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Book of Proceedings

Conference for Artistic and Architectural Research

Department of Architecture and Urban Studies,
Politecnico di Milano

Italy, Milano, April 03–05, 2025

Authorship(s) Book of Proceedings Colophon

CA²RE-Milan AUTHORSHIP(S): Conference for Artistic and Architectural Research

Editors

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Department of Architecture and Urban Studies (DAStU), Politecnico di Milano

Promoted by

PhD Program in Architecture, Urban and Interior Design (AUID), Politecnico di Milano

Keywords

Design-driven doctoral research, architectural research, artistic research

Published by

MMXII Press, piazza Leonardo da Vinci, 26, 20133 – Milano; MMXIIpress@gmail.com

ISBN: 979-12-985302-2-5

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© 2025 published by MMXII Press on behalf of the editors

Design concept, layout, and typesetting

Marko Damiš

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Scientific Committee

As mentioned in Section 8.

Special thanks to

Sara Anna Sapone, Francesco Airoidi, Gino Baldi, Duccio Fantoni, text editing and organizing committee. Gennaro Postiglione, Sara Protasoni, Alessandro Rocca, board of the organizing committee.



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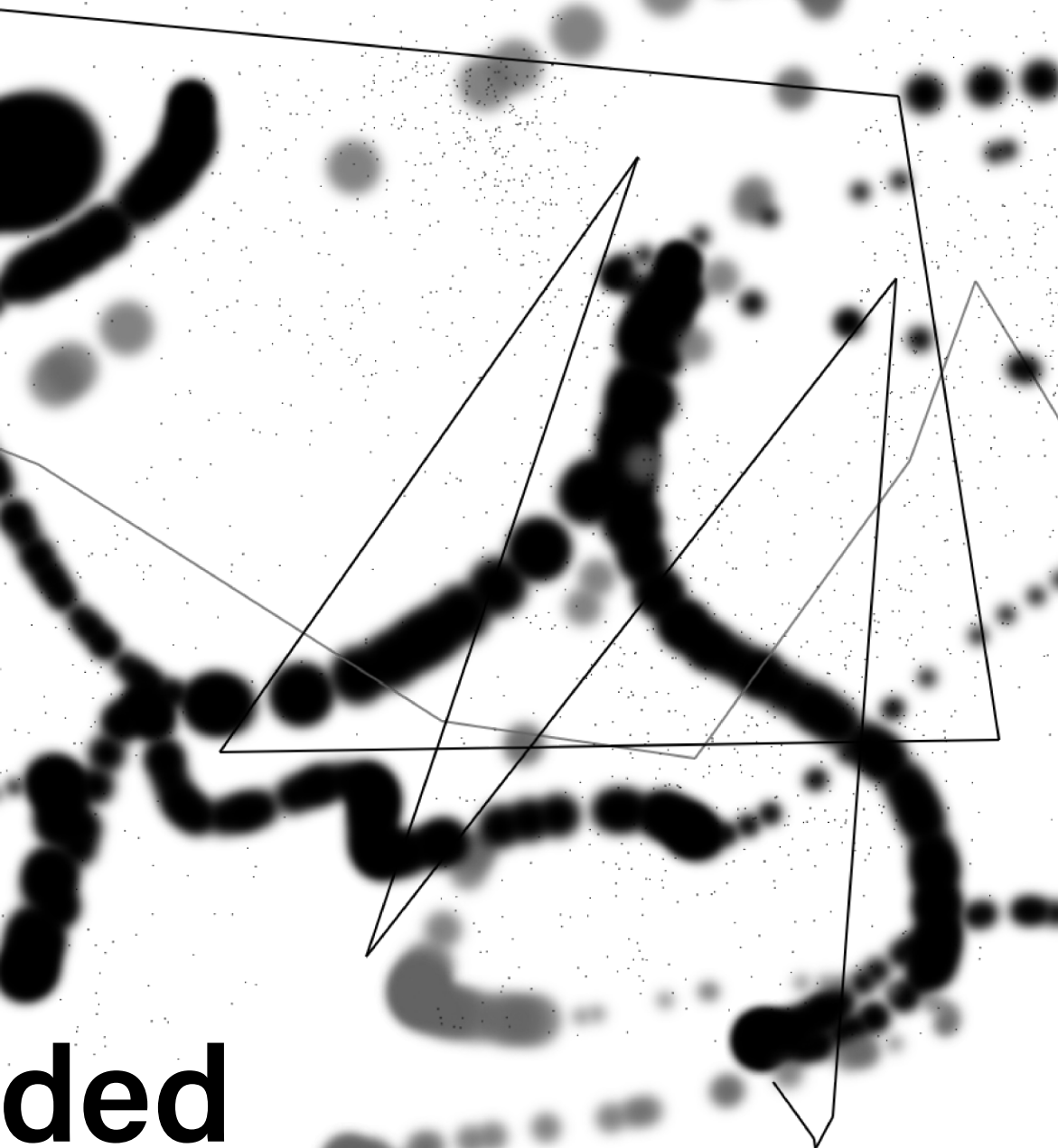
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Authorship on the Margins

Regenerating Urban Voids through Design- Driven Narratives

Nicolò Chierichetti, DASTU, Politecnico di Milano
BK, Delft University of Technology

metadesign, mobility residual spaces,
applied research

Abstract

The reconfiguration of residual spaces along infrastructures, such as Milan ring roads, offers fertile ground to explore authorship as a collective and iterative process. Through methodologies including mapping, taxonomy-building, and the construction of narratives, this research investigates how the designer role transitions from individual creator to mediator who synthesizes technical, cultural, and spatial components. It addresses site-specific explorations beside broader systemic analyses, stressing the balance between micro-scale sensitivity and macro-scale strategic frameworks. It places infrastructural voids as opportunities for urban regeneration, challenging traditional and prescriptive approaches by adopting adaptive and scalable guidelines. Co-funded by a third-party commissioner, this applied research aims to define conditions for future interventions without fixed outcomes, raising critical questions about the nature of authorship when multiple stakeholders are involved. Eventually, by reclaiming neglected urban voids through collaborative narratives and design-driven explorations, the research expands disciplinary boundaries and reframes infrastructure as both a technical necessity and a cultural opportunity.

Reconfiguring residual spaces along infrastructures, such as the ones of the ring roads of Milan, represents a valuable design testing field to explore how authorship emerges not as an individual act but as a collective and iterative process through technical, cultural, and spatial dimensions. This contribution wants to reflect on how design methodologies – including mapping, taxonomy-building, and atmospheres/visions/narrative construction – would redefine the authorial role in reclaiming and regenerating these neglected urban voids while acting on behalf of a third-party commissioner.

The framework is one of a co-funded PhD research, under PNRR¹ and Milano Serravalle Milano Tangenziali² fundings, tackling the role of sustainable mobility as an opportunity for Urban and Landscape Regeneration. This peculiar background is an extremely relevant scenario in which we can discuss the research authorship's limitations and peculiarities, when the project's commissioners and stakeholders have different interests. A key question within such research is the shifting nature of authorship between individual and private-collective interests. On the one hand, site-specificity demands a designer's direct engagement with the unique socio-spatial characteristics of specific urban voids. On the other hand, the systemic nature of a sequence of spaces requires a design taxonomy and atlas that reflect a broader, collaborative mode of authorship and intervention. This dichotomy identified the designer's role not as the sole creator but as a mediator synthesizing multiple perspectives, systems, and border conditions. For instance, an analytical and design taxonomy can rely on multidisciplinary inputs and reframe urban voids as opportunities for urban regeneration, shifting between a site-specific surface and a more general intervention model. Such authorial gestures

allow us to define macro-structures that enable future interventions without prescribing definitive outcomes ex-ante.

The essential form of authorship lies in its focus on *reliquati stradali* road residual spaces in Italy), which remains a poorly researched and under-explored topic. In the geography of academic literature such non-places are recurrent indeed, but always being considered with a negative sensitivity, as something else. On the other hand, for example, Purini presents in an essay on Casabella 739–740³ the sensitivity of understanding such surfaces not as “technical entities”, but within their presence that exceeds the limitation of the functional footprint, in their plural role which the modern times could not effectively evoke (Purini 2006).

Producing knowledge about these overlooked spaces – identifying, analyzing, and proposing interventions for them – identifies an act of authorship. The applied research also configures the opportunity to raise awareness on topics that have been ignored in academic, political, and professional circles, and the study aims to reclaim the physical spaces and expand the disciplinary boundaries of architecture and urban design. This approach to research recalls the principles of infrastructural urbanism, as Kelly Shannon and Marcel Smets discussed in *The Landscape of Contemporary Infrastructure* (Smets and Shannon 2010), where infrastructure is not merely a technical necessity but a spatial and cultural opportunity. They argue that the physical infrastructure is intrinsically entangled with the generation of architecture, landscapes, and the production of urban and living environments that contribute to constructing imaginative dimensions on the same plane of the engineering act.

In the same way, Pierre Bélanger’s work on landscape as infrastructure highlights (Bélanger 2017) the importance of integrating ecological and urban systems into the design of infrastructural spaces. Bélanger argues that it is crucial to “sponsor” an interdisciplinary crossover not only in terms of practical design but also in terms of the different urban components in the design process, especially in shifting the paradigm of infrastructures as a simple technical act. He underlines how infrastructure strategies at an architectural level should transcend a broad spectrum of scales and de-professionalize the conventional and monothematic approach given in dealing with such technical monuments. The approach that the research is trying to follow is to step aside from an “objectification of the infrastructure” (D’Hooghe 2010), which has characterized the previous century, by exploding the physicality and revealing to the commissioner a sequence of hidden values that can be emphasized instead of being reduced to the primary function of the object.

The research adopts a methodology that reflects a collaborative, scalable, reproducible, and iterative *modus operandi*. The combination of macro and micro-scale analyses, the development of systemic categories, and the definition of design-driven explorations define a methodology that steps ahead from traditional notions of originality as a defined outcome but instead attempts to assemble and reconfigure heterogeneous elements and systems in an infinite combination of possibilities. At the macro scale, it identifies and maps the complex territorial systems intersecting with the Milanese mobility infrastructure – such as ecological corridors, intermodal mobility hubs, and marginal residual spaces –

as potential sites for regeneration. Understanding the crossovers and the overlapping of the physical bi-dimensional spatiality with the peculiarities of interfering themes allows us to adopt a more comprehensive perspective not only as an operative act but also in the ability of sight and perception. At the micro-scale, site-specific explorations reveal individual surfaces' unique conditions and opportunities, offering a more profound and sensitive understanding of their potential. Each act of design and research requires the integration of technical, cultural, and ecological perspectives — challenging a conventional view of the designer as a self-referential creator while framing authorship as a process of both negotiation and synthesis. A critical dimension of this research lies in its applied nature. While the presence of an external commissioner reinforces the real-world applicability of the research, it also introduces layers of negotiation. The researcher becomes entangled in a matrix of interests, timelines, and bureaucratic thresholds. In such a context, authorship is no longer singular or heroic but distributed among multiple agents — some visible, others embedded within the protocols of institutional operations.

Being co-funded by an external company operating on the Milan territory⁴, the research outcomes would be constituted by guidelines and meta-design explorations intended to inform the competencies within the motorway concessionaire offices of different perspectives on how to design and develop, and to finally overcome their presence as dominant figures of a dangerous rationality (Secchi 2005). Such strategies are essential for bridging infrastructure's technical and spatial components and establishing a solid framework for future design practices with a renovated approach. However, this raises a critical question: what becomes the role of the researcher, when another practitioner adopts the guidelines and translates the design exploration into a definitive project? Can the researcher still reclaim authorship over the final realized outcome, or is their role limited to the one of a guideline writer?

The proposed guidelines and toolkit are not prescriptive, but rather adaptive, and allow the translation of site-specific insights into broader, scalable scenarios. They represent a form of authorship that is both situated and proactive. This form of authorship creates conditions for other practitioners and researchers to build upon the initial vision. The construction of narratives shows infrastructure to be more than just technical or functional entities — it reveals them as cultural and spatial phenomena. The taxonomy of residual spaces can also be intended as a narrative tool: it highlights the latent potential of these neglected spaces. It positions them within a broader discourse on urban regeneration, on the path of the explorations by Stan Allen in *Infrastructural Urbanism* (Allen 1999) on the performative role of infrastructure. The overlooked nature of these residual spaces connects to a broader historical condition, often labeled as *terrain vague* (De Solà-Morales Rubiò 1995) or part of the Third Landscape (Gilles 2004). These concepts frame such spaces not merely as neglected but as charged with potential — landscapes of indeterminacy where new ecological and spatial futures might unfold. Within the Italian context, the infrastructural developments of the mid-20th century prioritized separation and flow, often at the cost of fragmenting local territorial identities. Re-engaging with these fragments becomes both an act of repair and of authorship.

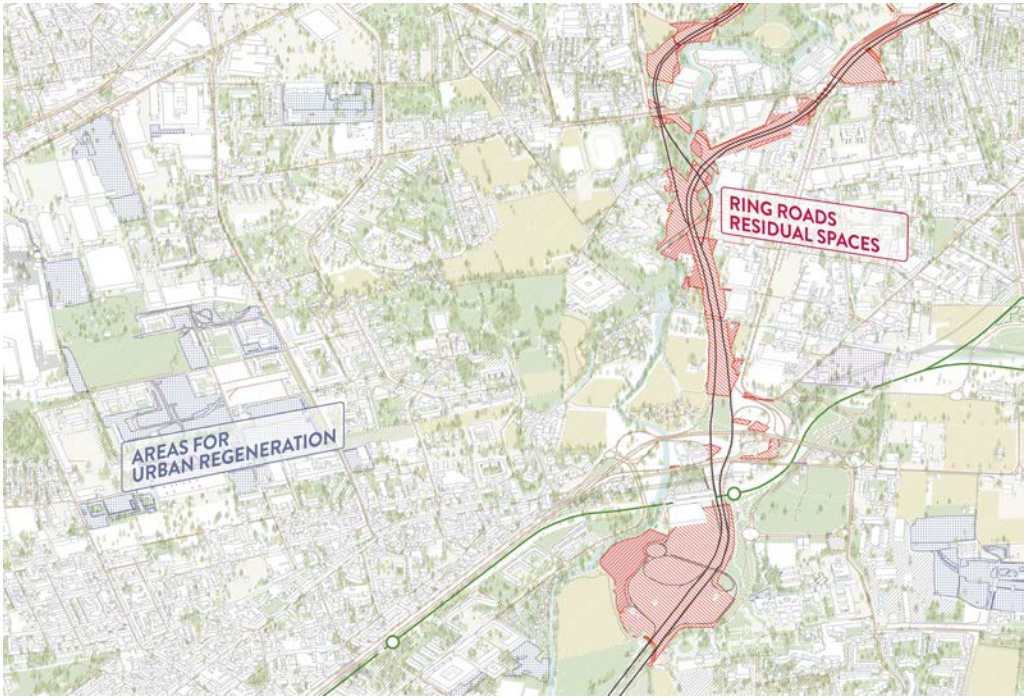


Figure 1: Chierichetti N. (2024). Whose space? In-between the city and the A50 highway infrastructure. The node of Cascina Gobba. [drawing]

Through the tools of drawing, mapping, and design probes, atmospheres are proposed by assembling and reimagining preexisting elements, as well as proposing original combinations and models of interaction. These methods enable the definition of atmospheres and visions that overpass technical limitations typical of infrastructure, opening new perspectives for understanding and interacting with mobility urban voids. By constructing these narratives, the intention is to reclaim authorship over spaces traditionally dominated by technical, bureaucratic, or engineering logic through the sensitivity of an architectural approach: that is indeed one of the added contributions. The use of the section, for instance, plays a key role in revealing vertical relationships and spatial dynamics – while analytical and strategic mappings, as well as the construction of an investigative taxonomy, offer a structured framework for organizing and systematizing heterogeneous inputs to lay the groundwork for future design explorations and interactions. The design research through the use of the section, especially in *territorial architectures* such the highways networks, allows to capture the uniqueness of its transversal interaction, in the same reading that Appleyard and Lynch adopted in their most famous work (Appleyard, Lynch and Myer 1964).

The design solutions proposed in this research balance site-specificity with broader applicability. The explorations are based on the unique conditions of the Milanese case study and are adaptable to other contexts, navigating between the particular and the general declination of strategies. The toolkit would be constituted by an atlas of design probes, which act as pilot case studies and guidelines for future interventions and test transformation premises. They offer a model for reclaiming urban voids in

other cities and regions. These adaptable, combined, and reproducible solutions are also useful to push such knowledge production beyond the boundaries of the immediate case study. This research discourse also underlines how authorship in design-driven practices can be redefined as a collaborative and iterative process that shifts between individual contributions as designers and the further levels of complexity given by the combination of upcoming donations.

The research proves the designer's role as both a mediator and a creator by reclaiming urban spaces and constructing narratives illuminating their potential for a forthcoming stakeholder. Guidelines and toolkits enable the translation of site-specific insights into broader, scalable scenarios, and they challenge traditional notions of originality, embracing the collaborative and multidisciplinary dimensions of design-driven research.

- 1 National Recovery and Resilience Plan
- 2 Milano Serravalle, in short, is a is an Italian infrastructure company that manages and operates a network of motorways and ring roads (tangenziali) around the city of Milan
- 3 The issue 739-740 was devoted to the "Forms of Movement"
- 4 Milano Serravalle Milano Tangenziali

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