

The background of the cover is composed of large, expressive brushstrokes in various shades of teal and dark blue. A prominent, dark, textured square is positioned in the center-right area, overlapping the brushstrokes.

COMUNICAR LA ARQUITECTURA

DEL ORIGEN DE LA MODERNIDAD A LA ERA DIGITAL

eug

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TOMO I

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del origen de la modernidad
a la era digital

TOMO I

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(EDS.)

COMUNICAR LA ARQUITECTURA

del origen de la modernidad a la era digital

Granada, 2024

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ISBN(e) 978-84-338-7371-2

Edita:

Editorial Universidad de Granada

Campus Universitario de Cartuja

Colegio Máximo, s. n., 18071, Granada

Telf.: 958 243930-246220

Web: editorial.ugr.es

Maquetación: Noelia Iglesias Morales

Diseño de cubierta: Francisco Antonio García Pérez (imagen de fondo: detalle de *Blue on almost white*, Nikodem Szpunar, 2022)

Imprime: Printhauss

Printed in Spain

Impreso en España

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IV Congreso Internacional Cultura y Ciudad

Comunicar la arquitectura: del origen de la modernidad a la era digital

Granada 24-26 enero 2024

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Films as Manifesto. Giancarlo De Carlo at the X Triennale of Milan

El cine como manifiesto. Giancarlo De Carlo en la X Trienal de Milán

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Abstract

En 1954, Giancarlo De Carlo (Génova 1919-Milán 2005) recibió el encargo de comisariar la Exposición de Urbanismo en la X Triennale di Milano, junto con Carlo Doglio y Ludovico Quaroni.

Para intentar sensibilizar a un amplio público sobre los problemas de la ciudad contemporánea y sobre el papel y la necesidad del urbanismo, el arquitecto genovés recurre también al cine, como medio capaz de comunicar de forma más amplia e inmediata, implicando a la opinión pública. Así, con la colaboración de varios intelectuales, elabora los tres cortometrajes *Cronache dell'urbanistica italiana*, *La città degli uomini* y *Una lezione d'urbanistica*, que por un lado critican la forma de actuar del urbanismo contemporáneo, pero por otro las otras prevén una nueva forma de actuar a través de la participación directa del individuo en los mecanismos de diseño del espacio humano, configurándose como un verdadero manifiesto de su pensamiento en el ámbito urbano.

In 1954 Giancarlo De Carlo (Genoa 1919-Milan 2005) was commissioned to curate the Urban Planning Exhibition at the X Triennale di Milano, with Carlo Doglio and Ludovico Quaroni.

To try to sensitize a vast public to the problems of the contemporary city and to the role and necessity of urban planning, the Genoese architect also resorts to cinema, as a means capable of communicating in a wider and more immediate way, involving the public opinion. Thus, with the collaboration of various intellectuals, he elaborates the three short films *Cronache dell'urbanistica italiana*, *La città degli uomini* and *Una lezione d'urbanistica*, which on the one hand criticize the way of acting of contemporary Urban Planning, but on the others envisage a new way of action through the direct participation of the man in the design mechanisms of human space, configuring themselves as a veritable manifesto of his thinking in the urban field.

Keywords

Giancarlo De Carlo, X Trienal de Milán, arquitectura de participación

Giancarlo De Carlo, X Triennale of Milan, participation architecture

For twenty years, from the Athens Charter to today, urban planning has revolved in on itself, presenting either the apocalypse or the rebirth of human society, and producing deserted cities, gloomy villages, bleak business centers, and impoverished residential neighborhoods where life fails to take root. Why does this happen? ¹

With the intention of addressing this question and suggesting new paths to follow, Giancarlo De Carlo (Genoa 1919 - Milan 2005) participates in the X Triennale of Milan, inaugurated on August 28, 1954. Alongside Carlo Doglio and Ludovico Quaroni, the Genoese architect is entrusted with overseeing the Urban Planning Exhibition, an occasion —as he will state himself several years later— to take stock of his own reflections², in a period when the Triennale represented “the most important event of contemporary international culture, surpassing even the Venice Biennale and the various scattered Roman initiatives. [And] it stood as one of the most expressive representations of Milan’s glory, during a time when Milan was illustrious”³, providing a reliable point of reference through which young architects could approach the most up-to-date architectural experiments from Italy and abroad. For the organization, for which De Carlo had “sought the collaboration of various painters and sculptors, including Ernesto Treccani and Mario Tudor”⁴, architects Ezio Mariani, Giorgio Madini, and Liliana Tarnoczy also contributed, along with the artist Luciano Miori, who created a decorative structure using metal pipes. Additionally, architecture student Michele Achilli took part. Regarding Doglio and Quaroni, around fifty years later, De Carlo would say that “neither of the two” took care of curating the exhibition.⁵ The premise from which the Genoese architect starts is the realization that too often exhibitions “praise Urban Planning. An annoying and aggressive praise that always remains unanswered because in exhibitions, as in everyday life, urban planners and the public have no connection”⁶, also because the discipline:

does not reveal his principles, does not specify his means, and does not declare his goals. [...] [And urban planners] do not take notice of the disinterest, boredom, and distrust of the public. They pursue their laborious achievements and leave behind failures, gaps, and doubts. They believe that their subject matter is too complex to be disclosed and that the obstacles are already too serious to allow for the suspicion that the front of Urban Planning is not secure and united.⁷

¹ Giancarlo De Carlo, “Intenzioni e risultati della mostra di urbanistica”, *Casabella-Continuità*, n.º 203 (1954): 24.

² Giancarlo De Carlo, Franco Bunčuga, *Conversazioni su architettura e libertà* (Milan: Elèuthera, 2000), 103.

³ De Carlo, Bunčuga, *Conversazioni su architettura e libertà*..., 102.

⁴ De Carlo, Bunčuga, *Conversazioni su architettura e libertà*..., 102.

⁵ De Carlo, Bunčuga, *Conversazioni su architettura e libertà*..., 102.

⁶ De Carlo, “Intenzioni e risultati della mostra di urbanistica”..., 24.

⁷ De Carlo, “Intenzioni e risultati della mostra di urbanistica”..., 24.



Figure 1. The Urban Planning Exhibition at the X Triennale di Milano. Visitor in front of the panels set up inside one of the rooms. Source: *Casabella-Continuità*, n.º 203 (1954).

De Carlo aims to overcome this *impasse* by establishing a direct relationship between visitors and the themes of Planning, which should then continue in the daily practice of everyone⁸. Thus, he sets up a sequence of interconnected spaces, in the central part of the ground floor of the Palazzo dell'Arte, with the goal of addressing various aspects of spatial quality—such as origin and destination—, flexibility, understanding of places and their characteristics, the presence of human beings, participation, and furthermore, Urban Planning and Architecture as concurrent scales of the same issue.⁹

⁸ Anna Luigia De Simone, “Giancarlo De Carlo”, in *Il cinema degli architetti*, ed. by Vincenzo Trione (Milan: Johan & Levi, 2014), 84.

⁹ De Carlo, Bunčuga, *Conversazioni su architettura e libertà...*, 104.

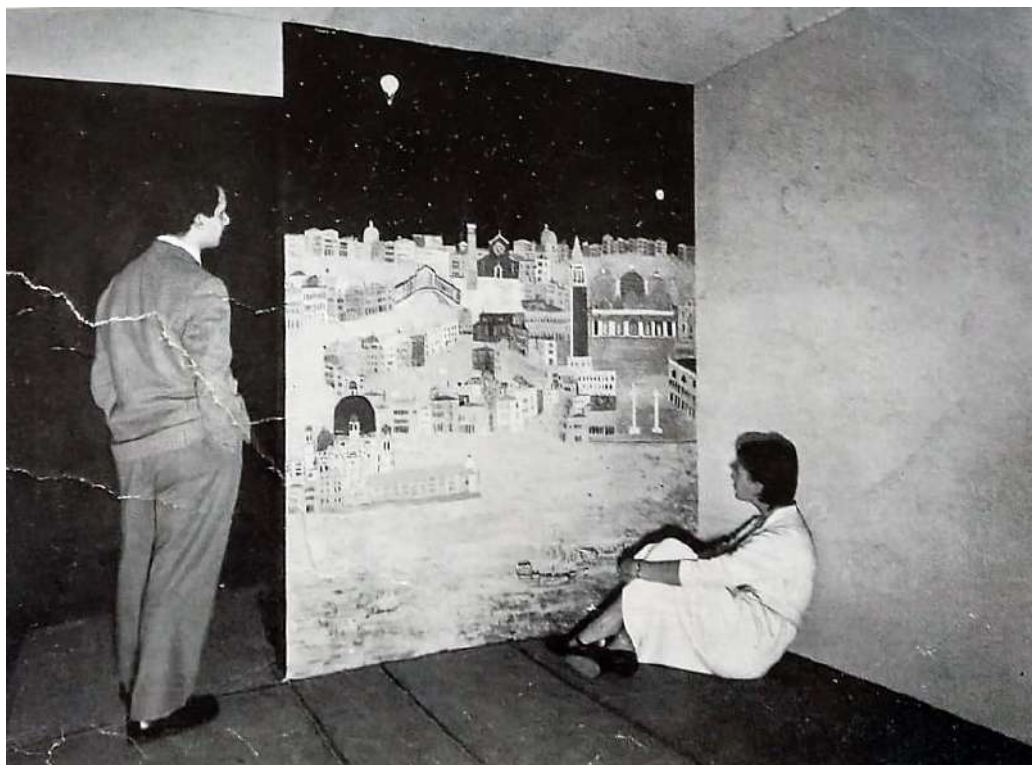


Figure 2. The Urban Planning Exhibition at the X Triennale di Milano. Visitor in front of the panels set up inside one of the rooms. Source: *Casabella-Continuità*, n.º 203 (1954).

The first two small rooms serve as an introduction to the exhibition, the content of which is elaborated in the subsequent rooms, presented in a series of chapters illustrated and commented upon by vibrant stage settings with extensive captions below the colorful banners and epigraphs placed atop the doors. In the first section, within passages bordered by black walls, the texts emphasize the significance of space in Urban Planning. This space, composed of houses, streets, and the countryside framed by windows, is shaped day by day by individuals and the collective populace that inhabits it. Therefore, if it is “disharmonious or unpleasant [...] it saddens life”¹⁰. Consequently, the displays reproduce examples of architectural and urban spaces that are particularly expressive of moments or aspects of various societies, including spaces that are inherently disharmonious. This approach culminates in a strict critique of the organization of the contemporary city and the actions exerted by urban planning during that phase. However, everyone must be fully aware of the potential role of Urban Planning in improving human living conditions. Drawing from the teachings

¹⁰ De Carlo, “Intenzioni e risultati della mostra di urbanistica”..., 17.

of Patrick Geddes, which De Carlo learned through the writings of Lewis Mumford¹¹, the captions on the panels warn: “Have you ever thought that it is we who give shape to this space, all together day by day?”.

In the second part of the exhibition, after an interlude of captions related to colored banners and photographic montages, the successive epigraphs introduce the consideration of the urban plan as a constantly changing, elastic, and open tool, to be spread throughout every area of reality where it operates. Above all, it's created by people and for people, and therefore it's a result of everyone's participation.



Figure 3. The Urban Planning Exhibition at the X Triennale di Milano. Visitor inside one of the rooms. Source: *Casabella-Continuità*, n.º 203 (1954).

¹¹ Giancarlo De Carlo, “Dalla progettazione alla partecipazione, 1970-75”, in *Le radici malate dell'urbanistica italiana*, ed. by Giancarlo De Carlo, Carlo Doglio, Riccardo Mariani and Giuseppe Samonà (Milan: Moizzi, 1976),

However, the task of broadening collective consciousness toward the problems of the contemporary city, against its ruthless transformations, is primarily entrusted to three short films screened in the central rooms: *Cronache dell'urbanistica italiana*¹², *La città degli uomini*¹³ e *Una lezione d'urbanistica*.¹⁴



Figure 4. Frame from the short film *Cronache dell'urbanistica italiana*. Source: Casabella-Continuità, n.º 203 (1954).

These films are dedicated to the reconstruction in Italy, the negative and positive aspects of the city, the consequences of misguided planning, and warnings about potential deviations of the modern metropolis managed by bureaucrats and technicians, for whom human interest isn't a priority. The three films are 35mm black and white film, each approximately 12 minutes long, and they are produced by La Meridiana Film¹⁵. The subjects, considered scandalous and anarchic by Bruno Zevi¹⁶, are authored by Giancarlo De Carlo, Carlo Doglio,

¹² *Cronache dell'urbanistica italiana*, lasting about 11' 50", it was produced by Mario Nascimbene for Meridiana Cinematografica. Subject: Giancarlo De Carlo, Carlo Doglio, Michele Gandin, Billa Pedroni, Ludovico Quaroni, Elio Vittorini. Film script: Carlo Doglio, Nicolò Ferrari; technical consultancy: Giancarlo De Carlo. Organization: Bianca Lattuada. Direction: Nicolò Ferrari. Photography: Vittorio Del Monte. Music: Mario Nascimbene.

¹³ *La città degli uomini*, lasting about 12' 32", it was produced by Mario Nascimbene for Meridiana Cinematografica. Subject: Giancarlo De Carlo, Carlo Doglio, Michele Gandin, Billa Pedroni, Ludovico Quaroni, Elio Vittorini. Film script: Giancarlo De Carlo, Michele Gandin, Elio Vittorini. Organization: Bianca Lattuada. Direction: Michele Gandin. Photography: Mario Damicelli. Music: Mario Nascimbene.

¹⁴ *Una lezione d'urbanistica*, lasting about 12' 16", it was produced by Mario Nascimbene for Meridiana Cinematografica. Subject: Giancarlo De Carlo, Carlo Doglio, Michele Gandin, Billa Pedroni, Ludovico Quaroni, Elio Vittorini. Film script: Giancarlo De Carlo, Gerardo Guerrieri, Jacques Lecoq, Billa Pedroni. Organization: Bianca Lattuada. Direction: Gerardo Guerrieri; directorial assistance: Anna D'Arberloff. Photography: Mario Damicelli. Music: Mario Nascimbene. Mimic direction: Jacques Lecoq; mimes: Antonio Cannas, Giancarlo Cobelli, Carlo Mazzone, Camillo Milli.

¹⁵ See: Luigi Emanuele Amabile, "Possibilità inesauribili di comunicazione. I cortometraggi di Giancarlo de Carlo alla X Triennale di Milano", in *Giancarlo De Carlo nel centenario. Sguardi di nuova generazione. Contributi del Dottorato in Architettura dell'Università Federico II di Napoli*, ed. by Gemma Belli and Fabio Mangone (Syracuse: Letteraventidue, 2021), 330-341.

¹⁶ De Simone, "Giancarlo De Carlo"..., 84.

Michele Gandin, Maria Luisa Pedroni, Ludovico Quaroni, and Elio Vittorini, occasionally accompanied by figures such as Jaques Lecoq, one of the most significant thinkers of contemporary theater. They are respectively directed by Nicolò Ferrari, Michele Gandin, and Gerardo Guerrieri. The photography in the first case is by Vittorio Del Monte, while in *La città degli uomini* and *Una lezione d'urbanistica*, it's done by Mario Damicelli. The music by Guido Nascimbene is deliberately contradictory to the flow of images, creating a sharp parody of the problematic nature reached by modernity.

Years later, De Carlo recalls the experience as follows:

Of the three [films] —which had been directed by Gandin, Guerrieri, and Ferrari— Doglio had worked on the one that dealt with Southern Italy, painting a rather pessimistic and hopeless picture of urban planning and society in the south.

I had worked on the other two and I had a lot of fun. The first, which I had done with Elio Vittorini, was about the city: its ills and its great potential for good. The second, with Billa Zanuso, was titled *Una lezione d'urbanistica* and told the story of a man (mime and actor Giancarlo Cobelli) who suffered in the city from all the woes of houses designed according to the *esistenza minimum*, congestion, lack of services, ruin of the landscape, and absence of pleasant architecture. But three urban planners arrive to fix things. One is a pure aesthete, another is a technical engineer, and the third is a quasi-scientist who believes in analysis, statistics, and regulatory frameworks. All three, one after the other, present their proposals, and in the end, the last one —the authoritarian urban planner— reduces the poor man to an automaton; fortunately, the man manages to escape towards a future where he can do things on his own, without the advice, tricks, and violence of the urban planners.¹⁷



Figure 5. Frame from the short film *La città degli uomini*. Source: *Casabella-Continuità*, n.º 203 (1954).

¹⁷ De Carlo, Bunčuga, *Conversazioni su architettura e libertà...*, 104.



Figure 6. Frame from the short film *Una lezione d'urbanistica*. Source: *Casabella-Continuità*, n.º 203 (1954).

This is a true manifesto that advocates a different way of thinking and acting, showcasing the perspective through which De Carlo believes the problem of the city should be differently approached. He centers it on the individual —the person of the city— who is not only the end recipient, as in rationalist projects, but is the subject called to collaborate. Harassed within a few square meters by the rigid standards of *esistenza minimum*, ironically, and brilliantly exposed, the protagonist highlights all the difficulties of navigating confined spaces and precise movements. Meanwhile, the off-screen voice, in clear contrast with the images, recites: “His everyday life is governed with rare ingenuity. Today, man lives under conditions that eloquently demonstrate the high level of rationality achieved by contemporary civilization”. Forced by the contemporary urban planner to conform to rigid, almost autistic visions, based on patterns and numbers, the man is openly reassured by the perspective drawn in the end: the possibility, indeed the necessity, of intervening and participating in the design operations of urban space, his space. “Go to your city, man, and collaborate with those who want to make it more humane, more like you”, is the closing message of the short. In addition to urging participation, De Carlo underscores the need to superimpose the culture of diversity over that of sameness, to replace the value of individual action with the international bureaucracy of those who believe they can control societal behaviors through the quality of the physical environment. He asserts that the primary purpose of designers should be to preserve and enhance individuals’ uniqueness, in other words, to design spaces with a recognizable identity through which everyone “can relate according to their character, inclinations, and cultural interests”¹⁸. He advocates for designing spaces for the individual, not

¹⁸ De Carlo, Bunčuga, *Conversazioni su architettura e libertà...*, 163.

for a generic subject, let alone for the masses. Regarding the latter term, De Carlo expresses in several instances that he harbors no sympathy for it, even going so far as to claim that “mass culture doesn’t exist, [because] the masses cannot possess culture”¹⁹, as individuals no longer exist within it, and culture cannot exist without the individual. “After all, I hate the masses and consider them objectively carriers of stupidity and violence. I’m interested in a society where individuals can retain their identity and continue to be people. A society of individuals is what interests me”²⁰, De Carlo asserts. So, he replaces the term mass with the expression *large number*.



Figure 7. Frame from the short film *Una lezione d'urbanistica*. Source: *Casabella-Continuità*, n.º 203 (1954).

His idea of the city will indeed stem from this perspective with which he regards the individual. In the crafting of subjects and scripts, the situation he will have to contend with is the one that the Italian city presents to him during that historical phase, afflicted by the problems related to destruction but also strained by the consequences of a long period of poor administration and insensitive management towards the real problems of the country. A city distorted by “fascism, [which] had constructed primarily rhetorical and monumental works for parades and desolate suburbs or grim barracks-like housing complexes for the people”²¹. A city that appears as a “defective organism, threatened by a serious crisis”²², but despite its ills, holds an immense potential for good²³, and is certainly a place of opportunities.

¹⁹ De Carlo, Bunčuga, *Conversazioni su architettura e libertà...*, 163.

²⁰ De Carlo, Bunčuga, *Conversazioni su architettura e libertà...*, 123.

²¹ See the film: *Cronache dell'urbanistica italiana*.

²² See the film: *Una lezione d'urbanistica*.

²³ De Carlo, Bunčuga, *Conversazioni su architettura e libertà...*, 88.

Thus, in *La città degli uomini*, the repetitive geometries of large buildings unfold, accompanied by urban noises, ringing phones, honking horns, ambulances, a multitude of individuals populating the streets in a disorderly fashion, mingling with traffic. And the off-screen voice recites: "We built cities to be together. Today, the city has this face, a rhythm that attracts and disorients. Should we then destroy it?". However, as the city metaphorically takes the form of a human figure, like those indicating the position of a body at a crime scene, and as one of the many cars passes by without care, the same narrator responds: "No! Because the city is also this: an inexhaustible possibility of communication"²⁴. Even if in the present it seems to have turned against the humans who created it, it's unthinkable to destroy it because its irreplaceable assets represent the only living force of the contemporary world: "only in the city can we work to help people live better"²⁵.

Faced with such contradiction, the urban planner has the duty to study the reasons for the crisis and propose remedies that are not "rash or partial"²⁶, but rather capable of capturing urban phenomena in all their specific complexity. These solutions should also be supported by the participation and consent of all involved. If the urban planner fails to consider this, they act in an abstract manner that can lead to even greater harm. The urban planner cannot accept rational schemes that are so broad and vague that they could be interpreted in ways that are socially, politically, and economically opposed. They cannot be tied to schemes that detach them from reality, leading to sterile sentimental or demiurgic attitudes, veering towards formalism, and ultimately distancing themselves from the active cultural and human forces they intend to work for. Simultaneously, the urban planner cannot be authoritarian but must always understand their intervention should involve space and people. Otherwise, they risk creating "well-ordered concentration camps governed by the political police".²⁷

Therefore, through the Urban Planning Exhibition, but especially through the three short films, De Carlo aims to construct a nuanced discourse along a dual trajectory. On one hand, he seeks to engage a broad public, informing them that grappling with urban planning is essential, as without it, the relationship between humans and space in contemporary society cannot naturally achieve harmonious development. However, this necessary action of urban planning is carried out by an *elite*, a qualified *elite*. But precisely because it is an external event, and precisely because it is led by an elite, the actions of urban planning can be dangerous. The three films thus intend to caution a wide audience about this danger, urging them not to lose control over what is happening and to realize that they themselves are the sole and irreplaceable protagonists of all the events urban planning affects. On the other hand, through the three short films, De Carlo provocatively addresses urban planners, warning them about the responsibility and consequences of their work. If carried out without community participation, their work loses touch with reality and becomes abstract

²⁴ See the film: *La città degli uomini*.

²⁵ See the film: *La città degli uomini*.

²⁶ See the film: *Una lezione d'urbanistica*.

²⁷ "La mostra dell'urbanistica alla Decima Triennale", *Casabella-Continuità*, n.º 203 (1954): 20.

and authoritarian. At the same time, De Carlo prompts them to declare the principles, goals, and means by which they intend to carry out their actions. He also urges them to specify the limits within which they are willing to confront the risk of engaging with reality, a confrontation that should occur through involving all the necessary cultural forces to activate widespread community participation. Thus, influenced, as he himself recounts, by conversations with Elio Vittorini, who wrote *Le città del mondo*, and with Italo Calvino, who wrote *Le città invisibili*, De Carlo employs cinema with a strong critical intent. He seeks to capture the neuroses and fluctuations not only of the big city during that historical phase but also of urban reflection and design practice, along with their respective influences on humans and the environment in which they live.

Given that cinema and design practice can operate in analogous ways, both involving planning and programming, both engaging in activities that are both individual and collective, and “both embracing a metonymic rhetoric that avoids abstraction”²⁸; and considering that both, as argued by Sergej Michajlovič Ėjzenštejn, work in terms of a journey, that in cinema’s case it is virtual and multidimensional, while in architecture’s case, it involves an encounter between a visitor and a site or building, where the visitor “navigates through carefully defined episodes within a programmed staging”²⁹; and considering that both cinema and architectural practice navigate through carefully distributed episodes within a staged setting³⁰, De Carlo’s cinema serves as a tool that employs moving images as a means of strong hermeneutic value. With it, the architect aims to provide insights into individuals’ lives, urban psychology, the “violence” suffered by nature, among other aspects. Lacking specific technical knowledge, the Genoese architect remains anchored in literary models and directs his attention to the screenplay and, therefore, the text³¹. As theorized by Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti with “critofilm”, De Carlo pursues a form of criticism that aims to penetrate, using a broad textual corpus. This approach combines concept-words and action-words with images to form a unified discourse.

As highlighted previously, the objective is to make delicate urbanistic themes, known to scholars and technicians, more easily accessible to a broad audience of non-specialists. The idea is to translate one’s theoretical reflections onto the screen, offering a simplified, more immediate version that is understandable to a wider range of people, with a clear intent of dissemination, education, and instruction. The cinematic medium is thus employed to convey complex concepts in a way that can be comprehended by a larger audience, with a distinct aim of popularizing, teaching, and educating. Therefore, the cinematic medium is used to help the viewer understand what is occurring in that historical phase, transforming “passive spectators into informed citizens, active supporters of a shared project”.³² Through this medium, De Carlo aims to prevent the public from thinking that:

²⁸ Vincenzo Trione, *Il cinema degli architetti* (Milan: Johan & Levi, 2014), 15.

²⁹ Trione, *Il cinema degli architetti...*, 15.

³⁰ Trione, *Il cinema degli architetti...*, 15.

³¹ Trione, *Il cinema degli architetti...*, 15.

³² Leonardo Ciacchi, *Progetti di città sullo schermo. Il cinema degli urbanisti* (Venice: Marsilio, 2001), 182.

Urbanism is solely the concern of experts and specialists. Instead, he wants to convey the message that Urbanism is primarily everyone's concern. [...] [And] we will try to make you think about what you could do yourselves when you hear the term Urbanism. We want to persuade you that this time too, you have every right to contribute your opinions and actions. You are the protagonists of all the matters that Urbanism engages with through its actions.³³

The X Triennale closed on November 15th of the same year. What was the assessment of the Exhibition of Urbanism with the three short films? De Carlo himself wrote about it a few months later in the pages of *Casabella*. He noted that while some urbanists had rejected any form of dialogue, reacting with disdain to the provocation, others —albeit with differing responses, ranging from approval to vehement disagreement— had rolled up their sleeves and started working. They were willing to set aside their intellectual pride to engage with reality. In terms of the public, however, the exhibition had not been as effective. It was seen as difficult and, in some places, inaccessible and esoteric. On the other hand, the short films had an immediate impact. De Carlo suggested that it could be considered a positive outcome if the memory of the event could be associated with that of urbanism. He hoped that every visitor, even in a fleeting reflection, would retain “the suspicion that urbanism [...] [is] not just a proposal for arranging the road network or composing monumental buildings, but a complex and dramatic issue of our time in which all of us, including himself, are now involved”³⁴.

Fifty years later, De Carlo, with a sense of amusement, will recall:

A great commotion had erupted, and no one would speak to me anymore. Ludovico Quaroni was particularly embarrassed by the situation. He was supposed to participate in the two films I had worked on, but at some point —either because he didn't like the scripts or because he realized they would provoke strong reactions— he distanced himself. Manfredo Tafuri, in a biography he wrote before becoming famous, had attributed the scripts to him, but it's not true: we had never seen him while filming, nor at the exhibition's opening. [...] The three urbanists weren't specific individuals but rather representative ways of teaching and practicing urbanism in Italy. [...] Needless to say, every Italian urbanist recognized themselves in one of the three representatives in the film; [...] that's why the anger directed at me was so intense: I lost four competitions before finally becoming a full professor.³⁵

³³ “La mostra dell'urbanistica alla Decima Triennale”..., 16.

³⁴ De Carlo, “Intenzioni e risultati della mostra di urbanistica”..., 24.

³⁵ De Carlo, Bunčuga, *Conversazioni su architettura e libertà*..., 105.



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