Architecture and its Metaphors. The Poetic Form as Experience

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While language can be understood as an expression of the phenomenal unity between the world and man, it is the poetic form that has always explained both mythical and physical phenomena of the human experience (Paz 1973). Following the idea of a primordial connection between poetry and understanding, I aim to explore the possibility of expanding the poetic model to other human cognitive experiences, and the architectural one in particular. The metaphorical relational structure between signifier and signified at the core of poetics can be translated in architectural terms in multiple ways: the relationship between container and contained space, built materiality and its experienceable in between, and many more. In this way, space as an external object becomes part of its subject: this is the limit and only possibility of knowledge. The emphasis given to the experiential dimension of the spaces we inhabit shifted the focus from what architecture is, has or does, to how its users feel and, ultimately, on who they are (Klingmann 2007). From the Situationist International to Antonioni's cinema and experience economy, this contribution addresses architectural forms as part of a social life which determines use, reception, and participation by communities, renewing the attention on experience rather than function.

— ARCHITECTURE
— POETICS
— METAPHOR
— EXPERIENCE
— PARTICIPATION

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Introduction

In "Semiology and Architecture", the essay opening *Meaning in Architecture* (1969), Charles Jencks argues that the relationship between semiology and architecture is all-embracing. «This is perhaps the most fundamental idea of semiology and meaning in architecture: the idea that any form in the environment, or sign in language, is motivated, or capable of being motivated», he writes: «we are in a literal sense condemned to meaning» (Jencks 1969, 11-13). However, he continues, too much reality would be unbearable, and for this reason poetry became the primordial way to shed light on reality. Poetry has accompanied humanity through millennia and civilisations. From Homeric epics to Yoruba chants and divination, the poetic form long embodied the multiple functions later attributed to several disciplines, including science, philosophy, literature, and so on. While language(s) can be understood as the expression of the phenomenal unity between the world and man, Mexican poet Octavio Paz claims that it is the poetic form that has always explained both mythical and physical phenomena of the human experience. In fact, he writes, «there are no peoples without poetry; there are some without prose» (Paz 1973, 133).

The association of poetry with architecture also takes us back in time. Poetry was performed and passed down orally long before any form of writing was invented. Specific architectural structures and, later, theatres in particular served as dedicated containers for poetry. It is in these contexts that built space gave importance and sacrality to the poetic language. In religious and institutional buildings in particular, architecture has carried in itself poetic allegories for centuries: of power, devotion, and mythologies. Since then, as American poet and literary critic John Hollander (1996) highlights, a constant exchange of words and vocabulary between the two fields has been influencing our way of expressing ourselves. *Stanza* in Italian means room, while in poetry it is a group of words and lines of a poem [1]; there is *architecture* in poetry and *music* and *rhythm* in spatial patterns; we use *language*, *vernacular*, or *vocabulary* to talk about architecture and design, and many more. There can be poetry in architecture, in its structure and relation with the natural world, or when architectural elements resemble others, shaping a style. But there can also be poetry about architecture, about the feeling of inhabiting a space, the symbolic and emotional value of some interiors, and the perdition of the tentacular metropolis. After all, p*oiesis*, from the Greek term *poieîn* (ποιεῖν), means 'to make', 'to bring something into being'. Understanding the poetics of architecture means addressing the poem and the myth that exist in architecture, human thought, and the meaning behind and within built forms. It means considering heritage and culture without limiting the possibilities of human creativity (Bianco 2020).

[1] Arguing that a similar linguistic correspondence can be found in other languages as well, including Arabic, Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben employs this metaphor as a tool to bridge the division that exists in Western thought between philosophy and poetry. The room becomes the symbol of the ideal unity in architecture and poetry, serving as a space of contemplation and reflection on the world, but also shaping desires and repair. To expand on the double meaning of *stanza* as both room and verse of a poetic composition and its implication see Agamben's book *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm of Western Culture* (1992).

Following the idea of a primordial connection between poetry and human understanding, I aim here to explore the possibility of expanding the poetic narrative model and its metaphorical nature to other forms of human experiences, and the architectural one in particular. If each group of words or words alone are for themselves a metaphor (i.e., they stand in

representation of something else), the relational structure between tenor and vehicle, target and source and, more in general, signifier and signified at the core of the poetic form can be translated in architectural terms in a variety of ways. For instance, this dichotomy can be found in the relationship between container and contained space, built materiality and its in-between, form and function, and many more. It is through the poetic scheme that architectural historian Alberto Pérez-Gómez understands the phenomenological experience of space and its fruition, claiming that «[a]rchitecture is not an experience that words translate later. Like the poem itself, it is its figure as presence, which constitutes the means and end of the experience» (Pérez-Gómez 2006, 8). In this way, space as physical surroundings becomes part of the subject inhabiting it: this is the limit and only possibility of knowledge. (AA)

This interest in spatial experience is not limited to philosophy or phenomenology of architecture. The emphasis given today to the experiential dimension of the spaces we inhabit, as German architect Anna Klingmann (2007) writes, shifted the focus from what architecture is, has, or does, to how its users feel and, ultimately, on who they are. Contemporary approaches including user-centred design and experience economy have contributed to renewing the attention on experience rather than architectural function in itself. For this reason, as Roland Barthes (1993) maintains, the consideration of a semiotic of space is only possible in the frame of a wider semiotics of culture. My reflection intends to address what we can learn from poetics and the poetic scheme to better understand the way we experience the architectures we inhabit.

From space to place: poetics, perception, meaning

When Edmund Husserl (1970) introduced the concept of lifeworld, he described an intuitive and shared universal horizon, the surroundings of each individual and all of them as the human collective. According to the philosopher, lifeworld is pre-reflective and self-evident, and it is given as a framework and background of human life. While we grow accustomed to it with time and experience, it is in the correspondence of form with meaning that we become familiar with our surroundings or, as Edward Casey (1997) defines it, our bodily space. To this system of locations within which the core dimension of life is entangled belongs all meanings that are attributed to space and our experience of it.

Meaning, as a spatial attribute, together with human behaviour is at the base of the sense of place. If place is a matter of the factors that

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In addition to understanding the significance of Phenomenology in Architecture, Perez-Gomez works alongside J. Pallasmaa and S. Holl to propose the relationship between phenomenology and design theory. Beware of this passage because the role of phenomenology in architecture, which is solely understood as a theoretical interpretation, is often misunderstood.

CARLO DEREGIBUS
I agree

inhabit it, it is the «mission of architecture [...] to activate the potential content of environment by converting somewhere to a place» (Parsaee *et al.* 2015, 371). Though the interpretation of meaningful forms, which, in semiotic terms, could be discussed as meaningful signs, architectures are understandable and accessible to people. This relation, from architectural forms to meaning, or from space to place, is itself metaphorical, comparable to the poetic image that sees a word or group of words (the vehicle) standing from an evoked concept or meaning (the tenor). This relational analogy comprises a wide array of possibilities.

For instance, the potential interpretations of this metaphorical relation in modernist architecture are multiple. They span from the idea that 'form follows function', evoking functionalist correspondence as the essential approach to architecture (a position defended by the Bauhaus school, among others), to a more imaginative and even emotional interpretation of modernist-built forms. This is the case of Michelangelo Antonioni's representation of the architecture of post-war Italy and Milan in particular. Architectural forms become interlocutors of the human experience, and they contribute to building the cinematic narrative and shaping individual and collective existence. For Antonioni, modern man's alienation is tied to the modern city, a direct effect of spatial situatedness. In *La Notte* (The Night, 1961), the movie begins with a camera's downward movement from the inside of the elevator of the Pirelli Tower (designed by Gio Ponti), what Tomasuolo (1993, 5) describes as a descent into the urban hell of the economic boom. The clean geometrical shapes of the architectural space reflect and affect the psychophysical state of the protagonists of the movie, from aspiration and disenchantment to sublimity and barrenness. As Tomasuolo writes, «architecture may even be said to determine the figures' behaviour [...: in] Antonioni's alienated *and* ambiguous cinema, architecture becomes a veritable heterocosm of experience» (Tomasuolo 1993, 4).

The translation of physical and spatial experience into meaningful narratives involves a mediated version of reality together with self-perception and self-representation. According to Edmund Feldman (1976), this gap is contingent and intelligible according to three factors that combine individual imagination with cultural models. They are:

> (a) the physiological differences between thinking and seeing; (b) the capacity of the individual to distort, edit, or rearrange visual perceptions of himself; and (c) the power of the dominant culture to instill visual and other norms - norms that every person tries somehow to live up to. (Feldman 1976, 10)

Language is one of the principal symbolic contexts – or, even, the symbolic context, semiotician Per Aage Brandt (2004), argues – within which the mediation between inner perception and socialisation with the external world is possible. Language functions as a tool for translation of the complexity of our surroundings, supporting their understanding through concepts and image formation. In this respect, metaphors are fundamental tools employed for multiple purposes, from sense-making and representation to communication and knowledge transfer.

Simply speaking, a metaphor is a correspondence, a «projection of one schema (the source domain of the metaphor) onto another schema

(the target domain of the metaphor)» (Moser 2007, 155). Metaphors comprise and refer to both personal stories and cultural concepts, social systems, and collective references. Metaphors, philosopher Sarah Kofman claims, «must be understood […] not as a rhetorical figure but as 'a substantive image […] in place of the idea'» (Kofman 1993, 8), in support of expression and reception likewise, covering any aspect of human activity. As Kofman continues, «the deliberate use of metaphors affirms life» (Kofman 1993, 19). Metaphors shape the sphere of the unknown with the support of images that pertain to the sphere of the known.

It is indeed through bodily experience that we create systems of meaning. Abstract concepts are linked to concrete ones through metaphorical association (Lakoff & Johnson 1980), and spatial concepts in particular are essential to support the meaning-making process of many other domains of human knowledge and experience. As cognitive scientist and linguist Mark Turner argues, «our understanding of social, mental, and abstract domains […] is formed on our understanding of spatial and bodily stories, namely by projection of these spatial and bodily stories onto social, mental, and abstract stories» (Turner in Brandt 2004, 33).

Human experience is characterised, according to Christian Norberg-Schulz (1985), by the combination of life and place. Ethos is created and gains sense only by existing and being situated in an environment of meaningful structure: the complexity of human experience as a changing sequence entails changing environments. Places and architectures order gestures and acts into narratives which, in the urban contemporary western frame, can be defined as narratives of built spaces. Meaning in architecture is thus an experiential story, a sort of oration, a speech on space. Or, as Pellegrino and Jeanneret write, «the architectural project, project of a possible world is substantially a work of fiction» (Pellegrino & Jeanneret 2008, translation by the author) in which we participate and to which we refer to make sense of our present. While space is always essential in shaping any meaning – as Brandt argues, «anything meaningful is meaningful in a context» (Brandt 2004, 30) – the architectures we inhabit are in themselves meaningful objects.

The concept of dwelling, consistently taken up by Norberg-Schulz (1985), is dominant in Heidegger's reflection on the human condition as a form of inhabiting space and being in a relationship with one's surroundings. Not only does the German philosopher associate dwelling with poetry as its devoted language of expression, but he also indicates poetry as the very source of dwelling. In Heidegger's philosophy, «the concept of poetic measure might suggest a pragmatic rather than romantic account of the grounding role of poetry in architecture, particularly for architecture's key conditions: creativity and dwelling» (Hill 2014, 145). Poetry is here understood as a form of measuring, a measuring device for life, its daily experiences and routines, but also its broader understanding and meaning. If «measuring is the (back)ground that allows the world to presence meaningfully» (Hill 2014, 150), Heidegger extends this idea to architecture and buildings in particular, arguing that they only truly happen where there is saying and naming, where language exists.

The association of architecture and human language(s) is strongly present throughout *Meaning in Architecture*. In architecture, just as in any other human structure legitimised through language, meaning entails

users' cognitive understanding. However, it is as a relational whole (both on a micro and macro level – the city, for instance) that buildings gain sense as the cohesive complexity we inhabit. The harmony (or not) of architectural unities has often been assimilated with narrative structures, and in particular with the poetic one. Both poetry and architecture share a malleable relation between meaning and form. Namely, the question is not only about what we want to say but in which way, and with which tools (words, composition, materials, and so on) we want to say it. Chosen words and chosen architectural elements need to be carefully selected and placed with one another to create poetic or spatial meaning, harmony with words or numbers, rhythm and metrics, measures and proportions (Campo Baeza 2012, 21). It is not necessarily about the message we aim to deliver with words or the function attributed to space, but how we can master these tools. As for verses in poems, architecture also presents multivalence in its forms and structures, with both functional and metaphorical meanings. (CD)

Form as approximation, or metaphors of use-situation

Spatial narratives are complex, ever-changing, and do not depend on static or absolute forms, architect Christian Norberg-Schulz (1969) claims. For this reason, he writes, «to participate effectively in this interplay man has to orientate himself among the phenomena, and to preserve them by means of *signs* [...]. The more complex and differentiated the environment becomes, the more we need a large number of different symbols-systems» (Norberg-Schulz 1969, 220). In this frame, it is unusual for us to perceive objects in isolation from one another. Human space is constituted by the ordered contextual system in which reality takes place. Space gains meaning through interrelation and co-dependence, and it is within preexisting spatial narratives that possible ways of moving and being are conditioned (Norberg-Schulz 1969, 225). Norberg-Schulz affirms that, both in physical and cultural terms, contemporary human life presupposes «*a system of meaningful places*» which entails the combination of «the physical milieu with a *symbol-milieu*, that is an environment of meaningful forms» (Norberg-Schulz 1969, 226, emphasis in original).

In architecture as in any other field, meaning needs means of communication, which are both understood in terms of cultural reference and individual experience. Architectures are meaningful wholes only if

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I could agree with pretty much everything. However, in poetry, language is directly used for creating metaphors, while in architecture there is at least a double metaphor: the first links architecture and language, the second this language to a metaphor. Therefore, architectural metaphors are always indirect.

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Taking a phenomenological perspective, I also believe that language itself (in the case of poetry) comes as a second step in translating experience(s). I thus see both of them as indirect, as much as meaning is.

organized in relational unities and inscribed in specific systems of reference. In this regard, architect and scholar Nathan Silver (1969, 280) claims that it is precisely people's interpretation, according to their needs, that makes architecture. There could be architecture without architects and even architecture without buildings, but there cannot be architecture without people. Users are the ones setting intentions in the use-situation relationship they develop with and within space.

This is the case, among many others, of architectures dedicated to cults, religions, and more in general the relationship societies have established with divinities and the otherworldly. Despite the abundant presence of symbolic references in religious architectures as we think of them today, from the Ranakpur Jain temple in Rajasthan (India) to the Saint Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, people have attributed sacrality and ritual value to caves (from Ireland to Mesoamerica), rooms and corners of the house, and even open-air locations including forests and rivers. According to use, people have adapted (or just occupied) pre-existing architectures for specific practices. It is the case of the Lala Mustafa Pasha Mosque in Famagusta (Cyprus), consecrated as the Catholic Cathedral of Saint Nicholas and converted into a mosque (but still featuring the appearance of a French gothic church from the outside) during the Ottoman occupation in the XVI century. More recently, the Loew's Valencia Theatre, a lavish and gilded well-known cinema built by Marcus Loew in Queens (New York) in the 1920s, was bought by an Evangelical congregation and turned into a church. Today, the stage of the former theatre can accommodate the 300-member chorus of the Tabernacle of Prayer for All People Church (Shepard 1978). As the mentioned cases illustrate, use and intention play a key role in determining meaning in architecture. Indeed, specific architectures are often built with precise intentions, but both buildings and urban infrastructures have also been repurposed throughout time and civilisations. Architecture gains meaning as long as it has one for the people inhabiting it.

There is multivalence in every object, and to architecture belong all meanings that, through experience, are attributed to physical locations. The metaphorical dynamic pertains to language as much as to visual imagery and spatial structures, functioning as a transfer from tactile, gestural (and many more) domains to non-physical ones, such as cultural values and emotional attributes. In the case of architectural forms, this equation varies conforming to multiple perspectives. According to Jencks (1969), meaning oscillates between the one intended by architects (forms are instrumental to functional intentions) and the one people shape out of fruition through time (meaning evolves and shifts conforming to diachronic dept). When approaching a building or a piece of architecture more in general, its form communicates to its observers in consonance with cultural references and previously experienced notions, before being addressed in functional terms. These two elements coexist and complement each other. Indeed, «the *primary utilitarian function* is related to use and acts like a denotation; while the *secondary function* is related to symbolical values, cultural conventions and ideology and reminds us of a connotation» (Terzoglou 2018, 121 emphasis in original). Form is important, Terzoglou continues, when understanding the meaning behind architecture; space is central if addressing a particular function. The combination of the two creates architectural value.

Spatial metaphors in architecture enable tensions and dissimilarities to coexist, involving the difference between its reading (architecture in some way always about itself) and its designated use. The duality of the metaphorical relation can be assumed in architecture with multiple, and even opposite interpretations. For example, architect Geoffrey Broadbent (1969, 73) argues that the metaphors in architecture are reversed compared to poetic ones. While in poems abstract images stand for real-life experiences, narratives of built shapes and concrete architectural spaces recall abstract codes and styles, as well as mores and traditions. However, this dichotomy could also be addressed oppositely, and architecture interpreted as the signified of specific social philosophies. According to Broadbent, architecture is both the vehicle of abstract meanings and values and the tenor of a pervasive cultural philosophy, which changes and evolves in time, he argues, but also with use and attributed function, one might add. By agreement, resulted from more or less wide social contracts, meaning in metaphoric relationships is not arbitrary. As for rhetoric, architectural figures are «built upon a procedure of secondariness and [...] designed to persuade the receivers of the values to be adopted. But form is as an approximation as faithful as possible to the referred content, which remains unutterable» (Pellegrino 2006, 214). (CD)

Architecture thus combines the articulation of space for usage (denoted function, namely the indication or sign of usage) and the articulation of space for distinctive values of a cultural system (connoted function, or the signification of such values), which evolve, as well as their signified counterpart, according to habits and practices of consumption. The manifold «relation of semantic metaphor», Pellegrino claims, established between architecture and meaningful association, defines «resemblance that posits a gap in order to propose its reduction» (Pellegrino 2006, 215). Pellegrino borrows this perspective on metaphors from the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur (1975), who argues that, by deviating from literal meaning, metaphors extend the significance of an object. However, they do not aim at ascribing a new idea to an object, but instead at reducing the gap that subsists between these two. Metaphors diminish differences through resemblance and emphasise the kinship of a perceived relationship.

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The concept of approximation is very important for me, and I have also written about it. I especially appreciate the concept of "secondariness", even if I'm not fond of the Platonic, idealistic approach that seems to emerge from this last part, which I think comes from the equalisation between the primary meaning and the function, imposing a fixity, in my opinion, conflicting with the uncertainty of meaning.

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I see your point, but I rather see the imposition of fixity that you describe as a possible instrumentalisation of secondariness (often failed) rather than its nature. A different, more productive, way to employ it could be accessibility (of value or function).

Towards a participative poetics of architecture

Metaphorically, architecture can also be understood in relation to the space we inhabit: the material container and contained environment, the substantial work of architecture and the space framed within. This space has always been interpreted in multiple and even dissonant ways. The Greek term for space, *chora* (χώρα)*:*

> is simultaneously the work and the 'space,' its ground or lighting; it is that which is unveiled, the 'truth' embodied by art, and the 'space' between the word and the experience. It is both a space for 'contemplation' and a time set out for 'participation,' a space of recognition. (Pérez-Gómez 2007, 18)

Whereas *topos* (τόπος) could be addressed as the combination of architectural elements that constitute an environment, while it also recalls a locus of becoming, where architecture evokes the natural world through the synthesis of geometry.

Generally, people perceive and experience architecture in a dual form. On the one hand, there is a certain distance in perception. Built form is seen as the given embodied presence of a cultural continuity. However, in its fruition, there is also a rupture and evolution from how architecture is first recognised. The intimacy of inhabiting and being in a certain space contributes to its re-interpretation at a linguistic level. The experience of architecture entails participative engagement and the creation of new meanings (Pérez-Gómez 2007, 18).

The semantic domains we employ to make sense of our surroundings, Brandt (2004) argues, are shaped by spatial metaphors. The bodily experience of relevant spatial frames contributes to the articulation of reality as an experienceable unity. The understanding of the different domains that shape the meanings we attribute to bodily and spatial stories is formed «by projection of these spatial and bodily stories onto social, mental, and abstract stories» (Turner in Brandt 2004, 33), and the experience of space and architecture is key to shaping our life-world perspective. Metaphors serve to transfer meaning with no restricted direction and integrate and enhance reality and our experience of it by combining basic domains:

> Metaphors and other semiotically composite and creative constructions, such as explicit comparisons, bring together imaginary formations - representations of thinkable scenarios: *mental spaces* - rooted in different semantic domains and produce more or less stable conceptual integrations, or *blends*. (Brandt 2004, 47, emphasis in original)

With experience, we can connect form with meaning, bridge contexts of reference and present ones, as well as incorporate different semantics and put them in dialogue. If language is the primary milieu in which we situate our experience, architecture functions just like any other linguistic domain to convey meaning, physical and spatial in this case.

The association of metaphor and architecture is not only central to the definition of meaning but also of our experience of it. In this sense, the metaphorical model can be a methodology too. It refers to our bodily ways of interacting with systems of knowledge, «a willingness to take the

unintended suggestions of language as reality and to pursue a figural and subjunctive hypothesis with a quite literal, demonstrative logic» (Dworkin 2004, 8). Knowledge in this case does not only rely on language, but specifically on the poetic structure of metaphorical association as a way to situate and confirm experience following specific categories. Architecture, as much as poetry, enables the dislocation of experiential knowledge of multiple and even opposite meanings according to use (Rasula 2004). (AA)

Space, given as an external physical complex, is incorporated and becomes part of a subject through experience. This change in perspective has today pervaded countless spheres of contemporary life. This trajectory, which spans from neuroscientific investigations to the emergence of experience economy (one of the latest trends within present-day capitalism) has caused a noteworthy paradigm shift. Architectural endeavours in production, and not only spatial fruition, are markedly influenced by the pursuit of specific body-centred objectives. The combination of neuroscientific understandings into the ethos of architecture accentuates a juncture wherein the cognitive and sensory dimensions become pivotal determinants in spatial design and built environments. Architecture becomes more and more entwined with the necessity of cultivating immersive and sensually resonant experiences. As Klingmann argues:

> this understanding necessitates a dramatic shift of the aim of architectural design, from producing static and discrete objects to the generation of a consciousness of desire and a desire for consciousness through a deliberate construction of context. (Klingmann 2007, 4)

To effectively understand and describe this consciousness, various elements have been borrowed from the poetic scheme so far, from its resorting to embodied consciousness to mythic recollection, metaphorical association and linguistic mediation. This position is emphatically supported by Bianco, who argues that architecture comes into existence «always through poetics» and it «is born through the dialogue of an individual with the world therein lies its existential dimension» (Bianco 2018, 112).

(AA) AUROSA ALISON
The context of linguistics certainly is interesting and referential, but what I suggest is not to limit the expression of experience solely in language itself. I remember that when using the realms of corporeality, one must at least mention contemporary aesthetics and all references from it. Aisthesis : the Greek word says it, it means "Sensibility," the aesthetic approach to experiential context and vice versa is one of the great theoretical themes about new design approaches.

FEDERICO RUDARI
I agree, I think linguistic articulation is one, and not the, practice that articulates experience and its meaning. However, I do not see it as a 'distanced' way of dealing with it, but rather a tool that we master while bodily and sensuously addressing the configurations that architecture entails. I see language as rooted in corporeality.

Discussing the work of Georgian architect Shota Bostanashvili, a pioneer in the study of architectural design in poetic terms, Bianco stresses how architecture must aim at creating an environment for people to interact, not in a close, pre-defined way but open to manifold readings. Bostanashvili proposed a poetics of architecture able to fill the void left by philosophy (and aesthetics in particular) and shape knowledge around space, shifting from words to physical object and back to words. If meaning is affected by the cultural contexts a subject is placed within, Bianco suggests that poetry should be the primary culture of architecture. In this context, he continues, «no architecture can be born without the ability of the subject to comprehend, navigate, and expand the boundaries of the culture that creates her and she, in turn, recreates» (Bianco 2018, 112).

The inspiration for an architecture that nurtures creation and exchange was endorsed by the Situationist International. In his 1956 lecture, *Demain la poésie logera la vie* [Tomorrow poetry will house life], Dutch artist Constant Nieuwenhuys maintains that the architecture of his times has been able to overcome functionalism (and what he calls the 'rectangle' design model) towards a true art of construction. Through the manipulation of materials and voids, volumes and spaces, architects are able «to create the most complete of arts, at once lyrical in its means and social in its very nature» (Constant in Wigley 1998, 78). From Eero Saarinen's MIT Chapel (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1956) to Hans Scharoun's Berliner Philharmonie (Berlin, 1963), architecture should invite for encounter, creation and, just like in a metaphor, transfer symbolic and built entities to non-physical ways of experience: «It is merely a way of ordering life so that it can be held and understood» (Chaplin 2005).

Conclusions

Multiple, countless, even infinite meanings can be attributed to bodily experiences, and the bodily experience of space and architecture is no exception. In virtue of this, with this contribution, I aimed to look at architecture and its understanding and use through semiotic, cognitive and poetic tools. I found this exercise particularly interesting for one main reason: while many human fields of knowledge and cultural expressions including today's technology, but also language and poetry, evolve and transform themselves at a rapid pace, architecture, as any other built-up system, does it more slowly. For this reason, as French architectural and urban historian Françoise Choay writes, «the urban system is threatened in its very existence [...] and hence partly doomed to continual anachronism» (Choay 1969, 31).

What we can acknowledge today is the evolving approach to our fruition and comprehension of built space and its vocabulary. If through language we can mediate our ways of experiencing reality, spatial narratives and metaphors are tools of constant use to translate perception into sharable forms of expression. The specificity of architectural spaces provides unique ways of meaning-making that combine a more 'distant' visual and aesthetic approach with engaged subjective fruition.

The possibility of a poetics of architecture represents a reflection on but also a synthesis between practice and experience, a response to what is given and the way we inhabit it, symbolic references and use-situation

interpretation. There is no meaning in architecture without diachronic depth (Lotman 2005, 206), since «participating in a work of architecture has a fundamental temporal dimension», one that «constitutes a re-cognition that is, also, a creation of ourselves» (Pérez-Gómez 2007, 23). A poetics of architecture is not only about buildings but also about ideas behind and about them, people's creations and experiences of participation. It is a poetics about what architecture is as much as about who we are.

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