

Title: Some Principles of Architecture

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A premise

Reading the chapters of my recent reflections on the current state of architecture – a globalisation product – an analysis that I have proposed in this writing, one might think that my considerations result from rather negative ideas about the future of construction. As a matter of fact, identifying critical moments, debatable orientations, excesses, or compositional errors, along with proceeding according to a mosaic of different references coexisting with rather questionable outcomes, is not the deliberate fruit of a pessimistic judgment but simply the effect of an unstable, indecisive, and confused period. What needs to be understood is *how* the drift that has homogenized previous languages, understood as cultural entities, must be overcome in favor of the opposite: a *spectacularization* of architecture that has invaded and isolated media communication, resulting in propaganda and celebrations. What needs to rediscover is a new season in which it is possible to confer upon the evolution of dwelling its deepest sense, rooted in history, memory, and the search for a new organicity that aligns with the shape of the world. In the event we proceed in this direction, which can only be positive, it involves a redimensioning of functionalism and typology that have been dominant the first throughout the entire 20th century, and the second as a secret *surplus value* considered knowledge that only a mysterious class of builders – the ancient Freemasons – possesses setting aside concrete

technique, technology tends to operate on a higher level than that inherited from architects and artists such as Wright, Mies, Le Corbusier, Terragni, Libera, Goldsmith. Furthermore, over the thirty years from the fall of the Berlin Wall to today, the concepts of morphology and typology have disappeared, as has the fundamental relationship between tectonics and architecture.

The respect for *the environment*, a third concept after those of *landscape and territory*; the need to counteract the increase in climatic temperatures along with all the other natural phenomena that derive from it; the issue of entire populations displacement from their settlements to more convenient and advanced ones; the urgent necessity that the numerous and risky human activities, and the resulting megalopolises, which have now become entities no longer urban but geological, should be redimensioned and then placed within a broader, more human framework; the shift from non-renewable energies in favor of inexhaustible ones are not just problems to be solved, but challenges to be addressed through a necessary, careful, and extensive redefinition of dwelling that confirms the existence of the physical form of human life its materiality that becomes spirit, totality, and a constant promise of evolution increasingly in harmony with others, the world, and the universe. The following text is therefore the Gramscian outcome of an *optimism of the will* that can and must overcome the *pessimism of reason*, which is so widespread today along with dramatic ideas about the future.

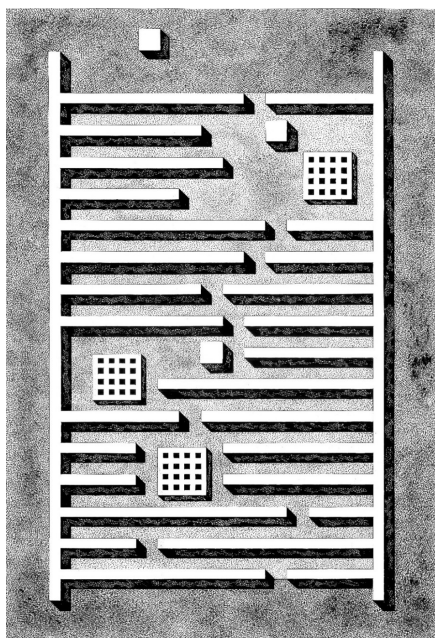


Figure 1. Taunsuan, Purini 2016

What is Architecture? Architecture is a primary activity that allows human beings to live. It unifies the construction of a building in its technical aspects and the functions it offers, with the necessity that the final outcome is form. In this context, form is understood as an artistic synthesis of the various contents of the building. In short, construction is both the result of scientific knowledge and art. Science is simpler in its resolution of technical issues, while the latter is more complex as it expresses higher-level content—no longer utilitarian but historical, conceptual, and spiritual. As is well known, without architecture, the inhabitants of the Earth would be exposed to rain, snow, cold, sun, wind, and probably would not have continued to live. Their early shelters housed scarce belongings—simple hides or rough textiles to wear, some weapons, provisions, as well as fire for cooking and warmth. These basic shelters organized families into a social order, which would later become increasingly complex, accompanied by rituals and communal practices. Above all, the primitive huts will over time be the models for building architecture no longer in wood but in stone and brick but which for a long period will preserve elements and decorations that made the first, true architecture more complete and evocative. In my opinion the art of construction is defined by three fundamental principles that have persisted from its inception with human communities to the present day, despite the passage of millennia. These principles are therefore always the same, even if the way in which they resist the various eras, with the cultural and structural changes and customs that characterize them, modify their enunciation. The first of these principles lies in architecture being the result of both scientific knowl-

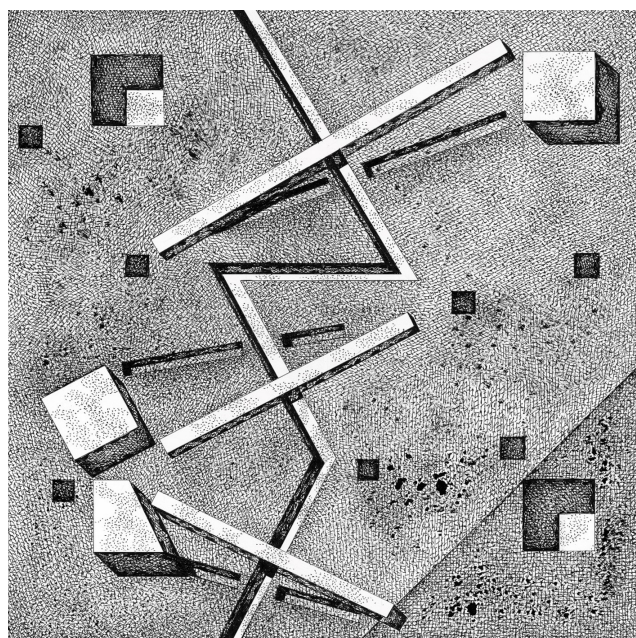


Figure 2. Congiunzione astratta, Purini, 2023

edge and artistic expression, as mentioned at the beginning of this text. This duality has remained unchanged across various architectural styles—from Babylonian and Egyptian to Greek, Roman, Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, and Enlightenment architecture—all the way to the constructions of the 20th century and the first quarter of the new millennium. As previously stated, the essence of architecture has not changed in its essence. Its three aspects—*utilitas* (utility), *firmitas* (durability), and *venustas* (beauty)—still form the foundation of construction, even though founding a city or erecting a building may assume different secondary characteristics. These characteristics include ways of thinking and organizing, available techniques, rules for construction sites, and the need for alignment with prevailing tastes, which vary according to different chronological periods, the meaning of architecture which in less culturally prepared people is conceived according to improper or casual orientations. What remains constant is the union of science and art, two conceptual realms—the former more comprehensible, the latter more tightly closed. The second principle is represented by an ideal perimeter that defines the scope of architecture. It has a thematic field around which new characteristics are selected over time, even if these merely complement existing issues. Let's imagine an enclosure that encompasses a certain number of topics. Believing, as is often the case today in architectural schools and in design and construction work, that this perimeter can expand to accommodate any phenomenon—whether environmental or not—is an mistake that the culture of construction is currently favoring. There is no longer a pause in continually introducing architectural themes with questions to which architecture

cannot provide answers. What can be accepted, perhaps, is the partial transformation of a problem for example, the climate crisis which already exists within the repertoire of architectural research. Promoting the constant growth of functional and formal construction knowledge, while continuously embracing new questions already discussed in other fields, only serves to render the potential of architecture impossible, inundated by improper or approximate inquiries. Keeping in mind the reality of the disciplinary framework of architecture, defending its boundaries, and attempting to identify the resources within the array of design forms that could solve problems without making them an inherent aspect of architecture is, in my opinion, essential. It's worth reiterating that the right approach is not to expand the limits of architecture, as has been happening in recent years, but rather to find the nexus that connects a fact to construction and, from outside this perimeter, address the problem that such a fact entails. A second debatable aspect of this principle involves a further transformation of architectural unity. Throughout its extensive history within human communities, architecture has constituted a unique body of knowledge. It encompassed landscape, territory, and environment—three distinct definitions of an identifiable part of the world that required intervention through appropriate infrastructure. Alongside the construction of cities and homes, these elements shared a common identity that fully defined the act of building. However, in recent decades, for reasons unknown, the unity of architecture has been fractured. The various components of this primary activity, akin to the limbs, organs, and bones of our bodies, once represented unity within diversity. Now, they have become a collection of presumed autonomous knowledge domains, separate realms that are rarely discussed in architectural schools. The dispersion of unified knowledge in favor of limited, fragmented expertise rather than preserving a coordinated body of understanding that gives life to architecture is the central cause of the pronounced difficulty in conceiving appropriate and enduring interventions in landscapes, designing livable and proportionate cities, and creating buildings with welcoming forms. Deprived of this unity, architecture is now disarticulated, no longer attuned to its genetic and unitary finiteness—a loss lamented. It exists somewhere between what remains of design and the virtual potential that promises advanced exploration of new technologies, capable of paving the way for an eagerly anticipated metaverse with its dominant virtuality. The third and final organic and authentic space of construction involves the realization and care of entire habitation. More precisely, it can be defined as an operative context in which material elements are produced for individual and communal life. Intervening in the terrestrial unit referred to as landscape, territory, and environment entails creating an autonomous beauty unintentional yet shaped by agri-

cultural labor, planned and executed by farmers, shepherds, and those who tend to animals. The cultivation and harvesting of plants to nourish both humans and animals play a crucial role. This labor transforms the land's surface, imbuing it with a more complex significance than that of untouched soil. The territory encompasses the same geographical space as the landscape, but this second notion, pertaining to the same location, highlights the need to make the landscape-territory accessible through various forms of pathways and architectural works. These include forest or open-air trails, roads of varying widths, rest areas with traveler accommodations, and shelters for vehicles. On the other hand, the environment considers the landscape-territory from the perspective of its exposure to natural phenomena such as those influenced by climate along with spontaneous vegetation that may be useful or unnecessary, rivers that traverse it, the presence of forests or accessible rocky soils, and the artificial geography shaped by human activity. The exploration of architecture's primary characteristics, which I've briefly summarized, is unfortunately less practiced today. The crisis of rationalism, or its outright rejection, has paved the way for numerous experiments often questionable where construction becomes not so much difficult as it is costly. The relationship between tectonics and architecture is no longer as permissible, and concepts like morphology and typology, once essential, have vanished from the design culture. My discussion of these critical theoretical themes isn't rooted in nostalgia, as some might assume. Instead, I express hopeful anticipation that the loss of fundamental aspects in our profession can be reversed, albeit with fresh perspectives. Alongside the decline of reason (which extends beyond rationalism), there's a critical engagement with the contemporary planetary challenges. Turning to green solutions, superimposing arboreal textures on cities and their buildings to radically reshape urban forms, and rethinking habitation in light of renewable energies capable of providing only partial illumination and transportation are pivotal choices. Perhaps revisiting nuclear power plant operations could offer a simpler, useful, and definitive solution for landscapes, territories, and environments. Regarding greenery, it's worth noting that over millennia, a balanced relationship has emerged between trees, grassy areas, and cities through grand parks and magnificent gardens an intricate equilibrium. However, the current green invasion seems intent on disrupting the historical harmony between cities and nature, overshadowing the proportional harmony of architecture (which, remember, is petrified music) in favor of a vegetal universe that could soon obscure spaces, volumes, and building facades entirely. Lastly, let's not forget that rational architecture isn't prescriptive, totalizing, or domineering. Within it, by listening to its spirit, we can compose infinite architectures—each distinct yet perpetually inspired by an eternal, mysterious logic.

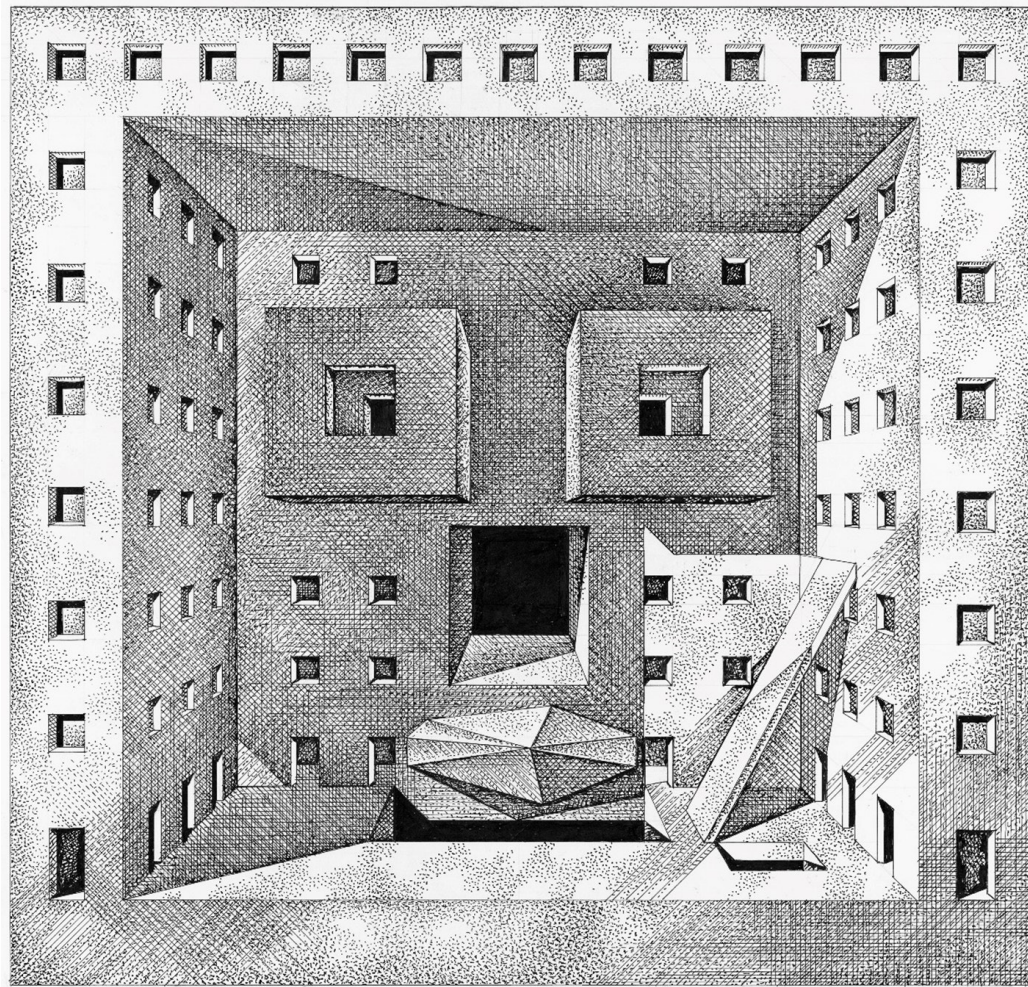


Figure 3. L'architettura guarda. Purini, 2023

Considerations on duration

During the 20th century one of the inherent characteristics of architecture has largely disappeared, if not entirely. This pertains to the concept of a building's lifespan, which had always been considered an intrinsic aspect of construction a fundamental principle. Before the eclipse of durability, it was normal for architecture to have an exceptionally long life, during which interventions such as facade modifications, substantial volume additions, restorations, or partial reconstructions never fundamentally challenged the notion of duration. Despite occasional expansions, the architecture subtly presented itself as a natural entity forever rooted in the landscape, expressing more than just a terrestrial backdrop. Sometimes, buildings originally designed for specific functions would adapt to new uses while retaining their core identity. In summary, architecture constituted one of the most profound representations of time. Even when reduced to ruins—a second existence for architecture—the skeletal remains of buildings, often partially demolished, continued to convey meanings deeper than those present dur-

ing their intact phases. As a brief parenthesis, it's worth noting that the concept of ruin is conceptually visible even during the construction process. It anticipates its own state, as evocatively depicted in Maarten van Heemskerck's true-to-life drawings of the construction of St. Peter's Basilica.

As I mentioned at the beginning of these notes, the concept of architectural durability has largely faded away. The lifespan of a modern building has become arbitrary, provisional, and relative. Over the past three decades, the era of globalized architecture, buildings have often served as media expressions rather than true constructions. They do not represent themselves but their propagandistic and celebratory functions. When this promotional role ends, the building is demolished to make way for another communicative campaign. The avant-garde movements at the start of the 20th century fundamentally transformed construction. Instead of relying on the massive load-bearing walls of the past, which ensured long-lasting architecture, modern architecture turned to reinforced concrete. This material defined the skeleton of a

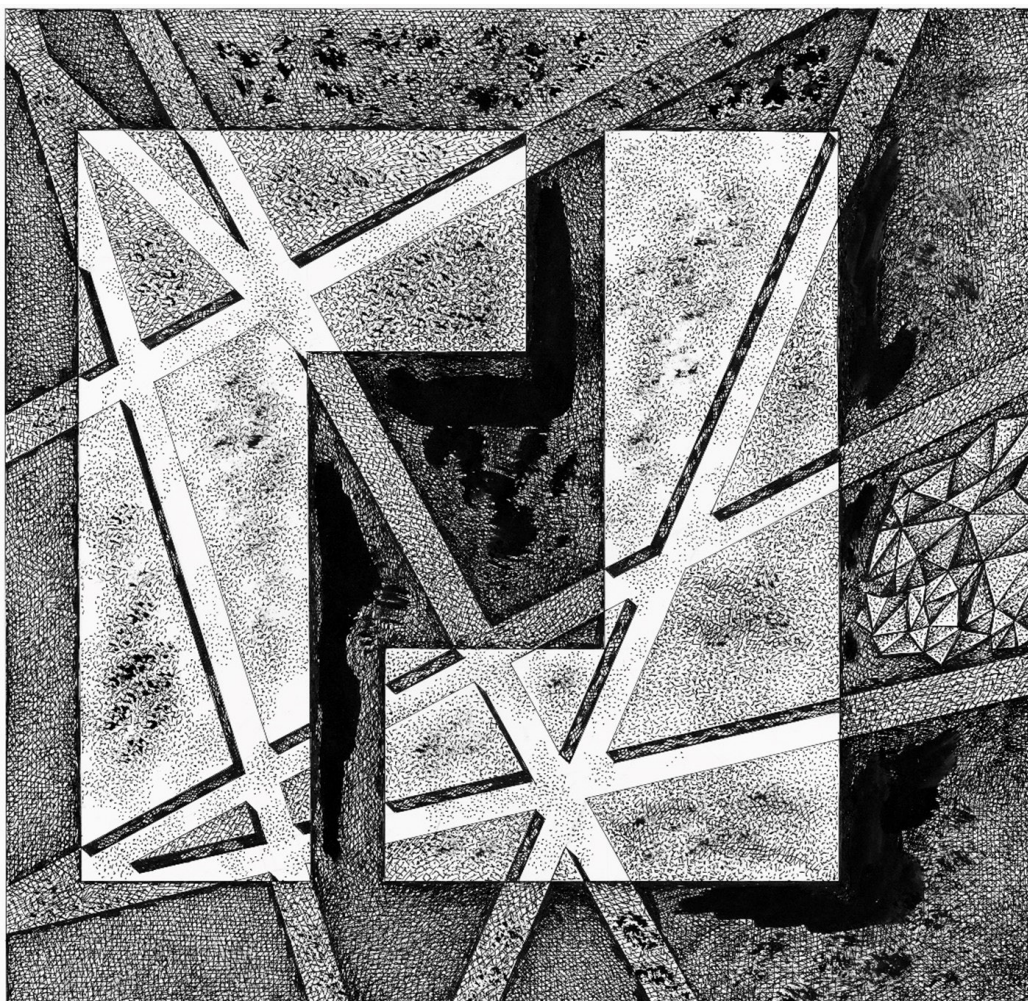


Figure 4. Congiunzioni, Purini, 2023

building, a structure with slender pillars and beams supporting walls and floors of smaller dimensions compared to earlier constructions. There exist photographs of Le Corbusier's iconic Villa Savoye, stripped of its original plaster, revealing load-bearing structures nearly consumed. Like a ruin, this 20th-century masterpiece dramatically displays its fragility, even as the remaining value of its spaces has nearly vanished. Restored to its origins, Villa Savoye embarked on a new cycle of existence, preserving the mystery of its past as a ruin. At this point of discussion is necessary to clarify the concept of ruin, remnants, and fragments. For writers, poets, and historians, ruins symbolize the limitations of human ambitions their inevitable end. Ruins demonstrate this failure. However, architects perceive the remnants of a building differently. As Vitruvius famously outlined, architecture embodies three aspects: *utilitas*, *firmitas* and *venustas*. When observing a building, all three dimensions contribute to its unity. To be clearer, when I see architecture I grasp all three aspects that characterize it together. However, if I want to understand the *firmitas* of a building alone, I must cancel the *utilitas* and the *venustas* and if, inst-

ed, I want to contemplate the beauty of a building alone I have to cancel the *utilitas* and the *firmitas*. Summarising, only when there is no longer a use in an architecture and the solidity of the structures can I take note of its *venustas* in all its expressions. It is through this method that some architects such as John Soane or Auguste Perret have been able to recognize the presence of beauty in some of their works in drawings or reflections. The reduction in the use of reinforced concrete as a construction system has undermined the durability of buildings. As I mentioned earlier, another factor contributing to this decline is the media-driven customization of architecture, which rarely extends to a truly long lifespan. Instead, buildings are often transformed or replaced entirely. To achieve lighter and more slender structures, architects have turned to materials like iron and steel. Skyscrapers, for instance, rely on one of these two solutions. In recent years, reinforced concrete has also become increasingly common in tall buildings. A third characteristic shaping contemporary construction, especially in residential and office buildings, is the embrace of spacious environments. Apart from the designated areas for

bathrooms, kitchens, and storage, the rest of an apartment often consists of open spaces devoid of partitions and doors. Office buildings similarly feature substantial spaces that accommodate workstations alongside plants or areas for breaks, rest, and conversations. However, the limited time frame allocated for architectural projects translates into structural weaknesses in new buildings. Additionally, furniture choices and surface treatments are designed not for long-term durability but rather as transient figurative and physical scenarios. Concluding these reflections on the waning concept of durability in the 20th century, it's essential to clarify that while rapid construction timelines persist, some architects continue to consider durability not as a concrete reality but as a reference to a previous situation—a historical context. In the 1980s, during the brief era of Postmodernism, a nostalgic resurgence for remembered rather than asserted durability emerged. This sentiment was echoed by the neo-avant-garde movement of Deconstructivism, which made the ruinous aspects of buildings visible even as they were being constructed—a fleeting light extinguished almost as soon as it began. Thus, rather than negating durability at the birth of architecture, we encounter a conceptual time that remains elusive. To contemplate durability is to unconsciously (or sometimes consciously) believe that architectural structures bear witness to events that occurred even in distant times—a testimony that could reconstruct the continuous and complex narrative of cities.

Style, architectural writing, language

After recent reflections on the near-total disappearance of the concept of duration from contemporary architecture, another eclipse has emerged in my considerations about the art of construction which it concerns with the notion of style a term and compositional process that no longer features prominently in architectural discourse. Instead, new definitions have replaced it. The last notable use of the word “style” in architectural criticism was in Gio Ponti’s magazine, “Stile,” which was published in the mid-1940s. The end of this significant experiment in architecture occurred in 1947, a year that marked the close of an era and the beginning of the country’s rebirth.

The term “style” referred to two aspects of architecture. The first involved giving an artistic purpose to an architectural work. For a building to have style meant that it was conceived as the result of a careful composition, based on the presence of meticulously studied elements, capable of creating a comfortable, elevated, and harmonious atmosphere. The second aspect indicated that an architect who had identified their own style became entirely recognizable in the sequence of their works. Style was thus considered as the recurrence in an architect’s buildings of repeated structural or plastic motifs, but above all, it conveyed

the necessity of creating situations capable of producing places.

In summary, style was the effect of a conception of architecture that referred mainly to the bourgeois world, for which it created a noble living environment, articulated in careful sequences and in buildings with composed, implicit, and discreet shapes. The absence of something to replace style, considered as a tribute to the most advanced class of society, lasted for a considerable time. Until the mid-1960s, there was no substitute for this concept, which excluded not only the theme of functionalism but also, and above all, the housing needs of the less affluent classes, whose living environments were not the subject of particular studies or adequate improvement programs for their neighborhoods located in peripheral areas not always equipped with services. The response to this absence was the idea of architectural writing, present especially in the articles, essays, and books of Manfredo Tafuri, but also in many theoretical and critical texts by other historians and architecture enthusiasts. This term covered a rather vast field of themes related to living. The various utilities of architecture, as the main and often sole issue, the construction problems, the relationship between the residential communities and the buildings that house them, the characteristics of architectural details, the overall visibility of the buildings, and their layout on the ground outlined a set of aspects that required not so much a reference to the final effect of a neighborhood, for example, but rather a point-by-point attention to all the necessities of life that find in living one of the primary dimensions of their existence.

All this initially took place in the atmosphere of neorealism, which, after literature and cinema, had also involved construction. It should be noted, however, that neorealism in architecture had a significant following for several years in the central and southern parts of the peninsula.

In the north, due to a bourgeois vision of society and its own identity, there was a cultural reaction to neorealism in the form of neoliberty, proposed by Ernesto Rogers’ Casabella, a trend that combined elegance with an underlying attention to a newer functionality in living. It should also be remembered that the alternative to neorealism did not prevent Casabella from having a notable interest, for example, in the works of Mario Ridolfi. It should also be said that, in reality, the definition of architectural writing was very close to the concept of style, which also etymologically relates to writing. Despite this coincidence, style had acquired the meaning of the artistic quality of the work, overshadowed by the second and broader term. Choosing such a term as the definition of a project aimed to refer to the more complex and significant contents of construction, but as I mentioned a few lines earlier, functionality has occupied the most present positions and orientations.

Even though the two definitions of style and architectural

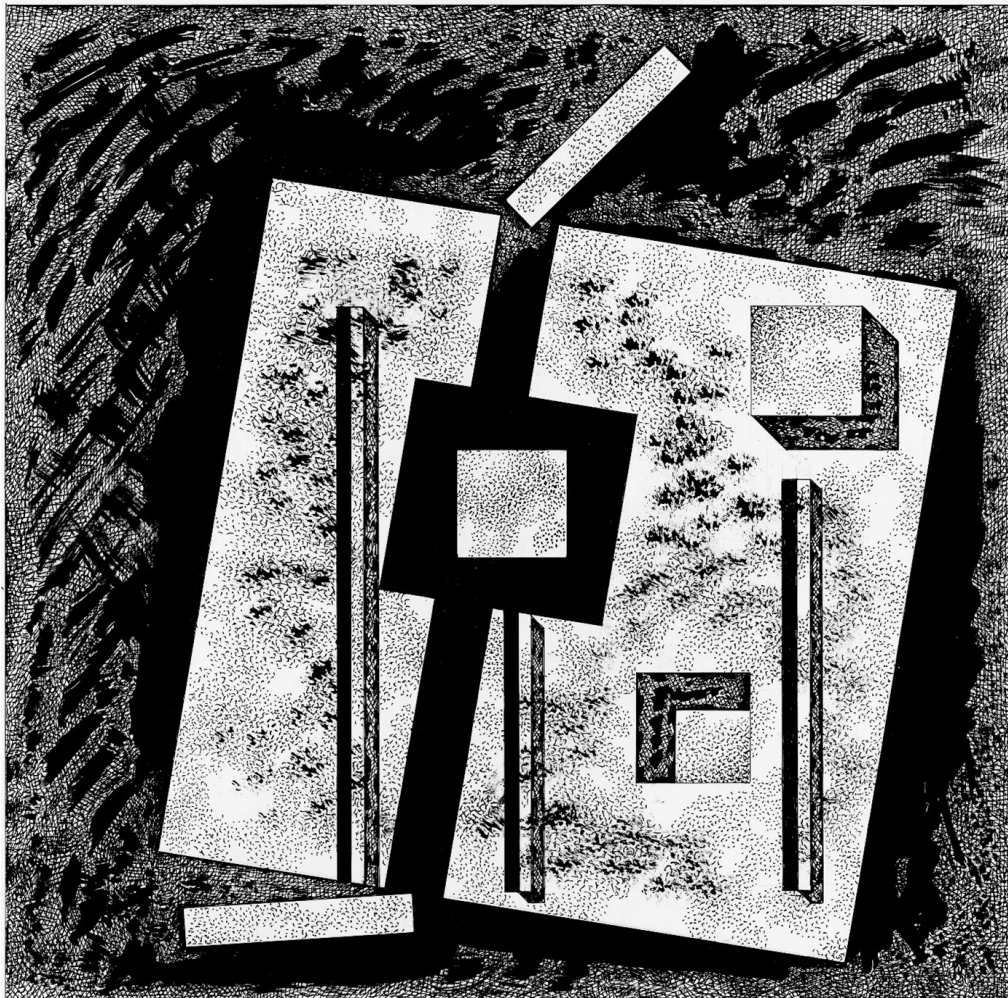


Figure 5. Dinamica planare, Purini, 2023

writing continue to be used at times, especially the latter, a further term has emerged in contemporary history and current criticism that has convincingly and continuously challenged them. This term is language. In recent years, this notion has prevailed, which does not seem to shift attention away from the definition of architectural writing as a set of design and construction processes. The word language merely modifies, in a non-exclusive and consistent way, the previously stated meaning of architectural writing. If the latter expression suggests a constant and multifaceted process, that of language rather alludes to grammatical and syntactic structures as fundamental elements of architecture. Obviously, if language is emphasized, it should not be something that constantly changes in an architect's research. On the contrary, language should be identified at an age that allows the choice of a set of compositional norms, namely between twenty and thirty years old. Once this language is found, it should be valid and active for a lifetime, even with some variations over the years – think of architectural protagonists like Frank Lloyd Wright, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, Giuseppe Terragni, Adalberto Libera – and not considered as

something ephemeral that changes regularly. However, the necessity for language to be continuous is almost always denied by shifting the idea of consumption from life to architecture. In fact, architects working in these years have almost all had to endure consumerism, considering the works being built as realities to be reproduced when deemed notable. Architects like Herzog and de Meuron, to limit myself to one example, have changed their ways of designing from a precise, highly personal architectural writing to the imitation of globalized architectures made known by the media. In this way, which has involved many other architects – in Italy, Cino Zucchi, Antonio Citterio, Mario Bellini, Gae Aulenti – architecture becomes esperantist, meaning it is conceived as a mosaic of fragments taken from the most well-known works. Language is no longer personal but is halted through a reconnaissance among the many media architectures, so to speak, which many think are important because they emerged on television or in the press as works to be celebrated.

All this in cities and metropolises that no longer have a morphological order but live in a convulsive mass of buildings, each in senseless competition with the others, arranged on the urban

layout randomly. This premeditated disorder should be avoided to restore the idea of language to its meaning. It is a difficult problem, that of returning the city to itself, but it is the only positive choice that can be transformed into action as soon as possible. Current cities, metropolises, and megalopolises, even those with centuries or millennia of history, are rejecting their memories as necessary signals for the future. Only by questioning what has been can we envision what may happen in our living.

To conclude, it is necessary to realize that today the beauty of architecture is thought of as the result of technology; that spatial and volumetric order derives from digital; that a building does not create a place or confirm an existing one. Only by realizing the mystery of each architecture, which is always a cosmic synthesis, can we build with reason and emotion.

Form and informality in the city

In the last fifty years, the idea of the city in its morphological-typological essence has been almost entirely abandoned. The coherence between new urban layouts, conceived according to organic criteria, and the methods of realizing new architectures has disappeared. The intervention on cities has thus been configured as an incoherent set of urban parts with a random structure, as can be seen in *City Life* in Milan. In this way, buildings no longer dialogue with each other, thus interrupting a centuries-old tradition that saw the buildings themselves coordinate in typologically similar groups, whose differences in language reveal an identity that is not absolute but positively partial.

Despite the almost total abandonment of morphological-typological canons in the Faculties of Architecture and in the design of urban parts, some remnants of urban analysis and related considerations still exist. Fragments of urban theory based on the relationship between place and project have indeed remained, even though knowledge about the city and architecture has almost entirely diminished. Knowledge that has been set aside in favor of an urban planning conception exclusively related to issues of pure functionality.

Given this precarious condition, free of conceptual references and limited to functionality, it seems necessary to reintroduce morphological-typological themes. These themes are no longer exclusively related to Saverio Muratori's theory but, starting from that, redefine it as the vision of the city and its relationship with other settlements has now changed. To be clearer, the ideas of morphology and typology persist, often in part, but no longer in the version that existed half a century ago, now projected onto new issues. In short, a contamination and alliance between morphology, typology, and the current randomness of interventions is not proposed. What is needed is to verify whether there exists today a new type of morphological condition that would be able to give back to the city an evolutive program capable of producing urban parts with a precise structure, real values, and a relationship

with important and unique aspects of the city and its history.

In fact, it is urban memory that should guide the path towards the future of settlement organisms. In this thematic context, it should be remembered that even environmentalist culture, with the problems to be addressed related to the crisis the planet is going through, should tune in with what human habitation is in all its expressions.

Focusing on morphology, I want to clarify that it has two main aspects. The first is of geometric nature, meaning it tends to develop settlement patterns that consist of functionality but, before this, an overall order of urban parts, which always assumes a symbolic meaning. The diagrammatic character of the geometry that is intrinsic to morphology conveys a series of contents often difficult to understand, except for the simplest and most direct ones. The urban fabric is almost always not visible from above, and therefore some of its values are recognizable from aerial views or from heights if these are present in the city. This is the case of Rome and Naples, cities that offer extraordinary panoramic views that reveal meanings perceptible only from significant heights.

The second aspect of morphology is determined by the ground. It can be flat, which allows for the representation of a planimetric scheme. It is also possible for the ground to have depressions and elevations that will give rise to a fabric that must follow the modeling of the terrain. This will result in an urban design that highlights the altimetric trends of the ground, resulting in a vast, complex, lively, and often exciting architectural scenography. The possible presence of watercourses would then give even greater spatial articulation.

The aspects of morphology—the word was invented by Johann Wolfgang Goethe—are, in my opinion, three. The first is reticular, as in ancient Roman cities, the second is multipolar, and the third is a system of settlement islands, divided and at the same time connected by greenery. It is the archipelago city, a city of cities.

The main role of morphology and typology is not only to produce a diagram but to represent an urban community, a higher task. The form of the city includes a hierarchical arrangement that, from the representative spaces of architectures expressing the centrality of public institutions, reaches the placement of dwellings in neighborhoods that accommodate different social classes,

in industrial nuclei, in places for culture and leisure, in barracks, in parks and gardens. From a broader perspective, morphology is a concrete abstraction, a guide for the city in its mutations, the interpretation of the urban community, the sequence of architectural presences that, from the vast dimension, and therefore not configuring itself as a notable evidence, reaches the centrality and finally the primary core of the city.

Concluding this survey on morphology, incidentally articulated in multiple ways, in historical cities mainly due to the city walls, and on typology, which made the division into social classes understandable while at the same time the community

they shared, an analysis must be conducted on the relationship, established in the 19th century, between form as a place of recognition of nature and social life, made more complex in the 20th century, and the informal. The random disorder or, if preferred, the negation of urban order in favor of a more considered ensemble of cities within the city, or an urban crack in which a real and sincere identity, as well as true autonomy, is sought, has given rise to a positive hybrid in continuous redefinition.

A new morphology thus seems to propose itself as a group of singular urban orders that seek unity, and at the same time, the alternating merging of one into the other. Being increasingly aware of this unstable balance can propose unprecedented urban horizons, more open, dynamic, capable of embracing the memory of cities, as attentive to diversity as able, if necessary, to unify them. One might ultimately think that the urban formlessness is nothing but the result of a rapid morphology that exhibits, by layering them, its own metamorphoses.

Space

Not space itself, but the awareness by architects of space as one of the primary categories of construction is not a fact that has always been known. Architects have built extraordinary spaces over millennia – think of Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman architecture, the works of Michelangelo, Raphael, Giovanni Battista Piranesi – but they were not aware of the existence of space. It was August Schmarsow, at the end of the 19th century, who identified space as the fundamental characteristic of architecture. In the 20th century, Gaston Bachelard, Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Luigi Moretti, Sigfried Giedion, and Bruno Zevi consciously exalted space, attributing to it an increasing number of complex aspects.

Space most likely originated when the first humans began to explore the forests that covered almost all the land. Simultaneously, newly formed tribes began to create structures derived from trees, vines, and leaves, resulting in villages with huts. Building them in circles or parallel lines, these residential nuclei were erected on clearings that made the huts more defensible and provided a common space for gathering or performing rituals. “Space is making space,” wrote Martin Heidegger, echoing a Latin definition in which the verb *patēre* indicated an open surface, free of boundaries.

In reality, the presence of boundaries is very important for understanding space and its dimensions. There certainly exists infinite spatiality, as in deserts, but it is an interesting exception. A space is almost always bounded by an enclosure. Observing a crack, it is easy to understand that a piece of land is nothing but a succession of areas, more or less large, separated by boundaries. Some of these were sacred, as the death of Remus, killed by Romulus because his brother had violated the threshold of Rome’s walls being traced, reminds us. Looking at a landscape, we can notice how it seems con-

tinuous, but upon closer inspection, signs are found that separate one area from another. A forest ends, a river separates two plains, these are interrupted by hills and mountains, some fields are cultivated, others remain intact. What seemed unitary reveals itself as a system of different textures. Space disarticulates, revealing the interweaving of boundaries.

The space of the landscape is very different from that of a building. Many architects habitually consider a construction only by acknowledging the envelope of its volume, its dimensions, its weight. In fact, the geometric solid that contains an internal space also has an external spatiality. If one has the necessary disposition to carefully consider the position of a construction in space, it becomes clear that a building has the ability to radiate its volumetry outward, represented by an external thickness, invisible but perceptible. As if the weight of the building were reflected on our body, we are, so to speak, traversed by the mass of the building. This evokes in us a suggestive and consistent magnetic tension. If this building has one, two, or three volumes next to it – think of architectures aligned along a street – the external projection of the four contiguous buildings would create a dialectic between them, resolved by transmitting an even more intense energy to those walking or observing these buildings.

What I described in the previous paragraph concerns an external phenomenon. Very different, however, is the study of internal space, which always seems larger than the volume seen from the outside. I have already highlighted in a previous chapter this impression that, at least for me, appears inexplicable. What I believe can define the spaces contained within volumes are two types of interiors. The first is absolute space, that is, the pure form of the volumetric envelope. It does not express only itself in its primary simplicity, which is expressed mainly in light. In this regard, for me, light has three characteristics. The first is emotional light, which surprises us in its alternation between light and dark, a dramatizing alternation. The second is analytical light, which shows, as in De Stijl architectures, the role of individual components in the constructive context of the building. The third is ontological light, the light that creates itself. I believe that the latter is what makes absolute space an interior with perfect measures that summarizes, in a single space, a magical complexity. All this, in a positive contradiction, along with the utmost simplicity. The second form of space is phenomenal space, that is, a space that contains other spaces. In a scenographic composition, space multiplies into other spaces in a set of geometrically organic cavities, with proximities and distances, depths and sudden emergences from the background, with light dialoguing with shadow. Emotional light makes the succession of different volumes vibrant.

Containing more fragments than there should be, this multiple and conflicting architecture exalts a poetic disorder that evokes a surprising conflict of form.

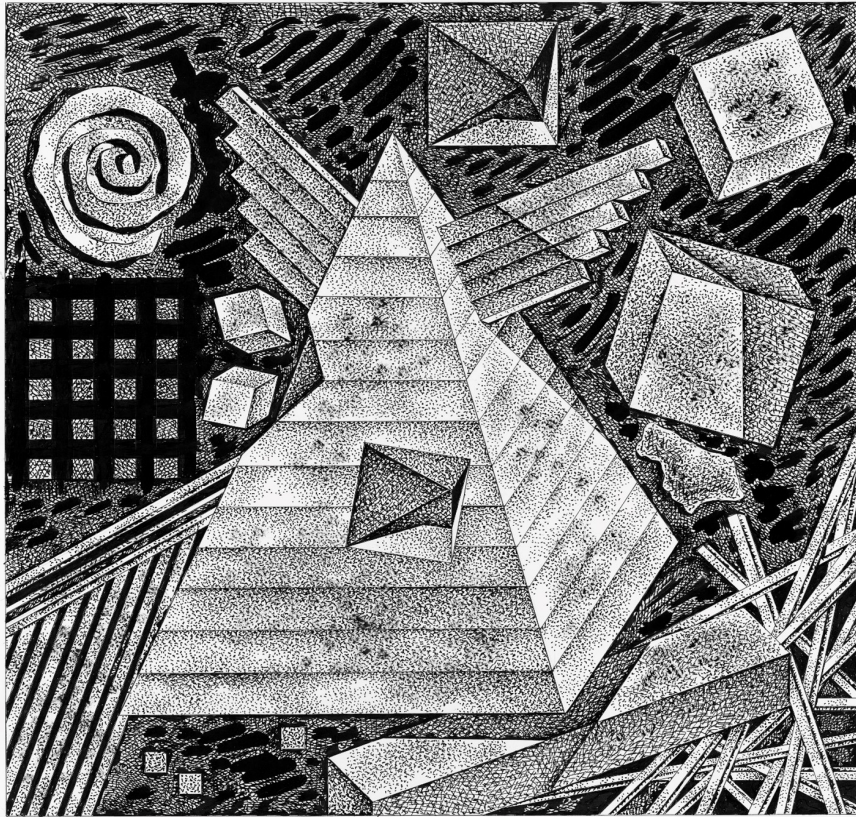


Figure 6. Il volo della Piramide, Purini, 2023

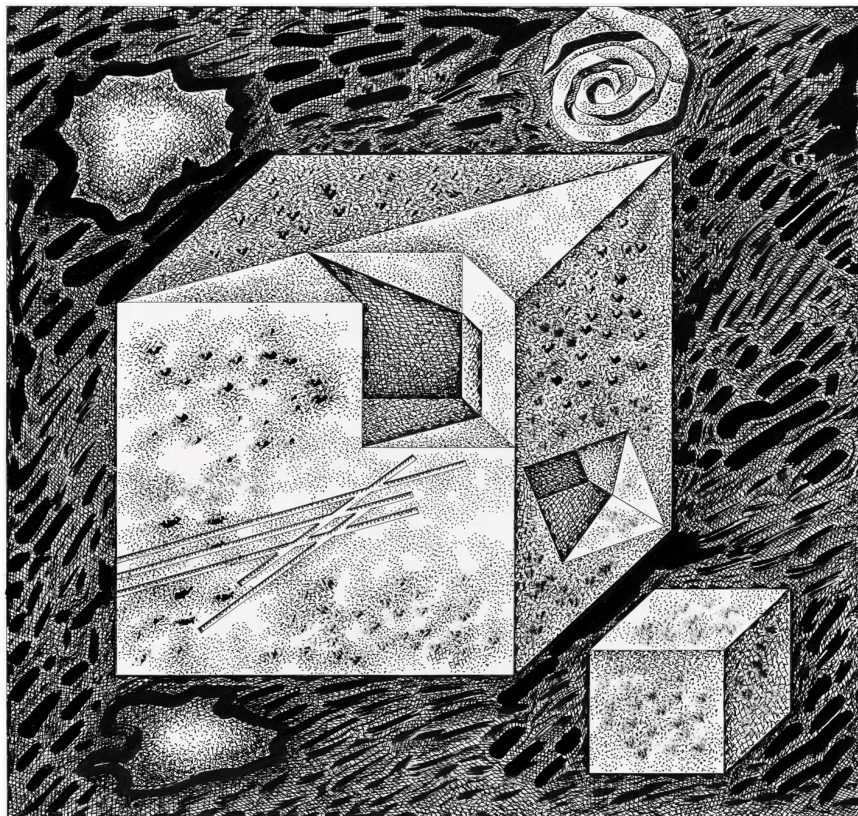


Figure 7. Istuar Denkub 2, Purini, 2023

In architecture, space is the synthesis of construction, and together its highest purposes. In its vastness, which from the landscape traced by roads and paths, animated by cities, reaches the house, dwelling is a world of spaces that between exteriors and interiors establishes an order that is sonorous and mute, that is never empty, it is movement and evolution, like a plastic writing, it knows how to tell who we are and what will become of our life. Listening to architectural space is a beautiful and inexhaustible adventure.

Architecture and reason

Architecture should not only be well-built, convenient, welcoming, equipped with useful, adequately proportioned, and bright spaces. It must first and foremost make its inhabitants happy, but above all, its task is to establish complex connections with the cosmic dimension, always mysterious, with the memory of communities and generally with the memory of the world, and finally with reason, which allows construction to have logic, concrete knowledge but at the same time ideal. Reason allows architecture to establish important relationships with other necessary knowledge, which, however, should not be included in its scope, that is, in its thematic field, but remain auxiliary contributions.

Every creative activity has a reference. Music is nourished by the sounds of the planet, the rustling of trees, the singing of birds or the roar of lions, the wind. In turn, poetry relies on music, which scans the verse, enhancing the void from one word to another. Painting and sculpture represent both the planet and the sky as well as human beings and, from the 19th century to today, what is in their minds. Theater imitates life, often elevating it just as cinema does, transforming the real into a deeper truth. Architecture, as I said at the beginning, also finds its model in nature. The primitive hut of Vitruvius and Marc-Antoine Laugier, the cave, the tent are the first steps of construction due to the imitation of particular presences such as trees, leaves, fiber weavings, filaments to weave, the walls of caves to decorate with impressive skill. Over time, the use of wood in architecture will remain, on the one hand, a suggestive memory that will adorn huts and temples, and on the other hand, it will allow the construction of flat roofs, trusses, and floors resting on beams.

Rationality in architecture cannot be considered as a set of simple and precise construction operations. As is known, reason is not unique. There is a more widespread and followed reason, which is concrete, practical reason, favoring clear work procedures but devoid of the contents that give life to a city and its buildings. There is also an enlightenment rationality that

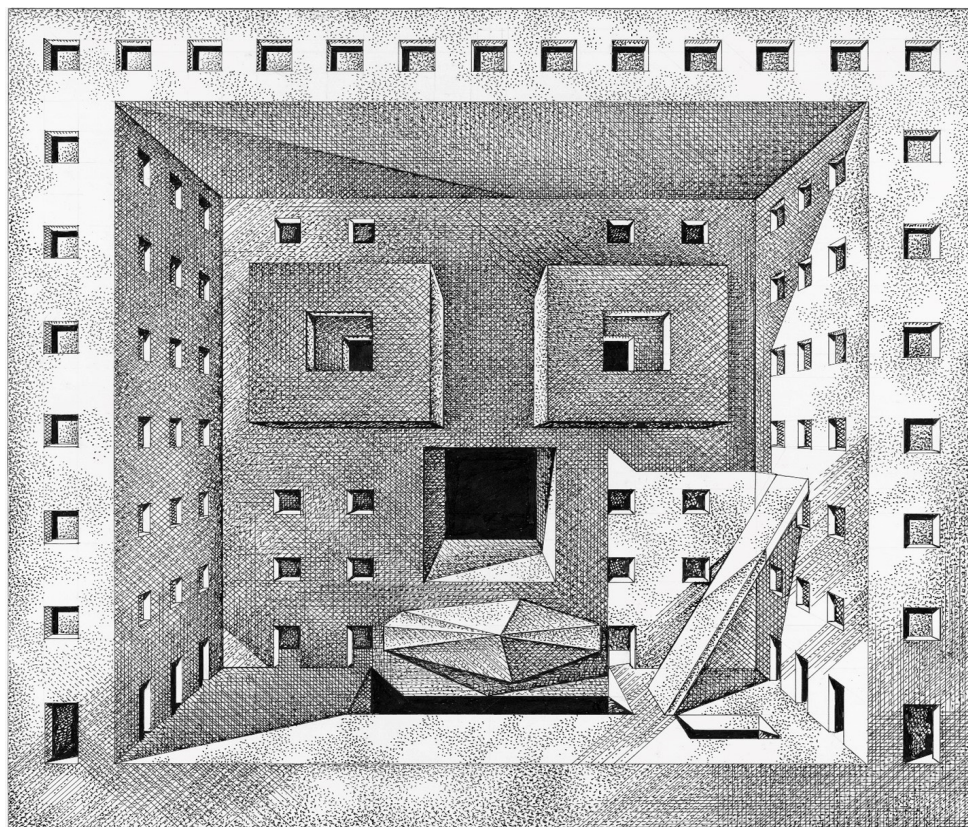


Figure 8. L'architettura guarda, Purini 2023

makes the forms and functions of architectures precious and expressive. It is a demonstrative rationality that moves between visionariness and utopia. More literary than architectural, this reason aims to produce an emotional totality in which the sense of construction acquires a prophetic and imaginative dimension. Another rationality is experimental, in the sense that everything known must be surpassed starting from the search for new conceptual and realization methods. For me, it is more authentic and human. Unlike enlightened rationality, it leaves progressive perspectives that prefigure the future free and, so to speak, more operative. Finally, there is a thematic rationality that expresses, before any other aspect, the possibility of giving architecture profound and superior meanings. These concern the multiplicity of the physical and abstract world, a parallel world made of impressions and interpretations. The character of this rationality is twofold. It is highly active but at the same time reveals itself to be dense with mysteries that cannot be understood and enigmas that can be solved. In short, thematic rationality is a category but also a research tool and, I would say above all, a fertile territory for invention.

One might think, reading this chapter, that the four forms of rationality are prescriptive. It is not difficult to think that for many architects the concept of rule is at the origin of many constraints and many prescriptions in the broad and rugged field of composition. In reality, it is not so. Reason is the space of thought even before it is of rules. Creative freedom is a gift of reason, which knows how to base itself on what is not yet, but has already set the stage to welcome the new, whose sources are beautiful and necessary to find.

The beauty of architecture

Studying the treatise by Vitruvius, the famous and unsurpassed theorist of construction and father of western architecture, one reads that the beauty of buildings is called *venustas*. It is the conclusion of the cycle that sees *utilitas* (function) precede *firmitas* (solidity) of a building. However, it is not known whether the placement of this aspect of architectural reasoning, *venustas*, in third place is the least important for the author of the *Basilica of Fano* or the most important. I have always thought that *venustas* is the most important and decisive component compared to the other two, bearing in mind that these three expressions of architecture are not separate, configuring themselves as analytical spaces that concern, as I have already said, and on every occasion, the meanings and values of construction. For me, the idea of plastic and ideal finiteness has a series of meanings, including beauty as an imitation of the divine, beauty as an expression of truth according to St. Thomas Aquinas who recalls St. Augustine, beauty as a promise of happiness by Stendhal, and beauty as the terrible at its beginning, by Rainer Maria Rilke.

Returning to Vitruvius, in the Latin language, beauty is not

indicated only by the word *venustas*. Two other terms that denote beauty are *pulchritudo* and *forma*. I believe that the noun *venustas* mainly means what is well-made, like the body of Venus. I think that the word *pulchritudo* best expresses true beauty, which I will return to shortly. Finally, the term *forma* seems to define the concept of beauty as the result of an idealization based on removing everything superfluous from a work, bringing it closer to abstraction. *Forma* is therefore the result of an idea of architecture in which a logical construction on grammatical and syntactic planes puts tectonics and architecture in tension. This necessary dialectic must result in a few elements, chosen with great accuracy, that make their essentiality evident and, consequently, the primary relationships that bind them. All this in the closest proximity of grammar and syntax, which tend to identify with each other. The origin of an architectural idea should not produce rewritings, thematic deviations, or syntactic repetitions because they would give rise to a project historicity that would contrast with the foundational presence of a primary principle. Syntactic insistence would also, incidentally, diminish grammatical potential.

Reflecting on beauty in architecture, one can see that it is not unique, but is the sum of several aspects that all fall within the realm of artistic writing. The first aspect, which I have already mentioned, is the well-made, that is, an assembly of parts of a building so correct and well-structured as to give the construction, in its technical accuracy and the quality of the elements, a consistent pleasantness. The second aspect, in my opinion, is recognized in the harmony resulting from the proportion of the various parts of the volume and the details. A harmony that can also be measured against its opposite. The musicality that emanates from an entire work and its arts pervades it in its poetic expression and in the light that highlights the play of shadows and the intensity of the brightness that makes the facades and interiors shine.

More than the first aspect of beauty, something fixed or repeated, it is the second, the passage of the sun during the day, modifying the image of an architecture according to the hours. There is also a further content in the luminosity of the building. From the outside, it seems smaller compared to the internal spaces. It is impossible to find the reasons for the difficulty in measuring the exterior and the interior. Perhaps it is being surrounded by other buildings that generates an environmental scale in the view, alternating the real measures, so that an architecture contracts, so to speak, appearing smaller than its actual size. Hence the apparent larger dimension of the interiors compared to what we see from the outside.

The third impression of beauty is actually a mystery. It is understood that an architecture possesses a deep, evolving artistic identity that surprises and moves us, but it is impossible to know why it is so. In short, it is not possible to understand in the composition of a building why it appears so perfect to us. At first

glance, but also after studying it for a long time, an architecture does not reveal what its beauty consists of, of which we perceive the presence but not the way of being, of becoming form. We can therefore ascertain the existence of beauty in an architecture – I think of the villas and palaces of Palladio – but we will never know what the secret message proposed to us is, except for our ability to discover that beauty is present and exciting. It should also be said that a true architecture regenerates its meaning and mystery during the various periods it goes through.

The opinions I have expressed about the beauty of architecture are subjective, but I hope they are at least partly shareable. It is necessary to be free in experiencing architecture,

making it our own, knowing it as far as possible, being attentive to understanding that the relationship between a building and a landscape is like a complex and engaging novel. Going beyond what we see in a building is necessary precisely because an architecture does not allow us to know it in every expression. As is known, even if we are architects, we will never know what it really is that we have managed to build. Our creation will always be distant from us as if it were born on its own or from the work of other architects, but just knowing that we have thought and proposed a content will be a gift for us, even if the mystery, which we have unknowingly brought to life, will continue to be unspeakable.

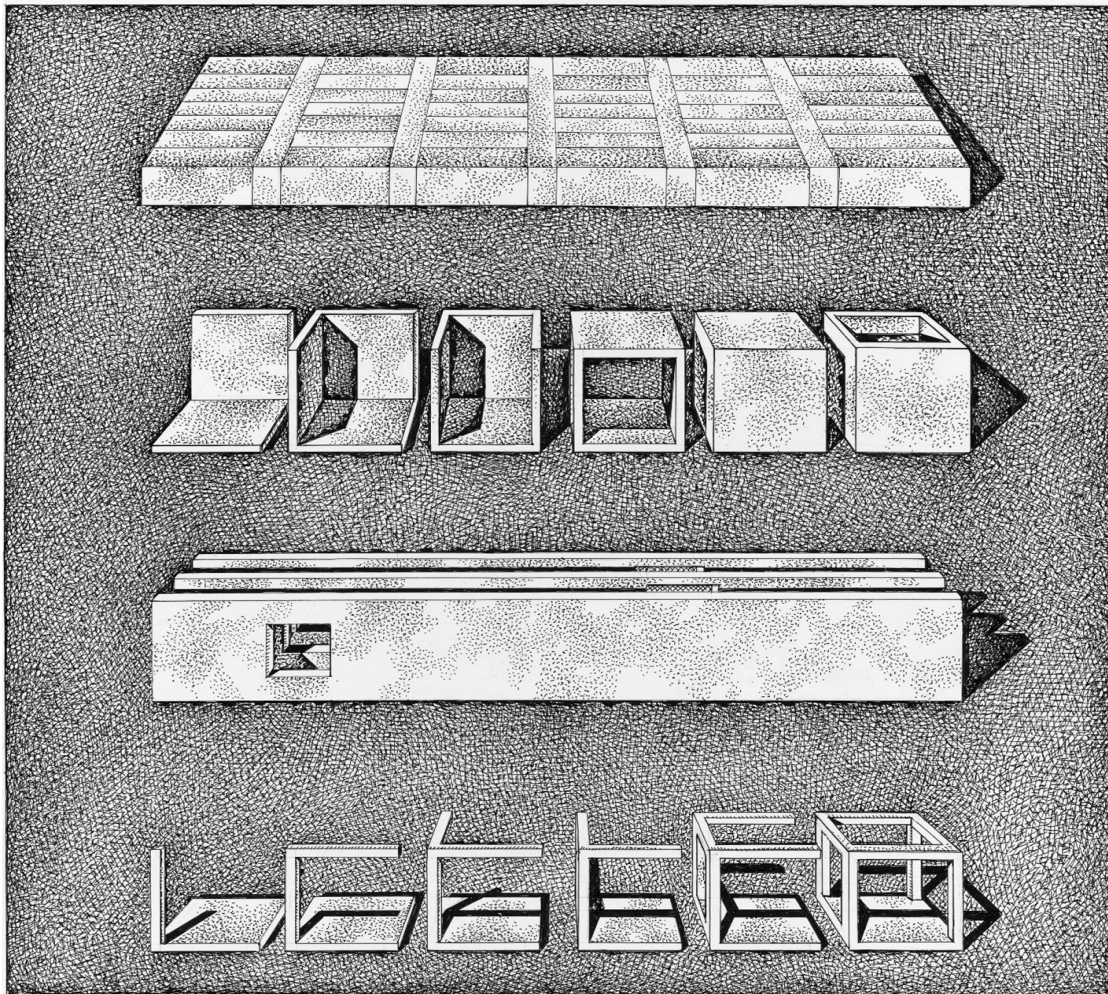


Figure 9. My way since 1968, Purini 2023

Tectonics and architecture

Contemporary architecture, which can be defined as the architecture of globalization, perhaps already in decline, is largely an “archisculpture,” according to critic Germano Celant. In short, it is based on the desire to propose buildings never seen before, the result of an anxious search for the unprecedented. On the other hand, its plastic aspect, pushed to the limit, highlighted the absence of a logically conceived structure, replaced by volumetric twists, unusual overhangs, complicated ground supports, and dizzying and superfluous heights. This architecture sought wonder at all costs, rather than dialogue with other buildings, always a reason for a more humane city. Furthermore, the planning of new interventions did not foresee sufficient settlement coherence, but what was built was configured as intentional disorder compared to structured urban orders. In this context, places, as I recently wrote, have been in fact and consciously completely forgotten, thus giving up creating more livable, balanced, and welcoming parts of the city.

In this regard, it should be said that, as is known, urban planning has taken a significant step back, consisting of abandoning concrete and advanced plans in favor of conceptions linked to politics as a future projection rather than to the city, in addition to assuming an abstract character in which a utopian orientation was referred to mainly economic and environmental issues, leaving the problem of urban evolution implicit in urban history unconsidered.

The current condition of contemporary construction, briefly summarized, which also presents a deliberate denial of the need for a theory, has completely abolished a fundamental relationship, that between tectonics and architecture. In summary, tectonics is the set of solutions concerning the construction process as well as the condition of the artifact over time. Tectonics is therefore a system of technical solutions that not only supports the building but gives it a form that expresses its deepest and most lasting aspects. If an architecture has its beauty, it owes it to the form, which in turn is indebted to tectonics. It should also be said that in reality, tectonics is not separate from architecture, as we might think, but is intrinsically present in it from its inception. This means that there is no tectonics that precedes architecture, but the two terms are contemporaneous. Using a simple comparison, tectonics is like the skeleton of a body, which is not something that anticipates what the bones will support, but is present in the body from the beginning. A unitary thought therefore allows establishing the technical rules of construction at the same time as the form appears. In almost all buildings of global architecture, the dialectic between entities, the implicit one, tectonics, and the explicit one, architecture, has almost completely disappeared.

The latest theoretical research on the primary relationship between tectonics and architecture was presented by Kenneth

Frampton in his 1995 book titled, *Tectonics and Architecture: The Poetics of Construction in XIX and the XX Century Architecture*. This date is important because it coincides with the birth of globalization architecture and at the same time with the worldwide spread of digital technology. A diffusion that surpasses the coincidence in manual drawing between an idea and its graphic expression. It is a conceptual and real contemporaneity that digital drawing could not confirm. On another level, we witness not only the eclipse of places, resulting in a casual arrangement of buildings that makes new urban interventions informal, but we also face the dissolution of another fundamental aspect of architecture, typology, which organizes construction according to the different categories in which it is articulated. Without a reference to it, each building can cultivate its being totally free to confront architectures that have the same functions. These are therefore completely different buildings and, for this reason, not being comparable, they do not constitute a recognizable system, bearing similar meanings. In this way, the type of a building is no longer considered as a message representing a condition of the urban community. All buildings can therefore be of numerous types which, not constituting an operative list dictated by the variety of the same community but a series of unclassifiable buildings, fail to structure the urban fabric as they are organized into typological families.

What has been said so far can, repeating something I have already proposed, and in which it is necessary to insist, rediscover the dialectic between tectonics and architecture. This duality, which in many ways allows the exchange of respective roles, establishes a primary compositional principle. It consists not so much in the distinction of the two roles but in their being ambivalent conceptions in which one reflects the other and vice versa. Tectonics is part of the metric universe, but its choices prefigure not only calculation but, at the same time, merge the premises of the form that the building will have. Architecture will give the data and choices of tectonics a new meaning, shifting everything that has been identified to the more complex plane, that of a higher necessity, a compositional ritual that generates a plastic, material, and spatial character shifted from technical concreteness to the most suggestive imaginary. Understanding the dual and contemporaneous presence of the dialoguing pair is a central place of the project, which makes creativity broader and deeper.

Inventing a language

In my sixty years of experience in architecture, I have always believed, from the beginning to today, that an architect has the duty to invent a personal language. This language has only one constraint: it must be understood by the majority. Regarding the search for my architectural lexicon, I have followed a path that I want to quickly retrace. At the beginning of this search,

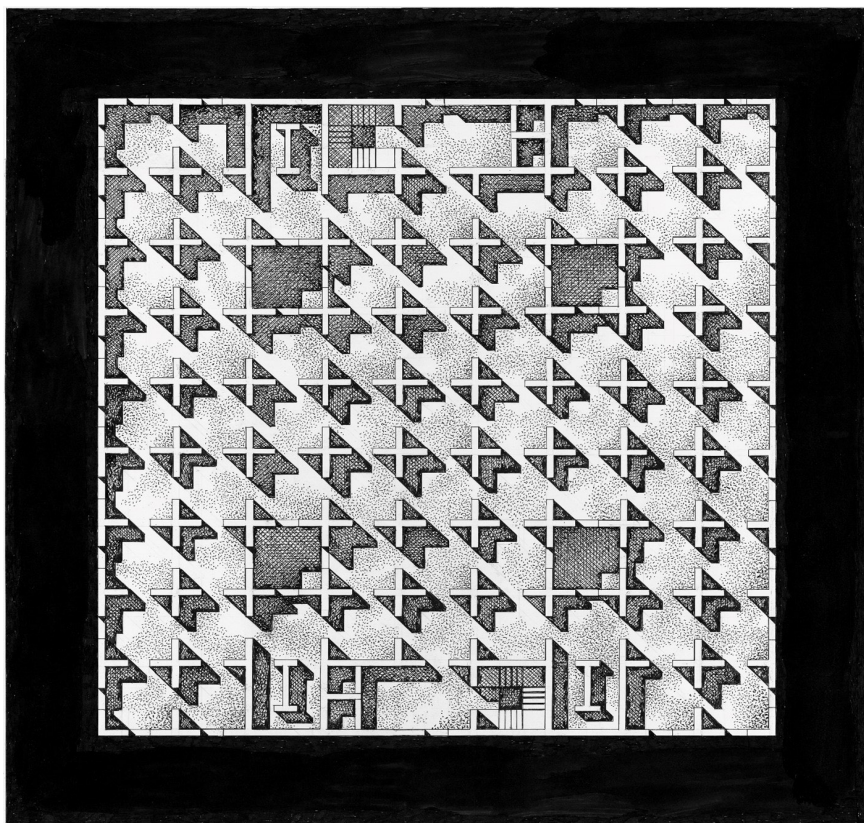


Figure 10. Pianta illuminista, Purini 2023

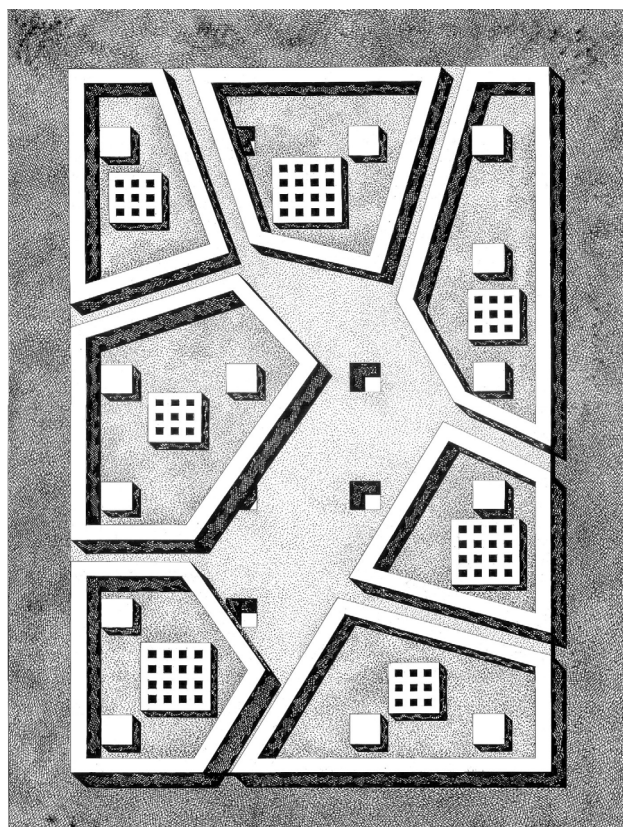


Figure 11. Taunfor, Purini 2016

which can only be done when young, I realized that there had to be a self-analysis from which a language consistent with the result of this introspection had to be chosen. In short, it was about choosing what message I could convey to others. Just one. Once found, it was necessary to ask how to communicate it through architecture.

The formative process of a language must address a very important problem, namely how grammar and syntax should be considered in architectural writing. Grammar allows us to know how to write, syntax what to write. It is always very important to ensure that the two entities are not too distant. If one constantly refers to syntax, a project historicization is created in which a whole series of additions and reflections unfolds along a path as long as it is harmful in its uselessness. Only if syntax does not stray from the origin of the compositional idea does it tend to consider the rules of grammar. In this case, the origin best expresses the genetic sense of an architecture, its primary image, its creative place.

Once identified, one's language first confronts public opinion on architecture. What I said in the initial steps of this writing means that if the conceived language is not entirely in tune with its numerous interpretations, it ends up being considered a non-interior and deep thought, a casual unfinished incapable of covering the entire arc of architecture. This critical consideration requires making the language itself easier to understand, bringing it closer, in the best case, to current expressions. At the same time, the chosen language is made more readable than that of buildings, for example, located in the most advanced neighborhoods, thus demonstrating, even in words, that the contracted and widespread language is superior to the more known and generic ones thought to surpass them. Common opinion then ensures that personal languages, some of which are visionary and utopian, are considered inferior to those known by almost all citizens. The official reduction of new and personal languages does not always occur after comparing them to conventional ones, but it often happens that architects in search of their own lexicon take a step back because they do not want less important architects to defend what was remarkable years before. Hence the need for the language sought and found to operate on two levels. The first is the habitual one, with explicit content that hides an implicit meaning, which is clear to those who do not superficially know the art of building. This duality is not a mechanical device, so to speak. That an architecture has two formal registers, one normal and the other special, higher, known to those who have some precise building information. That an architecture has two formal registers is a gift to those who know architecture and a more substantial reward to those who know how to interpret the language in its unitary nature and its subjective ramifications.

Inventing a language is neither a privilege nor a pursuit born out of self-gratification or the desire to be considered

special architects. Like a poet, a novelist, a painter or sculptor, a musician, an actor, a photographer, one must live with self-awareness and thus express one's own world. At the same time, being artists in the world of architects requires a dialogical ability to communicate what we have thought and realized. Creating an imaginary world, translating it into something concrete, knowing that what we do is always mysterious, questioning science, loving those who will inhabit our architectures is a beautiful, albeit risky, adventure. Even if our architectures are not works of art, the effort to conceive and realize them is a reward in itself.

Brief note on drawing

As is well known, digital drawing, towards the end of the twentieth century, revolutionized architecture in many aspects. It has been half a century since the complex process of electronic architectural graphics began to replace manual drawing, initially slowly and experimentally, and then increasingly rapidly. Manual drawing, practiced for centuries with pencils, pens, colors, set squares, T-squares, parallel rulers, tables, and drafting machines, was gradually overtaken by digital drawing. Over the years, digital drawing has not remained a mere technical change but has evolved into a set of design rules organized in a vision of architectural writing that aimed to speed it up and give it a more advanced practical attitude and greater technical capacity.

The culmination of this evolution and the conscious worldwide spread of digital drawing occurred a few years ago with BIM (Building Information Modeling), a design research system that proposed a broader, faster, and more complete design process to architects. Alongside the spread of this convenient tool, an unexpected change occurred. Alongside digital drawing, which had gone through various interesting phases, a new season of manual drawing began, focusing mainly on sketches, compositional and technical notes, and perspective studies. This way, a relationship that had disappeared was reborn, the harmony of the mind with the hand present at the same moment.

The re-emergence of manual drawing has allowed architects to rediscover a fundamental and suggestive coincidence between the mental image and its simultaneous transcription through manual drawing. Recalling two concepts of Federico Zuccari, a sixteenth-century painter who founded the Accademia di San Luca in Rome, there was an internal drawing, a mental representation known only to the one who imagined it, and an external drawing, traced by the hand, which could be understood in its meaning by anyone who saw it. Becoming external, it was no longer in possession of its author, something closed, but became open and available.

Currently, project drawing is articulated in two moments. The first is the geometric elaboration of a project carried out with

manual drawing, addressing compositional problems as well as the tectonic arrangement of the work and its form. The second is a series of graphic elaborations, made with digital drawing, organized into a set of representative and informative operations entrusted to a common language not only to every architect but also to all those who would then build the architectural work. In summary, the image becomes a fundamental thought in manual

drawing, again prevalent in design, while its technicalization and readability are achieved with digital drawing.

This duality is important. It gives life to a conceptual alliance through which an exchange between these graphic entities can only be more than positive for architecture.

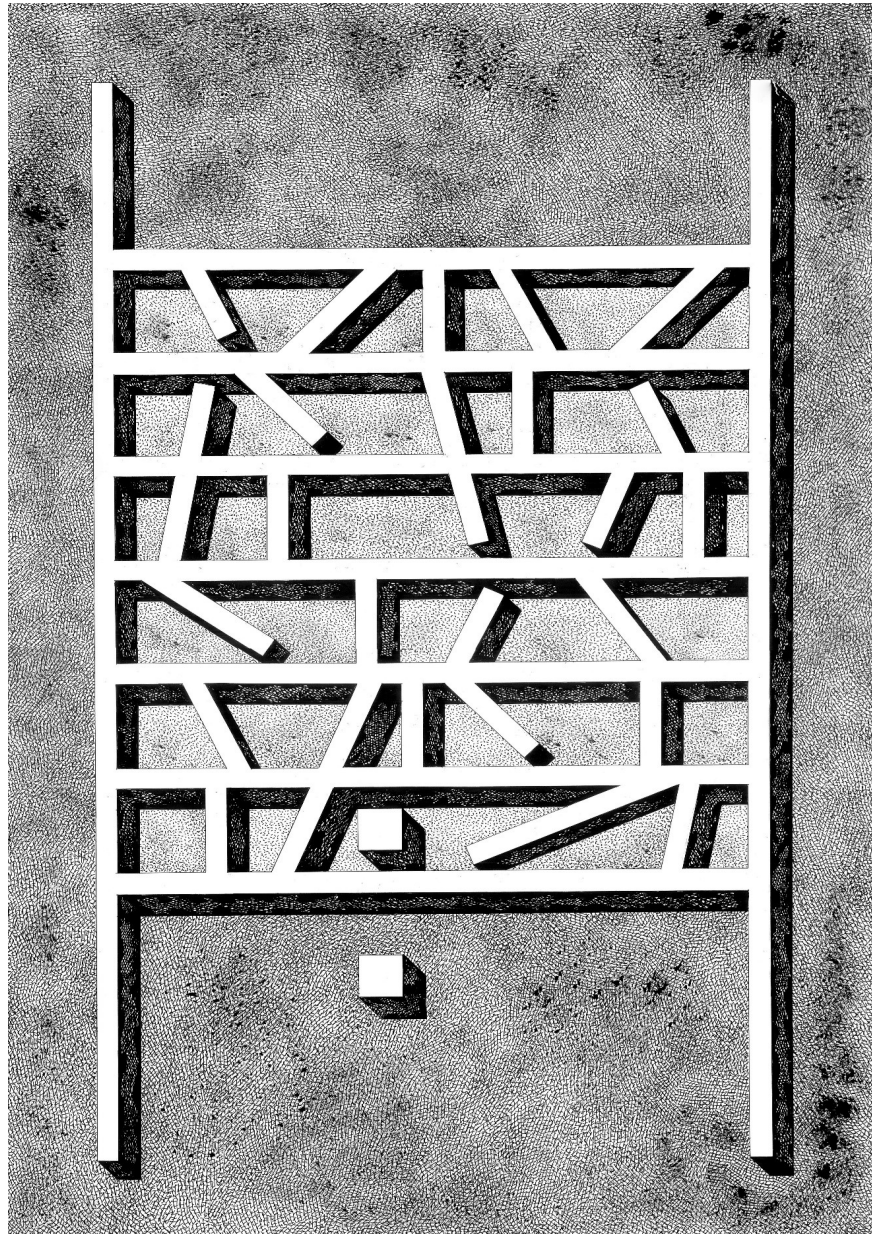


Figure 12. Taunstu, Purini 2016