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THE RESISTANCE OF ARCHITECTURE  
EDITORIAL



# IN ARCHITECTURE WE TRUST

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Architecture is the concrete result of human activities, that it both interprets and expresses

Gio Ponti  
*In praise of Architecture, 1957*

Order and Measure have always been the principles among which the project of architecture swings. The first, Order, entrusts the design process to a strategy that identifies the form as able to provide rulings for the space and sense to architecture.

The second, Measure, entrusts the same design process to a strategy that identifies the places as able to provide evidences and operative directions to the construction of architecture.

Both principles, today, gather issues and topics that have always been there, but gained relevance in the contemporary condition in which the project requires more participation, the value of common good strives for more relevance, and taking care of the places is an essential attitude.

Current conditions can still be traced back to these two principles: architecture, the project and its construction are able to provide an interpretation for the balanced processes of construction that govern the scale and the size of architecture itself.

The theme is to question and investigate architecture as "permanence" of a definite idea that connects to the complex modifications of the urban and natural environment. It is to discuss about architecture that does not innovate at any cost, but extends something that is already in place, thus preserving those visible transformation of the city and the landscape that have already taken place. This idea of "RESISTANCE" is an unequivocal stance towards history that enables architecture to support life in its development and create a privileged relationship with time. It is a process of knowledge triggered by the project of architecture that becomes a collective construction. It defines the boundaries and the invariants within which to define the modification strategies for a stratified context.

The construction of the knowledge finds its rulings and its scale right in the project: it is a dialogue built on stories and places in an age where the same places belong more and more to our lives and permeate our daily relationships. It fosters a research that becomes strategic to create relationships that stand as a precondition for a culture of construction that is a culture of common good as well. The issue, today, is that of an aware approach made of actions and choices as positive elements in a participatory process. To construct means first and foremost to understand the identity, acquire the memory and recognize the reasons of change and of transformation, through cultural and social values that imply a level of care that generates connections.

This set of actions means to implement the meaning of history that E.N. Rogers in "Gli elementi del fenomeno architettonico" defines "*notion of continuity*"<sup>1</sup>.

This definition pushes for a point of view with social and collective grounds rooted in a broad process of debate, that gives order to the differences without defining a "before" and an "after" or a prevalence of the disciplinary reasons alone. It is the idea of a resistant architecture that tries to preserve the life forms and the community relations that ensures respect and persistence, does not innovate at any cost but on the contrary extends something that is already in place. In this sense, architecture is something that lasts over time, it is endurance, it is the very idea of permanence. It also needs to resist not only on the physical level, but also as a concept, and that is something else. The Resistance of an idea is longer than the physical one.

The concept of time in architecture bears different meanings: one is its resistance as a material object that resists its life; the other is that architecture is bound to life, not only as function. Architecture is a definite point of view, it takes a stand because it is not indifferent to life.

Nevertheless, architecture needs to overcome changes in its use and function, as the large buildings from the past: they established a peculiar relationship with time, as they became able to support life itself in all its changes.

It requires a strategy that seeks novelty but in continuity with the existing environment, which has built the city and the landscape over time. A strategy that is a persistent reference for new architectures that continuously experiment the correspondence between the layout and the programme. In this sense, the project is the collection of the reflection and variations from a common process, which represent the system of knowledge in the architectural field.

This process of knowledge is a collective and cumulative construction that, by means of an exploration of the places, defines the boundaries and the invariants within which to trace the modification strategies for such a structured context. This research's common theme is to design a work of architecture able to interact with the city, its territory and the more general adopted strategy. Architecture is therefore, in this perspective, built through a necessary realism: it mediates between the given, pre-designed solution by Order and the solution that comes from the relationship with the city, the one by Measure.

This approach fosters a progressive improvement of the relationship between discipline and the real world, in which languages, ideologies, tradition and history are diluted by a critical use that, starting from the experimentation, makes the process, aims, issues, and the themes recognizable objective.

This practice is guided, in any case, by a fundamental disciplinary rigor that leads the definition of the programmes, as a condition in which to find concrete solutions to concrete problems. Knowledge and theories persist as critical categories in a flow of thought where architecture hardly legitimates individual contributions but, on the contrary, with its concrete actions, gives way to those characters that belong to a collective proposal. It generates a deep critical reflection on the design process and its value in our discipline, a way of approaching reality, of participating, of being aware of the collective action as raw material for the project. A project must take record of the social changes, the needs, the sense of things, implementing its action into a work of architecture that has deep roots in society. The project will have a different impact on people's lives, being once again real cultural and social value, in a measured relationship between architecture and regeneration of the city, between public and private. In this framework, the RESISTANCE of architecture binds to the sense of constructing that belongs somehow between Order and Measure, where spatial models, dimensional adequacy and the fundamental characters and principles of architecture itself are rediscovered. Built and Resistant works of architecture that do not focus on the mere appearance but, on the contrary, represent the conscious practice of an idea that becomes strategy, implementing profound cultural and disciplinary connections. What E.N. Rogers said in 1962 appears still extremely relevant: "*it is necessary that in the totality of the elements of architecture (the architect) he / she knows the society itself and incorporates it in the creative process*"<sup>2</sup>. This reflection confirms, in the end, the fundamental role, in a design process, of the knowledge of reality. An analysis based exclusively on the man and the place is also necessary, guiding the project definition from a critical comparison among its instruments of knowledge and proposal. An action that is limited to the discipline must make us aware of its limits, but at the same time it pushes

architecture towards a broadening of the ethics of the “*building within the built environment*” approach, in which it is the bearer of public good.

The project of architecture carries out its task with a strategic system of relations that starts from a concrete order. It finds its location and its meaning, and it determines the change. It comes from a process able to face complex matters in a simplified way, as it has always been also in very different situations.

Aldo Rossi, in his “*The Architecture of the City*”, cites Giuseppe Samonà “*in truth we find ourselves, as at all times, in a situation that, from a general point of view, presents man and his space in a well-balanced proportion, and in a relationship analogous to that of the ancients, except that in today's relationship all the spatial measures are greater than were the more fixed ones of fifty years ago.*”<sup>3</sup>

In this sense, the process of constructing architecture is preordained to the modification of the place, also as an articulated expression of a programme, and defines the relationship between that specific place and the use of its own history and the materials that it is made of. A “*stratified construction*” that requires the composition and location of the things to do to be assigned a meaning, as a contemporary Vitruvian *utilitas*. The definition here is although a little broader than the basic needs, the requirements or the conveniences of any other building programme. This broader meaning has to cover for a critical attention to the aspects that are not merely private, nor anyway limited, of the operation that is required from time to time. It is also a particular care, an attention to the consequences that the construction of the programme will have on a broader area, which happens to be the real field of complex modifications.

Architecture is a construction that measures and sets up a strategy by specifying the very idea of collocation as the main meaning of the constructed works.

The need of a layer able to guide and recognize the transformations appears fundamental in this reasoning: “[...] *architectural composition is the act of putting together, to make a whole, all those terms that belong to this manifestation, where the practical, the aesthetic, the moral and the political world must come together. I do not know a better definition than that of Leon Battista Alberti that I do not get tired of repeating: "Him I call an Architect, who, by sure and wonderful Art and Method, is able, both with Thought and Invention, to devise, and, with Execution, to compleat all those Works, which, by means of the Movement of great Weights, and the Conjunction and Amassment of Bodies, can, with the greatest Beauty, be adapted to the Uses of Mankind: And to be able to do this, he must have a thorough Insight into the noblest and most curious Sciences.*”<sup>4</sup>

So E.N. Rogers said in his lecture at the Polytechnic school of Milan in 1963. It represents the meaning of “*project*”, the idea of projection, of a built place that has its own characters.

With regard to this “*built place*” it is necessary to restore the due respect and consideration for the content, for that character of resistance, essential condition for the keeping and enrichment of the vital value of architecture. An expertise that allows us to “*gather meanings in a place*” and which makes us, even today, “*trust in architecture*”.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Rogers E.N. (1962), *Gli elementi del fenomeno architettonico*, Laterza: Bari, pag 62

<sup>2</sup> Rogers E.N. (1962), *Appunti sul fenomeno architettonico. II in “Casabella-Continuità”, n.266 agosto.*

<sup>3</sup> Samonà G., From the debate of urbanistic components and intervention tools (cited in: VV.AA. *La città territorio. Un esperimento didattico sul centro direzionale di Centocelle in Roma*, Leonardo da Vinci Editrice, Bari 1964)

<sup>4</sup> Rogers E.N. (1963), from the lecture at the Politecnico of Milan, 4 April (cited in: Montuori M. (ed.), *Lezioni di progettazione, 10 maestri dell'architettura Italiana*, Electa, Milano 1988).





**THE RESISTANCE OF ARCHITECTURE**  
**PRINCIPLES OF ORDER**



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# CONSTRUCTION RECONSTRUCTION RESISTANCE [OPPOSED TO RESILIENCE]

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## ABSTRACT

For centuries, new buildings have been built on the ruins and foundations of previous works. Is building not far from re-building? The presence of the past is project forming. Architecture is about carrying forward what has preceded us, providing a more advanced version of how we found it. We are not interested in embalming the past. We prefer to recognize its ability to accept the transformation without denying it. As personal experience I bring to edA the reconstruction of the Dom Römer quarter in Frankfurt. The case history is dedicated to the second reconstruction of the site, destroyed by bombs and by the first afterwar reconstruction. M34 is a passive house featured for high sustainable performances (as the old/new quarter all around - project with Anna Worzewski, Ilaria Corrocher, Valentina Fantin, Serena Acciai - Monumental Pergola also with PAS Jourdan & Müller + Steinhauser).

*Keywords:* Resilience/resistance, construction/reconstruction, Dom Römer old/new quarter, cultural heritage, passive house

Resilience - it's cool now - is a global topical word which stereotypically is currently applied also to architecture. Resilience - properly - is rather related to materials, sometimes it could be even a quality that a social context or a person may have. It is, for example, a person's ability or an attitude to deal with critical problems without weakening (for instance, ethnic resilience, which is often witnessed as a central feature of most immigrant groups, is intended as the mixture between awareness of racial and cultural differences, and the social solidarity that originates from such awareness). We do not wish to reject the common and widespread interpretation of the word's meaning, at least not among ourselves architects engaged in continuing or preserving cultural heritage, places, pre-existing landscapes or reconstructed cities. But, in light of the above, we prefer to talk about RESISTANCE, as EdA review is asking us.

RESISTANCE intended as the property of places and landscapes not to water down their identity in a misunderstood globalization. As personal experience, the built one I mean, I bring here the reconstruction of part of the city center in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. The case history is dedicated to the second reconstruction of the Dom Römer quarter, at the foot of the cathedral. As architects, we are what we are doing; and I do know that this work is quite far from the fashionable, global, glamorous, unsustainable and a bit ridiculous star system characterizing the architects' market. Sorry, I was born in Italy, a country that sometimes no longer exists.

In Frankfurt the right bank of the River Main lies downtown near the hill where the Cathedral rises. An outpost of Roman origin placed to protect the ford on the river. The most extraordinary Gothic quarters once standing all around the cathedral recall the experience of the European city. Goethe describes it in his *Faust: the tumult forced the bourgeois houses into the center of the metropolis, before the wide avenues and streets, here you have the narrow streets, the pointed gables, and a tight market of houses on all sides, and cabbage and onions and then the meat counters*. The city is built by types: two parallel walls distant the maximum of a timber beam, some passages that aren't even roads for wagons. This is the settlement's principle, this is picture, these are the urban rules fixed in the plans until WWII.

The Dom-Römer was shaven to the ground in 1944.

The fire after the bombing destroyed the wooden houses but left the stone basements. Immediately after the war, the remains and the rubble were catalogued and placed in a museum, as well as being sold by weight to private collectors. Now the City of Frankfurt has regained the old stones from collectors, finding many of the red weak sandstone house remains and some pieces of the basements in black hard. During the post-war period the area was cleaned up and the quarter was poorly reconstructed in the late Fifties with a large underground car park and public buildings. Now, after a long debate, in the recent years the Municipality, who has the property of the lots, courageously decided to demolish again the post war buildings and organized an architectural competition, promoted by Dom Römer GmbH, a company of public development.

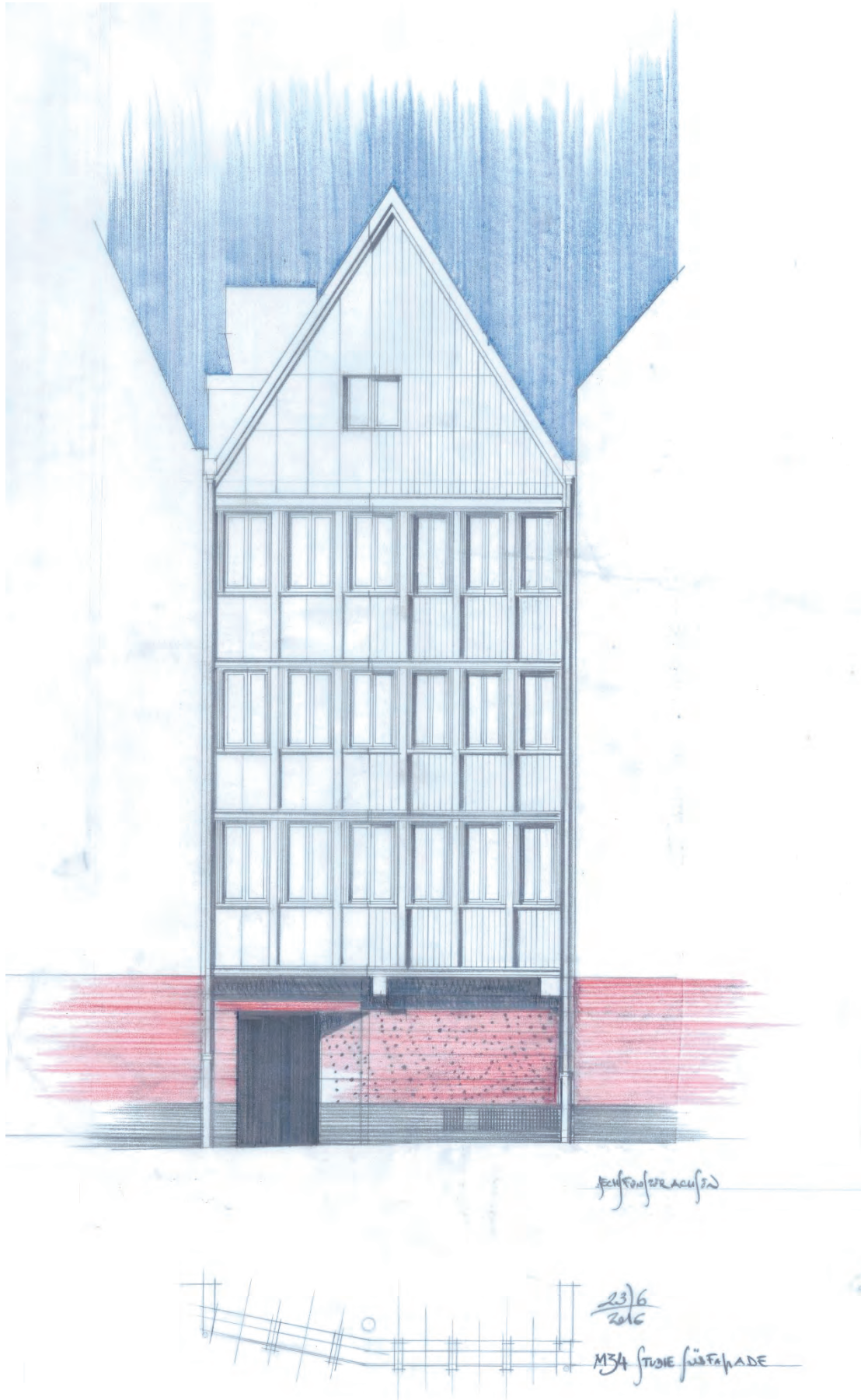


Fig.1. Haus M34, Drawing, by Francesco Valerio Collotti, Frankfurt, Germany



Fig.2. Frankfurt (Germany). Francesco Collotti, Haus M34 (in the middle of the picture marked by white plaster). Photo credits: Dom Römer GMBH



Fig.3. Frankfurt (Germany). Francesco Collotti, Haus M34, "belvederchen" /small terrace on the roof. Photo credits: Dom Römer GMBH



Fig.4. Frankfurt (Germany). Francesco Collotti, the red sandstone monumental Pergola and Haus M34 (in the background, wooden buttercup yellow facade). Photo credits: Dom Römer GMBH

The old quarter is being resurged due to a meticulous job done by the Municipality on the plans of the old registers and on the ancient surveys of the facades. Some houses were rebuilt as they once were, where they once were. Some other houses have been composed, or recomposed, by a constant comparison with the old, but without sacrificing the new (among other architects Hans Kollhoff, Tillmann Wagner, Morger + Dettli, Berndt Albers, Jordi & Keller, Dreibund Architekten, and Francesco Collotti who is reporting the experience here).

Building here is re-building without making a copy but seeking out the old measure and the proportion of the Gothic town while looking for a new possibility of warm life between these walls. Just a few hundred meters from the European Central Bank tower.

Building here is re-building, giving to experience of the city a slower time.

Here makes sense talking about the resistance of the architecture, anyway contrasting the memory loss so often affecting Europe now (and not only Europe, indeed). The quarter is crossed by the ancient route where the royal crowing procession was performed, in direction of the cathedral. A small altitude gap, not far from a high step, still marking the topography in front of the Schirn Exhibition Centre, the civic hall for contemporary art. For this place, the old Krönungsweg, we propose a monumental pergola in full stone blocks, properly reinforced and tensioned, cut in the red veined sandstone from the Main valley and rooted to the ground by black basaltic lava blocks. The ancient route once lost has been rediscovered, not by reconstructing the old facades, but recomposing the sequence as a backstage. Attempting to return its lost identity (both the projects, house M34 and pergola, with Anna Worzewski, Valentina Fantin, Ilaria Corrocher, Serena Acciai, the pergola also with PAS Jourdan & Müller + Steinhäuser). The measurements, proportions and details of the pergola stem from our basic survey of the nearby cathedral. The ancient existing stone being the project construction material.

The challenge with the past is direct, obliged, site-specific based. For centuries, new buildings have been built on the ruins and foundations of previous works, using these materials in various ways. Sometimes for so called *spoliatio*, re-deploying trabeations and tombstones in the foundations of Byzantine or medieval walls. The ancient stones are used as building material or as ready made platforms.

All around the Mediterranean here is the experience of Naples, Arles, Nîmes, Milan, Ravenna, Split, Zadar, Thessalonica, Byzance/Constantinople/Istanbul, Amman, Aleppo, Alessandria. We're interested in the deployment of these fragments or of these buildings as construction material for the architectural project. Sometimes the reusing of old roman stones is considered or as ideological punishment against the Romans (as in Pisa) or as legitimization for new power using the fame of the Roman Empire (as in Venice). A typical example is the inclusion in new walls of upside-down-set roman stone inscriptions. Admiring them, and - at the same time - reusing them in a submitted way. Changing the sign but exploiting the authority and the power of the monuments.

Is building not far from re-building? Buildings such as the Orsini Palace by architect Baldassarre Peruzzi, built in Rome on the Theater of Marcellus, or the Cathedral of Syracuse, in Sicily, where the church was built in the cell of the previous Doric temple, all these examples demonstrate the use of a building concept not far from rebuilding. These examples are an invitation to calmly consider the trauma or the events that over the centuries have altered the buildings.

Contaminated, processed, amplified, measured and reconstructed or re-used in a second life, the classical and late classical ruins are the material on which the landscape and the town is built in the following centuries.

Anyway as architect, or as historian or as art critic who I am not, I suggest to consider that the presence of the past is project forming. Architecture is about carrying forward what has preceded us, providing a more advanced version of how we found it.

We usually work as architects, by hypothesising, by showing similarities, sometimes by associations or even by placing - by choice - side by side other far away buildings. Linking them to each other - comparing them - is an attitude capable of producing meaning. Did the *giving-shape-to-the-memory* replace the classical architectural language?

In architecture, indeed, fast advances and antique gestures go hand in hand, the continuity is a condition, not a choice. We are not interested in embalming the past. We prefer to recognise its ability to accept the transformation without denying it.

What is the relationship between old and new, which continuity, at what distance?

These questions would be able to go beyond the absolute gap between restoration and *anything-goes-project*, in which the contemporary architectural debate seems to be confused.

On one side there are the supporters of total embalming implemented by mere restoration, and on the other we meet the prophets of that untidy and irresponsible design.

Is it still possible to think of a second life for old buildings?

How to use the old buildings or how to use the past to build new ones?

And where is the border between conservation and embalming?

In every project there is a necessary process of accumulation that our work from time to time composes and decomposes.

Our attitude to re-read the urban phenomena and sort through the project is maybe forced to survive in fragments. For fragments of plans, of architecture, of ideas, lives the contemporary city (Aldo Rossi). For fragments we can still evoke tasks often forgotten for this job, obliging us to continue to build-up the city and landscape, relocating it with memory projection, as transfigured it may be.