

PAOLA IACUCCI

A LIGHT THROUGH ARCHITECTURE

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“Architecture as event”.

Continuity and mutations in the work of Paola Iacucci:

doubt, invention, construction.

An imponderable distance exists between what is measurable and what is not: it is the same critical distance that marks the limit between theory and practice, between form and project, between the place of reflection on architecture and its actual declension in forms and materials in the city, and in the landscape of reality. If life itself is the ambivalent and multiple stage-set where architecture happens, the figure of the limit is its representation, in the indication - already meaningfully developed in literature - of a tension between ideal and real, between artifice and nature. Between the '60s and the '80s this was at the center of a great part of the architects' research, and even though it changed its own perspective, it also delicately wove life into the most interesting experiments of the newly begun century. Together with the oppositions that it separates, the figure of the limit projects itself to the idea of its own over-coming. It ignites a tension, trying to transcend rigid conceptual categories, uniquely defined, until it recognizes and interprets - in representation as in construction - the fragmentary and hybrid marks that inhabit the landscape of world contemporaneity.

The research, patient and sensitive, of Paola Iacucci proceeds to cover this distance with obstinacy, along this rarefied limit: questioning its 'aporie' and its tensions. Her knowledge proceeds by enigma, which means by leaps and sudden connections, open to possible new visions of reality. These visions crystallize in the project - and from this to the form - not in a free and arbitrary manner, but in a constrained and necessary way.

The dimension of the enigma - which together with the dimension of mystery is expression at the same time of 'poiesis' and myth - is for P. Iacucci the demonstration of the continuity of things, which ties extreme modernity - that is contemporaneity - to an ancient sapience. This is the possible revelation of what can tie the project to the essence of things, through a logical leap, which can clear the field from any fragmentation and separation, without nostalgic pretenses to recompose it, and at a considerable distance from sterile gestures. “The nature of the project has its inner necessity, whose 'facies' and wondrousness are revealed and discovered through making and drawing. This if .... the evolution of the project lets itself happen along its predetermined lines: the project does not happen by itself, but if the intention, and the poetic vision are authentic .... the project evolves with an autonomous life, along lines of necessity and of beauty” (P. Iacucci). During her activity, Paola Iacucci has privileged the theoretical and speculative moment, although immersing it in experience, and directing it to its immediate transposition in practice. The primary role of research in itself does not assume a non-interest in relation to practice, but underlines the necessity of a reflection on language, and on the tools themselves of architecture, not so much as components of a technical apparatus, but as representing a possible description of the world.

Finalities are cognitive and are intended to find, in origin and in myth, the reasons of the discipline, to be able to narrate them geometrically in an open itinerary, which does not understand history as a style, but has a tendency to describe them as a tuning of the instrument - corresponding to a distancing from its own foundations, presence and absence together - in form.

As in the case of the city, the project defines itself as analysis and synthesis, of experience and memory: it manifests its own laws, at the same time as their betrayal, as much as the dynamism of experiences. Architecture is not given as knowledge per se, but essentially as research, whose propositions try to describe an experience that appears untranslatable - and in any case not understandable - in the forms and in the modes of classicism. Though it does not transform itself into a critique, it is an analysis of intelligence, to which different parameters converge, which do not have their reference in a unique linguistic form, as the space-time coordinates are not uniquely determined. The assumption that derives from it is that architectonic language needs to have the same multiplicity and the same richness as the reality on which it intervenes - and from which it springs - not to penalize its ability to intervene as a proposition on that same reality.

This way of privileging the theoretical moment in relation to practice has two different reasons: one tied to the situation of the discipline itself, starting from the institutional crisis of the figure of the architect from the Nineteenth century to today, and from the loss of the representation of civil values, of which architecture had taken charge in the preceding centuries. The second reason we may define as generational, and it regards in particular the answers that the architects have thought feasible to give to the problem of design from the '60s to the '80s. Evidently the choice made by P. Iacucci has its own explicit tendency, which tries to enunciate a strong principle - the primary presence of language - even though it resides within a rigid compositional grammar. It is just in the years '66 to '68 that Franco Purini, expressing his hypothesis about

architecture, explores a “classification by sections of spatial situations” following a rich and accurate combinatory mechanism which assumes the cube as its generating element.

“These studies are born in a particular situation of the figurative arts to which they refer directly: Minimal Art as research on primary forms; Arte Povera as an attempt to cancel the depth of creative technologies towards expressions taken from the logic of the materials themselves, and subtracted from all that can diminish the naivety of intuition; Conceptual Art for the attention that, to the contrary, it presumes under every minimal gesture, and for the value that it detracts from the physical results, from the plastic presence, and visual values. They constitute as an ensemble the precedents of this work” (F. Purini). Beyond the particular stylistic connotations that the poetics of the single architects will assume in time, a kind of a group of work and research formed, especially in the milieu of Rome, which considered architecture as an articulate system of marks, as writings, and with the same degree of abstraction. While the same years saw, in the milieu of Milan, an effort to propose geometry in the attempt of defining the settlements of architecture and sites. They are two methodological processes in total opposition: on one side is the aim to sublimate language in the purity of form, inscribing it as law; on the other is the aim to contaminate geometrical abstraction with daily occupation, expressing its archetypal values geometrically, ordering them without making them absolute. Given the fact that these two behaviors have much deeper historical and cultural roots, it is none the less possible, confronting them, to let the quality and objectives of this essentially theoretical work performed on language emerge. Through the assertion of minimal conceptual elements the unabashed presence of the discipline is affirmed as a system of conventional notations ordered in language and historically founded, and, above all, one explicitly acknowledging the validity of its ideological contents denouncing “the destruction of that civil tension ... only from which a serious research can be born again” (F. Purini).

Here then the different coexisting propositions in the narrative figures of the work of P. Iacucci can be referred to by a metaphor: through the construction of a new perspectival representation - where the objects, disquieting, are no longer restrained by any compositional rule, which may be only remembered by its absence - an exhibited polarity in the distance between form and matter is expressed. Here form refers to an ideal “lost balance”, and the matter refers to the effort, to the necessary work to reconquer the “lost Paradise”, to give form again to the “house of Adam in Paradise”, following the definition of Joseph Rykwert. It is in this aspiration that matter is also transfigured, leaning in this way, in its ambivalence, to the myth of the origin. In the course of its history, architecture constantly pauses to reflect on its own origins, searching in the figures of myth its legitimate reasons, and the synthesis of expression of form and feeling. It is making - understood as rite, and at the same time as risk - that in the theoretical reflection of P. Iacucci, reconnects thought and matter: “stones, concrete, metal, glass, find a way unknown before, a common relation that changes and appears as new”(P. Iacucci). To transform it as a new finding is then a challenge that moves itself inside the tension of the limit between presence and absence, to achieve its catharsis in the quietness and fulfillment of form. To transform becomes the process in which one makes a bet between the prefiguration of architecture and its crystallization in the finished work. This is an open process, in the development of which technique becomes almost the limit itself of the challenge, an attempt to bend matter to a constructive will, which is mainly the construction of an idea.

From the idea to the built work, from the abstract form to the real object, architecture made secular reveals the fragility of time, and experiences the limits of the representation of its own space. In the same moment in which architecture researches its own principles in the truths of geometry (following Le Corbusier's assertion “as the axis, circles, and right angles are truths of geometry, they are also truths that our eyes can verify ... geometry is a language of the mind”), it is just then that architecture discovers - as a laceration - the conflict with the spiritual dimension, with the irrational. Starting from myth, the research of P. Iacucci builds on this boundary of a secular and secularized architecture, where the fatigue of making is in the presence of memories, in the enigmatic figures that it proposes, in the absences that it underlines. It is again in myth, as anti-historical dimension of the spirit, as a fragment of eternity in the caducity of the work, that the idea of construction poses itself as a temporal synthesis, as a pure poetry, that counter poses itself to the irreversibility of language.

The reference to myth - which also suggests that we live in more than one world - questions the discipline of architecture in an essential way. This happens both in the moment in which it keeps the memory of the origins of its appearance as a necessity, which presumes a technique, as well as in the revelation of the complexity of its stratification and in the multiplicity of its symbols. In this picture the technique refers back to its original moment: the myth of Prometheus. P. Iacucci identifies myth and language, which both manifest themselves in the fragmented nature of the work. Here the fragment shows the impossibility of recomposing - in the forms of language - experiences, memories, pre-figurations, as well as reconciling the ideality of form



with the reality of matter. And yet the fragment is itself still able to evoke the symbolism of myth, re-placing it in a linguistic construction where it is possible to name every figure.

It is the case, for example, of the competition in Venice for Ca' Venier dei Leoni (1985), which works above all on time, as the very material of the project, as it faces the theme of the completion of a fragment of architecture, which by the way holds a collection of works of contemporary art. The base of Ca' Venier - the only built element of the project of 1751 - is isolated and its nature as a fragment is proclaimed. The new building itself condenses in its presence the memory of the Rationalism of the '30s. In its manifest discontinuities a process of contamination is put into action, in which appropriations allude to a modernity that evokes the order and measure of Neoclassical memory, to the point of exhausting the conflict with the pre-existing, interrupted architecture of Ca' Venier. The parched figures hover over the mass of the building and recall this interrupted architecture, as they are embodied by a material - brick - as a mythical evocation of a primordial manner of construction. If then the primary act of making is founded on myth, it is in myth that the synthesis between idea and matter is accomplished. Language transforms itself in a reverse journey in time, up to the re-discovery of the archetype. Architecture then manifests itself as a rhetorical art, able to display - through the use of a non-verbal metaphor - a complex narrative apparatus, which re-interprets, in its own language, the sometimes obscure and incomprehensible daily life.

In this intertwining of life and forms, P. Iacucci re-directs the problem of building to an eternal interrogation, which posits doubt as the very matter of the project, also bringing back to it the ambiguous placement of language between presence and absence. Through narration, which in the end consists of a "narration of the self", in the process where architecture becomes the 'locus' of the intermingling between creativity and discipline, P. Iacucci builds the models of a rational making, through which form and matter can concretely coincide in the building. And even if this does not explicitly face the problem of technique, nor attribute a specific significance to matters, parading in terms of a metaphysical debate, it is none the less indicative that, to the explicit reference to matter and materials in her theoretical writings, it corresponds, in the practice of design of P. Iacucci, to an elusive behavior. This behavior seems instead to tend, to a sort of negation of matter, to an abstraction of the mark, almost sublimated in geometrical purities. Presence and absence seem then to evoke the unsolved relations, the ambiguous rapports which are created between thought and action. Doubt is the form acquired in the path from idea to building- there the fatigue of making, to which the architect refers, is expressed. The task given to the model is then to fasten the idea in a form able to elude matter - one which may be able to reaffirm, in its fixity as much as in its possibility to articulate itself from a few canonical elements - those values of the discipline that find their own necessity in a meta-historical dimension. But the model, in its capacity as an abstraction of reason, legitimates the absolute autonomy of the architectonic object, its belonging entirely to the discipline's territory. The metaphor of Adam and Paradise lost in fact refers once more to the project interpreted as an attempt to re-find the object of desire, and it conjoins itself - also in its own disciplinary rigor - to utopia.

This reference to utopia does not refer to the impossible realization of the proposed model, on the contrary: the suggested methodology, while not rigorously systemized by P. Iacucci, shows the possible realization of the model itself, and also shows its behavior, at one and the same time both rigid and permeable. Its formal absoluteness does not exclude interventions on superstructures, only - exactly because of the nature of a superstructure - it neutralizes them. If the materials, cause a crisis for the project as they intervene directly on the construction, the entire apparatus of decoration and ornament, all stylistic connotations, are made ineffectual. They cannot, even minimally, modify the structure of the building. Its space is thought of as a space/model. The importance of this model dwells also in a different multiplicity of factors, through which one would also want to contribute, to give back dignity, to a professionalism subdued in the daily work. The risk of this affirmation of the model is rather that of confirming the marginalization of architecture. The order of reason does not necessarily pre-suppose a law, while it imposes a discipline of the project, which finds anew - in alluding to the complexity of myth - its own original necessity. The reduction of language to its primary meanings derives from this. We can think of the peremptory repetition of the square which, on one side, reveals explicitly its own reference to the utopia of classicism, lived again through conscience, only to find instead oneself in front of a project, as such not to be realized. This causes its own figures to be disquieting, to explode in the pictorial space, and, at the other end, it carries the hypothesis of a real program of operation, among other things, perfectly in place inside the cultural assets of Modernity. This project - which does not pose itself only as an attempt to reconquer Adam's "lost Paradise" of language - discovers all the same the loss of identity between the house and the project. It just recomposes its tragic aspect, in the faith of a architecture able to find again, in myth, its own motives, as if it were a metaphysical "ipostasi", in this way avoiding

any absence of legitimacy brought by the arbitrary character of language, and any openness on which language is founded. In this way the process tends to the essential reduction of every compositional element, which are also freed from all narrative presumption, able to introduce historical variables in space/time.

Explicitly the research of P. Iacucci turns, on the methodological plane - and especially on the poetic plane - to the opus of Louis I. Kahn, while on the plane of narrative figuration appears to pay attention to the design modes of Franco Purini. But it is especially the images evoked by L. Kahn - in their suggestion as a metaphor of the laceration of the condition of design - which indicate and address the theoretical reflection of P. Iacucci on the theme of difference, or again on the narrative structures of architectonic composition. This proceeds to the point of reconstructing - exactly by means of Kahn's aphorisms - a symbolic repertoire of the modern project, in which the handling of the elements acquires a creative character, while it reveals, through surprise, its own wonder: "I love beginnings; beginnings make me wonder" (L. Kahn). The deconstructive and analytical aspects of Kahn appear re-composed on the basis of the articulate geometries of F. Purini. Purini succeeds - even without conceding anything to linguistic variations not already comprehended in their transgressive presence - in reinventing the poetics of Rationalism. The figures of F. Purini are systematically re-directed to the primary idea of dwelling. It is the house as archetype, which belongs to collective memory from its first architectonic formulation as hut and as temple, loci in which human and divine habitations recognize themselves theologically in their image. For G. Bachelard, "the geometrical contradiction is resolved: representation is dominated by imagination". Emblematic of these reflections are the Three Houses of P. Iacucci (1981 - 82), as an idea of a unique building that "takes form three times, with some variations on the theme". The Three Houses are also born as expression of poetic dwelling, which gives more attention to G. Bachelard than to M. Heidegger, as an almost nostalgic reconstruction of a dwelling, always saved in memory, and which finally finds a form, almost provisory, in the project. It is significant that the site in which they establish themselves also belongs to memory and to thought. The Three Houses are sited along a river: at the spring, along the course, and at the mouth. It is always the same idea of a house, a single and invariable model, which bends, from time to time, to the different conditions. It is really in this openness to mutation that the strength of the model is recaptured, asserting its capability to re-present itself, modify itself, with the force of a mathematical theorem. In this sense the model saves the idea, defending it also from the corruption of quotidian life, from dwelling in reality. Above all it defines the limits of freedom of invention, reestablishing these same limits in the modern tradition, which is asked to testify to the necessity of instituting a language capable of freeing architecture from the arbitrary. Imagination and discipline compose themselves in the figure of the cube, in the declination of the space of the square. Here P. Iacucci adopts elemental geometry, as only this geometry seems able to provide a rational basis for formal invention. But it is not only in the reference to the figures of geometry that she seems to reinterpret, as she reads it over, the opus of Durand. On another point, as it is anyway implicit in her method, she seems in agreement with the French architect: the primary presence of geometry excludes any naturalistic reference, positioning the origin of architecture in thought, and not in nature. The Three Houses make explicit a wider architectonic program, to the point of reuniting with the rule even the exception, as in the removal of a cubic volume in one of the three planar imprints. The retrieval of the volume of one building is fixed within the plan through the use of the golden section. The revealed geometrical construction seems to negate any transgressive hypothesis, and the transgression itself obeys laws probably less evident, but as rigid. Also the abstraction of the method, in its breaking away from history, ignores any typological reference. Willingly the typology of the villa is avoided: a metropolitan way of building is implicit in the method, to which all three buildings inevitably refer, as both geometry and model are instruments of spatial control, and as such they allow a more direct organization of the territory. On the other hand, the references to and the citations of Italian architecture of the '30s also refer to urban models. Geometry, as the place of theoretical certainties, nullifies the weight of matter. One can consider the thinness of the pilasters, the abstraction of the surfaces, where white indicates a precise poetic intention, and also the same composition of the volumes, which renounce any synthesis, to reaffirm a mathematical, rather than geometrical principle. The same Rationalist reference, to Libera of the Padiglione Italiano at the Brussel Expo of 1935, or the Constructivist one, in the suspended awnings, present themselves as abstract signs of the naturalistic context, in which the building is in some way sited, so - always observing a refined theoretical rigor - one point perspective brings each element into proportion, including light and reflection, in interiors spaces rigorously empty. The absence of dialogue, in this case with nature, corresponds to a negation of interior inhabitation, and also to discipline and to normalization of everything that seems incapable of being inscribed under the sign of reason. Thus, for instance, the Palladian reflection on the house with four spaces - without the program of "La Rotonda" - aims more

toward a predefined foundation, working to root itself in an historical setting made abstract by a determined will to position itself, not only outside of space, but also outside of time: an architecture finally free from epochal connotations.

The occasions, probably more important, chosen by P. Iacucci, in whose case the theoretical reflection is mingled with the social dimension of architecture, are certainly provided by the competitions. Through these occasions it is possible to find, in the themes addressed by Iacucci, research on the scale of interventions both metropolitan and territorial: from the competitions for the Universities of Cagliari (1972) and of Calabrie (1973), to the competition for the Palazzo del Cinema in Venice (1990). This precise delimitation of the area of the project - which needs to be understood also in the light of a singular episode, the project done with Arnaldo Pomodoro for the Theater in Gibellina (1982) - clarifies further the programmatic aim of the research, and demonstrates the desire to define the perimeter of reflection on the theory of the project. City and territory are actually the privileged places of a research which finds in the already quoted project for the Three Houses, a metaphor and a manifesto. The aspiration is in fact to exit from the limited dimension of the architectural volume as an autonomous object, to reinterpret it in an urban and metropolitan way. The project for the University of Cagliari is designed really as a system, which defines precise elements of reference at the scale of the territory, to be given form, in a series of punctual interventions. The language of architectures is reduced to a pictorial minimalism, which, exactly in the progressive rarefaction of the elements, tends to the abstract design of the territory, to which corresponds a more careful exam of architectonic writing, as a system of control of the territory, and of the complexity of an ensemble of landscapes, through rationality. In this context, the single object loses value, to find again its own meaning in the relations that it institutes with the other elements, not necessarily of the discipline, or of the project. Inhabiting is in this way reinterpreted in a more complex sense, which eludes the interior bourgeois, to recuperate its own vocation in a more general redesign of the complete habitat, until it identifies itself with a design program, in which architecture becomes a metaphor of deeper civil values. But at the same time it appears as a pretext, as it reinvents its own specific theme - the University - to give life to a spread of symbolic signs, which occupy every space, referring to some kind of extroversion of the project, which does not recognize, or find anew any intimacy, any moment of concentration. In a totally analogous way, the houses negate any type of representation of daily dwelling, to inscribe it instead in the rigor of its own laws, strictly of the discipline, in the expropriation of private life, and also in its polemical alienation.

A competition also identifies an area of thought, which allows, in the rationality of the models, to cover and propose anew, a classicist itinerary of architectonic culture. This will affirm itself as a renewed tension towards a better clarity of a comprehensible language, as if language would re-propose itself, starting from these particular occasions, as a universal model. The tendency to compose an architecture reference book emerges with particular clarity in the competition for building typologies IN-ARCH ANIACAP of 1973, as a typological inventory, to which the rigorous lay out of the elevations are associated. This particular occasion allows the proposition of "a unifying morphological asset, through design, functions, and urban requests" (from the statement of the competition). Particularities are solved here in an imprint that is presented in universal characters, originating from the reclaimed balance between geometry and function in the typological abstraction, and in the potentiality of the development of each element of the project. The same possibility for combinations are in the elevations; also, the urban image of the building achieves in this way, as in the plans, a theoretically infinite possibility to build figures, which obey all to the same geometrical rules.

If the variation happens within a prefixed rule, inside which it is possible to propose the differentiated forms of dwelling in space, it is then allowed to presume a single origin: myth, through drawings, legitimates the project, and in its universal character goes back to myth itself.

P. Iacucci, with these first works systematically enters the themes of contemporary culture. Particularly evident is her need to re-propose her projects in continuity with the models of classical culture, that is, with a strong culture, and the peculiarity of her opus is to exorcise all those elements which threaten to create problems for the abstract purity of language. Prefiguring the direction which her research will take in the '80s, P. Iacucci continually refers to an imposed language, now legitimated by essentially geometrical reasons, later by motivations of aesthetic character, where the passage is from the stasis of the classical representation to the expressive dynamism of the contemporary condition. Never will she include in her language elements of contamination extracted or interpolated from the particular context in which she works or assumes to work. History is not essential - in a theoretical construction which looks back to myth - and is unaware of the poetics of dwelling imprinted in places, in the forms of tradition. All of this characterizes her design, in both cases, as research on the essentiality of language, which, incorruptible, is withdrawn from the laws of becoming. And also in this case

one's view is turned to the epiphany of architecture narrated by L. Kahn.

The architectural submissions for the competition for the settlement of Monte Ricco, in 1973, are expressive of this philosophy of the project, starting from the motto that dedicates them to Winckelmann. The utopia of reason clashes with the naturalistic reality of a context already strongly handled by human intervention. The reorganization of the quarries becomes in this way the occasion to insert imagined and manipulated architectonic presences. Greek architecture is explicitly evoked in the sections, idealized in its figures, read again in the neo-classical aesthetic. If architecture cannot base its certainties on absolute values of knowledge, it then tends to aesthetic ideals and shows its own vocation to identify ethic and aesthetic values, artifice and nature. P. Iacucci does not exalt contradictions; she seems more to recognize the absolute diversity of the two systems of reference, nature and architecture, matter and project. And it is just matter, as materials, to be willingly forgotten in name of the primate of language. No conflict in fact exists inside the systems which declare their own confirmed diversity. This exercise of control will explode in the more recent opus, in a radical contending in fact of the classical 'ordo', order which had informed all her research, and that we could punctually retrace in every design occasion in her work. Though, just in the project for Monte Ricco, the earthy matter will be enounced in its ambiguity, artifice, and nature at the same time. The ambivalence of nature is now here underlined by the rigid stereo-metrics of architecture, though ambivalence is not synonymous of disorder or chaos, but it is the richness of symbolic contents, not translatable on the basis of logical or rational categories. This makes even more disquieting the relation with an architectonic transcription, which instead proposes an elemental classification of its own components.

In the work of P. Iacucci the value and the legitimate presence of utopia is constantly offered. The scale of metropolitan interventions further shows a will to reconstruct relations of continuity between architectonic form and the city, as it has come to delineate itself inside architectonic contemporary culture, starting from the Enlightenment. And it has to be understood how this research has continuity with eighteenth-century themes, also in its relation to and reflection on the same Renaissance models. It is the idea of a model - as the much lamented crisis of civil tension - which indicates how to move within a universe of formal values explicitly posing the question of the fragmentation of the organism of form. The reduction of the linguistic elements to minimal indicators, to be totally inscribed within a rational logic, has the meaning - in the evolution of these years, and in the general research of P. Iacucci - of a suspension of judgment in the attempt to find one more - starting from its abstract history - the legitimacy of making architecture. In this sense the utopian value of this research does not have to be re-read in a negative sense, but instead as a datum that recognizes in the disarticulation of metropolitan spaces, and in the autonomy of broken form, the starting point for a reflection on language, also as 'ars retorica', as a combinatory system. If the city is then the place in which form explodes into its contradictions, the project cannot but collect its fragments in the ordered rules of composition, as in the competition for Berlin of 1981. But the singular itinerary of P. Iacucci seems also to go through the attempt to remove memory, in a process through which we witness the progressive evanescence of form. "The relation between matter and memory in the work of architecture is a relation of presence/absence" (P. Iacucci), where traces prevail: in the quotes, in the homage justly paid to the language of the modern tradition, and finally, in tribute to a language that presents itself with its own universal character.

"The concept of trace is present in memory as the appearance of the matter of architecture; it is the origin of memory" (P. Iacucci). Trace does not belong to the memory of dwelling, but to the history of the discipline, which carries the imprint, in the very body of the building, of the memory of architecture, synthesized anew in the figure produced. One can see the intertwining of the tectonic marks that run across the surface of the volumes of the buildings on Lutzowstrasse, which define the pedestrian routes.

The repertory of signs, and the infinite possibilities of the mechanics of combination, do not tend toward a figurative eclecticism, but exhibit their own instruments of a discipline that - as in the competition for a Multifunctional Cultural Center in the City of Varese, 1980 - reaches the point of ironic homage to a technology of nineteenth-century taste. It is precisely from citation that the traces of the architectonic project flow, transforming experience into memory. The great covered spaces of the halls, the memory of architecture constructed in iron, and the theme of the great Expos are present, even in their performance as temples of merchandising, which - we need to underline - here conjoin them to the rigorous pages of Rationalist architecture. This links them also to the merely formal experiments of O. Ungers, and to the dis-enchantment, inevitably associated with the discovery of a form, to which no principle of value can be associated, nor any reference to any kind of knowledge.

"Una parola", obsessively repeated, characterizes then the prospect for the Nuova Sede dell'Istituto Regionale per il Finanziamento delle Industrie in Sicilia (1978).

Almost architectonic ghosts, mute testimonies, the buildings exhibit their own singularity, barely held in check by the monotonous continuity of the base.

Then to the autonomy of architectonic language “the refusal of liberty” is opposed, the total negation of any decorative element, the reduction to the essential form of the project, and finally to an ordered composition on the basis of mathematical laws, which refuse any hierarchical articulation. Further: to the absence of cognitive truths it corresponds sincerity, and a geometrical coherence of the architectonic object. The de-contextualization that characterizes the work of P. Lacucci not only refers to a proposition of universal architecture founded on its own principles, but tends to eliminate any possible conflict. It is actually the same operation carried out by L. Kahn: the abstraction from reality and a return to the fundamentals of the language of the discipline tend to clarity, to removing doubt, and with it any reference to the irrational, and to the real. To the excesses on one or the other side, P. Lacucci opposes the grammatical eclecticism of her projects, for example in the intervention on the metropolitan area of Florence (1977), where the interior coherence of the project, built on the modularity of the metal elements, echoes the polemic lack of attention to the context. The loss of identity between the house and the project transforms its making into a challenge, which sublimates the institutional conflict metaphysically. But silence- the same absence of Florence from this project for Florence - perhaps wants to insist on the memory itself of the city, on an ‘immaginario’ which defies any control, maintained in silence. The action and the project are thus brought back to reason, as the active instruments that every so often find extraordinary poetic projections. This happens in the project for the Bridge on the Adda River, an almost pictorial image on the essentiality of its own compositional elements, and in the punctuality of its own references, where constructive suggestions continue to echo. Rationalism on one side and Constructivism on the other generally end up, in the contemporary project, identifying themselves with two complementary moments. Often we find these moments associated- discipline and norm- in the rationality of compositional choices and as a lyric leap in the technological solution. We don’t need to be deceived. Re-read in a poetic key, technique is exorcised, deprived of its constructive character. If for the Constructivists there was a sort of attempt to domesticate the future in its aesthetic control, in the citations of P. Lacucci we are still contained in historicity.

Never the less this research tends, above all, to the construction of a norm to be immediately finalized in construction. Even if understood as an intermediate verification, realization is the basis of the research. To this is due the strong imprint, as if in an architectural reference book, which has characterized the entire first phase of the work of P. Lacucci, at least until her “rediscovery” of America, as a reactivation of the question of the disquieting forms of the irrational. The caesura that is reflected in the discourse between forms and techniques, between reason and poetic, tends to denounce the object - not the theoretical limit of the research, rather its utopian character - as it is destined to be fragmented and to break against the metropolitan space. Some disquieting drawings are a prelude to the American period of P. Lacucci. Here forms literally explode, until they invade a totally abstract space. They are not only the fragments of single elements - pillars - or the unstable proposition of an identical geometric figure - the pyramid - but are the same buildings that transform themselves into skeletal ghosts, which evoke, as in Piranesi, the “città analoga” of Aldo Rossi. These are the images that represent, more on an emotional plane than on an architectonic one, the impact with the city of New York, to which they are dedicated. The experience of time and of space that the city suggests, excludes any reference to the classical order, but exhibits brutally its own rhetorical apparatus in its ineffable narration. It is starting from this experience that the city, and architecture, are reflected in a system, in which one tries to reinterpret the classical language, the precise references to the “cardum” as the emblematic citations of the architectonic figures, at the light of a different perspectival representation. In fact now all the contradictions of a project that was thought of as “perfect” explode and find instead, at the end of its path, the disquieting space of Piranesi. Now these contradictions will be the ones to be resolved in an aesthetic vision. Through the New York experience, and through the fragmentation of totality acquired from the cultural vicinity to an architect such as Steven Hall, P. Lacucci finds herself verifying the relation between city and architecture outside of known parameters, which brings to a crisis those values reaffirmed in her methodic reflection on design. The experienced urban quality, the city as “macchina assurda”, indicates that architecture is brought to verify its own rationality in the light of metropolitan dynamism and irrationality.

We can then distinguish, starting from the mid ‘80s, two separate phases in the research of P. Lacucci. The first phase is characterized by a strong constructive attitude, which beyond the various professional occasions, is first of all directed to the formulation of a “rational” language, able to translate the elements of the project into a norm. Though this scope of work presents an attempt to develop a sort of international language, almost if P. Lacucci would propose a counterpoint to the superficiality of the International Style through a new code in composition

and style elaborated from a presupposed continuity with classical culture. This aspiration to a universality of language, which wants to become concrete in the re-proposition of shared models of the discipline - both as a reference to the archetype as well as to the necessity of a code - characterizes, more generally, the research of Roman architectonic culture. Its very being, from some points of view, was prejudiced towards drawing, since it puts forward even in the revelation of its own crisis, the validity of models and norms of composition, which have deep roots in Western design from the time of the Humanist revolution. This project is a strong project, which programmatically tends to exclude all contradiction from its own disciplinary body, as well as any irrational manifestation. Battisti, Puglielli, Seccia, as P. Lacucci, in this way introduce in the opus an irreducible “alter” character, from time to time idealized, and made paradigmatic. Nature is counter posed to the Artifice of architecture, or tamed in the re-writing of architecture, in the metaphor that wants to clarify the contradictions, separating the elements not because ambivalent, but as absolute references to a figure determined as unique. One reflects in this way on the crisis that neoclassical culture had gone through, where the “rule”, arbitrary in itself, was asked to govern the arbitrary nature of the project. But the rigor, as in Alberti, which informs these compositions is tragically traversed by doubt of its own legitimation, which tends - from its historical foundation - to call into question history itself in the experience of reality. It is in a certain sense exactly the same silence of the river of the Three Houses of P. Lacucci. Of the two elements of design, nature and architecture, the first does not belong to representation. Then if nature is not knowable, an ineffable object of experience, the meaning of architecture is in its eternal return to its origins, to myth as revelation. “The world of reference to myth is in some way distant in our culture: it persists through “poiesis”, and as “poiesis” has an action beyond time on the work of man” (P. Lacucci). It is the experience of art, as unity of form and matter, but it is also the place towards which architecture moves, through the mediation of a language, which gives character to its making. The immediacy of revelation in art is in this way mediated by the architectonic language, until the explosion of its own figures into fragments that have lost any space/time reference: New York, 1986. And as regards P. Lacucci, it is in fact the metropolitan experience that introduces the work to a figurative universe, in which the distinctions between architecture and art are nullified. They both pertain to a “revelation” that does not any longer belong to the rule, to the norm of the discipline, but to experience. For this, design becomes the representation of a conflict through the de-constructive process, starting from language, contested for its presumed rationality.

The expressive limits of a language founded on reason are here overcome in the affirmed irrationality of all logic. The relation of architecture with time and space is unsettled by the experience of reality, and by its colliding with both the mythical stratifications of memory and with set dialectic codes. The first element to be unsettled is the rule of linear perspective: linear perspective presumes a world that is possible to order from within a rigorously measurable space (therefore a conventional space), further, a vehicle of knowledge. It also presumes the possible apprehension and construction of space, its possible order. Nothing is more distant than this from the metropolitan reality - the space and the fabric of which may also be ordered with Euclidean geometries - but the perception of which happens along discontinuous temporal rhythms. Also different is the relation to history, and we should perhaps reflect on the fact that the so-called Postmodern architecture was born in the United States, affirmed in Europe with, in my opinion, totally different motivations. The autonomy of the architectonic object is, in American culture, a consequence of the urban fabric, which, while it isolates the building, offering it to a distinct perception, in reality inserts it into a flux of communication, which immerses it in a continuum of perception. The time of perception tends always to contract, until in the end it is not able to distinguish the differences. American architecture is not in the details, in particularities, but in the volume of the building. It is an error to think that the historicism of postmodern culture indicates an aspiration to commingle with history; it is instead an expression of the maximum degree of historical alienation, and it is totally functional to the American city. Transformed into a continuous bombardment of images, the American city gives the language of advertisement the role of transmitting its own messages. We could probably also read all of this in the light of the studies of K. Lynch on the image of the city. Looking through the work of P. Lacucci we can in some way perceive the contrast between two different cultures in which the convergences, if not the concordance itself of the models, provoke misunderstandings. P. Lacucci represents the experience of shock. The forms themselves, keeping classicism in their memory, are the ones which are called into question, and are not able to recover their own foundations, breaking into pieces their relation with the space defined by central perspective. In the projects of Italian architects sited in the American metropolis, there is some uneasiness, a certain rigidity. We can consider, for example, the projects by Emilio Battisti for Six Blocks in the Bronx, New York, designed during a Studio at Syracuse University at the end of the ‘70s. Here also the task of re-qualifying and giving value to the urban space is consigned to architecture.



These architectonic figures are rich in suggestions and memories, which seem to refer back to the European cities: from the theme of the variation of the building block to the Brown Place Arcade. The project here does not confront itself with the architectonic reality, or with the figurative repertoire within which it operates, not even in polemic terms. It seems to refer again to the hypothesis of a universal language, founded in the transcription, in a modern mode, of the classical architectonic order, and in this way reveals, at the same time, the impossible proposition of it. Differently from Emilio Battisti, P. Iacucci seems almost to want to call into question the same pre-suppositions on which her previous research was founded. She does this in order to express a new dynamic aesthetic, able to reflect the classical language of architecture, in light of the research of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA). OMA's aspiration to a sort of architectonic fluidity would seem to mediate the historicity of the language of the European tradition - and Italian in particular - with a perceptive dynamism, and this with the different space/time parameters of the States' urban reality. But no abrupt change happens with this move. Rather it is a further verification that calls into question the classical principles of the previous research. The crisis of the traditional time/space references becomes in this way the occasion to experiment with those same models. The challenge which P. Iacucci in fact sustains consists in the questioning of the very values on which Rationalism was founded, and through which, it can no longer reflect the images of contemporaneity in its own figures. The architects of the OMA group will take a position themselves against the extreme Rationalism of totality, though with different motivations, defending a mechanism of variation capable of making places and sites aesthetically seductive. Without doubt the most meaningful aspect of this is represented by a re-enacting of aesthetic values, which one tries to encompass in the work itself, and to which is tied the attempt to negate architecture as an autonomous object, to make it instead fluidly embodied in space. P. Iacucci counter-poses to the loss of value of the discipline the hypothesis of a metropolitan architecture, which is thought and designed for the city, and exalts its dynamic aspects, while at the same time elaborates some representations of it. These representations are no longer retraceable to defined geometrical figures. Instead they are separated and de-articulated, indicating a multiplicity of directions, which introduce the dimension of time into space. It is in these structures that "traces relate to and within themselves, as if they were at their first appearance in a definition of time in which past, present, and future continuously come back to themselves" (P. Iacucci). In the same way as with the OMA group, architecture tends to art, and, while this appears particularly evident in the American projects - in the same aerial suspension of architecture - it discloses itself with more violence in the project for the competition for the Museum of the Acropolis in Athens (1990), in the many tectonic signs enclosed in the precinct where memories come to a confluence and intertwine among themselves. Also in Athens, perhaps mostly in Athens, time is present as movement, depending on space. Time "is the flux and fluidity of space, which refers to the dynamic contemporaneity of the meaning, in which presence and absence continually conquer and form the spaces of the new tectonic forms" (P. Iacucci). From a closed system, language has now transformed itself in a new open and multi-faceted code, which has definitely freed matter from context. The competition for the Museum of the Acropolis in Athens (1990) marks in the work of Paola Iacucci a point of cohesion between the renewed questioning of tectonic language, and the compilation of a vocabulary with which to re-construct the phrases of the architectonic project. The idea of the Museum of the Acropolis in Athens is born at the encounter between the inner space, multidirectional, continuous, which unfolds fluidly, beyond one point perspective - a space in which contemporaneity and continuity of vision are the fundamental elements - and the cohesive, solid construction of the silent and absolute volumes, which adhere to or lie down on the land as simple and monolithic elements.

The reaction of tension between these two spatial and volumetric qualities of the buildings gives form to tectonic volumes, and to the materials in which they are expressed. The spatiality, which has been formed through an idea of the city as an experiential phenomenon, takes form in the construction of the building, and in its tectonic and spatial relations. This spatiality, which goes beyond the perspectival construction, does this in order to go back to spatial materials, which present qualities and connotations of contemporaneity, co-existence, and reversing of space - considered almost as a solid volume, instead of a void. This redefines a series of possibilities of variations and relations, which are expressed through different sites and different occasions. This process starts with the competition for Piazza Fontana in Milano (1989), where the fabric of the city traumatically separated because of destructions and disconnections that were superimposed on it through time, offers a strong urban theme, central in regard to the city. Sited behind the Duomo, the project proposes through solid elements - towered buildings - almost a triangulation of the void, which becomes in turn, like an inert solid, the prime protagonist of the project. It is a large contained space, an elliptical void that holds, frames, and defines a contemporary urban square, where movements, traffic, stasis, and human paths, wedges of

space and vision, coexist and superimpose to create and offer a new urban axis and a new central system. This system is dense and present as an image, as it offers the emptiness of a void, fluid, continuous, almost an absence of solid volumes. Geometries and surfaces of metals, glass, and concrete, as superimpositions of refracted, reflected, and absorbed lights, move in a continuous movement, following the margins of the surfaces of the void and the defined vertical volumetric presences of the towers. In Genoa for Piazza Dante (1989), the project of the competition takes on this same urban theme of spatial fluidity and movement, reversing it with a more complex game of scale, which measures the space of the reconstruction of the city. The difficult theme of weaving together fractured urban space, and its clearly traumatic reconstruction taking place between the two World Wars, relates the scale, measure, and space - or the lack of measure of this Modernist construction - to the space of the historic fabric of the city. Anonymity, the absence of scale, dimension, and measure is brought by the invasion of traffic, which through the big square, tangential to the House of Christopher Columbus and the adjacent garden, is re-woven, re-measured in a rapport of space and scale which redefines proportions, and volumetric and spatial references, projecting the voids of the historical city to outside the walls within the modern city. This results in their transformation into architecture and into buildings, constructing themselves tectonically along the same relationships and the same spatial and dimensional sequences of the voids of the historical fabric. Rebounding into solid volumes, they once more give scale and measure to Modernist re-construction, redefining it as a new unity and a new urban presence.

The project for the Church of Cesano Boscone - one of the three Churches of the Milanese Diocese, object of a competition - even more intimately and intrinsically conjugates the building with a spatial quality, which subtly puts in question the alignments, the connections, the planes, the voids. They reconstruct the "aula" of the church as a total unite space, in which the penetration, and the simultaneity of space, the light refracted through the colored glasses of the lateral openings, and the reflected light diffused from the oculus above, lightly vibrate, subtly moving the spatial, volumetric and light reflections. They separate and put just out of register the enveloping total space of the church. To the outside a kind of tectonic sail which brings the building to meet with the sky, and the wind of the plane, projects this space to the sky.

The competition in Moscow (1990) for a small series of theaters in the Gardens of the Hermitage was the occasion for deepening an idea of spatial and tectonic counterpoint between the different constructions of the two buildings, which contain the spaces of the theater halls and which reflect each other. One is constructed following an idea of direct light and defined time, cut volumetrically in a decisive solid way, in which light inundates sharp angles and spaces, and voids are cut into the volumes with precision, almost with hardness. In the other, light flows in and is diffused almost in suspension, bouncing as an echo on the surfaces, defining spaces that have the same qualities of suspension, interconnection, and reflection. Materials here are transparent and metallic, the tectonic is a construction of light: planar and transparent elements, which are suspended beyond gravity. It is the idea of duality of the theatrical mask, which to an exterior, as gestural and verbal projection of a representation - an extroverted exterior - counterpoises an introverted interior, focused to an inner center of conscience, to an interior and secret pit. The two buildings build in these two presences in space: the tectonic of the first is a tectonic of solid volumes, interpenetrating volumes, with precise voids and solids, masses intertwined with the same quality of light, captured inside within precise contours. The tectonic of the second is then a tectonic of implosive spaces, made of planarity, of transparencies, and of light metal structures, where light diffuses and dematerializes the surfaces, suspends them in a spatial construction, almost beyond gravity.

The competition for Piazzale Roma in Venice (1990), then, is the competition among the projects of this period that is more connected to an idea of suspended space: an elevated plane that raises itself above the zero level - as an additional plane of the surface of the earth - reverses itself as if it were a tectonic wave towards the Grand Canal, breaking itself in the tectonic construction of the building that faces the Canal. The building is penetrated, by view and space, at different levels, and reaffirms, as a measure at its inside, the typological measure of the adjacent houses, re-proposing them as solids, built inside the almost aerial and fluid spatial continuity of the entire building. In the interior space, which encompasses the series of volumes, the water of the Canal enters on the ground level and reflects the light from below along the surface of the embracing, off-axis wall.

In the predominantly theoretical and speculative dimension of the research of P. Iacucci, thought, in its totalizing assumption, in the conventionality and arbitrariness of its own laws, enters into conflict with the real city, not with the historical city. If this latter is in a way ideologically similar, the metropolis is instead mainly an anti-classical space. The city avoids all ideologies, as its own truth is stronger than the thought that would influence it. An aesthetic principle is reaffirmed and it substitutes the narration to which the earlier figures of P. Iacucci referred.

Now there is no contradiction between city and architecture, because the latter follows the former, in New York as in Athens. Because, even if language transforms itself in time, it still aspires to transmit the universality of its own principles and of its own laws, now rediscovered in a new universe of symbolic values: the contemporary metropolis. The metropolis questions any traditional category of thought. For this reason some futuristic citations also resurface from history in the previously mentioned projects, and the disquietude of a multiplicity of directions whose aims do not always seem clear: the nostalgia for the lost order, but also the enthusiasm for research. New York in this way is a merely an opportunity that almost accidentally indicates new potentialities of expression; it institutes new inner relations of the objects themselves. We are still, however, in a phase of research which appears random: on one side the critic and de-construction of order, on the other side construction of a new interpretative language with the fragments of that same language. To the proposition of this new linguistic construction is associated the uneasiness, clearly evident in the projects, of a classicism no longer capable of being put forward. No grammar any longer keeps the fragments together. We are in front of a malaise already described by C. Baudelaire, as by W. Benjamin, and to which P. Iacucci tries to give an architectonic form outside of literary schemes, in projects which clearly try to establish themselves outside of pregnant rhetorical representations. What in fact had been represented up to now, as a reference to the figures of myth in the construction of symbolic fragments, transforms itself into a totally abstract representation, in which the immediate referrals are to the history of art rather than to the history of architecture. Not only because the very reference of the discipline has been lost, but because the artistic representation seems to accept a larger complexity of contents, safeguarding those aspects not immediately referential to a literary universe. Above all abstract art returns to the metropolitan experience, finding anew, outside of myth, arabesque figures that refer to the possible infinite paths traversing the body of the city. Nor are they only physical paths, but also paths of interpretation, still relative to the system of communication: visible or invisible they weave a tight net on the territory.

The sense of dwelling changes, and with it, the form itself changes. This is one of the themes that emerge from the projects of P. Iacucci in the first years of the '90s. The projects pose themselves as themes of research that evidently does not attain a resolution, but through which the sense itself of the interrogation is modified. In this case myth is only one of the possible interrogations, without any possibility to refer itself to a law. Myths and figures of the culture of Modernity are instead discovered, and not only in their negative boundaries, but also in the positive new dimensions of the possibilities that Modernity opens. If time and space in fact no longer individualize uniquely determined forms in the project of architecture, it will happen that the multiple forms will build the new dimension of dwelling. Re-discovering in this way how the disappearance of Rationalist language will not necessarily correspond to an expression of irrational ways, but to the discovery of a different rationality, able to call itself into question through the creation of a new language. Perhaps, where the references to an aesthetic culture characterizing the theoretical positions of OMA seem escapes into an aesthetic to solve conflicts and to cancel fears - but also a disquieting fascination - of a project that finds itself without an ordering rule, and without a discipline on which to firmly base itself.

P. Iacucci again proposes the classic language of her own figures, inside a different orientation, following a perspectival view, made problematic by the multiplicity of its points of view, projecting them in a dilated space, in a vast desert, in which it is no longer possible to find a memory of an ideal natural condition. Everything is a poetically experienced artifice, to the point of radicalizing, in artifice, the convention of the classic language of architecture. But there is not in the work of P. Iacucci the ludic cynicism that characterizes the post-modern culture in the exhibited flattening of history, and its transformation into goods commodities, where all stories are equivalent in the progressive process of merchandising to which they are brought. This is no stylistic indulgence, then, but the polemic representation of a conflict, of the dispute among the ancients and the moderns, architectonically represented.

The reference to figurative culture becomes in this way particularly important, both because it brings back the problem of dwelling to its philosophical nature, and because it gives to architecture other instruments of representation, while it delays the problem of praxis, of constructing. All the research of P. Iacucci is inscribed in fact in an essentially theoretical "aura". Her reflection on the project, as it certainly emerges in the different competitions, and on other occasions, delays the problem of praxis, taking away meaning from construction. If this indicates the necessity to clarify her own operative instruments, at the same time it imposes on her the confrontation of a problem of technique, no longer interpreting it in a poetic sense - we can see the constructivist citations, for example, where the technical expression of construction is sublimated as an emblem - but as an original manifestation of the metropolis, instrument of transformation, not only of physical spaces, but also of their symbolic contents. It is then starting from the very myth of Prometheus that we need to search for the origin of architecture, and at

the same time, for the ambivalent nature of technique, which though never explicitly recalled, gives discipline to the organization of signs, to their ability to produce figures, starting from few simple elements, geometrically measured.

Having realized between 1989 and 1990 the interior architecture of the Wei apartment in New York - in which panels and furniture as diaphragms in wood, together with high planar fabric dividing surfaces, allow the mutation of space, moving toward different positions in the modular grid of space. They move in such a way as to contrast the prismatic disposition of the fixed elements, recalling in this way the sensibility of Gerrit Rietveld and Pierre Chareau. The two following decades, which are those between the two centuries, see P. Iacucci confront architectonic construction in Italy. From 1992 to 2008 she takes upon herself the realization of four buildings, all in the industrial valley of Ascoli Piceno: two houses (Casa Di Saverio, 1994-98; Casa ad Ancarano, 1994) and two industrial buildings (both in Ancarano, finished the first in 2000, the second in 2002).

In the Casa Di Saverio, there is a return to a re-interpretation of the spatial and figurative theme of the Modern Movement, already explored in Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier, trans-figured in a composition made of fragments, with the hybrid of a classical metrical rhythm. Base, volume, and heading are made evident by the use of materials, and imprinted on a gelid and controlled plan, geometrically articulated.

In the Casa in Ancarano, instead the tension between the stereo-metric angle and the curvilinear void comes back, though proposed this time with an aerial metal grid, with inverted roles in relation to use by Ilya Golosov and Giuseppe Terragni, of which there is a trace.

The two industrial buildings instead testify to an intense capacity of P. Iacucci to make explicit in the articulation of solids and voids in architecture, its vocation to become an urban artifact, and from this to inform landscape and its perception. Through a measured, wise sliding and translation in plan, articulated interior sections are built, accentuated by the transition of the construction materials in light, which recall the city. They reveal the landscape of the plane and of the distant hills, through unexpected framing and well-calibrated movements of the camera, formerly cherished in Renaissance perception. The theme of the section, as stratification and excavation, and of light, which gives appearance to space, is also articulated in the continuous reflections in drawings, at times fixed in the liquidity of watercolor. As in the series "Spazio", where this is constructed by a lunar light, a subtraction from the plenitude of night darkness, and where only the presence of imperceptible human figures evokes the suspended change of scale between architecture and landscape. Or, as in the series dedicated to Matera (1992-2000), in which the superposition of perspectival sections introduces light in the excavated magma of the city of stone. Or, again in the series "Pietra tettonica" (2003), which developing the vision that underlies the project of the Palazzo del Cinema in Venice, done with Steven Holl, seems to bring it to the dynamic and transitory dimension of the project for the Competition of the Ocean Pavilion for the Expo 2012 in Yeosu, Korea. The genesis of the forms in this last case is nourished by a narration that conjoins the origin of the oceans - translating into architectonic figures the myth of Pangea and the dynamics of the formation of the continents. The composition which derives from it is sited in the bay and in relation to the city, following the principle of the "Teatro del Mondo" of Aldo Rossi, showing an iced spatiality in its interior, similar to that of the floating icebergs.

Reflection on the city, and on the metropolis as a necessary dimension of architecture, is accentuated in these years, starting from drawings that research the Vertical City, which still finds in New York City its most fertile beginning. The skyline of Manhattan, contemporary Acropolis, is in "Tectonic voids" (2005) the matrix for a re-writing in vertical of an inspiration from Piranesi, but it is also the archetype of reference for the project of the four Towers in Porto d'Ascoli (2008), once more defined as a declension of the mutations of the same tower.

A further siting of the evolving research of P. Iacucci is then the one populated by the projects exhibited, spanning 60 exhibitions of architecture, design and visual arts, installed during her direction of the gallery in Milano of Aam - Architettura arte moderna, from 1996 to 2003. Through the dimension of these installations, P. Iacucci in fact succeeds in weaving and multiplying the many threads of her theoretical research in design, which are nourished by different exchanges, tying them, time after time along a path open and never preordained, with generous intellectual reciprocity.

If we then reflect on the very path of the research of Paola Iacucci, in all its multi-directional declensions, we are aware that we find in it the same path of the Italian architectonic culture since the '50s. In it are reflected the same doubts, the same interrogations, the same effort to elaborate anew language between the notions of modification and belonging. This happens starting from the classical fundamentals of architectonic language, from the same elements which P. Iacucci introduces into the American panorama in a disquieting way, with which she accepts a self-confrontation, also on the level of a discussion on the discipline, renouncing her

own ideological positions, to the point of asserting the non-existence in the metropolis of the principle of non-contradiction.

In a final analysis, it is just in the discovery of the principle of contradiction as the form of inhabiting contemporaneity, that the work of P. Iacucci characterizes itself as work at the limit, where the same metropolitan dimension affirms itself as new Nature. In the opus of F. Purini nature is experienced in terms of Leopardi, as a destructive force against which the inane action of architecture opposes itself, attempting to rule and dominate it with its own techniques. The dominion of technique is affirmed through the instruments, geometry and perspective, developed by the discipline to be able to work on reality. Though conflict presents itself always in action, mostly unresolved, it refers to the eternity and inevitability of the fight. While moving in the semantic area of F. Purini, P. Iacucci had at the beginning eluded for a long time one of the two terms of the question, reaffirming, in the absence of nature, the presence of architecture. Now the destructive “vis” of nature is recognized in the city, which in an equal way, avoids every form of control and seems to be ruled by its own laws, extraneous to the control of reason. In this locus, the research of P. Iacucci encounters that of F. Purini in the common desire to find, through method, not only the forms of a possible order of reality, but also the conscience of almost the existence of a destiny in the conflict. While F. Purini hones his own instruments of control, P. Iacucci experiences their ambiguity in the dis-orientation of her perspectival views, in the loss of the architectonic object that they denounce. The city, understood as new nature, is the site of the project.

In the drawings of Franco Purini nature aggressively comes to the foreground, just at the point of corrupting architecture, be it in history or in memory. Instead the metropolis of P. Iacucci seems to take inside any form, re-interpreting its mythical and symbolic contents in the distortions of its views. And it is still in this direction that the practice of drawing becomes the theoretical tool through which it is in the end possible to introduce the perception of time as an evolving thing: the slow chronologic time, which marks the relation between nature and architecture, as an eternal re-flowing of architecture into nature on one side, and on the other the dynamic, fast time of the metropolitan perception. In both forms, time erupts in the project, but above all in the theoretical place of the production of the project itself, it erupts in thought. To drawing, as a contracted representation of time, is entrusted the commitment to describe the transformations of the space to inhabit.

But both the representations of F. Purini and the ones of P. Iacucci are - in their handling of the structures of time - rhetorical constructions, which re-read the historical processes following what can be defined as “state of aggregation” of time. While rite prolongs the event, the acceleration of the processes enters into conflict with the need to control them. The two theoretical productions seem then to indicate two extreme positions, convergent just in the emblematic site of inhabiting - the house - whose reduction to an archetype seems to pose itself as an extreme attempt to preserve its original sense, in the autonomy in which it poses itself, both in relation to the metropolitan space on one side, and in relation to “nature” on the other. There is no attempt then to solve the isolation of the architectonic object, but instead almost a need to stress its own necessity, although in its autonomy. The image of the house, made more and more abstract, seems then to rather refer to the dimension of memory and desire. They are the desert interiors of P. Iacucci, as deserted are the interiors of A. Cantafora. Inhabiting constantly accompanies itself with the silence of dwelling: they are again the factories of G. Basilico.

No discourse seems then to be able to imagine the inhabitant. The desert of the places indicates the impossibility of experiencing those same places. The nostalgia of the inhabitant, as the experience of being not rooted, all are totally contained precisely in the representations themselves of P. Iacucci, and they push to the limit the theme of solitude in a narration of inhabiting which, accelerated, forbids reflection, forbids staying at length in the places, which move along as cinematic images. And perhaps the construction of film even furnishes instruments for the logic of the construction of architecture: Caminante no hay camino, se hace camino al andar.

## Yehuda E. Safran

Paola Iacucci

I have met Paola Iacucci at RISD School of Architecture at Rhode Island eighteen years ago. She was running a studio at the time with Alex Wall whom I knew from our days at the Architectural Association in London. Following our introduction, Paola did not pay particular attention to me in the early days. But when we met a while later in the street, with me carrying a relatively small traveling bag, she asked me where I was traveling to. When she received the answer: “India”, she was evidently surprised and impressed. Apparently she hurried to see what the students in my Studio were doing. My studio, at the time was called: “The Monster and the Sublime”. Since, the “Sublime” is so difficult, I had asked my students to create a self-portrait as a Monster. Paola was so impressed that when I returned she received me as a lost and found brother. This anecdote tells not only about an episode that inaugurates our friendship, but an important characteristic of Paola Iacucci, her incomparable capacity to register and appreciate the unknown, as yet unnamable. Her entire life’s work could be described as an insatiable quest for the impossible, the moment of sublime revelation, the light that shines on a rough surface, which brings into relief the shadow. Or, should we say the shadow that brings the light into relief. In Paola Iacucci’s work, architecture is no more no less than an obstacle to light.

You could describe it as the moment of an epiphany. The moment a white sail in the sea is just in our field of vision as we are observing the white wall on the roof of Casa Malaparte in Capri; there we see the sail as well together, the curved white wall on the roof. Or, at night, the light in the fire place in front of the glass square, in the large hall, again at Casa Malaparte, and there you would see the rocks of the Faraglioni, as if the fire here and the rock there, were one and same. Yes, she was, she is fascinated by places which offer such miracle of vision. In her chosen territory for her summer retreat, summer studio, she selected the far edge of Apulia, the most eastern coast on the edge of the Adriatic sea, Otranto, where the underground caves outside the city are studded with stones marked with very strange pictographs, which no doubt attracted her. Stone age signs and odd lines have made a lasting impression on her mind. As secret messages from a very distant time, which, no doubt they are. The difficulties in deciphering these oddities never bothered her in particular. No, Paola was far from indifferent, she loved the indecipherable.

Her paintings are full of recognizable elements gathered in a composition that would deny any conventional meanings. They draw you into a vortex of possibilities. And so the subject of the Sublime and the Monster turns out to be pivotal, turning point and axial, around which her own life unfolds. Navigating between the pure geometry of Purini and the unfathomable depth of the New York paintings of the Sublime. Only she, in her intuition could see the common ground, if there ever was one. But surely there is. She herself in her indefatigable intelligence and work could perhaps hold the extreme opposites as complementing each other, united in her own thread as she has weaved it all her life’s work. No, she is not Penelope undoing her daily weave to have the thread again, for the next day toil.

But, one look at her hands reveals all her doings and undoing. They are relatively large and extremely capable. There is nothing, she could not accomplish. Indeed, she created numerous projects of great intricacy.

She established a great small gallery in the center of Milano. She created the space for Carlo to continue to paint, even while his melancholy drove him away from painting his beloved golden squares, behind the exhibition space. She was present in many projects of Steven Holl and exhibited his and Alvaro Siza oeuvre in the Castle of Acaia, Apulia. Above all, none of her many students at Columbia Graduate School and elsewhere would ever fail to ask of her and to praise her to heaven. Just this afternoon in one of the charming neighborhood gardens in Alphabet City I have met one of her First Year students from Columbia ten years ago, “How is Paola?” By now a very charming young mother with her little girl who is afraid of the bugs in the earth, spending their afternoon in the private/public garden.

Is it the Labyrinth or the Sphere? I remember poignantly, walking together in the allies of Venice one early summer when we were running a summer studio there. Paola loved the Labyrinth and dreamed of the Sphere. Are they compatible? Certainly not, and yet in our human condition we are offered no other alternative, our cities are the Labyrinth and our dreams are the Sphere. Will they ever become one? Surely not, and yet, are we dreaming? What will our existence be without our inalienable ability to assert our sovereignty in our dreams? If we exist at all, surely we exist in our dreams above all. Would a just man give up on being just, just because this world is, and will remain unjust for quite a while, for the foreseeable future? Surely not. This is why we love Paola as she is, as her love is what we love.

New York, 11.V.13



PAOLA IACUCCI

# A LIGHT THROUGH ARCHITECTURE

1992 – 2012

SCHLEBRÜGGE.EDITOR

Marina Tsvetaeva

Il poeta e il tempo

E' la differenza tra il moto lirico del mare, fatto di flussi e riflussi, vasto, ipnotico, e quello del fiume: longitudinale, unidirezionale, senza ritorno. Differenza tra stare e passare. Il fiume lo ami perche' e' sempre diverso , il mare - perche' e' sempre lo stesso. Se vuoi sempre qualcosa di nuovo, vai a vivere in riva a un fiume.

Al lirico e al mare non chiedi lo scorrere senza ritorno, ma l'onda che sempre ritorna; non l'irripetibilita' dell'attimo e la non-fugacita', ma proprio la ripetitivita' dell'imprevisto (marino e lirico) e l'immutabile necessita' dei mutamenti e dell'avvicendamento - l'ineluttabilita' del tuo stupore dinanzi a loro.

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# book of the west

libro dell'occidente

solid and void

solido e vuoto

space

spazio

architecture becomes (as) life evolves.

l'architettura accade (come) la vita diviene.