

Writing of the History: Ernesto Rogers between Estrangement and Familiarity of Architectural History

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Abstract

Ernesto Rogers was the key figure of the post-war Italian architecture. Architect, educator, writer, editor, he was a man of a great erudition and talent. As with many intellectuals of the post - Second World War Italy, he theorized history and used somewhat eclectically sources to promote his idea of *continuity* as a temporal model in architecture. His theory came on one hand out of particular Italian pre-war intellectual tradition but was also based on a wide spectrum of resources such as Enzo Paci, Henry Bergson, John Dewey and Henri Focillon, among others. It found its way into writing a story of architecture in some of the work of his office, namely project for Torre Velasca in Milano that we will use as case study in this paper. Following his idea of “sensing the history” he created buildings and pieces that are in constant state of flux between what one might feel is familiar, a “true” representation of the history and, on the other hand, estrangement that comes with desire to physically embody history in the field of pre-existing environments (i.e. cities or natural environments) that was never really present. The result was the uneasiness that comes with the question of representation of history in the physical form that oscillates between history as we imagine it and history as a source of future imagination.

Keywords: Ernesto Rogers, Continuity, History, Tradition, Torre Velasca

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Introduction

In the period immediately after WWII, Italy was a country of political confusion, economic desperation, blurred borders of national identity and a site of artificially induced “self-absolving collective memory.” Building activities reflected land speculation, backed up by traditional building techniques and the need to reduce an enormous unemployment rate. Italy lacked a comprehensive urban planning policy which had multiple consequences for the development of its cities in the 1960s. A plan for Milan sketched out in 1945 as a comprehensive regional plan by Franco Albini, Pietro Bottoni, Ignazio Gardella, Ernesto Rogers, Ludovico Belgiojoso and Ezio Cerutti, did not go through. After the Christian Democratic Party (DC), strongly supported by the United States, won the election in 1948, it offered a national housing plan that gave only partial solutions to the current urban problems. In 1949 INA casa (*Istituto Nazionale Abitazioni*) came into being initiated by DC minister Amintore Fanfani which gave again, partial solutions to the problems of the cities.

An encounter with history and the question of how to write it, build it, or build within it, was for Italian architects a question of re-engaging modernism, rather than a project of unproblematic progression from previous times. Instead of linear time form that modernism generated and a perpetual production of the new, phenomenon connected to ahistorical approach to architectural production, Italian architects cultivated more complex understanding of historical time in the context of architectural heritage. The political and social context of the time was also complex. The ‘temporal’ posed the theoretical issue of the relationship between tradition and the present moment and also occurred as an issue of building practice. These issues conflated explosively when the architect was building within and around the historic city. In this reexamining of architectural and urban policies there was not always interest in novelty per se, and while many other art disciplines developed an avant-garde approach, Italian architectural production of the 60s was considered to belong to ‘incomplete’ avant-garde or rearguard.

Ernesto Rogers was an internationally renowned Italian architect. He taught in Great Britain, United States and South America and was one of the best known Italian CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) members. As with many intellectuals of the post - Second World War Italy, Rogers theorized history and used sources somewhat eclectically to promote his idea of *continuity* as a temporal model in architecture. Following his ideas of continuity, “sensing the history,” pre-existing environments and mediation, he created buildings and pieces that are in state of flux between what one might feel is familiar, a “true” representation of the history and, on the other hand, estrangement that comes with desire to physically embody history in the field of pre-existing environments (i.e. cities or natural environments) that was never really present. The result was the uneasiness that comes with the question of representation of history in the physical form that oscillates between history as we imagine it and history as source of future imagination.

Ernesto Rogers and the Notion of Continuity

Continuità as cultural charge was propagated through Rogers's editorial politics in journal *Casabella*, one of the most influential and widely read media that both supported modern architecture in the struggle against formalism and the continuation of Italian rationalism in the post-war period. As a model of time, *continuità* encompassed several of Rogers's concerns, from the notions of tradition and memory, invention and experience, to individualism and cultural unity. It marked the continuation of the pre-war experience and *Casabella* of Giuseppe Pagano and Eduardo Persico. Through their editorial politics these two authors attacked academism imbued with right wing philosophy pervading architectural education of the period. At the same time, *continuità* was a methodology, tool and a "complex ideology progressively theorized by Rogers."¹ It signified, in Rogers's words, "historical consciousness." As a methodology it supported his theory of the pre-existing environments. As an ideology the concept of *continuità* fostered fusion of modernist tendencies, history and tradition.²

The concept of *continuità* emerged from Rogers's understanding of tradition as a broad cultural activity to which the subject had direct access through art. Rogers and Enzo Paci attacked modernist ideology reflected in functionalism as well as Crocean idealism by offering phenomenological reading of history. They intended to bring artistic expression down from the world of ideal into the world of culture, presented as a unity of the social, technical and historical.³ This unified world, liberated from intellectual mediation, cognitive a-priori, and freed for immediate experience of the subject, is what Rogers called tradition.

At the beginning of his article "L'architettura e il mondo della vita" published in *Casabella* 217 Paci (1957), summarized key issues of two opposite tendencies that, in his view, needed to be superseded: Crocean detachment from the realities of the world, and the tendency to prioritize function and deny the artistic qualities of architecture. Paci goes on to problematize Marxist philosophy for its claims that artistic form is conditioned by economic structure:

"It is true that every human activity is conditioned. But what conditions it is not solely economic structure but complex set of factors, between which, in the case of architecture, reenter the nature of materials, utilitarian functions, geographic and environmental situation, ways and means of communication, psychological character of a given population, historical traditions and so on."⁴

¹ In several occasions Luca Molinari emphasized the significance of the concept in the period as well as diverse meanings it took over time. See "Giancarlo De Carlo and the postwar modernist Italian architectural culture: role, originality and networking" at http://www.team10online.org/research/studies_and_papers.html.

² Work of the Modern masters was presented on the pages of *Casabella* in the second half of the 1950's as steps in the evolution of architectural modernity. *Continuità* as a temporal model is based on the evolutionary process, the cumulative power of more or less gradual change. Rogers often used term evolution to describe development of urban forms.

³ Rogers's writings often show his desire to see once again the world in terms of what Lukacs called an 'integrated civilization'. Integrated civilization is pre-modern: it reflects society in which there is unity between the subject and the world. For instance, Rogers ascribes short life of *Style Nouveau* to the non-unified society where the relationship between the content and representation is broken. See Ernesto N. Rogers, Cesare de Seta, *Gli elementi del fenomeno architettonico*, p.70.

⁴ Enzo Paci, "L'architettura e il mondo della vita," *Casabella Continuita*, no 217. (1957)

Paci was born in 1911, studied under Antonio Banfi, the most prominent scholar of Husserel in the 30's in Italy and continued his phenomenological thought. Paci's thought is a specific merge of phenomenological and Marxist thinking. As George Psathas

Both Rogers and Paci believed that architecture is a way of exposing ‘life-world’ as a pre-meditative, mutually shared ever-changing cultural ‘horizon.’ The changes in the life-world are temporal phenomena, which is why Rogers considered the past significant for understanding human existence and the existence of architecture as one of necessary human practices. “It is while questioning the past (but not by becoming the past) that I understand the present and the interest of the present for its own transformation.” (Paci, 1972). Paci furthermore deployed Husserl’s ‘suspension of judgment’ and ‘seeing things the way they are,’ as immediately accessible for perception. New ‘style,’ according to Paci, could only be born of new encounters with the life-world, through lived experience unburdened by prejudices. The architect, who is able to uncover certain aspects of the life-world through his/her work, can find in it a society that is not “theorized or ideologized or structured beforehand according to the perspectives of a given sociology... but make[s] alive and real social relationship of his country, with its needs and miseries, with its illusions and hard sense of reality, of the limits and conditions of life.”⁵ This heightened awareness of the world is what the architect can bring forth if only (s)he herself can “see the things the way they are.” It is the collapse of an ordered relationship between human subjects and the world—authentic living that goes beyond purely rational and involves bodily engagement—that Paci and Rogers wanted to see in new architecture.⁶

Ernesto Rogers, T.S. Eliot and Bergson

In a February 1954 editorial, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Rogers borrows the title of T. S. Eliot’s well-known essay advancing the theory of artistic depersonalization. Rogers (Rogers, 1997) described how Eliot “invites artists and critiques to broaden the terms of historic sense while warning them against inborn deformations, which alter the quality of the judgment.” It is the capacity to critically approach one’s own and other cultures that is the prerequisite for a true artist. In this context tradition is the field in which artist continually erases himself and his progress is a “continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality” which enables mediating or channeling experiences outside his/her own sphere. In this vein, tradition, as Eliot (1982) claims, cannot be inherited:

“...if you want it you must obtain it by great labor. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense

explained : “Once the life-world is interpreted as incorporating the level of basic needs and of material production, phenomenology and Marxism are destined to converge.” p. 318. The central problem for Paci is the role of the subject in the world and the transformation it went through world’s ‘scientification.’ “The center of the whole problem is, and remains, the return to subjectivity. We have alienation when social relations do not allow this return.” ...”Phenomenology wants to return his (man’s) ‘subjectivity’ to man. It wants to return man to himself, freeing him from every fetishism, from the mask behind which humanity has been hidden or veiled.” p. 6.

“I, if I know myself, know myself in the world and in relationship to the others and that is to plurality and in plurality.”

⁵ Paci, “L’architettura e il mondo della vita”

⁶ It is precisely this request for authenticity and abstraction of historical contextualization of the subject that will be attacked by Theodor Adorno. According to Adorno, thinking that it is possible to grasp something substantial behind the thought generates ideology of a “universal humanity” that blurs distinctions between the subject and historical conditions to which it belongs. In Adorno’s opinion, “jargon” of authentic existence does not liberate subject from alienation but masks circumstances under which it operates. See Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*.

involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order... This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer more acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.”

This understanding of historical sense is what marks Rogers’s understanding of historical time: at once continuous time and the atemporal content of history shape themselves in the form of tradition. Instead of the causal chain of events, Rogers thought of history as the layering of events, layers that for him were equally visible in anonymous architecture as well as in Palladio.

How are temporal phenomena manifested in physical form in Rogers? Through invention, of which memory is an agent.⁷ It is memory that (Rogers, 1960) “confers on space the measure of time, of all the time which comes before us.” Following Bergson’s (Bergson, 1911) discussion of two kinds of memory, Rogers claims that memory has two functions in design, related to contemplation and activity respectively: “one that moves from us towards things” and one that moves “from things to us and beyond us.”⁸ In Bergson the former uses “centrifugal movements” and constitutes bodily memory registered in the body itself, while the second suggests “centripetal movements,” marked in representations within the external world. The first implies action formed by a habit, while the second requires recollection. In both cases the human body is the medium that communicates between the external world and its perception.⁹ While Bergson’s understanding of memory remained a discussion of individual memory, Rogers never clearly marked how this individual memory becomes collective; it is clear, however, in his writings that the artist/author is the one “who knows” the collective.

The work of art also employs Bergson’s contemplative memory, which moves “from things to us” and generates representations of the world as it is within. In order for the work of art/architecture to fulfill this role—as Rogers believes alongside Paci—it must balance the relationship between utility and beauty.¹⁰ The definition of form, moreover, was to Rogers (Rogers, 1960) one of the central problems of misuse of history in architecture:

⁷ However, Rogers claims, memory is just one of the elements necessary for the art to address the issues of larger cultural framework.

⁸ Rogers does not cite directly Bergson in this editorial but he confirms reading of his work in “Economia e armonia” where he discusses the role of tactile vision.

⁹ Bergson’s dual memory conflicts with Paci’s notion of continuity as life-world. First implies notion of directionality, from subject towards world and from the world towards subject that does not seem to be present in Paci.

¹⁰ By removing element of stability/firmness from Vitruvian triad structural concerns are avoided. This went hand in hand with Paci’s disinterest in technological aspect of the work of architecture. Rogers on the other hand was familiar with new technologies and interested in the possibilities of prefabrication and its role in the reconstruction. The issue was discussed on the pages of *Casabella*. However, Rogers in discussion with Roberto Pane claimed that in the symmetry beauty – utility *firmistas* is included as practical concern in utility. Rogers rarely showed enthusiasm for the technology which some of the modernists advocated.

“it is clear that the measure of these terms [utility and beauty] is different from case to case and that, therefore, their internal relations are in each case different. But it is just this identity of method, which consists in drawing form out of the reality intrinsic to each case that, in penetrating each case, reveals it for what it is and finds a different expression from one to another.”

The “case by case” method was a doctrine that enabled Rogers to criticize the perceived universalization of architectural language on one hand and the use of typology of Saverio Muratori’s kind on the other.¹¹ Method itself was Rogers’s tool to enact ideology; to address the classical ideal of *concordia discors*, a strategy of mutual dependency of architectural works, urban environment and man made landscape/nature, and finally, repetitiveness of typological approach. It was in his mind also the most powerful tool against formalism (Rogers, 1960).¹²

“Thus, the most profound discovery of the Modern Movement, i.e. the inclusion of methodological research in the process of form, transformed the very essence of traditional theory and practice which, however variable and rich, was based on a belief in few principles subject to the play of variations.”¹³

Paradoxically, in Rogers’s discourse, method generates specific autonomy of architectural work (Ockman, 1993): “[p]recisely because the method of approaching is the same, it follows that the solution to every problem is different.” Thus the solution to what Rogers sees as formalism and lack of historical awareness lies in keeping and balancing the distinction between *particular* generated by the method and *universal* created by typology. In Rogers’s view method requires careful recognition of the “concreteness” of a pre-existing environment, while typology abstracts its complexity. The duality between method and typological approach maintained in Rogers recurs as a problem in Torre Velasca, one of the most disputed and difficult projects BBPR built following the theory of pre-existing environments.

Rogers introduced the theory of pre-existing conditions in the editorial “*Le preesistenza ambientali e i temi pratici contemporanei*” in *Casabella Continuità* (February 1955). The text summarizes much of his thinking on the relationship between a building, urban environment and man made and natural landscape. *L’ambiente*, or context as it came to be translated in English, is the place of pre-existences, of the “prime plasmatic matter” as

¹¹ Michelangelo Sabatino explains that Rogers’ “case by case” method was an interpretation of “method without a method” advocated by his professor at the *Politecnico di Milano* Ambrogio Annoni. See , p.76.

Saverio Muratori (1910-1973) was an Italian architect, historian and educator known for the development of operative history based on typological research. Muratori’s methodology was rigid and conservative and soon became known as a generator of anachronistic and mute architecture mostly foreign to architects who considered themselves followers of modern tradition. After students’ protest in 1968 Muratori was removed from the architectural scene and his activities shifted from teaching and designing to writing.

¹² “The style, as a unification of figurative expressions, is each time specified through facts and there can be no mechanical repetition nor analogical (imitative) transference, where its formal constitution is already defined somewhere else. To empty forms from their defining content would be completely external operation which would precipitate into *formalism*.” p.99.

For Rogers, in order for formalism to be avoided, new building needs to be a result of a specific process/method that addresses dialectically relationship between the past and the present.

¹³ Rogers in several occasions acknowledged influence of Walter Gropius on his thinking as well as his disagreement on the treatment of history.

Rogers defined history.¹⁴ “It is clear then,” he further explains in *The Image: the Architects Inalienable Vision*, “that building cannot be isolated from the environment which surrounds it; and this does not merely include the landscape [paesaggio] that which visually embraces the place where the building is erected; but also that unity of images born of the most diverse associations, all of which are legitimate by reason of the serrated logic of sensation.”¹⁵ In a relational universe, where objects constantly create and recreate mutual connections, new buildings must enter “organically into the given spatial-temporal situation” where each form is specific to its own set of circumstances. This means that architecture is “profoundly connected to environmental conditions,” which are determined both by socio-economic and cultural factors. For Rogers, language, nature and architecture are products of the long history of transformations. Evolution of forms is the result of a long period of adaptation and selection.¹⁶ Evolution is culturally constituted but also has its natural determinants. However, when building is set in relationship with the context, “the copying of the traditional forms will obviously be impossible, but so will the design of an architecture only abstractly satisfying our taste and the conditions of contemporary technology[.]” Furthermore, forms must “convincingly document the subtlest ethical claims of collective and individual man, continuing the ancient discourse.”¹⁷

In his discussions of architectural continuity and evolution, Rogers had in mind both spatial and temporal consistency, notwithstanding radical shifts that mechanisms of change might bring in certain epochs or certain places. One must understand history and time as underlying the overall structure of human existence to understand why for Rogers it is not possible to eschew living in history (Rogers, 1999):

“Whether history evolves according to a continuation of customs, content, form or whether history is characterized by a fracture that causes an emergency, in any case, as I was suggesting, there is a relationship in time between the present time and the period that preceded it.”

Continuity, then, is not marked by the rate or nature of change, gradualness, or finding similarities between epochs but is a ubiquitous principle. It simply implies dynamic historic process, where every stage of development relates to the previous one.¹⁸ Continuity thus needs to be distinguished from chronological, or linear time, segmented in measurable units that succeed one another. Continuity, channeled through the theory of

¹⁴ In *Gli elementi del fenomeno architettonico* Rogers defines history as a “patrimonio disponibile: ridiventa materia prima plasmabile, secondo la volontà e l’interpretazione di cui siamo capaci.” , p. 32. Interestingly enough, Marc Bloch , founder of the Annales School of history claimed that “history’s time is the plasma in which phenomena are immersed and the locus of their intelligibility.”

¹⁵In p. 246. Rogers contributed to this book together with Jean Arp, Naum Gabo, S. Giedion, Walter Gropius, Fernand Leger, Richard J. Neutra, Norbert Wiener and others.

¹⁶ Rogers was familiar with Henri Focillon’s work and his theory of pre-existing conditions echoes Focillon’s theory of the evolution of form.

¹⁷ Republished in *Esperienza dell’architettura*, ed. Luca Molinari, (Milan, Skira, 2004), pp. 279-286. Translated and republished in Joan Ockman, *Architecture Culture 1943-1968*, pp. 200-204.

¹⁸ This understanding of continuity resembles the notion of continuism in science. Continuism assumes that “any event of today was directly preceded by some event which must have taken place yesterday. However, the event of today is not necessarily an ‘advance’ over the event of yesterday, but it is only a ‘reaction’ to it, and the reaction may be a positive or negative one. That is, the event of today may concur with yesterday’s event and carry it forward, or it may disagree with it, and oppose it with something different.” See “Continuity and discontinuity in nature and knowledge”, Dictionary of the history of ideas, <http://etext.virginia.edu/cgi-local/DHI/dhi.cgi?id=dv1-62>

pre-existing conditions, molds two concepts of time in one: while it implies diachronic¹⁹ processes of adjustment in the evolutionary development, working with pre-existing conditions understood as a historical pre-requisite that requires a horizontal cut through the grain of time.²⁰

Torre Velasca and Time Collapse

At 1959 CIAM conference in Otterlo, Ludovico Belgiojoso, Enrico Peressutti and Ernesto Rogers (BBPR) exhibited the project of Torre Velasca, several years long exploration into methodologies of skyscraper design within historic urban environments. [Fig.1,2]²¹ For an architectural practice that came out of the Italian rationalist tradition, Torre Velasca was not only different among other BBPR works but proved problematic for many CIAM participants.²² Rogers' (and BBPR's) interpretation of history as an overarching principle and tradition understood as 'life-world', once implemented in the urban context, was seen as static and anachronistic. In a heated conference debate, Peter Smithson commented that the building belongs to an anachronistic "closed aesthetic" and wielded a "plastic vocabulary" of an "immoral" and dangerous sort (Newman, 1961): "[n]ow I suggest that you, in a way, created a model here which has included certain consequences which, if you had been aware of your position in the society and your position in the development of things, you would have seen are dangerous." Jacob B. Bakema thought that building's silhouette looked as it could have been there for fifty years, and its form failed to communicate contemporary life.²³ In his answer to Smithson's charge of immorality, Rogers insisted on structural integrity of the building: "[t]o me the intimate morality of an architecture is the clarity and sincerity of the structure and the awareness of the use of the many things required in the putting up a building – that is the morality of the object."²⁴

¹⁹ In *Course in General Linguistics* Ferdinand de Saussure distinguishes between two branches of linguistics: "synchronic linguistics will be concerned with logical and psychological connections between coexisting items constituting a system, as perceived by the same collective consciousness. Diachronic linguistics on the other hand will be concerned with connections between sequences of items not perceived by the same collective consciousness, which replace one another without themselves constituting a system." See p. 98.

Diachronic time is related to the notion of diachronic history which is represented by a vertical axis. Diachronic history follows the process, it is evolutionary by nature, it registers changes and how certain event comes into being. Synchronic history implies structural approach and focuses on a system in place at a fixed point in time.

²⁰ In few instances Rogers mentioned cyclical time in the context of modern architecture. He was familiar with Vichian *corsi e ricorsi* from student's days and described in one of his texts historic change in terms of culture exhausting itself and creating a new one. This concept of historic time is not elaborated in his writings but it does, however, contribute to the overall understanding of historical time which is not based on the notion of progress.

²¹ In 1959 CIAM [Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne] members gathered for the eleventh time. Forty architects participated in the congress held in Otterlo in the Musée Krölller – Muller, building originally designed by Henry van der Velde. Rogers was in the coordination team together with Bakema, Roth, Voelcker and Wogenscky. Presentations reflected irreconcilable approaches towards direction of architectural thinking and the conference marked the end of the CIAM. Peter Smithson, Alison Smithson and Jacob Bacema harshly responded to BBPR's project. See

Giancarlo de Carlo, Ignazio Gardella and Vico Magistretti also exhibited their work at the conference. The projects raised a polemic between the members. Jacob B. Bacema for example, claimed that Rogers is resisting contemporary life. Projects by Vittorio Gregotti, Aldo Rossi, Guido Canella, Aimaro Isola and Roberti Gabetti were presented on the pages of Casabella which came to be known as Neo-Liberty.

²² There are other projects in this period that exhibit BBPR's interest in building with the theory of pre-existing conditions in mind. One of those is mixed use building in corso Francia in Torino. Most of them, however, do not exhibit historical elements in the manner Torre Velasca does.

²³ Bakema's statement points towards lack of understanding of specificity of Italian situation and the building constraints in Milan in this period.

²⁴ "There is one main difficulty that I see," Rogers replied to Smithson's argument that BBPR's project is both aesthetically and ethically wrong, "and that is that you think in English. Now that is not my way of thinking."



Figure 1,2: Torre Velsaca (authors's images)

At the conference Rogers claimed that (Newman, 1961) “the general shape of the building is the result of a very rational design approach,” where “in design of any building there are three things to be considered: how the building meets the ground, how it meets the sky and the variation of the body (how it goes around the corner).” Rogers thought that the three part division of façade in Torre Velasca was satisfactory, without reference to non-differentiated vertical (metaphorically infinite) compositional structure which is the usual typological determinant for a skyscraper. At the same time, Rogers claimed, the horizontal division of the high-rise enabled contact with human dimension. He emphasized the way in which the building was an “articulation of the structure,” which comports with Paci’s idea that architecture has particular power of articulating relationship between function and construction as a part of larger agenda of art to demonstrate social life. Apart from the “structural coherence” that allows for the construction to have an aesthetic role, Rogers claimed that the significance of the project also consists in the collection of images it evokes without direct reference to any particular Milan building. “The value of this design,” Rogers explained, (Rogers & Molinari, 1997) “lies in its intent to epitomize, culturally speaking – while avoiding repetition of the expressive language used in any of its buildings – the atmosphere of the city of Milan, its ineffable yet perceptible character.”

Conclusion

Rogers’s theory of *preesistenza ambientale* and desire for cultural unity generated methodology which combined diachronic and synchronic notions of time. In other words, it created conflict between event and structure, or process and system. In Torre Velasca historical continuity is dismantled by making a horizontal cut through the grain of time which meant simultaneous occurrence of architectural elements that belonged to separate time periods of the historical development of Milan. While these elements (color of concrete, shape of the windows, shape of the tower etc.) did refer to the cumulative

It is difficult to assess whether the argument between Rogers and Smithsons is, as Rogers pointed out, purely a consequence of cultural differences. However, Rogers’s insistence on the structural integrity and methodological consistency and unwillingness to accept the fact that these two parameters create particular aesthetics in case of Torre Velasca is highly problematic. Contrary to what Rogers advocated, immediate access to culture and its history proved itself not universal enough that it could be perceived by all.

process of the evolution of the city, the fact that they were combined at one place in one/present moment could not but freeze the historical process. This created an aesthetics, (something Rogers and his office claimed little interest in), that provoked experience of estrangement and familiarity simultaneously. Tacit dualism in the architecture of Torre Velasca drew from the notion of continuity, yet also the “collapse of time” seen in the contextual approach. The contextual framework that Rogers and BBPR posed as a starting point was a complex historic environment, and a resource for the work of art that imaginatively addressed whole of the history of Milan. The synchronization of the past embedded in the image of the building, however, clearly seemed to many a consequence of eclectic approach to history. This ‘approach’ which many named also stylistic, had to do with what George Kubler called the “spatialization of time” characteristic of stylistic representations of history (Kubler, 1967).²⁵

Torre Velasca can be seen both as a skyscraper and a scaled up fragment of a historic city; it is prefabricated system with expressive structural components and heaviness that resembles Perret’s work. One can say, however, that history in this building operates as the mechanism of memory: it is fragmented and somewhat remote. This brings us to the question of whether cultural unity was ever broken or its nature was transformed. If there is any reason why this work cannot be named historicist, proto-post-modern or any other lexical interpretation of the reaction to modern it is because it still belongs to the period of crisis of history. The attempt at timelessness of the building, manifested through the set of historical references belonging to different time periods and consequently different cultural expressions, brings us back to the question of the familiar and estranged. In this “time confusion,” Rogers found a source of cultural richness and the capacity for dismantling the dualism between the Nietzschean interior and exterior. Architecture’s task of mediating the aesthetic and ethic, or what Smithson called “morality,” proved difficult (Tafuri, 1989): “this was an architecture that reflected on everything – the past, the city, and the possible dialogue between intellectuals and the masses – less then on itself.”

²⁵ In Kubler’s terms: “The idea of style is best adapted to static situations, in cross-cut or synchronous section... Thus style and the flow of happening are antinomies. Style pertains to a timeless sphere...”

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