

## Un'arte al servizio dell'uomo e del suo ambiente

### *An art at the service of mankind and of its environment*

*L'architettura è al servizio dell'uomo e del suo paesaggio. Gli architetti dovrebbero produrre spazi per l'uomo: case, scuole, parchi urbani, città "all'altezza dell'uomo", spazi che siano anche capaci di generare empatia con ogni altro essere vivente e con il mondo intero. Le città sono così il palinsesto di generazioni: il nostro lavoro comincia con il mettere a fuoco i nostri occhi, un esercizio che ci permette di svelare la realtà e di corrispondere ad essa, persino se una certa confusione contemporanea tra il design e l'architettura ci ha condotto a sviluppare edifici oltre il ruolo che essi occupano. Una sorta di falsa monumentalità oggi confonde la scala o il budget dell'intervento con la dignità e la memoria.*

*Architecture is at the service of man and its environment. Architects should generate human spaces: homes, schools, streets parks, cities "at the height of men", spaces that are also able to generate empathy with the rest of all living beings and the whole planet. Towns are the palimpsest of generations: our work begins with tuning our eyes, a certain exercise that allows us to unravel that reality and then respond to it. Even though a certain contemporary confusion between design and architecture has led to the development of buildings outside the place they occupy. A sort of false monumentality confuses the size or the budget with dignity or memory. LB*



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What is the most pressing challenge that architecture is asked to resolve today?

I think we should begin to focus on what we really mean when we talk about architecture. In our time this concept has been treated very roughly by a majority practice with very little effort on the conceptual aspect, maybe in part by the need to fill the endless records that projects have become nowadays and also by the need to get jobs to feed the factories of projects.

It is even worse those professionals who fill the pages of specialized magazines and constitute the so-called «Star system». In most of the cases they have given up a rigorous and conscious practice and have opted for a cynical and accommodating service with its own name and irrationality

of their political clientele, whether public or private, sowing our cities with artificial and dispensable performances.

I think that it is a priority for society, and with it the entire profession, to understand the importance of architecture, its original vocation. The architecture is at the service of man and by extension its environment that, to this day, has already reached the entire planet. Our practice should generate human spaces, understanding to the full extension the enormous significance of this statement: homes, schools, streets, parks, cities at the height of men. They also generate empathy with the rest of all living beings and the whole planet. We are aware for the first time that

our actions can destroy the delicate balance of the Earth.

I think that to recover the height of the bar in these two areas –humanity and sustainability well understood, what we could call empathy with the environment– are the two most urgent objectives for the architecture of the 21st century.

1. Cfr. Paul Golberger. *Why architecture matters?* Ivorypress. Madrid, 2012. p. 250
2. Cfr. «*Once upon a time...*» Víctor López Cotelo. *Quaderns d'arquitectura i urbanisme* 169-170, 1986. p. 106

With respect to the design of the contemporary city; what is the role of architecture in managing urban phenomena?



I have recently read a passage by Paul Golberger that could help us with this very point. The architecture critic from the *New Yorker* pointed out for many years that «for a city to work, the architects have to think as if they were projecting a portion of a much larger composition, a composition that began long before and will continue after them, and that no matter their work may be different from those beside them, they cannot project as if the rest of the buildings weren't there».<sup>1</sup> I believe that a deep understanding of these words would release us from any further comments.

In the same vein, many years ago, when I was still a student at the School of Architecture of

Madrid, I read a text in story form by Víctor López Cotelo that, since then, I have always tried to have it near my desk. It spoke about architecture as a «logical nature, a harmonic order».<sup>2</sup> The work is somehow implicit in its boundary conditions. Our work begins with tuning our eyes, a certain perceptual exercise that allows us to unravel that reality and then respond to it. There would be then two moments: a first one of careful, of understanding the place, and another one of answer. If you devoted enough time and effort to the first one, the second will fall like a ripe fruit.

3. «The chair is a very difficult object. Anyone who has tried to make one knows that. There are endless possibilities and many problems – the chair has to be light, it has to be strong, it has to be comfortable. It's almost easier to build a skyscraper than a chair». Mies van der Rohe, in an interview about the chair MR 90, in 1930, a year after finished the Exhibition in Barcelona. <http://www.hermandotemplon.com/mies-van-der-rohe-the-beauty-of-the-simple>

Having practiced both activities, I've learnt over time that something more than the scale marks those limits. I disagree that architecture is a mere matter of design. I find even the word rather unfortunate. Some round phrases have contributed to this misunderstanding but, I do think, unfortunate.<sup>3</sup>

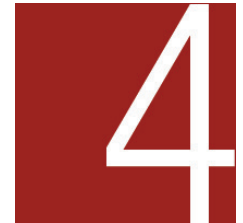
I believe in the idea of architecture that Vitruvius offers on the first page of his Ten Books. The architecture is the result of a holistic practice that addresses the complexity of reality, that doesn't assume simplifications, at least as far as a dedicated and conscientious work. The architect must respond to those peculiarities that design doesn't study, in a deep work from which

Architecture and design have established an exchange that is both operational and perceptive; buildings are conceived as objects and objects are conceived by those who design buildings. Between architecture and design, is it possible to define boundaries or intersections?



the form is the result. A chair, going back to Mies's quote, can change location, can be used by someone heavy or light, or be a mere embellishment. Instead, an architecture responds to a particular place and therefore a climate, an orientation, an environment – whichever – even a cultural and economic logic specific to the site.

The confusion between these two activities, the mere design and the practice of the architecture, along with the phenomenon of globalization, has led to the development of buildings outside the places they occupy. Big mistakes that we all know and our cities have to suffer. A sort of false monumentality which confuses the size or budget with dignity or memory.



When giving advice to students, what is the most valuable tool that an architecture or design student ought to acquire during their studies?

Our job is a long-distance race. I think it is important to let our students see from the very beginning the incredible richness the practice of architecture has to attend. Raising awareness of service of our activity while discovering the genuine, what it is «unique», and we can expect from our students. We have to ensure that they discover it themselves. Each one of them precisely because it will be their tool for life for that service.

I also find important to share and develop attitudes that, at least in my case, were not taught at University, quite all the opposite.

I refer particularly to the capacity of negotiation. That condition that permits to

uphold the excellence in every job, no matter how small or insignificant it may look, without disregarding its limitations. The very one that leads to giving a voice to those who don't have it: the natural environment, all living beings, and the whole planet. The one that should lead us to shuffle concepts seemingly opposed but that in our job cannot be: the economy, science, durability, the mystery, the beauty... Chapters which bring into play all the dimensions of the human being.