

Architecture – a method of restoring contextual/territorial history

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Abstract

Can architecture restore for a context/territory, the necessary architectural built space that is also culturally distinctive in time? The purpose of the proposed work is to open a discussion about the creative practices and to present an answer to this question. The objective to be achieved certainly remains the support of the idea of architecture as an organizational structure of the new space that restores values preserved in our subconscious. The research will consist of analyzing two works of the Italian architect Mario Botta (born in 1931), examples of space organizational structures that have proved their validity in time. In this context, he found the sign built in its cultural horizon, the nearest to the territory/landscape, containing information that has always been a benchmark and representation. The study is an analysis of three of its ideas, summarized by Céline Fossati in the interview with Mario Botta: architecture as a conceptual model that reflects a feeling, a dialogue and a creative transformation of the tangible (concreteness)/intangible (meaning) resorting to archaic forms verified in time. In conclusion we intend to identify the components of the architectural model that uses relationships between old/new tangible/intangible architectural layers and architecture, creating images of representations/substantiated emotions, restoring the value of the territory by continuing the events with remembrance benchmarks, as suggestive architectural means, creating, new forms for old functions – a matrix that may contribute for the transmission of the past to the future.

Rezumat

Poate arhitectura să restabilească pentru un context/teritoriu, spațiul construit arhitectural necesar și distinctiv cultural în timp? Scopul lucrării propuse este să deschidă o discuție despre practicile creative și să prezente un răspuns la această întrebare. Obiectivul de atins rămâne, cu siguranță, susținerea ideii arhitecturii ca structură de organizare a spațiului nou și restauratoare de valori conservate în subconștientul nostru. Cercetarea se va concretiza prin analiza a două din lucrările arhitectului italian Mario Botta (n.1931-), exemple de structuri de organizare spațială care și-au dovedit valabilitatea în timp. În context el a găsit semnul construit din orizontul său cultural, mai apropiat teritoriului/peisajului, cuprinzând informații care au fost dintotdeauna reper și reprezentare. Studiul este analiza a trei dintre ideile sale, rezumate de Céline Fossati în interviul cu Mario Botta: arhitectura ca model conceptual, care reflectă o trăire, un dialog și o transformare creatoare a tangibilului (concretul) /intangibilul (sensul) apelând la forme arhaice verificate în timp. În concluzie ne propunem identificarea componentelor modelului arhitectural ce folosește relațiile dintre straturi arhitecturale vechi/noi tangibile/intangibile și arhitectură, creând imagini

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de reprezentări/emoții argumentate, refăcând valoarea teritoriului prin continuarea evenimentelor cu reperatele rememorării, ca mijloace arhitecturale sugestive, creând, pentru funcțiuni vechi, noi forme - matrice ce pot contribui la transmiterea trecutului, viitorului.

Keywords: *creative practices, remembrance, new project, archetype*

1. Introduction

From being a merely a modern architecture and urbanism issue, acknowledging the complexity and contradiction, the pluralism and the permissiveness has come to signify for the contemporary architecture a mix of meanings of that term and the conveyance of its historical significance. Finding the work methods in today's architecture is "like a duty that is almost spiritual... a civil duty..., a way of fighting against losing one's identity, a way of resisting triviality...in modern society". We are talking about the possibility to restore the history of a valuable historical aspect, of architecture's interesting stance in the context of a specific landscape.

Our target is to use two concrete examples of an architecture which has found its expression in the context of the given landscape through a remembered architectural language which is both creative and morally acknowledged.

The question is not if, but rather how can architecture restore the history of a necessary context that is distinctive both historically and culturally?

2. A few considerations on the theme itself

We are going to proceed with our analysis by employing the Italian architect Mario Botta's ideas (born in 1931-) and by using two of his works meant to suggest an archetypal past through a spatially independent pattern which uses more "reading tools" [1]. This is essentially, about the Saint Mary of Angels Chapel, Tamaro, 1992-1996 and Casa Riva, San Vitale, 1971-1973 [2].

The creative pattern which illustrates the architecture is based on an architectural language which has always represented a balance through dialogue between any tensions in our transitions either from the solution itself to the immediately built context/territory/architectural/natural landscape, or from history to the transformation imposed by the contemporary society.

Botta relies on the type of architecture that creates compensation architectural spaces to suggest the symbolic past and makes possible the combined preservation of a remembered architectural experience (of the initial pattern / matrix) and a real landscape.

3. What kind of Architecture?

He explains his architecture by using a few essential ideas:

- Restoration is a new architectural project, this is an architecture that has always served as a reminder of the historical time and "one mustn't build on a moment in the past". [3]

This expressive form of history is a conceptual pattern reflecting a state of mind, the desire to preserve the identity pertaining to the society of the time when the builders lived; it reflects the quest for authenticity enriched with the values of those who contributed to its construction..." [4]



Figure 1, 2. [5]

Figure 3. [6]

Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, House Guiette, When society demands it, architecture distorts the universe, 1926 - 2011.

Botta considers that the shape of his houses owns to a landmark that is worth looking into. This idea of a pattern built on recollection/education stimulates the value in the restoration process.



Figure 4. Le Corbusier [7]

Figure 5. House M.E.Houck, [8]

Weissenhof-Siedlung Houses 14/15

Croce Riva, San Vitale

Le Corbusier wanted showcasing the new domestic architecture of Modernity, not restoring contextual history.

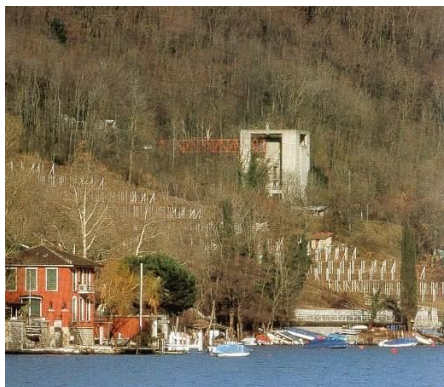


Figure 6, 7. [9] House Bianchi, M. Botta,

The new project is defined and determined by the landscape's topography.

Christopher Kanal, while appraising M. Botta's works, would say that "many of his works have an overwhelming appreciation for history". Architecture, he says, is a form of history and it is

structured on two landmarks: the value of history and the sensitivity. As a matter of fact, as it happens during the preservation process, he does not use the creative restoration to protect and preserve.

- Architecture is a conceptual intervention through dialogue.

The context is architecture for him and the thought is always targeted for intense relations as an answer to the landscape's value. Thus, we are not talking about the integration into the landscape but, as Botta claims, "we must talk about a dialogue between the rational forms and the organic element, the nature... The mountain is a presence, an architecture form in itself. The man adds another presence between the sky (the infinite) and the earth."



Figure 8. Chapel in Ticino, Switzerland [10] Figure 9. Bergamo Province, Italy [11]

The thought is always targeted for intense relations as an answer to the landscape's value.

- The project (the past as well as the present pattern) is defined and determined by the landscape's topography.

In this context, Botta redefines the concept of creative architectural restoration as a preoccupation to understand the value of the architectural landscape, the valuable natural element which contains unique elements that deserved to be marked as monuments.

Understanding this monumental value prompts him to find restoration solutions by using the intangible patrimony, for example, by a function the site served in a different location, in a different time, a function compatible with the place through which we can communicate its value to future generations, through means of recollection, without proceeding to the restoration/regeneration of the historic monument itself, from the well-known two perspectives, preservation and rehabilitation.

- Architecture transforms, when society demands it, the tangible (concrete) universe, but it can also, perhaps paradoxically, restore the intangible (the meaning).

This process yields a pattern of transformation limited by the architect. [12] In this context, the restoration of the atmosphere generating the function represents the landscape organisation and is a limited and dual creative process (it consolidates the existing setting/natural monument which is reorganised, and the architectural-creative intervention in order to outline and protect the value of its authenticity. For Botta, the infinite space requires this limitation so that the creative transformation process can take place by resorting to archaic forms, verified in time.

- Architecture can be moralising, having an educational value intellectually and spiritually. It can so be ethical, a way of „resisting the loss of identity by using the past, a way of resisting triviality...in the modern society". [13]

- Architecture may retrieve formal language by finding a new landmark/accent in preservation: aligning the monumental landscape with the new architectural context. [14]

Steven W. Semes goes even further by supporting, after less than two decades from Botta's claim, "the new traditional architecture", that, he notes, preserves the style and character of historical buildings, retrieves the historical language associated with the traditional city architecture", with the landscape. For this case study, it is important to make the important connection, which he outlines, between the historical preservation and the landscape preservation in order to safeguard the immaterial values of the authenticity pertaining to the culture of a certain place/archaeological site or a vernacular or natural landscape. Contrary to the widely accepted belief that draws a line between the natural and the man-made world, Botta claims that: „I do not believe we can speak of a natural world. Nature is already modified by man's intervention and it is continuously changing. The central idea of restoration is part of what architecture stands for..." [15]

- Architecture, like „a landscape organisation structure" [16].

In this case Architecture can restore values that are preserved in our subconscious like those concerning the satisfaction of human needs such as shelter and human protection. Here, Botta refers to both the dwelling itself, and to the citadel, by moving the centre of existence in time, just like F.Meraz said.

As far as the architectural conservation is concerned, the epicentre of temporality has mostly been in the past, and occasionally in the present, but rarely in the future." [17]

Alois Riegl cited André Costel when referring to the historical evolution of the built masses (good that were created but which escape the law of immediate usefulness). "The history of human development... is linked to the attitudes, and the rules referring to privileged artefacts which deserve to escape natural fatalities " [18] Architecture's volumetrics are themselves an aesthetical and a symbolic element, a restoration of a memory. Architecture as a spatial representation is a necessary gain, we must represent history with the help of cognizable forms, to recollect relations, to activate ancestral idea of building shelters, [especially, he noted] to create the shelter within a landscape.

- Architecture, like "the anciencey of the new";

When the function requires it, said Botta, the historical monument is a key element in forming identities, especially in the context of multicultural societies. The original, he said, "still exists in whatever is new in the society". According to his philosophical thinking, the use of natural materials reduces the form to a sign/symbol and necessarily implies a state of the art technological approach. But M. Botta "...understood the limits to the technological development and the necessity to return to origins" [because], going back to origins is actually the most powerful cultural element in a society that focuses constantly on the future." [19]

4. The way to achieve this purpose is using architecture as "a reading tool". [20]

He first proceeds to the restoration of certain architectural programs from the past by restoring the location of the historical monument with the help of foundation-rampart/tower or fortified dwelling/moat) and new relations. The architect's action is not used here to favour the built pattern or the landscape/site but to combine them, and is, as he said, similar to the basic instinct of building a shelter.

Secondly he proceeds to a restoration of the historic monument value by continuing the memory of the events using the recollection landmarks by suggestive architectural means. He creates new

matrix for archaic functions by using their availability to contribute to transmit the past to the future. Botta understood the importance of the conservation combining both the landscape and the memory.

And last but not least, Botta proceeds to a restoration of the dialogue as a form of synergy. "Architecture can surely express its time by admitting its historic context at the same time. But more can be done, he says. Stephen Day said that modern architecture can make more than a simple difference to history and it must „discover the essential principles in both the historical and the new architecture – in order to create new synergies”. [21]

Thus, we are not talking about the integration in the landscape but, as he says, we must talk about a dialogue between the rational forms and the organic element, nature. "The mountain is a presence, architecture unto its own. The man adds another presence between the sky (infinite) and the earth. In this case, he uses the sole cognizable contextual element from the vast landscape, the road". [21]

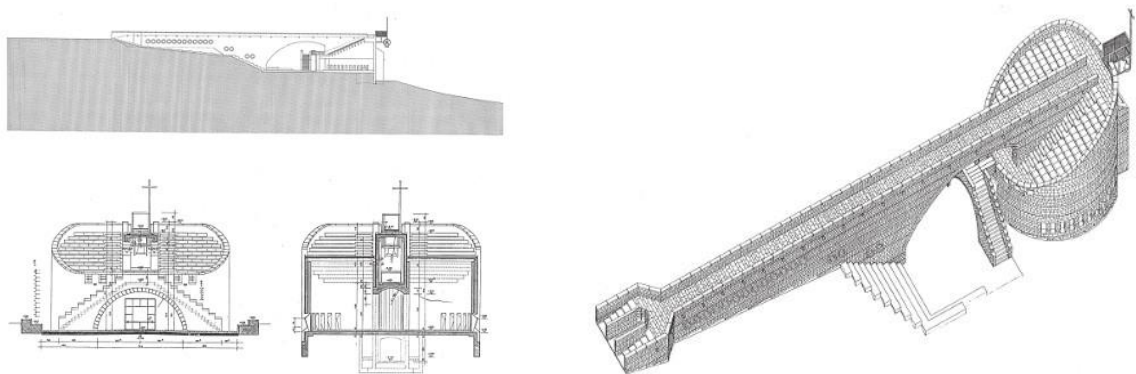


Figure 10, 11 [22] Saint Mary of Angels Chapel, Axonometric projection, longitudinal sections and cross sections, drawings by Werner Oechslin.

Further ahead, Botta restores the image of the dungeon-dwelling or of the fortress on the mountain top, as a place of refuge." The construction stands apart from the mountain to form a new horizon, as a starting point of an ideal relation." [23]

The works in this case illustrate his idea on the architecture project which is supposed to be determined and defined in order to make the transformation of the context into a new image by eliminating the rooftop and re-establishing the values of the stone self-supporting elevations belonging to the fortresses built in places which are not easily accessible. But what is that determines these interventions? It can be the way he understand architecture as history's formal, timeless expression:

Nicolas Bourriaud said that "the work of art has the ability to give meaning to the human existence and to indicate possible trails in the middle of the chaos that is reality".

So art, from the perspective of the social development, unifies reality and ideal, the concrete with the potential. Art and historical perspective share an undeniable homogeneity. It does not copy reality, it reproduces it, it recreates it, it regenerates it in a way, it reintegrates it into a universe of significances and social values. [24]

Botta is preoccupied by the necessity to link the activity of restoration to the specific knowledge belonging to other sciences and arts, especially sculpture, other professions, other than design and traditional crafts.



Figure 12, 13. [25], Saint Mary of Angels Chapel.
Restoring the context of landscape or from the nature at the culture. (C. Fossati)

His personal way of understanding the way in which both losses and compensations are indelibly linked to the main object of conservation and the protection of the cultural resources (destructions, disappearance, etc.) is in the Brandian spirit, in which conservation was „an activity which is related to prolonging the life of the work of art and the restoration of appearance and any other operation it uses to restore the effective order of a process of the human activity”.

If we consider the mountain the natural monument to salvage, its intervention is not preservation. Botta recollects, the same as Scarpa, the elements of a cultural context absorbed mentally and visually, he transforms these essential elements accumulated by knowledge into an action of the spirit examining its own ideas. He also uses their juxtaposition without classifying them in order to identify the element which is meant to be highlighted but instead transforms the environment through a dialogue of the valuable elements, of its ideas about these identified elements which he wants to share with us.

5. Architecture as a method of restoring contextual history is for Mario Botta:

- the restoration of the concept of fortress, as a defence function through the intervention at the functional level. Botta creates buildings that have the indoor and outdoor architectural space well defined, emphasizing the walls that mark-boundary element- relationship-concept reminding us of the real fortresses.

Botta is an example of another „restoration” of the functional defensive fortress program. He restores the fortress’s spiritual experience.

This is about the landscape’s old values – the spiritual solitude, the materials used – stone, the idea of shelter, defence –indoor’s human stairs. With Botta, as opposed to the numerous occasions when the historical fortresses got redefined and restored, the architectural plastics of his new „fortress” was independent and “the detail, its variety and its compact mass generate volume and accent, they generate signal”. [26]

- reinvention of functional forms, either simple or as a combination thereof: the tower / stronghold and the defence wall, combining the idea of a stronghold with the sentry road; Botta considers that „going back to origins is the strongest cultural element in a society that is constantly focused on the future.” [27]

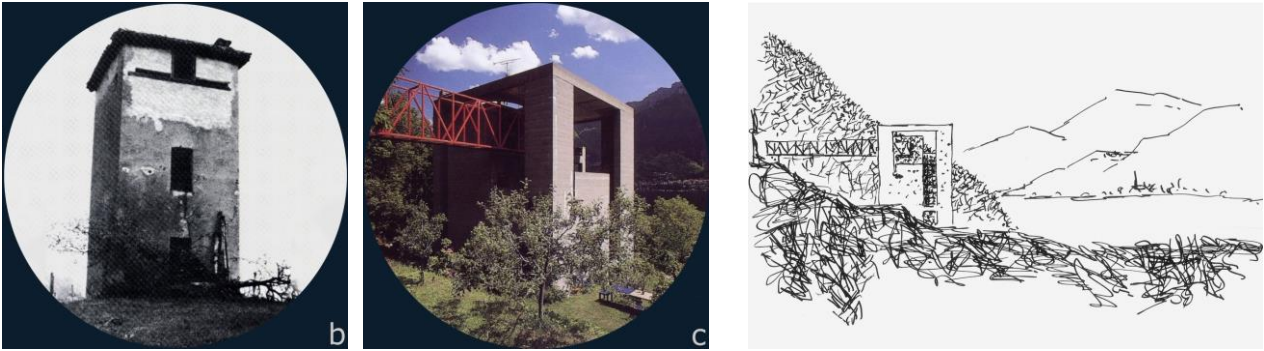


Figure 14, Old "Roccolo" characterising the Ticino region.[28] Figure 15, 16, House San Vitale [29] The atmosphere which restores an old, well known context of the landscape

- redefining the concept of restoration, paradoxically, through architectural concepts: the function (defence function, receptacle built to protect, sensations resulting from the control over the amount of natural and artificial light), the dynamic relation between the indoor/outdoor by passages, types and gap sizes, relations between the built outdoors – landscape – pinnacle on the prealpine landscape of the Alps), volumetrics (the simple forms and the different degrees of comparison between them (the cylinder, the parallelepiped or the circle and the linear element), functional details generating recollected moments (the stairs – the ziggurat profile, the ramp – grassy, the sentry road – imposing the material, the curtain, the gate, etc.)

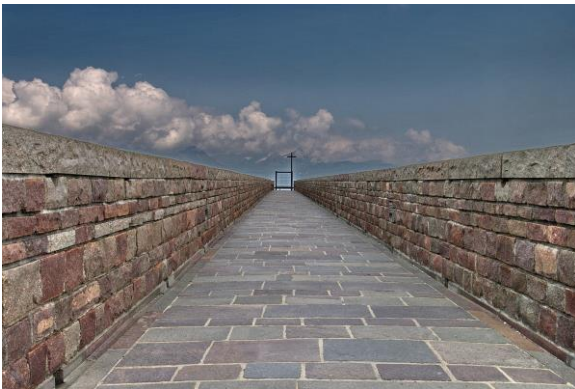


Figure 17, 18. Saint Mary of Angels Chapel. [30]

Just like with Scarpa, the footdeck / bridge that is narrow and almost immaterial is the element which re-establishes the defence function, and is the image of this physical reality which is enough to re-establish the relations between the environment and the built space. The descending vertical of the function organisation connects architectural spaces built minimally and included in the tower or dungeon planimetry.

- reinventing the architectural forms which are specific for the program: shooting holes, stairs, tunnels;



Figure 19. [31]



Figure 20. [32]

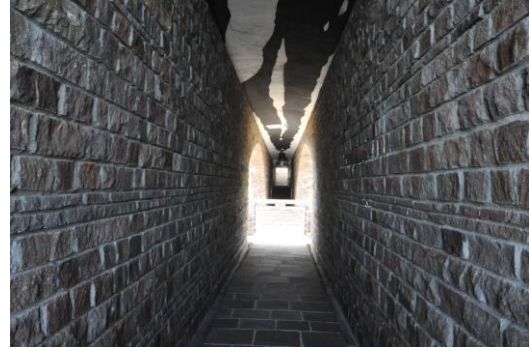


Figure 21. [33]

- the restoration of the stone value as the main construction material for the defence constructions.

Speaking about fortresses, our study will attempt to use theory and identify through the case studies we will look at examples which used new methods of restoration. Botta is an example of „another” restoration of the functional defensive fortress program. He restores the spiritual existence of the fortress. This is about the old values of the landscape – spiritual solitude, materials used – stone, the idea of shelter, defence – human stairs to the indoor.



Figure 22, 23. Saint Mary of Angels Chapel [34]

- the “antiquity of the new” concept;

- To build is sacred, an action which transforms nature’s conditions into culture requirements”. “Architecture is a discipline which gives order to the space in our lives, and this is why we can provide a space organisation structure”, said Botta. As Heidegger said, we can only survive when we have all requirements fulfilled in order to direct ourselves in the environment. In this context, Botta felt the need for a built landmark. And so he used the image of his cultural horizon which was the closest to the landscape. The recollection of a functional representation which has always served as a landmark and a refuge representation – the fortress – made him feel comfortable. „You feel more comfortable when you can control the space around you”



Figure 24, Saint Mary of Angels Chapel. [35] Figure 25, House Bianchi, San Vitale. [36]

6. Conclusions

What kind of architecture can be used as a method of restoring contextual/territorial history? We intended to identify the components of the architectural model that uses relationships between different architectural layers, old and new, for restoring the value of the territory by a synergetic transmission of the past to the future.

What we found in our sketch map of the chosen theme is that the importance of permanent artistic novelty (creativity) and age are values that have defined quality architecture until today. However, as discovered in recent years, these values are not and have never been universal values. This creates tension because we apply in an area where the very idea of heritage was redefined geographically and culturally. Recognition that historical and aesthetic values must be in balance in any intervention strategy is discussed, hence they cannot be used alone as Cesare Brandi wanted, thus leading the intervention in built heritage.

We need to take different approaches in order to restore, to make buildings viable in the future. Restoring creatively became part of an attitude with much more freedom towards making historical monuments to be useful for different interpretations and especially using them without destroying them, thus creating a "stratification additional" new layer without altering historical consolidated preserved signs. Using the change in conservation work, the idea of change and continuity are today in concomitance with challenges of heritage and modern architects.

Trying to draw a conclusion, we can say that this type of architecture has the ability to be:

- the expression of how we can creatively value the material and/or immaterial values of authenticity, acquired and/or existent through a new project;
- the expression of their balance in/with the context/landscape
- a creative pattern built on recollection/education which stimulates the value in the restoration process of architecture.

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