

## ORDER AND DISORDER IN THE CONTEMPORARY CITY

Michele Caja

*Politecnico di Milano Scuola AUIC Dipartimento ABC*

Starting from the topics of order/disorder in urban planning, focused by the Berlin «Daidalos» review as a possible answer to postmodern pluralism, the advantages and limits of order are considered as the principle of city construction. In relation to planned interventions of the European city and their reflection in the practice of contemporary architects, are here considered which elements of history are persisting in the design process. The resumption of concepts such as strategies of order, resistance, continuity, permanence, seems to indicate a common effort to resist the ongoing dissolution of city and architecture. Where this effort for the common good must agree not only on the idea of city to follow, but confront itself with the real city, which is always an implicit compromise between different urban ideas. The analysis of recent urban experiences related to the model of the historic city becomes reference for a design exercise of a new residential district in Milan.

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*On Order and Disorder*, a monographic issue of the Berlin architectural review «Daidalos» (March 1983), dedicated to the topics of order in urban planning, dealt with case studies of urban parts realized according to a unified plan. But also of the limits of this order, when it reveals itself as imposed ordering will, or is transformed into disorder by overlapping and collision between different orders, succeeded in time, corresponding to different ideas of city and architecture. The image that accompanied the review's editorial was already in itself emblematic: a sketch of Aldo Rossi's *Changing Cabins of Elba*, whose settlement rules, based on reiteration and serial juxtaposition, is put in crisis by some of them that seem to collapse on the ground or *come out of the lines*, as if to question the limits of every rational principle in the building of a (however small) city, as well expressed by the caption that accompanied it: *Manifest disorder or covered order?* (1).

Among the various historical-critical contributions, on which the review's index was built, ranging from emblematic moments of urban planning such as the Rue de Rivoli in Paris or other examples of new urban foundations in France, up to the milestones of German neoclassicist city (von Klenze's Munich, Schinkel's Berlin), a text by Giorgio Grassi, with a significant title: *Form liberated, Never Sought. On the Problem of Architectural Design* (in Italian, *Questioni di progettazione*) stood out as a partially out of place intervention, in which the author wondered about

the foundations on which to base design choices starting from historical references, able to reveal formal solutions without the need to research or invent new ones.

History and its forms, assumed as a principle for finding the most intrinsic *raison d'être* of design process, became in this sense a basic moment to resist to novelty at all costs, to obligation of originality and plurality urgently required to contemporary architecture (2).

Precisely in this unveiling of a rediscovered order, in the careful and precise analysis of historical examples, studied on the morphological scale, in their typological structure, as well as in their constructive choices, through which the architecture of the past was understood as a possible shared model of reference to the present, the position traced by the author became unique and exemplary, when compared to the pluralism of postmodern architecture of the time. The unitarity of the typological choice, as for example in the project for a new residential block in Pavia based on a square grid, seemed to find reference here in the order of large historical artifacts for collective residence, from the Lombard farms to the great conventual complexes of the Charterhouses, re-interpreted as alternatives to the speculative and privatized city of Nineteenth century.

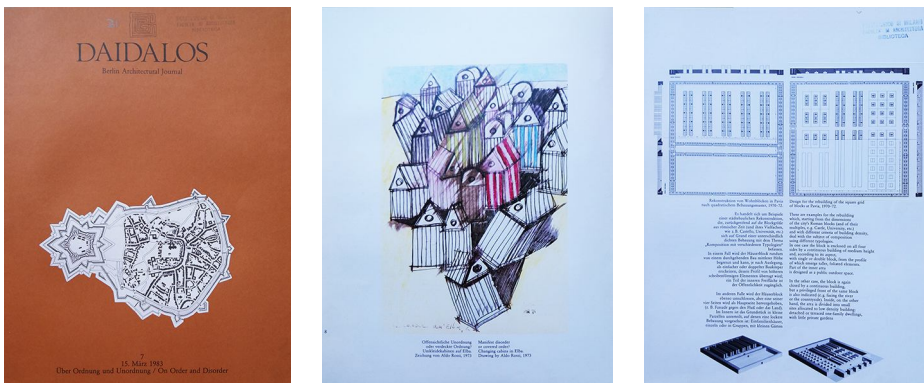


Fig 1-3 *On Order and Disorder*, «Daidalos», n. 83, March 1983: Cover; page 8: *Manifest disorder or covered order?* A. Rossi, *Changing Cabins in Elba*, 1973; page 25: G. Grassi, *Residential blocks on square grid*, Pavia, 1970-72.

The contents and the point of view given to this issue of «Daidalos» came to my mind by reading the topics here proposed through the use of some key words, such as *strategies of order*, *resistance*, *continuity*, *permanence*, which seem to indicate a common effort to resist against the dissolution process of the city and architecture. If such an effort should be made for the *common good*, then one should agree on which idea of city to base oneself. Just think of the never resolved dialectic, introduced by the Modern, on the relationship between compact city and open city, of which the concrete city is the result of an implicit compromise between the two urban conceptions, whose ordering principles often collide without mediation in a collision report. Or on the relationship between *architecture of the city* and landscape, a discipline that in recent decades seems to have prevailed on many occasions, to the detriment of a typological and morphological recognition of consolidated historical contexts, often left deliberately as incomplete urban pieces. An urban landscape in which the historic city remains as a pre-existence to be preserved in its fragmentary state, but not as a model to be completed or continued within new urban interventions. The rules of

construction of the historic city – its compact structure, its parcellized system, its minute scale – rarely become a concrete reference model for the contemporary city. If the city ceases to be built according to well-established morphological-type rules, architecture abandons its role of representing the building's own elements, to become a simple support structure, a technical scaffolding on which to graft elaborate technological or vegetal worlds. The crisis already underway for decades on the relationship between architecture and construction, accelerated by the introduction of new technologies, from which the increasingly pronounced dichotomy between supporting structure and external cladding, is apparently sublimated by the idea that nature substitutes architecture in the representative image of a city.

An obvious example that seems to reconfirm consciously the morphological structure typical of the historical city manifests itself in some, more or less recent, experiences of *critical reconstruction* of cities, where the concept of *Parzellierung* (parcellization) of urban blocks has become the password and ordering principle for any intervention that takes place within historical contexts (4). The rediscovered minute scale of the *Stadthaus* (Townhouse) as minimal element of the city's construction becomes the foundation on which not only mending or completing parceled urban blocks, but reconstructing entire parts of the city.

The historical city, whose apparent disorder is often the result of processes of transformation that took place over the long course of time, is taken up again in these experiences as a repeatable settlement model within new interventions. Quite debatable, these reconstruction examples are able to repropose in the contemporary city the building density of the lost historical centers and the complex spatiality of their spaces, like streets, squares and internal courts. The theme of urban density, once again a central and current theme (5), becomes the ordering principle that is leading recent reconstructions in Germany, from Dresden to Lübeck, from Frankfurt to Berlin, as in the project for the Werkbundstadt on the Spree, after the plan by Paul Kahlfeldt (6). But also in new neighborhoods and small towns, as in some Dutch, Belgian or Scandinavian interventions that have succeeded in redefining the urban dimension and the building scale of individual tenement houses, as proposed with updated forms and typologies (Sluseholmen district, Copenhagen, Nieuw Crooswijk, Rotterdam, Amersfoort, The Netherlands) (7).



Fig. 4-6 Werkbundstadt an der Spree, Berlin (model); Sluseholmen District, Copenhagen; Nieuw Crooswijk, Rotterdam.

If recent analysis on the quality of the urban spaces of historic city show how their image is linked to constant principles over time – the structure of urban blocks parcels, the alignment to the road, the individuality of the single house, the scale of the street and the square (8) – it seems that these principles have been omitted from our current regulations, in favor of a regulatory system based on the distances to be kept from the property borders or the road, according to an idea of building as an object dropped without any relation within an urban lot. With respect to this complex issue, between the urban scale and the single architectural design, a didactic exercise was carried out at Politecnico di Milano. The area involved of *Porto di Mare*, located within a plan agreed with the Milan Municipality (*Riformare Milano*), is located in a marginal condition, on the S-E borders of the Milan suburbs (9).



Fig. 7-9 *New residential district in Porto di Mare, Milan*: Ground floor plan, general model, typological abacus and model of one residential block (students: E. Merli, E. Marra, G. Moretti, M. Gardelli).

The proposed masterplan provides for reconstructing the density and urbanity of the historic center, basing itself on a regular system of residential blocks of different shapes and sizes, set on a streets layout conceived in continuity with the pre-existing surrounding area. The geometric order of the

plan adapts itself to the irregular boundaries of the area, according to a defined form, which gives the intervention a completed character of a new *citadel*, in which to reproduce the typological complexity of the consolidated city built over time. Taking as an example the characteristics of compact Milanese blocks set along the axis of Viale Tunisia, between Piazza Repubblica and Corso Buenos Aires (case study of the previous year), we tried to export them outside, to confer a new typological and functional *mixité* to this marginal area of the city.

For each urban block a lots subdivision plan has been drawn up in relation to the different building types and height references. Starting from this morphological subdivision of urban blocks and from the identification of typological abacuses, single buildings have been carried out individually. Through the assemblage of these in planimetric tables and a general model, we intend to verify and give expression to the vital relationship between order and disorder, rule and exception, urban constraints and individuality of single houses, typical characters of every city that has been built over time.

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MICHELE CAJA, Associate Professor in Architectural and Urban Composition at Politecnico di Milano, AUIC School-ABC Department. Doctorate in Architectural Composition at IUAV in Venice (2005). Among other universities where he did teaching activities: ETH Zürich, Faculty "Aldo Rossi" Cesena; FHP Potsdam.

He has collaborated with several architectural firms in Italy and abroad, including Dortmund (J.P. Kleihues, 1990), Vienna and Milan (G. Grassi, 1994-96) and since 1993 he has been working as a freelancer in Milan.

His research focuses on the relationship between theory and contemporary design, referring in particular to the Italian and German sphere. He is author and editor of several publications, among them: *Berlino Anni Venti*, 2012; *Cities in Transformation* (ed.), 2014; *Ricostruzione critica come progetto urbano*, 2017.