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PLUS CRITIQUE: MASSIMILIANO FUKSAS' DESIGNS



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IS MASSIMILIANO FUKSAS A CLASSICIST?

Italy-based architect Antonino Cardillo ponders on that eternal question in architecture—stay avante garde or take succour from the past. As a young and practising architect, he views Massimiliano Fuksas' futuristic works in glass, and argues how this award-winning architect's work is far from inclusive

Consistency is not an innate trait of an artist, although an analysis of his incongruities can often be useful in understanding the man and his actions. In his book *Caos Sublime* co-authored with Paolo Conti (Rizzoli 2009), Massimiliano Fuksas says, "He who imposes his own vision of the world, destroys. He who wants to restore the real identity, respect and reuse, finds it."

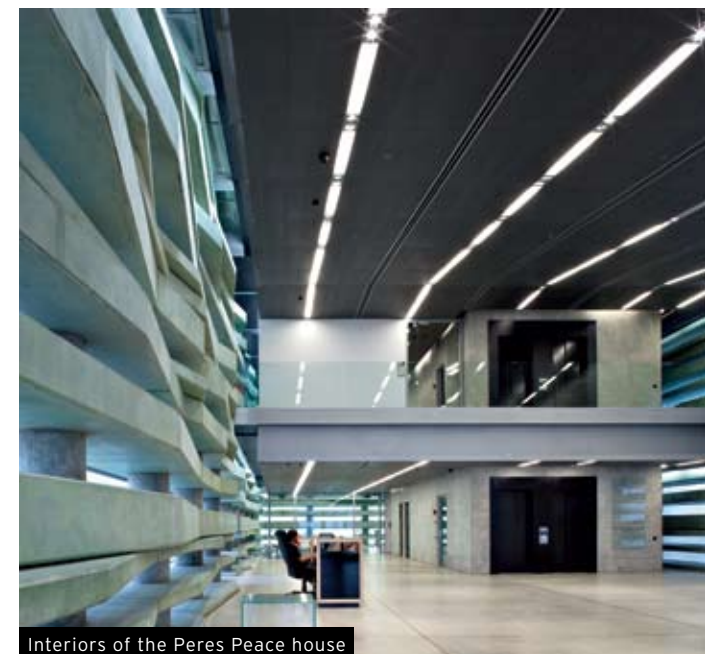
Like a futurist, Fuksas flaunts 'chaos,' almost as if it was his manifesto for a new architecture. "I must accept immediately the logic of urban disorder. If I don't have difficulty, I even create it." But it is notable that themes of inclusiveness, of acceptance, of reality and of contradiction, were already postulated many decades before by Robert Venturi, in 1966. On the contrary, looking at his work, what surprises is the presence of an order and a formal coherency that appears out of key with his theoretical premises. A few instances:

What is the road of the Fiera di Milano (the exhibition centre) if not an elegant straight colonnade which purges the ugliness and the visual contradictions of the Milanese hinterland? Can we talk of acceptance of reality? What is the 'cloud' of the future Palace of Congress in Rome if not a hermetic, highly prized late Rationalist glass casket that protects the deeds of the genius—the cloud to be exact—from comparison with the urban landscape of the EUR quarter (New Rome)? Where is the inclusiveness? And the ellipsoid glass of the Nardini distillery is yet another ideal of purity. Where are the contradictions? What is the Peres Peace of Jaffa if not a Cartesian enclosure? Certainly the walls are vibrant and perforated; there's a bit of chaos, but the layout of the building is yet again ordered and modernist. Again, the Ferrari research centre at Maranello—which forgetting its theoretical digressions, along with the church at Foligno, represent perhaps the best works of Fuksas. Don't their aristocratic cadences recall the mature works of Mies Van Der Rohe? Not by chance he has stated recently: "One of the best museums ever realised in the world is the National Gallery, Berlin, of Mies."

About his method of working in architecture, Fuksas says, "I adapt to what I find; like the Dadaists. But also like



Peres Peace House, Israel



Interiors of the Peres Peace house

Picasso, who in his works used the materials available at the time... Putting together different requirements, often opposed, thus trying to accompany the thousand contradictions of our age.” These ideas however, do not pervade his operative logic stuck in the dogmas about etherealness, transparency and naturalism.

A classicist sets an objective before starting work, trying to stay as close as possible to it. Maybe Massimiliano Fuksas is a classicist? Explaining one of his early projects, constructed in 1975, he says, “The Paliano project relates the failure of certainties, of stability... their fall... But also the appearance of a new positive world, suggested by the glass box and its transparency. That building, then, is a critical document on society... A prescient piece of architecture.”

But isn't identifying the new 'positive' world with a glass box the opposite of inclusiveness and contradiction in architecture? And furthermore what eco-sustainability is possible under such premises? In the end, if living inside a glass box is better, why has he chosen to found his studio inside an ancient Roman palace surrounded by heavy walls, without large windows and with a narrow internal courtyard? With regard to this it is interesting to point out one of his recent statements about his new church completed in 2009, at Foligno, in Umbria. He says, “I came from Fiera di Milano, I was tired of steel, iron and glass. I said to myself: Now I have to return to the wall, to cement, to heavy stone.” Do we not have a change of direction here?

For Fuksas, architecture is an act of criticism of reality, but he fails to see that it acquires sense and effectiveness from being in continuity with history. His recent works seem to live in a state of ingenuous isolation from time and space, prisoner of an axiomatic future. And this neo-futurist



Interiors of the MyZeil Shopping Centre



MyZeil Shopping Centre, Frankfurt, Germany

drift—which unfortunately encompasses much contemporary architecture – renders his actions abstract and homologous, cleaned of any possible geographical or temporal contamination, anti-historical, therefore... architecture for nowhere. He often declares that he works outside any avant-garde or utopia. But when with totalitarian virulence he states that “In architecture one acts always for the future, a little for the present, and never for the past. Looking to the past, re-elaborating it, revisiting it, is pure folly,” he reveals paradoxically his dogmatic nature, that of a demiurge of the twentieth century.

(These are the personal views of the author)