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FESTIVAL DELL'ARCHITETTURA

research and projects on architecture and the city

SYMBOLIC,
ICONIC,
FIGURATIVE:
REVELATIONS AND
REGENERATION

edited by Giuseppina Scavuzzo

y.IV n.22 / may 2013

grispan
marras
scavuzzo
segapeli
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zambrano





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Director:

Enrico Prandi

Editor-in-chief:

Lamberto Amistadi

Editorial staff:

Renato Capozzi, Ildebrando Clemente, Daniele Carfagna, Cristiana Eusepi, Carlo Gandolfi, Marco Maretto, Mauro Marzo, Susanna Piscicella, Giuseppina Scavuzzo, Carlotta Torricelli

Editorial office:

Paolo Strina

Tel: +39 0521 905929 - Fax: +39 0521 905912 - E-mail: magazine@festivalarchitettura.it

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FESTIVAL DELL'ARCHITETTURA

ricerche e progetti sull'architettura e la città

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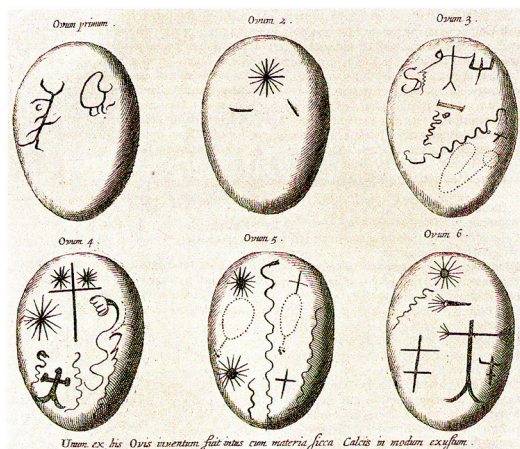
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SIGNS, SEED

Maria Zambrano



Kircher A. (1682), *Mundus subterraneus*.
Amsterdam

The symbol, the iconic and figuration characterise incidences of architecture that are very distant from each other. What they appear to have in common is the search for tools to refer to knowledge and questions which, however much they are repressed, accompany human experience like subterranean rivers, re-emerging to look for communicative signs: dimensions of the ancestral, the original and sacred, and of the associated mystery. The figure, the icon and the symbol live again as a link with architecture that has this original feeling. They are evocative traces emerging from the least problematic forms of a minimalism that risks aphasia. They particularly infiltrate the most orthodox forms of triumphant knowledge, those that exalt the technological and a futurity that is incapable of leading us towards truly desirable life scenarios and possibilities.

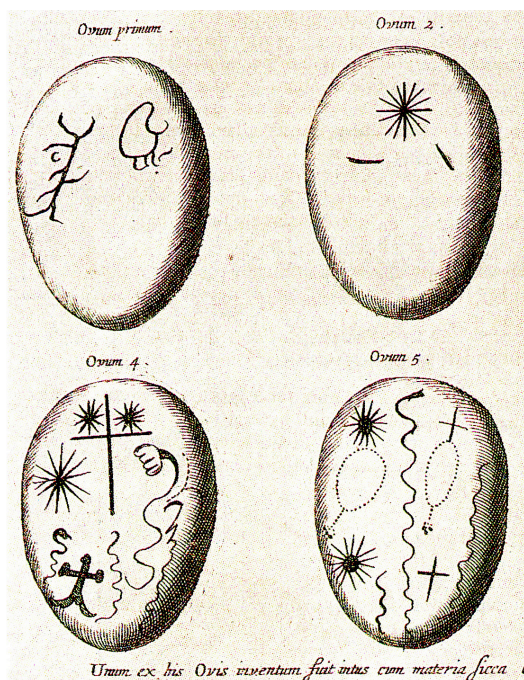
In her research on “poetic reasoning”, which releases things from the human soul that faith in progress has neglected, the Spanish philosopher Maria Zambrano talks about signs, twirling in the artist’s designs, without specifically mentioning the architect. The unusualness of these signs being seeds, in other words of being capable of germinating, well describes the symbolic role of architecture and the need to represent itself as a fecund activity.

The biological metaphor seems particularly useful today in defining a possible role of the symbol in architecture so that environmental awareness and attention to sustainability is not just good practice in building, and in the

Maria Zambano, SIGNS, SEED

end a technical-normative prescription or a dominant tool of technique in a new guise, but invests the language of architecture and its capacity to express meanings, restoring us to the primary condition of being inhabitants of the universe.

(Giuseppina Scavuzzo)



SEGNI, SEMI

Nella notte dell'essere, attraverso la chiarezza della coscienza che non la dissipa, scintillano segni, segni del regno della matematica, e anche figure di altri regni, del regno del sacro o che tende ad esserlo, principalmente. Invocano, minacciando di convertirsi in ossessioni, di essere decifrati; si impongono come stazioni da percorrere, come passi da compiere al di fuori o più in là del cammino di chi se lo sia tracciato anzitempo, con la sua sola, squallida ragione. Si aggirano e volteggiano questi segni nelle figure dell'artista e in quelle del visionario. Molte di esse fantasmi di qualcosa, essere o evento, percepito realmente nella vita quotidiana, percepito realmente ma non veridicamente. E così la sua figura immaginaria perseguita come la verità inavvertita, come la ragione lasciata a mezz'aria.

Segni, figure paiono così essere come germi di una ragione che si nasconde per dare segnali di vita, per attrarre; ragioni di vita che, più che rendere conto, secondo l'unica funzione abitualmente attribuita alle ragioni e persino alla ragione nel suo insieme, e più che fornire un appiglio alle spiegazioni di ciò che accade o meno, invitano ad alzare gli occhi verso una ragione, la prima, a una ragione creatrice, che nella vita dell'uomo ha da essere modestamente — adeguatamente — la ragione fecondante.

Semi, dunque, questi segni e figure di una conoscenza che impone e promette, all'essere che li

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guarda, la prosecuzione e lo sviluppo della sua vita. Già all'interno della nostra tradizione razionalista, gli stoici parlarono di "ragioni seminali", espressione che adesso non ci risulta più tanto chiarificatrice per via di quanto la parola Ragione ha perso, di quanto si è logorata col trasformarsi in astratta, quasi volesse essere la traduzione fedele del "logos". E la stessa cosa sta capitando ai termini "semi", "germi", in quanto riferiti oggi solo ed esclusivamente al biologico.



Maria Zambrano in una foto giovanile all'Università

I SEGNI NATURALI

L'attenzione ai segni non umani fa strettamente parte nell'uomo storico dell'attenzione che egli rivolge alle circostanze, senza che si tenga conto che le circostanze possono offrire una qualche rivelazione intorno agli elementi che le configurano e ci chiedono di "venire salvate", secondo Ortega y Gasset, che le "scoprì" come depositarie di ragione da riscattare dal logos occulto.

E così tocca sorprendere se stessi in preda allo stupore davanti all'evidenza del segno naturale: la figura impressa nelle ali di una farfalla, nella foglia di una pianta, nel guscio di un insetto e persino nella pelle di quel qualcosa che si trascina fra tutti gli esseri viventi, giacché qui tutto il vivente in qualche modo si trascina o viene trascinato dalla vita. Segni che non possono costituire segnali, né avvertimenti. E che se ci rimettiamo a quell'avvertimento del puro sentire che vive avvolto nell'oblio in ogni uomo, ci appaiono come figure e segni impressi da molto lontano, e da molto vicino; segni dell'universo.

Guardati soltanto nell'ottica di tale sentire, questi segni ci consegnano, o piuttosto ci riconsegnano, a una pace singolare, a una calma che proviene dall'aver fatto pace in quell'istante con l'universo, e che ci restituisce alla nostra primaria condizione di abitanti di un universo in atto di offrirci la sua presenza timidamente, adesso, come un ricordo di qualcosa ormai trascorso; il luogo nel quale si visse senza

Maria Zambano, SIGNS, SEED

pretese di possesso.

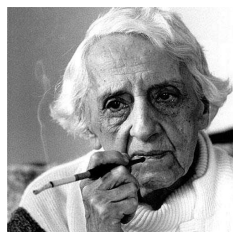
È mai accaduto che gli esseri umani non abitassero in alcuna città? Perché città può esserlo già la grotta, la rudimentale palafitta. Città è tutto ciò che ha un tetto. E col tetto, una porta. Una soglia e un tetto, una stanza in cui possono entrare solamente il padrone e i suoi, e - per scarso che sia il riparo da essa fornito - quanti altri egli vi ammetta. Già quell'uomo ha tracciato un limite tra la sua vita e quella dell'universo, una frontiera.

From Maria Zambrano, *Chiari del Bosco*

Original Title *Claros del Bosque*, 1977

Part VII, SIGNS

English Translate,

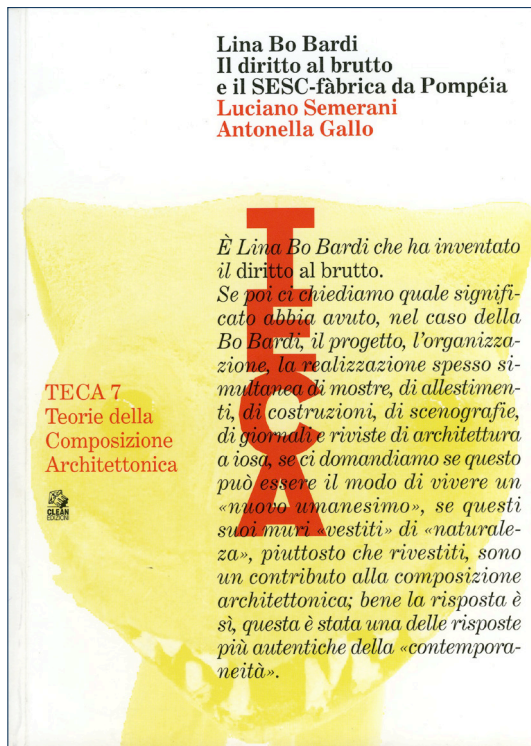


Maria Zambrano (1904-1991) studied under the philosopher Ortega y Gasset and spent a lot of her life in exile (in Italy from 1954 to 1964) due to her opposition to Francoism. On returning to Spain in 1984, she won the Cervantes Prize in 1988. Her principal works include *Filosofía y poesía*, 1939, *La confesion. Género literario y método*, 1943, and *El sueño creador*, 1965.

Maria Zambrano, Segni Semi

Ugliness: Between Desire and Necessity

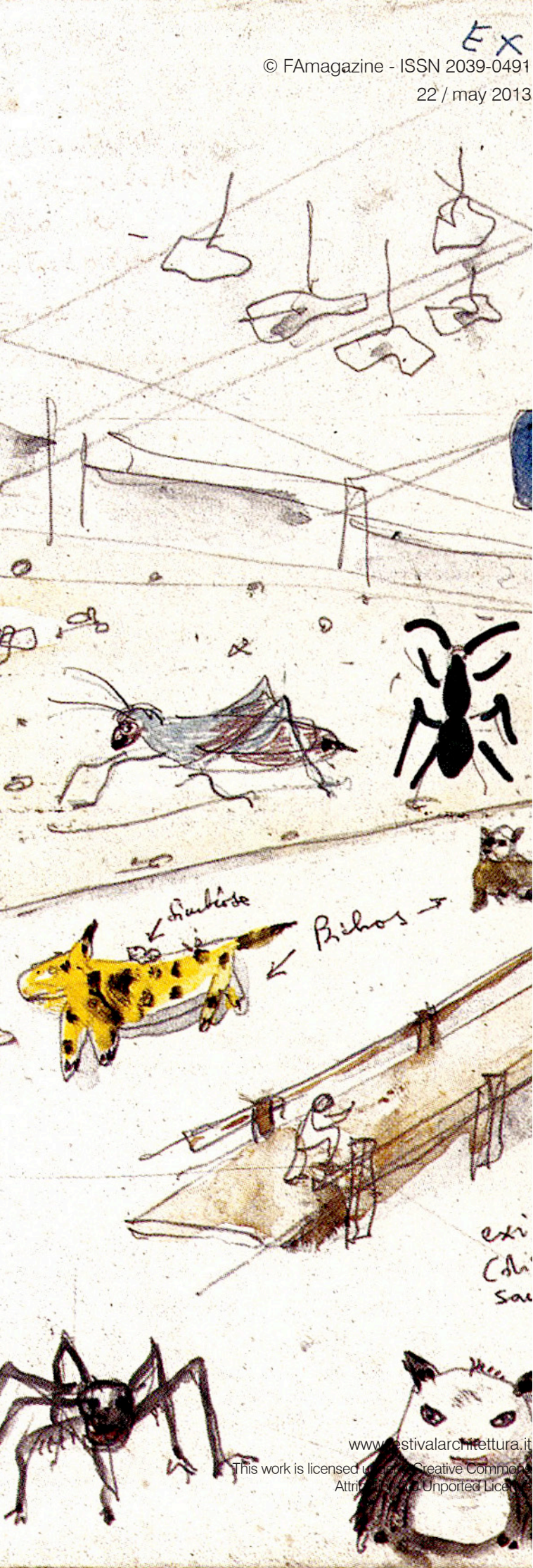
Giuseppina Scavuzzo



Semerani L., Gallo A. (2012) Lina Bo Bardi. Il diritto al brutto e il SESC-fàbrica da Pompéia. Naples: CLEAN, cover

Lina Bo Bardi. Il diritto al brutto e il SESC-fàbrica da Pompéia¹ (*Lina Bo Bardi: the right to ugliness and the SESC Pompéia factory*) is the title of Luciano Semerani and Antonella Gallo's new book about the Italian architect who worked in Brazil as a planner and professor of Architectural Theory, as well as being a cultural promoter. The provocative "right to ugliness" title of Semerani's essay comes from an expression used by Bardi. Its aim is to transmit turmoil, and it works. Reading the two authors' essays, we discover that this turmoil goes in a different direction to the disturbing coined by Freud and subsequently applied to architecture by Antony Vidler to describe the feeling of uninhabitability, of feeling uprooted, in the contemporary condition. By isolating this quote, the "ugliness" with which Semerani has emblematically summarised Lina Bo Bardi's discourse goes in the completely opposite direction: paradoxically, that "ugliness" becomes a hymn to the possibilities of architecture becoming fertile. It is a fertility that depends on being rooted in the most original, ancestral and visceral form that connects man to his birth on earth.

The "right to ugliness" was an expression Bardi initially used to refer to another of her interests: northeast Brazilian folk art. Later her reflection on the civic responsibility to produce objects was transferred to architecture, bringing with it the iconic and figurative power that animates her architecture. Northeast Brazilian production is pre-artisanal (artisanal knowledge



Bardi's is not a personal formal world which strives for originality or draws on a culture or an idea of the world with a corresponding aesthetic that is not the codified one from western culture. It has tools and rules. These are not harmonious canons referring to principles of superior validity, but rules that find superior validity by clinging to the cyclicity of nature, in which everything is a passage from one thing to another, including metamorphosis and reuse. Animals dig lairs or live in those of other animals, transforming them; plants adapt and can grow anywhere; everything is devoured and digested and becomes fertile soil for other forms of life. Bardi believed that western culture should also be devoured and digested to become something else, something fertile to nourish new life: a literal concept of crossbreeding that does not reinterpret or translate, but is fecund and regenerates.

A language that follows these rules cannot be abstract: like the myth and magic it refers to, the sign, or figuration, dominates. Taken from folk imagery, from the Brazilian bestiary that Semerani defines "Heaven on earth without archangels", Bardi wants to restore to us the original condition of the inhabitants of a universe uncorrupted by market needs or theology, an exuberant paradise of animal and vegetable life whose techniques of grafting, camouflage and assembly are passed on to architecture. With a compelling demonstration, Semerani describes composition reaching an ahistorical level. Bardi's considerations on the concept of time – the linear and progressive one invented by the theological and mercantile West, and the mythical, magical one consisting of a maze of lines in which one proceeds in a circular or jumpy fashion – are thus transposed from the ideological level to the diachronicity of architectural composition.

Bardi, quoting Brecht, said that the "right to ugliness" is also an affirmation of freedom, of the "capacity to

Giuseppina Scavuzzo, UGLINESS: BETWEEN DESIRE AND NECESSITY



Fifò, oil lamp for wall or table, tin plate and burnt-out lamp bulb, Bahia, 1963

say no” to the impositions of technique and market, because “the freedom of the artist is individual but true freedom can only be collective... a freedom connected to the limitations of science, and not to the technology that has become technocracy”². Bardi believed that modern culture could be created in popular culture with the propulsive power of a new humanism that reverts to using technique not as an aim but as a tool of necessity. Antonella Gallo takes as a paradigm of this research the SESC Pompeia, the history of the work, the constructive practice, the life housed within a kind of architecture in which, she explains, we find the very model of the growth of the metropolis that is devoured and digested until the meaning is subverted.

Emblematic of the relationship with technique is the exposed error that Gallo describes. In various architectural traditions, such as the Jewish one, the error is sought and offered as a sacrifice of pride, a reminder of the imperfection of man and his works. In this case it is not an exercise in humility but authenticity: the effort put into the work confirms this. It is not sought in order to be humbled but to be accepted, it does not invalidate the work but is part of it like the scars on a body that has lived and struggled. The exaltation of technique and market contain an idea of beauty linked to everything that proclaims it is new, lucid, perfect, to the extent that some contemporary architecture seems to tell us, from an alien world of technological perfection, that we are too human, with our imperfect bodies that are prone to ageing. The SESC, as described by Antonella Gallo, knows how to “dispense the pleasure of the body and the psyche’s freedom” through its openings, its primitiveness and its poverty. Composition and civic responsibility are inseparable: the composition’s poetic, timeless language is regenerated by its roots and its signs; its figures become seeds, promising a potential continuation of life.

Giuseppina Scavuzzo, UGLINESS: BETWEEN DESIRE AND NECESSITY

We see this awareness re-emerge even in countries in which the destruction of every root has been systematically planned and executed, in which technique, market and a misunderstood sense of modernity are allied to construct macro works that are the negation of any humanism. In China, Wang Shu builds multi-material walls in which materials from demolitions carried out in the name of growth – roof tiles, bricks, pieces of glazed tiles – are assembled according to traditional techniques, taking as a model the manual production of everyday objects. Thus, like a large metonymic figure, his Ceramic House of walls covered in pieces of glazed tiles assumes the form and principle of functionality of the ink stones used in the art of calligraphy that the architect practises on a daily basis.



Lina Bo Bardi, "Possible future of the SESC Pompeia", perspective, 1983

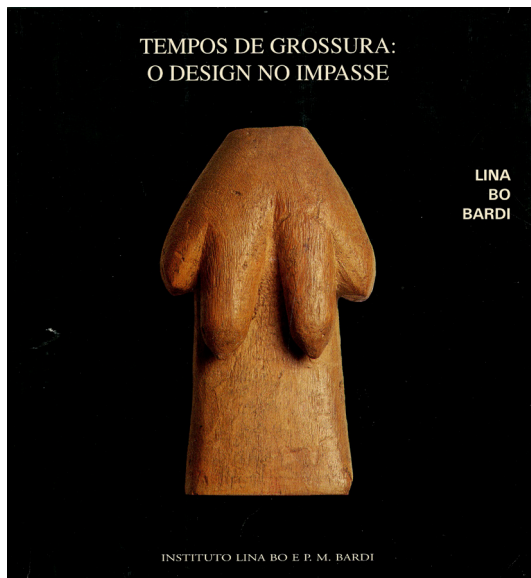
Semerani and Gallo's book, which does not follow linear time but an intertwining of timelines, returns to the present in search of more or less positive down-sizing, the "wry and questioning smile of a beautiful and intelligent woman", to quote Semerani. This stops us from being too certain that technical progress can give us what we need, which responds to our needs and fills us with desire. Gallo mentions another even more scandalously provocative feeling: pity, intended as the capacity to recognise and confer dignity to limited means, for architecture the capacity to be offered.

The Brazilian people's ability to celebrate life is never separated from this reading of Bardi's work. In her architecture, through those irregular holes, we glimpse the toothless smile of a baby. Perhaps out of spite we could say it is ugly in its disharmony, but it is as beautiful as a promise of happiness.

Giuseppina Scavuzzo, UGLINESS: BETWEEN DESIRE AND NECESSITY

¹ Semerani L., Gallo A. (2012) *Lina Bo Bardi. Il diritto al brutto e il SESC-fàbrica da Pompéia*. Napoli: CLEAN

² Bo Bardi L. (1994). *Tempos de grossura: o design no impasse*. San Paolo: Instituto Lina Bo e P. M. Bardi.



Bo Bardi L. (1994). Tempos de grossura: o design no impasse. San Paolo: Instituto Lina Bo e P. M. Bardi, cover.



Giuseppina Scavuzzo (1971), researcher in Architecture and Urban Design at the University of Trieste, PhD in Architectural Composition at the University IUAV of Venice, was a research fellow of the Fondation Le Corbusier in Paris.

Giuseppina Scavuzzo, UGLINESS: BETWEEN DESIRE AND NECESSITY

ICONICITY AND LIMIT FORM

Recycling as a research hypothesis for the architec- ture

Giovanni Marras



Lina Bo Bardi, MASP, São Paulo, 1957/1968, the form of the void, photo GM..

At the beginning of the second millennium "to build in the built in" (Moneo, 2007) seems to be the prevailing condition design for architects and "Re - Cycle," in "strategies for architecture, the city and the planet," it seems today the most viable (Pippo Ciorra and others, 2012).

To build on the existing, beyond all the ethical and economic reasons and the ideological tendencies that whenever accompany the debut of new cultural habits, also corresponds to the need to explore new possible spatial configurations in which to live and work.

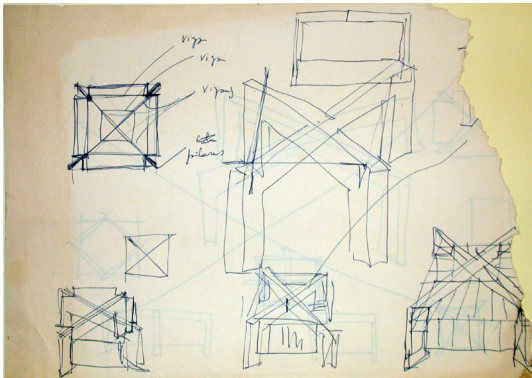
This new cultural awareness causes it to check for possible new cycles of life (Gangemi, 2004) to abandoned buildings, damaged parts of the city, obsolete fragments of landscape, looking for a middle way between the bistoury and the bulldozer.

The What to do? Today, in these places – the abandoned factories of the Chair District (Torbianelli and others, 2012), the industrial areas along the river Isonzo, or parts of the Old City in Trieste, a first set of study areas - emerges as possible research hypotheses for a compositional experimentation in which the theme of the structure takes new iconic and symbolic significance.

A research where, after the schematic opposition

between the (Italic) respectful homage to the identity value and historical and the succubus application of the (worldwide) paradigms of technological efficiency, memory and invention cease to be antagonist forces.

To know the potential of regeneration of the built environment through the tools of the composition (rarely used word by the copywriters of the recycling) introduces considerations on the duration of the architectural artifacts. Under the iconic profile and constructive, the possibility of "more lifes" in a building, is a function of the limit conditions of duration and reversibility of its constituent parts.



Lina Bo Bardi, MASP, São Paulo, 1957/1968, a study for the limit form, Instituto Lina Bo and P.M. Bardi.

Given as outdated the naive statement, attributed by Giuseppe Samonà to certain semiology, that "architecture [...] and the objects do not communicate, but they work" (Samonà, 1978, 44-45), it seems more topical than ever the idea, almost prophetic, that the buildings can become for architects "an extraordinary manifestation of iconicity", in which the limit of the form, if assumed by reason of its functionality, syntactic, iconic and constructive, approximates to the archetype.

Lina Bo Bardi's studies about the bahian folk art (Bo Bardi, 1994), her chairs and the first sketches for the MASP's project (Girardi, 2004) that will lead to the creation of this new metropolitan iconicity of the "great void", the SESC, seen all together reaffirm the iconic glow of the form when it represents the labor necessary to its construction, as in playful construction assemblages of the bricoleur.

In an architectural organism this possibility of more lifes is paradoxically subject to the existence of a significant stable form yet capable of representing, to the limit, the logic of construction of the building or parts of it with its own formal autonomy.

Giovanni Marras, ICONICITY AND LIMIT FORM. Recycling as a research hypothesis for the architect

In the recognition of this sort of limit form takes on new meaning the contrast between the type and the model. If the type is defined in absentia, as "formal invariant which manifests itself in different examples and is on the level of deep structure of the form" (Martí Aris, 2006 12), the model is manifested in praesentia and coincides with the constructive truth of the building.

The limit form, which is obtained by composition and decomposition of a building (syntactic and conceptual, before physics), rather than being "an expression of something general and permanent" (Martí Aris, 2006 11), corresponds to this kind of "intrinsic incompleteness" that, at limit, is recognizable in the Greek temple as in the "log cabins" of the early settlers of North America (Brusegan, 2013), or in the homes of wood and mud in Brazil.

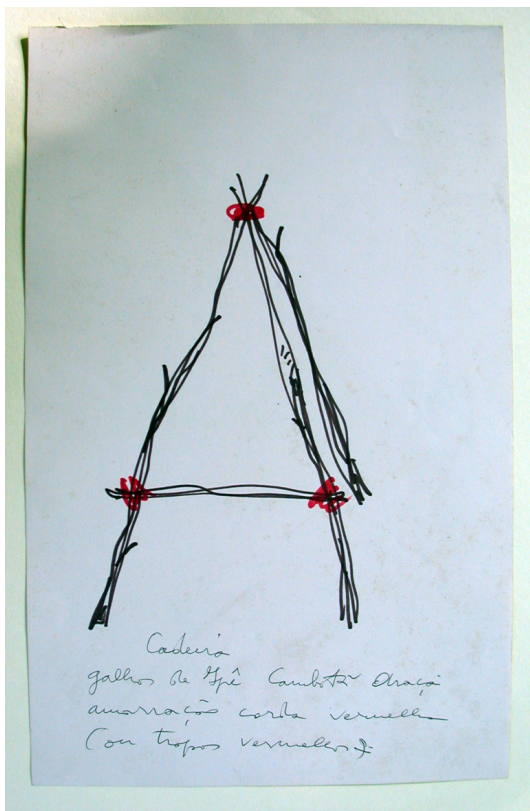
A cognitive process, very different from the diagnosis of conservative restoration, animated by a critical focus more creative and open-minded, "which tends to bring the qualities of the built in to the architectural structure: solid construction - responsiveness to the need - finiteness of the form" (Semerani, 1991, 100).

In this outlook, from the limit form of a building, one can experiment different modes of composition: inlay, overlay, extension, outer covering or inner. Compositional practices of modification of an existing structure with new buildings, useful to enable other methods of use.

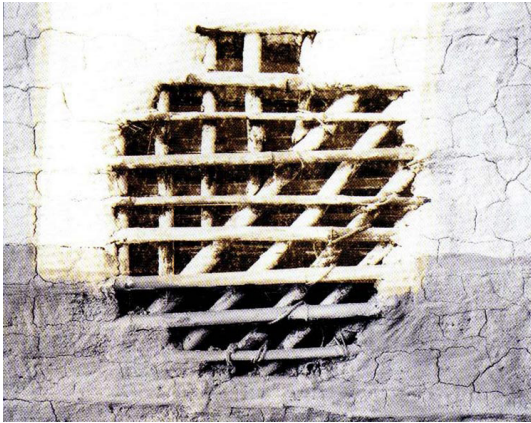
Design operations that regenerate the life of the buildings creating new living spaces, a new architecture made of architectures, in which the identity of the original building is part of recognizable parts.

One way to conceive the project, in line with the Italian tradition contextualist, which was originally of BBPR, Carlo Scarpa, Franco Albini, Ignazio Gardella,

Giovanni Marras, ICONICITY AND LIMIT FORM. Recycling as a research hypothesis for the architect



Lina Bo Bardi, board chair of the road, 1967, sketch, Instituto Lina Bo and P.M. Bardi.



Pau-a-Pique: rural house of woven wood and mud, Brazil.



Lina Bo Bardi, SESC, São Paulo, 1977, the true form, iconicity and construction, photo GM

that breaks disciplinary boundaries between restoration, museum design, architectural design and urban planning.

One way to critically understand and include in the project the different moments of the history of the building construction.

A process of formal and technical specification of the parts and elements of the limit form of the buildings always sensitive to "accept the discontinuity of historical time, to work on it, to 'work it' through successive constructions" in a "free game within of a strong knowledge of the texts "(Tafuri, 1984, 72-95). Techniques of composition and assembly, different than the montage (lasting legacy of the avant-garde), who work for inlay of architectural figures, according to the technical processes resulting.

Operations which trigger different compositional processes because of the connotation of the structures on which they operate, starting with the recognition of the durability of the elements of architecture and their functionality, especially involving the technical aspects and construction of the buildings. Starting from found materials and the interpretation of the expressive potential that they offer to the project is perhaps possible to consider the architectural composition as juxtaposition, layering and inlay of different figures, in a process in which the formal and constructive relationships between text and pretext can regenerate the life and the meanings of the buildings.

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If it is true that, beyond a schematic opposition between old and new, the architecture can be understood as "two sets of parts, one long-term and the other easily replaceable" (Lynch, Kevin, 1992 236-237), perhaps after a long season of figurative exuberance in which architects have focused more on the skin of the buildings, it is time to return to deal with that part of the "long-term", bringing back the architecture to a principle of authenticity.

keywords *composition, recycling, architecture*



Giovanni Marras (1963), since 2004 associate professor of architecture and urban design at the University of Trieste, 1994-2004 researcher at the Department of Architectural Design IUAV - Venice, in 1993 PhD in Architectural Composition at IUAV - Venice.

Giovanni Marras, ICONISMO E FORMA LIMITE. Il Riciclo come ipotesi di ricerca per l'architettura

UTOPIES RÉALISABLES ET APRÈS

Silvana Segapeli



*Open House (Also Called Drag-On & Dumpster),
1972. Wood, Found Doors, Industrial Container*

« (...)Les préoccupations relatives à l'écologie focalisent désormais l'attention sur la précarité des milieux de vie conduisant à explorer les entrelacs de l'artefact avec les dynamiques tectoniques et biologiques plutôt qu'à poursuivre des volontés prométhéennes. Des postures de ruse s'élaborent pour s'allier à la nature en tant que puissance dynamique. Ce changement interpelle les fondations que l'architecture contribue à instaurer et les régénérations qu'elle peut susciter.»
(Chris Younès)

The practice of redefining the architectural project in its eminently social role, beyond the internal unrest of the discipline, has assumed mounting importance for some generations, above all from the years when the energy emergency altered our system of perceiving the environment and the city. What capacity does architecture have to produce symbols that fit the current situation, that accord with the challenges of the "sustainable", and what are the concrete vital tools through which the project reveals itself as a vehicle of new interpretative meanings of this changeable reality?

The current search for an aesthetic regime that takes into account the issue of sustainable development testifies to an awareness that points to a growing sense of responsibility among architects. The

theme is certainly nothing new in the avenues of architectural culture; in Italy as far back as the late '50s Giancarlo De Carlo embodied the figure of an architect-educator, an edifying role of mediation between project and public/end-user. It is expedient to specify that, at the same time, also the idea of sustainable development has altered in parallel over the years, lending increasing weight to relational values and policies that arrange social relations within urban dynamics.



Open House (Also Called Drag-On & Dumpster), 1972. Wood, Found Doors, Industrial Container

In this process, what elements exhort transformation, in the sense proposed by the new approaches to eco-conception, and what instead are the ineradicable principles that form a permanent trace in our endeavours, as a sediment of cultural symptoms? If on the one hand Gregotti reminds us that the concept of stability was one of the founders of Western society, and that it has been brought to task in contemporary culture: "We know that today there is (...) a profound diffidence towards notions such as foundation, essence, specificity,"¹ on the other, new paradigms present themselves in the panorama of theories of an ecologist nature, and hark back to a different notion of transformation. According to Morin, metamorphosis, for example, would stand for the positive value of transformation, sublimating the radical nature of its change. "(...) a richer idea than that of revolution", metamorphosis would guarantee a link with the past, replete with cultural legacies, an expression of ways of life consolidated over time, a collection of mutual symbolic values.² Ecologist thinking, of which Morin is an eminent exponent, has heavily influenced the culture of the contemporary project: the passage from a consumer culture to one of reuse and repair has been for several years a common field of study amongst architecture and the various disciplines that revolve around the sustainable development concept.

Rubbish is Beautiful

Silvana Segapeli, UTOPIES RÉALISABLES ET APRÈS



Open House (Also Called Drag-On & Dumpster), 1972. Wood, Found Doors, Industrial Container

Some major work was carried out in the field of artistic practices long before the theories that lie in the Cradle to Cradle³ appeared. The germs of an awareness of the necessity to inscribe project practices within a symbolic system autonomous from consumer codes dates back to the '60s, an era when avant-garde production of movements and collectives - extremely prolific in terms of the elaboration of urban and social utopias - imbued architecture with the allure of a collective art. In that period, numerous artists began to work on the concept of 'rubbish', starting from Pop-Art, laden with contents critical of the consumer economy, leading to a rethinking of the symbolic values attributable to the new, to the original. Various examples might be mentioned, from Jean Dubuffet's "rehabilitation of discredited values" to Kurt Schwitters' Merzbau, from Vito Acconci's Garbage City⁴ to Mierle Laderman Ukeles' Manifesto for Maintenance.

"J'ai toujours bien aimé, c'est une espèce de vice, ne mettre en œuvre de matériaux que les plus communs, ceux auxquels on ne songe pas d'abord parce qu'ils sont trop vulgaires et proches et nous paraissent impropres à quoi que ce soit. J'aime à proclamer que mon art est une entreprise de réhabilitation des valeurs décriées. C'est aussi que de ces éléments, qui d'être si répandus sont habituellement par cela même soustraits aux regards, je suis plus curieux que de tous autres."⁵

Particularly fertile, in this sense, was the period of the '70s, which saw the emergence of the atypical figure of Gordon Matta-Clark, an architect/artist from New York, engaged in the search for a different role for architecture in the structuring of socio-environmental bonds. From the Garbage Wall sculpture - an assembly of everyday rubbish - to the Fresh Kill cycle and Open House, one of the first installations realized with materials from demolition sites, his projects mark a determinant step towards a symbolic re-evaluation

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of 'rubbish'.

*In the same period, again in the early '70s, Yona Friedman launched the international competition Rubbish is Beautiful, an event that first introduced the controversy 'throwaway versus repairable' significantly linked to the notion of 'civic choice'. Friedman explains that in fact "(...) le déchet n'est déchet qu'en conséquence d'une opération de sélection préconçue de composants utiles. Nous pourrions donc réduire, très simplement, la superproduction des déchets en transformant le mode d'utilisation de certains objets, donc en changeant l'opération-clé: la sélection."*⁶

The series of Objets Déguisés, which was followed by the better known series Les Structures Irrégulières, constituted his personal response to the competition. Attention slipped from the formally determined object to its material nature and marked the departure point of a search for a necessary "changement d'attitude"⁷, which would long remain the guiding thread of all his work.

His posture solicited a revision of the internal logic of an economic system that perilously regulates all the relationships between man and matter, between individual and subject, between society and consumption. A system that must therefore be questioned through the construction of a different sense regime.

The theme is simple and complex at the same time, the objective lies in the necessity to reorganize society based on a redefinition of the relationship between individual and environment, creating a critical distance with respect to consumerism. Cultural factors play a crucial role in the assessment of 'rubbish', the possibility of conferring on waste a different statute is primarily linked to moral values and only secondly to technical and functional factors.

To the same period belong, on the scientific front, concepts of adaptability and reversibility, which

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insist on the building of a new value system, at the crossroads between the science of materials, biology and society: in 1973. the Canadian ecologist Crawford Stanley Holling formulated the concept of "ecological resilience" linked to complex systems of adaptation and self-adjustment, in terms of the capacity of a socio/eco-system to assume and manage a transformation.

At the same time, the prolific vein of the "nouvelle écologie", already active in those years, was based on concepts belonging to biology and genetics, laying the accent on their cycles and biological rhythms.

The construction industry was the first to harvest the fruits. The concept of the lifecycle of materials which is now an indispensable tool in calculating the environmental impact of constructions, is linked genealogically to the studies of Richard Stein⁸, which patently belong to this same era.

In effect, if the '70s brought the trace of clivage, the fracture line, between the uncontrolled industrial production of capitalist countries and an awareness of the environmental crisis, the era was certainly one of the most fertile as far as experimentation was concerned - the building of new strategies, the structuring of different interpretative codes of ongoing phenomena - and mapping it would be somewhat daunting in view of the breadth of the spectrum of action.

Last but not least, this might be one of the possible keys to steer the difficult passage of contemporary architectural culture through the environmental crisis. Within the scenario of a decline in capitalism, the idea that recovery, reuse and recycling are not concepts linked solely to the material challenges posed by "sustainable" culture, but extend to a maieutic dimension of the recovery of the legacy of forms of production and ways of life, finds comfort in various strands of research.⁹

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² *Cf. Edgar Morin, Eloge de la métamorphose, 2011. Internet site: lejour-et-lanuit.over-blog.com. "(...) L'idée de métamorphose, plus riche que l'idée de révolution, en garde la radicalité transformatrice, mais la lie à la conservation (de la vie, de l'héritage des cultures). (...) Tout commence, toujours, par une innovation, un nouveau message déviant, marginal, modeste, souvent invisible aux contemporains." (Edgar Morin)*

³ *Cf. William McDonough et Michael Braungart, Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things, 2002.*

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Silvana Segapeli architect and Ph.D in Progetto e Recupero architettonico urbano ed ambientale. Teach «Paysage, Art, Design» at the "Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Saint-Etienne" and is Reasercher at the GERPHAU - Laboratoire Philosophie Architecture Urbain, della "Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture Paris la Villette".

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SEEING THE INVISIBLE IN THE VISIBLE

Re-velations in the Swedish
landscape

Carlotta Torricelli



Sigurd Lewerentz, Resurrection Chapel, Woodland Cemetery, Stockholm, 1921-25. Photograph by Carlotta Torricelli, May 2009.

“In these Nordic lands of Scandinavia (...) pagan elements are seen as, in the literal sense of the word, ‘fundamental’ terrible or benign presences, opposing the human order that they stalk from all directions. It is something that our minds can come to terms with providing we do not lose the ability to see the invisible in the visible”¹. With this words Marguerite Yourcenar explains the symbolic dimension dominating the narrative structure in Selma Lagerlöf’s novels, celebrated Swedish writer, and 1909 Nobel Prize literary winner for the ‘spiritual perception’ element that distinguishes her works. Equally the same words can serve to describe the intense plotlines comprising of classical phrases and Biblically inspired figures, littered throughout the thick Nordic forest characterizing the sublime landscape of Stockholm’s Skogskyrkogården (Woodland Cemetery).

In 1914 Erik Gunnar Asplund and Sigurd Lewerentz, both not even in their thirties, took part in the international contest to upgrade the Southern Stockholm cemetery using an original method. Large-scale plans and designs of the overall installation are combined with a series of frames in order to condense the narrative sequence that organized the space. The sequence of frames was continued throughout the design, but also by means of a series of photographs depicting natural surroundings onto which the architects directly sketched with a pen. The technical reproduction of reality does not incite

Carlotta Torricelli, VEDERE L'INVISIBILE NEL VISIBILE. Ri-velazioni nel paesaggio svedese



Erik Gunnar Asplund and Sigurd Lewerentz, Woodland Cemetery, Stockholm, 1915-1961. Photograph by Carlotta Torricelli, February 2010

a reduction in the site's aura² but instead uses a process of abstraction leading unavoidably to a restoration of significance. The jury selected the design because it conceived the new cemetery as an inseparable unity between architecture and nature, combining Biblical themes with Nordic myths and Social Democrat demands. However the architectural design's expressive capacity lies in the tension, used throughout the design, that arises between the natural and the artificial and not in the imitation of nature in art; in other words, the fine tuning achieved via the tension between object and subject, identified thanks to their separation and not to their fusion, in a romantic sense, of one with the other. One could mention a certain installation of nature in which the congruence with the place is pursued through declared operations. The project, then, is a work of continuation of nature, not of adaption to it. A few years prior, Wassily Kandinsky³ was lamenting the misuse of the word, Stimmung, its meaning having been trivialized by the masses. Today, a century on we can see that tragic saga of which the abused concept of 'mood' heralded the endpoint. Perfectly lifelike design simulations today flock to the architectural competitions (not least that of 2009 for the construction of a new crematorium at the Skogskyrkogården), losing sight of the chance to use the design for its rightful purpose: to show something beyond⁴ the veil of reality. The same Kandinsky, on the subject of Maurice Maeterlinck's composition, highlighted how, within the realms of anti-natural and non-impressionistic abstract art, tangible information had great symbolic value and was eco-spiritually significant: "the word is an internal chime". It is no coincidence then that we find the Belgian poet and playwright in Stockholm, 1911, receiving the Nobel Prize for literature for his 'poetic fancy', responsible for directly influencing the cultural prerequisites which formed the basis of the announcement for the Skogskyrkogården competition⁵. Today, the evocative capability of

Carlotta Torricelli, SEEING THE INVISIBLE IN THE VISIBLE. Re-relations in the Swedish landscape



Erik Gunnar Asplund and Sigurd Lewerentz, Woodland Cemetery, Stockholm, 1915-1961. Photograph by Carlotta Torricelli, May 2009

the word, and therefore the signs, has diminished and the ease of image accumulation excludes the abstraction process, only leaving space for sterile description.

It is often believed that mimesis is synonymous with respect, forgetting that the process of imitation calls for a mechanism for taking away from the object, which excludes a priori methods of direct overlap. Fragile photographic insertions in the often mentioned 'context' show with increasing evidence the process' hypocrisy. In the competition drawings of Asplund and Lewerentz, the use of photography effectively demonstrates how design conception is seen as instrumental in the re-velation of reality and in this sense it remains a part of the Science of Correspondences; an interpretation system elaborated by the legendary Swedish scientist, philosopher, and theologian Emanuel Swedenborg. According to Swedenborg, a direct connection exists between the real world and the spiritual world and it is up to man to recognize these rapports and discover the system of symbols, that due to rationality, are no longer able to be easily identified. The forest existed before Asplund and Lewerentz built in it. The dark mass of the woods represents the original matrix of the place, but the new design unveiled an archetypal value to the community that recognizes the monument and collectively regards it as a memorial. The two architects included the natural order and highlighted its significance in the struggle against an artificial order. The design of the paths that match a sequence of sacred, isolated buildings is embedded in the depths of the forest where the graves are all scattered uniformly at the feet of the trees. The idea of building a symbolic necropolis, a city that constitutes the analogy of the metropolis, but also in which urban fragments are aligned with the figurative power of nature or evoked by appropriately arranged natural creations, allows creating a place where two spheres are simultaneously represented: that of the classic and that of the archaic, in a conception of the

Carlotta Torricelli, SEEING THE INVISIBLE IN THE VISIBLE. Re-relations in the Swedish landscape

world in which the existence of one would imply the acceptance of the other. The rigor and absoluteness of the classical world give shape to a design capable of regulating nature, but also to comprise the darker zones of this natural universe such as disharmony, suspense and the domain of enigmas. The use of the mythical method such as constructive narration permitted the two young architects to mark out a route towards Modernity and, at the same time, adapt the design into Nordic culture. With lack of preconceptions they set about stealing signs from the codified languages of the Past and arranging them not only in the manner of fragments to evoke a feeling of lost unity, but rather like passages reaching the beyond which, without referring to God, is the ultimate goal of art.

*In this sense, Man and Nature are not mutually exclusive but accomplices in an eternally renewed dialogue. Nothing could be further, then, from an aesthetic camouflage that presupposes the integration of humankind in nature. Faced with the urgency of the planet's survival we are today witnesses to 'dressed up', inept practices, or even worse, the mitigation of events considered traumatic, trying to express a belated respect of a land deprived of its identity. In Ralph Waldo's profound speech, *The Method of Nature*, studied and commented on by Maurice Maeterlinck in an essay composed in 18986, the attention falls again on the genius' capacity to study nature surpassing the boundaries of the 'marvellous': "The poet must be a rhapsodist: his inspiration a sort of bright casualty"⁷ and his aim: to reach that 'something,' that is 'inapprehensible to the senses,' but whose weight is recognized. With regards to the Skogskyrkogården project Asplund and Lewerentz earned the epithet of *Meister des Namenlosen*⁸, masters of the inexpressible, and the symbolic dimension in their research is at the same time, striving for the absolute and rooted at the site. It is the unstoppable flight of *L'Oiseau bleu* by Maeterlinck, which could - for whoever should*

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desire to keep searching - continue to open new researches.

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Carlotta Torricelli (1980), architect and lecturer at the School of Civil Engineering/Architecture at the Politecnico di Milano. She obtained a PhD in Architectural Composition at the Università IUAV in Venice and was a fellow of the C.M. Leric Foundation in Stockholm..

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THE TEMPLE AND THE UNIVERSE

Sandro Grispan



Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'Angle Droit*, 1955.
Litografia del capitolo A.1 milieu. FLC Rés C 62

When Le Corbusier received in 1945 the proposal by Edouard Trouin¹ to collaborate on the project of the Basilique de la Paix et du Pardon, dedicated to Mary Magdalene and to erect at the foot of La Sainte-Baume² in the south of France, he imagined a building 220 meters high, in the shape of a truncated cone, «hollow like a bell»³.

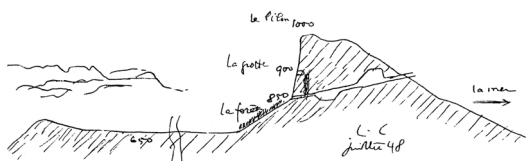
But going up the mountain during a visit to this place characterized by the magnificence of nature, Le Corbusier abandoned his dream of constructing a building to surpass the peak in order to gain a view of the sea towards the south⁴.

From the idea shared with Trouin of an architecture hidden «inside the rock», in 1948 Le Corbusier drawn a section of the basilica carved into the mountain, composed by a gallery along which two large spaces are placed, one turned downwards and the other turned upwards.

Flora Samuel suggested that the cryptic drawing of Le Corbusier can be interpreted as representation of a mandala, a model of the spiritual order of the world, with reference to La journée solaire de 24 heures drawn by Le Corbusier himself⁵.

In fact, the similarity between the symbol and the architecture comes out not only comparing their respective shapes, but especially considering the intelligibility of their forms.

In the solar day of twenty-four hours, Le Corbusier represents his own vision of the world, of nature and man, of the correspondences between

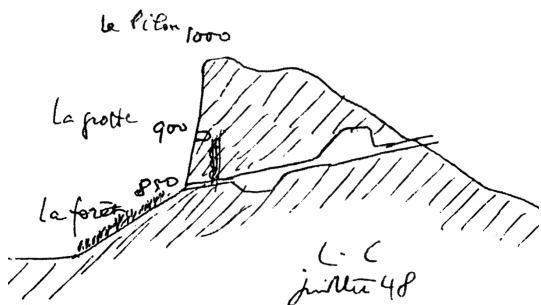


Le Corbusier, Sezione di studio per la basilica sotterranea, luglio 1948. FLC I3 1

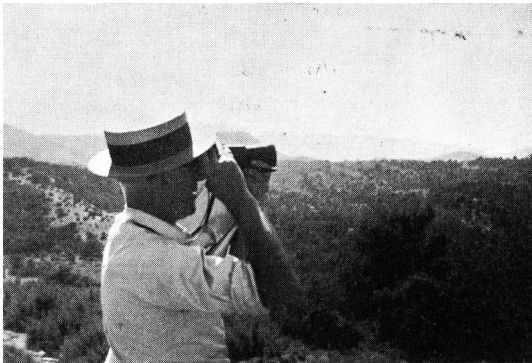
the Macrocosm and the Microcosm, through a cosmological archaic conception based on the cyclic structure of Time⁶. This graphical representation basically consists of a straight horizontal line, the earth, and a sine wave that tracks the movement of the sun across the sky during the course of an entire day. Intersecting the sinusoid in the inflection point, the earth-line divides the movement-line of the sun in two parts, corresponding one to the day and the other to the night. For archaic man, the «earth» was in fact the plane passing through the ecliptic. More specifically, the «emerged earth» was the plane passing through the celestial equator. In this way the equator divided the Zodiac, disposed along the ecliptic, into two halves. The first of these two halves, namely the northern zodiac arch that extends from the spring equinox to the autumn equinox, passing through the summer solstice, was the «emerged earth»; The second one, namely the southern zodiac arch that extends from the autumn equinox to the spring equinox, passing through the winter solstice, was the «sea»⁷.

But what helps us to better understand the common meanings between the twenty-four hours symbol and the section of the underground basilica at La Sainte-Baume is the interpretation made by Richard A. Moore of *Le Poème de l'Angle Droit*⁸, the graphic and poetic work in which Le Corbusier expressed his cosmic and symbolic vision and of the world.

Let's look the drawing placed at the center of the first level of the Poème's iconostase⁹ (A.3 milieu), the one in which the man Modulor is above the opus circulatorum, the alchemical circle, divided by a cross indicating the four cardinal points. The circle is broken at two openings located on an imaginary axis that connects the north and south. From an astronomical point of view¹⁰ we can consider these two openings as the moments when, during the year, the sun stops to rise or fall in relation to the celestial equator, namely the summer solstice and winter solstice, which coincide with Cancer and Capricorn



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Le Corbusier alla Sainte-Baume nel 1948. Fotografia pubblicata in J. Petit, Le Corbusier lui-même, 1970

zodiac signs.

According to the relationship between the Zodiac and the «evolution of the soul through the worlds» of the Pythagorean cosmogony¹¹, the extreme points of the tropics of Cancer in the north and Capricorn in the south are the «gates of heaven», respectively the «gate of men», through which the soul falls on Earth, and the «gate of gods», through which the soul ascends to Heaven¹².

In the drawing of Le Corbusier, the Modulor man is placed over two red triangles which remind of the two pyramids that Le Corbusier himself reproduces in the series of paintings entitled Taureau, where the pyramid with the base facing the ground represents matter, and the other with the base facing the sky represents spirit¹³. In the same way, the two triangles in the drawing of the Poème represent the dual nature of man, spiritual and material, made of body and soul. The man upright on its own feet, a symbol of life, is crossed by the horizontal line of the sea, a symbol of death, which marks the transition from the material to the spiritual dimension.

Then, let's look other two drawings of the Poème: the ones where the Capricorn, that so important mythological figure of the classic zodiacal conception of space and time, is painted¹⁴. The drawings are those placed at the centre of the fourth level (D.3 fusion) and on the right of the third level (C.5 chair) of the iconostase.

In the upper part of the first drawing, the Capricorn has its head turned downwards and invades the lower part of the same drawing, where a woman and a man are coupled. The «violent act of communion» between the woman and the man refers to a symbolic variant of the alchemical fusion¹⁵, the sexual metaphor of the Chemical Wedding between opposing principles, masculine animus and feminine soul. The Capricorn, above, symbolizes the elevation of the spirit freed from matter.

In the other drawing (C.5 chair), the image of Capricorn who hovers in flight with a smile takes us

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back to the doctrine which tells of the fall of souls on Earth, through the «gate of men», and their ascent on Heaven, through the «gate of the gods»¹⁶.

The same that Homer represented with the description of the cave of Ithaca in the Odyssey¹⁷, whose verses in the edition purchased by Le Corbusier in 1909 say: «La grotte a deux entrées: l'une tournée au septentrion, et ouverte aux humains; l'autre, qui regarde le midi, est sacrée, et leur est inaccessible: c'est la route des immortels»¹⁸.

During his research dedicated to the chapel of Notre-Dame-du-Haut in Ronchamp, Mogens Krustup was convinced that the sacred cave described by Homer presented many points in common with Ronchamp. Krustup interpreted the work of Le Corbusier as a cosmic model, believing that the south door of the chapel, which rotates on a pivot at its centre axis, indicates the axis of the two equinoxes when it is closed, and the axis of two solstices, Cancer and Capricorn, when it is open¹⁹.

Moore, however, believes that Le Corbusier gave to each element of the chapel a specific orientation according to the four cardinal points and infers that the sharp corner that rises facing south evokes the horn of Capricorn drawn by Le Corbusier himself²⁰. We might add that with the highest tower facing north it reconfirms the solstice axis along which the evolution of the soul goes on, from its incarnation in the body until its freeing on Heaven.

But if La Sainte-Baume generated Ronchamp, as many authors have often said²¹, is it perhaps possible that the forms, drawn by Le Corbusier, of the spaces of the Basilica of Peace and Forgiveness acquire a clear meaning through the symbolic, metaphysic and cosmologic interpretation of the relationship between man and the universe and are thus better understandable from the point of view of their architectural composition?

We don't have to forget that we are at La Sainte-Baume, the Tabor of Mary Magdalene, the one who gave the world the example of the sublime triumph of

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spirit over matter.

The disposal of the interior spaces of the basilica carved into the mountain can therefore be considered as an initiatory path that aspires to reconcile man with the fate of his soul and to raise him to the dimension of the sacred placed within himself.

Imagine then to enter into the underground spaces drawn by Le Corbusier and join the rhythmic-sensorial experience with the imago mundi that the ever changeable concatenation of the shapes of emptiness seems reveal.

Crossing the entrance of the basilica on the northern slope of the mountain, we have behind the constellation of Cancer. In a symbolic way, we are going through the «gate of men».

After the first part of the underground gallery, we arrive in the first large space which represents, with its presumed shape of a truncated cone with the larger base facing upward with respect to the processional path, the moment when the soul dies, takes bodily form, or falls on Earth.

After the second part of the underground gallery, we enter into the Magdalene's Sancta Sanctorum which instead represents, with its presumed shape of a truncated cone, with the larger base facing downwards with respect to the processional path, the liberation of the soul from the body, its return to the divine, or its ascent to Heaven.

Finally, after the last part of the gallery carved into the rock, we go out on the gentle southern slope of the mountain, with our eyes turned toward the constellation of Capricorn. In a symbolic way, we are going through the «gate of gods».

And then, the elusive space beyond the horizontal line of the sea leads us to explore that inconceivable void where the perception of a sacred dimension lies: the depth of our self, the abyss where the Truth lives.

bibliography

¹ *Edouard Trouin, surveyor of Marseille, met Le Corbusier in Paris April 1, 1945 and talks with him about plans of a sanctuary dedicated to Mary Magdalene, the Basilique de la Paix et du Pardon, and a new settlement, the Cité de contemplation, to build on the extensive grounds of his property at the foot of La Sainte-Baume.*

² *La Sainte-Baume is one of the highest mountains of Provence, a huge rocky outcrop majestically overlooking a dark forest and containing the grotto where Mary Magdalene, according to the legend that tells of her arrival by boat on the southern coasts of ancient Gaul, she would have spent the last thirty years of her life in repentance and mystical ecstasy, until her ascent to Heaven.*

³ *Cf. E. Trouin, letter to Le Corbusier, Paris, 2 april 1945: «hollow like a bell» (eng. trans. by the author of the essay).*

⁴ *L. Montalte (Edouard Trouin pseudonym), Fallait-il bâtir le Mont-Saint-Michel?, Editions L'Amitié par le livre, Bainville 1979, pp. 97-100.*

⁵ *Cf. F. Samuel, Orphism in the work of Le Corbusier with particular reference to his unbuilt scheme for a basilica and city at La Sainte-Baume (1945-1959), a thesis submitted to Cardiff University for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor, MA Dip Arch (Cantab), The Welsh School of Architecture 2000, p. 189.*

⁶ *It seems that Le Corbusier wants to share and recreate that firm grip on the "conceivable" of the archaic man, that vision of the cosmos framed in a temporal and eschatological order which had sense for him and reserved a fate for his soul. Maybe it's the Timaeus of Plato, repeatedly cited by Matila C. Ghyca in Le Nombre d'Or, that revealed to Le Corbusier the reason that in early times it was mandatory observe with the greatest attention the immense cosmic clock. In the Platonic image of the world, the soul of man, when it is right, participates in both the harmony of the cosmos as the bliss of the gods; it is bound to Heaven from which it came, thus returning to its star, to live there and lead a life of happiness.*

⁷ *G. de Santillana – H. von Dechend, Il mulino di Amleto. Saggio sul mito e sulla struttura del tempo, Edizione Gli Adelphi, Milano 2007, p. 83.*

⁸ *Cf. R. A. Moore, Alchemical and Mythical Themes in the Poem of Right Angle 1947-1965, in «Opposition», 19-20, MIT Press 1980, p. 111.*

⁹ *Le Corbusier named iconostase the schema at the*

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opening of the Poème made of seven layers, each of which corresponds to a specific theme and to a key color, that indicates the partition of the work. This configuration refers to the dividing structure adorned with sacred images interposed between the chancel and the nave of the ancient Byzantine basilicas. As well as the structure screened Eucharistic rites which only the priests and the initiated could assist and at the same time revealed to the faithful the promise of salvation, the iconostase of Le Corbusier is set up as a spiritual order and reveals the intention to consider the Poème as almost a religious text. Cf. R. A. Moore, Alchemical and Mythical Themes in the Poem of Right Angle 1947-1965, cit., p. 135.

¹⁰ *Le Corbusier had an original edition dated 1880 of C. Flammarion, Astronomie Populaire, C. Marpon et E. Editeurs Flammarion, Paris, from which presumably derive the astrological themes that, with those alchemical and mythological, are contained not only in the Poème de l'Angle Droit, but also and especially in the painting, sculpture and architecture of the last years of his life.*

¹¹ *Among the great initiates of the past, the one to whom Le Corbusier is particularly interested in is Pythagoras. As witness the many underlining and margin notes in Les Grands Initiés by Edouard Shuré and Le Nombre d'Or by M. C. Ghyka in its possession, the Pythagorean «numerology» is the most well-known subject by which he is attracted. Less well known is his likely interest addressed to the parallel concept of spiritual cosmogony or «evolution of the soul through the worlds», a doctrine that is known, apart from the Pythagorean initiation, under the name of the transmigration of souls. Cf. Edouard Shuré, I grandi Iniziati, Editori Laterza, Bari 2007, pp.304-305).*

¹² *Cf. J. Carcopino, La Basilique pythagoricienne de la Porte Majeur, L'Artisanat du Livre, Paris 1926, pp. 368-369.*

¹³ *Cf. N. Jornod - J.-P. Jordod, Le Corbusier (Charles Edouard Jeanneret). Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint, Skira Editore, Milano 2005, nota 1, p. 935.*

¹⁴ *It is not the first time that this mythical figure appears in the painting work of Le Corbusier. In September of 1948, Le Corbusier painted the mural of the Swiss Pavilion, where every form and shape refer to mythological and symbolic meanings associated with the processes of*

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alchemical transmutation and sublimation of continuous separation and unification of opposites. The belief expressed by Richard A. Moore in Alchemical and Mythical Themes in the Poem of Right Angle 1947-1965 (Cf. pp. 117-118) that the mural was intended to be read from right to left, as the Zodiac, leads to recognize the winged female figure with a goat's head, on the right side of the painting, as the first of a long series of drawings of Capricorn made by Le Corbusier.

¹⁵ *In the alchemical process, the term fusion means the moment when two principles are mixed to liberate the pure element (lapis filosoforum). The figures contained in the bottom of the design of Le Corbusier in fact, derived from the representation of the alchemical coniunctio sive coitus, the metaphor of spiritual liberation of consciousness.*

¹⁶ *René Guénon points out that it is not a theory more or less artificially constructed by the Pythagoreans or others, but rather a traditional knowledge found also among the Greeks before Pythagoras himself. Cf. R. Guénon, Il simbolismo dello Zodiaco nei pitagorici, in Simboli della Scienza sacra, Adelphi Edizioni, Milano 2006, p. 208.*

¹⁷ *How do reveal Porphyry (Porphyry, De Antro Nympharum, 22) and Macrobius (Macrobius, Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis, XII).*

¹⁸ *Homère, L'Odyssée, Editions Flammarion, Paris 1909, Chant XIII, p. 210: «The cave has two entrances: one turned to the north, and open to humans; the other, that looks to the south, is sacred and inaccessible to them: it is the road of immortal» (eng. trans. By the author of the essay).*

¹⁹ *Cf. M. Krustup, Ronchamp, negli abissi abita la verità, in G. Gresleri, G Gresleri (a cura di), Le Corbusier, il programma liturgico, Bologna 2001, pp. 111-112.*

²⁰ *Cfr. R. A. Moore, Alchemical and Mythical Themes in the Poem..., cit., p. 126.*

²¹ *Cfr. S. von Moos, Le Corbusier, l'architecte et son mythe, Editions Horizons de France, 1971, p. 124; J.-L. Herbert, La pensée religieuse de Le Corbusier, «Echanges», 180 (1984), p. 39; G. Gresleri, Le Corbusier sacro, «Arte cristiana», 712 (1986), pp. 57-62.*



Sandro Grispan (Neuchâtel 1968) docente a contratto di Progettazione architettonica all'Università degli Studi di Parma, ha conseguito il Dottorato di Ricerca in Composizione architettonica presso l'Università Iuav di Venezia.

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