

# 12. Alberto Seassaro. Struggle and Open Debate

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As I try to draw from the heated period of student struggles some memories with which to speak about Alberto, what surfaces moves me with tenderness, and this act of delving into recollections leads me to speak of events that today seem almost otherworldly.

I came to know and spend time with Alberto Seassaro when, at the Faculty of Architecture in Milan, everything was being called into question, and the disciplines of traditional courses were contested by students who demanded a more direct and conscious relationship with society. It was the famous *1968*, and I recall it with longing because then we were young, and we believed in those things with enthusiasm. At that time Alberto expressed his great vitality and his exceptional organizational skills in creating moments of struggle and also of free debate, and in forming study groups aimed at reflecting on the deeper meaning of designing.

Alberto and many of us, all *subordinate lecturers*, together with the students, challenged the teaching courses and many of the official professors. And we organized ourselves to practice an alternative didactics, discussing social housing and *power to the people*... We held

continuous assemblies and public demonstrations, also in support of the workers' struggles then demanding the Workers' Statute.

And also, as a provocation, we decided to welcome into the Faculty the families from the shanties who had occupied the public housing of Via Tibaldi after being evicted by the police. For this we spent a night gathered in a pseudo-assembly (presided over, moreover, by Dean Carlo De Carli) to justify the Faculty's nocturnal activity as *educational activity!* In the morning, however, they took us away, arrested us, and we spent a day at the police headquarters – only one day, as far as I remember – but first we lined up, raising our fists and singing *Bandiera Rossa*... Then we were dismissed as well, but that is another story...

Yet beyond the struggle, Alberto also possessed the ability to foster forms of free exchange between students and teachers. I recall, in particular, the seminar he held with Corrado Levi, titled *Il privato è politico* [The Personal is Political], in which the students' unease and their rejection of architecture were approached through a method that combined the design process with a simultaneous recognition of personal experiences and sensitivities. The seminar was followed with enthusiasm by many students who, through this experience, discovered a new possibility of approaching architecture and of uncovering its allure <sup>13</sup>.

And I think now that even the architectural choices and interests later cultivated by Alberto – the careful study of technologies and his love for design – were ways of deconstructing those weary forms, by then emptied of vitality, that academic tradition proposed. They were, in other words, the path – which would prove fruitful in the field of ecological thinking, and beyond – towards bringing architecture closer to life again.



1. Manifesto del movimento degli studenti di architettura, *Uniti si vince*.

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