

Marvin Cukaj
Theory and project. The continuity of a comparison

Author: *Raffaella Neri*

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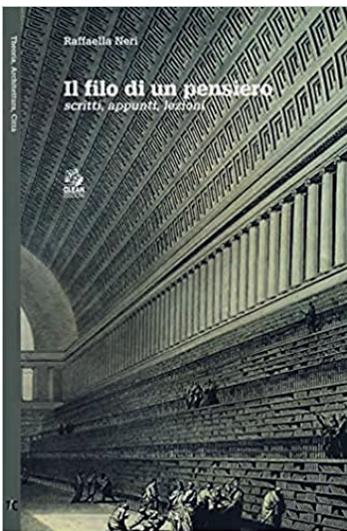
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Increasingly, architectural design is becoming a project of specialization, focused on exalting a specific aspect. Through captivating images, projects that exalt sculptural forms are told, through technical reports the technological efficiency of architectures that can be likened to real "machines" is told. Increasingly rare, vice versa, are the occasions in which an architectural project is accompanied by a report that makes explicit its reasons and compositional principles.

The project and the elaboration of the project represent the centrality around which the writings of Raffaella Neri's book orbit. In the different themes addressed, the nature of the research takes a different point of view from what happens frequently in the contemporary world, it is not focused on specificities but on the characters of generality, on the recurrences that allow to give an objective validity to the project. Generality of choices, generality of principles, leading to an ability to hold together, as a director does along the making of a film, the different aspects of which an architectural project is composed.

In order to divert attention from the specifics, trying to identify principles and put order among the problems that a project in its complexity must solve, an entire first part of the book focuses on the role that theory can invest. Theory, which the author understands as a necessary foundation for elaborating projects through which one can confront oneself, projects in which the concluding formal solution recognizably returns the reason for the building itself. Therefore, in dealing with the various aspects that make up the design process, it is necessary to pursue the overall purpose of the work, the principles on which it is based, and not to be sidetracked by individualisms.

The book is composed of thoughts and reflections, defined over almost thirty years of the author's training and academic career, put on paper on several occasions; university research and lectures, publications, project seminars and international conferences. The collection is thus rich in different themes and case studies, recurring, however, are the theses that the author tries to verify, comparing and abstracting, the lessons offered by historical cities and designers assumed as masters. Theses that belong to a twofold scaling of the project: at the scale of the building, we focus on the role of construction as a fundamental act of architecture; at the urban scale,

on the contrary, the focus is on the outside of the artifact and the relationships that architectures are able to establish with each other and with the context that surrounds them are investigated.

Construction is approached not in a technical way as the engineer might, but by investigating the encounter between the problem of construction and the problem of expression. Architectures by designers such as Peter Behrens, Mies van der Rohe, the architects of the Chicago School and the masters of Italian reinforced concrete are identified as exceptional case studies capable of enhancing the role of construction. The construction choices and principles that are able to be deduced through the analysis of such projects allow us to understand how the construction narrative can become the best opportunity to manifest the meaning of the building.

Instead, the relationships between architectures, and between architectures and context, represent the capacity to construct places and define the identity of those places. This capacity becomes the main objective to be pursued during urban design if, as the author argues, through urban design we aspire to an idea of the city understood as a composition of places, a sequence of different but related places belonging to the urban sphere, public space and the space of residence.

The title of the book, the thread of a thought, certainly refers to Raffaella Neri's already mentioned personal journey, however in the choices of themes and the ways of interpreting them there seems to be a general thread that refers to an attitude, to a posture with which to approach the project. A way of doing architecture that is based on knowledge as the architect's first act of awareness and responsibility, which seeks an objective validity of the project through the development of the deductive activity of recognizable rules and principles in a rational way. A way of doing architecture that, in conclusion, by framing the project as an opportunity for confrontation, as a continuous opportunity for growth, and by addressing itself primarily to students and project enthusiasts, belongs to a way of doing architecture school.