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BEAUTY AS DESIRE

PIĘKNO JAKO PRAGNIENIE

Architektura kształtuje przestrzeń, w których rozwijają się ludzkie zachowania. Obowiązkiem architekta powinno być zatem szukanie odpowiednich rozwiązań kwestii społecznych, kulturalnych, środków wyrazu etc. poprzez akt „czynienia”. Prawidłowe rozwiązanie danego problemu jest samo w sobie rodzajem piękna, jest samo w sobie bogactwem. Krótko mówiąc naszą – architektów – powinnością nie jest wcale tworzenie piękna. To raczej coś innego, coś bliższe pragnieniu, wyrażone w myślach i działaniu. To pragnienie piękna.

Architecture shapes places in which human behaviours develop. The architects' duty should be that of finding adequate solutions to social, cultural, expressive issues, etc, by the act of “doing”. Solving a specific problem with an appropriate solution is already a form of beauty, a resource. In short, our duty, the architects' duty, does not deal with producing beauty. It consists of something else, more related to a desire, expressed by action and thought.

It is a desire for beauty.

Then, at night I looked from a road bridge in the outskirts the bypass underneath showing its moving golden colours; and even today it still seems plausible what I thought then: that one like Goethe should have envied me because I lived now, at the end of the twentieth century.

Peter Handke, *Die Lehre der Sainte-Victoire*, 1980

I was very surprised when I was invited to express my opinion on the theme of beauty in contemporary architecture. Immediately, deep down I did not think I was one of the most suitable and competent persons to discuss the theme in an international seminar, especially with reference to architecture today. It seemed to me that I did not have much to say,

having always interpreted and seen the architectonic doing mainly as a constructive issue.

I think that our duty, the architects' duty, does not deal at all with researching beauty or the beautiful (be it universal or particular), in other words with producing beauty, but more with a desire expressed by action and thought.

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Starting a project with the ambition of designing beauty is one of the most useless and unlikely ideas. Beauty is an enigma that cannot be solved but can only be seen inside the *opus*, which makes it visible and evident. At first we feel embarrassed and unconcerned as soon as we try to think of a definition of beauty, probably more today than in the past. The frequent use and abuse of the term does not simplify our initial purpose, nor helps us to find its qualities and contents. As architects, we will be asked sooner or later to say something on the theme, and our duty should be that of relating and translating beauty into a specific shape, a real and final image, in short, an accomplished work.

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In ancient times beauty was a synonym for Order, Structure, Proportion and Functionality. For Alberti, for example, beauty is *concinntas* (brevity), a harmonious response among different parts of the architectonic work. For Vitruvius, the greatness of a work was safeguarded by the unity of the triad *Firmitas-Utilitas-Venustas*. Truthfulness, Authenticity and Functionality seemed to coincide with the idea of beauty. For the “old masters” the beauty of a building resided in its being authentic. The authenticity of the stones, the space and spatiality of places, the structure, the peculiarity of the shape had all to evoke symbolic values.

André Wogenscky in his *Appel à l'architecture* stated that “living in a visual and ugly disorder means being urged first to desperation, and then to violence, as a revolt to desperation. Living in harmony surrounded by beautiful shapes means being urged to a calm, balanced, and tolerant behaviour, experiencing a solidarity uniting all men.”

Since ancient times, over the centuries, many thinkers attempted to find a definition of beauty and the beautiful in different disciplines, from Plato to Kant, from Goethe to Proust, from Vitruvius to Le Corbusier, and so on.

When we refer to architecture, be it ancient, modern or contemporary, usually our idea of beauty does not agree with what is meant to be beautiful in a common sense, both as regards the majority of people and even worse the majority of wannabes or neophytes of architecture. Today in different ways the image of beauty in architecture seems to be embellished, falsified and trivialised.

Most of the times in our profession we are misunderstood or unappreciated as soon as we show and select the architectonic elements we consider beautiful, not necessarily contemporary.

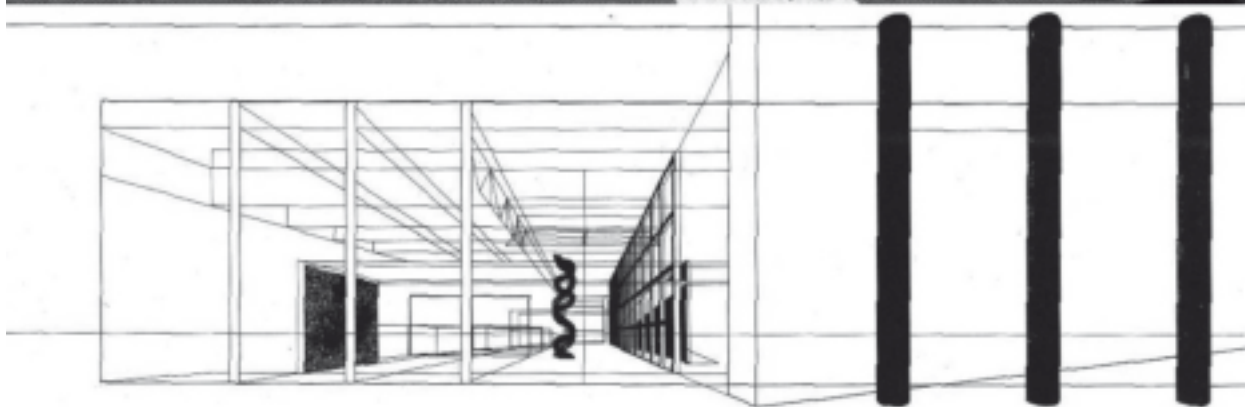
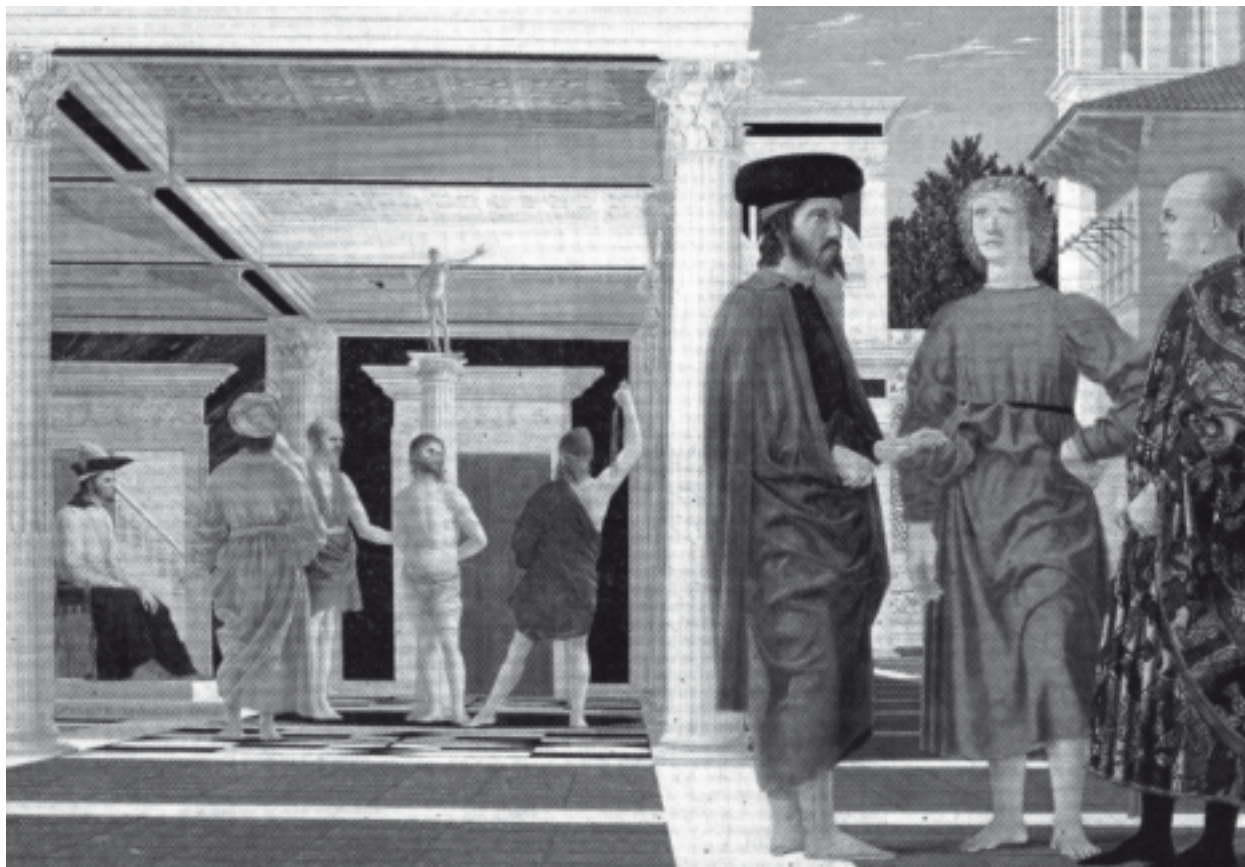
Beauty in contemporary architecture does not deal with a research for a new sophisticated aesthetics, least of all, does not result from a decorative or visual ornament, as the *maîtres à penser* of glossy magazines seem to suggest. On the contrary, this kind of beauty is to be found inside the work itself, in its relation with the place and the city. It measures the ability to express a desire for compositional and formal completeness. This can be seen particularly in those endeavours where the research of identity is the basis of the project. Beauty in architecture lies in defining the constructive reality as its very feature, presenting a formal synthesis and evocative quality. A designing thought is fulfilled by a constructive and investigative action.

Aldo Rossi's idea of 1976 of creating together with E. Consolacio, B. Reichin and F. Reinhard a large plan for the “Analogue city” seems quite distant, not only in time. But the fact that we still take into account Rossi's themes, thirty years after, is due to the meaning, some of us, continue to give to architecture, and to the role we still think it plays in constructing the city. This does not only relate a school of thought or a specific taste for translating the features of the city through the project, but a will to base the architectonic research on a project that is knowledge (or revelation) in which the city is the place of knowledge.

A metaphysical view of an imaginary city installed on a real one, as a source of inspiration, led more and more to assume a poetic-figurative approach, which was consequently separated from any evaluation based on a pre-codified objective value. It is worth mentioning Pier Paolo Pasolini's view (one of the greatest poets and directors of the twentieth century) on the “rule of analogy” as regards the creation of some of his masterpieces. With reference to *The Gospel according to St. Matthew*, in an interview with

Collage: *Apparent distances.*

Piero della Francesca, *Flagellation*, Urbino, 1460, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche
Gianugo Polesello, *Italia Pavilion at Giardini di Castello*, Venice, 1988



Oswald Sacks in 1969, he said: *In my films I have given up any form of realistic or naturalistic reconstruction; the rule dominating my production is that of analogy.*

The pictorial, figurative, cultural frame enclosing Pasolini's films allows us to present some suggestions derived from his poetics. These indicative hypotheses can be referred to an architectonic and figurative *modus operandi*, which by analogy recurs in the real city. The city shows the architecture. Moreover, the city as work of art is to be preserved and reaffirmed by a study on urban phenomena, filtered and renewed by a designing mould. This kind of reading takes into account urban complexity and at the same time engenders a comparison with signs, traces, places, historical architectures and the role of memory. The real city is opposed to the contemporary one, representing a place without memory. This collective urban event, imbued with living history, identity and memory, agrees with the places' figurative value, produced by spatial patterns, measures, dimensions, ratios, caesuras among volumes. The simplicity of the volumes in particular buildings, the monuments' urban value, the voids delimiting the ancient city and its surrounding, are all suggesting and showing new interpretative codes for the future city. Urban space is thus expressed in its potential, and the beauty of the city and the architecture is linked to natural landscapes and the identity of the place.

Considering the city of architecture as a sensible experience, a substance of desired objects, means taking into account the real city and giving dignity and civil consistency to architecture; the city becomes the collective expression of an urban culture and a society that are continuously renewed from within. On the other hand, interpreting architecture's spatial value in the work itself and underlining the complex and dense dimension of the city means re-

ading urban space and the city's territory as a stage. This stage is an expression of a landscape-architecture. In other words, our *modus operandi* consists in embracing a research from a problematic (that is, factual) point of view. This kind of research, developed from studying the elements of the city and its architecture, determined the expressive value of spatial composition and figurative investigation. It is based on the signs of art and technique but also on traces, directions, orientations, on the quality and identity of the city's urban places.

There are places that were conceived and constructed for inhabiting over the centuries and that even today represent the past, the memory and vision of the city. They were able to survive, projecting themselves beyond the city and designing its future. For these places, the value of architecture and its urban role coincide. Some of these, for example, have always been part of the collective memory of the city, such as the *Pantheon*, *Sant'Ambrogio* in Milan or *Piazzetta San Marco* in Venice, while others, set on the edge of the city, developed as urban relics, pieces of territory adrift. Their uncertain features led to the construction of meaningless urban agglomerates for the contemporary city, always in need of exploiting new territories. These are places *in fieri*, still waiting for a project.

One wonders what the ancient *Piazzetta San Marco*, set on the edge of *San Marco* basin, has in common with the shapeless *continuum* of the industrial area of *Porto Marghera*. On the horizon, beyond the bridge crossing the lagoon, the area looks like an immense iron floating body, set between the lagoon and the mainland. The central position of *San Marco* basin, with a side facing the *piazzetta* with the two Pillars of Hercules, that once delimited the *limes* between the city and "the unknown", is counterbalanced on its other end, by the urban edge of an indu-

ustrial landscape in the Venetian lagoon, full of conveyor belts, unsafe smokestacks, oil tanks and decrepit buildings, etc.

It seems quite unlikely that one can find any relation between these two distant realities, not only in history, but also in terms of dimensional and spatial value, so near to each other and still present. Never-

theless, the Venetian case is the emblem of a contradictory urban reality. Different definitions of edge, threshold, limit between *San Marco* and the first industrial area of *Marghera* share, in the same geography, a sort of unique complicity, and even if poles apart, enclose a territory which is a "place" in itself. This is a Place-Space, a Super-place of intrinsic contemporary beauty.