



INVISIBLE
ARCHITECTURE



INSIDE THE GREAT WAR BOUNDARIES

In the territories of our time, the architectural project enters into a relationship with the more or less visible and intangible traces of historical identities that have stratified the reality that we live every day. The essays in this book are a multi-identitarian collection on the issue of rehabilitation of boundary areas and conflict where memories, traces and absences create remembrances telling about human stories waiting for new rebirths.



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MEMORIES AND REMEMBRANCES
TRACES AND ABSENCES

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Edited by

Olivia Longo

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Translation of the chapter *Narrative palimpsests on the move. New life cycles for war architectures and infrastructures* by Claudia Battaino

Translation of the chapter *The landscape of strongholds* by Manfredi Leone

This book series deals with scientific research in the fields of city, landscape and architecture within the current focus on reuse and conversion of built heritage.

Special attention is placed on the sensible and inclusive aspect of architecture as far as it includes physical parts of context as well as immaterial aspect such as historical, antropological and sociological ones. These "invisible elements of architecture" are at the core of the book series. Consistently, key notions for this topic will be space-in-between, sublime, uncanny, and of course many others. These can help to understand some "experiential" issues which are normally excluded from design development.

The wide speculations of cultural anthropology and of phenomenology and existentialism set the ground for our approach.

INDEX



Project Great War 2014-18 Olivia Longo	7-II
A. CONSTRUCTION DESTRUCTION	
War destroys war builds Alberto Ferlenga	14-17
Military infrastructures and transformation of the territory Andrea Iorio	18-23
The First World War in the Alto Garda-Adamello Davide Sigurtà	24-29
The white war and the (in)visible landscape infrastructure Filippo Orsini	30-39
B. WAR EFFECT	
Ruins, debris and rubbles of the theatre of wars Silvia Dalzero	42-47
The Weight of Earth William M. Taylor	48-55
Memorial spaces and museums Andrea Nulli	56-59
“Landscape Velcro” Annette Condello	60-68
C. MUTANT BORDERS	
The border Benno Albrecht	70-73
Narrative palimpsests on the move Claudia Battaino	74-79
The landscape of strongholds Manfredi Leone	80-88
The Composition of Conflicts Olivia Longo	89-105

RUINS, DEBRISSES AND RUBBLES OF THE THEATRE OF WARS: BY DECONTAMINATION AND DISPOSAL PROBLEMS TO THE CONFIGURATION OF NEW LANDSCAPES.

Silvia Dalzero

The XX century is a period of wars and conflicts, which today transmit their memory through diffusive acts of “monumentalization”, with the actual possibility to lose the meaning and, sometimes, the reality itself of the historical event. Nevertheless, a monument generally relates to a memory, often being its primary means to assure its perpetuity in the time and beyond the time, stimulating emotions. The objective is to avoid being forgotten, defeating the time itself (as Françoise Choay in *Espacements, L'évolution de l'espace urbain en France*), and often a simple object, a monument indeed, allows partly to stop the flowing of time being at the same time influenced by it, progressively experiencing a partial or complete loss of meanings becoming a reiterated fetish till the final absolute forgetfulness.

Indeed, from the First world War it is not anymore a Homer's war fought by humans and watched by gods, but rather a spectacularized war, near and far, a war followed by direct broadcast, an absurd war, far, a simple fiction. The cinema, the photography and the military conflicts indeed run on parallel trails and, through the century, our history and the history of the cinema go “hand in hand”. Many are the image-stories that wisely describe the military dimension that is spatial, social and cultural. One example is Rome, open city directed by Roberto Rossellini, which tells about a city after the war and, by the same Rossellini, Germany, year zero, where Berlin is revealed as a city in rubbles showing the degradation of the German society and the incapacity to find any moral order, or a social and cultural identity. In Germany, year zero, the scenery of the city in rubbles, those rubbles generated by the absurdity of the war and housed by men half-dead in the body and in the soul, becomes the peculiarity of the “visual era”, which with the large diffusion of images of a world in pieces becomes “habitat” for the destruction and, indeed, rubbles and rubbles again, not ruins able to inspire romantic feelings, but simply pieces of materials scattered anywhere.

Since the First World War but even more from the Second, ruins spread without memorial value anymore instead referring to the present era, which identifies

in those same ruins the destruction and the absurdity of the conflict. Rubbles instead, crash, appear everywhere, and trace other sceneries, other urban dimensions, confirming their nature of being nothing more than material. Material that can, or better could, be one more time modelled and recycled if interpreted in a prospective of reconstruction and redefinition of a past but still standing identity.

Modern war cancels the shape, annihilating it: both the human body shape and the shape of the city. The body disperses, buildings and the same urban structure are deleted, reduced to heaps of debris, to mere traces on the soil, stratifications with different thicknesses and meanings.

On the other hand, the transience is always, in different forms and ways, innate in the life of the city itself, although the technique in the fantastic vision of the XIX century was still not intended as means of destruction, a trait that in the modern dimension is instead its primary expression. The space gradually assumes features of endurance throughout the time and the history, determining a element of connection between past and present, an unreplaceable factor of influence of the modern for the future. The traces of the time become clearer in order to remember and recollect the identity of the place and of the population that in that particular territory have settled.

Cities consequently reveal their being characterized by polyphonies of stratifications, by traces of the past time. Cities, in constant motion, changing and transforming, are the result of social and power equilibrium, they are manifestation of singular economies, subjected to crisis, to metamorphosis and in some cases, as verified, to collapse or death.

Urban shapes can be realised or read only as in continuous metamorphosis in continuous molecular mutation that, inevitably, lead to the discovery and definition of other sceneries, more or less stratified, more or less unique or exceptional. In particular, concerning the transience and the cyclic nature of history of the urban and social living, Walter Benjamin made use of the kaleidoscope in which the fragmented image, the unshaped image, assumed a new form after every hand rotation, collapsing in it following a higher order, an order given by the light, an ephemeral order because mutable and various, within which the destruction left debris collapsing into a new order given by the necessity of the present, by the architect of the memory. The leftovers were nothing more than the shape of the reconstruction having its starting point precisely in the debris, intended as the material for a possible, subsequent, other interpretation and formal identification.

Therefore, through the simple appearance, through the critic analysis of the existing state, the current study becomes strategic and interpreter of the possible

“urban phenomena” referred to a post war condition composed by ruins and rubbles.

Images of war, of destroyed cities, of rebuilt cities, of lost and recovered identities that define the urban appearance in its material dimension. Material made explicit in the alert and conscious observation of a present time that is composed of ruins to preserve since traces of a memory, and of rubbles to recycle. Certainly, any conflict, more or less distant in the time, more or less extended in the space, leaves behind heaps of material, of debris of any kind and shape, which occupy space, which occupy the city to rebuild and which need to be re-thought and, in any possible way, relocated. The remaining part of a war is nothing else than a set of urban materials, often without any value, occupying space and revealing, in their physical state, another unexpected urban and territorial image. In this way, rubbles represent a direction in the urban design research, assuming an active role in the geographical outline defining another way to describe the solidification and stratification of the traces of the history. Ruins and rubbles are for this reason intended not just as primary elements of a physical and/or cultural contest constraining and guiding from the outside the architectural and urban practices, but more peculiarities internal to the project, belonging to the relational world established between rubbles, ruins and the natural or artificial landscape in which they act.

The implicit difference between rubble and ruin can assume, in relation to many interpretation levels, a decisive role in the qualification/requalification of the space, connoting it both formally and historically. In this sense the ruin engages with the ground not only laying on it to preserve its original morphology but also interpreting the place, being the main actor in the memory of a past time still present. In the ruin is predominant an adding logic, traducing the urban dimension in a condition of mutual detachment echoing the distant past. A history transmitted by ruins able to gratify the sight as a setting of sculptures, a landscape in which it is possible to get lost in the dimension of a dream implied by the image of fragmented city.

From a landscape of ruins, the emanation of a magic atmosphere in which the perverse rule is of an instable equilibrium between the exhibition of the destruction itself and the necessity to transmit the history of this destruction, to document the actions of a past and still not forgot time. Concerning the rubble is instead prevalent a subtractive logic, which transforms the morphology of the soil, altering its character through a system of interventions, inevitably interfering with the passiveness of the soil, referring to the original meaning of “emblematic space” suggested by Martin Heidegger (in *Saggi e discorsi*, edited by G. Vattimo, Mursia, Milano 1991).

The rubble becomes space in the soil, turning in its integral part as if translating in a petrified landscape.

Therefore the city, even if challenged dimension between different realities, must always relate to its shaping material, which reveals its maximum essence during destruction.

The rubble assumes all the characteristics of Heidegger's *spatium*, with a different thickness, through which action and material relate each other, giving shape to a renovated urban space. Another territorial conformation takes shape and the orography changes, defining mountains of rubbles of different height, inside or outside the city, reclaimed lands transformed in solid grounds, coastlines on the water surface.

A built environment, a dense envelope or, following another perspective, a urban mass, unshaped, in continuity with the natural landscape. A promise of a future city that, in relation to the freed and the occupied spaces, gives origin to the identity of the post war space. The destroyed city, with rare exceptions due to the presence of ruins, gifted by some identity value, recognizes the existence of a material that, for its same nature, occupies space and in some way requires a design concept to become the primary element of its contest becoming urban and territorial object, or ground to other environmental relations. The city risks, also and mostly, to collapse into an intentional suspension, renouncing to any “legible and intelligible description” of a common memory to promote a design concept sordidly oriented to the indifference to the place and interested in concealing and forgetting more than interpreting a potential, subsequent, renovated urban and cultural identity. In effect, in the current time, the changes in the constructive and destructive techniques led to a different value in the difference between rubble and ruin. In any war from Germany to Vietnam, from Hiroshima to Beirut, from Gaza to Jerusalem, from ex-Yugoslavia to Iraq, the architecture in particular gave shape to a new urban and territorial dimension and also to a renovated social identity, leading inevitably to a radical subversion of the traditional “poetic of the ruins” into “poetic of the rubbles”. Actually, the rests are not any more places, solid and defined architectures with an intrinsic value, but just remains, more or less big, more or less ambiguous, challenged between different realities requiring a word, a thought in order to find or recollect a reason and a value.

After the catastrophic event of the XX century, there is an era of rubbles to reshape, to relocate, to remove and less often to celebrate. Rubbles and not ruins. Nothing inspiring romantic feeling is in the past events, a terrible time without anything sublime, an era of progresses, growth and development of course, but nullifying in conflicts that from the First World War will bring to destruction, to enormous catastrophes until the final fulfilment in Hiroshima first and Na-

gasaki then. Tragic events, the tangible expression of the pick of the scientific research and of the technological application, which led to the destruction with silent explosion of entire cities just in few second.

Every time the history experienced a conflict or a siege, a new “urbicide” occurred such as, for instance, the tragic siege of Sarajevo, lasted more than four years, and not only in the Balkans but also in Lebanon with the destruction of Beirut, or with the numerous attacks in Jerusalem, or the 11th September attack to New York or, again, the decade war of the Gaze strip or in the West Bank. In this dimension of “urbicide”, the Paris described by Benjamin, or by Théophile Gautier, Honoré de Balzac, Victor Hugo or even Jean Baudrillard when he described a splendid city but corrupted, luring, a modern Babylon, underlining that if Valéry recognised that after the First World War the civilization understood its mortal nature, after Auschwitz and Hiroshima it knows to be dead (in *La sparizione dell'arte*, edited by Elio Grazioli, Abscondita, Milano 2012).

Baudrillard's words assume in this era of devastations and continue mutations, the taste of an apocalypse reducing the reality to nothing more than material, nothing remains of history, nothing of the value, of the urban and social sense, and nothing remains to the world already saturated by itself.

Actually the transience is, in different shapes and ways, always incidental to the life of the city. Spaces, shapes and images of the reconstruction times become the clear reference to the urban identity and the history of the population finding answers more or less common, more or less repeated in the time, in the space and in the territorial morphology: sea city, land city...

Therefore the cities devastated by the war reveal in the relocation of the rubbles, the primary action for the reconstruction, to allow an effective remake, often conservative or emulative, of a destroyed past, in this way structuring a “fake” urban dimension, false and deprived of any legibility and recognisability. Legibility that instead can be found in the environmental stratification, able to describe the sudden and quick appearance of mountains or valleys where marshes and ponds were. In other words, the unexpected mutation of the orographic conformation as a conservative vision cannot be applied in any form to the material, being the mutation its primary concept.

The mountains of rubbles as the coastlines reveal today are the extreme synthesis of the conflicts and maybe they can be also considered as “monument” to the war devastation.

Definitively, the current research aims to recognize the “real landscape”, describing its history and material, where and how recycling the continuous and incessant construction estate starting from the current space, from a territory that, in different shape and balance, is composed by rubbles and ruins, a territory show-

ing its material essence, in a clear and strong way in the final act of destruction. Excavations would reveal everywhere ruins of ancient constructions, rubbles, fragments of the thought of our predecessors, and those rests, those eradicated and mutilated words, are today nothing more than the ground on which the contemporary city has its foundations, the visible city that conceals thousands of other stories.

As Luigi Ghirri wrote in the 1989 every time that we visit a place we bring with us a measure of what we have already lived and seen, but the effort required is to find a look able to cancel and forget the routine, not to watch with different eyes but to orient again in the space and in the time (in *Paesaggio italiano*, Electa, Milano 1989).

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