

# Borders, the architecture of street

strada  
spazio pubblico  
movimento  
città  
periferia  
vuoto  
**street**  
**road**  
**public space**  
**movement**  
**city**  
**suburb**  
**void**

Il disegno del vuoto ha assunto sempre maggiore rilevanza nella pratica progettuale contemporanea. Il tema di grande attualità è la difficile identificazione tra spazio aperto, il vuoto, e spazio pubblico. Difficoltà cioè nell'attribuire un nuovo significato, e dunque una nuova forma, agli spazi indecisi che i processi della vita urbana contemporanea producono come scarto, come spazio residuale. Lavorare sul vuoto, nel tentativo di definirne forma e significato, non significa lavorare sulla superficie delle cose. Quantomeno non solo. Riconoscere, da un punto di vista urbano e morfologico, lo spazio vuoto delle nostre città come un tema sensibile, una diffusa rete di aree in attesa di progetto, è una delle principali sfide che la disciplina architettonica deve affrontare con gli strumenti che le sono propri, eludendo facili soluzioni di arredo, attrezzature e abbellimento dello spazio.

The design of the void has become increasingly important in contemporary design practice. The highly topical issue covers the difficult of identification between open space, the void, and public space. That difficulty is in providing a new meaning, and therefore a new form, for the undecided spaces that the processes of contemporary urban life produce as waste, as residual space. Working on the void, in an attempt to define its form and meaning, does not mean working on the surface of things. At least not only. Recognising through an urban and morphological perspective the empty space of our cities as a sensitive issue, a widespread network of areas awaiting design, is one of the main challenges that the discipline of architecture must face with its own tools, avoiding the easy solutions of furnishing, equipment and embellishment of space.

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## INTRODUCTION

In architecture, working on the theme of limit implies a double register of actions: on the one hand design terminology separates the space, attributing different, often antinomic, meanings to the elements. For example public and private, indoor and outdoor, natural and built space, etc. On the other hand, the work on the limit is based on the need to connect the different spaces, acting as a hinge, filter and threshold between the parts. Think, for example, of the meaning of the threshold that, through openings and passages, introduces visual and conceptual communication between two spaces separated by a limit. In this context, the street is the urban space that assumes this ambivalent role as an ontological meaning. It divides the built mass of the city, defining its parts and making possible the perception of the full and, at the same time, connects the individual buildings, urban blocks, neighbourhoods, cities and landscapes in an infinite sequence of crossings.

The development of our cities has seen a progressive disintegration of the image of the street: the void, and consequently the public space of the city, remains devoid of architectural definition. The street loses its formal autonomy and becomes an un-built space, an urban waste devoid of shape and recognisability. The city thus produces marginal spaces, residual voids that do not collaborate in defining the shape of the city and instead contribute to the degradation of public space.

Never before has the street claimed its role as a public space, where the lives of individuals happen and where the *civitas* is represented. Still alive in our memory are surreal images of streets during the long Covid-19 pandemic, first deserted and then increasingly crowded by citizens who wanted to move freely, meeting in safety and re-appropriating social life by moving through public space.

On the one hand, the renewed attention to the issue of public

space design appears important in the experimentation of new ideas and forms of living and building the city, on the other, on many occasions, this attention seems to have stopped at a superficial rediscovery of the value of the road, without having deepened the ability of the road to build virtuous relationships with the urban landscape. It therefore seems more necessary than ever to broaden the disciplinary reflection towards the search for possible ways in which the road, understood as a filter space that generates urban spatial relations, can take on the value of a real urban place.

In relation to the general picture just described, this contribution proposes a reflection on the specific theme of the road as a compositional issue. The shape, the relationship between the layout and the spatiality made up of porosity, limits and facades, are elements that build up the value of the road, that can be understood as a field of architectural experimentation.

It is from these considerations that the first part of the contribution outlines the problematic background from which the research moves on, explaining the main issues related to the theme of the road. In particular, the construction of the general context has required the defining of a *state of the art* on the subject and a comparison with some of the research that, in recent decades, have dealt with the theme of the road.

What we want to investigate is the value of the road as a complex element of construction of the inhabited space, as a generator of urban redevelopments that radiate around the city space and as a means for the narration of space, starting from an awareness that the road is not simply a technical artifact that allows the connection between distant places, but is at the same time a place and space of movement. As Jackson observes, in fact, "the streets do not simply lead to places; they are places. And as such they play two fundamental roles: as growth and dispersion

promoters and as magnets around which new types of development can be experienced. In the contemporary landscape, no other space is so versatile" (Jackson, 1994, 190-191). Moving, then, from the conviction that the streets are real places, the research hypothesises that these can be considered as artifacts of architecture, able to build relationships with the contexts being encountered, as tools for urban and formal reorganisation. In this sense, it is not only the formal quality of the street architecture that takes on importance but also the quality of the relationships that it is able to establish with the surrounding urban fabric.

Before investigating the formal matrices that the street has and has had in urban dynamics, the research defines, in the third part, *The drawing of the void. Crossing, perceiving, signifying* the ontological meaning of the road as empty, as space of movement. The road, in fact, constitutes the founding sign of the construction of the landscape by man, which can be interpreted as a condensing of a vacuum towards the full (Simmel, 1970). The road finds its archetype in the trace, an act of foundation and knowledge of the landscape, both natural and urban. The city is founded on its streets and it is from the reciprocal interaction between the void of the road network and the completeness of the built that the city takes shape.

In the development of the city, the street took on different forms and meanings. In the fourth part, *From place to residue*, the research traces the salient stages through which the road, originally defined by a clear and bi-uniqueness relationship between complete and empty becomes, especially in the contemporary passages of our cities, a marginal, residual space. Loosing completely the value of form generator element and public space, the road today only embodies the space of mobility, a simple collector for car traffic.

Breaking the technical and functionalist paradigm with which the theme of the street in the contemporary city has been

addressed, what role can the street then play in the city of tomorrow? As a fundamental device of urban space, the street is considered as a central figure in the definition of new images for the contemporary city, identifying possible strategies that can guide the project.

These issues are developed through both the presentation of selected project experiences and in the concluding notes. The contribution presents some results of experimental research on the post-war Italian city (University of Bologna, Department of Architecture) that address the theme of the re-qualification of urban portions of the margin, through typological morphological and perceptive surveys on the tissue and structure of public space. The humanistic and design approach to the theme identifies a complementary field of investigation to the known literature that is mainly focused on the technical and functional aspects of the issue. The outcome of the examples examined, in particular, is compared to three major themes that refer to different ways of categorising the relationship between the road and city/ landscape, in terms of the different contexts and the different scales with which the projects are examined: the road inside the historical nucleus, the road that connects two centres and the road as limit of the coastal landscape. The educational project, presented as a case study, is an original contribution to understanding, in which the theoretical component is the background onto which some possible strategies of design intervention in the existing condition are suggested through methods of research and experimentation that confront increasingly topical issues and problems.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Around the issue of public urban space the architectural debate in recent decades has nourished an ever increasing interest, exploring its value from multiple points of view. The publications dealing with city and public space are aimed primarily at investigating the unbuilt

urban space and the role that the void takes in the construction of the image of the city. These aspects are addressed through conferences, monographs publications on specific constructed projects and critical essays published in the main specialized journals that comment on the broad spectrum of experimentation and research on the subject.

The role of the street as a fundamental component of contemporary urban space is a relatively little explored theme in this extensive literature on public space which mainly focuses on the investigation of specific aspects that touch on issues related to the different scales of mobility, the technical and functional investigation of the road as infrastructure.

Very few studies deal with the road as a matter of architectural composition, that is to discover the genesis, the spatial structure and the relationship between forms and meaning. A first approach of the research of the last decades sees as a primary point of view a historical and architectural analysis of the dynamics of transformation of the road space in relation to urban development. In this regard, during the 1908s, Vittorio Gregotti repeatedly stressed the importance for the discipline of architecture to return to the road as a subject, enhancing the role of artifact and track, rediscovering its value as an architectural object and as a component of the landscape (Gregotti, 1987). This means looking at the street as a founding figure of the urban system, a sign of the conquest of new spaces, multiple and collective construction, three-dimensional as well as two-dimensional (Maffioletti, Sordina, 2009).

Gregotti's words on the role of the road published in Casabella are paradigmatic of the boundaries of the issue. The themes of context and change, the issues of abandoned industrial areas and urban voids, large infrastructure, the design of open spaces are addressed from two points of view,

that of the architect and that of the urban planner. The centrality of the instances related to urban design is demonstrated both by the frequency with which, on the pages of the magazine, appear thematic contributions, and by the topics covered in the special issues of the magazine, which often reflect on the public space of the city, including the special issue entitled *On the Road*. To confirm, the fact that the street, as an open and collective urban space, is an autonomous architecture, Gregotti writes: "There is no need to bother the history of ancient architecture or William Morris's thesis that everything physical that exists in the built environment belongs to the domain of architecture, in order to claim for our discipline an important task in the area of the design and development of the suburban road, in its autonomy as an artefact, as well as in the importance of the design of its layout, both as a perspective on the landscape and as a component of it" (Gregotti, 1987, 3).<sup>1</sup>

A further approach of the recent research on street architecture is represented by a series of contributions that deal mainly with investigating the shape of the urban void and in particular of the street, as a design object. Some contributions focus on experiences that literally investigate the formal surface of the issue. *Strade urbane. Architettura e arredo*<sup>2</sup>, for example, tells of a cross-section of contemporary urban road projects, both as a new route and as a redevelopment of the existing network. The research direction, which this publication represents as an example but not an exhaustive one, presents design areas focused on the design of public urban space and the definition of public use scenarios of the street as an innovative and attractive place. The approach of the book *L'architettura Della Strada: Forme Immagini Valori* (Secchi 2020) is different because it addresses the theme of the street design as a problem of architecture through the construction of an atlas of images from antiquity to the present day. A great importance is attributed to the shape of the

road, to the relationship between its layout and the space delimited by sections and elevations, as an important expression of the spirit of time, of the dominant urban culture and also of the specific figurative cultures.

## THE DRAWING OF THE VOID. TO CROSS, TO PERCEIVE, TO SIGNIFY

As architects, drawing the void implies the recognition of its profound value. That is, to understand both its absolute intrinsic meaning, as an autonomous entity, and relative to that, with respect to the relations it establishes with the context and, reciprocally, how the context intertwines with it.

Emptiness has always allowed man to move, to cross space, to walk. The history of humanity is in fact a history of mobility, of migration: in fact, if we looked in the mirror, we could not deny that our anatomy responds to this tension for movement. "There will be a reason, after all, if at the bottom of our legs we have feet: not roots to anchor us to the ground, not underground rhizomes where to accumulate our food reserves, not filaments of byssus with which to weld to a rock, not cirrus or tendrils to cling to a wall or a plant, not peduncles, not suckers, like certain symbionts and parasites, nor spike proteins like those that make up the coronavirus crown, allowing it to engage the receptors of our cells" (Allievi, 2021, 27-28). The act of walking, as a tool to investigate the relationship between man and environment, has been addressed in a transversal way by many disciplines, from geographers, sociologists, urban planners, anthropologists etc. It is by walking that man began to build the natural landscape that surrounds him.

But what did this action on the landscape entail? From the activity of walking through the landscape derives a first mapping of space as well as that attribution of the

symbolic and aesthetic values of the territory that will lead to the birth of landscape architecture and the urban landscape (Careri, 2006). Man draws the landscape through points, references, destinations, cities to reach, to cross and from which to start again. But also by lines, trajectories, paths and roads. Roads that inevitably discover, recognise, and then connect, the conspicuous points in the landscape, marking out in turn our existence, in a complex circularity of cause and effect. Oscillating between nomadic tensions and sedentary needs, between walking and being, between road and city, our history is marked by a constant motion.

What emerges from these considerations is the ontological nature of the meaning of emptiness understood as the possibility of movement, in terms of how it has to do with man's way of inhabiting space. It must however be specified that by movement, in this writing, we mean a conscious crossing of space, which is expressed in a symbiotic relationship with it, not a mere transit.

Often today the empty space of cities and landscape, and specifically streets, appear more like free spaces for the transit of people and vehicles, or a movement indifferent to the surrounding context and one that does not contribute to the reading of the built mass that is being crossed. The road, in its deepest meaning, is not space for a movement-transit but for a movement-crossing.

Thus the act of walking is intrinsic to human nature, and emptiness is that entity-absence that makes the manifestation of this act possible.

That is, it allows man to build the landscape, drawing traces and tracks. Having demonstrated the relationship between man, emptiness and movement, it is necessary to add another piece of reasoning and investigate the relationship between emptiness and fullness, that is, between open space and city.

In fact, walking is not just a physical activity, a crossing. Not

just a wandering. Walking is a critical tool, the most natural and automatic way of humans to look at and experience the landscape, understood in its dimension both natural and urban.

It is also a tool for investigating the landscape and the city that develops the ability to perceive, read, and then produce, the transformations of space and the ways in which humans inhabits the world.

Walking is therefore an action that defines the individual with respect to the environment, characterising the space lived in by humans. According to this vision, the vacuum we are discussing is not so much what opposes architecture to the landscape, but is an element in symbiosis and complementary with the complete.

As Gregotti writes, the space that surrounds us, namely the city, the landscape, the territory, is: "a succession of large interiors of which the built, compact city or single building, are elements of its very constitution. In the same way squares, streets, urban greens are the great interiors of the city whose parts are formed by the frontages of the built, by the remoteness of the concatenations, by being parts of a sequence that is traversed on a ground and also modelled as a real front, indeed as the main connecting plane of the open spaces of the city" (Gregotti, 1993, 4) (author's translation).

The city is therefore a synthesis of full and empty places in sequence. The void would not exist without the full and vice versa. Indeed, it is precisely thanks to the void that it is possible to have perception and experience of the full. Emptiness becomes a place of modification when it reveals a new way of seeing and perceiving constructed reality.

Walking through the streets and squares of our historic cities we realise that we are not only in an empty space but in a place, by virtue of the reciprocal relationship between emptiness and the system of buildings that define it. The facades of buildings not only draw the floor plan of the streets,

but characterise it: the fullness of buildings qualifies the void of urban space, and vice versa. This compositional unit regulates not only the design of open spaces but also the arrangement of solids and their aggregation.

Drawing the void, then, compared to what has been said so far, is a possible action only if one recognises the void not as absence, but as potential. Crossing the open space and perceiving the indissoluble bond between empty and full are the first two unavoidable steps of the design process. The third is the attribution to the void of the value of public space. In this way the vacuum is not only a unit that allows the existence of the full and makes it perceive form and quality. Emptiness, as the space of collective life, is itself an architecture. Jackson writes that "the city, where we become citizens, and can be seen, begins just outside our door, where the street symbolises public life" (Jackson, 1994, p.190).

The void within the existing city becomes the material of the urban composition, as form, as volume, as artifact. Able to contain and at the same time to be contained, it is a strategic place for transformations and expansions. "The road is not an area but a volume. It cannot exist in a vacuum; it is inseparable from its environment. In short, it is no better than the company of houses it frequents. The street is the matrix: urban chamber, fertile soil and place of hatching. Its vitality depends on the right kind of architecture as well as the right kind of humanity" (Rudofsky, 1981, 91).

## FROM PLACE TO RESIDUE

Going to any Italian or European city it is clear that it is a collage of fragments, of urban pieces even deeply different from each other and built in different historical moments as a product of the culture of their time (Fig.1).

Faced with a morphological approach, the development of the city focuses on the relationship between home and empty space,



Fig.1 - City as a collage of images.

that is, the elements that build the city, such as the street, the square, the inner courtyard of the urban block.

The rules of urban composition dictate the relationship between built volume and free space, according to issues of formal proportions of architectural composition of the urban scenery, functional or hygienic nature, the

best conditions with respect to orientation, light and air.

Working on the empty space of the city, as an occasion for defining public space, imposes on us to search for the meaning of the formal origin of every single part of the city.

The traditional city, the compact and densely constructed historic



Fig.2 - Ravenna, historic city centre, © Beatrice Mazzoti, Camilla Pomarici.

city, has a clear relationship between full and empty. The buildings collaborate in defining the public space of the city, defining its size, proportion and properties.

In the space of the road the perspective vision of the city is created as a scenography, in which architecture can be placed, measured and recognised in the sequence of the road that, winding or straight, unravels in the built mass of the city.

In the historic city architecture exhibits an intimate connection with the road: the full defines the shape of the void and the void allows the crossing and the perception of the full (Fig.2).

The traditional rules of city composition are consolidated in the nineteenth-century urban structure, which marks the rhythms of the built city and open spaces, attributing to them a general and unified design.

All the theories of the modern city find in the street the central theme through which to find the compositional and spatial matrix of the new urban models.

The nineteenth-century city identifies the street, organised in orthogonal pathways, the founding principle of urban expansion.

Public space and the house are determined by an indissoluble relationship between a formal

and spatial nature that defines its architecture in which the road network, the block and the residencies become compositional elements that synergistically define the spatial and original module of urban growth.

The continuous succession of streets of the traditional city triggers the rhythmic and geometric scanning of urban blocks.

The link between the street as public space and architecture as a formal development of space continues to characterise the experiences of the early twentieth century, despite the modern image of the street contrasting sharply with that of the consolidated historical city.

The architecture of public housing represents the main theme for the design of the modern city.

In the fervent debate on this subject, the research of Jacobus Johannes Pieter Oud (1890-1963) represents a significant line of thought.

Oud, through his project experience on housing in the Netherlands, investigates the issue of housing, not with respect to the structure of the individual dwelling, but with respect to the volume of dwellings obtained by the aggregation of individual units, considered as an architectural phenomenon of the modern city. The street is recognised as an autonomous design unit that plays a major role in defining the shape of the modern city.

The theme is dealt with by the author in the first issue of the periodical *De Stijl* in which the essay "The monumental image of the city" is published, where Oud writes: "Architecture is plastic art: the art of determining space, which finds its most general expression

in the image of the city, in the single building and in the reciprocal conjunction of buildings. The picture of the city is generally determined by two factors: street and square. The street as a continuous set of houses; the square as the center of streets" (Oud, 1917, 39).

If the focus is to control and change the image of the city, the modern architect must work on the image of the street, giving the block the urban shape of an architectural unit.

The question arises then of the treatment of the road-wall as a unit: that is, the fronts of the blocks facing each other on the same road should have a unitary character. In this way the road takes on its own identity character. Oud treats the road-wall as a strictly and purely architectural matter: the road is not only a path to control in plan, but becomes space and volume, to read and design in section. Becoming space, the road needs a spatial and formal characterisation (Fig.3).

Since the 1930s, with the CIAM contribution to the debate, new

canons of urban design have been identified, which aspire to a scientific re-foundation of research on housing and the city.

The built mass of the city is detached from the empty space: it changes the way of thinking about the form of living and, therefore, changes the shape of the city.

Starting from the analysis of the main needs of living, urban theories want to determine the ideal type of human settlement, that is, they theorise in an abstract and conceptual way about the characteristics of the contemporary city.

The cultural debate reads with critical eyes the structure of the historic city, where infrastructure, air, light and green are not enough to meet the needs of humans.

The building-road relationship is distorted: the large fast-flowing streets remain on the edges, while within the city buildings can stand independently and take on a plurality of forms. Isolated residential blocks become the only rule for the construction of the



Fig.3 - J.J.P. Oud. Hoek van Holland, Rotterdam 1924.



Fig.4 - E. May, Westhausen, Francoforte 1929-31.

city, interrupting the centuries-old collaboration with the open space.

The buildings are arranged on the ground in a repeated way to infinity, perfectly equidistant from each other and without any relationship with the road, but arranged on a homogeneous green plane.

The emptiness and public space of the city lose their architectural definition. It no longer has formal autonomy but becomes a non-constructed, residual space without recognisability (Fig.4).

The breaking of the block and the removal of the building from the street have profoundly affected the structure and shape of urban expansions, constituting the design bases of most contemporary suburbs.

In the contemporary city the built disperses in every direction, including inside empty spaces that, completely devoid of form, become marginal.

Since the '50s and '60s we have witnessed a considerable growth of cities, totally devoid of a rule of land use and guided exclusively by a speculative and quantitative approach, in order to take advantage of the available land.

Small and medium-sized towns in particular have suffered the consequences of a development without rules. On the margins of the consolidated historical centres, new pieces of disconnected, 'foreign' cities have arisen, consisting of low-value residential construction.

In the following years, these urban areas have been subject to rapid and unacceptable degradation, not only architectural and urban, but also social and cultural. In the suburbs public spaces have no architectural significance, they are not defined by volumetric elements, but they lack form. Or they coincide with closed spaces with commercial or specialised functions: large conference halls, exhibition centres, shopping centres.

These residual spaces lack a defined name and careful design of the surrounding environment. These are undecided areas that, in the absence of real compositional rules or if waiting for a new use, have been formed without a specific role (Fig.5 and 6). According to Clement's words "if you stop looking at the landscape as the object of human activity, you immediately discover [...] a quantity of spaces that are undecided, devoid of function, to which it is difficult to give a name. This group belongs neither to the territory of shadow nor to that of light. It is situated on the margins." (Clément, 2018, 16).

## INSIDE THE ROAD

The research<sup>3</sup>, conducted through a morphological, typological and perceptive lens on the road-space, clearly describes how the city can be perceived as a narrative that unfolds over time, through a multiplicity of forms, looks and sensations (Ricoeur, 2013).

The streets cross, narrate and build the city and the landscape. The effectiveness of the role of the street as a public space depends, as we have seen substantially, on the architectural definition of its formal structure, on the close relationship with the urban fabric and the contexts crossed. In a word, from an 'intertextuality' with the urban phenomenon (Ricoeur, 2013).

Research shows that this relationship has weakened in the contemporary world. The space of the road has become progressively more and more destined to used for practical purposes, that is a sectoral infrastructure, monofunctional and not generating shape and meaning. The road has become residual urban space.

The reinstatement of the meaning of the street as autonomous architecture that generates form and organisation of space, within a landscape as discontinuous and fragmented as the contemporary one, implies, therefore, that the street project is no longer a simple answer to a technical problem, but an opportunity to define new urban architecture.

The theme of the street as architecture has a transformative potential not yet fully investigated but full of repercussions compared to the study of the shape of the city and the landscape. For this reason we have chosen to describe some design experiments useful for renewing the way of thinking about the existing street network as an architectural system.

The hypotheses formulated here, are not intended to propose easily reproducible, specific or quick design solutions, that can suggest idea for a new way of living and designing the public space. This would be a methodological mistake considering the complexity of the issues that feeds the problem. Rather, we investigate some possibilities, partially and not conclusively, through which to transform the urban void from being the object to being the subject of the issue, an autonomous unit capable of defining a new quality of the built.

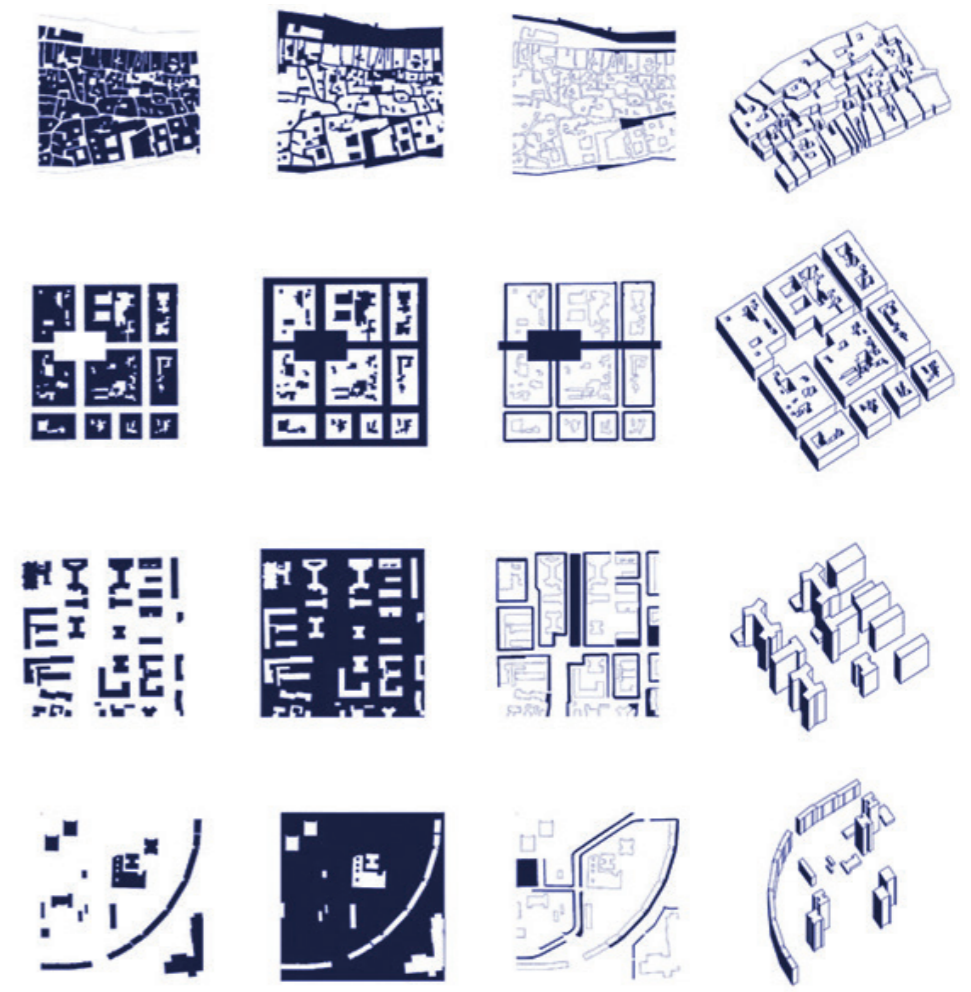


Fig.5 - Urban fabrics and public space.

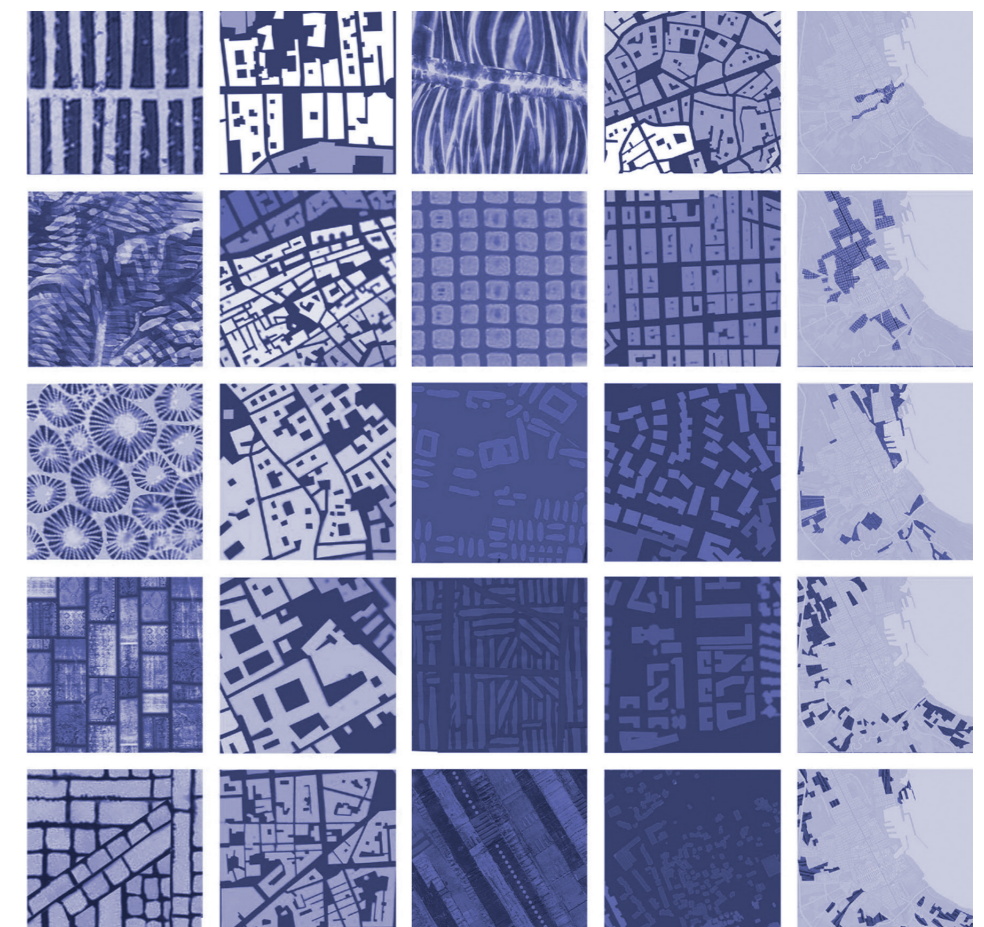


Fig.6 - Palermo, urban fabrics. © Chiara Ceroni, Giulia Tamarri, 2020.

Recognising the street as the founding urban element of public space and as an architectural product is the necessary premise for imagining the street as a space for autonomous design experimentation.

If it is true that in the contemporary city the space of the street appears as a confused mix of heterogeneous fragments, forcing it to undergo multiple projects to improve its understanding as, a preparatory tool to possible future transformations.

The Via di Roma in Ravenna, the Via Messina Marine in Palermo and the connecting road between the historic centre of Urbino and the Piantata district are some examples of fragmented urban spaces that cannot encapsulate, in a recognizable form, their relationship with the surrounding fabric and the landscape. Although roads are characterised by completely different historical, urban and landscape contexts, and despite being generated by different urban dynamics, they represent an opportunity to experiment with new ways of research, towards an idea of redevelopment of the existing city through public space projects. The streets, currently undefined and characterised by marginal spaces, are read as a unitary system. They are capable of contributing to redeveloping entire parts of the city by defining a form and a recognisable architecture. These projects deal with many themes but always centred on living and building public space.

In Ravenna, Via di Roma is a characteristic feature of the city. A commercial place since the Roman period, linking Rimini, to the south and Venice to the north. Its current condition sees it deprived of the urban role it has had over the centuries reduced to a fragmented road from the point of view of both viability and image (Fig.7).

Valued only for the portion that crosses the historic centre, from Porta Nuova to Porta Serrata, Via di Roma is divided into three segments: on one hand the historical part and, on the other



Fig.7 - Palermo, urban fabrics. © Chiara Ceroni, Giulia Tamarri, 2020.

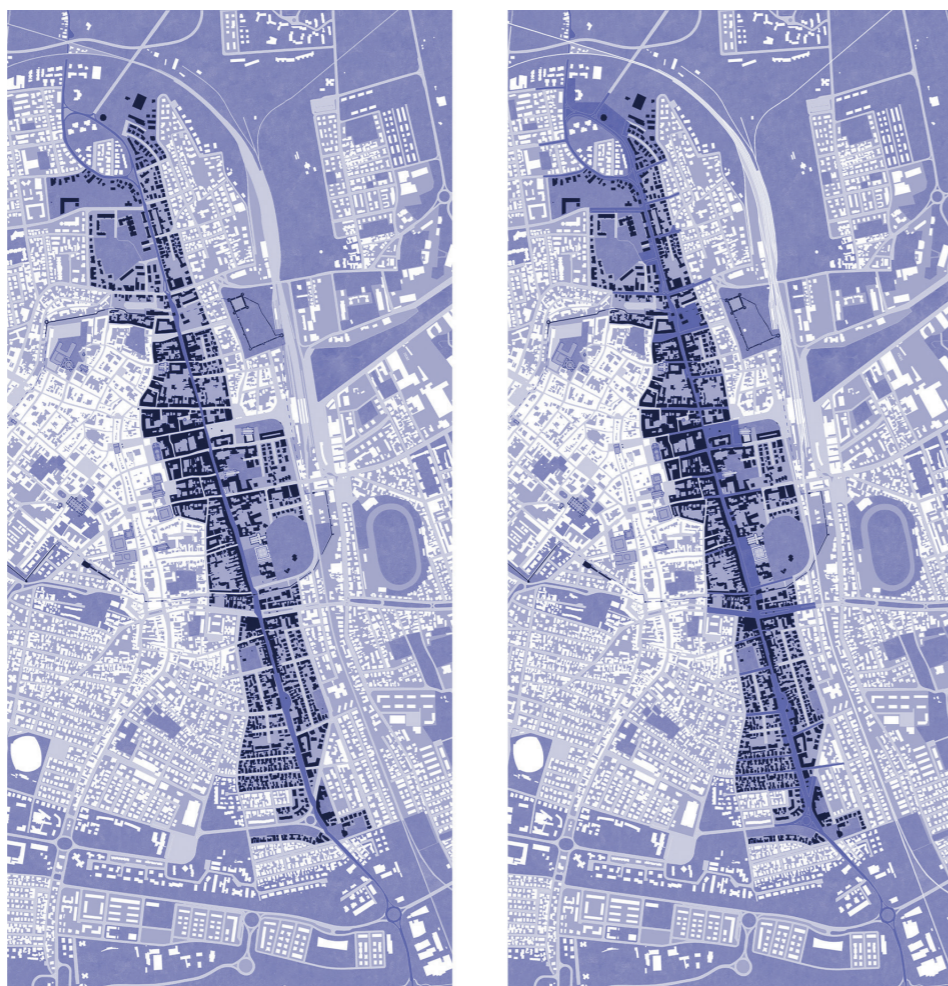
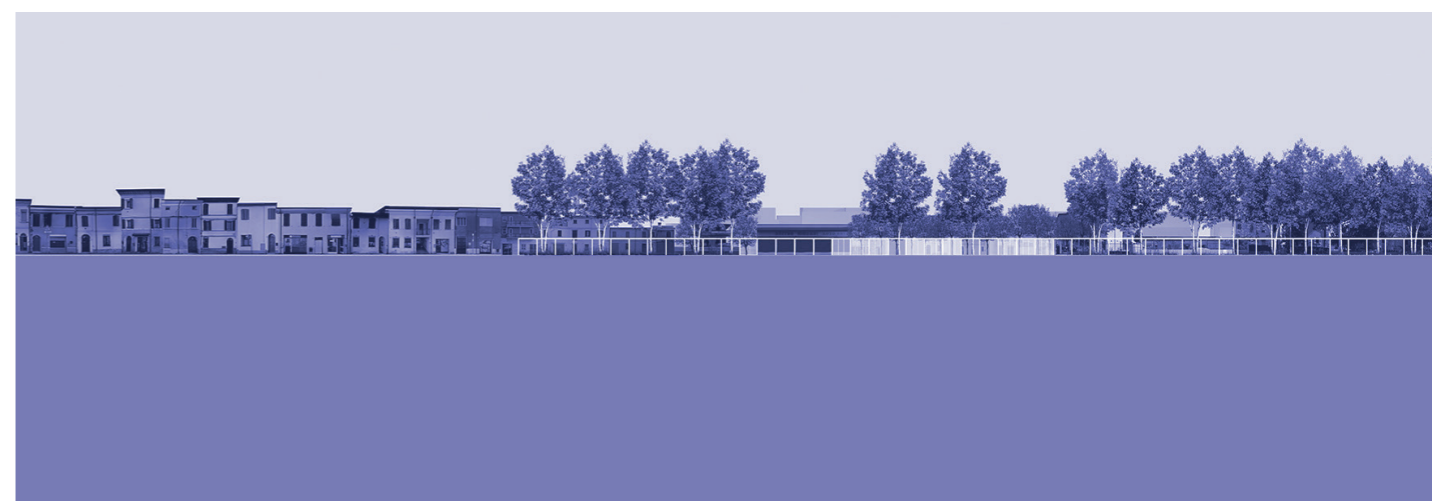


Fig.8 - Ravenna, space and perception of Via di Roma, © Beatrice Mazzotti, Camilla Pomarici, 2019.



Fig.9 - Inside the street. Renovation of Via di Roma, © Beatrice Mazzotti, Camilla Pomarici, 2019.



hand, the portions to the north and south have an urban design style of the 60s-'70, characterized by building speculation and with a common residential fabric. The crossing of different contexts and the uneven shape of the empty space, both from a morphological and perceptive point of view, make this road a heterogeneous urban margin without recognisability and quality (Fig.8).

The same marginality and unevenness characterises the road

that connects the historic centre of Urbino to the popular district La Piantata, built in the 80s and located north of the historic city as described by Benevolo. The road is just that, only a road system, completely losing the compositional and scenic value that characterises the original core of Urbino. A functional road without any architectural quality that crosses a hilly landscape of great potential (Fig.9).

The South Coast of Palermo,

which extends from Piazza Sant'Erasmus to the Water of the Corsairs, originally an agricultural territory dotted with water towers around which the inhabited centres were joined, underwent a radical transformation in the 1930s. Along via Messina Marine there are numerous bathing establishments and production facilities. Because of the continued depositing of debris, the coast progresses towards the sea producing a radical change in the geography and orography of the city. Today the south coast of

Palermo is a decomposed whole, made of social housing and remains of industrial architecture, despite the great landscape value of coastal margin of the area (Fig.10).

Here projects can transform the road. They study the diversity of the contexts the road crosses and become the generators of a new form of space.

The road becomes a unitary system with a recognisable

architecture: sometimes it becomes a linear garden defined by an urban facade that follows the ancient road, sometimes it is equipped with new urban parking spaces and new public architectures.

The interest of the project is not only in the formal outcome of the proposed results, but also in the method they seek to outline, giving possibilities for new methods of intervention on the city and landscape.

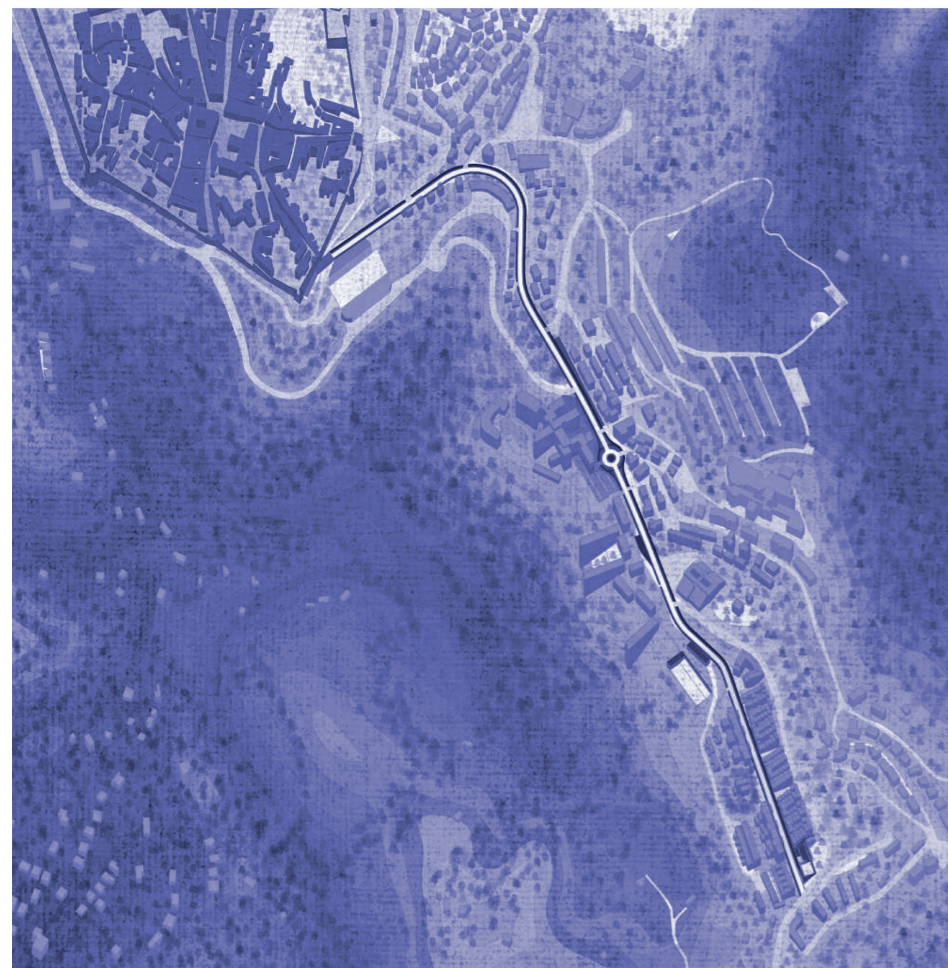
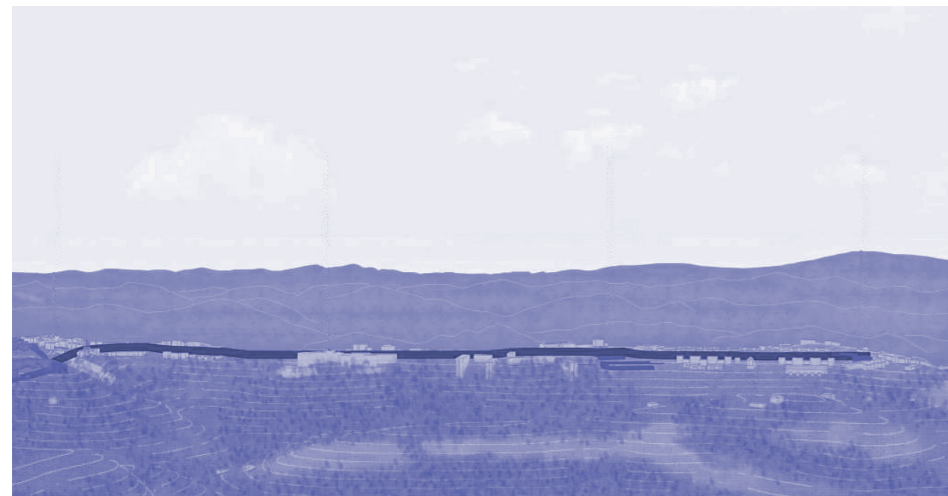


Fig.10 - Urbino, street as urban place between historic city and suburbs, © Diego Croceri, Noemi Irmì, 20.

## CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The purpose of this article is to bring out the contradictions and criticalities of the spaces described by describing the current urban condition of contemporary cities, looking for ideas for new designs of public urban space, and proposing possible future design research.

The premise that the road has an architectural value and should be interpreted as a real product is not a new aspect in the disciplinary debate on this issue.

The new interpretation that the research proposes is in the recognition of the void as a 'concrete' constituent of urban form. The objective is to attribute a new condition to the residual voids that the city, especially the contemporary one, has produced over time. In pursuit of this objective, the research proposes to consider the street space as a place for experimenting with autonomous design, worthy of formal and urban reflection. The design of public space is a field of research consolidated in different scales ranging from the definition of uses to materials and equipment, such as urban furniture, which make the urban space interesting for new activities along with social and economic relations. However, with regard to the new possibilities of research, the redevelopment of public space, and in particular of the street, requires a theoretical structure on which to base future experiments, instead of using design approaches that refer to 'decorative' aspects of space.

Following these guidelines, this study aims to stimulate a new design approach that combines reflection on the shape of the void and the urban and social role of the road. So the contemporary road will return to be a place that is able to contain and stimulate the development of the daily life of individuals as a vehicle of reconsidering entire parts of the built urban fabric.

By widening the scope, it is possible to examine the constellation of urban spatialities adjacent to the street in order to generate urban regeneration processes through an osmotic and capillary process. The use of the proposed paradigm allows for a wide applicability to multiple and dynamic situations, whether urban, landscape or architectural, public or private.

The enormity of the networks –road networks in particular – represents an extraordinary resource for urban regeneration, for which today the potential is not fully exploited, given that in Europe about 40% of the urbanised area is occupied by roads (Secchi, Bochicchio, 2020).

The urban transformations of the future, stimulated by the new environmental and social climate challenges, should use road space as a field of experimentation. However, the design actions should bring into play new materials and new shapes that leave a mark beyond the surface of the space. The architectural project should rather start from the ontological and formal meaning of the street, working on the architectural value of public urban space.

Perhaps we should start considering the road not only as an infrastructure network but above all as a collective architectural artifact. Today, after recent crises, it is even more urgent to redevelop these urban spaces, starting from the meaning and the role that public space can assume in the process of redevelopment of the urban landscape.

The redevelopment of street architecture is a current field of research, capable of starting off effective dialogues between communities and policymakers: we can consider, for example, the impressive number of architecture competitions that in recently years have dealt with the theme of urban regeneration of degraded public spaces. The application of research certainly represents one of the most important opportunities for the near future.

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## NOTES

1. The magazine *Casabella* in fact, promoter and at the same time witness of the international architectural and theoretical debate, systematically addresses the issues related to the relationship between urban architecture and the city, thanks to the fundamental contribution of Bernardo Secchi, the main theme of the magazine under the direction of Gregotti (1982-1996).

2. FAVOLE, Paolo. *Strade urbane. Architettura e arredo*. Milano: Tecniche Nuove, 2007.

3. The research was carried out in the Laboratory "Requalifying the post-war city" created by the Department of Architecture of the University of Bologna. The laboratory is committed to studying the urban phenomenon through public space and practices for a conscious urban redevelopment. The complexity of the theme has made it necessary a transdisciplinary structure of the laboratory. The course, coordinated by prof. Antonio Esposito, is based on various disciplinary contributions, such as History of Italian Architecture of the Second Century, Aesthetics of the landscape, Architectural and urban composition and Architecture and urban landscape.