

BOLLETTINO multimanano n° 2

By OSSERVATORIO *in* OPERA
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This issue of the Bollettino depicts the situation of the Isola by the date of June 2006 and it is entirely dedicated to all the people who have given concreteness to their dreams and desires with the will to defend their own dignity through a "political" action meant as an active participation of the citizen in social choices.

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Supplement to save: "Souvenir from Milano".

To keep a state of vigil, alert and tension is the lesson one learns at Isola Garibaldi through the decisive action of whoever opposes a forced imposition in defence of his own right of choice.

There are people who accept everything with indifference, others with resignation and at last people who refuse. What it's about is the impossibility to understand the increasingly rapid changes in the name of needs and reasons which by now escape the most serious understanding, and those groups of persons who refuse, refuse to not understand; they demand time, enough time to prepare questions that challenge the helpless deadlock in which they find themselves.

The only way to try to understand is to act. Reason alone doesn't create opportunities. The only way is to activate the whole of human faculties to be equipped with a personal speed to contrast an unnaturally accelerated motion.

"To do" is what has happened here at Isola. Paying attention to one's intuition and acting upon the imaginative and creative capacities of everyone have made evident a state of emergency.

"To do" has revived a state of individual and collective consciousness that has allowed people to formulate qualitative answers to the exhausting progressive reasoning, disastrous compared to a better common quality of life.

In this sphere, the defence of public space, cost what it may, becomes the assertion of the people's dignity, who for once want to decide for themselves the ways of choice that regards their lives, because the quality of life is never given beforehand, it's a conquest, a goal.

In this steadfast defence of one's own freedom and will of expression – that inevitably highlights the grotesque and sickening sweet face of property speculation – you can even find a parallel dimension, a single unrepeatable moment which remains in suspension, independent, considering what it will be, since it lives out of its own expectations.

Perhaps it is the only real dimension in which life seems as it could be and not what it is forced to be; it is the space of desire, "how wonderful life would be if", knowing that most people happen to live their life, or a good part of it, in the same place.

The dream that in this moment, and only in this moment, is cherishable, it is a happy reality and anyway, a sustaining force, visibly real in the network of loving and sharing relationships, the real recipients of the desired change.

Therefore we felt it important to gather the wishes of the people who participated at the festival in defence of the public space and report them in this issue of the Bollettino by Osservatorio in Opera, that is a permanent laboratory, born within the project of "Isola dell'Arte" at the Stecca degli Artigiani.

FORUM ISOLA

Coordination by:

Parents Assn. Confalonieri – Comitato I Mille – Isola dell'Arte Assn.

INFORMATIVE ON THE PROJECTS AND LODGED APPEALS

The actual project for the reorganization of the entire district of Garibaldi/Repubblica – Isola provides for the placing of various installations, with public offices (new headquarters of the Regional and township administrations) and private ones (including the Polo della Moda), as well as sizable commercial and residential areas, all distributed around a diamond shaped area named Campus (not park) intended both for a green area and buildings:

1 Integrated Program of Intervention GARIBALDI/REPUBBLICA – nearly 700.000 cubic meters.

Foreseen interventions: new Polo of the Regione Lombardia (260.000 mc.), Town Hall building (90.000 mc), Polo della Moda (300.000 mc), residential buildings (50.000 mc).

To the 700.000 mc are to be added the 250.000 cubic meters of the ex Varesine project. Two appeals have been lodged to the T.A.R. (Regional Administrative Tribunal) on 28.10.2004 and on 24.03.2006 by the resident citizens.

2 Integrated Program of Reclamation ISOLA-DE CASTILLIA (P.I.R. ISOLA) - approximately 30,000 cubic metres – Foreseen interventions: 14 floor office building, a shopping centre on ground floor with three floors

of underground parking and 4 upper ground level floors adjacent to houses of civilian use, realization of the first stretch of the new street from Viale Liberazione towards Viale Zara running over the gardens of Via Confalonieri that will involve more traffic and pollution.

Two appeals have been lodged to the T.A.R. the 11.01.2005 and the 9th of January 2007 by the resident citizens - hearing to the merits of the case set for 20.06.2007.

3 Integrated Program of Intervention ISOLA-DE CASTILLIA (P.I.I. ISOLA) approximately 90.000 cubic meters -

Foreseen interventions: construction of 9 buildings of which a 28/30 floor skyscraper for a total of 90.000 mc on the existing gardens and demolition of the Stecca degli Artigiani.

In 2001 the Town Council signed an agreement with the owners of the area of Via De Castillia to exchange their property grounds with the gardens of Via Confalonieri (including the Stecca) owned by Town Hall. On the 12th of April 2006 the Town Council, after a property offer, approved the project with the introduction of an amendment that does not include those which for years had been the requests of thousands of residents of the Isola neighbourhood, that is, the realization of the Boeri/Catella project on the Garibaldi/Repubblica grounds, where their right of building that volume overrules and where other construction areas of 90,000 mc are available. The new street and the demolition of the Stecca degli Artigiani are confirmed.

With the exchange of the areas the neighbourhood of Isola will be robbed of its only proximal green lung to hand it over to the new seats which will rise in the area of Garibaldi/Repubblica.

After approval of the project, on the 30th of June 2006, the resident citizens have lodged appeal to the T.A.R.

In the five appeals lodged to the T.A.R., and not yet heard, is complained of, among other things, the lack of standards involving all the three projects and, in spite of it being the same administration that has never come short of emphasizing that the three plans are strongly connected and integrated, the assessment of environmental impact has been carried out only for the P.I.I. Garibaldi/Repubblica and not over the entire area.

The new buildings on the existing gardens of Via Confalonieri (see point 3) and on the confining area (see point 2) bring about the arrival of a large number of new residents. It is easy to understand that the amount of green areas for the actual inhabitants will reduce drastically, keeping in mind that in the past three years, in the neighbourhood of Isola there have been or are in the process of being constructed other new buildings.

As for the campus, not park, the technical report observes that there will be a series of buildings dedicated to Fashion and Design and other prestigious initiatives. The campus will be destined to the new settlements of the Project Garibaldi/Repubblica (see point 1) and to the use of those who will attend the commercial and private offices yet to be built, as well as all those people who will commute arriving from terminals of public transportation (trains, underground): It must be emphasized that on the campus there will be the three buildings of Via DeCastillia 20, 22, 24 which at an earlier time were supposed to be demolished. It cannot, therefore, be considered green at hand for the inhabitants of the Isola neighbourhood.

THEY HAVE A DREAM!

A selective collection of thoughts, dreams, desires

INTERVIEWS WITH PEOPLE ATTENDING THE FESTIVAL ON THE 10TH OF JUNE 2006 AT THE GARDENS OF VIA CONFALONIERI, ISOLA GARIBALDI, MILANO.

BEATRICE

Osservatorio in Opera – Do the inhabitants of Isola want this neighbourhood to remain unique and do they put up resistance to whoever would change the urban asset without consulting them?

Beatrice – It's true. During these years and these transformations in act, the Town Hall administration and that of the district didn't really present the question to the citizens, so some urban projects started with pretty heavy interventions that don't guarantee liveability and the preservation of this neighbourhood just as it is, historical. Instead they go and substantially modify a neighbourhood. It's not just about another house without a bit of greenery, that there should be, anyway. This is about very, very heavy interventions, that

have a very hard effect on the viability, increase in population, and besides, they don't guarantee those basic essentials that make a neighbourhood liveable.

OinO – We have noticed that the Isola, compared to other neighbourhoods of Milan, has its own identity as a historical neighbourhood backed by workers and the Stecca could be considered as its symbol. As far as we can understand, with these transformations the Isola, instead, could become a suburb compared to a small centre, whereas now, it has the air of being a small centre.

B – Yes, this is practically an entity in itself, it has a strong identity compared to other neighbourhoods in the district which are dormitory neighbourhoods and therefore suburban. This has kept a certain liveability even if the more northern suburban neighbourhoods, Affori, Bruzzano, Niguarda, have in their turn maintained a liveability not at all determined by administrative projects, but by their own inhabitants. The inhabitants have formed volunteer associations and cooperatives, that in their turn, interacting with citizens and proposing social activities and gatherings, keep alive that which would otherwise be absolutely desolate.

OinO – Is this the potential of the Isola?

B – Fortunately, this is the potential that is diffused in most neighbourhoods of this district. At the Isola there are committees like those who organized today's festival and which are very active in guaranteeing the preservation of the Isola, not so much the "status quo", but rather its own liveability, in order to avoid the construction of giant skyscrapers that have nothing to do with the Isola.

OinO – By your own expectations, what are your chances for winning this battle?

B – For sure it's a hard battle and it hasn't just begun, but has been going on for quite a while. The citizens of the district have brought an appeal to the T.A.R. and are gathering signatures as well as other things. I don't live here, but I know that many are stubborn, so yes, it will be hard and even longer, that is, it won't end with an immediate victory for the property, but it will be about negotiating with the property in cases when permits have already been given and with the Town Hall and the Administration in cases when the works, instead, have already begun. So, the battle is still going on.

OinO – How do you see the situation of the Stecca and the Gardens?

B – The gardens must be safeguarded, because in Milan there aren't many, so if we also eliminate those which are still here ... it doesn't at all seem right to me. As for the Stecca, it is a reality that has been here in the Isola for a long time and must certainly be requalified ...right here and now though I don't know in what ways, I would have to think it over, but for sure it needs requalifying, which doesn't mean to demolish or eliminate what could be the treasures that have been operating inside the Stecca in these years.

OinO – How is the situation where you live?

B – Where I live there is Parco Nord which guarantees a daily breath of fresh air, so we're pretty fortunate, but also there are the same problems presented, in the sense that in recent years, as well as now, they are constructing in a careless and foolish manner and unfortunately the birth of a new building never corresponds to an amount of green that could barely guarantee enough oxygen for those who live there. Buildings are mushrooming, side by side, but the amount of necessary green is not enough. Fortunately, in Bruzzano there's Parco Nord that serves as a lung.

OinO – In your opinion, why does the administration have such a problem in considering what should be the right of whoever lives in an area?

B – Because, paradoxically, for me, as president of the District Council, I feel it is essential that the council keeps open dialogue with the citizens who live in the district, so that even whoever doesn't live in the district can have a firm grip on the situation. The problem is that too often in these past years we have forgotten that we are citizens, one only thinks as an administrator, and the aims are different, they're private.

FABIO E FRANCESCA

OinO – What would you like to come out in place of the gardens of Via Confalonieri and the Stecca? Tell us one of your ideas, something you imagine could happen in the future.

F – There's a key point from before which is whether it's possible or not to save the structure of the Stecca and what is objectively possible to obtain with respect to the new reconstruction projects in the foreseen area.

OinO – But is there something you can imagine, something you dream about?

F – It would be necessary to ask for construction charges with the obligation to build a series of services for the neighbourhood, for sure a maintenance service for the green area, which is already provided for in the project of the "Town of Fashion," but they must be activities useful to the neighbourhood: a playground meant for children, sportive facilities which are totally lacking here at the Isola, various activities, all at the disposal of the local population.

OinO – Francesca, do you have faith that the mobilization of you inhabitants could produce favourable effects and that what is being done could bring about a result or do you fear that the enticements of power can get the best of your will, of that which you desire?

Francesca – I think whatever will happen will happen, because I believe there exist more powerful people, who have more bearing.

OinO – So then, what do you expect in carrying on this battle?

Fabio – The basic problem, which is tied to the past experiences in battles for the neighbourhood, given that here it obviously is not about saving a tree or a structure which would be much easier, the problem, in my opinion, are the goals one sets and whether they are unfeasible because even if theoretically they are brilliant, but difficult, therefore impossible to achieve, the risk is failure. If we can focalize on the objectives that are obtainable it's easier to be successful. In my opinion, if there's something the movement of the Isola has done wrong is that they asked for things that are not so easy to have. Not that it's wrong to dream, but it's necessary to know what can and cannot be obtained. Ideal battles often shatter because they clash over the fact that it's child's play to say "no" to a mega-project which is then unfeasible. It is much harder to say "no" to single things upon which the same administration has great difficulties to oppose, as I said before, sportive facilities and things like that. I have been living in Isola for twenty years. I love the neighbourhood and I don't like the transformation that is undergoing, but inside the movement for the defence of the Isola there's missing a true and strong communication with the inhabitants, however impossible it may seem.

Even these events have always had a strong adherence from the neighbourhood, but above all from external elements which work well for the moment in which they are supportive during a battle, but then your strong reference should be the neighbourhood population. I think that some components that form the movement for the defence of the Isola often have some extremist comportment. I'll make an example: I work as a journalist, so a couple of times I happened to go to meetings bringing studies I had done on the destiny of Isola, which contradicted the movement's version. But I'm sure of the sources from which I had taken these documents, that often is not the Town Hall, from which it's so hard to get information, but from facilities that are tied to Town Hall and that have their own urban development projects. For example, from the Milanese Underground, that intends to build a line here under us, comes out a project that also includes the outdoors and that isn't exactly what was presented in the meeting, but in the moment I make this evident, that the destination is a bit different and therefore the situation is a bit less distressing, there is a refusal. I understand that it's easy to do a battle saying, "they want to build a freeway, they want to construct buildings". It's stronger, it makes more of an impact, it's clear that people get scared, but it gets harder to say "it's not exactly a freeway, but a road with a certain end", so the battle is a bit more difficult because the people are a little less scared.

And this is a fault, because tomorrow an administrator will come to present projects in which there isn't a freeway and here one risks to lose adhesion to the initial movement. I believe there has been a great popular movement, that has always been positive, because it results from indignation, but then, as it often happens on other occasions, one can get swept up by the movement itself without going to see what some of these projects are really about. I'm ready to mobilize, but every time there's a debate I have found closed doors, so I have taken a distance from the movement.

OinO – So, what do you expect, what do you foresee can happen?

F – For one thing the project of the "Town of Fashion" is absolutely out of control, and that's a point to keep in mind, so I believe it's important not to have a hundred aims, not even the idea to be able to save what can't be saved. You have to always keep in mind a goal you can reach, concrete, as I said before. If I could imagine the future of my daughter, all I hope for is that it will be possible to have spaces for social use for an ever growing population at Isola, that's always changing. There are increasingly more couples, more children. So, who are we watching? We're watching them. Just to think that 800 meters from here there's

one little garden very active in this neighbourhood and it's crowded, the only basketball court within 5 km, and it's crowded. I think that sort of a structure could work, even to substitute a garden like this one, which is nice, but in the end it's passive.

OinO – So, would you be willing to give in to reducing gardens?

F - In exchange for facilities, sport equipment, a centre for gathering, which obviously shouldn't be just 30 square meters, a space that could be like the Rotonda della Besana, for example in Milan, qualified, for exhibitions, for courses and a space meant, let's say, for children, the more vulnerable, and the elderly, a garden that is transversely useful, then yes. To defend as a closed packet these two green areas and the Stecca is a battle that from an idealistic point of view I would gladly accept, but that in reality we're going to lose, because the enemy is the one we all know, a local government that has already made some great choices and some investments have been already done. That's the kind of project we can't block. If we think we can fight that, in my opinion, we're risking to lose everything, because then we'll leave them the project of what is to come. If instead we have some propositions that may seem trivial, but are actually very binding, because no mayor can come in a neighbourhood and say "No, I won't exchange these spaces for a sports field, a social centre or a garden", it's much easier that we'll win the battle. It may seem like a second rate battle, but in reality it's much more concrete.

OinO – What could you give up?

F – Give up... obviously if they gave us the same measurement it would be wonderful. I don't believe it will be possible to save the Stecca in it's actual form. It's more likely a partial reimbursement, we'll call it that, a form of charges for the neighbourhood. Then there's the risk that here they'll construct buildings and there the charges will be managed by the Administration, which would come back in the construction of offices. No, instead, there we can bind them, because it involves obligations by law.

OinO – In place of the Stecca, what do you picture?

F – I see another space in place of the Stecca, that may be reduced in size considering its actual square meters. Moreover, the Stecca is a problem, because even if I'm fine there, not all the neighbourhood likes it. Actually it is a space that offers a lot, a lot of interesting things, useful for only a small portion of the population, it's not so transversal and if you want transversal support from the people, you have to show them an open window to dreams. If today you speak with the people of the neighbourhood, who may not be from the left, not particularly alternative minded, you'll notice that they see the Stecca as, not to put it lightly, the drug addicts' haven, a place they have nothing to do with.

OinO – So the problem is to imagine it in the future and not to see it as it is now?

F – Right, but if you want to join in for a battle you have to demonstrate that what you promise is not exclusively this. I have participated in three or four of these festivals: there were collectives, various gathering centres, bands, so there was instantly a transversal benefit on behalf of everyone in the neighbourhood, but if you look around and count how many people live here in Isola, you'll notice that a big chunk is missing. This, in my opinion, reveals a limit in the commitment of the movement for Isola, which means that you didn't know how to keep dialogue with the whole neighbourhood, because, let's face it, if it were a whole neighbourhood to support the battle, obviously you can turn the tables on the demands.

OinO – So, in your opinion part of the possible failure could be blamed on the fact that only a part of Isola is participating?

F – Exactly. We're fighting a battle that's impossible to win completely, that can only give a partial result. The margin of conquest over that partial result depends on the strength of the movement, and if you have only a partial capacity to converse... I'm not far from the movements, even so, every time I have expressed an opinion that didn't correspond, I found myself closed out, which doesn't intimidate me, I'm forty years old and have been to hundreds of assembly meetings, but if I have to adhere to your cause 100% it's already a lost battle, because the goals have to be so great that we can literally declare "we save everything", yet we have to realize that we can't save everything so we have to think about what we can obtain. When you make negotiations you have to know what to ask for, what you can obtain and beyond what lines not to yield, that's the most important thing. We have to try to keep the line as high as possible, but to do that you need the support of the whole population.

CLAUDIA

OinO – Do you live in this neighbourhood? Can you tell us about it?

Claudia – I've been living in the "Isola " for several years, since I was born, then I left for a short period, four or five years, and then I came back. The "Isola" is a neighbourhood that has changed in these last years, people have been mixed a little, I mean that at the beginning it was a working-class neighbourhood, but now, in the last five or six years there are mixed social ranks. The most important problem of the "Isola" is the lack of green areas and this is a big problem for us who have children: we are forced to move and go to Farini street, whereas we'd like to enjoy these areas that in anyway could be beautiful gardens, but that are actually kept in a state of decay. Therefore, we, parents of the Association of Parents, have been working together for two years now, with the committee "I Mille" that is trying not to allow the construction of 80.000 cubic meters of buildings. Last year, for example, children's paintings had been exhibited. They showed how they'd like these gardens in Confalonieri street. Then we exhibited all the paintings with their dreams to be realized.

OinO – Since here the possibility of a building with big profits is in sight, to what can't you renounce, in case you have to choose?

C – For sure this is a very attractive place. It's an area that is tempting many building contractors. If we don't continue this form of resistance, that began five years ago, we could end up with new buildings that for now we don't need. For the moment we need a park with recreational facilities and also the place for a gym, for a swimming pool, anyway a place for youths to meet. We parents have given some priorities: certainly a gym, since the primary school has only one gym and unfortunately next year the secondary school will be closed, therefore this gym can be no longer used – besides it has been closed for two years because of the asbestos. And certainly we need a cultural centre also. Anyway, most of all... the garden, since it's the only one green area, I can't understand why they want to take it away, to eliminate it! The Stecca, as it is now, frightens the parents a little, it's a building that needs to be reclaimed, but considering its historical value, it would be fair to maintain it as a symbol of this neighbourhood, considering its working-class origin.

OinO – It's therefore clear that the "Isola" has its identifying character in the town. Do you think that in the future it could maintain its distinguishing feature of neighbourhood or it will turn in a suburb?

C – We already have the examples of "Brera 2" and "Navigli 2", that are only a bother for the inhabitants with all those shops, restaurants, pubs etc. and then those are very special shops, there are some dressmakers, artisans also, who have, in my opinion, very high prices and this makes the neighbourhood a place for tourists. And we're not interested in this, on the contrary, I, who lives in Piazza Archinto, truly feel uncomfortable for this. This square is near the primary school and in the evening there is always a lot of people grouping, going out of the pubs and leading a night life, making a lot of noise and the day after there are a lot of bottles everywhere...this upshot couldn't bring other than trouble, we're not interested in changing our neighbourhood into a "Brera 2 ", "Navigli 2". On the contrary this should be a neighbourhood in which the "Stecca" is a benefit, I therefore see it reclaimed, restored, in a way that it will be something useful, with useful spaces, a cinema, a theatre, a place where kids could stay. Something that is useful to the neighbourhood from the cultural point of view.

OinO – If there should be a new proposal, a negotiation from the authorities and you should be forced to choose between what you have before suggested, what are you ready to renounce?

C – If I really should renounce something, I'd give up not the garden, but this Foundation soon opening by this real estate agent.

OinO - But the Foundation is not part of your renunciation that rather concerns the cut of the gardens and the "Stecca"...

C – If we weigh two things against each other, at present I feel I can't renounce either. As far as the "Stecca" is concerned, they speak about a future restoration, because not everyone likes it, anyway it's a problem for the inhabitants, but I wouldn't give up either.

PATRIZIA

OinO – Is there something you would like to see in place of the gardens and of the "Stecca"?

Patrizia – In place of... nothing, nothing in their place. How do I imagine it? The gardens reclaimed and a building with facilities that are a fact of personal survival for the neighbourhood, also in the immediate future. The “Stecca”, the way it is now, is revolting, but it is the essential space, once it has been conceived, imagined with a little of imagination; once it will be restored, it will be an ideal space, because it stands inside the gardens, it is on the halfway of a path, it divides the ancient from the new, like a kind of rib.

OinO – Do you have any idea to improve the neighbourhood “Isola”, starting from the gardens and from the “Stecca”?

P – I see it as all in one, this is one of the spaces of the many spaces. I also fight for the awareness of the neighbourhood. It is like a bet: to be able to stay together in a human way. When new people come from other neighbourhoods, I've really seen that they must be re-educated in social awareness. I live in a house with a running balcony, not a house with banisters, it's something more stylish of period, but the idea is that. And I really see the difference between those who have lived there and are aware of a different neighbourhood and those who arrive with good-will, but are ill at ease in saying hello or in sharing the space. It is therefore a re-educational process. I see it in this neighbourhood as a possibility for so many people of re-educating the citizen's soul. That's why this space cannot be separated from the rest of the neighbourhood.

OinO – Is it the symbol, the heart of the neighbourhood?

P – I see it as an opportunity, so that the heart could be rediscovered, so that there will be an awareness of everyone. Incidentally it is the heart, because we are the heart. As very few architects know, when you create spaces, you also condition the way of staying, of being, which is why changing some spaces inside the neighbourhood means changing exactly the being of the neighbourhood; so also in this space, when it will change, it's not important if it will be more beautiful or worse, but if something essential will change, something else will happen. And then we will see...

OinO – You're an optimist. Do you think that in the future the “Isola” could keep its character of neighbourhood and not of a suburb?

P - Brera, for instance, has no longer its identity, but a built-up one; so they destroyed the identity of Brera, now it is a commercial, a mock identity, so much so that it is losing its significance, I wonder why.... It's clear that if there is significance, people who arrive see it, feel it, touch it, smell it, otherwise it's only a show, that can be more or less beautiful, but always a show, it's not a content but a container. So for now this neighbourhood has an identity, even if it has changed so much in its living fabric. There are no more workers, or there are very few of them, because this was a working-class neighbourhood; it was the first industrial settling in Milan, and therefore it had a strong identity. Obviously around the factories houses with banisters were built up, where the workers and the artisans used to live, consequently they served the allied activities. This is its nature. Then there's the criminal aspect etc., ineffectual things.

OinO – If I've got it right it is representative of the “old Milan”, the one that Milva sang, just to give an idea?

P – As far as I'm concerned, Milva can go jump in a lake (she laughs). People never wanted to sing “Ma mi, ma mi”, they used to go to the Opera to free themselves, so they are the same old “radical chic” people, who, I hope, never move here, because I hope that educated people come who are different from workers, but who are kind hearted. Here we hope that “people” come and for now the newcomers are good hearted who want to have an alternative to the standardization, to the globalization...tion...tion...

OinO – People who certainly don't want a suburb here...

P – Here they try to find a little town, to establish humane relationships. This is what we need to maintain, apart from people who live here. It will be something different from what there was 50 years ago, obviously, now it's already different, there are new shops, but if people come who want to do this thing... I'm seeing it, because I'm attentive, sensitive, even picky about newcomers, but it seems to me that people who are coming don't want to devastate, but on the contrary they want to maintain. It will be different, sure, but I like to feel that this place will be reclaimed, I like well grounded trees, cleanliness, taking the graffiti away from the walls, they are really meaningless, but all this in a neighbourhood with a living fabric. If it becomes the umpteenth place of fun, I'll fight it! I'll fight both for these spaces and the identity of the neighbourhood, because they are connected with each other.

OinO – And the promises regarding the “Isola”, the promise of reclamation, the “Town of Fashion”, how do you see it?

P – Those are threats, just threats! The debate among the associations, whatever is the property or the interests, reopened the whole question... if you now listen to the communication about the “town of Fashion”, you’ll find out that they tried to sustain it, but I fear they haven’t the intellectual capacities to do that. Anyway the debate among the inhabitants of the neighbourhood has already changed something, because if you hear the proprietors speaking you realize that they want to work together with the Polytechnic, they want to relate with the official culture. They haven’t yet made a significant improvement with the inhabitants (she laughs), because they always think that the inhabitants are an “amoebic” and possibly ignorant mass. The promises of the threats are for the moment. Now the question is to turn them into promises.

OinO – Are you confident that the inhabitants’ mobilization could give these results or do you rather fear that the power enticements could have the best of your will as citizens?

P – The mobilization is the only condition without which we couldn’t even think of hoping to obtain something. It’s of the utmost importance. By the way... I’m a very special person, because I am priceless and I think that others like me are priceless, the question is to put them together. Some of us have succeeded in it till now, some, to the side, said their price, but they were discharged as blight, whereas priceless people are gathering together.

OinO – Do you think that the authorities could play on these prices and which is, at last, the biggest danger as to the promises and the “Isola” residents’ desires?

P – A big risk is that there really are these appealing prices for some, like on the other hand it happens, but it seems to me that it’s not yet happening, and then if it happens...

OinO – Illustrate the best the worst thing...

P – The best is to obtain what we want, to slow down the transformation of the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood should be a symbol of an alternative development of the town, a possibility of living in a more humane dimension, without meaning “backward” however. It could even be an exportable model. This is the game we play. To be together, to be at peace, to be at home when you get off the bus or you put the car in the garage and you’re already out of your home and this is, in my opinion, a possible condition, already happening. This is why it can be even a model, why not? Why are you happier here than in another neighbourhood? This is the question that the public managers should ask themselves, “why do the inhabitants feel good there and not in another place?” The architects, the scientific community, highbrowed and self-important, should pose themselves this problem.

OinO – Why are you putting up this fight?

P – There is this resistance, that is not caused by a “no” or by a “yes”, but by a “no, but” or “yes, but”, so it’s not a no, without communication (two sides engaged in a confrontation). So this is an idiotic position from the local government, because we’re not aliens coming down from Mars, but perhaps we simply get used to living in a situation that cannot be renounced, because the option is disgusting, but not because of fanatical or nostalgic, nor radical chic reasons, as far as I’m concerned. The best thing to do is to find a balance, the possibility of a mixed situation, allowing every possibility: whether one is artisan or shopkeeper, whether one is interested in fun rather than in the family. This “mix” leads to a magical balance, if I take one away, I take away also the other one. The neighbourhood becomes a “dedicated” one. And a dedicated neighbourhood is the worst thing, as far as I’m concerned. It is not so much the buildings, even if I certainly don’t give up the green areas, but I fear less one more building than a standardization, an idea that is not even an idea, but a foolish project that you can find in Calcutta rather than in New York, rather than elsewhere. After that you wake up and it’s like being in a Hilton hotel, you wake up and say “where the fuck am I, at Bari, or Perugia or Rome?” And you don’t know it, because if in the morning you wake up stunned, you lose your awareness, that is the condition without which a human being cannot even plan one’s future. Wherever do you plan your future, in your 40 sq. ft. flat?

OinO – At the Wood of Gioia it happened that the associations, the neighbourhood and Lega Ambiente tried to rebel against the municipal plans, but they lost. What do you think remains in the memory: the people’s fight or the authorities’ omnipotence?

P – This fact didn’t budge me an inch, and I’ll explain why... considering that we are still fighting, we cannot say that it’s all over, quite the opposite. That wood has only been cut down, in fact, but it is still under appeal. The real loss of the inhabitants has been the loss of an association that didn’t think it over, because we are carrying their plan out, I mean not to build.

OinO – Whatever happens in future, this kind of fight will be a precedent of awareness. Don't you think so?

P – It's something that cannot be renounced! As far as one can, one tries not to have one's life projected, even if we all are conditioned. Everyone chooses for the others, beginning from the family and on, there are some choices in life that one can make, saying that those are choices. In all my life I have made only three personal choices and I'm nearly 60. The other ones have been forced by the situation, by things, but as far as true choices are concerned, the ones that create the change, it is the self-determination that says "now I'll do this, in spite of all, for this reason, with full awareness". I've always said it, if we win it's absolute happiness, if we lose, we met each other at least, it's worth the effort. Then personally I think that we can even win.

OinO – In Milan have there been precedents like this?

P – No, not like this. It's a unique moment, even because we're fighting and putting different realities together. Here, all things considered, we're creating a true residents' association, but an association is reductive compared to the problems of a neighbourhood, because there are so many issues on which to work. And even when we should have won, it'll be ages before you've changed everything!

OinO – How do you see the participation in this festival of the gardens on June 10th?

P – I'm happy, first of all because there are so many people who are making the same experience together, that's enough difficult. The flea market, for instance, is something different, it's always a very interesting matter, but it is always related to the fact that people are shopping etc. but this is a different aspect of aggregation with a very important meaning: we're here, together, we're exerting ourselves a lot, but we did it all together, we thought up the document together, we've made this choice together.

OinO – Did you get many approvals?

P – I see the difference since I began four or five years ago. Now people are more conscious. I find it fabulous that we, association "I Mille" are together with the "Parents' Association" and the "Isola dell'Arte" to create this Forum. This is a historical fact! Instead of wearing ourselves down, since four years ago we have made an improvement, what do you want more from life? And it's exactly then that you win, there's no doubt, I'm an optimist!

MARINA

OinO – Were you born in this neighbourhood or did you come to live here and why?

Marina – I'm a resident of this neighbourhood by choice since 1980. I used to live in the Venezia district, but when I was younger in the 70's I used to come here to work in the theatre of the "Isola" social centre, where there was a self-managed nursery school. Even then the municipality gave the order to clear out a wonderful cloister with a garden that was perfectly equipped for children, for theatre; it was full of activities that were of use for all of the town, but then the choice was to destroy the space that is now the second garden. They razed a municipal property to the ground, just to send away the people who were making theatre there and the nursery school, managed by the inhabitants. We were at the end of the 70's and a heap of rubble was the result. Then our neighbourhood club of Lega Ambiente built that garden with hard work, I'll say it again, on the place of an old cloister with a garden, all of this municipal property. Yesterday evening and today I attended a meeting at Punto Rosso, a cultural association that in some way takes part in social forums. They were dealing with a very interesting question, they tried to get out of trouble as to the way of being left-wing and even they ask themselves questions about the fifth International and the Socialism of the XXIst century.

OinO – Do you think that this neighbourhood has a special identity?

M – I like to explore all that is moving in this neighbourhood, because every new form that is coming out excites me, I'm here for this. I chose to look here for my first home alone after my marriage ended, since I knew this fabric that seemed to me extraordinary when I was here to make theatre. I must say that I have been rewarded with great happiness, because this is a little town, in the richest sense of the term. You know each other, you wander through the streets and say hello to the shopkeepers, to the neighbours, to people doing social, political activities etc.

OinO – So this is not a suburb...

M - (she laughs) Don't even dream of it! They are trying to make a place of motorway transit of it, a sandwich bar, a place of fashionable bars for aliens, as it is already happening in Corso Como, where unfortunately crowds of frustrated, lost, well-dressed persons flock in on their high heels impossible to wear, with a palpable existential discontent. If you go for a walk in Corso Como in the evening, you'll see these dressed up to the nines girls, laughing and joking in a place without a tree, paved in a way that make one's feet sore, with putrid fountains and if this is beauty... there exist forms of art even of the decay, for heaven's sake! But I ask why stay there in the blight when you can stay in a beautiful place. Certainly the theoretical work that is being carried on at a worldly level about the other globalization is of the utmost importance. If we could enjoy the existing forms of democracy, they are already successfully practised as in this case, in which there have been Lega Ambiente, Cantiere Isola, all the Movement at the Stecca, the foundation "I Mille" that at the beginning even came into conflict with Cantiere Isola, and then it led to organizing all the appeals that we're carrying on, even with a group of professionals, because there are architects, town planners, lawyers, a small group of technicians who are working their tails off as they like it, but then they give institutional results. After that, there is the Movement, then an Arci club was born that opened a Time Exchange system association, a revolutionary form of relationship between people whose difficulty is asking for help, knowing what kind of help is to be asked and accepting to get it and this is paid in hours. There are real cheques in which you say "thank you, I received so many hours and therefore I place my time at disposal", at the provincial level of Milan, for instance I received help for an old lady from a Time Exchange association at Monza. So there are all these wonderful ways, in my opinion, alive and well, that are political forms. So this is a highly political neighbourhood, in the feminist sense of the term, if you want, in which the private is political, but really is... It is not an accident that there is a majority of active women in these situations, young women of the Arci Club, that is enough mixed, women and men and on the other hand a lot of older women, like in this group that is being created by parents and artists.

OinO – Which could be, in your opinion, the worst situation that could happen here at "Isola" if, for instance, a restoration should be presented as the "Town of Fashion"?

M – The alienation is what I fear the most, I mean those places where you are unhappy, where you are sitting on the pavement behind a flow of cars like they do in Via Valtellina...the whole of Milan is like that, the most of Milan is like that! You see all these youths staying up until four in the morning outside of the pubs with a glass in the hand and cars passing by. This is hell to me. It's the non aggregation, the desperate screaming of those who want to stay with others without having a place where they can do it.

OinO – So do you think that the Stecca with the gardens are a part that cannot be renounced in this plan of civilization for a liveable city?

M – Yes, of course! It's a pity to throw it away... I see it as a monstrous waste from a social, artistic, human, environmental point of view. They killed such an amount of trees that I personally went and took care of. At the Gioia Wood we cut the padlocks and went in. With gloves and shears we started cutting the ivy from the oldest trees. This was a public garden, bound by a donation that assigned it to be used as a public good. We don't know how, nor why, nor at which price our beloved administrators have transferred it behind our backs, whether we could ever know who paid what to whom and who received what by whom, because these are really obscure things... and so the citizens lose power.

We are substantially suffering a theft of a public good for private interests. It's the same old story, isn't it? We don't stand to gain anything by the "town of Fashion", but we're going to lose something because they're stealing from us the earth, green areas, the air. The sun was already stolen, because now it goes down three hours early in winter, at three pm it is freezing, whereas before we were used to sitting in the sun, in our gardens, on the ruins of a municipal cloister! So we continue to supply value, working and giving things a value, but the public administration cannot think of anything better than to destroy the good of the community, that the citizens, as a community, have put together for free in decades, and to sell it to private customers at unknown prices that don't come back to us. Are you kidding?! That's a robbery, a fraud, it's imperialism, call it as you want.

OinO – Considering your past experience of social participation and fight, how much do you think the neighbourhood is ready to fight to prevent that this could happen?

M – This is a much more difficult question. I myself am sick and tired of it, I mean it's hard work! It means that you spend hours and hours and hours of your life to make your rights, your properties, that are public ones, respected. It means to read and send e-mails, to be active, to attend meetings, to discuss, to get information. You cannot imagine what this could mean, you have to ask Augusta what does it mean to get information, it means wasted brain, imagination...to fight for one's rights is crushing, it's an activity that smothers your leisure time, your working time, because you have to give up even a lot to do more for your

professional success. I was an activist in the 1968 protest movement and absolutely not regretful. I must say that from the first occupation of the Statale, in which I got involved because I was already studying at the university, I devoted a lot of my time to fights. And one desires for oneself even a politically full life. This is also concerning something about which we were discussing ... I mean to keep on fighting is also to give up a part of one's life, certainly it's part of one's life, a full life that makes it rich, it's a very beautiful experience, but it is as much beautiful to lie on one's back to sunbathe in the country with friends and children. Fighting is beautiful, but it is a sacrifice, you need to have balls!

OinO – Among the offers that have been made, isn't there anything that could be accepted, something that, after so much fighting, has come towards you, taking into account your requests?

M – Surely we have had influence also on the offers, but we can say that it is still very strong the difficulty of the information and of the misinformation, because a lot of people say: “we've had enough of this decay, make a trade centre, if only you would do something!”.

OinO – So, does there exist a situation of decay?

M – Sure! The decay is the means for the theft. The decay is the same thing as making war and leaving a country in a war condition, and after that comes the absolute rule, the martial law... look at Cyprus for instance. The decay is kept to make the neighbourhood rise and ask for order.

OinO – Do you mean that there is something else behind the evident fact that the Stecca became an undisturbed area for drug pushing, filthiness, disturbance?

M - The Stecca was left an uncontrolled space, because we couldn't rule it, we made so many efforts there inside it, in particular, I think, the youths who live there. “Controprogetto”, the artists of “Isola dell'Arte”. In a word, on the “Stecca” we worked hard and many of us grew up, but we, people of the “Stecca” cannot cope with the 21st century problems.

OinO – Has everything happening in that space been allowed?

M – The Police Force certainly doesn't come to send the pushers away. Instead, they send away the young artists or the youths who play jazz late at night. The Power often behaves like that, unfortunately. The decayed space is for the theft, to say “take it away, because it is rotten”. But who left it to rot? It was a beautiful space, why has it decayed? It was mine, now it's rotten, now do take it away from me because it's rotten? Actually it's since 1963 that the Isola neighbourhood has blocked the property speculation, at the time they called it “Office District”. It was the first historical alliance, I think, between the students and the teachers of the architecture university and the neighbourhood for speculative and political reasons, when there weren't fights in the town yet. The town has been a very important political subject in the second half of the 60's and in the first years of the 70's. There was the Law 167, it seems to me before '68, because the Faculty of Architecture had already moved beforehand.

OinO – What do they want to build here?

M – The “Office District”. This is an area on which speculation has set its sight since more than 40 years ago. The “Eugenio Bussa” bridge, exactly that bridge, why does it end nowhere? Because, I have understood from Patrizia, Bussa had contacts in the Vatican and he said “if you want to see me dead make that bridge, but I won't allow it, because my parish will be damaged by it, and so will the parishioners, the neighbourhood...” and he stopped it thanks to his good-connections. There is an extraordinary historical book about the Isola neighbourhood edited by the parish.

OinO – And do the new residents know all this?

M – Well, yes, some of them know it, because they are open-minded and they come here for this. There is a selection, I'm one of them. I've been living here for 26 years. I'm here because I want to be. And I want to stay here. I'm also investing some money in my small flat here at the “Isola”, my daughter doesn't want to move away, not at all! She's so lovely.

BERT E MARIETTE

OinO – From interviews with inhabitants of the “Isola” neighbourhood there comes out an interesting and varied scene, in which all the people care a lot about the gardens and also value the culture and the art, but

everyone sees the “Stecca” with suspicion because of its present conditions. There comes out above all a social and political picture of different interests. You, who live in the neighbourhood, how and when did you make the decision to take part in the fight for the preservation of the “Stecca”? Which is your point of view about artists’ and inhabitants’ who live and act in this situation?

Bert – It happened five years ago, in 2001, and we were already living in this neighbourhood. We made the decision to take part in the fight for the preservation of the “Stecca” and also of the gardens that represent a public space, because we think that it’s not correct to speak only about the “Stecca”. From the very beginning we were concerned about the public space, to which both the “Stecca” and the gardens belong. It happened in a very systematic way, probably because we have seen the plans that were going to be realized for this neighbourhood and the future transformations. This was, let’s say, the objective situation, whereas the personal situation, I speak for myself as an artist, was to go on with my interest for the public space. In one of my first works, for instance, that I made in Italy in 1995, at the Biennale of Venice, I did the opposite, the antithesis to the public art, that consists in putting works of art in a public space, on the contrary I put the public space in the space of art, because I created inside the Biennale a situation consisting in a public space, different from all the other spaces, with a false pavilion and an indoor garden, where people didn’t behave as they do in a museum or at the Biennale. This is only to say that my interest is there and this is the same for Mariette, since we’ve been always working together, because she has always documented it with the camera. So, even our artistic interest met a situation in which a public space, related to our life, as we are part of this neighbourhood, was in danger. So it has not been a very difficult decision to make, a decision made because we saw from the beginning the potential of this situation and also the requested engagement, since it was a situation that would have lasted in time. It was evident that the project would have lasted for years, because here the matter doesn’t concern a work of art or making works of art, but it’s a long term work, engaging you from morning to evening.

OinO – So... from a represented public space to a real one?

B – Yes, the space at the Biennale was almost the opposite, but I also made a lot of works in the public space, in different towns, but I never did such long-dated works, this is the difference.

OinO – Is it for this reason we are speaking of a project that has involved you as both citizens and artists?

Mariette – It came about almost automatically. We found a flat here in 1997 and we began to take care of the condominium flower bed, with the other owners. We’d bought the plants together, to improve our little common space. This is also a way of making acquaintance. And then, when you go out of your house and see the only open space of the neighbourhood, these gardens where you mingle with people, where you read the newspaper, you see that this is really the only place where you can meet people and speak with them, it comes out automatically to be interested in what is happening there. In the beginning we met Augusta.

OinO – Was the “Stecca” closed in the beginning?

B – It was partly open, because there were the artisans, but most of the spaces were closed.

OinO – So, did the interest, even from the artistic point of view, develop immediately starting from the public open space?

B – The first performance was, I’d say, in 2001, the “Untitled”, the white palisade, when we weren’t inside the “Stecca” yet. Then, starting with this work that was created out of nothing, engaging about thirty volunteers – and it was a symbolic barrier against the plan, because if the Municipality builds the street, they must destroy this work, even if it was evident that it couldn’t have stopped a caterpillar that could wipe it away in five minutes– we thought to build around this symbolic barrier, this manifesto, a real barrier, both a social and political one. It was impossible to do it as a single artist and so in 2002 we created OUT, Office for Urban Transformation, and we have occupied a fairly small space at the first floor of the “Stecca”.

OinO – So did you find solidarity even as artists, not only as citizens?

B – Yes. From the very beginning it has been declared that this was a project of contemporary art as far as we were concerned. Since 2001 we, together with Cantiere Isola, have organized small events, even in collaboration with Care/Of and Viafarini, because we didn’t have anything, just a few artists, above all Stefano Boccacini and the Gruppo A12 and some curators like Roberto Pinto, Emanuela De Cecco and Marco Scotini. OUT was born in 2002, in the same moment when a real resistance from the citizens was born. In 2001 there was Cantiere Isola, made up of young architects who had finished the Polytechnic and

wanted to do some research about the neighbourhood transformations, but weren't sure what to do, to agree or not to agree, as the Gruppo A12 also did in the beginning. We attended some meetings that Cantiere Isola organized with the neighbourhood inhabitants, but they didn't lead to a real residents' association. Then some people, like Augusta and Patrizia created this association "I Mille". Cantiere Isola has always been a sort of a neighbourhood workshop and has never wanted to take radical positions, even if at a certain moment they said that they were against the big Garibaldi/Repubblica plan, but in practice they have always been a little here and a little there. In the OUT Office I involved Marco Vaglieri, Alessandro Di Giampietro, the Mexican architect Lorenzo Rocha Cito and we have created this office that is not a group, but rather a tool to work, where some people could work on the project, but others could participate more freely.

OinO – Has there been from the beginning the will to create a working artistic place related with the neighbourhood, I mean the idea of Art and Community Centre?

M – No, in the beginning OUT was born because we understood that people of the neighbourhood found it difficult to read the plans of the architects of Cantiere Isola, who did models and miniatures, but people didn't understand them and then OUT was born with the idea to give people some tools to understand better and also to express themselves better. This at the beginning was the first idea of an artistic project. Then the association "Isola dell'Arte" was born and only recently, since we strengthened ties with the neighbourhood and above all with the "Parents' Association", the idea of the Art and Community Centre was born, an idea which probably first came from the parents, that is to ask spaces for art and for the neighbourhood. Discussing with the parents, but also with the association "I Mille", this more interesting idea was born, to have spaces for the neighbourhood that could be partly used by the artists and vice versa.

B – In 2002 it was understood that if this movement wanted to obtain a result it was necessary the major possible external support inside the neighbourhood and that in Milan the world of art was frustrated by the lack of spaces for the contemporary art. So some artists came to the "Isola", among them Grazia Toderi who had taken a studio in Via de Castilla and came to see the spaces at the "Stecca" and was enthusiastic. At the time the idea was very simple: the art, just because of the difficult situation in Milan, can play a role of support to the battle of the neighbourhood, since the neighbourhood wants to defend its public space, the art wants spaces for art, well let's put them together, out of two problems we make one force. And that's the way it was. So the first meeting of the "Isola dell'Arte" took place in the OUT office, then in 2003 we have created the association "Isola dell'Arte" with so many artists and art critics.

OinO – Which is the meaning of OUT?

B – Office for Urban Transformation, but it's also a pun, because out means outside and here we have the risk of an eviction.

OinO – Was there a precise moment when you decided to fully collaborate with the neighbourhood?

M – During one of the street performances with surveys about the neighbourhood we had the idea to organize a meeting on Public Art and on the same occasion we made a starting performance in the garden where Stefano Boccalini put the hammocks and Bert put the white fence. Since then I began to document everything.

OinO – So was the "Stecca already squatted, in some way?

B – In 2002 Cantiere Isola squatted one of these spaces that Domenico, an artisan, had left. We understood that he also had other spaces, but the doors of the first floor were really welded together, because the Municipality had closed them. And then we opened them again, so OUT went in there. Then in 2003 we with the "Isola dell'Arte" began to squat the second floor spaces, but there was so much stuff, it was a deposit for furniture and other things, that at the beginning we could use only one half of the space. But finally we opened it and in 2003 we organized an event of the "Isola dell'Arte", that was called "The Thousand and One Nights" and on that occasion it drew the attention of the artistic world of Milan and it had been acknowledged by the press. In fact the newspaper "Repubblica" wrote about the project and we had a significant improvement, because no one was speaking about that before. To get a political result the event had to become important and all these names were needed, many of them got lost after that.

OinO – If I've got it right bringing the public space in the art was already implicit in your work and this met a receptive ground from which the present situation has sprung forth.

B – Yes, that's right. Since it's a project that cannot be repeated in every situation, a basic conflict was needed between the inhabitants and the town, the project that is coming to a realization on one hand and, on the other hand the inhabitants who become aware of it and are organizing themselves. It fits in this conflict, in this tension. What I always explain when I'm invited at a conference, or now at the Biennale of Architecture, is that there exist cold situations and hot situations, even warm ones, but anyway, I was saying that a cold situation is the normal one where there is an art centre and a neighbourhood, where, with the best of will it's possible to take people to see art...

OinO – So, is there a separation, are they two independent things?

B – Yes, contemporary art is a research field and is not immediately accessible to all, like a science with its own language. And in this situation there are didactics, but in a situation of conflict, of tension, as our situation is, in which some people of the neighbourhood are committing themselves for the public space, other possibilities of action open up, because the people who are not disjointed, independent, thinking only for themselves in their daily lives, but who begin to move for common aim, these people are more open to have new experiences.

OinO – Does this go for the artists too? Not all the artists are willing to do this and build together with community a completely different concept of art.

B – Yes, yes.

OinO – In Europe there are various examples of these modalities of work. Did you draw inspiration from these experiences, like the Hamburg one?

B – No, we discovered Hamburg later, by chance, at Documenta. We saw that it was very similar, not the same, because they only defended a park and realized it 8 years later, "Park Fiction". Since we found it interesting, we invited them to take part in our first event in 2003 at "Isola dell'Arte".

M – It was very interesting to see how they had documented everything too. They had made a movie, so we would have liked to show it here. They came and on that occasion we realized a writing "Cinema Park Fiction", because to have at the "Stecca" a place for the neighbourhood cinema, even for an experimental cinema, for children too, for the elders, was one of our dreams for a long time. Unfortunately this idea has never been realized, because little at a time we've understood that the other groups, that little by little filled up the space with their projects, saw the "Stecca" a little like an island in the "Isola" unfortunately, they only wanted to realize their projects and weren't interested in the neighbourhood as we were, maybe because we live here since 1997, I don't know.

OinO – Perhaps because you have a completely different idea of art...

M – In fact even the association "I Mille" has always found it hard to find solidarity in the others and so it's evident that our project is different from the ones of the other reality of the "Stecca". We are fighting not only to save the "Stecca", we are also very much interested in the town planning scheme that includes the street, the garden, in a word in the green and open space shared by the neighbourhood.

OinO – Bert, do you think that it will be possible to realize the Art and Community Centre, fulfilling in this way the intention of a real integration of the art with society or does it remain on paper like an another utopia?

B – I think that the project can be realized, but I don't know how long it will survive, because these projects depend on the people's lives too, in the sense that by now we have built it in five years time with other people, even with you and with others, and little by little, it's being realized. The other day I was speaking with Adrian Paci about it and he made a very interesting remark, he said "a tension must always remain, we should never arrive... it's good to think about art and neighbourhood because it doesn't exist so far, with the space for the neighbourhood where one makes art and the artistic spaces where the neighbourhood goes in, it's necessary to make sure that things don't finish there". In my opinion this is the right attitude. There is a Max Ernst quote that more or less says "if an artist finds himself, his research is lost".

OinO – It's the making of art that doesn't intend to realize itself in a conclusive way in the present, but that is thought in terms of what it will produce in the following stages, in the future...

B – Here it's not the final result that is important. In my opinion, the really interesting thing is the process and what others can learn by this process. If we can realize something that no one has made before us, then it becomes of interest, doesn't it? If we only copy from models, then it is no longer interesting.

OinO – Could this experience be exportable?

B – I don't think so. We also spoke with Park Fiction about this, since they had already been working for 8 years when we met them. When they saw what we were doing, Christof said "but you are already doing things in a much more modern way". I didn't quite understand what he meant, anyway he was very positive on everything and we didn't have the feeling to be doing something extraordinary, we only put things together.

OinO – So you became almost the pivot around which all these existing energies turned, like a start that could make this dream possible or could make this discontent visible.

B – It's not so easy.

OinO – It seemed to us that your presence here and the work of many years in this situation does not depend upon the will of creating another possibility of exhibition, the need of another museum that was lacking, if we can agree, but on the contrary it comes from the need of a different way of making art.

B – Yes, but to come back to the previous question, I'd say that the present situation with the Forum, with the Parents' Association and the residents' association "I Mille" wasn't established around something, it has been built little by little, it's grown, there have been some allies, people who felt that this is a right way, but others that fought against us. The fight hasn't been only against the municipality and the private investors, but also against others who don't share our opinion on this thing, who have always ...

OinO – Which thing?

B – The art centre for instance. I remember when we discussed it in 2002, when I first spoke during a meeting at Cantiere Isola, about the possibility of drawing in the artistic world to strengthen the fight of the neighbourhood, and I was answered by some that if we would have brought the art, we would have brought people full of money and that the alternative situation that they liked would have finished. They absolutely didn't want the art and then when in 2003 our project became popular, other groups of the "Stecca", like Cantieri Isola did, didn't look favourably upon this because they considered art as one among many things.

OinO – And this speaks volumes about how art is being considered...

B – To become the pivot was not what we really wanted since the beginning, but little by little it happened, because no one else did things and things ought to be done, so we've done, as we do now, for example if no one cleans the stairs, we do it, or other things, like discussing with a political party, etc. we do all that is needed for the project. That's why I say that this is a complete project, that involves you as a person on all levels, that strikes up friendship, but also generates people who hate you.

OinO – Besides the associations, are neighbourhood people aware of what is going to happen or is there still carelessness?

M – I think that the defence of the gardens is still a very strong desire of the inhabitants. It's clear enough that the present conditions of the "Stecca" make many people want its demolition, but it was already like that in 2001, when OUT realized the drawing of the restored "Stecca", because we've understood that when we told people that it could be even restored, the answer was "yes but now it's rubbish". So we understood that we should have created the desire of a new "Stecca" and that's what we did, even with the children, with people who wanted to take part in it, a picture showing what people want inside the "Stecca", on the gardens. Then the residents' association used this picture writing on it, "and if the "Stecca" would be like this?" Then they released it all around the neighbourhood and we saw how people changed their minds, only by seeing how it could be.

B – The fact is that even the neighbourhood mobilized, we organized a march, a meeting. From a political point of view, we've seen that the majority in the district council passed from the Right to the Left. In the primary, organized by the Left, the candidate who was allied with our fight, Dario Fo, gained in all Milan 12%, but 22% in the "Isola". So we could verify that this area is different. If we use the image of the comic-strip character Asterix, the "Isola" is like the Asterix' village: the Roman Empire has conquered all around, but the village holds on, with strange characters, we are those, or it's like a small town within the city, even if saying it like that it's simplified. We see that if we organize some events, the residents' association becomes trustworthy, but as far as art is concerned things are not so simple, in my opinion. The inhabitants have understood that we are with them, that we are with the association, but they haven't understood yet what we

want, I mean, we want them to come to the exhibitions, because this is a relationship that needs to be established, because you have to create the neighbourhood public. It doesn't exist yet. This is a part of the project that needs to be well considered, because usually an art centre, or a museum attracts the city art world and others, but the neighbourhood around doesn't take part in it, they are two different entities. On the contrary here we are trying to set a stronger connection with the inhabitants and this also means to create a public place where the art visitors come to see the exhibitions and so do other people who till now were not interested in art. This implies not only different didactics, but even a different artistic practice. This is the challenge: not to do conventional things that everybody likes, where no one understands whether it's art or not, but also to arouse curiosity, not only because children enjoy themselves etc. This is a challenge of the project that we haven't reached yet, but, in my opinion, we are creating the basis, organizing for instance four visits for the Parents' Association, because things arouse even giving certain motivating forces.

M – There is a new project called “Piedibus”, aroused by a need of the Parents' Association who would like that their children could go to school on foot, so we have thought up a common project, involving the NABA, creating a little competition to produce jackets, signs etc. So there will be a more expanded collaboration in future, because if the neighbourhood has a problem or needs something we can try to realize it together.

OinO – You completely fit in the neighbourhood, both as artists and citizens, the two things are not separated.

M – It's a choice. As an artist you can choose to live in the airports and to be always present at the openings... on the contrary we decided to work here, around us, where we live.

OinO – How did they view this in the artistic world, what did you realize about this which is, so to speak, only a fact, an event, but which presumes a reflection about the theoretical question of the making of art and of the artist's role?

Bert – I've seen everywhere, both here and in the rest of Europe and recently even in Asia, a great interest in what we're doing and a great attraction. Even among the young artists known here in Milan, many of them even gave their works for the auction supporting the project. I'm not sure everyone understands what is happening. A part of the artists who have been working with us from 2003 to 2005 had as a model the group of artists that existed in Italy as well as in other places during the 80's. A model, that is, to gather, to squat a place, to exhibit their work, to invite other friends and to self-promote. It has not been so simple to explain that here things were different. It also led us to conflicts, but it was necessary also to keep the project open to others, we didn't want the image of a closed group. We asked the collaboration of some young curators, Roberto Pinto, for instance. He understood this and brought here his lessons for young curators of Brera, some of them are still here. It was very important to make clear that this was not a closed group with its own space, but that we have an art project open to the research and to others. It's obvious that in a city like Milan there are people who don't share it, because they see it like a competition, but these are only details.

OinO – In Europe there are some museums, for example the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, that are reconsidering themselves with an intention different from the purely conservative, exhibitory one. Are they beginning to think about their role as to the community, maybe also as a result of the different situations, like this one of the “Stecca”, where the art and an art centre are thought in a different way?

B – Yes, as I was saying before, there are some art institutions that want a less pompous situation, nearer to everyday life, but this cannot be realized everywhere and always, however, it is possible to do activities with this meaning. Let's take the Palais de Tokyo, there is the project of an artist not very famous in Italy, who made a kitchen garden for the inhabitants near the museum. This is an ordinary kitchen garden like many that are in the countryside with salad, cabbages, carrots, only this one is in the centre of Paris near the Palais and is tended by some inhabitants. Even here at the “Isola” Stefano Boccalini tried to make a common kitchen garden, but the initiative then failed, because on one hand there wasn't a group who kept it going, on the other hand Stefano didn't keep it going. It had been something done and then forgotten, even though there were the potentialities, because nearly twenty people took part in it and it was a constituting act of something. At the Palais de Tokyo it happened that the curators called for Robert Milain from Bordeaux, if I'm not mistaken, to carry out this project and this is completely different, because one or two families have been involved and then all this has been exhibited. On the contrary the launching of Stefano's project was stronger because these gardens are in danger and the inhabitants take care of them. Unfortunately this thing didn't keep going, like other projects that had begun, but had gone unfinished. I think we have to do a critical consideration even about this. It seems to me that the most interesting thing about this situation, where there is a conflict, is that there exists the possibility to act both for artists and the inhabitants. The opportunities to work together are opening and people who are participating perhaps don't know if this is art or not, but at

least it's a hot situation, where something could happen. After that we have to try to make something interesting of it.

OinO – An emergency area, but an living one.

B - People open up when they are active, not when they're passive, this is a fact. This is the strength, but also the limit of such a thing, because it will have a story with a beginning and an end. It's useless to think that this thing could be always as it is now. The most important thing is what we are building in this historical moment. Even the fact that we succeeded in changing the initial project is a very important result for me. We've improved a lot what was expected. I'm thinking that next year I will show my own works in the museum of Geneva and I want to include the "Isola" and the OUT office. I thought to title it "a town is not a ready-made", that means something that is finished, that you get as it is. My own question is "can the city be seen as a sculpture?", because the sculpture implies a work on an existing form, marble, wood, and that you carve or model if it's clay. The city never stops, it's in permanent transformation. We act on the town with a "sculptural" attitude, because we want to change its form. As in sculpture, we should deal with the material, you can for instance model the clay as you like, but on a certain level you cannot do whatever you want, you have to deal with the material, like with marble you have to consider its resistance. Here we have the same thing, you cannot do whatever you want, there is a given form, you act to change this form according to an idea of yours, but not necessarily only yours, and you get a "sculptural" result, because in the end you've changed a part of the town. In this sense we can speak of a sculptural approach that anyway I wouldn't call sculpture, but modelling, that is to give a form: Beuys called it "soziale plastik", but in Italian and French it doesn't mean the same thing, because plastik means something that has to do with modelling and not with sculpture and is always translated as "social sculpture", but this is wrong. I'm speaking of a "political and town planning modelling", not a social one, which is part of this, but it's not the only aim. And obviously, as for sculpture, this is a metaphor, you don't work with nothing, you work with instruments, aids, here again it's not a solitary work. OUT is a tool for this political and town planning modelling, but it's not the only one. This is my own vision of the project as an artist.

M – Art as a strategy.

Bert – Yes, it is too. Picasso, for instance, represented and followed the changes and the fights. He represented Guernica that is anyway the representation of a historical event. On the contrary what we are doing, to remain in the history of art, is much nearer to John Heartfield's approach. He starts out as a Dadaist, then he wants to have an effect on reality and makes the graphics and the collages that can be showed in a gallery, but the important fact is that they were magazine covers sold in thousands of copies or posters to put up in town. In the 70's this concept of "site specific" was born, art thought for a specific place, but it was about the geographic or architectonic place and about the relationship with the work of art that is to be placed in it. It's just that many of these artists had forgotten that the place means above all people who live in and use it. Richard Serra, for instance, has created a big problem in "Federal Plaza" at New York, where the work has been destroyed. From then on many artists have understood that people exist and so they moved from the "site specific" to the "audience specific", this is a concept of mine, too, it means "specific to people", to the visitors of this place. If, on the contrary, as what we are doing, the public is in a fighting situation we can call it "fight specific", art specific to the fight. In English it sounds only like a slight shifting of sound, "site specific" – "fight specific" and it fits into the will of social responsibility, reminiscent of some soviet artists of the '20s or the Mexican ones, in more recent times obviously like Beuys, but also the Situationism. And we as well are working on the basis of these artists who came before us. It would be ridiculous to think that we invent all from zero.

OinO – Mariette, do you want to close with something that could be in some way referring to the future?

M – Perhaps what I am realizing more and more is that everything we're now trying to theorize, wouldn't have been possible without two or three persons who live here at the "Isola", who since the very beginning understood, without understanding art in its theoretical aspect. So all this work couldn't have been made without them, all would have stopped at a certain point, even the idea of an art centre. I think that the artist alone cannot invent a project like this, which anyway arose together with these people, is related to these people, above all Patrizia, who has been married with a painter, who's now dead. She has the sensitivity of a person who knows art. I'm not sure, but I think that all this is possible only if the situation allows it, because there already exists in the society an attention. It cannot be taken anywhere. Together with art a situation where people are open to change is needed.

ALBERTO

OinO – Which is in your opinion the urgent need of the “Isola”

Alberto – The urgent need of the “Isola” is to succeed in stopping a property speculation in general, and then we don’t know what we can take home in all, but the important thing is to avoid the rise in prices because of the “Town of Fashion” and to succeed in saving the gardens and the “Stecca” as much as possible.

OinO – What don’t you want to renounce in the present aspect of the “Isola”?

A – I can’t renounce the spontaneity of events, things and groups that have been created here, in the gardens and inside the “Stecca”.

OinO – According to your idea of public space, which is the structure that is more needed here at the “Isola”?

A – There are spaces. The problem is never the amount of the space, but what you can do in the space if you are given the possibility of doing something, so with respect to the amount of the structures nothing is lacking in my opinion. The problem is to be able to use a swimming pool when you want, to be able to use a room in the “Stecca” how and when you want, it is never a question of amount. This is a wrong way to confront it, because we come to the level of claims and they have always agreed with our claims, to build is never a problem. So it’s not a problem of claims, but the problem is that we could use what there exists in a more public and open way.

OinO – After all that has been done and that is being done to protect this green area and the “Stecca”, as far as one can in this long period of working and waiting, what did you imagine it could become for you and for the others, in this moment when the game is not over yet?

A – I can’t look so far ahead, I even find it hard to stay in expectation, I mean for me it’s important to live it day by day, even being aware that it could last six months, a year, ten years, because otherwise you risk to sit on the fence, to stand still waiting for an end that effectively we have seen postponed for years and years.

OinO – For you, could this possibility of imagining things be a psychological force to resist or is it an awareness of the difficulties that in facing a much greater force arouses a sense of bewilderment?

A – There are always difficulties and in situations of conflict they have always aroused creative impulses, so they don’t frighten me. Perhaps, speaking of the imagination is much more important, it is exactly the creation of a new imagination that allows us to do something that is neither productive nor based on principles of profitability or immediate profit. The imagination allows you to keep on working, but at the same time to be free from a fixed idea or from something you already have and let you think in terms of the new.

OinO – Is there something that you want to say besides what I’ve already asked you?

A – I’d like to say that I feel good in this place and we want to keep on working here.

LORENZO

OinO – We were told that you’ve got a wonderful idea about this place where we are.

Lorenzo – I’d say that it’s better if here they don’t build anything. Even the “Stecca could be readapted, in some way, reconverted: it would be great to join the two gardens, to do a project, even if utopian, to make a connection like a wave, keeping the building volume, keeping the activities, giving them a new meaning that will develop from the needs of the neighbourhood. I mean, to create a link between the two gardens and keep the volume below the ground level, in this way creating a small hill on the same volume of the “Stecca”.

OinO - So the “Stecca” would be below the ground level?

L – It would be below with an internal court, anyway keeping the same kind of function and the same volumes, but making this distinguishing feature that it will remain, because to restore it, in my opinion, is much more expensive than to knock it down and build it again. We could create a connection between the two things to avoid the idea of building here, because you only have to look at it to see that it’s not such a big space and this at least should be kept.

OinO – So which is the worst thing that could happen here in future?

L – Well ...I don't know what they want to do, to build on the only piece of green existing in this neighbourhood, in the end if they take even this....

OinO – So besides this idea-proposal of yours, besides the collective needs, does what you have said correspond also to your personal desires, or would you like something else for yourself?

L – In planning this thing? My idea would be to make this place like a wood as much as possible, I mean, to really make it a park, not what it is now, a meadow with a few trees, but...

OinO – Do you live here?

L – Yes, I live nearby, not even a kilometre.

OinO – This is a precious area that you have been enjoying now for twenty years.

L – Sure, anyway it's a place, I'd say, that's deteriorating, as long as no one intervenes to improve it, but even just for the will of the people to have planted four trees, I mean, nature is so beautiful, you only have to put down something that...

OinO – In your opinion does the capacity of imagination that we have in a situation like this turn out to be a strength, or rather a consciousness of the difficulties, that creates a little bewilderment?

L – Surely a great effort from a lot of people will be needed, because with few people we couldn't succeed in it. In my opinion, a lot could be related to an idea for the elderly, or for children, I mean all those persons who really have so much time to be spent and to be occupied, because perhaps the youths in a city such as Milan have a lot of space, even if it is private, there are some opportunities, some things, but what does Milan offer for children and the elderly? They should just run away from Milan.

OinO – If we reverse this, thanks to their presence could they carry out a change that would improve the spaces?

L – Of course. And then they do have the potentiality to do that... time, energy, that a thirty five-years-old person has difficulty to find, because he is too busy with work, because in my opinion you need a lot of time to devote to it and a person who works and lives in Milan has more difficulty to find it.

OinO – Would you like to say something else?

L – Well...first of all we've got to clean up the "Stecca", because in this moment it's being left in decay, in the hands of nobody, absolutely forgotten by the Police Force, by everybody, it seems that no one wants to take action for some particular reason. I just cannot understand how all this is possible. I haven't lived here for a long time, but anyway it has been years and I saw it getting drastically worse in the last two years. Until last year it wasn't like that, but since this winter there has been a real general decline. In my opinion it would be right to think of restoring the "Stecca" because I wouldn't like that just the people from the neighbourhood, the ones who don't care a lot, regarding what could turn into a problem, live it as a problem and could say the worst.

GIOVANNI

OinO – Giovanni, after all the work that has been done and that is being done to protect this green area and the "Stecca", as far as one can, in this long period of working and waiting, what did you imagine it could become for you and for the others?

Giovanni –Let's say that, as for me and people who live here, the "Stecca" should become a meeting centre for the neighbourhood with spaces available to the various associations, the Parents' Association of which I'm a member, or to the various residents' associations and this must necessarily remain the open space for all the neighbourhood, also because this is the only one. The idea that here they want to construct buildings, car parks, turn Via Voltorno into a high flowing thoroughfare, is in my opinion absurd.

OinO –Have you imagined something, an idea about what it could be or what is needed in this neighbourhood?

Giovanni – In this neighbourhood a lot of things are needed, a place where to meet is missing, community spaces are needed. As Parents' Association we asked for spaces in the school, but for several reasons, among which there are the school custodians who cannot work past a certain hour, or the alarms etc. we've never been given the spaces we've required. There is for instance a judo school that used to have a room in the school, but next year it will be taken away, so also there will be required a space and so the judo also needs a space. There are lots of reasons to have here in the neighbourhood a structure like this, besides the Parents' Association, spaces for art like the ones that they are trying to organize. A place for the inhabitants to meet is also required.

OinO – So is it a right to resist?

G – Of course, and it's the same right that has made us resist since almost ten years ago.

OinO – Do you know about similar facts here in Milan?

G – This is a municipal space, that is, the Municipality owns these gardens, they're not private.

OinO - Are the gardens public?

G – That's right. The Municipality is all of us, so they should continue to be of the Municipality. The fact that the Municipality made an exchange of areas with the one who has to build on the other side of the railway, making the gardens over there and building over here, is an absurdity, even for the kind of neighbourhood they want to build in, a neighbourhood of, let's say, low houses, because this is the only common area for the inhabitants.

OinO – Is it the capacity of imagining a quality of living or is it a condition that inhibits you since it outlines, above all, the difficulties you run into?

G – No, I think for sure that it's a quality of living. The fact that you can imagine to live in a better way is a quality of living.

OinO – Is it a strength, too?

G – Well, what I think is kind of missing is a massive participation of the neighbourhood, there just isn't. Fundamentally I think that the reasons are, if you'll agree, of a cultural kind, because this neighbourhood has changed its social class a lot, moving from a mostly popular neighbourhood to a neighbourhood where today houses are sold for three thousand euros per square metre. People have changed and in this change no one is able to... has thought to create something to keep together these two different things...

OinO – Were you born here?

G – I came to live here twenty four years ago.

OinO – What did the "Isola" look like twenty four years ago?

G – It was at the beginning of this process of transformation: there were a lot of shops of every kind, there were less restaurants, less pubs, wine bars, and little by little in these years these shops have taken the place of those that you trusted in, from the carpenter to the car electrician who is still there at the corner. But this transformation is still continuing, because they are trying to make this neighbourhood like Brera, with many pubs opened in the evening, a little bit elegant, even because, I'd say, from the architectonic point of view it has its peculiar structure of low houses.

OinO – Is there anything left of the old neighbourhood, I don't know, a feeling, a way of life?

G – Something is left, at least in the will of a group of persons. After living in this neighbourhood awhile, you feel that there is a minimum of unity between people. The problem is to be able to involve the neighbourhood people even more, to inform them about what is happening and above all to fight against the information of the big newspapers, all bought, that are selling this project of Garibaldi/Repubblica as...

OinO – According to a model of theirs?

G – That is the model of building here, of making streets, of making this mysterious "library of trees" that I haven't yet understood what it is, they speak of a park of a hundred thousand square metres.

OinO – Where indeed?

G – It's a shame that they consider as green space even flowerpots you put on the windowsill and if you think that that street, via Volturmo, should be extended and this (the garden) should become the traffic divider... they're trying to sell it very well, but they are selling something absolutely far from reality, but above all something completely disconnected from the character of this neighbourhood and this is a big nuisance to us, because, I repeat it, this is the only area here around, where we have a little space. The idea of being subject to the building of thousands of square metres, where the green space should become partly the green area of a block of flats, because it would be closed inside a block of houses and on the other side it becomes the traffic divider and at the end side we'll have a commercial area, a wall with a two-floor underground car park, it seems to us a really absurd project that goes against any kind of modern town planning project. If we look at the modern eastern towns, London, etc. the trend is to keep the traffic outside the town, not to make easier the car entry. Here they do exactly the opposite, so this is a project that goes exactly against the rules of the urban traffic management. The "Town of Fashion" will carry in five thousand people a day.

OinO – A great conditioning for the people of the neighbourhood, isn't it?

G – Yes, it is. Moreover, we need the spaces, we need to save the "Stecca" that is nearly in decay in a heavy way. Why not do here what once existed in any corner, spaces for art, for children, the nursery school, the cinema where a cineforum could be organized? Here meeting spaces are needed indeed. The residents' association "I Mille", that was born here nearly ten years ago, in which we, the parents' association take part, has already lodged four appeals against these different projects and every time we lodge an appeal they make a change in the town plan, we lodge a new appeal and so on, with this system it's ten years that everything is blocked. And now it seems that we are at the punch line, the person who has decided to build here is forcing the hand in a heavy way.

OinO – Was it important for you to decide for once about your future, instead of being given the projects always from above, on your heads?

G – Of course it is important, it is essential in my opinion, for everyone who lives in a neighbourhood it's essential to decide how to live.

OinO – Could it become an exportable model? ...A way to show others what to do?

G - I hope it becomes so, little by little. Perhaps here we couldn't succeed, I don't know, but, indeed, it should necessarily become a model. But what we need to do is to involve the neighbourhood, I don't say that there is a couldn't-care-less attitude, but, how to say, some kind of fatality, I mean, "I can make every effort, but then...".

OinO – Is it to accept something with a sense of impotence?

G – Yes, that's right, no matter how much one may fight ...finally there is the story of the Gioia Gardens, there were a lot of trees there etc. The Municipality wanted to build its beautiful skyscraper, there was resistance, but in the end they built it anyway. It sounds incredible, but the first of the two railway skyscrapers is completely empty, so why should the Municipality build new skyscrapers when one of them is empty, they can use that one for the moment.

OinO – What is left indeed of the "Gioia" gardens? Is it left the force action of the Municipality, who won, or rather the people's action who resisted?

G – The Municipality action is left, they won, and if we consider that there has been even an action of Lega Ambiente... well, even in this case it was not so clear what happened, it seems that at the end the action of Lega Ambiente only helped to favour the Municipality plan, because they intervened saying "let's look for a compromise" and this compromise is more or less a terraced garden and a preserved green triangle, indeed.

OinO – Did they proceed in the wrong way?

G – Yes, they did in my opinion, they have been acting as if they were a part of the Municipality system, they certainly didn't support the protest of the people who live there, but they have mediated between the two things, getting actually devastating results. We, as Parents' Association, Association "I Mille", have chosen to go ahead by ourselves, because Lega Ambiente had proposed mediation, but seeing what happens when

mediations are carried out in such a way, at this point we decided to go on bluntly, nothing is to be built any longer. We looked for agreements without getting them, at this point we engaged a confrontation, us against them. Will we loose? I don't know, anyway, we're putting up a fight.

OinO – Is it worth the effort?

G – We try and hope that this could at least set an example.

OinO – Certainly it is a precedent and also a tool for any citizen who wants to use it.

G – Some time ago, in the newspaper “Repubblica” they spoke about the plan Garibaldi/Repubblica, they said that the neighbourhood residents should be only happy, because the house values will increase.

OinO – Of course, but you cannot measure the quality of living in this way.

G – And then that remains to be seen, when you'll have five thousand cars every day passing by this street, I'd just like to see what happens.

OinO – For now, the true value of this place is in it's being still a neighbourhood, as we see it.

MARA

OinO – Do you live here?

Mara – Not exactly, my neighbourhood is a little bit far from here, I live in via Muretto, do you know where via Muretto is?

OinO – Not at all.

M – Practically, just next to the Niguarda Hospital, it should be the ninth district of Milan, in fact.

OinO – Well, do you know the situation of the Garibaldi neighbourhood?

M – Yes I do, besides that, this neighbourhood has now been renovated, but once upon a time these houses were very different from now, I'd say the Milan of a neighbourhood that was born over a hundred years ago, I mean, my father was born here, in via Pietro Borsieri. That house, that no longer exists, was a house with a spring in the centre of the court where people used to go and get water with a bucket. No one had running water at home neither the toilet. The houses were big with long balconies and at the end of them there was just a water closet that was used by the people living on that balcony, therefore three or four families. No one had running water at home, they used to go down in the courtyard with a bucket, they fastened a ladle to it with a hook and they drank the water from the ladle. Outside the house there was, and now it's no longer there, a ditch, as they called it, a kind of stream, but with running water. Women used to go there to do the washing, they went down on their knees with a little piece of wood, like a little wooden cane, and then they had another piece of wood that was bigger on which they did the washing with a piece of soap, and there in the ditch they used to do the washing. Women used to go there to do the washing. My grandmother, who was very poor, had a pannier on her back, then they used panniers, now they use rucksacks, but once it was a straw pannier, it was light, but it could be stuffed with a lot of things. With the pannier on her back she was going round the houses where many people used to live who had no time to do all that was needed and she asked if there was something to wash, and there were people who gave her a sheet, others a towel. Or there was someone who had to make a very good impression, because the marrying daughter was to be given a beautiful trousseau and then my grandma filled the pannier with linen and went to the stream, did the washing, put it on the grass to dry in the sun, then she folded it and took it back and there was not a fixed fee, she only held out her hand, one gave a coin, what one could, because not all the families were rich, but each gave something and this was enough to live on, because she had ten children, of which these ten, as a natural selection, five died in childhood and the remaining five were, as they say, oaks, very strong people.

OinO – But was this implying only a difficulty or was it felt a different quality of living?

M – No, it was a different way of living, no difficulty at all, people were happy as they were. Little was needed to be happy.

OinO – So in your opinion wasn't there any improvement in our social life?

M – Absolutely not... I don't think so. There was such a peace of mind, such a sense of value of human life, much better than now, because people used to know each other, to help each other. They used to share the little they had. It happened especially to women, a little out of ignorance, a little because of habit, they had so many children, it was something that, let's say, it happened, just because of love, a real married love, procreated children because it was natural, it was made of ignorance and simplicity, but there was really love, because people, even if poor, took care of these children. Sure, perhaps you didn't have beautiful cloths. A dress was given from one to another child, a pinafore and a pair of clogs were enough, that's all.

OinO – But here at the "Isola" that is threatened by this huge project, that wants to change it, and this is a way to destroy it in the name of a different quality, born from models that don't recognize the humane quality of living, in this transformation what should survive?

M – The symbol of what it was should survive, that gave as a result all these people who are now dried up because of all this cement, with all this technology that I don't know just how it could be useful, because at a given moment it in itself will destroy us, because everything should have a limit and now it seems that no one wants to know this limit. Here we have some symbols coming from our great grandfathers that should be preserved, because these people have begot children, who have begot grand-children and so on and each of them has a patrimony to tell. I am lucky to be here today to tell it, but who knows how many others have beautiful stories to tell. It is a patrimony that shouldn't be destroyed, because if there is one thing that is worth more than anything else, it's the human being. They can invent all the most incredibly perfect technologies, but nothing is beyond the human brain. It has been confirmed, according to studies, that we have the capacity to learn twenty different languages, which means nothing is more perfect than the human brain, that is linked with a living being, who is more important. It is a world and this world has to be respected, yes, I really think that it should be respected. I think that it shouldn't be destroyed what little that is left in the world of these human beings who had the fortune of having relatives who have lived here and therefore have absorbed the beauty that was here and have now the chance of keeping and telling it. When I'm speaking of it, I can picture my grand-mother at the stream on her knees, does the washing and goes to take the coin so that she can buy some bread, some sausage and take it home to her children. At that time there wasn't this behaviour of refusal, this selfishness. The neighbour said "today I've cooked polenta with lentils, send in your children". Then there was the "busetina", in the dialect of Milan that means chestnuts boiled in a big pot. They used to eat them in a bowl with milk at dinner, it was fabulous, they used to eat sitting at a wooden table, a very clean table. Even the door was lacking, there was only a curtain, after all, there was nothing to be stolen, but there was an enviable community between human beings.

OinO – What do you wish for the future of "Isola?"

M – I hope that they absolutely don't have to eat it up in cement, to transform it, to spoil it. I hope that what little is left could be left. I hope that people could have the chance to know the past of this place and tell about it to others, showing even a short movie, not the ones they recently made for pure propaganda, only something to let us know and see the value of that time and the value of the human beings. In my opinion this is the most important thing, nothing is more valuable than a person, a person is everything, he's really a universe, there's nothing better. I would like to keep, I wouldn't like to destroy anything, I would like to keep things, because I think that one can say "look how beautiful this tree is!". Just imagine! My grandfather used to come along here with other children and they played with tins, because there was not even a ball.

OinO – So a tree is a connection in time, it enables us to catch some passages, it creates the image of a place that, staying unchanged, connects the generations...

M – Even because there's nothing more alive than nature, nature is alive, it speaks, it's never-ending. And if only we'd speak with the trees, with the animals a little more... the only thing we can long for is to be like the animals, to sense in the same way as the dog does. The dog senses it if something is positive or negative, without being told about it by anyone, he goes away from a negative person. If we would be like animals are, certainly we would be better, because no animal is so fierce and bad as man is. Man is the worst beast in the universe, in my opinion. This is my opinion. Animals have got to kill, because they have to feed, but they don't kill the cubs, never. When the lion, as an example, the strongest of the animals hunts, he chases after the older, never the cub. On the contrary, we, human beings, have no hesitation of any kind. The human being has become something that seems impossible at times. When you listen to the news, now we have such a media that news is widespread and published, even too much, and they make you understand to which level of evil... I say that perhaps there is no more sentiment, a disarming reasoning is prevailing, but we also have a generation to bring up, what do we show to our children? This horrifying box that is the T.V, is not a good way.

OinO – This garden is a good way!

M – This is a good way, it's a garden where you speak, you meet with people, you communicate, you tell things to people and each has his own life that is a movie. Our movie we make every morning when we get up, our own life film, and everyday it is never the same as the day before, because we have always something new,....always. And I think that whatever we receive, we must live and accept it as it is, so much so that nothing will be destroyed, there is no end to nothing, but we have a cosmic energy. When we'll end, the matter will end, but our energy will come back to the cosmos, I see it in this way.

RENATO

OinO – What do you expect to happen here?

Renato – What we can expect here depends also on the work that we will be able to carry on as majority in the district council that opens different perspectives as to the past when we were in the opposition. These plans have been rejected only by the centre-left opposition at the time. Today, the fact of having acquired this only district of Milan opens these perspectives and we will fight for these areas which have been kept free up until now thanks to the past fights, both with the appeals to the TAR in 1991 that we won and the appeals to the TAR and to the State Council, and also through the four new appeals that we are presenting, that are ready, on the PII Garibaldi, and at last there will be the fourth appeal to the TAR about the PII Isola that concerns the "Stecca" and the gardens in via De Castilla/Confalonieri. With that, we don't want to refuse any readjustment of the neighbourhood and of the town better than the current one. I only say that whoever has the right to build and owns the volumetry to build does it on his own areas, because these ones are municipal areas. These are areas that have been managed and protected in these years by the citizens. I live facing here, in the houses that the plan includes, that are supposed to be knocked down and we are here to save them. I can bear witness that there is a love for this garden, also even because this is the only green area left in the "Isola", if they take it away, we'll have nothing left. The green they want to give us back here, the so called "wood", in the southern part of via De Castilla, will be a space that the citizens couldn't use and we can observe this in the places where there are only offices and in the evening it's a total desert: we can see it in via Restelli, we can see it in Melchiorre Gioia, near the Pirelli building where the municipal offices are. They are no one's land where prostitution, pushing and what have you is spread. We therefore ask that these gardens could be saved and kept, improving them with facilities like games for children. Such things that have never be done because their aim was to destroy and connect via Volturmo to Garibaldi/Como. We will oppose to these plans, mobilizing the inhabitants and using the means allowed by the law.

OinO – Is the neighbourhood as a whole responsive to this?

R – Responsiveness is never enough. Anyway looking around even today there is quite a bit of crowd, despite the fact that today is Saturday and many are busy with shopping or with family duties and what have you. Responsiveness has increased in these years compared to the past, our task is to develop it even more, to show that the fights and the work we're doing must not be thrown away, since through the fight and the mobilization we could carry home something.

OinO – Is it therefore important for you that this fight becomes a principle of identity?

R – A symbol.

OinO – A symbol of what?

R – When people meet and organize themselves, this is also a school for battles that is useful even to the other realities of the town of Milan, where in these years we've already seen the spreading of an uncontrolled property speculation and the expulsion of the popular ranks. And the strong powers have been ruling and on the side of the left at municipal level there has not been a reliable opposition to oppose these plans.

OinO - Is it true that what you are doing is unique enough in the history of Milan as to the continuity, the strength of the fight and the homogeneity?

R - Yes, it is.

OinO – Are you all aware of this?

R – We've been fighting for forty years, these plans didn't start now. They began long ago. This neighbourhood has been involved, in different moments, in some attempts of speculation, because by now the areas of a certain value in the centre of Milan, and we can speak of the "Isola" as the centre of Milan, are very few and they are strongly craved for.

OinO – Was it here the factory "Brown Boveri"?

R – There were the "Brown Boveri" and the "Siemens" as well, which started from the beginning of De Castilla and terminated at the "Stecca" here.

OinO – So did the idea of the gardens come later, when the factory had been dismantled?

R – The idea of the gardens came when every sort of thing was growing and besides that, the place has been occupied in an unruly manner. I have made a number of requests at the district council, at the time it was the 2nd district, so according to the agenda and the resolution that passed in the 2nd District Council, we could supply it with facilities at the least, plant some trees and this is the situation today and we're not willing to have it robbed. Keep in mind that behind the "Stecca" there was a boarding school of nuns.

OinO – Was it in the gardens over there, towards via Borsieri?

R – Yes, where the dogs' area is, there was a boarding school of nuns of Egypt, who have their order in Rome and they had been expropriated in an illegal way by the Milan subway and by the Municipality, with the excuse and the pretext of building the third stub of the 2nd subway line that ought to start from Orbetello, Palmanova, Garibaldi. This stub has never been realized, but the nuns have been thrown out, expropriated, they were given next to nothing, but before they were expropriated, we squatted it, with their consent. After that the deputy mayor of that time came, there was the Aniasi's town council. He gave us all guarantee that the nuns would have remained, instead they were expropriated. Later on we squatted it all and we established a residents' association, we opened a nursery school and went on with our activity for nearly ten years, then all began to drop and here we are. Anyway, the nuns had lodged an appeal, I had sent to Rome all the documents about the projects they wanted to realize on their areas, a pending suit not at the TAR, but at the ordinary tribunal and I hope that this too will be considered in future.

OinO – Anyway, apart from future, don't you think that it's important, even as a precedent for the future generations to show how much is possible to do as a single citizen, by one's own effort?

R - Even with few means citizens organize themselves before the giants, they act through the fight, because from time immemorial, both at the level of the trade unions and as to the rights achievements, no one gives you anything if there isn't a fight, if there isn't mobilization.

DANIELA, MAX, ANNA

OinO – Do you know about the fights going on for years here at the "Isola"?

Daniela, Max, Anna – Yes, we do.

OinO – This is a particular moment, since it seems that in some way soon there will be an outcome, whatever will be. In this moment what is tangible, apart from or thanks to the existing fight, are the desires that spring from the imagination and from the needs of each person involved. There will probably be none of this left in the future and we on the contrary would like to hold on to this moment by recording and writing out everything you have to say about what you think of the future transformations. In a word, the only real production now is your imaginary plans, proposals, wishes. What do you think of it?

D M A – We can tell you the reason why we have chosen to come to the "Isola". It is because we have the feeling of living in a small town.

OinO – How long have you been living here?

D M A – We have been living here in via Sebenico for ten years for certain, and before we lived for other ten years in the area before the Chiesa della Fontana, that can be considered "Isola" as well. He came from the centre and he got to know this neighbourhood...

M – It was a choice of mine, I told to myself “Isola” or nothing else in Milan.

D – Also because there is this idea that everyone knows everyone and in the street you still say hello to each other, it’s a different way of experiencing the town, at a humane level.

M – In this neighbourhood there is a humane dimension, that, to be frank, with the new project... to have a fifty-floor skyscraper... I appreciated the New York skyscrapers, but I really don’t want to have them here!

A – Even because the “Isola” is separated. I come from a part of Milan, the one of viale Abruzzi where I had lived for twenty years and I must say I didn’t know every tenant and every person. I arrived here in 1999 and within a year I got to know nearly everyone, I mean, many people, because it’s really a neighbourhood, not a working-class one, but the one of a little town. I remember I had some friends who I brought in Minniti square and they looked around saying “but this is a little town”, this was the first thing they said.

OinO – It’s probably nearly the last corner in Milan that has survived with these characteristics.

D – And then there is its history as working-class neighbourhood, because here there was the Brown Boveri, some factories and so many houses were built for the workers. The same theatre Verdi had been built for those who were working here.

OinO – Was it therefore built in relation with the work?

D – Yes, in relation with the work, so that there really are some buildings that were even built by famous architects. Someone had organized a tour of the “Isola” led by an architect who had explained to us... it was absolutely very interesting. In my opinion the neighbourhood has kept this air about it and so the fact that via Volturmo is going to be torn down to become an extension of viale Zara really seems foolish to me!

OinO – Would life in this neighbourhood be improved by this project?

A – Our lives wouldn’t, but indeed there will be people who will invest money, for sure a speculation with a commercial centre, 500 car places, I don’t know what it’s going to become.

OinO – What would you like to have, did you think, for instance, that the “Stecca” could be transformed or what could it be in the place of the commercial centre?

D – The gardens are fine just because among other things the “Isola” is the neighbourhood with the least amount of green space per head in Milan, so it’s important the fact of having attained this garden and the other one behind the “Stecca”.

M – Yes, because already some years ago they wanted to make car parks there.

D – I’d like to keep these micro gardens, because they really are small, and the “Stecca” could continue like this and the trend that the neighbourhood has taken, I mean, to be a place for artisans, artisans of a certain kind, here for instance there are some lute makers, if I’m not mistaken.

OinO – A noble kind of handicraft, indeed.

A – Another thing I feel the need of is a library.

D – I mean, the “Stecca” could become a multipurpose space, couldn’t it? It would really be a crime to waste this occasion.

A – Once there was a cinema here in the neighbourhood, in short there are a good lot of things that could be done, certainly not skyscrapers.

OinO – But if Mr Catella, the man who represents the building contractor, if you get my drift, should say “do you want this, I’ll find a way to give it to you, it’s provided for by the project”...

A – He did a proposal of such a kind, I heard it, for that space that was the villa, I mean the old railroad terminal, he said “but I offer you the green area, the bowling green to play boules” and I don’t know what else...

OinO – Was it all included in this huge project?

A – Yes, but we don't want all the other things.

OinO – Do you mean that the quality of life is already this, it only needs to be improved with a proper use of the "Stecca", of the gardens and all the proposals that have been made and that could be easily realized?

A – Yes, of course, this green area shouldn't be touched, it's the only one we have, actually, the only one.

OinO – Does the neighbourhood realize all this or are we speaking only with those more receptive few?

D – We're almost always the same number.

M – Sometimes we are, sometimes we aren't. Unbelievably, it seems people don't give a damn about it, not even in the face of evidence, since they live here. Facing a certain kind of thing one would have hoped for a general mobilization, even because here we have parents, we have the little ones, we have the elderly. Who is not interested in a very small, because here we're talking about a very small area?

OinO – Where does this sense of impotence come from? It seems that for the majority of the people it's exactly this that dupes them a little, that makes them withdraw into themselves, or is it just an unmotivated apathy?

A – I think that middle-aged people or mothers with children can probably understand this event, and elderly people as well, who in spite of everything don't know where to go, they who haven't a place.

D – And then I think it's the individualism that is typically Italian, isn't it? "Yes, I know, I understand that there are some problems, but if I spend an hour in this I'm hindered in my projects, on Saturday, on Sunday", forget it!

M – In a banal way there is a refusal towards politics that you can feel and see and be involved with even socially. There's also a refusal towards our quality of life. It seems to be something nobody really cares about.

OinO – We who live in Brescia have to admit that we're very surprised to see these people's involvement, and they're not just a few, in carrying out a situation like this is. People who live here have very clear ideas, they know what they want and they try to oppose a power, stronger than them without a doubt, but they don't give up. Does it seem that this is a unique situation in Milan, because there has never before happened anything similar here, has there?

A – There is for instance some opposition near the Niguarda district, they too are organizing some movements, because they don't want the building of car parks, I don't exactly know if they are to be underground or not, and they will cover part of the green areas of that district. And then, there is an association that spoke here one evening, it was the one of the Darsena, even there they were doing something, because they don't want the lock-up garages, car parks. So perhaps some neighbourhoods are trying to be very active to stop these situations to preserve their human quality of life.

M – Unfortunately in these cases there is always isolation, because everyone withdraws in one's own neighbourhood: one's own street, one's own lock-up garage, one's own hundred of trees and we have to say that the results are even discouraging, because car parks are always made anyway, trees knocked down as well. It's enough to see what happened here: the "wood in the city" was razed in one night, they took advantage of the Christmas holidays, that sounds like a raid, that is to say to rush things and what is done is done...

OinO – Can the force of the citizens, who have decided to rebel against such projects that have been decided by others, set an example or is this only an illusion?

M – If we are here it means that it's not an illusion, we always hope at least to be visible. Within the Isola Association there are some good brains who are trying to organize something even through this event. The most difficult thing is to be able to gather around these ideas a mass that even from the numerical point of view begins to be heard.

D – I really cannot understand what makes the difference. For example, we have had the chance to follow the fight carried out at Nice by a few people. It had been settled to build a big harbour drawing away some areas that they call beaches, but that are in fact rocky areas. People used to go there, but of course, not

being a beach there weren't so many people and it was decidedly a very beautiful place. In short, these people were able to stop the project, I don't know exactly why, but we can guarantee that they weren't so many, not more than the number of people who are here today, but in spite of that they carried on their fight for a year and they could block the project. I cannot understand which is the difference.

OinO – The same thing happened in Hamburg, where a project of the Municipality threatened to close the visual space of the harbour, the last left, with a wall of skyscrapers. Even there a small group of people from the neighbourhood, among which there were artists and some important figures, after eight years' fight won the struggle to save this place.

D – Well, we really cannot understand what is the reason that we cannot go on, perhaps we have a political class who doesn't listen, because there are so many interests of the economic kind. We tried to go to the District Council during a meeting, but...

M – But, as to what you were saying, even at Nice there was a very ambitious project that was moving a lot of money.

D – Mind you! In an absolutely rightist country, in the deep south, a city that alone was giving nearly 20% to Le Pen...

A – But here the "Stecca" is in a leftist neighbourhood, and here it's precisely the Left that... I just can't understand what's behind this claim. That evening I heard this Catella speaking and I must say that after a while I went out, it seemed he himself was doing everything, he seemed to love this place because his father and mother... And so I don't know what could happen in the District Council, I'm discouraged.

D – Maybe we're discouraged because of the age, I mean when you are young there is the enthusiasm that makes you believe that things could change, so I don't know.

M – Were you saying that at Brescia you never saw something of this kind?

OinO – Brescia is an industrial town, very rich, even though it's still a liveable town, it is not very responsive to situations like this one. It is mostly dedicated to its richness and to its looks. A good example on the cultural level is the organization of "big exhibitions", window-dressings that don't bring anything of substantial to culture. From a cultural point of view there was no need to revise the Van Gogh's figure on the base of new researches, but they make a spectacle of everything and give people the habit of an immediate and superficial use of the culture, that is useless and very expensive, precluding every other series of activities from any chance of getting a budget, even though the lowest. But the most detestable thing is that this is populist propaganda where it comes out that these events practically impossible to see and experience because of the density of visitors and the conditions in which they are mounted and realized, are supposed to be for the advantage of people, to give them the chance of facing the masterpieces of art.

M – This is the marketing of the today's culture. A fellow of mine has gone from Milan to Brescia, because he has been conditioned by this big hype.

OinO – It is no accident that curators practically deal only with promotional marketing, offering sumptuous and expensive previews to a world of politicians and rich industrialists. Well, you can understand a city even through this way of being and presenting itself. These are the cities of numbers, where the abstract numbers of the amounts of presences at the exhibition are valued more than a need of quality.

A – We have to consider the power of Brescia's clergy as well, of your mayor's ambition so unbridled that he even wanted to close with a great event, because he himself loves a lot to be visible, to be remembered for this kind of things, he loves to be famous.

D – On the contrary here it seemed to me a very good idea that even foreign artists had thought to re-qualify, carrying on the opposition to this huge project by the means of the re-qualification of the "Stecca" as a historical building and that therefore should have been restored. It seemed to me a good way, but I don't know, with this town council, I was hoping that something could change, whereas....

A – Yes, it's a place to be given a new value, a new life, whereas, unfortunately, in its present state, it isn't in fact. Unfortunately it has become a place..... in a word it's the sore point, because recently, on evenings, there are people who use the Stecca for pushing drugs. This has been the problem, it goes in from here and

goes out from there, but the residents' association has been very active and the police headquarters know about it.

D – Now the gates are being closed.

Patrizia too joins the group.

P – No, this is an error it has been considered as an error, because you shouldn't close the gates with the pushers inside, the problem would just disseminate and there will probably be another operation.

A -- ...Because they live in there?

P – Well, you know, there is a little of everything.

A – And yet it seems that the situation is tolerated in some way, because there have been even the police...

P – Last year the police carried out a heavy cleansing operation, but now it should be done again. This also means to wall up some spaces, some associations that don't... in a word to clean is to clean, you cannot do a fine distinction, the first time they make distinctions, the second time you don't know if they can make this distinction, but we think about it on longer terms.

A – I give in...

P – Of course.

A – Anyway it's very useful that in the pubs there is a notice that says "in this pub I don't want you to drink if you are under sixteen years old".

P - The work we're carrying out in the neighbourhood with the shopkeepers is important, so I always try to work on that, to come to an agreement with these shopkeepers. If there is this kind of alliance of the adult world, you can succeed in changing something, because it's not true that you can't have fun, it is true that you can enjoy yourself having good manners that are not restrictive, to feel happy.

OinO – It's sufficient to give them other models. These are needed.

P – That's why! So the present adults' world and this experiment means also this.

D – You see, it's wrong that they go to the discos at midnight or at one am, it's a really incredible regulation, we too have been young, and we used to go at ten.

M – Everyone, and I say everyone, from the first to the last...we can't say they aren't wacko, because they are indeed.

D – It's true that they are young, but they cannot cope with it, holding out up to six in the morning.

M – So they have to do all kinds of drugs.

D – I cannot understand why at a certain moment they decided to change the opening hour, it's evident that in this way the kid will drink more... yes, it's really evident that there are things behind that. Then it would be enough to...

A – Well, in Holland, for instance, or in Germany they don't sell liquor on motorways. Well, one can buy it first and bring it...

P – But if you can find it at the supermarket! We have Archinto square that's full at night, they take bottles and go to S.Lorenzo to do hubbub. I'm afraid someday Tito Minniti square will be turned into a pedestrian precinct. It's just the sort of place, an amphitheatre for this kind of things.

GIULIANA

OinO – Is there something that you would like to see growing here on the gardens of the "Stecca"?

Giuliana – I would like to see only the gardens, nothing else. I would absolutely like that the “Stecca” would be restored and have spaces for the neighbourhood, for the elderly people, for the children. Our ideal plan is that there will be an opening between the two gardens, so that they could be communicating. We want more trees, more shadow areas and absolutely no buildings. This is a square of our neighbourhood. This is a small town, isn't it? There are two or three-floor houses and they're all right. One cannot build in front of them a nineteen-floor monster, because just here where we are, in this garden, they want to build apartment buildings of at least seven floors.

Oino – The problem is that there are 90 thousand cubic meters to build on, or not?

G – Yes, it is, it's absurd to build 90 thousand cubic meters on this space and not only here, but even on the other side of the garden.

Oino – Which is in your opinion the worst thing that could happen to the “Stecca”?

G – The worst thing is that they build the skyscrapers, and carry on that awful plan of theirs. The awful thing is that they want to extend via Volturmo toward via Pirelli, I mean they want to open a street up until via Pirelli and doing so hundreds of cars, or rather, with such a traffic in Milan, thousands of cars would go past there.

Oino – Did they give attention to the needs of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood during the building stage of this plan, in your opinion?

G – They absolutely did not!

Oino – Did they at least take care to listen to your opinion?

G – Who are we? What do we want? Under this building, this thirteen-floor building they want to build here, they want to make a car park for more than five hundred cars, many of them by turns. What does it mean? It means that down this street there will come and go a lot of cars and I really don't think that they took care of the needs of the inhabitants of the “Isola”.

Oino – Do you have a dream, a project, even only an imaginary one, about these spaces of the Isola-Garibaldi? What would you do with them?

G – Nothing! I would only like that they could forget that it exists! If I could see a dream of mine to come true, I'd like that these spaces could be wiped out of the memory and minds of the constructors! That is somewhat unlikely, because the very awful thing is that the owner of this ground is the Municipality of Milan, but the Municipality of Milan shouldn't build. So then, do you know what the clever ones did? They made an exchange. What did we say to the constructors? Go ahead and build, but only on your own ground, on the Lunetta. But they also want to pull down those buildings over there, in front of us, in which 108 tenants live, I think.

Oino – Do you mean these houses in front of us? And the people who live there, did they respond?

G – Of course, at least they tried! They'll give them a new flat that they can choose from among those that they are building! Ah, ah, ah... and just to think that someone believed it! And perhaps they'd thought to receive it as a present!

Oino – So your decision is made, you want nothing else here except the “Isola” properly rearranged?

G – That's correct. I want it improved and I want them to leave us the spaces for the elderly people, for the people who want to chat, a “Stecca” with services we need, with a cinema of course, a nursery school and spaces for the children to play. They are all common things, aren't they? Does it seem we're asking for things that couldn't exist? These simple things, at the “Isola”, we haven't got! But, don't they realize that we have not even a library? We have to catch a trolley and go two or three stops if we want to go to the library. There's nothing here, there used to be a bowling green, but they destroyed it to build some lock-up garages at Sasseti. Here, if someone wants to spend time in the afternoon, where can he go? There are not even any more taverns. Once at least men used to go to the tavern! And now there aren't any more. And so what can we do? Can we sit all day at the table to do nothing?

OinO – The “Stecca” should really become a place for the community: in fact it doesn’t improve an existing service, but it should be available to create it, since you have the need of it, being no services, you deserve the meeting spaces for inhabitants of all ages.

G – That’s right. If you look around you, here at the garden there are benches full of people who chat, children who play, there is even the place for the dogs on the other side, even if they take them here too, but this depends on the common sense of the owners... If one day they should decide to leave this area in peace and if they should decide that here there will be only the gardens, we could make them like the other gardens of Milan. We’re very angry. By now, we have been fighting for four years.

OinO – Four years after, do you think that you have the chance to win this battle?

G – Yes, I think so. At least I hope so!

TEODORO E PAOLO

OinO – We would like to ask you some questions about the “Isola”... how long have you been living here?

Teodoro – Yes, of course, I’m Teodoro, I have been living in via G.Pepe since 1959 but have moved a number of times...

OinO – Is there something that you would like to see grow on the gardens of the “Stecca”, in via Confalonieri and nearby?

T – Something here? Something better, of course, certainly not the skyscrapers.

OinO – According to your idea of public space, which kind of structure would you like to see built here?

Paolo – A green area with facilities, there is a wonderful plan for this.

T – I remember that in 1975, if I’m not mistaken, I think it was exactly that year, we young people of this area proposed a project for sports facilities.

P – A project made by.... I don’t remember now, such a long time has passed, it was made by Art... something like that Art, I don’t remember...

T – Yes, that one, in fact that project had been submitted to the District Council. It provided for a football ground, a race-track, all kinds of games, a lot of sports equipment with real changing rooms like those you find in every sports centre. This project had been rejected because of the underground that passes here and therefore no construction could be realized, but now we’re getting five-floor houses and they even want to make some thirty-floor skyscrapers, just imagine it! But this is an old story. It’s sad even to remember it because after all those years of young enthusiasm, now as I have grown I realize more and more that no one gives a damn about people needs, about the needs of this neighbourhood’s inhabitants.

OinO - If you don’t wish to remember, then tell us how you would like this plan of the rearrangement of the “Isola” to be.

T – My problem is also to think about this plan, that among other things, goes ahead and it is a disaster. Not only will there be no more green areas, but there will also be works that will last ten years. And for ten years we will have cranes, excavators, trucks.

P - What these constructors want to do is to transform an area that is already an enormous traffic jam, if you know how Milan is, they want to bring in.., to increase the incoming traffic... and is this one of the most intelligent moves that an administration can make!? Abroad they close-out the traffic. We on the contrary want a large thoroughfare that leads the traffic directly into the town! And then all those cars that in this way arrive directly in the city centre, yes because here at the “Isola” we are practically in the city centre, where can we put them, do we freeze-dry them? What a brilliant idea this is!

OinO – Cars with inflatable interiors would be needed!

P – That’s right! So the idea is to take a beautiful square, to destroy it, to make a beautiful thoroughfare that arrives in the city centre and then what are they going to do about the traffic problems? How can we

distribute it from there? In television they showed a plan that Renzo Piano is going to realize in England. According to this plan a tower for one hundred and fifty thousand persons is going to be built, a tower where the spaces would be used as office areas and it has been planned purposely in that place because it would be near two underground stations and four railway lines, and it has been planned with only a forty five car parking lot, why? Because in this case the car is the only thing that you don't need. Here on the contrary they bring the cars in, have I made myself clear?

OinO – You've been clear enough. Do you have some more ideas to tell, some projects, some dreams about these spaces of the "Isola"?

T - If there exist spaces for the community, people would go out. I'd like a swimming pool, for instance, but someone else will have other needs, I would like them to be asked what they want in order to set a plan again. I would like to recreate what there once was, a village, a small town. Little by little they took it all away, all we had: the bowling green, the football goal posts have been taken away because they said they could be stolen... Just imagine that the people of my age nicknamed this garden the "rats ground" and not the "play ground", because there is really nothing.

OinO – You, as a shopkeeper, how do you think to respond to this plan?

T - There is little to do, more than getting involved like we're already doing... but those are powerful people, once that the contracts start, I don't know what we could do any longer, I hope we don't have to take it lying down and that's all. Here there is not a social life, and I wouldn't be content as a shopkeeper, nor as an inhabitant. Anyway I'm not happy with these new constructions that would not bring anymore people to my shop, also because a trade centre is going to be realized. Also a great amount of car traffic would not be the best for me, if on the contrary the area should be served better by the trolleys, there would be more people walking around. The real business in Milan however is in the trade centres, so I don't know what the destiny of my shop will be. And this is the major ambition of our administration. Perhaps things will go better for me with many apartment buildings. They're just building one of them here behind, that has seventeen apartments and 200 lock-up garages. It's absurd!

OinO – The reason why you want that everything remains like it is here at the "Isola" is clear. Can you tell us how you would like to improve it?

P –The way they have proposed the renovation of this area is wrong, because all this is an area that should be rethought and restructured. Obviously, if it is left as it is, it's also wrong. At present there is nothing working and the problem is that if no one intervenes, someone else will come up with a bad idea of renovation like what's happening now. All that area in front of us should be modified, for sure a supermarket shouldn't be built, even because...how can a truck enter it? That is, do we even let the trucks enter from this road? Have you seen what a traffic we have here? All we need are the trucks, now! And do you see where these two roads come to? It is not possible to plan a big supermarket in that space.

T – Only in via Borsieri there are 82 shops, in via Farini there are 90 with different activities, a big supermarket would change everyone's life, and then you can't say that the cheapest is the best. In a shop you find humane contact, a relation between people. A shop means trust, relation and experience. You don't need to militarize the areas and the cities to sell and buy and have some more security. When you know each other, if the shopkeeper does something wrong then everyone knows about it and you even know where to go for complaining.

P – The "Isola" is called "Isola" just for this reason, because it is an isolated environment, not in a negative sense, it was a neighbourhood, or better yet, a small town, a real small town.

OinO – That's true, this is the appearance we can gather, even if we don't live here.

P - Our hope is to keep such a thing, trying to improve it wherever it is possible and you see where it is possible. In front of us there are these gardens that could be a wonderful space for children. Look at the "Stecca", how they left it to decay! All of this, because they wanted to empty it making this neighbourhood a dormitory, giving thus the go-ahead to the realization of the Town of Fashion. The old houses had been bought by the Municipality thanks to the law 176 to renovate them and this house near us and the one behind it are the famous parking houses where people, waiting for the project Borsieri 12 to be ready, had been lodged. There has been a double action, hasn't there? At first they tried to break up the neighbourhood, because the well-known bridge from Baiamonti to Lagosta, in the well-known plan there is only the bridge, had been the cause of the demolition of some houses. Since then there has been a great movement and the Municipality took up the houses again and restored them. In fact all the Borsieri street is now a good looking

one, you see it, but then, this is what has generated these areas. I remember that here there were all houses, right, Teo? And factories too, the Tecnomasio and the Brown Boveri, I may be mistaken... but in front of it there was also the nursery school of the nuns, where I used to go, as soon as I arrived in Milan, exactly in those gardens over there I took a lot of photos.

OinO – And as far as the “Stecca” is concerned, here behind us, what would you like?

P – We want them to repair it, to keep the structure like it is, because it is very beautiful. On the second floor, there is also a very beautiful exhibition space, that is called “Isola Art Centre”, but the problem is to get up there because the stairs are in an awful state! Let’s transform that space and do our best so as people could reach it safely. Let’s transform it in liveable space, and even the space under it, with pubs, clubs, workshops and meeting places for everyone. This is how we would like it.

OinO – The decay of the “Stecca” has made it nearly impossible to enter it. What do you think about that?

P – Well, this is a strategy. To get a neighbourhood, you make the so-called immigration come in, the worst of the criminality, so then people complain about it and one day the police arrives and wipes it all off, then they come again and at this point they knock it all down to clear everything and they build again. In this way we are guaranteed to have a dormitory neighbourhood or the Town of Fashion for all the inhabitants. I don’t want to say that the pushers are addressed here, but...here at the “Isola” in the 60’s – 70’s there was a certain local criminality, I mean that the locals went to commit crimes somewhere else, because we were in an “Isola” neighbourhood, that is, in one of those restricted, closed areas where the police didn’t enter. It was a place of an incredible quiet, we went to school on foot safely alone, it was a kind of small heaven. Well, let’s say that it was a very special heaven, because it was a popular one. Here he is, look at Bert, he is an artist and lives here and has great ideas about the “Isola” and good contacts too, that could be enough to make the “Isola” and what is happening here more dynamic and known.

OinO – Yes, we know it, we are working with Bert for the “Isola” too, in the same exhibition space, on the second floor of the “Stecca”...

P – The problem is that besides you others have to mobilize. Now, for instance, we’re trying to convince the ladies from the association “I Mille” to be more disposed to communicate, because it would be enough to relay playful messages, we’ve got some ideas to involve people who live at the Isola.. As an example, the street will become a big thoroughfare... and will we go and say to the people who live there that tomorrow thousands of cars more will pass by there? Will we say that they are building a four-lane elevated road and all the rest?

OinO – Are there really people who live here and don’t know about it and don’t get information?

P – At last this is going to become a dormitory neighbourhood, just as they want it, just as there are in all towns. This is not an issue about personal interest, even if some have no specific need for the moment, so they don’t look about and don’t get information. And then, how do you know about it, if you work in another place and you are away all the day? For the moment what is happening isn’t written anywhere. You just read some articles in the newspapers...It would be a good thing to know and catch who writes them and above all who publishes the images, because I tried to overlap four of the Catella’s plans on the Google map, the satellite map of the Isola, and the dimensions didn’t match. The plan they presented for the area over there, you see, a very beautiful place that once was a station that is now a green area, is planned as a green area, so where do we put the 90 thousands cubic meters of the project? They wouldn’t fit!...On the green area? I mean, those men are trying to fool us... that man (Catella) has made an exchange with the Municipality of Milan, because he owns that site, but under that site there is the underground and on the other side there is the railway. So he has got this fine idea to exchange the areas with the Municipality and now we’re hoping that he can’t succeed in his intention. We, the neighbourhood inhabitants, have been doing a lot of things for four years, but now we have to intensify the communication.

OinO – Have you succeeded in making the inhabitants more aware of it?

P – Someone realized by himself that something was changing and so he came to us asking for information. For example, it happened to a girl, a friend of mine that the owner doubled her flat rent, 900 euros a month, saying that this area will become the “fashion quadrilateral” and so famous fashion designers will come here with their studios! But in your opinion would Armani leave his big shop in the city centre to come here to the Isola?!

OinO – Armani wouldn’t, but we’ve read that Cavalli would be but happy to come!

P – If I meet him in the street and he repeats the same thing, I'll make him change his mind, without any problem! Does mister Cavalli have by chance some contacts with some political groups or something like that? Or maybe he doesn't know shit about this project or perhaps he needs the building that all the others have and so he decided to build it here... the others have restored things not at all bad... but, sorry, they came first...

CARMELO

OinO – Hi, why are you here today?

Carmelo – I'm here because this is a place I know, I live here. I've read about this event in the gardens and I dropped in to see what's happening. I know this place as it is today, I know a little the history of what it was, even if it's not clear enough what it will be... Its history I know from the people I met here at the Isola.

OinO – You have been living here for some time, but weren't you born here?

C – No, in fact I didn't live here, but I came here on purpose. I chose the Isola, I chose this neighbourhood, because I liked how it was and now I find myself here at this event because I realize that this neighbourhood is really at risk. From what I could come to know, even if information is always incomplete and not certain, I understood that the Isola is going to be badly altered in all that it is now. I live here because I love the Isola, I love how you can live here, in a neighbourhood that looks like a small town. It's evident that we are in the centre of Milan and that this being isolated in the centre means to be precariously balanced, but I like it just for this reason, because it's cobbled together and at the same time you are in Milan. But I'm afraid, I'm afraid of the modifications, I fear that it may become a fashionable neighbourhood. Or worse it is already becoming it.

OinO – Someone before, an interviewed person, was saying that the rents have already been raised in expectation that the "Town of Fashion" project is being realized. Did you hear about that?

C – Yes, I did. Folks here don't talk about anything else. They say that this neighbourhood will become the place of the fashion and the new structures that will be built will be mostly dedicated and made for those who belong to that world. Fortunately some years ago you could still buy here something at a reasonable price, so my girl friend and I could buy a flat here. I know of people who are looking for a flat and want to buy it here, but prices have raised and no one can afford it. Someone, because of this hearsay, has seen rents rising almost inexplicably, that's why I was saying that it has already become a fashionable neighbourhood. Here for a two-roomed flat they ask crazy money!

OinO - – Is there something that you would like to see grow here in via Confalonieri, on the gardens of the "Stecca"?

C – No, I wouldn't like to see anything grow here. I would like everything as it is and I'd like that everything could be valued. I'd like that this could become a real park and could be used, because unfortunately in this moment it is a little bit neglected and this is the reason why people don't come.

OinO – According to your idea of public space, which is the structure that ought to be here?

C – Well, I see that in the neighbourhood there is the need of meeting places. The best solution for the Isola could be first of all the improvement of this park and then they could think of a space that could be a meeting space for all, children, youths, adults, elderly, everyone. It's clear that there are different ways of meeting, because each has one's own way to live it and has different needs, so it would be right to ask to everyone.

OinO – And you, what do you wish?

C – As far as I'm concerned and my personal interests are, I have heard that various realities, even artistic ones, have existed for a long time in which I'm very interested. I'd like that something of the music world could grow, a cultural project rather than practical needs, but in spite of this, I'd like that they'd consider that the green areas in Milan are very important. We need the open spaces. You can't imagine how much we need them in Milan.

OinO – You ought to know that all the plans proposed for this place, all the buildings planned for the Isola don't give much importance to this green space you care about so much. All the people with whom we have

spoken about this say that the gardens will be the first areas to be scrapped, because the estimated cubic volumes require that the great part of the space will be assigned to the buildings: big houses, car parks with an exorbitant number of parking spaces, trade centres and new streets that are promising only a traffic increase. Which is in your opinion, among many possibilities, the worst thing that could be built here?

C – Whatever they build will take away space and the green area will be cut down. Most of all, I'm worrying because this area risks to lose it's balance, that's what I was speaking about before.

OinO – If you should be asked to think of a project that would consider your interest for music, what would you try to do here at the Isola? As an example, how would you restructure the "Stecca"?

C – Exactly, my field of action would be the musical one, so I'd supply these spaces with all the equipment to organize even this kind of events, but not only, I mean concerts that shouldn't be the great productions we're used to seeing, but more reasonable and frequent ones, anyway projects realized with accuracy. Here I'd organize enjoyable and accessible concerts, not those big events that in the end appear only to be costly, even from an economic point of view...Music for all.

OinO – So is the main thing for you that this remains a public space and not a divided space of private buildings, even if they should undertake to realize events of cultural interest?

C – This is clear. This has to remain a public space. I see no need to build all of what we were speaking about, because first of all this is not a need of the neighbourhood and then in Milan there already are trade centres more than other things. This is the place which our municipal government could redeem for years of errors and horrors! Here I'd like a place where I could come every day and where I know I could be at ease, because I share it with others and it is precious to everyone, even if perhaps people of my age or who are busy as I am, have little time to enjoy it, because there is never time to do everything one would like to do. That's why there is the need of a place that is for everybody, always. Everyone has his own everyday life, but everyone knows that it's possible to go somewhere that is not a trade centre or a garden which you have to drive hours and hours to reach... and then it's good to know that there is a place where events could be organized and that anyone can organize them, where you can meet people and talk with them and they live close by and they know as you know that this structure is open. This is what I'd like.

ROSANNA

OinO – Can we ask you two questions about the situation of the Isola Garibaldi, Madam?

Rosanna – Yes, I lived here, I lived just there, near via Confalonieri, the first house on the corner at the end of the street that is no longer there. When they built the Garibaldi station, that house in which I had been living for years, was knocked down. There my parents had been living and when I got married, I moved here.

OinO - Did you move to the street on the other side of the "Stecca", the parallel road to via Confalonieri?

R – No, not there, I was exactly in via Confalonieri at number four, my parents were living there. I had been living in that house together with my family, my children, my husband for twelve years. I lived in this neighbourhood for twelve years. Even in my time there were a lot of houses. I lived at number four and at six there were still residences, at number eight there was a girls' school and a little further on there were the beehives and they made honey, but perhaps they made honey at number six because, now I remember, it was the door after, at number ten there was the girls' school kept by the nuns. After having lived there for many years I moved to via Lambertenghi, where the tram passes, because I needed it, and so we moved and we are still there in Lambertenghi and it's been fifty years we've been living there.

OinO – Why are you here today, did you hear about this event in the gardens?

R – No, I didn't know nor even my son did, but we come here when we can because I love to come here, when I come here it seems to me to be at home at last.

OinO – Can you tell us how much the Isola has changed during these fifty years and does the way it is now does it remind you of the way it used to be built in the years you were living here?

R – Yes, I have so many memories here. Mostly, if it weren't for the great monuments and some historical palaces, the rest of Milan is unrecognizable, but on the contrary here at the Isola, not at all. As an example,

there a little further on, straight in front of us there was the Brown Boveri, a factory producing mechanical parts, I think, but let's say that from the corner of via Confalonieri, at number two, there were a lot of people: there was the baker's, there was the tobacconist's etc... they came up here, do you understand?

OinO – It seems to us that, looking at these places today, you perfectly see again in the actual houses the buildings where your neighbours were living. Not all has changed in a radical way. Do you often come to the Isola gardens?

R – As the crow flies, from my house, I'm nearer to the garden of the "Fontana", it's easier to reach and then that was our church and some years ago the church of "Sacro Volto", that is nearby became a parish church. Anyway I prefer to come here, I was born in via Guglielmo Pepe, then I moved in via Confalonieri where two children of mine were born, then we moved in via Lambertenghi where others were born. The fact remains that this is my neighbourhood, this is still my neighbourhood, I spent the great part of my youth here and I'm still deeply attached to it. If I want to go to the park, I come here.

OinO – Do you know that there exist some projects, planning that the great part of the Isola, as you see it now, will be substantially modified?

R – What do they want to do? No, I don't know, or rather, to tell the truth, they have been saying for years that they'll build something here, but I don't live here anymore and so I'm not so well informed any longer.

OinO – The plans, that have been presented, completely redraw the Isola. On this very spot skyscrapers will spring up, garages, new roads and a trade centre and perhaps even, here and there, some green. If you could decide what to do with the Isola, if you had the power to decide, what would you do with this place?

R – Well, if I could be the boss, I'd kick in the rear all the people who say this stuff, all the people who made these plans. Ah, ah, ah. It's so beautiful here... I come here because besides this garden there is nothing! In this area and nearby there are no green areas, both for elderly and for children... there isn't a park, there is nothing at all. A lady told me that they want to make a road going to via De Castillia... in this way where do they put the cars? If only you knew how many times I ran by via De Castillia, in wartime! We used to arrive running to the end of it where the bridge is. The same lady also told me that they want to displace the market, that they have been trying it for some years, but they have collected signatures and from here no one moves any longer, only I don't know how it will end up, do you know?

OinO – No, we don't, but let's hope for the best, the neighbourhood and all the associations present on the field have been working hard for more than four years to make the re-qualification plans built for the inhabitants, considering, before the building speculation, which are the real needs of the people of the Isola Garibaldi. The local government should realize that the inhabitants have mobilized because they need some structures, meeting places and above all green areas.

R – Let's hope, because I'd be terribly sorry if they shouldn't leave us the park.