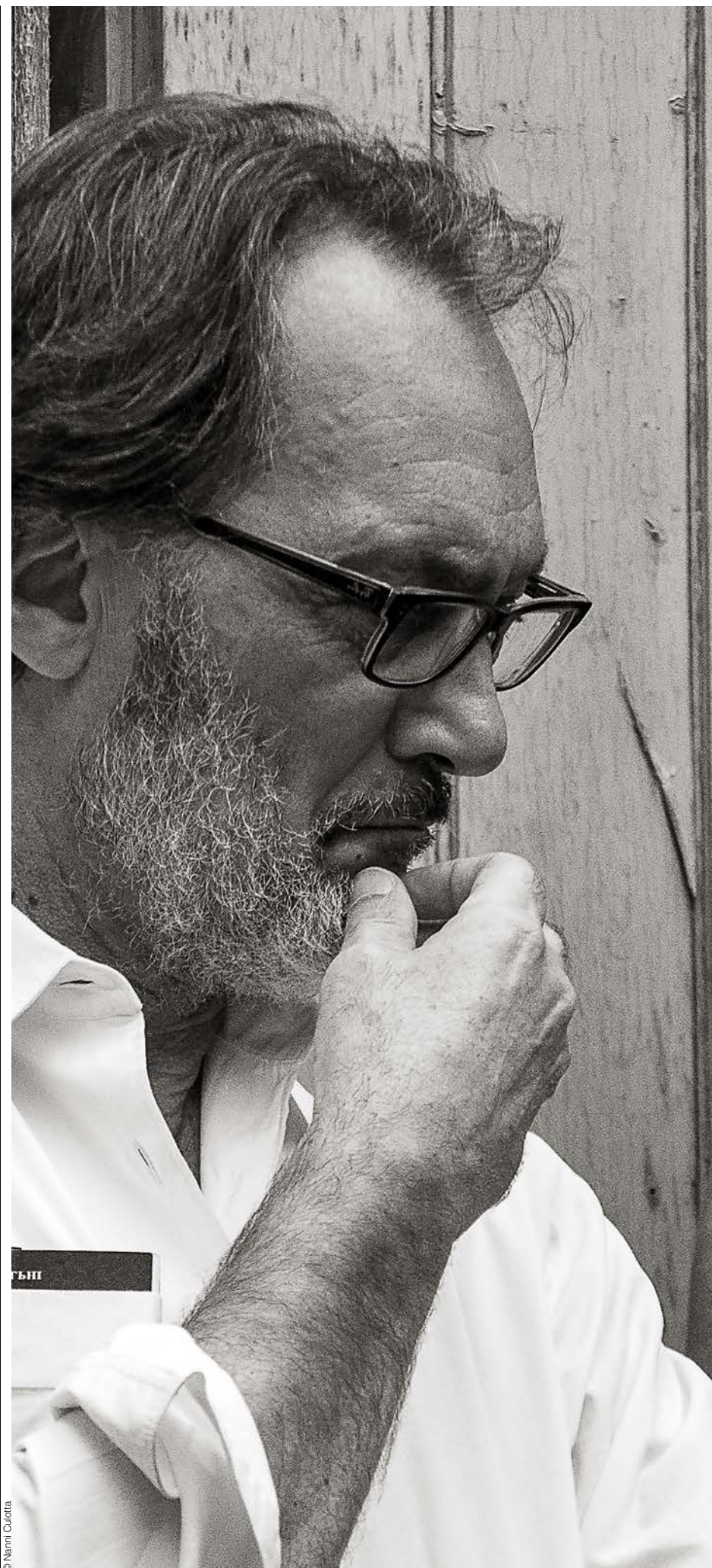


**SULL'ABITARE**  
**VINCENZO**  
**MELLUSO**  
**VINCENT**  
**VAN DUYSSEN**



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I lavori di Vincenzo Melluso e Vincent Van Duysen propongono due pensieri appassionati sul modo di progettare per abitare l'architettura, riportandoci ai valori fondamentali del fare architettura oggi.

Qui i luoghi dell'abitare si esprimono in un equilibrio delicato e raffinato, tra conoscenza della tradizione e dell'innovazione, capace di dare un senso profondo alle cose. Due esperienze emblematiche, fondate su un forte impegno civile, in cui la molteplicità degli elementi utilizzati trova sempre una giusta sintesi formale senza cadere mai nei vani formalismi e nelle chimere dell'high-tech che sono purtroppo diventati alcuni dei caratteri più negativi ed evidenti assunti dalla nostra disciplina nell'epoca attuale



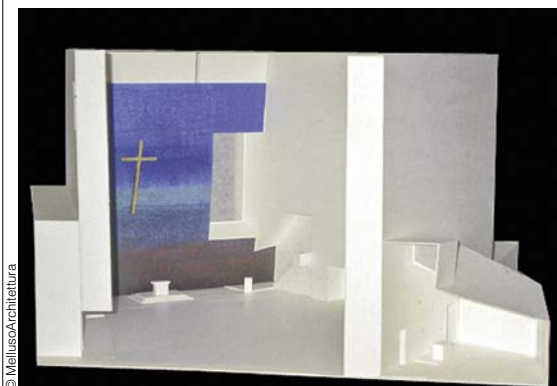
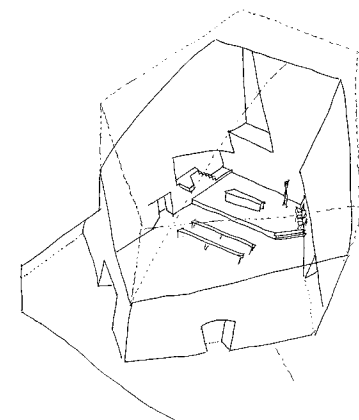
**Vincenzo Melluso** (1955)  
 La sua attività progettuale è stata spesso al centro dell'attenzione della critica, venendo documentata su varie pubblicazioni e riviste. Nel 2000 fonda lo studio MellusoArchitettura e dal 2006 è professore ordinario di Progettazione Architettonica presso l'Università di Palermo nella quale si laureò

*Ora ho osservato con più attenzione la mia scrivania e ho concluso che non ci si può cavare niente di buono. Troppe cose sparse che creano un disordine privo di armonia e di quell'equilibrio tra gli oggetti sparsi che altrimenti rende tollerabile qualsiasi disordine.*  
 Franz Kafka

Sulla questione dell'abitare mi sollecita a scrivere Nicola Di Battista. Chiede il mio punto di vista. Bella sfida oggi tentare di rimettere ordine su questioni così cruciali per la condizione della vita dell'uomo, con la consapevolezza che tanto si è scritto, in modo autorevole, e tanto si continua a scrivere e a fare, a volte con alla base tanti fraintendimenti. Ci provo comunque. In questo tentativo di mettere in ordine alcune mie considerazioni sul tema, vorrei però procedere attraverso alcuni 'prestiti'. Nell'accingermi allora a scrivere mi tornano in mente due esperienze diverse tra loro: una legata alla musica, l'altra alla letteratura. Esperienze, quindi, non esattamente nel solco della disciplina del progetto di architettura, ma certamente contigue e che spesso si intersecano. Citarle, in questa circostanza, lo considero estremamente utile per fare emergere il mio punto di vista. Ho la precisa consapevolezza di quante analogie si possono riscontrare tra la composizione

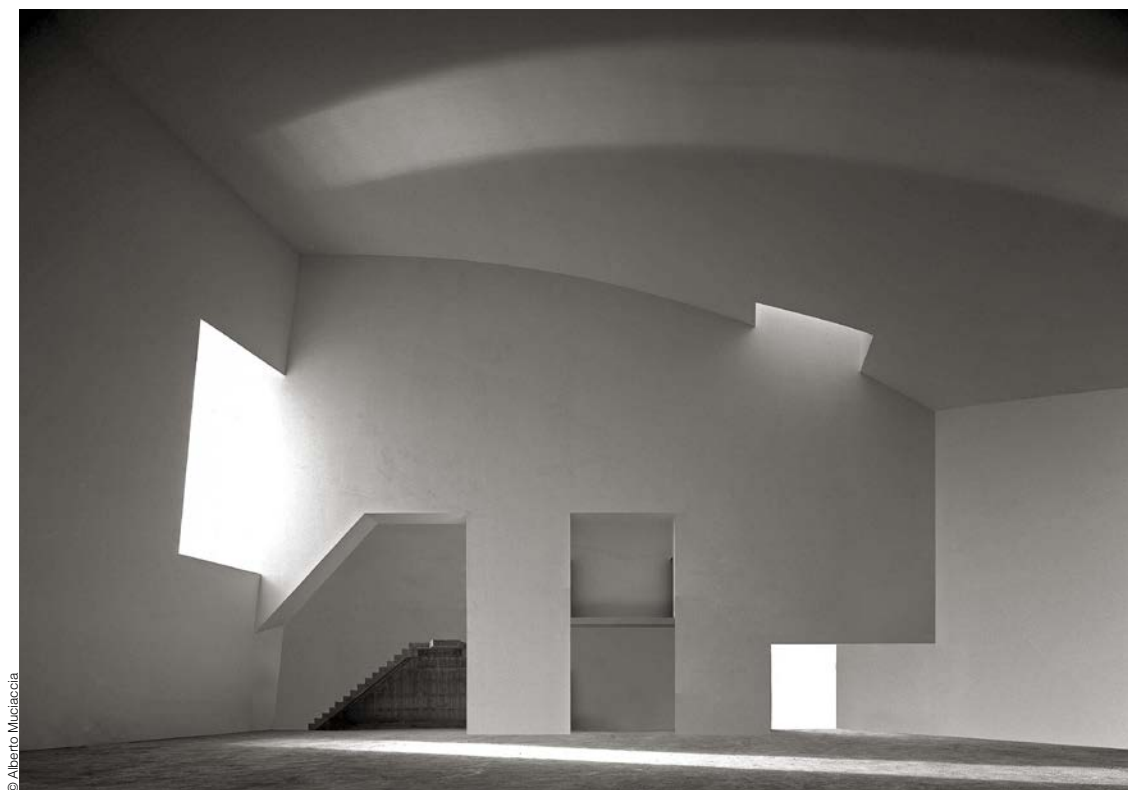
di un brano musicale e di un testo letterario. Per modalità di ideazione, sensibilità e carica evocativa delle migliori esperienze possiamo certamente ricondurle alla costruzione dell'architettura, quindi dello spazio dell'abitare. Proprio nei giorni scorsi riascoltavo alcuni brani dello straordinario musicista americano John Cage, ne ricordo adesso solo uno: *In a Landscape*. Un brano composto da Cage nell'ormai lontano 1948, settant'anni fa. Perché ricordarlo in questa circostanza? Desidero rammentarlo per la sua straordinaria capacità di fare convivere modernità e conoscenza del passato, innovazione e tradizione, in un equilibrio tanto delicato e raffinato, attraverso una profonda conoscenza della disciplina musicale e della sua storia. Cage crea delle atmosfere straordinarie, così come il brano appena ricordato, uno dei suoi più coinvolgenti: una grande armonia. È forse quello che manca oggi nelle nostre città? Proprio nell'insediamento umano per antonomasia? Adesso il mio ricordo si volge a una lettura ormai passata, ma sempre viva nella mia mente per il valore etico che emerge dalle pagine del libro. Il pensiero è all'appassionante *Memorie di Adriano* di Marguerite Yourcenar. Un libro più o meno coevo al brano citato di Cage, almeno nella sua prima edizione (1951). Qui la Yourcenar utilizza la figura dell'imperatore romano per sostenere con

vigore la necessità di un impegno fondato su una forte coscienza civile, un grande senso etico. Un passaggio del libro della scrittrice francese mi pare opportuno adesso ricordare: "... costruire significa collaborare con la Terra, imprimere il segno dell'uomo su un paesaggio che ne resterà modificato per sempre; contribuire inoltre a quella lenta trasformazione che è la vita stessa delle città. Quanta cura, per escogitare la collocazione esatta di un ponte e d'una fontana, per dare a una strada di montagna la curva più economica che è al tempo stesso la più pura! ... Costruire un porto, significa fecondare la bellezza d'un golfo. Fondare biblioteche, è come costruire ancora granai



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## OPINIONI A CONFRONTO VINCENZO MELLUSO



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pubblici, ammassare riserve contro un inverno dello spirito che da molti indizi, mio malgrado, vedo venire". È certo un grande richiamo alla necessità di dare misura e senso alle cose. Questo si richiede nella costruzione della dimensione dell'abitare: un ritrovato valore etico nella nostra azione. Si tratta allora di tornare a riprendere un percorso che, temo, in questi ultimi tempi si sia smarrito, in particolare in Italia. Una traccia da ricostruire allontanandosi il più possibile dai rivoli di una ricerca di clamore, troppo spesso inutile, e molto frequentemente segnata da una spiccata autoreferenzialità. Abbiamo un compito, noi architetti, di grande responsabilità civile nel dovere pensare gli spazi per l'abitare. In questo senso è necessario che, soprattutto le nuove generazioni, si rivolgano ai loro compiti con maggiore misura, avendo cura di acquisire la consapevolezza di quanto (e variegato) pensiero può esserci intorno all'architettura. Un pensiero che può includere notevoli sollecitazioni per concepire i luoghi dell'abitare. A partire da queste iniziali riflessioni, la mia convinzione si fonda sull'idea che per costruire spazi dell'abitare adeguati è necessario per prima cosa imparare a vedere. Bisogna addestrarsi e poi impegnarsi a comprendere quanto sta intorno a noi, com'è



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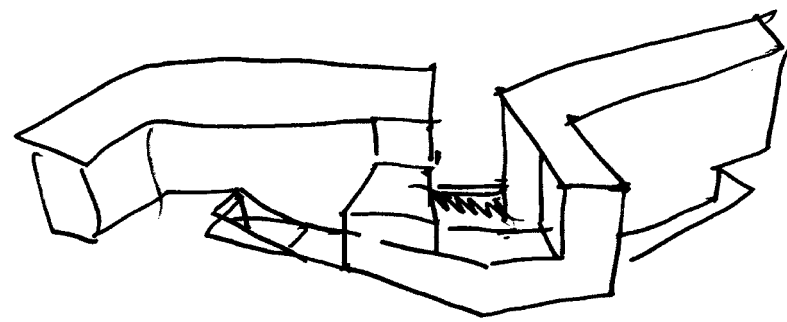
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**Pagina a fronte: progetto della chiesa e del centro parrocchiale Gesù Maestro a Potenza (1999-2010). In alto: schizzo di studio. Al centro: modello dello spazio interno della chiesa per un affresco di Erich Demetz. In basso: veduta dell'aula assembleare, dove lo spazio è fortemente caratterizzato da**

**elementi che scavano il volume primario e dal sistema di luce naturale. In questa pagina: Casa Barbera a Messina (2009-2013). Lo spazio domestico è fortemente articolato da un minuzioso lavoro compositivo sul solaio di copertura dove dei lucernari, diversamente posizionati, inondano di luce naturale gli ambienti**



**In questa pagina: progetto di riconfigurazione dell'area di piazza del Ponte a Mendrisio, in Svizzera (2010). Schizzo di studio e modello del progetto di riqualificazione, elaborati in occasione del concorso a inviti promosso dall'amministrazione comunale d'intesa con l'Accademia di Mendrisio**



composta la realtà che osserviamo e come si struttura il sistema delle relazioni che la attraversa. Un richiamo a dare 'senso' al nostro fare. Una riflessione che scaturisce dall'osservazione degli strumenti che oggi, in numero sempre maggiore e diversificato, per forma e contenuto – spesso però senza un adeguato e autorevole apparato critico – costruiscono una descrizione dove l'architettura non è altro che un gioco pretestuoso di forme, frequentemente stravaganti e difficilmente comprensibili, a volte anche inabitabili. Si estende sempre più una condizione dell'architettura diffusamente effimera, carente di basi solide e non legittimate da un pensiero attento e rigoroso. Bisogna allora ritrovarsi in una ricerca disciplinare capace ancora di fondarsi su una salda logica compositiva e sulla costruzione di strategici sistemi di relazione tra le parti. Tutto questo dedicando attenzione e misura ai dispositivi, alle gerarchie, ai meccanismi, ai linguaggi che si rendono necessari nella costruzione della forma architettonica, della struttura della città: dello spazio dell'abitare. Circa vent'anni fa ebbi una lunga conversazione con Alberto Sartoris. Nella sua casa-studio di Rue des Bons Enfants, a Cossanay, nella Svizzera francese, chiedevo al Maestro, protagonista e figura poliedrica del Movimento Moderno, di offrirmi alcune valutazioni sulle possibili prospettive per i nuovi architetti.

La sua risposta non era certamente una semplice formula, né uno slogan come i tanti che oggi ci assediano, ma un denso e ricco concentrato di esperienze e conoscenze su cui ebbi più volte, anche in seguito all'incontro, occasione di riflettere e che adesso, in questa circostanza, desidero testualmente riprendere: "Per conformarsi alle prospettive tracciate dalle continue metamorfosi delle arti, tenendo ben presente che nell'architettura non vi è evoluzione" precisava nel 1992 Sartoris "le nuove generazioni devono ... affrontare e risolvere i problemi inerenti al significato dei luoghi (alla loro storia e al loro sviluppo), all'architettura come forma, funzione e geometria territoriale, alla moltiplicazione mediterranea degli spazi e delle visioni interne degli edifici, all'inserimento dell'architettura nel tessuto urbano non come elemento facente da sé, ma come corpo creatore di ambienti, atmosfere, climi. ... Nell'attuale epoca di crisi e di sconvolgimenti, crisi e sconvolgimenti che il mondo conosce da tempi immemorabili – chissà perché poi alla fine, allora come oggi, il mondo è sempre in un'epoca di crisi e sconvolgimenti – il ruolo dell'architettura, dell'urbanismo e perciò della vita della città, risulta sempre lo stesso: la ricerca, ogni volta più impellente, della 'casa della felicità'. Una bella lezione, che può aiutarci a riportare ordine anche sulla scrivania di Franz Kafka!



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**Vincent Van Duysen (1962)**  
Fonda nel 1990 il suo studio ad Anversa, nel suo paese d'origine, in Belgio. La sua progettazione spazia dal product design alla progettazione architettonica su grande scala. Nel 2016 è stato nominato Art Director dei brand italiani Molteni&C e Dada



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Ho cominciato a studiare architettura in Belgio, nei primi anni Ottanta, all'apice del periodo postmoderno. Di lì a poco sarebbero giunti il decostruttivismo di Zaha Hadid, Daniel Libeskind, OMA e Coop-Himmelb(l)au, e successivamente il post-decostruttivismo, con tutti i suoi relativi formalismi e colori. All'interno di questo particolare contesto culturale, i miei studi a Ghent erano completamente concentrati sulla 'forma' dell'architettura, sulla progettazione di singoli 'oggetti' dalla natura forte e definita. Se guardo indietro al periodo di allora, il mio approccio calmo e contemplativo nei confronti degli spazi e degli oggetti è l'esatto contrario; ma ero giovane, dovevo ancora formarmi e trovare un mio linguaggio. Nel 1985, subito dopo aver terminato gli studi, ho incominciato a lavorare presso lo studio di Aldo Cibic, uno dei membri fondatori del Gruppo Memphis insieme a Ettore Sottsass, Alessandro Mendini e molti altri. Penso che sia stato durante la mia permanenza in Italia che iniziai a elaborare un approccio più personale al design, una mia visione che, lentamente, iniziò a costruirsi da sola. Ricordo ancora: stavamo ideando e producendo famiglie di mobili e accessori con il solo obiettivo di creare un senso di qualità e armonia all'interno della casa. L'approccio era sostanzialmente modulare, conforme alla pratica

di quei giorni; tuttavia, i mobili descrivevano lo spazio in maniera architettonica. E questo mi affascinava. Dopo questa esperienza a Milano, ho lavorato con Jean de Meulder, un decoratore belga, immergendomi completamente nel mondo del cosiddetto 'interior design'. È stato un periodo importante, mi ha permesso di capire come le persone abitano le loro case; ho scoperto un'arte di vivere che, più tardi, credo di essere riuscito a plasmare anche nei miei lavori. Sto usando la parola 'design', sebbene in realtà mi abbia sempre messo a disagio, così come la parola 'designer'. Forse è perché sono un architetto e vedo le cose con una prospettiva più ampia. Per molti anni ho combattuto contro una certa idea superficiale di design, che oggi è in realtà una produzione seriale, spesso macchiata dalla mediocrità. In passato c'era una certa integrità che ora è andata perduta; ci sono pochissimi architetti che prestano attenzione al vero benessere. Lo hanno fatto Victor Horta e Henry van de Velde in Belgio, Achille Castiglioni o Carlo Scarpa in Italia. Ma oggi abbiamo troppe archistar che ignorano ciò che esiste all'interno delle mura che costruiscono. L'interior design, come oggi viene chiamato, non è un'arte minore. È anzi essenziale e non può essere svalutato: è dove tutto trova una propria sintesi.

**In questa pagina. A sinistra: modello in sezione del nuovo megastore de La Rinascente, inaugurato a Roma, in via del Tritone nel 2018. Lo studio Van Duysen si è occupato della progettazione dell'atrio monumentale e della facciata.**

**In basso: modello di BA Residence, realizzata a Wilrijk, in Belgio, nel 2014. L'abitazione si ispira alla villa Krefeld di Mies Van der Rohe e alle case in mattone rosso, realizzate nello stesso quartiere dall'architetto locale Nachman Kaplansky**

## OPINIONI A CONFRONTO VINCENT VAN DUYSSEN



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**In questa pagina.**  
**In alto: veduta interna di VO Residence. L'accurata scelta di materiali in sintonia con le pareti in mattoni, regala eleganza e raffinatezza all'abitazione.**  
**A destra: modello del progetto di una torre residenziale per Jeddah, caratterizzato dalla scelta del materiale color oro e dalla rigorosa griglia strutturale visibile nei quattro prospetti.**

**In basso: due vedute degli spazi interni di BS Residence. In questo caso i materiali rustici, anche se trattati con una certa accuratezza, evocano la vita rurale.**  
**Pagina a fronte: scorcio dell'interno della C Penthouse. Il soffitto in cemento e in legno grezzo sono un chiaro riferimento agli antichi magazzini presenti lungo la banchina del fiume Schelda**

e continuo a pensare come architetto anche quando si tratta di comporre un interno. Del resto, il filo rosso che lega insieme i miei lavori, su tutte le scale, rimane un'attenzione particolare alla percezione dello spazio architettonico, da percepire attraverso i sensi: uno spazio visivo, tattile, olfattivo. Su tutte le scale ho sempre messo al centro il benessere delle persone, in modo rispettoso, nel tentativo di donare un'anima e una personalità a degli spazi in cui vivere bene, in cui relazionarsi realmente con gli altri. Circondati da calore, bellezza, tranquillità.

Del resto, come si può progettare una casa senza conoscerne la ritualità? Bisogna essere in grado di percepire le sue funzioni indispensabili, se si vuole darle forma senza cadere nel formalismo oggi purtroppo dominante, o nell'high-tech.

Devo ammettere di essere distante da queste tendenze. Per esempio, amo i materiali naturali, come la pietra, il legno e il lino. Sono continuamente ispirato da tutta la storia dell'architettura: dai templi egizi di Luxor; dalle strutture tribali del Marocco; dalle chiese romane; dal lavoro di Andrea Palladio, Carlo Scarpa, Tadao Ando, Luis Barragán. I materiali, le sequenze visive, le proporzioni, l'essenza architettonica di questi spazi mi entusiasmano;

è anche attraverso questi riferimenti che ho imparato a giocare con le materie prime per raggiungere quella consapevolezza sensoriale e quella sensualità che spero caratterizzino i miei progetti.

Non sto cercando di inventare nuove forme. Il mio obiettivo è solo quello di creare spazi carichi di emozione, con cui le persone vogliono relazionarsi e vivere. Ho l'ambizione di farle abitare meglio, creando i luoghi, gli arredi che li aiutano a farlo. E in questa ricerca, non può esistere un'architettura dell'interno separata dal resto dell'architettura.

Mi piace che le persone si riferiscano al mio lavoro parlandone come un qualcosa 'senza tempo', lo apprezzo, ma per me è importante che il mio lavoro continui a essere contemporaneo, sorprendente, e che entri in contatto con le persone sul piano emotivo. Ci troviamo nel mezzo di un mondo di consumo istantaneo, in cui tutto è facile, alla nostra portata, immediato; voglio offrire un contrappeso. Voglio creare spazi per calmare i sensi e permettere di concentrarsi sull'istante presente. Tendiamo a essere sempre più distanti dall'essenza di ciò che è l'arte del vivere, non sappiamo più cosa significhi. Voglio rallentare e rendere l'uomo più consapevole di ciò che lo circonda. È un modo di vivere una vita più cosciente. È il solo modo di abitare.



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## OPINIONI A CONFRONTO



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Reggio Calabria has a different value than doing it in Rome. After the earthquake, for example, we went to Macerata, and there we made our assembly. These are important occasions to reflect together in order to build a political agenda common to all the parties.

A crucial question, connected to our profession of architects and engineers, is the inexplicable split between the academy on the one hand and the professionals on the other. It is a legacy of the past, a past in which mistakes have been made that have given rise to prejudices.

On the one hand, there was an academic world that looked at professionals from top to bottom, also taking advantage of its role to have professional profit. On the other hand, a professional world that has been overly corporate, which has always thought more about defending its role based on the norm rather than the content. This situation has not only removed the world of professions from the world of universities but has also created conflicts. Never as in this moment we must bring these two worlds together. Because the professions need to update themselves coherently with the times we're living, to become aware of what has changed and therefore to reform. And the university needs the professions, because it must teach the theory but also the know-how, and a job is learned only by doing it. In other areas this commonality is much stronger, just look at medicine where it is historically so, and this gives it an extraordinary strength. We should make a common agenda in which we define the project of what it means today to “do architecture” and “do engineering” in Italy, and then pursue it together. Otherwise, we will be completely overwhelmed: we must rebuild ourselves starting from our skills and the redefinition of the role we have in society, or else there will always be a marginalization of our technical professions. Even more so today, where the territorial proximity has been lost, among many other reasons, due to the great revolution of digital technology. The sense of community and place has disappeared.

Dwelling, building, have not been able to defend their modernity. They seemed an old thing, a trivial comfort, and this led to a de-skilling of professional activity and a removal of young people from it. The fact that our future generations no longer see today in architecture or civil engineering one of their first choices, derives not only from the fact that there is little work, but also

from the fact that they associate these disciplines with the past. This reflection I'm making is deeply linked to one of the themes that I see today as fundamental: that of the digital. Any function that will be carried out in the future has in the digital an indispensable and fundamental instrument. Architecture and civil engineering, to renew themselves, must become protagonists of this revolution. And all this is inextricably linked to our country! A country that was among the first to start a process of modernization, but which never ended it. We must contribute to update this country, with all that technology puts us in place and all our cultural background. And modernization also involves making progress in defining the new roles, today, of architects and engineers. Let's take the topic of management, for example. In a complex world like today's, it is important not only to build but also to manage the built. So why should management not be done by an architect or a civil engineer, who have the capacity, the vision and the cultural baggage to do so? Instead, our world has delegated this profession to others, as if it considered managing something minor. It has delegated it to other professionals which by 'nature', due to their formation, do not have the right skills. Today, our profession must regain possession of these spaces, without limiting herself to the idea that the professional activity consists only in that of the designer, according to an almost nineteenth-century view of the figure of the architect and the civil engineer.

The training profiles must be reviewed in a radical way. In a world that changes so fast, having basic skills is fundamental; only by having these, one can adapt to those changes. The university must therefore maintain, as it is in its tradition, this basic formative function. And, at the same time, we must be able to look at our professional figures in the logic of their modernity. Which means that today the architects, the engineers, can no longer be just designers. The building process is increasingly complex: the engineer and the architect are not only creative figures, but they are also the integrators of a process, they must be able to manage this complexity. The experience of the 'Rectors Conference' helped me to define these ideas. Being its president and, at the same time, rector of the 'Federico II' University in Naples was important. The 'Federico II' University, one of the first three in Italy, pursues a policy that must

necessarily refer to a national or rather international vision. Being at the same time the 'President of the Conference of Rectors' has therefore allowed me to look at our university according to a much broader logic, understanding what the limits and opportunities were and are. It has reinforced my idea that, today, university training and research can be the most important lever to reduce the gaps inherent Italian society: having a competitive university system in the South means rebalancing the country as well. But to do this, we need to get out of a welfare logic towards the universities of the south. We need to understand how to make southern universities have a level of competitiveness that makes them attractive to young people. From my point of view, it is possible. It takes a strong government capacity and targeted policies: policies that look towards increasing territorial quality. What I brought from Naples in my national experience is precisely the concept of diversity. The south is traditionally, and Naples in particular, a place capable of metabolizing diversity. Naples was a great capital, a place where plebs and nobility stood in the same building. I tried to bring the goodness of this conviction: the ability not to separate, but to put together, which is much more difficult.

I would like to continue in this direction by influencing formation and research with this idea of this contamination. We have already begun to do so: the renovation of the San Giovanni area I was talking before has brought together very different skills, private enterprise and university.

But above all, I would like to use the new technologies to ensure that the cultural heritage of which we are large depositors may become a more shared asset: not only for few, but for all. The great distances that are there today in society, are often due to cultural distances. If we could have a more popular and shared culture, we would have solved most of our problems. And this is to be done starting with the University.

## A DESK IN DISORDER

### Vincenzo Melluso

*Now I have looked more carefully at my desk and I have arrived at the conclusion that nothing good can be done. Too many scattered things that create a disorder without any harmony nor balance between the disseminated objects, that otherwise makes any disorder tolerable.*

Franz Kafka

Nicola Di Battista urges me to write on the question of dwelling. He asks for my point of view. Today, it is an interesting challenge to try to put order in such crucial issues for the condition of human life, with the awareness that so much has been written, by renowned authors, and so much is being written and done, sometimes with so many misunderstandings at the base. I'll try anyways.

In this attempt to put order in some of my considerations regarding subject, I would like to proceed through some 'loans'. Starting to write, two different experiences come back to my mind: one linked to music, the other to literature. Experiences, therefore, not exactly inherent of the discipline of the architectural project, but certainly contiguous and often overlapping. In this circumstance, I consider quoting them extremely useful to attest my point of view.

I am aware of how many similarities can be found between the composition of a piece of music and a literary text. By means of conception, sensitivity and evocative charge, we certainly can associate them to architectural construction, therefore to the space of dwelling.

Just in recent days, I was listening again to some tunes by the extraordinary American musician John Cage; amongst them, I remember one in particular: In a Landscape. A song composed by Cage in the now distant 1948, seventy years ago. Why do I remember it, in this circumstance? Because of its extraordinary ability to bring together modernity and knowledge of the past, innovation and tradition, in a delicate and refined balance, through a deep knowledge of the musical discipline and its history. Cage creates extraordinary atmospheres, and the song just mentioned is one of his most engaging ones: a real 'harmony'. Is it, perhaps, exactly what today is missing in our cities? In, said otherwise, the human settlement by 'antonomasia', the way of living in modernity?

Now my memory turns herself to a

bygone reading, always alive in my mind due to the ethical value that emerges from the pages of the book. My mind goes towards the incredible Memoirs of Hadrian by Marguerite Yourcenar. A coeval book to Cage's song, at least in its first edition (1951). Here, Yourcenar uses the figure of the Roman emperor to vigorously support the need for commitment based on a strong civil conscience, a great ethical sense. I feel that I have to remember to us all a passage from her book: "... to build means to collaborate with the Earth, to impress the mark of man on a landscape that will remain forever modified; to contribute to the slow transformation that is the life of the city itself. How much care, to devise the exact location of a bridge and a fountain, to give a mountain road a curve that is at the same time the cheapest and the purest! ... Building a port means to fertilize the beauty of a gulf. Establishing libraries is like building public granaries, gathering reserves against a 'winter of the spirit' that from many clues, unfortunately, I see coming ". It undoubtedly is a great example to the need to give meaning to things. This is what is required in the construction of the dimension of dwelling: a rediscovered ethical value in our actions. It is therefore a matter of going back to resume a path that, I fear, has been lost in recent times, particularly in Italy. A track that needs to be rebuilt as distant as possible from the search for clamor, too often useless, and very often marked by self-referentiality.

We architects have a task of great civil responsibility in having to think about spaces for living. In this sense it is necessary that, especially the new generations, apply themselves to their tasks with greater measure, taking care to acquire the awareness of how much (and how variegated) thinking there may be around architecture.

A consideration that can include considerable inducement in conceiving the places of dwelling. Starting from these initial thoughts, my conviction is based on the idea that in order to build adequate spaces of dwelling, it first is necessary to learn how to see. We must train ourselves and then commit to understand what surrounds us, how the reality that we observe is composed and how the relations that crosses it are characterized. Mine, it's a call to give meaning to our doing. A reflection that arises from the observation of the tools that today, in an ever greater and more diversified number, in terms of form and content - often without an

adequate and authoritative critical 'apparatus' - construct a description where architecture is nothing but a pretentious play of forms, frequently extravagant and difficult to understand, sometimes even unlivable. It is becoming more and more an architectural condition to be widely ephemeral, lacking in solid foundations and not legitimized by a careful and rigorous thought. It is therefore necessary to find oneself in a disciplinary research that is still capable of being founded on a solid compositional logic and on the construction of strategic relations between the parties. All this, while giving attention and measure to the devices, hierarchies, mechanisms, languages that become necessary in the construction of the architectural form, of the structure of the city: of the living space. About twenty years ago, I had a long conversation with Alberto Sartoris. In his atelier in Rue des Bons Enfants, in Cossanay, the French-speaking part of Switzerland, I asked the 'Maestro', a protagonist and multifaceted figure of the Modern Movement, to offer me some evaluations on the possible perspectives for the new architects. His answer was certainly not a simple formula, nor a slogan like the many who besiege us today, but a dense and rich concentration of experiences and knowledge on which I had several times, even after the meeting, reflected and now, in this circumstance, I would like to quote: "To conform to the perspectives traced by the continuous metamorphosis of the arts, bearing in mind that there is no evolution in architecture" stated Sartoris in 1992 "the new generations must ... face and solve the problems inherent the meaning of places (their history and their development), inherent the idea of architecture as a form, function and territorial geometry, inherent the Mediterranean multiplication of spaces and internal visions of buildings, inherent the insertion of architecture into the urban fabric, not as an element making self, but as a creator body of environments, atmospheres, climates. ... In the current era of crisis and upheavals, crises and upheavals that the world has actually always known - who knows why, in the end, as much yesterday as today, the world is always in an era of crisis and upheaval - the role of architecture , of urbanism and therefore of the life of the city, it is always the same: the ever more compelling search for the 'house of happiness' ". A nice lesson, which can help us bring order even on Franz Kafka's desk!

## 'ON DWELLING'

### Vincent Van Duysen

I began studying architecture in Belgium, in the early 1980s, at the height of the postmodern period. That was just a few years before the beginning of the Deconstructivism practiced by Zaha Hadid, Daniel Libeskind, OMA and Coop-Himmelb(l)au, or of Post-deconstructivism with all its related formalisms and colours. Besides from this cultural context, my studies at Ghent were completely focused on 'form' and designing single objects of a decidedly strong nature. In retrospect, my own calm, contemplative approach to spaces and products is the complete opposite; but as a young man I still had to invent and find my own language. We could say that I was a pupil of postmodernism, but soon enough I started looking for something else.

In 1985, right after finishing my studies, I spent the early years of my career immersed in the world of furniture and interior design. My first working experience was an internship at the studio of Aldo Cibic, one of the founding members of the Memphis Group together with Ettore Sottsass, Alessandro Mendini and many others. It was during my stay in Italy that I think my personal view on design started to build itself. I remember we were composing families of furniture and accessories aimed at creating a sense of quality and harmony within the home. The approach was basically modular, compliant to the practice of those days; yet, the furniture described space in an architectural manner. And this appealed to me.

After this experience in Milan, I worked with decorators such as Jean De Meulder in my home country. This was for me an important period to understand how people live in their homes, to somehow discover an art of living, so that I could mould it, later on, into my works.

I'm using the word design, but in fact I have always felt uncomfortable with the words design or designer. Maybe it's because I'm an architect and I see things in a wider perspective. For some years I've been battling with design, which nowadays in reality is serial production, often tainted by mediocrity. In the past, there was a certain integrity which is now gone; there are very few architects that pay attention to wellbeing. Victor Horta and Henry Van de Velde did. The same in Italy with Achille Castiglioni or Carlo Scarpa. But today, we have too many star-architects who disregard what

exists inside the walls they build. 'Interior design', as they call it, is not minor. It's essential and cannot be devaluated, it's where it all ends up. But let's go back to us. In 1990 I established my own practice: I started putting into practice what I had learnt during my apprenticeship. This consisted into aiming at a highly purified essentiality, while adapting to the story of every environment and giving care to every detail. Ever since this starting moment – now nearly 30 years ago – the most important thing has always been to consider architecture as a profession dedicated to humanity; and that means starting from the architecture of places, whose inhabitants need to feel protected and relaxed, right through to the furniture and the objects around them that are necessary to live a comfortable and happy life.

This is why, for me, the relationship with the client plays an essential role. It's together with them that I relish a vision on the art of living, in which the architect's approach merges with the client's expectation. I tailor spaces in which they can feel comfortable. Empathy and knowledge of human nature are the most important qualities in architecture, because you not only make better designs for the client, but you can also translate the concepts better to the project's builders. Unfortunately, there are very few architects that pay attention to wellbeing.

I'm concentrating myself on what is commonly referred as 'interior design', but I would like to underline how I've never seen it as being severed from architecture: interiors are architecture. Interiors and exteriors are closely interwoven. And I persist in thinking as an architect even when dealing with 'interior design'. The guideline shared by my works, at all scales, remains a particular focus on perception of space: visual and sensory, physical, tactile. And at all scales I have always put the wellbeing of people at the center, in a respectful way, to grant soul and personality to spaces in which to live well and relate well to others. Amidst warmth, beauty, tranquility.

After all, how can you design a house if you can't understand its rituality? You must be able to sense its indispensable functions, if you want to give it form without straying into today's dominant formalism or high-tech. I must avow a love of natural materials, such as stone, wood and linen, and a constant inspiration from the Egyptian temples in Luxor; the tribal structures of Morocco; the Roman churches; or the work of Andrea Palladio,

Carlo Scarpa, Tadao Ando and Luis Barragán. The materials, the visual sequences, the spatial proportions, the architectural essence of these spaces thrill me; it is also through these references that I learned to play with archaism and raw materials to reach the physical awareness and sensuality of my projects. I'm not trying to invent new forms. My goal is just to create spaces and interiors and furniture that are loaded with emotion, that people want to embrace and live with.

I have the ambition of making people live better, creating the places, the spaces, the furnishings that help them in living well. And in this quest, there cannot exist an architecture of the interior, separated from the rest of the architecture. I like people referring to my work as timeless, but for me it is important for my work to continue being contemporary, surprising, and to reach people at an emotional level. While we find ourselves in the middle of a world of instant consumption, where everything is easy within our reach and is immediate through social media, I want to offer a counterbalance. I want to create spaces to calm down the senses and to focus on the instant present. As an architect, I need to take the responsibility to make people aware of the art of living. People tend to deepen themselves less in the essence of what life is all about, they don't know what dwelling means anymore. I want to slow down and make people more aware of what surrounds us. It's a way of living a more conscious life.

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## TOWARDS AN ITALIAN ARCHITECTURAL CULTURE FOR EUROPE

### Hans Kollhoff

The 'future' has become a marketing slogan at the service of dubious politics and of the exploitation of the quality of life in European cities, due to shameless mass consumption. The dead capital has always been the only one taking advantage of the 'future' and of 'progress', while the landscapes, the villages and the cities are sold off together with their culture and the life of their inhabitants. The trivialization of the environment and the consequent brutalization of social habits are reaching today a dimension that can silence any pompous debate on architecture and urbanism, if it were not for the fact that architects are actors and pilots in this unworthy game. In this context, putting the word "future" in our mouths is tendentious and irresponsible. 'Future' is contaminated.

I will talk about something that today, in Italy, is not allowed to be done, Weiterbauen: to continue building with the matter inherited to us with the historical centers. This means expanding, superimposing, restructuring and sometimes even demolishing and building new again, provided the new fits into the historical context without being inferior in terms of quality. Until the early sixties, in Italy, it still was possible to do so; from that moment on, however, an architecture that was initially only seen in the suburbs and rarely appeared in the city, began to establish herself, even in the historical centers. The architecture of modernity that wanted to be revolutionary, posing itself in opposition to traditional urban architecture. The common people in Italy perceived this architecture as a stranger, as an enemy of their own culture and as destruction of the city. This is why the Superintendence (historic preservation authority) established herself, and began to prohibit in the historical centers what over the centuries had always happened in a completely natural way: to continue building with the historical substance. From that moment on, the marvelous centers of Italian cities have not been ruined by modern architecture anymore, and rightfully so. However, they have been transformed into the largest museums in the world from which, step by step, normal life draws back, overwhelmed by the predominant globalized tourism. This tourism, which seems to be the only economic foundation of the old cities, will work well as long as the

authentic life that belongs to the urban structure and its architecture is not yet extinguished. This is the point in which the Italian historical centers have arrived today, with Rome ahead: where preservation, given it is profitable for tourism, is driving away the inhabitants, the workers and finally the tourists; what remains is a dull shopping center. Where the ancient materiality of the city does not appear profitable, the deterioration takes over and along with it the decay of the structure of the city which has been handed down to us. Seen under this point of view, the Superintendence is both a blessing and a curse. This is precisely why it will have to change its philosophy, an anachronistic philosophy that belongs herself to the misery of modernity, to the misery of feeling superior to the old and the proven. Moreover, the modernist trend, a globalized "architecture" mainstream, has degenerated into a vulgar marketing tool, having nothing at all to do with the ideals of modernity and even less with serious urban design or with serious architecture. The challenge for us architects, today, would be this: to oppose globalized contemporary trends, of what still calls itself architecture by means of a real renewal of architecture, a renaissance that arises in continuity with our heritage - not as its mere repetition, but as continuous building to extend the consolidated repertoire handed down to us by history. And this renaissance cannot follow any other principle but a tectonic one. On the other hand, the Superintendence must move away from the absurd assumption, which assumes that the new must constantly stand in contrast to the old, as appearance of the "Zeitgeist". If this renaissance of architecture will find the way to our profession and if we architects will be able again to continue building on a high level, there would no longer be any reason on the part of the Superintendence to forbid us access to the historical centers. We won't have to dispose of the Superintendence, but to open a competent architectural debate with it, leaving aside the administrative fury of an anachronistic ideology: its privilege of being a State in the State, sometimes bordering with divine intangibility, cannot be tolerated longer. There is a need for a liberating public discourse able to reduce bureaucracy and social snobbism, leaving space for younger generations. What is lacking is a competent and incorruptible authority that supports the Superintendence as a mediator between collective memory and individual life, in the interest of new works to be built, which intend to measure themselves

with the historical substance in all their aspects, based on a social responsibility. In this way, our profession would again be required. And architecture, in the original sense, still be possible. Architecture would have a future in Europe. It would certainly be risky. However, why wouldn't a country like Italy, based on its heritage and its historical experience, be confident enough to revitalize this tradition, building in continuity with the historical city, rather than fear the destructive forces of ignorance, stupidity and the pursuit of profit? The Superintendence must face the debate, it can no longer hide behind the mixture of nepotism and a doubtful ideology of historic preservation. Europe should not be afraid, as the French President Emmanuel Macron recently said. Europe is based on democratic debates, on a common culture of free exchange of opinions, on the idea of the sublime and of beauty. These are not values only for intellectuals. Such talk has not been heard by German politicians for too long. I would be surprised, however, if the Italian politicians, representatives of our Roman-European culture, would not follow Macron. There would be something new to do in the old cities for us architects, from whose architecture we could again learn for our craft, rediscovering the joy of working, once again proud of what we have created. We would no longer be condemned to accept the absurdity of the periphery, which will still torment us in the future with its globalized form that brings along with her devastating consequences for human coexistence. No other country like Italy has the potential to take a conscious position towards globalization while remaining faithful to its culture. I am not speaking about Milan which, prone to American capitalism, is accepting neighborhoods that could appear as well in China or Abu Dhabi. We should be careful not to mimic the American model. We need a culture-based policy in Europe, guided by living culture rather than an economic-financial force. Therefore, in architecture we need a dynamic that comes from our heritage, from the architectural substance of the historical centers which made this living culture possible, and symbolizes it until today. For what reason shouldn't be possible also today the commendable and radical change of paradigm that has happened in Florence, around Ponte Vecchio, after the destruction of the war: from a monstrous conception of modernization to a sensitive relationship with the heritage handed down to us, towards a new architecture that takes into

consideration traditional parcellation, public space and traditional materiality. By doing so, new quarters have risen, districts that the tourist cannot distinguish from the medieval ones and even we architects have difficulties to recognize the breaking point between the old and the new. Only a little at a time, with careful observation, we notice the balconies, the horizontal windows and then the exposed concrete, whose surface has been hammered and for this reason today has such a beautiful patina. Yes, precisely in this cautious reconciliation with traditional craftsmanship, one discovers the fascination of the great work of Florentine post-war reconstruction, even though the modernist architect may still be inclined to turn up his nose. If coming from Palazzo Pitti we look towards the north side of the Lungarno and between the Uffizi and the Palazzo di Ferragamo, we observe a lively and articulate front, composed of a succession of old, restructured and reconstructed buildings, juxtaposed in a playful and incomparable complexity; from this example, we can understand that history and modernity do not necessarily have to stand one against the other in a contrasting or even hostile way. Michelucci left us a marvelous example. His early sketches of post-war reconstruction showed megastructures coming from another planet, terraced houses floating on a highway along the Lungarno, just as along the East River in Manhattan. Two years later, Michelucci built a remarkable building on the corner of a block in via de 'Guicciardini, and not far from it a modest but grandiose little building that I go back to observe every time I'm in Florence, because I still have not found the key to understand it: its presence has something Japanese, while at the same time it coherently inserts itself in this extraordinary context. We Europeans, and especially you Italians, with your marvelous culture, which up to now has harmonized herself with the admirable ideal of a shared social life that is manifested also in the architecture of the historical centers, have something else to counter to uncontrolled globalization and all the right, indeed the duty, to be an example for the world. I love this land and its inhabitants, its cities, its buildings. I and who else would not very much like to be able to redesign an ancient building and to realize something new which is recognizable only at a second glance, starting from its respectable state. Something of which Aldo Rossi, Ernesto Rogers, and perhaps even Brunelleschi and Palladio would have rejoiced for.

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## ARCHITECTURE COMMUNITY AND URBAN PLANNING

### Adriano Olivetti

On sending this new architectural review to press, we should like to give the reader, in a brief examination of our purpose, some idea of the problems that have concerned the editors, and that may offer a cultural justification for their efforts. The supernatural contribution of Zodiac would not be enough in itself to justify our undertaking: it should be said that among us there is a loftier intention even if, we fear, its full realization may be beyond our powers. The architect, alone or as the recognized leader of a group assisting and interpreting him, is a natural participant in the forms, in the new directions ever more vividly marked out by the thought and cultural developments of his time. From the sea of the unconscious in which these forms are stirred into life, emerge like shining islands the precepts of the masters and geniuses who were the first to reveal them to us. These forms, as we know, have been subject to a profound evolution as historical circumstances have changed; so that today they have an inner meaning that is not yet completely evident, since a crisis is still ent in which the liberal world entered into in the process of developing. From the mom-crisis on the morrow of the first world war, the old architecture also went into crisis. A new human kind awaits now with anxiety, in every field, the means of its own redemption. It must accordingly be admitted that in our epoch of transition, there is a crisis in the values of architecture. But the many uncertainties and disorientation from which it suffers are the result of the uncertainties and disorientation existing in the ideological field, consequent on deviations from and renunciations of an upright conscientiousness in the human person. (This is seen in certain headlong programs formulated in the name of the people, as in the rush to adopt schemes which though new and apparently suited to the environment in which they were born, soon show themselves to be inconsistent with the new habitation). It is then necessary resolutely to turn to the happy, determinant necessity, that which sooner or later is destined to triumph over uncertainties, obstacles and immaturity: the necessity, the need for taking root, for finding again in the earth, in landscape, in traditions, architectonic forms, the love of men

for their community, the whole and natural feeling for place. This need, though widely and deeply felt, unfortunately has generally been answered by ineffective and unsuitable solutions. In fact, the conviction that feelings must be respected, the desire to share in the anxieties, the hopes and fears of a people, have more than once turned the new architectural expression from its true sense. Instead of being a luxuriant growth from the old roots, renewing, purifying and exalting the new needs of human souls, architectonic language has impoverished itself in formal and often demagogic tribute to folklore. The process of taking root that we have in mind, however, is one with the birth of the new community, through which spiritual world and material world are reconciled as a unity, and to which the architect is called to create its new, unmistakable physiognomy. The concept of a real, well-rooted community corresponds to two profound and vital necessities: 1. The creation of a new democratic authority, culturally stable, fertile, elevated, and able to build the new city, which will live through the omogeneous, organic and unitary choice that will go to make it up. This vigilant and devoted authority, the «new client» who is neither the private citizen nor the State, is lacking in modern society; and this lack is the root of many evils. Once the new Authority has been established, the problem is reduced to a dialogue between the Authority and the architect or architects it has chosen. The current discussions on architecture will become more felicitous and less sterile. 2. Generations are needed to give life to a true community. How many centuries did the building of Venice take, and how many years were needed to give Pisa's Piazza dei Miracoli its present form? Thus, continuity in time, a tenacious continuous labor of research and refinement is required. The physiognomy of the new city cannot be entrusted to the fancy of one man, but to a system, (a civilization, culturally decentralized). The psychology of form and the concept of «field» which today appear to be among the most advanced discoveries of modern psychology, are a solace to us in our undertaking. Eupalinos, conjured up and relived by Valery, saw in the constructed temple the features, and with these the harmony, of the beloved young girl. The architect now senses within himself new and more intense impulses, more complex motives; the «fields» that give him expression and nourish him with

ideas, draw upon new forms, whose life is just beginning to affirm itself. If this is so, today it is the fascinating and difficult task of architecture to discern whether separate forms are capable, by their own consistency and nature, of finding their proper position in the larger place where they are intended to take material shape. A mountain flower knows is itself how to grow amidst vast silences and perennial snows. In the same way the architect knows that his work is inseparable and indissoluble from the environment. In his creative interpretation he becomes a town planner, whether he wants to or not. Town planning and architecture intermingle, and the first includes the second: there is no escaping this condition. The relationship between the architect and «his» community will become his law, his moral conscience, and will mark his creative participation in the birth of the new community, illuminated by the spiritual flame of those who will have nurtured it with the substance of their humanity. To this end, may it become a place where man can cultivate his heart, embellish his soul and refine his mind; where the city of man can finally begin to evolve toward the City of God.