

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Jack Reads “Pronto, Professore”

Rick Meghiddo · Wednesday, January 20th, 2021

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[Jack Reads Pronto Professore from Rick Meghiddo on Vimeo.](#)

January 2021. At the beginning of a new post-pandemic and post-Trump era, we are framed between the barbarian actions on January 6 and a new beginning on January 20. The world’s main agenda needs to focus on healing and growth. Furthermore, we need to reinvent the human condition.

While evaluating past achievements and failures, I rediscovered a long poem I wrote during May 2000, “Pronto, *Professore*.” In November, the Italian Institute of Culture in Los Angeles sponsored a memorial to honor Professor Bruno Zevi. Since I was living in Tel Aviv and could not come to L.A. for that occasion, Jack Grapes volunteered to read the poem publicly in my stead. During the event, my friend Nathan Shapira recorded Jack’s reading and subsequently sent me a copy. It remained in a drawer for almost twenty years.

In 2018, while editing the documentary *ZEVI*, I inserted two segments of Jack’s reading and illustrated them. The video that accompanies this writing brings the public at large, for the first time, those two segments and the entire soundtrack. It seems to me that it remains actual.



Poetry reading with Jack Grapes in Brentwood, 1990

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**Pronto, *Professore***

Pronto, *Professore*, can you hear me?

I can hear you well,

as if you were just around the corner,

as if it were yesterday

when we used to dissect on location

the interior space of the Pantheon,

the interrupted rhythm of Santa Maria in Cosmedin,

the central split of Santo Stefano Rotondo,

the link between the interior and the facade of San Carlino,

the ascendant spiral of Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza,

as if it were yesterday

when we listened to your lectures at the faculty's auditorium,

the darkened room, the students occupying every available step,

lights and cigarettes' smoke projected over three screens:

the Parthenon on the left, a drawing of young Le Corbusier on

the center, a photograph of Ville Savoye on the right,

you, walking up and down along the isles, a Muratti between your

fingers,

your other arm gesticulating,

arguing with history, arguing with yourself

like a Talmud student interpreting and reinterpreting

what does that choice mean rather than the other,

what is the relationship between form and content,

where does that space come from, is it ancient or modern,

how do we live in a building, how do we possess light,  
what does all this mean for us today,  
what was the language of the time and its relationship to society,  
how were matter, space-time and technology used,  
why is that window there and not there,  
why, why?

Pronto, Professore, can you hear me?

I can hear you well

We need your help, give us your hand,

we are drowning in ignorance,

we are drowning in the drunkenness of power,

we are drowning in the mud of mediocrity,

we are drowning in the blindness of bureaucracy;

You left us a surgeon's knife to operate on a patient

that barely breathes.

We injected on him with shots of asymmetry and dissonance,

of antiperspective tridimensionality and of cantilevered

structures,

but he does not react,

he is intoxicated by television,

he is intoxicated by yellow newspapers,

he is intoxicated by technological gadgets,

he is intoxicated with hyper-sex

with hyper-tourism,

with junk food,

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with junk-music

with junk-houses

the patient doesn't read anymore, doesn't write anymore,

he speaks with fifty words,

he escapes towards hedonism or Messianism,

he lost his site,

he lost his vision

he lost his trust in the future,

he lost his trust in humankind,

he lost his trust in himself.

Pronto *Professore*, can you hear me,

I can hear you well.

I turned to Michelangelo for help

but his urbanism is too complex for today's planners;

I called Borromini, but the public doesn't want tormented souls,

the public wants "happiness";

I talked to Wright...are you kidding!

His language is incomprehensible, the universities

must produce graduates fast and at a reasonable price,

what is necessary is formulas, slogans,

"how to do this, how to do that",

a page by Wright is too charged, makes you waste time,

it is much easier to copy from fashion magazines;

I called the poets – Gaudi, Scarpa, Bruce Goff, John Lautner;

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I called the visionaries – Fuller, Soleri, Pellegrin...

You say that one must remain optimistic

in spite of the periodic regressions of history.

You think that after 1988 there is light at the end of the tunnel

in the rebellious adolescence of the Deconstructivists,

in the recycling of kitsch, banality and trash, but

what shall we do of the abyss that exists between

quantity and quality?

As we talk the world's population continues to grow

one hundred and sixty-six human beings per minute,

ten thousand per hour

two hundred and forty thousand per day.

We need,

more houses,

more schools,

more factories,

more sports centers,

more cultural centers,

more power plants,

more parking structures,

more freeways,

more airports,

more prisons,

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more cemeteries.

What shall we do, *Professore*

shall we produce one hundred Guggenheims per hour?

shall we produce “readymade” pseudo-Venice, clean, odorless,

like the one made in Las Vegas,

or shall we leave it all to the “do it yourself” suburbs, happily mediocre?

Who shall take care of the Leonardo’s subtleties that you quote:

the fog,

the mist

the rain

the ungrateful climate,

the heat,

the clouds,

the shadows and the transparencies,

the smells and the perfumes,

that is, the matter-less materials of architecture?

And then, let’s take a good look at this patient,

who is he, what does his face look like?

It is not an architect, Unknown Soldier of the existential battle;

Our patient is the captain of industry that produces nanotechnologies,

our patient is the minister that makes decisions of billions with our money,

our patient is the real estate speculator that sells houses as merchandise,

is the bank director that lends money to old projects,

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is the lawyer that knows how to convince us that black is white and

white is black,

is the general that considers a war plane more important

than four thousand apartments for the elderly,

is the mayor with a vision that doesn't go beyond the next elections,

is the elite that proclaims itself as educated:

the judge,

the school director,

the accountant,

the physician,

the scientific researcher,

the fund-raising lady of the charity institution.

It is the public that flocks to concerts and to gallery-openings

and visits the world's museums

but never heard of

the Johnson Wax Administration Building in Racine,

nor of the chapel of Notre Dame du Haut at Ronchamp,

nor of the Einstein Tower at Potsdam,

nor of Aalto's church at Imatra,

nor of Michelucci's church of the Autostrada,

nor of Johansen's Mummer's Theater in Oklahoma City,

nor of the Brion-Vega Cemetery at San Vito di Treviso;

May be our real patient still frequents the elementary school,

or maybe, actually, probably, he is still not yet born.

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So, Professore,

what shall we prescribe to this patient, vitamins?

Let's try a dose of

vitamin H, for the history of architecture,

vitamine V for the vision of the future,

vitamin W for the works of Wright,

vitamin Z for the writings of Zevi;

Shall we prescribe him interactivity,

particularly with painters, sculptors, poets, scientists and inventors?

Shall we prescribe him the drawing of trees,

to learn from their variety lectures of democracy,

to understand what is the continuity that links

earth, roots, trunk, branches and leaves to our solar energy,

to understand what is a cantilevered structure,

to understand the space-time relationship

between the permanent and the temporary,

to understand the functional aesthetics of flowers.

Shall we prescribe him with green, aaah, plenty of green,

green in the working spaces,

green in the stations of transportation,

green in the schools of our future citizens,

green, green, the green that links everything, saves everything,

idiocies, ugliness, crimes, monstrosities?



Shall we prescribe him convalescence in Venice, to learn  
how can pedestrians' movement be separated from the means of  
transportation,  
how can the rainwater of the block be recycled?  
how can the arts be integrated into architecture  
in houses, in piazzas, in campi?

Shall we turn Verona's Castelvecchio  
into an intensive care center for buildings' restorers  
on how to infuse modernity into our historic heritage  
with sensible and respectful imagination?

And what about prescribing intelligent structures  
to last five hundred years  
as an answer to a "sustainable architecture"  
with less waste, better use of energy,  
and better qualified spaces?

Our patient is in very serious condition,  
simplicity is not simple.

Pronto, Professore, can you hear me

We can hear you well.

You opened an unfinished road  
still to be explored,  
still to be built,

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still to navigate  
towards the horizon,  
towards the center of the Earth,  
toward the expanding galaxies,  
towards a new civilization where  
science, vision and art,  
space, matter and time,  
and the spirit of man  
become One, indivisible,  
in the image of God.

Pronto, Professore,  
we are listening  
to you,  
still.

Ricky Meghiddo

Tel Aviv, May 28, 2000



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