

Anyway, I think that not only the objects are reproducible, there are also things which are reproducible, despite not looking suitable to 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.

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## **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.

**G.L.:** What is green?

**R.C.:** It seems to me like a gimmick which can be found everywhere, another form of false conscience. The question is, where is the problem? I haven't understood yet if we are dealing with the same old story: whether the market needs new things to look newer, in order to throw away the old ones, or something really new is going to happen.

It would be the case if this were a change in the material condition; but, in a globalized world, does this still count?

**G.L.:** We think that staying in the realm of existing things, recovering them, lengthening their lives according to new needs or new meanings, can be the basic work to start and limit the field of what green could be. Working on the potential of things which are already there.

**R.C.:** The themes of the dimensions of the transformations are not arising now. Morris, almost two centuries ago, already faced these issues: the change in scale of the cities, the birth of the metropolis – we are in the middle of the XIXth century – He says: be careful, very important things are happening, there are such changes that ... everything is architecture ... except for the desert. What a discovery, everyone was enthusiastic, one can do anything, almost even in the desert, why not? But Morris' argument carries on, what he says right after that can be more and less summarized as: 'we have to remember however that this rapid transformation with no boundaries, which will take place for better or worse, requires all the awareness and therefore full responsibility of each of us...' Why? Because it is through the sum and the combination of each person's actions that extraordinary effects are produced, in building up as well as pulling down. I'll bring an example: throwing some paper onto the street instead of disposing of it in a suitable place – what would happen if we all threw paper onto the street? – is an irresponsible action. This common sense works properly in Switzerland, Germany or Northern Europe, but not in Italy; isn't there a problem, then, with Italian culture, which is particularly unbalanced from this point of view? Our dispersed landscape corresponds to our dispersed mind, it's our mental landscape to be destroyed more than the landscape which we would like to rebuild, as in a postcard. Thus the theme could be: actions, how to induce new behaviours?

**G.L.:** In this sense, the two most common ways are incentive and control. The latter only works fully if there is a policeman vigilating

behind each of us. In alternative, some specific kinds of projects are needed to make things happen in a determined way. I'll bring an example, in Germany, large rubbish items to be thrown away (furniture, computers, household appliances) must be left for at least two days in front of one's building after having given notice to the local administration, which will punctually collect them. During those two days, the aim is to let people see the possibility to reuse those items disposed. It is often the case for objects which are substituted because they are outdated by newer versions, or which are in need of small repairing. In that way there is a sort of pre-dump recycling as well as pre-industrial recycling. That's the point, someone thought about that, someone made a project called "how to dispose of large items". This design project doesn't produce a design object but rather a process, or maybe it even prevents other objects to be produced, just because it lengthens the life of the existing ones.

**R.C.:** That is true, but it involves also an important type of exercise, I would say a formative exercise, it affects the way in which you dispose of things. In our society, anything we can no longer use is rubbish, thus, it has no shape. The rubbish doesn't have any shape because it doesn't have an order any more. They are abandoned objects, which anyway come into the world to change their shape.

**G.L.:** But there are many projects of this kind, which don't produce objects, that's what Lucius Burckhardt called the "invisible design": buses timetable, school classes time schedules, shops opening times, etc. These are all things which don't have shapes, yet influence, rule and determine our behaviours as much as sitting on a comfortable chair or strictly speaking using an object.

**R.C.:** The question I ask myself is: 'which can be the objects of design today? I think it is such type of things, precisely behaviours. Perhaps rather than looking for a larger variety of things which already exist, on the basis of an incentive – whether conceptual or material – one could put oneself into a position of difficulty. If you have a difficulty you have to invent a behaviour to respond to that. I'll bring two examples from different fields: Vespa was born from the use of small military planes' starter engines abandoned by the Americans in Italy after the war. Someone thought about wrapping this engine with a metal sheet and a seat. This answer was born out of scarcity of resources, from the

"I cook with what I have" philosophy, it doesn't obviously start from a luxury condition or from the "today anything can be done" philosophy – wouldn't that be the problem? Whereas this green issue today is born, at least partially, from a consumeristic model-ideology, which is one of the reasons why the country and the agriculture do not function any more.

I think we should put ourselves in some kind of preliminary situation which shall trigger new material, thinking and working conditions. My other example is the situation when you are in a place with little or no water at all. In this case, the interesting thing which changes is the behaviour: you have to pay attention to the lack of water, wash your different body parts in a compulsory sequence, according to hygiene levels, water the plants, and you are obliged to define the tactic sequence of these operations; you use it in a cascade, from the cleanest to the dirtiest operations, you start to keep an eye on water, for successive uses and start to think of what you have to do first and what last, taking a real responsibility. And what if this were collective?

**G.L.:** But is this person living in a low comfort situation, suffering or just living?

**R.C.:** This is a border-line subject, it is clear that it can become anachronistic. But, you see, here in Polizzi water isn't certainly scarce, it comes from the natural sources, you hear it flowing continuously in the summer and in the winter, along the irrigation open-cast canals; it starts out as drinking water, but along its way something can happen, which can spoil it. We go filling our tanks at a friend's place, where you draw water almost directly from the source. When we get here we take care of that too, normally, this is part of living here.

**G.L.:** Yet, to design behaviours comes before the laws, does it mean producing other laws, or are the conditions that produce behaviours?...

**R.C.:** I think that the prescriptive thought finds its decadence precisely at the time when it is at the peak of its practical application. With the European community, everything is hyper-ruled, but from which experience, knowledge and consciousness of cultural variety, do all these regulations come? Anyway, I think the point is not really to design behaviours, but rather how to induce behaviours. A type of design which produces objects, not only in a physical but also in an abstract way, objects that help us come to terms with one another, understand

one another, converge in doing certain things, some sort of human economics, that's what really is ecological to me.

**G.L.:** Anything else about staying in the countryside which is not possible elsewhere?

**R.C.:** For instance, the relationship with time, with time passing by, with growth; you deal with things you observe more and more, with a very high level of complexity. Maybe that is the most important thing. When I open the external shutters, between outside and inside, I find many small bustling animals. All of that becomes an object for observation. We usually perform executive, applicative, normative gestures. How many among us are pushed to observe, and in how many situations?

**G.L.:** Beyond green as a slogan, a fashion trend, which matches completely the consumption and production of new images, there is another green which acts in opposition to that, regarding the observation of things, the relationship with time, the care for things. Maybe all of that comes in handy when we go back to the city, it helps us to resist to the mechanisms which works against that by making us increasingly aware of certain things and less of others, turning us into consumers.

**R.C.:** That's the real problem, the compulsion to consumerism and the market's monoculture. You can exercise the observation both in the countryside and in the city. The city is nothing but the other nature, our nature, the one we built, necessary by now and even extended to the countryside, of course. On the other hand, it is true that this semi-abandoned countryside easily becomes the deposit of our legitimate original nostalgia. It is transformed and in transformation, it is falsified in endless ways, but it mythically resists in our minds, although it is often occupied by eco-monsters that we pretend not to see to preserve our ideal mental image of nature which we tend to confuse with the countryside?

Maybe now it is only a matter of decadence, the country still allows observation (but won't that be true of surviving observers only?), to be out of the market – that is, the countryside which hasn't become yet an organized poisonous factory, as it happens with the greenhouses. Finally, maybe you could say that the country keeps an high value in terms of use, whereas the city has an high exchange value. The green lesson could be: we must go back to repair broken objects, we shall

not accept to carry on throwing away plastic tumblers just used once, we must expect organic products to be used, as a farmer friend of mine rightly suggests, first of all in schools, hospitals, barracks and in the public and private firms' canteens, which would lower the food's prices and extend their use, giving back a modern material condition to agriculture?

There is one thing I'm pretty sure about in terms of countryside and agriculture: that a period of great interest in this direction is coming, and that for various reasons, not only out of nostalgia or consolation of the picturesque, but also because of a certain actual need of a better use of the potential resources available to us.

And what if they realize that? Is it possible to realistically imagine a cultural revolution or will it only be business?

Finally, our enemies seem to be the lovers' moon and the malls. Neither the former nor the latter should succeed in destroying our amazement for the moon which we objectively carry on seeing every month.

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### **Green... LAYERING\***

*Pietro Airoldi*

The layering, the buildings' external surface stratification, is a phenomenon which embraces various disciplinary areas, from that of communication-expression to that of technological and environmental sustainability. The superimposition of envelops to buildings, just like the packaging of objects, introduces in architecture the concept of time-sensitive modification and of the ephemeral, as opposed to the idea of permanence which has marked architectures historically: the building's surface becomes strictly linked to the unavoidable obsolescence of technology and of its own communicative message, and can be considered an element whose configurations can transform themselves through time. The envelop truly becomes a place of interdisciplinary experimentation, indeed there are a number of cases in which artists, designers, lighting designers and graphic designers work with architects on the design of the building's skin: from the de-materialization of the façades (Toyo Ito, Sanaa), to the skin's ultra-materiality, whereby the use of images or videos (Realities United, Future Systems) refer to other semantic fields, which are different from the traditional one of

the relationship between the building and the city. But the structural detachment of the envelop from the rest of the building and its stratification produce new issues, new spacial typologies, the space among the layers, the layering. The in-between spaces which separate the layers propose today a new dimension to the theme of the inside-outside relationship and can be seen as derivations of the 'loggia' from Renaissance architecture, and of its later interpretations (Italian rationalism), but which can be found in other cultural archetypes as well, such as the Japanese engawa, the Arabic mashrabiya or the British bay window.

An emblematic example of an original and innovative interpretation of the intermediate spaces and of layers is given by Shigeru Ban's Curtain Wall House, in which the different configurations of the layers (in this case, a curtain wrapping the whole building and a much recessed sliding glazed wall) produce a living space in continuous mutation, and above all a new conception of the inside-outside relationship.

The theme of the environment, of its preservation and sustainability, has strongly entered the contemporary architectural debate of the past few years, like some sort of new environmentalism involving both design and urban planning, often in the shape of a simple, and at the same time simplistic, green camouflage, or through a nostalgic return to nature and to pre-industrial society. In some cases the environmental issue has been on the contrary a stimulus to ask new questions concerning the relationship between artifice and nature or to re-think the models of the town or of the home. Different kinds of approaches to the **green** attitude can be distinguished, from the purely figurative, trendy one, which has no real influence on the environmental issues except from the point of view of communication, to the less explicit, but often more effective approach, which brings about real changes in daily attitudes towards the environment.

Among the **green** projects, different themes can be identified:

- green façades;
- recycling;
- the use of technological elements aimed at energy saving or at the production of alternative energies;
- climate control through the use of filters in the façades;
- the figurative and decorative use of natural elements.