

The empathic home

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It is about 20,000 years that we are no longer homo sapiens sapiens, but homo empathicus. We tie together, socialize, take care of each other; we are cooperative [...]. For our wellness, we rely on three pillars: socialization, well-being (hygiene and health, nutrition), and creativity. When one of these three columns or empathy is lacking or repressed, our alter-egos emerge, from which violence, selfishness, narcissism, and so on [...]. But then, we regret having done wrong, because it is not really in our nature.

Jeremy Rifkin, in *The Empathic Civilization*

If we were to retrace history, we would find new paradigms that refer to the work of Alessio Barchitta (Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto, 1991), thus establishing several effective connections between the past and the fluid society that governs contemporaneity. But the origins remain the real, and at the same time ideal, model for the constitution of a thought, be it a universal and inviolable axiom or a utopian system to which people have been aspiring for centuries. The archetypal form preserves the secret, the mental and psychic mark. For this very reason, the mythical "primitive hut", theorized since the Vitruvian treatises, is still a foundation, an evolutionary model from which everything is born and to which everything returns, in terms that are always new, changeable, and enriched by time. Mainly rediscovered in the age of the Enlightenment, this structure symbolizes the primary compositional logic and design scheme, as Marc-Antoine Laugier states: "Let us consider the human being at his origin... some uprooted branches constitute the suitable material for his design, and having chosen four of the most robust, he erects them vertically, by placing them at the vertexes of a square. At their top, he places four more, horizontally, topped by others, inclined and joined at their extremities, arranged to form a sort of roof, which is covered with foliage [...]. The small primitive hut I have just described constitutes the model from which all architectural magnificence has been conceived..."¹. The parallelism with the work of Barchitta has no stylistic or building value, but it is aimed at dwelling as an original, foundational idea, a sort of radical rediscovery of nomadism, of the house as a heterogeneous and transient container, made of walls that exude the events and the memory of those who lived them. Composed of a housing version made of an isothermal tarpaulin supported by fir walls and by a sculpture in scrap wood that replicates an undersized house (to which a mobile miniature multiple is added), the project, entitled *Errante eterotopico* (Heterotopic wandering), recalls the archetypal idea of the primordial hut, containing its very principles in its formal and animistic essence, expressing that rare ability to capture the deepest traces that are hidden in the collective unconscious, as Jung recalls: "... we are faced with archaic types or, even better, primigenial ones, that is, common images present since ancient times"². It is a question anchored to history, a pre-existing and persistent form, which Barchitta translates and positions in different places. Fragile and temporary, the fabric structure is set up both in a metropolitan area of Milan and in the monumental castle of Milazzo, in Sicily, reappearing as a solid and inaccessible building in a church in Barcellona Pozzo di Gotto (the artist's birthplace), resuming then the aspect of a tent at Malpensa airport, in Milan – two photographs of this journey are on display. As Barchitta explains: "The vagabond, returning from his journey, partially recognizes the house as his own, infinitely filled with and weighed down by memories. Unable to 'take it with him', he sees as the only possible solution to lighten it, dismembering it and then reconstructing it, ideally, as the shelter of the first exhibition. The native house, like a stronghold, tied as it is to the ground by roots impossible to eradicate, is at the same time an unsettling, familiar, and disturbing object. The house of the origins remains that of the beautiful old memories, a place that remains so in memory, despite its distance: its image is always positive. Idealized and unreal, on the way back, it will prevent the vagabond from recognizing himself in the space, forcing him to feel, once again, the same feeling of loss that is typical of the journey."

The environment is the other coordinate on which the artist works, the places he is looking for are nothing but formations consolidated over time, a mental image, an inexhaustible projection adhering to the context, where any object comes to life and leaves a permanent mark of his disappearance. Also in the *Coordinate*³ series, silicone "tears" made by removing the layered surface of the plaster of neglected modern buildings, Barchitta retains and dilates the temporal variation, recalling it in the reflection of the past, with "the awareness of showing what was and what is no longer." The artist constantly establishes authentic bonds with the place, a process that goes beyond a mnemonic articulation, as it is rather an interconnected system, a multiple universe, beyond measurable space and time. Finally, in the unpublished site-specific work titled *Kick Me* (presented in the Milanese research gallery Amy d Arte Spazio, from Oct. 10th to Nov. 1st, 2019), the main aspects of his poetics emerge with playful declinations. It is a large environment (2x6 metres) made of a nautical fabric, on which images of five bunkers dating back to the Second World War, photographed at night, are depicted. Inside the installation, a synthetic lawn houses some soccer balls created with tiles and building material found in the riverbed of a stream in the Messina area, which today has become an illegal dump. The multi-coloured spheres produce the urge kick them, an impulse that remains compressed in the form of pure desire, while the system that holds them appears to be in-between the lightness of the building and the photographic constellation of military fortifications. Once again, the conflict returns, a dichotomy that Barchitta seems to resolve in the mutation, in the fluid passage of concepts that are ambivalent, but inherent in the same animistic root that holds in itself the principle of the empathic movement, between external reality and inner world, the ancient pre-Socratic pneuma, the vital energy, the breath of the soul.

Note

1. M-A. Laugier, *Essai sur l'architecture* (1753), in M. Bottero, G. Pigafetta, *L'arte nell'architettura*, Alinea, Firenze 2001, p. 46.
2. C. G. Jung, *Gli archetipi dell'inconscio collettivo* (1934/1954), trad. it, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2008, p. 17.
3. The titles of the various works in this cycle have a particular relevance, because they are associated with geolocation, that is to the exact coordinates of the place where the artist intervenes and picks up the materials.