

Modern architecture articulated itself in specific centers of propulsion, revision and critique during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The case of Milan is exemplary: Terragni and Razionalismo, the reconstruction with Ponti, Moretti, Viganò, the Tendenza of Rossi, product design, up to the current research. MCM traces this history from several contributors' points of view.



MCM  
Milan  
Capital  
*of the*  
Modern

Edited by Lorenzo  
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Modern

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BY VITTORIO SGARBI  
PADIGLIONE ARCHITETTURA  
GRATTACIELO PIRELLI - MILAN

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*of the*  
Modern

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**Lorenzo Degli Esposti**

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BY VITTORIO SGARBI

PADIGLIONE ARCHITETTURA  
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MILANO 2015 LOMBARDIA

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HOMAGE TO GUGLIELMO MOZZONI

Architecture Pavilion

**Expo Belle Arti by Vittorio Sgarbi**

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**Expo Belle Arti by Vittorio Sgarbi**

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MILAN, CAPITAL OF  
THE MODERN

Architecture Pavilion  
**Expo Belle Arti by Vittorio Sgarbi**

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*Milano, 1999*

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The 2015 Milan Expo represents a unique opportunity to promote the cultural, artistic, architectural, and landscape features of Lombardy. Of particular importance for this purpose is the collaboration between public entities and cultural institutions that are active in the region, which can give rise to positive consequences.

The Lombardy Region has sought to enhance its cultural heritage through a wide-ranging project in order to reinvigorate the culture and art of Lombardy.

The artistic and scientific project of the Expo Belle Arti Lombardia (Lombardy Fine Arts Expo), conceived and developed by professor Vittorio Sgarbi, whom we thank for this valuable work, proposes a rich program of cultural activities and events through itineraries visiting diverse and unique sites, with the offer of promotional rates and logistical facilitation, so as to increase the attractiveness and visibility of individual initiatives and the sites that host them.

Produced in collaboration with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and of Tourism, the City of Milan, and the principal cultural institutions of Lombardy, the project allows for the appreciation of the sites and artworks among the most evocative in Lombardy: essential masterpieces such as Caravaggio's *Basket of Fruit*, lesser known works, because they are very often off the usual tourist itineraries or not usually open to the public, or arriving in Lombardy through this great initiative and through the universal exposition.

A rich and unusual program, of great interest, which from May until October offered exhibitions and a wide variety of itineraries in order to discover or rediscover the "Fine Arts" in Milan and throughout Lombardy.



*Grattacielo Pirelli, Milan*

Ph. Marco Menghi

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# Excavations, Topographies, and Diagrams of Open Space

FABRIZIO LEONI

GRATTACIELO PIRELLI, 30.07.2015

The aim of this contribution is to compare some approaches in the design of open space in several locations in Europe: Milan, Barcelona, and Berlin.

Before describing and commenting on these case studies, I will illustrate some research done within the discipline on open space conducted by architects but also by artists, trying to find within them the elements useful for recognizing the themes that we will see in the second part of this presentation. In some cases, these contributions are very clear because one can discern the original matrix, both in terms of language and of form and of discourse, while in others evidently these influences appear in a slightly more concealed fashion.

The title: *Excavations, Topographies, and Diagrams of Open Space*. Contemporary open space, as it is conceived today in various areas of Europe, often has to do with the design of the land; a design that is sometimes purely two-dimensional and sometimes instead looks at three-dimensional places, involving the topography and building, through the movement of earth, more artificial places or ones closer to the design in nature itself: some are a morphological matrix for the built environment, others are ancillary spaces with respect to the buildings themselves, while others arise like backbones of urban design interventions, the true “diagrams of open space.” Diagram is an increasingly operational term: it is more of a sketch or an outline, as an “allusive” graphic device that has led us, over the last 30-40 years, to identify design strategies in which the project itself is not immediately visible, but instead the process of its elaboration.

Double Negative is situated at the origins of the project of contemporary open space, and it identifies a clear point of departure in a work that is not from an architect: Michael Heizer, a land artist active in the US from around the second half of the 1960s, investigates the desert areas in the southwest of the country, through the operations of construction/reconstruction, of waste, and of excavation in these then marginal territories, outside of the confines of the official art circuit. Framed within this direction in his work is his collection of zigzag excavations, a controlled depression in the ground, at times supplied by elements for containing the void, with perfectly horizontal concrete and grass, in search of incisions and other geometries than those of the design of the garden as we have seen until the middle of the XX Century.

They also belong to the desire to move dynamically within these sites, paradigmatic works of land art, such as Shift, in Ontario, by Richard Serra, whose contribution to the design of open space, which architects have later incorporated within their works, is a manifestation of the possibility that space can be conceived of as a place perceived depending on how one moves, where spatial events are depicted as sequences and no longer as “static tableaux.” Where it is assumed that the user

can use this space both within the narrative that the designer has established or through freer modes: surely beyond the idea that a place only embodies a pause outside of the urban chaos.

Isamu Noguchi, a sculptor and architect of Japanese origin, is active in California with a series of works that generated a thought with a very long wavelength. Some pertain to the formation of scenes, almost ideograms, of condensed cartographies, of places related to much wider geographies of the terrain in which they act. Costa Mesa, a “corporate garden,” is intended as a museum-type, figurative-allegorical representation, one that encloses and recounts, within a space encircled by a wall, a fragment of geographical reality elements, the desert, the stream, the stone emerging from the soil, the autochthon vegetation otherwise experienceable only by traveling a distance of many kilometers through the California territory.

Others are refined studio *maquettes*, part of a collection of some of his famous Playgrounds, sculptural spaces/spatial environments inhabited by a series of objects and animated by a plurality of possible uses that, later transliterated in the design of landscape architects, translate into artifacts and elements of “urban furniture” such as benches, “trees,” canopies, pergolas, lighting elements, “signals” from the most diverse of formal expressions, up to the involvement of the ground in terms of depressions, folds, tubs, basins oriented toward the dynamic perception of a space, not necessarily contemplative, but playful and sporty.

One of the prototypes of contemporary open space, as some critics sustain, is the large podium access to the Seagram Building, designed by Mies Van der Rohe in New York. At the height of the 1950s, this was one of the first operations in which the access space to a large private building was handled by means of a setback and an elevation from the level of the street, and the introduction of several partially new elements: two large basins of water and the long perpendicular seating area. The wall of this pedestal constructs a clear boundary with respect to urban life while the long green granite block of the seating area is a “macro” element, more clearly belonging to the theme of the city than that of the building, precisely because of its size, its tectonics, and its great strength.

Analogously, but a good thirty years earlier, the same author, in his most iconic building, the German Pavilion in Barcelona, tried out, among the many themes that are contained in this extraordinary artifact, this one as well being seminal, through the design of an internal, but external, private but public space, which expands the size of the inhabitable space: the building rests on a platform, accessible only through the small set of stairs, the wall/podium and, finally, the great stone urban seating. Seating that we will find, interpreted in different sizes, materials, and geometries in projects of open space



around the world that play a role of constructing forms of open space, beyond the literal object of street furniture.

An antecedent of particular importance in this field of interest is the house that Schindler built for himself in the late 1920s in Los Angeles, on Kings Road, where, moving one's gaze in the building itself – an essential example of the influence of Austrian rational architecture in the Los Angeles context – we recognize the beginning of a research focus on the theme of the garden through a measured use of depressions in the ground. Gradually lowered via tanks of 20-30-40 centimeter, this garden – the counterpart to the twin house to which it belongs – is built via rooms in the open, separated or distinguished not by walls but by hedges, as an aggregation of piazzas and sub-piazzas, spaces of land that will be compacted and cultivated, micro-geographies of excavation and topography. Even if the chain of transmission of this approach is not obvious to read, and its diffusion in some subsequent practices inside and outside its cultural context and its time, its capacity of filiation in contemporary sensibilities seems nevertheless clear.

The last two possibly important references – evidently among many other to be found – that overflow their specific period and physical place of activity and come to permeate the design of open space to this day, are those of two prominent members of the Landscape Project as properly understood; thus two approaches from within the discipline itself: Sørensen and Burle-Marx.

The subject of investigation of the Danish landscape architect that seems more generative is that of the enclosure, of the enclave, on one side strongly characterized by typical communitarian practices of its culture, on the other pointing to the use of architectural elements of plans, walls, limits, separations, “enclosures.” Fences sometimes rigid and solid, the tectonic equivalent of building diaphragms, like inhabited micro-worlds, protected by thick hedges and repeated in geometrically ordered agglomerations as in the case of Nærum Allotment Gardens, sometimes – as in the case of the Musical Gardens in Herning – with elements that are transparent, traversable, filtering, introducing in the size of the threshold, the entrance, the permeable boundary traced by small, almost diaphanous elements, able to change over time, with the seasons, with decay, growth, or maintenance of the green.

From the Brazilian landscape architect, who while coming from a remote culture with respect to the centers of generations of thought on contemporary open space in Europe, it is well present in his development, I point out the Calçada de Copacabana. An example, like the long list of his extraordinary built landscapes – in the modes of a tropical avant-garde – artificializing the natural in a country of exuberant nature; an example of design strategy guided by a compositional

grammar and by a spatial narrative of a planimetric-graphic type, via endless variations of figurative themes.

*Contemporary Case studies: Barcelona, Berlin, Milan*

#### 1. Barcelona

The case of Barcelona owes its extraordinary relevance to the fact that thirty years ago this *urbe* began to reflect in a determined way on the design of open space as a generative and regenerative element of the city, perhaps even before beginning to pose new questions on the architecture of the built environment. Already in the 1980s, a number of architects, in this case Torres and De La Peña, begin to work with the theme of the elements on the limit of green space, seating, markings on the ground that extrude to become street furniture objects, through the use of languages derived from some of the research cited previously. In the historical park on which they intervened, the Parc Sant'Amelia, the hedge goes outside the perimeter of the park, it extends its forms beyond its borders, it colonizes the sidewalk with a sort of geometric pruning, and becomes almost a part of a built category; it is a plant, obviously, but it is converted into a tectonic element, an architectural element.

The Jardí Botànic doesn't need a major introduction: Carles Ferrater and his work team build a botanical garden, organized into climate zones and thematic spaces, where the various families of plant species are distributed by superimposing a three-dimensional geometric mesh onto the hill; citing a discourse on the fractality of the land and on its use as a not necessarily inert element on which we have to lay down, but made of movements of earth, the connecting spaces to travel through, and rest areas, originating from an accurate use of the inclined plane, from which Corten steel triangles emerge, through a geometric logic, which sometimes serve as retaining walls or parapets, while at other times guide visitors in their orientation concerning the use of this educational space.

Also in Barcelona, the Fossar de les Moreres, neither a park nor a garden, but a memorial, a site considered just as a mere crossing, and, given its steepness, unsuitable to be experienced through seats, tables, or other street furniture. In its initial configuration, before the affixing of a commemorative torch that partially affects its minimalist grammar, Carme Fiol activates – with surgical simplicity – a depression in the ground; a built, urban, architectural ground. He inserts a simple red granite wall, which determines the three-dimensional fold of cut brick embedded into the ground, and separates the space of the memorial from the city and from the spatial domain of the immediately adjacent Basilica of Santa Maria del Mar.

The final project in Barcelona that I am showing has a completely different ratio, in which a complex operation of new urban design outside of the morphological logic of the

Plan Cerdá is managed by Enric Miralles through the construction of a park, or a well-equipped piece of land running from sea to inside the macro-block, that identifies an unprecedented sequence of interventions in which the design of open space is the matrix of the entire construction project. The large green patchwork is subdivided into various thematic spaces: spaces generated by the citation of the Andalusian patio, a large basin of water, the setting for children's games, the area of the playground, the micro-system of dunes, stretched out and distributed continuously in quadrants where the streets divide the macro-block. These sub-themes, supported by "urban furnishings" of high-end design, refer back to large-scale functionalities, and are so solid as to hold together the entire operation of real estate development.

## 2. Berlin

On disused railway spaces of Anhalter and Potsdamer Platz stations, in Berlin, Atelier Loidl builds a large-scale park, the Park Am Gleisdreieck, controlling it through the subdivision into sub-areas with differentiated contents. The railway embankment again suggests a reflection on the potentials of the topography, of the use of the inclined planes, the filling in of land and movement through various heights. Therefore, a park that uses the theme "topography," but that, taking its cue from the reactivation of a site previously occupied for other functions, rests firmly on the theme of memory: not traces to imagine but a physical memory, a tangible relic, with its lines, its tracks, its geometries. Sometimes within a vast green meadow, an open and undifferentiated site, where the uses are left to the free interpretation of the users, sometimes through a more specific, material design, with its soil, asphalt, red rubber, broken up cement, in order to define spaces with dedicated uses: the platform with its long wooden benches oriented to the *slow* living of the space, the protrusions taken to the necessary heights to obtain a linear *cavea* or the playgrounds for basketball and skateboarding, almost a direct application of the imaginary playgrounds of Isamu Noguchi seen previously. And the entrances and connections with the urban fabric around it.

Starting from the space between the two parallel walls that signified the great wound that split Berlin between 1961 and 1989, the Berlin Wall Memorial – Architekten Kollhoff & Kollhoff – constitutes, focusing on a small portion of its path, a cinematic series of spatial and perceptual episodes: the Chapel of Reconciliation, the little cemetery, the fragment of the musealized double-wall between two diaphragms of steel with its control tower, the lawn, the traces on the ground, the photographic archives that record the dramatic flights toward freedom. And, the element with the most evocative power, the palisade of slender Corten steel posts that allude to the rebar of the prefabricated concrete units

that made up the wall as well as the ability to flee or to be able to see through, and to the existence of an ambiguous threshold, like an access to a place that does not have a gate but a long sequence of micro-steps of filtration, by virtue of how dense the rods are or how thinned out.

Like in a territorial sculpture by Heizer, the visitor is led to move along this series of steel poles, until finding an access gate to the inside the memorial proper; but the memorial is all of it: it is the inside and the outside – thus also a psychological space, one of mediation/meditation with respect to a site full of symbolism.

## 3. Milan

In Milan, we see a number of cases that differ based on the fact that open space is the morphological matrix on which the piece of city is built or that instead open space is an intermediate place to be reactivated.

An interesting opportunity for urban design such as Abitare Milano led some years ago to reflections on the generative character of the design of open space, like in the cases of Cecchi Lima and of MAB Arquitectos. In the first case – Cecchi Lima – the diagrams of the various components, the rows of trees, the paved open spaces and those left to a controlled wilderness, areas with minutely hierarchical vegetation, motivate the organizational structure of the artifacts, in the specific formation of a courtyard already oriented perpendicularly on the main road and then open asymmetrically to the opposite edge of the lot. In the second case – MAB Arquitectos – the spine of the public spaces justifies and holds together the various volumes that slide laterally along the transversal dimension, perforates them by creating the conditions for total traversability and continuity of the whole project. The overviews show us the desire to create a double façade, with the buildings abutting the street with less traffic, and the more green and rarefied border towards more heavily trafficked access, outlined in a succession of fields, ponds, individually treated episodes, sometimes in a graphic or distinct way through the ground material, sometimes through extrusions and more topographically exuberant episodes.

The last project is the pedestrianization project of the historical space between Castello Sforzesco and the block's continuous perimeter of the Foro Bonaparte. The designers, Guidarini and Salvadeo, do not go through the streets seen earlier via the topography or a syntax of the urban weave, but apply an internal logic, that of the object, the device, which in its single deployment, expanded from the chart of its possible variations, is capable of inhabiting this space, of activating it and suggesting its use. Seating areas, coverings, rest areas, articulated in spots by technological elements that allow for a personalized use of the site according to need, season, or events happening.