

CINQUE INTERNI

architetture di daniele balzanelli

LEGGERE UN PROGETTO
LO SPAZIO DELLA STANZA

Daniele Balzanelli

Cinque interni . Architetture di Daniele Balzanelli

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Lo spazio della stanza

ISBN

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Finito di stampare nel mese di

five house set.

helder casal ribeiro

house one: two parallelograms; **house two:** inside perspective; **house three:** in-between catching light; **house four:** below the roof; **house five:** view over the city
(Little book editions)

An insight on architectural approach or composition always takes me to another artistic endeavor, the musician and his music, specially in the 50's, jazz's iconic years.

Nat Hentoff, one of the few jazz critics Charles Mingus trusted fully, with a lifetime friendship, wrote the following liner notes for Charles Mingus's album *The Clown* in 1957.

"Some weeks ago, for no reason at all but curiosity and pleasure, I listened for several days to nothing but Charles Mingus recordings from the 1950's, What particularly struck me was how fresh the music continues to be. Since Mingus was never modish and therefore never fell into idioms that were "hip" at the moment, his musical voice was and still is entirely, compellingly his."

In architecture, as in life, the path of friendship allows for discovery and enchantment through the confrontation or simple sharing of ideas/notions/situations, but it also sediments knowledge and implies *elective affinities* through personal or professional empathy. In encountering Daniele's work, it is impossible to ignore this condition or not to consider that these lines continue/inhabit this personal voyage.

These *cinque interni* portray with poetic truthfulness the endless hours of comfort and exchange, emotional and material, we have shared in the last couple of years, in-between intense classes or lectures in Mantova's campus and slow eating dinners in a *rooftop loggia* at Via S. Giorgio adjacent to Piazza Sordello.

Daniele's architecture is sensitive, sincere and passionately aware of the difficult *métier* an architect – an artist – needs to master so that his work – vision – seems natural and, without difficulty, presents an operative answer to a given reality, expressing the site's needs and the client's anxieties through operative architectural themes.

His passion, parallel to his Politecnico di Milano studies, for the 80's Venice School insights and long-standing lessons, from the temperamental Carlo Scarpa to the coherent Achille Castiglioni detailing, are referenced in his approach to the problem at hand, not in a formal way, but in an intuitive and conceptual manner, implying a subtle and informed perspective also on contemporary art and product design.

In spite of the scale and apparent programmatic simplicity of the present study cases we are not faced with delivery architecture but design architecture, where space and form are the main protagonists, where the delicate detailing and choice of a specific object embodies the intent of an architectural narrative.

In this sense, an observation of modern architecture's contribution to contemporary design discloses two legacy conceptions – the works equivalent in formal plasticity reproduction and those inspired by the progressive social intent and composition notions/themes but free from formal restraints. Together, these two conditions are similar in notion but distinctly different in result; one, places the issue on universality of architecture, the other universality in architecture.

The contemporary shift from an architecture discourse, keen to the modern movement masters, to the current architectural narratives, informed by conceptual and minimal art notions, implies a non-linear design method that explores universal architectural themes interwoven with a sense of place and programmatic intent.

Looking at these *cinque interni*, it is possible to understand that the key design concerns are linked to an intuitive and intellectual process that intends to interpret the physical issues through structured architectural themes i.e. responding to the material through composition.

In this *modus operandi*, it is of the utmost importance the attitude that embodies a sensitive approach identifying the main problem/issues, valuating the architectural qualities and conditions of the specific context, site or structure – interpreting the *conditions of place* – in relation to the client's character and his programmatic needs.

The sense of the intuitive, pragmatic and physical, so clearly portrayed by David Chipperfield's 90's *Theoretical Practice*, are key players in formulating the architectural narrative adequate to the (re)interpretation of existing forms/materials/textures, modulating space towards the client's necessities and ultimately to the composition's spatial needs. With a goal to build atmospheres by understanding the architectural elements, seen through their essence, be it within its meaning, significance or nature.

Clearly the notions in play here confront us not with five houses or apartments but five homes, outlined by an architectural poetics that transcend the pragmatic intake of the assignment and the corresponding budget commission.

Each proposal focuses on a particular set of compositional themes that portray a specific spatial narrative with **House one**, working the penetrability of two adjacent spaces, outlining a sequential relationship between interior and exterior, although both moments are drafted as interior space, which permits the reading of a continuous chessboard that

is organized with a set of architectural/functional objects – a cupboard, a kitchen unit, a step and a multipurpose flowerpot – giving significance and purpose to a fluid open plan setting. **House two** works the notion of boundary, defining the limits, proposing inhabited walls which give meaning and order to the enclosed spaces, while **House three and four** work on the double significance and (re)reading of *shelter/cover*, the roof as a ceiling, be it interior or exterior, continuous or interrupted in its expression. Although both explore their structural and spatial plasticity, the approach is distinctive due to the natural conditions of each site/building with **House three** selecting the cross-section as a way to reinterpret the shapes and textures in a new/old dialogue modulating space with natural light filtered through key zenithal light wells. In **house four** the architectural expression explores the horizontality and fluid openness between reorganizing space, while **House five** works on the universal reading of space and its functional appropriation, with the notion that *architecture comes from the making of a room*, in the Louis Kahn tradition; the symbolic event is associated to the way the rooms are sequenced and how they relate to each other, be the room an interior or exterior space. The catalyst for this spatial reinterpretation and consequent functional shuffle is the singular view over Alberti's radiant Sant'Andrea.

Complementarily, these specific compositional concepts, due to their thematic richness, can be read at other levels with different intakes and interpretations, although the design process will always be guided/regulated through specific architectural options and relations. In this sense, with the non-linear design approach, the architectural concepts can be seen through intellectualized narratives that help clarify the architectural expression and its syntax, guiding, almost like Jacques Tati's cinematographic *play* on the term *Playtime*, each architectural proposition.

House one: *two parallelograms* plays with the number "two", the double notion of two main spaces, inside/lounge and outside/terrace, and the two main volumes/objects that organize the inside and the two main architectural elements that organize the outside. This double intake allows the composition to be set in a sense of repetition – space and forms – although all the elements are different in nature, significance and shape.

House two: *inside perspective* plays with foreground and background notions, almost like a renaissance *teatro scientifico* where the viewpoints are strategically pinned and manipulated, by a compositional/functional boundary, for maximum visual effect, using the line as a conductor of inhabited space.

House three: *in-between catching light* plays upon the tension between elements and their textures, some natural others reinterpreted or invented, but always looking to be showered by sunlight. The subtlety of the composition is well expressed in the natural

stone wall that, although it is painted with the dominant colour, white, appears as a main theme and not as a backdrop like the remaining stucco surfaces.

House four: *below the roof* plays with opposites, the truthfulness of structure (roof/ceiling) and the falseness of partition walls (existing/proposed) as the uninterrupted mediator, with old and new presenting a continuous setting molding a succession of intimate and collective spaces, strategically placed and organized, valued by the textured assemblage of the roof's structural elements.

House five: *view over the city* plays with abstraction as a functional liberator and spatial regulator and qualifier, stripping the architecture down to its simple form, using geometry as a tool to establish subtle relationships between the spaces and their intermediate elements conforming an abstract system that will serve as a backdrop to the chosen designer objects – bought or manufactured – that will inhabit the rooms implying their functional use and clinical relation with the surrounding built landscape.

Thus, an informed analyses/reading of this handful of designs, permits us to perceive different influences or architectural discourses/notions that are part of our cultural heritage. The poetic syntax of space (August Perret) where the diagonals are explored, permitting a visual continuity without losing the identity/character of each particular moment /space or the foreplay of distinctive elements characteristic of neoplastic discourse, so fond to Bruno Zevi's literature. Not the pictorial intake, but the compositional notion of fleeing from the box notion, identifying the identity of each element and establishing their relationship in the conformation of space and form i.e. geometry and abstraction as tools of an architectural poetics.

Evoking Willis Conover's words, referring to *Duke Ellington*, in the presentation of Miles Davis's group, at the Newport Jazz Festival, Newport, Rhode Island, in July 3rd, 1958:

"In the Ellington conception it isn't the instrument that is being played that makes the difference but the man who plays it..."

Clearly Daniele's work embodies the *Duke Ellington conception*: for every project, there is a personal view/insight with a particular tale linked to the needs of the design, programme interpretation, budget and construction issues (regulations and quality craftsmanship) and obviously, a unique relationship with the client. All these design procedures are not only personal to Daniele, they promote an intimate relationship, with the client and builders i.e. all design and construction phases are personally overseen, stretching the budget scope to its limits, sometimes clearly at a personal loss.

The integrity of the project comes in first place, he will say, like J.P. Oud's decision in donating his architectural fee so that the construction of the church in his Kiefhoek

project could be a reality, Daniele prolongs, in time, his artistic and technical/professional relation with the client, site and, above all, with the construction – the real test to all the applied design notions and compositional themes.

His emotional bond to each assignment or project acknowledges a design method where the architect's craft includes the understanding and corresponding control of each component's manufacturing process and assemblage.

Ultimately, during a coffee break or *aperitivo*, we will end up focusing on the artisan's wood or metal skills, that, according to Daniele was not sensitive to the detail or the relationship established between the different components, underlining an intellectual restlessness approach to architectural notions based on a collective attitude and quality technical response.

In synthesis, the emphasis on the conceptual truth of the modern vocabulary and syntax through compositions that accentuate measurement, proportion, rhythm and tension between different elements imply a search for a harmonious and coherent compositional whole through a complex process of thought, informed by Donald Judd's *The simple expression of complex thought*, quoted extensively by John Pawson and so well expressed in Sackler Crossing (2005), an elegant bridge in the Royal Botanic Gardens, in London.

Daniele's *cinque interni* embody this notion of *simple expression*, with the pursuit of an individual creative work possessing a complex inner life refusing to fit into movements or obey the dictates of critical fashions, but always revealing contemporary man in the center of an artistic and social driven professional practice.

The approaches in each one of the five proposals feature the proportions of the human body and the spiritual concerns of man as a fundamental condition on drafting and understanding spatial notions/themes portraying a critical and artistic approach that avoids simplifications and transient options – the expression of an architectural poetics.

The American author, Paul Auster, answering to what had bewildered him, stated, when he was 17, Isaac Babel's stories "*opened a door in my mind, and behind that door I found the room where I wanted to spend the rest of my life.*"

With this architecture, I have continuously the same sentiment...

Helder Casal Ribeiro

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