

890

**LA SCUOLA NECESSARIA**

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BROOKS + SCARPA  
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TEATRO DELL'ARCHITETTURA  
ACCADEMIA DI MENDRISIO  
**MARIO BOTTA**

**UNA MOSTRA**  
LOUIS KAHN A VENEZIA

**OMA IN QATAR  
WEST-LINE STUDIO IN CINA**

LA RAPPRESENTAZIONE DELLO SPAZIO  
E IL MONDO PRIVO DI CENTRO.  
DA DADA A *DELIRIOUS* NEW YORK  
**FRANCESCO DAL CO**

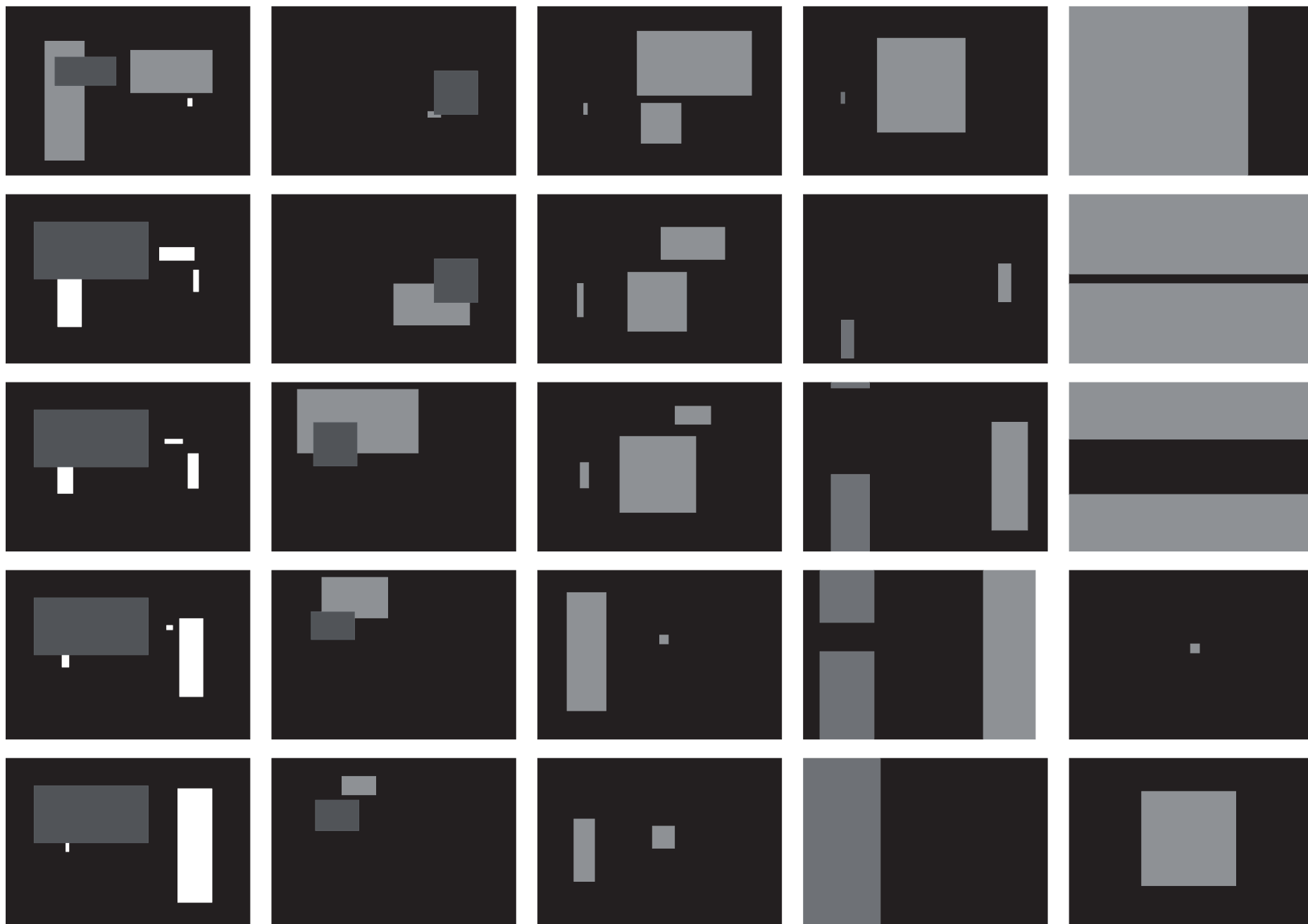
# CASABELLA

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3—7

EDITORIALE

RESTITUZIONE VIRTUALE DI UNA  
ICONA. IL CIMITERO DI SAN CATALDO  
A MODENA DI ALDO ROSSI E GIANNI  
BRAGHIERI  
Francesco Dal Co

6

VERO O FALSO?  
Antonio Conte

8—43

LA SCUOLA NECESSARIA.  
NUOVI SPAZI PER  
L'ISTRUZIONE

9

ALBERT FAUS

HOME KISITO, OUAGADOUGOU,  
BURKINA FASO

10

GIOCO DI VOLTE  
Camillo Magni

16

KARAMUK KUO

SCUOLA MEDIA WEIDEN,  
CANTONE SAN GALLO, SVIZZERA

17

UNA SCUOLA PER TUTTI  
Federico Tranfa

26

BROOKS + SCARPA

ÁNIMO SOUTH LOS ANGELES  
CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL,  
LOS ANGELES, STATI UNITI

27

OLTRE LA PAURA. UNA SCUOLA  
A SOUTH CENTRAL LOS ANGELES  
Chiara Baglione

34

FRANKLIN AZZI

ARCHITECTURE

SCUOLA SUPERIORE DI BELLE ARTI,  
NANTES, FRANCIA

35

IL PROFILO DELLA FABBRICA  
Matteo Vercelloni

44—61

MARIO BOTTA ARCHITETTI

TEATRO DELL'ARCHITETTURA,  
ACCADEMIA DI MENDRISIO,  
CANTON TICINO, SVIZZERA

45

UN TEATRO PER L'ARCHITETTURA  
Federico Tranfa

49

ACCADEMIA E TEATRO, UNA STORIA  
Federico Tranfa intervista Mario  
Botta

52

LOUIS I. KAHN A VENEZIA.  
UNA MOSTRA NEL TEATRO  
DELL'ARCHITETTURA

53

IL PROGETTO DEL PALAZZO DEI  
CONGRESSI DI KAHN A VENEZIA  
Maria Bonaiti

62—71

OMA

QATAR NATIONAL LIBRARY,  
DOHA, QATAR

63

LA STANZA DEI LIBRI  
Matteo Vercelloni

72—81

WEST-LINE STUDIO

CENTRO CULTURALE SHUI, SANDU,  
GUIZHOU, CINA

73

SCRIVERE E PROGETTARE PER  
IMMAGINI NELLA TERRA DEGLI SHUI  
Marco Biagi

82—91

BIBLIOTECA

82

RECENSIONI

84

A PARTIRE DA UN LIBRO.  
LA RAPPRESENTAZIONE DELLO  
SPAZIO E IL MONDO PRIVO DI  
CENTRO, DA DADA A *DELIRIOUS*  
*NEW YORK*  
Francesco Dal Co

92—97

ENGLISH TEXTS

92

ENGLISH TEXTS

In copertina:  
—Hans Richter, serie di  
fotogrammi tratti da *Rhythmus*  
*21*, 1921 (film muto, 35mm, b/n,  
durata 3')

## Scuola superiore di Belle Arti Nantes



### Il profilo della fabbrica Matteo Vercelloni

Il passato industriale e la tradizione della cantieristica navale della città di Nantes, capoluogo del dipartimento della Loira Atlantica, ha influenzato fortemente figura e approccio progettuali della sede dell'École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts Saint-Nazaire che presentiamo in queste pagine. L'Isola di Nantes, sito dell'intervento, affacciata sulle sponde nord e sud della città e a essa collegata da numerosi ponti veicolari, da due linee ferroviarie e da un passaggio pedonale, si estende nel fiume per una superficie di 337 ettari ed è il risultato dell'unificazione di piccole isole separate dai canali che costituivano parte dei rami fluviali della Loira. Le radici industriali dell'Isola risalgono alla metà del XIX secolo con l'insediamento delle fonderie Voruz che, nel 1870, registravano la presenza di 600 lavoratori. In seguito, nel 1909, grazie a una sinergia tra gli industriali di Nantes, sull'Isola si formano gli Ateliers et Chantiers de Bretagne (ACB), passati poi alla proprietà del gruppo siderurgico Alstom che, nel 2003, venderà le aree industriali dismesse a Nantes Métropole nella prospettiva della loro globale trasformazione urbana. Nel 2004 la riqualificazione e il ridisegno dell'Isola di Nantes e delle sue preesistenze industriali sono affidati alla Société d'Aménagement de la Métropole Ouest Atlantique (SAMOA), individuata come unico operatore del generale coordinamento progettuale e della regia delle diverse fasi d'intervento. La riconfigurazione del sito, di cui l'École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts è parte integrante, si basa sull'apertura dei "recinti di fabbrica" preesistenti, nello sforzo di creare una nuova rete viaria e una successione di spazi pubblici per costruire una dimensione di quartiere integrato e connesso alla morfologia urbana e alla vita della città che si sviluppano al di là del fiume.

La trasformazione delle Halles Alstom è parte fondamentale di questo processo e si

basa su tre azioni complementari: sviluppo di eventi per aprire il sito alla fruizione pubblica, offerta di spazi per laboratori creativi e di didattica, e disponibilità di studi per artisti. Oltre al recupero e alla trasformazione delle Halles 4 e 5 occupate oggi dall'École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts inaugurata nel settembre 2017, l'area dell'ex complesso siderurgico Alstom, dove sono stati eliminati alcuni corpi minori di connessione (3 e 6 bis) al fine di creare una rete viaria legata alla fruizione pubblica del complesso, accoglierà a metà del 2018 nel padiglione 6 l'Università di Nantes e un gruppo di imprese innovative legate allo sviluppo urbano e immobiliare; mentre i capannoni 1 e 2 riuniranno i protagonisti delle attività economiche del Quartier de la Création, un polo tecnologico, studi di artisti e di sperimentazione creativa e attività legate al tema della ristorazione (previsione di apertura giugno 2019). Una varietà di funzioni tra loro sinergiche e complementari tese a formare la struttura fondativa del nuovo scenario urbano, di produzione creativa e artistica, caratterizzato dal tentativo di decompartmentare le pratiche e la tipologia dell'offerta lavorativa, di sperimentazione e didattica del "nuovo" quartiere.

Le Halles 4 e 5, dalla tradizionale struttura metallica con travi rivettate, si estendono su una superficie di circa 6.900 mq, sviluppandosi in adiacenza in parallelo e in linea per una lunghezza di 161 metri e una larghezza di 42, raggiungendo un'altezza massima di 19 metri sulla copertura scandita da shed regolari. La sagoma dell'industria, così come potrebbe disegnarla la fantasia di un bambino, ovvero la "linea della fabbrica" è il *leitmotiv* che tiene insieme la filosofia dell'intervento di recupero e reinvenzione della preesistenza industriale con cui le nuove funzioni e i nuovi volumi si confrontano. Conservato l'intero scheletro metallico e liberato lo spazio dalle superfetazioni interne,

<sup>1</sup> vista dalla nuova piazza pubblica della testata ovest delle Halles 4 e 5 oggetto d'intervento. Il rivestimento di facciata si interrompe prima di raggiungere la quota stradale per rendere permeabile su tutti i lati l'organismo architettonico  
view of the new public square of the western end of Halles 4 and 5 involved in the project. The facade cladding is interrupted before reaching street level to make the architectural organism permeable on all sides





FRANKLIN AZZI ARCHITECTURE



FRANKLIN AZZI ARCHITECTURE



FRANKLIN AZZI ARCHITECTURE



FRANKLIN AZZI ARCHITECTURE



FRANKLIN AZZI ARCHITECTURE

2-6  
alcune fasi del cantiere;  
nell'interno, conservato lo  
scheletro metallico strutturale,  
sono stati creati due nuovi corpi  
paralleli a tre livelli  
indipendenti dall'involucro che  
li accoglie  
worksite phases; two new  
parallel volumes on three  
levels, independent of the  
enclosure, have been created  
in the interior, with  
conservation of the metal  
structural skeleton

7  
planimetria complessiva  
dell'area delle Halles Alstom,  
pianta piano primo, fronte  
longitudinale sud e sezione  
trasversale  
siteplan of the Halles Alstom  
area, first floor plan, southern  
longitudinal facade and cross-  
section

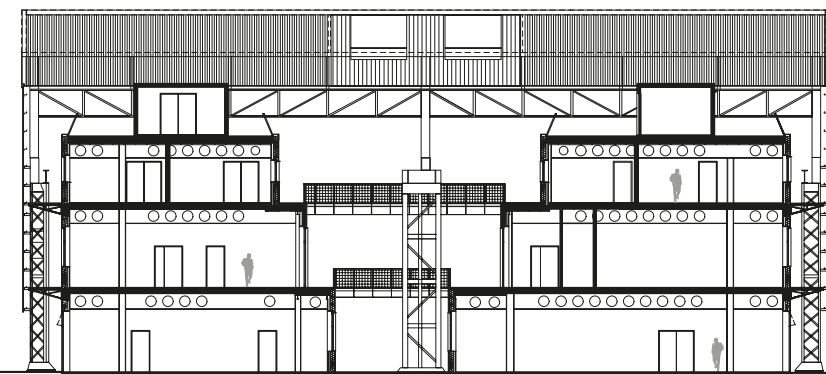
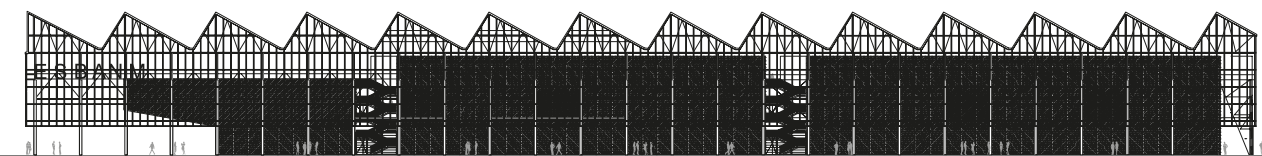
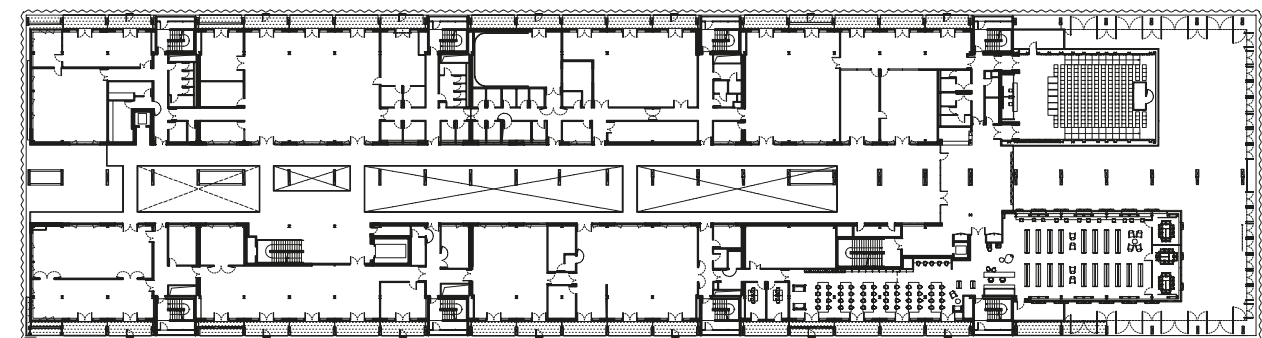
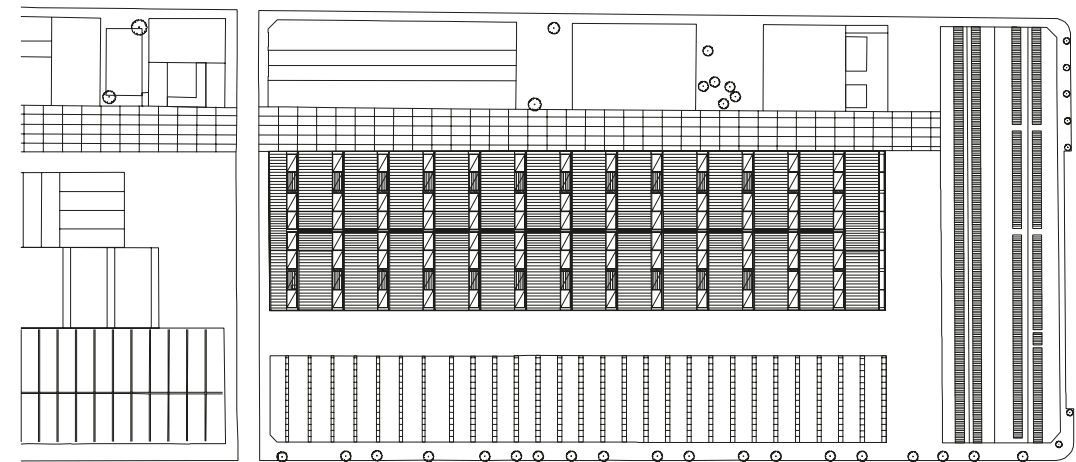
si è proceduto rivestendo la struttura  
originaria con una nuova pelle trasparente  
composta da pannelli di polycarbonato,  
interrotta sui fronti a circa quattro metri  
di altezza prima di raggiungere la quota del  
suolo. In questo modo la sagoma originaria  
dello stabilimento è stata ricomposta,  
diventando un'eterea e mutabile figura di  
riferimento (che varia dal giorno alla notte  
in base alle luci che si attivano all'interno)  
che volutamente è chiamata a ricomporre il  
profilo originario della fabbrica ricordandone  
le origini e le attività.

All'interno di questo involucro traslucido,  
che intende essere permeabile al pubblico su  
tutti i lati, organizzando una piazza coperta  
sulla testata ovest affacciata sul nuovo spazio  
pubblico prospiciente le Halles 1 e 2, si  
sviluppano due corpi paralleli a tre livelli,  
connessi tramite passaggi aerei sviluppati  
nella strada coperta centrale a tutt'altezza,  
in cui si coglie la dimensione originaria della  
fabbrica. Come una sorta di riuscita  
“matrioska architettonica” il progetto segue  
il concetto di “scatole nella scatola”; la prima,  
esterna, protegge dall'acqua piovana e filtra la  
luce del sole; la seconda, interna, si riferisce ai  
nuovi corpi modulari e compatti indipendenti  
sia dal punto di vista strutturale e sismico, sia  
per prestazioni termiche e impiantistiche del  
volume originario che li contiene. Nel grande  
piazzale coperto della testata ovest i due corpi  
interni si interrompono per disegnare due  
figure “sospese” in aggetto: un  
parallelepipedo vetrato a sbalzo e un volume  
a scatti che segue l'andamento delle  
gradonate dell'auditorium in esso contenuto.  
Un progetto di recupero e reinvenzione di un  
manufatto industriale rapportato alla scala  
urbana che denuncia come il confronto con il  
costruito, il lavorare per addizioni ed elisioni,  
l'assumere il patrimonio edilizio come risorsa  
da rivitalizzare sia una delle espressioni  
sempre più praticate dal progetto di  
architettura contemporaneo non solo  
europeo.

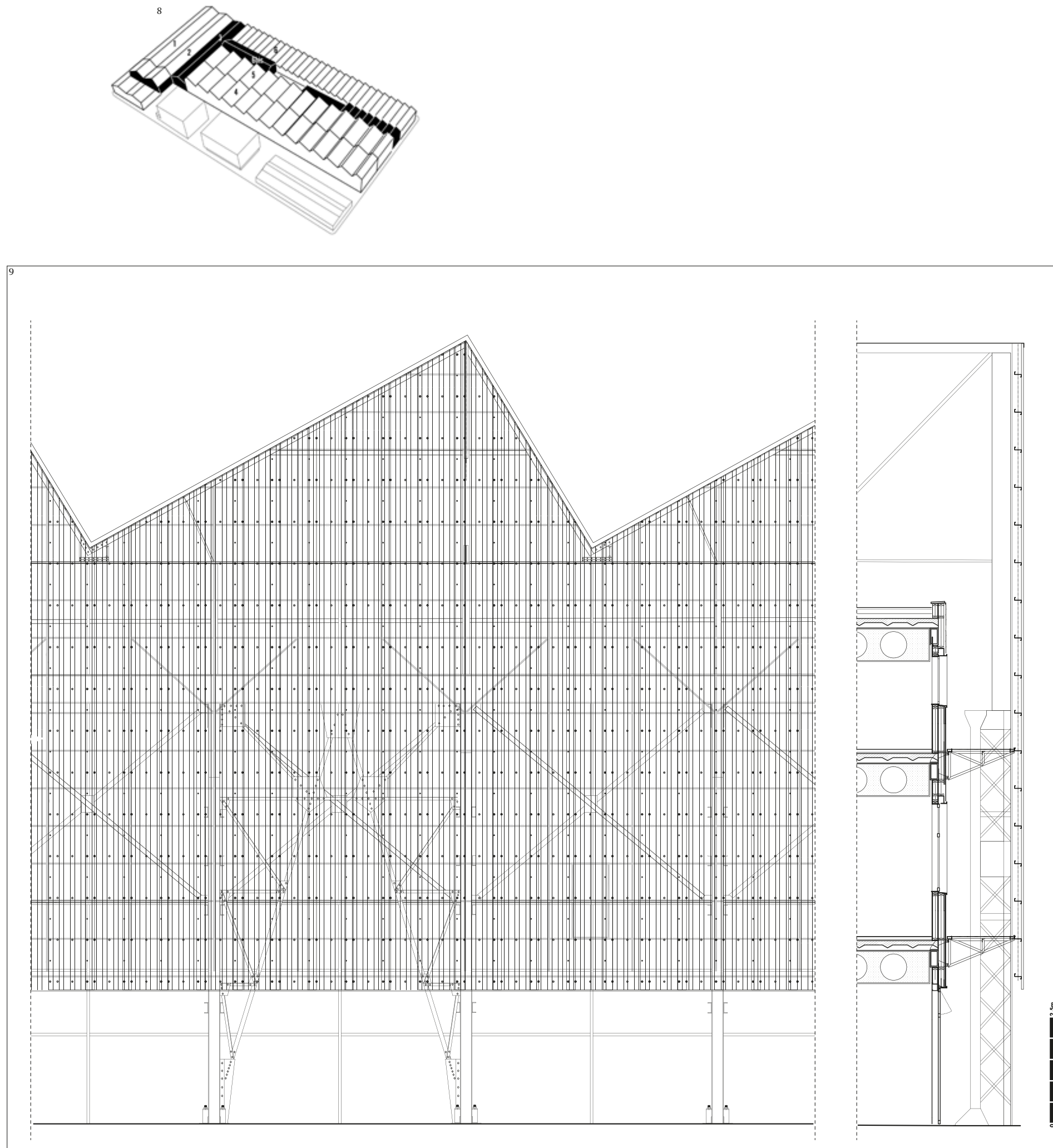
**Franklin Azzi Architecture**  
Halles Alstom, École Supérieure  
des Beaux-Arts, Mail du Front  
Populaire, Nantes, Francia

#### **scheda del progetto**

**progetto architettonico**  
Franklin Azzi Architecture  
**direzione lavori**  
ACS  
**ingegneria ambientale**  
Tribu  
**ingegneria acustica**  
Lamoreaux Acoustique  
**ingegneria delle facciate**  
Tes.s.s.  
**ingegneria generale**  
Setec Building  
**paesaggio**  
Office Bas Smets  
**controlli tecnici**  
Dekra  
**committente**  
Nantes Métropole - Société  
d'Aménagement de la  
Métropole Ouest Atlantique /  
SAMOA  
**cronologia**  
2010: concorso  
2011-14: sviluppo progetto  
2014-17: costruzione  
giugno 2017: completamento  
**dati dimensionali**  
17.000 mq superficie  
complessiva area intervento  
9.827 mq superficie  
complessiva Halles 4 e 5  
**localizzazione**  
Mail du Front Populaire,  
Île de Nantes, 44200 Nantes,  
Francia  
**fotografie**  
Franklin Azzi Architecture  
Luc Boegly  
Guillaume Satre







- 8  
key plan prospettico dell'area  
delle Halles Alstom; i corpi 3 e  
6bis in nero sono stati demoliti  
per creare la nuova viabilità  
necessaria alla fruizione del  
complesso  
perspective key plan of Halles  
Alstom; the volumes 3 and  
6bis in black were  
demolished to create the new  
circulation routes required  
for use of the complex
- 9  
particolare del rivestimento  
di facciata e sezione  
facade cladding detail  
and section
- 10  
vista della testata est  
view of the eastern end
- 11  
scorcio del fronte longitudinale  
dal nuovo contesto urbano  
view of the longitudinal front  
from the new urban context



- 12  
vista del fronte nord; il  
rivestimento in pannelli di  
policarbonato accoppiati alla  
struttura metallica dello  
scheletro strutturale originario  
ricostruiscono la sagoma  
originale dei padiglioni  
industriali. I pannelli si  
interrompono a circa quattro  
metri dalla quota stradale  
creando una fascia permeabile  
senza soluzione di continuità  
view of the northern facade;  
the cladding in  
polycarbonate panels  
coupled to the metal  
structure of the original  
skeleton reconstructs the  
profile of the industrial  
buildings. The panels stop  
about four meters from street  
level to create a seamless  
permeable band

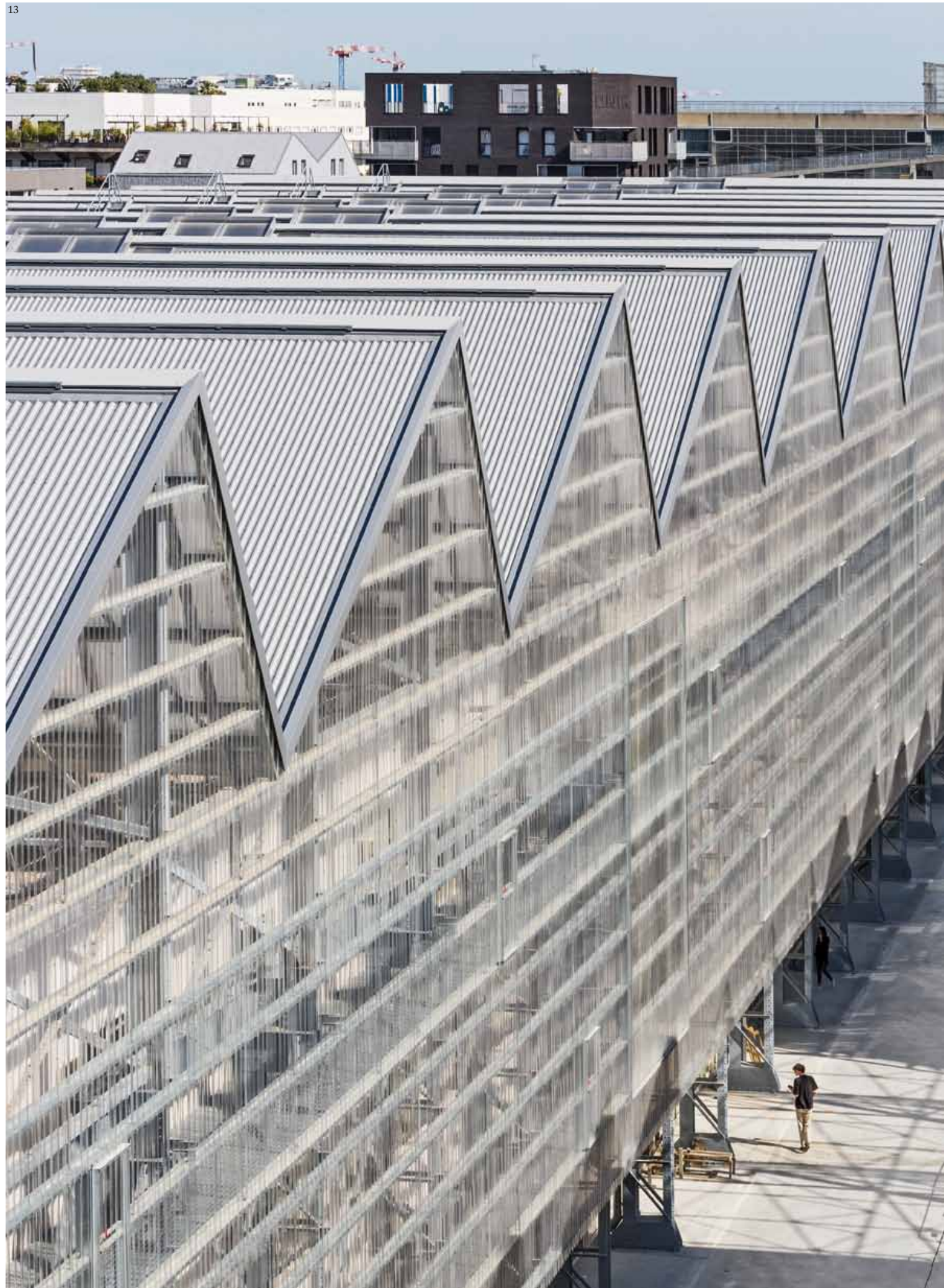




*13*  
particolare del rivestimento delle facciate con pannelli di polycarbonato. Il profilo della copertura a shed modulari e continui è stato conservato nelle sue proporzioni originarie  
detail of the facade cladding with polycarbonate panels. The profile of the modular, continuous sawtooth roofing has been conserved in its original proportions

*14, 15, 16*  
in corrispondenza della piazza coperta collocata nella testata ovest, il rivestimento di facciata si interrompe a un'altezza superiore invitando alla fruizione dello spazio interno pensato come estensione della piazza pubblica prospiciente. Due volumi sospesi, un parallelepipedo vetrato e la sagoma a gradoni corrispondente all'auditorium, si estendono nello spazio a tutt'altezza in cui cogliere la dimensione originaria della fabbrica. Un grande tavolo ligneo a circonferenza si pone come elemento attivatore di incontri

at the position of the covered plaza placed in the western end, the cladding is interrupted at a higher level, encouraging use of the internal space conceived as an extension of the public square in front. Two suspended volumes, a glass parallelepiped and the stepped profile corresponding to the auditorium, extend into the full-height space in which the original proportions of the factory can be grasped. A large wooden table provides an activator of interactions



LUC BORGLEY



LUC BORGLEY



LUC BORGLEY



LUC BORGLEY





GUILLAUME SATRE

17, 18  
scorci delle aule e dei laboratori  
interni

views of the internal  
classrooms and laboratories

19  
vista dell'interno  
dell'auditorium

view of the auditorium  
interior

20  
vista dal terzo livello della  
strada coperta interna centrale  
ricavata tra i due nuovi volumi  
tra loro collegati con percorsi in  
quota. La struttura metallica  
della fabbrica emerge nella sua  
figura originaria

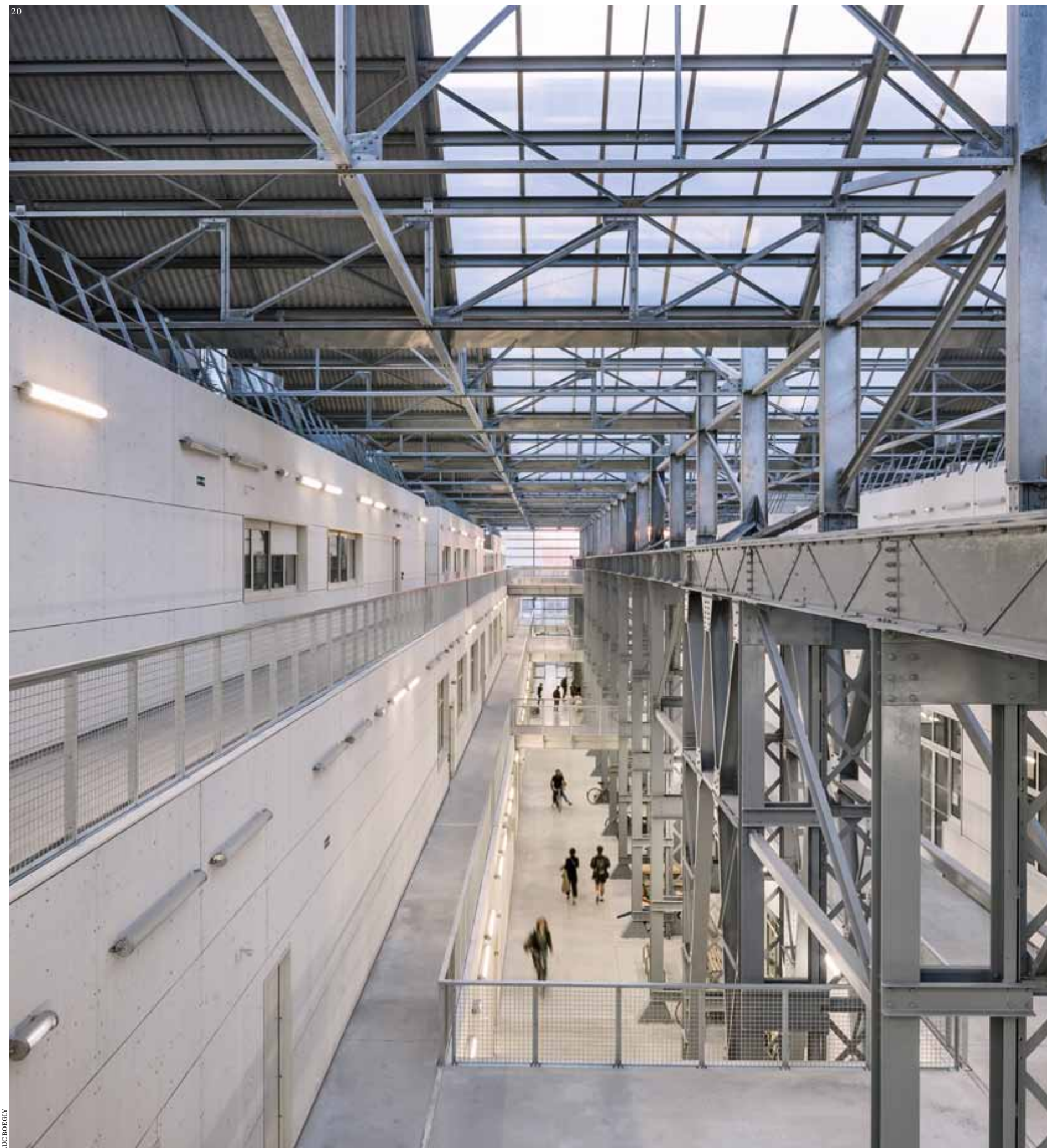
view from the third level of  
the central internal covered  
street created between the  
two volumes, connected to  
each other by elevated  
walkways. The metal  
structure of the factory  
stands out with its original  
figure



LUC BORELY



GUILLAUME SATRE



LUC BORELY

CASABELLA 890



will to keep faith with the architect's own roots. In this professional approach that is crossed with a specific context, we can appreciate the value of these works and of a different perspective on architecture.

## page 17

A school for all  
**Federico Tranfa**

The school building shown on these pages can be seen as emblematic for two main reasons: it responds to the needs expressed by the community in a logical way, and it represents a significant step for a young architecture firm that has established itself thanks to the opportunities offered by the Swiss system of design competitions. Having to cope with the problem of population growth and the need to update educational facilities, the city of Rapperswil-Jona held a competition in 2013 for the expansion of a middle school that is part of a complex already containing an elementary school and a daycare center. This is a typical situation in Switzerland, which is going through a phase of revision of its education structures. A political decision that has led to the launch of a governmental program with very interesting results, different in approach but not so different from the outcome of the program launched one decade ago in Portugal (see «Casabella» no. 839-840, 2014). Again in this case, the need to improve scholastic resources has met with the enthusiasm and intelligence of a generation of designers that thanks to an efficient selection mechanism have been able to receive important commissions in terms of size, scope and opportunities for experimentation. Once again, the school becomes a proving ground for quality architecture in the interest of the nation. For Ünal Karamuk and Jeannette Kuo (both born in 1978, the first in Zurich, the second in Indonesia), the Weiden school has represented a launching pad three years after the opening of their studio in Zurich. A partnership with an international profile, typical of a generation that has been able to take advantage of the quality of the Swiss system, contaminating it with experiences of study and teaching abroad. The architects describe the project as follows: «Like many of the peripheral areas of small Swiss cities, the context in which the Weiden school is inserted consists of a medium-density sprawl formed by industrial facilities, residences and cultivated fields. There was nothing memorable, except for an existing idyllic scholastic complex with lots of greenery. A garden next to a structure of nine classrooms, adjacent to a primary school and a daycare facility. All very handsome, though still incomplete. To the east and west the open space ambiguously merged with that of the surrounding private homes, seeming almost too monumental for the low block of the schools. There was also a plinth composed of the entrance platform of the existing school, which seem to have lost its moorings from the main volume. This was the context that confronted us in 2013, when the competition began. The guidelines called for an addition with 24 class-

rooms, a double gymnasium, an assembly hall and myriad office and workshop spaces. It was a dual challenge: to insert a building three times larger than the existing one without threatening the existing environmental qualities, and to generate a strong collective identity, in spite of the heterogeneous grouping of constructions. We decided that the least impact would come from a single building in which the classrooms were stacked over a semi-basement gym. The existing plinth would be modified and extended so the two buildings could share it, remaining two independent volumes, connected at the underground level. The increased height caused by the stacking would establish a clear hierarchy for the scholastic complex, anchoring the whole campus, clearly setting the boundary towards the open space and transforming the platform into a sort of central plaza. This reinforcement of the program meant putting the service spaces on the ground floor (lobby, auditorium and rooms for teachers), supporting the double height of the gyms and creating a visual relationship of proximity with them. In this way the gymnasium, a space whose functional program is independent, has become the center of scholastic life. In the levels above, the fact of being placed above the gym facilities generated sizeable depth of the volume, an opportunity to add value to the education experience through the creation of an informal inner landscape, composed of ample circulation spaces that can be utilized for various events. This programmatically flexible area makes a clean break with the typical character of the secondary school, which tends to compactly combine form and program, offering a spatial experience capable of adapting to pedagogical changes already in progress. The space is separated by four courtyards or open-air rooms that generate a range of different dimensions, from the cozy corner set aside for reading, to the large hall at the center of the building. In the patios climbing plants cross the space, creating a visual continuum over the two levels. On school days the courtyards function as informal study and recess spaces. The hall can be transformed as an exhibition space and once a year the teachers organize a shared breakfast there. A versatile area not stipulated by the guidelines, the result of the depth of the plan, but it is a space that is much appreciated and intensely utilized. Around the hall and the courtyards the ring of classrooms extends to define the facades, paced by large windows overlooking the surrounding landscape. From a structural standpoint the building is made with reinforced concrete up to the first aboveground floor, while the two levels of the classrooms, to reduce their weight, are in wood. The rhythm of the exposed beams has a unifying expressive quality, both in the concrete gymnasium and the wooden classrooms. The beams extend out beyond the facade, all the way to the overhang of the balcony that runs around the building, permitting the classes to go outside. Therefore the interior of the school is completely free of the constraints

imposed by fire regulations, which usually make it difficult to design the intermediate spaces and their flexible use.» The architectural language spoken by the Weiden school is simultaneously local and universal. It belongs to the culturally sophisticated and international line of thinking which realizes that the ordinary can have greater appeal than the extraordinary. For Karamuk and Kuo the latent potential of the site, to bring out through the project, had to do with development of a simple system from the viewpoint of building components, but one that is sophisticated in the way they are used, from the perspective of both the students and the teachers. A civil, communitarian work of architecture that is nevertheless capable of respecting individualities and of providing surprising, unexpected spaces.

## page 27

Beyond fear. A school in  
South Central Los Angeles  
**Chiara Baglione**

«Rule number one: get yourself a gun [...], rule number two: don't trust nobody [...], rule number three: don't get caught up,» the rapper Ice Cube, a famous exponent of “gangsta rap,” recommended in *How to Survive in South Central*, one of the tracks from the album *Death Certificate* in 1991. The title refers to one of the most violent and poor areas of Los Angeles, a place wars between gangs like the Crips and the Bloods, where in 1992 the Rodney King Riots caused 63 deaths, with over 2000 injuries, fires, looting and devastation. Twenty-five years later, those events were narrated in films and documentaries that appeared in 2017, like *Let It Fall: Los Angeles 1982-1992*, directed by John Ridley, which reconstructs the spiral of violence and poverty through the memories of its protagonists. Afro-American in the past, but with a growing Latino population starting in the 1980s, in recent years South Central has gone through a controversial process of gentrification, facing opposition from local associations of residents and groups of activists, along with signs of social improvement such as the birth of the “charter schools.” Beginning in the early 1990s and the focus ever since then of a debate between supporters and critics, these schools rely on both public and private funding, and have greater autonomy than state-run schools. After the failure of the practice of “busing” in the United States, starting in the 1970s – a policy of bus transport of students from Afro-American ghetto zones to schools in other areas, as a way of countering racial segregation – many “charter schools” were created to provide quality education with better chances of college admission for students from disadvantaged and low-income families. This is the case of the schools run in the Los Angeles area by Green Dot Public Schools, a non-profit organization founded in California in 1999, whose mission is the creation of new institutes and the transformation of existing structures. The Ánimo South Los Angeles Charter

High School, founded in 2004, is one of the 20 education facilities supervised by Green Dot in the Los Angeles area (others have recently been added in Memphis and in Washington state), and one of the first five created by this organization in troubled districts of California, in an attempt to respond to the crisis of state-run education, provided in buildings reduced in many cases to “daytime detention centers for an abandoned generation,” as Mike Davis writes in *Ecology of Fear*. Following the destruction of part of the school on South Western Avenue by fire on 22 July 2014, the task of rapidly preparing a reconstruction project on a limited budget was assigned to the Los Angeles firm of Brooks+Scarpa, which had already completed the Green Dot Animo Leadership High School in Inglewood in 2012. Beside an existing building spared by the flames, the new facility contains 10 classrooms for students from 14 to 18 years of age, organized –together with the spaces for teachers and offices– around a central courtyard with a circular form, slightly raised at the center. The classes are formed by about 25 students –a smaller number with respect to the standards of American state-run schools– to foster a higher level of instruction. The clarity of the layout solutions and the essential architectural language go together with several strategic choices that contribute to give the school a vivid image, in spite of the simplicity and low cost of the construction solutions. First of all, the horseshoe form used for the courtyard configures the open space as a welcoming place with a precise symbolic value. This arrangement is obtained thanks to external metal cladding that determines the overall image of the school. While in certain zones of Los Angeles a true “schoolyard fortification” has become necessary, with armed guards and protective enclosures at the borders of the lot, in this case the designers have opted for perforated metal sheets with a height of six meters, which for the most part run along the perimeter walls of the construction, separating from it only at certain points to create small spaces of connection, also used for outdoor activities. Allowing air and light to enter, the metal screen cuts down on noise and above all provides a bulletproof barrier, necessary in dangerous and troubled contexts where students regularly take part in “drive-by drills” to practice how to hit the deck at the teacher's signal, in case of gunfire from passing cars. The architects had to meet the challenge of creating harmony between the need for security and the need to create spaces that would transmit a sense of trust and “normality.” The building looks closed at first glance, but the metal screen, which shines in the sunlight and glows at night thanks to artificial lighting, manages to create an interesting sense of visual depth, offering glimpses of the internal spaces. The choice of a bright yellow color, finally, contributes to lighten the presence of the defensive barrier,

transfiguring it into a feature with a positive connotation. The result is a building that communicates the idea of a protective, safe scholastic institution that at the same time is open and inviting, in tune with the didactic project of Green Dot, which calls for involvement of parents and the local community in the educational activities, and is based on faith in the possibility of social redemption connected with an effective, innovative model of instruction.

## page 35

The profile of the factory  
**Matteo Vercelloni**

The industrial past and the tradition of shipyards in the city of Nantes, capital of the department of Loire-Atlantique, have forcefully influenced the design approach and figure of the facility of the Ecole Supérieure des Beaux Arts Saint-Nazare shown on these pages. The *Ile de Nantes*, the site of the project, facing the city on its north and south sides and connected by many vehicle bridges, two rail lines and a pedestrian walkway, extends in the river with an area of 337 hectares and is the result of the unification of small islands separated by the canals that were part of the branches of the Loire. The industrial roots of the island date back to the mid-19th century with the construction of the Voruz foundries, which in 1870 employed 600 workers. Later, in 1909, thanks to an agreement of the industrialists of Nantes, the *Ateliers e Chantiers de Bretagne* (ACB) took form on the island, then passing into the hands of the steel group Alstom, which in 2003 sold the abandoned industrial areas to Nantes Métropole with the outlook of their overall urban regeneration. In 2004 the revitalization and redesign of the *Ile de Nantes and its existing* industrial features were assigned to the *Société d'Aménagement de la Métropole Ouest Atlantique* (SAMOA), selected as the sole operator for the overall coordination of the project and the orchestration of the various phases of intervention. The reconfiguration of the site, of which the Ecole Supérieure des Beaux Arts is an integral part, is based on the opening of the enclosures of the existing factories, in an effort to create a new road network and a succession of public spaces, to construct a new neighborhood dimension connected to the urban morphology and the life of the city that extends across the river. The transformation of the Halles Alstom is an integral part of this process and is based on three complementary actions: development of events to open the site to public use, an offering of spaces for creative workshops, educational programs and artists' studios. Besides the recovery and transformation of Halles 4 and 5 occupied by the Ecole Supérieure des Beaux Arts opened in September 2017, the area of the former Alstom steel mills –where some smaller connecting elements (3 and 6 bis) have been eliminated to create a road network for the public use of the complex– has included, halfway through 2018 in pavilion 6, the University of Nantes and a group of innovative businesses



connected with urban and real estate development, while the Halles 1 and 2 will bring together protagonists of the economic activities of the *Quartier de la Création*, a technology center, artists' studios and places of creative experimentation, as well as restaurants (slated to open in June 2019). A variety of synergic and complementary functions organized to form the foundation of a new urban scenario of creative and artistic production, characterized by an attempt to decompartmentalize practices and the type of opportunities offered for work, experimentation and education in the "new" district. Halles 4 and 5, with a metal structure of riveted beams, extend over an area of about 6900 m<sup>2</sup>, in a parallel and linear arrangement having a length of 161 meters and a width of 42, reaching a maximum height of 19 meters with regularly paced sawtooth roofing. The industrial silhouette, as in a child's drawing, the "line of the factory" is the leitmotif that holds together the project of salvaging and reinvention of the industrial past with which the new functions and volumes come to terms. Having conserved the entire metal skeleton and freed the space from internal overlays, the project has proceeded by cladding the original structure in a new transparent skin composed of polycarbonate panels, interrupted on the fronts at a height of about four meters before reaching ground level. In this way, the original silhouette of the factory has been reorganized, becoming an ethereal, mutable figure of reference (which varies its appearance from day to night based on the lighting activated inside), intentionally assigned the task of reformulating the original profile of the factory, in a recollection of its origins and activities. Inside this translucent enclosure, intended to be permeable to the public on all sizes, organizing a sheltered space on the western end facing the new public zone in front of Halles 1 and 2, two parallel volumes extend on three levels, connected by elevated passages across the central covered street at full height, in which we can observe the original size of the complex. As in a sort of architectural "matryoshka," the project reflects the concept of "boxes in the box": the first is external, protecting against rain water while filtering the sunlight; the second is internal, taking the form of new modular, compact volumes, independent in terms of structure, seismic and thermal performance, and physical plant, in a recomposition of the original volume that contains them. In the large roofed plaza of the western end the two internal volumes are interrupted to create two "suspended" overhanging figures: a cantilevered glass block and a staggered volume that follows the shape of the steps of the auditorium it contains. A project of recovery and reinvention of an industrial artifact taken to an urban scale, which illustrates how the approach to constructed heritage, working through additions and contractions, treating historic real estate as a resource to be regenerated, is one of the most widespread expressions of contemporary architectural design, not only in Europe.

## page 45

A theater for architecture  
Federico Tranfa

"The new theater, as the only one of its kind, can constitute a new identifying image of the school itself: a laboratory of ideas and events, a place of experimentation, an ideal instrument for learning, rather than for teaching".

With the opening of the Teatro dell'architettura, and the already programmed expansion of the facilities for the courses of the first year, the Academy of Architecture of the University of Italian Switzerland in Mendrisio, 22 years after its founding, reaches a definitive status. The new building with a central circular plan is charged with forceful symbolism, because its content –representing its spirit– has not been determined in advance, but will depend on the quality of its programming and its capacity to become an attraction, also with respect to the community. The form of the theater links back to a humanistic idea of design, an intuition around which the Academy of Architecture –not without a number of difficulties– took form thanks to the commitment of a nucleus of its future faculty coordinated by Mario Botta. To found a school (specifically the first Italian-language university in Switzerland) is an action that marks the history of a community, because it represents its educational capacity at the highest level, in implicit recognition of its cultural importance. In 1991 the chairman of the federal council for schools of Zurich and Lausanne, Prof. Crottaz, asked Botta to focus on the problematic issues related to the increased enrollment in those two cities. In his report, imagining possible solutions, Botta went so far as to hypothesize the creation of a new institution capable of coping with the rapid changes of contemporary culture through a greater focus on the humanities. This idea seemed to be destined to remain a theoretical exercise, until in 1994, on a federal political level, Canton Ticino's right to create a University of Italian Switzerland was recognized, a development that encouraged Botta to write to the state council, urging the validity of the project he had developed for the Confederation. His opinion was that in relation to the intention to create the University of Italian Switzerland, the first department should be that of architecture. Among the reasons cited, there was the importance of the historic diaspora of architects and master builders from Ticino. Brilliant individuals whose origins, once they had migrated, were often confused with Italy, the favorite destination for their moves. Actually, the idea was not so much to lay claim to the background in Ticino of architects like Francesco Borromini or Carlo Maderno, as to insist on the timeliness of classical culture as a sum of knowledge capable of coping with the complexities of the contemporary world, combining the pragmatism of the polytechnic tradition with the sensibilities and mental openness of humanism. Thanks to the coinciding intention to create departments of Sciences of Communication and Economics in Lugano, Canton Ticino could reach the minimum number of departments required to obtain the status of a "university canton." So it was that in the fall of 1995, through a cycle of public conferences, the preliminary activities for the

formation of the University of Italian Switzerland (USI) were organized, with courses starting the next year, in 1996. The objective shared by the founders of the Architecture Academy was to implement a synthesis of technical and human sciences, operative skills and historical-critical thinking. This preamble is indispensable to understand the genetic code of a school of architecture that is reflected in its program of studies, but also in the organization of its spaces. The Academy campus, initially formed by Palazzo Turconi (the former hospital of Mendrisio) and a temporary wooden building designed by Mario Botta and Aurelio Galfetti, is now composed of a constellation of different structures, also including a residence for students. Through an international competition held in 2013, the project was selected for a building that would contain the teaching spaces, workshops and faculty offices for the first-year courses. This operation was followed by the transformation of Palazzo Turconi into a central library, and the demolition of the temporary wooden pavilion. One special characteristic of the campus is its integration in the urban fabric of Mendrisio. The absence of physical barriers allows pedestrians to cross the campus and to share its outdoor spaces, as in the case of the garden of Villa Argentina. From a functional standpoint, the Teatro dell'Architettura replaces the Academy gallery as an exhibition space, while offering a permanent location for conferences and public encounters. In the intentions of its founders, the theater has been created as an independent but synergic institution with respect to the university. It will be the space in which to evaluate academic production, but also a seismograph to intercept signals from abroad, passing them on to the community of students and teachers. An ambitious and in some ways utopian project, but one that is closely linked to the courageous, altruistic nature of the process of the Academy's founding.

## page 49

Interview with Mario Botta (10.11.2017 and 18.06.2018). Academy and Theater:  
a story  
Federico Tranfa

**FT** It is striking that the physiognomy of the Academy of Architecture in Mendrisio does not have a direct link with the work of the man behind it, but has always had a plural image. How did the passage happen from the initial intuition, that of an individual, to the team effort of the founding of the school?  
**MB** It could not have been otherwise, because my way of thinking about the discipline should not be confused with my architectural language, which is unconditional. The discipline, on the other hand, requires multiple interpretations to nurture critical awareness. We wanted to make this school into an institution capable of developing critical consciousness, and the Teatro dell'Architettura is intended to be its operative vehicle. After all, a school is something very different from an idea. The school cannot help but develop through the contribution of many people, especially its institutional counterparts. When you found a school there is also the problem of legitimacy with respect to other European schools, the necessary common denominator to achieve recognition of degrees and to permit student mobility.

For us, the effort has been to act within this limit – which is valid in Oslo just as it is in Palermo – to find a profile of teaching in which the technical and functional aspects, which are those that determine the practice of the craft, would be combined with the philosophical and social aspects that sustain the discipline. Our profile is based on the conviction that to approach the complexity of the new and the speed of transformations in progress, the humanistic disciplines are more indispensable than the technical disciplines in the training of an architect. For Switzerland this has been an epochal reversal, because the polytechnic institutes in the past saw technical instruction as the sole response to the problems of the society. Instead, we assert that the school should not focus on solutions (which are found, instead, in the practice of the craft), but should set out to identify problems. We have thought about a school that would be able to raise problematic issues rather than providing solutions.

**FT** All human endeavors are marked by phases of evolution, and the phase of the conception is remembered with great affection. Today the Academy is an established reality, but the time that has passed since its founding is still quite short (20 years, ed.). What do you say to those who feel nostalgia for the early years?  
**MB** Clearly the outset, the start of an adventure, represents a moment even richer in significance than the adventure itself. The start contains all the potential, and Louis Kahn has written some lovely things on this concept. The start of an adventure is full of hope and intensity, which make it impossible to compare to the phases of its subsequent development.

**FT** With the completion of the Teatro dell'Architettura the campus of the Academy has been enhanced by a space that will become a gathering place for the community of students and local residents. Over the years, how has the relationship between the school and the host city changed?  
**MB** Actually it hasn't changed much. Twenty years after the arrival of the first students, the changes in the town (we should remember this is more like a village than a city) are still not so evident. This depends on the fact that the number of students is quite limited, and on the naturally slow process of adaptation of the urban fabric.

**FT** From a physical standpoint the Academy has grown through the reuse of existing buildings and the construction of new ones. A constellation of different works of architecture, which scatter the presence of the school in the surrounding urban fabric. How much is all this the result of circumstances, and to what extent does it reflect the philosophy of the school, the aim of integration with the territory?  
**MB** The choice of placing the Academy in Mendrisio, remaining separate from the university campus in Lugano, was a matter of identity, connected with the desire to nurture a certain independence from the main institution. After all, the IUAV in Venice (where I studied) is also separated from the University of Padua, and has grown and developed independently. In our view, being in Mendrisio meant two things: getting away from the main institution, whose process of formation was not in any case much ahead of ours, and above

all to be closer to Italy, also psychologically reducing the distance from the Mediterranean world, which is the cultural territory we address. To achieve this objective, which was far from automatic, we had to make a concerted effort. Mendrisio also corresponds to an idea of a university campus distributed within the urban fabric. A system based on the excellence of certain small institutes scattered in the territory, each with its own identity. The library, the Archivio del Moderno, the Teatro dell'Architettura are institutes that individually enrich the profile of the school and contribute, together, to revitalize the town, which in this way becomes part of the university. This is quite different from the Anglo-Saxon model applied by Lausanne and Zurich, where the campus is autonomous and in some ways rather self-absorbed. Instead, we spend time in the cafes and restaurants, we mingle with the townspeople, sharing their gathering places.

**FT** The Theater of Architecture also comes into being thanks to a Foundation, which makes it even more independent. How do you envision the life of the theater in a few years?  
**MB** The theater was founded to become a prod with respect to the Academy, beyond the official appointments of the school's agenda. In our intentions, the theater will be complementary to the activities of the cycle of studies, offering its own independent cultural program.

**FT** We know that the Academy was created without reference to existing models, but instead by trying to respond to a cultural demand that was not being addressed in the world of higher education. Is it already possible to gauge the impact of the graduates of this school on a national and international level? I am asking this because elsewhere the figure of the architect with a general background (the basis of the program of the Academy) is seen as anachronistic, in a time when higher education should be moving towards maximum specialization.  
**MB** Our attitude has to come to grips with the process of specialization in progress on a daily basis. Today the specializations have an impact on all sectors of learning, from the world of communication to that of design, urban planning, structural engineering. We are deeply convinced that specializations serve the purposes of globalization, encouraging separation of tasks and division of labor, leading to subjugation to capital and finance. If, on the other hand, we are able to keep critical awareness alive, setting out to define the architect as someone who critically organizes the spaces of life of human beings, we can have a more conscious dialogue with the specialists, acknowledging their control over operative tools. This is the sphere in which we defend the figure of the architect-generalist, to which we have also devoted one of our Quaderni dell'Accademia (*L'architetto generalista*, ed. Christoph Frank and Bruno Pedretti, Mendrisio Academy Press-Silvana Editoriale 2013).

**FT** A very timely theme connected with architectural education is the relationship between the international dimension of the discipline and the need to have roots in the local culture. At the start of the Academy there was the conviction that these two aspects can successfully coexist. Do you still believe this?



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