

ALBERTO PRATELLI
ORCID: 0000-0003-4926-259X
University of Udine, Italy

ONCE UPON A TIME... WHEN *FAKE* WAS THE OPPOSITE OF *TRUE* AND A *LIE* WAS THE OPPOSITE OF *TRUTH*...

DAWNO, DAWNO TEMU... KIEDY TO,
CO *FAŁSZYWE* BYŁO PRZECIWIENSTWEM
PRAWDZIWEGO A *KŁAMSTWO* ODWROTNOŚCIĄ
PRAWDY...

Abstract

For centuries the art, which for its essence is artifice, therefore the work of man, and which adapts or substitutes the real, appeared to seek a sort of ever new truth. It was something so real (although artificial) that could help us to explain the world, or to represent it, or to better accept it, if not even utopianly improve it. It's not like that anymore. The truth seems too gloomy and normal to be sought. Let's just say it wouldn't look good on social media! Fakes are deliberately multiplying, they reproduce and self-certify themselves through a fast game of mirrors: every fake that produces applause generates new fakes that generate... in the kaleidoscope of fakes, we'll choose what suits us best for the next few hours... And in architecture, the impromptu beauty of thousands of neo-technological architectures does not allow us to discover whether there is, sometimes by chance or by choice, some truth behind them (which we will call as such if at least it lasts longer than a few months).

Keywords: social media, 20th-century urban planning, social housing, Barca district Bologna

Streszczenie

Przez wieki sztuka, która w swej istocie jest sztuczna (będąc dziełem człowieka), i która zmienia lub zastępuje rzeczywistość, zdawała się poszukiwać coraz to nowej prawdy. Było to coś tak realnego (choć sztucznego), że pozwalało objaśniać, przedstawiać lub bardziej akceptować świat, a może nawet utopijnie go ulepszać. Tak już nie jest. Prawda wydaje się zbyt ponura i normalna, by jej szukać. Powiedzmy, że nie wyglądałoby to dobrze na portalach społecznościowych! Fałszywki celowo się powielają, reprodukcją i uwierzytelniają, jak w szybkim odbiciu lustrzanym: każda fałszywka, która wywołuje aplauz, generuje nowe fałszywki, które generują... a my z kalejdoskopu fałszywek wybieramy to, co będzie nam najbardziej odpowiadało przez następne kilka godzin... Natomiast w architekturze improwizowane piękno tysięcy neotechnicznych obiektów nie pozwala nam odkryć, czy nie kryje się za nimi czasem, przypadkiem lub z wyboru, jakaś prawda (którą tak nazwiemy, jeśli wytrzyma chociaż ponad kilka miesięcy).

Słowa kluczowe: media społecznościowe, planowanie urbanistyczne XX wieku, budownictwo socjalne, dzielnica Barca w Bolonii

I'd like to start with two interesting *quotes*.

As you all know, the academic world today needs *quotes*.

With these you are evaluated, with these you find support for your own saying, and with these you show the "broadness" of your own thought and knowledge.

Of course, if you are an academic, you will always talk about "knowledge"; with that word there are now mentioned in universities all those things that were generically called *stuff*, not knowing what to call it.

For this it will be good to put a lot of quotes all over this paper, and following the teaching of managers and communicators, download the most beautiful phrases, taken from books we have never read and from comments we have never heard. But wondering what the authors were trying to say is now considered a useless waste of time: just mention them.

So, as I was suggesting, I'd like to start with two interesting quotes:

"The truth is more important than the facts" claimed by, apparently, Frank Lloyd Wright.

And:

"If the facts don't fit the theory, change the facts." We're told that Albert Einstein said so.

In both cases we seem to understand that, in order to seek the truth, many times it is necessary to go deeper and not to be satisfied with its superficial appearance.

Said a few years ago, these assumptions were very beautiful...

In reality, the possible meaning of these assumptions resided mainly in the high credibility of their authors. But today they don't make sense anymore.

Since when...

Since the *internet* (a great invention) has been invaded by *social media* (a very bad invention), this is no longer possible.

Social media were invented for a few precise reasons: to allow you to insult others, to tell lies, and to brag about yourself. And broadly speaking, to earn money by avoiding paying taxes. Of course, they have been so successful that they can also be used for very useful and right reasons, but this does not change their original meaning.

Since their success, truth and forgery are the exact same thing.

Then the old saying becomes really true: *Veritas filia temporis* (Truth is a child of time).

This is an ancient Latin saying, which has survived throughout history, and is now remembered as a proverb in most European languages.

The truth changes with our interpretation; it changes with changing attitudes.

And how are contemporary people expected to find out how their thinking is changing?

With a good survey!

Nowadays people need polls to figure out what they believe they're thinking...

Take a poll and find out what you think!

Photography: it used to be something that depicted a specific reality, perhaps it could not explain it, but at least it indicated the presence of something or someone, a small glimpse of reality ... at least until photography was analogical. Not anymore.

Reality and counterfeit, like daily work tools, are today on our table, scattered and accumulated together; who is who? what is what?

In painting it has always been different: in fact, art is first of all artifice.

A work of art represents a truth, a lie, a fabrication, an adjustment of nature, a...

In short, something that could be a truth or an explanation, but only for someone, and for a certain period of time. It will be a truth if it can give us an explanation of the world that can help us appreciate it or interpret it better.

In an old TV show in which Reinold Messner and Ambrogio Fogar were present, the two travelers discussed a controversial trip to the pole ... (those were the days of the dog Armaduk).

At one point Fogar, who was in a bit of trouble, explained that *truths* can be multiple... but Messner replied, yes, of course, but there is only one *reality*...

Of course, if we add the problem of reality, then many difficulties arise...

But the reality will still be there!

Here is a wonderful pasta: the *spaghetti alla bolognese*! But we all know that *spaghetti alla bolognese* doesn't exist. These were made because of the difficulties related to the virus.

But this is definitely a fake news.



III. 1. Serving of *spaghetti alla bolognese*, the most well-known of the international cooking totally fake. As everyone knows, *Spaghetti alla Bolognese* doesn't exist!

Great! for the first time I was able to feed myself with fake news! Like any other blogger or influencer...

So how can we proceed?

In the way of contemporaries, it's very easy: change the words!

Everyone's talking about a technology gap.

Today, just as everything that we hope makes sense is defined as *scientific* – so much so that all the educational fields covered by the Ministry of Education in Italy are defined as *scientific*, even those that have always been part of the arts and techniques – in the same way everything that is transmitted digitally, whatever its content, is defined as *technological*.

And here the words themselves change their meaning, and take on, convincingly for most, the opposite meaning to the original one, and thus find a general approval.

Friend? Once a rare person, able to help or at least encourage you in times of difficulty, now it just means a stranger who pretends to applaud every stupid thing that you put online (of course I should say *post*).

To share (Italian *condividere*)? The meaning was clear: you have a piece of cake, there are others close to you who don't have any, and you share it with them (*con-dividere*). Today it's simpler: do you read a stupid thing? Or, much rarer case, does it come to your mind directly? Here, you pass it around for free to thousands of people...

All this is done *remotely*, of course, which generally means that you don't know for sure who your contact person is and where he is.

I don't think it's a technology gap. It is, for better or worse, a real anthropological gap.

Something equally certain happens in the world of communication: when some "expert", whether a politician, a communicator, an economist, a manager, or others similar, very often professors, having to try to convince you or explain themselves, finds and uses new words to replace the existing ones – he does so only because he has nothing to say. What in Italy they call "englishness" (*inglesismi*) are seldom simple English words; they are just tricks to adorn the nothingness that is smoked to you.

Until a few months ago there was the *teleworking*, boring, but we all knew what it was. Then we came to work *by remote*: the same as before, but with a much more technical and professional air.

Finally, in a triumph of joy worthy of an economic miracle success, here we are at *smart-working*!

How nice! It's almost like it was before, except that the administrative offices, which could already do it before (at least as far as the contact with the public is concerned), continue to do it as badly as before, but a bit slower...; and the postal service, which was a special kind of telecommunication even before, takes weeks longer to deliver; and enthusiastic individuals – at least that's what it appears from the media communications – overlap when they see each other on the screen, get excited just by recognizing each other, and do what they were doing before, only in a less precise way, worse in every sense, but with the satisfaction of having succeeded.

Is everything so new?

Please try to carefully read the following piece.¹

Letter from a city planner lecturer about the city to come:

We're used to thinking one-dimensionally about cities. Now we have to be able to think about places and behaviors of people much more in relation to the times. Secondly, we will have to redesign the relationship between macro and micro local scales. Let's look at the political proposal of Anne Hidalgo, Mayor of Paris: *Ville du quart d'heure*, the city of quarter of an hour'...

The first sentence is meaningless, but it's fine, it's the way people like it: to say that we are used to thinking in a *one-dimensional* way about cities is good, because it gives us a sense of lack; but it's not true, it's simply meaningless. If Italian urban planners are now used to thinking in a "one-dimensional" way... then those who ask for their final disappearance (assuming that there are still some, outside the academies) would be right. Then it turns out that it will be good to start thinking in relation to different times and scales. Is that new? Certainly not, since it is the most natural thing a city planner should do. Then the

¹ This time I will not put the whole quote, because while I agree with it's basic substance, I do not agree with anything in the explanations. I was told she's a good professor at the Politecnico di Milano, but if I look for the details, I read: *download the magazine here for free*... and that's sufficient for me to let it go. The piece was also quoted by a famous radio show and some newspapers.

ultimate invention, something between politics, communication and discovery: the city of a quarter of an hour! In other words, the part of the city that can be walked through or reached in a quarter of an hour. A quarter of an hour, 50 years ago, it was the time that a person was said to walk, the range without cars. Nice: they're inventing the non-isolated district, connected to the city! One more step forward, and we are at the discoveries of the early 20th century...

Neighborhoods made for a living... Something so new?

They've discovered the bicycle! A 19th-century vehicle that had already preceded the motor vehicle... and that we all have always known would last longer, because it is one of the few mechanical devices that is deeply human, in its technique and its movements.

Ever since I started working, around 1970, I have been going to work and cycling around the city. For 40 years they have been laughing at me...

Great professors of business management and economics asked me, why? I simply answered: it's faster (it wasn't the only reason, but I knew it was the one they could understand better). They were surprised. They realized it was true, but they would never have thought of it!

Even then, Milan declared itself to be the moral capital. In that city, they have a great passion for going to work. I've rarely seen a citizen of Milan doing nothing, nor working.

I always saw them *going to* work; maybe, to better enjoy the queue, they lived as far away as possible from the place of work, and as far away as possible from the second home... which must be always reached, if you want to have the pleasure of a glorious return in traffic at the end of the weekend.

I don't use the bike anymore.. It's too complicated to go up and down the sidewalks, wander around the curbs indicated by the bike lanes.

They say, it has to be used for ecological reasons. But at the same time, there is a proliferation of assisted bicycles: earlier a person, if already tired, would stop; now a person, if tired, would at 30 km/hour throw himself on the unlucky passer-by. On the other hand, the batteries pollute more than everything else, and the pollution, no smaller than before, is moved elsewhere: it's called *zero impact*!

As usual in contemporary life, it is important to change the words.

Houses today are made and redesigned to look like TV sitcoms. Without entrance, directly into the living room, large sofas, a theatrical space to host chatting while depending on a giant monitor... Transparent, large tubs and showers, as if everyone is waiting for Naomi Campbell's sudden visit for a show...

Wonderful kitchens, where only coffee can be made, but which must only be prepared in huge espresso machines, in capsules. The cost of coffee made this way is about 30 times higher, but the *saving* lies in the fact that, if you are very good, you can perhaps, with extreme care, collect the aluminium caps or similar, in different containers for recycling...

The real food, on the other hand, will be brought in from the outside, by the deliverers... food always varies: it will always be pizzas, but in hundreds of equal variations.

Then the coronavirus arrived, and someone discovered that perhaps that type of accommodation was not the most comfortable... and many people discovered that you can also prepare meals at home!

Cooking at home? Our grandmothers already knew that...

Then why not to investigate the recent past?

I've been thinking about an old neighborhood in Bologna.

Quartiere Barca. The “train” in Bologna.²

The great post-war reconstruction led to the introduction of diversified architecture in the new suburban areas. Among the urban extensions, one of the most important was the construction of the Barca district, in a large expansion area provided for in the then General Regulatory Plan.³ The design was carried out by a group coordinated by the architect Giuseppe Vaccaro. The district extends for about 43 hectares and is characterized by a low population density, large green spaces and has a strong recognition in terms of soil and urban design. All the houses are organised in “neighbourhood units”, equipped with collective equipment. In the eastern area of the district, public facilities had to be located: a church complex, kindergartens, schools, markets, a clinic, a municipality delegation, sports facilities,



Ill. 2. Portion of “the train”, the most famous building of the Barca district

Ill. 3. Portion of “the train”, detail

Ill. 4. One of the various types of buildings

Ill. 5. The district model

² M. Casciato, G. Gresleri (eds.), *Giuseppe Vaccaro. Architetture per Bologna*, Editrice Compositori, Bologna 2006; the Photographic portfolio by L. Massari.

³ The settlement came from a joint operation between the Municipality and IACP – Istituto Autonomo Case Popolari, which in the years 1954/56 had a program of land acquisition, aimed at the formation of a large public property: the district was built in the context of the Coordinamento Edilizia Popolare (CEP) and the INA-Casa plan. The construction began in 1957 and lasted for several phases, from 1962 until the mid-eighties.

public gardens. Only some of them have actually been built. Only a part of the initial overall project is realized: out of the 40,000 inhabitants expected, the district will host about 11,000, and not all the collective equipment originally designed were actually built...⁴

And now, about another part of this district, a letter:

I have to say it. To protect me and my children from the dystopian loneliness of this period were not the video chats. Neither the virtual rooms, nor the rainbows bounced on PCs, much less the video lessons. Perhaps not even the books we devoured consoled us. It was the courtyard that protected us. A modest condominium courtyard ... in a neighborhood of Bologna (Barca) in the shadow of the sanctuary of San Luca... In the courtyard of my condominium of the 60s, during these long days without the essential heartbeat of the school, we witnessed the days that were getting longer... I'm not an expert in urban planning... But a walk in my neighborhood is enough to understand that in the 60s and 80s in Bologna, when drawing up the urban plans, a lot of thought was given to services, including public green areas, sports facilities and, why not? also common areas to be shared with the people who lived in the house. Courtyards. Community gardens. Spaces to chat, read a newspaper... Then I have to say it. What protected my children during this period was the social thinking of many years ago, the concern for collective well-being, first and foremost for the elderly and children. To the farsighted urban planners of almost fifty years ago I owe the laborious serenity that I was able to maintain. To them more than to Zuckerberg.⁵

Unfortunately, as we see, for many reasons, only a small part of that neighborhood was built. But if we examine the original projects, we see that it was self-sufficient, made up of many parts that are still being studied today, connected to the centre by public transport, served by areas dedicated to commerce, leisure, schools, civic life ... Of course, at the time, to indicate a community, one thought of small shops, kindergartens and elementary schools, the church, some cinemas or social centres. Today we have large shopping malls to replace everything.

More contemporary, but certainly not an improvement.

But perhaps we can go back even further, to discover the roots of the struggle, the significance and the depth of designing civil living, through architecture and urbanism.

Thereby let's go back to the Wien of the early twentieth century, the Rote Wien that we could discover well in the exhibition *Das Rote Wien, 1919–1934*, Wien Museum MUSA, and in the text that describes it ...⁶

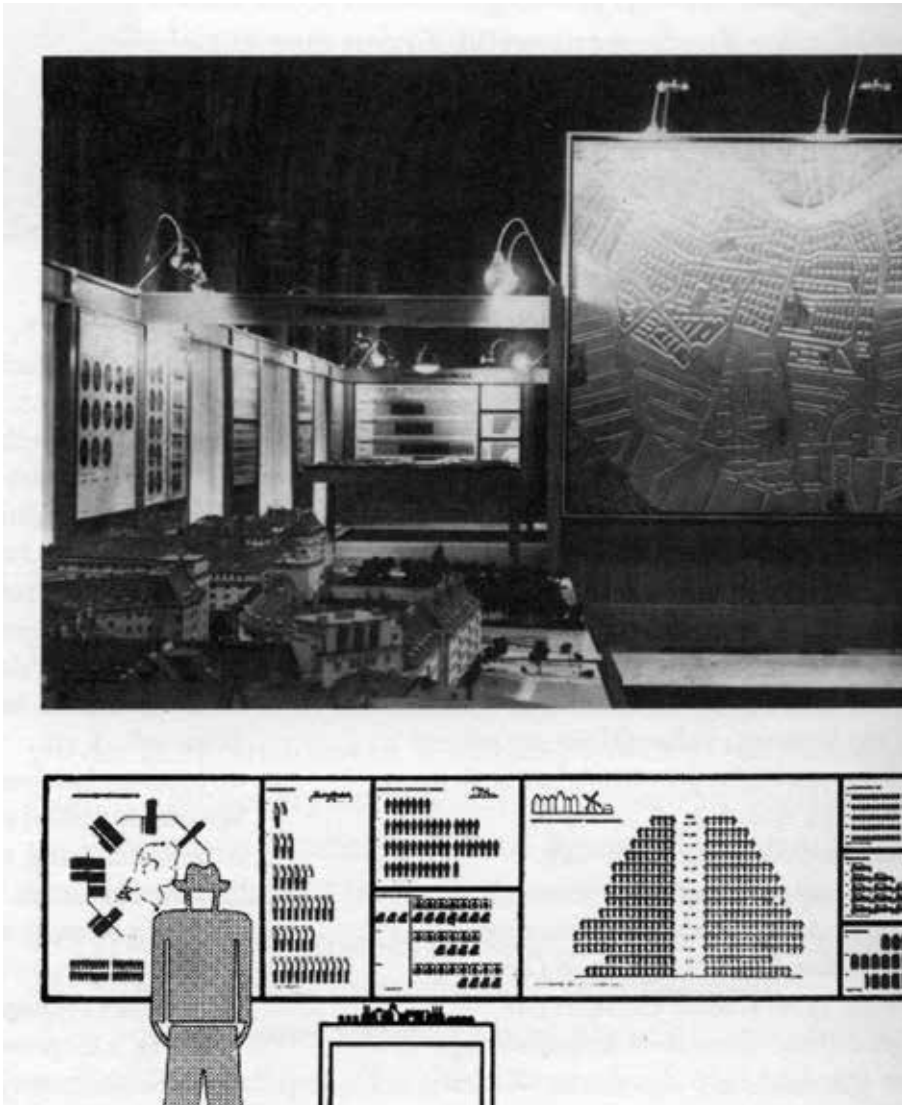
That period may seem a long time ago, but so much turmoil in today's society (that of then comparable to that of today) reminds us of the great technical possibilities (that of then comparable to that of today) and the crazy worldwide consequences that followed. We must forget the political approach that often accompanies us in these adventures in the past, an approach that takes someone to love them immediately and someone to ignore them, which are both *a priori*. But let's try instead to re-examine its design, and with it: a brand new didac-

⁴ Chiesa e Quartiere, 1962, no. 21.

⁵ G. Baldelli, *Ci hanno salvato i vecchi urbanisti* [in:] Invece concita, il posto delle vostre storie, 14.06.2020, <https://invececoncita.blogautore.repubblica.it/articoli/2020/06/14/ci-hanno-salvato-i-vecchi-urbanisti/> (access: 12.10.2020).

⁶ W.M. Schwarz et al. (eds.), *Das Rote Wien 1919–1934, Ideen Debatten Praxis*, Birkhäuser-Wien Museum, Basel-Wien 2019.

tic organization, a new approach to health and social services in the broadest sense (today we call it welfare), the connections with the international world, the deepening of communicative and psychological issues, the study of kitchens in residences, the development of common services in the neighborhood, and a thousand other things ...⁷



Ill. 6 Wien, Asstellung des Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum (GWM) in der Volkshalle im Neuen Rathaus, Wien, 1926; Otto und Marie Neurath Isotype Sammlung, University of Reading. (Here taken from the *Das Rote Wien 1919–1934*)

⁷ Subject areas from the volume index: *Grundlagen und Voraussetzung. Fürsorge. Schulreform und Bildung. Architektur, Infrastruktur, Wohnen. Kommunikation und Kunst. Arbeiterkultur. Gewaltsames Ende, Verfolgung und Emigration.*



- III. 7. TU Delft, Aula was designed by Van den Broek en Bakema architecture bureau, 1966. It is a classical example of a structure built in Brutalist style. TU Delft Aula houses main university restaurant and store, as well as lecture halls, auditoria, congress center, and administrative offices of the university.
- III. 8. TU Delft, The Van den Broek & Bakema auditorium sits like a huge frog in the green grass.
- III. 9. TU Delft, Library, designed by Mecanoo, around 1998, seen from the interior of the old Aula. The fascinating site for the new library on the 1960s campus of the Delft University of Technology is “overshadowed” by this large, brutalist concrete auditorium
- III. 10. TU Delft, Library, the new and the old buildings
- III. 11. The old Aula seen from the grass that covers the new library

It would be too long to go deeper into the subject, and there is no need to talk about that past with something resembling nostalgia, but a comparison strikes me: The urban planners and designers of a century ago hoped to design a better world and laboriously worked in that direction, while those of today seem to reduce each time the problem to the flood of words on which they feed; and to the extremely superficial discussion about how to accelerate the world through various types of electric skateboard and the strange ways in which we can make them run up and down streets and sidewalks. If that is not the solution, it will be another, equally superficial and a short-term one.⁸

When the truth was searched for in the structural field, too often we fell into what, in the best cases, was called *Brutalism* in architecture.

Few examples remain worthy of note today.

But there are a few left. I saw the main building of the University of Delft again after so many years.

It still lives well, and here we see it in the confrontation with the brand new library. But it's not because of its image, today a bit heavy as it was then, but because it's carefully designed in the way it organizes itself and its functions. In the architectural schools of 50 years ago, this part of the design was called in Italy *Caratteri distributivi degli edifici* (something like *distributive characters of buildings*), but it was too serious, profound and in some ways "modest" (in the sense of not directly visible) to be appreciated.

It would disappear from all schools of architecture soon.

As you can see, in order to return to talk about real facts, you have to move away from current approaches.

In the field of design and planning, everyone talks now particularly about *emotion*.

Without *emotion* today it seems that nothing can be explained, nobody seems to be able to explain anything about design without talking about *emotion*...

But it's not like that. How do you get to a masterpiece of design?

"With a mathematical path, because you never start from emotions."

That's how Giorgetto Giugiaro replied— seven honorary degrees, six Compasso d'Oro, three Cars of the Year, two Volanti d'Oro and other infinite awards – while talking to Web-Motori.

And what does Vico Magistretti had to tell us? ⁹

... In design there is a clear relationship with the technology of the manufacturer. This means working with information. Not just a good drawing. In design you work with others. It is a work of relationship.

Mass production is the opposite of style. You have to think with others. Technology is a way to overcome a kind of slavery...

Simplicity is the most complicated thing in the world. It comes from removing. It is immediately perceptible. But when someone says, "I might have done it," that's the best compliment.

⁸ I would like to remind here that most of the discussions on the environment and climate that have come to the agenda today are exactly the same as they were 50 years ago, then made obsolete and forgotten by the happy and joyful *dementia* of the 1980s ...

⁹ Vico Magistretti. Derived from the broadcast Mondo Politecnico, e.tv 9.12.2009.

There are objects that have lasted very long.

A good design is the Thonet chair that has lasted for 150 years.¹⁰

And to the question of what is the best preparation for those who study design? It's culture. "Some students asked me what book to study... I suggested War and Peace, the last chapter is a description of the house... Especially in a high-tech university, a classical culture is very important."¹¹

Perhaps Niccolò Tommaseo, a 19th-century Italian linguist and essayist, was right, as he made a big difference between *truth* and *true*.¹²

Let's see his words:

True, Real (*Vero, Reale*).

True can be opposed to false; real, to apparent. (*Vero* può opporsi a *falso*; *reale*, a *apparente*.)

But then, quoting other essayists, he points out that:¹³

Truth (*Verità, Veracità, Rettitudine, Lealtà, Libertà, Fedeltà, Giustizia, Sincerità, Schiettezza*.)

Truth is a transcendent virtue, which belongs in all well-regulated affairs; but according to the different deals, she takes different titles. In the schools it has the name of science; in describing, it has the name of truthfulness; in customs, of frankness; in conversation, of sincerity; in working, of rectitude; in bargaining, of loyalty; in counseling, of freedom; in keeping promises, of fidelity; and so in the courts it has the appropriate title of justice, which is a very constant will to give to each one what is due to him: if good, good; if evil, evil.¹⁴

I find this interpretation very interesting.

If truth is a virtue, it can be valuable even without the presence of its opposite, and things can be read in a completely different way. Then the truth in architecture is perhaps what we used to call the "good" architecture. Without too many comments related to its high appearance.

So let's go back to the past, to Giugiaro, to Magistretti, to the areas designed to live in (simply to live, even without too much of a hurry), to the Vienna of 100 years ago... to the things that are not told, but last over time.

¹⁰ At the time of the interview.

¹¹ Magistretti was born in 1920, and even today it seems that 80% of his projects are still in production. The Thonet chair he refers to, the *no.14* is the most diffused, created in 1859. It costed 3 florins, as much as 3 dozen eggs (but perhaps eggs were more expensive than today...). After 160 years still perfect...

¹² N. Tommaseo, *Dizionario dei Sinonimi della Lingua Italiana*, Francesco Vallardi, Milano circa 1867.

¹³ "La *verità* è una virtù trascendente, la quale entra in tutti gli affari ben regolati; senonchè, secondo i diversi affari, ella prende diversi titoli. Nelle scuole ha nome di *scienza*; nel favellare, di *veracità*; ne' costumi, di *schiettezza*; nel conversare, di *sincerità*; nell'operare, di *rettitudine*; nel contrattare, di *lealtà*; nel consigliare, di *libertà*; nell'attener le promesse, di *fedeltà*; e così nei tribunali ell'ha l'inclito titolo di *giustizia*, che è una costantissima volontà di dare a ciascuno ciò che gli sia dovuto: se bene, bene; se male, male." *Ibidem*, p. 451.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

And we end up taking, as always, from an ancient Italian adage:

The truth is told by children and drunks.

La verità la dicono i bambini e gli ubriachi

I wonder if we succeeded...

Which one of these categories do we think we belong to?

As you can see, maybe the *paper* is not finished; but it has already gone far enough to realize that it is better to close!

References:

- [1] Baldelli G., *Ci hanno salvato i vecchi urbanisti* [in:] Invece concita, il posto delle vostre storie, 14.06.2020, <https://invececoncita.blogautore.repubblica.it/articoli/2020/06/14/ci-hanno-salvato-i-vecchi-urbanisti/> (access: 12.10.2020).
- [2] Casciato M., Gresleri G. (eds.), *Giuseppe Vaccaro. Architetture per Bologna*, Editrice Compositori, Bologna 2006; the Photographic portfolio by L. Massari.
- [3] Chiesa e Quartiere, 1962, no. 21.
- [4] Schwarz W.M. et al. (eds.), *Das Rote Wien 1919–1934, Ideen Debatten Praxis*, Birkhäuser-Wien Museum, Basel-Wien 2019.
- [5] Tommaseo N., *Dizionario dei Sinonimi della Lingua Italiana*, Francesco Vallardi, Milano circa 1867.

Author's Note:

Alberto Pratelli, Full Professor Arch.

Since 1970, worked on the themes of architecture in Bologna and in Udine Universities. Full Professor since 1986, held courses on drawing and design in its various forms, on architectural design and art teaching. Active in the fields of architecture and design, interested in the world where problems – to reason in the old terms – can be solved analogically, through “shape” and figures. His research is oriented towards the analysis of the logic of building architecture, techniques for applied arts, and design as a language and form organizer.

alberto.pratelli@uniud.it