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AVANT-GARDE OF EVERYDAY LIVING

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Abstract

The current impoverishment of the state of architecture from a product, as a sedimentation of knowledge, to a product – due to the affirmation of a society with a lifestyle marked by the increasingly rapid consumption of every conceived object – is the dominant attitude: taste and contemporary fashion, whereby everything is reduced to entertainment culture with the consequent loss of sense of reality and with the rendering of this to a fetish, simulacrum, image. Accomplice of this attitude of reducing architecture to mere commercial production is the specialized and non-specialized sector information system, which, by virtue of the culture of exhibition, has generally replaced the necessary critical distance in the analysis of current production with a sort of cultural consumerism. According to Frederic Jameson (Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, 1984), consequence of this attitude, which is a formal characteristic of the postmodern, is the lack of depth, it is the expression of instances with a hasty character where the image repeats itself losing its ultimate referent in an annulment of the notion of history. Everything is lived according to an aesthetic vision of events, consumed without expression of equidistant judgment and, according to the collage technique, with heterogeneous citations.

Keywords: architectural composition, theory, capitalism

Streszczenie

Obecne zubożenie stanu architektury z produktu będącego sedymentacją wiedzy do produktu wynikającego z afirmacji społeczeństwa o stylu życia naznaczonym coraz szybszą konsumpcją każdego wymyślonego przedmiotu to dominująca postawa: gust i współczesna moda, według których wszystko sprowadza się do kultury rozrywki z konsekwentną utratą poczucia rzeczywistości i sprowadzeniem jej do fetyszu, pozoru i obrazu. Pomocnikiem tej postawy redukowania architektury do zwykłej komercyjnej produkcji jest specjalistyczny i niespecialistyczny system informacji branżowej, który za sprawą kultury ekspozycyjnej zastąpił niezbędny na ogół krytyczny dystans w analizie bieżącej produkcji swoistym kulturowym konsumpcjonizmem. Według Frederica Jamesona konsekwencją tej postawy, która jest formalną cechą ponowoczesności, jest brak głębi. To wyrażanie przypadków o pospiesznym charakterze, gdzie obraz powtarza się, tracąc swoje ostateczne odniesienie w unieważnieniu pojęcia historii. Wszystko jest przeżywane zgodnie z estetyczną wizją zdarzeń, konsumowane bez wyrażania zrównoważonego osądu i, podobnie jak w technice kolażu, przy użyciu różnorodnych cytatów.

Słowa kluczowe: kompozycja architektoniczna, teoria, kapitalizm

The increasingly manifested social contradictions of contemporary society are inevitably reflected in the shape of our urban landscapes, giving life to even more alienating places in which the sense of strangeness is as much alive as ever in the conscience of citizens. The various forms of protest implemented, in an attempt to eliminate or reduce damage, are, on

the one hand, evidence of how the transformations of the places we live in are increasingly divorced from their human and territorial context, while on the other, they affirm a new sensitivity towards what is the public thing par excellence, the city. The stage of the “human comedy” has been transformed in a relatively short period of time, from a fixed stage full of habits and rules, to a mobile stage in continuous and rapid evolution, often not without painful contradictions. Cities change more rapidly than we do, Victor Hugo said, condensing in an aphorism much of what actually happened in urban space, a phenomenon that, from the industrial revolution to today, has progressively accelerated. The ongoing process of the modification of spatial relations, which also occurred in ancient times, albeit in generally more contained forms, has involved increasingly vast dimensions of parts of cities, when not entire built realities. These events, which have not always been able to provide answers bearing convincing proposals on the development of metropolitan landscapes, nevertheless form in the city, according to the vision of Oswald Mathias Ungers,

a history of formation and transformation from one type to another, a morphological continuum: an open book of events representing ideas and thoughts, decisions and chance, reality and disaster. It is not a uniform degree, but a vivid set of pieces and fragments, of types and counter-types, a juxtaposition of contradictions, a process that is more dialectical than linear.¹

The complexity of the architecture of the city, with its contradictions and discontinuities, but also not infrequently with its continuity, is for many architects attentive to urban phenomena, the natural field of study and experimentation of their theories.

The theme is that of the search for a sharing of objectives if, as it has been argued that architecture is “the expression of a point of view that others want to share”, or a social art, the question lies in the development tools to achieve this goal. Architecture understood as collective art is thus both a reflection and a measure of it, in fact, as Hendrik Petrus Berlage argued,

since architecture is the art of society, it is fatal that it reflects, more than any other art, the different spiritual and political orientations of society, also characterized by a slow trend. These orientations can lead to oppression and the laceration of society, or, on the contrary, to liberation and union; architecture, like a barometer, will follow these changes. The other arts are also characterized by the prerogative of promptly expressing spiritual changes; it is when it happens on an individual and not a social level, and therefore does not reflect the transformations of society, as architecture does. From the examination of the architectural works, it is possible to formulate a judgment on the spiritual conditions of a historical period, as architecture is materialized spirituality and the stones are eloquent. Yes, the stones speak, since they are nothing more than an idea created in an artistic form. For this reason, architectural art has eternal value and monuments arouse a moving veneration in us: it is monuments that make history, and it is history that makes monuments.²

If we can still share these statements today, we must try to critically question the reality in which architects are called to work and the social framework, not without contradictions, in which their work is placed.

¹ O.M. Ungers, *La memoria collettiva*, “Lotus” 1979, No. 24, p. 10.

² H.P. Berlage, *Architettura come arte sociale* [in:] H. van Bergeijk (ed.), *Hendrik Petrus Berlage. Architettura, urbanistica, estetica. Scritti scelti*, Zanichelli, Bologna, 1985, p. 222.

The current impoverishment of the state of architecture and therefore of cities, can be inscribed in a frame of reference of society described by Frederic Jameson in which the culture of a product, as a sedimentation of knowledge and synthesis of a society, has been transformed into a commodity, for the affirmation of a community in which the dominant attitude of contemporary taste and fashion is a lifestyle marked by the increasingly rapid consumption of every object conceived. The prevailing trend of today's society is that everything is reduced to entertainment culture, with the consequence of the loss of the sense of reality and, with its exemplification, the rendering of this to a simple appearance modeled by icons empty of meanings. Accomplice of this attitude of reduction, which inevitably involved making architecture as a mere commercial production, is the mass information system which, by virtue of the culture of exhibition, has generally replaced the necessary critical distance in the analysis of current production, with a sort of cultural consumerism. Thus, taking up Jameson's theories, a consequence of this attitude – which is a formal characteristic of postmodernism – is the lack of depth and the expression of instances with a hasty character where the image repeats itself losing its ultimate referent in an annulment of the notion of history. Everything is lived according to an aesthetic vision of the events, consumed without expression of equidistant judgment and, according to the collage technique, with heterogeneous citations. For the postmodern world, the decrease in the exteriority of experience means for Jameson, a “loss of the radical past” or of the deepest reasons of history itself. This attitude places the individual in a state of bewilderment that prevents him from planning his own experience in coherent terms, therefore from finding his own place within society and representing its complexity. For Jameson, it is precisely from this situation that the need to measure himself against unrepresentability must arise through a “cognitive cartography” that “attempts to equip the individual subject with a new, increased awareness of his position in the global system”. Continuing his analysis, he thus hopes for a political and formative challenge:

the new political art (if it is really possible) will have to stick to the truth of postmodernism, that is to say to its fundamental object – the world space of multinational capitalism – and to the same time will have to progress towards a new, for now inconceivable way of representing it, in which we can begin to understand our position as individual and collective subjects and regain an ability to act and fight, which at present is neutralized by our spatial confusion and social.³

For those who work in the city or for those called to design it, this new ability to “act and fight” can be understood as the search for a recomposition, albeit by episodes, of the “spatial confusion”, in opposition to the general flattening of contents and forms of the city's architecture. The search for ways to operate in this condition of bewilderment and chaos of contemporary urban agglomerations is therefore pressing, which today seems to find the babel of architectural languages that surround us as the only answer. On this question, or on the relationship between memory and invention, Ernesto Nathan Rogers intervenes by arguing that “the ideal purpose for settling the contradictions between memory and invention is in the absorption of memory into invention so that the history of an object is identified in the history of a culture to the point of being an integral and inseparable part of this”. Below, he goes on to clearly focus on the need for a sharing of intentions with the society in which ideas materialize, so that they are not perceived as foreign bodies,

³ F. Jameson, *Postmoderno, ovvero, la logica culturale del tardo capitalismo*, Fazi, Roma 2007, p. 69.

here the individual creator merges with the society from which he emanates and it gives an immediate representation. Individual memory becomes collective memory and serves as a link between the many inventions; so that it is indispensable to find the roots of new objects (and ideas) in the terrain of history without which the masses will never be able to feel participants in the acts of individuals and individual emergencies will have no communication to establish a plausible conversation even among themselves. Cities all over the world, especially those where the renewal activity is more intense and rapid, are unable to form a characteristic unit, because the same buildings sprout in Tokyo and Rome without any respect for the pre-existing environmental ones, that is, of the specific character of their culture: they are artificially cultivated plants, transplanted without any concern for the climate, which distort the panorama of art as much as that of the landscape.⁴

This lucid vision of the condition of contemporary architecture is still very relevant today, so the problem of the estrangement of today's city and the disorientation of its inhabitants, after more than forty years, does not seem to have found a solution. On the contrary, much of the architectural culture has made its guiding principle out of this objective situation. The unanswered questions that Rogers' theoretical assumptions generate necessarily serve to ask us why these are still extremely topical today.

The sharing of a form, its recognizability, but at the same time its evocative capacity, should be for the community the contribution necessarily due to the search for meaning and belonging, in contrast with today's perception of a "fluid and elusive", without reference points. The transformation and continuous reinterpretation of the urban fact are the revolutionary data of this investigation. If what Zygmunt Bauman argues about contemporary society is true, we are dealing with a rationality whose characteristics consist "in not being imprisoned by the legacy of one's past, wearing one's identity of the moment as one wears a shirt, which can be readily replaced when it becomes useless or out of fashion, reject the lessons of the past and abandon the skills of the past without inhibitions and without regrets", because the "liquid-modern culture no longer presents itself as a culture of learning and 'accumulation', [but] rather appears as a culture of disengagement, discontinuity and forgetfulness"⁵, hence the need to take a position in favor of the search for permanent and transmissible values of the architecture of the city, of its memory and its history. A memory, a tradition that must necessarily be constantly reinterpreted and not a sentimental object of self-pity for an ideal world now lost. Just as what Karl Scheffler wrote about Heinrich Tessenow in his *Die Architektur der Großstadt* on this subject, does not seem to have lost its relevance, "it has tradition in its blood, it carries it within itself, not in the brain; in him, tradition is a vital rhythm, not an aesthetic choice"⁶.

This path in search of the sources for the clarification of an operating tradition necessarily passes through the study of the becoming of urban ensembles in which the space of relationship, the collective space is, and has been, the prerogative of the certain communities that formed it. The attention paid to public places has a thousand-year history and the first affirmations in the Greek and Roman times will remain the founding assumptions of all the

⁴ E.N. Rogers, *Memoria e invenzione nel design* [in:] *idem, Editoriali di architettura*, Einaudi, Torino 1968, p. 144.

⁵ Z. Bauman, *Vite di scarto*, trad. di M. Astrologo, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2011, p. 145.

⁶ K. Scheffler, *Heinrich Tessenow*, [in:] *idem, Die Architektur der Großstadt*, Bruno Cassirer, Berlin, 1913, pp. 164–173; sta in G. Grassi (ed.), *Heinrich Tessenow. Osservazioni elementari sul costruire*, Franco Angeli, Milano 1998, p. 16.

Western architectural theories to follow. The ancient city found its most evident form of expression and definition of itself precisely in the creation of streets, squares and monuments within an urban project made up of buildings designed for their mutual exaltation in which the civic reality, through these, it mirrored itself. It is in the classical world that, thanks also to the concept of *urbanitas*, i.e. civilized living, precise strategies are being consolidated capable of giving shape and creating urban hierarchies with extraordinary results that we all know and that starting from the cities built or theorized, the formation of the realities in which we live was possible⁷. So, it is precisely because of living in these that the most vital impulses have been inherited, to discuss their contents, but above all through this extraordinary permanent construction site, to experience the goodness of the solutions adopted through the many constructions built.

Throughout the classical tradition, we could by extension say that the design of the city coincided with the precise awareness that only the architectural project, in its broadest sense, is the driving force behind the implementation of clear changes to the places. Speaking of architectural design means asking questions of operational method and objectives, be they ideal or practical, to be achieved. The search for answers to the questions that the city puts forward can be methodologically exemplified by analyzing the generative issues of places, their social and cultural history which led to the definition of a specific form; for Oswald Mathias Ungers the city is formed by an overlapping of layers, which as architects we have the task and the duty to read and recognize, to try to interpret intelligently if we want to “put our hands” on the city⁸. In this, however, it must be kept in mind that reality is a schedule in which

new layers are superimposed on those canceled. The upper layers oppose the ones below. Fragment overlaps with fragment. Layer by layer. Antithesis to thesis. It is in the antithetical thought, in the superimposition and opposition of contradictions and opposites, in the multiplicity of possibilities and impossibilities, in the intertwining of ever new interpretations and objections or, in Popper’s words, ‘conjecture and refutation’, of representation and negation, in the ‘uncertainty’ of feelings and thoughts, which is the difficulty of moving in the complexity of reality.⁹

Despite the awareness of the partiality of the individual interventions – which alone cannot restore unity to the city, but at best aspire to be fragments in themselves complete, bearers of a renewed consciousness – we can share the Ungersian idea that identifies identity cities in urban islands which, however, will have to aspire to a clarity and comprehensibility of basic and design principles.

Perhaps for this research it is still useful to try to question the notions of public space, of character and therefore of coherence of the areas of relationship between buildings and the relationships they establish with the city. These are ancient notions that find in Leon Battista Alberti, interpreter of changed social conditions, a shift of meaning, so in *De re Aedificatoria*, he writes, “portico and vestibule – in our opinion – are not intended only for servitude, as Diodorus specifies, but to all citizens”¹⁰. As Giulio Carlo Argan pointed out about the Renaissance concept of public places,

⁷ Cfr. E.J. Owens, *The City in the Greek and Roman World*, Routledge, London–New York 1991.

⁸ Cfr. O.M. Ungers, *La città dialettica*, a cura di Stefan Vieths, Skira, Milano 1997.

⁹ *Idem*, *L’architettura come autonomia*, “Rassegna” 1998, No. 76, p. 50.

¹⁰ L. Battista Alberti, *De re aedificatoria*, Firenze, 1485, prima ed. it. a cura di Cosimo Bartoli, Firenze, 1550. Ed. critica: L.B. Alberti, *L’architettura* (lat. – it.) a cura di Giovanni Orlandi e Paolo Portoghesi, Il Polifilo, Milano 1966, 2 voll., Libro V, cap. II, p. 338.

the square is no longer the heart of community life, but almost an extension of the building, a court of honor, a place for ceremonies and parades. It therefore has a regular shape and a unitary architectural structure: it is often arcaded and has, in the center, a statue or a commemorative column. In turn, the palace is no longer a fortified building: Alberti says that the palace of the 'lord' must not impose itself with a threatening aspect, but with the harmony of proportions and the beauty of the architectural forms and works of art, art that adorn it.¹¹

This continuity of objectives between the building and the city, which places the two scales of intervention, particular and general, in reciprocal relationship, is repeated by Alberti,

if the saying of the philosophers is true, that the city is like a large house, and the house itself is a small town, it will not be wrong to argue that the members of a house are themselves small houses. Such as the atrium, the courtyard, the dining room, the porch, etc. ; omitting one of these elements due to carelessness or neglect damages the decorum and merit of the work. It is therefore necessary to study these elements with the utmost care and diligence, which are important for the entire work and to ensure that even the smallest parts are performed in a workmanlike manner.¹²

Therefore, if in the Albertian conception the house and the city coincide, in the same way the public spaces must also be treated with adequate decorum. In book VIII, on the ornaments of profane public buildings, when he deals with the arrangement of the streets and their beauty, he places the theme of decoration as a necessary condition for their existence,

as for the city streets, they will adorn them excellently, as well as a good flooring and perfect cleanliness, two rows of arcades of the same design, or houses all of the same height. The parts of the road that particularly require ornaments are: the bridge, the crossroads, the forum, the place for the shows. In reality, the *fòro* is only a broader crossroads; and the place for the shows is nothing more than a forum surrounded by steps.¹³

This statement contains several aspects of particular importance, including the idea that the decor of the city needs a general control and therefore how the dignity of the places is constituted by the composition of the whole. The idea of architecture, or rather, urban composition, becomes an art that comes from the city for the whole city. This tension for a process of urban transformations, as art intended at the service of the community which must necessarily be the result of sharing, should still be a matter of reflection on which to base one's work. These are ancient notions that can still be measured with contemporary architectural design. Hendrik Petrus Berlage, in his lecture *On modern architecture*, insists on the need for an architecture that does not base its essence on subjectivity and thus, taking up the assumptions of a writer, reaffirms the need to search for the universality of architecture,

there will come a time when those who have put their art at the service of the community and in whose labors and in whose soul a new love for humanity has vibrated, there will come a time when they will form a unity in which all that was particular will flow into the universal: into that universal which makes beauty all the more elevated. From this it follows, among other things, that the more universal the beauty, the less it will be necessary to discuss for reasons

¹¹ G.C. Argan, *Storia dell'arte italiana*, Vol. II, Sansoni, Firenze 1975, pp. 78–79.

¹² L.B. Alberti, *De re aedificatoria*..., Libro I, cap. IX, p. 64. V. anche Libro V, cap. XIV, p. 398.

¹³ *Ibidem*, Libro VIII, cap. VI, p. 711.

of taste. Beauty, in fact, exists only in ourselves, and is therefore relative; and when we turn to the particular, beauty also follows the same path. Spinoza says that beauty is a concept proper to human beings and therefore it is not a prerogative of certain objects. This universal character finds its place today, as in the past, in simple and natural constructions.¹⁴

The search for a universal language that rediscovers its reasons in the particular, today appears extremely topical, the expressive babel surrounds or sometimes constructs our urban realities, demolishing, intervention after intervention, the character of unity and formal uniformity that characterized the historic city. This dramatic transformation was observed with authority by Pier Paolo Pasolini who, in his famous documentary on the shape of the city, notes,

I chose a city, the city of Orte [...], I chose the shape of a city as the theme, the profile of a city. [...] I chose a shot that previously showed only the city of Orte in its stylistic perfection, that is, as a perfect, absolute form, and that's more or less the shot; it is enough for me to move this thing here, in the camera, and lo and behold, the shape of the city, the profile of the city, the architectural mass of the city, is cracked, it is ruined, it is marred by something foreign, which is that house that you see there on the left. You see her?¹⁵

A similar observation made some sixty years earlier by Adolf Loos regarding the inability of contemporary architecture to relate to the landscape and the city, reveals a general inadequacy of architects to intervene on the territory or on the city without distorting its together,

The sky is blue, the water is green and everything is deep peace. The mountains and the clouds are reflected in the lake and so are the houses, courtyards and chapels. It seems that they are there as if they were not created by the hand of man. As if they had come out of God's workshop, like the mountains and the trees, the clouds and the blue sky. [...] But what is there? A discord creeps into this peace. Like a useless screech. Among the houses of the peasants, which were not built by them, but by God, there is a villa. The work of a good or a bad architect? I do not know. I only know that the peace, the stillness and the beauty are already gone.¹⁶

The answer to the question about the inadequacy condition of contemporary architecture, perhaps is to be found precisely in the precise desire not to want to read the repertoire that founded its disciplinary corpus. The city, therefore, as a treatise on architecture, made up of stately examples and anonymous and simple artifacts, which nevertheless reveal the history of a specific community. As Pasolini clearly remarked, the levels of interpretation on the building must be multiple and therefore even those small marks left in the territory take on extreme value, such as the cobbled river path filmed in his documentary and thus commented,

it is a humble thing, it cannot even be compared with certain wonderful works of art, author, of the Italian tradition. And yet I think that this small street of nothing, so humble, must be

¹⁴ H.P. Berlage, *Sull'architettura moderna. Conferenza tenuta il 26 novembre 1910* [in:] H. van Bergeijk (ed.), *Hendrik Petrus Berlage. Architettura, urbanistica, estetica. Scritti scelti*, Zanichelli, Bologna 1985, p. 119.

¹⁵ P.P. Pasolini, P. Brunatto, *Pasolini e... la forma della città*, documentario Rai a cura di A. Zanoli girato nell'autunno 1973 mandato in onda il 7 febbraio 1974.

¹⁶ A. Loos, *Architektur* (1910), in *Trotzdem*, Wien, 1931; trad. it. *Architettura*, in id., *Parole nel vuoto*, Adelphi, Milano 1980 (1972 I^a tr. it.), p. 241.

defended with the same persistence, with the same good will, with the same rigor, with which one defends the work of art of a great author.

The defense of the city built by unknown authors of the history of architecture derives from the elementary observation of the concretization of an indisputably absolute form reached in the city of Orte, by virtue of a condition governed by a homogeneity of intent and, to quote Berlage, of a universal unity. Later, in fact, Pasolini goes on to underline the collective value of architecture,

[...] Nobody would fight rigorously, with anger, to defend this thing and I chose instead to defend this. [...] I want to defend something that is not sanctioned, that is not codified, that no one defends, that is the work, let's say, of the people, of an entire history, of the entire history of the people of a city, of an infinity of nameless men who, however, worked within an era that then produced the most extreme and absolute fruits in works of art and author. [...] Whoever you talk to, he immediately agrees with you in having to defend [...] a monument, a church, the facade of the church, a bell tower, a bridge, a ruin whose historical value is now established, but no one realizes that what must be defended is precisely [...] this anonymous past, this nameless past, this popular past.¹⁷

Despite today's awareness of the impossibility of recomposing the fragments into a *unicum*, if not for parts of the city, the architectural vision should be closely linked to the knowledge of the real architectural fact and not just abstract. We should move in this direction to find in the built city, in other words within its constitutive logic, the source of continuous inspiration and stimulus for new urban prefigurations that refer to it, without seeming to be a copy or, on the contrary, foreign body. Therefore, we should aim at the creation of urban scenes capable of constantly grasping the intangible secret of the relationships present between the spatial devices of the city and its architecture. Once again it is Ernesto Nathan Rogers who gives methodical indications about the necessary dialectical relationship between the city, its history and its contemporary interpreters. As already mentioned, the question of memory and therefore of its sharing is a central topic and a theme on which it will insist consistently throughout its existence. The same noun "continuity", used to distinguish his "Casabella", places its position within a precise choice of field that, on the one hand, clears any possibility of misunderstanding, but on the other, does not circumvent the complexity of the problem. In a programmatic way, his thinking and teaching gave body and substance to a school – not only Italian – which from him has taken up the threads of reflection on the dynamics of the city. The urban phenomenon should be studied in a progressive perspective and observed, as Rogers identifies, as a set of logical structures in which the sense of tradition gives life to an expressiveness whose foundation, "is the composition of ever new relationships, is the yearning to grasp the essential nature of architectural reality, which concretizes those different relationships"¹⁸.

So is the built heritage, with its shape or its building materials, in which everything had a strong relationship with the meaning that a particular architecture wanted or had to express. This desire to continue to build an architectural place in constant dialogue with history so that it can still be named as such – that is, a place for which terms such as street, square or palace can still be used – is not a trivial operation, nor is it so much less so obvious as it

¹⁷ P.P. Pasolini, P. Brunatto, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ E.N. Rogers, *Prefazione. Il mestiere di architetto* [in] L. Molinari (ed.), *Ernesto Nathan Rogers. Esperienza dell'architettura*, Skira, Milano 1997, p. 22.

might seem hastily. The danger of which it is easy to be victims is evident, namely that of falling into the aforementioned, in renouncing the invention, understood in its Latin meaning, of finding by investigating. Invention, then, as a fundamental means in finding fragments of a mistreated language, present in the city, but still intelligible, alive and in any case belonging to contemporary society.

The city of the distant or near past, whether built or just conceived, is understood as an immense catalog of forms from which new stimuli for contemporary living places can be found, but always mediated by the interpretative autobiographical data. The instrument of analogy and metaphor become the medium for giving life to architectural forms which, although not necessarily deriving from the repertoire of architecture, transliterated by the author, acquire spatial value, not just aesthetic formalism or cultured quotation. The aim is the space of architecture and the city. The “other” figure of inspiration is used to give rise to new forms.

The recent Berlin experience belongs to this field of research that has made the teachings of the historic city its own, seeking, in itself, a re-foundation of the architectural statutes. The post-unification reconstruction of the city has certainly assumed great urban value in the contemporary landscape due to the results obtained, which are made evident by the extreme quality achieved. Having become a real laboratory of building, the guiding idea was to renew its shape, where still possible, starting from the urban layouts, squares and streets, as they had conformed before the last world war to reconstruct, starting from the ancient, a new image of oneself¹⁹. The architecture of the city, the study of its ancient dynamics in continuous evolution, have thus again played a primary role in the urban and architectural project, despite the dramatic inheritance received. We have returned to thinking in terms of an architect not differently from what Ludwig Hilberseimer observed,

The need to shape a heterogeneous mass, often gigantic, of materials according to a formal law that is valid for each element involves a reduction of the architectural form to the essential, to the necessary, to the general, that is, a reduction of the cubic geometric shapes, which are the fundamental elements of any architecture. And here the essential quality of the architect assumes all the greater importance: the sense of volumes and their proportions, the organizational capacity. Shaping large masses according to a general law, dominating multiplicity, is what Nietzsche means by style. The general case, the law, are revered and placed in the foreground, the exception is put aside, the nuance is canceled, the measure triumphs, the chaos is forced to become form, a logical, unequivocal form, which is mathematical and law.²⁰

The search is to find the unspoken of places according to a “principle of revelation” always and in any case guided by a precise corpus of rules made available by the experience of architecture, whether it be the great masters or anonymous master builders. Perhaps the compositional principle lies in the ability to be amazed by the normality of things similarly to what Giorgio de Chirico observes:

A truly immortal work of art can only be born through a revelation. Schopenhauer has perhaps best defined and explained (why not?) A similar moment at the point in which in *Parerga and*

¹⁹ Cfr. il catalogo della partecipazione tedesca della 7a Esposizione Internazionale di Architettura della Biennale di Venezia a cura di Hans Stimmann, *Berlin 1945-1953-1989-2000-2010. Physiognomie einer Großstadt*, Skira, Ginevra-Milano, 2000.

²⁰ L. Hilberseimer, *L'architettura della grande città*, CLEAN, Napoli 1981, p. 103.

Paralipomena he says: ‘To have original, extraordinary and perhaps immortal ideas, one must only isolate oneself from the world for a few moments so completely that the most common occurrences appear to be new and unusual and thus reveal their essence.’ If instead of ideas, you imagine the birth of a work of art (painting or sculpture) in the mind of an artist, you will have the principle of revelation in painting.²¹

This compositional process of revelation, as outlined by de Chirico, can perhaps be adapted to architectural research in which the devices of city urbanities are relived with an apparently pragmatic detachment to build renewed and unprecedented architectural devices of the city.

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