

# Mi–Bg: 49km seen from the motorway

Andrea Gritti, Paolo Mestriner, Davide Pagliarini

**Beyond its technological dimension, a motorway can be defined in many ways. The motorway is an icon of modernity. It has both admirers and critics, who often swap roles, depending on whether they are drivers or pedestrians at the time of speaking. It is a cliché, made popular by the constant attention it attracts from literature, music, cinema, visual and plastic arts. It is a stage for exercising power and enacting protests and attention-grabbing actions. Setting aside references to the general nature of the type of infrastructure and focusing on the specificity of a segment of the planet's motorway network, many other things may be observed.**

## THE THEME

**The motorway, built in 1927 to connect Milan and Bergamo, is not only the essential part of the infrastructure backbone of Lombardy, but also its mirror, a "showcase" for transformations, sometimes seen in advance and at others lagging behind.**

As a mirror this motorway is a tool for understanding how and why things are changing externally and internally to its surroundings, recording the signs of recent times, commenting current events, interpreting the future in one of Europe's most critical metropolitan areas.

**Inspired by this belief, the curators and researchers involved in the preparation of this exhibition travelled and crossed the 49 kilometres of the original Milan–Bergamo route, starting from different observation points, but aiming for the same goal: to illustrate the intense friction generated by the encounter between this motorway and the lands it cuts across.**

Along what resembles a section of the Po Valley metropolis, the conflict between the exceptional systems that regulate rapid vehicle transit and the forms of ordinary urbanization holding them under siege, appears more evident than anywhere else. The sheer impact of the phenomenon emerges along the Milan stretch of the A4, from the A8 motorway junction to the Milano Est barrier, crystalized in a three-lane dual carriageway, but is also latent in the Bergamo direction when residual traits of farmlands and nature resurface or the signs that accompany the infrastructure changes appear (today junctions for the Milan orbital; tomorrow those for the Pedemontana motorway).

**With the decline of an archetype that required growth and development as permanent conditions and saw the motorway as its most loyal champion, the 49 kilometres of the original Milan–Bergamo route are now a field that can be circumscribed, precisely in virtue of its amazing level of relational intensity. Consequently, at a time when the effects of a momentous recession are still acute, this smattering of kilometres seems to be the perfect laboratory for taking the measure of an urban future.**



## THE LAYOUT

The motorway is a display of fast-moving bodies that rely on motorized prostheses ferried on rubber, powered by hydrocarbons. Its features are universal and widespread, and perfectly recognizable at all latitudes. The differences lie merely in the various histories. The original layout of the Milan–Bergamo motorway has been upgraded several times, with the introduction of the central reserve and second carriageway, then the inclusion of an intermittent third lane, and now a fourth continuous lane. These changes are required by new safety regulations but also respond to the conflict between infrastructure and urban and rural fabric already mentioned.

The image of a motorway completely surrounded by extensive suburbs, and whose only task would be to preserve efficiency and integrity seems to loom on the horizon. Since it is not difficult to imagine fierce resistance to the motorway, and its dissolution in the territory it crosses, we thought it would be enlightening to give some thought to this possibility.

**The composition of this exhibition lies in the dissemination of fragments and testimonies of the motorway's presence within the urban fabric of the company town of Dalmine, an icon inevitably complementary to that of motorway modernity.**

**The principle adopted for this de-composition is in debt to archaeological research, somehow retracing the steps taken half a century ago by the pioneers of industrial archaeology. Surveys, soundings, directories, and inventories therefore support a stratigraphy that tried to break this stretch of motorway down to its *elements*, recognizing the *landscapes* it crosses, naming the *architectures* that identified it as a specific context, exhibiting the *photographs* that represent them simultaneously.**

**The breakdown into themes and accordingly objects to display, is shown in the narratives located in the various premises housing the exhibition.** In Fondazione Dalmine, the drawings, images and videos that describe the *architectures* are housed in the domestic spaces of Building 19, and are actually surrounded by panels on a geographic scale with boards of detailed botanical information installed in the Park to describe natural, agricultural and residual *landscapes*. The bus station canopies, with a special dispensation from other public uses, host the *elements* that come from industrial sites where the pieces and parts of motorway engineering take shape. Lastly, the old Dalmine factory outlet, restored to its original glory of soaring heights and five completely visible naves, houses the two galleries laid out with the *photographs* documenting the long reconnaissance and observation campaign that accompanied all stages of the research.

## **ARCHITECTURES**

**(Curated by Andrea Gritti, with Marco Voltini and Claudia Zanda)**

The *Architectures* section, supported by significant archival research and preceded by the development of a motorway atlas that was both historical and geographical, illustrates a sequence of top architectural designs located this side of the Adda River, in the Venice direction. The Bayer chemical plant, the Brembo Sud motorway service station bridge, the Tenaris Dalmine and SIAD plants, the REA waste-to-energy plant, Kilometro Rosso and i.lab, the Torre dei Venti tower, the Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche are the works explored and which outline a motorway context of great architectural interest. In addition to these works, in good condition or even newly built, there are rare episodes of replacement and demolition of other iconic buildings like the first motorway service station at the Bergamo exit, and the dual-towered plant that housed the R&B Rossana industry in Stezzano.

Considered together, and implicitly, these architectures outline an ideal context on which a fortuitous community of designers worked, experimenting with architectural means to satisfy not only customer production, trade and symbolism demands but also the curious gaze of drivers and passengers travelling at high speed on the lanes of the motorway. Ultimately, what emerges from the selection on display is a kind of anamorphosis of a traditional urban image. While no concrete spatial rapport exists among them, the bridges, gates, towers, and walls dotted along a route of about 15 kilometres nonetheless project along the way the unmistakable signs of an urban potential expressed for the benefit of the motorway audience.



## LANDSCAPES

(Curated by  **Davide Pagliarini**  with  **Gianluca Agazzi**  and  **Alisia Tognon** )

The *landscapes* section was inspired by the desire to explore what lies behind those prefabricated partitions, noise barriers, hedges and rows of conifers lined up on the sides of the motorway, seeking specific and special environments. In the Fondazione Dalmine park a series of maps describes the natural *habitats* set in the environs of the motorway, between the River Adda and the city of Bergamo. The sites are extremely interesting for the community and are a far smaller in extension than the urbanized area. The maps include a series of data about the natural territory and references to the complex layers that compose these *landscapes*: transects of river valleys, ravines, ponds, ditches, irrigation canals, agrarian ecosystems and urban residues.

Porous and penetrable, in the not-too-distant future the Milan–Bergamo's 49 kilometres will soon become the scene of "fertile collisions" that are already delineated in the residual dimension of the settings being explored. It is just a matter of waiting for the decline of the artificialized present, ready to be dismantled by a widespread environmental awareness. In the obscure framework in which they lurk, the spaces currently neglected will expand and weld together, hosting technological innovation as well as rural tradition thanks in no small measure to being released from the use of fossil fuels. In this respect, the *landscape* section leads visitors to reconsider the areas crossed by the motorway in a new and unique perspective, possibly shaped by the actions of local communities and thus soon able to drive an everyday experience lived at differentiated speeds.



## ELEMENTS

(Edited by  **Paolo Mestriner**  with  **Elena Fontanella** )

Created to meet specific regulatory and safety requirements, the *elements* that make up the motorway artefact are presented to the exhibition audience with a didactic aim, through analysis of their formal and material specificities, and the combinatorial rules governing their reconstitution into a coherent whole.

For this reason the series of components set out under the long, wide canopy vault designed by Giovanni Greppi for Dalmine's bus station, is deliberately removed from its specific context and the interposition of other, complementary "signals" has been removed.

In this way the selected *elements* are configured as devices to use in a

renewed perception of the motorway: no longer distracted by travel at speed, but attentive and aware because based on direct experience. Distanced from the places where they are called upon to fulfil their true mission and restored to a "human scale", halfway between "found object" and "ready-made item", the *elements* reveal their authenticity and the design input that supports them. The selected *elements*, excerpts of material culture, designed to perform functions that are both choral and individual, are laid out as "museum pieces": and for some it is merely a bringing forward of their destiny.



#### PHOTOGRAPHS

(Giovanni Hanninen, image consulting Stefania Molteni)

What we experience today is probably a defining moment in the history of the Milan–Bergamo motorway. For this reason, the curators of the exhibition asked photographer Giovanni Hanninen to give substance to this awareness by directing his camera and microphones at the motorway and then making a gallery of images and corresponding sounds.

In words of the language dear to Gabriele Basilico, the 49 kilometres between Bergamo and Milan were interpreted as a "landscape section". Just as in architecture sections are required to show simultaneously the rules and exceptions of the composition, the overview and detail of how the different parts are linked and as a whole, so the photographs that section the landscape show the opposing reasons of unusual spaces in mutual antagonism and challenge the crude merger of the motorway artefact and the territories crossed by a single indistinguishable unit.

Consequently, in the layout chosen for the old Dalmine factory outlet, entirely inspired by the theme of architectural recycling, visitors find the images of the interiors invisible from the motorway and only documentable through a virtual crossing, the places of which the motorway reproduces only the echoing sound or a view from a distance, together with those where the effects of unsustainable promiscuity are obvious and in some ways dramatic.



*"I find that there is new significance when driving between Bari and Lecce, recognizing as I do the urban settlements, on different scales, dotted across the landscape. Passing through the towns or along the ring roads and seeing the steeples, then crossing the countryside with its olive groves, its vineyards, and then encountering another town. Then*

**more countryside. This alternation, these cadenced spaces, are of great value and driving from Milan to Venice, for instance, they are lacking. A continuous linear city, isotropic, without rhythm, stretches seamlessly for kilometres and . . . deprives you of any emotion."**

Roberto Spagnolo, *La città jonico-salentina secondo Redaelli*, Palazzo Nervegna, Brindisi, 27 November, 2014

#### **ABOUT THE EXHIBITION**

**At 6pm on 25 September 2015, the Mi-Bg. 49 km visti dall'autostrada [Mi-Bg: 49km seen from the motorway] exhibition opens at Fondazione Dalmine, as part of Triennale Xtra: in viaggio con la Triennale, a series of exhibitions and events that showcase architecture, art and design in the capital cities of Lombardy (<http://www.triennaleextra.org/>).**

This exhibition is the result of a joint venture involving Triennale di Milano, Lombardy Regional Government, Dalmine Municipal Authority, Fondazione Dalmine, Fondazione Bergamo nella Storia, Fondazione Sestini, and Confindustria Bergamo. The event is sponsored by Bergamo Municipal Authority, Fondo Ambiente Italiano Lombardy section, Association of Architects, Planners, Landscapers and Conservationists of the Province of Bergamo, Association of Engineers of the Province of Brescia, the School of Architecture and Society, and Department of Architecture and Urban Studies of Milan Polytechnic, and the Faculty of Engineering of Bergamo University. [...] **The exhibition is accompanied by a series of conferences and guided tours organized in collaboration with the Bergamo Scienza association and Fondazione Dalmine.**

**CURATORS:** *Andrea Gritti, Paolo Mestriner, Davide Pagliarini*

**RESEARCH GROUP:** *Elena Fontanella, Alisia Tognon, Marco Voltini, Claudia Zanda* con *Gianluca Agazzi* (Flora, Fauna and Habitat consultant)

**PHOTOS:** *Giovanni Hänninen*; Image consulting: *Stefania Molteni*

**28.09.2015 – 31.10.2015**

**FONDAZIONE DALMINE**

**Pensilina Autostazione Piazzale del Risorgimento**

**Ex spaccio aziendale Dalmine SpA**

**Open: Monday – Friday 3pm – 6pm**

• **The exhibition is dedicated to the memory of the late architect Roberto Spagnolo, Professor of Architectural and Urban Composition at Milan Polytechnic School of Architecture, who died on 21 July 2015.**

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