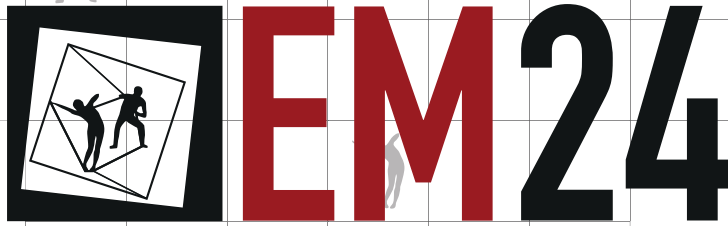


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IN-PRESENCE / THE BODY AND THE SPACE

The role of corporeity in the era of virtualization

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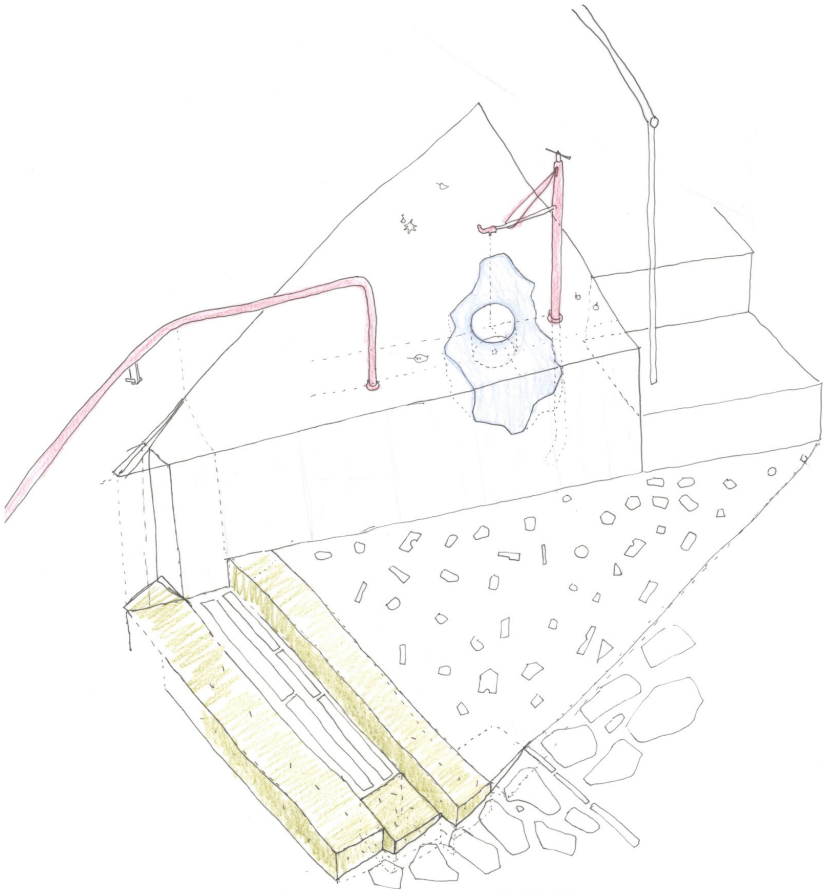
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IN-PRESENCE / THE BODY AND THE SPACE

The role of corporeity in the era of virtualization

For those who deal with the city and the territory, space refers to the body
(C. Bianchetti)

The EURAU Milan 2024 Conference aims to unpack the significance of corporeality in contemporary times and its relevance for the upcoming years. Specifically, the focus is on the relation between body and space and how this relates to architecture, the city and the environment, interpreted as physical facts and processes. Within the background of a technological turn, the focus is now on what has changed or will further change in this relationship and what, on the opposite, remains unalterable, inherently bound to the material and impervious to the virtual.



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The human scale of riverscapes.

A body-centered perspective for fragile territories

Key Words

River system, Body-centered perspective, Regeneration, Fragile territories

This contribution explores the meaning of a body-centered approach to the design of river systems in fragile territories: often associated with marginal areas and mountain or rural settings, these are characterized by risk, depopulation, and precarious social and economic conditions [Carrosio, Faccini 2018] [1]. Both a valuable endangered resource and a risk factor for these places, nowadays the river system represents an interesting field of investigation: in fact, it hardly constitutes an integral part of the landscape, but rather a “neglected area” [Clément 2004, p. 4] [2]. This transition within the collective imagination, together with the set of interventions that over the centuries have reduced the physical complexity, biological variety, and regeneration capacity of the river ecosystem, has forced renewed questioning about its management and use, orienting design strategies for its renaturalization and recovery [Oldani 2016, pp. 72-74].

Within this framework, a body-centered design perspective considers the river as a complex ecosystem that interacts with the surrounding environment and its users, and it implies two relevant design actions: the first rethinks the human scale of architectures for water use and management, emphasizing the ways by which water and body can dialogue within the space; the second involves both the physical and intangible connections of smaller interventions on a territorial scale, to build a single riverscape for the sensory experience [3]. Focusing on the latter, which is essentially bodily [Chiodo 2011, p. 93] [4], means highlighting the verbal nature of architecture and space: briefly, conceiving it through situations in addition to the forms [5]. A body-centered perspective in fragile territories seems essential for two main reasons: the first is the considerable environmental and natural heritage linked to the river ecosystem, which requires sustainable strategies for its preservation and, at the same time, its enhancement as a collective resource; the second is the general abandonment process that affects fragile

areas, which makes it urgent to develop projects which foster their re-habitability and take into account the needs of their inhabitants.

To bolster the argument, the current contribution delves into a curated selection of European case studies: these show how designers meticulously select, reimagine, and interconnect significant focal points within expansive water systems, all while prioritizing the human scale of spaces and nurturing the dynamic interplay between water and the human body. These examples, with their strong public vocation, represent an interesting point of view that can inspire design actions in fragile contexts, and bring out a methodology that unfolds in two distinct phases: a critical-interpretive one and a design one.

Starting with the former, the objective is to provide a reading of the place focused on the bodily experience. During this stage, it is necessary to discern and categorize various architectural elements that reflect the convergence of space and the human form: infrastructure geared towards overcoming physical barriers and managing water flow, alongside smaller features like fountains or water troughs, exemplify two interesting typologies characterized by very different scales. Yet, they collectively encapsulate the intricate web of human interventions aimed at regulating and distributing water across the landscape.

The second phase, the design one, consists of site-specific projects as occasions for new balances in the place, with particular attention to the human body as a yardstick of the space. Here, it will be necessary to evaluate how the typologies mentioned above can be systematized and rethought to build a unique riverscape in which the bodily experience plays a central role.

By using the methodology previously described and the case studies to validate the principles assumed on a theoretical level, a new semantics for fragile areas will be defined: it is conceived as the codification of a renewed language developed, firstly, from the recognition and systematization of the essential territorial components and, lastly, from the attribution of new meanings to them.

From this perspective, architectural design can trigger virtuous dynamics for the re-habitability of these territories and their waters, through a reading of the river system that considers its multiscale declinations by bringing them back, finally, to the scale of human experience. Thus, it will be possible to move away from a paradigm of water as a resource to be exploited, to embrace instead a vision that sees it as a fragile and collective heritage to be preserved, a territory of refuge and possible invention [Clément 2004, p. 14] that evolves in biological dependence, unpredictable and unstable by its very nature [ivi, pp. 26-27].

This new approach seems particularly important and urgent, especially in light of the depopulation processes affecting the inner areas: the rediscovery of margins, diversity, and residual spaces makes it possible to deal with the co-evolutionary gap between communities and territories and to enhance, ultimately, the fragmented and plural nature of the Italian territory [Lantieri, Simoni, Zucca 2021, p.40].

ENDNOTES

[1] In Italy, the fragile areas are characterized by a marked territorial polarization, due to the significant distance from essential services, poor socio-economic opportunities, low income and productivity levels, environmental and seismic risks, and poor maintenance of buildings and landscape: all these factors represent concatenated causes at the origin of increasingly intense abandonment and depopulation phenomena.

[2] According to Clément, neglected areas are marginal spaces that have been abandoned following their exploitation.

[3] Authors such as Kevin Lynch and later Christian Norberg-Schultz propose an investigation of the relationship between space and bodies based on the information that the individual acquires through the senses and, then, processes cognitively: Kevin Lynch, in particular, theorizes how individuals perceive space through common mental schemas [Lynch 1981], while Norberg-Schultz, based on Heidegger's philosophy, argues that 'inhabiting' is the purpose of architecture, and that humans 'inhabit' when they can orient and experience the meaning of a certain place [Norberg-Schultz 1979, p. 5].

[4] According to Chiodo, the human body is the *conditio sine qua non* of the spatial experience.

[5] The idea of situation evokes the interplay between two tangible bodies: the relatively static one of architecture, and the dynamic one of human presence. In this context, humans can be viewed as acting objects, and their mutual interaction with architecture defines the unique circumstances set by a certain space.

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FIGURES

Fig. 1 - Studioser Architects, *Redevelopment of the public spaces in Monte. Design of a fountain*, 2020-2022, Monte (Castel San Pietro, Canton Ticino). Source: Studioser.