The Old and the New: Designs to Enhance Cesano Maderno Old Town through a Regenerative Structure

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ABSTRACT The relationship between the old and the new is a specific theme of architecture that bears witness not so much to the original appearance of the old but to its enduring meaning in historic Italian and European cities. The complex palimpsest of signs, memories, and overwriting that time has layered on built forms opens questions of meaning that can be untangled only in the relationship between history, site and design. The investigation of structural characters of places and their relationships with cultural assets and heritage provides a layered set of readings, which is itself the forerun of an urban landscape design action. Beyond preserving the integrity of the material traces, there can only be the new. The test bench is therefore the project as a cognitive act around which to build 'case by case' the strategies for recovering urban identity. The series of projects for Cesano Maderno old town, north of Milan, exemplifies a design-led approach to the built heritage and historic urban landscape in which reading tools, conservation and design are shown in their mutual relationship. In this dialectic between the old and the new, the design is part of the architecture of time where the new, working through light reversible overwriting and measured grafting, becomes a further layer in the historical palimpsest and the authentic form of its enhancement and reuse. Integrating project strategies—from pure conservation to new architectural grafting, from reuse to overwriting—the sequence of designs give shape to a 'regenerative structure' that enhances as a system and for public use a set of introverted Baroque buildings and spaces along a historical promenade, re-centring the city around its brownfield core.

KEYWORDS urban interpretative tools, historic public spaces and building, enhancement and reuse, insertion, overwriting, grafting, historic urban landscape

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The Relationship between the Old and the New as a Specific Theme of the Architectural Project

The relationship between the old and the new, like that between history and design, has always been a specific theme of architecture, both in the modifications made to buildings over time and for the role assumed by the old in the demands to renovate architecture and cities. A role that bears witness not so much to the original appearance of the old but to its enduring meaning in historic Italian and European cities.

Economic, functional, and cultural reasons have always entailed the reuse and transformation of buildings and city parts assuming intentionalities contextualised within the changing meaning of the old in relation to a certain idea of memory, temporality, and history.

This overwriting of historical traces has enriched buildings with meanings, generating a layering process of history where the original condition is only one moment in a building's life, between its initial state as material and the ultimate one of ruin. The survival of the old is thus entrusted to everything lying between these two points, i.e. to the transformation of the new, since 'that which no longer has any meaning, becomes lost or destroyed' and waits for the archaeologist to unearth it, reopening the cycle of transformation and tampering (Melucco Vaccaro 1989).

The result of this long-term process of transformation and evolution in use and meaning simultaneously builds the identity and the present, tying together memory and design in the great progressive palimpsest of the work of architecture.

If the awareness of a historical distance, rendered evident by new knowledge from archaeological excavations beforehand and by the fracture of the modern city afterwards, has opened the birth of the concept of restoration—'the term and the thing itself are both modern' (Viollet-le Duc 1854)—and the recognition of a multiplicity of values, frequently conflicting in terms of permanence and coexistence (Riegl 1903), the specialisation of restoration as an independent subject has set restoration against design on theoretical and cultural levels, creating a rift between architecture, its works and its context while depriving the present of the right to represent itself in the future.

Refusing the growing dichotomous approach between architecture and conservation in the old city after World War II, Ernesto Rogers questioned design and conservation within 'environmental heritage settings' as an overall issue. In urban planning, 'to conserve or to build are two actions pertaining to the same act of awareness, since both are subjected to the same method: conservation has no meaning unless it is understood as bringing the past up to date, while building has no meaning if it is not meant as a continuation of the historical process: it is all a matter of clarifying the sense of history.' (Rogers 1958)[1]

The relationship between history and project is therefore defined in the method, where the validity of the theoretical premise has to be measured in experimentation on a circumscribed concrete field. Setting the issue of the context, understood as the historical making of a built landscape, Rogers adopted the 'study case by study case approach' first theorised by the other Milanese, Ambrogio Annoni (1946)[2]—mindful of Boito's concern for the individual circumstances of monuments—and precociously extended the scale of conservation from single buildings up to protection districts, considered as a logical extension. Overcoming the generic tool of 'Detailed Urban Plans', he entrusted design with responsibility for a critical interpretation of the city, seen as a precondition for the conservation and construction of its parts.

Despite the Italian Restoration Charter (1972) acknowledging man-made modifications to the environment as the making of a civilisation, in the practice of urban restoration the historical city—that 'living organism that must be conserved by transforming it', instead became untouchable, while the old–new relationship 'in harmony with the surroundings' (Washington Charter 1987) became falsified, ending in pure environmental mimicry (Canella 1990).

With the syndrome of indiscriminate conservation, the authenticity of contemporary design was banished from historic centres[3], while the role of memory (Yates 1966; Rossi 1973; Pedretti 1997) became inoperative and a factor of separation and privilege (Portoghesi 1980).

Still today, in the stances of many (Cervellati 2006; Italia Nostra Association) responsibility for the present is divided between a model of intransigent protectionism[4] in the ancient fabrics, where the old is frozen to thwart the new inside an evolution seen as concluded—and thus dead—and a more liberal one in the outskirts, where any transformation of diffused heritage can be attempted in the name of urban regeneration.

The results of the fragmentation of knowledge within disciplinary niches are clearly visible today in the historical cores where processes of conversion into tertiary sector, real estate development and gentrification have arisen, symmetrically matched today by the saving gesture of the starchitect of the moment (Samuels 2006; Carbonara 2011) where architecture, with less and less capacity for designing linked to the context and few exceptions, seems to be legitimate only if reduced to an image of consumption for commercial-tourism exploitation.

Nor, on the other hand, was recognition of the authenticity of the entire life of structures, of the historical-cultural value of materials, and of any testimony of human activity, developed early by the Italian conservation school at the beginning of the 1980s (Dezzi 2008), sufficient to include the operational vitality of the present.

The identity of places is not a closed cycle but a dynamic process of unending construction and reinvention. When Aldo Rossi (1973) discussed the issue of contemporary design's responsibility in works produced by tradition, he stressed the need for architecture to create authentic and circumstantial urban relationship by transposing 'the general character of the city to motives of its own design'. The historical palimpsest builds the physical and cultural matter of the present, which in turn feeds new works of architecture when designed in a cognitive relationship with the context.

Even though, starting from the 1990s, a clear need for a profound revision of the disciplinary statutes had already emerged (Torricelli 1990; Acuto-Pezzetti 1991), the role of the project of the new within the debate between conservation and restoration remains an open question (Dezzi 2004; Bellini 2007; Carbonara 2011). Paradigms, conservative protocols, or pure presentation aimed at tourist use do not explain on their own the stratification of the forms of anthropisation, which are an integral part of architecture in the broadest sense.

The 2010 Preliminary Report to the UNESCO *Recommendation for Historic Urban Landscape* (HUL 2011)

was in fact meant to hopefully minimise 'the gap existing between the ideal world of the "Charters" and the practical realities'. This ineffectiveness in applying the Charters within the gap between theory/praxis as regards to the material and architectural reality of structures (Bellini 1995; Dezzi 1976, 1991), the extremism of intransigent conservation (Canella 1990, Carbonara 2011, Portoghesi 1980, Ramo 2012)[5], along with the concept of cultural development and the public enjoyment of assets (Cultural Heritage and Landscape Code 2004), now urge from many sides to consider 'restoration as a generating phase of principles, in the concreteness of the conditions within which it is carried out' (Bellini 1995) and the common belonging to the territory of architecture based on the centrality of the project and on the old–new dialectic (Bellini 2007).

Beyond preserving the integrity and uniqueness that time and history have accumulated in structures, there can only be the new (Vassallo 2004). The test bench is, therefore, not the assessment of transient values but the project, understood as a cognitive act around which to build the reasons for intervention in a unique defined context, once again 'case by case'.

The overall dimension of the historic urban landscape has only recently been recognised as a suitable scale for framing conservation issues as well, when in 2005, the Vienna Memorandum acknowledged the need to integrate contemporary architecture, sustainable urban development, and landscape integrity. The landscape approach has been developed further by the UNESCO's Recommendation for HUL essentially as a management plan, to integrate planning policies and practices of conservation into the wider goals of urban transformation.

Yet the survival of the old is entrusted to the quality and control of transformation, which cannot be guaranteed only by management frameworks. In fact, the Krakow Charter (2000) had already introduced the reference to the city in its morphological, functional and structural whole, as a part of its territory, its environment, and surrounding landscape.

The HUL notion can be truly effective providing that every part of the city is considered as an individual identity, i.e. is investigated in depth through the urban project up to the architectural scale.

Therefore, what is meant by place, in both interpretation and design, is not neutral. The meaning of the whole is always more complex than the sum of its parts and is beyond the immediate physical aspect of a place: cities are the result of projects related or opposed to one another; lost or never built; in continuity or discontinuity; reflecting or opposing the society that has produced them. We should thus speak of authenticity and falsification even for the project of the new, in relation to modalities of intervention in those organisms which, being at the centre of dense territorial relationships, have the potential to build others (Canella 1990). Besides checking on aesthetic and environmental compatibility, it would also be indispensable to determine the functional and contextual compatibility so that 'the historical city will not be frozen in its physiological growth as a living organism' (Canella 1998).

Understanding of the context and its character becomes measure and control of the quality of modification, of its urban function and of the transmission of historical and civil values of dwelling, where the memory of the traces that have marked constructions over time is enriched with new meanings by the project. 'Thus, even the remodelling project must be able to interpret differences and operate subtly. It must know when to establish relationships or not, when to repeat and when to oppose, when to proceed by analogy and when by contrast.' (Vitale 1989)

The relationship between the old and the new is the project of the architecture of time and the authentic form of its enhancement. Therefore, pure conservation is not a neutral choice, either. In an age-old country like Italy, every new project ought to be understood as an act to restore urban identity while, correspondingly, even pure conservation itself becomes a precise architectural choice. Overwriting, grafting, and integrating the old with the new are the only ways shown to us by the history of our cities and architectures.

Within the conservative commitment of the existing as a condition for our action, the complex instances that are summed up today in the conservation and enhancement of the built heritage find in the shared cognitive condition of the project a place for the dialectic tension between conservation of historical testimony and its active contextualisation, both in the continuity of use and in the authenticity of its figurative resignification.

Cities as Individual Identities: The Case Study of Cesano Maderno

The projects for the old town of Cesano Maderno, north of Milan, exemplify a project-led approach to a historic urban landscape in which conservation and design are shown in their mutual relationship. A set of different project strategies and tools have been integrated in a comprehensive approach for the conservation, renovation, enhancement, and management of the built heritage.

Figure 1 Palazzo Borromeo Arese (17th–19th century), bird's eye view (Source: http://Faiperme.fondoambiente.it/default.aspx).
Figure 2 Palazzo Arese di Seveso (17th–18th century), facade overlooking Arese square (source: ISAL).

In a world dominated by global processes and homogenising toolkits, the uniqueness of the layering of signs in historical sites expresses physiological cultural resistance and original transformation processes that have given rise to expressions of civilisation and urban facts (Muratori 1950; Canella, Rossi, Semerani et al. 1968), which the project must be able to investigate and interpret. Behind the appearance of places and contemporary life needs, lies a layered topography made up of different signs and memories, knowledge and ambitious projects, documents and tales, which narrate a cultural tradition that time has turned into specific types of urban and architectural character.

Located in the Province of Brianza, Cesano Maderno owes its historical urban structure to an early urban renovation strategy, which between the mid-1600s and early 1700s superimposed a new order on the medieval fabric.

The luxurious and fertile Brianza area formed an outstanding setting for the spread of the phenomena of Renaissance and Baroque villas. However, the singular construction of Palazzo Arese Borromeo (17th–19th century) within the town instead of on an elevated natural site reflected the feudatory's ambitious intellectual program of new urban and aesthetic values (Figure 1). As Carlo VI's cadastral map records (1722), the construction of the Palazzo became the pivot of an urban renewal that overlaid a 2-km perspective landscape axis onto the medieval settlement, thus imposing a rotation of 90 degrees on the entire urban layout (Figure 3a–3k).

Centring on the Palazzo, the design established an axial perspective and a symbolic sequence expanding eastwards into the vast geometric garden as far as the menagerie, and extending westwards, through the frontal exedra, towards the countryside. The frontal exedra, expressively named 'the theatre', is also unusual, in that it was designed in front of the main façade, providing an innovative semi-public urban space facing towards the town while forming a scenic proscenium to frame the axis' focus.

The town itself was reshaped accordingly, resulting in a rotation of the nave of the old church and the construction of two new rows of houses to structure a portion of the axial perspective as far as the old Roman Comasina road, where a smaller exedra and entrance gate were positioned.

Through a set of coherent architectural objects (mansion, loggia, church, pavilions, gates, portals etc.), parts (new rows of houses) and structuring urban voids (exedra, garden, menagerie) arranged along the axial sequence, the Baroque design strategy hinged on the dense urban fabric and, through the detached elements of gates, portals, and pavilions, gradually thinned out into the countryside.

The coordinated composition on a grand scale shows that the appreciation of landscape was by then accomplished. At the same time, it embodied the urban manifesto of a cultural élite, testified also by the elaborate sequence of historical, mythological, and allegorical themes frescoed in the rooms of the Palazzo, echoing the virtues of Ancient Roman civilisation (Gatti Perer 1999).

The Baroque layout included a second short urban axis (Figure 3a), departing orthogonally from the semi-enclosed exedra, that organised the elongated Piazza Arese defined by the smaller but older Palazzo Arese di Seveso (1618–1628; 1700s), built by the cadet branch of the Arese feudatory family (Figure 2). This U-shaped Palazzo also possessed a

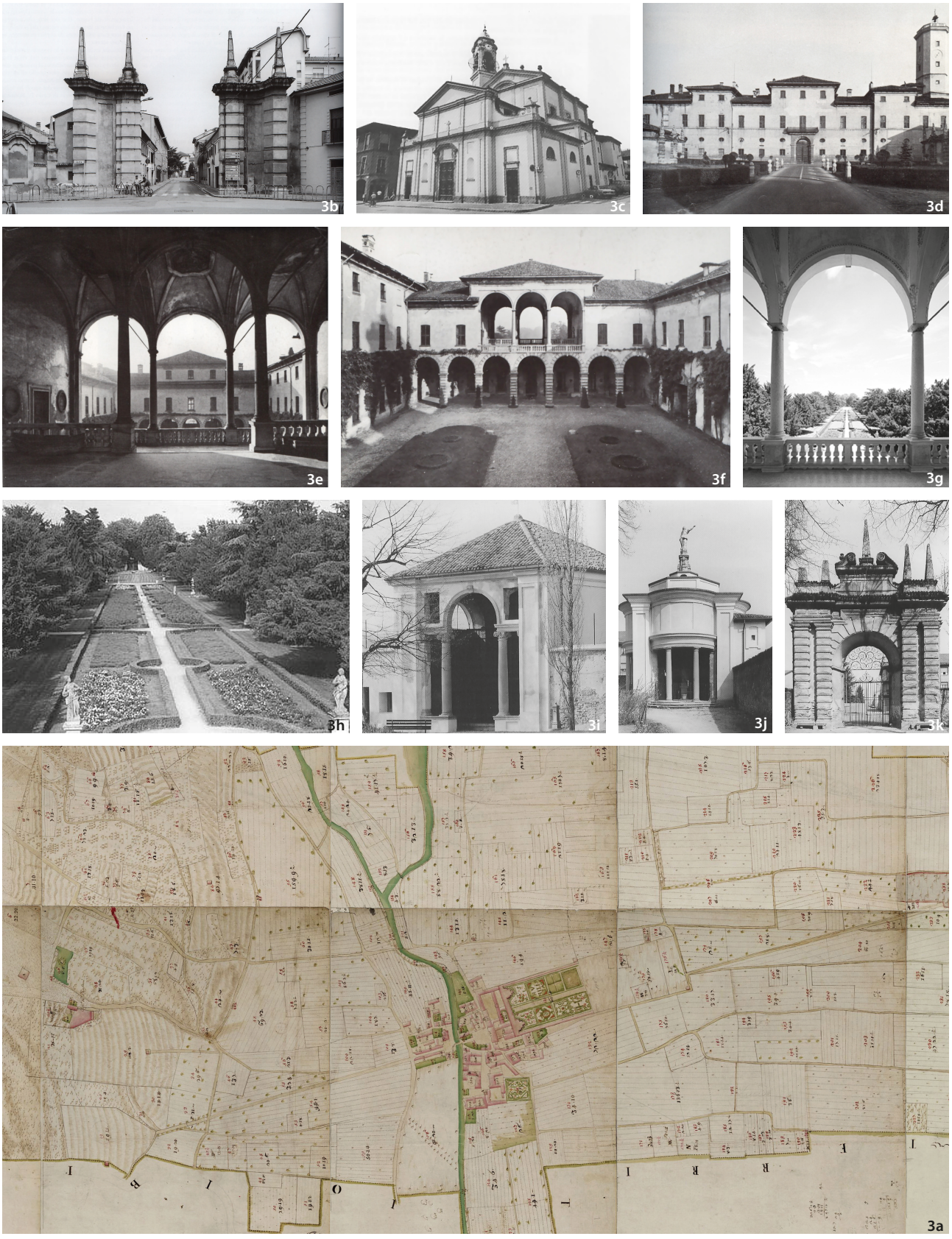


Figure 3a Detail of Carlo VI's Cadastral map of Cesano's territory, 1722 (Source: CM Municipality).
Figure 3b–3k Montage of some among the architectural elements lying along the Baroque axial sequence (Source: CM Municipality).

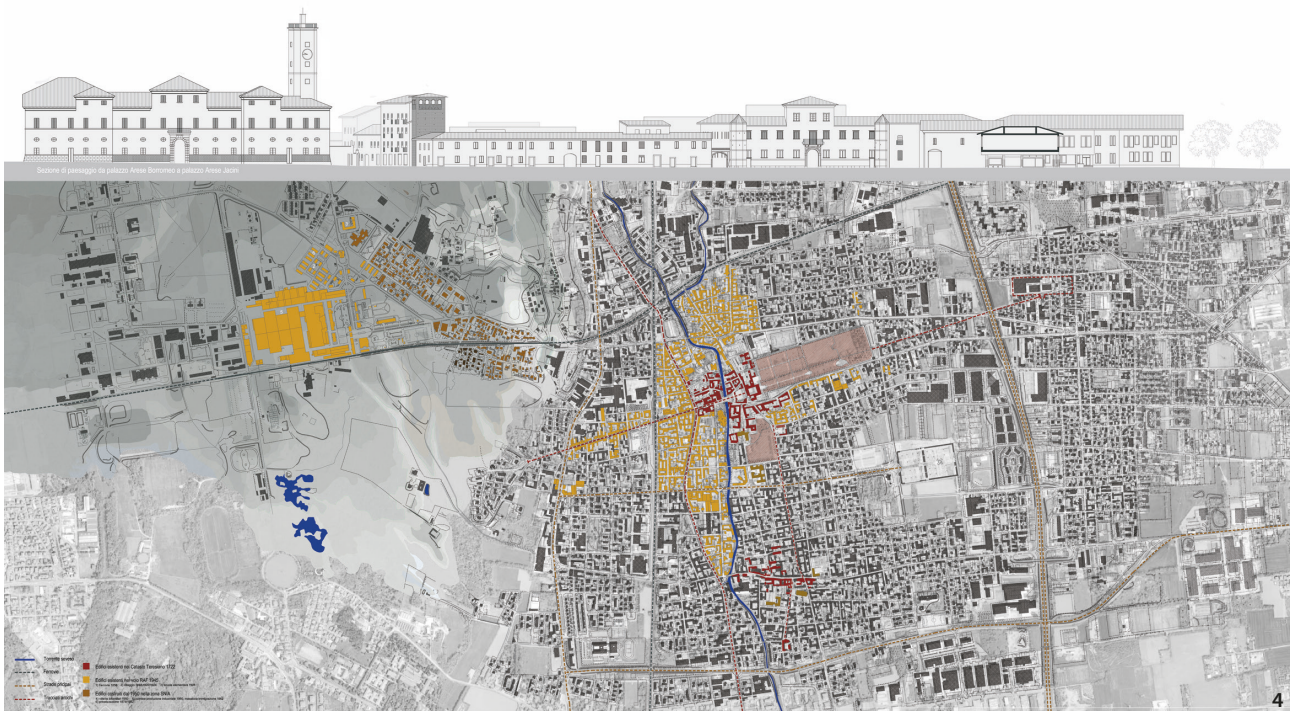


Figure 4 Cesano Maderno. Interpretative map of main urban facts and landscape section along the shorter Baroque axis (Source: the author).

formal garden, a farm courtyard, and an adjacent orchard. Although this shorter perspective was closed by the church (1642) annexed to the mansion, it pointed symbolically to a medieval sanctuary in the countryside (1200), which was included in the urban renovation project. The axis did not attain a real extension until the 1930s onwards.

With the arrival of the railway at the end of the 1800s and the beginning of industrialisation, the urbanisation trend again rotated north-south, following the major infrastructures, while the historical nucleus started to be progressively decentralised. After the mid-1900s, all the formerly majestic heritage buildings fell into neglect, the formal gardens became weed–filled, and the old church was abandoned for a larger one.

Learning a Staccato Strategy from the Historic Urban Landscape: A Sequence of Urban Rooms as a Regenerative Structure

In the layered palimpsest of signs, traces, memories, and overwriting of the existing city, a variety of parts are waiting to be acknowledged in their distinct or correlated character and rhythms, footprints, and types, and in their potential of use and meaning.

When a project is intended as a text of cognitive research, the context itself becomes the subject of the research. Architecture knows and is produced via a project. The intricacy of meanings, values, and testimonies that time has layered on built forms, opens questions of meaning that can be untangled only in the relationship between history, site, and design.

One could look at the Baroque layout as an historic document within a finished story or as an urban and conceptual material that is still useful today, an exemplary collection of techniques and solutions that remain valid.

From the Baroque structure, I developed the concept of a *staccato*[6] strategy realising a crasis between the urban and architectural characteristics through a set of discontinuous elements along a landscape section, instead of the customary continuum of a totalising design. Although still based on the perspective axiality of the Baroque, through the transposition into the urban structure of spatial arrangements and landscape tools derived from the territory—notably Villa Crivelli at Inverigo (1500–1600s)—the compositional strategy went beyond the 'finite dimension of the all-encompassing classical city' (Benevolo 1993) to include the infinite and the unfinished. This dialectic between fragmentation and unity was utterly modern, since

the procedures for governing urban landscape through discontinuity, fragments and mnemonic montage suggested an operative tool suitable for present-day town.

The identity of the old town was thus entrusted to the ability of the present to recognise structures, select character, and become construction again. Therefore, design started with recognition in the historical and structural character of the context with respect to a full assessment of its cultural assets, landscape and built heritage characters, providing a layered set of readings that is the forerunner of a site-specific design action.

A stratigraphic reading was necessary to identify character and values, coherent features, and antinomies, making hidden relationships legible among diachronic urban, topographical, natural, and infrastructural elements to envisage a coherent design strategy. Interpretative maps revealed a deep-seated urban order in which various parts and fragments could be acknowledged while apparent coherences could instead be dismantled; new urban units or spatial sequences could be foreseen, while single works of architecture and the overall urban landscape were revealed in their mutual relationships (Figure 4). The tool also provided a conceptual strategic frame to coordinate the various phases and different actors.

After many years of neglect, in 1987 the municipal administration purchased the two mansions, their premises and the old church, thus starting to speculate on their future. After the restoration of the Italian-style garden, while the conservation of the Palazzo Arese Borromeo was still in progress, in 2000–2001 a Feasibility Study (entrusted to the author) for the reuse of Palazzo Arese di Seveso as an extension of the adjacent town hall, questioned the scale of the single building to envisage a new urban order in the potential intersection between the two Baroque axes.

Interpreting the lesson learned from the staccato strategy, the urban structure could then be re-centred around the old core by enhancing for public use and as a staccato sequence the listed historical buildings and open spaces lying along the shorter urban axis, which, having developed over time, was the result of heterogeneous layering (Figure 5).

The municipality understood that a design-led approach to its heritage integrating conservation, renovation, and design enhancement, could target not just the preservation of a sum of listed buildings, but identify a vital city core at this very intersection (Pezzetti 2006).

By interweaving the conservation of heritage buildings for public and civic facilities (university, town hall, museum, and library) and churches (multi-purpose conference hall) with the remodelling of adjacent public, semi-public spaces and gardens, the shorter baroque axis could be reshaped as a civic centre. Blending architectural and urban characteristics, the Baroque strategy proved capable of establishing enduring character, values, and identity for the town.

Giving evidence to the staccato sequence along the minor axis, interpretative mapping brought out the constant of introversion in the typo-morphological fabric, consisting of buildings with multiple courtyards abutting onto the exedra and the square, they too introverted. Once renovated as public spaces, the voids of the introverted enclosures (Baroque public square, semi-public exedra, private courtyards, and formal gardens) would interact with heritage buildings in a correlated system of spatial and contextual relationships, shaping a regenerative structure in a unitary framework of redevelopment and public use of the entire historic core (Figure 6).

Moreover, by cutting a landscape section through the minor axis, the façades of the piano nobile of the mansions underscored the typological constant in the double-height hall of honour, still not projecting towards the garden but once again in the direction of the urban landscape, hinting at the susceptibility of the more collective space of the mansion to be reused by the public (Figure 4).

The regenerative structure turned the enclosed character of the urban voids and the public character of the hall of honour into a sequence of urban rooms, each acknowledging a morphological and spatial unit and displaying a variation of introverted character and public uses, making the layering reflected in the collective memory readable.

Acknowledged as a visible and physical dimension of the layering of a cultural civilisation, urban space could be experienced through a historical promenade within inner and outer spaces, where mnemonic reconstruction reorders single elements, images, places, and emotions.

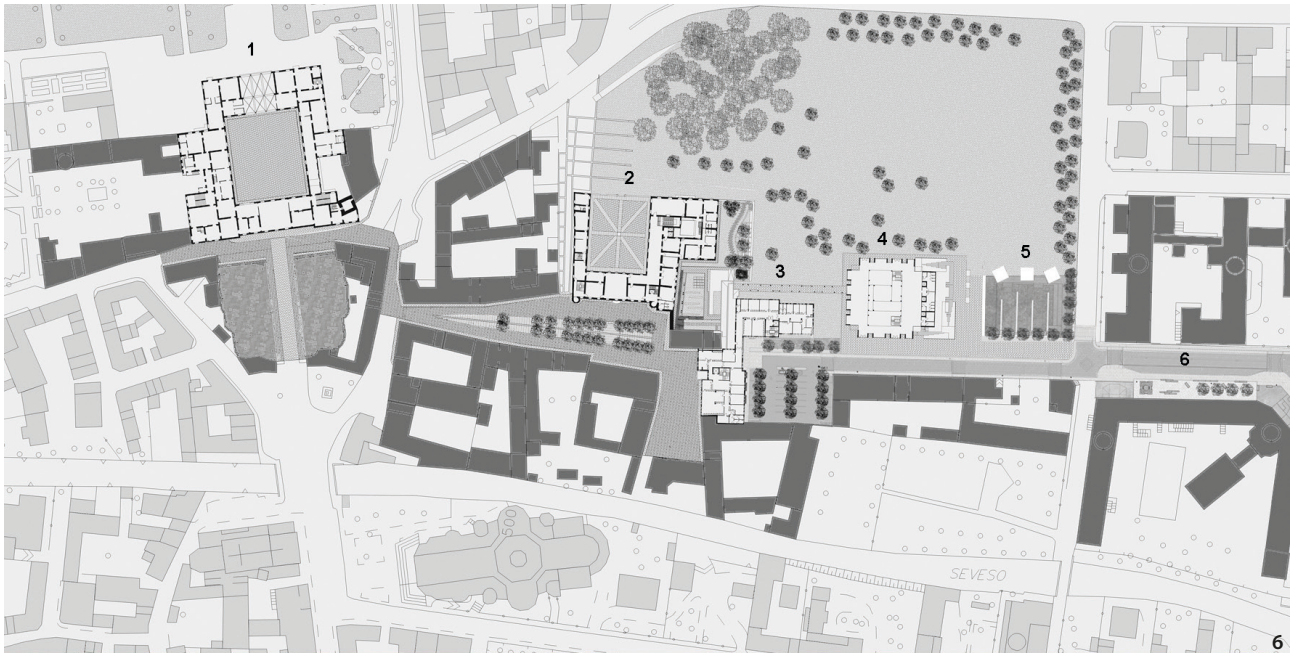
Since the time of the city makes all eras jointly present, the project included a proposal for a new polyfunctional Council Chamber (unbuilt for economic reasons) as a third hall of honour, to continue the historical sequence and trigger new links with the park and nearby school complex.

Moreover, being the regenerative structure a staccato the urban project could be realised by parts, fragments, and adjusted or implemented over time without losing its meaning. The most recent phase of design—a restricted competition where the author was awarded the first prize (2012)—will hopefully extend the redevelopment of the axis through the 1930s' school complex as far as the historical hamlet of Binzago, strengthening the character of the civic centre along an extended landscape section.

Figure 5 Interpretative map and urban strategy (Source: the author).

Figure 6 Designs for the enhancement of the public spaces around and inside the Town Hall complex of Palazzo Arese di Seveso (Source: the author).

1. Palazzo Borromeo
2. Palazzo Arese
3. Town Hall
4. Design for a Council Hall
5. Design for and open-air classroom
6. Renovation of public space among the buildings of the school complex



Beyond Conservation and Reuse, the Architecture of Time: Insertion, Rewriting and Grafting

Built heritage and public space form a correlated entirety that can be read and designed as a unique palimpsest of signs, memories, and overwriting.

The two historical mansions, built in turn on the nuclei of existing buildings, grafted the austere language of the Lombard Baroque onto fortified medieval elements, integrating stylistic features and fragments in a hybrid but coherent courtyard layout. Arranged according to a 'palimpsest' procedure significantly identity-giving, these cornerstones of the Baroque renewal latched onto the settlement's longer history.

Inserting itself into the dialectic between the old and the new, the project reopened questions of meaning and formulated principles that could not be reduced only to the application of predetermined conservative protocols, but required to be investigated every time in relation to character-defining elements and within the specific relationship between history, urban-architectural structure, and design.

Being a complex synthesis, the culture of design involves a wide set of readings and the integration of different strategies 'study case by study case'—from a pure conservation project to a new architectural grafting onto heritage sites, from reuse to rewriting—where different knowledge, factors, and stakeholders inevitably merge.

Design enhancement understands existing structure as a historic palimpsest rooted in the aura (Benjamin 1935) of its temporal-spatial uniqueness, its typology, historical authority, and relation to the place where it was built.

At the same time, design enhancement must define, on the one hand, new uses that are compatible with the typology and contest, to minimise the consumption of architectural heritage, on the other, to give shape to transformation for contemporary life needs with new architectural quality, authentic expressiveness, and legibility of both the historic palimpsest and the new work.

As stated by the Krakow Charter (2000), 'the project of restoration for historic areas regards the buildings of the urban fabric in their twofold function: (a) the elements that define the spaces of the city within its urban form, and (b) the internal spatial arrangements that are an essential part of the building'.

Figure 7 Palazzo Borromeo Arese, a frescoed room (source: ISAL).

Palazzo Borromeo: Pure Conservation and Adaptive Reuse

Even the pure conservation project, as was mentioned, is a precise architectural choice when it comes to the material integrity of a building.

The present integrity of Palazzo Borromeo Arese with its frescoed rooms required pure conservation and adaptive reuse to bring back to the living town the soul of this place, which was conceived originally not only for otium et negotium—rural activity and leisure—but as a political and cultural hub ante litteram, where the feudatory's cultural and political strategies for the Milan Senate could be developed (Figure 1, Figure 7).

Once restored by the Administration (1991–2001), its reuse as a university of philosophy (with an annexed conference centre in the renovated old church) and its inclusion in the Evolved Cultural Districts in the Province for programmed conservation seemed a coherent choice (Barbetta, Cammelli, Della Torre 2013).

Palazzo Arese di Seveso. Design Strategies: Layer Insertion and Design in-between

More complex instead was the subsequent intervention on Palazzo Arese of Seveso, where decades of neglect, looting, and a previous invasive structural and functional restoration—which introduced incongruous cylindrical pillars and a badly located lift—had taken their toll on the building's integrity.

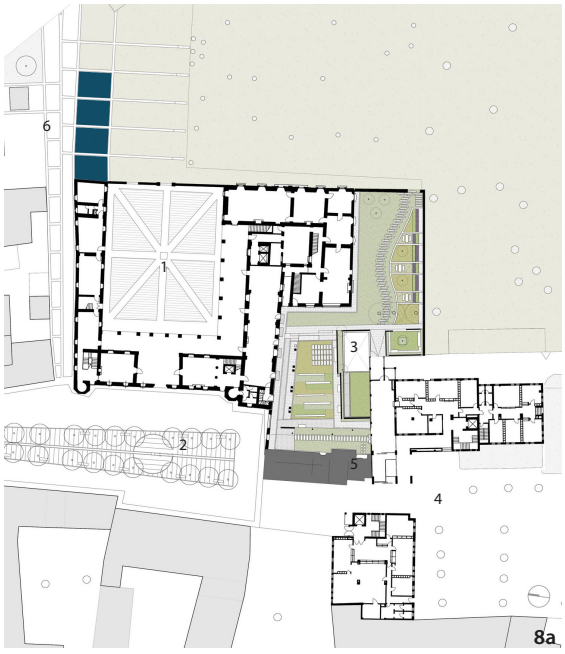
As the civic-cultural centre was the theme considered for the regenerative structure, the need to enlarge the nearby Town Hall made it necessary to verify in the above-mentioned feasibility study the compatibility of the reuse of Palazzo Arese of Seveso as an extension of the municipal seat.

Verification of the typological, material and formal compatibility of the intervention demonstrated that the project of reuse was appropriate and would make it possible to retain the typological layout and the physical elements of knowledge almost intact, thus launching the project to restore and reuse the Palazzo Arese of Seveso (2001–2003) complex, and thereafter the conservation-rehabilitation[7] of its external courtyards (2004–2007), both entrusted to the author (Figure 8a–8c).

As demonstrated throughout the history of architecture—from Roman architectures to Medieval fabrics, from Palladio's and Alberti's Renaissance basilicas up to Scarpa's Castelvecchio—the best way to preserve a building is to continue its life in terms of use but also of form, rather than freezing it to a single moment of its history. By both conservation, reuse and new interior design, the old Palazzo Arese di Seveso was turned into a mixed-use building, part of the town hall complex and seat of an important research institution (ISAL) with a library and a small museum.

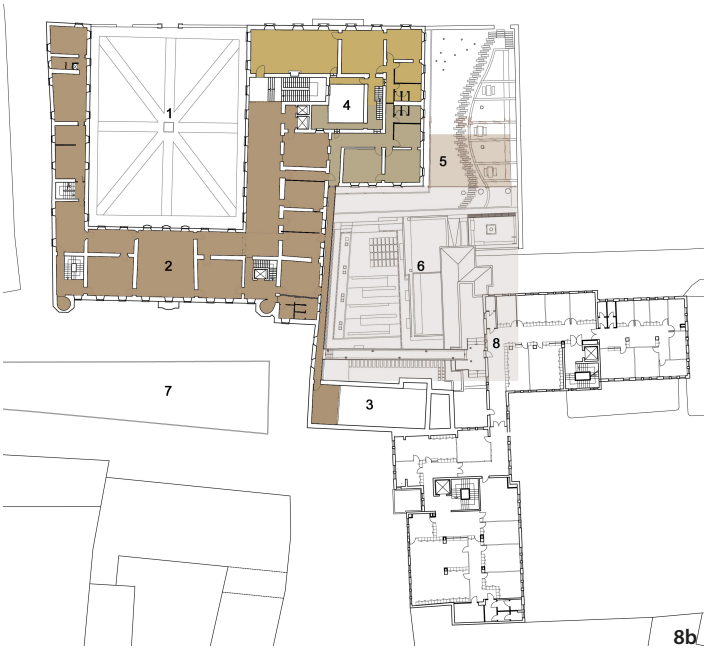
The question of the outfitting in the interiors of old buildings, which has sparked crucial works in Italy among museum circles, in this case referred instead to the functional, everyday needs of an office workspace, posed an unprecedented challenge.

Making sense of all the challenges of the re-use meant solving not only the functional layout and the



8a

1. Palazzo Arese
2. Arese square
3. Outer courtyards
4. Town hall
5. Church Santa Maria del Transito
6. Public spaces

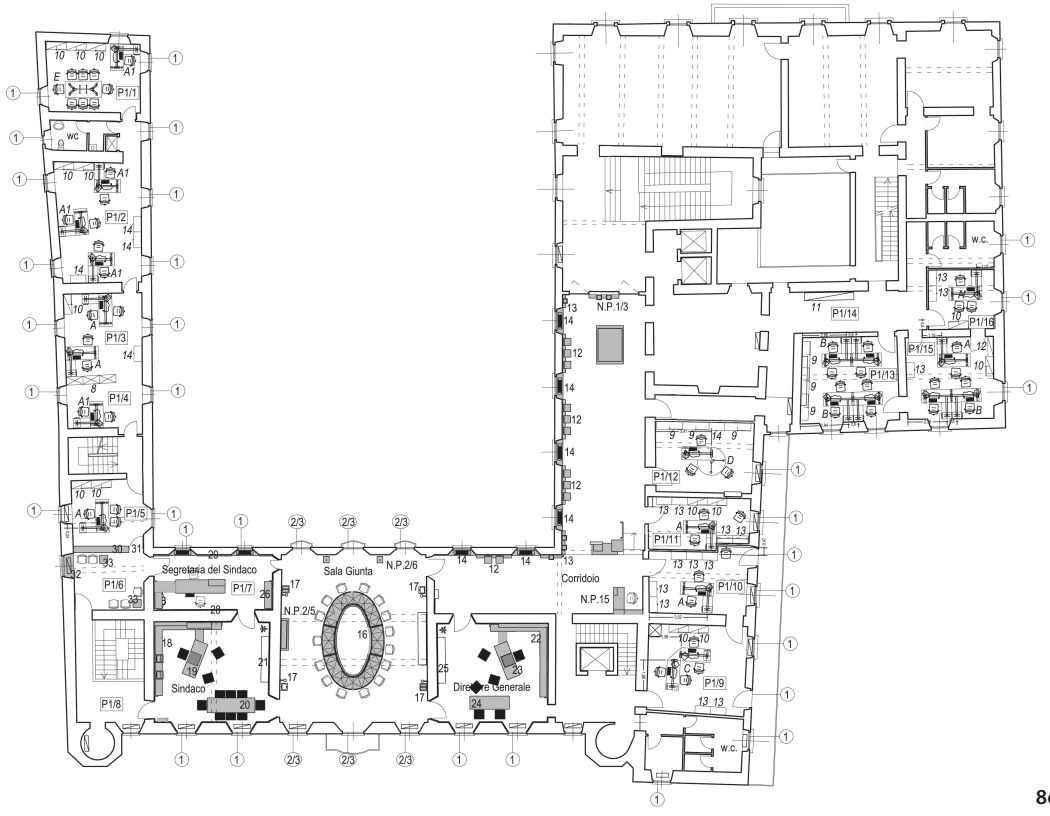


8b

Palazzo Arese di Seveso, 1st floor

- Baroque structure 1618–1628
- Neoclassical extension (end 1700s)
- Neoclassical renovation of the early Baroque structure
- Demolished wing
- Farm courtyards original structure

1. Honour courtyard
2. Baroque structure
3. Baroque Church of Madonna del Transito, Arese's private gallery
4. Neoclassical wing
5. Demolished wing (including ice-house)
6. Area of the original farm courtyard
7. Arese Square
8. Town Hall built in the 1980s



8c

Figure 8a Designs for the enhancement of the public spaces around and inside the Town Hall complex of Palazzo Arese di Seveso (Source: the author).
Figure 8b Palazzo Arese, historic construction phases (Source: the author).
Figure 8c Palazzo Arese, first floor showing compatibility of the reuse and outfitting layout (Source: the author).

9a


9b


9c

Figure 9a Palazzo Arese, office reception space and Swatch Museum on ground floor (source: the author)
Figure 9b Former Hall of Honour reused for the meetings and weddings on first floor (source: the author)
Figure 9c Gallery to offices at first floor with picture gallery and collection display (source: the author)

indispensable need for daily use as offices (climatic comfort, structural safety requirements, lighting standards, hygiene and health specifications), but finding a line of work for displays that would maintain the material testimonies and character of these spaces within a compatible use, without falsifying either the old or the new.

The desire of the Administration to make the historical building a welcoming home from home for citizens and not merely a cold administrative headquarters, also required innovations in the conception of the spaces (the reception and integrated museum, the painting gallery and the waiting areas, the mixed-use Hall of Honour for board meetings or marriages) which, unexpectedly, helped the old building accommodate functions without losing its true nature (Figure 9a–9c, Figure 10a–10f).

The two key design issues concerned how to combine modern functions and equipment while preserving the historical features; and how to design between the monumental scale of the space and the smaller scale of the furniture and displays.

The transition from the monumental scale of the inner spaces to the minute scale of modern functional equipment was established through the continuous line of the striped boiserie meant as a new layering of the wall—autonomous, reversible and recognisable—underlying all the representation rooms belonging to the original 1600s structure. The new layer of the wall provided a unitary system to arrange beneath a fixed height all the scattered functional equipment (seats, desks, lamps, wastebaskets, office fittings) while hiding heating and cooling installations, so that the bareness of the old walls and decorated wooden coffered ceilings would remain readable (Figure 11a–11f).

By avoiding the mere distribution of pieces of furniture, in which the old and the new might have coexisted independently or clashed, the design opened the dialogue between the old and the new, where both could clarify and enhance one another.

The reference of the boiseries—wooden panelling used from the 1700s onwards to decorate walls—to the striped motive present in the Baroque urban gates added a contextually evocative dimension of the project's new elements, establishing a resonance between the old and the new signs (Figure 3b).

Rejecting a stylistic camouflage between the two distinct identities of the old and the new, which should not be merged, the design established relationships in terms of rhythms and patterns through the metrical arrangement

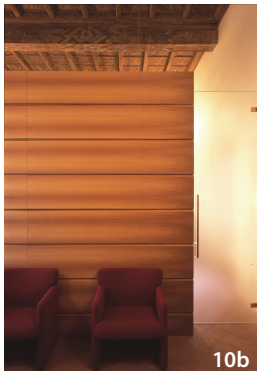





Figure 10a Palazzo Arese. The corridor as a lobby to the mayor's office (Source: the author).
Figure 10b and 10c Wooden partition between waiting room and vice-mayor's office (Source: the author).
Figure 10d Detail of the Baroque painted wooden ceiling (1618–1628) (Source: the author).
Figure 10e Detail of the Mayor's secretary's reception desk (Source: the author).
Figure 10f The Mayor's office (Source: the author).






Figure 11a Palazzo Arese, gallery to offices at first floor with picture gallery and collection display (Source: the author).
Figure 11b–11c Details of the boiserie as an autonomous hanging system for all outfitting (Source: the author).
Figure 11d–11f Details of outfitting (Source: the author).

Figure 12 Palazzo Arese, Honour Court and surroundings (source: CM Municipality).
Figure 13 Palazzo Arese, the fragment of the Palazzo outer courtyard before renovation (Source: the author).

of all the pieces of furniture, their primary massive quality, and the essential modelling of details. The recovered building became endowed with a new and wider meaning.

Courtyards Design Strategy: Srafting on and Overwriting a Fragment

In turn, the renovation of the Palazzo was the pivot to enhance the whole area along the shorter Baroque axis (Figure 12, Figure 7a). The Arese square, its courtyards, and the surrounding urban spaces were all renovated with respect for material authenticity, civil reuse, dialogue with contemporary languages, and the insertion of new elements into the historical layering, thus comprehending the true nature of architecture and urban landscape as a compositional palimpsest and a long-term process of transformation and evolution in use and meaning.

The rehabilitation of the Palazzo's farm courtyards (carried out by the author, 2004–2007) set out to redefine the relationship between parts that abrupt demolitions had made disparate, while bringing form to a space of transition between 'all of the built' of the urban area of Piazza Arese and 'all of the greenery' of the Palazzo's park (Figure 7a).

Of all the public spaces, this was the most delicate intervention, since its type, meaning, and spatial qualities had been mutilated and made illegible by the construction of the modest Town Hall in the 1980s, whose layout was incapable of resolving the demolishing of the courtyard in a meaningful new configuration (Figure 13, Figure 7b). What is worse, the dialectic between the old and the new has been banalised to a mimetic façade that introduced concrete arches, even more extraneous to the stylistic features of the Baroque building.

The courtyards that were once separated by an icehouse now appeared as two communicating open spaces defined by heterogeneous parts left in a state of neglect. One, the fragment of the 1600s square farmyard was delineated on three sides by the original nucleus of the Palazzo, its neoclassical extension, and the old church, the fourth by the unrelated frontage of the shoddy municipal offices. The other, although missing one side, still retained the original character of an enclosed space between the neoclassical wing, the lost formal garden and orchard, whose memory survives in a public park (Figure 7b).

Additionally, the requirement to link the offices of the municipal complex of Palazzo Arese through a raised covered walkway once again reopened the cycle of the transformations in an already rather heterogeneous palimpsest.

The design reinterpreted the historical separation between the two spaces by distinguishing two different schemes and kinds of landscape character: the Formal Garden in the fragment of the old courtyard, and the Equipped Garden in the space adjacent to the neoclassical extension (Figure 14).

By accepting its nature as a fragment, the design enhancement of the Formal Garden was not seen as reinstating a lost or finished order, but as a rewriting starting from an interrupted order, mutilated and no longer restorable which, nonetheless, needed on the one hand to make itself entirely legible in its historical stratification as a system of signs—even conflicting ones, and on the other to be brought back to a sense for the present.

Through the different interweaving of alignments, geometries, and material textures, and by outlining the order of relationships and concealments while maintaining the by-now long-established image of a green space,

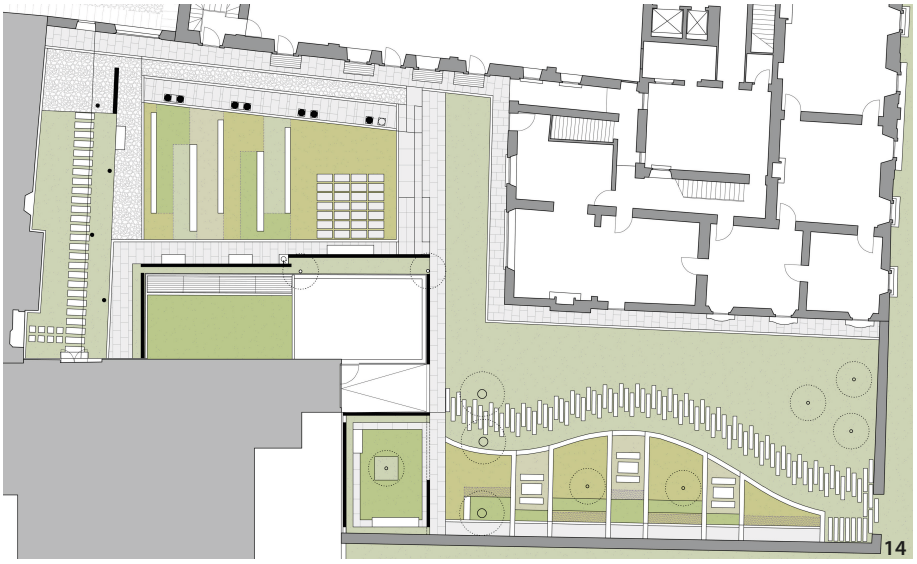


Figure 14 Design for the outer courtyards of Palazzo Arese (Source: the author).
Figure 15 The Formal Garden and the aerial walkway connecting the town hall complex through the outer courtyard, facing the Town Hall (Source: the author).
Figure 16 The Formal Garden and the aerial walkway, facing the Church side (Source: the author).

the rewriting of the design entrusted an immanent role to the historical stratification in the project, to increase the possibility of reading, comprehension, and reuse of this heterogeneous palimpsest (Figure 15).

The value of fragments is not only to do with lost integrity, but also—and in a decisive way for the evolution of architecture—in relation to a state of suspension between past and future, where other possible meanings and achievements are revealed. As Marguerite Yourcenar recalled writing of ancient statues, also in architecture the finished form is only a minimal part of the story of a structure, lying between its being a material and its becoming a fragment.

The investigation into the historical, figurative, and typological characteristics dismantled apparent coherences. The onsite twin columns, although dating back to the same period as the Palazzo, came from an unknown site and were juxtaposed only recently to the original structure to create an arbour, totally disregarding any rapport with the façade.

The twin columns therefore were included in the design composition in their nature as autonomous fragments, almost an unknown archaeological ruin. The slight variations in ground levels, materials, and textures introduced a pause between the columns and the reading of the façade, while including them in the rhythmic traces and geometries of the Formal Garden (Figure 16).

The raised walkway itself was a troublesome functional element, yet one that had to be resolved as a necessary element of the composition to define an open-air room (Figure 17–19).

Its attitude, figuration, and structure made sense of the multiple conditionings of the pre-existences. Arranged parallel to the side of the Baroque church between the openings overlooking the square but remaining invisible from outside while designating a disappeared structure, it established a shallow distance that is architecturally significant. A partition structure, clad in timber and Corten steel, brought shape to an entrance vestibule from the square, intended to house some old stone tablets. At the same time, the partition provided the necessary backdrop for the fragment of the twin columns. Both resulted in the eccentric static scheme of the structure and the shaping of the partition as a tool to frame the view when entering the Formal Garden.

The remaining structure is a rhythmic succession of alternating painted steel tubular supports, which provided measure and a dynamic framing for all the pre-existing facades while revealing along the path their historical spatial layering.

Owing to the height imposed by existing landing points and the consequent slenderness of the structure, in the original design the tubular supports were tilted to avoid visual interference with the 'dwarf-order' of the remnant twin columns and to produce instead a dynamic configuration varying with changing viewpoints. The prejudice against architecture at heritage sites, reflected in the power of veto of one single official at the Heritage Department against all other stakeholders, forced us to abandon the tilted tubular supports. Luckily, we succeeded in maintaining the alternating pattern, which helped to avoid a loose and out-of-scale 'colonnade effect' conflicting with the existing twin columns (Figure 20).

An open-air 'Secret Room' for contemplation, paved and enclosed by wooden-slat screens, resolved the head of the town hall, providing a junction between the geometries of the Formal Garden and the fluid lines of the Equipped Garden, which was related historically to the neoclassical extension and had its own distinctive features (Figure 21a).

Furnished with stone seats and wooden tables for the library housed in the neoclassical wing, the Equipped Garden was developed along the wall to avoid interfering with the façade while searching for fluid geometries to interact with the positioning of historical trees (Figure 21b–21d). The prevalence of botanical material provided a distinctly natural feel that made the Equipped Garden a transitional space towards the park from the monumental core of the town.

In an authentic relationship between the old and the new, as T. S. Eliot wrote (1920), the 'historical sense' is never a mere resemblance to works belonging to tradition but an awareness and understanding of their relation to the new work.

Overcoming the generic nature of toolkits, design acts as an interpretative tool and an inclusive synthesis, setting up a dialogue with contextual integrity without distorting the relationship with the historic structure but, on the contrary, enriching the meaning, identity, and communicative vitality of the site.

By reintroducing new qualities, meanings, expressive authenticity and new activities, design reopens the cycle of historical transformations in buildings, urban spaces, and landscapes as an entirety, legitimately including the dimension of the present to be considered historically as well.

Notes

1. Footnote by E. N. Rogers in "Il problema di costruire nelle preesistenze ambientali", in E. N. Rogers. 1958. *Esperienza dell'architettura*, Turin: Einaudi.

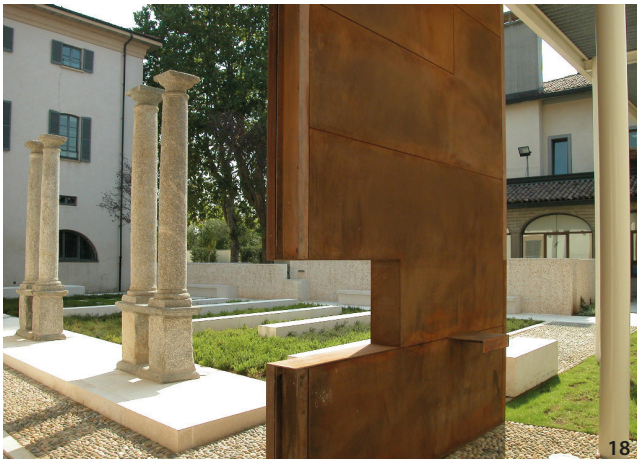


Figure 17 The Formal Garden and the aerial walkway, facing the entrance from the square and Palazzo Arese (Source: the author).
Figure 18 The Formal Garden and the elevated walkway, facing the entrance from the square and Palazzo Arese (Source: the author).
Figure 19 The raised walkway as a structure statically independent from the old (Source: the author).
Figure 20 Palazzo Arese seen through the Formal Garden (Source: the author).

Figure 21a The Secret Room (Source: the author).
Figure 21b The Equipped Garden, facing the entrance to the park (Source: the author).
Figure 21c The Equipped Garden, looking towards the Formal Garden (Source: the author).
Figure 21d The Equipped Garden, looking towards the park (Source: the author).

2. Annoni rejected the categorisations of Giovannoni. Cfr. A. Annoni. 1946. *Scienza ed arte del restauro architettonico. Idee ed esempi*, 19–30. Milan: Framar.
3. The problem of rebuilding Florence after World War II, and the rejection of F. L. Wright's project for the Masieri Memorial on the Grand Canal in Venice (1954), unbuilt because of mistrust on the part of both the administrators and the public, marked the beginning of a sharp division in the debate between those who considered the whole city 'historic', including its modern parts (Pane R., 1959), and those, like Brandi, who considered the old city an inviolable finished unit, where modern architecture was 'necessarily, constitutionally, extra moenia', i.e. out of city wall (Brandi C., 1956).
4. Pierluigi Cervellati, a protagonist of recovery plans in Italian historic centres, in an interview stated that 'the historic centre is not a part of the city, but a city that we have to protect and restore. Then there is the periphery that we must turn into a city, while now is nothing but a non-place'. Moreover, any new insertion in historic centre 'has to be forbidden, drastically forbidden' (cfr. De Pascalis 2006). This approach, still shared by important associations like Italia Nostra, has been instead criticised not only by architects but also by the academic proponents of Conservation theories and projects themselves, like for instance A. Bellini, M. Dezzi Bardeschi, F. La Regina, G. Carbonara and many others.
5. For almost 30 years, Italian architects and academic conservators-restorers have been warning against the dangers of intransigent conservation. Recently, controversial debates haves also arisen from different contexts, such as for instance the one stirred by B. Ramo on complexity and contradiction in conservation (Casabella 2012) or the one stirred by R. Koolhaas and S. Shigematso in the exhibition 'Chronocaos' (New York City, 2011), addressing the topic of preservation in architecture and urbanism. Speaking of which, The New

York Times' architecture critic N. Ouroussoff has questioned whether preservation 'has become a dangerous epidemic' and is 'destroying our cities'.

6. Staccato is a term I borrowed from a form of musical articulation, to define a composition made up of 'detached' elements.
7. 'Riqualificazione' would be the world used in Italian for these kind of enhancement based on the relationship between conservation and design rewriting, reflecting cultural meanings and theoretical positions referred to the interweaving of architectural, urban and conservation traditions matured in the particularly densely historicised Italian context.

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