**Seven questions with Peter Eisenman**

**By Shuli Beimel, Raffaella Laezza**

**1**.We wanted to title this book **“**CRASH**”** precisely because we think that your intellectual contribution to the IUAV of those years was really a crash between the architectural tradition and your new vision, which is necessary to linguistic renewal.

What do you think about this statement?

Thank you for your questions. They act as a spur to my thinking and my memory. With that in mind I want to rearrange the order of your questions and begin with question number 4, which has a specifical resonance for me. “Crash” is the title of a famous science fiction book which was a favorite of mine at the time. Crash was by J. G. Ballard, a British author, it came out in 1973. It was an important year for architecture. Rossi’s Milan Triennale of 1973 featured the Rads and Rats, the Radicals vs. the Rationalists, the Five Architects represented the Rats. I was particularly concerned with the Crash of 1973 because David Cronenberg did a film version of the story at the same time that my office was doing a virtual building for a Cronenberg Museum. Between film and architecture and the 70’s Biennales and Triennale, Crash could be seen as a marker of that time. 1986, the locus of our “crash” encounter was ten years after the moment of the first architectural Biennale of 1976, for which I headed the American section of the debate, Europa – America. It was directed by Vittorio Gregotti, and featured Hans Hollein, Aldo Rossi, and Jim Stirling among others for Europe, and Bob Venturi, Cesar Pelli, and John Hejduk for America. It was an amazing event with a memorable clash between Aldo van Eyck and Manfredo Tafuri.

So the context for the class of 1986-87 was already settled, ten years before. If there was a crash at that moment it was a faint echo of the Venetian summer of 1976. Don’t forget that period was also animated by the end of the Vietnam War and two of Ballard’s other books the Killing Ground, and the Atrocity Exhibition. Ballard was clearly one of my heroes in 1976, and some of the energy of that moment still remained in 1986, but today it has largely been dissipated.

**2**. In the same year that you taught the course at the IUAV you wrote the book "La fine del classico" (Cluva Editore, Venice); for some of our group of students it was a fundamental book in the growth process.

After 35 years, how do you see this text after continuing your comprehensive study of the fundamental themes of architecture?

In most cases I do not reread texts that have been published. This is because I believe that texts, buildings, even teachings are a response to a specific context whether that context is a time, a place, a school, whatever, there is always a context which animates the work. What I wrote 35 years ago was a response to that time. What I taught in Italy in 1986 was different than what I taught at Cooper Union or Yale. What I would write today in New York is different than I am writing for you. Context determines a lot.

**3**. The didactic content you offered us was radical compared to what we knew and, in many ways, different from the traditions in which we learned architecture. For the first time you were talking about an architecture made of layers, of scaling, of grids (language that later would have been that of computers. For us it was a real cultural CRASH of the old paradigms that could be renamed with your new language.

How did you see our reactions? Where the results of our group of students as you expected?

I did not answer the question because I do not have an answer. You can answer it anyway you think is accurate and I will include it.

**4**. How did your teaching at the IUAV influence your career as an international professor?

Teaching hopefully can educate, but not only though new thoughts, but perhaps merely through old thoughts in a different context. I am uninterested in the new. Students need to learn the discipline before they begin to invent the new. It is possible that what a student who knows very little, only thinks something is new because he or she knows very little. I do not teach the new.

**5.** We met at a course you taught at IUAV, Venice in the academic year 1986-87. We, together with others, were your students in the Architectural Composition Course 3. The theme you gave us for the course was the project of a Museum for Rovereto and it had to respect the concept of: NO TIME, NO SPACE, NO SITE.

It was just before the Deconstruction Exhibition at the MOMA in New York. In retrospect we can say that we met at a turning point in the history of 20th century architecture.

How did the cultural period influence the contents of your didactic theme?

There is no question that the cultural context of your class affected what I thought, but it was at the end of a period. 1988, the Deconstructivist show at MoMA ended the historical pastiche of postmodernism but also ended deconstruction. Actually, deconstruction as portrayed at MoMA was an amalgam of three things, philosophical deconstruction, Russian constructivism and Jencksian postmodernism. The architects in the show, except for Tschumi and myself had no idea what philosophical deconstruction was, or why they were in the exhibition.

The cultural period for me was characterized by my relationships with three Italians; Aldo Rossi, Giorgio Ciucci, Manfredo Tafuri. I had also become friendly with a younger Italian, Renato Rizzi hence the studio project located in his hometown of Rovereto. It was during this time that Rizzi and I had several important disagreements concerning the evolution of my work, which ended our relationship.

**6**. What were your expectations when you came to teach at IUAV, with Italian and international undergraduate students, at a public university, where the architectural tradition was linked to the lessons of Aldo Rossi, Vittorio Gregotti, and Manfredo Tafuri?

It was also during this time that Tafuri said to me “if you don’t build nobody will care what you think.” It was a time when my first major work the Wexner Center was going into construction so between teaching, writing, and building I was quite busy. I was soon to get the commission to design an American football stadium, as well as doing projects in Germany and Spain. Whether it was the cultural period that animated me, or that my work animated the period I cannot judge. All I know is that it was a productive period for me personally. I assume that was also true for the students. The difference between 1973, 1976 and your group in 1987, is that I was now consumed by building and less involved in exhibitions, conferences, and theory.

When you ask me about my teaching experience in Venice, you have to remember I started teaching in a foreign county, England. Even though I taught in English it was still a foreign language and environment. I then taught 4 years at Princeton after the three years at Cambridge. Follow this with several years at Yale, three years at Harvard, a few terms at Cooper Union, and you can see I was a wanderer except for the Institute in New York where I was the director for fifteen years. Teaching at the IUAV was something both challenging and easy. I have always loved Italy, its culture, its food, its people so doing this book is something important for me. I am sorry we will miss Kurt Forster who is also part of my Italy, but perhaps not of crash.

**7**. What role do you think the paradigm of eco-natural themes can play in contemporary architecture and, in particular, with respect to what Kennet Frampton calls **“**The poetics of reuse**”**, or what is called the Biophilia in architecture? Can you tell us some keywords on which to set the reasoning?

I cannot answer this question, because the nature of my work does not engage this issue. Thus context sometimes has no effect on what I consider my project. What I teach, or write, or build is often merely related to my project, which today could be titled “The Becoming Unmotivated of the Sign”. I am answering your questions because I am not prepared to write the necessary essay of explanation. In any case those ideas have little to do with Crash.

Date of interview: February 2022

**Sette domande a Peter Eisenman**

**Di Shuli Beimel, Raffaella Laezza**

**1**. Abbiamo voluto intitolare questo libro CRASH proprio perché pensiamo che il tuo contributo intellettuale allo IUAV di quegli anni sia stato realmente un CRASH inteso come “schianto” con una tradizione architettonica che si “crashava!”con la tua nuova visione, cosa necessaria per il rinnovamento linguistico.

Cosa ne pensi?

**2**. Nello stesso anno che hai fatto il Corso allo IUAV hai scritto il libro”La fine del classico”(Cluva Editore,Venezia):per alcuni di noi è stato un libro fondamentale nel processo di crescita.

Oggi come vedi questo tuo testo nell’insieme del tuo approfondimento dei temi fondamentali dell’architettura?

**3**. Il contenuto didattico che ci hai offerto era radicale rispetto a ciò che sapevamo e, per molti versi, diverso dalle tradizioni in cui abbiamo appreso l’architettura.Per la prima volta tu ci parlavi di un’architettura fatta di layers, di scaling, di grids ( linguaggio che poi sarebbe stato quello dei computers).Per noi è stato un vero e proprio CRASH culturale dei vecchi paradigmi che si potevano rinominare con il tuo nuovo linguaggio.

**4**. Come ha influenzato questa tua didattica allo IUAV nel tuo percorso di professore internazionale?

**5**. IUAV\_Venezia: Anno Accademico il 1986-87.Noi, insieme ad altri, siamo state tue studentesse al Corso di Composizione Architettonica 3. Il tema che tu ci hai dato al corso era il progetto di un Museo per Rovereto e doveva rispettare il concept di:NO TIME\_NO SPACE\_NO SITE.

Era poco prima della Deconstruction Exhibition al MoMA di New York. In retrospettiva possiamo dire che ci siamo incontrati in un punto di svolta nella storia dell'architettura del XX° secolo.

Come ha influito il periodo culturale con i contenuti del tuo tema didattico?

**6**. Quali erano le tue aspettative quando sei venuto a insegnare allo IUAV con studenti italiani e internazionali iscritti ad un’u- niversità pubblica, dove la tradizione architettonica era collegata con Aldo Rossi, Vittorio Gregotti, Manfredo Tafuri?

**7**. Che ruolo pensi possa avere nell’architettura contemporanea il paradigma dei temi eco-naturali e in particolare rispetto a quella che Kennet Frampton chiama “La poetica del riuso”? O quella che viene definita la Biophilia in architettura? Puoi indicarci alcune keywords sulle quali impostare il ragionamento?

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