



Casilino 23, Residential Public Housing Unit by Ludovico Quaroni et al, Rome 1965-75.

Ludovico Quaroni is a super Venturi?

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Abstract: Reading *Housing and the city. LOVE vs HOPE*, I was very happy to follow several examples from the Italian scene, and in particular by the presence of the urban development of Casilino in Rome, that was designed and coordinated by Ludovico Quaroni, but it was never at the center of the Italian debate on the topic. Other than Robert Venturi! The real genius of “Complexity and contradictions” was our Ludovico Quaroni. Who knows him, knows... his beginnings in Piacentini style, the opposite Neorealism of his Tiburtino and La Martella Villages which he refused in his churches, beautiful and massive.

The 10 of May of 2019 at Sapienza University of Rome, it was organized a presentation of the book *Housing and the City. LOVE vs HOPE* by Daniel Solomon.

Professor Anna Irene Del Monaco organized the event and several speakers were invited: Orazio Carpenzano, Dina Nencini, Lucio Barbera, Jean-Francois Lejeune, Attilio Petruccioli and my self.

I consider my self very privileged to have followed the different comments of the colleagues and to have read for the occasion Solomon’s rich and interesting book. I try to recollect my intervention at the presentation at Sapienza and also what happened later. In my intervention I touched several points concerning housing, and housing in America. In particular I was recollecting my US experience in the field. In fact I studied at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh with Louis Sauer, one of the major expert in Low rise-High density housing.

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When I came back in Italy I started to write about the architecture of Sauer and specifically his works in Society Hill Philadelphia. My book was originally published in Italian in 1988, but many years after a new edition in English was published. The topic of Low-rise-High density will fit perfect in the great fresco of experiences presented in the Solomon book. Reading his book, I was very happy to follow several examples from the Italian scene, and in particular I was very surprised by the presence of the Urban Development of Casilino in Rome, that was coordinated by Ludovico Quaroni, but it was never at the center of the Italian debate on the topic.

Solomon in his so airy and witty prose, writes: “Then you climb a driveway to a nondescript parking lot, turn left and there you confront Casilino—and good God—it is so superbly well done it takes your breath away.

Ghost of Ludovico Quaroni, I will take back every snide remark, but I don't know what to say to you. The almost parallel bars are the ubiquitous *casa in linea* again, this time raised up on *pilotis* in the fashion of “transalpine rationalism”. The only the difference between this and most of the French, German, Swiss, Austrian and Dutch versions of Zeilenbau social housing, is that Quaroni's is really beautiful. On one side of each bar of units there are heroic stair towers, every other unit. On the other side is a syncopated rhythm of deep, well-used balconies. The bars splay slightly and slope slightly, from eight stories on one end of the long bars to four or ve on the other. Except for the concrete stair towers, the material throughout is a handsome Roman brick, impeccably detailed. Between each bar is a beautifully designed and perfectly maintained formal garden. On a level below the gardens is the cleverest, most economical and pleasant solution to a parking podium I have ever seen. e drive aisles of the parking are open to the sky with rows of garages, traversed by occasional bridges, and with simple, day-lit little stairs to the gardens above. It is all so straightforward that I blush never to have thought of such a simple and elegant parking solution myself.” (Daniel Solomon, *Housing and the City. LOVE versus HOPE*, Schiffer, Atglen USA, pp.127-129). Partially during the talk and partially after it in a Facebook post, I developed a thesis that I want to summarize here. Other than Robert Venturi! The real genius of “Complexity and contradictions” was our Ludovico Quaroni. Who knows him, knows... his

beginnings in Piacentini style, the opposite Neorealism of his *Tiburtino* and *La Martella* villages which he refused in his churches, beautiful and massive. Each step of Quaroni contradicts the previous one! In urban design he wins the competition for Mestre *Barene di San Giuliano* with a strong town design. It is a project all based on “morphology” that Bruno Zevi admired. Together (and with others) they realized the project for the *Asse attrezzato* in Rome, a mega-megastructure that made any other megastructure in the entire planet pale. But then, instead of pursuing the same road, again Quaroni “contradicts” itself. And does the project of *Casilino* in Rome. Now in ... Casilino ... Ludovico Quaroni denies himself again! He completely abandons the idea of megastructure and the ideology of the prevalence of morphology, to make an all typological project. The urban form is not given by an “a priori dictated” by the architect’s signature, but “follows”, as a sort of DNA generated by the typological choices. Which are simple, brilliant and beautiful. Go there you will be amazed (viale Primavera, even by metro).

In my opinion, Ludovico Quaroni in Casilino was also thinking of Saverio Muratori’s project in Mestre, his competitor for the *Barene di San Giuliano*. Because everything lives in the complexity of thinking and if one is as strong as Quaroni was, sooner or later he scores. I was there to the Casilino after the book presentation because I wanted to see the project again. And Casilino is a marvel, it is a masterpiece, it exalted me. It reminded me of my “Hope” years, when I thought that the world could be improved with proper housing projects and that I could contribute with my work.²

2. After the book presentation I posted the above comment on Facebook. A notable series of comments followed. In particular the comment of Anna Maria d’Olimpio, one of my class mates in High school. Anna bought an apartment in Casilino and shares his positive visions. Follows a comment by architect Francesco Ferrara who speaks of his visits of Casilino with professor Alessandro Bollati, an architect who followed very much the theory of Saverio Muratori. After this, an intervention of architect Alessandro Camiz who wrote a very detailed essay on Casilino in which he underlined the major paternity of the Casilino was that of Roberto Maestro. Finally a deep and very articulated response by professor Lucio Barbera. Barbera vehemently rejects this thesis of Camiz concerning with Maestro paternity explaining in details the method. of working in team of Quaroni. Not only. Barbera recollects a common theme that goes from *Barene* of San Giuliano to the project for Parliament to Casilino. He called it the “walling of the fan”. Barbera short essay, as well as the other interventions, are very interesting indeed to read for the specialized reader. They can be accessed (and directly translated into English) at this address: <https://bit.ly/2UiTUwK>