

Prologue

Mapping the City

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This atlas collects 41 drawings related to two cities, Bologna and Aachen, drafted within the strategic partnership of the ArchéA program.

<https://site.unibo.it/archea/en>

These drawings fundamentally represent the cities taken as case studies according to three frameworks and two scales: the territorial scope at the 1:10.000 scale, the historic center at the 1:2.000 scale and the outskirts at the 1:2.000 scale. The original tables, which measure 90x90 cm, are published in the atlas with a multiplication factor of 0.3, meaning that they have been reduced from 90 to 27 cm. The drawings produced by the members of the research group are preceded by the figure-ground plans of Bologna and Aachen, also at the same scale and according to the same framework.

In other words, each of the five ArchéA partners redrew the same areas of the city according to the same framework and the same scale, but with five different approaches or classification grids. These redrawings not only allow comparing the different approaches, which correspond to different European schools of architecture, but subject the reality of the urban phenomenon to a solicitation according to which the intentional nature of the representation takes on an epistemological and strategic value.

A few points must be clarified. Firstly, it must be noted that the language of architecture is drawing; a drawing on a piece of paper is an architectural reality. Its language is closer to that of painting and writing than to that of spoken language, precisely in the sense in which Leon Battista Alberti (1435) urged his students to learn to paint as one learns to write. But unlike painting, architecture is an allographic art, that is, what interests in its drawing is not the author's concrete handwriting, the way in which the pencil produced the graphic sign, but what the author recounts, the meaning of his discourse.

Since the discourse that interests us and of which this book speaks is the city, the story can only be partial from time to time, and the description is much more interpretation and characterization rather than imitation; the story will focus on the representation of specific contents of a complex phenomenon that the drawing seeks to manifest. Precisely in the sense in which Klee said he wanted to make the invisible visible, in which Oswald M. Ungers defined urban planning as an art of discovery, and in the sense in which Giuseppe Samonà intended to build that "intentional" image he called an icon and clearly represented the field of possibility or the availability of a morphological system to be transformed. It is from this point of view that the image of the city and the concept of Mapping take on an epistemological and strategic value. The image becomes a real tool of knowledge and what is revealed concerns the very meaning of the city: the passage from a way of existing to a desired way of being.

The concept of Mapping can be considered a specification of the practice of urban analysis, that is, urban analysis conducted through the tool of drawing and the intentional selection of signs. The signs are "gradually" added to the drawing on the basis of a theory, or rather, of what epistemologists call "micro-theory." The micro-theory guides and organizes an ordered sequence of operations to obtain the image that directs the project, reducing the intervention possibilities to a finite number. A reduction according to an intention: this is the fundamental reason for Mapping. And this reduction is possible thanks to the so-called "elasticity of language" which allows us to analyze and represent the same phenomenon from different points of view, selecting certain characteristics from time to time and excluding others according to an act of voluntary determination. The analysis / representation combination takes the form of a decoding and recoding task which returns a series of images which share a structural similarity, that is - recalling Wittgenstein - what the fact and the representations of the fact have in common is the structure, because the different representations of the fact are all representations of the same fact. Which is arranged vertically according to different levels of depth.

The level of depth corresponds to the degree of abstraction. The story of the reasons that led Colin Rowe (1996) to adopt the most elementary reduction of the urban phenomenon is quite amusing and meaningful, namely the figure-ground plan. Basically, he blames the poor preparation of the students of his Urban Design course at Cornell University, half of whom barely spoke English, on the extremely simplified approach to studying the city. Owing to the "Gestalt" tradition of the Bauhaus introduced by Josef Albers in the circles of Yale, the first theses followed by Rowe in Ithaca reduce the complexity of the urban phenomenon to a black and white drawing (figure-ground) which highlights the relationship between built masses and space. This method, inaugurated with Wayne Copper's thesis drawings in 1967, will become his main tool for analyzing the shape of the city, which Rowe defines as "an abstract representation technique" in which the urban phenomenon is included within a simple binary opposition (a single duality), full and empty, figure and background, shape and countershape, black and white: even if Rowe confesses that he would have preferred the pink and green of the drawings of the Napoleonic land registry maps. This binary opposition between figure and background and the immanence of a synchronic approach, whereby the phenomenon is considered as it occurs in a single moment, project Rowe's method into the dualism of Soussurian structuralism.

This capacity for abstraction is strictly connected to the strategic value of Mapping. By strategic value I mean the way in which Mapping is useful to the urban design project, that is, the usefulness of Mapping for the design project. We have already spoken of the reduction of the field of possibilities

that it can establish, where the field of intervention possibilities is reduced: as mentioned, this field delimitation and this finitude take on a strategic and planning value for us. But another reason or another meaning of the same utility concerns the conventional relationship that the discipline (architecture) is able to establish with the phenomenon (the city). This convention allows us to intervene with the project starting from the abstract basis defined with Mapping, counting on the fact that the historical experience of architecture can guarantee some certain reliability in the relationship between the possibilities included in the initial design, the subsequent hypotheses and the final outcome. When we speak of the historical experience of architecture, or of a discipline in general, we mean precisely the subsequent adjustments that have occurred in the reciprocal relationship between hypotheses and outcomes, which act retroactively and progressively on the hypotheses, developing, updating and consolidating the effectiveness of the intervention tools and actions. This clearly emerged from the beginning in the specific case of the drawing of the relationship between building typology and urban morphology. The degree of convention and in-depth analysis reached by the study and the representation of this relationship had made it possible to ascribe and reduce relations of a social, economic and functional order thereto, relying on a certain faith in the fact that the intervention on one of the terms of the 'single duality' would have led to an improvement of all the relational orders and an improvement of the entire urban organism.

Because this is precisely the point. Mapping is a tool which allows imagining the city and the world as better than what they actually are. Therefore, the faith to which we are called is not so much and only faith in the drawing's ability to act as a mediation tool between the past, present, and future city (between the way of existing and the desired way of being), but faith in urban form's capacity to influence social behaviors. That is, that there is a relationship between the architecture of the city and the life of the citizens.



The Imperial Forums and Alessandrino District, Urban Land Registry of Rome, I Monti, Sheet 9, 1818-24 (ASR / MIBAC 2010, 2006)

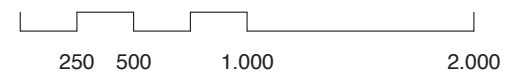
L. B. Alberti, *De Pictura*, 1435

L. Amistadi, V. Balducci, T. Bradecki, E. Prandi, U. Schröder, *Mapping Urban Spaces. Designing the European City*, Routledge, New York, 2021

C. Rowe, *As I was saying: recollections and miscellaneous essays*, Vol. 3: *Urbanistics*, The MIT Press, Cambridge and London, 1996

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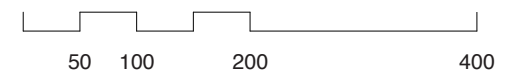
Bologna, figure-ground plan
scale 1:33.333





Prologue
Mapping the City

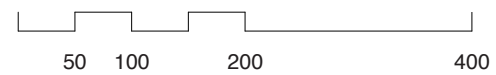
Bologna, city center, figure-ground plan
scale 1:6.666





Prologue
Mapping the City

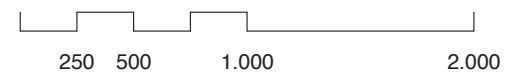
Bologna, Bolognina, figure-ground plan
scale 1:6.666

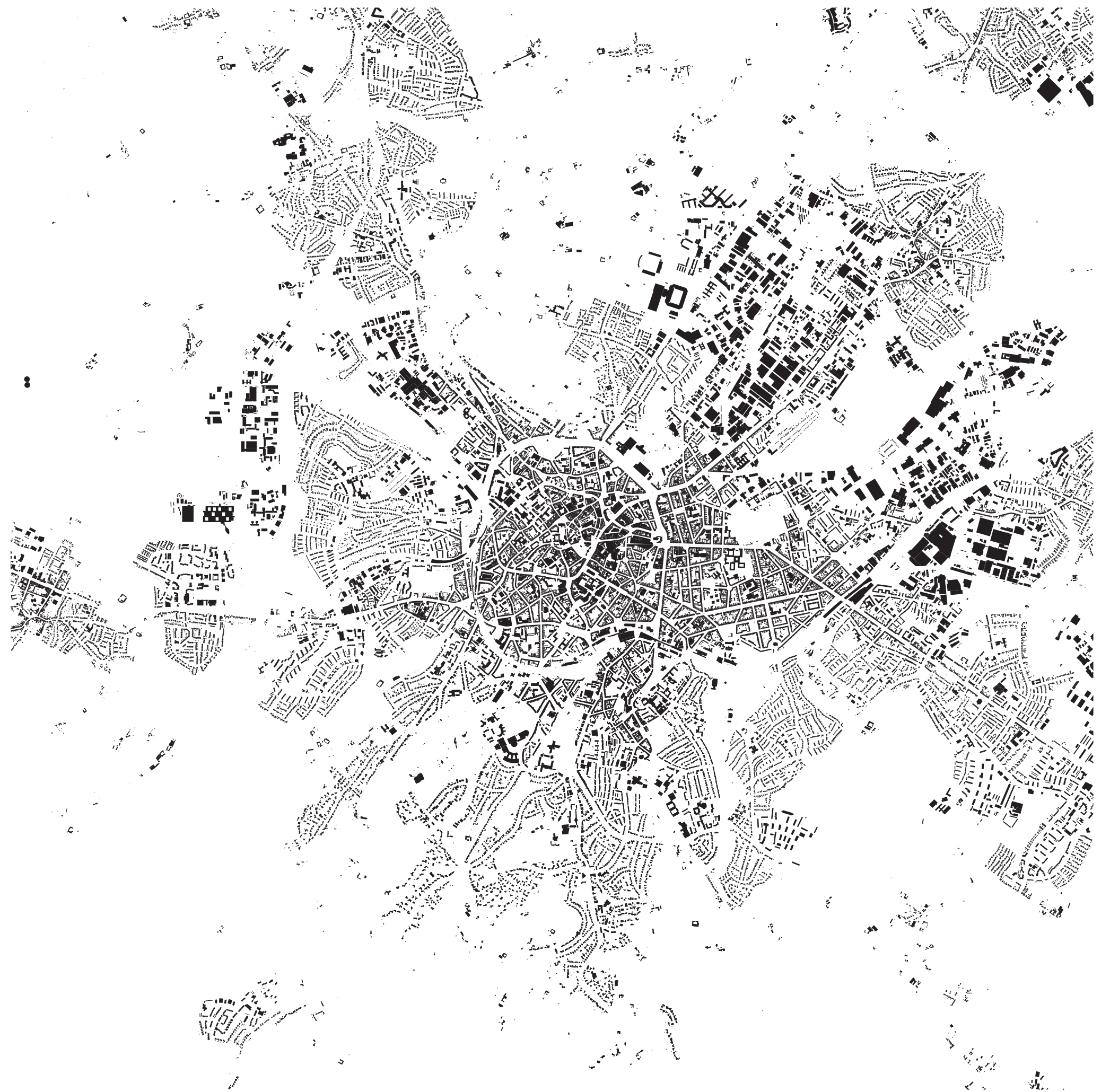




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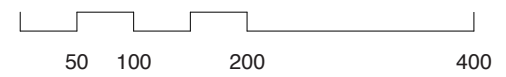
Aachen, figure-ground plan
scale 1:33.333





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Mapping the City

Aachen, city center, figure-ground plan
scale 1:6.666





Prologue
Mapping the City

Aachen, Driescher Hof, figure-ground plan
scale 1:6.666

