RE-Existence and Identity

Enrico Bascherini

Scuola di Ingegneria di Pisa – C.d.L. Edile Architettura

The architecture can be subject to resistance, resiliency or transcendence. If the resistance is the ability to withstand something, the resiliency the ability of take operates external, the transcendence, can define her/it as the evolution without memory of the preceding actions. There are laws written identitarie and others not writings, to which contemporary culture doesn't refer anymore; above all the historical city hands down still us laws and valid codes but daily consequential disattesi from the speed with which projects produce him, build and they consume buildings. If for a long time the city has represented a text for the continuous learning, through its histories, places, contexts, today, this text doesn't come bed anymore. You also finish less complexes than the identity, as it measures seriality, rule, character, typology, road alignment, polarity are circumvented in favor of leveling and globalizing, yet they have handed down to us an image of great value.

There is a before and after to everything, "*Time has a direction, and an arrow flows from something towards something. In the vision of time, every repetition is banned, we deal only with single, individual, unrepeatable events ...*" (Rossi, 1991).
What determines a passage between a thing and its transformation is the reaction of the existent to its change. In chemistry, this is called a reaction, and is the transformation of a primordial element into something else. Often the reaction is reversible, other times the change is such as to arrive at something quite opposite and unrecognizable. Like chemical elements, even architecture reacts to the actions it meets with flux. Architecture can be subject to resistance, resilience, or, indeed, transcendence. If resistance is the ability to resist something, and resilience the ability to introject external actions, we might define transcendence as the memory-less evolution of preceding actions.
In fact, resisting something means expressing the will to deny a change, that is, an intention to remain firmly rooted, to deny any interactions that might cause an imbalance to the pre-existing state. History regales us with fertile periods in which fragments of resistance have produced significant architectural phenomena. The Middle Ages was perhaps the moment when architectural phenomenology, without urbanity, first took root, then enduring for several centuries. If the Renaissance is to be understood as innovation, the following centuries can be said to have been constructed through a resilient attitude, and the results may be seen in terms of that constant and legible compositional arrow.
The 1900s were born transcendent, and only the trauma of the Second World War, a phenomenon entirely incomparable to other traumatic events, brought attitudes of resistance and resilience back to the fore. "*Architectural neorealism*" (Bascherini, 2013) is a vibrant confirmation of this.

1

The city has always changed and mutated its appearance, also, and above all, in relation to the urban capacity to accept the new. "*It is normal for one époque to pass into another slowly. Cities are organisms that survive the cultures that generated them, producing themselves their own culture*" (Ferlenga, 2015), and are thus definable as resilient.

If resistance does not allow change, resilience, understood as the capacity to react to external forces, can certainly represent a more constructive attitude.

Resilient is that which does not win *a priori*, but whose results can be seen over a longer time scale. The theme of resilience accompanies more enduring moments, in terms of both political and social continuity, and the results, seen according to time scale, are constant and un-leaping.

Transcendence, the notion in which a form of existence is identified and cannot be traced back to the determinations of experience, is perhaps a stage, in the perspective of human construction, opposed to resistance.

There is no doubt that today we live in transcendence; the sublimation of matter, the fluctuation of forms, the absence of doubt, of comparison, of content, the speed of communication; an idea of irresistible and non-resilient architecture, where even financial logic has further reduced the meaning of architecture to the concept of diversity as a value. "Everything that is different, unusual, and scandalous compared to anything that is current in a given moment seems indeed to have become the raison d'être" (Weisman, 2002).

Irresistible in language, in a psychedelic but above all schizophrenic, fickle and volatile image, "*The negation of the architectural relationship with the land and its reduction to a natural base without any mediation, corresponds well to the negation of every relationship with history and geography*" (Gregotti, 2010).

The new means of communication, through false prophets, cannot convey contents beyond the advertising spot, the meme, spectacle, unrepeatability, or immediate success. "The spread of this influence of the absurd in the field of architecture inevitably stimulates imitation, and some studios throw themselves into the design of iconic structures that lead to immediate fame and the adulation of criticism" (Silber, 2009). To transcend coincides with freeing oneself from dogmas or rules. "*In order to build skyscrapers and experience the thrill of touching the Lord, or in order to build a 'villettopoli' [urbanization] and bring a checkmate to the territory, one must have or try to have a name ...*" (Cervellati, 2000).
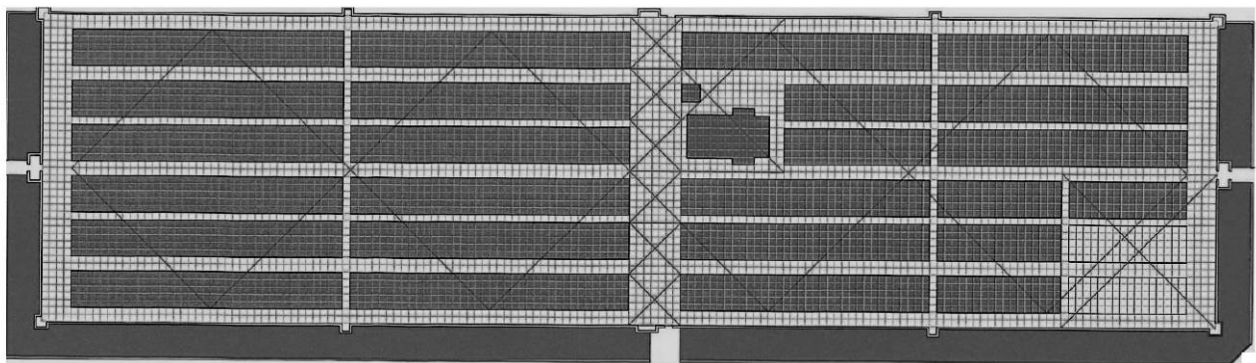

Fig.1 - Pietrasanta, a planned city – metric, compositional view

It could be understood that radicalization, or resistance, avoids that phenomenon of false freedom indoctrinated by the avant-gardes, which fomented by social phenomena, points to freedom as change. In fact, as someone has explained, "*Erasing also has to do with hiding, concealing, misdirecting, covering tracks, distancing truth, destroying truth*" (Rossi, 1991).

The history of architecture, never more so as now, is nourished by aggressive feelings, by freedom "*to exist outside or above another reality; to go beyond, to overcome, to surpass a certain area or limit of knowledge or reality ... to go beyond the limits imposed by convenience, by a right balance*" (from the Treccani Italian language dictionary); to transcend once again becomes a rule.

History, in the sense of what already exists, no longer seems to be a value. Indeed, the contraposition of "*modernity versus history*" (Ciorra, 2011) seems to represent an added value, as "*not only do we discard historical research, just as significance and the measurement of time and space, but we justify their absence in our direct interests as an element of modernity*" (Cervellati, 2000).
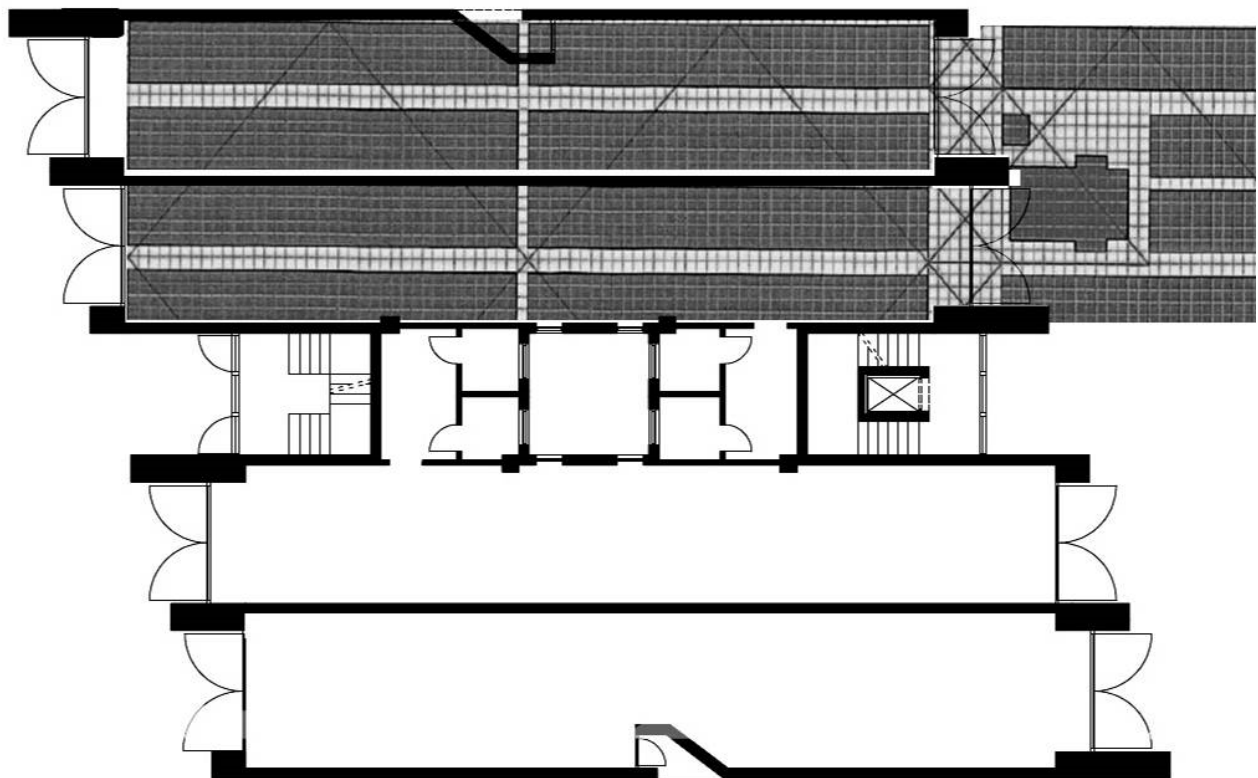

Fig.2 - Ground floor building plan and planned city metric/mnemonic relationship

3

The opportunity to work in the vicinity of a historic, but, above all, planned city, such as in the 'new Florentine lands', has allowed us to rediscover several already consolidated metric references for a building currently nearing completion.

Planned cities, especially the Tuscan ones, such as Pietrasanta, correspond to a precise and recognizable geometric urban layout. The sense of solidity of the urban plan, of the measure, of the social relationships induced by the layout itself, make the new city a model that resists over time in terms of quality and liveability. The specific project's implementation is based on the application of a measured fragment of the urban layout. Situated just a few hundred metres away, the new building takes the same orientation and the same metric score from the planned city. Regarding its layout, we see an arrangement extending in a longitudinal direction, regarding elevation, the building becomes indented in order to underline the importance of the main axis, or thoroughfare, in relation to secondary roads.

The material rigour of the longitudinal façade identifies itself in the planned city, the city fortress, with closed sides and open extremities. The other façades are sections opening onto the external space, and the perimeter does not close in on itself, but rather suggests a further extension. Indeed, the façade is rather a section, or an interjection, as Leon Battista Alberti once said.

Fig.3 – Rear façade

This is a resilient building; history, identity, context, permanence, continuity and the architecture of resistance are all perceptible in its construction, without a need for any winks to history, false reproductions of fragments or quotations. If there is a quotation, this is traceable in the allusion to a great frontal order, to an interaction between dialect and academy, or in angular fragments with eaves that from an inverse shell become horizontal.

Resistance is thus a concept connected to what already exists, which, in some way, is recognizable and recognized, appropriate and contextualized, having already given answers to place and community. To resist means to work on the logic of the law of the city and its narrative, of that continuity "*which, it can be said with certainty, is that of the pre-modern city so rich in elements of spatial continuity that it appears to us built on more typical or more characterizing models of it*" (Cusmano, 2013). Resistance also measures how much of the concept of identity and indeed identity itself represents a strong value of the concept of persisting and resisting, of that sense of appropriation or, contrarily, of disorientation.

Identity is a positive value, but is increasingly used to highlight absence, loss, a lacking, or, above all, a lapse of memory.

As Bauman says, "*Identity is a strongly opposed concept. Every time you hear this word there is a battle going on ...*" (Bauman, 2003).

Fig.4 - Detail of the chiselled facing wall

Since the term has no technical derivation, it is important to define its origin: identity derives from the late Latin *identitas* meaning "same".

It is thus presumed that the definition of a thing, a concept or a person as same implies the existence of another thing, concept or person, hence a comparison. "*When the term identical is used, we mean*

to indicate that which persists, the same, and, despite the variation of space and time, the same does not change, therefore its persistence as a same is in relation to something that instead mutates" (Stella, 2007).

It is certainly interesting to consider identity seen through the sense of belonging and recognizability; "*A person whose identity is questioned because years of absence have made him unrecognizable to his own family, as a last resort, will recount memories of events experienced in their company*" (Glasersfeld, 1993).

The city would have no monuments, there would be no names in the streets and squares, Florence would not have given names to the *canti*, people would not have given names to crossroads or localities, if it were not necessary to recognize and recognize oneself and each other.

"*The consequent lack of a sense of belonging, the crisis of identity, the ecological upheavals [...] pervasively characterize every area of society ... The possibility and the certainty of being recognizable and recognized is a fundamental element for the construction of identity and esteem of oneself*" (De Simone, 2010). This conveys the concept of recognizability as an exception and not as a rule, as two compositional values; the first transcendent, the second resistant.

"*Today it happens that nobody is any longer recognizable in a worldwide homologation of both architectural writing and its tectonic products. It is the loss of values of tradition that results in the greatest illiteracy, loss of identity and thus general mediocrity*" (Leoncilli Massi, 2000).

There are written and other unwritten identity laws, to which contemporary culture no longer refers. Above all, the historical city hands down to us laws and codes that are still valid, but are disregarded on a daily basis due to the speed with which designs are generated and buildings are constructed and consumed. The history of the future will not "*produce any more ruins, since it will not have time to do so*" (Auge, 2003).

Though the city may have always handed down to us a text for continuous learning, through its stories, places and contexts, today, this text is no longer read. It is interesting to reflect on the meaning of resistance that Cusmano gives to the historical city. "*It is like a worthy book, which can be read and reread, endless times and with multiple intentions. For this reason, research finds and reclaims its particular circularity*" (Cusmano, 1997). This very idea of a cycle suggests that there are elements that we find and resist, and that often determine the "*words of the city*" (Cusmano, 2009). Even terms that are less sophisticated than identity, such as measure, seriality, rule, character, typology, road alignment and polarity, are circumvented in favour of a levelling and globalizing conduct, and yet altogether they have given to us a linguistic Koiné of great value. What we have lost is undoubtedly the human dimension, or rather that rule that has conceived the fabrics of many cities and towns; the relation between the internal and external projection of the human measure over external space, "*space and body, the binomial through which man has designed the perimeter of his presence in the universe over the centuries*" (Sennet, 1992). It is indeed difficult to resist bigness, outsizedness, caricature, carnival, the temporary speculative emotion of an exceptional whole overwhelming and replacing that "*geography of memory*" (Tarpino, 2008) dear to the common man, to his history and to his identity.

6

References

Auge M. (2003), Rovine e macerie, Bollati Boringhieri, Turin.

Bauman Z. (2003), Intervista sull'Identità, Laterza, Bari.

Bascherini E. (2013), Da Pagano al Neorealismo, Kimerik, Mestre.

Cervellati P.L. (2000), La città bella, Il Mulino, Bologna, p.81.

Cervellati P.L. (2000), L'arte di curare la città, Il Mulino, Bologna, p.20.

Ciorra F. (2011), Senza architettura, Laterza, Bari, p.9.

Cusmano M.G. (1997), Misura misurabile, Franco Angeli, Milan, p.27.

Cusmano M.G. (2009), Le parole della città, Franco Angeli, Milan.

Cusmano M.G. (2013), La città e il suo racconto, Le Lettere, Milan, p.33.

De Simone A. (2010), La svolta culturale dell'occidente, Morlacchi, Perugia, 2010

Ferlenga A. (2015), Città e memoria, Feltrinelli, Milan, p.20.

Glasersfeld E.G. (1993), Notes on the concept of change.

Gregotti V. (2010), Tre forme di architettura mancata, Enaudi, Turin, p.43.

Leoncilli Massi G. (2002), La leggenda del comporre, Alinea, Florence, p.231.

Silber J. (2009), Architetture dell'assurdo, Lindau, p.43.

Rossi P. (1991), Il passato, la memoria, l'oblio, Il Mulino, Milan, p.119.

Sennet R. (1992), La coscienza dell'occhio, Feltrinelli, Milan, p.30.

Stella A. (2007), Identità e differenza, Quattroventi, Urbino.

Tarpino A. (2008), Geografie della memoria, Einaudi, Turin.

Weisman D. (2002), The 12 Cadavers of Joe Marine, Express Press.