

## Readings/Rereadings

# I luoghi di Dedalo. Elementi teorici dell'architettura by Vittorio Ugo. A Rereading

Luigi Cocchiarella

Rereading a text that has significantly contributed to one's path of reflection, after more than twenty years, can reserve unexpected emotional repercussions. I am referring to the resurfacing of echoes of some thoughts and dreams of the youth, and the prior awareness of a necessary critical review that would inevitably have involved the re-reader, too. And to the memory of the unexpected loss, which occurred in 2005, of a colleague and a teacher, as well as of the Professor with whom the writer was enrolled at the Politecnico di Milano in 1999, coming from the Federico II University in Naples. Of course, I will confine myself to the attempt of fulfilling my mandate by focusing on the "rereading" only.

To respond to a cultural urgency widely felt for a long period during the 1980s, the volume, published in 1991 by partially collecting and systematizing previously elaborated studies, aims to outline a theoretical asset for architecture, based on its own disciplinary statutes, for a discourse "about" architecture that is also a discourse "of" architecture (p. 11). A titanic mission to say the least, which Vittorio Ugo undertakes and develops by weaving and knotting an impressive amount of knowledge, retracing the endless ramifications and intertwining between myth and history, starting from classical Greece –the privileged source,

absolutely– and from the Latin world, to extend the investigation to the French culture between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, up to the twentieth with Michel Foucault, for him a decisive intellectual profile together with the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, as well as to the German and European culture in general, and the Far Eastern culture, in particular Japanese culture, personally dear to him –as the dedication on the title page proves–, including more remote worlds, and some Italian masters of his time. Almost 180 titles are listed in the bibliography, of which about 30 are by the author, to which the conspicuous series of the detailed citations in the text refers.

The definition of architecture, concise and dense, appears almost immediately, precisely on page 32 in a volume having a total of 215 pages, which is worth quoting:

"The Architecture consists of the 'form' historically conferred and phenomenologically recognized –through the action of building, the use, and the critical reflection– of the modes of existence of the system of relationships:

- nature/culture
- materials/techniques
- space/place
- memory/project

according to 'dwelling'" [my translation].

VITTORIO UGO

## I LUOGHI DI DEDALO

ELEMENTI TEORICI DELL'ARCHITETTURA  
postfazione di Roberto Masiero

Nuova Biblioteca Dedalo

EDIZIONI DEDALO

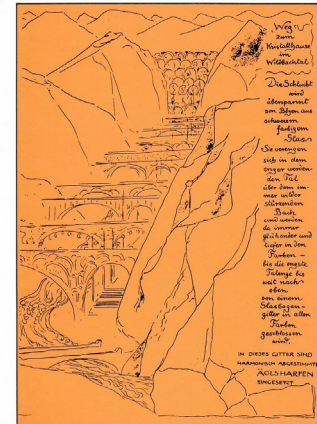


Fig. 1. Cover of the first edition. Original caption: "in copertina: Bruno Taut, Weg zum Kristallhaus im Wildbachtal, da Alpine Architektur, Erschienen im Volkswang, Hagen, 1919, Tav. 2."

From this thematic assumption, the sequence of dissertations and –sometimes enchanting– etymological genealogies starts, designed to re-establish and demonstrate the complex and articulated assertion, to justify it on a historical, theoretical, and critical stage. The argumentative approach proceeds, inexorably, through progressive series of syntheses of oppositional categories, as one can already see from the quotation above. Conceptual knots and categorical juxtapositions, sometimes apparently irreconcilable at first sight, break up and dissolve under the patient and very careful discursive elaborations, supported by a clear language and by the articulated support of formidable referential apparatuses, with frequent parenthetical references even to more minute and recurring details, almost to avoid the risk of even the slightest misunderstanding or omission. As in a theorem, the skein unravels, finally precipitating into synthetic and fulminating definitions, sometimes surprising, often further elaborated in new syntheses, in a tireless process of reduction aimed at recomposing a coherent and unitary theoretical statute for the architecture, at setting a barrier to its disarticulation, at correcting superficial or mystifying disciplinary interpretations. Hence the reference to the responsibility of the author is expressed in the *Premessa* (Introduction), citing Heidegger, who, “if he is happy, as the *actor*, he provokes an *augere*, a development” (p. 7). A development that the volume promptly triggers, and which has a lot to do with the theme of this number 10 of the journal *diségno* dedicated to the archives of architecture, since *I Luoghi di Dedalo* is a book precisely aiming at defining an “archaeological field”, intended “as a set of modes of existence of the architectural space”, of which it is con-

sidered necessary to identify appropriate “units of measurement” that allow us to “measure architecture with the architecture itself” (p. 147), considering the latter according to the William Morris key, or, in the entire range of its dimensional extensions, from interiors to the territory. The justification relies on the Foucauldian thought, for which the “archive” identifies “the field of the things said” and “the archaeology is destined to analyze it” (p. 145). With a further theoretical expansion, because the field of the things done, that is, of the things physically built, also belongs to the architectural archive, as even those things are *monumenta* (monuments) that can be processed as *documenta* (documents) in the theoretical synthesis.

Prepared by the first two chapters, the treatment of the third, precisely entitled *Una “Archeologia”* (an archaeology), takes up exactly half of the volume, containing its conclusion. It starts with a recognition and a redefinition of the “elements” qualifying the field of existence of architecture, understood in their intrinsic dual physical and conceptual value, updating them through the detailed recovery of roles and meanings from the depths of tradition, myth, and history, and proposing a detailed taxonomic classification of them, organized by increasing complexity, into “analytical elements” (that is, element as “material”, as “component”, as “part”, as “type”, as “nucleus”, as “limit”, as “fragment”) and “synthetic elements” (notably element as “origin” and “principle”, and as “syntax”). From these, in particular from their syntactic aggregations, the “archetypal forms”, capable in their entirety of “measuring architecture with architecture”, would arise.

The archetypes of “architecture” are thus specifically defined, being identified in the “labyrinth” (here is the work of Dae-

dalus! with wide resonances also in the other archetypal forms), in the “hut”, and the “bridge”, as well as the archetypes of “nature”, which are identified in the “forest”, in the “garden”, and the “clearing”, they all considered as the constituents of an “archeology” of architecture, or, of a “strong archaeosystem” corresponding to it, and therefore appropriate for measuring and generating it. Even briefly, it is worthwhile to review them.

*The “labyrinth”* (pp. 147-168)

Created by Daedalus upon the order of Minos to lock the Minotaur in a house that is at the same time a prison, the labyrinth is the most intriguing of the archetypes. It takes its name from *λαβύριον*, the intricate system of tunnels of the underground lair of the mole. One cannot visually embrace it at a glance, not even its two extreme configurations, that is, nor when it is “unicursal”, containing a single –tortuous– path towards the exit, nor when it is a “pure desert”, where one always proceeds –from an ever-ubiquitous center– everywhere to nowhere. Apparently unrelated to architecture, it relates to it in terms of “scheme” instead, and due to its tactile, topological, combinatorial structure, based on a “myopic algorithm”, whose “logical” organization one can follow and reconstruct by Ariadne’s thread, and through the “rhythm” of its unfolding, one can “measure”.

*The “hut”* (pp. 168-176)

It is the most human archetype, mimicked by Adam himself in the act of sheltering his head from the rain with his hands joined, on his expulsion from the Earthly Paradise. Also known as the “House of Adam in Paradise”, it is the best known and most legitimated of the archetypes considered at the origin

of architecture. Going back to Vitruvius, it refers to the *scenographia*, which provides “the image and the idea” to architecture, and through this way, to the ancient Greek word *σκίας*, which, in addition to evoking the shadow, translates the words “pavilion, pergola”, understood as the “fundamental reference” to the spatial and functional substance of architecture. The hut, therefore identifies the house, the shelter, also from an optical-projective point of view, as they can be inscribed and recognizable in the field of the visible, and therefore be related to Alberti’s compositional notions of *concinnitas* and *mediocritas*, concerning architectural design.

#### *The “bridge”* (pp. 176-191)

Although an object of particular and in a certain sense autonomous nature, the archetype of the bridge provides the “syntactic” element to architecture, by the function of connecting, holding together, linking, as in the Italian term *ponte* and in the Latin word *pons*, from which *Pontifex* (the Pope), derived from the Greek *πόντος*, the sea considered as a “path” connecting Mediterranean populations. However, the Greek culture made little use of the properly said bridge, in the author’s opinion, perhaps, also because Greek culture was not very sensitive to the “territorial unification”. Yet using the more natural and less “sacrilegious” *γέφυρα*, that is, the embankment that connects two basins, the Greek culture exploited its function as a connector between two lands, for the benefit of a spatial extension which, well beyond its metric dimension, such as Heidegger said, defines a “place”. The archetype of the bridge, considered in its physical consistency and as a theoretical device, therefore also concerns the relationships between the artificial and the natural component of architec-

ture. This latter is also measurable, with the three archetypes related to it.

#### *The “forest”* (pp. 200-203)

The forest refers to the “original state” of the Earth (*Erde*), in the Heideggerian language, as opposed to the state of the Earth as an inhabited world (*Welt*), to the *φύσις* of the “natural absolutes”, such as glaciers, deserts, abysses, mountain ranges, oceans, and so on. It is associated with the idea of the *silva*, or the wild nature, which, like the labyrinth, cannot be grasped in its entirety, except through the abstraction of cartographic reproductions or, at the antipodes, through the direct experience from “inside”. The forest, therefore, identifies the “anti-home” par excellence, which can be transformed into a place of living through a process of “domestication” that leads to the creation of the “garden”, or through the “localization” of a “clearing”, thus entering the field of action of the other two natural archetypes.

#### *The “garden”* (pp. 203-205)

Complementary to the forest, referable to pure nature, the archetype of the garden appears as an organized artificial system, even if composed of natural elements, whether it consists of a *κόσμος* prepared “by man”, or whether it is considered in the original form of the *Eden* predisposed “for man”. Therefore, even without “separating itself from nature”, it tends to “identify itself with the dwelling”. In this sense, compared to the forest as the anti-house, it rather represents “the totality of the house”, the “totality of the dwelling”, summarizing its fundamental characteristics in this. In this sense, the garden defines a model that can be extended to the “whole earth”, placing itself as a “medium” between micro and macro cosmos”, also establishing the principle

according to which nature can be “ordered, sampled, classified”, included in the cultural dimension.

#### *The “clearing”* (pp. 205-209)

The archetype of the clearing strongly refers to the concept of place. Whether spontaneously formed, or artificially created, the clearing establishes a “condition for the settlement”, like the foundation of a building or the groove traced in the ground for cultivation. It is the domain of agriculture, unlike the forest, the domain of gathering and hunting, in which it opens up like a *patio*, as in the BORGESIAN definition, letting the light penetrate it, a characteristic also attested by the words *clairière* (French), *clearing* (English), *Lichtung* (German). Therefore, the clearing opens up a “void” which, according to Heidegger, defines a “space” (*Raum*), taking on “locality” (*Ortschaft*) in connection with “dwelling” (*Wohnen*). That’s why it offers a fundamental “condition of existence” to the settlement, to the *ager* (rural), and the *civitas* (urban). Many examples attributable to the archetype of the clearing, taken both from nature and from built architecture, are referred to in this regard, from the cave, the oasis, the island, and the lake, to the court of the houses, palaces, and castles, as well as the square and the city bounded by its walls, up to the farms and the cultivated fields. All these manifestations share the fact that each of them is “circumscribed and not generically extended”, almost sacredly defined as a *τέμενος*, that is, as a “cut-out” identified by a border, by a frontier, which separates it and at the same time connects it with the surrounding parts.

In the last paragraph, titled *Un “campo archeologico”* (an archaeological field), dialectical juxtapositions are also proposed between architectural and

natural archetypes, assuming them in the correspondence labyrinth-hut/forest-garden, as well as in the more problematic relationship bridge/clearing, where, as it is described and argued, the “two classic dimensions of the Apollonian and the Dionysian”, the solar and the chthonic, intersect and confront each other in a more direct way (p. 211). Regarding the archetype of the bridge, apparently the least architectural and the most difficult to classify, yet so crucial in the passage from the concept of space to the concept of place according to Heidegger’s thought, it is hardly necessary to note that just the bridge appears on the cover of the book, namely the diaphanous crystal bridges of the *Wildbachtal* by Bruno Taut’s *Alpine Architektur* –a work that is also significant for other reasons in the present international situation–, as the only exception in a text devoid of images and exclusively concentrated on the discursive quintessence of architecture.

All this makes sense with the human dimension. Returning to the afore-

mentioned definition of architecture, we note that the two quoted terms “form” and “dwell”, which “tend to intersect and being unified in the realm of the realized work” (p. 32), possess profound proximity of meaning also at the linguistic level, given that “form” goes back to the classic Greek word *σχῆμα* (from *έχω*) and “abitate” goes back to the Latin *habitus* (from *habeo*), that is, both derive from the verb “to have” (in Italian *avere*), here understood as the indicator of a way of being rather than of mere possession, “like the ‘property’ that is spoken of about certain materials”, in short, “the English *propriety*, rather than *property*” (p. 33). It is the conclusion of a reasoning path, which from the beginning relies on the Heideggerian categories *Bauen* (to build), *Wohnen* (to dwell), and *Denken* (to think), taken as a system of critical notions, without omitting the persistent latent correspondences with the classic Vitruvian categories and their more ancient Greek ancestors, and whose further dialectic syntheses *Bauen/Wohnen*, referable to technique

(*τέχνη*), and *Wohnen/Denken*, referable to life itself (*βίος*), definitely highlight the fundamental value of the “dwelling”, and in particular, of the “culture of dwelling” (p. 107).

A demanding and intriguing work, aimed at establishing a theoretical statute, between *κόσμος* e *χάος*, for the benefit of architecture, an “art devoid of Muse” (p. 191), and therefore devoid of any reassuring truthful mythology, of any pre-established Olympic *ἀλήθεια*, however, for this reason so profoundly human, permanently in search of its proper foundation, of its *ἀρχή*, which resounds even in its nominal root. I will not go into the question of “truth” or verity, the pitfalls are well signaled, not only by the author himself but also by Roberto Masiero in the *Postfazione* (afterword) to the volume. Everyone can do it by reading, freely and secularly as the author would have liked, this singular and in many ways exceptional book. An invitation especially addressed to the young generations, with the reasonable certainty that they will find it unforgettable.

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