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The memory of a lost monument. The architecture of the ideal library

Abstract

I am exposing a particular aspect of the architect's point of view. In the period following the Second World War the designer was expected to give shape to a schematic program of functional data which assured some essential conditions for a good functionality. In the eighties he was expected to suggest attractive and well defines shapes planned for different social usages, even not related to the book world. Nowadays, while prefiguring places appointed for culture preservation, new and very different tasks are required. He is asked to invent a future with roots in the past, to suggest an interpretation of modernity considered as a recuperation of a distributive and constructive tradition not yet exhausted, to propose architectonic complex objects characterized by a strong symbolic expressivity and to hint, in small fragments, new architectonic compositions where iconological contents deeply rooted in teh collective imaginary are easily recongnizable.

To understand the new architecture, primarily one has to evaluate the degree of social legitimization for an ordered landscape of towers at the edges of an European (Paris) town or, at the opposite side, which emotional suggestions an intriguing resume of a classical ruin at the centre of a north-American city (Vancouver) can induce. An attentive observation of the recent architectonical realisations requires interpretative categories which are more complex than the mere verification of functional requirements and area measurement. Combined with administrative commitment, the architect nowadays is obliged to a "mythic commitment", through memories, narrative paths, evocations, expressions of the present social culture. In this perspective, next to "form", it is meaningful to speak about "fiction", more than about "function".

In the recently proposed solutions the quality of interior spaces is enriched by a very accurate symbolic valence. The authoritativeness of history contributes to defeat infinite sequences of trivial spaces, as well as to render experimentalisms and formalistic derivations vague and uncertain. As in an old public building of great tradition, the architect, consciously, in a modern biblioteca, similarly as in contemporary museum, profusely employs allusions and citations to precise figures inherited from history, restoring the atmosphere of silent pantheons or the mythical identity of halls for feasts, luminous galleries, imposing honour stairs and multiple level courtyards designed as lively covered squares. This in the conceptual aim of considering together the design of the hall, the design of the building and the design of the same town area.

In a next future two opposite special traditions might assert themselves. At one side the elegant museum-bibliotheca, spacious and open to the public, considered as the permanent exhibition of values acquired by civilization. At the other side the restricted bibliotheca-archive, nearly an industrial laboratory where the book pages are transformed in electronic impulses.

The first institution, next to many traces of social history, will exhibit on fee the most elegant samples in their original edition. The second construction, of industrial characterisation, will preserve copies and multiple editions for an easy access. The readers will be elsewhere, connected through optic fibres or satellite bridges. Then we might feel a physical longing for the book and a strong nostalgia for the lost monument.

Aldo De Poli graduated in Architecture at IUAV of Venice (1975) and DEA in Histoire et Civilisation at EHESS in Paris (1984). Visiting professor at the Ecole d'Architecture de Nantes, professor in architectural design at the universities in Genova and Parma. His main areas are the studies of the architecture of the public spaces (squares, waterfronts, urban belts) and of public buildings (theatres, museums, libraries, universities). Editor of the book *Biblioteche. Architetture. 1995 – 2005* (the Italian edition is published by Motta in 2002, the French edition by Actes Sud in 2004). He is editorial adviser for the architectural revues *Materia* and *Area*.