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Paralles between archive images and photographs in post-World War II Abruzzo architectural heritage

The fate of architecture in the second half of the twentieth century is often that of being absorbed into an anonymous urban fabric, metaphorically becoming the backdrop of daily life for inhabitants to whom only the monument is known. Abruzzo does not escape this fate, accentuated by the frenetic development of postwar reconstruction, which progressively occupied city spaces with high-density buildings.

The Ministry of Culture's initiative to census these architectures marks, the moment of the physical rediscovery of these artifacts and a first step toward the protection of those that have not reached fifty years since they were built.

The research induces the rediscovery not only material of the works, which in the instant of the photographic capture fixes the character of the architecture, its physical semblances trying to capture the intangible dimensions of each of them through the original design expression.

Thus, the analytical, graphic-documentary and photographic operation, in its expressive dimension, marks a parallel through the years with the role of the images that accompanied the design drawings, portraying the building showing itself, emerging from the building fabric and offering itself as a unique element in the urban palimpsest. In the comparison between the original representation, which imagined the urban scene in the making, and the current photographic shot, which contextualizes the built environment in the real context, the volumetric and spatial figurative elements of the projects and the contemporary city can be brought to light.

Keywords:
Census: Second Twentieth Century; Photography; Archives; Perspectivese.

1. BACKGROUND ON RECENT HERITAGE

Recent architectural heritage, in which the historical distance that allows its legal recognition is lacking, is often overlooked, concealed within the ordinary building fabric, which induces one to search for its architectural values, to visually highlight the cultural and social meanings it represents. The considerable building production after World War II has incisively defined the appearance of contemporary cities, generating new urban heritages, widely spread throughout the country.

The first step is that of knowledge, of an analytical reading by images conducted in such a way as to allow the visualization of architectures and infrastructures that constitute important pieces, architectural and cultural, to be reassembled in the overall design of the protection and enhancement of contemporary ni Italy.

In this sense is the research path initiated in 2002 by the General Directorate for "Contemporary Architecture and Art" that is still ongoing with programs of updating and integration.

The architectural picture of the Abruzzo region reported by the survey "census of architecture from 1945 to the present" which is the result of a series of agreements between the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Italian universities is articulated and traces alternating historical periods between local architects and leading figures in national contemporary architecture. The survey launched in 2004 that called for an initial selection of outstanding works was followed by two subsequent updates in 2012 and 2022. A refinement aimed at documenting lesser-known and more fragile architecture because it is more recent and not subject to any protection.

The phase relating to the first selection of works was published in a guide that collects them by province highlighting their locations and specific peculiarities (Palestini, Pozzi 2013). The selection offers 114 buildings presented in concise descriptive sheets that allow for easy consultation facilitated by the assignment of a QR code with information that can be consulted through a smartphone or web platform.

Subsequent reconnaissance is currently included in the "Census of Italian Architecture from 1945 to the Present" site (https://censimentoarchitetturecontemporanee.cultura.gov.it/) created by the General Directorate for Contemporary Creativity. The periodically updated site collects data by integrating them into a search engine that organizes the records through a series of parameters. It is possible to know the location of the work, author, type, dating and bibliographic citations. A special committee screened the selections of the surveyed architectures through an evaluation system that took into consideration not only the critical fortune of the work, but also the historical and "environmental" importance of the artifact and the author, in the local and national context. Specifically for the Abruzzo region, this attention to "environmental" value was the element that constituted the main differentiator in the selection of works, identifying those artifacts that, in a context often of poor urban and architectural quality, stand out from the built fabric and identify a figurative polarity in the urban landscape. Summing up the contributions of the three censuses, three main historical thresholds can be recognized: the first is that of the local "historic" architects, starting in 1945: Luigi Piccinato, the most nationally recognized, signs the stadium and the master plan of Pescara, who is joined by Paride Pozzi and Antonio Cataldi Madonna, whose important production partly shapes the architectural landscape of the city: the former's are mainly villas and churches while the latter's are some mansions but mainly two buildings of collective character: the Palazzo Monti, an office building, and the open-air D'Annunzio theater the outcome of a national competition in '53. There are also some works by non-regional authors, mainly related to sacred architecture, by Giuseppe Zander and Dante Tassotti.

The second period, identified between the '60s and '80s, is that of the "masters" and the birth of the school of architecture in Pescara; from '65 Aldo Rossi, Giorgio Grassi and Antonio Monestiroli bring what will be the Milanese school to Pescara and will form the first generations of architects from Abruzzo and will constitute it as a milieu afferent to the current of the so-called Tendenza, remaining linked to the university pole with the realization of the "Casa dello Studente" by Grassi and Monestiroli and the "Faro" by Rossi in Lanciano. At the same time in built architecture, Roman architects made their way: Portoghesi realized various architectures for education and culture in the L'Aquila area and in the province of Chieti; Quaroni signed one of the main churches in Francavilla, while in Pescara Aymonino won the national competition - later realized with some modifications - for a covered market in the city center, Montuori realized the central "Museum of Modern Art" in '52, Piacentini a church again in the heart of the city in '62 and Francesco Berarducci designed a villa with auditorium facing the Sea. In Teramo Gianfranco Caniggia designs the Palace of Justice.

The third period is the most recent one, characterized by the works of the students of the Pescara school, which once left by the Milanese architects, receives a Roman influence: among the main authors we find Mosè Ricci who works mainly on the coastal side of the province of Chieti, Pepe Barbieri who instead focuses on the university campus of Chieti, and in more recent times Giovanni Vaccarini, who also achieves awards abroad, and Rocco Valentini, who is particularly active in the area. These are also flanked by works by out-of-region authors and international names, such as Guido Canali's Maglificio Gran Sasso or Mario Botta's San Rocco Church, along with other works created for post-earthquake reconstruction in L'Aquila: such as, Shigeru Ban's concert hall, Renzo Piano's auditorium and Antonio Citterio's church.

In this uneven architectural landscape, the "forgotten" architectures awaiting new light are largely those pertaining to the first two identified periods, with the exception of public buildings, which in scale and form stand out more from the more uniform urban housing fabric. This phenom-

enon, in fact, occurs particularly in Pescara where in the post-war reconstruction the original city fabric had been heavily damaged, giving ample space - physical and figurative - to building interventions in the following thirty years; the lack of an architectural background and the overproduction that succeeded in the period of reconstruction and building boom thus led to the constitution of a multifaceted city, where the eyes of the observer, tired of the ubiquitous singularity of buildings, have difficulty distinguishing architecture from the rest.

2. COGNITIVE COMPARISONS BETWEEN CURRENT IMAGE AND ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS.

The process of knowledge is perfected by entering specifically into the graphic-cultural meanings of projects related to the context, urban and environmental, in which they are located. In this sense, the role of images is included: those of the state of affairs, those dating back to the construction phase that lead back to the project design for the understanding of the original idea, the different solutions and the transformations undergone during construction or at later times.

The investigation of these recent architectures requires special attention directed to the knowledge of the compositional process, to the understanding of the logic that led to the definition of the projects in the difficult moment of post-war reconstruction, in which the lack of regulations and speculative criteria defined the appearance of cities.

Research on the original design drawings kept in architectural archives offers interesting keys to interpretation, allows us to make comparisons with the built, to examine possible alternative solutions that have not been completed, making us understand the motivations, cultural climate and choices from which the works derive. Direct analytical reconnaissance interspersed with feedback on archival materials has broadened research perspectives, favoring the identification of those works that have not yet received historiographical recognition, as well as the worthies

Photographic processing of "design perspective of a residential tower on the Paolucci Promenade" by Arch. Cataldi Madonna , photography and digital post-production, 2023, Pescara.

of little-known provincial architects who revealed similar technical abilities to coeval designers with greater visibility in the national arena.

3. The photographic filter for understanding the architecture concealed in the urban fabric

The role of photography in the rediscovery of these architectures gains new light in the relationship with the original drawings and in some ways re-

trace the operation Gabriele Basilico leads in Rome in reproducing the views of Giovanni Battista Piranesi (Gagliardi et. al. 2019). The project, developed by De Lucchi and Basilico on the occasion of the exhibition "The Arts of Piranesi. Architect, engraver, antiquarian, vedutista, designer" in 2010 at the Giorgio Cini Foundation, compares Basilico's shots with Piranesi's engravings. By analyzing these shots, it is possible to draw similarities and differences with respect to a photographic

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campaign aimed at bringing back to the collective consciousness architectures lost in the fabric of construction; while the Piranesian drawing occupies a dimension somewhere between reality and fiction, with scenographic dilations and multifocal perspectives, Basilico's photography is documentary in nature constitutes a "tool for measuring the world" (Fagone, 2007, p.15). While developing a more subjective poetics than his masters Bernd and Hilla Becher, Basilico's "melancholic" (Valtorta, 2019, p.22) representation is not the result of a search for an aesthetic, but is the result of the description of a particular place and moment. The strong chiaroscuro, sharp details, and often frontal views, despite the use of black and white, do not succumb to the romantic aspect of the ruin, but represent the author's search for the structure of the place as a whole and detail, recalling the lesson of Walker Evans.

To define a methodology of photographic representation aimed at restoring the lost individuality of those architectures absorbed by the so-called "urban jam," it is also necessary to evaluate other photographic languages, which present a greater characterization of the subject. Among contemporary architectural photographers in whom an analytical approach is found, two authors emerge who, while maintaining a trait d'union with Basilico in the use of black and white, present a photography oriented toward expressive rather than documentary aspects: the Swiss-French Hélène Binet and the Japanese Hiroshi Sugimoto

Private Archives Antonio Cataldi Madonna, "Project perspective of a residential tower on the Paolucci Promenade," Arch. Cataldi Madonna, Watercolor, 1963, Pescara.

4. PHOTOGRAPHIC LANGUAGES

Hélène Binet emphasized the influence in her training of the experience of French photographer Lucien Hervé, the "photographer of Le Corbusier." it is possible to note the legacy of this master in Binet's work through the important use of chiaroscuro, not only to emphasize sense of depth and spatiality within the photographs, but also as an expressive element through which to achieve a poetic dimension, capturing emotional and atmospheric aspects of architecture, conveying a sense of intimacy and connection between the architec-

ture and the viewer, as if the latter were experiencing it firsthand. Although Binet's shots mainly depict fragments of buildings, these do not lack a unifying spirit that represents like a synecdoche the rest of the work by conveying its character and meaning. As pointed out by Juhani Pallasmaa (2015) Hélène Binet represents the atmosphere of a building: "a feeling or attunement that holds an architectural entity together (...) conveying its sense of uniqueness rather than its individual formal or geometric features" (p.9), denoting a clear artistic intention, even in the case of commissioned shots. In this regard, it is also important to consider the series of photographs of the

Vals Baths for Peter Zumthor, where, through the exceptional use of color, a parallel can be found with Gabriele Basilico's sporadic color production. In the photographs for this Swiss architecture, the chromaticism, although strongly desaturated by the vapors, modulates the rendering of the material of the architecture making the different elements even more a whole, representing an inverse world to his stark, three-dimensional but still dreamy black-and-white photography.

Hiroshi Sugimoto is an author who occupies, in the field of architectural photography, one of the most radical positions for its artistic and evoca-

Comparison of Arch. Cataldi Madonna's "design perspective of a building at 18 Kennedy Ave." and photographic processing, Watercolor, photography and digital postproduction, 1963 and 2023, Pescara.

tive component. His photographic approach stems from the legacy of the current of pictorialism-with exponents also in Japan such as Nojima Yasuzo-in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which was inspired by the pioneers of photography, such as Nicéphore Niépce and William Henry Fox Talbot whose personal collection Sugimoto owns. This artistic current used technical expedients to bring the photographic medium back to the softness of the image of early photographs, thus countering the technological advancement that rapidly innovated the quality of the images produced, rediscovering a more artisanal and subjective dimension: a medium that was not "transparent," as opposed to the Neue Sachlichkeit or "new objectivity" current, which instead embraced the new objective capabilities of documentary photography.

Sugimoto's blurring, a technique he calls "double infinity," exploits the focusing mode of large-format cameras, which are equipped with rails on which the lens and bellows slide with different focus distances marked, the last of which is at infinity; Sugimoto moves the lens to a point half the distance between the infinity focus mark and the film, hence the technique's name "double infinity." This elaborate technique is present only in the Architectures series (1997) and serves a specific intention, in reaction to the distinct modernist photography, such as that of Erza Stoller with which his New York photographs are usually compared (Reynolds, 2019, p. 66-69).

Sugimoto's shots do not propose an objective documentation of buildings, nor are they an expression of an aesthetic or subjective interpretation of them, but the author describes them as a synthesis of the "general idea," of the sum total of previous representations of buildings: a photograph that does not portray the building but its "canon." The out-of-focus, then, may appear as a ploy to mask the poor condition in which most of the subjects in the Architectures series were in, as Sugimoto describes in Rikyu Modern (2008, p.130), but it is in this "vagueness" that the author recognizes the fading away of the distractions of the details

and current condition of the building, leaving his concept to appear more forcefully: starting from a state marked by time, the photographic intent becomes to test the architectures by "dissolving" (Brougher, 2010, p. 181) their form, in order to distill and bring to light the designer's idea, which if valid survives the blurring operation (Ford 2005).

By comparing these three approaches we can see how the character of the photograph changes from time to time for each author: while for Basilico it is possible to speak of an abstract observer's point of view and thus of an objective - but poetic - representation from which to re-observe in the first person, in Binet's photographs one is transported into the portrayed space as if one were present at the moment of the shot, and finally with Sugimoto to find the loss of a true point of view through the "focus at twice an infinite distance," in favor of the representation of the ideal dimension of the

subject. It is clear that if the intent was simply to represent architecture, beyond the philological operation of capturing the perspectives drawn by their authors, a rigorous, stark, clean photograph would undoubtedly fulfill the testimonial needs as required by the census; but if the role of photography is to "make heritage" instead of representing it then it must be the medium for bringing architectures into the imaginations of observers, rather than into their sight.

5. CONCLUDING READINGS

In order to make a parallel of graphic-visual memories, a few works were chosen as examples in which to compare the size of the original perspective drawing with revealing photographic shots.
The move toward visualizing architecture through a medium that is easy for a wider audience to as-

Antonio Cataldi Madonna Private Archive - Project perspective of a building in Piazza I Maggio in Pescara, Watercolor, 1964, Pescara.

Photographic processing of a building in Piazza I Maggio, Giovanni Rasetti, Photography and digital postproduction, 2023, Pescara.

similate represents a visual way to reconstruct the lost image of places, no longer enclosed by mute backgrounds, but by expressive forms. The lesson borrowed from the reading of the three photographers is to adopt a complex approach that connects the viewer with the object, its atmosphere and the idea of which it is an expression. The juxtaposition of the contemporary shots with representations that preceded the construction, perspectives and archival drawings, refer to the uniqueness of these architectures that never aspired to become monuments.
In this regard, a few works by architect Antonio Cataldi Madonna in Pescara were taken as samples: the tower building on the Paolucci Riverfront and a residential building.
Cataldi Madonna's watercolor perspectives depict the building in an imagined city in the making, marking the difference between a figurative essentiality of perspective and the real datum por-

trayed decades after construction.

To bring the shot closer to the drawing in its ideal identity, the two experiences of photographers Irene Kung and Gabriele Croppi are emblematic. Kung, in the series "The Invisible City" (2012) portrays monuments and buildings isolated from their context in an artificial black blanket, which fades to a silvery light, illuminating only portions of the facades, which nevertheless, have enough strength to be synecdoche of the whole work; Croppi, on the other hand, in his "Metaphysics of the Urban Landscape" series, through the use of artificial shadows - which specify, superimpose or mimic silouettes of offstage buildings, citing the work of De Chirico - erases the superfluous, highlighting the buildings in an abstract but not entirely mute context.

From these references, a mixed technique was adopted, taking advantage of sharp shadows on the context and a gradual illumination toward the building that is the subject of the composition, so as to bring it back into a condition of abstraction, but without distracting it from the forms that surround it.

The tower building on the Paolucci Riverfront the so-called "skyscraper" consists of two building bodies, the main one rising from a horizontal plate to a height of 40 meters and an accessory volume facing a perpendicular street. The design of the elevations is the same, emphasizing the structural system that projects onto the side facades, while the front facades are dominated by a system of the parapets and loggias. The basement has undergone a major transformation, coming to diverge both materially and formally from the rest of the composition: the elevation that combined the horizontality of the balconies and repurposed the plaster and masonry paint finishes has been replaced with a system of metal panels and openings of varying size and geometry. The photograph that was produced emphasizes the horizontal elements of the tower's main façade, putting the basement elements that betray the original design in the background through less brightness.

The building on Kennedy Avenue , has as distinguishing features a gusset roof for the penthouse floor terrace and vertical brise-soleils on the main façade, complemented by the marked horizontality of the masonry parapets, which nevertheless indentify exceptions in meeting the vertical score of the openings, where the opaque plaster gives way to a glossy clinker surface. Compared to the author's perspective, there are now major trees and the commercial basement is crowded with superfetations and advertising elements that break the rhythm still present in the masonry fanlights. The photograph takes advantage of the strong presence of the naturalistic elements of the boulevard to emphasize the building's elevation through a play of light and shadow.

The experimentation through the language of photography aspires to show the architectures with a different perception, accentuating their characters, proposing greater visibility with an introspective look that gives a virtual monumentality of the works.

Photography alone is no longer sufficient to elevate the subject beyond the distracted view, due to the contemporary misuse of this medium; on the contrary, the development of a poetics in portraying even these minor works is crucial to the formation of an awareness and imagery of the built heritage.

NOTE: We attribute paragraphs 1 and 2 to Caterina Palestini, 3 and 4 to Giovanni Rasetti who also processed the photographic images. The concluding readings are derived from a synthesis between the authors.
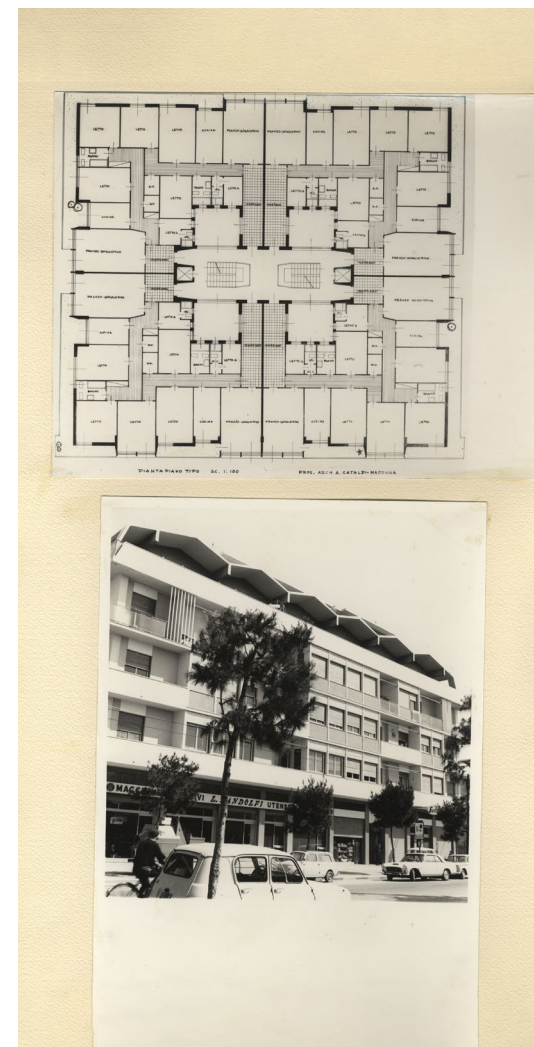
Antonio Cataldi Madonna private archive, "building on Viale Kennedy No. 18 in Pescara" Planimetry of the model floor and period photograph, 1963, Pescara.

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