

A Heritage of images witnessing the passage of time. The renovation of the Torino Esposizioni complex

Original

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IV CONVEGNO INTERNAZIONALE E INTERDISCIPLINARE
SU IMMAGINI E IMMAGINAZIONE
4th INTERNATIONAL AND INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE
ON IMAGES AND IMAGINATION

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A cura di / Edited by
Stefano Brusaporci, Pamela Maiezza, Adriana Marra
Ilaria Trizio, Francesca Savini, Alessandra Tata



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INDICE

STEFANO BRUSAPORCI IMAGIN(G) HERITAGE	21
TOPICS	22
FRANCESCA FATTA Scene da un Patrimonio	25
ALESSANDRO LUIGINI Sguardi plurali sulle immagini di un patrimonio immaginario	27
ADRIANA MARRA Esperienze di imagin(g) heritage. I contributi del volume	29
IMG23: PAPERS	
 HERITAGE EDUCATION EDUCAZIONE AL PATRIMONIO	
CHIARA AGAGIÙ The subconscious heritage as a psycho-pedagogical category Il patrimonio inconscio come categoria psicopedagogica	42
ALESSANDRA DE NICOLA, FRANCA ZUCCOLI Heritage fruition and interpretation A path of kit construction: the importance of images Fruizione e interpretazione del patrimonio Un percorso di costruzioni di kit: l'importanza delle immagini	50
ANITA MACAUDA, VERONICA RUSSO, MARIA CHIARA SGHINOLFI Writing images: a verbal-visual approach in teachers training practice Scrivere le immagini: un approccio verbo-visivo nella formazione degli insegnanti	58
SALVATORE MESSINA, ANITA MACAUDA, CHIARA PANCIROLI Heritage education and media literacy. Analysis of digitization practices Educazione al patrimonio e media literacy: analisi di pratiche di digitalizzazione	66
STEFANO OLIVIERO, MARIANNA DI ROSA Heritage education and heritage learning: toward a participatory perspective Heritage education e heritage learning: verso una prospettiva partecipativa	76
CHIARA PANCIROLI, PIER CESARE RIVOLTELLA The Cooperation Human-Machine. Educating for Creativity in the AI Age	82


|||||
GRAPHICAL STUDIES
STUDI GRAFICI

LEONARDO BAGLIONI, SOFIA MENCONERO Objective model and ideal model: physical models compared for the study of painted architectural space Modello oggettivo e modello ideale: modelli fisici di confronto per lo studio dello spazio architettonico dipinto	92
PAOLO BELARDI, VALERIA MENCHETELLI, GIOVANNA RAMACCINI, MARCO WILLIAMS FAGIOLI HERITAGE UNIPG. The image of the University of Perugia from the Super Specula of 1308 to the Official merchandising of 2022 HERITAGE UNIPG. L'immagine dell'Università degli Studi di Perugia dalla Super Specula del 1308 all'Official merchandising del 2022	100
STEFANO BRUSAPORCI Models Theory and Visual Sciences in Digital Representation of Architecture Teoria del Modelli e Scienze Visuali nella Rappresentazione Digitale dell'Architettura	108
ALESSIO CARDACI, ANTONELLA VERSACI A story in pictures: Bergamo and its surroundings in Luigi Angelini's drawings Un racconto per immagini: Bergamo e la Bergamasca nei disegni di Luigi Angelini	114
IRENE CAZZARO Hypothetical Cultural Heritage and its users: challenges in the interpretation and communication through verbal and visual methods	122
ENRICO CICALÒ, MICHELE VALENTINO Visualizing Archaeology. The Graphic Sciences' Contribution to Research in Archaeology Visualizzare l'archeologia. Il contributo delle scienze grafiche alle ricerche in ambito archeologico	134
ANDREA DONELLI The digital graphic/geometric construction in CAD-BIM. Models for building drawing La costruzione grafico/geometrica digitale in CAD-BIM. Modelli per il disegno edile	144
TOMMASO EMPLER, ALEXANDRA FUSINETTI The forms of representation and narration of the coastal defense systems of Elba Le forme di rappresentazione e narrazione dei sistemi di difesa costieri elbani	154
MARGHERITA FONTANA A proposal for a bunker aesthetics from Paul Virilio's archaeology to virtual architecture	162
ELENA IPPOLITI, MICHELE RUSSO, MIRUNA ANDREEA GĂMAN, NOEMI TOMASELLA, GIULIA FLENGHI Rediscovering Stratified Urban Context by Visual Pathways: the Esquiline of Rome	170


PAMELA MAIEZZA, STEFANO BRUSAPORCI Rebuilding the Past. For a Taxonomy of Virtual Reconstructions of Non-Existing Architectural Heritage Ricostruire il passato. Per una tassonomia delle ricostruzioni virtuali di beni architettonici non esistenti	178
LEONARDO PARIS, MARIA LAURA ROSSI, ANGELA MOSCHETTI The spatial syntax for diachronic analysis in the transformations of historical centres. Experimentation on Porta Cintia in Rieti La sintassi spaziale per l'analisi diacronica nelle trasformazioni dei centri storici. Sperimentazione su Porta Cintia a Rieti	186
FRANCESCA SAVINI, ALESSIO CORDISCO, ILARIA TRIZIO Digital Story Modelling: from digitising architectural Heritage to reconstructing the past Digital Story Modelling: dalla digitalizzazione del patrimonio architettonico alla ricostruzione del passato	196
STARLIGHT VATTANO Digital visions of an imagined Venice: the Biennale of 1985 Visioni digitali di una Venezia immaginata: la Biennale del 1985	204
ORNELLA ZERLENGA, CARLO DI RIENZO, VINCENZO CIRILLO Image/in intangible heritage. The ephemeral celebration in Paris in 1739	212
	
HERITAGE & MUSEUM PATRIMONIO & MUSEI	
RITA CAPURRO, FRANCA ZUCCOLI Bringing a museum to life from the imagination. The distributed museum at Milano-Bicocca University Nascita di un museo immaginato. Il Museo diffuso dell'Università di Milano-Bicocca	224
MARCELLA COLACINO Heritage, documentation and creation of meaning. Museum generativity in the case of the Brera Art Gallery Patrimonio, documentazione e creazione di senso. La generatività museale nel caso della Pinacoteca di Brera	232
MYRTO KOUKOULI, KATERINA SERVI, DIMITRA PETOUSI, MELPOMENI KARTA, NATASA MICHAILIDOU, LABRINI PAPASTRATOU, GEORGIOS I. GOGOLOS, KONSTANTINOS KALAMPOKIS, KONSTANTINOS PETRIDIS Channel to the Past: Combining different digital experiences in a single visit to the museum	240
ROBERTA SPALLONE, FABRIZIO LAMBERTI, DAVIDE CALANDRA, DAVIDE MEZZINO, JOHANNES AUENMULLER, MARTINA RINASCIMENTO Connecting objects, times and places: Digital VR re-contextualization of the standing Sekhmet statues in the Museo Egizio, Turin, from the Temple of Ptah at Karnak	248
FEDERICA ZALABRA Recomposing Heritage. Technology to support art-historical storytelling at the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo Ricomporre il patrimonio. La tecnologia a supporto della narrazione storico-artistica al Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo	258

|||||
HERITAGE & ARCHIVE
PATRIMONIO & ARCHIVIO

- CECILIA BOLOGNESI, DEIDA BASSORIZZI
Images of old projects, models of new spaces. Architecture translation: from archives to AR
Immagini di antichi progetti, modelli di nuovi spazi. Traduzione di architetture dagli archivi alla AR 266
- SALVATORE DAMIANO
Implementing the archival heritage: virtual reconstruction of an unbuilt villa by Giuseppe Samonà in Sicily
Implementare il patrimonio archivistico: ricostruzione virtuale di una villa non realizzata di Giuseppe Samonà in Sicilia 274
- PATRIZIA MONTUORI
L'Aquila and the new urban 'doors' for welcoming tourists and travellers. The Hotel Castello and the Motel Amiternum
L'Aquila e le nuove "porte" urbane per l'accoglienza turistica e dei viaggiatori. L'Hotel Castello e il Motel Amiternum 282
- CATERINA PALESTINI, GIOVANNI RASETTI
Unknown urban heritage: graphical-visual memories of architectures from the second half of the twentieth century in Abruzzo
Ignoti patrimoni urbani: memorie grafico-visive delle architetture del secondo Novecento in Abruzzo 292
- MARCO PAOLUCCI, SIMONETTA CIRANNA
The other side of Gran Sasso: Campotosto area in the 20th century. From the peat and hydroelectric industry to tourist-accommodation districts that have never been built
L'altro Gran Sasso: l'areale di Campotosto nel XX secolo. Dall'industria torbifera e idroelettrica ai comprensori turistico-ricettivi mai realizzati 302
- |||||
VISUAL HERITAGE
PATRIMONIO VISUALE
- DARIO AMBROSINI, ANNAMARIA CICCOZZI, TULLIO DE RUBEIS, DOMENICA PAOLETTI
Optical methods: imagin(g) the hidden world of cultural heritage 312
- CARLO BATTINI
No contact detection technologies: artistic expression as well?
Tecnologie di rilevamento no contact: anche espressione artistica? 320
- ALAN CHANDLER, MICHELA PACE
Heritage in a van. The paradox of intangibility 328
- ALESSANDRO LUIGINI
AI imaging, imagery and imagination. Considerations on a future that is already present, for a digital humanism in poetic and educational processes 336
- DONATO MANIELLO
Being in time. The fragment as a vision device
Essere nel tempo. Il frammento come dispositivo della visione 344
- SEBASTIANO NUCIFORA
The controversial heritage. The colonial architectural heritage in western sub-Saharan between its material presence and the persistence of memory

L'eredità controversa. Il patrimonio architettonico coloniale in Africa sub-sahariana occidentale tra presenza materiale e persistenza della memoria	350
ANNAMARIA POLI The Visual Heritage of Spoon River: intangible and tangible cultural heritage, from monuments and history to poetry and cinema	360
FEDERICO REBECCHINI Uzo Nishiyama and the drawing of domestic mutation Uzo Nishiyama e il disegno del mutamento domestico	368
FEDERICO RITA A heritage to be enhanced. The design and cultural perspectives of digital technologies Un patrimonio da valorizzare. Il design e le prospettive culturali delle tecnologie digitali	376
MARCELLO SCALZO Italy on the walls. Localities and Italian cities in tourist posters between the first and second post-war periods L'Italia sui muri. Località e città italiane nei manifesti turistici tra primo e secondo dopoguerra	386
PASQUALE TUNZI Between history and memory. The role of illustrations in early 19th century italian periodicals Tra storia e memoria. Il ruolo delle illustrazioni nei periodici italiani del primo Ottocento	396
	
HERITAGE INTERPRETATION AND MAKING INTERPRETAZIONE DEL PATRIMONIO E HERITAGE MAKING	
FABRIZIA BANDI Alive ruins: imagining cultural heritage through virtual reality Rovine viventi: immaginare il patrimonio culturale attraverso la realtà virtuale	406
MIRCO CANNELLA, VINCENZA GAROFALO, MARCO ROSARIO GERAZI, LUDOVICA PRESTIGIOVANNI The Recovered Image: the Majolica Floor of the Oratory of San Mercurio in Palermo L'immagine recuperata: il pavimento maiolicato dell'Oratorio di San Mercurio a Palermo	412
ALESSANDRA CIRAFICI, CATERINA CRISTINA FIORENTINO, PASQUALE ARGENZIANO The Cimarosian identity in Aversa. Visual paradigms and communicative codes L'identità cimarosiana ad Aversa. Paradigmi visuali e codici comunicativi	422
ORNELLA CIRILLO, CATERINA CRISTINA FIORENTINO, ROBERTO LIBERTI Procida's manufactures in the threads of history. An interdisciplinary approach to heritage making Le manifatture di Procida nelle trame della storia. Un approccio interdisciplinare all'heritage making	432
FRANCESCO DE LORENZO, AGOSTINO URSO Formal configurations of urban space. The design of blocks in the drawings of the Ente Edilizio of Reggio Calabria Configurazioni formali dello spazio urbano. La progettazione degli isolati nei disegni dell'Ente Edilizio di Reggio Calabria	440

LAURA FARRONI, MATTEO FLAVIO MANCINI Real, virtual and digital images from the Room of Pompeo quadratura at Palazzo Spada in Rome	448
ALESSIA GAROZZO, FRANCESCO MAGGIO Memory of the past between old and new images La memoria del passato tra antiche e nuove immagini	456
ROSINA IADEROSA The tradition of ancient crafts by means of images. Their tales between analogue and digital La tradizione degli antichi mestieri attraverso le immagini. I loro racconti tra analogico e digitale	464
ELENA IPPOLITI, FLAVIA CAMAGNI, ANDREA CASALE Seeing Urbino through the eyes of the Renaissance. A multimedia travel notebook Urbino con gli occhi del Rinascimento. Un taccuino di viaggio multimediale	472
SILVANA KÜHTZ, ALESSANDRO RAFFA Image and imagination.Re-inventing heritage in Matera. For a definition of heritage in marginal areas	482
ALESSANDRO LUIGINI, BARBARA TRAMELLI, FRANCESCA CONDORELLI, GIUSEPPE NICASTRO, ALESSANDRO BASSO Three experiences of imagin(g) heritage Tre esperienze di imagin(g) per il patrimonio	490
ADRIANA MARRA Reconstructing images through 3D printing: Application to archaeological finds at Amiternum (AQ) Ricostruire le immagini attraverso la stampa 3D: applicazione ai reperti archeologici di Amiternum (AQ)	498
VALERIA MENCHETELLI, FRANCESCO COTANA, CHIARA SPIPPOLI Images to interpret Cultural Heritage. Fortified Architecture in Umbria Between Survey, Cataloguing and Communication Immagini per interpretare il patrimonio culturale. Le architetture fortificate in Umbria tra rilievo, catalogazione e comunicazione	508
SONIA MOLLICA Physical and perceptual images. The visual representation of the paintings of the Basilica of S. Giorgio in Venice Immagini fisiche e percettive. La rappresentazione visuale dei dipinti della Basilica di S. Giorgio a Venezia	518
JONATHAN PIERINI, GIANLUCA CAMILLINI The editorial practice as a device for enacting archives Una pratica editoriale come dispositivo di riattivazione dell'archivio	526
ADRIANA ROSSI, SARA GONIZZI BARSANTI "Augmenting" Reality: a recent goal? "Aumentare" la realtà: un obiettivo recente?	534
DANIELE ROSSI, ALESSANDRO BASSO Exploring Cultural Heritage Through Virtual Tours: The Loggia of Galatea in Villa Farnesina	544
MICHELA ROSSI, SARA CONTE Visual Heritage and Memory Design	554

SABATINO MICHELE Remembering and documenting heritage through images. The farmhouses O.N.C. Of the land of the "Mazzoni" Ricordare e documentare il patrimonio attraverso le immagini. Le case coloniche O.N.C. della terra dei "Mazzoni"	564
ROSSELLA SALERNO "Reading" a place: between identity and globalization "La lettura" del luogo: tra identità e globalizzazione	572
KHAOULA STITI Revisiting participation in research. A literature review to rearrange the definitions of "research with" in heritage	580
ALESSANDRA TATA Memory and photography in the digital age: the case of L'Aquila Memoria e fotografia nell'era digitale: il caso dell'Aquila	588
TRAMELLI BARBARA Finding, seeing and comparing. Visualization Methods in the Lyon16ci Database	598
CHRISTIAN UPMEIER, ISABELLA KÜCHLER The Sounds of Heritage: a prototype for the Haus Am Horn of Weimar I suoni del patrimonio: un prototipo per la Haus Am Horn di Weimar	608
AGOSTINO URSO, FRANCESCO DE LORENZO Puzzles and representation. The puzzle image as a useful tool for graphic, multimedia and interactive storytelling Puzzle e rappresentazione. L'immagine del puzzle come utile strumento di narrazione grafica, multimediale e interattiva	616
ORNELLA ZERLENGA, MARGHERITA CICALA, RICCARDO MIELE Images for the fruition of Cultural Heritage. Virtual itineraries for the knowledge and enhancement of the Roccarainola castle Immagini per la fruizione del Patrimonio Culturale. Itinerari virtuali per la conoscenza e la valorizzazione del castello di Roccarainola	624
	
LANDSCAPE	
PAESAGGIO	
GIUSEPPE AMORUSO Rebuilding Amatrice. The authentic representation of the historical urban landscape Ricostruire Amatrice. La rappresentazione autentica del paesaggio urbano storico	634
MARINELLA ARENA Imago Memoriae	642
GIOVANNI CAFFIO Beyond villages. The challenge of drawing as a method of investigating depopulated villages Oltre i borghi. La sfida del disegno come metodo d'indagine dei paesi in spopolamento	650
ANTONIO CONTE, MARIANNA CALIA, ROBERTO PEDONE, ROSSELLA LAERA Creative heritage and fragility in Lucania small towns. Reconstruction through images of human events as a palimpsest of housing memory Patrimoni creativi e fragilità nei piccoli centri della Lucania. Ricostruzione per immagini di vicende umane come palinsesto della memoria abitativa	658

- CONCEPCIÓN RODRÍGUEZ-MORENO, MARÍA DEL CARMEN
VÍLCHEZ-LARA, JUAN FRANCISCO REINOSO-GORDO,
ANTONIO GÓMEZ-BLANCO, JORGE MOLINERO-SÁNCHEZ
Images of a disappearing cultural landscape: The factory-flour complex of
Los Tajos of Alhama de Granada (Spain)
Imágenes de un paisaje cultural que desaparece: El complejo fabril-harinero
de los Tajos de Alhama de Granada (España) 666
- CAMILLA SETTE, BERNARDINO ROMANO
Public landscape heritage. The Unsustainable Planning of Soil Consumption 674

|||||

ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE
PATRIMONIO ARCHITETTONICO

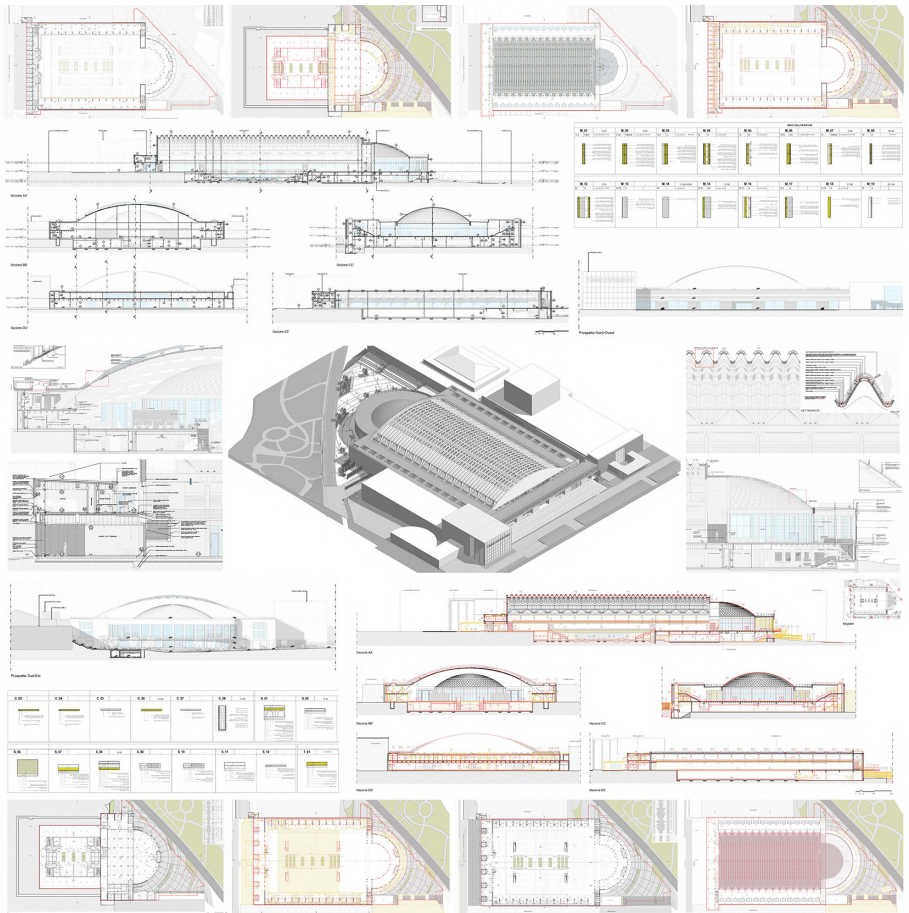
- FABRIZIO AGNELLO
Image and Imagination: Light as a material of architecture
Immagine e immaginazione: la luce come materia dell'architettura 684
- ALESSANDRA BELLICOSO
Constructing images and preserving memory. The New Provincial Insane
Asylum of L'Aquila
Costruire immagini e conservare memoria. Il Nuovo Manicomio Provinciale
dell'Aquila 692
- STEFANO BRUSAPORCI, PAMELA MAIEZZA, ADRIANA MARRA,
ALESSANDRA TATA, LUCA VESPASIANO
Reliability of HBIM models for built heritage management
Affidabilità dei modelli HBIM per la gestione del patrimonio costruito 702
- LUIGI CORNIELLO, GIANLUCA GIOIOSO, FABIANA GUERRIERO, GENNARO
PIO LENTO, PEDRO A. JANEIRO
A heritage of images. The survey model
Un patrimonio di immagini. Il modello di rilievo 708
- ANGELO DE CICCO, ANDREA MALIQARI, ANDRONIRA BURDA,
GENNARO PIO LENTO, FABIANA GUERRIERO, ROSA DE CARO, ADRIANA
TREMATERRA, GIANLUCA GIOIOSO, LUIGI CORNIELLO
Images of the UNESCO heritage site of Berat in Albania. Photographic and
photogrammetric surveys of the cistern in the castle
Immagini del patrimonio Unesco di Berat in Albania. Rilievi fotografici e
fotogrammetrici della cisterna nel castello 716
- DANIELE ARTURO DE LUCA, RAMONA QUATTRINI, CHIARA MARIOTTI
HBIM strategies for the phygital interaction with the architectural heritage.
Palazzo Olivieri-Machirelli and the Auditorium Pedrotti in Pesaro 724
- GIANCARLO DI MARCO, JUAN CARLOS DALL'ASTA
Architectural materiality as an image of the future past. 3D printed concrete
at the intersection of aesthetic language evolution and technological
development 734
- ERIKA ELEFANTE, GIUSEPPE ANTUONO, PIERPAOLO D'AGOSTINO
Gamification for participatory communication of information models.
Imagining the heritage of inaccessible architecture
Gamification per la comunicazione partecipativa dei modelli informativi.
Immaginare il patrimonio dell'architettura inaccessibile 742
- MASSIMILIANO LO TURCO, ANDREA TOMALINI, JACOPO BONO
A Heritage of images witnessing the passage of time. The renovation of the
Torino Esposizioni complex 750

MÓNICA LÓPEZ-PIQUER, CINTA LLUIS-TERUEL, JOSEP LLUIS I GINOVART Comparison of the methodology used for the analysis of the main section in Romanesque buildings in Val d'Aran	762
FANWEI MENG, YU HUAIYUAN The oldest catholic church in Beijing: Nan Tang	770
LUCA ROSSATO, FABIO PLANU, GRETA MONTANARI, DARIO RIZZI, FRANCESCO VIROLI The Rocca Malatestiana of Verucchio. Integrated survey and SCAN to HBIM process for cultural heritage management La Rocca Malatestiana di Verucchio. Rilievo integrato e processo di SCAN to HBIM per la gestione del patrimonio culturale	778
ADRIANA TREMATERRA, GIANLUCA PINTUS, ANGELO DE CICCIO, FABIANA GUERRIERO, ROSA DE CARO, LUIGI CORNIELLO Images of Sacred Heritage. Enhancement of Montenegro's Orthodox Monasteries for Sustainable Religious Tourism	788
GRAZIANO MARIO VALENTI Non-canonical representations: the aid of reflection Rappresentazioni non canoniche: l'ausilio della riflessione	796
LUCA VESPASIANO Fragments from Renaissance. The loggias in the historial center of L'Aquila Frammenti dal rinascimento. Le logge nel centro storico dell'Aquila	804
Index of aurnhors/Indice degli autori	816





**IMAGIN(G)
HERITAGE**



A Heritage of images witnessing the passage of time

The renovation of the Torino Esposizioni complex

Abstract

The essay describes the outcomes of the restoration of the Torino Esposizioni complex, an exemplary work of mid-century engineering by Pier Luigi Nervi. The complex is well known to the community for its various uses over the years and for the complete state of neglect it has been in since the post-Olympic period. In line with the call's suggestions, the Padiglione 2 well manifests the passage of time through a collection of images, between history and memory. The important work of digitizing the artifact and especially the HBIM modeling of the pavilion can be told through images.

Keywords

Pier Luigi Nervi, Torino Esposizioni, Civic Library, Pictorial turn, Digitization.

INTRODUCTION

As part of its policy of enhancing the value of its real estate assets, the city of Turin has submitted a proposal for intervention in the Po River area to the Ministry of Culture. The work includes the redevelopment of the Parco del Valentino and the restoration of the Torino Esposizioni complex. The renovation of Torino Esposizioni constitutes a unique opportunity for the regeneration of exceptional architecture in which to place the new Central Civic Library of Turin and the training and advanced research activities in the field of Architecture of the Politecnico di Torino. The new complex is proposed as a space open to the city and to the multiplicity of its users, as the fulcrum of connection of a cultural system that is in part fragmented today, linking presences of exceptional architectural and landscape value. This contribution is not intended as a mere chronicle of the events that led to the proposal of this important intervention on one of the most emblematic works of the Italian 20th century. Instead, the excuse is particularly stimulating to emphasize the renewed role attributable to images: images can be usefully employed as evidence of the passage of time, reinforcing the notion that the visual paradigm can appropriate an equal and complementary role to the verbal one. In this stylistic exercise, it is precisely through a narrative set in images that the passage of time and the various events that have affected this artifact can be effectively described. In this context, new technologies play a fundamental role, in the transition between past, present and future: sketches, drawings and historic images give way to three-dimensional representations in axonometric and perspective views, some with more technical content, others more mimetic and popular, allowing us to imagine what will be, while at the same time implementing an already rich heritage of images so intimately linked to the history of the artifact.

A RICH AND CONTROVERSIAL PAST DESCRIBED THROUGH MULTIPLE REPRESENTATIONS

The Sottsass-Nervi building stands in the southern part of Valentino Park; the area insists on the site of the former Palazzo del Giornale, built in 1911 for the Universal Exhibition organized for the fiftieth year of the Unification of Italy (fig. 1a). The Palazzo del Giornale was built to exalt Turin's presence and the role on the international scene, showing its identity as a great industrial pole, home to important manufacturers and factories, above all FIAT.

The buildings of Torino Esposizioni are incredible examples of architecture and structural engineering realized between the end of the 1930s and the early 1960s by some of the great engineers and architects of that historical period; it is no coincidence that perhaps the most representative pavilion, the Nervi one, destined to house the new Central Civic Library, is currently included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. The complex was born in 1937 as the 'Palazzo della Moda' designed by Ettore Sottsass; over the years, thanks to famous designers such as Roberto Biscaretti di Ruffia, Pier Luigi Nervi and Riccardo Morandi, the building underwent several transformations and it became an architectural organism known throughout the world as an exceptional example of structural engineering.

The buildings were designed by outstanding architects of the Art-Nouveau era, such as Pietro Fenoglio, Giacomo Salvadori and Stefano Molli. The idea represented by the main pavilion was the recreation of the production cycle of the powerful instrument of mass communication, the Newspaper: from the production of the paper support to the casting of the characters, from typesetting to folding (fig. 1b). Inside, there were exhibitions on related industries, the iconography of famous journalists, a exhibition of caricatures, as well as Calendar and Illustrated Postcard Exhibitions.

Fig. 1 - Bono, *The route from the newspaper palace to Sot-sass's project*, 2023, Digital composition. a) Facade of "Palazzo del Giornale", picture b/n. (Mussatti, 2017, p. 10). Private collection of Giorgio Pelassa; b) Interior of "Palazzo del Giornale" with printing presses, picture b/n. (Balocco, 2011, p. 93. In: Mussatti, 2017, p. 21); c) Facade of "Palazzo della Moda", picture b/n. Retrieved February, 20, 2023 from <https://www.exclusivebrandstorino.com/it/guide/torino-la-culla-della-moda-italiana/>; d) Interior view of the dance garden in the Palazzo della Moda, picture b/n. (Casabella n.133, 1939, p. 27. In: Mussatti, 2017, p. 113); e) Physical model, picture b/n. (Gregnanin, 2010, p.15. In: Casabella n.108, 1936, pp. 20-25); f) Framing and general floor plan, picture b/n. (Gregnanin, 2010, p. 15. In: Casabella n.108, 1936, p.20- 25); g) Sections, picture b/n. (Gregnanin, 2010, p.15. In: Casabella n.108, 1936, pp. 20-25).



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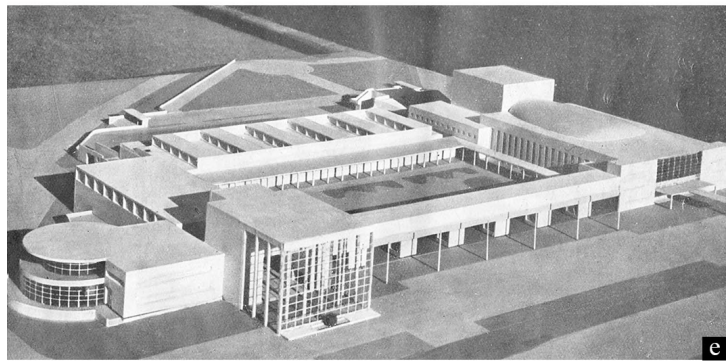
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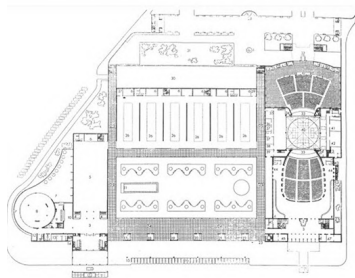
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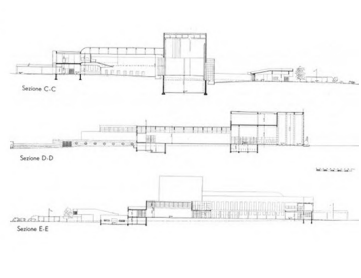
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In 1928, the Esposizione Nazionale Italiana was organized. After this event, just in front of the Palazzo del Giornale (Garuzzo, 1928), the first Palazzo della Moda was built in 1932, designed by Umberto Cuzzi for the interiors, by Annibale Rigotti, Aldo Morbelli and Gino Levi Montalcini; the latter was also in charge of the subsequent exhibition (fig. 1c-d). In the following year, a competition was announced for the design of the second Palazzo della Moda, replacing the Palazzo del Giornale. The new building stands out for its rationalist architecture, with pure and simple forms, in stark contrast to the opulence and decorative emphasis of the previous Palazzo del Giornale.

In 1947, the newly founded Società del Palazzo delle Esposizioni needed flexible exhibition spaces for various events. It was decided to grant the society the space of the Palazzo della Moda. The project was assigned to Roberto Biscaretti di Ruffia, an engineer from Fiat, whose outline design maintained the layout of Sottsass's project (figg. 1e-f-g). In 1947 the contract for the reconstruction of the Palazzo della Moda was awarded to Pier Luigi Nervi.

For Pavilion 2 Nervi designed a basilica with a rectangular free surface of 81x112 m. This is scanned along the longitudinal axis by a series of inclined, sinuously shaped shelf-pillars with a pitch of 7.5 meters to support the roof vault and the intermediate floor which acts as a balcony projecting over the nave. The inclined pillars in turn rest on shaped plinths to counter the thrust of the enormous vault covering the central space (fig. 2a-b). Completing the nave, towards the park, is the large glazed apse as already provided for in the Biscaretti project (fig. 2c). To build the pavilion, Nervi uses innovative systems already experimented by the Società Ing. Nervi e Bartoli of Rome, forerunners in the prefabrication of ferro-concrete systems.

In addition to the construction advantages (fig. 2d), the structure combines an admirable architectural expressiveness particularly appreciable in the transition from the undulating vault to the large inclined pillars. For the construction of the semicircular apse, at the bottom of the nave, characterized by a diameter of 60 meters, a construction system based on the prefabrication of lozenge-shaped elements, connected by cast-in-place reinforced concrete ribs, is adopted (fig. 2e-f). The overall thickness, taking into account the ferrocement of the lozenge-shaped tiles, is only 7 cm. The entire system of the horizontal structure, with the visible ribs that design the framework, together with the undulating and perforated ribs of the great vault, constitute that admirable structural and compositional creation that characterizes the originality and beauty of Nervi's masterpiece.

The complex was intensively used during the 1960s and 1970s as an exhibition center and the venue for several editions of the Salone dell'Automobile di Torino (fig. 3a). In 1989, the trade fair activity was transferred to Lingotto, beginning a period of scarce use, interrupted only for the 20th Winter Olympic Games, when the building hosted ice hockey matches (2006) (fig. 3b). Since 2015, the Torino Esposizioni complex has hosted various exhibitions such as the contemporary art festival 'Paratissima' (fig. 3c).

RECENT IMAGES TO DESCRIBE THE NEW DESIGN PROPOSAL

Starting from the restoration of these buildings, now not used and in part already degraded, the architectural and functional redevelopment project is proposed as a broad urban regeneration operation to establish new functions such as reading, studying and research, in a way that complements the area's historical uses, which have always been oriented towards culture, education, nature, sport and food.

The project for the new Civic Library pays attention to the conservation and enhancement of the existing architectural and structural elements, while preserving the original legibility of the exceptional 20th-century structures. The proposal also focuses on the definition

Fig. 2 - J. Bono, *An innovative construction: the forms and connections of Nervi's structure*, 2023, Digital composition. a) Front view, picture b/n. (Domus 231, 1948); b) Side view, picture b/n. (Gregnanin, 2010, p. 17. In: Carpanelli, 1955, p.227); c) Apse, picture b/n. (Gregnanin, 2010, p.18. In: Carpanelli, 1955, p. 226); d) Assembly of the prefabricated elements of the vault on "innocent" tube scaffolding, picture b/n. (Gregnanin, 2010, p.20. In: Carpanelli, 1955, p.224); e) single element of the corrugated vault, picture b/n. (Gregnanin, 2010, p.21. In: Carpanelli, 1955, p.223); f) Alignment of prefabricated elements for installation, picture b/n. (Gregnanin, 2010, p.21. In: Carpanelli, 1955, p.223); g) Technical detail of iron and concrete roofing, Indian ink inchostro on glossy paper, 580x1364 mm. (Vernizzi, 2011, p. 43. In: CSAC Parma, coll. 157/2)

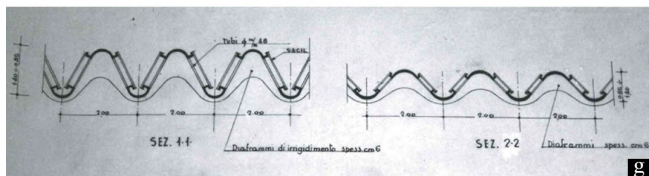
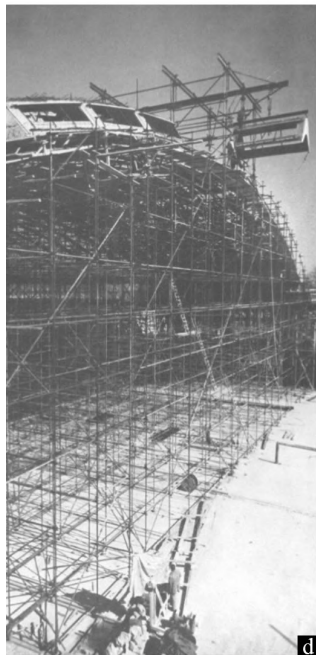
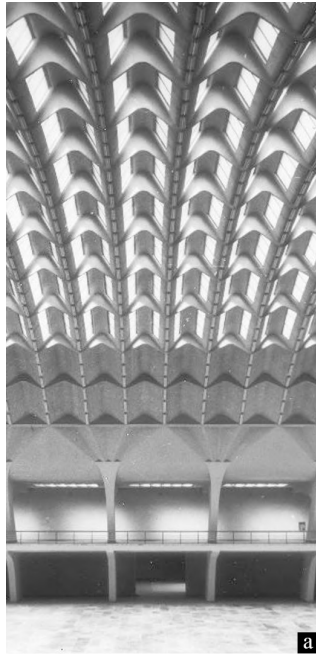


Fig. 3 - J. Bono, *The life of Torino esposizione complex from the 1960s to the present day*, 2023, Digital composition. a) Showcase of Turin's automotive industry, "Il Salone dell'automobile", 1954, picture b/n. Retrieved February, 19, 2023 from http://www.torinoesposizionegetty.polito.it/history/torino_esposizioni; b) Ice hockey rink during the Winter Olympics, 2006, picture RGB. (Urban Center Metropolitan, 2014, p. 16. In: Marinò, 2015, p.102); c) Cultural exposure: Paratissima, 2014-2015, picture RGB. Retrieved February, 20, 2023 from <https://www.urbanitaly.com/portfolio-item/turin-mollino-nervi/>



of the distributive, functional and technical elements of the entire complex as well as the individual functions, consistently with the architectural values expressed by the Soprintendenza Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio. The new Library assumes all the values and attractive potential of a modern public library, a cultural and information center, but also a meeting and socializing place, easily accessible to users of all ages and of different cultural and social conditions and backgrounds, thanks to the increased informative potentials (including multimedia), greater visibility and attractiveness, together with the comfort of the rooms.

The Library will constitute a showcase and a laboratory on current affairs to offer every citizen the possibility of reinterpreting the past by looking at the present and the future, as envisaged by the Faro Convention. Participatory processes and the co-creation of content by citizenship will be promoted; the meeting and exchange between generations, different audiences and new citizens will be fostered,

also through its being digital, technological and connected: given the evolution of digital and its pervasiveness, the library will have to be digital in all its parts.

The proposal is conceived to harmonize with the wider project that included the construction of the Architecture, Design and Landscape Campus. The new library will therefore play a decisive role within the new structure, embodying a place of absolute centrality for the community, but even more so to be the point of reference for all users of the Valentino Campus such as students, lecturers and researchers. Unlike the Anglo-Saxon campuses, in fact, the campus was not dedicated only to the academic education, but was open to the rest of the citizens, thanks to its welcoming and strongly permeable structure, even though it was identifiable and had an unmistakable cultural imprint. It is therefore evident how important the theme of coexistence between citizens and the academic world will be.

The future library will have three levels: on the ground floor, traditional reading and study activities will be concentrated; two underground sub-floors: the first will be used mainly for the technological system, the second for the storage of the library's holdings. On the balcony floor there will be coworking spaces, private and laboratory rooms that can be used for activities of an educational and informative nature.

The areas close to the entrance are conceived as a space of connection and integration with the outdoors, in which a literary cafeteria and a laboratory for urban and social experimentation for the participatory planning of cultural initiatives are planned. The central part of the ground floor, where the traditional reading and study activities were located, is organized with furnishing elements delimiting the different areas, without resorting to fixed structures; along the sides: open shelves, the service and back office areas of the staff, stations for self-service lending and return. In the final part of the apse, which completely overlooks the park, there will be spaces for reading in a classical and informal manner, so as to enhance the views to the outside through the large windows and the contact with nature in the park. In the great hall, the paths will be very intuitive and determined by the very conformation of the building and the few interventions in the project that preserve the original image of Nervi's design: users will be able to move freely on the level square, descend to the underground functions in the underground courtyard, climb up the internal balconies, exit onto the external balcony, enter the square-park and then enter the Valentino park from this new exit.

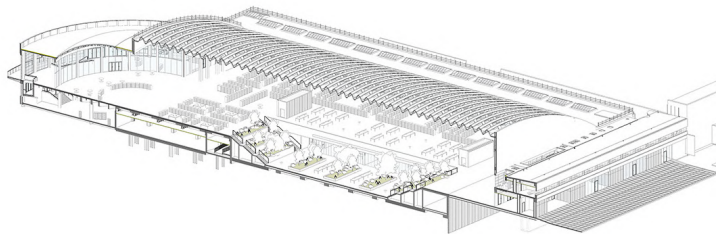
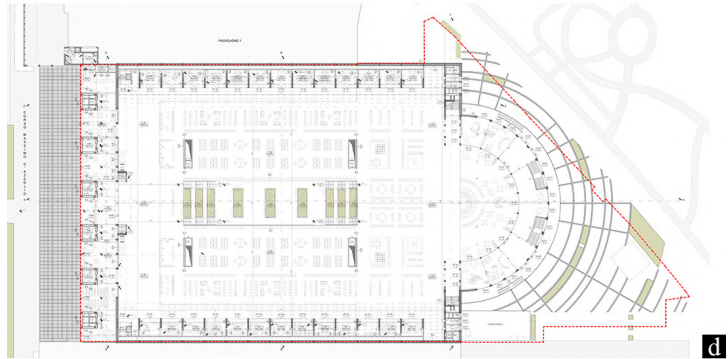
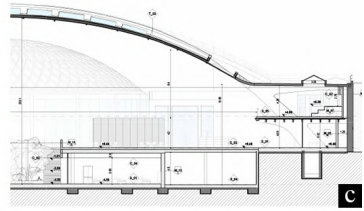
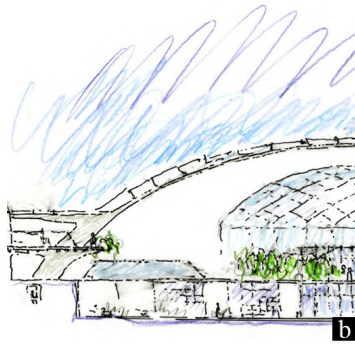
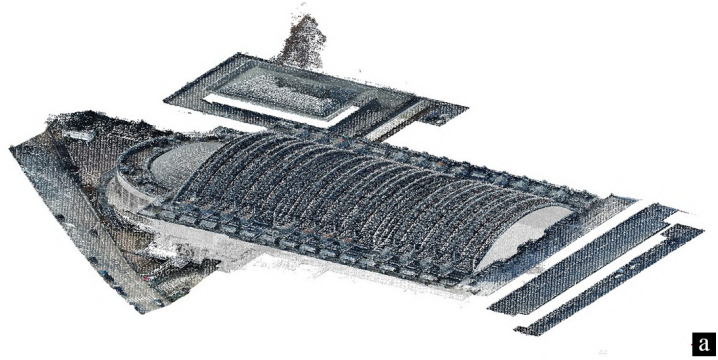
Although this is not the right moment to delve into the operational procedures adopted, as far as the design process is concerned, an integrated metric survey and the consequent production of point clouds (fig. 4a) allowed for the exact reproduction of the state of the art of the building. The subsequent processing in the BIM environment (fig. 4 c-d-e) allows to keep track of the existing situation and what is to come: the images previously commented are very interesting from a historical point of view but absolutely unrelated, while the infographic database collected will be a valuable documentary resource for the management of the construction site and the useful life cycle of the building. In this regard the images produced have a dual value, both documentary and informative, telling a part of history and constituting themselves a documentary heritage of undoubted value for years to come.

CONCLUSIONS

Through this narration described and explained through a multitude of collected images, it is possible to reaffirm - in the words of Thomas Mitchell - how images have the tendency to become alive in different declinations. Specifically, two of the five declinations introduced by the author emerge forcefully within this contribution: in the first paragraph the images root their vitality in the memory and imagination of the ob-

Fig. 4 - J. Bono, *The restitution of the project through images*, 2023, Digital composition.

a) ICIS S.r.l., Point cloud restitution, picture RGB; b) Arch. Aimaro Isola, Vision of the project, watercolor sketch. Retrieved February, 20, 2023 from <https://www.isolarchitetti.com/index.php/padiglione-nervi-torino>; c) J. Bono, Cross-section, RVT elaborate; d) J. Bono, Ground floor plan with context, red outline highlights the intervention area, RVT elaborate; e) J. Bono, Axonometric cutaway of the inner courtyard, the focus of the project, RVT elaborate



server; in the second part the images acquire their vital force through their legibility, thanks to the addition of texts, captions or encodings (Demaria, 2019). Going back to this last point, which recalls one of the three principles introduced by the acronym B.(I-nformation).M, it is possible to unveil the common thread that allows the image (or in this case a collection of images intimately connected to each other) to become the founding element of architecture. This attitude is visible thanks to a twofold look: the superficial one, taken on by its representation as an illustration, description, communication and explanation of its formal and technical characteristics; then, the deeper one, in which the image takes root and takes root and allows the "project to develop, grow and finally come to fruition" (Cicalò, 2010, p. 20).

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Cover figure - J. Bono, *Recent images telling the story of the new project proposal*, 2023, Digital composition.

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