

Architettura, arte dell'appartenere

Architecture, art of belonging

La sfida più urgente dell'architettura è recuperare vie per ricongiungere la nostra ossessione formale e la fascinazione globale per l'originale con i valori e le tradizioni delle culture locali, lasciando che le scelte formali emergano "dal basso". Trovare vie per incorporare le tradizioni significative già presenti nelle nostre culture umane e portarle ad essere parte del processo di composizione sembra essere cruciale per permettere agli abitanti di appartenere e persino dare senso alle proprie personali esistenze. L'architettura non è oggetto estetico dato che essa comunica sia a livello inconscio che a livello simbolico. Perciò l'architetto non deve essere un tecnico o un artista autoindulgente, ma innanzitutto un umanista, possedendo una cultura profondamente radicata tanto in filosofia quanto in storia.

The most pressing challenge for architecture is to recover ways to connect our formal obsession and global capacity for novelty, to local cultural values and habits, letting formal decisions emerge "from below". Finding ways to incorporate the already meaningful habits that are present in our human cultures and to make them part of our design practices seems to be crucial to allow inhabitants to belong and even make sense of their personal lives. Architecture is not "the aesthetic object" since it speaks both at pre-reflective and symbolic levels. Therefore, the architect must be not a technician or a self-indulgent artist, but primarily a humanist, possessing a deeply grounded culture in philosophy and history. LB



Alberto Pérez-Gómez

Alberto Pérez-Gómez studied architecture and practiced in Mexico City. In 1983 he became Director of Carleton University's School of Architecture (Ottawa, Canada). Since 1987 he has occupied the Bronfman Chair at McGill University, where he founded the History and Theory post-graduate programs. His books include *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* (MIT Press, 1983; Hitchcock Award in 1984), *Polyphilo* (1992), *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge* (1997), and *Built upon Love: Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics* (2006).

Parole chiave: **Incarnazione; Tradizioni locali; Appartenenza; Significati dell'architettura; Simbolo.**

Keywords: **Embodiment; Local traditions; Belonging; Meanings in architecture; Symbol.**



1. See Alberto Pérez-Gómez, "Mood and Meaning in Architecture," in *Mind in Architecture, Neuroscience, Embodiment and the Future of Design*, edited by Sarah Robinson and Juhanni Pallasmaa (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2015).



What is the most pressing challenge that architecture is asked to resolve today?

Given the manner in which capitalist market forces and the culture of consumerism have kidnapped architectural production, and the now unquestionable fact, corroborated not only through philosophical speculation but also through neuroscience, that the environment matters immensely for our psychosomatic health and well-being;¹ the most pressing challenge for architecture is to recover ways to connect our formal obsessions and infinite (global) capacity for novelty, to (local) cultural values and habits, letting formal decisions emerge "from below," like natural language from gestures, rather than be generated by supposedly autonomous acts of creation in

the architect's imagination and "dropped" on the world — regardless of place. This awareness is also crucial to start thinking of ways architecture should contribute to the design of the contemporary city.

2. See Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Built Upon Love. Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008).

With respect to the design of the contemporary city; what is the role of architecture in managing urban phenomena?



It is not enough to innovate by producing flashy pictures or unusual forms to be published in Internet newsletters.² Architecture is not a picture, though it should evoke a poetic image; it speaks to a pre-reflective embodied consciousness (80% of human consciousness is pre-reflective, not unconscious or subconscious — but embodied and in the world) and orients our lives. In other words, our personal consciousness and feeling is not only our internal, organic brain and muscles, it doesn't end at the skull or at the epidermis, but also is out there -- in the external world, which we often design, becoming an integral part of collective consciousness. Finding ways to

incorporate the already meaningful habits that are present in our manifold and diverse human cultures, often articulated as stories that characterize place, and to make them part of our design practices by valorizing the word (and not only forms or “parametric functions” — as has been the case since the early European 19th. Century) seems crucial. When architectural atmospheres are appropriately designed they speak back to the inhabitant, revealing purpose in the actions that they frame, allowing inhabitants to belong and even make sense of their personal lives.



3. This is the topic of a forthcoming book: Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Attunement: Meaning after the Crisis of Modern Science* (MIT Press, Spring, 2016).

Architecture and design have established an exchange that is both operational and perceptive; buildings are conceived as objects and objects are conceived by those who design buildings. Between architecture and design, is it possible to define boundaries or intersections?



Given the fact that architecture speaks both at pre-reflective and symbolic levels, it is wrong to identify it with “the aesthetic object,” (understanding aesthetics in its misleading 18th. Century sense). Only grasping the original Ancient Greek sense of aisthesis, signifying the primary meaning to which humans have access and that is both emotional and cognitive, and expressed to primary multisensory and undivided perception, can we start to understand how architecture truly “means” to humans.³



4. For the origins of modern architectural education and strategies for present transformations, see, Alberto Pérez-Gómez, "Early Debates in Modern Architectural Education: Between Instrumentality and Historical *Phronesis*," in *Phenomenologies of the City, Studies in the History and Philosophy of Architecture*, edited by Henriette Steiner and Maximilian Sternberg (Farnham UK: Ashgate, 2015).

Practice and education must thus seek a conjunction of justice and beauty, caring for others and the common good and not merely "solving problems" or providing a service for a client. In order to attain this aim, the architect must be not a technician or a self-indulgent artist, but primarily a humanist: possessing a deeply grounded culture in philosophy and history. This is easy to state in a sentence such as this, but a most difficult goal in our time of instrumental production, where only efficiency and marketability are valorized. This grasp of history necessary to the architect, moreover, is not a mere accumulation of historical data: it is an (hermeneutic) ability to understand the past

in order to enable a better future, becoming a rhetorical skill to state a position in view of practical and political problems; a true praxis. The architect must use history — our understanding of how the past answered through architecture fundamental, shared questions of human meaning for creativity (in the way that Nietzsche understood it), totally integrated with our own contemporary design questions and in opposition to the "separation" that some years ago was entrenched in Italian education by Manfredo Tafuri. And this is a history with deep roots, at least as old as the philosophical history of Europe that starts in Ancient Greece (with the history of architecture as a discipline),

When giving advice to students, what is the most valuable tool that an architecture or design student ought to acquire during their studies?

