

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, appearing to be a piece of material or a specific architectural element.

COMUNICAR LA ARQUITECTURA

DEL ORIGEN DE LA MODERNIDAD A LA ERA DIGITAL

eug

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COMUNICAR LA ARQUITECTURA

DEL ORIGEN DE LA MODERNIDAD A LA ERA DIGITAL

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

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Photographed Architecture: The Case of the Villaggio Matteotti in Terni by Giancarlo De Carlo (1969-1975)

Arquitectura fotografiada: el caso del Villaggio Matteotti en Terni por Giancarlo De Carlo (1969-1975)

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Abstract

Entre las obras más conocidas del arquitecto Giancarlo De Carlo (1919-2005), el barrio Villaggio Matteotti en Terni tiene un carácter claramente experimental. El método de trabajo de De Carlo se expresa aquí de manera límpida y clara, sobre todo por el vínculo entre la composición social y la estructura urbana y arquitectónica. Durante la fase de planificación, la colaboración con el sociólogo Domenico De Masi se acompaña de un diálogo continuo con los futuros habitantes, para definir un caso emblemático de “planificación participativa”. Por estas razones, la representación del nuevo barrio a través de la fotografía cobra suma importancia y, por otro lado, los fotógrafos de arquitectura encuentran en el barrio un sujeto ideal. La documentación del uso de los espacios a lo largo del tiempo, tanto a corta distancia de la finalización de las viviendas como 50 años después, es especialmente significativa para un tipo de arquitectura concebida precisamente en relación con las necesidades de los usuarios. La primera campaña fotográfica data de 1976, solo un año después de la finalización del distrito, y fue realizada por Gabriele Basilico, uno de los máximos exponentes de la fotografía arquitectónica. Pero también se realizan otras campañas muchos años después, como la de Emiliano y Lorenzo Zandri en 2016 y la de Mario Ferrara en 2021.

Among the best-known works of the architect Giancarlo De Carlo (1919-2005), Villaggio Matteotti in Terni has an evident experimental character. De Carlo's working method is expressed here in a limpid and clear way, above all for the link between social organization and urban and architectural structure. During the planning phase, the collaboration with the sociologist Domenico De Masi is accompanied by a continuous dialogue with the future inhabitants, in order to define an emblematic case of “participatory planning”. For these reasons, the representation of the new neighborhood through photography becomes extremely important, and on the other hand, architectural photographers find an ideal subject in the neighborhood. The photo shoots, both at a short distance from the completion of the dwellings and 50 years later, is particularly significant for a type of architecture conceived precisely in relation to the needs of the users. The first photographic campaign dates back to 1976, only one year after the completion of the district, and was conducted by Gabriele Basilico, one of the greatest architectural photographers in the second half of 20th century. But other campaigns are also conducted many years later, such as that of Emiliano and Lorenzo Zandri in 2016 and that of Mario Ferrara in 2021.

Keywords

Villaggio Matteotti, Giancarlo De Carlo, Gabriele Basilico, fotografía arquitectónica

Villaggio Matteotti, Giancarlo De Carlo, Gabriele Basilico, architectural photography

Introduction

One of the leading figures in contemporary Italian architecture was Giancarlo De Carlo (1919-2005), who always worked quite far from the mainstream of the architectural culture, both from the point of view of the academic elite and from that one of the disciplinary and methodological approach¹. At the beginning of the Sixties, he started an intense activity in the city of Urbino, where he designed the students' residences, various university buildings, and the General Town Plan². He was not following the ideas of Le Corbusier and of the so-called "Modern Movement" and in 1956 he founded Team X with the new generation of architects, including Alison and Peter Smithson, Jakob Bakema, and Aldo van Eyck³. He was against any abstract scheme and any "standard" and defended the importance of local context and cultural tradition as a base for every architectural project. The 1968 cultural movement was equally against any kind of pre-established authority and during the years of the so-called *contestazione* (student protest) De Carlo spoke openly with the students, wrote articles and improved his idea of "participatory architecture". This idea consisted in including the citizens in the design process to carefully consider their real needs. The first important work where he could experiment this approach was the Villaggio Matteotti in Terni, built between 1970 and 1975⁴.

De Carlo's Villaggio Matteotti

In 1969 Terni steelworks asked De Carlo to design a new neighborhood for the workers. It was a conflicted period in which the steelworks, the local administration, and the workers themselves represented apparently incompatible positions.

¹ Fabrizio Brunetti and Fabrizio Gesi, *Giancarlo De Carlo* (Florence: Alinea, 1981); Lamberto Rossi, *Giancarlo De Carlo: Architetture* (Milan: Mondadori, 1988); Benedict Zucchi, *Giancarlo De Carlo* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1992); Antonella Romano, *Giancarlo De Carlo. Lo spazio realtà del vivere insieme* (Turin: Testo e immagine, 2001); John McKean, *Giancarlo De Carlo. Layered Places* (Stuttgart-London: Axel Menges, 2004); *Giancarlo De Carlo. Le ragioni dell'architettura*, ed. by Margherita Guccione, Alessandra Vittorini (Milan: Electa, 2005); Alessandro Balducci, "L'eredità di Giancarlo De Carlo", *Territorio*, n.º 42 (2007): 7-8, "Giancarlo De Carlo at 100 (1919-2019)", *Histories of Postwar Architecture*, n.º 5 (2019) (ed. by Antonello Alici, Filippo De Pieri). For the consistence of the materials in the De Carlo Archive, IUAV, Venice, see *Giancarlo De Carlo. Inventario analitico dell'archivio*, and *Giancarlo De Carlo. Percorsi*, both ed. by Francesco Samassa (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2004).

² Lorenzo Mingardi, *Sono geloso di questa città. Giancarlo De Carlo e Urbino* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2018).

³ Brunetti and Gesi, *Giancarlo De Carlo...*

⁴ The theme of participation is central also in the bibliography about the Villaggio Matteotti. See: Herman Schlimme, *Il "Nuovo Villaggio Matteotti" a Terni di Giancarlo De Carlo. Partecipazione fallita e capolavoro di architettura* (Rome: Università di Roma Tre, 2004); Paolo Vitali, "Das endlose Seminar. Wohnsiedlung Villaggio Matteotti in Terni", *Werk, Bauen + Wohnen*, n.º 12 (2018): 31-37; Alberto Franchini, "Giancarlo De Carlo y la participación. El caso del Villaggio Matteotti. Terni, Italy", *Arquitectos*, n.º 32 (2017): 9-26.

The architect decided to use a “participatory design” process in order to give every part the right answer⁵. The first initiative was an exhibition about the most interesting cases of residential architecture, a kind of preliminary step for a further discussion. In 1976 De Carlo wrote about the “participatory design” to clear up misunderstandings: users’ participation in the architectural design process was not only a direct survey on their needs but it was much more a complex process, where both parts confront each other. De Carlo was convinced that “the wisdom of users is a myth, mirroring that of the infallibility of the technical specialist”⁶. Clearly, as De Carlo himself stated, the cooperation work is always guided by the designer and the final solutions are not autonomously determined. Furthermore, users of Terni were averagely educated and experienced workers, so that in other contexts the same work would not have produced the same results⁷. Anyway, in order to improve this “participative” process, De Carlo decided to include in the design team also a sociologist. The choice fell on Domenico De Masi, who was professor for Work Sociology in different Italian universities and had already been involved in projects for new industrial plants.

The result of this process is a layout divided into four rows of three-storey houses, with a wider central street and two more intimate, pedestrian, parallel streets, with a higher external block of a different type. The *béton brut* buildings don’t have a regular cubic shape but various volumes with recesses or overhangs, while a diagonal pedestrian way with three bridges crosses the three streets and a lot of greenery fills the two lateral paths. This kind of design produced an always changing perception of the space, so that Tafuri wrote that “the severity of the language is softened by modulation and details that lean towards a not always controlled *picturesque*”⁸. The 240 apartments are almost always different, as 45 different typologies were identified. Despite the criticisms received from the political world and from the religious authorities, who blocked the continuation of the neighborhood, the result is unique on a national level: urban connective texture and residential spaces do experience a total permeability, so that the pedagogical value of the urban space, that was dear to the architect, clearly emerges.

⁵ Alberto Franchini, *Il Villaggio Matteotti a Terni. Giancarlo De Carlo e l’abitare collettivo* (Rome-Bristol: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2020).

⁶ Giancarlo De Carlo, “Altri appunti sulla partecipazione”, *Parametro*, n.º 52 (1976): 50-53. See also Piero Rovigatti, “Partecipazione tra pratica e impegno. L’esperienza del Villaggio Matteotti a Terni”, in *A partire da Giancarlo De Carlo*, ed. by Federico Bilò (Rome: Gangemi, 2013), 83-91; Grazia Pota, “La progettazione processo di Giancarlo De Carlo. Forma e indeterminazione nell’architettura contemporanea”, in *Giancarlo De Carlo nel centenario. Sguardi di nuova generazione*, ed. by Gemma Belli, Fabio Mangone (Syracuse: LetteraVentidue, 2021), 32-41.

⁷ Giancarlo De Carlo, Franco Bunčuga, *Conversazioni su architettura e libertà* (Milan: Elèuthera, 2000), 201.

⁸ Manfredo Tafuri, *Storia dell’architettura italiana 1944-1985* (Turin: Einaudi, 1982), 135; then in *Giancarlo De Carlo. Immagini e frammenti*, ed. by Angela Mioni, Etra Connie Occhialini (Milan: Electa, 1995), 65.

Gabriele Basilico's Photographs and the task from *Casabella*

Gabriele Basilico (1944-2013) has been one of the most famous Italian photographers and his work has influenced generations of artists on an international scale.

He graduated in architecture at the Polytechnic School in Milan in 1973 and his first exhibition was about the city of Glasgow in 1971, even though his most popular work is the one about the factories in the Milanese suburbs. Since this work in Milan, he preferred to produce black and white images, preferentially with no people and with a kind of abstract and metaphysical atmosphere. Basilico's education as an architect was obvious, as he had a peculiar attention to urban contexts, especially the fringes of cities. Only in the Eighties did Basilico experiment with different approaches, as it happened in the *Bord du mer* project, promoted by the French government, and then in the exhibition *Viaggio in Italia*, ideated and coordinated by Luigi Ghirri. In these photographic campaigns to document French and Italian landscape, he tried to look at the landscape in a state of "contemplation"⁹. Therefore, it can be understood how the photographs of the Villaggio Matteotti are a truly anomalous stage in Basilico's professional career.

The number 421 (January 1977) of the Italian architectural magazine *Casabella* was the first one to be managed by a new editor, the Argentinian architecture and industrial design theorist Tomás Maldonado, who had previously been among the founders of the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm, in Germany. The new editor had the intention to change the contents and the profile of the magazine, addressing a wider audience and dealing with subjects that went beyond the narrow confines of architectural disciplines. De Carlo's work in Terni had been completed two years before and the multidisciplinary approach interested Maldonado. Therefore, in *Casabella* n.º 421 a large reportage on the Villaggio Matteotti was included and Maldonado asked Gabriele Basilico to take pictures of the neighborhood to illustrate the pages of the magazine. The reportage gave back a broad view of the different matters: Sergio Bracco wrote a critical introduction, Domenico De Masi reported about the sociological contribution, Giancarlo De Carlo wrote about the design criteria and then an interview to Gianluigi Osti, who had been chief executive officer of the Terni factory, followed. The whole articles series was coordinated by Giorgio Muratore. The name of Gabriele Basilico appears only in the magazine summary together with the ones of Giorgio Casali and Mimmo Jodice, who were authors of other photographs of the reportage.

The question of "participation" was of course relevant and was one of the most discussed problems in the *Casabella* pages. As a demonstration of the importance of the theme, extracts of the requests and considerations of the inhabitants are shown alongside the authors' texts. So, also Basilico was asked to provide documentary evidence of the interiors and of the inhabitants' life. In an interview of 2008 by Claudia Zanfi, together with the American photographer Bill Owens, who he considered a master, Basilico said that

⁹ Gabriele Basilico, "Fotografare l'architettura, fotografare il paesaggio", in *Fotografia e paesaggio. La rappresentazione fotografica del territorio*, ed. by Marisa Galbiati, Piero Pozzi, Roberto Signorini, (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 1996), 39-42, 41.

the editor asked me to photograph not only the result of the architecture, but also the interior of the houses. The families who occupied the houses no longer had the opportunity to deepen their dialogue with De Carlo, since the cultures and social environments were very different from each other, and therefore photography proved to be a good means of documenting what followed the realization. Thus, [in the photographs] equal space was given to the social component and to architecture¹⁰.

In this interview Basilico expressed clearly his debt to Owens, telling how much the portraits of the inhabitants in the Villaggio Matteotti were inspired by the ones in Owens' book *Suburbia* from 1973. In this book, Owens intended to provide an overview of the Seventies through the interiors of American middle-class homes. Basilico was also inspired by the British photographer Martin Parr, who was in turn influenced by Owens and who had published in 1974 the photographic book *Home Sweet Home*. Another possible reference for Basilico's work is that of the Italian photographer Gianni Berengo Gardin, who in 1977 – therefore shortly after the reportage on the Villaggio Matteotti – published with Luciano D'Alessandro his book *Dentro le case* (Inside houses)¹¹. These pictures were incredibly similar to the ones of Basilico and showed old-fashioned interiors that seemed to have nothing to share with modern architecture. Berengo Gardin was older than Basilico and quite famous at that time, but his work on the interiors show an evident analogy with the one of his colleagues: he was equally not trying to investigate the psychological aspect of the people but only to relate them to the space where they were living¹². Later, in the year 2012, Basilico explained how much and why he was influenced by Owens and Berengo Gardin: “their narrative style, which consciously showed the portrait of the subjects in their habitat, and which was cold and respectful of the static pose, in some ways “merciless”, had deeply impressed me”¹³.

“Architecture and participation”: buildings and people in Basilico's work on Villaggio Matteotti

Basilico's work on the Villaggio Matteotti was actually more complex compared to other reportages, since it was created on commission and had the purpose of documenting an innovative architectural project. The artist therefore moved on a double track, photographing the exteriors mainly without people and letting the architecture emerge as the main subject, while in the interiors the modernity of the architectural project disappeared to give way to the life of the inhabitants (fig. 1, fig. 2). According to Basilico, it was Maldonado who asked that portraits and interiors prevailed in the photographs¹⁴. The old-fashioned furniture of the

¹⁰ Claudia Zanfi, “Locchio non muore mai. Dedicato a Gabriele Basilico. Interview to Gabriele Basilico and Bill Owen”, *Artribune* (14 February 2013), accessed 18 July 2023,

¹¹ Gianni Berengo Gardin, Luciano D'Alessandro, *Dentro le case* (Milan: Electa, 1977).

¹² Ferdinando Scianna, Marco Belpoliti, “Una conversazione. Gianni Berengo Gardin fa 90”, *Doppiozero* (10 October 2020), accessed 17 July 2023, <https://www.doppiozero.com/gianni-berengo-gardin-fa-90>.

¹³ Gabriele Basilico, *Leggere le fotografie in dodici lezioni*, ed. by Maria Giulia Zunino (Milan: Abitare – Rizzoli, 2012), 14.

¹⁴ Basilico, *Leggere le fotografie...*, 14.

working-class petty bourgeoisie made any accent of modernity indiscernible. Apparently, this approach does not seem to have done justice to the innovative character of the new neighborhood, but Basilico had the task and the will to document precisely the aspects relating to "participation". For a young photographer who graduated in architecture only four years earlier, to deal with De Carlo and with a tangible manifestation of "participatory architecture" must have certainly had a strong impact. In fact, with the photographs of the Villaggio Matteotti, Basilico took part in the VII edition of the Optical and Audiovisual Photo Exhibition (SICOF) at the Milan Fair in March 1977, naming his contribution "Architecture and participation" (fig. 3).



Figure 1. Villaggio Matteotti, Terni, 1976, picture by Gabriele Basilico. Source: Archivio Mufoco – Archivi fotografici italiani online. <https://www.mufoco.org>.



Figure 2. Villaggio Matteotti, Terni, 1976, picture by Gabriele Basilico. Source: *Abitare*, n.º 486 (2008).



Figure 3. Villaggio Matteotti, Terni, 1976, picture by Gabriele Basilico. Source: *Abitare*, n.º 486 (2008).

In 2012, just one year before his passing, Basilico published a book that was a kind of general look on his career but was organized as twelve lessons of photography: *Leggere le fotografie in dodici lezioni*¹⁵. Since 2008, these lessons had been previously published in the magazine *Abitare*, whose editor – at that time Stefano Boeri – commissioned the work¹⁶. The first lesson was entitled “Architettura e partecipazione” (architecture and participation) and was dedicated to the Villaggio Matteotti shots. The idea of “lessons” was interpreted by Basilico in an original way, as in some cases the author described the formal construction of the photograph, in other cases, he described instead its intentions, conditions, and environment. Recalling a previous text in the magazine *Il Diaframma* from 1977, in the lines commenting on the photographs, in *Leggere le fotografie* Basilico returned to the theme of participation:

[The project choices] made have the merit, on the one hand, of overriding the traditional role of the architect, and, on the other, of triggering a process of self-management in the future. The participatory balance runs the risk of getting lost in the moment of construction and who decides, in the final analysis, is always the architect. *Béton brut* surfaces without plaster, long strips of ribbon windows, raised common paths are composed in a rigorous and Spartan language that leaves very little space for autonomous and spontaneous interventions¹⁷.

As seen, Basilico observed the theme of participation with a critical eye. Although in the years of study at the Milan Polytechnic he was subjected to the dominant influence of sociology, he managed to maintain extremely objective opinions. However, the Milanese photographer acknowledged that De Carlo’s choice had been “courageous”. He was probably

¹⁵ Basilico, *Leggere le fotografie...*

¹⁶ Gabriele Basilico, “Corso di fotografia. Prima lezione. Architettura e partecipazione”, *Abitare*, n.º 486 (2008): 32-37.

¹⁷ Basilico, *Leggere le fotografie...*, 13.

convinced that the Villaggio Matteotti was a first important experiment in the right direction, where in any case the architect could not give up the use of his professional skills. In the eyes of the architect-photographer, this was an unavoidable conflict between modernity and tradition (fig. 4, fig. 5):

The images of the interiors mercilessly tell of the difficulties encountered by De Carlo in making the users, i.e. the tenants, who were of course not experts in architectural culture, accept his radical, "brutalist", perhaps a little difficult language, which was opposed to their aspirations and their expectations. The inhabitants of Villaggio Matteotti proudly posed among decorations that sought to cancel the rigour of the architecture¹⁸.



Figure 4. Villaggio Matteotti, Terni, 1976, picture by Gabriele Basilico. Source: *Abitare*, n.º 486 (2008).

¹⁸ Basilico, *Leggere le fotografie...*, 14.

Basilico affirmed that he had been aware that his images showed “overabundant and sometimes kitsch solutions”, but he attributed this circumstance to the fact that the architectural project, despite the democratic and innovative intent, had had an “ambiguous” outcome. When Basilico wrote these words in 2012, De Carlo was already passed away. Perhaps the photographer confessed in this way that the project, specially because of the methodological aspect, did not seem entirely convincing to him. It is not a case that, as Basilico himself remembered, De Carlo was not completely satisfied with the photo shoot and, after having seen it in *Casabella*, was “embittered”¹⁹.

In this sense, Basilico was convinced of the social utility of photography, which is both a document and an artistic product, but he was also aware of the evocative and communicative power of images, as perfectly demonstrated by the case of the Villaggio Matteotti. In an interview in 1999, he answered that he was “strongly sensitive to the “duplicity” of the documentary genre and to the awareness or communication capacity that unleashes what often, apparently, is only a faithful reproduction of reality”²⁰. The shots of the Villaggio Matteotti interiors are not only a “faithful reproduction of reality”, as they prove a strong capacity of the photographer to identify with the inhabitants with the awareness –despite the “participatory” process– of the division between users’ aspirations and architectural culture.

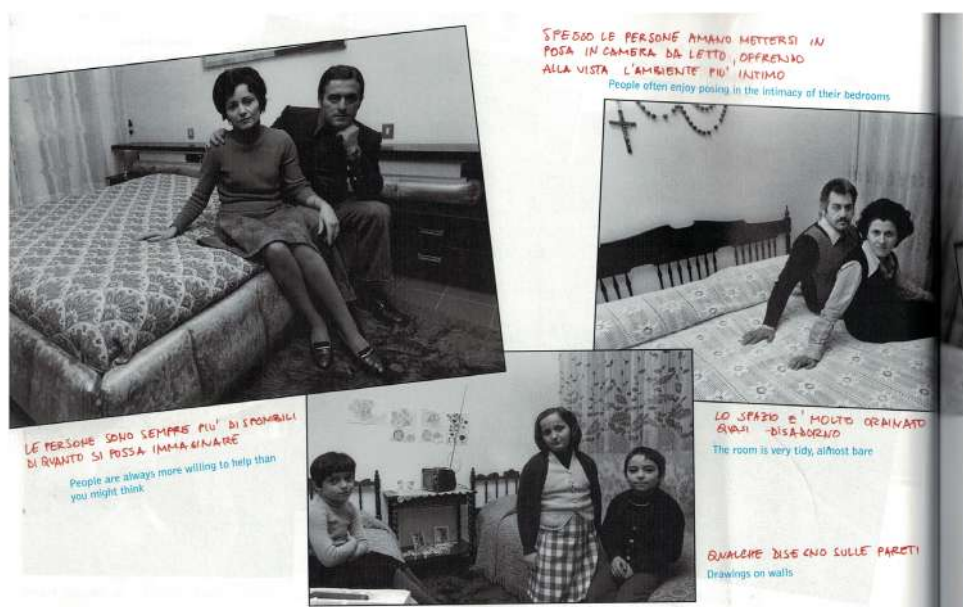


Figure 5. Villaggio Matteotti, Terni, 1976, picture by Gabriele Basilico. Source: *Abitare*, n.º 486 (2008).

¹⁹ Basilico, *Leggere le fotografie...*, 14.

²⁰ “Filippo Maggia’s Interview with Gabriele Basilico, 24.5.1999”, in Gabriele Basilico, *Cityscapes* (Milan: Baldini e Castoldi, 1999), w/o pg.

New looks on De Carlo's work: Zandri and Ferrara

Basilico's work on De Carlo has left for sure a long-lasting sign in further architectural photography and, on the other side, the Villaggio Matteotti continues to exert a certain charm on figurative culture even today. Even recently other architectural photographers have dealt with the Terni neighborhood. In 2016 a rich photographic report was conducted by the brothers Emiliano and Lorenzo Zandri, who form the ZA² studio. Their photographs focus on the exteriors, but the human figure, unlike Basilico's shots, is not completely excluded, and in many images the same young man can be observed running through the spaces, thus providing a reference scale (fig. 6). By the use of color images only, the *chiaroscuro* effect of exposed concrete –normally accentuated by black and white– is avoided.

In 2021 Mario Ferrara's photographic campaign in the Villaggio Matteotti was carried out for an exhibition which was held at the Department of Architecture of the Federico II University of Naples. In this case the author developed an approach which was based on the dialectic between analysis and synthesis, to prove the complexity and multiple identities of De Carlo's project. Through a work built on three "levels", which correspond to a gradual approach to the object, the overall views are followed by shots of greater attention to the architectural scale and finally by "details". In this case, even more than in Basilico's exterior shots, the human figure does not appear. Indeed, no inhabitant or visitor can be seen in any of the photographs. However, signs of life in the neighborhood are visible: cars, scooters, shoes, flower pots, basketball hoops and drying racks (fig. 7). Ferrara also prefers the use of color images and, by renouncing the suggestion of black and white, the shots are perfectly capable to underline the geometries of architecture and its design.



Figure 6. Villaggio Matteotti, Terni, 2016, picture by Emiliano and Lorenzo Zandri. Source: *Divisare*. <https://divisare.com>.



Figure 7. Villaggio Matteotti, Terni, 2021, picture by Mario Ferrara. Source: Mario Ferrara collection.

Conclusion

The photo shoot of Villaggio Matteotti was Basilico's first published work after the first one in Glasgow, when he was still a student, and that one in the Romagna dance clubs, both of which were published only many years later. This work on Terni neighborhood is not typical of his whole production, because with the further work on the Milanese industrial scenery his approach totally changed and his sociologic eye disappeared. As Manuel Orazi wrote, his Terni photos "are in a way schizophrenic: cold exteriors, warm interiors. On the outside the new buildings are seen with the eye of the architect —as if without inhabitants [...]—. Inside, however, people are seen with the eye of the sociologist"²¹.

One can understand why De Carlo did not like the images, and not only those of the interiors, but perhaps also those of the exteriors with an overly metaphysical aura. After all, on the one hand petty- bourgeois kitsch obscured the architecture and on the other hand buildings without people ignored the result of the "participation" process. The role of photography thus becomes central because it unmasks every ambiguity and every false myth, in this case causing the architect's disappointment.

Of course Basilico was extremely interested in the problems of "participatory architecture", but he probably was lead in recognizing its limits. The cultural climate of the Seventies, culturally dominated by sociology, clearly mattered. For this reason the most consolidated readings of the neighborhood —not just the photographic ones— are quite standardized on the theme of participation. Instead, even if many architectural critics do not recognize it, the quality of the architectural and urban space is very high and —again— photography plays a very important role, since while trying to portray the inhabitants and the use of the spaces, it shows the architectural image of the buildings and proves —intentionally or unintentionally— the quality of the project. If Basilico's work remains of extreme interest and constitutes almost a milestone in architectural photography, the shots first of the Zandri brothers and then of Ferrara, taken about forty years later, abandon the sociological slant and concentrate on architecture, without renouncing the human scale and the traces left around by the inhabitants. An apparently photogenic neighborhood actually turns out to be very difficult to photograph and, in all the cases mentioned above, the authors manage to avoid falling into the easy appeal of De Carlo's geometric lines.

²¹ Manuel Orazi, "The Light and Shadow of Gabriele Basilico", *Log*, n.º 30 (2014): 55-59, 55-56.



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