

“If you want to soar, to see the world from above in its entirety without losing the earthly sensations of walking through mud, then become an architect. Practice research, track down the imaginary. Venture into theory, remain awake in your dreams, leave ‘two and two make four’ to others, choose chaos instead.

Work within illusion.

You will no doubt wander in this realm for many long years; you will exhaust yourself trying to move stubborn mountains; you will often doubt your mental health. But at the end of this wandering you will find your dwelling, your mythical castle, and through the gaping doorway you will enter architecture standing upright: that place inaccessible to ordinary mortals.

Others possess power, money, pleasure, glory, happiness. You, you have nothing, but you stand at the source of liberation in the ways of living and thinking. You will be mobile; you will shift what cannot be moved; you will cross the Mediterranean; you will topple every citadel; you will render continuous the fractured surface of the planet, then fracture it again at will; you will practice reversal; you will love the fragment far more than the whole; you will be an architect... Good luck.”

Claude Parent, excerpt from his essay *“Errer dans l’Illusion”*.

The exhibition brings together eight major original drawings by Claude Parent, produced between 1988 and 2011.

Claude Parent (1923–2016) stands as one of the most influential architects and theorists of the second half of the twentieth century. His work is marked by a decisive break with modernist orthogonality and by the elaboration of the concept of the Oblique, developed in collaboration with Paul Virilio between 1963 and 1968 through the journal *Architecture Principe*. Over the course of his career, Parent consistently sought to translate this theoretical framework into built form, pursuing an architecture grounded in movement, inclination, and spatial instability.

The significance of his thinking has been widely acknowledged by subsequent generations of architects, including Jean Nouvel, Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, Wolf D. Prix, and Rem Koolhaas, all of whom have recognized the formative impact of his work on contemporary architectural discourse.

Within Parent’s practice, drawing occupies an autonomous and fundamental position. The works assembled here testify not only to their exceptional graphic rigor but also to the full fictional dimension of the Oblique. Fiction is understood here not as a departure from reality, but as an operative mode that enables dissociations, reconfigurations, and new articulations of space, time, and relational structures. In this sense, fiction functions as a critical instrument for rethinking the real, rather than negating it.

The exhibition dossier brings together biographical reference points alongside a selection of texts by Claude Parent published in his manifesto journal *Architecture Principe* between 1963 and 1968. Taken together, these writings and drawings articulate a profoundly political conception of architecture, in which architectural fiction, grounded in the logic of the slope, seeks to counter inertia and alienation by restoring movement as a fundamental condition of lived experience.



THE WAVES

Waves are isolated elements.

Repeated, they determine a rhythm of endless unfolding. They drift. Brought closer together, associated, they gather into a petrified movement of ascent; they generate waves that develop from one to another in jerks.

Each wave assails its complementary element in a curved ascent, without ever reaching it. Between them lies the oblique void, the "fault," which binds the two tilted cliffs.

There, fields of forces are woven, of controlled weightlessness. Humans move naturally along the curved surface and dive beneath the overhang of the cantilever. In the fault, suspended, weightless, they move at will. Thus, from fault to fault, from void to void, humans levitate.

Claude PARENT, in Architecture Principe 2

PULSION

The oblique function authorizes movement. Architecture becomes the support of displacement; movement is freed from the constraint of precise pathways: the choice of itinerary is free. There is no longer channeling but crossing, no longer constraint but conquest; the human flow can beat to its own rhythm, supported by spatial structure yet independent of the formal organization of its support. Its pulsions belong to the everyday or to the seasons and, at will, cover and uncover architecture. Petrified desert, or crowd that overwhelms and erases; solitary promenade in anecdotal switchbacks; clustered groups clinging on; brake-less descents in groups; staggered fatigue of ascents; all the faces of human isolation and gathering are offered — even processions will no longer find a pre-traced path there. An incessant flow, beating against architecture with its unpredictable backwash, yet sustained, engaged, perhaps in search of a new discipline.

Claude PARENT, in Architecture Principe 5



FLUIDITY

The oblique is the support of spatial continuity.

It is continuity itself. Its development allows for partitioning without ever opposing movement. As a structural support, the oblique is therefore associated with all movements of fluids generated by humans or by nature.

With respect to the element of water, the inclined site offers the maximum receiving surface, eliminating the unusable vertical surface and developing a contact surface greater than that of the site's horizontal projection.

The oblique function communicates to water its potentiality: capture, storage, channeling, enabling humans to create within "sites" a fusion of function and spectacle of the liquid element without mechanical intervention.

With respect to the element of air, the inclined site integrates itself. Refusing to create general turbulence, as does tall vertical architecture, it nevertheless establishes, within the continuity of the ascending dynamics of wind, a resistance, a permanent friction that wears down movement through the multiplicity of angles proposed. The oblique function may enter the domain of acoustics, but above all it determines a new static dynamism in which the fluid moves across the architecture, which, without displacement, reinvents mobility.

Against the ravages of the element of fire, the oblique function opposes the extreme development of its pathways, the multiplicity of its accesses and escape routes, the breaking of the trenches of its great longitudinal axes, the simplicity of its techniques, and the dynamics of water.

For humans in motion, the inclined site provides potentiality and the complex choice of itinerary, the freedom of movement, the spontaneity of gathering. This liberation from all constraint will only increase in the future, thanks to the development of ground-gripping surfaces on the upper face of the "site" and overhanging setbacks on the lower face.

The inclined precedes the human fluidity of the future, based on autonomous human flight. It is a gesture of connection with space.

Claude PARENT, in Architecture Principe 6

DEAD TIME

Beauty is no longer our end. Form is rejected by a universe with which it is in rupture. The goal to be attained is self-evidence. We must find a universe whose creative manifestation will be "self-evidently" beautiful, because it is integrated, an inherent part of fact.

The force of coherence must lead to certainty. To achieve this coherence, one must be freed from all fetishism toward the past and commit to a wholly new adventure.

We cannot continue to act, in order to define ourselves, through an escalation of personalization, that is, through ever-increasing aggressiveness in relation to a context with which we disagree. This attitude of "reaction" is insufficient. It is even negative and harmful, insofar as it sets authentic creators against one another. It engenders chaos.

The only possible response is to undertake the realization of new cities, or of cities "in equivalence," called parallel cities. Within this regained freedom, it is necessary to determine the criteria that will lead toward order, toward this new homogeneity which alone makes it possible to establish the architectural foundations of a civilization.

First of all, our position vis-à-vis SPACE-TIME must be determined. Contemporary thinking in urbanism consists in evaluating geographic displacement in "TIME-units" instead of linear units of measurement proportional to that displacement. We wholly separate ourselves from this proposition based on "speed." We reject this view. Space exploration renders obsolete and invalidates the very notion of speed. In new urban agglomerations, speed will no longer be considered a fundamental element. It will no longer exist. As a consequence, the universe of aerodynamics will collapse. The world of forms itself will free itself from this constraint, for this world, when it is real and not artificial, is the expression of a higher symbolic order, inherently and unconsciously tied to the concerns of the people of an era, but not represented by a displaced, decadent, conservative fetishistic symbolism.

In cities, movement will be slow, paced to the pedestrian. Concern for speed will be located elsewhere, in other galaxies or in diversion and leisure. Movements necessary to life will become active. The notion of "lost time" will disappear. Speed will no longer be necessary as a condition of survival. Humanity, autonomous, will have conquered the time to live.

Claude PARENT, in Architecture Principe 2



POWER AND IMAGINATION

The future of the world will therefore probably be decided by something as infinitesimal as the definition of two words: imagination or utopia? At present, the greatest danger threatening our civilization is the lack of imagination. Ultimately, the future depends on the balance between power and imagination.

The first process, voluntary, results in a backlash of the refusal of evolution in the present: a revolution. Revolutions create a rupture in the evolution of individual human advancement by unilaterally engaging the species in social advancement. There is a provisional regression, followed by growth along an inclined, saw-tooth profile.

The second process of abstraction is far more serious, as it stems from a creative incapacity and leads to the involuntary sclerosis of the future. It may proceed through fixation to the progressive disappearance of a civilization (the Maya), or to catastrophe through congenital imprudence and unconsciousness (atomic war, inability to respond to basic needs: water, food, air, etc.).

In a state of crisis, unable to foresee, caught in the act of abstraction, power reacts by elevating the distraction of the individual to the rank of a survival solution. In doing so, it thinks only of the survival of a dead and obsolete power and silences its responsibility toward the survival of the species.

Comfort is its weapon. From means, comfort becomes an end, a pursuit in itself, allowing the undertaking of a useless quest which, without object, occupies minds, monopolizes efforts, and absorbs the vital forces of a world into emptiness. Abstract power creates, in order to survive, the abstraction of commitment.

The final manifestation of this exaltation of comfort to the rank of mystique is the civilization of leisure, a crime of lèse-individual ratified by sociology.

Yet the individual himself adopts a spontaneous stance of revolt against these phenomena of abstraction that sterilize his autonomy: dandyism; this automatic therapeutic response is nevertheless ineffective. An attitude of refusal at the individual level, dandyism crystallizes into manifestations of superficial originality, forging clans yet incapable of meaningful regrouping.

Anglo-Saxon civilizations periodically resort to this phenomenon of a mechanical nature, relying on fashion.

The clash between the abstraction of authority — a phenomenon of mass distraction — and dandyism on the one hand, or between the refusal of evolution and social overbidding on the other, produces either incoherence and dissipation at the level of the individual, or the alienation of autonomy in favor of massification.

The process of degradation of power occurs when guiding men, those in government, have fallen from the rank of creators to that of technicians. They are no longer political men, men of invention, but organizers, adapters, politicians. As a result, they can neither control nor accompany the phenomena of the present, nor foresee or promote the future, limiting themselves to reacting from jolt to jolt, from emergency therapy to emergency therapy, to the succession of epiphenomena in the order in which they arise.

However, political or social revolutions have run out of steam. The power that once used them to resolve its crises now sees with greater anxiety its authority degraded and contested, its agents reduced to the rank of robots and irresponsible puppets, agitating around a defunct politics that no longer concerns humanity.

Stricken by an inability to create in the face of the complexity of society and its great speed of transformation, power then engages — without awareness that it is effecting its own negation — in a unilateral response to massification. Absurdly rejecting the exercise of authority of which it is nevertheless the emanation, ridiculing the “right of the Prince,” it seeks to be consequence rather than origin.

Without foresight of the future, without creative imagination, it accepts deducing its rules instead of inventing them. Distrustful of the arbitrariness of yesterday’s choices, it now submits without control to constraint by the masses. It embarks, with no possibility of return, upon a permanent super-demagogy which it adopts as its law.

Political power, now defunct, based on the logic of borders, yields to a delirious social power that leads to suicide because it has “submitted from birth” to the uncontrolled physical effect of the collision of masses.

In the face of this deficiency, the survival of the species demands a power of another nature. An appeal to imagination, the search for fundamental hypotheses, the determination of guiding principles, spatial partition, moral implantation — these are its means and its aims for the new era.

To imagine the world, rather than live it or submit to it, requires the presence of creators in the exercise of power.

Claude PARENT, in Architecture Principe 8



BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Claude Parent was born on 26 February 1923 in Neuilly-sur-Seine, where he died on 27 February 2016 at the age of 93.

After studying mathematics, he joined Noël Le Maresquier's studio at the École des Beaux-Arts in Toulouse in 1942. After the war, he moved to Paris to resume his studies in several Beaux-Arts studios. Disillusioned by the school's conservatism and academicism, he decided to leave it. After brief periods working in architectural firms (including that of Le Corbusier), he formed a partnership with Ionel Schein, another rebellious student and close friend who left the Beaux-Arts at the same time. Their collaboration lasted from 1949 to 1955. In 1952, while still students, they jointly won a national architecture competition organized by La Maison Française. This award, together with the construction of House G, brought them media attention and led to commissions for private houses.

After meeting André Bloc, who introduced him to the Groupe Espace, Parent became a representative of young architecture within the journal *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, and later joined its editorial board, on which he remained for more than thirty years. Within André Bloc's Groupe Espace, he worked alongside numerous artists and met Yves Klein, with whom he collaborated on concepts of architecture of air and fire. He designed numerous private houses, including Villa Bloc in Cap d'Antibes, the Perdrizet, Soultrait, Bordeaux-Le Pecq and Drusch houses. He also built several residential and office buildings, notably the Fondation Avicenne (formerly the Maison de l'Iran) at the Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris (1959–1969), in collaboration with André Bloc and Iranian architects Moshen Foroughi and Heydar Ghiai.

In 1963, together with Paul Virilio, Michel Carrade and Morice Lipsi, he founded the Architecture Principe group. Parent and Virilio, advocating a new appropriation of space that broke with the orthogonal rule, developed the concept of the Oblique Function (1963–1968). Parent was co-founder and later editor-in-chief of the journal *Architecture Principe*, which served as the group's manifesto. Among the realized projects representative of the Oblique Function developed with Paul Virilio are the Sainte-Bernadette Church in Nevers (1963–1966), now listed as a Historic Monument, as well as unbuilt projects such as the Mariotti House and the Exhibition Palace in Charleville.

After the dissolution of *Architecture Principe* in 1968, Claude Parent continued to develop the Oblique Function in several buildings, including his own house, the Bellaguet apartment, and the Sens supermarket (1970), also listed as a Historic Monument. Until 1973, he also undertook extensive efforts to popularize oblique architecture within the framework of France's Maisons de la Culture. In 1969, he was appointed commissioner of the French pavilion at the 1970 Venice Biennale, which he transformed into an oblique space, inviting artists to take part in this experiment.

At the same time, he designed large commercial complexes for the Suma and Gem brands (Sens, Ris-Orangis, Tinquieux, Pierry), socio-cultural facilities including the Maison des Jeunes et de la Culture in Troyes, and residential buildings in the Paris region. He took part in the major competition for the Plateau Beaubourg in 1971.

In 1972, following a long convalescence that prevented him from working for almost a year, he built the house of painter Michel Carrade. In 1974, he transformed his own house into an oblique dwelling, which remained in that configuration for more than ten years.

Between 1974 and 1975, Parent was commissioned by Électricité de France to study new architectural models for nuclear power plants and their integration into various sites. In 1975, he founded the Collège des architectes du nucléaire, comprising nine architects (including Paul Andreu, Roger Taillibert and Jean Willerval), which worked on these projects for over a decade. In addition to architectural research, Parent was responsible for the Cattenom and Chooz sites in eastern France.



He also designed the Théâtre Silvia Monfort in Paris, the regional council headquarters in Marseille, the town hall of Lillebonne, office buildings such as the Résidence Mouzaïa and the SEPTEN headquarters for EDF, as well as middle and high schools. He participated in numerous competitions. More recently, he built Cap Ampère for Électricité de France (with Reichen & Robert) and the Myslbek building in Prague's historic center (mixed-use building and commercial gallery, with Zdenek Hölzel and Jan Kerel, 1992–1996). The Workshop, created with artist Loris Gréaud for his studio, is Claude Parent's last built work.

A theorist as well as a practitioner, he authored numerous books, including *Vivre à l'oblique* (1970), *Cinq réflexions sur l'architecture* (1972), *Claude Parent architecte* (1975), *L'Architecture et le nucléaire* (1978), *Entrelacs de l'oblique* (1981), *L'Architecte, bouffon social* (1982), *Colères* (1982), *Les Maisons de l'atome* (1983), *Errer dans l'illusion* (2001), *Quand les bouffons relèvent la tête* (2002), *Cuits et archicuits* (2003), *Demain la Terre* (2010), and *Stop & Go* (2012), as well as a vast number of critical articles, particularly for *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*.

Today, his architectural works and theories, visionary drawings, and writings are recognized as a major influence on contemporary architecture. Breaking with classical and modernist orthogonality, he introduced the oblique as an architectural solution, promoting movement and instability within architectural language. Jean Nouvel (who worked with Claude Parent from 1966 to 1970), Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, Daniel Libeskind, Wolf D. Prix, Odile Decq, and many others, as well as leading architectural historians, have acknowledged the profound revolution and historical impact that the Oblique Function represented in postwar and contemporary architecture.





Ville Ouverte 1, 2004
Pencil on paper
75 x 110 cm



La Maison de FR et SD n °6 / Bulles, poils et textiles, 2006
pencil on paper
50 x 65 cm



YS La Neuve, 1988
pencil on paper
55 x 70 cm



Les Horizons Multiples, 2011
pencil on paper
65x50 cm



La route traverse la Maison Improbable, 2011
pencil on paper
50x 65 cm



Ville Ouverte V, 2004
Pencil on paper
75 x 110 cm



« *Conquérir l'horizon* »1, 2003
Pencil on paper
50 x 65 cm



Villes : Satellite 5, 2006
Pencil on paper
50 x 65 cm

