

Clichefication?

Alberto Alessi

Just when the gods had ceased to be and the Christ had not yet come, there was a unique moment in history, between Cicero and Marcus Aurelius, when man stood alone. Nowhere else do I find that particular grandeur.
Margherite Yourcenar (quoting Gustave Flaubert), 1951

Pigeon-box vs Babel

In the september WA issue we investigated what is happening in architecture in Italy, from the very far North to the very far South. In this number we concentrate our attention to the region between Rome and Naples, presenting the work of 10 architects operating in and out from these two places.

And also here, in such a small portion of the country, we can experience the same range of differences and specificities between the researchs, as we saw all around Italy. It's clearly impossible to look to them with the illusory will to identificate any coherent school or continuity.

However, the mainstream discussion on architecture nowadays turns continuously around the search for a (always new) definitive definition of architects, architectures and experiences and their possible belonging, putting in pigeon-boxes things that are necessarily unique and continuously different.

In particular, as the typological and formal analysis seems to be no more useful, no more clearly selecting groups and solutions, the most succesful classification in the field becomes to be that one of the national identification.

But what lies behind this need to speak about architecture as *national* result? What is expected of it, and which values should it embody?

As the political, financial and cultural systems are more and more the same everywhere, and the religions are too diffuse to define locally visible groups (except maybe the unknown terrorists), a nation becomes identified with the specificity of a spoken languages. That one still remains the bigger handicap to win for an open free exchange of knowledge. Specially where these languages are spoken only in a state or in a small landscape. And in analogy with a language, the discussion on national-ism become the new -ism to be imposed and extended also to architecture, intended to be defined as a closed specific formal language.

One is chez soi (at home) when it is possible to be understood without problems, and at the same time it is possible to enter in the reasons of the others without long explications.
Marc Augé, Non-lieux, 1992

Does this happen with an architecture? Is it possible for an Italian citizen, to enter in one of the architectures here presented and feel at home more than in a building done by a "foreign architect"? What is to be interpreted as identification element of this or that country, and what in generic? Could an *Italian* building nowadays be a Chinese or a French one? Why not? Who is the architecture realized for? Who must be fascinated? Who is represented?

In the *disappointing* relative reality, the real, concrete, physical architecture should represent the otherwise denied identity. It is difficult to number all the publications celebrating this rediscovered identity as a hardware memory of a lost golden age to be used.

But despite the success of the national-ism lecture, what really seems to be experienced nowadays as real national traditions, uses and specificities, so in Italy as elsewhere, is just the range of difficulties that stay between one's will and the realization of these expectations.

So once again. What is *italian architecture*? What is *italian in architecture*? What is the sense of these questions when the codes of the uses are lost, and the supposed traditions become just an obstacle or a repertoire of formal or material elements to pick up?

Clichefication

When you look to Casa del Fascio or to Villa Malaparte, the are you looking to the architecture, the architect, the situation?

When you look to the work of Moretti, can or must you deny Mollino or Gardella?

When you analize Rossi, are you able to forget Scarpa or De Carlo?

When you look to the project for the Beaubourg by Piano-Rogers in Paris or to the Maxxi by Hadid in Rome, what do you see? An architecture? Or a foreign architect in a foreign country?

We can try play the game.

Look to these several Icons of the last 100 years architecture projected in and out from Italy. Choose the one that in your opinion better represent the most exemplar italian architecture. Try to explain why this choice.



Clichefication. Choosing one's own italian architecture

Then, try to go deeper in the knowledge of you selection. Study its history, the reasons of the architect, these of the client, the variations to the project. Think to what was happening in the same period elsewhere.

And then ask yourself if this architecture or this architect continue to represent better then others your idea of *italianità* in architecture.

When we speak about the couple architecture and identity, we should understand at the same time:
- the identity of the architecture, its characters, its references to the discipline;
- the identity of the viewer that projects its expectations on this architecture.

The traditions are exploding. And this is not just now. As the following texts of Ponti and Moretti show, the *italianity* is more a state of the feeling than a question of definitive answers and determinated forms.

"Would it be possible to speak of "Architettura all'italiana"? There is no Italian architecture except modern Italian architecture, which is animated by the same spirit all over Italy. The old architecture was different in Turin, in Genoa, in Rome, in Venice (it was actually Byzantine there). From Venice to Verona to Vicenza, Mantua, Bologna, Florence, Rome, Naples, to the Puglie and Sicily – all over Italy - it was animated by a local, individual spirit. Something else exists, however, and that is the architecture of the Italians, the architecture that in its best works from every period in every style – romantic, medieval Byzantine, Renaissance, baroque, neoclassic, and also modern – has always been exceptional. We Italians do not have a formal vernacular tradition in the arts – I will never tire of repeating this – we have rather a tradition of "climaxes" in which formal inequality means richness, means freedom."
Gio Ponti, *Amate l'architettura* (*In Praise of architecture*), 1957

"That architecture, building in general, be a particular quality of the Italian, descends, when observing it well, from his typical conformation in the biological sense. The Italian has extraordinary finesse and sensitivity, be that in manual labor as well as in intellectual works. We can say that he has the mind and hands which are sensitive to the millimeter due to his biological makeup. This unity and coordination of his sensitivities, both visual, logical, manual and of imagination, allows him to be extremely capable, still today, to work in building (as well as in industrial design). Organizational refinement (aside from the help of modern working techniques that, left on its own, is an army void of leaders) needs this biological refinement and excitement. People to the North are biologically formed by logic more so than the Italians, but their imagination and their hands, metaphorically speaking, are less agile and, I would say, sluggish. People to the South have a biological conformation which is just the opposite. The Italian is that famous mechanism in the middle that has been and always will be the basis for comparison, the king, in certain fields, which, precisely to the point, is to work in architecture, especially on audacious and imposing buildings."
Luigi Moretti, *Building is the Italian's nature*, unpublished and undated script

So the great differences in the works of the architects in this issue is not a casuality, rather the spontaneous result of a society in change. These differences reflect the actual real lack of any *geographical or national language* and the discontinuity all around Italy now. It seems redundant and obvious to say, but at least in Europe, we are really living in a postmodern global society. And so every architect, as every citizen does, searches for his own projected identity in a bigger reference field than the national traditions. And everybody, also a non architect can project its own expectations and identification on a building.

Choosing you references, your past, your future

It is always a question of projection. Projection of knowledge, of expectations. An *Identification* rather then identity.



A question of perceptions. Greetings from Italy

Images

Clichefication. Choosing one's own Italian architecture

01	1926, Fiat Lingotto, Turin, Matté Trucco
02	1934, Post office, Rome, Mario Ridolfi
03	1936, Casa del Fascio, Como, Giuseppe Terragni
04	1937, Kindergarden Sant'Elia, Como, Giuseppe Terragni
05	1938, Antitubercular Centre, Alessandria, Ignazio Gardella
06	1940, Malaparte House, Capri, Adalberto Libera
07	1946, Skilift, Lago Nero, Carlo Mollino
08	1947, Astrea, Rome, Luigi Moretti
09	1947, Casa del Sole, Cervinia, Carlo Mollino
10	1948, Termini Station, Rome, Eugenio Montuosi
11	1950, Fosse Ardeatine, Rome, Mario Fiorentino
12	1953, PAC Contemporary Art Pavillion, Milan, Ignazio Gardella
13	1954, La Martella, Matera, Ludovico Quadroni
14	1954, Tuscolano Unity, Rome, Adalberto Libera
15	1955, Villa Planchart, Caracas (Venezuela), Gio Ponti
16	1956, Office and Apartment House, Milan, Luigi Moretti
17	1957, Loro Parisini Factory, Milan, Luigi Caccia Dominioni
18	1957, Small Sport Palace, Rome, Pierluigi Nervi
19	1957, Velasca Tower, Milan, BBPR
20	1958, Apartment House, Venice, Ignazio Gardella
21	1959, Olivetti's Mensa, Ivrea, Ignazio Gardella
22	1960, High School, Terni, Mario Ridolfi
23	1961, Palaexpo, Turin, Pierluigi Nervi
24	1961, Piazza Carbonari, Apartment House, Milan, Luigi Caccia Dominioni
25	1961, Pirelli's Skyscraper, Milan, Gio Ponti
26	1964, University, Urbino, Giancarlo De Carlo
27	1967, Castelvecchio, Verona, Carlo Scarpa
28	1967, Watergate Centre, Washington (USA), Luigi Moretti
29	1971, S. Cataldo Cemetery, Modena, Aldo Rossi
30	1971, San Giovanni Battista Church, Giovanni Michelacci
31	1971, Centre Beaubourg, Paris (F), Renzo Piano – Richard Rogers
32	1975, Brion Tomb, San Vito, Carlo Scarpa
33	1975, Corviale Housing, Rome, Mario Fiorentino
34	1980, Cretto, Gibellina, Alberto Burri
35	1980, Pharmacist House, Gibellina, Franco Purini
36	1980, World Theatre, Venice, Aldo Rossi
37	1994, reconstruction Roman Theatre, Sagunto (E), Giorgio Grassi
38	1995, Mosque, Rome, Paolo Portoghesi
39	1997, Schutzenstrasse, Berlin, (D) Aldo Rossi
40	1998, Maxxi Museum, Rome, Zaha Hadid
41	1998, New Uffizi EXit, Florence, Arata Isozaki
42	1999, Library, Amiens (F), Francesco Venezia
43	2000, Twin Towers, Vienna (A), Massimiliano Fuksas
44	2001, GNAM, Rome, Roger Diener
45	2002, Auditorium, Rome, Renzo Piano
46	2002, San Michele in Borgo, Pisa, Massimo Carmassi
47	2003, Bicocca, Milan, Gregotti Associati
48	2005, New Fair, Milan, Massimiliano Fuksas
49	2005, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern (CH), Renzo Piano

A question of perceptions. Greetings from Italy

01	1757, Views of modern Rome, Giovanni Paolo Pannini
02	1960, Ivrea, postcard
03	1970, Gibellina, postcard
04	1985, Italy in miniature, photo Luigi Ghirri
05	1990, Naples, postcard
06	1995, Rome, Postcard