# S

important and scandalous neighbourhoods of building speculation.

They shared in common their large scale, an anti-camouflaging intent, and the extremities like solid muscles laid bare in the desire to express a clear siting logic. Zen, Gallaratese, Pilastro, Corviale, Vele di Secondigliano, and Rozzol Melara are the icons of a scandalous signed mystery. Muraglie Cinesi del Vomero, the intensive works of Tiburtina, and the apartment buildings of Corso Buenos Aires are some of the successful faces of building speculation. And after the scandal comes the mystery.

The mystery of the single-class city, the mystery of the unfinished city, fragmented before being completed, the mystery of the city where only necessary things are done, the houses and not even always the houses, because there is no more money, not for services, not for shops, not for the urban substance because that is only the density of these things.

It is this that guarantees safety more than any patrol making the rounds between these platforms at the centre of the world.

Derelict but great testaments of a collective story meet with the subconscious of a fragile capitalism unable to face its recent past.

Social housing, like monuments, seems like an impossible dream in a country where there are no longer classes, or rather where belonging to economic and cultural classes is to be hidden like a disgrace to prevent anyone from recognizing themselves.

This is the scandal of which architecture is a victim and it disappears under the clutter.

For the new reality-show population, the compact, collective myth no longer exists. There is the individual hope of the sprawl, of the customized automobile to be recounted like a simulacrum of identity.

So down with the Vele, away with the Corviale, or let's fill it with tulle and mini-skirts like hanging gardens, free radio and such trifles without trying to add, complete, reconnect, or reinterpret with the tools of architecture, after having assessed social changes, new expectations and needs without superfluous enlightened paternalism. Monuments live in the fabrics of cities and they let themselves be layered with new additions, modifications, interpretations in stone and therefore the unfinished Zen layout can be a manifesto for a completion, of a layer that weaves a dense, intense dialogue with the authorial text.

Let's start right after that single finished and well-kept garden where Andrea Sciascia brought me to enjoy the schizophrenic coexistence of a burnt shard and a precise fragment.

Let's learn from the simple mechanisms of the dense and bourgeois speculation of Naples,

Rome, Caserta or Milan where the city works in the scandalously rudimentary combinations of house, office and trade.

Authorized before the Ponte Law, these neighbourhoods are the only architectural texts where a private, rapacious hand made more than houses, making that little bit more, that minimal amount that, forty years on, allows us to recognize the exact mystery of the Italian neighbourhood.

## Sign

*Francesco Moschini*

If we want to point out something different and unusual about it, the specificity and centrality of the *Italian sign and design* within the complex system of the arts can be traced back to it always having been felt as a doubly significant instrument of representation: as a moment of knowledge (therefore adjusting the idea to fit the object) and as an act of creative construction capable of modifying the passive perception of reality and refocusing it within the dimension of theoretical and practical construction, often with a pronounced ideological content. All this then imposes a non-conformist approach to the project, expressed in a kind of creative exuberance whose objective (not always declared) is to complete the research begun by the original Avant-garde movement through totally reducing the historical material in favour of the project's artistic and architectonic material. Using a procedure analogous to the linguistic one (significantly, the common factor can always be traced to the thinking of Wittgenstein), design becomes a means of investigating the conventions of language, with two aims in sight: the search for a code and the exploration of possible ways of expressing its contradictions. Unfortunately, critical writing has too often favoured the "romantic" and "decadent" aspects of this search, paradoxically exalting its regressive elements which are run through by a utopian nostalgia. But the importance of the search lies in the tension of all the arts which in recent years (following the beneficial logic of "intersecting perspectives") look to architecture with ever growing interest thanks to its potentiality for maximum abstraction and, therefore, to its capacity for elaborating models that contain an awareness of that separation between the natural and the artificial which has widened to the point of no return. At this stage it seems quite impossible to think of somehow resetting this fracture…think, for example, of the

research carried out by artists like G. Paolini or J. Kounellis.

Perhaps one of the key moments for understanding the dynamic between the architectonic sign and the more generalised artistic sign, is the analysis of certain special convergences, not only on a theoretical level but also on the nuts-and-bolts level of operative practise, theoretical construction and teaching. This moment can be seen in the collaboration, beginning in 1967, between Gastone Novelli and Achille Perilli, in the context of Maurizio Sacripanti's course on Architectonic Composition in Rome's Faculty of Architecture, and the debate on "prospective" in particular and on architectural design in general. The unease of the artist and the architect represents itself in the symbol of the labyrinth: "reducing visual information to the level of the image of the labyrinth" (A. Perilli) as the "classical" alternative to non-communication. The labyrinth is, after all, the emblem of stability and certainty: however complex and tortuous its paths may be, it admits only one direction and only one solution. Withdrawal into discipline, and the often abstract hypotheses of re-foundation, are behind the contaminations referred to. What influence, what teaching, apart from a generic appeal for creativity, leads to the architectonic design of G. Novelli and A. Perilli? Before all else, the introduction of a lucid and irrational element which postulates, as the *sine qua non* of its own existence, the impossibility of objective communication. But which is nevertheless united (and this is why it is so provocative) with an explicit attempt to rationalise the irrational, to classify, and which will find its most effective form of representation in grid systems, capable of uniting in an apparently analogous research Novelli, Perilli and Purini with a group of architects packed into the legendary studio in Corso Vittorio, firstly, and later in Atrio Testaccio. Whatever the differences in individual developments and intentions (for example, Purini's constructive exaltations on the one hand and Novelli's desecrating tensions on the other), all have in common a reading of reality perceived as fragments that cannot be reduced to any kind of unity, forced into the insane rationality of entirely arbitrary classifications. And finally recognising themselves (or maybe just finding themselves) outside history….which doesn't exclude, but rather imposes, the use of myth…. and forced to deal in signs: "an art constructed almost as a law of mathematics" (Novelli). In this context, the course given by Novelli in San Paolo is highly significant: emancipation from history is achieved through a regression to the pre-sensorial state in the observation of nature, that's to say by eliminating historical categories and abstracting language from time and space. The

reference to the writings of Kandinsky is obvious, but equally evident is the immediate transposition onto a symbolic level and the reduction of the compositional process to the procedure of addition: volumes and planes are not integrated but are rather determined by placing together or dovetailing autonomous forms which can only be elaborated by a magical language that uses remnants, "fossilised witnesses to the history of an individual or a society". Perilli's attitude is similar, although it is impregnated by a more intellectual spirit and proposes more direct theoretical objectives, starting from a rebellion against the use of perspective and arriving at an imaginary space where, through non-laws, the "Mad Image" is defined. The laws of autonomous structuring, of increased complexity, of the labyrinth and of the ambiguity of messages are all connected with mental itineraries, to an outlined suggestion of rationality that doesn't open up mystical spaces or usher in the visionary approaches which still, in a kind of way, characterised Novelli's work: if his omphali are still in symbiosis with nature, Perilli's columns are more like architectonic abstractions. Architecture can then signify however much of the artistic that it is still able to express or preserve within the intransitiveness of signs: this is the point of convergence between the interests of an architect like Sacripanti and artists like Novelli and Perilli, not excluding action but trying to free it from the continuum of the urban space, in the complexity of the labyrinth but also in the very homogeneousness of its form with those of "modernity". The learning and the practise of drawing and designing are recoveries of the primogenial creative moment. The recovery of the sign can follow one of two roads, either History (with Freud), or the Archetype (with Jung), and the attention paid to two such different architects as Sacripanti and Rossi is indicative of exactly that movement towards the archetype which recurs through all the heterogeneous research of those years. We might call this the passage from a logocentric system to a graphocentric system, to use Lacan's terms: "writing has nothing to do with meaning, but rather with measuring". Perilli represents, we might say, the transition between meaning and measuring, as can be seen from his works....from the first diagrams, constructed in a mythological space, to the subsequent geometricalisations which measure the spaces (even if in the negative). A path that is parallel to that taken by architecture from the 1960's to today, in an alternation of effectiveness and abstraction, theory and practice, reflected in the form of the architectonic object and the city, distinguishing between life and its representation. Although it may seem

paradoxical, all the destructive force of those architectonic avant-gardes straining to confront themselves with the planning side of art, all their basing themselves on the autonomy of architectural language, ended up moving as though in a single stream, to the point of producing something close to serial work, a repetitiveness destined for consumption, coherent and functional with a system which no longer looks for any expression of values in art, apart from economic values. And so the autonomy of art, the intransitiveness of the message, the loss of value finish up by nailing the work down to the phenomenon of fashion, in whose context, by this stage, it has to be analysed. Fashion, whose fate is to be consumed as rapidly and uncritically as possible, in order to make way for a new fashion....which also will be characterised by aesthetic loss, despite being full of artistic intentions.

# Social anthropology

## *Massimo Ilardi*

Social anthropology is an investigative approach that draws on results and interpretive tools from different disciplines, prime among which are communications and semiotics.
In recent years, the need for urban planning and architectural thought to be influenced by this type of investigation has grown desirable and positive because a world that has become a metropolis can only be interpreted in its complexity from the interweaving of multiple languages of study. However, the problem is that this social anthropological tool is now seeking to replace the density of writing and language that is inherent in the architecture project. The questionable aspiration of many architects to become improvised sociologists or anthropologists brings a double-sided risk. First, the passive acceptance of means and models of communication bring them to back a media-laden world, entrenched in marketing and advertising strategies. Second, turning architecture into spectacle leads to the dispersion of design theory and its dissolution within universal, neutral and abstract categories, specifically: society, technology and communication. According to the enthusiastic, gratified supporters of this trend, in a metropolis that has become a shiny, hybrid, nomadic video clip in which everything seems to drift by happily, architecture should likewise become liquid,
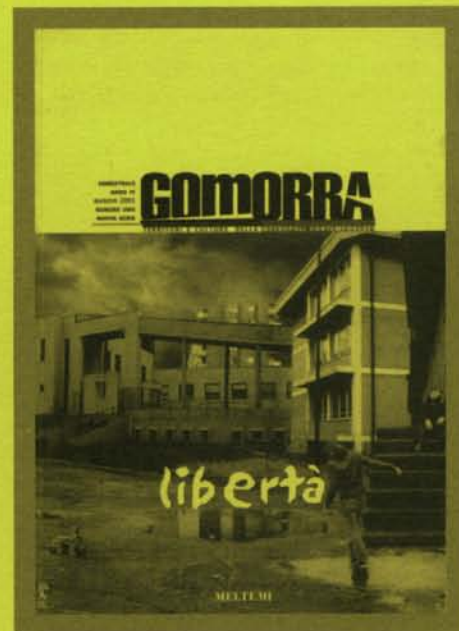


Cover of the magazine *Gomorra*.

floating and mobile, a faithful representation of an anthropologic landscape dominated by technologies of morphing. It should be incorporated within semiotic and aesthetic paradises, reduced to multiple images and formal complexities that serve as a shortcut for a fanciful escape from the hard repetitions of history and its wars, intractable conflicts and irremediable chaos.
Yet, it is precisely in the face of these feeble, senseless positions that the architecture project should set its own specificity and find its foundation. "Setting its specificity" means that there can not be any architecture without a relationship with the land beneath it, whose edges are not made of steel, glass or cement, and that we do not propose governing mutation as a local plan at the very moment of its transformation. Its direct conversation partner should be power and not resolving the "social question".
"Finding its foundation" means first of all avoiding seeking it in an *idea* that independently forms in the absoluteness of the architectural object, a "glorious form" of a universality that emerges once again as the whole of an intellect "separate" from the world. On the contrary: it is in the tension of the architect's research and action that are always embedded in the finite nature of the world in the *here and now*, which consists of more than networks and communication, as it also contains anarchy, disorder and conflict. This is the origin of the project. This is its political foundation. If this were not the case, we would