

URBAN PROTOTYPING AND HYBRID ARCHITECTURE. A MORPHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

In 1979, Gianfranco Caniggia and Gian Luigi Maffei were introducing in Urban Morphology and Building Typology the unprecedented distinction between “critical consciousness” and “spontaneous consciousness”. Their goal was to justify the sheer opposition between Modernity and Tradition in the field of urban form, already heavily manifested at that time through the industrial transformation of the European city. While the former concept clearly refers to the intentionality of Architecture- that is singular, exceptional and not repeatable in itself- the latter explicates the unintentional character of Buildings, since it is plural, normal and commonly shared within a specific and coherent social-historical period. This paper’s aim, far beyond the originating motivation pursued by the mentioned authors, is to demonstrate that Architecture is the domain of the Emotional/Hybrid, while Buildings pertains to the Rational/Pure. Furthermore, it states that the aforementioned definitions do not exclude each other but are complementary and mutually related, to an extent the one cannot be given independently from the other. Finally, it introduces an original definition of the type as the conceptual threshold, which defines and explains the complex and ongoing relation between the previous two frameworks within a circular definition of the design activity. Evidences about this position will be extracted from a selection of traditional (in favor) and modern (in opposition) case history. The main aim is to draw a compelling design strategy to face the contemporary increasing offer of vacant buildings and waiting lands prompted by the crisis of financial capitalism, at least since 2007 onwards.

Keywords: Critical consciousness, Spontaneous consciousness, Urban Morphology, hybrid architecture, building type.

INTRODUCTION

The discipline of Urban Morphology describes urban form in relation to the socio-historical emergence of building types and their sheer application to produce the physical evidence of the city in its uniqueness. The counterpart of this widely shared analytical framework, systematized since the '50 of the last century and rapidly spread over the scientific international community, is reflected by those urban design strategies, that consider the city as the site-specific arrangement of conventional units, precisely identifiable at all scale, or level of complexity. In that respect, Modernity and Post-Modernity seem to share the same attitude.

However, this approach tends to underestimate the preconditions under which the building type is defined, then revealing some methodological aporias to tackle. In fact, underlying dynamics, which are responsible of it, usually remain somehow latent, and furthermore their ontological status unquestioned. Even when the processual nature of the type is fiercely claimed, it seems to hide the implicit purpose of presenting it as the effect of ideal trans-historical laws, which bind its development, as well as the historic one, limiting its degree of freedom and unpredictability.

To avoid it, urban prototyping stresses the importance of exploring unexpected possibilities by means of experimental architecture, assumed as the testing ground of any built possible solution, to verify in advance its consistency and adequacy to the expectation of its future inhabitants and

society. Policy makers as well as designers, among others, nowadays increasingly appreciate this method, since it is facing a persistent state of crisis, which is contemporary socio-economic and institutional, encompassing a wide range of stakeholders in its procedures to guarantee successful results. Notwithstanding that, it is still scarcely shared the conviction that real scale prototype development was up to industrial Modernity, with few exceptions, the unwritten and untold practice of urban form construction, over the time, tacking the chance offered by the urge for transformation.

In that respect, historians' obsession for the documents, mostly texts and drawings, as the source of any truth, brings them to disregard architecture as the self-evidence of an unlimited sequence of swinging successful and failed attempts, continuously performed, to achieve a feasible result in setting the built environment. In that respect, to cast an unprecedented light on the still unresolved fascination spread by our traditional cities, we have to imagine them resulting from an anonymous legacy of practitioners as well as amateurs, incrementally searching for new solutions, by operating on the existing condition, whether they were natural and/or artificial, transforming them via trials and errors.

Beyond that, we do have to reconsider our prejudice towards the hybrid buildings, since its programmatic ambiguity and lack of authorship witnesses the above mentioned reaction to unpredictable emergences through experience, made via practice, searching for what was considered necessary for the development of up to date societal habits. This paper tries to offers a framework, based on an unprecedented interpretation of urban form with respect to the canonical one, bringing arguments from the remote and recent past in favor of a whole reconsideration of architectural practice as the foundation of a new discipline. Of course, this perspective is highly affected by the contemporary concern for vacancy and waiting lands, spreading all over the western world, which are asking for regeneration and adaptive reuse in a condition of resource scarcity, because of the crisis persistency.

FOREWORD

The widespread phenomenon of globalization in its various disciplinary interpretations and especially since the end of the last century, has come to represent the fundamental and apparently unstoppable premise of a process of persistent hybridization of anthropic systems with the surreptitious aim of sacrificing the concept of local identity. This was believed to be anything but instrumental to our expansionistic ambitions, not only of an economic-financial kind, in favor of an opening, and the consequent contamination of the "other", dictated by new market conditions.

From this point of view, the concept of *Hýbris* has progressively assumed a meaning with positive connotations, which has implicitly overshadowed varying critical fortunes in time. Therefore, for the purpose of the most complete lexical examination, sounding the unfathomable depths of the possible implication of the term, in consideration of recent events, it was thought to be expedient to develop an interpretative process of it. This assumption, starting from the origins, ultimately brings us to the current situation, shedding light on the meaning with the hypothesis of work in the near future.

THE ARCHEOLOGY OF THE WORD

The concept of *Hubris* or *Hýbris* (from the ancient Greek ὕβρις), originally used as a legal term although it was progressively widely used in poetry and literary works, indicates a condition of

“arrogance”, “excess” and “immoderacy” which must be punished in order to protect the foundations of civil living, as it is a clear destabilizing factor of the same. By way of confirmation of said danger, in ancient societies words were used in a way that expressed the concept of hybridization between human and divine qualities. This is where the idea of “guilt” comes from, as laid down in irreconcilable terms by the relevant rules, or systems of values, dictated by man or the divine, and from which the implicit negative connotation of the term derives. The idea of what is Sacred (which stems from the Indo-European *sacer*, or “what is separate”) is not in fact compatible with the idea of the profane which, not by chance, etymologically “is in front of a sacred precinct”, specifically identifying two distinct spheres of influence. It follows therefore that the former falls within the competence of Religion, and the so-called Spiritual Authority, while the latter falls within the competence of Politics, and Temporal Power.

THE CHANGING MEANING OF HYBRIDISATION

The Myth, representing the tale of origins, and the Genesis, representing the principle of the divine incorporated in earth as told through history, are complete expressions of the guilty “interpretation” of hybrid. This condition is described in the Odyssey by the ambition of man to share the wisdom of the Gods, to be lured to ruin by the sirens’ song, which Homer’s hero averts by having recourse to *metis*, or shrewdness, as a form of intelligence that anticipates reason. In the Bible, this is represented by the decision of the progenitors of man to eat the “forbidden fruit”, a metaphor for the tree of knowledge, which leads them to be banished from the Garden of Eden, intended as the emancipation from a presumed identification between man and nature, which marks the so-called “Golden Age”. By way of semantic extension, the secularised use of the term in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance leads us to consider the anthropological relationship with the “other”, implicitly referring to exceeding a physical and psychological limit. Beyond that is the distinct unknown, that the Columns of Hercules and the motto *Plus Ultra* on the coat of arms of the reigning house of Castile and Aragon, which financed the voyage to discover the Indies, clearly evokes. Said condition therefore implies a “crisis” in a system of values that can be attributed to exceeding the limits of the known world, and the consequent temporary loss of balance conventionally accepted as being fundamental for civilized living, to regulate relationships between the individuals in a homogeneous social structure.

In this sense, in the civil institutions of the Western world, Arts and Crafts Associations firstly, and Academies secondly, must perform a similar normalising function, as they are established on the basis of different and evidently antagonist political premises, to prevent the risk the “outsider” may bring. But hybrids can also be associated with what’s monstrous (from the Latin *monstrare*; to point out, to train), in terms of what is different in front of us, or outside, waiting for us to assimilate it, as suggested by processes of colonisation, or more simply, methods of scientific research. Thus, middle-class Modernity reifies first and foremost every expression of life whether natural or cultural, to finally make it purely a question of objective and transmissible knowledge subject to the exactitude of logical-mathematic calculation, and the consequent productive exploitation. In such a way, it accepts the coexistence of systems of values both old and new, reduced to a condition of substantial equivalence in order to defuse any potential conflict. Through the assimilation of Profession into Technique, made possible by the Machine-Instrument, in other words of Phenomenology into Ontology, behaviours can be described, enunciated and directed on the basis of a clear hierarchisation of use, based on the functional identification of Man with the Nature in which he exists. The secularisation of the term “hybrid”, and its acknowledgement as a recognised value, occurred during the Postmodern phase. The contamination of languages is an effective

allegory of the inflexible diversity of underlying ideologies, and the relevant assimilation of a condition of general equivalence, pursued as a value, of which European Nihilism constitutes the philosophical premise. This is the most complete manifestation of the existing acknowledgement of the indifference in us that forces us to interpret the concept of identity on the basis of unprecedented categories, delegitimising the rudiments of epistemology. Therefore, the “hybrid” becomes the most evident symptom of a surreptitious process for the delegitimation of institutions, which starts in the early 60’s with the noble intention of rediscovering the creative capacity of a subject that had become excessively normalized. Now this seems to rejoice in the “condition of ruin” into which Western democracy has fallen, failing to see the dangers of its commercial instrumentalisation by emerging neo-liberal factions.

CONDITIONING AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE URBAN FORM

Erroneously associated with multifunctionality in architecture, which if anything is a prime derivative of the same, hybridization is an essentially urban process, concerning a change in the role of the parts of the same, and of their relevant relationships, within their overall meaning, short-circuiting it to reveal unprecedented opportunities. In this sense by definition, the same nature of urban transformation is hybrid, as a “viral” practice which, destabilizing the genetic code from the inside, creates conditions in which the city can become the “other”, despite having necessarily passed through a dramatic change of state, while maintaining its expressive potential unchanged. As such, hybridization is the expression of a condition of suspension, which is by definition transitory. It stays somewhere between a “no longer”, in other words a town-planning culture in a state of crisis due to the changes in its institutions, and a “not yet”, in other words a settlement structure that can express a renewed coherence and harmony between *urbs* and *civitas*, between space and society. The concept of hybridization is therefore innate to every change of status and the process of transformation that leads to it.

This is particularly evident in the history of the city, due to the effect of the different inertia with which change occurs between the parts and the whole by virtue of the chronic imbalance between spatial structures, social institutions and phases in time, which programmatically makes the simple categorization of constructions into “genres” and “kinds” all but impossible. For example, in the transition from a Roman to a Medieval city, public buildings were commonly used for private purposes, mostly for defense, an evident phenomenon of an “urban unconscious” that was plainly becoming hybrid. This is the case with some amphitheatres, such as the ones in Arles, Lucca and Rome, which were used for residential purposes, in time creating new building complexes, the first terraced layouts, sometimes coexisting with models from the previous culture.

The same phenomenon can be recognized either in sumptuous palaces, such as Diocletian's Palace in Split, with levels of complexity and relationships similar to those of a city. Likewise, the establishment of the first built suburbs outside the walls is a morphological expression extraneous to the idea of an intra-moenia settlement (the habitants in fact do not have the rights of urbanised *cives*). They constitute *ab origine* a form of temporary hybridization, as they were completely assimilated in time, to become an effective instrument of development and part of the identity of the relevant urban structure only at a later date. The propagation of Carthusian monasteries altered the conventional relations between the urban settlement and the territory, as they are specialised buildings that reproduce the level of scalar structure found to a minor extent in municipal cities, used for residential purposes, services, by a wide range of professions, and as places to interact with the surrounding context.

Of some of the first examples of urban scale architecture in the Western world, subverting the conventional relationship between originally complementary structures, putting them in reciprocal competition, we might mention the Hospices for the Poor. Those institutions were the expression of an illuminated paternalism which by offering refuge, education and work to the needy, orphans and outcasts in general, promote the construction of buildings the special and functional complexity of which is similar to that of an urban settlement.

Even Palaces, such as Caserta and Versailles, despite being assailable with private estates, hailing to the complexity and wealth of the most sumptuous Imperial Roman villas, if considered in the territorial context they operate in, compete with contemporary cities in terms of some production and administration functions par excellence, in the mid-term creating disruptive phenomena in existing social teams. In the transition from the Ancient Regime to the middle-class State, hybridization is evident mainly in the construction of new types of buildings to be used for trade, such as large stores. Due to their size and the variety of goods offered, they constitute the first cases of public spaces inside privately-owned buildings, able to compete with open air public places in cities traditionally used by people to meet, such as streets, squares and parks. This leads, although still at a mainly unconscious level, to the first processes of urban "de-territorialisation", where the anthropic foundation of "leaving a trace" dissolves in the continuous flow of trade, a taste of Zygmunt Bauman's "liquid society" of the future.

In the city of the Modern Movement, Le Corbusier's "Uniform Sized Living Unit" becomes a paradigm of a variation of scale in the comprehension of urban organism, the prelude of the Territorial City, promoting the self-referentiality of the megastructural imagination, for subsequent gemmations. This mutation is possible through the assimilation of "Vertical city" architecture, including the elementary functions of town-planning, as established by the Athens Charter of 1942: dwelling, work, recreation and transportation. In this sense, the development of the American city somewhere between the end of the 19th and the start of the 20th centuries, especially with reference to the "scalar" growth of Chicago and New York, documented in the studies of Rem Koolhaas and Jean Castex, was premonitory.

In more recent times, economic globalization has promoted an unprecedented hybridization processes, producing striking results especially in developing countries which benefit from the transformation of areas marked by a high potential of intermodal accessibility that are also highly susceptible to status change, the so-called brownfields. Those infrastructures are making horizontal relationships between similar de-territorialized organisms more convincing than vertical relationships between organisms on differentiated scales in the same territorial system, inaugurating the current trend of Network Cities. Confirming the above scenario, the Smart City phenomenon accelerates the disruptive process in relation to every traditional form of transformation of natural space to meet human needs, which in its role as the underlying foundation is incorrigibly replaced by virtual space. Here, individual and collective behavior can be constantly mapped and reduced to the form of pure data, the expression of binary logic that has by now become the new "general equivalent" that takes the place of currency when quantifying any possible interacting relationships.

THE BUILDING TYPE FORMATIVE PROCESS.

Having acknowledged the anthropological nature of the hybridisation process, in its physiological declination ad interim in relation to becoming urban, and its pathological Nihilist shifts induced by the city's process of exasperated commercialisation; accepting the typological meaning, in other

words acknowledging the instrumentality of the results of unprecedented social products, we can clearly identify four distinct development phases in Western culture, which correspond to the same number of strategies for expressing the relationship between hybridisation and convention in social teams. In the first case, which dates from the origins of man to the Middle Ages, hybridisation constitutes a transitory phase in the process of transformation of the anthropised landscape, on various scales of relational complexity, firmly establishing an integral regeneration of the settlement system by now surpassed, but also partially inherited. In fact, this is apparent with the development of a changing system of relationships in production, social organisation and the corresponding cultural values in the assigned territory, and is expressed through the progressive assimilation of that which already exists in the strand of the new framework. Hybridisation, in this sense, expresses a condition of suspension between the “no longer” of the structure previously reached and the “not yet” of the new configuration.

It can be said that hybridisation can be considered as part of an “organic” view of existence and its life cycles, creating a new horizon in terms of meaning. Hybridisation phenomena are therefore, merely by way of example and with reference to European cities of Roman origin, those that occur in the primary courtyard fabric when the preliminary attractive drive of the street, as a place for interaction, creates a phenomenon of “tabernisation”, with the progressive development of more peripheral external cells, when the metabolisation process of original building types wasn’t fully completed, resulting in new stable structures, in other words creating aggregates of terraced courtyards due to the systemic subdivision of the parts of the domus.

In general, every kind of recycling of existing constructions, the expression of a complete social structure, with the aim of creating new spatial configurations to suit the requirements of the changing framework, goes through subsequent stages of hybridisation that are more or less evident and in any case “unconscious”, proof of the implicit tensions as times, never at peace, change.

In the second case, which dates from the Renaissance for the entire duration of the Ancient Regime, the relationship with a different system of values is expressed in terms of conflict, in other words as conflicting relationships. The Renaissance culture, beyond the dimension of the ideal city, is opposed by Medieval power, as it brings values that encourage discontinuity. The justification for space, ideally “crystallised” through the timelessness of design, clashes in antagonist tension with the narrative and procedural dimension of the existing city, and its perpetual becoming, which it tends to assimilate through progressive demolition and rebuilding. So a Palace, by occupying subsequent portions of the city block, or identifying itself in an integral way with the same, acknowledges its most intimate metric apportioned distance, reduced to the level of an image of its own compositional system, but also always remains a fragment of the living body of the city, which has been generated by the tension between said palace as a fragment and the continuous fabric of the city, and is never solved in brief at a higher level, owing a conspicuous part of its success to its own shameless iconicity (from the Greek *ἰσομετρία*, proportion).

The same can be said for numerous rebuilding processes through which the baroque city aspires to transform parts of the previous settlement, without however undermining its reasons for existing; if anything, setting its own imperative nature against it, which is nourished by the conflict in a permanent way to distance itself from everything that is not its own. In the third case, which dates from the times of middle-class culture until complete maturity, there is a new interpretation of hybridisation processes. The diversity of values is accepted in so far as it may be instrumental to reaching new goals, when suitably regulated. The fragmentation of constructions, and the consequent typological specialisation is therefore essential to a society that exists to administer and

exploit difference. Hybridisation is therefore a condition of coexistence in a new social structure. The middle-class Entrepreneur is he or she who has the ability to manage the many roles society defines, regulating them and managing them in reciprocal relationships.

The classification of building types into genres and kinds, is the most coherent product of the new praxis. While the Renaissance treatise aspires to the transmissibility of a common language in the Literary community, in other words Classicism, consciously inspired by processes of reality, making the underlying logic intelligible, that emerges from attempts at trial and error, Modern manuals aim to homologate the diversity of codes, separating them from their relevant context, on the basis of an acknowledged legitimate scientific method, through the unifying capacity of Composition and the relevant Taxonomy, of which the City of Parts is the most recent critical creation and the Découpage of Rossi's Analogous City is its accomplished Representation. In the last current phase, the hybridisation process appears structurally "critical", in other words an innate art of the same nature of social structure, in terms of Modernity. Starting from the Neo-Avant-Garde movements of the 60's, in all sectors there is evidence of repeated attempts to programmatically destabilise modern Taxonomy and the overwhelming power of the Plan, which puts it into action, as an abstract instrument for the management of a tendentially isotropic space, by now "de-territorialised", the role of which is similar to that of a machine/computer. The revolution of geographic-settlement, economic, behavioural and cultural customs determines the systematic obsolescence of inherited typological structures.

The net distinction in the scales of international Functionalism intervention, to which just as many levels of relational complexity in society correspond with the relevant pre-set instruments of governance, is succeeded by the reciprocal concurrence, and the severe megastructural imagination of Metabolism, through the Pop visionariness of Archigram and Cedric Price, as well as the most recent ludic experimentation by OMA/Rem Koolhaas, Christian de Portzamparc and the Bjarke Ingels Group, where the home, the fabric of the city and the landscape seem to implode in the agglutinant dimension of Bigness, the acknowledged expression of the Network Society. The homogeneity and coherence of complete self-sufficient interventions, that aspire to translate the relationship with their own historical time linearly into a spatial experience, is succeeded by the culture of concurrence and the transversality which, through the application of de-constructural methods, result in the hybridisation of Bernard Tschumi, Peter Eisenman, Daniel Libeskind, Ben van Berkel and FOA, in which architecture reveals an uninterrupted flow of its own making through the discontinuous assembly of relevant languages, disclosing the underlying ideologies.

The functional specialisation of building types, the expression of a search for causal and deterministic correspondence between form and role, based on the principle of programmed obsolescence, is succeeded by the search for adaptability built for changing lifestyles, which from the neo-primitive systemics in Dutch Structuralism, through the metaphysical fixedness of Rossi's Tendencies, lead to the work of Neutelings & Riedijk and De Architecten Cie, in which the process of construction metabolisation, and the possible multiplicity of the relevant results, are theatrically represented in the space of the project. The net separation between public domain and the private dimension, on which the hierarchisation of the culture of Modernity is based, is succeeded by the reciprocal permeation and overturning of roles which, in the opposite results of the Non Stop City by Archizoom and the traditionally British multipurpose Civic Centre, anticipates the phenomenon of the Sprawl and urban residuality introjected in the Mall, both sublimated in the design experience of MVRDV and SANAA. The clear separation of communicative styles, expressed in defence of disciplinarity, is succeeded by the contamination of codes which, through the

reinterpretation of the American Strip and Robert Venturi's Decorated Shed and the ephemeral bricolages of Charles Moore, lead to the digital experimentation of Toyo Ito, intelligent international Green Architecture buildings and Carlo Ratti's Smart City, where information technologies are fully integrated into the architectural body, amplifying performance beyond all limits, ever transforming them into interactive platforms, and altering the ontological statute irreversibly.

The emerging phenomenon of the regeneration of "abandoned territories" through the experimental temporary use of buildings and vacant areas, a sign of times inaugurated by the crisis in financial capitalism, would seem to be the evident antagonist to the creeping assimilation of the natural environment with the virtual one, and anthropic space with digital space. Said experiences, currently ongoing and therefore impossible to fully assess, appear to show convincing analogies with the processes of critical assimilation of what presently exists, which progressively emerge following the dissolution of social reality due to the effect of traumatic events and a harsh crisis in a system of values, therefore representing a new hybrid frontier, which refers more to smallness, short-circuiting the famous Koolhaasian motto, for its own horizon of reference.

CONCLUSIONS

Beyond any possible mythological concern and ethical prejudice, in the field of Urban Morphology hybridization processes always occur whenever it is necessary to exceed and remove the limitations implicit in the social-historical building type application, in relation to which the built space is specifically articulated and, then, constructed. As an immediate consequence, existing buildings are progressively abandoned and left vacant, not being considered any more relevant for the emerging new expectations.

This phenomenon is fundamental for the radical renovation of any urban form, since it is freeing all the energies, material as well as immaterial, embodied within the city physical evidence, at any level of complexity. Those energies are the ones furthermore responsible for the transformation process through which the coming into existence of new condition of inhabitation is eventually possible. Therefore, hybridization processes represent the continuous remastering, over space and time, through which what was already present, can be addressed according to a different perspective, achieving unexpected results, via trials and errors. In that respect, it is correct to argue that any project is always the project of autonomy, since its final outputs are unpredictable at its very beginning, finally resulting into a new set of rules, again potentially aiming at the status of a brand new building type.

In such a way, architecture can rediscover its political foundation and stance, by claiming the transformation of the existing conditions, to build up its represented society's destiny, whether they are natural and or artificial. Nevertheless, this is implying the primacy of practice over theory, at least in the unlimited domain of exploration and experimentation of unexpected possibilities. Theory is doomed to reestablish its primacy in the field of building production, where it is preserving the basic principle of its former political establishment.

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