



Marcello Piacentini, Cittadella Italiana, The Panama Pacific International Exposition, San Francisco 1915 (Source: Berkeley Library, digital archive).

Marcello Piacentini, Cittadella Italiana, P.P.I. Exposition 1915 Italy: the Medieval Palace, the "piazza" and the "tribuna" (Source: L'Edilizia Moderna, 1915, cit. Tav. LI); in Rosa Ressa, op. cit.

On Daniel Solomon's life-long work on 'City of Love versus City of Hope'

ANNA IRENE DEL MONACO¹

Abstract: Cities of layered history and the new neighborhoods replacing or expanding the traditional urban fabric are the major interests of Daniel Solomon during his life-long career as architect and scholar. His early interest in the European and Italian culture of cities is grounded in UC Berkeley academic environment and in the living urban lesson of the city of San Francisco.

Daniel Solomon's *Housing and the City. Love versus Hope* «explores the successes and failures of cities such as San Francisco, Paris, and Rome in a century-long battle between the so-called 'City of Hope', which sought to replace traditional urban fabric with more rational housing patterns, and the City of Love – love of the city's layered history and respect for its intricate social fabric». A perfect statement to summarize the work of one of the co-founders² of the "Congress for the New Urbanism" (1993) a movement, as reported on the CNU (Congress for the New Urbanism) official web site, «united around the belief that our physical environment has a direct impact on our chances for happy, prosperous lives. New Urbanists believe that well-designed cities, towns, neighborhoods, and public places help create community: healthy places for people and businesses to thrive and prosper».

Daniel Solomon's *curriculum vitae* provides clear justification on his combined attitude on writing essays and designing architecture, on his pleasure for story-telling and building up stories rich of humourism, statements and metaphors, as well as good building up high-quality architectures embedded of social commitment.³ Solomon's professio-

1. Anna Irene Del Monaco, Associate Professor of Architecture and Urban Design, Sapienza University of Rome; email: anna.delmonaco@uniroma1.it.

2. With Peter Calthorpe, Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, Stephanous Polyzoides and Elizabeth Moule.

3. Daniel Solomon was born in 1939 in San Francisco and studied at Stanford University (un-

nal and academic career could be compared, considering the balance between teaching and practicing, to his corresponding generation of Italian architects, the last fully experiencing a balanced double commitment in profession and academia (to which Lucio Barbera belongs to).

He has been practicing architecture, indeed, with the following firms: Mithun/Solomon, Partner 2012-present; Daniel Solomon Design Partners, 2008-2012; WRT-Solomon E.T.C. 2001-2008; Solomon E.T.C. 1996-2001; Daniel Solomon and Associates 1967-1996. In particular, it is interesting to notice that the early years of WRT, an architectural firm founded in 1963, by David Wallace, Ian McHarg, Bill Roberts, and Tom Todd, were immediately punctuated by large scale plans that formed the foundation for the firm's philosophy. And to highlight that W(M)RT's influential work included the Lower Manhattan Plan, Design with Nature, and the New Orleans Growth Management Program, demonstrating the complexity and richness of the professional and intellectual networks bridging the West and the East coast of USA, especially in the architectural practice, demonstrating that what appear as a contradiction in the theoretical debates can find the most productive and original opportunities in the city design practice.

As Solomon openly recalls in almost all his writings, among his mentors there have been Charles Warren Callister (Solomon was an intern in his office during his studies at Columbia NY), Catherine Bauer (leading architect-intellectual at Berkeley), Colin Rowe (the most influential intellectual for Solomon's generation of architects), Lewis Mumford (the great father of urbanism intended as a humanistic-technical discipline in US).

In line with his life-long convictions and as stated in all his other publications, collecting arguments on other urban and architectural contexts, Solomon demonstrates: «how the City of Hope has repeatedly failed its social purpose and driven a hot wedge into society's latent divisions, while the City of Love has succeeded as the portal of assimilation and social harmony».

dergraduate in Humanities 1957-1962), then he moved at Columbia University for undergraduate studies (B. Arch, 1962-1963) and finally enrolled at UC Berkeley for the Master in Architecture (M. Arch 1965-66). Today Daniel Solomon is Emeritus professor, after having been teaching at Berkeley since 1966 as lecturer, then as Assistant Professor (1967-1972), Associate professor 1973-1979 and Professor of Architecture (1979-2000).

In his 'Virtual Monograph' (this is how Solomon defines his web site www.danielsolomon.us) he describes two projects as "milestones" of his design achievements: the Pacific Heights Townhouses and the Fulton Grove. Both projects were somehow influenced and inspired by Colin Rowe theoretical works and correspond to a precise idea of a city.

In 1975-1978 he applied successfully for a Grants at NEA (National Endowments for Arts) to produce Change Without Loss, Residential Design Standards for the San Francisco Department of City Planning. In 1977-1978 Daniel Solomon designed and built Pacific Heights Townhouses, as demonstration of the ideas in Change Without Loss. "The thinking, the spirit, and the techniques of most of his works are grounded in this small project from long ago. Pacific Heights Townhouses is the foundation for later work; it clarified the idea of new architecture housing contemporary life finding inspiration in the place it is part of."

In 1992 Daniel Solomon designed and built Fulton Grove in the older San Francisco (crisscrossed with mid-block lanes). «Fulton Grove is a new lane on the old pattern, separated from but connected to the streets. Twenty small three-story townhouses, and two generous flats, each with its own entry, garage and rear garden, face each other along the private cobblestone drive. Access at both ends is through large apertures in new buildings which span the lane».

Before *Love vs Hope* Solomon authored the following books: *Bedside Essays for Lovers (of Cities)* (2012 Island Press eBook); *Global City Blues* (2003 Island Press); *Cosmopolis* (2008 Distributed Art Publications, Inc.); *ReBuilding* (1992 Princeton Architectural Press). All of them are «partly autobiographical, partly historical, and partly philosophical, an assemblage of priceless reflections on city building, urban development, politics, housing, music, ballet, and the like, all presented with wonderful erudition». There are recurrent themes and topics in Solomon's books: Continuous city versus Ruptured city, Modernity, Site versus Zeit, Chinese Urbanism (Wu Liangyong's Beijing project Ju're Hutong), the European cities and urbanism.

My 'encounter' with Daniel Solomon dates back in 2004 when on the bookshelves of the Avery Hall Library at Columbia University in the City of New York I stumbled upon the book *Global City Blues* (2003), an unseen (but somehow 'familiar') kind of writing for a young

doctorate candidate from Italy as I was. In that book the author demonstrates «how the power and seductiveness of modernist ideals led us astray. Through a series of independent but linked essays, he takes the reader on a personal picaresque, introducing us to people, places, and ideas that have shaped thinking about planning and building and that laid the foundation for his beliefs about the world we live in and the kind of world we should be making».

Reflecting on the themes tackled in Solomon's books it might be significant to provide evidence of the use of opposites: «Cosmopolitan is the best word I can find to describe the opposite of the sectarian tribalism that is so richly nourished by identifying races and classes by building type and style and then isolating them from the city around them».

The structure and the content of *Housing and the City. Love versus Hope* includes issues previously and partially explored in the book *Bedside Essays for Lovers (of Cities)* published in 2012 by Island Press by the same author. *Housing and the City's* manuscript is integrated and expanded especially through two chapters one on Rome and one on Paris and their modern urban history. In both cases there is always as a background «the struggle between the City of Love and the City of Hope has minidrama within it, an epic within an epic, fought on the battlefield of American public housing» as a main topic.

Love versus Hope continues the use of the author to include his cultural heroes selected from slightly different contexts than in his precedent manuscripts and analyzing them from different perspectives, introducing new details and organizing the story plot in different ways, providing evidence of the genuine pleasure for writing expressed by the author. Among these heroes: «Choreographer George Balanchine, the jazz giant Duke Ellington and the couturier and entrepreneur extraordinaire Coco Chanel. They are all attractive for the same reasons and all of them embody exactly what it seems to me missing from the currently arid culture of architecture, architectural connoisseurship and especially architectural education». Then, as already mentioned, Wu Liangyong, the Chinese remarkable and modern architect and academician, is another of Solomon's recent heroes. Among Solomon's books this is the one which dedicates particular attention to Rome (two chapters), to Italian architectural culture, introducing two new heroes: Marcello

Piacentini and Gustavo Giovannoni and their respective idea of a city.

The scholars contributing to the book event presentation in Rome (May 2019) of Daniel Solomon's book *Housing in the City. Love versus Hope* organized by the Doctorate in Architecture and Construction DRACo (coordinator Dina Nencini) were Attilio Petruccioli, Antonino Saggio, Jean Francois Lejeune, Lucio Barbera, and myself acting as moderator. In particular, during the presentation Petruccioli traced a detailed picture – including Solomon's one – of the different approaches and personalities converged in the experience of the Congress for New Urbanism, and their coherent cultural connections with the most remarkable tradition of city design in the Italian architectural culture. Saggio focused his intervention on the ambiguity of the concept of *Hope* and *Love* and on the genre of writing of *Housing and the City. Love versus Hope*: Italian scholars-architects would arguably define a scientific autobiography (see Aldo Rossi well know scientific autobiography) while American architects and scholars would naturally consider this book as a kind of intellectual elaboration without the necessity to define it “scientific” being an experiential – and therefore highly valuable – narration based on beliefs, studies, direct experiences in practicing architecture. Then, Lejeune presented the continuity of Solomon's book and the joint work under development titled *Rome. Spendid Ordinary* on a selection of historical roman neighborhoods conducted by himself, Barbera, Solomon, Guerrero and Del Monaco.

To reinforce the mentioned arguments and to relate about the deep interest of Dan Solomon, an American architect from San Francisco, for the European and Italian architectural culture, two excerpts from his book *Global City Blues* are reported revealing nexuses and explanations: «Frank Gehry, the grand master, and movement he helped to unleash in the works of Thom Mayne, Michael Rodundi, Eric Owen Moss, Fred Fisher, Mark Mack, and others are products of Venice. Their work originates deep in the soul of a particular place, like Perrier water, and like Perrier water it is now a global commodity. Los Angeles teaches an architect to survive in, even to reveal in, a world that is disjointed, irredeemably ugly to many outsiders and far beyond the possibility of the normal kind of civic grace that cities have aspired to for as long as cities have existed. It is a world in which invention and iconoclasm are not

merely licensed but obligatory». [...] «San Francisco teaches something different. It teaches an architect to believe that the history of urbanism did not end a few years ago, that in fact it is still going on, that it demands the same skills that it always has, and that the confusion of the last half of the twentieth century was neither permanent nor inevitable. The San Franciscans consider these to be with the qualities of traditional urbanity functions as the setting for contemporary life. They also see the messed-up places in the city and the suburbs built in the last half of the twentieth century, and they are dead certain that these places are not nice to live, work, shop, or play in as the older parts of San Francisco».

Therefore, the cultural nexus between Rome and San Francisco urban architecture – the latter probably one of the few cities in US experiencing the continuous and disrupted city –, considering the words of Solomon, is more direct than with other American cities, as Los Angeles, since new architecture in San Francisco deals often as in Europe with the existing context. As stated by Solomon in a paper of 1980 on his project *Fillmore Mews* – a project combining moderate income and market-rate condominium housing and neighborhood stores –, it represents a possible solution on contextual fit, «how to complement the old buildings without demeaning them by creating cartoon replicas. The permissive climate of post-modernism has generated in Victorian San Francisco the 'Repli-House' as a New building Type [...] Fillmore Mews is deferential to the old buildings but does not mimic them"⁴. In this sense in 1969 Manfredo Tafuri had already introduced significant arguments within his essay *Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology*⁵: «In the United States, absolute freedom is granted to the single architectural fragment, which is situated in a context that is not formally conditioned by it. The American city gives maximum articulation to the secondary elements that shape it, while the laws governing the whole are strictly upheld». [...] «The geometric design of the plan does not seek – in Washington, Philadelphia, and later, New York – an architec-

4. Daniel Solomon, *Fillmore Mews, San Francisco, 1979*, "Design Quarterly," n. 113/114, City Segments, Walker Art Center, 1980, pp. 70-71.

5. Manfredo Tafuri, *Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology*, in Michael K. Hays, *Architecture Theory since 1968*, Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 2000, pp. 6–35. previously published in "Contropiano" n.1, 1969.

tural counterpart in the forms of the individual buildings. Unlike what happened in St. Petersburg or Berlin, here the architecture was free to explore the most diverse and remote areas of communication».

As a consequence, we could state that Solomon proposes an approach similar to *a third way* in architecture “buildings of the third kind” – for designs that rise above the vernacular fabric of the city but are not intrusive, disruptive monuments to architectural brilliance. *A third way* in architecture had been also the possibility explored by Italian master of architecture like Mario Ridolfi and Ludovico Quaroni with Neorealism during post-war reconstruction phase starting from both of them with Tiburtino Neighborhood (INA Casa) and evolving through different experiences as Terni's historical urban center architectural infills for Ridolfi and Casilino's later experience in Rome for Quaroni.

To continue evoking on “cultural intersections” and contraddictory practices it could be interesting to mention a significant architectural episode: in 1914 the Major of Rome Ernesto Nathan appointed Marcello Piacentini to design the Italian pavilion for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco of 1915 (after he designed the Italian Pavillions of Bruxelles 1910 and Rome 1911). Piacentini spent three months in US during the construction of the pavilion (in a lot of 15.000 sqm). It is considered almost a legendary experience, affirms Rosa Ressa⁶, although Piacentini – which during the same years was experimenting a new architectural language in his Italian architectures for his Brussels and San Francisco projects – decided for a different approach, which «limited in freedom of experimentation by the expectations that this task entails. Piacentini creates highly didactic exhibition projects, where the image of Italy is flattened on an export stereotype, easily communicable and appreciated by the public and international juries». This is a story which could open to several discussions and further studies and act as a stimulus for the next book by Daniel Solomon who contributed to the understanding of contemporary architecture of the city that is relevant for Italian *lovers of cities*.

6. Rosa Ressa, *Marcello Piacentini e il mito della città italiana in America. La Cittadella Italiana all'Esposizione Internazionale di San Francisco del 1915*, in “Storia dell'Urbanistica” n. 6, 2014.