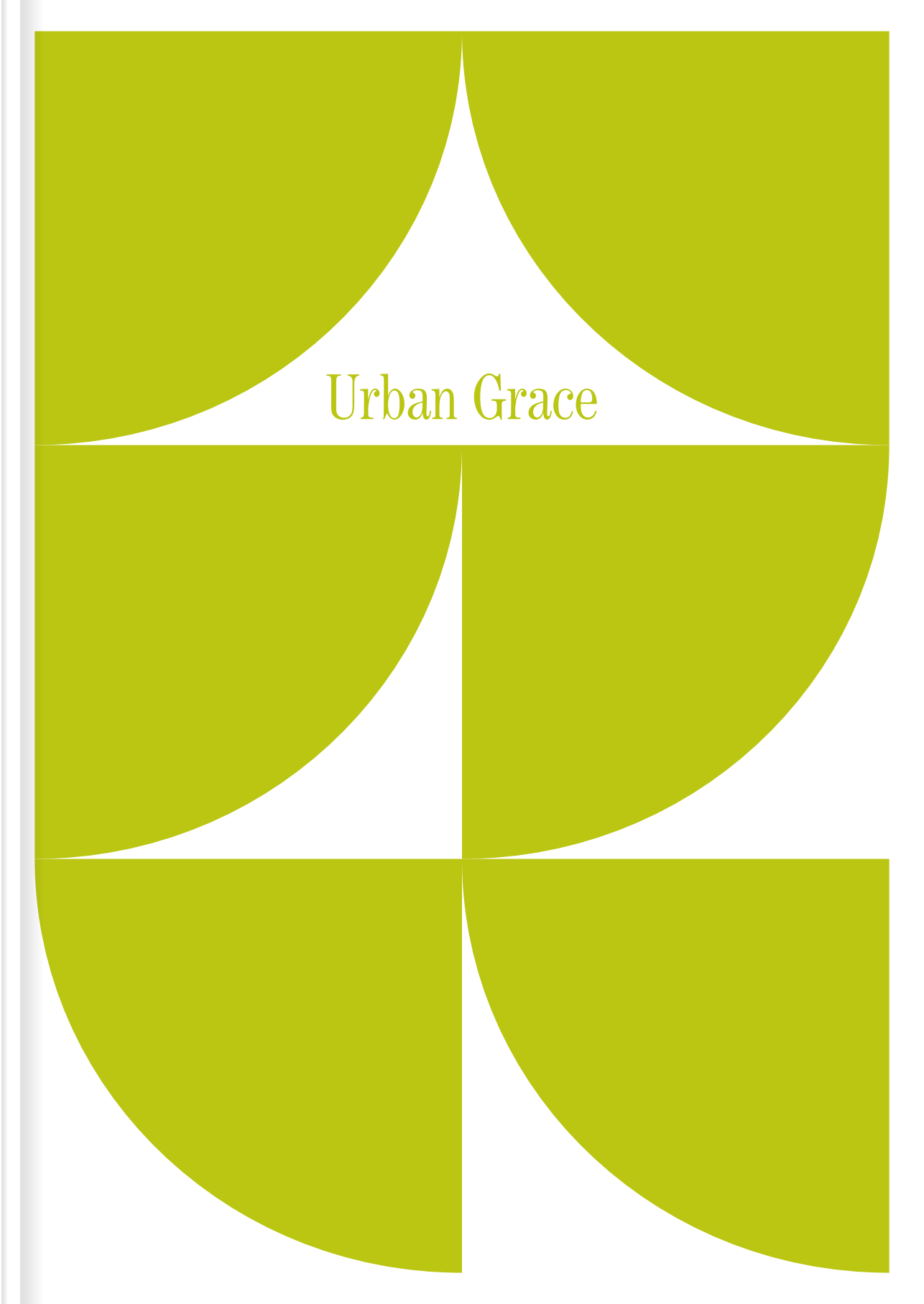




Urban Grace

Urban Grace.

Introduction to the series of lectures

Giancarlo Floridi
Cino Zucchi

“While the functionalist looks for the maximum possible adjustment to a goal as specific as possible, the rationalist is looking for the greatest chance of compliance to the largest number of necessities. (...) Nothing more understandable for the rationalist to put an emphasis on form. Form is born with the establishment of human relationships. The lonely man, isolated in the middle of nature, has no formal problem. (...) The question of form arises together with the union of more individuals, and form is the condition which makes possible men living together.”

Adolf Behne, *Der Moderne Zweckbau*, 1923

“Civilization, we dare to hope, can be transmitted; it cannot be taught in university courses that end in an exam. (...) What we call civilization can be interpreted as a web of value judgments that are implicit rather than explicit.”

Ernst Gombrich, *Art History and the Social Sciences*, 1975

The European and international design culture is reconsidering the theme of the city from a new point of view: a contemporary perspective, experimental and free from preconceptions, considering simultaneously the historical models settled over time, the attempts of their reform by the urban planning theories of the last century and the most recent reflections on environmental emergency and sustainability. In this complex framework, Urban Grace looks at the current practice and debate through a series of lectures by engaged European architects and design studios working with a constant exchange between design and research.

If the majority of contemporary strategies to tackle the energy and sustainability problem seem to identify it with the measurement of energy performance and the integration of greenery in buildings, the reconsideration of the concepts of durability, long life, and change push us to a non-nostalgic reinterpretation of the concepts of typology and resistance of the constructed form.

The theories of the last century that considered the city only as a large machine or as a biological organism somehow simplified the relationship between its physical form and the changing life of its inhabitants. The continuous evolution of the ways of living, working and being together and the relative slowness of the design response to the lability of functional needs and programs that often change in an unpredictable way make us re-evaluate urban places and architectures which — rather than pursue the most recent technical innovations and the often fallacious future prophecies — have shown how well they are able to welcome change by virtue of a certain robustness and spatial clarity. Without any nostalgia, we must admit that historic spaces and buildings have responded to change in a better way than many “futuristic machines” that have by now become ruins. A new concept of sustainability should think about both innovation and the transformation and reuse of urban buildings, and look at them not only as an energy machines but as places of exchange and expression of the values and differences of the people who live and work there.

The term “urban” is in many languages synonymous with “good manners”: urban space always embodies the evolving “social contract” between citi-

zens and records in a stratified manner both their permanence and changes in the “ways of doing”, customs or habits.

As professors engaged in teaching and research in the increasingly international Milan Polytechnic, we ask ourselves every day the question of which should be the shared codes on which the project of new urban environments can be based and which general values should be pursued, in collective search of a “new global etiquette” that can be perhaps found in the lobby of an international airport but also of the conservation and metamorphosis of the specific languages which underpin the incredible richness and diversity of European and world cities. The urban transformations and buildings generated by the reconstruction of Milan after the bombings of the Second World War are today admired and visited by architects, students and teachers from all over the world in search of an inclusive and kind Modernism, capable of grafting onto existing fabrics and at the same time to represent the new forms of living and social coexistence.

In this way of seeing technologies, materials and building details are not only neutral tools for the implementation of abstract ideals, but a real “language” with its rules, its exceptions, its consistency, its ambiguity and generosity. The relationship between the parts and the whole, between individual building episodes and urban structure represents an exchange that denies both the “nomothetic” character of standardized mass construction advocated by the early Modern and the excesses of narcissism of the built icons produced by the new urban capitalism.

Despite the specificity of individual research in relation to often very precise geographical contexts, the architects and studios invited to show their work in the cycle of lectures at the Polytechnic show a continuous tension towards that “common ground” embodied by the title of the 2012 Venice Biennale.

Can we today shape environments capable of responding even in an extreme way to contemporary needs and values and fostering biodiversity, the reduction of climate change and sustainable development starting from the reflection on existing cities both in a physical and cultural sense?

Can we produce more sustainable and “green” architectures without their expression necessarily being that of technological performance?

Can we affirm without nostalgia or shyness that one of the most important tools of environmental sustainability is the duration over time of spaces and buildings, referring both to their collective image and value and to the obsolescence of materials and techniques?

Bovenbouw Architectuur/Dirk Somers (Antwerp), LAN/Umberto Napolitano (Paris), Lynch Architects/Patrick Lynch (London) all interpret this new direction of research in a specific way by designing buildings and spaces that are always different in relation to individual occasions and programs, yet all endowed with a gentle urbanity and with a sustainability capable of reflecting on their economy of means, on their integration to the context and on their duration in time.

Urban Grace.
Introduzione al ciclo di lezioni

“Mentre il funzionalista cerca il massimo possibile adeguamento a un fine il più possibile specifico, il razionalista cerca l'adattamento al più grande numero di possibilità. (...) Niente di più comprensibile che il razionalista metta particolare enfasi sulla forma. La forma nasce con lo stabilirsi delle relazioni tra gli uomini. L'uomo solitario, isolato nel mezzo della natura, non ha alcun problema formale. (...) La questione della forma nasce con l'unione di più individui, e la forma è ciò che rende possibile la convivenza tra gli uomini.”

Adolf Behne, *Der Moderne Zweckbau*, 1923

“La civiltà, osiamo sperare, si può trasmettere; non la si può insegnare in corsi universitari che si concludono in un esame. (...) Quella che chiamiamo civiltà si può interpretare come una trama di giudizi di valore che sono impliciti piuttosto che espliciti.”

Ernst Gombrich, *Art History and the Social Sciences*, 1975

La cultura progettuale europea e internazionale è tornata a ragionare sul tema della città; lo fa con uno sguardo nuovo, incrociando in maniera sperimentale e scevra da preconcetti l'esame dei suoi modelli storici sedimentati nel tempo, i tentativi di una sua riforma da parte delle teorie urbanistiche del secolo scorso e le più recenti riflessioni sull'emergenza ambientale e sul concetto di sostenibilità.

In questo quadro articolato, Urban Grace intende esaminare il lavoro e aprire un più articolato dibattito con una serie di architetti e studi di progettazione europei impegnati sia nella dimensione progettuale che in quella teorica attraverso uno scambio costante tra empiria e ricerca.

Se le strategie contemporanee più diffuse per affrontare il problema energetico e della sostenibilità sembrano ridursi alla misura delle prestazioni energetiche e all'integrazione del verde negli edifici, la riconsiderazione dei concetti di durabilità, lunga durata, disponibilità al cambiamento ci spingono a una reinterpretazione non nostalgica dei concetti di tipologia e resistenza della forma costruita. Le teorie del secolo scorso che consideravano la città solo come una grande macchina, un organismo biologico, hanno in un certo senso semplificato il rapporto tra la sua forma fisica e la vita cangiante dei suoi abitanti. L'evoluzione continua delle maniere di abitare, lavorare e stare insieme e la relativa lentezza della risposta progettuale alla labilità dei bisogni e dei programmi funzionali che cambiano spesso in maniera imprevedibile ci fanno oggi rivalutare luoghi urbani e architetture che, piuttosto che inseguire le più recenti innovazioni tecniche e profezie future spesso fallaci, hanno dimostrato di saper accogliere il cambiamento proprio in virtù di una certa robustezza e chiarezza spaziale. Senza alcuna nostalgia dobbiamo ammettere che spazi ed edifici storici hanno risposto al cambiamento in maniera migliore di molte “macchine futuribili” oggi diventate rovine.

Un nuovo concetto di sostenibilità deve pensare sia all'innovazione che alla trasformazione e al riuso del manufatto urbano, e guardare ad esso non solo come macchina energetica ma come luogo di scambio ed espressione dei valori e delle differenze delle persone che vi abitano e lavorano.

Il termine “urbano” è in molte lingue sinonimo di “buone maniere”: lo spazio urbano incarna in maniera sempre diversa il “contratto sociale” tra i cittadini e ne registra in maniera stratificata sia le permanenze che i cambiamenti dei “modi di fare”, i costumi o le abitudini.

Come docenti impegnati nell'insegnamento e nella ricerca in un Politecnico sempre più internazionale, ci poniamo ogni giorno il problema di quali siano oggi i codici condivisi sui quali si possa fondare il progetto di nuovi ambienti urbani e quali invece i valori che vadano perseguiti in senso generale, alla ricerca di un “nuovo galateo” globale, rinvenibile forse nella lobby di un aeroporto internazionale ma anche della conservazione e della metamorfosi di idiomi specifici che fondano l'incredibile ricchezza e diversità delle città europee e mondiali.

Le trasformazioni urbane e gli edifici generati dalla ricostruzione di Milano dopo i bombardamenti della Seconda Guerra

Mondiale sono oggi ammirate e visitate da architetti, studenti e docenti di tutto il mondo alla ricerca di un Moderno inclusivo, gentile, capace di innestarsi senza complessi e mascheramenti su tessuti esistenti e al contempo di rappresentare le nuove forme dell'abitare e della convivenza sociale.

In questo modo di vedere tecnologie, materie e dettagli edilizi non sono solo strumenti neutri per la messa in opera di astratti ideali, ma una vera propria "lingua" con le sue regole, le sue eccezioni, la sua consistenza, la sua ambiguità e ricchezza.

Il rapporto tra parti e tutto, tra singoli episodi edilizi e struttura urbana, rappresenta così uno scambio che nega sia il carattere "nomotetico" dell'edilizia in serie propugnata dal primo moderno che gli eccessi di protagonismo e iconicità delle architetture del nuovo capitalismo urbano. Pur nella particolarità delle ricerche individuali in rapporto a contesti geografici spesso molto specifici, gli architetti e gli studi invitati a mostrare il loro lavoro nel ciclo di lezioni al Politecnico mostrano una tensione continua verso quel "common ground" assunto come titolo della Biennale di Venezia del 2012.

Possiamo oggi dare forma ad ambienti capaci di rispondere anche in maniera estrema a bisogni e valori contemporanei e favorire la biodiversità, la riduzione del cambiamento climatico e uno sviluppo sostenibile a partire dalla riflessione sulle città esistenti sia in senso fisico che culturale?

Possiamo oggi produrre architetture più sostenibili e "green", senza che la loro espressione sia necessariamente quella della performance tecnologica?

Possiamo oggi affermare senza nostalgia o complessi che uno dei più importanti strumenti della sostenibilità ecologica e ambientale sia la durata nel tempo di spazi ed edifici riferita sia alla loro immagine e valore per la collettività che all'obsolescenza dei materiali e delle tecniche?

Bovenbouw Architectuur / Dirk Somers (Antwerp), LAN / Umberto Napolitano (Paris), Lynch Architects / Patrick Lynch (London) interpretano ciascuno in modo specifico questa nuova direzione di ricerca progettando edifici e spazi sempre diversi in relazione alle singole occasioni e programmi ma tutti dotati di un'urbanità gentile, e di una sostenibilità capace di riflettere sull'economia dei mezzi, sull'integrazione al contesto e sulla durata.

Umberto Napolitano

LAN (Local Architecture Network)

Paris

October 18th
H 17:30



Umberto Napolitano (Naples, 1975) studied architecture at the *Università Federico II* in Naples and then at the *Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Paris-La Villette*. Founder of LAN (Local Architecture Network) with Benoit Jallon in 2002, he also conducts a theoretical work through research projects, exhibitions and conferences all around the world.

Umberto was professor at the Columbia University GSAPP of New York (USA), at the AA (Architecture Association) School of Architecture in London (UK) and currently at the TU Vienna (AU). He is a member of the French Academy of Architecture since 2016 and was appointed Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 2018.

LAN (Local Architecture Network) was created by Benoit Jallon and Umberto Napolitano in 2002, with the idea of exploring architecture as an area of activity at the intersection of several disciplines. This attitude, which has now become a methodology, allows the agency to explore new territories in search of a vision involving social, urban, ecological and functional issues.

The firm's projects reflect this spirit of openness and cover a wide range of scales and programs: the Maillon Theatre (Équerre d'argent 2020), the Euravenir Tower (nominated for the Mies van der Rohe Award 2015 and Prix Soufaché of the Academy of Architecture), the experimental housing in Bègles (Venice Biennale 2016), the student residence on Rue Pajol in Paris (first national BigMat prize), the EDF Archive Centre (Leaf Awards 2011), the Neue Hamburger Terrassen (International Architecture Awards in 2014) are some of the iconic operations that the office has produced over the last two decades. LAN is currently working on projects in Europe (France, Belgium, Germany and Slovenia) and is expanding internationally through experiences in the Middle East and Asia.

In addition to architectural and urban design, the office is actively involved in the disciplinary debate and develops a significant theoretical production through exhibitions (Venice Biennale in 2016, Haussmann - model city at the Pavillon de l'Arsenal in 2017), publications (Traces in 2012, Napoli Super Modern in 2020) and conferences.

Since 2019 two new projects have emerged in the LAN ecosystem: the Research Laboratory dedicated to Architecture and Reality (RAAR) and the Pianoterra gallery restaurant¹.

Teaching and transmission are also part of the transversal and transdisciplinary vision. Umberto Napolitano has been a professor at Columbia University GSAPP in New York (USA) and at the AA School of Architecture in London (UK), and currently teaches at the TU in Vienna. He has been a member of the French Academy of Architecture since 2016.

The two partners of the agency were named Chevaliers de l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 2018.

1.
pianoterra.fr





Dirk Somers Bovenbouw Architectuur Antwerp

November 22nd
H 17:30



Bovenbouw is a young Belgian office, based in Antwerp. Dirk Somers, professor, manager and head designer leads a team of 18 talented European architects.

Bovenbouw's work is characterized by an open minded and untimely approach to design, fully freed from the compulsive desire to be avant-garde. Paradoxically, Bovenbouw does not reject the notion of style. Bovenbouw tries to reinvent a style specific to every situation. This quest for style can be understood in a true classical sense, bringing together old and new ideas in an interesting blend of the everyday and the everlasting.

Bovenbouw's work has already been shown at various exhibitions in Venice, Munich, Mendrisio, Aachen, London and Antwerp. Currently Bovenbouw is presenting the 'Composite Presence' exhibition in the Belgian pavilion at Venice in the Biennale Architettura 2021.



Patrick Lynch Lynch Architects London

December 13th
H 17:30



Patrick Lynch was born in Oxfordshire and studied architecture at The University of Liverpool 1987–1993. He holds an M-Phil in The History and Philosophy of Architecture from The University of Cambridge 1995–6, where he was supervised by Dalibor Vesely. He gained his PhD from London Metropolitan University in 2015, where he was supervised by Peter Carl, Helen Malinson and Joseph Rykwert. He is now undertaking further post-graduate study, in Theology, at The University of Oxford.

Patrick represented Ireland at the Venice Biennale in 2008 and Lynch Architects exhibited at Venice again in 2012, and at the Milan Triennale in 2016. He has taught at the Architectural Association, London Met, UCD, Kingston, and most recently at Cambridge, and is currently an Honorary Professor at The University of Liverpool School of Architecture. He also teaches on the MA Landscape Architecture program at The Bartlett, UCL, and is supervising a PhD at KU Leuven.

His writing and design work has been widely published. Recent books include *The Theatricality of the Baroque City* (2011) and *Mimesis* (2015). *Civic Ground*, a version of his PhD, was published in 2017. Patrick is also the editor and publisher of the *Journal of Civic Architecture*, which is published twice a year by Canalside Press. He established the press in 2018, from within the offices of Lynch Architects, and edited and published *Still Beautiful* by David Grandorge that year. *On Intricacy*, a book with and about the English architect John Meunier was published in 2020, and *Change is the Reality*, a book about the Irish architect Robin Walker in 2021.



Lecture series organized by
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E STUDI URBANI

