Architecture's public

Editor's note [PBJ]

This milestone in architectural history began life as a lecture given at a conference in Liège in 1969, and was published in extended form with an English translation the following year in the Italian periodical Parametro.[1] *It carries both the optimistic and egalitarian spirit of 1968 and the anger of a younger modernist generation discovering that the social ideals of the Modern Movement had been lost or betrayed. Its strongly political tone recalls a time when the impact of global capitalism was beginning to be felt, and the political implications of the aesthetic were being exposed. Thirty-four years on, much remains relevant, and many of the problems identified are still with us: the tendency for academic architecture to isolate itself in its own discourse, for example, has increased. This remains a key text for anyone concerned with participation.*

The revolt and the frustration of the school of architecture

When the university protest exploded – the most important event since the end of the Second World War – the architecture faculties found themselves immediately in the vanguard. In many universities in Europe and in the wider world, students of architecture were the first to demand a radical renewal of organisational structures and teaching methods.

Why?

Because the faculties of architecture, more than any other faculty, had long been dominated by an academic body interested only in preventing new ideas from penetrating into the school (in architecture new ideas are at least 50 years old). Since the School was the last refuge into which new ideas had to penetrate, the conflict was radical at the beginning. The limits of the conservative position were solid and precise, so the prospects of renewal seemed equally solid and precise. But after an initial period of obstinate resistance, the academic body began to wonder if the new ideas were really so dangerous, especially since they were now accepted by everyone – at all levels of power, even by the state bureaucracy and property speculators. Precisely because of this universal acceptance, the suspicion grew that new ideas and young people had lost their aggressiveness. And so having reasonably accepted this idea, the academic

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As the original translation in *Parametro* was somewhat literal and unclear in places, this version has been re-edited, and includes some improvements added by Benedict Zucchi in the version published in his *Giancarlo De Carlo*, Oxford: Butterworth, 1992.

body made an admirable pirouette, changing its previous routine without moving the axis of rotation. By accepting the most innocuous elements of a new language – and possibly by introducing a few new personages chosen from among the most innocuous proponents of these innocuities – it was possible to continue defending something of the old position. The operation promised to be a success, and property speculation – given more time and different circumstances – had already carried it through. But instead it was a total failure. Why?

Because in the meantime the students, matured by their struggle, had changed their outlook. They had realised that it was not just a matter of organisational structures and teaching methods, but a more fundamental question about the purpose of their training and social role. The objective of their struggle could no longer be simply to substitute one symbol for another, or one person for another. It was a question of rediscovering the reasons for being an architect in a world which the academics and power brokers, men of apparently opposing sides, had long accepted and which they, the students, for good reasons had refused. They sought a different way of doing architecture for the edification of a different world (perhaps best defined negatively: not classist, not racist, not violent, not repressive, not alienating, not specialising, not totalising). For architecture to regain a progressive role, it was necessary first to verify how much new material was included in that passed off as new: then to build something truly new, wholly new in content as well as in expressive forms. This has not come about, however, and perhaps it has not even begun. And so the excellent premises which fed the revolt shaded off into a state of confusion which has removed the faculty of architecture from its avant-garde position to a frustrating and inconclusive place at the rear. Why?

Because there was nothing either in the faculty or in architectural practice that could nourish a courageous exploration. There was no line of thought or collection of facts coherent enough with reality to provide a matrix of concrete alternatives for the modification of reality. The field of architecture remained amorphous and impalpable, lacking structure. Not only was it incapable of regenerating itself: it even remained insensitive to the stimuli of its own contradictions.

The ambiguity of the architect's role
Any discussion of the credibility (and of the historical legitimacy) of architecture in the contemporary world must begin with an acknowledgement of this situation, acknowledging it as the origin of any investigation of architecture's future or past. We shall begin

defining the inconsistency between the field of architecture and the facts of reality by examining the behaviour of its protagonist, the architect. No other connotation of a human craft has had such wide and ambiguous meanings. The term has been applied to figures ranging from head-bricklayer to God (supreme 'architect' of the universe), and this unlimited latitude of meaning has weighed enormously on the destiny of those claiming the title, because it has trapped them between the frustrating suspicion of not achieving the minimum and the exalted vanity of arriving at the maximum.

In different historical epochs, depending on the use to which political power put him, the architect has been more a head-bricklayer or more a god. If not exactly head-bricklayer, he was certainly head builder at the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance. If not exactly God, then he was high priest and custodian of state secrets in ancient Egypt from the First Dynasty to the conquest of Alexander. In all epochs, whatever the importance of his role, the architect has been subject to the world view of those in power. Since money, materials, land and authority to act were necessary, and since the ruling power was the only force capable of furnishing him with these means, the architect by definition had to identify himself with it, even transforming himself into its operative appendage. Bourgeois society, famous for taking care of everything and leaving little room for manifestations of independence to insinuate themselves, also tried to classify the role of the architect, situating it within the more general concept of the profession. As a professional, the architect became a representative of the class in power. His duties were limited to the study and application of building technology (later also urban planning, later still environmental planning). In carrying out his duties he found both his dignity and his payment, as long as he did not worry about motivations or consequences: that is, as long as he did not refer his activity to a more general political condition. So with the rise of bourgeois professionalism, architecture was driven into the realm of specialisation, where only the problems of 'how' are important, because the problems of 'why' are considered solved once and for all. But the subjugation which succeeded so well with most human activities could not succeed with architecture. This was not because architecture had a conceptual and operative structure able to resist instrumentalisation, but precisely the opposite: because it lacked structure. We must not forget that when the sacred programme of specialisation began to succeed in a world shaken by the tremors of the industrial revolution, militant architecture remained obsessed with styles, proposing a mere manipulation of signs when what was really required was a profound subversion of concepts and methods.

But in any case, how and in what could architecture have specialised? The very school for the preparation of architects was born out of an ambiguous coupling of art and technology, destined inevitably to generate a sterile species. Its composition – still almost intact today – was derived from the grafting of a few peripheral branches of the Polytechnical School onto the old trunk of the Academy of Fine Arts, a combination of irreconcilable opposites. The academic artistic background was destined systematically to annul the formation of any concrete proposition connected with technology, while the technical was destined in turn to render commonplace any abstract expressive proposition connected with art. Forced into an inorganic coexistence, both academic art and applied technology retarded the scientific transformation of the architectural discipline and interrupted its contacts with social transformations. Thus the lack of a disciplinary structure saved architecture from specialisation but threw it into the state of vagueness and confusion which persists as the core of its contemporary trouble.

The Modern Movement:
Between commitment and uncommitment

Obviously at this point one could object that there was the Modern Movement, a movement which produced many ideas and many heroes. And it is a pertinent objection: the Modern Movement represented an important chance for cultural renewal in architecture. But we need to question architecture's 'credibility', i.e. its capacity to have a 'public'. And therefore we must start by addressing a fundamental question: what is architecture's public? The architects themselves? The clients who commission the buildings? The people – all the people who use architecture? If the third hypothesis is true – that all the people who use architecture are its public, and today this seems hard to resist – then the presence and the work of the Modern Movement and its heroes must emerge in a different perspective from that allowed by its own publicity machine. We cannot escape the fact that the Modern Movement has preserved substantial defects of the amorphous condition from which it emerged. For example, it preserved the ambiguity of role assumed when it became a bourgeois profession, and it sought to reconcile art and technology by simple qualitative modification of the first of these 'two factors', merely substituting modern art for academic art. Instead, it should have set aside the whole superfluous dilemma, questioning architecture's objectives and methods, both to allow it to become scientific and to allow it a radical expressive renewal.

But this was only the consequence of a more serious failing that the Modern Movement inherited from the amorphous matrix

in which it was generated: the deliberate programmatic attitude of an elite. I do not criticise the size of the group – the fact that only small groups can set off processes of real renewal seems unquestionable – but rather the group's choices in defining its field of operation. The field which the Modern Movement intended to conquer (and did in fact conquer) was that already occupied by academic or business architecture; a field restricted to relations between clients and entrepreneurs, land owners, critics, connoisseurs, and architects; a field built on a network of economic and social class interests and held together by the mysterious tension of a cultural and aesthetic class code. This was a field that excluded everything in economic, social, cultural and aesthetic terms that was not shared by the class in power. It is true that a few 'heroes' had intentions and produced works beyond these limits, but always leaning out of their elite positions, never stepping out to stand on the other side: the side of the people – those who use and bear architecture. The ideas and accomplishment of such 'heroes' – for example a Loos or a Le Corbusier or a few others (mostly different, though official criticism bunches them together) – have an inestimable value which architecture cannot do without. Nevertheless they represent only a tiny speck in the great mountain of unsolved problems in the contemporary human environment. By distancing itself from the real context of society and its most concrete environmental needs, the elite attitude of the Modern Movement just accentuated the superfluity of architecture. The old gulf due to an ambiguous professional condition was widened by a further estrangement from reality, isolating architecture in a floating condition. This has favoured the formation of a few great free spirits projecting a daring search for newness, but it has also encouraged the formation of their opposite; a multitude of walk-ons destined to nullify the novelties of the former, reducing them to inert symbols completely commensurate with the requirements of the ruling class.

There is no need to describe these walk-ons in detail: they form the artichoke of cultural activity, layer after layer: philosopher, economist, sociologist, politician, historian, educator, technologist, artist, decorator, designer, builder, city planner, etc. Under the hundredth leaf you find the consultants to those in power – the expert exploiters of floor-space, the manipulators of building codes, the cultural legitimators of the sack of the city, and the territory organised by financiers, politicians and bureaucrats to the detriment of ordinary people. To describe this character further is superfluous, because he is already familiar, if only at the literary level, through novels, comedies, films, and television sketches, which present him as a stereotype of intellectual alienation in our

Giancarlo De Carlo | 7

neo-capitalist age. Although this serves to explain why architecture is no longer credible, it is more worthwhile to analyse the phenomenon in its trunk than in its branches, even if the latter are substantial and diversified. The point is that credibility disappeared when modern architecture chose the same public as academic or business architecture; that is, when it took an elite position on the side of the client rather than on the side of the user. Historical experience has taught us that elites, even when claiming neutrality, get caught in fields of force that benevolently concede neutrality because they know that in conceding it they exploit it, simply through the effect of their interest. Conditioning arrives on cue at the very moment when it is expected: for when 'neutrally' dealing with the problems of 'how', the problems of 'why' are forgotten.

Faith in 'how' and ignorance about 'why'

Two examples selected from the history of the Modern Movement will illustrate this failure of memory. The first is the CIAM Frankfurt Congress of 1929 devoted to 'Minimum Housing'; the second the CIAM Hoddesdon Congress of 1951 on the 'Heart of the City'. Certainly the former was more important than the latter in terms of seriousness of commitment, but both were equally important for the prospects they opened up (and closed down). At Frankfurt, the architects addressed the problem of how to manage the great demand for housing that exploded after the First World War in every city of the world. They were right to take up the problem, but wrong to believe that it was their invention. It had already been invented and dramatised by the capitalist system, which having urbanised masses of farmers to generate manpower for industry without providing for their settlement in the city, now found itself in a tight spot, caught in the web of its own contradictions. The alarm expressed itself in the slogan 'more housing or less production' (and in the architects' more strident echo 'architecture or revolution'). The remedy prescribed was the construction, possibly in series, of the cheapest possible housing. It was reduced to the absolute minimum tolerable in terms of floor area, a minimum referred to as 'existential'. The architects of the Congress offered a series of brilliant solutions, competing to see who could most reduce not only the square metres and cubic metres per person, but everything superfluous to an abstract calculation of essential physiological behaviour. Concentrating on the problems of 'how', they played into the hands of the power structure. In neglecting the problems of 'why', they lost track of the most important reasons for their cultural commitment.

Today, forty years later, we find that those proposals have

become houses and neighbourhoods and suburbs and then entire cities, palpable manifestations of an abuse perpetrated first on the poor, and then on the not-so-poor. The proposals became cultural alibis for the most ferocious economic speculation and the most obtuse political inefficiency. Nevertheless, those 'whys' so nonchalantly forgotten at Frankfurt still have trouble coming to the surface. But we have a right to ask 'why' housing should be as cheap as possible and not, for example, rather expensive; 'why' instead of making every effort to reduce it to minimum levels of floor area, space, of thicknesses, of materials, etc, we should not try to make dwellings spacious, protected, insulated, comfortable, well-equipped, rich in opportunities for privacy, communication, exchange, personal creativity, etc. Nobody can be satisfied with an answer that appeals to the scarcity of available resources when we know how much is spent on wars, missiles and anti-missile systems, on moon projects, on research to defoliate forests inhabited by partisans or to paralyse demonstrators emerging from ghettoes, on hidden persuasion, on inventing artificial needs, etc. The priority scale established by the power structures has no sense except that of its own self-preservation, and therefore no one can or should accept the low priority assigned to housing, the city and the landscape. Nor can or should any one go on believing, according to the dogmas established at Frankfurt, that it is a good idea to define spatial limits in order to cook omelettes faster.

Working on 'how' without rigorous control of 'why' inevitably excludes reality from the planning process. Proposals for the solution of problems necessarily stand between the definition of goals and the evaluation of effects. The refusal to correlate one's contribution with the two poles of motivation and control is a typical manifestation of the idiocy of forced specialisation, which also influences the quality of the proposals and their capacity to resist interference. In fact, all the compensation which the Frankfurt architects introduced to counterbalance their minimum dimensions – more air, more light, more sun, more green areas, more formal rigour – were eliminated in practice as useless accessories or frills just like the 'abominable' decoration. These things were not included among those 'concrete goals' which the architects had examined, nor did they appear within the 'concrete controls' which neither the architects nor the users could object to. Not only had the problem been badly defined, but its solutions were destined to cause the disaster with which we are now all familiar. It had been so badly defined that today, forty years later, although it is universally accepted that housing for the poorer classes can be the cheapest and therefore the most squalid product on the market,

the demand for housing is still far from satisfied. On the contrary, it represents the most serious scarcity of our time.

At Hoddesdon, as at Frankfurt, but less intelligently

At the Congress of Hoddesdon of 1951 the architects thought they had invented the problem of the rehabilitation of urban centres. Confronted with the squalor of peripheral neighbourhoods and the demoralisation caused by the criteria of functional specialisation which they themselves had proposed with the idea of 'zoning', they conceived the notion that the centre should be given back those opportunities for exchange, communication, choices, and emotions that the city as a whole had lost by now; it should be transformed into a 'heart' capable of pumping blood back into the exhausted and disjointed limbs of the city. At Hoddesdon, as at Frankfurt, but to tell the truth in a weary tone, numerous proposals were made: to concentrate the most important administrative activities in the centre, to place the most attractive leisure activities near the centre, to pedestrianise the centre, to construct huge car parks in the centre, to preserve the historic character of the centre, to concentrate tertiary activities in the centre, to make parks in the centre, etc, etc. But as at Frankfurt, the invention had already been made elsewhere; and in any case, without stopping to investigate motives and consequences, action was decided on superficially. Already at that period landowning capital and state bureaucracy had combined interests, preparing the brutal operation known as 'urban renewal'. In American cities, where the wealthy classes had moved to the suburbs, the excessive commuting distances over congested roads and isolation in an environment that offered nothing but a monotonous repetition of itself began to weigh heavily. In European cities the wealthy classes had remained in the valuable central zones, so it was the obsolete state of the surrounding quarters that began to weigh heavily, increasingly occupied by poorer classes who became ever more numerous. But in both cases the most irresistible attraction was the potential value of the building areas, well located in the centre of the region, the outskirts and the city, and therefore highly profitable once cleared of everything poor and socially unbecoming: negroes or southerners, immigrants or lumpen proletariat, foreign workers, or indeed workers of any kind.

The architectural exercises of Hoddesdon thus once again gave cultural justification to an operation of political and economic plunder. The theories and proposals about the 'heart of the city' gave rise to all that was said and done in the following years to transform urban centres into management centres, commercial centres, recreational centres, or simply historic centres, destined – with

mournful rhetoric – to preserve the patrimony of values, together with the privileges of environmental well-being, of the ruling classes. The unconsciousness – or rather congenital irresponsibility – of architecture about motivations and consequences, had contributed decisively to the expansion of social iniquity in its most ferocious and shameful aspect: the segregation of classes in physical space. The centre was reserved for the houses of the rich, for the most profitable economic activities, for bureaucracy and politics. Excluded to the edge in their minimum housing, the poor were cut off from the real life of the city.

Good reasons for the non-credibility of architecture

The two examples of Frankfurt and Hoddesdon are taken from the history of the best architectural movement, and we could easily uncover more serious arguments if we took a look at the history of secondary movements or professional associations. But the point of this analysis is not to accumulate proof but rather to discover the reasons for the crisis of credibility that has hit architecture today, and to demonstrate that they have deep roots to be exposed and eradicated. For the time being it is sufficient to observe and describe, and we can summarise as follows:

1 — The period of the heroes, of the born-again, of the universal solutions is over. Function no longer automatically generates form, 'less' has ceased to be 'more' and there is little probability that 'more' will again become 'less': utility and beauty are no longer two halves of the same apple. But the effort to unite research and action in a coherent whole is also over. On the one hand there is Business, obtuse, repetitive and uncritical; on the other the Academy is regrouping its forces, presumptuous, pompous, and full of phoney ambitions. There are opinions circulating in favour of architecture as pure technology or pure fantasy; of the architect as an industrious functionary of the land registry office or as an inspired creator of monuments. Solutions are awaited from sociologists, economists or geographers; and since they are not forthcoming, in the pathos of an improbable social position, there is much verbal self-negation. But usually those who negate themselves in public, work for property speculation in private, so earning the means to negate themselves without losing their peace of mind. In architecture's ideological sphere, therefore, there is much confusion.

2 — There is just as much confusion in its practical sphere, where planning is as empirical, inspired, intuitive and makeshift as ever, and construction remains as crude, imprecise and inefficient as it was in Roman times. Since the problems of mass production and prefabrication have yet to be solved, a leap has been made

into 'science fiction', and since it has not been possible to deal with the quality/quantity dilemma, the whole problem of planning for the great number has been eluded, simply by slipping into monumentalism or formal utopia, with a great production of 'hypotheses' for mausolea, megastructures, universal systems, futurables etc. designed mostly for art galleries, current events magazines, and in certain cases as ornaments for the demagogical programmes of administrative boards and state bureaucracies. In the meantime, problems of territorial organisation – of urban reorganisation, transport, housing, facilities, the workplace – remain unsolved, and many decision-makers already consider industry the only force capable of dealing with the most pressing demands.

3 — Still more confusion is widespread in the schools, where the students' revolt uncovered once and for all the stupidity and indolence of the academic bodies. The crisis has been profound and serious, but seemingly without decisive consequences. The rapidity with which the professors ran for the lifeboats, leaving the students in the sinking ship, is only equalled by the shrewdness of their return to power on the bridge to resume the voyage for destinations so unknown as to be none of their business.

4 — There is still criticism, and as a vehicle for propaganda the journalism of reviews and weekly magazines. Overfed by the crisis of ideas and action, criticism travels a tangled network of roads (which for the most part, as in a maze, end up at the starting point). But two main lines of development emerge. The first analyses the vicissitudes of architecture through the behaviour of its heroes, and, if lacking heroes, tends to invent them, causing misunderstandings that are troublesome to demythologise. The second creates models of simulation borrowed from the figurative arts, the humanities or literature, sometimes even from the jungle of intellectual paradoxes. This creates even more serious misunderstandings, which not only mystify the cultural content and social responsibility of architecture, but also cause monstrous mutations in the habits of the architect. A symptom is the transformation of the language of architecture, now often incomprehensible and lacking in syntax, and playing on the terroristic effect of its incommunicability to hide the underlying confusion of ideas and purposes.

5 — The decisive function of journalism in estranging architecture from its real context is well-known. There is hardly a magazine or newspaper column that illustrates architecture taking the user into account; that furnishes news about how architecture really functions in its daily existence; that publishes images, photographs or articles in which the people who use, transform, and recompose the three-dimensional physical organism which they have been

given are actually present. It is as if architecture were merely a potential space and not an actual place, concrete, made of real materials, and inhabited by people in a permanent and continually changing relationship.

So why should architecture be credible today? It is not necessary for the user nor even for the client. As in the period of the first industrial transformation, in this new period of obscure forebodings and intense hopes, architects dissertate on trifles and lose themselves in the vacuum of a reassuring lack of commitment.

Architecture is too important to be left to architects

Nevertheless, the world cannot do without architecture. As long as a group of humans in physical space exists, the physical organisation of space will continue not only as a fundamental necessity of existence, but also as the most direct and concrete means of communicating via materialised systems of self-representation. Besides, the main *raison d'être* of human beings in this stage of their evolution is the destiny of making conscious transformations of their environment. It is precisely in dealing with the contradictions as these transformations develop that a role for architecture can emerge. The process, in fact, degenerates in the coils of an intricate paradox. While human activities multiply, becoming diversified and omnipresent, decisions about where and how they should take place are increasingly concentrated in the spheres of economic, bureaucratic and technological power. The role of architecture could be to contribute to the freezing or thawing out of this paradox, according to the stand it chooses to take – on the side of the power structure, or on the side of those overwhelmed and excluded by it. While it is certain that only the second choice can allow a concrete renewal, it is also certain that this choice can never be made by what passes for 'architects' architecture'.

In reality, architecture has become too important to be left to architects. A real metamorphosis is necessary to develop new characteristics in the practice of architecture and new behaviour patterns in its authors: therefore all barriers between builders and users must be abolished, so that building and using become two different parts of the same planning process. Therefore the intrinsic aggressiveness of architecture and the forced passivity of the user must dissolve in a condition of creative and decisional equivalence where each – with a different specific impact – is the architect, and every architectural event – regardless of who conceives it and carries it out – is considered architecture. The metamorphosis, in other words, must coincide with the subversion of the present condition, where to be an architect is the result of power delegated in a

repressive fashion, and to be architecture is the result of a reference to class codes which legitimate only the exception, with an emphasis proportional to the degree to which it is cut off from its context. The expedient of 'not reading the surroundings' (used so well by official criticism through the technique of uninhabited, edited, or even trick photographs; or through linguistic analysis excluding all judgement on the use and consumption of the event under analysis) corresponds, in fact, to an ideological, political, social and cultural falsification with no counterpart in other disciplines.

Architecture alters the context in which it is placed

It is improbable that a radical renewal of behaviour and characteristics in architecture will occur quickly, nor can it take place outside a more general renewal of the structures of society. Architecture, a typical superstructural activity, 'depends' on transformations in the structures of society. It is important, however, to clarify the dialectical terms of this dependence, to defend against it being oversimplified and used as an alibi for conservatism or despair. Structural transformations can create space for the renewal of superstructures. But in order for such renewal to become a reality, it must be produced within the superstructures themselves, creating room for yet further structural transformations. The new infrastructural realities feed back into the new structural realities, giving their motivations concrete tangibility. In this respect architecture has an incalculable advantage over other activities, for it produces concrete images of what the physical environment could be like if the structure of society were different. In other words, it allows the wedging of physically perceptible and experienceable facts into the narrow margins of choice (or into the wounds opened up by contradictions) of the structure as it exists today. Nothing new can happen in architecture which has not been first invented and elaborated within architecture and in architecture's own terms. But this new occurrence, if it is really new, really projected toward structural transformation, becomes the 'material cause' of the situation in which it is placed, feeding back into the structure of society and contributing to society's transformation. Therefore we cannot just sit passively in the cave of architecture as-it-exists, waiting for social rebirth to generate architecture as-it-will-be automatically. We must change the whole range of objects and subjects which participate in the architectural process at present. There is no other way to recover architecture's historical legitimacy, or indeed, restore its credibility.

Participation and scientific method

Unlike all proposals for stylistic renewal formulated up to now, to

change the whole range of objects and subjects would open a process in architecture which has no prescribed itinerary and no final solutions. Collective participation introduces a plurality of objectives and actions whose outcomes cannot be foreseen. Initially it is possible only to prefigure a line of behaviours and tendencies to set the process on its way. The evolution of society toward abolition of classes, the population explosion, and the continuing development of technology, pose enormous problems in the organisation of the physical environment, and to preserve its role, architecture must clarify its ideological position respecting these issues. The discipline and its ideology are connected by a reciprocal necessity, for just as the vagueness of exploration based on inspiration and taste reflected dependence on the client's whimsical power, so the rigour of scientific method corresponds to an identification of users' real needs. But identifying with the users' needs does not mean planning 'for' them, but planning 'with' them. In other words it means enlarging the field of participation through the definition and use of the plan, introducing into the system a whole set of complex variables which could never be composed into balanced situations except with procedural systems based on a continual alternation of observations, propositions, and evaluations; i.e. the use of scientific method. On this point we must be clear. Therefore we must start by clarifying the basic differences between planning 'for' users and planning 'with' them.

Quality of consensus and quality of plan

The first fundamental difference lies in the quality of consensus on which the architectural event must be based. When we plan 'for' people – even if we overcome the alienation due to deciding and operating externally – we tend, once consensus is reached, to freeze it into permanent fact. Consultation thus influences the conception of the plan but not its subsequent use, in other words the concrete life of the planned event. So unfortunately, the consensus is denied at the very moment when it is received. But if we plan 'with' people, consensus remains permanently open; it is renewed by confrontation with the planned event along the whole arc of its existence and, reciprocally, it renews the planned event by adapting it to the demands of a supporting apparatus which keeps redefining itself. In the case of planning 'for', the act of planning remains forever authoritarian and repressive, however liberal the initial intentions. In the case of planning 'with', the act becomes liberating and democratic, stimulating a multiple and continuous participation. This not only gives the planned event political legitimation: it also makes it resistant to the wear and tear of adverse circumstances and

changing times. For example, we know from experience that large-scale planning of cities and regions tends to fail even when drawn up according to the most conscientious analyses and accurate forecasts, and even when collective interests have been carefully considered. This failure is usually attributed to the intervention of forces opposed to the organic development of the collectivity and therefore hostile to the 'wise plans', a credible but not an exhaustive explanation. The 'wise plans' fail, in fact, because the collectivity has no reason to defend them. Since it did not participate in their formulation, it is perfectly within its rights not to consider them 'wise' and therefore not to support them. We all know of neighbourhoods or buildings planned 'for' the users which have suffered a refusal from within which corrupted and disintegrated them in a short period. Usually this refusal is attributed to immaturity or misunderstanding, and once again this is a credible but incomplete explanation. The neighbourhoods and buildings planned 'for' the users decay because the users, not having participated in their planning, are unable to appropriate them and therefore have no reason to defend them.

Following a conventional line of argument, it might be objected that changing one's point of view does not influence the object, that inverting one's view has no effect on what is perceived. But on the contrary, it is precisely the point of view that counts, and the fate of objects changes according to the point from which they are considered. Many recent events show how easily conservative positions can be upset when their hidden mechanisms are exposed, revealing both a condition of abuse and a prospect for progress. When the community becomes conscious of its state, it moves to direct action and takes up arms for change.

The second fundamental difference between planning 'for' and planning 'with' the users, a corollary of the first, lies in the quality of the planning. Here it is perhaps necessary to add that by 'participation of the users' we do not mean that the users should work at the drawing board or that they should dictate while the architects transcribe, transforming aspirations into images. Some people seem to believe in this more literal interpretation of 'participation', or without believing it promote it anyway to turn their frustration into populistic jubilation. But in reality, participation needs to transform architectural planning from the authoritarian act which it has been up to now, into a process. This process begins with the discovery of the users' needs, passing through the formulation of formal and organisational hypotheses before entering the phase of use. Here, instead of reaching its usual full stop, the process must be reopened in a continuous alternation of controls and reformula-

tions, feeding back into the earlier phases. The three phases – discovery of needs, formulation of hypotheses, and actual use – not only follow sequentially but also have a cyclical relationship. Each phase, though, has its specific character, and the possibility of relationships being consequent and well-correlated depends on the ways in which each is carried out.

The discovery of the users' needs

The discovery of the users' needs is not only the prerequisite of the process but also a matter of focusing basic choices. We can opt for an abstract idea of the user: the universal human being, with different symbolic connotations that the purposes and tastes of the dominant cultures of every epoch may attribute to him. In this case the discovery becomes a technical operation which intends to select and classify physiological and perhaps even 'spiritual' needs. An alternative is to opt for a concrete condition of society identifying a particular type of user, for example those belonging to a social underclass, and in this case the discovery becomes a political operation. We know where the first hypothesis, adopted to a large extent by the Modern Movement, takes us: to the illusory formulation of a universal scale intended to include all human needs but which instead, just because of the a priori contraction of reality on which it is based, ends up mirroring the interests, values and codes of the power structure. The four functions of the Charter of Athens provide a good instance of this result. A classification of needs calculated in relation to an imaginary 'average man' opens up no prospects of substantial renewal because it does not take into account the fact that work, dwelling, traffic and leisure, which are completely different activities and in many ways opposed, can be of primary or secondary importance depending on whether they are considered from the point of view of those with power or those without.

The latter viewpoint requires more complex research, for if we want to refer to a concrete social condition – for example, that of the underclass – an identification of needs requires the concrete presence of those who have them. This on the one hand requires a gathering of information and criticism to expose the imposed value system, dissipating the century-old alienation which it has produced, and stimulating a consciousness keen enough to bounce back with fresh information and criticism. On the other hand, it means an acceptance of confrontation: in other words risking the very cultural structures (experiences, values and codes) of those who set off the process. What will emerge in terms of new information and criticism is unforeseeable: it cannot be fed into old models without risking ridiculing the whole process by falling back into mirroring

the values of the power structure.

In fact, those excluded from the use of power – and therefore from what is officially recognised as culture, art, architecture – are not larvae waiting for a metamorphosis which will permit them to benefit from the legitimate values of the power structure. They are bearers of new values which already exist potentially, manifested sporadically in the margins not already controlled by institutional power. These are the manifestations of 'disorder' which always leak out into the region, in the city, in neighbourhoods, in buildings, mixing with the pathological dregs of 'order' with which they are usually confused. But while the pathological dregs of 'order' are the result of the exasperation of an authoritarian and repressive condition which outruns its own rules, spreading in a state of amorphous violence, the 'disorder' opposed to it has a complex branching structure of its own which, not being institutionalised, renews itself continually, constantly reinventing images of a reality in transformation.

To discover the real needs of the users therefore means exposing and acknowledging their rights to have things and their rights to express themselves; it means provoking a direct participation and measuring oneself with all the subversive consequences that this implies; it means questioning all the traditional value systems which, since they were built on non-participation, must be revised or replaced when participation becomes part of the process, unleashing energies that have not yet been explored.

The formulation of the hypotheses

The phase of formulating the hypotheses corresponds technically to what is called in authoritarian planning 'the project'. But in authoritarian planning this means translating into organisational and morphological structures, functional and expressive objectives that have been defined once and for all – or which are easily frozen because they follow an institutional, and therefore predictable, logic of behaviour and representation. In process planning, by contrast, the objectives find their definition in the course of the process itself: they are defined through continual interaction between the pressure of real needs and images of spatial configurations. In this process, needs are refined and configurations perfected until they reach a condition of equilibrium, even if some instability remains due to the innate mobility of the process. Thus the function of planning is not to block further interpretation of reality with a permanent and immobile form but, on the contrary, to open up a dialectical process in which reality expands continuously, solicited by images, which in turn become increasingly diversified through

new expansions of reality. In other words, unlike authoritarian planning, which imposes final solutions from the start, process planning formulates a sequence of hypotheses aiming at (and launched by) participation. Each hypothesis enlarges the field of forces already created by the preceding hypothesis, and therefore brings about its own replacement by a successive and yet more appropriate hypothesis. The sequence is suspended when a point of equilibrium is reached which permits the putting into effect – the materialisation in physical space – of the last hypothesis considered satisfactory. Afterwards it starts up again, along a further line of experience, in the phase of use.

The difference between the two ways of planning is so great, both in concept and in practice, that more explanation is necessary. Authoritarian planning cannot question the basic choices of the event it produces because it takes them as read, as already pre-decided by higher authority. In the case of a residential unit, for example, the resources assigned are considered invariable, so the standards corresponding to those resources are considered insurmountable. If designed for a rich social group, it will be planned to high standards, while for a poor social group it will follow low standards – as if the human needs of the two groups were not absolutely identical. The residential unit for the rich will follow high quality urban and building typologies, the unit for the poor low quality and depressing ones.

Observing the phenomenon from an explicitly superstructural point of view, (which deliberately proposes to unhinge the connections between structure and superstructure, finding reasons and leaving room for transformation of the structures) we can disregard the whole series of objections concerning the ineluctable mechanisms of the free market. After all, it is well known that the phenomenon manifests itself in the same fashion even when the market is regulated, where the logic of the capitalistic system is replaced by that of a state bureaucracy. And, in any case, what interests us here is the definition of new procedures for the transformation of the human environment that are based on direct action and therefore independent, by definition, of all the alienating automatisms of the productive system and the power structure. Returning, therefore, to the example of a residential unit for a poor social group, authoritarian planning accepts unhesitatingly the senseless axiom that resources should be scarce and standards poor. At best, technical shrewdness will be applied to the manipulation of the addenda which do not change the balance of the calculation: more green space, but greater construction density, more useful surface, but less subsidiary surface; more service space but less internal

refinishing; or vice versa, etc. These manoeuvres are carried out within a supinely accepted cage, and the negotiation of choices between various obligatory paths goes on between client and planner with total disregard for the users.

Process planning instead introduces the user as the fundamental progatonist of the operation and thus questions at the outset the legitimacy of the constraints which are imposed, including those on resources and standards. The job of the planner is to expand the sequence of hypotheses, enlarging the image beyond the margins of the framework imposed by the client: to show what we could (should) achieve if, instead of obeying a condition of preordained subjection, we allowed an objective confrontation with real rights. In the case of an architectural or urbanistic programme involving poor social groups – the most frequent and anyway the most urgent case – the job of the planner must start by re-establishing the clean terms of the class struggle. The sequential hypotheses which he or she has to propose must first reveal to the consciousness of the users the brutality of the authoritarian models which have brought about their present subjugation. This will involve comparison with models we would have a right to, if the economic, scientific and technological means available today were used to satisfy users' real needs. Successive hypotheses should begin to involve the user directly as protagonist in a progressive action of selection and definition of needs which the operation must satisfy, until a precise definition is reached of the architectural or urbanistic image that is to be achieved.

Administration and use

In process planning, the plan does not end with the construction of the architectural object. Instead, from that moment a new line of development begins which is consistent with the preceding one but characterised by different qualities. The client and architect leave the stage and the conflicts are shifted to the relationship between the architectural object and those who use it. For this relationship to be dialectical, it is necessary for each side to possess aptitudes for change through a continuous alternation of reciprocal identification and disassociation. The architectural object changes with the transformations which the user imposes on it as he or she adapts it to varying practical and creative needs; but the user also changes with the stimulation which the intrinsic quality of the architectural object transmits to him or her. In authoritarian planning, only this second line of influence functions, and it does so repressively, because the plan is usually conceived assuming that it is easier, quicker and more profitable to condition people than to

condition the environment. Therefore in the phase of use the user must normally adapt him or herself to the architectural object as to an inflexible cage and all tensions are resolved in superficial alterations that contradict the pre-established morphological order, without being able, however, to modify it substantially. At this point, we find manifestations of 'disorder' which originate in the creative pressure of the users and are blocked, deplored and even punished by those who create, support and even guarantee 'order'. The architectural object becomes a material representation of the institutional motivation that has created it, and turns into an institution.

In process planning the carrying out in three-dimensional physical terms of the plan is a tentative hypothesis. Its verification comes about through use and is therefore entrusted to the user who confronts the built environment in experiencing it. This phase which adjusts, subtracts, adds to, or modifies the design is still part of the project: it continues until the point of physical and technical obsolescence, which occurs when the motivation which set it in motion is exhausted or when the building's tissues are exhausted and have lost their regenerative capacity. Through process planning the teleological assumptions which have diverted architecture from its most concrete material causes are exposed.

An architectural work has no sense if dissociated from use, and the way in which it is used, or can be used, is one of the fundamental factors contributing to the definition of its quality. As an empty vessel, it cannot represent itself or establish purposeful relations with nature and history; because its purpose lies in its 'fullness' – in the whole set of relationships established with those for whom it was designed. Following the movement of these relationships, it continues both to modify and to be modified by the user; integrating itself in this way with nature and producing history, becoming itself, through the use that is made of it, part of nature and history.

Following this point of view, some of the subconscious tensions which have agitated recent architectural culture, such as problems of growth and flexibility, take on clearer meaning. Faced with the problem of rapid consumption to which architectural organisms are subjected today because of the change in the circumstances which dictated their initial programmes, an effort has been made to find a solution by contriving their morphological and organisational systems to permit additions and adaptations. But in the framework of authoritarian planning, these devices are immediately blocked at the point at which they contradict a structural and formal order which is by definition pre-established and

unalterable. The quality of the object is locked into a tangle of exclusive and private codes which permit exceptions only at the price of enlarging a network of communications which it is precisely their job to restrict. If an authoritarian plan were really flexible and open to growth, it would become possible for everyone to manipulate and understand it: thus it would lose those characteristics of ineffableness and immaculateness which sustain and hide its classist purpose.

Growth and flexibility in an architectural organism are not really possible except under a new conception of architectural quality. This new conception cannot be formulated except through a more attentive exploration of those phenomena of creative participation currently dismissed as 'disorder'. It is in their intricate context, in fact, that we shall find the matrix of an open and self-generating formal organisation which rejects a private and exclusive way of using land, and through this rejection, delineates a new way of using it on a pluralistic and inclusive basis. In giving the user a creative role, we implicitly accept this basis. At the same time, the morphological and structural conceptions and the operative tools which until now governed architectural production are thrown into question. A vast set of variables which institutional culture and practice had suppressed come back into play, and the field of reality in which architecture intervenes becomes macroscopic and complex. Therefore only the assumption of clear ideological positions and the application of rigorously scientific procedure can guarantee a legitimate political and technical framework. Then new objectives can be set and new practical instruments be developed to produce a balanced and stimulating physical environment.