

Italian interiors retraces the history of interior culture in Italy through the words of those who shaped its theoretical foundations throughout the twentieth century. Starting from Gio Ponti's well-known formulation, the volume brings into dialogue the voices of authors who defined the identity of this «school», showing how, alongside a series of emblematic projects, it also generated a critical debate of remarkable depth, which profoundly transformed the ways interior space has been conceived and interpreted, in Italy and worldwide. To this end, following a thematic structure consistent with the evolution of the discipline, the anthology offers a critical reading of a selection of key texts, clarifying their context, weaving together their theoretical connections, and highlighting their contribution to a broader cultural framework, while simultaneously bringing them to the attention of an international audience.

Imma Forino, Michela Bassanelli, Jacopo Leveratto

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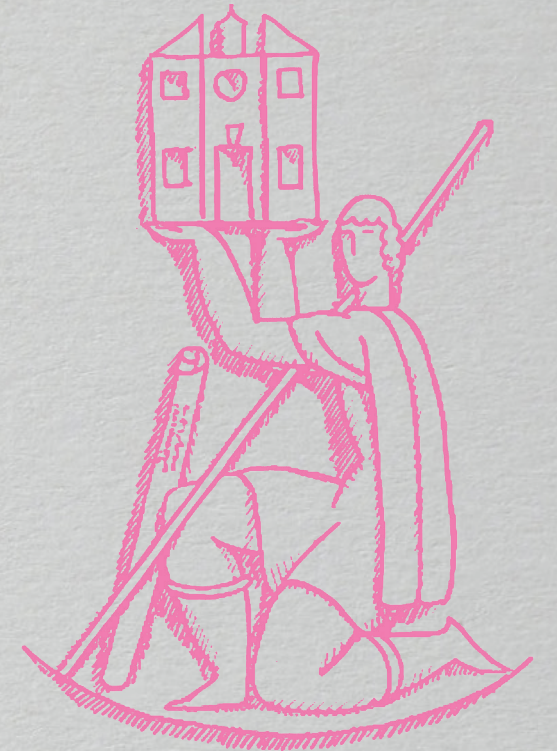


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Italian Interiors

Italian Interiors

A Critical Anthology of the Twentieth Century



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James Hillman, The Captive Heart

Italian Interiors. A Critical Anthology of the Twentieth Century
Imma Forino, Michela Bassanelli, Jacopo Leveratto

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Italian Interiors

A Critical Anthology

of the Twentieth Century

Imma Forino

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Foreword

«*All'italiana*» (in the Italian manner), not Italian. This is how Gio Ponti described his «Domus» in 1928, on the occasion of its first editorial, clarifying that his critical perspective was based not so much on a geographical criterion as on a cultural one. It was not all Italian interiors that interested him, but only those sharing a certain vision: the continuity between interior and exterior, for instance, a fundamental principle of integration between architecture and furniture, or, more generally, an idea of synthesis among the arts. But also, more simply, that of a design that «does not descend from the mere material needs of living» but rather from a sense of «broad hospitality»¹, with which Ponti summed up all those characteristics that, over the course of the twentieth century, came to identify the Italian «school» of interior architecture.

This term usually refers to one of the most significant design traditions in this field, still today largely represented in international discourse. Yet there is little awareness that, beyond individual projects, this school also produced an extraordinary range of critical interpretations and theoretical positions, thanks to which, directly or indirectly, the way of looking at interiors changed radically, in Italy as well as abroad. Not only Gio Ponti, Carlo Mollino, Franco Albini, or Carlo Scarpa, in other words, but also Mario Praz, Giulio Carlo Argan, Carlo De Carli, Renato De Fusco, Adelaide Regazzoni Caniggia, and Gabriella D'Amato, just to name a few. Authors who – even when less known to the general public, less translated, or rarely republished – built the conceptual foundations upon which the most famous projects in the field took shape. And to whom this critical anthology is therefore dedicated, in an effort to bring coherence to a discourse often perceived as fragmented, while at the same time presenting it to an international audience.

This volume in fact retraces the history of twentieth-century Italian interior culture through the words of its own protagonists and seeks to convey both the depth and the international resonance of the national debate on the subject, by framing the most important theoretical writings in the field through a thematic articulation designed to reconstruct that debate synthetically, and through an extensive critical commentary aimed at highlighting cross-references and mutual relationships analytically.

For this reason, and given the vastness of the material, the scope of the research has been limited to the disciplinary definition of the field: first as *Architettura degli Interni e Arredamento* (Interior Architecture and Furniture Design), and later as *Architettura degli Interni e Allestimento* (Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design). This choice has a precise historical motivation which, in turn, determined the profound originality of the Italian position in the matter – particularly in relation to the two other major traditions, the French and the English – through which this specific theoretical discourse took shape. From this

emerged an initial dual polarity between architectural interior and staged interior, and a consequent thematic articulation: the definition of the architectural interior in its material and procedural components; dwelling as both the ultimate goal and the privileged typological field of design; and furniture and exhibition design as distinct specifications of an integrated spatial structure, the latter of a more temporary nature.

Subsequently, a double criterion was defined for the selection of texts. The first was dimensional, given the limited space of a printed book – hence the selection of twelve texts per section – while the second concerned the content. In this case an effort was made to balance the impact or resonance of a text with its rarity – usually inversely proportional. Priority was therefore given to texts of greatest relevance to the orientation and evolution of disciplinary debate, while also privileging those less known, never translated, or even forgotten.

Finally, criteria were defined for the transcription, translation, and commentary of the individual contributions: in all cases, the selected texts are excerpts – as indicated by the frequent ellipses – since the ultimate goal of this anthology is not philological but critical in nature. At the same time, all texts have been faithfully transcribed and philologically translated – even at the expense of immediate clarity – by preserving the original style and the tone – as well as accents, italics, and particular glosses – and only standardising typographic symbols according to the Italian tradition.

Missing names or essential information have been integrated in square brackets, and, where present, the authors' notes have been moved to the end of each contribution. While the footnotes provide commentary by the curator of each section: brief introductions to the analyzed text, explanatory notes on key passages or references to lesser-known authors and projects, and suggestions for further bibliographic exploration, as well as cross-references between texts. In all these cases, explanatory notes have been reduced to the essential, in order to focus primarily on critical ones – both analytically, in relation to the issues raised in individual contributions, and synthetically, in connection with the framework outlined in the section introductions.

As for the appendices, the anthology presents a chronological bibliography of all texts considered, corresponding to each section, complemented by an additional list of works, also divided by sections, published after the period under consideration. These are intended to provide further insights into specific themes and to outline the foundations for a general evolutionary overview of the development of interior culture in Italy.

1. G. Ponti, *La casa all'italiana*, in «Domus», no. 1, 1928, p. 7.

Theory and History of Interiors in Italy

Imma Forino

Italian studies on interiors are characterized by a wide range of approaches: encyclopaedic entries and grand narratives alternate with historical, spatial, and typological research, while specialized publications and anthological collections on environments and furnishings are interwoven with micro-histories of artistic movements or individual authors. Little known abroad, even in Italy their circulation remains limited¹.

At first, it is art historians who deal with the subject, with a cognitive and descriptive intent²; later, scholars and critics of architecture and design join in – with the exception of Mario Praz, a scholar of English literature, whose most famous work, *La filosofia dell'arredamento. I mutamenti nel gusto della decorazione interna attraverso i secoli* (1964)³, had however a significant influence on other studies⁴. The extensive encyclopaedic entries are written by the most important critics of the time, such as Giulio Carlo Argan⁵ and Praz⁶, and they remain essential points of reference for anyone wishing to study the subject of interiors. The first author to attempt to systematize this topic was Guido Marangoni, who worked within a precise economic and political context – the rebirth of Italian society after the First World War.

In reconstructing an Italian historiography, with regard to the many historical and theoretical contributions on the discipline, two lines of investigation can be privileged: on the one hand, the selection of critical themes that gather together the viewpoints of different authors; on the other, the chronological criterion – from the 1920s to the present day – which makes it possible to order a subject that has not been treated through systematic studies over time, but that seems rather the considered outcome of individual personalities and their personal interest in interiors. The two lines of investigation, in any case, are not separable – they indeed reinforce each other. It should also be underlined that Italian historiography on interiors begins with the decorative arts and opens, already during the 1930s but more explicitly in the postwar period, to that of space more broadly; in other words, there is a cultural passage from a monocular critical vision – which regarded architecture as something to be filled through furnishing – to a complex interpretive gaze, in which architecture and furniture engage in a close dialogue.

Giulia Veronesi, when reordering in a critical edition the published and unpublished writings of Edoardo Persico – with whom she had collaborated for the magazine «La Casa bella» – retitles one of the Neapolitan author's essays⁷ as *Arredamento è architettura*⁸, borrowing a phrase from Persico himself within that very text and transforming it into a new title. In so doing, Veronesi emphasizes the critic's attention to interior design as an inseparable union of space and furniture, but at the same time, this gesture signals a shift in the interpretive attitude toward interiors – one to which Italian designers working in the years when Persico was writing, and even more energetically in the postwar period, responded with conviction.

Interiors and Decorative Arts

From the mid-1920s onward, the concept of furnishing as a decorative art emerged in Italy, thanks to Guido Marangoni, promoter of the Mostra internazionale delle Arti Decorative (later known as the Monza Biennale) held in the former Royal Villa of Monza⁹.

A politician, journalist, and art critic, Marangoni championed the renewal of the decorative and industrial arts – the latter virtually non-existent in the Italian context of that time – aware that he was responding to an economic necessity before a cultural one. After the Exhibition of Decorative Arts in Turin (1902), the Monza Biennale represented an attempt to formulate an Italian idea of furnishing through the display of objects and environments.

Marangoni sought to stem foreign monopoly by proposing a national taste freed from the production of antique styles and directed instead toward rustic art. The Biennials, however, offered a panorama as heterogeneous as it was ambiguous, often lapsing into folklore and marked by an initially weak selection process. In 1927 he resigned from the exhibition's organization amid controversy – Ugo Ojetti and Roberto Papini being among the sharpest critics – to which he responded with the publication of the *Enciclopedia delle moderne arti decorative italiane* (1925-1928)¹⁰ and with the launch of a new magazine, «La Casa bella».

In the six-volume *Encyclopedia*, written between 1925 and 1928, Marangoni underscored the notion of furnishing as an integral project to which diverse aspects contributed. More popularizing than specialized, the *Encyclopedia* is nonetheless a compendium of the artists and artisans who took part in the first three editions of the Monza Biennale (1923, 1925, and 1927). In addition to furniture and household items, the images illustrate furnished interiors, with indications of the designer, client or manufacturing firm. Some are Monza installations, others advertising sets for furniture companies or art schools, and others still are actual interiors – houses, the Real Yacht Savoia, bars, and shops.

Marangoni regarded furniture, textiles and flooring as the decorative elements that most contributed to defining the domestic interior. He noted that with the end of the Empire Style, the art of «adorning the house» had likewise come to an end. People of his time, from every social class, followed no organizing or stylistic criterion other than the clumsy imitation of the past or a fascination with Oriental arts. Yet furniture, as the manifestation of the applied art closest and most useful to human life, «must respond to constructive lines logical and appropriate to use before ornamental vanities, stylistic imitations or bizarre innovations deform its lines and structures and distance it from its purpose of practical daily use»¹¹. The examples he presented in fact seemed to contradict this assertion, but they also expressed the eclectic taste of the era – a time enamoured of the decorative arts.

Decorative art and architecture

In the search for a national identity, several journals served as mediators between architecture and the decorative arts. «Architettura e arti decorative. Rivista d'arte e di storia», founded in 1921 by Achille Clerici and later directed by Gustavo Giovannoni and Marcello Piacentini¹², was an organ for disseminating the Roman architectural school. Within its pages, studies of ancient monuments alternated with investigations into contemporary themes such as urban planning, new buildings, and gardens. Ample space was devoted to interiors, furnishings, and objects: in the selection of examples, the journal advocated the idea of an inseparable bond between architecture and furnishing, identifying the latter as one of the decorative arts. National identity was recognized in architects' ability to merge the various arts, uniting them under the broader theme of taste and style. These ideas, however, took on a more formal shape only from 1928 onward with the founding of the magazines «La Casa bella»¹³ – directed for two years by Marangoni – and «Domus»¹⁴, founded and edited by Gio Ponti, a multifaceted figure as architect, artist, designer, essayist and, later, director also of the magazine «Stile»¹⁵ from 1941 to 1947.

Marangoni continued along the same research path as before: the «twofold goal» pursued by «La Casa bella» was to awaken in the public the cult of art and of the home, and to encourage producers to follow the spirit of the times with new lines for objects «useful to life»¹⁶. Maria Croci, translator¹⁷ and writer of fantastic tales, contributed refined reports on furnishings and interiors¹⁸, yet the magazine was above all an eclectic container that referenced the market in particular. In 1932, the architect and urban planner Giuseppe Pagano officially replaced Marangoni as director, joined by the critic Edoardo Persico (both had already collaborated with the periodical in various capacities). The change in editorial direction – and the transformation of its title to «Casabella» in 1933 – marked the shift toward a publication dedicated to disseminating avant-garde tendencies. Ponti, for his part, used «Domus» to reflect on a global idea of dwelling: alongside articles devoted to art, architecture, furniture, and household objects, the magazine offered technical updates, book and record reviews, recipes, and patterns for building furniture. With «Domus», Ponti proposed an educational initiative of broad scope and, in contrast to the utilitarian *machine à habiter*, he championed a house that was human, intimate, and comfortable¹⁹.

The decorative arts also permeated the substantial volume *Le arti d'oggi. Architettura e arti decorative in Europa* (1930)²⁰ by art critic Roberto Papini, which documented the transition from the last impulses of Art Nouveau to the taste for Art Deco in its European guise – or, alternatively, the stylistic revivals that marked its national variants. The introduction, written in the allegorical mode of an imaginary city named *Universa*, provided the occasion to reaffirm Italian identity while at the same time polemizing with modern architects, in particular Le Corbusier: «a noisy herald of unrestrained modernism, who mixes rationalism with caprice, is obsessed with the architecture of steamships, finds ingenious motives for new proportions, but pushes them to their extreme and absurd consequences»²¹.

Papini's book was an illustrated anthology of Italian and European design after the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris (1925), whose most interesting examples the Tuscan critic had already documented in the pages of «Architettura e arti decorative»²². Compared to the reduced section on architecture, the subsequent ones on interiors, furniture, and the applied arts were amply documented.

The interiors presented an occasionally novel panorama, organized by functional categories or by arranged rooms (staircase, entrance, dining room, bedroom, study), followed by fur-

niture divided by type (beds, wardrobes, desks, dining tables, pianos, armchairs, sofas, chairs, and mirrors). Alongside established names and lesser-known architects, Papini highlighted representatives of less familiar European contexts such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Russia, Switzerland, and Spain. The concise captions accompanying the photographs were deliberate critical judgments – at times appreciative, at others severe. They revealed the critic's conviction that the configuration of space must be linked to decoration before functionality: a living room by Jacques-Émile Ruhlmann, for example, «lacks the essential – namely the decorative organism to which all motifs should be subordinated»²³; whereas in that of Josef Hoffmann, though viewed with interest, Papini could not help but remark on its «accent of eccentricity»²⁴.

Among the book's merits – besides its attention to little-known designers and projects – was its focus on the idea of furnishing as a union of art and architecture. Papini thus intuited and prefigured the fruitful Italian season of organic design integration, of which Ponti would be its foremost champion.

Interiors as a textile art

At the end of the 1930s, Marangoni published, in two successive volumes, *Arredo e abbigliamento, nella vita di tutti i tempi e di tutti i popoli* (1937-1938)²⁵. The text evoked atmospheres, ways of living, customs, and traditions reflected in furniture and household objects: ethnographic and social values were, for the author, historical documents as much as art. Marangoni particularly emphasized the «textile value» of furnishing, even though he did not explicitly refer to the theories of Gottfried Semper – which specialists, however, must have known²⁶. Fabric, the primary material of clothing (especially women's dress), was linked by Marangoni to *vanitas*, seen as a positive evolutionary contribution to social custom. Textile, moreover, was a phenomenon that permeated the history of dwelling: silks, draperies, curtains, and tapestries shaped space, yet were also a narrative artifice for princely or bourgeois interiors. The modern interior departed from this critical vision – the *machine à habiter* was condemned, as was the rational «mania for built-in wardrobes».

The work was republished after the author's death in a new edition (1952), edited by Alberto Clementi²⁷. The text and images were identical, but the graphic design was less refined: the colour plates, once mounted on rigid black backing with white captions in contrast, were now printed directly; the sequence and size of photographs and drawings were also changed. Moreover, a substantial elision affected the text: from the second volume, the three final chapters in which Marangoni harshly criticized Modernism were omitted. The title, too, was changed to *Storia dell'arredamento* – a clear sign of a changed critical attitude. The subject could no longer be treated solely from a popularizing perspective but required historiographical analysis, which the book had probably already aspired to, given its rigorous periodization.

The theme of space

Already during the 1920s, Salvatore Vitale had emphasized the very nature of architecture, in which «space is not only external but also, and above all, internal, [...] [it is used] in the totality of its constitutive relations, as volume and as mass; [...] in architecture, space, while maintaining its essential character as pure extension – that is, ultimately, as void – somehow succeeds in acquiring a corporeal semblance and solidifying; the architectural work, in short, is not only something that lives in space, but also something that makes space live within itself. [...] In architecture all space is ordered in its relationships of inside and outside, in the entirety of its extensive capacity»²⁸. Edoardo Persico's interpretive vision – a lucid intellectual guide to the story of modern

Italian architecture – reaffirmed that focus in relation to the discipline of interiors. Against the idea of a set of pieces of furniture arranged according to a variable scheme, to which walls and wallpapers merely lend a tone, the Neapolitan critic recognized the necessity of furnishing as an absolute unity between space and furniture. He illustrated this concept by presenting a project designed by Luciano Baldessari with Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini: in it, the architects «did not begin with the furniture in order to create the environment, but first established a harmony of spatial rhythms, to which they then made the forms of certain furnishings correspond. [...] Here furnishing is truly a work of art, and nothing can be altered without disturbing the harmonic law that governs it»²⁹.

On the occasion of the Second Autumn Exhibition of the Modern Environment (1932), held at the Milan art gallery Il Milione³⁰ – which Persico briefly directed together with Gino and Peppino Ghirighelli – Figini and Pollini presented a complete furnishing for an apartment. Persico then clarified his idea more precisely: attention must be shifted to the environment, that is, to architecture itself. «The furniture by Figini and Pollini has imposed upon critics and the public the conviction that furnishing is above all architecture: [...] It is not without significance that a gallery of “pure art” has thought it fitting to include in its activities an exhibition of furniture, without, for that reason, betraying the coherence of its program. One may discern in this fact another consequence of our effort, which is aimed at finding between modern art and “decoration” at least a stylistic accord, or a common ground upon which to reconcile all the aspects of our time»³¹.

In the postwar period, the theme of space was felt with particular intensity by Italian critics, in both art and architecture. It surpassed the question of style to become an interpretive lens for history. In 1948 Bruno Zevi published *Saper vedere l'architettura*³². Influenced by Konrad Fiedler's pure visibility³³, by the philosophical theories of architecture as *Raumgestaltung* developed by August Schmarsow³⁴, and by Hermann Sörgel's notion of art as the configuration of a hollow three-dimensionality³⁵, Zevi asserted that the true protagonist of architecture is interior space³⁶. This space could be investigated according to content-related, physiological-psychological or formal values, or through the empathy theory (*Einfühlung*) of Robert Vischer³⁷ and Theodor Lipps³⁸ – the idea that certain forms evoke corresponding psychological reactions. For Zevi, space and its use became the criterion of judgment for renewing historiography.

Giulio Carlo Argan questioned the meaning of interior space in an article for «Metron» (1948)³⁹ – a magazine in which Zevi played a central role – and later in the substantial entry *Interni* (1959), which he authored for the *Enciclopedia Universale dell'Arte*⁴⁰. In the former, Argan deepened and broadened Zevi's theory – architecture exists insofar as it has an interior space – relating it to both the creator of space and the one who experiences it. Thus, one may speak of interiors «not with respect to a wall enclosure, but with respect to the artist; and I would suggest calling it rather *interiority* than *interiors*, as that which one does not “possess” but which one “has” in architecture, through experience. Finally, the process of architecture – construction – is nothing other than the process of positing or determining space, of “spatializing”. Through this act, man recognizes and defines a relationship between himself and the world, delineating a “zone of experience” within which his personality is in any case active»⁴¹. The relationship between human being and interior space thus became decisive – a nearly humanistic vision that placed the individual back at the centre of space.

A few years later, art historian and critic Roberto Longhi began instead from an illusionistic detail – the *coretti* in Giotto's Scrovegni Chapel in Padua – to introduce the concept of *Giotto spazioso*⁴². These *coretti* feign an arched opening through

which one sees the upper part of a vaulted chamber, with a small Gothic window opening onto a clear, luminous sky – a true atmospheric sky, an exception in fourteenth-century painting. This extraordinary «invention of space without figure»⁴³ introduced, through Longhi's critical insight, the theme of spaciousness in Italian figurative culture. It was also significant from another point of view: it metaphorically anticipated the tendency of certain Italian scholars, from then on, to express themselves in spatial terms when discussing architecture.

The definition of the elements that structure space was then elaborated by Luigi Moretti in a notable article published in the magazine «Spazio», of which he was the founder⁴⁴: «Interior volumes have a concrete presence of their own, independent of the figure and substance of the matter that encloses them, as though they were composed of a rarefied substance, lacking energy yet highly sensitive to receive it»⁴⁵. These interior volumes, he continued, possess specific qualities, which he defined as their «geometric form» and «dimension» – both of a geometrical nature -; their «density», referring to the amount and distribution of natural light diffused within the architectural volumes; and finally their «energetic pressure», dependent on the configuration of the architectural envelope, on the elements that interpose within the «rarefied substance» through which one moves, and on how much the walls «press» upon the emotional sphere of the observer⁴⁶. The first two qualities were objective and rational – easily perceptible – whereas «density» and «energetic pressure» could only be understood through «an intellectual and psychological order»⁴⁷. To clarify his ideas, Moretti illustrated his essay with photographs of plaster models that revealed the interior volumes of paradigmatic architectures, such as Guarino Guarini's unbuilt project for the Church of San Filippo Neri in Casale Monferrato (1671) and the complex of Hadrian's Villa (2nd century CE) in Tivoli.

For Argan, the evolution of the concept of space coincided with «the becoming and transformation of the conception of life: whether it sets as its goal the contemplation or knowledge of the world, or, on the contrary, an internal and profound participation in reality»⁴⁸. This premise became crucial for the encyclopaedic entry *Interni* already mentioned, in which he was assisted by leading scholars of art and architecture of the time (Eugenio Battisti, Leonardo Benevolo, Fernanda de' Maffei) in developing the various historical periods and geographical contexts. Argan defined the relationships between interior and architectural design, between interior and civilization, and between interior and formal qualification. The latter derived from the type of relationship between the person and the external world – natural and social. Walls, ceilings, and floors were the spatial boundaries through which a place acquired its identity. A decisive contribution, he noted, was provided by furnishing, which he divided into fixed elements – integrated into the architectural design – and movable ones, light and transportable. Finally, he acknowledged Rationalism as the turning point in the problem of interior design: both for the shift toward industrial production and for the spatial continuum to which modern architecture aspired. Furniture tended to integrate into architecture, or else a progressive typological uniformity emerged through mass production.

The art and technique of furnishing

The reissue of Marangoni's volumes *Arredo e abbigliamento, nella vita di tutti i tempi e di tutti i popoli* allowed Alberto Clementi – editorial consultant for the series *Casa e costume* published by Vallardi in Milan – to complete the work by expanding its chronological scope with two new texts: *Storia dell'arredamento (1850-1950)* (1952)⁴⁹ and *L'arte dell'arredamento* (1954)⁵⁰.

The architect continually connected the history of furnishing to that of the various artistic movements, contextualizing them within social changes. He placed the modern period of

furnishing from the second half of the nineteenth century onward, attributing the renewal of the arts to social transformation – beginning with the French Revolution – and to the technical revolution of great feats of engineering. He also brought the environment and its relationship with the exterior to the forefront. There were, however, certain errors of attribution and underplayed judgments: Frank Lloyd Wright, for instance, was granted only a few lines, while among the examples of total works *Casa Tugendhat* in Brno (1930) by Mies van der Rohe – the only floor plan reproduced in the book – stood out as a crucial date in the history of furnishing, since here «furnishing is no longer an appendix of architecture but forms an intimate part of it. [...] The rationalism of the interiors suggests that the architect first conceived the environment and then enclosed it within an architectural structure»⁵¹. To Le Corbusier – who replaced traditional furniture with the *meuble-type* – Clementi attributed instead the «technique of furnishing», in which practical sense was elevated to a design principle.

In *L'arte dell'arredamento*, Clementi returned to the distinction between architecture and furnishing; of the latter he emphasized its relative independence from the other arts, regarding it rather as an expression of social custom. For this reason, one may speak of its «variations» rather than of a single evolutionary process. The theme was approached from a methodological perspective: the author clarified terminology and distinguished between *ammobiliamento* – the assemblage of individual pieces of furniture disregarding the architecture that contains them – and *arredamento*, understood as the direct and participatory act of designing with architecture. The latter, he wrote, «in certain respects [...] may be defined as interior architecture, since it largely stems from a floor plan and then extends to all the technical and aesthetic details»⁵².

Interior architecture was thus, for Clementi, «the art of arranging enclosed space (volumes and surfaces), distributing, organizing and composing it in order to make it suitable for a predetermined function (environmental arrangement)»⁵³. Furnishing, on the other hand, was a «conception of environment», to which the author attributed a psychological value. Decoration, finally, concerned the «finishing of the environment», that is, the characterization of its terminations. After this theoretical preamble – which, in truth, somewhat confuses the critical reasoning –, the second part of the book addresses the theme of dwelling by analysing it through the floor plan and observing, by means of exemplary images, the different ways in which domestic spaces could be shaped. Although not a design manual, the descriptive character of the text was now joined by the programmatic voice of the architect, illustrated through drawings and technical plates.

The literary *Stimmung*

A prominent place among interpreters of interiors belongs to Mario Praz – scholar of English literature and linguistics, literary critic and art collector – who developed a form of criticism of broad comparative scope, distinguished by its passionate tone, never aseptic or conventional, often intertwined with personal memories and motives. The relationship between literature, art, and furnishing – together with a recurring image of the *home* – was explored by the author in numerous writings. With *Gusto neoclassico* (1940)⁵⁴, Praz interpreted the theme of Neoclassical art through the lens of taste, environment, and particular sensibility. The text anticipated his lasting interest in the domestic interior and furnishing, a constant leitmotif in his later essays and in his own biography: it would evolve into a collector's obsession, materialized in his house-museum in Rome and reconstructed in the volume *La casa della vita* (1958)⁵⁵.

In 1945, the anglicist published the brief pamphlet *La filosofia dell'arredamento*⁵⁶, reviving the title of a well-known essay

by Edgar Allan Poe⁵⁷, which, with certain modifications, would become the introduction to his later book *La filosofia dell'arredamento. I mutamenti nel gusto della decorazione interna attraverso i secoli* (1964). Praz followed here the path opened by Walter Benjamin – particularly the notes for the *Passagen-Werk*, developed between 1927 and 1940⁵⁸ – rather than that of Argan, when reflecting on the interior as a form of interiority. He highlighted the «spirit» of furnishing, that is, the intrinsic qualities of objects and spatial compositions that survive both time and use.

The 1945 essay went largely unnoticed, as the Second World War was still underway; the expanded edition of 1964, however, and its translations in France⁵⁹, the United States and England⁶⁰, enjoyed considerable critical and public success⁶¹. In the twenty years separating the two editions, the author had become a collector of delicate watercolours of interiors and of Empire-style furniture, dedicating himself to tracing the original pieces depicted in paintings and reconstructing their histories. The 1945 pamphlet, rich in literary digressions and precise observations, became the introduction to the 1964 edition, whose corpus consisted of an extensive commentary on numerous *Conversation Pieces*, some belonging to Praz's own collection⁶². It was a selection – laid out by Mario Monti – of paintings depicting upper-bourgeois or noble family groups: scenes of daily life in which men and women, surrounded by objects and furniture, seem to converse with them. In Praz's words, these paintings magically turned into *tableaux vivants* – living pictures of a miniature theatre that the author staged, each time, to embody his idea of furnishing as an ideal of harmony and beauty. Not by chance, he distinguished between men who love their homes and those who do not, expressing a judgment not only aesthetic but also moral on ways of dwelling.

Praz was the first to inquire into the *stimmung* – that is, the inner mood or atmosphere – of the interior, which is not the mere delight in precious objects but rather the «sense of intimacy of the house, of the house conceived as a mirror of the soul, of the house as a state of mind – a modern discovery»⁶³. Starting from a subjective and stimulating point of view, he transformed the history and aesthetics of furnishing into a *kunstwerk*: a kaleidoscopic exploration that transcended the limits of historiography. The book excluded the twentieth century, except for the Art Nouveau period. The reason was clear: modernity, for Praz, offered no foothold for individual introspection. The *house of tomorrow*, the critic seemed to warn, would have to come to terms with a future emptied of ideals – and for those still seeking meaning in dwelling, nothing would remain but to lament, like Praz himself, the mortal traces of a glorious past.

The dialectic of envelope and cavity

The structuralist approach animates Renato De Fusco's *Storia dell'arredamento* (1985)⁶⁴ – historian and critic of architecture and design – following his earlier semiological studies in which he reinterpreted Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic system in architectural terms⁶⁵.

In his *Storia dell'arredamento*, De Fusco referred to the pair *invulcro/invaso* (envelope/cavity), identifying the former as the walls or other elements that delimit a space, and the latter as the void – the interior, for example, of a minimal spatial unit such as a room. The locus of furnishing is therefore the architectural cavity, the space in which life unfolds. The cavity and its inner faces – the elements enclosing that void (floor, walls, ceiling) – are the surfaces upon which furnishing acts, its «practice» depending on multiple factors: functional and distributive criteria, the pursuit of comfort, taste, adaptation to fashion.

Furnishing is thus a kind of «lining» that covers the faces of the cavity and that, over the centuries, has been conceived in greater or lesser harmony with movable furniture. It is governed by a «multiple code» that, drawing upon other artistic experienc-

es, combines its own linguistic code with expressions borrowed from other artistic systems. The multiple code of furnishing incorporates contributions from architecture, sculpture, painting, fashion and the applied arts. Moreover, the critic emphasized that there is no correspondence between furnishing and interior architecture (except in the particular case of an «interior within the interior»⁶⁶) – since furnishing is only *interior* – nor with the design of objects, which is one of the components that contribute to the formation of the aforesaid multiple code⁶⁷.

The textile metaphor of the «lining» is, in reality, a «historiographical artifice» through which De Fusco interprets the history of interiors from the Greco-Roman era onwards, analysing for each period its chronology, context, the relationship among the arts, style, elements of furnishing (furniture, lining, utensils), environments, designers and exemplary works. He thus proposed a global vision of furnishing, historicized across the ages.

With Le Corbusier, De Fusco asserted, the practice of furnishing as a conformative and representative language was definitively dissolved. In opposition to the tradition of the *ameublement*, the Swiss architect reduced all furniture to fixed elements (built into or attached to the walls) and to standardized pieces. He thus separated interior design into architecture and industrial design – on one hand, the architectural space; on the other, the design of objects and furniture for mass production. From that moment onward, the multiple code of furnishing lost its meaning. In fact, the Modernist program – in which everything was to be unified and globalized under the aegis of design – was never fully realized; conversely, the stylistic unity of past centuries was lost without another capable of replacing its value. Contemporaneity, De Fusco concluded, is a miscellany of traces, yet this pluralism lacks the capacity to make choices endowed with the authority of a shared reference.

Living among objects

A completely different perspective distinguishes Gabriella D'Amato's *Storia dell'arredamento* (1992)⁶⁸. Here furnishing becomes a tool for understanding the experience of dwelling – interpreted in the Heideggerian sense. The centre of the historiographical discourse is private space, Benjamin's *intérieur*, and in particular the notion of «living among objects»⁶⁹. Objects and furnishings represent the true memory of our past and the direct projection of our present; they weave invisible threads between the inhabitant and his or her behaviours, which, in the author's view, surpass spatial construction. D'Amato places the beginning of her history in 1750 – the start of the Industrial Revolution in England – when the applied arts emerged forcefully. The body of the work is divided into three macro-themes corresponding to three centuries: the Beautiful for the eighteenth, History for the nineteenth, and the Modern for the twentieth. Each is further articulated into internal variations (the rational and fantastic beautiful; metaphorical, ethical, and eclectic historicism; the anticipations, faces, and crisis of the Modern). For each section, a particular «mode of living» is privileged: literature and figurative art serve as the parameters for interpretation.

Subsequently, in *L'arte di arredare. La storia di un millennio attraverso gusti, ambienti, atmosfere* (2001)⁷⁰, the theme of furnishing as applied art emerges even more strongly. The chronological structure begins in the Middle Ages and reaches the twentieth century – a thousand years of furnishing, in which each century is analyzed through the relationship among the arts, stylistic issues, the craftsmen and designers who worked within it, and the typologies of furniture. Architecture takes on a lesser role than the «atmospheres» of inhabited places; the rich iconographic selection underscores this orientation.

The interior as a composition of significant parts

Setting aside to some extent the linear typological analysis that had characterized previous studies⁷¹, Adriano Cornoldi, in his volume *Architettura dei luoghi domestici. Il progetto del comfort* (1994)⁷², interprets the history of the house in its deeper meaning – as a response to human essential need for protection and rest – and defines the theme of comfort as both «spiritual and material comfort». Reclaiming a specific nature for the domestic place, the author analyses the history of the house with phenomenological rather than functional attention to the interiority of spaces: emphasis is placed on those «warm places, inviting to rest, to intimacy, to conversation, to conviviality»⁷³ that have characterized the different historical eras across Western countries. Drawing from Franco Maria Grapaldo's treatise *De partibus ædium* (1494)⁷⁴ and interpolating its definitions of domestic environments with certain spatial invariants common to all epochs – representative of the enduring values of private life – Cornoldi arrives at a definition of dwelling not as a mere sum of rooms, but as an ensemble of «significant places». These, in particular, are characterized by gestures of spatial appropriation by human beings in their search for intimacy and well-being.

To enter, to delve, to welcome or to meet, to move, to look out, to withdraw, and to gather oneself – these are then the four-dimensional keys of interpretation: selected to recount the history of the house in Great Britain, Central Europe, the Mediterranean area, North America, and a future globalized perspective. Developed as narrative itineraries by as many authors⁷⁵, they represent the main interpretive keys for telling another history of the house – one different from conventional historiographical readings. Each section analyses the evolution of domesticity through the intimate corners of everyday life, with exemplary solutions by architects who privileged the inhabitant over the imposition of a programmatic or geometric model: what emerges is a partial yet complex picture, sometimes excluded from canonical architectural historiography, to which Cornoldi restores dignity and meaning.

The aesthetics of the everyday

The experience of everyday life – from the perspective of aesthetics and philosophical anthropology – is the line of research that connects Maurizio Vitta's earlier works to the volume *Dell'abitare. Corpi spazi oggetti immagini* (2008)⁷⁶, cantered on the theme of dwelling. In exploring a multifaceted subject that resists a single exhaustive definition, the author adopts a humanistic and anthropocentric vision, allowing him to traverse with ease the different phenomenologies in which this «form of life» unfolds. Dwelling is viewed as an anthropological constant – it is the very being of the person, imbued with human nature, whose time is an eternal present. Or again, it is an expression that begins from the body of the inhabitant: it is the presence of a person in a given space that makes it a «dwelling»; only afterward does the project intervene to shape it.

The levels of reading proposed by the book (*Bodies, Spaces, Objects and Images*) correspond to as many fascinating narratives – visual, evocative, perceptive – in which the numerous references to philosophy and literature give rise to vivid descriptions. These fragments, gradually combined, open up new interpretive perspectives and serve as a warning for greater awareness among those who rigidly seek to give form to human dwelling through architectural or interior design. Critically, a rift emerges between the one who truly experiences dwelling and the one who, representing its space figuratively, constructs it or prescriptively normalizes its movements. In other words, to the *homo bene figuratus* Vitta always opposes the real, living, pulsating one – he or she who creates dwelling through his mere presence.

The phenomenal reality of dwelling is thus narrated through *Bodies* – the identity value of the inhabitant traced through the development of philosophical thought. *Spaces* reflects on the imbalance between the architectural text and the user’s rewriting of it through constantly shifting modes that may dissolve the designer’s original intentions. *Objects* considers furnishing, focusing on the interiority of human life, materializing the complexity of living in its tension between order and disorder, aestheticism and possession, ritual and magic, reflection of the self and its intellectual growth. *Images* externalizes, finally, the intimate experience of dwelling in literary works, in commercial and artistic iconography, and in filmic imagery.

Finally, against the supposed objectivity imposed from without by codes (style, fashion, social, economic, or cultural condition), the philosopher considers how the individual responds with his own art of dwelling – inner, hidden, secret. Vitta locates its character in being a detail, often invisible to the eye, yet the epicentre of human subjectivity: he thus overturns the formal principle of Gestalt psychology – the whole is more than the sum of its parts – by assigning to these latter (that is, to every minimal aspect of dwelling) the true value of inhabiting. The conclusion is that the art of dwelling and the art of living are one and the same: something ancient, stable, and recognizable as «simply human» resonates in our being in the world.

Beauty as truth

The result of forty years of university research devoted to understanding the meaning of dwelling through meticulous graphic and plastic reconstructions of various interior architectures, Gianni Ottolini’s anthology *Architettura degli interni domestici. Per una storia dell’abitare occidentale* (2015)⁷⁷ makes its dense narration its main strength.

Tracing, through different epochs, an idea of beauty translated into space – not merely as inhabitable space, but rather as space attuned to those who inhabit it – the author connects its expressions through concise sociological frameworks that introduce each chapter, before expanding into a detailed description of the numerous selected examples. These are for the most part works that have marked the history of architecture, which Ottolini reinterprets from the point of view of the «interior», illustrating both their structural complexity and their furnishings and details. The aim is to reveal to the reader «the reality ... constructed and staged by interior architecture and furnishing, as by all other arts, [as] a true poetic reality», recalling Giambattista Vico’s lesson and transcending mere physical reality: that poetic truth is expressed through «true houses, designed with artistic wisdom, capable of stirring the imagination and more clear and persuasive than conventional ones»⁷⁸. The famous definition by Mario Praz – «the house is a mirror of the soul» – returns here as well, which the author consciously adopts in order to move beyond the functionalist experience and to recognize, moreover, in domestic space a living value: the «true house» illuminates the being, or the potential being, of its inhabitant – that is, it translates into built form a possible, promised or announced human life. It is, without doubt, an act of faith in the spiritual as well as constructive power of interior architecture: the inhabited space is a lived space, which beauty clothes in truth.

The Italian gaze on interiors

In Italy, historiographical studies have for the most part concentrated on architecture and art, while the history of interiors has been considered a subject of lesser importance, only recently introduced into university curricula. This has probably also led to a limited number of translations of the works of the authors mentioned, with the exception of Giulio Carlo Argan, Bruno Zevi, and Mario Praz – so well known in their respective fields (art, architecture, English literature) as not to be overlooked by

international publishing. In Italy, moreover, one can clearly identify a current of architects devoted to interiors (in particular, the generation born around the turn of the twentieth century: Carlo Mollino, Franco Albini, Carlo Scarpa – while Gio Ponti must be regarded as a true pioneer, also for his extensive role as cultural promoter), whose best works developed from the needs of post-war reconstruction. These were designers who claimed the role of complete architects, distant from the tradition of the French *ensembliers* or that of the English and American decorators. They worked «with History», understanding it as design *material*: they intervened in historical contexts and buildings – often damaged during the war – and worked on exhibition installations, museum restorations, and interiors in which the presence of the past – understood as artifact, but more often as suggestion – was re-elaborated, interpreted or evoked within the design vision of the present. It is mainly thanks to the legacy of their architectural contribution that in Italy the expression *Architettura degli Interni* has become established, rather than *Interior Design*.

The critical approaches identified here differ, deriving above all from the cultural formation of each author and then from the historical and artistic context in which they worked, as well as from their particular ways of interrogating the history of interiors. The various scholars define the characteristics of interior space through stylistic and cultural declensions, phenomenological interpretations, or by emphasizing philosophical and anthropological values. In many works, furnishing (or the «decorative art»), decoration, or the object are the preferred keys for the study of interior spaces; Praz, on the other hand, highlights the value of interiority in those spaces – their sense of *stimmung*. In every case, however, the chosen interpretive keys never disregard the relationship with architecture – indeed, they most often reinforce it.

What emerges, on the other hand, is a general critical and historiographical framework in which the hybridization of roles becomes fundamental: critics with architectural training, historians with a background in art history, literary scholars in the service of art criticism. In this cross-fertilization between intellectual formation and the constant renewal of critical perspective – and in the ability to consider and blend interpretive approaches drawn from other disciplines (architecture, literature, art) – lies the distinctive character of Italian thought in the historiographical analysis of interiors. Criticism not only allows for a deeper understanding of the meaning and value of a work but also proposes hypotheses of interpretation, stimulates comparison, invites direct observation, and compels awareness of one’s own taste, motivating both affinities and rejections. In the possibility of dissent, in the richness of cultural debate, and in the opening of new spaces for discussion lies its greatest commitment.

- In her survey of international literature on interiors, Paula Baxter notes (*Thirty Years of Growth in the Literature of Interior Design*, in «Journal of Design History», vol. IV, no. 4, 1991, p. 242) only the works by Mario Praz, *La filosofia dell’arredamento. I mutamenti nel gusto della decorazione interna attraverso i secoli*, Longanesi & C., Milan 1964, in its English translation (*An Illustrated History of Interior Decoration. From Pompeii to Art Nouveau*, George Braziller, New York 1964), and by Renato De Fusco, *Storia dell’arredamento*, UTET, Turin 1985.
- A. Schiaparelli, *La Casa fiorentina e i suoi arredi, nei secoli XIV e XV*, G.C. Sansoni, Florence 1908, 2 vols. The text was published on the occasion of the museographic arrangement – with period furnishings – of the interiors of Palazzo Davizzi-Davanzati in Florence, undertaken by the antiquarian and painter Elio Volpi (who purchased the building in 1904) and opened to the public as the private museum Casa Fiorentina Antica. See also B. Teodori, *Il recupero novecentesco del palazzo e la nascita del Museo della Casa Fiorentina Antica*, in *Palazzo Davanzati e Firenze*, edited by the same author, Edifir, Florence 2017, pp. 91-104.
- M. Praz, *La filosofia dell’arredamento*, Documento, Libraio Editore, Rome 1945 [excerpted in this volume]; new ed. *La filosofia dell’arredamento. I mutamenti nel gusto della decorazione interna attraverso i secoli*, Longanesi & C., Milan 1964.
- In particular, see the following volumes: P. Thornton, *Authentic Decor. The Domestic Interior, 1620-1920*, George Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London 1984; W. Rybczynski, *Home. A Short History of an Idea*, Viking Penguin, New York 1986; G. D’Amato, *Storia dell’arredamento*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1992.

- G.C. Argan, entry *Interni*, in *Enciclopedia Universale dell’Arte*, Istituto per la Col-laborazione Culturale, Venice-Rome, Sansoni, Florence 1959, vol. VII, cols. 580-610 [excerpted in this volume].
- M. Praz, entry *Mobilio*, in *Enciclopedia Universale dell’Arte*, Istituto per la Colla-borazione Culturale, Venice-Rome, Sansoni, Florence 1959, vol. IX, cols. 466-529.
- G. Veronesi, ed., *Edoardo Persico. Tutte le opere (1923-1935)*, Edizioni di Comu-nità, Milan 1964, vol. II, p. 91.
- E. Persico, *Una mostra a Milano*, in «La Casa bella», no. 57, 1932, pp. 25-31 [in this volume the title assigned by Veronesi has been recovered to identify this article by Persico, together with his essay *L’arredamento come opera d’arte*, in «La Casa bella», no. 42, 1931, pp. 23-31].
- The first edition was held in 1923, followed by those of 1925, 1927, and the triennial exhibition of 1930. See A. Pansera, M. Chirico, eds., *1923-1930, Monza, verso l’unità delle arti. Oggetti d’eccezione dalle Esposizioni internazionali di arti decor-ative*, Silvana Editoriale, Cinisello Balsamo 2004. Subsequently, the exhibition moved to the Palazzo dell’Arte in Milan and took the name Triennale di Milano. The Fifth Triennale was inaugurated in 1933.
- G. Marangoni, ed., *Enciclopedia delle moderne arti decorative italiane*, Casa Editrice Ceschina, Milan, UTET, Turin 1925-1928, 6 vols. (vol. I – G. Marangoni, *Il mobile contemporaneo*, 1925; vol. II – G. Marangoni, *Il ferro battuto*, 1916; vol. III – G. Marangoni, *Ceramiche, vetri, vetrate. Le arti del fuoco*, 1927; vol. IV – C.A. Felice, *Loreficeria*, 1927; vol. V – G. Marangoni, *Le stoffe d’arte e l’arredamento della casa*, 1918; vol. VI – G. Marangoni, *Decorazione murale, pietre lavorate, mosaico, pavimen-to artistico*, 1928).
- G. Marangoni, *Il mobile contemporaneo...* cit., pp. 31-32.
- Papini, a member of the editorial board, also claimed its authorship. Cf. P. Nicoloso, *La formazione dell’architetto*, in G. Ciucci, G. Muratore, eds., *Storia dell’ar-chitettura italiana. Il primo Novecento*, Electa, Milan 2004, pp. 60 and 98, note 6.
- See C. Baglione, *Casabella, 1928/2008*, Electa, Milan 2008.
- See J. Caputo, *Domus. 45 ans d’architecture, design, art, 1928/1973*, Domus, Mil-an 1973, catalogue of the exhibition of the same name at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Pavillon de Marsan, Palais du Louvre, Paris, 31 May-23 September 1973; C. Fiell, P. Fiell, eds., *Domus 1928-1999*, Taschen, Köln 2006, 12 vols., see in particular the introductions to the volumes written by Luigi Spinelli.
- See C. Rostagno, ed., *Gio Ponti. Stile di*, Electa, Milan 2016.
- G. Marangoni, *Verso la duplice meta*, in «La Casa bella», no. 1, 1928, pp. 9-10.
- Croci translated into French the writings of Benito Mussolini and, from French into Italian, novels and short stories by French authors.
- M. Croci, *Passaggi parigini*, in «La Casa bella», no. 5, 1929, pp. 38-40; Id., *Una mostra documentata a Parigi*, in «La Casa bella», no. 2, 1929, pp. 14-16; Id., *Al Pavillon de Marsan*, in «La Casa bella», no. 3, 1929, pp. 23-25; Id., *Stoffe d’arte francesi*, in «La Casa bella», no. 6, 1929, pp. 37-39; Id., *La decorazione della tavola*, in «La Casa bella», no. 7, 1929, pp. 37-40; Id., *Gli insieme decorativi di Eugène Prinz*, in «La Casa bella», no. 9, 1929, pp. 29-33; Id., *Gli italiani al Salon d’Automne*, in «La Casa bella», no. 12, 1929, pp. 50-53; Id., *La sede di una rivista a Parigi*, in «La Casa bella», no. 4, 1930, pp. 15-19; Id., *I metalli nella decorazione e nell’arredamento*, in «La Casa bella», no. 9, 1930, pp. 20-33.
- G. Ponti, *La casa all’italiana*, in «Domus», no. 1, 1928, p. 7 [excerpted in this vol-ume].
- R. Papini, *Le arti d’oggi. Architettura e arti decorative in Europa*, Casa Editrice d’Arte Bestetti e Tuminelli, Milan-Rome 1930; facsimile reprint Verbavolant, Lon-don 2005. The latter edition was purged of the dedication to Benito Mussolini, «citizen of honour of Universa». See I. Forino, *Arredamento come arte decorativa*, in «Op. cit. Selezione della critica d’arte contemporanea», no. 136, 2009, pp. 39-54.
- R. Papini, *Le arti d’oggi...* cit., pl. XXXV, fig. 53, «Arch. Le Corbusier et Jeanner-et (Switzerland): Villino in Boulogne-Seigne»; and fig. 54, «Arch. Le Corbusier et Jeanneret (Switzerland): Casette in Stoccarda».
- Id., *Le arti a Parigi nel 1925. Primo: l’architettura*, in «Architettura e arti decora-tive», y. 1, 1925-1926, pp. 201-233; Id., *Le arti a Parigi nel 1925. Secondo: gli interni e i loro mobili*, in «Architettura e arti decorative», y. 1, 1925-1926, pp. 345-379; Id., *Le arti a Parigi nel 1925. Terzo: i metalli*, in «Architettura e arti decorative», y. 1, 1926-1927, pp. 18-48.
- Id., *Le arti d’oggi...* cit., pl. CV, fig. 155.
- Ibid., pl. CVIII, fig. 167.
- G. Marangoni, *Arredo e abbigliamento, nella vita di tutti i tempi e di tutti i popoli*, Società Editrice Libreria, Milan 1937 (vol. I) and 1938 (vol. II).
- G. Semper, *Der Stil in den technischen und tektionischen Künsten oder prak-tische Ästhetik. Ein Handbuch für Techniker, Künstler und Kunstfreunde*, Verlag für Kunst und Wissenschaft, Frankfurt am Main 1860; Fried. Brückmann’s Verlag, Munich 1879-1880.
- The title of the work also changes: A. Clementi, ed., *Storia dell’arredamento (fino al 1500)*, Società Editrice Libreria, Milan 1952; Id., ed., *Storia dell’arredamento (1500-1850)*, Società Editrice Libreria, Milan 1952.
- S. Vitale, *Elogio dell’architettura*, in «Rivista d’Italia», no. 15, 1926, pp. 32-46; later published as *L’estetica dell’architettura. Saggio sullo sviluppo dello spirito costruttivo*, Gius. Laterza & Figli, Bari 1928; now in *L’estetica dell’architettura e altri scritti*, C. Lenza, ed., Editrice Compositori, Bologna 2010, p. 94.
- E. Persico, *L’arredamento come opera d’arte...* cit., p. 31 [italics ours].
- On the history of the gallery Il Milione, see I. Forino, *Private Exhibitions. Galler-ies, Art and Interior Design, 1920-1960*, in G. Lees-Maffei and K. Fallan, eds., *MADE IN ITALY. Rethinking a Century of Italian Design*, Bloomsbury, London, New Delhi, New York and Sydney 2013, pp. 167-169.
- E. Persico, *Una mostra a Milano...* cit., p. 25 [italics ours].
- B. Zevi, *Saper vedere l’architettura*, Einaudi, Turin 1948 [excerpted in this vol-ume].
- K. Fiedler, *Der Ursprung der künstlerischen Tätigkeit*, Hirzel, Leipzig 1887.

- A. Schmarsow, *Raumgestaltung als Wesen der architektonischen Schöpfung*, in «Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft», no. 9, 1914, pp. 66-95. Cf. A. Castagnaro, *August Schmarsow dalla critica d’arte contemporanea alla Raumgestaltung*, Progedit, Bari 2017.
- H. Sörgel, *Theorie der Baukunst. I. Architektur-Ästhetik*, Piloty & Löhle, Munich 1921.
- Nor should one overlook the possible influence of the text by S. Vitale, *Elogio dell’architettura...* cit. [excerpted in this volume]. Cf. here J. Leveratto, *Meanings of interiors*.
- R. Vischer, *Über das optische Formgefühl. Ein Beitrag zur Ästhetik*, Herman Credner, Leipzig 1873.
- T. Lipps, *Ästhetik. Psychologie des Schönen und der Kunst*, Voss, Ham-burg-Leipzig 1903-1906.
- G.C. Argan, *A proposito di spazio interno*, in «Metron», no. 28, 1948, pp. 20-21 [excerpted in this volume].
- Id., entry *Interni...* cit. [excerpted in this volume].
- Id., *A proposito di spazio interno...* cit., p. 21 [italics ours].
- R. Longhi, *Giotto spazioso*, in «Paragone», no. 31, 1952, pp. 18-19.
- L. Bellosi, *La rappresentazione dello spazio*, in P. Fossati, ed., *Storia dell’arte ital-iana. 4. Ricerche spaziali e tecnologiche*, Einaudi, Turin 1980, p. 14.
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- Ibid., p. 13.
- G.C. Argan, *A proposito di spazio interno...* cit., p. 21.
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- Id., *L’arte dell’arredamento*, Società Editrice Libreria, Milan 1954; new ed. *Arte e tecnica dell’arredamento*, Società Editrice Libreria, Milan 1954.
- Id., *Storia dell’arredamento (1850-1950)...* cit., pp. 214, 216.
- Id., *L’arte dell’arredamento...* cit., p. 21.
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- E.A. Poe, *The Philosophy of Furniture*, in «Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine», May 1840, pp. 243-245.
- W. Benjamin, *Das Passagen Werk*, R. Tiedemann, ed., Suhrkamp Verlag, Frank-furt am Main 1982.
- M. Praz, *L’Ameublement. Psychologie et évolution de la décoration intérieure*, Tisné, Paris 1964.
- Id., *An Illustrated History of Interior Decoration. From Pompeii to Art Nouveau*, George Braziller, New York 1964; Thames & Hudson, London 1964.
- For the editorial history, see I. Forino, *L’arredamento come ideale di armonia e bellezza*, in «L’architettura, cronache e storia», nos. 585-586, 2004, p. 580.
- On the *Conversation Pieces*, see also the volume by M. Praz, *Scene di conver-sazione*, U. Bozzi, Rome 1970, itself inspired by the book by S. Sitwell, *Conversation Pieces. A Survey of English Domestic Portraits and Their Painters. With Notes on the Illustrations by Michael Sevier*, B. T. Batsford, London 1936.
- M. Praz, *La filosofia dell’arredamento. I mutamenti nel gusto...* cit., p. 53.
- R. De Fusco, *Storia dell’arredamento*, UTET, Turin 1985. A preview of the vol-ume appears in the articles: Id., *Per una teoria dell’arredamento*, in «Casa Vogue», no. 150, 1984, pp. 198-199 [excerpted in this volume]; Id., *Design contro arredamen-to*, in «Casa Vogue», no. 151, 1984, pp. 252-253.
- Id., *Segni, storia e progetto dell’architettura*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1973 [excerpt-ed in this volume].
- Id., *Introduzione*, in I. Forino, *L’interno nell’interno. Una fenomenologia dell’arreda-mento*, Alinea, Florence 2001, p. 9.
- Cf. I. Forino, *Arredamento versus Architettura degli interni*, in «Op. cit. Selezione della critica d’arte contemporanea», no. 181, 2024, pp. 107-111.
- G. D’Amato, *Storia dell’arredamento*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1992.
- Cf. Ead., *Abitare tra gli oggetti*, in «Op. cit. Selezione della critica d’arte contem-poranea», no. 74, 1989, pp. 16-25 [excerpted in this volume].
- Ead., *L’arte di arredare. La storia di un millennio attraverso gusti, ambienti, atmos-fere*, Bruno Mondadori, Milan 2001.
- Cf. for example A. Cornoldi, *L’architettura della casa. Sulla tipologia dello spazio domestico con un atlante di 100 abitazioni disegnate alla stessa scala*, Officina Edizioni, Rome 1988.
- A. Cornoldi, *Architettura dei luoghi domestici. Il progetto del comfort*, Jaca Book, Milan 1994.
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- Ivi, p. 30.

Meanings of Interiors

Jacopo Leveratto

Generally speaking, within the field of architectural design, every discourse of disciplinary positioning is essentially *ethical* in nature. For it concerns, first and foremost, the clarification of the tasks and methodological principles of a given discipline. In the case of interior architecture, however, the problem is, first of all, *ontological*. As if the point were not to define what it ought to do, but rather to understand, each time, what it truly is. Thus, the problem in this field is not so much a question of establishing an epistemological framework of reference – which, despite its complexity, is in fact rather well consolidated¹ – as of understanding what is meant when one refers to an interior – what dimensions it should have, or how circumscribed it must be in order to be considered as such.

This may seem strange from a certain point of view, especially given the common opinion that conceives the interior as the space enclosed by the walls of a building, and particularly of a domestic one². Yet from a theoretical standpoint, it is perfectly understandable if one considers that, unlike architectural, urban, or landscape design, interior design does not concern a typological domain but a topological one. While the former deal with specific spatial categories that are historically consolidated, the latter engages with a completely different dimension: one that does not imply a particular projective idea, but rather translates, spatially, a relation among different elements, independent of geometrical or scalar specifications³. In other words, by its very definition, the design of interiors deals neither with a specific type of space nor with a particular scale of it, but rather with a specific *spatial condition*. Hence, if one wishes to understand what is meant by interior architecture from a design standpoint, it is necessary to look at the invariants and methodological recurrences through which, over time, this condition of interiority has been constructed.

The problem, in this sense, is that the historical evolution of architectural interiors may be read according to two very different temporal arcs, depending on the perspective from which they are observed. The first, of longer duration, dates back to prehistory and refers to the conscious transformation of the natural environment in response to the human need to find a kind of refuge, adapting one's living space to oneself and to one's needs⁴. The second, far more specific and better documented, concerns the emergence of distinct design contributions, separate from architecture, within the integrated operation of shaping the inhabited space⁵. There is also a third, in truth, more of a literary dimension, which, referring to the appearance of a sense of domestic intimacy, may alternatively be traced back either to the rise of bourgeois society or to a proto-historical motive of dwelling⁶. In any case, from whatever point of view one chooses to consider it, at least two theoretical positions regarding the design

role of the architectural interior emerge from all these historical readings: one that sees in it not so much a positional condition opposed to an exterior, as the *genetic dimension* of inhabited space and, therefore, the very reason for architecture itself; and another, diametrically opposed, that identifies it as the field of action of a distinct and secondary discipline with respect to architecture, whose specificity lies in intervening within a pre-existing shell, not only through an entirely autonomous set of tools but also through a completely different operational philosophy. All this according to a dichotomy between interior architecture and decoration that, in other countries – even looking at the last century alone – was taken as substantially established. Whereas in Italy, during the same period, it generated an extraordinary series of critical and historiographical interpretations aimed at clarifying the relationship between the two: sometimes writing an *or* between them, some others an *and*, or, in some cases, even an *is*.

On the one hand, for example, proceeding along a disjunctive line, one might read Salvatore Vitale's *L'estetica dell'architettura*, in which – in clear opposition to Crocean idealism and following Albertian theories – it appears the first explicit reference within the national context to the essential value of interior space for the morphogenesis of any architecture⁷; and compare it, on the other hand, with Mario Praz's *La filosofia dell'arredamento*, where the interior is instead that of the home – seen as a material projection of its inhabitant – whose meaning is embodied in that tonal value, or domestic atmosphere, which he calls *stimmung*⁸. Likewise, one might consider Bruno Zevi and his *Saper vedere l'architettura*, where – beginning with the legacy of August Schmarsow and the *Einfühlung* school – the internal practicability of a space becomes the essential precondition for any architectural fact⁹; and compare it, in turn, with the entry *Interni* by Giulio Carlo Argan, who – after having already corrected Zevi's notion of interior with the more complex one of «interiority»¹⁰ – ultimately focuses on the idea of furnishing and on the distinction between «the art of architectural interiors» and «architecture»¹¹. All this within a play of oppositions – which also involves, among others, Luigi Moretti and Carlo Mollino¹² – in which one dimension is never the negation of the other, but simply remains clearly distinct from it, in typological, disciplinary, and design terms alike. At least until those early attempts at integration between the two notions – such as Carlo De Carli's phenomenological approach and Renato De Fusco's structuralist one¹³ – through which the two dimensions came to be regarded as equally essential in structuring the inhabited space – whether a «primary space» or «spatial vessel». Thus laying the foundations for that distinctly Italian attempt whereby interior architecture would subsequently reject any subordination to the architecture of the city, in the

belief that «if there is no such thing, nor can there be, as an architecture of exteriors [...] all architecture is interior architecture»¹⁴.

Perhaps, however, the most original feature of this approach to interior space – which may be considered constitutive of Italian culture – lies precisely in the inextricability of the terms architecture and furnishing. This idea, which clearly emerged as early as 1932, in an article by Edoardo Persico later retitled *Arredamento è architettura*¹⁵ (Furnishing is architecture), it was already perceptible in the inseparable binomial between these two words sanctioned in 1928 by the founding of the journals «La Casa bella» and «Domus»¹⁶. But it was only in 1932, with the reform of Italian schools of architecture, that the course in Interior Architecture Furnishing and Decoration, previously anchored to drawing disciplines, was definitively incorporated – thanks in part to Gio Ponti – among those of architectural design¹⁷: a disciplinary framework that would later perfectly describe the cultural attitude of a generation of interior *maestri* – such as Franco Albini and Carlo Scarpa – who would consistently assert their status as fully-fledged architects, rejecting any association with the French *ensembliers* or with English and American *decorators*¹⁸; and which also paved the way for another generation of scholars – such as Filippo Alison, Adriano Cornoldi, and Gianni Ottolini – who would consolidate its theoretical premises, laying the groundwork for academic and applied research¹⁹. This, in other words, is the tradition from which arises the idea of a cultural position that «has never been, nor seeks to be ... [an] autonomous [discipline] [...] [but] architecture itself, viewed, for convenience of analysis, from the inside»²⁰ – while always including within this vision that entire furnishing organism from which, precisely for the sake of analytical completeness, it can never be detached. For it stems, in any case, from the awareness that, from a design standpoint, the fundamental problem of interiors «is not that of defining spaces, but rather of adapting spaces to the needs of life»²¹. That is to say, of transforming a space into a habitable place²².

What this means in practical terms, however, is not always easy to say, since, depending on whether it is observed from the point of view of decoration, design, or interior architecture, the pursuit of habitability may be understood as the possibility of reflecting and expressing the personality of those who inhabit a given space, that of adapting it to new symbolic and functional requirements, or simply as the intrinsic welcoming capacity of an architectural interior. However it is interpreted, in any case, it cannot be ignored that, for Italian culture, it represents the primary objective and the main defining element of interior design. And that, consequently, the design of interiors, regardless of its degree of integration with architectural design, is always considered in this context as a form of research into the means through which these two dimensions, architecture and dwelling, may arrive at a compromise. As if to say that, if its object is not merely the definition of a simple space but that of a kind of interface between the purely positional datum of an environment and the real possibility of inhabiting it, its quality is measured by its capacity to adhere or adapt both to the space it intends to transform and to the life of those who inhabit it, constructing a meaningful connection between the two. For this reason, interior architecture and design, when understood according to this specific cultural perspective, may be considered as a body of practices, processes, and tools concerned with adaptability, capable of offering, if not a fully articulated methodological horizon, at least a series of principles able to define an operative approach to habitability. And thus a kind of philosophy of action which, thanks to its topological

nature, is not limited to a specific type or to a single scale, but is open to different contaminations and hybridizations of a disciplinary nature.

1. Cf. G. Postiglione, *Interni. Metodi, azioni, tattiche (della ricerca)*, LetteraVentidue, Siracusa 2012.
2. P. Cecere, *L'interno architettonico*, in A. Bossi, P. Cecere, *La qualità oikogena dello spazio. Contributo alla comprensione dell'interno architettonico*, Edizioni Progetta, Naples 2015, p. 66.
3. From a spatial perspective, the term interior, as well as exterior, represents one of the fundamental categories studied in topology – a branch of mathematics that examines the qualitative properties of geometric figures which remain invariant when the figures undergo continuous transformations so profound as to lose all their metric and projective qualities. J. Leveratto, *Dall'interno. Verso un approccio multiscalare all'abitabilità*, LetteraVentidue, Siracusa 2018, p. 16 (Eng. transl. *From within. Between interior Architecture and Design*, LetteraVentidue, Siracusa 2020).
4. Cf. E. Camesasca, ed., *Storia della casa*, Rizzoli, Milan 1968; L. Cosenza, *Storia dell'abitazione*, Vangelista, Milan 1974.
5. Cf. G. Marangoni, *Storia dell'arredamento*, Editrice Libreria, Milan 1935; R. De Fusco, *Storia dell'arredamento*, UTET, Turin 1985.
6. Cf. D. Baroni, *Interiors*, in «Ottagono», no. 54, 1979, pp. 30-39; I. Forino, *Interno e interiorità*, in «Op. cit. Selezione della critica d'arte contemporanea», no. 102, 1998, pp. 18-27 [excerpted in this volume].
7. S. Vitale, *L'estetica dell'architettura. Saggio sullo sviluppo dello spirito costruttivo*, Laterza, Bari 1928, pp. 21-32 [excerpted in this volume].
8. M. Praz, *La filosofia dell'arredamento*, Documento, Librario Editore, Rome 1945 [excerpted in this volume] (Eng. transl. *An Illustrated History of Interior Decoration. From Pompeii to Art Nouveau*, transl. by William Weaver, George Braziller, New York 1964).
9. B. Zevi, *Saper vedere l'architettura*, Einaudi, Turin 1948, pp. 22-32 [excerpted in this volume] (Eng. transl. *Architecture as Space. How to Look at Architecture*, transl. by Milton Gendel, edited by Joseph A. Barry, Horizon Press, New York 1957). For a complete discussion of the spatial conception of architecture, see Id., *Architettura in nuce*, Sansoni, Florence 1979.
10. G.C. Argan, *A proposito di spazio interno*, in «Metron», no. 28, 1948, pp. 20-21 [excerpted in this volume].
11. Id., *Interni*, in *Enciclopedia Universale dell'Arte*, Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, Venice-Rome, Sansoni, Florence 1959, vol. VII, cols. 580-587 [excerpted in this volume].
12. Cf. L. Moretti, *Strutture e sequenze di spazi*, in «Spazio», no. 7, 1953, pp. 9-20 and 107-108 [excerpted in this volume]; C. Mollino, *Utopie e ambientazioni*, in «Domus», nos. 237-238, 1949, pp. 14-19 and 20-25 [excerpted in this volume].
13. Cf. C. De Carli, *Contro la realtà finta*, in «Interni», no. 1, 1967, pp. 2-5 [excerpted in this volume]; R. De Fusco, *Segni storia e progetto dell'architettura*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1973, pp. 30-36 [excerpted in this volume].
14. G. Ottolini, *Forma e significato in architettura*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1996, p. 16 [excerpted in this volume].
15. E. Persico, *Una mostra a Milano*, in «La Casa bella», no. 57, 1932, pp. 25-31 [excerpted in this volume].
16. The respective editors at the time of their founding were Guido Marangoni and Gio Ponti, the latter of whom also directed the journal «lo Stile, nella casa e nell'arredamento» from 1941 to 1947.
17. In 1936, in fact, following the university reform of 1932, there was the first national competition for the assignment of the Chair of Interior Architecture Furnishing and Decoration, won in Turin by Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo, in Milan by Gio Ponti, and in Florence by Giovanni Michelucci.
18. A detailed reconstruction of this history can be found in I. Forino, *Many Voices, One Story. Interiors through Italian Eyes*, in «Interiors», vol. 1, no. 3, 2010, pp. 177-196.
19. For an overview in this regard, see the essays in A. Cornoldi, ed., *Architettura degli interni*, Il Poligrafo, Padua 2005.
20. G. Rosa, *L'architettura degli interni*, Officina Edizioni, Rome 1999, p. 10 [excerpted in this volume].
21. G.C. Argan, *Interni... cit.*, p. 580.
22. A. Bossi, P. Cecere, *La qualità oikogena dello spazio... cit.*, passim.

Salvatore Vitale

Architecture and the Arts

1928

Poetry and music live and relive within the Spirit and by means of the Spirit, for it is, indeed, the Spirit that communicates with itself through them, and this communication takes place in poetry by way of images, in music by way of harmonies¹. [...]

Music and poetry are, therefore, truly immaterial arts, unreal, in a certain sense, since reality is the union of Spirit and matter, a union that is fully realised, precisely, in architecture. The architectural work separates itself from the Spirit that created it; it assumes its own precise objective reality, it lives in space, that is, in real and tangible extension, of which memory is only a projection upon the plane of time. As such, it imposes itself, with this solid and squared reality of its own, upon the Spirit that contemplates and admires it, and it succeeds, in a certain way, in overcoming time, in living a life outside of time, which has, at least when compared to the fleeting life of human generations, almost the semblance of the eternal. Thus, the feeling we experience before the great works of architecture upon which centuries have left their grey trace is not only an aesthetic one; it also contains, intermingled within itself, something deeper, a quasi-metaphysical sentiment awakened in us by the sudden revelation of a mysterious and impassive reality that transcends us, humbles us, and casts us down. [...]

And therefore, to this modern sensibility, architecture seems a less worthy art, for it lends itself poorly to being altered from time to time, to being continuously renewed, to being interpreted in time and realised according to the mood of the moment. Let us recall here [...] [Friedrich] Amiel and his well-known definition of landscape: *A state of mind*². And let us recall, too, Ugo Foscolo, the first truly modern man of the nineteenth century, who, in his *Ragion poetica* of the poem *Le Grazie*, calls architecture «the most wretched of the arts, precisely because it is the most confined and constrained to remain as it is»³. Yet in this, for us, lies the strength, the dignity, and the power of architecture – in this intimate union of Spirit

and matter through which it can realise itself in the work of art, entirely and completely, once and for all, across the centuries; in this objective reality through which it separates itself from the Spirit that created it, assuming its own personality and autonomy of life. [...]

Of the other arts, those closest and most akin to architecture are, certainly, painting and sculpture. Yet even when compared to these, the differential character of architecture as construction in reality proves to be fundamental. Painting and sculpture are both characterised by imitation, they both «have before them» – as Francesco Algarotti writes in his essay on architecture – «the exemplified beauty. They have, in a certain manner, only to open their eyes, contemplate the objects around them, and from these form a system of imitation. Architecture, on the contrary, must raise itself on high with the intellect, and derive a system of imitation from the ideas of things most universal and most distant from man’s sight; and one could almost say, with good reason, that among the arts it occupies the same place that metaphysics occupies among the sciences»⁴.

In painting and sculpture, then, the artist imitates a reality that already exists in Nature, albeit idealized, whereas in architecture, instead, a new reality is created, one that is not found in Nature. And this new reality is not merely shadowed or symbolised by means of images and ideal phantoms, as in music and poetry; rather, it is completely brought into being and realised through spatial and material constructions that, in their totality, detach themselves from all the models existing in Nature. [...] Thus architecture transcends Nature itself and, as such, surpasses and unites within a higher aesthetic conception, one that only it can make possible, the two opposing theses: that of [Gotthold] Lessing, who reduces Art to pure Nature, and that of [Johann Wolfgang] Goethe, who transfigures Nature in Art⁵. [...]

monplace to assert that the modern age is dominated, in the field of aesthetics, by a predominantly musical conception» (Vitale, *L'estetica dell'architettura e altri scritti... cit.*, p. 81). Thus, in order to begin addressing a specific aesthetics of an architectural nature, with all its material implications, Vitale first distances himself from a conception of art as a «science of the eternal becoming of innumerable forms», whose first theoretical references – though for different reasons – are to be found in Benedetto Croce and Henri Bergson. Cf. G. Sorel, *Sur les applications de la psycho-physique*, in *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger*, no. 22, 1886, pp. 363-375; B. Croce, *Estetica come scienza dell'espressione e linguistica generale*, Sandron, Palermo 1902; H. Bergson, *L'Évolution créatrice*, Alcan, Paris 1907.

2. Cf. H.F. Amiel, *Octobre 1852*, in Id., *Fragments d'un Journal Intime*, Sandoz et Thuillier, Paris 1883, n.p.

3. U. Foscolo, *Le Grazie*, published posthumously in Id., *Poesie (Opere edite e postume*, vol. IX), Le Monnier, Florence 1856, p. 211.

4. F. Algarotti, *Saggio sopra l'architettura e sulla pittura* (1756), in Id., *Opere del conte Algarotti. Edizione novissima*, Carlo Palese, Venice 1791, vol. II, p. 7.

5. Vitale here most likely refers to *Laocoon* by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and to *Winckelmann* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Cf. G.E. Lessing, *Laokoon, oder*

Painting and sculpture undoubtedly live in space, and in this they may be considered closer to architecture than poetry and music. But it is a conventional, artificial space, which only shadows reality without wholly embracing it. Painting, in fact, has a two-dimensional space, the plane, and three-dimensional reality is simulated by technical means, by the play of shadows and by the skilful resources of perspective. Sculpture, it is true, also lives, like architecture, in three-dimensional space; yet, on closer examination, this space, in the final analysis, possesses only a superficial character, and may itself be easily reduced to the plane. One may say, in a certain sense, that sculpture moves around reality but is never capable of encompassing it entirely. [...]

A statue is, in the end, a multiple surface, a polyhedron; it lives, indeed, in space, but that space remains external to it; it is not contained within it. The relationship between form and content is thus inverted, and the statue appears to us almost as something that receives its form from exterior space, rather than as something that gives form to the interior space it encloses. The three-dimensional nature of the sculptural work is, therefore, only apparent, and in this there is revealed, along with its abstract and unreal character, that quality of decorative and accessory element of architecture which belongs not only to the caryatid, the frieze, the capital, architectural elements by definition, but also to the statue itself, to the monumental group itself, which need, in order truly to live as works of art, the appropriate surrounding space, an environment capable of giving them that reality which they do not possess in themselves. [...]

In architecture, instead, space is not only exterior, but also, and above all, interior; it is not employed in only one of its relations, as simple surface, but in the totality of its constitutive relations, as volume and as mass. We may even say, in a certain sense, that in architecture space, while maintaining its essential character of pure extension, that is, in the end, of emptiness, nonetheless succeeds, in some way, in acquiring a corporeal semblance and in solidifying itself. The architectural work, in short, is not merely something that lives in space, but something that makes space live within itself. In it, form possesses a spatial content of its own, and, unlike painting and sculpture, where space is ordered solely in relation to the plane, in architecture all space is ordered in its relationships of inside and outside, in the full complexity of its extensive capacity. Moreover, recalling Leon Battista Alberti’s phrase in the ninth book of his *Architettura*, that a building is «almost like an animal»⁶, we may say that, as in biological organisms, so too in the architectural work form acts from within outward, as a true *entelechy*, shaping the building according to an intimate and unified law that gives to the entire construction the personal and individual character of something truly living and real⁷.

über die Grenzen der Mahlerey und Poesie, Christian Friedrich Voß, Berlin 1766; J.W. von Goethe, *Winckelmann und sein Jahrhundert*, in Id., *Goethe's Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe letzter Hand*, vol. 38, Cotta, Stuttgart und Tübingen 1805.

6. L.B. Alberti, *Della architettura (De re aedificatoria)*, Book IX, ch. V (lt. transl. by C. Bartoli, Leonardo Torrentino, Mondovi 1565, p. 216).

7. As Renato De Fusco notes in his preface to the critical edition edited by Cettina Lenza, «this is [...] the highest point of Salvatore Vitale’s architectural theory, particularly in a milieu where people were still debating whether decoration was an integral part of architecture or a mere embellishing addition, whether buildings should express the architect’s individuality or the socio-political context» (in Vitale, *L'estetica dell'architettura e altri scritti... cit.*, p. 9). It is not difficult to find in these words, beyond a direct reference for Persico’s work, also an indigenous precedent for Zevi’s later theories (cf. B. Zevi, *Lo spazio protagonista dell'architettura*, in Id., *Saper vedere l'architettura*, Einaudi, Turin 1948, pp. 21-33) [excerpted in this volume]. «Nevertheless», as Lenza observes, «Vitale never develops, on a critical level, his early and promising interpretation in terms of interior space», being in fact interested in something else (in Vitale, *L'estetica dell'architettura e altri scritti... cit.*, p. 28).

The building, in fact, is not constructed for its façade; rather, the façade is the final crowning, as a work of beauty, of the purpose to which the building itself responds. And, moreover, in the façade there is not only, from a spatial point of view, that simple play of light and shadow which is found in painting, or of planes and surfaces as in sculpture, but there is also a more complex play of masses and volumes, that rhythm of voids and solids which causes the façade not to appear as a mere scenographic device, but to make us feel, behind it, the deep and complex life of the palace or the temple.

Material and spatial elements such as these translate into elements of spiritual life. In a most suggestive book, which we shall have occasion to cite [...], *Eupalinos ou l'architecte*, Paul Valéry has Socrates say, in conversation with Phaedrus in the pale dwelling of the dead: «*Une peinture, cher Phèdre, ne couvre qu'une surface, comme un tableau ou un mur; et là, elle feint des objets ou des personnages. La statuaire, même, n'orne jamais qu'une portion de notre vue. Mais un temple, joint à ses abords, ou bien l'intérieur de ce temple, forme pour nous une sorte de grandeur complète dans laquelle nous vivons... Nous sommes, nous nous mouvons, nous vivons alors dans l'œuvre de l'homme!*»⁸. When I admire, in fact, a beautiful painting or a fine statue, I always feel them outside myself, as something external, with which I can unite only in a kind of mystical rapture of aesthetic contemplation; but when I find myself, instead, in the midst of the Hall of the Great Council in the Doge’s Palace in Venice, or at the centre of Saint Peter’s in Rome, beneath Michelangelo’s dome, I truly live within it, within the hall or the temple, I feel myself mingled with that reality; it is no longer something that stands before me, from which I feel separated, but rather something that surrounds me on all sides, within which I live and move.

The space that separates me from the pictorial or sculptural work unites me, instead, with the architectural one; indeed, it includes me within itself, through it and by means of it⁹. It is, in short, the concept of space as sensible reality that architecture reveals to us, just as music reveals to us the reality of time. But architecture also gives us, beyond this, that which music, in its fleeting and continuous becoming, is incapable of giving: the very image of an ordered Universe, stable and divinely impassive, which imposes itself upon our restless and mutable spirit, in the solemn and definitive lines of marble and stone.

[Salvatore Vitale, *L'estetica dell'architettura. Saggio sullo sviluppo dello spirito costruttivo*, Laterza, Bari 1928, pp. 21-32]

8. «A painting, dear Phaedrus, covers only a surface, like a picture or a wall; and there it feigns objects or figures. Sculpture, too, adorns only a portion of our field of vision. But a temple, together with its surroundings, or even the interior of that temple, forms for us a kind of complete magnitude within which we live... We are, we move, we live then within the work of man!» P. Valéry, *Eupalinos ou l'architecte* (1921), in Id., *Eupalinos, L'Âme et la Danse, Dialogue de l'Arbre*, Gallimard, Paris 1944, pp. 32-33 [transl. by the editor].

9. Here again, one should note the originality of these positions with respect to a debate – the Italian one – in which such issues would become central only some twenty years later. It is also interesting to observe a notable – whether unconscious or undeclared – closeness to the concept of *Raumgefühl*, first coined by Oswald Spengler (cf. *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, vol. I *Form und Wirklichkeit*, C.H. Beck, Munich 1918, pp. 650-670) and subsequently elaborated by the art historian August Schmarsow in 1894 to denote the sense of the body within an architectural space that contains and embraces it (cf. A. Schmarsow, *Das Wesen der architektonischen Schöpfung*, Hiersemann, Leipzig 1894). On this subject – and more generally on the influence of the so-called *Einfühlung* school – see the commentary on Bruno Zevi’s work included in this section. [JL]

Mario Praz

The Philosophy of Furniture

1945

As in every other field, so too in furnishing, men [sic] are divided into two classes, indeed, into two races, as Charles Lamb would say. Just as there are the beautiful and the ugly, the good and the bad, the static and the dynamic, the cheerful and the melancholic, the loquacious and the taciturn, the prodigal and the miserly, and infinite intermediate nuances and the strangest combinations of opposites. For Lamb, all the most varied classifications would be reduced to the original diversity of «men who borrow and men who lend»¹. I would venture to propose an even more fundamental original distinction: men who care for their house and men who do not care for it at all. Naturally, here too, the usual intermediate shades: men who care a little, or somewhat, or only in certain phases of their lives; men who show some interest in furniture only when they set up house for marriage, and once that costly enterprise is done, never concern themselves with it again (and perhaps these, we shudder to think, are the majority). There are some entirely insensible to what surrounds them, others who adapt, and even take pleasure in living in environments that most would judge intolerable. I confess that it is extremely difficult for me to understand the soul of men indifferent to things and to their home. Each of us sees his fellow men under the species of some idiosyncrasy [...]. Every day I meet my fellow beings who care nothing for what surrounds them; and I must say that whatever sympathy I may feel for them undergoes a severe test when I discover that particular trait in them. «He does not love his house» is, in my vocabulary, an observation as grave and definitive as, in the vocabulary of a moralist, would be the recognition of an essential deficiency in the ethical sense of one of his fellows. If someone were to say to me, «Beware, that man is a cheat», I would not bat an eyelid; yet it has happened that I have felt myself change colour on seeing, for the first time, the surroundings of a companion I had known for years. [...] The man who has no sense of home and is un-

moved by the harmony of beautiful furnishings is for me what, for [William] Shakespeare, is the man devoid of musical sense, born for treachery, for deceit, for theft. The movements of his soul are dark as night, his appetites black as Erebus. Do not trust such a man! [...]

Many will reproach me for judging men by such an external and accessory datum, reminding me that just as clothes do not make the man, so the house does not describe the person who lives within it. I would rather apply another famous saying: style is the man. The house is the man, *tel le logis, tel le maître* – or rather, «tell me how you live and I will tell you who you are»²: the house is the man, even when one can scarcely say that there is a house at all; and I think of all those who live for years in hotel rooms or rented lodgings, and, though they could move, do not, but curl up with absolute indifference in the corner «where fortune has cast them». The way a man reacts to his environment is, for me, a far surer index than the clothes he wears. [...]

This, and nothing else, is, in its deepest reason, what a house is: a projection of the self; and furnishing is nothing but an indirect form of self-worship³. The type of contemplative who loves a beautiful home might properly be defined as a narcissist. To some extent, this narcissism is common to all people, for very few limit their home to the strictly utilitarian, and do not seek to adorn it. But when care for the home becomes a true cult, then narcissism is evident, patent. And it is surprising that this was not entirely perceived by that subtle analyst and narcissist Edmond de Goncourt, who prefaced that poem to furnishing, *La Maison d'un artiste*, with reflections in which he sees in the interest for furniture and trinkets a substitute for love of woman: «*l'intérêt de l'homme, s'en allant de l'être charmant, se reportait en grande partie sur les jolis objets inanimés dont la passion revêt un peu de la nature et du caractère de l'amour*»⁴.

2. That the original proverb should be French is no surprise. It is in France, in fact, that the project for *La Comédie humaine* is conceived by Honoré de Balzac – later cited by Praz – who significantly dedicates its first chapter to the Lamarckian naturalist Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, as a declaration of his adherence to the principle that humans, like other animals, are functionally differentiated according to the environment in which they live. Cf. H. de Balzac, *Le Père Goriot*, Edmond Werdet, Paris 1834.

3. Here, compared with the earlier text by Salvatore Vitale included in this volume, Praz introduces a very different and sharply-defined thematic reading – one of which he can be considered an initiator. The interior he envisions is not the generic space that generates the architectural fact, but that domestic realm materialised by the furnishing system, which reflects the personality and way of life of its inhabitant. This reading is not only dictated by the author's personal interest but can also be traced back to a precise historical interpretation that sees the birth of interior design (cf. C. Percier, P.F.L. Fontaine, *Recueil de décoration intérieure concernant tout ce qui rapporte à l'ameublement*, Paris 1801; T. Hope, *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration*, Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, London 1807) as coinciding with the affirmation of bourgeois culture and its tendency to confine the experience of dwelling to the domestic

A narcissist *par excellence*, Robert de Montesquiou, put it well: an apartment is «a state of mind»⁵. «Furniture are my feelings», he might have said, making his own that famous line of [George] Byron: «'Tis not the mountains, but the soul; and skies, because of me and of my soul, as I of them»⁶. [...]

It has been said that just as the body, according to the philosophy of [Emanuel] Swedenborg⁷, is nothing but a projection, an expansion of the soul, so for the soul the house it inhabits is nothing but an expansion of its own body; that for a soul loving order and treasuring experience, innumerable delicate affinities are established between it and the things of its outer dwelling, so that in the end there is no longer any distinction between the inner and the outer, and the surrounding aspects (such as the light that, at a certain hour, imperceptibly reaches a certain picture or a certain space on the wall, the scent of flowers rising near a certain window) become for it not so much apprehensible objects as very powers of apprehension and conduits to things beyond [...]. Thus the environment becomes something more than a mere mirror of the soul; it is rather an intensification of the soul, or, if one prefers to pursue the image of the mirror, a play of mirrors, where infinite perspectives open, depths of multiplied and identical reflections⁸. [...]

The environment becomes a museum of the soul, an archive of its experiences; in it the soul rereads its own story, remaining perpetually conscious of itself; the environment is its sounding board where, and there alone, its strings give their authentic vibration. And as many pieces of furniture are moulds of the human body, hollow forms to receive it – the chair, the armchair, the sofa their bases, the bed a case, the desk with its hollow to contain the knees another case, the mirror a mask awaiting the human face to come alive – and even in those pieces of furniture in which the integration with the human counterpart is less evident (such as the wardrobe, the drawer) there nonetheless prevails a symmetry akin to that of the human body, so that handles and studs correspond like the eyes and ears in the head – so the whole environment ends up becoming a mould of the soul, the casing without which the soul would feel like a snail deprived of its shell⁹. The anthropomorphic and theriomorphic forms so frequent in furniture are but indices and reminders of their participation in human life; the ancient lion's paw still preserves some vestige of its original sacred meaning, which was to transmit its virtue, its strength, to the person seated on the chair so supported; for the ultimate sense of harmonious furnishing, as has just been said, is indeed to mirror man, but to mirror him in his ideal essence: it is an exaltation of the self.

For this reason, perhaps more than painting, sculpture, or even architecture, furniture reveals the spirit of an age; and nothing like a retrospective exhibition of rooms furnished

sphere alone. As Walter Benjamin writes, it is «under Louis-Philippe [that] the private individual makes his entrance upon the historical stage», and «for the private individual the living space [...] is constituted in the *intérieur*». W. Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt 1982 (Eng. transl. *The Arcades Project*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1999, p. 152).

4. «Man's interest, withdrawing from the charming being, was redirected largely to the pretty inanimate objects to which passion imparts something of the nature and character of love». E. de Goncourt, *Journaux intimes*, in Id., *Pages d'un Journal (1891-1898)*, Charpentier, Paris 1898, p. 23 [transl. by the editor]. On the relationship between Praz and Goncourt, see also I. Forino, *Living in “The Sense of the Past”. Solipsistic Impulses in the Domesticscapes of Edmond de Goncourt and Mario Praz*, in «Interiors», no. 2, 2011, pp. 7-26; Id., *Back to the Self. The Interiorized Intérieur of Edmond De Goncourt and Mario Praz / Ritorno all'io. L'intérieur interiorizzato di Edmond De Goncourt e Mario Praz*, in «Between», no. 28, 2024, pp. 137-159.

5. R. de Montesquiou, *Philosophie de l'ameublement*, (France), n.d.

6. G.G. Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto III, stanza LXXV, in Id., *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. A Romaunt*, John Murray, London 1818.

in chronological succession reveals at first glance the varied character of their occupants. Or their very lack of character. [...]

Since it goes without saying, inherent in the nature of the thing – the fundamental narcissism of furnishing – that possession is an integral part of it. The inscription on the façade of [Gioachino] Rossini's house in the Strada Maggiore in Bologna, *Non domo dominus, sed domino domus*, presents an antithesis which, for the true lover of the home, does not exist. The house is for the master, and the master is for the house; a synthesis not found in philosophical treatises, since philosophers generally belong to that race of men who care nothing for the home. The house, being an expression, an expansion of the self, being not only an articulated system of conveniences, but that intimate world in which it pleases the self to behold itself daily, has as its first corollary possession. The house is the sphere of influence, the living space, the fief, the domain, the freehold, and whatever other formula lawyers and politicians may have coined to signify the fact that, in the rudimentary language of the child, is expressed by a petulant: «It's mine!» [...]

Hence the love of the home cannot be satisfied in someone else's furnishing; the most sumptuous of environments would not fulfil that need, for one who feels it, if he knew that the surrounding things were not his, that he was but a passing guest. *Parva sed apta mihi*... is an inscription worthy of [Ludovico] Ariosto's great good sense. Thus, by a subtle and inevitable transition, he who cares for his own house can easily become a collector. [...]

The true lover of furnishings is not a master for the comfort of his friends, nor for their astonishment. It is not without reluctance and annoyance that he consents to conduct the *tour du propriétaire* for visitors. He errs who believes that he lives only for this. He does not want a beautiful house to entertain others in it, or to swell with their admiration. Narcissus has no use for the admiration of the nymphs. He is a solitary contemplative, and rather melancholy¹. [...]

Galleries, churches, famous viewpoints, landscapes immortalised by poets, yes, all this leaves me far from indifferent; but for houses I have a weakness. In them I feel not only more in touch with the past, but the very disposition of the furnishings acts upon me like an enchantment. The scent of furniture, of waxed floors, of ancient rooms, is as dear to me as, and perhaps dearer than, the fragrance of spring meadows; and among my own furniture I am especially fond of a small Restoration dressing table in fragrant cedar wood, which in the stillness exhales its light scent in rare breaths, which one must seek by standing in just the right spot, as one does to view a painting.

And I have a weakness for watercolours of interiors, of the sort painted in such numbers especially in the first half

of the nineteenth century, patient works of minor artists and amateurs, who reproduced every piece of furniture and every utensil, every detail of carpets and curtains, and the play of light and shadow in the room¹⁰. [...]

However inferior written descriptions may be in evocative power to painted images, they are not without delight to read. They too, like small paintings of interiors, allow one to penetrate into the intimacy of other people's homes without leaving one's own armchair. Of certain minor works by [Honoré de] Balzac, one remembers only such pages as that in *Un début dans la vie* where Madame Moreau's pavilion is described¹¹. [...]

The inventory of Balzac, however, lacks that precision which alone can render things tangible. [...]

And what is it that is lacking in Balzac's description [...] ? There is but one word to express it, and this word is Nordic, as the feeling it denotes is Nordic in origin: *Stimmung*¹². For the sense of the interior was born in times relatively close to our own. Quite another thing is the love of precious objects, which has always existed, up to that summit of refinement that troubled [...] Cicero; quite another to take delight, like the rich man of whom Horace speaks, in a house shining with ivory, with a golden ceiling and architraves of Hymettian marble resting on columns hewn from the remotest Africa¹³; and still another is this taste for the sumptuousness of furnishings, together with the sense of intimacy of the home, the home conceived as a mirror of the soul, as a state of mind, which is a modern discovery, like that of landscape in the sense in which we now understand it, and in which it was certainly not understood in the time of Horace, for whom the delights of rustic life consisted in rural labours accompanied, at most, by that sense of religiosity which Walter Pater, in his *Marius the Epicurean*¹⁴, sought to interpret for us, though portraying a gentleman-farmer perhaps closer to the Victorian English than to the ancient Romans¹⁵. [...]

And yet it is precisely in these Nordic environments, seemingly gloomy, that *Stimmung*, the sense of intimacy, first arises¹⁵.

The medieval idea of beauty and security was always that of something secluded, sheltered from the world: the cloister, the castle, the walled city, the enclosed garden, the orchard; the French of the fifteenth century, with the help of tapestries, transformed their rooms into exquisite, shadowy artificial gardens, where the life of woods, fields, and hunts appeared faintly reflected, like light filtered through deep waters. A still, aquarium-like atmosphere reigns in the first paintings of interiors in the modern sense of the word: interiors that are not merely «rooms», but mirrors of the soul. In the miniature of the Birth of Saint John attributed to Hubert Van Eyck, in the famous *Heures de Milan* of 1416¹⁶, a door in the background, surmounted by a shelf laden with dishes and kitchenware, reveals other rooms crossed by tranquil lights, and every object is minutely

rendered not only in that background but also in the chest and on the table in the foreground, so that the painting breathes a sense of order and cleanliness which dominates even the figures themselves, and is the soul of the representation. A similar harmonious peace reigns in the portrait of the merchant Arnolfini and his wife painted by Jan Van Eyck in 1434¹⁷, where the two spouses, motionless as wax figures, seem to conform to the still life of the surrounding things [...]. Here too, *Stimmung* is above all determined by the sense of the apartment conveyed by the open door leading to other rooms [...].

This sense of intimacy, which the northerners so often expressed in their depictions of the studies of saints and humanists – [Albrecht] Dürer's *Saint Jerome* seated in the warmth of the sun by the window of his cluttered room, between the cardinal's hat and a gourd with elegant tendrils¹⁸; the other *Saint Jerome* by a Neapolitan imbued with such a Flemish spirit that the painting was even attributed to Hubert Van Eyck¹⁹, that *Saint Jerome* lovingly tending his lion, drawing a thorn from its paw in that small alcove lined with shelves packed with books, vases, boxes, bottles, letters, painted with that minute zeal one will find centuries later among Biedermeier watercolourists of interiors; Erasmus of Rotterdam by Quentyn Matsys²⁰, enclosed, almost wrapped within the wooden casing of the walls, with those hanging scissors between the shelves of books – this sense of intimacy is not to be found in the interiors painted by our Renaissance artists, where – see, for example, [Domenico] Ghirlandaio's *Birth of the Virgin*²¹ – architecture introduces a solemn and formal note; except in one, [Vittore] Carpaccio, who learned from the northerners the magic of the door that lets one glimpse other rooms, as in the *Birth of the Virgin* in the Bergamo museum and especially in that *Dream of Saint Ursula*, which gives us all the poetry of a Renaissance interior²², made of airy spaces and delicate vigour: slender bed columns, graceful statuettes on the door lintels, a small altarpiece on the wall with its lamp and its stoup, delicate little trees in elegant pots at the window, the chair back tapering upward, until the upward aspiration of the vertical lines and the vast calm of the horizontals – the edge of the wainscoting running all around the room, the profile of the bed and canopy, which find their counterpart in the parallel of the ceiling – seem to echo in the two figures: the angel advancing with a tremor of sharp wings, the saint resting on the bed in perfect calm.

That sense of vastness and emptiness which prevents us from feeling *Stimmung* in the interiors of a Ghirlandaio or an Andrea del Sarto is entirely absent in the *Dream of Saint Ursula*, a rare document, south of the Alps, of a mode of feeling that had already spread in the north. [...]

Perhaps it is the predominance of the architectural element that hinders intimacy in Renaissance interiors, as it does

in painted interior scenes where furniture has a structural function. [...]

But when, in the eighteenth century, France began to prefer townhouses and country pavilions – *hôtels* and *maisons de plaisance* – to great palaces, when court life demanded variety, comfort, and gaiety, then began the golden age of furnishing²³, born from the confluence of bourgeois and aristocratic taste, just as those two forms of taste met in the prose of the *Spectator*, giving it that tone of distinction combined with affability, of humanity and classical composure²⁴. [...]

Thus began that domestic and accessible neoclassicism which had its full spring in the France of Louis XVI, its summer in the Empire, and its languid autumn in the delightful clumsiness of the Biedermeier²⁵. [...]

If we now imagine, as in a retrospective exhibition of furnishing, the interiors created in Europe in recent centuries, we seem to discern a series of Vichian courses and recourses [...]. That from geometric Gothic one passes to the curvilinear, and from this to the perpendicular, with the consequent alteration of decorative composition from closed in the geometric to flowing in the curvilinear (or *flamboyant*); that to the rectilinear classicism of the Renaissance succeeds the curvilinear of the Baroque, with a change in the character of decoration analogous to that just mentioned for the Gothic; that from perfect symmetry one proceeds by degrees to an excess of picturesque and dancing dynamism (in the Rococo, with its vegetal motifs, reeds, palm branches, symbols of movement), and that to this there follows a reaction of excessive static rigidity (Neoclassicism, Empire), which in turn yields, from that crystallised and archaeological uniformity, to a new recurrence of the picturesque, no less archaeological, but changeable and eccentric, inspired by all extinct styles, until the resolution in the dynamic naturalism of *art nouveau*; that this in turn provokes, in the years nearest our own, a reaction marked by an essential nakedness of line, by pure and strongly asserted geometric forms: these are phenomena not predictable with mathematical certainty in detail (not reducible, that is, to Spinozist theorems and corollaries), since they arise from human fantasy, and yet assignable to a general law that relates the rhythm of taste to that of nature and the universe, and allows us to distinguish in it cycles and seasons. And if so, should we not foresee the furnishing of tomorrow, of that tomorrow which designers will find bare, bare as never artist dreamed of finding wall or ground for his new projects – bare as the ancient houses, the illustrious palaces, are swept and emptied away, so that perhaps that very void will make them dizzy, and on the brink of a world that would rise again from its ruins they will feel themselves wavering, lost?

i. Cf. E. de Goncourt, *La Maison d'un artiste*: «*Cette passion... ce plaisir solitaire... doit son développement au vide, à l'ennui du cœur...*».

ii. And it was to be another English gentleman, Sir Archibald Geikie, who would write at length about the love of the Romans for nature, in *The Love of Nature among the Romans*, London 1912, with chapters on flowers and animals in Roman life.

[Mario Praz, *La Filosofia dell'arredamento*, Documento, Librario Editore, Rome 1945, pp. 21-115]

10. That is, what are commonly called «conversation pieces». Praz devoted to this genre his *Scene di conversazione* (U. Bozzi, Rome 1970), itself inspired by the book by S. Sitwell, *Conversation Pieces. A Survey of English Domestic Portraits and Their Painters*, B.T. Batsford, London 1936.

11. Cf. H. de Balzac, *Un début dans la vie*, in Id., *La Comédie humaine*, ed. Furne, Paris 1845, pp. 5-15.

12. It is interesting to note that, in line with the idea that a house functions as a resonance chamber, Praz uses a word whose original meaning is that of musical intonation or tuning, derived from the verb *stimmen* (to tune an instrument). Yet it is equally true that the term had already been used philosophically by Immanuel Kant in the *Critique of Judgment* (1790) to refer to the harmonic quality of aesthetic taste, and by Friedrich Schiller, who broadened its use in the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795). Praz's sense of *Stimmung* as atmospheric tonality is, in any case, something absolutely original, which ultimately becomes central in many other readings of domestic space – even internationally – above all for its capacity to identify an idea of interiority well before the nineteenth-century bourgeois conception, and thus to lay the groundwork for a much broader cultural interpretation in this regard. See, for instance, W. Rybczynski, *Home. A Short History of an Idea*, Penguin, New York 1986; C. Rice,

The Emergence of the Interior. Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity, Routledge, London 2006; S. Muthesius, *The Poetic Home. Designing the 19th-Century Domestic Interior*, Thames & Hudson, New York 2009.

13. Cf. M. Tullius Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes*, V; Q. Horatius Flaccus, *Carmina*, II, 18, vv. 1-3.

14. W. Pater, *Marius the Epicurean. His Sensations and Ideas*, Macmillan & Co., London 1885.

15. The following analysis, based on a pictorial iconographic repertoire, here becomes canonical for the interpretation of a theme which, by its very nature, often lacks adequate material and documentary references for a proper historical framing.

16. Preserved in the Museo Civico d'Arte Antica of Palazzo Madama, Turin.

17. Held in the National Gallery, London.

18. *Saint Jerome in His Study* by Albrecht Dürer is a burin engraving dated 1514, with one of the best existing impressions preserved in the Staatliche Kunsthalle of Karlsruhe.

19. Praz refers here, without citing it directly, to the painting by Colantonio, executed around 1445 and now in the Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples.

20. Dated 1517 and held in the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome.

21. Fresco executed between 1486 and 1490 in the Tornabuoni Chapel of Santa Maria Novella, Florence.

22. Dated 1495 and preserved in the Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

23. This is a historically accepted interpretation, confirmed among others by Peter Thornton in *The Authentic Decor. The Domestic Interior 1620-1920*, Viking, New York 1984, pp. 14-21. A long passage from the original text is omitted here, containing a historical reconstruction of furnishing over the last centuries. For full iconographic reference, see the illustrated edition of 1964.

24. «The Spectator» is a British weekly magazine of politics, culture, and current affairs, first published in July 1828.

25. For further thematic insights of this kind, also by Praz, see in addition to those already cited *Gusto neoclassico*, Sansoni, Florence 1940 (Eng. transl. *On Neoclassicism*, transl. by Angus Davidson, Thames & Hudson, London 1969); and the entry *Mobilio*, in *Enciclopedia Universale dell'Arte*, Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, Venice-Rome, Sansoni, Florence 1959, vol. IX, cols. 466-529.

[JL]

Bruno Zevi

Space, the Protagonist of Architecture

1948

The lack of a satisfactory history of architecture stems from the general inability of most people to understand space, and from the failure of historians and critics of architecture to apply and disseminate a coherent method of spatial analysis of buildings¹.

Everyone who has even briefly reflected on this subject knows that the distinctive character of architecture – the feature by which it differs from all other artistic activities – lies in its working through a three-dimensional vocabulary that includes man [sic]. Painting operates on two dimensions, even when it may suggest three or four. Sculpture operates in three dimensions, but man remains outside it, separate, he observes those three dimensions from without. Architecture, on the other hand, is like a great hollowed-out sculpture into whose interior man enters and moves about².

When you wish to build a house, the architect shows you a perspective of an exterior view and perhaps another of the living room. Then he shows you plans, elevations, and sections, that is, he represents the architectural volume by breaking it down into the planes that enclose and divide it: exterior and interior walls, vertical and horizontal planes. From the use of this representational method, reproduced in technical histories of architecture and illustrated in popular histories of art by photographs, derives, to a large extent, our spatial illiteracy.

The plan of a building is in fact nothing more than an abstract projection onto a horizontal plane of all its walls, a reality that no one ever sees except on paper, whose sole justification lies in the need to measure, for the workers who must physically execute the construction, the distances between its various elements. Elevations and sections, interior and exterior, serve to measure heights. But architecture does not result from the sum of the widths, lengths, and heights of the constructive elements that enclose space; rather, it derives from the void, from the enclosed space, from the interior space

in which men walk and live. In other words, we use as a representation of architecture the practical transference that the architect makes of its dimensions for the builder's use. For the purposes of seeing architecture, this is roughly equivalent to a method that, in order to illustrate a painting, would give the dimensions of the frame or calculate the intervals between the various colours by reproducing them separately. [...]

Anyone who wishes to begin the study of architecture must first understand that a plan may appear abstractly beautiful on paper, four façades may seem well studied for their balance of solids and voids, of projections and recesses, the overall volume may even seem well proportioned, and yet the building may turn out to be poor architecture³. The interior space, that space which [...] cannot be fully represented in any form, which cannot be grasped or experienced except directly, is the protagonist of the architectural fact⁴. To grasp space, to «see» it, constitutes the key to understanding buildings. Until we learn not only to comprehend it theoretically but to apply it as a fundamental element in architectural criticism, a true history and, consequently, a true enjoyment of architecture will only be vaguely granted to us. [...]

An immense, and certainly disproportionate, part of the pages devoted to architecture in school histories of art concerns the sculptural, pictorial, social, and even psychological history of buildings, not their architectural reality, their spatial essence. This material is, without doubt, valuable [...]. But it would be absurd to forget [...] its original purpose and its ultimate goal [...]. All archaeological, historical, and philological research is useful only insofar as it prepares and enriches the synthetic possibility of a history of architecture⁵.

What is architecture? And, more pertinently, what is non-architecture? Is it correct to identify architecture with artistic building and non-architecture with ugly building? In other words, is the distinction between architecture and non-ar-

chitecture based purely on an aesthetic judgement? And what is this space that is the protagonist of architecture? How many dimensions does it have?

These are the immediate questions faced by architectural criticism. Let us attempt to answer them, beginning with the last, which is the most specific.

We have said that the four façades of a house, a church, or a palace, no matter how beautiful they may be, constitute only the box within which the architectural jewel is enclosed. The box may be finely wrought, daringly sculpted, tastefully pierced; it may be a masterpiece, but it remains a box [...]. In every building, the container is the wall structure, the content is the interior space. Very often one conditions the other [...]. But this rule has numerous exceptions in the past, particularly in Baroque architecture. Frequently, throughout building history, we find constructions in which there exists a clear disparity between container and content, and even a cursory analysis shows that, more often than not, indeed, far too often, the wall structure has been the object of greater thought and effort than the architectural space itself. [...]

The fourth dimension once seemed to answer satisfactorily the question of the dimensions of architecture. [...] Yet a dimension common to all the arts can evidently not be the distinctive feature of any one of them, and therefore architectural space is not exhausted within the four dimensions⁵. [...].

To be more precise [...] the fourth dimension suffices to define architectural volume, that is, the wall box enclosing space. But space in itself – the essence of architecture – transcends the limits of the fourth dimension.

How many dimensions, then, does this architectural «void» possess? Five, ten, perhaps infinite. But for our purposes it suffices to establish that architectural space cannot be defined in terms of the dimensions of painting or sculpture. It is a phenomenon that materialises only in architecture and therefore constitutes its specific character.

The reader will understand that at this point the question «What is architecture?» has already found its answer. To say, as is customary, that architecture is beautiful building and non-architecture is ugly building has no clarifying value, since beauty and ugliness are relative, and since in any case one would first have to offer an analytical definition of building itself, starting again from the beginning.

The most precise definition that can be given of architecture today is the one that takes into account its interior space⁶. Beautiful architecture will be that which possesses an interior space that attracts us, elevates us, subdues us spiritually; ugly architecture will be that whose interior space annoys and repels us. But the crucial point is to establish that whatever lacks interior space is not architecture⁷. [...].

Yet here two serious misunderstandings may arise, which would not only nullify the value of the preceding argument but render the spatial interpretation of architecture ridiculous. They are:

1) that architectural spatial experience can be had only within a building, that is, that urban space does not exist or has no value;

2) that space is not only the protagonist of architecture but exhausts the architectural experience, and that consequently a spatial interpretation of a building suffices as a critical instrument for judging it.

These misunderstandings must be immediately dispelled.

The spatial experience proper to architecture extends into the city, into streets and squares, alleys and parks, stadiums and gardens, wherever human work has delimited «voids», that is, has created enclosed spaces. If within a building space is bounded by six planes (a floor, a roof, and four walls), this does not mean that a void bounded by five planes rather than six, as in a courtyard or a square, is not equally space. [...] Now, since every building volume, every wall box, constitutes a boundary, a break in spatial continuity, it is clear that each building contributes to the creation of two spaces: the interior spaces, defined completely by the architectural work, and the exterior, or urban, spaces, enclosed by that work and the adjacent ones⁸. It is therefore evident that all those themes we have excluded from architecture proper – bridges, obelisks, fountains, triumphal arches, groups of trees, and particularly façades – all come into play in the formation of urban spaces. Here, too, their particular artistic value is of secondary importance; what matters is their function as determinants of an enclosed space. Whether the façades are beautiful or ugly is, up to this point, secondary. Just as four well-decorated walls do not in themselves create a beautiful room, so too a group of excellent buildings may enclose a poor urban space, and vice versa⁹.

The second misunderstanding pushes reasoning to its logical extremes, and to absurdity, by drawing conclusions entirely foreign to the intentions of those who support a spatial interpretation of architecture. To say that interior space is the essence of architecture does not at all mean that the value of an architectural work is exhausted in its spatial value. Every building is characterised by a plurality of values: economic, social, technical, functional, artistic, spatial, and decorative [...]. The reality of the building results from all these factors, and a valid history of architecture cannot ignore any of them. Even if we set aside the economic, social, and technical factors and focus our attention on the artistic ones, it is clear that space in itself, although the noun of architecture, is not sufficient to define it. [...]

The text reproduced here is an excerpt from *Saper vedere l'architettura* by Bruno Zevi, published in Turin by Einaudi in 1948, and regarded by many – including Paolo Portoghesi – as the true founding act of a «critique of space». As proof of its international influence, one may note its numerous and important translations: into English (*Architecture as Space*, Horizon Press, New York 1957), French (*Savoir voir l'architecture*, Minuit, Paris 1959), and Spanish (*Saber ver la arquitectura*, Editorial Poseidón, Buenos Aires 1951). For a critical introduction, see P. Ciorra, ed., *Bruno Zevi. Scritti, 1934-2000*, Electa, Milan 2001; R. Dulio, *Introduzione a Bruno Zevi*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 2008.

2. These aspects will be addressed more extensively later. Here, in the immediate context, it is enough to highlight the remarkable similarity with what had been written twenty years earlier by Salvatore Vitale, with whom Zevi had a rather turbulent relationship, having harshly criticised his second book, after having warmly praised the first. Cf. S. Vitale, *L'estetica dell'architettura e altri scritti*, C. Lenza, ed., Editrice Compositori, Bologna 2010, pp. 57-63.

3. The recurring reference here, and in the following paragraphs, to architectural education serves Zevi to reaffirm his distance from Giovannoni, who had promoted the 1932 university reform applying, to all Italian schools of architecture, the model established in Rome, following the German *Bauforschung* approach of historical-philological orientation. Cf. G. Giovannoni, ed., *La scuola di Architettura di Roma*, Paolo Cremonese Editore, Rome 1932.

4. It is worth noting, in relation to what has been said above, that despite Zevi's continual references to Frank Lloyd Wright, the spatial issue he addresses is, above all, a theme of essentially German origin. Gottfried Semper was the first to discuss architecture without reference to the architectural orders, arguing that its first impulse was to enclose space (cf. *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten oder praktische Aesthetik*, Frankfurt 1860-1863). Similarly, August Schmarsow was the first to write that space exists only and always

in relation to a subject who constitutes its generative centre (cf. *Das Wesen der architektonischen Schöpfung*, Hiersemann, Leipzig 1894). Zevi himself acknowledged his debt to the *Einfühlung* school of Robert Vischer and Heinrich Wölfflin, to Konrad Fiedler's concept of «pure visibility», and to Alois Riegl's notion of the «age of space» – as well as, for different reasons, to Henri Focillon and Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti – in his *Architettura in nuce*, Sansoni, Florence 1979, *passim*.

5. Here Zevi clearly demonstrates both his proximity to the thought of Sigfried Giedion and his introduction of the theme of the fourth dimension into the architectural field (cf. *Space, Time and Architecture. The Growth of a New Tradition*, Harvard UP, Cambridge MA 1941), and his desire to take a step beyond it.

6. «The interior environment, the space within which one lives, is the great fact of the building – the environment, which must be expressed on the exterior as an enclosed fact». F.L.L. Wright, *In the Cause of Architecture IX*, in *Architectural Record*, December 1928, p. 510.

7. It is almost superfluous to stress how this position, though heteronomous, was seminal for the development of interior architecture in Italy. Indeed, this Wrightian reference to the crucial value of interior space influenced first Giulio Carlo Argan's concept of «interiority», then Renato De Fusco's notion of the

«architectural cavity» (*invaso architetonico*), and later Carlo De Carli's idea of «primary space», through which he ascribed to the interior «the same genetic interiority of the space itself». It can therefore be said that Zevi laid the groundwork for the original attempt by which interior architecture in Italy – particularly in academic and critical contexts – came to reject any subordination to urban architecture, focusing instead on the generative process that connects all scales of design. For a detailed reconstruction in this sense, see M. Basanelli, J. Leveratto, *Per una storia della Scuola degli Interni in Italia*, in G. Ottolini, *La Scuola di Milano e gli Interni*, Thymos, Naples 2024, pp. 50-61.

8. This is another fundamental passage in Zevi's text, especially with regard to the generalised applicability of spatial thought, already anticipated by Herman Sörgel in 1918 with his extension of the meaning of interiority to all urban figures that «have been conceived through spatial thought» (cf. H. Sörgel, *Einführung in die Architektural Ästhetik*, Piloty & Loehle, München 1918, p. 51). As evidence of its impact, it may be compared with Renato De Fusco's «hypothesis for the urban sign» (*in Segni, storia e progetto dell'architettura*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1978, pp. 77-84) and with what soon developed into a full-fledged theory of «urban interiors» (G. Ottolini, *Conformazione e attrezzatura dello spazio aperto*, in «Quaderni del Dipartimento di Progettazione dell'Architettura», no. 4, 1987,

At this point, the lay reader may perhaps feel confused. If decoration has importance, if sculpture and painting, at first excluded, re-enter the field of architecture, what has all this discussion achieved?

Evidently, not the discovery of new ideas or the invention of esoteric theories of architecture, but rather the ordering and orientation of the ideas that already exist and that everyone intuitively feels. It is true that decoration, sculpture, and painting fall once again within the study of buildings [...]; everything falls within architecture, just as, after all, every great phenomenon of art, thought, or human practice includes everything else. But in what way do they enter? Not indifferently, as one might suppose in affirming a generic and vacuous unity of the arts. They enter, in the architectural equation, in their proper roles as nouns and adjectives, as essence and as extensions.

The history of architecture is first and foremost the history of spatial conceptions⁹. Architectural judgement is fundamentally a judgement of the interior space of buildings. If this judgement cannot be made due to the absence of interior space, [...] the building [...] lies outside the history of architecture: as a volumetric ensemble, it belongs to the history of urbanism; as an intrinsic artistic value, to the history of sculpture. If the judgement of the interior space is negative, the building belongs to non-architecture or bad architecture, even though its decorative elements may fall within the history of sculpture. If the judgement of the space of a building is positive, it belongs to the history of architecture even if its decoration is ineffective, that is, even if the building as a whole is not entirely satisfactory. Finally, when the judgement of the spatial conception of a building, of its volumetry, and of its decorative extensions is positive, then we are faced with the great, complete works in whose sublime reality the expressive means of all the figurative arts collaborate.

In conclusion, although architecture may encompass the contributions of the other arts, it is interior space, the space that surrounds and includes us, that sets the key for judging a building, that forms the «yes» or «no» of every aesthetic verdict on architecture. Everything else is important, or rather, may be important, but it functions in relation to the spatial conception. Whenever, in history or criticism, this hierarchy of values is lost from sight, confusion arises, and the current disorientation in matters of architecture is only increased.

That space, the void, should be the protagonist of architecture is, upon reflection, perfectly natural: for architecture is not only art, not only the image of historical life or of life lived by us and by others; it is, above all, the environment, the scene upon which our lives unfold¹⁰.

i. The study of architectural history, which in Italy has deepened and intensified over recent decades, though largely under the influence of a positivist mentality, has produced a critical inhibition, a devaluation of ideas with respect to the «fact» and even to the «date». [...] Archaeological and philological production, with its discoveries and documents, often overturns historical-critical interpretations and provides new material for interpretation; but it can never, by itself, produce historical-critical works. For this reason, to make historical synthesis dependent on the completion of philological research appears illegitimate. [...].

ii. The spaces we here call didactically exterior, and which are exterior with respect to the building but interior with respect to the city, must be characterised using the same method adopted for interior spaces. [...].

[Bruno Zevi, *Saper vedere l'architettura*, Einaudi, Turin 1948, pp. 21-33]

Giulio Carlo Argan

On the Subject of Interior Space

1948

Just as the understanding of painting and sculpture is still delayed by the prejudice of imitation of nature (which has become all the more insidious since it ceased to be naïve), the understanding of architecture is still impeded by the corresponding and opposite prejudice, which has never been naïve¹. Not to mention that when one says of architecture that it is a metempsychic art², that it creates and does not represent, one always implies «as opposed to painting and sculpture, which are mimetic arts». And that very implication is enough to spoil everything and to unleash the infinite range of pseudo-concepts: from architecture adhering to needs as a shoe to the foot, to architecture-as-music and architecture-as-message, revealing the supreme laws of the world. To the denunciation of those prejudices, to their refutation and their confinement within the historical, cultural, or aesthetic spheres that produced them, Bruno Zevi has devoted himself with assured success³; and it is fair to wish his highly effective guide for «learning to see architecture» the didactic fortune enjoyed by the almost homonymous book by Matteo Marangoni⁴.

There is, however, in Zevi's book, an aspect not only didactic and orientative but methodological as well; and it is undoubtedly worth examining even beyond the limits within which the author, for the sake of practical clarity, has confined it. The original cue is given by that concept of «interior space», assumed as the discriminant between architecture and non-architecture, or between art and building; and which, in the end, takes shape and declares itself as a fundamental instance of modern architectural culture, enclosing within the broader scope of urbanism that initial dichotomy of art and non-art within an activity homogeneous in its processes and aims, that is, building itself. «Beautiful architecture will be that which possesses an interior space that attracts us, elevates us, subdues us spiritually; ugly architecture will be that whose interior space annoys and repels us. But the crucial point is to

establish that whatever lacks interior space is not architecture».

It thus comes naturally to ask why interior space possesses an aesthetic validity denied to exterior space; and why «the four façades of a house, a church, or a palace, no matter how beautiful they may be, constitute only the box within which the architectural jewel is enclosed».

It is obviously superfluous to remind Zevi that, for example, the façade of the Pazzi Chapel⁵, although it is a wall of that enclosing box, is a perfect work of architecture: since the divisions and members of that front do not derive from a strict projection of the interior spaces onto the plane, that surface is expressive of interior space and repeats from it its value, which indeed is not that of surface but of plane, understanding by plane, as I have recently had occasion to specify, the «incision» of the visual pyramid or the zone in which depths become measurable «by comparison» and are constituted, beyond every emotional or illusory effect, in «proportions»⁶. Just as the cell of a Greek temple is an enclosed space without being an interior space, a Renaissance façade is an interior space even though it is an open one.

It therefore seems that the problem must be shifted, recognising in interior space nothing other than a communication or reciprocity between what is inside and what is outside the enclosing box, that is, the formal value born from conceiving the architectural image as something that inserts itself into reality and modifies it: a process evidently realised in the act of building.

Moreover, Zevi does not conceal the historical origins of his concept: the experience of Cubist painting and of the architecture of [Frank Lloyd] Wright, the fourth dimension.

Indeed, the distinction does not consist merely in the addition of a fourth to the three perspectival dimensions: it is well known that the scientific rigidity of such a process was trans-

pp. 38-50). For an extended discussion of this topic, see the commentary on Gianni Ottolini's text in this section.

9. In this regard, in addition to the aforementioned work by Vitale, see the much better known one by Nikolaus Pevsner in *An Outline of European Architecture* (Penguin, London 1943, p. xxi), whose introduction ends rather unequivocally with the sentence: «the history of European architecture [i]s a history of expression, and primarily of spatial expression».

10. See the well-known 1898 statement by Adolf Loos, according to which «the general task of architecture is to provide a habitable and welcoming space». A. Loos, *Das Prinzip der Bekleidung* (1898), in Id., *Ins Leere Gesprochen 1897-1900*, Georges Crès et Cie, Paris-Zürich 1921, p. 105 [Editor's translation]. [JL]

The passage reproduced here, later reissued in *Progetto e destino* (Il Saggiatore, Milan 1965), was originally published by Giulio Carlo Argan in «Metron» – the journal directed by Bruno Zevi – in 1948, and constitutes a kind of response, in the form of a critical review, to the publication of Zevi's essay *Saper vedere l'architettura* (1948) [excerpted in this volume]. Of great interest, also with respect to the context of its publication, is the revision of Zevi's concept of the interior, which Argan further developed independently in two later essays (see G.C. Argan, *Il problema dell'arredamento*, in «La casa. Quaderni di architettura e critica», no. 2, 1956, pp. 5-10; Id., *Interni*, in *Enciclopedia Universale dell'Arte*, Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, Venice-Rome, Sansoni, Florence 1959, vol. VII, cols. 580-587) [both excerpted in this volume], ultimately constituting an original and substantially opposite position on the subject.

1. This is, of course, a question of such deep historical scope that it precludes an exhaustive bibliography on the topic. In this context, it suffices to recall Salvatore Vitale's already cited statement, according to which «in painting and sculpture [...] the artist imitates reality as it already exists in Nature, albeit idealised; but in architecture, instead, he creates a new reality that is not found in

Nature». S. Vitale, *L'estetica dell'architettura. Saggio sullo sviluppo dello spirito costruttivo*, Laterza, Bari 1928, p. 28 [excerpted in this volume].

2. A curious term, used as the opposite of «mimetic», appearing only – in the alternative gloss «metessic» – in the readings by Terenzio Mamiani and Vincenzo Gioberti of the Platonic and Pythagorean theories (see *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, UTET, Milan 1961, vol. X, p. 268). Implicit in the choice of this term is a critique of the idealism of Crocean origin, from which, however, Vitale himself derived.

3. B. Zevi, *Saper vedere l'architettura*, Einaudi, Turin 1948 [excerpted in this volume].

4. M. Marangoni, *Saper vedere*, Treves, Treccani, Tumminelli, Milan-Rome 1933.

5. Argan refers here to the work of Filippo Brunelleschi, begun in 1442, located within the first cloister of the Basilica of Santa Croce in Florence.

6. Starting from Leon Battista Alberti, Argan had already advanced the idea that the plane is not merely a theoretical construction (see *Forma e destinazione dell'architettura*, Einaudi, Turin 1948), but a structure capable of making space measurable and intelligible – beyond mere illusionistic or emotional effect – as he would later clarify in *Storia dell'arte italiana*, vol. II, *Da Giotto a Leonardo*, Sansoni, Florence 1988, pp. 103 and ff.

lated, in certain modern architects, Le Corbusier, for instance, into the moral aridity of their reformist programme. Interior space is that which «cannot be fully represented in any form, which cannot be grasped or experienced except directly». In other words: exterior space is space given and accepted as a notion, space presented *a priori*, expressed through certain pre-established criteria of measurement or formal schemes; interior space is the space that is posited or created or grafted together with form, and finds its expression and its measure only within it. It is certainly possible to compare a building constructed according to established or traditional rules and principles with those very rules and principles, or with the conception of space that they transmit; but such a comparison is impossible if the building, instead of reflecting or applying a certain conception of space, posits space in the direct and concrete terms of its forms. In the first case we have a textual application of already known concepts or, worse, their rhetorical exaltation, the «monumental»; in the second, we have the positing of a new concept. This reasoning seems obvious for modern architecture, which continually offers us new spatial problems and tears us away from our habitual notions of space: whence the surprise of many at hearing solutions that seem to them most arbitrary and fanciful defined as «rational» or justified by practical necessity. But when one seeks to explain [Filippo] Brunelleschi through central perspective, or [Francesco] Borromini through the application of projective geometry to the determination of architectural form, one forgets that central perspective is a «deduction *a posteriori*» from Brunelleschi's architecture, and that the application of projective geometry to architectural form is likewise a «deduction *a posteriori*», precisely by [Guarino] Guarini, from Borromini's architecture. If instead we relate Brunelleschi's architecture to the spatial tradition to which it was historically opposed, the Tuscan architecture of the late fourteenth century, or Borromini's architecture to the imaginative and picturesque space of Bernini's, it will be easy to recognise that the new idea of space appears first in the formal or constructive intuition of Brunelleschi or Borromini, before in any perspectival or geometrical formulation⁷. Precisely through that intuitive character, which necessarily finds expression in constructive acts, Brunelleschi's or Borromini's space is interior space even when it takes shape in a wall or in the almost purely graphic spiral of a dome's lantern.

A mere wall too may be interior space, as in the stage of [Andrea] Palladio's Teatro Olimpico or in the famous geometric screen of Wright's Midway Gardens: the former for the space it opens beyond empirical space, the latter for its being set as a screen between two limitless spaces that mirror and interpenetrate one another through interwoven structures. Such spaces are interior not in relation to a material enclosure, but

in relation to the artist; and I would suggest calling them rather interiorized than interior, like those of which one does not «have» but rather «makes» experience in architecture⁸.

Finally, the process of architecture, construction, is none other than the process of positing or determining space, of «spacing».

Whence arises and how is organised within the human spirit this need or will to «space», that is not a question that can be discussed in this brief note. Yet whatever the initial impulse, there is no doubt that through that process man [sic] recognises and defines a relationship between himself and the world, delimiting a «zone of experience» within which his personality is, in any case, «active». In dimension or in form (two terms that modern artistic consciousness tends to identify), man draws the limit of his own being or action, the term of validity of his experience. What is generally called the evolution of the concept of space is nothing but the becoming and transformation of the conception of life itself, of its setting as goal the contemplation or knowledge of the world, or conversely, an inner and profound participation in reality. The very economic or utilitarian foundation now recognised in architectural form may rather be understood as the demand for a form immediately adherent or inherent to life, almost moulded upon the acts and movements of our daily existence; just as perspective, which justifies all the formal schemes of Renaissance architecture, is the expression of an objectified space, the logical outcome of that process of distinguishing the object from the subject which is the very condition of detached contemplation.

Zevi is therefore right when he extends the limits and the function of modern architecture until they merge with the limits and function of urbanism, which is precisely, in the strictest sense, interior space or space that is created, and which, precisely because of this continual creation, cannot be contained within a finite form. [...]

Urbanism as the organic extension of plans rather than as the perspectival extension of façades, urbanism that is not spectacle but spatial function, that has no fixed viewpoints or has infinite ones, that is realised not in the symmetrical juxtaposition of masses but in the living instrumentality of the plan, that is lived and acted rather than merely seen, that defines the individual's place within society rather than his position before nature, this, we believe, is the goal of modern architects who prefer to create conditions of life rather than conditions of view, and to identify in forms human values rather than the symbols of eternal ideas.

[Giulio Carlo Argan, *A proposito di spazio interno*, in «Metron», no. 28, 1948, pp. 20-21]

8. This is the fundamental passage in Argan's theory as considered here, which once again develops in terms of relativisation. On the one hand, in fact, to replace *interno* (interior) with *interiore* (interiorized) – and thus, in original, with its comparative of superiority – means to relativise positional limits beyond the simple binary logic of what lies inside and what lies outside. On the other hand, it also means to bring the meaning of the word back to an experiential dimension constructed within architecture not as an object but as an active subject – whether this subjectivity refers, as he specifies in this passage, to that of the artist, or, as he writes in the following passage with regard to the «spacing», to that of the inhabitant. Thus, to Zevi's idea that views interior space as a genetic and therefore substantial element of architecture, Argan opposes an independent concept of space which, within the stable boundaries of architectural form, accommodates «the becoming and the transformation of the conception of life» – which is itself «moulded upon the acts and movements of our daily existence». And although later he expends considerable effort in reinforcing a supposed theoretical correlation between interiors and urbanism, it is already apparent here that the disciplinary field to which he actually refers, as his later essays demonstrate, is that of interior design. [JL]

7. The historical relativisation of the idea of space understood as an analytical category is here not only methodologically impeccable but also of great interest; such a category loses all effectiveness when applied to contexts that do not already contemplate it, from the outset, as a design principle.

Carlo Mollino

Utopias and Environments

1949

Every act reveals its author; every work is made in the image and likeness of the one who has shaped it, whether it be a thing, a man [sic], or an animal.

In the beginning was divination; just as the customs, nests, dens, or shells of animals came into being, so too, in man, were born ceremonies and laws, houses, garments, weapons, and every device for communicating, building, moving: *extensions of his own being*, to live, to affirm himself, and once more to take pleasure in that affirmation. Extensions of his taste, *taste* being nothing other than the individual or collective mode of reacting to the particular conditions of existence, just as lead and chalk react with differing imprints to the primordial condition of gravity.

The persistence or variability of internal or external conditions, understood in the broadest sense, creates a complex of particular qualities, preferences, and ever-changing sensitivities that constitutes *taste* in its becoming. Like all definitions, that of *taste* suffers from indistinct boundaries, where the characterisation of a being blends with that of the manner of being or wishing to be, of acting, thinking, and desiring.

The aim of these notes is to characterise the mutual reflections between the particular taste of interior architecture, that is, of that extension which is the environment, furniture included, and the corresponding society in its life of grandeur, misfortunes, misery, and ambition¹. Every intention of aesthetic criticism is excluded. [...]

It is commonplace [...] to observe the crisis of present-day society and its corresponding diagnoses in relation to the «decline of the West» and the like. Promised lands (nineteenth century) constantly found barren, despite a most refined industrial and mercantile activism, *a technical-scientific progress ungovernable and out of harmony with that of civilisation*, the death of ideals and of faiths left unreplaced, a peaceful and *clandestine omertà* and amorality, all are fragments of a

configuration still nebulous, yet converging in the image of a society that *denies its own present* and seeks, in the most contradictory forms, an escape [...] towards a *state* that is not its own. A state that is often a scene, illusorily and consciously constructed, and that is nothing other than the declaration of its own non-existence. It is with [François] Talma (1790)², and therefore with the advent of the Third Estate, that the cult of the *actor* is born, that is, of the one who knows how to bring to life the type longed for; this cult continues, on a grand scale, in the *star system* of the cinema: symbols of escape.

Apart from a *satisfaction of individual pre-eminence*, even gratuitous, apart from a biological refinement, *contemporary society no longer knows what it wants*. It no longer even needs, at bottom, a house, except for a scenographic vanity; the ideal of the house now lies in the hotel. [...] The artist, a man of his time, can do no more than reduce himself to the expression of a subjective world, problematically communicable. Extreme subjectivity, the cause of the incommunicability between public and artist, is itself a phenomenon new in history. Every artist emigrates toward unknown shores, individual and unanchored from a world that has disowned itself. From here to utopia is a short step.

It is time to acknowledge openly that the figurative arts, even in their noblest and most accomplished present manifestations, *sincerely* interest only a tiny handful of respectable specialists, whom the usual maniacs and snobs join in. It remains a fact that the majority [...] could not care less about modern figurative arts; this is not the place to discuss whether this represents, as for other arts (for example, tragedy), a natural agony. In the case before us, the practical instance, *particularly implicit in the activity of the architect*, fails fatally before the result of a house made *for a society that does not exist*, and *fails even when the aesthetic result is perfectly achieved*.

The text by Carlo Mollino reproduced here is an excerpt from a two-part history of furnishing and the domestic interior published in the pages of «Domus» in 1949. Presented in polemical form, in opposition to the standardisation of contemporary architecture, this history was never republished, despite containing remarkable insights into the idea of interior space and the articulation between architecture and furnishing. For further study and comparison, see C. Mollino, *Architettura di parole. Scritti 1933-1965*, M. Comba, ed., Bollati Boringhieri, Turin 2007.

1. Here Mollino seems to echo Argan's conception of the interior as the space of the «becoming [...] of life» (see G.C. Argan, *A proposito di spazio interno*, in «Metron», no. 28, 1948, p. 21) [excerpted in this volume], linking it, however, in his historical reading, to the concept of taste – and thus more to human aspirations and desires than to a pseudo-functional idea of everyday life. It is also interesting to note how he immediately replaces the term interior with environment, to indicate all those personal «extensions», including objects, of which the interior forms a part – the same notion already discussed by Le Corbusier in *L'art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*, Cres, Paris 1925 (Eng. transl. *The Decorative Art of Today*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1987, pp. 73-78). Most of Mollino's historical

reading preceding the immediate contemporaneity has been omitted here for reasons of space; for completeness, see the original article.
2. François-Joseph Talma (1763-1826) was a French stage actor, much admired and celebrated during the period of the Revolution and the Directory, and considered one of the first stars of modern theatre.

This practical failure is most sharply revealed in the interior of the house, in its furnishing, where the contrast between the world of the author and that of the inhabitant assumes multiple and immediate forms³. In the absence of an ideal interior landscape shared and interpretable within the understandable domain of a common taste, the architect has created an environment for a hyperuranian other-world, coinciding with his own dream and organised in his own image: a *world that does not exist, that cannot exist except in the realm of utopia*. An illusory everyday life that may well be built with the real elements that should have made it perfect, but which, in the present case, is dead before being born. An impeccable industrial and mechanical technique will permit the creation, to the utmost degree of purity and refinement, of dwellings for transhuman beings, pure spirits daily devoted to the serene enjoyment of untouchable spatial and chromatic relationships.

Quintessential equilibria of a Euclidean and Platonic world, where one is not allowed to have toothache, debts, family problems, time pressures, or painful delays. In these environments, *which will remain in history as genuine works of art, no less than the celebrated ones of any age*, the contingent can find no place. The collision with everyday life would result in continuous catastrophe: a newspaper on the floor, a table laid for dinner, a pair of slippers left behind, would correspond to a chain of collapses. I believe that reading a book in these astral environments is anything but easy: an armchair moved a few degrees from the intended position would be an intolerable dissonance amid such tension of golden sections. After admiration arises the feeling of uninhabitability [...]. Equally, and equally uninhabitable within the Western world, appear those ecstatic and serene Japanese houses [...], *true* only for their most sagacious inhabitants and for the dream of the Western architect.

After these golden knots (...1930), the developments of «modern architecture» proceed along more or less impeccable orbits, yet ever astral ones: formal and constructivist dynamism, psychological functionalism, the proclamation of romantic aspirations to a «return to nature», and again a return to the original positions of abstract formal exercises, even a declared negation of itself in exacerbated mechanismism (see existentialism). I repeat, these are astral and programmatic orbits, which critically and polemically interest only the usual tiny «élite», and which exert but the faintest influence *on the architecture that is actually being built* throughout the world⁴.

Equally optimistic and utopian is the ever-recurring, purely functional commitment of modern furnishing, still deluded by the idea of a taste for dimensional and organisational previsions, of obligatory paths calculated upon the schemes of a life as perfect as it is unknown, which might be mistaken for those of a torpedo-boat's targeting cabin. Schemes that fa-

tally fail in every objective when faced with the innumerable exceptions that are themselves the rule. And from the interior urbanism of the house the discussion might well extend to the observation of the failure of classical urbanism in general, that planned on paper, in all its most elastic developments, and chronically in agony since the very day of its birth, at the stage of realisation.

Finally, another aspect of utopia is the well-known intellectualistic rejection of *decoration properly so called*. Without presuming to launch into a disquisition on its essence, or to demonstrate its irreplaceability, I shall limit myself to noting its obstinacy in re-entering through the window into the environmental architectures of the greatest architects, beyond suspicion of any reactionary weakness. And it was the «abandon» to the Surrealist unconscious, even if a transitory label, that demonstrated its legitimacy in contemporary taste, as in every age. Voltaire's paradox remains truer than ever: «*Le superflu, chose très nécessaire*»⁵.

Those who discuss decoration customarily and blithely forget, or avoid asking themselves, the embarrassing question of its nature through the millennia, from the incision on a reindeer bone to the Greek frieze and the pattern on a fabric, a «creation of high fashion», and this despite all programmatic intentions to *functionalise* or to reduce to *harmonic measure* the purely formal or chromatic compositional elements. This *decoration*, a *useless* gesture, in the most precise sense of the term, is among the most exquisite signs of man's progressive removal from the animal, which is to say, of *civilisation*⁶. We stand at the antipodes of [Adolf] Loos's polemical *Ornement et crime*, of good memory (1908)⁷. There is no need to invoke Freud to find its origins in a *ludic* activity, a sublimated release of vitality or of an instinct «repressed» by the tension of an excessive normative technique, that is, an act of purely biological politics within daily life. Likewise, one could argue the *rational* disappointment before the vitalistic return of *organic* architecture.

The thread of this schematic outline of the history of the relations between furnishing and society can certainly not conclude with exhortations or proposals. As architects, we shall continue within utopia, the only way, today, to exist as such. The sole conclusion is to hope that we may belong to an *authentic* society, and that it, in turn, may not be so barbarous as to have no need of a house equally authentic¹.

i. A parallel between taste and environment [...] might seem a return to the old simplistic theory of the *milieu* of [Hippolyte] Taine or [Auguste] Comte. [...] Yet despite its elegance, such a declaration always offends an ancient human taste: that of seeing oneself as the dynamic, not merely the kinematic, reason for what happens to one.

[Carlo Mollino, *Utopie e ambientazione*, in «Domus», nos. 237-238, 1949, pp. 14-19 and 20-25]

5. Voltaire, *Le Mondain* (1736), v. 22, in Id., *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, vol. 9, Garnier Frères, Paris 1877, p. 206.
6. This reference to civilisation, immediately following that to Voltaire, closely recalls Mario Praz's *La filosofia dell'arredamento* (1945) [excerpted in this volume], according to which civilisation – understood as the process of formalising manners – reaches its apex precisely in the eighteenth century. Entirely in line with Praz, too, is the historical treatment that occupies the first part of Mollino's article – omitted here for reasons of space – as well as its anecdotal and caustically ironic tone. What is important to note, in any case, is the re-evaluation of the concept of decoration by one of the protagonists of modern design – at a time when the subject was simply beyond discussion.
7. The French title *Ornement et crime* is explained by the fact that the first transcript of Loos's lecture, delivered in Vienna on 21 January 1908, was published in that language. A. Loos, *Ornement et crime*, in «Les Cahiers d'Aujourd'hui», no. 5, 1913, pp. 25-36. [JL]

3. This is a clear opposition, on Mollino's part, between architecture and furnishing – in this case viewed as antithetical in their ability to accommodate the taste and way of life of their inhabitants. In reality, however, Mollino's distrust is directed less toward architecture itself than toward the contemporary design culture – functionalist and rationalist – and its tendency toward a supposed utopia, rather than toward an architecture opposed to furnishing.
4. It is interesting to note that two years after this article, again in the pages of «Domus», an editorial by its director, Gio Ponti, revisited this very theme of the distance between art and life, though reaching conclusions opposite to Mollino's: «Far from a divorce! “Crisis” of art? Art in crisis? [...] Misunderstanding? But this is a crisis of “that public”, not of “that art” [...] in relation to life! [...] If, in the end, there has been a crisis, it is the public's: but it is perfectly explicable (indeed a more than natural fact, and therefore not a crisis at all), because it is what occurs when art is taken beyond its own élite». G. Ponti, *Arte e vita*, in «Domus», no. 262, 1951, p. 1 [transl. by the editor].

Luigi Moretti

Structures and Sequences of Spaces

1953

An architecture is read through the various aspects of its figure, that is, in the terms by which it expresses itself: *chiaroscuro*, constructive texture, plasticity, the structure of interior spaces, the density and quality of materials, the geometric relationships of the surfaces, and others still more remote, such as color, which may at times assert themselves according to the elusive laws of resonance¹. Each of these terms is so closely interwoven with the others that, in that vivid, unstable, shifting act, never identical, which is the vision of an architecture, it is hardly possible to rest upon a single one of them and follow that alone.

All the facts, and we might say all the metaphysical figures, the beings, that compose it intervene in our conversations with an architecture, each reciting in its own language, whether of light, of weight, of measure, of matter, or of empty space: now calling upon the others, now repeating itself, now vanishing, in an expressive concatenation that is always changing, like light and human beings, yet possessing a final coherence, an immutable destiny, which is none other than the created order of their relationships, the structure of the work.

Naturally, if in an architecture every expressive aspect, every facet of its figure, is coordinated with the others, for example, the texture of *chiaroscuro* with the plastic organism or with the apparent organism of the construction, it would seem legitimate, in the critical analysis of a work, to take one of these aspects in abstraction from the rest, as an index of the work itself, and consequently to draw from it arguments valid for the entire architectural reality. It seems legitimate, yet in fact the results of such a critical process are at times excellent and at other times deplorable. It is enough to think of the precise insights and, at the same time, the gross errors reached by criticism that speculates on the pictorial or plastic language, or even on the constructive organism, of a work. The one and the other depend, certainly, on the subtlety of the analysis applied

Published for the first time in 1952 in the journal «Spazio» he founded, the excerpted essay presented here is one of Luigi Moretti's most renowned and innovative theoretical writings. Initially little regarded, the essay began to enjoy increasing attention from the 1970s onward – particularly thanks to Bruno Zevi, Manfredo Tafuri, and Massimo Scolari – following the renewed emphasis on the concept of space as structure. The text was republished on several occasions (beginning with L. Moretti, *Scritti di architettura*, F. Cellini, ed., Officina Edizioni, Rome 1971) with an important English translation (L. Moretti, *Structures and Sequences of Spaces*, in K.M. Hays, ed., *Oppositions Reader*, The MIT Press, Cambridge MA 1998, pp. 160-172), which played a decisive role in spreading Moretti's thought within the international context. For further analysis, see O.S. Pierini, *Per una teoria della composizione architettonica*, in *Spazio. Rivista delle arti e dell'architettura 1950-1953*, facsimile reprint of the journal, Quodlibet, Macerata 2007, pp. 7-17; and L. Spinelli, *Gli spazi in sequenza di Luigi Moretti*, LetteraVentidue, Siracusa 2012.

1. Unlike Bruno Zevi – whose *Saper vedere l'architettura* (1948) this essay is clearly indebted to – Moretti introduces here the term «figure» as the object of architectural reading, in order to distinguish its perceived, legible, and unified

to the chosen aspect, but above all on whether one is or is not conscious that one is operating upon a symbol of a reality of terrifying complexity. Nevertheless, even these unilateral critical explorations, whatever their outcomes, ultimately serve the much-invoked integral reading of works.

There is, however, one expressive aspect that encompasses the architectural fact with such amplitude that it seems possible to consider it, even in isolation, with greater confidence than the others. I mean the interior and empty space of an architecture². Indeed, it is enough to observe that certain expressive terms – light, shadow, plasticity, density of matter, construction – reveal themselves as aspects, formal or intellectual, of «matter» in its physical concreteness as it is employed in architecture, and therefore form a group of a certain homogeneity, one that is in its totality highly representative. Now it should be noted that the empty space of an architectural interior stands in exact opposition to this group as a specular, symmetrical, and negative value, as a true negative matrix, and as such it is capable of summing up both itself and its opposing terms. Especially when the interior space is the principal reason, or even the generating reason, for the building, as it most often is, it reveals itself as the seed, the mirror, the richest symbol of the entire architectural reality.

For the ancients this was perfectly clear, and for centuries so remained: from the Romans to the Romanesque, from the Gothic to [Filippo] Brunelleschi, from [Donato] Bramante to [Guarino] Guarini, the conquest and resolution of interior spaces coincided with the very conquests and history of architecture. Modern criticism has repeatedly focused, directly or indirectly, on interior spatiality as the determining, synthetic, even unique (and this is an error) aspect of architecture: it suffices here to recall Friedrich Ostendorf, [August] Schmarsow, and the lucid [Albert] Brinkmann³. More recently, Bruno Zevi has had the merit of stating the question clearly, even amid the

configuration from its geometric-material definition, understood instead, in Zevian terms, as «form». The term, of clear Gestalt lineage, is likely influenced by the Italian translation (published the previous year) of W. Köhler's *Gestalt Psychology*, Liveright Publishing Corporation, New York 1947 (Italian transl. *La psicologia della Gestalt*, Laterza, Bari 1951), and is central to the development of the spatial theme in a more markedly structuralist direction. In this sense, and specifically in reference to the concept of interior space, see R. De Fusco, *Segni, storia e progetto dell'architettura*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1973; R. Arnheim, *The Dynamics of Architectural Form*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1977 (Italian transl. *La dinamica della forma architettonica*, Feltrinelli, Milan 1981).
2. It is almost superfluous to recall that, according to Zevi, «The interior space – that space which [...] cannot be fully represented in any form, which cannot be grasped or experienced except directly – is the protagonist of the architectural event. [...] Everything else [...] may be important, but it is a function of the spatial conception. [...] For architecture is not only art, not only the image of historical life or of life lived by us and by others; it is, above all, the environment, the scene upon which our lives unfold». B. Zevi, *Saper vedere l'architettura*, Einaudi, Turin 1948, pp. 22-32 [excerpted in this volume].

nebulousness of contemporary architectural criticism, adrift between the most opposing points of reference⁴. Yet it is also true that the critical statements concerning interior stereometries were never pursued in a truly analytical investigation, neither as pure theory nor as philological analysis of specific works of architecture.

The connections between interior space and the other elements of an architecture are infinite and unyielding. It is enough to consider that an interior space has, as its limiting surface, that shell upon which are condensed and legible the energies and events that make it possible and form it, and whose existence, in turn, it generates. But interior volumes possess a concrete presence of their own, independently of the figure and solidity of the material that encloses them, as though they were formed of a rarefied substance devoid of energy yet extremely sensitive to receiving it⁵. They thus possess their own specific qualities, of which, I believe, four are manifest: geometric form, whether simple or complex; dimension, understood as the absolute quantity of volume; density, dependent upon the amount and distribution of light that permeates them; and «pressure» or «energetic charge», according to the greater or lesser imminence, at each point in space, of the bordering constructive masses and of the ideal energies emanating from them. This last quality is comparable to the pressure within a fluid in constant motion, which varies depending on the obstacles, resistances, and constrictions it encounters, or, similarly, to the potential of a space as a function of the electric masses that influence it⁶.

In these brief notes, however, the intention is neither to pursue the relationships and their ordering between interior space and the entire work of architecture, nor to analyze, within a space considered in isolation, the range of possible combinations among the four qualities mentioned, still less to seek, among these combinations, those privileged for some presumed expressive excellence. One would risk falling into that metaphysics of absolute values to which little consistency can be ascribed, just as little can be granted to those discourses about a surface being more or less beautiful in itself according to its proportions. Although, precisely in regard to interior volumes, this statement may seem contradicted by the long series of observations by treatise writers, from Vitruvius to [Leon Battista] Alberti, [Andrea] Palladio, [Sebastiano] Serlio, [Giuseppe] Viola [Zanini], Guarini, [Francesco] Milizia, who have referred to or specified the geometric relationships most appropriate to the beauty of a room. Yet, on closer inspection, these observations do not go beyond the didactic sphere in which they were framed, and rightly so, to guide less discerning architects toward solutions that were formally sound and structurally balanced on average⁷.

Therefore, leaving aside this field of inquiry, the present study aims instead to limit itself to the analysis of spatial units composed of interior volumes that, arranged in a certain order, constitute, through the succession of perspectives and in relation to the movements and durations necessary and possible for their perception, a true sequence in the current sense of the word. Of these volumes, coordinated into a unity, the intention is to clarify the modalities of their succession and hence the structure of their composition, that is, the type and reason for the differences among the volumes and for their concatenation. This «differential» investigation is, in logical terms, fully justified, since it does not derive from absolute interpretations of spaces but from their comparison through parameters which, once established, whether exact or not, remain the same⁸. Thus, having fixed the four qualities, or parameters, of interior volumes, the analysis will focus solely upon them. We shall examine, that is, sequences in the differences that are revealed, among the volumes that compose them, in geometric form, in absolute quantity of volume, in density, and in «energetic pressure». The first two are differences apprehended by intellectual means, the latter two by a combined intellectual and psychological order.

If we think of the Baths of Diocletian, of Santo Spirito by Brunelleschi, of St. Peter's Basilica, of certain churches by Guarini, it seems clear that the interior spaces of these buildings, in which the great act of architecture, destined for the widest number of human beings, is gathered, are, by virtue of this very universality, carved upon the living core of the human spirit in what it has of the most elementary and constitutive. And so, a study of the composition of these spaces and of the emotional movements that their sequences awaken in us may perhaps cause to flicker into view certain elements of that obscure law that universally governs the human spirit, the same law that impels great souls to compose such extraordinary architectures as it moves even the simplest minds that behold them. From this arises the thought that the supreme morality of architecture, its only authentic social, indeed human, mission, is to communicate equally with all, humble and mighty alike. [...]

The great spaces of architecture are born with Rome and are its magnificence. Along with the superhuman vaults and walls of incredible strength, sustained by the instinctive breath of indomitable military works, they are the expression of the conscious power of a community. These spaces open sovereignly and are linked in proud sequences in which the measured order seems to make perceptible both the clarity of mind and the consciousness of that clarity, that is, the majesty, of the Roman people. The sequences of volumes in the basilicas, and especially in the baths, of Titus, of Agrippa, of

Diocletian, of Caracalla, must have achieved, through the variety of their constituent elements and the multiplicity of possible routes, effects that remain unsurpassed. Upon the ruins of the walls that defined those volumes, from Brunelleschi to Michelangelo, was born the Renaissance and Baroque space, and with it the sense of the grandiose in the new civilization of the West.

To assess in their complexity the sequences of volumes in the baths, it is useful first to observe those more elementary sequences that may be found in certain examples of Roman architecture itself and in some Renaissance constructions. Among the buildings of Hadrian's Villa, a mirror of silver brightness reflecting every inflection of imperial eclecticism, one can identify interesting models of sequences, from the simplest to the most elaborate⁹.

The ternary group of the portico of the Pecile, the square hall called that of the Philosophers, and the circular *natatorium* may be taken as an example of a sequence of volumes whose vividness and solemnity depend exclusively on the difference of geometric forms among the elements of the group. [...]

If the portico of the Pecile, the hall, and the *natatorium* may be taken as an example of a sequence based primarily on differences of geometric form, it is in the Renaissance that we can identify sequences shaped with the utmost subtlety through differences only in the dimensions of volumes that maintain identical or similar geometric forms. Two such sequences may be observed in the Ducal Palace of Urbino: one running from the guest chambers to the throne room, and the other comprising the four rooms of the Appartamento della Jole. The pure rectangular prisms of the halls, made vivid in their vaults by the diamond-shaped facets of the lunettes, follow one another in both chains of spaces, expanding ever more in volume through their increasing length and height. [...]

Sequences achieved through progressively enlarging volumes can also be found, among other cases, in a design by Palladio for a building in Verona¹⁰. Yet in the genius of this architect, an infallible measurer of abstract relationships, we must find, and indeed cannot think otherwise, the most perfect examples of the musical geometry of interior spaces. A sequence distinguished both by differences of geometric form and by differences of dimension unfolds in the chain of volumes of Palazzo Thiene in Vicenza; a chain that unravels with the splendor of a necklace of diamonds, each cut in a different way. A pure chain, whose differences are mirrored in four symmetrical nodes so that the cadences advance and then continually reverse themselves. [...]

But in that mirror of architecture which is the Rotonda, the lyrical concatenation of the interior spaces, as it can be read in the engravings of the *Quattro libri dell'architettura*,

which most closely reflect Palladio's original thought, reaches a degree that the ancients would have had the courage to call sublime. [...]

The key sequence of Palladio's Rotonda [...] is articulated through differences in geometric form, in the quantity of volumes, in the density of light, and, in the middle term of the passageway, in «pressure». Present within it, therefore, are all the powerful fermentations of spatiality characteristic of those great buildings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries whose supreme reflection is the Basilica of St. Peter. [...]

The universality of St. Peter's Basilica springs from the prodigious simplicity of its sequences, from the chain of pendular effects of «opposition» and «release» upon which they are chiefly woven. This pendularity has such a dominant, exclusive, and unalterable rhythm that it seems to reveal the very movement, the very breath, that is necessary to the structure of the human spirit. Of all the arts, architecture is the most universal, perhaps because it renders these oscillations perceptible and immediate, unconsciously repeating oppositions and releases of space that, at the origins of human experience, in nature's hostilities and welcomes, and ever since, have formed one of the shaping aspects of the pulse of human structure: ravines, gorges, and open plains. One thinks, inevitably, of the journey in the second Faust. [...]

The interior space of St. Peter's, however, remains a composition of elementary volumes, each individually discernible and connected to the others through passages or smaller spaces. It is necessary to arrive at Guarini, passing through Michelangelo's late designs for San Giovanni dei Fiorentini, or better yet, through [Francesco] Borromini's interiors at San Carlino, to encounter the extreme culmination of the entire process of modulation of interior volumes and their sequences, achieved in the attempt to surpass the mere juxtaposition of spatial singularities in favor of an almost continuous body. [...]

Guarini, after the great masters of the Renaissance, was the architect who perceived space with the greatest vehemence and clarity. His spaces were conquered through the slow elaboration of purely geometric worlds governed by a surprising lyrical logic. The interplay of Guarini's stereometries is always extraordinarily attuned to the great constructive drama: the intersections of volumes coincide with the lines of force necessary to sustain them. He even achieves that metaphysical play, unattained even by the Gothic builders, of arches that exert their full supporting power while being entirely oblique, with the keystone displaced from the plumb of the supports. Guarini's spatial system is so unitary and absolute, each point so bound to the other in both formal and structural sense, that his buildings seem incapable of partial ruin: if a dome collapses, the entire edifice is annihilated⁸. [...]

3. In addition to August Schmarsow – and his personal, corporeal, and projective interpretation of the architectural phenomenon – Moretti cites Friedrich Ostendorf, a German architect and theorist among the main exponents of the so-called *Ordnungstheorie*, and the historian Albert Brinckmann, his compatriot, in an attempt to identify the origins of a concept of architectural composition grounded in structural and normative principles. On these three authors, see respectively A. Schmarsow, *Das Wesen der architektonischen Schöpfung*, Hiersemann, Leipzig 1894; F. Ostendorf, *Die Baukunst des XIX. Jahrhunderts. Ein Rückblick auf die Entwicklung der Architektur seit 1800 mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Lehre*, J. Hoffmann, Stuttgart 1917; A. Brinckmann, *Baukunst der Renaissance in Italien*, B.G. Teubner, Leipzig 1908.

4. Zevi, *op. cit.*

5. This represents the most innovative aspect of Moretti's theory – namely, the concrete presence of interior spatiality – which, with good reason, can be regarded as the first true systematization of the architecturally conceived interior. Traces of this notion, however anecdotal or experimental, can already be found in the earlier works of Friedrich Kiesler and Oskar Schlemmer. On this subject, see J. Leveratto, *From Within: Between Interior Architecture and Design*, LetteraVentidue, Siracusa 2020, pp. 79–88.

6. Moretti's logical-mathematical approach is clearly evident here, informing his entire case-based analysis – much of which is omitted here for reasons of space. The original text is also accompanied by magnificent images of architectural models representing interior space as a solid mass.

7. On the dual influence of Moretti and Roman architecture on interior studies, see P.F. Caliari, *Tractatus logico sintattico. La forma trasparente di Villa Adriana*, Edizioni Quasar, Rome 2012.

8. Moretti refers here to Guarini's design for the Church of San Filippo Neri in Casale Monferrato, which can be dated between 1679 and 1680.

Modern architects, by contrast, appear to have forgotten the laws governing the sequences of interior volumes. They must once again conquer space as a sensitive, living element, not by trusting extrapolations from graphic symbols.

The errors of modern architecture, born of its neglect of space in its concrete reality, can now be judged directly, provided, of course, that modern architecture still lives in the realm of the real and has not already been transferred, as a matter of culture, into its bidimensional symbols, drawing and photograph. [...]

A particular interest attaches to the experiments of [Ludwig] Mies van der Rohe, if we wish, at least for pedagogical reasons, to trace back to him the dissociation, through screens and partitions, of a unitary space. The ancients, in composing their sequences and spaces, took account of those elementary geometric figures that made possible the mental possession of an entire form even when only a part of it was visible, thus allowing that simultaneous intellectual apprehension of vision whose decisive importance was observed by Adrian Stokes⁹. Mies van der Rohe, by contrast, beginning with a constructive volume of irregular geometric profile, dissociates its space, preventing its integral and direct reading, the only one its form would allow, by inserting free walls and partitions. These generate spatial sectors that are unpredictable, uncertain, and overflowing. He works, that is, so that the space not directly visible remains, in intuition, elusive¹⁰. [...]

This is evidently yet another proof of the elusive and romantic stage of modern architecture, and especially of rationalist architecture, a stage that seems, indeed, characteristic of our own age more than of the nineteenth century. For even in music and in the plastic arts, our time rests upon analogous structural ambiguities, which may be regarded either as a weariness of the spirit, if we still believe that the spirit might again attain the lucid exaltation of the classics, or as its natural state, if such lucidity is deemed forever unrecoverable.

i. With regard to the «pressure» or «energetic charge» of a space, it should be noted that the magnetic field offers a more interesting analogy than the potential field. In fact, the distribution of the lines of force within a magnetic field, as a function of the expansions that generate it, provides a topography similar to the distribution of the intensity of psychological sensations produced by the expansion of wall masses. It should also be observed that the sense of «release» or the drop in «pressure» felt immediately after passing through a constriction into an ample space corresponds to a neutral zone, a void, that can be identified in a magnetic field at the point of a sudden expansion of the poles. Moreover, the existence of a certain class of relations between the phenomena of an electromagnetic field in a given space and the phenomena of human sensory perception (and consequently of the related psychological modifications) is evident, if one considers that everything falling within the field of visibility is energy of radiation. A topology of «forms» within a field is structurally analogous to the topology of a particular group of radiations within that same field. Theoretically, one can therefore perform operations on either structure interchangeably.

ii. Among the classical theorists who formulated questions or solutions regarding the proportional measurement of an interior space, the following are especially noteworthy: L.B. Alberti, *De Re aedificatoria*, Florence, 1485, Book IX, chap. VI. A. Palladio, *I quattro libri dell'architettura*, Venice, 1570, Book I, chap. XXIII. Giuseppe Viola Zanini, *Dell'Architettura*, Padua, 1629, Book I, chap. 31. Guarino Guarini, *Architettura civile*, Turin, 1737, Treatise II, chap. VII, sixth observation.

iii. «A project by Palladio for a building in Verona». This refers to the design for the Palazzo for G.B. della Torre, partly executed and later altered. The sequences mentioned concern the two groups of three rooms flanking the central elliptical staircase. The lengths of the three rooms follow the ratio 1.1 – 1.5 – 3.

[Luigi Moretti, *Strutture e sequenze di spazi*, in «Spazio», no. 7, 1953, pp. 9-20 and 107-108]

Giulio Carlo Argan Interiors 1959

The art of architectural interiors has fundamentally different characteristics from architecture. Its problem is not the definition of spaces, but rather the adaptation of spaces to the needs of life, according to practical requirements which, when translated into aesthetic solutions, involve the whole complex of furnishing and decoration of rooms in their reciprocal relationship and in their unitary conception¹. In this sense the art of interiors is also the art of furnishing, but it is distinct from the particular and separate aspects of the forms of furniture, fittings, tapestries, carpets, and so on. In practice it reflects, directly and with great sensitivity, through the convergence of several factors, the taste of a period, a culture, a social circle and even of a family tradition or a personal will. Conservative in primitive and popular societies, it appears instead rapidly variable, almost as in a succession of fashions, in more dynamically developed civilizations. In public or historic buildings [...] it can assume monumentally qualified aspects, with distinguished examples that document its inspiration and its vicissitudes on a par with architecture. In the contemporary age the function of the designer-decorator has taken on a fully defined and autonomous character.

The art of interior environments in its relations with architecture and furnishing

The configuration of interior space, affected not only by the conception of nature but by the conception of life and of social customs, is profoundly different from civilization to civilization, and within the same culture, from place to place and from class to class. Within certain limits interior spaces are conceived, distributed and articulated at the moment of architectural design; however, when the building is not highly representative and destined for public functions, the final determination of interior spaces and their formal qualification is to a large extent

due to the initiative and taste of craft workers [...] and of the users themselves, similarly to what happens with customs². In most cases interior space, or more properly the environment, reflects, in its formal configuration, general ideas about natural space: whether, by means of that configuration, one seeks to dilate the limit of enclosed space by ideally relating it to open space, or, conversely, to eliminate any apparent relation by accentuating the isolation and, consequently, the sense of intimacy of enclosed space. It should be noted, however, that although in many cases such relation or such lack of relation is explicitly pursued in the material structure of the building, in many others it is entrusted, in whole or in part, to the psychological factor and at times even to optical illusion: so that exterior space, as a component of the image of interior space, is never considered objectively, but always as space seen or imagined by someone located within an enclosed space; hence even the direct view of exterior space, which is nonetheless an almost constant component in the configuration of interior space, has value insofar as it appears beyond a wall, inscribed within the geometric perimeter of a window, like a painting within its frame.

Within architectural design, interior space, when it is not a matter of rooms that for ritual or functional reasons are segregated from any relation with the world [...], presents an almost constant set of problems that can be articulated in the following terms: a) dimensional and proportional determination; b) exposure (ventilation, sunlight, etc.); c) functional distribution and articulation of rooms; d) formal qualification. [...]

Keeping in mind the need for a unitary treatment that considers as a whole the phenomenology of enclosed space or of inhabited architecture, a classification scheme should distinguish: 1) functional aspects, both in the technical sense and in the practical sense, insofar as they condition the dimensions,

this volume], see also C. Gamba, ed., *Giulio Carlo Argan. Progetto e oggetto. Scritti sul design*, Medusa, Milan 2003.

1. In the first part of the summary, Argan immediately clarifies his position with several explicit choices, especially when considered in light of the Zevian tradition. First of all, the use of the term «art», instead of «design» or «architecture», reflects his attempt to include within this disciplinary identity a set of competences whose boundaries are not always clear-cut, since the figure of the interior designer arose, around the mid-eighteenth century, essentially as a decorator, when replacing, together with the upholsterer, the coordinated furnishing work of interiors that had previously been entrusted to the cabinetmaker. Secondly, the distinction he makes between architecture and the art of interiors does not stem from a theoretical declaration of principle, but from a final characterization which, historically, lies not so much in making space as in making architectural space inhabitable, adapting it to the «needs of life», to the «taste of an epoch» or to simple «personal will». Finally, the unitary formulation he provides at the end of the second paragraph clearly defines the limits of a discipline, which also includes furnishing but not the design of individual pieces of furniture, whose specificity lies in intervening *within* a pre-existing enclosure, through an entirely autonomous set of tools and completely different operational modes. In other

9. It is unclear which specific text by Stokes Moretti is referring to here, although it is most likely *The Quattro Cento*, Faber & Faber, London 1932.

10. This refers to his Villa Tugendhat in Brno, 1928. [JL]

proportions, distribution of rooms and their formal qualification; 2) structural and decorative aspects, insofar as they are conditioned by function. [...]

Considering the first class, we should include in it all structural elements, whether bounding or load-bearing [...], that receive, on the inside, a formal qualification; the elements of communication between interior and exterior space [...]; the interior structural elements whose task is to subdivide interior space or to modify its configuration, when destined for differentiated functions; the articulating or connecting elements [...]. The second class instead includes themes of decoration and ornament, hangings, furnishings, wall coverings, furniture and household objects.

Structural and functional elements

An essential factor in the determination and configuration of interior spaces is the plan layout, as the result of the distribution of load-bearing elements in relation to the statics of the building and of the fungibility of rooms in relation to their purpose, but also as an essential agent of the sizing, proportioning, and plastic modulation and modelling of space. The spatial limits determined by the plan layout are nevertheless liable to be integrated or modified: either by means of accessory elements [...], or by means of the decorative, plastic or chromatic, figurative or purely ornamental qualification of the surfaces.

Structural elements, even when common to the interior and exterior configuration of the building, generally acquire a different aspect on the inside, for the most part being clad with materials and ornamental forms more delicate and more suited to close viewing. It is not uncommon for them to take on a symbolic meaning, intentional or not: examples of intentionality are the decorations of domes with figures alluding to the sky [...] or those of columns and pillars understood as the support not only of the building as such, but also of the idea of spiritual construction generally connected with it; less explicit or even unconscious is instead the mental association between wall and horizon, which nevertheless lies at the basis, albeit in different terms in different periods and civilizations, of wall decoration.

Determinative of interior space, in its objective and imagistic correlation to the outside, is obviously the need for protection from the elements, for the safeguarding of material goods and for so-called privacy, as well as the opportunity to be able to modify, according to circumstances, that correlation: on these needs depend the size of openings to the outside, but also their equipment of protective [...] and screening [...] devices. These elements, in addition to having in themselves a decorative function, obtained for the most part through effects of transparency and diffused light, influence the formal configuration of the whole as determinants of lighting conditions. Entrance doors to buildings, which have always had symbolic

or ritual meanings, underscored by a concentration of decorative motifs [...], when applied inside as communication between two rooms retain a highly decorative character, often heightened by surrounds of precious materials and by draperies, and especially expressed in the leaves, often painted or carved or inlaid. Frames in turn act as delimiters or as connectors of surfaces, as an element of *caesura* or plastic joint: this function is made explicit even when the frame is reduced to a mere plastic or painted frieze, and is obviously intensified where it meets openings such as doors and windows. [...]

Another functional element that is frequently developed as a theme of high decoration is the staircase, not only for the evident social reason that it is the most public part of the building. If, structurally, the staircase presents itself as a rapid perspective and thus as a variant with respect to the building's constant perspectives, from the decorative point of view it develops a very complex thematic, but generally based on the suggestion of the vanishing perspective or, in any case, on effects of movement.

In the determination and configuration of interior spaces, as well as in their decoration, particular importance attaches to certain zones explicitly dedicated or traditionally destined to special family or social functions: worship, dining, receiving, study, etc. [...] Other elements to which, because of their prominent social or family function, meanings directly or indirectly symbolic are attached, and which find expression in their form and in their situation within the room, are fireplaces or, among certain peoples, large architectural and storied stoves, the bed and the alcove, often raised on steps and isolated by canopy curtains, etc. The almost constant placement of such elements, dictated by necessity or tradition, constitutes an important factor in the organization of interior space, which to a large extent results from the interrelation, sometimes prearranged since the design stage, of the main elements of furnishing. Finally, it should be borne in mind that the general morphology of interior spaces is, for practical necessity or by custom, connected with different building types: thus, for example, the need to obtain a perfect and uniform transmission of sound or to allow the convergence of gazes on a given point determines the form, kept substantially unchanged, of the spatial cavities of theatres, auditoria, etc., or of certain types of religious or public buildings.

At a higher level, in large public buildings, interior space appears closely linked to the specific, religious or social function. When, because of the unitary character of such functions, the interior space of the building is not subdivided, or is subdivided in such a way that one room clearly predominates over the others, which have accessory functions, there is a clearer structural and formal relation with the exterior, as in churches, theatres, town halls and, in the modern era, parliaments. In

these cases the furnishing is also generally directly dependent on the architecture or forms an integral part of it.

Another special case, which nevertheless falls within the field of building typologies, is that of modern buildings responding to specific functions, such as stations, offices, factories, laboratories, power plants, industrial plants, etc., where those very functions determine forms unusual with respect to ordinary building, and such as to offer the architect unusual imaginative possibilities.

The specific interiors of vehicles, carriages and ships were derived by analogy from the interiors of architectural structures. In this case the need to concentrate systems and furnishings in a small space, to make them fixed so as not to be affected by movement, as well as the use of materials such as wood and metal in place of masonry, gave these interiors a distinctive character and style. [...]

Formal qualification of interior space

The formal qualification of the interior space of architecture, besides being determined by objective static and functional requirements, is determined by a set of other factors, extremely differentiated according to periods and cultures, but largely reducible to the type of relation that, from time to time, is thought to exist between the individual and the external world, natural and social³. Qualification takes place through the use of various materials and techniques, of a plastic and pictorial order, and can be schematically classified according to the type and location of the spatial limit to which it refers: walls, ceilings, floors.

Apart from the flat or curved, or, more rarely, irregular, development laid down by the plan, the wall is normally the object of a surface qualification, which may take place by means of ornamental or narrative figuration, carried out with specifically developed techniques such as fresco or stucco, or by means of the superposition of objects such as wall coverings, hangings, tapestries, paintings and reliefs, trophies, arms, coats of arms, etc.

The effects to which wall decorations can be schematically reduced are: the illusory expansion toward the outside, almost cancelling the spatial limitation of the wall, or, conversely, the accentuation of the limit and, consequently, of the spatial seclusion. Common to both tendencies is the pursuit of structural evidence, realized through the actual presence or the feint of load-bearing and articulating members, or through the scribing of the surface into panels variously proportioned and combined.

[...] One of the most interesting aspects, and one common to almost all modes of wall decoration, is nonetheless the flaunting of the pretence and its artifices, almost making pretence an end in itself: thus not only does painting imitate

marbles, woods or textiles or suggest landscape views and fantastic apparitions, but it also feigns, in *chiaroscuro*, sculpted reliefs or trophies, tapestries, etc. The same testimonies of ancient writers, and not only Western ones, underscore the importance of the illusory artifice which, by revealing itself as such, arouses admiration but, obviously, destroys the efficacy of the illusion. [...]

Effects of accentuating the limit, sought especially in small rooms whose character of intimacy or seclusion one wishes to underscore, are achieved for the most part by means of heavy draped hangings, or claddings of noble materials and by the fineness of elaborate workmanship that requires close viewing. Whereas the decoration of the large room is normally tied to the architecture and falls at least in part within the design of the building, that of the small room brings out the participation of all the forms of craftsmanship and, through the direct intervention of the client, approaches more closely the processes and ways of customs.

More than any other element of interior spaces in architecture, the ceiling preserves evident traces of its structurality: not only are the vault and the dome typically structural forms, but the flat ceiling itself manifests, more or less openly, and often in a wholly fictitious manner, the structure of the beams and suggests an upward perspective. The very frequent use of wood in ceilings not only answers the opportunity to employ light materials, but depends on the timber structures generally used for roofs. The problematic of spatial representation on ceilings is among the most varied: it ranges from the spatial reversal of certain Etruscan tombs, which show the roof with its tiles and climbing plants as it would be seen from outside, to the classical lacunars or coffers, so widely repeated, which suggest upward vanishing between beam and beam; from Islamic stalactite ceilings which, almost reversing the perspectival solution of the coffers, jut out to occupy the space of the bay, to Renaissance and Baroque vaults which develop the architectural theme of the room into an imaginary opening to the sky with naturalistic figures. [...]

No less complex is the phenomenology of the configuration of the walking plane or floor, since in it the implicit reference to the ground generally renders improper any allusion to a perspective of depth; moreover, technical and functional requirements, presenting a very broad problematic, give rise to the possibility of employing extremely varied materials and techniques, ranging from marble paving to marble *commesso* and *intarsia*, from brick paving, which recalls the original beaten-earth floor, to ceramic tiles, from mosaic to worked wood in various forms. From the point of view of spatial composition the floor is in direct relation with the ceiling, whose structure it often repeats or freely resumes, in its compartments; the divisions of the floor, moreover, according as they follow a lin-

words, the same modal characteristics to which he devotes much of the essay that follows, in order to account systematically for their specificity.

2. Here one can clearly see Argan's attempt to historicize the concept of interiors, linking it more to the practice of its construction than to the autonomous conception of an analytical category. Architecture is therefore not excluded *a priori*, but considered solely in cases where it is actually called upon to contribute to the formation of an interior, of which, often, other craftsmen or the users themselves are the true authors, with the exception of the operations of sizing,

distribution and structuring of the building envelope, which always remain the architect's responsibility.

3. It is interesting to note that Argan, in discussing the actual configuration of interior space, does not establish any hierarchy of impact, limiting himself to presenting structural and decorative features one after the other. Yet his use of the term «qualification» in this paragraph seems to suggest an implicit pre-eminence

ear-perspectival or a rhythmic course, tighten or loosen the perspectival succession, thereby influencing the dimensional configuration of the environment-space.

If the need for the floor always to give the idea of the plane favours an almost constant recourse to geometric ornaments and strongly stylized and recurring motifs [...], elements originally naturalistic are also frequent [...]. That same need for the floor to give the idea of the plane obviously prevents the development of broad historical-naturalistic representations. It should not be forgotten that the floor implies a near and constant viewing distance, which excludes an overall view and presupposes the movement of the beholder on the same plane as the figuration: hence the necessity of a fragmented figuration, even if concatenated and continuous. Prevalent on floors, therefore, are figures of limited extent, for the most part concentrated in panels and medallions, and having a character more symbolic or emblematic than narrative.

Relations with furnishing

An important component in the determination of architectural interior space is constituted by built-in pieces of furniture. Regardless of the material of which they are made [...], which varies according to function, period and culture, these elements, integral with interior space [...] are for the most part liable to be absorbed into the architectural conception and, from time to time, either constrained within intentionally decorative schemes or else destined to play a predominant role in the entire configuration of space [...]. Built-in furnishing finds, in the contemporary age, its true *raison d'être* within the integral design of all the elements of construction, and, given the dissolution of masonry enclosures into watertight compartments, itself becomes a necessary element in the *a priori* subdivision of fungible spaces [...]. An ever-narrower margin is therefore attributed to proper furniture (*mobilio*), which by its nature is less tied to the building of the edifice. The form of furniture has been profoundly influenced by the structure that interior space has from time to time assumed. [...] The evolutionary process of the conception of furniture in relation to architecture is likewise related to the progressive decline of craftsmanship and the parallel development of industry, whose standardized products are born of a design akin to, and often coincident with, architectural design. [...] Corresponding to this standardization of types, which in turn corresponds to the standardization of the structure of interior spaces, there naturally comes a diminution of the user's participation in the formal definition of interior space. [...]

Design

The problem of a preordained and conscious relation between architectural design properly speaking and the formal defini-

tion of interior spaces is relatively recent. [...]

A decisive turning point in the history of the problem of interior design occurs in the twentieth century, both because of the crisis of craftsmanship and the transfer of furniture production to the industrial plane, and because of the new conception of architectural space. This conception, which totally eliminates the traditional distinction between a capacious space and the object contained within it, is founded on the principle of the unlimited divisibility of space and hence of its continuity: the distinction between exterior and interior therefore loses, on the plane of representation, every value. [...] In turn, modern architectural procedures, which eliminate the load-bearing function of walls, allow maximum plan flexibility and thus the modulation of interior spaces according to the concrete needs of the life that unfolds within them. Furniture thus tends to become integrated with architecture: either through built-in elements, often envisaged already in the plan layout, or through the progressive typological uniformity brought about by industrial production. On the other hand, the assumption of function as the determining factor for formal definition leads architects to focus their attention on interior space, which is no longer a deduction, obtained by progressive reduction of scale, from exterior space, but is the generator of the entire architectural space⁴. Exterior space is therefore nothing but a projection or a natural definition of the limit of interior space.

[Giulio Carlo Argan, ed., *Interni*, in *Enciclopedia Universale dell'Arte*, Istituto per

of furnishing and decorative works in defining the perceptually most relevant features of what he calls the «phenomenology of enclosed space».

4. This is probably the most subtly polemical passage with respect to Bruno Zevi's idea of interior space, which is here relativized from a historical standpoint. For Argan, in fact, attention to interior space is not always «the generator of the entire architectural space», but depends largely, at the time he is writing, on the use of new materials and production processes which, in turn, determine a «new conception of architectural space». Zevi's theory would thus be nothing more than a retrospective projection of a certain way of understanding architecture that, however persuasive, makes little sense from a historical perspective. On this point, see again G.C. Argan, *A proposito di spazio interno*, in «Metron», no. 28, 1948, pp. 20-21 [excerpted in this volume].

[JL]

Carlo De Carli Against the False Reality 1967

Once again, I start over. [...]

I will deal with (as far as I am able to deal with them) the problems of «interiors» in architecture. The problems of «interiors» in architecture are the problems of «interior space» and the «objects» that furnish it; they are the problems of the reciprocal relations between interior space and object; hence, of furnishing and its variable nature among variable things; more complex and restless and profound in contrast to apparent immobility¹.

Interior space and objects, through reciprocal influence, consolidate or change until they come to shape, through different forms that are illusively complete in every respect, the environment of a house, of an office...; until they gather the most subtle values of the meaning of «architectural cavity» rich in relationships in every sense²; from the apparent finite limits of a «room» to the variability of the physical contours of a volume that expands to embrace the most complex functions of dwelling; or reduces its contours and its capacity to contain, maintaining equally the sense of openness, through the integration of each of its parts with the other. [...]

«Interiors» (that is, «interior space» and «furnishing») is the title of the magazine's first issue: thus, «space» and «objects» will be treated together, in their reciprocal relations, because they concur in showing how it is possible to create a «human environment» that has the power to be such even when it appears to be limited and even compressed by boundaries of minimal dimensions³.

Without dispersing those vital «unknowns» that have no end and, for that very reason, are stimulating factors in the process of formation, which belongs to every problem and is evident in the most extended ones, that is, continuous, rich, contradictory. The unknowns seem to provoke a profound search and to demand solutions useful to everyday life.

But there is something subtler and less visible that has the same unknowns; therefore the same solicitations and richness of intent in Architecture.

It is the unitary value of the individual factors that come to have, in themselves, characteristics of balance and openness to every relation, so as to be evenly variable and composable in every direction toward a natural germination of architectural episodes.

And yet, in the so-called «small» dimensions, it seems that everything proves too easily resolved or simple in itself or reduced, ignoring the external existences and the necessary contacts with them; everything being visible and apparently possible to define or easy to define; it seems that every vitality of relationship diminishes and that contradictions are lost in the «small»; diluting the most significant, complex, and contradictory attitudes that in the end are (and only are) the «human» ones; in both large and small scales; that is, they are the attitudes of the man [sic] who acts, being by nature «social»; because, in another sense, it cannot be said that he acts; this attitude, visibly individual, too often appears within the solitude that is adverse to common utility; it seems, that is, that a man, naturally social and freed from the restrictive bonds of obedience to the firm, that is, immobile, command of one seated higher or of a group seated higher, and quite different from Aesop's lamb, refuses the community.

This interpretation that negatively touches the «small» dimensions, defining them as such, is at least foolish⁴. [...]

It seems to some that, by now, singular thoughts are sterile of subsequent processes; they cannot produce; they make no projects; they keep their eyes fixed on one center, losing sight of relationships.

I cannot understand how one can divide thoughts and our acts into singular and global ones, recognizing them as effi-

The text presented here is an excerpt from the first editorial of the newly founded magazine «Interni» (previously launched as «La rivista dell'arredamento»), which Carlo De Carli directed from 1967 to 1971, where several of the recurring themes of his later and more well-known writings appear in an early form. Although apparently tied to the Zevian conception of space, the article is in fact informed by a fundamentally autonomous philosophical perspective – one not exempt, in terms of the ethics of design, from the influence of the Milanese *milieu* and, in particular, from the contemporary positions of Ernesto Nathan Rogers. For further study, in addition to De Carli's cited texts, see G. Ottolini, ed., *Carlo De Carli e lo spazio primario*, monographic issue of «Quaderni del Dipartimento di Progettazione dell'Architettura del Politecnico di Milano», no. 20, 1997.

1. It is interesting here to note the identity that De Carli establishes, in a design sense, between the «interiors in architecture» and «furnishing», and the way in which he defines the latter – namely, as a set of relationships between «interior space» and the «objects» that furnish it. This relational perspective, in fact, represents an original contribution to the definition of that unified framework outlined by Giulio Carlo Argan (cf. *Interni*, in *Enciclopedia Universale dell'Arte*,

Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, Venice-Rome, Sansoni, Florence 1959, vol. VII, cols. 580-610) [excerpted in this volume].

2. The term «architectural cavity» is a clear reference to Bruno Zevi, *Saper vedere l'architettura*, Einaudi, Torino 1948, pp. 21-33 [excerpted in this volume].

3. This idea of a «human environment» derives not so much from August Schmarsow and the school of *Einfühlung*, as it does from De Carli's personal relationship with Dino Formaggio, one of the most prominent Italian exponents of phenomenological aesthetics. De Carli in fact invites Formaggio to the Politecnico di Milano in 1964 to teach a course in Methodology of Vision, which represents a crucial step in shaping his own concept of «primary space». For, as Formaggio argues, art is imagination that is movement, and movement that is invention, in relation to the corporeality of human beings and that of things. And, as he explains first in *Idea di artisticità* (Ceschina, Milan 1962) and later in *Arte* (Isedi, Milan 1973), even in the field of artistic creation the body is pure intentionality and original openness toward a world that takes form and structure from its creative gesture. On this topic, in addition to the cited texts, see D. Formaggio, *Progettare con il corpo*, in «Domus», no. 676, 1986, p. 22.

4. This sentence, together with the preceding paragraph, introduces into the discussion of architectural interiors an aspect which, though almost self-evi-

cient only when they follow a total path that has a beginning and, never, an end; continuing to proceed absurdly, toward infinity; or returning to the starting line, after having destroyed what had been made.

Thoughts have the same limitations as human nature because they are human and certainly cannot touch infinity. They proceed; they live; and they are transmitted; in the small and in the large. They continue. And they have different moments and different angles.

Thus reality has no problems of extension or reduction; unless it is false.

It exists.
And it can equally be grasped by everyone together, helping one another, or by one man, singularly, through a way of being among others, who will work with him.

Not a global way; because beyond the globe, there will certainly be other essences; at least the air for a certain thickness; and other space. Therefore the «global» is not «the whole». Indeed, it makes no sense. The unknowns stimulate and enrich every moment.

They come and go. Inside and outside.
Nothing is falser than believing that there is an interior and an exterior by contradiction. And nothing is falser than believing that there is a totality that can be verified.

The unknowns continue equally to renew themselves after each resolution.

The interior is not the contradiction of the exterior; it is a temporary whole like every other architectural event; varied and mutable; happy and in crisis; constant and contradictory; yet a part; human; apparently enclosed by physical walls or mobile partitions that also respond to the need to protect man in the necessary recollection, and that define for him a physical environment, even of limited dimension, already capable of being complete, though as a part; it is not opposed to the «outside» and it has neither large nor small dimensions; it is a continuity that assumes different aspects and meanings, it is a singular consistency of a moment; it is a human condition of living, referred, in our case, to the term «architectural cavity»; or simply to the «interior» in architecture; which interior does not interrupt the progress of things if it understands things even in their change, and must be considered, dimensioned, opened architecturally in itself; because it is open in essence⁵.

Many scholars of architecture like to speak of macrostructures and microstructures, as monuments, that is, of large and small structures that live outside (so it seems) or coil into small interior dimensions (so it seems).

I will not speak that way; I will be, I hope, simpler (or more confused) because it seems macroscopic and microscopic to speak that way in the pages of a magazine that must be ad-

dressed to the widest public in order to encourage a dialogue on our way of dwelling. [...]

We must oppose the false reality of «monuments» of ideas that were never born. [...]

Oppose the false reality of *a priori* sermons on «where» and «how».

False reality always betrays.
Everywhere.

It betrays our studies, our research, our universities; the singular efforts of every scholar who would like, without presumption, to open a path for others. [...] It betrays culture. [...]

Architecture is born; in each of its episodes and among all; good and bad; and among things; beautiful and ugly; when it has the strength to be; in great and in small.

Measures that do not exist.
Because it alone is Architecture. It is thought, singular; for everyone; formed by all and «one».

Without it being necessary to celebrate its monument built upon a physical «total» environment that would never end; indeed, it does not exist, in the finite sense; nor to prepare its foundations on too many complex relations that never end; indeed, they do not exist, in the finite sense; seeking a false «totality» through the agitated movement of things and men and their confusion; enemy of thought.

Architecture needs everyone; but «everyone» is not the globality that does not exist; it also needs an individual. [...]

Architecture needs, for its problem relative to the «architectural cavity», even those discourses that seem intimate and are not intimate, if that meaning is to be taken negatively. [...]

I would like to speak of the things that I know or have known or have understood through the people I have known, who made them.

Against false reality. [...]
I join my statement, without specific textual references, but with the aim of entirely, not generically, underlining it, with some photographs of interior solutions, where the achieved balance of a space-object relationship is evident, and the absolute value of architectural composition. [...]

Today and for my program, they are meant merely as a visible and stimulating document of the intentions of those who have studied a problem of interiors and have reached the capacity to form an «environment», expressing themselves as individual persons and rigorously respecting the rules of Architecture, which apply to all and are made for everyone's utility; when they are rules of balance in Architecture⁶.

[Carlo De Carli, *Contro la realtà finta*, in «Interni», no. 1, 1967, pp. 2-5]

6. This concept of «environment» as a unity of architecture and furnishing within the bounds of interior space had already been introduced by Carlo Mollino in his *Utopie e ambientazione* («Domus», nos. 237-238, 1949, pp. 14-19 and 20-25). Here, however – and in the preceding paragraph – De Carli does something different, attempting to trace everything back to the original impulse of architecture alone and, even more surprisingly, to the rules of architectural composition. A fact that, perhaps, is less surprising when considered in light of the Rogersian idea – which at the time characterized the entire Milanese design context – that the architect is responsible for the technical and formal organization of everything, «from the spoon to the city». In any case, this notion would soon prove fundamental, particularly in this context, for opening interior architecture to areas of design and research that had previously been entirely ignored. Cf. G. Ottolini, *Conformazione e attrezzatura dello spazio aperto*, in «Quaderni del Dipartimento di Progettazione dell'Architettura», no. 4, 1987, pp. 38-50. [JL]

Renato De Fusco

Hypothesis for the Architectural Sign

1973

It may be formulated as follows: since the peculiar character of architecture, considered by [August] Schmarsow as *Raumgestaltung*¹, lies in its being formed by a hollow three-dimensional space, an assumption confirmed by [Bruno] Zevi's theory derived from Wright's poetics², according to which interior space is the protagonist of architecture, we can, as a first approximation, regard this as the «signified» and the exterior space [...] as the «signifier»³. These, then, are the components of the architectural sign, or rather the necessary but not yet sufficient conditions for defining it. Why do we speak of the «signified» precisely in reference to the interior? First of all, because it constitutes the practical end for which a building is constructed; secondly, because it is the space in which one lives, in which the function, typology, and intentions of the builder, as well as custom, culture, and history, are most clearly manifested; in a word, because from every point of view, and evidently also from the semiotic one, internal space constitutes the *raison d'être* of architecture. If these considerations were not enough, we have seen that, within the *Ein-fühlung-Sichtbarkeit*⁴ tradition, Schmarsow and his school associate the formative factor of interior space, determined by the measure of the human body, its structure, movement, and utility, with the semiotic factor by which art, and architecture in particular, is a dialogue, a desire for communication, an exchange of impulses between man [sic] and the surrounding reality, a continuous dialectical relationship between subject and object, in both the physical and the psychic sense⁵. It is quite true that this current of empathy, which tends precisely to unify the formative gesture with the expressive one, generally stops at the metaphorical level and does not reach the point of speaking of an actual communication, as we understand it today in a semiological sense; at most, the «signified» of interior space was conceived in symbolic rather than truly semiotic terms. Indeed, [Herman] Sörgel writes: «Architec-

tures must generally be defined as those conformations into which one can enter; therefore [...] also the construction of a monument as the dwelling of an idea, of a symbol, thus, for example, the Greek temple as an enlarged casket for the divine image, and the pyramid as the final abode of the king, and so on»¹. Since we have called upon such examples, it must be said that the semiological interpretation of interior space as «signified» confirms Zevi's thesis (according to which anything that lacks interior space is not architecture, while exterior space belongs to the domain of urban planning)ⁱⁱ and corrects its more uncertain points, such as, precisely, the exclusion from the sphere of architecture of the Greek temple, on the grounds that it is in practice devoid of internal space. It confirms Zevi's position (apart from the identification of exteriority with urbanism, which we shall discuss later) insofar as it recognizes space, or rather space-as-sign, as the protagonist of architecture; it affirms an interiority and an exteriority bound to a single structure that is not merely tectonic but semiotic. On the other hand, it amends and deepens it, giving it a new meaning by introducing the factor of signification. Indeed, once identified with the «signified», architectural interiority loses its binding merely material consistency: it is no longer an empty volume necessarily practicable and inhabitable⁶. The *naos* of the Greek temple or the tombs of the pyramids thus again become the «signified», that is, the primary reason for which these monuments were built, regardless of whether their interior spaces are more or less easily accessibleⁱⁱⁱ. To make ourselves clearer, however, it is better to abandon these extreme cases, which generate more confusion than they demonstrate or refute a thesis; let us therefore say that the interiority of our «signified» may also be virtual, and move on, that is, let us consider as the object of our inquiry the general case in which the interior space is actually accessible and reflects what Schmarsow called the law of concavity.

The text presented here is an excerpt from one of the fundamental chapters of *Segni. Storia e progetto dell'architettura* by Renato De Fusco (Laterza, Rome-Bari 1973), one of the most significant works for a semiotic introduction to architecture. In this passage in particular, De Fusco outlines an unprecedented parallel between the concepts of signifier/signified and envelope/cavity, as an entirely original attempt to reconcile the gap between Bruno Zevi's conception of interior and that of Giulio Carlo Argan, through an interpretation that essentially integrates the two dimensions without, however, reducing them to identity, as was typical of the Milanese tradition. In this sense, besides the texts cited, see also R. De Fusco, *Dentro e fuori l'architettura. Scritti brevi (1960-1990)*, Jaca Book, Milan 1992.

1. Cf. A. Schmarsow, *Das Wesen der architektonischen Schöpfung*, Hiersemann, Leipzig 1894.
2. Cf. B. Zevi, *Saper vedere l'architettura*, Einaudi, Turin 1948, pp. 21-33 [excerpted in this volume].
3. This equivalence, it should be stressed from the outset, represents the central focus of De Fusco's theory, of which the chapter reproduced here constitutes a detailed argumentation. The first reference for this conception is,

naturally, Ferdinand de Saussure (*Cours de linguistique générale*, Payot, Paris 1916), which De Fusco discusses extensively in the preceding chapter. The author also draws, more broadly, on Charles Sanders Peirce (*Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Harvard UP, Cambridge MA 1958) for the idea of the sign as icon, index, and symbol, as well as on the contemporary writings of Umberto Eco, which two years later would converge in his *Trattato di semiotica generale* (Bompiani, Milan 1975).

4. The two terms may be translated as *empathy* and *visibility*. The first refers to the aesthetic school of Schmarsow, Robert Vischer, and Heinrich Wölfflin, while the second recurs frequently in the phenomenological studies of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.
5. For the German philosopher, in fact, since «we all carry within ourselves the dominant coordinate of the axial system, in the vertical line running from head to foot [...] the spatial construct represents an emanation of the human being who inhabits it, a projection that issues from within the subject». A. Schmarsow, *The Essence of Architectural Creation* (1893), in H.F. Mallgrave, E. Ikonomidou eds., *Empathy, Form and Space. Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873-1893*, Getty Center, Santa Monica 1994, pp. 288-289.

If the identification of the interior cavity, of that inhabitable void, that «inverse» of space, to use [Henri] Focillon's expression^{iv}, with the «signified» component of the architectural sign is undeniable and clearly comprehensible (unless, of course, one starts from a different hypothesis or semiotic conception), the identification of the «signifier» component with exterior space proves to be more complex in conception and exposition. First of all, the adjective «exterior» must be defined.

Let us say at the outset – avoiding the various classifications of space as existential, phenomenal, empirical, psychological, geometric, and the like, all of which are, in our view, disappointing and of little operational utility – that by architectural space we mean an artificial, cultural, preordained (in the sense of designed) delimitation of natural space, effected with a view to the meanings and functions peculiar to architecture. These, in turn, give rise to a vast typology of buildings for dwelling, for work, for worship, for teaching, for leisure, and so forth. The central nucleus of this delimitation is a cavity, a closed and covered void, materially (or at times virtually) inhabitable, and as such responding to the law of concavity. However, both because our daily experience of inhabiting spaces tells us that we are inside or outside an environment, and because the notion of concavity logically implies that of convexity, and finally because all our reasoning about structures and systems constantly involves a dialectic, a dualism of oppositional entities, interior concave space necessarily entails the recognition of an exterior convex one. The immediate idea arises, one that proves only partially correct, of assigning the former to architecture and the latter to urbanism. In fact, as we observed in Sörgel, both architectural environments and urban enclosures are always places that, although with differing characteristics, conform to the law of concavity. Yet if this is true, in what sense do we speak of convexity as the exteriority of architecture? Leaving aside for the moment the problem of the urban sign, which must be addressed only after defining the architectural one, we must distinguish between the space that is «exterior» to architecture (that is, proper to urbanism) and the space that is «exterior» of architecture⁷ [...]. Furthermore, if we assume, as a first approximation, that the enclosing wall constitutes the «signifier» component – which is legitimate, since it is the element that materializes the sign – we obtain one of the two terms of the dichotomy that corresponds precisely to the law of convexity. To say, however, that the interior is concave while the exterior is convex is not a sufficient condition to define the internality or externality of spaces. On either side of the envelope, the very «nature» of space changes, and all the difficulties entailed by the dichotomy interior/exterior stem from the mistaken notion that on both sides there exist two homogeneous spaces. In reality, bearing in mind that we

are examining the space of architecture, while interior space is *continuous*, belonging to the configuration of a void, exterior space is *discontinuous*: it is the sum of the surfaces that shape a solid volume: one need only think of the four façades, the roof, and the plan (which is also an exterior surface in the case of suspended buildings). In other words, to illustrate the heterogeneity of the two spaces, we may imagine transposing the plan's outline upward through the entire height of the cavity, something possible only within a void, without altering the external volumetry; whereas no such movement can be conceived for the façade surfaces without noticeably altering the envelope⁸.

Up to this point we have discussed the simplest case: that of an incorporating or exterior space and an incorporated or interior one, as though the building could be compared to a box. This reduction has served to clarify the sense in which we speak of the adjectives «exterior» and «interior» as applied to architecture. In reality, things are more complex, and therefore the model we intend to construct, in order to analyse the greatest possible number of real cases, must be more articulated. Above all, since the notions of interiority and exteriority are relative, if we wish to avoid limiting ourselves to the merely tectonic level, in which the interior mechanically relates to the exterior and vice versa, we must grasp this relativity in relation to another parameter: that of signification. To do so, we must first answer the following question: of how many signs is a building composed? The possibility of an answer is given by our initial hypothesis and by Schmarsow's assumption that the smallest element possessing a hollow three-dimensional magnitude can already be defined as architectural, which, for us, indicates the presence of a sign. Thus we may have:

a) a building composed of a single space (for example, a church with a single nave, without apsidal cavities or side chapels, which would introduce smaller enclosures at the edges of the principal one);

b) a building formed of several contiguous but distinct spaces on one or more levels (the rooms of historical palaces and the units of modern buildings);

c) a building not composed of truly distinct environments, but of intercommunicating spatial units (churches with several naves; interiors articulated by staircases, landings, and partition screens; the so-called «free plan» of many modern constructions);

d) a building or, rather, parts of it whose interiority is not completely enclosed but partly participates in exterior space (courtyards, porticoes, loggias, or certain works of contemporary architecture in which a continual osmosis between interior and exterior is deliberately sought).

Postponing the definition of this last case [...], we may say that in the first type we have monosemic architecture; in

the second, polysemic architecture which, to use again a Saussurean term⁹, we may define as associative, since, being in one space, we can mentally associate it, *in absentia*, with adjacent ones, whether on the same level, above, or below. In the third type, we have syntagmatic polysemic architecture, since the connection between one space and the others, all being intercommunicating, is clearly perceived, that is, it occurs *in praesentia*.

The great majority of buildings are polysemic and present features of both syntagmatic and associative types.

In any case, the following definition may hold in most situations: the sign is the minimal spatial unit of architecture (a room, an environment) composed of a cavity = «signified» and an envelope = «signifier»¹⁰.

Returning now to the discussion of the «signifier», after having listed the various cases of interior structuring of buildings, it appears that the enclosing wall is indeed exterior to the spatial core it encloses, yet it presents itself as an entity with two faces, one exterior and one interior (not by chance does traditional architectural nomenclature, albeit limited to arches and vaults, speak of *intrados* and *extrados*). This property is even more complex in the case of the architectural elements located within a polysemic building, that is, the horizontal and vertical planes, floors, load-bearing walls, and partitions. In fact, within a polysemic building, each space is delimited by such elements, each of which serves on one side as the interior of that space and on the other as the exterior of that same space and as the interior of the contiguous one. We shall define this property as the *law of reciprocity of the elements of contiguous signs*. Furthermore, from the observations just made [...], we can conclude that, ultimately, what determines the value of interiority or exteriority of the elements in question, and which therefore induces us to define them as part of the «signified» or of the «signifier», beyond nomenclature, is precisely their character of signification. For example, a partition wall may, with one of its faces, delimit a scarcely significant space, and with the other, on the contrary, configure a space of strong expressive intensity. Therefore, to the question: exterior or interior space in relation to what? we answer: in relation to semantic-positional values, to the function of signification, to the process of communication¹¹. And we hold, moreover, that only semiotic interpretation can truly respond to the age-old question and resolve the various aporias that have arisen around the interior/exterior spatial pair, explaining its structural complexity and linking it to the parameter of signification, that is, relating it to factors wholly inaccessible to an asemantic conception of space.

Moreover, the dependence of interior and exterior characters of sign components on their degree of signification, particularly in relation to the more complex phenomenology

of the signifier, requires a clarification. In associating the Saussurean dichotomy with that of interior and exterior space, we do not intend to establish (even though for didactic and schematic purposes this may seem convenient) a one-to-one correspondence between terms, but rather an equivalence between the two pairs in their total valence. In other words, while it is true that exterior space plays the role of «signifier» and interior space that of «signified», there is nonetheless no simple one-to-one identification among the four terms thus defined, nor a sharp separation between the two spatial entities considered. Except in the simplest cases of monosemic and extremely linear buildings, it is never possible to pinpoint the precise threshold at which interior space becomes exterior space, where the «signified» passes into the «signifier».

i. H. Sörgel, *Einführung in die Architektur-Ästhetik*, Piloty & Loehle, München 1918, p. 157. However, although inspired by a symbolist intent, this statement also indicates the overcoming of a merely phenomenal and inhabitable internality in favor of another, virtual one, which is certainly not foreign to our idea of identifying the interior, in any case, with the «signified».

ii. Cf. B. Zevi, *Saper vedere l'architettura*, Einaudi, Turin 1951.

iii. On the question of interior space, [Emilio] Garroni returns in his most recent book: «To what extent – he asks – must a space be interior and inhabitable [...] in order to constitute the essence of architecture?» Referring to our essay *Significanti e significati della Rotonda palladiana*, he writes: «Nor does the recent attempt by R. De Fusco [...] to adopt and correct this criterion in a “semiological” sense manage, at the same time, to resolve Zevi's material difficulties and to preserve the specificity of the criterion itself. In fact, replacing the interior and inhabitable space with the notion of semiological space, not necessarily interior and inhabitable, is either a compromise between the formal and the material, leaving Zevi's material difficulties intact, or it ceases to be, properly speaking, a criterion for defining the language of architecture. This very aspecific conclusion seems to us particularly interesting, although we fear that De Fusco, and, in general, those architect-theorists who have approached architecture from a semiotic point of view, would scarcely be inclined to accept it. Yet a “semiological space” (space as “signified”) can only be virtual space» (cf. E. Garroni, *Progetto di semiotica*, Laterza, Bari 1972, pp. 92-93). We do not share this exclusivist position. Certainly, architectural theorists cannot renounce the specific character of architecture, nor refrain from investigating its real spatial phenomenology, if they wish in any way to translate their theories into practice. Confronted with the alternative between a truly inhabitable interior space and a virtual one, they could only opt for the former solution; but fortunately such a dilemma does not exist. We reaffirm our idea [...] that, thanks to the notion of semiotic space, one may speak of internal space in both a real and virtual sense, thus resolving earlier aporias without abandoning the specificity of the architectural language.

iv. H. Focillon, *Vita delle forme*, Le Tre Venezie, 1945, p. 53.

[Renato De Fusco, *Segni storia e progetto dell'architettura*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1973, pp. 30-36]

6. What is written in this passage represents perhaps the most convincing attempt, and certainly the most thoroughly argued, to find a synthesis between Zevi's theory and its correction by Giulio Carlo Argan (cf. *A proposito di spazio interno*, in «Metron», no. 28, 1948, pp. 20-21; *Interni*, in *Enciclopedia Universale dell'Arte*, Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, Venice-Rome, Sansoni, Florence 1959, vol. VII, cols. 580-587) [both excerpted in this volume]. The exclusion of practicability and habitability as defining factors makes it possible to extend the notion of interiority beyond the limits of a binary positional logic to include everything that represents the meaning of a given construction, without losing the objective recognizability that Argan's first formulation tends to blur. At the same time, De Fusco's structuralist reading marks a clear break from the phenomenological tradition, of which Carlo De Carli may be regarded as the last representative, aligning himself instead with the long-neglected position of Luigi Moretti (*Strutture e sequenze di spazi*, in «Spazio», no. 7, 1953, pp. 9-20 and 107-108) [excerpted in this volume].

7. This is another essential clarification to avoid interpreting the pair simply in terms of architectural and urban signs – a topic to which De Fusco in fact devotes a separate chapter. Cf. R. De Fusco, *Ipotesi per il segno urbanistico*, in Id., *Segni, storia e progetto dell'architettura...* cit., pp. 77-84.

8. As Adriano Cornoldi wrote years later, poetically summarizing this relationship, «the exterior, the place of conflicts, embraces contrasts and contradictions. The interior, the place of reassurance, demands close integration. [...] The exterior, the place of estrangement, can accommodate otherness. The interior, the place of reappropriation, must express belonging. [...] The exterior, the place of turbulent multifunctionality, conveys a contradictory communication. The interior, the place of appropriateness, requires unity of visual message». A. Cornoldi, *Specificità del restauro di interni*, in Id., ed., *Gli interni nel progetto sull'esistente*, Il Poligrafo, Padua 2007, pp. 65-72 [transl. by the editor].

9. Cf. F. De Saussure, *op. cit.*

10. Envelope and cavity (in Italian *involucro* and *invaso*) are two terms introduced here that recur frequently in De Fusco's writings as essential elements of his semiotic reading. Limiting the discourse to the field of interiors, see in this regard R. De Fusco, *Per una teoria dell'arredamento*, in «Casa Vogue», no. 150, 1984, pp. 26-27 [excerpted in this volume]; Id., *Storia dell'arredamento*, UTET, Turin 1985.

11. With this passage, De Fusco reaches a fully convincing conclusion to the argument opened by the identification of interior/exterior with signified/signifier. He acknowledges that, according to the law of reciprocity between concavity and convexity, when one is inside a space is simultaneously outside another. Yet his semiotic approach allows him to overcome this apparent contradiction in terms different from Zevi's. For him, what characterizes the interior is not merely a relative positional quality – that is, where a person happens to be at a given moment – but above all the design quality of signification – therefore authorial or interpretive – whereby certain architectures may display an urban role – and thus define an urban interior – more strongly than that of the space they physically enclose. The phenomenological theme of design intentionality is therefore fundamental here, even if not explicitly mentioned, just as is the

recognition that «most buildings are polysemic» and that it is therefore often difficult to attribute a univocal predominance of meaning in this sense. [JL]

Gianni Ottolini

Space and Architecture

1996

Architecture is the harmonious construction of the place in which human life unfolds, and in which human life, through a particular transposition into its material forms, becomes present. [...]

Is the place that architecture constructs, and, more precisely, the atmospheric cavity or hollow defined by its wall masses (or «boundaries») and within which human life occurs, the simple result of its constructive action, or is it itself construction?

A response to this question comes from the conventional and synthetic definition of architecture as *the art of space*, which directly privileges space, rather than the «hard» stones and other building materials, as the specific object of the art¹. The art of space means that architecture is not merely construction carried out according to appropriate technical, functional, and aesthetic rules, but rather the appropriate construction of space, understood not as the generic extension of matter, but as a habitable place.

The becoming of space into a habitable place in architecture is inscribed in the very etymology of the word «space», as Martin Heidegger observed. In a 1964 lecture on *Art and Space*², [...] after identifying the connection between solid masses and cavities [...], he questioned the validity of the notion of space proper to technical-scientific thought, aimed at investigating and mastering external reality, in order to grasp the inner substance of space in the work of art; and he sought a different interpretation by tracing back to the original meaning of the term.

He thus discovers that within the word space (*Raum*, in German) there resonates a primitive making space (*Raumen*), in the sense of clearing, of creating an open place in which to dwell². [...]

Space, then, is a making space, a discovery in nature of what is already there, or a creation within it of an open, that

is, free, welcoming, and cultivable place in which to dwell and live³.

We thus find ourselves facing an apparent paradox of architecture: it identifies its spaces only in relation to the constructed boundaries that delimit and envelop them, and it normally presents itself as space gathered within its perimeter, and therefore as enclosed [...].

Yet space in architecture, even when physically enclosed, is not a «closed thing»: it is rather a *circumscribed-open*, a space that is delimited and at the same time open, open to welcome, to settlement, and to human gesture⁴. [...]

Immediate is the connection between this idea of space and that of primary space, proposed in the academic context by Carlo De Carli in the mid-1960s, which he [...] developed in his teaching and in various research reports⁵. [...]

«The examination of architectural organisms already built leads me to think that space is in every case – but above all and preeminently in Architecture – an act of qualification, an authentic attribution or donation of meaning. It is not out there, in the world, already completed, nor in here, within us, as the *a priori* schema of a transcendental subject in general; it is neither something external (upon which one draws) nor pure interiority, for it is born imbued with lived experience, with the fullness of all lived experience.

Precisely for this reason, in Architecture it happens that the so-called interior space is never such in relation to, or by simple logical inversion of, exterior space; rather, it is the very genetic interiority of space, the genesis itself, and thus the qualification of space as such. Qualification is, here, its positing not in the universal but in the particular, not as space but as this space.

This makes it so that this space, with its here and its now, not only involves in its constitutive act temporality and history, but also de-privatizes our I that inhabits it: this space, in fact,

is not and cannot be only our space, but the most objective, historical, and ethical space of intersubjectivity.

Finally, this interior architectural space is a true and proper original space; not the space, but a space: this one.

Rightly, it may also be called, in the context of Architecture, *primary space*: not in the sense that it should enjoy any evaluative primacy, but for its proximity to the primary originarity that constitutes it within the projective and operative genesis»⁶.

The space that is the ancient «making space», the revealing and opening of the primordial place of life's hospitality, inscribed in the very etymon of the word, here becomes a true attribution or donation of meaning, grasped in the immediate moment in which, here and now, the I opens itself to intersubjectivity. De Carli repeatedly defined primary space as the «space of first relations» or «space of relation», the space of the authentic and simple, sometimes secret, gesture of openness toward others and toward the world⁵. [...]

No geometrical or material form guarantees *a priori* the realization of such a space, from which, rather, it derives, and which, in other respects, as we shall see, it also prefigures or anticipates; nor did De Carli ever wish to reduce the idea of primary space to a recipe for design, much less to a linguistic code. He preferred instead to propose an ethics of design, founded on the attentive participation in human needs as they arise, and in particular on the «sense of the preciousness of the human person»⁴. [...]

In the term *space* [by way of summary] and in the genesis of architecture there lies an act of qualification and of donation of meaning. It is born with the gesture of humankind, which is always a relational act, with oneself, with others, with the world.

«Gesture» is equivalent to the «birth of space». We say gesture and not action or function, neutral terms, lacking subject and figure, because it is the word that best involves the corporeality of the one who acts, and at the same time the material and figural manifestation of an intention, of its foundations in thought and emotion⁶.

The involvement, through the dynamics of gesture, of the corporeality of the inhabitant thus substantially concerns architectural space, so that one may say there is no architecture unless the human body is present within it, or, more precisely, unless human life can unfold within it, in the specific sense. [...]

In architecture, the form, dimension, and environmental condition of space, even before utility [...], allow and require that the human body enter into space, whether architectural or urban, circulate within it, and move between inside and outside, enjoying its hospitality and perceiving it visually as well as through other sensory channels, only

partially subsumed, by synaesthesia⁷, within the visual one.

Bruno Zevi was the first to explain that architecture exists when there is an interior space⁸, and this material category of interiority is also, for us, distinctive and specific, provided that it is understood as space truly, and not merely imaginatively, inhabitable by the human body, whether individually or collectively.

We are always inside a space, more or less welcoming and clear in itself and in its boundaries, from the child in the mother's womb to interstellar exploration (for infinity is excluded from our sensory perception, which always physicalizes a limit, even if it be darkness, at a finite distance). We can only move from here to there, from inside to outside, and vice versa: a movement that can always be described as passage from one interior to another, if one considers the celestial vault as the perceptual upper boundary of the open spaces «outside» buildings⁹, and such spaces as enclosed between earth, sky, and vertical margins, whether natural or constructed.

Just as a single building embodies within itself the double property of appearing as an external body and, at the same time, of having an internal cavity, with the envelope serving as the medium of relation between exterior and interior^{viii}, so urban and territorial space can likewise be perceived both from within (streets, courtyards, squares, natural environment)⁷ and from without, as in the approach to a city or in the passing over a hill that had hidden a valley from view.

Within the continuity of interior spaces, the condition of being inside, lies the possibility of integrating open urban spatiality and architecture, thus providing a theoretical foundation for what is called *urban furnishing*^x.

If there does not, and cannot, exist an architecture of exteriors, that is, if by the very definition of architecture as space circumscribed by boundaries and hospitable, *all architecture is interior architecture*, then a «façade» is nothing other than the manner in which a building presents itself to an urban or territorial interior⁸. One may thus regard it not only, or not simply, as a possible «mirror of the interior» or as its impossible «literal» declaration to the outside [...], but also as an event in itself, to be related to another (urban) interior in which it appears.

The design of urban furnishing, as a specification and field of application of architectural design, thus concerns not only the objects and equipment of this space, not only its paving or arboreal masses, but the very architecture of the buildings and their manner of relating to the common open space⁹.

At the opposite scale, the smaller one, the presence

The text presented here is an excerpt from the opening chapters of *Forma e significato in architettura* (Laterza, Rome-Bari 1973), in which Gianni Ottolini summarizes the most significant issues concerning a spatial interpretation of the architectural phenomenon. Of particular interest to the field of interior architecture are his reflections on the interiority of the exterior and on the unity of the spatial phenomenon, from which evolves an original line of theoretical and applied research, initiated by Ottolini himself a few years earlier (*Conformazione e attrezzatura dello spazio aperto*, in «Quaderni del Dipartimento di Progettazione dell'Architettura», no. 4, 1987, pp. 38-50), on what he calls «urban interiors». See also G. Ottolini, *Interni urbani*, in V. Saitto, ed., *Interni urbani*, Maggioli, Santarcangelo di Romagna 2013, pp. 12-18.

1. Once again, to identify the roots of this definition, see A. Schmarsow, *Das Wesen der architektonischen Schöpfung*, Hiersemann, Leipzig 1894.
2. The same argument, as is well known, was already present in M. Heidegger, *Bauen Wohnen Denken*, in Id., *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Neske, Tübingen 1954, pp. 145-164.

3. See in particular C. Norberg-Schulz, *L'abitare. L'insediamento, lo spazio urbano, la casa*, Electa, Milan 1984, which represents the direct disciplinary transposition of Heidegger's conception.

4. This notion of circumscribed space as constitutively open, in terms of both use and meaning, finds a counterpart in the scientific definition of interior itself, which, from a mathematical standpoint, simply designates all the points of a set except those that constitute its boundary. See J. Leveratto, *Dalla tipologia alla topologia*, in Id., *Dall'interno. Verso un approccio multiscalare all'abitabilità*, LetteraVentidue, Siracusa 2018, pp. 11-19.

5. The question of the «gesture», which Ottolini would later develop extensively, first appears in De Carli's writings on a theater space he designed, in relation to the dialogue established there between architecture, actor, and audience. See C. De Carli, *Teatro Sant'Erasmo. Un piccolo teatro nel seminterrato*, in «Domus», no. 285, 1953, pp. 16-19.

6. On the concept of gesture, and on the formative power of the design gesture, see, in direct continuity with De Carli's thought, the writings of Dino Formaggio and, in particular, *Progettare con il corpo*, in «Domus», no. 676, 1986, p. 22.

7. Here, in addition to the theories of Zevi and De Carli, see also, for their relevance in this regard, Renato De Fusco's already mentioned *Ipotesi per il segno urbanistico (Segni, storia e progetto dell'architettura*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1973, pp. 77-84), Rudolf Arnheim's study of public squares (*The Dynamics of Architectural Form*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1977, pp. 112-114), and especially Christian Norberg-Schulz's theory of the *Genius loci* (Electa, Milan 1979, p. 58), in which it is possible to read, for the first time in these terms, the idea that «the gathering function exercised by the city determines a complex inner structure, an *urban interior*».

8. Here, one might say that Ottolini attempts to bring to completion the discussion on the unity of the architectural fact that De Carli began in *Contro la realtà finta* («Interni», no. 1, 1967, pp. 2-5) [excerpted in this volume], explicitly extending it to all those urban and territorial forms that may be understood from the same phenomenological perspective. In this sense, his interpretation is less structural than De Fusco's but, precisely because of its pliability, lends itself more readily to applied possibilities that until then exceeded the limits of the specific disciplinary field.

9. On this subject, which as mentioned would soon become one of the emerging areas of the discipline, among the contributions developed within the doc-

of architecture, in turn, derives from the possibility of recognizing a practicable interior spatiality even at the microscopic scale of objects of use (a bed, a chair), which, like pods or «casts of the body»^x, so to speak, «allude» to space, opening themselves to the gesture of the human body that employs them.

These considerations do not, of course, deny the reality of the conventional notions of «exterior» (open space outside buildings) and «interior» (inhabitable space enclosed within buildings), with their respective material and functional specificities and differing symbolic connotations [...].

The emphasis on inhabitable interiority as the fundamental attribute of architecture at every scale does not, in fact, exclude that, throughout history, some architectures have been conceived chiefly as interiors and others mainly as exteriors, while in yet other cases a deliberate interplay between interior and exterior has been pursued, illusionistically bringing the outside in, or projecting the inside out. [...] Yet there is no doubt that, in the tradition of architecture and in the objective materiality of any work [...], the differentiated presentation of the envelope, or spatial boundary, toward the exterior and toward the interior is inevitable, and leaves open a vast range of ways to connect the two spaces thus defined.

Starting from the preeminence of inhabitable interior space as that which characterizes the very existence of architecture, we are consequently led to speak of the envelope that circumscribes it and makes its identification possible.

Indeed, in architecture there is no space without boundary. In brief, one might say that the dialectic of architectural materials is that which is established between an «open», that is, a *spatial cavity* delimited by its margins (whether enclosed or open-air) and hospitable; the *margins* or limits that bound it toward an exterior; the *dividers* that, as sensitive diaphragms, articulate it within; and the things, *the fixed and movable furnishings*, that equip it. Architecture, as a material reality, is defined precisely by the material and formal properties of these mutually related elements, among which space stands out because it is that which gathers «the preciousness of man» [sic], his body and his gesture.

- i. M. Heidegger, *L'arte e lo spazio* (1964), Il Melangolo, Genoa 1979.
- ii. C. De Carli, *Spazio Primario*, Facoltà di Architettura, Politecnico di Milano, 1970. This text is only partially reproduced in C. De Carli, *Architettura Spazio Primario*, Hoepli, Milan 1982.
- iii. C. De Carli, *Architettura Spazio Primario...* cit., p. 362.
- iv. Ibid., p. 250.
- v. J. Marston Fitch, *La progettazione ambientale*, Muzzio, Padua 1980, p. 161.
- vi. B. Zevi, *Saper vedere l'architettura*, Einaudi, Turin 1951.

The interior of the Palazzo del Senato in the Ducal Palace of Mantua, designed by Giulio Romano, 1526-1527. The interior of the Palazzo del Senato in the Ducal Palace of Mantua, designed by Giulio Romano, 1526-1527. The interior of the Palazzo del Senato in the Ducal Palace of Mantua, designed by Giulio Romano, 1526-1527.

toral program in Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design at Politecnico di Milano, coordinated by Ottolini, see in particular V. Saitto, ed., *op. cit.*; J. Leveratto, *Città personali. Interni urbani a misura d'uomo*, LetteraVentidue, Siracusa 2015; F. Lenzini, *Riti urbani. Spazi di rappresentazione sociale*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2017. These texts derive from the idea that interior space, besides representing the fundamental environmental unit of any architecture, is not confined to a single type, canonical scale, or specific configuration, but rather identifies the phenomenal representation of the way people perceive and inhabit built space, whether in private or in public, at home or in a square. Thus, what determines its formal qualification is not only its architectural configuration but also all the furnishing and equipment operations that contribute to defining its ultimate consistency in terms of interpretation and use. For an overview, see J. Leveratto, *Urban Interiors. A Retroactive Investigation*, in «The Journal of Interior Design», vol. 44, no. 3, 2019, pp. 161-171. [JL]

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- vii. According to [Giambattista] Vico, «the first men, like children of the nascent human race, believed that the sky was no higher than the mountain tops (just as children today still think it to be little higher than the roofs of their houses)». See G. Vico, *Principj di Scienza Nuova d'intorno alla comune natura delle Nazioni*, Third Edition (1744), ed. P. Soccio, Garzanti, Milan 1983, p. 219. Since this concerns the poetic imagination of a perceived reality, this recurring “childlike” point of view can be considered a correct perception of reality in the poetic sense. On the perception of the sky as ceiling, see also [Christian] Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci. Paesaggio, ambiente, architettura*, Electa, Milan 1979, p. 39.
- viii. G. Ottolini, *Lineare Piano Volumetrico. Tre sistemi d'arredo per l'abitazione*, Clup, Milan 1987, p. 26.
- ix. G. Ottolini, *Conformazione e attrezzatura dello spazio aperto*, in «Quaderni del Dipartimento di Progettazione dell'Architettura», no. 4, Clup, Milan, March 1987; Id., *Urbanistica della luce*, in AA. VV., *Milano illuminata*, AEM, Milan 1993.
- x. M. Praz, *La filosofia dell'Arredamento* (1963), Longanesi, Milan 1981, p. 22.

[Gianni Ottolini, *Forma e significato in architettura*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1996, pp. 5-17]

The interior of the Palazzo del Senato in the Ducal Palace of Mantua, designed by Giulio Romano, 1526-1527. The interior of the Palazzo del Senato in the Ducal Palace of Mantua, designed by Giulio Romano, 1526-1527. The interior of the Palazzo del Senato in the Ducal Palace of Mantua, designed by Giulio Romano, 1526-1527.

Imma Forino Interior and Interiority 1998

The interior of the Palazzo del Senato in the Ducal Palace of Mantua, designed by Giulio Romano, 1526-1527. The interior of the Palazzo del Senato in the Ducal Palace of Mantua, designed by Giulio Romano, 1526-1527. The interior of the Palazzo del Senato in the Ducal Palace of Mantua, designed by Giulio Romano, 1526-1527.

A well-known and widely acknowledged theme in architectural culture and philosophical speculation is that, among the distinctive meanings of architecture, is the creation of interior space.

The «feeling for space» ([Oswald] Spengler)¹; architecture understood as *Raumgestaltung*, or the art of shaping a hollow three-dimensionality ([August] Schmarsow, later [Albert] Brinckmann, [Herman] Sörgel, [Leo] Adler)², whose task is to form enclosed spaces and create their contours ([Alois] Riegl)³; architecture as the construction of «an inner world that measures space and light according to the laws of a geometry, a mechanics, and an optics which necessarily remain included within the natural order, but over which nature has no hold»⁴, and again, architecture as «the art of spatial containers, of enclosed “voids”, of the dynamic sequences of polydimensional and multi-perspectival cavities, in which the life of human associations finds its physical and spiritual expression, and in which the creative impulse of architects is fulfilled»ⁱⁱ, ending with the identification between the «cavity» and the «signified» component of the architectural sign ([Renato] De Fusco)⁴, are only some of the main concepts that have animated critical debate, emphasizing, though in different tones, the internal spatiality of the architectural artifact.

If the theories just mentioned have addressed the interior mainly from a properly physical standpoint, in other words, as a void bounded by constructed and easily identifiable margins, scholars operating in fields apparently far from architectural criticism have considered other kinds of values, equally important, that allow connections to be traced between the world of the interior, the interiority of those who inhabit it, and furniture, the true *trait d'union* between the two. The image of the house as shell ([Gaston] Bachelard)⁵ or of the primordial refuge, whether den or shelter ([Rudolf] Arnheim)⁶, the desire

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The text presented here, published in 1998 in the journal «Op. cit. Selezione della critica d'arte contemporanea», constitutes an original historical excursus on the relationship between the conception of the bourgeois interior and the expression of the interiority of its inhabitant. It represents a felicitous revival of a theme – clearly of Prazian lineage – which, while long neglected in Italian architectural literature, has been the object of numerous and significant international studies (cf. W. Rybczynski, *Home. A Short History of an Idea*, Penguin, New York 1986; C. Rice, *The Emergence of the Interior. Architecture, Modernity, Domesticity*, Routledge, London 2006; S. Muthesius, *The Poetic Home. Designing the 19th-Century Domestic Interior*, Thames & Hudson, New York 2009; G. Teyssot, *A Topology of Everyday Constellations*, The MIT Press, Cambridge MA 2013).

1. O. Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, vol. I, *Form und Wirklichkeit*, C.H. Beck, Munich 1918, pp. 650-670.
2. Cf. A. Schmarsow, *Das Wesen der architektonischen Schöpfung*, Hiersemann, Leipzig 1894; A. Brinckmann, *Baukunst der Renaissance in Italien*, B.G. Teubner, Leipzig 1908; H. Sörgel, *Einführung in die Architektur-Ästhetik*, Piloty & Loehle, Munich 1918; L. Adler, *Vom Wesen der Baukunst*, Asia Major, Leipzig 1926.

to be somehow protected by the *intérieur* ([Walter] Benjamin)⁷, are especially suited to the argument we wish to advance⁸.

Let us begin with a few premises concerning the relationship between interior and interiority, by considering some reflections by [Giulio Carlo] Argan. According to the author, interior spaces are «not in relation to a material enclosure, but in relation to the artist»ⁱⁱⁱ, and he suggests defining this type of space as «rather interiorized than interior, like those of which one does not “have” but rather “makes” experience in architecture»^{iv}. Although these statements are in part comparable to Zevi’s positions on interior space, derived from Wright’s poetics⁹, Argan further specifies them when, in speaking of furniture, he observes that: «When one speaks of interior space, one does not refer to the space bounded by walls in relation to the space outside them, but to a general conception of space as *internità* or interiority. [...] That space, which we call interior, is such precisely in relation to the human being, who conceives it as the dimension of his own existence, or as the region open to the realization of his possibilities»^v. In other words, what is underscored is the close connection between space and inner experience, not only that of the creator of the architectural artifact, but also of the one who will dwell within that interiority¹⁰. This becomes evident if one considers the entire history of dwelling: the gradual awareness of one’s own interiority – a laborious process that can be traced back to the late Middle Ages ([Norbert] Elias, later [Georges] Duby)¹¹ – constitutes, in fact, a crucial node in the development of the individual, and the furnishing of homes evolves in parallel with it ([John] Lukács)¹², accompanying its path and eventually making it perceptible to later observers through archaeological findings first, and figurative representations thereafter.

It is also well known that among the various instincts of interiority there is «that of creating for oneself a theme, an arti-

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3. Cf. A. Riegl, *Historische Grammatik der bildenden Künste. 1897-99*, eds. K. M. Swoboda, O. Pächt, Böhlau, Graz-Cologne 1966.
4. R. De Fusco, *Segni, storia e progetto dell'architettura*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1973, pp. 30-36 [excerpted in this volume].
5. G. Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace*, PUF, Paris 1957.
6. R. Arnheim, *The Dynamics of Architectural Form*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1977.
7. W. Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt 1982.
8. It is interesting to note here the idea of the architectural interior that emerges from the ensuing historical reading which – following the authors cited – appears simultaneously as imprint and as cast of a personal identity built along with it. As Maurizio Vitta would observe some years later, «the time of dwelling is not that immobile time, fixed once and for all, of the architectural project, but the mobile time [...] of the existential project of the inhabitant [...]. It is therefore in habit that the conjunction is accomplished between the purely spatial datum of the dwelling [...] and the vital experience of the inhabitant». It is likewise in this dimension, materialised by furniture, that those two data come to construct one another in a process of co-evolution. M. Vitta, *Dell'abitare. Corpi, spazi, oggetti, immagini*, Einaudi, Turin 2008, p. 83 [transl. by the editor].

ficial shell, within which to protect and foster one’s intimacy»^{vi}. As Bachelard reminds us, nests and shells are to be regarded as transposed images, however seemingly banal, of the function of dwelling, even though they have no direct connection with a human origin: the values of shelter are in fact so simple, so deeply rooted in the unconscious of the being, as to constitute a «primordial» and therefore indestructible image^{vii}. This is a «proto-historical motif» of inhabiting, writes Benjamin in several lucid fragments, of «what is remote – perhaps eternal – the image of man’s dwelling in the maternal womb [...]. The original form of all dwelling is not to live in a house, but in a shell. This bears the imprint of its inhabitant. The dwelling ultimately becomes a shell»^{viii}.

The quality of concavity that «envelops» pertains to interior space not only in the critical interpretations of theorists such as Schmarsow or Sörgel, but also of those who have approached it from the standpoint of sensory perception: «An interior – writes Arnheim – is a closed and autonomous world. [...] Instead of leaving the entrant in a boundless world, an interior envelops him like a womb, and this can be an experience that is either reassuring or oppressive. The world of the interior can be wholly embraced; it is explorable, and can be related to the dimensions and power of the human being far more closely than can the exterior, and is therefore more sensitive to his control. Man is taller than many of his furnishings and can reach most of the rest. Made for him and at his service, the interior surrounds its occupant as courtiers gather around their king»^{ix}.

If a phenomenological interpretation of the world of the interior thus cannot be separated from the familiar archetype of the Mother-House – since «*the act of dwelling* clothes itself with the unconscious values that the unconscious does not forget»^x – we must nevertheless recall that within the same domain there coexists an ambivalent reality of meaning, two opposite sides of the same coin: the interior as prison and as hiding place. This is a deep psychic di-polarity, related to the human need for protection, which can be associated with the binomial tomb-womb, or, by further regression through Bachelardian *rêveries*, traced back to the dualism of death-life. «From the oppressive closure to the sweetness of being enclosed»^{xi}, from the anguish of entrapment to the desire to be enveloped, countless resonances then unfold and echo within the world of the interior, states of mind, certainly, but ones that are reflected in the «artificial landscapes» configured by the different ways of inhabiting and furnishing that space.

The desire to nest or to barricade oneself, in other words, to live sensorially and psychologically the experience of withdrawal into an extra-natal refuge, was identified by the psychoanalyst [Elvio] Fachinelli with the term

claustrophilia¹³. He coined the expression claustrophilic area precisely «to emphasize the intensity and force of the drive toward the *claustrum*, toward enclosure». It is important, however, to note the author’s overcoming of the equivalence between closed place and maternal womb, in favour of a genuine search for «enclosure» itself. In Fachinelli’s view, «the situation apparently symmetrical and opposite to this, the claustrophobia, appeared to me as an individual accident, something which, at least in part, in its essential part, was still contained within the claustrophilic area. The already available and apparently similar term *agoraphobia* seemed inadequate, because it primarily implied a “fear of the open”, whereas what I wished to emphasize was the “search for the closed”. I would also point out that this closed, this *claustrum*, indicates only in the last instance a confined place referable to the model or image of the maternal womb. For me, it refers primarily to the act of closing, of barring, of shutting oneself within. And this is consistent with the etymology of the word: in Latin *claustrum* means key, lock, bolt, and the like; only much later did it come to mean an enclosed place»^{xii}.

If it is above all the bourgeois nineteenth-century interior, filled with trinkets, *bibelots*, and suffocating draperies, that embodies the ambiguous image of the «refuge»^{xiii}, both oppressive and comforting, in general it is the act of furnishing – an intervention that is, we recall, subsequent and supplementary to the one that gives form to the room itself^{xiv} – that can be read as a way of preserving for oneself a «universe» commensurate with one’s own claustrophilia. In that singular domain, which is the domestic environment, furnishing in fact determines a series of subsets, delineating «privileged» spaces, «enclosures», as it were, within the larger enclosure of the house, itself opposed to the external world-nature. From the simple arrangement of furniture and objects according to a precise, rational will, to more radical interventions of organization and structuring of interior space, one discerns the desire to appropriate a place, the interior, aimed at creating «a spatial envelope that protects and comforts one’s instinct for possession»^{xv}.

It is above all in the pages of philosophy and literature that the link between claustrophilia and furnishing becomes clearest¹⁴. In the former, the main reference is [Theodor W.] Adorno’s reflections on [Søren] Kierkegaard’s philosophy. The Danish philosopher had romantically compared interiority to a feudal castle, but it is in Adorno’s interpretation that the bourgeois *intérieur* of the nineteenth century sheds the idealistic concept of interiority proposed by Kierkegaard. The intellectual with a «tendency toward private living»^{xvi}, in an isolation that folds him back upon himself, had in fact experienced a kind of melancholic reclusion, in reality, an

unusual response to a personal desire: «when Johannes – writes Kierkegaard in a youthful work – asked permission to go out, it was usually denied him; instead, his father often suggested, as a substitute, that they walk up and down the room hand in hand. At first glance this seemed a meager compensation, and yet... something completely different was hidden within it. The proposal was accepted, and it was entirely up to Johannes to decide where they wished to go. Then they would leave through the great gate, walk toward a nearby pleasure castle, or out toward the shore, or wander through the streets, just as Johannes wished; for the father could do anything. As they thus walked up and down the room, the father described all they saw; they greeted passersby; the carriages brushed past them, covering his voice with their noise, and the candied fruits in the pastry shop were more tempting than ever...»^{xvii}.

According to Adorno, this imaginary-perceptive experience is transfigured by the Danish philosopher into an explanatory key to his «philosophy of existence»: the objects of the dwelling, with their arrangement – what Adorno calls «furnishing» – are compelled to assume the connotations of the external world. «The mute things speak as “symbols”»^{xviii}, and thus «reality [...] appears reflected by pure interiority»^{xix}. In a lighter and more liberating tone, another *flâneur* transforms the descriptions of his walks around his room, traversed along every possible path, into an existential experience. «My room [...] – writes Xavier de Maistre – forms an elongated square with a perimeter of thirty-six paces, following closely along the walls. My journey will, however, include more than that; for I shall often cross it lengthwise and breadthwise, or diagonally, following no rule or method. – I shall also describe zigzags, and traverse all the lines possible in geometry, should necessity require it»^{xx}. In a «journey» lasting forty-two days, around his own room, the furniture (the armchair, the bed above all) – the furnishings – become reflective mirrors of the writer’s soul, but also «places» within the room where he may pause and meditate.

If the interior with its furnishings is thus fundamentally a mirror of the soul, as Mario Praz always stated, in some cases it becomes even a «deforming» element, the amplification of an idea, a sensibility, a need to inhabit, an obsession. Significant in this regard is the experience of the protagonist of a story by [Joris-Karl] Huysmans, a writer whose Symbolist poetics is strongly linked to the theme of furnishing, following in the footsteps of [Edgar Allan] Poe, [Charles] Baudelaire¹⁵, and others before him ([Francesco] Orlando, [Liana] Nissim)¹⁶.

The main character, Monsieur Bougran, dejected by forced early retirement, lives in a state of painful anguish until he reconstructs, in his own home and down to the

smallest detail, his former office. He «first of all [...] ran to the wallpaper merchants, bought several rolls of an inferior chicory-milk-colored paper, which he had hung on the walls of his smallest room; then he bought a black-painted pine desk topped with pigeonholes, a small table on which he placed a chipped basin and a piece of marshmallow soap in an old glass, a semicircular cane armchair, two chairs. He had white wooden filing cabinets set against the walls, which he filled with green folders with brass handles; he pinned a calendar above the mantelpiece, from which he had the mirror removed, and on whose shelf he piled up card boxes; he threw a mat and a wastebasket under the desk and, stepping back a little, exclaimed delightedly: “There! I’ve got it!”. [...] Without taking a single step, he found himself back before his old desk, in his old room. He sat down, radiant, and from then on relived his bygone days»^{xxi}.

This literary example clearly illustrates the «petrification» of a precarious existential equilibrium precisely through the re-creation of an interior: furnishing is the necessary medium through which comfort and the recovery of security become possible, in other words, a material artifice employed by the psyche to reach a state of well-being. Furniture and its arrangement may thus be considered as transitional objects, mediating between the individual and the world, between the personal space and what surrounds it¹⁷. It is, in any case, a possible way of constructing a refuge-enclosure, or, in other words, of taking possession of a world: «however precarious it may be, it can arouse all the dreams of security»^{xxii}.

If the considerations examined so far represent a strong and indispensable motive of dwelling, they can also be understood as a realistic model of a specific socio-cultural climate, that which marks the passage to modernity at the turn of the last century. It is, rather, in other reflections by Adorno that we can read the «philosophy» animating the European *intérieur* after the physical and moral devastation of war. To the traditional dwelling, whose intimacy is now imprisoned by the «musty community of interests of the family»^{xxiii}, the destruction of European cities and the prospect of a socialist society oppose a new aspect of modernity: the impossibility of dwelling, the decline of the home. Not only is private property compromised by the enormous proliferation of consumer goods, such that no individual can any longer appeal to the principle of their limitation, but at the same time the individual cannot do without owning something, so as not to succumb to the frustrating need that ultimately favours that same relationship of possession. According to the author, this destructive paradox finds expression in «genuine apartments, but ones pieced together through compulsive purchases, [where they who]

9. Cf. B. Zevi, *Saper vedere l’architettura*, Einaudi, Turin 1948, pp. 22-32 [excerpted in this volume]; F.L. Wright, *In the Cause of Architecture* IX, in «Architectural Record», December 1928, p. 510.

10. As Argan himself wrote, «the art of architectural interiors has fundamentally different characteristics from architecture», since «its problem is not that of defining space, but rather of adapting space to the needs of life» (*Interni*, in *Enciclopedia Universale dell’Arte*, Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, Venice-Rome, Sansoni, Florence 1959, vol. VII, cols. 580) [excerpted in this volume]. Yet, while Argan lists the technical components of such an art, in this case the author develops the theme of interiority in a more explicitly psychological key.

11. N. Elias, *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation*, 2 vols., Haus zum Falken, Basel 1939; G. Duby, *Le temps des cathédrales*, Gallimard, Paris 1976.

12. J. Lukács, *The Bourgeois Interior*, in «American Scholar», no. 39, 1970, pp. 616-630.

13. The theme of claustrophilia, here introduced for the first time into the disciplinary discourse on interiors, serves to update the psychoanalytic reading inaugurated by Bachelard, attempting to account in more systematic terms for the widespread fascination with a certain idea of domestic seclusion.

14. On this subject, beyond the references cited by the author, see also the earlier essay by D. Baroni, *Interiors*, in «Ottagono», no. 54, 1979, pp. 30-39. For further developments, see the more recent C. Fagone, ed., *La stanza accanto. Interni e sensibilità immaginativa della scrittura*, Lupetti, Bologna-Milan 2015; Ead., *Geografia di un interno. Luoghi dell’abitare e ricerca artistica tra memoria e sperimentazione*, Milieu, Milan 2018.

15. E.A. Poe, *The Philosophy of Furniture*, in «Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine», no. 5, 1840, pp. 243-245; C. Baudelaire, *Le Spleen de Paris*, Calmann-Lévy, Paris 1869.

16. F. Orlando, *Gli oggetti desueti nelle immagini della letteratura. Rovine, reliquie, rarità, robaccia, luoghi inabitati e tesori nascosti*, Einaudi, Turin 1993; L. Nissim, *Storia di un tema simbolista. Gli interni*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 1980.

17. It is necessary here to underscore the clarification of the role of *trait d’union* played by furnishing, first introduced between the notions of interior and interiority. It is through furnishing – understood both as product and as process – that the space of dwelling and the act of inhabiting come to coincide within the same dimension. Hence, it may be considered one of the essential apparatuses for the construction of one’s identity (cf. in particular G. Agamben, *Che cos’è un dispositivo?*, Nottetempo, Rome 2006, p. 14), whose inherent ambiguity – especially regarding its capacity for control – is well highlighted in this text. On this ambiguity, particularly in relation to the following sections, see G. Teyssot, *Figure d’interni*, in Id., ed., *Il progetto domestico. La casa dell’uomo. Archetipi e prototipi*, Electa, Milan 1986, vol. I, p. 23; and the later essay *Sull’interieur e l’interiorità*, in «Casabella», no. 681, 2000, pp. 26-35.

take refuge does nothing but embalm himself alive»^{xxiv}, or, alternatively, in interiors that cannot free themselves from mere decorativism, even when adopting functional forms, so that «seen from afar, the difference between the Wiener Werkstätte and the Bauhaus is not all that significant»^{xxv}. If, for [Friedrich] Nietzsche, one may call fortunate he who possesses no house, Adorno adds that, to such an extent, it has become «a moral duty never to feel at home»^{xxvi}.

Adorno's thought, clearly linked to a specific historical period, nonetheless has the merit of revealing a condition of existence pivoting on the awareness of the inevitable transformation of every socio-cultural value. It also seems to signal the beginning of a counter-tendency to the obsessive claustrophilia of which the Victorian house was the most conspicuous reflection, a counter-tendency that today is more relevant than ever. Indeed, one may ask whether, in a dwelling dominated by media as in the contemporary one, where communication with the rest of the world is assured even within a sought-after isolation, it is still possible to regard the home as a refuge in which to withdraw. The world of the interior, invaded, often chaotically, by the exterior, no longer seems able to cloak itself in a reassuring sense of *Stimmung*¹⁸: the desire for intimacy might no longer be fulfilled through the search for claustrophilia but, paradoxically, through its complementary opposite, or, to continue using Fachinelli's terms, through agoraphilia.

- i. H. Focillon, Italian transl. *Vita delle forme* (1943), Turin 1987, p. 35.
- ii. B. Zevi, *Architettura in nuce*, Florence 1979, p. 44.
- iii. G.C. Argan, *A proposito di spazio interno*, in «Metron», no. 28, 1945, p. 21.
- iv. Ibid.
- v. G.C. Argan, *Il problema dell'arredamento*, in «La casa. Quaderni di architettura e critica», no. 2, 1955, pp. 5-6.
- vi. E. Battisti, *I mobili e la loro storia*, in «La casa. Quaderni di architettura e critica», no. 1, 1955, pp. 38-39.
- vii. Cf. G. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (1957), Italian transl., Bari, 1984, passim.
- viii. W. Benjamin, *Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century. The Paris "Passages"* (1982), Italian transl., Turin, 1986, p. 290.
- ix. R. Arnheim, *The Dynamics of Architectural Form* (1977), Italian transl., Milan, 1981, pp. 110-111.
- x. G. Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Repose. The Images of Intimacy* (1948), Italian transl., Como, 1994, p. 109.
- xi. D. Régnier-Bohler, *Exploration d'une littérature* (1985), Italian transl. in P. Ariès, G. Duby, eds., *La vita privata. Dal Feudalesimo al Rinascimento*, Rome-Bari, 1987, p. 257.
- xii. E. Fachinelli, *Claustrophilia*, Milan, 1983, pp. 63-64.
- xiii. [Georges] Teyssot, whose essays have provided material for this note, was the first to use the term claustrophilia in relation to the archetypal elements of dwelling. Cf. G. Teyssot, *"Acqua e gas a tutti i piani". Appunti sull'estraneità della casa*, in «Lotus International», no. 44, 1984.
- xiv. On the relationship between architecture and furnishing, see R. De Fusco, *Storia dell'arredamento*, Turin, 1985, p. 1. Cf. also C. Lenza, entry *Arredamento*, in *Grande Dizionario Enciclopedico Utet*, Turin, 1985; P. Thornton, *The Italian Renaissance Interior, 1400-1660* (1991), Italian transl., Milan, 1992; id., *The Italian Renaissance Interior, 1620-1920. A History of Domestic Taste* (1984), Italian

- transl., Milan, 1985.
- xv. E. Battisti, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
- xvi. T.W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: The Construction of the Aesthetic* (1962), Italian transl., Parma, 1993, p. 34. The discussion concerns Kierkegaard's affinities with Schopenhauer.
- xvii. Ibid., p. 112. Johannes Climacus is a kind of alter ego of Kierkegaard.
- xviii. Ibid.
- xix. Ibid.
- xx. X. de Maistre, *Voyage autour de ma chambre* (1834), Italian transl., Naples, 1990, p. 28.
- xxi. J.-K. Huysmans, *Monsieur Bougran's Retirement* (1964), Italian transl., Palermo, 1984, pp. 27-28.
- xxii. G. Bachelard, *op. cit.*, p. 165.
- xxiii. T.W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflections from Damaged Life* (1951), Italian transl., Turin, 1994, p. 34.
- xxiv. Ibid.
- xxv. Ibid., p. 35.
- xxvi. Ibid.

[Imma Forino, *Interno e interiorità*, in «Op. cit. Selezione della critica d'arte contemporanea», no. 102, 1998, pp. 18-27]

Giancarlo Rosa

The Architecture of Interiors

1999

Today in Italy there is a widespread misconception that the architecture of interiors simply coincides with furnishing, and there are those who would like to divide professional attributions by assigning to the architect the nobler task of designing the building, understood as an urban subject, and to the decorator the arrangement of interiors, in any case open to any configuration independent from the architectural conception of the building itselfⁱ. [...] The care devoted by architects to the design and finishing of interiors is therefore very limited and confined to a few inevitable occasions, with the result, stemming from inexperience, of producing meagre solutions.

Far away is 1948, when Bruno Zevi [...] declared: «tthe distinctive character of architecture – the feature by which it differs from all other artistic activities – lies in its working through a three-dimensional vocabulary that includes man». Indeed, architecture «is like a great hollowed sculpture into whose interior man enters and walks». It «does not derive from the sum of the widths, lengths, and heights of the constructive elements enclosing the space, but precisely from the void, from the enclosed space, from the interior space in which men walk and live»ⁱ. Even if four façades stand out for their fine design and the right proportion between solids and voids, the building may still prove a poor work of architecture, because it is the interior space that is the protagonist of the architectural fact, that space which no representational method can fully convey, and which only direct experience reveals. «To take possession of space, to know how to “see” it, constitutes the key to the understanding of buildings»ⁱ.

Zevi's statements, as is well known, served his passionate advocacy of organic architecture; [Frank Lloyd] Wright had long before written: «the interior environment, the space in which we live, is the great fact of the building – the environment which must be expressed on the outside as the enclosed fact»ⁱⁱⁱ.

This was the great truth of organic architecture; but even though the opposite is not necessarily a defect, the Byzantine architecture being an eloquent example of not revealing the interior on the exterior, no one has since denied the absolute necessity of attention to interiors in architecture^{iv}.

The architecture of interiors has never been, nor does it wish to become, an autonomous discipline: it is an integral part of architecture, a sort of didactic deepening that directs attention, the design reflection, toward that ineliminable aspect that characterises the very quality, the very essence, of architecture itself. The architecture of interiors is therefore architecture itself, viewed, by convenience of analysis, from within; it does not live in isolation, but is in continuous relationship with every other theme and component of the architectural fact². Thus architectural design does not proceed by separate moments, first the preliminary definition of the plan and later the consequent definition of the elevation, without engaging the essential role of the section.

Interiors must be designed for the appropriate unfolding of human life. «The room must appear welcoming, the house inhabitable», said Adolf Loos^v. Interiors, though they may appear detached from contextual constraints, can, and in some cases must, be influenced by them; and there must be a reasonable coherence between the architecture of interiors and the architecture of exteriors. Consequently, the questions of architectural and technical detail, of the role of materials, of the concreteness of building, cannot be avoided, for only in this way can true architecture be achieved.

There are great works of modern architecture known exclusively for their interiors. The library by [Étienne-Louis] Boullée³, who fixed, in his «amphitheatre» of books, a modern archetype for such constructions, owes its value to its interior, effectively represented in a perspective drawing; it is irrelevant to know how its exterior might have appeared if it had



The text presented here is an excerpt from the introductory chapter of *L'architettura degli interni* (Officina, Rome 1999), in which Giancarlo Rosa reflects with remarkable precision on the role of the discipline and, more generally, on that of architectural design. Throughout the passage, one can clearly perceive the influence of the Roman and Zevian tradition, foundational for a certain way of looking at interiors. This tradition is here reinterpreted in light of its various historical readings and of new contributions on the subject, and set out in a systematic manner, particularly in relation to the question of architectural education.

¹ Here Rosa summarises earlier positions, analysed in detail in the essays included in this section, and draws a balance of what he considers to be the prevailing orientation in the field – one that has had direct effects on education and, consequently, on professional practice.

² Of particular interest here is the discussion of disciplinary autonomy, which was, in fact, achieved the year following the publication of Rosa's book. Beginning in 1980, with the establishment of disciplinary groupings (D.P.R. 382/1980), the field of *Architettura degli Interni e Arredamento* (Interior Architecture and Furnishing) formed part of the same group as Architectural Composition, without any formal distinction. And even after the restructuring of the sectors in 1992, it continued to belong to that same area. It was only with the definition of the scientific-disciplinary sectors (D.M. 4 October 2000) that what would later be called *Architettura degli Interni e Allestimento* (Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design) acquired the autonomy necessary to establish dedicated courses, to open research and teaching positions formally recognised as such, and to develop its own doctoral programmes and research lines. Rosa's reference to a historical dependence on Composition, made precisely at a time when the autonomy of Interior Architecture was being debated, serves on one hand to recall the Zevian tradition centred on the interior as the core of the architectural phenomenon, while on the other it represents a markedly critical and, in a sense, countercurrent stance with respect to the redefinition of contemporary disciplinary boundaries. For an initial assessment of this autonomy, see A. Cornoldi, ed., *Architettura degli interni*, Il Poligrafo, Padua 2005.

¹⁸ On the notion of *Stimmung*, here clearly referring to Praz, see note 12 in the commentary to his excerpt included in this volume.

[JL]

been built, nor is it of any interest, for the study of the architectural type, to know what relationship it might have established with the interior, given that the large opening at the apex of the barrel vault was necessary for proper illumination. [...]

And if we think of Giambattista Piranesi's imaginative engravings of the *Carceri*⁴, we recognise in them an architecture made of interiors alone: the tension of research, the impulse to explore and open new horizons for architecture, the invention of a world in which one might live – as in a forest – without ever leaving it, makes the Venetian architect «forget» that an outside, an exterior, might even exist. [...]

The first human refuge, the cave, is the appropriation of an interior space⁵; and as the cave is continuous and multi-form, so too can be the interior of a building. The primordial act of building a shelter, a protected environment, is the modelling of an interior within which to take refuge and defend oneself from external natural forces; and it is precisely from this necessity that architecture was born⁵. [...]

The architecture of «interiors», [however], must be designed as the architecture of «exteriors», bearing clearly in mind the inadequacy of the plan to encompass all the coordinates of the enclosed space⁶. [...] Ancient codes and theoretical treatises on architecture established proportional relationships between plan and section: as the planimetric dimension of rooms varied, so too did their height, for interior space was never the result of horizontal partitions placed at uniform distances, giving equal height to all rooms on each floor.

The economy of varied heights, according to the type and size of rooms, generates complex sections, producing an interior spatiality more appropriate and more responsive to structural needs. From a single plan there is design freedom to define multiple, differing sections, and only through the combination of plan and section is the geometry of architectural space unequivocally defined.

The architecture of interiors must therefore be controlled in the design process through plans, sections, and partial elevations of the walls of individual rooms; it must be verified through perspective sections that examine space in successive cuts, just as perspective drawings do for exteriors. Equally useful for verifying the spatial outcomes of what is being designed are the so-called «exploded» axonometrics, and those taken from below. [...]

The plan alone makes it possible to relate all parts of the building in planimetric terms, «it achieves the maximum of interpretative possibilities in the condition of maximum neutrality», especially in its floor-by-floor investigation. The section relates the various levels of the building, but may become useless if they, like in speculative buildings, are all uniformly horizontal and of equal height.

It is crucial, in interior design, to think in terms of coordinating only the surfaces that delimit each enclosed space, a method that equally trains one to control exterior space, that is, to avoid designing the façades of a building as elements of a decontextualised object, and to consider them instead as part of a continuum of urban walls in relation to the «pavement» of the ground and the «ceiling» of the sky⁷. That some may then literally transpose this process into an interior [...] is another matter.

Once an interior is built, it must be made functional, equipped, «furnished»: one must know how to propose an appropriate arrangement for the «fixed» furnishings and for the «mobile» ones that will later be placed by the users; and one must also know how to design the furniture constructively, listening to the advice born of the experience of craftsmen and technicians. The architect who designs spaces for dwelling must learn to know and understand the intimacy of Nordic and Anglo-Saxon interiors. Contrary to the Italian vice of composing forms indifferent to life, forms made only to be looked at, northern architecture teaches, through its felicitous spaces, how to draw inspiration from corners, niches, and every «refuge» it invents to make each person feel well in a house that pleases the eye as much as the ear, touch, and smell: that is, the whole body. An architecture, in other words, that expresses a true culture of dwelling, so vital to the sensibility of those peoples as to constitute the dominant theme of artistic expression in the paintings that privilege the depiction of domestic interiors⁸. [...]

Once, Wright was asked whether his architecture had an Oriental inspiration, and he replied: «It was Tao who said that the reality of buildings lies not in the walls and the roof, but in the habitable space within them. The interior space is the true reality of a building. Now this means that one must build from the inside out, rather than the opposite, from outside in, as the West has always done»^{vii}.

And what [Herman] Hertzberger has written [...] seems to have absolute value for the architecture of interiors: «Spatial quality is not an isolated factor: it is perceived only through use and through the sensations it arouses in the user. When it is not used, a building is like an empty container. It is the situations created among people through their relationships, their gestures, their emotions, that the architect seeks to capture and, if possible, to encourage, through the right dimensions, the right degree of intimacy and openness in the right places. Today, more than ever, there is a tendency toward abstraction from reality, and thus the reduction of form to being nothing other than itself. Architects are becoming increasingly indifferent and insensitive to the uses of the possibilities at their disposal»^{viii}.

i. Bruno Zevi, *Saper vedere l'architettura*, Einaudi, Turin 1956, pp. 21-22.

ii. B. Zevi, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

iii. Frank L.L. Wright, *In the Cause of Architecture*, in «Architectural Record», October-December 1928.

iv. «One must not forget that the architectural mass simultaneously presents a twofold aspect: exterior mass and interior mass. These masses may function in relation to one another; this occurs when the exterior composition makes the arrangement of its contents immediately perceptible. But this rule is not constant [...] the deepest originality of architecture as such lies [...] in the interior mass. In giving form to this hollow space, it truly creates its own universe [...] The unique privilege of architecture among all the arts [...] is not to assume a convenient void and surround it with guarantees, but to construct an interior world which, yes, measures space and light according to the laws of geometry, mechanics, and optics, but over which nature has no hold», Henri Focillon, *La vie des formes*, Paris 1934.

v. Adolf Loos, *Ins Leere gesprochen*, Verlag Herold, Vienna-Munich 1962 (Italian transl. by S. Gessner: *Parole nel vuoto*, Adelphi, Milan 1972, p. 255).

vi. Luciana Finelli, entry *Interno* in *Dizionario Enciclopedico di Architettura e Urbanistica*, P. Portoghesi, ed., Istituto Editoriale Romano, Rome 1969: «The space enclosed between walls, however arranged or configured. It is the principal and characterising element of any architectural work, intended for the use of those who pass through, cross, or dwell within it; in this sense clearly distinct from that of the other figurative arts. [...] “Architecture must be seen, felt, understood, proceeding from the inside outward, and the progress of architecture through the centuries must be traced in the expressive development of interior volumes rather than in the external forms that contain them, or-worse still-by standing before them as if they were monumental façades affixed thereto” (R. E. Warder, *The Study of Architecture as Art*, “College Art Journal”, no. 3, 1949)».

vii. Frank L.L. Wright, in «The Sunday Times», 1957 (republished in «Il Venerdì di Repubblica», no. 493, 15 August 1997).

viii. Herman Hertzberger, *Il Centro musicale Vredenburg a Utrecht*, in «Spazio e società», no. 9, March 1980, pp. 42-44.

[Giancarlo Rosa, *L'architettura degli interni*, Officina, Rome 1999, pp. 9-27]

3. Here Rosa refers to the 1785 design for the *Bibliothèque publique*, published in É.L. Boullée, *Architecture. Essai sur l'art*, J.-M. Pérouse de Montclos, ed., Hermann, Paris 1953, pp. 134-137.

4. Cf. G.B. Piranesi, *Carceri d'invenzione di G. B. Piranesi Architetto Veneziano*, Calcografia Piranesi, Rome 1761.

5. In this sense, Rosa's critical position can be traced directly back to the frontispiece of Abbot Laugier's treatise, which reinterprets the myth of the primitive hut already introduced by Vitruvius and Filarete (cf. M.A. Laugier, *Essai sur l'architecture*, Paris 1753). For a comprehensive discussion, see J. Rykwert, *On Adam's House in Paradise. The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York 1972.

6. From this point, the author begins to provide a series of practical indications for interior design which, in some respects, can be considered akin to those of Gianni Ottoloni and Adriano Cornoldi, formulated in the same years or slightly earlier. Cf. in particular G. Ottoloni and V. De Prizio, *La casa attrezzata. Qualità dell'abitare e rapporti di integrazione fra arredamento e architettura*, Liguori, Naples 1993; A. Cornoldi, *Architettura dei luoghi domestici. Il progetto del comfort*, Jaca Book, Milan 1994.

7. On the notion of the sky as a ceiling, see the well-known 1971 drawing by Louis I. Kahn bearing the inscription: «The Street is a Room by agreement / A community Room the walls of which belong to the donors / Its ceiling is the Sky». L.I. Kahn, *The Room, the Street and Human Agreement*, in «AIA Journal», no. 3, vol. 56, 1971, pp. 33-34.

8. In relation to the previous notes and to the broader Italian culture on the subject to which Rosa connects, see E. Camesasca, ed., *Storia della casa*, Rizzoli, Milan 1968; L. Cosenza, *Storia dell'abitazione*, Vangelista, Milan 1974; A. Cornoldi, *L'architettura della casa*, Officina, Rome 1988; R. Rizzi, ed., *Civiltà dell'abitare. L'evoluzione degli interni domestici europei*, Lybra, Milan 2003; G. Ottoloni, *Architettura degli interni domestici. Per una storia dell'abitare occidentale*, Cortina, Milan 2015. It is also worth noting here the reference to «life» and, in a certain sense, to an Arganian conception of the interior (cf. *Interni*, in *Enciclopedia Universale dell'Arte*, Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, Venice-Rome, Sansoni, Florence 1959, vol. VII, col. 580) [excerpted in this volume], which Rosa, in his conclusion, seems intent on reconciling with Zevi's position, thus weaving together the two principal strands of the Roman, and more broadly Italian, tradition on the subject. [JL]

Cultures of Dwelling

Michela Bassanelli

The essays gathered in this section investigate dwelling in its multiple nature as a phenomenological event that takes place in a specific space, namely the house. Dwelling is one of the themes most extensively studied and analysed not only from an architectural point of view but also from social, anthropological, and philosophical perspectives¹. From the first half of the twentieth century onward, scholars from fields other than architecture have read domestic space not as a simple physical volume, but as an interior dimension, associated with the idea of a shell, a primordial refuge, and the need for protection². Designing a space to be dwelt in requires a profound understanding of the relationship between the body and the surrounding environment since, as the very etymological origin indicates, *abito* derives from the Latin *habitare*, the frequentative of the verb *habere* (to have), and means to have continuously or, also, to have a habit of a place³. Dwelling therefore does not coincide with a simple spatial occupation, but with a reiterated practice, a form of relationship that is constructed over time. The space of the house, as the French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas affirms, is the first refuge of human existence: «The privileged role of the house does not consist in being the end of human activity, but in being its condition and, in this sense, its beginning. [...] At once outside and inside, it places itself outside starting from an intimacy»⁴. It is in the relationship between interior and exterior, and in the very gesture of separation, that the first dwelling sign of humankind is manifested.

Over the course of the twentieth century, in Italy, the theme of the house, of the models and forms of dwelling, was at the centre of articulated reflections that brought to light, from time to time, its cultural dimension, its typological-architectural dimension, and its social one. Precisely on the interior-exterior dichotomy and on the idea of the house as an «extroverted» place, Gio Ponti opens the editorial published in 1928 in the first issue of the journal «Domus»⁵: a manifesto-text that inaugurates a reflection on dwelling as an experience capable of placing architecture, furnishing, and nature in relation. Thresholds, loggias, terraces, and courtyards become elements through which the act of dwelling opens itself to the world. This idea is borne out by many domestic interior projects that characterise the Italian scene between the 1930s and 1940s, in particular those realised as manifesto works at the V and VI Triennale di Milano (1933, 1936), where space is conceived in continuity with the exterior⁶.

Alongside this vision, a reflection gradually emerges that places the dwelling at the centre as an elementary, primary place, bound to the fundamental needs of humankind. The editorial by Ernesto Nathan Rogers, *La casa dell'uomo* – published in 1946 in «Domus» on the occasion of the resumption of editorial activities after the war – marks a more introspective moment on the theme⁷. Rogers brings the discourse on dwelling back to an ethical and social dimension. The house of humankind is not the privileged *domus*, but a universal place

of protection, capable of restoring dignity to everyday existence and of accommodating family life in its complexity. This attention to the anthropological and social character is also central to the essay *Abitare* by Pio Montesi, published in 1955 in the journal «La casa. Quaderni di architettura e critica»⁸. The author addresses the subject through a comparison between vernacular dwelling forms and models of modern building, denouncing the loss of the profound sense of dwelling in the human being of mechanical civilisation. Traditional dwellings, constructed in direct relation with the environmental and social context, display a capacity to integrate functions, symbols, and relationships that is often lacking in modern housing. The appeal to such models has a critical value insofar as it serves to call into question the idea of progress as a merely technicistic outcome.

A broad historical perspective is finally presented in the three volumes *La casa nel tempo. Storia universale dell'abitazione e dell'arredamento* edited by Vittorio Del Gaizo (Canesi, Rome 1970), where dwelling is interpreted as a field of tension between the useful and the pleasurable and between the necessary and the superfluous. In this reading, the house becomes the mirror of a civilisation, reflecting its symbolic values, economic conditions, and the cultural transformations of different historical epochs.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the theme of dwelling is further enriched by contributions that bring to light its political, social, and gender implications. The essay *Condizione femminile e ideologia del comfort* by Silvia Esposito, Tomás Maldonado, and Raimonda Riccini, published in «Casabella» in 1981, analyses for the first time in Italy domestic space as a device for disciplining everyday life, highlighting the role of material culture and technical objects in defining gender roles¹⁰. Dwelling here emerges as a non-neutral practice but one traversed by power relations and dynamics of control: in this sense, comfort operates not merely as a condition of well-being, but as a disciplinary *dispositif* that normalises corporeal conduct and domestic routines, aligning everyday life with the requirements of productive rationality¹¹.

On a related plane, but oriented toward the symbolic and narrative dimension, lies the reflection of Maurizio Vitta, who in the essay published here anticipates some theoretical topics later developed in the volume *Dell'abitare. Corpi, spazi, oggetti, immagini* (Einaudi, Turin 2008). Moving between the history of material culture and aesthetics, Vitta interprets the house as a system of signs through which individuals construct and narrate their own identity. The experience of dwelling thus becomes inseparable from that of self-representation and from the interweaving of the private dimension with the collective imaginary¹². The will to define the evolution of a culture of dwelling also emerges in the contribution by Andrea Branzi, where dwelling is interpreted as an unstable system, traversed by contradictions and tensions. The author highlights how contemporary domesticity is marked by precariousness, mobility,

and the fragmentation of roles. In such a context, design can no longer aspire to a unitary and definitive form but must open itself to hybrid solutions, in which meaning emerges from use and experience rather than from a completed form¹³.

In the essay *Verso una nuova cultura dell'abitare*, Gianni Ottolini addresses the fracture progressively consumed, starting from the post-war period, between architectural design, furnishing, and the real practices of dwelling¹⁴. In particular, the author identifies in the years of the economic miracle the emergence of a profound distance between the dwelling models proposed by design and the everyday behaviours of inhabitants, especially in the contexts of social and public housing. His contribution calls for the necessity of an integrated vision of dwelling, involving both the domestic interior and the urban context, explicitly calling into question the political and social responsibility of design.

From the 1980s onward, and above all thanks to the figure of Adriano Cornoldi, architect and professor who made the study of domestic space the research of a lifetime, the dwelling comes to be understood, on the one hand, in its interior quality, namely in its liveability, and, on the other, in the importance of space and its equipment as the expression of that feeling: «the value of the house lies first and foremost in its faculty to foster a sense of warm gathering and discreet relationship among its “interior” places (as much closed as open, as much covered as uncovered); its architectural value lies in the capacity of its environments to express through their form that gathering and that relationship»¹⁵. In particular, his interest in a dynamic spatiality finds responses in the English or Anglo-Saxon house, where within each individual room that sense of withdrawal is realised which «lies in the co-presence of individuality and relationship of spaces, which indeed guarantee at the same time privacy and measured interaction»¹⁶. In continuity with this interpretative line lies the contribution of Maurizio Vogliazzo, who interprets the architecture of the house and its composition as a privileged place for investigating the deep interweaving between forms of life, culture of dwelling, and spatial relationships¹⁷. Dwelling becomes a site for the verification of hypotheses discarded or marginalised by the Modern Movement. Through the analysis of *A nostra casa* by Raul Lino and *Das Englische Haus* by Hermann Muthesius, Vogliazzo identifies an alternative tradition to the dominant rational-functionalist current: a tradition founded on *Wohnkultur*, understood as a complex system of relationships between forms of life, spaces, and everyday practices. The 1980s are years of ferment in the cultural debate on domestic space. A central role in this renewed attention to the domestic theme was also stimulated by the XVII Milan Triennial entitled *Il progetto domestico. La casa dell'uomo archetipi e prototipi* (1986), curated by Georges Teyssot, which traversed, from a historical point of view, the principal evolutions of dwelling while also attempting to identify some contemporary ramifications¹⁸.

Manolo De Giorgi and Marco Romanelli are among the first, at the beginning of the 1990s, to address dwelling by assuming interior design as an autonomous field of historical and cultural investigation¹⁹. The curators propose a «parallel history» of post-war Italian architecture, constructed starting from the making of interior space through the analysis of some central themes, among which the relationship with the existing, the use of fixed furnishing, the centrality of plan and section, and the direct relationship with the inhabitant. This is followed by an atlas of project cases which, between 1947 and 1993, are able to restore an exemplary panorama that defines a precise interpretative line of interiors.

The reflection of Agostino Bossi finally introduces a phenomenological reading of dwelling, shifting attention from design as formal configuration to design as experience. In the es-

say *Accogliere, raccogliersi*, Bossi identifies in the categories of welcoming and gathering two fundamental polarities of the domestic interior²⁰. Welcoming is understood as a relational action that manifests itself in threshold and passage spaces – entrances, halls, staircases, intermediate spaces – through a sequence of degrees of interiority that mediate the relationship between exterior and interior. Gathering, on the other hand, concerns the more intimate dimension of dwelling and finds expression in spaces such as niches, alcoves, equipped windows, in which space assumes the measure of the body.

The essays collected here show an Italian line, both theoretical and projectual, that has influenced domestic design by identifying precise spatial, typological, and also cultural characteristics. Dwelling has been one of the fields in which interior design has constructed its own critical autonomy as a domain capable of directly interrogating the relationship between space and everyday life. In this sense, the domestic interior is configured as a privileged place of experimentation, in which design measures its effectiveness not only as a formal outcome but also in its capacity to accommodate practices of use, temporalities, and transformations. It is in this capacity to unite space and everyday life that the most significant contribution of this tradition of domestic design resides, as well as its critical contemporaneity.

1. Cf. G. Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace*, PUF, Paris 1957 (Eng. transl. *The Poetics of Space*, Beacon Press, Boston 1994); M. Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Günther Neske, Pfullingen 1954; W. Benjamin, *Das Passagen Werk*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1982 (Eng. transl. *The Arcades Project*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1999).

2. Cf. I. Forino, *Interno e Interiorità*, in «Op. Cit. Selezione della critica d'arte contemporanea», no. 102, 1998, pp. 18-27 [excerpted in this volume].

3. Cf. M. Vitta, *Dell'abitare. Corpi spazi oggetti immagini*, Einaudi, Turin 2008.

4. E. Lévinas, *Totalité et Infini. Essai sur l'extériorité*, Martinus Nijhoff, Den Haag 1974 (Eng. transl. *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on exteriority*, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Den Haag-Boston-London 1979, p. 152).

5. G. Ponti, *La casa all'italiana*, in «Domus», no. 1, 1928, p. 7 [excerpted in this volume].

6. Some examples of these manifesto houses can be found in G. Ottolini, *Architettura degli allestimenti*, R. Rizzi ed., Alinea, Florence 2017, pp. 38-63.

7. E.N. Rogers, *La casa dell'uomo*, in «Domus», no. 205, 1946, pp. 2-3 [excerpted in this volume].

8. P. Montesi, *Abitare*, in «La casa. Quaderni di architettura e critica», no. 1, 1955, pp. 28-37 [excerpted in this volume].

9. V. Del Gaizo, ed., *La casa nel tempo. Storia universale dell'abitazione e dell'arredamento*, Canesi, Rome, 1970, 3 vols. See also E. Camesasca, ed., *Storia della casa*, Rizzoli, Milan 1968.

10. Silvia Esposito, Tomás Maldonado, Raimonda Riccini, *Condizione femminile e ideologia del comfort*, in «Casabella», no. 467, 1981, pp. 27-33 [excerpted in this volume].

11. T. Maldonado, *Il futuro della modernità*, Feltrinelli, Milan 1987, p. 94.

12. M. Vitta, *Una cultura dell'abitazione*, in «L'Arca», no. 14, 1988, pp. 1-3 [excerpted in this volume].

13. A. Branzi, *La cultura dell'abitare*, in «Interni Annual Casa», no. 168, 1991, pp. 7-13 [excerpted in this volume].

14. G. Ottolini, *Verso una nuova cultura dell'abitare*, in *Lavorare in architettura. La cooperazione d'abitazione*, Ediz. La Biennale, Venice 1982, pp. 323-328 [excerpted in this volume].

15. Among the principal texts by Adriano Cornoldi on dwelling: A. Cornoldi, *L'architettura della casa*, Officina, Rome 1988; Id., *Architettura dei luoghi domestici. Il progetto del comfort*, Jaca Book, Milan 1994; Id., *Le case degli architetti. Dizionario privato dal Rinascimento ad oggi*, Marsilio, Venice 2001.

16. A. Cornoldi, *Architettura dei luoghi domestici*, Jaca Book, Milan 1994, p. 73.

17. M. Vogliazzo, *Due Ipotesi Minoritarie nell'Architettura del Novecento: «A Nossa Casa» de Raul Lino e «Das Englische Haus» di Herman Muthesius*, in «Estudos Italianos em Portugal», no. 51, Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Portugal, Lisbon 1988, pp. 15-34 [excerpted in this volume].

18. G. Teyssot, ed., *Il progetto domestico. La casa dell'uomo: archetipi e prototipi*, Electa, Milan 1986.

19. M. De Giorgi, M. Romanelli, eds., *Figure dell'abitare*, in *Dichiarazione di interni: Appartamenti italiani 1947-1993*, in «Rassegna», no. 58, 1994, pp. 4-7 [excerpted in this volume].

20. A. Bossi, *Accogliere raccogliersi*, in Id., ed., *Accogliere raccogliersi. L'interno domestico fra partecipazione ed esclusività*, Giannini, Naples 1999, pp. 13-29 [excerpted in this volume].

Gio Ponti

The Italian House

1928

The Italian house is not the padded and garnished refuge of its inhabitants against the harshness of the climate, as are the dwellings beyond the Alps, where life seeks, for long months, shelter from an inclement nature: the Italian house is like the place we choose in order to enjoy in our life, with joyful possession, the beauties that our lands and our skies bestow upon us through long seasons. In the Italian house there is no great distinction of architecture between exterior and interior: elsewhere there is even a separation of forms and materials: with us, the architecture of the outside penetrates the interior, and does not refrain from using either stone or plasters or fresco; in vestibules and galleries, in rooms and staircases, with arches, niches, vaults and with columns, it regulates and orders the environments of our life in spacious measures. From the inside the Italian house comes out into the open with its porticoes and its terraces, with pergolas and verandas, with loggias and balconies, *altane* and belvederes, inventions all most comfortable for serene dwelling and so Italian that in every language they are called by the names from here. One and the same architectural ordinance thus governs, in differing measure, in the Italian house, façades and interiors and still further regulates around it nature itself with terraces and steps, with gardens, indeed called *all’italiana*, nymphaea and vistas, kitchen gardens and courtyards, all created to give ease and scene to a happy habitation. The Italian house is outside and inside without complications, it welcomes furnishings and beautiful works of art and wants order and space among them and not crowding or mixture. It comes to be rich with the ways of greatness, not with those of preciousness alone. Its design does not derive from the material requirements of living alone; it is not merely a «machine à habiter»¹. So-called

«comfort» is not, in the Italian house, only in the correspondence of things to the necessities, the needs, the conveniences of our life and to the organisation of services. This «comfort» of it is in something higher; it is in giving us, with architecture, a measure for our very thoughts, in giving us, with its simplicity, a health for our customs, in giving us, with its broad welcome, the sense of a trusting and numerous life, and it is finally, by that easy and joyful and ornamented opening outward and communicating with nature, in the invitation the Italian house offers our spirit to recreate itself in restful visions of peace, in which consists, in the full sense of the beautiful Italian word, CONFORTO.

[Gio Ponti, *La casa all’italiana*, in «Domus», no. 1, 1928, p. 7]

tural forms, lies the fulcrum of the architect’s thought that he will pursue in the choice of the projects published, not only built, but also imagined. Cf. F. Irace, *Gio Ponti. La casa all’italiana*, Electa, Milan, 1996; M. Maguolo, «*Domus*» e le altre. *Le riviste di architettura fra guerra e dopoguerra. Intorno a una lettera di Gio Ponti*, in «Engramma», no. 175, 2020, pp. 259-286; V. Saitto, *La casa ideale. Progetti domestici per «Domus» dal 1928 al 1945*, LetteraVentidue, Siracusa 2023.

1. Here the reference is to the well-known expression by Le Corbusier, which Gio Ponti deliberately underscores as a point of reference from which to distance himself in order to imagine a different space, to which he will dedicate a brief article in the July issue of the same year: «These manifestations are a characteristic point for measuring today’s movement of architecture and for identifying its stylistic consequences, which consequences, however, today are what interests us least in it and what proves less valid in the face of a critical examination of rigorous rationality» G. Ponti, *La machine à abiter*, in «Domus», no. 7, 1928, p. 10 [transl. by the editor]. [MB]

Ernesto Nathan Rogers

The House of Man

1946

From every side the house of man [sic] is cracked (were it a vessel, we would say it is taking on water). From every side the voices of the wind enter, and cries of women and children go out. We ought to rush in with a brick, a beam, a pane of glass, and instead, here we are with a journal. To the hungry we give no bread, to the shipwrecked no raft, but words. If the feeling of solidarity has not abandoned us and yet we are conscious of our acts, even this offering of words, however out of place it may seem, must, in intention, have a concrete meaning that can be justified. Whoever travels through Italy, along the Aurelia or the Via Emilia, or in Apulia or in Sicily, sees an immense devastation: ruins and ruins. Certainly, the same is true in Provence or in Brittany. The same is true on every road in Europe. In the face of so many calamities, our impulse would like to translate moral feeling into the precision of an economic fact: how many families are without a home? how much material is required? how much time? One thinks that winter is now coming and they will be cold. One cannot think of anything else. What value does beauty have for these people? Poetry, music, painting, proportion threaten to become empty ambitions of our intellectual egoism: luxury objects, instruments of sin. While the other day I was listening, in a friend’s house, to a concert that brought back to us the broad cadences of a seventeenth-century composer, I suddenly felt my face flush with an intimate shame (such as kindled the terrible conscience of St Augustine), and doubts assailed me, becoming a dense crowd of threatening spectres. What are you doing here?

The text reproduced here is the first editorial that Ernesto Nathan Rogers writes for the journal «Domus», of which he will be director for nineteen issues, from January 1946, the year in which publication resumed after the interruption caused by the war, to December 1947. The subtitle «The house of man» clearly identifies the aims the architect sets himself. As emerges from the opening lines of the text, the question of the house, from the post-war period onward, is first and foremost a social and collective problem. After the directorship of Gio Ponti (1928-1941), «Domus» had experienced alternating phases: from 1941 to 1944 under the guidance of Massimo Bontempelli, Giuseppe Pagano, and Melchiorre Bega, and finally, until 1944, entrusted to Bega alone. With Rogers the journal takes on a different orientation: the editorial inaugurates a reflection that rejects both aestheticism and asceticism or materialism, proposing a balance between utility, morality, and aesthetics. For Rogers, the «house of man» is not the Roman domus, «that of a socially privileged family», but a dwelling understood as an elementary and universal place capable above all of providing protection. The etymological comparison that Rogers introduces is an attempt to redefine the category of dwelling as an experience that intertwines material and spiritual needs, intimacy and sharing. Cf. E.N. Rogers, *Editoriali di architettura*, Einaudi, Turin 1968; L. Spinelli, *La «Domus» di Rogers*

But when the soloist removed the bow from the viola d’amore and the last sustained note merged with the applause, I could not help clapping my hands along with the rest of the audience (and they were, I assure you, respectable people who do not devote their lives to idleness). The contrast between art and morality becomes palpable precisely every time one is on the point of confronting the problems of existence on a plane of greater severity of customs, such that, in the most religious epochs, when one sought only to restrain the human values of society, many believe, even if moving in opposite directions, that they must turn their backs on art. On the one hand these are the ascetics, on the other the materialists. And both, when they do not become outright iconoclasts, end up reducing art to a mere means to satisfy the aims of their philosophizing: to a *strumentum regni*, a help, a support, a subsidy of that realm which, for the former, is the negation of matter and, for the latter, of the spirit. On the other hand, there are those who, with greater presumption than the religious and less altruism than the humanitarians, pivoting solely on their own person, severed from any other communion or community, amuse themselves with art as if it were a game, gratifying their hedonistic world. These are the aesthetes, players without innocence. Far from the ascetics, as from the materialists and the aesthetes, and yet recognizing that each of these tendencies contains a part of the truth, our ideal places itself between them, at the barycenter of the triangle. Truth lies in the relation; the word we offer is therefore there, in that relation: do we wish to define ourselves as functionalists? And yet we are among those who anxiously seek to reunite the threads of a synthetic knot in which every part is equally necessary to the consistency of the whole.

(1946-1947), in C. Baglione, ed., *Ernesto Nathan Rogers. 1909-1969*, FrancoAngeli, Milan 2012, pp. 71-78. [MB]

Why renounce men? why the gods? why beauty, which often replaces truth in acting as a mediator?

No problem is resolved unless it responds to utility, morality, and aesthetics at the same time.

A house is not a house unless it is warm in winter, cool in summer, serene in every season, so as to welcome the family in harmonious spaces.

A house is not a house unless it encloses a corner for reading poetry, an alcove, a bathtub, a kitchen. This is the house of man.

And a man is not truly a man until he possesses such a house.

Does this house exist? has it ever existed?

I am told that originally the Greek word *domos*, from which the Latin *domus* derives, meant the most elementary human dwelling: an enclosure, that which protects.

But *domus* is a learned expression, which the Romans adopted in the meaning already in use to define the complex of elements of the urban patrician house.

Domus was not the house of man, but that of a socially privileged family; all the other Latin terms indicate rather specific constructions than that typical one, corresponding to the concept, apparently more abstract but in reality far more vital, of human dwelling.

Think, instead, of the English: home (I would like to demonstrate, against the opinion of philologists, that home and *homo* have the same origin), but think also, why not, of the Germans: *heim*; the two beautiful adjectives *homly* and *heimlich*, which we translate so poorly as homely or domestic, express the material and spiritual needs of every man in his house.

Even more significant is French when it says: *chez moi*, *chez toi*, *chez soi*; it truly seems that the constructive elements take on the features of the inhabitant.

I want to have a house that resembles me (in beauty): a house that resembles my humanity.

The extremes of our reasoning may lead us to utopia or to commonplace, because, if we ask too much, we aim at the unattainable and, if instead we look only at what surrounds us, we risk being satisfied with very little.

The house is a problem of limits (as, moreover, almost every other problem of existence).

But the definition of limits is a problem of culture, and it is precisely to this that the house is reduced (as, in fact, are the other problems of existence).

If this is so, even words are building material. And even a journal may aspire to be so.

It is a matter of finding within one's own spirit the ancient nature (and here Rousseau may well be right), while nevertheless following the fertile path of experience (which is the generous compensation for lost virginity).

There are many useless things that solicit bourgeois van-

ities, but also many marvelous ones of which most people still cannot avail themselves.

A journal can be an instrument, a lever for establishing the criterion of choice.

From what we have said, one may deduce what our intentions are, indeed the hopes we set as goals unattainable by our forces alone.

It is a matter of forming a taste, a technique, and a morality, as terms of a single function. It is a matter of building a society.

There is no time to waste illustrating trifles.

Let us all help one another to find harmony between human measure and divine proportion.

[Ernesto Nathan Rogers, *La casa dell'uomo*, in «Domus», no. 205, 1946, pp. 2-3]

Pio Montesi Dwelling 1955

The progress of technique; the thought of humankind which, albeit with varying fortune, nonetheless proceeds and rises in the constant, continuous attempt to eliminate errors, to reconcile ancient with new truths; the apostolate of a few – but sufficient – utopists for an effective recognition of the values of the spirit and of the importance of human dignity; the movements and agitations of peoples or of categories among them against misery and injustice; twenty centuries of Christianity; clamorous discoveries of new and formidable sources of energy and wealth: here are some elements of the prodigious history of humanity which, if they were to come to the knowledge, by divine will, of a wise inhabitant of another planet, he would have sufficient reason to convince himself of the happiness of a great part of humankind.

But if that same wise man, instead of deducing so important a conviction from a set of theoretical cognitions, had the melancholy idea of ascertaining personally the beneficial effects, upon everyday humanity, of so fertile an activity, and for this were to transfer himself momentarily to the earth, I think that the poor fellow at first would believe he had mistaken his destination.

Let us see.

We travel today at a speed ten, twenty times greater than fifty years ago; but this speed does not serve to make the journey less heavy and fatiguing; one does not take advantage of this speed to conceive the new town planning from which those human anthills called the city's «residential quarters» might be banished; on the contrary, the only results of progress in this sector are the breathless rhythm of life it has provoked, without an adequate increase of the activities of the spirit, and a continuous threat to our safety.

The machine – the most recent divinity of humankind – has indeed made human labour less burdensome by indefinitely increasing production; but for this reason modern man does not work less than his ancestors: indeed we must bitter-

ly recognise that today we have far less time to dedicate to a healthy repose of spirit and body than our forebears enjoyed.

The riches of the earth would in practice be sufficient to allow the two billion individuals who inhabit it to live in well-being; science, moreover, and technique have multiplied these riches: and yet the greater part of humankind lives miserably and a great part of it suffers hunger.

People give themselves laws that support the increase of population; the leaders of production devise methods and systems to increase natural and industrial products: but these results, long pursued, once they are attained, become the cause of destruction – on an ever larger scale – of those same people and of the very things laboriously produced. [...]

Let us consider one of the multiple aspects of human activity, one among the most important functions of human life: dwelling. And let us consider it in its simplest manifestation, I would like to say its most humble, as it springs spontaneously from the consciousness and labour of human collectivities technically (I am in doubt whether to add the word «civilly») more backward.

Let us linger, as a first example, in the territory of Cameroon, which extends from the Mandara Mountains, in the north, down, down almost to the equator. I have chosen, among the many possible, precisely this area of Africa because a recent documentation¹ illustrates in a quite exhaustive manner the types and constructive systems of the dwellings of this country and the customs and ways of life of the population.

Let us cross together the threshold of any dwelling of the Matakam tribe in Northern Cameroon; it is a modest dwelling of a young family, not even all that well-off.

The entrance opens in the enclosing wall which, more than surrounding the property, joins with stretches more or less long the various huts. As soon as we have passed the opening in the wall we see to our left the granary and near this, to the right of the opening, the man's hut which contains

The text reproduced here is published in the first issue of the journal «La casa. Quaderni di architettura e critica», directed by Pio Montesi between 1955 and 1960 (seven issues), whose aim is to construct a different line of thought with respect to the theme of the house and of dwelling, with an approach that reflects the celebrated expression «from the spoon to the city» by Ernesto Nathan Rogers. In these pages, the author investigates the relationship between technique, civilisation, and house, denouncing the loss of the profound sense of dwelling in modern man, overwhelmed by the rhythms of production and by the predominance of the machine. His reflection, which interweaves anthropology, social critique, and architectural culture, situates itself ideally in the wake traced by Rogers, for whom the house and the city must return to being «places of humankind», a synthesis of utility, morality, and aesthetics as described in the editorial published in «Domus». In parallel, Pio Montesi's interest in vernacular African dwellings and in Apulian ones (*trulli* of Alberobello) recalls the comparative approach of Bernard Rudofsky who, ten years later, will publish the catalogue of the homonymous exhibition *Architecture Without Architects* (1964). In both there is present the same tension to recognise in anonymous knowledges and in the spontaneous gestures of dwelling the original forms of a civilisation of humankind, opposed to technological alienation and modern

standardisation. His writing thus places itself as a manifesto on the urgency of restoring to the house its function as the vital, symbolic, and moral nucleus of contemporary society. Cf. E.N. Rogers, *Editoriali di architettura*, Einaudi, Turin 1968; B. Rudofsky, *Architecture Without Architects*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York 1964. [MB]

the nuptial bed. On one side and on the other of the man's hut another granary and the hut of the sacred calf. These four environments are distinct and isolated and are, so to speak, disengaged from the very limited external space.

Another group of huts, but with different characteristics, completes the house. Here the different environments draw close to one another until they fit together, touch, communicate directly among themselves. A single opening made in one of the huts gives access to the group. In that one the mother sleeps together with the children; and through that one one goes into the little goat hut on the one side, and into the larger hut of provisions on the other; from this, finally, one enters the kitchen. It is the woman's realm, compact, closed, strongly organised; organisation, moreover, is at the basis of all the dwellings of this area and the characterisation and distribution of the environments that constitute it are among the most evident characteristics of the way of dwelling of these tribes.

Even the constructive methods, the materials employed, the position of openings correspond rigorously to objective reasons determined by the climate, by orientation, by the direction of the winds and finally by the surrounding environment.

It is truly surprising how living and clear, in these primitive peoples, is the function of dwelling: a profound sense of equilibrium emanates from these humble huts, each destined to a precise purpose, with the right dimensions for that purpose, reciprocally situated in the right place and all together enclosed in an indissoluble unity. There is no doubt that the way of conceiving and realising one's own dwelling on the part of peoples whom we, with too much nonchalance, are inclined to consider savage, descends from an elevated and civil consciousness of the importance of the house for the well-being of individuals and of the family and for the strength and for the prestige of the tribe itself.

The second example we take, instead, from a country of undoubted civilisation, indeed (as one is accustomed to say) of millenary civilisation: Italy; and precisely from that marvellous land of Apulia which Italians themselves know so little.

In this region there is a brief stretch of territory, less unknown than the rest of the land, above all because of the tourist publicity made of it; and of this territory a town is especially known: Alberobello.

Alberobello is famous for its *trulli*. [...]

And yet the houses stand there, ancient and ever current, spontaneous (at least they say) and yet wise in their distribution and in the way of building; and most beautiful.

Above all beautiful.

Let us enter one of these *trulli* on a suffocating afternoon in August: immediately one is seized by a sense of well-being for the coolness of the temperature, for the colour of the discreet light; a broad room receives us decorated with jars, bot-

ties and other objects lined up on a stone shelf that runs along the four walls of the room; a low ceiling with a circular opening large enough for the passage of a person limits the height of the space and determines, at the same time, a broad and convenient loft within the space of the cone above.

From this environment one enters the parents' room, usually closed by a door, and the various alcoves all destined, except one which is the kitchen, to the repose of the other members of the family.

Precise characterisation of environments also in this case; rigorous division of parents from children and of males from females. A small courtyard, always shaded by some tree, completes this type of house, original in its distribution and in its structure and so fascinating in its exterior aspect.

Two examples: the first taken from a primitive people of a primitive region; the second from a people of ancient civilisation but technically backward and belonging to an area, as economists say, depressed.

And yet, left free to conceive the way to satisfy their exigencies of life as concerns the dwelling, these peoples demonstrate not only a great technical skill in the choice of materials and in their employment as a function of duration and of the geographical and climatic conditions of the place; but above all an elevated and civil sense of the house in relation to the relationships of hierarchy among the members of the family and to the specific functions that the family itself must be able to carry out within it.

And yet as soon as these men and women move from their own environment to enter the zone of influence of the «city» (the region is always the same, and brief is the physical distance from the places of origin), as soon as they come into contact with modern civilisation that consciousness is lost, that function degrades until it becomes a disorderly, anti-human crowding, without distinction of hierarchy, of sex, of age, in a miserable rectangle closed by walls whose structure has nothing to do, most of the time, with the natural characteristics of the place.

With the sense of the house, one also loses the sense of the family, of the community, of the chief. What has happened?

If we recall the centuries of struggle for the recognition of human dignity; the adventures of thought for the conquest of new truths; the fabulous progress of science and technique; if we keep in mind, in short, all this enormous baggage of culture and spirituality that civilised man has accumulated over the course of history, there will appear to us incomprehensible, absolutely incomprehensible, this phenomenon of degradation of thought, of civilisation and of the dignity of certain categories of people belonging to primitive or backward civilisations, which occurs as soon as these categories come into contact (through the desire to improve their lot) with other people of higher civilisation.

Specialists in the matter are ready to provide adequate and exhaustive explanations, especially as concerns dwelling: economic laws, with the relative distinction of consumer goods, among which the house, and instrumental goods; and the consequence that descends from it for a «sound» economic policy of favouring the production of the latter at the expense of the former; urban planning, with all that it entails in limitations – every planning in general and in particular urban planning; building and hygienic regulations with rigid prescriptions of forms, dimensions, distances, etc.; finally the administrative organisation of every civil society, so general and invasive as to make it impossible to disentangle oneself from it [...] even for the ordinary citizen of average intelligence and limited means. But it is not so.

The fact is, instead, that modern man, the man of mechanical civilisation, does not feel the house, does not have the exigency of the house. This dynamic, enterprising, swift man has lost the meaning of the function of dwelling.

Men and women spend the totality of the hours of the day outside the house; the midday meal, reduced to a physiological function, is consumed rapidly in restaurants more or less economical connected with places of work.

The relationships and human relations that before found in the house the natural place in which to establish themselves, creating bonds narrow but indissoluble of solidarity and friendship, have dispersed, widening, if one wishes, on broader bases but for that very reason anonymous, of trade-union, cultural, political, religious associations.

The house has been reduced, for modern man, to an occasional refuge – necessary, naturally – in which to sleep at night. Therefore the explanations of the specialist that I have sought to interpret are not valid.

The definition that economists give of the house as a consumer good is arbitrary and contingent and in any case unilateral; it derives, more than from general principles, from a particular conception of the economy in view of precise results that one wishes to attain to the benefit of certain economic groups.

Thus urban planning, which determines and regulates the life of the city above all on the basis of statistical data relating to roads, collective services, plants; and in so doing ends up neglecting the true exigencies of the human life of the individual and of the family, which escape, by their very nature, any statistical inquiry. Let us not speak, then, of building regulations which date back, for the most part, to thirty or forty years ago [...].

Even those which are commonly considered as provisions of the State in the matter of dwelling in fact spring from the arid conscience of technicians who consider the house as a purely constructive fact and from the political speculation of men of government who see in work programmes a powerful

weapon of propaganda exclusively at the service of party interests.

The human being, with their needs, their affections, their physical and moral exigencies, the human being is not involved.

It is thus that houses are walled up for the «homeless» [...] composed of one or at most two rooms but which will have to receive families of five, six and even more persons, with the specious justification that this smell of house is better than the cave.

I say that the cave is better: because, constituting a grave warning to society, one day or another it must indeed be eliminated; those walls, instead, by the appearance they give of a house, will perpetuate in the future, normalising it, an immoral and antisocial situation.

This is a point at which the machinery, of which one spoke at the beginning, does not function. [...]

One can continue on the – wrong – road that is currently followed; but those who insist on treading it must take upon themselves the responsibilities that follow from it. They must, however, know that the function of dwelling is one of the determinants of the character of society; that a great part of the well-being and the civil and moral level of a collectivity depends on the way in which the function is satisfied.

Which presupposes various activities from town planning to furnishing. It follows that a housing policy worthy of this name must foresee and organise programmes that, starting from the town plan of the «neighbourhood» and of the «quarter», arrive as far as the piece of furniture and the object of everyday use.

Because it is only thus that the function of dwelling must be understood.

The prodigious possibilities of modern technique provide us with the instruments to carry out, on a productive plane and economically adequate even to the lowest incomes, these programmes: but those instruments will remain inert and ineffective until the moment in which society re-establishes the hierarchy of human values placing in the first place, concretely, that simple human being, until the consciousness of individuals and of the collectivity feels within itself, living and operative, the civil and moral exigency to conceive and realise the house as the natural place in which the family is constituted, develops and consolidates itself in an harmonious exchange of affections and interests.

i. *L'habitat au Cameroun*, Publication de l'Office de la recherche scientifique outre-mer. Paris 1952.

[Pio Montesi, *Abitare*, in «La casa. Quaderni di architettura e critica», no. 1, 1955, pp. 28-37]

Vittorio Del Gaizo

The House Through Time

1970

The history of the «house» unfolds in an almost continuous conflict between the useful and the pleasurable, the necessary and the superfluous: that superfluous which Voltaire had the frankness and good sense to define as *très nécessaire*, attributing to it even the merit of having brought the two hemispheres together.

The reasons for this conflict are self-evident. They can be summarised in a few words that the reader will find in Giovanni Garbini’s Essay: «The taste for the beautiful object to be used daily or to be utilised exclusively to ornament the dwelling stands in a direct relationship with the economic possibility of being satisfied and, even more, with the cultural and aesthetic demands of a given social environment»¹. Here one speaks of objects, but the discourse is implicitly extensible to the house in its structure, that is, to architectural form and to the number or the extent of the environments that constitute it.

Obviously the presupposition is not enough: it is necessary that there be highly skilled artisans or, better still, artists, because «artistic value has no social equivalent», as Hauser explains precisely in his *Social History of Art*². «At most», he says, «sociology can lead the elements of which a work of art is composed back to their origin, but these elements can be the same in works of very different quality». And so that no doubt may remain, here is a decisive example: «It would be a serious error» (we continue to cite Hauser) «to see in the social conditions of contemporary Athens the necessary premises, or even only the ideal premises, for the birth of such an art and so high», that is, of the art of Phidias and more generally of the classical style.

No one should be surprised if in appearance we have gone somewhat far afield: many furnishing objects are authentic works of art, not to mention that in the decoration of interiors recur the names of Pinturicchio, Mantegna, Correggio, Raphael, Veronese, Tiepolo, and so on. Artistic facts are

therefore not directly linkable with economic-social facts; yet they presuppose them to the point that their realisation would be unthinkable without the favourable circumstances of which we have spoken above.

Here we must not think of the split between artist and artisan, which occurred gradually over the course of the sixteenth century, through the exaltation of «genius», which is perhaps to be regarded as the most remote antecedent both of the decline of craftsmanship and of the rupture between artist and public; although the two things reconnect to the changes introduced by the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century. The idea of the artist who isolates himself from the world and produces on his own account while awaiting recognition is recent and in a certain sense episodic, so true is it that the ancient relationships between artist and patron have been in part replaced by the new relationships between artist and dealer, while the theory of art for art’s sake was having its day along with other similar ones, even if different in essence, and the avant-garde currents were gradually ascending to the rank once occupied by so-called official art.

Rather, it is significant that precisely between the end of the last century and the beginning of ours there is proposed a redemption of craftsmanship from the invasiveness of mechanisation and consequently a revaluation of the decorative arts. [...]

We have not the slightest intention of calling into question the importance of *Liberty* as a rupture fact, destined to open for art a new period of originality, above all in the field of architecture and furnishing. But, having said this, one can add nothing else: that is to say, it is not possible to pass from recognising its historical significance to recognising an effective aesthetic validity. This can also be deduced from the deviation of its programme. *Liberty*, even if anachronistically, wished to restore dignity to craftsmanship and ended up transforming

itself into a colossal proliferation of serial products, recognisable in those innumerable and most squalid little second-hand objects of imitation alabaster, imitation marble, imitation bronze (painted plaster), with which the new style invaded Europe together with furniture of little-valued wood, always either too fragile or too massive, which seem to lose themselves in the night of the times of our memory, but which no recollection succeeds in ennobling or warming. [...]

Because there is this too, in the programmatic failure of the new style: that, wishing to be an art of the people for the people, it ended up being the art of the bourgeoisie, expressing its vaporous and vapid decadence, as the works of Klimt, for example, or those of Beardsley, exquisite illustrator of O. Wilde’s *Salomé*, demonstrate, and, perhaps more immediately, the furniture and objects of Köpping, Gallé, Tiffany, Mackintosh, and the Daum. Where one sees once again, in times so different and changed from those of the Middle Ages or the Renaissance or classical antiquity, the persistence of the link between artistic facts and the economic-social situation: not in relation to the intrinsic quality of the product as such, as has been seen, but to its presupposition, because, precisely, a rich or well-to-do class, able to appreciate the products of art and artistic craftsmanship, is the indispensable presupposition for the production of works of art and furnishing objects endowed with an aesthetic dignity.

Now it is from this implication that the conflict between the useful and the pleasurable, the necessary and the superfluous arises. For a house or, to be more exact, a dwelling is not in itself, that is necessarily, a work of art or a centre for the collection of works of art: think of prehistoric caves, the rudimentary huts of certain primitive peoples, the makeshift houses that arose in Europe in the immediate post-war period, and the apartments that nest in the anonymous peripheral hives of modern cities³.

A hovel, if and insofar as it fulfils its task, is already a dwelling. Strictly speaking, even Diogenes’ famous barrel was a dwelling, and it is credible that in so cramped and uncomfortable a space the old philosopher was happier than Alexander in his palace. It seems, however, that human beings, in the great majority, do not care to attain such happiness, so true is it that the first rough forms of dwelling have been modified, enlarged, and organised into ever more complex buildings, according to a diagram that coincides in its variety with the development of human civilisation, and in which concur a tendency toward functionality and another toward aestheticity.

From this concurrence there arises a different conflict between the useful and the pleasurable, the necessary and the superfluous, of a technical-aesthetic character, which has various points of contact with the other. [...]

One might say, and indeed it is repeated quite often, that the relationship has been reversing: that then functionality

was subordinated to aesthetics, whereas now aesthetics is subordinated and even sacrificed to functionality. Which is true and not true, even if we cannot enter into a discussion that would lead us off topic; but it is certainly true that contemporary architecture, rather than subordinating aesthetics to functionality, has sought to coordinate the two demands. [...]

The results, in our view, are tangible and can be ignored only by professional *passatisti*, endowed with eyes in order not to see and ears in order not to hear. But we would not wish to assume a polemical tone, which would be out of place and which in any case we could not sustain without fully confronting the matter. What matters, rather, is to consider how the concept of the superfluous not only changes continually, from place to place and from epoch to epoch, but on the whole has gone progressively narrowing. In the matter of sanitary services, for example, fifty years ago what today appears concordantly indispensable could still appear superfluous, so true is it that even the most modest public-housing dwelling is by now inconceivable without a bathroom. Yet many dwellings are still lacking one, while others possess three or four and perhaps one for each cohabitant, clad in mirrors or precious marbles, with specially made fixtures and porcelain or vermeil taps. Here, then, is how the concept of the superfluous, while changing and, in the sense said, progressively narrowing, continues to offer a sufficient margin for the ethical-aesthetic conflict to arise or arise again. [...]

This new reversal of values does not abolish the ethical-aesthetic conflict⁴; indeed it renders it more urgent, but also contingent, that is, bound to a particular historical situation in the process of being overcome, or presumed to be such. In other terms: it is no longer a matter of an opposition of principle, but of a practical opposition, motivated by the scarcity of dwellings, by the problem of the homeless, by the standard of living of the poor classes or of underdeveloped peoples and, in short, by hunger, to put it with Sartre: by the light of a world that is «hungry». *Maiores premunt*: yet the presupposition that there are «greater» things, therefore more important and more urgent, implies that there are «lesser» things, therefore less important and less urgent – that is, in the last analysis, a persistence of the conflict itself in the terms we indicated at the outset and upon which decisive influence has been exerted, even if very differently, by idealist historicism, historical materialism with its political developments, and lastly also by the attitude of the Catholic Church.

Naturally, this is only one aspect of the present situation, much more complex and fragmented than can appear from our approximate synthesis. [...]

«The evolutionary process of the conception of furniture», writes G.C. Argan, «in relation to architecture is also in relation to the progressive decline of craftsmanship and the parallel development of industry, whose standardised products arise

The text reproduced here is an excerpt from the introduction to the three volumes entitled *La casa nel tempo. Storia universale dell’abitazione e dell’arredamento* (Canesi, Rome 1970), edited by Vittorio Del Gaizo, with the contribution of numerous authors, to whom the texts of the different historiographical sections are entrusted. The publication addresses, from prehistory to the Modern period, the evolution of the dwelling in the interweaving between its conformation and the cultural and environmental context of reference. This text follows the volume *La storia della casa* (Rizzoli, Milan 1968) by Ettore Camesasca. With respect to the latter, Vittorio Del Gaizo identifies in the dichotomy between the useful and the pleasurable the construction of a sense of dwelling over the course of different historical periods.

1. The author refers to Giovanni Garbini’s text in the volume on page 113 and ff.
2. A. Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, A. Knopf, New York 1952.

3. In these lines the author expresses the critical slant with which he addresses, in the volume, the history of dwelling across different historical epochs. The history of the house develops in the comparison between the useful and the pleasurable and between the necessary and the superfluous. It is constructed on the one hand as a response to functional exigencies of protection, survival, as in the huts of primitive peoples, on the other by following aesthetic tendencies. With the evolution of society, the dwelling expands and is endowed with ever more refined technical and ornamental apparatuses.

4. The entire history of the house, read in this perspective, is not the progressive resolution of the conflict between aesthetics and utility, but its continuous reformulation, responding from time to time to economic, symbolic, and technical questions that redefine its meaning.

from a design akin and often coinciding with that of architecture. In the framework of the diffusion and great increase of consumption, the physical space of interiors, understood first and foremost as the projection of existential and biological functions, is ever more rightly dimensioned to adhere as much as possible to the programme of the useful, to the request for the minimum: the typological variety of furniture contracts until it is reduced to a few unifying elements and yet susceptible, by means of their composability, of adhering to an extended variety of functions. To this uniforming of types, corresponding moreover to the uniforming of the structure of interior spaces, naturally accompanies the diminishing of the user's participation in the formal definition of interior space. The apparent frustration has determined within certain strata of contemporary society a misunderstood revaluation of styles and a tendency toward pastiche, toward collecting: especially in the dwelling one very often resorts to the use of furniture of various periods, with environmental results that are acceptable only thanks to the intervention of a surely oriented taste and of a controlled creative freedom»⁵.

In our view, if the revaluation of «styles» is very often misunderstood, frustration, on the contrary, only in a few cases is apparent. On the other hand contemporary interior space, in its neutrality of form and colour, seems made on purpose to promote the tendency toward pastiches; which, it should be clear, have nothing in common with reconstructions in style or the crowded and pathetic contaminations of the end of the century. Whoever visited, to cite only one example, the exhibition *L'antiquariato nella casa moderna*, organised in Florence in Palazzo Strozzi, in the autumn of '62⁶, will have realised personally what and how many happy solutions the fusion and integration of the modern with the antique can admit. They, without doubt, presuppose «a surely oriented taste and a controlled creative freedom», which are not for everyone, indeed for the very few, as always, but which even those who tend toward and achieve great results within the ambit of a unitary furnishing, rigorously modern, cannot do without.

Apart from these few clarifications, Argan's passage is of a most lucid validity: it has the merit of bringing into focus the present situation in its positive and negative aspects and of explaining the derivation of the contemporary cult of the antiquarian object together with that nostalgic consideration for other epochs that shines through, for example, from the pages of Mario Praz's *Filosofia dell'arredamento*.

«Hyper-sensitivity of nerves and love for furniture are conjoined phenomena», he says, connecting himself to Hugo von Hofmannsthal, for whom, from past generations, moderns would have received in inheritance only two things: fine furniture and hypersensitive nerves⁷. [...]

However, in insisting too much on this connection, one risks misconstruing the present, minimising it and, what is worse, spreading a certain distrust around the facts of furnishing, as though love for a cut velvet, an Urbino ceramic, a Jacob chair, and so on, or, more generally, love for the house itself, were nothing but feminine occupations or those of decadent neurotics; which is where the aesthetic character of the ethical-aesthetic conflict is born or could have been born: and it is, for example, the perhaps unexpected case of Proust. [...]

This is why Proust criticises the mania of presenting a painting amid furniture, knick-knacks, and tapestries of the same period, preferring to this «insipid scenario» the museum room, «which symbolises much better, with its nakedness, the interior spaces where the artist withdrew in order to create». Here Proust, criticising a fashion whose taste he did not share, reunifies in the projection of his own «interior space» the creative act with the recreative act. It remains, however, that many of the works he would have preferred to admire in museums had been executed with a decorative function, to be seen and lived in the intimacy of another «interior space»: the «interior» of the house.

And it is here that the ethical-aesthetic conflict finds its natural outlet: in this actual increase of the artistic patrimony, considered progressively almost universally a universal good, and in its multiplying together with the progress of technique, even if the two phenomena, while interdependent, do not proceed in step, indeed at times oppose one another; and it is not possible to speak of progress with regard to artistic facts, whereas one cannot not speak of it with regard to technical innovations.

In reality it is with the history of the superfluous that the history of civilisation begins, not in the strictly Marxist sense of the base-structure-superstructure relation, but rather, even if with a vague approximation, in the sense of certain ideas of Huizinga, by which it is possible to see converge, in a different order of dependence, *homo sapiens*, *homo faber* and *homo ludens*⁸. Thus the superfluous unfolds entirely in its necessity, rendering superfluous all disquisitions on the matter, even if they still subsist and probably will continue to subsist always, expressing that dialectical principle from which there are generated from time to time new instances and new or recurring solutions. [...] «We alone», writes Proust, «through the conviction that they have an existence of their own, can give to certain things we see a soul, which they then preserve and develop in us». In practice, it is always this soul that he seeks to grasp. Then one understands why, beyond every critique, Mme Swann's «composite and disorderly» drawing room has for him «a cohesion, a unity, an individual charm» much greater than any «ensemble, even the most intact, transmitted by the past»⁹. We could say that every time or, at least, very often, a

sentimental motive overlays aesthetic motives, transforming the descriptions in fact into impressions. [...]

All this belongs properly to Proust's imagination and sensibility, but objectively implies at least two things: on the one hand, the transformation of the house into a «state of mind», something that begins to occur with a certain approximation toward the middle of the eighteenth century; on the other, the dialectical dynamism of Romanticism and, more directly, the becoming of the Bergsonian philosophical vision. However, even before assuming the character of a state of mind, in the critical sense of the term, the house has corresponded in some way from always to its inhabitants, reflecting the spirit of a people, of a social group and, in more differentiated epochs, of individual persons within the ambit of the same civilisation. And it is within the order of this correspondence that its becoming unfolds through the multiple architectural types that are known, from the simplest to the most complex, and through the different forms of furnishing.

«The dwelling», writes V. Lanternari in his Essay, «reflects from time to time, in its conformation and structure, in the material of which it is built, in the technique followed in building it, an entire environmental and cultural world differentiated from case to case». And here is a poetic transposition of the same concept: «In the beginning there were Babylon and Nineveh: and they were built in brick. Athens was all columns of marble and gold. Rome rested on great arches of tufa. In Constantinople the minarets flamed like great candles around the Golden Horn... Packed onto the narrow island, the buildings with thousands of windows will rise gleaming, pyramids upon pyramids, like peaks of white clouds above hurricanes»¹⁰. Thus Dos Passos in the epigraph that opens the second chapter of *New York*, evoking all at once the joy, pride, arrogance, anxiety, and almost apocalyptic panic of contemporary man. The image, in any case, is historically faithful: there is enough to explain the bricks of Babylon, the marble of Athens and the tufa of Rome, just as the «narrow island» explains the birth of skyscrapers, which in turn presuppose the invention of reinforced concrete. But there is something else for one who does not stop at marble or tufa and also considers the arches or the columns: there is the sense of that spiritual force which, dominated and conditioned by environmental circumstances, each time succeeds in conditioning them, dominating them, and resolving them into symbolic forms: the only ones capable of expressing, even in the contingency of their historical relativity, a content of universal value.

[Vittorio Del Gaizo ed., *Introduzione*, in *La casa nel tempo. Storia universale dell'abitazione e dell'arredamento*, Canesi, Rome 1970, 3 vols., pp. ix-xxii]

5. Here the reference is to the essay by G.C. Argan, ed., entry *Interni*, in *Enciclopedia Universale dell'Arte*, Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, Venice-Rome, Sansoni Editore, Florence 1959, vol. VII, cols. 580-610 [excerpted in this volume].

6. «From ethics, I repeat, aesthetics must move in furnishing, especially on the question of the antique in the modern. From ethics, from the spiritual value and therefore necessarily moral that we shall give to ancient work and to modern work together. It is ethics that tunes everything, that gives unity, that makes the environment», L. Borgese, *L'antico nel moderno*, in *L'antiquariato nella casa moderna*, Palazzo Strozzi, S.T.I.A.V., Florence 1962, n.p. [transl. by the editor].

7. Here the reference is to the text by M. Praz, *La Filosofia dell'arredamento*, Documento, Librario Editore, Rome 1945 [excerpt in this volume].

8. Cf. J. Huizinga, *Homo ludens. Proeve eener bepaling van het spel-element der cultuur*, H.D. Tjeenk Willink, Haarlem 1938 (Eng transl. *Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, The Beacon Press, Boston 1955).

9. The quotations are taken from the first volume *Du côté de chez Swann*, first volume of M. Proust's work *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Gallimard, Paris 1919.

10. J. Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*, Harper & Brothers, New York-London 1925. [MB]

Silvia Esposito, Tomás Maldonado, Raimonda Riccini

The Female Condition and the Ideology of Comfort

1981

When surveying the enormous amount of literature which has already been written about «family work», on the working role of women within the family¹, it is surprising to see how little attention is paid to what, for the sake of brevity, we shall from now on call the technology of everyday life, namely, that whole set of techniques and practices which underlie household material culture. In our view, this neglect is explained by the abstract character of a large part of studies devoted to female condition. This is the famous «abstract strategic line» pointed out by Ulrike Prokop², a line which deems it more useful – for the purposes of women’s emancipatory struggle – to privilege general matters over particular ones, macro-history over micro-history. This idea is based on the widespread assumption that generalizations are more effective, and better suited to stir the public’s consciousness, than statements drawn from empirical data. And yet this assumption, even if debatable, has, in certain respects, received undeniable confirmation. One must in fact recognize that the successes achieved so far by the women’s social and political movement is to be ascribed mostly to this strategic choice. This being admitted, it must immediately be said, however, that in recent times, in part also as a result of those very successes, an increasingly critical attitude toward similar abstract theoretical constructs is emerging among women. It is a fact that, at present, generalizations persuade less and less.

There is less and less willingness to endorse uncritically generalizations which, very often, are nothing other than daring fideistic assumptions with no (or scant) corroboration in factual reality. One may think, by way of example, of the offhand contrivances concerning the relationship between domestic work and capitalist accumulation, or those concerning the woman-class relationship³.

But there is a point of the «abstract strategic line» which is now seen by the majority of women as a dangerous loss of the sense of reality, indeed as a form of aberrant intellectualism: the

refusal to dill with the so-called «minor events» in everyday life. In particular, with those events that surface, in all their dramatic force, when we examine the environmental context within which household work is carried out.

This theoretical lacuna must be filled². There is everything to be gained, both on the scientific plane and on the political one. Even for those who, legitimately in our view, see in household work a sort of crime that is perpetrated every day against women, it can be very fruitful to recognize the place in which the crime actually occurs, especially if one wants to understand, let us say, the mechanics of the crime. For it is obvious that it is carried out in a place that is not only socially but also physically structured. We allude, concretely, to the interior space of the house, a space which, for a century now, has presented itself as increasingly technologized, a veritable space-machine. Put differently, a space in which operations, productive and reproductive acts are performed with the aid of specific technical objectsⁱⁱⁱ. The justified reactions of the feminist movement against the «factory-like», Taylorist version of household work have led to viewing with suspicion any investigation (or even simple reflection) on domestic machines^{iv}. And the effects of such an attitude have been very negative: in this way there has taken shape a genuine repression of the techno-material aspects of dwelling space, precisely those aspects which, as we shall see, are fundamental in any rigorous analysis of the work of housewife-women, both those full-time and those who have a double role: on the one hand, wife-mother-housewife, on the other, worker in a factory, in an office, or in services.

Basically, one tended to overlook a rather obvious point, namely that, besides an articulation of functional compartments that is more or less rigid (dining room, living room, bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, etc.), our living space is also a material system, an arrangement of mobile and fixed objects (equipment and tools for the preparation and preservation of food; for child-care;

for hygiene and cleaning; systems for the thermal control of the environment; devices for recreation and communication; furniture; household objects; etc.). The everyday life of the housewife is, to a great extent, a continual struggle with this system, with such arrangement. More than this: it is precisely here that the housewife, as the protagonist of household work, defines her torn, suffering identity – in short, her female condition³.

Although these themes are only exceptionally examined by scholars of the feminist movement, one cannot say that they are entirely new. Many scholars external to the movement – archaeologists, ethnologists, sociologists and historians of the family, of custom, of technology, of industry, and of architecture – have given, and continue to give, important contributions to this field of inquiry. An effort, in our view still not accomplished, would certainly be that of attempting an integration of all these pieces of specialized knowledge into an overall vision of domestic material culture, with particular reference to late-capitalist society. It is, to be sure, a difficult task, and we do not here presume to tackle it. In this context, we instead wish only to hint at a few aspects concerning the technology of everyday life, above all those that can help us better discern the nature of the supporting (and driving) elements of such a culture.

Let us begin with a first consideration: the technology of everyday life is not neutral, nor has it ever been so. In fact, it belongs to that kind of devices designed to ensure social control, which Isaac Joseph, following Michel Foucault, has called «home tactics and disciplinary figures»^v.

But at this stage, the obvious question arises: how and where did the tactics and figures disciplining our present household material culture come about? That is to say, what were the circumstances determining the appearance of those control system deisgned to structure and, in the last instance, to stabilize, daily life in capitalist society? How and where, in other words, did the system of values and norms ruling to-day’s so-called «modern» way of conceiving use objects, prefiguring behaviours patterns, or articulating dwelling spaces, break into history?

The answer to such questions is usually to be sought in Victorian England. Indeed, it is in that Country – and at that particular historical moment – that the decisive turning point occurs in the constitutive process of the above-mentioned tactics and figures. After the devastating social impact of the first phase of industrialism, an ever greater disquiet surfaces in England regarding the effects that such an impact can have, in the long run, on labour force reproduction. The situation at that time, let it be recalled, presented more than alarming aspects: the drastic reduction of average life expectancy; the high infant mortality rate; the enormous increase in the number of abandoned children and elderly people, delinquents, vagrants, beggars; the spread of epidemics proper to undernourishment, promiscuity, and the absolute lack of dwelling hygiene; the ever greater diffusion of the exploitation of women and children; the rampant phenomenon of juvenile criminality, alcoholism, and prostitu-

tion; etc. Faced with this dramatic state of affairs, at the time already described by Friedrich Engels^{vi}, the ruling class responds by launching certain containment strategies; it creates the most varied assistance institutes: nurseries for children and the elderly, mendicancy hospices, places of confinement for the «mentally ill» (or presumed such); it implements a vast plan of hygienic-sanitary interventions in neighbourhoods and in working-class dwellings (opening of wide streets, channels, sewers, etc.); it enacts laws regarding the length of the working day and the hygiene and safety of labour. In short: capitalism, albeit unwillingly, makes concessions. To put it with Engels, «large-scale industry, in its outward aspects, moralizes itself»^{vii}.

At this stage, it is worth noting that many of the disciplinary tactics and figures of the Victorian age, especially those pertaining to the «home», appear from the outset strongly conditioned (and even determined) by a new «ideal-typical» construct: the ideology of «comfort»⁴. All the efforts of those years, tending to guide the reconstitutive process of the working-class family, identify themselves with the attempt to install – indeed, to sanction – a model of household material culture. Ideally, this model should mediate between «rich culture» and «poor culture», enhancing, so to speak, a downward acculturation, the handing down of values. But the factor that most contributed to the success of such a design was precisely the ideology of comfort^{viii}.

Let us dwell upon this notion of comfort for a moment. Although the term comes, as is obvious, from English («comfort») and this, in turn, from French («confort»), its true origin is notoriously late Latin: «confortare», «con-fortis», to make strong, and by extension, to encourage, to relieve from a pain or a fatigue. Two important derivations must also be mentioned: «confortabile», which deserves comfort, and «confortevole», which offers convenience and refreshment. From this brief etymological excursus there emerge certain connotations that may be extremely useful for grasping the explicit (as well as implicit) sense of the Victorian use of the word comfort. In the specific case, in fact, comfort presents itself as a procedure with a compensatory function, that is, a procedure that seeks to restore – both on the physical plane and on the psychic one – the energies consumed in the inhospitable external world of productive labour. In short: something akin to the «rest of the warrior». However, since the «warrior», the subject in need of rest, was considered – according to the vision of the time – only the male, comfort became exclusively (or almost) male comfort. Thus, for example, the most comfortable pieces of furniture were those intended for men’s use^x. And this manifested itself clearly in their extremely vast, and at times grotesque, functional specialization. Let us recall the «reading chair» («reading chair»), the «smoker’s chair» («smoker’s chair»), the «siesta chair» («siesta chair»), the «digestive chair» («digestive chair»), etc. But, moreover, the spaces of the house too were classified as «male» («dining-room» and «smoking-room») and «female» («drawing-room» and «bedroom»), and the man’s spaces had a greater quality of comfort

The text reproduced here is taken from an article published in the journal «Casabella» (no. 467, 1981), in the years when Tomás Maldonado was its director (1977-1983). Co-signed with Silvia Esposito and Raimonda Riccini, it addresses the theme of dwelling by intertwining notions of gender, comfort, and forms of disciplinary control within society. The years of Maldonado’s direction of the journal place the «design question» at the centre, expanding its disciplinary boundaries. *Condizione femminile e condizione abitativa* is the title of «Casabella» no. 467, which is among the first in Italy to deal with how the construction of space and, in particular, domestic space, is influenced by women’s role and by the objects of use that compose it. These early reflections will be taken up again by Maldonado in the chapter entitled *L’ideologia del comfort* within the book *Il futuro della modernità* (Feltrinelli, Milan 1987, pp. 96-108). See also G. Tonon, *La casa come ambiente di lavoro*, in «Hinterland», no. 11-12, 1979, pp. 38-39; R. Riccini, *Identità femminili e tecnologie del quotidiano*, in L. Fortunati, J. Katz, R. Riccini, eds., *Corpo Futuro*, Franco Angeli, Milan 1997, pp. 155-166. 1. On the topic, see M. Barbagli, *Sotto lo stesso tetto. Mutamenti della famiglia italiana dal XVI al XX secolo*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1984; G. Bassanini, *Tracce silenziose dell’abitare. La donna e la casa*, FrancoAngeli, Milan 1994.

2. Two fundamental contributions that have investigated the female conditions from a sociological point of view are F. Bimbi, ed., *Dentro lo specchio. Lavoro domestico, riproduzione del ruolo e autonomia delle donne*, Mazzotta, Milan 1977; L. Balbo, *La doppia presenza*, in «Inchiesta», no. 32, 1978, pp. 3-6.

3. As explored in other articles in the same issue of «Casabella», the kitchen proves to be the place in which women’s role and condition in the house has been, and is still, played out: «Often considered a “female place” par excellence, even from a cultural point of view [...], the feminization of the kitchen becomes explicit during the nineteenth century, when with the affirmation of industrial society one witnesses a more evident break between professional labour [...] and domestic labour», I. Forino, *La cucina. Storia culturale di un luogo domestico*, Einaudi, Turin 2019, p. xxi.

4. Cf. T. Maldonado, *Il futuro della modernità*, Feltrinelli, Milan 1987, pp. 96-108.

than those of the woman, for the simple reason that in them there was the most comfortable furniture⁵.

It must be pointed out, however, that this tendency grew weaker over the years. Women become increasingly conscious of certain evident advantages of comfort, and advance demands (and proposals) aimed at making the places where they carry out their domestic tasks easier and more welcoming. And they do not stop there: between the end of the '70s and the beginning of the '80s, still in the last century, women mobilize, in England and in the United States, for a reform of women's clothing, publicly denouncing the damage caused by certain items of clothing and underwear, above all those most harmful to women's health (such as the «corset») or most restrictive of their freedom of movement (such as the «crinoline»)*. From those years onward, step by step, women begin to rid themselves of their traditional, resigned passivity and seek to appropriate certain aspects, far from irrelevant, of the culture of comfort. Even if it would be too optimistic to speak of a «de-masculinization» of such a culture, it is not rash to say that, in that period, men show themselves willing to concede, somewhat reluctantly, that specifically female environments and their furniture may be more comfortable.

We are led, however, to ask ourselves whether the sreading of a desire such as that for comfort really entails «progress». The answer is at the same time negative and positive. For one thing must be clear: the ideology of comfort, like many other «ideal-typical» constructs of capitalist society, does not constitute a homogeneous block to be rejected or approved globally. If, on the one hand, it is right to condemn it insofar as it is certainly part of a manipulative-repressive design (the already mentioned role of comfort as «at home» disciplinement), on the other, it would be foolish not to admit the positive effects of an everyday life made more comfortable.

Having reached this point, it seems necessary to address another aspect of the problem, namely that pertaining to the way in which comfort inserts itself – let us say functionally – into the process of modernization. It is a matter of knowing, all in all, why the process of modernization – which for many authors identifies itself with the civilizing process^{xi} – manifests itself predominantly as a qualitative and quantitative growth of the prestation of comfort. And the answer, also in this case, is not easy. For the simple reason that comfort is not always «performed» in the same way, but according to a dynamic that permanently changes the terms of the relationship between the supply and the demand of comfort. Let us recall that comfort, beyond a certain critical threshold, can transform itself – as often happens – into a source of new discomforts and sufferings. In a few words, comfort can lead to a negation of comfort. One may think, for example, of the perverse collateral effects (pollution, traffic congestion, etc.) generated by the automobile.

Such nuances, however important, must not lead us to underestimate (still less to ignore) the fact that there exists an undeniable bond of reciprocal dependence between modern

development and the diffusion of comfort. In the course of the present article, there has often been hinted at the conception – not ours, but which we have made ours – of comfort understood as a means of disciplinement at home. It should be noted, however, that it is a very peculiar disciplinement. In practice, through norms more or less formalized, more or less explicit, comfort serves to regiment everyday life, to ritualize behaviours, above all the attitudes and postures of the body as a function of furniture and domestic objects of use. On close inspection, comfort expresses, better than any other cultural device, the «techniques of the body»^{xii} proper to modern bourgeois society.

But since comfort regiments everyday life, it also contributes, indirectly, to disciplining the family, to transforming it radically, to making its «modernization» possible, that is, its nuclearization. This hypothesis is fully confirmed by the most recent studies on the constitutive process of the «(nuclear) modern family»^{xiii}, in particular by those that have dwelt on the influence of micro-environmental factors on that process. There is no doubt, in fact, that the new family arrangement appears, from the outset, closely connected to the changing of dwelling space. It suffices to recall, in this regard, the structural changes in dwellings that occurred in the period of passage from the traditional family to the modern family. From an open living space, with fluid, imprecise, elusive boundaries, typical of the environmental context of the traditional family, one passes, with the birth of the nuclear family, to a closed space, articulated into a system of rigidly established functions.

And the purpose is clear: it is a matter of blocking the excessive instability of the family, sheltering it from external intrusions, anchoring it to a precise place, binding it, in short, to an interior. But creating an interior, fencing off a space, is not enough. It is equally necessary that the new space, by its particular structure, be capable of promoting a new ideal of home life. In its emergent phase, the bourgeoisie, conscious of this need, hastens to define the form and content of its ideal of life: a life centred on intimacy, on an «atmosphere of intimacy». And yet bourgeois intimacy is not described only in terms of intimism. It certainly calls upon the traditional spiritual values of private life, that is, the values of a life that is realized in the enjoyment of interiority. At the same time, however, the dream (for it is a dream) of bourgeois intimacy is based on a tight ordering of material things. In practice, to put it with Bachelard, it is a «rêverie de l'intimité matérielle»^{xiv}.

If one observes well, the question leads us directly back to our theme of comfort as a means of disciplinement. And at this point, it seems, some further clarifications on the matter are needed. There is no doubt that intimacy appears, in many respects, conditioned by the ideology of comfort, but also by another ideology that has always had a close relationship with the former: the ideology of hygienicity. One thing is certain: intimacy, deprived of comfort and hygiene, is voided. But what do comfort and hygiene have in common such that, when they are lacking,

intimacy is obscured? The answer is simple: order^{xv}. Comfort and hygiene are indicators of order. More: it is from this complex, intertwined play of the ideology of comfort and of hygienicity, both guarantors of private order, that the modern system of household appliances is born^{xvi}. It is here, above all here, that the dialectic of women's condition manifests itself with the greatest clarity. Some of these objects have certainly contributed to freeing the housewife from not a few of the fatigues of family labour; others instead have brought her to a further subjection. But the aspect (perhaps the most disquieting) of the matter is to be sought in the fact that household appliances – both the «good» and the «bad» – have come to reinforce the old role (now highly technologized) of the housewife as gendarme of private order. “Putting the house in order has been (and remains) the obsession of many housewives, especially of the middle class. And putting in order means cleaning, dusting, polishing, but also placing things back into a pre-established order, that is, into the place where they were before use displaced them. «To dwell», said Benjamin, «is to leave traces»^{xvii}; the housewife wants to erase all traces. And in this rancour of hers against a dwelling that has always been the dwelling of others, never her own, there transpires the will to carry to the point of absurdity her adherence to an order that is not even hers.

i. Ulrike Prokop, *Weiblicher Lebenszusammenhang. Von der Beschränktheit der Strategien und der Unangemessenheit der Wünsche*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M. 1976 (Italian transl. M. Bianchi and M. Mair, Feltrinelli, Milan 1978, with an introduction by M. Bianchi). Exceptions to the «abstract strategic line» are to be found in certain orientations of German and American historiography. The works of the American D. Hayden and of the Germans G. Stahl, L. Kramer, G. Bock, and B. Duden, published in this issue of «Casabella», are examples, we believe, of an approach centred on concreteness. In Italy, the names of L. Balbo and C. Saraceno should be mentioned, whose works have long been moving in the direction of rigorous empirical research. In our country, in fact, there is today emerging a healthy (and opportune) reaction against the danger recently denounced by Balbo, «of an easy slippage into ideology, dogmatism, prescriptivism, which renders analysis abstract and incapable of descending into a reality that eludes conventional schemes». L. Balbo, *Lavoratrici comunque*, «Rinascita», 37 (19 September 1980), 32-33. All in all, the most serious exponents of the feminist movement are now everywhere engaged in overcoming utopian feminism and opening the way to scientific feminism, as one might say by paraphrasing the famous opposition relative to socialism. In the United States, especially within the university sphere, this tendency seems increasingly to consolidate. It suffices to glance, for example, at the programme «Harvard Research in Progress on Women». Cf. C. Pasquinelli, *Come studia il movimento. I «Women's Studies» negli Stati Uniti*, «Rinascita», 37 (19 September 1980), 33.

ii. On this point see the important text by M. Molineux, *Beyond the Domestic Labour Debate*, «New Left Review», 116 (1979), 3-27. Cf. also W. Seccombe, *The Housewife and her Labour under Capitalism*, «NLR», 83 (January-February 1974), 3-24; J. Gardiner, *Women's Domestic Labour*, «NLR», 89 (January-February 1975), 47-57; M. Coulson, B. Magas, H. Wainwright, *The Housewife and her Labour under Capitalism – A Critique*, «NLR», 89 (January-February 1975), 59-71.

iii. As concerns the notion of «technical object», which we shall use often in this text, cf. G. Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, Aubier, Paris 1958.

iv. On the birth of the efficiency ideology of family labour, especially in the American context, cf. G. Turnaturi, *La donna fra il pubblico e il privato. La nascita della casalinga e della consumatrice*, «Nuova DWF», 12/13 (July-December 1979), 8-29,

and G. Cesareo, *La contraddizione femminile*, Editori Riuniti, Rome 1977, pp. 314 ff. Cf. also, in this issue of «Casabella», the articles by L. Kramer, G. Stahl, G. Bock, and B. Duden.

v. I. Joseph, *Tactiques et figures disciplinaires*, in I. Joseph and Ph. Frisch, *Disciplines à domicile – L'édification de la famille*, «Recherches», 28 (November 1977), 83-123. Cf. G. Heller, «*Propre en ordre*» – *Habitation et vie domestique 1850-1930: l'exemple vaudois*, Edition d'En-Bas, Lausanne 1979. On the «disciplinary» role of domestic material culture, with particular reference to women, cf. the precursor contribution of B. Taut, *Die neue Wohnung – Die Frau als Schöpferin*, Klinkland und Biermann, Leipzig 1924, pp. 9 ff.

vi. F. Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), Editori Riuniti, Rome 1973.

vii. F. Engels, Preface to the 1892 edition, *ibidem*, p. 29.

viii. On the role of the ideology of comfort in the Victorian period, cf. F. Beguin, *Les machineries anglaises du confort, in L'haleine des faubourgs*, «Recherches», 29 (December 1977), 155-186. Cf. also J. Gloag, *Victorian Comfort* (1961), David and Charles, Newton Abbot Devon 1979, and J. and F. Fourastié, *Histoire du confort*, PUF, Paris 1973. One should also note the precursor book by S. Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command*, Oxford University Press, New York 1948.

ix. J. Gloag, *op. cit.*, pp. 60 ff. Naturally, the reasons for the greater comfort of male furniture compared to female furniture are quite complex. One cannot deny that other factors exist. For example, the puritan attitude of Victorian culture toward women's bodies, which was ready to judge vulgar, even immoral, any position of the female body that privileged relaxation over composure and modesty. Nor should one underestimate the fact that, in so-called female furniture, the picturesque component prevailed over the purely functional one. Cf. A. Ferebee, *A History of Design from the Victorian Era to the Present*, Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York 1970, pp. 25 ff. Usually, it is a picturesque element with a strong emblematic-symbolic imprint: furniture in fact functions as a true allegory. And this should not surprise, especially if one takes into account the old male tendency to use the figure of woman in an allegorical function: suffice it to think of monumental representations of Justice, Truth, Liberty, etc. On the woman-allegory relationship, cf. C. Rentmeister, *Berufserbot für die Muse*, «Ästhetik und Kommunikation», 25-VI (September 1976), 92-112.

x. On the difficulties created by the use of the «crinoline» inside the house, cf. Q. Bell, *On Human Finery* (1947), The Hogart Press, London 1976.

xi. On the theme of modernization, cf. T. Maldonado, *Il Movimento Moderno e la questione «post»*, «Casabella», 463/464 (November-December 1980), 10-14. On the relationship between the process of modernization and the civilizing process, cf. N. Elias, *Über der Prozess der Zivilisation* (1966), Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M. 1977, and also G. Friedmann, *Problèmes humain du machinisme industriel*, Gallimard, Paris 1945 (Italian transl. B. Maffi, Einaudi, Turin 1949, p. 461).

xii. M. Mauss, *Les techniques du corps* (1934), in *Sociologie et Anthropologie*, PUF, Paris 1968, pp. 363 ff. As concerns the current disciplining role of comfort in a particular dwelling context (the living room), cf. the excellent, and by now classic, empirical investigation by A. Silbermann, *Vom Wohnen der Deutschen – Eine soziologische Studie über das Wohnerelebnis*, Westdeutscher Verlag, Köln 1963.

xiii. On the matter see E. Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family*, Basic Books, New York 1975 (Italian transl. G. Pelone Colombo, Rizzoli, Milan 1978), and L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage – in England 1500-1800*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1977. Cf. E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou – village occitan: de 1294 à 1324*, NRF, Paris 1975.

xiv. G. Bachelard, *La terre et les rêveries du repos*, Librairie J. Corti, Paris 1948.

xv. Cf. on this point M. Douglas, *De la souillure* (1967), Maspero, Paris 1971. «As we know it, dirt is essentially disorder... Dirt is an offence against order».

xvi. Cf. T. Maldonado and E. Wahl, *Grundsatzuntersuchung über Haushaltsgeräte* (mimeograph), Hochschule für Gestaltung, Ulm – Donau 1966. This is an empirical investigation, with a strong systemic approach, on the universe of household appliances.

xvii. W. Benjamin, *Paris, die Hauptstadt der XIX Jahrhunderts*, in *Illuminationen*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M. 1961, p. 190. On Benjamin's theory of the «interieur», cf. T. Maldonado, *Arredamento e malinconia*, in *Almanacco Bompiani*, Milan 1975, pp. 36 ff.

[Silvia Esposito, Tomás Maldonado, Raimonda Riccini, *Condizione femminile e ideologia del comfort*, in «Casabella», no. 467, 1981, pp. 27-33]

5. For further study on the construction of bourgeois domestic space, see M. Ciampi, *Forme dell'abitare. Un'analisi sociologica dello spazio borghese*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2011.

[MB]

Gianni Ottolini

Towards a New Culture of Living

1982

The crisis in housing design

[...] The interior of the affordable dwelling¹ (which should be accessible thanks to contributions from the government) today presents itself, for the most part, «crammed to the brim» with furniture in false styles («ancient» or «modern»), with dimensional and functional incongruities between spaces and furnishings. The consequence is that, instead of rejoicing on seeing how reality, how people’s lives develop in a creative and original way implementing what the «metaproject» outlined, the designer draws from it a sense of discouragement, all the stronger the more he has committed himself to the «existential and performance requirement», that is, to a methodology and poetics of architecture that wants to be extremely attentive to the users’ needs.

It is not only a matter of the improper or too coarse handling of the «furnishability requirement», whereby one has not sufficiently evaluated the quantity of equipment and furnishings that Italians by now possess, or the prevailing dimensions, the typology and the morphology of production accessible to the lower and middle strata (so that the kitchen-dining-living space, by now so often present as a single unit, translates into grotesque face-to-face encounters between modular wall cabinets in plastic laminate, crystal-drop chandeliers, and immense armchairs in real leather), or the very anthropometric data of the users [...].

Rather, it is the outcome of a long history of the progressive divergence of the building sector from that of furnishing, consummated in the last twenty years, and of an original vice of the current methodology of the design of mass housing building, which more properly and generally can be defined as «design»².

The «disappearance of form» in the metaproject, that is, the genuine removal (among the «institutive contents»³ of the building component and of the whole) of aspects of aesthetic

and morphological identity, or rather their reduction and simplification to the aesthetic code of the manufacturing process (so that form, naturalized and banalized in the design phase, returns with force where it is left free to express itself, that is, in the users’ concrete furnishing behaviour), gives the idea that the prevailing aesthetic culture of these designers, who do not want to use architecture only to give representation either of their personality, is still that of the «form of the useful», that is, functionalism and industrial aesthetics, which precisely in the field of the design of furnishing for the dwelling in these years has gone into a deep crisis.

The matrix of this aesthetic culture, which is the very same as that of the Modern Movement, is characterized not so much as «prohibitionist» of aesthetic pleasure and its laws (as is evident from the joyful assumption of primary and pure colours on luminous white and concrete-grey backgrounds, or from the valorization of the aesthetic qualities of «natural» materials, or from its links with the experimental researches of psychologists on visual perception), as rather as an attitude of «rupture with history», of overcoming the objects and trappings of the decadent taste of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, but also, and above all, of overcoming the images and dwelling behaviours of a people of peasants driven into the cities and into industry, that is, into a new universe of objects and architectures and environment (dwelling, street, workplace) to be made «organic» and «coherent».

It is in fact the product of a reformist and paternalistic commitment to a new identity and social homogenization of the subordinate classes, to their integration into a new society of engaged and responsible producers (in public as in private), under the banner of efficiency and of «hygiene», in a new and definitive «naturalness». [...]

But today, when functionality is taken as the basis of a new beauty, every furnishing for every destination can be orig-

inal and independent from already existing models, having another origin and function. For this reason today there can exist the piece of furniture and the furnishing for the public housing dwelling not inferior, in its new beauty, to the furnishing and the furniture of the gentleman’s house. [...]

Here, it is precisely this «functionality», this type of functional aesthetics and, together, a pedagogical programme of the intellectuals towards the masses [...], it is this design culture that has gone into crisis.

If one wants to mark the moment of the start of the current different situation, one must refer, in Italy, to the early 1960s, that is, to the end of the «economic miracle» and to the rapid crisis of the reformist hypotheses of the economy (of production and of private to social consumption) and of social relations. Faced with the new pressure of the subordinate strata to recover greater shares of the produced surplus, in a situation of objective increase and diffusion of well-being, and to have a programmed development of the economy and of the environment, on the one hand the inflationary response once again makes housing and furnishing a safe-haven asset – all the more interesting the more voluminous and overloaded with material signs of wealth – and on the other hand, as Koenig writes with regard to Rosselli and the crisis of *Stile e Industria* and of the *Compasso d’Oro*⁴, the «prince», that is, industry (of furnishing and furniture; but it is also true for building), seizing this potential for anti-inflation spending, abandons its «counsellor», that is, the designer committed to a «serious» product, original and coherent in its functional, technological, and aesthetic foundations, and pushes towards an acceleration of the formal change of products in and for themselves, as a stimulus and accelerated inducement of new consumption.

That gradual and progressive renewal of furnishing production, marked by the fermenting hinterland of a minute artisanal productive structure, which designers and scholars such as Carlo De Carli (with the journal *Il mobile italiano* and support for competitions and for the «international exhibitions» open to the public) or Silvio Leonardiⁱⁱⁱ supported and documented, is overwhelmed by the financial and industrial take-off of the sector (with the emergence of some «leading» industrial producers), of which the Milan Furniture Fair, reserved only for operators, becomes the most conspicuous vehicle.

In the same way, the guiding role and the prevailing weight of public intervention in housing building gives way to the unleashing of the speculative forces of the market, so that, overall, those integrated models house-social services and building-furnishing, which in the immediate post-war period and still in the 1950s had set themselves as an exemplary direction to be pursued throughout Europe (Le Corbusier’s *Unité*, Piero Bottoni’s QT8), find in the failure of the competition announced in the ECSC in 1966 for a low-cost mass dwelling with the use of steel^v their forced and sad epilogue³. From that mo-

ment on, the building-furnishing relationship will remain only in the super-technological and «futurible» proposals of the houses printed in metal or plastic of the Japanese^v and of the «total furnishing units»^{vi} or, more simply, in holiday caravans, according to a model of functional and formal integration ever more closed and totalizing⁴.

This fracture internal to the culture and to design practice for dwelling does not mean that things since then have not changed. But while in building the free play of private initiative has constantly shown that it does not know how to face the unresolved problem of housing for all, and therefore the programmatic and promotional attitude of the public body and the relative design ideology constantly return to the foreground, in the field of furnishing, that is, of a good judged non-essential and «compressible» and entirely left to the user’s «freedom», the integration into the competitive logic of the market, increasingly wild, of entire generations of new designers, in a war fought with blows of design and of copying, has indeed corresponded to an imposing process of technological and merchandising renewal of the productive structure and to the triumph of «italian style» on the world market (triumph of the modern «signed» piece of furniture and of the «ancient» style skilfully remade or counterfeited)^{vii}, but at the price of an accelerated increase of the typological and morphological repertoire of furnishing [...] and of a genuine «formal clogging» of the market, in which there is everything and one finds everything, just as in the interior of houses.

Furnishing behaviors

In this contradictory and chaotic archipelago of styles and forms that characterizes, and only apparently diversifies, the current inhabited interiors of the middle and lower class, one can nevertheless discern over time a coherent line of development which, with Jean Baudrillard^{viii}, we can define as that of social stratification and of the pursuit on the part of the subordinate strata of the objects and forms that are gradually «passed on» to them by the upper strata by status. [...]

This corresponds to real and imaginary economic and social ascents of the purchasers, and within it there emerge, as goods of particular cultural duration, household appliances (ever more numerous and articulated, from the old refrigerator to the electronic oven and the stereo system) and the «living rooms» (with their armchairs and sofas, a true social conquest and representation of status)^{ix}.

But what most strikes one in the inhabited interiors in no way «low-cost» of the less well-off strata, beyond the «full of furniture» of which has been said, is the marked contrast with the external environment, whereby the dwelling laboriously conquered [...] represents itself as a compensatory «den» against the hostile and only commercially enticing city. If it is true that the entrance and the «threshold» are, in architecture,

The text presented here is an excerpt from an essay published in the volume *Lavorare in architettura. La cooperazione d’abitazione* (Ediz. La Biennale, Venice 1982), which gathers contributions by different authors dedicated to the role of housing cooperatives in Italy. Gianni Ottolini’s essay, placed at the close of the volume, addresses some general questions concerning the housing problem of the middle-lower strata through a socio-cultural reflection on the evolution of certain domestic spaces and on the relationship between space and furnishing. Many of the theoretical concepts of this contribution find full development in the subsequent essay *Cultura dell’abitare e «design». L’interno domestico*, published in the journal «Hinterland» no. 26 (1983) directed by Guido Canella. In both texts, the author underscores the persistence of a strong gap between dwelling models designed from above and inhabitants’ real practices. Cf. G. Ottolini, *Spazio e arredo della casa popolare. Un’indagine*, FrancoAngeli, Milan 1981; Id., *Storia e progetto d’arredamento*, Di Baio, Milan 1989; Id., *Civiltà dell’abitare*, Galleria del Design e dell’arredamento, Cantù 1997; Id., *Architettura degli interni domestici. Per una storia dell’abitare occidentale*, Cortina, Milan 2015.

1. The author refers to the middle-lower stratum, petty and middle bourgeoisie and proletariat.

2. The separation between building and furnishing has its roots in the processes of Italian industrialization in the post-war period: while public housing remains bound to minimum standards, furnishing experiences more rapid evolutions. The housing envelope remains fixed to rigid and obsolete spatial models that users attempt to update through the purchase of furniture and objects which, not having been foreseen by the design, insert themselves in a chaotic way, generating that confusion indicated by the author.

3. Here the reference is to the research carried out in Italy in the Milan Triennials: V Triennale di Milano, *Mostra dell’abitazione* (1933); VI Triennale di Milano, *Mostra dell’arredamento* (1936); VIII Triennale di Milano, *L’abitazione* (1947).

4. The author develops in depth the integration between architecture and furnishing in the volume G. Ottolini, V. De Prizio, *La casa attrezzata. Qualità dell’abitare e rapporti di integrazione fra arredamento e architettura*, Liguori, Naples 1993.

the most sensitive symbolic projection of the relations between «interior» and «exterior»^x, it would suffice to describe the vicissitudes of keys and the ways of closing the entrances of Italians' houses over the last thirty years (from wrought-iron keys, to those more functional and secure like Yale, to today's armoured security locks) to understand how the culture of dwelling has changed, which is, always, an internal relation between space and objects and, together, an external relation between dwelling and context. [...]

Here: in inhabited interiors, just as the old industrial functionalism already wanted and as today, in other ways, the new productive logic of furnishing and fashion wants, there is no history, indeed there is rupture with one's own past social history (a total removal of peasant and proto-industrial civilization, the «how we were» thirty or seventy years ago) and with personal history itself (there are no more furnishings inherited from one's parents, nor does one any longer display their photographs); and together there is no future (one does not believe one can leave objects of real value and duration, even aesthetic, to one's children, or to others), except that of the wholesale replacement of entire «environments» that are no longer fashionable and with which, in depth, one has never identified (otherwise one would not have such massive furnishing replacements upon entering the new house).

The problem has thus become not that of filtering and discussing production with others, but of «modelling oneself» on the stereotypes that the upper strata gradually project onto the market. [...]

An example: the entrance-living room-kitchen-dining system

But a possible resistance to the assumption of dwelling stereotypes of the upper strata, and the capacity to condition in a significant way the entire production on the basis of a culture that invests both space and objects and behaviours and the roles of the members that constitute the cohabiting nucleus, is demonstrated in Italy by the internal vicissitudes of a functional complex that is neuralgic for the dwelling: the ensemble entrance-living room-kitchen-dining.

The initial reference models for the design of this complex were very clear: on the one hand the peasant kitchen, with that which is the «total» woman, that is, not economically subordinate to the man, and which is the peasant woman, with the large room of multiple function (entrance, dining, kitchen, hospitality) centred on the fireplace, with the smells of food that bother no one; on the other hand the bourgeois house, with its hinterland of roles (mistress of the house and cook-maid), fixed in an extreme functional and environmental subdivision which, for brevity, we will call composed of four distinct rooms of entrance, living room, dining room or tinello, and kitchen,

the latter removed as much as possible from the rooms of representation so as not to show «disorder» and «smells»⁵. [...] For working-class families of new urbanization, rationalism between the two wars fixes a completely original model: the «minimal» «functional» kitchen, separated from the living-dining room by a cupboard or a serving-hatch wall to allow the «mother» (brought to the function of «angel of the hearth» by the productive crisis and by the loving paternalistic mentality of the husband, of whatever social stratum) to carry out the functions of cooking (without smells and disorder for the others) and together of «controlling» the children who play in the living room (and only there)^x.

At this moment the kitchen furniture and the related household appliances, produced industrially in a «modular» way, become the cornerstone of a new society freed from fatigue, object of a maniacal study of architects in order to minimize the paths between one phase and another of the food «productive cycle»; it is the triumph of the «American kitchen»^{xii}. But this «kitchenette» (as they say in Emilia) or «cucinino» (Lombardy) has never pleased Italians: in Italy one eats in the kitchen, one sews and irons in the kitchen and, today, one watches television and receives friends in the kitchen (around the table, to drink a glass; not on the armchairs of the living room, which generally are there for representation). [...] Now, since the Gescal living room was already planned at 14 or 15 square metres, that is, large enough to contain together with the armchairs the «good dining» (the bourgeois one for honoured guests), it is understandable that the Gescal dwelling, with net usable surfaces among the highest in Europe in coherence with the practice of public housing as a lottery prize, has normally been composed of living-dining room and kitchen-dining room: with a duplication of dining that accords very well with the separate productive structures of kitchens and of the remaining furnishings. [...]

At the end of this history of what is improperly called «day zone», and which could better be called «space of relation»^{xiii} to distinguish it from the «more private space» of the single person or at most two people (with possible friends, to study and play or converse or other) improperly called «night zone», the model that is consolidating in Italy is certainly closer to the «originary space» of the subordinate classes, to the peasant kitchen-dining room (with possible autonomy of the entrance and living-room zone) and of small holiday houses than to the persistent «divided» model of the bourgeois house.

It is surprising that from some quarters^{xiv} one maintains that «the integrated kitchen, which goes hand in hand with the requirement of a full participation of the woman in social life and is characterized by a language aimed at evoking escape and ludism (sic), ends up cancelling the materialization of a very real social relation: the oppression of women [...]. The

dining room, a space susceptible of uniting the family and of being put at the disposal of certain social relations, turns out moreover to be a space of transition that spares the woman from being perpetually persecuted by the ensemble of her roles: mother, spouse, companion and lover [...].».

It is surprising not so much for the refusal of a spatial model: in fact there is no doubt that peasant space, and its objects, fruit of a secular fixing of social roles, functions, and symbolic forms, is certainly not today re-proposable as such. [...]

It is not in fact only a question of space and of forms.

The sociology of the nuclear family and the meaning of dwelling

That assertion is surprising because it does not grasp that in these years the internal roles of the members of the nucleus of middle and low income have already changed, or are in any case profoundly changing, and therefore the very meaning of dwelling, at least as regards its «private» side. It is not only the unification of males-females in employment lists, and therefore the relative resumption of female employment (this in fact has become a life choice, not a painful constraint by material necessity); or the interchangeability of the two working parents in obtaining leave to assist at home a sick child: these are only the legislative signals deriving from a new culture of the «family» as a nucleus of voluntary cohabitation, continually verified and verifiable, in which, in the first place, freer economic relations between man and woman, and together the very maturation of sexual and affective customs, found a different and new meaning of the reciprocal relation man-woman and parents-children, of reciprocal material support and cultural exchange^v.

It is this society richer, but together more adult in the private sphere which, in a slow but irreversible process of modification of its own demographic structure towards nuclei of small and medium cut (many of a single person) and often different from the classic conjugal nucleus with or without children (two or three young people who live together, a young or elderly mother alone with the child etc.), also finds methodologically a new culture and its very design.

Beyond the decomposition of the dwelling into 5 or 50 or 500 «functions» (all with a specific «spatial fallout»), it is this synthetic cultural meaning of dwelling in itself and in its relations with the exterior that requires «representation» or, better, new spatial and typological concepts and new aesthetic expression⁶. [...]

The interior-exterior relationship

But in no case can this new culture of dwelling stand and be serene in opposition or in frightened closure towards the space of relation with «others», in the first place the open ur-

ban space (which, from the point of view of architecture, is never an «exterior» but is always and in any case an urban or territorial «interior», with spatial and furnishing problems very similar to those of private space)⁷. [...]

Now, the culture of architects (and, in many European countries, experimented) [has] two limit-systems within which, case by case, the functional disposition of the settlement can be decided^{xvi}: that in which everything is in the dwelling and it is privately connected (from the «multi-use» room in which more or less black work is done, to the garage, to the private garden, etc.: but this «everything» is not generic and infinite, it is precise and finite, and it is what a society affirms as a right for all), and that in which the maximum of the functions of dwelling is socialized (in toto: paid work, domestic works such as washing laundry and drying it, cultivating flowers etc., or in part: studying, hosting for long periods etc.) in spaces and equipment that really exist at the level of an aggregate of several dwellings or of a residential settlement complex.

Evident is the diversity of the spatial and furnishing typology of the dwellings that corresponds to these two models, which naturally can translate into a wide variety of materials and forms of architecture. From an urbanistic point of view, these two settlement limit-models are not in contradiction, containing the same «functions» with different modalities, and the choice between the one and the other or, in general, of their specialization depends only on the evaluation of the «services» that the context can really offer (jobs, full-time schools, gyms and cultural centres, gardens etc.) whether it is a new neighbourhood or historical fabric.

But economically and politically these two models are in contradiction, and the choice to assume them as a normative reference of a new programmatic line of dwelling, and to define and pursue case by case the right point of balance between them, is an entirely political responsibility of those who have the institutional task of facing and resolving the problem of housing and of the environment in Italy⁸.

If the private is articulation and projection of the public, and this is its indispensable complement, perhaps today the question of their respective relations in architecture must be seen above all in the «hinge» elements between the one and the other, in the «semi-public» spaces and equipment (in particular, of open urban spaces) at the right small scale, according to a model of coordination between house and social services, which precisely the solidaristic and cooperative movement has most practised.

It is known that the central node of this model is «management», that is, «participation».

It is on the other hand a characteristic aspect of the Italian and Mediterranean tradition, which many envy us^{xvii} and which is still living in the minor urban centres and in towns,

5. For an in-depth history of the kitchen and its cultural and spatial transformations see I. Forino, *La cucina. Storia culturale di un luogo domestico*, Einaudi, Turin 2019. It is also interesting to note how in the text it reappears the theme of the conception of woman in relation to the use of domestic spaces, already seen in S. Esposito, T. Maldonado, R. Riccini, *Condizione femminile e ideologia del comfort*, in «Casabella», 467, 1981, pp. 27-33 [excerpted in this volume].

6. This text proves precursor of many reflections that characterize the current domestic panorama. If the variations of family nuclei here hinted at have become the norm, they still do not find sufficient correspondence in the design solutions proposed. Cf. M. Bassanelli, *Il postdomestico. Nuovi modelli e nuovi spazi da abitare*, in ead, ed., *Abitare oltre la casa. Metamorfosi del domestico*, De-riveApprodi, Rome 2022, pp. 31-47.

7. This reflection is developed in G. Ottolini, *Conformazione e attrezzatura dello spazio aperto*, in «Quaderni del Dipartimento di progettazione dell'architettura», no. 4, 1987, pp. 38-50. The author overcomes the distinction between interior and exterior insofar as form and content cannot be separated and defines urban interiors as authentic architectural spaces, characterized by an «open» ceiling, coinciding with the sky, which functions as upper limit. Ottolini takes up Bruno Zevi, who in *Saper vedere l'architettura* defines within the city «enclosed spaces» in which the spatial experience of architecture is prolonged [excerpted in this volume].

8. The distinction proposed by Ottolini recalls the European debate on housing welfare and the experiments of co-housing and community services present in Northern European culture. The solution presupposes political choices that imply the vision of a different model of society. [MB]

a «care for the exterior» public space of one’s own house not much inferior to that reserved for the private interior (for example, for cleaning or embellishment with flowers) which is a fundamental sign of an authentic culture of dwelling.

The culture of furnishing (and of interior designers)

From the new ideal and cultural orientations outlined above there emerges today the possibility, for the middle and lower strata, to construct and express a new model of dwelling, capable of posing itself as an autonomous and original pole of reference; in particular, the possibility of a new culture of furnishing, understood not only as selection of the most appropriate furnishings or objects for the material and symbolic requirements of daily life within the impetuous flow of goods and merchandise that the market continually offers, but also as an original resolution of the problems of relation among the different elements of furnishing, between space and furnishings, between interior and exterior.

Great is the responsibility of designers for the consolidation of this culture, which does not have in front of it the long times of peasant civilization and is forced to find its balance in continuous change. [...]

In reality there is an abyss between designers and people’s needs. Design for the dwelling is in fact today a design culture that fixes itself and lives insofar as it is separated from users (without even the wiles of decent market research, left to the «pulse» of merchants and furniture retailers), with a rooted *qualunquismo* or distrust in the possibility of doing something to structurally affect production and the relations between productivity and product. On the contrary, a different relation between designers (furnishers) and users, in which for both the demands of «representing» are attenuated to the advantage of expressive ones (of oneself, of one’s own history and dynamics), could do nothing other than disseminate the base concepts and the method, more than the products, of the art of furnishing. [...]

When Praz, proposing this «philosophy of furnishing» in 1944, wrote of the furnishers of tomorrow as those who, «as is probable, will want to express a new hope, a new faith, and will want to translate into ornament the voice of a free people» he certainly did not imagine that this connection between «ornament» and the civil freedom of the people would today almost have to be built without furnishers and against design.

Tools for the design project

If one wants the inhabited interior to be born as a projected and symbolic structure of a freer interiority, it is therefore necessary for design to pass from the list of «functions» to the judgement on the personal, material, and symbolic relations

that exist between those who dwell, and between these and «others»^{xviii}.

Only experimental initiatives, promoted by the public bodies for housing and based on new relations between designers and users, will be able to pose themselves as a bridge to overcome the current division between architects’ culture and the requirements of the middle and lower strata, and to invest the very building envelope so as to overcome the fracture between building and furnishing at least on the plane of typological and dimensional coordination and of a minimal integration of «fixed» equipment and furnishings with the plant and structural parts. [...]

But the true design problem is the necessary splitting of current «environments» and the finding again of simpler furnishing elements with which to compose space. On this aspect there emerge, above all among low-income young people and intellectuals, new attitudes of consumption that, in their unscrupulousness (and without falling into the dilettantism of «do-it-yourself» or into the precariousness of the «ephemeral»), in fact anticipate a new furnishing behaviour: on the one hand the so-called culture of high-tech^{xix}, that is, the search for industrial products of high resistance, low cost, and particular aesthetic valence, normally destined for places of production or for public services (shelving, tables, trolleys, lamps etc.), and their transfer into domestic space, at times with some further superficial chromatic treatment; on the other hand, that which could be called the culture of a «new craftsmanship»^{xx}, in which the traditional artisanal knowledge of the treatment and aesthetic valorization of building and furnishing materials, supported by new more sophisticated technologies, returns with force to compete with the more consolidated industrial productive structures (for example in many building renovation interventions). In both cases these are products or partial building interventions, fragments, certainly not sufficient for a new dynamic composition of the interior of the house, but which must be signalled for the common characteristic of giving products at contained cost and very «durable» materially and aesthetically. [...]

Once again, it is a matter of constructing quality by reckoning with resources and with concrete productive forces. [...]

Thus it is evident that it now falls to the structures that organize housing users, housing cooperatives in the first place, to pose themselves as a creative hinge between the forces of production available to those operators and cultural institutions that have not awaited revolution or restoration, in order to evoke through architecture a new material and social civilization.

- i. The term is by A. Quistelli in *Obiettivi e tendenze della strumentazione tecnologica*, ISES, Convegno di studio sull’edilizia universitaria, Rome 1970.
- ii. G.K. Koenig, *Alberto Rosselli*, introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition on “Stile e Industria: Alberto Rosselli”, Università di Parma, Centro studi e archivio della comunicazione, quaderno no. 50, 1981.
- iii. S. Leonardi, *Produzione e consumo del mobile per abitazione in Italia*, Feltrinelli, Milan 1960.
- iv. Some projects participating in the competition of the European Coal and Steel Community are published in «Casabella» no. 352, 1968.
- v. For example, in Kurokawa’s «housing capsules» in Tokyo, in «Casabella» no. 358, 1971.
- vi. The term is by J. Colombo. The design of his prototype, realized for the exhibition of Italian design in New York in 1972 (*Italy: the new domestic landscape*, Museum of Modern Art, catalogue of 1972), is published in «Casabella» no. 366, 1972.
- vii. Istituto per il Commercio Estero, *Studio del mercato del mobile in USA. Formulazione di strategie per l’esportazione di mobili italiani*, Roma, July 1981. Some projects participating in the competition of the European Coal and Steel Community are published in «Casabella» no. 352, 1968.
- viii. J. Baudrillard, *Per una critica dell’economia politica del segno*, Mazzotta, Milan 1978.
- ix. A. Tosi, *Ideologie della casa*, Angeli, Milan 1978.
- x. C. Norberg-Schulz, *Genius loci. Paesaggio, ambiente, architettura*, Electa, Milan 1980.
- xi. A. Klein, *Lo studio delle piante e la progettazione degli spazi negli alloggi mini-mi*, ed. M. Baffa and A. Rossari, Mazzotta, Milan 1975.
- xii. S. Giedion, *L’era della meccanizzazione*, Feltrinelli, Milan 1967.
- xiii. C. Alexander, S. Chermayeff, *Spazio privato e spazio di relazione*, il Saggiatore, Milan 1968.
- xiv. R. Perrinjaquet and R. Rotman, *La sala da pranzo, a che serve? Mangiare in casa dal ’700 ad oggi*, in «Album» no. 1, 1982.
- xv. For an international view of the problems of family life see: *Interferenze. Lo Stato, la vita familiare, la vita privata* ed. L. Balbo and R. Siebert-Zahar, Feltrinelli, Milan 1979.
- xvi. M. Molon, G. Ottolini, R. Pugliese, *Strumenti e metodi per la progettazione delle unità ambientali e delle unità abitative*, dispense no. 10 and no. 14; M. Baffa, M. Boriani, R. Dorigati, P. Vidulli, *Strumenti e metodi per la progettazione degli spazi collettivi residenziali*, no. 23, Dipartimento di Progettazione dell’Architettura del Politecnico di Milano, a.a. 1981/82.
- xvii. B. Rudofsky, *Strade per la gente*, Laterza, Bari 1981.
- xviii. J. Baudrillard, *Lo scambio simbolico e la morte*, Feltrinelli, Milan 1979.
- xix. J. Kron and S. Slesin, *High-tech. The industrial style and source book for the home*, Clarkson N. Potter, New York 1978.
- xx. M. De Carli, U. Polazzo, E. Salvi, *La cultura dell’High-Craft*, in «Interni» no. 321, 1982.

[Gianni Ottolini, *Verso una nuova cultura dell’abitare*, in *Lavorare in architettura. La cooperazione d’abitazione*, Ediz. La Biennale, Venice 1982, pp. 323-328]

Adriano Cornoldi

Form and Life in the Places of Living

1988

«What distresses me is the loss of form I see happening in life». Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*.

The «aesthetic» quality and the «habitative» quality of the house appear normally to be the object of distinct and autonomous interests. On the contrary, I believe that no critical discourse on domestic space can be initiated without studying the interrelations between these two systems of qualities.

The essential aim of a house is that one should live well in it. To this end, architecture has at its disposal certain fundamental techniques, whose use offers the possibility of responding in the most precise manner to the demands of contemporary everyday life. These techniques are: reference to past and recent history, housing typology, furnishing (fixed and movable), and the use of geometry.

The latter holds the greatest and most direct potential in the construction of the form of a house. Leaving aside the more general aspect of the correspondences between geometry and architectural form *tout court*, let us consider the more specific field of study offered by the relationship between type of geometry and type of conception of dwelling.

That such a relationship exists, that it is complex and intricate, and that it is indeed decisive in design, is easily verified through the graphic analysis of any dwelling, provided that it has been studied as such.

Let us confine ourselves to recalling examples from the last two hundred years. Residential typology had previously been enriched, in the Baroque age, once again displaying in its fullness the first specific character of the geometry of the house as distinct from that of public buildings: the greater potential for freedom and irregularity of forms, symptomatic of the greater flexibility and looseness typical of private life¹. In France, as in the Nordic countries, the singularity of sites and programmes had suggested highly articulated inventions of

space, which conferred upon them new intimacy and, at the same time, movement, in accordance with the contemporaneous evolution and enrichment of social habits. An emblematic example of this research is the dwelling built for himself by Nicodemus Tessin the Younger in Stockholm². The narrow and irregular plot, far from producing disadvantageous constructions, stimulates in the architect imaginative connections, flarings, and recoveries of axiality. The Parisian hôtels of the period had put into effect all this potential for freedom, from the most original regularizations, as in the Hôtel de Beauvais³, to the ingenious differentiation of the thickness of the sides behind a symmetrical façade, as in the Luxembourg Palace⁴. A further act of compositional freedom occurred with the abandonment of the principal axis of symmetry through its splitting between courtyard and garden, thereby favouring a greater degree of privacy in the relationship between interior spaces; thus in the Hôtel de la Vrillière⁵ and, even more so, in the explicitly polycentric Hôtel de Matignon⁶. But all this precedes the great parallel changes in the culture and form of the house.

In the Age of Enlightenment, an unprecedented tension develops both in space and in philosophy of life. We can in fact observe how the crisis of certainties in eighteenth-century French thought runs parallel to the loss of the centre (or its emptying of value) in the plans of Ledoux; just as the consolidation of the new customs of bourgeois society in Neoclassical England is contemporaneous with the affirmation of the organisms of balanced polycentrism of the Adams and of Sir John Soane. Likewise, the unlimited specialization of domestic activities in the Victorian age, and their differentiation according to many degrees of privacy, corresponds to the proliferation of variously closed, polygonal and curvilinear, oblique and broken figures⁷.

This type of verification becomes more rigorous when we shift attention to individual authors, especially those most

sees everywhere the breaking of totalising axialities, starting from Rome, with the introduction of balanced symmetries (see Palazzo Barberini or Borromini's project for Palazzo Carpegna), and then especially in France, with the combination of translated axes of symmetry (from the Luxembourg Palace to the Hôtel de Beauvais or de Matignon)».

2. Nicodemus Tessin the Younger (Nyköping 1654-Stockholm 1728), a leading figure of Swedish Baroque architecture, perfected his training in Italy, where he had the opportunity to work in Gian Lorenzo Bernini's *milieu*. His works show a language that combines the legacy of late Roman Baroque, evident in the general composition and façades, with a handling of spaces inspired by French classicism. His principal work is the Royal Palace of Stockholm, in front of which, between 1692 and 1700, he also built his own residence. This residence presents a main volume flanked by two projecting wings that define a *cour d'honneur*, beyond which extends a garden. At the end of the latter, a large semicircular exedra with fountain introduces a play of spatiality that leads to a second green space. The whole scheme culminates in a high niche which, through a calibrated system of perspectival glimpses, suggests the illusory presence of a deep colonnade.

committed to architectures explicitly intended for everyday dwelling.

Of particular interest in this regard is the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, as the apex of the centuries-long dialectical confrontation, carried out in the Anglo-Saxon world, between the Nordic dwelling tradition and the Palladian one, the two major traditions within modern Western civilization. For the former, the dwelling is a system of enclosed rooms, equipped with a single small lateral door and tending toward mutual segregation, the expression of an accentuated intimacy.

For the latter, on the contrary, it is an organization of densely interacting rooms, tending to be pass-through spaces, that is, with multiple doors, generally wide and axial, such as to determine a micro-urban continuum (in homage to the Albertian definition of the house as a «small city»⁸). Wright's culture of dwelling is therefore that of an intense family life, equally rich in private moments and in relations; and thus the design of the prairie houses offers the most compact yet rich deployment of forms deriving from the two different matrices: places partly enclosed by welcoming bay windows and partly variously drawn in by the attraction of adjacent spaces, within a complex composition that offers at once a sense of secure internal protection and of confident openness toward the outside. Centrality and translations, alignments and offsets, grids and accidental lines govern a learned and rigorous architectural response to equally precise and complex requirements of life.

The analysis of the uses for which places are intended thus enables us to understand the profound value of the forms conceived for them.

From such analysis emerge more precise contours for that second essential question in geometry, namely the choice between symmetry and asymmetry.

In this regard, it must be stated that here we intend to set aside abstract theorisations, carried out by treatise writers, philosophers, and even theologians, and to assign to the two terms an operative meaning, referring to design in the three dimensions of inhabited space. In particular, by the use of asymmetry one does not mean the abandonment of rules in favour of chance or arbitrariness, nor the choice of compositional procedures of lesser commitment. Rather, it is a distinct disciplinary practice, aimed at seeking figures, proportions, and relations in the same way as symmetry, with a greater degree of freedom than the latter, but also with greater needs for control, in order to guarantee the unity of the project. The requirement of unity and balance in fact leads to a design in which the symmetrical figure is replaced by a nevertheless balanced figure, such as to justify speaking of «ponderal symmetry»⁹.

On this question it is necessary to preface a general consideration: the infinite meanings of architecture are variously situated between two polarities, the collective place and the

individual one, to which correspond, respectively, symmetrical and asymmetrical figures. The former, constructed on axes and centres, determine rhythms, iterations, and hierarchies that indeed confer solemnity and unity, distinctive characteristics of public spaces. In the same way, the latter, constructed on translations and offsets, determine singularity and uniqueness of places and thus favour discretion, differentiation, and the *apartment*¹⁰, aspects typical of private space. In every epoch and in every author we encounter this discriminant, which constitutes the first distinguishing datum of buildings: the Egyptian sanctuary, the Greek temple, the Roman baths, or the Christian cathedral are as symmetrical in plan and section as their houses are asymmetrical.

If Renaissance dwelling constitutes an exception from this point of view, one must not forget that it assumes, not by chance, the meaning of a place of representation and of extra-domestic activities to a far greater extent than in any other preceding or subsequent epoch.

Indeed, subsequently, starting from the Parisian hôtels particuliers, as we have seen, and from the London Georgian dwellings, residential layouts once again distinguish themselves from public ones by their displacements; we shall see this more clearly later.

This principle of residential design is so decisive that it can act even upon symmetrical types derived from public architecture, deforming them all the more the more they adhere to domestic purposes. This rule does not even spare the centrally planned type, as demonstrated by the study carried out on the matter.

The exceptions to the rule merely confirm it. Let the case of the Shaker dwellings in the northeastern United States suffice for all¹¹. These are rigorously axial layouts, in blatant contrast with the North American tradition, which, as is well known, tends to use classical models by altering them for residential purposes. But this anomaly is immediately explained when one studies the nature of their use: they are emblematic collective houses, stripped of privacy in every element, where, for example, the presence of twin specular stairwells is required by the necessity of distinct circulation paths for inhabitants of different sexes!

The distinction as outlined above is, however, still coarse. If taken literally, it would lead to the conclusion that maximum habitability lies in totally asymmetrical constructions, such as Wright's *Fallingwater* or Mies's house at the Berlin Exhibition – dwellings which, in my view, despite their fame, present cold and inhospitable interiors. If it is true that for Wright and Mies van der Rohe the public-symmetrical equation also holds, it is equally true that in their happiest dwellings notable elements of axiality are not lacking. These, limited to part of the composition, express a sense of welcome: the reciprocal equation therefore does not hold. In other words, if one may say that the

The excerpt presented here was published in the journal «Parametro», no. 168 (1988), entitled «Teorie dello spazio domestico». The issue was focused on the transformation of the house. Adriano Cornoldi offers an insightful rethinking of the analytical tools to be considered in the interpretation of domestic interior architecture, moving beyond traditional formal typology, deemed insufficient insofar as it is detached from the experience of use. The author's attention is instead concentrated on the structure of inhabited places, adopting spatial typology – understood as form in its dynamic three-dimensionality – as a privileged interpretative key. This text follows shortly after the publication of the volume *L'architettura della casa* (1988), in which the quality of dwelling is read as the result of the relationship between architectural configuration and domestic life. The author analyses several celebrated dwellings of the last two centuries through the instrument of geometry, highlighting how the domestic dimension produces intrinsically asymmetrical configurations. Cf. A. Cornoldi, *L'architettura della casa. Sulla tipologia dello spazio domestico, con un atlante di 100 abitazioni disegnate alla stessa scala*, Officina Edizioni, Rome 1988; Id., *L'architettura dei luoghi domestici. Il progetto del comfort*, Jaca Book, Milan 1994.

1. A first reflection by the author on the form of Baroque residential typology appears in the volume *L'architettura della casa...* cit. (p. 57): «the Baroque age

3. The «most original regularizations» to which Cornoldi refers concern certain false walls and windows adopted to confer symmetry to the façade and to internal elevations. A. Cornoldi, *L'architettura dei luoghi domestici...* cit., p. 60.

4. The Luxembourg Palace (*Palais du Luxembourg*) is an emblematic example of French Baroque. It was designed by Salomon de Brosse and built in Paris between 1615 and 1624 on commission from Maria de' Medici. The architectural composition provides a *corps de logis* on an H plan, preceded by an ample *cour d'honneur*, laterally defined by two-level service wings destined to stables and service rooms, and closed frontally by an access façade on a single piano. Since 1958 the building has housed the French Senate.

5. The Hôtel de La Vrillière, today Hôtel de Toulouse, is an *hôtel particulier* built in Paris between 1635-40 by François Mansart for Louis Phélypeaux. Since 1811 it has housed the Banque de France.

6. «A formal device that underlines the search for privacy of relations is represented in many Parisian *hôtel* plans [...] by the offsetting of axes. The Hôtel de Matignon, a polycentric domestic organism, is an emblematic example of how the French Baroque overcomes the organised distribution of a single axis of symmetry», A. Cornoldi, *L'architettura dei luoghi domestici...* cit., p. 53 [transl. by the editor].

7. «The English house is composed of parts, where each room has its evident and unmodifiable specialisation; this flexibility in every direction finds its raison d'être in Victorian social life. This way of life required not only a large number of rooms for guests and servants but also a precise differentiation of the intended use of individual rooms. There are no rooms of greater or lesser importance but each place has its function and is therefore a "centre" of the house [...]. Symmetries are not even recognised at the scale of a single room [...]. Individual floors are unlinked [...] All formal and distributive characteristics are tied to respect for privacy and comfort in order to guarantee a harmonious and functional dwelling». G. Cappellato, *Nascita e sviluppo della casa contemporanea. Quindici schede di architetture esemplari*, in «Parametro», no. 168, 1988, p. 39 [transl. by the editor].

8. Leon Battista Alberti, in chapter IX of Book I of *De re aedificatoria*, compares the house to a little city (*I dieci libri de l'architettura di Leon Battista de gli Alberti fiorentino*, Venice, 1546, p. 18).

9. By «ponderal symmetry» the author means a symmetry in which the «lateral axes [are] different and balanced», which differs from off-set symmetry with «symmetrical lateral axes». A. Cornoldi, *L'architettura dei luoghi domestici...* cit., p. 20.

collective building tends toward symmetry, one cannot say the opposite for the private one.

The problem for domestic space is therefore that of a combination between symmetrical and asymmetrical devices.

This duality is all the more present in subtly intertwined forms the more a space offers the precious attraction of a warm, welcoming, and varied habitability.

There are many realms of interweaving between these two different scripts.

The boundary realm, as well as the most elementary case, is given by the breaking of axial composition due to external conditions, such as site configuration and orientation. Even in this case, however, the problem is not that of implementing purely mechanical expedients: the best solutions are those that use the irregularity of the context to introduce translations or rotations that express the withdrawal of the private place, according to a practice we have seen anticipated by late French Baroque, but which had had marvellous precedents since antiquity – suffice it to recall the villa of Piazza Armerina.

The Paca Palace in Warsaw¹², inclined with respect to the street, faces it with an exedra, at the centre of which there is not the entrance but rather a statue niche; the entrance to the main courtyard is lateral, but balanced by an identical entrance to the small circular service courtyard. The different parts thus reconstitute the urban unity of the whole.

The most fertile dialectic between the two geometries intervenes, however, when the entire composition is involved, giving rise to a true combined geometry.

The first level of combination – also the most emblematic and the richest in profound implications for the value of every architecture as an urban fact – is the natural outcome of the two limit tendencies – public-symmetrical and private-asymmetrical – stated above: it consists in the coexistence of symmetry in the public image, that is, in external characteristics such as the main front (or the courtyard), and asymmetry in the private image, that is, in internal characteristics such as the garden front and the plan.

This duality of figures is a recurring character, dominant or at least latent, throughout the entire history of the house. It becomes, however, a conscious central motive in the research of domestic design only with the birth of modern private life, that is, in eighteenth-century British culture: behind Adam's symmetrical façades, barely anticipated on the exterior by the lateral position of the entrance, unfolds the splendid sequence of sliding rooms. The same procedure is also found in the most varied experiments of the moderns, from Hermann Muthesius to Heinrich Tessenow, from Gunnar Asplund to Auguste Perret; Wright left excellent testimonies of it, from the Winslow House to the Roberts House, as did Adolf Loos, from the Tzara to the Moller, or Le Corbusier, from the Cook to the Savoye. A special homage must be paid to Loos for his Müller

House, where, perhaps due to the dominant site position, he wished to maintain an urban image on all fronts, without thereby compromising the magnificent freedom of movement of the interior.

The Anglo-Saxon architects of the Victorian age develop a complex research aimed at tempering this rigid opposition. As has been noted, in North America one proceeds toward a free contamination of axial orders – determined by pediments, colonnades, and other principal structures – with the introduction, in offset positions, of minor elements that are also axial, such as arches, pediments, turrets... In a more controlled manner, the English connect the minor elements in asymmetrical positions to the principal figure, limiting their representational peremptoriness while preserving their recognisability.

This type of operation coincides with the birth of contemporary domestic space. The new processes of interior specialization in fact find the possibility of freely defining also the crucial and decisive element of their individuality, namely the openings to the exterior, without further façade constraints. Herein lies the great conquest, today more than ever actual, of authors such as Henry Hobson Richardson and Wilson Eyre in the United States, or Richard Norman Shaw and Edwin Lutyens in Great Britain.

The second level of combination concerns the relationship between the form of the layout and that of its parts. We have already seen how the plan tends to articulate itself freely as a result of more complex domestic requirements in the distribution of rooms. These rooms in turn tend to articulate themselves, enriching their formal characterisation, in order to respond to further differentiations of use. The room thus also loses its centre, becoming itself a system of distinct places: thus the multi-centred living room is born, secondary passages are defined for more secluded activities, and areas of movement and areas of rest are configured.

Geometry accompanies and expresses these instances, characteristic of epochs of development of private life, such as late Romanity, the Neoclassical age, the late nineteenth century, and our own time.

Thus, following the rediscovery of the imperial villas, the rooms of Georgian London assume bipartite or tripartite segmentations, by means of flattened arches, columns, niches. Axes of symmetry apply to each partition, thereby multiplying and intersecting: the symmetries are in fact double, in homage to the persistence of a certain formality in domestic life.

That specularity fractures in Victorian interiors. Desiring to have, within the same room, areas of different degrees of privacy – that is, gathered, distinct places not disturbed by circulation – the form of the space consequently tilts, losing an axis of symmetry, replacing central crossings with tangential passages. The spaces thus freed in one direction are able to project themselves along the other direction, toward the ex-

terior, in freer forms. This is the moment when ancient motifs are recovered and reinterpreted in all their possibilities, such as the loggia, the terrace, the composite window, and above all the bay window of ancient derivation: authentic rooms within the room. The bay window, for example, now becomes far more than a picturesque accident; it becomes an instrument of precise directionality and identity of interiors. It is no coincidence that it is used by authors of the most diverse tendencies: Frank Lloyd Wright, Josef Hoffmann, Hermann Muthesius, Peter Behrens, Heinrich Tessenow, Adolf Loos, Walter Gropius, Louis I. Kahn, Carlo Scarpa...

At the moment when research on domestic space finds itself at the ford, between the static axuality of tradition and the dynamic offset of the avant-garde, there is an architect who succeeds in holding the two banks together: Adolf Loos. In the Müller House, as already in the intervention on the Strasser House, spaces configure their form and relate to one another according to an alternation of centrality and laterality, in function of the different requirements of giving form to collective or individual places, of expressing representativeness or intimacy: as well as – and better than – the English Neoclassicists (see Soane's house-museum), the two geometries sometimes coexist within the same room, signifying on the one hand the calm of its activity and on the other the tension with adjacent activities. The overall composition that derives from this is a magical coagulum of spaces traversed or skirted, contemplated or glimpsed, manifest or secret, freely concatenated and at the same time rigorously controlled in design by proportions, modularity, and alignments.

We have thus crossed into the third level of geometric combinations: the asymmetry of the room and the symmetry of its parts.

This duality becomes complete when rooms lose all axuality. Under the impulse of more dynamic relationships among domestic activities – as happens, for example, at the beginning of our century – spaces break their closed envelopes and interpenetrate; their form frays. In the simplest case they acquire an L- or T-shaped plan, motifs degenerated in recent building production, which the masters, however, have been able to bring back to accomplished forms through the identification of the design of the arms: precisely by virtue of a recovery of symmetrical parts, these, like every other irregular figure, find their architectural resolution.

To this end the potentials of the third dimension become particularly precious: development in height according to regular forms can rebalance the mixed-line perimeter of the plan, and vice versa. I wish to recall some examples: the sober orthogonal progression of the atrium of Muthesius's House Stave becomes an anticipation of the most airy dimensional and figurative expansion of the upper overlook; Soane's ingenious idea of the pseudo-dome in the breakfast room of his

own house is intended to distinguish the convivial zone from the passage zone; the octagonal regularisations of the upper balcony in Wright's Roberts House, or the rectangular ones in Loos's Khüner and Sapiuha houses, are intended to reconstruct unity in the composite system of the underlying places, privatised within envelopes defined by broken lines.

But those disarticulations are only apparently casual; geometric control appears dissolved only to a superficial view, much to the satisfaction of functionalists.

In reality, other geometric devices have intervened here: the symmetry of parts and the asymmetry of relations – all the better if the latter are connoted by level differences. It is a composition regulated by small shifts, controlled in proportion as by a mysterious mesh of thin threads, presiding over a lace-work of minute and dense signs. These are devices partially used in various epochs: above all, once again, in the epochs we have privileged here.

It is this final level of dialectic between opposing geometric intentions that ensures that coexistence of clarity and mystery in which lies the charm of the most beautiful houses – a charm that public buildings are not granted. Here geometry is neither faceted, facile, and lucid, as much rampant postmodernism would like, nor casual and memoryless, like so much engineering. As in unseen make-up on a woman, so in invisible geometry, in the Sapiuha House, lies beauty.

In the present essay [...] bibliographic notes have not been provided because there are no reference texts that address in a direct manner the relations between type of geometry and type of domesticity in the architecture of the house, unlike what occurs with public buildings, for which the literature on the symbolic and functional implications of form is extensive [...]. For the most part, modern histories of architecture, as well as treatises of the past, substantially ignore the problem of domestic space: among the most interesting exceptions to be noted is the volume by Aa.Vv., *Lineamenti di Storia dell'architettura*, Rome, 1978. More specific and more widespread are introductions to the subject in English, including of a manual nature: see F. D. K. Ching, *Architecture: Form, Space & Order*, New York, 1979. If one wishes to enter into the heart of the matter, it is necessary to turn to works of a more divulgative character, such as that edited by E. Camesasca, *Storia della casa*, Milan, 1968, or by L. Cosenza, *Storia dell'abitazione*, Bari, 1979, or to studies of a typological kind, such as A. Cassi Ramelli, *Sillabario di Architettura*, Milan, 1959; still in English, more systematic treatments are available, such as S. Gardiner, *Evolution of the House*, St. Albans, 1976. [...] The symmetry-asymmetry problem in particular is touched upon by B. Zevi, in *Il linguaggio moderno dell'architettura*, Turin, 1973, pp. 20-28, 157-170, with positions that are as curious as they are naive and arbitrary. More suggestive are the considerations of S. E. Rasmussen, in *Experiencing Architecture*, Cambridge, USA, 1962, and of R. Venturi, in *Complessità e contraddizione in architettura*, Bari, 1980. Precise and stimulating are the observations of L. Quaroni, in *Progettare un edificio*, Milan, 1977, pp. 146-194, where, however, a distinct nature for private space is still not identified. That distinction is examined by the present author in *L'architettura della casa*, Rome, 1988, pp. 52-62.

[Adriano Cornoldi, *Forma e vita nei luoghi dell'abitare*, in «Parametro», no. 168, 1988, pp. 16-21, 94]

10. The use of the term *apartment* – here understood above all as an expression of reserve and private life – also carries with it the idea of modernity of dwelling. As the author notes, «asymmetry determines different parts, differentiates, withdraws, sets apart: apartment is the name given to the modern urban dwelling». A. Cornoldi, *L'architettura della casa...* cit., p. 56.

11. The Shakers are a religious community whose villages, located in the United States, are formed by buildings that host religious and communal activities. Their adherence to ideals of purity, shared work, and communal ownership produced exemplary settlements for order, self-sufficiency, and formal rigour, but also characterised by strong social control. From an architectural and design point of view, the Shakers generated environments and objects that anticipate modern sensibilities: functional, essential spaces, free of superfluity, in which aesthetics arise from craft precision and logic of use. Cf. D. Hayden, *Seven American Utopias. The Architecture of Communitarian Socialism, 1790-1975*, The MIT Press, Cambridge MA-London 1976; H. Schiffer, *Shaker Architecture*, Schiffer, Exton PA 1979.

12. Paca Palace in Warsaw is a building originally constructed in a Baroque style towards the end of the seventeenth century by Tylman van Gameren. In 1825 the palace was acquired by General Ludwik Michał Pac, who entrusted the architect Henryk Marconi with a significant enlargement and remodelling in a new Neoclassical language. Among the nineteenth-century additions, the most relevant is the semicircular entrance, conceived as a mediating device between the palace and the urban space of the square in front. Cf. A. Cornoldi, *L'architettura dei luoghi domestici...* cit., p. 39. [MB]

Maurizio Vitta

A Culture of Dwelling

1988

«Tell me what sort of house you live in, how you have set things out and how you have organised your private life and I will tell you what your habits are, at what stage your intellectual development is and what status you have in society». This was what A. Ammann and Ch. Garnier wrote in 1889 in their *Guide historique à travers les habitations humaines*, published in Paris on the occasion of the Universal Exhibition¹.

This is clearly a somewhat late-positivist statement but it does contain a degree of fundamental truth which is well worth a moment of reflection. Simone Roux was quite right in his *La maison dans l'histoire* (1976)² when saying: «Tell me what houses you are describing and just how you classify them and I will tell you what story you want to write»; however, there is indeed no doubt that there exists no mean parallel between typologies of houses and social structures. The problem is, however, methodological rather than historical. The modern concept of «home» came into being with mass-society where large urban concentrations came to circumscribe living spaces within the limits of the apartment and cram it full of objects. «The nineteenth century was, more than any other, a period when people had a somewhat clinging affection for the home», wrote Walter Benjamin. «They looked upon the home as a case for each individual who was thrust inside with all his belongings»³. So the «home» came to play a particular role in architectural culture. Whereas dwellings were once divided into «palaces» and «mansions»⁴, indicating a drastic differentiation of class that was resolved only in the common public, collective, and in some sense spectacular character of both modes of dwelling, the modern bourgeois «home» ended up mediating between the two types by lowering the palace to the role of apartment building and raising the hovel to the rank of popular housing. This process was described at its origins not only by Marcel Proust, but also by our Edmondo De Amicis, who judged that in a city such as his Turin «architecture is democratic and egali-

tarian. Houses can call one another “citizen” and address each other familiarly. The distribution of social classes in superimposed layers, from the piano nobile to the roofs, removes from the city those visible oppositions of magnificence and misery that ignite in the imagination the restless and melancholy desire for great wealth»⁵. There is a whiff of petit-bourgeois mentality in this description; but this should not surprise us if we consider that the modern «home» also descends from the Biedermeier apartment, which, with its decorous and modest functionalism, had already theorised the urban refuge isolated from the world and lived in symbiosis by men, women, and objects⁶. The style of living therefore blends with the style of life; in fact, it stands as its most complete expression.

For this reason, the «home» as a dovetailing of life and objects represents one of the cruxes of architectural culture. Arthur Schopenhauer observed that «compared to the plastic arts and poetry, architecture has a distinct character: unlike these expressions, it does not give the image of things, but rather the things themselves»⁷. In the case of homes a space where the voids are as concrete as the volumes is created, along with culturally codified itineraries, around which the subjectivity of the home is expressed by means of a complex play on adaptation and transgression. In this sense, the modern «home» has not undergone many transformations from its origins to the present day. Change is certainly perceptible in various aspects, beginning with the external envelope – the form of the building – and extending to materials, colours, utensils, furnishings, since the entire architecture of the twentieth century has measured itself against this theme, following the trajectories of its own autonomous development. But the history of the house as a «home» has unwound more sluggishly over the years, and this difference of speed has built up a contradiction that is still unsolved. Almost two centuries ago Western society, in fact, created a living model that has

remained almost unchanged. The «home» is still divided into two spheres – the public and the private, according to Erving Goffman’s distinction – which in turn are subdivided into various sectors linked to the primary functions of existence⁸; and around this articulation, highly resistant to modification, architecture has constructed its own history, made up of technical solutions and stylistic proposals, which have had an external influence on the «home» as such. As far as homes are concerned, when Schopenhauer spoke about «thing itself» he meant not only the container but also the contents, but these, however, due to their nature, keep their own autonomous features with respect to the project.

The impossibility of reducing the idea of the «home» to purely architectural canons thus also derives from the ambiguity of the very concept of «home». From an anthropological and social point of view it is in fact to some extent codifiable, and it suffices to think of Le Corbusier to recall attempts to draw up an elementary grammar of dwelling. These researches, however, have remained enclosed within a mechanistic vision, which can say little about the psychological ramifications of the phenomenon. In reality, the home stands as a wholly particular way of being, that starts out from a widespread behavioural structure to then express itself in a subjectivity which is constantly in limbo between conformity and creativity. «The home is the man», wrote Honoré de Balzac. And the few systematic studies undertaken on the subject have confirmed this literary intuition. «By studying the objects that patients bring into their rooms», observed Claude Leroy in an essay published in *Spazio e comportamento* (1976), «we have been able to show that these reveal four functional and symbolic areas: that of body care, that of articles of clothing, that of the space around the bed with the presence of the things belonging to the patient and from his work-table, and finally the walls and their decoration»⁹. There is, therefore, an ideal and typical model in our relationship with living space, into which subjective distinctions then dovetail. Very little work has so far been done on this problem, to which Jung refers with his concept of «individuation». Yet, since there is the hypothesis of a radical transformation in lifestyle in a world that is on the verge of crossing the threshold of the 21st century, we should at least bring out the really innovational elements in this field. One of the modifications most insistently emphasised is the technological one, thanks above all to the shift of our relationship with space and objects from the plane of physical contact to that of «immaterial» connection. In this sense, two environments of the «house» have undergone the greatest transformations, including symbolic ones, namely the kitchen, thanks to the presence of household appliances, and the living-dining area, thanks to the presence of the television. The kitchen, once a point of aggregation – with the maternal image of the

hearth, the set table, and the utensils for subsistence – today has the appearance of a functional and highly technologised room, with a vague flavour of a «service sector»¹⁰. The television, conversely, has made the «living room», once a public and representative environment, the centre of family communal life, but has literally revolutionised its space, drawing it toward itself and organising it according to a concentric, hemicyclical configuration¹¹.

Architecture must take responsibility for all these problems insofar as it must assume within the project the human and behavioural data that compose the «thing itself» of which it is the producer, namely the «house» as a «home». In his essay *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, Martin Heidegger related the concept of «building» to that of «living»¹². In his opinion in fact, «The essence of building is that of “creating living space”. Only if we have the capacity to live, can we build». What we need, therefore, is a culture of the home, which cannot but start out from architecture to gradually draw in all the other cultural fields, in a process of re-elaboration and reflection which is capable of reaching the very core of the problem, avoiding a situation where it is only technological innovation to modify our way of life as has been happening up until now, at least in this sector.

[Maurizio Vitta, *Una cultura dell’abitazione*, in «L’Arca», no. 14, 1988, pp. 1-3]

The essay reproduced here gathers some initial reflections on dwelling as a cultural phenomenon of a phenomenological nature. Published by Maurizio Vitta in the pages of the journal «L’Arca» in 1988, the text retraces, through a series of cultural references, the ambivalences that characterise the modern idea of the home, showing how it derives from a long process of transformation in which dwelling has been charged with symbolic, psychological, and behavioural meanings that exceed the simple sphere of design. Already in these pages emerge some theoretical aspects destined to become central in the author’s subsequent thought: the tension between private space and public space, the intertwining of objectuality and lived experience, and architecture’s difficulty in keeping pace with the slower but deeper metamorphoses of domestic behaviours. These reflections find a broader and more mature formulation in the volume *Dell’abitare. Corpi, spazi, oggetti, immagini* (Einaudi, Turin 2008), in which Vitta interprets dwelling as a «rite», a situated action that takes place in a specific time and space, shaped by the body and by the everyday practices of the inhabitant. The continuity between the 1988 essay and the 2008 book allows this text to be recognised not merely as an isolated contribution, but as the originating nucleus of a broader «culture of dwelling», which Vitta would go on to define over the following twenty years and which remains fundamental for understanding the relationship between architecture, experience, and everyday life.

1. A. Ammann, C. Garnier, *Guide historique à travers l’exposition des habitations humaines*, Librairie Hachette, Paris 1889.
2. S. Roux, *La maison dans l’histoire*, Albin Michel, Paris 1976.
3. W. Benjamin, *Das Passagenwerk*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt 1982.
4. See the paragraph *Il palazzo e l’abituro* in M. Vitta, *Dell’abitare. Corpi, spazi, oggetti, immagini*, Einaudi, Turin 2008, pp. 45-51.
5. E. De Amicis, *Le tre capitali. Torino, Firenze, Roma*, Niccolò Giannotta, Catania 1898.
6. Biedermeier is a compound term formed from the adjective *bieder*, meaning «simple, modest», and a common Austrian surname, Meier. For further discussion see *La casa Biedermeier* in G. Teyssot, *Il progetto domestico. La casa dell’uomo: archetipi e prototipi*, Electa, Milan 1986, vol. 1, pp. 136-145, and M. Vitta, *Dell’abitare...* cit., pp. 51-58.
7. A. Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Bei Georg Müller, Munich 1819.

8. E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Doubleday & Co., Garden City NY 1959.

9. *Spazio e comportamento*, Guida Editori, Naples 1976.

10. Cf. I. Forino, *La cucina. Storia culturale di un luogo domestico*, Einaudi, Turin 2019.

11. Here the reference appears to recall the installation *La casa telematica* by Ugo La Pietra, presented at the Milan Fair in 1983, where television screens invade every domestic environment – from the kitchen to the bedroom and the living room. The project follows the customary distinction between servant spaces and served spaces, but within this apparently ordinary structure objects and indicators are highlighted that reveal the new potential effects of technology on everyday life, transforming the dynamics of relations within the house. The arrangement of the living room subverts traditional spatial rules: armchairs are placed in a row rather than arranged around a common centre, modifying the customary ritual of conversation. Cf. Ugo La Pietra, *La conversazione elettronica. Modificazione dello spazio abitativo e dei suoi rituali attraverso l’uso di strumenti telematici*, Alinea, Florence 1985; M. Bassanelli, *Dispositivi e architettura. Lo spazio dinamico dell’abitare*, Postmedia Books, Milan 2024, pp. 91-107.

12. M. Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Günther Neske, Pfullingen 1954. [MB]

Maurizio Vogliazzo

Two Minor Hypotheses in Twentieth-Century Architecture 1988

The impression – indeed, by now something more than an impression, after years of research and reflection not only on our part – is that, within the Modern Movement in architecture, there have existed, and perhaps still exist in the form of traces, substantial and convincing hypotheses that were immediately placed in a minority position and discarded, and then decisively expunged by the winning current, the rational-functionalist one of continental Europe (especially German): by the architects who can in some way be traced back to them, but above all by their critical supporters (perhaps out of mere ignorance of the facts, as has happened in Italy). We are speaking of the years 1910-20 of this century: as is not difficult to imagine, these minority positions are all defined around the themes of *Wohnkultur*; and it is mainly on this ground that they are defeated.

In certain respects it was inevitable that, in those years, things would turn out that way: by loading the house with ethical and political intentionalities of social innovation, and proposing it as one of the principal elements for resolving conflicts and for modernisation, directly insofar as a physical device – architecture – capable of guaranteeing and transmitting values, ways of life, by means of its typology, its distributive characteristics, its composition, one expected perhaps too much of it. One may well wish to make layers and layers of society participate in a bourgeois style of life that they have never even perceived, and that instead have been projected directly from situations of agrarian *esclavage* into the factories of the metropolis. Millions of beautiful houses would not suffice. This on the one hand; but on the side of more direct economic interests, both private and public, tied to land questions, those proposals were completely dysfunctional.

Thus these original architectural devices have been, almost everywhere, forgotten; indeed removed, especially by that part of the professional milieu which, feeling itself so-

cially engaged and thereby invested with who knows what missions, has ended up producing, at least in Italy, but very probably elsewhere as well, the tedious affected sing-song of standards, low-cost social housing, the response to «real needs», and so on – wholly self-legitimising, ineffectual, and on the other hand so involuntarily bound up with the well-known mechanisms of degradation and deterioration of the urban and metropolitan environment: through an inability to think in architectural terms. This too must be credited to the weight of ideology.

Within this apparently not too complex framework in terms of architectural historiography, not everything, however, is so simple and taken for granted. Let us see, for example, what a scholar such as Julius Posener¹ says about that particular attitude toward the construction of buildings, which he defines as functionalism, and which in some way has to do with the questions we are dealing with.

In seeking its theoretical matrices, Posener usually dwells on John Ruskin, William Morris, Augustus Pugin; construction as a «moral element» of architecture, correspondence with purpose, the «frankness» and «genuineness» of buildings, their «authenticity» and «essentiality», the harsh anti-classical polemic and the «sympathy» with the Gothic, artistic production as a social fact, the critique of the city as critique of the industrial city, and so forth. There is no need to summarise these positions, which are widely known; particular ramifications are then analysed, those of architecture (and of the «applied arts»), read through the events of the English «country house», starting from the work of Robert Kerr but especially of Philip Webb up to William Lethaby², seen, rightly, as its most lucid theoretician³. Upon this complex cultural whole, Posener continues, Hermann Muthesius would conduct the most minute analyses, recognising the work carried out around the English country house as a «genuine offshoot of the century

of science», which: sets «exclusively practical» ends, through the elaboration of a «system of conditions to which the project must conform», aimed at «satisfying, as well as possible, social and comfort requirements, without first of all taking into account so-called architecture». [...]

Through the great work *Das Englische Haus*⁴, in which Muthesius would report this entire English experience through painstaking analyses and descriptions, reserving particular attention for the procedures of design, according to Posener the «roots» of functionalism, traced in England, penetrate the German architectural debate of the years just before the First World War. They would inform, in the following years, the development of the «new architecture». Posener rightly notes how Muthesius nevertheless does not limit himself to re-proposing the English experience as a reference model: he filters it through his viewpoint as a German: «at most, he thought of providing a new style of life to the German bourgeoisie through the country house: since having a house of one's own appeared to him as a moral postulate». [...]

Up to this point, broadly speaking, the trace that Posener reconstructs proposes: functionalism «is born in England»; through Muthesius's work the problem of «function» becomes a central element of the subsequent elaborations of the Modern Movement.

One might ask: why return yet again to an interpretative key of the events of recent architectural history that does not, in the end, seem very different from that proposed by Nikolaus Pevsner in his *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius*⁵, as early as 1936? This approach, often called into question, is perhaps to be considered somewhat schematic and outdated [...]. Instead, precisely here lies the point. English functionalism, understood as an original complex of procedures pertaining to design, does not in fact enter in any relevant way into that «new architecture» elaborated in Germany in the first post-war period. Functionalist instances of English derivation generally remain extraneous or wholly marginal; they constitute, in other words, exactly one of those hypotheses that are discarded by the Modern Movement: probably the most interesting and important. [...]

On the threshold of the 1920s a small book by the architect Raul Lino⁶ is published in Lisbon: *A nossa casa. Apontamentos sobre bom gosto na construção das casas simples*⁷.

The interest aroused is notable, and in a short time it reaches its fourth edition, in 1923. Italian architectural culture knows little, perhaps nothing, about Lino; and, while waiting to return elsewhere soon to his figure and work in a more systematic manner, it is good to provide some brief information.

Lino was born in 1879. His father dealt with construction and building materials.

According to one of the best customs of a self-aware bourgeoisie, long foreign experiences contribute to his for-

mation, decisively determining, as we shall see later: first in England, then in Germany, in Hanover, under the guidance of Albrecht Haupt (a passionate connoisseur of Portuguese matters, author among other things in those years of an appreciated collection of drawings on Gothic and early Renaissance architecture in Portugal). For Lino, Haupt would remain forever the avowed «Querido Mestre»: the «Lieber Meister». The precocity and intensity of the curriculum are surprising, even for those years and for those social strata.

In Windsor he stayed from 1890 to 1893; in Hanover in the following years, until 1897. He returned to his homeland at eighteen, and his activity rapidly became extremely intense; he is the author of many projects (more than seven hundred over the course of a very long life) and realises many architectures.

He also writes a great deal: besides the little book already mentioned, one should at least recall: *A casa portuguesa*⁸ and above all *Casas portuguesas*⁹ (of 1933 – five editions in the following years: not to mention an immense activity as publicist and polemicist, intensified in the second half of his life). Taken together, the writings constitute a personal contribution to architecture that goes well beyond the dispute of those periods around the question of «styles». [...]

After the Portuguese World Exhibition of 1940, in which he built a notable pavilion for Brazil, he became Director of National Monuments (by a hair's breadth before reaching the age limit); from there he exercised – or attempted to exercise – an activity of control and guidance over new interventions: for which reason it was inevitably regarded as censorious and vexatious by the professional milieu. He died almost a centenarian, in 1974, after the Gulbenkian Foundation had dedicated to him, in 1970, a large retrospective exhibition (and a fine catalogue, which remains up to now the only contribution of some substance on his work and his figure). He thus died on the threshold of well-known national changes, clamorous and exhilarating; this reminds one that there are also other slopes of history, the political and social ones, where Lino, also a public figure, will have had his placements. [...]

In order to develop their theoretical reflections, to define and communicate personal poetics more effectively, the most cultivated and self-aware architects have always favoured, among the many possible, certain fundamental themes, to which to make continual reference in the course of their experience. Dwelling, and therefore the house, is one of these, perhaps the most loved for its basic, primal, initial character. [...]

Apparently this is also true for Raul Lino. *A nossa casa* has the graphic and typographic appearance of a small, neat little work, almost a pocketbook. A text of a little more than seventy pages, developed following a narrative form that stands between reasoning and storytelling, describes in rather detailed fashion how small simple (and rather inexpensive) houses can

1. Architectural historian and critic Julius Posener (Paris 1904-Berlin 1996) was among the major scholars of modern architecture. Trained in Berlin with Hans Poelzig and emigrating in 1933, he taught in various countries before returning to Germany after the war. Professor at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Berlin, he contributed decisively to modern historiography with essays, research, and exhibitions. Among his principal writings: *Hans Poelzig. Gesamelte Schriften und Werke* (Mann, Berlin 1970); *From Schinkel to the Bauhaus* (Lund Humphries, London 1972).

2. William Richard Lethaby (Barnstaple 1857-London 1931) was a central figure in the Arts and Crafts movement. Trained in the office of Richard Norman Shaw, he was one of the architects who defined and advanced the English house tradition.

3. «The English house is simple and modest on the outside but rich and articulated on the inside [...] The principal element of the English house is the absence of symmetry; there is no centre or hierarchy of spaces but an open system», G. Cappellato, *Nascita e sviluppo della casa contemporanea...* cit., in «Parametro», no. 168, 1988, p. 39 [transl. by the editor].

4. H. Muthesius, *Das englische Haus. Entwicklung, Bedingungen, Anlage, Aufbau, Einrichtung und Innenraum*, E. Wasmuth, Berlin 1904. The volume presents an analysis of the English house and of its functional, distributive, and typological principles. The book, destined to exert enormous influence in Germany and Europe, presents the British domestic model as an example of coherence between form, use, and building tradition, in contrast to the decorativeness and eclecticism then dominant in the German world.

5. N. Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design*, Faber and Faber, London 1936.

6. Raul Lino (Lisbon 1879-1974) was one of the protagonists of Portuguese architectural culture of the twentieth century. He trained in Germany and England before establishing himself in Portugal, where he developed a design vision that unites modernity and tradition, placing at its centre the relationship between architecture, landscape, and local identity.

7. R. Lino, *A Nossa Casa. Apontamentos sobre o bom gosto na construção das casas simples*, Edição da Atlântida, Lisbon 1918. This small volume proposes a Portuguese housing model founded on a harmonious conception of everyday dwelling, on suitability to climate and local materials.

8. Id., *A casa portuguesa*, Imprensa Nacional, Lisbon 1929.

9. Id., *Casas portuguesas*, Edição de Valentim de Carvalho, Lisbon 1933.

be built well. There are also some examples illustrated with freehand line sketches, plans, details, perspectival views; watercoloured front elevations, in order to indicate colours precisely. Each of them refers to a determined geographical and environmental situation, which must be taken very much into account in design. At the end of the booklet there is a very brief appendix of modern architectural history, which serves the author to take a series of precise distances: first of all from the eclecticism of the second half of the nineteenth century, literally abhorred, because lacking its own specific *Heimat*; from the diffusion of the chalet fashion; seen truly as, a few years ago, one could see the International Style; but also from Art Nouveau, while good appreciation is reserved for Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites, read lucidly as Gothic (whose spirit, tempered by the best of the classical tradition, should increasingly be that of modern architecture). Lino concludes by opening the question of the Portuguese House – not to be confused with the extremely dangerous late-eclectic variant of the house «in the old Portuguese manner» – as a modern and national hypothesis for architecture. [...]

Hermann Muthesius publishes his *Das Englische Haus* in Berlin, in three successive volumes, starting in 1904, after his seven-year London stay as technical attaché at the German embassy. The work soon sells out, and four years later is reprinted, testifying to an editorial success and a diffusion not very usual in these cases and in those years. [...]

Muthesius, who is now present in critical literature and in the history of modern architecture almost solely with regard to his role in the Deutscher Werkbund [...] was born in 1861. His father was a master mason; from the parish priest, while attending elementary school, he learned Latin and French. Before secondary school, for two and a half years he worked with his father learning the trade, and also rudiments of construction techniques and drawing. Then gymnasium studies and two years of philosophy, military service and architectural studies at the Königliche Technische Hochschule of Berlin. Site manager in 1887, he works for Ende & Böckmann in Tokyo, where he already builds something on his own account. Upon returning, state examination with honours in architecture, in 1893. Various technical posts in Prussian ministries; a grant for a study trip in Italy. Then the famous appointment as technical counsellor at the London embassy. Upon returning, house for the former minister von Seefeld, in 1904. Then the von Schuck-en, Bernhardt houses, and so on; his own, designed in 1906 and realised in Berlin-Nikolassee three years later. Dozens of projects, up to his sudden death (in an accident) in 1927: almost all realised. A great deal, especially if one compares with other protagonists of that period: one can think, for example, of Hans Poelzig. He continued to be a high ministerial official, with a very rare privilege: half-time; in the afternoons he ran his private atelier. He carried out an extremely intense publicistic

activity, theoretical and polemical. He wrote many books, besides the one already cited, and dozens of essays and articles. He was among the founders of the Deutscher Werkbund, in 1907. He played the piano and the organ, rather well, they say. He dealt with and wrote about literature, music, and fashion. And yet he remains one of those authors, as Alberto Arbasino says, revered and whose importance and problematic are known; but who knows why one never finds the time to read them (this holds especially for his work as architect-designer).

Das Englische Haus should not be taken as a general history of the English house (it would inevitably soon show the late-positivist strain), but as a personal treatise, or also as a manual pertaining to the design and construction of architectures. The work has a rather systematic character and is divided into three parts.

In the first, after a general framing of the relationship between dwelling and English culture, the genesis and development of the «modern English house» are analysed. Starting from the pioneers, also in the literary and more generally artistic field (Pre-Raphaelites, Ruskin, Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, the South Kensington schools), Muthesius identifies three great informers of domestic architecture: Philip Webb, Eden Nesfield, and Norman Shaw (of the latter, however, a certain propensity for historicist returns is criticised). By specifying the basic differences between classicism and «vernacular» building modes, the latter are assumed as the point of departure for the development of modern residential buildings, «freed from historical styles». [...] Muthesius then goes on to consider the younger generation, submitting it to examination first of all in terms of the utmost formal reticence and rigorous simplicity (Lethaby, Newton); secondly, in terms of adherence to the new conception of the house and its content as a single entity [...]. For all the architects considered, various buildings are analysed, providing for each accurate plans, careful and minute indications of the intended uses of individual rooms, photographs of exteriors and interiors, drawings, information on construction methods and on the use of materials.

In the second part Muthesius addresses in systematic fashion the question of distributive organisation and construction. Initially, with framing intent, a series of «determinants» is described, namely geographical and geological influences, characteristics of social organisation, laws and customs concerning «property for rent», the legislation we would now call planning, building regulations and prescriptions, and so on. The treatment is divided into great country houses; surroundings of the house; small country houses; urban dwellings. As regards the first, a decomposition into three parts is carried out: the residential part proper; the service zones; the dependencies. It begins with the identification of the «ultimate» element of the house: the room. Certain fundamental characteristics of it are treated: especially isolation (privacy), obtained

through appropriate expedients and dispositions (for example, that of internal doors, with different directions of opening, and so on). The residential part has rooms for living, rooms for sleeping, rooms for children. Among the former, very important is the drawing-room (which has no exact equivalents in continental Europe; it is somewhat a salon, a living room; the use is different, continuous and differentiated). Its most appropriate design modes are analysed, the relations among the principal elements (fireplace, windows, doors). Then there is the dining-room, another pillar of the distributive system, or rather, compositional. Other rooms, to be provided or not according to the size of the house, are the library, which is also smoking-room or *Herrenzimmer*, but not a study, an office, which is always outside, elsewhere; the morning-room and the breakfast-room, for a more homely morning use; the dining/sitting-room, with a proper fireplace corner (*ingle-nook*); the billiard-room, which can also be in the hall; the conservatory; the picture gallery. The hall has central importance as a connecting element among the various rooms; it can also contain other functions, and in any case with its organisation and arrangement it tends to eliminate many accessory spaces, corridors, passageways, and so on. Muthesius then analyses the bedrooms, giving prescriptions relating to the arrangement of furnishing elements, to services; very important is the part destined to guests, for which various degrees of amplitude are indicated. Finally, children's rooms, similarly analysed in order to extract their compositional «necessities». In treating service spaces, the same procedure is adopted; here also begin to appear very detailed drawings relating to objects and devices, such as gas stoves, pantries, porcelain sinks, and so forth, which will then be taken up again in the extraordinary survey of everyday objects contained in the last part of the work. There are also precise descriptions of materials and construction methods.

The third part of *Das Englische Haus* concerns the interior of the house. Following a procedure parallel to that already applied, Muthesius initially identifies certain precedents, or points of departure: William Morris, Augustus Pugin, Edward William Godwin, A. Stevens. The treatment then presents the usual characteristics of systematicity. The interior is subdivided and studied, one might say, following its components: the wall, the ceiling, the floor; openings in the walls: the fireplace, the doors and windows. For each of them an accurate examination is carried out of the most appropriate positions, reciprocal relations, appropriate technologies, construction characteristics, and so on. Examples are described at length, providing photographic documentation also of details, and drawings. Finally Muthesius deals with furnishings, objects and accessories pertaining to each room, considered as a unit¹⁰.

The inquiry becomes, if possible, even more minute, and Muthesius seems fascinated by the «natural» exactness of devices, which are simple objects for complex functions: here are tables and small tables that extend, that fold, wholly or in part; revolving bookcases, reading headrests, billiard lamps adjustable; showers isolable with a curtain, with or without tub, towel-dryers, soap-holders for bathtubs with differentiated compartments.

That this immense analytical and descriptive effort does not derive from mere classificatory frenzy is absolutely evident; just as Muthesius's intention is certainly not only that of remedying a lacuna (the absence of even minimally satisfactory literature on the events of the «English house») that Lethaby himself had not failed to note. The sense of the operation is therefore certainly that, already mentioned, of constructing by this route a sort of treatise, under wholly new guises and entirely anti-classical, and also a manual useful for finding new directions for European architects of modernity. It goes without saying that this is also a way – and what a way – of communicating and transmitting one's own personal poetics of architecture. The acknowledgement, registration, and recording of the precise and utterly concrete physical form of every constructive and constitutive element already in itself eliminates any possible risk of rigidity in distributive characteristics – which instead frequently recurs in continental manuals, up to our own day –, constituting instead a very rich and open system of compositional procedures, which could be defined as «by parts». An original and very British device, which has nothing to do with vulgar empiricism, and will subsequently succeed in informing even very different poetics. [...]

If things stand thus, functionalism, as Posener pevsnerianly said, could indeed have been born in England: but what sort of functionalism is it? The «English house» remains, in this respect, the central knot and, despite Muthesius's great enterprise, almost wholly unexplored (restored only in caricature: privacy is not a problem of distribution, it is rather a mental, cultural fact).

While the social situation of reference is quite different – that of Portugal at that time as compared with other continental countries (even if these things are never exhaustively important in architecture) – in Raul Lino there are traces of many of the fundamental ideological terms that in those years were emerging here and there in the principal European architectural cultures. [...] For Lino, in the end, it is only a matter of the search for a reasonable and recognisable grammar and syntax, capable of guaranteeing a civil and acceptable architectural coexistence [...].

Raul Lino succeeds rather well in what Hermann Muthesius never achieved through his projects and built architectures: transferring to continental Europe and on a small scale

10. Adriano Cornoldi dedicates to the English house a specific itinerary to define the «withdrawn house»: «[...] already within the same room the modern sense of setting oneself apart is realised (whence the term apartment), which lies in the co-presence of individuality and relation of spaces, which in fact guarantee at the same time reserve and measured interaction», A. Cornoldi, *Architettura dei luoghi domestici. Il progetto del comfort*, Jaca Book, Milan 1994, p. 73 [transl. by the editor].

the unequalled refinement of that special *Wohnkultur* matured in England through the events of the country house in the nineteenth century. Gripped by an irresolvable set of contradictory instances (and of difficult concrete situations), Muthesius will never manage to transcribe into wholly convincing architectural dispositions the English models he so loved and studied (we speak here now only of architecture and not of the social hypotheses of reference): especially when it is not a matter of dwellings for the upper bourgeoisie but of popular settlements. [...]

There remain, between Muthesius and Lino, other notable analogies [...]. For both, in some way, the Arts-and-Crafts-derived idea of the «strictly artistic unity of the interior»: to which must certainly be added that of the cultural coherence of exteriors, among themselves and with the environment – for Muthesius demonstratively anti-classical (always: at least in intention) and laden with ethical aims; for Lino «quietly pedagogical», connected rather with the pursuit of a sweetness of life, made of shelter, welcome, hospitality, privacy; self-respect and self-control. For both, moreover, above all, having written – in different literary forms – and, apart from Le Corbusier, the last true books of architectural composition.

Did Raul Lino read *Das Englische Haus*? Who knows. It is certainly very probable. What is done there on the English house – the patient search for the ultimate elements of composition, the simple «parts» perfectly functional to use not only physical, to be recomposed into complex sequences, architectural mechanisms as efficient and pleasant dwellings upon which to reason in order to draw useful indications on the continent, in Germany – is carried out here as a direct treatment of the recurring fundamental elements of the «Portuguese house», from the distributive, technological, compositional standpoint. Naturally this is a delicate point, and it is not the case to underestimate it. How can one refer to a «Portuguese house», indeed postulating it, if it is not at all proven that it ever existed? Muthesius had referred not to ahistorical models, but to a circumscribed and very precise period, chosen deliberately also in terms of social formation and corresponding values; in order to address an equally well-defined public, the Berlin industrial bourgeoisie precisely in the years before the World War. The difference is no small one: despite the substantial failure, even in architectural terms, one cannot fail to recognise the value and rigour of the attempt. Lino's case, however, is completely different: for him it was a matter of formulating a hypothesis to be expressed in terms of true architectures, designed and possibly realised, in which the very terms of their *Wohnkultur* were themselves an element to be designed, perhaps on the basis of formal or social fragments, always however strongly marked by the interpretation of a strong personal poetic intentionality. Architecture first,

therefore, outside the trap of historical styles; the social values connected are always those directly referred to dwelling.

In comparison with Muthesius's, Lino's operation appears much more «light», not without many of the interesting aspects that contemporary culture attributes to this term. Nothing could be further, in any case, from the heavy apparatuses of late-positivist classificatory campaigns. And yet in the second half of the 1960s, at the instigation of Francisco Keil do Amaral, a great research campaign on Portuguese popular architecture is launched and conducted, which culminates, in 1961, in the publication of a major work entitled *Arquitectura popular em Portugal*¹¹.

Beyond documentary purposes (for these the work remains to this day unique and thus unsurpassed), the central objective, perfectly evident and obviously achieved [...], but declared only twenty years later in the preface to the second edition, was precisely that of demonstrating, once and for all and «scientifically», that there does not exist an architecture, a «Portuguese house», but, as is logical, many different forms and building customs. [...]

Once it has been clarified that Raul Lino is synchronous with the highest standards of the best European culture of his time; does not display the same politico-social and disciplinary *envergure* as Muthesius; masters with light and discreet awareness the difficult tones together of architecture and the art of living; withdraws from the burdens of ideology, cumbersome and rather sterile in his time as in ours; is extraneous to the diaphanous and ambiguous suggestions of domestic ideologies with a Heideggerian flavour, while broadly embracing the hypothesis of the nationality of style at a moment when it was rather questionable; once all this has been clarified, as increasingly it is the case to do in these last times, one will be able to devote oneself to rereading *A nossa casa* and draw from it great pleasure.

More than a book of, and on, architectural composition, it is a true manifesto, or rather the expression in refined terms of a personal and original poetics (which also includes the precious values of civil coexistence). [...] Lino is a great narrator of houses; and his houses are in turn narratives. There also emerges fairly fully an idea of composition as plot, as *plot* – upon which then good taste and culture (and intellect) will suggest, for the infinite possible developments, as many ranges of tones always refined and muted. [...]

The house is therefore, to a large extent, narrative. In his somewhat rigid manner Muthesius means to say this as well when he states that the house is «the mirror of the personal culture of those who live in it»; Lino says more or less the same thing, avoiding however flattening it excessively on the side of the users alone, and thus takes up again the great open question, by its nature unclosable, of architecture as autobiography.

[...] With much understatement Lino recounts the importance of the plan to be drawn before anything else and with great respect for the site; the weight to be given to the various rooms, as in English houses strictly connected to use and to who inhabits them. The dwellings, whose scale will never be excessive, even with large plots available, will have recurring rooms. The «sala (or casa) de estar», somewhat the centre of domestic values, of shelter, of being together, of hospitality, also of devoting oneself to oneself; the «sala de jantar», which could also be reduced or even disappear in favour of greater richness and articulation of the former; the atrium, which performs functions comparable to those of the hall in English houses, of distributive simplification, of eliminating corridors and dead spaces, which in modest dwellings could even perform the role of *sala de estar*; and which in any case ends up having a certain spatial richness, with upper-floor stairs and various half-levels converging there («the delightful effect of being inside a great ark», proper to the hall, says Lino, should here be transformed into an impression of recollection and coolness», as from a cloistered patio). From outside to inside and vice versa the passage must be resolved by means of a rather complex device of successive mediations: before this atrium there will in any case be a small vestibule, and before the entrance door a protected space, an *alpendre* – a moment of transition, the announcement of shelter, already a first shelter. All this, often, also occurs by introducing among the various episodes changes of direction, giving unpredictability to spaces perhaps very small, which thus become very rich. It is an altogether original and felicitous architectural configuration in which Lino often gives his best: his *Casa do Cipreste* may stand, for all, as an example.

Another very important element is again an *alpendre*, this time of dimensions comparable to those of a room, indeed a true loggia-room, open and covered usually by a pitched roof. It is an external prolongation of the internal and private space, as if the *sala*, or *casa*, de estar, as an intimate place of life, found the need to reopen a passage, to throw a bridge, toward external nature, in order to entertain with it new relations, always under the sign of domestic intimacy. This is a function that Lino considers fundamental in order to find the architectural places of that balanced and rich art of living so much loved; and the advice and indications become minute, very detailed.

[...] The unpleasantness of long narrow corridors and the sweetness of shelters; the importance of the reciprocal proportions of the various elements of external and also internal elevations; the beauty of plasterwork with coloured lime, the different whites, the pink, the oxblood, the pale green, the different colour that frames and shutters must have; the different criteria to follow in the countryside and in the city. (Depending on the regions, says Lino, one will build following local customs, also compositional). The importance of roofs in

composition, the effects obtainable with the various tiles, *coppis*, Marseille tiles, Portuguese tiles; the improper use of projecting pitches. And again: the proportions of entrance doors and also internal ones; those of windows and their disposition in walls. The measure of things.

The architecture of interiors; the role of service rooms and connecting elements. The ventilation of the kitchen, stairs of contained dimensions, the possible sweetness of the bathroom, technical systems well distributed and easy to maintain. An irregular plan can often favour a good disposition of the house, says Raul Lino; there is no need whatsoever to subject oneself to the «eternal rectangular quadrilateral» (here again a version of composition «by parts»).

And so on, for further pages dedicated to construction techniques and to the beauty and utility of thick walls; to interior finishes, floors, walls, ceilings, frames. The value and enchantment of small tonal variations within the same material. A small garden or at least many places for plants. After all, says Lino, architecture is an index of civilisation. It is difficult to disagree.

[Maurizio Vogliazzo, *Due Ipotesi Minoritarie nell'Architettura del Novecento. «A Nossa Casa» de Raul Lino e «Das Englische Haus» di Herman Muthesius*, in «Estudos Italianos em Portugal», no. 51, Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Portugal, Lisbon 1988, pp. 15-34]

11. Sindicato Nacional dos Arquitectos, *Arquitectura Popular em Portugal*, Sindicato Nacional dos Arquitectos, Lisbon 1961. [MB]

Andrea Branzi

The Culture of Living

1991

It may seem strange, but it is only very recently that the culture of design has concerned itself (and worried itself) with the problems of the house. Until the last century architecture was committed to designing palaces, churches, squares, monuments; but not «man’s house», that is, everyday dwelling. Indeed, it was not considered part of official culture. The house was instead located within that vast area of the real world that we might define as «private», and which, although belonging to history, is nonetheless hidden behind the folds of its officialness.

Building houses, rather than designing them, was for three thousand years a craft-based building activity, profitable and important within both large and small metropolitan economies, yet external to the codes of Vitruvius and to the elevated debate of the architectural discipline.

And moreover, the imprint that we men of the twentieth century retain, when we think of and dream about a house, is still one strongly tied to an ancestral memory, of a pre-urban construction, perhaps rural, with four windows and a gabled roof, maybe of straw.

An archetype that in reality we have never lived in, but which defines the house as a basic product, still external to the evolution of forms imposed by modernity.

This is already an important point for reflection, because instead it was precisely modern culture in the broad sense – that is, philosophical and economic – that, from the nineteenth century onward, brought onto the stage the great urgent problems, those of man’s «private» sphere, that is, his soul and his house, as «deep» themes, structural for the construction of a new society and a new industrial metropolis¹.

But modern culture was also, first among all the historical cultural epochs that preceded it, unable to give man a house of his own. In the sense that modernity took away

the house of his ancestors, severed his domestic roots, cast him into an artificial metropolis with vast political and social horizons, but did not know how to reconstruct for him either that lost hut or a new roof.

This is one of the tragic aspects of the human story of modernity; but it is also one of the new achievements that the current culture of design is beginning to theorize: to reconstruct man’s house within the artificial universe that surrounds him, to make the world inhabitable once again.

Today, designing man’s house means combining nomadism, uninterrupted flows of information, metropolitan relations, and at the same time the affective value of a place, silence and intimacy². It means designing objects capable of creating poetic relations with their user. It means introducing the hard instruments of design into a sacred territory, that of the domestic private sphere, which by definition is a «non-designable» place, in the sense that the house is everything and the opposite of everything.

It is the place of the unconfessable and at the same time the most official place of the individual. A place of memories and of advanced technologies. A place of the private and of the public. A unitary and composite place. A place of ethics and of sex. A place defended and profaned by information. An elective and mass place.

But these, which are some of the infinite contradictions of the domestic place, are also the very reasons that make the house the central «place» of the Second Modernity: the challenge to be resolved, the central point for saving the world.

Because in the end this is what it is about: giving man a house once again in order to save him. Saving him from madness, from violence, from the solitude into which the industrial revolution has cast him. And this must be done

precisely by using the Industrial Revolution. That modern culture which ruined him is also the only one that saved him.

It seems a paradox, but in fact it is so: design, which more than any other discipline has been close to its domestic secrets, has used two opposite therapies. On the one hand it has used «cruelty» (introducing into the house technologies, civic languages, signs and structures of an aggressive world), making man «interiorize the machine» as a shock homeopathic cure, in order to save him through the modification of his most intimate and traditional soul. In practice, it sought to adapt the patient to the illness.

But design has also used an opposite therapy, which has been that of «domesticating» technologies, new materials, the signs of pure mechanics, in order to introduce them into the delicate human habitat.

For this reason design, well beyond architecture, remains the protagonist of the Second Modernity.

Because it is the only one to have accepted, in the age of mega human projects, the apparently smaller scale of domesticity, the low threshold of household utensils and everyday objects, thus becoming the only filter between man and the artificial universe that surrounds him, the only design discipline that in some way touches man’s «private» sphere³.

[Andrea Branzi, *The Culture of Dwelling*, in «Interni Annual Casa», no. 168, 1991, pp. 7-13]

The excerpt published here anticipates some reflections that Andrea Branzi develops throughout his entire path of rereading design practices, electing design as the solution capable of mediating between the individual and modernity and of restoring to the house a central role in the process of contemporary civilization. Interest in the author with respect to the discipline of design lies in the bond that objects establish with life and everydayness. That «man’s house» invoked on the pages of «Domus» by Ernesto Nathan Rogers in 1946 seems to have been lost over time in the technological developments that have «interiorized the machine». The author’s first reflections were published in the volume *The hot house. Italian new wave design*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA 1984.

2. In this statement Branzi anticipates many themes on dwelling that would become central to his reflection from the early 2000s onward. In the essay *Il mondo cambia*, the author underlines how the city is undergoing «a shift with respect to the functional zoning on which it was planned and built»: former factories are converted into spaces for creative production, warehouses become dwellings, and old depots or garages are transformed into art galleries. In the same way, domestic environments as well, traditionally organized according to a rigid typological subdivision, evolve toward more fluid and less defined configurations, in which functions intertwine and spaces contaminate one another. A. Branzi, *Il mondo cambia*, in I. Faré, S. Piardi eds., *Nuove specie di spazi*, Liguori, Naples 2003, pp. xi-xvi.

3. «To begin again from the minimal threshold of reality, from the system of objects and utensils that stand around man and constitute his most intimate and almost corporeal habitat. [...] It is a matter of designing the soft structures of metropolitan domesticity, the shells that contain them, the sensitive surfaces that divide space, the smells and colors of the environment, the territorial signs». A. Branzi, *Cose e case*, in Id., *Pomeriggi alla media industria. Design e seconda modernità*, Idea Books, Milan 1988, p. 32 [transl. by the editor]. [MB]

Manolo De Giorgi, Marco Romanelli

Figures of Living

1994

A history of the near-present, still lacking the usual distance from the things it deals with, is a history built predominantly on the affective relationship between the author and the object of research. This «immediate» history, which cuts across the times between the event, its recording, and its rationalization, bears some of the subjective distortions of one who, called upon to record an event, is also responsible for its production. «Dichiarazione di interni» (Interiors Declaration), with its thirty Italian apartments selected to compose a first homogeneous corpus of «architectural interiors», is a history still underway, continuously under verification, a history more by designers than by historians in the strict sense¹.

Its choices and its deformations are dictated by the urgencies of an immediate operativity that imposes on this instant history the need to make its own orientations explicit, so that, «by revealing itself for what it is, it may open itself to the paths of equity».

1. To speak of interior architecture, that is, to speak of the interior as a problem of architecture, appears today unusual, even in a context such as the Italian one, which had greatly privileged this scale of design, achieving extraordinary results already by the end of the 1950s. Subsequently, the theorization of the urban dimension of the project, the ossification of typological research, the facile exhibitionism of drawn architecture or of postmodern poetics, have caused many to lose sight of this «interior» and in some way foundational dimension of architecture. Today one often finds oneself no longer capable of designing, nor even of reading, a building starting from the correct habitability of its interiors. It is instead still possible, in our view, to trace the foundations of that decisive typological project, centered precisely on dwelling, which had constructed an Italian architectural tradition. According to a pattern customary to a nation such as ours, where histories are constructed through a succession of events, occasions,

and exceptional figures (without ever periodizing a latent and diffuse consciousness), it is possible to construct a parallel history of architecture, tangent only at certain points to the official one. A history built by architects with strong inclinations and capacities for the structuring of interior space. A silent history, appreciated by those incomparable criminals of post-war reconstruction, and able to reach us intact, involving, at an indisputably high level, the younger generations of designers.

2. Interior architecture, already in the immediate postwar period, was precociously attentive to registering the problem of reading the historical datum, shifting its meaning from the idealistic concept of cultural asset to the modern and all-encompassing one of the «existing»², in the new configurations of trace, clue, material residue. The theme of reading the existing thus leaped beyond the rigid philological-stylistic-chronological dualism of value-non-value, opening onto the more general theme of interpretation. In this way, the path was traced for a possible use of the existing heritage in a spatial-physical-anthropological sense, as material condition and presupposition of design. The readings by Franco Albini and Carlo Scarpa³ in pre-existing containers therefore remain exemplary, positioning themselves as historical essays of interpretation, valid also for major architecture, which for long stretches of the postwar period was more ambiguously ensnared in the web of the historicism of the «isms», or paralyzed in its operations of reading by the poetics of the tabula rasa dear to a large part of the Modern Movement.

3. It is possible to identify, in the succession of these interiors, the signal of a «course correction» for the architectural discipline. Today, now that we are finally capable of analyzing a history substantially built «by and for» the haute bourgeoisie; free of complexes, but above all lucid in recognizing the repercussions, at the most diverse scales of design, of a great number of the realizations that mark this history. Repercussions,

sign that brings to light its theoretical and cultural dimension, highlighting how dwelling constitutes a terrain of confrontation between architecture, design, applied arts, and everyday practices. The theoretical reflections and the extensive atlas of case studies collected in the monographic issue of «Rassegna» find further development and deepening in the exhibition catalogue curated by Beppe Finessi entitled *Stanze. Altre filosofie dell'abitare/ Rooms. Novel Living Concepts* (XXI Triennale di Milano, 2016), which broadens the critical gaze on the theme, reinforcing the idea of the interior as a space of experimentation. Cf. E. Morteo, *L'interno-abitacolo o dello spazio intermedio*, in «Rassegna», no. 58, 1994, pp. 73-79; B. Finessi ed., *Stanze. Altre filosofie dell'abitare/Rooms. Novel Living Concepts*, XXI Triennale di Milano, Marsilio, Venice 2016.

1. The apartments analyzed extend across the entire national territory in the reference period between 1947 and 1993 and are grouped through certain interpretative keys identified by the two editors, which contribute to defining «A lexicon for interior architecture». The cases identified oscillate between well-known authors such as BBPR, Carlo Mollino, Franco Albini, Carlo Scarpa, and others less studied such as Cesario Carena and Guido Drocco, Claudio Nardi and Marta Lonzi.

in reality, more important than those produced by realizations apparently targeted, demagogically shrouded in educational or demonstrative intentions for the economically most disadvantaged classes. Today, distant from such a moralistic and pedagogical attitude, we finally manage to recover a historically rejected tradition, reconsidering the paradigmatic and fruitful design sequence of the Italian apartment.

4. That «from the inside» is a hard school, an arduous apprenticeship that presupposes a great capacity for site control, a great capacity to work at the most diverse scales, from the 1:200 of overall configurations to the 1:1 of details. It requires the willingness and the capacity to weave a dialogue with users. From all this descends a method that adopts the plan as its principal instrument, continually verifying in section what is gradually being defined on the plane – totally disregarding the elevation. This condition, if born from the very definition of a discipline that works inside a container, has become over the decades an unconscious lifeline for the generations that succeed one another in addressing the theme. Recently defended against mannerism and the scenographization of architecture that leads to the sole objective of constructing a façade image. In parallel, the rapid and, we would say, ineluctable transition from project to construction site, which characterizes interior work, has allowed these designers to preserve a strong attention to making, to the necessary verification and implementation of the validity of the drawn ideas – a verification conducted in concert with the most critical of judges, the inhabitant of the house. On the one hand, therefore, an extraordinary oscillation between measurement in millimeters and direct design on site together with the craftsmen; on the other, an extraordinary oscillation between one's own and others' dwelling experience. But not only that: there exists a further balancing that, when radicalized, places on one front the necessity of considering the work of the architect «in interiors» as a «service work», thus denoting the figure of the technician, and on the other the possibility of a totalizing intervention and the consequent delineation of an artistic figure. Positions that were long considered as alternatives, if not antithetical, have recently come to be understood as both simultaneously belonging to those who consciously deal with interiors. In particular, the second argument, concerning artisticity, leads one to infer a further distinctive characteristic for architecture «in interiors», namely the capacity to cast a real bridge between design disciplines and artistic disciplines. A concealed common denominator is, for those who move within the two aforementioned realms, a greater proximity to matter than for those who instead concern themselves with larger scales of intervention. Matter in fact has, whether it is resolved in work on the semi-finished products of construction and assembly, or completed in the intervention of others in the artistic field, a primary importance

in the interior dimension. In this sense, as well as in the foundational planimetric attention of which we have spoken, interior work becomes a remarkable and fundamental school for the entire spectrum of the architect's field of action, providing sensitivities and knowledge difficult to accumulate otherwise.

5. Interior architecture acquires, in a future perspective, and especially with respect to design with which it has often been erroneously confused, an important moralizing function. Faced with the theme of excess, of waste, and of the proliferation of objects in domestic space in reiterated and sometimes underused furnishing typologies, interior architecture can propose itself as a bridgehead in the project of dismantling, relaunching the theme of fixed furnishing as equipment for the house even before for people. Thus, a rethinking of the dwelling is proposed in terms of volumetric encumbrance, restoring to the elements of interior architecture a modern-ancient centrality (user adapting to the envelope, to the niche)⁴. In this logic, a further outcome of interior architecture is given in relation to the world of furniture production. The interiors presented here were in fact both matrix and verification for a great number of furnishings that, from the singularity of those places, subsequently passed into the boundless space of serial production.

6. Italian interior architecture, even in the particular and entirely «experimental» condition that has often associated it with «work of art» or relegated it to the sphere of the «one-off», has generated a production of repercussions on the theme of dwelling such that, although it has not made the history of architecture, it has rendered a model that is, in retrospect, highly typologically coherent and recognizable – a model which, in its recurrence, qualifies as a «place» of objectified interiority and, therefore, as a very clear and very specific project. A project evidently exhibitionary, and yet capable of allegorical behaviors and of a culture of integration, which in its specificity is not reducible to any of the typological models elaborated for residential architecture.

[Manolo De Giorgi, Marco Romanelli eds., *Figures of Dwelling*, in *Dichiarazione di interni. Appartamenti italiani 1947-1993*, «Rassegna», no. 58, 1994, pp. 4-7]

2. The interpretative expansion proposed by the two editors with regard to reuse, not only as philological restitution but as «presupposition for design», anticipates the contemporary development of «adaptive reuse», which finds resonance in the European context not only through the development of a reference scholarly literature but also through numerous design cases. Cf. G. Brooker, S. Stone, *Re-readings. Interior Architecture and the Design Principles of Remodeling Existing Buildings*, RIBA Publishing, London 2004; G. Brooker, *Adaptation. Strategies for Interior Architecture and Design*, Bloomsbury, New York 2016; B. Plevoets, K. Van Cleempoel, *Adaptive Reuse of the Built Heritage. Concept and Cases of an Emerging Discipline*, Routledge, Taylor & Francis, New York 2019. For an in-depth discussion of intervention on the existing in relation to interior design in Italy, see I. Forino, *Italian Interior Reuse. A Dialogue with the Past*, in C. Ebert ed., *Theorising Interior Architecture and Design. Identity, Practices, Education, and Beyond*, Routledge, London-New York 2025, pp. 91-101.

3. Here the fundamental references concern the domestic projects of Franco Albini (Robbiate 1905-Milan 1977) for Casa Albini (Milan, 1940), Casa Mercenaro in Palazzo Rosso (Genoa, 1954), and of Carlo Scarpa (Venice 1906-Sendai 1978) for Casa studio Scatturin (Venice, 1961-63), Casa Gallo (Vicenza, 1962-65), Casa Balboni (Venice, 1964).

4. The importance of fixed equipment in interior design has been addressed by G. Ottolini, V. De Prizio, *La casa attrezzata. Qualità dell'abitare e rapporti di integrazione fra arredamento e architettura*, Liguori, Naples 1990; I. Forino, *L'interno nell'interno. Una fenomenologia dell'arredamento*, Alinea, Florence 2001. [MB]

Agostino Bossi

Welcoming and Turning Inward

1999

The discourse concerning welcoming, by the very nature of the concept, refers back to the interiority of built space, to the architectural interior, in its perceptual quality concerning those ideal objects of the mind, the essences, not directly dependent on sensible experience. As such, welcoming positions itself as the «*oikological*» finality of design – the ideal reference term of the configurative process of architecture. To question, then, the meaning of welcoming, to deepen speculation around this theme, means to ground design research in critical awareness, freeing it from wishful suggestions, from the arbitrariness of an extemporary and inconclusive gesture.

In the semantics of the term it is not inappropriate to note the idea of taking care, of disposing oneself with joy and dedication for the arrival of the other into space and into the very existential vicissitude of the I, of working concretely so that whoever arrives in a place perceives the world around them as their own world. In welcoming the miracle is realized whereby the welcomed person feels that their coming was the desired event and that everything had been prepared for a sincere embrace. Welcoming in itself alludes to a mode of relating different from the apparently similar concepts of hosting and receiving.

In hospitality, however comfortable the environmental and psychological condition, however much the guest is put at ease, there remains for them the ephemeral fate of one who enters in order to leave, and their in-room-ness is the staying inside of someone who is constitutively outside. The act of welcoming is more demanding than the exercise of hospitality because it involves the existent in a full and radical way, engaging its interiority and the essence of sentiments. Hospitality, by contrast, does not presuppose such involvement and can be fully realized without engaging the deep core of relational motivations.

In hospitality there is the willingness to grant the use of one's space, one's habitat; in welcoming instead the intention manifests to adopt the other and to promote their development with solicitous care. Hospitality is consumed in the present and projects into the future insofar as it senses the conclusion of the relational episode it ushers in. Welcoming lives the present as beginning and is entirely directed toward construction: it cares about the destiny of the other without any prefigured temporal limit.

Therefore welcoming does not resolve into a simple hosting, nor even into a receiving; instrumental and functional devices aimed at comfort alone cannot suffice for it. Welcoming puts into play factors that transcend the merely biological and functional aspects, demanding the intervention of sentiments and values whose formation cannot be exclusively entrusted to the aggregation of things, instruments, and equipment for living. From this the deep distance that separates this concept from those of «receiving» and of «containing» is measured even more clearly – in which there is no trace of the semantic-qualitative richness inherent in the former, everything resolving into a mere concurrence of functional and quantitative elements.

Consequently, the reference of the concept of welcoming to the quality of architectural places is richly consequential¹. But before entering this rich and complex territory, where reference to the history of architecture and to that of the culture of dwelling – in its ancient vicissitude and in the recent one of modernity – becomes fundamental, I intend to examine the conceptual correlate of welcoming: turning inward². Here too one must first attempt to clarify the semantic valence of the term, then see in what relation it stands to the concept of welcoming analyzed above; finally, to focus on the concrete implications it can have in the specifics of architectural research.

Two are the fundamental nuclei of meaning to which the word refers. First, it alludes to a kind of recomposition into unity of a dismembered reality, *disiecta membris*. Simultaneously, it invokes a will of consciousness that attempts to restore the totality of its being by withdrawing from the dispersion and distraction of the self. Turning inward is therefore the moment of the return of the I to its unitary nature, dictated by the need to reappropriate the self in its entirety and by the necessity to dialogue in the silence of one's own interiority.

Turning inward thus opposes that mode of everyday existence in which the totality of the I is fragmented, loses awareness, and renounces establishing a conscious relationship with the world.

This does not mean, however – as one is immediately tempted to believe – that the coessential dimensions of turning inward coincide with those of separation and isolation; on the contrary, when one turns inward, the I manages to be fully present in the world and truly capable of dialoguing even with the reality external to it. Turning inward is not a negation of the world, an aside, but rather an internal welcoming of the world, an instituting of a dialogue with it and with oneself. What is experienced as an impeditive factor are not the voices and sounds of the world, but the hubbub and vulgar noisy clamor that the world generates.

The conclusion of this discourse is that the experience of turning inward ultimately coincides with that of welcoming – that is, of welcoming oneself and the world in the most intense and meaningful manner. Let us now analyze in detail the domains in which to recognize the spatial specificities related to welcoming and to turning inward, seeking to identify the configuration, as well as the disposition and sequence relative to other parts of the built, of the places where these categories are enacted.

The act of welcoming manifests primarily, also taking into account a precise temporal succession of activities, at those points of architectural space where interior and exterior are put into relation – not only from the physical point of view but also with regard to the construction of perceptual and behavioral categories that mediate the passage from activities proper to the exterior to those characterizing interior functions.

These functions are those that realize the sensible relationship established between the one who is welcomed – the guest, or better the friend – and the one who welcomes, choosing to make the other a participant in a more significant part of their social or domestic life. It is undeniable that, programmatically, architecture can conform, with regard to the relation between inside and outside, even to deny such dialogue, or at least to place the one about to enter in a condition of intimidation.

This belongs to modes of being or to functions that by their nature need to grade and regulate the manners of welcoming. There are therefore different degrees of welcoming to which different interior places relate: there is a first level that we may define as «introductory» relative to a second, more intimate one that corresponds to a relation developing over longer times and accomplished in the more interior spaces of the overall compositional arrangement.

It will be convenient therefore to recognize an abstract sequence that begins with spaces still external to the architecture – starting from the organization of access paths, from the construction of perspectives and views toward the place of entry – to reach all those elements that characterize the entrance threshold such as roofs, steps, balustrades, lamp posts, architectural terminations. One then moves on to consider those already interior environments that have no other destination than to introduce the real succession of functions – such as the atrium, the entrance, stairs and corridors with a purely scenographic purpose – up to those spaces that represent a further and more significant degree of interiority, also intended for purely private activities but foreseen for sharing with those participating in the welcoming; these are the living spaces which in different historical epochs have been at times reception chambers, dining rooms or kitchens, or even the fourteenth-century bedchamber of memory.

Welcoming therefore takes place temporally in places that accompany, that transit, from a dimension of total strangeness to one in which one adheres instead to a series of sensations and events that belong to the behavioral – and consequently spatial – sphere of the one who, by welcoming, makes their person and their habitat available to others. This transitional phase can assume very different tones and facets depending on cultures and the time to which it refers. It can be very prolonged, and therefore bound to a complex ceremonial, or extremely brief, born of more informal modes and cultures; august and monumental, charged with symbolisms of precisely codified meaning, or discreet and linear, akin to more direct manners of being; but it is always pertinent to the execution of a «ceremonial» that concretizes, in different ways, the rite of participation.

One thus intuits how such a phenomenon is in architecture hardly codifiable and very complex, involving at times design practices that include the organization of scenographic sequences of neoclassical or baroque taste, at others intimate and private places typical of the domestic environmental apparatus.

Turning inward, beyond the human capacities to enter into sympathy with oneself independently of any surrounding condition, finds an appropriate collocation, especially in interior architecture, in those specific spatial situations that,

The excerpt presented here is published in the volume *Accogliere raccogliersi. L'interno domestico fra partecipazione ed esclusività* (Giannini, Naples 1999), which addresses the theme of interiority of domestic space by placing it within a broader reflection on the meaning of dwelling as an existential and relational experience. At the center of the discourse is the notion of the «oikological quality» of architecture, understood as the capacity of inhabited space to become a meaningful place for the subject who lives it. In this perspective the domestic interior is a space that manifests itself in the very act of dwelling through a quotidian gesturality capable of producing relations. Welcoming and turning inward, terms that structure the entire volume, are read as complementary polarities. Agostino Bossi's essay, which constitutes one of the theoretical nuclei of the volume, clarifies how welcoming cannot be reduced to a functional condition but must be understood as an action unfolding in time and involving the body, behaviors, modes of passage and pause. The domestic interior thus becomes the place where a continuous threshold between interior and exterior is constructed, capable of mediating between the public and the private. Cf. A. Bossi, P. Cecere, *L'intangibile nell'architettura. La vocazione oikologica e il carattere cosmotopico dell'interno architettonico*, Clean Edizioni, Naples 2023.

1. A first taxonomy of spatial themes including the places of «welcoming or meeting» and of «turning inward» is defined by Adriano Cornoldi in the volume *Architettura dei luoghi domestici. Il progetto del comfort* (Jaca Book, Milan 1994, pp. 31-32), as parts of the reading of a sequence of spaces that shape the lived space and that change in relation to different geographic areas. Cornoldi identifies in meeting places the essence of welcoming as in the case of the Roman house with its sequence of spaces or in the kitchen. In Bossi's essay welcoming is assumed as a founding principle of dwelling, not as one of the moments that characterize different significant places but as present in all those spaces that connect interior and exterior not only in terms of spatial conformation but in relational and perceptual terms.

2. Cf. G. Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1957; E. Lévinas, *Totalité et infini*, Martinus Nijhoff, Den Haag 1971.

3. See in particular Imma Forino's essay in the same volume: I. Forino, *Lo spazio della solitudine*, in A. Bossi ed., *Accogliere raccogliersi. L'interno domestico fra partecipazione ed esclusività*, Giannini, Naples 1999, pp. 51-69.

being closer to man – and not only to his physical dimension – predispose him to a reflective and recollective attitude³. It is implicit that such an activity, proper to the human soul, develops above all thanks to the conformation and composition of furnishing structures, fixed or movable, which by their nature are those that enter into the most direct sympathy with man's expectations and needs. For brevity of treatment we shall consider this phenomenon in its consolidated aspect and shall therefore exclude all those objects that [...] already represent in themselves singular and at the same time complex domains in which to turn inward.

With respect to the places of the architectural interior it is appropriate to approach the margins that define the spatial box and to investigate, from a material, morphological, and compositional point of view, those particular fragments that, carved out in the wall thickness or in the vicinity of punctual happenings such as windows, fireplaces, under-stairs, are realized in fractions of more complex environments where the structures are predisposed to cut out appendages, micro-spaces, suitable to carry out and satisfy more constitutionally contained, physically and intellectually intimate instances. Such small domains can also be configured as architectures within architecture: the interior within the interior⁴ represents in turn a further particular case [...].

Thus conceived, the places in which one turns inward, seen as emanations, prolongations or deformations of a more indefinite space in which particular aspects of the human soul are independently emphasized, find their specificity precisely in the perceptual, tactile and evocative relation they establish with the rest of the environment, which in turn is charged by them with more detailed, defined and significant senses.

This relation obviously does not limit itself to parts of the interior alone, but also involves, through vision, parts of the exterior that are, so to speak, drawn in to participate in interiority. The modalities by which we can recognize the individual characteristics proper to parts of more complex spaces lie in the definition of material, dimensional and morphological characters relative to the function to be performed and the necessities to be satisfied. A change of texture, of material or of chroma highlights a different tension of one domain with respect to the rest, just as differences of level – walking surface, floor slab, ceiling – or the contraction or expansion of a part of the wall curtains, or more generally of the margins, realize spatial specificities in which to develop certain activities⁵.

Along the contours of an environment of less rigidly defined character, pulsations of space have, over the course of History, identified recurring and characteristic environmental situations such as the place of the hearth, the equipped window, the alcove, the niche or simply the projection on which to rest an object or a book.

It can finally happen that places of such defined character and sensitive to the expectations of the user arise from the deformation of domains that would otherwise not seem to manifest a specific vocation beyond the functional or accessory: such is the case of staircases, landings, attics, terraces which, thanks to the intentional and conscious manipulation of the structure that shapes them, transform into places of contemplation or meditation such as belvederes, roof terraces, outdoor pergolas, diaphragms and sun screens, becoming formerly unthinkable areas.

These are places of free form, or better liberated form, never gratuitous, shaped «...*faisant chanter l'espace...*»ⁱ to allow that dialogue we spoke of above – the most profound and aware one of man with himself and with others, in tune with historical memory and with the evolution of times and custom which, beyond artificial resolutions entrusted to improbable formulas, lead us to agree with Charlotte Perriand when, recalling her confrontation with themes connected to the search for the qualities of permanence, intimacy and communicability to be attributed to spatial solutions proposed for interior architecture, she relates that «...*pour cette étude systématiquement je me posais des questions et je me reportais à d'autres temps, à d'autres lieux, à d'autres mœurs. Quel enrichissement! Art d'habiter – Art de vivre*»ⁱⁱ.

i Charlotte Perriand, *Un Art de Vivre*, Flammarion, Paris 1985, p. 34.
ii Ibid., p. 45.

[Agostino Bossi, *Accogliere raccogliersi*, in Id., ed., *Accogliere raccogliersi. L'interno domestico fra partecipazione ed esclusività*, Giannini, Naples 1999, pp. 13-29]

4. Cf. I. Forino, *L'interno nell'interno. Una fenomenologia dell'arredamento*, Alinea, Florence 2001.

5. The essay is accompanied by some exemplary images of certain spaces recounted by Agostino Bossi through cases by Joseph M. Olbrich (Casa Keller 1902), Leopold Bauer (Darmstadt, 1900), Ernst Jung (Haus an der oberen Isar 1911), Adolf Loos (Casa Khuner, 1930), Rob Mallet-Stevens (Villa Cavroix, 1932). [MB]

Phenomenologies of Furnishing

Michela Bassanelli

Furnishing represents, in the Italian context, an autonomous phenomenology of dwelling that eludes rigid disciplinary classifications. Every attempt to define it has confronted a twofold resistance: on the one hand, that of a critical tradition which has long confined furnishing within a marginal and at times decorative horizon; on the other, that of a design vision that has tended to measure its meaning in relation to the architectural form. It is not, in this context, a matter of establishing whether furnishing is a major or minor art, nor of assessing its subordination to architecture, but of understanding how the different interpretations consider furnishing as a dynamic threshold between body and space, between time and form: «it presents itself as a bridge between the empty physical cavity and the vital fullness of dwelling»¹.

Starting from the first half of the twentieth century, at least four interpretative lines can be distinguished which have attempted to define the modes and evolutions of furnishing throughout different historical epochs, and which can be traced in the essays collected here. The first, consistent with the modernist tradition of integration among the arts, conceives furnishing as a spatial articulation in continuity with architecture. A second interprets it as a cultural manifestation, a mutable expression of taste and social habits. A third, of semiotic-structuralist matrix, investigates its nature through a system of signs and languages. Finally, the fourth perspective concentrates on the relational and affective dimension in which objects acquire a particular significance due to their bond with memory and with the ultimate meaning of dwelling. None of the four lines prevails over the others; rather, they intertwine and contaminate one another, shaping a theoretical fabric in which furnishing emerges as a complex phenomenon, close to the most intimate part of space.

A first moment of overcoming an isolated vision of furnishing can be traced in the writings of Edoardo Persico, who between 1931 and 1932 – through two short texts – defines furnishing not as a set of furniture pieces placed within space, but as a rhythmic and integrated construction capable of defining the very form of the environment². The examples he cites – such as the rationalist dwelling by Luigi Figini and Gino Polini, or the celebrated Craja bar by the same architects with Luciano Baldessari – clearly show how interior design arises from space and how furnishings lose every objectual autonomy in order to merge with architecture into a single work. It is in this shift that Persico recognizes the possibility of a new modern language: a furnishing that is architecture, not by analogy but by structural continuity. Persico overturns the historical tradition that saw furnishing as a mere complement, anticipating the notion of *ambiente totale*³ which would become central to the Italian design culture of the 1930s and 1940s⁴. Filippo Alison's text (1988), which reinterprets some of the works of the

master Charles Rennie Mackintosh, takes this very direction to highlight the continuity between architecture and furniture⁵.

This tension toward unity is problematized in the early 1950s by Alberto Clementi who, drawing on the thought of Guido Marangoni⁶, interprets furnishing as a manifestation of cultural practices: «furnishing stands to architecture as clothing stands to the human body»⁷. Furnishing, he writes, does not evolve according to the same logics as architecture: while the latter aims at design stability, furnishing follows the rhythms of social custom, resembling clothing more than construction. In this perspective, furniture pieces are not definitive elements but are subject to variations in taste. Furnishing thus appears as a cultural phenomenon, a collective expression that reflects everyday life. Clementi defines, in particular, the introverted nature of furnishing: a closed, interior dimension that operates within the delimited space of dwelling, in contrast with the extroversion of architecture, projected toward the natural and urban environment.

A related interpretative line can be found in the writings of Eugenio Battisti⁸, who in the 1950s proposed a history of furnishing no longer based on styles and typologies, but on the material traces of intimacy and daily practices. Against the traditional «furniture histories» intended for antiquarians and collectors, Battisti proposes an anthropological reading: furniture is not only functional or decorative objects, but witnesses of dwelling and of collective memory. In this perspective, the home becomes the place in which interiority materializes, and furnishing becomes a projection of the individual, the emotional double of his or her interior life, according to that *stimmung* that Mario Praz had used to describe the atmosphere of seventeenth-century Nordic interiors⁹. In this direction, first Praz¹⁰ and then Battisti anticipate more recent interpretations that view furnishing not only as an object of historical-artistic study, but as a complex cultural phenomenon in which aesthetics, anthropology, and the psychology of dwelling intersect.

Giulio Carlo Argan, in the essay *Il problema dell'arredamento* (1948), places himself on the one hand in continuity with an idea of furnishing that, although indisputably tied to architecture, does not intervene on the building's form but on the experience of space, on its content of interiority¹¹: «[...] it truly becomes the mobile and variable element of architecture»¹². On the other hand, Argan amplifies its social value, situating the question of furnishing within a debate that concerns not only domestic design but also the transformation of modern society. At the center of this reflection, he focuses on the concept of standard, which he understands as an instrument of democratization of design, conceived for a classless society and capable of responding to collective and individual needs. Furnishing thus becomes the element through which modern architecture recovers the qualitative dimension of dwelling.

At the end of the 1950s, alongside theoretical-interpretative needs, educational ones emerge that attempt to construct a first systematization of the discipline of interior architecture and furnishing within the expanded field of design¹³. Michele Cretella, an exponent of the Neapolitan school, interprets furnishing as that part of architecture most closely connected to daily life and to the material and spiritual needs of human beings. In his view, furnishing is the result of stratifications and adaptations, of stylistic returns that coincide with historical and cultural cycles. It is thus a social testimony, which evolves with humans and which, precisely because of its proximity to life, can never be fixed in rigid formulas¹⁴.

In the 1970s and 1980s two further interpretative lines take shape: the first of semiotic-structuralist matrix and the second centered on the relational and affective dimension of objects. Renato De Fusco was the first to translate the mutations of furnishing into theoretical terms, identifying its codes as a language structured around its relationship with architecture¹⁵. Furnishing is a semiotic system that produces meaning through its symbolic placement within the fabric of everyday life¹⁶. The thought of Carlo Scarpa, the only designer present in this collection of essays, confirms this vision. For Scarpa, the act of furnishing is not distinct from that of architectural design, but constitutes its most vital and experimental component. In his inaugural address at IUAV, Scarpa traces the etymology of the word «furnishing», which implies at once «providing what is necessary» and «taking care». This double root illuminates his idea of furnishing as the construction of relationships between matter, light, and body, a process in which even the smallest detail participates in defining the space¹⁷.

Adelaide Regazzoni Caniggia addresses the theme with an even more systematic method, derived from the typological studies of Saverio Muratori, introducing the concept of «furnishing organism»¹⁸ as an ensemble of objects, of their relations, and of their connection with the architectural envelope and with the exterior space pertaining to it, in order to read the invariants that characterize the evolution of furnishing. Every piece of furniture, every spatial arrangement, derives from a basic matrix – often tied to «pre-house» contexts – which over time specializes and stratifies. If Cretella insists on the importance of a historical and humanistic approach that places at its center the measure of the human being and his experience, Regazzoni Caniggia provides the analytical tools for reading this variability as a structural process, inscribing furnishing within a system of relations that embraces the domestic, urban, and territorial scale.

Beginning in the 1960s, alongside the word *arredamento*, the term *design* gradually gains ground, used to define the industrial production of objects intended to meet the new needs of a society in transformation¹⁹. Design introduces a serial and standardized logic, oriented toward efficiency and functionality, but also toward the construction of a modern imaginary linked to mass consumption. In this context, multifaceted figures such as Alessandro Mendini emerge, who, in open opposition to the industrial and anonymous matrix of design, propose furnishing objects charged with irony, affection, and memory, capable of conveying a form of cultural critique²⁰. The inhabited space becomes theatrical and symbolic, moving away from functionalist neutrality, and opens toward a conception of furnishing as a critical language of dwelling²¹. From a theoretical point of view, Gabriella D'Amato radicalizes this perspective, describing furnishing as an operative fabric made of gestures, a network of relations that eludes any univocal definition. Furnishing thus becomes the element through which private and collective stories are told, intertwining the tangible with the imaginary²². This relational vision, which places itself in continuity with the aesthetics of Mendini and other exponents of

neodesign, orients itself toward a phenomenology of dwelling, in which meaning emerges from experience and lived life.

In conclusion, the essays included here gather the different phenomenologies that have interpreted the evolution of the various conceptions of furnishing throughout the twentieth century in Italy. Today two visions seem to prevail: on the one hand, the vision that regards furnishing as the primary structure of space, in continuity with architecture; on the other, the vision that underscores its autonomous nature, tied to the temporality of taste and to the necessities of living. This constitutive ambiguity is perhaps the most representative aspect of Italian furnishing: it describes a form of knowledge that acts through experience, memory, and the body. As Cetina Lenza writes²³, furnishing does not add itself to space but inhabits it, transforming the void into place. If architecture constructs space, it is furnishing that transforms it into lived experience. In this constructive ambiguity resides the meaning of a design knowledge that, even today, challenges disciplinary separations to become a complex language of interiority. In this sense, furnishing does not merely occupy space, but constructs it from within, orienting its meaning, modulating its use, and intensifying its experience.

1. M. Vitta, *Dell'abitare. Corpi spazi oggetti immagini*, Einaudi, Turin 2008, p. 204.
2. Persico speaks of an «absolute unity between environment and furnishings», anticipating the concept of the modern environment as total work of art. E. Persico, *Due arredamenti*, in «La Casa bella», no. 42, 1931, pp. 23-25; Id., *Una mostra a Milano*, in «La Casa bella», no. 57, 1932, pp. 25-31 [excerpted in this volume].
3. This notion of total environment would be developed in the experiences of Franco Albini and Marcello Nizzoli, as also demonstrated by the VI Triennale di Milano of 1936, in which Persico himself played a leading role.
4. Cf. R. Aloï, *L'arredamento moderno*, VII edition, Hoepli, Milan 1964.
5. F. Alison, *Il sistema degli arredi, generatore dello spazio interno e dell'intero organismo architettonico*, in G. Laganà, ed., *Charles Rennie Mackintosh 1868-1928*, Electa, Milan 1988 [excerpted in this volume].
6. Cf. G. Marangoni, *Arredo e abbigliamento. Nella vita di tutti i tempi e di tutti i popoli*, Società Editrice Libreria, Milan 1937.
7. A. Clementi, *Arredamento ed architettura*, in *L'arte dell'arredamento*, Società Editrice Libreria, Milan 1954, p. 6.
8. E. Battisti, *I mobili e la loro storia*, in «La casa. Quaderni di architettura e critica», no. 1, 1955, pp. 38-49; Id., *I mobili e la loro storia. Dal Quattrocento al Neoclassicismo*, in «La casa. Quaderni di architettura e critica», no. 2, 1956, pp. 36-50 [excerpted in this volume].
9. M. Praz, *La filosofia dell'arredamento*, Documento, Librario Editore, Rome 1945 [excerpted in this volume].
10. Id., ed., entry *Mobilio*, in *Enciclopedia Universale dell'Arte*, Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, Venice-Rome, Sansoni Editore, Florence 1963, cols. 466-529.
11. G.C. Argan, *A proposito di spazio interno*, in «Metron», no. 28, 1948, pp. 20-21 [excerpted in this volume].
12. Id., *Il problema dell'arredamento*, in «La casa. Quaderni di architettura e critica», no. 2, 1956, p. 9 [excerpted in this volume].
13. A first theoretical reference can be found in M. De Renzi, *L'Architettura degli Interni. Analisi critica, metodo e programma didattico*, Ars Nova, Rome 1943.
14. M. Cretella, *Arredamento ed architettura degli interni*, in *Introduzione allo studio dell'Architettura degli Interni e dell'Arredamento*, Libreria Editrice Treves, Naples 1957, pp. 5-19 [excerpted in this volume].
15. Cf. R. De Fusco, *Storia dell'arredamento*, UTET, Turin 1985.
16. Id., *Per una teoria dell'arredamento*, «Casa Vogue», no. 150, 1984, pp. 26-27 [excerpted in this volume].
17. Carlo Scarpa, *Arredare*, inaugural lecture given at the opening of the academic year 1964-65 at IUAV in Venice, now in F. Dal Co, G. Mazzariol eds., *Carlo Scarpa. Opera completa*, Electa, Milan 1984, p. 282 [excerpted in this volume].
18. A. Regazzoni Caniggia, *Introduzione*, in *Profilo di tipologia dell'arredo*, Alinea, Florence 1977, pp. 9-12 [excerpted in this volume].
19. G. D'Amato, R. De Fusco, *Per chi tanto design?*, in «Op. Cit. Selezione della Critica d'Arte Contemporanea», no. 59, 1984, pp. 5-18; R. De Fusco, *Design contro arredamento*, «Casa Vogue», no. 151, 1984, pp. 24-25.
20. Cf. A. Mendini, *Radical Design*, in «Casabella», no. 367, 1972, p. 32.
21. Id., *Gli oggetti di domani*, in «Op. Cit. Selezione della critica d'arte contemporanea», no. 55, 1982, pp. 26-31 [excerpted in this volume].
22. G. D'Amato, *Abitare tra gli oggetti*, in «Op. Cit. Selezione della critica d'arte contemporanea», no. 74, 1989, pp. 16-25 [excerpted in this volume].
23. C. Lenza, ed., entry *Arredamento*, in *Grande Dizionario Enciclopedico Utet*, UTET, Turin 1985, vol. II, pp. 292-301 [excerpted in this volume].

Edoardo Persico

Furnishing is Architecture

1931-1932

Two pieces of furnishing

The furnishing of an interior consists almost always of a set of furniture pieces arranged, according to a scheme that can vary infinitely, within an environment to which one has given, through the colouring of the walls or through wall coverings, a particular character. Naturally, this work turns out, most of the time, without a concrete physiognomy, because the furniture pieces – however beautiful they may be – remain by themselves in the space in which they have found only a provisional placement, and to which they do not belong through any bond. What is lacking, that is, is that absolute unity between the environment and the furnishings, through which one could speak of a true and proper furnishing. What the architects Baldessari¹, Figini and Pollini² have realised for an interior dwelling is, instead, a singular novelty³: because the authors of the arrangement did not start from the furniture piece in order to create the environment, but first established a harmony of spatial rhythms, with which they made the form of several furnishings coincide. From this essentially derives the appearance and the value of the study we publish: here, in fact, furnishing is truly a work of art, and nothing can be changed without abolishing the harmonic law that governs it. From this also derives the novelty of the fixed furnishings, tied to the structure of the environment – such as the easel and the dividing shelves – or to their definitive placement, such as the wall-mounted table. It is, as everyone can see, a very characteristic work, in which, as already in the Bar Craja⁴ by the same architects, the criterion of special spatial rhythms has been employed, as, for example, in the architectures of Mies Van der Rohe. [...]

An exhibition in Milan

The exhibition of furniture, designed by the architects Figini and Pollini, which is currently being held at the Galleria del Milione⁵, is, among the events of the year, one of those that

have aroused the greatest interest: not only for the beauty of the exhibited objects, which confirm the value of our advocacy; but also because the press has taken it up with an unusual breadth, demonstrating how the ideas of this journal have made their way everywhere. Perhaps for the first time, sensible ideas on the problems of furnishing have been read in daily newspapers, and it has begun to be understood how it should be conceived in a modern way. The furniture by Figini and Pollini have imposed, upon critics and upon the public, the conviction that furnishing is above all architecture: for some years we have been disseminating this criterion, and seeing it adopted by everyone, in the very terms of our advocacy, gives us pleasure. Also not without significance is the fact that a gallery of «pure art» has thought to include in its activity an exhibition of furniture; without, for this reason, failing in the coherence of its programme. In this fact one may discern another consequence of our action, which is also aimed at finding, between modern art and «decoration», at least a stylistic understanding, or a common ground upon which to situate all the aspects of our time. The exhibition includes a complete apartment. The furniture pieces belong to that decidedly modern tendency in which the search for functionality and the elegance of the line are in accord. In spite of this, the furniture presented are not «theoretical pieces» or «exceptional pieces», destined for those truly new homes that do not yet exist among us; but while responding to the most modern tendencies they can enter ordinary dwellings and adapt themselves to the most common requirements and the most ordinary necessities. The public should look upon this fact with interest.

[Edoardo Persico, *Due arredamenti*, in «La Casa bella», no. 42, 1931, pp. 23-25; Id., *Una mostra a Milano*, in «La Casa bella», no. 57, 1932, pp. 25-31]

in the article, which depict the antechamber, the study, and the living room. Great attention is devoted to the definition of the materials of the walls and floors, as well as of the furnishings.

4. In 1930 Antonio Craja commissioned Luciano Baldessari to design the new Bar Craja, located in Piazza Ferrari at the corner with vicolo Santa Margherita, Milan (demolished in 1964). For this commission, Baldessari involved the architects Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini and the artists Marcello Nizzoli and Fausto Melotti. This project is considered by critics as a total installation of the space, assuming, in the evening, the appearance of a particular «urban lantern». G. L. Ciagà, *Il bar Craja di Luciano Baldessari. Design totale per un interno milanese (da Rovereto a Berlino)*, in «AIS/Design Journal», no. 15, 2021, pp. 149-164.

5. The gallery Il Milione, founded in 1930 by the Ghiringhelli brothers and directed by Edoardo Persico, was a fulcrum of Italian abstract art. The interior design was entrusted to Pietro Lingeri, who created one of the first «Italian rational environments». I. Forino, *Private Exhibitions. Galleries, Art and Interior Design, 1920-1960*, in G. Lees-Maffei, K. Fallan, eds., *MADE IN ITALY. Rethinking a Century of Italian Design*, Bloomsbury, London 2013, pp. 163-177. [MB]

Alberto Clementi

Furnishing and Architecture

1954

Faithful to the task assigned to us which, as we have stated, is far better directed toward clarifying than toward teaching, we shall initially consider the themes of a more general character. We shall attempt, first of all, to specify the nature of the relationship between architecture and furnishing, and to measure the breadth of the possible contact between the two terms.

One of the most characteristic phenomena among those that have accompanied, since its origins, the Modern Movement is constituted by the continual aspiration, regularly accompanied by stubborn practical attempts, to keep architecture and the so-called applied art closely connected and responsive to one another. The avant-gardists of art in every country, and we may go back to 1935, to 1920, to 1914 and to 1900, had placed, all without exception, among their fundamental premises the achievement of that «perfect correspondence among the various arts»¹ which each had excellent reasons to consider one of the most urgent objectives. Yet, throughout the course of the unfinished conflict which we would not hesitate to define as harsh, between classicism and romanticism, this correspondence among the various arts, and therefore between architecture and furnishing, never occurred spontaneously.

Beginning with the floral style, which accentuated even further the separation between architecture and decorative art precisely through the absurd practice of confusing them by submerging with gratuitous ornamentalisms structures already technically evolved, and ending with the forced correspondence produced, at the academic level, by the well-deserving German Bauhaus which, for applied art, nonetheless resolved itself in a demonstration of incompatibility between the theories of machinism, abstractionism and surrealism on the one hand, and the spiritual custom of the common man on the other. And it was precisely the common man who had already assumed that determining function in spiritual movements which, in previous epochs, had been the prerogative of

intellectual aristocracies. For this reason, the ingenious initial experiments of [Walter] Gropius, [Marcel] Breuer and [Mies] Van der Rohe, founders and fecundators of the Bauhaus, succeeded only in making decorative art and furnishing resemble architecture, without obtaining that they would unite with it spontaneously. And that this resemblance had nothing in common with the «precise correspondence» theorized was demonstrated not long after the first categorical declarations, when, through a spontaneous process, architecture and decorative art each gradually resumed its own path: the former effectively evolving toward and beyond the so-called Rationalism, the latter involving itself in manifestations often clearly in contrast with the progressivist sentiment.

The delays and recurring involutions that characterize the field of furnishing by no means constitute an index of inferiority of decorative art with respect to the major art, but simply establish its relative independence and at the same time remind us that the art of furnishing² must be associated with the manifestations of social custom, and that, like the latter, it remains far more easily subject to variations than to true and proper evolutionary processes. The parallel between the imprecisable laws that regulate the field of furnishing and those that characterize the variable manifestations of the fashion of hairstyles arises here spontaneously. In effect, one could assert with much approximation that furnishing stands to architecture as clothing stands to the human body, since furnishing is, in a certain sense, the dressing of architecture, just as clothing is, indeed, the furnishing of the human body³.

We may therefore say that furnishing obeys, in the greater part of its manifestations, that same apparently frivolous law dictated by fashion and social custom, and that consequently it is far more inclined to respect conventionalisms than to recognize a priori the validity of any rigoristic concept. Despite the numerous polemics aimed at demonstrating the theoretic-

The text presented here is an excerpt from the essay *Arredamento ed architettura*, included in the volume *L'arte dell'arredamento*, published by the Società Editrice Libreria of Milan in 1954. This book is part of the series *Casa e costume*, which gathers the three celebrated volumes on the history of furnishing: the first two authored by Guido Marangoni, *Storia dell'arredamento (fino al 1500)* and *Storia dell'arredamento (1500-1850)*, and the third, *Storia dell'arredamento (1500-1950)*, by Alberto Clementi, the first edition of which was published in 1952. These works constitute a theoretical foundation of reference for Clementi himself.

1. The author revisits the concept of the total work of art of Wagnerian origin, *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which was expressed in the domestic projects of the avant-garde movements such as Art Nouveau and Art Déco. Cf. M. Vitta, *Dell'abitare. Corpi spazi oggetti immagini*, Einaudi, Turin 2008, pp. 197-198.

2. By the art of furnishing the author means «the principle of the conception of environment, where by environment one should understand that abstract entity which could also be translated into the conventional terms of “climate” or “atmosphere”, and which ultimately represents a “state of mind”» (A. Clementi, *L'arte...* cit., p. 34). Here the reference to the home as a «mirror of the soul» is to the text by M. Praz, *La filosofia dell'arredamento*, Documento, Librario Editore, Rome 1945, pp. 21-115 [excerpted in this volume].

3. The association between furnishing and clothing has its roots in the theoretical reflection of Guido Marangoni, who addresses these themes in the volume *Arredo e abbigliamento. Nella vita di tutti i tempi e di tutti i popoli* (Società Editrice Libreria, Milan, 1937), later republished in 1952 under the title *Storia dell'arredamento* (the second edition was edited by Alberto Clementi). Marangoni recognizes in furnishing an anthropological value and insists upon the structural parallelism between dressing and furnishing.

cal unacceptability of this situation, facts have never ceased to confirm its inevitability. To cite examples, we might observe how the interiors of [Josef] Hoffmann (1914), of [Jacques-Émile] Ruhlmann (1923) or of [Gio] Ponti (1938) resembled perfectly the fashions current in the customs of their contemporaries and not at all the pure contemporary architectures of [Frank Lloyd] Wright or Gropius or Le Corbusier. The architect-furnishers of the last fifty years have, moreover, provided abundant examples of how they themselves built according to one law and furnished according to another. Contrary to what has been affirmed by some, this divergence of artistic intents did not signify incongruity, nor, even less, did it ever represent an error. In Art the concept of error cannot subsist and cannot be admitted even in pure theoretical terms. Every artistic manifestation is a fact to which there corresponds unfailingly a spiritual necessity which no one, absolutely no one, can be in a position to define as erroneous. Epochs and artists can express only themselves, and it is impossible to affirm otherwise.

Art history teaches that in fact a perfect correspondence among the various arts may occur or may not occur, and in either case the exceptions are never capable of dictating that law which can only be sanctioned by the average characteristics of the mass of examples. Attempts at evasion have contributed effectively important results, but far more gradual over time and less radical in substance than was the intention of the impatient escapees, who were always forced to return to the tracks of that apparently irrational law which issues from the elusive human nature.

No rationalistic stiffening is therefore possible in our field. When, faced with certain suggestive and exceptional realisations, such as those that characterize the period 1930-1935⁴, some of the most perceptive critics believed the moment had arrived to establish definitively the new position of the furniture piece within the more modern concept by inserting it into the great hierarchical order in which it was to serve as the first step («furniture, environment, dwelling, house, city»), they found themselves immediately afterwards confronted with the phenomenon of the disappearance, within that same concept, of the furniture piece as such, which in the meantime had become incorporated into architecture. But that is not all. No sooner had the concept of the furniture piece vanished – which Functionalism had attempted to transform into an almost exclusively utilitarian element – than mysterious instinctive laws hastened to declare the experiment partially failed and, while waiting, instituted a general truce during which the now habitual phenomenon re-appeared of a return to the use, albeit for predominantly decorative purposes, of the element of antiquarianism.

We may well say that major architecture, barring isolated betrayals, remains detached and almost immune from the ac-

tion of these uncontrollable processes, and that it aims more directly at goals that remain far more clearly identifiable. All this confirms the absence of any rigorous correspondence between furnishing and architecture, and the extent to which, on the contrary, their connections are elastic. From these assertions, however, we would not wish yet another misunderstanding to arise. It is necessary, in fact, not to confuse the generic term furnishing⁵, which has a meaning of whole, with that of furnishing element, which has a meaning of part. Many furnishing elements, considered in themselves, are architecture. The form of a vase and the schema of a furniture piece, for example, are architecture, just as any three-dimensional object is architecture. What we have intended to say refers to the freedom declared and maintained by this reduced-scale architecture to follow or not to follow the evolutions of major architecture, which is tied, precisely, for dimensional reasons as well as environmental ones, to the laws of physics and mathematics. In other terms, the difference between these two architectures, if we may be permitted to use this word in the plural for purely demonstrative purposes, lies in the fact that one, introverted, is free from statics and inserts itself into a completely artificial and delimited environment, whereas the other, extroverted, is tied to the physical laws and inserts itself into a natural environment in contact with the infinite. In social terms, moreover, it is clear that whereas architecture is founded entirely upon concepts of foresight and anticipation, furnishing follows social custom and is at most its interpretation in the present.

Since it must be remembered that furnishing is not, and cannot be, art for art's sake, that is, spiritual bread for artists alone, but more practically represents a service that major art, through concessions and adaptations, renders to a mass of users of art who habitually live in a world entirely foreign to art.

These clarifications of ours hold true if, naturally, it is understood that in clarifying the relationships between architecture and furnishing, as we have already done in previous works, we do not at all intend to establish that we find ourselves in two different «fields»⁶. It is obvious why in this context we do not use the rigorous language proper to theorists of aesthetics, otherwise we would necessarily have to admit not only that furnishing but also, let us say, sculpture is still and always architecture. After which we would no longer know how to explain ourselves in order to make ourselves intelligible to those users of art to whom our work is predominantly addressed. Nevertheless, even according to our divulgative language, it is obvious that the field remains common and that the diversity of the manifestations, even when it appears divergence, is entirely relative and comparable, if we may allow ourselves, to the diversity of the manifestation, upon the same human body, of two illnesses that may have the same intimate origin. Also

in our field the constructed body is one; its architecture and its furnishing, though developing in close contact, can manifest themselves in completely different ways. Thus, in a city building, for example, a public establishment may characterise its premises according to its particular commercial requirements rather than according to those of the architecture of the building. And this cannot be considered an error. The reasons that justify such freedom are, from the economic and commercial point of view, exactly as valid as those that, from another point of view, support the aesthetic functionalism of a construction.

It is precisely the failure to recognize the perfect legitimacy of these two points of view that leads to the realisation of architectural complexes that possess style, but are not style. In conclusion to our brief observations, it seems to us that we have clarified what we intended to allude to in casting doubt upon the possibility of a perfect correspondence among the various arts. One may consider, moreover, that modern art, being devoted to the total liberation from any and every bond, leaves all the arts and all the artists free to reach the most diverse objectives by the most diverse means, and from this point of view the elementary Crocean theory may find partial justification, which, as is known, arrives at a conclusion that might be simplistically summarised in the popular saying that «what pleases is beautiful», provided that to «pleasure», it is understood, there corresponds an authentic feeling.

[Alberto Clementi, *Arredamento ed architettura*, in *L'arte dell'arredamento*, Società Editrice Libreria, Milan 1954, pp. 5-9]

5. In the second chapter devoted to terminology, the author clarifies the distinction between *arredamento* and *ammobiliamento*: «[...] “to furnish” (*ammobiliare*) means to follow an “inductive” process with wide possibilities of error and whose result does not go beyond the common complexes of heterogeneous units, whereas “to arrange” (*arredare*) is a “deductive” process with precise control of particulars insofar as they are connected by a unity of conception and realization», A. Clementi, *L'arte...* cit., p. 22.

6. For an in-depth discussion of the relationship between architecture and furnishing, see R. De Fusco, *Per una teoria dell'arredamento*, in «Casa Vogue», no. 150, 1984, pp. 26-27 [excerpted in this volume]. De Fusco emphasizes the relationship between the two fields, since furnishing finds in architecture its *topos*, while at the same time highlighting their autonomy. [MB]

4. Cf. Edoardo Persico, *Due arredamenti*, in «La Casa bella», no. 42, 1931, pp. 23-25; Id., *Una mostra a Milano*, in «La Casa bella», no. 57, 1932, pp. 25-31 [excerpted in this volume].

Eugenio Battisti

Furniture and its History

1955-1956

The histories of furniture and furnishing have almost always been compiled for practical purposes, that is, to provide a guide for collectors and antiquarians, and models for craftsmen. The distinction between major and minor arts, which has no critical validity and against which the most broad-minded modern culture has risen up, has left serious traces in this field. At most, furniture has been considered as the evidence of a particular decorative taste, a historical rarity, an architecture in reduced scale. Thus, in the best of cases, manuals give us a succession of assorted specimens, from Babylon to Wright, as if in those millennia, as far as the furnishing of the home is concerned, no change had occurred other than a change of style.

A history written in this way has, as a serious consequence, that of almost totally neglecting the documents relating to everyday life, in which household goods are rarely made with precious and durable materials, and only seldom possess notable artistic qualities. The furnishings that appear reproduced almost always have an aulic or sacred origin. The home, by contrast, reflects in an extremely close way the spiritual and moral attitude of every society. Let us think, for example, of those nineteenth-century interiors that are represented as the setting of certain unforgettable novels. Well then, when we find them miraculously preserved or reconstructed, we immediately realize that their personality depends not only on the individual furniture pieces, which we might even find in better examples in some museum. Whoever dwells there creates in his room a kind of double, which manages to survive even for centuries. Cinema has addressed this theme several times, giving us hallucinatory and convincing realizations. The rooms in which a drama takes place, as they appear on the screen, are certainly not a creation of the prop room, but bear the trace of the author responsible for the film.

To be truly comprehensive, the history of furniture ought to take into account the complexity of the subject with which

it deals. A chair, for instance, does not have only an aesthetic function, just as it is not created solely to satisfy a practical need. Otherwise one would not understand why even in the most ancient ages, when furniture was an immovable patrimony, passed on from father to son for generations, homes were renewed from time to time. Nor is it true that the function of certain essential furnishings has always been the same, or that every age required identical household goods. The bed acquired in almost every century a wholly specific physiognomy and importance; the Greeks did not know the use of the table except for the service of food; certain types of furniture were reserved exclusively for particular classes or particular ranks. From the point of view of the environment, the historical panorama is extremely broader than from the point of view of style. Everything appears upset as by a stormy sea. Houses, eternally built and destroyed, are the Sisyphean toil of humanity. Almost no object can be considered of constant use.

And yet something perennial and inalienable does exist. But it lies in the interiority of the human soul. Among its various instincts (and not among the least) is that of creating for itself a shell, an artificial shell, in which to protect and foster its intimacy. There may be boundless love for the home and its furnishings, or an almost total aridity, but between these two extremes humankind, from the moment when it abandoned the nomadic state for the sedentary one, wrote one of its most sincere and moving pages. Woe betide those who enter without restraint, without humility, those rooms that millennia of civilization still present to us laden with affections and pathos; it would truly mean translating the life of families into inventories for bailiffs.

The origins

The furnished room, which is indispensable for our modern life, enters very late into human history. And even later, per-

haps only in the nineteenth century, does the taste spread for an environment that is a true and proper personal creation and represents a state of mind. If we were to draw the necessary social consequences from these facts, we could conclude that the individual and the family found it very difficult to create a solidarity of their own, detached from the rest of society, and to feel themselves as an individual nucleus.

The first great step was absolutely elementary, and consisted in giving to strictly personal objects a minimum of artistic elaboration. In this way the primitive imposed his personality upon the surrounding environment.

Many peoples still do not possess furnishings; they sleep on pallets. The bed, in its most elementary form, that is, the function of rest, is identified with the house itself. There exist huts raised on tall poles, which serve only for rest, like great aerial hammocks.

The home, moreover, among many African peoples, is itself conceived as a large utensil. An inquiry recently carried out in Cameroon by a group of young architects (*L'Habitat au Cameroun*, Paris 1952)¹, shows that the various functions of family life create particular architectural forms: around the hut of the chief or pater familias, in which the conjugal pallet is housed, the dwellings generally circular and with conical roofs of the wives and children, the granaries, the stables, the kitchens are arranged in a ring, almost like cellular organisms. Every construction, despite its simplicity, is a model of appropriateness and elegance precisely due to the spontaneous correspondence to its purposes. The pallets, at times skilfully built with interwoven reeds, the vessels, the other humble furnishings, assume a position that seems eternal and immutable. Even when they possess an artistic elaboration, they appear necessary. This is all the more surprising when one considers that indigenous constructions, free from constraints of land registry, can expand and differentiate as they please. The farmsteads, with their coordinated environments, satisfy extremely varied needs, ranging from the need to take shelter from wind and heat in closed and dark cells to the terrace where one may rest and smoke a pipe in front of the spectacle of the sunset.

Naturally, this order corresponds to a perfectly balanced state of civilization, which can be destroyed or impeded by sudden changes or by a pitiless climate. [...] The possession of the surrounding environment, so as to create around oneself a spatial envelope that may protect and comfort one's instinct of property, can be realized in various ways. When it is not concretely determined by architecture, it is created through the arrangement, even in the open air, of certain objects disposed according to a rational and precise will. [...]

If one observes the most rudimentary furniture pieces that have come down to us or are still made in Africa or Asia, one notes that they often preserve animal forms, even when

they are very simple². It is as though humankind found it very difficult to convince itself that it has the possibility of making inert objects that perform mechanical functions. The seat remains for a long time, with its animal legs that persist even after the Renaissance, a diligent and patient animal that acts as an intermediary between the seated person and the earth. At other times the stool, richly carved, represents human caryatids. A vivid sense of animism inspires and elevates all Black popular art.

It is therefore almost marvellous to find in Egypt, where the climate has faithfully preserved wooden objects dating back even to the second millennium B.C., a remarkable series of perfectly functional furniture pieces, only rarely inspired by animal themes. One of their qualities is the straightforwardness of their structures. Several types are widely diffused, some of which date partly back to prehistoric times, such as a folding chair with crossed supports in the form of shears, supporting a seat covered in leather; a stool and a low chair with quadrangular legs, joined by mortise and tenon with wooden pegs and nails, seats that resemble the simplest modern armchairs, with a backrest at times slightly curved to give better support to the back³. Numerous beds have also come down to us; they originally had a net of tightly interwoven rushes on four rather tall legs. A very beautiful example is elegantly curved almost like a cradle and has two headboards. There also exist chests and coffers, at times raised on slender quadrangular legs, painted on the sides in bright colours or with geometric patterns and at times inlaid. They open both at the top and at the sides and served to store precious objects. In the cases of greater wealth, furniture pieces have an extreme elaboration, as befits their destination. Carpentry also had to tackle problems of monumentality and of true artistic expression in funerary furnishings, especially in mortuary beds and mummy cases, which belong to the realm of art.

Rome and Greece

[...] The Greeks and the Romans did not have furniture of a very different type, yet they adapted it to their needs, whether of refined elegance or of sumptuous luxury, imprinting it with their temperament. Before describing some of these pieces, it ought to be observed that we are still tied to antiquity by extremely fine threads, far more tenacious than those which scholars and demagogues claim, from time to time, to awaken. Behind us we have a sum of customs, of life traditions that continue to characterize our civilization. We owe it perhaps to the Assyrians, the Egyptians, the Greeks and the Romans if we sleep on high beds instead of on mats, if we eat at tables and if, in our daily life, we have symbolically grown in height.

Greek wooden furniture has perished completely, but its representation remains to us in vases and sculptures, which

The text presented here is an excerpt from two articles published respectively in issues 1 and 2 of the journal «La casa. Quaderni di architettura e critica», directed by Pio Montesi between 1955 and 1960 (7 issues). The journal aimed to investigate the theme of dwelling in the postwar period, focusing on several central topics, among which: the meaning of dwelling, the theme of furnishing, the relationship between house and neighbourhood, and finally the questions related to building and construction processes. The two texts are among the first to outline a history of furnishing connected to daily uses, beginning with nomadic populations and extending up to the eighteenth century. This reflection was later expanded by Mario Praz in the entry *Mobilio*, published in the *Enciclopedia Universale dell'Arte* (Florence 1963, cols. 466-529), and by Ettore Camesasca in the book *Storia della casa* published by Rizzoli in 1968. Battisti's text is one of the first to highlight gender differentiations in the use of spaces and furnishings within the home.

1. The study gathers the principal housing typologies in the African territory of Cameroon and is characterized by a rich iconographic and illustrative apparatus, with drawings and sections of the dwellings. Cf. J. P. Béguin et al., *L'habitat au Cameroun: présentation des principaux types d'habitat. Essai d'adaptation aux problèmes actuels*, Office de la recherche scientifique outre-mer, Éditions de l'Union Française, Paris 1952.

2. A first reference to the relationship between forms derived from animals and furnishing is found in M. Praz, *La filosofia dell'arredamento*, Documento, Librario Editore, Rome 1945, pp. 21-115 [excerpted in this volume].

3. For further discussion see E. Camesasca, ed., *Storia della casa*, Rizzoli, Milan 1968, pp. 37-38.

can easily be dated. It turns out that they were limited to a few types, perfecting their forms. Since there is nothing new under the sun, some chairs of that time are similar, even in their execution, to those used in colonial America.

The Greek house was extremely simple, like the dwellings of the Mediterranean in general, where the greatest treasure was light and mild air. Interiors were almost empty; tables were not used, since objects such as mirrors, glasses, vessels, were hung on the walls. Cupboards were replaced by chests, in which clothing was also stored. The most widespread furniture piece was naturally the seat, of which three types can be identified: the *thronos*, the *diphros* and the *klismos*.

The throne was the seat *par excellence*; it was reserved for princes and the powerful, therefore for the gods and illustrious men. [...]

The humblest, most common and easily transportable seat was the *diphros*, a stool without a backrest, upon which Odysseus sat when he appeared as a beggar in Ithaca. Its elegance consisted above all in the juxtaposition of elements, often turned. There existed, as in Egypt, folding stools covered in soft leather with animal feet.

The most characteristic product of the ancient art of furniture was the *klismos*, a very comfortable armchair with a backrest, worthy of gods and heroes but above all suited to the beautiful female body, adorned with cushions. Less formal than the throne, more welcoming than the stool, it represented the invention of a middle class that loved comforts without obligations of etiquette. The result is remarkable for the elegance with which the curved legs accompany and follow the backrest, which opens as if to embrace.

Another indispensable piece of furniture in well-off homes was the bed, which also served as a sofa. The frame that supported a net of intertwined cords was generally of wood, decorated in the case of wealth with shells, metal inlays. [...]

A complement to the bed, as indeed to the throne, were stools, at times painted with geometric motifs.

Tables had a temporary use and appear always and only in scenes of banquets. Each diner had his own, light enough to be grasped as a shield in case of attack. One dined lying on the bed, except for women, who were excluded from such a position, unless they were courtesans. Dogs took care of eliminating the scraps under the tables. Tables generally had three legs, though they were quadrangular; there also existed round ones, resting on a central support, and this type, with time, became increasingly popular. [...]

Chests, as in Egypt, were of various forms and served to store clothes, coins, utensils. Some were raised on legs, with pitched lids.

The Romans reattached themselves to the Greek tradition, reworking the forms of Hellenism. They even made copies of Greek furniture, and introduced only a taste for exuberant ornamentation. Thrones, *cathedrae*, *sellae* – stools, at times folding – were widespread. In Rome too the *cathedra*, with backrest, was considered for female use.

Extremely popular was the bed, with round legs, of which a magnificent example, poorly restored, is found in the Museo dei Conservatori in Rome. Upon it were thrown blankets and cushions of purple, embroidered in gold and silver.

Tables, rectangular or round in form, have legs in the shape of animals, caryatids, etc. The most typical, as found in Pompeii and Herculaneum, have two massive bases in stone, carved and ending at the sides in monsters, and a rectangular top in marble or wood. [...]

Byzantium and the High Middle Ages

The moral revolution brought about by Christianity did not diminish the love for fine domestic furnishings, for precious woods with refined varnishes, for the elegant workmanship of craftsmen of standing. In the new churches, tables, cathedrae, ambos of equal preciousness made their appearance. The figurative and written sources that allow us to reconstruct seats, beds and other domestic furniture show their perfect concordance with pagan types, save for a greater, decadent sensitivity in engraved or inlaid decorations. Wood above all, and then metal and ivory, were the most widely used materials. [...] Byzantium, while priding itself on being the continuator and heir of Rome, inevitably modified the styles it inherited, inspiring them with a new character. Over time it increasingly became a refuge, an *hortus conclusus*. Its rarefied atmosphere was dominated above all by the taste of the court. The furnishings that we manage to know from the sources seem always destined to the emperor, earthly or heavenly. The piece of furniture that predominates over all is the throne, followed by the comfortable seat with backrest and curved legs which the Greeks had invented. Woodwork refines the techniques of late Greece; in chairs, armchairs and divans the use of turning is asserted to a degree without precedent. The most typical feature of those interiors, which unfortunately we can no longer recreate even mentally, must have been the overabundance of fabrics, hangings, tapestries and rugs of oriental magnificence.

Even for the High Middle Ages our knowledge of interiors remains indirect. From the variety of ancient furniture it would seem that one passes to an extremely limited picture. Moreover, even the various differences of social status and of economic condition had been miserably reduced to a small oligarchy of powerful men, lay or religious, silhouetted against a panorama of poverty and human desert.

One furnishing above all stands out: the throne, the material symbol of sovereignty and transcendence. In the church it becomes the sign of episcopal power, and establishes a hierarchy, exalting some as «cathedrals». And in these must have been accumulated marvellous treasures, created by extremely refined craftsmen whom faith transformed into supreme artists, as we see in the surviving goldsmith's work. The Empire, equally, must have attracted to itself the most brilliant minds; but the people, if they did not know how to awaken, especially in the North, a local art of wood carving like that which still characterizes mountainous regions, must have been reduced to the bleakest poverty. [...]

But even in the courts, in the centuries between the fall of the empire and the Romanesque period, life cannot have been too comfortable. We have the inventory of the objects left in inheritance by Charlemagne: they are vessels, utensils in bronze, iron and other metals, weapons, clothes, curtains, bedspreads, felts, skins, carpets, harnesses, a great quantity of books, three tables in silver and one in gold, upon which are engraved the plan of Constantinople, of Rome and the map of the world. There is no mention of furniture. It is likely that these riches were heaped in a particular room of the palace. It is worth noting the insistence with which the bed linen is mentioned: to have a well-appointed bed, as already in antiquity, was the greatest delight of which a man could then enjoy. In the later centuries, when the use of the bed spread and it became possible for many to possess one, the bed would become the principal piece of furniture in the home, occupying, in a place of honour, the best room and becoming the centre of family life. [...]

All the other furniture pieces, by contrast, had the character of easy transportability. Tables were makeshift: they were prepared by placing long planks on trestles, mostly three-legged, and were covered in tapestries and fabric. The life of the lords unfolded in continual wanderings. Some doubt that the castles of the early Middle Ages possessed true furnishings, given the ease of pillage as soon as the lord had departed. The home of kings was the tent; we may imagine it from the later example of Charles V's tent, preserved in the Museo dell'Esercito in Madrid: of leather, spacious, containing a luxurious wooden bed and an iron-bound chest.

The chest, precisely because it responded to the need to safeguard goods in these conditions of provisionality, assumed a dignity never before seen. It gradually became heavier and more cumbersome, served as a seat, was transformed into a bench chest. Upon it the servant would sleep, at the foot of the masters' bed.

The Romanesque period marks the triumph of the initiative of individual regions. A society of national type was created, bound to its land by emotional and economic ties. Every

area had different styles and naturally a greater or lesser fertility, in relation to the availability of raw material – timber. The broadening of demand impoverishes techniques; furniture made of turned parts becomes rarer. Quadrangular legs are preferred, with wide, flat faces to receive rich geometric and naturalistic decorations; on the fronts of chests even figural scenes unfold. Decoration is insistent, gradually invades every free surface, arranged in pronounced rhythms. [...]

No longer the search for elegance as a mental category that sublimates matter and dematerializes the object, but a profound adherence to the formal vocation of the object. [...]

The variety of forms is extreme; chests may also stand on tall legs, with double-pitched lids. In the more popular forms, decoration is limited to simple geometric carvings, leaving much of the surface raw. The application of studs and iron reinforcements yields highly remarkable artistic results, inasmuch as it fully corresponds to the craftsmen's vocation for solidity, simplicity and constructive clarity.

In the courts, furniture must have been decorated more richly; a new source of wonder, from the twelfth century, were the large tapestries, still of religious subject.

The Gothic

Histories of Gothic furniture, though presenting some structural affinities with Romanesque pieces, stem from an almost opposite taste. Their aim is to offer a spectacle of elegance, even at the price of fragility; they no longer aspire to be eternal endowments of churches or palaces. Compared to the Romanesque style, which also allowed craftsmen lacking rigorous training in drawing to achieve excellent results, the Gothic imposes itself, almost abstractly, through a declared "class".

This is easily explained by its relationship with architecture. The pointed style is the work of specialized teams of architects who knew how to foresee buildings on paper before execution and possessed the prerogative of carrying out unheard-of technical feats. It is highly probable that they also oversaw the design of church furnishings. Choir stalls soon become enriched with sculpted relief decorations, growing extremely slender in their sharply pointed members. In domestic furnishings, the Gothic style begins to appear only in the fourteenth century, as a renewal of decorative vocabulary. [...]

The Gothic, however, inspired by a desire for boldness, ended up profoundly renewing the art of woodwork. In the first decades of the fifteenth century, painting represents interiors that are completely new. Furniture pieces are arranged so as to be reflected in one another; their light, perforated panels allow for long, peaceful contemplation. Structurally, the great invention is the transformation of the bench chest into the cupboard, with several tiers, several doors, articulated in a play of receding and projecting masses. The jewel of furnishing is

instead the casket, with painted sides or composed of ivory panels on which scenes from chivalric romances are depicted.

But before entering, through the magic mirror of Jan van Eyck, the intimate interiors that harbour the serene life of Antwerp merchants – the class that first gave impetus to the new furnishing style – let us return to our small cities, still surrounded by countryside. Very little remains in Italy of twelfth-thirteenth-century furniture of popular character, and it is difficult as well to understand, from the surviving houses, the life of their inhabitants. [...]

In the last quarter of the fourteenth century Sacchetti enables us to catalogue the objects necessary even for modest living: the cupboard had not yet replaced the chest in the rooms, but the kitchen was well supplied with graters, ladles, pans and fire chains; in the room the well-appointed bed displays itself, with blankets and pillows and, for convenience, a chamber pot within arm's reach. [...] The bed occupies much of the room; upon it, in a habit that would last for several more centuries and even among the highest classes, several people might sleep. It has at its side a bench chest or stands on a platform, and is accompanied at most by a very simple chair.

It is highly probable that such comfortable interiors, which demonstrate an intensification of home life, should be related to the spread of wall fireplaces, which allowed economical and effective heating. [...]

Italy became acquainted with the Gothic style late and largely modified it. Nonetheless, even in the field of furniture, it remained in step with European developments. There is, however, an abyss between the Nordic rooms, so intimate⁴, and ours, where, up to the Renaissance, one can speak more of neatness and simplicity than of intimacy. Here too, if one wished, one could deduce a fundamental difference in the very spirit of the family. Among us, the individual manages to find his isolation in the cell, that is, in the ancient study⁵, whose tradition has never been interrupted. Hadrian had one built for himself on an artificial islet, connected by movable bridges to the libraries of his villa at Tivoli. But the evangelists and saints seated at their desks in the codices of the entire Middle Ages also enjoy an equally contrived peace. The open book on the lectern must be the mirror of the soul. Nothing perhaps represents the fascination of meditation as much as *St Jerome* by Antonello da Messina in the National Gallery in London. Everything breathes silence, even if birds fly beyond the mullioned window. From the great hall in the background, divided in two by a colonnade, the now-tamed lion advances, without the peacock in the foreground, watchful, needing to fear its closeness. The glazed window to the left, opening onto the distant city, lets in a calm and mild light. Jerome is still not satisfied with the great emptiness and has built for himself a

kind of partition, with shelves on which several volumes rest open at their essential passages, next to the pen and inkwell. At the saint's feet, two vases bring rustic fragrance into the enclosed space. The saint may meditate attentively at his desk; his microcosm, carved within the immense Gothic halls of the monastery, his peace, are now secured for eternity.

To rediscover the same sense of silence – or rather of distant music – in rooms where a private family lives, we must move back to the North. It will be the home of the Arnolfini. The woman, beside the great red bed, leans ecstatically upon her husband, who seems to assure the future child of an equally eternal fidelity of affection. The light that ripens an apple on the windowsill does not manage to extinguish the glow of a candle, which contributes to gilding the great bronze chandelier, edged like embroidery. More modest is the room where the Baptist is born in the *Très belles Heures* of the Duke of Berry. Here the neighbours bustle to care for the newborn, to restrain a child, to prepare potions for the woman in childbed. In the background a door opens through which Zacharias can be seen tranquilly reading his breviary. The furniture is rustic; the chest, which opens to reveal neatly folded linens, has no decoration; the small table at the centre, of a very rare form, lends itself a little to every use. Next to the spindle, an empty triangular stool awaits the return to work. Many objects are scattered here and there, and two cats as well; yet the intimacy of the room remains equally miraculous. Praz has written splendid pages on this miniature; he says that its *Stimmung* is determined by the sense of the apartment, given by the door open onto the other rooms and by the gentle lights⁶. And yet this is not enough to explain the tenderness of the two representations. There is moreover a faintly erotic sense in the two scenes: whether it be the advanced maternity or the birth of the Precursor, the true protagonist of the two interiors is the great curtained bed, within which the woman may be not only housewife-mother but finally lover. In exchange, she leaves her imponderable mark on all things.

Florentine Quattrocento

It is generally stated that furniture depends on architecture, that it is, in short, an imitation of it in miniature. This is only true in a certain sense and in certain periods. Nevertheless, a relationship between the form of individual furnishings and the contemporary architectural civilization does exist. An artefact such as a chest of drawers or a bench chest has to be built, and every manufactured object which acquires a more elaborate form requires a complex process, carried out even through various intermediaries. One can speak, in short, of a technique of execution, which implies at its origin a guiding design. If one compares architectural plans of different cen-

turies one immediately observes how much their conception varies. They presuppose a living tradition which they intend to regulate and direct.

The passage, both in architecture and in the minor arts, from the Gothic to the early Renaissance cannot be explained solely by a transformation of taste. It is a true technical revolution, which has its origins in a new conception of design, so to speak, industrial. Argan's observations on Brunelleschi are important: the artist's aim would have been to bring out the symmetry and proportion of the parts, aiming to obtain the greatest clarity of structures⁷. Hence the new value assigned to technique, understood no longer as a manual process but as a rational method. A picturesque world is replaced by a geometric microcosm. [...]

In reality, purely architectonic interiors were perhaps never realized in domestic building. Yet the evolution of taste, without the restraint of love for magnificence, would have led to dramatically modern results: architects, that is, scientists, dominated Florence, then Tuscany and Italy. Leon Battista Alberti could write around 1485: «These cities we saw, when we were children, made all of wood, which now have been made all in marble!»⁸. In woodwork, humanist rules meant a return to the Romanesque tradition, renewed, however, by a rigorous geometric sense. A rigid coordination of parts is established in furniture as well, a sharper and sharper subdivision between structural elements and panels, which would progressively lead, before the decorative efflorescence or independently of it, to a projection of functions onto the surface. [...]

The statutes of the carpenters' guild in Florence imposed strict rules, above all to guarantee the quality of workmanship and of the wood used. There also existed sumptuary laws, at least at the end of the fourteenth century. In 1373, for instance, it was ordered that «whoever makes or buys a bedstead, a chest, a bench chest and a little bedstead whose total value exceeds 25 gold florins must pay the communal bursar 15 gold florins for each of the furniture pieces purchased». The law was later abrogated. It is important, however, because it lists the average, normal furnishing of a home: the *lettuccio* could be a small divan kept also under the bed and used during the siesta. The quality of the furniture is also approximately indicated: the poorest pieces, poorly cut and roughly nailed together, called «wild», were the prerogative of the poor and of peasants. Normal furniture was very simple, made with smooth boards, without ornament but excellently crafted. Luxury furniture was called «showy», and for it 5 soldi had to be paid to the consuls of the guild. The lack of furniture that can be dated with close approximation, of furnished interiors, of studies conducted with a sufficiently broad view of the problem prevents us from following chronologically the evolution

of taste and private well-being. Nor can one specify in which years (but from bench chests it would seem towards 1440-50) the Gothic begins to be supplanted. It is, however, legitimate to affirm that only at the end of the century did interiors acquire a character of straightforwardness and simplicity. For many decades, furnishing continued to create suggestive and sensual interiors, effacing the clarity of masonry. We imagine typical fifteenth-century rooms as bare and stripped, and yet full of a special poetry – of a «rare and cerebral exquisiteness», as Praz wrote – like those described or illustrated in *Hypnerotomachia Polyphili* by Francesco Colonna⁹. But they are a revision, and moreover a northern one, of a culture in the process of renewal. They express a vocation for simplicity perhaps attained only by rustic interiors in the sixteenth century. [...]

Schiaparelli, on the basis of long archival research, has established the real conditions of the Florentine home¹⁰. Almost all the walls were decorated, even in the latrines, with geometric ornament and freehand motifs, isolated figures and even stories. Famous are the series of illustrious men and women, a theme beloved throughout almost all of Italy. Windows with glass panes were few; mostly there were *impannate*, that is, frames of transparent fabric. Floors were in brick, later in glazed or enamelled tiles. Wooden ceilings, while retaining their natural colour, were enriched with painted decoration. The walls were panelled in the lower part, at least to a height of 50-60 centimetres, panels that also served as backrests for certain furnishings (little couches, benches, chests). These wainscots over time became very sumptuous, with complex mouldings, inlays, and even narrative paintings. [...]

A characteristic feature of the humanist interior, and of distant origin, were painted furniture pieces, at times entirely so and even by famous painters. Others (such as the headboards of matrimonial beds) had inset mythological scenes that are among the jewels of painting of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. The most typical and best known are the celebrated nuptial chests, which actually gave rise to a pictorial school. [...]

Sought after and contested by collectors, exhibited in the most important museums in the world, these chests demonstrate how complex the relations among the various arts are. Painting and cabinetmaking come together in an inseparable whole, which shows the harmony between artists and craftsmen. [...]

Moreover, furniture is among the first to bear the backlash of the archaeological discoveries that took place in Rome, especially under the pontificate of Leo X: bench chests became large carved sarcophagi, cupboards were articulated according to the classical architectural orders, their fronts wished to be reconstructions of ancient buildings. Where, as

4. On the history of intimacy in the home see W. Rybczynski, *Home. A Short History of an Idea*, Penguin Books, New York 1986.

5. «The term *studiolo* generally presents a double meaning. On the one hand, it is used already in the Gothic period to indicate, within the aristocratic palace and the bourgeois home, a space clearly derived from the monastic cell, whose primary function is that of a place for study and, beginning with the Renaissance, for the keeping of collections; on the other hand, it designates the actual piece of furniture used for writing and reading», I. Forino, *L'interno nell'interno. Una fenomenologia dell'arredamento*, Alinea, Florence 2001, pp. 21-22 [transl. by the editor].

6. The author refers to the German term *Stimmung*, literally meaning «atmosphere», with which Mario Praz describes the sentiment discernible in Nordic interiors, of the home as mirror of the soul. The Dutch context constitutes a paradigmatic example of a culture that enacted a sharp separation between public space and the private sphere, attributing to the latter a dense symbolic charge. This domestic sphere was defined not so much by the material richness of the furnishings as by the capacity of these environments to evoke an atmospheric quality, a deep intimacy that transcends their physicality.

7. Cf. G.C. Argan, ed., *Brunelleschi*, Mondadori, Milan 1955.

8. Cf. L.B. Alberti, *De re Aedificatoria*, book VIII, chapter V.

9. A well-known Renaissance allegorical novel whose literal meaning is «The Strife of Love in a Dream», richly illustrated. Cf. F. Colonna, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili, ubi humana omnia non nisi somnium esse docet. Atque obiter plurima scitu sane quam digna commemorat*, in aedibus Aldi Manutii, Venice 1499.

10. Here the reference is to the well-known publication by A. Schiaparelli, *La Casa fiorentina e i suoi arredi nei secoli XIV e XV*, Casa Editrice G.C. Sansoni, Florence 1908, anastatic reprint Casa Editrice Le Lettere, Florence 1983, 2 vols.

in Florence, the constructive tradition of the early Renaissance remained strong despite the desire for magnificence and decorative richness, there were not only returns to a rigour and simplicity that were almost archaic, with Michelangelo, with Vasari, etc., but even in later centuries, during the Baroque and Rococo, an extraordinary, perhaps excessive composure reigned. In the North and beyond the Alps, where the Renaissance appears above all as an inventor of ornamental formulas and as a splendid and imaginative reconstructor of antiquity, architecture yields to sculpture and carving. Furnishings, disturbed by subterranean Gothic anxieties, become excessive and abnormal. [...] Excessive fantasy loses all bite.

Renaissance furniture in Europe, the passage to the Baroque

Degeneration in a decorative sense was inevitable and is easily explained by social reasons, as well as by the taste for collecting, for worldly and courtly life, by the need to transform one's wealth into stable goods. A well-furnished house gave enormous prestige and replaced the expenses that industrialists and politicians incur today for publicity. It would therefore be a mistake to interpret the development of furnishing from the fifteenth century to the Baroque solely from a stylistic point of view. The Renaissance invented new ways of life, created necessities and spiritual needs, and also produced the furnishings necessary to satisfy them. Tables became permanent, with thick legs. Various forms of small tables existed, for writing, for meals, with feet in the form of vases, legs, animal heads, dolphins, chimeras.

For sitting, benches and pews were abandoned in favour of easily transportable chairs, armchairs, the throne as symbol of authority and thus reserved for the paterfamilias or for the highest dignitary.

The bed ceases to have steps and to be tied to bench chests; it has headboards that then give rise to rich, carved columns, later supporting a canopy. Cupboards, mostly divided into two superimposed parts, assume very different forms, always in imitation of architecture. There are bookcases and shelves around the walls of small rooms. For food, the sideboard (*credenza*), already mentioned in 1341, is created; it soon becomes one of the most elegant and sophisticated pieces of furniture. An invention that met with enormous success in Italy and abroad was that of the *studiolo* or cabinet, composed of two sections. [...]

In all countries, the Renaissance style directly succeeds the Gothic without transition and is thus characterized by great decorative richness. Furthermore, some of the ancient customs remain, such as the state bed. Often the wife had by law the right to the richest bed in the house. Furniture is mostly designed by painters, also imported from Italy. The assimilation of Mannerist forms was, however, very rapid, and after

decorative excesses there was generally a return to simplicity and even to local forms. The Baroque, which arose over an already extremely differentiated panorama, thus assumed very different, if not downright antithetical, characters.

One of the most violent contrasts, analogous to what occurs in painting, is seen between Dutch and Italian furnishing. Dutch interiors hold for us the same fascination as Flemish interiors of the early fifteenth century. They mysteriously preserve a sense of intimacy even while assimilating Italian forms. Not only this: the passage from Gothic to Renaissance, in a wholly unexpected way, accentuates their dignity, giving at most a touch of melancholy. The sumptuous decorations of Baroque Rome, which conceive life above all as outward magnificence, were not accompanied – except very late – by a concern for the well-being of family life. In the great Italian palaces, the entire *piano nobile* was devoted to reception apartments. In Dutch homes, the dwelling is articulated into rooms each with its own dignity, without hierarchy; the lady who plays may see the maid sweeping in the corridor; the bed, like the armchair, like the most ordinary furnishings, does not seek gilding (only the frames of paintings have it); the greatest treasure of the home is the sun that enters through the windows and at times, for instance in E. De Witte's interiors, gives these extremely quiet and simple rooms a romantic, almost pathetic atmosphere. Rarely has the home been so comfortable, serene, enjoyable. Rome, by contrast, and Italy, are noisy. [...]

True Baroque must have manifested itself in Rome, within the milieu of Bernini, and thence spread to all the other cities. Furniture (especially frames, tables, armchairs, consoles) presents curious affinities; as though, despite the mental fertility of the painters who designed them or of the rare outstanding craftsmen such as the Fantoni and the Brustolon, they were excessively bound to the same formulas. Moreover, they still harbour excessive pretensions; they want to possess artistic dignity at all costs, rival sculpture, even representing mythological scenes. [...]

It would be important to be able to compare the evolution of Italian interiors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with what occurred in France. But one fact is already clear: dwelling in Italy remained under the jurisdiction of men, who used it as an instrument of public life; in France, even at court, the predominance of women accentuated its characteristics of refinement and comfort. The relations between women and furnishing have so far been seen only in terms of fashion; from this point of view, everything would be reduced to curiosities of chronicles, preferably gallant. Thus in England the high, armless armchair would have been replaced by small chairs after the king, in 1613, forbade ladies in farthingales from entering the palace, having observed that such garments occupied all the space in the halls, preventing dancing. Women,

by contrast, are those who in advanced regimes organize domestic life; and if their creativity is free to express itself, they perfect it, renewing at once the home and its furnishings. According to Mrs. Putnam, already under Henry IV, the Marquise de Rambouillet¹¹ radically transformed the plan of her palace, placing the staircase at a corner of the building instead of at the centre. [...]

Though the exaltation of the heroine may perhaps be a little excessive, it is certain that French ladies were largely responsible for the metamorphosis of the *hôtel* into the modern apartment.

The Baroque and Rococo in France

Jokingly, one could say that the entire evolution of furnishing, especially in Paris, is characterized by the struggle of the woman – fragile, small, and sensitive to the cold – against the pomp of decoration, first Renaissance and then Baroque. Perhaps it was her intrigues, her battles and her victories that allowed us to live better¹².

Madame de Rambouillet, who among other things anticipated the Rococo by possessing enamelled buffets laden with Chinese porcelains, crystal urns, ebony-framed mirrors, gilded caskets, did not in reality do anything but accelerate a process already underway, whose best result was the clear separation of service areas from residential apartments.

Little by little, instead of the great rooms that served both for living and resting, smaller rooms were introduced for individual activities. Around 1640 the layout of an *hôtel* was as follows: a vestibule, an antechamber where meals were taken, a salon, a small sitting room, an alcove, and several cabinets for clothing and services. [...]

The reign of Louis XV is instead characterized by the desire for intimacy and comfort. The primary concern is that of heating the rooms: airtight windows are experimented with, methods for increasing fireplace draft are studied, and bathrooms become widespread. *Cabinets* flourish – small, welcoming, discreet rooms, with secret passages and service corridors¹³. Exoticism intensifies; Oriental, Indian and Chinese curiosities, lacquers and porcelains accumulate in every corner. Furniture becomes smaller, curved, swollen in form. Rococo, which reaches its peak in interior decoration, marks – like the Flamboyant Gothic – the triumph of fantasy, and witnesses, perhaps for the last time in the history of art and culture, a lively and enthusiastic collaboration among artists and artisans, architects, decorators, sculptors, carpenters, stucco workers, weavers. As always happens, economic reasons favoured its effervescent blossoming. Rococo, one could say, is the result of the absence of gold and marble; that is, the recognition that workmanship – not the material – makes any substance precious. [...]

Artisans and Individualism

It is always interesting to trace results back to their causes, but in this case it is particularly so. I owe to an article by Pierre Verlet (in *Le Meuble*, Paris 1941)¹⁴ the following information on the organization of French carpenters in the eighteenth century. Unfortunately, studies of this kind are still too rare, and without them it is certainly not possible to attempt a history of furniture.

Carpenters were gathered in the *Communauté des maîtres menuisiers-ébénistes*. They were subdivided into specializations, but the essential distinction was between carpenters and cabinetmakers; the latter produced all veneered furniture. In reality, no law prevented a carpenter from undertaking cabinetmaking work. But such was the mutual respect and the love for one's specialty that no example of boundary-crossing is known. There was instead intense collaboration: the *fauteuil à la reine* of Louis XV, from 1737, was made jointly by a carpenter and a cabinetmaker.

Carpenters were almost all French, and there existed true dynasties [...]. This is the reason for the large number of French furniture pieces that are signed, whereas in Italy, where similar customs did not prevail, they were very rare. [...]

The vitality of these artisans must have been exceptional. We have proof of this in England, with Thomas Chippendale, whose name is unfortunately usurped for ignoble armchairs and sofas in fake Rococo. Around 1752 he became the owner of a large furniture workshop and in 1754 published a volume of prints, *The Gentleman and Cabinet Maker's Director*¹⁵. What is astonishing is the variety of his inspiration. He imitates Louis XV French forms, corrects them according to the Anglo-Saxon tradition, devises Chinese caprices, learns from American carpentry [...] how to construct solid and extremely simple structures which at times anticipate our office furniture, and served as examples for the Liberty style. In this way he responded to the most varied needs of his clients and encouraged them to attempt unusual furnishings.

Rococo, for that matter, represents the triumph of skill. Yet the gravest error would be to consider the century and the taste that gave us, among other things, some of the greatest theatrical and musical masterpieces, as an age of frivolity. Furniture and architecture allow us a more concrete and benevolent evaluation. In the eighteenth century France attained supremacy in Europe. It has been observed that in Italy – where Rococo certainly drew origin and continuous nourishment – it flourished above all in the regions most connected with European culture. [...] It is no accident that Rococo manifested itself especially in the most evolved cities. This becomes entirely clear when we consider the fierce polemics that accompanied its spread. The antithesis *rocaille*-Classicism was not only for-

11. Madame de Rambouillet is considered a key figure in the birth of intimate and aristocratic salons, precursors of Rococo taste. The *chambre bleue* becomes the symbol of an exclusive and sophisticated literary salon, arranged precisely in her bedroom and specifically in the *ruelle*, the space between the bed and the wall, transformed into a place for encounter and conversation. Cf. N. Aronson, *Madame de Rambouillet ou La magicienne de la chambre bleue*, Fayard, Paris 1988.

12. See subsequent studies on the role of women and their relationship with the home, the family, and society. Cf. J. Still, *The Enlightenment and Gender*, in M. Moriarty, J. Jennings, ed., *The Cambridge History of French Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2019, pp. 263-270.

13. Cf. M. Perrot, *Histoire de chambres*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 2009, pp. 37-51.

14. Cf. P. Verlet, *L'art du meuble à Paris au XVIII siècle*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1958.

15. Cf. T. Chippendale, *The Gentleman and Cabinet-maker's Director*, Thomas Chippendale, London 1754. [MB]

mal but social and political. Classical had to be state architecture, which represented the authority of the sovereign. Private individuals instead disrupted the regularity of urban planning with their caprices: in Turin there was even a private citizen who wished to decorate his palace more richly than the king.

The small sitting room for making music or conversing [...] clashed violently with the seriousness of affairs of state. A ceiling decorated with stuccoes and a wall with painted pastoral scenes were like a sponge wiping away the slate of courtly duties. Each person had his own small court, in Arcadia, equal among his equals. One may affirm that the more Rococo a city was, the more lively was its resistance to the sovereign's authority.

And when, in the second half of the eighteenth century and beyond, the cities of all Europe sacrificed stuccoes for columns and arches of marble and stone, the surviving or restored king succeeded in having severe settings built for the parade of his troops; yet he found the gilded windows and doors of the palaces closed in his face, into which neoclassical furniture entered – yes – but far gentler than the architecture; not pompous, but permeated with eighteenth-century elegance. Thus the house for the individual triumphed over raison d'état.

[Eugenio Battisti, *I mobili e la loro storia*, in «La casa. Quaderni di architettura e critica», no. 1, 1955, pp. 38-49; Id., *I mobili e la loro storia. Dal Quattrocento al Neoclassicismo*, in «La casa. Quaderni di architettura e critica», no. 2, 1956, pp. 36-50]

Giulio Carlo Argan

The Problem of Furnishing

1956

Furnishing represents, and there is no need to demonstrate it, the line of contact between architecture and the whole fan of the so-called applied or industrial arts. At a moment such as this, in which there is a tendency, on the one hand, to eliminate the traditional distinction between pure art (and therefore architecture) and applied art and, on the other, that between architecture and urban planning, so as to reduce the whole phenomenology of art to planning and design, the question of furnishing acquires a decisive importance as a typically, indisputably architectural question. And all the more does it acquire this importance insofar as modern architecture is an architecture, as it is said, of interior spaces, that is, an architecture that assumes as a spatial and formal principle the plan instead of the block, structurality instead of the elevation, the volume instead of the façade. It is appropriate to specify that, when one speaks of interior space, one is not alluding to the space circumscribed by walls in relation to the space that lies outside them, but to a general conception of space as «interiority» or *interiorità*¹. The thought of interior space excludes the thought of exterior space, and vice versa. This can be verified. The spatial conception of the Renaissance, which conditioned the forms of architecture up to the last century and to which the modern conception polemically opposes itself, is typically a conception from the outside: space is thought as nature, and the human being is distinguished from nature as the subject is from the object. In Brunelleschi's basilican constructions² the proportions of the naves reproduce the dimension of exterior space, that is, they are thought as «exterior» independently of the fact that they are found within the perimeter walls; the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore is the graphic and plastic demonstration of the metric identity posited between closed space and open space, between built space and natural space. One may even go so far as to affirm that the very theory of perspective and of proportions, which is born precisely with

Brunelleschi, develops in the architecture of the Renaissance and of the Baroque and is prolonged – though by now deprived of any constructive reason or interest – in the low eclecticism of the last century; it is, in the end, nothing other than the theory of the finite representation of infinite space, or of the adaptation and reduction of closed space to open space, of the interior to the exterior.

Conversely, modern architecture posits all space as interior, that is, no longer as nature to be contemplated, but as the dimension or environment of human living and acting. In fact, it recoils from the wall that isolates, closes, creates incommunicating compartments, from the block, from the mass set down in a space with which it can only share a boundary; it seeks in the plan a generatrix³ and no longer a spatial limit; and that generatrix develops, in a progressive and unlimited planning, from the dwelling unit to the group, to the whole of the city and the region. In proposing to be «functional» it does not intend merely to adhere to practical requirements, but to trace a line, as open and articulated as possible, for the development of human activity and functions. And since it assumes as fundamental character and attitude of modern man practical doing and no longer abstract and detached contemplation, space can no longer be thought as a scene or natural spectacle but, simply, as the dimension of action and of all the relations that human actions weave and tie together in their taking place: as the condition, at once determined and determining, of action, indeed of all possible human actions. What has definitively disappeared from the consciousness of modern man is the ancient thought that space is something preconstituted and immobile, almost the immutable architecture of the universe. Space is nothing other than practicability, usability, possibility of action and of relation. Just as it has no limits, it cannot have a center: every human act, and precisely by virtue of the actuality of its occurrence, is always at the center of space,

The excerpt presented here focuses on the relationship between furnishing and architecture, clearly including the former within the field of action of the latter. Argan sees in furnishing the possible redemption and appropriation of the human being in the definition of his own space to be inhabited.

1. The first formulation of the theory of the interiority of space was treated by the author in the essay *A proposito di spazio interno*, published in the journal «Metron» in 1948. The dimension of human action becomes an element shaping space, which is understood not as a limit but as an open and articulated entity in the unfolding of human activities. Cf. G.C. Argan, *A proposito di spazio interno*, in «Metron», no. 28, 1948, pp. 20-21 [excerpted in this volume]. The essay was republished in G.C. Argan, *Progetto e destino*, Il Saggiatore, Milan 1965, pp. 91-95 and Id., *A proposito di spazio interno*, in «L'architettura. Cronache e storia», no. 477, 1995, p. 532.

2. Cf. G.C. Argan, *Brunelleschi*, Mondadori, Milan 1955.

3. These reflections arise from the bond with Bruno Zevi. In 1945 Argan published a critical review of Zevi's book *Architettura Organica* and in 1947 the essay *Introduzione a Wright*; both texts are important occasions for the development of certain reflections on the continuity of space: «Yet the plan is still the only means by which we can judge the entire organism of an architectural work», B. Zevi, *Saper vedere l'architettura*, Einaudi, Torino 1948, p. 34 [transl. by the editor].

that is, at the center of a system or fabric of human relations which, in the final analysis, is nothing other than human society as a whole, in its infinite complexity, in the movement of its continuous becoming. That space which we call interior is such precisely in relation to the human being, who indeed thinks it as the dimension of his own existence or the region open to the realization of his own possibilities, but without ever forgetting that that existence and those possibilities of action are always realized within the ambit of society, nor can they ever transcend it. Hence one may say that interior space is the space of society, just as exterior space was the space of nature.

On the terrain of sociology, this conception of space expresses the need, which each individual feels, to pose and resolve in his own acts the problem of the relationship between himself and society as a whole; and this same problem modern architecture, which was born of profound social interests and refuses to separate them from its own aesthetic interests, confronts and resolves precisely in furnishing: which must therefore be considered, in full right, architecture.

It is easy to observe how, in the historical development of modern architecture, furnishing tends more and more to identify and integrate itself with the constructive fact. Not only is the piece of furniture today, more than in any other age, the product of the architect's design, but architecture itself, just as on the one hand it tends to cross over into urban planning, on the other tends to find its conclusion in furnishing. Open, articulated, flexible plans remove from the walls the traditional function of closure, of fixed spatial limit, and give them a quality and a function of «furnishing element»; the distribution of openings, no longer conditioned by the laws of symmetry of the façades but by the practical necessities of aeration and lighting of interiors, confers on them a compositional function with respect to the environment; and the width of those openings, framing the landscape, gives to the natural aspects themselves a character of «interior» and a furnishing function; in the spatial continuity of the floor, even elements that are clearly constructive become elements of interior architecture, of furnishing. The very functional premise, necessarily leading to an extreme specification and qualification of the individual spatial units of the building, ends by conditioning them to that closer and more immediate instrumentality of theirs, which is expressed precisely through the elements of furnishing and household equipment. Everything in modern architecture tends to become «furnishing element»; and the «furnishings» that constitute furnishing can truly be considered the most sensitive and delicate formal terminations of architecture. And precisely because this is no longer, in any way, naturalistic, it is led to imply and reproduce in the rigor of its constructive forms that phenomenal variability which is proper to nature: planning, as a formal generatrix a priori, contains in nuce all

possible formal determinations. It is a principle of order or of structure which, if valid, cannot fail to determine and verify itself in the most diverse materials (wood, fabric, ceramic), just as it determines and verifies itself in adherence to the most varied individual requirements. One may even go so far as to affirm that modern architecture, after having confronted in urban planning the great quantitative problems of society in its groups and in its totality, then recovers in furnishing the «qualitative» values, that is, the sensitive awareness of the presence and function, but above all of the ineliminable value of the individual in society. More precisely: within the wide circle of planning and design, modern architecture resolves in furnishing the problem of individual existence just as it resolves in urban planning the problem of collective existence. It is useless to explain how every social problem must be considered ill posed that considers the individual independently of the collectivity or the collectivity independently of the individual.

At this point the question arises: is it possible to think of a total conditioning – albeit in the name of clear rational principles – of life and of social custom, of an elimination of all personal initiative on the part of «users» in a field such as that of furnishing, which concerns the conditions of the private, indeed intimate life of individuals? In the future, will we have to resign ourselves to living in «standardized» homes down to the smallest details, according to a type of «comfort» which the architect has minutely studied and prearranged? Evidently, modern architecture proposes nothing of the kind; indeed, much more than the architecture of the past, it stimulates collaboration, the intervention of the user. But in order not to re-establish between the «technician» and the «user» anything other than a necessary collaboration, it is necessary to clarify what the nature of individual initiative currently is in the field of furnishing.

The person whom we call the «user» intervenes in determining the configuration of the environment of his own dwelling in two ways: through the choice of types and through the distribution of objects. It is clear that, through choice, he also influences production, provoking a greater demand and therefore a greater production of certain types in preference to others. It is also clear that, in studying the furnishing of his own dwelling, each of us obeys an impulse of an aesthetic nature: one wants the dwelling to be comfortable and practical, but one also wants it to be «beautiful». It is easy to see that this aesthetic interest is inseparable from a social interest: one wants the house, in its appearance, to express the social condition that one has achieved through one's work. But how many times is the environment that we believe we have configured not a debased and disfigured copy of the tastes and stereotypes of others or of classes that seem prestigious to us and toward which we are driven by a futile, clumsy anxiety of

imitation? How many times, in furnishing, do we bow servilely instead of expressing our authentic selves, toward more fortunate social groups; and how many times, instead of creating around us an environment in keeping with our most authentic needs, do we seek to transform our house into an emblem of social rank, and not even our own? How many times, instead of expressing what we are, do we express what we would like to be and therefore are not?

The history of furnishing can be, also from this inevitable sociological point of view, highly instructive. Leaving aside rustic furniture, which very often preserves the agile and bare beauty of the utensil and of «spontaneous» architecture, almost all furniture production appears inspired by the furnishing of the ruling classes or, indeed, of the courts: even today the most heinous monstrosities in furniture production are perpetrated in the name of the various Louis, kings of France. (Nor did this happen by chance or by virtue of the ingenuous ambition of «users»: the various repertoires of ornamental motifs engraved by the «peintres du roi» demonstrate that imitation of the sovereign or of the aristocracy was encouraged as a precious factor of social «discipline», that is to say of passive subjection.) But the history of furnishing also demonstrates how rapid and inevitable the corruption of «style» is. As soon as a new type of furniture has been produced by a high-quality craftsman, according to an original design, with the use of rare materials, with great refinement of execution, it is immediately reproduced in thousands of specimens, increasingly inferior, in vulgar materials badly disguised, without any grace of design or care of workmanship. When industrial production supplants craftsmanship, corruption becomes precipitous: in the last century, fetishism for historical styles (although only a vague memory of the ancient forms is preserved) gives rise not only to ridiculous counterfeits, but to those frightful, grotesque, base contaminations that populate the sitting rooms and dining rooms of the upper and middle bourgeoisie. And note: false «modern» is made with the same ignorance and arrogance with which false «antique» is made, «Twentieth-Century style» just like «Louis XV», so that the famous freedom of the user is in reality reduced to the freedom to choose between two types of false, equally brazen.

It will be said that this perversion of the public's taste, this degeneration of current production, has no relation with our problem. But this is not true: nine-tenths of people still draw on current production, encouraging its decline; almost all the money that could support good artistic production instead supports mediocre commercial production. Finally: the social and aesthetic problem of furnishing is precisely the problem of current production, of average and minimal «levels». The sociological aspect of the question, which we have just indicated, cannot be neglected: when the public rejects the idea

of a strictly instrumental, utilitarian, standardized furnishing, it is, up to a certain point, right. Furnishing cannot be as uniform as a uniform: each person has the right to choose his own furnishing and to express in it something of himself, just as he has the right to choose his own clothing and to express in it certain traits of his personality. But it is necessary that the public demand and that producers offer habitable environments and not village theatre sets, clothes and not disguises, ridiculous carnival masks.

We have affirmed that furnishing is, in full right, architecture: as such, it begins with the plan of the building, with the first schematic determination of habitable space. There is no boundary beyond which the architect ceases to be such and is transformed into an interior decorator; when an architect designs a type of wardrobe or armchair he is, in the strictest sense of the term, doing architecture. But how is his design, which rightly seeks to extend itself as far as the determination of the most direct conditions of life, reconciled with the legitimate intervention, the necessary initiative of the user? Is it a matter of a compromise or of a necessary and positive relationship? The answer is apparently easy: the freedom of choice of the user is in no way diminished by the fact that the types of current production are designed by an architect or a designer instead of by some tradesman. It is certainly probable that the counterfeits and contaminations of historical styles will gradually disappear from the market and that the factories of Cascina or Brianza will devote themselves to producing (as in fact already happens) types with more sober and correct lines; but this natural updating of production will certainly not be what gives a logical solution to the aesthetic and social problem of furnishing.

Modern architecture begins, as is known, from precise social assumptions: its objective is not elite production, but the achievement of values of quality, and of aesthetic quality, in quantitative or serial production. It tends to realize its formal values no longer in the palace or the villa, but in the «neighborhood», no longer in the single unit but in the housing complex. When, however, it proposes to realize economical or working-class building types, it does not at all intend to confine its interest to a particular class that is more in need, to a depressed sector of society. The interest of modern architecture is always directed toward society as a whole and toward its productive and progressive function: within which, moreover, it is in the working class that the most authentic protagonist is revived. One often hears talk of a «minimum of existence»⁴ as the basic condition of the problem of dwelling and furnishing; but it must be noted that only through a tendentious and interested interpretation can the «minimum of existence» advocated by modern architects be presented as a narrowly economic program intended to resolve the housing question

4. Here the author introduces a reflection and also a possible critical implication regarding the principle of the *Existenzminimum* promoted within the II Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), held in Frankfurt am Main in 1929 with the title *Wohnung für das Existenzminimum*, where the theme of dwelling for the minimum vital level, that is, for the minimum level of existence, was addressed in a programmatic way. In a Europe still marked by social imbalances and by the consequences of the post-war crisis, the congress focused on identifying housing solutions appropriate to the weakest strata of the population, placing at the centre of the architectural debate the definition of a minimum habitable standard in terms of air, light, space and hygienic conditions. The concept of «minimum existence» – understood as a biological but also social and cultural threshold – thus becomes a field of collective experimentation and reflection, aimed at reconciling economic requirements, functional efficiency and the dignity of dwelling. Cf. W. Gropius, *Die soziologischen Grundlagen der Minimalwohnung*, in *Die Wohnung für das Existenzminimum*, Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1930.

with the least means. The «minimum of existence» certainly has a quantitative aspect, but it also has a qualitative one: it implies the thought that, since the community has absorbed many functions that were once carried out within the family nucleus, the function of dwelling is necessarily reduced to a «minimum», as that which responds to the particular needs of the individual and his family nucleus. «Minimum of existence» does not mean that, within the social ambit, particular classes must necessarily live according to a «minimum» standard and nor that such a level must, for reasons of humanity, be guaranteed even to the most destitute: it means that, in the present structure of society, the strictly «private» functions of dwelling represent, quantitatively, a minimum in relation to the maximum of community or collective functions. In other words, the social interest of modern architects is not directed toward a particular class judged to be in need of assistance (which would already imply recognition of a defect of structure), but toward an ideal, classless society in which each individual has the same degree of dignity and of economic independence and is qualified and classified only in relation to the function he fulfills within the whole group.

If the standard had a purely economic justification, of lower-cost production, there would be no sense in attributing to it the value of an aesthetic condition; nor would one ever succeed in explaining how it is that the object produced in series, according to the principle of the standard and the process of design, attains an aesthetic level far superior to that of the so-called «art of luxury». [...]

Let us now return, for a moment, to the taste of the public or of the user, to that taste which we have seen so often diverted and corrupted by the mania of imitating the outward forms of the life of other classes that, consciously or not, are considered more elevated or privileged. We have, as we could not but do, indicated the falsity of this attitude; but we could not fail to consider equally inhuman and immoral the discourse of one who exhorted the worker or the minor employee not to wish to appear more than he is, to content himself with reflecting in furnishing or clothing nothing other than his own rank, as though a diversity, even external, of life and of social custom should indeed correspond to different classes. In the ambition to adapt oneself to the modes of life of classes believed to be more elevated there is certainly a confused need to escape from the limits of one's own class; it is a mistaken ambition, but the error lies in not understanding that one does not escape that limit by aspiring to pass into a higher class, but by surpassing every class limit in the thought of a society that is no longer hierarchical but homogeneous and functional. Now, in suggesting a standard, the architect or designer suggests a form that does not respond to the needs of a certain class, but of a classless society: and the strata that do not wish to ac-

cept that standard will pay for that false pride by purchasing, at certainly higher prices, objects of certainly inferior quality. It is not denied that in the forms of the standard there is also expressed a social myth, the myth of a harmonious society, engaged in a function, immune from contradictions; but why should we deny that the furnishing of the house is an expression of social myths? Perhaps industrial design does not also arise from the need to give the object a mythical sense, a value of beauty that transcends its mere instrumentality?

But here is the problem: what is the social myth that is expressed in the environment of the traditional bourgeois home; what is the social myth that is expressed in the environment of the modern home? The latter, many say, lacks intimacy; it is not sufficiently welcoming, restful, secluded; it also regulates leisure and rest as just so many functions to be performed according to a rational method. This is not contested, but whence is born that taste for seclusion, for intimacy, at times for a slovenly neglect, if not precisely from the most negative attitude of bourgeois morality: that which thinks life as a struggle, and a struggle aimed at improving one's condition, at acquiring a condition of freedom which, in the final analysis, consists in oppressing rather than being oppressed? In the home, a man rests after the struggle; he regains his benevolent human face after having shown the world his ferocious face; he deludes himself with a victory he has not achieved; he compensates for the humiliations he has suffered. And that house, with its futilely ambitious furnishing, is precisely the symbol of his repressed aspirations, of his inhibitions, of his frustrations: let us say it outright, even at the risk of being accused of moralism, of his vices and not of his social virtues.

But it is enough that society is no longer thought as an enemy, that intimacy is no longer a refuge from the offense of the stronger, that daily work is no longer a condemnation, that life is no longer a struggle, and the panorama of individual existence will also suddenly change. Already in its structure, the house will cease to be a refuge or a stronghold⁵, it will connect with a «neighborhood» that will gradually widen until it encompasses society as a whole; and the individual accent that will be brought into the forms of the immediate landscape of our life will be a note in tune with the concert of human voices: it will finally be a way of opening oneself and not of closing oneself, of participating and not of segregating oneself.

But, it will still be asked, what will become of individual initiative if furnishing too will fall within the cycle of building planning, and homes will be born already largely furnished, and a stronger standardization of furnishing elements will restrict the possibility of choice on the part of users? Let us begin by observing that greater standardization will not reduce the series of forms, but only the series (artificial because resulting from progressive and increasingly arbitrary counter-

feits) of historical «styles». Modern architecture, in rejecting closed formal systems, also rejects any predetermined formal thematic: the time is past in which, by legitimate reaction to the «modern baroque» of Art Nouveau, modern or «rational» architecture meant rigidly geometrical forms, smooth planes, sharp edges, squared profiles. Today architecture is rather a method than a formal system, and it takes shape much more in the process of elaboration than in the designation of formal schemes; and in its very adherence to function it finds the motive for a continuous flexing and varying of form, outside of any preconstituted stylistics. Not only this, but precisely because the object no longer obeys fixed laws of symmetry and of composition, that is, it is no longer thought in function of a determined point of view, its formal quality remains unchanged in whatever perspective, under whatever visual angle; it even manages to escape a purely visual appreciation, to realize its aesthetic value in the pleasure of contact, of use, of appropriate and effective employment. Now, one of the great conquests of modern art is precisely this: that form is not strictly bound to a constant phenomenal semblance, indeed it remains unchanged while external appearances change (a typical case, but valid for all artistic forms, is the return of sculpture to the open air, so that form may modulate itself, while conserving its own quality intact, according to the continuous changing of environmental conditions). Well then, architectural furnishing, that which we say represents the most delicate and sensitive «termination» of the constructive fact, is the element that determines the variability, the possibility of an unlimited modulation of the constructive form; its capacity to connect to a space that can no longer be thought except phenomenically, as a continuous variation of colors and light. This possibility of flexion or variation of effects is already implicit in the design, in the internal structurality of furnishing: which therefore always aims to create the most «natural» conditions of existence. Nor does architecture define in furnishing only the conditions, including psychological ones, of a perfect habitability; but the «furnishing element» itself is conceived as an inhabitant, a friendly personage with whom a relationship of custom or familiarity is established: it seeks in short that the form of the object be as conformable as possible not to an abstract and generic «style», but to what we might call the spatial modulus of the environment. Thus it truly becomes the mobile and variable element of architecture, so that it can be differently arranged and combined with other objects without that modulus, the sensible expression of the method of design, being substantially altered. The aim of the modern architect is in fact to attain a structure that does not condition in a univocal and constant way the experience of daily life, but constitutes, so to speak, its visual column, framing and clarifying it in all its acts and moments. It is no accident that one of the themes

most studied by modern architects in the field of furnishing is the piece of furniture that can be dismantled and reassembled according to the needs and taste of the user, without its basic compositional modulus ever being modifiable. It is enough to recall how traditional or «period» furnishing invariably imposes a symmetrical layout, from which modern furnishing instead recoils, to understand how many greater possibilities are now open to the initiative of the user and to his indirect, continuous collaboration with the artist designer.

It is also easy to see how modern architectural furnishing stimulates, rather than mortifies, the possibility of «personalizing» environments. A typical case is afforded by the use of color: a field in which individual initiative generally proves to be very timid, preferring, for fear of making mistakes, neutral tones, moderate juxtapositions, gradations and shadings within the same hue. Muted or weakly contrasted colors are indeed a constant characteristic of traditional bourgeois environments, almost a discreet sign of distinction. It is only the artist who, thanks to his more secure and deep experience of visual values, can risk applying large fields of pure colors, with strong contrasts, but with such rightness of relationships as to qualify space visually, distancing a wall that is too close, suggesting passages that break the monotony of barriers and limits, opening up perspectives, bringing into the closed environment the intensity and the mobility of effects of the open air. The lady who, at first, will have judged those frank tones too «demanding» or unpleasantly noisy will very soon realize that each new color note, inserted into that chromatic space, will at once find the right tone; and that at each new insertion of color, however occasional, the space of her home will seem to decompose only to recompose itself immediately in a new and unexpected perspective. The fact is that the architect has not prepared a «wallpaper», but simply a chromatic structure: a «decor vide», if one will, but always awaiting animation through the entrance and action of the human person. He has been concerned with creating not fixed conditions, but a formal principle, a scheme of relations that can develop infinitely and, just like the aspects of external nature, change sign and value with the changing of circumstances and even of the states of mind of the person who, in that environment, lives the simple and yet most civilized vicissitude of his own daily life. Nor has he done, in substance, anything other than destroy the visible semblances of prejudices, conventions, social hypocrisies, so that that individual life might freely and fully realize itself.

The same may be said of the forms of the furnishings, of household equipment. We have said that the standard is not only an economic, but also a formal requirement: it is now necessary to clarify in what the aesthetic quality of the standard consists. It is obvious that this cannot be understood as a perfect, ne varietur form, because the very principle of design,

5. Numerous scholars have read and interpreted the house of the nascent bourgeoisie from the mid-nineteenth century onwards as a search for a refuge. Walter Benjamin writes in this regard: «The original form of all dwelling is to live not in a house, but in a shell. This shell bears the imprint of its inhabitant. The dwelling ends up becoming a shell». W. Benjamin, *Das Passagen Werk*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1982 [transl. by the editor]. [MB]

which produces the standard, is the continuous surpassing of its own results. Adherence to function itself, which is the generative principle of the standard, does not have an absolute final value: that the unsuitable or imprecise form of the object I use forces me to make a movement a few centimeters wider or to employ in the gesture a few fractions of a second beyond what is strictly necessary can certainly be an unpleasant fact, but it is not yet a matter of such moment as to justify, for heaven's sake, a revolution in the world of forms of use or to imply recourse to the great principles of sociality. What is sought, then, is not an irrelevant saving of space and time, perhaps to be paid for by extending a kind of «Taylorism» from the workshop to the house; what is positively sought is the transfer of an aesthetic experience from the creator of the object to the person who uses it, it is the pleasure that a perfectly adapted form gives to the one who frequents or uses it, together with the sense of the completeness and efficiency of his gesture. What we feel when the form of the object adapts to our hand and seconds our gesture is the satisfaction of the effectiveness of our acts and of their exactness, the sense of «being in form» that the form of the object communicates to us. We then say that the functionality of the object does not conclude in the bare beauty of its form, but is realized in its use, linking an aesthetic experience to the acts we perform. Thus the objects that surround us are no longer merely a background or a scene: they are the condition of a positive, familiar coexistence between the house and its inhabitant.

There thus takes shape the circuit of a function that involves, in a kind of solidarity, the artist designer and the user. Functional furnishing and equipment engage whoever uses them, and precisely in the very act of using them, in an aesthetic experience that is just as active and complete as that of the person who designed them: indeed, they are two functions that continue one into the other, they are integrative and complementary, they cannot be thought of separately.

Nor could it be otherwise: in fact, the designer, in studying the form of the object, has done nothing other than identify himself with the future user, reproduce in himself his needs and aspirations, reconstruct his experience; thus the objects he creates often attain the polished, long-matured beauty of utensils that have found their form in prolonged contact with the hand, in the infinite repetition of the same human gesture. And to anyone who persists in insisting on the need to «humanize» furnishing, one may answer without hesitation that the aim of modern architects is precisely to create furnishings that are, ab initio, profoundly human.

A new fact has thus occurred, or is in the process of occurring, in the field of furnishing: whereas until yesterday the public influenced, through its demand, the production of objects, today it influences the ideational process of those who

design them; it is itself, in a certain sense, the creator of modern furnishing, since the public, none other than the public, constitutes the area of information from which the designer draws the data of his formal problem. The difference is only this: that whereas in the past the public acted upon the production of furnishing objects with the full weight of its own prejudices, of its own ambitions and its own social inhibitions, that is, with what it had in itself of most morally false, today, through the interests and social consciousness of modern architects, it influences production with what it has in itself of most authentic, with the lucid and civilized simplicity of its own existence, with the clear awareness of the value and of the limits of human individuality within the ambit of a collective or social function.

[Giulio Carlo Argan, *The Problem of Furnishing*, in «La casa. Quaderni di architettura e critica», no. 2, 1956, pp. 5-10]

Michele Cretella

Furnishing and Interior Architecture

1957

The architect-furnisher is the same architect who has had to struggle, and who still struggles, to clarify and to define well in Italy his position in the field of Art, of technique and of the profession in the face of the comfortable definition of the past, «architect of façades», and in the face of the worn commonplaces with which many – too many, I would say – believe they are adorning and enriching our functionalism and our compositional experience¹. He is the same architect who sees problems from within that architecture belonging to the environment and to the landscape upon whose backdrop our life unfolds; that architecture which polemic, together with studies and with daily experiences, has contributed to make known and discussed ever more profoundly, and by an ever greater number of people.

Naturally, problems increase and become more difficult with the absence of Nature's help, within whose great eternal tableau the work of man is at times made acceptable. The architect, thus enclosed within four walls, is invited to reflect. Something that it is fitting to do aloud and with sincerity. Discussion and polemic can only give life and importance to the topic. To reflect better one must start from the beginning, from the roots: in our case from the teaching of Furnishing and of Interior Architecture.

Among the numerous problems that must be resolved, the teacher must courageously face those that refer to graphic formalism; to furnishing fashion understood as neo-style; and to modernist simplification; that is, to that tendency of many young people who would like to bury – as outdated and as dead – perhaps with a moved prayer, in a severe and dignified museum hall, every Civilization and every manifestation of Art not judged current and modern.

I believe this tendency is the most dangerous.

On this point it is fitting to pause and reflect with sincerity, even at the cost of cutting deeply enough to touch the wounds.

When it is a matter of going back in time, it seems as though the confines of our century are distant and almost insuperable, too vast for a complete and comprehensible vision.

Through words and thoughts that cannot manage to veil the desire to remain tied only to problems and customs that are close and familiar, the reason appears evident.

In this limited cultural field it is almost always furnishing that constitutes the fundamental theme of discourse. With the help of its rich literature, the numerous possibilities of comparison and interpretation give discussion, criticism and teaching broad and solid bases, without danger and without unknowns.

The opposite holds for interior architecture, for which one must create a particular problematic, find a case history and study a method, entering into the life and into the habits of all times and opening the door of all architectures².

As though this were not enough, the precise will is increasingly making its way, dangerously, to give the adjective «dead» – used for the mother tongues of our culture and of our mentality as Latins and Greeks – its true and crude literal meaning.

I do not believe this is the appropriate place for an in-depth analysis of such a thorny and painful subject: what is being decided for admission to the Faculties of Engineering and Architecture is too evident to need comment.

In this landscape, confronted with such unknowns and such dangers, the duty imposes itself of establishing a harmonious equilibrium between form and content and between thought and expression, giving to interior architecture and to the furnishing of our time a sincere and subjective meaning, outside of stylistics, without compromises, far from fashion.

For this meaning to become clear and convincing, and for the past to be known and understood so as to become a formative part of our analytical and compositional mind, to serve us in a precious way in the present, a profound and systematic

The excerpt presented here includes a second moment of reflection that follows the first contained in M. De Renzi's book entitled *L'Architettura degli Interni, analisi critica, metodo e programma didattico* (Ars Nova, Rome 1943), with the aim of defining full autonomy for the figure of the architect and the specificity of the discipline of interior architecture within the expanded field of design. Both authors underscore the centrality of the human being as bearer of necessities and needs to which the architect must know how to respond, and of history as an element of knowledge. It is no coincidence that both investigate precisely those places of the past in the context of the Mediterranean area such as Pompeii and Herculaneum. Cf. P. Giardiello, *L'architettura vista dall'interno*, in B. Gravagnuolo, C. Grimellini, F. Mangone, R. Picone, S. Villari, eds., *La Facoltà di Architettura dell'Ateneo fridericiano di Napoli 1928-2008*, CLEAN, Naples 2008, pp. 174-178; N. Flora, *La didattica dell'arredamento nelle facoltà di architettura in Italia*, in Id., *Lezioni dall'architettura. Appunti, scritti e saggi intorno all'architettura della piccola scala*, CLEAN, Naples 2008, pp. 144-157.

1. The figure of the interior designer began to take shape between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, initially as a decorator, often in collaboration with the upholsterer. Works such as Charles Percier and Pierre-François-

Léonard Fontaine's *Recueil de décoration intérieure* (1801) and Thomas Hope's *Household Furniture and Interior Decoration* (1807) belong to this phase. A significant change occurred in North America in the second half of the nineteenth century, where a more design-oriented approach emerged, oriented toward industrial efficiency. From here came the progressive substitution of «decoration» with «design», especially in the 1920s and 1930s, when the term became established to designate an interior design closer to architectural principles. In Europe, instead, the idea of integration between architecture and interiors prevailed. Cf. M. Bassanelli, J. Leveratto, *Per una storia della Scuola degli Interni in Italia*, in G. Ottolini, *La Scuola di Milano e gli Interni*, Thymos Books, Naples 2024, pp. 50-61.

2. Further on the author specifies: «To speak of interior architecture is the same as seeking the reason for Architecture. Within it is man, with all the weight and responsibility that his material and spiritual necessities give to Society and to the designer». M. Cretella, *Introduzione allo studio dell'Architettura degli Interni e dell'Arredamento*, Libreria Editrice Treves, Naples 1957, p. 38 [transl. by the editor].

study of furnishing and interior architecture in the various epochs is necessary.

On this premise it becomes more evident than ever that the knowledge of furnishing, composed within architecture seen from the inside, in function of the history and the evolution of man, is the sole valid element for preventing the possible and dangerous division between past and present, between ancient and modern.

The purpose of these brief notes is to be able to guide young people – for whom these pages are written – in the direction indicated by the fundamental principles mentioned; stimulating their curiosity and their interest with the knowledge and the fascination of a past that has inspired and still inspires the «Great» of all epochs; making known and illustrating the work of the craftsman-artist, in parallel with the development and progress of Civilizations; and highlighting the enormous and profound importance of taste and of the adherence of furnishing to the stature of man.

Before attempting the difficult definition of the boundaries of the discipline, I feel the need to affirm that the personality of the student must be defended. In the broadest and most complete sense. Because from freedom – followed and guided – there may arise that creative poetics which lies at the basis of composition.

I believe that the most important, most suggestive and most difficult task of the teacher is precisely this defence of personality, which – among so many dangers and so many difficulties – is continually threatened by the exasperation of the values and of the meaning of technique. With its luminous mirages of ever new conquests, of dreams become reality, and with the glitter of infinite new materials, this queen of our age could appear to young people as the sole and magical dispenser of formulae and means sufficient to create and to express furnishing and architecture.

I do not believe, I have never believed in such exasperated and magical simplistic technicism. I have written it elsewhere and I repeat it in these pages and I will say it again whenever I deem it useful.

The misunderstanding of a dominant, efficient and sufficient technique for the development and representation of the idea and of invention, with its discoveries, its novelties and its synthetic materials, is exceedingly evident and dangerous. All the more dangerous insofar as, in exemplifying the problems of composition and of realization – that is, the problems of architecture –, one might ultimately arrive at surpassing the inventive and creative effort that precedes and accompanies composition. One would end, in conclusion, by sliding into one of the most dangerous and absurd deviations of thought and of activity in the vast, difficult and delicate field of architecture.

To define the boundaries of a subject such as ours, whose denomination is still elastic and under discussion, is a task full of unknowns, thorny and open to criticism. For even unwillingly, one may invade the terrain of a discipline of the same group, or one may be accused of wanting to do too much.

It is only yesterday that we recall a furnishing based, for the most part, on graphic expression and therefore open to misunderstandings so grave and profound as to touch the criteria for evaluating the very personality of the architect. And again only the day before yesterday the misunderstanding which wanted to keep us far from the life and needs of man, enchanted and in ecstasy in the antiquarian's shop, taken by the dream of a colourful and dazzling fantastic world belonging more to the novel than to history and art.

It is well to clarify that I do not intend to criticise imagination, vivid inspirer of architectural invention and creation. On the contrary, I believe firmly in its great determining value.

The difficulty lies in finding equilibrium and harmony between reality and imagination, between past and present, between the poetics that inspires and the technique that assists us in realization.

Before defining the meaning and the characteristics of our discipline, it is fitting to touch upon the technical orientation, referring to the illustrative notes for details.

Let us therefore start from technique and examine the dwelling³. This entails the study of its organization; of furnishings divided by types and categories; of the executive details of the furnishings themselves; of the production of fixed furnishing; of walls with movable, sliding and rotating elements; of timber ceilings; of the specific mountain furnishing contained in characteristic interior architecture; of special frames; of Venetian blinds.

The vastness of the field of study, the elasticity and the continual movement of renewal that transforms and increases the problems, appear evident. And we have looked only at the technical part of the dwelling which, like the historical and stylistic references mentioned in the following pages, belongs by full right to our discipline.

One must then take into consideration the shop with its history and its technique; and with the shop the department stores, the emporia, the large American-type commercial organisms, the public premises for trade and leisure.

Naturally, it is when speaking of interior architecture that the discourse grows more complex and opinions less concordant. But it is precisely on this topic and on those which enter laterally into the discussion that one must insist on demanding its weighty protection. For it is within the interior of the dwelling that the architect must operate not as an upholsterer, but as an architect, modulating relationships, composing with vol-

umes and with surfaces in order to create the environment in which furnishing must be studied and composed. And among the other topics upon which discussion and polemic might arise is that of commercial urban planning.

One may say to me: «but all this concerns urban planning, which has a two-year course». Agreed, but I believe that, at least in part, the study belongs to interior architecture and to furnishing¹. Provided one does not wish to arrive at a logical collaboration. And provided that in the urban-planning courses the commercial component is developed as we «interiorists» understand it. These boundaries are not precise, but this is logical and also very important: only organisms in movement are alive and evolving. It means that the discipline which is closest to human life and to its needs, made of art and technique, of dreams and material necessities, is alive and vital, in continuous development.

Furnishing and interior architecture

Interior architecture and furnishing, seen in depth across time, give us, more than any other expression of the human being-artist, the meaning and the value of the environment in which life unfolds. Not only in the grandest and most well-known works, but also, and above all, in those tied to the common and minute daily life, in struggle with the needs of body and spirit. In the interior of the dwelling one may therefore grasp the sense of the humanity of architecture and the full measure of the relationship of architecture itself with the stature of man.

In substance, the furnishing of each period may be seen as the element most closely adhering to life and to social and economic progress or regress.

If for Art in general and for High Architectureⁱⁱ this consideration may seem approximate and, in part, arbitrary, for interior architecture and for furnishing it may be held completely exact precisely because of their close adherence to life. Not only this, but almost always the «stylistic returns» coincide with historical returns and with the reawakening of letters and of the arts and display surprising expressions of analogy. And when the personal and creative element is eliminated or erased by commercial imitation and serial repetition, the analogy remains always evident and significant in the artisan activity which, in every age, shows us a great unknown artist: the anonymous popular artist, often brilliant, many times conscious and humanly understanding to a degree equal to or even greater than that of the artist. Also and above all when by popular artist we indicate not a single individual but a group of artists operating over a more or less long period.

In a panoramic and synthetic vision, against the economic and social background, the two most important factors stand

out: human needs – even when these are not, willingly or unwittingly, in the premise of invention and composition – and the environment, that is, that interior part of architecture which contains furnishing.

As regards the needs of man, the subject is more modern and topical than ever.

Man is, or should always be, present: he has not always been so. Many times his figure has been crushed by the grandiosity and the vastness of the environments, before the Gods and before Power. We find him alive and sincere, proportioned and at ease, with the possibility of touching everything with his hand, only in the interior of that architecture which – with a substantial contradiction in terms – is called minor. Pompeii and Herculaneum take him as parameter, as inspirer and as operator; that operator who has left us the testimonies of his taste, of his social habit and of his mentality⁴.

Naturally it would be desirable that creative art always animate composition, even when it works for the common man on the plane of necessities and with the characteristics of place, in the historical and social environment of the time. The simplicity of certain painted backgrounds of the Middle Ages and of the Renaissance, their intimacy and their enclosed and modest internal volumetry, are among the happiest and most sincere expressions of art. Even if personal inventions, we always find ourselves in the epoch and in the environment of the artist. Thus in the «Annunciation» of Fra Angelico and, with even more evident simplicity and modesty of relationships, in the «Miracle of the Consecrated Host» by Paolo Uccello, two artists representative of their time.

At the origin of the very life of Humanity we find the first manifestations of furnishing, together with those of clothing, tied to the most stringent necessities of man and to his instinctive magical mind.

«Without any doubtⁱⁱⁱ these primordial decorative arts of the house and of the person preceded in the world every other aesthetic manifestation».

The man of the earliest ages cannot be seen as a creative artist. Manifestations that are ends in themselves, of the so-called art for art's sake, do not belong to prehistory.

«They arose much later as abstractions of art from exclusively physical life»^{iv}.

But in a certain sense – and this is very important and significant – man is already working with a high and instinctive decorative sense and with an extraordinary adherence to reality.

In function of what? In function of the person and of the primitive dwelling, making the latter «more comfortable and more beautiful», refining his shapeless fleece into more graceful forms.

3. The dwelling and the design of the house are acknowledged as central themes of the discipline, which is distinguished precisely by its need to investigate and observe daily time and the habits of people. This adherence between forms of life and architecture would influence the thought of the professors of Interior Architecture in all the Schools throughout the national territory. See A. Cornoldi, ed., *Architettura degli interni*, Il Poligrafo, Padua 2005.

4. Cf. M. Cretella, *Botteghe ad Ercolano e Pompei*, Treves, Naples 1961.

In function, moreover, of his activities, from which he draws the sources of life, connected with the magical sense of primitive religion. The images of animals struck by arrows that we find in cave paintings as first manifestations of art are evidently connected with magical dynamism^v.

Frobenius⁵ was able to ascertain among the Pygmies the survival of this practice, with the actual action preceded by preparations of a magical nature: sketching synthetically on the ground the image of an antelope and piercing it with an arrow when the sun, at its rising, touches the «drawing».

The rock paintings of the Bushmen of South Africa perhaps come even closer than the sand drawings of the Pygmies to the cave paintings of prehistoric man, since they have as their subject the animals hunted, usually rendered with very realistic art.

«Since the hunt for these animals is often painted, one may believe that the paintings have a meaning more than artistic, and, like those already discussed, intended to bring success in the actual hunt»^{vi}.

And Hauser⁶, after having asked himself in a series of clear questions about the purpose of Paleolithic art, writes: «We know that it was the art of primitive hunters.....», adding:

«Everything indicates in it the instrument of a magical practice, and as such it had an absolutely pragmatic function, directed entirely to immediate economic ends»^{vii}.

In substance, therefore, since the distant dawn of decorative and furnishing art, primitive man works with instinctive adherence to reality and to the forms of Nature, under the influence of the supernatural.

Descendant of this remote ancestor-artist, in all times and in every place we find the popular and anonymous artist, at times grouped into categories and guilds, who works with spontaneous naturalness in a given historical period.

After the expressions of the Renaissance, of the Seventeenth and of the Eighteenth centuries, in which secular values are reflected – for which the history of furnishing coincided in time with civil and military history – and after the first experiences of industrialization in the nineteenth century and the consequent descent of the art of furnishing into an anonymity that altered these secular and “historic” values, the human element is reborn upon those distant (roots) of the Middle Ages. The revolutionary stances of William Morris and of his Arts and Crafts indicate the beginning of attempts to bring furnishing back closer to man.

The contemporary age rediscovers human values and the need to defend them; it rediscovers the relationship with human stature. Historical and social movements and the progress of civilization have, in recent times, reinserted at the basis of the guiding concept of interior architecture and of furnishing these essential values, propellers of new energies and new creative freedoms.

In a certain sense, one passes from the architectural and aesthetic plane to the social and political one.

As the needs of life are planned for an ever greater mass of human beings, the architect-furnisher and interior architect becomes – like the urban planner – an artist and a technician (or a technician-artist) who operates in the field of sociology.

Perhaps it is better to say that he becomes a sociologist-architect, conscious and humanly understanding, who seeks to make the struggle of life less harsh for his fellow human being, within the four walls of a working-class or economical home, in a bleak suburb of the modern city.

i. I refer to that vast and important part of urban planning which, with its instruments of analysis and inquiry, contributes to the definition of regulatory plans and which concerns places of sale, large and small, central and peripheral, their location, their importance with respect to city traffic and services.

ii. Here *high architecture* is said in contrast to *true architecture*, and «high» is meant to signify «of great mass» or «ceremonial».

iii. Guido Marangoni, *Arredo e abbigliamento di tutti i tempi e di tutti i popoli*, Milan 1953, I, p. 3.

iv. *Ibidem*.

v. Nitzkie, *Teorie e Testimonianze*, in *Splendori delle Antiche religioni* by Jack Finegan, Aldo Martello, Editore, Verona 1955.

vi. J. Finegan, *Splendori delle Antiche Religioni*, Verona 1955, vol. I, p. 41.

vii. A. Hauser, *Storia Sociale dell'Arte*, I, Novara 1955, p. 21. Hauser's confirmation is noteworthy, as he brings magical practice onto the economic plane, giving us the first causes and the first effects in art.

[Michele Cretella, *Furnishing and Interior Architecture*, in Id., *Introduzione allo studio dell'Architettura degli Interni e dell'Arredamento*, Libreria Editrice Treves, Naples 1957, pp. 5-19]

Carlo Scarpa Furnishing 1964

Anyone who knows me well enough is aware of my affliction at this moment... Speaking in public has always been distressing for me. Even at the beginning of every lecture I feel a certain hesitation... it is a serious flaw that I shall no longer correct.

To give myself a bit of courage I wanted to consult the old *Crusca* dictionary and Battisti's etymological dictionary to see what they said under the word «*arredo*». Incidentally, the 1836 volume of the *Crusca* was printed on very beautiful, crackling paper: it made one want to eat it...

The *Crusca* dictionary, under the word «*arredo*», says only: «to provide what is necessary». Battisti adds that «*arredamento*» derives from the Gothic «*ga-redàm*», meaning «to take care», and from the Spanish «*arrear*», meaning «to adorn»... From these very simple terms follows the principle of necessity. Furnishings are necessary, whence the corollary: to take care of furnishings, of their preservation and, above all, of their beauty, something that seems to me a categorical imperative for our profession. Just as one provides for necessity, it seems to me very logical to provide for beauty, a fact that is inherent in human beings from the origins. At the origins prehistoric man, before furnishing them, adorned the caves: it is unequivocal that no examples of cavern furnishings have come down to us, but rather wonderful aesthetic forms of decoration. In the earliest signs traced blindly in the darkness we see two characteristics: the irrational, spontaneous, instinctive, barbaric gesture, devoid of technique, and then, almost immediately after, a semblance of rationality in the diagonal signs, in the circles containing squares, instinctive signs yet drawn by an ordering mind. I recall a marvellous function of furnishing that becomes an architectural and plastic fact in the interior of an African hut. The photograph was in colour and thus I was able to perceive the chromatic values of the environment. The floor was of beaten earth, more perfect than a rubber floor of our own day. Imagine then a place much smaller than this hall,

an elongated rectangle: the door behind was the only source of light, while toward the back was the parents' bed arranged on a masonry structure, a sort of step, covered with hand-woven fabrics, in the same manner in which the Greeks folded the cushions on their chairs... In that African hut the sense of decoration, the idea of beauty and of adorning, were entirely absent. Whereas in Pompeii, instead, in that highly evolved civilisation, we find decoration... The examples I offer aim to demonstrate that modern architecture cannot do without the knowledge of architectural values that have always existed. What is, for instance, a Renaissance room? One finds architectural members that form compartments where perspectival paintings may appear. It is said that perspective opens space, but I venture to affirm that this is not true. One need only go to Maser¹ or to Villa Valmarana² to realise that the impression of the wall always remains. I mean that the sense of space is not given by a pictorial order, but always by physical phenomena, that is, by matter, by the sense of the heavy, by the weight of the wall³. For this reason I affirm that it is the openings, the thresholds and the passages that realise spatial relationships. Modern architecture, abstractly stereometric, destroys every sensitivity for the membering and the decomposition... We have created nothingness around things.

What shall we be able to offer when we decide to contribute with our works to the creation of a more eloquent life for people?... We no longer have thick walls: we tend toward extremely thin thicknesses, we have even abolished the wall⁴ – at times we say that all this is a spatial fact, but it is not at all, because spatial value is... is difficult to express.

It is impossible to think of an ancient Greek seated: thus architecture is always vertical and indeed classical members are always vertical, whereas today there is a tendency toward horizontality...

The text reproduced here is an excerpt from the prolusion that Carlo Scarpa delivered on the occasion of the inauguration of the academic year 1964-65 at the Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia and is published in the monograph edited by Francesco Dal Co and Giuseppe Mazzariol (1984). The text presents two nuclei of interest: the first because it is one of the few texts in this collection to be written by one of the masters of interior architecture and exhibition design in mid-twentieth-century Italy, combining theoretical, practical and educational approaches; the second concerns an interpretative principle that conceives «*arredare*» (or furnishing) as an action that participates in the composition of space.

1. The reference is to Villa Barbaro at Maser (Treviso), designed by Andrea Palladio between 1554 and 1558-1560.

2. The reference is to Villa Valmarana (Lisiera, Bolzano Vicentino), a Venetian residence conceived by Andrea Palladio around 1563, whose original project was only partially realised.

3. Enclosed in this sentence is Carlo Scarpa's poetics, which entrusts to matter one of the fundamental values in the definition of space.

4. Here is an implicit critique of the Modern Movement and of the subsequent creation of largely standardised spaces that diminish the value of the interior's complexity as well as the composition of exteriors.

5. Leo Frobenius (1873-1938) was a German ethnologist, archaeologist and cultural theorist, considered one of the pioneers of African ethnology.

6. Arnold Hauser (1892-1978) was a Hungarian art historian and sociologist, among the first to interpret artistic production as a social and collective phenomenon.

[MB]

To obtain something one must invent relationships. But someone might say to me: «You see, then, that decoration has nothing to do with it?». And yet I tell you that there is a moment in which you will indeed have to imagine the chromaticism of things – you will make a floor, a ceiling, walls: do you want them all white?⁵ Even in the design of a simple cubic space there enter small reasonings, an alphabet, perhaps a grammar. It is a curious faculty that allows us to sense that a precise dimensional fact, a thickness, for example, is an eminent quality of the physical value of things... Modern art has allowed us to see certain phenomena of matter with new eyes and has enabled us to make exceedingly important discoveries of natural facts. We can admire the bark of trees without constraint, no longer bound by the eloquence of tradition. As men of our time we have redeemed many things both morally and socially. But as architects we have not yet redeemed the form of humble and simple things.

[Carlo Scarpa, *Arredare*, prolusion delivered on the occasion of the inauguration of the academic year 1964-65 at the Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia, now in F. Dal Co, G. Mazzariol, eds., *Carlo Scarpa. Opera completa*, Electa, Milan 1984, p. 282]

Adelaide Regazzoni Caniggia

A Typological Profile of Furnishing

1977

The need to understand critically the ways in which anthropic space is structured has been repeatedly asserted, giving rise to a series of researches which, especially in the last decade, have concerned the dimensions of building, urban and territorial typology¹. On the scale of the smaller dimension, yet more closely related to human beings, and for that very reason more strictly codified – that of furnishing – little has been done.

Critical studies on furnishing may be said to be rare: apart from some examples, mostly at the level of sector monographs or histories of individual makers, styles or periods and, with few brilliant exceptions², almost constantly with divulgative aims connected to the antiquarian market, it would even seem that scholars shy away from deeming the scale of furnishing worthy of attention, the way in which domestic utensils are structured; the most useful indications in this field also come not so much from architects as from the areas of anthropological studies or human geography³.

Yet it must be asserted that the examination of typological processes of domestic furnishing has a historical-formative character such as to be required as necessary to the study of building typology. Let us anticipate, in the meantime, that the cognition of furnishing precedes, chronologically, the very cognition of the house: therefore to understand furnishing merely as the movable objects contained within a house is doubly reductive, and certainly does not facilitate the understanding of furnishing typology. First, because furnishing, born before the house, already conditions the use of space, the paths, the reciprocal relations among furnishing objects, in short, everything that becomes house when one first shelters it and then encloses it within an envelope: that is, when one codifies a covered and closed space. Second, which is in consequence of the first point, even in a synchronic, non-historicised view, the house is not comprehensible except through

the set of functions exercised within it, and which make use of furnishing structures as a necessary mediation between habitual domestic acts and the envelope that isolates them from the outside.

This means that the furnishing organism is the structuring of anthropic space directly connected with a primordial territorial organism (characterised by varied and projective structures) even before the formation of the mediation, usual to our eyes, between furnishing and territory, constituted through the emergence of the concepts of house, settlement, urban nucleus, which have become, so to speak, unduly the preferred field of study for research based on the reconstruction of typological processes³. As such, they require a retracing back to formative matrices that one cannot help but recognise in pre-house stages⁴, in the civil stages of furnishing without house, the only ones suited to understanding the substance of the structuring subsequently attained by the house.

The method I propose to follow is not yet so widespread as not to make necessary a brief clarification, which I shall present preliminarily, associated with the necessary definitions and with a programmatic exposition that must take into account the distinction of furnishing objects, of their placement and reciprocal connection in forming elementary organisms, in turn mutually conditioning one another in local organisms, the rooms, and in the general organism, the furnished house.

But it is a subject too vast which, by its close belonging to the most generalised anthropic basis, cannot but invest all civilisations of all epochs, indeed finding its most significant meanings in prehistory and in anthropological levels: it is therefore necessary that the applied part be limited to a spatial and temporal context chosen among those most readily documented (from around the sixteenth century to the end of the eighteenth century).

The excerpt reproduced here is taken from the text *Profilo e tipologia dell'arredo* (Alinea, Florence 1977), in which the author sets out for the first time her analytical theory based on the concept of «furnishing organism», which includes the relations between space and furnishing: «we define furnishing organism as the complex of objects and their reciprocal relations present in a house and in its associated area of pertinence; in other words, the anthropic structuring through the acts that a family performs and the envelope (the house) that contains its activity, together with the open space» A. Regazzoni Caniggia, *op. cit.*, p. 22 [transl. by the editor]. The book is structured in two parts: the first defines the theoretical and methodological framework, the second focuses on the systematic analysis of the seat from the mid-fifteenth century to the nineteenth century. This text, unlike the author's previous writings, is not based on a reading of the relation between space and furnishing in relation to the sentiment of time, but on a rigorous scientific approach founded on the concept of type, dear to the teaching in the Schools of architecture in those years.

1. The reference here is to the works of S. Muratori, *Studi per una operante storia urbana di Venezia*, Istituto poligrafico dello Stato, Rome 1959, and G. Caniggia, *Strutture dello spazio antropico. Studi e note*, Alinea, Florence 1976.

2. The extended references here are: for French furnishing G. Janneau, *Les Siéges*, C. Moreau, Paris 1940; for Italian furnishing M. Praz, *La filosofia dell'arredamento. I mutamenti nel gusto della decorazione interna attraverso i secoli*, Longanesi, Milan 1964; the series *Il mobile nei secoli* by A. Gonzalez-Palacios published by F.lli Fabbri, Milan 1969; L. Rubino, *Quando le sedie avevano le gambe. La lunga marcia del mobile moderno*, Bertani editore, Verona 1973; for English furnishing J.C. Rogers, *English Furniture*, Offices of Country Life Limited, London 1923.

3. The author's attempt is to consider furnishing, understood as the smallest scale of architecture, as part of the system of structuring anthropic space.

4. By the term «pre-house» the author refers to the base type or anthropic base, that is, to that civilisation whose family life takes place predominantly outdoors and whose shelter is represented by natural elements: «we may assume or not hypothetically as already acquired the level of “den”, that is, as already formed a structure capable of containing human beings during rest» A. Regazzoni Caniggia, *op. cit.*, p. 17 [transl. by the editor]. From this moment onward all the matrices of today's furnishing structures may already be considered in nuce. [MB]

5. For Carlo Scarpa the union of space and chromaticism occurs initially in the drawing, where pastel colours indicate materials, colours and transparencies and appear at the various scales, including the detail scale, before then migrating into the design. [MB]

It must nevertheless be specified that for such a period, as in the majority of cases, we possess only scant documentation relating to basic furnishing (defining this as the set of essential elements conditioned by their belonging to the base – peasant, artisan or proletarian – and for that very reason not tainted by being products of intentions, and thus belonging to a typological process derived directly from spontaneous consciousness): one cannot therefore do without referring to that furnishing which, proper to the ruling classes, appears to us almost constantly laden with the conditioning characteristic of any specialised product. In the field of building typology it is easy to recognise basic types, present in large numbers, still today, in historic centres and agricultural settlements: in dealing with furnishing we find ourselves in the same conditions as one who, occupying himself with building and urban typology, could dispose almost only of dwellings of the ruling class or specialist buildings and of fabrics of such elements, and had to extract from palaces and churches the spontaneous processes that have generally conditioned these but that derive, and are more immediately legible, from the experience gained in terrace houses or courtyard houses constituting the great majority of the basic building stock of the past. But it is only a matter of finding, and refining, appropriate methods of reading: after all, many disciplines, among the most evolved, must operate in a similar fashion. The linguistⁱⁱⁱ, who for the periods preceding the present possesses only remains tainted by being the product of particularistic languages such as the epic, the literary or the epigraphic, must derive from these the traces of the language actually spoken, of the living language, which is precisely the basis on which the others have been formed in specialised fashion; and the archaeologist can only reconstruct wooden or bone utensils, or the use of eoliths – stones not worked but used – from the remains in durable or visibly worked materials that followed them, by imitation of their typology, or that accompanied the former as products of specialised, sacred, warlike use, etc., and here too often as products of the ruling class. One must therefore read the typological process that generated them through progressive logical reconstruction, backwards in time, of the primary, generative characters, still always implicit, even if difficult to read, within their progressive complications.

i. See, by way of example of differing approaches to furnishing, the works of: G. Janneau, useful and philologically exhaustive for French furnishing; C. E. Rava, broadly informative; A. Gonzalez-Palacios, of good divulgation; L. Rubino, for recent and contemporary furnishing; J.C. Rogers, for English furnishing; but also M. Praz, not specific, literary but of broad humanistic vision; and many others (see bibliography).
ii. For example, the numerous notes concerning furnishing objects in works such as: J.E. Lips, *The Origin of Things. A Cultural History of Man*, London 1949; C.S. Coon, *The Story of Man*, 1954, Italian ed. Milan 1970; C. Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage*, Paris 1962, Italian ed. Milan 1970; *Du miel aux cendres*, Paris 1966, Italian ed. Milan 1970.
iii. I recall among all two well-known volumes by G. Devoto, *Gli antichi Italici*, 1931, and *Storia della lingua di Roma*, 1940, where with great capacity for synthesis the vivid image of remote peoples is drawn from scant documentation of specialist language: dedicatory, sacred or legal inscriptions.

[Adelaide Regazzoni Caniggia, *Introduzione*, in *Profilo e tipologia dell'arredo*, Alinea, Florence 1977, pp. 9-12]

Alessandro Mendini Tomorrow’s Objects 1982

The various genres of classical design are based on the idea of «commodity», a traditional commodity: objects, tools, things built by human beings with machines, more or less in series, more or less by hand. But the traditional productive system is at sunset, about to relinquish its role as protagonist. For two centuries industry has operated according to all possible combinations and has reached every point, every situation, the most remote markets of the globe. If the hypothesis was that of generalising wealth and therefore of reaching the utopia of widespread well-being, reality tells us that the phenomenon of inequality has increased, has become irreversible, is a fixed characteristic of humanity. After the nuclear and space experience, we are now faced with a wholly new industrial system, that of informatics, to which corresponds a different kind of commodity, ideology, utopia, labour, productivity: the «neo-commodity», so to speak, of neo-modern design¹. It induces us to think of «something else» in comparison with the old project of consumerist design, that is, of models, methods, processes, objects that are radically different.

The future of «new things», of «new consumption», is utterly unknown, despite many predictions and some initial approaches: to it belong the objects of tomorrow, perhaps those of the new millennium. If I try to imagine these objects, I see them as light, discreet, psychic, almost evanescent and formless, to be used and commanded by voice or by a breath: «non-objects-objects», a virtual commodity, the product of human ideas but of abstract automatic factories. In other words, the paradox of informatics understood as an applied art itself, as robot craftsmanship.

The world scene witnesses the shifting of the fulcrum of major military, economic and cultural decisions: the divided forces of the USA and USSR placed on the same front of conservatism, while Japan, the Mediterranean, China,

certain emerging and non-aligned countries will become the new needle of the balance also for design, and cultural leadership will shift for the first time in history from the northern to the southern hemisphere of the world. From rationalism, which has self-destructed, we move toward a new human odyssey that includes and accepts the sense of catastrophe and the values of submerged and banal culture. It is not certain that informatics must coincide with that idea of development, typical of the modern age, which foresees an Enlightenment-like progress of human beings toward objectively better conditions. On the contrary, the new means available will lead toward conditions of cultural and environmental archaism, toward a coexistence of opposites: the bourgeoisie, both great and small, dies, and new systems of mass men, of «small masses», of sums of individual human beings, are born. To a functional improvement in living conditions will correspond a sort of anthropological simplification, a return to origins, to tribes, to languages at once decadent and ancestral: situations of extremely high technical level mixed with human beings rendered once more primordial.

How, in this context, can the figure of the «new designer» be described? Let us think of the classical one. He has designed with ideas of synthesis, order, stability, abstraction. The classical designer has been and is, so to speak, a male designer. Form, poetics, style, history, social and political forecasting are the parameters on which he has founded his destiny as creator of the living space, an empty and cold space that woman has twisted, shattered, softened, decorated and regenerated to introduce other truths, other presences, other labyrinths of life and death.

I believe that today the word «dwelling» concentrates in itself and surpasses all designing and that the «private house» returns: not as a functional part of a whole, but as

The excerpt reproduced here is taken from Alessandro Mendini’s paper at the conference *Il design oggi in Italia tra produzione, consumo e qualcos’altro* (Naples 1982), whose proceedings were published in 1983 by Editoriale Domus (Milan). In the text signed by Renato De Fusco, *Design e qualcos’altro*, republished in the volume *Teorica di arredamento e design* (2002, pp. 59-64), the author underlines the crisis experienced by design, particularly of domestic objects, in those years due to the lack of a cultural policy, the ever-greater power of technology, and the divergence between public demand and proposals concerning the factor of taste.

1. For an in-depth discussion of Neomodern, see G. D’Amato, *Il design tra radicale e commerciale*, in «Op. cit. Selezione della critica d’arte contemporanea», no. 53, 1982, pp. 5-21. Among the main exponents one recalls the Alchimia studio, founded by Alessandro Guerriero in 1977, with which Mendini himself collaborated, and the Memphis group.

the whole itself, as the generating element of all aspects of dwelling. The word furnishing reappears, in opposition to the word architecture. To furnish is a natural gesture before being a project. A hospitable, living, welcoming, hermetic notion, of an hermaphroditic character. Such could be the nature of the new designer, specular and hybrid, of the future interiors of our humanity immersed in the cosmic fear of the neo-modern world. The private house as personal scene, as the last symbol of one's own capacity for choice, as heterogeneous space, as an accumulation of objects, as a forest, a tangle of adventures and passions even anti-design. It is the fascination, so to speak, of the «soft» project² against the ostentatious security of the «hard» project, the premonitory, demagogic one, which arises more to assert itself and its rules than to exist as a new reality. The materials of the hard project are those of classical construction: stone, iron, concrete, metal, glass. Instead it is precisely within furnishing, that is, within the most protective shell and closest to human beings, that the essence of the soft project exists. What are the materials for the soft project? They are fabric, colour, climate, memory, light, which touch and caress the body without harming it. Then all objects, rooms, façades, arches, statues, soft and pliant furniture. For architecture is made of naked and hostile parts, which soft materials warm, cover, soften and lead back to the maternal womb.

Let us look within a private house, within the stage of an ordinary person. Modern typological tradition proposes an extreme simplification of its functions, synthesising them in rooms destined for cooking, eating, sleeping, washing. The incredible interweaving of the other thousand sensory and mental functions is forgotten, rigidified within this architectural grid of interiors, elaborated on the concept of elementary survival, typical of the productive schemes and serial standards of contemporary societies³.

But human beings are urgently in need of other kinds of survival, a subtle survival: instead of living room, kitchen, bathroom and bedroom, what is needed, perhaps, are new types of rooms and habitats: rooms for swimming, for keeping flowers, for telecommunicating, for reading books⁴. Elementary functions may be absorbed, as sub-problems, within the sophisticated ones; one may eat in the swimming room, cook in the greenhouse, wash in the telecommunication room. The bed, which today is that small insignificant place destined to recycle us toward our daily commitments, will become a central object, the delicate instrument deputed on the one hand to our mysterious lethargy, to our slow progression toward eternal sleep, on the other to nocturnal relations and to the second life of all of us. Maximum isolation together with maximum communication. Place of

dream, folly, rest, tears, joy, twilight, instinct, presage, imagination, the bedroom of the future will replace the traditional living room with a mythical living room, in a new kind of intimate and protected meditative room, considered as the nucleus around which to articulate the whole house.

Opposed and cruel, instead, are the forecasts for the kitchen and food. Here the problem, for centuries and centuries, is and remains hunger in the world. Some eat to survive, some eat to live, some live to eat, some eat themselves to death. Hands, bowl, field kitchen, plastic cup, steel coffee-pot, silver plate, modular kitchen, computerised kitchen, are the objects for that social, intimate, animal, sensual, cultivated act of swallowing.

But the «food-object» itself must reach an ever more homogeneous geographic standard if the hypothesis is that all human beings may eat in a nutritionally equal manner. The alimentary object must be industrial and mass-produced, even if this tendency toward a banal food will have the negative consequence of making us lose the cultural tension toward the meal as ritual.

And then the human body: considered today at last as an object among other objects, natural, pleasant and rich in possibilities. Many doors that in houses had long remained carefully closed to hide acts that were almost illicit have lost their keys and locks. Today people – fathers, mothers, friends, children – comb their hair in the living room, wash together, breakfast naked, do gymnastics in the kitchen, like new primitives. Therefore the bathroom needs a new name. One cannot consider the body as new protagonist if it is cleaned within a dark little bathing room where the four sanitary fixtures resemble instruments of torture. There will thus be a «room for the body» in our future houses, public like the Roman *thermae*, purifying like Christian baptism, with something of the Islamic stone rills, something of the artificial grottoes of the Baroque era.

And then the problem of the metropolis, which today is the harsh and estranged reversal of failed petty-bourgeois furnishings. The soft project considers as positive a condition of non-project of the surface of the globe, a new city physically indeterminable, open, available, fluid, galactic, realised through a tangle of minimal moves, not through decisions and institution of maximal programmes. The new architectures will never be large, never close to one another, they will be small, artistic, intense point-like intellectual assertions. The terminology typical of modern urbanism disappears: master plan, building regulation, zoning, even the demagogy of participation. One might paradoxically propose the ghetto again, if ghetto means recognising the existence of small groups with homogeneous languages; one might seek to hinder transport excesses because

excess communication kills; one might prefer small, so to speak, exclusive gardens, if one believes in the usefulness of strong spiritual and aesthetic presences in the territory; one might demonstrate that the periphery is more beautiful than the historic centre; one will allow building to aggregate and self-generate spontaneously.

Within this framework, what are the characteristics of the «new project»? A first fixation: it still happens today, but was once a rule, that those who draw have in mind to make something true, certain, exemplary and valid for eternity, something whose meaning will never change.

Let us try the opposite: in these times in which one hardly knows where one is going, a few minutes after making a drawing it is already expired and surpassed. For what matters in things may be more their mutation than their stability, more indeterminacy than certainty, more romantic sense than rational. A drawing is a provisional, perishable, artificial event, little tied to the static coldness of the real and the authentic, tied instead to the ephemeral vibrations of the apparent and the unknown, where the frailty of life's sighs prevails over the completeness of death, the amorous drawing over the functional drawing. This is why one may think of the new design as a minimalist system of eclectic, changing objects, of ever smaller and more virtuosic tools, of spaces built around the person, intimately connected to his body. Hence the second fixation: that today not only furnishing but also decoration may prevail over design and architecture and even technically oppose them⁵. Decorations vanish into nothing with the same speed with which they arrive, and in that transitory moment in which they exist we like them morbidly; they have always existed; they charge with energy, tension and violence even the driest structures of our everyday. To yield to total decorativeness, to an infra-professionalism of the world, means taking note that human beings are not able to communicate structurally, to communicate in depth, that in their intimate substance they are solitary, but that what can enter well into circulation among them is the skin, the surface, the «depth of the superficial», the redesign.

But the disenchantment of neo-modern human beings, their pessimism, their unhappy consciousness now guarantees them from risking fantasies that are too intense, dramatic or impossible. The times of messages and radical revolutions are over: the acceleration of time, which makes every value expire in the same instant in which it is proposed, gives us the features of the new project, indicates the possible positive cynicism, the «limited fantasy» of the «informatic» object.

[Alessandro Mendini, *Gli oggetti di domani*, in «Op. cit. Selezione della critica d'arte contemporanea», no. 55, 1982, pp. 26-31]

2. An extended reflection on the distinction between the «soft» project and the «hard» project is presented by the author in the editorial published in «Domus», no. 626, 1982, p. 1.

3. This passage marks a break with the modernist rhetoric of the house as a «machine for living», to which Mendini opposes an idea of «Existenz maximum». Cf. A. Mendini, *Existenz Maximum*, Tipolito Press, Florence 1990.

4. This vision finds a significant parallel in the research of Ugo La Pietra, who as early as the 1970s had challenged the idea of design as an ordering system, opposing practices of «inhabiting the city» based on the reappropriation of domestic and urban spaces. The anti-institutional dimension of design, evoked by Mendini, finds an experimentation in the experience of Global Tools (1973-1975), a school of architecture and design that sought to go beyond industrial design to open up to collective and processual practices, where manual skill, the body and the performative dimension replaced the centrality of the finished object. Cf. L. Parmesani, *Alessandro Mendini. Gli scritti*, Skira, Milan 2004.

5. «I do not like to distinguish disciplines from one another; I do not consider architecture detached from decoration or design, for example. This was expressed very clearly by the Futurists, who had an extremely high mixing of disciplines, tending toward a decorative synthesis. The metaprojectual basis of the Futurists was decoration and it is also the metaprojectual basis of my work», P. Nicolini, M. García Sanchis, *Marco Zanuso Alessandro Mendini. Design e architettura*, Electa, Milan 2022, p. 87 [transl. by the editor]. [MB]

Renato De Fusco

A Theory of Furnishing

1984

That complex of design, of choices and arrangements of objects, of the disposition of furniture, of functional and distributive criteria, of collecting, of bricolage, of fashion, of the pursuit of comfort and of *Stimmung*¹, etc., which constitutes the «practice of furnishing» seems irreducible to a definition and to a theoretical formulation. And this because the factors involved are too heterogeneous, the demands of taste too changeable, the ways of shaping and fitting out an environment too personal. Nevertheless, aside from the fact that every epoch shows that it possessed its own clear idea of furnishing, with an implicit definition and theory, the need for theoretical reflection and for a delimitation of the field is felt all the more today, that is, now that furnishing is continually fused and confused with design, architecture, the visual arts, garden art, and even urban planning, to the point that one speaks, with an expression that is in my view intrinsically contradictory, of urban furnishing.

Many authors maintain that, in the field of the human sciences, definitions and theories no longer claim today to be unique and immutable, to hold for every place and historical epoch, to give life to a code of laws, etc. But this orientation, not without a certain reasonableness, very often translates into the opposite excess: in following the vogue of «openness», of work in progress, of a dynamic criticism mutable according to every eventuality, one risks losing every parameter of reference, the terms of a disciplinary discourse, and thus the very possibility of articulating it. Faced with these risks and with the damage produced by the confusions mentioned above, in the present article I intend to proceed against the prevailing critical orientation and attempt precisely a definition of furnishing that descends from a specific theoretical conception. That every definition or delimitation of a field, unless one derives it from empirical observations, must rest on a general conception, on a theory, is beyond doubt; more problematic proves

the relation of furnishing to a theory, because in it everything or nearly everything seems to be exhausted in practice. But, before addressing this issue, it is necessary to set out a few considerations on how this art manifests itself.

Furnishing as language

Furnishing presents itself first of all as a language, at once conformative and representative; secondly, it embodies one of the most typical cases of an applied art (an expression now freed from any limiting judgement). And this not only owing to its evident practical destination, but because it is sustained by a «multiple code». As I have observed in my recent *Storia dell'arte contemporanea*², every art form of the past, whether pure or applied, drew from other artistic experiences, uniting with its own specific linguistic code expressions deriving from other artistic codes, giving rise to what I have termed the multiple code. Painting, for example, from antiquity up to our own century, absorbed elements drawn from literature, from sacred texts, from theatre, from architecture, from furnishing itself, etc. Thus, owing to the presence of so many linguistic signs, it could be understood even by those unable to grasp it in its totality but familiar with at least one type of sign present in its multiple code; hence its comprehensibility at virtually every level of cultural information. The other example of an art with a multiple code is offered by cinema, the artistic experience most popular and most suited to our times, in which the filmic «specific» is accompanied by a series of external contributions: literature, theatre, music, painting, photography, etc. Starting from the historical avant-garde, the arts considered major – architecture, sculpture and painting – rejected the contributions of linguistic codes external to them: they pursued a search for «purity», and constituted within themselves a series of tendencies (the famous «isms») that further specialised their languages. In place of the ancient multiple code

there arose single codes, and even sub-codes (with Futurism, dynamism; with Cubism, volumetric decomposition; with Surrealism, the oneiric dimension, etc.). All this contributed to the decline in semanticity of these arts and with it to the loss of a broad public, obliged to read works and tendencies in a single key. Furnishing [...] likewise followed, from Rationalism onwards, the same line or, at least, considerably reduced the linguistic contribution derived from other experiences³. But, temporarily setting aside this line – which, moreover, in recent times is becoming attenuated – let us see which external contributions classical furnishing absorbed within its own sphere, which by its very nature has always been of an essentially heterogeneous kind.

External contributions

The multiple code of furnishing is sustained above all by architecture, which indeed represents the very *topos* where the art we are studying manifests itself; almost as evident are the contributions of sculpture, to which many of the plastic elements of a furnished interior may be traced and, in many respects, the very morphology of furniture and household objects; the painterly language, moreover, may be recognised in every two-dimensional element of the interior; the ties with fashion may be seen, among other things, in upholstery, in furniture coverings, in draperies; the traditional arts of glass, metalwork and ceramics complete the multiple code of furnishing. That it is a linguistic code should escape no one: the free choice of elements, their symbolic value, the manner in which spaces are articulated, the presence of antique furniture alongside modern pieces, all the small preferences of those who inhabit a house are factors that render it their most faithful portrait. Indeed, a large part of the literature on furnishing is centred on this symbolic mirroring, up to the most recent semiotic research.

The relationship between theory and practice

But if the code of this art is so positively and semantically multiple, is it possible to recognise within it a central nucleus, its «specific», a principle integrating so many «presences» and experiences? In a word, what is the structure of what we call furnishing?

To answer this question, let us resume the theme left pending of the relationship between theory and practice in furnishing. It has already been mentioned that this art appears to be apparently irreducible to a theory; that furnishing seems to draw from its very making the rules and criteria that in any case remain operative. But if this were so, we could not give it a definition, nor study it outside the identified historical examples, nor, without carrying out a few indispensable abstractions (theory is always abstracting and generalising), even speak of it except as a description of said examples.

It is therefore necessary to admit that, as in all things, also in furnishing there exists a theoretical moment and a practical one; not only this, but that the former has, so to speak, the faculty of freeing itself and shifting with respect to the latter in the passage from one historical period to another. Put differently, what we consider as theory is a set of principles which, after having supported what we consider as practice for a given span of time, passes, almost remaining unchanged, to inform the practice of the subsequent span of time. Thus is explained, in fact, how, as the forms, characters and most typical aspects of a style vary, we continue to consider as «furnishing» that of another epoch marked by a wholly different style. We are thus faced with something invariable, with a structure, with a system that does not change with the changing historical process⁴.

Interior architecture

To grasp at last this structure, the definition of furnishing and its inseparable theory, it is necessary to refer to architecture. In a recent past many authors spoke of furnishing as «interior architecture»⁵, but apart from the evident fact that the one is found within the other, the definition thus formulated can only be accepted in a metaphorical sense. In fact, if the «specific» of architecture is considered to be its internal and habitable spatiality⁶, what sense is there in speaking of furnishing as the interior of another art form already characterised by its interiority? Evidently, since we are not dealing with Chinese boxes or Russian dolls, inserted one inside another, the definition of furnishing as interior architecture is mistaken. And it is so not only with regard to spatiality, but also as regards defining it as architecture insofar as, unlike the latter, it has no interior and exterior. Probably this twofold erroneous definition of furnishing was reached on the basis of an architectural poetics fashionable in the 1920s and 1930s and disseminated up to the 1950s, when it was asserted that all architecture consisted in its interior space, in the free plan, in the free section, in the fact that external nature itself penetrated into architectural space, etc., and the elements delimiting and enclosing this space were assigned an utterly negligible if not null value. In reality, while recognising the greater importance of the interior space of architecture, it is not given without the walls or other elements that delimit and shape it. But let us specify these terms more clearly, and with them the relationship itself between architecture and furnishing.

Sign and meaning

Elsewhere, and in particular in the book *Segni, storia e progetto dell'architettura*⁷, drawing on the semiotic-structuralist method, I have described an architectural work, a building, as a system of empty and habitable spatial units, each composed of a cavity (a room, a hall, a chamber) and of an envelope, that is,

The text presented here is among Renato De Fusco's first reflections in defining a semiotics of furnishing. Far from a purely theoretical approach, it underscores the discipline's codes as a language, beginning with its relationship to architecture, sculpture and also painting. The text was first published in «Casa Vogue» in March 1984 and later republished in R. De Fusco, *Teorica di arredamento e design. Scritti brevi dagli anni '50 a oggi*, Liguori, Naples 2002, pp. 80-85. A second article follows this one, published in «Casa Vogue» in April 1984 and entitled *Design contro arredamento*, where the author further examines the distinction between furnishing and design. The former belongs to what De Fusco defines as the «architectural cavity» and possesses a spatial matrix; the latter is a component of furnishing. The author identifies Rationalism as the moment in which furnishing loses part of its characterisation in favour of the «purist revolution». Several excerpts from the two texts were republished under the entry *Arredamento*, in *L'universo del corpo*, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana (Founded by Giovanni Treccani), Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, Rome 1999, vol. II, pp. 317-323.

1. Here the reference is to M. Praz, *La filosofia dell'arredamento*, Documento, Librario Editore, Rome 1945 [excerpted in this volume].

2. R. De Fusco, *Storia dell'arte contemporanea*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1983.

3. In Rationalist architecture De Fusco clarifies that it is precisely in the «lining» of the cavity that the greatest modifications were made: «The internal face of the glazed envelope is reduced to a curtain, often consisting of mechanical elements attributable more to the products of design than to those of furnishing; the partition walls are reduced to panels so narrow that the doors are placed along a single side in an asymmetrical arrangement [...] the traditional specularity between floor and ceiling, often in the past inspired by a single design, is entirely lost». R. De Fusco, *Design contro arredamento*, «Casa Vogue», no. 151, 1984, p. 24 [transl. by the editor].

4. In the text *La "riduzione" culturale. Una linea di politica della cultura* (Dedalo, Bari 1976) De Fusco defines the concept of structure through two definitions. The first refers to a system composed of interdependent elements; the second to a model in which invariant features are recognised.

5. Here the reference is to the Neapolitan school of Mario De Renzi and Michele Cretella (see excerpt in this volume), for whom interior architecture and furnishing coincide in their aims.

6. The reference here concerns Zevi's conception of the internal practicability of a space as a foundational element of architecture. Cf. B. Zevi, *Saper vedere l'architettura*, Einaudi, Turin 1948, pp. 22-32 [excerpted in this volume].

7. Cf. R. De Fusco, *Segni, storia e progetto dell'architettura*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1973.

the walls or other elements that shape and delimit that cavity. To the binomial cavity/envelope I have given the name «sign», and precisely to underline the value of interior space I have proposed defining the cavity as the «meaning» component and the envelope as the «signifier» component of the architectural sign. This binomial cavity/envelope, entirely similar to others such as content/container, incorporated/incorporating, etc., clearly derives from Saussure’s definition of the linguistic sign, roughly the word, where the «meaning» stands for the (immaterial) concept and the «signifier» for the sound (material) that concretises and renders communicable the former⁸. Among the other advantages of considering in this way every architectural environment is that, if on the one hand the importance of interior space is confirmed, on the other an appropriate importance is conferred on the factor that shapes this space. Indeed, it is common experience that when one designs and subsequently builds, it is precisely on the walls, on the envelope, on the «signifier» component of the sign that one works in order to obtain the desired spatial result.

The same dialectical structure is found in any spatial unit or architectural sign belonging to any period of the history of architecture. Epochal styles, tendencies, movements of taste, the possibilities offered by technology, the constructive systems varying with the customs of peoples may now accentuate the cavity, now the envelope, here make the interior space more visible, there more concealed, in short highlight one or the other term of the binomial, but it never occurs that the first exists without the second⁹. And if this holds for a single sign-room, the same applies to the entire system of a building, in which a complex general envelope – what is called the volumetry of a construction – incorporates the complex ensemble of the individual signs. From this conception of architecture (set forth here only in constructive terms, though the mere speaking of signs implies the presence of «something else») directly descends that of furnishing.

The interior face of the envelope

Let us say immediately that the locus of furnishing is the architectural cavity, the space in which one lives, that interior void which is ultimately the very practical reason for which one builds. In this cavity furnishing arranges its system of furniture and objects, but because these must not respond only to their own internal logic, as occurs in a showroom, but to the specific environment of a well-determined house, furnishing calls into question the elements that shape said sign-environment. Indeed, owing to the indissolubility between cavity and envelope and since the envelope is composed of an internal and an external face, we must add that the domain of furnishing is that of the cavity including the internal faces of the envelope: the floor, the walls, the ceiling, the openings, etc., that is, a set

of elements which we may define as the «lining» of the cavity. Therefore, a reasonable definition of furnishing may be that of an applied art composed of heterogeneous contributions, that is, based on a multiple code, which manifests itself within an architectural cavity and is composed of two fundamental ensembles: the system of furniture and the «lining» of the cavity itself, namely the internal face of the envelope.

Once this definition is accepted, it follows that furnishing is not «interior architecture» but an art with its own characteristics. It differs from architecture in the fact that it makes use of only a part of the latter, the system of «immobile» elements, which it integrates with another system, that of the «mobile» elements; it diverges from it moreover because, while architecture shapes the entire ensemble of the spatial units of a building up to and including its overall external volumetry, furnishing finds its field of action in the world of the single environment.

Furnishing is not design

Nor should furnishing be confused with design. The differences between the two experiences are various and numerous, and would require a subsequent specific examination; here it will suffice to say that the objects of design are only one component of the systems on which furnishing operates, that of furniture and that of the «lining». It is true that, as has been mentioned, in the years of Rationalism a union was attempted between architecture and design aimed at ousting the practice of furnishing, deemed perhaps not sufficiently «pure» and in any case compromised with the past, but the attempt has long since failed. All have realised that without furnishing there lacked a work of mediation, of articulation and synthesis between the extreme objectivity of design and the extreme individuality that, for various reasons, every architectural environment presents; as also between the extreme optical valence of painting and the extreme tactile valence of sculpture. Then, to the «technical» and structural definitions given above another must be added by way of conclusion: furnishing is an art that cannot stand alone, but at the same time is the only one capable of holding together the works of all the other plastic-figurative arts.

[R. De Fusco, *Per una teoria dell’arredamento*, in «Casa Vogue», no. 150, 1984, pp. 26-27]

Cettina Lenza Furnishing 1985

We intend by F. (Furnishing) the formal and functional qualification of interior space. In this sense, F. is distinct from architecture which, as spatial conformation, nonetheless constitutes its presupposition. By allowing the adaptation of spaces to the practical, psychological and symbolic-communicative needs of human beings, F. may, indeed, be considered the logical extension of architecture and its further specification. Naturally, in its function of configuring the environment, the practice of F. interacts with the definition of space established by architectural design. In fact, it intervenes, first of all, upon the architectural support itself, whose components (delimiting or bearing, such as walls, pillars, floors, ceilings, etc., and connecting, such as the various openings), although already defined in their distributive, dimensional and conformative aspects, are characterised either through the direct decorative qualification of surfaces or through the superimposition of movable elements (such as paintings, tapestries, carpets, and so on).

These interventions also condition the general configuration of the entire ensemble, perceptively modifying the very spatiality of the architectural cavity¹. The real boundaries of the latter may be annulled through the use of mirrors (an integral part of F., for example, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) which effect its dematerialisation; or altered, through the illusory expansion towards the outside obtained with simple chromatic effects (as in modern F.), or even – and the case of Mannerist interiors is typical –by resorting to figural devices which, through *trompe-l’œil*, allude to further architectural or natural spaces.

Conversely, the use of coverings and ornamental motifs may, by virtue of their colour, texture and the minuteness of their design – intended for close viewing – underline the existence of such limits, accentuating the intimate and segregated character of the interior. In the organisation of space, these same elements may be integrated (if not partially substituted,

as occurs in the modern open plan) by furnishing components inserted into the constructive structure (internal staircases, mezzanines, built-in cupboards or bookcases, equipped partitions, etc.). Moreover, although independent from the architectural envelope, furniture proper also participates in the articulation of interior space, establishing relations with it that vary depending on regions and cultural epochs, oscillating between the opposite terms of the object-furniture, responding to requirements of lightness, mobility and minimal bulk (Japanese furniture and contemporary furniture), and the architectural-furniture, which, by virtue of its massive proportions, concretely occupies space or even dominates it (Renaissance furniture and, in particular, Baroque furniture). On the basis of such characteristics, its placement within space also differs, for it may be freely situated on the living plane or assume a fixed destination, usually leaning against the margins of the cavity, to the point of constructing a thickening of its boundaries.

In any case, furniture makes it possible to equip usable space functionally, with the contribution of the various household objects which also play a considerable role in the characterisation of the environment, thus falling, in full right, within the domain of furnishing.

By virtue of the number and variety of the elements that belong to it, F. therefore presents a particularly broad field, having, so to speak, as its upper extreme, architecture, and as its lower extreme, the ensemble of objects of individual and occasional use. In the band comprised between these ideal delimitations is distributed the entire complex phenomenology of furnishing elements which, on the basis of their formal and functional characteristics, can nonetheless be schematically grouped into five categories.

The first comprises fixed two-dimensional elements, that is, the delimiting surfaces of the cavity, in their decora-

UTET, Turin 1985, vol. II, pp. 292-301]

The text reproduced here is an excerpt from the encyclopaedic entry *Arredamento* published in the *Grande Dizionario Enciclopedico Utet* (Turin 1985) and later re-issued in *L’Enciclopedia* (La Biblioteca di Repubblica, Milan, 2003, vol. II, cols. 189-200). In line with the structuralist thought of Renato De Fusco, the author defines furnishing as part of architecture yet a distinct system within it. Early reflections on the theme were addressed by Lenza in the text *L’iconizzazione del mobile*, in «Op. cit. Selezione della critica d’arte contemporanea», no. 48, 1980, pp. 29-59.

1. For further exploration of the envelope/cavity binomial in relation to historical styles, see R. De Fusco, *Storia dell’arredamento. Dal ’400 al ’900*, UTET, Turin 1985.

8. Cf. F. De Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, C. Bally, ed., A. Sechehayé, Payot, Paris 1967.

9. De Fusco extends these early reflections on the relationship between envelope/cavity in relation to different styles and historical periods in the work *Storia dell’arredamento*, UTET, Turin 1985.

[MB]

tive, plastic or chromatic definition, figural or purely ornamental; the second, two-dimensional movable or semi-movable elements (such as curtains, tapestries, carpets, etc.), also with a predominantly characterising function; the third, fixed three-dimensional elements (internal staircases, built-in furnishings, equipped partitions), structurally connected to the architectural envelope and, in turn, shaping the cavity; the fourth, three-dimensional movable elements, supporting or containing (furniture properly speaking), bearing persons or things; the fifth, three-dimensional movable elements which do not bear weight but are, for the most part, borne by the other furnishing components, generally containers, as they possess an internal spatiality (the various household objects).

These categories, taken together, constitute the system of F., although each of them is susceptible to autonomous consideration, toward which critical interest has traditionally tended, examining separately the various aspects that contribute to F. (interior decoration, furniture, etc.) and thus neglecting, through a synthetic vision, to bring out the rules that determine the combination, in an organic ensemble, of the various elements belonging to the aforementioned categories.

F. (as the etymological root of the term indicates, from the Gothic *radfan*, to put in order) is identified precisely with the overall organisation of the environment, responding to a unitary conception established on the basis of cultural conventions, more or less binding (the styles), generally dictated by a leading nation, culturally hegemonic, and having, though with local variants, an international character.

These conventions, thanks to the frequent recourse to true models (the environments of courts, the aristocracy or, in any case, the ruling classes function as paradigms for centuries), establish, for the various epochs, the typological repertoire of furnishing components and their formal characteristics (such as shape and decoration, often relying, in order to give the entire ensemble a unitary imprint, on the prevalence of an ornamental motif, of a particular technique or material). Moreover, they also regulate the relations that the various elements maintain among themselves and with the architectural space that contains them, determining, in certain cases, the arrangement of furnishings and their disposition according to rigid and frequently symmetrical schemes.

Consequently, historically variable is also the particular environmental meaning – the result of the furnishing operation – that each organisation of interior space communicates. According to M[ario] Praz, such meaning would translate, in relatively recent times, into *Stimmung*, that is, the typically northern and bourgeois sense of intimacy of domestic interiors, manifested first of all in Flemish furnishing, aimed at expressing the ideals of cleanliness, well-being and solidity of the nascent Dutch bourgeoisie, and later variously interpreted,

until assuming the particular character of nineteenth-century interiors and, subsequently, those of Art Nouveau. Even today, the new solutions proposed by modern F. constitute, in turn, the reflection of the needs and aspirations of contemporary society.

Ultimately, F. reveals, more than any other manifestation, the spirit of an epoch or of a social class; it bears witness to the successive transformations of taste, custom, and even conceptions of life itself, adapting its functional requisites to the evolution of the concept of comfort and its symbolic values to each ideology of dwelling. Significant therefore, on the sociological plane, F.'s interest lies also in being the expression of the artistic and technical culture of different periods: besides adapting itself to the spatial structure of architecture and following its morphological mutations and typological evolution, F. often stands alongside it stylistically, reproposing, indeed, in furniture, forms and motifs that are strictly architectural. Painting and sculpture also participate in F., both as pure arts (paintings and statues) and in accordance with the general decorative theme. But F. constitutes above all the domain of the various applied arts (from carpentry to cabinetmaking, to the working of metals, textiles, etc.), whose products bear witness to the level reached in the development of techniques, in the organisation of labour, in professional specialisation.

The fruit of close collaboration or, in any case, the result of the diverse contributions of artisans and artists, F. has in fact established – beyond any historical separation – the connection between the so-called major and minor arts, often anticipating, on the operative plane, a legitimate theoretical unification. [...]

[Cettina Lenza, ed., entry *Arredamento*, in *Grande Dizionario Enciclopedico Utet*,

Filippo Alison

The Furniture System

1988

About thirty years ago, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, the most creative Scottish architect of the century, burst onto the already fully staged scene of modern architecture produced in Italy, capturing the immediate attention of experts and non-experts alike, above all for the divergent traits of his cultural lyricism. That event was rightly interpreted as the beginning of a substantial inversion in the satisfaction of taste and in the expression of the aesthetic needs of today's society. And, indeed, the features of apparent novelty in Mackintosh's work then prompted a vast cultural deepening, directed toward disciplinary and social themes that were widely diversified: between the revival of *Liberty*, the post-modern tendencies of built architecture, domestic design. In these problematics one discerns, at a distance of time, nothing other than the reflection of actual changes in productive life as regards the fungibility of domestic space, the links between objects and existential functions, between furnishings and forms of space.

Of the multiple meanings that have emerged from so much dynamism, it seems right to underline, not only for the purposes of a disciplinary propaedeutics, the many changes that have followed one another in this span of time, beyond the flares of fashion, demonstrated by the plethora of plagiarisms that attest ever more firmly the suitability of the master's design to correspond fully to the exigencies that have emerged from the expectations of today's public. New points of reference of determination and evaluation of the environment have been acquired, not only in the field of modern design but also in the broader ambit of users. Above all, the conviction has diffusedly permeated the consciousness of ordinary people, even those furthest from the area of design and interested connoisseurs, that furnishing can be a fundamental factor of spatial determination in an architectural function¹. It is right to trace this idea back to its original formulation, precisely in Mackintosh's work, which validates his connotation as a path-

breaker of modern architecture. The culture of objects and of furnishing, which has expressed itself as a community experience in characterising social life and design over these last decades, has subsequently fixed the presuppositions for the implementation of a truer and more correct correspondence of the Modern Movement.

The creative originality of our man is related, in the hermeneutic mediations of historians, to a certain sympathy for indigenous Scottish architecture, whose spontaneity and usefulness of composition he strengthened. This is true; the external structure of the house springs from the plan and from internal organisation, in the manner proper to seventeenth-century baronial architecture. Nevertheless, the recognition of this filiation, even if it suffices to confirm to the Scottish master his fertile imagination, does not describe his inventive capacities.

Mackintosh's rich formal patrimony is based, to an equal degree, both on the experiences of the styles then current, and on the particular use of structure as a decorative element: the figurative permeates formal structure, in the same way as the figurative quality of the object determines its structural arrangement.

The true teaching that can be drawn from the master's work lies in his firm persuasion that modern architecture must be more satisfying, more free, and can result from a vast knowledge of constructive techniques that inevitably reflect the cultural climate of the times.

Productive techniques and work processes are in fact the principal sources of new aesthetic possibilities. It is the task of the artist and the designer to master the expressive potential of acquired methods and techniques; to choose subsequently the solutions most suited to the material and spiritual needs of humankind. Since this conception today seems as essential as it is obvious, we tend to undervalue the revolutionary

The excerpt reproduced here was published in the monograph dedicated to Charles Rennie Mackintosh, produced on the occasion of the exhibition held at the Palazzo Vicariale in Certaldo (31 July-30 September 1988) and organised by Mario Laganà. Earlier rereadings of the Scottish architect's work were published by Filippo Alison in two articles in «Casabella», respectively in no. 376 of 1973 (pp. 17-26) and in no. 380-381 of 1973 (pp. 33-40), and in the monographic work *Le sedie di Charles Rennie Mackintosh* (Documenti di Casabella, Milan 1973). The exhibition presents, for the first time in Italy, an organic and complete critical analysis of Mackintosh's work, bringing together furnishing and architectural works, and drawings. These texts place themselves within a perspective of rediscovery of the architect, whose value of spatial articulation and of the continuum between furnishing and architecture Alison underlines.

1. The reference to the continuity between furnishing and architecture and to its influence in Italy is found in the two articles by Edoardo Persico excerpted in this volume, which grasp the lesson of the Scottish master.

import it bore at the beginning of the twentieth century, when architecture was still subject to the practices of «style». In the same way, undervaluing the notable chromatic experience of modern life, in relation to machines and objects of everyday use, we are led to minimise the greyness that characterised interiors at the time when machines were all black.

It is probable that Mackintosh's most significant contribution was his original method of approach to design. It is a widespread opinion that his design method did not distinguish between interior space and exterior space, but I believe it is more correct to consider his architecture as a true expansion of furnishing. In substance, the objects that individually define the interior arrangement become the elements that also define the external spatial structure². This design attitude proves entirely original and as adherent as possible to the demand for new architecture advanced by the community. One must therefore analyse Mackintosh's interiors, if one wishes to discover the formative principles of his artistry. For the first time in the history of architecture, in a context of design practices fossilised and apparently incapable of regeneration, we discover in the totality of the project a hierarchical organisation of space, a distribution of levels meticulously controlled, a rhythmic scanning of lines, a combination of forms and volumes, to express a single unified theme.

The teaching that can be drawn from Mackintosh's proposals, with some validity in today's architectural and social reality, is to be identified precisely in that personal intellectual disposition of his, by which the design of the building structure – whether public or private – develops contemporaneously with the complex of furnishing objects.

From the plan of the Hill House³ the generative function of furnishings and their degree of formalising capacity is clearly deducible. If in the project the architect emphasises the location of a furnishing element, representing it with greater incisiveness than the whole and perhaps repeating the annotations, this means that the apparatus pre-exists in the designer's conception with respect to the structure; indeed, in a certain sense, it determines it.

To verify this assumption it is opportune to reread the Hill House, with the objective of fixing its expressive value beyond monumental configuration, of extracting its constitutive algorithms, germinated from furnishing, and the significations of structure. The principal block of the construction rests on a terracing that runs horizontally from east to west. The sufficiently articulated form of the plan reveals the artist's will to integrate into the house landscape delights, to arrive at a spatial continuum where it is not possible to distinguish interior and exterior. For integration to be effectively achieved – that is, not remain only in potency or resolve itself in a banal detachment of the construction from the natural beauties of the site

– concrete elements of continuity are required, which belong exclusively neither to the dwelling nor to the garden. Mackintosh identifies in the window with a curved projection outward, proper to traditional indigenous habitation, the furnishing situation that can substantiate the primary meaning of the architectural project. The outward swelling of the wall in the bedroom, containing a seat plane inside, expresses the master's intention to confirm the determining role of the furnishing sign – in our case the bench-window system – in the compilation and characterisation of designed space. The bay-window of the Drawing Room in the same house is not simply a divan with a harmonious, hospitable air, placed wisely in the most liberating position of the living room. If it were so, it would be a trait strictly bound only to the area of the house, such as is the only bay-window – from which in fact it was derived.

Mackintosh's masterly manipulation, carried out through a series of formal and figurative choices, unbinds the bay-window from the house, which becomes, in this case, the place where it no longer has meaning to separate the interior from the exterior. The Hill House represents the most generalised example of Mackintosh's realisations in which furnishing objects fully carry out their role of areal and spatial determination. Before distribution, before even the planimetric arrangement, attention focuses on a complex of objects (divans, armchairs, chairs, etc.) which, by their position, do not respond even minimally to any sequence of obvious symmetry. They contribute, instead, to making the sense of domestic relaxation grow, which is due in a prevalent manner to a multiplicity of correspondences.

It springs not from an arid geometry but is generated by the harmonious interpenetration of one object into another, along bands and generative axes, according to a logic of ambits made more human precisely by elements that seem almost errors, escaped from the architect's hand.

Through this proposal of reading, I believe I have clarified the meaning of Mackintosh's furnishing, not only for the iconological value of the objects of use which, in the architect's design process, result as generative constituents of the work, but also in the complex of «furnishing complements» and of ornamental coefficients that are unjustly often dismissed as marginal. On the other hand, the metrical compositional concurrence of furnishings, in the example recalled, appears limited to horizontal bidimensionality but in reality it dilates in the varied richness of volumetric compartments, thus confirming the centrality of furniture (primary position) at the different heights of their placement, also in vertical fruition. The maximum fruition of environments at the height of 70 cm belongs to equipment destined to determine a sensation of intimate and one's own that finds in the fireplace its exaltation; one then perceives a progressive attenuation of the base dyna-

mism in rising up to the height of 210 cm, where the vault tears open the culmination of interior space.

Decorative coefficients too form part of Mackintosh's coherent continuum of environment. In this regard, one must observe carefully the variety of the *penero* placed along the balustrade of the library of the Glasgow School of Art⁴. The library is, par excellence, the place of maximum fixity, in any construction. It would remain such also in the library of the Glasgow School of Art, if the Scottish architect, with a measured solution, had not counterposed to the sense of death, ineluctably inspired by fixity, the play of sign combinations at the extremity of the wooden drapes. They correspond in an articulated manner in different directions, as in an abstract temporal scanning, obliging the reader not to succumb to the monofunctional staticity of the environment.

The effect of the wooden drapes is enhanced by the chromatic dynamism of the carvings on the pillars, which seem to activate a swarming of coloured lights, in a tempering abundantly sombre.

[Filippo Alison, *Il sistema degli arredi, generatore dello spazio interno e dell'intero organismo architettonico*, in Guido Laganà, ed., *Charles Rennie Mackintosh 1868-1928*, Electa, Milan 1988, n.p.]

2. Mackintosh pushes the bond between furnishing and architecture not only with respect to the construction of interior space but also of exterior space. An emblematic example is the curved external projection of the Hill House (Glasgow, 1902-1904) which hosts within it a seat.

3. The Hill House is located in Helensburgh and represents one of the works most identifying of Mackintosh's poetics, where architecture, decoration, and furnishings form an organic unity. The exterior is characterised through the composition of grey volumes which, with a sequence of solids and voids, takes up the internal distribution of spaces.

4. The Glasgow School of Art is designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh between 1897 and 1899 and between 1907 and 1909. The space that best reflects the continuity between environment, furnishing, and decoration is the library. [MB]

Living Among Things

Gabriella D’Amato

1989

Object and interpretation

For Heidegger, we «arrive at dwelling only through building. The latter, building, has that – namely dwelling – as its goal. Yet not all buildings are dwellings. A bridge and an airport, a stadium and a power plant are buildings, but not dwellings; likewise a station, a motorway, a dam, a covered market are buildings, but not dwellings. And yet these types of buildings also fall within the sphere of our dwelling. This sphere goes beyond the ambit of these constructions, and on the other hand is not limited to dwellings. The truck driver is at home on the motorway, and yet this is not the place where he lodges; the woman worker is at home in the spinning mill, but does not have her dwelling there; the engineer who directs the power plant finds himself there as though at home, but does not dwell there. These buildings shelter man. He dwells in them and yet does not dwell “in” them, if by dwelling in a place one understands only having one’s lodging there»ⁱ.

We shall certainly not venture into the philosophical meanings of the passage just quoted, nor attempt to translate it into terms of architectural criticism, for this would probably be impossible. Besides, Heidegger himself warns us that «This thinking concerning building does not claim to uncover ideas that might serve as models or rules for actual constructions. This attempt of thought does not present building from the point of view of architecture and technique in any sense, but seeks to reach building in that original realm to which all things that “are” belong»ⁱⁱ. Nevertheless, the words in question are at least capable of provoking more than a few considerations for architectural criticism itself. In the first place, they prompt us to question the scale and nature relevant to the notion of dwelling; in the second place, they suggest that the interpreter of this notion is above all the inhabitant – the only one, that is, capable of understanding where he is at home. This latter idea ought moreover to make those reflect who still

deceive themselves into believing they can impose revolutionary models of life devised at the drawing board, given that designing and building are, in all probability, the accompanying of the natural and bloodless metamorphosis of civilisation and of the times.

If the inhabitant is the elective interpreter of dwelling, one must nonetheless understand the way in which he succeeds in attaining its essence. And here the thought of Heidegger can once again help us, for he, precisely, deepened the philosophical orientation of hermeneutics, or the theory of interpretation, extending its domain from religious, literary and juridical texts to those of every aspect of human existence.

As Gadamer reminds usⁱ, for Heidegger the hermeneutic circle, in its part/whole relation, «is characterised by the fact that the understanding of the text is permanently determined by the anticipatory movement of pre-understanding. The circle of parts and whole is not resolved by dissolving itself in the understanding attained, but rather precisely in such understanding is realised in the fullest way. The circle therefore has no formal character; it is neither subjective nor objective, but characterises understanding as an interaction of the movement of historical transmission and the movement of the interpreter. The anticipation of meaning that guides our understanding of a text is not an act of subjectivity, but is determined on the basis of the commonality that binds us to tradition. This commonality, however, in our relation with tradition is in continuous process of becoming. It is not merely a presupposition always already given; it is we who establish it insofar as we understand, insofar as we actively participate in the subsistence and unfolding of tradition and thus carry it forward ourselves»ⁱⁱⁱ.

If dwelling too, then, can be an object of interpretation, it must presuppose a pre-understanding and imply a belonging. The problem, however, is to establish at what level the inhabitant

acquires this pre-understanding of dwelling. Certainly, it may be attained at the level of the city, of the neighbourhood, of the housing cell, and always with an increasingly precise degree of approximation. Yet these are still scales that are too vast. The inhabitant belongs indeed to urbanistic tradition, but, owing to the incommensurability of this horizon, cannot embrace it in its entirety. Perhaps the dimension of the neighbourhood could be more familiar to him, but only if it is a neighbourhood in which he has settled without trauma by being born there or by choosing to reside there voluntarily. Probably the four domestic walls are the proper reference, but even these are not a garment tailored to measure: too often, in fact, their choice is born of chance, of market opportunities, of the convenience of rents, of proximity to the workplace, that is, of circumstances dictated by necessity rather than preference. Moreover, the house is often a mirage denied by fate and replaced by a thousand compromises. And then, the language of empty spaces is too hermetic, too sparing of words, and it requires intellectualist manoeuvres within the reach of few.

There is, however, one level that cannot in any way be subtracted from the knowledge of dwelling, and this is the one that belongs to the world of objects. These constitute the authentic memory of one’s past and the immediate and direct projectuality of one’s present².

The objects of the house are in fact received as gifts, inherited, purchased, collected. They can be handled, arranged, stored, hidden. In short, we intervene upon them – without interference or impositions – by means of touch, sight, and aesthetic taste. Many of them have preceded us, thereby constituting an integral part of our history, both cultural and familial: the commonality that links us to them anticipates our understanding of dwelling and binds us to traditions; yet, at the same time, in acting upon them we make the traditions themselves advance. As we shall explain shortly, objects, with regard to the sense of dwelling, possess the capacity to establish relations with space, with time and with the *topos*.

Objects and space

According to the words of Herbert Read³, the success of the ceramic objects manufactured by Josiah Wedgwood at the end of the eighteenth century was so widespread as to justify the assertion that «an architectural style and a furnishing had to be invented to adapt to Wedgwood’s invasive products»^{iv}. The statement certainly says much about the capacity of furnishing objects, however small they may be, to penetrate the taste of the inhabitant more than a style, a tendency, or an architectural programme. But it is not only a matter of taste. The object, in fact, also contributes to determining the knowledge of the spatiality of the dwelling. And here we do not mean only the physically usable space, which appears more or less emp-

ty or full depending on the dispersal or clustering of objects. We rather refer to «private space», far more complex than physical space, at times even virtual, but in any case charged with the symbolic aura of dwelling. No one fails to notice that, since the house has become an ever narrower ambit, it has fallen to objects to compensate for the concrete lack of space. They have therefore multiplied their functions – sofa beds, bookcases used as partitions, kitchen-cupboards; they have miniaturised their format – pocket radios, micro-calculators, cassette recorders; they have condensed usefulness and artistic quality so as to be enjoyed daily and not relegated only to the cumbersome display of collecting – designer coffee pots, signed appliances, the artist’s rug – and so on. Springs snap, hinges swivel, doors and shelves fold away or tilt downwards, and where one once sat and lived, one now works or rests: whether one considers it a brilliant remedy for the lack of square metres or a sad, though necessary, illusion, it is nonetheless undeniable that household objects have the capacity to act perceptibly upon spatial experience.

A further knowledge of «private space» comes to us from those objects referred to as the «terminals» of technological services. As is well known, in the last hundred years technological innovations have profoundly changed our way of dwelling. Air conditioning makes it indifferent to live in a humid or a dry climate; the elevator makes living on the first or the thirtieth floor equivalent; telecommunications make living in a metropolis or in an isolated place comparable. These and other services have not only enabled new architectural typologies but, given their significant bulk, they themselves contribute to suggesting formal cues for architecture, thereby attaining a dignity equal to that of structures. At least this is Banham’s opinion when, regarding Louis Kahn’s Richards Memorial Laboratories in Philadelphia, he writes: «By providing the mechanical services with an external monumental volume, Kahn forced architectural historians to pay more attention to his theme than any other recent innovation in building services had done»^v.

These are, however, once again, reflections for specialists, which touch little or not at all the experience of the inhabitant. The latter, in fact, hardly perceives the link between the elements enclosing his private space and the services that enable the quality of comfort, which is perceived by the inhabitant essentially in the form of objects: the lightbulb, the radiator, the telephone, the air conditioner. These can be handled, installed or removed at will, even selected for their aesthetic quality, and seem to have little or nothing to do with the mysterious wires and pipes housed who knows where and connected to phantasmagorical and distant plants⁴.

In an article from the early days of domestic electrification one reads: «We pass through the various rooms of a

The text reproduced here was published in 1989 in the journal «Op. cit. Selezione della critica d’arte contemporanea» and reflects on domesticity and on the role of objects within the space and time of dwelling, arguing for the necessity of recognising an autonomous disciplinary value for the furnishing product. In the 1980s, in a climate of distrust toward architecture, the world of objects emerges as a concrete response to the needs of the inhabitant, opening up new projectual and relational modes. Earlier reflections by the author were published, also in «Op. cit.», as *Il design tra «radicale» e «commerciale»* (no. 53, 1982) and *Per chi tanto design?* (no. 59, 1984).

1. Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) is among the most influential twentieth-century philosophers in the field of philosophical hermeneutics. His principal work, *Wahrheit und Methode*, J. C. B. Mohr, Tübingen 1960, proposes a conception of understanding as a dialogic process in which meaning emerges from the encounter between interpreter and text, and not as the simple reconstruction of original intentions.

2. The author defines the object as the component closest to human needs, the one endowed with greatest intimacy.

3. Herbert Read (1893-1968) was an English art critic, theorist and poet, one of the foremost promoters of artistic modernity and of theoretical reflection on design. His theoretical production is distinguished by the attention paid to the educational and cultural function of art and objects, maintaining that design is not merely aesthetic but also an expression of social and moral values.

4. On the theme of the mechanisation of the home see S. Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command. A Contribution to Anonymous History*, Oxford University Press, New York 1948.

well-organised apartment – entrance hall, drawing room, dining room, kitchen, bathroom – in which electric igniters, bells, call panels, lights, automatic scoring devices for billiards are in operation, and everything that electricity can supply for the comfort of modern life»^{vi}. One could hardly have a clearer demonstration of how the new ease with which one could make use of domestic spaces was associated, from the outset, not with «abstract» electricity, but with its «concrete» and «tangible» devices that made its conduction possible.

Perceived as objects, technological services also lose their aseptic impersonality and begin to interfere with our character traits, to the point of provoking in us unconditional approval or irreducible aversion. And this, incidentally, is well known to anyone who viscerally refuses to use the computer or the electric typewriter, despite the undeniable advantages they could derive from it. Marcel Proust was well aware of this irrational empathy when he reminded us that his housekeeper, Françoise, refused to learn how to use the telephone. «The progress of civilisation», he wrote, «allows everyone to reveal unsuspected qualities or new vices, which make us dearer or insufferable to our friends. Thus Edison’s discovery had allowed Françoise to acquire one more defect: that of refusing, whatever the usefulness or urgency, to use the ‘little telephone’. She found a way to flee when they wanted to ‘teach’ her, as others do when they are about to be vaccinated. For this reason the telephone was in my room, and, so as not to disturb my parents, its bell had been replaced with the sound of a small rattle»^{vii}.

Thus one may conclude that each «terminal» not only condenses the energies that allow it to bring light, heat or voice into the dwelling, but also releases within the dwelling’s private space potent potentials that are not measurable by any instrument other than the experience of the one who inhabits it.

Object and time

Objects, like events, may be considered the concrete entities that crowd history, that which frees time from its abstract dimension in order to fix its trace and perceive its rhythms. Thus the multitude of disposable containers that enter our home underscores the convulsive sequences of the consumer civilisation in which everything, once used, no longer deserves to be recovered. Conversely, the few objects destined for domestic museification or collecting mark the longer and more significant pauses through which we attempt to connect the dimensions of past, present and future. As Baudrillard writes, «the profound power of collected objects does not derive from singularity nor from specific historicity: not for this reason is the time of the collection not real time, but “because the organisation of the collection replaces time”. The fundamental

function of the collection is without doubt this: to resolve real time into a systematic dimension»^{viii}.

Objects weave invisible patterns with people. Those who possess only a few surviving pieces of a table service, increasingly thinned out over numerous family handovers, know that they cannot part with them. And this because, although they ostentate the arrogance granted to them by the fate of being more durable than the individuals who handled them, they also preserve the sweet memory of our roots. Objects, ultimately, help us feel less alone in the world and suggest that anticipation of meaning that guides our understanding of dwelling. But not only with people. With behaviours too they weave invisible ties. We know, moreover, that our way of laying the table – the types of dishes, their positions, their number and the number of courses – derives from a configuration codified by Escoffier at the end of the nineteenth century and known as the *dîner à la russe*⁵. Today, we may choose the most contemporary tableware, but it suffices to arrange it in the customary way, to add some interference imported from other table cultures, for the distances of times and places to contract and for a step forward to be taken in the behavioural tradition to which we belong.

The knowledge of time that accompanies the world of objects had been perfectly understood by George Kubler⁶ when, in coining the expression «the shape of time», he warned: «we have not simply intended to adopt the euphemism that replaces the insipid ugliness of “material culture”. Anthropologists use this expression to distinguish ideas, or “mental culture”, from products (or artefacts). “The history of things” instead intends to reunite ideas and things under the heading of “visual forms”, including in this term both artefacts and works of art, replicas and unique examples, tools and expressions: in short, all matters worked by the hand of man under the guidance of ideas linked and developed in temporal sequence. From all these things there emerges a form of time; a visible portrait of collective identity – whether tribe, class or nation – takes shape. This self-portrait reflected by things serves the group as guide and point of reference for the future and finally becomes the portrait handed down to posterity»^{ix}.

Object and *topos*

The object, understood as guide and point of reference for the group, calls to mind the section devoted to nomadism in the exhibition organised by the Triennale di Milano in 1986⁷. In the catalogue, Reyner Banham discussed the theme by considering it from the perspective of industrial design objects designed for travellers. He introduced the discussion by commenting on a scene from John Ford’s film based on Steinbeck’s novel *The Grapes of Wrath*: the Joad family, moving to the Cali-

fornian Promised Land, struggles along on a lorry overloaded with household goods. «They are the first nomadic farmers», Banham writes, «who have no herds of cattle or work animals following them, but who have brought with them a mountain of pathetic domestic utensils»^x. It is worth spending a few words on those utensils.

Far from pathetic. In them seems to be enclosed the entire secret of the experience of dwelling. Relocated to an unknown place, beyond their practical use, they will have the power to make the *déracinés* immediately feel «at home» and in harmony with their past. Perhaps nomadism, as has been suggested from various quarters, will become a new imperative dictated by the times – indeed, in countries at an advanced stage of well-being, this is already happening. The phenomenon, however, is directly proportional to the desire for uniformity in dwelling models. In other words, one moves all the more willingly the more likely it is to recreate the environments left behind. This, after all, is demonstrated by airport waiting rooms or by the rooms of certain hotel chains in which a punctilious replication of furnishings and environmental conformations is sought, in order to make up for the sense of displacement caused by continuous movement.

Nomadism can therefore lead to two consequences: either to conclude that «when a move is imminent, the furniture becomes ridiculous»^{xi}, and thus to standardise one’s existence around a set of universal objects retrievable everywhere; or else to tend toward an extreme personalisation of one’s household objects to make one’s dwelling «unique» wherever it may be. In either case, however, the importance of objects in the liveability of the domestic environment remains demonstrated. It is therefore possible that one may grow estranged from places and dwellings, but it is difficult to imagine estrangement from objects. Indeed, one may hypothesise that their symbolic value and personalisation will be directly proportional to the indifference and anonymity of the telematic devices that will enable the new nomadism.

Certainly, let us not fall into the naïveté of denying that the *topos* has a decisive weight in the notion of dwelling. As has been noted, while good architecture «can modify an unsuitable *topos* by intervening with an appropriate series of corrective measures to improve a place considered unsatisfactory, the opposite is not true: a beautiful place does not modify bad architecture»^{xii}. But it is also true, in our view, that objects can make a bad architecture at least «habitable» and an alien *topos* «bearable». And this is certainly not negligible.

[Italo] Calvino says that «from the moment an object appears in a narrative, it takes on a special force, becomes like the pole of a magnetic field, the node of a web of invisible relations. The symbolism of an object may be more or less explicit,

but it is always there. We might say that in a narrative an object is always a magical object»^{xiii}.

And we might conclude that, by substituting the word «narrative» with «dwelling», the meaning of Calvino’s passage does not change.

- i. M. Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (1954), Italian transl. *Saggi e discorsi*, Mursia, Milan 1985, p. 96.
- ii. *Ibid.*
- iii. H. G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960), Italian transl. *Verità e metodo*, Bompiani, Milan 1983, p. 343.
- iv. H. Read, *Art and Industry*, Italian transl. *Arte e Industria*, Lerici, Milan 1962, p. 38.
- v. R. Banham, *The Architecture of the Well-Tempered Environment* (1969), Italian transl. *Ambiente e tecnica nell’architettura moderna*, Laterza, Bari 1978, p. 2.
- vi. The passage is taken from an article by Gaston Tissandier published in «L’illustration», 20 August 1881, and cited in P. A. Carré, *Luce elettrica e telefono (1881-1914), ovvero l’inizio dei nuovi terminali*, in AA. VV., *Il progetto domestico*, essays edited by G. Teyssot, Electa, Milan 1986, p. 194.
- vii. Citation taken again from the essay by P. A. Carré, p. 193. The passage by Marcel Proust is from *À la recherche du temps perdu, Sodome et Gomorrhe*, Italian edition, Einaudi, Turin 1978, vol. IV, pp. 143-144.
- viii. J. Baudrillard, *Le système des objets* (1968), Italian transl. *Il sistema degli oggetti*, Bompiani, Milan 1972, p. 124.
- ix. G. Kubler, *The Shape of Time* (1972), Italian transl. *La forma del tempo*, Einaudi, Turin 1976, p. 17.
- x. R. Banham, *Neo-nomadismo e nomadismo chic*, in AA. VV., *Il progetto domestico*, cit., p. 240.
- xi. G. Teyssot, *Figure d’interni*, in AA. VV., *Il progetto domestico*, cit., p. 25. The author cites a phrase by E. M. Forster.
- xii. L. Sacchi, *Architettura senza topos*, in «Op. cit. Selezione della critica d’arte contemporanea», no. 70, September 1987.
- xiii. I. Calvino, *Lezioni americane*, Garzanti, Milan 1988, p. 35.
- xiii. I. Calvino, *Lezioni americane*, Garzanti, Milan 1988, p. 35.

[Gabiella D’Amato, *Abitare tra gli oggetti*, in «Op. cit. Selezione della critica d’arte contemporanea», no. 74, 1989, pp. 16-25.]

5. The reference to the French chef Georges Auguste Escoffier (1846-1935) and to the *dîner à la russe* at the end of the nineteenth century opens a reflection on the way in which culinary practice can reveal cultural and social configurations of the domestic space and of the table. The introduction of a sequential service of courses, distinct from the custom of the *service à la française*, in which everything was set out simultaneously, is not merely a change of practical order but an outright transformation of convivial ritual: each course acquires autonomy and specific value, and the table becomes a stage for the relationship between host and object. Cf. I. Forino, *La cucina. Storia culturale di un luogo domestico*, Einaudi, Turin 2019, pp. 77-78.

6. George Kubler (1912-1996) was an art historian and theorist of design known for his analysis of form and time in artistic and technical production. In his celebrated *The Shape of Time* (Yale University Press, 1962), Kubler proposes that objects and works be considered as nodes of a temporal sequence in which form emerges through progressive variations and transformations.

7. The reference here is to the XVII Triennale di Milano, entitled *Il progetto domestico. La casa dell’uomo: archetipi e prototipi*, curated by Georges Teyssot and Mario Bellini. In the text *Figure d’interni*, written by Georges Teyssot in the homonymous exhibition catalogue, the author identifies several transforma-

tions of domesticity, among which is what he defines as «domesticity in movement», namely that phenomenon of nomadism which, for various reasons, was emerging with great force in the 1980s and which transforms the house into a «place of transit». Cf. G. Teyssot, *Figure d’interni*, in *Il progetto domestico. La casa dell’uomo: archetipi e prototipi*, Electa, Milan 1986, pp. 18-27. [MB]

Philosophies of Exhibition Design

Jacopo Leveratto

If, on the one hand, the pairing of the terms «philosophy» and «exhibition design» clearly refers to Mario Praz’s theory of interior decoration – and to his attempt to confer cultural dignity on a subject otherwise considered marginal¹ – on the other, it might just as easily sound paradoxical, if not outright provocative. Indeed, even after a brief survey of the field, one could legitimately wonder what kind of philosophies or theoretical *corpus* might have emerged from a discipline long regarded, since its earliest systematisations, as a sort of *corpus vilis* within architectural design². A discipline whose birth is historically bound up with that of the great World’s Fairs – «mastodontic trophies erected to the deities of Industry and Commerce»³ – of which exhibition design constitutes the essential infrastructure in terms of «advertising», «offering», or even «selling» the product on display. And one that, in this sense, also evolved in other domains – such as the artistic – always in a functional capacity as a complementary practice, whether spectacular, persuasive, or didactic in nature, whose ultimate significance is always deferred to something beyond itself⁴. A service-oriented and circumstantial discipline, in other words, dictated by the needs of objects and occasions, and lacking a stable disciplinary status, which, depending on circumstances and often tentatively, includes highly diverse techniques of not always «noble» lineage, all in the name of the communicative dimension to which it was necessarily bound⁵. And, most importantly in this context, one whose relationship with architecture is marked above all by temporality – if not by a kind of *programmed obsolescence* – wherein a project of exhibition design, unlike an architectural one, might exist for only a few hours⁶. A fact that has led, in effect, to a devaluation of the meanings it conveys, compensated for, however, by an often-exaggerated rhetorical emphasis on those very meanings.

These, in short, are the doubts that tend to surface in any initial attempt to outline a theoretical framework for exhibition design, and they are the same doubts that, as a sort of disclaimer, appear at the outset of nearly all the historical-critical accounts produced in Italy on the subject⁷. Yet rather than dwelling on or disputing these doubts within the disciplinary boundaries themselves, such studies have almost uniformly sought to highlight the extraordinary opportunities that this type of design offers, especially in relation to the interpretation of architecture as a whole – as is typical of the Italian culture of interiors. And they do so by taking as their starting point, not the functional difference between exhibition design and architecture, but rather the difference in their duration, which becomes the fundamental distinction through which to identify potential intersections and reciprocal influences. Thus, on the one hand, these studies expand the scope of the field well beyond the strictly exhibitionary, encompassing also artistic displays, museography, didactic and scenic exhibitions, and any context involving the construction of a designed space.

While, on the other hand, they examine how architectural culture has used exhibition design to experiment with new materials, techniques, and, above all, compositional languages and methods aligned with the international theoretical debate – particularly in moments when, for various economic and political reasons, Italy’s architectural production was confined to a largely local scale. Something that first happens, for example, towards the end of the 1920s, when exhibition design offered the opportunity to develop a consciously rationalist approach during a period when architectural commissions were scarce and constrained by the «Novecento canon»⁸; and again, after World War II – especially within the field of museography – as a means to consolidate a clear and original architectural idea that would later achieve exceptional international resonance, and become one of the defining features of that particular design culture⁹.

In other words, within Italian critical literature, exhibition design has never been conceived as an autonomous discipline with fixed boundaries, but rather as a *modus operandi* of architecture itself – an alternative way of doing architecture when prevailing production conditions do not permit actual construction – wherein what matters most are not boundaries but transgressions. This is partly due to the material, economic, and political circumstances of a country whose architectural output – even aside from the emergency situations mentioned above – has long been far lower than that of its Western European counterparts. But it is also the result of a specifically Italian conception of architecture as a continuum of design across all scales and functions – «from the spoon to the city», in Ernesto Nathan Rogers’s famous phrase¹⁰ – beyond the typological and thematic divisions that elsewhere have produced distinct professional specialisations. As if to say that wherever there is space – and by space one also means that designated by objects – there is architecture, and that an architectural thought – understood as a philosophically grounded control of built space – can emerge even in the absence of the permanence and solidity that traditionally define the discipline. A quality, this latter, which is distinctive of Italian interior culture and has evolved as a rejection of any identification with mere decoration, furniture design, or industrial design, instead asserting a fully architectural dimension¹¹, extending as well to the design of a more urban character¹². And which, within an ideal history of Italian exhibition design, takes the form of a series of attempts, practices, and experiments that, if they can be said to establish a shared disciplinary ground, do so precisely through the absence of any systematic theoretical elaboration of their fundamental principles.

If we in fact exclude a few more recent and significant efforts in this direction – such as those by Francesco Dal Co and Luca Basso Peressut¹³ – the critical literature on exhibition design can be broadly divided into two categories: historical

texts, like those of Eugenio Gentili and Agnoldomenico Pica¹⁴, and design-derived writings, such as those by Franco Albini and Leonardo Savioli¹⁵ – with interesting hybrid cases, like that of Giuseppe Pagano¹⁶. And if in both groups what stands out is the evident impossibility of arriving at a coherent theoretical system that could yield definitive or modal principles, it is the latter group, the design-derived writings – as well as the hybrid cases – that offers the most clues for defining what might be regarded as a specific philosophy. For it is within these contributions that, at historically surprising moments, alongside more conventional questions drawn from canonical architectural discourse, one begins to find references to «plastic affirmations», «spatial experiences», or «architectural atmospheres»¹⁷, as well as to «vibration», «tension», or «surprise» as criteria for the qualification of space and design¹⁸. It is here, therefore, that exhibition design first emerges as a distinct domain in relation to architecture at large, and where, by virtue of that same cultural continuity mentioned earlier, a series of previously unfamiliar concerns enters the architectural vocabulary. Thus, if a philosophy of exhibition design exists, it is that of a project exempt from confrontation with time and place – a design whose only task is to construct a coherent environmental unity articulating relations among spaces, objects, and things. A philosophy freed from the necessity of expressing objective values, and instead devoted to constructing that «poetic atmosphere in which everyone breathes»¹⁹, and which perhaps is the most elusive, yet ultimately the most essential, dimension of the architectural phenomenon.

Perhaps, however, in terms of content, there is a further «philosophical» component that can be identified in this field, more closely linked to its grounding within the disciplines of interiors and to its specific geographical articulation, which has to do with that exhibition design related to dwelling that profoundly characterizes Italian culture in this domain. For if it is true that, from the postwar period onward, exhibitions on housing and furnishing primarily represent instruments for the formation of taste and national identity, from the end of the 1960s, with the «radical» season, they begin to constitute an experimental field for the development of a critical theory of the consumer society which, rather than accommodating prevailing models of production, starts to position itself as an alternative to them. Specifically promoting new ideas of dwelling which, by calling into question that set of reified, spatialized, and consolidated power relations embedded in the bourgeois domestic project, end up shaping, over the years, if not exactly a forge of models, at least a series of «resonance chambers» for the formation of a political consciousness capable of interrogating an order of things and a principle of development that are increasingly presented as natural. From the first experiments of Triennale di Milano on *Il grande numero* (1968), to the «counter-projects» of the exhibition *Italy. The New Domestic Landscape* (New York Museum of Modern Art, 1972), and the historical revisionisms of *Il progetto domestico* (Triennale di Milano, 1986), up to the various attempts through which, particularly in the 1990s, dwelling, through exhibition design, returns to the center of political discourse, no longer in response to an emergency, but as an alternative to the prevailing idea of society. Attempting, that is, to recompose, through an extended idea of the inhabited interior, the presumed contradiction between politics and economy, *polis* and *oikos*, city and dwelling, which still runs through contemporary debate. And recognizing in the exhibited interior not only the mirror but also the fundamental mechanism of construction of the post-industrial city²⁰, which, as such, may represent an essential device not only for its representation, but also for its transformation²¹.

1. M. Praz, *La filosofia dell’Arredamento*, Documento, Librario Editore, Rome 1945 [excerpted in this volume].
2. G. Pagano, *Parliamo un po’ di esposizioni*, in «Casabella Costruzioni», nos. 159-160, 1941, n.p. [excerpted in this volume].
3. E. Gentili, *Organicità e decorativismo nell’allestimento delle mostre*, in «Metron», no. 10, 1946, p. 60 [excerpted in this volume].
4. Cf. G. Celant, *Una macchina visuale. L’allestimento d’arte e i suoi archetipi moderni*, in «Rassegna», no. 10, 1982, pp. 6-11 [excerpted in this volume].
5. C. Viano, *Note per una teoria dell’allestimento*, in M. Mastropietro ed., *Progettare mostre. Dieci lezioni di allestimento*, Lybra Immagine, Milan 1991, pp. 106-123.
6. Cf. G. Ottolini, *Architettura degli allestimenti*, Altralinea, Florence 2017.
7. For an overview, see R. Aloï, *Esposizioni, architetture, allestimenti*, Hoepli, Milan 1960; S. Polano, *Mostrare. L’allestimento in Italia dagli anni Venti agli anni Ottanta*, Lybra Immagine, Milan 1988.
8. Cf. G. Pagano, *op. cit.*; G. Dorfles, *L’architettura moderna*, Garzanti, Milan 1972, pp. 36-37.
9. Cf. G.C. Argan, *Problemi di museografia*, in «Casabella Continuità», no. 207, 1955, pp. 65-67 [excerpted in this volume]; M. Tafuri, *Aufklärung II. Il museo, la storia, la metafora (1951-1967)*, in Id., *Storia dell’architettura italiana 1944-1985*, Einaudi, Turin 1982, pp. 56-108.
10. Expression formulated for the 1952 Charter of Athens.
11. See, in this regard, the introduction to the first section of this volume, titled *Meanings of interiors*.
12. Cf. E. Bonfanti, *Arredamenti ed esposizioni*, in E. Bonfanti and M. Porta, *Città, museo e architettura. Il Gruppo BBPR nella cultura architettonica italiana 1932-1970*, Hoepli, Milan 1973, pp. 65-70 [excerpted in this volume].
13. F. Dal Co, *Mostrare, allestire, esporre*, in S. Polano, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-17; L. Basso Peressut, *Architettura dell’esporre*, in «Exporre», no. 5, 1990, pp. 1-5 [both excerpted in this volume].
14. E. Gentili, *op. cit.*; A. Pica, *Esposizioni*, in R. Aloï, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-38 [excerpted in this volume].
15. F. Albini, *Una lezione di Franco Albini su: «le funzioni e l’architettura del Museo» (alcune esperienze)* (1954), in C. De Carli, *Architettura Spazio Primario*, Hoepli, Milan 1982, pp. 416-424; L. Savioli, *Il problema degli allestimenti*, in L. Savioli and D. Santi eds., *Problemi di architettura contemporanea. L’architettura delle Gallerie d’arte moderna*, G&G, Florence 1972, pp. 258-259 [both excerpted in this volume].
16. G. Pagano, *op. cit.*, n.p.
17. *Ibidem*.
18. F. Albini, *op. cit.*, *passim*.
19. Gruppo BBPR, cited in Bonfanti, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
20. G. Bosoni, *Prefazione*, in S. San Pietro, *Nuovi allestimenti in Italia*, L’Archivoltò, Milan 1996, pp. 8-9 [excerpted in this volume].
21. On the development of this approach in the past few years see, as an example, the catalogues of the exhibitions by B. Finessi, ed., *Stanze. Altre filosofie dell’abitare/Rooms. Novel Living Concepts*, XXI Triennale di Milano, Marsilio, Venice 2016; and N. Bassoli, ed., *Home Sweet Home*, Electa, Milan 2023.

Giuseppe Pagano (Pogatschnig)

Let’s Talk a Little About Exhibitions

1941

One of the most effective vehicles for the understanding, disseminating, and testing the ideas that govern modern taste is represented by exhibitions. Indeed, we can trace with the greatest accuracy the most recent stages in contemporary taste by closely following the record of the various exhibitions that have captured the attention of the civilized world over the last fifty years. It might seem, from the point of view of art history, that more solid and less fleeting events should be considered more important; yet it is equally true that when humankind wishes to test a «novelty» (even if that novelty will, after a few years, become a truth accepted by the majority), it prefers to experiment *in corpore vili*¹, that is, on provisional occasions. The principal condition (I would even say the «necessary» condition) for an exhibition to truly become a fruitful and courageous experiment and to serve as a natural vehicle for the progress of taste is its provisional nature. Without this characteristic, which minimizes the economic risks of experimentation, which justifies the event’s touristic appeal through a «generous acceptance of the new», which offers the organizers the opportunity to employ the liveliest and most controversial artists at a reasonable cost, and which encourages debate, criticism, and publicity, exhibitions turn into banal stylistic reconstructions, where architectural prudence poorly interprets the innovative intentions of their organizers.

That this provisional nature is one of the most favorable conditions for an exhibition to be truly lively and interesting can be confirmed by simple observation. When Italian modern architecture was still struggling in its first polemics and «horrors» abounded, when the Milan train station, the Casa Madre del Mutilato, and the first section of Via Roma in Turin² were being built; when a few impassioned architects were shouting and organizing exhibitions of «rational» architecture to combat the irrationality of a feeble, conventional stylistic revival; when functional architecture was regarded with suspicious caution,

and every self-respecting citizen swelled with patriotic indignation at the sight of a house without a roof, a horizontal window, or a doorway without wrought-iron fittings; when the patronage of some intelligent café owner (let us recall the Craja Bar in Milan!)³ was considered an act of heroic audacity, where, then, could the architectural dreams of modern architects find expression? In exhibitions! Indeed, between 1927 and 1932, Italian architects were forced, almost without exception, to be content with temporary structures for fairs and exhibitions⁴. From these intelligent sheds the Italian public first came to know the early steps of modern architecture. One need only recall the Turin Exhibition of 1928⁵ (on that occasion I myself was able to test the expressive value of a smooth wall and to make my first positive and negative experiments), the Casa Elettrica in Monza (1930)⁶, and the first temporary buildings and exhibition designs in Monza, Turin, and at the Milan Fair.

In these cases, the «new taste» was tolerated almost as a publicity necessity, and the new architecture, instead of attracting the attention of the ruling classes (as was happening at the time in Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Finland), was forced to enter the history of modern art under the ambiguous label of the «Novecento style»⁷: a style that first asserted itself with initial courage in exhibitions, fairs, and store displays. A counter-proof of this condition of inferiority and temporary tolerance toward modern architecture (the fair commissioners called it «radical Novecento») can be seen in the cases where exhibitions, pavilions, or displays were built with «permanent» characteristics. In such situations, the «responsibility» of a tradition-tested architecture inevitably resurfaces, and construction sinks into the most tasteless, colorless, and odorless academicism: that cautious international academism that solves everything with old stylistic recipes. I will not cite recent examples, so as not to cause further displeasure to the publisher of «Costruzioni».

fundamental traits of exhibition design, which – due to its transitory nature and low economic impact – can afford a degree of experimental freedom usually denied to architecture, whose higher political representativeness makes it far less flexible. This aspect, not secondary for the period in which Pagano was writing, is essential to understanding his argument.

2. Pagano is referring respectively to Milan’s Central Station, designed by Ulisse Stacchini after winning the 1912 national competition; to Marcello Piacentini’s project, built between 1925 and 1937; and to the first phase of Turin’s redevelopment (1931), which extended from Piazza San Carlo to Piazza Castello.

3. The Craja Bar was a 1930 project by Luciano Baldessari with Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini.

4. This same periodization is repeated almost verbatim by Gillo Dorfles, who, years later, writes that «in the period between 1927 and 1931, [...] even though few buildings were constructed, polemics and critical debates were intense, and I believe one can affirm that – at least among an élite of architects and critics – modern artistic thought was correctly understood and interpreted». G. Dorfles, *L’architettura moderna*, Garzanti, Milan 1954 (1972, pp. 36-37).

5. Pagano here refers to the International Exhibition of the Decennial of Victory (Esposizione Internazionale del Decennale della Vittoria), during which, among

It is certain, however, that architectural courage is inversely proportional to the lifespan of buildings. The Palazzo della Moda in Turin⁸ is the only exception in this regard, or at least the most striking one.

If an architect dreams of the unity of an exhibition in a total coherence between exterior and interior, wishing to submit everything to the most imaginative invention, the most free and lyrical correspondence between form and content, the most poetic balance between scenographic needs and structural logic, the organizers at first often share the same intentions. The difference, unfortunately, is that the logical consequences of an artistically coherent argument frequently collide with the illogical or trivial needs of an organization insensitive to the values of art and imagination. The fortune of exhibitions depends on the happiness or misfortune of these encounters: encounters between people.

When an exhibition is organized (whether determined by purely artistic, commemorative, celebratory, or simply commercial purposes) the work of presentation is generally divided into three main categories: those who finance it (the presidency and administration), those who organize it (technicians specialized in its particular topics), and those who realize it (the artistic direction of the exhibition design). Upon these three different activities rests the success of exhibitions⁹. When these three cornerstones speak the same language, vibrate with the same enthusiasm, and do not fear the new, there is the risk of achieving a perfect exhibition. A president who urges everything to be coordinated within a courageous affirmation of life and progress, without arrogating aesthetic authority but concerned instead with three essential matters: generous and prudent administration, distrust of purely speculative initiatives, and wholehearted collaboration with the responsible artists; a technical organization that does not claim aesthetic rights but works effectively to provide the artists with all materials to be exhibited, comments on their features, emphasizes their merits, and assumes full responsibility for timely delivery; finally, an artistic direction which, through strength of character, organizational skill, and the personal quality of the artists involved, succeeds in winning tactical command of the entire enterprise and offers the complete authority of both director and arbiter.

When these ideal conditions are met, it soon becomes apparent that, provided the artists in charge of the exhibition design possess great imagination and their work is not obstructed by the negative interference of incapable organizers or careless technicians, the exhibition can attain the importance of a major victory in the field of art and taste. In all my experience, this ideal case was realized in the Exhibition of Italian Aeronautics, thanks to a young, courageous, and active president¹⁰. In that instance, by concentrating the various re-

sponsibilities in a tightly knit group of three people, complete fusion of duties was achieved, along with an intensified sense of final artistic responsibility that greatly contributed to the immense success of that exhibition and gave the architects the satisfaction of realizing things never before imagined. Such combinations, however, are rare. Few presidents accept their constitutional role, and fewer still resist the deleterious influence of envious or dissenting opinions that always seek to diminish acts of courage, to distrust intelligence, and to exploit others’ experience through imitation or copying. Exhibition histories are full of these emasculated [sic] cases. Nor would it be worth discussing them, were it not for the numerous examples of organizers who dictate banal «rules of taste» and imagine that they display their superficial artistic education by imposing, with authority, the bourgeois vulgarity that normally surrounds them.

From all this, it is clear that among the three functions of an exhibition, the most important and responsible is that of the architect who selects, directs, and constructs, of the artist who furnishes, of the individual who «presents». This truth is rarely accepted in all its inescapable evidence. It must bow to the proud presumption of the «organizing committees», resign itself to following directives often absurd and sometimes contrary to the most elementary good sense. Few presidents notice or wish to recognize that a good architect is not merely a poet of forms or an ingenious scenographer, but is endowed with organizational abilities that allow him to embody both roles of organizer and exhibition designer. Where such a combination occurs, greater unity and a more congenial climate for a perfect work can be achieved.

In the final stage of preparing an exhibition, this combination of duties proves not only necessary but indispensable to avoid dangerous discrepancies between organizer and architect. If the exhibition designer is complacent and relies on the clichés of banal presentations (the usual displays of «dioramas» or showcases stuffed with tricolor ribbons and trivial piles of «artistically» decorated products) then agreement with the usual *commendatore* posing as a connoisseur is easy. But when the artist knows his craft and seeks to achieve results that attain the dignity of a true work of art, then conflict, sometimes very lively, between the «competent organizer» and the artist becomes inevitable. The history of exhibitions is full of these dramatic clashes, since it is rare for organizers to place unlimited trust in artists, especially when they are somewhat controversial or daringly modern.

Nevertheless, on average, tolerance for innovative impulses and indulgence toward surprise and invention have been more generous and widespread than the acceptance of permanent architecture. Commercial motives and a natural indulgence toward temporary extravagance? Certainly, this

The text by Giuseppe Pagano presented here, originally published in «Casabella Costruzioni» (nos. 159-160, 1941), appeared on a single double-sided sheet inserted as an appendix to the journal, accompanied by the following note: «We have just received this article at the last moment, and must insert it into the already printed issue. Our director wrote it during a respite from his service as a combatant on the Greek front». An ideal postscript to the editorial in the same issue (*L’architetto e le esposizioni*, pp. 2-3), the article likely represents the first genuine contribution to an Italian theory of exhibition design and, at the same time, a snapshot of the Italian «exhibition culture» of the period (see S. Polano, *Mostrare. L’allestimento in Italia dagli anni Venti agli anni Ottanta*, Lybra Immagine, Milan 1988, p. 528, with the full transcription on pp. 538-545). For further studies, see the monographic issue of «Casabella Costruzioni» dedicated to Pagano (no. 199, 1946); C. Melograni, *Giuseppe Pagano*, Il Balcone, Milan 1955; A. Bassi, L. Castagno, *Giuseppe Pagano*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1994.

1. The expression *in corpore vili* (a shortened form of the phrase *faciamus experimentum in corpore vili*) historically refers, in medicine, to experiments carried out on corpses or animals and thus, by extension, to tests performed on subjects considered expendable. Pagano uses it here to highlight one of the

others, the GANT group (Pietro Betta, Maurizio De Rege, Mario Dezzutti, Gino Levi Montalcini, Armando Melis de Villa, Arturo Midana, Sandro Molli, Domenico Morelli, Ettore Pittini, Paolo Perona, Mario Passanti, Giuseppe Pagano, Antonio Pogatschnig, Natale Reviglio, Gianni Ricci and Giuseppe Rosso) designed the Book Pavilion and the Architects’ House (Padiglione del Libro and Casa degli Architetti).

6. A project exhibited by the Gruppo 7 (Luigi Figini, Gino Pollini, Guido Frette, Sebastiano Larco Silva, Carlo Enrico Rava, Giuseppe Terragni and Ubaldo Castagnoli, then substituted by Adalberto Libera) at the 4th International Exhibition of Decorative and Industrial Arts (Esposizione Triennale Internazionale delle Arti Decorative e Industriali Moderne) in Monza, designed by Figini and Pollini for the building structure, with contributions by Piero Bottoni, Guido Frette, and Adalberto Libera for the interiors.

7. Pagano’s doubts here – entirely legitimate – concern the inclusion of such tendencies within the broader framework of the Novecento movement, associated with the return to order promoted by Margherita Sarfatti. For further discussion of the various strands of the Novecento, see L. Caramel and M. De

Micheli, *Il Novecento italiano*, Feltrinelli, Milan 1970; G. Fanelli, *Architettura e fascismo*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1976; M. Tafuri, *Storia dell’architettura italiana 1915-1945*, Einaudi, Turin 1982.

8. Designed by Ettore Sottsass Sr. in 1936 and built two years later.

9. In this passage Pagano introduces another defining feature of the Italian discourse on exhibition design which, unlike other sectors of architecture and interior design, does not rest upon general theoretical principles but rather on an extremely technical, specific, and pragmatic foundation, grounded in the actual productive capacities – whether technical, economic, or political – of the exhibitions in question.

10. The Exhibition of Italian Aeronautics (Esposizione Aeronautica Italiana), conceived by Marcello Visconti di Modrone, mayor of Milan, was held at Palazzo dell’Arte in 1934. For this exhibition, Pagano designed the entrance area, the Icarus Room (Sala d’Icaro, with Bruno Munari for the pictorial elements), the grand staircase, and the Decennial Hall (Sala della Crociera del Decennale, conceived with Arturo Martini).

generosity has allowed the realization of plastic affirmations, spatial experiences, and entirely new architectural atmospheres that are still vainly sought in permanent construction¹¹.

Thus, born from almost exclusively commercial or touristic reasons, the technique of exhibitions had the not insignificant merit of enabling and facilitating experiments otherwise impossible. In this field, Italy had the privilege of achieving a mastery of the first order, fully able to rival that of artists in other nations highly attuned to modern taste.

Contributing to this favorable climate were the great industries with their publicity organizations. Indeed, around these technicians, skilled and sophisticated in the modern resources of advertising, several of Italy's best exhibition designers gathered. The names Montecatini, Fiat, Olivetti, and Snia are now associated with some of the most successful expressions of exhibition art, and certainly facilitated that refinement of taste and effect that flourished in official exhibitions from Monza¹² to the Milan Triennales¹³, from the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution in Rome¹⁴ to the recent ones at the Circus Maximus, from the Exhibition of Aeronautics to the Leonardo Exhibition¹⁵, from the Fashion Exhibition in Turin to the most accomplished displays of the Milan Fair.

If we now examine what has been done, both in Italy and abroad, in this very particular field of advertising architecture, we must first note how, starting from an apparently commercial or didactic point of view, artists have often achieved results of immediate poetry¹⁶. In no other field, perhaps, have modern architecture and the contemporary sense of interior design fought such a fierce battle against the laws of statics and convention in order to obtain surreal effects, to reach new balances, to dissolve space into lyrical images, sometimes filled with exasperated dynamism, sometimes immersed in the calm solemnity of the absolute. To achieve an «effect» born at times from purely didactic or advertising necessity, one arrives at that aesthetic emotion that is the sure mark of a work of art. And thus there appeared, almost by indirect and seemingly practical means, that most contemporary sense of free structures in space, that tendency to immerse the visitor in a new architectural world full of unexpected and evocative perspectives, intimately related to the modern technical conception of skeletal structures. This pictorial expression of space, this same exaltation of *mise-en-scène*, this release from excessively practical or rigidly functional constraints, encourage freer explorations and more courageous and moving statements. To this exaltation of «pure» values, which ignore the weight of practical necessities in order to pursue instead an affirmation of «style» and «decoration» in the most lyrical sense of the word, contributes not so much the material and constructive sense proper to architectural engineering as the poetic and imaginative sensibility of painters and painter-ar-

chitects. Just as it was thanks to painters of poetic imagination that modern architecture, in Italy and elsewhere, first showed signs of life, so too did exhibition art, through a refined pictorial sensibility transferred into freer spatial play (as if it were painting in three dimensions), receive the highest lessons and contributions from painters, graphic designers, and scenographers. In Italy, the names of [Felice] Casorati, [Marcello] Nizzoli, [Luigi] Chessa, [Mario] Sironi, [Primo] Sinopico, and above all the unforgettable [Edoardo] Persico stand as witnesses to a first-rate contribution. The architects who most distinguished themselves in this play of imagination were those directly related to pure painting and in constant contact with the liveliest painters.

Thus, reasoning along this line, I am led to think that this great vein freely open to the inspiration of fantasy is not a sub-category of architecture, but rather the natural and logical path toward those «decorative» affirmations that some short-sighted critics still fail to recognize in functional architecture¹⁷. What higher expression of imagination could there be than that achieved today for advertising purposes? What more exciting stimulus for a living poet than to exalt, with all the refinements of art, the things, ideas, and products of contemporary civilization? Why should a machine, a propeller, an engine, the colors of a chemical factory, transparent blocks of quartz, the elegant plasticity of a microscope or a scale, and all the other proofs of human industrious intelligence not have the right to be loved and exalted with the artifices of poetry? Perhaps only exhibition art, within its clear limits, finds this simple and human salvation in coherence, and, without shame or false modesty, draws its courageous inspiration from the exaltation of contemporary life. It is not impossible that only it, ultimately, has the right to represent that «spirituality» which academics vainly seek in analogies with the past. In any case, it is certain that the most vital artists find in exhibition art the comfort of being able to surrender themselves without restraint to the fantastic world of dreams and poetry.

[Giuseppe Pagano, *Parliamo un po' di esposizioni*, in «Casabella Costruzioni», nos. 159-160, 1941, annex, n.p.]

14. Dedicated to Fascist propaganda in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome, the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution (Mostra della Rivoluzione fascista) was held in Rome from 1932 to 1934 under the supervision of Adalberto Libera and Mario De Renzi.

15. Both exhibitions were held at the Palazzo dell'Arte in Milan, respectively in 1934 and 1939: the former with contributions from Piero Bottoni, Luciano Baldessari, BBPR, Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini, and in particular Marcello Nizzoli and Edoardo Persico, authors of the celebrated Hall of the Gold Medals (Sala delle Medaglie d'Oro); the latter remembered for the Anatomy Room (Sala dell'Anatomia), designed by Pagano and Bruno Ravasi, and the Leonardesque School Room (Sala della Scuola Leonardesca) by BBPR.

16. In this sentence and the following, through the unprecedented association of «advertising architecture» and «poetry», Pagano further emphasizes his view of exhibition design as a field of experimentation both for architecture and for interior design – disciplines he regarded as one and the same.

17. On this subject, see also Pagano's seminal *Arte Decorativa Italiana*, Ulrico Hoepli Editore, Milan 1938. [JL]

Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi

Organicity and Decorativism in Exhibition Design 1946

It has been said and repeated to the point of becoming a commonplace that exhibitions represent extremely useful occasions for architects to experiment, since their temporary nature allows them to attempt the most daring stylistic innovations which, once tested, may later be transferred to the field of permanent construction¹. We find ourselves in clear disagreement with this well-established aphorism: just as in any other architectural field, exhibitions must first and foremost be opportunities to create good exhibitions, or, if one prefers, good exhibition architecture. And precisely because it is good, such architecture is born with a clearly defined purpose and a specific physiognomy that bind it so closely to its function as to make any transposition onto another architectural plane impossible, without losing its original adherence to its functional premise.

If exhibitions are to be recognised as a testing ground for anything, it should rather be said that they serve to test the architects who design them in works of non-definitive commitment; testing their capacity for self-criticism and control even in the face of the temptations of unrestrained formal freedom, revealing their sense of analysis and intelligent responsibility.

A short time after the many propaganda, commercial, and artistic exhibitions held over the past twenty years, the experiments, wherever there were any, appear to have failed, mere manifestations of a taste that took advantage of the inherent transience of the object not to find new and appropriate solutions or specific problems of expression, but rather to give vent to excesses, nostalgias, and dreams of transgression, otherwise impossible, into the realms of graphic art, plastic decorativism, or abstract constructivism. No truly defined architecture was ever born from such endeavours. The experiment, in short, was not conceived as the application of certain theories to specific ends, but rather as the use of those theories merely as a pretext, if not even as an occasion for exhibitionism: and

the *trovata* of the exhibition design, the new for the sake of the new, never transcends the level of formal virtuosity to acquire the substance of a true architectural language.

From this point of view, certain exhibitions held in the nineteenth century or in the early years of the present century are of far greater interest to us: in them there prevailed an evident enthusiasm for the novelty of the «thing» to be exhibited, and it was upon this that attention was primarily focused, even though all too often it slipped into collateral concepts, and the *Excelsior Ball* mentality tended to transform the displayed objects into mastodontic trophies erected to the deities of Industry and Commerce. Yet, it was precisely the emergence of a stylistic concern within the field of exhibitions that diverted their character from what might be called the rudimentary organicity of displays such as those of London 1851, Paris 1867, or Philadelphia 1876, leading them instead towards a disorderly decorativism, as in Paris in 1878 and 1900 and in Turin in 1902². In these and many other cases, the objects were scattered across pavilions conceived above all to materialise confused and unjustifiable scenographic ambitions, thus giving rise to that system of «exhibition of the exhibition» which has so brilliantly resisted all stylistic evolutions, to the point of corrupting and distorting the organising principles of many more recent events.

For while, on the one hand, the effort to underline through the exhibition design the content of the exhibition itself, and to bring these two terms into accord, is certainly commendable, on the other hand it is clear that this must occur without any deliberate distortion of functions, within precise limits and in a balanced relationship; it would be difficult to justify, on theoretical grounds, the deformation of structural elements in order to force echoes or references with the exhibited material, or the creation of other elements for purely imitative or allusive purposes. Moreover, all this results in shifting the visitor's

11. This sentence encapsulates Pagano's entire position on exhibition design: despite – or precisely because of – its supposed marginality, it offers opportunities for realization far greater than those available to architectural construction of the period. Of note, too, is his use of expressions such as «spatial experiences» and «architectural atmospheres», which are not only strikingly innovative for their time but entirely foreign to the contemporary architectural debate.

12. Beyond the already-mentioned Casa Elettrica (Electric House), Pagano was likely referring in particular to the I Biennale of 1923 (with Gio Ponti, Marcello Nizzoli, and Fortunato Depero) and the III of 1927 (with Felice Casorati and Alberto Sartoris).

13. Pagano took part in several editions of Milan Triennale, presenting at the V (1933) a Steel-Frame House (Casa a struttura d'acciaio, with Franco Albini, Giancarlo Palanti, Giulio Minoletti, and Giuseppe Mazzoleni), the Summer Room (Sala d'Estate, with Gino Levi Montalcini, Luigi Chessa, and Ettore Sottsass Sr.), and the interiors for the Breda train (with Gio Ponti). At the VI (1936), in addition to serving on the executive board, he designed the new pavilion, the entrance, the Exhibition of Rural Architecture (Mostra dell'architettura rurale), and the Exhibition of Building Systems (Mostra dei sistemi costruttivi); at the VII (1940), he designed the Exhibition of Mass Production (Mostra della produzione in serie).

The text presented here is an excerpt from Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi's essay *Organicità e decorativismo nell'allestimento delle mostre*, published in «Metron» in 1946, which represents one of the earliest Italian theoretical contributions on exhibition design as an expressive and communicative space, to the extent that it was later republished in S. Polano, *Mostrare. L'allestimento in Italia dagli anni Venti agli anni Ottanta*, Lybra Immagine, Milan 1988, pp. 545-551.

1. Cf. G. Pagano, *Parliamo un po' di esposizioni*, in «Casabella Costruzioni», nos. 159-160, 1941, n.p. [excerpted in this volume]. From this position Gentili Tedeschi slightly diverges, despite the clarity with which he introduces his disagreement, to dwell on a disciplinary specificity which, in fact, already forms part of Pagano's own discourse. What separates the two, rather, is their judgement of contemporary exhibition experiments, which, as Gentili clarifies in the third paragraph, often proved to be sterile and gratuitous exercises in stylistic experimentation – or better, as he later specifies, «exhibitions of exhibitions», if not indeed «exhibitions for exhibitions».

2. Here Gentili Tedeschi refers to the theme of the World's Fairs, citing their most renowned instances.

attention from the object exhibited to the manner in which it is exhibited, or even to everything that surrounds it. Hence, not only an «exhibition of the exhibition» but an «exhibition for the exhibition», a most serious error of principle which completely overturns the *raison d'être* of an exhibition, regardless of the abstract value of individual exhibition design solutions³.

The exhibition design of displays has followed, more closely, the evolution of decorative taste rather than the development of a coherent logic of presentation, one coordinated according to a differentiated system based on the fundamental purposes of each exhibition; yet, it must be said, there have not been lacking certain precise calls for an organic and in-depth study of the subject, and one may even say that, for better or worse, such teachings constitute those few reliable points of reference to which almost all exhibition architects turn in *extrema ratio*. It is significant that, even in this field, the clearest statements have been made precisely by those who most actively contributed to the renewal of architecture itself: this fully justifies the fact that exhibition design has come to fall within the sphere of the architect rather than that of the painter, decorator, or scenographer. In fact, only the architect can gather together and give unified direction to all these and other specialised activities, in the service of a clearly defined expression⁴: a concept which, in relation to exhibition requirements, had already been grasped by [Henry] Van de Velde and, in 1925, by Le Corbusier with his Pavilion of the Esprit Nouveau, and was later taken up, developed, and fully articulated by [Erik Gunnar] Asplund in Stockholm in 1930, and in the same year in Berlin and Paris by the artists of the Bauhaus⁵. In their hands, the material to be exhibited, whatever it may be, became an element of a precise composition: graphics, charts, and images themselves represented the constituent parts of a unified work, without arbitrary additions, but solely through the relationships that arise from their reciprocal juxtapositions. The result, ultimately, was a greater clarity of the individual objects and of the logical connection linking them to one another. Thus were born the principles of expressive sequence and rhythm of space, form, colour, and intensity, together with rigorous technical studies concerning visibility and lighting. [...]

In any case, we are still here on the plane of applying already existing elements, albeit refined to the utmost and elevated to the level of style through the skill and completeness of their combinations. The truly new fact occurs around 1930, through the work of [John] Heartfield⁶, and it is the invention of photomontage.

With photomontage, the produced image immediately transcends its value as a simple documentary illustration inserted to demonstrate or connect the phases of a particular logical discourse, to become instead a means of pictorial expression [...]. Yet, while on one hand this system allows any

decomposition beyond the idea of real space and lends itself to introducing, in some way, the dimension of time, through the possibility of clearly reconstructing phases of successive operations and sequences of movement, on the other hand it gives rise to the replacement of direct exhibition with a mediated representation, realised outside the realm of the absolute, and therefore fatally destined to degenerate into decorativism⁷.

This capacity to go beyond natural experience explains why photomontage became the great protagonist of political propaganda exhibitions, and why, having first been defined in Russia and Germany [...], it also generated several noteworthy achievements in Italy. Indeed, it may be said that in our country the most intense period of exhibition activity took place under the sign of photomontage, which in turn became the starting point for a new evolution in graphic art, interior architecture, and even sculpture, through the variations that were progressively devised: disproportionate enlargements, photomosaics, obsessive repetitions, juxtapositions with real elements, with paintings, with abstract forms.

Thus, the concept of «exhibition of the exhibition» perhaps found its fullest development in Italy; but, in truth, it was also here that a vigorous recall to the essential motive of the exhibition emerged, with the Hall of the Gold Medals, designed by Edoardo Persico in 1934 in Milan for the Exhibition of Italian Aeronautics⁸. For him, the exhibition material, whatever its nature, was arranged within a rigorously standardised modular architectural framework, designed for no other purpose than to fulfil its pure and simple function. This framework, profoundly moral in intent, is only apparently austere, in reality allowing infinite variations derived from the differing requirements of the objects to be displayed, offering to the artist who is capable of deep analysis a vast range of expressive possibilities: a lesson that, indeed, was clearly understood and variously interpreted in numerous, often excellent examples.

The architect's work thus shifts from free creation to the selection of objects which are, themselves and exclusively, the elements to be employed in the composition and determinants of its character: and from this selection arises a criterion that is finally organic in the organisation of the entire ensemble. For one of the essential factors is precisely this, to perceive the exhibition as a unity in which the prominence of the individual parts must be subordinated to the explanatory clarity of the whole, and in which the complementary elements must attain the greatest simplicity and the highest coherence with the peculiar characteristics of the objects.

In the major exhibitions held in large number during the last five years preceding the war, there persisted, however, a continuous hesitation between two paths to follow, the organic and the decorative; and to this uncertainty contributed the

misinterpretation of certain highly perceptive works by a few gifted artists, which provoked facile and incomprehending imitations. A typical case is that of Max Bill, author of the Swiss section at the Milan Triennale of 1936⁹: after the appearance of this work, abstract forms became widely fashionable, but no one knew how to use them with such purity as to make them genuine works of sculpture, independent of any reference to direct experience: a reference, on the contrary, that was generalised, exploiting what had been an intelligent expressive medium, for countless gratuitous and aesthetically questionable interpretations.

In this confused atmosphere arose the last Triennals, the Exhibition of Glasgow [sic] of 1938, the Exhibition of Textiles and the Exhibition of Minerals in Rome, the Leonardesca, and even the Exposition Universelle of Paris in 1937, all events rich in excellent ideas and serious intentions, yet at the same time marked by arbitrary and promotional distortions devoid of correctness. Particularly noteworthy in Paris were the bold conception devised by [Luis] La Casa and [Josep Lluís] Sert for exhibiting a great work of art, Picasso's panel *Guernica*, and the unified and highly effective system by which Le Corbusier developed his favourite themes within the large tent that served as the pavilion of the «Temps Nouveaux»¹⁰.

The year 1939 witnessed the final flashes of an activity that had grown ever more intense: while in Italy work began on the ill-fated E 42, which would have been anything but an exhibition¹¹, in Zurich, Liège, New York, and San Francisco there appeared tendencies still very distant from one another, yet certainly highly instructive: for, while of the two American exhibitions only that of New York preserved something that undoubtedly followed precise exhibition criteria, namely, certain European pavilions: Finland, Sweden, Czechoslovakia¹²; in Liège there was a first attempt at collaboration with architects, and in Zurich, through the work of [Hans] Hoffmann, the concept of the planned exhibition was developed with vivid imagination and a keen sense of proportion, achieving a stylistic unity that encompassed the whole down to its smallest detail: a manifestation not of propaganda, but of an intelligent expressive will¹³.

In essence, even in these latest cases, we find once again the familiar antithesis between the principles that have variously characterised exhibition architecture: in America, to impress; in Zurich, to explain through presentation. Between these two terms we too must make our choice for the exhibitions yet to come. For the world does not stop, and will therefore continue to trust in the possibility of teaching and learning something new. And while we may hope that the era of certain cumbersome and noisy manifestations of empty megalomania has definitively passed, we believe that our future task will rather be that of a technical, demonstrative, and educational

propaganda, of the new ideas and new means being developed by the avant-gardes of thought and labour in the interest of the community.

In general, our means will be limited, and, above all, we will have the conviction that the public is now scarcely sensitive and rather sceptical before grand gestures and displays of ostentatious publicity; and that therefore our power of persuasion must be all the more intense and subtle. A power that is nourished by logic and by an intimate understanding of the communicative and emotional, indeed poetic, value inherent in objects, and which finds its expression as a characteristic manifestation of the spirit of synthesis, on the plane of an absolute and conscious historical coherence.

[Eugenio Gentili, *Organicità e decorativismo nell'allestimento delle mostre*, in «Metron», no. 10, 1946, pp. 60-64]

3. In this paragraph, although some uncertainty still lingers in distinguishing between exhibitions and expositions, Gentili Tedeschi clearly defines what must be the principle and *raison d'être* of an exhibition, which must inevitably centre upon the object or artwork on display. This explains his regret that the field's development, instead of advancing in step with that of a logic of presentation, has followed instead that of decorative taste.

4. This is another fundamental passage for understanding the disciplinary framework within which, beginning with Pagano and Gentili Tedeschi, exhibition design is situated, even at the expense of other professional figures historically involved in such collaborations.

5. Here Gentili Tedeschi refers respectively to Van de Velde's projects for the Werkbund Exhibition in Cologne (1914) and for the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris (1925); to Le Corbusier's pavilion for the same occasion; to Asplund's Stockholmstställningen (1930); and to the Bauhaus projects of the same year for the Section Allemande du Werkbund at the Salon des Artistes Décorateurs in Paris, the Wohnung und Werkraum and the Bauhaus-Ausstellung in Berlin.

6. John Heartfield (pseudonym of Helmut Herzfeld, 1891-1968) was a German artist, best known as one of the pioneers of political photomontage.

7. Here Gentili Tedeschi comes very close – though it is unclear to what extent consciously – to Walter Benjamin's argument in *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (cf. «Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung», no. 1, 1936, pp. 40-66), whose first Italian edition, however, appeared long after Gentili's essay (*L'opera d'arte nell'epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnica*, in *Illuminazioni*, ed. H. Arendt, Einaudi, Turin 1962, pp. 57-109).

8. As Pagano had done, Gentili here cites the exhibition design by Persico and Marcello Nizzoli at Palazzo dell'Arte (cf. AA.VV., *Esposizione dell'Aeronautica Italiana. Giugno-ottobre XII*, official catalogue, Edizioni d'Arte Emilio Bestetti, Milan 1934), offering an ambiguously positive assessment of the exhibition's role in the development of architectural research in the field.

9. As Agnoldomenico Pica writes several years later, «the Swiss section, designed by Max Bill, between Neoplastic taste and pure graphic design, achieved effects of high emotional intensity, to the point of seeming the first moment in which the iconic violence of Expressionism was translated, without residue, onto a plane of rigorous and limpid contemporaneity, almost a very successful attempt to transform, in technical or para-technical terms, the turbulence and melodramatic tumult of pictorial scenographies that had still pleased the generations of the early twentieth century». A. Pica, *Esposizioni*, in R. Aloï, *Esposizioni. Architettura, allestimenti*, Hoepli, Milan 1960, p. 32 [excerpted in this volume].

10. See the Pabellón de la República Española by Josep Lluís Sert and Luis Lacasa Navarro, and the Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux by Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, both at the Exposition Internationale de Paris (1937).

11. Despite its name, the Esposizione Universale di Roma 1942 – or simply E 42 – was less an exhibition than a vast urbanistic, architectural, and ideological project promoted by the Fascist regime to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Marcia su Roma.

12. With projects by Alvar Aalto, Sven Markelius, and Ladislav Sutnar.

13. Gentili Tedeschi here refers to the Landiwoche – or more precisely, the Swiss National Exhibition held in Zurich in 1939, also known as Landi 1939 – coordinated by Hoffmann and regarded as a key event in the conception of the planned exhibition, articulated through thematic pavilions, coherent routes, and displays integrated from graphic, architectural, and communicative perspectives.

[JL]

Franco Albini

Functions and Architecture of the Museum

1954

Speaking of functions, one may immediately state that the museum is decidedly an institution of the modern age, even though the seed of the art museum can already be found in the great collections of the Hellenistic period, in Rome at the end of the Republic and during the Empire, and later in the Renaissance, with the «cabinets» and «closets» of princely families and the «museums of the *Opera*» belonging to the Cathedrals.

The establishment of museums, in the modern sense of a public institution, was born directly from revolutions and social change. Collections that had originated as expressions of political power, of luxury and refined culture, the princely and ecclesiastical ones, became, at that moment, accessible to the people. Indeed, the French museums were created after the French Revolution through the nationalisation of works of art that had belonged to the Crown. Following these, from the late eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, arose Europe's most important public museums: they were formed through the purchase of works from the collections of declining families, especially Italian, and of masterpieces unearthed in the excavations of Italy and Greece.

It was therefore during the period marking the beginning of social progress that the social value of museums was affirmed: scientific and historical documents and works of art were made accessible to all: their educational potential and the enjoyment of their spiritual values became a collective good. Let us observe how the function has changed from then to the present day¹.

The function of the earliest museums nevertheless remained limited to collecting as much material as possible and preserving it for purposes of study and public curiosity. Each museum, in general, displayed everything it possessed, without any arrangement guided by precise critical intentions.

The curator's interest was directed exclusively towards the scientific work within the museum, towards the objects kept there, rather than towards the public.

Ancient palaces were adapted, and new buildings were specifically constructed, yet the simple functions of collecting and preserving did not give rise to problems of spatial adaptation, and rchitecture existed for its own sake, it bore no relation either to the works exhibited or to the visitor. This marks the first phase: architecture sought no relationship either with the works or with the public. In a second phase, it would seek a relationship with the works, in a third, with the public².

In a second phase, the evolution of criticism, asserting the concept of pure art, introduced a new function within museums. The work of art, detached from the environment to which it had once belonged, having lost its practical destination, came to acquire its essential autonomy as a work of art, becoming a source of spiritual enjoyment through contemplation. Public museums offered everyone the opportunity for such contemplation. The work of art thus acquired a potentially broader social value.

At this moment there arose a new function of the museum: to encourage the public's contemplation of the work of art in its essentially aesthetic values: and the new function found its architectural expression in the setting of the work, or its *ambientamento*.

The idea emerged of situating the artwork within environments that reflected the contemporary taste of the work, itself and this is an interesting document of the culture of that period: architecture sought relationships with the exhibited works, but not yet with the visitor: it did not attempt to bring the viewer closer to the artwork through a language coherent with his sensitivity, nor did it seek to interpret his essence as a modern human being. In both curatorial arrangement and architecture, the education of the community was not a primary concern. Museums exerted little influence on the broader public and remained the expression of an «élite» culture. [...]

The war created, especially in Europe, exceptional conditions for the renewal of museums: new museographic ex-

periments were able to be realised, and a lively renewal of concepts, methods, and forms can now be observed in this specific field of study³. [...]

First of all, the original functions of collecting, also in the sense of increasing the collections, of conserving them according to scientific criteria, in relation to the physical state of the works, and of offering specialists critically classified study material, became more articulated; the function of creating environmental conditions suited to the fullest enjoyment of the works (or of objects of study, since the problem is analogous for museums of art, science, or technology) was emphasised: furthermore, the educational function of the museum and the necessity of its integration into modern life⁴ were affirmed: the attention of the curator thus extended from the stored works to the public: architecture became the mediator between the two.

Within the cultural framework of the post-war period, the aim of the museum appears to be that of making the visitor understand that the works he admires, ancient and modern alike, belong to his culture and to the actuality of his life: that tradition is a living and renewing phenomenon, continuing into the present through modern artists who are themselves creators of tradition; that the problems of coherence between art and society persist in every age; and that art is the expression of a civilisation, both active and potential, in harmony.

Accordingly, the concept of *ambientamento* also changes: and here we enter the third phase. Architecture, shifting its focus from the exhibited work to the public, now tends, so to speak, to «set the public» rather than to set the work of art⁵. Architecture creates around the visitor a modern atmosphere and precisely for this reason comes directly into contact with his sensitivity, his culture, his mentality as a modern man⁶. The elements of architecture and of furnishing, when familiar to the visitor and stylistically coherent with the contemporary mode of life (for example, serially produced objects), do not disturb attention, which can thus be entirely directed towards the expressive values of the exhibited work: the first approach to the work of art is provided precisely by the architecture.

A modern environment is certainly the most favourable to the understanding and enjoyment of the work of art. The necessity of expressing, even in this museographic field, the aesthetic conception of our epoch is thus reaffirmed on a functional level.

[...] The curatorial arrangement sets the theme for the architecture of the museum: the clarity of the concepts contained in the theme is always a necessary condition for good architecture [...]. While the problems of curatorial arrangement are fairly well defined, the same cannot be said of the architectural realisations. To the clarity of the theme there must correspond a closer adherence of architecture to that very theme. [...]

Certain salient aspects of the present moment in museum architecture deserve to be noted: the character of flexibility and the creation of the «environment», or the *ambiente*.

The flexible character of architecture responds to the necessity that the arrangement be changeable, whether due to the growth of collections, to periodic modifications connected with museographic material, or to changes in the very concepts of arrangement. Architecture must shape the museum as an elastic instrument of display, one that does not constrain the curator through the predetermined dimensions of spaces. Flexibility, moreover, recurs frequently in modern architecture: it meets both the present need for a constant openness towards future possibilities and the conception of the building as a truly living organism, undefined in time, bearing within itself the potential for transformation. Flexibility, interchangeability, modulation, elastic standard, all these have given rise to an entire current of taste⁷.

In particular, within the museographic field, the way of conceiving the life of the building, its mutability, the rhythm of each transformation, and the gradation, within architecture, between the ephemeral and the permanent, defines the difference between museum and exhibition. It is a difference that architecture itself must make perceptible. The curatorial arrangement and the architecture of the museum must obey a certain, though elastic, stability and express a continuity between the origins, the past, and the foreseeable future developments of the museum's function, whereas the exhibition, directed towards more explicitly informative and didactic purposes, developing a discourse on a limited theme valid for a defined duration, is by nature ephemeral, and here too architecture may play upon the appeal of the ephemeral.

In all cases, architecture must act as mediator between the public and the exhibited work: it must therefore give maximum value to the environment, understood as atmosphere, as a powerful element of suggestion for the visitor; this environment must rely on spatial solutions rather than on plastic ones: it must create architectural spaces bound in absolute unity with the exhibited works, operate upon voids through air and light, and impart vibrations to the atmosphere in which the spectator must find himself immersed and stimulated.

The relationships among the various parts into which the museum is divided and articulated must be carefully felt, so that the spatial landscape, from one side to the other, shows no loss of tension.

These relationships may be established, at the two extremes, either through the interconnection of one space with another, fusing them into a single architectural continuum, eliminating those elements that would otherwise create tangible separations and emphasising instead those that accentuate continuity among the various parts: or through the

The passage reproduced here is an excerpt from the transcript of a celebrated lecture delivered by Franco Albini at the Faculty of Architecture in Turin in 1954. It was originally published under the title *Le funzioni e l'architettura del museo* («La Biennale di Venezia», no. 31, 1958, pp. 25-31), and was later reissued in different versions by Carlo De Carli (in *Architettura Spazio Primario*, Hoepli, Milan 1982, pp. 416-424) and by Luca Basso Peressut (in *I luoghi del museo*, Editori Riuniti, Rome 1985, pp. 105-108). This text, one of the very few written by Albini, is cited in an extensive bibliography, yet it is almost impossible to trace a true *editio princeps*, as the first publication is evidently abridged. In this context, the version reproduced here follows that edited by De Carli (and published under the auspices of the O.S.A.T.), as it is the least incomplete in presenting the article's theme, which, beyond that of museums, also decisively addresses the design of exhibitions.

1. Albini's text, like his lecture, is essentially divided into two parts: the first devoted to the history and recent developments of the museum type, and the second to exhibition design, including an account of some of his specific experiences – namely, the Exhibition of Contemporary Art, Decorative Art, and Italian Architecture in Stockholm (1954) and the Official Italian Exhibition in São Paulo (the same year) – here omitted for reasons of space.

2. In this passage, Albini introduces into the museographic debate the fundamental question of *ambientamento* – the concept of spatial setting – through which he interprets the evolutionary development of museums according to three successive stages, corresponding to the criteria of conservation, contemplation, and education. His position is substantially independent of any traditional typological approach, being explicitly focused on the relationship among space, work, and public, here simply defined as the «environment». On the notion of environment and its relevance for interior space, see the earlier essay by C. Mollino, *Utopie e ambientazione*, in «Domus», nos. 237-238, 1949, pp. 14-19 and 20-25 [excerpted in this volume].

3. During this period, a rapid transformation occurred in the very idea of the museum. With the fall of the regimes that had shaped European politics up to 1945 came the collapse of the authoritarian conception of a «State culture» to be conveyed through that institution. Furthermore, the emptying of museum buildings for the safekeeping of artworks necessitated the reinstallation of collections and thus a profound reconsideration of the museum idea itself. Cf. D. Poulot, *Musei e museologia*, Jaca Book, Milan 2008, p. 73.

4. Cf. G.C. Argan, *Il Museo come scuola*, in «Comunità», no. 3, 1949, pp. 64-66; Id., *Problemi di museografia*, in «Casabella Continuità», no. 207, 1954, pp. 64-67 [excerpted in this volume].

5. By setting the public Albini refers to «the creation of a space linked to contemporaneity, close to the daily life of visitors [...] in which [anyone] is able to recognise themselves and the present, and thus to approach the testimonies of the past through the present». A. Rossari, *Leggerezza e consistenza. I musei genovesi*, in F. Bucci and A. Rossari, eds., *I musei e gli allestimenti di Franco Albini*, Electa, Milan 2005, p. 49.

6. Another key concept introduced by Albini is that of «atmosphere», which acts as a perceptual counterpoint to the previously mentioned notion of environment and recurs throughout the essay as a central element in shaping the

visitor's experience. An early reference to atmosphere as a design parameter for exhibition projects can be found in G. Pagano, *Parliamo un po' di esposizioni*, in «Casabella Costruzioni», vol. XIX, nos. 159-160, 1941, n.p. [excerpted in this volume].

7. Again, see Argan's *Problemi di museografia* [excerpted in this volume] and his idea of a museum conceived not for a fixed arrangement but as a venue for temporary exhibitions, though in this case with greater attention to the representative aspect of museum architecture than in the earlier text.

concatenation of successive, enclosed spaces whose centripetal character particularly suits self-contained museographic themes whose value is thereby enhanced.

A fairly important point in the pursuit of unity between the exhibited work and the architectural space is represented, in the case of painting galleries, by the much-debated problem of the frame. Perhaps it cannot be said that the frame is either necessary or useless; but it can be said that there is almost always a need for an intermediate space between picture and environment, be it a frame, a wall, a background surface, or a volume of air assigned to the painting, almost as a zone of influence surrounding its pictorial space.

The architectural layout of a museum, even when it concerns the adaptation of an existing building, requires the work of highly qualified architects: too often, however, museum curators, to whom we have acknowledged the greatest merit in the modern renewal of museographic criteria, believe they can dispense with them, and exhibitions consequently lose effectiveness, communicative power, and the ability to evoke suggestion in the public.

The components of the problem are varied and complex, and they require the control of a finely tuned sensibility of taste: yet I would nevertheless note that the architectural solution must never be simply a matter of taste, however up to date or cultivated, but must be truly authentic.

At present, in curatorial practice, there is a strong tendency towards didacticism, especially outside Italy: a sign of a widespread awareness of the need to recreate, around the work housed in museums as a self-contained value, its historical context, and to democratise the work itself by reintroducing it into the living culture of the present. [...]

According to [Giulio Carlo] Argan, «it is absolutely inconceivable to strip Italian museums of their traditional character: however, if no integrative activities are undertaken, this will prevent museums from exercising any educational function, will deny them all development in the direction indicated by modern critical studies, and will entail the progressive decline of their function of conservation, which is justified solely by the educational value and purpose recognised in the work of art. Only temporary exhibitions make it possible to resolve the problem»⁸. [...]

There exists a difference between Museum and Exhibition, one that does not lie in their content, which is essentially cultural in both cases, nor in the material displayed, which in both instances consists of works of art or objects [...]. The difference lies in the distinct way of conceiving display in the museum or in the exhibition, in its aspects of theme, arrangement, and architecture⁹.

Display in the museum is bound to a permanent location, I believe this is an important element of characterisation, de-

spite the variations that exist among museums according to the types of their collections and the differing cultural contexts of various countries; differences that at times bring the museum closer to the exhibition.

For instance, art museums have retained the predominant task of enhancing masterpieces and have preserved a more solemn character, while scientific, technical, or ethnographic museums have emphasised their educational function and acquired a more flexible, variable character resembling that of the exhibition. In all cases, the display of collections in the museum has no limits of duration: the collections are permanently exhibited; their arrangement is altered only due to the expansion of the collections or to changes in the very concepts of arrangement.

Arrangement and architecture must obey a certain stability, however elastic it may be for the reasons stated above, and express continuity between the origins of the museum, its past, and the foreseeable future developments of its function.

The exhibition, on the other hand, is by nature contemporary. Its brief duration determines its character and distinguishes it sharply from the museum. [...]

The exhibition has affinities with the spectacle, also in its visual language, and, like the spectacle, it requires a clear, defined, and self-contained theme, together with an arrangement that proportionates its parts, structures them, and concludes them, as the direction of a play does with its actions.

A well-chosen theme, kept within clear limits, shares, with the quality of the works and the architecture of their presentation, responsibility for success. And an exhibition, to achieve its purpose, must be successful, for this success is the measure of its usefulness, full approval, opposing opinions, or controversy, it does not matter, for all are aspects of success.

The theme is the first issue to be studied in planning an exhibition¹⁰.

The public must always be engaged by the theme. One must anticipate possible reactions and the origins of those reactions, particularly abroad, where an exhibition assumes a special importance and exerts a much wider and deeper influence than one held in our own country. [...]

A discourse similar to that made on the theme could be developed for the architecture of exhibitions. It establishes the relationship between the exhibited works and the visitor, and moreover determines the first approach of the public to the exhibition's theme. The first moment of sympathy. Without dwelling on specific examples, I will limit myself to noting the necessity that the architect's sensitivity should take into account the angle of acceptance of a particular public, as well as the limits within which surprise may serve to win, at the very threshold of the exhibition, the sympathy of the visitor.

It is sometimes fundamental, for the success and the interest of the exhibition, to detach the visitor from external reality and to introduce them into an environment of a particular atmosphere, which helps him to concentrate his attention on the exhibited works and to heighten his sensitivity without causing fatigue.

The exhibition design must draw the visitor into its play; it must generate around the works the atmosphere most suited to enhancing them, yet without ever overwhelming them. [...]

It is my opinion that it is the voids that must be built, since air and light are building materials.

The atmosphere must not be still or stagnant, but should vibrate, and the public should find itself immersed and stimulated within it, without realising it. [...]

This charged atmosphere, conducive to the fullest enjoyment of the objects displayed, must persist [...]. There should be no drops in tension, but only, to avoid the danger of boredom and fatigue, variations in the route¹¹.

The exhibition as a whole must reflect a single direction, possess continuity of display method, coherence of system, and at times, at appropriate points, make use of repetition in identical elements. [...]

The brief duration that, in general, characterises exhibitions allows the use of materials that are modest and not durable over time.

To emphasise this provisional nature can be highly effective, and the use of certain materials outside their usual application, pushed to the limit of their possibilities, can become a source of invigorating surprise. [...]

Exhibitions have cultural, didactic, and also propagandistic functions and, precisely because of this nature, are often required to be transferred successively to other locations. Travelling exhibitions thus assume a special importance.

These require thorough study: materials must withstand multiple assemblies, all elements must be reducible to easily transportable dimensions, assembly must be simple, and above all, the components of the exhibition must meet the evident requirements of flexibility and interchangeability.

In these cases, the technical element acquires great weight, and care must be taken that the exhibition design is not overwhelmed by it. The machine for exhibiting must never become more important than the objects exhibited, and it must, despite everything, allow, and indeed facilitate, perfect visualisation. [...]

It may be summarised that the purpose of exhibitions, museums and temporary shows alike, within the cultural framework of our time, is to make the public understand that the works exhibited, whether ancient or modern, belong to the actuality of its life, to its living culture; to make it understand that tradition is a reality perpetually renewed and continuing

into the present through modern artists, who each day add their own creations to it: to make it understand that the problems of coherence between society and art persist in every age.

As for Architecture, I certainly could not establish rules stating that exhibitions are made well today or how they should be made better tomorrow.

The discussion cannot be confined to the architecture of exhibitions, but must extend to architecture as such.

It is not possible, I would say, to extrapolate from a diagram of the present situation a diagram for the future. Progress is not made in steps forward, only new steps are taken, and there exist solely situations in continuous transformation, only new aspects of ancient problems, which are always the same in human life. It is the architects' duty to place themselves within these problems with a sense of responsibility: it is their duty to become fully conscious of them. At the base of architecture there is always a moral problem: at the base of our profession there exist nothing but duties.

From the awareness of problems, and only from this awareness, the Architect will be able to derive the forms that adhere to the modes of life of his society. From this awareness they will draw the invention of new forms that will generate new ways of living.

[Franco Albini, *Una lezione di Franco Albini su: «le funzioni e l'architettura del Museo» (alcune esperienze)* (1954), in Carlo De Carli, *Architettura Spazio Primario*, Hoepli, Milan 1982, pp. 416-424]

8. G.C. Argan, *Renovation of museums in Italy*, in «Museum», no. 3, 1952, pp. 156-160.

9. Here Albini uses Argan's quotation to move from the museographic theme to that of exhibition design, which he had already touched upon indirectly. In the second part, however, Albini proceeds to list not only the principles or general strategies of exhibition design but also the simple expedients that, in his view, make it truly effective. For this reason, the text assumes a less systematic and more fragmented character – largely anecdotal in nature – yet of great practical interest in this respect.

10. On this topic, see G. Ottolini, *Una maestria architetonica nell'allestire contemporaneo*, in F. Bucci and A. Rossari, eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 186-197.

11. These few lines can be regarded as central to Albini's exposition not of a closed theory, but of a genuine poetics of design, which is expressed in exhibition design in a way quite distinct from what previously written about museum architecture, and which, over the years, has contributed to the critical success of the essay, despite its limited availability. The terms used here of «atmosphere», «tension», and «vibration» in fact refer to a conception of space – strikingly close to that described by Mario Praz in his *Filosofia dell'arredamento* (Documento, Librario Editore, Rome 1945) [excerpted in this volume] – which at the time found few equivalents in the architectural debate, despite being implicitly central to its design. [JL]

Giulio Carlo Argan

Problems in Museum Design

1955

When, in setting up or reorganising a museum, one begins by saying that the «modern sensibility» appreciates works of ancient art more when they are presented in a «modern environment», one might as well take Melani's manual and start decorating the galleries in the «Renaissance style»¹. From the outset, the false problem is ill posed, for the pseudo-modern is as false, and as odious, as the pseudo-ancient. For quite different and far more serious reasons, the museum has become one of the preferred themes of modern architects, and some of the greatest among them (one need only recall [Frank Lloyd] Wright, Le Corbusier, [Ludwig] Mies van der Rohe) have sought, at least on paper, to establish the architectural type of the modern museum². These reasons are programmatic, strictly connected with the general principles of contemporary architecture and urbanism. The museum is no longer the «temple» (or worse, the mausoleum) of art, but a living centre of study and work, indeed, the centre of those aesthetic activities which, as is well known, are today assigned an essential importance within the sphere of social life and education.

In the museum the scholar, archaeologist, ethnologist, or art historian, is trained; but in the museum too, or rather, they should be, are trained artists, artisans, and skilled workers in certain branches of production. A school of industrial design that were to take the museum as the foundation of its teaching activity would certainly achieve results of surprising novelty; at the very least, it would once and for all overcome the inferiority complex that still, and without any justification, afflicts schools of applied arts in their relation to the academies of fine arts. In an epoch such as ours, characterised by the mechanisation of industrial production and haunted by the fear of the deleterious consequences that this repetitive mechanism may have on individual consciousness, the museum represents, in a sense, the great reservoir of pure values of quality (which are always historical values) and the indispensable guide for

all efforts aimed at reintroducing the principle of quality into an activity that tends to become exclusively quantitative. For this very reason, the museum occupies an essential place in the ideal urbanism of modern communities.

The first point to be made clear, therefore, concerns the internal function of the museum, as an essential condition for the unfolding of its educational function, which must extend to the entire cycle of social life. The function of the museum is evidently not limited to the collection, protection, and preservation of those artistic values that are progressively excluded from the active circulation of social life: collections of dethroned sovereigns and fallen princes or of decayed noble families, paintings and sculptures rescued from destruction or neglect in ancient churches or palaces. Naturally, the museum is the specific instrument for the protection of the artistic heritage of a nation or region; but the protection of the artistic heritage can in no case be reduced to a charitable asylum for homeless works of art. The museum was born of the awareness that the work of art, in the present historical condition of society, can no longer be a private possession but belongs to the community, and that within this collective sphere it must be able to exert its educational influence. The decline and demise of the great social institutions that once held the monopoly of art constitute only the negative aspect of a phenomenon whose positive aspect is, conversely, the assumption by the community, and precisely through that specific cultural organism which is the museum, of the function of protecting and bringing to value artistic phenomena. If in some countries, including our own, the situation of museums remains precarious and their function uncertain, this depends on the fact that the community (or, which amounts to the same, the State) is not yet sufficiently prepared to fulfil the cultural role abandoned by the privileged classes and the great institutions of the past: our technicians have made admirable efforts to give the most

dignified arrangement to the artistic treasures of the museums, yet they have lacked the material means to develop fully the educational function of those museums. [...]

But if the active function of the museum is to mediate the passage of the work of art from the individual to the community as a whole, it must be specified that this is not a transmission of patrimony, but of function. And it must immediately be added that the cultural function of society is inseparable from its economic and productive function. It is therefore understandable that many modern museums, especially in America, include extensive educational and workshop facilities, designed to re-establish the contact between the world of art and the world of production, and where students of art and craft schools study the formal, technical, inventive, and executive processes of the past³.

The connection between museum and school, at all grades and levels, is one of the most urgent needs of modern culture. Certainly, it cannot be satisfied, as it is today in Italy, through rare and perfunctory visits, or worse, through tedious and useless exercises in copying. The specifically didactic activity that takes place (or should take place) within the museum can in no case be separated from the strictly scientific function that consists in the technical and historical analysis, cataloguing, and study of objects, and in the research of the best restoration methods, etc. The modern museum thus presents itself as a structurally complex organism: alongside the exhibition spaces (both main and secondary) and the indispensable ancillary facilities, we find laboratories for analysis, restoration, and photography, as well as libraries and archives, consultation rooms and study halls, workshops and studios. And it is precisely this activity, whose scope is exceedingly wide, that provides the functional foundation of museum's architecture.

Since this complex scientific and didactic activity always culminates in the exhibition rooms, it constitutes the determining factor of the *ordinamento*, that is, of the selection of the works to be displayed and of those to be given greater prominence, of the sequence of groups, and of the juxtapositions between objects. This is, of course, the specific task of the technical directors, yet it is also the framework upon which the architect's project must be constructed. There is no such thing as an ideal type of *ordinamento*; more precisely, the ideal *ordinamento* is the one that lends itself to continuous decomposition and recomposition, and the ideal architectural structure is the one that can adapt flexibly to the needs of each kind of *ordinamento*. The architecture of the museum is not complete until the *ordinamento* of the museum is complete, since all determinations of space, light, and colour depend exclusively upon the works of art themselves: in no case, more than in the museum, must architecture know how to subordinate itself, or

even to efface itself, in order to enhance, that is, to set in a dimension and light appropriate to, the work of art.

Nor could it be otherwise. In every «living» museum the collections are in constant development, and new acquisitions necessarily entail shifts in the *ordinamento*; the very scientific and didactic activity, bringing with it continual corrections of attributions and dates, implies a constant revision in the sequence of objects. A museum that fixed the position of every item, even in the best possible way, would surely be the worst of museums: an inert museum, rather than a living one.

For some time now (and the phenomenon would merit careful study), exhibitions of ancient art, with materials drawn primarily from museums, have multiplied. Has anyone ever asked why exhibitions attract the public far more than museums? Evidently because, in exhibitions, the presentation of objects is livelier and more stimulating, the juxtapositions more persuasive, the comparisons more incisive, and the critical problems more clearly defined. Naturally, we are not enthusiastic about this plethora of exhibitions, which certainly does not benefit the conservation of the works; nor do we believe that the suggestive, and sometimes spectacular, modes of presentation occasionally employed by exhibition designers can be transplanted as such into museums. Yet the experience of exhibitions can greatly advance our understanding of museography⁴, encouraging us to study *ordinamenti* that bring critical issues into sharper focus, and to move the museum's material continuously so as to suggest new juxtapositions and comparisons⁴. In that case, museums would end up substituting for exhibitions (or rather, would cease to be substituted by them), or else exhibitions would be organised, needless to say, with considerable advantages, within the very halls of the museums. We are persuaded that the museum of the future will not have a fixed *ordinamento* and that its «public life» will consist of cycles of exhibitions, for the most part arranged with the museum's own materials (but combined each time in different ways, according to the various theses to be demonstrated), and that the nobility of such an *ordinamento* will enable the museum to follow with living adherence the developments of critical studies. There can therefore be no constant architectural or structural type⁵. What ought to determine such a structure would be the *ordinamento* (to which corresponds the «route» of the visitors); but if the museum can have neither a fixed *ordinamento* nor a fixed «route», it cannot have a fixed structure. The ideal museum would ultimately be an immense empty space, capable of being subdivided by mobile elements in width, length, and height according to the needs of the exhibition, and filled entirely with light that can be regulated and modulated according to the dimensions of the spaces and the hours of the day. Shall we then, after the museum-temple, have the museum-warehouse? We are as opposed to the

The excerpt reproduced here, originally published in «Casabella Continuità» in 1954, represents a kind of continuation of the argument first articulated five years earlier in *Il Museo come scuola* («Comunità», no. 3, 1949, pp. 64-66), in which Giulio Carlo Argan set out, in an organic form, his conception of the museum as an educational space. This later text, however, unlike the former, succeeds more effectively in connecting the museographic theme – so central to the culture of post-war reconstruction in Italy (cf. M. Tafuri, *Storia dell'architettura italiana 1944-1985*, Einaudi, Turin 1982, pp. 56-108) – with that of exhibition design, defining an original line of research already informally initiated by Franco Albini (cf. *Le funzioni e l'architettura del museo*, in «La Biennale di Venezia», no. 31, 1958, pp. 25-31) [excerpted in this volume in its extended version]. For a detailed discussion of these issues, see M. Morrocco, *Il museo negli scritti di Giulio Carlo Argan*, in «TeCLa», no. 3, 2011, pp. 8-31.

2. On this typological theme and on the definition Argan provides at the end of the paragraph, see, for a more detailed study that also examines the examples cited, L. Basso Peressut, *Il museo moderno. Architettura e museografia da Auguste Perret a Louis I. Kahn*, Lybra Immagine, Milan 2005.

3. This issue is closely related to that addressed by others (cf. G. Pagano, *Parliamo un po' di esposizioni*, in «Casabella Costruzioni», nos. 159-160, 1941, n.p.) [excerpted in this volume], concerning World's Fairs, since the first museum of this type, the South Kensington Museum in London, later renamed the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1899, was conceived as a direct continuation, and indeed financed through the profits, of the Great Exhibition of 1851. In this sense, that museum can also be regarded as a key reference in the history of exhibition design, as it was the first to present to visitors an integrated and comprehensive vision of the objects displayed, achieved in part through the design of showcases conceived expressly for this purpose.

4. Here Argan articulates a fundamental critical point: that the experience of exhibitions, by their very nature temporally limited, can suggest new curatorial, conservation, or display systems capable of keeping the museum «alive», by structuring a discourse not fixed once and for all, but one designed to be reformulated continuously. In this light, if one accepts his notion of the «museum as school», one must equally consider that of the «exhibition as school» for such a conception of the museum. See, in this regard, Argan's concluding note, which provides several practical examples on the subject.

5. In relation to the preceding argument, Argan offers here his typological definition of the modern museum, which is, in the final analysis, wholly anti-typological, structured instead around the temporal variability of the exhibition as the defining element of such spaces.

latter as to the former: the protagonist, the «inhabitant» of the museum is the work of art: an extremely qualified and specific value that cannot tolerate being placed within an unqualified, generic space. Moreover, even a fixed structure reduced to the bare minimum of load-bearing walls and levels is, in any museum of some size, inevitable. But how can one foresee, for each object, the spatial measure, the lighting, the chromatic environment most conducive to its appreciation, if the objects, or at least the majority of them, have no fixed placement?

Let us clarify that we do not believe in «neutral» values, whether in relation to the dimensions and configuration of space or to lighting and colour: a «neutral» space is simply a formless one, a neutral light is merely a dull one; as for colours, a grey tone may, in relation to the tonalities of a given painting, be more offensive than a vivid hue. Nor do we believe in so-called «ideal values»: the work of art is a concrete fact that must be contained and situated within a concrete space and light. [Walter] Gropius, whose rationalistic rigour is well known, spoke in this regard of *fleeting occurrence*⁶, specifying that a work of art cannot be withdrawn from the modulations and variations of light during the different hours of the day: it is absurd to imagine a museum with fixed, unnatural, aquarium-like light. How often has a slight, sudden shift of light allowed us to grasp in a work of art a value, a quality, a nuance that had previously escaped us?

The placement of a work of art constitutes a critical definition in act, it is equivalent to the interpretation and revelation of what we judge to be its aesthetic values, a way of demonstrating and communicating our judgement: and, as such, it is without doubt the task of the art historian; yet, since it is expressed through architectural framing, its material realisation falls to the architect, who is therefore the direct collaborator of the museum's director.

One might object: how can the architect foresee and prepare for future rearrangements of the *ordinamento*, or for successive long-term exhibitions that will constitute the museum's vital cycles? And how can one imagine a structure that, without being unqualified or generic, lends itself to the continual subdivision and redistribution of its interior spaces?

To the latter question it is easy to respond that modern architecture now possesses sufficient experience with modular subdivisions to be able to design a space adaptable to every possible division and articulation, without losing its original formal quality (see, for example, the new pavilion of the Galleria d'Arte Moderna in Milan, by [Ignazio] Gardella⁷). As for the former, the answer is that if – as a constant type – an architecture of the museum cannot exist, the present development of museographic needs and activities makes indispensable the work of a specialised architect, who is responsible for all the arrangements necessary to the presentation of works, to

the setting up of exhibitions, to the revision of *ordinamenti*, and – if necessary – to the direction of the workshops and laboratories within the institution. If the architecture of the museum can only be an architecture in constant evolution, it is clear that the architect's work cannot stop at the initial design and the supervision of construction, but must develop alongside the very life of the museum, supporting it in all its activities. We have already suggested on another occasion that this new professional specialization should find its place within university curricula and within the administrative structures of museums; yet it does not seem inappropriate to repeat this here, in the pages of an architectural journal, as an expression of a need equally legitimate for both artistic preservation and the development of modern architecture.

i. Several major exhibitions recently set up by architects of assuredly modern taste demonstrate how much can be gained, from those temporary displays, for the more stable organisation of museums. It will suffice to recall the exhibition of Chinese art arranged by [Carlo] Scarpa in the Doge's Palace in Venice, and that of seventeenth-century Italian painting organised by [Franco] Albini in São Paulo, Brazil. Both Scarpa and Albini have also confronted specifically museographic problems, all the more demanding in that they were required to create a modern environment within historic buildings: Scarpa in the arrangement of the picture gallery in Palermo, Albini in that of Palazzo Bianco in Genoa. Each worked in close collaboration with directors of exceptional preparation, rigour, and discernment (Caterina Marcenaro in Genoa and Giorgio Vigni in Palermo) and the accord between art historian and architect was perfect, even though the two solutions, Genoa and Palermo, differ greatly from one another. Scarpa drew fully upon his experience as a brilliant designer of exhibitions of ancient art, exploiting it to the utmost in the arrangement of the museum: for every work he devised an apt and felicitous «solution», transforming each object into the focal point of an imagined perspective. Albini, by contrast, made full use, in his exhibition at São Paulo (as previously in the exhibition of Italian modern art in Stockholm), of the experience he had gained in the museum. In São Paulo, Albini's primary aim was to preserve around the works (seventeenth-century paintings from Italian museums) the atmosphere, the space of the museum itself, while animating the sequence of rooms, subdividing and articulating the spaces in accordance with the succession of works, and with the juxtapositions and relationships of school or tendency that the exhibition's organisers had wished to highlight. The movement of the partition walls, which nevertheless always retains a certain spatial and luminous «module», and the open articulation of the rooms, demonstrate how even in the arrangement of a temporary exhibition Albini had the museum as his ultimate reference: that is, not the individual work «mounted» like a jewel in its setting, but an ideal continuity of works, a development in which each piece finds, almost spontaneously, its proper place.

[Giulio Carlo Argan, *Problemi di museografia*, in «Casabella Continuità», no. 207, 1955, pp. 65-67]

6. Argan's quotation refers to what Walter Gropius asserts about museum lighting in his writings of the 1930s, according to which «today, any museum gallery can be artificially illuminated with a better effect than is possible with natural light; moreover, it can always show each object in that most favourable aspect which, under natural light, occurs only as a fleeting event». But this, according to Gropius, is an error, since «the best artificial light available, though intended to enhance every quality of the exhibited work, is nonetheless static. It does not change. Natural light, instead, by continually changing, is alive and dynamic». W. Gropius, *Scope of Total Architecture*, Harper & Row, New York 1955, p. 40.
7. The reference here is to the Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea (PAC) in Milan, designed between 1947 and 1950 by Ignazio Gardella together with Costantino Baroni, and inaugurated in 1954, the very year in which Argan is writing.
[JL]

Giuseppe Samonà A Contribution to Museum Design 1956

The task of creating a museum involves delicate problems, all of which have a common root in the relationship between the public, the environment, and the works on display. In recent years, much has been written and much has been done regarding the museographic arrangement of works of art: whether these should be grouped according to schools or tendencies, or whether they should instead be coordinated in ways not explicitly chronological but more effective in capturing the viewer's spiritual attention, whether certain aspects of a period's culture should be emphasised, not always revealed by individual works but rather by groups of works that enhance the unique and poetically most expressive piece, and so on.

Among specialists in museography, Italy today counts several highly qualified figures, cultivated and perceptive minds, unprejudiced in their critical judgement, open and sensitive to the various problems not only of an aesthetic and historical nature, but also of a psychological one, in relation to the general public, which shows an ever-growing interest in works of art. It is no coincidence that museums such as Palazzo Bianco in Genoa have been created, which stand as an example of perfect collaboration between architect and curatorial historian. This, like other excellent examples in Italy, demonstrates how valuable the collaboration between the two creators of a museum can be when both are animated by the same spiritual refinement and by an analogous artistic sensibility. A collaboration requiring the harmonious encounter of two distinct needs, that of the artist and that of the critic, both sufficiently open and receptive to each other's spiritual needs, seemingly akin, yet in depth born of profoundly different emotional motives¹.

The artist is, in the final analysis, the creator of the museum. The skill and expertise of the historian consist in the clarity with which he can convey to the architect a sufficiently precise and detailed idea of the museographic objectives to

be achieved in that specific case and for that particular theme, and in his ability to yield, at least in part, to the architect's creative requirements. These requirements are almost all directed towards establishing a human contact between the exhibited works and the public, through a particular atmosphere within the environment which, contrary to common belief, is always an emotive environment, never a neutral frame for works of art. An environment that seeks, within the atmosphere of the room, in the space enclosed between two wings, that relationship with the work through which the latter reveals itself in values imbued with a judgement alive with our own culture, and therefore historically committed to exerting an emotional influence upon the mass of visitors. The architect creates this environment insofar as imagination within him acts as that of a spectator contemplating².

The idea of an environment in which only the work of art is visible and everything else is made so as not to exist for the visitor is almost a paradox of a certain historical and technicist culture that has been contradicted by the entire tradition, old and new, of museum architecture. It is an idea devoid of common sense, yet one that has nevertheless found some following, as it arose as a justified reaction against those entirely external characterisations of environment based, in the recent past, on stylistic revivals of the period in which the works on display had been created³. Against this inverted historicism there has rightly been a reaction; but the true artist-architect has gone beyond the paradoxical idea of a space excluded from the work of art, and has instead included it within that space with an insight far more acute and sensitive to its values in relation to those of the work itself.

Today, in good museums, the spiritual values of the work of art emerge with greater clarity, for they find in the space where the work lives a dimension proportionate to the expressive fullness of the represented subject. The environment, in

The text reproduced here, first published in «Casabella Continuità» in 1956, represents one of Giuseppe Samonà's not infrequent forays into the field of furniture and exhibition design (see in particular *L'arredo urbano e la città*, Over, Milan 1983, with Alberto Samonà). It is constructed as a sort of review of the then very recent project for the reorganisation of the museums of Castello Sforzesco in Milan by the BBPR group (1954-1956). Defined from the title as a contribution to museography, the text is in fact a precise reconnaissance of the compositional value of the exhibition design and of its essential spatial role in constructing what Samonà calls – in direct continuity with Albini's position on the subject – an emotional environment (cf. F. Albini, *Le funzioni e l'architettura del museo*, in «La Biennale di Venezia», no. 31, 1958, pp. 25-31) [excerpted in this volume in its extended version].

1. In this brief introduction to the true core of the article, Samonà revisits a fairly common argument of the time concerning the necessary critical coordination among the different professional competencies contributing to the definition of the museum environment as a whole – an issue already addressed, for instance, by Franco Albini and Giulio Carlo Argan (cf. F. Albini, *op. cit.*; G.C. Argan, *Problemi di museografia*, in «Casabella Continuità», no. 207, 1955, pp. 65-67)

[both excerpted in this volume]. Yet, whereas both authors cautiously lean toward an equitable balance among these professional roles, Samonà goes so far as to declare, without mincing words, that above all it is the architect who is the true creator of the museum, since only through environmental modulation can one establish a human contact between the exhibited works and the public, thereby fulfilling the first and most important museal mission.

2. In this crucial passage, which seems almost to systematise Albini's then-unpublished position on the subject, Samonà clarifies the means by which the encounter between public and artwork must occur, which he attributes to an essentially emotional dimension. For the author, in the creation of a museum installation, what matters is not simply the definition of a particular environment, but that of one characterised by a particular atmosphere, capable of expressing the conditions under which a work of the past reveals itself as living for contemporary culture. This requires the architect not only to imagine himself as part of the public who contemplates, but also to devote specific attention to those perceptual and experiential components of space which, while integral to the culture of interiors, still remain somewhat alien to architectural culture. On this point, for early references to the concepts of atmosphere and environment as fundamental parameters for interior design, besides the already cited

certain cases, succeeds perfectly in sensitising the dimensional relationships between a particular category of works and the setting in which they are displayed, rendering more explicit the effectiveness of a specific museographic technique through the results it seeks to obtain by means of a given arrangement.

Today, the museum of Castello Sforzesco [in Milan] offers a new and original contribution to this special world of artistic phenomena that is the museum environment: an environment newly attuned to the expressions of our civilisation, almost imaginary yesterday, yet now increasingly committed to an expressive dimension of which the architects [Lodovico] Belgiojoso, [Enrico] Peressutti, and [Ernesto Nathan] Rogers provide, in this museum of the Castello Sforzesco, the most elevated measure of the values achieved⁴. [...]

The unity achieved in the work demonstrates how effectively the expressive completeness of the restored architectural values has been enhanced by being involved in a precise purpose endowed with spiritually vital functions. Every intervention carried out upon the structures has indeed become alive, for the architects have known how to bend it towards expressing specific meanings corresponding to the museographic functions⁵, while maintaining a thoughtful stylistic coherence with the language of the historical fabric. Conversely, the architectural elements of the Castello and the spatial proportions of its organism have inspired effective figurative solutions in both the ensemble and the detail of the executed works which, though at times they may appear overly varied and exuberant, are, in our view, fully justified by the aim of reviving, almost in a popular spirit, that world of Milanese art of a bygone time, which the museum renders once more vital, precisely because it is represented with such vivid tones.

Those capable of grasping with serene balance the values that inspired the work of both the artists and the curator will find throughout the entire development of the museographic discourse a perfect coherence with this dual commitment: on the one hand, to measure attention in relation to the value of works so heterogeneous in subject and artistic level, studying their reciprocal coordination and most fitting arrangement; on the other, to animate the interior of the rooms so that their vast spaces do not appear as empty vessel in which proportion, harmony, and grandeur are contemplated with the cold detachment with which we regard many works of the past and admire them as expressions of a life far removed from our own.

The bold idea of bringing into the first room the fourteenth-century arched portal of the Pusterla dei Fabbri acutely fulfils this animating requirement of the interior space, which here is multiplied by a succession of long, linear perspectival values. This is not merely the clever device of creating, with this wall section, a non-blunt separation between

the entrance vestibule and the actual museum, but, more than that, it means localising, upon the imposing sculptural fact of the Pusterla, an emotion that makes it leap vividly from its isolation as the protagonist of a precisely determined perspectival representation, animating a punctual sequence of figurative subjects whose first solemn pause is the Arca di Bernabò Visconti, placed in the second room as though in its own setting, with the right measure of space left around it. The opening of the great arched openings that unite the first rooms into a single environment would not have achieved this necessary unity without the lively and dynamic aid of the perspectival sequences created by the multiplication of figurative episodes in a space that never exhausts its continuity, otherwise fragmented by the twofold and all too perceptible interruption of the arches, which would have broken the linguistic unity of the museographic discourse.

Within this unity we perceive, with striking clarity, the expressive predominance of coordinated spatial relationships. One recognises in it a meticulous and profoundly creative study, which has placed or aligned, against the wall and at the proper point, high reliefs upon broad wooden backgrounds, suspended sculptures and capitals and urns upon varied upright supports, and positioned, frontally, in intermediate areas on the floor, marble slabs gently inclined, as if merely to arrest the spatial flow. All this concludes and defines spatial episodes, large and small, articulated among themselves yet always measured within the volume of the rooms and perceptible in every part of it, as ideal elementary units of coherent subjects, to which a compositional unity is given by the judicious placement of a piece that, by its character and plastic vigour, stands out from the others.

It has been said that the language of the superstructures created by the architects, to support, frame, or attach the individual works against the walls, is too eclectically bound to a question of taste, and that their well-known imaginative refinement has led them too far into the domain of furnishings, exceeding that restraint which should have been imparted to the discreet accompaniment of accessories extraneous to the subject of the artworks⁶. That in these furnishing devices there is a search rich in varied linguistic accents is incontestable, but to claim that it is excessive or lacking in unity seems to me critically mistaken. I believe the error arises from a mental attitude distorted by reference to a certain type of museographic environment quite remote from that of the Castello Sforzesco, and which therefore disregards the demands of a discourse intended to be conducted in the spoken language, for it is deemed as the most fitting means of illustrating material that is alive through its history and not wholly artistic with a capital A, yet for that very reason no less engaging. [...] Moreover, wooden, iron, and stone furnishings, though employed in

diverse forms and with varying plastic vigour, always seek to embody an idea of lived equipment, wherein the expressive element is engaged in underlining the artistic or historical value of each piece, in warming with a necessary emotion the carved stone, the fragment torn from the original and more complex unity of which it once formed part. It is precisely in this sense that one may say the architects have firmly committed themselves to complementing the environment surrounding each figurative episode with others of their own creation that succeed, and almost always succeed, in conferring a more animated richness of atmospheric content around every work or group of works, by drawing to them that degree of attention each subject requires, and thus creating a more evident relationship between works, almost always fragmentary, atmosphere, and public.

With this spirit, then, one must consider and judge the two most daring arrangements conceived by the architects: that devised for the Pietà Rondanini by Michelangelo, and that for the Sala delle Asse. The first, conceived with acute awareness of spatial relationships, exploits the effects derived from a change of level within the enclosed space, and expresses itself both through the physical dynamism of proceeding along descending platforms, and through the slowness of that movement when the stairway is broad and dominated by the pauses of the landings, and through the psychological effect of descending to a lower plane, and, finally, through the sinuous layout of the stair itself, which causes the space to revolve and prepares the visitor for the final vision of the Michelangelesque work, presented from the reverse side to those approaching, and discovered with sudden emotion, yet received by the almost sacred environment the architects have created in proportion to the work, as an invitation to contemplation and silence. A setting in the form of a niche, in just proportion to the artwork it contains and perfectly attuned, in the colour of its material, sandstone, of a calm grey hue. The ensemble, though prompted by an involuntary and understandable intellectualistic impulse, is so well expressed through the architectural skill with which the architects have translated its literary implications into living reality, that it constitutes a creative achievement of high order, never overwhelming the Michelangelesque work, but rather isolating it within its own environment, which, without artifice, brings out its sublime poetry.

One is gravely mistaken in thinking that this is a matter of improvisation or facile scenography; the torment of meticulous study is instead evident in every stone, in every smallest detail or proportion of this arrangement, which, in my view, is exquisitely sensitive. Observe, in the zone preceding the enclosure, the figurative pause it establishes, note the skilful placement of the recumbent statue of Gaston de Foix, observe again its perfect consonance with the descending rhythm of

the stair platforms, and the harmony with which it is set in contrast to the bold vertical element prepared for the delightful busto della Mora; and you will surely feel how demanding the artists' poetics have been, and what plastic sensitivity they have managed to create in the atmosphere, before the silent area that enfolds the great work of art⁷.

More difficult to comprehend is the boldness of the wooden labyrinthine structure in Leonardo [da Vinci]'s Sala delle Asse, unless one keeps in mind the architectural necessity of filling its entire space with something solid and extended, so as to elude the contrast between the magnificent painted vault and the bare walls. This act of filling became for the artists an act of creating vibrations in unison with the complex vibratility of the vault's fabric, a rhythm articulated through plastic elements of vertical, striated, and enveloping wooden screens⁸. Perhaps some exuberance here might have been reconsidered, particularly in the sequence of lanterns projecting from the upper edge of the screens. Yet my reservation is probably tied to a literary rigour for which, in this museum, no perceptible correspondences can be found in relation to its strong commitment to communicative illustration. A communicativeness closely bound to particular expressive meanings, for which, in every room and for every theme, the artists have managed to find the right tone⁹. [...]

This sense of communication within the museum seizes upon every pretext to reveal itself, to bind together, with a tenacious expressive bond, all the routes. Another very clear example of this is the sudden opening, through a breach in the wall of the Sala degli Scarlioni, of a passage leading to a small courtyard picturesquely enclosed among high walls, against which leans a stairway descending to the bottom of the moat, where a graceful sixteenth-century fountain is installed. The ensemble has been created with the intention of altering the visitor's mood, who, having lived through the unique and intense emotion of the Pietà, finds in this more descriptive and romantic setting a means of rebalancing with a more tangible reality. [...]

A particular spatial significance is assumed by the large hall containing the Arazzi Trivulziani, arranged according to a sinuous route that corrects the casual placement of the windows and condenses its lively figurative language within the interior volume, avoiding the void that would have been created by hanging the tapestries along the walls, a solution typical of many celebrated rooms in our monuments, which, through their inability to animate the intermediate waves of space, produce in the viewer a sense of detachment and chill.

Special mention must be made of the first rooms on this upper floor, where the furniture collections are exhibited, divided into four sections. Here the architects have sought to create an environmental expression distinct from the facile

example of Albini, see also those by Giuseppe Pagano (*Parliamo un po' di esposizioni*, in «Casabella Costruzioni», nos. 159-160, 1941, n.p.) and Carlo Mollino (*Utopie e ambientazione*, in «Domus», nos. 237-238, 1949, pp. 14-19 and 20-25) [both excerpted in this volume].

3. Cf. G.C. Argan, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

4. From this point onward, the article continues with the description and analysis of the project in question – presented by the authors themselves in the same issue of the journal (BBPR, *Il riordino dei musei del Castello Sforzesco*, in «Casabella Continuità», no. 211, 1956, pp. 50-77) – in which Samonà, consistently with the principles previously set out, combines a careful examination of the compositional aspects of BBPR intervention – rarely found in other critical texts on exhibition design – with an unprecedented attention to its atmospheric and perceptual components. For a contextualisation of the project within the work of BBPR, see E. Bonfanti, *Arredamenti ed esposizioni*, in E. Bonfanti, M. Porta, *Città, museo e architettura. Il Gruppo BBPR nella cultura architettonica italiana 1932-1970*, Hoepli, Milan 1973, pp. 65-70 [excerpted in this volume].

5. Functions for which BBPR avail themselves of the consultancy of Costantino Baroni.

6. The criticism that the architects had subordinated the works to the emotional engagement of the public – a sentiment already implicit at the time Samonà is writing – is formalised a few months later by Antonio Cederna (*Il regista invadente*, in «Il Mondo», no. 41, 1956, pp. 9-10). On this point, and particularly regarding Samonà's rebuttal – perfectly consistent with the arguments advanced in the introduction – see M. Labò and R. Pane, *Dibattito sul Museo del Castello Sforzesco a Milano*, in «L'architettura, cronache e storia», no. 33, 1958, pp. 152-163.

7. With this description of the arrangement of the Pietà Rondanini, Samonà provides, in narrative form, an example of how specific compositional relationships yield atmospheric results. The fact that, in the following paragraph, he uses the second person plural to invite readers to confirm his analysis only further underlines the experiential quality he seeks to articulate.

8. On the use of the term vibration coupled with that of atmosphere, see once again F. Albini, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

9. In this passage, Samonà revisits one of the central themes of Italian literature on exhibition design – namely, the notion of display as a discipline of service and occasion – and he emphasises its necessity in relation to the essential aim of such interventions, which he identifies with the term communicativeness, before which every claim to literary rigour recedes into the background. [JL]

and arbitrary sensations of a falsely lived interior. Such an arrangement would have been cursory and perhaps superficially effective, but contrary to any genuine sense of critical engagement, an evasion of the museographic characteristics adopted both in the technique of the illustrative discourse and in the configuration of the plastic language accompanying its development. Thus, in this case as well, the artists turned to a search for values that could recompose appropriate spatial dimensions for each group of furniture, almost always avoiding strict placement against the walls. In each room, space is subdivided and defined by furniture groupings of differing dimensional weight. [...] The overall result is most pleasing and achieved with considerable effectiveness for the didactic purposes partly intended.

Perhaps the coordination among certain groups on display is not always convincing, [...] yet these are fleeting impressions that do not alter the highly favourable judgement one must render upon the coherence and sensitivity of the language employed even for this subject, so different from the others, and perhaps more than any other difficult to arrange while avoiding evocations or the clutter of an antique dealer’s shop.

At the end of the visit, we feel we have enjoyed ourselves without fatigue, for an ideal and coherent modulation of spaces, creating dimensions always suited to the works on display, has guided us from room to room. The more discerning eye perceives and values the meticulous care with which the architects have managed to translate into living and meditated language all that craft-based instrumentality which, at the level of mere taste, would have remained a more or less felicitous *trouvaille*, but which here reveals, through the traits of a strong personality, the high artistic level of the work as a whole and the great significance of this new museographic experience. New problems of language have been posed, to which the architects have given solutions that, on the critical plane, represent beyond doubt an effective contribution to the definition of the complex organism of a modern museum.

[Giuseppe Samonà, *Un contributo alla museografia*, in «Casabella Continuità», no. 211, 1956, pp. 51-68]

Agnoldomenico Pica

Exhibitions

1960

At the beginning of the twentieth century, and more distinctly after the First World War, it was not so much the style, taste, and order of the exhibition that changed as the inner meaning of the exhibition itself. After, let us say, a century and a half of history, dense and triumphant, exhibitions, born of the infatuation with «Progress» and with technology, yet grown as a predominantly commercial phenomenon, essentially mercantile even in the case of the Parisian art «Salons», began to assume tasks and to posit aims of a distinctly spiritual nature, tasks and aims which they had hitherto entirely ignored, moreover, spiritual, cultural, didactic, and ideally propagandistic ambitions tended to become dominant and, at times, exclusive¹. [...]

The different sense and the new value that exhibitions [...] came to acquire found their precise counterpart not only in new arrangements and in a previously unheard-of conception of the show, but in a genuinely new style of exhibition, what we might call a new *icastica*, or iconicity, of display. It is not that, previously, in the nineteenth century, the new art had not intervened in such manifestations [...]. It would suffice to recall how some of the most celebrated «commonplaces» of every history of modern architecture were in fact born as buildings for exhibitions² [...]. Yet these were, precisely, buildings for exhibitions and nothing more [...], in which the functional pretext offered by the occasion was exhausted in the creation of a vast covered space – the eternal theme of architecture – without that interior space being conditioned by any compositional idea. Once the building, ephemeral or otherwise, was completed, architects, artists, and often technicians as well, remained on the threshold, abandoning the space they had brought into being to the feats of commercial arrangers and generic florists and upholsterers, the gap between exterior and interior, at best, could not have been more glaring. [...]

In the complex pavilion built in Cologne in 1914 for offices and machinery, by contrast, [Walter] Gropius was the first

to propose a different permeability, even physical, between exterior and interior, and a rigorous coordination among the spaces, such that the interior too was coherently conditioned.

Gropius’s proposal, nor could it have been otherwise at that time, proceeded solely from a new awareness of the building’s functionality, just as, later, in 1921, the small yet remarkable exhibition of the Constructivists³ in Moscow proposed a new organisation of interior spaces solely in view of a new aesthetics and a novel plastic evaluation.

Functionalism and new plasticity were thus knocking at the door, but only as requirements of style, not yet as fundamental conceptual commitments.

In Paris, in 1925, at the «Exposition internationale des Arts Décoratifs», Le Corbusier’s Esprit Nouveau pavilion represented the cell of a rented dwelling, that is to say, although of great consequence for new architecture, merely an «object exhibited», Josef Hoffmann’s Austrian pavilion prestigiously established the convergence of the Secession with functionalism and seemed to profit from Gropius’s 1914 lesson, but the pavilion of the USSR, through the merits of Constantin Melnikoff [sic], offered perhaps the first assertion, not merely aesthetic but conceptually essential, of what today would be called a new course for exhibitions. All this corresponded exactly to the direction of the forces at play. [...] The USSR in Paris had solely to declare, propagate, and impose social ideals and political systems. Commercial interest and economic incentives ceded place to a manifestation of ideal prestige, to a representation of ideas that aimed to be attractive, impressive, and, ultimately, persuasive⁴.

The mercantile *battage* gave way to ambitions of a philosophical and social nature, publicity yielded to political propaganda.

In place of commerce and the very «progressivist» infatuation with technology and industry came a form of apologet-

The passage reproduced here – very likely the first attempt to define an organic history of exhibition design – is an excerpt from Pica’s long introduction to Roberto Aloï’s *Esposizioni, architetture, allestimenti* (Hoepli, Milan 1960) – the first Italian monograph to present a broad collection of exhibition projects from the 1920s to the 1940s – later republished in abridged form in S. Polano, *Mostrare. L’allestimento in Italia dagli anni Venti agli anni Ottanta*, Lybra Immagine, Milan 1988, pp. 561-569.

1. The history of exhibitions is not as homogeneous as it may at first appear. Initially, from 1851 – the year of the Great Exhibition in London – they represent the place where the state of the art in science and technology can meet manufacturing industry and its potential clients. Later, beginning with the 1939 New York World’s Fair, *Building the World of Tomorrow*, the meaning of these events evolves culturally along with the very idea of the museum. On the subject, besides Giuseppe Pagano (cf. *Parliamo un po’ di esposizioni*, in «Casabella Costruzioni», nos. 159-160, 1941, n.p.) [excerpted in this volume], for a general introduction see the slightly earlier A. Perilli, ed., *Esposizioni*, in *Enciclopedia Universale dell’Arte*, Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, Venice-Rome, Sansoni, Florence 1959, vol. V, cols. 42-54. In this article, however, Pica attempts,

most interestingly, to trace the roots of the great exhibitions’ change of course to experiences prior to the New York fair, focusing not so much on institutional change as on cultural shift.

2. In the omitted passage, Pica refers to a series of buildings «from Joseph Paxton’s Crystal Palace erected in London in 1851 to the Eiffel Tower and the Palais des Machines by Cottancin and Dutert built in Paris in 1889, from Raimondo D’Aronco’s pavilions in Turin in 1902 to the German Werkbund Theatre erected by Henry van de Velde in Cologne in 1914».

3. The exhibition to which the author refers, one of the first to shape Constructivist poetics, was organised at the Poets’ Circle in Moscow in 1921, with contributions, among others, by Alexander Rodchenko, Boris Ioganson, and the brothers Vladimir and Georgii Stenberg.

4. This is a particularly interesting point in the article, since with his reference to Mel’nikov’s pavilion Pica attributes to an architectural – hence cultural – change a large share of responsibility for the broader institutional transformation later consolidated by the 1939 World’s Fair.

ics and apostolate whose ends, though entirely concrete, were posited well beyond immediate temporal contingency.

It was a contingency, and indeed an unofficial one, that this revolutionary, ambitious, and in a sense abstract programme should have found, in Melnikoff and in those Russian artists who had not yet had the misfortune to encounter the officially imposed banalities of Socialist Realism, the energy and imagination necessary to translate it into that masterpiece which was the Russian pavilion of 1925 in Paris.

German Expressionism, re-thought through the Constructivism of [Vladimir] Tatlin and the Vesnin brothers⁵, and through the volumetric reconstructions of [Alexander] Archipenko⁶, and even the choreographic imagination of the then recent Ballets Russes, concurred to create that surprising atmosphere, somewhat exalted and hallucinatory, which an aggressive propaganda demanded in place of a fiery oratorical eloquence. If the latter could have been more analytical and less tempted by ambiguities, this language of images, of plastic and graphic allusions, of spaces animated by unforeseen rhythms, of audacious structures, had the advantage of being immediately intelligible to anyone.

The Werkbundsiedlung in Stuttgart of 1927⁷, the exemplary Siedlung Dammerstock at Karlsruhe of 1929⁸, as well as the constructions in Milan's park for the V Triennale in 1933 and the later QT8 in Milan, conceived by [Giuseppe] Pagano in 1936 and realised by [Piero] Bottoni in 1947⁹, belong rather to the history of architecture and urbanism than to that of exhibitions.

Similarly, though on other grounds, buildings for exhibitions such as the «House of the Arts» built in Oslo in 1930 by Gudolf Blakstad and Herman Munthe-Kaas, or Giovanni Muzio's Palazzo dell'Arte in Milan, or, much later, the superb hall erected in Turin by Pier Luigi Nervi for the periodical motor shows [...], do not fall within the scope of our present discussion, since they do not partake of that taste for the ephemeral and the experimental which is proper to the architecture of exhibitions. Nor is anything pejorative implied in the adjective ephemeral, which here denotes a quality inherent in the «experimental».

For that matter, these architectures for fairs and exhibitions, destined to last a few weeks or months, are not so different from those dreamt-of architectures that attracted the acumen of Joseph Ponten¹⁰: projects designed but never built. Perhaps it is precisely here that there lie and burn, to borrow Carlo Mollino's image, the truest and most searing «great loves» of architects.

In 1928, in Paris, with the dismantlable metal Nestlé pavilion, Le Corbusier, and shortly afterwards, in Milan, Luciano Baldessari with the «Vesta» pavilion¹¹, pointed the way with

confidence to how the concepts of coherent exterior-interior continuity could, indeed should, now enter even commercial fairs. This is, from then on, what occurred with increasing rigour in those trade fairs which, with growing energy and breadth, were supplanting exhibitions in mercantile and industrial sectors.

Again in 1928, in Cologne, at the international «Pressa» exhibition¹², Giovanni Muzio and Mario Sironi authoritatively and vividly reprised the theme of political propaganda, while, not very differently as to intent, Mies van der Rohe, with the German Pavilion at Barcelona in 1929, realised in that unforgettable masterpiece one of the most significant and poignant expressions of Germanness, with that measure of heroic, obstinate technical lucidity and that hint of romantic aspiration to a dreamed-of Attic purity that constitute its most secret and constant elements. Much the same, in this sense, might be said of [Gunnar Erik] Asplund for the fanciful pavilions of the Stockholm exhibition of 1930¹³, yet these seem far more consequential for the decisive para-rationalist impetus introduced into European architecture at the time than for the effects we are considering here.

The «Galleria della Grafica» set up by Muzio and Sironi at Monza in 1930¹⁴ marked the highest attainment not of a technique, but properly of an art of exhibition, in which the exhibited object and the environment fused into an inseparable expressive fact.

By now nothing could be more distant from the original anonymous and undifferentiated emporium; the exhibition, like a well-defined work of art, achieved the quality of a unitary creation in which the object ceased to be a casual episode and became a precise word, precisely articulated and modulated within that discursive fabric, often polemical, apologetic, or exegetical, which the exhibition intended to be.

Later, there began to be laments about an alleged predominance of the container over the content, as though reviving the quarrel between content-mongers and calligraphers. Even recently, we have heard loud laments over this supposed strangulation perpetrated by exhibition designers to the detriment of the objects and «products» displayed.

One does not exclude that some overreach, or excessive, even clumsy, formalistic concern, may at times have forced the hand of some designer, but, conceptually, such fears and protests seem destined merely to reveal sectors where the sense, value, and measure of the profound revolution that has transformed exhibiting from a passive, merely receptive phenomenon into an active, willed, and propulsive operation, have yet to be grasped.

There are no longer «products», «manufactured goods», «objects» to be shown and, separately, environments or show-

cases to contain them in fine order, there exist, rather, and press upon us, a discourse to be brought to a conclusion, an idea to be demonstrated and defended, a programme to be illustrated, a theory to be indicated and tested¹⁵. [...]

In that singular composition, or better, *mise-en-scène*, which is an exhibition, it is evidently no longer important whether the desired results, that is, specific emotions and specific reactions to be elicited in the public, are obtained through individual objects displayed and cataloguable, perhaps even marketable, or through a certain disposition and gradation of the individual pieces, or thanks to expedients of pure staging, or, finally, through the concurrence of all these elements. Exactly as in the staging of a theatrical performance, no one will ask whether the scenic effect, and hence the emotion in the audience, ought to be aroused by the lighting, or by the sets, or by the costumes.

Where the new concept of the exhibition, conceived as discourse, and therefore as eloquence, in this case political, is taken up in its entirety from the Russian proposal of 1925 is, naturally, in the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution (Mostra della Rivoluzione fascista) held in Rome in 1932¹⁶.

Inevitably, not only the concept but also certain attitudes were reprised, and with greater prestige, both because of a longer and richer maturation and because, in Italy, over the encumbrance of a still programmatically polemical Constructivism there prevailed the stimuli of an Expressionism perhaps suggested by German experiences, but purified of their romantic dross and transfigured both by the vital vehemence of Futurism and by the tenacious ardour of the first Italian Rationalism.

Mario Sironi's «Galleria dei Fasci»¹⁷, the memorial chapel to the martyrs by Adalberto Libera and Antonio Valente¹⁸, Marcello Nizzoli's rooms, and that by Giuseppe Terragni can scarcely be classified otherwise than at the forefront of the recent history of exhibitions, for the degree of emotive intensity attained within a rigorous unity of discourse, or, if one prefers, of declamation.

As a kind of counterpoint, on the same occasion and in the same venue, Leo Longanesi and Mino Maccari seemed to introduce into the sphere of exhibitions a certain flavour of irony¹⁹, expressed through a graphic sensibility that was to have far-reaching consequences and which, alongside others' heroic tones, could take on a curious hint of ideal Surrealism, not without effect on future developments in a world already embarked upon the search for emotional stimuli, spectacular ferment, and indeed shock.

In Milan in 1933, the Triennale, above all through Sironi's mediation, transferred to the plane of cultural and societal debate the elements of the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution,

yet the influence of Gio Ponti and, more so, the spirit of the first Rationalists seemed, though in divergent directions, to divert its expressive force to the advantage of more substantial and, at least apparently, more urgent inquiries.

The more or less manifest conflict of different currents, or even mere inflections of taste, was resolved, in the wake of the V Triennale and precisely in the spirit of the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution, in that wholly felicitous event which was the Exhibition of Italian Aeronautics organised by Giuseppe Pagano in 1934²⁰.

The theme of politico-military exaltation, which in Rome had found highly effective accents, though at times tending toward a certain truculence, here seemed to receive a more intense expression, precisely through a conscious measure of effects and a kind of restrained warmth that would remain exemplary. Pagano's «Sala di Icaro»²¹ and, still more, the now celebrated room of the «Medaglie d'oro»²², in which Marcello Nizzoli and Edoardo Persico ingeniously drew upon Gropius's lesson, represent secure achievements, alongside which it is only right to place, for the subtlety of its interpretation, the «Sala dei Precursori» by Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini²³.

The more distinctly graphic taste which Herbert Bayer²⁴ had masterfully expressed in Berlin in 1930 on the occasion of the Werkbund exhibition resurfaced in Milan, albeit with far less rigour, in the Sport Exhibition²⁵, where certain hints of Surrealist irony were of evocative value rather than conclusive force.

At Brussels, the 1935 World's Fair, dominated by the rather crude mass of the great «Palais du Centenaire», generally represented a moment of stasis, if not of regression, of taste. Yet, against the flatness of the general tenor, Jean De Ligne, with the Usines Remy pavilion, Victor Bourgeois, with the elegant Restaurant Léopold, and, most inventively, Adalberto Libera, Mario De Renzi, and Ettore Rossi with the Italian pavilions²⁶, reacted with coherent clarity.

In quite a different climate of taste, the Triennale of 1936²⁷, with Pagano, Sironi, and Arturo Martini, summarised with singular energy, and we might say at a moment of happy equilibrium, the Expressionist ferment and megalographic aspirations deriving from Melnikoff and from the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution, together with the ever more exacting and rigorous schemas of an Italian Rationalism that, between Gropius's teaching and Le Corbusier's example, was tracing its own path.

In their «Introduzione alla mostra della abitazione», [Gian Luigi] Banfi, [Lodovico] Belgiojoso, [Enrico] Peressutti, and [Ernesto Nathan] Rogers proposed, with no little verve, an example of a programmatic and propagandistic exhibition, propagandistic in a cultural and social sense, while Guido Frette

5. That is, of course, Vladimir Tatlin – known for his 1919 design for the Monument to the Third International – and Leonid, Viktor, and Alexander Vesnin, authors, among other projects, of the 1924 design for the Moscow headquarters of the newspaper «Leningradskaia Pravda».

6. Alexander Archipenko (1887-1964), Ukrainian sculptor.

7. Experimental housing estate better known as the Weißenhof.

8. Housing estate designed by Walter Gropius.

9. For further reading on Monza Biennals and Milan Triennals, see A. Pansera, *Storia e Cronaca della Triennale*, Longanesi & C., Milan 1978.

10. German writer (1883-1940), influenced by Expressionism, known not only for numerous short stories but also for texts on architecture and landscape.

11. Pavilion designed for Irma De Angeli at the Fiera Internazionale di Milano in 1933.

12. An exhibition within the International Press and Printing Exhibition, organised in Cologne in the summer of 1928, where «highly original formal results can be found, both in the structuring and in the characterisation of spaces». M. Sironi, *Il mito dell'architettura*, Mazzotta, Milan 1990, p. 86.

13. The Stockholmsutställningen.

14. More precisely, within the IV Triennale di Milano.

15. On this thesis, see also E. Gentili, *Organicità e decorativismo nell'allestimento delle mostre*, in «Metron», no. 10, 1946, pp. 60-64 [excerpted in this volume].

16. Inaugurated at the Palazzo dell'Esposizione in Rome in October of that year.

17. With a layout indebted to Mel'nikov and El Lissitzky both in volumetric composition and in its taste for photomontage and newspaper collage.

18. Centred on a blood-red pedestal from which rises a metal cross, and above the word «presente» running along the hall.

19. Respectively a writer (1905-1957) and an illustrator (1898-1989), they were tasked with curating the so-called Sala T, the space devoted to Benito Mussolini, and with the historical reconstruction of the year 1920.

20. This is the widely cited Mostra dell'Aeronautica italiana held at the Palazzo dell'Arte, in which Pica also took part. For further discussion, see A.M. Mazzucchi, *Stile di una mostra*, in «Casabella», no. 80, 1934, pp. 6-9.

21. With its great spiral of sheet steel rising to a height of thirteen metres.

22. With its ideative-expository grid becoming both visual support and free compositional instrument for the narrative.

23. Containing all the Italian studies and attempts from Leonardo da Vinci to the most recent aerostats of the early twentieth century.

24. Austrian artist and graphic designer (1900-1985), who studied at the Bauhaus under Vasily Kandinsky and László Moholy-Nagy.

25. Mostra dello Sport italiano, Palazzo dell'Arte, Milan, 1935.

26. For a fuller treatment of these works, see A. Pica, *Nuova architettura nel mondo*, Hoepli, Milan 1936.

27. V Triennale, entitled *Continuità-modernità*.

and Pagano, with the «Mostra dei materiali edilizi e delle strutture», and Franco Albini and Giovanni Romano with the «Antica oreficeria italiana», offered two scarcely surpassable examples of shows in which the object, far from being neglected and indeed carefully valorised, entered with naturalness, according to the laws of stringent compositional necessity, into the whole.

Two examples in which the old emporium system was necessarily, and rightly, recalled, yet at the same time coordinated within a more complete and complex compositional unity.

With regard to the jewellery exhibition, it must be acknowledged that the authors knew how to renounce the originality of invention, evidently recalling Nizzoli and Persico, in order to achieve a result of such prestige as to bring the previous experience to a definitive conclusion.

In the same exhibition, the Swiss section, designed by Max Bill, between Neoplastic taste and pure graphic design, achieved effects of high emotional intensity, to the point of seeming the first moment in which the iconic violence of Expressionism was translated, without residue, onto a plane of rigorous and limpid contemporaneity, almost a very successful attempt to transform, in technical or para-technical terms, the turbulence and melodramatic tumult of pictorial scenographies that had still pleased the generations of the early twentieth century.

Finally, the Victory Hall (Salone della Vittoria) by Nizzoli, [Pietro] Palanti, and Persico, with sculptures by Lucio Fontana, proposed, with monumental firmness, an exhibition with nothing to exhibit, a purely declamatory show, indeed, highly declamatory, yet without rhetoric.

From the experiences of the Milan Triennals there issued, after 1936, the Roman exhibitions at the Circus Maximus. Urbanistically defined by the natural disposition suggested by the ancient site plan, these exhibitions all achieved a precise effectiveness of representation. Although two of them, «Tessile» and «Minerale», explicitly had a mercantile theme, almost in the nineteenth-century sense, all came to adopt the detached and consequential tone which Libera, De Renzi, and [Giovanni] Guerrini gave to the exhibition on «Colonie Estive», that is, the aspect and value of a unitary illustration which, avoiding any petty episodichness of the trade fair, culminated in the definition of spaces, lights, colours, and structures that were essentially expressive.

Worthy of mention in this regard are certain displays by [Angelo] Bianchetti and [Cesare] Pea²⁸, the pavilion by Luigi Moretti²⁹, and, above all, that of the Armed Forces in the Mostra del Minerale by De Renzi³⁰, where timber lattice parabolic-arch structures were masterfully employed many years before they became fashionable in the Anglophone world.

Again in Rome, indeed, in the Vatican, around these years Gio Ponti curated the international exhibition of the Catholic press, remarkable for the clarity and suggestiveness of its layout.

Among the last undertakings prior to the Second World War, the Leonardo exhibition of 1939 in Milan, conceived and developed amid doubts and uncertainties, like the Triennale of 1940, offered, save for rare and noteworthy exceptions, no great results.

A broadly similar judgement must be given, in general, of the two great international exhibitions, Paris 1937 and New York two years later. Yet the former, with the Spanish pavilion by [Josep Lluís] Sert, featuring Picasso's «Guernica», and the Swedish pavilion by Sven Ivar Lind, presented motifs of considerable interest, and with Alvar Aalto's beautiful Finnish pavilion proposed one of the surest and most influential models for the post-Rationalism that was already maturing within European architecture.

As for the New York exhibition, the «New York World's Fair», optimistically titled «The World of Tomorrow», it must be recalled that it suffered, organisationally, from the competition of the contemporaneous «World's Fair of the West» or «Golden Gate International Exhibition» in San Francisco, as well as from the precipitous turn of international events.

Even so, the last world's fair before the War would suffice for fame by virtue of the singular, if somewhat ingenuous, *Trylon* (obelisk) and *Perisphere* by Wallace K. Harrison and J. André Fouilhoux³¹. The invention of that extremely gratuitous composition, reviving, in the name of «Democracy», the nineteenth-century and mildly rhetorical motif of the dominant central emblem, may be debatable, yet it must be recognised to have created, in some measure, a plausible, monumental modern equivalent to what the Eiffel Tower represented in 1889, an achievement far from attained, alas, by the more recent creators of Brussels's *Atomium*³².

Better than in the overly vast and diffuse exhibitions of Paris and New York, brilliant stylistic results were achieved in 1939 by the Schweizerische Landesausstellung in Zurich³³, where the elementary schemas of European Rationalism seemed now enriched by the dialectic of a freer imagination, granting to the flair of invention a credit at least equal to that which, up to a few years earlier, had been parsimoniously reserved for technique and functionality.

Beyond the violent *caesura* imposed by the Second World War, the adventure of exhibitions and shows resumed, one might say, with undiminished intensity, culminating, in terms of organisational, constructional, and expressive effort, in the «Exposition internationale et universelle» of Brussels in 1958.

It would be impossible to affirm that the character, taste, and style of the exhibitions of these recent years have changed

radically in relation to those of the 1920s-1940s, nevertheless, motifs, dispositions, measures, rhythms, and inflections of taste have gradually and imperceptibly shifted, reaching novel expressions that would not have been possible, or justifiable, without the pre-war experiments. The pavilion built in Brussels by Reima Pietilä for Finland in 1958 descends from that which Aalto erected in Paris in 1937, nor could Sverre Fehn's wonderfully limpid Norwegian pavilion in Brussels be explained without the example of Mies van der Rohe's German pavilion at Barcelona in 1929, likewise, many current installations and presentations pay, if distantly and even unwittingly, their tribute to Sironi's Expressionism, to Terragni's Rationalism, and even to certain Futurist solutions by [Enrico] Prampolini.

Perhaps one should say that the most recent period, as is only natural, brings to a close, often felicitously, the proposals, attempts, hopes, and ambitions of the previous decades, with that degree of freedom and at times audacity which were then often impeded or hindered from outside to inside [...], by the public distrust that all new things entail and [...] by the rigorous, and at times truly inhibiting, brake imposed by a polemic which current post-Rationalist tendencies have long since set aside.

This modern mode of exhibition, availing itself of avant-garde photography, graphics, and stagecraft, and of modern lighting, has succeeded in setting, within the Cartesian order of early Le Corbusier and the abstract purity of architectural rhythms, the powerful suggestions of Expressionism and the allusive irony of Surrealism, and has come to create a kind of highly particular, specialised show direction, a staging so suggestive, refined, and attentive that it has ended up being entrusted even with the reorganisation of museums of ancient art.

In effect, the problem of the museum is not substantially different from that of the exhibition, it is therefore unsurprising that, especially in Italy, and with excellent results, the techniques of exhibition design have been applied to the museum as well. [...]

The discourse on the current architectural organisation of museums is, naturally, another matter, involving a wholly different series of problems [...]. What concerns us here was merely to note how, now effortlessly and indeed spontaneously, the art and technique of exhibition have entered the museum and the art gallery, which, should proof still be needed, would truly clarify *ad abundantiam* both the nature and the impact of the change that modernity has wrought, in the last forty years, upon exhibition design.

[Agnoldomenico Pica, *Esposizioni*, in Roberto Aloï, *Esposizioni, architetture, all'estimenti*, Hoepli, Milan 1960, pp. 5-38]

31. Respectively, a tapered needle-like mast over two hundred metres high and a large globe over sixty metres in diameter.

32. Designed by the architect André Waterkeyn for the 1958 Brussels World's Fair.

33. Again, see E. Gentili, *op. cit.* [JL]

28. In particular, those for the Mostra del Tessile in Rome in 1939.

29. The pavilion for the exhibition on Colonie Estive, held at the Circus Maximus in 1935.

30. Mostra autarchica del minerale italiano at the Circus Maximus, 1938.

Leonardo Savioli

The Problem of Exhibition Design

1972

The opportunity I was given [...] to design [...] exhibitions [...] has constituted for me a form of exciting experience¹; an experience which, although differing somewhat from that of architecture and furnishing, which evidently have different aims, means, durations and consistencies, has nevertheless offered me a new, unusual, and unexpected form of stimulus in the mechanics of spatial configuration.

A form of stimulus which, though proper and characteristic of exhibition design, has then, by reflection, flowed back, through a process of filtering, sedimentation, and mediation, into the very aggregation of spaces in architecture, where, as we have said, the problems of space are obviously of a different nature.

To begin with, as a first and highly positive aspect of exhibition design, one should note the brief lapse of time, indeed, the total absence of any interval, between design and realisation, which instead exists, and in an exasperating way, in architecture, where we are inevitably obliged to realise an object slowly, several years after it has been conceived. This absence of interval places one immediately in a kind of short circuit between oneself and the object, between the sign and the material, between the drawing and life itself².

This short circuit, I must say, actually overturns the very conception of space, which is shaped through direct configuration, almost without intermediaries; a space which, however it may be conceived, directly reflects gesture, creativity, and immediate imagination, like an organic membrane; with all the virtues and perhaps also all the defects of an organic membrane: an emanation, that is, of one's own hands, gestures and actions.

I would venture to say that the act of exhibition design, although something quite different, is in certain respects akin to certain operations of figurative environment³; and this figurativeness which, in modern architectural practice, generally,

though wrongly, follows as a passive consequence of countless other so-called preliminary operations (technique, prefabrication, method, function, etc.; on this point I should add that the formal research proposed in such mediocre terms has led either to an absolute banality of form, or, conversely, to the most exasperated formalisms), here instead takes place simultaneously and proposes itself from the outset, step by step, in equilibrium with the other components, as one of the vital ones. It is placed, it seems to me, like a series of hundreds of images condensed into one, like a sequence of spatial intersections unfolding along a path, like a footage of images, at times barely veiled, at times outright violent; like, finally, a sort of architectural film⁴. This architectural film, precisely, which is not cinema, not theatre, not scenography, not sculpture or painting, nor even architecture in the truest sense of the word, has been, at least for me, a penetrating instrument for the comprehension, organisation, structuring and mechanics of architectural space, though the latter obeys, as said before, other laws.

Another point of exceptional interest in exhibition design is its provisional nature, which might at first appear to be a negative element but, if rightly interpreted, is in fact a highly positive one. Here, however, even beyond the field of exhibitions themselves, a clarification is needed as to what should be considered, or at least what I consider, worth preserving and transmitting, and what instead is provisional and destined to be destroyed.

The new spatial organisations in the territory, the city of the future, new neighbourhoods, dwellings, objects, will, in my view, be extendable, modifiable, consumable and therefore also destructible. Destructible in the sense that, once their specific function has been exhausted – and I say this at every scale – they will indeed be destroyed and replaced by others.

This is what will not remain.

But it will not remain in the strictly material, physical, objectual sense; rather, what will remain and be transmitted, from one act of use to another, from destruction to destruction, from iteration to iteration, will be the message, the meaning, the existential value which must instead be enriched, added to, accumulated each time, as an ever broader and more vital experience of a life in renewal. Thus the new object that is created and continually re-proposed will always be new, yet will also contain, bear witness to, and embody the total sum of the experience of the destroyed objects and of the lives that have passed.

This, then, is what will endure: a sort of «eternity» handed down and transmitted through provisional, destructible, destroyed objects; an «eternity» not of the objects themselves, but of the value contained within them, which, once they are destroyed, is returned to life.

Now, the provisional nature of exhibitions, which by definition last only for a short time, precisely tends for this reason to accumulate a greater density of meanings, to produce richer complexities of value, to make, in short, a treasure of symbols and signs, so that, precisely because it is something destined to be quickly dismantled and rapidly experienced, it may transmit and firmly impress its testimony upon the spectator; especially when that testimony bears witness to a time now past [...].

In short, exhibitions, by virtue of their transience, perhaps even more than other complexes we now build to last, stimulate the search for signs, for values, for «memories» that must find their place more immediately in the spectator's memory⁵.

Exhibition design is, in this sense too, a kind of great lesson in the psychology of space, a sort of inverted reading of proxemics.

[Leonardo Savioli, *Il Problema degli allestimenti*, in Leonardo Savioli and Danilo Santi, eds., *Problemi di architettura contemporanea. L'architettura delle Gallerie d'arte moderna*, G&G, Florence 1972, pp. 258-259]

The passage reproduced here, originally published in the volume co-edited by Leonardo Savioli with Danilo Santi and entitled *Problemi di architettura contemporanea* (G&G, Florence 1972), represents a reflection, based on certain autobiographical experiences, concerning the specificities of exhibition design in relation to architectural design. Of remarkable critical and design relevance to both fields, although little known, the essay is later republished in full in M. Nocchi, *Leonardo Savioli. Allestire, arredare, abitare*, Alinea, Florence 2008, pp. 181-183.

from the historical angle usually adopted – moving closer to what Franco Albini writes in *Le funzioni e l'architettura del museo* («La Biennale di Venezia», no. 31, 1958, pp. 25-31) [excerpted in extended form in this volume], as well as to his own personal approach to the subject.

2. Here Savioli introduces a particularly interesting issue regarding the temporality of exhibition design, which concerns not only its life cycle but also the almost complete coincidence between the time of design and that of realisation – which, from his point of view, has an even greater impact on a way of designing that approaches the plastic arts.

3. The term, whose introduction is attributed to a 1958 interview with the American artist Allan Kaprow, gains informal currency during the following decade in the context of museum exhibitions and artistic installations, to denote a constructed or designed space conceived as an immersive environment, structured according to recognisable formal principles and often endowed with a strong communicative, symbolic or narrative charge. This essay by Savioli – while certainly the most influential – appears to be the first instance in which it occurs within the Italian architectural context.

4. In this other key passage, Savioli reaffirms the centrality of formal research with respect to the technical and functional issues on which, in architectural

practice, it is often made to depend. The specific idea of form to which he refers seems to constitute a felicitous synthesis of the already mentioned Albinian positions on spatial experience and those of a more structuralist nature advanced by Luigi Moretti (cf. *Strutture e sequenze di spazi*, in «Spazio», no. 7, 1953, pp. 9-20 and 107-108) [excerpted in this volume].

5. In conclusion, returning to the more canonical theme of the provisional nature of exhibition design, Savioli underlines another crucial point concerning the way in which such temporality compels the designer to heighten the meaningfulness and communicative intensity of a given spatial construct. This, in turn, once again relates to that idea of kinetic figurativeness to which he alludes earlier, and which, although not yet belonging to a specific disciplinary field, is essential «for the comprehension, organisation, structuring, and mechanics of architectural space» in the broadest sense.

[JL]

Ezio Bonfanti

Furnishings and Exhibitions

1973

Reference has already been made here – and other authors, among whom we may recall [Giulio Carlo] Argan, [Alberto] Samonà and [Manfredo] Tafuri, have written insightfully on the subject – to the significance assumed, particularly in Northern Italy, by the opportunities offered by exhibition design and interior furnishing¹. The reasons for this interest are evident, as they concern both the nature of the commissions and the demonstrative value that exhibitions in particular possess, making such occasions especially appealing to modern architects who always feel themselves engaged in a «battle».

Another aspect of considerable importance is the frequency and immediacy of these occasions. Building activity was limited (especially in relation to the ambitions of the time) and involved long durations. Exhibition and furnishing design, on the other hand, entailed an almost simultaneous process of conception and realisation. This may matter less to someone like [Ignazio] Gardella², who even in his furnishings (see, for instance, that of Villa Borletti) quite openly aspired, in a Miesian manner, to attain «absolute» values. Yet the aspect of timeliness held considerable importance for a more «Heraclitean» conception such as that of BBPR³, with its «rapid succession of giving and receiving, of creation and critique».

We shall offer a brief account of this field of activity, which nonetheless cannot be overlooked, since it was invested, even by BBPR themselves, with a significant declarative and documentary function. We know, moreover, that this sphere of work always greatly interested Ernesto Rogers, to the point that one might speak of a kind of vocation⁴: a fact corresponding to his frequently reiterated refusal to distinguish between minor and major occasions, between the dross and the cream of the profession.

It also offered an opportunity to attempt to bridge that sort of gulf which, despite many contrary intentions, persistently separated architecture from the other arts. This attempt

must have particularly concerned Rogers, whose architectural vocation was less clear-cut than that of his partners, and who, in his youth, had devoted brief critical notes on painting and sculpture to Vincenzo Costantini's journal «Le arti plastiche»⁵. It is difficult to summarise the nature of the obstacles that stood between architecture and the «figurative» arts; in general, the most qualified critics, even, and especially, among the advocates of modern architecture, were by training and conviction critics «across the board». [...] The attempt at reconciliation was pursued insistently on two fronts: on the one hand, by the introduction of «works of art» into architecture (a point to which we shall return shortly); on the other, by the identification of an intermediate «genre», as the field of exhibitions, advertising architecture, and a certain range of furnishings was regarded or made to become⁶. Then, almost as an act of expiation for those dissonances, came the collaborations between [Edoardo] Persico and [Marcello] Nizzoli⁷, the choices made by BBPR of artists such as [Fausto] Melotti and [Lucio] Fontana, and so on; yet even here without the determination that a well-grounded and full solidarity would have required: not only for the exclusions, but also for the encouragement, in certain artists who – like Fontana – were simultaneously pursuing divergent paths, of their more explicitly «figurative» tendencies (one might think of the Salone d'Onore of the VI Triennale designed by Persico), as well as for the recurrent «returns» and hybridisations (as in the contemporary collaboration of the Como group with Nizzoli and [Mario] Sironi for the Palazzo del Littorio)⁸.

That exhibitions constituted a ground of encounter is demonstrated precisely by the fact that both artists and architects concretely engaged in them, the former choosing to move beyond the tradition of the scenographic sketch or of applied decoration (as practised, even masterfully, for example by Sironi in Monza or by the neo-Futurists), in order to reach

architecture «in the proper sense»: such as the Turin-born [Luigi] Chessa, with [Umberto] Cuzzi and [Carlo] Turina, at Monza in 1930 (where there had been a precedent, similar in this respect, in Giandante X's work of 1927⁹), or Manlio Rho at Villa Olmo in 1938; and the latter, the architects, occasionally undertaking true «departures from architecture» in a clearly plastic-pictorial direction: such as [Giuseppe] Terragni in the Sala O of the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution, or [Cesare] Cattaneo with [Mario] Radice for the fountain at the Triennale of 1936; or Rogers and his partners in the Exhibition of Film Scenography¹⁰ (and it is perhaps no coincidence that this peak of proximity to abstraction occurred in Como, and on the occasion of an invitation from Rho and his friends). [...]

The most interesting aspect of this field, which derives from its characteristic abundance and rapidity, is the fact that it provides a rather faithful and sensitive diagram of the orientations observable within the BBPR group even when they operated on the architectural scale, often in fact anticipating and specifying them¹¹. We can thus discern a first period in which the furnishings above all reveal an intention of control and rigour, which often results in a certain heaviness and static quality. [...]

This approach, predominant at least until 1936 in their furnishings, was however increasingly abandoned after the Room for Young Sporting Newlyweds (a chilling theme of that Triennale), when solutions featuring broad intervals of empty space and aligned and rhythmically articulated elements were progressively left behind – solutions that reach their climax here, though in a new form, in the Room of Coherence. The exhibitions, on the other hand, start from a distinctly different premise. This is clearly evident, by contrast with the contemporaneous composed furnishing solutions, even in the exhibitions of 1934 and 1935 (mostra Aeronautica; mostra dello Sport; mostra del Mare in Trieste). The exhibition theme lends itself to giving free rein to a component of the group's research already noted: these are, in fact, exquisitely narrative solutions, as can be seen particularly in the Aeronautics Exhibition of 1934, where one may compare the abstract room by Nizzoli and Persico with the orderly sections of BBPR, full of large and small objects displayed in their concreteness, exalted through pathetic artifices and naturalistic touches (the aeroplanes hung on an angle, as if caught in mid-turn; the small flags set into the gravel in the GUF hall of the Exhibition of Sport; the aviary with stuffed birds in the Gliding hall, and so on). In these instances the peculiar pragmatic version of BBPR's Rationalism stands out clearly, in contrast to the «position» of [Giuseppe] Pagano, [Giuseppe] Terragni, [Luigi] Figini and [Gino] Pollini, who not infrequently, consciously or not, forcibly or not, had drifted towards more «classicising» positions.

involvement of artists within works of architecture. For an overview on this topic, see E. Crispolti ed., *La sintesi delle arti*, Laterza, Rome-Bari 1979; L. Piccioni, *Sintesi delle arti. Il progetto moderno fra arte e architettura*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2019; E. Boeri, R. Dulio (eds), *Dopo la sintesi delle arti. Dialoghi e rapporti tra artisti e architetti nel Novecento*, monographic issue of «Studi e ricerche di storia dell'architettura», vol. 8, 2020.

7. See once again the celebrated Sala delle Medaglie d'Oro at Mostra dell'Aeronautica Italiana (1934).

8. This passage refers to the second-degree competition for Palazzo del Littorio in Rome (1937), an unrealised project designed by Giuseppe Terragni with a group composed of Antonio Carminati, Pietro Lingeri, Ernesto Saliva and Luigi Vietti, and in collaboration with the painters Marcello Nizzoli and Mario Sironi.

9. Giovanni Giandante, or Giandante X – pseudonym of Dante Pescò (1899-1984) – was a painter, sculptor and architect.

10. Within the Exhibition of Italian Theatre held at Villa Olmo in 1937.

11. The essay is in fact an extended analysis of BBPR's exhibition and display works, which Bonfanti subsequently examines in detail in relation to the broader architectural and artistic culture of both Italy and the international context.

BBPR alternated, in these exhibitions, a rather broad range of tones. Narrativity is expressed in subdued registers, as in the Exhibition of Sport, and in more agitated ones culminating in the Room of the First Flights, but there is a consistent refusal to model or completely transform space (as occurred, instead, in the aforementioned room by Nizzoli and Persico, as well as in works by [Franco] Albini, Figini and Pollini, Terragni, etc.). With the exception of the mostra del Mare, and up to the Room of Coherence, we observe a typically episodic, centripetal scenographic approach. The environment as a whole is accepted as given, with its dimensions, forms, colours and even lighting. The intervention is reduced to a commentary, sometimes ostentatiously frivolous, as in the «Viennese» balustrade of the Room of the First Flights.

In 1936, with the Bozzi and Crippa Pavilion¹² and the room at the VI Triennale¹³, several new motifs appeared. Not so much, within the pavilion, the use of a three-dimensional supporting grid (timidly anticipated on the plane, and with characteristic irregularity, at the mostra del Mare); but rather, on the one hand, the invention of the undulating wall that screened the old pavilion, and on the other, the search at the Triennale for a more intense and dramatic quality, even obsessive, through the regular, rhythmic repetition of Melotti's white silhouettes. A more direct will to capture attention emerges here, a search for exceptionality not unrelated to the architectural inventions of Pila, Opicina and Gornate, and, the following year, of the monument for Piazzale Fiume and the palace for the E42 Exhibition¹⁴. If the wall of the Bozzi and Crippa Pavilion, with its circular perforations concealing and revealing at the same time the old structure behind, may recall the partitions of Villa Morpurgo, the more immediate reference, however, is to the figurative arts. [...]

The pierced wall of the Bozzi and Crippa Pavilion, therefore, rather than being related to some analogous advertising solution (for instance, to [László] Moholy-Nagy's contemporary pavilion at the London Aeronautical Exhibition [1940], or to the Non-Ferrous Metals Exhibition by [Walter] Gropius and [Joost] Schmidt of 1934, for the effect of the circular void in a curved surface), should be considered an attempt to employ, for once without intermediaries, forms belonging to the figurative arts: with a clear reference here to [Hans] Arp, or more indirectly to Le Corbusier as painter, while at Villa Olmo one can trace a link – through the Comaschi and Melotti – above all with certain artists of the Bauhaus, from Moholy-Nagy to [Josef] Albers, Schmidt, and above all the well-known [Xanti] Schawinsky.

Soon these references would become more complex, and to some extent dissipate within an extension of this tendency that gradually came to affect the design of every furnishing element. This trend would culminate in almost hyperbolic as-

The passage by Ezio Bonfanti reproduced here is an excerpt from the chapter *Arredamenti ed esposizioni*, originally published in the volume *Città, museo e architettura* – edited by the author together with Marco Porta (Hoepli, Milan 1973) – expressly devoted to the work of BBPR. Of particular interest is the fact that, although the essay focuses exclusively on the Milanese studio's experience in the field of exhibition design, it uses this specific case as a lens through which to reflect on a broader trend which is characteristic of the Italian context as a whole. For relevant comparisons, see its republication in the critical anthology edited by Sergio Polano (*Mostrare. L'allestimento in Italia dagli anni Venti agli anni Ottanta*, Lybra Immagine, Milan 1988, pp. 577-583).

1. It is interesting to note, at the outset, how Bonfanti considers the themes of furnishing and exhibition design to be analogous, since – as implicitly explained in the following paragraph – although they possess substantially different functional, symbolic and expressive characteristics, they share the same underlying motives and productive conditions. Among the authors mentioned by Bonfanti, besides the texts of Argan and Samonà, see also M. Tafuri, *Aufklärung II. Il museo, la storia, la metafora (1951-1967)*, in Id., *Storia dell'architettura italiana 1944-1985*, Einaudi, Turin 1982, pp. 56-108.

2. This refers, of course, to Ignazio Gardella (1905-1999), one of the leading figures of twentieth-century Italian architecture, while the Milanese project mentioned by Bonfanti here (1933-1934) was among his earliest.

3. As is well known, the BBPR group was composed of Gian Luigi Banfi (1910-1945), Lodovico Barbiano di Belgiojoso (1909-2004), Enrico Peressutti (1908-1976) and Ernesto Nathan Rogers (1909-1969).

4. During his editorship of «Domus» (1946-1947) and «Casabella Continuità» (1953-1965), Rogers published numerous editorials and essays on exhibition design, furnishing, and the notion of the «house of man» [sic] as a total and communicative environment (see in particular *La casa dell'uomo*, in «Domus», no. 205, 1946, pp. 2-3) [excerpted in this volume]. His interest in the subject – also demonstrated by his extraordinary exhibition design for the Museo del Castello Sforzesco in Milan (1956-1963) – was, however, shared by the entire group, as evidenced, for instance, by L. Belgiojoso's article *L'evoluzione del metodo espositivo nelle passate Triennali*, in «Casabella», no. 203, 1954, pp. 72-77.

5. A periodical published between 1927 and 1929, edited by Costantini.

6. It is noteworthy here that Bonfanti traces the theme of exhibition design to a specific subcategory of what can more generally be defined as the «synthesis of the arts», which – as he himself specifies – normally takes shape through the

12. Pavilion for the XIV Fiera Campionaria di Milano (Milan Trade Fair).

13. Bonfanti refers here to the design of the Room of Coherence in Palazzo dell'Arte.

14. Bonfanti is probably referring here to the works planned in Pila as part of the Valle d'Aosta master plan, drawn up in 1936 on the initiative of Adriano Olivetti; to Villa Morpurgo at Opicina (1935); to the remodelling of Villa Venosta in Gornate Olona (1936); to the Monument to Victory in Piazzale Fiume, Milan (1937); and to the Palazzo delle Poste at the E42 (1940).

pects of complication and contrivance, countered for some years by tendencies of the opposite sign. [...]

It is the same tension between Rationalist rigour and subversive impulses that, more or less in the same years, we have noted in their architectural-scale projects, and whose most dialectical solutions, in the field we are now examining, are the Film Scenography section at the Villa Olmo Exhibition and the Navigating Pavilion at the Exposition Internationale de Paris [1937] (where undoubtedly BBPR, and in particular Rogers, who stayed in Paris for a month, were struck by Le Corbusier's «tent», whose echo would resurface much later in the Stupinigi Pavilion of 1953). In both cases, a precise and ordered layout is complicated by consciously «gratuitous» inventions (the whirl of tall masts and rigging in Paris, emphasised by the apparently random inclusion of Fontana's plastics), by a superimposed and antithetical disorder (the interior arrangement in Paris), and by overtly scenographic and evocative devices (the hypnotic play of lights, projections and shadows on the unsettling abstract forms in Como). [...]

Regarding this constant feature of BBPR's work, which is its «mechanical complexity», Giorgio Piccinato has observed that «the invention of an architectural-spatial device was always, at bottom, the object of their interest», and he precisely identified a procedure that we shall encounter again: «the detail itself thus tends to stand in for architecture». That the detail should stand in for architecture occurs not only in the form of this contrivance, which was, moreover, a tendency perceptible in other architects of the same period (see, for example, Albini's glass-shelved bookcase suspended by cables, of 1944)¹⁵. Other motifs also make their appearance: the paradoxical, almost Prampolinian one of the «tongue» snaking between floor and ceiling in Rogers's sketch for the Crippa shop; but above all the accentuation of the narrative vocation reaching almost Longanesian tones in the Green Room in the City at the VII Triennale (1940), where, within an intensely evocative atmosphere, sentimental realism is indulged through fragments of lampposts and benches accompanying charts and diagrams. It is no coincidence that this regression coincides with the VII Triennale, the Triennale of [Marcello] Piacentini, in which the Rationalists, «limited to a marginal presence, organised the sections and rooms that could be most useful and effective for their polemic». Here BBPR returned to the sources of their exhibition conception, reconnecting with the Exhibitions of Sport and Aeronautics, about which they had written in 1935: «...the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution has clearly established the principle of the political-social task of exhibitions, immersing every object in a poetic atmosphere»; an atmosphere necessary to persuade and to communicate: «Poetry, this is the medium that everyone breathes, artist, technician, public»¹⁶.

[Sigfried] Giedion, commenting on the exhibitions organised by [Walter] Gropius, noted that, with the exception of only two cases, all of them take the dwelling as their theme and must be regarded as manifestos of a new way of life; that is, as parts of a coherent and unified discourse that Gropius pursued on every occasion. Few statements, like the words just quoted from BBPR, an homage to a persuasive function left undefined, could stand in sharper contrast to the spirit of Gropius's exhibitions. Indeed, later, and in a different context, Rogers himself clearly perceived this difference, identifiable precisely as yet another opposition between Gropius and Le Corbusier.

The contrast thus identified concerned not only BBPR but the entire Italian architectural culture, of which one could say, regarding exhibitions, almost the opposite of what applies to Gropius: namely, that everything was celebrated, from the Fascist Revolution to Icarus, from lighter-than-air flight to ancient goldsmithing, and only occasionally (though preferably) was the function of modern architecture illustrated and tested. And few things express more effectively, in summary, the gap between Italian Rationalism and the more mature and firmly grounded formulations of the Modern Movement in Europe.

[Ezio Bonfanti, *Arredamenti ed esposizioni*, in Ezio Bonfanti, Marco Porta, *Città, museo e architettura. Il Gruppo BBPR nella cultura architettonica italiana 1932-1970*, Hoepli, Milan 1973, pp. 65-70]

Germano Celant

A Visual Machine

1982

Over the course of a decade, art and architecture have been transformed from producers of illusion into receptacles of illusion¹. Instead of setting in motion subjects for contemplation and representation, they have preferred the pleasure of being admired and portrayed. The role has been inverted, rather than revealing and making visible spaces and images, thereby serving as instruments of mediation towards reality, art and architecture now «show» themselves. They concentrate every gaze upon their own appearance and superficiality, turning into the spectacle of a cultural existence whose reality unfolds less in concrete development than in the «theatrical», thus rendering themselves identical to backdrops and façades¹.

No longer working on the detection of visual and environmental deceptions, they have become works of deception, where the unreal and the represented take the place of substantive being. And since this choice tends towards inactivity, one might say that art and architecture are proposing themselves as «readymades»: linguistic operations «already made», whose only justification for existing lies in mere presence rather than in the complex deconstruction and discussion of their own languages. The process under way is therefore one of autosuggestion: one coils back into oneself under the pretext of an analysis of the past and of historical flux. On the contrary, the situation is that of declaring oneself «external» to one's own doing absolute heroes of a proceeding which – like all narcissistic behaviours – dies of illusion and glorifies itself in the illusion of looking at itself in the mirror, at least in the Idea. Yet we all know that thought can be saved only in practice, and since the only practice left, in this historical condition, is that of exalting what does not exist, the system of art and architecture has invented flight into an ideal territory, where languages live an illusory condition based on the illuminations and revelations of a culture yet to come.

The passage reproduced here is an excerpt from Germano Celant's article *Una macchina visuale. L'allestimento d'arte e i suoi archetipi moderni*, published in a special issue of «Rassegna» devoted to exhibition design (no. 10, 1982) and simultaneously included, in English, in the catalogue of the VII Kassel's Documenta in the same year. A text renowned for coining the term «*mostrismo*», or exhibitionism, with which Celant criticises contemporary tendencies in the field, the article is in fact a notable attempt to identify a specific disciplinary statute related to «showing», based more on a linguistic and spatial interpretation of exhibition design than on its figurative nature.

1. Since the article dates to 1982, Celant is describing a particularly delicate decade for architectural culture, which, in a very short time, moves from a period of structuralist reflection on its own practice – markedly ethical in character – to a substantially opposite phase of «disengagement» which, although likewise based on the idea of architecture as language, arrives at completely different outcomes. One need only think, for example, of the projects presented at the first Venice Biennale of Architecture in 1980, directed by Paolo Portoghesi, or of the sequential publication of *Learning from Las Vegas* by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour (The MIT Press, Cambridge MA 1972),

We are in the midst of a ceremonial course: what counts here is disguise and the power of the image, sources of a future figuration, almost otherworldlyⁱⁱ. The memory of Idealism, of nostalgic ancestry, is not far away, and it is here that the ephemeral apparatus of spectacle draws its strength. This keeps alive and sustains the idea of an operative identity and of a cataloguing of the totality of processes, which have, however, disappeared. What is produced is therefore a succession of «*vedettes*» that stimulate desire but do not satisfy needs. Indeed, they suffice only unto themselves, since the pleasure derives from being recognised, that is, from being shown.

Through the exhibition, the phenomenon of appearance constructs a real territory for itself, it takes the floor in order to suppose or affirm that every concrete emission is already finished. The drawn or painted surface, the sketched project and the model take the place of building, as though watercolour, graphite or plywood were to prevail over realisation. This procedure, whose elephantiasis exploded in the last decade, has been adopted under the alibi of a creative and unproductive negation of architectureⁱⁱⁱ. Now, art and architecture have always exalted themselves through negation, but this used to be of a problematic order, it could correspond to a crisis in the public or personal function of architecture, yet it was not a vehicle of spectacularisation and consumerism. The proliferation of «exhibitionism» on the part of public institutions indeed tends to affirm the appearance of doing, therefore the negation of artistic and architectural action proves favourable to a practice that lives on «manifestation», on a process that has no end or purpose other than itself². The current economy of culture lives on this system, where the principal product is constituted by showing and by showing oneself. With the prevalence of the exhibition over activity, art and architecture are being formulated according to the spectacular, often thematic, demands of museums and galleries, publishers and journals, Bi-

The Language of Post-Modern Architecture by Charles Jencks (Rizzoli, New York 1977) and *Dopo l'architettura moderna* by Portoghesi (Laterza, Rome-Bari 1980). This explains an opening which, in tackling the theme of art exhibitions, may seem almost like a polemical digression, but in fact serves to place the author's critical interpretation within the appropriate cultural context.

2. This passage on exhibitionsim, or, originally, «*mostrismo*» – the tendency to transform art and architecture into a pure spectacle made merely to be admired in its scenic surface – a felicitous term introduced here for the first time by Celant, besides being of striking contemporary relevance, closely recalls what Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi wrote about «exhibitions of exhibitions» and «exhibitions for exhibitions» to describe the situation almost forty years earlier (cf. *Organicità e decorativismo nell'allestimento delle mostre*, in «Metron», no. 10, 1946, pp. 60-64) [excerpted in this volume]. Here, however, Celant does not limit himself to denouncing the drift towards an exclusively aesthetic tendency, but, in a few lines, deconstructs an institutional system in which cultural promotion has become a truly self-referential economic circuit.

15. In all likelihood, the so-called «Veliero» bookshelf, produced by Albini as a unique piece expressly for his own home, though dating from 1938.

16. This is the key passage of a text which – as specified in its concluding paragraphs – after analysing the evolution of the Milanese studio's approach to the theme – from an initial «staticity» to a deliberately sought «mechanical complexity» – ultimately interprets it as the mirror of a broader national conception of Rationalism which, while distant from that of the Modern Movement, is perfectly suited to describe the distinctive character of an Italian approach to design – poetic and persuasive – whether in furnishing, exhibition design, or architecture.

[JL]

ennales and Triennales. Practice gives way to a construction of images and projects whose *raison d'être* is to prove the existence of art and architecture as thoughts that, however, have lost their operative function.

Public institutions make it apparent that languages exist, but push them increasingly to express themselves in written and drawn, painted and modelled form. So that they may be seen, but manifest no effect other than that of being shown. Their occupation is thus to exist as cultural goods to be consumed on the surface: of a wall, of a page, and of a screen.

The action is accompanied, moreover, by a cultural stardom that sees in the exhibition ceremony the social value, where everything is suspended in expectation of acclamation. Hence a quest to perfect artifice and *maquillage*, in which the mask dominates over lived experience^v. It is the principle of the façade, where structural articulation is replaced by an image that exists above and, at the same time, makes itself known as the only reality. This development, which subordinates the actor to the backdrop, transfers the entire value of research to the method of its spectacularisation. If the formulation of intentions becomes essential, the true force becomes the exhibition technique. Now, if content lies in the form of the display and demonstration is entrusted to the manner in which one shows, the claimant to originality becomes the visual machine of exhibition design.

Calculated as a «service», with and upon which to construct a series of paradigms that establish the reading of the work, exhibition design, with its different philosophies of showing, is assumed as a «text», a linguistic *locus* in which art and architecture occupy a real role in social life. Evidently the conditions of exhibition creation are not at all identical to those of art or architecture, they live from both, since the exhibition method must, through the organisation of spaces and the composition of visual materials, provide a «plastic» spectacle. Nevertheless, the articulation of exhibition design, the driving element of display, differentiates itself so as to constitute a form of modern work, in which the spatial and visual text plays an important part. If this is true, the time would seem to have come to consider it from both the scientific and the historical point of view. The interest in its application does not, however, urge that it be imposed as the sole definition, but rather that it be recognised as a terrain of communication and specified in the form of a «discipline of showing»³.

What is exhibition design in the course of history? In the nineteenth century it is the evocation of a place or an environment, preferably bourgeois or museal, produced by traditional pictorial and volumetric means. From the Paris Salons to the Expositions Universelles, from 1863 to 1902, via Vienna and Brussels, to the Venice Biennales and the Turin Exhibition, exhibition design is decisively an ornamental and illustrative pro-

cedure^v; it indicates a route or a particular situation, provides a temporary solution to a commissioner's requirements, whether artist or patron, yet remains anchored to the tradition of the classical picture gallery or of the antiques depot. [...]

The display conception that traversed museum rooms as much as exhibitions in the nineteenth century [...] was typically «quantitative». Paintings and sculptures accumulated indiscriminately on walls and on floor supports, side by side, without interval between frame and frame⁴. Limits and boundaries touched, and the room seemed papered by a pictorial wall. The absence of pause between individual artefacts seemed to signal an interest in amplifying one element by means of another, in order to create an ideal organic unity, that of the artistic universe.

It is clear that the intention was to give priority to language rather than to individual phrasing, yet some articulation had to be posited. In any case, the code of exhibition design was not manifest, and the visitor was therefore induced to perceive the whole rather than to interpret it⁵. Ultimately, the quantitative method refused to select the representation or to suggest a selection. This was provided by the process of accumulation, whereby the gallery was seen as a space flooded, from floor to ceiling, with works. Perhaps, with the advent of the first universal expositions, and especially with the personal pavilions of [Gustave] Courbet and [Édouard] Manet at the 1867 Expo, the exhibition method became more refined. In needling to emphasise singularity, display shifted towards an «articulated», and therefore linear, presentation of works. With the common denominator of a single author, and earlier of the «group» of rejects or of the Impressionists, a connective relationship was instituted among the various artefacts; the signature or typicality of production became the «constants» that rendered the collection homogeneous. It appeared as a defined and framed ensemble.

Juxtapositions took on the function of describing a sequence, a period, or a characteristic of the artist's operative path. The space between painting and painting, though still marked by the primary limit of the frame, began to assume a significance of an analogical, historical-chronological, thematic, and environmental nature. [...]

The parietal or spatial interval between artefact and artefact (the «territory» of the single painting) automatically instituted a linguistic connection, in the sense that its regularity or its design related the visual and volumetric terms of the exhibition. Its scanning extended the connections and created a display phraseology in which the objects could proceed by similarity as much as by contrast. [...]

Upon this interval, which with time has devoured the frame, the wall, the environment, and the architecture, the universe of exhibition discourse has been constituted⁶.

The idea of a totality not undifferentiated but ordered according to a route, running from personal discourse to the historical-theoretical trajectory, establishes a methodology of showing, whereby the functions of where and how to display come to be identified with specific, non-generalised constants. [...]

Up to the early twentieth century, however, the highest degree of association and distinction among ensembles of paintings and objects is characterised by the simple oppositions of tradition and the modern, of the academics and the rejected, and later by groupings by tendency. [...]

Display solutions, on the other hand, remain fairly traditional: the wall territory, invariably covered with drapery or executed in movable materials, was defined by the optical axis that delimited the perception of the works, with decorations that rose about a metre from the floor and descended from the ceiling. [...]

The situation does not change as the historical avant-gardes develop, even if the «new spirit» of art seeks to transpose itself into display statements. In 1905, at the Salon d'Automne in Paris, the Fauves made a «thematic» leap⁷. Beyond presenting themselves as a group, they sought to spectacularise an operative constant: the chromatic material is the principal ingredient. The attempt is to polarise public attention to the utmost and direct it towards a specific focus. In order to distinguish themselves and render their difference visible, the Fauves, in addition to putting themselves on show as researchers, emphasise a «motif», that is, they stage a «scene» of art.

Given their intentions, one may deduce that the display was regarded as a simple accessory, a kind of background that had to disappear from the visitor's consciousness and perceptual field. [...]

The initial meaning of the Armory Show in 1913 is the opposite⁸.

Here it is the device that must emerge, since the event aims to share with the American public the «modern» revelation. Hence the gigantic New York hall cannot subject itself to small artistic motivations. The display is therefore destined to dominate. And since the true subject of the exhibition lies beyond the simple presentation of artists (even if they are [Pablo] Picasso and [Henri] Matisse, [Paul] Cézanne and [Paul] Gauguin, [Odilon] Redon and [Vasily] Kandinsky) namely in the cultural and educational broadening of an audience, this attitude towards expanding mental spaces is reflected in the environmental structure. [...] Yet this environmental extension does not seem sufficient. All the works float upon vast surfaces, on walls and floors alike. They are arranged like the peaks of icebergs and force the Armory's visual horizon. [...] Moreover, the highlighting of the work, removed from the mass of studio-produced artefacts, defines a zone of selection, critical or

economic, linguistic or thematic, that subtracts the work from its historical and productive context, placing it in an abstract limbo. The infinite white surface of the ideal gallery is not far away.

Before passing to the potentially achromatic page, the protagonist of the wall is still «decoration», expressed in the visual motifs and material surfaces of canvases, velvets and wallpapers. Before being torn away and annulled, these signs are «participated» in order to be encompassed within artistic research. Their sensitisation takes place through the irradiation of colours and lines from paintings to walls. According to the Futurist drawings of [Giacomo] Balla – «Il progetto di arredamento futurista» (1918) and the Festa futurista in Casa Depero (1923) – the wall surface is in synthesis with the pictorial surface. That is to say, the walls no longer frame the painting, but *are* «paintings». The entire space is therefore traversed by a chromaticism that activates every detail of the interior architecture. [...]

Exhibition design is therefore specular, the environment is the reflection of art and vice versa. [...] Interactive continuity creates only aesthetic fields where the elements cohabit and interact. Any accumulation is equivalent to any other, what matters are the relations.

In 1921, at the Galerie Sturm in Berlin, Ivan Puni accumulates works in an unpredictable manner. Instead of aligning them along the optical axis, [...] he disperses them across all the gallery's surfaces, on ceiling, door, window, floor, and wall. Rejecting the discipline of display, he covers every architectural element with letters, drawings, figures, numbers, paintings, and geometric forms. The result is a visual constellation in which verbal, visual, and environmental areas coexist.

The impact is multifunctional, Puni introduces a different consideration of the spatial relations between object and wall surface. He underlines the positional values of the artwork: the function of perceptual distance and proximity, the activating role of wall structure, the possible alteration of its optical values, and the capacity of artist and visitor alike to comprehend the dimensional and environmental relations of artistic signs enclosed between frame and canvas. [...]

Being radical, the passage from artwork to environment within Russian art tends to exclude every preconceived and restricted position, therefore each artist pushes beyond traditional coordinates and attempts a communicative expansion, to which public-information techniques, aimed at reaching large numbers, are not extraneous.

[...] In Berlin, on the occasion of the Great Exhibition of 1923, [El] Lissitzky and Kandinsky did not present artistic commodities, such as paintings and sculptures, ready to enter the Western market, rather, they sought to offer environmental examples that would introduce a «concrete monism of percep-

4. See here what Franco Albini writes regarding the space between works and the role of the frame in *Le funzioni e l'architettura del museo* («La Biennale di Venezia», no. 31, 1958, pp. 25-31) [excerpted in extended form in this volume].

5. Consider, for example, Paul Valéry's well-known critique of this type of display, contained in *Le problème des musées* (originally published in «Le Gaulois», 4 April 1923), in *Œuvres*, vol. II, *Pièces sur l'art*, Gallimard, Paris 1960, pp. 1290-1293.

6. This sentence constitutes the methodological principle with which Celant seeks to construct this essential history, viewing exhibition design not as a device complementary or ancillary to the work, but as a physical and interpretative space established between one work and another, which, among other things, allows him to move beyond the superficial and exclusively figurative conception he criticises at the outset. For precedents in this sense, see in particular F. Poli, *Ambienti, l'arte verso lo spazio*, Mazzotta, Milan 1977.

7. The artists present in the central room of the Grand Palais were Henri Matisse, André Derain, Maurice de Vlaminck, Henri Manguin and Charles Camoin. 8. Also known as the International Exhibition of Modern Art, it was the first major exhibition of modern art organised in the United States, held at the 69th Regiment Armory in New York, from 17 February to 15 March of that year.

3. This is another pivotal passage in the text: rather than attempting to offer a single definition of a practice that, over the years, has been shaped by highly diverse professional contributions, Celant simply proposes the foundation of a distinct disciplinary statute through which a common ground might be found even beyond a theoretical elaboration of its underlying principles. What follows, therefore, is nothing other than an attempt to identify possible historical roots for such a statute by highlighting the chief episodes that mark its evolution.

tion of the world and of praxis» (Boris Arvatov). «In that bric-à-brac which is the exhibition pavilion at the Lehrter Bahnhof, host of the Expo», [...] Lissitzky seems to realise that the practice of exhibiting objects is significant because it has a total meaning that cannot be fragmented, but must be considered as a whole «made of six surfaces (floor, four walls, ceiling) which must receive a form»^{vi}. [...]

The result is the Proun Environment of 1923, which carries to their extreme consequences the coincidence between the visual machines of art and of exhibition design. [...]

The Proun Environment reflects precisely on the ultimate object of artistic display. It controls level after level, retraces the entire phenomenology of space, and ensures that the project prevails over architectural matter, subjecting it to the contemplative and creative process. It is therefore the proof of a conquest on whose extension the history of the machines for showing will be modified. [...]

In instituting a direct correspondence between the linguistic systems of art and architecture, this total environment distinguishes itself from its predecessors by its independence from all decorative and objectual rationale, to the point that it may be considered the first example of pure environmental art or of artistic exhibition design. It is not surprising, therefore, that Lissitzky, from the pioneering work in Berlin, moved in 1926 to an environment for the Art Exhibition of Dresden⁹. [...]

[Here] the devaluation of wall anchorage, characteristic of all modern architecture, frees the display of artefacts from static constraints. A new spatial conception takes over, based on forms and placements released from impediments. The fall of the wall enclosure in fact opens up an abyss of display arguments: paintings and sculptures begin to move in the void. They leave behind the bidimensional representation of front/back and vertical/horizontal and set out to rotate in space.

The unilateral nature of seeing and showing the artefact no longer rests on wall frontality, but finds grounds in a «spherical perception». The exhibited work is highlighted from every side. This adaptation of the object to a dynamic-temporal vision is in fact constructed from Cubist experiences, continues with the suspended and rotating forms of the Constructivists, but finds its complete theorisation and design only from the Bauhaus onwards, which comes to define the global and rational character of the «functional figuration» of the product. Its criteria of analysis give rise to displays whose degree of abstraction rejects any reference to architectural context and renders the propositions on show explicit. [...]

The consequences of an «abstract» display detached from architectural context make explicit the autonomous significance of the wall. Thus, if Balla, Puni and [El] Lissitzky had sought to bend wall surfaces to art, the complementary atti-

tude will be to declare them wholly incompatible with artistic use, in order to exalt it in its aesthetic nature. [...]

This precise awareness of the wall's «artistic» functionality is relevant for a history of exhibition design. The Purist axiom is, from the 1920s onwards, the matrix of the archetypal image of the modern and contemporary exhibition hall.

The environmental circumstance in which to show art today can be none other than the «ideal white cube»¹⁰. That ensemble of bare walls whose splendour and memory prevail over any artistic *corpus*, while quieting extra-artistic perturbations. The «ideal» gallery indeed creates an aseptic container, full of optical padding, in which the visitor-collector can perceive art as uncontaminated, virgin matter, thus disposed to his desires. [...]

Among the few to react to the reductionism and minimalism of «abstract» display machines were the Surrealists. For them, the state of contemplation was traversed by disturbances and obsessions, nightmares and visions. It could not therefore relate to an a-physical and a-sensorial condition, but had to encompass the deafening noise of *eros* and tactility, of the visceral and the organic. Rather than a walk through emptiness, their exhibition amounted to a journey into the viscera of the unconscious. [...] Their hostility to wall hibernation is thus justified, since it froze both the eye and participation. To the clean, delimited rectangle of a square on a white page, the Surrealists preferred the violence of the stain and the tear, and to its glare they opposed darkness. [...]

In this type of display, art occupies all the intervals, and artefacts intertwine with one another. The visitor too is not left at rest, the interiors inhibit passivity: one descends and ascends, touches and responds. The exhibition excludes flattening and demands participation. Each display fold conceals an optical «threat», so that wastefulness and the repose of the attentive body are not permitted. [...]

The same dramatic and scenographic components recur in Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery in New York, designed by [Frederick] Kiesler in 1942. [...] Kiesler's thousand displays in one mark a further stage in the convergence between art and architecture, whose relations, from the 1950s onwards, would be channelled along the tracks of dysfunction and function. In the first case, the plurality of spatial and structural expressivity would tend to render the terms between art and architecture indiscernible. The heterogeneity of materials, forms, colours, surfaces, and visual languages would be found within both, in the tradition running from Lissitzky to Kiesler, producing an accord that confounds their respective positions. A condition of crossing-over in which displays simulate an equivocal action because they are interchangeable with art. They disguise themselves and put them-

selves on show. End of the parenthesis. Or else, in the other case, they function as parentheses¹¹. They present themselves as impalpable and invisible architectures. They dematerialise and, with their bare walls, seek not to interfere with the exhibited fetish. They are thus protective screens whose functionality, from Gropius to Kandinsky, is based on absence. It is an oscillation between difference and indifference.

i. *La presenza del passato*, ed. P. Portoghesi, Biennale di Venezia, 1980.

ii. J. Baudrillard, *La précession des simulacres*, in «Traverses», Paris, February 1978.

iii. G. Celant, *Architettura radicale*, in *New Italian Landscape*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1972.

iv. *La presenza del passato...* cit.

v. *Ottant'anni di allestimenti alla Biennale*, ed. G. Romanelli, Biennale di Venezia, 1977.

vi. E. Lisitskij, *Ambiente dei Proun*, in «G 1», Berlin, July 1923 (Ital. transl. in *El Lisitskij*, Editori Riuniti, Rome, 1967, p. 354).

[Germano Celant, *Una macchina visuale. L'allestimento d'arte e i suoi archetipi moderni*, in «Rassegna», no. 10, 1982, pp. 6-11]

10. By the time of this article, the term has already been popularised by Brian O'Doherty through his celebrated essay *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, originally published in «Artforum» in 1976 and later republished as a monograph by University of California Press (Berkeley-Los Angeles 1986).

11. Note again, in this final metaphor adopted by Celant to describe the two predominant tendencies, the insistence on the concept of «interval», of «parenthesis», with which the author attempts to transpose onto the spatial plane an interpretative discourse too often relegated to the exclusively figurative. [JL]

9. The passage refers to the Room for Constructivist Art designed by El Lissitzky for the Internationale Kunstausstellung in Dresden in 1926.

Francesco Dal Co

Showing, Displaying, Exhibiting

1988

In concluding his brief essay *Zum Thema. Ausstellungen*, published in 1928 in «Die Form», [Ludwig] Mies van der Rohe argued that the task of the «exhibitions of the future» would be «to intensify our life»¹. It is not possible, in this context, to analyse such a statement in detail. In a formulation concise to the point of obviousness, Mies in fact summarised the themes and problems articulated in the debate that had animated German architectural culture since the latter half of the nineteenth century, then matured within the Werkbund, to whose journal Mies entrusted that sparse reflection at the very moment when he was preparing to realise, for the Barcelona Exhibition, one of his most disquieting masterpieces². Yet having said this, in what sense may the German architect’s words introduce [...] a kind of «history of showing» [...]?

Properly speaking, the «intensification of life» corresponds, in general, to the experience that every exhibition aims to achieve, indirectly capturing its dynamic component. The experience to be had in the exhibition-form tends to reflect the traits of the modern rituality presupposed and stimulated by the gathering of «things» and the public in a space designed for showing. The involvement of architectural design in such practices has relatively recent origins. Without wishing thereby to make any explicit historiographical claim, it may be maintained that the particular mode of design now in question came to explicit definition in conjunction with the first nineteenth-century world exhibitions, before enjoying particular fortune in the early decades of the twentieth³. Temples dedicated to the cult of commodities, the exhibitions of the nineteenth century were gathering-places in which expansive tensions were exercised and the «energies of growth» of contemporary masses were resolved. This tension towards growth renders the horizon of every modern exhibition that of «universality». In relation to this expansive nature, design intervenes selectively. Even the most celebratory architectural

programme is indeed directed towards «intensification» and thus towards selection in respect of the extensive and quantitative data that the exhibition spectacle seeks to celebrate. If design is a strategy of functional selection, exhibition logic unfolds as cumulative energy. Design, therefore, coincides with an experience that tends to transform a taxonomic-cumulative movement into a critical-interpretative selection⁴.

Each exhibition, moreover, configures itself as a space of gathering, in which an acceleration of perception and an intensification of observation take place. Distraction and intensity are the poles between which every practice of showing moves. «Objects» originating from different worlds, geographies, histories and processes are reassembled in order to be displayed; they are convened in an environment that, in hosting them, effaces their traces, confuses their provenance, and annuls their specificities beneath masks that interpret their «relations». To exhibit, therefore, is to estrange, while the design of an exhibition coincides with an alienation foreseen in view of an uprooted re-placing⁵.

What is placed within the exhibition dynamic is stripped of its roots and acquires new meanings and dimensions. Compresence is a decisive component of this process. Exhibition design, in this respect, mirrors what normally occurs in the functioning of museums, confirming the analogies that may be observed between the principles proper to museum institutions and those of exhibition environments more generally. In museums, privileged *places* among the representative spaces of modernity, are gathered the residues of past experiences, relics that have arrived at historical survival. Ordered by museal taxonomies, these «documents» are re-placed by the institution that enhances their memorial content at the price of their definitive alienation⁶. Compresence operates in the museum in the same way as within an exhibition, eliminating any residual «numinosity» and erasing the disquiet that might arise

from the «contemporaneity of the non-contemporary». Once showing becomes the object of design, «everything» is offered to the homogeneity of a time without responsibility, not multiple, ordered in resolved successions. To the experience brought by the non-contemporary that erupts into the present are substituted surrogates that efface the traces of that very experience.

Showing thus tends to become the only experience permitted by display, to the detriment of the meaning that «what is shown» retains. Arbitrariness, therefore, is the unacknowledgeable «content» of every exhibition event. The power of uprooting that modern design nourishes thus finds a particular occasion to exercise itself in treating the metaphorical space of exhibiting. It could be said, in general terms, that showing is alien to «caring», since showing implies the reduction of what is shown to appearance⁷. Only subjective and radical critical decisions can counter these aporias of design. When the designer’s critical intelligence is exercised *against* the aspiration of the project to become the sole experience permitted by showing; when the designer works «against» design in defence of the designed, then what is shown may coincide with a manifestation of that particular caring enclosed within every «drawing».

If modernity conceives «exhibiting» in terms of a panoptic restitution of the «universal», showing may coincide, in the rarest cases, as Mies demonstrated at Barcelona, with the preparation of an «opening», a void made ready to receive what is destined to adorn its constitutive difference. Thus the project, in this case a practice awaiting ornament, reveals, in applying itself to the theme of display, a substantial convergence with furnishing. From this perspective, too, the ambiguous relation between «exhibition» and «museum» is confirmed. If the museum is the roof designed to house the relics of an unending shipwreck, the exhibition is the space where «things furnish» (take care of) the space⁸.

The exhibition is the stage upon which objects prolong their pathology of the moribund – where things, that is, still «live», unlike the «documents» preserved by the museum. Between showing and arranging there is consanguinity, but not coincidence. In arranging a space one essentially prepares it for an expectation destined to be resolved through showing. In the temporal interval thus defined may be realised that «intensification of life» of which Mies van der Rohe spoke. If arranging is a predisposition, it is in the act of showing that decoration appears as the art of measure, as the manifestation of the will that intends to offer and to proffer things, emphasising their autonomous value. Arranging, in the end, means acting in the sense of «offering», though this offering does not exhaust «showing», which finds its fulfilment when showing becomes an act of openness towards the experience that every «object»

may possess⁹. For this reason, exhibitions and displays can be a full expression of design wisdom when they present themselves as places of accelerated communication, when realities and appearances, distance and proximity, «quantity and quality», to quote Mies once more, appear as protagonists of continual conflicts.

In the field of museum installations and temporary or ephemeral exhibition designs, Italian architecture has given decisive contributions. Franco Albini, Ignazio Gardella, Luciano Baldessari, the BBPR, Carlo Scarpa, Achille Castiglioni – the works realised by these figures in the post-war years alone would suffice to justify speaking of a specific «tradition», whose legacy should not be dispersed. Much remains to be done in the fields of conservation and research; and even more should be done to ensure that this heritage receives proper recognition within the institutions responsible for the education of architects. The establishment of specific university chairs for the teaching of the «art of showing» would be an act of due respect towards a particularly rich culture so exposed to the distortions perpetuated by numerous and often indiscriminately celebrated epigones¹⁰. If the present volume contributes to a deeper knowledge of that tradition, to efforts aimed at enhancing its legacy and to the consequent need to regard with greater attention and critical awareness what is happening today in this fascinating field of modern design, then it may be said that the work devoted to this research has not been in vain, and that the extensive documentation here presented will prove its value.

[Francesco Dal Co, *Mostrare, allestire, esporre*, in Sergio Polano, *Mostrare. L’allestimento in Italia dagli anni Venti agli anni Ottanta*, Lybra Immagine, Milan 1988, pp. 10-17]

The passage reproduced here is an excerpt from the introduction by Francesco Dal Co to the renowned volume by Sergio Polano titled *Mostrare. L’allestimento in Italia dagli anni Venti agli anni Ottanta* (Lybra Immagine, Milan 1988), a true cornerstone of Italian studies in the field. Although rather concise and essential in form, the text represents a fundamental contribution to the identification of a disciplinary statute within the field, constructed as a kind of reasoned glossary of recurring terms such as «to exhibit», «to show», and «to arrange». Of particular relevance, moreover, for the present context of publication is the connection established with interior design in a broader sense, through an original articulation of the notion of «care».

1. Cf. L. Mies van der Rohe, *Zum Thema. Ausstellungen*, in «Die Form», no. 4, vol. 3, 1928, p. 121.

2. This refers, of course, to his Barcelona Pavilion of 1929.

3. See, in this regard, the now canonical periodisation proposed by Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi (cf. *Organicità e decorativismo nell’allestimento delle mostre*, in «Metron», no. 10, 1946, pp. 60-64), subsequently reiterated by Germano Celant (cf. *Una macchina visuale. L’allestimento d’arte e i suoi archetipi moderni*, in «Rassegna», no. 10, 1982, pp. 6-11) [both excerpted in this volume].

4. This sentence offers an extraordinary definition of the role of design within a broader strategy of display, which, beyond acknowledging the essential contribution of architectural culture in the field, also constitutes a first distinction between the ideas of «exhibiting» and «showing».

5. The content of this and the following paragraph, on the other hand, represents a second form of distinction between the aforementioned categories: if, in the first case, it corresponds to an «estrangement» of the work and its placement according to an exclusively cumulative perspective, in the second it takes the form of a process of «re-placement» within not the original context but within an order of interpretative discourse, in which new meanings and relations are established.

6. On this subject, see P. Valéry, *Le problème des musées* (originally published in «Le Gaulois», 4 April 1923), in *Œuvres*, vol. II, *Pièces sur l’art*, Gallimard, Paris 1960, pp. 1290-1293.

7. This is another essential observation which, from an operational standpoint, may also serve as a basis for distinguishing between the project of exhibition design and that of interior design more broadly conceived. In fact, following Heidegger’s teaching on the subject, every action identifiable with the idea of dwelling – that is, what interior design deals with – is configured as a form of «caring». On this point, see C. Norberg-Schulz, *L’abitare. L’insediamento, lo spazio urbano, la casa*, Electa, Milan 1984, pp. 15-19.

8. This, in relation to the previous note, could be translated into the notion that the museum represents an architectural project, while an exhibition represents an interior design properly speaking. Furthermore, given the semantic malleability of the term «care» – from the latin *cura* - one might note that while in the museum the logic of ordering prevails, in the exhibition it is that of «curatorship».

9. Once again, this highlights a substantial distinction between the idea of arranging as the art of «offering» and that of showing as an «opening» towards the experience that the work can provide. For further insights into the first definition, see in particular M. Borsotti, *Tutto si può narrare. Riflessioni critiche sul progetto di allestimento*, Mimesis, Milan-Udine 2017.

10. Here the notion of a specific disciplinary statute reappears – one already invoked by Germano Celant (cf. G. Celant, *op. cit.*) – to be recognised, however, also in the academic sphere, starting precisely from the theoretical bases provided by the present essay and by the survey contained in the volume in which it appears (S. Polano, *op. cit.*).

[JL]

Luca Basso Peressut

Notes for a Study on Museum Exhibition Design 1990

«L’Homme dans le temps et dans le lieu. Exactement l’œuvre humaine reportée à l’époque de sa création et dans les lieux qui l’ont vu naître. L’œuvre, Le lieu, Le temps. Comment synchroniser cet exposé par une visualisation instantanée?»¹

The Babel-like and unending itinerary of the ideal visitor to Le Corbusier’s *Musée Mondial*, which unites knowledge and the architectural-exhibitory space in a museum «where all is one (man), and where all is *innumerable* (the works of human passion)», metaphorically re-proposes the coordinates for a necessary and unified re-location of the reflection on the relationship between museum and exhibition within the binomial of architecture and display, in the light of the new statutes of the contemporary museum institution.

In essence, this means re-discovering the paradigms upon which to build, critically, the centrality of the correlation between exhibition and architecture as a disciplinary phenomenon, in response to the *Babel* of languages, experimentations, heteronomies, and utopias of the contemporary exhibition universe. A universe increasingly disarticulated into sections and sub-sections, both specialised and technical-professional, whose «design» fragments into incidental digressions and occasional dazzlements the unity of a discourse capable of rendering comprehensible the forms and meanings of the overall composition of the triad *City, Architecture, Museum*, and its natural repercussions on the forms of the designed exhibition space².

This entails beginning from the acknowledgement of several concrete facts. On the one hand, the structural loss of centrality of the exhibition function within the overall set of functions of the museum organism (a physical space which today, as is well known, may represent scarcely a tenth of the museum’s total surface area) in the face of an almost expo-

nenential increase in the volume of collections that nearly all museums continue to acquire – and therefore to store in warehouses, repositories or decentralised facilities. On the other hand, the definitive suspension of the pedagogical function of «instructing through display», which nineteenth-century positivism had set as the foundation of the Museum’s social role (and which even Le Corbusier, with an «optimism of will», inherited, adopting it within his own personal *recherche*), now gives way to an acceleration in the complexity of technologically sophisticated and subtly persuasive media of communication and dissemination, and to the multiplication of the image which overlaps with the traditional vision of the museum as an *expression of order*³.

The contemporary museum thus becomes a vehicle for a more articulated dimension of social *loisir*, adhering to models of collective consumption in forms that are often paroxysmal, transient and fashion-driven [...]. The most recent and, in a certain sense, most fascinating examples of these museal realities move precisely in this direction, raising questions concerning the meaning assumed, within this mass dimension, by the event of the museum visit. An event in which, at the limit, the exhibition dimension, that is the communicative relationship with the materiality of the object, becomes almost a superstructural and even negligible factor in the strategies of architectural design. [...].

At the same time, and in consonance with these roles, modes and functions that the museum performs within the processes of cultural acquisition in the social body, lies the aforementioned necessity of bringing to «display» the vast quantity of collections and artefacts stored in increasingly overflowing depots. This condition leads to a progressive rarefaction of the concept of the permanent, fixed and immutable exhibition, giving way instead to an inevitable organisation based on rotation [...] and to a greater circulation of collections and works,

3. In this and the following paragraphs, Basso Peressut introduces a series of issues relating to the evolution of the museum institution which, besides remaining highly topical, are of great significance for its architectural and display-related characterisation. Instead of treating them as problematic data, however, the author simply highlights them as contextual conditions for the production of a new museum space, taking form from the notes for an operational research programme listed in the second part of the article.

4. Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

5. The text by Albinì to which Basso Peressut refers (*Le funzioni e l’architettura del museo*, in «La Biennale di Venezia», no. 31, 1958, pp. 25-31) [excerpted in this volume in its extended version], was republished by Basso Peressut himself in *I luoghi del museo...* cit., pp. 105-108.

6. Each of the numbered notes in the original text is accompanied by a series of images through which Basso Peressut seeks to illustrate the aspects he intends to emphasise. In this case – concerning the continuity of tradition in the museum, especially with regard to the coherence between architectural design, ordering and exhibition spaces – he cites, in iconographic form, the Salle from Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand’s *Précis des leçons d’Architecture* (vol. I, part II, plate 13; 1805-1819), Leo von Klenze’s Glyptothek in Munich (1816-1830), and

with exchanges, transfers and re-arrangements that diversify, over time, their modes of communication and reception.

Lastly, there remains the unresolved issue of *museum didactics*, a congeries of theories, experiments and more or less successful attempts which heavily overlap, especially through their physical apparatus [...], with the intention of «creating architectural space» within the exhibition dimension of the museum form.

Yet if we maintain that the museum remains the *locus* of the accumulation of «spiritual and material» knowledge, where the products of human work and endeavour («les œuvres de la passion humaine») ⁴ sediment, to become both instruments of knowledge and stages for collective cultural life, then the disciplinary role of exhibition design must be reasserted as an overall, global fact of the museum environment, in the sense indicated by Franco Albinì, for whom «the first approach to the work of art is provided precisely by architecture» ⁵.

We may here attempt a first synthetic selection, in the form of key points, of the issues to be addressed:

1. The necessity of re-reading that «continuity of tradition» which, in the classical museum, achieved a precise coherence and consequentiality between architectural design, ordering and exhibition arrangements of the display spaces (in which, ultimately, even *décor* becomes a permanent element of the museum exhibition, defining its character and recognisability as a place devoted to presentation, according to a conventional social organisation of cultural communication). This reading, developed in a historical perspective, allows us to recover the deeper meaning of an institution which, more than any other, operates within the delicate relationship between scientific research and the dimension of memory ⁶.

2. The architectural section understood as the absolute generative matrix of the exhibition space in its spatial and figurative components, as synthesis of architectural determinants and technical factors (lighting, exhibition systems, etc.), and as an application of design theory which marks the persistence or the dissolution of the founding conceptualities of museum architecture over more than a century ⁷.

3. The «icon» and the exhibition space. The architectural response to the event-value of the exhibited object, around which is constructed the entire set of factors defining the quality of the mode of display of systems of objects, up to the extreme case in which architecture becomes a «shell» moulded in the exceptionality of a unique, marvellous and definitive display ⁸.

4. The display of the «fragment» within the museum architecture, where the *accrochage* of objects or artefacts becomes an element in the composition of the exhibition space,

as well as a self-expository interpretation of a reference system for the communication of the collection’s character, and also a design attitude that, in the heterotopia of the composition of fragments, constructs a specific idea of architecture ⁹.

5. Museum display as *machine à exposer*. In the modernist utopia of transforming and standardising the organisation and use of the traditional communicative structure of the museum, the device, the apparatus, the *automaton* become tools for the invention of a new way of experiencing the relationship between user and object. The exhibition machine thus creates the architecture of the museum ¹⁰.

6. The free plan, as a complementary aspect of that same transformative impulse, postulates the absolute freedom to organise the exhibition (or exhibitions) in terms of the functioning and functionality of the museum organism, while at the same time expressing a concept of compositional structure in exhibition design that, within the empty space, takes form through the figurative relationships between the objects displayed *ad arte* and between these and the public and/or a possible panoramic background ¹¹.

7. The «fixed scene» as the interior space of the museum, determined in the absolute autonomy of the architectural act and in its construction induced by a more general architectural theory, which thus stands *a priori* in relation to the role played by the object in the overall composition, a kind of «architecture within architecture» that creates a landscape in which the dislocation of the display element becomes a non-significant variable in the design parameters ¹². [...]

8. Exhibition and communication. From the reconstruction of environments to the dissolution of environment in the exhibition without objects: the most extreme syntheses of museum communication are «deformed» both in models of *ambientamento*, in which reconstructions of situations replicating reality dissolve the museum as an architectural fact into the diorama or the exhibition of territory, and in the complete technologisation of the communicative message, [...] so that the very concept of exhibition disappears to make way for a different organisation of spaces for didactic communication ¹³.

These programmatic notes are proposed as conceptual nodes of a research project oriented towards the construction and refinement of a knowledge-based and design system relating to *exhibiting* as a complex architectural fact, and as points of reference within the architecture of the museum, in whose unity the permanent, non-ornamental forces of action may be measured, in view of a possible «theory of display» ¹⁴.

[Luca Basso Peressut, *Architettura dell’esporre*, in «Exporre», no. 5, 1990, pp. 1-5]

The passage reproduced here, later reworked and republished in an extended version (cf. *Allestimento, museo. Per un’architettura dell’esporre*, in M. Mastropietro, ed., *Progettare mostre. Dieci lezioni di allestimento*, Lybra Immagine, Milan 1991, pp. 138-155), is an excerpt from the article with which Luca Basso Peressut opens the fifth issue of the journal «Exporre» (1990), devoted to the architecture of display, in an attempt to bring the broader discussion of exhibitions back within the museographic field. Here, exhibition design is considered specifically within its museal dimension, itself addressed from a distinctly architectural perspective. This is articulated through a duality between the notions of «fixed scene» and «architecture within architecture», which is of absolute originality within the field – as well as of notable relevance to the culture of interiors – particularly in its relationship with the contemporary evolution of the museum institution.

1. Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, *Projet pour le Mundaneum*, in *Œuvre complète 1910-1929*, vol. 1, Girsberger, Zürich 1937, p. 196.

2. On this triad, see the earlier L. Basso Peressut, *I luoghi del museo*, Editori Riuniti, Rome 1985.

Karl Friedrich Schinkel’s exhibition arrangement for the picture gallery of the Altes Museum in Berlin (1828-1830).

7. On the architectural section as the generative matrix of the exhibition space, references include August Stüler’s Neues Museum in Berlin (1841-1855), Frank Lloyd Wright’s Guggenheim Museum in New York (1943-1959), Louis Kahn’s Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth (1967-1972), and James Stirling’s extension of the Tate Gallery in London (1980-1987).

8. On architecture conceived as shell, reference is made to El Lissitzky’s Salle des Proun at the Berlin art exhibition (1932), the Castello Sforzesco Museums in Milan by BBPR (1954-1956), Franco Albinì’s Tesoro di San Lorenzo in Genoa (1954-1956), Carlo Scarpa’s Castelvecchio Museum in Verona (1957-1965), and Frank Gehry’s Air and Space Museum in Los Angeles (1982-1984).

9. In this case, from a design standpoint, Basso Peressut refers to the John Soane Museum in London (1792-1833), Francesco Venezia’s Museo di Gibellina (1981-1987), and Giorgio Grassi’s reconstruction project for the theatre of Sagunto (1985).

10. On museum design as *machine à exposer*, references include Le Corbusier’s project for a museum of contemporary art in Paris (1931), Philip Johnson’s Painting Gallery in New Canaan (1965), Renzo Piano’s Menil Collection in Houston

(1981-1987), and Guido Canali’s Galleria Nazionale of Palazzo della Pilotta in Parma (1970-1986).

11. Here the author refers to Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s project for a Museum for a Small City (1942), I. M. Pei’s National Gallery of Art in Washington (1976-1978), and Joseph Beuys’s *Olivestone* project for the Museo d’Arte Contemporanea at the Castello di Rivoli (1984).

12. See the Sketch for the arrangement of the central hall of the Museum of Western Art in Tokyo by Le Corbusier (1959), Roland Simounet’s Musée Picasso in Paris (1976-1985), Oswald Mathias Ungers’s Deutsches Architekturmuseum in Frankfurt (1979-1984), Hans Hollein’s Städtisches Museum in Mönchengladbach (1972-1982), and Richard Meier’s Museum für Kunsthandwerk in Frankfurt (1979-1985).

13. Finally, on exhibition and didactic communication, see Frank Gehry’s Children’s Museum in Los Angeles (1980) and Adrien Fainsilber’s Musée National des Sciences, des Techniques et des Industries in Paris (1980-1986).

14. Concerning this position, also by Basso Peressut, see his later *Il museo moderno. Architettura e museografia da Auguste Perret a Louis I. Kahn*, Lybra Immagine, Milan 2005.

[LJ]

Giampiero Bosoni

New Exhibition Design in Italy

1996

It is necessary to go back to 1960, precisely to the exemplary book by Roberto Aloï, *Esposizioni (Architetture – Allestimenti)*ⁱ, in order to rediscover the model, the first and almost the only example in Italy, of a publication devoted to updating the state of the art of exhibition design. This is not to say that since then there have been no good examples, however rare, of historical studies, sometimes even up to date, dedicated to the theme of exhibition design, especially in the museum field; but these have indeed been predominantly historical researches and confined to the museum domainⁱⁱ. [...]

We should recall that the themes of temporary architecture and exhibition design, understood as instruments of research, design models, prototypes, or manifestos of new creative tendencies, constitute a constant within the formative process of the architectural and artistic avant-gardes of the twentieth century. Precisely within this particular project space, in certain respects «timeless and weightless», given its lesser architectural gravity, the avant-gardes often found an ideal limbo in which to materialize, free from contamination, the purest expression of their research, not always patient but, on the contrary, most often instinctive and sudden, just like certain exhibition designs that emblematically represented it.

For this reason, one frequently returns to speaking of exhibition design as a place of experimentation; the *machine à monter* as the ideal instrument of the avant-gardes for elaborating new models of inhabited space, authentic manifestos of design hopes; the exhibition as an open work, a fragment of an interrupted discourse, within which to test new languages, decipher new codes, and within which to crystallize, for a brief moment, the utopia of the modern project. Thus, throughout the history of architecture, particularly Italian architecture, and even more so that of the twentieth century, but also of contemporary art, these ephemeral, transitory signs have often been prefigured, appearing like revelatory comets of new expressions of form,

of new dimensions of space: sublime visions of a world still *in nuce*. Exhibition design thus manifests itself as the instantaneous testimony of a thought, of a research: an *in vitro* fragment of complexity, a privileged place for a transversal reading of increasingly fragmented and dissonant metanarratives. Certainly, beyond the acknowledged value of some episodes, the exhibition design of space appears in this sense generally as the *ante litteram* locus of modern complexity, where the infinite voices of the civilization of communications and of the world of commodities intertwine in a dissonant chaos¹.

Thus, first of all, when speaking of temporary architecture, that is, architecture born to last only briefly and sometimes to be «consumed» within the span of a single day, the scholar must confront, especially in trade fairs, a continuous sedimentation of images, different every year, in the same places: a condition that, given the frequency of modifications, paradoxically leads almost to a hyper-archaeological study of the site, which can be conducted only through the surviving iconography. On the other hand, these temporary architectures, these so-called ephemeral environmental installations, have passed the test of history by preserving themselves, so to speak, perhaps more intact (in memory, of course!) than the relative fragility of many architectures, the «real» ones, built to last, especially those of the modern period, which time has mercilessly disfigured, suffocating their primordial luminosity, eroding their material, and simply denouncing their necessary temporality. This is a natural, indeed necessary, condition of *firmitas* and *utilitas* in architecture; yet it is a dimension from which exhibition design consciously escapes, returning to us as its sole memory, through the rare documents handed down to history, images of uncontaminated architectures, of rare purity and, paradoxically, precisely for this reason, perhaps one may say: born to be eternal².

To look today at research into ephemeral spaces, par-

exhibition practice and its general projection toward the future.

1. In this passage, Bosoni takes up one of the core themes of Italian literature on exhibition design – namely, the freedom of experimentation that it allows – and reworks it, however, according to an approach of vaguely «radical» derivation, which sees exhibition design not only as a laboratory but also as a construction site for the post-industrial city. On the genealogy of this vision, see F. La Rocca, ed., *Scritti presocratici. Andrea Branzi: visioni del progetto di design 1972/2009*, FrancoAngeli, Milan 2010; and for a systematic exposition, see A. Branzi, *Interni, in XXI secolo. Gli spazi e le arti*, Istituto per l'Enciclopedia Treccani, Rome 2010, pp. 523-532.

2. Here Bosoni highlights a fundamental aspect concerning the temporality of exhibition design that is rarely brought to the fore, namely the scarcity of documentary material which – precisely because of its transitory and, in a certain sense, service-oriented nature – makes it difficult to develop historical analyses capable of informing a fully founded disciplinary status, such as that of architecture, by contrast. At the same time, however, and rather surprisingly, he overturns the usual negative reading normally given to this scarcity (cf., for example, S. Polano, *Malcelate esibizioni*, in M. Mastropietro, ed., *Nuovo allestimento italiano*, Edizioni Lybra Immagine, Milan 1997, pp. 6-9), in order to emphasize the greater

ticularly that of urban representation, means to take stock of the symbolic and expressive values of the latest frontier of the modern project.

The places of commercial communication (shopping centers, exhibition pavilions), artistic communication (installations), recreational communication (amusement parks), and cultural communication (museums, exhibitions), when observed through the magnifying lens of the interpretative work of the architect, the environmental artist, and the exhibit designer, offer us a significant frame of reference for the current state of international creative research aimed at overcoming traditional models of perception of urban space and, in some cases, even of landscape space³. One may observe, in conclusion, that retracing the events of exhibition space design over the last decades at the international level, and particularly in Italy, corresponds more or less to taking stock, in general terms, of the situation of design research: from architecture to graphics, from design to certain peaks of artistic research. Framing today this entire recent system of relations certainly constitutes a very arduous task which, even if one wished to confront it in its entirety, would surely not allow us to describe all its episodes in enthusiastic tones – unlike, as one may imagine, what could be said for other historical momentsⁱⁱⁱ.

It nevertheless instills a certain confidence to recognize the budding of certain design inventions proposed by some designers of the latest generations, who engage with creativity and mastery of new tools in the evolutionary research of exhibition space in relation to multimedia communication; while we remain rather perplexed by the uncertain and vague, purely scenographic dimension of certain other *mise en scène* more proper to theatrical space. Yet it is characteristic of exhibition design to have multiple points of entry and just as many exits, all conditions and qualities that, with different weights and measures, contribute to enriching the experience of a continuous research and verification of the concept of space within contemporary design. For these new generations as well, the discourse of interdisciplinarity of design holds true, and according to the best tradition we see young architects, designers, and graphic designers intersecting their experiments within this design field. For some, the influences exerted by the spatial researches proposed by conceptual and environmental artists, which define new relations of communicative fruition, appear very strong; for others, developments in multimedia communication and interactive informatics forcefully enter the scene within the increasingly complex languages proposed in exhibition spaceⁱⁱⁱ.

[...] One may examine some emblematic cases of the different categories in which temporary exhibition design is articulated: from commercial fair space to the environment of the cultural exhibition, from the social-scenic event to the

propagandistic communicative instrument, from the museum domain to open space, sometimes on a territorial scale. The design approach toward each of these categories may vary considerably, ranging from communicative functional rigor to a greater attention to construction methods: some working with the learned irony of play, others exercising themselves in refined compositional themes or, at times, in mannered decorative motifs. Yet it is always exhibition design, in the best Italian tradition: an idea of exhibition design which, by virtue of its scale, quality, and continuity, brings Italian experience to the fore at the international level.

To these brief considerations devoted to the design culture that has operated within exhibition space, it is appropriate to add some notes on that particular material culture which has supported, with specific and typically Italian characteristics, the value of this constructive domain. There certainly remains to be brought to light the largely anonymous history of the craftsmen who have realized and continue to realize these temporary architectures, often achieving results of great executive quality and participating in a fundamental way in the success of these particular spatial concepts. These are mostly small and medium-sized companies with a specific organizational competence [...] and a very rich, typically artisanal experience in all fields of construction and material processing⁴. This thus constitutes a testimony that further enriches the interesting body of design and constructive values mobilized within the project of temporary architectures in Italy.

i. Roberto Aloï, *Esposizioni. Architetture-Allestimenti*, Ulrico Hoepli Editore, Milan 1960. With an essay by Agnoldomenico Pica.

ii. Among others, one may recall: the extremely rich anthology of images and texts collected in the volume by Sergio Polano, *Mostrare. L'allestimento in Italia dagli anni Venti agli anni Ottanta*, Edizioni Lybra, Milan 1988; the ten issues of the journal «Progex. Design & architectures espositive», edited by Giampiero Bosoni from 1988 to 1994; several interesting booklets edited by Franca Semi for the Cluva University of Venice; and some recent publications edited by Antonio Piva and Fredi Drugman devoted to the theme of museum design.

iii. Some of these concepts had already been addressed by the author within a general historical framework in the English-language article *Temporary Architecture. Exhibitions and Their Traditions*, written in December 1993 for the American journal «Print. America's Graphic Design Magazine», on the occasion of a monographic issue, *The Italian Issue*, edited by Paola Antonelli and entirely devoted to Italy.

[Giampiero Bosoni, *Prefazione*, in Silvio San Pietro, *Nuovi allestimenti in Italia*, L'Archivoltò, Milan 1996, pp. 8-9]

The passage reproduced here is an excerpt from Giampiero Bosoni's preface to one of the last volumes published before 2000 on the «new exhibition design in Italy» (*Nuovi allestimenti in Italia*, S. San Pietro, ed., L'Archivoltò, Milan 1996), in which the author, almost ten years after the publication of *Mostrare. L'allestimento in Italia dagli anni Venti agli anni Ottanta* by Sergio Polano (Lybra Immagine, Milan 1988) – a true cornerstone of Italian studies on the subject – takes stock of the contemporary panorama, highlighting the new themes introduced by current

capacity for formal – rather than material – persistence of this type of project, or at least of its best episodes.

3. Particularly interesting here is the list of fields in which Bosoni situates contemporary design, which, in addition to revealing his distancing from the historicist and museographic perspective within which reflection on the topic normally develops, leads him to look increasingly convincingly toward the very mechanisms of production of contemporary urban space – when not of the landscape itself. On the developments of this critical perspective, here only embryonically

outlined, see in particular L. Basso Peressut, G. Bosoni, P. Salvadeo, *Mettere in scena, mettere in mostra*, LetteraVentidue, Siracusa 2015.

4. This is another theme briefly mentioned here, but which within a few years would become central in framing the specificity and success of what would come to be defined as the Italian «design system». In this regard, see M. Pizzi, M. Romanelli, *Il lungo fiume del design italiano. 1961-2011*, in «Abitare», no. 512, 2011, pp. 90-193; G. Cutolo, *Il Grande Fiume del design italiano*, in «Op. Cit. Selezione della critica d'arte contemporanea», no. 147, 2013, pp. 40-48.

[JL]

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Biographies

Michela Bassanelli

Architect and PhD, Michela Bassanelli is a researcher (RTT) in Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design at the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, Politecnico di Milano. Her research interests focus on domestic interiors, with particular attention to their historical evolution and the phenomenology of contemporary processes, approached through an interdisciplinary theoretical framework. A member of the editorial boards of the journals «ARK», «PAD. Pages on Arts&Design» and «Territorio», in recent years she has been studying the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on transformations of domestic space and workplaces. Among her most recent publications are: *Dispositivi e architettura. Lo spazio dinamico dell’abitare* (2024); (co-edited with I. Forino) *Gli spazi delle donne. Casa, lavoro e società* (2024); (with E. Scaramellini) *In-Between Rooms. Dispositivi architettonici nel contesto naturale* (2024).

Imma Forino

Architect and PhD, Imma Forino is Professor of Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design and a member of the Doctoral Board of the PhD Programme in Architectural, Urban, and Interior Design at the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies of the Politecnico di Milano. Her research focuses on interior spaces and furniture from a spatial and historiographical perspective, in which the study of power relations and the architectural and furnishing dispositifs through which they are enacted throughout history plays a central role. She is a member of the editorial board of the book series «ii inclusive interiors» (Maggioli) and of the scientific committees of the journals «Op. cit. Selezione della critica d'arte contemporanea», «ARK», and «Res Mobilis». Among her publications are: *L'interno nell'interno. Per una fenomenologia dell'arredamento* (Alinea 2001); *Uffici. Interni arredi oggetti* (Einaudi 2011, winner of the 2012 Biella Prize for Literature and Industry for non-fiction); *La cucina. Storia culturale di un luogo domestico* (Einaudi 2019).

Jacopo Leveratto

Architect and PhD, Jacopo Leveratto is Associate Professor of Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design and a member of the Doctoral Board of the PhD Programme in Architectural, Urban, and Interior Design at the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies of the Politecnico di Milano. He is Associate Editor of «iijournal», a member of the editorial board of «ARK», and a member of the executive committee of «Stoà». He has written, among others, for «Architectural Design», «Area», «Interiors», «Interni», «Op. Cit. Selezione della critica d'arte contemporanea», and «Vesper». He is the author of articles, essays, and monographs on interior architecture and radical forms of habitability, including: *Città personali. Interni urbani a misura d'uomo* (LetteraVentidue 2015); *From Within. Between Interior Architecture and Design* (LetteraVentidue 2020), *Posthuman Architectures. A Catalogue of Archetypes* (ORO 2021); *A room of no one. L'architettura della stanza generica* (Quodlibet 2025).

Franco Albini

Architect, designer, and educator, Franco Albini (Robbiate 1905-Milan 1977) graduated in Architecture from the Politecnico di Milano in 1929, initially training in Gio Ponti’s studio. From the 1930s onward, he established himself as a leading figure of Italian Rationalism, collaborating with «Casabella» and taking part in the cultural and political debate on modern architecture. After the Second World War, he began a fruitful partnership with Franca Helg, with whom he produced exemplary works such as the installation design for the Museo del Tesoro di San Lorenzo in Genoa (1952-56), La Rinascente in Rome (1957), and the stations of Line 1 of the Milan Metro. Invited by Giuseppe Samonà to teach at IUAV in Venice in 1949, later professor at the Politecnico di Milano from 1964, and member of the Accademia di San Luca, Albini also designed furnishings that entered the history of Italian design, such as the Luisa chair, awarded the Compasso d’Oro in 1955. On his work, embodying an immediately recognizable architectural ideal founded on measure, sobriety, and innovation, see F. Bucci, *Franco Albini. La scuola di Milano*, Elected, Milan 2009.

Filippo Alison

Architect, critic, and historian of architecture and design, Filippo Alison (Torre Annunziata 1937-Naples 2015) held the chair of Furnishing and Interior Architecture at the Università di Napoli Federico II from 1971 to 2007, after serving as assistant to Michele Cretella and Roberto Mango. From the 1960s, his research focused in particular on the relationships between the tradition of European modernism, material culture, and industrial production, positioning itself at the crossroads of professional practice, historical inquiry, and design experimentation. For Cassina, he oversaw, among other initiatives, re-editions of works by Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, Charlotte Perriand, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Gerrit Rietveld. Winner of the Compasso d’Oro in 1986, his principal publications include *Le sedie di Charles Rennie Mackintosh* (1973), *Erik Gunnar Asplund. Mobili e oggetti* (1985), *Frank Lloyd Wright. Designer of furniture* (1997), and *Le Corbusier. L’intérieur du Cabanon* (2006).

Giulio Carlo Argan

Among the most authoritative art historians and critics of the twentieth century, Giulio Carlo Argan (Turin 1909-Rome 1992) studied at the University of Turin under Lionello Venturi. An official in the Fine Arts administration in the 1930s, after the Second World War, he was among the protagonists of Italy’s cultural and institutional reconstruction. From 1959, he taught art history at the University of Rome, helping to define a rigorous, interdisciplinary method of reading works, founded on the integration of form, function, and historical context. Among his most influential works are *Progetto e destino* (1965), in which he affirms the centrality of art, and *L’arte moderna* (1970), a widely disseminated critical handbook. Particularly significant is his interest in architecture, understood as a synthesis of aesthetic language and social organization, and in furnishing as a cultural phenomenon. Author of a lucid reflection on the role of the intellectual in society, Argan was the first secular mayor of Rome in the postwar period (1976-79), leaving a profound mark on Italian artistic and urban culture in public life as well.

Luca Basso Peressut

Architect and educator, Luca Basso Peressut (Milan 1950) graduated in 1980 from the Faculty of Architecture at the Politecnico di Milano, beginning an intense activity of teaching and research in architectural and museographic design. Holding a PhD in Architectural Composition, after teaching at the University of Genoa (1992-98) he was appointed to the Politecnico di Milano, where, since 2003, he has been a full professor of Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design. A member and coordinator of doctoral programmes, deputy head of the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, founder of the AIMAC section and of the IDEA Master in Exhibition Design, Basso Peressut has consistently combined theory and research, with particular attention to places of culture and memory. Coordinator of the European programme *European Museums in an Age of Migrations* (2011-15), he has served on the scientific committees of editorial series and journals in the field of exhibition design and museography. Among his writings: *I luoghi del museo* (1985) and *Il Museo Moderno* (2005).

Eugenio Battisti

Historian of art and architecture, Eugenio Battisti (Turin 1924-Rome 1989) graduated in Philosophy in Turin in 1947 and subsequently specialized in art history with Lionello Venturi in Rome. He taught at various Italian universities, including Florence, Reggio Calabria, the Politecnico di Milano, and the University of Tor Vergata in Rome, and abroad in the United States, at Pennsylvania State University and the University of North Carolina. A careful scholar, he introduced new critical and methodological approaches published in *Rinascimento e Barocco* (1960) and *L’Antirinascimento* (1962); he also participated actively in journals such as «Marcatre» and «L’Arte», and, together with other critics, founded the Museo Sperimentale di Arte Contemporanea at the University of Genoa, donated in 1965 to the Galleria Civica d’Arte Moderna in Turin.

Ezio Bonfanti

Historian and critic of architecture, Ezio Bonfanti (Milan 1931-1973) trained at the Politecnico di Milano, where he graduated in Architecture in 1963. A reserved figure yet intellectually rigorous, he took an active part in the Italian architectural debate between the 1960s and the early 1970s, distinguishing himself by a historiographic approach attentive to the continuity of the modern tradition and to a critical rereading of its protagonists. He collaborated with journals and academic institutions, developing a research trajectory focused primarily on the work of the BBPR group, whose tension between Rationalism, civic commitment, and historical memory he analysed in depth. With Marco Porta, he published in 1973 the monograph *Città, museo e architettura. Il Gruppo BBPR nella cultura architettonica italiana 1932-1970*, still considered one of the most important critical reconstructions of the Milanese collective. After his premature death, the posthumous publication of *Scritti di architettura* (1981) gathered essays and articles produced over the course of his career.

Giampiero Bosoni

Architect, historian, and theorist of design, Giampiero Bosoni (Milan 1955) graduated in Architecture from the Politecnico di Milano, where he has carried out teaching and research in the history and theory of design and interior architecture. A lecturer at the Department of Design, he teaches historical and theoretical design disciplines, focusing his studies on material culture, the evolution of furnishings, and everyday objects, with particular attention to Italian design in the second half of the twentieth century and to the relationships between design, industry, and communication. Alongside academic activity, he has pursued an intense critical and editorial practice, collaborating with numerous specialist journals, directing «Progetx», and serving on the editorial staff of «Rassegna». He has curated significant exhibitions and exhibition projects, including the Museo del Design at the Triennale di Milano (1997). His main publications include *Il design degli interni* (1998), *Il design italiano* (2007), *Made in Italy. Rethinking a Century of Italian Design* (2016), as well as numerous essays and contributions in collective volumes.

Agostino Bossi

Architect and theorist (Pola 1941), he graduated in Architecture at the Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II. He was a full professor until 2012 of Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design at the same faculty, and professor ad honorem at the Universidad de la República Oriental del Uruguay. Founder and coordinator of the International PhD programme in Philosophy of the Architectural Interior at the University of Naples, he was also a member of the scientific committee of the PhD in Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design at the Politecnico di Milano. His research has concerned the promotion of the discipline of interior architecture in Italy and abroad, and the development of themes related to industrial design, the crafted object, and museum curatorship. Among his publications are *La casa fuori casa* (2011) and *L’intangibile nell’architettura* (2023, with P. Cecere).

Andrea Branzi

Architect and designer, Andrea Branzi (Florence 1938-Milan 2023) graduated in Architecture in Florence in 1966. Co-founder of Archizoom Associati, he contributed decisively to the season of Radical design in the 1960s and 1970s. His projects are held in the CSAC in Parma and at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. He taught at several Italian universities, including the Faculty of Architecture in Palermo, the Domus Academy in Milan (where he served as academic director), and the Design Faculty of the Politecnico di Milano. From 1982 to 1984, he was editor of «Modo» and collaborated with the major journals of architecture and design. In 1994, he received the Compasso d’Oro for lifetime achievement in recognition of the cultural value of his work. Among his principal publications are *La casa calda* (1984), *Modernità debole e diffusa* (2006), and *Introduzione al design italiano* (2008).

Germano Celant

Art historian and critic, Germano Celant (Genoa 1940-Milan 2020) studied at the University of Genoa with Eugenio Battisti, beginning his publishing activity at a very young age. From the mid-1960s, he established himself internationally as one of the most influential theorists of contemporary art, above all through the definition of the concept of «Arte Povera», formulated in 1967. Alongside his theoretical work, Celant distinguished himself as curator of major exhibitions, including *Identité italienne* (Centre Pompidou, 1981), *Italian Metamorphosis 1943-1968* (Guggenheim, 1994), and the 1997 Venice Biennale, of which he was director. From 1988 to 2008, he served as Senior Curator for Contemporary Art at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, and from 1993 as scientific director of Fondazione Prada, contributing to the definition of its cultural profile. Author of countless monographs and catalogues, he took an active part in the debate on the role of art in society.

Adriano Cornoldi

Architect and theorist of architecture, Adriano Cornoldi (Milan 1942-Venice 2009) graduated in Architecture at IUAV in Venice, where he would first become a full professor of Architectural Composition and then, from 2005, of Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design. Graduating under Ignazio Gardella and Giuseppe Samonà, he earned a Master’s degree in Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania with Louis I. Kahn. In 1970, he founded Studio 42 together with Paola Mariani and Giancarlo Perdon; its works were published in the monograph *Adriano Cornoldi 1968-1993* (1994). His theoretical and design research focused on housing typology and on the relationships between forms and everyday spatial life. He authored numerous volumes on dwelling, including *L’architettura della casa* (1988), *Architettura dei luoghi domestici* (1994), and the edited volumes *Architettura degli interni* (2005) and *Gli interni nel progetto sull’esistente* (2007).

Michele Cretella

Michele Cretella (Cosenza 1902-Macerata 1990) graduated in Architecture in 1940 at the Università Federico II di Napoli. From 1947 until the academic year 1971-72 he held the course in Interior Architecture, Furnishing, and Decoration at the same university. His teaching continued that of Mario De Renzi, who held the chair from 1929 to 1947, pursuing its theoretical principles. He practiced professionally and designed several residential buildings in Naples in the mid-1950s. A scholar of English and French architecture and furnishing, among his writings are the monograph *Botteghe ad Ercolano e Pompei* (1961) and the essay *Sale da pranzo e camere da letto*, in R. Aloï, *L’arredamento moderno* (1952).

Francesco Dal Co

Historian and critic of architecture, Francesco Dal Co (Treviso 1945) is a leading figure in the international field of studies on contemporary architecture. Having graduated in Architecture at IUAV in Venice, he went on to teach History of Architecture there, becoming a full professor and contributing decisively to the institute’s historical-critical orientation. Director of «Casabella» since 1981, he steered the journal toward an international critical analysis, opening it to theoretical debates and to the protagonists of the global architectural scene. He curated the Architecture section of the Venice Biennale in 1980, in 1986, and again from 1998 to 2004, imprinting it with strong historical depth and attention to the present. Author of numerous essays and monographs, his editorial activity includes directing Electa’s architecture series, through which he has promoted reference publications for the history and criticism of design.

Gabriella D’Amato

Architect, historian, and critic of architecture, Gabriella D’Amato (Naples 1945) graduated in 1969 at the Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II, where she would teach History of Contemporary Architecture and History of Design and Furnishing. Her research focuses on interiors and furnishing, fields in which she has published numerous essays, articles, and volumes. Her principal works include *L’architettura del Protorazionalismo* (1987), *Fortuna e immagini dell’Art Déco* (1991), *Storia dell’arredamento dal 1750 a oggi* (1992), *Atmosfere d’Europa* (1999), *L’arte di arredare* (2001), *Storia del design* (2005), and *Moda e design* (2007). From 1970 to 1990, she collaborated with «Op. cit. Selezione della critica d’arte contemporanea» and wrote numerous biographical entries for UTET and Allemandi dictionaries, distinguishing herself through a critical approach attentive to the relationship between aesthetics, taste, and material culture.

Carlo De Carli

Architect, designer, and educator, Carlo De Carli (Milan 1910-1999) graduated in Architecture at the Politecnico di Milano in 1934, where he undertook an intense teaching and research activity, succeeding Gio Ponti in 1962 in the chair of Interior Architecture, Furnishing, and Decoration, and presiding over the School from 1965 to 1968. A prominent figure in postwar architectural culture, De Carli participated in the debate on reconstruction and on the modern identity of Italian architecture. Among his most significant works are the office-and-residential building in Via dei Giardini in Milan (1947-49), the Teatro Sant’Erasmo (1951-53), and the Church of Sant’Ildefonso (1955-56). In parallel, he developed a personal research in industrial design, winning the Compasso d’Oro in 1954. His thought is founded on the concept of «spazio primario», understood as the core of architectural experience and the anthropological origin of built form, to which he devoted texts such as *Architettura Spazio Primario* (1982), *Creatività. Riflessioni sull’architettura* (1990), and *Corollario* (1993).

Renato De Fusco

Historian and critic of architecture and design, Renato De Fusco (Naples 1929-2024) graduated in Architecture at the Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II in 1953, beginning his academic career a few years later at the same institution, where he became full professor of History of Architecture in 1972. A central figure in Italian theory in the second half of the twentieth century (InArch award for the career in 2001 and Compasso d’Oro for the career in 2008), De Fusco was among the first to apply semiotic tools to the study of architecture, emphasizing the linguistic and communicative dimension of design. Among his best-known works are *L’idea di architettura. Storia della critica da Viollet-le-Duc a Persico* (1964), *Architettura come mass medium* (1967), *Segni. Storia e progetto dell’architettura* (1973), *Storia dell’architettura contemporanea* (1974), *Storia del design* (1985), and *Storia dell’arredamento* (1985). Founder and director of «Op. cit. Selezione della critica d’arte contemporanea» from 1964 to 2024 (InArch award 1966), he contributed decisively to the dissemination of historical-art criticism within architectural discourse.

Manolo De Giorgi

Architect and critic, Manolo De Giorgi (Milan 1956) trained at the Politecnico di Milano. After working at Gregotti Associati (1983-87), he opened his own practice in Milan in 1988, partnering with Walter A. Noebel. He has been editor at «Modo» and «Domus» and guest editor of three monographic issues of «Rassegna» devoted to design and architecture. Since 1985, he has carried out an intense activity in exhibition projects and museum curatorship, collaborating with institutions such as the Triennale di Milano, the Pinacoteca di Brera, and the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. He has curated numerous installations in Italy and abroad devoted to Italian industrial design, interiors, and design history. He is the author of volumes and essays, including *Carlo Mollino. Interni in piano-sequenza* (2004) and *Marco Zanuso e Milano* (2018), and has taught at IUAV in Venice and at the Politecnico di Milano.

Silvia Esposito

Having graduated from DAMS in Bologna with Tomás Maldonado, Silvia Esposito (1954) coordinated the exhibition *Paesaggio. Immagine e realtà* (Galleria d’Arte Moderna, Bologna 1981) and curated the catalogue of the same title (Electa, Milan 1981).

Imma Forino

Architect and educator, Imma Forino (Naples 1965) graduated in Architecture in 1989 at the Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II. After completing a PhD in Interior Architecture and Furnishing at the Politecnico di Milano, she pursued an academic career that led her to become a full professor at the same institution. A specialist in the study of domestic space and the forms of dwelling, she combines teaching with an intense research activity centred on reuse, interior architecture, and the relationship between space, society, and material culture. Among her most significant works are *L’interno nell’interno. Una fenomenologia dell’arredamento* (2001), *Uffici. Interni, arredi, oggetti* (2011), and *La cucina. Storia culturale di un luogo domestico* (2019).

Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi

Architect, designer, and theorist, Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi (Turin 1916-Milan 2005) graduated in Architecture at the Politecnico di Torino in 1939. Active in the Resistance, in the post-war period, he participated in founding the journal «Metron» (1945) and opened his own practice in Milan. Among his best-known projects are the Heichal David synagogue in Milan (1951-53) and Porta Garibaldi station (1961-63), with Giulio Minoletti and Mario Tevarotto. A reference figure in teaching, he taught first Interior Architecture at IUAV in Venice and then at the Politecnico di Milano, where from 1981 he was full professor of Architectural Composition. Among his most significant writings are *Elementi di architettura* (1965), *Uno spazio per l’architettura* (1982), and *La cultura del progetto* (1985), as well as numerous articles in «Comunità» and «Abitare», through which he sought to promote an integrated vision of architecture, design, and material culture.

Cettina Lenza

Historian of architecture, Cettina Lenza (Salerno 1954) graduated in Architecture at the Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II, beginning in 1974 an intense activity of research and teaching in historiography and architectural criticism, with particular attention to theoretical and methodological issues. She is a full professor of History of Architecture and History of Architectural Theories at the Faculty of Architecture of the Seconda Università degli Studi di Napoli, of which she was Dean from 2005 to 2009. She collaborates with numerous specialist journals, including «Op. cit. Selezione della critica d’arte contemporanea», «Grafica», «Modo», and «AION», and is author of essays and volumes including *Le nuove idee dell’Architettura* (1991, with Renato De Fusco), *Monumento e tipo nell’architettura neoclassica* (1997), and *Dal Pantheon a Brunelleschi* (2005, with Alfonso Gambardella and Stefano Borsi).

Tomás Maldonado

Tomás Maldonado (Buenos Aires 1922-Milan 2018), design theorist, artist, designer, and philosopher of technology, was among the central figures of twentieth-century design culture. Trained within the Argentine avant-garde and among the founders of the Asociación Arte Concreta, in 1954, he arrived at the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm, of which he became one of the principal protagonists and, from 1964, rector. Having settled permanently in Italy, he taught Environmental Design at the Politecnico di Milano. Alongside his academic career, he pursued an intense essayistic activity. Among his principal works are *La speranza progettuale* (1970), *Avanguardia e razionalità* (1974), and *Reale e virtuale* (1992). Director of «Casabella» between 1977 and 1982, Maldonado contributed to renewing the architectural and design debate, promoting a critical vision of modernism and anticipating environmental, technological, and semantic questions that are now central to design thinking.

Alessandro Mendini

Architect, designer, and theorist, Alessandro Mendini (Milan 1931-2019) graduated in Architecture at the Politecnico di Milano in 1959, and in the early 1970s embarked on a critical-editorial path that made him one of the most authoritative voices in the Italian design debate. After initial collaborations with «Casabella», he became its editor-in-chief in 1970 and remained in that role until 1976, steering the journal toward an open and interdisciplinary reading of design and introducing themes linked to utopia, radicality, and the social dimension of design. From 1977 to 1981, he directed the journal he founded, «Modo». He later led «Domus» in two distinct periods (1979-85 and 2010-11), transforming it into an international laboratory for dialogue between architecture, visual arts, and industrial design. Alongside editorial activity, he developed design research between formal experimentation and irony, among whose best-known outcomes are the Poltrona di Proust (1978) and furnishings for Alchimia and Studio Mendini.

Carlo Mollino

Architect, designer, photographer, and among the most eccentric and original figures in twentieth-century Italian culture, Carlo Mollino (Turin 1905-1973) graduated in Architecture at the Politecnico di Torino in 1931, beginning a career marked by a continual oscillation between discipline and fantasy, technique and imagination. After his debut with the project for the headquarters of the Federazione Agricoltori in Cuneo (1933), he established himself with the Società Ippica Torinese (1937-40). His approach developed within cultivated, refined settings, in which bespoke furnishing plays a central role in defining space. Author of works such as the RAI Auditorium in Turin (1950) and the Palazzo della Camera di Commercio (1964-72), Mollino elaborated a conception of architecture as a narrative and poetic act, distant from the rules of functionality and orthodox modernism. A lecturer in Interior Architecture at the Turin school, Mollino left a deep imprint on Italian design culture.

Pio Montesi

Architect, theorist, and university professor, Pio Montesi (Rome 1903-1981), a pupil of Gustavo Giovannoni, devoted himself in particular to study and research on residential building. He founded and directed the Ufficio studi e progetti of INCIS and directed the journals «Umanità della casa» (1946) and «La casa. Quaderni di architettura e critica» (1955). From 1955, he taught Architectural Composition at the Faculty of Engineering in Trieste and practiced professionally, designing public and private buildings in Trieste, Cagliari, Rome, and Foggia. Among his writings is *La Cappella di Ronchamp* (1975).

Luigi Moretti

Architect, theorist, and a leading figure in twentieth-century Italian architecture (Rome 1907-Capraia 1973), Luigi Moretti graduated in Architecture at the Scuola Superiore di Roma in 1929, training in the academic environment of Gustavo Giovannoni. After an early phase on the construction site of the Foro Mussolini, he gained recognition with works such as the Casa della GIL in Trastevere (1933) and the Casa delle Armi (1934-36), where he combined Rationalism and monumental rhetoric in a plastically and spatially innovative language. In the 1950s, he founded and directed the journal «Spazio» (1950-53), a laboratory of reflection on the relationship between visual arts, architecture, and the sciences, and later established IRMOU, a pioneering institute for parametric and mathematical modelling applied to urbanism. Among his best-known projects are Villa Il Girasole near Rome (1949), the Watergate complex in Washington (1961), and the Montréal Stock Exchange. A theorist of architecture as language, Moretti is distinguished by a personal interpretation of the Baroque as a historical and mental form.

Gianni Ottoloni

Architect and theorist of interior architecture, Gianni Ottolini (Milan 1937) graduated from the Politecnico di Milano in 1963, where he began an academic career that led him to direct the Department of Architectural Design from 1996 to 2003 and to coordinate the PhD in Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design from 2007 to 2012. In his teaching and research, he has promoted an interdisciplinary approach to the design of inhabited space, affirming the centrality of the interior as a place of synthesis between architecture, furnishing, and material culture. A reference figure in Milanese culture of domestic design and a pupil of Carlo De Carli, he continues De Carli’s investigation into the concept of «spazio primario», understood as the meaningful nucleus of dwelling. His principal publications include *La casa attrezzata* (1993, with V. De Prizio), *Forma e significato in architettura* (1996), *Architettura degli interni domestici* (2015), *La Scuola di Milano e gli Interni* (2024), and numerous essays in collective volumes.

Giuseppe Pagano (Pogatschnig)

Architect, theorist, and intellectual (Parenzo 1896-Mauthausen 1945),

he graduated in Architecture at the Politecnico di Torino in 1924, after serving as a volunteer in the First World War. A central figure of Italian Rationalism, with Gino Levi-Montalcini, he developed the Palazzo Gualino project in Turin (1928-29), followed by major works such as the Institute of Physics at the Città Universitaria in Rome (1934) and the Bocconi University building in Milan (1936-42). Director of «Casabella» from 1933 to 1943, he transformed the journal into one of the main instruments for disseminating modern architecture in Italy. He also distinguished himself in the design of exhibitions and pavilions (5th and 6th Triennale di Milano), in which architecture is interpreted as a synthesis of aesthetics, technique, and social commitment. Progressively distancing himself from Fascism, he joined the Resistance, was arrested, and deported to Mauthausen, where he died in 1945. In his lifetime, in addition to countless articles, he published, among others, *Tecnica dell’abitazione* (1936), *Architettura rurale italiana*, with G. Daniel (1936), and *Arte decorativa italiana* (1938).

Edoardo Persico

Critic, publisher, graphic designer, and designer, Edoardo Persico (Naples 1900-Milan 1936) was one of the most representative figures of Italian culture between the two wars. Trained in literary and philosophical contexts, his research developed at the intersection of art, architecture, politics, and visual communication. Active from the 1920s between Naples, Turin, and Milan, he participated in the anti-fascist circles of «Rivoluzione liberale» and founded the publishing house Biblioteca Italiana. From 1929, he was in Milan, where he became co-director of the Galleria Il Milione and began a theoretical and curatorial activity of great significance. As editor of «La Casa bella» (later «Casabella»), together with Giuseppe Pagano, he shaped an editorial line that fused architectural criticism and avant-garde graphics, contributing to the affirmation of Italian Rationalism. He authored exhibition designs and interior projects, often in collaboration with Marcello Nizzoli. Among his main works are the Sala delle Medaglie d’oro for the Mostra dell’Aeronautica (1934), and the Salone d’Onore at the VI Triennale di Milano (1936), designed with Palanti and Nizzoli.

Agnoldomenico Pica

Architect, historian, and critic of architecture, Agnoldomenico Pica (Padua 1907-Milan 1990) was among the central figures of Italian cultural debate between the two wars. Graduated in Civil Architecture at the Politecnico di Milano in 1931, he complemented technical training with studies as an auditor in aesthetics and archaeology at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Milan. His activity as a designer is concentrated in the early 1930s and privileges exhibition design and ephemeral architecture, including the project for the Ponte dell’Accademia in Venice (1932) and the Libreria di architettura at the V Triennale (1933). It is, however, his work as historian and critic that traced a longer and more influential path, addressing themes ranging from architectural history to criticism of the avant-gardes, and collaborating with journals such as «Domus», «Spazio», «Le Arti», and «Casabella». In the 1930s, he also became secretary to the organizing commission for the modern architecture exhibitions at the Triennale di Milano.

Gio Ponti

Architect, critic, and theorist, Gio Ponti (Milan 1891-1979), after gradu-ating in 1921 at the Politecnico di Milano, opened his first studio with Emilio Lancia (1927-33), with whom he designed villas and palaces in a neoclassical style. In 1928, he found- ed the journal «Domus», a repository of ideas and projects centred on the theme of the house, also expressed in the «case tipiche» built in Milan under the names Domus Julia, Faus- ta, and Carola (1931-36). In parallel, as artistic director of Richard-Ginori (1923-30), he helped renew Italian ceramics and gained internation- al recognition. His work includes public architectural projects and private houses, among which stand out the Montecatini building in Milan (1936-39), Villa Planchart in Caracas (1953-57), and the Pirelli skyscraper in Milan (1956-60). In the 1940s and 1950s, he also founded and direct- ed «lo Stile» (1941-47), central to the promotion of design and modern architectural culture in Italy and abroad. Author of fundamental es- says and texts, including *Amate l'ar- chitettura* (1957), from 1936 to 1961, Ponti was the first professor of Interi- or Architecture, Furnishing, and Dec- oration at the Politecnico di Milano.

Mario Praz

Anglicist, literary and art critic, Mario Praz (Rome 1896-1982) graduated in Law in Rome and in Literature in Bologna, with a thesis on Sir Thomas Browne. After teaching English liter- ature at various British universities, in 1934, he obtained the chair at the University of Rome, which he held until 1966. A profound connoisseur of neoclassical style, Empire taste, and nineteenth-century aesthetics, he contributed decisively to the re- valuation of minor and marginal as- pects of historical art and furnishing, influencing a generation of scholars and architects attentive to interiority and to the «environment as expres- sion». His most famous book in this field is *La filosofia dell'arredamento* (1945), in which Praz articulates an unprecedented vision of dwelling as a projection of bourgeois interiority. Particularly significant, in this sense, is his reflection on inhabited space, testified by *La casa della vita* (1958), an autobiography in the form of a de- scription of his Roman apartment.

Adelaide Regazzoni Caniggia

Architect, Adelaide Regazzoni Can- iggia (Rome 7-Milan 2019) graduated in Rome in 1959. She first collaborat- ed as an assistant in the furnishing course of Professor Luciano Rubi- no and then taught in the course of Furnishing and Interior Architecture at the Faculty of Architecture Valle Giulia of the University of Rome. She carried out research within the Isti- tuto di Disegno Industriale e Arreda- mento of the same faculty as a re- search fellow in history. Her research interests focus on defining the «or- ganismo arredativo» as the union of «architectural envelope system» and «furnishing system». Among her main publications are *I mobili da riposto* (1982), *L'organismo arredativo* (1990), and *Teoria e storia dell'arreda- mento* (1994).

Raimonda Riccini

Raimonda Riccini (Rome, 1953) is a full professor of History of Design at IUAV in Venice. She has taught The- ory and History of Design and Visual Communication at ISIA in Urbino and, subsequently, History of Design at IUAV in Venice, where she consolidat- ed a research method attentive to the cultural, technological, and material processes that run through design experience. She served as president of the Associazione italiana degli storici del design (AIS/Design), di- recting its journal «AIS/Design. Storia e ricerche», and has also collaborat- ed with sector journals and national and international cultural institu- tions, contributing to an interpretive framework of design as an interdis- ciplinary phenomenon. Among her best-known publications is *Pensare la tecnica progettare le cose. Storie del design italiano 1945-1980* (2012).

Marco Romanelli

Architect and critic, Marco Romanelli (Trieste 1958-Milan 2021) graduated in Architecture in Genoa in 1983. He was editor of «Domus» from 1986 to 1994 and of «Abitare» from 1995 to 2007. In 1986, he founded his own studio in Milan, where he carried out an intense activity of curatorship and exhibition design, with shows in inter- national venues including the Design Museum in London, the NAI in Rotter- dam, the Triennale di Milano, and other institutions in Europe and Japan. He also worked as art director for companies such as Driade, O-Luce, Montina, Marazzi, and Poltrona Frau, and, together with Marta Laudani, au- thored projects for major Italian and international furnishing companies. A member of the ADI Permanent De- sign Observatory, he collaborated in the realization of the ADI Design Mu- seum and taught at the Politecnico and at IULM in Milan.

Ernesto Nathan Rogers

Architect, theorist, and critic of ar- chitecture, Ernesto Nathan Rogers (Trieste 1909-Gardone Riviera 1969) was among the most influental fig- ures in Italian architectural culture in the postwar period. Graduating in 1932 at the Politecnico di Milano, that same year, he founded the BBPR studio with Gian Luigi Banfi, Ludovi- co Barbiano di Belgiojoso, and Enrico Peressutti, which would deeply mark the Italian architectural scene. The studio produced works in the wake of Rationalism, participating in debate in the leading Italian journals and at the V Triennale di Milano (1933). After the Second World War, BBPR resumed activity, steering archi- tecture toward a modern language attentive to historical memory and urban context. Alongside profession- al practice, Rogers pursued intense theoretical and editorial work. From 1946 to 1947, he directed «Domus» and, from 1953 to 1965, «Casabel- la-Continuità», transforming it into one of the central sites of European architectural debate. A professor at the Politecnico di Milano from 1952, among his best-known writings are *Esperienza dell’architettura* (1958), *Gli elementi del fenomeno architettonico* (1961), and *Editoriali di architettura* (1968).

Giancarlo Rosa

Architect and educator, Giancarlo Rosa (Rome 1938) graduated at La Sapienza University in 1973 under Ludovico Quaroni. After an initial period of independent design activ- ity, he began an academic path as a voluntary assistant in 1972, becom- ing a researcher in 1981. In 1992, after an experience at the Univer- sità Politecnica delle Marche, he re- turned to Rome, where he continued research and teaching in the field of Interior Architecture, becoming a full professor in 2004. Among the promoters of the BA and MA pro- grammes in Interior Architecture at La Sapienza, he founded and directed the PhD in Interior Archi- tecture and Design. His theoretical and design work moves across the different scales of the project, con- tributing to the definition of interior architecture as an autonomous and theoretically grounded disciplinary field. A reference figure in the ed- ucation of numerous generations of designers, he is the subject of the monographic volume *Maestri Roma- ni. Giancarlo Rosa*, edited by Andrea Grimaldi (2021).

Giuseppe Samonà

Architect, urban planner, and ed- ucator, Giuseppe Samonà (Palermo 1898-Rome 1983) graduated in Civil Engineering in Palermo in 1922, beginning a career that con- stantly combined design practice with theoretical reflection and civ- ic commitment. A central figure in twentieth-century Italian architec- tural culture, Samonà interpreted architecture as a social discipline, capable of affecting the transfor- mations of territory and city. Among his most significant works are the Banca d'Italia in Padua (1946-58), the Municipio di Gibellina (1971), and the Teatro Popolare of Sciacca (1974). Director of IUAV in Venice from 1945 to 1971, Samonà pro- foundly renewed the institute, pro- moting an interdisciplinary teaching that interweaves architecture, ur- banism, art, and the social sciences. Among his principal writings are *L'urbanistica e l'avvenire della città negli stati europei* (1959) and *L'unità architettura-urbanistica* (1975), in which he affirms a humanistic con- ception of design understood as an instrument of knowledge and trans- formation of collective reality. From 1972 to 1976, he served as Senator of the Republic, elected in Veneto on the lists of the Partito Comunista Italiano.

Leonardo Savioli

Architect and educator, Leonardo Savioli (Florence 1917-1982) is one of the most significant figures of Italian architecture after the Sec- ond World War. Graduating in 1941 in Florence under Giovanni Micheluc- ci, the first professor of Interior Ar- chitecture, he undertook an intense professional and academic activity within the same faculty, influencing generations of students through a radical and visionary teaching. From early projects-such as the plan for the village of La Martella in Matera (1952) and the INA-Casa district at Galluzzo (1954-58)-Savi- oli developed a personal expressive language close to an Italian inflec- tion of Brutalism. Alongside design activity, he devoted himself to a the- oretical reflection on architecture as a perceptual and communicative process, with particular attention to exhibition design. On this topic, in addition to F. Brunetti, *Leonardo Sa- violi architetto* (Dedalo, Bari 1982), see in particular M. Nocchi, *Leonar- do Savioli. Allestire, arredare, abitare* (Alinea, Florence 2008).

Carlo Scarpa

A Venetian-trained architect, Carlo Scarpa (Venice 1906-Sendai 1978) is one of the most singular and po- etic figures of twentieth-century Italian architecture. Trained at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Venice, in 1926, he obtained a qualification in architectural drawing. He worked until 1931 in the Venetian studio of Guido Cirilli, whom he also assist- ed in teaching at IUAV in Venice. In 1933, he became a lecturer in study from life and decoration; in 1964, he was appointed as a full professor of composition; and from 1972 to 1974, he directed the institute. He never fully adhered to the dogmas of the Modern Movement, while sharing its impetus for renewal, developing an entirely personal language. Among his most celebrated works are the restoration and exhibition design of the Museo di Castelvecchio in Vero- na (1958-74), the Museo Canova in Possagno (1955-57), interventions at Palazzo Abatellis in Palermo (1953-54), the arrangement of the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice, and the monumental complex of the Brion Tomb at San Vito d'Alti- vole (1969-78). Scarpa has been the subject of numerous critical stud- ies, including those by M. A. Crippa (1984), F. Dal Co and G. Mazzariol (1984), and O. Lanzarini (2003).

Salvatore Vitale

Art critic with a degree in Law, Sal- vatore Vitale (Catania 1887-Rome 1966) began his administrative ca- reer in 1910 within the Ministry of Public Instruction, reaching in 1923 the rank of section head in the Di- rezione generale delle antichità e belle arti, and being appointed Commendatore the following year. A contributor to the «Giornale di Sicil- ia» and to various journals, including Gobetti's «Rivoluzione liberale» and «Il mondo», Vitale belonged to the generation of southern intellectuals formed within the Crocean milieu, for which he proposed a renewal aimed at overcoming its idealist matrix. His two most significant works on defining an architectural aesthetics can be traced to this aim. Largely forgotten after the 1950s, Vitale is the subject of a recent critical edition titled *L'estetica dell’architettura e altri scritti*, and edited by Cettina Lenza (Bologna 2010).

Maurizio Vitta

Historian and theorist of design, Maurizio Vitta (Milan 1946), trained in philosophy, taught History and Cul- ture of Design at the Design Faculty of the Politecnico di Milano and at the Accademia di Brera. For many years, he has investigated the relationship between aesthetics and everyday experience, also teaching Theory of Visual Communication at ISIA in Urbino and History of Art and Visual Communication at NABA in Milan. A prolific author, he has published es- says that have durably shaped Italian critical reflection on architecture, de- sign, and contemporary art. He was deputy editor of «l'Arca» and collabo- rates with the Sunday supplement of «IlSole24ore». Among his books are *Il disegno delle cose* (1996), *Il sistema delle immagini* (1999), *Il progetto della bellezza* (2001), *Dell’abitare* (2008), and *Le voci delle cose* (2016).

Maurizio Vogliazzo

Architect and critic, Maurizio Vogli- azzo (Aosta 1943-Venice 2018) grad- uated at the Politecnico di Torino in 1969. Alongside design activity, he immediately began an academic career in Turin and, in 1976, at the Politecnico di Milano. In 1990, he became a full professor, teaching Architectural Design, Furnishing, Exhibition Design, and Interior Ar- chitecture and, later, Landscape Ar- chitecture, contributing significantly to the development of these discipli- nary fields. From 1996, he was a vis- iting professor at University College London, FAUTL in Lisbon, ISACF in Brussels, ESAD in Matosinhos, and ETSAB in Barcelona. He curated and organized exhibitions devoted to ma- jor figures of twentieth-century ar- chitecture and design and authored exhibitions in international venues such as MoMA in New York, the Tri- ennale di Milano, and the Venice Bi- ennale. From 2008, he was deputy editor of «l'Arca» and wrote numer- ous essays, dedicating his critical reflection to interior architecture, exhibition design, and landscape. See Sulla sua attività si rimanda a S. Jung, *Maurizio Vogliazzo. Architecture as a Tool*, LetteraVentidue, Siracusa 2026.

Bruno Zevi

Architect, historian, and critic of ar- chitecture, Bruno Zevi (Rome 1918-2000) graduated from Harvard in 1945 under the direction of Walter Gropius, after leaving Italy because of the racial laws. Returning to Rome in 1945, he founded the As- sociazione per l'architettura organ- ica (APAO) and, in 1946, the journal «Metron», instruments through which he promoted an idea opposed to the classicist Rationalism dom- inant during the Fascist period. He taught for over thirty years History of Architecture, first in Venice and then in Rome, helping to educate generations of architects. With *Sa- per vedere l'architettura* (1948), one of his most influential texts, he pro- posed a dynamic, spatial reading of the architectural work, opposing every form of historicist academ- icism and monumental rhetoric in design. An indefatigable popular- izer, he wrote for decades in «L'Es- presso» and took an active part in political and cultural debate. A Rad- ical Party deputy from 1987 to 1992, Zevi was a protagonist of architect- ural thought in the second half of the twentieth century.

