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interiors



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# Abelardo Morell

## Sineddoche Morell

Andrea Volpe

*"Algunas veces las cosas distantes pueden convertirse en las más cercanas.*

*Solo basta con sentir la presencia de esas cosas lejanas....*

*Solo tienes que darles un lugar en tu espacio interior...."*

Victor Mauricio Muñoz San Martín, poeta cileno

*"Nel 1991 ho avuto un anno sabbatico dall'insegnamento ed ho pensato che avrei potuto scattare una serie di immagini che fossero in grado di descrivere il processo fotografico stesso. Delle foto che ben spiegassero ai miei studenti di fotografia, per così dire, la meccanica della ripresa fotografica. Così ho scattato la foto ad una lampadina ed alla sua immagine dentro ad una scatola, ed ho pensato: 'Wow! Forse potrei fare una serie di foto artistiche sul processo che sta alla base di questo medium...'"<sup>1</sup>*

Abelardo Morell è un fotografo americano, nato a Cuba nel 1948 poi trasferitosi con la famiglia negli Stati Uniti nel 1962. Educato al Bowdoin College ed a Yale University, è attualmente Professore Emerito al Massachusetts College of Art di Boston.

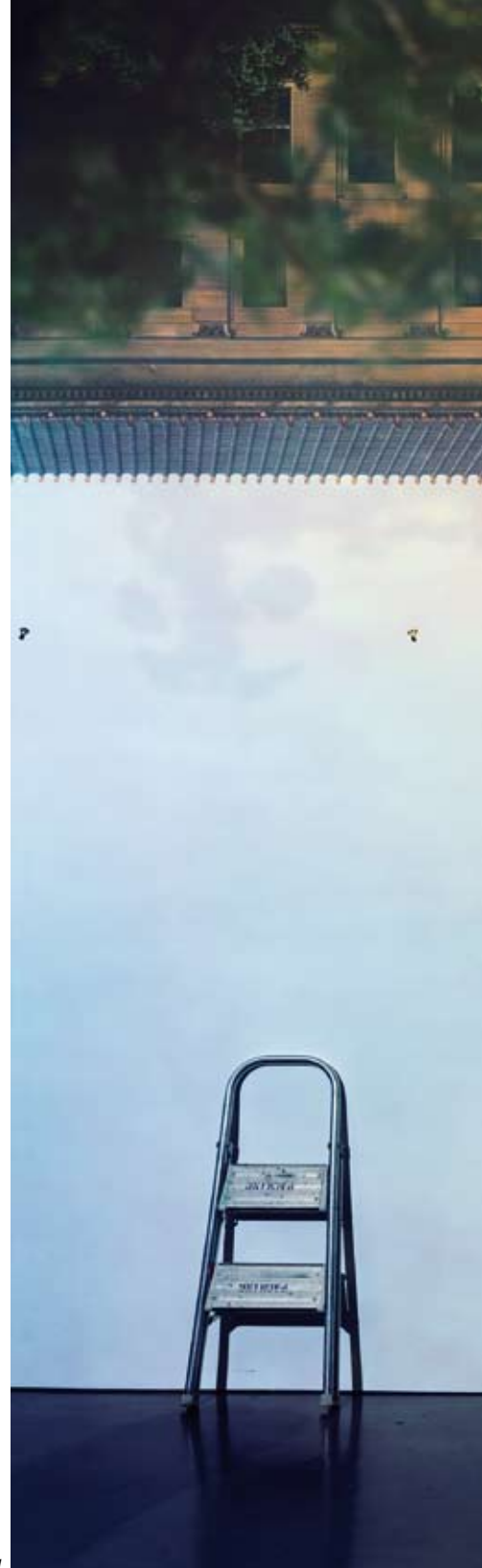
*Camera Obscura*,<sup>2</sup> la serie fotografica che lo ha reso celebre, nasce dunque da un preciso intento di mostrare in modo elementare la modalità di formazione e ripresa di un'immagine. Un esercizio sul fondamento stesso della disciplina che inevitabilmente finisce per assumere un significato più vasto. Non solamente rappresentativo della sua quarantennale ricerca poetica. Del suo costante interesse per il tema della luce. Di come essa, entrando in ombrosi recessi domestici, in soffitte o stanze ancora tiepide di vita sia capace di trasfigurare in paesaggi dell'anima pile di libri e pagine

di caratteri tipografici in rilievo per non vedenti o banconote, monete e mappe.<sup>3</sup>

È piuttosto una sfumatura più estesa e profonda quella che emerge dalle sue fotografie e che ben ci racconta lo spaesamento dell'esule cubano nella quotidianità dell'*American way of life*. Dapprima indagata a Yale secondo i canoni della *street photography*, in accordo con la lezione di Robert Frank e Diane Arbus. Poi declinata mediante uno stupefatto, infantile, sentimento di surrealità. Sempre risolto mediante quelle dolenti ironie e straniere leggerezze che guidano le prime indagini dei paesaggi domestici della casa di Brookline, Massachusetts. Qui perfino i giocattoli del figlio Brady o le suppellettili della cucina, grazie al salto di scala, alla prospettiva inedita, al rivelatore gioco di luci e di ombre possono diventare sorta di Lari e Penati che, al pari di silenti spettatori, vegliano sulla *calda vita* familiare.

Sicuramente è di qualche interesse riflettere su come Morell, perseguendo un preciso intento didattico e dopo essersi liberato dal rigido dogma di Yale,<sup>4</sup> sia riuscito a lavorare senza contraddizione alcuna sul tema che connota per definizione la fotografia di strada. Portando la ricerca dell'attimo magico e puro, frutto dell'incontro con il soggetto fissato nello scatto che ne testimonia il gesto irripetibile e spontaneamente armonico, da una dimensione solamente estetica ad una concettuale, filosofica e *ça va sans dire* religiosa.<sup>5</sup>

*"Io voglio documentare ciò che una stanza vede..."*<sup>6</sup> *Camera Obscura* è l'esito di quella domestica esplorazione del panorama di oggetti di affezione dove l'ordinario si trasformava in straordinario ed il consueto in rivelazione.



1

Tutte le immagini sono riprodotte per gentile concessione di Abelardo Morell

1  
© Abelardo Morell  
*Camera Obscura Image of The Philadelphia Museum of Art East Entrance in Gallery #171 with a De Chirico Painting, 2005*





2

2

© Abelardo Morell  
*Camera Obscura Image of the Empire State  
Building in Bedroom, 1994*

3

© Abelardo Morell  
*Camera Obscura Image of Windows in Gallery  
with Hopper Painting, Whitney Museum, 2003*

4

© Abelardo Morell  
*Light Bulb, 1991*

Pagine successive:

5

© Abelardo Morell  
*Camera Obscura Image of Manhattan View  
Looking West in Empty Room, 1996*

6

© Abelardo Morell  
*Camera Obscura Image of Boston's Old  
Customs House in Hotel Room, 1999*

7

© Abelardo Morell  
*Camera Obscura:5:04 AM Sunrise Over the  
Atlantic Ocean, Rockport, Massachusetts,  
June 17th, 2009*





5

Il tempo dell'istantanea viene dunque -letteralmente- rovesciato da Morell nel tempo sospeso dell'incontro fra dimensioni opposte e complementari. Teatralmente messe in scena per documentare al meglio da un lato la sostanziale coincidenza dell'esterno con l'interno, del pubblico con il privato, della città o del paesaggio con l'architettura che ne costituisce il carattere, la stratificazione e la storia. E dall'altro per ritrovare ogni volta l'inevitabile conferma che noi "*non possiamo permetterci di vedere la vita in modo diretto. Qualsiasi medium si usi, la vita è sempre troppo grande per essere ripresa, troppo vibrante, troppo caotica. Per questo dobbiamo trovare un modo esatto per osservarne bene almeno una parte...*"<sup>7</sup>

Il modo è trovato grazie alla memoria di una tecnica rinascimentale e di un effetto noto fin dai tempi di Aristotele.

Un processo (ed un rito) che celebra l'incontro fra diversi *loci* con la spazialità limitata della camera (di casa, d'albergo, del museo del Castello della Civitella Ranieri Foundation di Umbertide che ospitò Morell nel 2000). E di queste con la fotocamera a grande formato puntata<sup>8</sup> verso le pareti opposte alle finestre di vetri, così da raggiungere una condizione di buio totale. Solo un foro circolare del diametro di pochi millimetri è lasciato libero. Un varco sufficiente perché la luce naturale formi l'immagine rovesciata di ciò che sta al di là; prossimo ed al medesimo tempo inafferrabile e proprio per questo da riprendere, da rivedere, da portare dentro di sé. Una condizione di sognante ed inverso equilibrio che solo recentemente -grazie all'uso di particolari prismi- Morell ha corretto, raddrizzando così l'immagine proiettata.

Non è dato sapere se ci sia stata un'influenza diretta. Se Charlie Kaufman<sup>9</sup> sia stato affascinato dalle iconiche immagini di Morell. Certo è che la New York più vera del vero che il regista teatrale Camden Cotard, interpretato da Philip Seymour Hoffman, ricostruisce nel grande hangar affittato per l'allestimento della sua monumentale opera autobiografica in quell'indefinibile film (inedito in Italia) che è *Synecdoche New York* (2008) è stranamente simile alle vedute di Manhattan o Time Square di Morell.

Come Cotard/Kaufman si avventura a ricostruire un simulacro della *Grande Mela* sotto l'enorme volta del magazzino scelto come *location*<sup>10</sup> con un'ostinazione degna del Visconti de *Le notti bianche* o del Fellini/Guido Anselmi di *8 e 1/2*, Morell ogni volta ripete il gesto dell'allestimento della sua foto-camera stenopeica in un processo complesso





6

e lento che, come ci ricorda il fotografo stesso, si potrebbe tranquillamente ricreare in meno di un'ora di lavoro usando *Photoshop* ©.

Ma dopotutto è questa l'unica forma di resistenza lasciata a disposizione degli ultimi poeti. La possibilità di lavorare in forma quasi artigianale al perseguimento dell'idea e del progetto. Al suo stato di letterale sineddoche. Di parte che rappresenta il tutto, di unicum posto in relazione con l'universale perché derivato dall'universale.<sup>11</sup>

D'altronde nella serie *Camera Obscura* facile è ritrovare altri elementi di riflessione ed altri nessi. Come le *boule de neige*, i *kaiserpanorama*, e la città-stanza del *flâneur* del *Passagenwerk* care a Walter Benjamin, quelle camere finiscono per contenere lo scintillio delle schegge di memoria e dei frammenti del personale vissuto di ciascuno di noi. Facendoci



7



ricordare i nostri paesaggi interiori e le nostre *madeleines*: la camera ottica di Fontanellato in *Prima della Rivoluzione* di Bertolucci, la *Città analoga* di Aldo Rossi<sup>12</sup> e la vita segreta e sospesa degli oggetti nelle stanze svuotate dalla nostra presenza. Stanze che ora osservano noi là fuori. Fissati nel tempo di una posa lunga che ci rende invisibili. Evanescenti presenze sovrapposte allo sfondo della scena fissa dell'architettura della città.

<sup>1</sup> Da un'intervista di Jim Casper ad Abelardo Morell del 2007 per *Lens Culture, Photography and Shared Territories*, [www.lensculture.com](http://www.lensculture.com), © Lens Culture and individual contributors. All rights reserved.

<sup>2</sup> Abelardo Morell, *Camera Obscura*, introduction by Luc Sante, Bulfinch Press, New York, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. Abelardo Morell, *A book of books*, introduction by Nicholson Baker, Bulfinch Press, New York, 2002 e *Abelardo Morell*, introduzione di Richard Woodward, Phaidon Press, London, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> "Stampare il negativo per intero; mai illustrare un concetto; evitare i soggetti romantici; se costretti

ad utilizzare il colore, almeno non usarlo in maniera decorativa..." Richard Woodward, *ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> Occorre qui infatti ricordare come Morell abbia seguito al Bowdoin College corsi di Religione comparata.

<sup>6</sup> da "Abelardo Morell: A simulation of signs" by Michael Kaufmann, published: May 18, 1997, *The New York Times*, © The New York Times

<sup>7</sup> "we cannot afford to see life directly. With any means, with any media, life is too big, too radiant, too chaotic. We all need some way to observe life..." da *Shadow of the house* Photographer Abelardo Morell, un film di Allie Humenuk, 74 minuti, U.S.A., color, video 4:3, © 2007 Allie Humenuk.

<sup>8</sup> E con un tempo di posa di circa 8 ore con fotocamera a grande formato analogiche. Molto più breve dopo il passaggio al digitale. Da notare che oltre al prisma per correggere l'inversione della proiezione Morell usa apporre all'esterno del foro praticato nella oscura cortina lenti di grande luminosità in modo da aumentare la definizione dell'immagine che andandosi a formare sulla parete sarà poi registrata dalla macchina fotografica.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Kaufman è lo sceneggiatore di film quali *Being John Malkovich* (1999) ed *Adaptation* (2002), per cui è stato nominato all'Oscar, e di *Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind* (2004), premio Oscar per la migliore sceneggiatura. *Synecdoche New York* segna il suo debutto alla regia dopo le collaborazioni con i registi Spike Jonze e Michel Gondry. Presentato al Festival di Cannes del 2008, il film -nel frattempo assurdo ad uno stato di classico- è stato comprato da

BIM e per ragioni misteriose mai distribuito in Italia.

<sup>10</sup> Realizzando così inconsciamente il sogno della grande cupola progettata nel 1960 da Buckminster Fuller e Shoji Sadao per Manhattan.

<sup>11</sup> "Ogni opera d'arte è una *sineddoche*. Non c'è possibilità di veicolare la totalità di qualcosa, così ogni creazione artistica è al massimo un aspetto della cosa che si esplora..." Charlie Kaufman, da *The universe according to Kaufman*, by David Carr, published: May 9, 2011, *The New York Times*, © The New York Times.

<sup>12</sup> Dopotutto il collage di Rossi rappresenta una stanza impossibile, non tracciata, non tracciabile nonostante un lampadario penda dal soffitto e la silhouette di un uomo guardi da una finestra il cui infisso coincide con il cardo ed il decumano. Punctum dell'immagine e traguardo dello sguardo. Nella città analoga l'atto del vedere può dunque coincidere con un atto di fondazione.



9



10



11

Pagine precedenti:

8

© Abelardo Morell

*Camera Obscura Image of Santa Croce in Office, 2000*

9

© Abelardo Morell

*Camera Obscura Image of the Coliseum inside Room # 23 at the Hotel Gladiatori, Rome, 2007*

10

© Abelardo Morell

*Camera Obscura Image of the Grand Canal Looking West Toward the Accademia Bridge in Palazzo Room Under Construction, 2007*

11

© Abelardo Morell

*Camera Obscura Image of Castle Courtyard in Bedroom, 2000*

12

© Abelardo Morell

*Camera Obscura Image of Umbrian Landscape Over Bed, 2000*



garden built, real limit that draws the space of the house, a place of contemplation, the boundary within which man's gaze will remain confined, in fact, another characteristic of traditional or contemporary Japanese home is the sense of recollection derived from this limit-garden that closes around the home.

This small house itself has many traditional features associated with a profound innovation in construction techniques. In fact this project found its external composition on the existence of plum trees that impose the structure its irregular shape planimetry, while the internal composition founded its form in through the repetition of *tatami*.

Each of the rooms generated by the combination of this minimum measure representing a function, and on the white background of the walls of steel, instead of a collection of furniture, a single piece of furniture, be it the bed in the chamber or room table dining there is nothing else in the room, a reduction which has aims to take off any foreign element to the order of composition.

Seventeen rooms, seventeen functions, compose the building; being mutually connected and interrelated through a series of openings that thanks to the double heights allow to perceive the environment not as a series of stacked elements, but, as a single large space.

So back again the idea of *unicum*, the search for unity of the parts and between the inside and the outside, the walls become screens which have the translucent texture of rice paper or silk.

The large openings through which one can contemplate the exterior and the interior of the house give an idea of the dynamic permeability of the large movable walls as if here had been being constantly left open and, through them, the light enters the house without causing strong changes of shade, the reflected light spreading like a colourless reverberation is remember of the infinite gradations of shadows filtered by *shōji*. The decorations are not needed because the endless changes of light and shadows that stagnate in the corners create the poetry and the uniqueness of each part of the whole.

A blank canvas without depth - the house - on which the plum tree - the tree - could somehow be reflected, only two fires - key points - of an architecture that has managed to blend tradition and innovation, in an unavoidable unique.

## Amerika! Architecture and nomadism by Michelangelo Pivetta

(page 86)



### To the west, El Dorado

Long before the spread of so-called American Myth in the late half of the '900 and '800, precious men and women, intellectuals, artists, scientists, along with a much larger and hungry multitude, emigrated to that at the time still looked like the great opportunity country, a nation as vast as rich, advanced. That set of federate states government that seems

remained firm, despite everything, in the ideals of its Founding Fathers.

Was a young man from Wisconsin to celebrate the show on the world stage of American Architecture able to act dialectically compared with the European marking through the communication the thinking and understanding the fate of his work. F.L. Wright became known in Europe under discussion, as much as, even before the 1911 year when the German-language publication of his monograph by publisher Ernst Wasmuth in Berlin will mark its European consecration.

No coincidence that this was published in Berlin, a city that since the Franco-Prussian war had begun their upward flight towards the hegemonic aspiration, still extremely relevant, leading over time to the First World War, the poetry of Walden published in *Sturm* '23 "... Berlin is the capital of the United States of Europe (...). Perhaps the United States of America have their own Berlin. But in Berlin lacking the United States of Europe..." and all the tragedies of World War II.

For the Loos blessing, in his American tour which also took the opportunity to admire Sullivan especially, the ornament becomes weaving a complex language, but the rhythmic cadence obsessively compressed, reflecting that beating form in the whole composition. Plans, sections and elevations are needed to evoke a *continuum* down to the every aspect and detail, a vision of Architecture made of natural harmony also when it becomes obsession and reflective tautology. *Organic* defined by Wright in '39 this way of walking, extreme synthesis of hermeneutics of the relationship between man, society and environment. Many of these reflections on the world and on Architecture, seize and revised, certainly originated from the subtle speculations of his beloved master Sullivan but also from the consideration of the work of a far but well-known Berlage and the orientalist experience which marked that historical period.

*Arts and Crafts* movement although not of U.S. origin, but English, founded upper middle-class patrons and architects hungry for a new identity in Europe, mainly in Austria, where in 1903 is based on the *Weiner Werkstätten* and Germany, where the *Werkbund* was founded in 1907, and among others, joined by Behrens and Gropius. On these theoretical grounds and in the footsteps of the aforementioned and known Adolf Loos journey to Chicago, many of his young disciples, and not, directly discover the New World in the years between two world wars, bringing with

them backgrounds, experiences and heterogeneous attitudes that will be able, in the years ahead, to produce fruit in the lush fertile lands overseas.

### Euro-Amerika: Rudolph Schindler, Richard Neutra

Already in 1914 a young architect/engineer, R.M. Schindler, assume their practical and theoretical experience in the wake of Otto Wagner and Adolf Loos, due to the restlessness of the European environment, the substantial immobility of practice and especially the personal involvement in an almost obsessive interest in the work of F.L. Wright, decided to move to the U.S. in response to a job advertisement as a draftsman in Chicago. In 1918, after several attempts was accepted in the study by Wright where after an initial period of unpaid work, thanks to their capabilities, is entrusted by the American master to prepare the final drawings of the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo.

The transfer to California in 1919 came to help achieve the *Hollyhock House* and from this prosperous area, adored by the Austrians for the climate, he never came back.

In fact, the first of the California Twenties years is not only a perfect climatic environment like today, an event unique socio-economic development. The City of the Angels of those years is subject to one of the biggest real estate boom in Western history, there are built dozens of homes a day and now collects both intellectuals and entrepreneurs attracted by the riches of the oil from the emerging world of cinema.

The Kings Road House, built for himself and a couple of friends, already establishes this new category of interest in its program. A house divided into two wings for the two families but where all the parts of the service are jointly liable to promote sociability and perhaps pave the way towards what the Viennese architect was the main interest throughout his career, management dynamic interior spaces and their continuing relationship with the outside.

The Wright Japan Architecture and the Hispanic tradition experience of *pueblo* lead Schindler to the design of interiors from which outsiders are shaped in the guise of housing. Large sliding glass walls, borrowed directly from the concept of Japanese *shoji*, pour the inside to the outside patios, outdoor fireplaces which provide the evening and during the cooler months stay. The sparse decor and marked by simplicity and uniqueness of the pieces that compose it can not avoid, in the tradition of *Arts and Crafts/Werkbund*, from containing in its palette exclusive sessions designed by the same architect. The world-famous *Sling Chairs*, still produced and high demand, summarized in their concept aesthetic and techniques home characters, combining simple materials such as fabric and solid wood with a clean and pure design.

The creative period of R.M. Schindler was forced in 1923 by the arrival of his friend Richard Neutra also, who formed a partnership with as brief as important for the maturation and development of their abilities.

Schindler is also the architect of the Lovell Beach House, where as early as 1922-1926 the modernity of the design approach shows it undoubtedly at the top. Two of the pillars of Modern Architecture, *Ville Savoye* and the *Tugendhat House*, are respectively built in the 1928-31 and 1929-30. In this project, the concrete structure is laid bare and made manifest itself into the building through overlapping same material planes in anticipation of some themes that will be developed in subsequent years and will serve as a model for all the *beach house* to this day.

The particular attention was paid to the materials, technologies and their management itself within a composition will always remain one of the peculiar characteristics of the Schindler work together, when possible, to the reoccurrence of reflexive references to the principles of the Loos *Raumplan*.

### Harvard Five: Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer

After the brief London experience the exodus of Walter Gropius to the United States takes place in 1934 when the Graduate School of Design at Harvard named him as director of the Architecture section. Basically, it re-establishes the bases, constituting as it did a few years after Mies, a new School of Architecture by European *avant-garde* experiences and especially the monumental Bauhaus task move into the fabric of American education evolved and the natural relationship between the arts, a streamlined and made up of liberal programs and asymmetrical relationships teaching. The almost instant success, due in part to the total and almost infinite availability of resources, will be stigmatized in many publications, but particularly in around one hundred works, mostly private homes, built by architects from Harvard in the woods of New Canaan.

Gropius was joined a little later in the U.S. by Marcel Breuer who escaped from Germany after a short stay in England, he joined the Berlin teacher in teaching experience and professional lives also. The two architects formed almost immediately the TAC, "*The Architects Collaborative*" organization in balance between firm, thinking crucial and meeting and training place for many students and neo-architects, mainly from Harvard. In Breuer, like the great masters, suddenly the search is unveiled in a sort of cultural entropy that can be able to create a unique art, in which Architecture, sculpture, visual arts, photography, literature and movies can be able to move independently but osmotically in a complex but rational ideas flow.

Marcel Breuer and Philip Johnson, John M. Johansen, Eliot Noyes and Landis Gores will be counted in the circle of so-called *Harvard Five*, an intellectual partnership between teachers and students share from the final goal of realizing a new sight of Architecture. The house field will be investigated further, where you can experiment with the application of theories developed within the School of Design.

The same attention to the study of materials in the project design is oriented toward the evisceration of all the details and technologies aimed at achieving the objectives of balance between *construction* and *form*, and then pour it in the studio perfectionist buildings can greatly exceed the modernist idea of a "*machine habiter*" through empathic solutions type to overcome these so refined the difficult relationship between *function* and *features*.

A emotional Architecture vision, predestined to draw a deep furrow in the american architectural culture in its trajectory expressed in the words of the only poem written by the same Breuer:

"Colors that can be heard;  
Sounds to see;  
The void that you touch with your elbows;  
The taste of space on the tongue;  
The fragrance of dimensions;  
The juice from a stone."

Synaesthetic Architecture processed in a single flow converging towards the creative ecstasy, memory and volumetric processing of what expressed by Kandinsky years before.

A few decades later, another group of young architects of the East Coast will take the witness is placing itself as an alternative to the most radical and reactionary to those worn now, trying yet another summary of the processes of the legacies of modern theorists. John Hejduk, and others will find themselves involved in the complex and still disputed experience in some of those who called by Tafuri, perhaps in relation with *Harvard Five*, *Five Architects* and others more clearly call *New York Five*.

#### *The more is the least: Mies van der Rohe*

Everybody knows, seen the very large literature, the experience of american Mies, as more than clear are the prerogatives of his work, professional and academic both.

Mies, even today, more than all the *Euro-American* architects representing both Europe and the U.S., similarly, a bastion of architectural knowledge. For many of his contemporaries who have taken the same path of emigration, are considered in between the sides of the ocean completely different. This is for issues relating to the activities of teaching and transmission of knowledge, both for a works publications and often unable to overcome the sea and then find the right feedback and the European equivalent.

The elegance and simplicity of the german *meister* interiors commute in the U.S. the experiences that have long-established in Europe during the Thirties. The professional relationship with Lilly Reich, interrupted physically by the American transferring, is quite obvious to the latest works of the after Second World War period. Probably are the 140 square meters of the *Farnsworth House* in order to define the true mature Mies's idea of Architecture. That is an extreme synthesis of all previous houses designs, pavilions, exhibitions and public buildings, this project contains in itself the *scientific approach* to logic as a tool of architectural research and the ultimate result that will be. The objects of furniture, chairs, benches and beds, according to a unique hieratic and immutable language, define completely interchangeable and flexible areas. No one had ever before dared to exaggerate so much these already known concepts, but almost never carried out, with this field depth.

All the japanese rigor, all the modernist poetry sophistication of *Arts and Crafts/Werkbund* and the Bauhaus experience, here are finally complete in an unknown summary and solemn fulfillment.

"We should try to bring nature, houses, and the human being to a higher unity..." Mies had to say about it and how much these words recall away from the intentions of the beloved F.L. Wright says a lot about how shiny sinuous path theory that the same architect was able to develop during his stay in the USA.

Difficult how interesting the trails that Mies and his attitudes leaves behind: Myron Goldsmith, Raphael Soriano, Philip Johnson, Craig Ellwood, through their extensive and wise work, can certainly be inscribed in the circle of the great americans of the '900, but the their contribution although important and fundamental for the contemporary, will never be able to produce the same *total and dogmatic quality* that Mies was able to achieve.

Reflecting, back to mind the echo of words spoken by Captain John Smith in Terence Malick *The New World*: "How many lands behind me, how many seas, such hardships and dangers...". How many times and in how many languages we would have felt the spirit of these men/architects who, like many others, crossed the Atlantic Sea were moved by the incurable spirit of challenge and confrontation, but also by the simple need to find a better life.

## Abelardo Morell

*Synecdoche Morell* by Andrea Volpe

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"In 1991 I had a sabbatical from teaching and I thought I would make some pictures describing photography itself. I planned to teach my students the fundamentals of photography. I thought I would make some pictures just showing the mechanics of it, and I made a photograph of a light bulb inside a box, just again, to show the simplicity and the mystery of a medium and I loved it so much that I thought

"wow!" maybe I can make art picture about the mechanics of this medium..."

Abelardo Morell is an American photographer born in Cuba in 1948, who emigrated with his family to the United States in 1962. Educated at Bowdoin College and at Yale

University, he is now Emeritus Professor at the Massachusetts College of Art of Boston. *Camera Obscura* is the photographic series which brought Morell success and fame. With these pictures, especially the iconic 1991 *Light Bulb*, Morell explores the possibility for photography to show its own principles and its most secret ritual: the birth of an image. This exercise inevitably became a more sophisticated statement, deeper and wider when compared to its original didactic premises. Such ontological concerns fit well within the conceptual density of Morell's work. He has sought endlessly for all the different possibilities to shape images with light: light which dramatically breaks up shadows filled rooms of houses, libraries and museums, environments entirely deprived of the presence of human beings but still permeated by their warm, invisible, essence, a dreamlike atmosphere somehow related to Morell's personal condition of estrangement as a Cuban exile living his brand-new American way of life.

From the period of his street photography, practiced during the Yale years according to the lessons of Robert Frank and Diane Arbus, to the first explorations of his home in Brookline, Massachusetts, Morell has maintained a pure, amazed vision of reality and a surrealist feel, always blended with irony and poetry.

The toys of his son Brady or humble household furnishings are perfect examples. Using compositional tricks and dramatic perspectival angles, these objects are seen by Morell as silent enigmatic presences, almost like the ancient Roman idea of household gods (the Lares and Penates) protecting Morell's family's intimate life.

It is worth noting the ability of the photographer to maintain the same sense of visual tension throughout the decades. Morell has progressively enhanced and expanded the decisive dramatic moment which usually marks the aesthetic of street photography into a philosophical (or better, religious) dimension.

"I want a sort of historical record of what a room sees". *Camera Obscura* is the result of that previous journey into his own domestic landscapes, where the ordinary was seen as extraordinary and the expected shot became a revelation.

Morell's work is, after all, a work about the use of time. His process blurs the boundaries between snapshots and long-exposure photography. The result is a series of undefined situations where juxtapositions between opposing dimensions are mutually overlapped. There is no distinction made between natural or architectural landscapes and interiors. Apparently without contradictions, public and private spaces can become one, changing their usual roles as if in a sort of holistic theatrical play.

"We cannot afford to see life directly. With any means, with any media, life is too big, too radiant, too chaotic. We all need some way to observe life..."

The process Morell uses to build such magical state is old. The phenomenon was already known to Aristotle more than two millennia ago, and the technique has been used by painters from the Renaissance onwards.

Morell seals the windows of his studio with a dark fabric or black plastic sheets, leaving an opening less than 1/2 inch wide. In this way the room is turned into a pinhole optical device where the large-format view camera, placed on a tripod, may record the upside-down visions of the world projected on the opposite wall. The image is a *panorama* at the same so near and paradoxically so elusive to require hours and hours of exposure. The finished product is almost a celebration of the encounters between all the different *loci* outside, and the enclosed space of the rooms - in hotels, apartments, or even castles, like the one photographed in 2000 at the Civitella Ranieri Foundation in Umbertide.

The result of this process is a mysterious atmosphere, recently balanced by Morell by using optical prisms designed to correct the original upside-down effect caused by the nature of refracted light.

No connection has been proven between Charlie Kaufman's bizarre (and still unreleased in Italy) 2008 movie *Synecdoche, New York*, and Morell's iconic images. But the big theatrical stage constructed by the playwright Caden Cotard (played by Philip Seymour Hoffman) as an alternative version of New York City, oddly resembles Morell's photographs of Times Square and other parts of Manhattan.

Just as Cotard (standing in for Kaufman himself) dares to build a simulacrum of the "Big Apple" inside an enormous New York sound stage, with all the same attention for details paid to the reconstructed set of Livorno by Luchino Visconti in *White Nights* (1957), or by Federico Fellini in *8 1/2*, (1963), for every image Morell makes, he repeats with extreme accuracy the slow construction process of his long exposure pinhole cameras in new locations around the world.

Morell loves to explain that the same results could be reached with one hour of work using *Photoshop*®. But this is the point: he continues doing what he has always done exactly the same way, with the same extreme attention to detail, slowness and handicraft skills.

Maybe this is the sole possibility for resistance left to the last poets: the chance to be free from the need to perform quickly or to multitask. The chance to pursue their own vision of the world while being conscious that every work of art is *-literally-* synecdoche: a part used to express the whole, a personal vision of reality mirroring (upside-down) the totality of reality itself together with its unchanging metaphysical values.

In the *Camera Obscura* photographs it's very easy to find a wide range of possible connections and references, like the *boules de neige*, *kaiserpanoramas* and the *fiâneur* interpretation of the urban landscape as a comfortable room. The spirit of Walter Benjamin's *Passagenwerk* seems to fit perfectly in Morell's spaces, spaces big enough to host even our personal soulscapes, our most beloved *madeleines*. There is the *Camera Ottica* of the Castello Sanvitale in Fontanello, as represented in Bernardo Bertolucci's 1964 *Before the revolution*, or Aldo Rossi's 1976 collage *The analogue city*, where the drawing of a room has a city plan forming one of its side walls. Or, last but not least, the imagined secret and estranged life of our most beloved objects when we are not at home. Morell transforms homes into silent watchers looking at us, there, outside. Frozen in a long exposure shot. Similar to invisible ghosts acting on the theatrical stage of the architecture of the city.

