

ALLA RICERCA DELLO SPESSORE PERDUTO

Prologue to the book *Cavità e limite* by Francesco Iodice

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On my large white table, a half-full glass of Asprinio dell'Agro Aversano wine and several books, the *Meditations of Emperor Marcus Aurelius*, *Amate l'Architettura* by Gio Ponti, the monograph *Iodice architetti 2000-2010* edited by Antonio Carbone, a printed copy of *Cavità e limite*, and an image of a sculpture by Henry Moore.

This book *Cavità e limite* is a book of texts where an architect and teacher, Francesco Iodice, talks about architecture and explains some of the reasons why he sets up his works. I have always defended that architecture, over and above the forms in which it appears to us, is an idea that expresses itself through form. It is an idea materialized with measures that relate to man, the center of architecture. It is a constructed idea. Because the History of Architecture, far from being only a History of forms, is basically a History of constructed ideas. With the passage of time, forms are destroyed, but ideas remain, they are eternal.

And Iodice defends here the architecture that we call stereotomic, the one that is made from the continuity with the earth. Henry Moore said: "The first hole made through a piece of stone is a revelation". The first hole made through a piece of stone is a revelation. And he was right. An architect knows well that excavating a stone, making a hole in a stone, is the way to make visible the mass of the stone, its stereotomic character. Moore, and Iodice with him, knew well that il cavo is an effective mechanism to reveal the beauty of the stone's gravity through excavating the mass with shadow so that light can reach the bottom.

Can an architect of the third millennium defend thickness? Can a contemporary architect defend stereotomic architecture against tectonics? Can an architect today defend strength against lightness? The answer is yes.

The author opts, already in this third millennium, for the defense of strong, dense, stereotomic architecture, to find there, after its excavation, the space of architecture itself, as opposed to that other lighter architecture that Foster summarized in the question Fuller asked him: "How much does your building weigh, Mr. Foster?" I would then ask Francesco Iodice: "How much does your building weigh, Mr. Iodice?" As opposed to the lightness of Cavalcanti in his leap *si come colui che leggerissimo era*, the strength of Hercules embracing the columns.

Fortunately, there is no single truth in architecture. And what Francesco Iodice does in this book is a clear analysis of architecture and then take sides in one direction. Architects like Böhm in Germany, Steiner in Switzerland, Lampens in Belgium, Oiza in Spain or Moretti in Italy, have made a strong, powerful, wonderful, universal architecture, as much or more interesting than many of those that, much less valuable, by dint of being light, were sheltered under the umbrella of the Modern Movement.

In this book, Francesco Iodice, with a markedly pedagogical character, runs through the world of the stereotomic and tectonic hand Semper and Frampton and Aparicio. And following the thread of historical architectures ranging from the Greeks to the Romans that we love so much, to the most contemporary, he takes sides with those in which the gravitational continuity is direct, with those that belong to the world of the stereotomic.

Iodice emphasizes excavated architectures, the architectures in which we architects excavate to introduce light into their interior, which, when it passes through these spaces, as air does in a musical instrument, makes the light vibrate so that the architecture can sound there.

At one point the author makes Louis Kahn and his *colonna cava* the protagonist of the final part of the book. But this is neither Iodice's first book nor his last. And as Gio Ponti rightly says in his wonderful book *Amate L'Architettura*, "un libro non finisce mai".

Many of the images shown are very suggestive and full of meaning: the caves of Matala in Crete, the baths of Caracalla in Rome, the perforated mountains of Cappadocia in Turkey, or the *sassi* of Matera, speak clearly of that "solidification of the air" with which Iodice poetically defines architecture.

In many moments the text reaches a great literary quality and also a great architectural precision as when he proposes "the reconquest of the wall thickness". Or when, after quoting Heidegger, he adds that "the limit makes architectural space visible, defines it, materializes it". Or when he makes such precise diagnoses as "we are witnessing the dissolution of the work in its effect".

His proposal of how the Greek culture establishes the limit through the columns, of points, as opposed to the Roman culture that establishes the limit through the walls, of lines, is very attractive. Although it may seem a simplification, it is a very clear way of analyzing these spaces with a profoundly pedagogical sense. Iodice's strong teaching spirit is evident, and I would like to be his student.

Iodice uses great clarity both in the ideas he proposes and in the words with which he translates them, giving reason for what he designs and builds as an architect. Because architecture must be based on reason. That *adecuatio rei et intellectus* that philosophers proposed to define truth is in his case the adequacy between what is thought and what is built. That which Goya showed so universally in his engraving *El sueño de la razón produce monstruos*, is more than adequate when it comes to architecture. Reason in architecture must always be awake, wide awake. For this, the most basic reasons with which architecture works are those that Iodice tries to collect in this book. What Louis Sullivan expressed so well when in 1901 he wrote: "You cannot create without thinking, and you cannot really think without creating in your thinking. Judge our present architecture by these criteria and you will be surprised at its poverty of thought, its falsity of expression, its lack of humanity." And just as forms pass away and are destroyed, Ideas remain, they are imperishable. The History of Architecture is a History of ideas, of constructed ideas, of forms that materialize and set up those Ideas. Because without ideas, forms are empty. Without ideas, architecture is vain, empty, pure empty form.

What the great Casablanca sculptor Mohamed Fariji expresses so well: "It is the immediacy of the act of vacating a space that creates it. It is the search for the origin of things and of being". Because it is clear to him, and to us with him, that space is the central theme of architecture, which is what Francesco Iodice reminds us once again in this book.