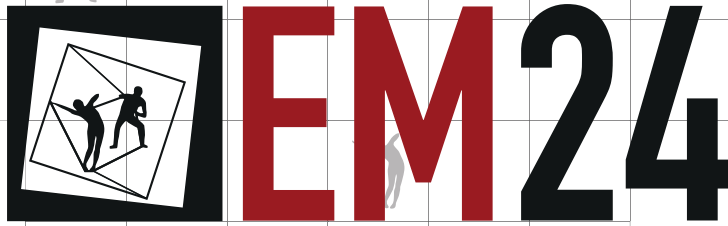


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THE BODY AND
THE SPACE

The role of corporeity in the era of virtualization

Edited by: Marco Bovati, Anna Moro, Daniele Villa

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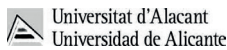
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The Department of Architecture and Urban Studies of the Politecnico di Milano organises at the School of Architecture Urban Planning Construction Engineering (AUIC), EURAU Milan 2024 "IN-PRESENCE / THE BODY AND THE SPACE - The role of corporeity in the era of virtualization", the eleventh edition of the international conference, which takes place from 19 to 22 June 2024.



/ EURAU Milan 2024

11th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

EUROPEAN RESEARCH ON ARCHITECTURE
AND URBANISM INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

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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Empowered Bodies.

The legacy of Tschumi's work as a driver for social and spatial transformation

Key Words

Space-Time-Body, Gender-Space-Architecture, Built Environment

"We must therefore avoid saying that our body is in space, or in time. It inhabits space and time" [Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 161].

Exploring the concepts of space and time and their relationship in the built environment correlates with an understanding and reflection on how bodies perceive, move, inhabit and modify space through time, where practices of use of space, performance and experience question and reformulate the idea of materiality of architecture and what generates it.

Within the current social, environmental and economic uncertainty scenario, there is an urgent need to transform and adapt our built environment to cope with this rapid and continuous instability, where similar to an ecological crisis, we are undergoing a "crisis of care" [Fraser & Jaeggie 2018]. This condition implies shared answers that can bridge the gap towards a just and equitable environment, where the effort is directed towards constructing a culture of prevention engrained in space. Therefore, recasting the architectural projects to cope with these renewed scenarios means reflecting on the tools, methods and processes through which they interact and transform the materiality of space.

In this scenario, design cultures are facing a crucial challenge:

"How do we design spaces and architectures that reflect and respect the diversity of voices, bodies, and identities present in our society? Moreover, how can we promote the long-term empowerment of vulnerable, marginalized bodies and unheard voices through design?"

This question, which goes to the heart of the gender discourse, requires a profound reflection on how issues, which find their origins in reflections with a solid political, ethical and social charge, can directly influence architectural and spatial disciplines, introducing gender equality

as a matter of design. Following the pandemic, there has been a strong call for a reflection on themes that have been central for feminist critique: Living Bodies in Space and the forms of coexistence, a renewed attention to forms of inhabiting space, rethinking the relations between house, work, public space and belonging, breaking down a preconceived patriarchal model for inhabiting and being a citizen.

Drawing from the seminal work developed by Tschumi, the article frames the necessity to reconsider bodies in spatial transformations actively, rethinking the relationship with spaces and, therefore, the design process, suggesting a shift in terms of critical thinking. In the 1970s and early 80s, Tschumi developed a theoretical and applied framework around the relationship – and their continuous inter-exchange – among space/architecture, motion, event and social interactions. This approach, instead, sets the premises of an architecture that ceases to act as a background of everyday life and becomes action. This conception shows the entanglement between space, body and event, stating that “architecture is the discourse of events, as much as the discourse of spaces” [Tschumi 1996, p. 22]. How we perceive, move, inhabit and modify space through time and represent it is affected by how we understand the notions of space and time. These two categories are not absolute nor neutral; on the contrary, they are conceived and conceptualized as shifting according to our identities and activities. Feminist literature in architecture has referred to the physical presence of living bodies in space, defining both a political action of resistance and of appropriation, where the awareness of one’s own body coincides with knowledge of being in a place [Bianchetti 2020, p. 8] and by extension its capacity to recognize itself in it.

This conceptualization was influenced by the radical movements and the socio-cultural and artistic panorama evolving in Paris and London from the 1960s, seeking to reject the Modernist dogmas and recasting the discipline of architecture. The turn from structuralist to post-structuralist theory, with an intellectual mutation from ‘totality’ to ‘multiplicity’, strongly influenced the theoretical reflection at the time. As a result of this epistemic change, there was a shift in how design was conceived. Tschumi’s interest in the dialectic between social praxis and spatial forms was moulded in the correlated disjunction between predetermined uses and those performed by the actual users, which must be preferred [Charitonidou 2020]. The Manhattan Transcripts and Space and Events make explicit this conception of urban experience as simultaneously space and event, unveiling “the complex relationship between spaces and their use; between the set and the script; between ‘type’ and ‘program’; between objects and events” [Tschumi 2012, p. 80]. The contribution considers space and time as culturally perceived categories, where the relation of bodies to space and architecture shifts according to time and its identity. In this sense, how can we design spaces that encapsulate and translate the notion of embodiment and diversity within them? This framework becomes relevant in the debate around social and gender inequalities in the built environment, where Tschumi’s theoretical and design legacy, informed by a cross-contamination of architecture, arts, literature and forms of representations, could give valuable insights to frame a contemporary reflection on the necessity to recast the discipline of architecture by its encounter with the everyday experience of space encompassed in feminist critique. By assuming the ephemeral, the performative, the occupation and appropriation, the experience of space in all its multiple declinations – for they reflect the dynamic transformations our societies and cultures are undergoing – architecture is called upon to rethink the intersections between sociality, spatiality and temporality, holistically.

The article frames the necessity to reconsider bodies in spatial transformations actively, rethinking the relationship with spaces and, therefore, the design process, suggesting a shift in terms of critical thinking. Highlighting the intersection of space, time, body and gesture, which finds a synthesis in the construction of the built environment, allows the unveiling of the networks of power and how people carve out space during a different period, encompassing the transformative power of temporality understood as part of the design process. The current debate informing architectural activities has been characterized by questioning how we will live together, focusing on the coexistence of bodies and objects within the urban milieu. It seems, therefore, relevant to draw renewed attention to Tschumi’s interrogations between space, events and the role of physical experience, for they can give a fruitful perspective to this discussion. In *The Pleasure of Architecture*, he argued that architecture could act as “an instrument of socio-cultural change”, where the cohabitation of people in space could facilitate urban success [Tschumi 1977]. The paper wants to draw a reflection on the possibilities that the encounter between this conception of urban experience as simultaneously space and event – where the cohabitation of people can facilitate urban success – and feminist critique – which questions whose voice is represented, how bodies are “physically, socially, sexually, and discursively produced” [Grosz 1995] and how this attitude can inform a different kind of engagement with people and the environment – can open up. Feminist methodologies

have brought attention back to living bodies in space, with their own gendered identities and characteristics, going beyond the abstract category of “users” [Lefebvre 1974] devoid of phenomenal identity, incapable of recognizing themselves in space. Furthermore, what emerges from this kind of approach is the notion of different temporalities that coexist and structure the process. Tschumi’s investigation could be considered, in this sense, an essential reference in exploring the intersections of time, space, movement and body and how they can shape space, unveiling the power relations that structured space through time, causing the “expulsion” and the lack of recognition of vulnerable and marginalized bodies in space. However, this relationship between space and body understood dynamically, has often given rise to performative experiences linked to the spatial and temporal dimension of the event, which takes on the ephemeral as its main characteristic. Looking primarily at those practices of urban commons and the re-appropriation of spaces in vulnerable contexts by marginalized communities, often referred to as “altering practices” [Petrescu 2007], the contribution questions this approach and its capability of interacting with the ‘hardware’ of the city. Therefore, the aim, through the discussion of contemporary design experiences, by muf architecture/art, Equal Saree and Atelier d’Architecture Autogérée, is to investigate the role of the event – as a first formalized moment – in conveying strategic design actions and how these can trigger long-term transformations of the built environment, setting up a more inclusive, equitable and democratic change in architectural design and processes, starting back from the role of living bodies in conveying a transformation. Specifically, the aim is to reflect on how Tschumi’s contribution can generate contemporary design to methodologies and how, from the event, it is possible to generate long-term transformations of the built space by reconstructing a unity between object and event, between space, time and sociality, between bodies and places. In conclusion, the contribution aimed to open up the discussion about designing spaces and architectures that translate and encapsulate the diversity of voices, bodies, and identities, promoting long-term empowerment of vulnerable and marginalized bodies and amplifying unheard voices through design. Therefore, the contribution explores the possibilities of considering bodies, events, movement and synchronic temporalities in discussing spatial transformation, considering the intersection between this framework and feminist critique. This reasoning involves the meaning of design – where, through the event, it is possible to trigger not only a spatial transformation but also a cultural one, modifying the meaning of space and, therefore, the space itself.

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