Precedent Studies

There are four precedent studies listed in this section. The first two deal with a similar predicament to that of this dissertation: the solving of post-war functional architecture within a contemporary context. The third study investigates the possibility of including elevated public space within a new design while the fourth does so in an experimental project within an existing building.

Upgrading of the Public Spaces on Via Basso in the Gratosoglio District: Cino Zucchi

The intention of this project was to create a well defined and protected public space within one of Milan's dispersed satellite towns. The context, similar to that of Sunnyside, consists of post-war functionalist flat-blocks. The plan of the intervention responds to the structures which existed before the flats were built: a farmhouse, a market, a railway line and a road - individual elements brought together to form a cohesive whole.

According to Aymonino & Mosco, the concept of enclosure has always been an act of foundation, protecting a piece of the world "from the profanity of the world itself."(Aymonino & Mosco 2006:103) Perhaps this concrete enclosure, along with its contents (a green dune, a fountain, lighting systems, furniture and blown-up graphics), are an attempt to insulate its users from the oppressive architecture surrounding them.

Fig 41

Aerial view of intervention showing the farmhouse, market and railway as well as the post-war functionalist flat blocks in the background.
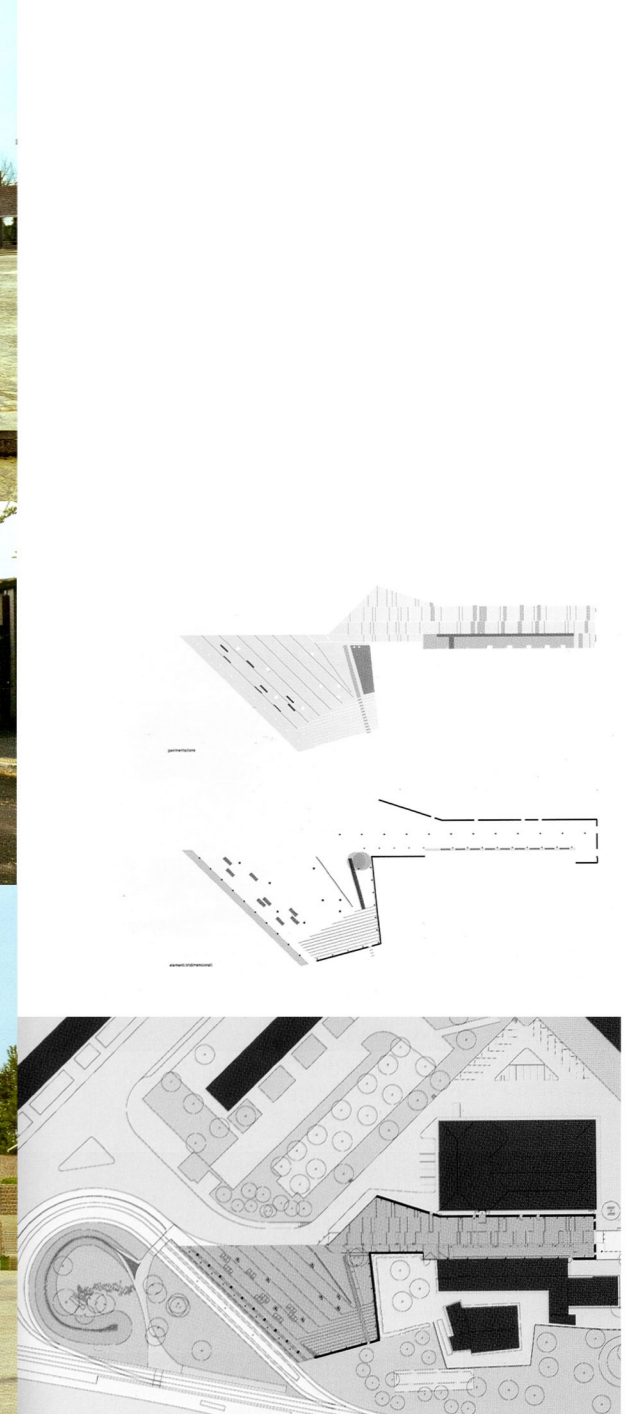

Fig 42 - 44

Progression of views upon site entry: *(Bottom)* Advancing towards the site from a distance; *(Middle)* Entrance threshold with blown-up graphics; *(Top)* Central enclosure with lighting and street furniture.

Fig 45 - 47 *(top to bottom)*

(top) Pavement plan; *(Middle)* Three dimensional element plan; *(Bottom)* Site plan showing existing functionalist buildings to the north (Facing south-northern hemisphere)

Corviale Apartment Block: ON

"Corviale, monstrosity of modern architecture. Corviale, a symbol of the city's outskirts and decay. Corviale, masterpiece of Italian postwar architecture. Corviale, social laboratory. Corviale, a place filled with immigrants, drug dealers and refugees. Corviale, the place that stopped the spring breeze. Corviale, the utopia. Corviale, for which its architect committed suicide."(Molinari 2005:83)

Built during the 1980's, Corviale is a one kilometre long residential block of flats situated on the outskirts of Rome. When it was completed, the ideal of public collective housing had long faded. Its architect, Mario Fiorentino, conceived of it after the problem of mass housing had been substantially resolved, and the monumental residential model had been essentially abandoned.(Purini 2005:75)

Amongst the Italian public, Corviale has become the yardstick of architectural catastrophe, with labels such as "extreme case" and "emergency building".(Purini 2005: 75) Although an option, Corviale's demolition would result in the displacement and dislodgement of 5900 inhabitants, some who have spent most of their lives there, not to mention those who squat in the unfinished amenities area on the fourth floor. Although there have been many attempts at 'correcting' Corviale, none have proved sufficient and highlight the insurmountable challenge posed by these residential monsters. According to Purini, Corviale had no need to be corrected or saved, but only to be completed, used and modified for that which it is, in other words, urban architecture. (Purini 2005:75) Molinari suggests that intervention into Corviale cannot be merely an act of renovation, nor

can it simply be about drafting new regulations relating to public order and management. It raises serious questions regarding the evolution of the notion of public space and private living for communities in a fluid metamorphosis.(Molinari 2005:83)

The difficult task of 'correcting' Corviale was undertaken by Osservatorio Nomade (ON), a group of artists, filmmakers and architects in a project called "Immaginare Corviale". The group split into three components: ON/network worked on changing the public image and media's condemnation of Corviale; ON/field focused on the place as a physical, symbolic, and social resource; ON/univerCITY investigated the place as a design experience for future change, focusing on the processes of identification and appropriation of the neighbourhood's spaces.

Through workshops and micro-transformations, ON/univerCITY attempted to probe and encourage appropriation activity by allowing spaces to reach a more imaginative dimension where social and public spaces are created instead of them being privately asserted by the individual. In so doing, they attempted to reach the level of social experimentation so hoped for by the architect.

Figure 49 *(left)*

Digital Collage showing recreational and agricultural spaces incorporated on the southern side (northern hemisphere) of the apartment block.

Figure 50 *(above)*

Photographs of entrance lobby and the view from the external circulation passages.

MVRDV
Mirador Apartment Block

Another work of interest is the Sanchinarro Mirador apartment block, a project by MVRDV built on the periphery of Madrid. A 165 unit block of flats, the Dutch firm chose to reject many of the norms attributed to low cost(in the European context) mass housing. "Mirador rejects the logics of the skyscraper or the apartment building of rationalist stamp, distinguished by a monotonous serial repetition of the basic living unit, in favour of a more complex, articulated solution."(Flores 2005) MVRDV's aim was to integrate different social groups as well as their lifestyles into one building. After investigating the housing typology of the region, 5 to 8 storey homogeneous, courtyard blocks, they decided to turn the typology onto its side, creating a 22 storey apartment block where the 'courtyard space' becomes an enormous 4 storey balcony 40m above the ground. The block incorporates 9 different 'buildings' – the term given to the differing flat unit typologies – around this central void. These 'buildings' are articulated in the block's facade through different colours and materials.

The central void is not the only space dedicated to the public realm. The articulated 'fire escape' staircases and their landings which snake around the outside four facades of the building act as spontaneous gathering spaces for residents and public alike. These landings are configured as red-painted, shaded courtyards and, after only a short while, residents have begun placing potted plants, bicycles and other personal paraphernalia there, providing each enclave with its own identity. An addition proposed by the architects (but left out due to budget cuts) is an escalator leading from the plaza in front of the building into the void above. It was hoped that this would further encourage public interaction with the building's community.

The success of the building lies in that it has given to a previously nondescript, periphery suburb a landmark symbol of "solidarity and public coherence", with an incredible "array of public spaces in a form that proclaims their communal identity." (Betsky 2005:65)
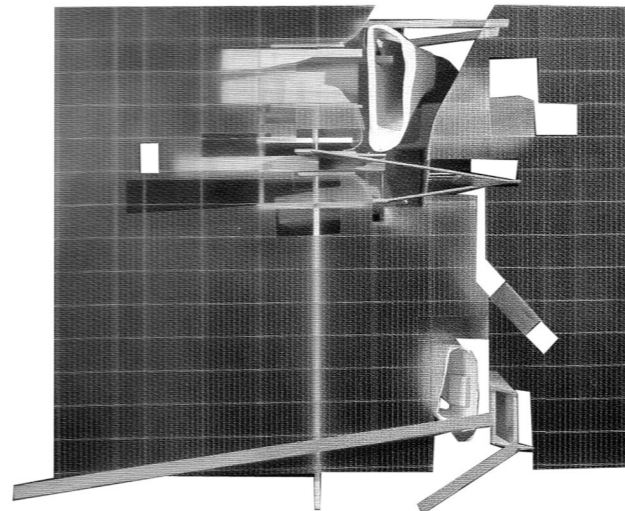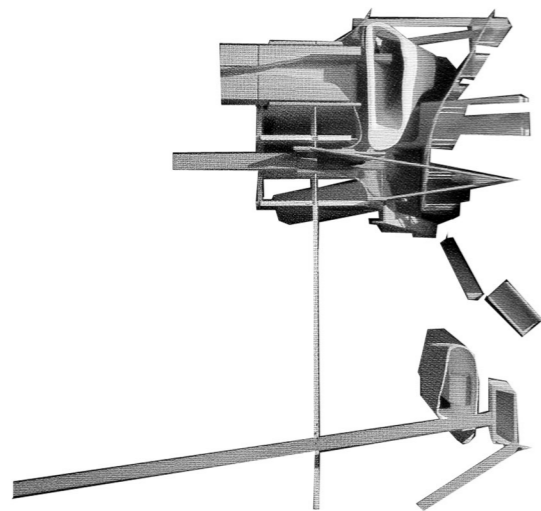
Figure 51

Southern view of Mirador apartment block. The different flat types are articulated on the facade in grayscale while the circulation routes are highlighted in bright orange.

Figure 52

Digital collage of a user's progression through the building. Beginning from its identification as an urban landmark to the view from its elevated public space.

Author, 2006

BVA1: Wolfgang Tschapeller

Under the title Metamorph, the 2004 Venice Biennale was a world-wide survey and exhibition of projects and works which encapsulated the 'profound shifts' that where being experienced in all disciplines at the beginning of the 21st century. One of the exhibits, an experimental project by the Austrian architect Wolfgang Tschapeller, illustrated the transformational aspects of the Biennale's 2004 title.

Tschapellar, who "has long occupied himself with the idea of transforming given conditions rather than figuring out a way of accommodating them"(Forster 2005:376), is convinced that in the near future most buildings will be accompanied by and even situated within other buildings. The experimental BVA1 project in Vienna (1998) is an attempt to bring about this transformation into building

hybridization. The project envisions a concrete office block being reduced to its skeletal necessities, where "discrete levels could be sold off and developed like a plot of land"(Forster 2005:378). These volumes are public "guest rooms", and are only accessible from the outside, but are situated within the confines of the building. Property owners will be forced to commit a percentage of their holdings to public space, allowing for "small public cells [which become] caught in the grid like flotsam." At the 2004 Biennale, Tschapeller's BVA3 project followed on from BVA1 in that it further examined the relationship between the building's skeleton and the 'settlers' that inhabited it. With the project, he attempted to animate how the "two elements react to each other with rhythmical changes of volume and surface."(Forster 2005:378)

Figure 53

Wolfgang Tschapeller, BVA1, Vienna, 1998; Model of urban rooms and public circulation.

Figure 54

Wolfgang Tschapeller, BVA1, Vienna, 1998; Model of urban rooms, public circulation and glass curtain facade.

Figure 55

Wolfgang Tschapeller, BVA1, Vienna, 1998; Model digitally superimposed into existing context.