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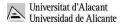
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The Department of Architecture and Urban Studies of the Politecnico di Milano organises at the School of Architecture Urban Planning Construction Engineering (AUIC), EURAU Milan 2024 "IN-PRESENCE / THE BODY AND THE SPACE - The role of corporeity in 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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#### Barbara Coppetti

Politecnico di Milano, DAStU - Dipartimento di Architettura e Studi Urbani barbara.coppetti@polimi.it

# Retrospective | Prospective. The body inhabits the world

#### **Key Words**

Persistence, Continuity, Inhabit

"I can go to the end of the world, hide under the covers in the morning, make myself as small as possible, and even melt in the sun on a beach, and he will always be where I am. It is irremediably here, never elsewhere. My body is the opposite of a utopia; it will never be under another sky; it is the absolute place, the small fragment of space with which I make a body. My body, ruthless topia." [Foucault 1966].

In the radio conference on "Other Spaces" in 1966, Michel Foucault understood the body as the place we are condemned without appeal. The body is a shell that can become a cage from which to look and be looked at, speak and listen. On the opposite, there is utopia, a place outside of any place where you can have a body without a body or a body with superpowers. A substantial body, for example, which, when desired, becomes invisible, fast, luminous, particularly agile, or which can transform and change its appearance.

In utopia, an incorporeal body that can be crossed lives. In fairy tales, bodies move at the speed of light, wounds heal in a flash, and the heart continues to beat even after accidents or explosions; bodies survive a thousand dangers. Utopia erases bodies, but simultaneously, the

human body is the actor of all utopias.

Pinocchio, the wooden puppet in Carlo Collodi's fairy tale [Collodi 1881], which has become a universal icon, is a metaphor for the human condition from an emotional point of view and in terms of body language. The novel tells of the metamorphosis of a constantly changing body and goes far beyond the story of a piece of wood shaped by a carpenter. In his physical transformations, he goes through embarrassing deformations and bestial degradations when he becomes a donkey. He becomes burning material for the Fire-Eater [Mangiafuoco], and after many adventures, he is reborn with a child's body thanks to the help of the fairy who celebrates the achievement of the human condition; the wooden alter-ego seems, perhaps definitively,

deposed. Therefore, in the narrative unfolding, Pinocchio's body represents a plural form, open to desire, exposed to enslavement, subject to incessant transformations, and continually threatened by the dissolution of the body shell [Catelli & Scattina 2017].

From an inanimate body to a vertebrate man, the pu pet as a form in progress was the protagonist of many illustrated editions, such as that of Emanuele Luzzati in 1997 and of Mimmo Paladino in 2004, and many films, from Disney's animated original in 1940 to the film by Luigi Comencini with Nino Manfredi and Gina Lollobrigida in 1972, to the version by Roberto Benigni with Vincenzo Cerami in 2002, to the recent film Matteo Garrone with Benigni in 2019. It has been the subject of transpositions, countless rereadings and rewritings for almost 150 years because exploring the world involves putting the body into play.

Moreover, Pinocchio's body reflects reactions, mutations and a world that belongs to all humanity; Pinocchio's body inhabits this world, which induces its metamorphoses and reacts to them, inter-acts, highlighting the dynamic and active relationship between space and body. The reflection on the dynamics of active interaction in the body-space relationship starts from the awareness that "The body inhabits the world". I borrowed the title from the second paragraph of the second chapter of the volume "The Body" written by the philosopher Umberto Galimberti, an essential book in recent cultural history and my biography. However, the rereading I carry out here allows me to consolidate and underline an indispensable physical approach to the relationship between space and body. An architectural approach that underlines the

traits of persistence with the past, when the role of presence, co-presence, movement, ges-

tures and sensorial engagement in terms of embodied experience were the only possibilities for human beings.

In preserving the materiality of space, which makes embodied experience indispensable, I underline the traits of persistence and continuity in the ways of being and inhabiting places because the space of the body escapes any abstract system of coordinates: the body responds to that indivisible series of acts that allow us to displace things above or below, to the right or the left, near or far, thus obtaining orientation and direction. The possibilities of its actions measure our body. The homogeneous and objective space of geometry acquires meaning only by starting from the oriented space of the body.

As the philosopher states, living is feeling at home, hosted by a space that does not ignore us, among things that say our experience, among faces that there is no need to recognise. Living is knowing where to put your clothes down, where to sit at the table, where to meet others, where responding means co-responding. Living means transfiguring things; it means loading things with senses that transcend their pure objectivity; it is removing things from anonymity and returning them to our "habitual" gestures that allow our body to feel among its "things" [Galimberti 1987, p. 69].

This meaning of inhabiting implies inhabiting the world and its truth. Therefore, only an ego deprived of the body, which does not inhabit the world, can doubt the distinction between illusion and reality. The body experiences the correct dimensions of reality and the different dimensions of the imaginary only inhabiting the world. The world, therefore, is not what we think but what we inhabit.

In an era in which many aspects of our society are moving from the physical to the immaterial, from the corporeal to the virtual, it is necessary to establish the unavoidable aspects of how the body inhabits the world in qualitative terms: knowledge of the world comes through inhabiting the world with an active body because the flow of information between the world and the body is reciprocal.

The body projects itself into the world; the body engages, operates and recognises itself in the things of the world. The body's actions in the world are substantial in the life process. "The day this commitment ceases, our hold on the world ceases, the body no longer recognises itself, it no longer feels alive, and therefore it takes leave of the earth. This farewell is prepared by a progressive disinterest in the world, a decline of meaning, and a progressive blindness that no longer allows us to see the meaning of things. Our body is something more than its senses' possibilities. Its life can be above or below these possibilities because it is not the senses that decide his degree of vitality, but his interest in the world" [Galimberti 1987, pp. 70-71]. The interactive meeting between body and space nourishes and creates specific habitats. The best intertwining between body and space is achieved through conscious architectural choices that create places with meaning and identity. The construction of architectural space cannot ignore the presence of the physical body that inhabits it because it is the physical body that operates there with its practices and actions.

In scientific research, teaching and training, observation and experience inevitably imply the physical body's presence. This body measures itself against others and participates in learning practices within the educational community. Learning that when it involves the industriousness of doing, in the involvement of the senses, is also an exercise for thought. The Architecture Ex-

periences section, which I lead and implement with teaching and scientific research, is building key action moments: students react to stimuli and become actors in significant architectural spaces.

The questions that emerge in these moments of architecture involve the essence of living,

building and composing.

Issues that never emerge during frontal lessons; in this time, the students take on a passive role by simply listening and projecting images and drawings. Architecture Experiences establish stimulating, physically and mentally exciting life situations. In this way, the teaching and training of future designers directs attention to the foundations of Modernism and the cornerstones of twentieth-century architecture.

In his scientific autobiography, Aldo Rossi continually merges the narration of projects with his personal history and the events of his own life. In each of his projects, he summarises a general involvement connected to the simple acquired ability to see and feel space with the body and its senses. Through an analogical process, observation and experience, which then turn into a

memory of things, were Rossi's most important formal and design education.

To conclude, observation and experience invariably imply the presence of the physical body, of that body that inhabits the world and develops its interest in the world. The relationship between architectural space and bodily space - a measure of the possibilities of one's actions - is not new in our discipline but is today weakened by digitalisation and the virtual. In the past, it has been the subject of studies on Le Corbusier's Modulor and has had applications in the specialised fields of ergonomics and anthropometry. Today, recalling the role of field experience, of active training within the educational space characterised by a living and vital environment that surrounds every human being, intends to relaunch the basis of training in architectural design. Therefore, the proposed advancement in architectural research is retrospective because in today's reality, characterised by relationships that increasingly develop in an immaterial digital environment, experience and direct observation struggle to find space, time and resources in our educational programs.

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#### **FIGURES**

Fig. 1 - Promenade Architectural: measures, structure, rhythm, and sequences in Milan's Monte Amiata residential complex, 1st March, 2024.

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