

**THE STRONG HAND OF PLUTO ON THE TREMULOUS FLESH OF PERSEFONE**

**About the Olivetti Factory of Luigi Cosenza in Naples**

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It is not easy to summarize the work of a creator in a single work. But it is true that we often immediately associate the name of an artist with a single one of his creations, the one we believe to be the most representative. And so we identify Velázquez with *Las Meninas* or Goya with the *Naked Maja*. Although I particularly identify the former with his *Venus in the Mirror* at the National Gallery in London or the latter with his *Dog Buried in the Sand* at the Prado Museum in Madrid. And Mies Van der Rohe is remembered for his *Farnsworth House* and Le Corbusier for his *Ville Savoie* rather than for his greatest works.

And if I had to choose a work by the Italian architect Luigi Cosenza that could represent him, I would choose his Olivetti of Pozzuoli, in Naples. And if of the many qualities that this work has, I had to highlight only one, I would speak of its exemplary implantation in the site, of its stupendous understanding of the place. Perhaps this is the first condition that must be demanded of any architecture, which is always built in a specific place.

When I first visited the Olivetti in Cosenza, perched on the hill that borders the Via Domitiana, I understood all this perfectly. And immediately came to my mind the mastery with which another Italian, Bernini, in his *Pluto and Persephone* makes Pluto's strong hand touch the trembling flesh of Persephone in that prodigious sculpture that always moves me deeply. So well placed it is.

I remember clearly when on one of my trips to Rome I went to the Galleria Borghese for the first time. Something you should do from the very first day. And there I discovered in a new, palpable way the universal sculptor Bernini. The same Bernini to whom I had already become an architect so long ago. In front of that rapture of Persephone by Neptune I felt an emotion that is difficult to describe. How could that pious Gian Lorenzo Bernini of the demons make that frigid marble capable of pulsating with such a warm heartbeat? As in Architecture, in sculpture there is always, there must be, a strong moment. The divine climax, when Pluto's right hand squeezes the morbid flesh of the left thigh of the anguished Persephone, is undoubtedly a high point in the History of Sculpture of all times.

And I repeat that all this came to my mind clearly on my first live visit to the Olivetti of Cosenza. My admiration was awakened by the way that group of buildings was placed on the hill of the Via Domitiana. With the same wisdom of Bernini. It was not for nothing that Bernini and Cosenza were both born in Naples. Of course, I don't know if this is the reason why, just as Bernini completes that sculptural group with a lion, Cosenza also had a lion at his feet at one point in his life, this time a real lion, in his own house.

After my last lecture in the precious Court Theater of the Royal Palace of Naples, Anna Maria Cafiero and Gianni Cosenza were telling me how their father had spent so much time deciding on the precise place where to set the different plans on which he wisely placed the building. He had to recognize the hill inch by inch, as the Greeks did on the

Acropolis, which has something of the Acropolis in this complex. Instead of doing what the Modern Movement did so many times, establishing a unique and radical explanation. I had the opportunity to get to know the Olivetti in depth on the occasion of my participation in the Jury of the prestigious Cosenza Prize, in 2000, when it became international, after the disappearance of the Palladio Prize. That year we gave it to the Aires Mateus, young Portuguese architects who have continued to rise ever since. There were also, among others, Mario Botta, Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani, then Director of the ETH Zurich where I was Gastdozent during the entire course 89-90, and Benedetto Gravagnuolo, now Director of the School of Architecture of Naples and whose book on Loos I have so often recommended to my students.

Adriano Olivetti, after the success of the Milan building that Figini and Pollini did so well, instead of repeating with the same architects, commissioned Luigi Cosenza in 1950 for the new Ivrea factory. ("A Napoli si poteva fare benissimo una fabbrica moderna"). Such was the prestige of our Neapolitan architect. And Luigi Cosenza, with his usual parsimony, designed and erected between 1951 and 1952 a building in which he not only took care of the spatial and constructive aspects, but which was also a model building of its kind from a functional point of view. And he succeeds in constructing a building that is very advanced in all its aspects. Including the social aspect.

Functionally it is resolved with a series of independent buildings very well articulated that allow its adaptation to the different levels of the sloping terrain. It is especially interesting the constructive section resolved with great ingenuity and that responds with simplicity to the different climatic requirements.

Formally, the Olivetti Factory in Cosenza belongs to the best Italian rationalist architecture. More tempered than Terragni's, less radical, and more adequate than Figini's and Pollini's, less compact. The work of Cosenza, and in a special way this Olivetti Factory, is a capolavoro of the Italian Architecture of that period that we call rationalist and that with the passage of time manifests itself of an indisputable quality.

The conclusion is that we are faced with one of the most important, essential figures of the architecture of the Modern Movement in Europe. One of the masters whose work has not only withstood the passage of time, but whose time has highlighted his high quality. That high quality that even in the human aspect can be seen in this insightful portrait that Mimo Jodice makes of Luigi Cosenza, a true master.