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Via Edoardo Orabona, 4

70125 Bari - Italy

Phone: +39 080 5963564

E-mail: info@artecweb.org - tema@artecweb.org

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EDITORIAL

CONTEMPORARY URBAN STORYLINES

Cristiana Bartolomei*, Alfonso Ippolito**,
Simone Helena Tanoue Vizioli***

* DA - Dipartimento di Architettura, Università di Bologna, Bologna (Italy)

** Dipartimento di Storia, Disegno e Restauro dell'Architettura, Sapienza Università di Roma, Roma (Italy)

*** Instituto de Arquitetura e Urbanismo, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo (Brasil)

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«The sense of self, strengthened by art and architecture, allows us to engage fully in the mental dimensions of dream, imagination and desire. Buildings and cities provide the horizon for the understanding and confronting of the human existential condition. Instead of creating mere objects of visual seduction, architecture relates, mediates, and projects meanings. The ultimate meaning of any building is beyond architecture; it directs our consciousness back to the world and towards our own sense of self and being. Significant architecture makes us experience ourselves as complete embodied and spiritual beings. In fact, this is the great function of all meaningful art» [1].

In the interaction between interior and exterior spaces, the façade functions as a membrane, the skin that simultaneously hides and reveals the building's environment. It can adopt distinctive styles, whether ornate, minimalist, technological, historical, contemporary, industrial, or environmental. A building's façade constitutes its threshold, inviting exploration and serving as the opening lines of a narrative.

The articles in this edition focus specifically on the architectural façade. Amidst the myriad technological advancements it has undergone, one notable distinction between the façades of ancient structures and those of the contemporary era lies in the evolving comprehension of its significance across different historical eras. No longer confined to merely serving as an entrance to the shelter, the façade has transformed into a realm of construction and composition, assimilating the rational functionality of modernity and the industrial revolution. It navigates the currents of the present through a dialectical process. As architecture evolves into a spectacle, challenging structural and design paradigms, it simultaneously reinforces the phenomenological connections between the human body and the built environment.

Exploring the realms of post-modernism and contemporary perspectives sheds new light on architectural discourse. Kate Nesbitt underscores the era of post-modernism in architecture as a period wherein architectural theory draws influence from paradigms external to the discipline. During this phase, not only did philosophy play a pivotal role in shaping architectural discussions, but fields such as history (operating independently), linguistics, politics, and sociology also contributed significantly to the debate [2].

Otero-Pailos asserts that architects, particularly since the 1940s, have increasingly sought inspiration from sources beyond traditional architectural theory to analyze and comprehend the challenges inherent to the discipline itself [3]. Contemporary architectural theory has drawn closer to philosophy by highlighting the interplay between the human body and its environment. Visual, tactile, olfactory, and auditory sensations form the visceral dimension of architecture's apprehension. In the postmodern era, the human and subconscious relationship with architecture permeates every aspect of the built environment.

Furthermore, in his essay *Build, Dwell, Think (Bauen Wohnen Denken)* [4], Heidegger emphasizes the importance of dwelling and construction in shaping our understanding of existence. He asserts that architecture encompasses more than the mere physical construction of buildings; it also investigates how human beings inhabit the world.

Buildings reflect and mold our thoughts, interactions, and perceptions of the world. They modify and are affected by their surroundings, including the landscape, nearby structures, and streets. Inside, buildings serve as a central hub for inhabitants' experiences and outlooks.

Historically, people have created façades using various materials, including clay, stone, concrete, glass, metal, fiber, and innovative technological substances. On rural properties, a welcoming porch often greets guests before they enter the owner's private domain. Façades can contribute to a unified, perfectly aligned architectural ensemble in urban environments. Alternatively, a solitary building can captivate attention through its façade, emerging as a central figure in the surrounding landscape.

Current architecture encounters distinct challenges and opportunities in representing and examining façades. While conventional methods such as plans, elevations, and sections persist, a forward-thinking approach seeks a deeper understanding of 20th-century façades. This comprehensive archaeological perspective delves into materials, construction methods, socioeconomic contexts, and the motivations that guide architectural decisions. Its goal is the complete reconstruction of a building's history.

This collection features numerous articles that employ digital technologies to collect massive data, using methods such as laser scanning or photogrammetry. In some instances, the main objective is the documentation of façades, while in others, the focus is on restoring elements that have suffered deterioration or destruction over time.

Among the various existing documentation methods, two technologies based on three-dimensional scanning using point clouds have emerged prominently in recent decades: laser scanning and photogrammetry. Whether attributed to their rapid data acquisition and generation, exceptional precision, or growing accessibility, both have demonstrated significant promise as techniques for the three-dimensional digitization of built heritage. Façades adorned with numerous ornaments, some crafted manually, pose challenges in accurate representation through 2D methods. Modern digital technologies, however, excel in mapping intricate details such as the conservation status of façades, textures, pathologies, and other relevant information.

According to Carpo [5], during the 1990s, researchers were able to transfer old science to newly discovered computational platforms using new digital machines that were no longer considered "new" today; on the contrary,

computers can work better and faster if they are allowed to follow a different, non-human, and post-scientific method.

Carpo further asserts that, metaphorically, computers are now developing a new kind of science. Façades also lead to this advancement. Some come close to artificial intelligence, capable of capturing data, interpreting, and transforming their status and configuration, as in the case of kinetic façades that change dynamically, transforming buildings from static monoliths into surfaces that are always in motion.

Some architects raise questions about these advances, arguing that self-referential architecture reflects the crisis in the contemporary urban landscape. They assert that such designs highlight the limitations of a culture that centers on spectacular forms. The Netherlands has lost the tradition of constructing urban spaces through façades, which has led to the observation of this trend. The article *De vliesgevel in the Netherlands between construction and representation. Past and present-day experiences in social housing* sheds light on this issue. Hans van der Heijden's *Experience of Social Housing* by the authors Alessandro Dalla Caneva and Angelo Bertolazzi, examines social housing complexes designed by architect Hans van der Heijden, who seeks to rescue Dutch tradition, highlighting the importance of the shape and construction of façades to preserve local memory and values.

The article *Between memory and reason: the brick wall* by the authors Adriana Rossi, Luis Manuel Palmero Iglesias, Sara Gonizzi Barsanti, and Santiago Lillo Giner brings the relationship between space and social dynamics by integrating the nature of the environment with complex human needs. The designer's inventiveness and tectonic imagination form the basis for artisanal and traditional culture in the context influenced by the Mediterranean tradition. In this environment, affective involvement intertwines with efficacy resistance. The bricks present in Vietri's domes, façades, and architectural elements exemplify adaptive versatility. The outcome reflects a unique correlation between place, form, and material, identifying themselves in a cohesive expression.

Starting from the concepts of rhythm, rule, and the analogy between architecture and music, the article *Built*

forms and underlying geometries in 20th-century architecture: Muuratsalo House and Leicester Engineering Department Building by the authors Maria Grazia Cianci, Daniele Calisi, Stefano Botta, Sara Colaceci, Sagraio Fernandez Raga, Carlos Rodriguez Fernandez, and Michela Schiaroli, is dedicated to architectural analysis and representation, with a particular focus on façades. The study compares two specific cases: the Muuratsalo House, designed by Alvar Aalto (1952-1953), and the Leicester Engineering Department Building, designed by James Stirling and James Gowan (1959-1963). They compare specific categories of façades by addressing their texture, fundamental compositional signs (such as their relationship with the ground, windows, and connection with the sky), and geometries as the basis for our methodology.

The article *The presence of the past: analysis & representation of the Strada Novissima*, by the authors Agostina Maria Giusto and Emanuela Chiavoni explores the 1980 Venice Architecture Biennale, entitled *The Presence of the Past*, analyzing it from two perspectives: a broader one, highlighting the conflict between the exhausted modern movement and new disciplinary positions; and another more intrinsic to the exhibition, especially in “Strada Novissima”. Through its twenty façades, the exhibition reflects the ideas of representative architects of the time, moving between architecture, sculpture, scenography, and painting.

The article *Understanding and documenting decorated façades of the Coquimbo Region in Chile* by the authors Elena De Santis, Emanuela Chiavoni, and Natalia Jorquera Silva, examines the adorned earth architecture found in the Coquimbo Region, Chile, specifically in the provinces of Limarí and Elqui, with a detailed focus on Tulahuén and Pisco Elqui. The distinctiveness of the decorated façades in these areas lies in their vibrant and intricate ornamental compositions, resulting in remarkable realizations of patterns and textures. These embellished façades, in turn, bear witness to the significance of Chilean heritage on the land, emphasizing the unique cultural importance of this architectural expression within the region.

The article *Hierarchies and panoramic aspects of Anne Tyng’s urban projects and the contemporary vision*

of the city by the authors Cristina Candito, João Cabeleira, and Alessandro Meloni, explores Anne Tyng’s Urban Hierarchy proposal, addressing both its geometric reasoning and the helical structure and intrinsic progressions. Furthermore, it examines coexisting experiences and assumptions, especially concerning developed visions that re-examine urban patterns and images. By following these two complementary paths, the study aims to comprehensively understand the project’s image based on the configuration of the helical megastructure and the infinite possibilities derived from the application of modular and aggregation principles.

The article *When decorations have a function. Technology and aesthetics in contemporary façades* by the authors Michele Valentino and Enrico Cicalò reflects on the historical role of decoration and ornamentation, emphasizing, through case studies, the diminishing significance of the traditional dichotomy between function and decoration in the contemporary artistic and architectural landscape. The primary emphasis lies on adorned façades, delving into their historical significance and present-day perspectives. In today’s architectural realm, communication takes center stage, and the field endeavors to articulate its communicative function, mainly through crafting external surfaces and enclosures. These components play a pivotal role in shaping semantics and iconicity within the evolving languages of contemporary architecture.

The article *Representation of the surface of architecture: from Western solutions to the Eastern case studies of solid development* by the authors Federico Rebecchini, Emanuela Chiavoni, Alekos Diacodimitri, and Maria Belen Trivi presents a type of complete representation that brings together the exterior (or interior) surface of architecture: drawings that, with different assumptions and references, achieve the same intention: a total representation, developed in plan, of all interior or exterior façades of a particular architecture. Western examples, notably Robin Evans’ studies called *Developed Surface*, introduce a type of representation that was later adopted, with similar or adapted intentions, by several Japanese architects in the 1970s and 1980s.

The article *The symbiosis of the arts in the technological elements of building façades* by the authors Fabio

Minutoli, Alessio Altadonna, Adriana Arena, Graziella Bernardo, and Luis Manuel Palmero Iglesias presents two examples of architectural prospectuses built in Messina in the 1950s. They aimed to clarify the representativeness of the meanings inherent in the selected works by highlighting how they articulate external configurations. These configurations illustrate the emotional relationship between architecture and the context in which it exists.

Focusing on post-World War II façades, the authors Daniela Pittaluga and Juan Antonio Quiros Castillo, in their essay *Surfaces of 20th-century façades: reflections on their archaeological awareness*, extend an archaeological approach to the study of 20th-century architectural façades, adopting meticulous attention to materials, labor, technological devices, socioeconomic context, and motivations behind choices, using architectural archeology as the method.

If the Language of Architecture is a way in which cultures express their understanding of being and buildings

communicate meanings and cultural values, the façade projects itself into the relationship between the old and the new, between the manual and the digital, between the interior and exterior, between the material and the immaterial. The articles presented here focus on this architectural element from different perspectives.

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