

# Athens Institute

Working Paper No. 2026-2798-43

19 June 2026

## Architecture, Pedagogy, and the Sacred Space: Experimental Designs in the Age of Hyper-consumption

Gregorio Froio

Working papers are published by the Athens Institute to stimulate discussion on various issues. These papers are primarily based on presentations made by the authors at various academic events organized by the Athens Institute. All published working papers undergo an initial peer review aimed at disseminating and improving the ideas expressed in each work. Authors welcome comments.

This paper should be cited as follows:

Froio, Gregorio (2026) Architecture, Pedagogy, and the Sacred Space: Experimental Designs in the Age of Hyper-consumption. Published by the Athens Institute: Working Paper No. 2026-2798-43, 19 June 2026. Pages 1-17

No.: 2026-2798-43

Date: 19 June 2026

DOI:

ISSN: 2241-2891

Previous Working Papers available at: [www.atiner.gr/papers.htm](http://www.atiner.gr/papers.htm)

*This series began in 2012 and was known as the Conference Paper Series until 2024. In 2025, the series was renamed and is now called the Working Paper Series.*

Athens Institute ([www.atiner.gr](http://www.atiner.gr))  
2026

## **Architecture, Pedagogy, and the Sacred Space: Experimental Designs in the Age of Hyper-consumption**

*By Gregorio Froio\**

*The sacred space occupies a persistent and vital place at the heart of modern architectural design culture. In the contemporary era, the intersection of architecture, pedagogy and the sacred provides an important basis for theoretical reflection, especially in the context of the complexities of the globalised city. This paper reflects on the relationship between architecture and the sacred within a pedagogical framework, focusing specifically on Franco Purini's research conducted during his lectures at the Faculty of Architecture in Rome between 2004 and 2012. The study is based on the philosophical and anthropological debate between modernity and the sacred, with theologian Romano Guardini's ideas playing a central role. This research translates these philosophical principles into the field of architectural education. According to Purini's definition, 'didactic architecture' is considered a fundamental aspect of composition. This theoretical space is free from professional constraints and commercial considerations. The paper analyses a specific pedagogical challenge: designing a 'Centre for the Spirit' integrated into a shopping mall. This project embraces the idea of 'contamination' between spirituality and mass consumption. The research explores its integration into the vital flows. Commerce, culture and social interaction coexist in the modern society. These experimental projects highlight the paradoxical role of the sacred as a 'desecrating' force against globalisation, restoring a sense of limits, silence and gathering.*

**Keywords:** *sacred space, pedagogical experimentation, hyper-consumption, liturgy, contemporary architecture*

---

\*Adjunct Professor, University of Calabria, Italy.

## Introduction

The concept of sacred spaces has always played a particularly important role in modern architectural design. In the contemporary era, the intersection of architecture, pedagogy, and the sacred offers fresh and urgent opportunities for theoretical reflection.

The sacred dimension refers to concepts such as symbols, liturgy and rites. Consequently, the concept of modernity has long been a subject of interest in anthropological and philosophical fields with regard to architectural culture. Notably, Romano Guardini's work has influenced architects such as Rudolf Schwarz and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.

This writing reflects on architectural projects concerning the theme of the sacred within a pedagogical context. Specifically, I will approach the subject by following the research line pursued by Franco Purini during his lectures at the Faculty of Architecture in Rome from 2004 to 2012.

Why did the author choose to address that particular case? What did that work represent for the author?

In the academic context, the theme of the sacred spaces was approached with an exceptionally broad vision. The idea of contamination between spirituality and mass consumption, between spaces designed for reflection and prayer, is evident. So, commerce, culture and sociality coexist in the modern society. Sacred space is therefore understood not as something detached from the modern world, but as something completely immersed in and traversed by it.

A teaching environment can foster a modern approach to composition, shifting the focus towards complex urban scenarios. As a branch of educational discipline, pedagogy connects the two terms (the sacred and architecture) in a triadic form. The digital age is characterised by instantaneous content and hyper-consumption of images as a privileged commodity. The projects developed in those workshops highlighted new forms of experimentation with the intersection of the sacred and consumption, the material and the immaterial, and rite and market. These experimental forms see the content of the sacred play a paradoxically desecrating role in relation to globalisation.

The pedagogical dimension of architecture is experimental by nature. As Franco Purini maintains: "The pedagogical dimension is the conceptual place in which architecture — an instrument of daily life and a support for heroic living — continuously rediscovers its origin."<sup>1</sup>

It is a place where utopia and its potential scenarios can be experimented with. As Ernesto Nathan Rogers states: "The university should be the least prejudiced part of life, free from the compromises of a practical and contingent nature that weigh down the implementation (and even formulation) of programmes in a transitional society."<sup>2</sup> According to Rogers, *The utopia of reality* shows the possibility of experimenting with visions and scenarios. It can predict and propel reality forward.

---

<sup>1</sup>Purini F (1980). *L'architettura didattica*. Gangemi: Roma, p. 95.

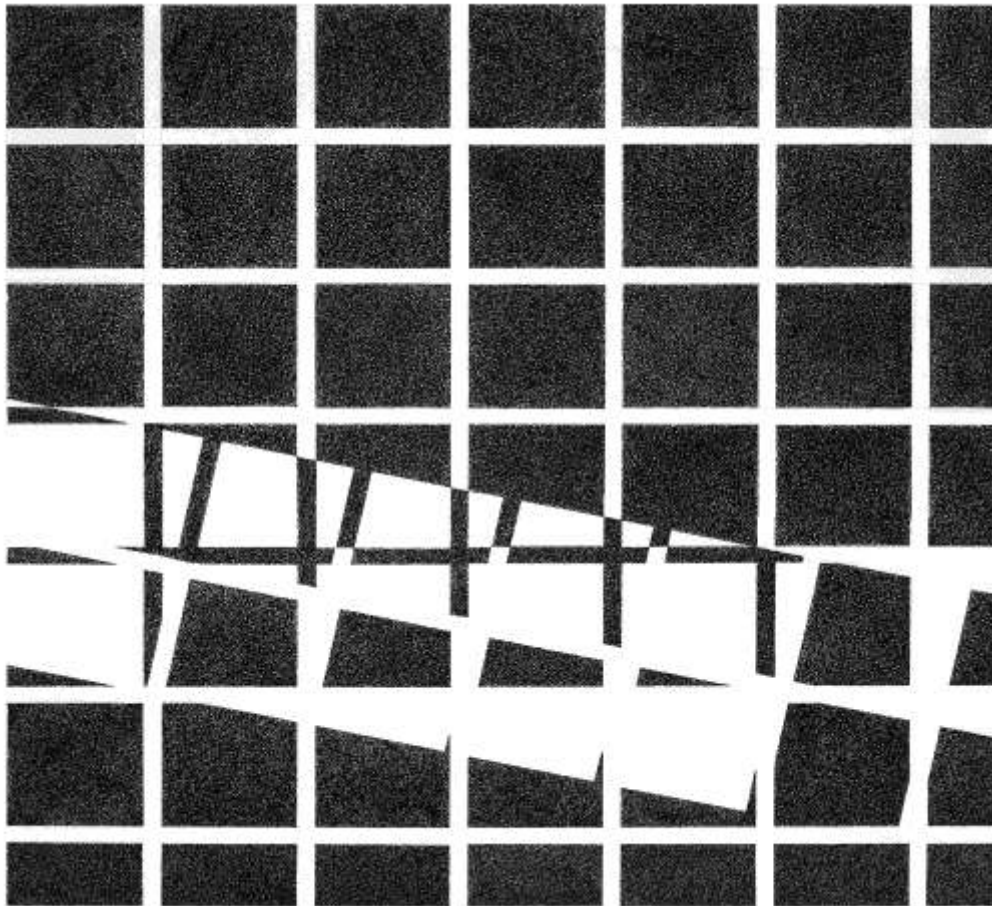
<sup>2</sup>Rogers E N (1965). *Esperienza di un corso universitario*, in: *L'utopia della realtà. Un esperimento didattico sulla tipologia della scuola primaria*. Leonardo da Vinci Editore: Bari.

## Didactic Architecture

According to Purini, didactic architecture (*Architettura didattica*) represents an initial stage of composition. In this stage the mind is free from preconceived ideas and professional constraints. This concept is fully realised in university classrooms. In pedagogical experimentation, the student's experience takes centre stage: "In students, craft and naivety are not vital experiences as they are for established architects, but rather a natural condition of learning. Unfortunately, this is destined to be almost always lost in professional practice."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, naivety and learning are the prerequisites for an architecture that is free from patterns and is experimental and unconventional by nature. Didactic architecture is as restless as the young people who practise it: "This restlessness reflects the need to question one's own lack of knowledge and the possibility of speaking only of oneself. However, it also reflects the awareness that certain answers must not exist."<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 1.** *Stratigraphic Matrix, Ink on Schoeller Board, 40x40 cm*



Source: Froio 2025.

---

<sup>3</sup>Purini F. *L'architettura didattica*, cit., p.95.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid*, p. 96.

This theme introduces the concept of creativity as a linguistic exercise. Self-generative knowledge is derived from linguistic studies.<sup>5</sup> According to Noam Chomsky, language is not 'learned', but rather an innate and primitive architectural act.<sup>6</sup> In this sphere creativity is the pedagogical experimentation of innate design ideas. A fundamental element emerges: drawing as a theoretical and practical discipline. This concept has been expressed by a generation of architects. An era of 'drawn architecture' is represented by architects such as Aldo Rossi, Carlo Aymonino, Costantino Dardi, Alessandro Anselmi, Franco Purini and Franco Pierluisi. In the specific experimental and pedagogical context, drawing becomes a central compositional focus.

A significant example is the sketch. It prefigures an advanced idea in its embryonic stage. The necessity and practice of drawing play a central role in the field of pedagogy. Regarding our proposed theme, Franco Purini's courses at Valle Giulia in Rome expressed a configurational mode of drawing with a specific formal content. The morpheme becomes a sign of origin — a sort of genetic DNA capable of instantaneously conveying compositional information<sup>7</sup> (Figure 1). The morpheme, as a generative act performed by students, is free from superimposed references and is innately their own creation. Endowed with semantic immediacy — almost as primary sites of composition — these morphemes: “are provided with a symbolic complexity that synthesises a compositional idea and its numerous references to meanings with very few strokes — meanings that always accompany elementary architectural forms as effective semantic resonances.”<sup>8</sup>

Into the definition of didactic architecture, the theme of the symbolic is an equally central concept. In a circular correspondence between signs and symbols, didactic architecture presents itself as a *secular architecture*. “It is anchored to a perpetually student-like phase marked by a desire for programmatic naivety; it explicitly positions itself as anti-totalitarian and partial; and it deliberately places itself within the limits of human experience centred on the everyday, from which it draws its symbols alone.”<sup>9</sup>

Another characteristic of didactic architecture is an evident compositional structure. The clarity of the architectural volumes and the tectonic articulations give them formal autonomy. This is deliberately exhibited, and is simultaneously cold and emotional. This is linked to the concept of architectural theory.

Within the pedagogical theme, the more specific subject of pedagogy in relation to sacred spaces emerges. We will discuss this in the main body of the text. Before entering into specifics, however, it is necessary to reflect on the concept of the sacred. Certain theoretical reflections, particularly those on liturgy

---

<sup>5</sup>Chomsky N (2006). *Language and Mind*. Bollati Boringhieri: Torino.

<sup>6</sup>See: Purini F (2022). *Discorso sull'architettura*. Marsilio: Venezia.

<sup>7</sup>According to Purini, morphemes, as entities, “consist of elementary connections of primary signs. Such generative combinations present themselves simultaneously as theoretical principles concerning the architectural object and the settlement context, and as formal devices capable of being articulated at various scales and in different thematic contexts”, in: Purini F (2000). *Le opere, gli scritti, la critica*. Electa: Milano, p. 101.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Purini F. *L'architettura didattica*, cit., p. 95.

analysed by the German theologian Romano Guardini, offer an insight into the culture of architectural design. The objective is to demonstrate how the experimental nature of the pedagogical project welcomes and follows the theme of the sacred in the contemporary era. We will explore how sacred spaces reflect this contemporary compositional condition, manifesting in specific spatial situations.

## Sacred Space and Liturgy

The word 'sacred', which shares its root with 'sacrament' or 'sacrifice', derives from the Latin *sacer*. The concept is fundamental to the study of religion, even though it remains indefinable except in opposition to the profane. "In fact, the sacred is everything that is not profane. While various languages and civilisations may have terms that correspond more or less to our term 'sacred', and while the sacred of one religion may differ from that of another, the sacred — and thus the distinction between the sacred and the profane — lies at the base of all religions. Indeed, it represents the constitutive element of religion as such"<sup>10</sup>. In this definition, the terms 'sacred' and 'profane' are antithetical. The original term means 'separated'. In Hebrew specifically, this term indicates a quality referring to contact with God and his power. The condition of contact: "entails a risk because God opposes man as totally heterogeneous in terms of power. For this reason, consecrated persons (priests) and specific places (the temple, which in Greek has an etymology related to cutting or segregating) are delegated to this contact."<sup>11</sup>

The inherent separateness of the term 'sacred' establishes a relationship with the term 'sacrifice' by opposition. For H. Hubert and M. Mauss (1897/99), in particular, it indicates a 'break in level' between the two planes (the sacred and the profane) that allows for the passage from one state to another. As Luigi Berzano maintains: "The sacred is the order of the world; within it, my actions are ordered into a set of signs that attribute meaning to them every time. A second function is the organisation of time, feasts and rites: the sacred is a time among times. A third function of the sacred is to integrate the individual into the group and establish their connection. This is the organic bond and the mystical network of unity. A strong and cohesive group requires passions and recognised duties, the legitimisation of violence and war under certain conditions and forms, and the recognition of a transcendent dimension. The sacred is the matrix of all social life, or the 'social divine' as Durkheim says — that is, the aggregating force at the base of any society, association and collective behaviour."<sup>12</sup>

The concept of liturgy is central to the definition of a sacred space. Romano Guardini wrote magnificent texts on this subject, analysing theological and doctrinal content while also providing a foundation for designing spaces dedicated to prayer and spirituality. According to Guardini, liturgy has an objective character, meaning it concerns the worship of the community rather

---

<sup>10</sup><https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/sacro1/>.

<sup>11</sup>*Enciclopedia di Filosofia*. (Garzanti: Milan 2004), p. 799.

<sup>12</sup>Berzano L (2009). *Forme del sacro*, in: 'XXI Secolo', Treccani online.

than the individual. "The subject, the 'I', of the liturgy is the union of the believing community as a whole; it transcends the sum of its individual members."<sup>13</sup>

Prayer, by virtue of this characteristic, acquires a measured form that is not tied to individual subjectivity, possessing solemnity and universality. The concept of universality concerns the community as a whole, forming the body of the Church. The individual becomes a vital cell of this body. The liturgy requires the believer to maintain a continuous tension between renouncing their personal autonomy and accepting the tenets of religious life. In this relation the spiritual and social content of the liturgy lies: "There, it was necessary to overcome the pride that wishes to remain within itself and the narrowness of particularism; here, it is necessary to overcome the aversion to external material life unfolding around us and the feeling of spiritual aristocracy of one who wishes to be only with those they have personally chosen and to whom they have spontaneously opened up."<sup>14</sup>

The relation between the 'I' and the 'we' is sublimated in the liturgy. "The individual is certainly a member of the whole, but not merely a part of it; they do not completely dissolve into it. They are inserted into it in such a way that they nonetheless remain what they are: a personality resting upon itself."<sup>15</sup>

In the liturgy, personal style is transcended and sublimated into the universal. Thus, the liturgy acquires a solemn tone: it transcends the spiritual content of the individual. The liturgy therefore possesses a sober style, stripped of particularities and aimed towards universality. Over time, the liturgical form has been refined by theological thought as well as by the passage of time. "Style, in the specific sense of the word, is clear discourse, measured movement and a strictly elaborated arrangement of space, objects, colours and sounds. It is the derivation of everything — thoughts, words, gestures and images — from the elementary forces of spiritual life. This ensures richness and variety, as well as transparency, in expression."<sup>16</sup> From this aspect the powerful force of the liturgical form emerges as a vital, expressive force.

## Sacred Space in Mies and Schwarz

As a twentieth-century architect, Rudolf Schwarz (1897-1961) interpreted the theme of the sacred in the design of places of worship particularly well. Known as the 'master builder of churches', he expressed this concept through an aesthetics of the transcendent.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup>Guardini R (1930). *Lo spirito della liturgia*. Morcelliana: Brescia 1930, p. 18.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid, p. 42.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, p. 52.

<sup>17</sup>Schwarz's search for a world of the 'threshold' indicates "a boundary that is passage and transfiguration, the mediating space in which the altar is the liminal zone and the architectural figure a precinct provided with profound truth", Grisi T (2017). *Figure di Chiese nell'architettura di Rudolf Schwarz*, in *Conoscere, conservare, valorizzare il patrimonio culturale religioso*, O. Niglio (ed), Aracne: Rome, p. 33.

In one of his famous writings, Schwarz states “The sacred meaning proper to every church construction, replaceable by nothing and exchangeable with nothing else, is the living church.”<sup>18</sup>

The influence of the theologian Romano Guardini is strongly felt here. The liturgical content of Schwarz's works manifests in the sharp recognisability of the religious building as a reflection of design thought. “The Schwarzian understanding of churches cannot stop at pictorial perception capturing a vague symbolic echo; it must affirm the real availability of truthful images as elementary archetypes of the ‘being together’ of the praying community that traverses and recreates them as inhabitable images.”<sup>19</sup> The construction of places of worship as a ‘praying work’ for Schwarz implies a craft “called to become prayer, detaching itself from liturgical purpose not to deny or reduce its importance, but to better identify the architectural project's specific contribution.”<sup>20</sup>

Guardini himself offers a lyrical description of sacred space in one of his writings. About the new Church of Corpus Domini in Aachen, designed by Rudolf Schwarz, Guardini offers a theological reflection on the modern concept of sacred space, emphasising the ideas of poverty and majestic solemnity evident in this work. The protagonist is the void, immersed in silence: “In this church lives the sacred presence. I could imagine someone saying it is empty. I would then suggest that they look deeper into their own feelings to see if they truly understand them. So much of us perceives something like this as ‘empty’. They do not perceive the silent calm of large intact surfaces, the clear breadth of an uncluttered space or the pure presence of simple forms.”<sup>21</sup> This is an absolute space where, as Franco Purini reminds us in his writing, light becomes ontological.<sup>22</sup>

Another great twentieth-century architect, Mies van der Rohe — a younger contemporary and great admirer of Schwarz — was deeply influenced by his friendship with Guardini. In his notes and writings about Guardini, “one recognises an exercise in the selection, memorisation and interpretation of the theologian's thoughts, in search of fundamental, original and universal architectural characteristics.”<sup>23</sup> For Mies, technology is always a civilising force to be reckoned with in relation to man. “I felt that it must be possible to harmonise the new and old forces in our civilisation. True architecture is always objective and expresses the inner structure of the era in which it is created.”<sup>24</sup>

Guardini, in turn, expressed himself as follows in a famous writing: “To master the new, we must understand it properly. We must master the unleashed forces in order to make them serve the creation of a new order that is centred on

---

<sup>18</sup>Schwarz R (1999). *Costruire la chiesa. Il senso liturgico nell'architettura sacra*. Morcelliana: Brescia, p. 230.

<sup>19</sup>Grisi T, *Figure di Chiese nell'architettura di Rudolf Schwarz*, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>20</sup>Crippa M. A., *Il mistero della Chiesa, corpo di Cristo e tempio dello Spirito Santo*, in: *SCRIPTA THEOLOGICA / VOL. 47 / 2015*, 719.

<sup>21</sup>Guardini R. *La nuova chiesa del Corpus Domini ad Aachen*, in: *Opera Omnia*. Vol. XV, 121.

<sup>22</sup>Purini F (2000). *Comporre l'architettura*. Laterza: Roma-Bari, p. 74.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Mies Van der Rohe. L. in Neumeyer F. (1996) *Ludwig Mies van der Rohe: le architetture, gli scritti*. Skira: Milano, pp. 332-333.

humanity. However, this work cannot ultimately be accomplished by starting from technical problems; it can only be achieved by starting from living people.”<sup>25</sup>

### **Sacred and the Body**

The philosophical notion of the body is fundamental to this discourse on the sacred.<sup>26</sup> From a Christian anthropological perspective, Romano Guardini traces the relationship between soul and body back to that between spirit and body. Overcoming their conflictual nature, he speaks of the living body (*Leib*). “The living body is therefore not merely the place that houses the presence of the spirit — its dwelling, its prison, its instrument or its obstacle. The body is, by its very nature, much more than that: it is the result of the union of spirit and matter. The spirit is not merely present in the body, but is rooted in it; the body expresses the spirit, participates in it and brings it into play within destiny.”<sup>27</sup>

In the Christian vision the opposition between spirit and body is decisively overcome. In Guardini's anthropological perspective, the spirit becomes flesh and is expressed through the body. Guardini further states: “In this body, the spirit enters the dimension of spatiality. Of it, one can say: ‘It is here,’ ‘It speaks,’ ‘It is responsible.’ The same is meant by the term ‘history’. Only through the body can there be history. Undoubtedly, it is the spirit that has a history, but only as a living soul in a body.”<sup>28</sup> This profound relationship between spirit and body is part of Guardini's broader theological reflection and represents the central point of this discourse on the body as theological space. Sacred spatiality thus acquires a depth that was understood by some of the great twentieth-century architects, particularly Mies van der Rohe and Rudolf Schwarz, as we discussed in the previous paragraph.

---

<sup>25</sup>Guardini R. *Lettere dal Lago di Como*. (Morcelliana: Brescia, 1959), 97.

<sup>26</sup>The concept of the body has permeated Western philosophical thought in its entirety. In ancient and medieval philosophy, the relationship between the soul and the body was central and developed in two main directions. The first, of Orphic–Pythagorean derivation, views the body as a distinct entity from the soul. In the *Phaedo*, Plato draws on this, describing the body as a corruptible entity within which the soul is imprisoned. This interpretation is connected to the patristic tradition of Origen and the scholasticism of Scotus Eriugena. The second interpretation was developed by Aristotle. Stoicism, Epicureanism and the Scholasticism of Thomas Aquinas adopted the idea of the body as an instrument of the soul. Instead, Augustine of Hippo developed the doctrine of *forma corporeitatis*, according to which the body escapes its instrumental function because it possesses an independent reality. The separation of body and soul is fully realised in the work of Descartes, who believed that the two were substances of different natures. Leibniz and Spinoza address the complex relationship between the two terms. Eighteenth-century materialists such as J. Mettrie and P.-H. d'Holbach influenced Marx, while Nietzsche exalted the body as a principle of truth in opposition to metaphysical idealism. In the philosophy of Schopenhauer, the body and bodily phenomena are representations of the will. For Bergson, the body is a simple instrument of practical action, governed by spiritual consciousness. For Husserl, the body is a living experience (*Leib*), a concept that inspired J.-P. Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and the phenomenological psychiatry of L. Binswanger. Further information can be found in *Enciclopedia di filosofia*, Garzanti, 213–214. and Galimberti U (2023). *L'etica del viandante*. Milano: Feltrinelli.

<sup>27</sup>Guardini R. *Opera Omnia*, III/2, 286.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

In this reflection on the aforementioned pedagogical building, there is finally a reference to the human figure and, once more, to the status of the architectural body: “The body is understood as a measure — not only proportional, but also a parameter of inhabiting — the centre of a sphere of formal relations whose meaning can continually be restored by function. It can be used as a lever to displace the obtuse repetition of customary constructive gestures.”<sup>29</sup>

In our era, the concept of the body has a sacred dimension common to many religions, particularly Christianity. There is a very deep relationship between body and architecture. In contemporary times, the image of the body is configured as a metaphor for the architectural body. According to the Vitruvian definition, architecture is seen as an extension and expression of the human body, a body split into its limbs (and today into its prostheses). This expresses the conceptual paradox of a material body that is disjointed and fragmented, and an immaterial body that is dematerialised into pure visual communication.

The theme of the body today seeks new statuses. In this sense, as Franco Purini maintains: “The project of the body is thus configured as an extreme experimental field in which genetics, medicine, electronics and art propose radical scenarios that, for the first time, displace convictions held for millennia.”<sup>30</sup>

Biology is moving towards staggering new perspectives, with life evolving towards previously unthinkable possibilities. Transplant surgery turns the body into a place where the organic and the inorganic are brought together. Electronic extensions attempt to enhance human senses, creating an intermediate being suspended between the physical world and cyberspace, as in the stories of William Gibson.<sup>31</sup>

In architecture, the body has thus become a hybridised body with extensions of every kind, in constant mutation. The body imitates the representation of the self found in statuary on the one hand, while projecting itself into the dimension of extreme artifice and pure immateriality on the other. This is no longer the body described by Leon Battista Alberti or the modern *machine for living* of Le Corbusier, but rather an immaterial body — a telematic icon devoid of substance that exists purely for communication.<sup>32</sup>

## **Pedagogy of Sacred Space and Hyper-consumption**

The pedagogical dimension of designing a sacred space is the conceptual focus of this discussion. The terms proposed thus far — sacred space, liturgy and body — can generate a contemporary vision of composition within a teaching context, directing a semantic shift towards complex urban scenarios.

---

<sup>29</sup>Purini F. *L'Architettura didattica*, cit., p. 96.

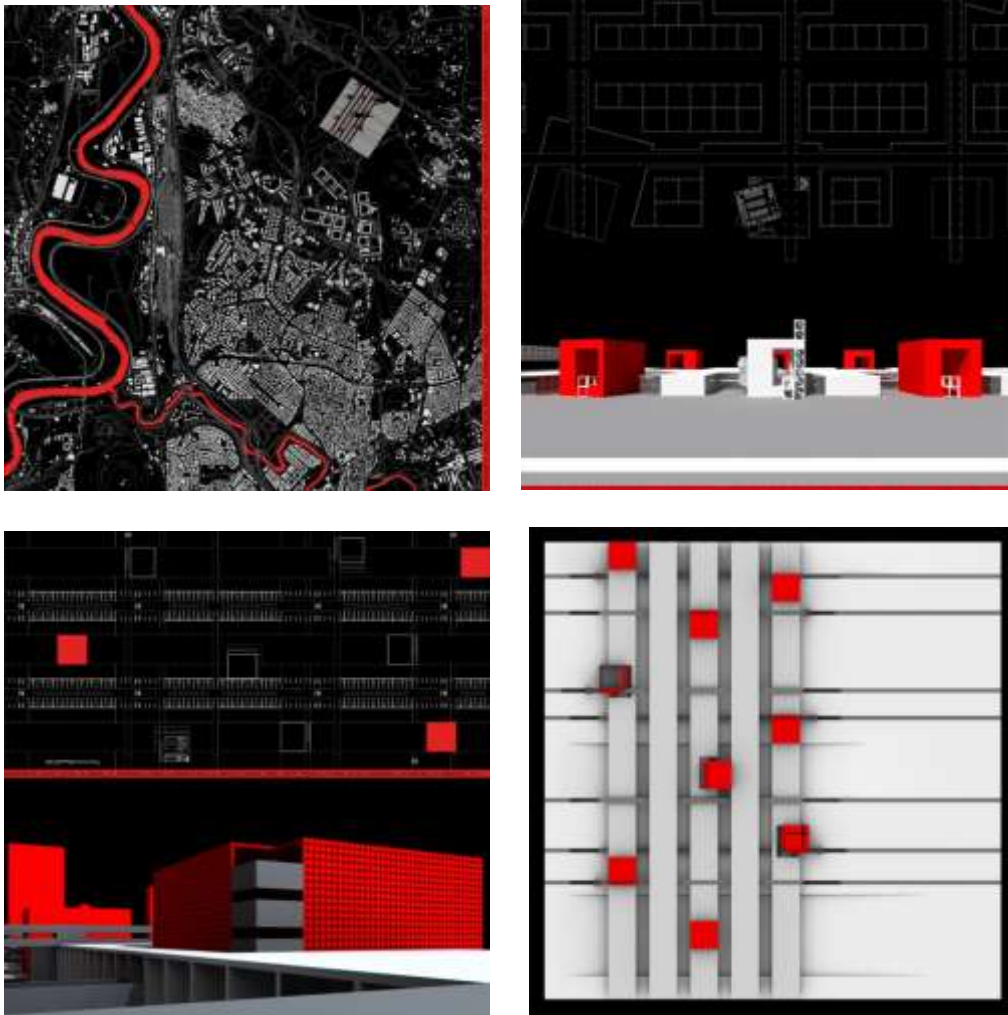
<sup>30</sup>Purini F. *Comporre l'architettura*, cit., p. 23.

<sup>31</sup>See W. Gibson's novels: *Pattern Recognition*, 2003; *Monna Lisa Cyberpunk*, 1988; *Neuromancer*, 1984.

<sup>32</sup>See Orlandi G (1966) *Leon Alberti Battista. De re aedificatoria*. Milano: Il Polifilo, 1966; Sestito M. (2017). *Corpo e Architettura o de humani fabrica*. Rubbettino: Soveria Mannelli; Squire M. (2011). *The Art of the Body. Antiquity and its Legacy*. London: I.B.Tauris e Co.

An example of this utopian and experimental line of research is the series of architectural courses held by Franco Purini at the Faculty of Architecture in Rome between 2006 and 2014. Although they are distant in time from the present day, they remain relevant in terms of their pedagogical and methodological approach. In the courses held from 2006 onwards, the project of a shopping mall was configured as an autonomous device capable of engaging in a dialogue of contrast with the commercial, recreational and cultural functions of a compact urban container, with the theme of the sacred (the religious building) serving as an additional layer of complexity.

**Figure 2.** Eleonora Lucantoni, *Final Synthesis Laboratory A.Y. 2006-2007 – Center for the Spirit*



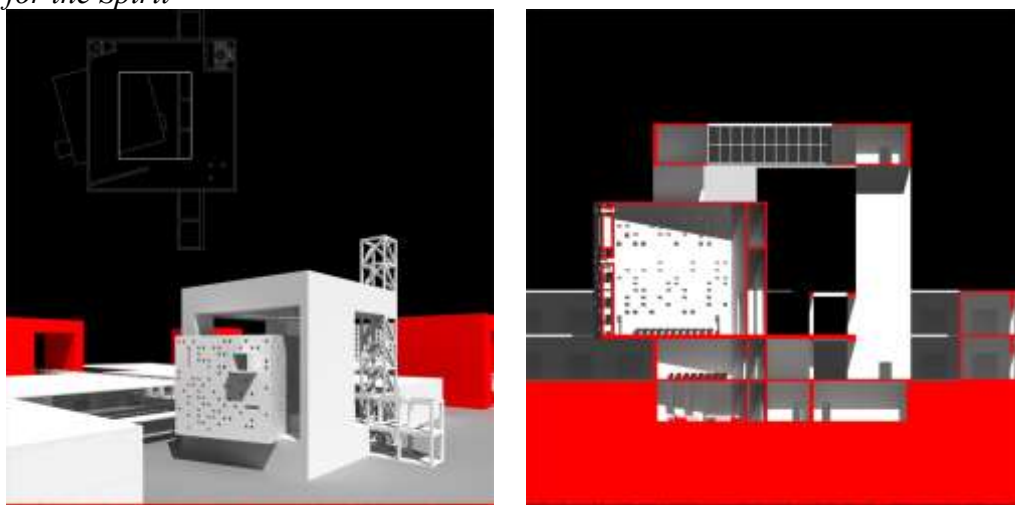
Source: <http://www.francopurinididarch.it/>.

The *Syllabus* set itself three objectives. The first was to foster the union of the cognitive and compositional knowledge acquired by students during their studies. This unity aimed to “enable students to develop a critical awareness of the most complex issues in contemporary debate. (...)”. The second objective was to equip students with advanced compositional tools with a global perspective,

enabling them to enter an increasingly competitive and transnational professional environment. The third objective was to encourage students to develop their own unique design language. This third goal is particularly important at a time when architects are at the centre of communication strategies based essentially on the iconic value of the autographic sign.”<sup>33</sup> The course consisted of three phases. The first phase involved drawing a *morpheme*. This entity is defined as “an elementary formal configuration endowed with evolutionary capabilities, translated into a true work of art.”<sup>34</sup> The second phase involved developing a program plan related to the proposed design problem. The third phase involved formulating individual architectural themes. All phases were accompanied by a series of theoretical lectures.

The proposed theme, a *Centre for the Spirit*, consisted of a compact group of buildings located at a point along the GRA (Figure 2). This incorporated places of worship dedicated to various religions, as well as a large container space intended for all faiths and also for secular use, alongside shops and spaces for commerce and leisure activities. A space for mass outdoor events was also planned. The centre was intended to be a major new focal point for city life, reflecting the multicultural composition of Rome's population and the tensions within urban communities in the age of globalisation.

**Figure 3.** *Fabiola Monfreda, Final Synthesis Laboratory A.Y. 2006-2007 – Center for the Spirit*



Source: <http://www.francopurinididarch.it/>.

In these workshops, the dialectical and participatory element (between students, professors and assistants) played a pivotal role. Each student's work was presented to everyone and discussed in turn by the professor and his assistants. The first part, concerning the graphic execution of a morpheme, was particularly important in relation to manual drawing. The students' projects offered solutions aimed at incorporating the theme of the sacred into a compact

<sup>33</sup><http://w3uniroma1.it/purini/index.asp>.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

layout (Figure 3). This theme was clearly evident in the overall site plans at an urban scale. The master plans showed internal formal unity in the form of boustrophedonic scripts that traverse and define the Roman landscape through contrast. The religious buildings, which were designed in detail by the students, maintained a recognisability linked to liturgical functions (altars, liturgical furniture, etc.). The identity-defining typology of the sacred hall (*aula sacra*) retained its vital expressive force. In many projects, the theme of light played a decisive role: zenithal in some cases and filtered and 'baroque' in others.

Several graduation theses supervised by Franco Purini in 2008 explored the sacred dimension, offering further motifs for reflection on the project. The concept of the sanctuary emerged as an independent entity capable of creating an anti-pole to the urban core. Light was seen as an expression of the divine — an ontological light whose source remained concealed. The liturgical aspect of the Eucharistic rite was manifested as a series of interconnected spaces. For example, the Blessed Sacrament chapel was not centred on the altar. There were also spaces for accommodating the congregation during modern liturgical rites.

In a Master's Thesis on the project of a Christian sanctuary, developed by the author during the 2007/08 academic year (Figure 4), the project involved creating four structures around the historic centre of a small hilltop village on the Calabrian Ionian coast: a sanctuary, an auditorium, a panoramic terrace and a hospitality complex. The sanctuary was designed to be a modern, medium-sized church, with the church and rectory forming the final destination for visitors. Particular care was dedicated to the space for liturgical celebrations. The lantern (*tiburio*) was reinterpreted as a contemporary scenic machine that captures non-zenithal light and projects a diffused luminosity onto the altar. The traditional crypt theme was also reimagined in a contemporary style: stripped of all religious significance, the space beneath the altar became a place for contemplation. Light plays an equally fundamental role here. It is interesting to note how the light illuminating the internal nave undergoes a double scaling change, being filtered by partitions (*setti*) that shield the high lateral windows. The liturgical furniture (ambo, altar, celebrant's chair and pews) has been stripped of any decorative excess, reduced to simple, archaic objects. The height of the nave does not exceed 9 metres in section — a deliberate choice to create a horizontal space that meets specific acoustic and thermal heating requirements. As prescribed by CEI regulations, a small chapel houses the Blessed Sacrament among the other rooms. Finally, the entrance has been decentralised to create a crossing path acting as a lateral 'pocket' filter between the exterior and interior.

## Conclusion

The themes described above give rise to a series of final reflections. The pervasiveness of art in the contemporary world — the prophecy of an aesthetic society<sup>35</sup> — raises questions and issues that remain unresolved. Central is the idea that art has primacy as a totalising presence. Every event and fact is absorbed by the media and transformed into an aesthetic phenomenon. A second phenomenon permeating every aspect of contemporary society is the centrality of communication. Art, too, subjects itself to this, thereby modifying its own status. A third element is provided by the theme of the market in the era of globalisation. “Its unpredictable yet ironclad logics have become paradigms that concern not only the destiny of the work after it has come to light, but also elements with which the artist must reckon in a more conscious and decisive way than in the past, especially from Andy Warhol onwards”<sup>36</sup>. This theoretical thesis reveals the relationship between sacred space and consumption. This concept sits within the broader field of the relationship between art and architecture, or more specifically, between art and the contemporary city. In this context, communication remains a central issue from a visual perspective, as it “entails the centrality of the image in its ambiguous consistency between absence and presence.”<sup>37</sup> This critical interpretation, in particular, gives rise to the idea of consumption as a means of understanding the world, as a “tool available not to the masses, but to individuals within the masses, to express the hidden structures and intrinsic values of their world.”<sup>38</sup>

In this context, considering the concept of sacred spatiality, with its spiritual places, within urban environments characterised by consumption, may appear to contradict the above. However, accepting the idea of consumption — or rather, understanding its ambiguous and problematic nature — does not necessarily mean yielding to its logic. Rather, it means internalising the concept of consumption (or hyper-consumption, as it has been defined) within an interpenetrating perspective of art and the city. A city of consumption necessitates a search for a spatiality of encounter — a mediated agora that incorporates the complex and contradictory facets of contemporary living. This occurs within the theological and anthropological perspective described by Romano Guardini, involving acceptance of the world throughout its extraordinary processes of transformation.

By incorporating sacred spaces into shopping malls — a common practice in contemporary spaces such as airports, subway stations and museums — we embrace the vital contamination of sacred and profane spaces. Consumption is absorbed and recomposed between the sacred and the profane within hybrid, fluid and intrinsically porous container spaces. The pedagogical research

---

<sup>35</sup>Menna F (1983). *Profezia di una società estetica*. Officina Edizioni: Roma.

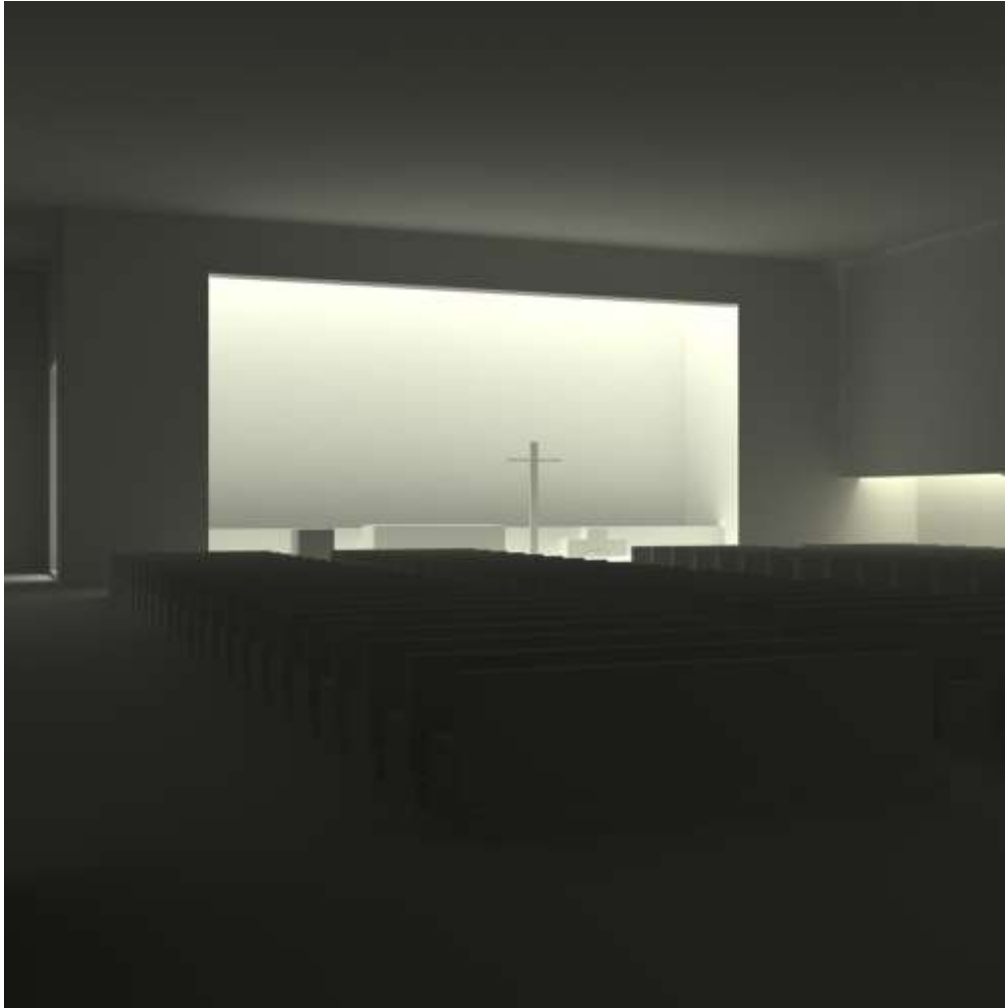
<sup>36</sup>Purini F (2008). *I musei dell'Iperconsumo*, in: F. Purini, P. Ciorra, S. Suma (eds). *I musei dell'Iperconsumo. I luoghi dell'arte nell'era dell'Iperconsumo*. Libria: Melfi, 2008, p. 9.

<sup>37</sup>Purini F (2008) *Arte e architettura tra mistero e eversione*, In: *I musei dell'Iperconsumo*, cit., p. 129.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid*, p. 130.

conducted by Franco Purini in his university courses in Rome forcefully articulates this challenge, accepting its contradictions and resolving them positively through design. The project of the 'new' becomes an operative matter, embedded in a rigorous yet profoundly free pedagogical vision — distant, as previously mentioned, from the logic of compromise. It is a surprising, intrinsically democratic and still relevant pedagogical 'game'.

**Figure 4.** *A Christian Sanctuary in Montauro (Italy), Master's Thesis, A.Y. 2007-2008*



Source: Froio 2007.

## References

- AA.VV. *Enciclopedia di filosofia*. (Encyclopedia of Philosophy.) Garzanti, 2004.
- Berzano, L. *Forme del sacro*. (Forms of the Sacred.) In: *XXI Secolo*. (21st Century). Treccani online. 2009.
- Chomsky, N. *Il linguaggio e la mente*. (Language and Mind.) Bollati Boringhieri: Torino, 2011.

- Crippa, M. A. *Il mistero della Chiesa, corpo di Cristo e tempio dello Spirito Santo*. (The Mystery of the Church, Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit.) In: *SCRIPTA THEOLOGICA* / VOL. 47 / 2015, 719.
- Froio, G. *Percorsi del classicismo nell'architettura moderna*. (Trajectories of Classicism in Modern Architecture.) Rubbettino: Soveria Mannelli, 2025.
- Galimberti U. *L'etica del viandante* (The Ethics of the Wanderer.) Milano: Feltrinelli, 2023.
- Gibson, W. *Pattern Recognition*. 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Mona Lisa Overdrive*. 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Neuromancer*. 1984.
- Grisi, T. *Figure di Chiese nell'architettura di Rudolf Schwarz*. (Figures of Churches in the Architecture of Rudolf Schwarz.) In: *Conoscere, conservare, valorizzare il patrimonio culturale religioso*. (Knowing, Preserving, and Enhancing Religious Cultural Heritage), edited by Olimpia Niglio, Aracne: Rome 2017.
- Guardini, R. *Lo spirito della liturgia*. (The Spirit of the Liturgy.) Morcelliana: Brescia 1930.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *La nuova chiesa del Corpus Domini ad Aachen*. (The New Church of Corpus Domini in Aachen.) In: *Opera Omnia* (Complete Works). Vol. XV 121.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Lettere dal Lago di Como*. (Letters from Lake Como.) Morcelliana: Brescia, 1959).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Opera Omnia*. (Complete Works.) III/2, 286.
- Menna, F. *Profezia di una società estetica*. (Prophecy of an Aesthetic Society.) Officina Edizioni: Roma, 1983.
- Neumeyer, F. *Ludwig Mies van der Rohe: le architetture, gli scritti*. (The Artless Word: Mies van der Rohe on the Building Art.) Skira: Milano, 1996.
- Orlandi, G. (1966) *Leon Battista Alberti. De re aedificatoria*. (On the Art of Building in Ten Books.) Milano: Il Polifilo.
- Purini, F. *L'architettura didattica*. (Didactic architecture.) Gangemi: Roma, 1980.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Discorso sull'architettura*. (Discourse on Architecture.) Marsilio: Venezia, 2022.
- \_\_\_\_\_. P. Ciorra, S. Suma. *I musei dell'Iperconsumo. I luoghi dell'arte nell'era dell'Iperconsumo*. (The Museums of Hyper-consumption: Places of Art in the Age of Hyper-consumption.) Libria: Melfi, 2008.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Comporre l'architettura*. (Composing Architecture.) Laterza: Roma-Bari, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Le opere, gli scritti, la critica*. (The Works, the Writings, the Criticism.) Electa: Milano, 2000.
- Rogers, E. N. *Esperienza di un corso Universitario*. (Experience of a University Course.) In: *L'utopia della realtà. Un esperimento didattico sulla tipologia della scuola primaria*. (The Utopia of Reality: A Didactic Experiment on Primary School Typology.) Leonardo da Vinci Editore: Bari 1965.
- Schwarz, R. *Costruire la chiesa. Il senso liturgico nell'architettura sacra*. (The Church Incarnate: The Sacred Function of Christian Architecture.) Morcelliana: Brescia 1999.
- Sestito, M. *Corpo e Architettura o de humani fabrica*. (Body and Architecture or On the Fabric of the Human Body.) Rubbettino: Soveria Mannelli, 2017.
- Squire, M. (2011). *The Art of the Body. Antiquity and its Legacy*. London: I.B. Tauris e Co.