

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, *Ökologie – 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, p. 42-48.

(page 9)

## 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, zacc...

**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

**T.L.R.:** I'm absolutely positive on this. Through the individualistic

attitude we contribute to the deterioration of the landscape, because the individual doesn't really produce anything ecological if we take into account beauty. It's always the same issue, even the recent housing law which enhances quantity by rewarding it, can be useful as an example. The important thing is always how to do things. In Milan, there is a law allowing small extensions into the attics, which has produced some interesting examples. Something similar to our local law about the reuse of lofts, which, as it is interpreted, only brings a larger availability of space, without any chance for improvement.

**G.L.:** That's true, but in Milan you have to reserve a part of the extension to collective needs of the apartments, while with our apartment blocks we often come across contradictions because they are born as collective buildings but the flats in them tend to be intended today as independent units, as if they were independent from one another.

**T.L.R.:** Yes, it is a collective rather than individual improvement, but that's a cultural issue affected by individual behaviours, and that's where things are not very green. We all live in houses which are older than us and which reflect a lifestyle which was suitable for our grandparents, they are old-fashioned houses. The changes in our life style are not reflected yet in our domesticity. When Le Corbusier talked about the garden roof he thought the countryside would be progressively further away from the city, so he considered very important to grab a piece of it and put it under the building, inside or on top of it, like in the Immeuble-Villa. Today all of that is recycled into the green attitude.

**G.L.:** An alternative to the gadgets is the passive solar approach, whereby all possible solutions are employed to allow a house or an object, through their shape, material, position and orientation, to reduce or abolish the reliance on complicated appliances, so that in the best case-scenario one could be completely self-sufficient in terms of energy. But this option seems to apply mainly to new buildings, where one can choose their orientation and position first thing, but here, in the saturated conditions of the historic centre, you can't choose orientation or position, so what can you do? For instance, if you put a glazed wall to the south, by choice or by mistake, the only possible thing to do is to fit a set of very active elements to limit the temperature issues.

**T.L.R.:** The passive approach is very important and depends on the knowledge of one's own habitat and climate, you can't do here the

same things you do, for example, in ... Finland. Here, we need to protect ourselves from the heat. That's a subject I already faced in 1982: I participated to the workshop "Energy conscious building design" in Urbino, involving many architects and climate control experts. I worked with Pierluigi Nicolini on existing buildings in Schio city. In a consolidated city you can't choose the buildings' orientation. Normally you can't turn the orientation of an existing house, even if there are extreme attempts of this kind. We have made experiments which were based on the assumption of not using in any way the so-called gadgets. We worked on different façades' treatments, depending on their orientation, with patios, greenhouses, deeper walls, different ways of opening and closing the house according to the solar exposure, and this, as confirmed by the calculations made, produced a considerable breakdown in the energy requirements.

**G.L.:** Thus, the technology and the choice of materials are all things which put you in a position of noble maintenance or of repairing.

**T.L.R.:** Yes, that's all true, but the main thing is the acknowledgement of a the potentiality of a place and of all those things which often remain unseen. An example of that is my own house. Basically, when I say that the house was there I mean that in the transformation there has been an understanding of its potentiality to be something else without any discontinuity with its previous state. The reuses in the historic centre are attempts to transfer the houses from the city's expansion in the sixties to the centre, with the same features, except for the style. In terms of Palermo's historic centre, is it easy to criticize? It's an old-fashioned idea of restoration, but nobody ever thought about working with what the Masterplan really says. If one talks about typological restoration, it's not to be interpreted to make a small house that looks like those in the Nativity scenes. Typology is something abstract, which has nothing to do with language, it's about the condition of some relations which are already given within the existing building. Yet nobody has made an attempt to see things in this way. Maybe that's how one should try to work on the Masterplan, trying to understand what one can do with its outdated rules.

**Vito Priolo:** The workshop competition announcement asks for a reproducible object.

**T.L.R.:** You can usually win a competition by transgressing its rules.

Anyway, I think that not only the objects are reproducible, there are also things which are reproducible, despite not looking suitable for reproduction. The problem is to think about it.

**G.L.:** I wouldn't confine the theme of reproducibility to the object's scale, but rather take into account reproducible situations. A greenhouse is a reproducible object, to be reproduced each time in a different context of course, but the greenhouse-principle is reproducible, the attitude itself is reproducible.

**T.L.R.:** Exactly, an object can be reproducible, but a system could be reproducible too; like Ikea, producing things that are assembled later, a system of objects which produces different effects and that each of us adapts to different contexts. Yet behaviours and ways of living are the most important thing, I'd like to think that even behaviours can be reproducible.

**V.P.:** And what about technology and materials?

**T.L.R.:** Yes, materials: there is a lot of innovation around materials but none around objects. The objects have always been there, chairs, tables, garbage bins. I can't think of anything particularly innovative in terms of design, except for the ability to find new questions, which I think is one of the most interesting things. The object is not the goal nor the solution of an issue, and that's even more true of this green subject.

**G.L.:** I think that reproducibility is to be intended as a system of reproducible actions. I'll bring you an example: recycling garbage requires objects to contain it, but do I separate garbage at home individually or in my apartment block collectively? Do I put it outdoors or indoors? Does it generate a space in the building to contain it, and therefore becomes part of the things to be managed? Let's think about our cities: garbage goes into bins. There are other cities where the garbage area is part of the building. You can access it from outside or from inside, from the inside for the users, from the outside for its recollection, therefore we are already talking about the location of this place: between inside and outside. But it gets even more difficult when we are confronted with existing buildings, how do you do that? Or let's talk about mobility issues, that's a green subject as well, how do we move about? On foot? By bike, by car, by bus? Where do you put the bikes, where will the car parking be? The car seems to me an unresolved issue. The object is produced, the car evolves, goes faster

and consumes less, but a whole lot of incompatibilities remain, if you produce a condition in which for example cars disappear, because they stop somewhere, does that become a reproducible system?

**T.L.R.:** Many of the issues you bring up mainly require a change in terms of individual behaviours and the ability to naturally adapt to the changes in life, which pose increasingly difficult problems to face. One could think of inducing these changes through productive actions, such as those you were talking about. I think it would be useful if the strength and the continuity of the experiences in the end produced something, as long as people are made aware of the level of necessity. If you think about it, that's characteristic of the world nowadays, the loss of the relation of necessity with things, which is what has always produced the greatest innovations.

(page 13)

### Country trip

#### At Roberto Collovà's house. A conversation

by *Gaetano Licata*

*In 2009 Roberto Collovà built for him and his partner an extension to an existing building in the countryside of Polizzi Generosa, around 100 Km away from Palermo. We went to visit him on the Sunday before the Workshop.*

**Gaetano Licata:** You've been living in this house for a short time. You designed its expansion yourself, as a second home in the country. What kind of discovery is country life?

**Roberto Collovà:** I can tell you what it is not: it is not a discovery which changes my entire life, there is no romantic idea of escaping to an alternative world, I like the city, but I know more and less where it comes from. Many people live in their country homes in a picturesque way, as if there were some sort of nostalgia for a nature which objectively does not exist any more. The intact, original nature, is just not there anymore, for the simple reason that from the beginning of time we kept on changing it and, being part of nature ourselves, we have changed along with it. Therefore, for me, it is not about the search for an original lost nature, as in the conservative and ideological image of the preservation of an environment which should stay still, unchanged, which is today very widespread and hypocritical.