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**Looking Ahead  
A Theoretical Glance of the Teaching Activities  
in Architecture**

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**Looking Ahead**  
**A Theoretical Glance of the Teaching Activities in Architecture**

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**Abstract**

In the new educational offer by the Italian school of architecture we notice the necessity of a contemporary new version of the theoretical consideration within the courses of architectural design. We are not referring to the re-proposition of a self-referential approach disconnected from the project, but teaching students the necessity to motivate one’s choices, without deferring them to a supposed illusory invention.

We have to explain still decisive questions, such as the relationship with the context, the correct passages among the various steps of in-depth analysis of the project, the awareness not subjected to fashion or to the sample-taking of the endless examples immediately available on the internet.

The question of typology has to be re-considered: it reached its peak in Pescara during the years of the so called “Tendenza” and after was completely removed. C. M. Aris’ studies propose to identify the *fil rouge* with history upon which many contemporary projects are based, although declaring against it.

In the passage from studies on the compact city to those on the sprawling city, it appeared impossible to analyze it by means of a typo-morphological approach, requiring a lengthening to other disciplines such as photography, topography, literary description and the destabilizing suggestion of *land art*, towards the planning identification of new centralities in the large magma of wide spread settlements.

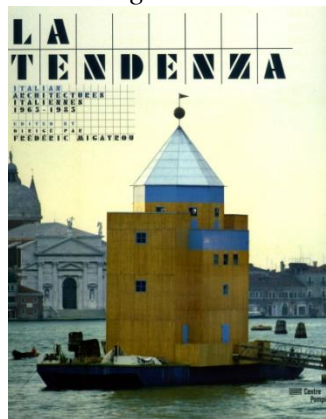
**Keywords:** Invention, Sprawl, Transgression, Typology, Variation

## Introduction

When we thought, in our PhD course, about a day of study concerning the experience of the so-called "Tendenza" (Figure 1) within the Pescara Faculty of Architecture, someone thought that it would be like having a conference that inevitably could oscillate between two alternatives: a nostalgic and apologetic attitude towards a hyper-critic vision.

Our lay attitude avoided a conflict between cultural parties and tried to investigate, after forty years, if some of the teachings of the Architecture Group of the 1970s ("infancy" of the Faculty of Architecture of Pescara, began in 1967) could still be a positive tool for work. This is interesting in the period in which the new Department of Architecture introduced the profound teaching innovations with a new training proposal.

**Figure 1.** *The Book Cover Publishing the Exhibition in Paris (2012)*



**Figure 2.** *Project for the Chieti Student House (Grassi G., Monestiroli A.)*



## A Theoretical Glance

We want to remember the history of this group of architects and teachers, marked in particular by the story of the construction of the Student House in Chieti (designed by Giorgio Grassi and Antonio Monestiroli, winner of the 1976 competition), recently outraged by its partial demolition (Figure 2): the reasons for this are the structural degradation and the failure to meet the current

standards. This should have covered the incomplete skeletons of buildings for rooms and facilities: instead the demolition was applied also to one building porch in front of the survivor canteen; we do not know why!

So we proceeded to nullify the sense of this architecture, with its references to the project of renovation for the Kaiserstrasse by Weinbrenner in Karlsruhe, characterized by the construction of a typical urban street with porches addressed to see the countryside: the coexistence of cities and countryside is at the center of the description of the urban sprawl by Agostino Renna in "Le illusioni e i cristalli"<sup>1</sup>. This project was multi-published and present in the memory of European architects.

The history of this building was so painful to motivate the non-participation of the teachers of that time to the day of study: the absence of the Student House was remembered (the night before the conference) by an interesting and caring installation developed in the exhibition space "Usomagazzino", which often Lucio Rosato devotes to the memory, the absence and the disposal of sense (Figure 3).

The theme of absence is translated from the Chieti artifact to the theoretical teaching of architecture, that was the center of studies of the first years in the Pescara Faculty, evaporating in the following decades.

We decided to organize this work day starting from the present, consisting of three recent books proposed for the discussion by young and postgraduate students.

However those considerations are motivated also by another small book on the teaching of architectural composition, edited by Emanuele Carreri<sup>2</sup>, in which Alessandro Cece describes the day of a student in some American faculties as cut in two parts: the morning dedicated to teaching theory, by professors of theory and history, the afternoon for the architectural design, in which the "designer" professor is responsible (Figure 4).

**Figure 3.** *The "Absence" Installation in the Usomagazzino Exhibition Space*



**Figure 4.** *The Book Cover of the Texts Edited by Emanuele Carreri*

In the new educational offer by the Italian school of architecture we notice the necessity of a contemporary new version of the theoretical consideration within the courses of architectural design. We are not referring to the re-proposition of a self-referential approach disconnected from the project, but teaching students the necessity to motivate one's choices, without deferring them to a supposed illusory invention (Figure 5).

It is to explain issues still decisive, as to the relationship with the context, the stringent steps between stages of study of the project, its awareness is not subject to cultural trends or to withdraw the countless examples from the instantly visitable Internet sites.

The question of typology<sup>3</sup> has to be re-considered: it reached its peak in Pescara during the years of the so called "Tendenza" and after was completely removed: the judgment can no longer be of cultural submission; Aldo Rossi, after the years of his teaching in Pescara, stated that fundamentalist use of the typology in teaching came to be an excessive constraint for students.

The studies by Carlos Martí Aris<sup>4</sup> proposed to recover the "fil rouge" with the history, in which many contemporary projects are based, although it declared an opposition: it comes now to recover the concept of "spiritual families", recognizing and motivating the membership, but also interpretations, changes and transgressions (Figure 6).

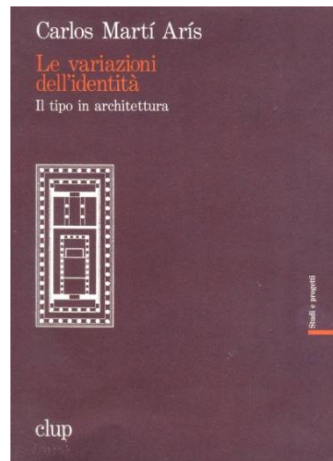
Then it will reflect more on the analogy than imitation (referring to the theoretical development by Rossi), coming to make unexpected discoveries, passing from time to time by Palladio to Le Corbusier to Rem Koolhaas. It is interesting to see that a particularly innovative engineer, such as Cecil Balmond (who comes from the "planetary" study of Ove Arup), binds its digital research and then numeric, for the engineering of complex projects of the so-called archi-star, to the golden section of Renaissance memory (Figure 7).

The complexity of the structures of contemporary architectures on a metropolitan scale reminds us of the complexity of the city on which we have to investigate and design: we cannot limit to self-referential architecture that programmatically does not propose a relationship with the environment;

**Figure 5. New Training Offer Poster by Pescara Department of Architecture**



**Figure 6. Book Edited by Carlos Martí Arís**



**Figure 7. Cecil Balmond**



We need buildings that would reverse this relationship, leaving the forced perimeter of respect for the existing environment and offering new elements to

enrich the context, often weak of the Adriatic cities, weaving wires and geometries to rewrite the quality for the actual city (Figure 8).

In the transition from studies on the compact city, excellently analyzed by means of typo-morphological approach described in the publication of studies on "La città di Padova"<sup>5</sup> carried out by the Venetian research group, to the urban sprawl, there has been a substantial inability to analyze it with the same "closed" methods. It has been indispensable an extension to other disciplines such as photography, topography, literary description, the destabilizing suggestion of *land art*<sup>6</sup> towards the planning identification of new centralities in the large magma of wide spread settlements.

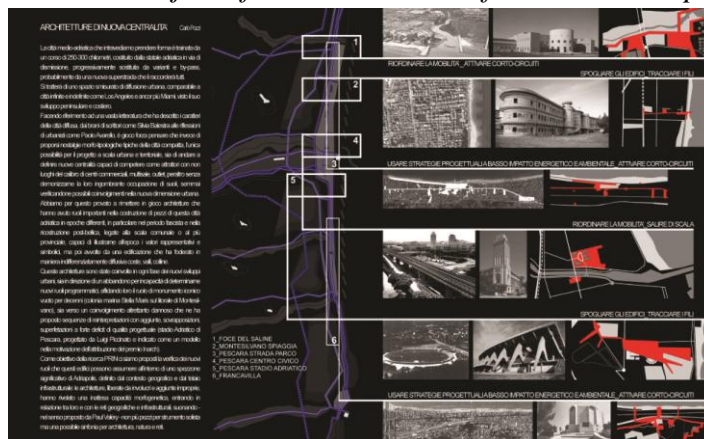
Even on these issues, it occurred prior to a rejection of the experience accumulated during the years of the Tendenza Group Architecture in Venice, rejecting the relationship with the context. Only recently, with interesting thoughts, we have seen the revival of the request for further analysis and the project research on the urban scale:

"After years of intense, sometimes heated debate around the theme of the transformation of the idea of the city, today we face with an all too bloated 'clearance' of urban sprawl by insiders. On the contrary I believe that the time is ripe to launch an urgent study and an attempt to leave behind the adherence to phenomenon of a spontaneous city, and the misunderstanding that it is open around the strategies of design intervention in these areas. (...) After the time of provocations, (...) I think it is urgent to raise the scale of urban planning or, more generally, that of the relationship between architecture and context."<sup>7</sup>

From the compact city to the urban sprawl; finally we are sinking our hands into the muddy dough on which the informal city is flooding the planet (favelas, slums, shanty towns) (Figure 9).

The planet requires even more urgent work for an ecological city, that grows less and less and instead knows how to qualitatively regenerate.

**Figure 8.** *The Research Project of New Centralities for the Urban Sprawl*





**Figure 9.** *The Workshop Project of New Spaces Inside the Brazilian Favelas*



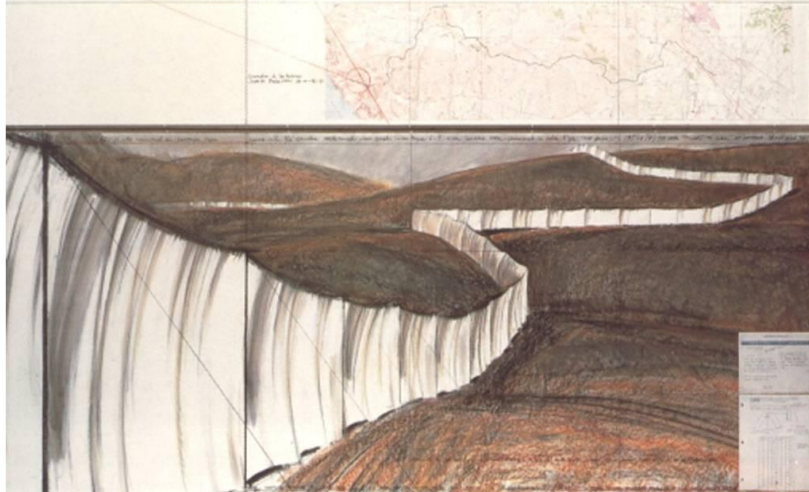
The underlying issue, linked to the study day in Pescara, would be: could a traditional theoretical training be used as *hard core* for the insertion of specialists from other disciplines? What has changed the attitudes of builders, the provocation of *land art* (Figure 10) or that of the ecologist world, characterized by risks due to climate change?<sup>8</sup> With these branches it would risk to undermine, until dissolution, the fundamentals of the architectural discipline? These rhetorical questions refer to insecurity of the present time, solvable only by the decision to choose the hybridization rather than the purism (in this case of alleged autonomy and scientific character of discipline).

It is interesting to also combine elements of science of the craft with the poetic and biographical approach: in just a day's study of the PhD on "L'Architettura della Città"<sup>9</sup> by Aldo Rossi, I proposed the "prescription" of not separating the interpretive reading of this book from that of the following "Autobiografia Scientifica"<sup>10</sup> in which the author creates a counterpoint between his desire to systematize the knowledge in one architecture manual and the design maturity, marked by positive and negative happenings of life (Figure 11).

It is necessary not to keep the gap between architectural processes - more technical - and artistic processes - more creative -: in this sense we could interpret the *mantra* many times proposed by Ettore Spalletti, a well-known international artist from Pescara: <the Faculty of Architecture has killed the Art School!>. He probably meant from experience from the high school of Pescara was flowed along the 1970s to the "Convergenze" gallery, that proposed the performances of artists such as Andrea Pazienza, Albano Paolinelli, Franco Summa, Sandro Visca and so-called Spalletti.

In the event "Cantiere Abruzzo" in December 2013, the Department of Architecture began to reduce this distance: from the closure in the autonomy on our discipline we switched to the cooperation with the other arts, including those that applied, beginning again to look at the experiences of the Vienna Secession and the Bauhaus (Figure 12).

**Figure 10.** *Running Fence, a Land Art Project by Christo (California 1976)*



**Figure 11.** *Day's Study Poster for PhD in Department of Architecture*



**Figure 12.** *"Cantiere Abruzzo": The Mannequins by Francesco D'Incecco*



## Conclusions

The wealth of the theoretical studies of the recent past<sup>11</sup> makes sense only if it is directed to the future, to the construction of a teaching project that makes contemporary sense, for the student of architecture to understand each step of a complex process, going beyond the traditional opposition between artistic creation and scientific attitude to research, experimenting with an unusual mix of typology, land art and ecology.<sup>12</sup>

## References & Notes

- [1] Renna A. 1980. *Le illusioni e i cristalli* [The illusions and the crystals] (Clear, Roma, 1980).
- [2] Cece A. 2007. *Didattica nelle scuole di architettura USA* [Teaching in schools of architecture in the USA], in *Insegnare composizione architettonica. Principi e pratica quotidiana* a cura di Carreri E. (Kappa, Roma, 2007).
- [3] The type joins a family of architectures that all have the same relationship among the parties that are: buildings at court, with gallery, on line: these permanent relationships have been used to provide students with the educational categories, indispensable, particularly in the early years of course, to establish a project partnership with the history of architecture and to combat free creativity based only on imagination.
- [4] Marti Aris C., *Le Variazioni dell'identità. Il tipo in architettura* [Variations of identity]. The type in architecture (Clup, Milano, 1990).
- [5] Aymonino C., Brusatin M., Fabbri G., Lena M., Lovero P., Lucianetti S., Rossi A., *La città di Padova* [The city of Padua] (Officina, Roma, 1970).
- [6] When in the arts the so-called "arte povera" showed, the painting and sculpture production is out of the picture and tried new fields of intervention, especially spaces of nature and landscape (Smithson, Christo, Mary Miss) by making them dense of essential meanings for a teaching of architecture that did not look at the object in a self-referential way.
- [7] Desideri P., 2008. *Ri-comporre: una scuola italiana, prefazione per Mondaini, G., Ri-Composizioni. Temi e figure per conversioni urbane* [Re-dial: an Italian school, the preface for Mondaini, G., *Re-compositions. Themes and figures for urban conversions*] (Gangemi, Roma, 2008).
- [8] It is the understanding that the beauty that has to be taught to the students in architecture cannot be a theoretical concept, but must be closely linked to the design response to be given to changes and problems caused by climate change, ambitious project of salvation of threatened lands and the whole planet. Teaching should therefore - if not distorted - be at least profoundly rethought: environmental education means teaching to enhance the landscape, to care, to live carefully, checking the design changes necessary to live there.
- [9] Rossi A. *L'architettura della Città* [The architecture of the City] (Marsilio, Padova, 1966) (Quodlibet, Macerata 2011).
- [10] Rossi A. *Autobiografia Scientifica* [A Scientific Autobiography] (Pratiche Editrice, Parma, 1990).
- [11] Baukuh, *Due saggi sull'architettura* Two essays on architecture (Sagep Editori, Genova, 2012); Malcovati S., *Una casa è una casa. Scritti sul pensiero e sull'opera di Giorgio Grassi* [A house is a house. Writings on the thinking and work of Giorgio Grassi] (Franco Angeli, Milano 2011); Pagano L., Agostino

Renna: rimontaggio di un pensiero sulla conoscenza dell'architettura [Agostino Renna: replacement of a thought on knowledge of architecture] (Clean, Napoli, 2012).

- [12] The methodology of the writing has been structured as a mounting that puts in discontinuous sequence phenomena such as *Tendenza*, *Land Art*, the *Ecological Conversion* to show the obvious theoretical distances but also desirable and innovative new synergies.