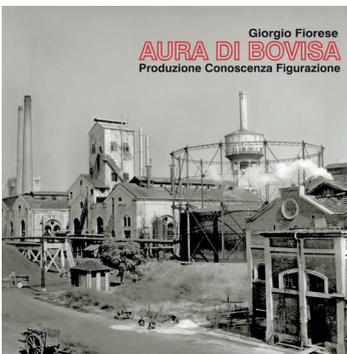


Giuseppe Verterame  
**Learning from Bovisa. Memories of a neighborhood**

---

Author: *Giorgio Fiorese*  
 Title: *AURA di BOVISA*.  
 Subtitle: *Produzione Conoscenza Figurazione*  
 Language: *Italiano*  
 Publisher: *Maggioli Editore*  
 Characteristics: format 26x26 cm, 139 pagine, brochure, in colour  
 ISBN: 978-88-916-5579-0  
 Year: 2022

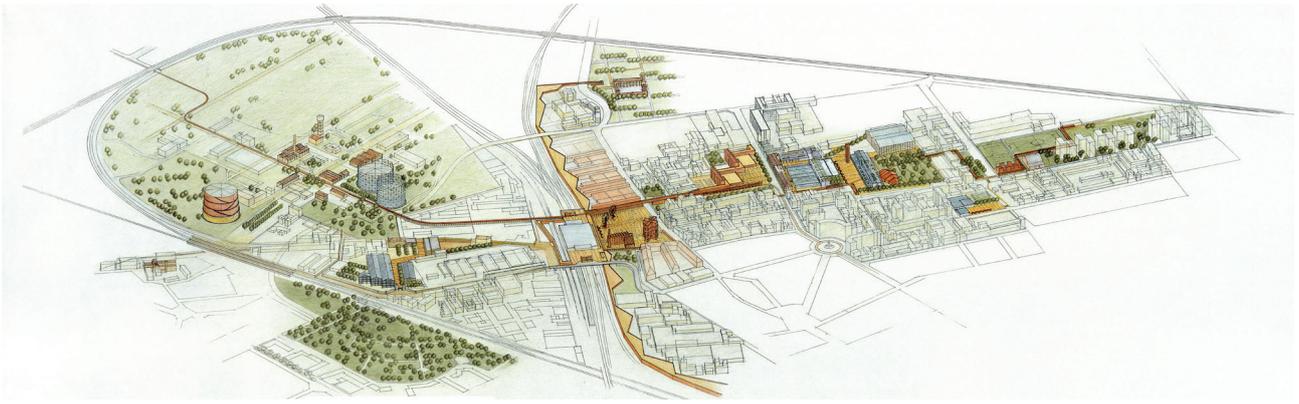
---



Giorgio Fiorese's book represents the latest outcome of a personal research on the Bovisa district, in which he has been involved since the early years of his academic and professional career. From the pages of the book, one feels a strong involvement that has lasted for decades and from which a certain *romanticism* shines through. It is no coincidence that, in the title «Aura of Bovisa», he uses a highly evocative word associated with the toponym that unequivocally identifies an area within the city. The word *aura* is a dynamic concept, evoking a sensation, an irrational substance associated with an opaque and unspecific memory. In the book, an attempt is made to restore the *aura* of the neighbourhood through numerous, heterogeneous events that feature the Bovisa stage. The author does not attempt to describe this atmosphere, but tries to crystallise it through maps, photographs, biographical accounts, extracts from novels, films and plays. The book spans 140 years of history, and the range of materials it contains makes it an immense archival repertoire that conveys the changes that have taken place in this piece of land, where the environment has changed numerous times in relation to urban, economic and social developments.

Fiorese adds three words to the title - Production Knowledge Figuration - useful to identify three thematic-chronological sections and, at the same time, keys to interpreting Bovisa's complex history. The structure of the book consists of 16 chapters full of information and numerous parallel insights. They advance in chronological order, but the thematic subdivision involves references and overlaps that make the relationship between the events, necessarily, multiple and complex. The thematic tripartition enunciated by the subtitle is not evident from the summary; instead, it manifests itself among the events mentioned in the pages of the book, in the photographs, in the paintings or in the poems, and sometimes mixes the elements of the whole to restore the *aura* of Bovisa.

The first chapter reports the biographical stories of people connected to Bovisa. Among them are characters from different social backgrounds, and their stories are an important contribution to portraying the changes that have taken place. The nine different biographies reported embrace the entire life of the district, from the first decades of the 19th century to the present day, or almost.



**Fig. 1**

Project by the "Social Infrastructures" group (group leader G. Fiorese) of the Architecture Design Department on the occasion of the exhibition for the Municipality of Milan - Zone 7 Bovisa Dergano Council (11/12/1996 - 17/01/1997).

Even before the district existed, there was only land devoted to agriculture: the territorial system was made up of a punctiform set of farmsteads and oratories. One of these was the Cascina Bovisa, located in the Municipality of the Corpi Santi, from which the district's name was also derived.

From the mid-19th century a series of events occurred that began to characterise and structure the future Bovisa district.

In 1859 the Milan-Turin railway line was completed and in 1879 the connections to Erba and Saronno. These events would give Bovisa the image of a border territory, from an institutional, administrative and economic point of view.

In 1873 the municipality of the Corpi Santi was annexed to the city of Milan: the conversion from rural territory to urban satellite began.

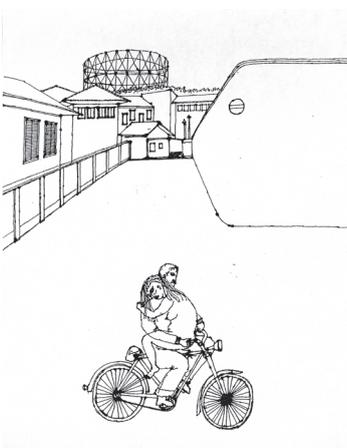
This date represents a watershed and the actual birth of the district, which will be gradually completed over the following decades.

1882 is recognised by Fiorese - who uses a conspicuous bibliographical apparatus - as the year of birth of the Italian chemical industry, which found in Bovisa the ideal place for development and where excellences in the sector began to settle: Candiani, Calamari, Brill, Carlo Erba, Mapei, among others. The author reconstructs this period - which corresponds to *Production* - through a precise chronology of the Bovisa industry. The latter is supplemented with numerous photographs of the period and descriptions of the most important production activities, from which the life of the industrial district and the stories of the workers and factories are accurately portrayed.

Between the turn of the century and the 1930s, several civil settlements were built to integrate services and inhabitants into the prevailing production activity. These include a hospital, two primary schools, and three residential units of the Istituto Case Popolari.

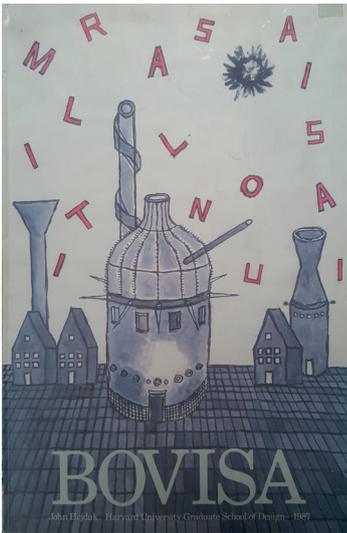
The first gasometer was built in 1905, followed by one in 1930 and a third in 1953, then closed in 1994. Still today, the gasometers - only two, as the one in 1953 was demolished - characterise the urban landscape of the district, clearly visible from different points.

The book continues with chapters on the periods of the two world wars and the post-war period, when the district continued to structure itself from an urban point of view. These sections contain various testimonies, including paintings by Mario Sironi, workers' memoirs, an excerpt from Ermanno Olmi's «Il ragazzo della Bovisa», drawings and paintings by Ampelio Tettamanti, works and photos by Ernesto Treccani, writings by Giovanni Testori, and testimonies and scenes from Luchino Visconti's «Rocco e i suoi fratelli».



**Fig. 2**

Bovisa - The Return, John Hejduk, project for the Triennale di Milano 1987.



**Fig. 3**  
Bovisa – Chapel of the dead angel, John Hejduk, project for the Triennale di Milano 1987.

1970 saw the beginning of a period - corresponding to the often-converging theme of *Knowledge* and *Figuration* - in which the author was involved, including the period of student mobilisations and academic reform. In those years the industrial decommissioning of the district was taking place, prolonged over the following decade, which gave rise to many urban transformation projects, and the group coordinated by Guido Canella, of which Fiorese was a member, developed some of these proposals, which sought to establish the new headquarters of the Politecnico in Bovisa.

The book contains a great deal of archive documentation, from the discussions with the public administration - which originally planned to locate the Politecnico in Gorgonzola - to the various design proposals that followed.

In 1987 Nicolini repropoed the theme at the Triennale, in the event «The Imagined Cities». In the book, this occasion provided the opportunity to devote several pages to the figure and works of John Hejduk, one of the designers invited by Nicolini for the Bovisa proposal.

The exploration of material on the neighbourhood continues with interviews, further stories, photographs and drawings. The final pages present the most recent projects and initiatives - including the knowledge hub - that confirm, in fact, the main idea of a cultural district.

The book only apparently shows the history of a neighbourhood-laboratory through the countless voices of its inhabitants in the course of its evolution. Actually, Giorgio Fiorese realises a product through a scientific process that is as intricate as it is exemplary, linking the findings of a potentially boundless archive with the eternal dynamics of the city's transformation. It is a very complex process, but one that has been made transmissible precisely thanks to this publication: it is not, therefore, just about the memories of the Bovisa district. This example shows us how history and design feed off each other, giving rise to combinations that give rise to multiple interpretations. That of Bovisa, is a tale that continues to the present day, by its very nature imperishable: it reveals the becoming of an *imaginary museum* through a process of selection and juxtaposition of material elements, events, stories that testify to the experience of the city's centuries-old substance. Many still unresolved suburbs like Bovisa can only benefit from the reconstruction of a memory-archive from which to generate a multiplicity of interpretations, especially from the point of view of the project.