

A. Milan*, M. Pellegrino**

* Researcher, DAPT- Department of Architecture and Urban Planning, Alma Mater Studiorum, University of Bologna, Italy.

** Post-PhD, School of Architecture, Polytechnic of Turin, Italy.

“Futurama II”. Tracking the ‘Presence of the Future’ in Contemporary Architecture Representations.

Preface

This text intends to discuss the profile of three architects belonging to the past century: Enzo Venturi, Claude Parent and Roger Anger. The aim is to compare their representations to prefigure their ideal towns. Interest is even greater, if we hypothesize and sustain the existence of a link between these three personalities which is far from being simply indirect. A new interpretation of the three authors highlights common cultural aspects. The identified links open up new prospects for investigation, substantiated by an exam of the works of these three architects. In particular, a specific element is compared: the representation – through the drawing – of a model town based on innovative, spatial organisation in architecture both in terms of structure and shape. This proposal anticipates the “town of the future” in its different utopian, ideal or alternative aspects, also in view of their subsequent, cultural influence.

1. Biographical Mix and Cultural Influence.

Enzo Venturi, Claude Parent and Roger Anger belong to the same period of time, as the latter two are contemporary while the former was born 13 years earlier, in 1910. However, their stories are quite different. Their approach to architecture reflects the widely varied characteristic and personal features of the three authors, despite their contradictions and complexities. Venturi is reserved, proposes innovative, visionary architectures within a feasible, consistent context. His reclusive personality kept him away from the French glowing, international environment, in fact he remained in his hometown of Turin that did not love him and soon forgot the contribution of his works. Parent, on the other hand is a brilliant, omnipresent, polemic, provocative personality. Architect among artists, he was the real driving force among artists and intellectuals of post-war Paris; he was appreciated by institutions and was therefore included in the French architectural elite. Anger is the architect who was integrated into the system, a prolific, trendy architect who developed several residential projects, in Auroville, India, therefore implementing his utopian vision of the town.

Differences that do not exclude and, on the contrary, confirm the opportunity to identify in the three authors, a common urban representation. We refer in particular to the special declination of the ideal, utopian town, according to similarities and repetitions that make this comparison rather interesting. This is even more significant as the analysis highlights a network of cultural, personal relationships, either ascertained or highly probable.

1.1. Architectural Avant-Garde. French-Italian Paths and Cultural Osmosis.

From a cultural point of view, the influence of art on the second half of 20th century architecture can be perceived not only in these three architects, but in the majority of the protagonists related to the most interesting innovations of that time. France was in the front line with these new ferments, being organised around two main nuclei, communicating with each other: André Bloc, with the magazine *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui* and the group ‘Espace’, on the other hand Michel Ragon, with the boundless scientific work and GIAP [*Groupe International d'Architecture Prospective*]. Starting from 1960, utopian and visionary architectural and artistic concepts were flourishing, the leading French and European representatives were Yona Friedman, Nicolas Schöffer (1912-1992) [1], Paul Maymont, Walter Jonas (and naturally Venturi, Parent and Anger). Venturi resided in Italy and was inevitably influenced by Italian futurism (in particular by Sant'Elia, Chiattone and Virgili), but due to his cultural tradition and geographical proximity operated in close contact with the French environment. This has a two-fold meaning which is also political-ideological, following the

traumatic interruption in cultural relations with the German world in the post-war period. From this lively French context Venturelli derived inspiration and models that, in the meanwhile, were opportunities for discussion and fame in the Paris milieus: *Michel Ragon*, in particular, appreciated his contribution and vision. In 1958 Venturelli exhibited his first projects in Paris, at the *Office National Italien du Tourisme*, including also his revolutionary *Casa-atelier Mastroianni* (1953-'54). The successful exhibition, in terms of visitors and critique, in April 1958 was covered by the papers 'Le Monde' and 'Le Figaro' under the title '*Venturelli à l'avant garde*'. A second opportunity was offered to the Italian architect in 1962, with the Paris exhibition: "*Lieu: théâtre, bien culturel*" a project submitted in collaboration with *Jacques Polieri* for a totally mobile theatre. Polieri, as stage designer, maintained close contacts with GIAP, of which he was a member in 1965-66. Though not in the official list of possible members of this group, Venturelli belonged to the GIAP cultural circle. His works were well known by Ragon and were mentioned, prior to the proclamation of the "*Manifeste pour une architecture prospective*" (1965) [2], in some of his critiques [3]. In the 1963 exhibition, Polieri presented six projects of theatres, featuring also the "mobile theatre", designed with Claude Parent and André Bloc.

It is almost certain that Parent and Venturelli had met, as they had the opportunity to know each other's projects and poetics. In 1965, Parent, together with Bloc and with Ragon's group (Schöffer in particular), had been invited to join the team. Parent did not join them as in 1963 he had drawn up '*Architecture Principe*', with P. Virilio.

1.2. Visionary Futurism. A Common Line of Research

Within a framework of complex collaborations – in other words, architects working for artists [Venturelli +Mastroianni], with artists [Parent + Schöffer|Klein], with stage designers [Venturelli|Parent + Polieri], active in groups, associations and movements – Roger Anger apparently played a different role. In 1965, when GIAP was created, in contrast with the other two architects, many of Anger's works had already been built. He was a successful professional, fully integrated into the professional world, who was about to become the chief-architect of the projects in the ideal town of *Auroville*, (official post : 1968). This different path had at least one point in common: interest in utopian, futuristic, visionary architecture, that he basically accomplished in such a radical, deep experience as that of Auroville. It is no pure chance that since 1960 Anger started producing drawings and sketches for visionary models of utopian towns from *Ville Pyramidale* (1964) to Auroville (preliminary sketches). Nor is by pure chance that at the opening session of the *Conférence* held on 17th September 2010 organised within the context of *Journées Européennes du Patrimoine* entitled: *L'héritage de Roger Anger. Recherche sur la beauté: architectures 1953-2008*, the discussion was moderated by Parent, who also edited the introduction to the monograph on Anger by A. Kundoo [4]. When travelling with Anger in Mexico, Parent had abandoned together with his colleague the IUA Congress (Cuba, 1963), considered to be 'suffocating'. Parent defined Anger as a traveller who was able to '*basculer vers un autre univers de formes*'.

Despite the fact that Parent's work and thought have been investigated in depth, however, both Venturelli and Anger have been 'removed' from recent architectural scenarios, both at international but also - even more surprisingly - at national level. Only few, fragmented publications define their work in a comparative perspective [5]. The authors' analysis on the representation of the town is a first step towards an in-depth discussion on the concept of 'projection and future' in contemporary architecture.

2. Utopia and Urban Representation

2.1. Enzo Venturelli. The Tumultuous Rationality.

We can speak of the 'Venturelli case' to talk about the professional life of Enzo Venturelli, a visionary architect of the 1950s and 1960s in Turin, right in the heart of the industrial and technological world at the time of the so-called 'Italian Economic Miracle'. Undoubtedly Venturelli was a leading figure in the cultural scenario, even though his production is fragmented and partially lost. His theory, illustrated in his drawings and texts of 'nuclear architecture' and 'spatial urban planning' [6] had little impact in Italy. One of the reasons for this lack of interest can be found in

the hybrid character of Venturrelli's works. Although Enzo Venturrelli - graduated in 1939 at the Polytechnic of Turin - started working as technical designer in 1927, when he was only 17, in the prestigious engineering firm of Arrigo Tedesco-Rocca, as an architect he only built a few buildings. His numerous graphic works and illustrations, partially collected in the book *'Urbanistica spaziale'* (1960), recall utopian-futurist models in urban planning. In the preface to the catalogue of the 1958 Paris exhibition, he declared that the exhibited projects *"were considered then to be daring and disconcerting; ahead of time, and were defined as not eligible"*. In actual fact, what Venturrelli suggests is not at all utopian. His projects are feasible and his propositions are structured in order to define the layout of a new master plan. His research focuses on a new language for the modern city, aimed at solving functional criticalities. The original style of the suggested solutions and the innovative character of many drawings can be defined as utopian, impregnated with 'plastic dynamism' (Fig. 1b), supported by precise formulas and applicable principles: such as the need to *'absolutely and totally'* abandon the chessboard-like layout of building blocks. Mobility and connections are organised on different levels according to whether they refer to vehicle or pedestrian flows. There is also a vertical translation of private green areas; buildings are oriented according to the sun diagram. Finally, Venturrelli prefigured the ground level, to be used exclusively by vehicles and the consequent introduction of bridges and elevated mobility structures (Fig. 1a).

2.2. Claude Parent. The Tradition of Utopian Reformism.

Out of the three architects, Claude Parent, is the one who dedicated more time in developing models, designs and projects for a utopian town. In this sense, the architect must have *"un pied dans le présent et la tête dans un siècle prochain hors des limites compatibles avec les circonstances du moment, donc entrant dans le domaine du non-lieu"* [7]. The role of the design is, according to Parent, fundamental, and is intended as a powerful means between reality and imagination, that can anticipate new experiments. Following his structured path, this architect formulated 'different' concepts and approaches with respect to the idea of the town in terms of *'nuclear architecture', dynamic-spatial urban planning, the theory of oblique architecture* (Fig. 2b) [8]; in any case, the guiding principle starts from refusing to separate the constitutional process of town planning from architecture. This translates into practice in a radical criticism of *grands ensembles*. The megastructure is intended as integrated.

Inside *Villes cones* (Fig.1a) space is compact, so that the area may include both big infrastructures ensuring links as well as cultivations and natural environment. Parent affirmed that in order to live in these new towns people have to develop a new conscience and change lifestyle. This stress, as a utopian reformer, characterises future towns and is shared by the three architects. Venturrelli and Anger associated new lifestyles to social enhancement: the former – challenged by a rapidly expanding Turin – opted for a 'hygienist and rational' investigation focusing on practicality, facilitated movement, reduced pollution; the latter aimed at a more spiritual research, involving the individual both physically and mentally in space.

2.3. Roger Anger. The Philosopher Architect.

Roger Anger (1) after an experience in Social Housing (Grenoble, Paris) started his extraordinary, well-known experience of Auroville, a utopian city still existing in South India. The idea of this city is highlighted in the first project drawing – a sort of crater – further specified in the final design based on a spiral; the 'energetic' analogy with the figures, highlights the forces of the earth, generated by a primary element. Despite being conditioned by the complex iconological and symbolic programme of theosophical nature – the implementation of the philosophy developed by *Sri Aurobindo* (1872-1950) [9] and *Mirra Alfassa-Richards* (called: *the Mother*) (1878-1973) - Anger's background can be defined as a sort of figural, architectural syncretism, expressed both in the general definition of the urban project and in the 'resilience' of the architectural language [10]. In Auroville, analogies and opposition with the anthroposophical conception of space, theorized by R. Steiner and A. Besant, are numerous and evident [11]. The city is intended as a collective, artistic work that slowly develops, starting from modelling of the site and invention of the landscape. This is a process that literally takes place *ab ovo*: a desertic – re-

forested and redesigned site with a totally new identity also resorting to radical mutations [12]. In this sort of local re-generation and construction of the city – an Augustinian representation of the *Civitas Dei* from which the *Civitas Hominum* is derived – the relation with time is suspended: by analogy with Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's doctrine, the time cycle is achieved starting from individual development, from the release of forces found within human nature. The same principle inspires the gardens and temple of *Matrimandir* [13] – the most hermetic of Anger's works - in which the sunlight, captured by a series of lenses and sun followers, is concentrated and disseminated through a pure crystal ball, almost suspended in the heart of the temple. Picture 3a shows some drawings and projects of houses for Auroville. Anger called these projects "Maisons Champignons". Although his language is comparable with that of Venturelli, Anger's intent, however, is totally different. The architect tries to *organically* harmonise with the site, establishing a link between *simple structure, soil and energy*. Detachment from the ground is a consequence of the intent not to disrupt the naturalness of the ground, while respecting its slopes and original features. Anger in practice, refuses to functionally saturate surfaces, to allow for vehicle mobility. Anger too tries to find highly dynamic and plastic solutions (Fig. 3b).

Conclusion

Critical prospection of movements in utopian architecture – and their comparative study through graphic work are still underused to outline an '*iconic history of ideas*', similarly to the study of derivation and theoretical development in architecture. The drawing can therefore be used to start an '*oriented interpretation*' of architecture in order to detect, like a chemical reagent, cultural moods and changes of an era.

Venturelli's stroke is sometimes conditioned by the objective rigidity of technical drawing, but when it is freed it becomes narrative and prophetic in overall views, by using both techniques as *collage* and photo montage, but also pictorial lyricism of popular illustration. His collaboration with one of the most famous illustrators of children's books is well known. Venturelli's expressive 'style' can reach mimicry and transfiguration up to the limit of good taste for *cartoon*, especially in pen drawings, where there is an early *Pop-Art* irony. Parent and Anger's projects are more refined and appreciated internationally, submitted to an international, cultural environment, free from the oppressive provincialism that conditioned and marginalised Venturelli.

The urban idea that emerges from the three 'futurist' conceptions is not different from the numerous examples that in the mid 1950s industrial designers, both in Europe and in the US, tested as prototypes: mushroom-shaped buildings today are considered old-fashioned, almost *modern antique* examples of urban objects; the *Monsanto House of the future* [14] - in plastic material in *Futurama II* [15] - and Anger's sketches are clearly similar.

In the case of Venturelli and Parent we get the impression that many different types of architecture are derived from the observation or enlargement of mechanical details and commonly used objects: experiments with origami, seen as an experimental spatial matrix, seem to support this hypothesis.

Finally: French culture often lingered in irrational prospection since the beginning of the 20th century. This is testified by the experience both with surrealism and the 'espaces imaginaires' that proliferated after the studies on Piranesi and John Martin's architecture. Propositions by the three architects explore the "*fiction architectonique dans l'architecture et les arts plastiques*". [16]. Analogies are found in terms of space and research with Wenzel Hablick [17] and Albert Trachsel [18]. Just like in forerunners, these visions belong to that set of ideas for a new, ideal society, that with only a few exceptions, are a refined, provocative, intellectual game.

Rediscovery of Venturelli, in Italy, coincides with the attempt by the City of Turin to resume a tradition based on experiments and research that was almost lost in recent decades: his drawings still have a provocative power That can stimulate both formal and system research on the future of the city. This essay therefore paves the way for a possible study on the 'life of shapes' and on their appearance and disappearance in relation to ideal tensions and 'sprints ahead' of avant-garde art.

- [1] On the work by Nicolas (Miklós) Schöffer, See: *Précurseur de l'art cybernétique*, in: Exhibition catalog Espace Gantner. Espace ED. Paris, Electra, 2004: The Hungarian artist, naturalised French citizen, explicitly referred to "musique concrète" and to the "Spatiodynamisme of futurist Luigi Russolo (1885-1947), "L'arte dei Rumori" (1913).
- [2] "L'explosion démographique | l'accélération spectaculaire des progrès techniques et scientifiques | l'augmentation constante du niveau de vie | la socialisation du temps, de l'espace et de l'art | l'importance croissante des loisirs | l'importance des facteurs temps et vitesse dans les notions de communications | font éclater les structures traditionnelles de la société | Nos villes, notre territoire ne sont plus adaptés à ces transformations. | Il devient urgent de prévoir et d'organiser l'avenir au lieu de le subir. | Le GIAP a pour but de rassembler tous ceux, techniciens, artistes, sociologues et spécialistes divers qui recherchent des solutions urbanistiques et architecturales nouvelles. | Le GIAP veut être un lien entre les chercheurs de tous les pays, même si leurs thèses sont parfois opposées. Le GIAP n'a donc pour l'instant d'autre doctrine que la prospective architecturale. | CONTRE une architecture rétrospective. | POUR une architecture prospective. [Signé à Paris, en mai 1965 par Yona Friedman, Walter Jonas, Paul Maymont, Georges Patricx, Michel Ragon, Ionel Schein, Nicolas Schöffer.]
- [3] Ragon included him among his contacts in Italy together with Manfredi Nicoletti. See the 1997 interview granted to Thierry Paquot on behalf of Institut d'Urbanisme.
- [4] Kundoo, A. Roger Anger: *Research on Beauty, Architecture 1953-2008*, Berlin, JOVIS Verlag, 2009.
- [5] Kundoo revealed, during the congress, the difficulty to find spaces for dissemination and publication (the text was originally in German and not in French).
- [6] Venturelli, E, *Urbanistica spaziale. Integrazione dello spazio nella città*. Torino, Pozzo ed., 1960.
- [7] Quotation reported in the text by Michel Ragon, *Monographie critique d'un architecte. Claude Parent*, Dunod, Paris, 1982.
- [8] Parent, C., Virilio, P., *Architecture principe*, Besançon, Les Éditions de L'Imprimeur 1966.
- [9] Sri Aurobindo sees – just like ancient Rishis who wrote the Vedas – that the disclosed world is not a mistake or an illusion that the soul should reject to return to heaven or to go back to the Nirvana: the world is a big scenario of a spiritual development, enhancement of the Consciousness through which the Divine Consciousness – concealed from the origin or convoluted into the Matter – gradually develops from the original Unconsciousness. The mind is the highest peak reached so far since its development, but it's not the highest. Man, according to Sri Aurobindo, is only "a transitional being". Above the mind there is a Supermind, a Truth-Consciousness, a supramental divine Gnosis that spontaneously holds the light and power of the supreme Divine Consciousness and whose descent on earth shall radically change life and matter.
- [10] We mean the attitude to accept and develop in an original way the different, sometimes chaotic and contradictory philosophical issues, while meeting the need for a developed form.
- [11] The anthroposophical matrixes derive, in actual fact, from a common interpretation of oriental mystical and esoteric tradition. In their works Aurobindo and Mirra Alfassa strongly stressed their independence and autonomy in this sense; this is also found in the mix between illustration and re-interpretation of Vedic and Biblical texts on the Creation and on the meaning of the world.
- [12] In Anger's project water acquires a specific role, obtained by digging artificial water stretches and lakes. The project of green areas was defined, after Anger's death, by Italian Landscape Architect Paolo Tommasi.
- [13] Aurobindo, Sri, *The Mother* p. 36-37, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1987.
- [14] Phillips, S., "Plastics: MOHF," *Cold War Hothouses*, ed. Beatriz Colomina, et al., Princeton, Princeton Architectural Press, 2004.
- [15] Maahsen-Milan, A., Pellegrino, M., *Futurama. Il mito magmatico dell'innovazione in architettura*, Bari, Bari Press, 2011.
- [16] Baumgartner M., Fauchereau S., *L'Europe des esprits. La magie de l'insaisissable du romantisme au modernisme*, Exhibition Catalog, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern 31.03-21.07.2012.
- [17] Tischhauser A., Santomaso E., *W. Hablik, Designer, Utopian, Architect, Expressionist, Artist, 1881–1934*, London, Architectural Association Publications, 1980.
- [18] Bornbaum, W., *Das Weltgebäude: Zur kosmologischen Architekturkonzeption in Symbolismus und Expressionismus und zu ihrer Vorgeschichte*. Frankfurt am Main, Lang, 2001.