

Encounters, writings, domesticity, and places: evolving interpretations of Giancarlo De Carlo's legacy

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**Antonello Alici, Filippo De Pieri**

## **Encounters, Writings, Domesticity, and Places: Evolving Interpretations of Giancarlo De Carlo's Legacy**

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This essay originates from a discussion between the two authors, whose mutual work it remains. The introduction as well as paragraph 1 are however due to Antonello Alici, while Filippo De Pieri produced paragraphs 2 and 3, and the conclusions are signed by both.

The reasons for dedicating a monographic *HPA* issue to Giancarlo De Carlo lie primarily in the hope that the centenary of his birth can revive interest in a protagonist of the history and culture of the 20th century. The idea of a call for papers was conceived within the Committee for the Centenary that was established in October 2018 at the National Academy of San Luca, an institution which De Carlo was president of in 2001-2002. The centenary has given rise to numerous projects that have alternated and intertwined in a free spirit that reflects the character of Giancarlo De Carlo. The initiative responded to the need to reflect once again on a very complex and layered legacy, both in time and in space, to be shared with the latest generations of architects and students in a dialogue between witnesses and collaborators of GDC and those who are getting to know him for the first time.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A map of the main initiatives organised in 2019 as part of the centenary can be found on the website <https://www.giancarlodecarlo2019.com>.



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Until some time ago, examining Giancarlo De Carlo meant delving into studies on a troublesome figure, observed with suspicion in many university classrooms and the subject of a limited number of studies.<sup>2</sup> The fact that the situation has changed in the years following his death is demonstrated both by the numerous initiatives dedicated to him and the collection of essays published in this issue of *HPA*. Indeed, the texts that follow document the strong interest that De Carlo's trajectory has inspired in contemporary architectural culture, along geographical pathways that have a strong international dimension, outlining a legacy that touches both the plane of theoretical research into architecture as well as that of the spatiality of his buildings, not to mention a political and ethical commitment to the transformation of the environment.

This issue has a dual origin. On the one hand, the call published in March 2019, which sought to collect wide-ranging studies "capable of broadening the palette of existing interpretations and re-conceptualizing De Carlo's contribution to postwar architecture": our text welcomed "direct investigations of built and unbuilt works that were overlooked by previous studies" and papers focusing "on a close analysis of available archival sources". On the other hand, some results of the international seminar promoted by the Department of Architecture of the University of Bologna at the National Academy of San Luca on 13 November 2019 ("Giancarlo De Carlo at 100"). Papers presented on that occasion are collected in the opening section.

The texts gathered from these two initiatives document the strong continuity over time of some research topics concerning De Carlo but also their inflection in specific directions and the emergence of issues hitherto rarely frequented by the literature. In particular, it seems to us that three key concepts emerge: domesticity, the role of writing, the space for meetings and exchanges. These are complemented by a fourth cross-cutting theme, that is, the importance of places. In many ways this is a schematic distinction that captures points of interest that often overlap and intertwine. However, it may be useful to discuss it in more detail, also because it lends itself well to contextualising the collection within a broader context of recent initiatives focused on De Carlo.

## 1. Domesticity

The three essays by John McKean, Francesco Ceccarelli and Virginia De Jorge Huertas observe De Carlo from a perspective – the design of the single-family home – that has not been prominent in the literature on the architect in recent decades. While the topic of residential models has often been at the centre of critical writings on the architect, as has the construction of privileged relationships with exceptional clients, rarely have such views been applied to the study of small buildings such as those discussed here. It is a shift that signals

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<sup>2</sup> Bibliographies of the writings on Giancarlo De Carlo until 2004, the year of the exhibition dedicated to him at the Centre Pompidou, can be found in John McKean, *Giancarlo De Carlo: Layered Places*, Stuttgart, Axel Menges, 2004; Francesco Samassa (ed.), *Giancarlo De Carlo. Inventario analitico dell'archivio*, Padua, Il Poligrafo, 2004.

at least two noteworthy changes. First, a widespread trend in contemporary architectural research to adopt micro approaches as a strategy to renew the study of broader issues.<sup>3</sup> Second, a different attitude towards De Carlo's biography, now observed from an angle that favours the relationship that is established between architectural research and the construction of a network of personal and familial exchanges.

Two of the three articles examine Ca' Romanino, the house designed by De Carlo in 1967-1968 in the hills of Urbino for Livio Sichirollo and Sonia Morra, and for some time also inhabited by De Carlo himself.<sup>4</sup> This building was preserved and made accessible in 2002, assuming a central role in architectural research by virtue of this heritage strategy. A second residence enters the De Carlo literature for the first time thanks to the piece by Francesco Ceccarelli, who lives in it and safeguards its memory.

John McKean proposes a refined journey through the history of Ca' Romanino and brings out its playful and public dimension. The house is the true protagonist thanks to its ability to interpret the landscape, in its remote dialogue with Renaissance Urbino in the years when the architect and the philosopher-client defined the strategies for its future, in its representation of both their personalities and their cultural affinities. Sichirollo never lived in these spaces, so the story shifts to Sonia Morra, his wife, and to her decisive will to make it a public place, for spending time with friends, and later a centre of culture that for 50 years has kept alive the expertise of De Carlo's project. This house for "jumpers" facilitates "the philosopher's mental gymnastics" thanks to its vertical projection, the multiplication of paths and the openings that connect the interior landscape with the exterior. The building confirms the primacy of the section as a recurring element in De Carlo's designs, a memory of his youthful experience with naval architecture.

The house as a pathway through the landscape and as a projection into the sky also characterises the project for Marcello Ceccarelli in the Bologna hills, which precedes the house for Sichirollo by a few years. There are many similarities in the two projects, the first being the designer and the client themselves, an architect and an astrophysicist in the most important years of their careers: while De Carlo was shaping the house, Ceccarelli was working on one of his masterpieces, the Northern Cross radio telescope. The sectional project and the vertical design of the spaces reach their pinnacle in the observatory: "a place to observe the sky" away from the light pollution of the city. The home of the scientist who looks at the stars and that opens up at the bottom to the landscape of Bologna offers precise stimuli to the architect's study of space. Francesco Ceccarelli accompanies us for the first time through his father's home, underscoring the immediate rapport between his father and De Carlo thanks to their

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3 Gaia Caramellino, Filippo De Pieri, "Private generalizations: the emergence of the micro scale in historical research on modern housing", in Anne Kockelkorn, Nina Zschocke (eds.), *Productive Universals/Specific Situations: Critical Engagements in Art, Architecture and Urbanism*, Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2019, p. 295-313.

4 Associazione Culturale Ca' Romanino (ed.), *Ca' Romanino. Una casa di Giancarlo De Carlo a Urbino*, Urbino, Argalia, 2010. See also the Foundation's website, <https://www.fondazioneucaromanino.it>.

mutual energy and free, independent spirits. The certainty of being able to establish a frank, creative dialogue with the client, of being able to conceive the space in harmony with those who will inhabit it, appears in fact to have been a precondition for Giancarlo De Carlo before accepting private projects.

Returning to Ca' Romanino, Virginia De Jorge Huertas' analysis focuses on the dialogue between architecture, philosophy and landscape, suggesting spatial and temporal relations with the tectonic dimension of the city of Urbino and its Ducal Palace, to the point of attributing the inspiration of the "democratic" circular study to Federico's studio. The house is investigated and sectioned in its constructive and material dimensions, in the interaction between the square and the circle, in the multiple intersections between vertical paths and horizontal crossings. The interplay of interpretations includes the detail of daytime and nocturnal sources of light, from the "eyes" that connect the rooms with the sky, with the moon and the stars, to the simple and imaginative array of lamps. Thus, spatial and immaterial constellations are defined that foster a multiplication of experiences and the appropriation of space for the individual visitor.

These three essays are accompanied by a series of other studies that in recent years have touched on the question of De Carlo's approach to residential architecture from a wide range of perspectives. On Villaggio Matteotti, an icon of post-war Italian architecture, works such as Alberto Franchini's doctoral thesis today allow for a more documented understanding of the controversial question of the role of participation in the project.<sup>5</sup> Significant contributions to research on De Carlo and housing also come from the observations of less canonical works within the consolidated corpus. An example is Federico Bilò's work on the three seaside holiday villages designed in 1961 (the marine colonies of Riccione and Classe and the holiday housing complex in Bordighera), taken as a paradigm of a way of working on space for cumulative and combination processes.<sup>6</sup> Worth mentioning is also Lorenzo Mingardi's research on the Pineta complex in Urbino, an "experimental" project for a private promoter that lends itself to being understood as a contrast with the choices made in the zoning plan for the ducal city.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Writings

De Carlo's writings have always been a privileged key for accessing his work, well represented by the "official" monograph edited by Angela Mioni and Etra Connie Occhialini and featuring a systematic combination of images of

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5 Alberto Franchini, "Giancarlo De Carlo y la participación. El caso del villaggio Matteotti. Terni, Italia, *Arquitextos*, 24, 32 (2017), p. 9-26; Id., *Il Villaggio Matteotti di Giancarlo De Carlo. Storia del progetto e genealogia dei temi*, doctoral thesis, tutor Luka Skansi, IUAV, PhD in Architecture, City and Design, 2019.

6 Federico Bilò, *Tessiture dello spazio. Tre progetti di Giancarlo De Carlo del 1961*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2015.

7 Lorenzo Mingardi, "I torrioni di Giancarlo De Carlo. Il quartiere Pineta e il Piano regolatore di Urbino", *Storia urbana*, 164 (2019), p. 95-119.

his projects and short extracts of the architect's texts.<sup>8</sup> Three of the articles published in this issue – Adam Wood's text on the notion of architecture with respect to Giancarlo De Carlo and those of Rita D'Attorre and Matteo Sintini, respectively dedicated to the volume *Questioni di architettura e urbanistica* of 1964 and to the magazine *Spazio e Società* from 1978 – propose reflections on De Carlo's writing and on his fertility as a theorist and cultural promoter.

Starting from the perspective of the social sciences, Adam Wood explores the potentials of De Carlo's conception of architecture to acquire new ways of conceiving space. His primary interest is in the design of educational spaces. De Carlo's holistic vision can help overcome the traditional absence of intersections between architecture, planning and education and foster more democratic forms of organisation of educational processes. Wood underlines the value of GDC's direct commitment to education, from the CIAM summer school to ILAUD, from teaching at IUAV to his American experience. Commitment and interest that are also reflected in his writings, from the first articles for *Domus*<sup>9</sup> and fundamental texts such as "Why/How to Build School Buildings" and the Thomas Cubitt Lecture.<sup>10</sup> His lesson lies in the foundation of an innovative approach to the design of schools based on a review of the educational process.

Rita D'Attorre's essay, which rereads *Questions of Architecture and Urban Planning* through subsequent editions, also focuses on the breaching of disciplinary boundaries. A book still largely overlooked by the international literature on De Carlo, which allows us to reflect again on his fundamental contribution to the debate on the relationship between architecture and urban planning in the years of his academic commitment to IUAV and his professional commitment to urbanism.

Matteo Sintini reviews the journal *Spazio e Società* focusing on its early years, those engaged in the construction of a "tentative" editorial line subject to constant re-assessment. The open character of the journal and the very definition of an audience beyond the professionals for whom it was intended underscore its distance from other Italian periodicals, as well as the desire to build an international observatory open to developing countries and post-colonial architecture, a choice consistent with De Carlo's call for pluralism in the languages of architecture against the risk of a new eclecticism in the burgeoning postmodernist trend.

The three texts reflect a view of De Carlo that in recent years has focused very much on his publications and his method of writing, a topic that is undoubtedly central in the case of an architect for whom exchanges with the literary

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8 Angela Mioni, Etra Connie Occhialini (eds.), *Giancarlo De Carlo: immagini e frammenti*, exhibition catalogue, Milan, Electa/Triennale di Milano, 1995.

9 Giancarlo De Carlo, "La scuola e l'urbanistica", *Domus*, 220 (1947).

10 Giancarlo De Carlo, "Why/How to Build School Buildings", *Harvard Educational Review*, 39, 4 (1969); Id., "Reflections on the Present State of Architecture", the Inaugural Thomas Cubitt Lecture, *Architectural Association Quarterly*, 10, 2 (1978).

world were frequent and significant. In turn, such a critical approach reflects a broader international debate on architects' writings as a field of action characterised both by its autonomy and a particular relationship with design research.<sup>11</sup> Significant work has been done recently on the republication and critical reissue of De Carlo's main writings, in particular thanks to the efforts of his daughter, Anna De Carlo, and the publishing house Quodlibet. Here we find unpublished texts such as the travel diaries in Greece (2010) or the transcriptions of the four lectures on the city held at the Faculty of Architecture of Genoa in 1993 (2019).<sup>12</sup> Quodlibet has also made available new critical editions of some key texts published by De Carlo in the 1960s and 1970s on the relationship between architecture, power and participation, in particular the essays "La piramide rovesciata" (1968) and "An architecture of participation" (1972).<sup>13</sup> Alongside this systematic work – which also includes the publication of essays such as *La città scritta* by Stefano Boeri, in part dedicated to the study of De Carlo<sup>14</sup> – there are initiatives related to the re-edition, sometimes updated, of texts such as the book interview with Franco Bunčuga, the novel written under a pseudonym *Il progetto Kalhesa*, or the two works subject to specific attention in this collection, *Questioni di architettura e urbanistica* and the editorials of *Spazio e Società*.<sup>15</sup>

The initiatives carried out as part of the centenary deserve a separate space in the examination of De Carlo's writings, in particular the resumption of the marathon project of reading his texts that had initially been launched in 2014-2015 by the Ca' Romanino Foundation of Urbino. The centenary marathon, led once again by the Foundation together with the Polytechnic University of Marche and Turin Polytechnic, was transformed into a virtual event due to the dramatic pandemic of 2020. The initiative built a community of readers distributed among Italian and foreign schools of architecture and engineering who are tracing their own itineraries in time and space capable of bringing out the central themes of the literature on De Carlo and spreading the refined lessons of the city's history and the narration of the places he crossed through in fifty years of work.<sup>16</sup> Of the main events held for the centenary celebrations, of particular note is the first public exhibition of the *Quaderni* manuscripts, hitherto unpublished, written by

11 Béatrice Bouvier, Jean-Michel Leniaud (dir.), *Le livre d'architecture, XVe-XXe siècle. Édition, représentations et bibliothèques*, Paris, École Nationale des Chartes, 2002; Catherine de Smet, *Le Corbusier: Architect of Books*, Baden, Lars Müller, 2005; Laurent Baridon, *Raisons d'écrire: livres d'architectes, 1945-1999*, Paris, Éditions de La Villette, 2013; Carlo Olmo, "La storia dell'architettura contemporanea: il punto di vista e la presa di distanza. Esiste un'etica della ricerca?", *Lexicon*, 26-27 (2018), p. 7-18.

12 Giancarlo De Carlo, *Viaggi in Grecia*, edited by Anna De Carlo, preface by Stefano Boeri, with 40 drawings by the author, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2010; Id., *La città e il territorio. Quattro lezioni*, edited by Clelia Tuscano, ibid., 2019.

13 Giancarlo De Carlo, *La piramide rovesciata. Architettura oltre il '68*, edited by Filippo De Pieri, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2018; Id., *L'architettura della partecipazione*, edited by Sara Marini, ibid., 2013.

14 Stefano Boeri, *La città scritta. Carlo Aymonino, Vittorio Gregotti, Aldo Rossi, Bernardo Secchi, Giancarlo De Carlo*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2016.

15 Giancarlo De Carlo, *Questioni di architettura e urbanistica*, preface by Paolo Ceccarelli, Santarcangelo di Romagna, Maggioli, 2008 (first ed., Urbino, Argalia, 1964); Franco Bunčuga, Giancarlo De Carlo, *Conversazioni su architettura e libertà*, Milan, Elèuthera, 2015 (first ed., ibid., 2000); Ismé Gimdalcha [Giancarlo De Carlo], *Il progetto Kalhesa*, preface by Edoardo Salzano, s.l., Edizioni di Storia e Studi Sociali, 2015 (first ed., Venice, Marsilio, 1995); Isabella Daidone, *Giancarlo De Carlo. Gli editoriali di Spazio e Società*, Rome, Gangemi, 2017.

16 The virtual marathon is on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2115897955371943> and Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/gdccentennial1919\\_2019](https://www.instagram.com/gdccentennial1919_2019).

the architect from 1966 until his death: a rich body of notes and travel diaries that sheds new light on how his intellectual laboratory operated.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. Dialogues, influences, exchanges

A final corpus of essays reflects on a topic that historiography has always devoted attention to, namely the dense network of exchanges, dialogues and influences involving Giancarlo De Carlo both in Italy and abroad. The centrality of the matter requires no debate in the case of one of the Italian architects who was most visible on the international scene after WWII, first through the exchange circuits developed and institutionalised by 20th-century modernism – CIAM, Team X – and subsequently through the construction of a series of personal, intellectual and institutional relationships that have yet to be fully fleshed out in all their complexity. Research in this direction now seems all the more appropriate considering the increasing weight given to the issue of the transnational circulation of experiences and models by a broad stream of studies on urban planning and architecture of the 20th century.<sup>18</sup>

Antonello Alici's interview with Benedict Zucchi, Alberto Terminio's article on De Carlo and van Eyck and finally the text by Luigi Mandraccio, Stefano Passamonti and Francesco Testa on industrial design address the issue from three different points of view.

Benedict Zucchi, in retracing his meeting with De Carlo – first through his research and then with a brief collaboration in his Milanese studio – underlines De Carlo's affinity with Anglo-Saxon culture and the allure that his lesson continues to exert on British architects for his conception of architectural design as a process and discipline, which prefers "substance over style, clarity of structure before detail". Zucchi also underlines the central role of De Carlo's writings, insisting on the contemporaneity of some of his fundamental texts of the 1960s and 1970s.

Relations with Anglo-Saxon culture are continuously intertwined with those with the Dutch members of Team X. Alberto Terminio addresses a subject that has been much discussed by critics, namely the relationship between De Carlo and Aldo van Eyck, examining the two designers' common interest in the architecture of large numbers. Recalling the influence of the North African grid presented at CIAM IX in Aix-en-Provence, Terminio retraces the main stages of the experimentation of an additive process of modular units towards the open form in the different oscillations of De Carlo and van Eyck between order and freedom of expression.

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17 *I quaderni di Giancarlo De Carlo 1966-2005*, exhibition curated by Gatto Tonin Architetti, Triennale di Milano, January-February 2020. The critical edition of the Quaderni is in the process of being published by Quodlibet.

18 See for example Paolo Scrivano, "Architecture", in Akira Iriye, Pierre-Yves Saunier (eds.), *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 53-56, and for Italy Id., *Building Transatlantic Italy: Architectural Dialogues with Postwar America*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2013; Lorenzo Ciccarelli, *Il mito dell'equilibrio. Il dibattito anglo-italiano per il governo del territorio negli anni del dopoguerra*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2019.

Mandraccio, Passamonti and Testa offer an original interpretation, dissecting De Carlo's work as a designer of objects and furnishings and investigating his relationships with the production and industry sectors. Without contradicting the unity of architectural design at the various scales claimed by De Carlo, the essay examines lesser known experiences such as the design of metal tubular chairs exhibited at the 8th Milan Triennale, the design of the first-class cabins of the Lucania ship from which arose the collaboration with Arflex, the furnishings in the projects for the University of Urbino and finally the urban lighting system in blown glass globes designed first for Urbino and then in Mazzorbo and Colletta di Castelbianco. Even in this particular area of design consolidated relationships such as the one with Franco Albini and with the Milanese cultural context and meetings such as the one with Fernand Léger for the Lucania project appear central, not to mention the long-distance dialogue with the Scandinavian masters in the use of plywood to complement curved tubular metal.

This variety of subjects and references lends itself to being usefully accompanied by other works published for the centenary, retracing in various ways the threads and textures that lead back to De Carlo. This is the case of the publication edited by Paolo Ceccarelli on ILAUD (International Laboratory of Architecture and Urban Design), which traces the history of this original teaching experience from its founding in 1976. The volume proposes a perspective that, in addition to covering the years of De Carlo's direct participation in the laboratory, also extends to activities after 2006, when ILAUD opened up to global settings such as China, Japan and Israel. In this case the memory of De Carlo is associated with Etra Connie Occhialini, the first secretary of ILAUD who died in 2019.<sup>19</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion: places and archives

There is a line of research on De Carlo that cuts across all those discussed so far, particularly evident in all the articles of the issue: the architect's special relationship with some cities that represent the background for reflections gained over an entire career. Two collective works, one edited by Emanuele Piccardo on De Carlo "architect of Urbino", and one edited by Antonietta Iolanda Lima based on a reconsideration of the experiences in Palermo and Catania, have recently reaffirmed the centrality of the issue and the way in which a reflection on places can still represent a useful starting point to trigger a critical debate on the relevance of De Carlo's trajectory.<sup>20</sup> Of particular interest today are studies capable of systematically mobilising sources – both those referring to the architect and his studio as well as those related to many institutions and figures with whom his work intertwined – showing greater attention to the nuances and questions

19 Paolo Ceccarelli (ed.), *Giancarlo De Carlo and ILAUD: A Movable Frontier. The International Laboratory of Architecture and Urban Design from 1976*, Milan, Fondazione OAMi, 2019. The catalogue accompanied an exhibition held at Fondazione OAMi in 2019.

20 Emanuele Piccardo (ed.), *Giancarlo De Carlo. L'architetto di Urbino*, Busalla, plug\_in, 2019, 2 vol.; Antonietta Iolanda Lima (ed.), *Giancarlo De Carlo. Visione e valori*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2020.

they pose with respect to some consolidated topics: this is the case of Lorenzo Mingardi's documented work on the relationship between architecture, planning and politics in Urbino during the 1960s.<sup>21</sup>

The existence of a solid, rich archive related to De Carlo, made possible by the architect, his family and his studio and their awareness of the importance of preserving the material, is in fact one of the reasons why De Carlo will remain a fertile subject of study, even in the future. An important part of the documentation concerning his activity has been widely accessible for some years now thanks to the valuable work done by institutions such as the IUAV *Archivio Progetti*, directed by Riccardo Domenichini, which received De Carlo's professional archive from the architect himself so that it could be made available to scholars. Both the essays published here and the vitality of recent public initiatives related to De Carlo show how the recently concluded centenary can be a starting point for a new season of study that will hopefully be able to combine the potential of documentary exploration with the reasons for a new critical interest.

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21 Lorenzo Mingardi, *Sono geloso di questa città. Giancarlo De Carlo e Urbino*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2018.