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Re-inventing public spaces, a lesson by Mario Botta and Vittorio Gregotti

On Thursday June 2nd at the Teatro Sociale two internationally well-known archistars discussed about how re-invent public space, matching creativity with urban as well as market rules. Mario Botta, with more than fifty years of work experience, proposes an architecture - “Le Corbousier-inspired” - featured by strong, pure and simple geometrical shapes, a sort of architectonic pragmatism in which bricks and stones rule, as the MART Museum in the closest town of Rovereto. Vittorio Gregotti - a veteran too in architecture with project realised in more than twenty country during his three quarter of a century long career - moved from a “new liberty” style to the so-called “Italian rationalism” one. Both Botta or Gregotti are confident that architecture could affect economic performance of urban places.

Vittorio Gregotti does not like to be considered an archistar. On the contrary he is very critical and disapproving this trend of “architects going on television” in his words. “Metropolis or cosmopolis nowadays seem not to be the suitable place for a positive and alternative growth – sentences Gregotti – since the relationship between architect and end users has been broken”. Two are the reason of such a phenomenon in Gregotti opinion: the invasive role of real estate majors and the archistars “commercial exposure”. Anyway, one of the main failure of contemporary architecture is related to the unfair condition of suburbs both in developed countries or – worse – in emerging economies. “Suburbs is an ideology to be demolished - admonishes Gregotti -, suburbs should become part of the metropolis, not living outside of it”. Finally, a last thrust on archistars: “they seem to play a praise of reality- closes Gregotti – an illustrative service to the establishment”.

Mario Botta vision on architecture is not so pessimistic as Gregotti’s one. In Botta opinion, though negative effects of globalisation, architecture can still find in itself useful resources to stay alive. Quoting his mentor and spiritual guide Le Corbusier “to be it means to occupy the space”, Botta explains that architecture is a primordial activity while urban spaces are the best social organization ever, a necessary condition for human being. “Today more than 50% of total world population lives in urban context – outlines Botta – and cities are basically a collective construction shaped and modelled by history”. Architecture cannot contrast immigration or climate change but it can afford the civil dimension of the urban project. Yet, mentioning Siegfried Kracauer (a Jewish-German architect turned an American sociologist during the ‘40s) and Louis Isadore Khan (a Jewish-American architect, Kracauer contemporary) Botta closes: “territories have their memories, nevertheless it is not through nostalgia that architect should find a solution in order to combine social with spatial dimension. The best way to respect the past is to be authentically modern”.

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