



Ignazio Guidi, Palazzo dell'Anagrafe (1936-39), via Petroselli, Roma.

An overview and an account

ATTILIO PETRUCCIOLI¹

Abstract: There are three teachings that Solomon's book gives us: The city is not a summation of serial parts, aggregated as modules of a submarine, but an organism of parts linked by instances of necessity. Contrary to the heroic image conveyed by the stars of contemporary architecture that sees users as spectators, the architect is a silent and anonymous civil servant who puts his profession at the service of the community. Large cultural movements such as New Urbanism that have changed people's feelings about housing and city issues require strict continuous self-criticism to maintain an avant-garde role in exercising discipline and not falling into the fashion routine.

Solomon's book is an emporium of reflections on the activity, the design adventures, the experiences of an architect, founder of the New Urbanism Charter, during a long professional life and didactic commitment. It is an overview of a passionate engagement for a more organic city both in downtown and in the alienating suburbs of American cities and an account asked to those street companions of the Charter, who found an easy shortcut in simplistic trendy formulas.

The book has different trails but the connector is given by the title itself: Hope is the city of the hope and Love is the city of love.

Hope is the city of the Modern Movement which has substituted the continuous stratification of the urban fabric of the city and history, with Rational models. It failed. It created a disruptive city of boxes in the middle of left-over spaces and produced social alienation. City of Love, on the contrary is the continuous city, the city of stratification, the city of the people. To give you an idea of what is intended for continuous city we can read at page 16: the piece is called: "A morning in Prati". Our protagonist is ready to leave his apartment in Rome early

1. Attilio Petruccioli graduated in Architecture in 1970 and Oriental Languages and Literature in 1980. He is full professor at the Polytechnic School of Bari and teaches at the Doctorate Course in Architecture and Construction of Sapienza University of Rome. Author of numerous publications on islamic architecture and developing countries, he was editor of the Journal of the Islamic Environmental Design Research Center. Aga Khan Professor of Architecture for Islamic Societies and Director of the Aga Khan Program. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. 1994-1998. Founder of the Bibliotheca Orientalis in Trani (2019-).

in the morning, he closes the door goes into the elevator, then he goes to a market, he reaches a bar where he has a very good cappuccino with cornetto. Of course, he has a discussion with the bar-man and with the other clients of the bar. Then the protagonist continues walking towards the University seat. Total distance covered on food 370 mt. Total elapsed time 27 minutes, conversation 4 as participants and 3 as overheard. Such is the life in the neighborhood of a continuous city. The physical container is implied in this fresco of the continuous city, since the shop windows and the wide sidewalks and the street furniture of the bars, the decoration of a high quality civil construction, often anonymous, are the theater of life.

Rome occupies an important place in the book. Personally I read this section with interest and participation and I was hit by a detail: Solomon points out a very specific building of Rome that is never considered in due relevance, done by an architect whose name is Ignazio Guidi. Solomon says that the Anagrafe building is a good architecture since it is not invading the context, it tries to establish a dialogue with the archaeology that is in front of it. It tries to pass unnoticed.

In the last 50 years the best contribution of the American architects to the Italian architectural culture is the fact that they are pragmatic people that are not dominated by ideologies. This means a lot since the architect of my generation was educated to consider fascist architecture as a bad architecture, bad as Fascist until American architects – most of them host in the American Academy in Rome – started to claim: “the Church in Piazza Euclide by Armando Brasini is powerful!”. Then I started to look at architecture of the 30-40s with a different attitude and I started to distinguish not because of red or black architecture, but because of good and bad architecture. After April 25th, 1945 they liberated us a second time.

The second part of the book is a warning that Solomon addresses to the New Urbanism movements. He starts proposing an opposition between two terms that Solomon calls with the Greek term *Metis* on one side and *Episteme* on the other. *Metis* is the intelligence that is flexible, that goes from the past to the present into the future, which is also smartitude. *Episteme* is the knowledge with a scientific bases. New Urbanism was born as an expression of *Metis*, it was based

on a pragmatically attitude and was dominated by pragmatical issues. Enough with the sprawl of periphery and the Federal Government housing project which produced slabs one next to the other and produced a disrupted city. Pragmatically New Urbanism never used directly the Academy, they addressed the organization of the people. But in the last years Daniel Solomon and Colin Rowe saw a change in the movement: The New Urbanism now is trying to find a sort of consolation in methods based on measurement guaranteed norms and universal values. They are accusing New Urbanism of moving slowing from Metis to Episteme and particularly they point the finger into the new way of the so called “smart code”. The illusion that applying certain smart codes we can guarantee that a building, an environment, a city are sustainable. Since then the New Urbanism was forgetting that the Sustainability was not an issue in the city of continuity because all the necessity was dominated by the Surviving and Sustainability was implicit in every architectural operation. It was achieved also because architecture was local while nowadays with the globalization the sustainability becomes a product guaranteed through norms, codes... but in reality does not work in that way.

There are three teachings that Salomon’s book gives us:

1. The city is not a summation of serial parts, aggregated as modules of a submarine, but an organism of parts linked by instances of necessity. The urbs which is the domain of architects is the theater of civitas, which manifests itself in daily activities, life.
2. Contrary to the heroic image conveyed by the stars of contemporary architecture that sees users as spectators, the architect is a silent and anonymous civil servant who puts his profession at the service of the community.
3. Large cultural movements such as New Urbanism that have changed people’s feelings about housing and city issues require strict continuous self-criticism to maintain an avant-garde role in exercising discipline and not falling into the fashion routine.