

## Un-iconic

*Paolo Barucchieri*

I believe the 20th century marks a period of extraordinary scientific discoveries that have ignited transformations in all areas of human endeavor. These advances, and what Toynbee describes as “the welfare of the whole human race as a practical objective” were, unfortunately, in contrast with the intense speculation and competition that characterized the economic drive of the 20th century. I agree with the concept of the ‘collaborator’. Today it is imperative to establish and develop a sense of cohesive application of these discoveries. The utopian vision of the Architect, with the desire to stand on an ideal pedestal, is no longer a comprehensible manner to co-exist with the environment and a society that needs more and more to re-acquire a sense of collective identity. In other words, society and its built environment need to find again the common tissue that would enable the creation of a sense of belonging rather than a state of anonymity.

The concept of the iconic Architect comes from classical and humanistic philosophies. Man becomes the subjective interpreter of reality; constructing a model that symbolically wants to solve the dichotomy between himself and the universe (Bernardo Rossellino’s project in Pienza, for example). The man-centered worldview that is humanism shaped our western culture into what it is.

In opposition to this, by changing the parameters of individuality and the models of knowledge and aesthetics, the Architect tends to acquire that anonymity typical of a Master Builder

of the Middle Ages. When we explore these two concepts, we see that the project of Rossellino is possible only when there is a fixed body of knowledge that can be defined (Icon) and used as the only ideal point of reference. On the other side, in our contemporary culture, the model is no longer identifiable and sustainable



(examples: Relativity and Cubism). The disappearance of a fixed ideal makes it impossible to identify and define the promoter of that ‘a priori’ concept of form.

The Middle Ages shifts this role; man is an extension rather than an interpreter. Consider the typical

medieval town: the medieval builders, on one side, come with a great pragmatic preparation and experience; on the other side, a powerful faith and concept of ‘essere’.

The changing paradigm not only impacts architecture, but all professions. This will require a broader vision that can address specific

knowledge, specific expertise, and values toward a new collective way, thereby opening a channel towards a new concept of collaboration.

The phenomenon of the single expert or Icon, that has dominated the architectural world, will become less significant as we recognize the larger

process, bound to the complexity of a global habitat and its sustainability. We are now still enthralled to the culture of the Super Building and the Super Architect both as celebrities. We worship the culture of the hero and the iconic, which very often is in disharmony with the surrounding environment. Carlo Scarpa is a recent example of one who rejected the idea of the Architect as innovator and authority. Instead he considered the Architect to be a master of assemblage and proposal, bringing components of construction together in a collective manner. Academically, we can say that contemporary architecture has served the Architect; it is now the moment where the Architect will again serve architecture.

The benefits of collaborative architecture will be a system enriched by the event of co-participation of parts (religious, economic, social, scientific, etc.) to attain a more integrated whole. The city, like the human body, thrives when it functions as an organic system rather than isolated parts. This collaborative response to the events impacting future habitats will provide techniques capable of addressing, in a more effective way, the level of quality of the human habitat. While the development of technical skills, knowledge, and the profound desire for dialectic inquiry will always be important for the Architect/ Collaborator, the methodology will change - totally modifying the traditional definition of the manner through which the architect acts. Approaching architecture as a system of collaboration will require interfacing

with the other components of the group in a new alchemic manner where the final result will be more than the sum of all specific parts.

The professional world will gradually adapt to collaborative attitudes; many studios already approach projects in the context of team work. The technological advances, social changes, and emerging economies will more directly impact the world. The general public, professions, and practitioners will be imposed upon, thus creating the need for a new, spontaneous, collaboration. We should look at the model of the medieval guild or loggia, where there is a common desire to take architecture to the edge of its material expression and to free the energy contained in the heart of architecture. The new office should be more like a 'luogo' where more comprehensive disciplines are unified and the results evolve from the group as a body.

It is different in academia. Students, by nature, are curious and open to challenges and will adapt well to shifting methods. However, being sensitive to the demands of the institutions (academic environments), they will need a strong will to overcome the requirements established by the academic system. I believe that students today feel that something profound is changing. The academic points of reference that were, can no longer be sustained in the face of changes completely different from what we have experienced up until now; any fixed model of objectives quickly becomes vague and inadequate amidst the flux of our infantile new

world order.

Take, for example, the Megacities and ask the question, "What kind of iconic building can you add to a city that will improve its urban environment?" I believe that, as we design today, we completely neglect what is the container of our designs and propositions. We need teams of experts; we need technicians that work together for collective results that are capable of reconnecting the

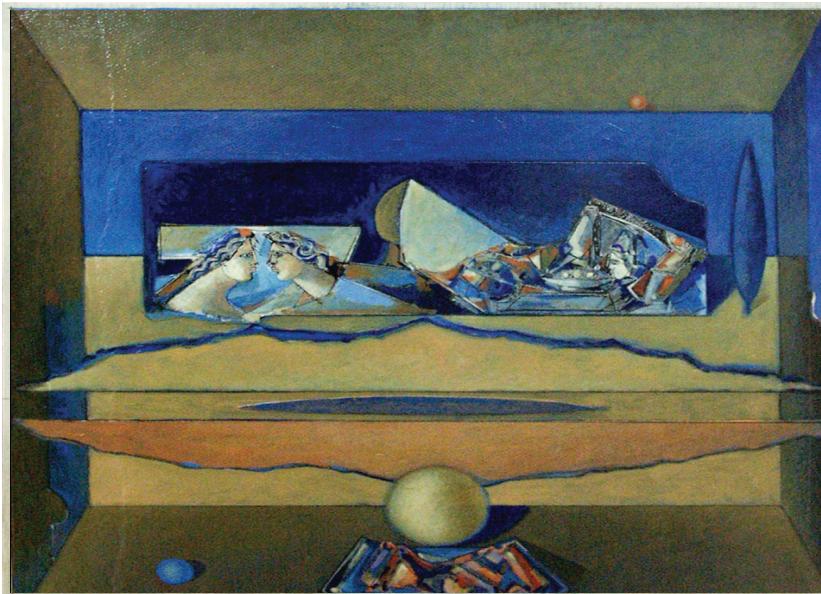
eliminating the model threatens their very framework. Our departure from the 20th century brought a new vision that questions the way we teach, what we teach, what we build, and most importantly, how we use the planet. I believe a more universal vision will replace the old models. Some might call it a 21st century primitivism.

Mankind's place must be an extension of a new consciousness. This does not mean that skills and

new balance. What has been excluded from the classroom/studio is attention to economy, theology, sociology, etc., as a larger context to the individual architectural event.

The institutions will not easily embrace this new understanding of the architectural event. The academy is still bound to the adoration of the Icon and the preservation of its status quo. The institutions will, as they have always done, resist change, therefore rejecting the collaborative attitude. Recognizing this change would threaten the perceived status that dominates the institutions, where accountability and set academic expectations based on past generations are used to control the process of change and innovation.

While it is true that not having a historic preparation is a handicap and limits our way of looking, students must open their minds to the world around them. They must ask themselves, "what is changing?" and "what must change?". Students should be asking questions of people in other disciplines, not putting their whole focus on imitating the icons. While we can appreciate their efforts within the context of their time, we have to move forward and have the courage to embrace a broader vision of collective actions. Thus, by fully knowing where we have been, and where we are, we can more-easily consider where we need to go. It is vital that we as Architects, especially students, question our place and direction. In moving towards a new collaborative world order, we must be adventurous in our thinking- we must be Medieval.



building with the tissue of a habitat. The romantic vision of the Super Architect christening another Super Building is not sustainable and is out-of-touch with historic reality.

Educational institutions, by their situation as interpreters of the educational dimension, cannot recognize true paradigm shifts. The institutions provide the model and must teach that model, and so

learning tools will not be taught, nor will schools cease to provide a structure for encounters with knowledge-based experience; however, the substance will change. If we understand history, not the knowledge of facts, but the true knowledge of how these facts are put into context, then we can perceive the complexity of global events and the important shifts that will be necessary to make civilization find a