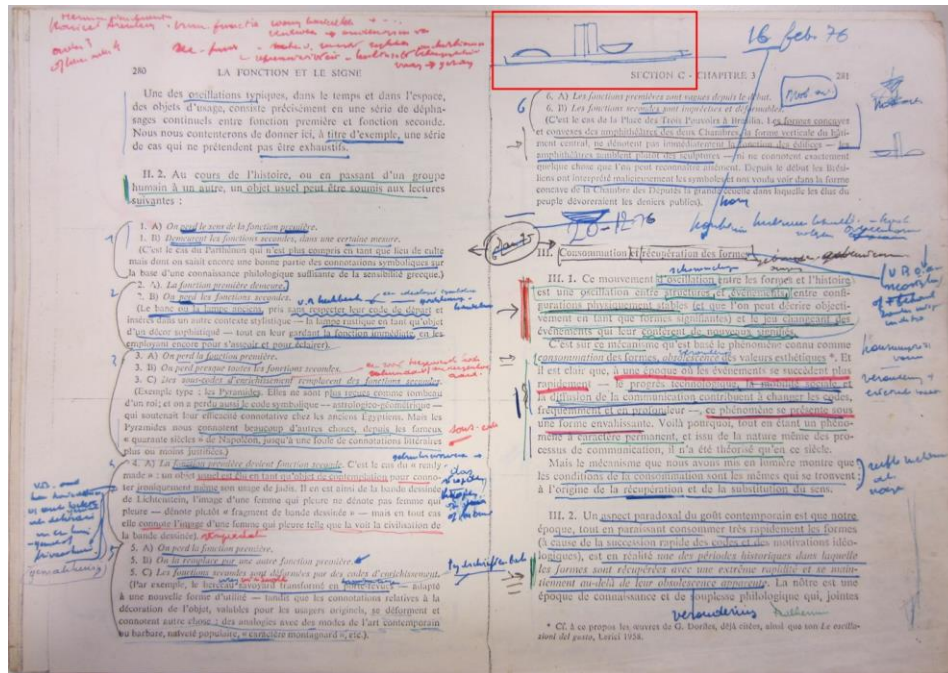


Figure 9: Graphics. Manuscript La structure absente, pages 280–1. Courtesy of Family Archives Paul Felix, Ostend. Box U13 – File 1.

<sup>47</sup> For a quick survey of development of the KU Leuven after the division of the bilingual university in 1968, see Johan Tollebeek and Liesbet Nys, *De stad op de berg : een geschiedenis van de Leuvense universiteit 1968–2005* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2008), 143.

<sup>48</sup> Elisabeth Bruss and Marguerite Waller, “An Interview with Umberto Eco,” *The Massachusetts Review* 19, no. 2 (1978): 409–20; Umberto Eco, “On the Style of the Communist Manifesto,” in *On Literature* (New York: Harcourt, 2012), 23–27.

## Communication in Time

From this last cluster of metamorphoses we learn that Felix put a strong emphasis on the concepts of communication *in time*. Felix agreed with Eco that architecture should be studied for its symbolic or ideological implications (connotation) next to its primary function (denotation). Felix recognized as well the flexibility of the architectural sign which, according to Eco, was dependent on the interpretation of the user living in a certain time period. Essentially, as all culture came down to communication, architecture could be, as Felix noted in the margin, only a “communicative fact.”

To illustrate the basic premise of the multiple ways that signs can be interpreted, Felix happily adopted a well-known illustration used by Eco in the text. Eco wrote of how the population of Southern Italy first used toilet bowls to cleanse their olives.<sup>49</sup> They were thus unaware of the intended function of the toilet and changed its meaning according to their own needs. In the third section of the manuscript, Felix not only affirmed this idea of the context-dependence of signs and their shifting meanings through time, he also thought of new examples. He pulled the topic of the flexibility of the sign to a knotty problem in architectural discourse: the problem of historicism in conservation practices. Whereas Eco gave only an enigmatic account of this issue — “La vie des formes est pleine de ces géants vides de sens, ou au sens trop petit pour un corps si gros . . .” (“The life of the forms is full of meaningless giants, or, as it were, they are too small for a body so big...”) — Felix connected this passage to the specific debate of the neo-styles in architecture. He noted in the margin that conservation theories approached architecture as a décor, and thus turned architecture into a lifeless museum.

This criticism was in line with the writings of the architectural historian Reyner Banham, who believed that such “gutless” and “pompous” historicism was drying up all creativity.<sup>50</sup> Felix thus took on a modernist stance toward the application of historical styles and ornaments in contemporary building practice. According to Felix, the nineteenth century neo-styles concealed an empty core, as historicist ornaments could never express the “original” ideological meanings they referred to. For similar reasons, Felix denounced the “fermette,” a building typology that had gained popularity since the 1960s in Flanders. These “imitation farms” had been put forward by Catholic civil society organizations to promote a Flemish identity.<sup>51</sup> But after Felix read Eco, he considered that ambition as a fallacy: the exterior of the fermette may have referred to local farmhouses of the past, but its interior was tuned to contemporary standards of comfort, and its inhabitants were not usually farmers.

Despite these notes in the margins, Felix did not publicly engage in a deep conversation on the tension between tradition and innovation, even though the relation between architectural form and history was a highly debated issue in the 1970s. Rather than commenting upon such real-world concerns, he preferred to hold on to a somewhat abstract discourse, arguing for an intermediate position in the functionalism debate.<sup>52</sup>

## The Interpretative Lenses of a “Hedgehog”

The study of the different metamorphoses can help to portray more precisely Felix as a reader. Following Isaiah Berlin’s famous division of thinkers and writers into two categories, “hedgehogs,” who view the world through the lens of a single defining idea, and “foxes,” who draw on a wide variety of experiences

<sup>49</sup> Eco himself was indebted to the Italian architectural historian Giovanni Klaus Koenig (1924–1989), who provided this example.

<sup>50</sup> Nigel Whiteley, *Reyner Banham: Historian of the Immediate Future* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 17.

<sup>51</sup> Els De Vos and Hilde Heynen, “Shaping Popular Taste: The Belgian Farmers’ Association and the Fermette in the 1960s and 1970s,” *Home Cultures* 4, no. 3 (2007): 237–59.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with André Loeckx, 24 February 2014.



and for whom the world cannot be boiled down to a central, all-embracing system, Felix must be seen as a “hedgehog.”<sup>53</sup> He was longing for an overarching framework anchored in a centripetal idea. Yet, the question remains: Precisely how did Eco’s main idea that architecture should be interpreted as having a communicative function help Felix in composing his own architectural narrative?

Felix was drawn to this text because Eco discussed at length the interrelation between function and meaning, and thus provided Felix a way out of his struggles with functionalism versus formalism. Eco’s text thus offered an interesting criticism of functionalism — because it does not recognize the importance of cultural codes — as well as formalism — because the language of architecture is not fully autonomous, and hence a pure manipulation of forms as forms is not necessarily meaningful. Felix thus was an architect who started to decode Eco’s text with a preconceived agenda: he used it to criticize the strict interpretation of functionalism and to critically comment on the elitist inclination toward formalism.

Felix’s reading, however, is riddled with a paradox. Being a “hedgehog” longing for a single defining idea, Felix looked at *La structure absente* as a closed entity, isolated from the ongoing intellectual debates. Eco, on the contrary — who moved on many intellectual and artistic levels and who can rightly be portrayed as a “fox” — stressed the multiple interpretations of signs and especially texts.<sup>54</sup> At no point did Felix refer to the semiotic debates of that time. Yet, that context is crucial to understanding Eco’s semiotics of architecture, as it was written to promote a specific type of semiotics. What Eco ultimately wanted to illustrate was that each communicative act is governed by a socially and historically determined subconscious. In fact, his text is primarily a long commentary on Ferdinand De Saussure’s (1857–1913) notion of a global, immanent sign system, which had dominated continental semiotics for decades. Eco joined an ongoing debate in literary circles on the context-dependence of signs. As a disciple of the Anglo-Saxon pragmatic tradition, Eco had always encountered difficulties with the French structuralist view, which advanced a grammatical approach, looking for the internal structures of the linguistic sign.<sup>55</sup>

It can be argued that Eco, as a semiotician, introduced the notion of the “code” to find a middle ground between the understanding of language as a univocal system on the one hand and as an infinite system of meaning on the other.<sup>56</sup> Indebted to Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), Eco thus denounced the idea of an invariable sign and situated the sign within a network of other signs. Eco’s interest in exploring general theories about (popular) culture was what had led him to the “science of signs” at the end of the 1950s. In part, he was responsible for popularizing this rather new methodology and for turning the theory of semiotics toward a reappraisal of Peirce. Therefore, 1968, the year that *La structure absente* was published, was “a fateful year for European culture” as Peter Bondanella, Eco’s intellectual biographer, noted. *La structure absente* not only gave mass-market appeal to a discipline, it also tried to rekindle it.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy’s View of History*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013). Berlin’s essay has been an inspiration to Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, who defined Le Corbusier as a “fox assuming hedgehog disguise.” Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 93.

<sup>54</sup> De Dijn Herman, “Umberto Eco in Leuven,” in *Eco in Fabula: Umberto Eco in the Humanities* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002).

<sup>55</sup> Of course, this was Eco’s own reading of De Saussure. As recent scholarly work has shown that this division between the immanent sign and the context-dependent sign was a rather superficial construct. See, for instance, Emanuele Fadda, “Les abductions de Saussure,” *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 57 (2004): 115–28.

<sup>56</sup> Leach, *Rethinking Architecture*, 173.

<sup>57</sup> Peter Bondanella, *Umberto Eco and the Open Text: Semiotics, Fiction, Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 42. In 1971, by the time Felix got the text in his hands, Eco had just moved to Bologna, where he was awarded Italy’s first Chair in Semiotics. So, while Felix was struggling to get a grasp on the text, Eco systematized his semiotic theories. For an extensive biography of the writer, consult Daniel Salvatore Schiffer, *Het labyrint van de wereld: leven en werk van Umberto Eco* (Amsterdam: Bakker, 1999). Before he came to Bologna, between 1966 and 1971, Eco had developed an affinity for architecture. He then occupied the Chair of Visual Communications at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Florence.

The fact that Felix was unaware of the “scholarly war” Eco was involved in is no surprise. Felix was not skilled as a philosopher and therefore did not have at his disposal the tools to discover in *La structure absente* Eco’s efforts to incorporate analyses of popular culture into broader theoretical frameworks.<sup>58</sup> Felix’s attempts to master the Eco text nevertheless offer a window on the intellectual environment in which his reading unfolded. Felix, at the time he was appropriating Eco’s ideas, was not in contact with other Leuven scholars working on Eco. At the Higher Institute of Philosophy (HIW), situated in the same university, the interest in Eco’s work on medieval aesthetics had grown from the mid-1950s onward.<sup>59</sup> Around 1970, his semiotic work was thoroughly studied by Herman Parret (b. 1938) and Sam IJsseling (b. 1932).<sup>60</sup> Neither professor, however, remembered Felix attending their courses or lectures. Because Felix never frequented these circles, the remarkably early reception of Eco in Leuven took place without his knowledge. Since Felix became ill in 1978 and passed away in 1981, he was not present when the then-renowned Eco was celebrated in Leuven for his 1981 novel *The Name of the Rose*,<sup>61</sup> nor did he see Eco’s first honorary doctorate awarded by the KU Leuven three years later.<sup>62</sup>

The Eco text consequently must have reached him in another way. Semiotics possibly came to Felix through a 1970 semiotic analysis on architecture published in the Catholic periodical *Streven* by his colleague Geert Bekaert, at that time still a member of the Jesuit order.<sup>63</sup> In this text, Bekaert examined architecture as a mass medium and thus highlighted its communicative potential, by referring to Eco’s *La structure absente*. Similar to Felix’s criticism, Bekaert’s article is interlaced with comments on the narrow interpretation of form and function:

The reason why the understanding of architecture as a mass medium not came earlier in mind can be found in the art historical narrowing down of architecture to an aesthetical object, which can only be interpreted from within an autonomous, closed frame of reference.<sup>64</sup>

Because of the strong ties between the two colleagues, Bekaert may well have shown Felix semiotics as a meaningful answer to the biased form–function issue.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> For more information on the fierce opposition the emerging discipline of semiotics faced, see E. Walters, “Ist die Semiotik überhaupt eine Wissenschaft? Eine wissenschaftstheoretische Anmerkung,” *Semiosis* 61/62 (1991): 5–14.

<sup>59</sup> Eco was already known for his work on medieval aesthetics and phenomenology at the HIW. His interchanges on medieval aesthetics with the Franciscan founder of the Husserl-archives (located at the HIW), Herman Leo Van Breda, established the Eco tradition at the institute. Correspondence with Herman Roelants, 10 February 2014.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Herman Parret, 05 February 2014.

<sup>61</sup> This book would be the centre of attention at the well-attended study days of the Philosophic Circle of the KU Leuven in 1984. Interview with Franco Musarra 17 January 2014. Struycker Boudier has recorded that the attendance during these study days had never been as high as for Eco’s lecture “The Perfect Language.” Struycker Boudier, *De filosofie van Leuven, Wijsgerig leven in Nederland en België 1880–1980* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989), VI: 21.

<sup>62</sup> In 1985, Eco was recognized for his semiotic work and received his first honorary doctorate. Franco Musarra, a friend who had recommended him as a candidate for the honorary doctorate, lauded Eco’s semiotic work.

<sup>63</sup> In 1946, Bekaert entered into the Jesuit order where he was educated in classical philology, art history, theology, and philosophy. He left the order in 1972.

<sup>64</sup> Bekaert and De Meyer, *Paul Felix*, 432.

<sup>65</sup> At that time, Bekaert still had hope for the potential of ideology, which he interpreted as a positive force able to convey meaning and accentuate a historical continuity. Ten years later, he would however contradict this logic and announce the “sublime uselessness” of architecture. Christophe Van Gerrewey and Geert Bekaert, *Rooted in the Real: Writings on Architecture by Geert Bekaert* (Ghent: Ghent University, 2011).

While Felix saw semiotics as a welcome infusion to treat the overall anaemia in the architectural discourse, his interest stemmed not only from a preoccupation with theoretical issues. Felix also read Eco through a modern Catholic lens, one that was focused on openness and dialogue with the outside world. By the end of the 1960s, the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) gradually permeated the local religious communities, and Felix, as a Catholic intellectual, certainly was aware of the task of “Aggiornamento,” bringing the Church up to date in a rapid changing world. This had already been his vocation during the interwar period, as he at that time was strongly influenced by Albert Dondeyne’s (1901–1985) appeal for “in-der-Welt-sein” or the ability of the “modern Catholic” to connect with the world through interpersonal dialogue.<sup>66</sup>

Based in a communal student home in the Jan Stasstraat 2 in Leuven, Felix had worked for the periodical *Universitas* — the voice of the Catholic Action and of which the priest-professor Dondeyne was then the main editor.<sup>67</sup> Dondeyne, who was a mentor to many students, sought, as Dries Bosschaert wrote, “to bring about the full Christian humanist formation of its students.”<sup>68</sup> In the mid-twentieth century, this attention to human beings in their socio-historical context led to a theological renewal embracing anthropology, history, and sociology at the Theology Faculty at the KU Leuven and throughout Europe. Felix later brought this theological project to bear on his architectural and pedagogical practice.<sup>69</sup>

By delving into popular theological studies, such as those of the Swiss Hans Küng (b. 1928), Felix was ardently seeking answers on how to make his actions in society meaningful.<sup>70</sup> As Felix was convinced that spiritual experience could not be disengaged from practical action in society, he distanced himself from the conception of the autonomous architectural creation. Eco’s semiotics thus offered a confirmation of his existing ideas *and* a methodological approach to frame these multiple processes of signification in society in a single central vision. Driven by an innate idea of Catholic solidarity, and by his attentive, albeit unsystematic readings, Felix thus developed a theoretical stance that believed in the potential of functionalism only as it contributed to the development of a more humane environment.

Taking into account Felix’s intellectual profile as a “hedgehog,” his academic environment, and his Catholic background, semiotics clearly did not appear in his work out of the blue. In addition, his reading influenced his own architectural practice.<sup>71</sup> Felix’s attitude as an architect had changed remarkably by the end of the 1960s. His clearly articulated designs from the 1950s and 1960s, which had led to free-standing modernist concrete structures such as the training centre in Destelheide (1967) (Figures 10 and 11), became outdated. He now faulted these buildings as too sterile. Instead, from the 1970s onward, Felix sought to

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<sup>66</sup> The idea of “in-der-Welt-sein” was based on both Thomist and phenomenological principles. In his book *Geloof en Wereld* (Antwerp: Patmos, 1961), Albert Dondeyne elaborated on the communicative aspects needed to fulfil this societal mission. . This philosophy professor at the KU Leuven influenced a generation of Catholic students with his call for societal engagement. Reacting to the much-proclaimed distance between faith and reason, Dondeyne pushed towards an integrated vision of religious life by following the philosophical concept of personalism. Bekaert and De Meyer, *Paul Felix*, 15; Gabriël Buyse et al, *In dienst van geloof en wereld: A. Dondeyne 1901–1985* (Leuven: Acco, 1985); Luk Sanders, Carl Devos, and Patrick Stouthuysen, *Politieke ideologieën in Vlaanderen: liberalisme, socialisme, christendemocratie, Vlaams-nationalisme, ecologisme* (Sint-Niklaas: Standaard Uitgeverij, 2008), 263.

<sup>67</sup> See Hugo Roeffaers’ contribution on the *Universitas* climate: “Streven, Universitas en professor Albert Dondeyne. Een terugblik,” *Streven*, April (2005).

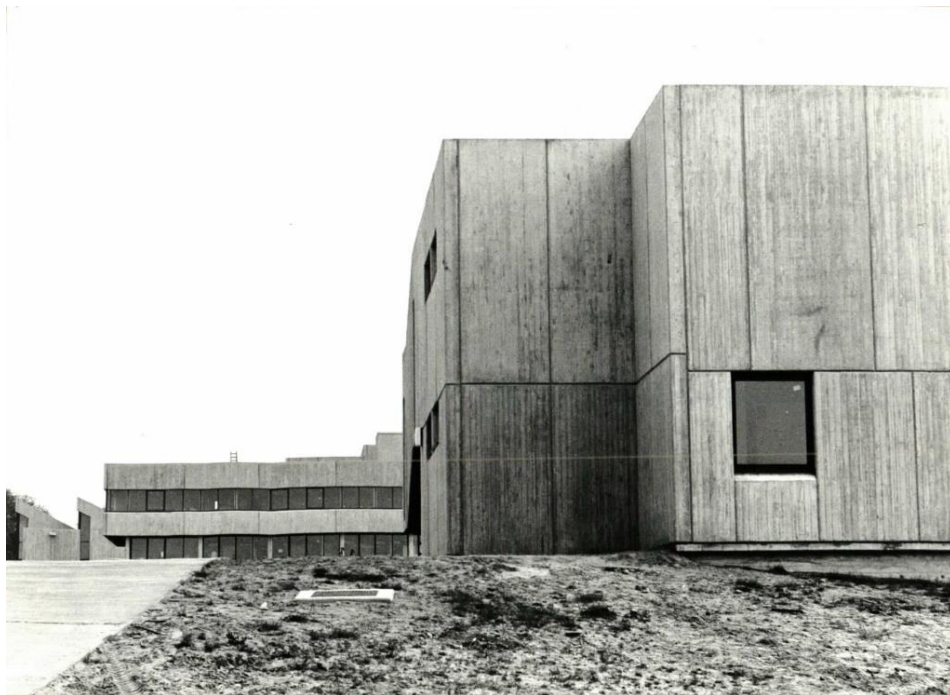
<sup>68</sup> Dries Bosschaert, “A House with Many Mansions: The Anthropological Turn in Louvain Theology (1942–1962),” *Church History and Religious Culture* 95 (2015): 9.

<sup>69</sup> The term *aggiornamento* was coined by Pope John XXIII (1958–1963), who pleaded for a modernization of the Church. This goal was converted into policy during the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965).

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Marc Felix, 03 April 2014.

<sup>71</sup> See notes from 1970 to 1973 in Paul Felix Archives, Box U10. Semiotics is also mentioned in his synopsis of the course “Architectural Theory” in 1977. Paul Felix Archives Ostend, Box U12 – File 1. Different semiotic texts are kept in Box U12 – File 11 and in Box U13 – File 1 and File 3.

charge architecture with meaning. Illustrative of this is his extension to the administrative centre in Ostend (1971–1973) (Figure 12). As a reaction to the neglect of human scale and quality of life in his early modernist projects, Felix decided to break open the façade and implement balustrades connoting an air of domesticity. In this way, toward the end of his life, he tried to readjust architecture's contact with the human psyche and also with the ideas he himself had promulgated in the classroom.



Figures 10 and 11: Structure of the training centre in Destelheide. 1967.  
Courtesy of Family Archives Paul Felix, Ostend.



Figure 12: Left: Paul Felix, administrative centre, Ostend. 1971–1973. Right: Paul Felix, school building, Ostend. 1978. Courtesy of Family Archives Paul Felix, Ostend.

## “Performing” Text in the Classroom

### A Tool for Schooling

The study of the “micrologics” at work within the heavily annotated extract from *La structure absente* not only can help to characterize Felix as reader, it also provides access to the — now silenced — classroom where he “performed” the manuscript. As an educator, Felix attributed a central role to this text in his courses on architectural theory.<sup>72</sup> Before he was even ready to introduce Eco to his students, he studied each paragraph thoroughly. To build his confidence on the subject, Felix — as we showed above — repeated, translated, and reformulated the key concepts in the margin. Hence, the manuscript became primarily a practice book for himself.

Once in the classroom, Felix roughly followed the textual structure set out by Eco, but he never delved deeply into it. Rather, he produced a synthesis of the text based on a selection of paragraphs. Standing in front of his students, he read the selected paragraphs of the manuscript aloud one by one. The manuscript thus functioned as a handout for his students, who could follow his argument word by word. In addition, the Eco manuscript functioned as a logbook of his educational practice. After a class, for example, Felix would note the date next to the text. Additional notes such as “many students absent”<sup>73</sup> or “4<sup>th</sup> year,”<sup>74</sup>

<sup>72</sup> By the mid-1970s, he had composed a course syllabus in which he recorded the major readings for that year. This reading list included a Peter Eisenman’s review of Charles Jencks and Georges Baird’s *Meaning in Architecture* in *Architectural Forum* (July/August 1970): 88, 90; Françoise Choay, “Semiologie et urbanisme,” *L’architecture d’aujourd’hui* 132 (1967) ; C. A. Van Peursen and C.P. Bertels, *Informatie, een interdisciplinaire studie* (Houten: Het Spectrum, 1968) . Paul Felix Archives Ostend, Box U12 – File 1.

<sup>73</sup> Manuscript *La Structure Absente*, 274–5. Paul Felix Archives Ostend, Box U13 – File 1.

<sup>74</sup> Manuscript *La Structure Absente*, 304–5. Paul Felix Archives Ostend, Box U13 – File 1.

indicate he used this manuscript for his upper-level classes from about 1972 till 1977. Felix thus repeated this classic performance at set times over a couple of years.

The Eco manuscript then turned into a record of operational data, revealing that teaching architectural theory implied a sort of navigation. Like a ship's captain who notes in his logbook weather conditions, times of routine events and significant incidents, and what ports were docked at and when, Felix used the margins of the Eco text as a map for his pedagogical expedition. After diligently studying and taking in the knowledge transmitted by Eco, Felix similarly and authoritatively disseminated that same material. As he did so, the Eco manuscript became a pedagogical tool, stamped by a belief in a directly transferable knowledge and structured around the all-subsuming idea of architecture as a communicative act. But what was the larger context, the "sea" in which Felix's pedagogical expedition took place?

In the classroom, the spoken ideas were not fully embraced by the younger generation of students. Clearly, a generational gap lay between the students and their teacher. Felix, who taught during a latency period between normative and reform pedagogy, based his ex-cathedra education on the principles of obedience, discipline, and order. This pedagogical approach inevitably clashed with the "no frustration" principle advocated by non-religious reform pedagogues and supported by a student generation inspired by this wave of emancipation.<sup>75</sup> Starting from the mid-1960s, the students raised their voices, demanding a higher level of involvement, both in the organization of education and in architectural practice. In an evaluation of the educational program at the architectural department of 1972, Felix's students complained about the closed character of his discourse and their inability to speak out in his courses.<sup>76</sup> As their teacher read the text out loud and down to the letter, he allowed no room for discussion. Instead of the theoretical subject matter, the students desired group discussions and seminars in which "concrete societal problems" could be discussed.

These opposing viewpoints clearly could not be brought closer together. Felix's broad vision of architecture, based on the idea of open communication, remained abstract subject matter to his students. While Felix was a man of words, his students protested against the mechanical nature of the course and favoured direct, oppositional action over abstract thought. Felix's students, for instance, announced an exodus from their suburban campus toward the town centre of Leuven. They believed that exposure to the heterogeneous impulses of the city would be more relevant for practice than the digestion of abstract ideas in the classroom:

Architects are not mere brewers of ideas, but as well builders of space and volumes. . . . We therefore propose to establish a creative studio in the city. We want to go outside of the Arenberg castle [where the department of architecture was situated], as disorder is not tolerated here.<sup>77</sup>

While the students, and some of his colleagues, turned toward the streets, the everyday, and the vernacular to expand on the notion of form, sometimes in the explicit hope of generating a phenomenological

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<sup>75</sup> Marc Depaepe, *De pedagogisering achterna: aanzet tot een genealogie van de pedagogische mentaliteit in de voorbije 250 jaar* (Leuven: Acco, 2000), 203. As neo-Marxist ideologies and the critical theory of the Frankfurter Schule furthermore found their way to his generation of students through pamphlets and magazines, the demand for new educational models that would overthrow the traditional power structures gained a firm foothold.

<sup>76</sup> The University Archives of KU Leuven, for instance, have a report from the 1970s of students complaining about Felix's detached way of teaching. University Archives KU Leuven, Paul Felix. Box 3 – File 5, Folder 2.

<sup>77</sup> Letter to be found in University Archives KU Leuven, Paul Felix Archives, Box 4 – File 2. This was also confirmed by Paul Felix's son, Marc, who studied at the KU Leuven. Interview with Marc Felix, 03 April 2014.

concreteness or political activism, Felix stayed behind his text in the classroom.<sup>78</sup> Seemingly, neither the students nor their teacher could find a way to reconcile this direct action with the theoretical character of the course. Yet, the message itself was not so much deemed irrelevant as was the way that message was delivered in the classroom. Only Felix's style of teaching was outdated, not the concrete ideas he tried to bring to the foreground. Action reports and student letters kept in Felix's archives indicate that the formalist mindset, which had long dominated the educational program of the architectural department in Leuven, was gradually being contested and replaced by alternatives. The theoretical foundations of Felix's courses thus did not differ greatly from the demands of the younger student generation for a new, radical architecture and education.

In these years Leuven was not at the forefront of those schools that experimented with "radical pedagogies."<sup>79</sup> Clearly, however, many of the forces that revolutionized architectural education elsewhere were present in this school too: the desire to make architecture socially relevant, the criticism of the anti-urban character of modernism, the quest for meaning in architecture, the call for more participation of users and residents. If the theoretical framework implemented by Felix and his colleagues in Leuven could hardly be called "radical," it nevertheless was an honest attempt to provide an architectural education that was more comprehensive, more design-based, and more reflective than before.

## Conclusion

Many authors noted an impasse in Belgian architectural culture in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>80</sup> Apart from two promoters of a fledgling postmodern architecture — the architect Lucien Kroll (b. 1927),<sup>81</sup> who designed through participative processes, and the architect of ornaments and symmetry Charles Vandenhove (b. 1927) — Belgian architecture at that time received little attention internationally.<sup>82</sup> In a 1963 text about building practices in Belgium, the architect and poet Albert Bontridder noted that this lack of international appeal coincided with a theoretical vacuum.<sup>83</sup> And indeed, few architects active during this period felt the urge to advance theoretical statements or to explain their own work through texts.

Paul Felix is part of this so-called "silent generation." Operating in an interregnum period between modernism and postmodernism, he is a rather typical example of a post-war intellectual who turned to architectural theory as a way to come to terms with the modernist legacy. In his search for "meaning" in

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<sup>78</sup> For example, his colleague Herman Neuckermans (b. 1943), who had held workshops on design methods and theory since 1967, sent his students away from the Faculty of Engineering in the remote suburb of Heverlee to make life sketches in the city centre of Leuven. As well, the founder of the Postgraduate Centre for Human Settlements Jan Delrue (b. 1939) promoted the vernacular and inhabitant participation by introducing John Habraken's (b. 1928) methods of designing and building adaptable housing. For a history of Human Settlements, see Viviana d'Auria, Bruno De Meulder, and Kelly Shannon, *Placing and (Re)Locating Human Settlements: Projects, Events and Texts (1945–2010)* (Leuven: KU Leuven OSA, 2010).

<sup>79</sup> Beatriz Colomina et al., "Radical Pedagogies," *The Architectural Review* 232, no. 1388 (2012): 78–82.

<sup>80</sup> Bekaert and Strauven, *Bouwen in België*; Anne van Loo, Marc Dubois, and Natascha Langerman, *Repertorium van de architectuur in België: van 1830 tot heden* (Antwerp: Mercatorfonds, 2003); Christophe Van Gerrewey, "40 jaar architectuurcultuur in België (en A+)," *A+*, no. 242 (July 2013): 49–54.

<sup>81</sup> In the chapter "Post-Modern Architecture" Charles Jencks mentioned the work of Kroll next to the work of Antonio Gaudi. Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (London: Rizzoli, 1977), 95. For Kroll, this was a springboard to international success.

<sup>82</sup> Reference cited in the unpublished master's thesis of Manu Mermans, "Vlaamse architectuur op de scharnierlijn tussen 20ste en 21ste eeuw" (University of Ghent, Faculteit Ingenieurswetenschappen en Architectuur, 2015).

<sup>83</sup> Albert Bontridder, *Dialogo tussen licht en stilte. De hedendaagse bouwkunst in België* (Antwerp: Helios, 1963). See also Joost Meuwissen, "Bouwen in België", *A+* 242, "Architectuur in België" (2013): 20.

architecture, Felix re-interpreted the form–function paradigm that had dominated modernist discourse. He turned to semiotics as a study of codes relating directly to architecture and thus providing a possible way out of the overall impasse in the architecture discipline. Anthony Vidler observed this tendency internationally in *Troubles in Theory* (2011–2012), a series of issues of the journal *Architectural Review*, in which he summarized the range of expressions of architectural theory after 1945:

This generation was in search of new principles for architecture itself. In the shadow of the modern masters, critical of the social and urban effects of International Style Modernism, yet reluctant to abandon a commitment to modern architecture, they looked in different ways for continuity through more or less radical revision.<sup>84</sup>

Doubtless, Felix shared these questions and expectations with many of his contemporaries, who together constituted the audience that digested the emerging production of architectural theory books. They were actively seeking to legitimize their discipline through theory and they did so not from the perspective of a producer, but of a reader.<sup>85</sup>

### **A Prehistory of the Theoretical Turn**

The value of studying these day-to-day activities of intellectual work is twofold. First, these activities arguably shed light on a “prehistory” of the discipline of architecture’s theoretical turn, a turn that would persevere at the KU Leuven architecture department after Felix’s death.

By introducing semiotics in the classroom, Felix did not have a direct, measurable impact on his students. Yet, his theoretical endeavour did help to set in motion architecture’s “theoretical turn” of the 1970s and 1980s at the KU Leuven. Although the goal of this article is not to see Felix as an ultimate precursor or a founding father of a semiotic tradition at the institute, he played a significant role in putting theory on the curriculum. Felix’s authentic questioning of his own architectural beliefs and his continual search for answers to theoretical questions not only provided a foundation for both his own architectural practice and a pedagogical program, but also engendered interaction with a broad intellectual field.

Felix’s former colleagues remember him for broadening the perspectives of the students by introducing humanities and social sciences into the curriculum of the engineer-architects educated at Leuven.<sup>86</sup> He had made serious efforts, moreover, to make research on architectural theory a considerable part of the curriculum. As an unexpected illness in 1978, at the age of 56, prevented Felix’s further teaching, the younger faculty members were obliged to take over the courses that he had developed. This event coincided with a change in university policy that required new professors to have a PhD (Felix himself never acquired one).<sup>87</sup> Hence the department decided to encourage several young teachers to devote

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<sup>84</sup> Anthony Vidler, “Troubles In Theory Part I: The State Of The Art 1945–2000,” *The Architectural Review* (21 september 2011).

<sup>85</sup> Some of these figures are studied in the PhD project “The Formation of Architectural Theory in Flanders, 1965–1995”, which is funded by the Research Foundation - Flanders (FWO).

<sup>86</sup> Interview with André Loeckx, 24 February 2014. Correspondence with Hilde Heynen.

<sup>87</sup> It is also around this time that doctoral programs in architectural history and theory started to gain momentum internationally. MIT’s *History, Theory and Criticism* program started in 1975; at UCL’s Bartlett School of Architecture, a Master of Architectural History program was begun in 1981; and at the KU Leuven some 20 PhD degrees in this field were granted between 1980 and 1990. See, for instance, Ockman, *Architecture School*; Ole Fischer, “Institutionalized Critique? — On the (Re)Birth of Architectural Theory after Modernism: ETH and MIT,” lecture at the conference “Theory’s History: Challenges in the Historiography of Architectural Knowledge 196X–199X,” Brussels, 2017).



themselves to doctoral research. André Loeckx went on to take over the chair of Paul Felix in 1982, and further developed the courses of architectural theory – with a special focus on semiotics – along the lines set out by his predecessor (albeit in a more systematic way).<sup>88</sup> Both Jan Schreurs and Piet Stevens also continued to teach theory to future engineer-architects, keeping Felix’s legacy alive and further developing research on architectural semiotics.<sup>89</sup> In that sense, Paul Felix, while not publishing anything that we now would recognize as “architectural theory,” clearly was nevertheless an important figure for the emergence of theory as a discipline in its own right.

### A Micro-history of Modernism

Second, the focus on the day-to-day activities and processes of intellectual activity in a local Flemish context, posed a challenge to the meta-narratives of the modern movement.

Until the 1970s, the historiography of architectural modernism was largely written by authors closely involved with its protagonists. Not surprisingly, the accounts of that generation have been revised in recent decades, with a large upsurge of revisions of architectural modernism. Many historians and theoreticians questioned the implied Hegelian concept of history and the selective geographical scope with its persistent ethnocentrism, and pointed attention to the formative power of the vernacular, gender, and political debates. This revising work, mainly fuelled by poststructuralist and critical paradigms, gave rise to a parade of adjectives, all debunking modernism’s teleological unity: “another” modernism,<sup>90</sup> “anxious” modernism,<sup>91</sup> “off-modernism,”<sup>92</sup> and “second” modernism.<sup>93</sup> It unpacked the constitutive role of representations and historiographical agenda’s by talking about “mediating” modernism<sup>94</sup> or “inventing”

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<sup>88</sup> Interview with André Loeckx, 24 February 2014. In 1982, André Loeckx received his PhD for a dissertation entitled *Model and Metaphor. Starting Points for a Semantic-Praxiological Approach of Building and Dwelling*. This research was supervised by professors Herman Neuckermans (b. 1943) and Renaat Devisch (b. 1944). Herman Neuckermans graduated as an engineer-architect in 1967 from the University of Leuven, where he also obtained his PhD on Design Methods and Computers in Architecture in 1976. As a professor at the department of Architecture since 1981, he taught design methods and theory including CAAD, architectural design studio and construction. Renaat Devisch is an anthropologist associated with the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Leuven.

<sup>89</sup> Piet Stevens conducted research on the different currents in architectural semiotics. Also under the supervision of Herman Neuckermans, he started the research project *Architectural Semiotics, Evaluation and Research of the Basic Principles*. On the 10 July 1980, he delivered a lecture centered on Eco: “Semiotic Contribution to an Architectural Theory: Eco’s Componential Analysis of the Architectural Sign.” A year later, he further reflected on the status of architectural semiotics, giving a speech together with the architectural theoretician Françoise Choay (b. 1925) in *Architectural Semiology, Critical Balance and Further Perspectives*. WAGT Archives Hilde Heynen, File 1 – Folder 3. Jan Schreurs, who has been an associate professor at the KU Leuven Department of Architecture since 1991, developed a strong interest in typo-morphological studies, thereby questioning the role of metaphors, density, typology, and design concepts for public spaces and buildings. In his doctoral research finished in 1986, *Design and Metaphor: Contributions to an Architectural Poetics*, he analysed the potential of semiotics for the design practice. WAGT Archives Hilde Heynen, File 1 – Folder 3.

<sup>90</sup> Hoai Anh Tran, *Another Modernism?: Form, Content and Meaning of the New Housing Architecture of Hanoi* (Lund: Department of Architecture and Development Studies, 1999).

<sup>91</sup> Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Réjean Legault, *Anxious Modernisms: Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Culture* (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture/MIT Press, 2000).

<sup>92</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

<sup>93</sup> Arindam Dutta, *A Second Modernism: MIT, Architecture, and the “Techno-Social” Moment* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).

<sup>94</sup> Andrew Higgot, *Mediating Modernism: Architectural Cultures in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2007).

modernism.<sup>95</sup> In all these revisions, modernism's different layers of thought were not just analysed as they smoothly intersected. They were foremost seen as tectonic plates with a high potential for forceful collision. "Genealogy" and "entanglement" became cherished key terms.<sup>96</sup>

As far as architectural modernism is concerned, the account of its legacy still is — despite all efforts to exploit its hidden fissures, deep-seated proclivities, and straddling divides — severely filtered. Historical narratives often focus mainly on intellectual personae from the past who wrote and followed the rules of discourse, instead of on those who struggled and stammered but nevertheless dealt with theory. Clear-cut ideas, intellectual historians warned, have always been favoured over timely and contingent efforts of theoretical production.<sup>97</sup> Recently, some efforts have been made to untangle the rhetoric of modernism by looking at "minor sources" or at avant-textes. One such example is Tim Benton's recent focus on Le Corbusier as a lecturer.<sup>98</sup> As a palaeographer, Spyros Papapetros deciphered a note scribbled in the margin of a typescript made by the architectural historian Sigfried Giedion, another pioneer of the modern movement, to grasp his ideas on the beginning and origins of history.<sup>99</sup> Andrew Steen worked with the marginalia that Charles Jencks inserted in a text, and the work of Walter Benjamin also has been subjected to such genetic editing.<sup>100</sup> This article is intended to contribute to this growing body of work, and moreover focused on a less canonical figure in the history of modernism, whose work nevertheless revealed much about the impact of modernist thought and practice, and about the intellectual difficulties its practitioners encountered. It thus follows the suggestion of sociologist Neil McLaughlin, who, in his article "How to Become a Forgotten Intellectual," diagnosed a myopia in revisionist studies:

With few exceptions, scholars have largely ignored detailed examination of the sociological dynamics involved in the exclusion of once prominent intellectuals. In addition, the literature generally does not attempt to build cumulative theory and research by drawing together the insights and findings in the literature on both canonized and excluded thinkers and ideas.<sup>101</sup>

A thorough consideration of undisclosed "minor sources" collected by a "minor" figure certainly helps to dismantle an all-too-tight focus on canonical texts. This article reinforces the growing consensus that the constitution and dissemination of post-war architectural theory not only depended on established printed volumes. It demonstrates that these avant-textes are not additional pieces of a mosaic which added colour to Felix's life, but rather must be considered as crucial elements that form the theoretical foundations of his way of thinking.

Moreover, these avant-textes revealed a long intellectual trajectory and offered a way to plumb the depths of a pedagogic practice. Working with minor sources also necessitates relating the history of ideas

<sup>95</sup> Anthony Vidler, *Histories of the Immediate Present: Inventing Architectural Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).

<sup>96</sup> Alina Payne, *From Ornament to Object: Genealogies of Architectural Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012). Duanfang Lu, *Third World Modernism: Architecture, Development and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>97</sup> Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution* (Duke University Press, 1991), 19. Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn, *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6.

<sup>98</sup> Tim Benton, *The Rhetoric of Modernism: Le Corbusier as a Lecturer* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2009).

<sup>99</sup> Spyros Papapetros, "Beginnings or Origins — Beginnings and Endings: Sigfried Giedion's (Pre)Historiography," *Journal of Architectural Education* 65, no. 2 (March 2012): 9–12.

<sup>100</sup> A. Steen, "Operation Marginalia: Translations of Semiology and Architecture," trans. and ed. Christoph Schnoor, *Proceedings of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand*: 31, vol. 31 (2014): 345–54; Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin's Archive: Images, Texts, Signs*, ed. Ursula Marx et al. (London: Verso, 2007).

<sup>101</sup> Neil McLaughlin, "How to Become a Forgotten Intellectual: Intellectual Movement and the Rise and Fall of Erich Fromm," *Sociological Forum* 13, no. 2 (1998): 215–46.

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to personal, generational, cultural, and institutional contexts. Developing such full biography or a “polygraphical historiography,” as Jorge Otero-Pailos called it in his 2010 book *Architecture’s Historical Turn*, prevents the researcher from falling into “the monographic trap.” Historiographic efforts, so he argued, have too long focused on the discourse conducted by a self-selected group of people operating within renowned schools, and therewith constituted a seemingly autonomous body of knowledge.<sup>102</sup> Yet, theory formation always is a multifarious process, constantly subject to change. This analysis of Felix’s work not only proves this statement, it also offers a path to make sense of it.

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<sup>102</sup> This method was pinpointed by Jorge Otero Pailos as a “polygraphic historiography” in *Architecture’s Historical Turn* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 8. Sarah Williams Goldhagen worked on the notion of the discourse of modernism in “Something to Talk About: Modernism, Discourse, Style,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 64, no. 2 (2005): 144–67.