

L'ARCHITETTURA DELLE CITTÀ
MONOGRAPH SERIES



Società Scientifica Ludovico Quaroni

LUCIO VALERIO BARBERA

**FIVE EASY PIECES
DEDICATED TO
LUDOVICO QUARONI**

L'ARCHITETTURA DELLE CITTÀ
MONOGRAPH SERIES #2



EDIZIONI NUOVA CULTURA

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Preface

by Anna Irene Del Monaco

Genres of writing and ‘of schools’

The first edition of this book was published in Italian in 1989, about two years after the death of Ludovico Quaroni; this edition in English is addressed mainly to non-Italian scholars with an interest in modern architecture in Italy. The author, interviewed by the present writer for this second edition, has touched on a series of issues that supplement some of the themes of the book and which have been included here. This preface also includes some remarks on books on Ludovico Quaroni written by some of his pupils.

The purpose of the book and the reason for its title

Lucio Valerio Barbera relates how he began writing *Five Easy Pieces*, dedicated to Ludovico Quaroni soon after his death, when he was asked by Antonino Terranova to write a piece for a commemoration of the teacher they had both shared, which was to be held at Pescara, where Terranova had recently been appointed full professor. Barbera does not remember exactly what kind of an event it was (a conference, or the publication of a collection of papers, etc.); he began writing, and gradually, one by one the ‘Easy Pieces’ took form, but, given the time that had passed, no longer for Terranova’s original proposal.

And so, since the original purpose had been abandoned, the publishers made changes to the project and initially suggested that it should consist of six pieces, of which in the end only five were actually written.

The idea was to follow the analogy of the musical offering typical of string quartets. Usually, but not always, composers of the classical, Romantic or modern era composed quartets in series of six. For example, the Op. 18 of Beethoven or the Op. 1 of Haydn, much loved by the author, contained six quartets; at other times the number could be more than six, or more often, less – which could be considered as an unfinished series, like the pieces presented here. Quartets – chamber music in general – for small or very small groups of instruments is a form of musical composition that requires experience and great skill on the part of the composer. It enables him to explore much more intimate musical worlds compared to orchestral works, and he is compelled, by the reduced consistency of the instrumentation, to display the breadth of his artistry and sensibility and to reach heights of expressiveness with the smallest of resources

At the beginning, then, the ‘easy pieces’ dedicated to Ludovico Quaroni envisaged by Lucio Valerio Barbera, or rather the episodes to be narrated, should have been six. The sixth piece was in fact never written; the author tells us that the sixth piece would have been (or will be) called ‘Sophia, Sophia, Σοφία’ and that perhaps, one day, as I hope, the series will be completed. The last piece would have addressed an issue of a personal nature (but we can also say, with due respect, of a mythographical nature) in the life of Ludovico Quaroni.

Barbera also tells us that the title *Five Easy Pieces* should have been different; the coincidence of having the same title as the prize-winning 1970’s American film directed by Bob Rafelson and starring Jack Nicholson, did not exactly inspire him, or at least not very much. But a different title would have meant some kind of introductory note explaining the musical analogy of the collection with the string quartets, and so, after some discussion of other possibilities, the title stayed as *Five Easy Pieces*.

Dialogue as a device

Given the imperfect parallel between musical and literary composition, therefore, in this book an intimate intellectual atmosphere prevails, which reveals the author's skill in creating a narrative and also in engaging in a type of critical writing that is rarely undertaken by architect-intellectuals.

The five episodes in the book cover almost thirty years, from 1958 to 1987, which were years that remained deeply preserved in the author's memory. The literary form of the pieces gives all of them a common structure: they are dialogues; usually consisting of brief exchanges of few words, spoken or written, between the author and Quaroni. In one of them – *Charisma* – the dialogue takes place between Quaroni and a larger chorus. In another – *Elective Misunderstanding* – we have a double dialogue at a distance, a trio, if we return to the musical metaphor, between Quaroni, Lodovico Barbiano di Belgiojoso and Barbera. The last piece is a longer conversation by Quaroni on himself; a taking stock and a valediction.

What we have here however is what might be termed a 'colloquial' genre, a form that strikes a particular chord with Lucio Valerio Barbera, an architect and intellectual, already historically disposed, following family tradition, towards the study of music and poetry. Returning to the dialogue motif, we can highlight another important issue that Barbera has recently examined in his essay *Quaroni-Muratori, between dialogue and silence*, included in his book *The radical city of Ludovico Quaroni*. Referring to the generation that Ludovico Quaroni and Saverio Muratori belonged to, both of them teachers of whom, at different times and in different ways, Barbera was a pupil, the author says that "I am however convinced that most of their generation of Italian, or rather Roman bourgeoisie (my parents' generation) had spent their childhood and adolescence being educated into

silence and embarrassed dialogue”¹. But the habit of using dialogue as an unavoidable form of personal confession and cultural endeavour was transferred from Quaroni and Muratori’s generation to that of Barbera, who was thirty years younger. Dialogue was used by the new generation in a much more mature and self-assured fashion, extending its use to the social community and to politics (one need only think of the wealth of intellectual and ideological dialogue that took place in the fifties, up to the explosive events that engaged all Italian youth in 1968 and for more than ten years after, especially in the case of young architects and architecture students). For the young final-year students and graduates of the Faculty of Architecture in Rome in the 1950’s and 60’s, the embarrassed dialogue with their teachers was transformed into a training ground for self-educating themselves. One recalls the debate between the very young group of architects from the AUA, gathered round Tafuri, of whom Barbera was a member, and, for example, the group consisting of Paolo Portoghesi, Gianfranco Caniggia, Paolo Marconi, and the GRAU (Rome Group of Architecture and Urban Planning), from which came Sandro Anselmi. For the youngsters, it was an experience that forced them to make crucial choices, to participate in cultural and ideological competition and conflicts that were much more difficult than what faced them in an ordinary research doctorate.

Dialogue as a device for intellectual growth is a much more effective undertaking when it takes place between teacher and pupil, as it in fact takes form – or takes the stage, let’s say – in *Five Easy Pieces*. It is the required performance of *improvisation on a theme* (to continue with the musical metaphor) that always begins with the introduction of a precise *subject* of study that is shared by and stimulates both parties, and which an instrumentalist in training and a grand

¹ Lucio Valerio Barbera, *The Radical City of Ludovico Quaroni*, Gangemi Editore 2014, p. 220

master can both contend with, or a young actor who is still to make his name but is full of enthusiasm, with a skilled performer, somewhat jaded yet highly and resplendently experienced.

The atmosphere of the dialogues

The episodes that make up *Five Easy Pieces* are constructed round a few snatches of dialogue, but take place in a narrative atmosphere or space that we need to be aware of to understand the work and its attempt to make sense of Quaroni's world.

The first piece, *In every style*, is made up of an increasing number of exchanges that form a rather highly charged dialogue – perhaps the most tensely expressed of the five – up to the point where Quaroni quite casually spells out a crucial aspect of his way of being and being seen to be an architect: “Because I’m good in every style... and also because every object and every person can exist together with their opposite”. This utterance overturns the moral judgement passed on Quaroni by Manfredo Tafuri in his famous book written in 1964².

The second piece, *Charisma*, is built round a *coup de theatre* by Quaroni, who, at the end of an episode that is the most chorally orchestrated of the five, says, “Asserting my prerogative as Chairman of this Seminar, I reserve the right not to speak”, and a few lines later, there is Aldo Rossi's coda when he says, “He's really intelligent.”. The piece describes the attitude of self-restraint and embarrassed silence that falls between Quaroni and Giancarlo De Carlo after the latter's speech at the end of the famous Seminar of Arezzo in 1963, in which Barbera took part, along with others who

² Manfredo Tafuri, *Ludovico Quaroni e lo sviluppo dell'architettura moderna in Italia*, Edizioni di Comunità, Milan, 1964

would become important members of the teaching body of architecture in Italy in the years that followed. And so we are told of the defining moment when the unlikely cultural association between Quaroni and Aldo Rossi began, which later was to include two significant episodes: the national convention where Aldo Rossi, still very young, was acknowledged by Quaroni as being worthy to become a full professor of an Italian university, and Rossi's preface to Quaroni's book *La Torre di Babele*³.

The third piece, *Schubert was stupid*, opens a window on to the ongoing dialogue between Quaroni and Barbera on music, understood as a metaphor for architecture, and used to make cutting remarks on the architect's art and status. This piece is perfectly in tune with the first piece, if we think of Quaroni's statement "Because I'm good (at designing) in every style" as it relates to Tafuri's provocative comment, from which the third piece takes its cue, that one needed to be 'stupid' to really be a good architect. I think this episode is closely linked to the fifth, which is even more dense in its musical metaphors, divided as it is into two movements, from which emerge Richard Strauss and Johannes Brahms, both controversial modern masters, and both, indeed, extremely 'good in every style'. First we have the episode with Schubert – a Romantic in classical garb – then the episode with Strauss and Brahms, whose artistic mindset, especially in the case of Brahms, coalesced around the two poles of Classicism and Romanticism⁴. For this reason, as Barbera reveals in his conversations for students and younger friends, in the last years of his life Quaroni often said that the only composer in his extensive music library he needed to listen to now was Brahms. In his youth, Quaroni had been an accomplished student of the

³ Cfr. Lucio Valerio Barbera, *Per un'architettura impura*, in G. Canella, *Atti della Giornata di studi in onore di Guido Canella*, Franco Angeli, 2014

⁴ Alberto Batisti (edited by), *Massimo Mila. Brahms e Wagner*, Einaudi 1994

cello, and from the beginning his inclinations as architect and intellectual centred round the two opposing poles of his day – modernism and tradition in architecture, and he seemed almost to form a harmonious attachment to Brahms, admiring his enormous professional wisdom and sensitive to, and partaking of, the harsh criticism the composer suffered in his lifetime. Perhaps it would not be improper to give to Quaroni the description Schoenberg gave to Brahms: ‘forward-thinking’; a forward-thinking academic. A definition that even Quaroni himself might agree with. The fourth piece, *Elective Misunderstanding*, returns to the relations between the academic personalities from Milan and Rome, a subject already touched upon in the second piece. The exchanges used in the dialogues deal with the embarrassed friendships, strongly shared values and long-lasting mutual admiration that Quaroni and Belgiojoso (BBPR) kept up throughout their lives, from their first meeting in EUR in 1938-39.

The fifth and last piece, *Letzte Lieder*, goes back to examining the meaning of modernity, of the changes in language and in hopes. Perhaps the main subject of the intricate dialogue is the reasoned consideration of the ‘expressive instruments’ that architecture makes use of to affirm its ‘progression’ through history, its modernity. Music appears once again, in the shape of the musical instruments from many cultures hanging everywhere on the walls of Quaroni’s house as the only decoration, and music designs the scene and defines the atmosphere in which the dialogue develops. Ludovico’s interest in the musical instruments of all ages comes out in the first lines, and is further reinforced by the well-known fact that he was a collector. “*It’s a gekkin*,” he says, handling a small Eastern stringed instrument, “maybe better a ruan – Japanese, with four strings... of silk”.

In the tale there appears the music of Luciano Berio, who becomes for quite a long time almost a third character in the dialogue, a basso continuo in the lower

register, a determining presence in a dialogue dedicated to the expressive instruments of modernity. In one of his last writings, Berio, making architecture a metaphor for music, says, “in the past, it was said that music changed because its materials changed. With the advent of iron and glass, it was also said that architecture was changed. However I believe that architecture had already changed when architects realised they could use glass and iron. The sine-wave, square-wave, white noise and impulse generators of the Fifties, in the experiments in electro-acoustic music, did not change the future perspectives of music; these had already been changed from the moment that musicians addressed the problem of assimilating these generators and transforming those wave forms, and when they adopted essentially additive standards of sound assemblage typical of those years”⁵.

Barbera says that he wrote the last sentence of the last piece, and thus of the whole work, while listening over and over to *Fandango*⁶, a composition by Luigi Boccherini, a piece with an Andalusian lilt to it, haunting in its mellifluousness, which could be repeated *ad infinitum*, as in much of ancient (baroque) music. This was ‘natural’ music, like an architecture without architects, created by Boccherini to give expression to an abstraction, as he felt the need to take a new direction. This natural music was inherently multi-cultural, with all its rhythmic, instrumental, ‘ethnic’ influences, like the architecture of Mediterranean and oriental cities, whose hidden treasure Quaroni spent his whole life seeking, in order to transpose it into the modern city. Perhaps *Five Easy Pieces* is a kind of embrasure in the castle wall of international modernity, from where one can see in the distance a vista that is no longer attainable, the

⁵ Angela Ida De Benedictis (edited by), *Luciano Berio. Scritti sulla Musica*, Einaudi 2014, pg. 489

⁶ Luigi Boccherini, *Fandango*, n.4. D major (G. 448)

panorama of a forgotten heritage and abandoned pathways, a landscape of nostalgia for things left undone. I believe that there is no better proof that speaks of this sentiment linking Quaroni and Barbera, than a personal note written by Lucio Barbera to his brother Luigi Maria, who was also an architect and music-lover, and who I thank for letting me know about it and giving me the permission to publish it. In it, Lucio Barbera talks of music, naturally, and I ask the reader, once again, to imagine he is talking about architecture, and to substitute the names of the great musicians with those of the architects, famous or unknown, who were active in the same era of the past. Those architects were following paths that were arduous, sophisticated and revolutionary, and even if they failed in their attempt, they provided a sound basis for our sacred modernity, now long consigned to oblivion. Or else they passed on to us the idea that there is another path, heading towards different, more intriguing horizons: “like Quaroni”, Barbera seems to be telling us.

Gianfranco Caniggia, in the book’s prologue, says, “You Quaroni people, when you talk about Architecture, you always make out that Architecture is really something quite different from what you are talking about, or from what you can talk to each other about.” And Barbera replies: “This is why, to talk about architecture, sometimes we talk of other things”.

Here is the text of the note: “you might be surprised by my surprise when I began to understand, in my own way, how important was the link between Saint Colombe and Marin Marais, which was only the most significant, and mysterious, focal point of a concerted, shared culture of experimentation that for more than a century seemed to take music, and therefore the music-listening public at all levels of society, in directions that were much different from those followed for most of the eighteenth century. These were directions adhered to by the great Italian Baroque masters,

by Domenico Scarlatti in Spain, Charles Avison in England, and the versatile constellation of great French viola players, Louis de Caix d'Hervelois, Louis Heudelinne and Jean Barriere, who in turn forged the link between the viola and the cello. Also intimately involved were Handel and Bach, not in their ceremonial, regal or sacred music, but in their experiments in harpsichord music, in solo instruments or in small instrumental groupings. The new musical horizons were openly embraced by Jean-Philippe Rameau in his meditative studies for the keyboard; he was the most modern of all of them, and the longer defeted. These future musical developments were in no way tainted by the exhilaration of the *galant* style, nor by the ephemeral joys of Italian opera, nor by the brash assurance of Enlightenment idealism; they were imbued with the knowledge that science and music – just like physics and mathematics, closely bound one to the other – did not open up better worlds, but only revealed the deep mystery of human life and the hopelessness of its fleeting existence. On this point, you see, they were all brothers of Lucretius, even if they did not know it”.

Quaroni's pupils writing on Quaroni

The episodes of *Five Easy Pieces*, linked together by topics that all relate to the subject of Ludovico Quaroni, are therefore organised in a sequence where the first, third and fifth episode are tied together, as are the second and the fourth, along the lines of the classical canons of musical form. Together they thus create a unique monograph on Ludovico Quaroni, that differs from others which are far more weighty (by Tafuri, Terranova, or Ciorra), in that it is the only one written (not the only one published) by one of his students and assistants after Quaroni's death. The work has not therefore had any direct reviewing or the stimulus of Quaroni's presence, which was the case for the others.

Addressing the differences in intent and structure between the monographs on Quaroni written by his direct assistants and disciples⁷ might be a way to arouse interest in Barbera's work, especially on the part of readers who are young or not Italian.

In 1964 Manfredo Tafuri published his book *Ludovico Quaroni e lo sviluppo dell'architettura moderna in Italia* with the Edizioni di Comunità. The introduction to the book is a close-knit essay explaining the purposes of the work, which is divided into two sections: the pre-war works, and Quaroni's post-war activities. The second part is better documented than the first, also because it describes a period of design projects that is considerably longer. Both sections include photographs and designs. The written text is often at odds with the sequence of the projects illustrated: the writer describes projects one at a time, and explores the political and cultural events behind the projects, indicating the changes from one stage to another. Tafuri explains the idea behind the book: "We will attempt to use an analysis of Quaroni's work as a particular set of experiences belonging to a much larger picture, of which it supplies the premise and to which it provides the perspective, with the purpose of using the research to carry out an investigation based on a critical interpretation of this perspective". Of Quaroni, Tafuri says: "Within the context of Italian architectural development, Quaroni has until now always had a special place; he is certainly, above all, the most experimental of architects, when we consider the kind of experimentalism that has been a feature of cultural ventures of the past sixteen years. Actually, it is rather the case that he can be seen as

⁷ Here we should mention Lucio Barbera's recently published *The Radical City of Ludovico Quaroni*, Gangemi Editore 2014, and the book by Antonio Riondino, *Ludovico Quaroni e la didattica dell'architettura nella Facoltà di Roma tra gli anni '60 e '70*, Gangemi Editore 2012

a master of experimentalism, which in his works takes on a form of moral significance. Consequently he has become a symbol of the agonising series of events that plagued architecture in Italy, an archetypal point of reference, as someone deeply immersed in a setting that is mirrored with absolute precision in his work.”

Here it is interesting to note also the comment Maristella Casciato made in her essay *The Italian Mosaic: The Architect as Historian*⁸, about Tafuri’s book on Quaroni: “the first authentic historical synthesis of Italian modern architecture from fascism to post-war neo-realism.”

The second monograph on Ludovico Quaroni and his work was edited by Antonino Terranova, published in 1985 and entitled *Ludovico Quaroni. Architetture per cinquant’anni*⁹. After prefaces by Terranova and Quaroni, the book is divided into four sections, dealing with Quaroni’s work under four headings: By way of the monument, All-embracing quality, The design of the city, and Six ways of thinking about urban planning.

Terranova explains his purposes in a significant passage: “Ludovico Quaroni was born in the years when art had to face the European crisis of conscience [...] today he can once again present himself as a Master, as one who carried the ‘baton’ of architecture through the process of modernisation, and rediscovered tradition, but without making a fetish of it.” In the book, Terranova is attempting to place Quaroni’s work in a theoretical and critical context, as can be seen by the terms he employs: the virtuoso spiral, the intercession of contradiction, the style beneath the sign of the city, classical language as a hidden law, deformation

⁸ Maristella Casciato and Barry Fifield, *The Italian Mosaic: The Architect as Historians*, in “Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians”, Vol. 62, No. 1, 2003

⁹ Antonino Terranova (edited by), *Ludovico Quaroni. Architetture per cinquant’anni*, Gangemi 1985

as romantic expression, tension as a method and as a style. Quaroni wrote many of the essays himself and on page 45, he explains his view of the purpose of the book and its difference from the motives behind Tafuri's: "the reason that we have thought it appropriate to set aside the usual chronological order, in an attempt to throw light on my fifty-six years as an architect, and use what Terranova calls 'a scalable system', is mostly due to our desire to differ from Manfredo Tafuri's book, which focuses on moments in my work contrasted with the work of others – or of certain others in particular, generally seen and analysed in relation to the cultural, political, civil or personal situation they had to deal with; and also to explain the behaviour of a man devoted to uncertainty in a world that he considers to be his only up to a certain point. On the other hand, since this book is also a kind of catalogue connected to an exhibition of my work, it seemed logical to place more emphasis on the 'internal' features of the work rather than its relationship to the 'development of modern architecture in Italy'.

In 1989 there appeared another important item in print about Quaroni, which is, one could say, a joint effort: a long interview with Quaroni by Manuel de Sola Morales, published in issue n° 7 of UR *Urbanismo Revista*, in the form of a monograph, in English and Spanish. The text contains organised transcripts of comments and replies by Quaroni during the interview, which concentrated on his best-known design projects. I personally feel that this article is among the most interesting ever written on Quaroni's work. It is straightforward, simple, without any redundant critical analysis, and is rich in details of various kinds, anecdotes and incisive comments by Quaroni on himself and his times. Here as never before emerges one of the ideas that Quaroni held regarding his way of being an architect, remarked upon

by Roberto Maestro in a recent interview¹⁰: “He had an idea of architectural design as teamwork, where each person was assigned a different role. This derived from his experience in the Rome film-making school. Each actor played his part separately, guided by a director, and following a plan or a script. In some ways he saw himself as more a scriptwriter than a director, ready to engage in discussion and to give space to the opinions of others, even if they were younger and less experienced than he was”¹⁰.

Pippo Ciorra’s book on Quaroni, *Ludovico Quaroni, 1911-1987. Opere e progetti*¹¹ was published after Quaroni’s death, almost simultaneously with *Five Easy Pieces*. The book does not contain anything written by Quaroni, but according to what Lucio Barbera remembers, Ciorra wrote the book after consulting the archives in Quaroni’s studio, and, certainly, consulting Quaroni himself. Terranova’s book had been published a mere four years earlier, and Ciorra had contributed to it, editing the essay ‘Le Opere’, with a careful examination of Quaroni’s urban design projects, in the section *Six ways of thinking about urban planning*. Ciorra’s book has the same format as Tafuri’s, with a long introductory essay which mentions each design and gives a general outline of their history. There follows a section on the design projects, organised chronologically. In his densely-argued text, it can be seen that Tafuri felt the need to accurately piece together everything that had been asserted or established, especially by Terranova and Tafuri who were obviously the essential points of reference, and naturally by Quaroni, either directly or quoted in other sources.

¹⁰ Alessandro Camiz, *Intevista a Roberto Maestro*, in Giuseppe Strappa (edited by) *Studi sulla periferia est di Roma*, Franco Angeli, Milan 2012, pp.129-130

¹¹ Pippo Ciorra, *Ludovico Quaroni, 1911-1987. Opere e progetti, Documenti di architettura*, Electa, Milano 1989

Ciorra's text reflects his rigorous archival researches, and is much more systematic than is the case with Tafuri or Terranova's contributions, which instead give an impression of a more historically and critically-based attitude towards Quaroni's work, in widely different ways; they also had direct contact with Quaroni during the time the essays were written, even though twenty years previously.

In several passages one has the impression that the person who really commissioned the books by Tafuri and Terranova (and very probably also Ciorra's) was actually Quaroni himself.

Lucio Valerio Barbera is someone with a different profile compared to Tafuri, Terranova, Ciorra or Sola Morales – just as all the pupils chosen by Quaroni are different one from the other. His interest in Quaroni's design projects derives from, above all, the influence that they may have had on his way of seeing architecture and the contradictory relationship between western modernity and the endless flow of history.

This emerges very strongly in this present volume¹². On the frontispiece, Barbera gives a clear indication of his intentions: "For students of Architecture who are well-educated and for architects interested in getting to know better a Master of their trade".

¹² Lucio Valerio Barbera takes a different approach in his recent book *The radical city of Ludovico Quaroni*

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