

Paul Cret: The American Order

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Abstract: This work will look at the question of the relationship between classical order and order of modernity in the work of Paul Philippe Cret (1876-1945), the French-American architect, a student of Jean-Louis Pascal and Julien Guadet at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. In the wake of tradition and vocabulary of the Beaux-Arts, Cret's civic architecture represented in its conception by the "Attic order", one of the five canonical orders, conceived for modern life, without the explicit and philological or direct use, creating an anti-dogmatic program that he will define, in fact, "New Classicism". The text will cover more in detail the Folger Shakespeare Library built in Washington D.C. (1929-1932), whose expansion and renovation was entrusted (1977-1983) to the firm Cox & C. In the structure the problem of the contemporary interpretation of classicist architecture is obvious, of an architecture in which the idea of classical order lives. The text refers to the critical success of Cret's work and the direct and indirect influences that his investigations had on the modern classicism of such architects as Marcello Piacentini, Albert Speer, Adalberto Libera, Ludovico Quaroni, Luigi Moretti. And on the further migrations of his *stripped classicism*² through the works and writings of his Philadelphia students: in an Anglo-Saxon context (Louis Kahn), and a Chinese context (Liang Sicheng).

Keywords: Paul Philippe Cret, Stripped Classicism, New Classicism, Philadelphia.

From École des Beaux-Arts in Parigi to the American 'New classicism'

This work will look at the question of the relationship between classical order and order of modernity in the work of Paul Philippe Cret (1876-1945), the French-American architect, student at the École des Beaux-Arts in Lyon and Paris during the late 800s and examines the Folger Shakespeare Library project (1929-1932), built adjacent to the the Capitol in Washington D.C.

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2. Stripped Classicism: the style attributed to many international institutional architecture built between 1920-30.

Beginning in 1903 Cret taught for about thirty-four years in the Department of Architecture of the Philadelphia University. From that institute, in fact, Paul Davis had graduated, his colleague at Jean-Louis Pascal's (1837-1920) studio at the Parisian École was introduced to Warren P. Laird, director of a newly founded school in Pennsylvania. He was offered a teaching contract that allowed him to carry out his professional activity. So Cret, abandoned the goal to which he had aspired and worked towards for years, participating in the tough competition for the Prix de Rome³, and decided to leave for America. Here he will have among his students some of the most influential American architects born in the early twentieth century such as Louis Kahn, Alfred Easton Poor, Alfred Bendiner, Robert McGoodwin, Sydney Martin, John Harbeson, Charles I. Barber, and William Ward Watkin. His students will also include such Chinese architects-intellectuals as Liang Sicheng, considered the father of modern Chinese architecture, his wife Lin Huiyin⁴, Fan Wenzhao (Robert Fan), Zhu Ping and Yang Tingbao, the latter considered the most important architect of his generation.

Cret's early American period is marked by his gradual acceptance into Philadelphia's professional society: he led free evening workshops on the French atelier model, sponsored by T Square Club, and attended by Philadelphia architects well introduced in professional circuits who

3. The *Prix de Rome* is a scholarship established by the French state for the best students in the arts. Winners were given the opportunity to study at the French Academy in Rome, founded by Jean-Baptiste Colbert in 1666. Almost always, in the case of architects, the winners, went on to a significant career in institutional architecture.

4. Paul Cret's influence, therefore, was essential for modern Chinese institutions entrusted to reshape modern architectural thought. During the twenties about 15 young Chinese students (the so-called traveling scholars) left for the University of Philadelphia – also known as “Penn” – and, on their return, almost all became teachers at Nanjing University. An interesting essay on the relationship between this generation of traveling scholars and the Cret's Beaux Arts teaching Cret is analyzed in the essay by RUAN, 2002, pp. 30-47. There is also a recent book edited by leading Sinologists, CODY, STEINHARDT, ATKIN, 2011, which gathers essays by scholars of different generations Chang Yung Ho Seng Kuan, Zhang Jie and historians such as Joseph Rykwert that, for example, states “Paul Philippe Cret was an almost notoriously loyal disciple of the Parisian École des Beaux-Arts, where he enrolled as a student in 1895 and where he took his diploma with much distinction in 1905. The brilliant graduate was hired by the University of Pennsylvania to make the Philadelphia school a true colonial outpost of the metropolis. One of his teachers—the most distinguished perhaps—Julien Guadet, has, in his four-volume treatise,¹ left the best summation of the school's teaching when Cret was a student, and even though it was adulterated with other ideas, notably, the structural rationalism of Eugene Viollet-le-Duc”. The multicultural and geographic intertwining around Paul Cret's classicism is even more interesting when considering that Louis Kahn, Cret's student, would greatly affect the cultural environment at Yale where personalities such as Vincent Scully, then in turn, influenced such students as Norman Foster and Richard Rogers.

wanted to sharpen their expressive and design capabilities.⁵ In the years between 1908 and 1940, therefore, the French-born architect obtained important professional assignments in the United States, a set of projects corresponding to one of the most significant repertoires of civic architectural works that have given form to important institutions of The United States. For the projects in which he was involved, a hundred or so, he was co-designer or consultant in engineering projects, including the Delaware River Bridge, the Calvert Street Bridge in Washington D.C., and the Falls View Bridge in Niagara Falls, New York. But soon he designed works such as libraries, shrines of war, mausoleums and courthouses.⁶ A French working-class immigrant, therefore, – as we learn from the book by Elizabeth Greenwell Grossman, author of the most extensive monograph the architect entitled *The Civic architecture of Paul Cret* –, interpreted the expectations of relevant American public and private institutions, proposing an architectural concept based on republican ideals – individual freedom, equal opportunities – with the intention of bringing common people closer to institutions: «not objects of awe and veneration but places where citizens would be encouraged to participate pleasurably in the work of governance».⁷ In the tradition and the vocabulary of Beaux-Arts, and the specific cultural bearing of the different French schools that had formed him, Cret's *civic architecture* represents classicism designed for modern life, interpreted as “Hellenism” without the explicit or direct use of one of the five canonical orders, an anti-dogmatic program that he will define, in fact, “New Classicism”.

The formative years are critical to an understanding of the architectural choices so as to correctly interpret Paul Cret's works. In France he took part in the debate on modernism with some reluctance, especially rejecting the idea that new structural techniques would render the use of classical forms irrelevant. Before attending Lyon's l'École des Beaux-Arts he attended, thanks to the support of a relative, a liberal and renowned school, Lycée Lalande in Bourg-en-Bresse, unlike

5. Nancy Thorne, Paul Philippe Cret papers Ms. Coll. 295, University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts 1999; last update July 24, 2014, p. 4.

6. In several respects his professional career is comparable to that, almost contemporary, of one of the most talented Roman architects Mario De Renzi.

7. GREENWELL GROSSMANN 1996, p. XVI.

École Technique de la Martinière in Lyon where he studied instead, Tony Garnier (1869-1948). Here Cret did not follow the curriculum of classical studies, but rather “modern and special” studies based on examining living languages and the sciences, analytical design and free hand drawing.⁸ Once back in Lyon he enrolled at the École des Beaux Arts, a democratic institution representing a tradition, of Lyon, which tended to distinguish itself from the Parisian culture for more explicit republican values. The issue of “living languages”, which Cret had assimilated during the years in Bourg-en-Bresse, and that much remind us of Claude Perrault’s theoretical works, certainly influenced his concept of architectural language. He wrote in 1923: «it has been said of the transformation of the language: ‘Health in a language consists of leaving its origins behind without violence’. This is equally true of transformation of architecture».⁹

As mentioned above, his years at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris brought Cret in contact with mentors such as Jean-Louis Pascal and Julien Guadet (1834-1908). Particularly Pascal, whose atelier had great international appeal because of its three Prix de Rome awards, practiced a teaching method based on the idea that the teacher’s task was to help students develop their own design ideas. A didactic method that Cret will use during his long teaching career at the University of Pennsylvania – that we could call Socratic type, very close, in some

8. GREENWELL GROSSMANN 1996, p. XVII. This recalls Choisy’s drawings, and reading Greenwell Grossmann at p. 153 “the writings of Choisy had allowed Cret to set up a lineage encompassing French theory, the American Greek revival, and modern classicism. However, it is the disjunction, rather than the connections, between the work of Louis Duc (1802-79) at the Palais de Justice in Paris and of Cret at the Hartford Courthouse that are most telling. Although there are significant parallels between the two buildings, Duc’s work demonstrates the possibilities of a structurally rational classicism; yes it is this hope of legitimizing classicism through structural rationalism that Cret rejects. The rectilinear profiles of the Attic order allowed Cret to acknowledge the steel frame, but he believed that, fundamentally, the proportions of classicism were antithetical to the wide spans of steel structure.”

9. This approach confirms the roots of the École des Beaux-Arts in the work of French intellectuals at the time of Jean-Baptiste Colbert and Claude Perrault (1613-1688). The latter, trained as a medical biologist, proposed a reading of the relationship between medicine and architecture that Alberto Perez-Gomez very effectively describes in his introduction to the book, in *Ordonnance for the five kinds of Columns After the Method of the Ancients*: “The connection between medicine and architecture had been self-evident since classical antiquity. It involved a relationship between the order of the microcosm and the macrocosm and the task of caring for the health and well-being of each, as well as “taking the measure” of the physical earth to provide a harmonious dwelling for the body of man. During the Renaissance, this connection resulted in architects conceiving their architectural ideas as “cuts” (that is, plans, section, and elevations) or projections. The new architecture thus closely coincided with the development of modern anatomy and the new interest in perspective as a vehicle for measuring the mathematical depth of the world of appearances.”, PEREZ-GOMEZ 1993, p. 5.

ways, to Ludovico Quaroni's teaching method and the original teaching method of the School of Architecture of Rome. Furthermore, it should be noted that at the Parisian École teachings were not based on questions regarding style, but rather on problems that encouraged the architect to play an active role in the conception and development of building types, as shown by the lessons published by Julien Gaudet: they analyze the most representative institutional building types of a secular republic like the French (museums, libraries, courthouses, etc.): «students were taught that architecture could register the current state of society through the design of institutional buildings with a character appropriate to modern conditions. Their first task was to perceive within the programme (the given set of functional requirements) the latent potential for change within the institution».¹⁰ Julien Guadet, particularly, in his theoretical writings, *Éléments et théorie de l'architecture*, proposes codifying typological elements, placing the emphasis on civic buildings and on modernity as “experimental progress”¹¹ and therefore, continuing to reflect on the importance of typological questions: «Through decisions about which type of rooms to place where, their relative proportions, and their individual characterization, architects could make known their interpretation of the present possibilities for the institution».¹²

Among other things, contests won by Paul Cret in the United States, as documented by the minutes of the juries, often obtained consensus for the clarity of the design in the plan and the functional program, which leads us to reflect, more generally, on the articulation and differences in architectural research in the world of Beaux-Arts – where in the works of Claude Perrault (1613-1688) and Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand (1760-1834) the lessons of the theorists of the Pre-Enlightenment and Enlightenment are still alive. On the contrary, Greenwell Grossmann furthers this reasoning asserting that Cret practiced an *intimate* form of monumentalism. Fluent in the classical language, he experimented varying styles, ways and solutions for the main purpose of using classicism to unify elements, functions and volumes without wanting to introducing historicist quotations. And, also, he made use of an order using only Attic pilasters

10, GREENWELL GROSSMANN 1996, p. 8.

11. GUADET 1909, p. 10.

12. GREENWELL GROSSMANN 1996, p. 8-9.

(popular in France) and pillars because suited better to the modern construction systems. However, Greenwell Grossman explains, Cret did not practice teaching and the profession with a sectarian attitude, always contrary to a teleological vision of history¹³ and poorly tolerated having to take part in the dialectics of modern-classicism.

The Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC (1932)

The Folger Shakespeare Library is one of the most exemplary works of the idea of “New Classicism” developed by Paul Cret. The oil magnate Henry Clay Folger wanted to build a library and a theater to offer the public his rare collection of Shakespeareiana.

In 1928 Folger assigned the task to Alexander B. Trowbridge, known for his architectures in Old English Style: both Folger and his wife – co-curator of the collection – had thought of a Tudor-style building. But Trowbridge himself suggested that Folger give the task to Cret, reserving for himself simply the role of consultant, convinced that the best architectural solution for that particular task in that lot (which Folger laboriously acquired parcel by parcel over the years) would be to realize a neoclassical architecture. The lot, in fact, was near the Capitol and the Library of Congress and was intended for possible expansion of the same. Trowbridge suggested that Cret send Folger his portfolio which, at that time, included monuments and shrines dedicated to European battles using slender columns also without capitals. Among them, the best known, are probably the Monument to the Dead of Pennsylvania, the Varennes-en-Argonne (1924), the Aisne-Marne Monument in Château-Thierry (1926-32) (Fig. 1), the Virginia War Memorial (1925), and the very first prototype with capitals, the Indianapolis Library (the theme of the doric façade).

Both Trowbridge and Cret agreed on a neoclassical solution for the exterior of the building. The Tudor-style, however, was used for the interior (readings halls and Elizabethan theater) – a solution, looking at the eastern migration of Cret’s legacy, recalls the Tudor-style Jazz Bar at the Peace Hotel in Shanghai and its Art Deco façade (1926) designed by Palmer and Turner, the Hong Kong Studio.

13. GREENWELL GROSSMANN 1996, p. XVII.

The Folger's building (Fig. 2) consists of an elongated body, parallel to the street, containing the reading room and the Exhibition Hall, in which two transepts intersect at the ends, one dedicated to the Elizabethan theater and the other to offices; the whole constitutes a floor plan in the shape of a stretched "C". Cret presented two hypotheses for the layouts to the customer. Version A and version B (realized) differ in the presence of the Exhibition Hall, introduced so as to filter access to the library through a formal reception space and to muffle the noise disturbance from the street in the reading room. The discussion between Cret and Folger on the project was active and intensive. Folger was a very demanding customer; he began to enter into the logic of the neo-classical syntax by giving importance to the result of the main façade, as evident from the correspondence with Trowbridge criticizing the result proposed by Cret for its similarity with the Brooklyn Museum designed by McKim, Mead & White from 1896 to 1915¹⁴ – even if it is a poorly confirmed opinion. Grossman writes commenting on the Folger and Cret's correspondence: «'The pilaster... be as flat as possible, without statues' but with sculpture over the entrances and the middle of the front, and above and below all the windows. Confronted with these directives, Cret finally ceased his efforts to preserve the visual autonomy of his fluted piers. Instead, he retreated to a more extreme position. The Greeks had made architecture sculptural and sculpture architectural – or as Choisy, whom Cret so much admired, had put it, prefacing an analysis of the 'allure of the profile' in the Greek orders, they had 'utilized shadows and reflected light in architectural ornament: la modénature (modeling) properly called is essentially Greek'». ¹⁵

In this dialectical and passionate context, Folger's project was completed by the metopes (Fig. 3) produced by John Gregory (1879-1951), nine scenes depicting scenes of Shakespearean plays alternating with pilasters, placed at the base of each window (Fig. 4).

The Folger library was expanded and renovated from 1977 to 1983 by the Hartman-Cox Architects office (Fig. 5), specialized in keeping the classical tradition alive yet modern of "federal" or institutional buildings. In addition to updating functional and technological intervention the

14. GREENWELL GROSSMANN 1996, p. 172.

15. GREENWELL GROSSMANN 1996, p. 174.

building the envisaged expanding the reading room, which closes the court created by the two wings of the transept on the side further from the street with compartments that repeat Cret's the floor plan. The new rear façade thus obtained, therefore, consists of a new volume, in which the Hartman-Cox studio undertakes with the use of the Order realized in marble and continuous steel lintel – a solution which reminds one of the building by Ettore Rossi (1894-1968) realized in the EUR (Rome) in 1941, The Palace of the former Restaurant of the EUR Authority (Fig. 6).

Paul Cret's critical fortune and of his Stripped Classicism

The number of monographs and essays on the works of Paul Cret are limited. Besides the aforementioned monograph by Elizabeth Greenwell Grossman, *The Civic architecture of Paul Cret*, Cambridge University Press 1996, the result of twenty years of research into the archives, we find another previous volume, edited by Theophilus Ballou White, an architect who worked in his studio: *Paul Philippe Cret: Architect and Teacher*, The Art Alliance Press, Philadelphia 1973. In the general (or mainstream) literature Cret is usually cited as Louis Kahn's teacher (though George Howe certainly had more influence on his way of being architect¹⁶) or Liang Sicheng's (whose studies of traditional Chinese architecture are a direct result of the teaching methods learned in the French master's atelier¹⁷). But for scholars the most relevant source is certainly the archive of Cret at Penn that collects writings, pictures and drawings (Nancy Thorne, Paul Philippe Cret papers

16. SCULLY 1993. "Kahn was trained in a clear order, the order of the Beaux-Arts, at the University of Pennsylvania under his great teacher, Paul Cret. Then he lost that order. He lost it so completely that he forgot what it was that he'd lost. And then he had to find it again, but he had to find it on his own new terms so that he could believe, deep in his soul that he was inventive, that he was, in a sense, making it all up himself. The order in which Kahn grew up can be seen in a house built in 1924 by George Howe, who later became Kahn's partner in Philadelphia."

17. BARBERA 2014, p. 2013; ROWE, KUAN, 2002; HARBESON 1927, p. 77: "In Liang's case, the particular body of western knowledge he learned and brought back to China was the Beaux-Arts system. The key method of the Beaux-Arts system, or more precisely what was preached by Paul Cret at University of Pennsylvania, was summarized by Harbeson: "design is not concerned primarily with ornamentation or detail, but with making an arrangement that will satisfy the practical requirement, with the composition of elements, with the proportion of masses, with the arrangement and disposition of openings, etc., and with producing a building of pleasing appearance". The relationship between USA and China starts with Zhuang Jun (1880–1990) who attended the University of Illinois, graduated in 1914, and built the Grand Auditorium of Tsinghua with Henry Murphy in neo classical style.

Ms. Coll. 295, University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts 1999).

Returning to to a comparative reasoning, one cannot but note the similarities between Paul Cret's (1876-1945) architecture and that of the other personalities in the architectural culture of the early twentieth century and in particular for Europeans the architecture of Marcello Piacentini (1881-1960) and Albert Speer (1905-1981), for example, I suppose, it constitutes a historiographical still unresolved knot – at times presented with ideological rhetoric – in the spirit of classicism and use of order in architecture. Surprisingly Sandro Scarrocchia in his book *Albert Speer e Marcello Piacentini. L'architettura del totalitarismo negli anni trenta*¹⁸, he explains that Speer never evidenced much the associations between him and Piacentini during his visits to Rome. And he does not even mention Cret, despite the obvious reference to his best works. Writing about Piacentini Lucio Barbera affirms that: «from his international experience, however, in his famous 1930 essay *Architettura d'oggi*, [Piacentini] speaking about American architecture omits even mentioning Frank Lloyd Wright, despite the Berlin exhibition of 1910 and the famous 1911 edition of Wasmuth, whose drawings were elaborated during Wright's stay in Florence! For the Beaux-Arts tradition he has only conceited words of irony; not a word about Paul Cret and the Philadelphia school, destined to soar without equals after the Second World War with the affirmation of the figure of Louis Kahn, seen at least in Italy, as the last great master of modernity. [...] I said "unjustified silence" because in photographic plates illustrating his book, Piacentini, however, cites Paul Cret without saying a word, presenting, with no comment or explanation, a beautiful and gigantic detail of the extraordinary Delaware Bridge in Philadelphia (now Benjamin Franklin Bridge)¹⁹ finished in 1926 by the engineer Leon Moisseiff and, indeed, Paul Cret».²⁰

Piacentini, in the years around 1921 realized in Bergamo (Fig. 7) the Reconstruction of the city center, in particular the Court-House C.I.A.A (1922-1927), formulation akin to Cret's architecture. In an essay of 1921, however, *Il momento architettonico all'estero*, Piacentini himself says «In North America, because it lacks traditions,

18. SCARROCCHIA 1999.

19. PIACENTINI 1930 (2009), p. 104.

20. BARBERA 2016, p. 241.

we find perhaps the greatest number of styles (schools, trends). Buried for good imitations of the Gothic and English Tudor, in the monumental public buildings, there persists preponderantly Duban's, Labrousse's and Ducneo's neo-classical character. A large part of the young American architects goes on to perfect themselves after studying at Academy of Fine Arts in Paris, especially to earn the right to be called, once home, *Architetti beaux arts*. Their compositions have a single imprint, entirely scholastic, entirely impersonal; colonnades and gables after Garnier, attic orders and capitals, plethora of scrolls and garlands, farne and putti, aluminum domes and lofts. [...] ».²¹

The oversight of Piacentini, for what openly anticipated in America his linguistic choices of the period of his greatest political, academic and professional success, were not confined to the neo-classical teaching of Paul Cret. Continues Lucio Barbera: «In the first post-war Paul Cret's linguistic research aimed at defining an architecture that would adopt the monumental tradition of classicism as a modern expression of innovation and soundness of the institutions. Nothing is more consonant with Piacentini's architecture of the thirties, in fact. Aside from masterpiece of linguistic finesse, which is undoubtedly the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, whose site began in 1929 – a year before the publication of Marcello Piacentini's book – while Piacentini was writing his *Thesaurus*, Paul Cret had begun, in Aisne, France, to build Chateau-Thierry, the monument to the fallen Americans in the second battle of the Marne, a kind of cell-compendium of the most severe and bare language of modern neoclassicism. It seems strange to me that the project of that imposing fragment of American neo-classicism, designed as a metaphysical theorem, poetic in its own way, rhetorically launched in the French countryside and the great European crucible of militaristic impulses in the period between the two world wars, escaped Piacentini [...] But what is even more disconcerting, in that book of 1930, is the total silence on the vision of the *Civic Art* by Werner Hegemann. However private Archives which Marcello Piacentini left the Faculty of Architecture of Rome one finds a copy of the original edition of *American Vitruvius; An Architects' Handbook of Civic Art* from 1922».²²

21. PIACENTINI 1921, p. 32

22. BARBERA 2016, p. 245.

It almost seems that Marcello Piacentini in presenting to young people and the most provincial of his colleagues on the international scene of his day carefully left in shadow the sources of inspiration of his linguistic processing to avoid losing the authority that he was trying to get as creator of an original style that would resolve the relations modern-classicism and architecture-politics once and for all it could be argued that Piacentini, active pawn of the great game of migrations of ideas, both reveal to us, today, as a sower of the Italian architectural concepts and styles of Cret distillations. So the generation that was Quaroni, Muratori, Moretti, Libera unknowingly committed themselves, originally each in its own way, in a dialectic between modernity and classicism whose synthesis proposal “from above” was purely “cretiana” rather than Piacentini.

It is also interesting to point out some contradictions that emerge from readings of these events that are neither Roman nor Italian, like those of Christine Beese from the Freie Universität Berlin.

In the essay *About the Internationality of Urbanism: The Influence of International Town Planning Ideas upon Marcello Piacentini's Work*, she, in fact, states: «In terms of architectural style, Piacentini was influenced by a monumental classicism that dates back to the early 20th century, to the work of Peter Behrens and that of a younger Wilhelm Kreis. Therefore Piacentini's design strategy for the World's Exhibition did not originate from Albert Speer's plans for a new German capital. It resulted from Piacentini's admiration for the antique Roman forum, the Greek agora and for the *Beaux Arts* spaces of precedent International Exhibitions. With the E42 and its Palazzo degli Uffici dell'Ente Autonomo EUR, Piacentini returned to his starting point – to Josef Hoffmann's pavilion and to the Roman exhibition of 1911».²³ Beese's reasoning seems to be missing more than a few essential bibliographic connections, especially it is surprising her distorted idea of relationships (and architecture) of Speer and Piacentini.

Continuing with the essay by Lucio Barbera: «Paul Cret, great Americanized French architect, constructed from a simplified classical language, in which he wanted the spirit of Roman imperial classicism to waft, a suprahistorical and a-contextual language to be proposed to

23. BEESE 2013, p. 19.

the glories of the American nation: modern, imperial and culturally inclusive».²⁴ For a long time, therefore, its critical reception was not equal to that of many other architects he peers who built up a repertoire of comparable works, as well as being successful teachers. In addition, the European critics after World War II could not escape what he has noticed recently also Witold Rybczynski²⁵ in the New York Times.

The reason, says the historian, would be the influence that Cret had on fascist and Nazi architecture, especially Albert Speer's architecture, such as the Nuremberg Rally Grounds, Zeppelinfeld (1933-1938) (Fig. 8):²⁶ «Paul Philippe Cret (pronounced "Cray") is hardly a household name, yet during the three decades leading up to World War II, he was one of America's leading architects. [...] Decades later, his buildings remain admired, enjoyed and – most important – cared for. At least 10 of them are on the National Register.

So what accounts for his present-day anonymity? Perhaps the chief reason has to do with historical accident. By education and temperament Cret was a classicist. But he was also a pragmatist, believing that classicism had to be adapted to the needs and tastes of the modern world. To that end, he developed what he called New Classicism, which dispensed with the Greek orders but preserved a classical sense of proportion, balance and symmetry. [...] Cret's new (or "stripped") classicism was widely studied in Germany in the 1930s, and in 1935, after 30-year-old Albert Speer had been appointed the official architect of the Third Reich, he designed a colonnade of square piers atop the Zeppelinfeld stadium, directly referencing Cret. [...] It is a shame that Cret's architecture was tarred with the fascist brush, for his World War I memorials are among the most evocative commemorative structures ever built».²⁷

But it is up to Carter Wiseman, of the Yale School of Architecture to restore the difference in cultural and moral dignity of the original (Cret) and imitators (Piacentini and Speer)²⁸ «Although some have argued that Cret's "stripped classicism" – which he preferred to

24. BARBERA 2016, p. 238.

25. RYBCZYNSKI 2014

26. BARBERA 2016, p. 244.

27. RYBCZYNSKI 2014.

28. WISEMAN 2004, p. 324.

call “new classicism” – reflected a return to conservative sources in reaction to the upheavals of World War I, a more convincing argument can be made that Cret was seeking a version of a style in whose fundamental principles he still believed but he still believed but whose embellishment had become overly familiar and socially suspect. He suffered among other critics for the superficial similarities of his work to that of contemporary architects in Italy and Germany, whose less sensitive forms and spaces created in the service of authoritarian regimes were given a political overtone of racial ‘purity’».

To complete, finally, this brief review on the influence and critical fortunes of Paul Cret would include, of course, Le Corbusier expressed concern on the use of Beaux-Arts ornamental devices used in those years in engineering structures and admonished the possibility that the George Washington Bridge in New York be performed according to the Beaux-Arts variant (New York expression of the aesthetic exhibited at the Quai Voltaire): «No stone, no ornament. The two pillars, and the mathematical play of the cables form a beautiful unit. They are a unit. It is the new beauty.»²⁹ And Leon Battista Alberti also speaks of the cavity and walls when, in the First of his ten books says «since the orders of columns are nothing other than open walls and cavities in more places. And profiting to define her a column, it would not be without purpose were I to say she has a certain form, and perpetual part of the wall, stood erect from the ground to the top, so as to hold the covering».³⁰ Here, established in the most concise way, the inspiration and the American meaning of the Order of Paul Cret.

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29. LE CORBUSIER 1937, p. I., II, 106, 107.

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