

# FIRENZE architettura

2.2009



## la maschera



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Anno XIII n.2

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In copertina:  
Igor Mitoraj  
Scenografia per l'Aida  
foto Carmelo Provenzani

# FIRENZE architettura

2.2009

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editoriale	Alcune note su "la Maschera" <i>Luciano Semerani</i>	2
percorsi	L'illusione del mito <i>Alessandro Cossu</i>	4
progetti e architetture	Paolo Zermani Dentro la maschera <i>E-mail tra Andrea Volpe e Susan Yelavich</i>	12
	Maria Grazia Eccheli, Riccardo Campagnola - Michele Caja, Silvia Malcovati La maschera di pietra. Sulla ri-costruzione del Castello di Berlino <i>Silvia Malcovati</i>	20
	Igor Mitoraj - Fabrizio Arrigoni Velature <i>Fabrizio Arrigoni</i>	26
la maschera	Herzog & de Meuron Tre mosse: il CaixaForum a Madrid <i>Michelangelo Pivetta</i>	32
opera prima	Gabriele Bartocci La soglia come assenza <i>Gabriele Bartocci</i>	42
riflessi	Perché la maschera <i>Cinzia Bigliosi Franck</i>	48
	Appunti di viaggio <i>foto Massimo Battista</i>	50
	La maschera e l'idea <i>Andrea Tagliapietra</i>	52
	Buchi, pori, ferite. La pelle delle cose <i>Patrizia Magli</i>	62
	Camouflage e effetto nebbia <i>Antonio Costa</i>	72
	Giochi di corpi e di vestiti Il motivo del camouflage nel Macbeth di Shakespeare <i>Paola Colaiacono</i>	76
	Metamorfosi della maschera <i>Paola Arnaldi</i>	82
	Maschera, letteralmente <i>Giuseppe Montesano</i>	86
	Le maschere della mente Itinerari obliqui e rotte di contaminazione <i>Chiara Matteini</i>	88
eredità del passato	La "maschera" come astrazione nell'opera di Giuseppe Terragni <i>Alberto Pireddu</i>	92
	La maschera sincera: la facciata della Nuova Italia <i>Francesca Mugnai</i>	102
eventi	Geografia del silenzio <i>Fabio Capanni</i> Pino Castagna ... <i>in pietra alpestra e dura</i>	108 112
letture a cura di:	<i>Paolo Di Nardo, Matteo Menotto, Luigi Pavan, Stefania Suma, Andrea Donelli, Carlotta Torricelli, Sara Riboldi, Eleonora Mantese, Francesco Collotti</i>	114
english text		118

# Maria Grazia Eccheli, Riccardo Campagnola Michele Caja, Silvia Malcovati

## La maschera di pietra Sulla ri-costruzione del Castello di Berlino

Silvia Malcovati

"Il XIX secolo ha rivestito con maschere storicizzanti ogni nuova creazione (...). Si creavano nuove possibilità di costruzione, ma se ne aveva in qualche modo paura, le si comprimeva senza posa in scenari di pietra".

Sono parole di S. Giedion, riprese da W. Benjamin, che descrivono criticamente un preciso momento della storia, l'architettura dell'800 e la sua "inclinazione, lo sguardo rivolto all'indietro, a lasciarsi permeare dal passato".<sup>1</sup> Una critica che definisce il complesso rapporto tra storia, memoria e progetto, e costituisce uno dei fondamenti della costruzione del linguaggio moderno dell'architettura, ma che sembra oggi spesso consapevolmente rimossa, nella volontà di ri-costruire anziché de-costruire quella stessa "maschera storicizzante", come un elemento imprescindibile di un progetto contemporaneo che si misura con il passato.

Da questo punto di vista il Castello di Berlino rappresenta un caso molto particolare, e per certi versi esemplare: distrutto dall'ideologia più che dalla guerra, sostituito da un altro oggetto ideologico a sua volta demolito, il *Palast der Republik*, è oggi rimpianto come un elemento decisivo e insostituibile della forma urbana, al punto da voler essere ricostruito, almeno nel suo aspetto esteriore, "com'era e dov'era". Una scelta "storicista", che conferma, indirettamente, una sostanziale diffidenza nei confronti dell'architettura contemporanea, un dubbio radicato sulla sua adeguatezza a costruire un luogo centrale della città carico di storia e di memoria come lo *Schloßareal*. Dopo alcuni tentativi falliti e una infinità di perizie e pareri, il bando di concorso

esecutivo per la "*Wiedererrichtung des Berliner Schlosses*" (letteralmente "Ricostruzione del castello di Berlino") sceglie deliberatamente la "maschera di pietra" come soluzione unica possibile, imponendo la riproposizione della facciata barocca su tre dei quattro fronti esterni e sui tre fronti interni del cortile seicentesco di Schlüter.

Il progetto contemporaneo deve quindi assumere necessariamente questa maschera come tema di architettura, come un dato di fatto, come se si trattasse di conservare una preesistenza, anche se in realtà si tratta invece di ricostruire la forma e la facciata di un edificio scomparso, dato che dell'antico castello non è rimasta che qualche traccia di fondamenta e un ridisegno affatto scientifico. La questione deve essere stata evidente anche agli organizzatori, che hanno tenuto a precisare il titolo con l'aggiunta di "*Bau des Humboldt-Forums im Schlossareal Berlin*" ("Costruzione dell'Humboldt-Forum sull'area del castello di Berlino"): progetto di ricostruzione del castello e insieme di costruzione dell'Humboldt-Forum. Una precisazione che, lungi dal fare chiarezza sugli obiettivi architettonici del concorso, ne rende quanto mai dubbia la natura: oltre a costringere l'architettura nuova dietro l'obbligo di una maschera, definisce per l'edificio una destinazione d'uso multiforme e imprecisata, ne mette in discussione la struttura tipologica e il carattere: un castello o un foro? Un foro o un museo? Un edificio antico, all'apparenza, che contiene una destinazione contemporanea, globale, come un centro museale multiculturale.

Da questo punto di vista occorre anche



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Wiedererrichtung des Berliner Schlosses  
Bau des Humboldt  
Forums im Schlossareal  
Berlin

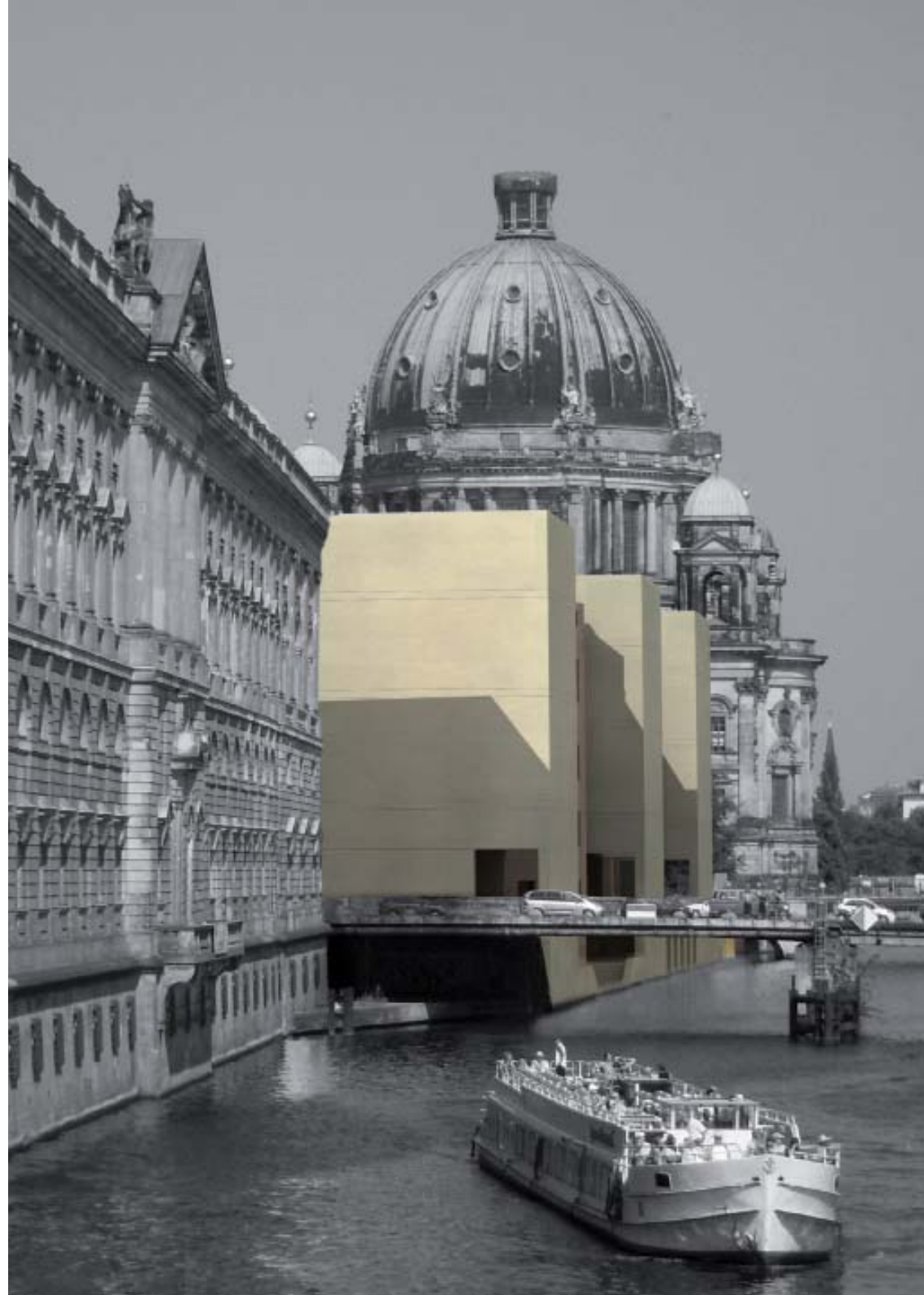
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Politecnica



considerare la natura estremamente composita, stratificata del Castello di Berlino, che ne rende difficile, per non dire impossibile, una classificazione di carattere tipologico o una schematizzazione in termini astratti. Come ha scritto Giorgio Grassi, "il Berliner Schloß rappresenta solo se stesso. E questo dal punto di vista della sua architettura lo rende irripetibile, praticamente ma anche teoricamente irripetibile".<sup>2</sup> Questo accentua il carattere scenografico e teatrale della ricostruzione di queste facciate, che richiama alla mente l'attualità di Schinkel, quando diceva che la menzogna è consentita in architettura solo nella misura in cui ne sia lo scopo stesso, e questo accade solo nel teatro.<sup>3</sup>

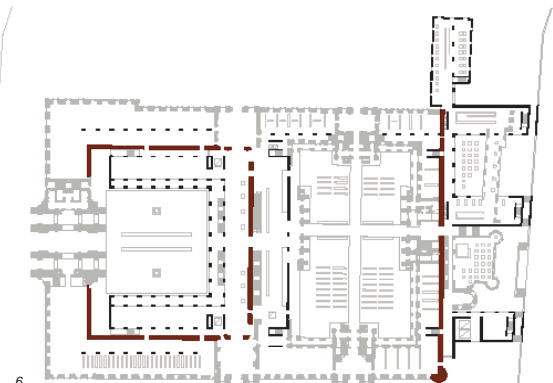
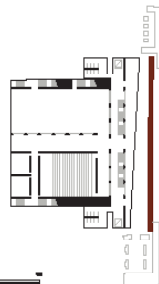
<sup>1</sup> La citazione di Giedion, tratta da *Bauen in Frankreich*, pagg. 1-2, è ripresa da Benjamin nel *Passagenwerk*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982; ed. italiana Walter Benjamin, *Opera completa*, vol. IX, *I passages di Parigi*. A cura di R. Tiedemann e E. Ganni, Torino: Einaudi, 2000, p. 455.  
<sup>2</sup> G. Grassi, "Reconstruction in Architecture", in *Display*, n. 03, 2009, p. 237.  
<sup>3</sup> K.F. Schinkel, in G. Pescken, *Das architektonische Lehrbuch*. München-Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1979, p. 20



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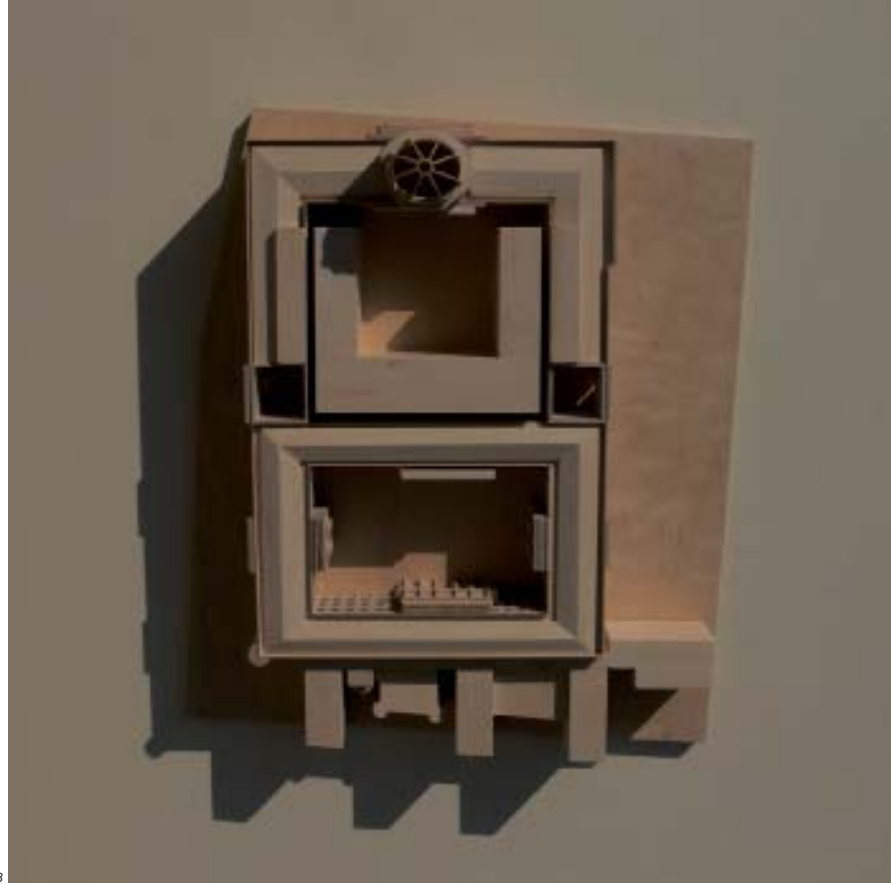
- Pagine precedenti:  
 1  
 L'Isola dei Musei, planivolumetrico  
 2  
 Vista sulla Sprea  
 3  
 Galleria degli antichi  
 4  
 Pianta piano -2 a quota -9 m.  
 5  
 Pianta piano -1 a quota -4,5 m.  
 6  
 Pianta piano terra a quota città

- Pagine successive:  
 5 - 6  
 Viste del modello  
 7  
 Sezione longitudinale

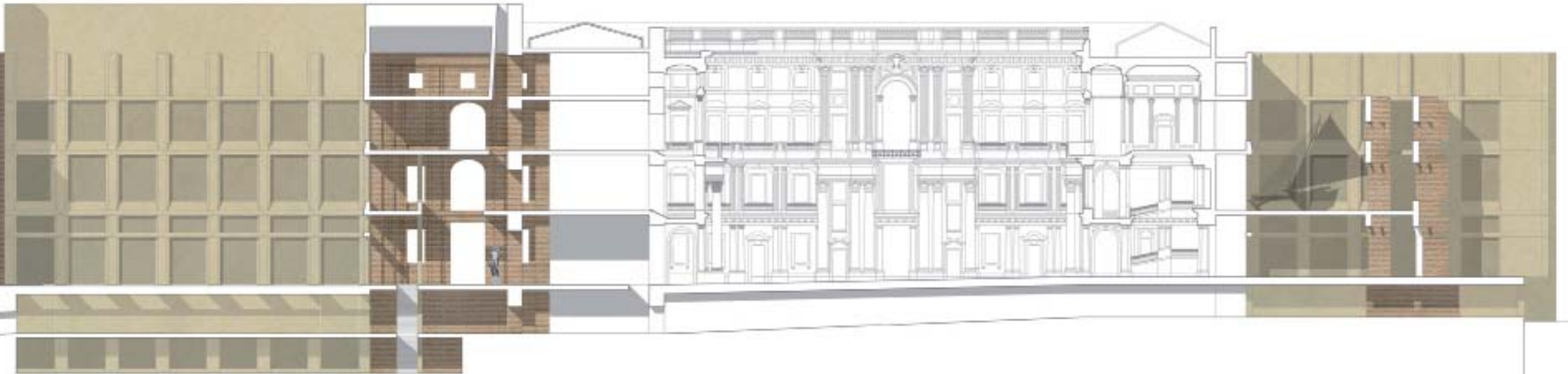




7



8



## Paolo Zermani

*Inside the mask* E-mails between Andrea Volpe and Susan Yelavich  
(page 12)



Five years ago, 6.00 o'clock in the morning, Susan Yelavich and I left the American Academy in Rome heading north, towards Parma. The final destination of our trip was a work of architecture Susan wanted to visit and study for her new book, a global survey on contemporary interior design finally published in 2007 as *Contemporary World Interiors*. Her interests in Paolo Zermani's house—a manifesto of his devotion for subject matters like identity, history, tradition—focused around the enigma generated by the juxtaposition between its iconic front and its hidden spaces arguably designed as a nest for the architect's family. Having the chance to meditate once again on that house, we asked

the American critic and Assistant Professor of Design History and Theory at Parsons The New School for Design in New York City, to recall that clear blue day spent between a walk in the countryside with an amazing (and rare) view of the Alps in the distance, and an exploration of what was waiting to be revealed inside the mask.

AV: "If I have to think about Paolo Zermani's house as a brilliant example of the concept of mask in architecture, I would immediately think to the ancient Greeks. They were using the word *prosopon* either to define the human face or the theatrical mask. Blurring all the differences between reality and representation. The mask was obviously hiding the faces of the actors on stage, but at the same time their voices and talents were enhanced by that device. To me the house uses the its front in the same way. Protecting the privacy of the family, but not denying the identities of its members. Yes it is a mask, but it's not deceiving. It's telling the truth, loudly, quietly." SY: "I remember the day vividly—the house, the conversation with Zermani inside it, and a very particular kind of hospitality. Zermani's house stared at the world but welcomed us with a sideways glance. Here, the slit in the mask was a door, concealed by the enormous oculus. Like any secret entrance, it took inspection to find it, all the while I felt we were being watched. And we were, by the lady in the window—her oval portrait a more literal mask for the house's inhabitants. If we'd thought that the giant round window was an eye on the world, she was there to disabuse us. The sense of a deeply prized interior life was confirmed once we joined her in the house. It turned out she lived in an intimate two-story library with room for just two chairs that faced the fireplace not the view. Every facade is a mask, but it struck me that this one was calculated to maximize the surprise of seeing the face it hid. The house's austere geometry had artfully denied its familial persona. We talked non-stop over a lunch of cheese, sausage, bread, and wine. The farmhouse fare matched the kitchen's eyelid curtains—which somehow didn't feel incongruous under the stern, primordial pitched roof. Zermani's welcome was unpretentious but precious, nonetheless, for its unmasking."

## Maria Grazia Eccheli, Riccardo Campagnola Michele Caja, Silvia Malcovati

*The stone mask - About Berlin's castle reconstruction*

(page 20)



"The Nineteenth Century covered every new creation with historicizing masks (...). New possibilities of building were offered, but in some way they were frightening, they were ceaselessly compressed into stone scenarios".

These words of S. Giedion, quoted by W. Benjamin, critically describe a precise moment of history, Nineteenth Century architecture and its "propensity, looking backwards, to allow the past to permeate herself".<sup>1</sup> A criticism that defines the complex relationship between history, memory and project, and represents one of the foundations of the construction of modern language of architecture, but seems today often consciously forgotten, in the will of re-constructing instead of de-constructing that same "historicizing mask", as an indispensable element of a contemporary project that measures itself with the past. From this point of view Berlin's Castle represents a very particular, and in a way exemplary, case: destroyed by ideology more than by war, replaced by another ideological object pulled down in its turn, the *Palast der Republik*, this Castle is now regretted as a crucial and irreplaceable element of urban shape, so much to be reconstructed, at least in its external appearance, "as it was and where it was". An "historical" choice indirectly confirming a substantial diffidence towards contemporary architecture, a deeply-rooted doubt about its adequateness to build a central place of the city, loaded with history and memory as the *Schloßareal*. After many unsuccessful attempts and an infinity of examinations and advices, the announcement of the executive competition for the "*Wiedererrichtung des Berliner Schlosses*" (literally "Reconstruction of the Castle of Berlin") deliberately chooses the "stone mask" as the only possible solution, and imposes the remaking of the baroque façade on three of the four external fronts and on the three internal fronts of the seventeenth-century Schlüter's courtyard.

The contemporary project must therefore necessarily assume this mask as a theme of architecture, as a fact, as it were a question of preserving a pre-existence, whereas in reality it is a matter of reconstructing shape and façade of a missing building, since only a few traces and a scarcely scientific redrawing remain of the ancient castle. The question must have been evident also to the promoters, who took care to specify the title with the addition of "*Bau des Humboldt-Forums im Schlossareal Berlin*" ("Building of the Humboldt-Forum in the area of Berlin's Castle"): project of re-

constructing the castle and at the same time of constructing the Humboldt-Forum. A specification that, far from clarifying the architectural aims of the competition, makes its nature extremely uncertain: in addition to constraining new architecture behind the obligation of a mask, it defines for the building a multiform and undefined function, and brings into discussion its typological structure and its character: a castle or a forum? A forum or a museum? An ancient building in its appearance, but containing a contemporary, global, function, as a multi-cultural museum centre. From this point of view it is also necessary to consider the extremely composite, stratified nature of Berlin's castle, that makes difficult, not to say impossible, its typological classification or its schematization in abstract terms. As Giorgio Grassi wrote, "the Berlin castle represents just itself. And this fact, from the point of view of its architecture, makes it unrepeatable, practically but also theoretically unrepeatable".<sup>2</sup> This fact accentuates the scenographic and theatrical character of the reconstruction of these façades, that recalls Schinkel's topical observation, as he said that in architecture lie is admitted only insofar as it is its very aim, and that happens only in theatre.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The quotation from Giedion's *Bauen in Frankreich*, p. 1-2, appears in Benjamin's *Passagenwerk*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982; Italian edition *Walter Benjamin. Opera completa*, vol. IX, *I passages of Parigi*, edited by R. Tiedemann and E. Ganni, Torino: Einaudi, 2000, p. 455.

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<sup>3</sup> K.F. Schinkel, in G. Pesckon, *Das architektonische Lehrbuch*. München-Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1979, p. 20.

## Igor Mitoraj - Fabrizio Arrigoni

*Veils* by Fabrizio Arrigoni

(page 26)



Next to the old foundation of the Massa Gate, Piazza Matteotti stretches to the west until it comes to a stop against the front of a building that has a vaguely eclectic air, the Pietrasanta town hall. Three large windows on the first floor provide light to a regularly shaped room measuring 12 x 8.3 meters, with a 4.6 meter ceiling, located at the top of two flights of a monumental staircase and thus the fulcrum of the entire building. The room is entered through three openings along its long side, echoing the windows on the opposite side. Between 28 July and 7 September 1998, Igor Mitoraj painted two wall paintings, *Alba (Dawn)* and *Tramonto (Sunset)* (210 x 340 cm, fresco and sgraffito), which dominate the

short walls at either end of the room. Even though fixed within the set geometry of their golden rectangles, the paintings move out beyond their boundaries to impose an overall order on the room: the virtual lines extending the perimeters of the two works capture the void in a cage that encloses the ceiling, the arrangement of the large slabs of marble in the floor, the layout of the walls, the furnishings. These correspondences, marked by the succession of materials, subtle impressions into the plaster or the change in rhythm of the various partitions, are the genius dominating the room that, by default, organizes the positions and the presence of the people who enter it, even before any technical or utilitarian aspect. From this derives the shape and position of the mayor's desk, the horseshoe-shaped table, the bench against the wall, ensuring that a central open area is left free and unencumbered. A suspension and a lingering that become the bow in which the veiled heads can resound, expanding their presence like an echo. Reinforcing this general arrangement, a series of interruptions on a smaller scale – such as the two small bronze sculptures set into the wall (*Homme et femme à la fenêtre*, 1984, 32 x 35 cm), the bas-relief insignia of the city, a disguised service door, and the support for the photograph of the president of Italy – can be interpreted as dialectical expedients that, by going against it, make the underlying norm equally conspicuous.

The plans combine a geometric spirit – the search for and restoration of a "certain Mediterranean climate made up of order and balance" by means of the immanent and sensual force of the bodies – with an attention to the values of tactility, light, and color present in the surfaces and the objects (in this dual key, the architectural design continues the play between abstraction and naturalism set up by the lines of the paintings). The materials used are: tinted plaster for the walls, Apuan marble – white with arabesque swirls – and *pietra serena* for the floors, and Alpine green marble for some of the decorative accents; the stone was deliberately not polished to a shine. The long narrow table is supported by six pillars, consisting of a box-like structure of solid wood around an iron core, to sustain the beams assembled with metal pipes and double metal sheets – the maximum distance between the supports is about four meters; the iron, after a light sanding, was etched and patinated. The tabletops – made up of nine modules fitted together with hidden interlocking elements – are made of multi-ply wood with an oak veneer on both sides, and edges and joints of solid oak inserts to give sufficient protection to the corners. The dark color was obtained using natural stains: a pigment of iron sulfate and copper sulfate, subsequently spread with a hot infusion of logwood and finished with a coat of beeswax. The natural light, entering from the east, is filtered through raw linen curtains – the same kind of material often found in painters' workshops – whose rods repeat in silhouette the same design as the wooden window-frames. The council chamber presents itself as a quiet, separate place. An inlay, a cutout, enclosed in the lines of its plan and construction and its dissimilar materials and textures. Like many examples handed down to us by history, the close dialogue and counterpoint between art works and their immediate surroundings deconstructs the original homogeneity and compositional integrity of the building, creating a break in it that is as explicit as it is uncompromising. Entrance into the room reveals an unexpected, eccentric and isolated sense of space, something new that dissolves what lies behind it, its earlier support (a metamorphosis analogous to that of

the animal kingdom, or to use the words of Alessandro Pizzorno: "The mask hides, it is true, but it is a hiding that abolishes and identifies").

This is a totally-interior that has no exterior, a *hortus conclusus* as it were, or a cave or a paradoxical overturned mask. And in specific terms, it maintains some of the fundamental characteristics of the archaic mask, such as the fact of transcending individual traits in the fixed expressivity of the archetype, and of moving beyond the form as a reflection of a psychological condition towards a full affirmation of objective and impersonal power. But also the exemplification of the conflict, devoid of any resolution or conciliatory synthesis, between performance and silence, between ritual and incidental use, between ordinary time and its disruption in the second time of the event – festival, mourning, gift, memory. Thus it is not a fortuitous coincidence that from the very beginning the room was thought of and felt, even more than as a manifestation of esthetics and its power to seduce, as the locus *par excellence* for the presentation of community worship and the setting for local performances (Milton Singer): a sphinx-like agora for political and symbolic theatricality – *vultus vero dictus, eo quod per eum animi voluntas ostenditur...* – or in other words the meeting point of collective and individual trajectories, the site where the manifold connections set up between the *communitas* and the individual are able to unfold in the interval of the visible.

translation by Susan Scott

## Herzog & de Meuron

*Three moves: the CaixaForum in Madrid* by Michelangelo Pivetta

(page 32)



A single thing seems unbearable to the artist: do not feel itself at the beginning. Cesare Pavese

The appearance often tricks, much more when we think about Architecture; thus up against the recent Madriener Herzog & de Meuron realization we can have the idea to find an attempt to exceed the consolidated planning terms in the previous and famous London Tate Modern, similar for topics and targets. It is not true, or not completely, the plan of the Caixa, coming from substantially similar program apparatuses, is shaped like an ulterior experience and alternative in the field of research and in the positioning in ahead of its limits. Three the main issues of the plan,

three the moves, that like in a fast chess match they proposed for its solution: take part on a historical building in a strongly consolidated town context, propose a new balance of this apparatus in the sense of attraction, showing clearly the necessity of a new and engaging *performance building*, resolve in the meager space available all the functional demands of a contemporary and complex Center for the arts and cultural assets.

First move. The renovation seems, at the first, like a reconstruction operation, conceived in the way of a shrewd re-use of the ancient through new semantic outlines. This that remains of the original building, emptied, dismembered and raised from the ground is only the main bricks fronts, that became from original building curtain a new category of its body covering. A completely unknown tension, an innovating attitude that places the plan on a different and superior plane in comparison with the Tate, always maintaining the Swiss architects research continuity in the field of *sheath and packaging*. To exalt the rigor of the original facades, the widening overhangs don't respect the cornice line upon a nearly *mannerist* idea of volumetric increment in the vertical development and modifies, in the bargain, the language by use of chopped surface steel plates in a kind of intentional *digital arabesque* that it seems designed from the contemporaneous presence and absence of pixels.

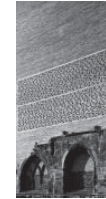
Second move. The building now is the scene of a new public square turned towards the green of the Botanic Garden and obtained by the demolition of a gas station. The public square sneak in, by the basement negation, inside the building in a continuum between outside and inside, revealing, through the grip fissure, an evocative cavern, an attractive and promiscuous area. The visitor introduces itself in the machine and meets that the womb hides; steel is the main material of the distributive areas, synthesis of the contemporaneity and dipthong of the expositive areas stark white form absence. The complex machine is perceived taking advantage from its performances that in this case are the functions; only rare openings allow to pick as the movement interacts on the context; once inside, that is outside belongs definitively to an other dimension. The confirmation of this intimate conception of the building like an object is definitively acknowledging in the attic on the top, where a foregone logic would induced to the creation of a great terrace pointed out on the trees tops of the close Botanic Garden but also there - overall there - the view is denied or intentionally shielded, divided, exactly pixelated. The new monument is completed in the ascertainment of own abnormal materiality; magnetic forms and materials attraction used with a smart knowledge.

Third move. The widening is an *architecture topic* and in this case shows itself through the deepening about the *over-addition* idea. The original Central Electrica is used like a support of the new one, it places planimetric but not volumetric limits; the volume is now the quintuple, but the shape in plan is unchanged. The disarranged section reveals the arcane: the public square is the roof of the immense buried and secret building part that contains the auditorium and the articulated composition that developed vertically in seven floors. Carrying out itself of the entire operation is rhythmically distinguished by the materials use like ideological support to an openly complex and inborn language of the propulsive idea of architecture that the Swiss architects always proposed. Since the Basel Railway Control Tower and the Dominus Vires Cellar, their jobs has been centralized on three fundamental topics: *tectonic*, *sheaths* and *materials*. These, seem to be still the intellectual support of a challenge that now, that the beginning is far away, becomes very vital. The wide blind front of the adjacent building is involved in this operation of reconstruction and it is not stranger from this logic also. Through a Patrick Blanc's work

the horizontal green of a town public square changes its registry and becomes vertical, not only for an effective lack of space, but because the facade, otherwise dumb, definitively comes true like a integrating part of the complex; art and architecture are melted till to become indissolubly the same. The CaixaForum, inaugurated in spring, is a success that only the time and the next works of Herzog & de Meuron, like the Hamburg Philharmonic Hall, will be able to confirm. This work has already left the due and demanded sign in the *city fabric*, that has found again in a powerful way, a space before forgotten and that, in a complex and uncertain time, it seems to be already enough.

## Mask and idea by Andrea Tagliapietra

(Abstract page 52)



In this paper the author makes a both philosophical and anthropological analysis of two key-concepts in the western philosophical tradition: mask and idea.

The work begins by drawing the reader's attention to cave paintings in such archaeological sites as Lascaux, La Marche, Chauvet and Altamira. Besides the famous animal images, the author points out, those which represent masked human figures are also highly recurrent. Why did this primordial humanity always represent human beings with their faces covered by animal-masks? What anthropological interpretation should we give to these findings?

Following the main path of Platonism-based European culture, we should link the mask only to a desire for pretence, falsehood and insincerity. There is a well shaped truth lying under every mask, and the only obstacle to acknowledging it is the mask itself. In Plato's philosophy, beyond every mask and every illusion, beyond the material and sensible world itself, stands the world of ideas, the intellectual and objective forms, namely universals, through which sensible reality can be rationally understood. Mask and idea, as it seems, are thus completely antithetical concepts: the former is connected to error and falsity, the latter to knowledge and truth. This conviction is linked to the epistemological paradigm that lies at the base of Plato's philosophical dismissal of art, drama and poetry from the ideal society, as is maintained in his most famous work, the *Republic*. For Plato, art and theatrical *mimesis* (the Greek word for imitation and identification) do not concern neither truth nor justice. They are on the contrary reason of ignorance, disorder and violence.

Nevertheless, in Tagliapietra's opinion, a closer look at Plato's dialogues, in particular the *Phaedrus* and the *Laws*, could undermine this unilateral conclusion. Perhaps, he argues, even in Plato's metaphysics there is a place left for theatrical identification as a genuine form of knowledge. At its highest speculative level, Plato's philosophy shows a disturbing and unforeseen proximity between mask and idea and, subsequently, between the act of putting on a mask and the enterprises of science and philosophy. Anthropological studies concerning the religious and theatrical use of masks in archaic societies, the author points out, support the conviction that theatrical empathy and artistic imitation are the oldest forms of knowledge that humanity has exercised over the course of its history.

## Camouflage and the Fog Effect by Antonio Costa

(Abstract page 72)



If the techniques of *camouflage* make us unable to see what is there and enable us to see what is not there, the tricks (or special effects of cinema) have a similar goal. This essay – which is a short version of a presentation given at a conference on the aesthetics of *camouflage* organized by the

Faculty of Design and Arts of the IUAU University of Venice – discusses the uses, meanings, and functions of the fog effect in cinema. Among all special effects, the fog effect is the one that directly derives from the techniques used by the military, and specifically from the fog maker, whose function is to disorient the enemy and alter the perception of space. The function of the fog effect for set designing is here examined through several examples: from Hitchcock (*The Lodger*) to George Cukor (*Gaslight*), from Woody Allen (*Shadows and Fog*) to John Carpenter (*The Fog*) and Robert Zemeckis (*What Lies Beneath*). Moreover, the essay discusses the relationships between the fog effect and various figures of the cinematographic language, such as the cross fade.

## Bodies playing dresses, dresses playing bodies. The "camouflage" motif in Shakespeare's Macbeth by Paola Colaiacomo

(Abstract page 78)



Ideally the citizen of a late Renaissance world, Macbeth – in this Shakespeare's perfect contemporary – is fascinated by new, secular paradigms of interpretation. His control of them is far from perfect, though, and he is stuck in the interval between signifier and signified, entangled between a mimetic and a semiotic conception of language. The Weird Sisters' words – "Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be, until Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill Shall come against him" (IV, 1, 92-4) – sound to him as an absolute guarantee of safety, in no need of further interpretation. The height of irony is that the verbal camouflage they represent implies the actual recourse to camouflage as a war tactic. A play-within-the-play effect is thus achieved at the moment of the hero's downfall.