On June 23 and 24, 2021, the symposium “Carlo Aymonino. Progetto, città e politica” was held at the School of Architecture, Valle Giulia, at the Sapienza University of Rome. It was part of a cycle of events “Carlo Roma 2020,” organized by the Faculty of Architecture under the patronage of the Department of Architecture and Design | DiAP, which also included two exhibitions: Disegni per Carlo Aymonino (featuring original drawings, as visual commentaries on Aymonino’s works, by invited Italian architects) and Opera in quattro parti. Letture del Campus di Pesaro (where Aymonino’s project at Pesaro was analyzed by Sapienza doctoral students and curated by Dean Orazio Carpenzano, Prof. Caterina Padoa Schioppa and Prof. Luca Purqueddu). This cycle of events was envisioned and organized by Dean Carpenzano, and by Federica Morgia, professor at the Sapienza, in conjunction with the exhibition curated by Manuel Orazi at the Milan Triennale, Carlo Aymonino. Loyalty to Betrayal (May 14 – August 22, 2021).¹

The events, had the objective to start a critical conversation on Carlo Aymonino’s legacy for the contemporary architectural scene, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of his death. The symposium featured several speakers, who were invited to piece together their direct experiences with Carlo Aymonino: memories, anecdotes and different critical readings of his works.

The relative silence on Aymonino’s legacy, after his passing, was probably due to the complexity of his works and contributions, quite difficult to categorize, in spite of the important role that he played within the Italian architectural, cultural and political context, especially in Rome. He held relevant institutional and political positions together with a consistent
professional practice and research. In fact, civic commitment and the desire to disseminate knowledge and research about architecture and other cultural fields were a constant with him. Making a synthesis of his work, therefore, is not an easy task.

The studies about the correlation between architecture and urban space were one of the *leit motivs* of his entire *oeuvre* and it belonged to the Italian architectural culture not only in that specific time but also for the following generations. His projects, developed around that theme, were paradigmatic of a way of working which generated continuous in-depth analysis, considerations, questions, and they contained undoubtedly three main topics: project, city and politics. All of them were intertwined with each other throughout his life. Those correspond also with the three main sections in which the symposium was articulated, even though they should not be interpreted as taxonomic categories but as wide trajectories of Aymonino’s work.

![Figure 1. Symposium poster, University of Rome “Sapienza,” Faculty of Architecture at Valle Giulia, Rome (June 23-24, 2021).](image-url)
PROJECT

After the institutional introductions by Giuseppe Ciccarone, Deputy Rector of the Sapienza University of Rome, and Alessandra Capuano, Director of the Department of Architecture and Design | DiAP, followed the speech of Dean Orazio Carpenzano. He defined the research modalities – adopted on the occasion of this cycle of events – finalized to find the main features related to Carlo Aymonino’s work, those which created an echo within the educational programs of the schools of architecture. Highlighting the importance of Aymonino in creating a future perspective, Carpenzano also invited to reflect on the role of the university and on the figure of the architect within civil society.

This was followed by the description of the different phases of Carlo Aymonino’s life, such as the university education in Rome, the professional practice at Marcello Piacentini’s studio, his drawings and projects, the theoretical work, the design exercises in which he engaged his students, the directorship of the architecture school at the IUAV (Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia) in Venice and the political role in Rome, as alderman for the Rome municipality, with a specific role about the interventions for the historic center of the city.

Returning to his theoretical work, Carpenzano described how the architect aimed to keep united two concepts: city and architecture, through the extension of the spatial and plastic concept of a building toward the urban dimension. A concept which belonged to the Italian school of architecture at that time and, with the contribution of the work by Saverio Muratori and Giuseppe Samonà, as well, disseminated at the international level. The roles and aims that Aymonino assumed for himself were certainly demanding ones, which caused in him some concerns – as it is publicly declared on his drawings – but, at the same time, this aspect demonstrated the seriousness with which he made his commitments, especially with regard to his role within Rome city council.

After Carpenzano’s introduction, some video-interviews with Carlo Aymonino were displayed and a new section of the symposium was opened by Rosalba Belibani, Fabio Balducci, Francesca R. Castelli e Paolo Marcoaldi, before a video-keynote by Rafael Moneo, introduced by Federica Morgia.

Keynote by Rafael Moneo

Rafael Moneo divided Carlo Aymonino’s biography into three different times, those in which he had a contact with him, offering a knowledge of this figure through detailed moments, personally experiences, and offering a comprehensive vision of this complex architect.

1963. Rafael Mondeo was in Rome as a research fellow at the Spanish Academy and his first contact with Carlo Aymonino was through the visit of
his residential project in Via Arbia: a unicum in postwar Roman architecture. The focus on the relationship between the different volumes of the building was a dominant aspect, they were fragmented but at the same time they led to an overall view. Together with other design choices, it proved the maturity that would lead him to a brilliant career.

1978. Rafael Moneo met Aymonino on the occasion of an international design workshop in Venice – which concluded with the 10 Immagini per Venezia exhibition (1980). In addition to the memory of a mature professional architect, in that moment there was also the figure of a professor and academic leader who shared his ideas through teaching – keeping always the practice of the profession at the center of his preoccupations. The projects envisioned during that Venetian period were the most significative, according to Moneo, of Aymonino’s production.

2008. Rafael Moneo was in Rome to attend a conference at the Spanish Academy and met again Aymonino, with whom he visited the latest project at the Campidoglio (the Capitol). The project appeared as a generic architecture, a large sheltering over ruins and sculptures out of context, as if finding a simple protection for the Marco Aurelio statue was enough for him. For Moneo, it was a sign of a change in Aymonino’s trajectory. Moreover, in Aymonino’s specific case, according to Moneo, the demanding commitment with his political activities in service of the larger community, had certainly an impact on his works and limits our understanding and appreciation of his great talent as an architect.

Video-Interview with Peter Eisenman

Peter Eisenman made a description of Carlo Aymonino through a comparison with his alter ego, and close friend, Aldo Rossi. Eisenman defined Aymonino more as a politician than an architect, as Aldo Rossi was. Eisenman also remembered Aymonino as a sophisticated, cultured and generous person. He talked about his drawings and how these were different from Aldo Rossi ones. Aymonino was a “draftsman,” focused on materials, colors, and so on, for him this kind of representation were only disegno (drawing), he was not an ideologue; on the other hand, Aldo Rossi was able to draw ideas and from this point of view he was the most important architectural figure of that time.

In the end, Eisenman distinguished two words which remark the difference between them: the principe (prince) and the “architect”. Then, he stated that Aldo Rossi was not a principe as Carlo Aymonino was. But this is more important than being an architect, because it made possible to evoke what gravitates around him: Carlo Aymonino made things possible and we wouldn’t have Aldo Rossi or Manfredo Tafuri without Aymonino’s charismatic figure.
First Session

Manuela Raitano, professor at the Sapienza, introduced Federico Bilò, professor at the G. D’Annunzio University of Chieti-Pescara and Efisio Pitzalis, professor at the Luigi Vanvitelli University of Campania.

Federico Bilò articulated his paper in four points focusing on the urban analysis, respectively as: (a) a specific Italian contribution towards the international architectural culture; (b) a system to reconnect architecture and city; (c) a method influenced by the structuralist school; and (d) how the urban analysis was growing in importance at that time, but then how it has more and more decreased in its influence within the design practice.

Efisio Pitzalis gave a reading of the work of Carlo Aymonino from a point of view of the urban analysis in order to explore the generative logics of the design process of this architect and provide interpretative keys. A couple of projects were selected by Pitzalis. The architectural composition based on “defined and autonomous parts” made thinking about the residential project of Monte Amiata at Gallaratese district, in Milan. All the singular elements participate to a sort of “choir.” This urban poetic is evident also in the project for the district of Roma Est. History was another selected theme by Pitzalis, as it was conceived by Aymonino as a generative element which allowed to interpret the city as an in fieri work, therefore, projected toward the future. The idea of the Colosso concerns this matter.

Video-Interview with Renato Bocchi

Renato Bocchi, professor at the IUAV, remarked again on the way Carlo Aymonino always focused his work on architecture “in relationship with,” in other words: architecture was always in a relationship with something else, and particularly with the city, because it was not conceived as an object defined in itself. In fact, in his teaching, Aymonino used to highlight the importance of defining the architectural dimension of a part of the city.

Second Session

Alessandro Lanzetta, professor at the Sapienza introduced Luca Molinari, professor at the Luigi Vanvitelli University of Campania, and Franco Purini, also Professor at the Sapienza.

Luca Molinari likewise analyzed projects by Carlo Aymonino, but from the point of view of the formal aspect, because the theoretical apparatus of the urban analysis was often contradicted by the projects themselves. His idea of a “composed city” included automatically the concept of “fragment” and this is something which belonged to an entire generation of architects – which included Aldo Rossi – together with the concept of “monument.”
Considering both these two concepts for analyzing the project of the Colosso in Rome, Luca Molinari observed that it included the archeological theme. Therefore, the idea related to the “fragment” played a peculiar role. This is not because of nostalgia, but because it was a choice, deliberately based on a contradiction: archeology as an image of a future urban landscape. In this way, a new interpretation about the role of the monument in the contemporary time was proposed, and this is a topic on which there is still an open debate.

Franco Purini articulated his speech on a few points. He started with the consideration that twentieth century Italian architectural historiography was mainly dedicated to architects who belonged to the academia, overshadowing important designers committed uniquely to the professional activity.

After this introduction he defined two different categories of architects: those who integrated their autobiography in their work – Carlo Scarpa, Mario Ridolfi, Aldo Rossi, Carlo Aymonino – and those who avoided the transcription of their autobiography – Maurizio Sacripanti, Ludovico Quaroni, Saverio Muratori, Luigi Moretti. It is a matter of how the subjective dimension is included in the work of architecture and how much it is explicit. Purini considered this matter a relevant element for the historiography of architecture.

To conclude, he selected the projects by Aymonino which are fundamental to understand his way of working: the housing complex at via Anagni in Rome, the residential project Monte Amiata at the Gallaratese District in Milan, the Paganini theater in Parma and the School Campus in Pesaro.

CITY

The second main topic of the symposium was opened by Dean Orazio Carpenzano who introduced the keynote speaker for this section, Maristella Casciato, Senior Curator at Getty Center Institute in Los Angeles.

Keynote by Maristella Casciato

The city, according to Carlo Aymonino, is certainly a complex phenomenon and it is inseparable from politics: polis as policy. It was a palimpsest which, throughout history, declared the inseparability between the architectural project and the city. Two main books are relevant and were highlighted by Casciato: Origini e sviluppo della città moderna (1965) and La città di Padova (1970). The first was a sort of a sequel to L’urbanistica e l’avvenire della città (1959) by Giuseppe Samonà and the second book collected all the research on urban morphology and building typology, which came from the period of teaching at IUAV.

Another essay was mentioned by Casciato, “Com’è bella la città,” where Casciato sees Carlo Aymonino’s programmatic manifesto. It consists of the awareness about the continuous change of the city and of its uses, which
determinates, in turn, further transformations. Therefore, the decisions about the future role of the city plays a decisive role.
The commitment as Alderman for the Historic Center in Rome was a serious matter for Aymonino, because he envisioned the need to give back the historic center to its citizens. This implicated a connection of the center with the outskirts of the city and an overcoming of the idea of center as a “sacred enclosure.” Another important aim was the delineation of the existing heritage through the definition and construction of the incomplete places of the city, not through models anymore, but with the conception of new ideas, decisions and solutions.

**Video-interview with Paolo Desideri**

Paolo Desideri, professor at Roma Tre University, stated that a political choice could not have any way of realization, except through the project, or better, through the idea of a project for the city. The typological matter was what really Aymonino was interested on, and the typological invention
was the arrival point of his creations. Even though he was aware that the ultimate purpose of architecture is its construction, he used to not investigate beyond the 1:100 scale [about 1” : 1/8’ scale]. Likewise, according to Desideri, he conceived the discipline of restoration only applied to a large scale, as it could keep together the city and political action. In light of that, Aymonino’s project of the Fori Imperiali [Imperial Fora] archeological park could transform a place which was simply called until then “area of ruins” into a vision of an “archeological park” for the local and international community.

First session

Luca Reale, professor at the Sapienza, introduced Gabriele Mastrigli, professor at University of Camerino, who focused his paper on the affinities between Carlo Aymonino, James Stirling and Oswald Mathias Ungers. He was followed by Valerio Paolo Mosco, professor at the IUAV, with a paper on Aymonino’s language, which grew, according to Mosco, out of Marcello Piacentini’s legacy and it became an idea of the city made out of large “urban paintings.” The figurative element, or better, the figurative ideal demonstrated his clear vision of the city.

Second Session

Luca Porqueddu, professor at the Sapienza, introduced Sara Marini, professor at the IUAV. Marini talked about two figures, Carlo Aymonino and Giancarlo De Carlo, who were working at the same time in two different, but close-by, cities – respectively, Pesaro and Urbino. These were two quite different contexts, in terms of the role of architecture in city-making. This paper underscored how the fate of a city is inevitably related to history and architecture. The parallelism between the works of the above-mentioned architects for those two cities, in somehow, created a distant dialog between them.

Marini started her critical analysis with the school campus in Pesaro by Aymonino and the university colleges in Urbino by De Carlo; in both cases it was a project of a piece of city, but in two different ways. Another selected project was the business center Benelli in Pesaro by Aymonino and others, wherein the monumental idea cut the connection with the surrounding existing paths to accent the high-level horizontal connection inside the building, creating new views. Besides this work, Marini described La Pineta district in Urbino by De Carlo, another large-scale project which defined a sort of city gate, therefore a border for the expansion of the city.

To conclude, the last project unveiled a story about an alliance: Carlo Aymonino and Paolo Portoghesi, in 1982, designed a temporary pavilion to be placed into the historic center of Urbino but, because of the conservative politics of the municipality, it was realized outside the walls of the city.
POLITICS

The third and last main topic of the symposium was opened by a keynote by Paolo Portoghesi, professor at the Sapienza, introduced by Federica Morgia.

Video-Interview with Paolo Portoghesi

Portoghesi described the cultural heritage left by Carlo Aymonino to Italian architecture. He is mainly remembered because his binomial architecture-city, which means looking at architecture comparatively to the city. His method, based on the analysis of the urban structure, did not mean approaching to a far historical document, but recognizing the city in its making. He was not an historian; he was inspired by archeology. According to Portoghesi, Aymonino believed that between architecture and community there was a strong connection, which was expressed by particular rules. And those rules could be defined by an understanding of the needs of society, its ideas and aspirations; in other words, by the sentiments of the community. Portoghesi also narrated about the experience of the project for the Pavilion in Todi, designed with him. This work meant, for both, gratitude and respect toward Aldo Rossi and it was arisen by the shared ideas of the two designers, ideas which kept them close. Portoghesi remembered having Aymonino, then an assistant to Prof. Ludovico Quaroni in Rome, as one of his tutors in architecture school. Even on that occasion, Carlo Aymonino demonstrated openness, brilliance and acute irony.

First session

Fabrizio Toppetti, professor at the Sapienza, introduced Alberto Ferlenga, professor and former Rector at the IUAV, and Patrizia Gabellini, professor at the Politecnico in Milan.

Alberto Ferlenga wondered how a figure such as Carlo Aymonino could be important for politics today. Through a reading of the correspondence between him and Aldo Rossi, in the mid-1950s, it is evident how the idea of a redefinition of politics, particularly at that specific time, was necessary. It was a common background which included, not only architects, but the Italian intellectuals with a sense of responsibility toward the reconstruction of the country. In this scenario, the re-definition of an architectural culture was another need, and Aymonino made this as one of his commitments. His demonstrated ability in cultural politics allowed to overcome the condition of conservatism: for instance, the studies of Saverio Muratori, professor at the IUAV before Aymonino, were relocated toward an idea of progress. Ferlenga concluded with a final consideration: while the projects are being built, the ideas go forward and they could be also re-elaborated in order to create new conditions. Aymonino lived in a time characterized by an
historical transition, but we are also going through transitions, as we are surrounded by important changes. Despite this, a substratum of reality still remains unchanged and we have the responsibility to understand this. So, the keys of interpretation, inherited by the studies of Carlo Aymonino, could help this comprehension in order to think about the future, especially in a country where the history is still a present reality.

Patrizia Gabellini addressed an issue about the experience of Carlo Aymonino when he had the role of Alderman for Interventions in the Historic Center in Rome, 1981-85. The book *Progettare Roma Capitale* (1990) by Aymonino represented the basis for the following considerations made by Gabellini.

The political aspects he had to deal with were mainly three: the program of activities (political vision), the political connections (power) and the handling of administrative practices. He privileged the aspect of the vision, for Rome, and consequently the role of the projects within his vision. Furthermore, the need of an acknowledgment about the historic center of the city, as a different morphological part in relation to others, made the urban analysis a fundamental tool and probative element of this matter. The transformation of the historic center from the idea of a business district to an archeological park, which belonged to the entire community, was the program that Aymonino proposed, along with others. This project had certainly a political significance, but it was not understood and completely supported to the end by Rome city council.

Aymonino was aware of the fact that it was not due to discipline or intellectual matters, but it depended on political issues. However, a conflict with his same political faction meant, for him, questioning about a life choice. What hindered his work was the administrative structure, the procedures, the regulations. Gabellini remembered the “sour opinion” expressed by his close colleague and friend Raffaele Panella towards Rome municipal administration.

Despite everything, what is certain, for Gabellini, is that Aymonino still left an important cultural legacy.

Before the last session of the symposium, a video-interview with architect Luisa Tugnoli, Aymonino’s collaborator at the office for many years, described the work experiences she had with him and the numerous projects made together.

**Second Session**

Caterina Padoa Schioppa, professor at the Sapienza, introduced Adriano La Regina, professor at the Sapienza as well, who talked about his direct and personal experience with Carlo Aymonino during his position as Alderman for Interventions in the Historic Center in Rome, and the cultural context of that time. The last discussant of the session was Alessandra Capuano, also professor at the Sapienza.
In her paper, Capuano also focused on the time between 1981 and 1985, defining further aspects related to the work of Aymonino at the Municipality of Rome. His political role saw him committed also on a theoretical level, as the intellectual he was. Pursuing solutions to the problems of the city, he defined an original way of working, in antithesis with the urbanistic practice of that period. The aim was finding solutions, not only to quantitative needs, but also through the creation of quality modern spaces, wherein the historic center could be seen as part of the contemporary city.

Aymonino identified strategic planning interventions for the city of Rome with powerful visions. This approach was different from the traditional urban planning because, compared to what was done until then, his method was less rigid and more adaptable to a diversified control of the space over time. A re-reading and a reconsideration of the city became a necessary process for Aymonino, which involved a dialog with different disciplines, research institutions and universities, and outside experts who were invited to collaborate. It was an attempt to reduce the distance between academia and institutions. It was an interpretation of the city of Rome, as a multiplicity of places, guided toward the necessity of a reinterpretation of its parts and their connection with each other. Raffaele Panella supported also the position of focusing the attention on the edge of these areas, because it was seen as an occasion to re-define the relationships and the synergies between the ancient and the modern city.
Capuano concluded with a discussion of the project of the Colosso, a (modern) re-construction of the statue that used to stand next to the Colosseum. In her analysis, Capuano mentioned the San Carlone statue in Arona, just north of Milan, so dear to Aymonino’s friend and colleague Aldo Rossi - two images bringing together two important personalities of Italian architecture.

FINAL ROUND TABLE

For the final round table, the participants were:

- as moderator: Orazio Carpenzano;
- as discussants: Pippo Ciorra, Senior Curator at MAXXI Architecture in Rome and professor at the University of Camerino; Manuel Orazi, professor at the University of Ferrara and curator of Carlo Aymonino’s exhibition at the Milan Triennale (May 14 – August 22, 2021); Clementina Panella, professor at the Sapienza and Maurizio Sabini, professor at Drury University (USA), Editor-in-Chief of The Plan Journal and former student and collaborator of Aymonino’s at the IUAV in the 1990s.

As discussed so far, the complex figure of Carlo Aymonino opened toward numerous considerations and the final section of the symposium regarded a further series of analyses and reflections, which served as the conclusion of the conference and started to outline further research material around the Italian master.

Pippo Ciorra highlighted a couple of points which he considered important to remember. He agreed with Rafael Moneo’s consideration about the necessity of appreciating Aymonino’s work within a specific generation of architects. Ciorra also talked about Aymonino’s “beautiful paradox” because he was a “communist,” but with an interest and passion on the image of the European bourgeois cities, designed for that social class. Summarizing what Aymonino left to further generations is an optimism toward the power of architecture as a transformative tool of the city.

Clementina Panella worked for thirty-five years as archeologist at the Piazza del Colosseo and she sustained – together with other intellectuals who worked with him – Carlo Aymonino’s vision: the interpretation of the historical heritage as a collective value for a modern city, a city with a national and global importance. In fact, she sustains the concept of a “democratic archeology,” within the urban archeology discipline.

Manuel Orazi picked up Pippo Ciorra’s argument and pointed out how it could be important to step beyond the general label of “communist.” For a better understanding, he made a comparison between two architects: Carlo Aymonino and Carlo Melograni, equal in age, with the same university education and both “communists,” but with completely different architectural references. Carlo Melograni supported the democratic design and the school of Bauhaus, therefore Leonardo Benevolo and Tommaso Giulio
Longo’s positions. Carlo Aymonino had other references, he didn’t believe in the Bauhaus school, but he looked toward the socialist city and he was closer to Aldo Rossi and Costantino Dardi. What emerged is the necessity to overcame the political adjectives and focus about the territory, as something to be thought together with architecture, urban planning and politic choices.

Maurizio Sabini raised the question about how to discuss the legacy of Carlo Aymonino for a wide and international context. Articulating this perspective, he brought out three main aspects of the work of the architect, which could be an encouragement for future generations. The first is the “vision”, not only in reference to a political dimension but also to architecture. The Gallaratese residential project, the school campus in Pesaro and the project of the archeological park in Rome were three different works which expressed the spirit of three different cities: a new outskirts for Milan, a new Pesaro and a new, modern, Rome. This is because Aymonino’s “obsession” toward the (re)definition of parts of the city, which was a constant topic for him. The second point is the “criticality.” In other words Aymonino, according to Sabini, did not want to be limited by an ideology, he wanted to preserve the freedom of criticism. The final point was about civic commitment, as a citizen active in politics, but also as teacher, director of IUAV and architect. Sabini mentioned Thomas Jefferson and his famous quote: “political thought and design activity are indivisible.” For Sabini, in Aymonino there is also the sensibility to differentiate the specificity of the two languages. For instance, when he was an alderman, he often made clear that he was there to be a politician and not to be an architect. The great vision for the Archeological Park in Rome would not have been possible without his vision and his being the intellectual architect he was.

Orazio Carpenzano concluded the symposium by expressing the hope that this cycle of events could be the beginning of a historiographic and critical study to deepen the assessment of Carlo Aymonino’s legacy and stimulate other initiatives along this direction.

Notes

Credits

Figure 2: photo by © Federica Morgia.
Figure 3: photo by Carmine Vincelli.

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