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WORKSHOP IN ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN DESIGN

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New Next Nature

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*from ecological landscape
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NEW NEXT NATURE



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NEW NEXT NATURE

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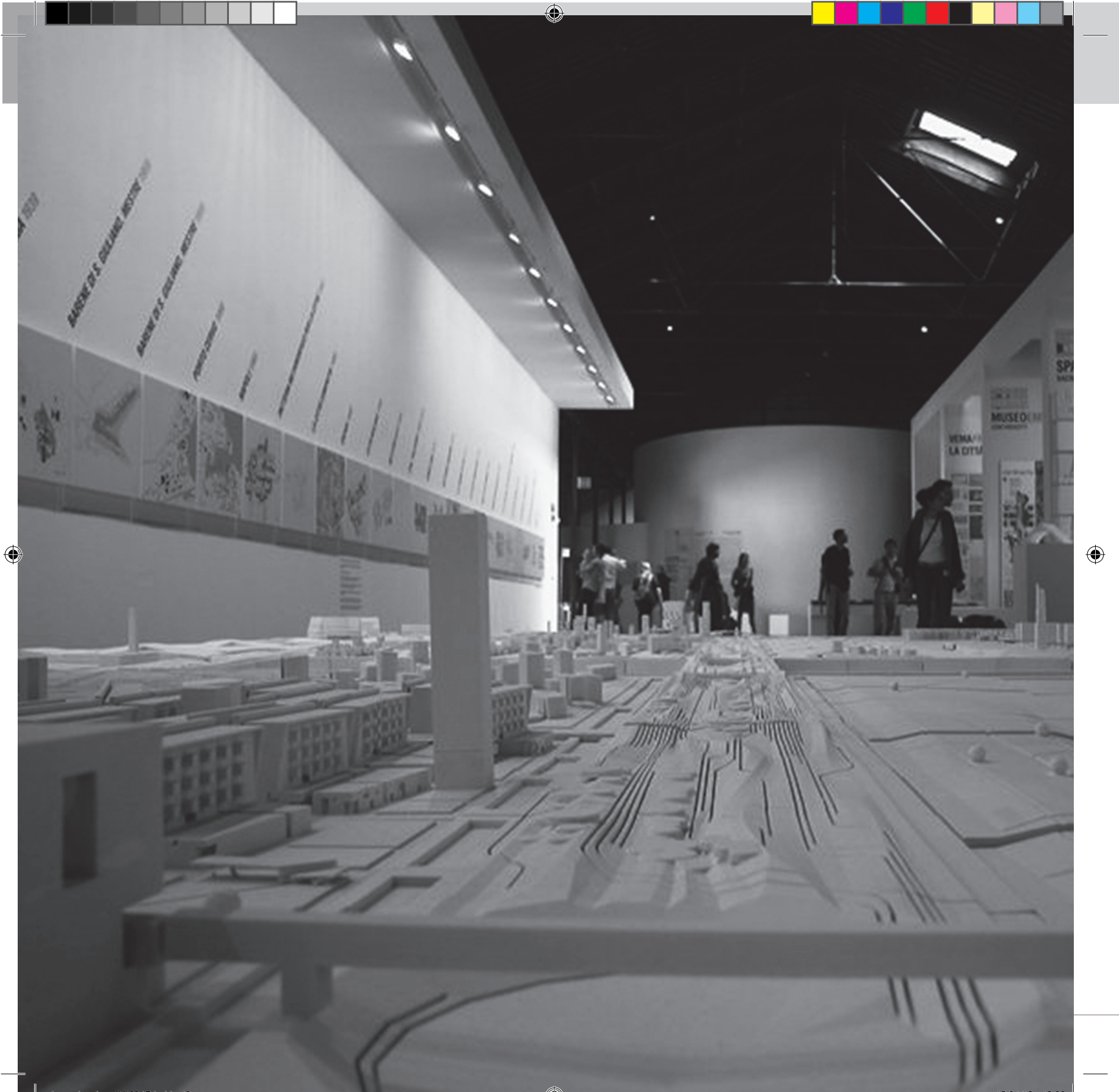
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FUTURE URBAN UTOPIAS

Pasquale Mei

“New Next Nature” is the title of the 8th edition of OC - Open City International Summer School. The theme offers the possibility of interdisciplinary dialogue and comparison among workshop different actors: directors, coordinators, lecturers, organizers, tutors and students. In this horizon, Piacenza was the background of the project experimentation with visions oriented to 2050.

The main issues, through the scenario of *urban utopias*, concern the forms of the city of the future, and mainly the relationship between nature and artifice in the urban context stressing a second theme, the contamination. From here some questions were developed: what are the possible integrations of innovative forms of use of nature in the contemporary city? What could be the potential sustainable landscapes to be designed for the future of our cities?

The cultural context, which framed the project experimentation, is part of a necessary dialogue of integration between the scenarios on a global scale (where the contemporary cities are called to give answers to the changed social and economic needs) and environmental and local conditions, increasingly stimulated by the citizens, of architectural transformations oriented to the regeneration of abandoned buildings spaces. This need, mainly of a cultural nature within the architectural and urban project field, is supported today by a strong push towards innovation, and consequently it involves the capacity to propose alternative models and scenarios, in order to give a possible progress in the research for alternative models of sustainable development. The design research was carried out through models of *urban visions*, taking references in the world of past *utopias* and extrapolating elements from the *repertoire* of the design culture. It became

“City of Vema” design by Franco Purini, X Mostra Internazionale di Architettura di Venezia, 2006

an opportunity for the construction of ideas, strategies and actions of a methodological and instrumental nature made available for the city of Piacenza.

From this point of view, during the workshop, the possibility of revisiting a possible new semantic meaning of the urban and landscape project - which today requires a reinterpretation according to new cultural models - started. Our contemporaneity, more and more, defines the landscape as a "complex product of a relational nature", composed of multiple and pleated events, dynamic in their temporal dimension and therefore changeable in their spatial form. Complex and heterogeneous materials, impacts of the anthropized world, they're the elements that make up the parts of the new environments - both natural and artificial - and define potential figures which are characterized by *contamination*. They're figures which are only apparently contradictory as they are capable of generating *multiple units*. For this reason it becomes necessary the need to have different looks, coming from different disciplinary contexts, in order to be able to respond in a coherent way to the "common" construction of the future city.

Consistent with this background, the aim of the workshop was to design a possible vision for the city, focused entirely on the future, to better respond to the contemporary society new challenges. The developments of different levels of integration between innovative and experimental functions were the foundational actions for a regeneration process, even more than individual urban fragments, for the construction of a possible cultural model of synergistic, sustainable and shareable transformation.

The thematic proposal of the OC summer school 2017 has the main goal to place Piacenza, thanks to the participation of representatives of international scientific and academic world, to the attention of the different political, economic and productive local institutions, about the role that the Emilian city is called to conceive and carry out in its own future. It's a challenge that has been tested both locally and globally. One of these challenges involved its vocations as a city *junction*, an *ex-military town* and an *agricultural territory*. Regarding the latter vocation, Lorenzo Bellu - economist at the FAO (*Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations*) - recalls the conditions of agricultural future production in relation to the statistics for 2050: the population will increase by about 40% compared to 2010, it means 2,5 billion people more on the whole planet and it cannot not to be a factor for a strong development. This prospect of population growth determines the need to increase the agricultural production by 50% by 2050, with the expansion of arable land surfaces and the research for the development

of new technologies for agricultural production. The building of the critical background for Piacenza will trace a possible horizon to be pursued for the next decades in order to be able to identify potential answers to the following questions: how will architecture be able to give a true reply to these new needs? What are the direct impacts of the relationship between the urban space of the Farnesian city and its productive countryside and farmlands? How the local economy can be redefined to increase purchasing power for the most disadvantaged people? How will Piacenza be able to react to these new challenges?

Common spaces for future cities

The great urban transformations that happens in our contemporary era are determining important changes of perspective towards the future, more and more characterized by a greater need for a sharing not only spatial, but also economic and social, of the collective places of the city itself. The phenomenon of the "*great acceleration*" of human activity, a term coined for the first time in 2005 at the Dahlem conference in Berlin, is the main cause of the change of understanding of the earth system, seen now as the sum of human processes interacting with each other. The new era, the one we live in, is defined by two scientists Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer (2010) with the term "*anthropocene*" and it declares the presence of man on the planet as a true geological factor. This condition requires a shift in the paradigm about the use of available resources on the planet. A new ethic seems to emerge, due to a different sensitivity that citizens have gained thanks to the awareness of the limited nature of world's natural resources. The change in scale does not only concern the physical-spatial dimension, but also the political, social, demographic ones, as discussed by Marc Augé and consequently also ecological. These changes increasingly require the need to define new *eco-sustainability* formulas, *reversible processes*, *temporary actions*, all aimed at shareable scenarios, also of a utopian nature, for the recovery and the reuse of areas that no longer fulfill to their original function and which have remained closed to the social interactions of the city. The true definition of the concept of contemporary "public" is strongly questioned and determines a consequential crisis of public space, its use and its taxonomic categories, as defined and accepted in the past. Re-reading today the new social "containers", through the theme of *Urban Utopias*, in a moment of great cultural, technical, economic transformation, with consequent consequences on the urban setting, is an opportunity

to reflect on the theme itself of the open space and of its possible forms of regeneration. What are the possible spaces of these “containers” today? How can they be re-used strategically for the development of the future city? What new collective values are able to express? How do you configure a shared space in these places today? In light of this described background, what could today be the new forms of sharing and use of spaces closed to the city? In an increasingly dynamic and complex society, secularized by economic and especially financial needs, the city’s space - both private and public - becomes a potential capital of a nature that is not only material, but also, and mainly, cultural and social because of the endless opportunities of define new forms of sharing.

Estroflex heterotopias

The places of “etheropia”: “Medical term used by the French philosopher Michel Foucault to indicate those real places, found in every culture of every time, structured as defined spaces, but “absolutely different” from all other social spaces, where they are “*at the same time represented, challenged, overthrown*”. The function of these special spaces, true “*situated utopias*” in relation to all other spaces, is to compensate them, neutralize them or purify them. The prison, the garden, the cemetery, the museum, the asylum, the cinema, the ship are considered examples of heterotopias (...) The idea of heterotopias will have multiple diffusion, for example between architects and theorists of architecture and urban planning as it is capable of revealing the multi-dimensionality of the inhabited space, as well as among the geographers, to account for the territorial layouts generated by colonialism”. [1]

Heterotopic spaces are the mirror, which allows us to see where we are not, but an absolutely true place connected to true space. The French philosopher defined *heterotopia* as a place open to other places whose task is to connect spaces with each other and contrast it with the definition of *utopia*. In “*Words and Things. An archeology of the human sciences*” Foucault described the dichotomous relationship between utopia and heterotopia: “Utopias consolation; in fact, if they do not have a true place, they open up in a wonderful and smooth space; they open cities with wide avenues, well-planted gardens, easy villages even if their access is chimerical. The *heterotopias* worry, undoubtedly because they secretly undermine the language, because they forbid naming this and that, because they break and entangle the clichés, because they devastate rather time the syntax and not only that which builds the sentences, but the less obvious that makes

keeping together (...) words and things. This is why utopias permit fables and discourses: they are placed in the straight line of language, in the fundamental dimension of the *fabula*; the heterotopias dry up the discourse, block the words about themselves, contest, from its root, every possibility of grammar, unravel the myths and make the lyricism of the sentences sterile" [2]. Within the new urban landscape, heavily influenced by the new tools of the global world (internet, immaterial networks, social networks), exactly the places of the past *heterotopia* can *extroflex* themselves waiting for a ransom, worthy of their value and their strategic role in the construction of the shape of the future city. The collective spaces of the great social "containers" of the 19th and 20th century city, as *barracks, hospitals, prisons, schools* have been characterized over time as elements of permanence, where the spatial dimension, which is represented by the *long duration*, prevailed over factors of reversibility or temporary-use space. Today these places potentially offer a new scenario that we could define of *heterotopia* and seem to have the possibility of interfering with the city according to a logic of non-permanent use, but based on the concept of temporality, where the temporal dimension prevails over the dimension of space and where the *long duration* represented by the physical space of the architecture is replaced by the definition of *short duration* through the temporary use of the spaces themselves.

The change of paradigm that is offered to them (from enclosure to the new open spaces of sharing) is in fact the occasion to recognize these places as possible counter-forms of the pre-existing space, reversed spaces or decals of the previous use, capable of assuming in the contemporary city, once again, a strategic and significant value. As new spaces offered to communities for the public use, they become capable both of responding more flexibly to the needs of sharing and of adapting to different times and uses without irreversible consequences.

Design experimentation

Some areas Piacenza have been studied during the workshop. It was a sort of design experimentation aimed at building a utopia education for new generations of students. The areas can be identified in 3 different urban sectors.

The first is along the banks of the Po River. The second is within the consolidated fabric of the historic city and the third is outside the historical Farnesian walls. The architectures involved can be counted among the places of the *heterotopias* as defined by Foucault: the

barracks included in their military enclosures (Ex- Laboratorio Pontieri, Lusignani, Scalo Pontieri along the Po River, La Pertite, the Military Hospital, the Arsenal) and other public buildings such as the Carceri, the Guglielmo da Saliceto Hospital, the Church of Carmine and Sant'Agostino, the Benedictine Convent, the Convent of San Sisto with its annexed Cloister, the Cavallerizza, the former Prison of San Lorenzo, the former Slaughterhouse, Porta Borghetto, Bastione Fodesta, the Therm-oelectric Station, the River harbor, the A-21 motorway, the Berzolla Building, the Fruit and Vegetable Market, the Tobacco Factory, the Agricultural Consortium, the Fax Hall Shopping Center, the Logistic Center.

It's an heritage of disused and abandoned architecture that is not only a material, but also a cultural resource to activate a possible regeneration of Piacenza according to a programmatic vision of future development within scenarios of *city junction* and capital of a productive agricultural territory.

Every historical period, each epoch produces its own *heterotopias*. Contemporary heterotopias, represented by the abandoned assets of the historical architecture, have the opportunity to become the new letters of an alphabet with which architects can rewrite the city of the future. A future that stands on a rich and multiple palimpsest made of traces, footprints, footsteps that have always connoted the cultural richness of the European cities. The return to a reinterpretation of the concept of *heterotopias* can be a deep opportunity to reflect more broadly and profoundly on the theme of the recovery of the abandoned spaces of our cities. Just in this horizon we could define spaces for a rewriting of the future city. Returning to the great narratives of modernity, which are dead according to Lyotard's postmodern appearance, is, as Paul Virilio teaches us, necessary because we cannot think the present outside of time. Also, and mainly, the future time, for the prospects, illusions and hopes to overcome the frontiers of the unknown. [3]

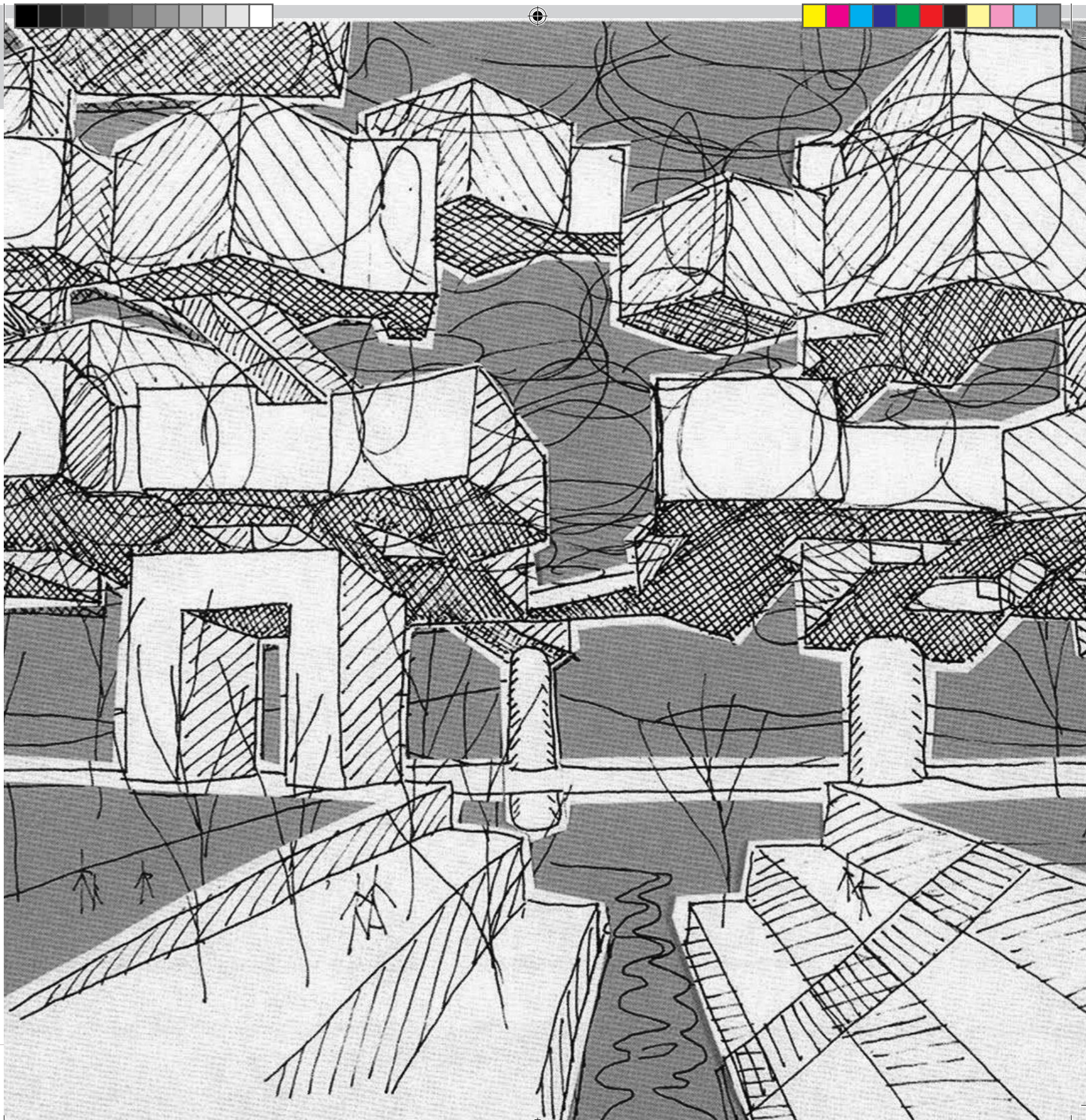
Notes

[1] "*Eterotopia*" in Italian edition of online Enciclopedia Treccani

[2] "Le parole e le cose. Un'archeologia delle scienze umane", BUR Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, Milano 2016, pp. 7-8

[3] Marc Augé, "Futuro", Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2012, p. 106

Yona Friedman, *Spatial City*, 1959

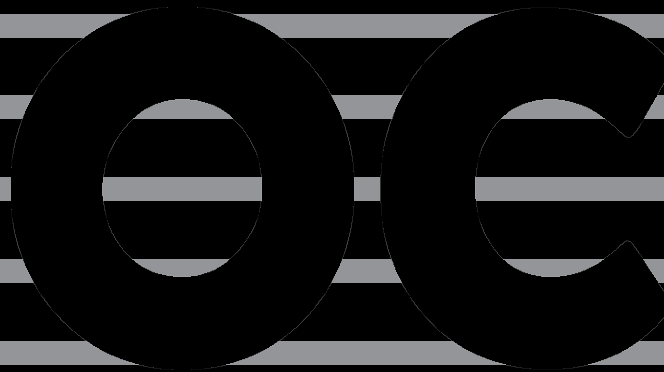


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