DOI: 10.23817/2023.defarch.2-9

GINO MALACARNE
ORCID: 0000-0002-9102-9874
University of Bologna, Italy

THE HOUSE AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE CITY

DOM I ARCHITEKTURA MIASTA

Abstract

The city, the theatre where "human events" take place, has always been the centre of my work.
Believing in the architecture of the city certainly does not mean thinking of a reconstruction whose objective is the city's form in general. The current city, a contradictory complex place, is an open work that definitely cannot aspire to any kind of unity. The contemporary city is not homogeneous, but discontinuous, and is made up of parts, characterized as a whole by a fragmentary conformation. The city of our time is not just one place, but many places.
Projects propose the construction of places that would like to be significant and which (in going beyond the contingent problems that the areas might present) aspire to become new urban centralities, points of reference, keystones in the suburbs of the cities of our time, in areas where the urban form is being lost.

Keywords: architecture, city, cityscape, theatre, home

Streszczenie

Miasto jako teatr, w którym rozgrywają się „ludzkie sprawy", zawsze znajdowało się w centrum pracy autora.
Wiara w architekturę miasta z pewnością nie oznacza rozważań nad jego przebudową, której celem będzie ogólna forma miasta. Współczesne miasto, miejsce złożone ze sprzeczności, jest dziełem otwartym, które z pewnością nie może osiągnąć jakiejkolwiek jedności. Współczesne miasto nie jest jednorodne, lecz nieciągłe i zlepione z części, jako całość charakteryzuje się fragmentaryczną konformacją. Miasto naszych czasów to już nie jedno, ale wiele miejsc.
Proponowane projekty zakładają tworzenie miejsc, które mogłyby być znaczące i które (wykraczając poza uwarunkowania obszarów) aspirują do stania się nowymi miejskimi centrami, punktami odniesienia, filarami na przedmieściach miast naszych czasów, na obszarach, gdzie forma miejska zanika.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, miasto, pejzaż miejski, teatr, dom

And never had the city where they lived seemed so beautiful and so unknown. The houses as a whole offered a great spectacle even if in detail or taken one by one they were not beautiful

Robert Musil[1]

1.

The city, the theatre where "human events" take place, has always been the centre of my work. Whether designing houses or residential neighbourhoods, I have never stopped building cities

[1] R. Musil, *L'uomo senza qualità*, vol. 2, Einaudi, Torino 1979, p. 1057.

by fragments. In fact, I have tried to build places for people's life, collective spaces characterized by an idea of architectural ensembles, not sophisticated design objects, to define the cities' face. For Pouillon, "Ensembles are more important than isolated masterpieces, because they play a part in people's daily lives"[2].

It is therefore the architecture of the city that is the centre of my interest.

Believing in the architecture of the city certainly does not mean thinking of a reconstruction whose objective is the city's form in general. The current city, a contradictory complex place, is an open work that definitely cannot aspire to any kind of unity. The contemporary city is not homogeneous, but discontinuous, and is made up of parts, characterized as a whole by a fragmentary conformation. The city of our time is not just one place but many places. Intervening in the contemporary city does not mean aspiring to found or re-found cities, but to intervene on those places that need "overwriting", a stratification to endow with character and meaning, by proposing an architecture that is grafted onto and overlaps the existing city, thereby bringing it new meanings.

To talk about the architecture of the city I like to introduce the term "Urban Landscape", a term borrowed from French geographers, (such as Georges Chabot), and from those who recognize the city "as a reference and foundation of architecture". For me, moreover, the definition of "Urban Landscape" indicates the possibility of building places with a distinctive character, fragments, parts of the city endowed with "finiteness" within an open work which is the city itself. This is a necessary aspiration to try to reconstruct an idea of the city even by significant fragments, able to give shape to the urban shapelessness. In essence, in my work, the projects aspire to reconstruct parts of the city by defining fragments of urban landscapes.

2.

The residential settlements which define the general framework of the research carried out on the theme of the house in recent years insist, in particular, on the rediscovery of architectural spaces compatible with an urban and morphological development that allows a domestic wellbeing for the house and an indispensable urban recognizability[3].

A rebirth of the peripheral urban forms and places of the city is equally desirable in light of the extensions of meaning that this theme has taken on; on the one hand, in relation to the importance increasingly attributed to the needs of environmental protection and valorisation of existing heritage, on the other, in consideration of the increasing interest aroused by opportunities for reconstruction and urban transformation. As already mentioned, in dealing with the theme of the relationship between architecture and place, the architectural project requires the construction of defined and recognizable residential urban settlements, which establish an urban development with the intention of regenerating parts of the territory as well as the city in which they have put down roots.

The projects developed in recent years have always been oriented towards an architecture that is able to propose redevelopment/regeneration/reconstruction projects for marginal,

[2] F. Pouillon, *Ordonnances*, Cercle d'Etude Architecturale, Aix-en-Provence 1953, p. 19.

[3] G. Malacarne, *La casa, interni e città. Cultura e qualità dello spazio collettivo domestico* [in:] G. Malacarne (ed.), *La Casa. Forme e luoghi dell'abitare urbano*, Skira, Milano 2012, pp. 7–40.

peripheral, and abandoned urban places; towards an architecture able to propose "new centralities for the suburbs". The suburbs represent the largest part of the urban heritage that needs redeveloping. The "new town", an expanse of residences-dormitories, has not yet found an independent life and has lost its initial impetus.

As has been observed[4], the "suburbs are a large territory which is completely privatized (…) a place devoid of the fundamental requirement of every city, which is the relationship between public and private." Consequently, for any redevelopment project it becomes necessary to foster a new relationship between collective places and residential areas. In this sense, the public side of housing belongs to everyone and not only to those who live there, precisely because it contributes to the scene of a city and therefore demands civil architecture. This means proposing a polycentric model of the city, for large and medium-sized cities at least.

The urban suburbs are essentially an economic and social problem, but architectural design can do a lot by giving a form to the urban formlessness. The theme of defining the urban form naturally represents a possibility for the city, but we do well to remember that it defines only one aspect of a complex framework within which issues, techniques, and economic strategies are all interested in governing the vital dynamics and use of a city. Nonetheless, for those who "believe" in the architecture of the city in which to find and establish a system of order, one made up of hierarchies, fixed scenes, and recognizable configurations, the theme of the urban form is an equally important key fact to identify the functional aspects of urban areas.

And even if we hope for strategies, "practices" and "tactics"[5]of social and spatial appropriation, these alone will not suffice, as necessary as they are, since they nourish a sense of belonging. Only architecture can build the conditions (places) for the development of a dignified urban life. As Henri Lefebvre wrote: "Urban life, urban society, in a word, the urban, cannot go without a practico-material base, a morphology"[6]. The city, according to Lefebvre, "is an *oeuvre*, closer to a work of art than to a simple material product. (…) There is no *oeuvre* without a regulated succession of acts and actions, of decisions and conducts, messages and codes. Nor can an *oeuvre* exist without things, without something to shape, without practico-material reality, without a site, without a 'nature', a countryside, an environment."

This means, without a doubt, favouring, through the definition of form, alternative urban processes to the sole urban practice of "standards", thus able to recall, even if by fragments or significant parts, the themes of urban centrality, the value and richness of the overall form of the city and, why not, the identity of places.

I therefore strongly believe in a disciplinary autonomy of architecture which, however, takes architects who are civilly (and politically) committed. Places that have lost their urban role (once the original intended use has been lost), or might never have had one, look forward to important changes; and this not only concerns urban areas and suburbs but also zones which are often central in location, but marginal in importance within a city devoid of form and meaning. Finally, places that are awaiting substantial transformations in a quest for new uses and new formal identities.

Our task should be to propose a form for these places in cities.

---

[4] Some considerations have been taken from Antonio Monestiroli, *Nuove piazze urbane/Neue urbane Plätze* [in:] U. Schröder (ed.), *Die Idee der Stadt*, Wasmuth, Tübingen-Berlin 2009, pp. 172–181.

[5] Again, taking up some themes stated by Michel de Certeau, *L'invenzione del quotidiano,* Edizioni Lavoro, Roma 2010, pp. 69–75.

[6] H. Lefebvre, *Il diritto alla città,* Marsilio, Padova 1970, p. 68.

Starting from a major work of maintenance and restoration, the reconstruction of houses and neighbourhoods through thinning, densifying, and stratifying processes will allow the construction of spaces and collective places which, together with an adequate supply of services and amenities, will determine new centralities for the suburbs while trying to represent at the same time a new and necessary urban form. In fact, it has long been forgotten that "Building cities means: using housing to shape space"[7].

To do this takes civil architecture, in the sense of belonging to everyone and not only to those who designed it, which will be the backdrop to an urban life of a city that – obviously – needs to work. Trying to build "an architecture", as Vittorio Gregotti wrote[8], that is "urban civil, simple, knowable, without the search for applause, open to the social imagination (…) without getting lost in the society of the spectacle, (…)."

The synergistic relationship between the project of the house and its relationship with the city has led over the years towards design research that therefore seeks to develop around the "new town" idea, the urban suburbs, (and all peripheral and marginal areas in general) the city of our time to which no one has yet offered adequate answers in general terms; proposing a kind of architecture that is grafted onto and overlaps the existing city not only in the direction of correction, but also intervening in antithesis, by contrast; thus endowing it with new meanings.

3.

The house represents a shelter for human life but in its construction it determines places, the city's public and collective spaces. In its construction, therefore, it becomes a "fixed scene of the events of man"[9]. The house offers a public side – the exterior, and a private side – the interior. The public side belongs to everyone and not only to those who live there and need civil architecture. The interior is a private place, suited to domestic life, and requires a design approach which attempts to interpret the liturgy of domestic life without forcing the inhabitant to maintain a cumbersome work of art or to live in a coercive place where everything is already pre-planned. On such themes we might refer to the lucid reflections and projects of Adolf Loos. Or try to build houses intended as open spaces, free, as flexible as possible from a functional point of view (flexible but not agnostic houses).

As far as the design of the house and its relationship with the city is concerned, I believe it is key to reorient architectural research towards a regeneration of urban studies and the relationships between architectural typology and urban morphology, by proposing a recovery of the examples developed on these themes in the writings and works of the wide-ranging tradition of Italian studies and research. Together with others, I support the need for scientific continuity with these studies and their related way of understanding rational design as a means of linking the destiny of architecture to that of the city. I am interested in a design experience ascribable within a civil horizon of architecture in which we can recognize and affirm that "Living is possible only as a collective space"[10].

---

[7] A.E. Brinckmann, *Platz und Monument*, cited by Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani, in the article *Case economiche come avanguardia*, "Domus" 2020, no. 1043, p. 15.

[8] V. Gregotti, *Stadt und Bürger/Città e cittadino* [in:] U. Schröder (ed.), *Die Idee der Stadt*, Wasmuth, Tübingen–Berlin 2009, p. 150.

[9] A. Rossi, *L'architettura della città*, Clup, Milano 1978, p. 12.

[10] A statement of U. Schröder in *Bologna*, Tubingen 2012, p. 64.

Residential construction is, today more than ever, a major challenge and at the same time an opportunity for architecture and for the growth and definition of a city's places. An increasingly complex challenge, conditioned on the one hand by the impossibility for many to access it from an economic point of view, and on the other by the multiplication of lifestyles (further accentuated by migratory phenomena) of the expectations of liveability of urban and domestic spaces, technological innovations and new sensibilities towards the environment as a whole and, more generally, to the issue of environmental sustainability in relation to the construction of the city.

From this point of view, the construction of the residential building represents a concrete possibility to provide answers and to extend, within consolidated or newly expanded urban environments, an offer of housing that varies in size, materials, and construction characteristics.

The design of a residential building therefore focuses on the role of the urban project and on the meaning which residential settlements can take on in the processes of regeneration and transformation of urban areas, trying to recover the generality of a social, and at the same time, architectural theme: the idea of a "home for all"[11].

4.

The projects I am presenting envisage a "rebirth" for parts of cities that are "lacking and needy".

These projects propose the construction of places that would like to be significant and which (in going beyond the contingent problems that the areas might present) aspire to become new urban centralities, points of reference, keystones in the suburbs of the cities of our time, in areas where the urban form is being lost.

In the city understood as an artefact, the "plan" is realized using architecture, the only possibility for an urban project which contemplates as a final result a significant form of the city, endowed with its own character.

Such projects are then built as similar pieces of cities that are rooted in the built city and the imagery to which they refer. The ability to imagine figures and spaces derives from a knowledge of historical cities (from the urban artefacts that characterize cities). The city – in fact, a place of common values and "theatre" where human life takes place – is the custodian of a tradition of urban forms forged by time and the life of humankind. I am therefore sharing the projects and ideas of cities that refer to known places which have been transcribed, reinvented and found in projects, recalling with Cesare Pavese that "(…) True amazement is made of memory, not of novelty"[12].

The reference, through urban analysis to types and figures that derive from history, also contributes to making urban artefacts recognizable and identifiable. Projects establish a relationship with history to be understood as generative, not as imitative, and that is built through an analogical process. As happens in the best works of architecture, it is the "precedents" and historical references that can be glimpsed which feed the imagination they themselves

[11] E. Vittorini, *Case popolari case per tutti*, "L'Ambrosiano", 7.03.1934, p. 3. Published in G. Biondillo, *Carlo Levi e Elio Vittorini. Scritti di architettura*, Testo & Immagine, Torino 1997, p. 70.

[12] C. Pavese, *Il mestiere di vivere*, Einaudi, Torino 1984, p. 220.

produce. Evocative images are, in fact, wholly necessary to the principle of recognition and identity-making of places.

The architecture of the city is the urban theatre of civil life; the urban scenic space is therefore an essential component of the urban project and is a figure which recurs in my work as an architect. This component requires careful attention to the implementation and representation of the project, in fact, if the city is the theatre of public life, it is the works of architecture that make the urban landscape intelligible in terms of culture and experience.

Project for the Werfthafen in Duisburg, 1991

The project area, on the edge of a small urban centre peripheral to the city, is a peninsula located between two port basins in search of new functions, new uses, and new formal identities. The intervention proposes a fragment of civil architecture in an area where the form of the city is being lost.

The project involves the construction of a complex multifaceted settlement unit, intended for different functions, and also becomes the occasion for a complex typological experimentation concerning the tower type on a plinth. The large plinth, which adapts to the morphology of the peninsula, features an alternating succession of towers interspersed with courtyards which identify the public spaces. At the same time, the plinth and its towers are scaled to the nearest urban dimension and then to the industrial cityscape, the port, and the city in general, acting as a landmark.

The project builds different relationships with the city and at the same time presents itself as a unitary work of architecture, thus showing its urban vocation.

Competition for the Ziegelsee Schwerin, 1993

The project for this area proposes a work of architecture capable of shaping this part of the city, a central place in terms of location, but which became marginal once its original intended use had been lost. The area is recomposed in a unitary project which establishes new architectural hierarchies and contrasts the landscape of the city; the tower, and the in-line building, while the other buildings along Hafen Strasse accept the relationship of scale with the cityscape, the lake, the harbour and the city more generally.

The project redefines the area as an urban block even if it is not traditional: many apparently heterogeneous architectural elements define it and there are many breaks in the frontage, through which to glimpse the lake. The in-line building follows the virtual curve of the current block and defines a new urban backdrop for the historic city, of which it has a privileged view, as well as for the lake and the dock.

The architectural elements adapt to the morphology of the place and propose a certain spatial and distributive complexity, but never renounce their formal status to the project's unity.

Project for 24 apartments in San Pietro in Casale, Bologna 1993–1994

This residential complex for 24 apartments responds to a social problem: to build low-cost housing managed directly by the municipal administration. The project sought to propose an architectural solution that was not merely an answer in terms of urban planning indexes and standards, but which contributed to building a recognizable place for this part of the city.

The form of the buildings is that of an open courtyard, dictated by the desire to build first and foremost a place with its own formal identity, but also with the intention of creating

a collective space linked to the lives of its inhabitants that establishes relationships with the public space of the garden. The architectural element of the loggia, which characterizes the courtyards, the pilasters which determine the divisions of the façade, the shape of the elevator shaft towers, the materials and the colours, all try to relate the project, without nostalgia, to a local building tradition by now lost.

Project for two blocks in Verona South, Verona 2007
The project for two residential blocks complies with the layout and regulatory rules imposed by the plan for Verona South. It is located in an area on the southern fringes of the city, behind the railway station where, during the mid-20th century, the industrial development of the city and the Trade Fair area was concentrated. The two blocks of the project feature, with respect to the discontinuity and fragility of the surrounding building fabric, the strength of a unitary principle, by seeking a system of correspondences and analogies with the ancient city. The relationship with the street is resolved, on the ground floor, by a continuous portico that links the buildings to the street network and introduces the large garden courtyards which fill the centre of both blocks. But the portico also becomes an opportunity to underline the different role of the streets and their return to being not merely a road axis, but a public space, also characterized by an idea of an architectural ensemble to define the face of this part of the city. The buildings, in an elongated foreshortening, face the large green space and reveal, in the ordered pattern of their architecture, their belonging to the city, constituting a fixed scene which opens up towards the park.

The court, the street and the city. Project for the Scalo Farini, Milan, 2014
This architectural project adhered to the principles and constraints imposed by the general project, defining an open block which presents different hierarchies to the streets delimiting it. Building houses in Milan for the Scalo Farini area is essentially a problem of city architecture in the complex relationship between urban morphology and building typology. The project proposes a type of housing in which the coexistence of some services – recreational, commercial and working – produces a complex settlement unit. Along the main axis of the project, two towers define the limit of the block and enclose it, while two heterogeneous buildings with a large and complex section separate the space of the street from that of the internal park-garden.

On the street, the building presents itself as a series of courtyards, memories of the buildings *à redans* of Eugène Henard. Towards the green space are stepped terraces, alternating with vertical elements that contrast them. Underlying the project there is also an intention to pursue a feeling of life and living.

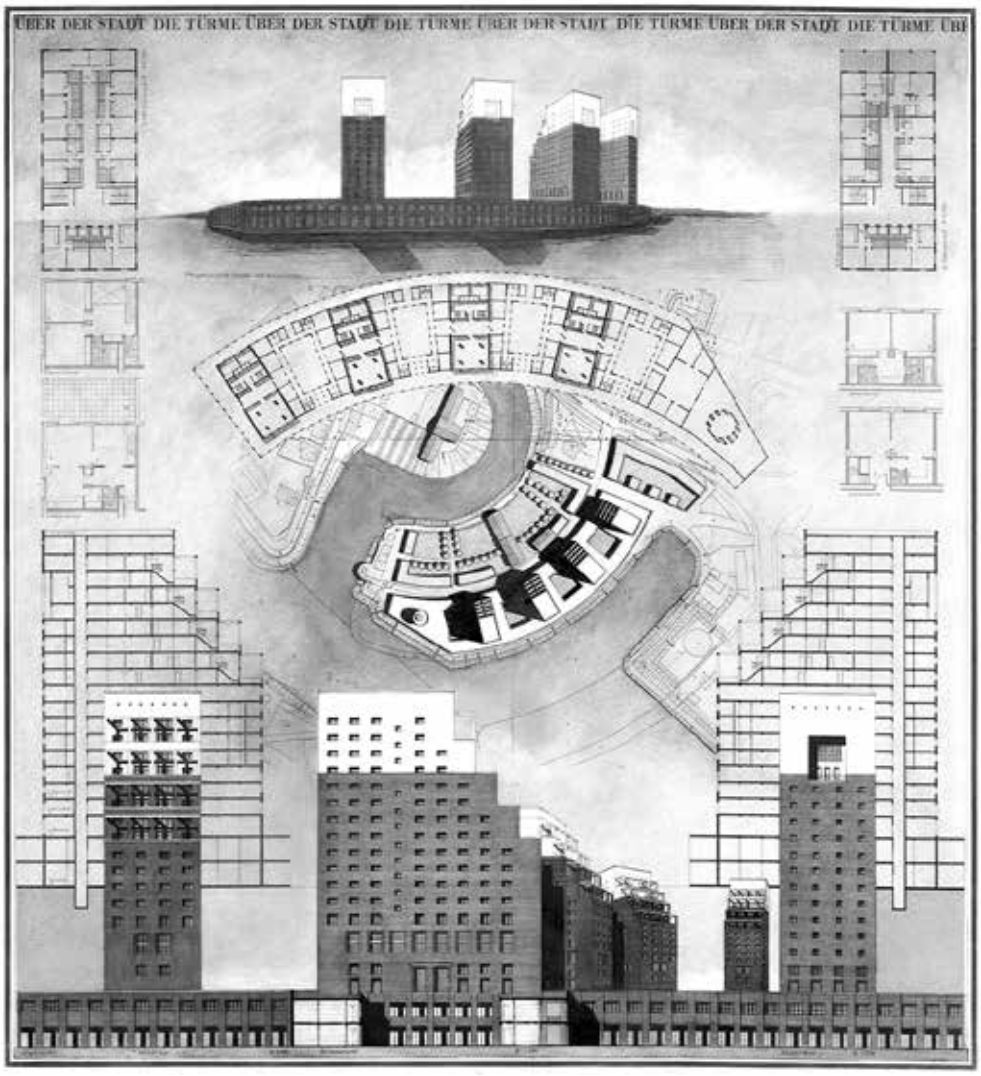
The Driescher Hof in the Outskirts of Aachen, Aachen 2020
Within the Driescher Hof district, a suburban area awaiting substantial transformations, this project intervenes to shape the place and bring quality to the urban space.

The space which most offers the possibility of transformation includes a barracks, an industrial area, and a large green area located among the built fabric. The green area represents an important resource, a fragment of countryside within the city that must be improved.

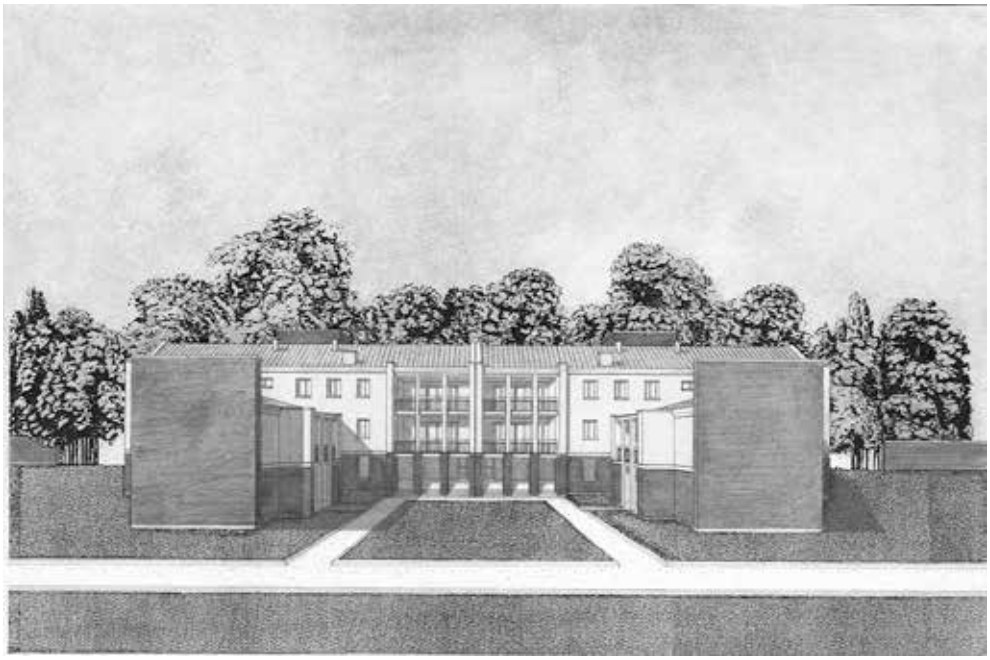
The barracks, in the part dedicated to housing (*baracken*), with its recognizable outline, identifies a potential public space, a sort of "forum", a green campus; this is a key urban

artefact not only for this part of the city and in defining a collective space, but would like to be evocative, identifying a new and necessary centrality for this site.

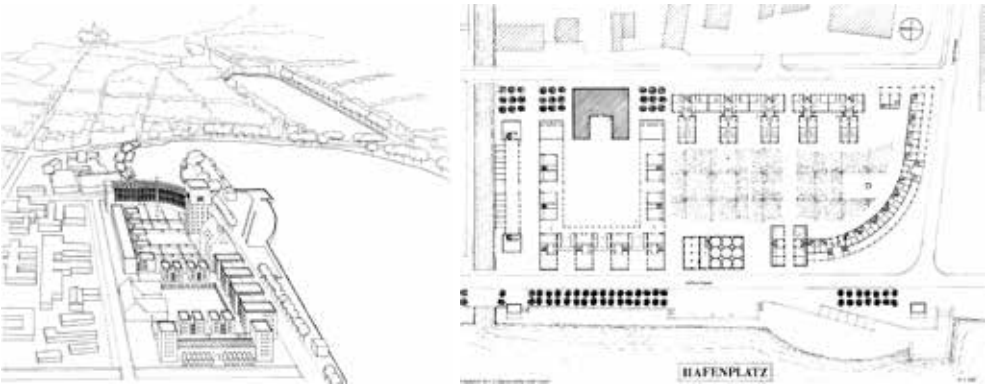
The ground plan of the barracks area, its geometry, defines the ordering structure of the settlement. The resulting compositional axes organize the system of streets and identify residential blocks, collective spaces and buildings, as well as a public green. The urban limit of the building is characterized by residential tower buildings, which evoke a “turreted citadel”.



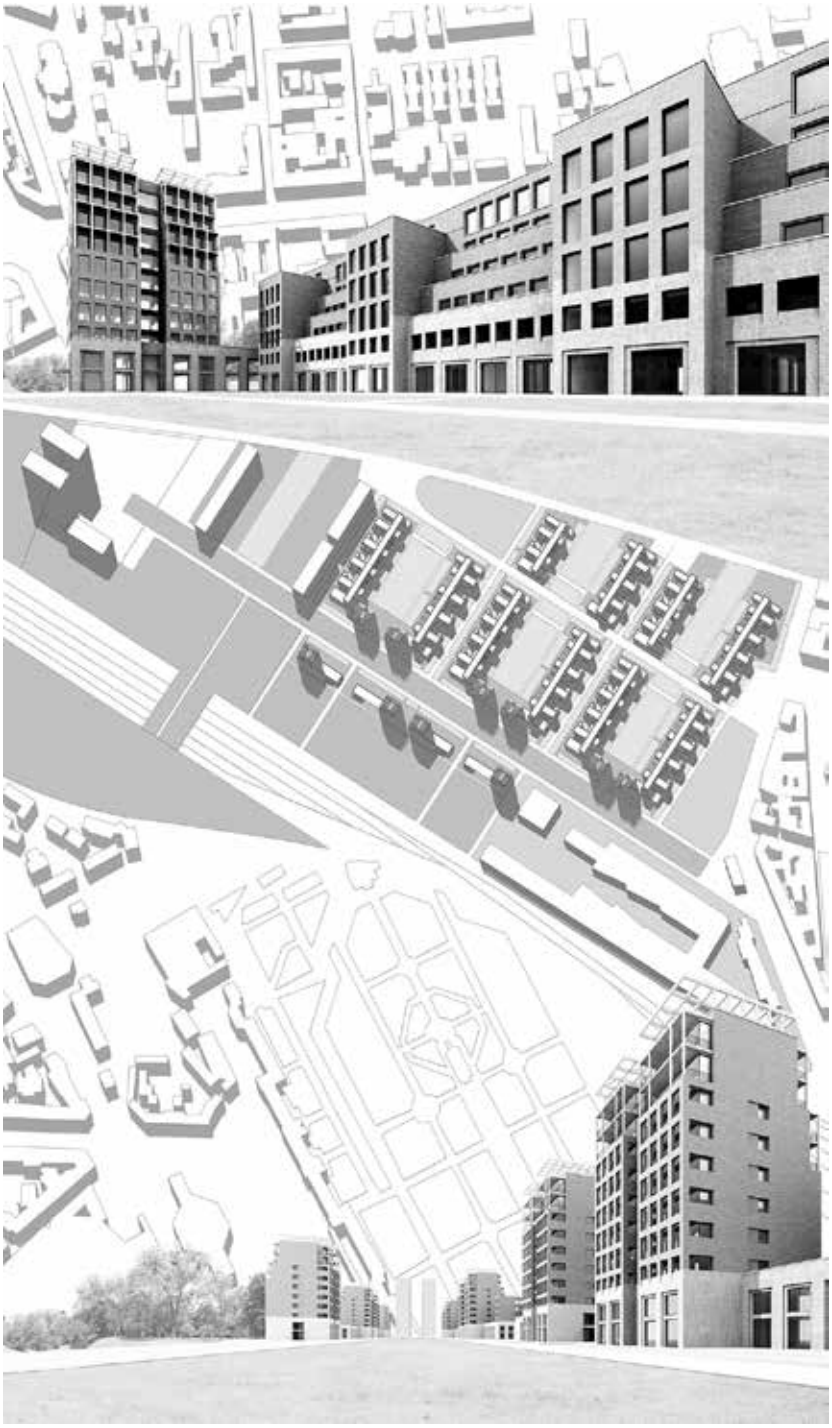
Ill. 1. Gino Malacarne, project for the Werfthafen of Duisburg, 1989/1990.



Ill. 2. Gino Malacarne, residential buildings in San Pietro in Casale, Bologna, 1992.



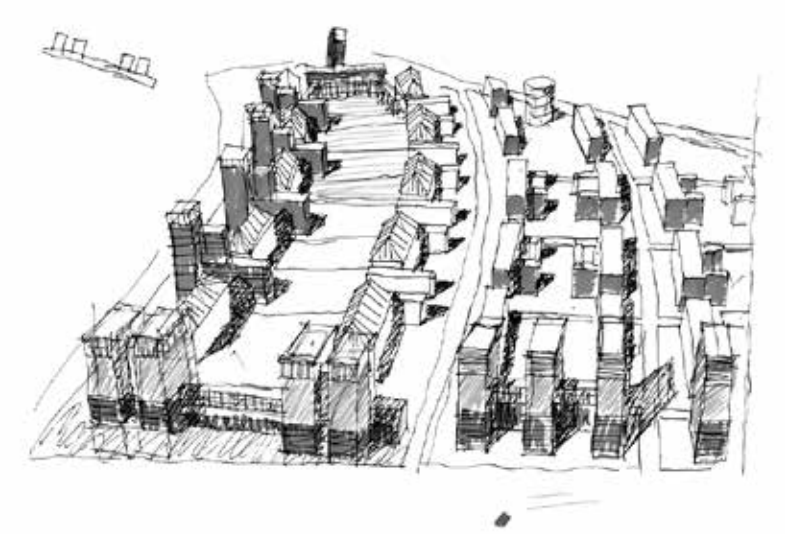
Ill. 3, 4. Gino Malacarne, project for the Ziegelsee in Schwerin, 1993.



Ill. 5. Gino Malacarne, project for Scalo Farini, Milan, 2014.



Ill. 6. Gino Malacarne, two residential blocks project, Verona, 2007.



Ill. 7. Gino Malacarne, the Driescher Hof in Aachen's Periphery, Aachen, 2020.

References

[1] Biondillo G., *Carlo Levi e Elio Vittorini. Scritti di architettura*, Testo & Immagine, Torino 1997.
[2] De Certeau M., *L'invenzione del quotidiano*, Edizioni Lavoro, Roma 2010.
[3] Lefebvre H., *Il diritto alla città*, Marsilio, Padova 1970.
[4] Magnago Lampugnani V., *Case economiche come avanguardia*, "Domus" 2020, no. 1043, pp. 15–16.
[5] Malacarne G. (ed.), *La Casa. Forme e luoghi dell'abitare urbano*, Skira, Milano 2012.
[6] Musil R., *L'uomo senza qualità,* vol. 2, Einaudi, Torino 1979.
[7] Pavese C., *Il mestiere di vivere*, Einaudi, Torino 1984.
[8] Pouillon F., *Ordonnances*, Cercle d'Etude Architecturale, Aix-en-Provence 1953.
[9] Rossi A., *L'architettura della città*, Clup, Milano 1978.
[10] Schröder U. (ed.), *Bologna*, Wasmuth, Tübingen 2012.
[11] Schröder U. (ed.), *Die Idee der Stadt*, Wasmuth, Tübingen–Berlin 2009.
[12] Vittorini E., *Case popolari per tutti*, "L'Ambrosiano", 7.03.1934.

Author's Note

Full Prof. Gino Malacarne, Arch.

(Portomaggiore 1955). Architect, Full Professor in Architectural and Urban Composition at the Department of Architecture of the University of Bologna. He graduated in architecture in Venice in 1981, where he taught until 2004. From 2005 to 2012, he taught at the Faculty of Architecture "Aldo Rossi" of the University of Bologna where in the same years he held the position of Dean.

gino.malacarne@unibo.it