

# Architecture as a project for society: The teaching of Giancarlo De Carlo, twenty years after his death

## ■ GENERAL TOPIC AND FRAMEWORK OF THE CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Faced with the intensification of global changes produced by extractivist societies, architecture is confronted with issues that concern not only the effects of human actions on the degradation of physical environments, but also the relationship between the transformation of space and the evolution of human relations and society. In a context marked by individualism, social atomisation and the gradual dematerialisation of spatial relationships - described, among other things, by Zygmunt Bauman's notion of 'liquid modernity' - the social value of architecture is the subject of debates and practices which, not without ambiguity, call into question the conditions under which living spaces are produced and the role of the players involved. While contemporary socio-environmental issues are gradually being incorporated into narratives of social commitment, both in education and in recent architectural practices, the scale of the global changes underway - many of which have a spatial dimension - nuances the scope of positive discourse and forces us to adopt a critical vision, capable of moving beyond the collapseist, techno-solutionist and negationist approaches that saturate contemporary debates.

In this context, re-reading the thought and work of Giancarlo De Carlo (1919-2005) allows us to grasp the relevance of a thought based on the relationship between space and society, the interest of a practice with a strong ethical value and the richness of a career in which teaching, practice and research were never dissociated. Involved in various intellectual, educational and professional networks in the second half of the twentieth century, and recognised as an alternative and independent voice in the panorama of international architectural culture at the time, De Carlo stood out for his many fields of activity, which more than ever encourage us to place the reasons for and consequences of human actions in the perspective of relational approaches. The events held in Italy in 2019 to mark the centenary of his birth have highlighted the need to re-read his career, as evidenced by the books and articles published in Italy at the same time as this tribute. More recently, this rediscovery has been echoed in a number of dedicated publications in other European countries, and in the emergence of historiographical interest in Team X, of which De Carlo was a member, and the ILAUD (International Laboratory of Architecture and Urban Design), which he founded and directed for twenty-six years.

The aim of this call is to continue this re-reading within the framework of an **international educational and scientific perspective** which, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the architect's death, structures two interdependent actions - a **public conference** and an **exhibition** - to be held in Paris in November and December 2025. **Two types of contributions** are expected in response to this dual perspective, which is open to researchers, doctoral students, teachers and students from French and foreign schools of architecture and landscape design:

- **PAPERS** : selected by a specific scientific committee, these will be discussed at the public conference dedicated to the twentieth anniversary of De Carlo's death, to be held at Ensa Paris-Belleville in November 2025;
- **POSTERS** : selected by a specific scientific committee and linked with the outcome of educational activities related to the issues addressed by the initiative, they will be displayed as part of the exhibition "*ARCHITECTURE AS A PROJECT FOR SOCIETY. The teaching of Giancarlo De Carlo, twenty years after his death: pedagogies in debate*", which will be inaugurated on the occasion of the public conference mentioned above.

Authors wishing to submit materials for one of these two types of expected contributions are asked to comply with the specific instructions given on pages 3-4 of this call for papers.

## ■ SPECIFIC ISSUES AND OBJECTIVES OF THE CALL

Giancarlo De Carlo is one of the most important Italian architects of the second half of the twentieth century, and his work is included in the main textbooks on the history of contemporary architecture. Although his many commitments reflect an existential experience that is never disconnected from professional experience, the aim of this call is not to provide an exhaustive analysis of his career, but rather to highlight the richness and topicality of his thinking, based on an aspect of his many commitments that is both specific and complex. De Carlo's teaching activity since the mid-1950s represents, in this sense, a specific problem and a stimulating working hypothesis, not only because it opens up new avenues for reflection on his human and professional career, but also because it enriches the most recent debates in France and abroad on the development of architectural education in the face of current change.

Developed in different forms and in different institutional and geographical contexts, teaching was for De Carlo a privileged motor for practising a constant exercise in methodological research and critical reflection on the relationship between architecture and society, politics and time. By rejecting formalist approaches and the adoption of self-referential models, this activity never aimed to create a school of thought, a style or a movement. Constantly confronted with the major changes in society, teaching helped De Carlo to develop and disseminate his idea of professional practice, through active participation in various educational and institutional networks, and became thus a fundamental lever for thinking about the social value of architecture, the relationship with context, history and politics, or the inseparability of design scales and the reasons for architectural language. In this approach, architecture was called to contribute to the transformation of the world in the name of the utopias and programmes of social emancipation that it could inspire, because for De Carlo it was *'the most complete and significant system of communication available to human beings for expressing and representing themselves'*.

While the approach and quest for emancipation reflected in de Carlo's teaching and career may seem far removed from the institutional frameworks and practices of architecture today, an analysis of this heritage can help us to take a critical look at changes in the conditions under which living spaces are produced and built, and at the way in which these changes are integrated into architectural education and research. By reconnecting with the roots of a way of thinking that closely links theory and practice, the proposed perspective aims to encourage links between these two often dissociated fields and, more specifically, to meet the following **two complementary objectives**:

- 1) to situate De Carlo's contributions within the theoretical and methodological debates of his time;**
- 2) to place his legacy in the context of the debates and practices that question the evolution of architectural education and their links (or lack of links) with contemporary professional practices.**

## ■ THEMATIC AXES

In order to meet such goals, the authors are invited to re-read Giancarlo De Carlo's teaching in a retrospective and/or prospective way, by putting into perspective some of the key notions of his thought and the objects in which it took shape, while forging links with some of the crucial questions touching current architectural education. The contributions are expected to re-examine and update the following three pairs of concepts:

### **1. Structure and Form of physical space**

From the 1960s onwards, De Carlo used the conceptual pairing of 'structure and form' to offer a key to understanding physical space, and to signify the relationships that the structures of society establish with the form of places, while distancing himself from the Modern Movement. While these notions remained open-ended, they made it possible to evoke the tension between the visible aspects of the built environment and the capacity to analyze and modify existing relationships (whether social, spatial or based on power), which was always present in the architectural project. Although the notion of 'network' is now tending to replace that of 'structure' in the definition of human relationships, this line of thought has several implications whose relevance and topicality remain, in many respects, intact. Firstly, it underlines the need for a methodological reflection capable of appreciating the tensions and controversies that characterize the process of architectural and urban design; secondly, it allows us to consider both the value of form (architectural and urban) and its inadequacy, and the way in which representations and spatial devices translate the topological relationships that form materializes; thirdly, it evokes the dimension of time as an essential variable in the project.

How were these notions integrated into De Carlo's teaching and how did they embody the search for relationships between the individual and the community in his built works? How did they impact on theoretical and pedagogical debates and/or professional practices in the second half of the twentieth century? In what way does a re-reading of this pair of concepts bear witness to changes in the conditions under which inhabited spaces are produced and built today? And what paradoxes and/or controversies does this evolution raise?

### **2. The Heteronomy of architecture and Participation**

In defending the idea that architecture should generate 'processes', De Carlo evoked the notion of heteronomy in order to grasp the interdependence of the factors that determined the configuration of a space and the influence that such interdependence has on these factors and, through them, on society. This conviction led him to condemn both disciplinary autonomy and ultra-specialization, which in his view were responsible for the depoliticization of practices and their gradual standardization. In this approach, architecture represented a civil condition and had to contain an ethical commitment based on respect for the explicit and implicit needs of those who used it. This explains his interest in participation, of which he was one of the strongest advocates since the late 1960s. In a context in which the notions of interdisciplinarity and participatory democracy have become, not without ambiguity, essential dimensions of contemporary architectural and urban practice, his approach helps to question the relationship that knowledge establishes with the practices of inhabitants, and the role of the architect in society.

How were these notions received in the theoretical and pedagogical debates of architectural culture in the second half of the twentieth century? In what way does this heritage place the construction of the architect's knowledge and know-how in tension today, when the triumph of disciplinary specialization appears inadequate to address the challenges of habitability? In what way do these notions contribute to rethinking the ethical and political dimension of architecture in education, in a context dominated by the capitalist economy and the market?

### 3. Reading and Design of the Territory

By using the notion of “reading” to signify the need to grasp “the signs of physical space, extracting them from their stratifications, interpreting them, ordering them and recomposing them into systems that have meaning hic et nunc, including for us”, De Carlo moved away from historicist and formalist approaches by specifying that this task ‘participates in the action that it prepares’. By questioning the relationship between analysis and design – and therefore opening up a debate that is still ongoing in architecture schools – he interpreted design as ‘a means of knowing the problem in architectural terms’ by means of hypotheses, trials and verifications (tentative design). This approach, which encourages us to transcend scalar and disciplinary divides, was supported by the notion of ‘territory’, to denounce the loss of the co-evolutionary relationship between human groups and their living environments, and to signify the interdependent relationship between architecture and urban planning, which was asserted in his teaching and practice. While De Carlo was not alone in highlighting the importance of this notion – which has become an essential dimension in rethinking modes of governance and contemporary socio-environmental issues – his interpretation opens up questions that encourage us to reconsider the relationship between nature and culture and to rethink societies’ relationship with time.

What influence did these concepts have on theoretical and pedagogical debates in the second half of the 20th century? How do they differ from the approaches of the same period, and what are their theoretical, conceptual and methodological implications? In what ways do these notions re-interrogate the teaching and practice of architecture in the light of current socio-environmental changes? And what paradoxes and/or controversies do they raise ?

Without being exhaustive, these notions bear witness to the specific way in which education fuelled De Carlo's thinking throughout his life and confirm the emergence of the ‘spatial turn’, defined by Edward Soja to signify the growing role of space in defining social life. By reconsidering the place of architectural education in recent and past debates, the contributions (articles and/or posters) may fit into one or more of the proposed lines of thought. They will aim to reflect on the renewal of the tools for thought and action that enable us to rethink the social responsibility of architecture, in terms of the system of relationships that its practice implies with society.

## ■ EXPECTED CONTRIBUTIONS AND TIMETABLES

### I. PAPERS

By proposing a retrospective and prospective re-reading of the concepts proposed, the scientific articles are intended to provide a critical analysis of Giancarlo De Carlo's teaching activity, making it possible to bring out, through different types of sources, its relationship with his intellectual and professional trajectory. This re-reading can identify the cultural transfers, collaborations, forms, modes and impact of this activity on theoretical debates and on the teaching of architecture in the second half of the twentieth century. It can also take account of the topicality of the concepts addressed, in order to open up reflection on the way in which this teaching questions contemporary teaching practices. Contributors (researchers, early-career researchers and doctoral students) should send an **abstract of no more than 4,000 characters**, together with the names of the authors and their institutional affiliations, to:

[enrico.chapel@toulouse.archi.fr](mailto:enrico.chapel@toulouse.archi.fr)

[filippo.depieri@polito.it](mailto:filippo.depieri@polito.it)

[roberta.morelli@paris-belleville.archi.fr](mailto:roberta.morelli@paris-belleville.archi.fr)

**Languages accepted:** French and English

**Deadlines:**

. abstracts:

**23 March 2025**

. full papers (first version):

**30 June 2025**

After the abstracts will be approved by the scientific committee, the authors will be required to send the full version of their article, which will correspond to a text of a **maximum of 40,000 characters** (including spaces), an abstract of 2,000 to 1,500 characters in French and English, and a biographical note of around 600 characters.

. final articles (final version):

**22 September 2025**

The selected papers will be presented at the International Conference dedicated to the twentieth anniversary of the death of Giancarlo De Carlo, to be held in the first half of November 2025 at Ensa Paris-Belleville.

## II. POSTERS

The posters will propose contributions in line with one or more of the proposed themes, with a view to examining contemporary teaching practices in two ways:

- **A critical reflection on one or more of the key concepts raised in the present call, developed through a critical analysis of one or more objects from the built or written work of Giancarlo De Carlo:** based upon an explicitly presented range of sources (archives, surveys, interviews, etc.), this reflection will be the subject of an original graphic and/or analytical interpretation, bringing out the pedagogical, theoretical and/or practical implications and the controversies linked to their updating.
- **A critical reflection based on teaching work carried out in architecture and landscape schools which, although not directly linked to De Carlo's work or teaching,** reflects the actualisation or resonance of one or more of the concepts mentioned, in relation to the following three dimensions around which the above-mentioned exhibition will be structured:
  - a) **Space and Society**, concerning the relationship between the individual and the community that architecture helps to define on an architectural and urban scale.
  - b) **Habitability and Territorialisation**, concerning changes in the conditions of production and construction of inhabited environments and the associated effects on the habitability and modes of appropriation of buildings, towns and territories.
  - c) **Architecture and Urbanism grappling with Time**, concerning the paradigms, issues and paradoxes that our Western societies establish with time (past, present and future).

Contributors (teachers and/or students) should send a **poster in A1 vertical format**, indicating the title of the contribution, the name of the author and their institutional affiliations, to :

[roberta.morelli@paris-belleville.archi.fr](mailto:roberta.morelli@paris-belleville.archi.fr)

[nicolas.andre@paris-belleville.archi.fr](mailto:nicolas.andre@paris-belleville.archi.fr)

[beatrice.jullien@paris-belleville.archi.fr](mailto:beatrice.jullien@paris-belleville.archi.fr)

**Languages accepted:** French and English

**Deadlines:**

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| . <b>statement of intent</b> (written abstract max. 3000 characters) | <b>28 March 2025</b>     |
| . <b>poster (first version)</b>                                      | <b>23 June 2025</b>      |
| . <b>final poster (final version):</b>                               | <b>22 September 2025</b> |

The selected posters will be exposed in connection with the educational contributions produced during the academic year 2024-2025 by Ensa Paris-Belleville, as part of the exhibition organised in collaboration with Ensa Toulouse and the Politecnico di Torino.

## ■ **SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEES**

### **Scientific Committee for the selection of papers**

Enrico Chapel (professor ENSA Toulouse), Filippo De Pieri (professor Politecnico di Torino), Federico Ferrari (associate professor ENSA Paris-Malaquais), Hélène Jannière (professor Université Rennes 2), Catherine Maumi (professor ENSA Paris-La Villette), Roberta Morelli (associate professor ENSA Paris-Belleville), Francesco Samassa (architecte, PhD in architecte, architecture, archivists).

### **Scientific Committee for the selection of posters**

Roberta Morelli (ENSA Paris-Belleville), exhibition curator, Nicolas André (ENSA Paris-Belleville), Michele Bonino (Politecnico di Torino), Enrico Chapel (ENSA Toulouse), Filippo De Pieri (Politecnico di Torino), Béatrice Jullien (ENSA Paris-Belleville), Etienne Léna (ENSA Paris-Val de Seine).

## ■ **INSTITUTIONS AND RESEARCH LABORATORIES INVOLVED**

Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Paris-Belleville

Ipraus (Institut parisien de recherche : architecture, urbanistique, société)

In collaboration with:

Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Toulouse - LRA (Laboratoire de recherche en architecture)

Politecnico di Torino, DAD – Dipartimento di Architettura e Design

## ■ PARTNERS

Institut Culturel Italien de Paris (IIC)

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