

Cesare Dallatomasina  
**The wonder and the concrete utopias of architecture**

---

Author: *Roberto Secchi*  
 Afterwords: *Piero Ostilio Rossi*  
 Title: *Architettura. Bisogno di sognare*  
 Language: *Italiana*  
 Publisher: *Tab, Rome*  
 Serie: *Bauhaus 101. Intercultural Dialogue Books*  
 Characteristics: *14x20 cm, 192 pages, paperback, colors*  
 ISBN: *978-88-9295-597-4*  
 Year: *2022*

---



The book *Architettura. Bisogno di sognare* by Roberto Secchi is divided into two chapters followed by conclusions, complemented by the afterword written by Piero Ostilio Rossi. After the prologue, emphasizing that the two sections will be united by the concept of concrete utopia, as the author highlights «the need for visions of the future built on a critical, attentive, and radical reading of the present and the projection into projects of profound transformation», the discussion turns to the concept of wonder.

In this paragraph, the meaning of this term in the architectural context throughout the centuries is explored through an analysis of the seven wonders of antiquity and the modern world. It then transitions to its contemporary significance. It is evident that wonder occurs under four fundamental conditions: size/grandiosity (although over time, this has diminished in value due to its widespread nature), technical/technological innovation, symbolic value/communicative capacity, and the beauty of the work and its ornaments (sculptures, decorations, etc.).

These aspects are also addressed in the afterword where Piero Ostilio Rossi points out that «today, in the global world of media, the multitude of works and their dissemination generates disenchantment, and their ability to arouse wonder and surprise is increasingly reduced», and further asks «who still has the strength to be amazed by something in the face of the quantity and pervasiveness of the images that assail us?».

Wonder, understood as amazement, is increasingly difficult to generate today. Both Secchi and Rossi use this aspect to criticize contemporary architecture, which often, in an attempt to evoke wonder, turns into mere advertising, becoming decontextualized, deliberately extravagant, and devoid of content.

This situation leads Secchi to analyze the concept of beauty, which, along with surprise, constitutes wonder, and through Greek mythology, he connects it to natural things. Although the «definition of ‘beautiful’ continues to elude», and linking back to the aesthetic issue mentioned earlier, he adds that what is saved from this decline is poetry. Also in architecture.

For the author, beauty is found in works «devoid of presumption, arrogance, exhibition, rich in humility, which barely reveal the tension of the research that produced them» and capable of enhancing the idea of poverty ; «not understood, of course, as indigence but as a quality that escapes the

materialism of things to assume its spiritual dimension».

What has been stated represents not only a concept of beauty but also the vision of a more communal and solidary world, characterized by radically different lifestyles, oriented towards reducing the superfluous and less focused on consumption. Certainly, these are utopias, but, as suggested by the book's title, it is to them that we must refer, as humanity has done in other historical periods.

In this regard, Secchi, proposing the deliberately antithetical linguistic pair of «concrete utopias», highlights how, only during the 20th century, humanity has been able to carry out several such endeavors. As for individuals, the author traces the visions of Bruno Taut found in his *Die Auflösung der städte* and in the *siedlungen*, Hans Scharoun in his public buildings, Adriano Olivetti in Ivrea, Giovanni Michelucci particularly in his project for the Sollicciano prison, and Ludovico Quaroni and Saverio Muratori in the proposals for the competition for Le Barene di San Giuliano in Mestre in 1958. For collective and community production, he describes the INA-Casa plans, the reconstruction of Florence after the 1966 flood, and the initiative in Gibellina following the earthquake. In this sense, he states:

There are many cases of utopias that have marked the future reality of construction. They have the task of paving the way on paths not yet explored; in their abstraction, they cannot, and must not, lead to imitation; articulating principles, revealing the possible not yet become is their task.

However, not all utopias have materialized so clearly; sometimes, they have remained abstract ideas that, due to their unrealizability, have provoked reactions and prompted reflection. Examples are the urban utopias that emerged in the 1970s, formulated by groups such as Archizoom, Andrea Branzi, UFO, Zziggurat, Archigram, Metabolism, Lebbeus, and others.

Secchi's criticism is directed at the present day, as he notes a lack of utopia, the difficulty in imagining a different future, and in dreaming. In this sense, the author examines the period of Neorealism to highlight how, through a reinterpretation of the present, it was possible to "concretize a utopia". This process is particularly evident in some neighborhoods in Matera and Rome, as well as in macro-structural projects like Corviale, Gallarate, Zen, and others.

What is particularly striking and shared in this text are the criticisms directed at the world in which we live and the situations that have generated it, such as globalization, environmental and social issues, the current economic and development model, and more. However, there are also optimistic conclusions regarding the possibility of a better future, based on the observation of positive realities around us. The author emphasizes associations, volunteering, youth movements, non-profit agencies, and others that reflect the wonder of the present and the concrete utopias of the future.