

Brands, Museums, Cities. The Case of Fondazione Prada

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Abstract. This paper explores the relationship between museums, exhibition spaces and urban environment, focusing on the case of the Fondazione Prada exhibition venue in Largo Isarco in Milan. This site, aligning with contemporary consumption trends, presents contemporary artworks within a former distillery repurposed as an exhibition space. The combination of avant-garde architecture, high-profile permanent and temporary exhibitions, a bar and restaurant designed as standalone destinations, and a carefully orchestrated system of openings and closures in relation to its surroundings has transformed Fondazione Prada into a dynamic space frequented by both locals and tourists. Beyond its cultural appeal, the venue has played a pioneering role in redefining the identity of its neighborhood, catalyzing ongoing urban transformations.

1. From Iconic Brand to Urban Transformation

Brands are increasingly expanding their reach beyond the products they create or the services they offer. They have evolved into multifaceted entities that take a stance on social issues, embody values, protect their reputation, uphold ideals, challenge adversaries, and engage with interlocutors – whether to align with them or to set themselves apart.

Building on this trend, some fashion brands have initiated a dialogue with contemporary art in various ways: acquiring artworks, collaborating with renowned artists and architects on commercial projects, and establishing galleries and museums. However, the ambition to bridge visual arts and fashion goes beyond merely departing from traditional marketing in favor of cultural branding (Holt 2023) or elevating a brand into the pantheon of iconic labels. These initiatives have a far broader impact, positioning brands as key social actors in shaping urban identities – architecturally, through the construction or restoration of spaces dedicated to their activities, but also politically, culturally, and in terms of urban development.

Through strategic choices regarding exhibition spaces – deciding where to open a store, where to place a museum, whom to entrust with its design, what kind of physical and ideological path to offer visitors, and how to engage with local communities – brands actively transform urban areas. They shine a spotlight on specific neighborhoods while potentially diverting attention from others, generating effects that extend far beyond retail transactions or museum visits. In some cases, they even become integral to a city's identity, embedding themselves in its social and architectural fabric. Consider how Silicon Valley's demographic composition and urban landscape are inseparable from the high-tech industries that are located there, or how LEGO has shaped Billund into a global tourist destination centered around the well-known brick factory (Giannitrapani 2024). Similar dynamics can be observed in the connections between Maranello and Ferrari, Stuttgart and Mercedes-Benz, Dublin and Guinness, and many others. It is therefore not merely a matter of a museum attracting millions of tourists and reshaping a city, nor of a brand choosing to invest in a specific urban area. Rather, it is a triadic relationship – exhibition space, city – where each actor is bound to the others by complex, multidimensional interactions. As we have seen, these relationships have the power to influence the developmental trajectories of cities and their inhabitants.

These dynamics will be explored in this paper through the case study of the Milan venue of Fondazione Prada.



2. Brands Patrons

As we said, for some time now, brands, especially high fashion brands, have broadened their spectrum of action, going beyond their original product sectors to engage in various ways with the world of art, dispelling earlier doubts and countless controversies surrounding a supposed unjust “artification” of fashion or an alleged commodification of art. While a temporary exhibition of Armani collections at the Guggenheim in New York in 2000 and a 2007 exhibition dedicated to Valentino at the Ara Pacis (Pezzini 2011) caused quite a stir, over the past twenty years, the hybridisation of art and fashion discourses has increasingly become the norm (think of the Bulgari’s exhibition at Palazzo Venezia and Hermès at the Ara Pacis; and the list continues).

On the stores front, there has been an explosion of increasingly sophisticated window displays and interior designs, spectacular temporary stores and collaborations with contemporary artists commissioned to design collections or exhibit their works within stores. As a result, while museums hosting commercial products have, in some cases, become akin to shops, shops displaying artworks have transformed into museums. These trends are not entirely new but have been spreading progressively since at least the 1980s (consider the iconic Fiorucci store in Milan, filled with works by Keith Haring). On the front of exhibition venues, brands such as the Louis Vuitton Foundation, the Cartier Foundation, the Kering Group, and, as we will discuss, the Prada Foundation have instituted their own art spaces, mainly dedicated to contemporary art. In doing so, the brand adopts the thematic role of the modern patron, combining the ideals of the early museums – making art accessible to the public – with the spirit of private collecting, which predates the birth of the museum: showcasing works and artists (transitive dimension) also means exhibiting one’s own aesthetic competence (reflective dimension) (Zunzunegui 2011).

If, on the other hand, fashion, like art, is a language that expresses systems of taste and axiologies, it is clear that this homology makes the incessant translation from one to the other pertinent. And, after all, if we think about it, hybridism (between art and fashion, in our case), is not the exception but the rule that allows the reaffirmation of an identity’s core through coherent deformations. Similarly to when an information broadcast incorporates elements of entertainment: it is precisely the small *divertissement* (in the background) that acts as a counterpoint and in turn reiterates the informative nature of the program in question (in the foreground)¹. Thus, the opening of museums or the collaboration with artists on the one hand makes it possible to translate values – aesthetic, ethical, etc. – from clothing to paintings; on the other, it reaffirms the company’s core business, with the exhibition venue and its programming serving as a translation of a certain way of conceiving the role of the brand, while still maintaining its boundaries.

Within this framework, in the 1990s, the Fondazione Prada was founded, on the initiative of Miuccia Prada and Patrizio Bertelli, with the aim of promoting culture through exhibitions and events primarily focused on contemporary art. Since 2011, the Foundation has opened a venue in Venice, in the historic building of Ca’ Corner della Regina, two locations in Milan (Largo Isarco and Galleria Vittorio Emanuele) followed by expansions in Shanghai, Tokyo and New York. It has thus configured itself as a global cultural hub, coordinating exhibitions that often span different cities around the world simultaneously. The venue in Largo Isarco in Milan, which we will deal with here, is the most representative, due to the size of its exhibition spaces (19,000 square metres), the spectacular nature of the architectural project, and its media impact.

Hailed at the time of its opening as a space capable of regenerating its surroundings – therefore as a trendy and developing space – it has in fact acted as a flywheel, triggering, as we will see, another series of chain transformations that have redefined the surrounding areas and continue to do so. Rather than predicting the future as prophets do – who operate in the long term and between equally probable alternatives, as Fabbri and Calabrese (2014) already pointed out in 1989 – the media have contributed to the construction

¹ It is the same mechanism emphasised by Floch (1995) for Chanel’s total look, in which the baroque counterpoint only enhances the classicism of the silhouette.



of reality, according to the classic principle of a self-fulfilling prophecy: by repeating to the hilt that that project would change the neighborhood, the media have in fact contributed to triggering this change.

3. New contents for old housings

In 2015, the spaces of the Fondazione Prada in Largo Isarco, Milan, were inaugurated following a restoration project entrusted to the OMA studio, led by Rem Koolhaas, with whom Prada had already collaborated on other initiatives and for the construction of some stores. The project involved the recovery of a former early twentieth-century distillery, which was complemented by three new buildings: Cinema, Podium and Tower (the latter inaugurated later, in 2018).

The process of re-functionalising architecture is certainly not new; indeed, it has been and remains the norm: think of Greek temples that became Catholic basilicas or Roman remains used to build palaces of Moroccan emperors. Traditional museums themselves were often situated in ancient noble palaces. In the last few years, former factories, warehouses, and the like have been converted to serve as sites for several modern museums² – such as for example, the Tate Modern, the Hangar-Bicocca, Punta della Dogana in Venice, the Macro in Rome, the City of Science in Naples, and the Centrale Montemartini in Rome³. The modern re-functionalisation of spaces is motivated by the need for recovery, centralisation, and redevelopment of peripheral areas: industrial zones, being on the edge of cities, are ideally destined to become nerve centres for cultural development. While the size of industrial spaces certainly makes them suitable for hosting large-scale works and installations, it is not only the practical aspect that has contributed to the spread of this trend. It also relates in part to the valorisation of reuse and recycling—the ecological logic that aligns with contemporary sensibility.

While from a functional point of view, conferring a new use on an industrial plant raises questions about what to do with portions of urban spaces no longer in use, from a semiotic point of view, questions emerge relating to resemantisation, involving the disinvestment and new investment of values in buildings⁴. Converting a factory or a warehouse into a museum implies a transformation of the thematic role of space and, therefore, a change of scripts and actors associated with those places. Not only that, but it will also be a matter of choosing: what to keep and what to transform? To what extent should one keep trace and memory of previous functions? How can the past, however recent, be translated into the present of architecture? How can we honour the memory of what was there?

Fondazione Prada's choice was to keep the past and the present distinct. The difference between the old and new buildings of the architectural complex is striking due to its contrast: chromatic – as in the case of the Haunted House, covered with gold leaf that stands out with its brightness against the opaque gray of the pre-existing buildings – but also topological – as in the case of the Tower, which stands out in height, differentiating itself from the rest of the complex which develops mostly horizontally (Fig. 1). Thus, although the exterior declares its industrial nature – blending with the surrounding urban context and remaining rather anonymous – the strong contrasts characterising the interiors make the past immediately distinguishable from the present. This discontinuity, this temporal tear is underlined by Koolhaas himself:

The Fondazione is not a preservation project and not a new architecture. Two conditions that are usually kept separate here confront each other in a state of permanent interaction – offering an ensemble of fragments that will not congeal into a single image, or allow any part to

² Some of the reflections contained in this paragraph were elaborated with Carlo Campailla, on the occasion of the meeting “Spazio al tempo. Eredità museali” (October 2023), as part of the *Ereditare. Semiotica della trasmissione*, a series of seminars curated by Francesco Mangiapane and Francesco Mazzucchelli.

³ See, in particular, Pezzini (2011), on the case of Punta della Dogana and Fondazione Vedova in Venice, and Hammad (2006) for the analysis of the Centrale Montemartini in Rome.

⁴ On this subject cf. *Desemantizzare, risemantizzare, Versus 1/2022*, edited by A. Giannitrapani.

dominate the others. New, old, horizontal, vertical, wide, narrow, white, black, open, enclosed – all these contrasts establish the range of oppositions that define the new Fondazione⁵.

To support this general approach, a section of the Foundation's website is dedicated to the musealisation of the museum itself: some artists were invited to document the transformations that the different rooms went through during the renovation process through photos and videos. It is an interesting metacommunicative operation, which demonstrates how the need to present not only the exhibition but the museum space itself – and, by extension, the institution representing it – independently of its content, is increasingly felt. Specifically, *Spirits*⁶ was a project commissioned by the Foundation to Ila Bêka and Louise Lemoine, who have created fifteen short films that narrate the final phase of the distillery's transformation. Fragment no. 13, in particular, features the former owner of the factory, who, wandering through the rooms of his former home, recalls what once existed in each space ("here was my children's room...", "here there was a spiral staircase"), but and then shows signs of disorientation, no longer able to recognise the space as it was in the past ("now I don't know where the rooms were anymore", "I am completely lost") and drawing attention to elements of the structure that have been removed ("there were very nice radiators, you have stripped them all off").

In general, except for dining establishments (see paragraph 4), the reference to the building's industrial past is largely lost in the interior spaces, where the container was emptied, made flexible and ready to accommodate different installations, in line with the principles of new museums (Pezzini 2011). In the interiors, the past and the present are disjointed and unbalanced, with a prevailing emphasis on the present, or even the future. The recovery of the building went in the direction of a reflexive disjunctive transformation (that is, set in motion by the enunciator), embodying a *renunciation* (Greimas 1983) of the past, to which only vague references remain.



Fig. 1 – Fondazione Prada, Milan.

4. Photography for Sharing

Perhaps precisely because of the complexity of the space – vast and spread across several buildings incorporated within a single area – the museum enunciator has provided orientation devices at the start of the itinerary that frame the Foundation as a "place", in De Certeau's (1990) terms: unifying visions that, while excluding practices and itineraries, account for the unity of the project beyond its physical

⁵ www.fondazioneprada.org/visit/visit-milan/?lang=en.

⁶ www.fondazioneprada.org/visit/visit-milano/.

dispersion. For instance, in the library, a large model reproduces the Foundation in 3D (Fig. 2) and immediately thereafter, at the ticket office, an informative map set into the pavement highlights the relationships between the different buildings and their relative positions, serving as a guide in the concrete exploration of the spaces (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2 – 3D Model of the Fondazione Prada displayed in the library.



Fig. 3 – Map set into the pavement.

One of the first places visitors encounter along the itinerary is the Podium, where temporary exhibitions are hosted. This large, open space punctuated by windows that allow visitors to maintain contact with the outside world – and therefore with the other surrounding Foundation buildings – is rearranged according to the specific needs of the scheduled events. The Iranian marble flooring and perforated aluminium walls (which help to maintain optimal thermal conditions) create a neutral background that can be adapted to meet various requirements.

For example, in the case of the exhibition *Paraventi: Folding Screens from the 17th to 21st Centuries* (October 2023 – February 2024) – a multisite exhibition dedicated to screens held simultaneously in the Foundation's spaces in Shanghai and Tokyo – the ground floor of the Podium was segmented thanks to undulating surfaces made of transparent and opaque plexiglass, which established a clear plastic relationship with the objects on display (as both the screens and the partitions featured undulating forms). These partitions introduced subtle thresholds that, on the one hand, encouraged visitors to explore similarities between screens on display in the same area (for example, the most recent screens on digital supports), while on the other hand, they connected the elements of the project into a unitary whole (since the other sections of the exhibition were rendered largely visible precisely by the transparent surfaces, Fig. 4). The itinerary was free and labyrinthine at the same time and postulated an enunciatee invited to lose themselves among the small environments created by the subdivisions, with the transparent surfaces promising an upcoming conjunction with the objects exhibited in the neighbouring areas (Hammad 2003). A sense of disorientation and discovery, typical of new museums (Pezzini 2011), that is also recreated through the absence of information supports in situ: the explanatory captions of the artefacts on display were not physically present but could be accessed exclusively via smartphones by scanning a QR code on the introductory panel of the exhibition. On the upper floor, completely shielded from the outside space, the exhibition followed a much more traditional approach. Here the screens were valorised by being framed and placed on horizontal supports that also reproduced their zigzag shape (Fig. 5).

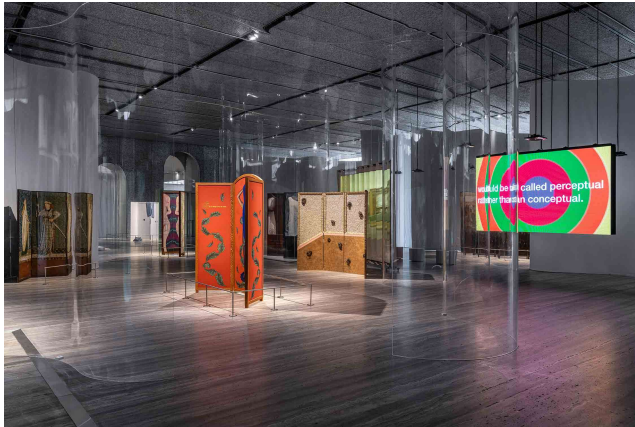


Fig. 4 – Set up for the exhibition dedicated to screens on the ground floor of the Podium.



Fig. 5 – Set up for the exhibition dedicated to screens on the first floor of the Podium.

The Tower, a new building and the ideal endpoint of the route (being the furthest from the entrance), serves as a kind of fulcrum for the complex. A sort of portico precedes the entrance, partially screening the city with a series of semi-transparent tubes that blur the view (Fig. 6). In the entrance area, a staircase is surrounded and surmounted by mirrors, creating a kaleidoscopic effect that inscribe the visitor within the architecture through an interplay of glances and reflections (Fig. 7). In general, everything in the building is invested with artistic value and even those spaces that typically serve merely functional purposes become an integral part of the visit. This includes the architecture of the toilets and the lift (Fig. 8), which becomes part of the experience not only for its size and the material it is made from (pink onyx), but also for acting as a frame, a delimiting device that opens almost magically to the floors, framing works or portions of the city, the latter incorporated in their own right among the artefacts to be admired.



Fig. 6 – Space in front of the entrance to the Tower.

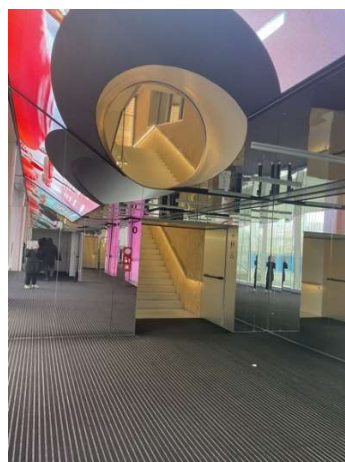


Fig. 7 – The entrance to the Tower.



Fig. 8 – The lift.



The building houses *Atlas*, Fondazione Prada's permanent and most representative collection, which features large-scale installations. This is the case of such works as *Gantenbein Corridor* and *Upside Down Mushroom Room* by Holler, which open the visit on the top floor (where the staff recommends starting the tour) and merge, in reality, into a single piece: the first is a corridor to be walked through in total darkness, the second a room with giant, swirling mushrooms hanging from the ceiling. The obscured vision in the corridor is designed to magnify the viewer's sense of amazement upon entering the second room, where they are transported into a fantastical world reminiscent of Carroll's imagination. It is also the case of *Tulips*, by Koons, a huge bouquet of colourful steel tulips placed on the floor and surrounded by works by Carla Accardi; or of the floor almost entirely dedicated to Hirst's work, among which is *Tears for Everybody's Looking at You*, a glass case inside which a downpour is simulated and an umbrella protecting two fake ducks is suspended. Works that, as is increasingly the case in museums, are not so-much site specific as they are *photo-specific*, inserted ad hoc to capture, more than the visitor's eyes, the smartphone's camera lens, called upon to capture snapshots ready to be sent and displayed on Instagram. Thus, whereas in the past taking photographs in museums was prohibited, and later allowed only in some cases (minor paintings, specific rooms, etc.), today it is the museum itself that encourages the practice of photography (Rosso 2023), even setting up corners that explicitly invite selfies. As a result, the work of art is now continuously reproduced, indeed sustained by its reproduction, in a reversal of Benjamin's thought (1936), according to which the uniqueness and sacredness of a sculpture or a painting are inseparably tied to the equally unique moment of its experience, a singular and autonomous act. Reproducibility (made possible by photography, but also by cinema) would in his view, strip the work of art of its "aura", desecrating it by exponentially increasing its "exhibition value" while erasing its "cult value". And at the same time, the spectacularising process (Abruzzese 2003; Codeluppi 2021) concerns not only seemingly frivolous, transient goods designed to attract a supposedly naïve consumer, but also permanent, eternal artworks, with which the committed visitor playfully engages in a conscious way.

The space itself modulates the gaze, calibrating openings and closures: blind walls alternate with large windows; rooms that tend to promote continuity between the different exhibition spaces alternate with places that focus the gaze inwards. And, as one ascends, the view increasingly opens up to the city, with a panorama that becomes gradually wider and encompasses ever greater sections of the urban landscape (see par. 5).

5. Food, Fashion and Art

As in any innovative exhibition space, great attention is paid to areas for internal food consumption. Starting with the *Luce bar* (Fig. 9), designed by Wes Anderson, who signs the project by bringing back to the architectural space the colours, scripts and atmospheres typical of his films. It is in this space that the history of the building is referenced: both in theme (the world of spirits that is part of the gastronomic offer of the restaurant) and in style (with an early twentieth-century atmosphere reflected in the décor and the furnishings). Formica furniture, shades of green and pastel pink, jukeboxes and pinball machines reproduce a vintage atmosphere, in which the visitor enters the scene as an actor. Through *débrayage*, they are called to project themselves into a fascinating past with a retro flavour that even in the intentions of the enunciator explicitly aspires to recall the old Milanese cafes. The new suburbs where the Foundation is located, thus, reproduce the old historic centre. However, it is precisely this theatricalisation of the past that is quickly abandoned for the rest of the visit, in favour of a projection towards the future.

This particular taste for vintage aesthetic (Pozzato, Panosetti 2013) is also resumed on the sixth floor of the Tower, in the restaurant of the same name, which boasts, among its furnishings, some pieces from the *Four Seasons* in New York. Citing an icon of overseas dining, known among other things for its elite clientele, once again conveys a past that is significant less for its historical time than for its mediatisation and the consequent seduction that it can exert on the customer, in a mechanism perfectly consistent with what was already at work in the *Luce bar*. Like the *Four Seasons*, and in line with the wider context of the

Foundation, the restaurant is furnished with design objects (by Saarinen) and decorated with artworks, including by Fontana. The concept behind the restaurant is to continue the tour through contemporary art even during the gastronomic experience. It is no coincidence that the Foundation's website includes a dedicated page describing the works exhibited in the restaurant, almost as though part of a catalogue. And in this constant pursuit of exclusivity, another typical motif of haute cuisine emerges: the option of booking a seat at the chef's table, a marked table, with dedicated service, in which, thanks to a new spatial separation, a new and more elitist community is created. From this station, diners not only enjoy a view of the city from a private terrace but are also offered a privileged view into the bustling kitchen. This is a reward reserved for the patron, whose status is, if you think about it, very different from that of a typical customer at a restaurant with an open kitchen. At the *Tower* restaurant, only a select few are allowed to admire the chef's work. In this way, the culinary craft is not commodified, put at the mercy of anyone, but it is protected by the chef in their role as an informer, who, negating the desire to be seen, presents a modest image (Landowski 1989; cf. chap. 3). Thus, in contrast to the increasing spectacularising of the exhibition space, the restaurant is becoming more and more privatised, transferring the aura from the artistic object – multiplied by media devices – to the food object, sacralised in its unique and singular consumption.

Adjacent to the restaurant is another bar, where, once again, the regime of glances plays with partial shielding: the bottle wall (Fig. 10), as described on the website a large suspended bottle rack filled with spirits, on the one hand “frames the bar” and, as a frame, emphasises the importance of the interior space; on the other hand, it offers tantalising glimpses of the city, enticing the visitor towards the outdoor terrace. Note, again, the artistic isotopy, reinforced not only by the concept of the frame, but also through terminology that explicitly references the art world (the website, for example, mentions the “art” of mixology’ practiced at the bar).



Fig. 9 – *Luce* bar.



Fig. 10 – Bottle stacks near the *Tower* restaurant.

6. Glances at the City

The city of Milan, evoked as an atmosphere of the past in the spaces of food consumption, is staged in its contemporaneity in various points that open onto it (Fig. 11). The openness to the surrounding spaces, the city itself becoming a work to be admired, and the dialogue between inside and outside are typical features of new museums (Pezzini 2011). What makes this particular place “trendy”, however, is not just the openness, but the fact that these apertures offer a panorama that, in turn, denotes trends. What is staged is not so much an aestheticized city, captured at its major tourist landmarks, but rather a suburb in the making and seized in its transformative movement, as it prepares to shift from the outskirts to a new cultural and commercial centre. The view from the *Tower* looks out over former *terrain vagues* now under construction, dotted with cranes busy redefining the surroundings, offering a glimpse of the promise of a city – a panorama of the future, in short.



Fig. 11 – View from the Tower of Fondazione Prada.

At the time of writing, the area in front of the Foundation is occupied by a building site engaged in the construction of the Olympic village, which will host athletes during the 2026 Winter Olympics and will be converted into a student residence after the event. The village is therefore already designed with a view to its re-functionalisation, to be carried out with minimal interventions. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argued, *becoming* has no end, as it is always destined to transform into another state of becoming⁷. And, what is even more relevant for the purposes of our discourse, becoming always postulates relationships of proximity and nearness:

Starting from the forms one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfills, becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are closest to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes. This is the sense in which becoming is the process of desire. This principle of proximity or approximation [...] indicates as rigorously as possible a *zone of proximity or copresence* of a particle [...] Proximity is a notion, at once topological and quantal, that marks a belonging to the same molecule, independently of the subjects considered and the forms determined (pp. 272-273).

The dimension of resonance (in our case between spaces) is therefore a key characteristic of becoming. Fondazione Prada acts as a kind of pivot, radiating its performative force beyond its boundaries, and interpreting its role as a subjectivity capable of regenerating its surroundings; as a place that can trigger transformations through contagion. As it happens, shortly after its inauguration the Covivio group launched its urban regeneration project *Symbiosis*, aimed at revitalising the neighbourhood. The entire area, therefore, seems to be characterised by an inchoative aspectuality, within which one can trace signals open to sets of possibilities that tend to be framed as chains of randomness (Lozano 2021).

Two considerations can be made in this regard. The first concerns the fact that the aesthetics of becoming is already outlined in the interior spaces of the Foundation, particularly in the Tower, where some internal partitions of the exhibition rooms are made from OSB panels (Fig. 12) and descending the stairs, one encounters steel grids covering plywood sheets overlaid with splashes of paint (Fig. 13). This rough aesthetic evokes the atmosphere of a construction site still in progress, underscoring its imperfectiveness. In a nutshell, an internal becoming that generates an external becoming.

⁷ On the subject, see also Ceriani (2023).

The second consideration concerns the fact that, in this narrative construction, it is Prada's role as a transforming subject that is emphasised. The view, by focusing on change, simply seizes the engine of that change. This narrative construction has a visual counterpart in the views and perspectives offered to visitors: while the upper floors of the Tower afford a view of the construction site and the surrounding suburbs in the process of centralisation (the transitive dimension of the gaze), going down the stairs one discovers a series of windows overlooking Piazza Olivetti and, in particular, one of the first buildings built as part of the Symbiosis project, featuring a mirrored wall (Fig. 14): on this surface, Fondazione Prada narcissistically reflects itself, sanctioning itself as the hero of this story (the reflective dimension of the gaze).



Fig. 12 – OSB panels delimit the exhibition spaces of the Tower.



Fig. 13 – Rough aesthetics on the stairs of the Tower.



Fig. 14 – The building in which Fondazione Prada is reflected.



The result is a dual regime in the way in which the upcoming time is framed. From the perspective of the enunciatee, the panoramic and all-encompassing gaze frames an “avenir” (Latour 2015) in which the visitor is called upon as a mere spectator, with no control over what unfolds. Conversely, from the point of view of the enunciator, this panoptic vision presents a nearly certain “future” (Latour 2015) that is programmed and programmable, and in one’s own hands⁸. Consequently, two different regimes of temporality emerge: the first, pertaining to the enunciatee, is a deontic-injunctive future, modalised by duty, characterised by a high degree of predictability (of the present over the future) and a low degree of influenceability (of the future over the present) (Fontanille 2021). The second, tied to the enunciator, is a buletic-predictive future, modalised by will, and characterised by a high degree of predictability and influenceability (Fontanille 2021).

In summary, the space conveys a narrative aimed at the future, a scenario already conceived in terms of posterity, to be understood as “the horizon of expectations of today’s accomplishments, the dimension in which the future is built from a present that is passing (or that we already consider as past)” and which implies a form of positive sanction on what is being done (Lorusso 2020). The view, then, becomes a manifestation of a future perfect, in which what is yet to come is not conceived as pure virtuality but as an actualisation on the path to realisation, something inevitably approaching the present (Bertrand 2021).

7. What’s Next?

Thus, a space emerges that reflects a precise idea of trend, associated with a particular conception of historical time. On the one hand, the past is blurred, so to speak: the history of the building is a background of which only faint traces are visible. References to the city’s history occasionally come to the surface, as an impressionist portrait linked to a cinematic image of Milan, as we have seen in the case of *Luce bar* and the Tower restaurant. The *space of experience*, understood as the *present of the past* (Koselleck 1979), is reduced and reconstructed, imagined as partially detached from the present and instead projected towards the future.

On the other hand, the *horizon of expectation* (Koselleck 1979), understood as the *present of the future*, expands out of all proportion, coming to the fore not only in the temporary exhibitions and permanent collections, largely focussed on contemporary art, or in the design of avant-garde spaces that hint at the most recent museographic concepts: it also reflects the interpretation of the museum’s role as a proactive engine and pivot of urban development, especially in a city like Milan, which is already future-oriented and driven by an efficiency-focussed logic.

This interplay of foregrounds and backgrounds between present and past can be understood in terms of enunciative praxis (Fontanille, Zilberberg 1998), which notably takes into account the collective dimension implied in the phenomena of enunciation. With enunciation, not only does an instance of subjectivity appropriate the *langue* to produce a speech act but, in fact, the reiteration of the uses of language somehow reacts on the system, with repeated acts that are ready to be reactivated in the subsequent enunciation processes (see also Bertrand 2000). That is, the uses of language can be reabsorbed into schemes, institutionalised, just as shared schemes may vanish. Fontanille and Zilberberg, in particular, have proposed a tensive model that considers how the virtuality of the *langue* – actualised in discourse and realised in speech acts – can be potentialised, remaining as a reserve of meaning, always able to attain a new virtualisation in a circular way. This would give rise to phenomena of *emergence* (from virtualisation to actualisation), *appearance* (from actualisation to realisation), *decline* (from realisation to potentialisation) and *disappearance* (from potentialisation to virtualisation), with ascending and descending

⁸ On these aspects see also Bertrand (2021), who links Latour’s distinction between “futur” and “avenir” to Coquet’s theory of enunciating instances: on the one hand there would be a “futur” that is the result of subject’s intentional programme involving ‘assumption’ operations; on the other hand, an “avenir” envisioned by a non-subject which instead simply asserts it under an external influence.



movements that could be combined with each other in various ways. If it is true that every upward movement is accompanied by a downward one, and that therefore, in these fluctuations of semiotic dimensions, the modes of existence are crossed according to scales and gradations, it is clear that such a model can be useful for describing the universe of tendencies, bringing out different facets and possible articulations. As if to say, there is no single tendency but a set of *tendencies*, which vary according to the way they are conceived and, as we said at the beginning, constructed. In the case of Fondazione Prada, in particular, we would be faced with a *fluctuation*: on the one hand, the industrial nature of the building and the district imposes itself as a *declining* dimension – that is, which passes from the realised to the potential – remaining as a reserve of meaning always ready to be reactivated; the content of the exhibition space (and its surroundings), however, manifests itself instead as an *apparition*, transitioning, in that perpetual becoming that we have encountered, from actualisation to realisation.



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