

# dommus

**Caos. Deprime la ragione, esalta l'emotività. Più la ricerca scientifica si addentra nei misteri dell'universo, più si constata con stupore che tutto è regolato dalla curiosa regola delle probabilità. Anche i progetti umani per il futuro.**

**Chaos. It diminishes reason and heightens emotivity. The more scientific research penetrates the mysteries of the universe, the more we are amazed to find that everything is governed by the curious law of probability. Even human design for the future.**

Michele De Lucchi

Bjarke Ingels  
Herzog & de Meuron  
Mecanoo architecten  
MVRDV  
Assemble  
Mario Trimarchi  
ECAL  
Restart

Chance.  
Disorder.  
Creativity.

# Chaos



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## Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara respond to the editor’s invitation to reflect on his theoretical position expressed in *Domus* in recent months

Dear Michele De Lucchi,

Our first instinct was to question your proposition that “objects represent the concrete part of existence”.

When you say “everything exists in an objective dimension” we think about the philosopher George Berkeley. He makes the case that objectivity is impossible since the personalised overlay of our inner world comes into play when we perceive objects.

When we were asked to curate the Venice Biennale, our first thought was to focus on space and not on the object. This is because we believe that architects are makers of space and that the nature of architecture is inexplicable, except through the experience of space.

Rafael Moneo’s response to the Freespace theme is, in our view, relevant here when he says “the perception of freespace appears at the moment when a building’s condition as an artefact gives way and space is felt as a sensorial expression of freedom, letting us briefly forget the built world and the discipline of architecture”.

We think of architecture as the phenomenon which enables us to be human, as the maker of spaces where we humans stand, anchored by some larger force, the space from where we can perceive and experience the world, objects, surfaces, materials, form. To perceive an object one needs a co-ordinate; a reference point; a space made by objects; or made by surfaces or made by light and colour. We believe architecture to be active in enabling and empowering us to find our place in this world. For these reasons, we do not believe that “objects are our world”.

We are interested when you say that thinking of “architecture in terms of objects” helps us to “distinguish between functional and symbolic qualities, pragmatic and representative intentions”. But we wonder if you are proposing that functional and pragmatic qualities are inferior to symbolic and representative qualities? It is interesting to clarify what we mean by “function”.

We cannot omit the functional and architectural need to enable the user to feel welcome, comfortable, at ease in the environment created, or to enable the user to discover, to experience, to be enriched by space.

So a functional quality might also be described as a spiritual quality, feeding the spirit while providing spaces of shelter, for work, or play, or renewal, or pleasure.

And a pragmatic quality might also be a positive quality, when we think of the way that a carpenter or craftsman can intuitively and creatively solve practical problems through his/her skill or experience.

We believe that the role of the architect is to interrogate functional requirements, in great detail, so that the result is a direct response and a translation of those needs into what we call: architecture. That act of translation, transforming, imagining, is the act through which we discover the crucial added ingredient which brings about the making of a piece of architecture, rather than just a building. It is through the interrogation of the function and the need that that the authentic symbolic and representative qualities are found.

Without this functional base and analysis, the translation process is impoverished, whimsical, entirely subjective. Without representative and symbolic intentions architecture cannot exist, but the path to achieving truthful representation and meaningful symbols involves the weaving of the functional and the pragmatic into the mix.

Our experience as Curators of the Venice Biennale has enriched our understanding of the many ways of making of architecture. Working with over 100 architects from all over the world has shown us how both the most modest and the most monumental works can give expression to an architectural idea. We have witnessed a vast range of approaches to very particular challenges – be these related to climate, to economic or political conditions, or to the extending and renewing of existing architectural cultures.

We have found imagination combined with pragmatics; symbolism combined with need; representation combined with craft and making, all working towards making objects and spaces which enrich people’s lives. There is a culture of architects working invisibly, in the background, facilitating communities to enrich their environment. There is a culture of architects addressing global questions with authority and skill. There is a culture of architects making powerful civic spaces.

Imagination, optimism, generosity of spirit are shared qualities that we have found throughout. In his book, *Levels*, Frederic Bonnet describes “architecture’s cultural dimension and its centuries-old disciplinary corpus of fertile and unfathomable complexity, and its constant investigation to address an ever-evolving world in which economic, environmental and social parameters demand appropriate responses.”

This “constant investigation” and “ever-evolving world” can sometimes lead us off track, where value systems need to be reassessed. The current economic pressure on architecture is enormous. So-called “value engineering” can strip a project of many, if not all, of its cultural cartilage.

Architecture sits between art and business. It is commissioned. As an art form, it is shackled. Imagine a person walking on a tight rope over Niagara Falls, with a long pole in their hands. They are trying to cross safely, using the pole to balance their precarious position. On one end of the pole is Culture and on the other is Commerce. This balancing act is the world of architects.

Many projects around the world are given to

architectural practices where the “balancing pole” leans more towards business, where the impact of the scale of project is not fully understood or evaluated. The pressure to house us all, to protect from floods, to provide a new built-world is enormous. Who chooses? Who advises? Who decides? Who makes the final decision?

Many institutions are poorly advised, having perhaps advisors with incompatible views on cultural worth and the impact of architecture. Is it a case of: “he who pays the piper, calls the tune?” Many projects are given to “business” architects, in “bundles”, for speed, for ticking boxes. It is perceived that, when a big site is assembled for development, “big” firms are necessary to “do” the work.

But, the world is full of architects who, if given the opportunity, would commit enough time, talent and focus to enrich and complete the task. Enlightened clients know that projects involve architectural talent as well as time and energy. “Warrior” architects around the world work hard at making – making the best they can.

When we read Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani’s “gestures devoid of content” (*Domus* 1022, March 2018) we are emboldened. We underline his words and say “ Yes!” to his definitions, to his observations. When we read Adolfo Natalini’s words (*Domus* 1026, July/August 2018), our reaction is the same – one of delight that these voices are so clear, so insightful. We are happy to know that people like them are “out there” standing ground – real ground.

When Adolfo Natalini describes the world as “disturbing and increasingly inhospitable”, we read it as a call to believe in architecture again; to believe that, as a profession, we have the duty and the capacity to build with generosity, with spatial skill.

We know that architecture is an all-encompassing enclosure. At the scale necessary for the future, we would argue that architecture is actually New Geography. It encloses our human bodies, our skin. In this digital (finger-tip!) age, architecture as something “real” is now needed more than ever, to anchor us.

Your editorial is a provocation. We welcome your invitation to enter into a distant dialogue with you. If this series of responses to your editorial is to have possible impact, it is necessary to promote ways of thinking, where space – the nothing – the collective resultant space formed by “objects” is valued for itself. This is to concede that the void itself is a type of “object”. We need to counterbalance the emphasis on “object” so that we can make meaningful individual and collective spaces.

Architecture is Built Culture. Our Freespace manifesto is a call to go beyond the visual, beyond the object, to aspire to tender, sensual possibilities for the built environment.

**Grafton Architects** was co-founded by Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara in 1978. The Practice’s awards include: RIAI Triennial Gold Medal, Jane Drew Award, RIBA International Prize, Thomas Jefferson Foundation Medal in Architecture.

# Pier Paolo Tamburelli L’architettura è spazio Architecture is space

## Immaginare un’architettura costruita attorno a gesti che non sono né controllati, né psicoanalizzati, ma solo accolti

All’inizio della sua direzione di *Domus*, Michele De Lucchi ha scritto che avrebbe dedicato la rivista agli “oggetti e ai loro significati”. Per una rivista di architettura, questo programma implica che l’architettura si occupi di oggetti e di significati. Nessuna delle due tesi mi convince.

Comincerò dalla seconda. Che l’architettura si occupi di significati vuol dire che va intesa come un linguaggio. Eppure, in questo caso, si dovrebbe poter individuare le ‘parole’ dell’architettura (gli edifici interi? O dei pezzi di edifici, come colonne, finestre? O dei pezzi più piccoli ancora, come cornici, ringhiere, battiscopa?); poi si dovrebbe definire un modo per connettere in maniera regolare significati e significanti, stabilire una grammatica costante; infine, si dovrebbe capire chi indirizza messaggi attraverso gli edifici, e a chi: chi parla nell’*architecture parlante*? E a chi? Di fronte a tutti questi requisiti inevasi mi sembra difficile poter sostenere che l’architettura sia un linguaggio, se non in un senso così genericamente metaforico da risultare subito privo di qualsiasi utilità. Certamente si può provare a stabilire un rapporto diretto tra edifici e concetti. La storia dell’architettura è piena di esperimenti di questo tipo: porte a forma di bocca, fontane a forma di elefante, santuari a forma di fallo, negozi a forma di anatra. Eppure, il tempio a forma di pene non ricorderà mai l’esperienza di fare l’amore come una stanza con lo stesso armadio e lo stesso odore di una stanza in cui lo abbiamo già fatto, e il negozio a forma di anatra non ricorderà mai il suo sapore come la luce o il colore delle tapparelle della sala da pranzo della nonna. Rispetto agli edifici, il legame indiretto tra gli spazi, le esperienze e la loro memoria è sempre più convincente di quello diretto tra le figure, i significati e i messaggi.

Che l’architettura si occupi di oggetti, poi, significa che si occupa di solidi, di cose piene, tangibili, pesanti. Indubbiamente l’architettura si serve di solidi: di muri, di pilastri, di travi, ma non è questo il suo scopo. Si tratta solo di strumenti: lo scopo dell’architettura è il *negativo degli oggetti*, il vuoto, il volume d’aria in cui ci si può muovere, il solido di niente in cui si può respirare, dormire, lavorare, bere il Campari, baciarsi, darsi addio. L’architettura lascia che siano altri a introdurre un contenuto sulla scena che prepara. Così in architettura l’accessibilità, la libertà d’uso e la generosità coincidono con l’astrazione e l’ambiguità, con la vera e propria reticenza delle figure. L’architettura è vuota, priva di contenuto e, pro-





Pagina a fronte: Bas Princen, foto dell'abside laterale della crociera della chiesa di Santa Maria delle Grazie a Milano, di Donato Bramante  
 Opposite page: Bas Princen, photo of the side apse of the crossing of the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan, by Donato Bramante

## Imagining an architecture built around gestures that are not controlled or psychoanalysed, but only accepted

prio per questo, è l'arte pubblica per eccellenza. E l'architettura resta fedele alla sua natura pubblica solo se si mette interamente al servizio del vuoto, solo se *non ha contenuto*, se semplicemente *contiene* qualsiasi cosa si voglia andare a posare al suo interno. Lo spazio più generoso è infatti il più astratto, il più vuoto, quello che meno partecipa alle azioni che accoglie, quello privo di un sentimento univoco che lo abiti subito tutto, lasciandolo intasato di emozioni impossibili da sostituire. L'architettura si occupa solo di definire il margine che consente di limitare e proteggere il vuoto, di costruire la cornice che lascia apparire il vuoto.

Una volta esclusa la possibilità d'intendere l'architettura come linguaggio e una volta accettato che l'oggetto specifico dell'architettura *non è un oggetto*, diventa decisamente più facile impostare una teoria per l'architettura contemporanea. E una teoria che potrebbe essere di un qualche uso per l'architettura contemporanea è una teoria dell'astrazione, un teoria della non-corrispondenza di spazi e funzioni, d'interno ed esterno. Questa teoria consentirebbe di riconoscere che l'architettura sta tutta nell'intervallo tra i gesti e lo spazio. Consentirebbe d'immaginare un'architettura costruita attorno a gesti che non sono né anticipati, né spiegati, controllati o psicoanalizzati, ma solo accolti. L'architettura potrebbe così essere semplicemente produzione di spazi per desideri di altri, una tecnologia sobria e rispettosa, capace di attribuire precisione ai gesti senza pre-determinarne la natura, capace d'incrementare la definizione di ricordi che non sono i nostri e che non abbiamo ragione di conoscere, capace di ancorare le memorie a una cornice comune, senza volerne in alcun modo fissare il contenuto.

**Pier Paolo Tamburelli** (Tortona, 1976) è uno dei soci fondatori di baukuh. Attualmente insegna al Politecnico di Milano e all'Harvard University Graduate School of Design.

When Michele De Lucchi began to edit *Domus*, he wrote that he would devote the magazine to "objects and their meanings". For an architecture magazine, this programme implies that architecture is concerned with objects and meanings. Neither of the two theses convinces me.

I will start with the second. That architecture deals with meanings implies that it should be understood as a language. Yet, if this was the case, we should be able to identify the "words" of architecture. (Whole buildings? Pieces of buildings like columns and windows? Or smaller parts, like cornices, railings, skirting boards?) Then we would have to define a way to connect the meanings and signifiers regularly, establish a constant grammar, and finally understand who sends messages through buildings, and to whom. Who speaks in *architecture parlante*? And who to?

Faced with all these unanswered questions, it seems difficult to say that architecture is a language, if not in a sense so generically metaphorical that it is at once appears useless. Of course we can try and establish a direct relationship between buildings and concepts. The history of architecture is full of experiments of this type: mouth-shaped doors, elephant-shaped fountains, phallus-shaped shrines, duck-shaped shops. Yet a dick-shaped temple will never recall the experience of making love like a room containing the same wardrobe and the same scent as one where we made it in the past. And a duck-shaped shop will never evoke the taste of duck like the light or the colour of the shutters in grandma's dining room. Compared to buildings, the indirect bond between spaces, experiences and their memory is always more convincing than the direct link between figures, meanings and messages.

That architecture deals with objects means that it deals with solid, full, tangible, heavy things. Undoubtedly, architecture uses solid elements: walls, pillars, beams, but this is not its purpose. These are only the means: the aim of architecture is the *negative of objects*, the void, the volume of air in which we can move, the solid of nothing in which we can breathe, sleep, work, drink Campari, kiss or say goodbye. Architecture allows others to introduce a content into the setting it shapes. In architecture, accessibility, freedom of use and generosity coincide with abstraction and ambiguity, with a true reticence of the figures. Architecture is empty, devoid of content, and for this reason it is the supremely public art. And archi-

ecture remains faithful to its public nature only if it places itself wholly at the service of emptiness, only if it *has no content*, if it simply contains whatever we choose to place inside it. The most generous space is in fact the most abstract, the blindest, the one that participates least in the actions it contains, one without an unequivocal feeling immediately pervading it completely, clogged with feelings that can never be replaced. Architecture is only concerned to define the margin that makes it possible to limit and protect the void, to construct the frame that allows the void to appear.

Once we discard the possibility of understanding architecture as language and accept that the specific object of architecture is *not an object*, it becomes far easier to devise a theory of contemporary architecture. And a theory that could be of some use for contemporary architecture is a theory of abstraction, a theory of the non-correspondence of spaces and functions, of interior and exterior.

Such a theory would enable us to recognise that architecture lies wholly in the interval between gestures and space. It would let us imagine an architecture built around gestures that are not anticipated, explained, controlled or psychoanalysed, but only accepted.

Architecture could thus simply be the production of spaces for the desires of others, a restrained and respectful technology, capable of attributing precision to gestures without preordaining their nature, capable of enhancing the definition of memories that are not ours and that we have no reason to know, capable of anchoring memories to a common frame without wishing to fix the content in any way.

**Pier Paolo Tamburelli** (Tortona, 1976) is one of the founding partners of baukuh. He currently teaches at the Milan Polytechnic and at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design.