Giancarlo de Carlo and the Italian context of Team 10

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Introduction

Giancarlo de Carlo is the only Italian meber of Team 10. He was born in 1919 and now lives in Milan. He is an individualist, and a humanistic architect and a man of strong morality.

I say *humanistic*, because of his manyfold culture and because of his view of architecture as something which is about people. He looks at architecture as part of the whole, complex process which deals with transformation of society through time. Architecture cannot change society as a whole, but can suggest the directions of change and support them, make them grow, give them spaces and represent them in physical forms. He has said somewhere that towns are written history, and the process of designing in his case is somehow linked to 'read' the context, both social and physical, and to find out the vital forces in it, and to deal with them for transformation. And 'reading' the context is not the recording of an objective pattern, but a tendentious interpretation of how a local context works and, through planning and architectural design, bring it closer to how it should work. Giancarlo de Carlo is one of the most tough moral architects, one of those persons who might make their client regret their choice: working for people is not always a private and even a public aim. No celebration or monumentalism in his work, and a lot of energy spent on designing the open spaces, which are not sold or used in 'productive' ways. And this is not always the primary aim of the private, and even of the public client.

As commonly stated within Team 10, monumentalism is not the point of architecture, which has to celebrate life in its particular, local and social context. No easy prescriptions, only a method. And that is a very Team 10 way of working: not to find out rules, but just a method to approach problems. Team 10 worked at a common research in looking for a method, but without common solutions in their thought or in the architecture they produced.

As for the *individualistic* aspect of Giancarlo de Carlo, I think it has something to do with the same method: no easy prescription, no universal rule in architecture nor in politics or cultural groups. His anarchic view set him in the left wing culture, but he wasn't linked to the Italian communist party, which in the 1950s and 1960s held great power in the field of culture.

The Italian Context

Before we come to the 1950s and early 1960s, in a rough scheme of the Italian situation, you can detect first of all the rupture caused by the second world war. Before the war, rationalism, the Italian branch of the International Style, had developed from Le Corbusier principles, with outstanding architects as Terragni, Daneri and Michelucci, and the review *Casabella* had a primary role in culture: *Casabella* to begin with was directed by Pagano, (who had also organized the exibition about 'architecture without architects' in the 1930s), who died in Mauthausen, and after him, from 1948 to 1964, by Ernesto Rogers, who has

been working in Milan with Belgiojoso, Banfi (who also died in Mauthausen) and Peressutti (the group was called BBPR) and who became the Italian main character in the 1950s.

After the war the Italian architectural culture grew around two different poles: in Milan around Ernesto Rogers, and in Rome around Bruno Zevi, in a quite separate way. Rogers was the link with CIAM and the international architecture scene, as he was a member of CIAM. Within Italy he was in touch with Magistretti, Gardella, Zanuso and Albini, who produced the best architecture in the first years after the war developing rationalism into a more local tradition, and with younger architects, as De Carlo. In Rome Bruno Zevi had a thoroughly different approach: he had come in touch with America and Wright, and he proposed organic architecture in a manifesto-like fashion. He founded the 'neorealismo' movement, and was in touch with Quaroni, Ridolfi, and other bright architects. Though the north and the south developed rather in separated ways, these two poles came together in the architecture school of Venezia, which was really very different from all the others because Giuseppe Samonà collected the best outsiders from the accademic world, Albini, Scarpa, Gardella, De Carlo, Zevi, Astengo, Piccinato among athers (not Rogers because he taught in Milan, as he was accepted by the academic culture there).

As a consequence, the school of Venice stood apart from the other very academic schools, because it was linked to a wider cultural world, particularly the new neo-realistic cinema, which became a widespread and popular phenomenon (Visconti, Rossellini, De Sica) and literature. In these years there is a very strong transversal link between architecture, and literature and sociology and cinema, at least in the cultural context in which De Carlo moved. For example he was in touch with the writers Elio Vittorini, and his wife Ginetta, Italo Calvino, Cesare Pavese, Frénaud, Anthelme, Marguerite Duras, the publisher Giulio Einaudi, sculptors and painters linked to Vittorini, whom he met at Bocca di Magra before the multicultural 'società degli amici di Bocca di Magra'-group, LUNAE PORTUS, was formally defined.

From the Bocca di Magra group I want to mention Elio Vittorini's 'Le città del mondo' which is a story of a father living in the inner land of Sicily, who has a lot of sons and daughters, and he has to bring these sons out of this place and into the world, to make them live on their own, because it is a problem to have them all at home and feed them all; so he moves out of his land with a young boy, dreaming all the best for him, and he is enthusiastic about everything new they encounter, especially about towns. In Vittorini's book there are beautiful descriptions of these new cities, of what the father imagines and what he enthusiastically sees of them.

And I want to mention Italo Calvino too. As a hommage to our kind guests I sorted out a quote from the book 'The Invisible Cities', which you might know: the description of

Smeraldina, which somehow looks a bit like Delft: it's a town which has a network of water channels, overlapping with a network of roads, which the inhabitants go through everyday in different combinations, to reach the place they want. And the roads are on different levels, up and down, and become bridges and terraces on their way. And in the underground there are other roads, digged in the darkness, and used by pirats, smugglers and rats. So also the most boring lives are never identical to themselves in Smeraldina, because everyday there is a different way. *'In a map of Smeraldina all these ways, solid and liquid, visible and hidden, should be traced in different colours. More difficult is to mark on the map the ways of the swallows who cut the air over the roofs, and dive along invisible parables with steady wings, change direction to catch a mosquito, raise up again in a spiral along a pinnacle and, from each point of their paths in the air, they overlook all the points of the town'.*

This is one of many cities described in the book by Calvino, and I think it explains the strong link between the world of literature and the world of architecture in this period. And among all these people and ideas and groups Giancarlo de Carlo stood alone, in touch with the Roger group, with the Bocca di Magra society, coming from CIAM, teaching in Venice and building Team 10.

The Milanese Scene

To go a bit deeper into the subject, I will briefly mention some positions that made up the context of Milan after the war. The proper Italian Team 10 context. The thesis I want to put forward is that the research in the post-war period was a further elaboration of the Modern Movement principles, as well an attempt to modify the Modern Movement language, yet also implying a loss of the social engagement of pre-war rationalism. Local building materials and building techniques were included, and the shape of the buildings became different, but not linked to any inner social kind of programme. So the research was about the form and the new look of the buildings, but was not any more dealing with the way people would use it.

This path brought great results as a few buildings by BBPR testify of, designs which move from the first sketches still highly influenced by the International Style to more interesting architectural languages, such as Torre Velasca built in 1958, or the building in Piazzale Meda built in 1969, also in Milan. The project of Torre Velasca was brought by Rogers to the Otterlo meeting, where, as it is well known, it was severely attacked by the elder CIAM members, together with other projects of the Italian group (the Olivetti canteen by Ignazio Gardella, where the air conditioning plant becomes the expressive theme in the interior and, informally because he was a younger participant, the housing in Matera by Giancarlo de Carlo). These buildings show what was basically the research of the Milan group: a transformation of the language of Modern Architecture toward a more complex language linked to historical language, an issue which had been brushed away from Le Corbusier's explosive innovation.

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Besides a good quality of design in industrial production it is worth mentioning at least a few other positions.

The INA Casa neighbourhood in Cesate designed in 1951 by Rogers together with Ignazio Gardella, which is part of an interesting national public housing programme in which the National Institute suggested among other aims, to root modernism in national and local tradition. The church of the neighbourhood, designed by Gardella and built in 1957, is thoroughly in bricks, and rather far removed from the five principles of the Modern Movement.

The house in Fondamenta delle Zattere in Venezia is an important project by Gardella, dated 1959. Again a research of a new language, the modification of a simple language. From the first elevation to the final drawing Gardella brought the image of the building closer to the existing ones in materials and rhythm, though thoroughly modern.

The Castelvecchio Museum in Verona (1956-64) by Carlo Scarpa, who was also in the group of the architectural school in Venice. His language is very rich. His research is very precise: he works upon details, he adds materials and forms and shapes and the result is very complex, at very different scales. In this work Scarpa designed every detail, and the texture of local stones he drew for the wall is a good example.

The Università di Genova, Facoltà di Architettura (design of the area 1969-71, building site 1975-81) is another work by Gardella, more recent. The plan for the new university area to be build within the very historic centre of Genova included existing buildings which had to be restructured, completed and connected. The way the building is linked to the town at different levels, in different ways, the public passage which finds the way trough the open spaces is one of the best example of linkage to the context. The removal of the Faculty of Architecture into the historic centre has had an important impact on the town, because a lot of students came in, and this all-men's land around the harbour became much more linked to the rest of the town.

I think the best architecture of the early post war period is the Cathedral Treasure Museum in Genova, designed by Franco Albini (1952-56). It's an underground architecture, so it has no elevations. The geometry is very simple but very strict. Very dark stone, which is slate, the local stone, on the floor and on the walls. The drawing of the concrete structure of the covering is continuous over the circular walls, and cover the main space in the middle. It is a very good architecture - again dealing with shape and a new language.

But to be fair we must also acknowledge that the Italian architectural context was hardly determined by these architects; we must remember that while Abini, Gardella, Rogers,

Scarpa, Zanuso, De Carlo were speaking about architecture, most Italian housing and buildings in the reconstruction period and in the great expansion of the 1960s were not designed by architects, yet constituted the dull and crumbled image of the town we still see today.

Team 10 and Giancarlo de Carlo

Now let's go back to Otterlo CIAM Congress, to see what Giancarlo De Carlo has been doing from the beginning throughout the Team 10 period.

The housing in Matera is one of the projects he brought to the CIAM Congress in Otterlo in 1959. Matera is a small town in the south of Italy, and the housing was built in an area close to the country, which isn't a rich territory. No pilotis nor flat roofs: it would have been a bit like a spaceship colonizing this territory, with the only difference that it had to be driven by the local farmers. In facts this building is in between rationalism and local architecture.

Another project De Carlo brought to Otterlo is the housing in Comasina, Milano (1953-55). Both projects were attacked for its architectural language, the second one especially for some oval windows, which were very strongly criticized by Wogenscky and the older functionalist architects.
These projects are somehow an introduction, they are important, because they meant to go against the International Style principles, when CIAM was still popular. But more importantly I would like to point out three themes of Giancarlo De Carlo's work, which are of course interwoven, but can be demonstrated best by different projects of his. I also think these are the same themes which Giancarlo De Carlo brought to Team 10 discussions.

1) The first theme is the <u>link with history, which means link to the context</u>.
The project of the re-opening of the Mercatale ramp (1970-1977) is not one of the early works, but shows the way De Carlo interprets the relationship with history and with the context. After the ducal palace in Urbino had been finished, Francesco di Giorgio built in the fifteenth century the ramp which let Duke Federico da Montefeltro reach the palazzo on horseback from outside the walls. The ramp is in fact very easy and very wide.
In the 18th century the upper part of the ramp was demolished, and a theatre was built on top of the ramp, which was forgotten: it was closed from the bottom, it was cancelled on the top. Only by chance De Carlo discovered the entrance from a manhole and managed to convince the municipality to reopen the ramp.

The relationship with the context includes both the theatre and the ramp. De Carlo worked in the space in between, connecting the ramp to the town on the side of the theatre. He doesn't approach the theme as a problem of conservation, of reopening the ramp to show

that there had been a ramp there, and how it had been built, and used, but he sees it as a matter of making it work again. There was some difficulty in making the connections, because the municipality had to deal with some private areas, but the important message is that you don't have to do an archeologist work, but that things must be alive; you have to use the ramp, you have to connect it to the vital network of the town. And that is what actually happened in Urbino with the ramp, as from the day it was opened it has been continously walked on.

The project of the Faculty of Magistero in Urbino (1968-76) is another work which shows again the relationship with the context. Urbino's historic center is very compact and very old. The new faculty was to be built in the area of an old convent and of its wide garden and orchard. In the open space De Carlo made a new architecture, with a thoroughly different language, but closely linked to the existing building. What I want to underline is the principle that every period should represent itself. In Italy there is a very difficult problem with conservation because it is commonly thought by the Soprintendenze, the public authorities who look after the monuments, that you should build in the old fashion, not to make a contrast with the monument – and most of Italy seems to be a monument now. But in De Carlo's work you detect that it is important to build at the best of your capacities and of the available technology, to give light and shade as well, to build a space that can be divided with movable partitions or used all together, and you cannot do this if you stick to brickwork and wooden structure. And, beside this, it never happened that ages didn't represent their time: it is important that doing architecture you give a sign of your time as well, you don't pretend you are in another time and borrow another language, as we no longer speak Latin now.

A project which can show another aspect of the link to the context is the project for Piazza della Pace in Parma (1981). The piazza in the centre collects the directions of the existing streets. The cmpositional idea is that streets carry the energies which flow into the town, so you have to collect them and release them at the same time, to let them follow their own path and perhaps come to a recompositioning of them again.

2) The second theme I want to point out in Giancarlo De Carlo's architecture is the <u>link with the future, which is flexibility</u>, i.e. the way the architecture you build will have a life of its own, being capable to accommodate changes of use or transformation. When you finish a building site the building begins its life, and, if it is capable of accepting transformation, which obviously will occur because a town is a living thing which changes, and people change, and as time passes other people arrive and mix with the previous. So, if a building can accept changes, it will live longer and will remain adequate over a longer period of time. Only if a building is very beautiful and strong and makes people come together in a vivid and fascinating way, then it will be able to force people to come together in the same way for a long time, but this happened only few times in the history of architecture.

In urban planning flexibility is even more important, because you have to be able to capture and include changes, otherwise your plan becomes a liability to transformation: the plan should be an instrument able to outline the future without being rigid, in order to respond to changes without collapsing.

The plan of Urbino was designed from 1958 to 1964. A lot of importance was given to the open spaces, and to the capability of including further transformation.

The housing Quartiere Matteotti was designed and built in Terni from 1969 to 1974. The houses were built for the people working in the steel company 'Italsider' in Terni, and De Carlo worked on the project with the future inhabitants from the beginning; unluckily only part of the general plan was built, because the company had problems and the operation was stopped. It was a very important intervention because of the method: it was a very particular situation in which De Carlo invited the future inhabitants of the dwelling to participate in the process from the beginning. Again flexibility is a main theme.

I remember De Carlo telling about this project, that, apart from what people said they wanted, you had to work out what people really might want when the building would have been finished; so he also adopted the technique of building the inner partitions not interrupting the floor, so that you could change them in future. These buildings have changed in time, and people seem to have taken possession of the inner and outer spaces, and of the common facilities along a diagonal, elevated way.

3) The last theme I want to point out is <u>language, which is the link to the present</u>, because it is the means through which you depict the present time to the future generations, and, on the other side, it is the means trough which you communicate with people and get them in touch with the spaces they live in, and represent them to theirselves.

If you look at the housing in Mazzorbo, which is a public housing intervention on an island of the Venetian lagoon, this project could seem rather vernacular because all together the image is rather Venetian, but if you look at the single elements this is not traditional Venetian architecture with regard to forms or details: the windows, and the staircase, and the round shapes. But the language is somehow domestic, so that people get in touch with the space they live in.
Colour is a traditional element: in the lagoon area houses are very strongly coloured, just like the boats.

Transformation of the convent of the Benedettini in Catania (1984-95) for University.
Apart from the restoration of the convent and the replacing of the functions, De Carlo had to build a big technical volume for the central heating and plants, which is near the second

cloister. It was a difficult task to incorporate it within the building's language; all the chimneys on top are carefully designed, and for the one storey elevation he placed mirrors with different inclinations, which reflect parts of the old covent, in a new designed image.

Conclusion

So is there a continuity from Matera to the recent buildings?

I have the feeling that in the background there is a continuity which perhaps begun with Pagano's 'Architecture without architects' exhibition in the 1930s, and then goes through Ecochard and the Moroccan approach brought in CIAM in 1953, and touches on the old town of Matera as De Carlo showed it in Otterlo, and as it was published in *Forum*, the Dutch magazine, in 1961-62, and goes on to 'Spazio e società', the journal which De Carlo directed since 1974, and then goes through self construction…
The continuity of a research which is inclusive and curious, and investigates differences with the aim of including, not excluding them (which is a very contemporary theme). The continuity of a research toward an architecture for all people, which was also common to most Team 10 members, and which becomes more and more indispensable today as our society becomes more and more multietnic and multicultural. A research based on a good eye upon society, the striving to understand and a good deal of solidarity as well, which was surely Aldo van Eyck's interest, and of Haan and Candilis, who had worked in ATBAT, and of Erskine and De Carlo, and all the other Team 10 members, inner circle or not, I don't mind, who have always put their best energies in building for people, picking what is alive, the wishes and passions and the sufferings, and dealing with them and bringing them in an architecture.

Because it's human passions that really move the world.