

Leonardo Ricci

Back on Sorgane. An Open Neighborhood Adhering to Existence

Leonardo Ricci wrote the following unpublished letter to Giovanni Michelucci to explain his master the project for Sorgane's possible development both under an existential and an operative perspectives. The text of the letter is kept in Casa Studio Ricci and was translated by the curator.

My dear Giovanni,

ever since I came out of the Antico Fattore I have been sick and have been brooding to myself whether today's heated discussion, which threatened to create rifts among the "Sorganini," was good or bad. And cold and rational as well as emotional and irrational reasoning cannot give me exact answers. Perhaps because it was at the same time good and bad, and perhaps neither good nor bad, somewhat like all things in life, that is, existential acts that always involve in themselves that particular form of "friction," called by men "pain."

Certainly it is, apart from any element in "moral" or "intellectual" judgment about what happened today, that tonight I feel the desire to have a "love" chat with Sorgane's colleagues. So I am writing this letter to you so that you may make yourself an interpreter to others. It is just laziness not to make many copies and send them to everyone and perhaps also a sense of modesty that keeps me from being totally and brutally "open" with too many people. With



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you it's easier for me whether it's out of habit, whether it's out of filial affection, whether it's because you're more experienced than I am, whether it's just so I'm driven by it from the inside.

I said "loving" chat. And since my way of loving (when I really love) is certainly not, as you well know, sweet, sentimental, detached, but very often violent, jealous, sometimes even cruel, certainly in this letter some of these characters will shine through, so I beg you and the others to excuse me not because of "lying faith" (which I would not consider extenuating) but precisely because of that attempt I make to break between us those last veils or walls, depending on whether you mean it.

Again, this is how it happens to me. When I am in love with a thing, my woman, a child, a tree or a starry night it doesn't matter, to feel a state of "communion" is necessary.

The osmosis between beings, this mysterious decanting of universal realities whereby what is unknown, foreign, absurd, becomes known, friend, logical (in the sense of *logos*), seems to me the only satisfying condition of love. So when, in spite of love, I prevent, for imponderable issues (fatigue, habit, boredom and so on), this "creative" act that the state of the conversation can give, I sometimes become as if blinded with wrath.

Today I am a little older and calmer. But even with a little more wisdom it is still the yelling, the beating perhaps, the swearing, all that at the seemingly most bestial if you will, that arises within me as a "holy wrath" to break those barriers that divide me from the things I love. The pretending that everything is all right in the thousand ways that human mystification has taught us, seems to me not a sign of love, but the death of love.

Now I have fallen in love with Sorgane, and with Sorgane I have fallen even

Fig. 1
Pictures of the building type D "La Nave", pictures by Giuliano Gameliel, Casa Studio Ricci.

more in love with those I already loved and who work for Sorgane, and I would really like to fall in love with everyone, even those whose lives for thousand reasons, whether for lack of sufficient contact or for others unknown to me, had prevented me from falling in love.

Because I am certain that this is the only possible condition for something to be born true and objective.

I think that more or less this is the story of all of us although the methodology is certainly different.

I am no longer naive, though. I know that loving exists, but I know that it is not enough. One must also know how to love. And I also know that if one does not know how to love afterwards there is the wound. And each wound hurts me, you, everyone, cats and worms included. Now for Sorgane we have to know how to love.

Because Sorgane is not just a private act (I love, I can't love, I take the consequences: game over). This is with people as well as with a work of art: (for example, I mistake a painting because my heart was not sufficiently penetrating, I take it and burn it).

Sorgane is a public act. It's about making houses where men then live, and it's about making houses possibly "historically appropriate" and all the "components that history today gives us as the basic elements of our analysis, our judgment, finally our design.

And we have been "ambitious." We have declared among ourselves several times that we want to make Sorgane something within limits (of cost, of environment, of authority, of a thousand other things) which represents what urban planning and world¹ architecture of the last fifty years have done, a fixed point, new objective, participant of the human adventure in the present historical condition in its plenitude or at least tending toward this plenitude.

We all have made mistakes and we will make mistakes again. And we will make mistakes for Sorgane as well. And mistakes must be punished. It is my understanding that the Father or whoever for that matter makes everything pay in life once you have the grace of being brought into the world. Grace then that perhaps someone else or we ourselves have paid. But without going into the seemingly metaphysical or transcendent, it seems certain to me that if some mistakes cannot be avoided precisely because they are out of our reach due to human limitation, other kinds of mistakes can be avoided² if the problem-setting is done with that clarity, openness, total sincerity even if the latter things often cost effort, constraint, pain.

I went out of the house to get some rest. And I saw the eclipse of the moon. Here is an example that comes so naturally to clarify my thinking even more.

1 The word was underlined by Michelucci in the original document

2 The word was underlined by Michelucci in the original document

Once savages (now I don't know anymore) created a "taboo" of every fact mysterious to them, so that an eclipse of the moon was an event that made them afraid (devil or god, spell or benefit they could interpret it). Animals certainly still feel this taboo. The dogs tonight here in Monterinaldi seem mad and you can hear the barks echoing in the valley. We men who know the motion of the earth and the moon are no longer afraid of it. Not because a rational thing only makes us understand this little boy's mechanical game, but because a "new dimension" has been added to man. It is only a matter of "awareness." The mystery! Or the wonderful mystery remains. Indeed deeper is the mystery now that we "know" the juggling of motion. But the soul remains at peace and I remain hopeful waiting for the moon to pop up again through these wonderful strange phases of light and shadow that speak to me even more of the stupendous miracle (in the etymological sense) of the life of the world.

And now back to Sorgane.

I would not want to be hurt again. If others will prevent us as much as we desire, because they are stronger than us despite our fighting for this reality, it is ok; but to screw us among ourselves would be a stupid thing for boys to do. To not screw us over there is only one thing left. Specify what we want to achieve in Sorgane, always within the limits imposed by the actual conditions. Which I believe is not bad but only good because realities of life.

It has been about 12 days since I started this letter. First fatigue, then work, then a thousand other things, prevented me from continuing it.

This is how things happen. You set out to reach the "moon" when you are a boy, then slowly you get tired and the moon stays up there.

But not all things are the "moon up there." There are things that belong to us. And we must not "let them go". So on Monday we met again, talked calmly about Sorgane. Some people made concrete, serious and interesting proposals, but in my opinion, the "fundamental" part was glossed over so much that I again, with less violence but still with a certain firmness felt the duty to precise again.

What in my opinion is the fundamental part? I try to become a little abstract to make myself better understood.

In the things of history there are two that history itself leaves us with: one is real, the other conventional. If the former is therefore valid, the latter is only hindrance to continue the journey.

As it is, if any accident (total war, atomic bomb, sunspots) destroyed what man has done, the former would remain, the latter would disappear.

Let us therefore imagine that this is the case.

Let us therefore imagine that Sorgane for a moment was the beginning of a work that some men who escaped disaster feel they must do in order to continue life. How will we act? This is the crux of the matter, earth, sky,

geography, children, women, men. Flying into space, living in this new multi-dimensional space, navigating the cosmos. Smiling, making love, being born and dying. It is always the mystery. But a new mystery, no longer that of taboos. That of the consciousness of existing.

If so, it seems to me that the "structure" of the new neighborhood would be open, free, spatial, new.

What meaning would certain elements of the ancient city have? What meaning would those old streets, those old habitual spaces, those once-human relationships, now inhuman, limited, narrow, elbow-to-elbow, where since man's adventure on earth no "sign" exists? What would be the meaning of those cubes or rectangles or parallelepipeds, placed side by side, static, inert, without cosmic participation of existence? And within these boxes, tall little boxes where men enclose themselves more and more, separate themselves from others, limit themselves, kill themselves because they kill the intrinsic vital realities of man? That those courtyards, courtyards, courtyards, barren and dead spaces that do not participate in the sky, in motion, in the rising and setting sun, in the breathing trees, in the integrated contemporary life of all things that stand on and off the earth?

That those absurd separations of functions of man "the religious," "the political," the "public," the "private," as if man were only religious in the church, political in the town hall, public in the social center, private in the bedroom?

But what is this perhaps life? And is believing life an abstraction and not reality, madness and not ---³ things? But is not the rest just conformity and not adherence to existence? Can we cut those natural spaces, calcine parts of them, make them become tombstones, ---⁴ to men sky, moon and sun? But where will they make love, immerse themselves in space, live, if you want to call it that, God? And where are the dead? And those who will come where are they? But wouldn't it then be better to do nothing more, to sleep in the woods, to make love in the meadows, to walk barefoot, to eat sitting on stones, if we everything of life is to be destroyed? And this may still seem abstract and untrue. But are we born with underpants the collar and the vest?

I am neither a pagan nor a naturalist. And so we build, and we build to live there as men who are embedded in nature and transform it. But transforming it does not mean killing it. We will lay stone upon stone, iron and lime, brick and wood, but as "signs" of our existence. We will build spaces in space but as "witnesses" of our universal consciousness. Otherwise what we do that is worth that "separates" us from the world and does not integrate us with it?

When I say let us make not houses but one house as if it were a hill. When I say let us make not fragments but one structure. When I say let's make not squares, courtyards, streets, but one space, and so on, sometimes I feel

3 Missing word in the typescript.

4 Missing word in the typescript.

misunderstood. But when flying in an airplane we see the crust of the earth, do we see many little holes or a single composition? But when we see from above an albeit stupendous medieval city, what are those holes that we loved so much?

They were not wrong. We are wrong if without any "hope" to live we live only on those dimensions that no longer belong to us.

And I could exemplify more.

But let us overlook the abstraction as well. Let us also get back down to earth.

There are limits. There is Florence. There is Sorgane. There are 12,000 inhabitants. There are laws. There are economic limits. There are lots of planners.

Right. Right. I agree. But I don't find a difference. Limits are always there in life. One eats, sleeps, breathes, otherwise one dies. Yet there are a thousand ways to eat, sleep, breathe. That's the point. I don't believe at all that these limits prevent our design, prevent these new dimensions of man.

But let us come even more to the point and respond to the "points" set out last Monday by one of the Sorgane groups.

I respond point by point:

1) Building density.

2,9. This does not seem excessive at all. There is no need to thin out. Men are increasing more and more on the earth. Men need to be concentrated just as hills and mountains are a concentration of soil compared to plains. Therefore, for me there is no problem at all.

2) Building types of housing.

In my opinion it has no meaning to say; building types. Talking about terraced or isolated houses, high houses or low houses, no longer means anything. You have to create a single fundamental structure in which living spaces fit together.

3) Construction elements.

Very interesting would be the normalization of plant and fixture structures, but one has to do the calculations with time, as I believe that when one designs the knowledge of the used elements (especially structural) must be clear. So a posteriori analysis is impossible.

4) Social elements and their areas.

In the neighborhood structure I would determine only those elements that everyone can use. Those on the other hand that not everyone uses, either eliminate them completely or make them become private acts of some (at least if they maintain traditional concepts). Structurally they must be also included in the overall composition with compositional freedom that is absolutely

different from traditional ones, especially since the relationship that exists between the dwelling and them no longer takes place through one dimension of time-space, (man-walking), but with multiple dimensions of time-space (man-pedestrian, man-mechanized).

5) Elements of speculation.

Consider them, even if of speculation at present, as integral and participating elements of the overall structure; that is, do not make them become added elements of the neighborhood.

6) Road network and types

Almost total elimination of multi-function venues (pedestrian, mechanized), as both the plastic compositional relationship and that of the possibility of enjoyment of things change according to the speed man has (remembering sequence, rhythm; mnemonic memory of space).

Condensation of mechanized roads (single trunk with branches).

The pedestrian road no longer understood as a road, but as a free path. The hearse story should not create fear.

There is nothing wrong with a coffin being carried perhaps 50 meters on foot to the mechanized vehicle. Nothing wrong with the living "seeing" the dead.

7,8) Private green and public green.

Complete osmosis between the two types. Absurd and insignificant single-family green spaces in any case, but especially in this one where the predominantly working-class population does not even have time to take care of its green space that turns into the garbage storage.

9) Sports area

Sports elements grafted directly to dwellings for those sports that do not need large equipment, deferring to the extra-neighborhood area those elements that need extensive equipment.

10) Flora

Regional flora that does not need special care that lives naturally.

11) Water, telephone, gas, electricity.

Centralized elements with their own inspectable and underground locations.

12) Heating.

Theoretically centralized.

13,14,15) Public lighting.

Public water.

Public transportation.

To be studied in a more technical line.

16) Squares understood in their urbanistic relations.

Squares understood as open spaces that have become plastic and architectural not as heretofore enclosed in the medieval sense.

17) Public building types.

Again plastic elements incorporated into the overall structure.

19) Pedestrian walkways

Depending on function

18) Nature-architecture relationship.

Attitude neither romantic nor classical but existential.

20) Neighborhood entrances.

Not monumental and rhetorical but real "nodes" of departure.

21) Osmosis

I have briefly expressed my thoughts about these points but it seems to me that there are especially two other fundamental ones:

1) Neighborhood issue

Of this point I have already expressed, in the first part of this letter, some opinions.

It would remain to make a more specific analysis of what the collective centers are: church, public building, etc...

2) Relationship between urban planning and architecture

If the plan were made by one group, each could resolve this relationship in its own way, but since we go from an urban planning problem of general setting, to the design of the housing cores that each group makes, I think it is impossible to arrive at binding "manufacturing" plans. Consequently once the general fabric is tacked on, it is up to individual planners to study the relationships between the dwelling cores and the general structure.

Dear Giovanni,

I have tried to express with this letter, as simply as possible, my opinion. And I would like, definitely, these points to be analyzed and expressed, and especially by you, who are the coordinator, summarized and synthesized.

What is important is that each of us know clearly the path to follow. Although deliberately not expressed so as not to influence anyone, it shines through clearly both from this letter of mine and from my group's contribution to the plan what my intentions are: human, expressive and plastic.

It is not important that my views or those of others prevail. On the contrary, it would be good if they were the synthetic expression of everyone, so that in

Phase II everyone will be able to express his or her personality more specifically.

What is important for me is to set precise limits in order to move with exactitude without infatuation from before, resulting in disappointment.

If by chance the result of the synthesis is also very far from my point of view it is fine. One can in any way arrive at a true and good thing. What is important for me is to know what we all accept together and what we reject. Because, dear Giovanni, I really would not want misunderstandings to arise. I really wouldn't want to be mistaken for being conceited or eccentric. So far I have made the contribution I was capable of, and I will try to do the same in the future, even in case everyone's common denominator is far from what I personally think.