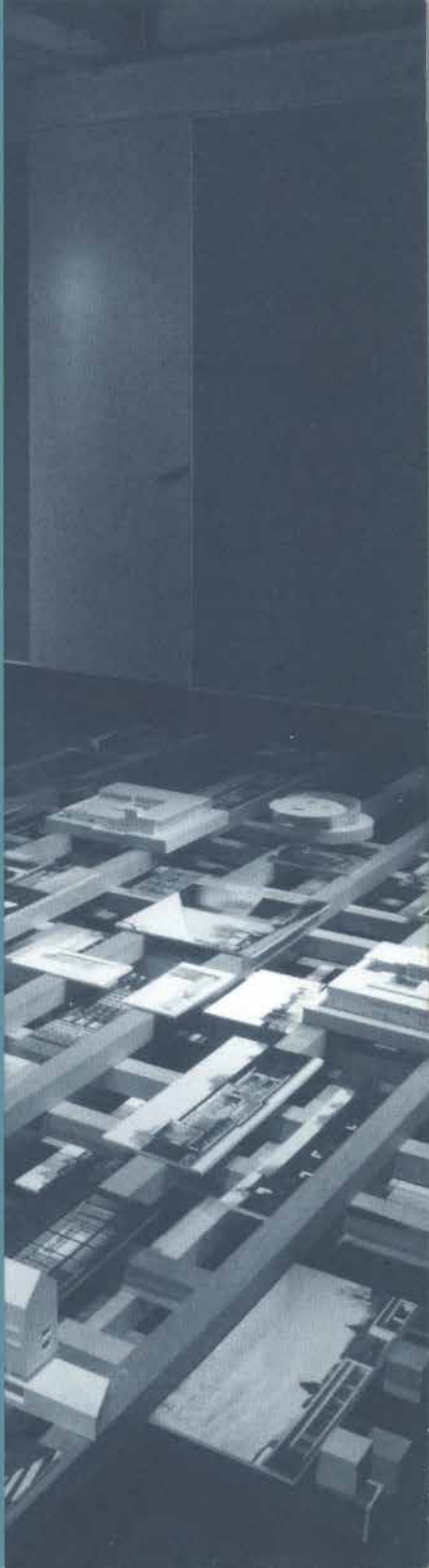


FEELING CONTEXTS
C+S ARCHITECTS

CARLO CAPPAL
MARIA ALESSANDRA SEGANTINI

March 14 - April 18, 2013

The Keller Gallery
MIT Department of Architecture



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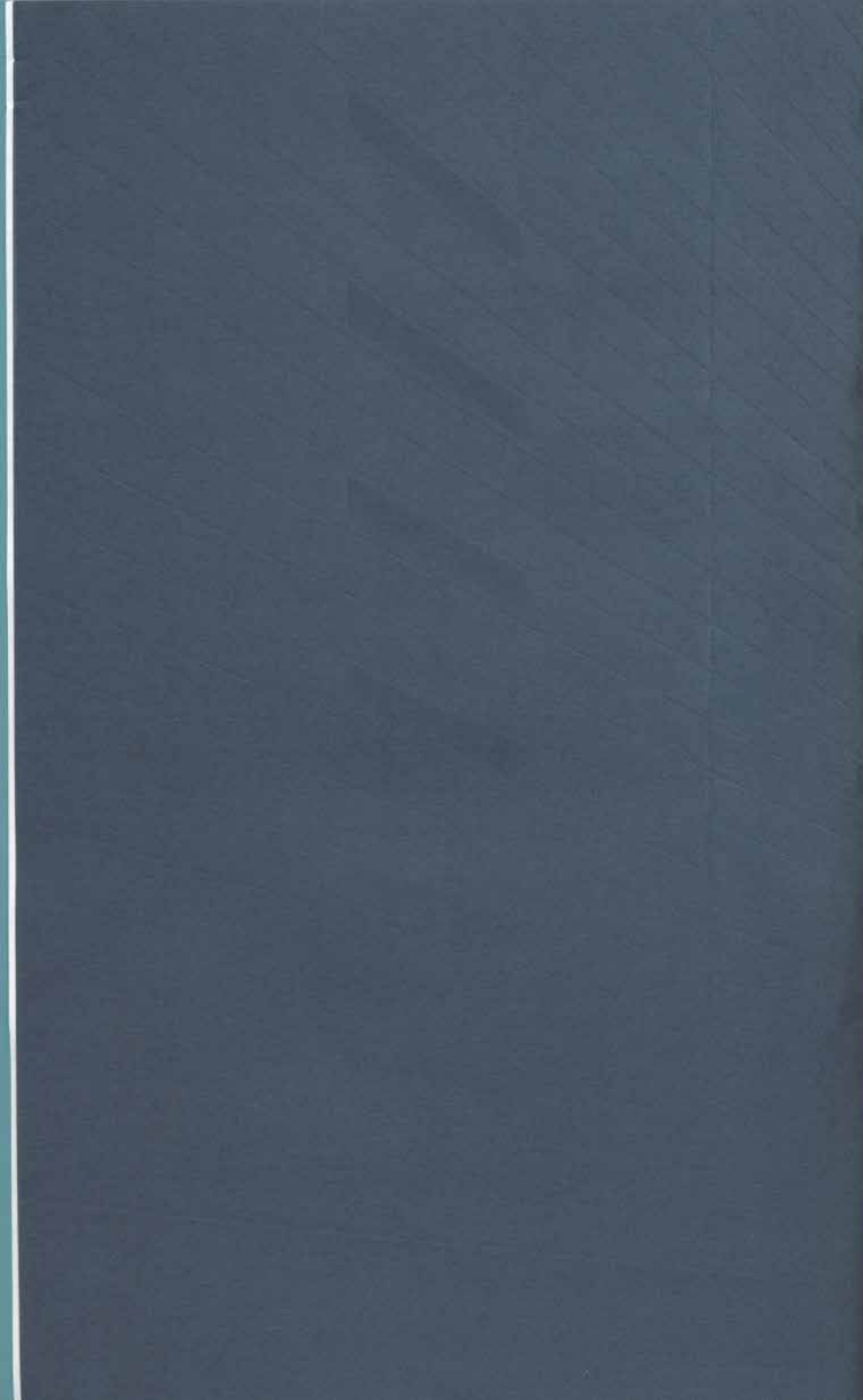
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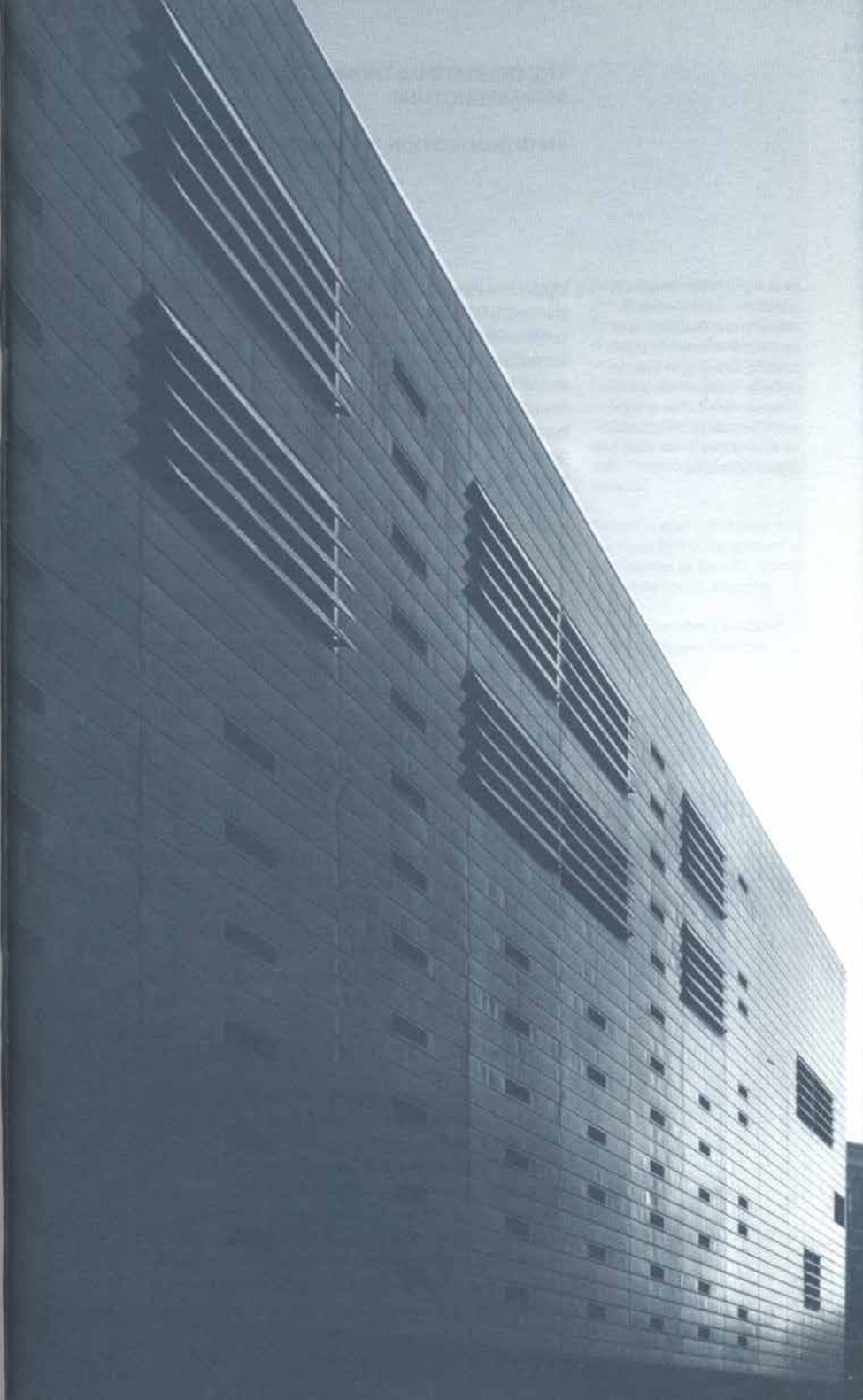
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Feeling Contexts was presented in the Keller Gallery from
March 14 - April 18, 2013.





THE DELICATE INSTRUMENTALITY OF INFRASTRUCTURE

AN INTRODUCTION BY NADER TEHRANI

Working on interdisciplinary platforms, Nader Tehrani's research has been focused on the transformation of the building industry, innovative material applications, and the development of new means and methods of construction—as exemplified in his work with digital fabrication.

Upon meeting Maria Alessandra Segantini in the fall of 2012, I had the unique opportunity to review the work of C+S one early morning over breakfast. I was struck not only by the commitment to design, but moreover a dedication to the 'built' environment—which for the Italian context has unfortunately become all too rare. With the general demise of architectural culture in Italy since the early 1980s—the result of a challenged political system, an ailing economy, and an older generation of architects who were unwilling to pass on the torch—the more recent generation has been left to fight on their own, against all odds and with few means.

Cappai and Segantini have defied this trend, and beyond building a professional practice, have produced a series of works that are demonstrative of a critical bridge they have helped construct between practice and the academy. With an interest in the region in which they live, their focus on the Veneto is far from the romantic "centro storico" that we think of as dedicated tourists. Theirs is a study of the Veneto region as an ecological enterprise, taking on the entire lagoon as a cultural, physical, and hydrological phenomenon. The rising tides of Venice are no secret, and many generations of technicians have offered proposals from a variety of perspectives, but few architects have offered alternatives that go beyond the conceptual realm of visions. In this sense, the work of C+S is much more modest, targeted and rooted.

Working from 'everyday' commissions, ranging from parks, schools, housing and waterfront projects, Cappai and Segantini expand the interpretations of infrastructure to envelope a larger programmatic range. With limited, post-crash budgets, they have found ways of translating scarcity into the minimal realm of irreducible needs. Operating within the idiom of the Modernism, they bring emphasis to a robust sense of materiality, brute realism and a concurrent

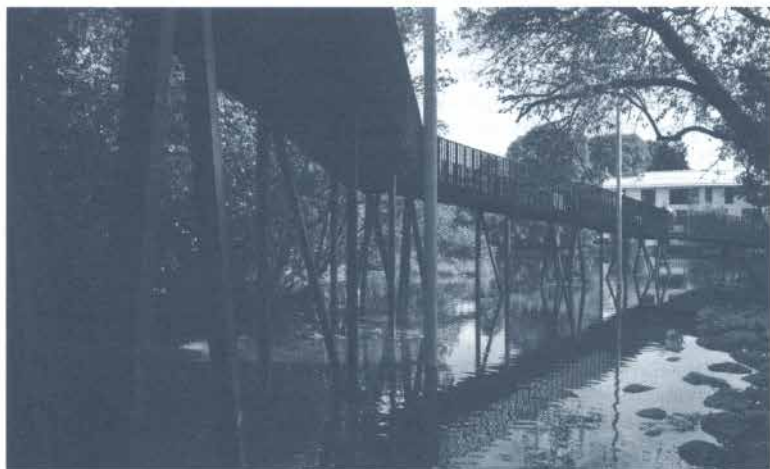
refinement. The Law Court Offices next to Piazzale Roma, the Sant'Erasmus Infrastructure, and the Urban Lake Housing all attest to this sense of versatility, which the architects bring to the varied disciplinary realms where they operate. Each is extreme in one sense or another and as conceptually elegant as they are disciplined in formal and spatial resolution.

Within the context of MIT, Segantini's presence was felt in the studio, where the infrastructural predicaments of the Veneto lagoon were addressed more frontally with projects that made lucid the blurred boundaries between architecture, urbanism, landscape and the engineering of hydrology. Capped with both a lecture and exhibition, Segantini brought an heightened sense of intensity to her collaboration with our students and faculty. This small catalogue brings a sliver of that exquisite energy to its pages.

As the founding principal of NADAAA and Office dA, Tehrani's work received many prestigious awards, among which included the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Award in Architecture, the American Academy of Arts and Letters Architecture Award, and Thirteen Progressive Architecture Awards.

Tehrani is also a professor and the Head of the Department of Architecture at the MIT School of Architecture & Planning.

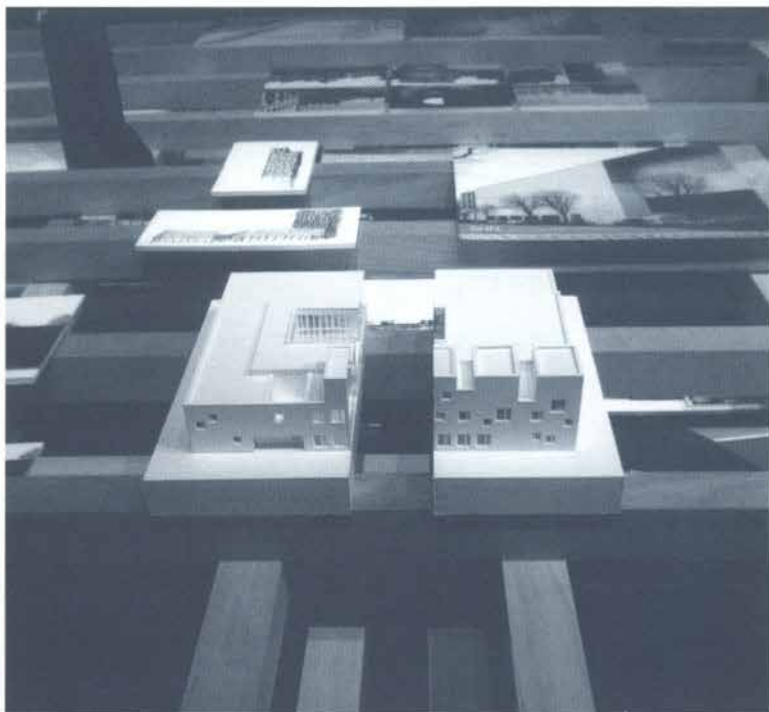
Previous spread: Law-Court offices in Venice © Pietro Savorelli



Above: Urban Lake Housing ©
Alessandra Bello

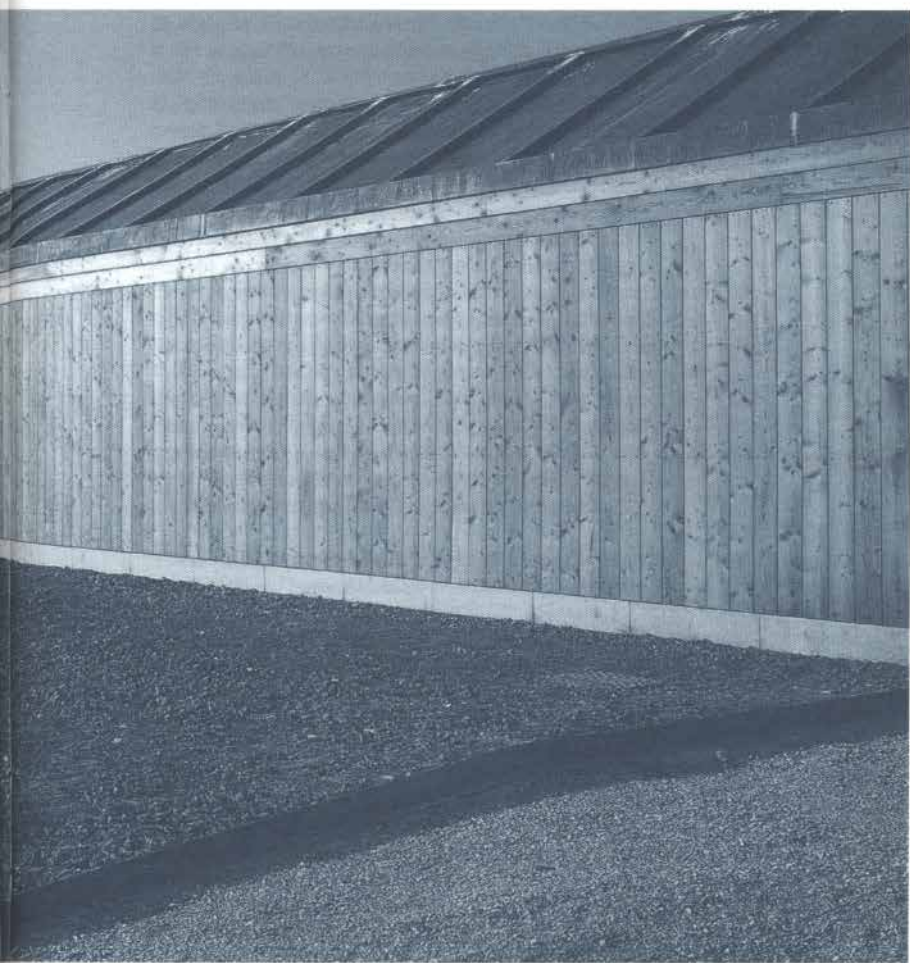
Below: Torre Massimiliana
Museum © Marco Zanta

Opposite: *Feeling Contexts*
installed in the Keller Gallery





Above: Sant'Erasmo Infrastructures © Marco Zanta



MIT KELLER GALLERY
FEELING CONTEXTS EXHIBITION

CARLO CAPPAL
MARIA ALESSANDRA SEGANTINI

The Feeling Contexts Exhibition opened on Thursday, March 14, 2013.

For us, the Keller Gallery at MIT was a context to graft some thoughts around architecture.

As if lifted from our studio in Italy and planted directly within MIT, a working table of suggestions, models, drawings and sketches composes the central space of the gallery.

Situated at a register just above the floor, a physical move is required by the observer to look at each piece. While allowing the perception of a general atmosphere from the standing position, it's the visitor's choice to stop and pay attention to one detail. More than a table, we designed a frame, where pixels of our works appear within a raw lumber structure with the aim of letting the visitor customize their own opinion of the connections and threads which tie together the different aspects of our work.

These "pixels" could easily be moved to create new and different landscapes.

What ties the different materials together is a tonality, an atmosphere made of light and shadow, which is strongly connected to our work, a cross-section through architecture and landscape design.

The walls of the gallery itself are repainted to create a grain, a thicker texture which captures and intensifies the shadow where the projection of a quotation by José Saramago strengthens the idea of customization related to that of having a journey through our feelings about architecture.

We believe that architects are the translators of contexts.

VENETIAN LANDSCAPING THE WORK OF C+S

FULVIO IRACE

During the last few years the state of Italian architecture has been one of the central issues of many discussions, together with its place in the European context—if not global. Despite the inevitable division between those who can be named apocalyptic and integrated, it has been recognized by many observers (including international) that, after the long stasis—starting from the 80s onward—many signs indicate a recovery or even a revival of projects, thanks mainly to the maturity and ease of the young generation.

Obviously in Italy the concept of “young” still remains flexible and fluctuating when referring to the architectural field; but if we should consider those architects aged forty and under, there is no doubt that Carlo Cappai and Maria Alessandra Segantini can be considered members of a new wave who have earned in-the-field recognition and credibility, nurturing the hope that through them, architecture will accomplish a definite reset, allowing the discipline to regain the rightful shares of the cultural international market.

What is the ‘identikit’ of the young Italian successful architect?

It is impossible to enclose it in a single profile because, fortunately, the weight of each regional tradition is still present, mitigating the inevitable attractions of the media system, with respect to the “schools”.

The schools themselves have also changed a lot, due to the natural phenomenon of replacement, but mainly due to the disappearance and the attenuation of the total control effect practiced since a few decades ago by the old masters and their zealous followers. One has the impression that the breaking (certainly unintentional, but positive) of the rules, which had been governing the university for many decades and turning it into an aged academy, guaranteed a breath of fresh air.

This is certainly not controlled, but undoubtedly useful to reopening the design field to unpublished reflections. Inside the university, Cappai and Segantini took their first steps immediately after their graduation at the IUAV, in Venice. The link between the project and the theoretical research is one of the characteristic elements of their professional

commitment, which translates itself within their writings and research, as well as in their practice.

Unlike the past, when it was believed that theory should determine architectural practice in a consequential—if not mechanical—way, their critical thinking helps to broaden the vision of the project, prompting it to compete with a wide range of perspectives.

This feature, in which some recognize the sign of a relaxed availability (cynicism) of the younger architects, is actually a salvation, because it helps to calibrate every single project out of stereotypical patterns while enlarging the question about its responsibility; broadening the resources involved and introducing a sensitivity which belongs entirely to our contemporary culture.

The best evidence of this attitude Cappai and Segantini give is largely in those works where the emergent theme is one of landscape.

In discouraging urbanism or doubtfully denying the territory, the landscape becomes central, both in terms of historical implications and design. The first application (the most immediate one) is at the environmental scale: the infrastructures for Saint Erasmo island (the most convincing and exhaustive example on the ability to work together as a unit on the restoration, territorial and technical records), and its immediate corollaries in Conza, Pertusillo and in the Jesolo lagoon. The topic of "hybrid landscapes" was the workhorse for Dutch architecture in the 90s, which, in response to the particular historical and environmental conditions of a territory torn from the sea, has developed particular poetics of environmental control in which the artificial becomes an integral part of a vision which returns to the notion of landscape at its truest character of invention. However, it is also true that a certain exaggeration of artificiality is often translated into compositions, which are too linked to the peculiarities of a specific historical moment, appearing now obsolete and to some extent vaguely "capricious". In Italy, on the other hand, each intervention is forced to compete with the existing landscapes that affects not only the physical structure of our territories but also the memories (and the visual sensitivity) that history has layered upon them.

The idea of landscape witnessed by C+S exists deep inside the disturbance of this historicity, acknowledging, almost by osmosis, that intense perception of air and light that was typical of the sensitivity of great Renaissance Venetian painters. The "finishing touches" of the sandy expanses and cultivated lands in the Northern part of the Venetian lagoon are exemplary—even in their system of representation—of this sensitivity that is expressed through "tonality" and "shading" of the local light, which is characteristic of all of their work.

In this sense, the "invention" of the landscape corresponds to the part of the massing that shows where the original nature of the places is clarified through the historical interpretation and trans-

lated in a contemporary form, which necessarily includes those signs of contemporary techniques and materials.

Making a leap in scale, from the size of the Lagoon to that of a denser urban "spot", the Venice law-court offices in Piazzale Roma can be considered evidence of a landscaping intention, which basically accepts but purifies the existing dissonances, resolving the inconsistencies by overwriting with an apparently discrete character, which is actually strongly intentional.

In fact, in its broadest application, the notion of landscape aims to review the notion of the antiquated practice of urban design, also touching those aspects related to the specific nature of the individual constructive intervention. The numerous master plans (for the Sile watermills, Bassano, San Giorgio in Pordenone, Conegliano, etc.) demonstrate the interactive nature of a project which tends to propose transforming landscapes and open projects, more than final solutions.

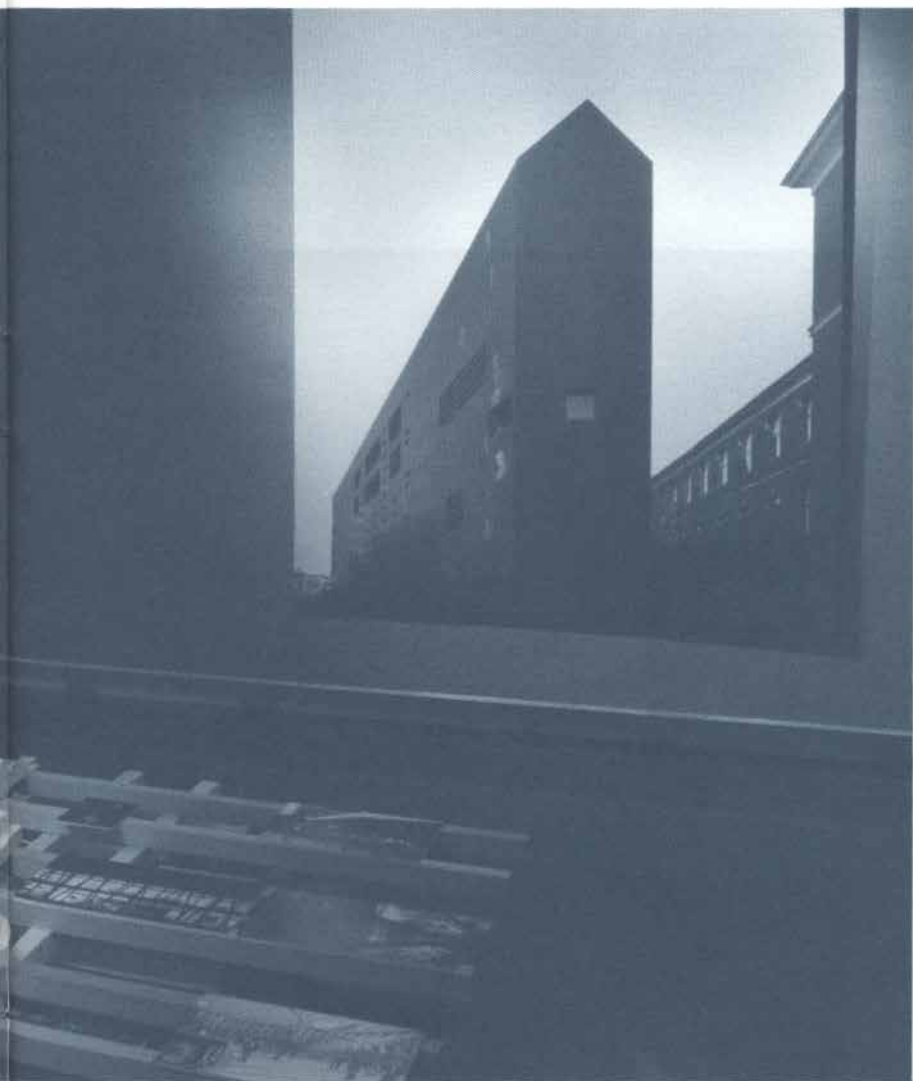
Inside them is expressed the rejection of the idea of architecture as a landmark, that has marked so extensively the view during the last two decades: the timely gesture is in fact the opposite structure of a fabric, where the gaps count as solid, and where the network of streets, avenues and squares becomes equally significant as the individually built "pieces". This represents an act of understanding of the reality of the Italian landscape, which is realized in a fabric of built, residual spaces and infrastructures, nearly uninterrupted.

The city reproduced in the microcosm of a building is the third variant in this landscaping vision, which finds its strengths in the small school buildings built or designed in the Venetian countryside, from Ponzano, to Chiarano, to Fontaniva, to Covolo. This work is part of a larger research on the type of primary school building, these societal nuclei participate in a concept of civil commitment planning, which translates the usual notion of the infrastructure, bringing it from the engineering field to that of architecture.

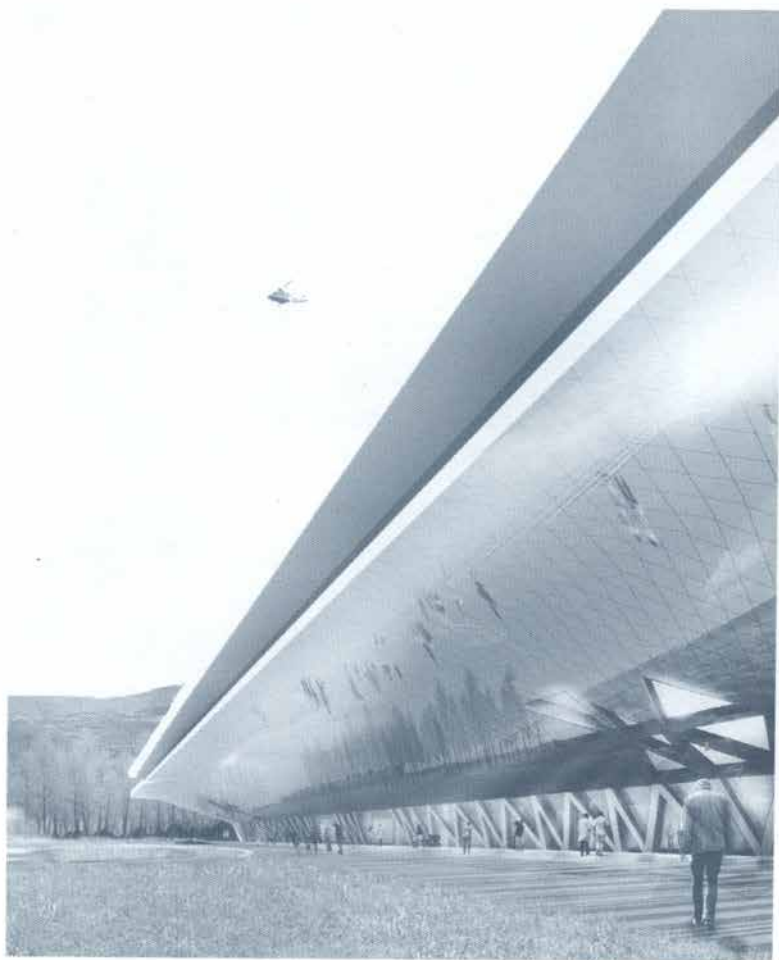
For C+S, the infrastructure of building is what structurally enables the development of the civic: it not only competes with the large size of the road, bridge, viaduct or parking, but even (and especially) the minute dimension of schools, houses, town halls—in short, all of the civic architectures across the range of its functional performance.

The design of school buildings is one of the most significant achievements of C+S, mostly for their capability to build varied landscapes, to stage the variation between relational spaces versus introspective ones, to stage colors and shapes where the world of childhood is not corrupted for a child's gaze; a corruption which is often the byproduct of adapting an architecture originally built for grown-ups.



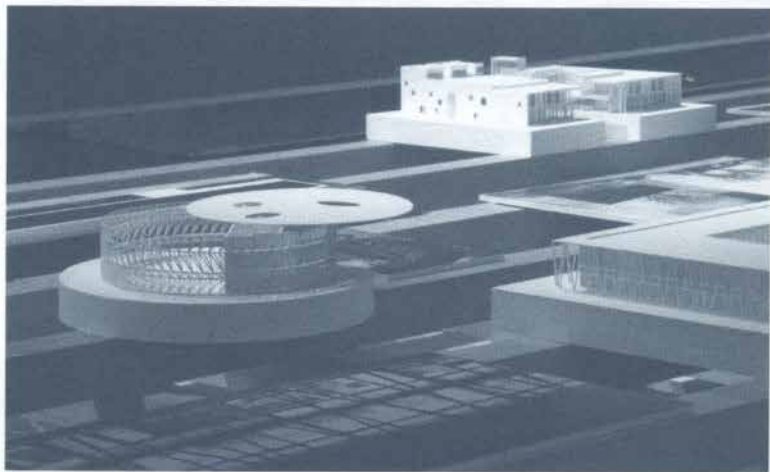
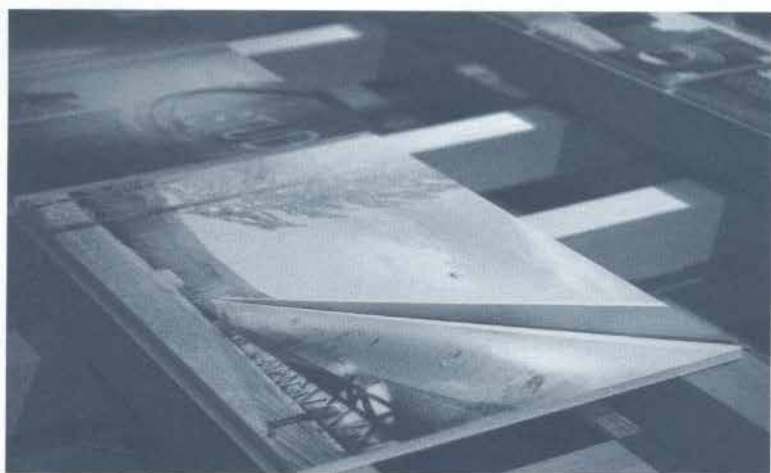


Above: *Feeling Contexts*
installed in the Keller Gallery



Opposite, Next Spread:
Feeling Contexts installed in
the Keller Gallery

Above: New Hospital Trento ©
C+S Architects



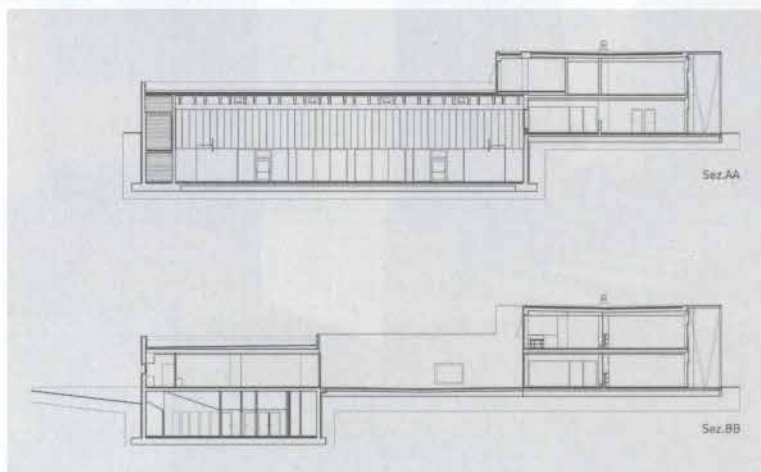


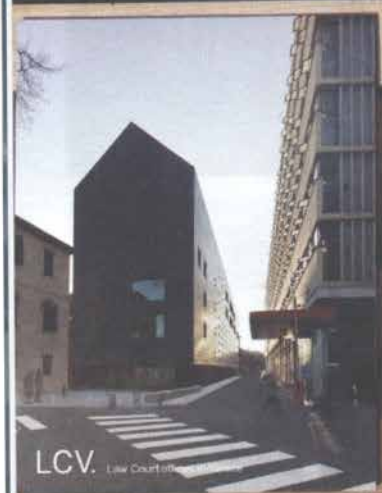




Above: Ponzano Primary
School ©Pietro Savorelli

Opposite: Ponzano Primary
School, section drawings
©C+S Architects





LCV.

Lila Court

Lucy & Lucy



PPS.

Porzang

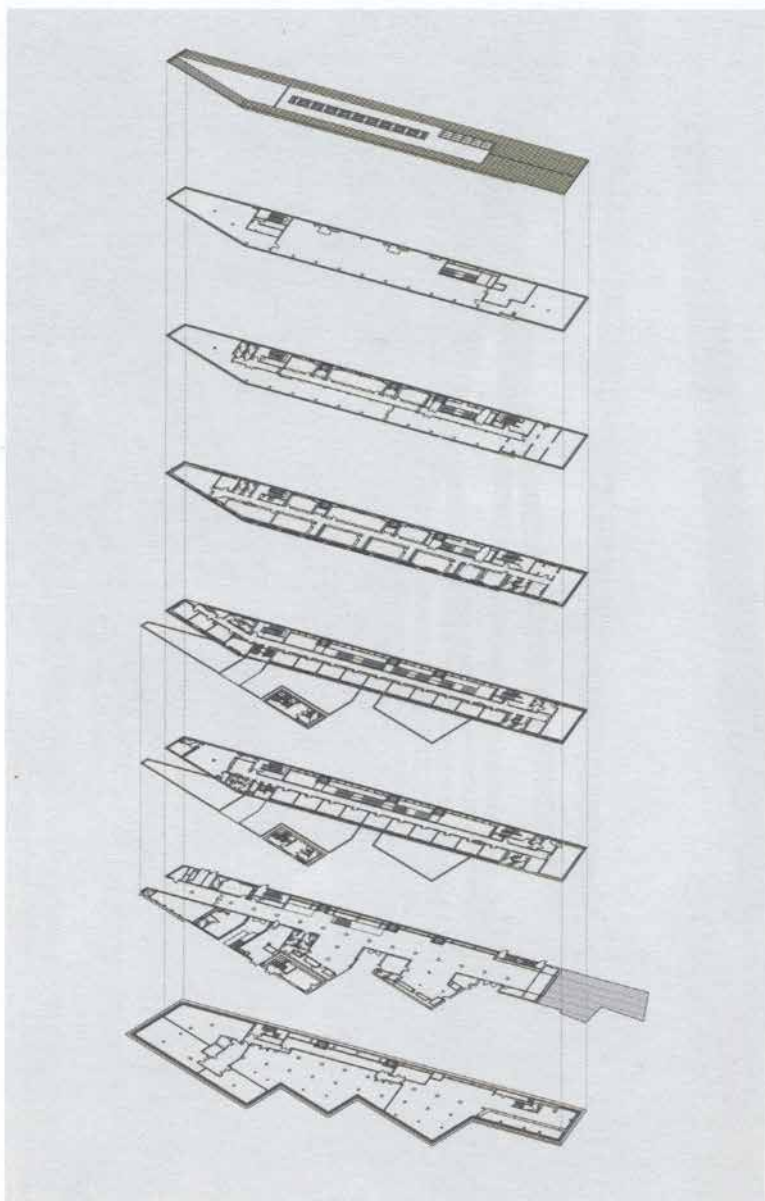


NSC.

Nursery School

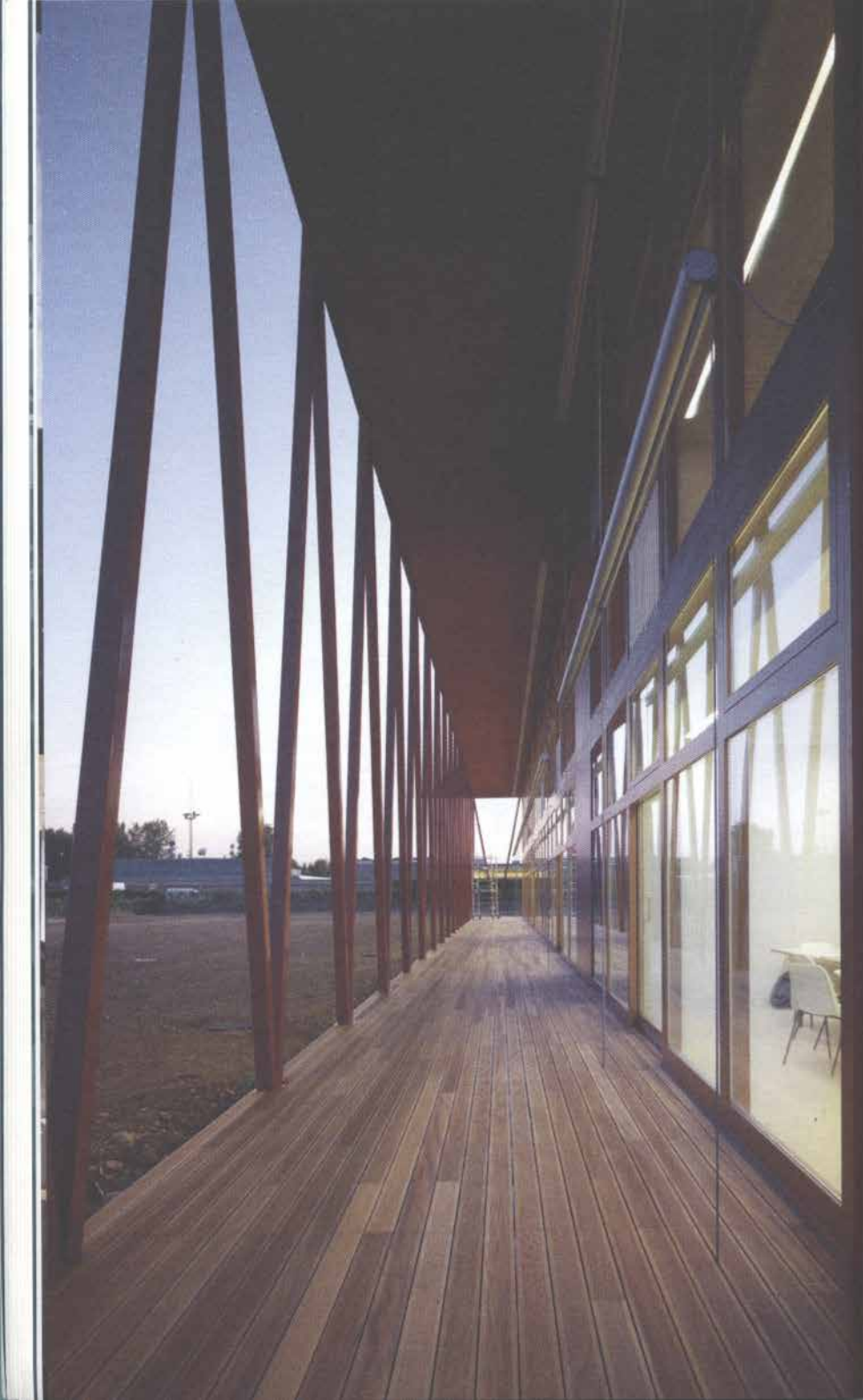
NSC

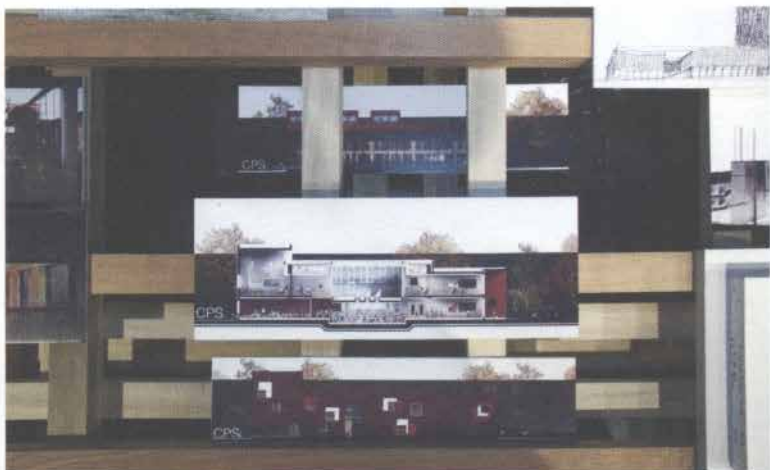




Opposite: *Feeling Contexts*
installed in the Keller Gallery

Above: Law Court offices in
Venice, plans, ©C+S Archi-
tects



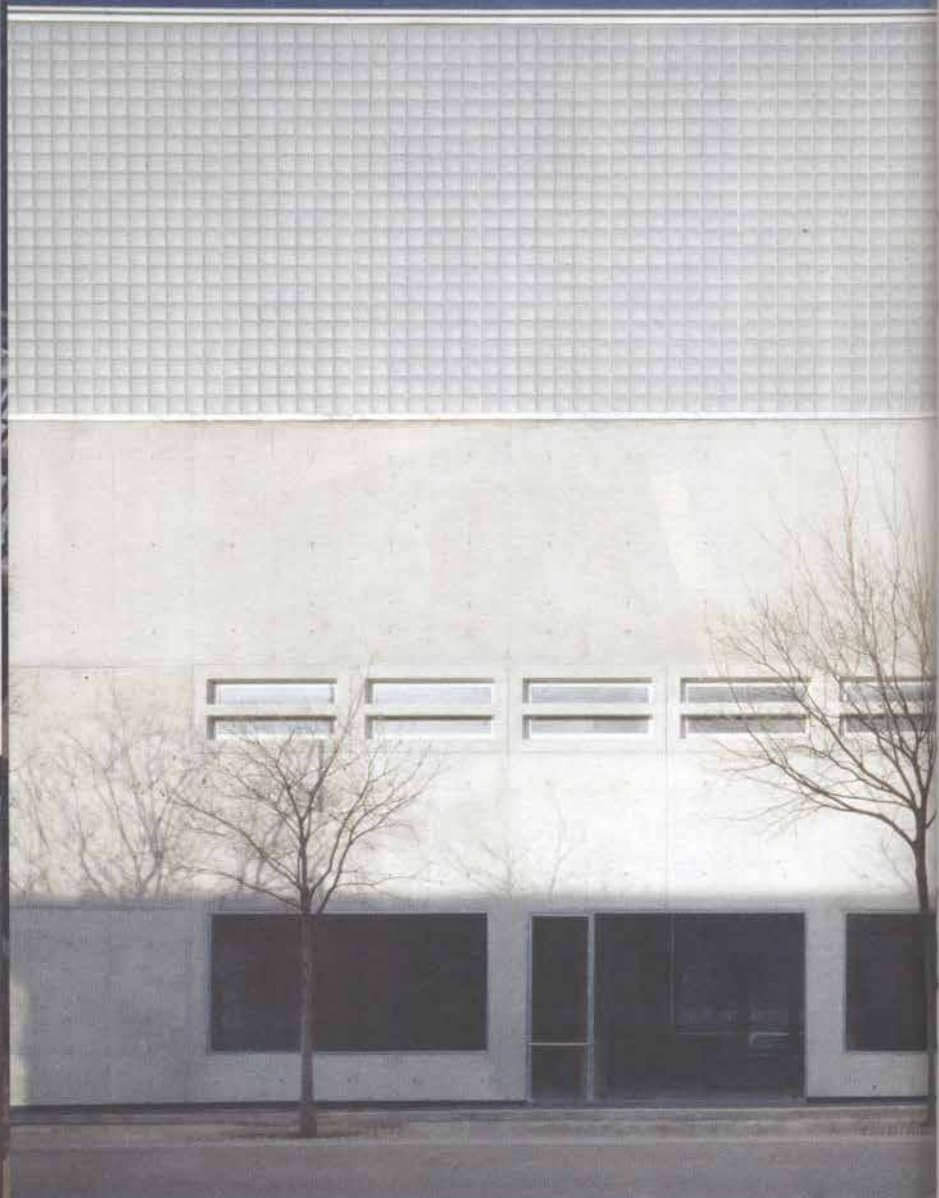


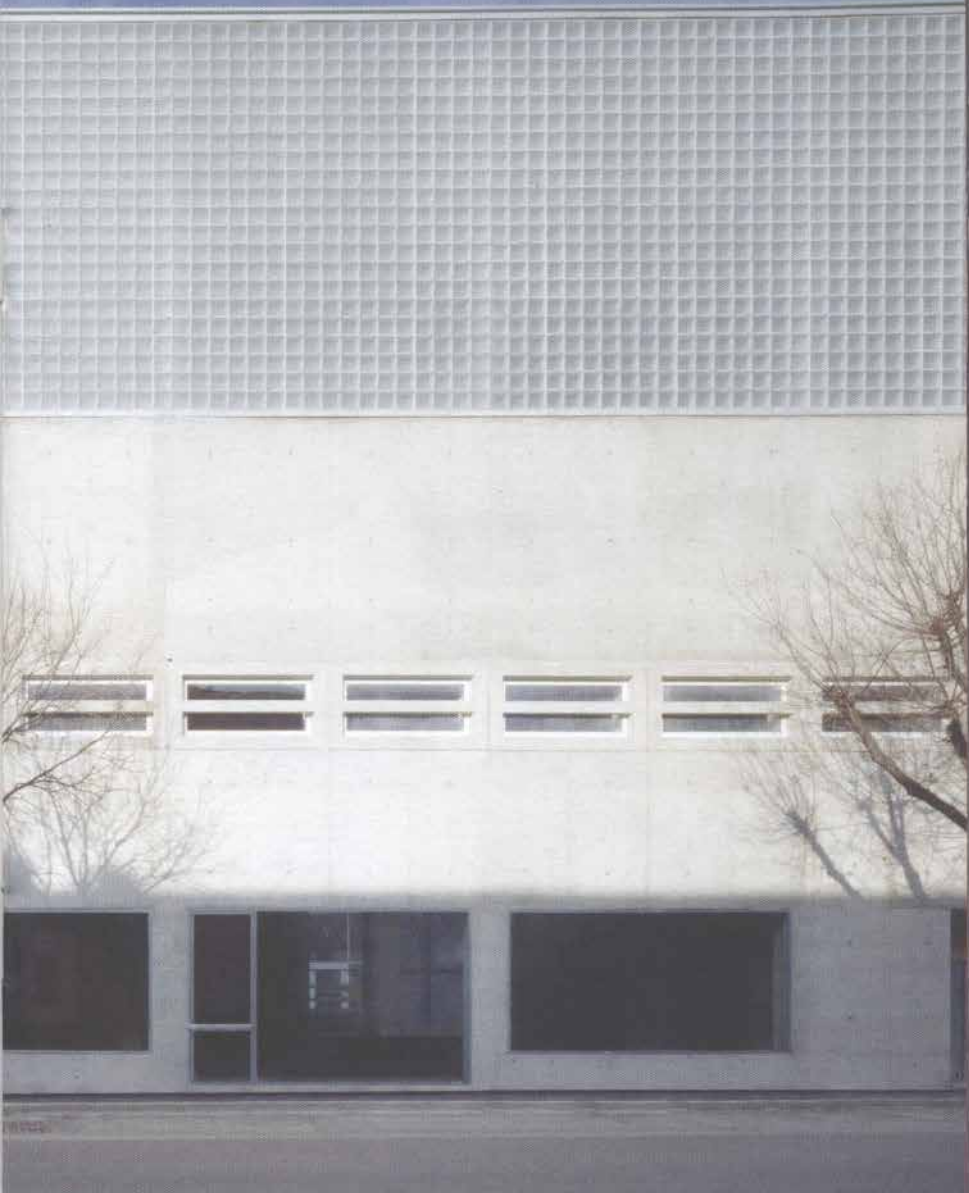
Opposite: Ponzano Primary
School © Pietro Savorelli

Above and below: *Feeling*
Contexts installed in the Keller
Gallery; Entrance to the 50th
Art Biennale in Venice © Pietro
Savorelli

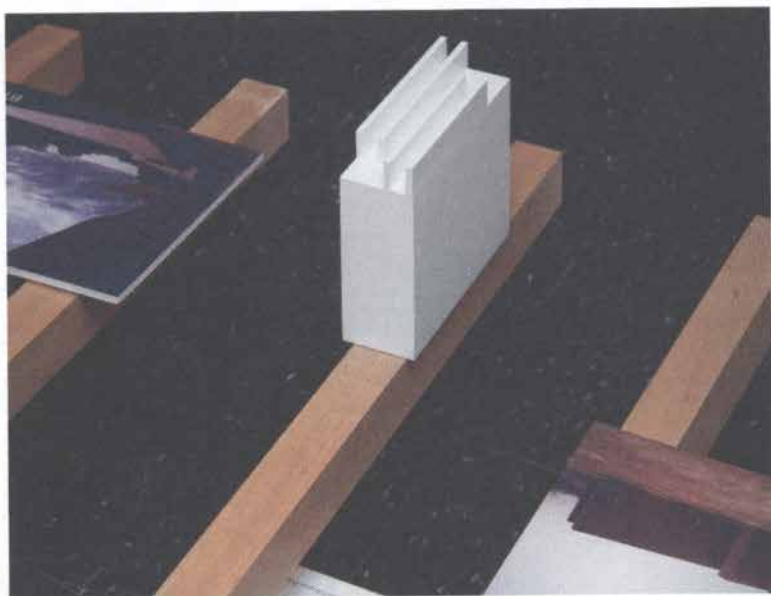






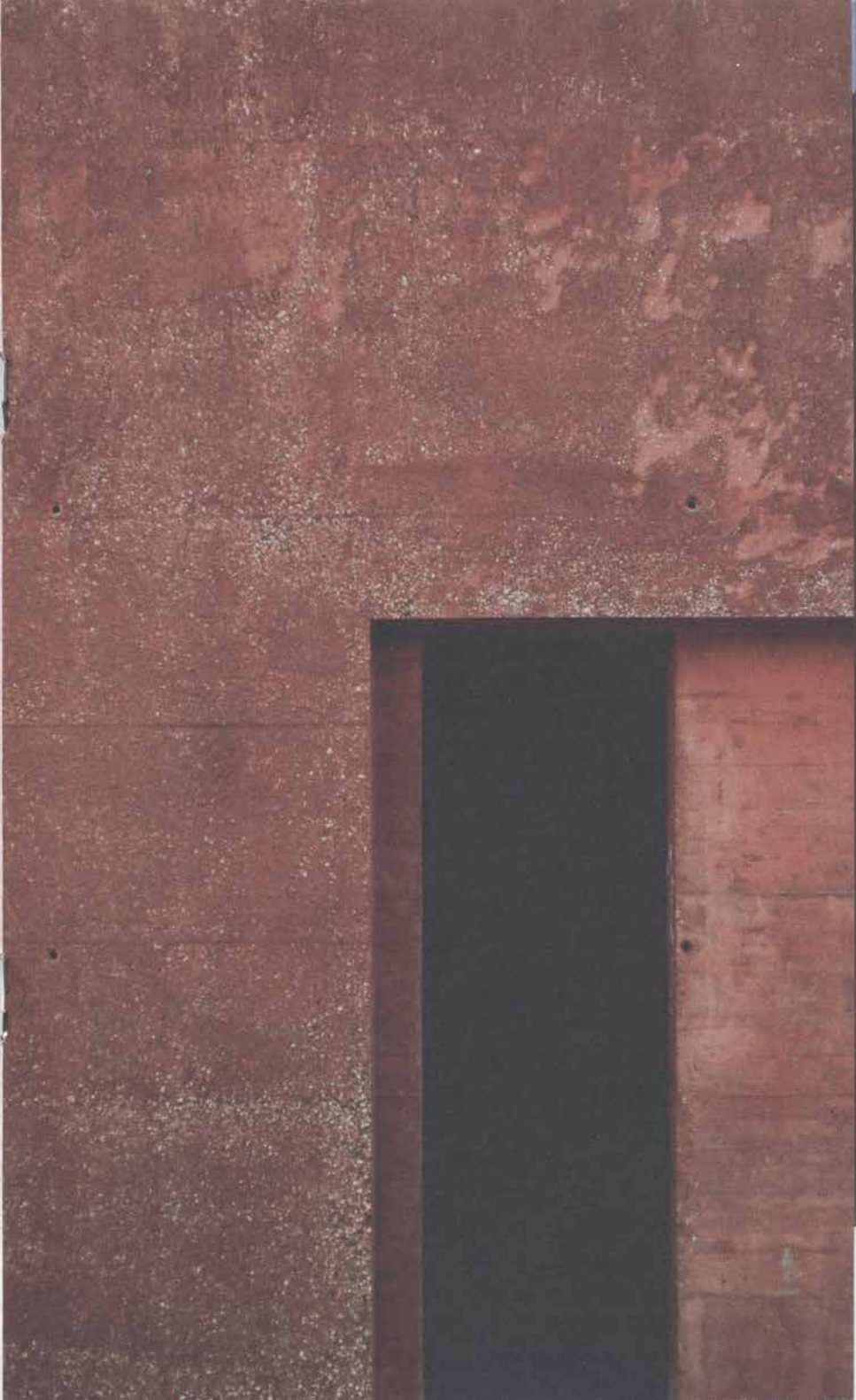


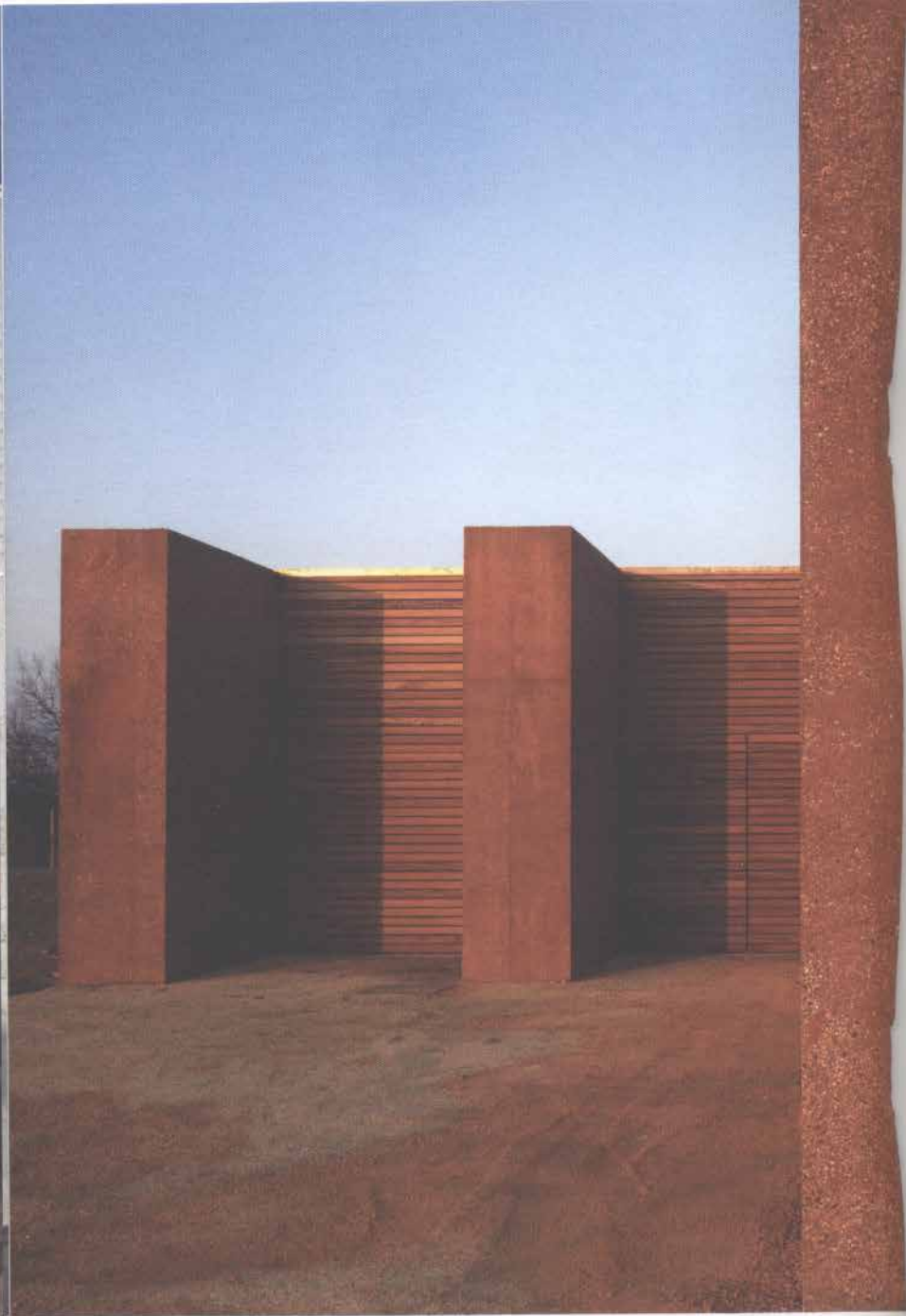
Above: Student Housing
Novoli © Marco Zanta



Above: *Feeling Contexts*
installed in the Keller Gallery

Opposite: Sant'Erasmus In-
frastructures, Water Filtration
Plant, concrete detail; Photo-
graph ©Pietro Savorelli



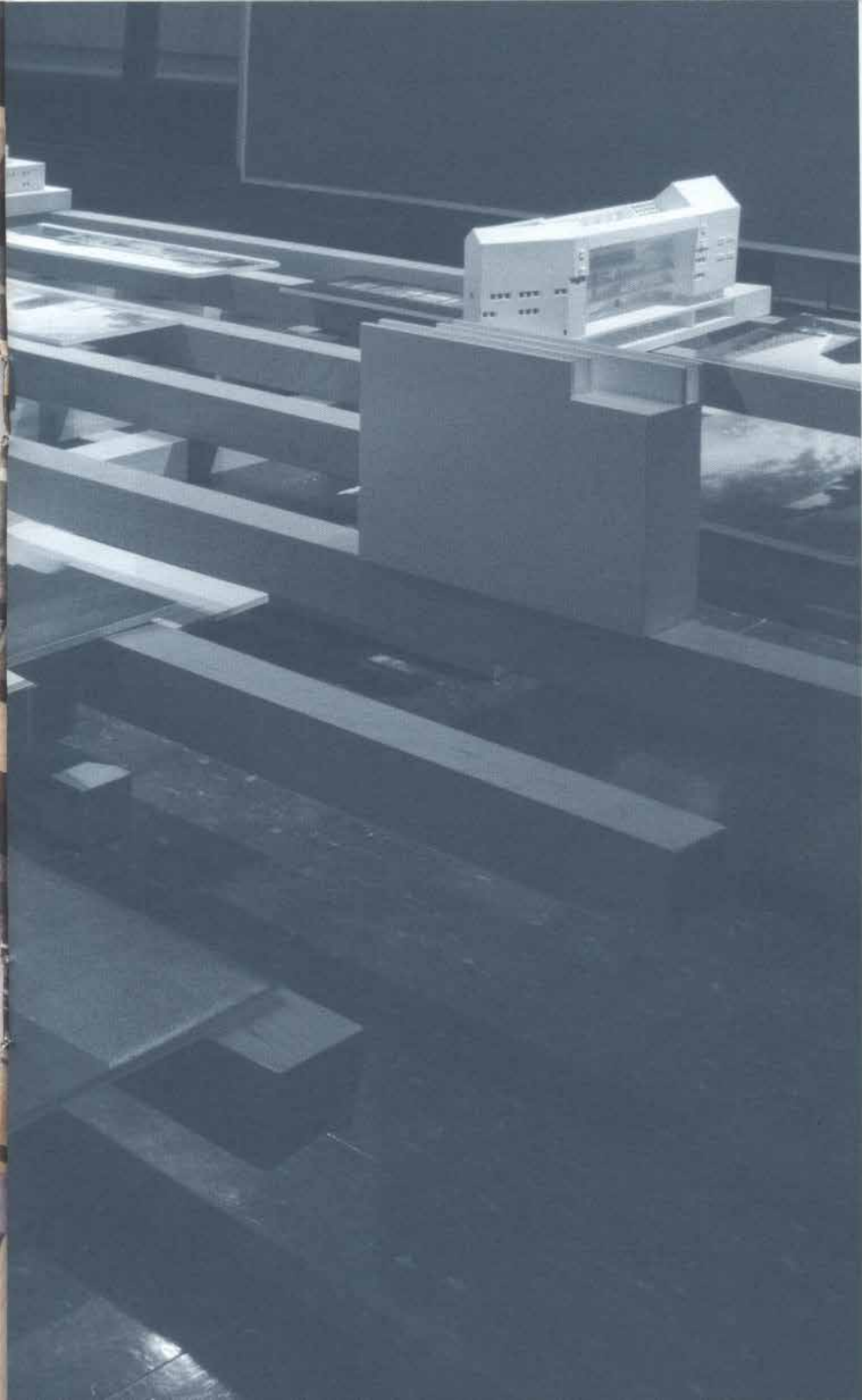




Above: Sant'Erasmus Infra-
structures, Water Filtration
Plant ©Pietro Savorelli

Following Spread: *Feeling
Contexts* installed in the Keller
Gallery





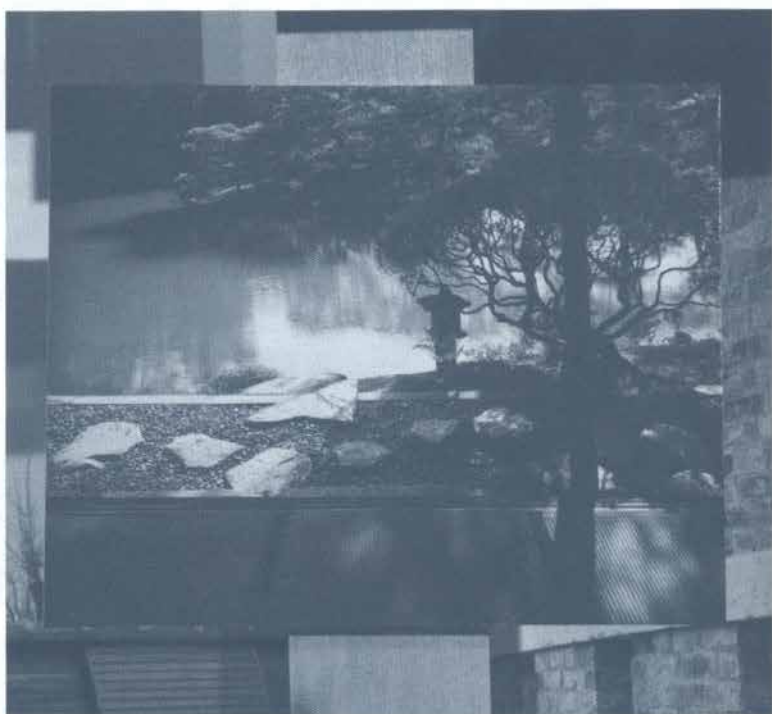


Above: *The Wave*. Entrance to
the 60th Venice Film Festival
© Marco Zanta

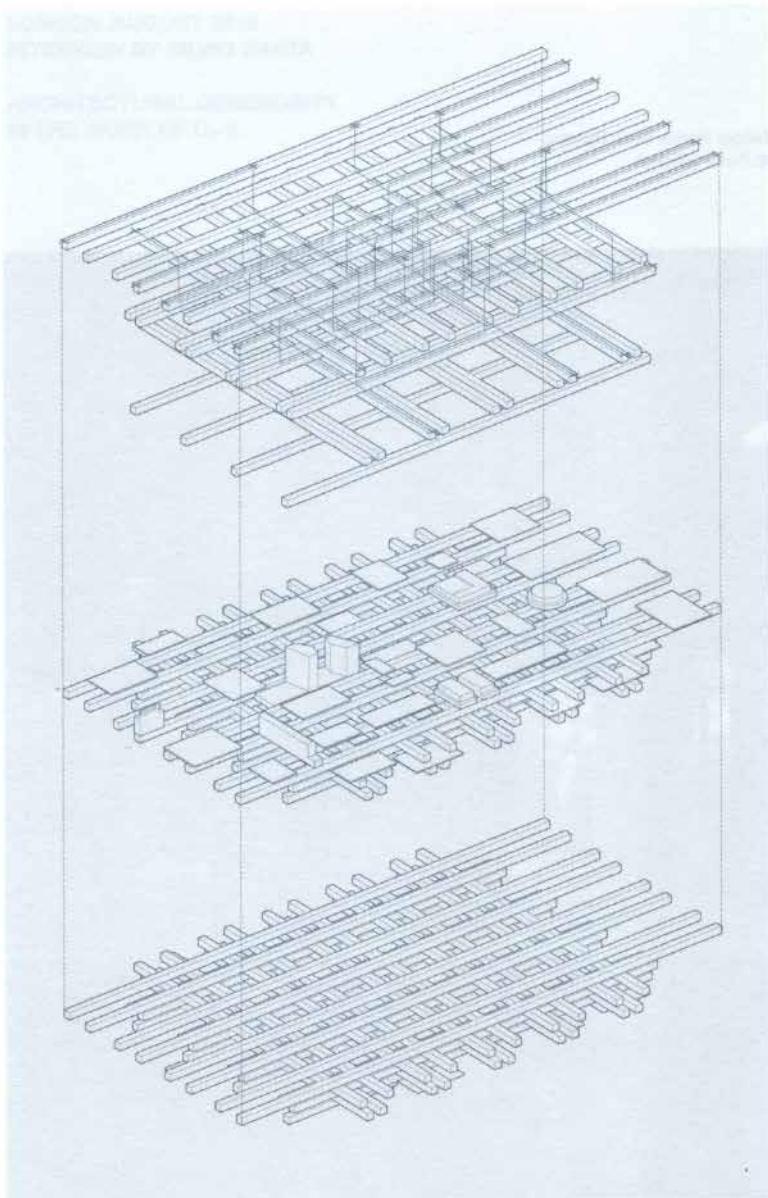
Opposite: *Feeling Contexts*
installed in the Keller Gallery

Next Spread, Left: *Feeling
Contexts* installed in the Keller
Gallery

Next Spread, Right: Axono-
metric diagrams of *Feeling
Contexts* installation



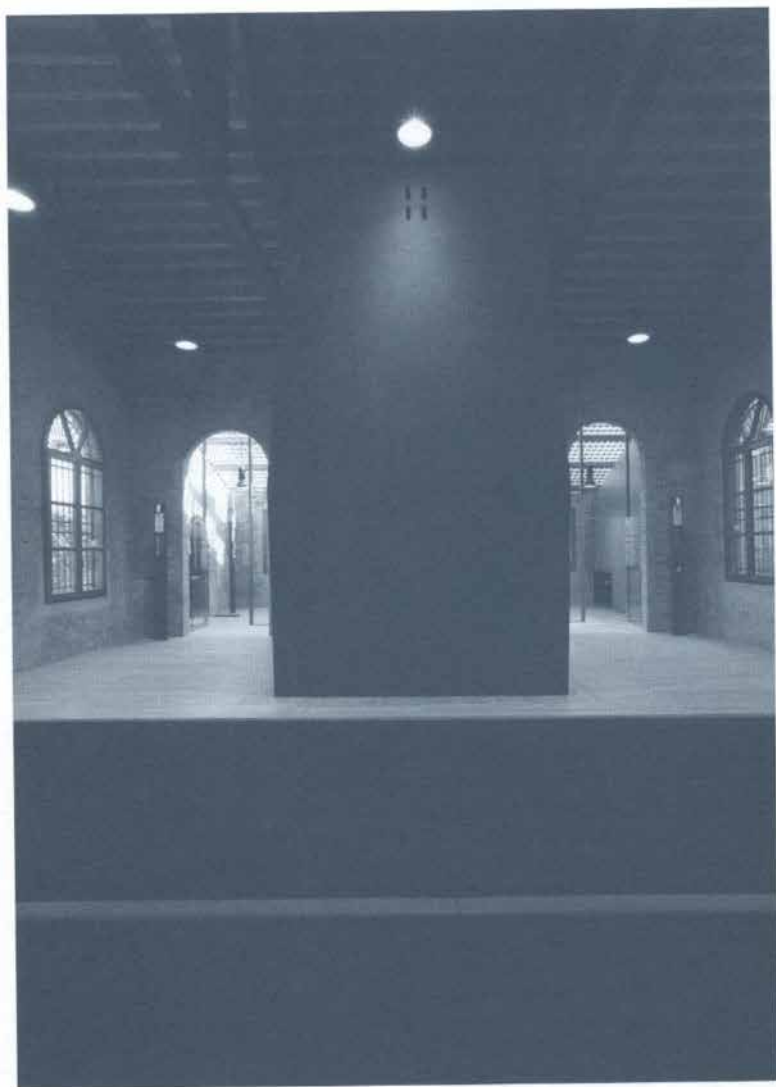




Opposite: *Feeling Contexts*
installed in the Keller Gallery

Above: Diagram showing
the relationship between the
frame and the 'pixels' laid
upon it.

Below: Harbor Brain Building
© Pietro Savorelli



ARCHITECTURAL GENEROSITY
IN THE WORK OF C+S

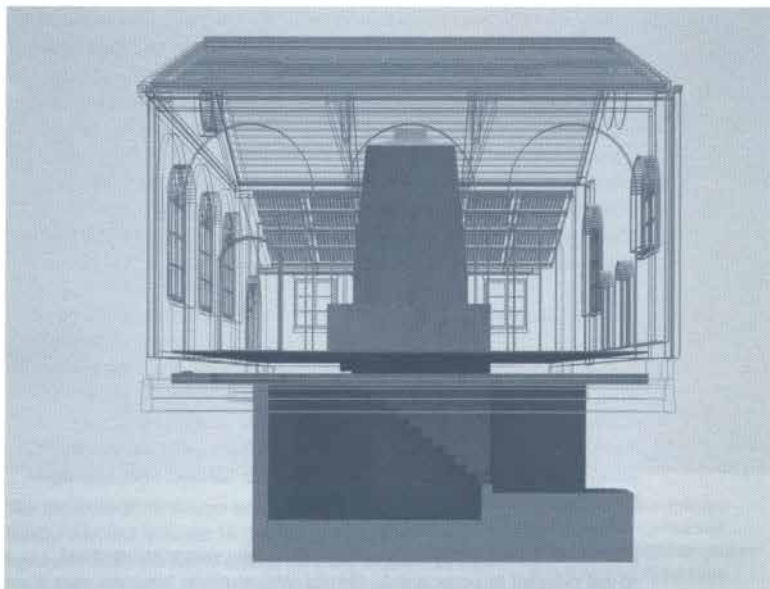
I. Architectural Generosity. The notion of architectural generosity has gradually emerged in the last decades as one of the possible alternatives to the rigid application of functionalist design principles inherited from the Modern period. Within the plethora of different approaches to contemporary design running away from ordered rules, the architectural generosity—intended as adding a surplus of physical space, program or use initially outside the requests of a built project—offers promising insights. In a broad sense, the generosity is generally employed as synonymous of abundance or extra, and it confers to the architect a positive role in the design process, where the users are given something unexpected. In the layman's vocabulary the term "generosity" is related to a human virtue of subjective interpretation, similar to magnanimity, kindness or altruism. However, in a more objective perspective, the architectural generosity can be framed in a more measurable way and several architects are nowadays employing it as a guiding principle in their design. Amongst others, main epitomes of such approach are Juhani Pallasmaa and Lacaton & Vassal's work.

In his essay "Artistic Generosity, Humility and Expression," the former depicts generosity as an encounter between the designer—with his/her own knowledge, experiences and system of values—and the final user, who should be able to feel the architect's message embedded in the physical space of walls, ceiling, materials, proportions or light. In Pallasmaa's idea of generosity, the building is left to "sail independently through time and human destiny." Instead, Lacaton & Vassal seem to address the notion of "plus d'usage" by grounding their design approach in two main aspects: the freedom of appropriation and the open structure of design. The first point consists in providing the users of the building with a certain amount of leeway by triggering their own ability to figure out possible ways of inhabiting the space. The architect's role is to provide the users with a basic living structure with a sufficient dose of indeterminacy for the users to complete and configure the space throughout time. The existence of a certain limit of their involvement in the design process is openly accepted by the French architects. "Generosity is not just 'more space', it is also accepting what people are going to do with the architecture; you have to accept appropriation" says Jean Philippe Vassal.

In this respect the work of C+S Architects may offer a specific and crucial contribution to this discussion. The projects they have realized since 1994 seem to have the common characteristics of expanding their resonance far beyond their physical boundaries. While both the definition of generosity of Pallasmaa and Lacaton & Vassal concentrate on the inside of the building, in the attempt to establish a direct engagement of the architectural elements with the user, C+S's seems to found indirect physical connections to other buildings or parts of the city through their use and the activity of people. With C+S's work, the notion of generosity may be augmented and—in a way—completed by the range of possible connections that an architectural project may establish with its context, cultural, social and the built environment altogether. On the urban level, the impact of buildings like Ponzano Primary School and Law-Court in Venice ramifies in both strictly physical and programmatic dimension. Their programs are nested within the structure of the city where they sit. C+S seems to achieve such level of relationship in two complementary ways. On the one hand, the design operates in collaboration with other part of the built environment, by providing room for extra-activities (see for example the housing master plan in Bassano) or serving as part of an overall program at a larger scale (think of Law Court in Venice and its function as a central hall for the entirely new Citadel of Justice). On the other hand, the internal characteristics of each project call for engagement by suggesting a continuous interaction with the buildings. The functions and the use of both internal and external spaces are often clearly indicated by their shape and proportions, but are not utterly defined. In such a margin of resolution, the user is called to activate a spontaneous process of interpretation, being called as main actor in the construction of a partial defined space. The following questions try to highlight and discuss C+S's position in respect to these points, with the broader idea of architectural generosity as a background.

SC In most of your projects a discrepancy seems to emerge between the initial bid and the final proposal from your side, indicating a possible variation of the strategy between the client's original idea and the architect's interpretation of the request. Could you elaborate on this point?

C+S In regard to program, we have to say that we had the opportunity to confront very different grades of openness. While experimenting with the restoration of a monument, in the Torre Massimiliana Museum project (TMM), where the program was open and it became one of the research topics of the design process, on the other hand, we have been coping with very tight briefs—when designing the school buildings in Italy, confronting very strict and bureaucratic Italian codes.



Above: Harbor Brain Building
© C+S Architects

Leaving aside the specificity of each case, we believe that programs (and sites) are never given and that one of the tasks of design is to find and offer to the users a certain degree of unexpected possibilities, which goes beyond the required program. This position is particularly evident in our school projects. In the projects of Ponzano Primary School (PPS) and of the Chiarano Primary School (CPS), both winning entries of international competitions. While carefully respecting the required brief, we added a certain degree of open program which allowed us to introduce the possibility of involving the whole community in the design process firstly, and then to focus on the activation of parts of the buildings to be open to the community after the school hours. To a certain degree this was hidden in the numbers we submitted. Doing this specific action in each of our projects, we refer to a concept borrowed from economics known as the “capability approach.”

According to Amartya Kumar Sen, the capability approach is a different criterion to measure actual well-being and ‘happiness’ — a measure of life quality and not just a result of goods and services as measured by the GDP.

Translating that into space making, we added value to the space itself, which is available for different activities and can be used beyond the

functions required by building codes. For example, the classrooms on the ground floor meet the minimum of required interior space, but it are expandable via a covered arcade, which allows to enlarge the space at will, with users moving outside even if it's raining. By working on the circulation design, we were able to open those more 'public' or special functions of the school building to the whole community after the school hours. Examples include the gymnasiums and some special classrooms such as the art rooms and the music rooms.

Another example is the entrance of the CPS. A big space, it is used for playtime in winter and turns into the children's public community library, to be open all day and after school hours. The corridors of both projects are larger than what is required from the codes and the classroom walls are glazed for more than fifty percent so they can be used as exhibition windows. All the classrooms' walls are turned into storage-boards, wardrobes or pegs.

SC The elaboration of the building program seems to be crucial in your work. Could you explain how do you normally proceed in developing your design strategy in this regard? What novelty have you introduced and why? And, with what results?

C+S To answer to your question, we need to refer to what we believe is the role of the school building in the contemporary city and society. It can be argued that schools are usually considered from the inside: mainly as functional buildings made up of repetitive spatial modules, functional and conservative, to the more glamorous and attractive building typologies, which fill the architecture magazines and websites. To design a school is usually to cope with very restrictive requirements, a tight budget, a specific functional brief and a noisy population always trying to transform and put the space into a real mess. We interrogate the design approach, which typically respond through conventional technical solutions for the current crisis—the re-invention of public spaces, among them school buildings, which can be seen, instead as a great opportunity for innovative horizons within the design disciplines.

As architects and scholars, we recognize the political role of small public spaces in the urban realm, where design is avoids the production of independently standing objects (such as with shopping malls, or 'cathedrals of consumerism' and museums of 'cathedrals of culture'—which although privatized, are considered the new public arenas of society. Innovative reconsideration of the role of school buildings within the urban realm of community can provoke different ways of reinventing the present and of planting seeds for a better future. In this view, school buildings act as great political mediums.



We believe that these small buildings—punctually vibrant events in the grey of urban sprawl—can be reinvented as new nodes in the liquid modernity of connections. The search for medium scale but heightened interventions to become 'nodes' in the territory of the sprawl, which characterizes a new form of 'horizontal metropolis' (borrowed from Bernardo Secchi's) inspired our investigation of the role of contemporary school buildings. Such buildings are a matter of interest for a series of different reasons:

Schools are small and dispersed: they follow a sprawl logic but their presence is compulsory in relationship to the minimal required distance of the inhabitants;

Their program looks very specific but instead needs to be rethought as open;

Schools are spaces where a multi-cultural experience is compulsory but also happens naturally. (A non-measurable resource, this cultural experience contributes to overall community happiness);

Schools are familiar, small in scale, easily accessible and vibrant. (The latter is a crucial point if we consider the grey city of dispersion);

Schools are usually low-budget buildings, making them affordable during moments of economic crises;

Above: Chiarano Primary School entrance hall with suspended botanical garden that functions like a large clerestory; Photograph ©Ales-sandra Bello

Schools can be considered 'seed spaces', places where future citizens are molded.

In general, the compulsory use of the school building generates a misunderstanding about its programmatic possibilities. Moreover, the lack of resources generated by economic crisis is pushing the search of different applications of local resources (both human and economic), which can convert into new forms of experimentation for these buildings when built and used by the community beyond the school hours. Some very interesting contemporary experimentations, such as those of Kerè or Herringer, involve the community as early as during construction, while other examples create events and expectations around these new community centers, turning the city and its buildings into frames to be filled by activities that grow beyond the very initial and specific functions.

In all of our school projects we worked with the community: through theater, storytelling or by mapping people's expectations. These events have not only the aim to get in touch with the living context, but to affect people directly through the grafting of the memory of this place.

As a result, our Covolo Nursery School has become a community center. During weekends, families use the central 'square' to meet, cook, and invent ways of sharing experiences guided by the younger population.

SC A very crucial aspect of your design approach is grounded in its ramification in a larger context. What are the connections (direct and indirect) that your projects establish with their surroundings at the scale of the region and the city?

C+S For us, the connection with the surrounding region and city is what matters most. And we work with this topic with very different perspectives. In the master planned Housing in Bassano—the winning entry of a short-listed competition—both the site and the program were given. We were required to design a housing and offices complex on a site on the boundary of the railway station. From the very first sketch, our different perspective was to look at the un-built rather than at the buildings. By mapping the existing green spaces of the city, we discovered that the given site was already part of an informal 'smart loop.' This loop only needed to be formalized through the design of a pedestrian and bike path running through the new park. The loop was intertwined with the historic walls of the city, broadening the conventional 'idea of the Italian historic city' to a contemporary perspective. The new buildings became unfolded volumes following the design of the park. Doing this we changed the core of the project and we were able to return value back to the citizens of Bassano, in the form of a new green space, which satisfied the community as well as the client.

In the Urban Lake Housing project, the special location of the complex—between two sectionally divided parts of the city and the lake—pushed us to design an urban path/bridge, which turned the site into a space of urban connection where the housing complex becomes the setting of a new public space, unfolding and restructuring the edge of the lake. Again, a new stone-paved public space, though privately owned and maintained, is given back to the citizens of Pordenone.

For the Masterplan of San Marco, an ex-military site, the huge void space was located at the entrance of the city. Going beyond what was required by the competition brief, we decided to compress the housing to one corner of the site and to leave the rest empty, submerging a new 350-space car garage. By removing the parking from the surface, the area became a potential hub where normally the parking garage is used for the city, but in special cases, the area can serve a regional activity of larger events, such as concerts, fairs or others to be invented. To keep the area free (it was previously used as a parking lot), we proposed to work with the materiality of the place and paved the whole void with the local big stones of the Piave River, which can easily be removed in accordance to the use of the public space. This action helped us to introduce another important and non-measurable value, which is connected with materiality and light and refers to what we call the 'memory' of the place.

Working on the materiality of the place, in Sant'Erasmo Island, the design of the infrastructures, which usually takes on the form of a technological buildings, was turned into landscape design. The brief called to preserve the island from high tide. Working with the potential of the place, we directed the choices also initiated changes in the urban planning codes. With a declining role within the broader system of the Venice Lagoon (for a century the island functioned that the vegetable garden of the area), Sant'Erasmo island was rich with cultural capital, to be preserved and reinvented through infrastructure redevelopment and an nodal series of interventions: accessibility (docks), nets (streets, canals and systems), gateways (terminals), technological buildings together with parks, public spaces, monumental and technological and terminal buildings resulting from the potentials of the place. The economic landscape of the island, where there was no expectation of growth as farmers still continued small scale, family farming and watched the decline of historical significant sites, pushed us to reconsider the systems of accessibility. Working to protect the city from potentially damaging high tides, our design binds together the given and the potential open programs, to promote tourism through art, sports, camping, special tourism, wineries, fishing ponds.

SC It seems that you tailor a different strategy for each place you are asked to work in. Do you follow a general principle from which your punctual design strategies stem from? Or, in other words, have you generalized your design strategy into some form of tenet?

C+S Operating in translated landscapes, our research looks critically at the potentials of context. Each project is interfering in the aim to unpack the complexities of the environment through architecture: a process that we term TranslationArchitecture™.

We believe that architects are the translators of the contexts. Edouard Glissant writes that the translator necessarily invents a language, which is common between two different idioms but is in some way unpredictable for both. The architect acts similarly, choosing the context to translate and presenting it in another form and time through the invention of a language that is both necessary and unforeseeable. TranslationArchitecture™ is a contemporary, continuous, and vital transformation of context. Against both the imitation of the past and the temptation of the odd and spectacular, TranslationArchitecture™ enables a contemporary, as well as continuous and vital form of transformation of contexts.

SC In which way the notion of translation resonates to the physical forms of your buildings?

C+S We work and play with the word "adapt" to signify a physical configuration of a translation. The word is composed of two syllables: 'ad' and 'apt'. We interpret apt as a soft technological element, an infrastructure necessary for a dialogue between incompatible systems.

This allows connections and creates understanding without threatening the identity of each system. 'Ad' is understood as both an addition and an advertisement, related to communication and manipulation. In Sant'Erasmo Island we added a series of 'adapters': hybrid buildings which are physical translations, which capture the materiality of the place and act as interferences in the landscapes, adding infrastructure to the island connecting it to contemporary form and time.

SC Could you make a concrete example of adaptors in your work?

C+S The adapters in Sant'Erasmo are the 'contemporary embankment' added to the existing complex of the Torre Massimiliana Museum. This is a new 'silent' building, designed by earth and wood, which houses all the technological devices (systems, heating, toilets, air treatment devices) to make the 19th century military monument of the Torre Massimiliana work as a contemporary museum. The larch board facade of the building is a translation of the service buildings

in Sant'Erasmo and of the buildings in the lagoon, which were historically built in wood. Other adapters are the new wooden docks, introduced to regain the strict connection between earth and water, which is the DNA of the Venetian Lagoon.

The WFP is a large scale adapter, necessary to provide the islands of Sant'Erasmo and Burano with purified water. Another 'adapter' was introduced in the adaptive reuse of a 19th century space in the Venetian Arsenale. The Harbor Brain Building, will become the harbor station to control the dock openings after the completion of the MOSE project. A shell of corten steel is designed inside the square space of the original existing teza of the Arsenale, after demolishing the internal partitions. Inside the shell all the technological and terminal installations are compressed, bridging the 19th century space to contemporary use. A part of the roof becomes a contemporary 'lantern of light' made of photovoltaic cells (a first time for an adaptive reuse project in Venice) which work as energy producers for the Harbor Brain Building, playing with the lights and the shadows of the existing space but using the most sophisticated technological devices of sustainable architecture.

This technological solution, more than being an opposing and foreign object inside the existing space, is the translation of the space into a simultaneous molding of matter, materials, colors, light. Changing the effect of the experience in the building every single moment of the day, it activates the building through a soft technological 'adapter'. Design is about time more than space. Borrowing Haroldo and Augusto De Campos' idea of translation studies, our TranslationArchitecture™ is comparable to an act of respect and of nutrition, which absorbs the properties of the text and the words (materials) in a way which is very similar to that of Benjamin/Derrida, for whom translation is a vital force necessary to the survival of a text. In this sense the translation/design gets rid of the sense of loss (we always lose something when practicing design) and becomes an act of joy and pleasure, re-contextualizing signs, bridging them into different time-scapes.

The Harbor Brain Building is a device which changes every single moment of the day according to light and climate condition and activates the building. The interior glazed partitions, while supporting the different programs, are able to maintain the perception of the space as a whole, thanks to the specific detailed design of wood reinforced with an invisible metal skeleton which has the effect of reducing the necessary thickness of the wood. The glazed surfaces bounce the light reflections multiplying the effects and acquiring the 'tonality' of the Venetian landscape.

SC In the Venice Law Court offices you designed a building that connects to other buildings, reaching a quite large area by only operating with use and program. How did

you conceive and control the implementation of such an idea? Have you employed diagrams, texts, schemes, physical models in order to formalize such complex functions in your work?

C+S In fact we did not only focus on use and program. When speaking of the Venice Law Court, we like to describe it as the adapter between programs, scales, typologies, and—from a broader perspective—between historical memory and the contemporary. While its scale is based on the huge void of Piazzale Roma, the automobile entrance to the city, and the Grand Canal, spanned by the Santiago Calatrava-designed bridge on the opposite side of the plaza, the Venice Law Court grafts the complex Venetian urban system facing the same plaza.

The new program proposes a hybrid typology: building, housing the law-court offices; infrastructure, housing the technological systems that, going against the competition brief, were given visibility and form on the top of the Venice Law Court, instead of being dug underground and that, though only concentrated inside the The Venice Law Court, will in fact, serve the whole ex-tobacco factory urban complex, on completion. The piazza, a seven-story public entrance hall for the new system of public spaces, returned to the city after the completion of the restoration process, is still under construction. The introduction of a five-foot-thick technical atrium between the facade and the interior allowed us to work with light, which in Venice is always diffused by water.

Through a soft technical solution, whereby the external perforations are splayed into more generous windows on the interior, the seven-storey atrium space changes with every moment's light and climatic conditions, activating the building as much as the people. The interior space, while supporting the different programs, maintains the perception of a 'teza,' a typical Venetian void space included between two parallel structural walls and covered by a pitched roof. The Venetian teza can be described as a stereometric simple volume inside which the void space is at disposal to be activated by the most different uses: production, housing, storage, boat parking, just to quote the main ones. The typological and scalar manipulation follows that of the program. Settled at the end of a series of existing 19th-century tezas, which face Piazzale Roma, the simple and compact shape of the new volume is a distorted, contemporary teza, which connects the scale of the multi-story parking garages to the smaller-scale urban texture. Firstly we added a new teza, which then was stretched in length and height, while cutting it transversally on two directions to graft it in the thin space left between the series of 19th century buildings and the parking garages. On the Piazzale Roma, the volume does not touch the ground. A 16-foot cantilever draws pedestrians inside and becomes a counterpoint to the Calatrava bridge, connecting

the regained industrial site to the Grand Canal. The building is clad in pre-oxidized copper, which in Venice distinguishes institutional buildings. Through this modification of the materiality of the building, we investigate, and instigate, the action of time in architecture. We don't know if, when, and how the oxidation process will turn the building into the green color of the vaults, which punctuate the Venetian horizon. The building is turned into a big roof—a translation suspended between the historical and the contemporary.

SC The Different Scales. If your design approach (to provide an "extra") remains the same regardless of building typology, what does it change when you pass from the scale of the school to the one of the master plan? What physical characteristics are modified?

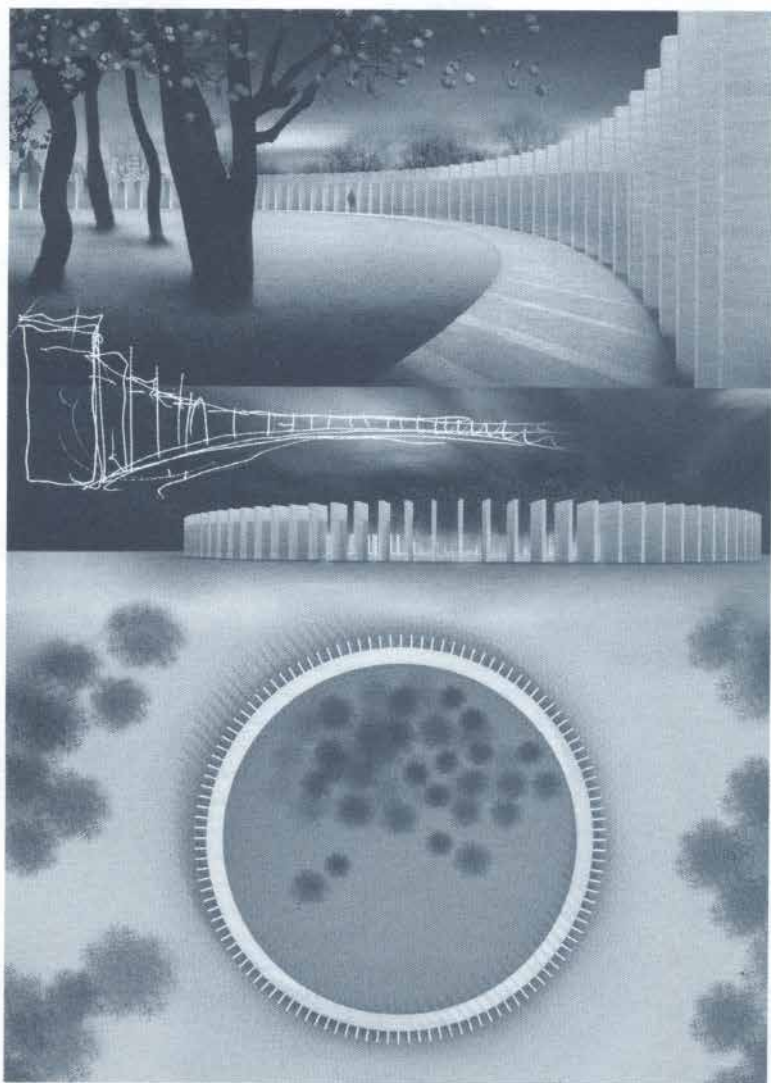
C+S With regard to our master plan projects, we work more with the void spaces than with the built parts. With this perspective, it's easy and very challenging to consider the certain degree of public space that is present in each project, no matter of its scale. We then like to reconsider and give form to the program of a school building around the void space of a courtyard or of a central plaza, which becomes the core of the project, while the classrooms are turned into a backdrop. This concept is very simple when we work on the master plans as the public space always becomes the backbone for the development. We stressed it in a more radical way when working on housing.

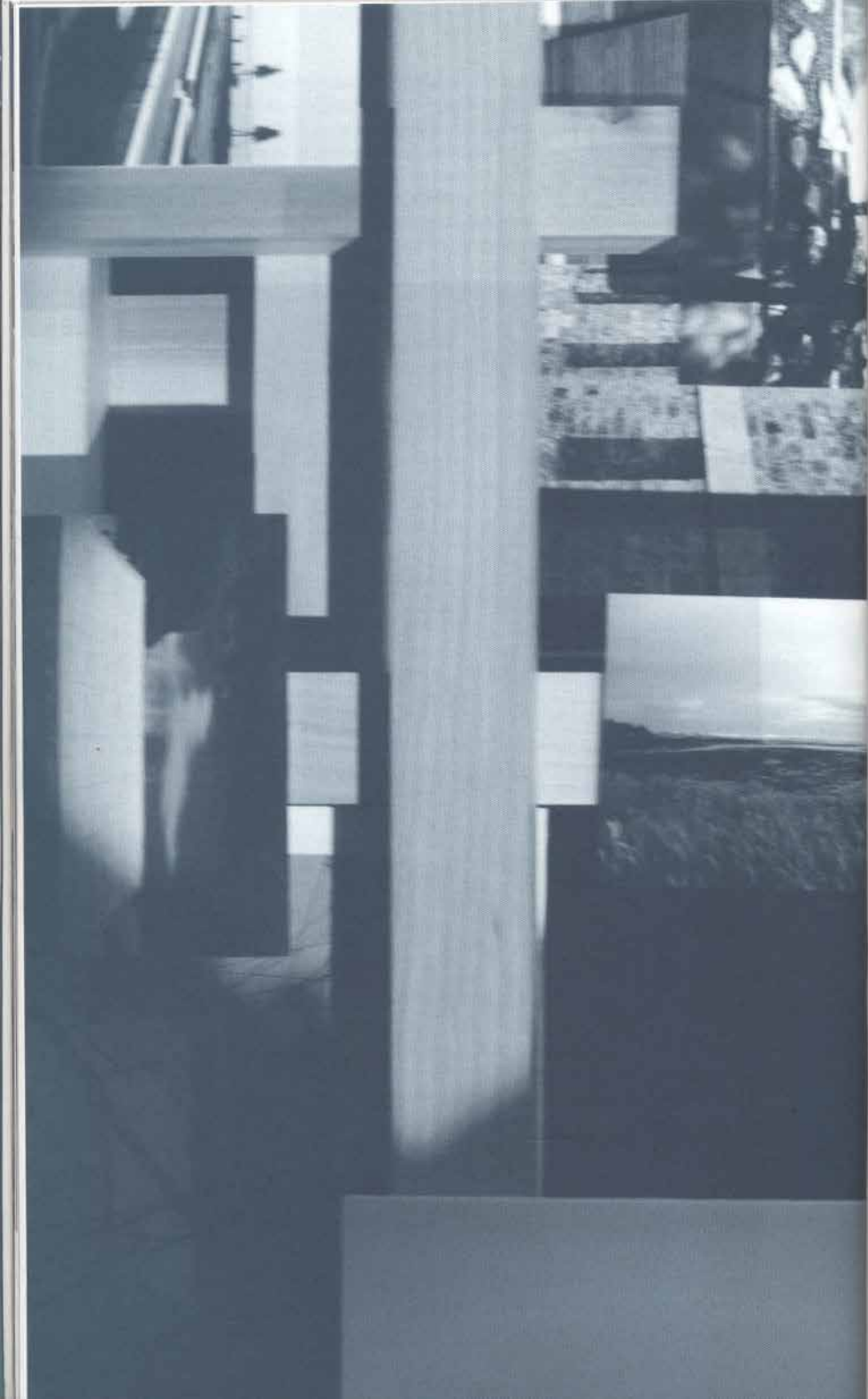
What is clear and simple with the typologies of student housing and senior housing is the compression of the privately owned space (substantially little more than a bedroom) in favor of a larger shared and so public space. Evidence for this argument was made clear in Segantini's book on Contemporary Housing. In our Student Housing in Novoli, a huge part of the volume is available not only for the students inhabiting the dormitory, but for the entire community, who can eat in the canteen or study in the studying rooms, without any control. With the economic crises, when sharing becomes a master-word, we believe and have worked to reduce the privately-owned spaces in favor of space and time-sharing between inhabitants of a specific housing complex. Again, looking at these radical solutions only in terms of numbers, one could consider this suggestion a loss. Some non measurable values need to be introduced, those related to sharing helping and taking care of each others, which to us are fundamental to contribute to happiness.

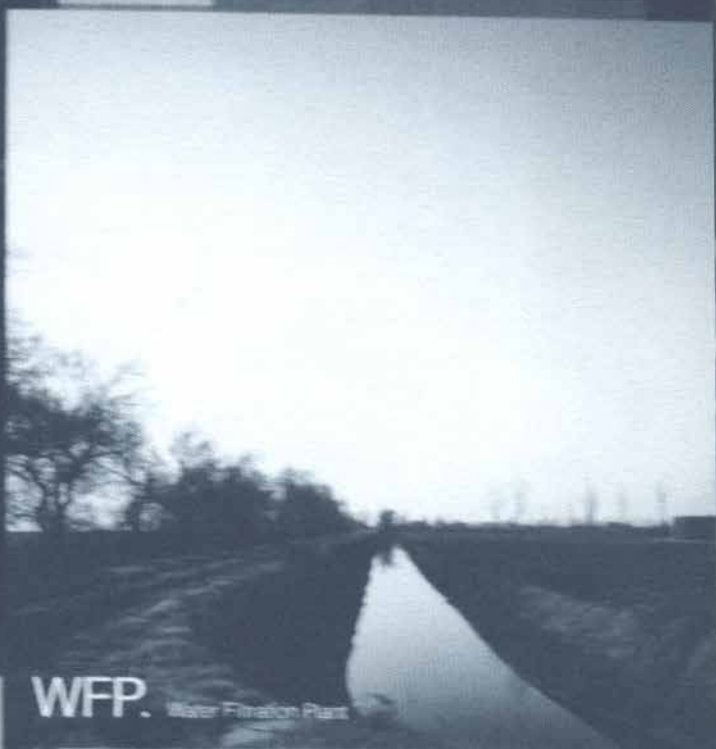
Opposite: Peace Memorial
Monument © C+S Architects

SC How do you think your work is contributing to a step forward in rethinking not only the spaces we live, but also the design approach we use?

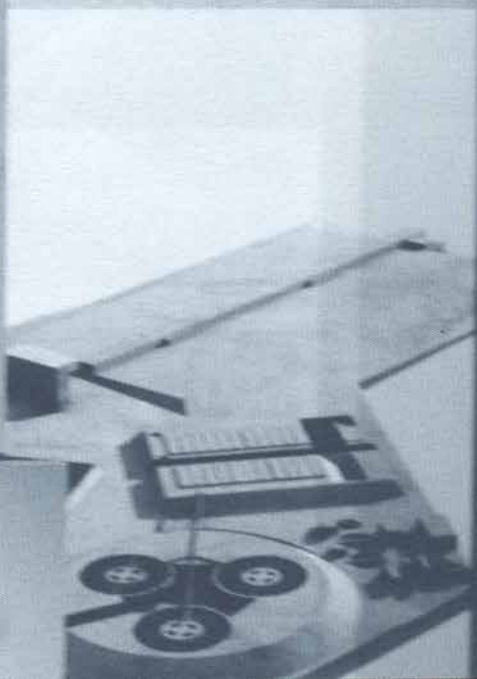
C+S We want to be provocative and argue that we need to rethink our design approach in terms of economic efficiency through critical thinking. What inspires us is to go beyond the conventional, where efficiency is just an answer to given data. Confronting every day with the notion of instability, especially in financial terms, efficiency has to be turned into 'efficacy' and here we need to recall the French philosopher François Jullien, whose work confronts efficacy in the Western and the Eastern ways of thinking. The latter is based on the evaluation of the potentials and the action, when happening, more than an imposition is an exploitation of these same potentials. In this sense, the process is central in a world that considers transformations to be more than a series of actions. With this approach, the idea of leaving the project a certain degree openness becomes naturally connected to the concept of potentiality. The renewed interest of citizens asking to participate in the city transformations and the so-called bottom-up approaches, which are so popular today, are a natural consequence within these premises. And for these same reasons, we believe that the role of the architect as a scene director of these changing processes is becoming more and more relevant.

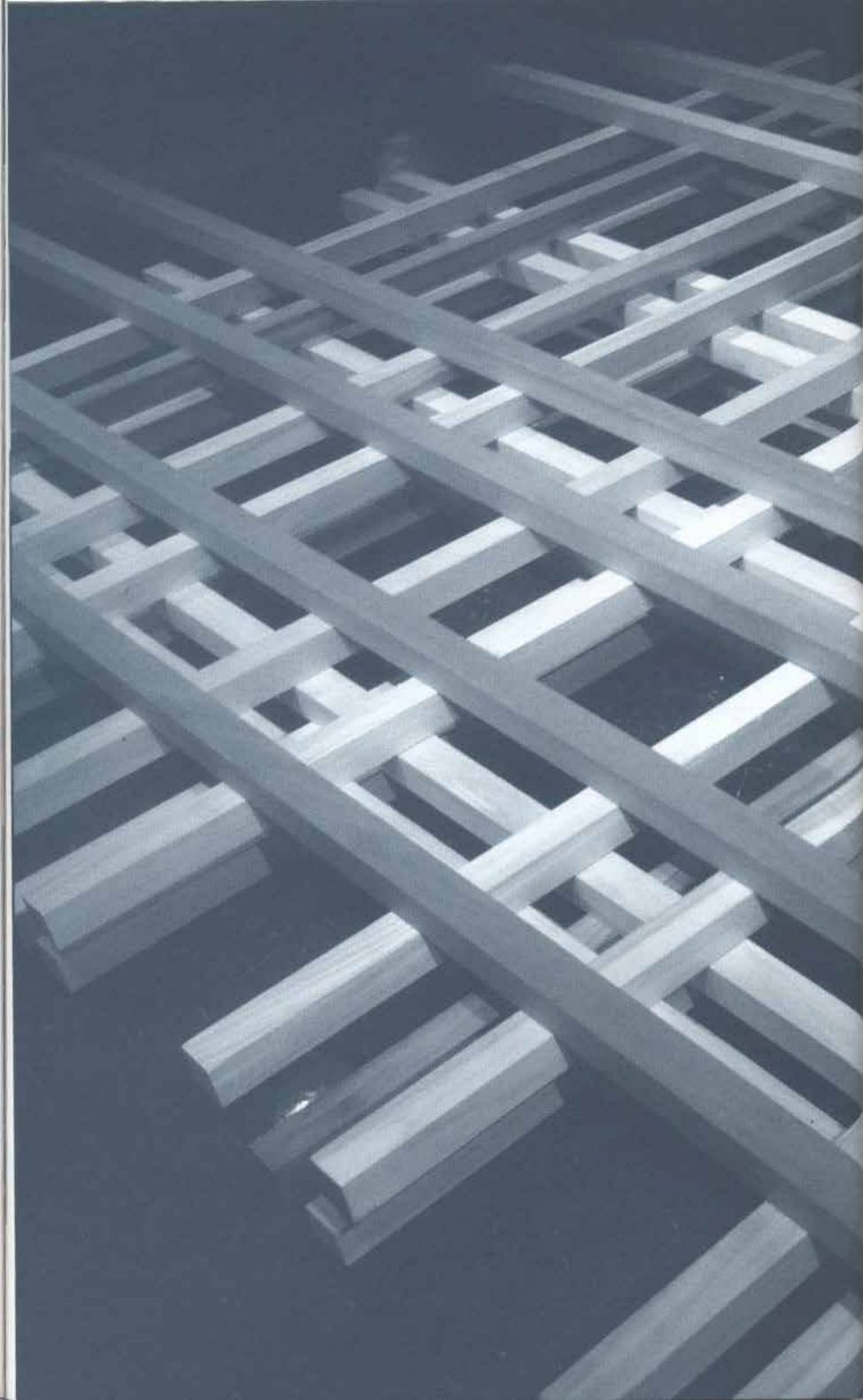


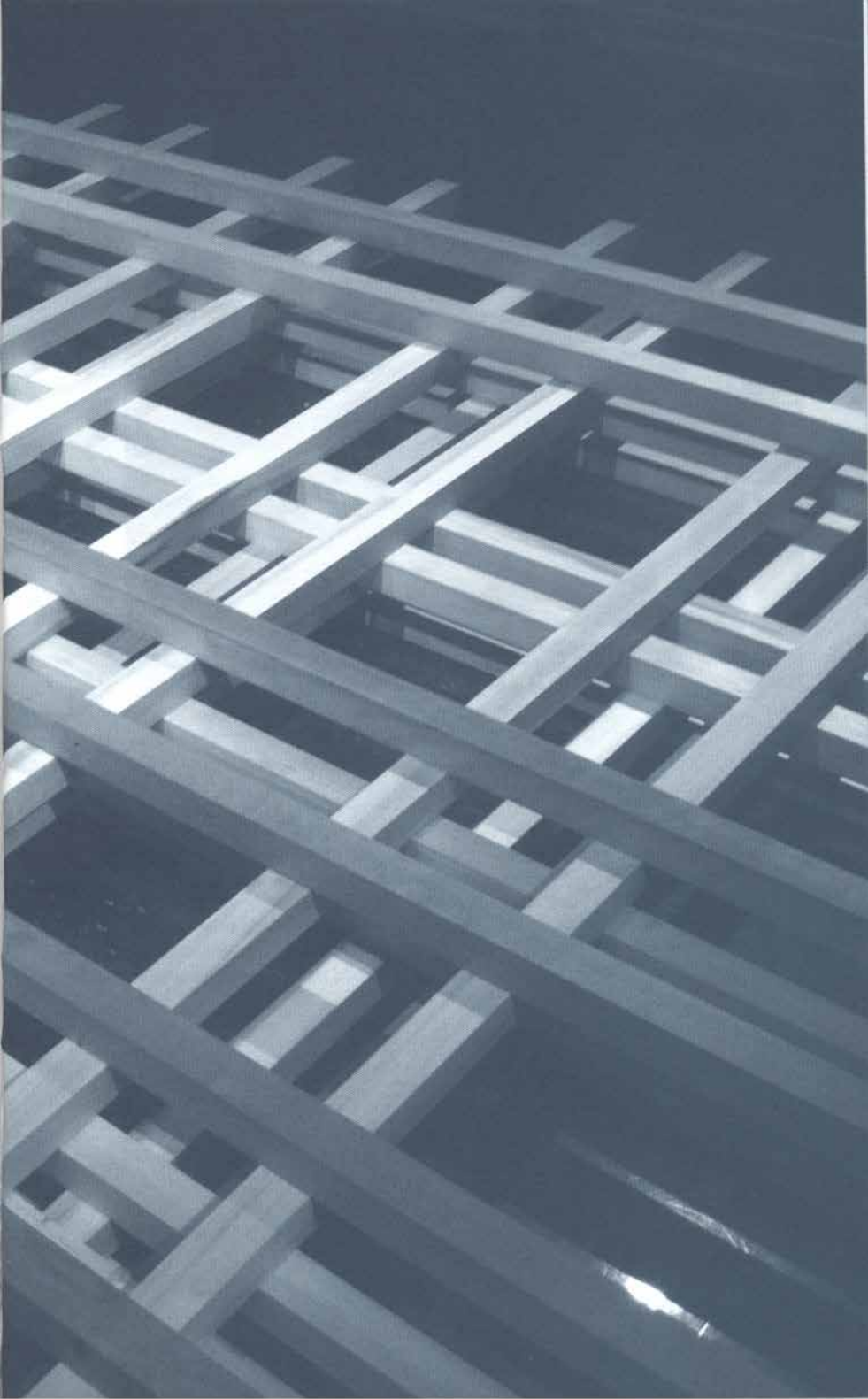




WFP. Water Filtration Plant









Carlo Cappai and Maria Alessandra Segantini are principals of C+S Architects based in Treviso, Italy. They obtained an Awarded Master Degree in Architecture at the University of Architecture of Venice in 1991.

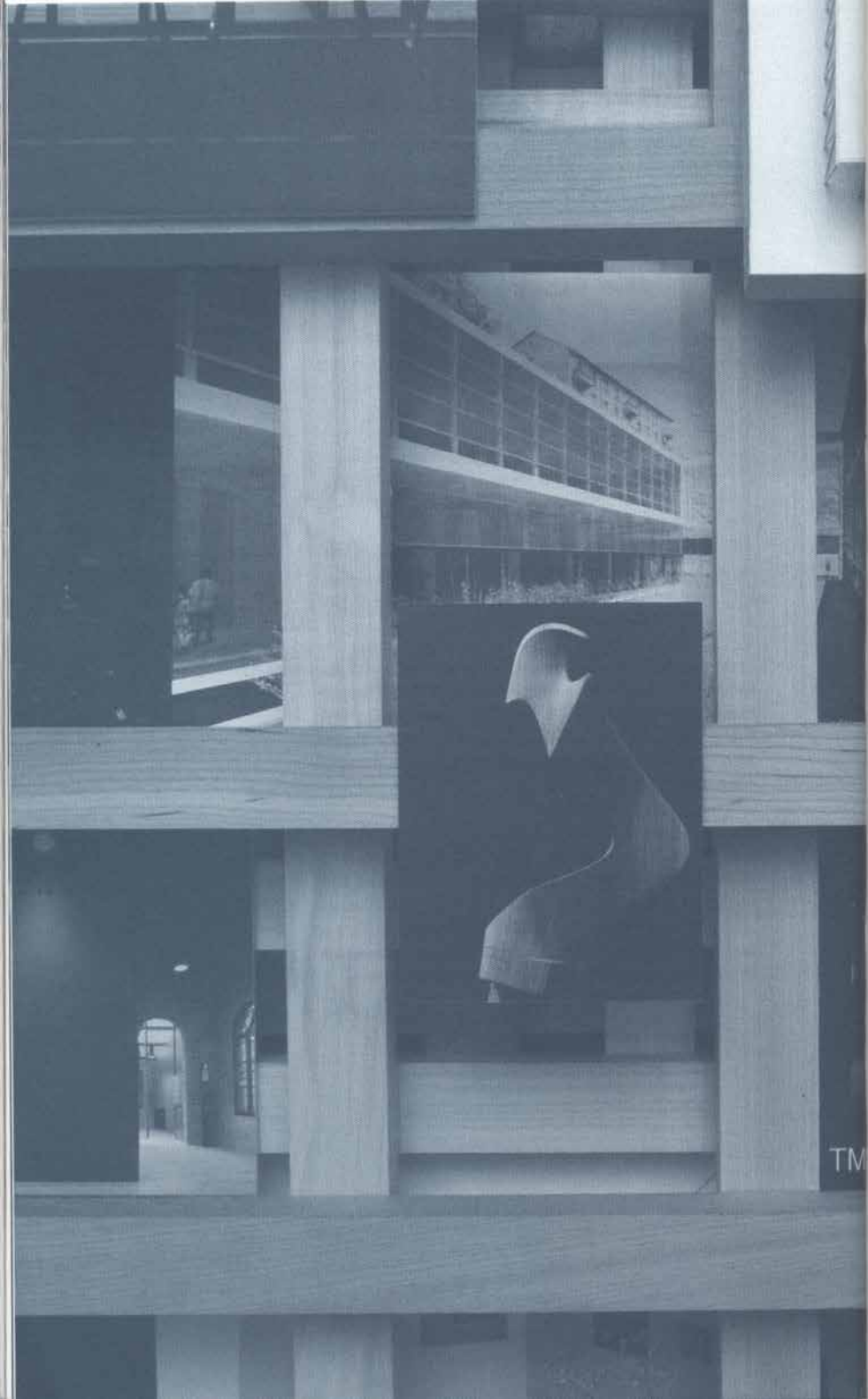
They have lectured internationally and have been visiting professors in several universities among which are the School of Architecture & Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Syracuse University, School of Architecture, New York, the Universities of Architecture of Venice and Ferrara in Italy, the Hasselt School of Architecture in Belgium, and the University of East London, UK.

Their work has been awarded the Special Prize, Gold Medal of Italian Architecture 2012, a Selection Award in the European Mies van der Rohe Prize for 2009, the SFIDE 2009 Prize of the Italian Ministry of Landscape and Environment, among others.

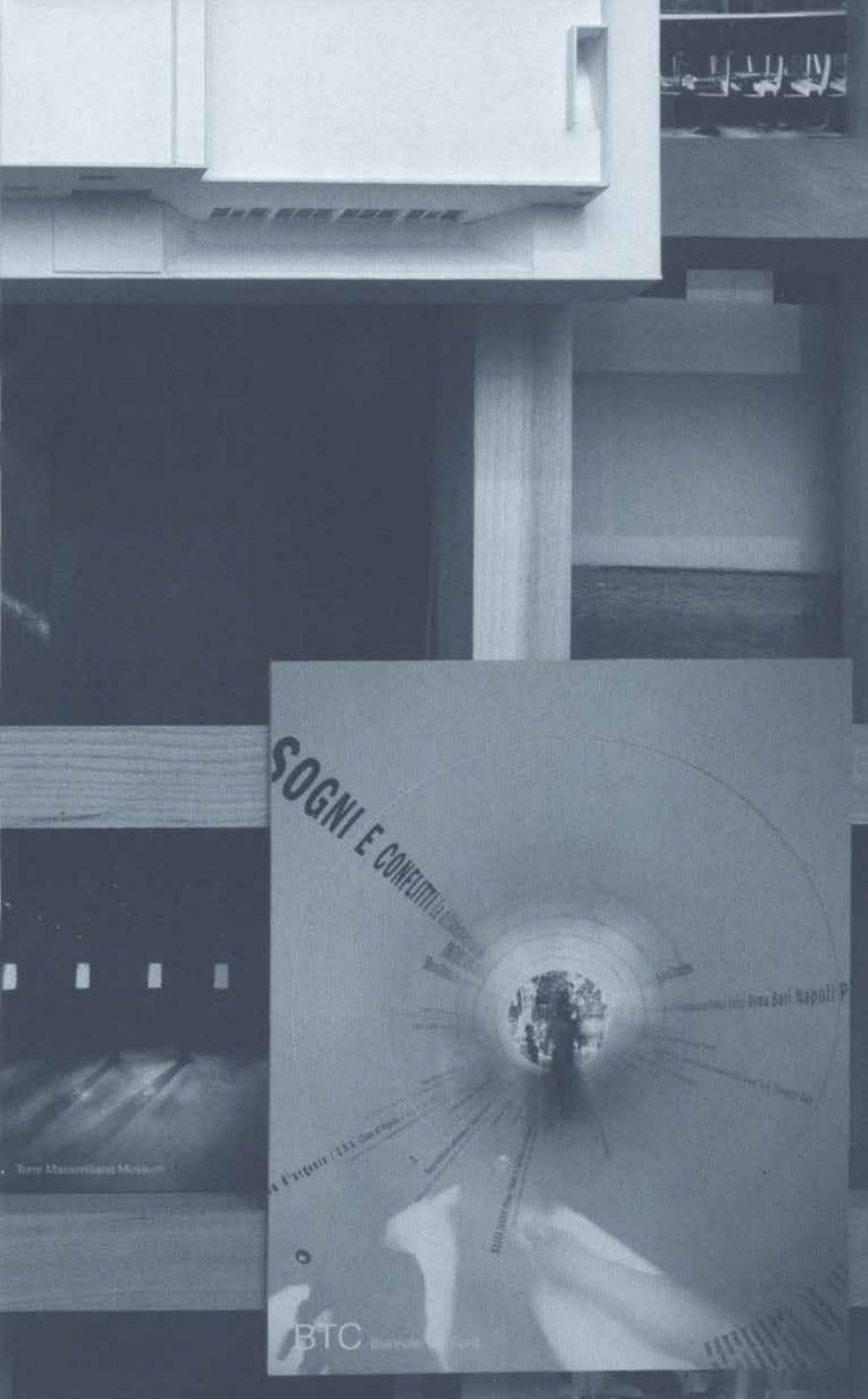
C+S works have been published internationally and exhibited in the 8th, 12th and 13th Venice Biennale (Architecture), at the Keller Gallery, MIT, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, at the Triennale of Milan, at the Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine in Paris, the Architekturzentrum in Wien, and the RIBA in London, among others.

Previous spreads: Images from *Feeling Contexts* exhibition at MIT's Keller Gallery

Above: Carlo Cappai and Maria Alessandra Segantini at exhibition opening



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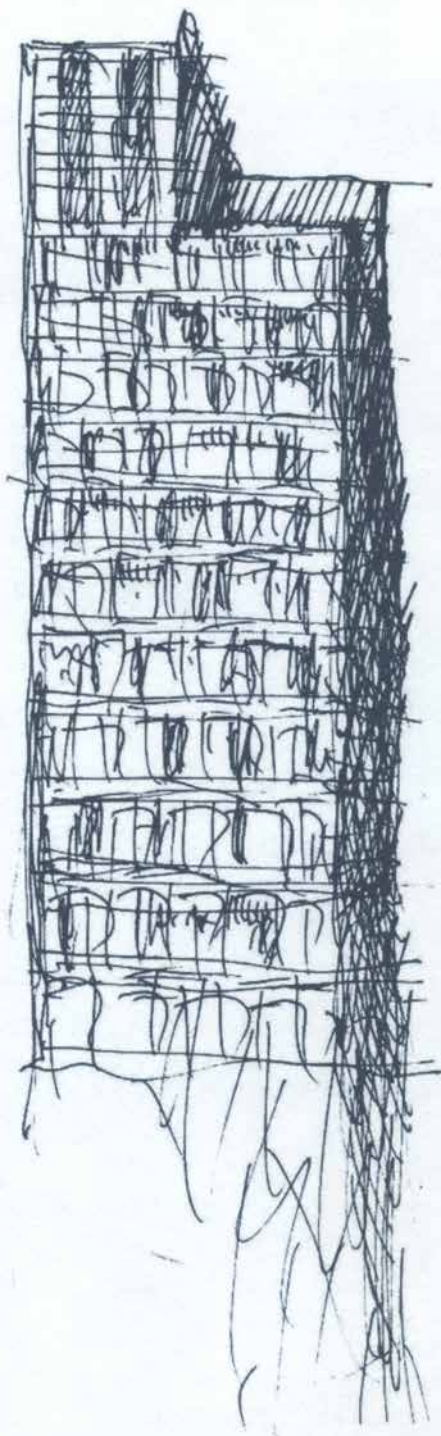
SOGNI E CONFINI



BTC

Previous spread: Images from
Feeling Context exhibition at
Keller Gallery

Above: ExpoHousing Milan,
sketch, ©C+S Architects



In a little over two years, room 7-408 has transformed from what was once a plotter room into the Keller gallery at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's school of architecture & planning. Through a generous gift by Shawn Keller, principal of C.W. Keller & Associates, the Keller Gallery opened with its first exhibition in the fall of 2011.

With nineteen exhibitions and counting, the Keller has already accomplished much in the way of creating a shared space for the several different communities that pass by and through its door. Part of a larger series of initiatives set forward by Nader Tehrani, who is the current head of the department of architecture, the gallery brings the spirit of debate, ambition, and design into the heart of the school—through and for the faculty and student community. Sarah Hirschman, who helped to launch the curatorial direction of the gallery as its first director, puts it best when she writes that the Keller “uses physicality to get everyone in the room.” As her successor, I cannot think of a better way to sum things up.

The central motivation for such a small gallery—and one less plotting room—is the regenerative challenge to put forth an answer to the question: How to display architecture? Seemingly simple, this act—one that shifts scales, translates intentions, and relocates our gaze—grows increasingly less straightforward. The simplicity of this question is further amplified by the diminutive dimensions of the gallery. Its size affords only so much and thus forces our exhibitors to be focused, edited, and abbreviated, using limited means to make the strongest conceptual statement. An exhibition at the Keller is conceived as a One-Idea space, a One-Building space, or a miniature exhibit, among a range of other tropes. As the discipline itself takes on greater, less or simply different responsibilities, the Keller attempts to both reason and argue with the assumptions that have taken hold while we went about our business.

A combination of project images, opening photos, and texts, *Feeling Contexts* is one of six compact publications that touch upon the immediacy of the exhibition itself, as well as a consideration of the context and conversations that surround it. These collected books do not pretend to recreate the exhibition experience, but rather aspire to expand what we see and what we discuss, as we continue to make architecture in varying formats, and across academic and professional work.

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