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## A “No Manifesto”

*The need not to be radical.*

by Luca Galofaro <sup>1</sup>

*"... Changing, adapting, becoming different, resembling, echoing themselves ... all the works must be able to turn into another form, even to express things in a different way, to be represented starting from different premises."*<sup>2</sup>

### Premise

This text is the result of our participation to a symposium we were invited and of a more general reflection on architecture as a discipline. Today there is much talk on the need to be radical, to do a cutting-edge architecture, to chase those image techniques that have been invading the real and virtual space. Architects like us, who continue to deal with the project in the same way as always, find it difficult to place themselves within these circumstances. We really feel confused, and confusion is necessary to understand and to understand each other. So we started to make a list of things we consider important in our work and to reflect on our need to use the project as a research tool; we wanted to write a manifesto that could represent us without the need to publish it. But the more we were talking and writing, the more we started realizing this is not a manifesto but a list of all those things we do not want to do through our projects.

We were not sure until the last if inserting our projects within the text to support the statements, or seeking in the project a parallel text to make it clear that finally words only count when they take a precise form, the form of architecture. Our statements are accompanied by atypical notes, an additional text to be considered or not, to be read smoothly or not read at all, but that was very helpful for us to write.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.ianplus.it](http://www.ianplus.it)

<sup>2</sup> The Otolith Group. Thoughtform/ La forma del pensiero, Mousse, Roma, 2011, curated by Carolina Italiano.

*Limited and traditional definitions of architecture and its means have lost their validity. Today the environment as a whole is the goal of our activities—and all the media of its determination: TV or artificial climate, transportation or clothing, telecommunication or shelter.*

*The extension of the human sphere and the means of its determination go far beyond a built statement. Today everything becomes architecture (H. Hollein)*

## **Introduction**

Nowadays architecture is completely self-referential, it self generates knowledge, architects do not need the city anymore as the place of representation but they need the media. This has widened the field of action and representation bringing architecture closer to that liquid world theorized by Bauman, weakening it and preventing it from being an autonomous<sup>3</sup> discipline, governed by its own laws. The social value of architecture was exactly based on these prerogatives, while now it is based on the consumption of places and spaces.

In the Sixties Hans Hollein breaks with the idyllic image of architecture, replacing it with everyday objects by declaring that *everything is architecture*; he does not think anymore in terms of style, in terms of conventional architectural works, but he considers architecture, in the same way of art, as an expression of the human spirit. Architecture and territory dissolve when an aircraft carrier turns into a structure creating a man-made landscape, where no element dominates the other. Today Hollein's words take on even a deeper meaning, in the exact moment when everything really has become architecture. But if everything is architecture, it is always more difficult to understand the kind of spaces defining it and which practice to follow.

We strongly believe in the practice of architecture as a thought and project discipline, going beyond the mere production of shapes and objects. We declared it with a project that was starting exactly from Hollein's statement, even if with *Microutopie*<sup>4</sup> we tried to do the opposite, to bring an aircraft carrier isolated in the desert back to its natural environment: the sea; through this action architecture regains its value, returning to be project. The aircraft carrier is no longer an object turning into architecture, but an objective reality, an architectural event which structures the territory through its program.

It is important that an architectural project responds to the demands of the market and makes *good* buildings, but it is equally important to make sure the project continues to be a thinking tool to interpret reality. Architecture should not only anticipate the future, but should create its conditions

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<sup>3</sup> The use of this term may be risky not so much for its real meaning but for those that are often given. We use it without any political implication, without any reference to the tradition of Italian architecture, without considering architecture a discipline isolated from reality. Architecture must be considered a discipline autonomous from everything distorting its deeper meanings related to the shaping of space. Architecture is considered in its broadest sense, as comprehensive all the arts and sciences related to building.

<sup>4</sup> In the exact moment when architecture recycles the aircraft carrier, a new functional program amplifies its capacity. In *Artscape* the carrier becomes a museum, in *Housescape* the carrier becomes housing, in *Sportscape* the carrier becomes a theme park, in *Landscape* the carrier returns to be a natural landscape. The transformed aircraft carriers represent the boundary between two specificities: they are no longer warships, they are not pure architecture as well, they become operative strategies, models of intervention restoring its own autonomy to the discipline of architecture.

giving shape to the reality of the present; in order to accomplish it we need a cultural attitude that claims new theoretical and linguistic formulations, not reduced to the current condition of constant antagonism between different positions, where we continue to reproduce reality or we keep advocating a Radical or Avant-garde architecture because it uses particular tools and can produce in a continuous stream always new Utopias.

But this is impossible because the condition referred as *radical* in the Seventies, for its political and social connotations, and for its constant references to the artistic avant-gardes that were subverting modern languages, is no longer viable; you can not choose to be radical, the avant-garde is then constantly changing because it is connected to multiple paradigms whose lines of research have fragmented every issue related to space. Paradigms produce only different languages constantly struggling with each other. The digital drunkenness, the parametric morphogenesis, the sustainability, the technology, to name only the most common paradigms, did not have the strength to deeply change the real space, but till now they have created only isolated worlds, struggling to overlap. There is not even a chance to rethink the urban space through a political and cultural debate, because politics has turned into the economic management of public matters, and culture corresponds always more to a market that sees art as the new frontier of consumption. Architecture has adjusted to the changes, turning into a product to be consumed quickly and, as such, images through the sense of wonder have turned into the *persuasive powerful vehicle that shapes the consciousness and disciplines the society*.<sup>5</sup>

The utopian imagination has turned into a real dystopia, a virtual utopia that has consumed our future. *It removed it from the sphere of imagination and of the human will*<sup>6</sup>. How to recreate the meaning but, more importantly, how to still match imagery and imagination, if not through a reconsideration of architecture not as a language or as a paradigm, but as a project intended as a research tool and as an operative approach.

If we want architecture to reclaim its meaning back, it is necessary to pursue it trying not to produce utopia, not to produce other visions, not to be radical, not to produce strong projects, do not follow new paradigms, do not be self-referential.<sup>7</sup>

## 1. No Utopia (Reality VS Utopia)

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<sup>5</sup> After the future. From futurism to cyberpunk. The modernity breakdown, by Franco Berardi (Bifo), DeriveApprodi, Roma, 2013. The quote is related to the definition of Baroque, as the moment when, for the first time emerges the deep separation of the public discourse, the separation between the sphere of the founding truth and the sphere of the linguistic and imaginary reproduction. Today this separation has become endemic in the assimilation between culture and image, between reality and vision produced only to create a surplus in any operation acting on the city. The project loses value the image becomes its simulacrum.

<sup>6</sup> After the future. From futurism to cyberpunk. The modernity breakdown, by Franco Berardi (Bifo), DeriveApprodi, Roma, 2013

<sup>7</sup> If we really want to go back to think about architecture not only as the production of fictional realms of imagination, but also as the opportunity to give a sense to reality in its form, then we need to think about architecture not anymore as a diagram of everything, but as a specific event focused around the use of things ... the use of space is directly embodied in the architectural form and therefore it does not need any other representation if not the form in all its object absoluteness - (Beyond diagrams. Iconography, Discipline, Architecture, by Pier Vittorio Aureli, Gabriele Mastrigli, 2005. <http://architettura.it/files/20050618/>)

Many utopias have a universalist character; there are, however, also more sectarian or non-inclusive kinds of utopia. The utopian thinking must be considered as a provisional category. It is important to realize and to be convinced that Utopia does not exist anymore. The utopian projects must leave room for representations acting on the present that can be immediately operative in the territory. The field of imagination can be expanded only through a clear redefinition of space in direct contact with its potential evolution over time. Rejecting utopia to try to rewrite the future already written, is for us the way, paradoxically, to be radical today.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. No Visions (Imagination VS Image)

The idea of *vision* is outdated and self-referential, what does *vision* really means? To relegate an idea into a world that maybe will never exist. Today the vision and the image of the project coincide; images are consumed quickly because, completely emptied of content, they have lost all connections with society. Remaining connected only to themselves, they cannot stand the test of time, they cannot go beyond the limit of an eternal present. In the society of images, visions occupy daily life, they belong to it and for this reason they have lost their uniqueness and originality; imagination is instead a temporal stratification of so many visions, a continuous tension between different places and times. To do architecture is necessary to replace images with imagination: a figurative architecture where the figure becomes meaningless, gaining programmatic value. The figure helps to influence the program, making the line between public and private blurred; the public city no longer exists, therefore it is necessary to turn part of a building into the common space, triggering from the inside a kind of resistance at all costs of the architectural project.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> **The form of democracy:** it is a project planned for the metropolis in 2050, a project that redefines the idea of Parliament as a common space, inspired by a common practice, the practice of confrontation, the practice of protest that goes back to occupy the streets reclaiming a direct relationship with the political class; there is no leader but a multitude acting through resistance. The project started from various considerations and observations over the current social changes and addresses the need to re-territorialize the political space. The idea that democracy could finally find in the web its ideal environment from where then radiate to the real world it is always more clashing with a reality where economic interests prevail even on the virtual dimension. There is a strong need for a space for confrontation and dialogue, where the web relates with the reality of the institutions. Not a utopian project, but the clear intention to create a space that evolves with the city and through the space of the city. We selected three model cities and three spaces: Montecitorio, seat of the Chamber of Deputies in Rome, The United Nations in New York, and the Parliament of Dhaka in Bangladesh, and we have transformed the urban spaces in front of the government buildings in transitional spaces, urban fabrics between city and architecture. Only one architectural element, a covering structure, redefines the urban space turning it into an interior space. Architecture and City are the same space.

(<http://www.labiennale.org/it/architettura/archivio/mostra/padiglione-italia/>)

(<http://www.ianplus.it/index.php>)

<sup>9</sup> **Benetton multipurpose center in Tehran:** to colonize the private domain architecture needs to turn into an urban device, intermediate space between opposite conditions. In the project for a multipurpose center in Tehran, planning a functional mix of commercial space-office-housing, we tried to redefine the boundaries between public and private, reinventing the programs and adjusting them to contemporary needs. The core of the building is well defined, a traditional system housing the required functions; between this core and the city the common space starts to take shape. Space expands outside the core through a light membrane that redefines the boundaries; the membrane expands the interior space projecting it to the exterior, wrapping the core of the building without retracing its volume. Such a conceived building redefines the surrounding urban space, while furnishings determine the use of the surrounding open spaces. The ground floor is an urban space controlled by this membrane: it lets air through, it protects without enclosing, it widens and expands the common space, which houses markets, working areas, protected rest areas. The building has a recognizable shape that changes according to the time of day, the central core appears and disappears, the membrane continuously redefines space modulating light.

### 3. No Radical Projects (Structural VS Radical)

Vision must be replaced by the project and by the need to provide it with an added value so to take on different meanings and uses: projects must be able to *intensify reality*. Reality changes because it is perceived and used subjectively, in different ways by the individual or by the group, the project gains a different meaning, beside the program.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> **The Grid:** the grid as structure characterizes projects of hybrid buildings subject to a constant revisiting and rewriting: the Busan Opera House, the Afghanistan National Museum, the expansion of the Bauhaus Museum. The three-dimensional grid is used as a matrix structuring the project. The building turns in fact into a vertical urban space, or a horizontal continuous space, city and architecture overlap. The building disappears because the traditional facade gains thickness. Activities shape it and its use defines the boundaries between public and private. The grid is used as a generic condition, an abstract system giving order to the building in every single part. The grid is an evolution of the membrane façade.

**Opera House di Busan** > The facade is a three-dimensional modular steel grid 4x4 m: an independent structure declaring the importance of architecture and its necessity. It consists of a transparent skin that makes the building highly porous, open and permeable. Repetition and modularity shape high flexible spaces: each module can be reconfigured over time, and changed according to programmatic needs and use. The default use program will be enriched by subsequently introducing ideas and functions deriving from actual needs and usage; a building designed as an assemble kit of a completely interchangeable plastic model. The fundamental character for the Busan Opera House is that it no longer contains a strict time or space value that has been assigned by the architect, but it rather becomes a flexible system that varies, according to the changing needs of citizen in the course of time. In this sense the building is adaptive, living. The project idea is to have a building inside a building: a compact core that houses the theatre and an external diluted perimeter structural envelope with all other complementary functions such as commercial spaces, exhibitions, restaurants, workshops, playgrounds; all spread throughout the free section which defines the vertical square. Behind the enwrapping structure, the core is finished with a reflecting material. The architecture loses its stability, its *firmitas*; the city and the landscape disperse and resolve on the core surface. The reflection decomposes the form weakening it, while the nature penetrates the building.

(<http://www.archdaily.com/283660/busan-opera-house-competition-proposal-ian/>)  
(<http://www.designboom.com/architecture/busan-opera-house-proposal-by-ian/>)

**New Bauhaus Museum** > The grid is an external envelope wrapping the central core, intended to reveal by hiding, intriguing one's imagination. Packaging is indeed a way to represent the mystery surrounding the object; the hall as something precious to be revealed. Further each module can be reconfigured over time and changed according to programmatic needs and use. The grid permit the building grow.

(<http://www.ianplus.it/index.php>)

**Afghanistan National museum** > We carried out a "fragmentation" process through the use and repetition of modular spaces organized in a grid of rooms and walls; their combination creates a "space within the space", letting visitors loose the perception of a coercing container space. The cancellation of limits contributes to space customization and to fulfill its requirements shaping the void. Flows must turn into an instrument of knowledge, and the actions performed by visitors must collaborate to enrich the content. In parallel, according to the exhibition requirements, the regular grid allows a flexible subdivision of the space into rooms and/or galleries. The museum arises entirely on the ground floor within a regular square grid, which is defined by two systems of mutually perpendicular walls. Simple geometric shapes are cut into the brick walls, which are equipped partitions, accommodating the exhibition devices so to become display supports. These walls also contain built-in display cases that define a continuous exhibition space. Roof skylights illuminate the exhibition rooms; natural light is controlled through shading systems in order to avoid direct light hitting the artworks. The natural light combined with the structural system defines a spatial matrix that acts on the reinterpretation of Islamic architecture's basic elements: an undecorated and continuous space defined through its abstraction and non iconic image..

(<http://europaconcorsi.com/projects/210871-Museo-Nazionale-dell-Afganistan>)

(<http://www.archdaily.com/275758/national-museum-of-afghanistan-ian/>)

#### 4. No Icons (Weak Projects VS Icons)

In the common meaning referring to a project as “weak” can be understood in a poetic way, as a project where architecture disappears, it is imperceptible. In this case, we intend it the ability of architecture to have a value to be interpreted and transformable by its use, and where buildings are implementable, not iconic. The building is not disconnected from the urban structure, but it is an integral part of it, architecture defines the city and turns into a tool for the production of urban space. We need to work with what we have, with the city conceived as whole system and not divided between center and periphery; on the contrary it is necessary to intervene in the historical center, as a place to restore in order to produce city;<sup>11</sup> and in the suburbs as well through buildings that give back to the area a central condition.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> **Re-living historic center:** the project defines a strategy to operate on underutilized buildings, which are emptied and reorganized inside, while the existing facades remain untouched to dialogue with the existing fabric; within these enclosures takes place a new everyday complexity, and the threshold between the urban system and the empty space is configured as the structuring fulcrum of the project. Through the border symbolized by the facades, we achieve a cancellation of the language and an intensification of the functional complexity. If we want to stop this residential emptying of historic centers we need to activate an urban renewal process before the residents of the different neighborhoods drop below a security level, and all the businesses are destined exclusively to the mass tourism circus. Our idea is to demolish under-used buildings leaving integral only the facades, that can be a sort of threshold by which past and future can dialogue. The housing prototype, inserted within a structured existing fabric, brings us to reflect on the concept of “City Recycle”, starting from the absolute value of the city itself, and its condition of urban space. Within the chosen enclosures, housing and natural landscape types overlap and integrate with each other, types that belong to the memory of the places. The enclosures will not only accommodate the new housing prototypes, but they will define portions of natural environment to rebuild a landscape substratum for the city. The reclamation of the historical center by the residents aims to the salvation of the public city, today always more lacking in functions and complexity. The project configures an idea of community life; it defines a life-style, not strictly connected to the house but rather to the context where it is inserted. The historic center are not in fact only physical structures; they are a complex and delicate balance among inhabitants, facilities, public spaces, small commercial and artisanal activities and they need to be considered in their whole.

( <http://metropoles.centrepompidou.fr/intervenant.php?id=3&langue=EN> )

([http://tv.exibart.com/news/2008\\_lay\\_notizia\\_02.php?id\\_cat=94&id\\_news=6254](http://tv.exibart.com/news/2008_lay_notizia_02.php?id_cat=94&id_news=6254) )

<sup>12</sup> **Parcheggio Nuovo Salario:** in a different urban context, the periphery, the project for the Nuovo Salario Parking should be read as a not-iconic project; even if at a superficial analysis it may seem the opposite, it is actually a *weak* project. In a green area between two natural slopes, the regional railway and the residential blocks, the opportunity to design a parking area near the station gave us the chance to re-qualify part of the natural landscape that had remained somehow isolated inside the compact urban texture. The project fulfills the functional demands of the competition notice for a parking space, but at the same time, it uses the parking structure as a mean to trigger a process of territorialisation on this area. The building turns into a micro-infrastructure, controlling the flows exchange between the railway, the parking area, the green park and the residential areas and protecting the green areas from vehicular traffic. On the eastern side, the parking structure works as an extension of the street, capturing the urban vital flows and allowing all the functions for changes of state. A three-dimensional facade with variable dimension formed by hexagonal hollowed blocks, becomes the system to establish a relationship between the different spaces. The roof is the prosecution of the station's main platform: a sort of terrace overlooking the park. The facade has a value to be interpreted as, conceived as functional closure, can be read either as a sculpture or a service infrastructure and as a place open to various ludic activities in support of the various activities of the park. The function of the various modules constituting the facade changes; it can be a bench, a playground, a kiosk or whatever. It is implementable because it does not have a beginning or an end; it is a structure that can grow indefinitely in height and length. It has a precise length only because those were the limits of the area; it is an icon but at the same time also its negation.

([http://www.designrepublic.it/viewdoc.asp?co\\_id=551](http://www.designrepublic.it/viewdoc.asp?co_id=551) )

(<http://architettura.it/files/20070519/index.htm> )

## 5. No New Paradigms (Architecture VS Paradigm)

Today the new paradigms, intended as combinatorial strategies, produce architecture.

In this sense, architecture is the result of mechanical processes applying parameters to an action repeated in different contexts and urban structures. A paradigm follows the trend of a precise historical moment, supporting an architecture every time connected to a particular technique or technology, to a particular control tool. We must therefore refer to a wider and deeper transformation than the one paradigms offer us within a particular historical moment. Architecture must remain connected to space, it must continue to be independent without being slave of any paradigm, that will always try to absorb it, canceling its value to replace it with the paradigm itself, subject to fashion, to economy and to always changing contingent circumstances.<sup>13</sup> Architecture is an act of Resistance!

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<sup>13</sup> **Energy bridge:** it is a project trying to combine hydrogen energy production and architecture. No part overcomes the other, the project establishes a dialogue between the paradigm (the energy produced by hydrogen), architecture and the territory. Architecture and its interference with landscape become instrumental to a general redefinition of the idea of energy production; the grid structures and defines the productive territory, acting at different levels and at different scales. A new typology of micro-infrastructure confronts the space of the highway; the established image of Autogrills and overpasses crossing the highway will be enriched by a new element. With this project we did not pursue the formal invention; the shapes we use are in fact only the vehicle of the content. We try to structure the various requirements while maintaining the possibilities of architecture untouched, remaining far away from the paradigm.

(<http://www.fondazionemaxxi.it/2012/11/29/energy-architettura-del-petrolio-e-del-post-petrolio/?lang=en>)

([http://www.domusweb.it/en/architecture/2013/04/24/\\_oil\\_and\\_post-oil.html](http://www.domusweb.it/en/architecture/2013/04/24/_oil_and_post-oil.html))