Negative Strategies

EUT

QUADRA

Volume 01

Edited by Elena Marchigiani and Giuseppina Scavuzzo

Research Investigation on Territories and the Built Environment

Università degli Studi di Trieste
Università degli Studi di Udine

Elena Marchigiani is associate professor of Urban and Landscape Planning and Design at the Department of Engineering and Architecture – Università di Trieste, and vice coordinator of the PhD course in Civil and Environmental Engineering and Architecture.

Giuseppina Scavuzzo is associate professor of Architectural and Urban Design at the Department of Engineering and Architecture Engineering and Architecture – Università di Trieste, and former vice coordinator of the PhD course in Civil and Environmental Engineering and Architecture.

The book collects the essays of former doctoral students:
Elisa Maria Vittoria Bertolini (XXXIV cycle); **Elisa Cacciaguerra** (XXXIV cycle); **Sara Carciotti** (XXXIII cycle); **Alberto Cervesato** (XXXIII cycle); **Barbara Chiarelli** (XXXIII cycle); **Gianluca Croce** (XXXIV cycle); **Egidio Cutillo** (XXXIV cycle); **Mariacristina D'Oria** (XXXIV cycle); **Veronica Riavis** (XXXII cycle); **Valentina Rodani** (XXXIV cycle).
They are introduced by essays of their supervisors:
Giovanni Corbellini, full professor of Architectural and Urban Design at the Politecnico di Torino; **Giovanni Fraziano**, Senior professor of Architectural and Urban Design at the Università di Trieste; **Ilaria Garofolo**, full professor of Architectural Engineering at the Università di Trieste; **Giovanni La Varra**, associate professor of Architectural and Urban Design at the Università di Udine; **Alessandra Marin**, associate professor of Urban and Landscape Planning and Design at the Università di Ferrara; **Sara Marini**, full professor of Architectural and Urban Design at the Università Iuav di Venezia; **Paolo Rosato**, full professor of Real Estate Appraisal and Project Evaluation at the Università di Trieste; **Alberto Sdegno**, full professor of Drawing at the Università di Udine, and coordinator of the PhD course in Civil and Environmental Engineering and Architecture.

This first issue of the *Quadra* series collects the results of researches developed in the frame of the Architecture curriculum of the XXXII-XXXIV Cycles of the PhD course in Civil and Environmental Engineering and Architecture, jointly established by the Università di Trieste and Università di Udine since the academic year 2015-16. Being characterised by strong interdisciplinarity, the curriculum encompasses a range of study fields: architectural and urban design, urban and landscape planning and design, architectural representation, technical architecture, and economic evaluation of plans, projects, and policies. Under the umbrella of economic, social, economic and cultural sustainability and of climate change adaptation and resilience, the focus is on the enhancement and transformation of territories and the built environment, through the integration of different theoretical and operational tools and scales of intervention. By bringing together architectural and urban design reflections and devices, technical and technological tools, spatial planning investigations and instruments, the doctoral researches this book presents provide a picture of a large variety of topics and approaches. Their common aim is to explore fields of innovation in the various steps of transformation processes: from their conception to the proposal of approaches to the building of possible solutions. The first section of the book, *Territories of Smartness and Interactions*, collects contributions dealing with material and immaterial, physical and technological aspects and tools, addressed to the investigation, integrated planning, management and communication of the multiple dimensions of territorial assets and transformations. The second section, New *Metabolisms and Subtractions*, presents researches that are primarily related to the fields of architectural and urban design. Each essay is the result of a synthesis and reworking of a doctoral thesis and its key findings, and is introduced by a presentation written by the research supervisor to sketch broader theoretical frameworks. Overall, the book offers an articulate "geography" of topics and hypotheses the PhD course has dealt with: a tentative mapping of research paths, understood as a starting point for new critical reflections, and for stronger interactions among disciplinary fields and approaches.

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Being the first of the *Quadra* series, this book collects the results of some researchers developed in the frame of the Architecture curriculum of the PhD course in Civil and Environmental Engineering and Architecture (cycles XXXII-XXXXIV). The course has been jointly organised by the Università di Trieste and the Università di Udine since the academic year 2015-16. The coordinator of the course is Alberto Sdegno, Elena Marchigiani and Giuseppina Scavuzzo are respectively the current vice coordinator and the previous vice coordinator.

The PhD offers multidisciplinary education and training on topics and approaches that today are at the center of resilient and sustainable design. The objective is to develop skills capable of addressing the radical transformations that are happening in contemporary cities and territories. The curriculum dedicated to Architecture includes a number of disciplines such as architectural and urban design, urban and landscape planning and design, technical architecture, project evaluation and appraisal, and drawing. Researches explore design theories and methods, from the scale of buildings to that of territories, also through the use of advanced surveying and representation tools, information and communication technologies, economic assessment, and construction techniques focused on environmental sustainability.

This book would not have been possible without the commitment of doctoral students; through their researches, they make it valuable evidence of the work done so far. A heartfelt thank goes to all the colleagues who participated in the PhD teaching and training activities, and provided their essays. Last but not least, special thanks go to the PhD students Martina Di Prisco, Anna Dordolin, Andrea Peraz, Vittoria Umani, and Camilla Venturini whose efforts have made the creation of this editorial product possible.

PhD in Civil and Environmental Engineering and Architecture

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Section 2. New Metabolisms and Subtractions

Negative Strategies

Giovanni Corbellini

Even though architecture is usually thought of as an intrinsically constructive, namely additive, discipline, subtraction has unexpectedly taken on a main role in its most innovative practices and theories. The sober attitude of the Modern Movement famously found its most concise expression in Mies's adage "Less is more": an ethical and aesthetical imperative that resurfaces in Buckminster Fuller's urge to do more with less, and in the many other similar statements and practices that characterised this long and fruitful season. Removal paradoxically turned out to be one of the most productive theoretical and design instruments of the last century, to the extent that its development bolstered some effective negative readings. Federico Soriano, for instance, rearticulates in his *Sin-tesis* (2024) a history of the short century avant-garde experiments precisely according to an ongoing subtractive attitude, from the elimination of scale, to those concerning form, weight, plan, detail, and gesture.

Gianluca Croce's work begins where the Spanish scholar got to, addressing some new millennium design outcomes and the theoretical interpretations that came along. This meant a shift concerning both the phenomena studied, which of course react to and represent a different reality, and the way to look at them. The increasing centrality of the political – which recently became dominant in the human sciences debate, the architectural one included – is therefore a main part of his approach. Contemporary architectural subtractions are accordingly read as the complex result of the accelerated pace of crises (economic, social, humanitarian, climatic, health, etc.) that characterises the last decades, and of the apocalyptic imagery and narratives it fuelled. The increasing and pervasive presence of a decaying building stock produced by these recurrent crises forced the architectural debate to elaborate on repressed or unspoken issues, such as obsolescence, decline, abandonment... So that the traditional responses to the need of renovation (from *tabula rasa* to romantic ruin attraction) come out now reshuffled in a contemporary interpretation of the relationship between old and

new. By addressing current phenomena according to a dimensional progression (from small to large, from the household to the city), Gianluca Croce's research looks at them through different "lenses", able to highlight some recent design attitudes.
A close glimpse on artefacts highlights how nowadays a narrative and aesthetic speculation around a deprived materiality emerges, often borrowing uses and habits of the so-called informal and spontaneous architecture of the slums, or recovering the radical artistic discourse of Gordon Matta-Clark or Robert Smithson. Mainly carried out by minor offices, in almost always residential and internal contexts, the various operations of piercing, removal, delamination, peeling, etc., make up a sort of glossary of subtraction, able not only to reformulate the consolidated practices of living, but also to offer a further reflection on the qualities of the "zero degree" of construction and its elements. Getting a more detached point of view, another trend comes out. It concerns the weird translation of the image of devastation into a sort of design language shared by established offices, especially when their ambition to mirror the present times deals with the complex negotiation between the representation of corporate identity in big objects and their relation with the cityscape. This attraction for the catastrophic finds countless examples in the proliferation of apocalyptic movies, extreme tourism in contaminated places, ruinporn craze, and other manifestations of the contemporary cultural industry. Its recent manipulation by architectural design accelerates the typical postmodernist game of simulating ruin or collapse, so that some contemporary projects seem to use subtraction as a significant and signifying variable in their reinterpretation of the modernist tower.
A further shift towards the dimension of landscapes and territories addresses the unprecedented potential to destruct, dismantle, remove things and the way these actions increasingly offer desirable approaches in the territories of the accumulation of waste, for artefacts corroded by decay and obsolescence, and in contexts of a general and progressive shrinkage. In such apparently antinomic conditions, the role of the architect can be carried out "in reverse" and is entrusted to his ability to discern and select which subtractive action makes sense here and now. Therefore, designing no longer means to propose the demiurge gaze and a totalising reality, but working in terms of a skilled anti- or post- urban surgeon, able to deal with the proliferation of liberated areas destined to become parks, agricultural fields or given back to wilderness.
By applying a very selective and focussed attitude, Gianluca Croce's research on subtractive tactics in contemporary architecture offers an

original interpretation of a present, largely overlooked phenomenology. It does it by means of a vast review of disciplinary contributions further worked out through a set of multidisciplinary tools, which lend him a sharp, critical gaze. The work of comparison and systematisation of various well-known positions is then developed – and consistently deconstructed – collecting and intersecting recent meaningful experiences. The operative content thus extracted represents a particularly useful and original result, especially from the point of view of design disciplines.

De-sign: Architectural Subtraction in Times of Crisis

Gianluca Croce

Recurring crises determine, as the most evident consequence in the built environment, the production of ruins: these become the operative and representative tool of a discipline aimed at transforming, in proactive terms, what constitutes its apparent threat.
The issue is declined in three different perspectives related to crises that comprise the three chapters of the research: poor construction as a referent for a project "in reverse"; the simulation of disaster and the apocalyptic imaginary; demolition as a panacea in urban crises and the proliferation of the wilderness.
In each chapter, the subtractive strategies are illustrated by appropriate case studies, preceded by their broader cultural peculiarities, their historical background and the rhetoric supporting them.
The research brings out the potential of the "negative" design insofar as it is seemingly antinomian to the custom of a discipline understood as exclusively additive and proliferative.

Keywords: subtraction, crisis, disasters.

1. Introduction: Less is Lore

In the aftermath of the outbreak of the 2008 crisis, a predictable return to a sort of new sobriety in architecture was observed, a *rappel à l'ordre* after the years of daring formal experimentation sanctioned by the phenomenon known as "stararchitecture" that dominated mainstream disciplinary production at the turn of the new millennium. Alongside this general tendency towards simplification, a further and extreme form of reduction has occurred in recent years, and rather than corresponding to a zero degree of construction, it operates a true design process in negative, an active form of design subtraction. Whether total or partial removals exerted on existing buildings or simulations of these in *ex-novo* structures, the theme of ruin reappears as a device capable of conveying the most representative image of contemporary crises and offering renewed and rediscovered design paradigms.

The elaboration of the current subtraction project differs from the simple formal reduction driven by practical (or moralistic) reasons imposed by recent crises. The various forms of contrived destruction show once again the disciplinary skill of "Learning from..." events and effects that are controversial, concealed or removed. In evoking the tangible signs that crises determine in its production, and transforming these into fully operational devices, architecture thus seems to evade its own inner crisis, the one induced by the awareness of its own marginality with respect to the main contemporary issues.

The declinations of the subtractive project are analysed here according to specific affinities with the aspects/effects that crises have in a more or less direct way on the production of the built territory. Recurring economic crises have triggered a series of low-cost design strategies that have brought out the operational potential of poor and dilapidated construction; the mediatisation of disasters on a more or less global scale amplifies the commercialisation of apocalyptic scenarios in which architecture can easily situate itself thanks to its iconic scope; urban crises offer the material space for experiments in the project of de-construction and for the value of the "void" as a sphere of proliferation of wild entities (Fig. 1).

2. Poor is More

The growing expansion of informal settlements, from the more entrenched and geographically specific to the precarious and nomadic ones, has generated a progressive disciplinary attention resulting in projects that have mostly attempted to re-establish a dialogue between the normative city and the unauthorised one, with design tools to support the infrastructural deficits and collective services that are usually lacking or completely absent in such environments. At the same time, the analyses of the settlement principles and building characteristics of the various slums, favelas, bidonvilles, etc. have revealed, beyond their social criticalities, the potential of informal and self-constructive processes driven by practical needs and the variable adaptive and

Figure 1
Madrid void.
The subtraction of built space offers opportunities for the development of spontaneous and indeterminate processes (G. Croce, 2022).

aesthetic roughness. However, the analytical gaze towards spontaneous and primitive building practises is not a recent fascination. Descriptions of primordial constructive techniques can be traced back to the very beginnings of architectural literature, but it is with the prodromes of modernity that the primitive hut takes on the speculative status of the archetype. If the evolution of Modern architecture can be summed up as a progressive process of subtraction (Soriano, 2004), then Abbot Laugier's essay (Laugier, 1755) seems to unveil the modern approach to formal synthesis, starting precisely from the simplicity and frugality of the hypothetical primitive hut. In fact, Laugier's treatment is not so much an archaeological reconstruction, as an idealistic and symbolic speculation on a structure that represents the architectural basics, purified of any superstructure and Baroque refinement, with the precise intention of restoring the primacy of classicism embodied in the Greek temple. This way, Laugier introduces disciplinary issues into the Enlightenment debate, where the principles of reason correspond to those of the emerging rationalist architecture. The instrumental use of the pure, primitive authenticity of the hut – in line with the myth of the good savage – would later become a recurring practise, both within the moral rhetoric of the honesty of modern construction and in subsequent anti-functionalist controversies. While the Masters looked to the efficient synthesis of constructions guided by the purely pragmatic needs of frugal and prosaic buildings (see the emblematic case of Le Corbusier's *Cabanon*), later contributions to the valorisation of an architecture without architects (Rudofsky, 1964) would show the enormous richness and complexity of primitivism, vernacular constructions and building spontaneism, whose general rules are epitomised in the logics of the bricoleur's adaptive skills (Lévi-Strauss, 1962; Jencks & Silver, 2013).

The condition of scarcity of economic and therefore material means determines the rough, improvised and ramshackle character of informal settlements, where the builder-bricoleur shows the ability to creatively translate any element of everyday life into operational design tools, producing dissonant configurations and assemblages that defy any rigid typological definition. Despite the limits of available resources, the self-constructive processes are nevertheless characterised by a tendency towards addition and accumulation, while the designer's activity, in times of crisis or when faced with budget constraints, sometimes takes place in the perspective lying between Miesian minimalism and Fuller's efficientism, where "doing almost nothing"[1] can even become the ultimate design strategy[2].

1 If the Miesian "Less is more" has become the slogan par excellence of minimalism, even the most affected and superficial, the concept of "ephemeralization", coined by Richard Buckminster Fuller and embodied in the motto «doing more with less and less until eventually you can do everything with nothing» rather expresses the synthesis of the efficiency orientation (Fuller, 1938: 256-259). On the cultural, historical and economic reasons for doing more with less, see: Aureli, 2013.

2 See Lacaton & Vassal's paradigmatic project for the Place Léon Aucoc in Bordeaux (1996), where any physical transformative hypothesis was discarded in favour of a plan for the maintenance of a space considered by the designers to be qualitatively adequate in its existing configuration.

The contemporary low-cost project, driven by a concept of efficiency based not on purely technical aspects but on the smart use or reuse of existing resources, brings back to the field the qualities of the "as found" condition and the ready-made approach. In this view, even elements of the built landscape considered as waste or the ruins of modernity acquire new design potential and aesthetic qualities, following the intuition that had marked the production of artists such as Robert Smithson or Gordon Matta-Clark in the 1970s. Buildings affected by demolition processes resulting from a previous interrupted or failed refurbishment are opportunities to set up spaces where it is the degree of indeterminacy that responds to the demands of flexible and variable programmes: this applies as much to a contemporary art gallery such as Lacaton & Vassal's *Palais de Tokyo* (Fig. 2), as it does to a psychiatric clinic pavilion that relies on the daily negotiation between staff and patients to convey meanings and uses as a therapeutic tool, such as Architecten De Vylder Vinck Taillieu's *Caritas*. But it is precisely in the transformation of domestic spaces that the subtraction project allows the experimental approach of the bricoleur to be verified. In the very low-budget redevelopment project *Sayama Flat*, Schemata Architects eliminate the internal partitions of the units of a residential tower to offer new living spaces more adaptable to the needs of contemporary family compositions, where the material quality of the surfaces deprived of coating becomes the characterising informal finish of each space. *Antivilla* by Brandlhuber+ is the conversion of a former factory into a private dwelling, in which the large interior space resulting from the subtraction of non-load-bearing inner walls is only compartmentalised during the colder months by a system of curtains enclosing differentiated thermal zones. While the informal approach of the residence is emphasised by its name, the large breaches in the façade that open the large windows to the landscape give the dramatic character of a building apparently affected by a traumatic event.

3. Fake Subtractions for the End Times

The terrorist attacks and the total destruction of the Twin Towers – and their subsequent spectacularisation – seemed like the sinister opening omen of a new millennium now dominated by the condition of permacrisis. The idyllic narratives of a unified world under the aegis of globalised capitalism and liberal democracies (Fukuyama, 1992) have been shattered in the face of the emergence of new international conflicts, terrorist attacks, economic crises, environmental disasters, pandemics, etc., incidents that are often in a reciprocal and consequential relationship and as more or less direct outcomes of the Anthropocene. The perception of a contemporary era on the brink of real or presumed catastrophe animates milleniarian interpretations, post-truths, hoaxes, and conspiracy theories, spread and amplified by the multiplier effect of digital social networks. In this sense, the production systems of the culture industry profit from the construction of apocalyptic imagery that triggers a sense of the sublime updated to today's sensibilities. Whether it is a revival

3 Take for example the widespread #ruinporn (Lyons, ed., 2018).

Figure 2
Palais de Tokyo, detail. The subtractive interventions, also conducted by means of sections, show the material and construction qualities of the various elements that make up the building (G. Croce, 2019).

of the disaster-movie genre or one of the various hashtags with which images of catastrophes are collected and disseminated on digital platforms[3], the fascination exerted by violence and embodied in destruction tickles impulses and voyeurism that are perfectly exploitable by the spectacle's logics, where the production and reproduction of apocalyptic visions, real or fictitious, do not act as warnings or auspices but only end up exacerbating, by aestheticising them – thus depriving them of any critical and/or discursive mediation – the controversies of contemporaneity (Jameson, 1991: 382; Fisher, 2009: 2).

Every apocalyptic narrative describes a possible threat not of the end of the world, but rather of the end of humanity in the world: it goes without saying that the ideal backdrop of its representation is built space, the destruction of which constitutes a danger not only material but also more generically symbolic. Beyond the extrinsic, more or less probable factors that may lead to its annihilation, there are rather controversial intrinsic aspects of architecture. Paul Virilio stresses how each stage of technological development brings about its own «integrated accident» (Virilio, 2006). It follows, thus, that architecture holds the potential for disaster: since its inception, every building and its development have been an experimental challenge against the force of gravity, where each collapse has served as a traumatic lesson (Levy & Salvadori, 1994). Bernard Tschumi identifies the violence of architecture in its interaction with individuals: not only in buildings conceived as places of detention and torture but, in a broader sense, also in the limits that building imposes on the habitability, access and usability of spaces. Violent is the manipulation of form operated by architecture on the environment and which translates into distortions, ruptures, fragmentations, disjunctions (Tschumi, 1981), but also all those events that modify the order of construction through various degrees of entropy in which ruin constitutes the final and definitive stage.

Whether it is the direct manipulation of decaying buildings – between despoliation and reuse – or the fake remnants of destroyed buildings – the follies –, the ruin has cyclically been the object of investigation and design also because of its load of symbolic significance. In the 1970s, during an era of energy, economic and political crisis, the SITE group interpreted Venturi's lesson on the decorated shed in a paradoxical way: the image branding of the BEST malls was entrusted to seemingly dilapidated façades, a kind of consumerism fostered precisely by the supposed criticism of consumerism itself. The advent of postmodernist relativism generated a renewed interest in the fragment, collage and free association of dissonant elements typical of reuse practises, but it was with the 1990s and the so-called deconstructivist architectures that the rigidity of Euclidean space was definitively demolished – by means of oblique folds, fractures, decompositions, poised volumes, and collisions – as a representation of the loss of ultimate and stable referents imposed by globalisation. The impact of the Great Recession has subsequently decreed a divergent register in the formal and structural extreme evolutions but has not exhausted the need to represent the tensions and anxieties of contemporaneity.

Figure 3
MVRDV's Valley complex in Amsterdam under construction, 2021 (© Choinowski). The seemingly paradoxical construction of a fake ruin negates modular repetitiveness by instead taking its cue from the entropic variables typical of destruction (https://commons.wikimedia. org/wiki/File:The_Valley_complex_in_Amsterdam_under_construction.jpg).

modular housing cell aggregates to the digital age, which are now ideally matched to the conventional minimum units of a computerised image. This correspondence between construction and the medium in which it is conceived and marketed is quite significant when one considers the mosaic blurring usually applied to controversial images intended to be censored without covering them completely and whose recognisability is entrusted to interpretive mechanisms. Some contemporary projects seem to resort to this kind of formal-perceptive expedient, tickling the apocalyptic imaginary through the articulation of towers and residential complexes volumes in apparent ruins, in which the sudden alternation of full/empty spaces would seem to be the result of fortuitous events (collision cavities, collapses, etc.) when they are actually the result of a thoughtful design. Rather than the imitation of destruction, the reference to disaster is more suggested and surreptitious than overt or at least diluted by the reference to artificial and playful aesthetics à la Minecraft. In Ole Scheeren's *MahaNakhon Tower*, the traditional hermeticity of tertiary towers and the "vertical schism" is subverted by means of a continuous spiral excavation of the building parallelepiped, in which semi-public open-air spaces

are accommodated, standing out in the Bangkok cityscape with the uncanny appearance of a (fake) damaged building. MVRDV's Valley complex in Amsterdam (Fig. 3) further extremes the wink of ruin in which only fragments of the perimeter curtain seem to be left of a typical residential block, while the interior consists of residential "pixels" arranged in seemingly random order as if they were the remnants of a collapse. As controversial as it may appear, the liberating, albeit fictitious, demolition aspect in these and other examples metaphorically represents, in the absurd condition of mock ruin, the inseparable duality of construction/destruction – or addition/subtraction – with which the vicissitudes of the built territory have always been perpetuated.

4. The Work of Architecture in the Age of Mechanical Destructiveness

The construction/destruction alternation is the basis for the development of urban settlements and the built territory: the demolition of old or outdated models has always allowed cities to renew themselves by employing of punctual or overall replacements, but it has also allowed the value of the full/empty succession to be established through appropriate subtractive actions. Destruction – like death – is automatically associated with trauma, and even if this is true to the extent that we consider natural catastrophes or wars as active engines of its execution, in general even the planning of destructiveness, of whatever order and degree, often originates in a crisis – political, economic, or social – in which subtraction acts as a cure for the ailments through the reorganisation of urban spatial arrangements. If this type of natural enantiodromia is thus comparable to that of the dualism that determines the life cycles of every organism, the rhythm of the creation/annihilation of built space takes on an acceleration with the advent of modernity and the processes of modernisation. The origin of this increase lies fundamentally in the very nature of capitalism and its class of choice, the bourgeoisie, marked by the "creative destruction" induced by the continuous need for transformation as consequential and interdependent processes of innovation and obsolescence[4]. Destructive/subtractive logic can also be traced according to the Weberian interpretation of the origins of capitalist development in the Protestant Reformation. The practises of iconoclasm and formal sobriety and customs were understood as moral praxes of austerity and simplicity as engines of savings and investment, these orientations would result, a few centuries later, in their secularised version in the wake of the Enlightenment revolution. The development of economics as an autonomous science and the advent of efficientism would then contribute to the birth of the rationalist and functionalist tendencies in the discipline of architecture, which would later find maximum formal but also ideological expression in the multiple evolutions of modernity and the Modern Movement, whose procedures were also carried out through extensive

4 The concept is elaborated by the Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter in the 1940s, thus defining the driving force of capitalist economic arrangements set to continuous innovation, taking up, with some differences, the Marxian *Vernichtung* on the peculiarity of capitalism to function by cyclical devaluations of wealth through crises in the order to create new, additional wealth (Schumpeter, 1942; Marx and Engels, 1848).

destructive plans. But as already mentioned, every development peak entails its own crisis, the consequence of which can be traced in various subtractive stages of the built territory. Conventionally, the "death of modern architecture" was sanctioned by an iconic implosion – the *Pruitt-Igoe* complex in Saint-Louis in 1972 (Jencks, 1997: 23) – at the very moment when the development model of Western economies, defined as the Glorious Thirty, was definitively entering a crisis. The dismantling of Minoru Yamasaki's complex was the epitome of a widespread aversion towards buildings that were too associated with abstraction and technophilia as expressions of the Machine Age, which was often accompanied by demolition auspices that would leave the field open for new forms of real estate developments. The destruction of social housing schemes built between the 1950s and 1970s was always preceded by a sneaky mechanism in which class issues, lack of maintenance and obsolescence were combined with a general stigma towards these models that ended up becoming easy scapegoats. The teardown of complexes such as *Norfolk Park* in Sheffield or *Red Road Flats* in Glasgow was greeted by the jubilation of a public that flocked to witness an iconoclastic spectacle that sanctioned the end of a settlement pattern and the political and social system of reference.

Subtraction as demolition has not always intervened as a necessary process for new development processes, it has sometimes been invoked as a value in itself, as a "project of the void" especially in contexts where the contradiction of the concept of infinite development is evident. The case of shrinking cities represents the most tangible consequence of the effects of industrial crises, where large areas of productive abandonment are consequently accompanied by deserted residential areas. The hypothesis of reverse planning, proceeding by surgical subtraction especially in the most expendable parts of the diffuse city, has sometimes animated the disciplinary debate, with projects that, in any case, did not deviate too far from the radical principle of tabula rasa as panacea. OMU's project for the shrinking Berlin of the 1970s, OMA's masterplan for Paris Mission Grand Axe, or the various "smart shrinkage" in Detroit and in other Rust Belt cities have illustrated the potential of reordering plans for territories plagued by abandonment and decay. However, by not intercepting plans to fund interventions of such scale, the projects are destined to fall

Figure 4
Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord, 2006 (© Raimond Spekking). The proliferation of vegetal elements as the redemption of nature on the built landscape and as a material for subtractive urban design in the context of post-industrial conversion (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Landschaftspark_Duisburg-Nord_-_Landschaft_2.jpg.).

into the realm of utopia. More immersed in the domain of the real are the projects that work on punctual demolition processes through an economy of subtraction: the activities of groups such as Rotor, engaged as much in the storage of elements from demolished buildings as in projects involving their recycling, update the practises of stripping and reuse in renewed contemporary architectural palimpsests.

Abandonment and demolition are also opportunities to rethink the traditional natural/artificial dichotomy: the proliferation of vegetation in the various interstices is one of the first traces of the deterioration of a building artefact and, in ruins, it is the sign of nature's revenge on the man's work. In the epoch of environmental crisis and with the spread of constructions destined for oblivion, the "third landscape" (Clément, 2004) seems to offer redemption for an overly man-made environment. While the transformation of brownfields into urban parks is a well-established feature in the post-industrial era (i.e., the *Landschaftspark* by Latz+Partner, Fig. 4), more recent examples work on the modification through subtraction of abandoned remnants, favouring and directing the growth of wild plants. Near Frankfurt, GTL have transformed the area of a former airfield into an urban park with a series of subtractions of the runway surface in which both the resulting voids and rubble are areas for the proliferation of native plants that are allowed to grow freely. In a typical shrinking city in post-unification Germany, Sation C23's *Dessau Landscape Corridor* uses the scraps or skeletons of industrial and residential demolished buildings as street furniture in a post-urban landscape overgrown by vegetation. In these and other examples of the paradoxical project with the wilderness, the designers seem to emphasise an unspoken truth: that the most natural condition of architecture is ruin.

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Authors

Giovanni Corbellini
Full Professor of Architectural and Urban Design, Politecnico di Torino
(giovanni.corbellini@polito.it)

Giovanni Fraziano
Senior Professor of Architectural and Urban Design, Università di Trieste
(gfraziano@units.it)

Ilaria Garofolo
Full Professor of Architectural Engineering, Università di Trieste
(Ilaria.garofolo@dia.units.it)

Giovanni La Varra
Associate Professor of Architectural and Urban Design, Università di Udine
(giovanni.lavarra@uniud.it)

Elena Marchigiani
Associate Professor of Urban and Landscape Planning and Design, Università di Trieste
(emarchigiani@units.it)

Alessandra Marin
Associate Professor of Urban and Landscape Planning and Design, Università di Ferrara
(alessandra.marin@unife.it)

Sara Marini
Full Professor of Architectural and Urban Design, Università Iuav di Venezia
(sara.marini@iuav.it)

Paolo Rosato
Full Professor of Real Estate Appraisal and Project Evaluation, Università di Trieste
(paolo.rosato@dia.units.it)

Giuseppina Scavuzzo
Associate Professor of Architectural and Urban Design, Università di Trieste
(gscavuzzo@units.it)

Alberto Sdegno
Full Professor of Drawing, Università di Udine
(alberto.sdegno@uniud.it)

Elisa Maria Vittoria Bertolini

(elisamariavittoria.bertolini@dia.units.it)
XXXIV Cycle, Supervisor Prof. Paolo Rosato, Prof. Giovanni Campeol
PhD Thesis: **Valutazione di scenari alternativi per il miglioramento dell'interconnettività transfrontaliera nell'Isontino** */ Evaluation of Alternative Scenarios for the Improvement of Cross-border Interconnectivity in the Isonzo Area.*

Elisa Cacciaguerra

(elisa.cacciaguerra@gmail.com)
XXXIV Cycle, supervisor Prof. Ilaria Garofolo
Funded by Comune di Trieste
PhD Thesis: **Studio di metodi e strumenti per la digitalizzazione dei processi nella gestione delle opere pubbliche e la rifunzionalizzazione del patrimonio edilizio storico di proprietà del Comune di Trieste**/*Study of Methods and Tools for the Digitalisation of Processes in the Management of Public Works and the Re-functionalisation of the Historical Building Heritage owned by the Municipality of Trieste.*

Sara Carciotti

(saracarciotti@gmail.com)
XXXIII Cycle, supervisor Prof. Alessandra Marin, Prof. Walter Ukovich
PhD Thesis: **Smart Cruise Destination: un approccio innovativo a network nella gestione delle connessioni tra il turismo crocieristico, le destinazioni turistiche e il territorio**/*Smart Cruise Destination: an Innovative Network Governance Framework to Manage the Connection Between Tourism, Destination and Territory.*

Alberto Cervesato

(alberto.cervesato@uniud.it)
XXIII Cycle, supervisor Prof. Giovanni La Varra
PhD Thesis: **Il manuale dei borghi**/*The Village Handbook.*

Barbara Chiarelli

(barbara.chiarelli@dia.units.it)
XXXIII Cicle, supervisor Prof. Ilaria Garofolo, co-supervisor Prof. Elena Marchigiani
Funded by Regione Autonoma Friuli Venezia Giulia-Fondo Sociale Europeo 2014-20
PhD Thesis: **Strumenti di e-participation nello sviluppo di processi e progetti di rigenerazione urbana. Esplorazioni e pratiche di ricerca-azione nel Friuli-Venezia Giulia**/*E-participation for the Development of Urban Regeneration Projects and Processes. Explorations and Research-Action Practices in the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region (Italy).*

Gianluca Croce
(gianluca.croce@unina.it, glccrc@gmail.com)
XXXIV Cycle, Supervisor Prof. Giovanni Corbellini
PhD Thesis: ***De-Sign: Architectural Subtraction in Times of Crisis***.

Egidio Cutillo
(ecutillo@iuav.it; egidio.cutillo@gmail.com)
XXXIV Cycle, supervisor Prof. Sara Marini, co-supervisor Prof. Giovanni Corbellini
PhD Thesis: **Architetturofagia. Naturalizzazione e consumazione del corpo architettonico/*Architecturophagy. Naturalization and Consumption of the Architectural Body.***

Mariacristina D'Oria
(mariacristina.d'oria@dia.units.it; doriamariacristina@gmail.com)
XXXIV Cycle, Supervisor Prof. Giovanni Corbellini
PhD Thesis: ***Mean Time Architecture. Or, How to Deal with Trauma in the Posthuman Era.***

Veronica Riavis
(veronica.riavis@uniud.it)
XXXII Cycle, supervisor Prof. Alberto Sdegno, co-supervisor Prof. Fabio Crosilla
Funded by Fondazione CARIGO
PhD Thesis: **Rappresentazioni tattili di pittura e architettura: ricostruzione geometrica della Chiesa di Sant'Ignazio a Gorizia e restituzione prospettica dell'affresco parietale/*Tactile Representations of Architecture and Painting: Geometric Reconstruction of the Church of St. Ignatius in Gorizia and Perspective Restitution of the Presbytery Fresco.***

Valentina Rodani
(valentina.rodani@outlook.com)
XXXIV Cycle, supervisor Prof. Giovanni Corbellini, co-supervisor Prof. Giovanni Fraziano
Funded by Fondazione CARIGO
PhD Thesis: ***Liminal Architecture. Enduring Experimentation on the Threshold of the Moving Border.***