Cos'è **Green?**
by Gaetano Licata

2.a di copertina

What is green? A life style, a fashion trend, a philosophy? All of that and much more. This question generated a workshop at The University of Palermo, which had been invited, together with other Italian universities, to take part in the students' competition Costruire Green Life, promoted by the magazine Interni: an occasion to formulate some answers under the shape of projects, ideas and words, on one of the major current themes, the environment and its resources, with which architects and designers are confronted, but towards which all of us are summoned to take a position. The book What is green? conveys the outlines of the reflection emerged during the workshop and presented through the exhibition held at its end. This was one way of facing the question, but above all of generating other questions, being convinced that an open attitude could trigger suggestions, planning skills and a new form of responsibility.

4. di copertina

What is green is the first number of the series transforma, a collection of small books, which go through architecture and issues of our times.

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Introduction
What is Green?
Gaetano Licata

The Faculty of Architecture in Palermo, together with three more Italian universities (Milan, Naples and Venice), was invited by the magazine INTERNI to participate in the students' competition Costruire Green Life. In January, a workshop took place, bringing about four projects (Coordination: professor Gaetano Licata; tutors: Pietro Airoldi and Michele Cammarata). This event generated a workspace which involved several people in the debate "What is green?". The opportunity to show the results generated an exhibition which draws on the same question.

Serious environmental questions, such as the relationship with limited energy resources and all the efforts towards a new awareness of our society's attitude towards nature, have been summed up in a concept which has been called 'green' for a while now, outdating more scientific but overused terms such as sustainability, or more politically charged ones, such as ecology. This linguistic innovation implies the risk of creating a hazy blob which comprises everything but does not precisely define anything, in fact generating confusion only. At the same time, the subject has been somehow lightened, thus resembling in terms of temporariness and lightness to a fashion trend, which time could therefore easily erase. Green-economy, green-life, green-housing, green-power, green-tower, green-energy… Yet the opposite is happening.

In the last decades, let's say starting with the first oil crises in the seventies (which forced us to leave cars at home on Sundays), affecting the western civilizations at first, and gradually the rest of the world as well, the environmental issue has occupied increasingly prioritary positions: conferences on the environment, the birth of new control institutions, observatories and agreement protocols which give a measure of the transnational dimension and relevance of the matter. The fact that this might really become a fashionable subject, or that it is one already, could also bring advantages along, but only if we consider fashion as "a change in perception, whereby we see the same things we were already seeing, under other aspects, according to other links"1. The first advantage of all is a certain guarantee of diffusion, and somehow of a vulgarization of its contents and messages. The environmental issue, for its own gravity and planetary scale is a widespread problem, investing each of us, and can therefore only be faced with great numbers and changes affecting everybody.

So, is it not this widespread lightening what is really necessary for this very complex issue? Especially if one wants to have, through a mass involvement, the minimum hope of succeeding in the bet on a paradigmatic change in the relationship with natural resources, which, according to some catastrophic forecast, could even have the continuity of our own species at stake.

In the perspective of embracing with full awareness the green trend, the first thing to do is to ask oneself with gradual approximation what really green is, and, according to the formulation of the questions, rather than that of the answers, one should begin to filter what should or could be green. The answer to the first question 'is green a fashion trend'?: Yes, but not exclusively.

'Is green a nostalgic return to nature'? Phenomena such as the new urbanism, Krier's nostalgic visions, not by chance developed for Charles the Prince of Wales, aim at a reversion to the medieval dimension of the city, some sort of return to the past, with the motivation that it is more on a human scale than life in a metropolis, or on the thirtieth floor.

Yet this attitude, founded on the culture of preservation, produces an odd return to nature, made of low-rise houses, narrow and curving streets, but without latrines and with cars! Moreover, this is the cause of all those reassuring laws, issued by institutions which should supervise the State's culture and which do not want to show that time keeps passing by.

Is slowness green? Surely a time dimension which is less accelerated than ours brings about time for observation, for consideration, but does not necessarily make us think carefully or do the right things. But taking time is common to natural processes, growth, seasonal rhythms and conditions reiterated at precise intervals. Is sustainability green? The term sustainability is surrounded by a certain heaviness, since it is nowadays everywhere and it has become a commonplace. The molecular designer Michael Braungart considers sustainability as a tolerant attitude towards the planet's destruction, which is harmful to a real paradigmatic change in the relationship with the environment. To say "Protect the environment. Use the car less"[2] is equivalent to saying "Protect your children. Beat them less often!". Therefore, sustainability looks like the acceptance of a slow death.

Is responsibility green?A new form of responsibility is necessary. The argument whereby "Every decision has to be taken by the same subjects who suffer the consequences "[3] seems outdated today. And what if the decisions taken affect the future of generations yet to be born at the time when the decision is taken? Who is going to defend those who are not there yet? The current situation of some industrial contexts with a very high pollution rate will cause the sons or the grandchildren to suffer because of the decisions taken by their parents and grandparents. One could selfishly neglect this, saying that those who will come later will be smart enough to solve the problems which will emerge. But this is not an answer, this is rather not taking responsibility.

Is transformation green? The mere action of lengthening the life cycle of existing things, abandoning the widespread logic which only apparently makes us feel free to use things and dispose of them, surely is one of the possibilities. Among other things, this always allows us to economize. In a building, some parts age more quickly than others, more or less as it happens with cars, which need to be substituted or upgraded. If we apply the same principle to the city, it means to densify, to make all the infrastructural parts exploited to their most: streets and networks. If we apply that to objects, we could reach the non-production of objects, and thus the reduction of the energy necessary to produce them from scratch in the first place, and then of the energy necessary to dispose of them. To give some numbers about the disposable philosophy: every year 10 billions disposable razors are produced, which correspond to 250 thousand tons of steel.

Is design green? If by design we mean the invisible part of a project, which rules or, even better, induces behaviours, as opposed to all designs which find their raison d'être in their direct visibility only, maybe we have a possible key in our hands. An improvement in our relationship with the resources is usually proposed only through the use of new products, which do not belong to the green logics, precisely because they are new and because they substitute older products. The invisible design4, in the case of green, needs new assumptions and new motivations, leading to new objects or relationships between people, and between people and things generating or transforming previous things, with a different perception of new needs, objects, cars or houses, beyond any formal rhetoric. This is necessary to respond to a condition of restrictions, of uncompulsory growth, of slowness, which need small breaking off actions, even within rigid scientific disciplines.

Who does today the greener things? Those who make the most important discoveries are transversal figures, new professionals: designers

of self-degradable materials, engineers of biogenetics producing sweeper bacteria, plant-scientists creating plants which clean up polluted water, nano-technologists calculating in real time traffic streams, scientists calculating the energy saved by simply painting roofs in white and thus returning some heat to the atmosphere...

If new mass behaviours do not develop besides scientific research, the green challenge is doomed to remain difficult. And if an actual cultural passage can be helped by green as a fashion trend, or as a slogan..., why not? If only riding a bike became fashionable instead of having a SUV.

1 Lucius Burckhardt, Okölogie – nur eine Mode?, in: Die Kinder fressen ihre Revolution, Köln 1985, pp. 220-224.

2 German institution for the environment preservation's announcement, cited in "La sostenibilità è noiosa, di Michael Braungart, Abitare, n. 482/2008, p. 126.

3 Vittorio Hoesli, Filosofia della crisi ecologica, Torino 1992, p. 146.

4 Lucius Burckhardt, Per un design invisibile, in: D'Ars, n. 103/1983. German original: Design ist

unsichtbar, in: Die Kinder fressen ihre Revolution, Köln 1985, pp. 42-48.

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Urban Tour
At Teresa La Rocca's house. A conversation
by Gaetano Licata

Since 1972 Teresa La Rocca has been living in Palermo historic centre, in a house with three green areas, in front of the harbour: it is a house she transformed several times. We visited her on the Saturday before the workshop.

Gaetano Licata: You've been living in this house, transforming it and watching its growth; it is set in a saturated urban area of the historic centre, yet it features two patios and a terrace which flourish with vegetation.

Teresa La Rocca: I've been living here for more than thirty years... and, as you know, the house was there, the actual changes have been minimal, mainly small adaptations to the changes in life...what really grows is the vegetation. In my patios the trees have found their climate, I've planted myself many plants which are local, this one for example comes from a broken branch I picked from the big ficus tree in Piazza Marina. There are even twenty-five year old plants, which I am often forced to cut, since they sometimes invade the house; I somehow protect myself from them rather than cultivate them, so every now and then, zac...

G.L.: With regard to going green in an active way: have you ever thought about fitting photovoltaic, solar panels, or rain-harvesting devices in this house?

T.L.R.: No, never, here I don't have any climatic issue, the patios, the vegetation, the ventilation, affect a rather enjoyable way of life... green you would say. These days, I am confronted with this theme, I have to say I'm a bit desperate, I can't find a solution

G.L.: Why?

T.L.R.: I'm trying to understand what is the best way of doing it. I won't just pick the panels and install them; for example, nowadays they are handed out on a plate, there are tax incentives, discounts, and energy saving has become a proper business. Everything in Italy turns into a business. I don't know, I'd like to use them to make pergolas, I don't know yet how to do that, I am working on this, you can't just have them fitted, they are so invasive...

G.L.: Don't you think that dealing with those things we often call gadgets, since they are usually just superimposed, is a legitimate duty? The fact that many of us are not eager to use these objects confines their use, disposition and integration, only to those people who make a profit out of it, from manufacturers to sellers, to installers or even certain engineers. Is this a subject to consider as well?

T.L.R.: Yes, that's true, but I'd rather think of this as of a collective matter, I don't know, for instance, on the scale of a small community of flats within a house, instead of enhancing the individualistic policy of a single use of improvements, which I would almost forbid. On the contrary, a strong promotion is currently taking place, making the individual purchase and installation of these objects much simplified, while there are only few strategies for collective needs. I think that in Italy there is no sense of public responsibility, nor the acknowledgement of a small community such as, for example, that of a house split into apartments. Everyone acts for themselves. 'Town' and 'Public' are words ignored by the majority of people.

G.L.: Therefore, energy saving, for instance, can only be a collective attitude

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