

Elements of everyday life. Domestic spaces and actions in a pedagogical experiment

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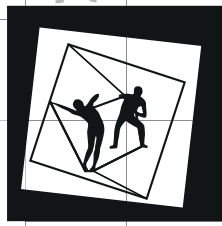
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EURAU - EUROPEAN RESEARCH ON ARCHITECTURE
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IN-PRESENCE /
THE BODY AND
THE SPACE

The role of corporeity in the era of virtualization

Edited by: Marco Bovati, Anna Moro, Daniele Villa

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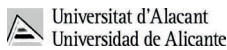
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The Department of Architecture and Urban Studies of the Politecnico di Milano organises at the School of Architecture Urban Planning Construction Engineering (AUIC), EURAU Milan 2024 "IN-PRESENCE / THE BODY AND THE SPACE - The role of corporeity in the era of virtualization", the eleventh edition of the international conference, which takes place from 19 to 22 June 2024.



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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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"Bodies, encounters, scenes. City assemblages and design strategies"

/RENATO BOCCHI, professor of Theories and Design of Architecture at IUAV University of Venice till 2019 and Director of Architectural Design Dpt. from 2006 to 2009. He coordinated the research program Re-cycle Italy, involving 11 Italian Universities (2013-16). He held lectures in Spain, Portugal, Argentina, Scotland, Ireland, Greece, and Slovenia. From 2015 to 2020 he promoted cultural initiatives among Iuav University, Ca' Pesaro Museum of Modern Art, and Querini-Stampalia Foundation. From 2019 onwards he is collaborating with the Doctorate Schools at Iuav Venice and Sapienza University of Rome. The dominant topics of his research and publications are the relationship between arts, architecture, city, and landscape. His most recent book: "Spazio arte architettura. Un percorso teorico", Carocci, Rome, 2022.

"Art And Architecture. Between Space And Body"

/CRISTINA BIANCHETTI, architect, PhD in Urban Planning, is full professor of Urban Planning at the Interuniversity Department of Regional and Urban Studies and Planning, in Politecnico di Torino, where she has also served as Deputy Dean. Her work focuses on themes related to living spaces and the critique of contemporary urban planning projects. Her presence in the cultural sphere is evidenced by her participation in and coordination of numerous research projects and by her many writings. Her latest books, "Corpi tra spazio e progetto" (Mimesis 2020 – English edition Jovis, 2021) and "Le Mura di Troia: lo spazio ricomponi i corpi" (Donzelli 2023), explore urban planning projects and their practices from a perspective centered on the body, revealing unexpected scenarios that emerge when the viewpoint shifts away from the actor, decision-maker, technician, or a legal or statistical entity, to that of a body that cannot be reduced to its abstractions.

"Insights for a theory of embodiment in urbanism"

/FRANCO FENOGLIO, a nuclear engineer at the Polytechnic University of Turin, he joined Thales Alenia Space (then Aeritalia) in February 1990, dealing with thermal and environmental control of spacecraft. In the late 1990s, he became Chief Engineer of the Nodes in ISS, leading "Nodo 3" until the integration and launch campaign in 2010. Subsequently, he started the Orion European Vehicle Service Module and managed exploration studies and advances. Today, he is Director of Human and Robotics Planetary Exploration, including Thales Alenia Space programs running for Artemis (lunar orbit and surface) and robotics to Mars. As part of his career, he has interacted with major Space Agencies (NASA, ESA, ASI) and major international companies.

"Beyond Earth. Thinking and designing solutions for humans in the (deep) Space"

1 / CONCEIVED

/ On the Body-Space relationship mediated by reflection and theoretical-experiential elaboration.

In recent years, architecture has shifted its paradigm regarding the relationship between body and space. This transition towards a new understanding of actions, movement, and experience has flanked – and partially replaced – the traditional emphasis on proportion, measurement, and geometry.

This evolution prompts a fundamental re-evaluation of how architecture, urbanism, and spatial practices conceptualise, theorise and practice the body-space relationship. To grasp the depth of this transformation, it is critical to delve into the historical modification of this relationship and the simultaneous, interacting, and at times conflicting, positions of contemporaneity. These perspectives encapsulate the past's legacy and lay the groundwork for future explorations.

The conceptual framework that underlies our understanding of the space-body relationship and its paradigms of reference, profoundly influences the design thought and process; it also informs our way of bodily inhabiting space through human and social practices. Therefore, thoroughly exploring this relationship's conceptual and creative dimensions and foundational principles is crucial.

Moreover, investigating the fundamental role of the space-body relationship also means recognising the multidisciplinary contributions that the world of culture and the arts have made to our subject area, where art, dance, cinema, theatre, and literature have played a fundamental role in reshaping our perception of this relationship in redefining its paradigms.

This session welcomes contributions which include but are not limited to:

- / The body as a system of proportion, measurement, and geometry;
- / The proxemics;
- / The space as actions, movement, and experience of bodies;
- / The mind and the perception of the space;
- / The body and the memory of the space;
- / Bodily project practice and technological innovation;
- / Architecture as a space device;
- / 'Spatial Design': the space, the body and the synthesis of the arts;
- / Contemporary Art: interventions on space and human perception.



Elements of everyday life. Domestic spaces and actions in a pedagogical experiment

Key Words

Dwelling, Actions, Design, Everyday life

The centrality that, in recent years, the question of the relationship between body and space has acquired in developments of architectural (and urban) research [Bianchetti 2020] highlights how, at least on the level of discourse, trends, approaches, and interpretations that try to distance themselves from the legacies that the twentieth century has left us are emerging. This is a reaction to the developments that sought the legitimacy of disciplinary practice in the articulation between social commitment and autonomy and that, exhausted as early as the 1990s, tried to shift their gaze toward dwelling as the condition and purpose of the theoretical and operational practice of architecture [Bianchetti 2011]. The reference is to the theoretical speculations and formulations that, articulating the existentialist vision and anthropological perspective [Heidegger 1976; Augè 1992], attempted to establish a certain critical distance from the culture of modern design, which had separated the body from the physical dimension of the city, and to claim the importance of dwelling as a constitutive action of the human being [Casanova Berna 2013; Doberti 2008].

In line with this way of understanding the object and the aim of the architectural discipline, this contribution shows the program for the first-year architectural design laboratory of the Bachelor's Degree in Architecture at the Polytechnic University of Turin over the past two years. The aim of developing this topic in a first-year laboratory was to explore how dwelling can lead to the production of user-friendly spaces. Focusing on the relationships between bodies, actions, cultures, and spaces, the main goal of the course was to rethink how architectural practices are related to the context and to the built environment with its materials, memory, principles, and rules that conform the space to the place. To do this, the approach to the architectural project precisely started from the characterisation and study of the activities, actions, and dimensions of dwellers, trying to bring together traditions of study and research in an inclusive transdisciplinary perspective that drew instrumentally, eclectically, and without dogmatism

on diverse disciplinary contributions. The reference went from Alexander Klein [1975] to the Modulor of Le Corbusier [1950, 1955], from Nuno Portas [2004] to Hillier and Hanson [1984] till the study on the domestic activity carried on sections by Katsutoshi Sasaki [2021].

The pedagogical experiment described here concerns constructing a series of exercises to enable first-year architecture students to build a solid interpretative foundation of space and its construction. The main topic concerns dwelling as a primary human need and ergonomic construction of everyday space [Norman 2002].

The first exercise involves listing the "Elements of Everyday Life" to understand their proportions, measurements, and geometry. The elements correspond to furniture and objects that are part of each student's personal and public sphere, such as the bed, the desk, the chair, the toilet, the sofa, etc. Hence, each element was analyzed the same way Enzo Mari [1974] describes his "CNC Chair", using orthogonal projection and indicating measurements.

The topic of dwelling as a research focus allows the development of a methodological path that moves around users, their habits, and their predictable and non-predictable actions. In this sense, the narrative around the possible users of a space to be inhabited starts from their physical (age, gender, ability and/or disability) and circumstantial (aptitudes, work and occupation, special needs such as a hobby or a workspace) characteristics. In addition, the relationships with other inhabitants of the same unit (family, parental ties, presence of children with special needs and abilities, housemates, etc.) are described for each user.

Information on the inhabitants/dwellers/users and their characteristics became the basis for constructing a series of exercises and moments of reflection preparatory to design, which consider the body and the user at the centre of the architectural approach, partly abandoning the functionalist [Bevilacqua 2011] and typological conception.

If, as Georges Perec writes, "daily activities correspond to specific time slots, and each time slot corresponds to one of the rooms in the apartment" [Perec 1989, pp. 38-39], then the list of actions serves as a model for the flows and movements of each user (with their characteristics) within a hypothetical and as yet unidentified domestic space. As a further exercise, visualizing the "List of Actions" through planimetric draws of rooms helps shape each user's required space. The characteristic of the rooms, thus obtained, is not to depict the minimum space necessary for each action but to design the optimal space for living.

The next step in the construction of the dwelling concerns ordering the information gathered by identifying the elements, the actions, and the optimal spaces (rooms) according to the users' definitions. In this sense, the "Sections" are a relational tool to establish connections between spaces, geometries and volumes. The horizontal and vertical sections allow each student to relate the spaces previously identified with each other to draft an early housing project. Thus, the position of spaces, geometry, and volume are articulated and take form throughout the section. Every relation established so far collides with the spatial arrangement and reciprocal spatiality of objects and rooms in the dwelling. Drawing sections, even schematic ones, raise the issue of the link between use, body, movement, space and action again. The sections become an expression of the configuration of domestic space as an ordered succession of the needs of everyday life and the temporality of the body in the space.

As the final step, before the actualisation of a design project, the process leads to an abstraction and synthesis of the dwelling principles. Through its symbolic representation, the drawing of a "Concept" helps to underline the basic idea of the design related to the system of elements, spaces and actions of everyday life. Collecting many themes and issues on dwelling and user behaviors in a conceptual diagram leads and orients the project's development based on the living space.

Through these steps, the design proposal prioritizes dwelling, where the body, its movements, its relations with objects, and its rhythms shape the space [Fig.1].

When Perec talks about space points out the obviousness of living in a space, but at the same time, warns the reader not to take that for granted, especially referring to those who are active in the design process [Perec 1989]. Before Laugier's proposal to find the design in the model of the primitive hut [Vidler 1998], there were no corridors, gardens, courtyards, or other spaces. Still, these spaces nowadays have multiplied, broken up and diversified; they are of every size and every species for every use and every function [Perec 1989].

In conclusion, this contribution highlights a collection of outcomes and an approach to architectural pedagogy (referring to the dwelling topic) that instills design practice awareness. This awareness prioritizes the users, their bodies and their movements in space as the driving force behind a thoughtful design.

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FIGURES

Fig.1 - Collections of design proposals built within the Architecture Design Studio of the Bachelor's Degree in Architecture at the Polytechnic University of Turin, 2023.

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