

Editorial and Abstracts

Editorial. Lessons from the Past

Maria Argenti

The reflections accompanying this issue of *Rassegna* develop from the desire to avoid losing a small but important legacy of varied lessons in architecture inherited from the past century. A hidden pattern that, years on, reveals both a substantial modernity and a paradigmatic dynamism whose definition legitimises the use of the word “lessons.”

As observed by Carmen Espegel in her essay dedicated to “spiritual functionalism,” and in two built works by Eileen Gray (the *Maison en bord de mer* and the apartment in rue Chateaubriand), “looking back at the results achieved by many projects from the past is not simply anti-progressive nostalgia, but instead a true historical necessity”: that of seeking in the past not only a model, but also lessons to be learned. What emerges from this issue is a weave of parallel visions, some critical, of the Modern Movement and the clichés of the CIAM; a body of knowledge, anchored to paradigms less explored and more marginal in the past, and now become crucial to any plans for the future, precisely due to their diverse modernity.

The approaches presented offer proof of the possibility to define architectural composition in a singularly holistic manner, contaminating languages, while simultaneously defining building and landscape, urban spaces and architectural details.

Examples include social and environmental sensibilities and how to bring value to local contexts that underpin one of the most original alternative interpretations of the values of the Modern Movement in the work of César Manrique in Lanzarote. Or the architecture of the Brazilian João Filgueiras Lima, more commonly known as Lelé, also inspired by the desire to combine values of aesthetics, environment and construction. Or the sober calligraphy of the work of Juan Sordo Madaleno, analysed by Miquel Adrià. Or the use of metal, wood and concrete in the lightweight architecture of Marcel Breuer, one of the first students of the Bauhaus; or the democratic monumentality of his institutional buildings. There is also the reading of Schindler by Hans Hollein, explored in an essay by Caroline Maniaque.

This issue also looks at the National Schools of Art in Havana, whose history is retraced by Serena Maffioletti, and the work of Mario Romafiach (initially in Cuba and later in the United States, in Porto Rico, and finally in Venezuela) for his ability – retraced by Victor Deupi and Jean-François Lejeune – to combine continuity and transformation, site and invention in an entirely particular modernism.

In Africa we look to the original approach of Pancho Guedes, a member of Team 10, investigated by Francesca Sarno in terms of its “oneiric, bizarre and fantastic” nature, its contorted spatialities, capable nonetheless of

combining image, function and content; or the work of André Ravéreau that, as observed by Daniela Ruggeri, fuses “the lesson of the *École des beaux-arts* with that of the desert, the spatial sequences of interiors and the framing of exterior views on the iconic elements of the site.”

This type of architecture has characterised such cities as São Paulo in Brazil, through the work of Rino Levi – whose vision is so well presented by Alessandra Criconia – or Buenos Aires, in the work of Clorindo Testa, still lacking, as Dina Nencini points out – “a systematic study, a history that traverses and interprets her numerous projects” offering a contemporary interpretation of his impulse toward the theme of space, the body of architecture and the city, and the voids that contribute to their definition.

A visionary pragmatism would appear to characterise these “lessons from the past”; such as that described by Roberta Amirante and Mattia Cocozza – presented by Stefania Filo Speciale in the “totalising relationship with the fragmented topography of the city” and “filament-like layouts (that push into the bowels of the earth, guiding visitors down unusual and unexpected routes)”; or that of Flora Ruchat-Roncati, analysed by Ilaria Valente in her essay, underlining the capacity to undertake “a true, refined synthesis of technique and art.”

What emerges from this issue is a more generalist and segmented notion of the profession, a unified vision of art as sensory experience, an intelligent use of new materials and new building techniques. Uniting the diversity of these parallel paths – all strongly influenced by diverse cultures and popular arts – is the capacity to mix know-how and cultures from the past, coupled with a strong attention to the human component (individuals and communities) as the active subject in the prefiguration of architecture.

Reflecting on the “other” twentieth century, reinterpreting it through the eyes of the present, renders its teachings actual. More than the continuity of a commitment to keeping these other stories from being forgotten, it is equally a question of underlining the visionary and simultaneously realistic capacity of diverse events that weave a pattern; comprehending how this pattern becomes built matter, and thus living architecture with the ability to be both timely and timeless, to the point of a new understanding of an inversion of roles, and thus also an “architecture without architects,” such as that of César Manrique.

Thus it is a web that *Rassegna* has tried to weave back together in this issue, to bring to life a memory that would otherwise remain confined to its time, and in order to reiterate how history is an intertwining of so many stories, which must be woven together.

RESEARCHES

Inhabiting Perspectives in Eileen Gray *Carmen Espejel*

Rereading some works from the past today is not mere nostalgia, but it represents a historical need to seek alternative models. To do so, the essay relies on a paradigmatic tandem of two works by Eileen Gray, the E.1027 (Cote d'Azur) and the apartment of *rue Chateaubriand* (Paris). For both residences, a detailed illustration of spatial solutions is presented, supported by meticulous graphic documentation. The drawing or reinterpretation allows to objectify the project, distancing it from its semantic content, appearance, or dominant taste. Eileen Gray's works thus enable the exploration of architecture from a territory where theoretical and disciplinary fields overlap. They represent precise inventories of a way of production, implementing the wise coexistence between being and concrete action, which we can translate into paradigms today.

The Lesson of Stefania Filo Speziale *Roberta Amirante, Mattia Cocozza*

Stefania Filo Speziale is a woman of "records." Born in 1905, in 1932 she was the first woman/graduate in the recently established Royal School of Architecture in Naples; in 1937 she was the first Neapolitan woman/architect to design a building: a series of pavilions in the *Mostra delle Terre d'Oltremare*, the fairgrounds which represented the first true opportunity for a collective experimentation of modern architecture in Naples; in 1955 she was the first woman/full professor of the Neapolitan School of Architecture. She realized over 150 buildings and in the last years of her life she decided to destroy her personal archive.

This choice is the apparent reason for the limited attention given by critics to her important figure as an architect: it is much more likely that the responsibility of having designed the first "scandalous" skyscraper, built in the historic center of Naples, had a major weight in her "obscuration."

In the last decade, her figure has begun to come "out of the shadows": this article sets out space for a rediscovering process, identifying Filo Speziale as a complex key-figure within the construction of the Neapolitan school of architecture "character."

Flora Ruchat-Roncati: Place, Form, and Time of the Architectural Design *Ilaria Valente*

Flora Ruchat-Roncati (1937-2012), a Swiss architect and graduate of the ETH where she taught, established herself as a designer of large-scale infrastructure architecture for the N16 Transjurane motorway and the Gotthard Alptransit. Considering recently published studies, the essay retraces the milestones of her design research, traversing the places of his life and projects, the Canton of Ticino, Rome, Zurich and Friuli, for her most recent projects. Flora Ruchat-Roncati's work develops at different scales, relying on her appreciation of the figurative and plastic arts and her critical reworking of Le Corbusier's teachings.

The continuous search for a deep rootedness to the site and the affirmation of the prefigurative power of design,

understood as an act of ordering space, are the leitmotif of his work.

From her beginnings in Canton Ticino, where she realised her first houses and public buildings, and where she collaborated with Aurelio Galfetti and Ivo Trümpy on the project for the Bagno di Bellinzona, through her cooperation with Rino Tami for the N2 Motorway, and on the strength of her polytechnic training, Flora Ruchat-Roncati has been engaged in a fertile dialogue with engineering, assuming a fundamental coordinating role in the design of infrastructures, based on the control of the form of the artefacts and the territories crossed in the long time of their realisation.

Volcanic Oases Sheltered from the Wind. César Manrique, Landscape and Architecture in Lanzarote

Maria Argenti, Roberto Pasini

The article reviews the series of architectural works created by César Manrique on his native island of Lanzarote between the 1960s and 1990s, with insights into the projects of Casa del Taro de Tahiche and Jameos del agua, in reference to the unique landscape context of the site. The elaboration focuses on the artist's powerful identification with the island, its natural elements and the cultural productions of the human community, through which he aspires to incarnate the spirit of the place. The synergy between creative action and chthonic forces seems to transfigure the centuries-old action of landscape transformation performed by the settled communities to "order and second" the harsh pristine nature of the places, product of the encounter of eruptive volcanism, foaming Atlantic currents, and powerful trade winds. The same synergy also fuels the network of landscape installations that underlines the territorial fabric of the island and is captured in the figurative fresco and mosaic cycles adorning various public spaces at the service of residents and visitors.

Mario Romañach before and after the Revolution. Modernity and Cubanidad

Victor Deupi, Jean-François Lejeune

The modern concept of Cubanidad (Cuban identity of transculturation) was the impetus behind the first generation of Cuban modernists' search for an architecture that could conceivably represent a national idiom. The idea of the three "P"s – *persianas* (louvers), *patios* (courtyards), and *portales* (porticoes or arcades) – provided a clear direction for a modern architecture that would use tradition, history, and adaptation to climate to represent the modernizing national identity of the island. Among the architects who put Cuba at the forefront, Mario Romañach arguably designed the finest examples of modern houses and apartment buildings in the 1940-50s. He went into exile after the Revolution and like many others landed in unfamiliar territory and professional practice. Yet, Romañach was one of the very few who, from his position at the University of Pennsylvania, continued to experiment with residential architecture. His thoughtful approach to translating the modern Cuban house abroad resulted in a unique series of projects in the US, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela, that combined notions of continuity, transformation, and invention.

The National Art Schools in Havana: Exceptionality and Universality

Serena Maffioletti

Result and expression of an extraordinary political and cultural conjunction, the National Schools of Art in Havana still bring to us today the echo of events and emotions that swept across the world in the early 1960s. “Superimposed” on the Golf Club where the corrupt ruling and business class of Fulgencio Batista entertained themselves, conceived by Fidel Castro and Ernesto Guevara as the beacon of a new Pan-Latin American and Third World artistic formation, the Schools arose in a short period of time like the gleam of a dream, in the two years between Castro’s entry into Havana and the anti-Castro landing at the Playa Girón. Compromised in the completion of their realization, only partially used and largely degraded by abandonment, the five buildings still live a sort of “embargo,” enclosing them within a predominantly political dimension, therefore distant in space and time. The aim of recomposing their history, not only in that “revolutionary” light but also within the great cultural migrations that united different worlds in those years, allows us to break that isolation to perceive the Schools as an essential chapter in global architectural culture.

The Lion Still Laughs. The Africa of Pancho Guedes

Francesca Sarno

In Africa, among the many variations and diffusions of the Modern Movement, there have been attempts to incorporate the vernacular qualities of the continent into architectures. However, most of these attempts have often failed, driven by a process of adapting traditional forms to the materials and needs of modernity.

In this scenario, the work of Pancho Guedes emerges, capable of producing an original post-colonial and post-modern African architecture. Born in Portugal, educated in Mozambique and South Africa, and a member of Team 10, Guedes is among those architects who, spanning from the Mediterranean to the sub-Saharan region, have sought to activate a flow of ideas, styles, forms, and architectural-artistic sensibilities. His production between the 1950s and 1970s is distinguished by the “humanization” of buildings, during a period of both political and architectural disorientation. His work does not express Portuguese colonization in Africa, but rather the geocultural hybridization that now appears as one of the paths to pursue in asserting African architectural culture. This involves a synthesis process between tradition, modernity and contemporaneity, today especially significant.

André Ravéreau, Lessons in Comparison. Beyond the Borders of M’Zab

Daniela Ruggeri

The word “lesson” can offer a particular angle through which to observe and rediscover the work of André Ravéreau (Limoges 1919-Aubenas 2017), a French architect, mainly based in Africa: he worked for about twenty years in Algeria, where he held important positions – from 1965 to 1973 he was *Architecte en chef des monuments historiques*

d’Algérie (Architect in charge of the superintendence for the architectural and historical heritage of Algeria) – then in sub-Saharan Africa; in 1980 he received the Aga Khan prize for the Mopti Health Centre. Still a not well studied figure, Ravéreau follows a trajectory that will lead him towards another modernity, although the different lessons he uses to arrive to his personal synthesis can be contextualized within a precise cultural *milieu*.

This paper intends to highlight, on the one hand, the lesson, or rather the architectural lessons Ravéreau learnt during his life, and on the other hand, the lesson the architect leaves through his writings and the design projects.

The Teaching of Clorindo Testa. Architecture is a Concrete Art

Dina Nencini

This essay on the work of the architect Clorindo Testa brings to light an architect known internationally but relatively studied, due to the relevance of both his pictorial and architectural work. After a quick survey of the cultural climate of his early years in Buenos Aires which allows us to identify connections and continuity between artistic experiences and architecture, two emerging works from his architectural production are chosen: the Banco de Londres and the National Library. The center of the reflection concerns the expressive impulse and constructive control of his creations, in which the architect nourishes the generative nucleus of his works, and which represents a key to understanding from which emerges the coherence of his architectural production. A dominant aspect concerns the theme of space, which, selected as an interpretative key but also as the main place of observation of Testa’s architecture, highlights a principle of interscalarity of the compositional procedures, which are distinguished into a settlement plan and an evocative one, both for large artefacts and for homes. Through the first he implements the relationship between the architectural body and the urban or natural and environmental body; through the second, Testa’s ability to build with the void is realized.

The Other Modernity of Rino Levi: the Brazilian Soul of City Architecture

Alessandra Criconia

With over 200 projects of which almost half have been built, Rino Levi is the author of architecture that has left its mark on the modern transformation of São Paulo. Taking the approach he learnt in Italy during his years of study, first in Milan at the Brera Academy of Fine Arts (1921-24), then in Rome at the Regia Scuola Superiore di Architettura where he graduated in 1926, Levi put into practice a programme of work outlined in the article *Architecture and Aesthetics of the City* written when he was still a student, for the Brazilian daily *O estado de São Paulo*.

In the article, which can be regarded as his theoretical manifesto, Levi develops an argument about the role that technology has on the renewal of the arts and architecture, and the ethical task of the architect to give an appropriate aesthetic form to the building by imprinting a Brazilian soul linked to the climatic and natural context.

Over the course of thirty years of activity, interrupted by his sudden death, Levi designed houses, cinemas, theatres, banks, hospitals, garages, civic centres and office

buildings with the firm of associate architects he founded, through which he reinterpreted a modernity outside of the Brazilian modernism of the LeCorbusierian type. It is neither Le Corbusier's five points nor the pilotis of the Ministry of Education and Health that mark his architecture. On the contrary, the urban model Levi looks to is the American model of skyscrapers and garden cities.

«Rino was, writes Carlos Lemos, the anti-Oscar par excellence. [...] a faithful servant of the rules and his merit is that he served them with good taste» (C. Lemos, *Arquitetura Brasileira*, Melhoramentos EDUSP, São Paulo 1979, p. 158).

Lelé: the Architect with a Project for Brazil

Anália M.M.C. Amorim

The aim of this brief text is to introduce the Brazilian architect João Filgueiras Lima, also known as Lelé, through a commented description of his professional trajectory. It will focus on some of his creative phases, following a chronological narrative. In addition to an invitation for further exploration in the future, this is an initial approach that should continue with the analysis of the architects who influenced him, as well as the architectural evolution of each constructive element.

Lelé was the architect who most advanced prefabrication in Brazil, experimenting with various project scales. Throughout his career and thanks to the various factories he conceived and built, he designed and executed: residences, residential complexes, commercial buildings, day-care centers, schools, sports gyms, community centers, auditoriums, aeroclubs, resorts, clinics, hospitals, research centers, chapels, churches, convents, administrative centers, audit courts, electoral courts, police stations, fiscal posts, public transport stations, historical center restoration, urban footbridges, drainage channels, retaining walls, squares, and open spaces... in addition to furniture and equipment that make up many of these buildings.

He was undoubtedly the architect who designed and built the most in Brazil, being the one who not only conceived beautiful architectural spaces but also devised ways and means to construct them.

The Mexican International Style. Juan Sordo Madaleno

Miquel Adrià

Juan Sordo Madaleno was a modern architect, clearly aligned with the International Style. He embraced the principles of a modernity that fit perfectly in Mexico, during a period of developmental boom. In the second half of the last century, the conditions for economic growth arose, drawing a significant portion of Mexican society towards a universal progress that left behind any attachment to local identity. It was within this prosperity that Juan Sordo Madaleno's projects flourished.

Throughout his career, his work flowed measuredly between discretion, good taste, and a strange knack for the exact tone, the right height, or the appropriate proportion. Three phases stand out in the chronology of his work: the early years in the 1940s, when he collaborated with Augusto H. Álvarez, producing meticulous modern projects with rigor and prudence. This was followed by decades of maturity where his distinctive style and delicate compositional calligraphy became more pronounced

in projects of great significance. His later years are characterized by a leaning towards volumetrics, prismatic expression, and an iconic relationship with the city.

Marcel Lajos "Lajkó" Breuer (1902-1981)

Denyse Rodriguez Tomé

During his long career as an architect and furniture designer, Marcel Breuer has explored the bending of metal and wood, the brutality of concrete, the expression of extreme lightness as well as the power of matter. Born in Pecs in Hungary in 1902 into a Jewish family, he was one of the first students of the Bauhaus in Weimar in 1919. He trained there in the carpentry workshop and in the architectural agency of Walter Gropius, then director of the school. The tubular metal armchair created in 1924 made him known and marked a turning point in Bauhaus research. He left the school with Gropius in 1928 but suffered from the rise of Nazism, then followed his professor to Harvard, Massachusetts in 1938. They founded an architectural agency where Breuer specialized in the creation of lightweight houses, proposing binuclear plans in two wings separating living room and rest areas. At the beginning of the 1950s, he radically changed scale and materiality, facing two concomitant commissions, the new St Jones Abbey and its university Collegeville, Minnesota, and the UNESCO House in Paris. His collaboration in this last project with the engineer Pier Luigi Nervi is decisive for his new practice, and influences the abbey project. Breuer uses concrete in the style of Nervi, with pilotis on the ground floor which lift the thick volumes of the buildings. Breuer then becomes on the international scene one of those American architects producing institutional buildings, in search of a modern and democratic monumentality. In south of France, for the IBM company, he designed a Research Center, for which he initiated the use of load-bearing concrete thick facades with breakers sun. In Flaine in Haute-Savoie, a ski resort, concrete buildings where cantilever shadows contrast on the light south-facing facades. The Whitney Museum in Manhattan seems like an inverted pyramid on the street, the opposite of the stepped buildings surrounding it: sculpture architecture for art, a modern free plan on the 4th floor, in a cantilever.

Hans Hollein Discovering a Viennese Compatriot: Rudolph Schindler

Caroline Maniaque

This text is based on the testimony of Viennese architect Hans Hollein (1934-2014), who spent time in the United States between 1958 and 1960. The account of his epic journey reveals just how conducive this time was to the perception of "newness," whether visual, sensory or intellectual. For him, the trip was an opportunity for a mental redistribution of categories, from architecture to art, from learned culture to popular culture, from the contemporary architecture of skyscrapers to the discovery of the vernacular architecture of the pueblos. But it was also a way of reviving a memory, that of the work of a Viennese architect living in Los Angeles whose work was, at the time, rarely mentioned: Rudolph Schindler (1887-1953). Hollein wrote in several Austrian periodicals about the Wolfe House on San Catarina Island, which Schindler built in 1929.