

# The After Image Phenomenon between Immaterial and Hyper-Material Architectures: Hypothesis on the Influence of Italian Architecture at the Time of the Cold War

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*The Cold War was not only a political-military confrontation but also a way of life, an atmosphere that enveloped and influenced society in all its dimensions. Through the two key concepts of "anarchic architecture" and "interrupted sign" the paper analyses the design processes theorized and experimented by Giancarlo De Carlo within the complex and articulated historical-cultural context of the Cold War. From this analysis, the research highlights both the conscious and unconscious origins of a complex process of dematerialization that has characterized some more recent architectures, oriented towards the rejection of compositional processes based on the composition of forms, instead privileging abstract design concepts more closely linked to the user's emotional and perceptual sphere. Finally, the research refers to the phenomenon of the After Image defined by Biraghi as a possible orientation towards an "after contemporary architecture".*

## Introduction

This contribution explores the causes that in the last twenty years have led to the global spread of architectures expressing messages of immateriality and transparency. They seem to oppose the previous compositional process based on the construction of shapes, as it occurred in the pursuit of compositions of architectural volumes during the Modern Movement of the twentieth century.

By investigating the characteristics of the Cold War, this research identifies some connections between the compositional methods of Giancarlo De Carlo's architectural projects (from the 1950s to the end of the 20th century) and the cultural phenomena that characterized this global conflict.

To proceed with this examination, it is necessary to provide a historical introduction to the Cold War.

At the end of World War II, the introduction of nuclear weapons led to the paradox of MAD (Mutual Assured Destruction), which made conflict unlikely due to the extreme effects it would entail.

The Cold War arose from a political-military, economic, diplomatic, cultural, and ideological opposition, no longer solvable through frontal warfare and thus based on the so-called "balance of terror" in a new bipolar world divided between the two superpowers, the USA and the USSR.

Europe was a contested territory between the two blocs because the proliferation of financial, commercial, and cultural ties between the two Europes

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(Western and Eastern), the dynamism, openness, and prosperity of Western societies determined the psychological and then political surrender of the Eastern part.

Globalization was not generated by the Cold War, although it facilitated and channeled it, but rather the dynamics of globalization determined the end of this conflict. Although the European territory was the main object of contention, this war focused on controlling the political and social development of the Third World.

Believing their position in Europe to be consolidated, the Soviet Union hoped to turn the upheavals of the Third World to its advantage, while the West continued to influence European thought in the sphere of communication, using principles and categories such as freedom and liberation, deterrence and credibility, which exist only in the interpretation given to them by people from time to time. For this reason, the Cold War has been defined as the greatest "fiction" of the time, fueled and shaped by imagination, which in turn continued to fuel it.

Considering the complexity and ambiguous nature of the events of this war, it must be remembered that although the era of the Cold War ended in 1989, the long reflections of its lights and shadows will slowly fade away, accompanying us for much longer.<sup>1</sup>

The Cold War was not just a political-military confrontation but a way of life, an atmosphere that conditioned society in all its dimensions. A daily life lived and suffered in an atmosphere of absolute distrust and fear that led to the birth of the so-called "culture of suspicion." A way of conceiving and looking at "the other" as an enemy, the one who lived beyond the iron curtain, behind the wall (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** *Frame of a Bridge Too Far, Movie by R. Attenborough, 1977*

Source: Raiplay, 2020. Graphic processing by O. Longo (2020).

In the last twenty years, the most successful architectural production seems to be oriented towards an immaterial representation of buildings, rejecting the formal compositional processes of the Modern Movement. In this regard, Biraghi identifies

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1. See Romero F (2009) *Storia della Guerra fredda. L'ultimo conflitto per l'Europa*. Turin: Einaudi, pp. 8-12, 346.

the phenomenon of the *After Image*,<sup>2</sup> which can represent this type of architecture that the historian defines as "post-contemporary".

Among the many possible architectural examples, this concept of *After Image* clearly emerges from the architectures of Herzog and de Meuron, where there is a willingness to oppose a type of design based on the mythologization of form and image. The paradox of this process lies in their search for the moment when materiality transcends immateriality by using a strategy of hyper-materiality, where the material conditions of the structure are questioned from the outset.<sup>3</sup>

The contribution will seek to identify both the conscious and unconscious origins of this complex concept of immateriality, through the key concepts "anarchic architecture" and "interrupted sign" that we can apply to the design processes theorized and experimented by Giancarlo De Carlo, within the complex and articulated historical-cultural context of the Cold War.

### Literature Review

In 2019, during the celebration of the centenary of De Carlo's birth (organized by the Architects Register of Milan), focusing on themes dear to the Master such as participation, ethics, and the future, Massimo Cacciari highlights De Carlo's strongly ethical-political spirit, as well as that of other contemporaries, and his fundamentally anarchic approach, making specific reference to immaterial architecture as a possible new frontier in architectural research of our time.

On several occasions, De Carlo criticized the methods of the rationalists of the 1920s, such as their attempt to frame the modern world according to logics that failed to adhere to reality.

Since the 1960s, he has proclaimed the need to understand the process of city formation as a succession of interconnected and rational stages but characterized by transitional moments caused by "unknown and broad participations or the impulse of individual actions", that determine its irrational character.<sup>4</sup>

In 1969, at a conference in Liege, De Carlo spoke about the crisis of architecture at that time: the Modern Movement and its "heroes" must be re-evaluated from a different perspective, from that devised by their own advertising strategy.

The Modern Movement aimed to conquer (and effectively did) the domain already occupied by academic or corporate architecture, excluding what was not shared by the classes in power in economic, social, cultural, and aesthetic terms.

De Carlo recalled the 1929 Frankfurt CIAM dedicated to minimal housing and reiterated the need for a true metamorphosis to develop new design methods

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2. See Biraghi M (2008) *Storia dell'architettura contemporanea II. 1945-2008*. Turin: Giulio Einaudi editore, pp. 509-532.

3. See Mori T (2002) *Immaterial / Ultramaterial. Architecture, design and materials*. Bergamin A (ed), *Immateriale / Ultramateriale. Architettura, progetto e materiali*. Milan: Postmedia, 2004, pp. 105-107.

4. See De Carlo G (1960) Introduzione. In *The future metropolis, American Academy of Arts and Sciences*. In Rodwin L (ed), *La metropoli del futuro*. Padua: Marsilio editori, 1964, p. XIII.

and new models of architect behavior. The intrinsic aggressiveness of architecture and the forced passivity of the user must dissolve into a condition of creative and decisional equivalence.<sup>5</sup>

Through these and other writings by De Carlo and some masters of the twentieth century, it is possible to identify traces of a design root that tends towards the symbolic disintegration of volumes and facades. To this end, it is necessary to first describe an overview of the historical situation of the time.

The complexity of the social and moral position of the West in post-war Europe is evident in the film "The Third Man" (1949) through the personality of the protagonist Holly Martins, an American writer who fails to communicate and place himself in the complex Viennese context portrayed in the film.<sup>6</sup>

The film is set during the brief and uneasy truce between the fall of Hitler and the onset of Cold War tensions. The most famous scene is performed by Orson Welles with the monologue about the Swiss cuckoo clock<sup>7</sup>, while the film's particular documentary and neorealist components, with expressionist shots and a haunting musical theme played by Anton Karas (with the Austrian zither), add an atmosphere of paranoia and anguish.<sup>8</sup>

In 1998, Leonardo Benevolo wrote his book *L'architettura delle città nell'Italia contemporanea*, in which he describes Italy in the post-war period by quoting a series of Italian films of the time.

Benevolo states that in those years, architects of his generation chose to distance themselves from the previous generation of architects, because they needed to create architecture based on an objective reality that could be represented by the term "Realism".

Benevolo cites the films *Roma città aperta* (1945) and *Paisà* (1946) by Rossellini, *Sciuscià* (1946) and *Ladri di biciclette* (1948) by De Sica, using their scenes to describe the Italian landscape of that time.

Benevolo asserts that to tell the story of Italian post-war architecture, one must remember the atmosphere of that period, such as the detachment from myths and the need to objectively verify previous architectural experiences.

According to Ignasi De Solà-Morales, the crisis of modern architecture has generated the idea of an aesthetic as the production, by a subject, of elementary perceptual experiences that produce meanings through the ability to generate emotions.

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5. See De Carlo G (1970) Architecture's public. In Blundell Jones P, Petrescu D, Till J (eds), *Architecture and Participation*. London-New York: Spon Press Taylor & Francis Group, 2005, pp. 6-11.

6. See Wilson C (2015) Rooting for Harry Lime: 'The Third Man' As Morally Ambiguous Heterotopia. In *PopMatters*, 7 Ottobre, <https://www.popmatters.com/196355-rooting-for-harry-lime-the-third-man-as-morally-ambiguous-heterotopi-2495496750.html> (01/2020).

7. *You know what the fellow said – in Italy, for 30 years under the Borgias, they had warfare, terror, murder and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance. In Switzerland, they had brotherly love, they had five hundred years of democracy and peace – and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock.* (Orson Welles / Harry Lime).

8. See Thomson I (2019) *Financial Times*, 23 Agosto, <https://www.ft.com/content/5cce6602-bf76-11e9-9381-78bab8a70848>, (12/2019).

As with all fields of aesthetic creation, architecture also gains absolute freedom of perceptual experimentation, especially regarding the effects generated by forms, materials, and spaces.<sup>9</sup>

If it is true that architecture becomes art when society reaches a certain level of wealth and moral culture,<sup>10</sup> then we can draw some parallels between the history of art and that of architecture, which can help us understand the development of modern architecture.

We know that in a short span of time, a work of art can concisely and synthetically express the human condition of a particular era, sometimes also marking the different phases of civilization's progress.<sup>11</sup>

According to Hauser,<sup>12</sup> by renouncing the harmony and chromatic beauty of Impressionism, Modern Art opposes this movement because it wants to be "ugly" in principle. In painting, it destroys pictorial values; in poetry, feelings and image perfection; in music, melody and tonality, instead becoming a kind of anxious flight from everything that is pleasant and decorative.

The painter, the poet, the musician wanted to draw from intellect rather than from feeling. This attraction sometimes manifests with the purity of structure, sometimes with the ecstasy of metaphysical passion.

The squalor, oppression, and torment of Picasso, Kafka, and Joyce are the manifestation of this search for truth against the sensualism of the previous illusory world of art.

As Gardner, Nicholls, and White wrote in 2012 about Italian art, can Italian architecture also be considered influenced by the effects of the Cold War?

Italian art of the post-war period was influenced by the geopolitical context of the Cold War in two significant ways:

1. With the help of the Marshall Plan (see Figure 2) and the support of Americans, because organizations, and individuals arrived in Italy from the United States, creating international artistic colonies in Rome, Venice, and Milan, and generating a significant impact on the peninsula's culture.
2. After the period of Fascist autarchy that isolated Italy politically, economically, and culturally from the Western world, Italians developed a great interest in the United States.<sup>13</sup>

Despite this significant cultural exchange between Italy and the United States (which was in a situation of economic prosperity after World War II), between 1950 and 1952, President Truman's policy against Soviet influence and the armed conflict in Korea against the communist North by the South Koreans had a

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9. See De Solà-Morales I (1991) *Architettura ed esistenzialismo: una crisi dell'architettura moderna*. Casabella 583, p. 40.

10. See Quatremère de Quincy AC (1788) *E.M.A.*, I tome. Farinati V, Teyssot G (1985) *Dizionario storico di architettura. Le voci teoriche*. Venice: Marsilio, p.120.

11. See Arnheim R (1971) *Entropy and Art. An Essay on disorder and order*. Pedio R (ed), *Entropia e arte. Saggio sul disordine e l'ordine*. Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 2001, p. 79.

12. See Hauser A (2001) *Storia sociale dell'arte*. Turin: Giulio Einaudi.

13. See Gardner A, Nicholls M, White A (2012) Cold War Cultures and Globalisation Art and Film in Italy: 1946-1963. In *Third Text* 26(2), p. 208.

significant impact on American society. The result was a climate of suspicion that led to the persecution of anyone who could be involved in alleged anti-American activities.<sup>14</sup>



**Figure 2.** Schild "Hier half der Marschallplan", about 1950

Source: Creative Commons, Schiffahrtsmuseum in Kiel, author Holger.Ellgaard, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marshallplan\\_Schild\\_2015.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marshallplan_Schild_2015.jpg) (07/2022).

## Methodology

The methodology of this research was based on a dialectical evaluation of the interaction between person and world, through the observation of the experiential and interpretative quality of thought, feeling, and human action within the scope of architectural production and composition.

An interdisciplinary bibliography was collected, including the field of Cold War history and that of Art and Architecture history.

Some aspects of De Carlo's architectural design approach were studied using these concepts: "anarchic architecture" and "interrupted sign," identified through the analysis of his writings.

From these observations on De Carlo's thought and architecture emerges the hypothesis that his work may have initiated a trend in architectural production oriented towards the dismantling and dematerialization of the rationalist volumes of the Modern Movement.

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14. See Carluccio G (2012) Il cinema americano classico, 1930-1960. Evoluzione e declino dello «studio system». In P Bertetto (ed) *Introduzione alla storia del cinema. Autori, film, correnti*. Novara: UTET Università De Agostini Scuola, p. 140.

This line of thought may have then evolved over time into the contemporary conception of "Immaterial Architecture," to which the concept of *After Image* defined by architectural historian Marco Biraghi can be associated.

Finally, to illustrate this latter concept, some architectures by Herzog & de Meuron were selected, following the analysis of some of their writings.

## Results

In his book *Gli spiriti dell'architettura*, De Carlo asserts that architecture and urban planning are fundamentally authoritarian because architects and urban planners have provided their services to power and have thus developed theories, solutions, and projects in line with their clients. However, there are different ways of conceiving the relationship between people and territory.

He claimed that in the American cultural context, there is an important current, often overlooked by official criticism: the deeply anarchic thought that consists of not specializing the human environment, not dividing the territory from the city, the neighbourhood, the building, but rather seeing them together as a place of existence.

De Carlo cites two Italians who would belong to this orientation: Elio Vittorini and Italo Calvino.

His book *Le città del mondo* reflects this libertarian thought, this articulated vision of the city. "Invisible Cities" are the product of the people who inhabit them and of the infinite stratifications, not the product of authorities. For Calvino, it is the use of the city that defines it, not who ordered or designed it.<sup>15</sup>

After World War II, De Carlo met the anarchist groups of the magazine *Volontà* with Berneri and Zaccaria, and the English magazine *Freedom* with Woodcock, Read, Richards.

In the introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition of De Carlo's works at the Triennale in Milan, De Michelis writes that after World War II, the modernist tradition had inevitably merged into the conventional character of the International Style, repeatedly condemned by De Carlo.

From 1945 onwards, a question permeated the debate of the time: whether the "modern tradition", interrupted by the war and somehow defeated by the political-cultural crisis of Europe in the 1930s, could take on the task of reconstruction; on the contrary if it was impossible to absolve rationalist architecture from its complicity with the fascist regime in Italy during the previous decade.<sup>16</sup>

In 1966, De Carlo went to the United States for the first time, where he would return several times for teaching periods at MIT, UCLA, Cornell. The discovery of American reality in a period of intensity (the Vietnam War, the revolt of the youth,

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15. See De Carlo G (1992) *Nelle città del Mondo*. Venice: Marsilio, pp. 195-198.

16. See De Michelis M (1995) In forma di introduzione. In Mioni A, Occhialini EC (eds), *Giancarlo De Carlo. Immagini e frammenti*. Milan: Electa, p. XIII.

pop art, rock music, the advent of anti-Bauhaus architecture) had a considerable influence on him.<sup>17</sup>

In the introduction to the book *The Future Metropoli* (1960) which collects essays (published the following year in *Daedalus*) by eleven American scholars belonging to different disciplinary fields (urban planning, visual design, political science, social history, territorial economy, trade, and philosophy), De Carlo emphasizes the scientific and interdisciplinary component of American urban culture, considering the variety of themes treated as valuable, united by the interest in the general problems of metropolitan development at the time. De Carlo identifies in the writings an optimistic confidence in a policy considered capable of managing the imbalances of urban growth, directing development towards goals of real efficiency.

He thus initiates a fundamental reflection on the complexity and contradictions of the modern world, without avoiding explicit commentary on the differences between American and Italian culture, and between the left and capitalism, which were central issues for the dynamics of the Cold War.

De Carlo describes very frankly the main reasons behind the suspicion of Italian urban academics towards American research. Among these, he emphasizes the problem of the vision of Italian left-wing culture, which, although open to the increase of rational domination, is conditioned by an indiscriminate recourse to abstract value judgments, letting the concrete aspects of experiences escape. De Carlo does not even spare American culture, defining it in some respects naive and particularly tied to a capitalist political and economic system.<sup>18</sup>

With this approach to complexity and avoiding easy escapes, De Carlo demonstrates that he anticipated the issues of today's architecture and cities by decades through a courageous work of exploration and management of a constantly changing reality.

Interviewed by Franco Bunčuga, De Carlo declares that he returned to admire anarchist thinkers after being disappointed by communism around the 1950s. Rereading their writings, De Carlo emphasizes the anarchists' ability to be patient and asserts that these principles were his starting point for his architecture and urban planning projects. By emphasizing the means, anarchists end up suggesting complex and tortuous processes, described by hesitant and itinerant curves. By allowing the possibility of meeting other non-linear processes, such as those of nature, the inefficiency of anarchists thus becomes an ethical and political quality, because it can lead to being more inclusive and, consequently, more effective.<sup>19</sup>

In this way, De Carlo confirms that it is possible to have a project without keeping fixed objectives because they will continuously adapt to circumstances and context, depending on the changes that will occur.

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17. See Mioni A, Occhialini E C (1995) Giancarlo De Carlo. Immagini e frammenti. Milan: Electa, p. 179.

18. See De Carlo G (1960) Introduzione. In *The future metropolis, American Academy of Arts and Sciences*. In Rodwin L (ed), *La metropoli del futuro*. Padua: Marsilio editori, 1964, pp. X, XV.

19. See De Carlo G, Bunčuga F (2000) *Conversazioni su architettura e libertà*. Milan: Elèuthera, pp. 210-212.



The contradiction that runs through the theme of "freedom" in De Carlo's architecture lies on one hand in the tension towards the conquest of an architectural expression devoid of obligations towards pre-existing conditions, and on the other hand in the ability to measure oneself with the context.

His critical approach to typology emerges in his way of considering living as a set of constantly evolving modes, shaped over time by community life.

From the concrete characteristics of a consolidated settlement habit, De Carlo triggers a series of progressive mutations according to a situationist attitude that explores its hidden potentials and implicit subversions.

In his works, De Carlo often resorts to the "staging" of the daily life of the inhabitants and visitors of his architectures, acts of his stories of ordinary people who become active protagonists of the architectural expression of his buildings.

In the residences of Mazzorbo (see Figure 3), a series of spaces (from urban scale to that of the single dwelling) and the typological matrix dissolve into a network of topological relations, where distance and proximity become tools for narrating living together, in an urban landscape that does not seem designed but spontaneously generated.<sup>20</sup>



**Figure 3.** Residential Complex in Mazzorbo, Venice, Giancarlo De Carlo, 1980-1997

Source: Adobe Stock, author Guido, [https://stock.adobe.com/it/search/images?k=Giancarlo%20De%20Carlo&search\\_type=default-asset-click&asset\\_id=473965806](https://stock.adobe.com/it/search/images?k=Giancarlo%20De%20Carlo&search_type=default-asset-click&asset_id=473965806) (05/2022).

In 1951, De Carlo, Samonà, and others curated the exhibition on spontaneous architecture for the IX edition of the Triennale. Here the anonymous rationality, faithful however to the *genius loci* of the buildings of the Italian countryside, in continuity with Pagano's research on rural architecture, replaced the monumental prototypes of American industrialized architecture, denouncing that sort of "retreat from Modern Architecture" by Italians.

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20. See Purini F (2004) L'opera e il tema. In Samassa F (ed) *Giancarlo De Carlo. Percorsi*, IUAV – AP archivio progetti. Padua: Il Poligrafo, pp. 83-86.

This kind of break with the Modern Movement guided De Carlo towards a process of fracture that has been synthesized here in the concept of the "interrupted sign".

From this critical revision of the recent past, De Carlo assimilates and interprets the ethical component of the evolution of the idea of standard, preserving the coherence of the process. He is also shifting his attention towards urban design as a synthesis of architecture and urban planning, which opposes the idea of urban fabric (born within the CIAM and developed through the work of the Team X designers) to the dialectic between street and built. The ground is no longer a tray on which to place volumes but a carefully designed whole in which spaces, streets, buildings, green systems, and paving interact.<sup>21</sup>

Through a critical revisitation of Le Corbusier's writings, the young De Carlo had already broken with the "tradition of the new", orienting himself years later towards the experimentation of diffused settlement forms (houses in Baveno in 1951 and the Spine Bianche neighborhood in 1954), whose origins certainly date back to the spontaneous architecture of the 1951 Triennale.

By interrupting the constructive continuity, De Carlo designs small isolated two-family units, equipped with semi-public spaces intended for the social interaction of the community.<sup>22</sup>

At the architectural scale and vertically, the interrupted sign is explicit in the glass façade of the new thermal power plant under the Novizi's Garden of the Benedettini Monastery in Catania, where De Carlo proposes a reflective glass that narrates the Monastery in fragments, along a broken line of rectangles with different inclinations (see Figure 4).

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21. See Borgarino M.P., Bazzoli N., Del Curto D., Mazzolani M., Sansonetti A., Troisi A., *I collegi di Giancarlo De Carlo a Urbino. Piano di conservazione e gestione*, Sustainable Heritage n. 7. Sesto San Giovanni (MI): Mim Edizioni, pp. 38-39.

22. See De Michelis M (1995) In forma di introduzione. In Mioni A, Occhialini EC (eds), *Giancarlo De Carlo. Immagini e frammenti*. Milan: Electa, pp. XIII-XIV.



**Figure 4.** Recovery of the Compleso dei Benedettini, Catania, Giancarlo De Carlo (1986-2004). On the left: the glass wall of the new thermal power plant under the Giardino dei Novizi, where the Monastery is narrated through fragments and broken images that reflect along a sequence of rectangles with different inclinations. On the right: the helical staircase, nestled between the lava rock and the floor level of the Giardino dei Novizi, concludes the sequence of overlapping "interrupted signs," both natural and man-made.

Source on the left: photo by Nicolò Arena (2015), Creative Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Centrale\\_termica\\_monastero\\_catania\\_1.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Centrale_termica_monastero_catania_1.jpg) (09/2021). Source on the right: photo by Nicolò Arena (2015), Creative Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Scala\\_elicoidale\\_monastero\\_catania.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Scala_elicoidale_monastero_catania.jpg) (09/2021).

Other interrupted signs characterize the design of the tower for Siena (1988), conceived as a "disordered" volume because De Carlo asserted that disorder is often a higher form of order, more nuanced, intricate, and arcane than the usual ones; yet endowed with rigorous internal correspondences.<sup>23</sup>

From the 1950s to the 1980s, the production of Italian architects oscillates between rigorous and "sincere" symbols and ambiguously "interrupted" signs. The character of incompleteness could derive from the Zeigarnik effect discovered in 1927 by the psychologist of the same name, who claimed that interrupted behaviours are more easily remembered than completed ones.<sup>24</sup>

In 1978, Giulio Carlo Argan and Christian Norberg-Schultz organized the international exhibition in Rome "Roma interrotta", paraphrasing the title of an editorial column edited by Luciano Patetta, "L'architettura interrotta" published in the magazine *Controspazio* directed by Paolo Portoghesi.

23. See De Carlo G (1992) *Gli spiriti dell'architettura*. In Sichirollo L (ed), Rome: Editori riuniti, 1992.

24. See Spaltro E (1992) Vittoriano Viganò ovvero come un architetto possa esprimere una città. In *A come Architettura*. Milan: Electa, p. 155.

Among others, Robert Venturi, Aldo Rossi, Paolo Portoghesi, and James Stirling participated in the exhibition.

As Patetta stated, the architecture of the exhibition was characterized by an unrealism that, on the one hand, denounced the impotence to which architecture was constrained and, on the other hand, alluded to an alternative reality.<sup>25</sup>

After observing the student protests between 1963 and 1968, when the University students spilled onto the streets, in his essay "La piramide rovesciata", De Carlo states: only when institutions are 'interrupted' can we reach 'total experience'.<sup>26</sup>

The student revolt interrupted an institution traditionally immovable since its post-medieval reinvention. It perhaps interrupted for a moment too short, perhaps falling too soon into violence and sinning from excessive simplifications.<sup>27</sup>

In comparing De Carlo's and Woods' projects for the University of Dublin, as different interpretations of mat-building, Zuddas identifies the conception of the university as a system of scattered poles connected by generic spaces for the most public use possible. Through these poles, De Carlo fragments the systems of academic power, destabilizing the old conception of a centralized university.

The university is transformed into a large urban infrastructure in which the properly academic use becomes only a transitory moment, instead creating spatial conditions to define continuous re-territorializations for the practice of different forms of learning that go beyond the traditional ones.<sup>28</sup>

We can therefore assert that the concept of "interrupted sign" has been present in architectural theory and that De Carlo applied it during his design processes.

Therefore, the "interrupted sign" represents a break from traditional architectural conventions. De Carlo indeed preferred to interact with users (inhabitants of a building or users of an urban space) during the design process, activating a dynamic transformation of architecture where solutions are not static but adapt to the expectations of the people involved from time to time.

The "interrupted sign" is a symbol of openness to diversity and complexity. It is an invitation to overcome old relationships between designer and user to conceive architecture as a continuous process of exchange and flexible adaptation.

These theories of De Carlo are evident in his buildings, such as in the Collegi universitari in Urbino (Figure 5), where he created spaces that reflect the users' needs, challenging traditional architectural conventions.

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25. See Biraghi M (2008) *Storia dell'architettura contemporanea II. 1945-2008*. Turin: Giulio Einaudi editore, p. 192.

26. See Zuddas F (2015) Pretentious Equivalence. De Carlo, Woods and mat-building. In *Magazine del Festival dell'Architettura* 34, p. 51.

27. See Zuddas F (2019) La piramide rovesciata. Università e architettura italiane del '68 secondo Giancarlo De Carlo, 13 marzo, <https://www.artribune.com/editoria/libri/2019/03/la-piramide-rovesciata-giancarlo-de-carlo/> (09/2021).

28. See Zuddas F (2015) Pretentious Equivalence. De Carlo, Woods and mat-building. In *Magazine del Festival dell'Architettura* 34, p. 60.



**Figure 5.** *Collegi Universitari in Urbino, Giancarlo De Carlo, 1962-1983*

Source: Own work, by Limoncellista (2019), Creative Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Collegi\\_Urbino.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Collegi_Urbino.JPG) (02/2024).

The building system covers an area of approximately 62,000 square meters and is designed to provide a unique living experience, not just accommodation, with common and public spaces where people can meet informally, study, discuss, relax, or spend leisure time, without separation between areas dedicated to students and those open to citizens.<sup>29</sup>

This building system is considered one of the most important works of Italian architecture in the second half of the 20th century. Among the first in Italy, it addressed themes that were at the centre of international debate at that time, such as the inclusion of social objectives in architectural design and the development of a new modern language.

Here, De Carlo imports his interpretation of the campus that he had experienced in the USA as a Visiting Professor at Yale University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cornell University, and the University of California at Berkeley. He intertwines the civil and social role of education with the themes of landscape and history. For this reason, he creates architecture that combines an innovative cultural vision with a recognizable modern language inspired by the context.<sup>30</sup>

There is also a clear reference to the historical fabric because the buildings and pathways (that connecting them) are built using few simple elements that repeat with minimal variations, and they are distributed in different ways to accommodate differences elevations of the terrain, and directing users' views, pathways, and actions in various directions.

In 1966, Van Eyck described this architecture as follows: it is two places at the same time, open and closed, interior and exterior, large and small, and it is

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29. See Stocchi V (2019) La Visione dell'Università, in Borgarino M P, et al., *I collegi di Giancarlo De Carlo a Urbino. Piano di conservazione e gestione*, Sustainable Heritage n. 7. Sesto San Giovanni (MI): Mim Edizioni, p. 12.

30. See Borgarino M P (2019) Il Piano di Conservazione e Gestione dei Collegi Universitari di Urbino, in Borgarino M P, et al., *I collegi di Giancarlo De Carlo a Urbino. Piano di conservazione e gestione*, Sustainable Heritage n. 7. Sesto San Giovanni (MI): Mim Edizioni, p. 14.

simultaneously individual and collective. It belongs to the building as much as to the surrounding area, so the building and the area coincide.<sup>31</sup>

### Discussion

To understand how De Carlo's work can be connected to the design processes of contemporary architecture, we will base our discussion on the studies of architectural historian Marco Biraghi.

In 2008, he identified thirteen phenomena that define the 'myths' and 'rituals' of contemporary architecture, traceable only through some 'clues' contradicting each other.

Among these phenomena, concerning the image and its potentialities, we find what the historian defines as the *After Image*, associated with an architecture where the configuration of buildings, especially regarding the use of materials, is a source of mutability and continuous variation.

To make this assertion visible through the architectures realized in the last twenty years, a fitting example could be the architectures of Herzog and de Meuron.

In 2001, during a roundtable discussion, Jacques Herzog asserts that his deep interest in the physical world originates from the ancient history of human culture based on the dialectic between material and immaterial.

Herzog reminds everyone that in the current phase of human civilization, much of our perceptual energy is absorbed by the visual impact of electronic media. Our culture is now moving towards more immaterial values.

For this reason, through the conscious stimulation of both tactile and olfactory senses, Herzog and de Meuron's architectures are always conceived to engage all five senses (see Figures 6-7).

The concept of "immaterial architecture" can also be perceived through Ean White's work "Boundary Interference", where space and the movement of its inhabitants are connected to their emotions. On an interior wall, behind a foam bench, just above the central point of the spine, devices have been placed to emit recordings of traffic noise. When the listener sits on the bench and leans back, the sound is transferred through the bones, producing the sensation of perceiving traffic noise inside their body.

The space is thus silent and empty until human activity alters this condition through touch and the movement of their body.

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31. See Borgarino M P, et al. (2019) *I collegi di Giancarlo De Carlo a Urbino. Piano di conservazione e gestione*, Sustainable Heritage n. 7. Sesto San Giovanni (MI): Mim Edizioni, p. 35.





**Figure 6.** *Allianz Arena, Herzog & de Meuron, 2002-2005*

Source: photo by Timothy Brown, Creative Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Allianz\\_Arena,\\_Herzog\\_et\\_de\\_Meuron\\_\(2665665506\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Allianz_Arena,_Herzog_et_de_Meuron_(2665665506).jpg) (07/2022).



**Figure 7.** *Laban Dance Centre, Herzog & de Meuron, 2003*

Source: photo by John Lord, Creative Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trinity\\_Laban\\_\(8340754913\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trinity_Laban_(8340754913).jpg) (07/2022). Graphic processing by O. Longo (2022).

## Conclusions

The influence of the Cold War on architecture and territories occurred mainly through deterrence operations, namely through various highly effective means capable of influencing governments and masses of individuals globally.

Although the origins of these (psychological) weapons of war in the twentieth century date back to the Great War, the global scale of the Cold War involved territories much larger than previous wars.

The First World War was among the most innovative for its modern approach to psychological warfare, aimed at the moral exhaustion of the opponent through propaganda and the use of new communication tools such as radio and persuasive images.

These tools induced people to donate their belongings, oppressed by the moral obligation to support compatriots sacrificed on the front lines.

While the other wars of the twentieth century were much shorter and more visible, transforming territories even during subsequent reconstruction, in the nearly forty years of the Cold War, the effects of the conflict at a psychological level were predominantly subliminal and prolonged over time.

Also markedly different was the kind of physical transformation of places, which mainly involved areas where new military infrastructures were built, even adapting existing ones to the needs of a new type of warfare.

On the other hand, in different contexts and with different purposes, in the fifties and sixties, Guarini and Gideon reported that the knot of the new culture that emerged in the twenties and thirties had highlighted a "tragic fracture" between the conditions of the context and human reality, between the psychic and spiritual capacities of the inhabitant and their adaptation to places.

A fracture that led to unsuspected risks and responsibilities emerged from 1964 and until the early seventies, during politically critical years on a global scale.

During that period, in Milan, the radical cultural change was manifested in international exhibitions at the Triennale in the Palazzo dell'Arte, oscillating between radical research and provocative positions.<sup>32</sup>

As mentioned above, in this context, Giancarlo De Carlo combined his passion for architecture with a commitment to participation, freedom, and interest in people's needs, demonstrating how architecture can be a tool for social change and the creation of more inclusive spaces.

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32. See Crippa M A (2009) *Vittoriano Viganò e l'ambiente culturale milanese*. In Cao E, Piva A (eds.), *Vittoriano Viganò. A come asimmetria*, Rome: Gangemi editore, pp. 20-24.



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