



Urban Morphology Following The Muratorian Tradition

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The method of reading and design the built landscape I will briefly present you here, draw from studies taking place in Rome in the interwar period by scholars as Gustavo Giovannoni, Giovan Battista Milani, Arnaldo Foschini and continued by Saverio Muratori.

For the method I propose, the Roman School heritage is relevant mostly for notions as history’s centrality in built environment interpretation and the coincidence of reading and design. Architectural “redesign” was (and is) in fact considered as a tool to transmit the notion of process and organism intended as an “integrated, self-sufficient correlation of complementary elements expressing a unitary aim”. (Strappa, 2014).

Unlike other Italian schools, such as Aldo Rossi’s and Carlo Aymonino’s ones, the Muratorian school considers the critical reading of built reality as the design itself.

Some affinities with this method can be recognized in researches conducted within the Birmingham University, where a whole geographers school, coordinated by Jeremy Whitehand, formed on M.R.G. Conzen teaching (for several aspects close to Muratorian school) has meet a particular fertile ground of confrontation.

Perhaps the closest research, in Turkey, to this school is due to Sedad Hakkı Eldem, an architect born in Istanbul and of international culture, who has long studied the building types of Turkish architecture. Eldem’s abstraction process in Turkish House Types is, in fact, the invention of an “universal category” which has a general and generative value, out of its own local definition. His abstract plan type is explored through the study of the planimetric organization of sofa as the constituting the central element of the distributive space and the focal, symbolical point of the traditional house. Eldem refers explicitly to the Turkish architectural tradition and derives morphological general considerations from it.

I believe that an useful definition that Eldem would share is that “Urban morphology is the study of urban form interpreted as the visible aspect of a structure”. Consequently urban morphology study is referred to the interpretation of the urban landscape as a structure in which each part is linked to the others, and to the knowledge of the urban environment not just through the perception of it but as the visible aspect of the territorial structure.

The same interpretation could be used for urban organism and fabrics: cities can be conceived as the result of a transformation process, form in continuous evolution, and buildings could be considered as organisms in which the actual shape derives from a transformation process starting from the matter who becomes material, elements, structures, organism itself.

In my opinion the modern meaning our cities is precisely contained in the notion of “process” and in the connected one of “formativity”, a neologism proposed by the philosopher Luigi Pareyson to indicate the development through which the architectural



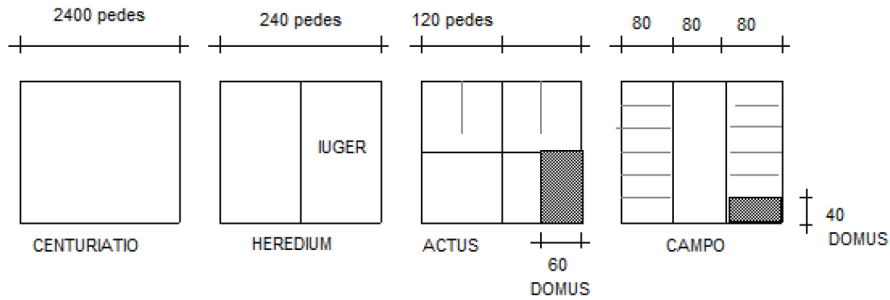
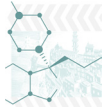
product (to paraphrase the author) is not the result of a sudden creation but is generated by a progression of formative moments (Pareyson, 1960).



To avoid getting lost in theories, as an architect I would like to propose an example that everyone knows. The structure of the Venetian palace. From the point of view of perception a picture of Vendramin Calergi Palace should give an idea of what was a Venetian palace:” A facade on the beautiful canal waters with regular windows and a very pragmatic, unimportant lateral facade.

But the perception of the Vendramin Calergi Palace form, in fact, does not explain much and is not very useful for the project. A student of architecture can see all the Venetian palaces but he does not learn much for designing: it is not enough to see the form, it is necessary to read the form. Which is a bit more complicated.

The typological matrixes of Venetian palace are, in fact, deeply rooted in the Roman Po Valley. The recurring dimensions (to be regarded as typical and variable within reasonable limits) of the Venetian single-family domus derive from the traditional half-actus module or, in the case of the 40 pedes front, from the direct subdivision of the heredium into three parts along one direction (two strigae and one open space in-between), and into six according to the other, thus producing the common aggregation with squared fronts onto the public space of the campo (the Venetian square).



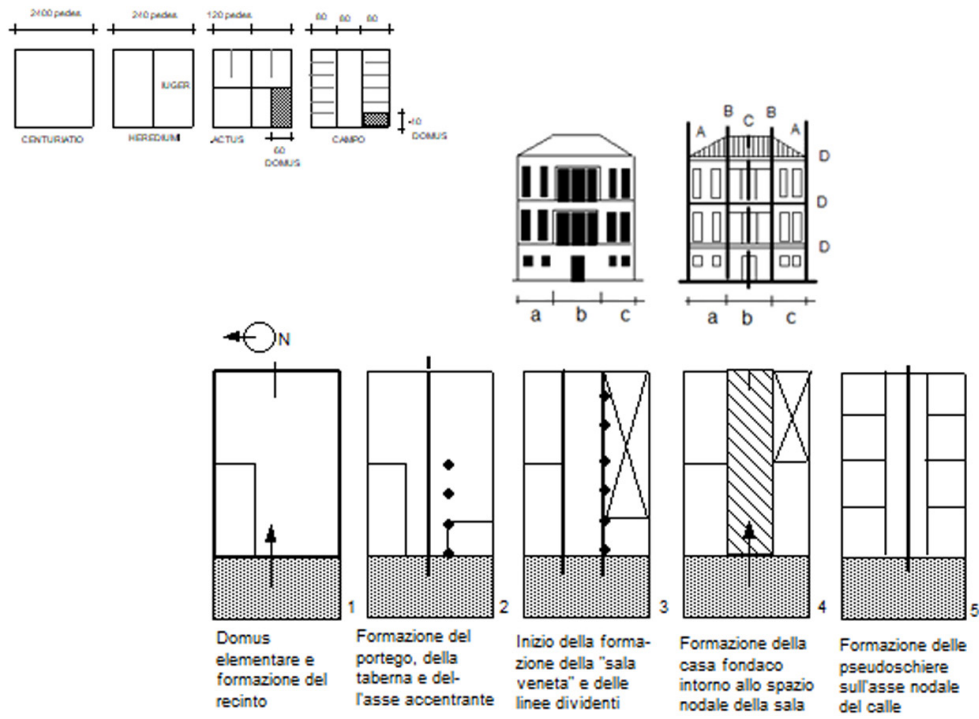
Disegno domus

Le pied romain = cm 29,65
La mesure est importante : p. 60 = 3 x 20 (3 cellules élémentaires)

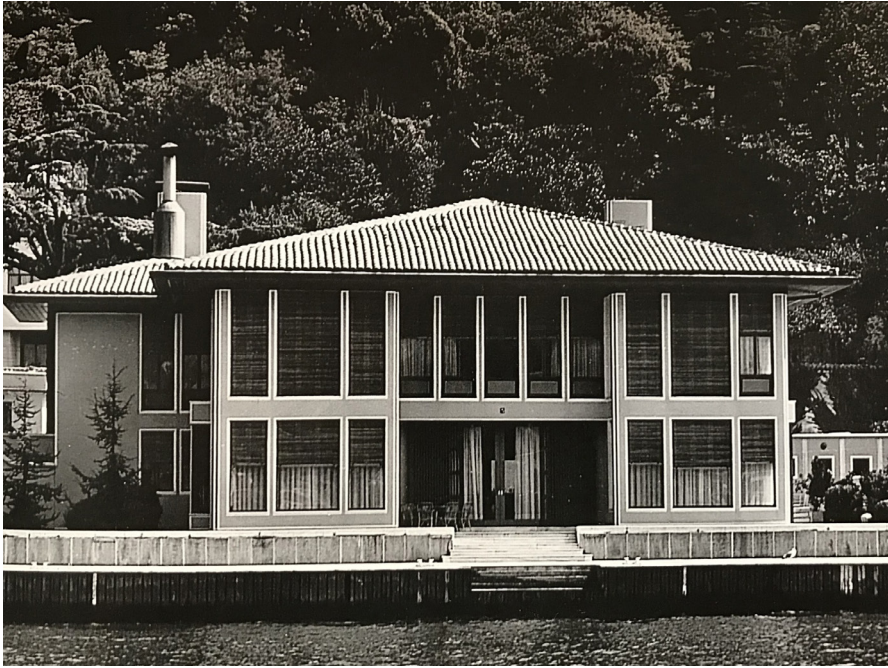
By schematizing a very complex process, the larger lots are preferably laid out with the long side facing north in order to have the water (often a small canal or rio) parallel to the terra firma passage on the side by the first construction typically oriented south. The internal route is progressively covered over time, generating a portego (portico) which geometrizes the route and originates an axis polarized at both ends by entrances.

The following building, in short, takes place on the southern side, starting from the external route with more nodality according to the typical process of “tabernization” (Caniggia-Maffei, 1976) through the formation of the internal dividing lines complementary to the centering axis.

This internal space assumes two fundamental roles related to economic and social processes - the changes of which were already quite advanced in the 12th century - which led on one hand to the differentiation of the domus type into upper-class residence and palazzo, and on the other to its subdivision into low-income family houses.



From reading the Venetian palace as an organism, we can understand its language: the polifora as a legacy of the open space, of a void; the side parts with the windows as a legacy of the domus structure. In general, if the building is an organism in which each part is strongly connected to the others, the facade should read as the place in which, directly or indirectly, every composing system is showed, from the static structure to the distribution system till the construction data. In an architectural organism the facade is thus an aesthetic synthesis in which we recognize the permanence of the type and its transforming process.



I believe this process has been understood and interpreted by very few modern architects.

Among these, surely Sedad Eldem, who interpreted the Bosphorus house in an exemplary way, as you can see in this splendid example of the Suna Kıraç house (1965).

Considering now the whole built environment as an organism, the first steps in the interpretation of it are related to the individuation of its principal development phases.

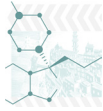
The key concepts are, following the notions employed in the example: the built reality intended as an organism, the built environment intended as a process.

The two concepts are strongly related and are the principal tools to link together the elements forming, following Muratori, the built space: Routes, Base Building, Special Building, Urban Fabric.

Base building are considered all the architectures and buildings in which the function is related to the life activities and the dwelling. The term base derives from its main characteristic: each form of architecture and building derives from the house.

A clear example derives from European cities in which the great majority of the construction is made by housing and from these structures were developed more complex building and architecture and in general the cities.

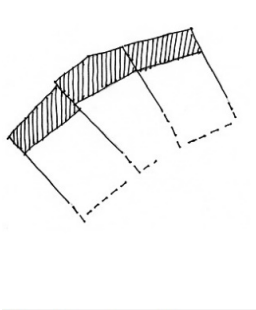
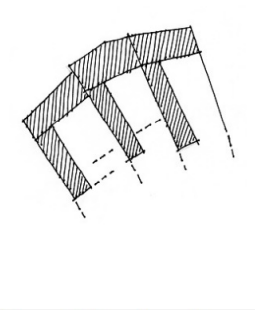
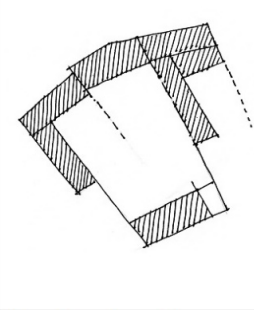
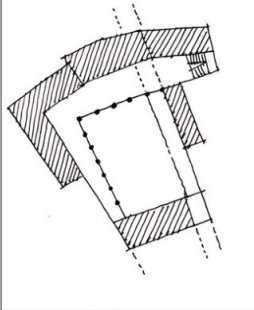
The “special building” term means all the non-residential part of the built environment, also including those building types where the housing function is secondary to that which gives rise to the specialization of the type. This fact, that special building derives from the transformation of base building, is very important from a design point of view. It can be a method to design.



I would like to propose an example of the design of this specialization process, to show how reading can coincide with the project.

It is a project proposed for the redevelopment of an area in Carezzano, a small settlement in Piedmont. The competition called for the reuse of an abandoned area through a new public buildings. Our proposal was based on the conviction that any contemporary intervention has to continue a still ongoing process of transformation, so all the buildings have been preserved. In designing the new intervention, we had to consider the relations of solidarity established over time between routes, public spaces at the intersection between routes (nodes and poles), housing and public buildings. The option was to “upgrade” the existing fabric of residential and rural abandoned buildings, with demolitions limited to the indispensable.

The reading acknowledged that the urban aggregate to be transformed was originally made up of three courtyard houses, according to a type widespread in many small Piedmontese Italian centers of ancient rural traditions.

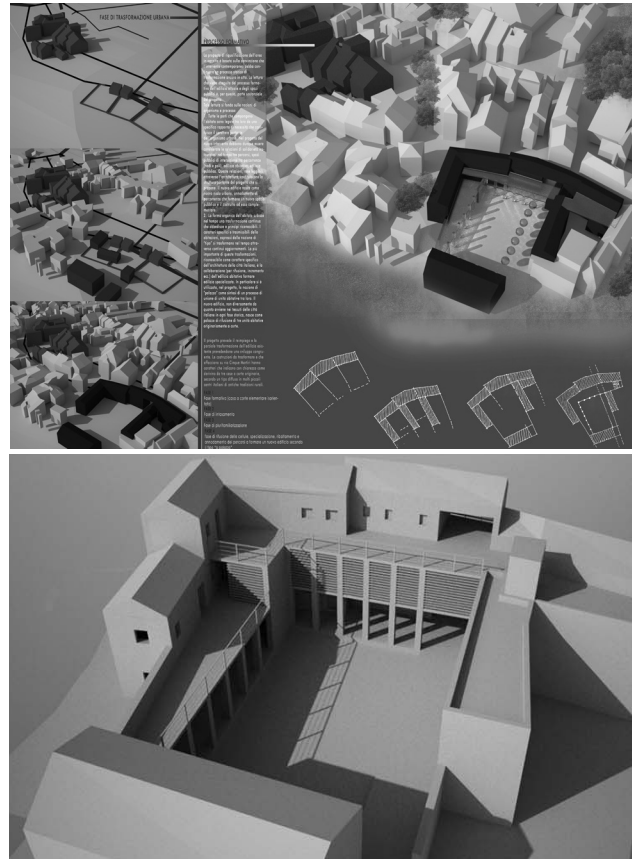
			
Prima fase formativa: casa “a corte” elementare isorientata.	Seconda fase formativa: intasamento delle corti.	Terza fase formativa: plurifamiliarizzazione.	Quarta fase formativa: rifusione, specializzazione e annodamento.

A process of transformation (see drawings) typical of these constructions has been identified, which can be seen through:

- a first forming phase consisting of isorientated elementary courtyard houses;
- a second infilling phase;
- a third phase of multifamily transformation;
- a fourth phase of cell recasting, specialization, routes overturning and knotting, based on the notion of palazzo.

In fact, only the first three phases have actually taken place.

The fourth phase has never been really produced but could (should) take place in the future. It corresponds to the design as logical/economic outcome and architectural synthesis of a process in progress.



In this way the new design, avoiding any vernacular imitation, was born as a contemporary urban node, knotting routes that form a new public space: it forms as a small palace recasting the three original courtyard housing units. Reusing existing buildings, besides protecting the character of the built environment, will bring considerable savings in the cost of the intervention, in addition to a considerable passive energy saving due to the solutions adopted and also to the thickness of the existing masonry.

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