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Interview with Alessandro Rocca

By Rotating Editor Milan. Published on 22 July 2015.



Interview with Alessandro Rocca taken on 10/06/2015 at Politecnico di Milano, curated by Luisa Selo

Alessandro Rocca is associate professor of architectural and urban design at Politecnico di Milano.

Among his books we remember *Il giardino a crescita illimitata. Riflessioni e progetti per il giardino dei Giusti di Milano* (2013); *Architettura ambientale. Progetti, tecniche, paesaggi* (2012); *Architettura Low Cost Low Tech* (2010); *Parchi e fiumi. Il paesaggio naturale del territorio milanese* (2008); *Planetary Gardens. The Landscape Architecture of Gilles Clément* (2008); *Natural Architecture* (2007). He was also editor of *Lotus International*, 'Quaderni di Lotus' and 'Navigator'. He is the founder and the director of the bimonthly online magazine *Fuoco amico*.

Considering your work online, what is your opinion about the relationship between architecture and the virtual world made of blogs, social media and web magazines? What are good and bad sides?

It is a really complicated issue because it is about the way of communicating information and the online system is very good at this. Anyway, it is not effective when we deal with the spread of knowledge.

In the communication of architecture, the aspect of spreading knowledge was really important and it was realized through paper magazines, probably with some arbitrariness, but in a really effective way. Paper magazines have built the culture of architecture for entire generations. Nowadays, on the web, the information takes the place of the spreading of knowledge and this is definitely a turning point. For those of my generation, belonging to a pre-computer world, the idea of broadcasting articulated and complex thoughts about architecture through the new media is missing.

Everything seems reduced to a tweet.

The tweet can be ingenious, fast and global, but it's not possible to write a whole series of issues with it. The medium is the message and, since the

medium is changed, the message has changed as well. Architecture, which is a medium too, is completely transformed.

Anyway, I live the online condition as the perfect normality, and wandering among websites, mailing, blogging, facebook, issuu, etc., I edit my pocket magazine, Fuoco amico, which make sense just because of, and thanks to, the net.

What is the reason of the recent large spread of architectural websites? And what do you suggest the architecture students should do in order to orientate inside this 'maze'?

The important thing is not to be limited just to the Internet. The web is totally fine and it is also needful, but it doesn't have to be 'just the web'. It is important to have also other relationships with architecture. This means that we need to read books, notice the architecture, see important exhibitions and try to understand, for instance, how the last Venice Biennale was.

Understanding the Biennale through the web or by visiting the exhibition, are totally two different issues.

What are the features of a good student of architecture?

I think we don't need 'good' architecture students.

An architecture student must have a dialectic and almost conflictual relationship with Institutions. I'm personally unhappy to see good architecture students. I'm happy when I see passionate and motivated ones who are able to understand some issues and break some rules.

Could you tell me the major differences between the architecture students of your generation and the actual ones?

They represent two completely different worlds. For example, the manual skills are missing these days.

The architecture students of my generation learnt how to draw, rub out, roll drawing sheets, how to use the blade, the white rubber and the

yellow one and much more. There were different tools and manual operations which represent the equivalent of the computer tools used by this generation. The media have changed as well. Even if nowadays students often study the same books, they have completely different work experience.

What is Politecnico offering in comparison to other foreign universities?

I think that Politecnico is a good school for some reasons.

The first one is that it is located in Milan. The relationship with the city is indeed old, strong and deep-rooted at the same time so studying here is a good training for sure. A student has to understand what 'design' means in Milan, because Milan is a city of great projects, which are not just the architecture ones. Milan is also the city of interior design, fashion, communication design and books publishing. There is a certain attitude of the city towards the world of design, which also animates our university.

Another important aspect of Politecnico is its dimension, because it is a really big university. This might be problematic, but it also offers some potentiality in terms of personalization of the study plan and of the whole learning experience. Moreover, there is a Milanese school, which articulated following different fields, but has the same origins: from Ernesto Nathan Rogers to Aldo Rossi, Giorgio Grassi, Guido Canella, Antonio Monestiroli and also Renzo Piano if you wish.

It is possible to start from a modernism, which was deeply significant, to reach at the end some contemporary young architects of Milan, who are currently doing some excellent projects.

Is an architecture student of Politecnico once graduated ready for work? What is your advice for a graduate architect looking for a job?

Honestly, I believe that a preparation for the world of work doesn't exist. The world of work presents indeed a large variety of situations. It is wrong

to think that after graduation students are already prepared to make an executive project of a building, manage an urban development plan, work in the city planning office or for a real estate company. Anyway, I've never thought that a professional preparation was interesting and useful. In fact, it is possible to work in an architecture company for six months or so, to obtain all these skills.

Considering some European Union guidelines for the future, the state exam (an exam which allows to be a licensed architect after the graduation in Italy) won't exist anymore and it will be substituted by one or two years of internship, which will represent the new transition phase to the world of work. At university, the students have to learn to be well-educated, curious, ready for the comparison of ideas and coming from a cosmopolitan world – something which Milan and Politecnico are offering – to build their own intellectual profile.

Therefore, if students have the brainpower, they will also be able to learn quickly during their first phases of work experience. Actually, every single project represents a challenge which brings the architects to research, learn and understand. Our job consists of a continuous updating and testing about issues, which can change every day.

Can you describe in two adjectives the Expo and tell me the reason of your choice?

The positive aspect is that it is an historic event. Expo is an operation, which first has broken the borders of the city. For instance, the 'Nuova Fiera' has remained outside the city, even if it is really close. Expo is the first big intervention that is changing the scale of the city.

It is creating a new centrality, even if ephemeral and completely outside the historic city, for the first time there is a perception of the city under a different scale. A scale which is not corresponding to the urban traditional scale anymore, but to the scale of the metropolitan city. If we really start thinking about Milan as a metropolitan city, we can articulate solutions to some problems under totally different perspectives.

Furthermore, the recent infrastructure works – the outer ring road – are operations which are changing the city and its perception.

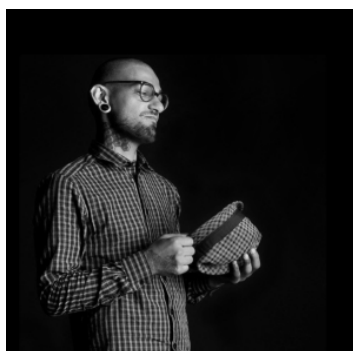
The negative aspect of Expo is that it is very ordinary. Even considering that this is a kind of 'folkloristic show', I was expected to find some surprises, something unexpected, but it was a disappointment under this point of view. It is the exhibition of globalism in its unifying and trivializing version.

Author of the picture: arch. Maurizio Petronio ©

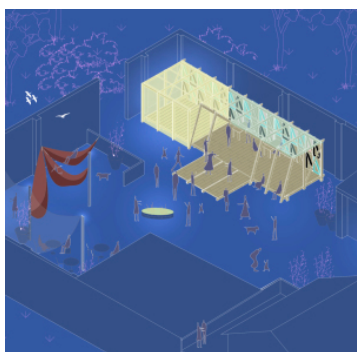
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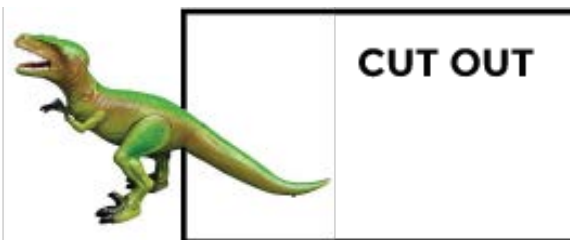
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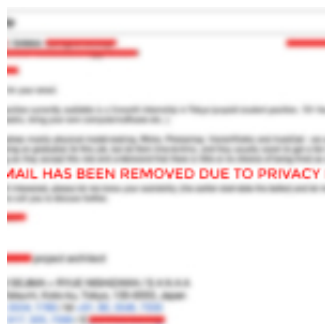
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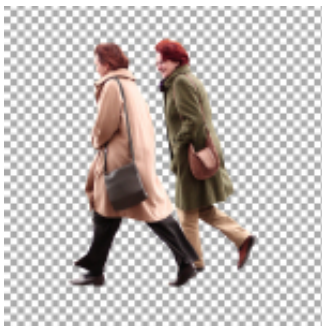
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