

Editorial and Abstracts

Editorial. Urban Choreographies

Gianni Celestini, Annalisa Metta

The condition of “inhabited place” persists as long as someone sets foot there, stays there, adapts to it and, conversely, adapts it to own needs, both practical and poetic. Dwelling requires being there, requires the body. It is not surprising, then, that a long European tradition has defined the city as a corporation – in the literal sense of an aggregation of bodies – rather than as a physical sphere. More recently, the planetary experience of the temporary expulsion of humans from the urban scene, to contain the spread of the Covid-19 contagion, has confirmed that the city exists as a relational field between bodies whose presence/absence and movement are cognitive, configurative, social, spatial, political, architectural actions. This is the substance of which public space is composed, where multiple choreographies – either free or induced, coordinated or anarchic – constantly overlap and intertwine, with different rhythms and registers. For this reason, public space is the geometric, political, and choreographic warp of the city, and its design is the art of arranging spatial conditions for social interactions that are embodied and incessantly generated, slumbering, and reborn. Designing public space is directing movement. It is the choreographic writing of the experience of the common inhabited space, whether it determines obligatory actions or welcomes and invites spontaneous and unpredictable behaviors. Observing and designing urban choreographies means interpreting the relationships between the spatial structures of the city, the physical and emotional experiences of its inhabitants, and the codes, rules, and conventions that induce or determine them.

The papers collected in this issue of *Rassegna di Architettura e Urbanistica* describe and question practices, rituals and ceremonies that define the city as a social and spatial contract. They follow different and complementary lines of research and perspectives of observation, but they are all oriented towards defining the city as a composite of existences, and therefore of bodies, both individual and collective, that preside over and configure shared space. The underlying question is how the design of public space intervenes to turn, to direct, to suppress or to revive the choreographic arrangements of the city: how design shapes the “architecture of behaviors.”

The articles in the “Debate” section sketch some general outlines. Luca Molinari starts from Richard Sennett’s book *Flesh and Stone*, thirty years after its publication, to explore the status of the body in the contemporary city: domestic, public, functional and emotional. Cristina Bianchetti and Camilla Rondot jointly examine the return of reflection on “plurality” in contemporary urban studies, after a long period of insistence on “collectivity.” The two essays by Gianni Celestini and Elena Dorato, from different perspectives, dwell on the design of pub-

lic space as a propeller of inventive behaviors, starting from modes of triggering and intentional indeterminacy to support the “designing body.” Marina Ciampi traces the case of North American social photography that portrays the exhaustion of fragile populations and the places they inhabit or pass through, where bodies reflect landscapes impoverished by production.

The representation of the relationship between bodies and space returns with a very different slant in the essay by Ila Bêka and Louise Lemoine in the “Research” section, which explains their choice to use movies to investigate the thresholds between the personal and the collective, the intimate and the public, the stable and the mutable, the home and the street, in different cities around the world. The street is the protagonist of Matilde Cassani’s contribution, which reads the Macy’s Parade in New York as an analogy to baroque ephemeral architecture, both in terms of scenographic spectacularity and the involvement of the public as an integral part of the staging. Florencia Andreola and Azzurra Muzzonigro’s four-handed essay and Giovanni Bellotti’s contribution, on the other hand, attempt to answer the question of which bodies are in urban space, the former from a gendered female perspective, the latter including non-human subjects and their agency, with reference to recent projects by Studio Ossidiana. Giulia Marino, on the other hand, considers the multiplicity of bodies from an intergenerational perspective, studied through the spatial register of the playground. The sensitive dimension is the subject of Philip Rahm’s contribution, who, through a selection of his own projects, reconsiders the need to recombine the social connotations of public space and the physiological conditions of its habitability, essentially linked to thermal comfort. Instead, it is sensuality that emerges in the narrative of Annalisa Metta, who reads the history of London’s pleasure gardens as a landscape of emancipation, transgression and liberation of the body, possible through the encounter of urbanity with the forest and the night. Finally, Mathieu Gontier invites us to consider the project itself, when it becomes practice, as a choreographic action: it is in this perspective that he interprets his own profession as a designer-gardener, where management is part of the metabolic choreographies of the landscape.

Thirty years after the debut of *Spigge*, Massimo Vitali has provided *Rassegna* with a number of images chosen especially for this publication, accompanied by texts by Irene Panzani, who interprets Vitali’s interest in the ordinariness of human existence, captured in shots that combine panoramic views with details of the bystanders’ postures.

DEBATE

Plural Bodies

Cristina Bianchetti, Camilla Rondot

The swarm, mentioned by the Belgian choreographer Anne Terese de Keersmaecker to recount the movement of bodies in space, describes a collective behaviour of a complex system composed of an irreducible plurality of bodies. The paper starts from this image to discuss the implications of the constitutive intertwining of spaces and bodies in the field of urban design. More precisely, it claims how taking into account the plurality of bodies reformulates some relevant research and design issues. It constitutes a horizon of action and at the same time marks perhaps the most relevant break with the traditions of the disciplinary culture of the last decades of the last century, built around the notion of the collective.

Choreographies and Landscapes. Activations and Triggers

Gianni Celestini

Bruno Latour's "new climate regime" refers to the unstable character of the physical context in which we live, which determines a profound mutation in our relationship with the world. This condition stimulates an interpretation of the current correlation between body and landscape, in order to indicate some possible lines of research for landscape design. Considering bodies as active subjects, as bearers of desires and demands, provokes a profound break with the visibilist conception of landscape that has been dominant in the West for centuries. The conditions are ripe for a different thinking and practice of landscape that affirms the centrality of relational aspects, of a continuous interplay between factors, entities, and subjects that produces interference and intensity for the creation of activating devices and practices. No longer landscape-scenario or landscape-environment, but landscape-agent: then the body that acts takes the place of the body that looks, and interacts with the landscape, participating in the incessant play of its correlations.

Bodies and Spaces at the Origins of American Social Photography

Marina Ciampi

This essay analyses the importance of the tradition of social photography for the development of that branch of sociology – defined as *visual* – that uses images in the construction of its cognitive and empirical path. The works of the most important American social photographers are mentioned here in order to indicate how social photography has been a fundamental means for analysing the problems of the most marginal social strata and the destitute living conditions of the poor classes. A photograph capable not only of bearing witness, but also of assuming the value of a *social document*, capable not only of impressing public opinion but above all of promoting intentions of social and political reform.

Indeterminacy and Intentionality Within the Body of the City

Elena Dorato

This contribution examines the relationship between urban space design and human behavior within cities, emphasizing the interdependence between inhabitants and their environment. With a focus on both human and urban bodies, it draws on theories from urban studies and sociology, critiquing functionalist and hyper-functionalized urban designs for their prescriptive and often restrictive nature, which limits the freedom and diversity of urban experiences. By drawing on empirical studies, such as William Whyte's "Street Life Project," the role of behavioral observation in informing urban planning and design is underscored, advocating for a design philosophy that embraces indeterminacy: allowing urban environments to support diverse uses and interactions, thereby fostering urban choreographies, and a more dynamic and vibrant urban life. "Looseness," "open-mindedness," "plurality," and "minority" are all existing design postures and approaches which, however, should be re-discovered, updated, and hybridized in order to support the complexities of contemporary urban life.

Stone and Flesh. Rethinking the City of Desiring Bodies

Luca Molinari

"Flesh and Stone. The body and the city in Western Civilization," written by Richard Sennett in 1994, is the starting point for a critical consideration on the central role of the body to re-define our urban environment. The progressive "sensorial deprivation" we are living in the present times, due to a mass-mediatization of our daily experiences, is calling for a radical revision of the role of the body in the process of revitalization of the public spaces and the domestic environments in the contemporary metropolis. All the living bodies (minerals, mammals, vegetal) are part of a circular environment which is the focus of an alternative design vision aiming to redefine the traditional design tools and face the most relevant metamorphosis after centuries in our civilization. The urgency of the present condition brings us back to the seminal book of Richard Sennett and to the centrality of the notion of body, not as an alternative to the mineral city, but in symbiosis with it.

RESEARCHES

Gender Choreographies: the Taking-Care City

Florenzia Andreola, Azzurra Muzzonigro

The gender perspective on the city proves fundamental to make urban spaces inclusive and supportive for all citizens. This vision allows us to focus attention on various aspects of everyday life, especially for women, queer subjectivities and other social groups often overlooked by urban planning. In particular, some categories of women, such as new mothers, caregivers, and teenagers, are disadvantaged by the current organization of public services and infrastructures. This study explores the challenges these categories pose to urban planning, their specif-

ic needs and current conditions. Furthermore, possible solutions and methodologies to improve their inclusion through participatory processes are presented. An intersectional analysis of urban experiences can reveal the different needs within the female sphere, often in conflict with each other. For example, the urban experience of a teenage girl differs significantly from that of a mother with a stroller or an older woman with limited mobility. By responding to the needs of these groups, it is possible to create public spaces that welcome a wide range of users, from children to the elderly, promoting an idea of public space that is inclusive and welcoming to all.

Practices of Presence

Ila Bêka, Louise Lemoine

The bodily dimension of architecture is the mobile and never resolved relations that happen when bodies meet each other and get in contact with spaces. It is not a matter of a geometric measure; it is a tensional state that demands an immersive condition, it is a matter of behavioral relations. Behaviors are the outcome of the proximity between bodies and spaces: they can be induced, suggested, enabled, or inhibited by space and, in turn, they can completely overwrite space. The bodies involved in an architectural investigation of spaces are not only the human ones, but everything that moves or generates movement: bodies involved in architecture are all the ones that make events happen. In this perspective, movies are tools for understanding and investigating the bodily dimension of architecture. Making movies is a way to understand and reveal when something is happening, and things happen when places call us to be present, to be there consciously. That is why movies are for us exercises of presence, where presence means “being here” but even “being now,” in this precise instant, in these specific conditions. Architecture is the “here and now” of space, through the medium of bodies. Architecture needs presence.

Macy's Parade, the Inflatable Baroque

Matilde Cassani

Since the Baroque era, streets have been the scene of celebrations that enliven cities. The population gathers becoming a cohesive mass, pursuing a shared ideal, and reshaping the urban environment. The cornerstone of these rituals, both religious and pagan, is the participation of the crowd. The citizens walking together in a single procession are a veritable architecture made of people promoting a social and political gesture. The text analyzes the Macy's Parade, that has been enlivening Manhattan since 1924, with the appearance of huge inflatables in the New York sky, coordinated by the massive mass of citizens marching continuously for three hours arriving in front of the historic department store. The interest is to delve into how this march has affected the spatiality of New York City's streets, involving thousands of citizens each year, attracted by the ephemeral architectures of the festival just as in the Baroque era. Although the duration of the celebration is limited, citizens walking through the streets declare their political, social, and cultural beliefs through the natural movement of their bodies, defining a form of popular expression accessible to all.

A Sense of Direction

Giovanni Bellotti / Studio Ossidiana

Our bodies define us as individuals, but are also habitats for microbes, making us both ecosystems to other forms of life, and inhabitants of the planet. This makes it difficult to imagine a hard boundary between us and the world we inhabit: all the borders we imagine as lines, from our skin to our domestic walls, are thick with life, spongy environments where billions of microbial lives unfold. Everyone is the involuntary curator of a vast collections of life forms, from the microscopic life forms which inhabit us, to the ones we affect with our actions.

This paper reflects on three projects by Studio Ossidiana, addressing ideas of ownership, habitat, and inhabitation. Whether brief or long lasting, ownership, for Studio Ossidiana, is understood as a lively, ever-changing contract we have with things, and with the forms of life that inhabit them, a relation which can last minutes or generations, but will always be in motion.

The essay is a reflection on the agency of actions like gathering, drawing, and playing in producing different forms of ownership. It proposes an idea of architecture and landscape dependent on actions, where, whether intentionally or not, we are always more than visitors or users, but gardeners, explorers, cartographers, and curators of the life and space within and around us.

Choreography. The Possible Gestures of the Landscape Project

Mathieu Gontier

As a landscape architect, from Wagon Landscaping, I would like to show through key project stages, how we implement a concrete field approach which is a movement of mind and body, paying attention to elements which are pre-existing and which may contribute to the life of sites in a process of transformation.

Before imagining project, landscape architect observes a site. He investigates, reads, and tries to understand elements which may interact in the future transformation.

Then, he sets out to assemble his observations into what will become the very first sketch project. Hand drawing on paper is the direct transcription of thoughts from mind to pencil which helps to write the project story.

After drawing, he goes back on site to adapt design to reality and ground in building process.

After all, landscape gardener returns on site to adopt, again, an observation attitude to guide multiple evolving possibilities for project developments.

All these measured gestures could be compared to a choreography.

Without Instructions for Use

Giulia Marino

The play-city manifests itself in all those urban situations and projects that, without presenting themselves as playthings, are able to make people play because they offer a variety of useful possibilities and therefore allow all sorts of surprising and unpredictable things to be discovered in public space. Not brightly coloured playgrounds with rubber floors, plastic slides and swings, but hybrid spaces that by their very nature are not used in a single way, for which there are no pre-determined instruc-

tions, and where, on the contrary, it is often necessary to negotiate the rules, to make compromises, to be careful where one steps. They are places of interaction between the elements that define the space and the bodies that pass through it, that inhabit it; they are also places where seemingly inappropriate uses of space are suggested and where unexpected behaviours occur. The text presents some examples of contemporary landscape projects that focus on the constant rewriting of rules and codes of use, not because of specific categories of users (such as children), but because of all those bodies that playfully traverse the space and participate in its transformation.

With the Favor of the Night. Pleasure Gardens and the Sensual City

Annalisa Metta

Pleasure gardens are a peculiar kind of urban gardens, widespread in major European cities between the 17th and 19th centuries. Fenced off, they were managed by entrepreneurs for profit. An entrance fee was charged, even for selecting the clientele, nevertheless they had a dubious reputation. Together art galleries, venues for concerts, theatre, banquets, masquerade balls, and fireworks, these gardens were not content with entertainment (i.e. leisure garden), but demanded pleasure, taking part into the new urban values of the time, between hedonism, profit, and Enlightenment culture. The encounter between bodies, woods, and the night made them different from any other urban place: they were mainly a summer and nocturnal phenomenon in cities that were still predominantly dark. Unlike any other park, they opened the gates at dusk, displaying their glittering casket of lights and making the social order falter, giving the chance to indulge in exciting transgressions. Their very significance is in the contest between light and darkness and their literal and metaphorical associations with illusion, exposure, and concealment, embodying utopian tensions, such as the mixing of social classes, or desires, such as promiscuity and excess.

Urban Landscapes with Figures

Irene Panzani, Massimo Vitali

This contribution outlines some key features of Massimo Vitali's photographic work, with particular reference to the *Italian Beaches* project, inaugurated in 1994, accompanied by a critical and descriptive commentary by Irene Panzani on the photos specifically chosen by Massimo Vitali for this publication. Thirty years of photographic research on beaches clearly reveal Vitali's interest in representing everyday life and the simplicity of human existence, captured in his shots that combine a panoramic view of the human landscape with details that best describe postures and ways of inhabiting space. Vitali's images require careful preparation and the placement of the viewpoint so that the viewing space remains unobstructed, allowing the observation of the complexity of everyday relationships. The extensive time span of the project gives his work an anthropological character, as the images record changes in people's lifestyles and behaviors, captured with that detail within his wide panoramic views. The commentary on the photos, far from being didactic, highlights aspects and details of each image, referring to the underlying themes that guide Massimo Vitali's poetics.

The Climate of the Polis

Philippe Rahm

If the 20th century separated the human from the material, the superstructural from the infrastructural, the social from the climatic, history shows us that the social is not in fact independent of material conditions. Thus, public space was originally a social and political place that met the physiological need to get something to eat and drink, to cool off and warm up. The public space was formed in the shade of a tree, around a fire. Here, people met, talked and loved each other. In the Twentieth century, with cheap energy, air conditioning, and central heating, public spaces largely lost their climatic and physiological meaning in favor of commercial or tourist interests. But because today's climate is warming up, public spaces need to rediscover their thermal function: providing coolness in summer and warmth in winter. Illustrated by a few urban projects from Philippe Rahm Architectes office, this paper propose to reflect on the social value of public space in terms of material values, no longer separating human superstructure from material infrastructure, aesthetics from physiology.