

Antonio Biancucci  
**Architettura che cura il pianeta**

---

Author: *Michele Sbacchi*  
 Title: *L'architettura e il pianeta malato*  
 Language: *italian*  
 Publisher: *Tab edizioni*  
 Characteristics: *15 x 22 cm, paperback, colors*  
 ISBN: *9788892955646*  
 Year: *2023*

---



The third publication of the series «Architettura Sostenibile. Estetica risorse riuso» focuses on sustainability not only in technical and technological terms but also from a humanistic point of view, culturally closer to the field of architectural design. The title of the volume is inspired by the 1970s Debord's well-known essay *La planète malade* and so investigate architecture as a “therapy”, or as a discipline that should be not an expression of a sick society but again, as it was in the past, of the fine balance between development and progress on one side and sustainability and care for the environment on the other, thus resolving this dialectical relationship through the culture of design. The essay takes its roots in the origins of environmentalist movement born between the 60s and 70s to go even deeper into some fundamental cultural references of the relationship between society, development and environment, namely American Transcendentalism and the Frankfurt School. Of the former the author demonstrates how some themes born in the artistic and literary field with Emerson, Whitman, Thoreau then nourished a certain architectural culture that had wide resonance in the last century; about the latter then, starting from Adorno and Horkheimer's Dialectic of Enlightenment, it is explained how the critique of the exploitation of the environment operated by a “sick” capitalist society has subtly animated the research of figures such as Soleri or the Japanese Metabolists. What emerges is a tangible permanence of the sustainability within the founding core of an architectural episteme that can respond, as it has always done in the past, to this complex challenge as a “space therapy”. A concept that has already been introduced by Plato in *The Republic*, first of all starting from the city seen as a to-be-cared-pasture that is necessary to feed the community's well-being.

Is architecture still committed to profitably fulfilling its fundamental therapeutic purpose today? Is it still the means by which people take care of its environment and therefore of the society of which it is the expression? Instead, everything would seem to point in the opposite direction and it is easy to see how the climate change has not been matched by an analogous architectural change. With the eye of a cultured designer Sbacchi makes a deeply reading in the reasons of this lack of alignment and of the resulting crisis of disciplinary identity, as an incapacity to intimately see the *transition* not only pragmatically through its tangible manifestations but also as the result of a process of cultural involution in our relationship with science and technique, as Husserl have well explained.

Important themes that the author clearly describes, with examples at the small and large scale of architecture and landscape, dealing with little-known episodes or rediscovering them in the light of new challenges such as the environmental one and always showing a motivated originality as only those who well know the topics can do. The subjects are various, the new meanings and expressions of living and domesticity, some innovative but not sufficiently valued experiences of the last century, the use of territories for a new vision of the landscape. Areas of research that are sealed together through a mature reading of architectural design also in the light of the principles of philosophical hermeneutics and of phenomenological and existentialist thought. It therefore seems to us not obvious to agree with the author that architecture can continue to play a role only through a conscious recovery of its cultural depth. The heritage outlined by Husserl and then developed by giants such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty is in fact the same which, through a long series of references, then comes to nourish the tradition of studies such as that of Rykwert, Vesely and Perez-Gomez. Scholars that the author had directly known and that nourish a critique of the current drift towards an anti-humanist desemanticization built only on quantitative and not qualitative parameters. Drift well summarized by the 1950s Adorno's "impossibility of dwelling", that is, the loss of meaning of the notion of domesticity. A theme that obviously concerns not only the house but all architecture in general, as a link between the world, the system of objects, and our bodies.

Behind the easy branding of words such as "borgo" or "resilience" is often hidden a plethora of concepts without a real cultural depth. Where to look then? The heritage of micro-settlements of the Sicilian rural hinterland is perhaps the most evident example of a possible backdoor to find new ways for the urban agglomeration through design. Open-air archives of a constructive knowledge that is above all sharing a common cultural vision that binds community and environmental continuity and that brings out important concepts such as *contamination* or *contextual specificity*. These concepts help us to fight the uncritical hegemony of globalization that erases the value of places in favor of technological dominance and standardization.

The author uses history as an operational knowledge, a language in continuous transformation where the concept of *metamorphosis* emerges as an essential quality of innovative architectural organisms that demonstrate a possible harmony of modern and vernacular. The importance of both conceptual and operational categories such as *soil* and *void* in the definition of new relationships between landscape and city (Secchi, Koolhaas, Corner) shows the possibility of always finding connections with widely settled disciplinary issues (Laugier, Milizia, Tafuri, Corbu). Among the many topics addressed, the countryside-architecture relationship seen in the landscape's construction is very interesting. Particularly, where the building becomes contextual to the agricultural production system highlighting the rules that governs the territory to bring together fields (built architecture and cultivated countryside) that important studies such as those of Pagano and Sereni have deeply investigated each for their own areas without however arriving at a unitary vision.

Another side of the coin, even more unusual in our reflections, is that given by the so-called *energy landscapes*, the "cultivation" of the territory for the production of renewable energy resources, solar and wind power. Same issue for infrastructures, which are addressed with little-known examples such as the Morandi viaduct in Agrigento. Agriculture, architecture, infrastructure, energy production systems, all areas that must enter into a new homogeneous and structured vision of the landscape as a "logical con-

struction". Given that the architecture of the future will increasingly be the transformation of the existing, the theme of its hermeneutical reading becomes even more central, strategic for the interpretation and governance of this metamorphosis.

Ultimately, in addition to the very fresh, serene writing devoid of unnecessary complications as in so much specialized literature, to the very rare and very brief notes, to the original and not obvious bibliography, what appears cogent among the characteristics of this volume is the ability of its author to create short circuits between disciplinary fields usually not inclined to dialogue. The essay makes concretely tangible themes and experiences even very far from our daily practice and at the same time elevates facts and examples that generally fail to evade from areas of local culture or specialisms to the rank of scientific matter. The author shows an ability that is generally more noticeable as a quality of relating in figures more dedicated to concrete application in design. Thus, as in a design process, different subjects, heterogeneous in terms of characteristics and temporality coexist in the essay in a meaningful unity, as all equally contemporary. An aptitude, marked by *sprezzatura*, capable of accommodating all the complexity of reality, the most representative example of which is perhaps precisely that adopted by Scarpa in Sicily in the refurbishment of 'u Cubu, the Palazzo Steri in Palermo.