

FOR PIETRO VALLE

Giacomo Borella

There's a conundrum here: you asked me to write something about the building site and I never succeed in doing it because I am always on the building site.

We do have some small construction going on here around Milan but, above all, there is a sort of building site in our office. You should not imagine a Renzo Piano-like workshop, sponsored by UNESCO and with a view on the sea, but a dark and messy basement filled with the tools of those who make architecture (or attempt to) with a do-it-yourself attitude. Architecture, referred to what we do, is really a big word, but, from our small viewpoint, we try to blend hand and intellectual (this is another big word!) labor. It's been a while since we had enough of sitting in front of a computer and leaving the practical, physical, bodily part (that is, all the fun!) to others! We still, though, are able to make only small things by ourselves; those that are a little bigger, we still give them to a real builder. Blending design, hand labor and dialogue with builders is what we like to do. In *Fields, Factories and Workshops* (a classic, written more more than one century ago and more up-to-date than a lot of the featheredbrained assertions of Rem Koolhaas...), Kropotkin says that those who try to blend hand and intellectual labor are "individuals who escaped the much praised work specialisation. They are the irregulars, the kossacks who fell out and broke through the barriers built between clas-

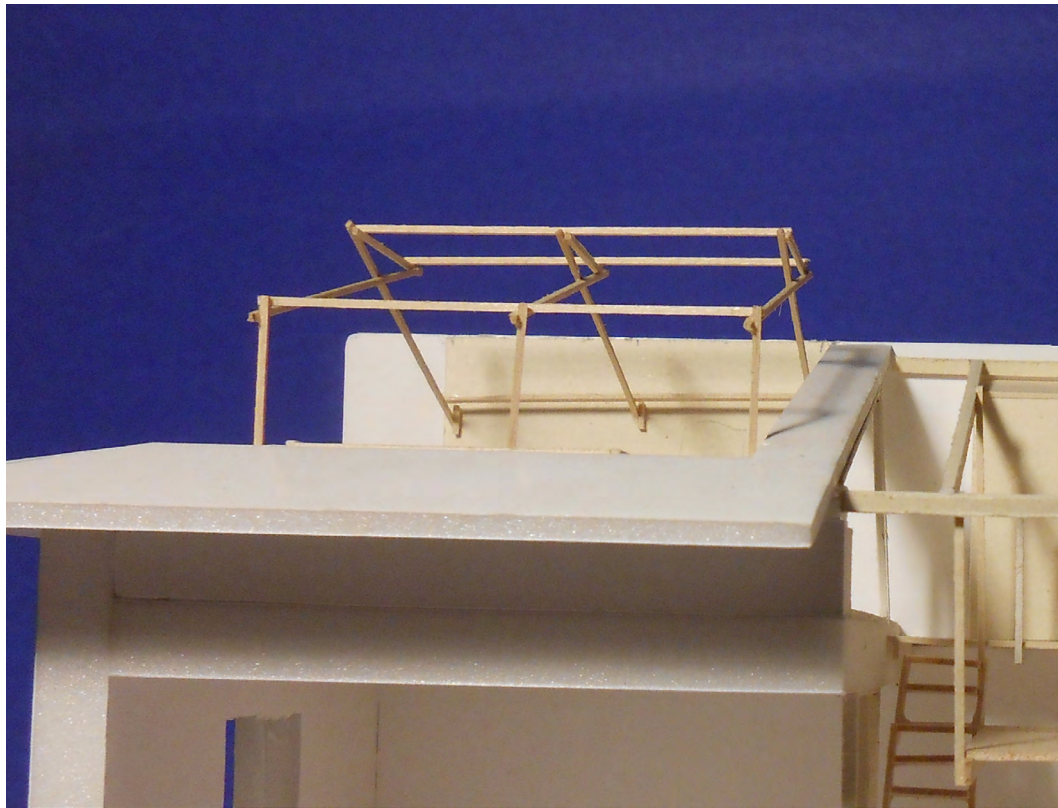
ses".

At times there has been friction with builders and, other times, a profound understanding. Some days ago, for example, I was on a roof with Mr. Oscar, who is finishing our project for a small extension. He is a shrewd craftsman, he does the masonry but also the wood and the metal work. He was using a hand riveter, the same as mine, a cheap tool, elementary, perfect: one of those tool that Ivan Illich labeled as "convivial". I said to him: "Shit, the riveter is still a fantastic tool!". he stopped for a moment, looked at me and, smiling, said "Pota... (Pota is his favorite quote) "...it always work...".

Here is Oscar working at the flashing.



The next day it was our turn: we had to build a pergola on a balcony, in another building site, without any Mr. Oscar to help us. A pergola done with chestnut poles, the ones used in agriculture, bound with ropes without any metal tie. This is the way we thought of building it:



While we were making it, though, we realised there was a flower box overhanging just in the place where the central pole was planned and interfering with it. Our structural engineer, Carlo, was there, and playing the rope binding master. We consulted with him and he figured out that the pole thickness was strong enough to allow us to get rid of the central pole. He also suggested to bend the two side bays some forty centimeters towards each other, so that they would contrast; we did as he said. Luisa, the apprentice helping us, in the end said. “I have learned more today with these poles than in a whole year of structures class”. This is the pergola as it came out.



In general, the building site has been reduced to an annoying interregnum that gets in the way between the bodiless output of the computer processing and the abstraction of the finished work that wants to resemble a rendering.

In a modern country, it is absurd to spend such a long time and effort to go from the conception to the finished product!

Contemporary architecture (but Modernism had already taken giants steps in this direction) seems to be thought to conceal its nature of human product.

Dear Pietro, excuse my messy thoughts. I would like to write something more structured but we are in Rovinj, Istria, now, assembling a small shop, and I am a little bit in a hurry.

I say farewell with a small sketch of Rovinj.

Goodbye now, and thank you for your patience!

Giacomo

Rovinj, april 17, 2015



BIOGRAPHIES

Gianandrea Barreca is one of the founders of the A12 group who promoted projects, exhibitions and installations internationally. In 1999, together with Giovanni La Varra and Stefano Boeri, he established Boeri Studio who promoted important urban and architectural projects in Italy and abroad. Since January 2008, together with Giovanni La Varra he started the professional practice Barreca&La Varra, based in Milan. He has taught at the Domus Academy in Milan and the University of Genoa. He has been a visiting professor at Kent State University, California State University and Syracuse University all based in Florence and i2a in Vico Morcote.

Giacomo Borella received his architecture degree at the Milan Polytechnic and has been a pupil of Umberto Riva and Alvaro Siza. In 1993 he founded Studio Albori in Milan with Emanuele Almagioni and Francesca Riva, and works at architectural and landscape projects that consider environmental and ecological issues. He has written essays and pamphlets, collaborating with many publications like *Lo Straniero*, *Gli Asini*, *Corriere della Sera*, *Lotus*, *Radio Popolare*. He has been a visiting professor of architectural design in many universities.

Giovanni Corbellini is a professor of architecture and research leader at the University of Trieste, as well as a tutor in the *Villard de Honnecourt* international doctor-

ate. His many books include: *Ex Libris - 16 parole Chiave dell'Architettura Contemporanea*, *Bioreboot - The Architecture of R&S(n)*, *Le Pillole del Dott. Corbellini*, *Housing is Back in Town*, *Parametrico Nostrano* (with Cecilia Morassi).

Giovanni La Varra, deputy editor of *Viceversa*, started his professional practice in 1994 and in 1999, together with Giovanni La Varra and Stefano Boeri, he established Boeri Studio who promoted important urban and architectural projects. Since January 2008, together with Giovanni La Varra he started the professional practice Barreca&La Varra, based in Milan. He has been granted awards such as the *International Highrise Award 2014* for the Vertical Forest tower in Milan. He has taught at the Milan Polytechnic and Statale University. He is currently associate professor of architectural design at the University of Udine.

Valerio Paolo Mosco, editor-in-chief of *Viceversa*, is a practising architect and critic. He has written: *Naked Architecture*, *Ensamble Studio*, *Cinquant'anni di ingegneria in Italia e all'estero*, *Steven Holl*, *Architettura contemporanea: Stati Uniti East Coast*, *Architettura contemporanea: Stati Uniti West Coast*, *Architettura a volume zero* (with Aldo Aymonino), *Valerio Paolo Mosco: scritti di architettura*. He teaches at the IUAV in Venice and at the IED (Istituto Europeo di Design) in Rome; he has been a visiting professor at the Milan Polytechnic, at the Brescia Architecture University and at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago.

Michele Nastasi, since 2004 has been working as a photographer in the field of architecture, urban landscape and interiors for architectural firms and magazines, as well as developing his own research projects. His pictures have been published extensively and exhibited at the Biennale di Venezia and in other exhibitions in Italy and the USA, among which *Suspended City. L'Aquila after the Earthquake of 2009. Photographs by Michele Nastasi*, Wolk Gallery, MIT, Boston 2013. He co-authored with Davide Ponzini the book *Starchitecture. Scenes, Actors and Spectacles in Contemporary Cities*. He is part of the editorial staff of *Lotus international*. He teaches Architectural Photography at the Milan Polytechnic.

Marko Pogacnik is an associate professor at the IUAV in Venice, He has been a visiting professor of architecture in Potsdam, Triest, Graz, Aachen, Dortmund and Innsbruck. He is in charge of the Venice unit in the Italian National Research Program *Atlas of the Structural Forms in Italian Architecture of the 1950s and 1960s*. He has been curator of the exhibition *Adolf Loos und Wien* in Vienna in 2011-2012. He has written monographs on Adolf Loos and Karl Friedrich Schinkel, as well as curated books on Adalberto Libera and Hans Sedlmayr.

Stefano Pujatti received his architecture degree at the IUAV in Venice as well as a Master in Architecture at Sci Arch Los Angeles. He worked in the firms of Gino Valle in Paris and Coop Himmelblau in Los Angeles. In 2005, he founded Elasticospa based in Chieri, near Turin who promotes architectural and urban design projects that have won international recognition. He has been a professor at the Turin Polytechnic, a visiting professor at the University of Toronto as well as a guest critic in many international schools of architecture.

Kester Rattenbury is an architectural journalist, critic, author and teacher. She has taught at the University of Greenwich and then, from 2000, at the University of Westminster in London. In 2003, she set up EXP, the *Research Centre for Experimental Practice* that promoted the *Archigram Archival Project* and the *Supercrits series*. She has contributed to the most important english architectural magazines, published books in the *Supercrit*, *Architects Today* and *The House Book* series, as well as written monographs on Cedric Price, O'Donnell and Tuomey and Terry Farrell. Since 2003, she has been working *Another Country: The Architecture of the Novel*, a research which re-explores some of England's most famous imaginary environments.

Jonathan Sergison, together with Stephen Bates, established Sergison Bates architects in 1996. The practice has been awarded the Heinrich Tessenow and Erich Schelling medals and many of their buildings have won international recognition. Having taught at a number of prestigious schools of architecture, the Architectural Association in London, ETH in Zurich and the Graduate School of Design at Harvard among them, Jonathan Sergison is currently Professor of architectural design at the Accademia di Architettura, Mendrisio.

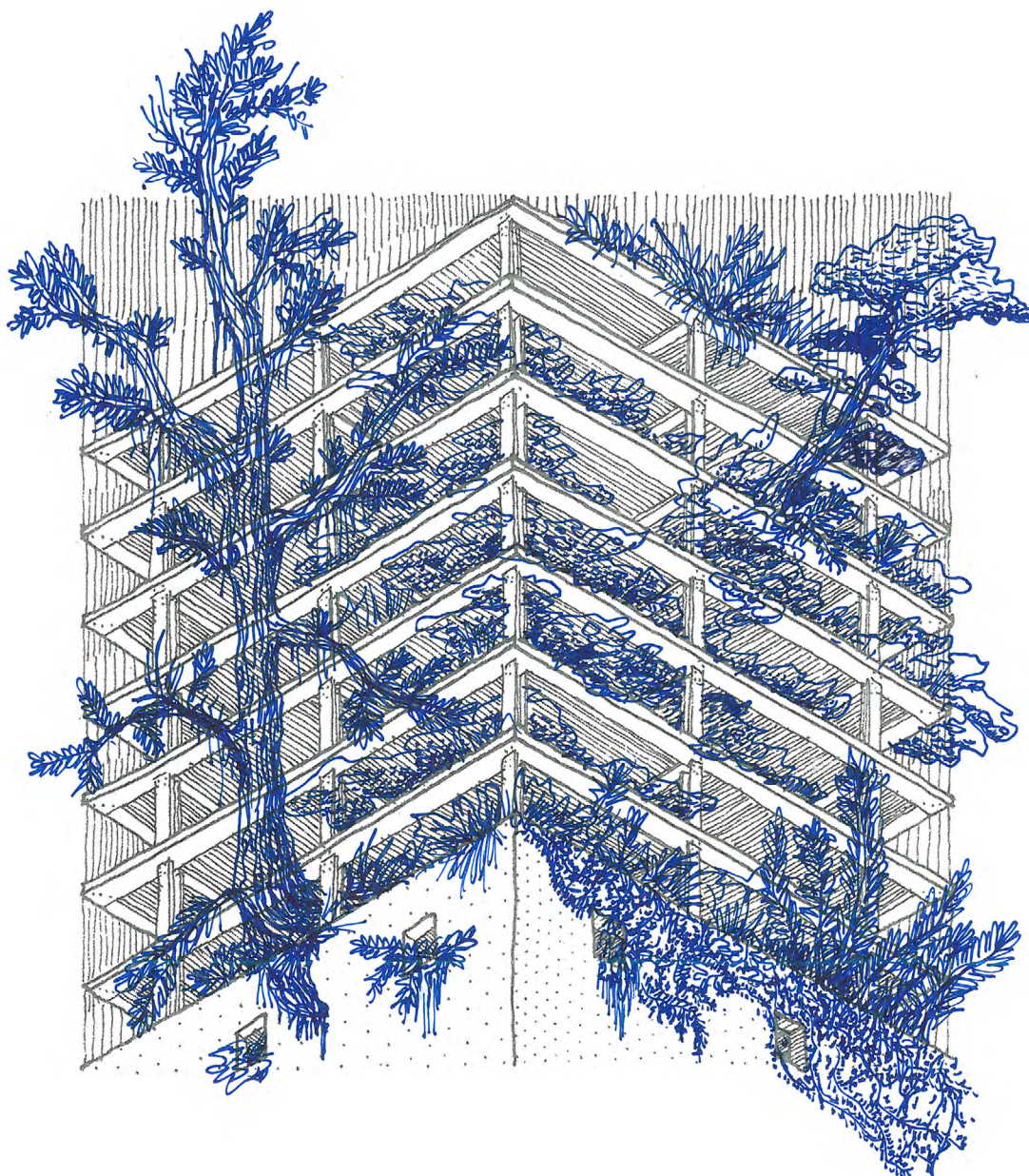
Christian Sumi, after his degree at ETH in Zurich, collaborated with the Institute of History and Theory of Architecture within the ETH. Together with Marianne Burkhalter in 1984 he founded Burkhalter Sumi in Zurich that won international recognition for their innovative wood buildings and color schemes. He has taught at Harvard Graduate School of Design in Cambridge (USA), at Lausanne Polytechnic and at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow. He is currently Professor of

architectural design at the Accademia di Architettura, Mendrisio.

Pietro Valle, guest editor of the *Building Site* issue of *Viceversa*, received his degree at IUAV in Venice in 1987 and a Master of Architecture at Harvard Graduate School of Design in Cambridge (USA) in 1989. He worked in the firms of Boris Podrecca, Emilio Ambasz and Frank O. Gehry. Since 1990 he has collaborated with Studio Valle in Udine/Milan and is nowadays the firm main partner and designer. He has been a visiting professor of architectural design in many U.S. universities, in Ferrara and at IUAV in Venice. He has contributed with essays to many art and architecture magazines, as well as he keeps on writing books. His last is *Alpe Adria Senza, Paesaggi Contemporanei a Nord Est*.

Peter Wilson studied at the University of Melbourne and at Architectural Association where he taught from 1974 to 1988. In 1980 he founded the Wilson Partnership in London. In 1989, together with Julia Bolles, he founded Architekturbüro Bolles+Wilson in Münster that has won international recognition with its built projects in Germany, Holland, Japan and the United Kingdom. He has taught as a visiting professor of architectural design and theory in Berlin, Mendrisio, Edinburgh, Rotterdam, Cambridge, Havana and Venice. In 2013, he has been awarded the Gold Medal from the Australian Institute of Architects.

VICEVERSA



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