Lamberto Amistadi
The possible community: a project for the CSAC of Parma

Author: *Carlo Quintelli*
Title: *The Abbey, Archive | Museum | Workshop, an architectural project for the CSAC*
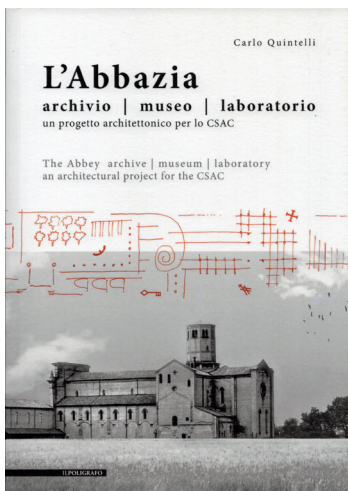Text Language: *Italian, English*
Publisher: *Il Poligrafo, Padua*
Series: *The Arché Project*
Characteristics: *format 18x25cm, 216 pages, paperback, b/w*
ISBN: *978-88-9387-053-5*
Year: *2018*

Carlo Quintelli makes things clear right from the title *The Abbey, Archive | Museum | Workshop* and the citation of Tolstoy that catches the eye under a fine photograph of the Abbey of Valserena: "People understand the meaning of art only when they cease to consider that the aim of that activity is beauty." And, in fact, this releases the museological and display project for the CSAC Study Centre and Communication Archive of the University of Parma from any overly facile and reassuring aesthetic and contemplative temptation. In reality, the more than 200 pages of this volume, throughout which the tale of the architectural project for the archive-museum-workshop unravels – from the genealogy of the abbey type to the definition of a complex functional programme – point elsewhere and higher up: to try and understand the role of art in society, the role of architecture for art, i.e. the possibility of preparing a sophisticated space-functional device that can put the visitor in the condition to assume an active and informed role in respect of the artworks. And, generally speaking, is it possible through a marriage of art and architecture to contribute to some extent to reactivating individual awareness, its rational and emotional component, and, by and large, to return the individual to the role of an informed and responsible citizen?

Quintelli is well aware of the difficulty of this problem and in the volume there is no lack of references to the contemporary "human condition" in the accounts of sociologists and anthropologists, in a tight clasp between existential solitude and the illusions of simulacra. It is no coincidence that he speaks of "r-existential leaning", which "tends to return under a certain logical, selective, and reflexive control, the kaleidoscopic inflation of the aesthetic offer and the syndromes that accompany it (...)"[1]. But perhaps the point consists precisely in this: to build a counter-narration in which a pretext – sometimes one has the feeling, reading the book, that the CSAC project is nothing but a pretext – becomes an occasion to hope, like Gramsci (i.e. under the responsibility of doing), in the possibility of reproducing those seeds of rationality and amazement that nurture the most authentic experiences of life. From this point of view, the architectural project for the CSAC represents the construction or invention of a happy experience, in which the abbey lends its body to the exposition-production of a material whose semantic-figurative density seems able to re-activa-

te the critical capacity of its visitors, "involving them in a mechanism of understanding and thus of participation within a spatiality rich in spatial stimuli, symbols, and imagery, along a path that is not unique but well determined in its being formalized and decipherable"[2] while re-producing the spiritual riches of the ancient Cistercian community. Because, by developing the terms of the discourse further – it is the book that demands this, its structure presented as a thematic concatenation for subsequent insights – the vexation on which to base our counter-narrative consists in a reaction to Bataille's acquiescence on the impossibility of bringing life to any community whatsoever or at least to a community that survives itself and does not end with conscious annulment in death. For an instant, Bataille saw the possibility of a "community of readers", whose members share a text that "exposes itself" (sacrifices itself) to reading and interpretation. Franco Basaglia[3] – from whom we borrowed the title of this review – relates his "possible community" to a "therapeutic community" that replaces an agglomerate of invalids, a community based on interpersonal comparison and communication. These references are not so foreign to our discourse if we consider the heterogeneity with which the ancient Cistercian community welcomed and hosted both scholars dedicated to interpreting texts and pilgrims in need of spiritual and corporal comfort, and just how many contemporary anthropologists and artists (I cannot help thinking of John Hejduk) have matched the theme of education with that of care. Or even – to respond to the concerns on the grip of the relationship between the city and democracy expressed in the last book by Carlo Olmo[4] – if the citation of Munford that Quintelli mentions is true, namely, the fact that to some extent the monastic communities also cared for the cities, acting as an incubator to identify and renew ideal objectives[5]. Because the community Quintelli is thinking of, as a university professor and lecturer, is one devoted to the study and exegesis of the works of art preserved at the CSAC, but also to make workshop activities "come alive", to obtain "unexpected new meanings with respect to the works, the authors, and the historical contexts."[6], ultimately, one cannot escape the romantic imperative of the "education of man" – to quote Fröbel and the humanistic-phenomenological dimension of German Idealism. And Quintelli lets this be understood quite clearly, appealing to the idea of a "university community", a sort of "humanistic technopole" on the example of the Bauhaus and in the end invoking Arnheim in defining an expressly pedagogical perspective: "To try to answer this question the project adopts the point of view of Rudolf Arnheim when, in his treatise with its eloquent title visual thinking, he says that "Once it is recognized that productive thinking in any area of cognition is perceptual thinking, the central function of art in general education will become evident."[7]

Like the project for the CSAC, also Quintelli's volume "works" or "enters-into-action" – to recall some "Poleselli-style" references of the book – at different levels, elaborating the discourse through successive insights grafted onto the main structure of the text, in a continuous game of correspondences between the project and the book: the chapter entitled "The spatial-functional device of the archive - museum - workshop" is thought of as the screenplay of a film, according to which a long sequence of planes articulate the narrative device from the arrival at the Abbey Museum (1) to its projection in the sweeping plain of the surrounding countryside (Museum 9), passing through the Sculpture Court (Museum 2), hallways, diaphragms, joints, cloisters, "the great workshop of the Church" (Mu-

seum 8), A game of targets and crossings that are repeated at different scales, between the chapels and the church as between the Abbey and the landscape; the structure of the text resembles a little those devices of medieval mnemonics that suggested establishing a correspondence between a real work of architecture and the book whose content you wished to remember. In our case, within the general discourse, what open up, like lateral chapels, are some long thematic excursi (the Cistercian community, the abbey type, the contemporary art museum), which articulate the story through sub-plots that assume the density of monographic research; between the nature of the community life and that of the archive-museum-workshop a game of mirrors and allusions is established, where the meanings chase one other analogically according to three key concepts: searching, producing, the community (see the chapter "Reproducibility of the abbatial project").

And finally, in the game of recursion which we have mentioned, the book tells of a project conceived as a story, i.e. serving to recount the works exhibited, each in turn the bearer of a particular story. Because ultimately Quintelli is right when, "Bataille-style", he says that, "the first object to exhibit [*donate or sacrifice*][8] is in fact the CSAC itself, the story of an idea and a process from the origins to the present day throughout its historical evolution."[9]

Notes

[1] C. Quintelli, *Abbey archive | Museum | Workshop, an architectural project for the CSAC*, Il Poligrafo, Padua, 2018, p. 14.

[2] Ibid., P. 20.

[3] *Franco Basaglia: la comunità possibile.* Acts of the 1st International Conference on Mental Health (Trieste, 20-24 September 1998).

[4] Cf. C. Olmo, *Città e democrazia, per una critica delle parole e delle cose*, Donzelli editore, Rome 2018.

[5] See C. Quintelli, op. cit., p. 71.

[6] Ibid., P. 51.

[7] Ibid., P. 124.

[8] Parenthesis added by the author of the review.

[9] C. Quintelli, op. cit., p. 168.