

Reviews

Anna Christiana Maiorano

***Il corpo grafico di una
architettura decorata.
Rilievo Disegno Ornamento***

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Although Christiana Maiorano's book can be considered a monographic work entirely dedicated to a specific case study, it is part of a broader research framework related to the knowledge of the architectural, cultural and typological features of the Apulian cities and territory, on which the research group of the Department of Architecture, Construction and Design (ArCoD) of the Politecnico di Bari, to which the author belongs, has been working for a long time. The author, in collaboration with Valentina Castagnolo, is particularly involved in the definition of an in-depth study concerning the linguistic and typological-formal codes of Bari's architecture, especially historical buildings, that characterise the fabric of the city's nineteenth and twentieth-century expansion. The research, whose methodology has gradually been consolidated, has provided the opportunity to analyse approximately four hundred artefacts, starting from the survey of the façades and resulting in a considerable amount of data, subsequently organised within a substantial information system that has oriented outputs in different thematic layers, although originating from the same matrix [Castagnolo, Maiorano 2018].

Based on this previous experience, the work that Christiana Maiorano presents in this book moves from the analysis of a single building, one of the most original examples of Art Nouveau in the city of Bari, using the most

classic tools of the disciplines of representation, to experiment new research frontiers.

The choice of the case study, palazzo Barrocci, among the many available in the same territorial and cultural context, is determined by two main reasons. The first one is related to the recomposition, even if only virtual, of the unity of the building, whose overall reading has been completely compromised by the construction of an imposing infrastructure in front of it: the driveway bridge built in the 1960s, which has inexorably changed its perception. The building, built in 1913, occupies the entire head of a regular mesh in the urban fabric and stands in a marginal position within the 19th-century expansion. Its location has placed it in the dual condition of spectator and protagonist of the changes and major transformations that the city has undergone over the past centuries. Among these, the main one was undoubtedly the construction of the imposing infrastructure that assumed considerable weight for the building, definitively altering its visibility to and from the outside. In this regard, the author says: "Looking for the point of observation –of the research as well as of the object of study– means in fact moving by making movements that allow one to perceive and identify new meanings, values, identities and intentions in this denied place of the city" [p. 24].

The second reason is to restore to the city's collective memory and heritage, through an accurate path of knowledge that moves from the survey and restitution of the palace's complex decorative code, analysed in its symbolic and geometric components and an evident expression of the client's belonging to the city's bourgeois class. Every functional element of the building, both outside and inside, is charged with an aesthetic value as evident as it is characterizing so that the final result represents an evocative manifesto of the client's political and cultural status and interests. Indeed, the ornamental register refers to the language and decorative symbols of Egyptian matrix, which are evidently inspired by nature [Jones 2016, pp. 47-55] but whose code is often juxtaposed with that of Masonic style [Abdoh 2020].

These reasons are explicitly recalled by the volume's subtitle, *Rilievo Diséno Ornamento*, in which the knowledge phase is entrusted to one of the main tools of the disciplines of representation, the survey, while the critical interpretation phase is assigned to the restitution phase, that is the drawing of the architecture that becomes a narration through the decoding of the decorative language used.

The survey of the building is based on the integration of techniques, using active and passive sensors, and is aimed at preparing an accurate and reliable metrically and geometrically knowledge base suitable for the subsequent interpretation and implementation of the data.

On the other hand, the author entrusts the digital representation with the task of restoring the denied unity to the architectural object, irreparably compromised by the urban layout following the building of the artifact, to allow again the overall reading of the

fronts that the changed boundary conditions have definitively compromised. The research approach to this point is classic and shareable, but the most interesting and even innovative aspect of the book, again stated already in the title, is related to the concept of the 'graphic body' of architecture that the author attempts to explain on several occasions and in various ways within the chapters and, not least, in the graphic appendices.

Among the most suggestive explanations that the author uses to clarify the meaning of 'graphic body' is the one that aims at assigning to this concept the difficult task of representing the link between architecture and its decorative apparatus, a relationship that tends to be constituted in a whole made up of punctual elements, lines and signs capable of graphically translating the architectural essence and, above all, its dualism between matter and form. This passage is expressed by observing the data derived from the survey, which are transcribed by draws and from which it is possible to categorise the elements that characterise the building through a new mapping of signs that translate, in the graphic language of drawing, what for the author represents the graphic body of architecture [p. 37]. In short words, from the taxonomy derived from the cataloguing of the architectural elements, one is transported to a visual classification of the signs of architecture itself, reconfigured into a new graphic and semantic composition.

In this exercise of interpretation, decomposition and recomposition of data, the decoration is the fulcrum and represents the element that bridges the two worlds: the real one, objectively deduced from the artefact survey, and the ideal one, which derives

from the subjective translation of the architectural language of the real into that of its 'graphic body' that is expressed through the creation of a real map of the decorative language of the building. The methodology behind this creative exercise, which is expressed through the graphic body of the architecture, is fully explained in an earlier contribution by the author in the book *Graphic Languages. Decoration* [Castagnolo et al. 2022]. In that case, the procedure was applied on a larger scale while maintaining the basic analogy between the knowledge of architecture and its interpretation through drawing, and that of the creation of a map that interprets reality by establishing new points of view and new perspectives. The result of the exercise is a new narrative of the building's decorative apparatus that gives us different keys to knowing and telling, through the attribution of new meanings, the same architecture.

Among the main outcomes of this work, in the writer's opinion, there is certainly the already expressed merit of reassigning the building to its original wholeness within the collective memory through procedures of integrated survey to return its original usability to the community, providing a unified reading that is also achieved through the exploration and investigation of its ornamental code. In this path, the integrated use of digital technologies, through which the survey is accomplished, has a primary role. This purpose is visible in the iconographic apparatus of the volume, which is organised in thematic sections respectively named mapping, nomenclatures, geographies, taxonomies, and geometries.

But it is again, also from a graphic point of view, the materialisation of the architectural graphic body that

represents the book's most original features. This reading key, which lends itself to replication in other geographical and cultural contexts, also seems to represent a particularly effective tool from an educational point of view. In-

deed, it is possible, through operations of reading and re-reading, decomposition and re-composition, abstraction and materialization, survey and drawing, to understand, and subsequently rework the architectural language

codes of the analysed building, filtered through the personal feeling of those who approach the critical knowledge of an architectural work.

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