

Some questions regarding "junk" by Luciano Semerani

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One asks oneself, when visiting the last Art Exhibition at the Venice Biennale, after ascertaining that quite a few television sets and films have finally disappeared, but also that the hundred year old *avant-gardes* are now justly confined to the initiatives of touristic-artistic institutions, one asks oneself, I repeat, why contemporary art, although being in essence dramatic, dark, necrophiliac and obsessed by a desperate sexuality, why despite all this apparent expressive commitment it is void of emotions. Surrealism's absurd, Dada's intellectual paradox, the anti-bourgeois punch in the stomach, and even totalitarian triumphalism sought to create a diversity of moods, reactions of disgust or appeal which left everlasting traces in our memory. All of this is gone, because at least in the pieces placed on the market by the art galleries chosen by the Commissary, there is only the trace, maybe, of a not very high-brow intellectualism that is substituted by an industrious artisan effort lacking in ideas, and therefore hopeless, yet technically very elaborate, sometimes refined in its recovery of folklore, and paranoid regarding an ability that derives from an obsessive backdrop, a profuse, boring, extremely long and difficult process of collecting, welding, repainting and dematerialising junk. The question interests architects because it concerns as well the re-utilisation, recycling, and recovery of artifacts, buildings, and obsolete territories which we undertake in architecture.

There is no lack of interest for form in the pieces exhibited at the Venice Exhibition. Morphology.

Precious *herbari*, endless displays of books, infinite expanses of objects are Venice's hymn to morphology.

Morphology is the classification of objects (plants, animals) according to their formal properties.

But what are the formal properties that concern a work of art, or an architectural project?

First of all, in my opinion, the evocative properties, those that prefigure a future for the object.

Regarding the tragic dimension, which characterised our artistic expression in the century that I lived in, it was often the case of a critical judgment on a "missed future", on an "ideal failure", on a "lost love".

Reason was often lost in dreams because the narrative potential prevailed over the other semantic elements.

The woods, the river, the house and the mountain in the paintings by Cézanne, Kandinsky and Rousseau were not only elements of a "collective imaginary" but were also, thanks to a "morphological specificity", *that wood, that river, that house, that mountain*, and thus in their specific structure they each assumed an identity. But this is exactly the opposite of a morphological classifying practice, which is also a process of massification. Favouring identity is in opposition to the didactic dimension of scientific knowledge.

Is this concept of "identity" a "potential that is immanent to the object"?

I believe it is, I think that recognising this "potential of latent energy" that is deposited in a landscape, in a fragment, a ruin, in an obsolete building, is to put into consideration a "desire of a future" that is latent in the landscape, the fragment, the ruin, or the abandoned industrial structure.

The "desire for a future", that is for life, which artistic intentionality tends to reveal. This is what stands behind the success of the so called "*arte povera*".

And also of "*l'objet trouvé*".

The "project" is the unveiling of what is essential in the object, the essential elements and not the whole reality of the object which becomes the object of the project, not only regarding the form of the object, but also because of its capacity to be a "*topos*" in the communication between the artist and the public, as a chargeable sign of an emotional tension, of a mood as well as of a logical support. It is well known that the notion of "project", with the mechanisms of the "abstract project" which characterises our species in its current evolutionary phase, is associated with the notion of "architecture". Yet the answers to the questions regarding the aims of the architectural project are different. "Project of what?"

The interpretation, taken from Le Corbusier's writings, which considers the architectural project as the project of an "*outil*", project in other words of a necessary instrument for the carrying out of other instruments (dwellings, hospitals, prisons), did not satisfy Le Corbusier himself, who later in life compared the compositional act to the "alchemical fusion of Marriage", to an amorous encounter, therefore recognising the irrational dimension of empathy, the reciprocal attraction of signs, the hermetic potential that icons have in the conceptual process of the project.

There is no single intelligent and responsible way when it comes to ret-

tribution, health or education which can dictate the physical and spatial properties of a prison, a hospital or a school, without becoming a vaster "prefiguring of the future" and "remembrance of the past", as ideal horizon of the fact that is realised through the project in question.

The "presence" of life both in the place and in the things, not as "preexistence" to the project, but as "coexistence", in the signs of the architecture, of the "consciousness of what is memorable and of what is a part of a possible future in the life of mankind".

In "that" place and "now".

It is from this intention that stems the analytic capacity to recognise the parts that form the existing object, the nature of the intrinsic and extrinsic relations that the said parts have with each other, in other words "morphology" becomes an exercise of experimentation of the transplants, montages, collages and metamorphoses possible with the materials accepted as worthy of a future life. The intentionality of the project is thus mainly that of building desire through emotions, and through enthusiasm, of Baudelairean memory, overcoming the objective dimension of the "traces" found, carrying them into the future, in a horizon of intuited sense, hoped for and desired, that language reveals.

What did Lina Bo Bardi, John Hejduk, Guido Canella and Aldo Rossi find so attractive in gasometers, in old crumbling factories, that is so important as to influence their language?

If they found vulgar gables, metallic trusses, the various and varied residues of a "*social comedy*" that is gone or dying, as *significant*, both in the suburbs of Sao Paolo and of Milan, it is certainly not because they had developed a taste for the "*bric-à-brac*", nor were they moved by the didactic imperative of industrial archaeology. Instead, I believe that they were moved, in that "*popular working-class*" world, by the absence of glitter, of the banality of every-day life, of the material nature of existence, and by the "*need for freedom*" that invention generates in the intellectual-architect. The "*many dreams*" of the people, of the masses that were brought to the cities by "*progress*", although now vanished, constitute the *humus* of those places that are the "*back shops*" of the contemporary metropolis, on the periphery of which is deposited the obsolete refuse of technological progress together with "*a certain type of humanity*". Whoever has read the chapter "*The cellar*" in Thomas Bernhard's Autobiography understands what I am saying. "*Scherzhauserfeld*", the non-place that was so loved by the young Bernhard because of its authentic state of perdition, is a category of the spirit, it is "*the place of humanity*" that is present in the folds and the sores on the body of the city.

We probably need to make space in the future of architecture and of the metropolis to a vision of the contradictions that is inclusive and not exclusive, that is narrative and not refuse.

It means living with these problems, not resolving them.

It is not a question of technology but of language. The essence, as always, is language.

Translation by Luis Gatt

Pier Paolo Pasolini

Return to Chia by Nico Naldini

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We adored everything about our villages: the countryside with all its different crops and the peasants in their Sunday best, with the lingering smell of the stables as an inherent part of their very existence.

Every village had its irrigation channel, or more than one, all intersecting, with little bridges connecting the courtyards and the kitchen gardens, flowing by the most secret recesses of the houses. The ducks would float motionlessly where the current was strongest, their feet paddling away underwater. On the banks, the turkeys were taken out to pasture by the younger women, whose eyes were already seeking to understand the world. What with their work in the fields and stables, boys had little time, but Sunday would eventually come round and the smell of incense from the Mass would cling to their clothes. We used to cycle from one village to another along a single dusty, stony track. There were few cars in those days, and when one went by we would get down into the ditch to let the cloud of dust waft past.

We loved our villages and life appeared to be one of eternal youth, with a future without variation other than that of the seasons, which would burst into our lives and change our timetables and habits.

The only interruption of our impassioned contemplation of nature came once a year, with a journey to Rome. The word 'Rome' was always pronounced triumphantly at the railway ticket office. We took the Vienna-Rome train,

which stopped for a few minutes at Casarsa, but as soon as we were at the first bend, we already felt homesick for what we were leaving behind. We travelled through the night and dawn broke at Orte, which dominated from on high. The smiling Etruscans on their sepulchres welcomed us and the ode to country life started up again to the notes of Virgil's *alma tellus*.

Our cousin Pier Paolo was twenty-seven when he moved to Rome. Pursued by a recent scandal, he dreamt of a more radical escape, setting his sights on an imaginary East, only to slide back into the humiliation of hearing himself called a '*Rimbaud without talent*'. Out of work and maintained by a relative in a rented room, all he had going for him was the freedom of the penniless. Even though with some desperate moments, he took advantage of this and treated it like a holiday, for his room gave onto the Tiber, where crowds of cheerful, open-minded young Romans would pass by. The days went by and he wanted to take that world in, rather than just watch it from the outside. The young man of letters, all introspection and inner dialectic, was swept away by the real world of the people, which tore the drapes off him. Rushing wildly about, he penetrated the world of popular humility and when reality came together in a universe of dreams, he began to describe this world of the people with the echoes of its age-old gaiety. Mockery, derision and irony poured down from the great, unattainable Belli. The Pier Paolo who came to the banks of the Tiber was a pure young man who lived through the extraordinary nature of his perceptions.

But the Tiber had a king of its own, the poet Sandro Penna, whose only aim in life had for years been that of walking along the Lungotevere, surrounded by the young people with whom he mingled.

They naturally soon became friends: '*You're Penna.*' '*And you're Pasolini.*' With the assistance of his new friends in Rome, and especially of Giorgio Bassani, Pier Paolo began working on the very bottom rungs of local cinema as a script editor. He also worked with Fellini, who gave him a second-hand Fiat Seicento, with which he began to expand his range of action as far as the outer suburbs, where the kids packed into the same old criminal bar, ready to mock any new arrival but also to strike up immediate friendships.

The lure of the unknown gave wings to the Seicento, in which the stench of the kids' feet condensed from one day to the next and which Pasolini seemed to appreciate as much as De Quincey did his opium. He also continued his literary and cinematographic career, in a strange, unprecedented osmotic form, in a parallel of Roman stories between *Ragazzi di vita* and *Accattone*. But what is the finest story ever told over the millennia? The answer came instantly to the soul of Pasolini the unbeliever: *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*.

Making a film requires a project, a subject, a screenplay, and a selection of actors and of places where it is to be shot. There was no problem for the actors, for Pasolini had always had them right before his eyes: they were hustlers, from the Citti brothers, Sergio and Franco, to Balilla (who would die on the cross in the film *La ricotta*) and countless others.

The locations were those he had wildly frequented in his car and on foot. He also went to Israel on reconnaissance, but he did not like the modernity of the new state and he came across no traces of the ancient world in it. He found what he was seeking not where Christ had lived but in Italy, and he found it in the South, and in Matera in particular. One scene that sets the whole film alight is that of the baptism of Christ, with the water pouring from the hands of Saint John the Baptist.

Pasolini used no megaphone and gave no peremptory orders, nor did he let himself go to hysterical scenes at the slightest hitch. Maybe he recalled an ancient maxim of the classical world, which encapsulates the energy of any crucial act: '*Equitare, arcum tendere, veritatem dicere*'. He was always calm and quiet, always concentrated, and he thought like a strategist before giving even the simplest instruction. The baptism of Christ. Orte was perfect, with its special conformation and pristine Roman countryside all around. Pier Paolo went through it, attracted by a tall tower that appeared to rise up on its own. As he approached, he found it was part of an ancient defensive wall enclosing a vast space with many ruins – the complex known as the Torre di Chia. Up against the walls is a brook with primeval sink holes and massive boulders that rolled down in distant geological eras. These ancient stones had been part of the world long before man arrived, and their sacredness convinced him to make this the setting for the baptism of Christ.

I may not remember well but I believe a passionate desire to purchase this place simply swept over him, with those towers and ancient walls symbolising a safe haven for life. While the highest tower and the area around it were to remain intact, the ruin, possibly an old guardhouse, was to have two modern extensions, with vast, extremely modern windows. These two wings were to enclose an even more secret place, where Pasolini would have his body buried, with Ninetto beside him.

A studio bedroom in one wing and a sitting room with leather sofas and a fireplace in the other. The childish joy of building sandcastles.

For his future work as a writer, however, he needed an even more secluded place – a vast wooden pavilion painted green, blending in with the nature around it, with two sofas, a table and, next to the table another one of unusual proportions. A work table, he called it, but what work would that be? Possibly a mix of written pages, graffiti and photos, of which only the written pages would survive – about six hundred typewritten sheets that would be published some years after Pasolini's death, under the title *Petrolio*.

The happiness of New Year of 1974 around the sitting-room table, with the fire crackling in the hearth and then lunch at the nearby trattoria, followed by more glasses raised in the sitting room with its huge windows giving onto the brook and its erratic boulders. Pier Paolo perceived some negative signs that evening. Nobody wanted to notice, but simply filled their glasses, and yet his superstitions, which he cultivated with that sprite, Sergio Citti, were well known. Pier Paolo was worried, but we knew how Elsa Morante had extended two fingers across his forehead and banished his gloom the way one shoos away an insect.

Pier Paolo announced to his guests: '*Next year will be one of famine.*' A rather too Biblical comment for our then rather blurred minds.

But by a quirk of fate, the perfect isolation of Chia was not that perfect after all, for it had a slight flaw. From one corner of the walls, the view stretches out over another person's land. We did not know who the owner might be but, like in so many other places, there was always the threat that some industrial shed might rise up and ruin the carefully studied isolation forever. Suspicion can be a snare. So Pier Paolo was much relieved when I offered to go a find the owner of that plot and make him an offer for it, for no other reason than to keep that natural backdrop intact.

There were warm greetings and much joy when the first guests arrived. Mimi and Guido Piovene, Moravia, who was at home here, and Guido Davico Bonino, who was about to conclude the move of Pier Paolo's works to Einaudi. A caretaker, Troccoli, was hired from the nearby village and Pasolini took to his teenage son, who appeared in a number of scenes in the film *Salò*.

Pier Paolo spent much of his time in Chia but in the evenings he would return to the home of his mother, whose life was for him both in his presence and in his absence.

Translation by Simon Turner

The infinite inhabits Chia. Pier Paolo Pasolini's house/castle by Maria Grazia Eccheli

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From the deep wooded furrows of Fosso del Rio and Fosso di Fontana Vecchia, two ravines civilised by the Etruscans, rises a triangular piece of land whose vertex, at the meeting of two river banks, is the virtual centre of two semi-circles that trace the defensive geometries of the Medieval castle of Colle di Casale.

Arched between the margins of the vales, the two walls hold two aligned pentagonal towers – one very high (42 meters), the second one broken – which signal the ideal itinerary.

An opening next to the first tower communicates the dense woods, which are held by the first wall, with a wide lawn, a *spianata*, where the two defensive structures face and, as in a tournament field, are visible to each other. Emerging from a moat – from its position below the horizon –, the broken tower is the entrance to the last and secret *hortus conclusus*: a courtyard suspended over the cliff.

The mystery is in the view, in that overlook on neighbouring ruins, on the faraway landscape seen in the full light of noon, chosen, one would say, by the very curving of the walls: Bomarzo, Mugnano and the lands of the Tiberian Valley. A Tuscia with streets, pathways, Etruscan grottoes and enigmatic "pyramidal altars". A place high above the deep dales where the Mola flows, improvising waterfalls, such as the one known as di Fosso (or *del Castello*) which in the fecund imaginary transpositions/osmoses of the legendary Palestinian topographies into Italian landscapes that PPP undertakes, becomes the backdrop for the scene of the Baptism of Jesus in *The Gospel according to St. Matthew*.

His capacity to see myth in different places, almost as though the *genius loci* of a place could migrate to unexpected locations, is perhaps at the bottom of PPP's idea of transposing a CASTLE – a building without interiors and congealed within its muted military essence, almost to the point of becoming a mere heraldic symbol, apparently inalterable – into a DWELLING. Then again, the "visits" of Longhi's pupil to Piero della Francesca's world in Arezzo were legendary¹.

Thus the COURTYARD/ROOM – the lawn as floor, and for a roof the leafy branches of the trees – becomes the *impluvium* of an imagined house. A simple wooden structure (less than four meters long and three meters high) is added to the stone walls, which have no interiors, in order to double the width of the scythe-shaped layout, and obtains volumes and form from the central tower that both divides and unites it. Dwelling thus takes place in

two wings (built at different moments during the Seventies). Direct access from the courtyard gives the sense of rooms of passage, one within the other, recalling an ancient, perhaps rural or peasant way of life.

A cursory wooden bridge with bayonet railings – boundary between the flatland and the private space of the poet – serves as entry into the stone parallel-epiped at the base of the broken tower. There, as in fairy-tales, are four doors: two placed at the axis of the castle and the house – the spaces at the interior and exterior of the walls: north and south – the two other opposite doors are at the centre of the dwelling spaces: to the east the bedroom, the bathroom and the studio; to the west his mother Susanna's bedroom, divided from the spacious living-room by a bathroom and a kitchenette. In contrast to the rest of the structure, which is placed against the wall, the living-room presents a sudden break: taking advantage of an existing breach, it distances itself from the base of the wall to invent itself as a wall-less pavilion, between the courtyard and the trees, in which the space is dominated by a large fireplace.

The rooms stand on a stone base which accommodates the uneven nature of the ground; in the interior spaces the flow of the narrative of the stone walls is punctuated by narrow gaps which allow the sunlight from the south, whereas towards the languid northern light the wooden walls are characterised by large windowpanes which dilate space towards infinity.

The CASTLE/HOUSE is a sort of theorem of light: nested within the eternal shadow which originates in the walled concavity, it assumes the role of the Lucretian spectator faced towards the full light of faraway landscapes, when "[the first ray of mere sun] distributes... to the buildings... the appearances of inhabited shells, which they are, of gesture and of life"².

The "house like myself" which PPP wanted, pursued, that he "designed" together with a very young Dante Ferretti, and realised with the same mastery with which they dealt with the demanding set designs for his films, is characterised by a timeless modernity.

In the rooms that the prophet loved one can still breathe the silence of faraway gazes, of readings and words written in industrious quiet; of skillful brush strokes on a thousand white sheets of paper, of presences and absences. His visage absorbed, the hands busy correcting a ream of texts typewritten with letter 22, the body defenseless in rooms of Franciscan simplicity: subjects immortalised, in the second week of October, 1975, by the camera of Dino Pedriali³. In his room/studio, facing infinity, PPP had placed a wooden table, Scarpa's Valmarana, and a comfortable leather armchair, "(...) next to the fireplace, on an uneven stone made flat by a glass pane, Pier Paolo would gather some books, those necessary, because – Graziella Chiarocci Cerami recounts – he would bring from Rome only those that he needed for writing"⁴.

Translation by Luis Gatt

¹ "in September, with Bassani at the wheel of his automobile, he went on a wonderful trip around Central Italy, following the footsteps of Giotto and Piero della Francesca: Florence, Arezzo, Perugia, Todi, Spoleto..." in Nico Naldini, *Pasolini, una vita*, Tamellini edizioni, Albaredo d'Adige (VR), April 2014 [Einaudi, Torino, 1989], p.208.

² Roberto Longhi, *Piero della Francesca*, 1923

³ Dino Pedriali's photos are published in: *Pier Paolo Pasolini, Fotografie di Dino Pedriali*, John&Levi ed, 2011.

⁴ A fragment of Graziella Chiarocci Cerami's stories during our journey from Rome to Chia. A heartfelt thank you to her for giving us the opportunity of visiting the rooms that her cousin PIER PAOLO loved, and for allowing us to consult precious documents.

A story of emotion. Travelling towards Pier Paolo Pasolini's hermitage in Chia by Andrea Volpe

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The appointment was in Piazza Mazzini at 10.30. The taxi was late, brief pleasantries were exchanged. It was early May in Rome and there was already hot African weather. "You get the car, you drive it..." Graziella smiled but decisively handed me the keys while I feigned nonchalance¹. Inside however I felt like exploding, from emotion, from the responsibility.

We departed. Direction Chia. But first we had to get out of Rome's *Foro Italico*, and *Ponte Milvio*, then the notorious *Ponte Flaminio* designed by Armando Brasini; the bridge on which Nanni Moretti in an episode of *Caro Diario* must pathologically pass over on his Vespa scooter at least twice a day. It's a scene that precedes a few minutes before another scene, which is accompanied by the music of Keith Jarrett's *Köln Concert*. As Nanni Moretti says in this scene, it is a journey towards "the place where Pasolini was killed".

Perhaps it's the most beautiful homage to Pasolini: dry, heart-breaking,

without rhetoric and in jealous naivety I even did it myself, obviously on a Vespa, during those days of my life in Rome.

I was thinking about this while I followed Graziella's directions for the *Autostrada del Sole*. And so another pilgrimage with scattered fragments of memories and disorder but at the same time there was a conscious effort of having to stay morally clean. After all we were not going to Lourdes.

Why then was this childish emotion trying to dominate me? Was there an unconscious desire for a miracle? Was I expecting some revelation or prophecy? In the meantime, the windshield revealed the damaged skyline of Orte, one of the set on "*La forma della città*"². The incongruous condo that troubled Pasolini so much was inevitably multiplied and turned into faux-rustic neighbourhoods with neat rows of industrial prefabricated buildings, which assaulted the hill and plains below. Yet it is still the most ancient and remote Tuscia that welcomed us. Despite the building of so many scars, that landscape for us hypersensitive motorway travellers is still the one described in the finale of Pasolini's confessional poem *Poeta delle Ceneri*³.

Indeed, at the River Jordan and the Middle East's *Gospel according to St. Matthew* one can find a few kilometres from the road at Torre di Chia the ancient early medieval fortification bought by Pasolini in 1970 where he wrote his final novel as a hermit.

I thought to myself that it was actually a bit difficult not to expect a sacred experience from this tour, or at least another baptismal rite. After all, we were heading towards the Palestine of Viterbo, renowned thanks to the movie and the mythology on which we grew up on⁴.

First though, with a little of tension in the air we stopped at a motorway service. Graziella couldn't find the keys to the house, which consequently lead us to the fear of a wasted trip. However, once past the gate that separated the forest from the large open space inside the ring of walls the feeling disappeared. A theatre company warmed up on music and songs. They came out of the wooden pavilion next to the medieval castle restored by Pasolini along with the young Dante Ferretti⁵. The poet used to draw in the pavilion.

The sun was up, the air hot, the light was too strong and the shadows were too dark, surely the worst time to take photos. But these issues were now irrelevant. The problem laid elsewhere. How could you reasonably record being there? How could you think of taking more photographs after those shot by Gideon Bachmann, Deborah Beer and Dino Pedriali, the last witness to the intimacy of the home of Chia⁶?

And then there was a presence, an absence so strong. Forty years have passed since the death of Pasolini and very few from that of Vincenzo Cerami. The house is still closed, hidden by the great wall that protected the ruins. It was inaccessible despite a wooden bridge with surprisingly Japanese characters, past the front rampart, on the plateau where we silently stood. And then there was the passageway to a narrow entrance.

To understand the place we carefully studied detailed records of black and white photographs: Pasolini posing before the walls, before the high tower of Chia, waiting at the front door as an enigmatic guest that still benevolently welcomed us. His spirit will live forever over that threshold. Transfigured in his home between the landscape, he is framed, protective looking.

Some of his last verses in dialect from *La nuova gioventù* (The New Youth) came to my mind. They illustrate nostalgia for rural culture in Friuli, where a similar humble beauty was turned into cinematic experience in the style of Chia Mountains. Caught in a sequence of windows, like frames of a long sequence shot, they turn north following the trail of ancient walls as if to embrace the distant Apennines.

"(I) The sun gilds Chia with its pink oaks and the Apennines know of hot sand. I am a dead man here, who returns today in a day of celebration March 5, 1974. [...] Peasants of Chia! Hundreds of years or a moment ago I was in you. But now, from the time the land is abandoned you are not in me..."⁷

The door was finally opened here. Feelings of denial, desire, were fulfilled by the miracle of crossing the threshold of this house, which is both a poem and a narrative film made of space, light and shadow. It was therefore a pure architectural fact. P.P.P. believed it to be an apodictic demonstration of the possibility of construction of the new by virtue of the profound dialogue with tradition. It was architecture literally supporting the old, to the *strength of the past*. It was time to go. We moved away from a house whose character "more modern than any modern" house⁸ was ultimately for us architects, too prone to enthusiasm, one of the most authentic self-portrait of Pasolini.

translation by Michael Phillips

¹ These brief notes seek to describe the atmosphere of the journey made to Torre di Chia last May 9, made possible thanks to the kind availability of Pier Paolo Pasolini's nephew Graziella Chiarocci Cerami.

² This refers to "*Pasolini e...la forma della città*", a short film directed by Paul Brunatto in the autumn of 1973 for Rai, an episode of *land...tv* show, curated by Anna Zanoli, a former student of Roberto Longhi. Roberto Chiesi includes this short film in Pasolini's body of work, *Lo sguardo di Pasolini la forma della città, un film di Pier Paolo Pasolini e Paolo Brunatto* in www.pasolini.it/articles/pasolini.htm, where he essentially puts together the suggestion by Naldini, Contini and Laurencin of the real possibility of inclusion in PPP's official filmography of Rai's episode which employed Brunatto as their established director.

³ *Ebbene ti confiderò prima di lasciarti che io vorrei essere scrittore di musica, vivere con degli strumenti dentro la torre di Viterbo che non riesco a comprare, nel paesaggio più bello del mondo, dove l'Ariosto sarebbe impazzito di gioia nel vedersi ricreato con tanta innocenza di querce, colli, acque e botri, e lì comporre musica l'unica azione espressiva forse, alta, e indefinibile come le azioni della realtà"* Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Poeta delle Ceneri*, Archinto editore, Milano, 2010 (revised edition based on the typewritten original document).

⁴“Le riprese di ‘Medea’, che inizialmente si intitolava ‘Le visioni della Medea’, iniziarono alle ore nove del 1 giugno 1969 a Uchisar, in Cappadocia [...] il 27, la troupe, ritornata in Italia, effettuò le riprese presso il fiume di Chia, non lontano da Viterbo, sottostante un’antica torre medievale...” in Roberto Chiesi, *Dossier Pasolini 1969-1972, I. Le visioni barbare di Medea*, in *Pasolini sconosciuto*, curated by Fabio Francione, Falsopiano Edition, Alessandria, 2008, p. 243

⁵“Ho aiutato Pasolini a costruire una casa di cristallo perfettamente trasparente e col tetto in erba, in località Chia in provincia di Viterbo: non si sa che fine abbia fatto...” in “Intervista a Dante Ferretti – Scatti corsari nel paese svelato da Pasolini”, Laura Laurenzi, *Il Venerdì di Repubblica*, 21 Ottobre 2011. Others interesting news concerning Pasolini’s intense relationships with the Tuscia region are reported in Silvio Cappelli, *Pier Paolo Pasolini: dalla Torre di Chia all’Università di Viterbo*, Vecchiarelli Editore, Manziana (Roma), 2004.

⁶ For a comprehensive presentation / interpretation of photos taken by Pedriali at the request of Pasolini and read by Elio Grazioli and Marco Bazzocchi “*Pasolini ritratto da Dino Pedriali*” <http://www.doppiozero.com/materiali/recensioni/pasolini-ritratto-da-dino-pedriali>

⁷ From *Ciants di un muàrt in La nuova gioventù*, Einaudi, Torino, 1975.

⁸ Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Poesia in forma di rosa*, Garzanti, Milano, 1964. This verse read by Orson Welles and voiced by Giorgio Bassani, appear in the famous episode *La ricotta* in *RoGoPaG* later known as *Laviamoci il cervello*, 1963.

Toshiko Mori

Thread - The Sinthian Center: the Albers Cultural Center and Artists' Residency by Michelangelo Pivetta.

(page 26)



The Ariadne's thread

“Thousand steps always start by one.”

San old tribe proverb.

Africa holds the secret of man, hiding, at least in its most original part, everything that humanity is, every *beauty* and every *tragedy*. Anyone who had access to the knowledge of this secret will never be the same as before. Architecture, which everywhere is the most obvious and viral of man expression, it is not in Africa; there Architecture, the original one, loses any iconic value to magnificently reduce itself just into a necessity. It leaves the role of regulator at the case and the role of function to solve minimum problems: to protect from the rain or defend against other men or animals. The African history gave us memories of ancient and vast empires and the knowledge of their heroic architecture but, the *regressive evolution* imposed, in the last three hundred years, by the *white man* blocked the road to the hundreds of millions of people natural growth path.

As part of a kind of pitiful - in the sense of the latin *piety* concept - path of mending and rapprochement between *white* and *black* civilizations some valuable collaborations occur. The realization of many architectures capable to contain these operations is necessary. Sometimes these architectures, especially recently with roles that are beyond the simple functionality, become parameters of a cultural and social renaissance, accompanied in the same time by a synchronous awareness of their unique self-identity value. Senegal between many countries in sub-Sahara Africa can be considered among lucky supporters of a miraculous balance, suspended between tribal tensions and geopolitical - and now religious - dynamics. The thick intellectuals and artists substrate that this country has over time cultivated and encouraged, certainly helped to reach and maintain this positive situation. The *Ecole de Dakar*, the *Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres*, the *Biennale de Dakar* are some fulcrums around which, since the sixties, collective experiences of expression materialized, allowing the trans-tribal and trans-religious sharing, plumping a particular and substantial consciousness of freedom and people communion. *Thread* fits as a part of this social and cultural capitalization. The main goal of this work is to welcome and to strengthen the local artists community that otherwise would be dispersed over the vast and difficult territory of the African country.

Toshiko Mori, after a intense activity during which she has been involved in a lot of realizations immersed in the mellifluous landscapes of the USA East Coast, has dedicated itself to that project with an unprecedented design effort with a renewed and propulsive ability. Certainly this assignment could make a concrete commitment from always made, as a member of the *World Economic Forum Council*, under the theory that the architecture is, everywhere, one of the most appropriate responses to solve the social problems. The realization of a Cultural Centre for the arts and artist in a rural area in Senegal appears as one of the themes to which every architect should aspire. To devise a functional architecture for the activities related to the arts in an inconvenient place for a community thirsting for culture and in need of places from which to evangelize it, it seems to enclose each key of the intimate idea of making Architecture.

The newyorker architect shrewdly developed the theme, exploiting every problem to her advantage and introducing in the project an approach that is in balance between tradition and innovation, simplicity of implementation with indigenous technology and sharing of unusual material that the African way of building made available.

A great canopy made using the typical African *thatch* - a roof built by weaving stalks of what we, in its African declination, would call sedge - performs the task of the main architectural object, but also is a water collector that supplies about half water need of the entire village. This cover embraces, protecting from the sun and rain, the spaces below that are divided in a seemingly random succession of solid and empty volumes around open and closed spaces, conceptualized not only according to a specific function but also according with an aspiration of indefinite utility.

Such as the geometry of interaction between the houses of any rural settlement in sub-Saharan Africa, even here, relations take place mostly outdoors, in those interstitial spaces that a thousands years old endemic wisdom of *spontaneous urban planning* can make the favorite places of socialization and life of tribal communities.

The building *rules* designed by Toshiko Mori follow a dynamic but soft, arhythmic but deliberately persuasive tensions progress that accompanying hand by hand the man without any hesitation. The composition critical *run-out* is the planimetric proposal in which the Japanese architect plays with the traditional forms. She swaps usual hierarchies, emptying and discovering the circular spaces that usually identify a full and covering the interstitial spaces that are normally opposed to the interstitial connective outdoors.

The references, used to create the roof structure and the wall portions for micro-ventilation, are *mnemonic resources* intended to suggest the origin of technical choices declared as necessary. This practice, common in best architecture projects, defines the possibility of reading a project through multiple layers depending by the scale of interaction that could be chosen by the observer. The first of these *resources* it is the structure of the roof that, in reference to the Japanese origins of its creator, is achieved through the bamboo binding according to something like the *Gasshō* of the *Minka* typical houses in the rural Japan. An act not withheld signing, almost undetectable, but clear and imperishable. The second *resource* concerns the design of the ventilating walls that participates, together with the geometry of the large roof, the false image of precariousness that the structure seems to communicate. Not only that, it wants to expose the memory of the client, or rather the promoter, through the ideal reproduction of one of his Op-art graphics.

Roberto Filippetti recently well explicate the terms of *modern hybrid* sense about some part of contemporary African architecture. Here it seems perfectly able to be fitted instead the concept of a hybridization leaning towards the need to exist and proud bearer of that sense of *pure poverty* originated by an essential, but at the same time perfectly declined, architecture.

What is also important in projects such as *Thread* it is the collaborative aspect of the building, its growth within a social group or a geographic location, its use for that it will be able to do extraordinarily determining, once again, as the architecture is unique tool to create civilization.

Thread means wire, but not only. A thread could be the unitary element capable to generate more complex weaving. A thread has the ability to bind, weave, connect. *Thread* is like an *Ariadne's Thread*, it is able to weave the community using the significance of art in order to increase the awareness and culture. It could be a vector capable to lead out from the darkness of a poverty and radicalism labyrinth, reinforcing the relationship by the identity through the architecture language. This is the beginning of a long journey where *Thread* is the first essential step.

Aires Mateus

When building INEXPENSIVELY becomes a LUXURY

by Maria Grazia Eccheli

(page 34)



On Alberoni Beach, in Venice’s Lido – far from the overcrowded *salons* of the Hotel des Bains – Luchino Visconti designed a sandy courtyard, with simple wooden cabins set as a U; with white and grey/blue striped curtains supported by a slender structure he then amplifies the necessary shade for channeling the sea breeze in the sultry hours of idleness.

In Visconti’s most Proustian film, where Gustav von Aschenbach’s desire for young Tadzio is worn out, the sandy courtyard is inhabited by simple beach chairs and reeds, by the rustling of the white dresses of women protected by wide hats, by the solemn gait of an elegant, pale and silent Silvana Mangano.

The atmosphere of the “descent to the sea”, with its spare assortment of utensils on the sand, the lightness which derives from rigorous work, from memory, from knowing how to do well with little resources, seems to migrate – in an era characterised by doing too much, and badly – from Venice’s Lagoon to the Alentejo. Enchantment and disenchantment on a strip of land wedged between the estuary of river Sado and the ocean, a natural park where new constructions are apparently not allowed. Four fishermen’s cabins with the traditional straw roofs – two built with bricks and two with wood and reeds – become the “CASAS” of COMPORTA, through the restoration-transformation by the Mateus brothers. The idea of the project, the dialectic criteria of the issues pertinent to re-usage, is already a part of the interpretation of the four buildings: disposed in a semi-circle in such a way as to form a sandy courtyard open on the sea, they are intended as the various rooms of a single dwelling [for inhabiting the summer]. Their division/distinction, caused perhaps by the analytic attribution of destinations – three of them, in fact, become rooms – is exhibited yet at the same time recomposed by wooden boardwalks which spread over the scorching sand, almost as if stressing the unifying morphology of the courtyard. All the openings that face the courtyard become doors, expressing the role of IMPLUVIUM, which is defined by a virtual in-existent portico.

If the restoration of the two brick houses – a bed and a bathroom in each – consists in a thermal adjustment through the doubling of the walls, transfigured by the priceless white plaster which gives back the oceanic light, the adaptation of the two wooden houses, a more complex endeavour, seems to be at the origin of the idea of the project itself. The two wooden houses/rooms were disassembled and reassembled following a careful interpretation of old local construction techniques, which result in a wooden structure that is the same both on the interior and the exterior, thus becoming space and decoration at the same time. The reeds, which are placed alternately and supported by horizontal wooden strips, characterise the elegant texture of all the walls. But the new interpretation of the place has its vertex in the house/room of the last cabin: it is the sand, which continued in the interior, constitutes the flooring. Thus walking barefoot on the beach continues inside the cabin, on the sand which also houses comfortable sofas draped in white cloths.

Maybe it is the archetypal form of the buildings, an air both ancestral and contemporary at the same time – together with evocations of illuminist theorems on the cabin as ordinary model – that gives the four structures such a surprising depth. In building two CABANAS not far from there, the Mateus’ seem to want to continue the precious landscape of the Reserva Natural do Estuário do Sado. A landscape of water and stilts: a lagoon/estuary that the ocean tides constantly mutate, alternating to the splendour of the blues of sky and water the sandy grey of the sea-beds of intricate and invisible canals from which rises a forest of stilts. A world of wood for walking on water, for mooring small vessels and inhabited by cabins and fishermen.

Two small parallelepipeds built with recycled wooden planks disposed vertically. The two structures acquire sureness in the landscape declining their own individuality through almost invisible gestures: a misalignment between the two which at the same time underlines the affinity and diversity of the geometry of the roofs, determined by the necessary inclinations for the disposal of rain water. It is once again the case of a functional hendiadys: the two small rooms – measuring around 10 sqm each – are in fact complementary, a cabin contains the bed and the services which, surprisingly, also constitute the entrance and can be opened towards the landscape; the second cabin is devoted to the day activities. Wooden planks placed on the beach unite the temporal dimensions – day and night – while a boardwalk communicates it with an old jetty, the true border between land and water. The material unity (old wood) and the modality of its realisation – the sincerity of the structure characterises both the interior and exterior spaces – gives the whole a chromatic unity which surprisingly blends in with the almost invisible horizon.

I have build a castle on the sea, of 3,66 x 3,66 meters, *for my wife*, said LC about his well-known Cabanon, pre-fabricated in Corsica and carried by ship to Cap Martin, not far from the house of his friends Eileen Gray and Jean Badovici. In Roquebrune, on a path that almost reached the sea where everything was small: the door, the stairway and the access to the cabin through the vineyards. Only the site was grand: a splendid bay with steep cliffs.

Translation by Luis Gatt

Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo

Dream house by Alberto Pireddu

(page 44)



In 1942, Ernesto Nathan Rogers relies on *Confessions of an anonymous* among the pages of “Domus” the description of his dream house, a beautiful house, “warm” and worthy dwelling place of human life:

This is my ideal home: away from you, enough for singing out of tune and being not heard, yet so close so I can greet you by waving hands and you could answer me.

It grows from the ground like a plant and is yet sovereign of the nature, assertive man trace. A piece of land at the bottom and a piece of sky at the top: among countless flowers, someone perfumes just for me and, in the night, a square of stars – among the infinite – lights up only for me.

My house changes face at the turn of the seasons; changes fronds rejuvenating itself every spring, in summer it has the coolness of the woods; colored in autumn, wrapped by the winter snow, underneath, my family germinates waiting for the sun. Let the walls be limits to the outside world, not obstacles: may they open all outside, may they close, half-close: eyes with eyelids and eyelashes or, perhaps, pores that could breathe the universe and bleed harmful moods.

My house is a body, as my body, holder of sorrows and joys, next to your border.

In penetrable bodies¹.

Rogers seems to materialize his dream not far from Noto, Sicily, in a small holiday house designed by Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo².

Here, among the almond and olive trees in a gentle slope towards the sea, two volumes functionally and formally distinct, interpenetrate under the same roof: the “manor house”, with its solid structure of reinforced concrete, and the iron body of the “guest’s residence”.

Equipped with a mechanism that determines movement on metal rails, animates the life of the house, protecting it during the winter and allowing it to unfold for the arrival of spring when, with the first sun, the walls finally open to illuminate the interior. In the changing size loggia, the large living room and the manor bedroom meet the *enfilade* of the guest’s accoutrements.

The lodge is a rarefied space, a room facing the sea, suspended on a metal grid. The building, in fact - by seeking a continuity of quotas with some existing buildings and trying to reach the sea horizon, over the treetops - does not touch the ground, but stands on concrete beams firmly anchored to the hill, while a steel structure supports the metal cage of the sliding volume and its relative staircase. And yet the house has “its own roots”³, encloses a private world taken away from indiscreet glances, so that no one can reveal the secret.

The project summarizes some key points of the poetry of Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo. Among them, it calls into question the Vitruvian *firmitas* through movement, the contraction and expansion of the architectural body and the idea that this may not last forever, but endowed with an “own life, that at a certain point turns off”⁴, a belief that seems to find echo in the words of Rogers “I do not ask my house to be eternal, but enclosed like an embrace”⁵. The same materials used denounce the acceptance of an impossible eternity – the concrete, which is now produced depending on the expected lifetime for a building, gas concrete of the partitions, the okumè of the ventilated walls – as well as the mechanical apparatus intended for an inevitable technological obsolescence.

‘Poor’ or at least ‘ordinary’ materials, commercially available and sometimes reminiscent of an industrial world, which architect experiments on numerous occasions, by placing them together poetically. It happens, for example, in the control tower in Marina di Ragusa⁶, in which a glass box is suspended on two opaque volumes externally defined by a coating of wooden planks and zinc-titanium panels; in the Scoglitti holiday house⁷ whose body of reinforced concrete confuses its own imperfections with those of the surrounding abusive landscape while portions of reinforcement not included in the cast support containers of the suspended beds; in the family house in Ragusa⁸, where selecting the steel for the platform and outside stairs reveals the wish to make addition parts recognizable compared to the work of removal on the main volume and reuse of the ruins to create a new, direct, relationship with the garden.

Then, the deep care for human life and transformations that it produces in architecture that, in a continuous changing of rules, cannot reach a final arrangement. This is, after all, the big idea behind the editorial project of the book *Loose Ends*, recently published, with its endlessly decomposable storyline and his papers impossible to be ordered, in a total abolition of all code structure.

The book itself is an architecture of “measures, rules, notes, wishes, requests ...”⁹, a house of cards, blank or pre-written, never equal to itself. Moreover, while quoting Gaston Bachelard, the dream house may not be definitive, because if it were so, the soul could not “find his vast life”¹⁰:

Perhaps it is good to keep a reserve of dreams towards a house that we will live later, later and later, so much later that we will not have time to realize it¹¹.

Translation by Arba Baxhaku

¹ Ernesto Nathan Rogers, *Confessioni di un anonimo del XX secolo*. 9° *La casa dell'Anonimo*, in “Domus” n. 176, agosto 1942, p. 333.

² Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo, *Loose Ends*, Lars Müller Publishers, 2014, FCN.2009.

³ Ernesto Nathan Rogers, *cit*.

⁴ Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo, *Sulla lingua*, in *donn'Architettura*, by Maria Grazia Echeli, Mina Tamborrino, Milano, FrancoAngeli 2014, p. 269.

⁵ Ernesto Nathan Rogers, *cit*.

⁶ Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo, *Loose Ends*, cit., PMR2.2008.

⁷ Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo, *Loose Ends*, cit., GNS.2002.

⁸ Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo, *Loose Ends*, cit., SPR.2001.

⁹ Maria Giuseppina Grasso Cannizzo, *Sul processo*, in Id., *Loose Ends*, cit.

¹⁰ Gaston Bachelard, *La poetica dello spazio*, Bari, Edizioni Dedalo 2006, pp. 87-88.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

ELEMENTAL

From Quinta Monroy to Conjunto habitacional Violeta Parra
by Francesca Privitera

(page 52)



Quinta Monroy is the name of an unauthorised settlement by 97 families, which grew up in the 1960s in the centre of Iquique, a town in the desert of Atacama in northern Chile. In late 2001 the government tasked the practice Elemental, led by the architect Alejandro Aravena, with planning a settlement for the families of *Quinta Monroy*.

This project was developed in the context of the programme *Vivienda Social Dinámica sin Deuda*, addressed to the poorest sectors of the population. The programme calls for spending 7500 US dollars for each residential unit, including purchase of land and basic infrastructures. An amount sufficient for setting up about 30 square metres per dwelling on land having near-zero market value. This has brought about the flight of social residence from town centres, overcrowding, lowering of architectural and urban quality and physical and social degradation of settlements.

Aravena's proposal is based on reversing these premises. Families are relocated onto the same land they have been illegally occupying for some thirty years. The layout consists of residential blocks set up around common, open courts. Future inhabitants are supposed to be actively involved through shared planning workshops and self-building. The dwellings, measuring about 36 square metres each, are intended to be *half-houses*, awaiting future completion.

In 2004, residents of *Quinta Monroy* received the keys to their homes. On the day it was inaugurated, the settlement was still under construction. The structure was not a finished solution, but an *open worksite*, a promise of space and life, suspended between the present and the future, between the substance of what had been built and uncertainty about what was to come. The part handed over to the families, of an *elementary* – in an etymological sense – composition, made using prefabrication, was the palimpsest upon which the settlement was to grow. It established the orientation for future developments of homes self-built by their inhabitants. Standardisation integrated with spontaneous urban forms and with participated planning workshops will give rise to an urban form shared by the community, not imposed from above but the outcome of fertile integration between public initiative and citizens.

Standardisation of industrial elements regenerated by the creative human element of self-building, instead of generating monotony and alienation will lay – as in Walter Gropius' American experimentation with *serial incremental houses*¹ – the foundations for community ethics and a possible human dimension to industry. Use of prefabrication in the *Quinta Monroy* project does not set down strict residential patterns, but provides the necessary rules on which to graft the vital transgression of self-building, giving rise to a model for expansion which will set the example for later experimentation calling for integration of informal residential interventions.

Extensions, which reflect the individual needs of families, fill in the gaps of a *porous building*² and affect both the architectural image of each residence and the spatial image of shared courts, areas of interaction between the individual and the collective dimension.

As in a healthy biological organism, flexibility variables – as Gregory Bateson calls them³ – provided for within the settlement of Iquique allow growth of the system, preventing it from collapsing, unlike what happens in other South American outskirts, where self-building brings about a pathological urban growth which tends to saturate available space. On the contrary, in Iquique, individual building becomes collective construction of a redeemed urban and social identity, and the space arising from it mirrors the society which makes it and avoids any mystification, bringing back to mind the ethical principle of *obedience, invoked by Ruskin and so often forgotten today.

The project of Elemental is not just the immediate answer to a housing problem. Its DNA is urban, it is the construction of shared values, liberty, equality, democracy. From the root of *Quinta Monroy*, in a time negotiated between today and tomorrow, there springs forth the *sense of the city*, sealed by the dedication of the residential complex to the intellectual and artist who gave

voice to the rights of the people of Chile and who helped to understand their identity through a quest for their deepest roots.

From then on, *Quinta Monroy* will be known as *Conjunto habitacional Violeta Parra*.

¹ Cfr. G. C. Argan, «L'architettura di Gropius in Inghilterra e in America», in *Walter Gropius e la Bauhaus*, Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi, Turin, 1988.

² Cfr. A. Aravena, A. Iacobelli, *Elemental: manual de vivienda incremental y diseño participativo*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2012

³ Cfr. G. Bateson, «Ecology and Flexibility in Urban Civilization», in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Chandler Publishing Company, 1972.

Volpe+Sakasegawa

Under the volcano. An Italian house in Southern Japan
by Andrea Volpe

(page 60)



"Then, against the will of the captain and of his sailors, we reached Japan. Neither the devil nor his ministers could have stopped us. Finally Almighty God led us to these lands which we desperately wanted to reach on the day of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in August 1549.

*Without any possibility to enter any other port, we went ashore in Kagoshima: the homeland of Paulo de Santa Fé, where we were welcomed, as much by his relatives as by everyone else, with great love and affection."*¹

Thus, Saint Francis Xavier came ashore in one of the most important cities of southern Japan, seven years after the "discovery" of the Land of the Rising Sun reported by Portuguese adventurers who had fortuitously reached Tanegashima, the main island in the Osumi archipelago. From that moment, Kagoshima became the main entry-point for any westerner willing to explore the mysterious land of *Zipangu*, the mythical country whose existence was first introduced to Europeans by Marco Polo's well known travel chronicle.

Consequently this region of Kyushu, the southernmost of the four primary islands forming the *Tennō's* empire, saw for almost a century both the militant proselytism of the Society of Jesus and the growing profit of the Portuguese arquebus trade. It was from Kagoshima, too, where Bernardo, the Japanese disciple of Francis Xavier, came. Historians believe Bernardo to be the first Japanese to set foot in Europe, in 1553 on his way to Rome, where he arrived two years later to meet Ignatius of Loyola and supposedly Pope Marcellus II.² Kagoshima, facing the broad, deep bay of Kinko, is dominated by the imposing profile of one of Japan's most active volcanoes, Sakurajima, which frequently covered the city with its black dust. The ancient capital of the Satsuma Domain has recovered only recently its historical links with the Mediterranean, having become the first Japanese city to forge a cultural relationship with an Italian city since 1960. The bay and the hyperactive volcano, endlessly spreading black powders over the city, are the strongest features of Kagoshima's landscape and link it to Naples, its sister city.

Both are southern towns, both possessing a similar morphology, these two cities seem to share also the temper of their inhabitants. Kagoshima people are flamboyant indeed and quite different from the cold elegance of Tokyo's or Kyoto's sophisticated residents. There exists a sort of Kyushu version of southern hospitality one can find in other Japanese port towns like Nagasaki or Fukuoka, for example, or maybe it would be better to say, which one can find in every other southern place in the world.

Located just one hour away by bullet train from Fukuoka, the city where Aldo Rossi built his notorious Palazzo, Kagoshima offered us the chance to build a small architectural exercise in Take. In this fast-developing central neighborhood property prices are constantly rising because of its proximity to both the new *Shinkansen* railway station and to the main avenue of the town (named *Napoli-dori*). As such, Sanyo House Company asked us to design a model house especially tailored for this burgeoning area and conceived like a sort of manifesto of the Italian architectural identity. This was no easy task, though, since the technology we were obliged to use was local and had to be standardized and cheap, matching the kinds generally used by the contractor themselves; namely, a traditional anti-seismic wood structure walled with wood sandwich panels, a combination offering a thickness of only ten centimeters. Moreover no Mediterranean spatial typologies like patios or courtyards could be included in the design layout, in order to maximise the high value of the ground. Last but not least a pitched roof was considered mandatory so that the volcanic black rain could be easily washed away.

To solve this conundrum, we therefore chose a dialectical approach, in an at-

tempt to merge both the technical constraints and the conceptual possibilities. Despite being surrounded by anonymous single-family detached houses which cannot share party walls in order to respect the strict Japanese seismic and fire-protection codes, and being partly overshadowed by high apartment buildings which hide any view of the bay and the volcano, this house introduces to the Take neighborhood an interpretation of a well-known architectural typology. Two built spaces are placed one beside the other, sharing a wall and forming a possible first nucleus for a design for a row house development: the smaller space contains the hallways, the staircase, the toilets and bathroom; the bigger one hosts the main rooms including the *tatami* room (or Japanese-style room) with the usual straw mat floor and the traditional *tokonoma* (a built-in recessed space in which pictorial scrolls *-kake-mono-* or artistic arrangements of flowers *-ikebana-* are usually displayed).

Conceptually blurring the uncertain territory where Japanese and European identities meet, the house and its blackened-timber facade could be read on one hand like an homage to the traditional Japanese art of preserving wood by charring it, called *shou sugi ban* or *yakisugi*; on the other hand as an enigmatic reminder of the arrival of the *Kurofune*, the black vessels used by the first Portuguese merchants. But there is another inevitable reference for such blackness. It is the precious obscurity kept in the traditional Japanese houses, as described by Jun'ichirō Tanizaki's in his *In praise of shadows*. We chose to overturn that deep interior obscurity, using it to form the exteriors of the house, now transformed in a sort of lava rock pierced by the big window of the double-height living room; a squared *oculus* which frames a view of the trees in the nearby park.

The sole green fragment of the landscape surviving in Take, placed between the Ibusuki railway line and the Nakasu Dori bridge, generates another moment in the house. The old trick Le Corbusier conceived for the *cabanon* is directly quoted in the mirrored shutter of the master bedroom interior window which works like a life-size viewfinder of a livable *camera obscura* pointed toward the trees.

We brought the darkness of traditional Japanese houses outside and placed it on the house facades. This move allowed us to work with other powerful analogies in the interiors: the memories of the whitewashed houses of the Mediterranean villages and their little piazzas. Images that form a reversed landscape can be found especially in the living room, an house-like negative space theatrically surrounded by counter-facades with balconies and windows. These open onto secret intimacies, or "the blue of the sky".³

Translation by Justin P. Walsh

¹ From "Ai compagni residenti in Goa (Kagoshima, 5 novembre 1549)" ("To the members resident in Goa (Kagoshima, 5 November 1549)", the first letter written by Saint Francis Xavier to his Jesuit brothers living in the monastery of Santa Fé in Goa, India. Translated from Spanish according to the original version composed in Malacca in 1550. In Francis Xavier, *Dalle terre dove sorge il sole. Lettere e documenti dall'oriente*, foreword and editing by Adriana Carboni, Nuova Città Editore, Rome, 2002, p. 323.

² Bernardo the Japanese was one of the very first Christian converts in Kagoshima who had no genetic relationship with the clan of Paulo de Santa Fé, the official translator of Francis Xavier (considered the first Japanese to set foot in India). Formerly known as Hanjirō, Paulo, like Bernardo, was a samurai. Bernardo would join Francis Xavier in his journey back to India. From Goa he would then reach Lisbon in September 1522. He would not arrive in Rome until January 1555, remaining there until October of the same year, and meeting Ignatius of Loyola. Thirty years later, four young ambassadors from Nagasaki would also leave for Europe. This epic journey to Portugal, Spain and Italy, managed by Alessandro Valignano, the successor of Francis Xavier in Japan, has been reconstructed in the terrific book written by Michael Cooper, *The Japanese mission to Europe 1582-1590 The journey of four samurai boys through Portugal, Spain and Italy*, Global Oriental, United Kingdom, 2005.

³ One of the Aldo Rossi's most iconic competition projects was entered under the title 'the blue of the sky'. This was a direct homage to Georges Bataille's book, *Le Blue du Ciel*. Immodestly, this house lies under the Kyushu sky, pretending to imitate Aldo Rossi's Palazzo in Fukuoka. Both buildings call out a miraculous analogy, the Mediterranean blue hour.

Arrigoni Architeti

Bāmiyān Cultural Centre - Afghanistan by Fabrizio Arrigoni

(page 68)



The starting concept of the project has been to generate form and orientation of the building from the surrounding landscape itself; hence, the fundamental orthogonal footprint aligns to the course of the Foladi river while getting a slight deviation to focus on the perspective of the western Buddha. While the southern part of the building remains committed to this pattern, the side overlooking the valley unfolds like a fan to embrace the whole length

of the cliffs, reaching to the opposite landmark of the eastern Buddha. In this way the horizontal layout integrates the different views, transforming them in architectural elements: whereas the complete panorama of the cliffs can be enjoyed from the outside promenade unrolling in front of the new cultural centre, a sequence of arches on the inside accompanies and guides the visitor in the dynamic perception of partial views, stimulating a deeper, individual experience and suggesting different levels of confrontation between human scale and monumental dimension. On the other way, the building aims at encouraging a reflection on its cultural mission through the architectural medium: the southern front welcomes the visitor with the familiar and recognizable image of a walled compound, like the dwelling form of the *Qala*, typical of rural Afghanistan; at the same time the presence of decorative features like interlaced geometric fretwork and a lapis lazuli coloured wooden screen denies the traditional defensive character of the *Qala*, reminding of the singularity of the building and the public spirit of its function. Surprisingly, once stepped beyond the wall, instead of finding us in a withdrawn space, we discover the unexpected, unique character of the cultural centre, opening itself to the surrounding landscape. It is easy then to catch the message that the cultural centre wishes to share with its guests: although we can feel the contentment granted by accustomed forms and materials as we stroll through the public parts of the building, their disposition does induce us to literally see beyond, showing up different perspectives and symbolically inviting us to greet them not as a threat but as a peaceful chance. Yet, should we look for more privacy, that's possible, too: we can find retreat in more secluded spaces, like in the smaller ones on the south, facing the quiet linear garden beyond the wall, or in the library, with its own secret courtyard, or even enjoy the almost meditative atmosphere of the round domed, light-flooded schoolrooms. The northern front displays an array of oblique transversal walls in an ever-changing sequence of light and shadow, mirroring the alternation of glimmering rock surfaces and darkish caves on the other side of the valley. As the building stretches out onto the slope, its short transversal façade takes the form of a monumentally powerful architectural statement, gathering different volumes both horizontally and vertically and thus formally corresponding to the complex commitment of achieving harmony between different peoples and cultures. Consequently, this is the where the expected expansion will be found: instead of weakening the purity of the building with the addition of further constructions the area is going to be carved underneath the cultural centre itself, reproducing the coexistence of additive and subtractive architecture typical of nearby cave dwellings (in this regard a partial reinforced concrete structure beneath the centre can be arranged beforehand by the first construction phase).

Materials and techniques

The goal is to keep a low profile, taking advantage of local resources in terms of knowledge and materials. Wide use of bricks, provided in their full range of variations depending on their role: from *khesht-i-kham*, sun-dried bricks, to the stronger, baked *khesht-i-pukhta*, suitable for arches and higher load-bearing walls (a concealed, reinforced concrete inner structure might be provided). Furthermore mud cladding, like in the classrooms domes (*gunbad*), and pakhsha can increase diversity and general quality: the idea underneath is to establish a fruitful interchange with local enterprises and determine together single formal and technical aspects. Although the structure is mainly based on simple flat-roof construction, some more challenging elements (like domes and wide-spanning arches) are present: one is not supposed to underestimate the capabilities of the afghan constructors, so astoundingly showed in many monumental buildings of the past (among others the *Qala-e-Bost* arch...). Precious particulars, on the entrance side and in indoor details, can underline the prestige of the building: we think about the use of lapis lazuli, to be found in the nearby mountains, to stain wood and glaze tiles, the latter ones hidden like a treasure in the linear garden beyond the wall.

Landscaping

In order to achieve a non-artificial, site-oriented appearance and make maintenance easier, the arrangement of external garden-like areas is reduced to clearly marked beds, slightly rising from the soil to serve as perimeter benches. The rest is deliberately left as untilled flat terrain, which represents the natural surroundings of most afghan architectures. The botanical choice implies a selection of species according to aesthetical and practical principles; they all provide the benefits of lower water needs and, what's more, have been traditionally grown for centuries and acquired over the years a symbolic value, too. Five beds of Damask rose (*Rosa damascena*) greet the visitor with their soul-stirring fragrance. On the lower eastern level again a flowerbed, this time filled with ornamental *Nigella damascena* and valuable saffron (*Crocus sativus*); beyond that a small shady plantation of pomegranate (*Punica granatum*) offers shelter for relaxation and walks.

Sustainability

Known construction methods applied to traditional materials, albeit focusing on constructive challenges and sensible experimentations, assure consistency and feasibility of the project. Integration means involvement of local workers in the project development, rejection of formal fashionable gestures artificially superimposed to the context, revitalization of an available technical knowledge that should not get lost. We can take advantage of traditional indoor climate controlling solutions (like thickness and composition of walls) integrating them with contemporary systems like solar panels and borehole thermal energy storage. In addition to that a rainwater reservoir is placed under the building.

Last but not least the above-mentioned landscaping project involving useful plants can represent an additional income (pomegranate fruits, rose essence, dried saffron stigmas) as well as the real, continuative integration of local population, avoiding to create an extraneous enclave.

Aris Konstantinidis and the house in Anávyssos an offer to the landscape by Fabio Fabbrizzi

(page 74)



In 1962, Aris Konstantinidis got the assignment to design a small house for the weekend in Anávyssos, at the 48th kilometre on the coast road that runs from Athens Cape Sunio promontory.

At that time, landscape appearance of that segment of coastline embodied in the quintessence of nature and in the simplicity of a little number of architecture volumes, that characteristic of authenticity that Konstantinidis would have pursued in his design research since he went back to Greece after the German training period. He did his research principally thanks to photography and drawings, the main instruments that Konstantinidis adopted to analyze and highlight the qualities of nature and Greek authentic architecture, in order to understand the inner-power of sites that only mythological dimension can recount and preserve.

The building site, selected by Papapanayotou, the Anávyssos house client, is situated ten kilometres far away from Poseidon's temple, which ruins rise on the top of Cape Sunio cliff in a dominant position above the Aegean sea, which name originates from the king of Athens who threw himself among the waves as long as he presumed his son Teseo's death.

The construction site – a rock strip that floats on the sea, suspended between earth and sky, in the middle of a pure landscape – moreover than extraordinary beautiful, it's really full of hopes, with an innate strong figurative and paradigmatic *latency*, made dull nowadays by the various little villas and hotels which changed hopelessly the primordial sense of place, so brilliant and primitive to Konstantinidis' eyes more than fifty years ago.

We can imagine him – as sometimes he loved to remember – sitting on a stone, *breathing* the site, feeling himself as part of that compound in which the light, the earth, the water and the air are only a small part of a bigger *non-human* creation, as if that place, like anyone else, would be an earth's breath, wanted by a benevolent god just to be understood in the exact moment of its comprehension. And while the comprehension sediments, we can imagine him, tracing against a bright sky, some clear lines of a possible geometry that can organize the sense of an archaic rhythm, an elementary and absolute measure, made of nothing but still able to gather everything inside itself. Once the design project is *mentally* created on the site, the drawing table represents only the required time that is necessary to fix a concrete shape that *born from the earth*.

It's born from the earth, but also from a constant developing heritage that Konstantinidis feeds, snapshot after snapshot, sketch after sketch, observation after observation, thanks to that spontaneous source made up of vernacular architecture, that allows his design capability to be placed out of time, in a true harmony with things, schemes, figures, themes and types that are still the same through the different ages.

In the sensitive interpretation of a possible *structure* that idealizes and discloses the shape – which linguistic result in the end is less important than the power that determines it – we can find tradition, regionalism and also a critic to modernity inside Konstantinidis' works.

During 1964, on the rock strip promontory of Anávyssos, Konstantinidis inserts a rectangular plane of 18,50 m x 9,50 m made up of grey schist plates of several big dimensions, almost an emerging stylobate that comes from the earth, which foundations are obtained from the same dug stone. On the plane, a raised volume reminds the essence of Mycenaean *mégaron*, a rectangular room identified by four corner columns with the fireplace in the middle, around which all other rooms are distributed.

The pure house geometry is completely understandable at first sight, with its perimeter containing a parallelepiped of 14,50 m x 6,00 m and an L-shape porch which surrounds two sides of the volume. The internal rooms are set-down on a 2,00 m x 5,00 m grid, to which the thickness of the walls must be added-on. The porch is set-down on a 3,00 m x 4,00 m grid, characterized by powerful wall-sections of 2,00 m and 4,00 m length which are alternated to breaches of the same dimensions.

All the external stone walls are realized in big pieces assembled in irregular rows; the best pieces are used to define the angles, in order to obtain

sections of a more defined stonework, clear in their vertical raising as the traditional rural construction technique requires. A 50 cm concrete slab, realized flush with the external stonework, closes the upper part of the building and gives to the internal rooms a symbolic sense of pressure, as long as they are 2,40 m high. So, the compressed internal space, further expanded in the horizontal direction thanks to the rough concrete surface of the ceiling intrados, lets the view run out the house in landscape direction, through the big breaches shielded by sliding green painted wood panels, towards the irregular rock hills profile on a side and the continuous dividing line between sky and sea on the other side.

The internal distribution is arranged around a central fireplace which divides the living room from the dining room, while the kitchen looks out in a small independent loggia and a room with a bunk bed communicates with a small bathroom. The essential dimension of the house, designed for a professional soldier as a *buen retiro*, suggests the sense of shelter, of refuge, protection against the dazzling light and the incessant wind, harmony with the *material* of the surrounding context, till the point that the house, just finished, in some vintage snapshots, seems to be a natural stone concretion, eroded by wind and salt. The intermediate space under the porch, intended to be the mediation site between the inside reflection and the outside vastness, gives the possibilities to live the most part of the day in open air condition.

Sobriety, dignity, simplicity, but at the same time absolute, abstraction, symbol, seem to be the extremities of the vast definition field inside which it's possible to give an interpretative reading of this little masterpiece; first of all, in the overlay of formal and building dimensions, where the technique is pure shape and the shape is pure technique, in a constant sending back between figure and substance, we can find the most precious core, the one that imposes itself over the other possible interpretative superstructures.

In the wise simplicity of this house, we can read the power of archetype, the primordial need of a roof protection and at the same time, the expression of one of the most concise example, immediately after the assertiveness of Modernism, of a certain design tendency originated from the encounter with the archaic sense of site, charged of its whole ancestral tension.

Architecture for Konstantinidis is a collective process, in which the architect can express his own world vision through his works. An authentic world, made of everyday life, of duties and prohibitions, of definite rules and habits that are the improvement of the sensitivity that unites man to earth, and in this alliance, *"the real architecture must be comfortable, as a shoe is, it must have the flavour of well-kneaded bread and grow up on the earth like trees, bushes and flowers do. (...) Architecture, far away from the harsh and cruel scientific method, owns an artisan and handmade dimension, thanks to which it can express and give shape to life teaching, as these take place on the contorted and unknown destiny's paths"*¹.

Konstantinidis' vision is a fatalist one, absolutely aligned with the spirit and Greek soul, where the sense of humanity consists also of architecture as one of its most high expression, always in relationship with a higher dimension. But looking to Konstantinidis' design and theoretical approach, no provincialism can be recorded, neither typicality due to the folkloristic dimension of several characteristics of Greek identity; instead, we can find a large-scale effort that goes over the strict boundaries of a single nation and makes this itinerary appear extraordinary aligned to the best European design lesson of the second post-war period. In particular, the Italian one, in which the rediscovery of truth, reality, authenticity and simplicity, becomes the conceptual and operative nodes that reveal the way for a more respectful design approach, taking care about the several voices that sites have to suggest to those ones that are humble enough to understand them.

*"In a good architectural project, building general design and its details are all part of an harmonic composition, as if all its parts would be interlaced with the same point of view; detail is identified with the general design and this one, on its own, includes the detail without any fear, as if it would be a part of its own. An architecture with a stature and a shape that has reached perfection in composition, with all the parts that create a well-organized organism, shows itself in the surrounding landscape as if it would be there continuously, as if they would melt together in a moment, ancient and new, contemporary and past, as if we could identify in the present work the construction of tomorrow"*².

Between the undertow lapping, or the cicada's chirping, between the smell of myrtle and the light that hits directly the stone walls, the poetry of this design approach is showed in the clear geometry of this house, designed by an architect as a real "site offer". An offer immediately neglected, only two years after, when the owner, because of the several criticism of his *entourage* that judged the architecture too banal and invisible in the landscape, sold it to a ship-owners family that reduced it to a tools cabin in service of the vulgar and exuberant villa that immediately was built beside.

Translation by Paolo Oliveri

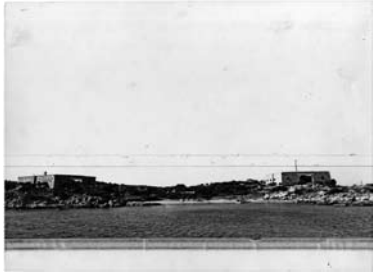
¹ Cfr. Konstantinidis A., *Alcune parole ancora*, in Cofano P., *Aris Konstantinidis la figura e l'opera*, Libraccio editore, Milano, 2012, pp.97-103.

² Cfr., Konstantinidis A., *Op. Cit.*

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A bourgeois retreat. The houses at Arzachena by Marco Zanuso by Francesca Mugnai

(page 82)



"Monti di Mola" is now just the title of a song by singer-songwriter Fabrizio De Andre which tells of a wild land where a troubled love blossomed between a handsome boy and a white jenny (female donkey).

When Marco Zanuso is commissioned in 1962 to build two holiday houses in Arzachena (Olbia-Tempio, Sardinia, Italy), the tourist colonization of Sardinia is just beginning and, in that part of the region, the old name of "Monti di Mola" is still used. In the local dialect (gallurese) it means "stones for the millstone". The few families that still live in the area gladly part with their coastal lands, which, malarial and infertile, are still considered wasteland. Even Zanuso's commissioners, among them the architect's brother, on their voyage from Milan to find a suitable site for their summerhouse, encounter a landowner who offers to sell his land to them¹.

However, the development of the shoreline is soon destined to assume another scale entirely and with different connotations. At this time, the *Consorzio Costa Smeralda* (literally: Emerald Coasts Consortium) is established. It will re-name and forever transform that virgin land, rugged and indomitable, abused by an oriental prince who will remain unpunished. Antonio Cederna, an Italian journalist and environmental activist, was charged with 'defamation' for having denounced the development as a disaster and the crimes as: "A typical robbery of tourist exploitation is underway: a wanton urbanization of the coast, its transformation into a continuum of building that alternates estates of great luxury with seaside concentration camps of the worst quality. Both break every connection between the shoreline and the interior. This privatizes what should be accessible to all; it encloses the sea in a cage and degrades irremediably the natural prestige of these places, which is what really allows the development of tourism"².

If, on the one hand the mess perpetrated in *Costa Smeralda* "style" has as its main objective the elimination of the original wilderness of the coast in order to offer a fake and opulent domesticity, Zanuso's project, on the other hand embraces and re-elaborates all the rusticity of Sardinian land, to offer to the modern Ulysses a temporary refuge (just a holiday) from the comforts and the obligations of the bourgeois life, in communion with the natural elements. This conjures up images Penelope's bed (talamo, in Italian) built by her husband from an olive tree stump.

The twin houses arise near each other but with different orientations so as to follow the coastline. The floor-plan is a 15 metre square enclosure, further divided into 9 equal squares. Only the four corners are rooms, plus an intermediate space occupied by lavatories and an oven³.

The remaining areas form an atypical cruciform court. A grand pergola made of wood and matting recapitulates the central space; a *velarium* hangs wall to wall. This is the centre of the house, the domestic hearth. Here, symbolically, are the oven and the round table, whose top is a granite grindstone. Though the house itself appears to be an introvert structure, it opens outwards through the mediation of the court which overlooks the sea towards the distant coastline through the frame of a large portal.

The court as a pivotal element of the house is almost Zanuso's signature (for example the coeval villas at Arenzano). Here, however, his resort to this typology is ambiguous. The planimetry is an abstract geometrical creation, which has no reference to any precise model and is still inspired by Mediterranean residences (the Greek, Roman and Islamic) in the dual relationship that the living space has with the exterior: direct with the domestic life outside and mediated with the public space. Such ambiguity is reaffirmed by a subsequent enlargement of one of the two houses, consisting of two buildings with a circular plan evoking the nuraghe, yet they integrate into the existing syntax according to rules that are not ascribable to the type.

In the living quarters, the interior design is essential, in harmony with the spirit of the project. Fixed elements integrate with the structure of the house; beds and seating elements, for example, are built in stonework and woodwork, while the door shutters, when open, are recessed into the wall. Everything synchronizes to realize this modern laic refuge that "redefines and reinvents the contemporary idea of the Mediterranean identity"⁴, as architect Francesco Cellini observes.

The image of the squat shapes on the seashore, the thick granite walls and the great gate - more like a fortress than a house - evokes an archaic and fabulous world of shepherds with their flocks, of sorceresses and shipwrecked sailors. With the explosive force of *deja-vu* (meant truly as psychological phenomenon), Zanuso's landscape represents the Mediterranean Homeric myth. In this synthesis, built into the *Arzachena's* houses, we can actually recognise an image that we have never seen, not in Sardinia, nor anywhere else. Nevertheless it appears familiar because it is able to encapsulate - in a modern way - centuries and layers of our History.

Originally these newly-constructed houses are lit with oil lamps and have water tanks for washing and bottled gas for cooking: in Sardinia at that time there is no other technological alternative. It is this real austerity that also emphasizes the ancestral connotations of this house, meeting the clients' wishes. It is not time to challenge the forces of the nature, like in Villa Malaparte, which dominates the sea from above and re-shapes the rock outline. Thirty years later, certain of its domination of the world, the bourgeois challenges itself: by indulging in the paradoxical luxury of remaining naked in order to experience its own ability to resist the deprivation of "wellbeing" and "comfort", nevertheless still returning to nature to measure its own power.

Zanuso's intellectual itinerary presents some affinities with the early *Arte Povera* of the time, which explores the historical-anthropological roots of the Mediterranean culture, searching for an antidote to homogenization, and opposes the plethora of consumerist objects through "humble use of the bare necessities"⁵. Like the "poveriste" works, Arzachena's houses, even if rustic and primitive, are intended for those who live consciously immersed in the civic culture. Although Zanuso had designed objects which are considered the very symbols of consumerism, in 1972 he built a small house for himself in Paxos (Greece) inspired by these same austere values. Perhaps this was his personal "Ithaca" able to embody his aspiration, as man and architect, not to lose sight of the essence of things, including the true nature of objects: "The true vice is incomplete technology", he declares in an interview in 1988, "[which means] that technology which is unable to reach its ultimate conclusion: freedom, and a return to nature and humanity"⁶.

Translation by Livia Dubon Bohlig

¹ Information on the genesis of the house are to be found in M. J. Zanuso, *Casa ad Arzachena*, Marco Zanuso, in "Lotus International" n. 119, 2003.

² A. Cederna, *Hanno messo il mare in gabbia*, in "L'Espresso", 10 settembre 1966.

³ For a deepened analysis of the geometric construction of the plan cfr. A. Calgarotto, *Il cielo nella stanza*. Marco Zanuso, *Casa per vacanza*, in E. Mantese, *House and Site*, FUP, Firenze 2014.

⁴ F. Cellini, *Introduzione*, in E. Mantese, *op. cit.*

⁵ An expression by fra' Ubertino da Casale cited by G. Lista in a beautiful paper on *Arte Povera* in G. Lista, *Arte Povera*, Abscondita, Milano 2011.

⁶ V. Magnago Lampugnani (interview with Marco Zanuso), *Marco Zanuso: portare l'artificio alle sue conseguenze estreme*, in "Domus", n. 690, 1988.

The Poetry of Lost Spaces. Vittorio Garatti's Ballet School in Havana by Caterina Lisini

(page 90)



El campo huele a lluvia reciente. Una cabeza negra y una cabeza rubia juntas van por el mismo camino, coronadas por un mismo fraterno laurel. El aire es verde. Canta el sinsonte en el Turquino... Buenos días, Fidel.

Nicolás Guillén¹

"If Cuban culture - in whichever expression - aspires to reflect the Revolution, I believe it must do so with a full consciousness of a certain excess: deliberately indiscreet and exorbitant"². Thus Hugo Consuegra recounts the 'heresy' of the five Art Schools of Havana, designed by Ricardo Porro, Vittorio Garatti and Roberto Gottardi: architectures that are fable-like, "magniloquent"³, spectacular, naturally excessive and yet extraordinarily capable of summarizing in enchanted and joyous forms the entire consciousness of the Cuban revolution, the vastness of the challenge and the utopia of hope. The year is 1965 and the events concerning the construction of the schools are at their conclusion. Risen with impetus, in the first months of 1961, through an initiative of Fidel Castro himself, and built in the majestic and luxurious site of the exclusive Country Club, the five schools (Dramatic Arts, Plastic Arts, Ballet, Modern Dance, Music) would be, within a few years of

their construction, exalted, then harshly criticised, and eventually delegitimised, abandoned and soon even forgotten⁴.

It is not difficult to glimpse today in these unexpected forms the poetical sign of 'another' modernity, where over the abstraction of rationality and orderliness the poetry of the place prevails, the accumulation of sensations, the unfolding of a narrative made of spaces, shapes and situations that are ever different and surprising, with a verbal abundance that seems to recall an irreverent and virtuous tropical "garrulity"⁵. "Cuba - writes Alejo Carpentier -, was fortunately mestiza like Mexico or Upper Peru. And since every mongrel culture, through a process of symbiosis, mixture and addition, generates a form of barroquism, Cuban barroquism consisted in accumulating, collecting, multiplying (...)"⁶.

Vittorio Garatti's Ballet School lies in a small valley, on a small cove of the Quibú river, unwinding its plasticity, like a leafy tree, on the soft variations of the slope. The structure envisages a choreography theatre, three dance practice pavilions, a series of theoretical classrooms, a library and administrative offices. The construction itself was carried out with the use of simple traditional techniques, elementary and 'poor': a single material, bricks or tiles, characterises all spaces, whether assembled in the refined details of the walls, curved in the undulating vaults following the technique of the *bóveda tabicada catalana*, or composed in majestic aerial cupolas. "The arch and cupolas were out of the ordinary - recalls Roberto Gottardi - but we had nothing else and we used them with great ease"⁷. The use of reinforced concrete was very rare, always limited to a few load-bearing beams, as in the cupolas, due to the scarcity of steel and concrete in Cuba in the first years after the Revolution. A rich inventory of forms characterised by a deep figurative intentionality serve as a counterpoint to the technical inexpensiveness of the construction. The composite structure - a long winding gallery which connects the various pavilions at several levels - seems to respond, more than to an organicist blueprint of Wrightian influence, to a joyous happiness, an almost childish enthusiasm which guides the integration of the architectural forms to the folds of the terrain. As in a musical symphony, the curved masses of the walls emerge "sprouting from the woods around the small valley: they rise from the river, encircle the pavilions, abandon the pavilions and once again submerge themselves into the greenery"⁸. Every space is determined by its function, as Garatti often underlines, but the rational principles almost disappear to make way for perception, sensation, even a sense of humour, which together play a preeminent role in the conformation of the architecture. This is the case of the dance practice pavilions, where the surrounding walls, which are convex, evoke the movement of the dance while the light cupolas swell, welcoming the aerial twirls of the dancers; or else of the connecting pathway, true *paseo arquitectónico*, which mutates section and proportions in correspondence to the changing perspectives, and harmonises the luminosity at every turn and rest. The project is also an exercise in memory, where every pencil line, every trace, carries signs and experiences, where the lessons learned from Rogers' teachings in Milan, the particular attention to places and history, the legacy of tradition and the masters, is always present to guide the navigation like a trusted lighthouse. "I always thought of the project as a voyage, and to the attention that is placed in preparing the luggage. In my suitcase for the Schools of Ballet and Music there were records of Johann Sebastian Bach, Igor Stravinsky and Bela Bartok, some paintings by Wifredo Lam, books by Lezama Lima and Alejo Carpentier, and naturally the Revolution, the spark of my creative process for all the works in which I participated during my fourteen years in Cuba"⁹.

At the same time it is the entire Cuban tradition that is reflected in the seductive forms of the school. *La Habana Vieja* is a "city of shadows, made to take advantage of the shade - shadow itself"¹⁰, just as the quality of the shade, even more so than the modulation of the light, is what seems to determine the sequence of spaces in Garatti's architecture. The *paseo* is a deliberately hollow form which fosters the presence of shade, a place where light penetrates intermittently, obliquely, from the fissures that result from the overlapping intersections of the vaults: the space next to the ground is dense, material, and seems to fluctuate in the glowing slices of light. The entrance to the school complex itself is a threshold of shade, which is reached by descending a long serpentine stairway, and precisely at the limit between exterior and interior space the vaults rarely and darkness seems to progressively fade away. This alternation of shadow and light emphasises the dynamic nature of circulation, thus creating a "musical architectural promenade, intoxicating and captivating: undoubtedly dance-like"¹¹. In contrast, the pavilions are concentrated spaces, collected and mono-functional, weaved or flooded by light thanks to the *medio punto* technique, a crafty deterrent of solar reflection which comes from the Creole tradition. Yet Garatti's architecture does not give in to folklore, or picturesque naturalism. Even when using almost literary quotations, as in the case of the *ventanas a medio punto* of the cupolas, the work on the details and the spatial invention manage to transfigure them, turning them into almost mythological backdrops for the *promenades*, where the fan-shaped structures and the flow of water in the open-air canals constitute an almost magical landscape, a poetic sing in symbiosis with the surrounding nature. Nothing is ever, or completely what it seems, like the brick walls, in continuous metamorphosis between retaining walls, stage wings, natural backdrops, even canals-aqueducts for the water that flows across the entire architectural structure. The architectural episodes, sequences and events intertwine and confound themselves, creating fleeting and changing

forms, immersed in the landscape. The school itself seems to transform into a small city, and in Garatti's small city the *paseo* is also the Cuban street, noisy and indiscreet, while the pavilions recall the intimate nature of private homes, reserved and introverted. Precisely regarding traditional dwellings Carpentier writes: "These houses were truly functional. The patio, always in the shade, gave the dwelling what we could call an 'interior life'. In the high-ceilinged rooms air was always flowing. Those houses had no pretensions of being Le Corbusier's *machine à vivre*, and were instead rather full of 'lost spaces'"¹². Garatti's architecture is also a series of multiform 'lost spaces', always different, fitting, and extraordinarily happy.

Translation by Luis Gatt

¹ "The countryside smells like recent/ rain. A black head and a blonde head,/ walk together down the same road,/ crowned by the same fraternal laurel./ The air is green. The sinsonte sings on the Turquino.../ Good morning, Fidel." Nicolás Guillén, *Canta el sinsonte en el Turquino, from Elegie e canti cubani 1930-1968*, edited by Dario Puccini, Milan 1971.

² Hugo Consuegra, *Las escuelas nacionales de arte*, in "Arquitectura Cuba", n. 334, 1965.

³ *Ibidem*

⁴ Regarding the events related to the National Schools of Art (ENA) in Cuba see, amongst others: John Loomis, *Revolution of forms: Cuba's forgotten art schools*, New York 1999; Esther Giani, *Il riscatto del progetto. Vittorio Garatti e l'Ena dell'Avana*, Rome 2007.

⁵ Mario Vargas Llosa speaks about 'garrulity' as a virtue of Latin American writers, in his afterword to: José Lezama Lima, *Paradiso*, Turin 1995.

⁶ Alejo Carpentier, *La città delle colonne*, in Id., *L'Avana, amore mio*, Milan 1998.

⁷ Roberto Gottardi, *La mia storia della scuola d'Arte Drammatica*, in Esther Giani, cit.

⁸ Vittorio Garatti, *La costruzione delle Scuole di Balletto e di Musica*, in Giorgio Fiorese, *Architettura e istruzione a Cuba*, Milan 1980.

⁹ Vittorio Garatti, *Memorie*, in Esther Giani, cit.

¹⁰ Alejo Carpentier, cit.

¹¹ Hugo Consuegra, cit.

¹² Alejo Carpentier, *Le case di una volta*, in Id., *L'Avana, amore mio*, Milan 1998.

High ideas facing low budget. The Ponti Quarter by Franco Albini in Milan by Francesco Collotti

(page 98)



The typical for Milan orange tramway passes right through the city centre streets heading out towards the outskirts of town, ending its route with a grand carousel, after having crisscrossed the whole of the quarter which has grown up outside of Porta Vittoria.

The IFACP assigned a crooked lot to Franco Albini, placed running parallel in the direction of what would later become the fruit and vegetable market.

Once again, on Franco Albini's part, an exercise of refined resistance to the whims of municipality's masterplan and to the lots' tailors, who used the land as if it were fabrics for clothes or pasta for ravioli.

And if Broglio, already an architect for the Socialist Administration before Fascism, worked within the official urban masterplan, forcing it to the extreme point at which he was allowed, reaching a high level of quality and proposing defined blocks surrounding the domestic tested standard of the Milanese courtyard (close to the style of the Höfe of Red Vienna), Albini was instead looking to go beyond the obstacle, reaching a particularly illuminated form of gentle contrast to the official urban planning proposal². He had already taken on this theme in an exemplary way in the Fabio Filzi Quarter in Viale Argonne (1936) following his first experiments in San Siro - Milan, which were in 1932³. Albini, here in the Ponti Quarter, was looking once again to create blocks without them being closed off (1939)⁴.

A simple, yet at the same time, refined plan, a composition for single note coupled or repeated for light deviations and refined combinations.

High thinking, low budget.

This volume of Firenze Architettura review develops the idea of 'costruire povero' (low budget building but great ideas inside), which in the Ponti Quarter becomes a noble effort able to evoke the quality of the small streets and squares, built here. Here, where a city for the poor was growing just before WW2 breaking.

Three courtyards (mall squares?) which follow one another in a sequence, aligned on to the central enfilade which splits the lot into eleven apartment blocks to be erected following Albini's original plan, drawn up with Renato Camus and Giancarlo Palanti.

Nine were built and today seven still remain, as two blocks composed by two buildings each were demolished.

There are seven, like the famous Nuremberg seven, the lines of houses that can be seen today, lined up three on each side of two square courtyards with one at the top towards the city. Of little importance are the egotistical fences which currently are trying to destroy a beautiful idea. This place is resisting intelligently. It is much stronger than the stupidity which inflates the particulars. From the inside to the outside, the way houses should always be made. The internal courtyards, unexpected from the outside, are a total break from the rigorous rhythm of the parallel buildings. Albini respects the road lines, but does not pander to the headlines of the official masterplan, as usual he turns round the blocks, freeing the orientation of the buildings from the street grid, in some of his quarters rigorously respecting the heliothermic axis. The building heads become the facades of the quarter and arrive at the nearby roads taking with them the internal rule of the complex, not adjusting themselves to the imposed alignment.

Here is the alternative city by Albini, a more intelligent town which demonstrates a convincing sense of order. Essential houses, intransigent, laconic, only just marked by the emphasis of a certain type of stairs, a chiaroscuro which hints at a loggia or, an overhanging roof giving a shade on an otherwise flat façade, the division of a window which uses the roller blinds' casing to acquire a classic proportion.

The minimal decor trying to build recognisable places, at least something that could be called HOME on returning from work, even if in some basic form. The apartments are after all minimal, only one side exposed, two bedrooms of which one is meant for two/three children and an annexed double bedroom, the kitchen area (a small corner) next to the loggia.

A dignity and respect for the house and a WISH FOR ARCHITECTURE above all, which the town seems to have lost since.

Here is the ability of Albini to resist, made up of extremely courteous gestures. Precise, able to demonstrate a principle almost by exhibiting its own lightness, never oppressive or heavy and always elegant despite the 'costruirsi povero', and never, above all, arrogant.

Through this technical ability comes the construction of an idea of minimal decor (similar to some milanese houses of the early '900). What was decoration when marble effect plaster was enough to evoke a stone stairway that you could never afford?

If in the quarter of Fabio Filzi in Viale Argonne, the loggias are slightly withdrawn compared to the kitchens and the exaggerated chiaroscuro shows the living room in shade, seemingly wanting to reach out into the open, in the Ettore Ponti Quarter sheltered by Via Maspero, Via Monte Cimone and Via Turchino, the chiaroscuro frames the facade with an eyelid which protrudes above and gives it volume, containing it, protecting the home.

Sometimes a few centimetres are enough to conform a space.

Has this town been able to produce projects in the years following this? Maybe only for those who are looking for lukewarm (anyway tender) ultimately peripheral centres.

¹ Above all quartiere Mazzini, ex Regina Elena 1925-1932 (Ufficio Tecnico ICP - G. Broglio), along Via dei Cinquecento, brilliantly described in the poetry of Antonia Pozzi.

² F. Collotti, S. Acciai, *Fare l'isolato senza il blocco: oltre Broglio, Albini?* Speech at the convention *La parabola del quartiere a Milano nell'architettura di Giovanni Broglio*, 2009 Dec the 10th c/o Facoltà di Architettura Civile del Politecnico di Milano

³ In the wide bibliography of the residential buildings of Franco Albini: the monographic edition on Franco Albini from *Edilizia Popolare* n.237, anno XLII January-February 1995; the small and precious catalogue managed by some of his former students *Franco Albini Architettura e design 1930-1970*, Milan 1978 with the designs of the residential buildings; the monographic volume from A. Piva and V. Prina *Franco Albini 1905-1977*, Milan 1998; and the other previous monograph of F. Rossi Prodi, *Franco Albini*, Rome 1996

⁴ 1936, spring; Piero Bottoni took part at the exhibition which should have been a section of the VI Triennale. 1938 he publishes the manifesto-volume *URBANISTICA*. After defining urban planning as *new and old tools in the organisation of the life of men, functioning on the technical possibility and artistic forms which correspond to and express the era*, Bottoni introduces a small exhibition dedicated to a particular theme: *the portioning up of the city. The painter Munari who had already collaborated on the composition of URBANISTICA worked at the posters on the 'ways of urban settlement'*

Figini and Pollini *Our Lady of the Poors*, Milan. *Giorgio Rajneri kindergarten in Collegno*. "Pre-fabricated buildings"

by Gabriele Bartocci

(page 106)



The second post-war Italy economic recovery brought to the diffusion of the pre-fabricated building system.

This system was basically used to create the icon of the industrial building: a factory shed declined in its different evolutions. At the base of the pre-fabricated building choice lies the cheap price in producing and building. This was due to the simplicity of its material and its assembly.

Indeed the construction material was produced in factory as one piece of a whole machine and this brought to a drastic reduction in production time and working force, a better transport of its elements, a faster set of the building yard and a reduced maintenance its structures needed.

In this context, construction as a factory product does not often establish a relationship with the territory, which is considered just as a setting base or even a speculative one.

The building is set on the floor just like a body, without rooting in it.

The consequence of this is the homologation and transformation of the Italian landscape, irreversibly compromised.

Contrary to the defined process, in some rare occasions, the architecture research shows some interests in inserting into the production system and directing the elements to a compatible aim.

Among these examples the vicissitudes behind the projects of *Our Lady of the Poors* church in Milan, Baggio, designed by Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini (1954) and that of a kindergarten in Collegno, designed by Giorgio Rajneri in the outskirts of Turin (1977) are proofs of that. These works sign the responsibility that a building project has of the landscape around and that the urban tradition to create suburbs area in Italy. They completely detach from the destructive results of a low cost industrial construction thanks to a high-level project design. Architects take the constitutive elements of pre-fabricate architecture vocabulary, they read it and interpret it through a composition method that fully takes advantage of its expressive potential.

The architecture building represents a reflection on a constructive naturally re-producible concept that is being treated, as a replicable model easy to adapt at the environment the building is set.

Figini and Pollini church is part of a post-war reconstruction program of the city of Milan. The building seems to express a urban area process in progress where the historical city lives with the contemporary one, so innovation overlaps old tradition without erasing nor mistaken traces for identity.

The church has the disposition of volumes and the external aspect of an factory building, a parallelepiped apparently indifferent to the context.

By looking at the façade, on isolating it in a frame and amplifying its image potential, it seems as if it had suffered the same difficulties of many Italy's churches façades, whose constructions works were interrupted once and remained un-finished.

A first structure works just like a superficial skin that is constituted by pre-fabricated panels and stringcourses that reveal the different construction phases. This surface overlaps an apparently softer older skin in bricks, the same material that was used for the urban complex of Saint Ambrogio cathedral in Milan. Just like a veil it flourishes as in filigree, recomposing the prospect design of the recalled cathedral and its symmetry.

The large horizontal bricks prospect that presents four vertical cuts appears as the interpretation of a tape window that here does not work as an opening access but it shows itself as a plugged surface that continue on the sides front, forming a loggia. The pre-fabricated stringcourses look as if they were the abstraction of the iron structure bands that surround the ruins they preserve, protect and restore. The horizontal bands interrupt the pilasters line and two plugged openings, cutting them. Comparing to the others, the access opening is out of scale; the church's entrance is in the shadow, as the frame is set back, at the point where the building loses a piece of wall.

The side prospect is distinct to the reduced section by a series of thin cement pilasters that close the building like a scuff-holding structure.

Architects succeed in reducing to the minimum the thickness of the external cover that gains the lightness of a large pre-fabricated panel. In fact they insert inside the supporting structure, which is constituted by four couples of pilasters with trusses of a dimension that double the one of the pilasters.

The loggia is a matroneo overlooking outdoors and it reveals the building section, that of its thin cover and the side aisles.

By avoiding the gutter (the water collecting canals are set behind the top of the walls) the prospect composition looks unfinished.

A tower shows the presbytery and brings light to the altar; it is thought and treated as a pre-existing one and looks coverless: the roof is flat and lower than the height of the walls. The drawing that is carved on the paint wall of the tower reproduces the force lines of the beams reticular; each element reaffirms the concept of double: history and contemporary.

The apse is obtained from bending outside the back wall of the parallelepiped: here the openings of different dimensions are not as symmetric as the ones on the façade and they are set back of a double order of pilasters that overlaps the prospect. The focus inside is on the framing of the structural beams that delimit the presbytery space. The pilasters represent the interpretation of the chains used to enforce the churches' naves and are illuminated by a light that comes to the altar as on a grave exalting the framework. In a similar Italian urban context, after 20 years the Collegno kindergarten designed by Giorgio Rajneri represents the possibility of rescuing Italy outskirts. The building is a poetic reflection of the industrial village that surrounds it. It has its symmetric axis on the bisector of the triangular lot in which it is inserted. The pivot of the composition is the triangular court that is set on the central axis and it is accessible from a covered but warm hall.

The external area flows into the court through the building with no solution of continuity. Behind a space that hosts the services (the administration, the director's and secretary's offices and the teachers' spaces) are rooms that overlook at the landscape.

The two entrances, set at a lifted height, are positioned at the extreme sides of the parallelepiped, at the points where the volume is in the blocks of the didactic rooms.

Rooms are covered by conical vaults and have unaligned heads.

The resulting consequence is an aggregation of elements that seems to have developed in different times.

The tape windows obtained on the ground floor do not occupy the entire line contrary to the openings at the first level, but they interrupt at the point where the ground rises and changes height, modifying the vertical alignment to the superior windows: the building adheres to the lot and to its topography.

The construction system constituted by a Y pillar and a S.A.P. vault establishes the composition rules of the prospects becoming a characterising element of the building. Embossed over the volumes' heads, the structural elements determine a shadow line on the lights lunettes that give lightness to the cover and make it resembling the pages of an open book.

The building is the result of the multiplication of the same elements infinitely aggregating and it is in fact a closed system, unique and complete, not replicable. Concerning with the school of Collegno, Roberto Gabetti in a letter to Giorgio Rajneri published on n.3 "Controspazio" in 1979 wrote:

"You know that among the project designs here, the one I prefer is certainly the one of the kindergarten in Collegno, whose windows are cut, thanks to the builder competence, which does not indulge trends of that time. It's there where your research is such faithful to the construction product that it would be taken for granted. Together with it there's the typography that your brother Beppe fixed in great light sheds still using construction methods of that time. Our observation did not tend to the evidence, but to the concrete adherence to the ways of production. Maybe all of these are just old memories; I'll seriously stop now: everyone is in a hurry. Your Roberto Gabetti".

Translation by Albertina Acerbi

An ideal shelter for children. Project of a kindergarten in Poggibonsi (Siena), 1955-'64 by Riccardo Butini

(page 114)



In 1954 the local government of the town of Poggibonsi deliberated on the construction of a kindergarten at the edges of a residential area.

It was the first school of the Tuscany town to be built after the war.

Thanks to an influential "piece of advice"¹ the next year Mario Ridolfi, Wolfgang Frankl and Domenico Malagracci will be the men in charge of designing the project of a kindergarten in Canton Vesco.

There are some common points between the two different projects, especially for what concerns the space distribution of the didactic areas. But there are differences in the adopted solutions and they are easily linkable to Ridolfi's school of that time.

Some of the causes that could have determined the relievable distance between the two works might be the different economic and environmental conditions the architects had to face². The pictures were shot during the different construction phases of the building yard and immediately after. They show a large free space area between the multi-floors buildings, (signs of the modern urban set of the village) and the Staggia river beyond which the landscape still maintains the complex but clear geometric frame of the rural settings. Ridolfi is faithful to the former place setting. He embraces it with his usual sensitivity, this time interested in a possible updating of the characteristics of rural architecture that is witness of the material culture the architect had to deal with. The kindergarten building was thought as a small rural complex that was constructed little by little as a spontaneous aggregation. It resembles much of an ideal shelter children-tailored, that escapes the grandeur of the big residential buildings with a simple design, much essential and it shows its technical solutions completely shameless.

Each pavilion is made of a local stone that presents some pieces of bricks and travertine corners.

The pavilions are covered of a four-pitches roof that is made of a roman style mantle. Along the riverside area rooms are protected by canopies, which are sustained by rough wooden points beams.

Beams are supported by pilasters, which are made of bricks.

The didactic unities are set around the large squared canteen room together with the other functional cores (as well as the two sections, the project foresees toilettes, the director and administration's offices, one kitchen, a laundry, one canteen and the guardian's house).

They are formed of two rooms in square map aggregated to a services pavilion. For this space the architect will design a marvellous wooden truss cover rounded to the map and sustained by four bricks pilasters in bricks and squared travertine blocks that are covered by a stylised Doric capital as precious support that lacks in additional decorations.

This is the real heart of the project that was first destined to be a temporary yard. A series of windows that are included in the double shutter of the bearing structure of the cover almost empties the perimeter walls and allows the light to gain space as to completely illuminate it.

The cover seems to be hanging above the large hall that was thought as the main living place, which shows itself as an open space area.

Ridolfi commits himself to think over a possible dialogue with the traditional architecture but he has to deal with the claims of a "know-it-all educational psychology"³ that is oriented to the "detachment of a building body and of space as a didactic value"⁴. This in contraposition to the constitutive clearness and simplicity of the space structure the architect works on.

Although the presentation text of the project shows that "the rooms' section, the actual core of the school, was designed according to the latest experiences on the subject"⁵. Ridolfi will have to deal with the critics on the excessive height of the rooms that "lack in a good ceiling design and reach the height of 5,50 metres in the middle (...) so it will be necessary to provide for good ceiling structures of no more than 4 m height from the floor"⁶.

The rigidity of the central hall, "an almost Renaissance choice, static, from one room to another, a correspondence between the design of the ceiling and the one of the floor... what will the kids do there but playing the Ringa Ringo 'Rosie'?"⁷ Ridolfi won't be faithful to the absurd requests of the technic commission if necessary. He works hard to defend the project. It was carefully studied on every little detail, from natural light to internal partitions, fixed tailor-made furniture integrated into the walls structure as to find always the best solution to satisfy the needs of the future "little" inhabitants.

As well as the boards that show the furniture disposition, the architect designs the executive details until reaching the 1:1 scale, as he did with the flip-open beds.

The rooms' windows set the adjacent landscape through the wooden made infix grid just like big transparent boards. They allow the view of the relations between indoors and outdoors: two different dimensions, which make the experience of learning and knowledge becoming true.

In a context that is strongly modified by the great urban transformations of the last fifty years, the kindergarten is surrounded and this unfortunately makes it harder interpretable.

Thanks to the joyful and cheerful presence of the children, however, it is still possible today to appreciate the lesson of Ridolfi. He created a work that can hold out the linguistic and typological distortions of the contemporary time, visual testimony of the possible relation through time, ordinary life and architecture.

Translation by Albertina Acerbi

¹ With these words the Mayor, in his charge letter of 20th September 1955 spoke frankly to Mario Ridolfi saying his name was advised directly from the Ministry.

² The plan of construction foresees two sections (four rooms of about 36 square metres) as well as toilettes, director's offices and the administration's, one kitchen, a laundry, one canteen and the guardian house: all in a room of about 2000 square metres and at a presumable cost of about 21 millions of lira. Ridolfi communicates promptly to the mayor that the sum isn't enough and foresees two functional pieces of papers to sensitize the Ministry as to commit himself to work hard for it.

³ F. Cellini, C. D'Amato, *Le architetture di Ridolfi e Frankl*, Electa. Milano, 2005, p. 99.

⁴ *Ibidem*

⁵ Extract taken from the project presentation.

⁶ From a comment by the Construction Committee.

⁷ P. Signori, *La scuola materna di Poggibonsi e l'arretratezza dell'edilizia scolastica italiana negli anni cinquanta*, in F. Brunetti, ed., *Mario Ridolfi: 1984*, Lalli, Poggibonsi, 1988, p.29.

A Testament to modesty and charity. Church of Saint Joseph Craftsman in Montebeni by Simone Barbi

(page 120)



The surprise for those who are familiar with Raffaello Fagnoni's architectural production, creator of this little church, lies in standing before an artifact that at first glance hardly reminds his previous designing research¹.

Built between July 1965 and May 1966 on a hill in the surroundings of Florence, while the author's style is clearly expressed in the early stages of the designing procedure of the church, it becomes unrecognizable in the final product. This work represents an unexpected yet not conclusive final stage² of his enthusiastic research on the theme of a sacred space that he had started a long time before then. In fact, he had carried on his exploration through many assignments received after the rebuilding of Saint Dominic's Church in Cagliari in 1949³, as well as through a constant dialogue with Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro⁴ the inspirer of a group of intellectuals from Bologna and their journal *Chiesa e Quartiere*⁵ who were very busy in the national and international debate on the relationship between architecture and modern religious art. Designed between 1963 and 1965 and consistent with Fagnoni's research for richness of details, production complexity and structural expressiveness – by examining the archives, two ambitious preliminary projects come to light. However, they were likely deemed unfeasible due the limited resources of the committing diocese.

[...] In June 1965, the final project was born just like all the artsy things, like a flower of the soul that suddenly becomes clear emerging from the blurred⁶. Rephrasing the aphorism and it benefits me the most where it harms me the most⁷, the 'poverty' bond imposed by the patron is absolved through some simple but effective composition and construction choices focused on the bare building of the space. This latter is reduced to the minimum and accomplished – according to Fagnoni's expression – through a cautiously economic and well-done realization, expressed among others by the covering intrados, which displays all the elements and turns the construction frame into an ornamental system without any finishing touch.

Materials – concrete in view, industrial-produced bricks, self supporting and opalescent glass such as the 'U-Glass' usually used for manufacturing plants – are glorified through two mechanisms. First, control over the natural light effects on the surfaces, verified from the start by using a scale model. Second, thorough attention required from the workforce on site during the manufacturing and the laying of each element.

For the first time, Fagnoni discards mass solidity, one of the key features of his work, and by breaking the volume he builds the hall as a composition of materic surfaces connected by measured 'light joints'.

The light is meant to deal with the sculpture plasticity and ceremonial furniture that the architect placed all over the space thanks to some important collaborations with many artists trained in Florentine workshops⁸.

The light is designed to enhance several elements: first, the tactile features of the matter; second, the processing of the cement etched by unrefined form-works; third, the 'in relief' weaving of brick vestments; lastly, the bareness of the covering intrados in untreated industrial-produced clay-bricks mounted on concrete chiseled rafters.

One of the most interesting characteristics of Fagnoni's project is in the South facing apse. The opening gives light the way to enter the space from the East and to hit the brick curved wall. This way, it restores the traditional orientation of the Christian cult buildings – or at least its perception. However, such a detail demonstrates that a simple layout choice may address symbolic needs and completely remodel the space overcoming the obstacles enforced by the lot itself.

Placed at the top of a staircase and at the end of a ramp connecting the site to the street level, a bronze gate welcomes devotees into a liturgical hall. The baptistery sacellum enveloping the monolithic baptismal font and perfused by direct natural light represents a very well lit secondary access. The bell tower, which was included in every previous submitted version, is the element that turns such a little church into a proper landmark. Two reinforced concrete partitions contain three bells, which are surrounded by ledges in order to stiffen the in-view structure. There is no actual facade but rather a rearward front, which is arranged with strongly plastic elements tied together by the edge of the inside-out pitched roof of the hall.

After ten years from its completion, Francesco Guerrieri defined this work among those awarded the IN/ARCH prize in 1966 as *the least flashy yet the most creative from a craftsmanship point of view*⁹. It suggests a connection to the dedication to Saint Joseph 'craftsman', and it emphasizes how in Fagnoni's production the overall proud modesty, as well as the ability to include *the human depth of craftsmanship in the work*¹⁰ may find again for the last time a strong interpretation.

Translation by Giulia Sacchi

¹ Suffice is to mention: Air force Military Academy (Florence, 1937), Church of the Assumption (Montecatini Terme 1953-'58), Gesù Divino Lavoratore Church (Rome, 1954-'60), "La Rotunda" of Settignano (Florence, 1961).

² This is Fagnoni last work, as he died in Florence three days after the official opening of the church on May 4, 1966.

³ See: Mugnai, F., *Un Museo d'Aereo Precipitato su Cagliari, Raffaello Fagnoni e la Chiesa di San Domenico, 1949-1954* in "Firenze Architettura", 2/2012, p. 114-119.

⁴ See: the 1957 conference at the Architecture Faculty of Florence, published in: Lercaro, G., 1964, *Posizione Attuale dell'Architetto di Fronte al Tema Sacro*, Le Monnier, Firenze.

⁵ See: Gresleri, G., Bettazzi, M., 2004, *Chiesa e Quartiere. Storia di una Rivista e di un Movimento per l'Architettura a Bologna*, Compositori, Bologna.

⁶ Various Authors, 1976, *Montebeni un Popolo e una Chiesa*, Siena, p.29.

⁷ Michelangelo, 1998, *Rime*, Mondadori, Milano, p.99.

⁸ See: Salvagnini, F., *Un Architetto e i Suoi Scultori. Nel Trentennale della Morte di Raffaello Fagnoni*,

"Libero. Ricerche sulla scultura e le arti applicate del primo novecento" 7/1996, p. 1-9.

⁹ Guerrieri, F., *Un'opera di Architettura, Montebeni un Popolo e una Chiesa*, cit. p. 49.

¹⁰ Guerrieri, F., cit. p. 49.

A temple without columns by Chiara De Felice

(page 128)



[...] So let's build a sauna there! Not the usual semi-civilized travesty of the old Finnish sauna (as all our saunas are today) but a cultural sauna, a national monument, the first of its kind in the budding Finnish civilization [...] Visitors enter through a hall supported by four columns. The walls are clad in ceramics, and directly in front of the entrance stands a stove with crackling fire of choice logs. [...]

With these words in Jyväskylä's local newspaper, the "Keski-suomalainen", Alvar Aalto describes an idealistic project to be completed in the city: the *Saunatempelli* (sauna temple). In this 1925 brief article, the Sauna, in Aalto's conception, functions as the manifesto for the principles of the rising Finnish civitas (Latin for 'social body of citizens'). Nevertheless he underlines the need to abandon the vernacular tones to embrace the more pure classic canons, which are the only ones capable of elevating this humble traditional building to equal Acropolis's temple.

The article seems to have the weight of a precise declaration of intent: Aalto explains, almost in a propagandistic way, the foundations of his creative research at that time. Early on, he expresses his desire to give form to a "northern dream of Pompeii"; the same desire clearly expressed in fewer words in several earlier sketches.

The 1925 statements appear clearer if viewed in the context of Aalto's return to Jyväskylä from his first trip to Italy. In fact it is to this phase that we can ascribe a rich, as well as naive, collection of proposals "in Italian style", on which the architect intends to base an ambitious program for the re-foundation of the flourishing independent Finnish culture. However, in observing Aalto's production, both before and after this article, we notice that, precisely in regard to the saunas, this wave of classicist enthusiasm meets a resistance that seems insurmountable: each time the architect is called upon to have a concrete confrontation with this typology, he is unable to free himself from the rudiments of the traditional model. On the contrary he actually refuses every classical reference. If the Italian architectural models he experienced during his visit are the basic structure for some of Aalto's productions, they remain unworkable when it comes to the specific case of the sauna. This is why it is possible to say that the proposal for the *Saunatempelli* will remain a unique episode of its kind, constrained to his early poetic, and characterized by design considerations simultaneously enthusiastic and immature.

This contradiction between declarations of intent and formal results is nevertheless definitely far from representing the abandonment of his principles in project terms; the reluctance of Aalto to resort to the classic code, demonstrated by these characteristic constructions, must instead be considered in the light of what the sauna symbolises in Finnish culture. This building cannot be compared with a common space for the care of the body; for its particular nature, it is unreasonable to compare it with the thermal buildings of the Graeco-Roman tradition, but as Aalto clarifies, the sauna is "Finnish material". In the sauna lives the archetype of the northern house and its plain aspect is tied to the severity of the northern nature. Aalto perceives, in these rudimentary buildings, an ancient sentiment of necessity that makes any formalism inadequate. In the bare space of the sauna, the primordial house, the atavistic dwelling rites are fulfilled: here children are born, here brides and grooms purify themselves on their wedding eve, here, again, we nurse the sick and bid farewell to our loved ones as they pass away.

The reluctance to dramatically change the primitive typology is reconfirmed in each of the numerous sauna projects. Aalto will never design something alien to the Model as defined by Finnish tradition: a bare cabin of juxtaposed logs. Even if some innovations are introduced in those saunas designed as annexes to Aalto's more modern buildings, these novelties are reduced to variations on the theme, and do not disregard the inherent essence of these architectures. An example of this 'instinctive' connection with the native typology is expressed masterfully in the summerhouse of Muuratsalo, especially in the sauna. Here Aalto reaches an exemplary balance between intuition and project thinking.

The founding principles of this project are imputable to a profound change, both personal and professional. This had already affected the architect in the years preceding the project's drafting of the experimental House (mentioned

above), especially after his wife, Aino, died prematurely in 1949. Aalto's poetics slowly move from the classical lyric models to the medieval ones (including both classical tradition and the spontaneous model), better able to express the "domestic" inclination of Aalto's renewed architecture.

The Koetalo's project (Experimental house) also realises these refined principles of domestic simplicity. In his elaboration Aalto avoids both bourgeois and bohemian stereotypes. For the bourgeois this kind of residence is seen as an attainment of a craved social status, for the bohemian it is more like a romantic place for contemplation. Instead, in Aalto's conception this home is a shelter in which to reconcile oneself to a more modest living. By incorporating the roughness distinctive of the *mökki*, the summer-house, in his practice Aalto stay true to this concept of sobriety. The essential organism revolves around the traditional *tupa*, the room of the hearth, reiterated outdoors in the typical Aalto's atrium; all the other areas of the house, which were realized in later years, are subordinated to the central original nucleus. It is with this new sense of humanism - with "a Franciscan spirit, a spirit of the *Song of Songs*, because of this profound solidarity with all the things of the world, of nature and of life", as Raggiandi said of the Finnish Master - that Aalto decides to complete Koetalo in 1953, realising the sauna, a further reduction in scale and spirit of the house itself: a primordial camp.

The Aalto's cabanon, sited not too far from the house, is arranged on some big blocks. These meet the rough wooden steps, allowing access to the narrowest changing room- the antechamber to the actual sauna. Once we enter into the sacellum, where the brazier is kept, we are finally enveloped by the vapour (*löyly*), which is the spirit of life. The big logs of the walls are arranged horizontally in a traditional way and interlocked with notches. The roofing, a slightly inclined surface and covered with vegetation, extends beyond all four sides of the cabin, constituting, together with the ends of the logs, a frame that crowns each façade. The main building, the entrance to which faces the lake, connects to it through a path of delicate wooden pier that almost disappears into the water. The Muuratsalo's sauna is a temple of authentic northern poverty only a few details reveal the refinement of its design: the proportions between volume and roofing, the geometric pattern of the door listels, the birch wood handle, similar to the bronze one mounted by the Finnish architect to the sumptuous door of Villa Mairea.

The humble cabin on the seashore of lake Päijänne might appear, at first glance, like an anonymous traditional building but, once again, this deep-rooted devotion to the model has nothing to do with "the forms of the folklore". The composition of the Master is more a choice of contents than of forms. With this little construction Alvar Aalto consecrates his personal temple; an unadorned sanctuary, naked, like the man that enters. Almost as a liturgical gesture, mankind leaves its clothing outside (in latin *habitus*, has the double meaning of clothing and house) and, in doing so he performs an act of liberation, a Franciscan act.

Translation by Livia Dubon Bohlgir

¹ Alvar Aalto, *Saunatempelli, Temple baths on Jyväskylä Ridge*, "Keskisuomalainen", 22-1-1925, published in G. Schildt, 1997, *Alvar Aalto. In his own words*, Keuruu, Otawa.

Bernard Rudofsky, Tino Nivola: Building with a few bricks, some blocks of concrete and a few poles. Nivola Garden-House, Long Island, NY (1950) by Ugo Rossi

(page 134)



With the purchase of an old farm-house in the Hamptons in Long Island, the artist Costantino Nivola (1911-1988) and the architect Bernard Rudofsky (1905-1988) find themselves together to work on the renovation of the garden. Like Ruth Nivola recalls, in the days in which Tino and Bernard worked together: "it was a little like children playing in the garden"¹. The two friends, without planning and executive drawings, "with some bricks, some concrete blocks, and a few two-by-fours"² build a house.

As Rudofsky recalls:

Some years ago, a friend of mine and I [...], built what I call a Wohngarten, literally, a dwelling garden. It consisted of a pergola, a solarium and an ample fireplace - really an outdoor kitchen [...] the point is that it cost all of 80 dollars³.

That pleasant building experience coincides with one of the many Rudofsky's aspirations, in particular with the one envisaging a profession that should go back to be play and fun and not only a work⁴. During the University lessons at the *Royal Academy of Fine Arts* in Copenhagen, he states the importance

of that experience and he advocates the helpful assistance of a workshop:

If somebody would ask me how to enlarge, or to improve, the education of the student of architecture; how to offer him a more direct experience than the one he gets in school, I would suggest that he be provided with an experimental yard - a *Bauhof* - a place part indoor but no plus outdoor, where he could make architectural models, not 1:100, or 1:50, or 1:20, but full scale, one to one⁵.

Rudofsky wishes to stimulate the faculties and senses of future architects through the practice of planning, experimenting, playing and having fun, rather than just showing them exactly how to do things. To such purposes he quotes as an example the playful experience of the experimental workshop enjoyed with Nivola in the Long Island's house.

The renovation plan for the garden of the Nivola's atelier-house in Long Island is defined by the presence of a solarium, a *barbecue*, a number of benches, a balcony, a few trellis and walls that the two friends build between the spring and the summer in 1950⁶. Such experience represents for Rudofsky the opportunity to implement, on American soil, some of the ideas cherished for so long on the garden-house.

What he describes as *The Conditioned outdoor room*⁷, the Wohngarten or the yard, had previously been addressed in relation to the villas built in Brazil between 1939 and 1941 and, before that, in a series of drawings going back to the mid 1930's. One of those drawings was then used for the *Domus*⁸ editorial first and on the cover of *Interiors*⁹ after. That same drawing shows like the essence of the house consists of an outdoor room. To Rudofsky the idea itself of the home coincides with the one of Paradise, a word that, as he likes to point out, derives from a Persian terms that means "garden of pleasure and fenced by a wall"¹⁰ and conjures up the idea of outdoor spaces as areas suitable for home living on a daily basis: "In a superbly laid-out house-garden, one ought to be able to work and sleep, cook and eat, play and loaf"¹¹.

The peculiarity of the Nivola's house garden renovation plan allows for a number of variations on the themes of his own vocabulary with an emblematic result. The main theme is of course the renovation of the garden of the atelier-house of the artist. The plan though, does also coincides with the taking to an extreme of the outdoor house concept: the garden inevitability changes, thanks to the compositional elements and Rudofsky's architectonic ideal, into a house that, as Rudofsky says, had only a cost of 80 dollars.

Rudofsky defines the main points of the planning in the articles *The Bread of Architecture* and *Giardino, stanza all'aperto*¹² and the design plan is published in *Architectural Review*¹³. In those writings he describes the need for a house to relate to the garden, almost even to a complete correspondence with it, contrary to what said by Le Corbusier who imagined the garden to be simply a space to be observed from the inside. The house with big windows, besides, was the actual representation of the modern American architecture, particularly popular in the Los Angeles area thanks to the houses build within the context of the *Case Study House* program promoted by the magazine *Arts & Architecture*, by John Entenza, and attested by the beautiful and spectacular photo shoots by Julius Schulman, which became icons of American modernity around the world¹⁴. Rudofsky, ironically, observes on the other hand that "The picture window seldom affords a view of anything more picturesque than the picture window of one's neighbour"¹⁵. He writes about how in the houses in Pompei the gardens were an integral part of the house. They were proper outdoor rooms without a roof, as, to really appreciate the ever changing playfulness of the light, or of the clouds in the sky, it was necessary to contemplate the sky from within four walls, to have a frame as well defined as the one of a painting: "A wall is the bread of architecture"¹⁶. The plan is articulated on the compositional devices of his own vocabulary: the wall, pierced through by a pre-existing apple tree, just like before, in the 1930's drawings of the bungalows in Antibes designed with Gio Ponti¹⁷. Rudofsky explains:

In a garden, such a wall assumes the character of sculpture. Moreover, if it is of utmost precision and of a brilliant whiteness, it clashes - as it should - with the natural forms of the vegetation and engenders a gratuitous and continuously changing spectacle of shadows and reflections. And aside from serving as the projection screen for the surrounding plants, the wall creates a sense of order [...] an old apple tree pierces one of the walls, lending it (methinks) a peculiar monumental quality¹⁸.

The wall is the bread of architecture. The fenced area with a tree is the home. It is the actual presence of the tree providing shade from the sun and sheltering from the rain, which makes domestic living possible.

To Rudofsky not only the tree represents the house, as it happens in different cultures and lands, but also it does coincide with the foundation of the sacred space. The tree, the house and the temple all come together into one "Thus what we call a temple is actually the abstraction of a grove; the thicket of columns recalls the thicket of tree"¹⁹.

Not far from the wall and the apple tree is situated the solarium. A roofless room, accessible from an outer stair. The floor is partly tiled with red bricks and partly covered by a grassy carpet and the room temperature is as such to allow sunbathing even in the winter. The origin of the solarium is to be referred to the photos that Rudofsky took during his trips: precisely to a vernacular building that he came across on the island of Pantelleria, called *Giardino*, included in his book *The Prodigious Builder*, described like "a kind of miniature fortress, scattered about the vineyards. A massive ring wall"²⁰. The other elements of the planning are the "trellis-pergola", obtained by thin

wooden poles painted white, which ideally delineate the spatial limits of cubic rooms. The 'pergola' is reduced to an almost linear element aimed to measure the space²¹. Those trellis, are similar to the 'pergolas' in the Pompeian gardens, to the ephemeral structures of the medieval gardens in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, which Rudofsky knew very well²², or to the hot houses for the cultivation of lemons in the Gargano region and included in the catalogue of the exhibition *Architecture without Architects*, which opened at MoMA in 1964. The last of the outdoor rooms, furnished with benches, is constituted by a 'pergola', which delineates a few perfect 'cubes', and by the *barbecue*, which defines its domestic and convivial significance, the core that, at weekends, animates the discussions of the many friends invited. The kitchen and the fireplace play a fundamental role:

[The kitchen] it was, and sometimes still is, the life center of the house. In the distant past it doubled as a kind of chapel – the hearth was both altar and sacrificial stone. Prayer and animal sacrifice were intimate related and the invocation of the gods went well together with a family barbecue [...] It may thus, in a roundabout way, revert to the noble status it held in earlier times – a sanctuary and an altar to life-giving force²³.

The architecture of such *construction* is shaped like the choreography of actions and ways of living and it is set up in the images of Tino, Ruth, the children, and the *parties* with friends sitting on the benches. As Ruth recalls, the garden-house soon became a centre for socialising²⁴. Besides the Rudofskys, many others became regular 'punters' of the house: Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner who lived down the road, Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, Franz Kline, James Brooks, Hans Namuth, Dorothy Norman, Saul Steinberg and his wife Heda Sterne, who lived opposite, Peter Blake, Frederick Kessler, who ended up renting a house not far from there, Paul Lester, Paul Tishman and last but not least Le Corbusier²⁵.

The Rudofskys too thought about building a house in Long Island but, as attested by the drawings for the plan, it remained only a dream²⁶. Bernard and Berta had first to wait to find the proper place to build their own home/house, 20 years later in Frigiliana, a village between Malaga and Nerja, three kilometres away from the Spanish coasts on the Mediterranean Sea. A house on top of a hill surrounded by an olive grove, completely open to the landscape and entirely thought for a life outdoor²⁷.

¹ Gordon Alistair's interview to Ruth Nivola, East Hampton, 17th September 1999, quoted in Gordon Alistair, *Weekend Utopia Modern Living in the Hamptons*, Princeton University Press, NY 2001, p. 53.

² Bernard Rudofsky, *Lectures Tallahassee*, Rudofsky Papers, Getty, p. 7.

³ Bernard Rudofsky, *Lectures Tallahassee*, ibid.

⁴ Bernard Rudofsky, "When architecture was all play and no work", *The prodigious builders*, Hacourt Brace, NY - London 1977, pp. 84-127.

⁵ Bernard Rudofsky, *Lectures Copenhagen (Back to kinderkarten)*, 8th April 1975, Rudofsky Papers, Getty, p. 5.

⁶ See: Giuliana Altea, "Nel giardino di Springs", *Costantino Nivola*, Ilisso Edizioni, Nuoro 2005, pp. 52-54; Giuliana Altea, "La stanza verde, Bernard Rudofsky e il giardino di Nivola", in *Nivola, L'investigazione dello spazio*, edited by Carlo Pirovano, Ilisso, Nuoro 2010, pp. 25-37 and Alessandra Como, *Riflessioni Sull'abitare. la Casa-giardino a Long Island 1949-50 di Tino Nivola e Bernard Rudofsky*, Aracne, Roma 2010.

⁷ Bernard Rudofsky, "The Conditioned Outdoor Room", *Behind the Picture Window*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1955, pp. 150-167.

⁸ Bernard Rudofsky, "Problema", *Domus*, n. 122, February 1937, p. XXXIV.

⁹ *Interiors*, May issue cover, 1946.

¹⁰ Bernard Rudofsky, "Die Wohlt temperierte Wohnhof", *Umriss* 10, 1/1986, p. 5.

¹¹ Bernard Rudofsky, *Behind the Picture Window*, ibid, p. 157.

¹² Bernard Rudofsky, "Giardino, stanza all'aperto: A proposito della 'casa giardino a Long Island' N.Y.", *Domus*, n. 272, July-August 1952, pp. 1-5+70-71; "The bread of architecture", *Arts and Architecture*, LXIX, October 1952, pp. 27-29+45.

¹³ The publications in question will be the cause of disagreement between the two friends. See: Giuliana Altea, "La stanza verde, Bernard Rudofsky e il giardino di Nivola", ibid, pp. 33-35.

¹⁴ The *Case Study House* is an actual experiment born out of the need to deal with the housing crisis caused by the return home, from 1945 to 1956, of many soldiers at the end of WWII. The planners involved are Charles and Ray Eames, Richard Neutra, Pierre König, Eero Saarinen, Craig Ellwood, William Wurster and others. See: Esther Mc Coy, *Case Study House, 1945-1962*, Hennessey & Ingalls, 1977; Elizabeth A. T. Smith, *Case Study House*, Taschen, Köln 2009.

¹⁵ Bernard Rudofsky, *Behind the Picture Window*, ibid, p. 195.

¹⁶ Bernard Rudofsky, "Giardino, stanza all'aperto", ibid, pp. 70-71.

¹⁷ Gio Ponti, "Hotel du Cap, progetto per bungalows per Eden Roc ad Antibes" (1939), *Lo Stile nella casa e nell'arredamento*, agosto 1941, n. 8, pp. 21-22. See also: Ugo Rossi, "Questo albergo è una casa. Gio Ponti, Bernard Rudofsky: albergo San Michele a Capri, 1938", in *Abitare con*, a cura di Eleonora Mantese, Canova, Treviso 2010, pp. 65-81.

¹⁸ Bernard Rudofsky, "The bread of architecture", *Arts and Architecture*, LXIX, October 1952, pp. 27-29+45.

¹⁹ Bernard Rudofsky, *The Prodigious Builder*, ibid, p. 53.

²⁰ Bernard Rudofsky, *The Prodigious Builder*, ibid, p. 210.

²¹ Bernard Rudofsky, "The bread of architecture", ibid.

²² Bernard Rudofsky, *Behind the Picture Window*, ibid, p. 161.

²³ Bernard Rudofsky, *Behind the Picture Window*, ibid., p. 32.

²⁴ Gordon Alistair's interview to Ruth Nivola, East Hampton, 17th September 1999, Gordon Alistair, *Weekend Utopia*, ibid., p. 55.

²⁵ Gordon Alistair, *Weekend Utopia*, ibid., pp. 54-55.

²⁶ Drawings belonging to the *Bernard Rudofsky Estate* in Vienna.

²⁷ See: Ugo Rossi, "Das Haus Rudofsky in Frigiliana (Spanien) - Bauen ohne zu zerstören", *Denkmal*, n. 16, Jänner-April, Vienna 2014, pp. 30-31; Mar Loren, "La casa en Frigiliana. Manifiesto

rudofskiano de la domesticidad contemporánea", in *Bernard Rudofsky: Desobediencia crítica a la Modernidad*, edited by Mar Loren e Yolanda Romero, Granada, 2014, pp. 30-51.

Lina Bo Bardi two "Site-Specific Museums" between Brazil and Africa. Complex and inexpensive building by Giacomo Pirazzoli

(page 144 abstract)



In 1985 singer Gilberto Gil (who later served as the Minister of Culture in Brazilian Lula da Silva's government) chaired the Gregorio de Mattos Foundation in Salvador Bahia (Brazil). In order to "expressly upset the Eurocentric priorities of the Brazilian artistic-intellectual class", he asked architect Lina Bo Bardi and anthropologist Pierre "Fatumbi" Verger (both European rooted intellectuals who have become Brazilian by adoption) to collaborate in building two museums documenting how slaves were rounded up and celebrating Afro-Brazilian heritage. The results are the "Casa do Benin" (1989) in Salvador de Bahia and the "Maison du Bresil" project in Ouidah, Benin. The two locations represent respectively the points of departure and arrival of the slave ships, and are a now forgotten comment on a pre-globalized era. The certainly harsh and not so glam issues that these two museum experiments call into play are part of a sustainable and careful re-interpretation of the world and of its relationship with places and uprooting. Moreover Bruce Chatwin's "The Viceroy of Ouidah" (1980), as well as Werner Herzog's screenplay "Cobra Verde" (1987) which stemmed from Chatwin's book – are relevant contributions to this path. A video documentary will narrate this peculiar "Elsewhere museum" story between Africa and Brasil. The first part of film archive research on Lina and Pierre was edited by Giacomo Pirazzoli for the cultural association Orlandolab and produced for the Festival of Creativity, held in Florence in October 2008. The present step, entirely produced by University of Florence-DIDA Department of Architecture has been granted by ToscanalNContemporanea - Regione Toscana.

Actually directed by Giacomo Pirazzoli, it consists on several interviews after a documentary to be accomplished; project witnesses and/or Lina Bo Bardi's collaborators help reflecting on a topic which remained substantially unexplored, despite Lina's centenary. (see: <http://www.sismus.org/eng/three>)

Enzo Mari, or on critical design by Giuseppe Lotti

(page 150)



Enzo Mari has navigated across 60 years of Italian design. With extreme coherence.

His activities as designer, poet and theoretician were always motivated by a will to force the limits of the profession in the name of an explicit moral tension - "I believe that if from one's own 'doing' does not rise an awareness, a shift, everything is useless (...)"¹, "ethics is the objective of design"²; "for me design means changing the world"³. A tension that is the fruit of deep intellectual honesty, which emerges in his thought, complex, sometimes difficult, and in the slow, always carefully meditated design-related activities, which nonetheless, did not prevent Mari from being one of the most prolific authors in contemporary design.

Design as critical act, therefore, that on the formal level almost inevitably is translated into an essential, minimal and sometimes bare language. The motivations of these choices appear to change through time, but they are always coherent.

Programming Art

In the first years of activity, Mari operated within the framework of Arte Programmata, together with figures such as Munari, Studio MID in Milan,

and Gruppo N from Padova, developing a “reflection on the presence, ever more common at the collective level, of the results of scientific and technological breakthroughs”⁴.

Our aim, declares Mari in those years, is that of “systematically verifying, through procedures analogue to those used in scientific research and artistic phenomena (...) of demystifying the entire apparatus of aesthetic conventions that (...) continue today to be the instrument and vent of a bourgeois culture (...) which does not seek knowledge but only its certification”⁵. Art was considered until then as a purely aesthetic fact, completely detached from scientific and technical considerations and remained a privilege for the few. It is necessary on the contrary that the new instruments of science and technique become a part of the practice of art. The aesthetic experience must abandon that spontaneity that characterised it until today in order to embrace a series of logical models which permit an almost scientific programming of the function of the work. Research and experimentation assume a great importance and the relationship between art and exact sciences such as mathematics, gestalt psychology and structural linguistics becomes more tightly knit. It is necessary that art becomes related to everything. The first step is that of adopting a language that can be easily understood. “When a painter from the Renaissance put across a certain idea he used means that were understandable by all: when a painter from our age does the same he uses means that are understood only by himself”⁶, writes Mari. Furthermore, the artist does not need to dedicate his attention to the single object anymore, but to products that, because of their reproducibility and low cost, are available to all. Mari, like Munari, arrives to design almost naturally. As Munari says: “A demolition operation is necessary today of the myth of the *artista-divo* who produces only masterpieces for the most intelligent people (...) It is necessary, in a society that is becoming a mass civilisation, that the artist descend from his pedestal and deigns to design the butcher’s sign (...) The designer reestablishes the contact, long lost, between art and public (...) no longer the painting for the living-room but the appliance for the kitchen. Art should not be separated from life: beautiful things to see and ugly things to use”⁷. In Mari scientificity in artistic undertakings finds expression in a continuous search for simplicity. Thus in the marble vases known as *Paros* (1964), a name that is obviously not fortuitous, the rational harmony is broken by decisive cuts; in *Java* (1988), container for the table, a small object almost becomes architecture; and, more generally, with *Nine objects for Danese productions* (1960-69), the pieces repeated in the presentation express an almost classic seriality. A simplicity that is however conceptually ‘complex’, as in *16 animals and 16 fish* (1960), which is at once a puzzle and a construction game, a perfect interplay of joints that is the product of infinite drawings. A game for ages two and up, which keeps on working when the children grow, since it leaves ample space for interpretation, stimulating the creative capacity beyond any didactic imposition or interpretation, which for Mari was always of a repressive nature. All of which without gratification; a good example is *Putrella* (1958), a double “T” iron beam bent at both ends, with apparent weldings, which transforms into an object that refers to the functionality of a tray, in which simplicity becomes bare.

Socialisation of design

In the Seventies, Mari’s thought acquires a more political connotation, which will remain a constant in his activities. According to Mari the crisis of industrial design may be overcome if design itself assumes a political charge. He pointed out how the operative possibilities of the artist are sadly limited. If once there existed a tight relationship between society and the artist who, despite the subjection before those in power, produced objects that were useful for society, the situation today is very different. An intermediary has come between the artist and society, the bourgeoisie, which requires from art only products which testify to its own social status. From this new point of view it is art itself that changes meaning: selfless and autonomous research disappears, and design is understood only in terms of the market. This manipulation is even more evident in the work of the designer who turns out to be “subordinated, functionalised and integrated to the productive organisation”. “Who designs”, explains Mari, “is Capital, and the cycle of design increasingly coincides, without residues, with the motives of capitalist production”⁸. What are then, in such a situation, the operative possibilities for a designer who does not want to be only a tool in the hands of the industry? For Mari the awareness of the impossibility to escape from the conditioning derived from power must be accompanied by an explicit condemnation of the present contradictions. It is necessary that design assume a clear political meaning as a check on the current production relations and as a challenge to the capitalist work organisation laws that are responsible for alienation and bad conscience.

It is a question of designing objects which produce a tangible enhancement of both work and salary conditions, but especially of making the working class aware of its creative capacities. Only then can a complete equality amongst men be reached.

The objective, says Mari, with an enthusiasm that cannot appear solely as nobly Utopian, is thus “the socialisation of design”. In this context schools, trade unions, rank committees and neighbourhood councils assume a fundamental importance.

As a consequence of the radicalisation of ideas minimalist aesthetics is expressed in products that can almost be defined as poor.

Thus in *Proposal for self-design*⁹ (1974) - “A project for the production of

furniture through the simple assembling of rough boards and nails by the person who will use them. An elementary technique so that every person may face contemporary production with a critical capacity (anybody, excepting the industry and merchants, may use these designs to produce them). The author hopes that this operation will remain in a state of becoming; and asks to those who will construct these objects, and especially their variations, to send photos to his studio, in Piazzale Baracca, 10 - 20123 Milan”¹⁰. Giulio Carlo Argan writes: “Mari is right, everybody should design: in the end it is the best way to avoid being designed”¹¹. This is a path with a strong Utopian impetus which, inevitably, comes into contrast with the rules of reality. “The proposal (...) that people should be stimulated by the examples to make the objects they need, including typologies alternative to those proposed, and to liberally develop them using the suggested example only as a prompt and not as a model to be repeated (...) was very successful and I received thousands of requests.” But in 99 per cent of the cases it was not understood in the name of a market which in those years required inexpensive, unsophisticated objects which called for a return to nature (even as a solution for the problems of young students), or for furnishing the second house in the countryside in a rustic style.

Other of his works do not go as far as self-design, but the designer seems however to *take a step back* inviting others to co-design: such as in *Proposal for the manufacturing of porcelain* (1973) where products require the manual work of an artisan who, inevitably, participates in the design.

Simplicity as project

Mari’s simplicity is never a type of formalism – not even when in the Nineties minimalism seems to be the trend in the market – but is based upon moral motivations - “design consists in decanting, in eliminating everything that is useless and false”¹²; “My work is a process of destruction (...) in a redundant society, such as ours today, I can work only by trying to reduce the said redundancy, thus as negation and destruction”¹³. He adds: “a form is just if it is (it has no alternatives) and is not just if it seems (alternatives are infinite) (...) the form is the only possible materialisation of ethical meanings”¹⁴.

A simplicity that is the result of the search for an archetype - “In all of the history of art we can acknowledge one hundred or so masterpieces, or maybe a few more. From these stem all the other works of art, some poor, and some integrative, such as 17th century Neapolitan Mannerism. All of which were, however, created in a dialectical relationship to the archetypes. If those hundreds of archetypes had not been created the million of relatively decent works of art, and the zillion indecent ones, would not exist. There would be no schools of art, no schools of design, there would be nothing at all! Those are the masters and it is useless to deny it. It is only from our intimate understanding of them that we can learn”¹⁵.

Minimal, yet not minimalist choice, without any stylistic concessions: “For example, over the years people have come to me because some of the things I have made in the past seem like a sort of *karaoke* of minimal design (...)”¹⁶. These are the years of collaboration with Magis, of the chair for kids called Pop (2004), of childish design; of *Mariolina* (2002), a reinterpretation of the kitchen chair of the Fifties, in itself an archetype; and of Mari’s work for Muji, the Japanese company, which turned formal simplicity into a mission – three series of tables and chairs which remained in the prototype stage.

A poetics which opens possibilities which are not explicit, yet evident from the point of view of sustainability. With *By subtracting. Broken vase (Per forza di levare. Vaso Rotto)*, 1994, he anticipates motivations that are a part of so much of contemporary design – defect as value; and with *Ecolo* (1995) – simply a handbook with instructions for creating oneself a flower vase from used bottles, with a label with the name of the editor and designer that if one wishes can be attached to the completed vase, almost as if saying: “In design today what you buy is not a product, but only a label”, and a way of making it clear to everybody that the vase is secondary with respect to the flower arrangement – in which the designer disappears while inviting everybody, once again, to self-design. Mari’s umpteenth condemnation, as the “inquisitor of design who hurls ecumenical appeals to the innermost depths of the designer’s consciousness”¹⁷, and of ours as well.

Translation by Luis Gatt

¹ Enzo Mari, *La valigia senza manico. Arte, design e karaoke*. Conversation with Francesca Alfano Miglietti, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 2004, 26.

² Enzo Mari, in Marco Minuz with Alessio Bozzer and Beatrice Mascellani, *questo non è uno scolapasta*, Editrice Compositori, Bologna, 2006, p.89.

³ Enzo Mari, *Progetto e Passione*, “ideamagazine.net, 2001 n..

⁴ Anty Pansera, Maurizio Vitta, *Guida all’arte contemporanea*, quoted in Alfonso Grassi, Anty Pansera,

⁵ Enzo Mari, “Nuova tendenza: Etica o Poetica?”, foreword for the catalogue of the fourth edition of “Nuova Tendenza”, 1966, in *Funzione della ricerca estetica*, Edizioni di Comunità, Milano, 1970, p..

⁶ Enzo Mari, intervention in the debate regarding “La ricerca estetica di gruppo”, in *ivi*, p.

⁷ Bruno Munari, *Arte come mestiere*, Laterza, Bari, 1966, p.

⁸ Enzo Mari, *Funzione della ricerca estetica*, cit., p.

⁹ Forty years later, on the occasion of its 75th anniversary, the Finnish brand Artek decided to make some of the pieces in the *Autoprogettazione collection*.

¹⁰ Enzo Mari, *autoprogettazione?*, Edizioni Corraini, Mantova, 2002, p.1.

¹¹ Giulio Carlo Argan, *Valutazione critico-artistica*, “L’Espresso” 5 May, 1974, in *ivi*, p.34.

¹² Enzo Mari, in Marco Minuz with Alessio Bozzer and Beatrice Mascellani, *cit.*, p.86.

¹³ *ivi*, pp.75-76

¹⁴ *ivi*, pp.90-91

¹⁵ Enzo Mari, *Progetto e Passione*, cit.

¹⁶ Enzo Mari, *La valigia senza manico. Arte, design e karaoke*. Conversation with Francesca Alfano Miglietti, cit, p.26.

¹⁷ Alessandro Mendini, in Marco Minuz with Alessio Bozzer and Beatrice Mascellani, *op. cit.* p.29.

Roma, Tempietto del Bramante

Luciano Matus - *de tiempo luz de luz tiempo* by Maria Grazia Eccheli

(page 164)



Only LIGHT can inhabit PERFECTION

The visits to Italy of the Mexican artist Luciano Matus are frequent: long stays in Florence, Milan or Rome where at the Pantheon he has encountered that light which, in the shape of a cosmic opening, slowly moves, marking the duration of days and seasons on the eternal convexity of the virtual sphere of internal space. In 2003 the young architect - first Latin-American to obtain a scholarship from the Royal Academy of Spain in Rome - encounters Bramante's "Spanish" Tempietto on the Janiculum, opposite the cupolas of the eternal city.

In May 2015 he returns with an installation to that same chapel which, enclosed in the convent of San Pietro in Montorio, is a "model" of the round peripteral temple, a paradigm of centrality, both real and symbolic: a *tholos* whose cupola and tambour, set in a circle, evoke the same proportions as the Pantheon.

Luciano Matus, artist/architect, is aware of the fact that the symbol of PERFECTION on the Janiculum does not admit any additions to it... not even of his famous and ephemeral spider webs: geometrical structures made of long nickel cables, the continuity of which is obtained by the invisible attraction of magnets that hang in space, drawing traces and absences and completing ruins.

Everything is muted eloquence in that MARTYRIUM: the CRYPT represents the depth of the earth; the SACELLUM - only 4,50 meters in diameter - occupied by the altar, a sign of the place where Peter's cross was stuck into the ground; and the celestial vault of the CUPOLA summing up the circularity that is present -and absent (the round courtyard which was never built)- in the symbolic volume of the resurrection.

This uninhabitable temple, symbol of geometrical harmonies, deprived by its dimensions of any practical function, may be inhabited exclusively by LIGHT. With humble means: a milky balloon, a LED and a fan, the artist/architect pierces the darkness of the perennial night of the Tempietto with the vibratile luminous sphere... unveiling and recreating geometries with moving shadows. When the magical sunset over the city of Rome is over, hidden elective affinities appear and intertwine: the epiphany of architecture and light in the Altarpiece of San Bernardino by Piero della Francesca; the force and character of Bramante's architecture vis-à-vis his own archetypes, especially the PANTHEON. Piero's cosmic egg detaches itself, for Matus, from its Urbinian shell, and fluctuates in Bramante's cavity: between memory and contemporaneity, permanence and variation, wealth and poverty.

Translation by Luis Gatt

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