**Un grattacielo per la Spina. Torino. 6 progetti su una centralità urbana** by Michela Comba, Carlo Olmo, Manfredo di Robilant , Allemandi, Turin, 2007, pp. 176, 208 col., 79 b/w.
Available also in English: **Choosing a Tower. Turin. 6 Projects for a skyscraper.**

Intesa Sanpaolo consulted six architecture firms of international renown before building its new tower headquarters in Turin. The challenge of this 150-metre-high skyscraper was tackled by Hiroshi Hara, Estudio Lamela, Daniel Libeskind, MVRDV, Dominique Perrault and Renzo Piano Building Workshop. Piano's proposal is the one that will be built. This catalogue illustrates all the projects presented and the development of the one that will be constructed. With height as its leitmotif, it offers a comparative glance at design cultures and visions that are as different as they are interesting and thus aid understanding of the debate on architecture, its forms and reasons.
A competition by invitation proposes the – perhaps - oldest *topos* in the history of architecture: a meeting between the principals and the architects. And it was explicit in the case of the new Intesa Sanpaolo headquarters, because the principals organized and described their request in a *Preliminary Document* with a wealth of nuances. By reading between the lines, it is possible to see how some international architecture firms interpreted (or twisted) individual issues and the specifications as a whole.
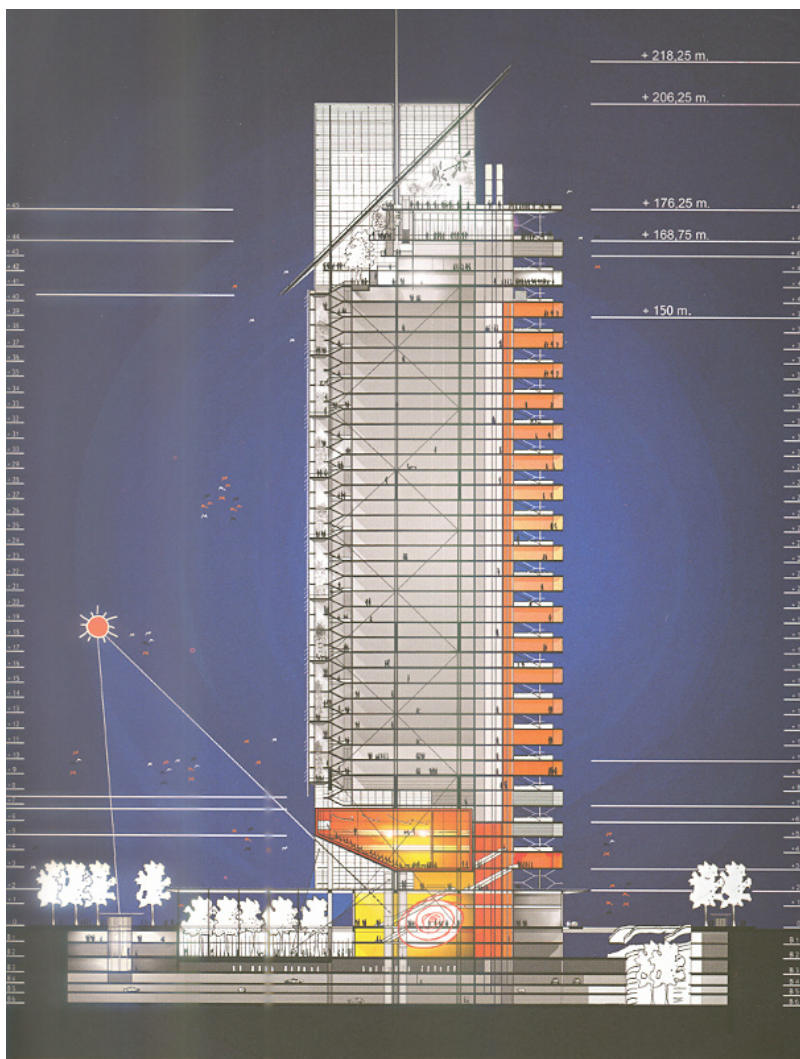
Without doubt, image is the factor which they all took into consideration in their different ways. With the exception of RPBW, the six selected groups worked by detaching image from architecture, up to the oxymoron by MVRDV, for which image is architecture. A juxtaposition that the tall building has been given in the various stages of its history and which, in effect, has more general roots.
The grammar of metropolitan images - and the skyscraper is the most recurrent icon - has hardly ever been investigated historiographically.

The images are still *images-atomes* which disregard the critical reasoning that gives them a meaning. Indeed, a tall building usually implies a metropolis. It is also for this reason that nowadays the migration of symbols to tall buildings is as banal as it is widespread for recognizing the locations and parts of a city.

A criticality that clearly emerges in the proposed architectures. Except for RPBW and Perrault, the projects are a conventional response to distribution issues, while research (and surprise, at times paradoxical) is devoted to volumetric choices. In this context, the projects are not only self-referential (work continues on tall buildings already begun by the firms), but also express their concern for novelty (the case of Libeskind as well as MVRDV), thus losing the urban scale and, therefore, making inventions artificial or figurative. Research that neglects another request's specificity.

The *Preliminary Document* seeks and draws up a genealogy of the bank building in Turin. In effect, none of the projects presented for consultation takes this tradition into consideration. They are container-projects tied to the tradition of skyscrapers. The hypothesis that there could be a possible shape for a tall building used as the headquarters of a bank is not envisaged. Moreover, today's internationalized architectural shapes standardize types as well as practices (both in terms of projects and linguistics), thus leading to – and this is not an irrelevant contradiction in the current economic situation – the much sought-after autonomy in architecture. However, unlike the modernist tradition of the 20th century, it is an autonomy that includes everything except the relationship with function.

The most interesting and praised element in the RPBW preliminary project was another factor. The construction of a tall building with the requested (and planned) sustainability criteria once again makes architecture a leading area of process and product innovation, but also an opportunity for growth in research, the enterprise system and professions: a rotor that was unable to pick up speed at the Turin Olympics. Architecture becomes innovative when social demand (in this case, environmental sustainability) imposes construction, plant engineering, distribution and urban solutions that are not coded and repetitive, and starts carrying out experiments that also include the "shape" of the architecture. This innovation joins technology and society in a way that few other processes and products are capable of reproducing.