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Ruggiero, Luca

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NEOLIBERAL URBAN POLICIES AND ARCHISTAR SYSTEM: LANDSCAPE REGENERATION OR PRODUCTION OF ALIEN SCENARIOS?

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Luca Ruggiero

University of Catania

Department of Sociology

NEOLIBERAL URBAN POLICIES AND ARCHISTAR SYSTEM: LANDSCAPE REGENERATION OR PRODUCTION OF ALIEN SCENARIOS?

Introduction

This study is the product of a critical reflection on the results of the neoliberal urban policies adopted by many cities with the aim of re-launching their image, their capacity of attraction and activate development processes in response to new paradigms of post-modernity,[1] through innovation, creativeness, culture, art and architecture. The argumentation touches some of the most recent processes of transformation of the contemporary city, which changes the physical shape and functions of it, the socio-economic and demographic structures, the inter-connections between the local dimension and the global one, contributing to the construction of the enigmatic and complex urban landscape of the cities of the XXI century (Ewen and Hebbert, 2007; Martins and Rodriguez Alvarez, 2007; Van der Heiden and Terhorst , 2007).

The geo-economic and geo-political stamp that permeates this work does not exclude comparisons between culturally and ideologically different disciplinary paradigms, just as it recalls the theory and opinions of scholars and talents of international fame, which supply a guide in the face of serious uncertainty at the end of this first decade of the year two thousand. To give a meaning to the inter-connections between economic and social evolution and to that of the landscape of the contemporary city , indeed, a flexible understanding is required ,which bears in mind the environment in which it matures and develops and the prerequisites that characterize it, such as social cohesion, local culture, the nature of capital invested, the involvement of the town dwellers, creative skills, sustainability of the choices (Jouve, 2007; Lanzani , 2004). In front of this complexity it is natural that this study rather than searching for exhaustive answers intends to open a comparison between experience and political orientation and different methodologies.

This study in particular dwells on the role that culture, architecture, innovation, creativity and tourism take on in urban policies run by the "visionary leadership", which invest heavily in initiatives, works and plans with the aim of giving a sense of space and place to public areas to make cities and districts vital and attractive (Landry, 2006; Bonet, 2007; Malecki, 2007). Difficult objectives to achieve, if it is true that in the area of apparently similar options, those repetitive, approved and unsustainable in outlook, loom over the original and creative initiatives. It is worth saying that these are those capable of involving the collective identity, of activating processes of

[1] Starting from the 90's geographers, town planners and scholars of social-spatial phenomena have developed their interest for the themes of neo-liberalism and for its implications in political-economic ,urban and territorial dynamics

identification *ex novo* indispensible for the development of vital and authentically alternative districts and avoiding the most serious phenomena of gentrification, typical of cities in rapid evolution (Less, Slater and Wyly, 2007; Sassen et al ii , 2007). On the other hand similar initiatives, while in some cases they are concerned with the containing of the urban sprawl and the rediscovery of advantages of the compact city, at other times they refer to the upgrading of the suburbs, to the density of their fabric and to the strengthening of the model of "multi-centered metropolis", with the aim of stopping the processes of making into ghettos and insecurity of the suburbs in them.[2]

The central part of this study concerns the value, the social impact and the strength of attraction of architecture in the third millennium, the processes that activate its ability to mould the landscape of the city of the future, with its idealistic works and its "incredible towers" (Alison, Brayer, Migayrou and Spiller, 2007; Coleman, 2005; Knox 2006). But, also , the options related to creation, modification and use of urban spaces on behalf of the architects and the town planners and the quality of life that they should define. Spaces whose identity, vitality and attraction are marked, more than by the creativity of the architect, by people that use them (Cosgrove, 1990; Banerjee, 2006; Gaventa, 2006; Krauel, 2006; Krier, 2006).

Neoliberal policies and the regeneration of the urban landscape

In this "fourth urban era", as Roger Simmonds (2001)[3] defined it, in which the development of the metropolis is characterized and directed by hyper-connectivity and poly-nuclearity and by a criss-cross of paradigms of information and communication, the protagonists of the city are:

-high intensity knots of the networks that feed material and immaterial flows;

-the creative, innovative , cultural and artistic activities;

which have opened unusual prospective on the economy and on urban development, accentuating the "symbolic" nature, marked by a high degree of immaterial content of its products.[4]

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[2] The urban sprawl (term often substituted by "urban spread", "lost town planning" " dissipation of dwellings") nonetheless its economic environmental and social costs can't be easily held back, seeing that it has origins in such complex and notable socio-economic and cultural processes as to impede a pure and simple return to the model of the compact city, no longer able to satisfy all the needs of contemporary society and its businesses (Camagni, Gibelli and Rigamonti, 2002 pp. 18-24; Clark, Lloyd, Wong, Jain , 2002; Bae and Richardson 2004).

[3] Author of a survey on changes in some *city regions* of three continents (Boston, San Diego, Seattle, Ankara, Bangkok, Madrid, San Paolo, Randstad, Taipei, Tokyo and the West Midlands).

[4] The economy of the city, identified by symbols of images and products, contributes to creating symbols more than tangible goods and inside it the media and publicity have a decisive role, orienting tastes, creating needs and inventing new aesthetic models (Zukin, 1996).

Economic and social principles that are at the basis of improvement of business and of the urban landscape, their combination, type of implementation the role that the actors play, the *governance* and public and private assets, follow models in continuous evolution, so much so as to be celebrated by some authors as the triumph of post-modern complexity (Mommaas, 2004). An entrepreneurial management of the city which avails of flexible town planning instruments emerges in such a context, like a *master plan* and strategic plans,[5] and a distinct propensity to attract assets, of firms and visitors (Borrelli, 2006; MacLeod, 2002). This is demonstrated by the increasingly frequent proliferation of processes of gentrification, the spreading of which is the result of the popularity of neoliberal urban policies and of the progressive abandonment of the ideals and objectives of a social type that had animated the policies of urban upgrading between the end of the 70's and the first half of the 90's.[6](Harvey 1989,2003; Clark 2005).

The most effective answers are the ones that come from the cities open to new ideas, whose businesses, stimulated by creativity and innovation, develop new synergies with the culture and arts competing with economic growth and with employment, with the well-being and urban sustainability ,the strengthening of human rights and the civil community life in multi-ethnic districts. In these cities the creation of new emerging social classes, which give life to production and immaterial services with a high added value, is associated with the experience of innovative governance and to original types of planning and of management of development (Franke and Verhagen, 2006). The aims are almost always ambitious: to trace dynamic scenes projected towards more attractive urban identities, the aesthetic renewal of the city, of its shapes, of its structures and its processes and, at the same time, the improvement of the quality of life of the residents and of environmental sustainability. Objectives which the neoliberal choices, with their economic and social implications, are sometimes incompatible , being sources of new challenges and new conflicts, of imbalances and tensions inside the urban areas, in the relations between central and suburban districts, in a particular way in the economically less developed countries.[7]Culture, creativity, innovation and tourism and the complex system of relations that they set going indeed assume meanings and impact that have different effects from one city to another and in the areas of

[5] Plans which allow a plurality of subjects and of elements to act in a synergic manner for the achievement of different and complex objectives, almost always interconnected, in which the skill to use each intervention as a fragment in an operation on a wider scale is noted.

[6] The types of gentrification are as different as the critical factors that are at the roots of them, from those of housing to those concerning the new types of business, of employment, education, transport to local leadership, for which to brake the impact of it requires targeted policies and investments.

[7] The economic and propulsive role of culture in contemporary cities, sustained since the 80's by scholars like Zukin (1982,1991,1992) is by now generally recognized. Nonetheless those who underline the excessive rhetoric aren't missing, proposing alternative approaches to urban regeneration (Miles 2005, 2006; Ellis, 2005; Peck, 2005; Harding, Deas, Wilks_ Heeg 2004, Polenske, 2007).

the same cities, depending on whether they involve central districts or the most dilapidated suburbs or are directed at sewing up the tear which separates these two worlds. The critical voices linger above all on the phenomena of urban re-centralization and of gentrification connected to a reappraisal of the historical centres, to the strengthening of certain groups and to the new centrality of the suburban districts assailed by cultural activity and by tourism, in which business and housing of the new wealthy social classes has concentrated itself in (Zukin, 1996, 1998; Butler, 1997).

An equally important criticism is that concerning the proliferation of buildings and environments planned by post modern architecture, often sustained by important speculative real-estate operations, which intensify the conflict between aesthetic dimensions and social relationships and between cultural diversity and local identity. Indeed, while on the one hand a seductive image of the city is created , through the eclecticism of shapes, the spectacularism and the diffusion of new forms of entertainment, highlight the processes of segmentation of spaces, their separation and making into ghettos , exalting the differences between privileged areas and areas of poverty and social exclusion (Finocchiaro, 2002 pp. 120-126).

Recently the contrasts and the contradictions inherent in the boldest neoliberal policies (which determine the approval of urban landscapes and the loss of their vitality, their symbols and collective identity and ethnic-social pluralism) and the evident crisis of their model of reference is supplying a growing back-up of the restoration of the main conditions of equity inside the cities. It is demonstrated by the most recent guidelines adopted by some civil servants , stakeholders, architects, town planners and landscape designers increasingly directed at the planning of buildings and public spaces capable of exalting the social and cultural identity of the districts and their requisites of sustainability and flexibility, with the aim of favouring development, well-being of the residents and environmental sustainability (Gastil and Zoé, 2004; Zoè, 2006).

The roots of the present transformation of the urban landscape are to be looked for in the formation of a new urban economy, after the industrial decline of the 70's , when the first interventions of recovery started in districts of a historical , architectonic and cultural value, marked by poverty, by war,or by natural disasters. The work was particularly important where historical continuity and a unified character, strengthened by cultural ties, gave the ability to represent the "sense of place ", the urban identity and the image of the city (Tiesdell, Heath and Oc, 2007; Tiesdell, MacFarlane , 2007). Then, recovery was extended to areas lacking in historical interest, but of a strategic value in the sphere of the urban fabric. . The spaces and the containers freed from obsolete activities (productive structures, hospitals, railway stations, workshops, warehouse, etc.) were transformed into resources and, re-modernized, were re-used with different functions, among which cultural and

creative activities , museums, theatres, art galleries, fairs and exhibitions, hotels and other welcoming structures have assumed a particular importance. The renewal has involved in a particular way *the waterfront*, but also districts and *cluster* in which creativity, innovation, cultural dynamism, industry and cultural production was liberally expressed.

The great successes of post-modern architecture, decreed in the 90's by the media and by international public opinion and the emergence of the "Archistar System" have multiplied and radicalized the urban metamorphoses. Contemporary architecture has spread, not limiting itself to redoing old unused structures and of building new single iconic buildings, but assailing bigger and bigger areas of the city, or whole districts and the suburbs too. Suburbs which thanks also to the attraction of the new iconic buildings have become leading figures in processes of urban re-balance and sometimes contribute to the strengthening of the model of "multi-centric metropolis". In this context physical renewal and economic revitalization of the cities the competition to attract businesses, financers, fairs, markets, company headquarters and to re-launch the potential for tourism has been enhanced. Many American cities have been involved in it , as well as European and Asiatic ones, although the operative choices, the actors and the capital invested differ noticeably, influenced by the different context in which they developed (Hackworth, 2006; Jones and Evans , 2008). Nonetheless, the substantial differences are among the superficially repetitive initiatives and the original ones, capable of re-launching the real soul of the city or of the districts, their vitality, their cultural symbols, the social-ethnic pluralism, the identity and the sense of belonging of the town dwellers. A particular urge to renewal is seen in cities in which the commitment of the town and of private individuals is flanked by that of the region or the State, certainly phenomenon that aren't new, as the numerous historical precedents demonstrate , marked by initiatives with a strong symbolic meaning (Sudjic, 2006; de Baan, Declerck, Patteeuw, 2007). In such a case the aim is that of facing a not exclusively local public to bear witness to the cultural sensitivity of a leader and of a political party, the accreditation of a new international role of a government, a regional or town administration, from the elation of regional autonomies , like those of Barcellona and Bilbao.

A towing role in this context is played from the 90's by the restoration and assignment of new functions to spaces and disused urban buildings (industrial areas and artisan workshops, factories, warehouses, public buildings, railway stations, etc.), above all when they are associated with an effective policy of enhancement of real estate and with artistic and cultural activities. Certainly authentically original projects are not frequent. Reviving more or less important parts of urban quarters, recovering their traditional and pluralistic charm or creating *ex novo* is a task which rarely

succeeds. Projects put together by loan and speculative management proliferate, started by rich trans-global companies, which moreover transform into isolated exhibitions of architectural skill which correspond to the processes of more or less extensive gentrification (Otsuka and Reeve,2007).

The New Paradigms of Architecture and the Star-System of Architecture

Following the road opened by the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao and strengthened by the Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles by Frank Gehry, in the last decade urban strategies aimed at capturing the interest and the imagination of the public to trigger off processes of regeneration of individual districts if not whole cities have proliferated.[8] Architects like Norman Foster, Peter Eisenman, Enric Miralles, Zaha Hadid, Daniel Libeskind, Renzo Piano, Will Alsop, Rem Koolhaas have created for private and public clients spectacular icons of urban architecture, arousing admiration and polemics in an equal measure. The drive of the new projects, publicized by the media with images and suggestions that involve the public in general, on the one hand change more and more profoundly the landscape of the contemporary city and its identity, on the other it offers new reasons of attraction and re-launches the image.

On the results of continual search for elements of novelty, spurred by the request of clients and by the desire to amaze and attract the attention of a vaster and vaster public, in recent years a close confrontation that goes well beyond superficial enthusiasm of the media for the creative specificity of architecture has opened up. A debate that, started by architects and town planners, has then extended to assessments of an economic, geographic, sociological, political, anthropological and psychological nature. It was foreseeable that critical analyses on the impact of the works of the architects should be discordant , considered the complexity against which it must be measured, from the socio-cultural value to the sustainability of the processes that it activates, to the inter-relations with the flows of tourism.

The new symbolic buildings are the reflection of the economic, social, ideological and cultural metamorphosis of the city and of its profound contradictions, and arouse several questions. In order to understand the meaning it is necessary to go back to the wave of criticism that from the early 60's targeted the demand for the architects and modern town planners to change urban spaces, exalting rationality and functionality and ignoring the complexity produced by the different

[8] In Europe, before the Guggenheim in Bilbao, a similar spectacular operation of upgrading of an urban obsolete area was carried out with success with the Beaubourg project of the Italo-British team of Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers (Ockman , 2004,p.227; Poulakidas, 2004).

cultural and often contrasting elements , but essential sources of creativity, of vitality and of energy in the city (Jacobs, 1961; Rossi, 1984). Criticisms that do not save even the greatest masterpieces, outside the usual designer cannons and which conciliate , starting from the 80's on the basis of new paradigmatic elements, the over throwing of the models of reference of modern architecture, like the Opera House in Sydney.[9]

The post modern orientation of architecture represented in some ways a partial answer to these criticisms, re-assessing the past and welcoming and combining in the urban and architectonic choices different elements, not always functional to the structure of the buildings. They, moreover, were expressions of contrast between the grim, elitist, monotone and repressive nature of the modern city with the infinite variety of possibilities that the post modern city was capable of offering (Frisby, 2001; McNeill, 2006,2007). From this point of view the eclectic post modern architecture could be considered as the symbol of a different and more complex contemporary society (Dear, 1986, 2000;Ellin, 1996; Kleniewski, 2005). Society inspired by economic development and in a particular way by technology, by innovation and by communication that offer new materials for construction and a better mobility, giving the contemporary architects the freedom , never experimented with in the past, to produce new centralized , diffused or de-centralized urban shapes.[10] In reality, nonetheless, though free from the exclusive bond of rationality and functionality, architecture has rarely managed to really acquire that creativity and that aesthetic sense indispensible for reflecting , at least in part on the complexity of contemporary society. It ,indeed, as Harvey (1991), Jameson (1991) and Zukin (1991,1992) point out in the early 90's , became the expression of an economy dominated by the global capital.

The following years showed architects and town planners worried on the one hand about matching the clientele's requests, on the other about supplying acceptable answers to new dilemmas. Firstly those of the changes of urban equilibrium due to their work and to their products which, reflecting on urban income and on the cost of land and of rents, determined phenomena of gentrification, the fleeing of residents and a part of the same local business with a lower income (Zukin1982,1988, 1992; Savage and Warde, 2005). The questions concerning the new clientele stand out in a particular way from the contrast with what had characterized the urban areas beginning from the middle of the XX century, when the symbolic relations between private assets and the city had

[9] Certainly there are numerous architects that have tried and try to interpret with their creations the transition from the industrial city to that of information, communication, culture and the sustainable city, it is sufficient to remember in this respect some of the main works of Renzo Piano that recall the complexity, the transparency, the permeability, the energy saving and bio compatibility, relying on the layering of multi-functional spaces.

[10] The Opera House outstretched on the sea, at the entrance to the port of Sydney, the undisputed icon of the city, absolute masterpiece of the architecture of the XX century, declared officially as Heritage of Humankind and inserted in the list of UNESCO, was built between 1959 and 1973.

given life to real "temples of private assets". Industrial and financial magnates at that time commissioned the best architects (Frank Lloyd Wright, Wallace Harrison, Raymond Hood, Sloan and Robertson) buildings and functional physical spaces for their businesses and symbolic of their personal glorification (like the Guggenheim Museum and the Rockfeller Centre in New York), giving the image of a capitalism animated by civil pride (Swyngedouw and Kaika 2003; Kaika and Thielen , 2006). On the other hand, the new urban Élites, created by an economy organized around the global flows of capital and of information, of creative companies and technological infrastructures, of services and of mass tourism, no longer consider themselves to be connected with any particular city, nor even less do they think of commissioning buildings that reflect their condition. Thus, instead of being an expression of urban economic power, the new symbolic buildings are the result of a mutually beneficial relationship between private assets and the city and they get their status from architectonic criticism, that is spread by the media, usually before their completion. The new buildings are "*branding objects*", the result of elegant architecture, the shape of which no longer depends on its function, but on its image, lacking in clear ties with the city, while the architects , who are the authors, limit themselves to carrying out their work following abstract formulas of success , giving up their intellectual role (Sudjic, 2006). For instance Kaika and Thielen (2006) suggest that these changes in the patronage of contemporary architecture produce an impact: in the relationship between the buildings and public spaces; in the one between the single building and the city, and in the social role of the architect and architecture in general.

For some years private clients have been increasingly associated to that of public actors, who hold a competition to win the services of the most famous architects on an international level, with the aim of promoting political operations and images. Their signature gives, indeed, visibility and prestige to works besides increasing the power of attraction of the cities. Since the end of the 80's showy and super-expressive works and public spaces created by post modern architects substitute the unused areas and fill the "urban emptiness" , more and more often acquiring the value of icons and spectacles, animating the flat and monotonous landscape which characterize the modern city.

The concept of the product of architecture as an icon of the post-modern city animates interesting discussions on the works of the most representative exponents of contemporary architecture.[11] The theoretic bases of this discussion which buds in the 70's , with the opening of the frontiers of architecture to dialogue and comparison with Art, Literature, Philosophy, which started an experimentation with new languages, such as those of deconstructionism and minimalism, and

[11] Among whom they can be included, besides those already quoted, Alvar Aalto, Gae Aulenti, Santiago Calatrava, David Chipperfield, Odile Deqc, Massimiliano Fuksas, Vittorio Gregotti, Hans Hollein, Herzog & De Meuron, Jean Nouvel, Richard Meier and Toyo Ito etc.

which is opening up the road to the champions of "contextual" architecture. The latter is a direction, which unites an increasingly rich host of architects committed to overcoming the suggestions imposed by forms and functions for territorial and social-cultural integration of their works. The manifold international exhibitions help to constantly renew this comparison, from which themes and questions arise which concern:

- The relations of architecture with the clientele (Shane, 2005) and with the main powers that manage urban development of the city in the XXI century (images, business, migration, tourism and safety);
- Architecture as a phenomenon of the media, besides an artistic and spatial, and self-referential and the ethical value of the works of architects and of town planners;
- The relation of architecture , culture and the urban landscape, their impact on the residents and visitors and the advantages offered by the "slow city", or rather of a city which manage to recover its own rhythms in order to improve the quality of life of its city dwellers.
- The chances offered by new materials and by digital systems of communication (which transform architecture and design into interface between physical life and the virtual one) and the development of relations between engineering and architecture (Kara, 2008);
- The professional alternatives offered by digital planning : the exaltation of individual creativity and of the fame of the architect or a new era of architectonic anonymity and the decline of the *aclista* (Anstey, Griller and Hughes, 2007; Carter and Le Cuyer, 2002).

In these exhibitions the successful architects , the "archistar" or "starchitect" or "egoarchitects", are both leading figures and subject to criticism. Having become a mixture of artists, managers and celebrities in the show-business world, the "archistar" use and are used by the mass-media, dedicating their work as much to planning of buildings and urban spaces, as to the diffusion of their own image.[12]Their collective identity, , famous, propagated, and celebrated by the system of the media, from which the definition "media architect" , allows them to get more and more prestigious work.[13]A phenomenon that certainly isn't recent, if it is considered that the figure of the architect as a "star" was already evident at the times of Le Corbusier and of Frank Lloyd Wright, but only in

[12] Philip Johnson leader of the International Style before and during Post Modernism then he is among the architects of the twentieth century who used most the power of advertising and of fame, the first to understand that "the front cover of Time is worth more than a monograph", managing to build a totally disproportional visibility of his real talent.

[13] For some years the opening to the archistars has widened up to Asia, China and the countries in the Gulf of Persia (Campanella, 2008). China, above all for the Olympic Games in 2008 and the Expo in Shanghai in 2010 , destined to celebrate its image as a world economic power, opened the gates to foreign architects who, nonetheless, have the task of achieving their projects with the collaboration of the State bodies like the Chinese Architecture Design & Research Group and the Chinese Building Technology Development Centre.

the XXI century has it assumed, such high and yet such unpredictable levels. Indeed, urged by the media and by research for a position of universally renown prestige, the architects have become, with their hyper expressive creations, part of the *show business* that links the world of architecture, of marketing and of communication, of publicity, of publishing, of Art, of design and of haute–couture and of shows.

The archistar became thus a "*trend setter*" who launches new trends and his products are "*brands*" "*griffe*", a show in continual evolution that is sometimes associated with fashion to give life to a new "*lifestyle*". Fed by this system which imposes a continuous, quick, energetic and competitive overtaking of itself, of fashion, of styles, of conventions, every new sensational building must try to eclipse the previous one, architecture becomes more and more sparkling and exclusive, spectacular, a means of cultural promotion and of image (Jencks, 2002; Lo Ricco and Micheli, 2003; Benevolo, 2006; Hodge, 2006). A clear mirror of these phenomena is the increasingly frequent collaboration between brands of the fashion world and star-system of architecture, that create sophisticated architectonic structures with a strong impact on the urban landscape. Heightening at times the aesthetic quality, overturning at times with exaggerated eclecticism (Amendola, 2006).[14]

Architecture of shops enters in the spaces for shopping as interpreter of the culture of consumerism, it is compared to the art of displaying luxury goods and the entertainment of the consumer, it collaborates in the continual evolution of methods of presentation and displaying products on sale (Sudjic, 2002 pp. 466-470; Colaiacomo, 2003 pp.126-132; Captano, 2003; Criconia, 2007). Rem Koolhaas' strategy is a symbolic example of this for the Prada shops in New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco, which he claims have not only supplied the fashion company with coverings , but with "a totally new spirit, opening up to marketing and to the attraction of the most elegant visitors".(Lo Ricco, Micheli, 2003,pp. 184-195). On the same level the main global brand names move, conscious of the importance of a suitable stage on which they can show their creation, "Hermès, Tod's, Louis Vuitton, Dior and Chanel like Miyake, Stella McCartney, Alexander MacQueen and all the others want important commercial spaces. The architecture of the store becomes a *fashion statement*, ephemeral ideology"(Marenco Mores, 2006, p.7). The new figure of the architect that comes to the fore in this context, capable of crossbreeding with the other visual arts (cinema set design and television, video-clip, rock shows and above all fashion) and cherished on many occasions by Koolhaas (2001,2006), finds important supporters and equally

[14] This phenomenon is due to the huge resources which recently the brands in fashion have poured out in order to achieve the big flagship stores, undertaking a sort of competition to win the most prestigious locations, to build the most spectacular structures, involving in the planning the most famous archistars of the international architectonic panorama.

important opponents. It is undeniable in every case that fashion, through architectonic works, tends to strengthen companies' brand identities and accomplish its plan, besides legitimizing itself in the cultural world.

The Star System of architecture seems to have reached in these years its apex, but, at the same time, there are those who see the first cracks on its inside, in coincidence with one of the worst economic and financial crises of the post world war two period. These signs would come from the growth of faith in young architects and their ideas, not imposed from on-high, but with strong ties with the territory and thus more suitable for satisfying local aspirations. New talents ,indeed, continually crop up, which are seen in competitions, exhibitions and international calls for tender, and the attemps to overcome modern and post-modern are multiplied and the same rules of Euclidean geometry ,using new materials and being inspired by the world of art, biology and the natural landscape. On the one hand if today the world of the big companies still uses the name of the stars to make a profit and an image, the opposite trend is also growing: it launches new talents or looks for young architects capable of developing completely new ideas. A trend encouraged by the use of the computer, which has allowed flexible and new firms to manage complex types of planning and programming which a couple of decades ago would have been completely beyond their reach.

Questions and Criticism on the symbolic and functional value and on the economic and social impact of contemporary architecture

The more or less daring plans of the architects have acquired a central role in the urban strategies of development, of strengthening the identity and of promoting tourism, permeating deeper and deeper into the landscape, the life and the functions of the city. Local government of the big and small urban areas redesign the urban *skyline* inserting ultramodern structures next to or inside old buildings, glass and steel buildings, futuristic bridges, which the development of new materials and building techniques make more and more daring (Sebestyen and Pollington, 2003). Prestigious museums, institutions, public and private bodies compete to acquire the plans of famous architects that give them a new look. Even some of the most beautiful European historical and artistic centres, in order to touch up their architectonic genius, acquire new public and private buildings and unpublished space dedicated to art, culture and entertainment, to welcoming visitors, companies financial organizations and businesses. A phenomenon, that of the new architecture, that includes airports, railway stations and undergrounds and other infrastructures, whose functions are often enriched and diversified in order to make them new elements of attraction.

In the past criticism and polemics involved the limited sphere of workers, like those radicals of Jane Jacobs for modern urban works and of David Harvey for post modern ones or like those referring to Beaubourg, the pyramids of the Louvre and the speculative real estate operation of Canary Warf. In recent years a more general interest has been aroused instead, stimulated by the global media (Hall, 2002; Short, 2007). The work of architects like Frank Gehry , Zaha Hadid and Herzog & De Meuron have been accused of repetition (the market asks you to repeat if you're successful, spreading deconstructionist mannerism) and those of Santiago Calatrava (Palau de les Arts) are involved in a lawsuit for structural defects. Criticism is not absent either from the museum of Ara Pacis, of Richard Meyer and the re-modernization of the Uffizi in Florence by Arata Isozaki. Criticism has gone well beyond the aesthetic and functional features, important examples of these are :

- The famous philosopher and English conservative writer Roger Scruton (2008a , 2009b)who attacks modernist , rationalist and de-constructionalist architecture, for Scruton the "archistar" , "egomani" architects, have built horrible and inhospitable buildings , alien bodies in the urban fabric, whose roots should be looked for in the works of Le Corbusier;
- Of the ethnologist and French anthropologist Marc Augé (1997, 2004, 2007) according to whom the archistars works contribute to the "spectacularism" , which make the line between reality and its representation and reality and fiction fainter and fainter every day (2204 p. 58); they compete for expansion of "non- places" and with their calculable duration don't aim certainly at eternity, condemning the contemporary city to an eternal present;[15]
- Rem Koolhaas (2006) who for many years believes that the architecture of Modernism has created "junk space" and "non places";
- The architecture historian Joseph Rykwert (2007) who underlines the destructiveness of the latest architectonic trends, incapable of producing shared symbols and attractions that contribute to the "seduction of places" and he complains about the poverty of the architects' ideas, taking as an example the projects to re-build "Ground Zero" which in order to gather a wounded city propose a banal "let's build like before but even higher";
- The Marxist geographer Neil Smith who discerns the connection between development of the real estate sector , public loans and an elitist architecture "a revanchist conspiracy against the urban poor" (Smith , 1996a, 1996b);

[15] Augé doesn't stop nonetheless at the fact that the new urban landscape can also have a historic value, reflecting on the evolution of contemporary social and capitalistic relationships.

- The anthropologist Franco La Cecla (2008), who invites us to leave the archistars to their own egoism and to replace the models of this architecture of fashion and acclaimed by the mass-media as if it were a brand.

  An exclusive architecture in comparison with other fields of knowledge and a search for an abstract art, far from the real interests of the city-dwellers, aimed at transforming entire pieces of the city ignoring the economic-social mechanisms, the collective unconscious, the sense of belonging, the conflicts and the environmental emergencies.[16]

  Nonetheless the most radical condemnations on the social impact of these new works of architecture come from:

  -John Silber (2007) of Boston University, who questions the presumption of the architects, like Frank Gehry, Steven Holl and Daniel Libeskind , who don't build thinking of people , but of their expressive aims. For which, while in the past public and institutional buildings transmitted a sense of order and solidity, today they suggest collapse and disharmony. His judgement of the Stata Centre of Gehry, heart of scientific investigations of the MIT is particularly severe, a building which in his opinion has completely ignored the needs of the researchers, tinned up, in open spaces, all transparent and curved boards, while that type of procedure and studies needed a certain intimacy, including the possibility to close a door behind you. Without considering the enormous costs incurred during the construction and the other costs of maintenance.

  -From the mathematician of Texas University Nikos Salingaros (2004,2007), theorist of architectonic forms and town planning , who complains about the destructive nature of the latest architectonic trends. Quoting the writings of the most famous projects of Johnson, Jencks, Gehry, Eisenman, Hadid, Libeskind and Tschumi, he not only denies this architecture a scientific base but demonstrates that , rather, it is against science and requires useless costs and technical efforts in order to satisfy the incoherent and negative visions of the architects. The archistars' spirit of deconstruction, latest fashion of the architects, that has spread in the intellectual world as if it were a virus, according to Salingaros, isn't due so much to egoism and the cult of genius as it is to a nihilist desire to deny the community. This deconstructionism reveals , however, the real nature of all the modernism, which is destructive for the city, society and human culture. It has produced, indeed, a world

[16] La Cecla states that architects like Jean Nouvel when they promise light surfaces, untouchable shop windows, it seems as if they want to say that architecture is only bi-dimensional, seeing as it must go onto the pages of a shiny magazine. Moreover, always according to the author, if it is true that for some years Manhattan has been the centre of public interest, thanks to the proliferation of works of the archistars, from Renzo Piano and Frank Gehry and Daniel Libeskind, it is also true that Manhattan seems dangerously reduced to a "brand", constellated by monuments to consume like shopping.

> of unlivable cities, the destruction of natural matrices, an uncivilized , dangerous, selfish population and the subsequent horrors of society. Radical modernism doesn't build for the city but against it.

The polemics don't even save the managerial class that commission the works of the archistars, to whom the attestation of historical centres, their gentrification, the zeroing of local identity and the transformation of districts into "fun fairs for tourists" is debited , where the distinction between reality and fiction dies away until it reaches the point where reality copies fiction and not vice-versa. More generally an excessive attraction for aestheticism of a group of rich people is revealed , ignoring the social disintegration of the indistinct suburbs of the poor and immigrants , where anger and violence explode (Lees, 2008; Mennel, Steffens and Klemek, 2007). Certainly, besides the most fervent criticisms of the Star System, "icons" and "anti-icons" in architecture seem to agree that the problem should be placed in substantially qualitative terms, as a thoughtful scholar of these problems, Charles Jencks (2006) states. A conclusion made even clearer by the global crisis that in the course of 2009 extinguished much enthusiasm, causing serious doubts to arise on the globalizing model to which contemporary architecture refers. The same fantastic museums designed by the archistars don't seem indeed to enjoy the same interest, the new orders have difficulty in taking off and the difficulty in covering the costs of their running spread the awareness that something is changing and that a new cycle is about to unfold.

Conclusions

The criticisms, doubts and new forms of experimentation if on the one hand haven't impeded the enlargement of the scale of the projects of the Star System, on the other have urged the advent of sustainability as the new primary source of inspiration of the archistars. Their orders from isolated individuals have extended indeed to urban operations of a wider reach since the 90's, following the achievement of some important projects of urban regeneration for which the super stars of architecture were called to supply the shop windows of attraction. The extension of the dominion of the architects to regeneration of more or less vast areas of the city brings about a real reconciliation between architecture and town planning, motivated at the beginning of the XXI century by neoliberal strategies and real estate operations of a vast reach , started by the town authorities and by individuals of global capitalism (Holl, 2008). These operations highlight the important differences between European, American and Asiatic countries, both as far as the role

carried out by public and private individuals is concerned as well as the participation of the local community, although the start of processes of gentrification is common to both (Smith, 2002).

The archistars' work of planning does not develops without important contradictions, clear since the last century, when the great masters (from Le Corbusier to Frank Lloyd Wright from Ludwig Mies van der Rohe to Oscar Niemeyer, Louis Kahn and Philip Johnson)try to operate as much in the field of architecture as in that of town planning, clashing with the differences of mentality and competency that these two disciplines require, one traditionally focalized on the object the other on the textile-part of a *continuum*. Without considering that the extrapolation of criteria based on iconic buildings tends to produce on a wider scale totalizing effects, defined as "continual monuments", like those produced by the work of Oscar Niemeyer in Brasilia, who dilutes the impact of buildings and symbolic places.

Doubts on the opportunity to give life to urban landscapes whose aesthetic identity is produced by a sole or very few architects (who plan from museums to offices, from the corner of the greengrocer's to the café) were also expressed in the area of exhibitions , like the X Biennial of Architecture of Venice in 2006. The same Jean Nouvel has often stated that an architect who proposes to build a city is like a writer who wants to write a whole library.

The criticism in any case haven't stopped the commissioning of town planning projects for the archistars, which have become increasingly numerous, from the emblematic ones of Times square in Manhattan and from Potsdamer Platz in Berlin to that of Lille, entrusted to Rem Koolhaas.[17] Koolhaas' team is one of the most committed to the achievement of a master plan that concerns more or less important parts of the city ,but the architects of the caliber of Frank Gehry, Daniel Libeskind, Norman Foster , Jean Nouvel, Zaha Hadid and Richard Rogers are just as active, whose activity reveals a constant search for new paradigms that can make districts and suburbs of the city attractive.

Another clear direction, which has become the new categorical imperative of many scholars of architecture, is the creation of eco-buildings with a modest environmental impact or which recall natural shapes, self-sufficient and even positive in energy consumption.[18] A real cultural turn-a-bout ,using sophisticated technologies and their mutual interaction, has made respect for the climate and

[17] The plan of urban renewal of the Euralille consortium which counted on the propulsive thrust supplied by the railway link with the TGV (completed in 1996), includes structures of the same Koolhaas and buildings of Nouvel, Shinohara and Christian de Portzamparc.

[18] Indeed, responsible environmental architecture turned up on the international scene in the second half of the 70's in response to the energy crisis and to the growing degradation of the environment and, initially it concerned individual houses and offices, with the backing of local government it has been extended to big housing estates and then to entire eco-districts and eco-cities (Wines,2002; Moe 2008).

nature, the awareness of the fragility of natural environments the primary sources of inspiration for the architects in the creation of new urban icons. Natural materials and renewable energy, bio constructions and bio architecture in many cities , victims and at the same time responsible for the global climatic change , are used both to improve the quality of life of the residents and to give life to the new architectonic icons and town planning of the eco-sustainable culture.

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