

Unity of Architectural Organism and Urban Form.

The Teachings of Muratori and Quaroni in the School of Rome

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The 60s were inaugurated with the Olympic Games, presenting the world with a new image of Rome: a city that was more modern, more efficient and definitively freed of the fascist period. The decade appeared (and not only in the Italian capital city) as a time of great political and cultural turmoil—and it was precisely the Faculty of Architecture in Rome that set one of the main stages for this struggle. The student movement began a process of profound questioning and transformation of the educational system.

By Alessandra Capuano

Protests zeroed in on a few university professors, particularly on Saverio Muratori who had been summoned from Venice in 1954 to hold his lectures in Rome. His teachings are considered the emblem of a detached and academic attitude, especially when referring to the Composition course in year 4 when he requested the design for a *masonry chapel with a central plan*. The mandatory use of traditional building techniques and a non-innovative typological design seemed like downright refusal of the acquired achievements made by the Modern Movement.

In fact, the considerations elaborated by Muratori already since the antebellum period did not only go in a direction aimed at recovering the past, but one overcoming the Modern; one that anticipated issues which would have soon led to a drastic change of perspectives in the culture of Italian and international architecture.

His book entitled *Architettura e civiltà in crisi* was published in 1963. With this book Muratori completed the conceptual project he had already outlined in 1944 with *Storia e critica dell'architettura contemporanea*,¹ which observed that the crisis of Modern architecture stemmed from a lack of cultural and historical continuity with the past.

According to Muratori, modernity and volume deconstruction lead to destroying the relation between form, structure and function. Simplification of form, deconstruction and accentuation of detail suffocate architectural unity. According to Muratori, the crisis began with the Enlightenment Rationalism period when “form was superimposed on the real matter and on the structure, being specifically intended as a decoration,”² what he defined as an actual “overflowing of the pictorial sense into the field of architecture.”³ According to the author, it was with Le Corbusier that the conscience of an artistic problem arose in architecture: expressing by building. Muratori developed his critique of the Modern and, simultaneously, his will to overcome the crisis by searching for architectural unity and objective rules. Hence the need to find

materials endowed with internal coherence,⁴ as Muratori probably considered the teaching exercise for a masonry chapel. He also conducted his first important studies on urban analysis, establishing a particularly productive disciplinary current in Italy from the 60s on. Then came *Studi per un'Operante Storia Urbana di Venezia* in 1959, which was followed three years later by similar studies inherent to the city of Rome. With this work, Muratori marked the transition to a working methodology “that would reach its height through his teaching experience in Rome. “In fact, teaching objectives in Rome became determining factors in the elaboration of a synthesis between theory and architectural design, between research and the architect’s task [...]. Muratori taught *Composizione Architettonica* (Architectural Composition) while being opposed to the dominant concept (typical of the Modern) of architecture as the exclusive product of creativity, of personal inventiveness and affirming the teaching of architecture as a “common language.” He proposed a project related to history since its objective was the production of an architectural organism that was the unified and organic summary of the complexity of environmental components—reinterpreted over the course of history.⁵

Rejection of Croce’s idealist attitude and a willingness to delve into context and continuity were the conditions that induced Muratori into distancing himself from the Modern Movement and hence led the student movement into attacking the university professor. The bitter controversies that ensued led to the Faculty being occupied and to the famous General Assembly that was held on the premises of the Roxy movie theatre in 1963. On that occasion it was decided to call Adalberto Libera and Ludovico Quaroni back from Florence (to teach Composition and not Urban Planning as the latter had done from 1951 to 1954), in addition to Bruno Zevi and Luigi Piccinato from Venice.

It actually seems safe to say that, despite the considerable diversity of methods and arguments, there was a common perspective that inspired the work and teachings of Muratori and Zevi. In both cases there was an appreciation of history, meant as a subject that was func-

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< Cover of the book *Progettare un Edificio* by Ludovico Quaroni.

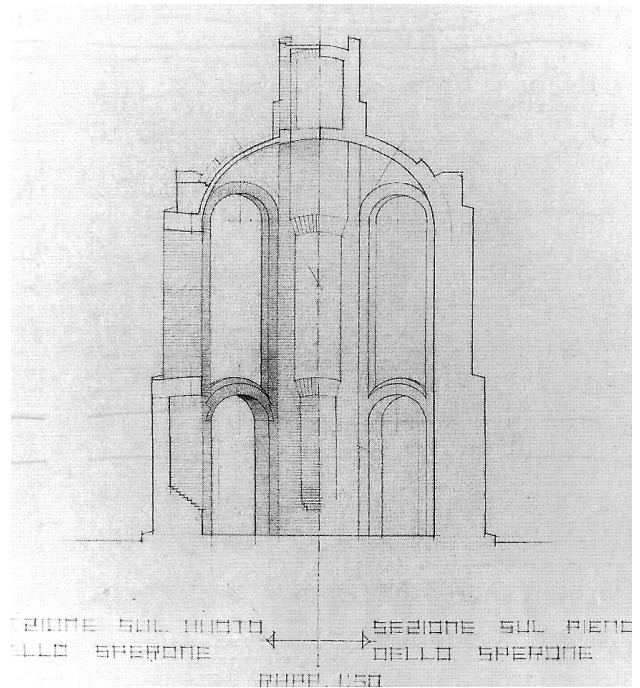
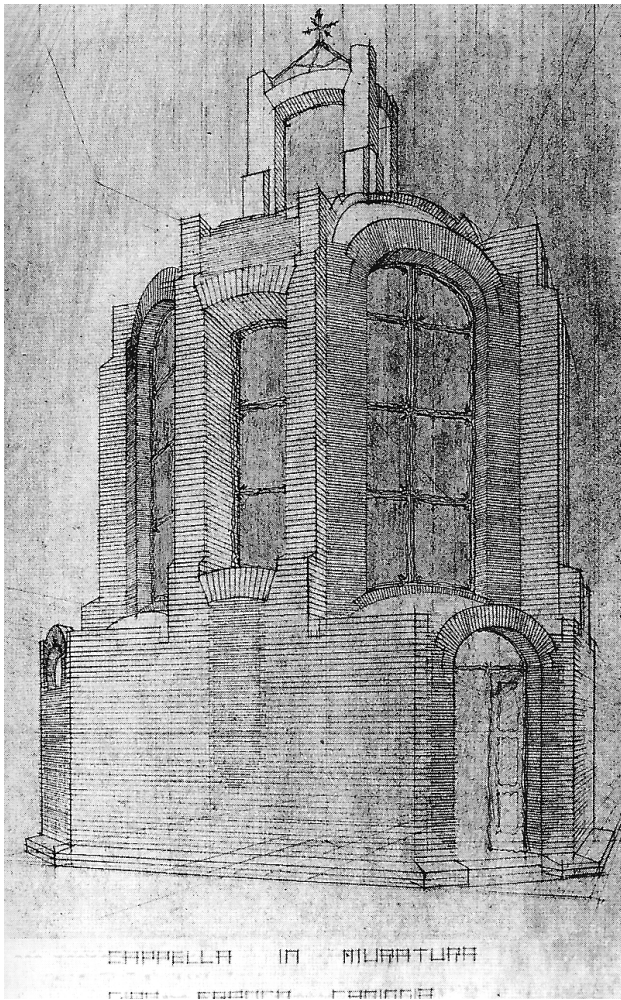
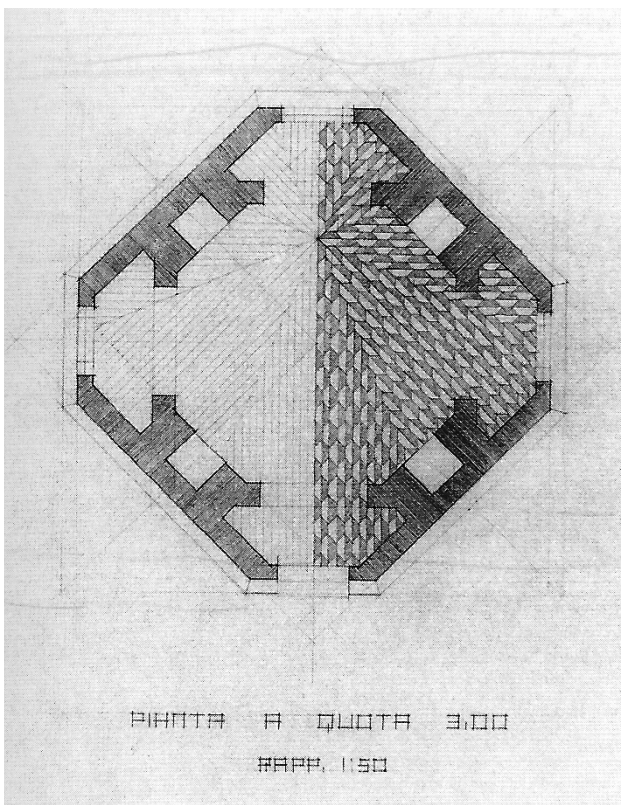


Figure 1. Course of **Saverio Muratori**, exercise for a masonry chapel with a central plan, 1954-55. Student: **G. Caniggia** (from *La Facoltà di Architettura dell'Università di Roma "La Sapienza" dalle origini al duemila Discipline, docenti, studenti, a cura di V. Franchetti Pardo, Gangemi editore, 2001*).



tional for design, and the recognition of the importance of architectural organism as expression of the unitary coherence of architecture. Whereas their views of the Modern Movement were distant from one another: Muratori considered it a failure in its will to recover a global reason for architecture; while Zevi, on the other hand, believed it was the highest manifestation of culturally revolutionary thought, one that would lead to continuous experimentation that was antithetical to the academia.

*La città come ambiente costruito è il vero centro del mito personale*⁶ (The city as a built environment is the true nucleus of personal myth) by Ludovico Quaroni. Quaroni accompanied us through the milestones of debates regarding architecture and the city, from the fascist period to post-modernity. He believed "that design interpreted in the complete significance it had in ancient times for us and that maintained in Anglo-Saxon culture⁷ is the true problem of the Modern city and that utopia meant as the natural offspring of imagination and experience, of art and of rational science"⁸ is the solution able to revitalize the process of urban design. The planning of ancient cities was determined through clear hierarchies that were established between building fabric and emergences—"ancient cities were beautiful", wrote Quaroni in *La Torre di Babele* (The Tower of Babel)—continuing with a shared

and global architectural structure, part of the consciousness of all, of inhabitants and architects alike. Modern city design is instead a marginal factor.

In this *spiral-shaped* text entitled *La Torre di Babele*, Quaroni used many standpoints to face issues regarding expressions of the Modern metropolis, widespread quality, the invention of architecture, without ever neglecting the essential aspect whereby architecture (like the city) is not only an object for mankind to contemplate. Beyond the physical form of the city, its social aspect, management of the urban form through its regulatory and procedural legacy and according to different scales of intervention, the complexity and multiplicity of problems were, for Quaroni, equally central issues. He did not consider urban science as a separate discipline or as architecture theory, but as a structure governing relations between things.

According to Antonino Terranova, those were the years in which the *first disappointments* emerged. Quaroni was hanging in the balance between those who, as “pure architects,” asserted their disciplinary independence and those who followed the debate about the city-region and the complexity of contemporary cities. Although the common objective was the form of the city.⁹

La Torre di Babele is accompanied by a rich collection of images testifying to the figurative idea of cities. Quaroni has these images of cities seeming like works of art roll by as a film, offering us a repertoire going from ancient Greece to contemporary times.

Modern reality is complicated, as the city of Rome is multiform. And two years later Quaroni dedicated his most beautiful book, entitled *Immagine di Roma*¹⁰ (Image of Rome), to the capital city.

La Torre di Babele had already clearly explained that the figure is formed through both disciplinary and heteronymous knowledge; and that to understand a city one needs to know (in addition to the specific architectural aspects) even its aspects linked to sociological, political, geographical, visual and humanistic interpretations. Quaroni’s *Immagine di Roma* now demonstrates that creativity is stimulated through a profound knowledge of the true character of a city. That same character that for Rome took time to become what it is now and that always comes to the surface in every one of its manifestations and not only from the exterior appearance.

By rendering his vision of Rome, Quaroni reminds us that language is only one of the many aspects making up the structure of the city; and that therefore self-referentiality is not enough in solving problems.

In 1977 Ludovico Quaroni published a teaching manual entitled *Progettare un edificio. Otto Lezioni di architettura*.¹¹ While trying to collect some considerations concentrated on the controversial issues of a discipline going through a deep crisis, and attempting to reassemble architecture unity that was more and more divided in the various components of the Vitruvian Triad, Quaroni explained the reasons campaigning against a simply technological form of architecture, one only interested in

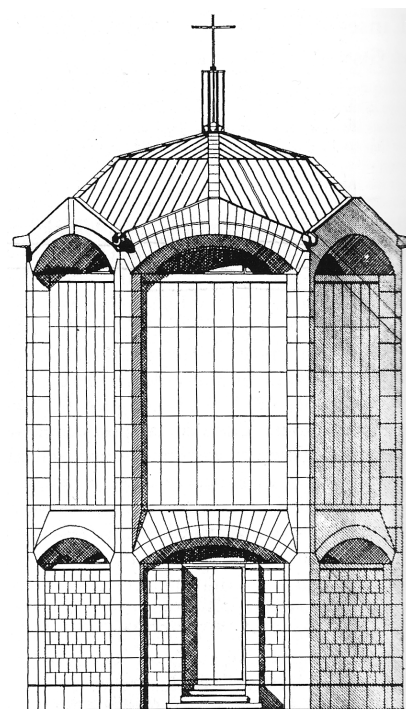
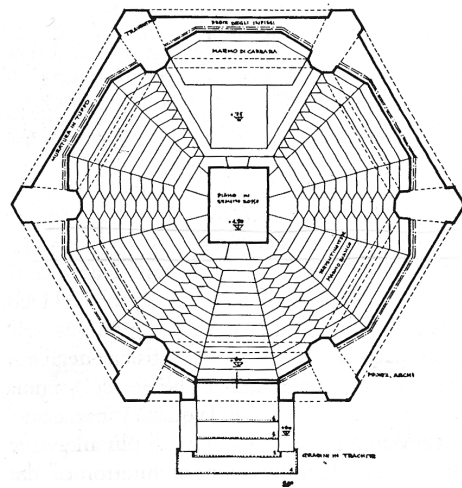


Figure 2. Course of **Saverio Muratori**, exercise for a masonry chapel with a central plan, 1955–56. Student: **M. Greco** (from *La Facoltà di Architettura dell'Università di Roma "La Sapienza" dalle origini al duemila Discipline, docenti, studenti, a cura di V. Franchetti Pardo, Gangemi editore, 2001*).

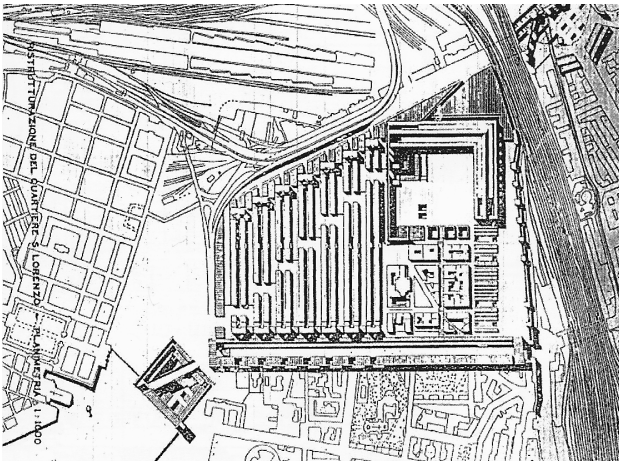
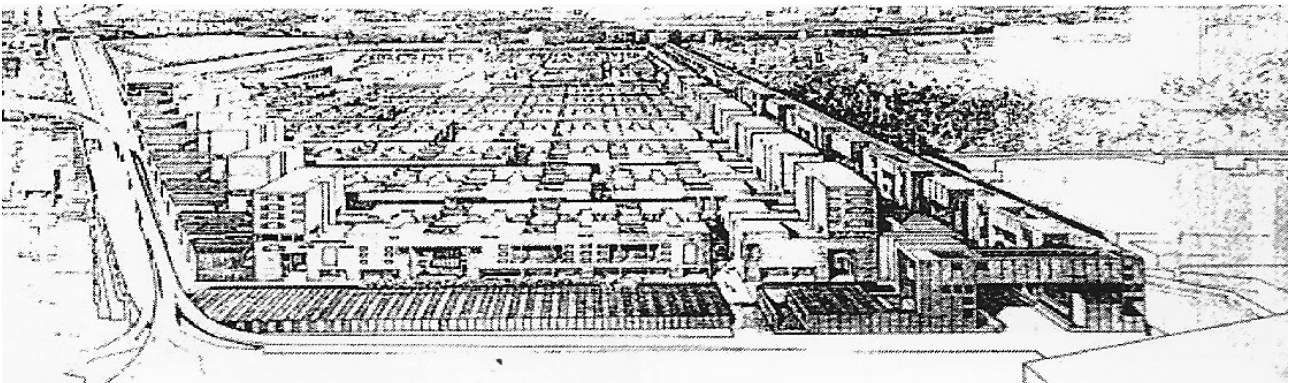
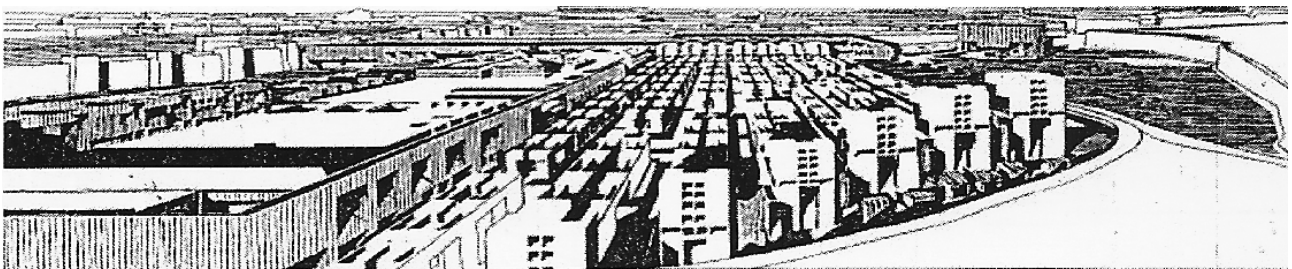
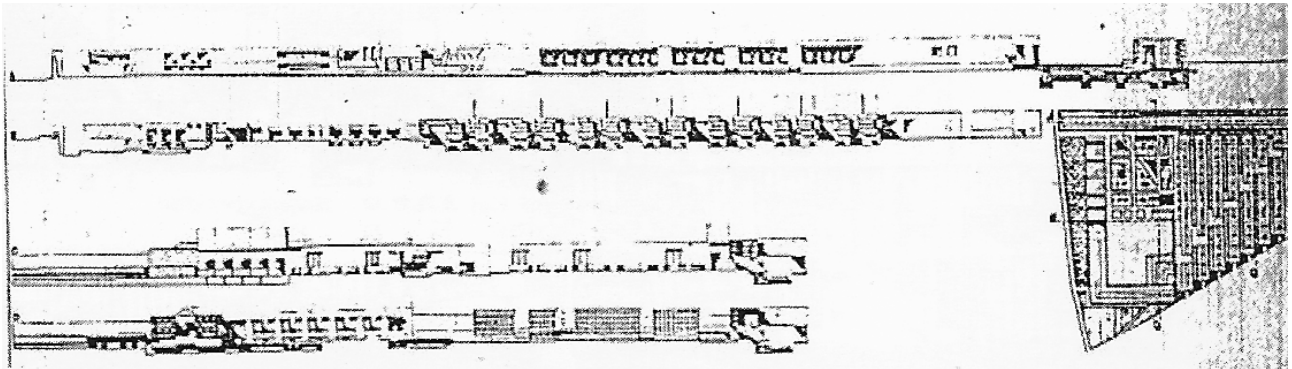


Figure 3. Course of **Ludovico Quaroni**, exercise on the continuity of the urban texture, 1969-70. Student **L. Thermes**, proposal for the rehabilitation of the S. Lorenzo neighborhood in Rome [from A. Riondino, *Ludovico Quaroni e la didattica dell'architettura nella Facoltà di Roma tra gli anni '60 e '70. Il progetto della Città e l'ampliamento dei confini disciplinari*, Gangemi editore, 2012].

functional uses or simply careful about aesthetic-formal results. He attempted to describe all the precautions that should be kept in mind when one is about to design a building.

However, architecture for Quaroni meant action at the different design levels; once attempting to re-establish the rules one must (if anything) match this against the objective of reporting problems without going through pacifying simplifications.

We also sustain the need to re-establish the foundations [...] But we do not agree at all about the opportunity of setting off (for this disciplinary re-establishment) from the construction of a linguistic code that can "teach" a simple and safe method (for a dime a dozen) to anyone who wants to get involved in architecture. If there is something certain in the historical period we live in [...] it is insecurity and complication, a turmoil of ideas, hence we believe every attempt at "coding", at drawing up a "manual" that copies (albeit in a new and differ-



ent way, perhaps the direct opposite) regulations of the past "orders" can be defined as a childish exercise (but we might be wrong). The present crisis (similar to those from other moments in history) does not depend upon a lack of ideas; it is a crisis that depends upon the difficulty, and not only in architecture, to sum up in a few strong ideas all the many, very many, too many feeble ideas that circulate, and circulate in their own right, precisely because of the numerous contradictions characterizing this critical stage of culture. One that has suddenly gone from local, domestic or continental dimensions to the worldwide, global dimensions of a humanity and civilization that is heterogeneous in its manifestations as much as it is in its problems.¹²

An "active" kind of teaching that is still very much alive in the schools of Rome, namely the teachings of Muratori and Quaroni, which inseparably conjugate form of the city and architectural organism. Architectural design is a project of forms, of relations between forms and space, a structure of forms for a structure of life

[...] Purpose and plan for a future city that perhaps willing it to be marvellous would suffice. But is there anyone who truly wants it, other than me?¹³

Notes

1. The first critical history of the Modern Movement written in Italy, confronting the essay by M.G. Corsini, "Saverio Muratori e il problema critico e storico dell'architettura moderna in Facoltà di Architettura dell'Università di Roma 'La Sapienza' dalle origini al duemila. Discipline, docenti, studenti", edited by V. Franchetti Pardo, Gangemi editore, Rome, 2001, 388.
2. M.G. Corsini, cit., 401.
3. Muratori, Saverio, *Storia e Critica dell'Architettura Contemporanea* (1944), presently in a posthumous work edited by G. Marinucci, Centro studi di Storia urbanistica, Rome, 1980, 43.
4. Tafuri, Manfredo, *Storia dell'Architettura Italiana 1944-1985*, Einaudi, Turin, 1982, 79.
5. M.G. Corsini, cit. 396.
6. Terranova, Antonino, "Introduzione", Quaroni, Ludovico, *La città fisica*, edited by A. Terranova, Laterza, Bari, 1980.
7. Quaroni, Ludovico, *La Torre di Babele*, Marsilio Editori, Venice, 1967, 48.
8. Quaroni, Ludovico, idem, 49.
9. Terranova, Antonino, "Gli Anni 50/60, Sviluppo e Modernizzazione nella Nuova Dimensione della Città, dal Livello Intermedio del Town Design alla Meta Progettazione", Quaroni, Ludovico, *La città fisica*, edited by A. Terranova, Laterza, Bari, 1980, 151.
10. Quaroni, Ludovico, *Immagine di Roma*, Laterza, Bari, 1969.
11. Quaroni, Ludovico, *Progettare un Edificio. Otto Lezioni di Architettura*, Mazzotta editore, Milan, 1977
12. Quaroni, Ludovico, *Progettare un Edificio*. cit. 12.
13. Quaroni, Ludovico, *La torre di Babele*, cit. 144.

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- Riondino, Antonio, *Ludovico Quaroni e la Didattica dell'Architettura nella Facoltà di Roma tra gli anni '60 e '70. Il Progetto della Città e l'Ampliamento dei Confini Disciplinari*, Gangemi editore, 2012.



Figure 4. Cover of the book by Ludovico Quaroni *Progettare un edificio*.



Figure 5. Cover of the book by Ludovico Quaroni *La Torre di Babele*.

Pardo, V. Franchetti, *La Facoltà di Architettura dell'Università di Roma "La Sapienza" dalle origini al duemila. Discipline, docenti, studenti*, Gangemi editore, 2001.

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