Volume 1

LUDOVICO CENTIS, MATTEO D'AMBROS

SPECULATIONS ON THE IMAGE OF BEAUTY *PUBLIC SPACE AND GLOBAL COASTAL CITIES*

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Summary

THE IMAGE OF THE COAST. MAPPING CHANGE FROM NOLLI'S ROME TO RISING SEAS

Ludovico Centis
Matteo D'Ambros

Why are coastal areas so important? And, above all, why will they become even more crucial in the future? These are the fundamental questions at the core of the research presented in these volumes – questions that have guided the investigation of twelve global coastal cities within the broader framework of contemporary spatial, ecological, and socio-economic transformations. The study outlines a synthetic profile of the physical and geographical dynamics of these urban contexts, examining their spatial, relational, and symbolic dimensions, in which nature, infrastructure, and human settlements interact in complex and interdependent ways.

Today, a significant share of the world's population, economic activities and infrastructure is concentrated along coasts: approximately 11% of the global population – equivalent to 896 million people – live in low-lying coastal areas directly exposed to climatic hazards (Pelling et al., 2022). Projections indicate that the population potentially exposed to a 100-year coastal flood will increase by about 20% if the global mean sea level rises by 0.15 m compared to 2020 levels; it will double with a 0.75 m rise and triple with a 1.4 m rise, assuming no demographic changes or additional adaptation measures (Glavovic et al., 2022).

By their nature, shorelines are intrinsically unstable, subject to ongoing geomorphological and anthropogenic transformations. By 2100, the value of global assets located within coastal floodplains with a 100-year return period event is estimated to range between USD 7.9 and 12.7 trillion (2011 values) under the RCP4.5 scenario, and between USD 8.8 and 14.2 trillion under the RCP8.5 scenario (IPCC, 2022). These figures confirm not only the enormous economic vulnerability of coastal zones but also highlight the urgency of integrated governance of risks and resources – one capable of combining mitigation, adaptation and spatial planning. But are we, and will we be, truly willing to abandon the coastal areas we inhabit in the face of rising mean sea levels?

The publication presents two complementary sides of the research, each corresponding to one of the two volumes. The Volume One addresses a number of theoretical, historical, and interpretative issues concerning the relationship between public space and environmental change, in order to understand how coasts function both as thresholds and as potential laboratories of experimental design research. Included alongside the contributions is an interview by Matteo D'Ambros with Ila Bêka and Louise Lemoine, artists and filmmakers whose work explores new narrative and cinematographic approaches related to architecture and the contemporary

city, focuses on the ways in which we learn to adapt to and inhabit cities across different global contexts, highlighting the importance of the open and constantly evolving dimension of public space.
Volume Two extends these reflections through a series of case studies, focusing on twelve global coastal cities and their evolving spatial configurations, explored through critical cartographic readings, iconographic analyses, and design-based interpretations of urban open spaces.
It is no coincidence that the first part of the volumes' title echoes the closing words of a letter written in the mid-16th century by the Sienese humanist Claudio Tolomei, a leading figure of the so-called Vitruvian Academy, or Academy of Virtue, founded in Rome in 1542.[1] Referring to a work of rereading and rediscovery of ancient architecture which combined historical study with precise measurement and redrawing, in particular according to the use of the three orthogonal projections advocated shortly before by Raphael, Tolomei observed that such practices would give ancient Rome 'new life, if not as previously beautiful, with some semblance or image of beauty'.[2] It was precisely in those years, around 1551, that the first ichnographic representation of Rome was engraved by Leonardo Bufalini from Udine. Two centuries later, in 1736, the land surveyor Giovan Battista Nolli, from Como, on his own initiative began a detailed survey campaign of the *Eternal City*, encompassing not only the open spaces, monuments and urban blocks, but also the publicly accessible interiors contained within them. The campaign concluded in 1747, culminating in the publication of the *New Map of Rome* in 1748 — one of the most celebrated and influential cartographic representations ever produced — whose origins, features and conceptual legacy are discussed by Ludovico Centis.
Matteo D'Ambros expands the reflection on maps as cognitive, narrative and political tools that shape how we understand and design

1 While the Academy's primary and explicit aim was the collective reading and commentary of *De Architectura*, its deeper purpose for artists, scholars and enthusiasts lay the rediscovery of the legacy of Greek and Roman art and architecture, primarily through the reading, interpretation and commentary of Vitruvius' treatise, translated into Italian in 1521 by Cesare Cesariano.

2 'nuova vita, se non come prima bella, con qualche sembianza o imagine di bellezza'. Claudio Tolomei, *De le lettere di M. Claudio Tolomei libri sette*. Venezia, 1548, libro terzo. Quoted in Ian Verstegen, Allan Ceen (eds.), *Giambattista Nolli and Rome. Mapping the City before and after the Pianta Grande.* Roma: Studio Urbis, 2013, p. 35.

space. From Fra Mauro to contemporary practices such as Forensic Architecture, mapping emerges as a creative and critical act that unveils hidden relations, redefines boundaries and reimagines the world through representation. Engaging with these dimensions of perception and representation a following text by Centis explores the evolution of the concept of urban and territorial space from Christopher Alexander to Vittorio Gregotti and Rem Koolhaas, tracing the shift from the figure-ground relationship to the scale of 'Bigness', which redefines how architectural and geographical space are perceived, represented and designed. Matteo D'Ambros further contributes with a reflection on contemporary approaches and strategies for adaptation to climate change, highlighting the critical vulnerabilities that increasingly endanger Italy's coastal territories. An additional text by Ludovico Centis investigates the relationship between climate change, desires and collective imagination in coastal urban contexts. The maps and accompanying commentary presented in the final section of the book, developed by the authors in collaboration with Federico Vascotto, visualise the potential impacts of rising mean sea levels on the metropolitan regions of the twelve cities examined in Volume Two Spatial and territorial relations are taking on unprecedented configurations, affecting the socio-economic sphere and generating reverberations that spread uncontrollably, confronting us with new issues of coexistence among species. New flows, new infrastructures, new temporalities: everything is becoming more volatile and, inevitably, increasingly less fixed (Demuth, 2023). Our role as observers and critics has led us to refocus attention on the public spaces of certain coastal cities, seen as sensitive indicators and privileged laboratories for guiding policies of maintenance, preservation and adaptation. Through this lens, it is possible to reformulate expectations and redefine the paradigms of habitability and safety within a condition of continuous and inevitable transition.

JAYWALKING BEYOND THE LINES: ON THE VALUE OF OPEN SPACE

Matteo D'Ambros in conversation with Ila Bêka and Louise Lemoine

Matteo D'Ambros (MDA)

Throughout history, spatial design practices have reflected a range of approaches to the configuration and appropriation of open space by society, individuals, and the corporeal presence that animates them. By examining an extended temporal arc and referencing emblematic case studies – such as the Piazza del Campo in Siena, Central Park in New York, and the forecourt of the Centre Pompidou in Paris – as well as more modest spatial interventions, including natural micro-landscapes or mineral insertions conceived as urban leisure environments, we can trace the evolving paradigms that have shaped the notion of open space. It becomes evident that the modes of use and spatial practices associated with these environments have assumed different forms across different periods.

At the same time, there exist places that, while not traditionally considered exemplary, nonetheless reveal implicit spatial choreographies which are able to define spaces in a way that responds to human interaction with remarkable effectiveness. These are spaces that accommodate the movement of bodies, encourage spontaneous play and absorb ephemeral transformations. More broadly, they embody the lived dimension of urbanity – hosting the bodies that traverse and inhabit them, while simultaneously shaping and being shaped by them.

Louise Lemoine (LL)

As a premise, it is important to clarify that our position is that of observers of spatial behaviour, adopting an extremely free approach to our research. We are not design specialists, but we use the medium of film to test and confirm certain hypotheses. In relation to the urban realm, our work is fundamentally distinct from that of architects or landscape architects, who engage directly with the design of urban spaces, both public and private. We don't adopt a technical approach.

Ila Bêka (IB)

In our practice, we do not follow a conventional research methodology that begins with preliminary investigation and culminates in the production of images to support a thesis. Instead, our inquiry unfolds directly in the field, through observation. We simply capture what happens in the places we film and, only after this, do we draw any

Piazza del Campo in Siena. Courtesy A. Bruchi, 2023

conclusions – though these aren't always necessary.
This process is almost the opposite of structured research or methodologically rigid forms of research, particularly those grounded in scientific paradigms. Our understanding arises from lived, experiential engagement rather than from theoretical assumptions. If there is any analysis, it takes shape in the act of observation itself or may emerge as a result of observation. An additional dimension of our work involves distinguishing between different typologies of public space within the observed environments, while consistently maintaining our position as observers.

MDA

In a short essay entitled *The City and Its Streets: A Tactical Territory*, published in the exhibition catalogue for *The Street. Where the World Is Made* which ran in Rome from 2018-2019, Saskia Sassen reflects on global cities, emphasising how spatial differentiation within urban spaces can foster processes of negotiation.
The populations inhabiting marginal areas, Sassen argues, become an *urban* subject described as the "results from hacking ethnicity, religion, phenotype, inequality, physical disability" (Sassen, 2018, p. 128).
Sassen cites examples such as ancient Baghdad and Jerusalem, industrial Chicago and New York, and early twentieth-century Berlin and Buenos Aires, describing them as cities characterised by a high degree of complexity, which underpins their adaptive capacity and resilience.
Within the informal spaces of these cities, established orders are constantly being subverted, giving rise to new normative frameworks embedded in the space and its uses.
Cooperation between people, driven by different passions and beliefs, even leads to hacking formalized urban spaces.
Sassen contends that the incompleteness of open spaces allows global cities to survive, unlike closed and rigidly formalized systems that tend to collapse.
Moreover, the presence of local street-level knowledge embedded within otherwise standardised systems facilitates experimentation across multiple scales.
How, then, should we understand the value of public space today?
What kind of desire for public space persists among urban inhabitants, and to what extent does it continue to shape contemporary urban life?

IB

Public space is often experienced as a protected place.
Entering a public space, a park, or a square, means entering an area that is perceived as safe. Outside these spaces, the city often takes on the appearance of an aggressive mechanism. Public space offers respite, allows for breathing space, extracting bodies from the urban environment that is perceived as hostile.
The birth of the idea of the park, for example, can be linked to the space where, in theory, a single rule presupposes the absence of cars.
Cars are not allowed in public spaces. Yet, the types of urban spaces that interest us are not defined merely by the absence of cars. Rather, what we find inspiring are those spaces in which functions intermingle, where a productive tension emerges between protected and shared zones – spaces cohabited by vehicles and pedestrians. It is precisely in these spaces of negotiated coexistence, where corporeal presence intersects with urban flows, that we observe forms of spontaneous interaction that are vital to the city's social and spatial dynamism. To formalise public space is to impose a regulatory framework that prescribes how it is to be used by its inhabitants. Informal space, by contrast, resists such prescriptive delineation.
It is not designed to stand apart from the city, nor to serve as a retreat from it. Instead, it remains responsive to its rhythms and complexities. What we consider significant is the vitality of the city, which does not primarily manifest in formalised public space but rather emerges through the tolerance of informal uses of the street. Our interest lies in observing what unfolds in the street – how coexistence is negotiated within a shared space that is not necessarily governed by rigid regulations. Based on our experience as observers in numerous cities worldwide, documented in our project *Homo Urbanus: A City-Matographic Odyssey* (Bekâ and Lemoine, 2017-), we have noticed that urban vitality flourishes where societies permit spontaneous practices in street space. Conversely, when this tolerance decreases, the city transforms into a mechanism governed by rules and vitality wanes.
When rules and planning prescribe every spatial condition, the city may operate in an ostensibly more efficient and safer manner. However, this apparent efficiency often engenders an intolerance towards spontaneous appropriations of shared space, particularly in the street. Vitality, instead, emerges precisely in the different ways in

which individuals inhabit, adapt, and reimagine the street.
An emblematic example is Bogotá, where roadways are a crucial space for survival. Yet, increasing regulatory measures are progressively being introduced, aimed at ensuring safety. We've noticed how urban policies are eliminating many street activities, once tolerated because they were considered essential to survival.
In Bogotá, the street functions as an essential context for survival, where individuals sell a range of goods and where commerce assumes a central role in everyday life. This is in stark contrast to many European cities, where any activity in public spaces is regulated by strict rules and subject to specific permits. In such environments, cities often appear sanitized and heavily controlled, with public spaces constrained by preordained frameworks of cohabitation, reducing freedom of movement and the possibility of spontaneous social interaction.
Rem Koolhaas has identified the *generic city* as a model of urban systems in which these dynamics are particularly pronounced (Koolhaas, 1995).
It could be argued that the generic city tends to normalize interpersonal relations. When reflecting on many of the cities we have filmed – such as Seoul – it becomes apparent that it is often difficult to discern a specific location within the expanse of a city. Indeed, were it not for certain distinctive graphic elements or the physiognomy of its inhabitants, one might imagine oneself in almost any city in the world.
Such urban environments increasingly resemble one another, forfeiting their distinctive character as the rules governing social coexistence become virtually identical everywhere.
The pursuit of greater urban safety often results in the adoption of universalized regulations. When the norms shaping the use of shared public spaces – such as the street – become uniform, cities inevitably converge in form and atmosphere, thereby eroding their uniqueness.
The vitality of the street – which represents the quintessential setting for urban life – tends to disappear. Unlike formalized public spaces such as parks, the street accommodates spontaneity – in parks, vitality is often regulated, making it less authentic and, at times, altogether absent.
It would be valuable, in future research, to incorporate concepts that are often overlooked in urban planning, such as spontaneity, humanity, and the ability to foster relationships.
These elements can manifest, for instance, through the commercial appropriation of spaces not originally intended for commerce or

Bogot. Homo Urbanus Bogotanus. Courtesy I. Bêka and L. Lemoine

through the transformation of urban areas into play environments liberated from predefined rules.
One useful observation can be made with regard to children, who serve as an immediate and sensitive indicator of a city's vitality. In Paris, for example, as in other comparable cities, children move from home or school to small, enclosed spaces where they can play in safety, away from vehicular traffic and noise. This mode of urban organisation, which creates protected environments for specific groups such as children, the elderly, or domestic animals, reflects a broader tendency to specialise space through design.
Venice offers us an extreme case and is equally an interesting exception. The absence of cars eliminates the need to define exclusive spaces for pedestrians. There are no spaces reserved solely for leisure or recreation, as the entire urban fabric is scaled to the dimensions of the human body. In this environment, children can play throughout the city, and social encounters occur naturally and without restriction. Venice demonstrates how it is possible to create an urban setting that promotes spontaneous human interaction, standing in contrast to the "generic city," which appears uniform across contexts and where spontaneity is increasingly replaced by regulation.

MDA

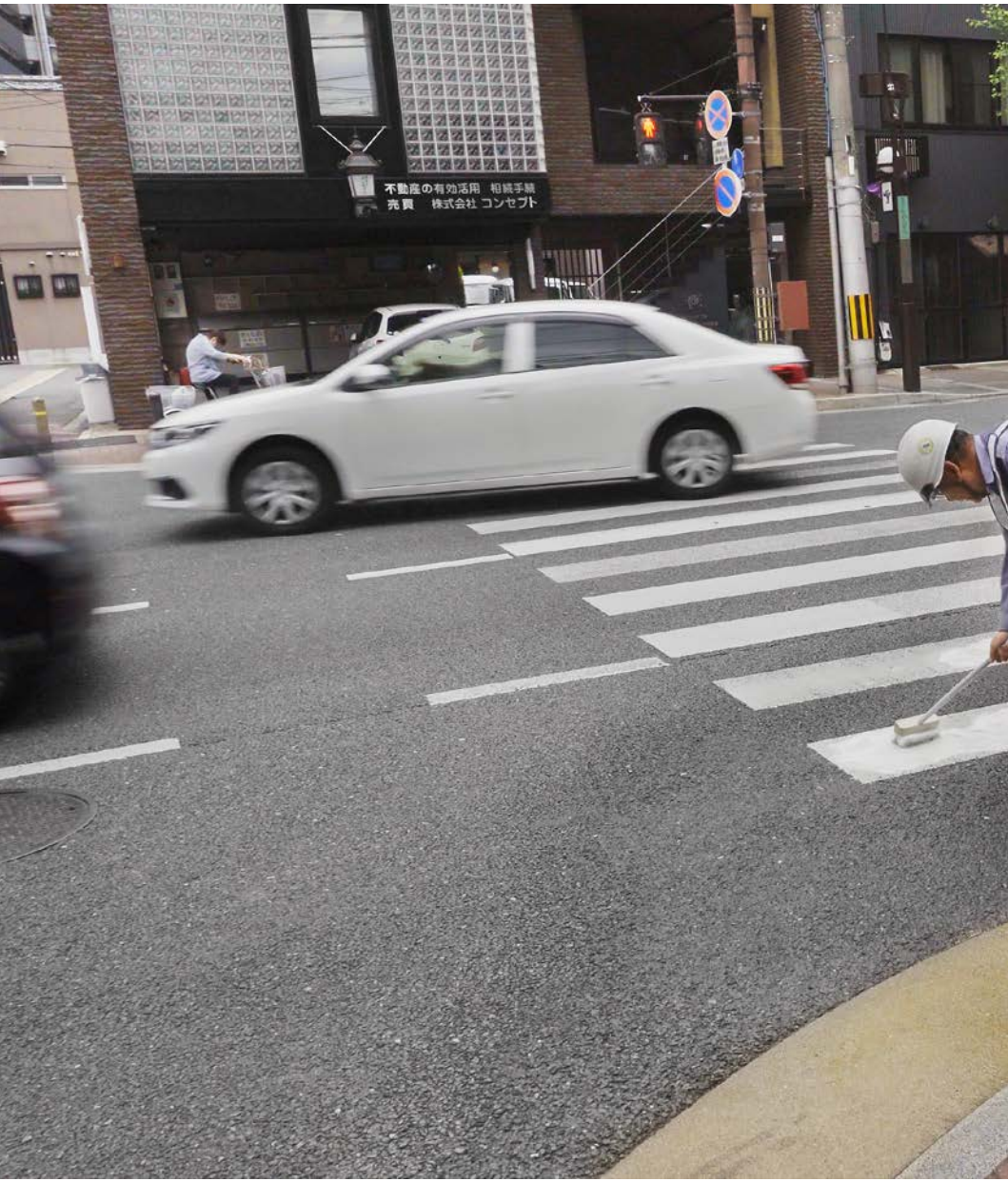
In the late 1980s, Italian urban planner Bernardo Secchi argued that street space represents a crucial place for reflecting on the city (Secchi, 1989). With concern, he noted that streets were often subjected to specialized interventions that removed them from the broader scope of urban planning, adding that it was impossible to be content with the streets as they existed.
Secchi described the street as an ambiguous space. On the one hand, the street accommodates functions that are highly specific and should be interpreted with an engineer's eye and with fluid mechanics in mind. On the other hand, the street supports functions that are vague, linked to a mechanistic understanding of social interaction.
On the one hand, the street assumes is banal and reductively hydraulic in its character and function, serving primarily to regulate flow and movements. It channels, circulates, evacuates, and transports. On the other hand, more complex purposes emerge, linked to the street's role as a public space. From this perspective, its collective value becomes

crucial. Conceived in this way, the street reveals itself as a mirror of society; a social space that reflects human dynamics and relationships.

IB

A central theme is urban planning, which, in my opinion, has largely sought to establish protected spaces within the city.
This remains, for me, an unresolved challenge, as urban planning has not demonstrated sufficient effectiveness in achieving this objective.
The effort to define the functionality of spaces and to secure the fluidity of movement required for automobiles, public transport, and, more broadly, communication, has tended to produce rigid and codified spatial arrangements. From this perspective, parks can be seen as small enclaves of protection inserted into the wider urban fabric.
Urban planning has not proved strong enough to counter the predominance of spaces dedicated to mobility, where the street is conceived exclusively as transport infrastructure. Rather, it should be the automobile that adapts to the rules of a city with human beings at its core. The industrial city was designed explicitly for the automobile, and as a consequence, urban planning has frequently neglected the centrality of people, bodies, and their capacity for direct interaction.
A useful comparison can be drawn between modern cities and Venice. While this line of reasoning may also be applied to many medieval cities, Venice offers a particularly distinctive case for reflecting on space.
The city has remained entirely immune to the influence of the automobile. By contrast, in other historic cities, such as Rome, contact with motor vehicles is both inevitable and constant, but in Venice, this is simply impossible. It is precisely here that two contrasting urban models converge, making Venice a compelling case study.
Venice embodies a city designed and constructed on a human scale, standing in opposition to the modern, industrial city, which is planned at a car-friendly scale. Modern urban planning, emerging alongside the industrial city, has failed to transcend the functional paradigm imposed by the automobile and has rarely attempted to propose an alternative model. Instead, it has largely accepted and internalised the rules dictated by vehicular mobility. Within this system – now dominated by the automobile – urban design attempts to create small enclaves of refuge for the body, identified as public spaces.
Public space has seldom been conceived as a central and foundational

Kyoto. Homo Urbanus Kyotoitus. Courtesy I. Bêka and L. Lemoine



element of urban design; rather, it has emerged largely as a reaction to an urban realm overwhelmingly dominated by the automobile.
Consider, for example, the forecourt of the Centre Pompidou in Paris, which you referenced earlier. The square resists the pressures exerted by its surrounding urban environment. Yet public space does not always succeed in fulfilling its intended role, prompting the question: what, in essence, is a square? What is a park? These are spaces that people claim for themselves within a city that, in many respects, does not truly function. It is difficult to imagine the inverse scenario. Perhaps we should instead envision a "square for cars," leaving the remainder of the city entirely dedicated to people. In my view, such an idea should serve as a guiding principle for urban design.
It seems almost natural to us to consider the square as a space at our disposal, but as soon as we leave its confines, we are no longer free to move. A child must be constantly supervised and held by the hand, otherwise they would not be safe and would risk being hit by a car. This situation is also evident near the Centre Pompidou as a five-lane road runs just behind it. In the square in front of the building, everything appears to function, we feel protected and safe, but the moment we step beyond that space, we enter a hostile environment where the risk of being hit by a vehicle is real.
In the conception of the modern city, it has long been accepted that urban space should be organised in this way, with small spaces of survival carved out to ensure our existence. If, however, we were to think the city from the opposite perspective, a radically different urban configuration would likely emerge.
Bernardo Secchi is correct in asserting that the street is poorly designed. It is a space in which the greatest share of surface area is allocated to cars and transport, while people are relegated to the edges – pressed against the façades of buildings on narrow pavements. Frequently, these pavements do not even provide sufficient space to walk in safety and comfort.

MDA

It seems to me that Secchi recognises an intrinsic potential within the space of the street, attributing a distinctive specificity to the urban material embodied by the street itself. He does not confine his analysis to its functional dimension but also acknowledges its significant role as a space of collective function.

IB

The social element which we have referred to appears to be in steady decline. In these spaces, people attempt to resist, yet the prevailing trend is towards a progressive erosion of freedoms. This is evident in our own work. Our films are often shot in neighbourhoods that constitute the last remaining places where street life remains visible and vibrant. However, such neighbourhoods are becoming increasingly rare and spatially isolated. In Seoul, for instance, we filmed sequences in the Jongno district, which has for years been undergoing a process of normalisation and is gradually being absorbed into the surrounding urban fabric. This district is the last area where authentic street life can still be observed. By contrast, in modern districts such as Gangnam, the public space of the street has disappeared entirely. Here, urban space is dominated by the monumental scale of highways. Seoul, in effect, is a city of highways – some with as many as sixteen lanes running through the very heart of the city. This is the "generic city" described by Koolhaas. In this context, the street as a space of encounter and interaction is undergoing a continual process of contraction. While filming *Homo Urbanus Shanghaianus*, a documentary on the city of Shanghai, we found ourselves asking a crucial question: Where is this meeting place today? Observing Shanghai, it becomes evident that its neighbourhoods are becoming increasingly uniform, progressively losing their distinctive characteristics.

LL

In large, multicultural cities, it is particularly revealing to observe public spaces by mapping how urban policies negotiate the customs and cultural differences of various groups and communities. During our years in Paris, we found it especially stimulating to cross the city. A metro journey from the seventh to the twentieth arrondissement offers a striking illustration of how street use varies radically between urban areas. The municipal administration manages these differing levels of tolerance towards the use of street space in markedly distinct ways. In neighbourhoods such as Chinatown, the African Quarter, and other culturally specific contexts, distinctive ways of inhabiting the city are easily observed. The rules governing public space – along with the everyday relationship to space, even to something as seemingly simple as the pavement – differ substantially between areas such as Belleville and the boulevards of Ménilmontant.

Shanghai. Homo Urbanus Shanghaianus. Courtesy I. Bêka and L. Lemoine


南苏州路

IB

Around twenty years ago, in Paris, I witnessed a striking phenomenon that illustrates how the city can simultaneously generate and dismantle public spaces connected to the street – spaces which, for us, represent places of quality. On this occasion, I observed the occupation of public space by groups of people moving on rollerblades. There was a period in which, these groups zig-zagged across the city, meeting every Friday evening to travel together on rollerblades. Initially, it was a small, contained event, a handful of rollerbladers informally appropriated the street space, without any formal organisation or authorisation. Equipped with lights, three or four individuals positioned themselves at the front and rear of the main group, occupying streets ordinarily reserved for motor vehicles. Their actions asserted that the street belonged to them as well.
Over time, the number of participants grew rapidly, transforming the event into an increasingly significant urban occurrence.
After six months, the gathering had grown from fifty friends to more than eight hundred participants. At this point, the municipal authorities intervened – not by prohibiting the weekly rollerblading event, but by formalising it. They established predetermined routes and closed certain streets to facilitate its passage. This intervention, however, removed the element of randomness and spontaneity that had defined the original action. The rollerbladers had become an exception within the regulatory framework – an activity to be managed so that the urban system could continue to operate according to established rules.
In the terms used by Sassen, cited earlier, the rollerbladers' action was no longer a "hack": its subversive dimension had been neutralised through regulation.

MDA

In *Good City Form* (1981), Kevin Lynch focuses on the relationships that exist within the city. In a chapter entitled "Dimension of Performance", included in Part II, "A Theory of Good City Form," he observes:

> Performance characteristics will be more general, and the easier to use, to the degree that performance can be measured solely by reference to the spatial form of the city. But we know that the quality of a place is due to the joint effect of the place and the society which occupies it (Lynch, 1984, p. 111).

Later in the same text, drawing on the concept of the ecosystem, Lynch introduces the idea of a *learning ecology*. He describes a system in which certain actors are conscious and capable of transforming both themselves and the rules of the game:

An evolving "learning ecology" might be a more appropriate concept for the human settlement, some of whose actors, at least, are conscious, and capable of modifying themselves and thus of changing the rules of the game.

> The dominant animal consciously restructures materials and switches the paths of energy flow. To the familiar ecosystem characteristics of diversity, interdependence, context, history, feedback, dynamic stability, and cyclic processing, we must add such features as values, culture, consciousness, progressive (or regressive) change, invention, the ability to learn, and the connection of inner experience and outer action. Images, values, and the creation and flow of information play an important role (Lynch, 1984, pp. 115-116).

A further passage, addressing the symbolic meaning of place, particularly in relation to human settlements, clarifies how, across different historical periods, all cities have recognised the symbolic as a primary task of urban design: Then it was the first task of a city builder to see that a city was a vivid symbol of his society's conception of itself and of the universe.

> The Islamic city, for example, was intended and widely understood as an expression of the fundamental religious concepts of that society. At other times, such an attempt has seemed ridiculous. Any deep symbolizing is left to the fancy of the individual, operating on the accidental characteristics of form. Nevertheless, we find that some symbolic connections are always made between a person's environment and her central beliefs. She may choose to focus on the symbols of home, or on those of nation, neighbourhood, nature, divinity, history, or the life cycle, but the security and depth of these symbolic associations enrich her life. So, I risk a general proposition: a good place is one which, in some way appropriate to the person and her culture, makes her aware of her community, her past, the web of life, and the universe of time and space in which those are contained. These symbols are culture-specific, but also draw on such common life experiences as cold and warm, wet and dry, dark and light,

> high and low, big and small, living and dead, movement and stillness, care and neglect, clean and unclean, freedom and restraint (Lynch, 1984, p. 142).

LL

Reflecting on the notion of learning and more specifically of a *learning ecology*, inevitably raises a fundamental question: Who should be the learner? Should the citizen adapt their behavior to a potentially overly complex, theoretical project, rigidly shaped by the designer's vision? Or the designer, who should learns by observing how bodies interact with space, thereby shaping a less prescriptive and more responsive project?
One of our earliest films, *24 h sur Place* (2013), is particularly relevant for exploring the relationship between urban form and bodily interaction. The work was developed through an observational project centred around Place de la République in Paris, in collaboration with the French architecture and urban planning firm TVK.
The reconfiguration of the square as a public space plays a pivotal role in the city's urban ecosystem. Place de la République is an exceptionally symbolic site. It is both one of Paris's principal infrastructural nodes and a major intermodal hub linking the metro system with road traffic. In addition, it holds considerable political significance, being the departure point for a number of public demonstrations. For these reasons, it constitutes a central locus of Parisian democratic identity and carries substantial symbolic weight in the political sphere.
Before its reorganisation, the public space of the square was limited, functioning primarily as a crossroads for major urban arteries – a space rarely appropriated by citizens and largely confined to its role as a transit zone. TVK's proposal centred around the performative aspect of the city, seeking to create an open stage within the urban realm. Although conceptually complex, the approach was to intervene almost without intervening (a strategy at once fragile and ambitious), to foster a meeting place which would generate the spontaneous dynamics of interaction between people without imposing invasive physical structures or prescriptive behavioural rules.
The project reconfigured circulation patterns in certain parts of the square, enabling a more natural and fluid movement, envisioning "rivers" of people intersecting and converging. In this way, the square has been transformed into a true theatrical stage for the city, articulated

into multiple zones that allow all who inhabit or traverse it to express themselves, maintaining a completely free space.
Our film adopted this same performative principle, documenting twenty-four consecutive hours in the square to observe the full spectrum of people passing through and to study the diversity of its users. Historically situated in the northeast of Paris, Place de la République lies within one of the city's most vibrant districts – though in recent years the area has become home to "bobos" (bourgeois-bohemians).
For us, the next natural step was to create a snapshot of Parisian society on a June day in 2014, capturing within a single day how the square was experienced, traversed, and inhabited in a multitude of ways, almost as if composing a sequence of visual tableaux. TVK's project appears to allow for deviations and evolutions, including those that are unpredictable or uncontrolled, extending beyond the scope of its original design.

IB

What makes the intervention under discussion compelling is not so much the establishment of rules, but the creation of spaces where those rules are suspended or, at the very least, reinterpreted. Designers engaged in shaping urban spaces are typically tasked with resolving dysfunctions or organising functions from a logistical and operational perspective. Rarely, however, are they invited to conceive a project whose sole priority is to foster human relationships or forms of coexistence.
A notable example can be found in the public spaces of Hong Kong, where urban strategies seek to define privileged flows. However, it is still possible to identify spaces that evade the rules imposed by authority. Another significant case is the cycle lane network in Bogotá, where, on weekends, the city's busiest street – *Septima* – is closed to motor traffic and dedicated to walking and slow movement. On these days, the street is effectively colonised by people walking, cycling, or selling goods, most often home-cooked food. Filming this temporary reappropriation revealed the profound transformation of a major urban artery – a true urban highway – which, once closed to traffic, is returned to the pedestrians. These actions can be understood as forms of reclamation – a collective assertion aimed at recovering lost spaces. They underscore the necessity of multiple uses within public space and for the coexistence of diverse functions. At times, however, temporary appropriation is insufficient. It would be valuable to investigate whether

Redevelopment project for Place de la République, Paris, 2013. Axonometric view, ©TVK–Martin Etienne, Studio TVK, Paris

Place de la République

The redevelopment of Place de la République was conceived of as a stage for multiple forms of urban appropriation. The square was delivered by Studio TVK in 2013. The project reconfigures the square as a large-scale urban landscape, transforming it into a metropolitan structure; a dynamic and inclusive platform designed to facilitate accessibility and diverse modes of use. A clearly articulated central axis organises the spatial composition, aligning the Marianne statue, the reflecting pool, and the tree-lined edge. The balanced proportions of the space are reinforced by a ground treatment of perfectly level paving, composed of prefabricated concrete slabs in varying shades of grey, which establishes a coherent horizontal plane. Measuring 70 by 220 metres, the square, long embedded with both symbolic and popular significance, has been redefined as a contemporary centre for attraction, exchange, and civic encounter. In its north-western section, a pavilion in the form of a fully glazed structure provides an uninterrupted visual relationship with the entirety of the square, consolidating its role as a flexible and integrated public space.

there are examples of public spaces in which different activities occur simultaneously, and to what extent the coexistence of heterogeneous functions is socially and spatially acceptable.
A recent example worth examining concerns pedestrian movement in New York. Crosswalks represent one of the few protected and sanctioned spaces for pedestrians, functioning almost as exceptions to the street's primary role, which remains oriented towards motor vehicles. However, when pedestrians are granted the legal right to cross at any point free from penalties for doing so outside designated crosswalks we witness a subversion of the established logic of street use. If codified in law, such a shift radically transforms the hierarchy of the street. Risk is reassigned to the motorist, the car loses its primacy, and the prevailing hierarchical principle is inverted.
By contrast, according to current rules, pedestrians in most cities are compelled to adapt to environments fundamentally designed for cars. Infrastructure such as crosswalks, pavements, and parks are inserted into this context as markers of resistance to the overwhelming occupation of public space by motor vehicles.
Thinking differently in this case means imagining what would happen if the use of public space in every city were entirely inverted, as is beginning to happen in New York. A transformation of this scale, where crossing the street anywhere becomes possible, would constitute a revolution in the established order. Priority would shift from cars to human bodies, fundamentally altering a system that has, until now, been unconsciously accepted. In my view, such a shift would represent the most profound change, far surpassing the conventional idea of simply designing spaces that are appropriate for people.
The challenge, therefore, lies in reinventing the rule itself. This is a critical point for reflection and a potential starting point for advancing proposals for change. Moving beyond the narrow question of how to cross the street would open a broader debate on how people can truly inhabit and experience the street.
At first, a change like this might be disorienting, yet the confusion would stem from the human factor rather than from any loss of efficiency in a city designed primarily for cars.
Given that the city must function as a mechanism, it can be difficult to imagine this type of change. However, experimenting with new rules for shared spaces would constitute a valuable step towards avoiding the

creation of overly specialised and segregated environments.
I believe we lack a true understanding of the street. The system could operate more effectively if more open rules were introduced. However, the ideal should not be a model in which the rules governing public space are entirely abolished, nor one in which survival alone compels extreme inventiveness, as is the case in contexts such as Naples or Havana.
A more promising model might be one that incorporates spaces intentionally designed to accommodate a degree of disorder, as Richard Sennett proposes (Sennett, 2023). When behaviors that stretch the rules in favour of the body, spontaneity, and human interaction are permitted, something truly meaningful can emerge.

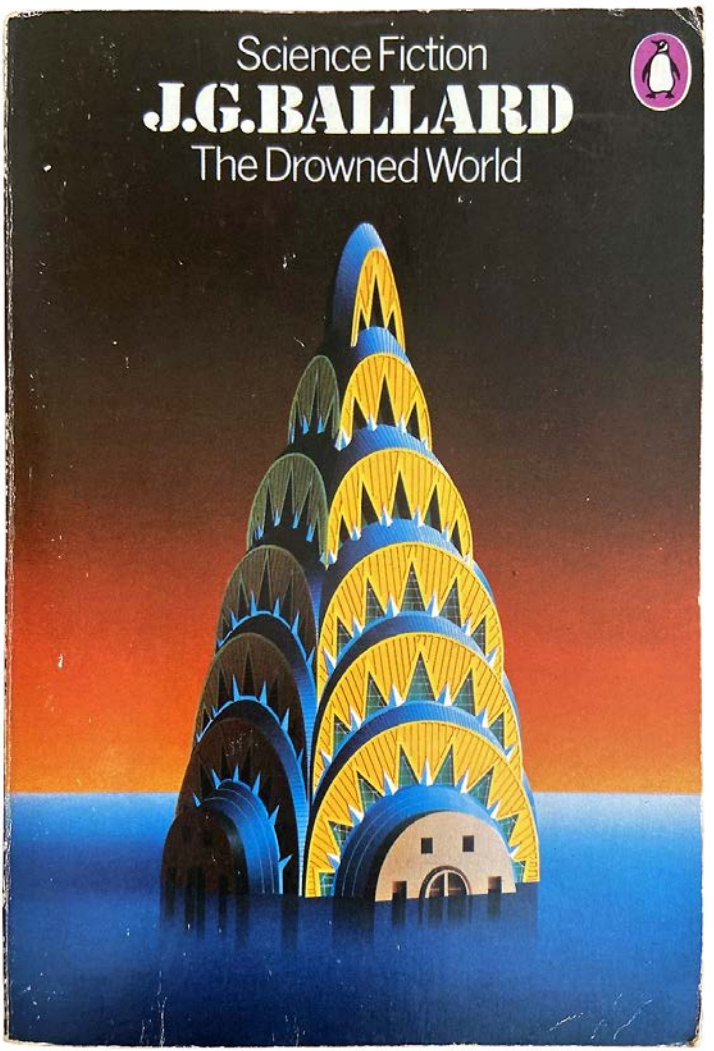
LL

There is an implicit dynamic of spatial appropriation by individuals who will, inevitably, not always conform to the plan or the project's behaviour guidelines. The more restrictive the definition of acceptable behaviours, the greater the potential for conflict among users. These conflicts that, in turn, generate highly complex dynamics which institutions will be required to manage.

MDA

In 1962, James Graham Ballard published *The Drowned World*, later included in Mondadori's *Urania* series and translated into Italian as *Deserto d'acqua* (*Water Desert*, 1963). In this first edition, edited by Italian writer Carlo Fruttero, the cover illustration by Karel Thole depicts an urban landscape entirely submerged under water. Partially submerged buildings protrude from the water's surface, while here and there isolated monuments rise above the flood, imagery that anticipates the celebrated photomontages subsequently produced by Superstudio, inspired by the 1966 Florence flood.
Ballard's dystopian narrative portrays an Earth in which human populations have retreated to the now-temperate polar regions, while the remainder of the planet lies beneath tropical lagoons teeming with luxuriant vegetation and amphibious life.
Although we are not presently confronted with a cataclysm of such magnitude, certain environmental emergencies are already reshaping extensive territories and urban contexts and the equilibrium of these areas is increasingly destabilised by the accelerating pressures of climate change.

Book cover of *The Drowned World* by J. G. Ballard, (1974, 3rd ed.; 1962, 1st ed.), Harmondsworth: Penguin, painting by David Pelham. The Chrysler Building based on a photograph by Evelyn Hofer: New York Proclaimed (1964)



Book cover of *Deserto d'acqua* (1963, 1st Italian edition) Milano: Mondadori, painting by Karl Thole, 1962.

Do you believe that the growing tendency to specialise public space as a means of mitigating climate-related risks could ultimately diminish the quality and inclusiveness of urban environments?
Could you identify any recent public space projects that you regard as particularly compelling or relevant, and situate it within the broader discourse on climate change adaptation?

IB

Our film *Homo Urbanus Petroburgumus* offers valuable insights into this subject. The ways in which urban spaces are used shift dramatically with the changing seasons. In winter, spatial dynamics emerge that are entirely transformed in the summer.
A particularly telling example concerns the presence of subtle yet distinctive topographical features in certain public spaces.
In St. Petersburg, some natural urban areas contain minor depressions and elevations that may appear negligible at first glance. In winter, however, once these forms are covered with snow and ice, they spontaneously acquire new functions, often serving as versatile playgrounds for children. A similar transformation occurs with the city's canals, which, once frozen, become accessible as public spaces and recreational areas. Under such conditions, the spatial character is entirely reshaped by the influence of cold.
This does not, however, imply that heat simply enables behaviours excluded by cold. The relationship between climate and the use of urban spaces is complex, shaped as much by the social and cultural dynamics of a place as by environmental conditions. From this perspective, climate change can be seen as a catalyst for experimentation in devising urban strategies that enable the transition and adaptation of public spaces. In this sense, the onset of a new era in urban planning appears almost inevitable.

LL

I would add that the focus lies in activating behaviours through minimal interventions in shared spaces. It is particularly compelling to observe how people succeed in appropriating these spaces, generating patterns of use that were neither anticipated by premeditated design nor aligned with conventional design approaches.
In terms of public space design, we are currently filming in a Copenhagen neighbourhood centred around an urban park developed by Topotek 1,

Bjarke Ingels and Superflex. During this process, we visited one of their projects in Høje Taastrup, which exemplifies the convergence of two distinct needs: the creation of a skatepark for a newly developed neighbourhood and the establishment of a rainwater retention basin. The latter appears to be the primary function, with the skatepark serving as a secondary program. Observation of the space and the activities it accommodates reveals an effective superimposition of functions. While the flooding of the ground through rainwater is not a daily occurrence, the defining characteristic of this public space lies in the deliberate decision to design a generously scaled basin for surface water collection, capable of performing drainage and storage functions within a residential context. The design was conceived and implemented to incorporate a performative dimension, with a playful quality. For us, encountering this project was an exceptionally positive discovery.

Miracoli, Venice, 12 November 2024.

Studio Topotek 1, Downtown H.je Taastrup, General plan and principle for the water route in the park, 2011–2022. Courtesy I. Bêka and L. Lemoine

Downtown Høje Taastrup

Downtown Høje Taastrup was completed in 2022 and is situated approximately twenty kilometres from Copenhagen. The district constitutes a newly developed neighbourhood structured around principles of social, economic, and environmental sustainability. The masterplan is the product of collaboration between the landscape architecture practice Topotek 1, based in Berlin and Zurich, and the Danish firm Cobe Architects. Within this division of responsibilities, Topotek 1 oversaw the design of the open spaces, extending over 50,700 square metres, while Cobe Architects developed the 155,000 square metres of residential and commercial fabric. The spatial configuration of streets, landscapes, and public areas is organised around a central green core, conceived as the primary structuring element of the plan. This large park incorporates playgrounds, sports facilities, and interconnected pedestrian and cycling networks, thereby functioning as both a recreational and ecological infrastructure. Play areas and permeable landscapes are designed to perform as rainwater retention basins, integrating stormwater management into the everyday use of public space. By combining permeable and impermeable surfaces, the system channels, collects, and retains rainwater, transforming potential hydraulic risk into an amenity that reinforces the recreational and ecological value of the neighbourhood. The design strategy constitutes an innovative example of climate-resilient urbanism, achieved through the careful manipulation of topography. The public space is distinguished by its dual functionality. While operating as a skatepark, it simultaneously incorporates water management as a structuring principle of the project. The site is traversed by an extensive network of gutters, supplementary reservoirs and rain gardens, all designed to collect and regulate stormwater. Collected water is employed for the irrigation of green areas before being channelled into an open-air retention pond. In addition, an underground system of drainage pipes conveys both stormwater and wastewater from the internal streets of the surrounding residential district. The skatepark itself extends for approximately one kilometre, functioning as a large-scale hydraulic basin capable of accommodating intense rainfall events, with a maximum storage capacity of 6,500 cubic metres of water. This multifunctional configuration exemplifies the integration of recreational infrastructure with ecological performance, positioning the project as a paradigmatic model of sustainable urban adaptation.

MEASUREMENT, SELECTION AND REDUCTION. THE TIMELINESS OF THE NOLLI MAP

Ludovico Centis

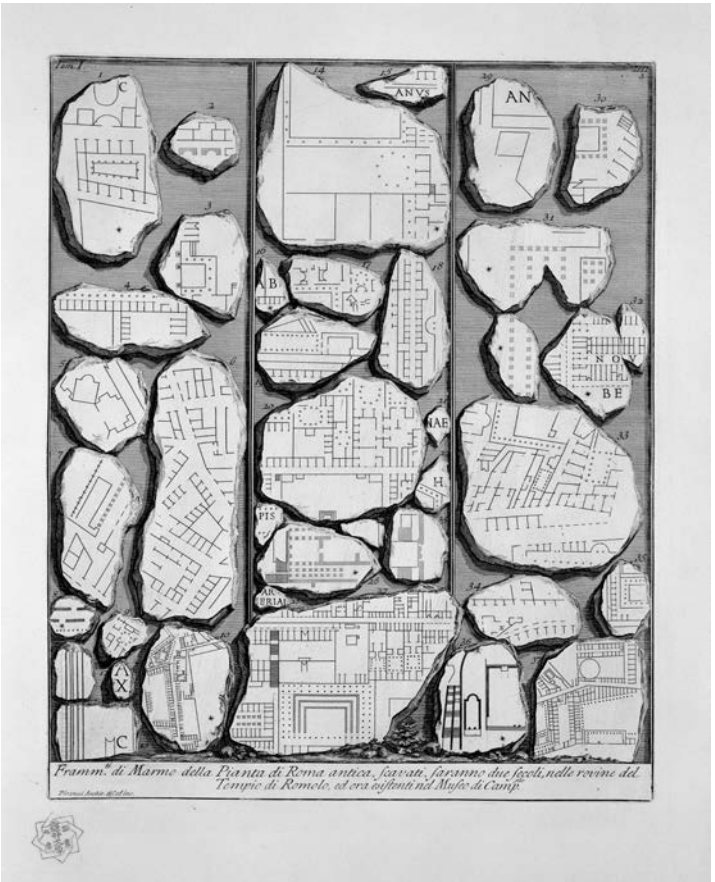
BETWEEN FRAGMENTATION AND SYSTEMATICITY

The *Forma Urbis* Museum is located a short distance from the Colosseum and the Arch of Constantine. It preserves one of the most extraordinary and rare documents that have come down to us from antiquity: the surviving fragments of a monumental plan of ancient Rome, created between 203 and 211 AD and known as the *Forma Urbis Romae* or the Severan Marble Plan. Originally engraved on 150 marble slabs, the plan covered a surface of approximately 18x13 meters and was displayed on the wall of a room located in the Temple of Peace, later incorporated into the complex of Saints Cosmas and Damian.
The engravings precisely traced the plans of buildings, streets and public spaces, thus representing one of the highest moments achieved by ancient cartography. Despite the accuracy with which it was created, the original location of the work suggests that its main purpose was symbolic, a celebration of imperial power.
Today, a selection of around 200 surviving fragments is displayed on the floors of the rooms of the Forma Urbis Museum, placed on a planimetric base that reproduces the New Plan of Rome by Giovan Battista Nolli from 1748, commonly known as the Nolli Map. This choice is not accidental, as the architect from Como was commissioned in 1742 as a consultant to the arrangement of the Severan Marble Plan, in parallel with the huge survey campaign started in 1736 which led him to complete his own Plan of Rome twelve years later. With this background in mind, Borsi notes that:

> Nolli does not interpret the *Forma Urbis* organically or with a valid archaeological method: the extremely incomplete state of the fragments and his lack of knowledge of antiquity suggest him to turn the marble plan into a series of twenty uniform panels, aggregated more for the homogeneity of the format of the various fragments than for concrete proposals for topographical identification or restitution of the whole [...] One wonders whether from this very remarkable experience, Nolli learned lessons in detecting Roman antiquities in its plan, or obtained important information on ancient topography (Borsi, 1993, pp. 36-37).[1]

1 Unless otherwise specifed, quotations have been translated by the author.

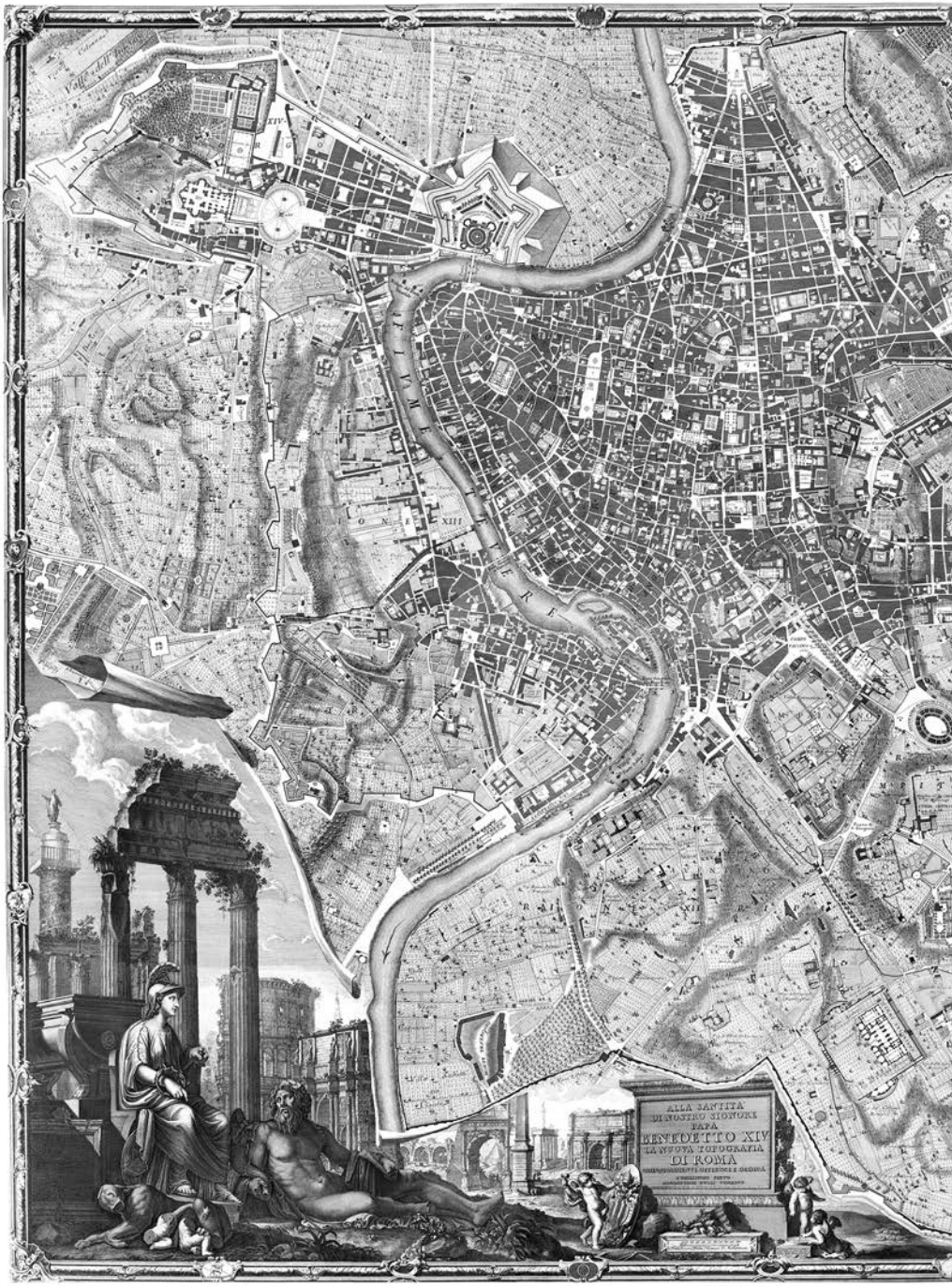
Piranesi, G.B. (1756), Le antichità romane, Vol. 1. Rome: Stamperia Salomoni. Reprint 1784, pl. IV 'Marble fragments from the map of ancient Rome'

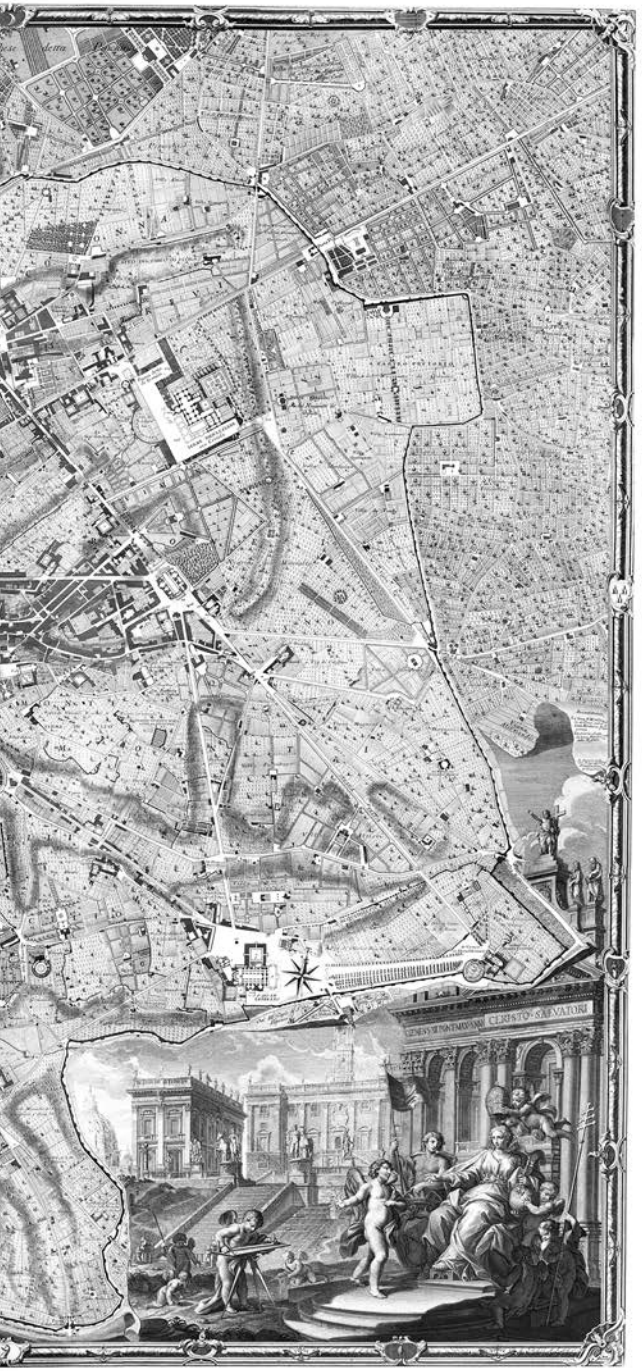


The method adopted by Nolli was later criticized by the other great architect of mid-18th century Rome, Giambattista Piranesi, who included the fragments of the Severan Marble Plan in his *Roman Antiquities*, and in 1774 published the two plans of ancient and modern Rome, dedicating them to Pope Clement XIV.
Instead, it seems that Nolli did not want to follow the example of the Severan Marble Plan. The engravings of the *Forma Urbis Romae* were made at a scale of approximately 1:240 and the south-east was placed at the top, a choice which derived from the consideration of the Appian Way as the main road of the Roman Empire. The 1748 plan was instead drawn up at a scale of 1:2.900 and was oriented with north at the top.
The Nolli Map's talking frame, a recurring element of the period, reports information about the method and instrumentation used in the survey campaign. In fact, a compass is also included within the frame (underlining the non-coincidence of geographic and magnetic north) as well as a surveyor's chain (an extendable series of rods of equal length), a Praetorian tablet and an alidade (a sort of ruler with viewfinders). All tools which Nolli had already made extensive use of during his time as a cadastral land surveyor in northern Italy before arriving in Rome.
The presence of the tools also testifies to the culture of measurement and accuracy that had gradually spread throughout Europe from 17th century France, thanks to figures such as Antoine Desgodets who was the first to survey the monuments of the Eternal City with extreme precision (Cellauro and Richaud, 2008). Traces of this approach can also be found in Nolli's original drawing, which differs from the version printed in 1748 in that it shows all the parcels and subdivisions of property (Borsi, 1993, p. 58), a notable effort which the Como architect later gave up.

THE NATURE OF THE PLAN

The New Plan of Rome was completed by Nolli at the end of 1747, supplemented by letters of dedication dated 1 January 1748 and put up for sale, complete and bound, for four *zecchini d'oro*. The large plan alone was sold for eight *scudi*, the two small plans for 50 *baiocchi* each, that is to say, one *scudo* for both of them. The first copy was presented to Pope Benedict XIV on 11 April 1748 in two copies, both as a bound volume containing 16 separate sheets of imperial paper and


ALLA SANTITA
DI NOSTRO SIGNORE
PAPA
BENEDETTO XIV
LA NUOVA TOPOGRAFIA
DI ROMA



G. B. Nolli, La nuova pianta di Roma, 1748.
Private collection

two reductions, and as a plan to be mounted on a frame and glued onto textile supports (Borsi, 1993, p. 24).
Although Nolli's Map was published in time for the Holy Year of 1750 – unlike the previous plan by Tempesta who did not respect the deadline of the extraordinary Jubilee proclaimed by Sixtus V for 1590– it was not commissioned by the Pope. Instead, Nolli's New Plan of Rome was of completely independent origins. In its definitive version, it provided a rational and exact image of the urban centre, with the new administrative subdivisions and responsibilities deriving from the 1744 reform.
As Borsi notes, it filled an existing void: "multiple needs of a practical, utilitarian nature converge on the plan, the meaning of which cannot escape the civic authorities [...] Even if it was not created for such particular purposes, the Nolli Map constitutes a satisfactory and reliable response to many unfulfilled requests of the municipal administration" (Borsi, 1993, p. 36).
The graphic conventions used for the topographic representation contributed significantly to the systematicity and consistency of the 1748 Plan. Although aware of his limited knowledge of archaeology, Nolli recognized the importance of this aspect in creating his plan of the Eternal City. This awareness, which increased as a result of his time working with the *Forma Urbis Romae*, did not give Nolli a deep understanding of ancient Rome, but it did inform his ideas about the general criteria and graphic conventions used in cartography. In the fragments of the Severan Marble Plan we find the use of a single line to represent ordinary buildings and a double line for public buildings such as temples, basilicas, forums and theatres. This distinction is taken up again in Nolli's New Plan, but with some variations. The double lines indicate ancient buildings that have disappeared or been integrated, a thicker black line indicates still existing antiquities, while a simple line represents the contemporary city. Furthermore, the Como architect makes the structure and internal organization of religious buildings particularly legible and applies a similar approach for civic buildings where he includes elements like colonnades, internal courtyards, staircases, porticoes, wells and gardens to reveal a hierarchy of buildings, ranging from large patrician palaces to common houses. These elements are used even when the building is not significant enough to be included in the rubric and identified by its number.
Further information is provided through conventional symbols, for

example, closed entrances, guard posts, public fountains, covered and uncovered sewers, cemeteries and district boundaries. Despite the ichnographic approach, the 1748 Plan retains some elements of that descriptive tradition that harks back to authors such as Tempesta or Maggi. This is evident in Nolli's representations of green areas, where trees, simplified into conventional signs, cast shadows similar to the long shadows cast by afternoon light that populate Tempesta's late 16th-century Plan of Rome (*ibid*, p. 65). Nolli's plan, given the author's synthetic approach and the summary division of the green areas into tall trees, vineyards, vegetable gardens, and ploughed land, cannot be considered a detailed document on rural history or garden architecture, but it nevertheless remains a precious source for the study of Rome.

A TIMELESS MODEL

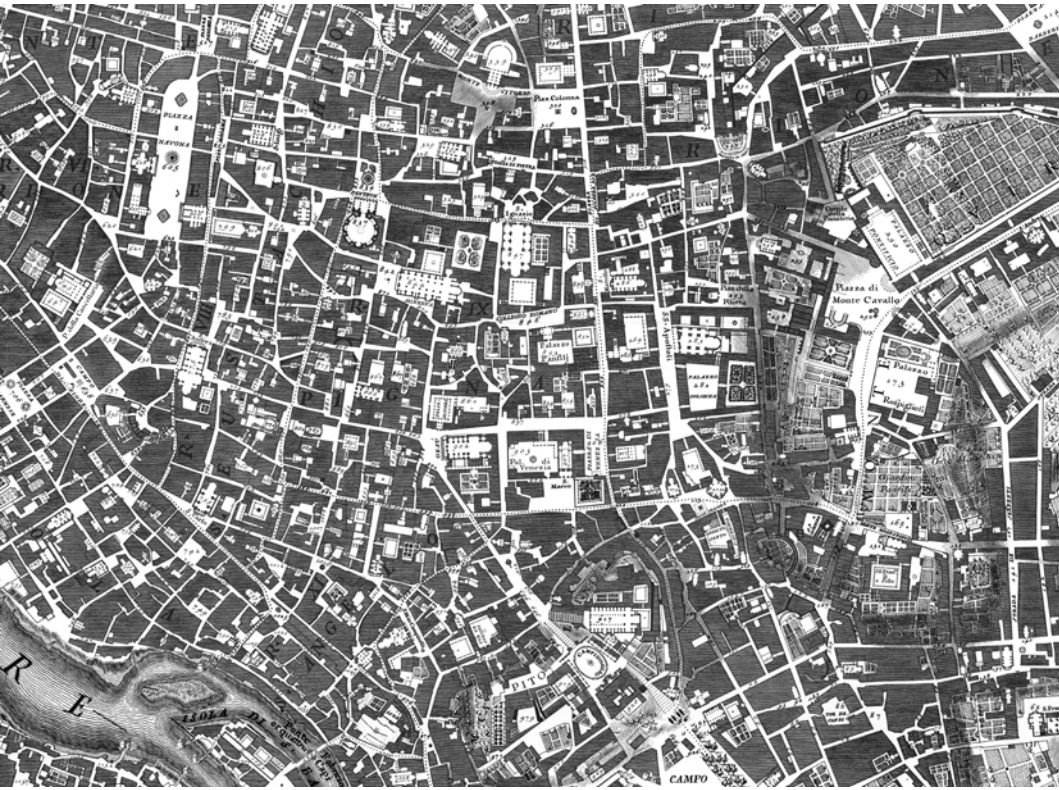
"Learning from the existing landscape is a way of being revolutionary for an architect. Not the obvious way, which is to tear down Paris and begin again, as Le Corbusier suggested in the 1920s, but another, more tolerant way that questions how we look at things" (Venturi et al., 1972, p. 3).
It is interesting to note that only a few pages into *Learning from Las Vegas*, we swiftly reach two sections entitled 'From Rome to Las Vegas' and 'Maps of Las Vegas', in which Nolli plays an important role.
Although the parallel proposed between the two cities by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown and Steven Izenour may be surprising at first, it is based on the authors' profound understanding of Nolli's work. This knowledge and understanding is also the result Scott-Brown's internship in 1956 at Giuseppe Vaccaro's studio in Rome and Venturi's participation in a study program at the American Academy in Rome in the mid-1950s, which led to him writing *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966). In this period, the future couple also had the opportunity to individually explore the landscape surrounding the capital, capturing its salient aspects. The explicit reference to Nolli, particularly in relation to mappings of Las Vegas included in *Learning from Las Vegas*, was undoubtedly one of the reasons why the association Incontri Internazionali d'Arte, founded by Graziella Lonardi Buontempo with Giulio Carlo Argan and Christian Norberg-Schulz, invited Venturi, Scott-Brown and Izenour to participate in the *Roma Interrotta* exhibition. As part of this event, held at Trajan's Market in the spring of 1978, 12 studios and

professionals were asked to imagine with great freedom the Rome of the future, each using one of the 12 tables that made up the 1748 Plan as a starting point.
While *Learning from Las Vegas* has become a cornerstone of 20th century architectural and urban planning theory and research, the book that Nolli had imagined as a counterpart to his large plan was never released, much to his disappointment. The Plan itself enjoyed little commercial success, particularly in the first decades after its publication. One of the reasons was its size, which according to the bookseller Verzura "would be too cumbersome" (Borsi, 1993, p. 24) a fate that also befell the later monumental view from the Janiculum by Giuseppe Vasi. The underlying reason, however, was suggested by the bookseller Moretti, based in London, who, having spoken to potential customers, reflected that "being totally flat, and with no elevations or views of Churches, Palaces, Fountains, etc. for this reason, they don't even want to see [the plan]" (*ibid*).
Precisely in this gap, between the consolidated landscape tradition and the Como architect's ichnographic approach, lies the novelty –and to its detriment, the significant economic failure– of Nolli's undertaking. This gap was highlighted centuries later, by architect Costantino Dardi while he was developing a project for the *Roma Interrotta* exhibition:

> the survey conducted by Nolli through processes of selection and reduction, renders uniform all the materials (fabrics and building morphologies as well as monuments, palaces, courtyards, churches, vegetable gardens, villas, cloisters and gardens), lucidly refusing to offer an interpretation of the city which had, until then, been attempted with the use of the pictural perspective maps, instead presenting itself as an analysis of the urban structure, capable of communicating, beneath the intertwined figurativeness of the image, the many layers of the different systems and the relationships underlying them (Dardi, 1978, p. 48).

Dardi highlights the way in which Nolli's use of selection and reduction refuses to interpret the city beyond the indisputable quality of the engraving and the precision and systematic nature of the survey campaigns conducted under his guidance. And it is equally this same aspect that ensures the extraordinary relevance of the Nolli Map today.

Detail from La nuova pianta di Roma, 1748. Private collection



POWER AND MEANINGS OF MAPS

Matteo D'Ambros

I have drawn what the town, what the area looks like. I have drawn a kind of floor plan for every house that I've talked about because you want the sun always to come accurately into certain windows and you want the yard light always to be coming in certain windows and not other windows.

Kent Haruf

In Venice, in the St Mark's Wing of the Correr Museum, a small, dimly lit room preserves a large parchment depicting Fra Mauro's *Ecumene*, a mid-fifteenth century world map of the habitable world known to the cartographer. The map, fixed on a wooden panel measuring 230 x 230 cm, was completed in 1459 by the Camaldolese monk and includes toponyms, historical-geographical annotations, pictograms of urban settlements, and representations of natural environments. Through the use of sophisticated cartographic technique and an unprecedented level of visual composition, the map offers a selective reconstruction of the entire physical world prior to the discovery of the Americas. Fra Mauro's *mappa mundi* is unique and of exceptional value and fundamental significance not only for the sciences concerned with the dimensions of space and place (Zurla, 1806; Gasparrini Leporace, 1956; Perry, 1963; Cattaneo, 2011; Falchetta, 2006), but also for the history of knowledge production.

It operates as both a narrative and a projective device, an instrument for reflecting on the necessity of observing, selecting, and describing, all elements which are elementary operations of resistance against excessive abstraction, in order to comprehend and make sense of the world around us (Rossi, 2022).

In his volume *Maps: Finding Our Place in the World*, James Akerman explains that the human need for maps originates from a constructive anxiety – a persistent tendancy toward representation that has characterised Western culture since its origins. To find our place in the world, we need maps that help us negotiate our sense of belonging (Akerman, 2007). Since the end of the Middle Ages, the collection, systematisation, and selective processing of data through graphic representation in the form of maps has become pervasive. Mapping is thus both an epistemic and territorial practice; an exercise of control over the spaces we inhabit or would like to inhabit. Maps are not merely passive reflections of reality, they actively construct, select, and reduce it, giving form to specific choices and perspectives effectively (Woods, Fels, 1992). They may also lie, because every cartographic representation


CIRENAICA
LIBIA
monti de barcha
GION
EGYPTO
EGYPTO
MA. EGYPTIUM
MA. LIBICUM
MARE MEDIT
PALE STINA
CIPRO
CRETE
SERMIN
ASIA
ASIA
MAR. MAVRO.
PONT VS
EVSI NVS
GOTHIA
RVENIA
CAGORA
Bolgaria
Vngaria

Detail from the *Ecumene of Fra Mauro,* 1459. Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice.

implies acts of omission, reduction, and synthesis (Monmonier, 1991). Observing what is represented – and equally to what is excluded – is crucial, as every map is founded on the difference between the real and the represented. In this sense, the map functions as an interpretative tool that can never coincide with the area it represents, it remains an abstraction, an idealisation (Korzybski, 1933).
This consciousness lies at the core of the well-known paradox evoked by Jorge Luis Borges, who in his book *El hacedor*, quotes the rigorous discipline of cartography and refers to a map that perfectly coincides with the territory. The map in question is, of course, so vast as to render itself useless (Borges, 1960). Umberto Eco, among others, has reflected on this symbolic framework, observing how a map may become opaque, suspended, and in the last instance ineffective, thereby exposing the intrinsic limits of representation (Eco, 1977; 1992). Every map, consequently, must be understood as an imaginary construct, a narrative form that, even while fabricating distortions, helps us to orient both our bodies and our minds within the world. As Wisława Szymborska writes:

> I like maps, because they lie.
> Because they give no access to the vicious truth.
> Because great-heartedly, good-naturedly
> they spread before me a world
> not of this world.
> (Szymborska, 1998, p.183).

These lines reveal our constitutive relationship with maps and the way in which, through them, we represent multiple possible versions of the world.

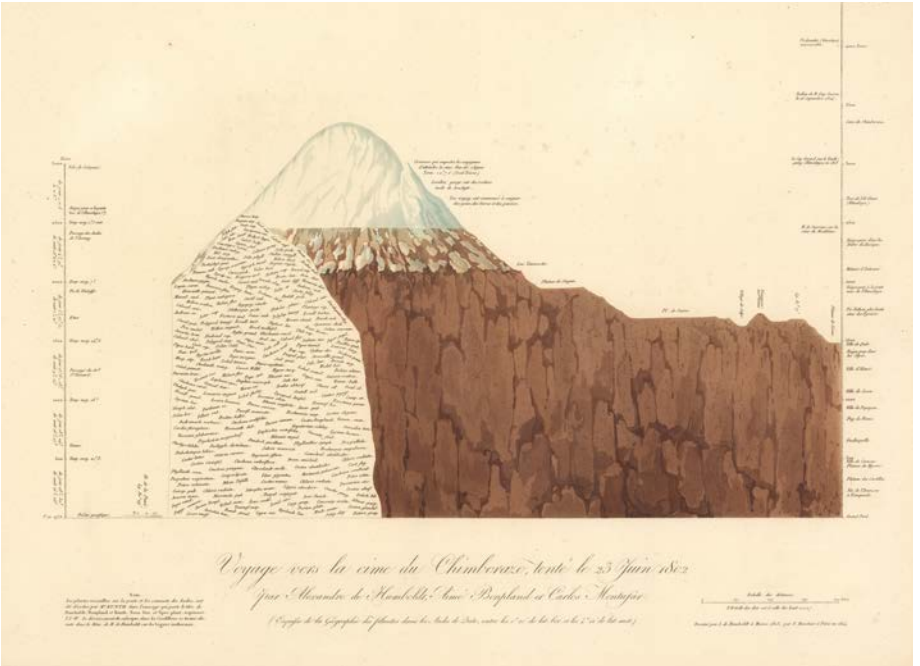
MAPS AS A PROJECT

The observation, selection and organisation of territorial elements alongside the materials of urban and natural landscapes, are fundamental to the interpretative process of design practice. In the context of urban planning and regional development, such operations acquire a foundational significance, finding their ultimate embodiment into the map. This inclination has a tradition that can be seen in a distinctly modern approach to looking at the world and takes the form of the need to interpret the territory not as a collection of points, but as a net of relations – a spatial field through

Ecumene of Fra Mauro, 1459. Correr Museum, Venice. Photograph by the author, 2023

which spatial transformations can be conceived and implemented.
This attitude is exemplified in the Chimborazo's celebrated cross-sectional map, published in *Essai sur la géographie des plantes* by Alexander von Humboldt and Aimé Bonpland (Humboldt & Bonpland, 1805; 1824). This well-known drawing from 1802, gives visual form to the interdependencies between climate, altitude, and vegetation, demonstrating an extraordinary capacity for the integration of empirical observation with aesthetic and cognitive intent. The picture fuses science and art, sensitivity and precision, totality and detail, thereby anticipating a systemic approach to understanding both nature and thus the landscape.
In urban planning, the map emerges not merely as a transitive instrument devised for description and orientation, but as an ongoing project in itself. Mapping means the activation of a cognitive and creative process through which latent forces and previously invisible possibilities are brought to light. Acts of observation, selection, and ordering are never neutral, passive, or meaningless; rather, mapping constitutes perhaps the most formative and generative moment within any design process, initially revealing and subsequently staging the conditions for the emergence of new spatial realities. It is for this reason that James Corner underscores the potential of map-making: "Mapping is neither secondary nor representational but doubly operative: digging, finding, and exposing on the one hand, and relating, connecting, and structuring on the other" (Corner, 1999, p. 225).
Reasoning through maps can equally emancipate us, as was articulated in the short essay 'Between Literature and Urbanism', in which Bernardo Secchi states that urban planners do not confine themselves to a global or prospective vision, but rather seek to imagine possible and alternative worlds. He suggests that maps, like literature, refer to reality without ever telling the whole truth. They constitute a selection of elements, and those who observe them always thirst for truth fuelled by doubt (Secchi, 2011). One of the principal objectives of mapping, therefore, lies in developing cognitive and communicative strategies capable of expressing the multidimensional reality that the map inevitably constrains within the limits of a two-dimensional sheet of paper. Understanding reality involves a continuous shift in perspectives, thereby conferring fuller meaning upon space, the city, or territory – entities always constructed through a multiplicity of subjects and objects, often indistinguishable when our gaze remains fixed.

Humboldt v. A. (1803). Voyage vers la cime du Chimborazo tenté le 23 juin 1802. Plance IX. In: Humboldt v. A., Bonpland A., Marchais F., Montufar C., (1824). Geographie des plantes dans les Andes de Quito. Paris: J. Smith



MAPS AS INTERSECTIONS

Among the most frequently cited references in the tradition of urban space studies is the meticulous drawing known as the *Nuova Pianta di Roma* (also known as the Nolli Map) commissioned by Pope Benedict XIV, produced by Giovan Battista Nolli over a period of six years, and published in 1748 (Bevilacqua, 1998, 2004; Borsi, 1993, 1994). Trained as a land surveyor, Nolli adopted an innovative method for selecting and representing multidimensional spaces, urban materials, and the landscape through elementary yet rigorous principles. The plan reveals, with particular clarity, the spatial continuity between open, unbuilt areas and the internal ground floors of public buildings, places of worship, and other sites of collective significance. In doing so, it established itself as a powerful interpretative device, capable of representing the city of Rome through a new and previously unprecedented cartographic canon. Nolli's representational logic delineates sequences of places within both urban and non-urban spaces, which are all articulated through the careful depiction of the city and its territory by means of signs rendered iconically on the map. From this perspective, the map is able to generate meanings that transcend its purely technical function, positioning itself simultaneously as both project and narrative.

A selection of symbols and patterns used by Giovan Battista Nolli in the Nuova Pianta di Roma include elements of the anthropised environment (streets, squares, private plots, and green areas), natural features (hills, quarries, waterways, forests, wetlands), as well as infrastructures and urban devices (aqueducts, bridges, mills, ferries, fountains, road drains, and piers).

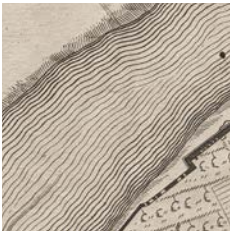
By presenting the world in new ways, maps enable the emergence of unexpected solutions and imaginaries. In contemporary thought, the semantic field of the map has expanded. It is no longer understood solely as a technical aid, but also, in certain contexts, as a tool of political and social action. Denis Cosgrove has underscored how cartography engages in a spatial metaphor that exceeds mere technical function. The map, as a material artefact, participates in broader discourses, generating complex metaphorical meanings that extend well beyond the boundaries of symbolism (Cosgrove, 1999). The map thus operates as a medium that, over time, establishes values and, when

Private space

Garden

Vegetable garden

River



Public parts of building

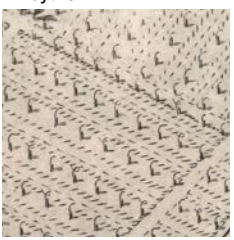
Vineyard

Plantation

River craft

Public space

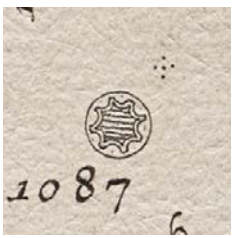
Vineyard



Plantation

Bridge

Fountain



Trees

Hill

Port

Aqueduct

Grassland

Quarry

Water mill

Map of Palestine, 8 August 2025. Specifically, agricultural land (green), agricultural land destroyed between October 2023 and May 2024 (black), and agricultural land destroyed between May 2024 and May 2025 (red) by the Israeli army are shown. In: A report by Forensic Architecture with the World Peace Foundation. The Architecture of Genocidal Starvation in Gaza, 18 March – 1 August 2025.
Courtesy Forensic Architecture

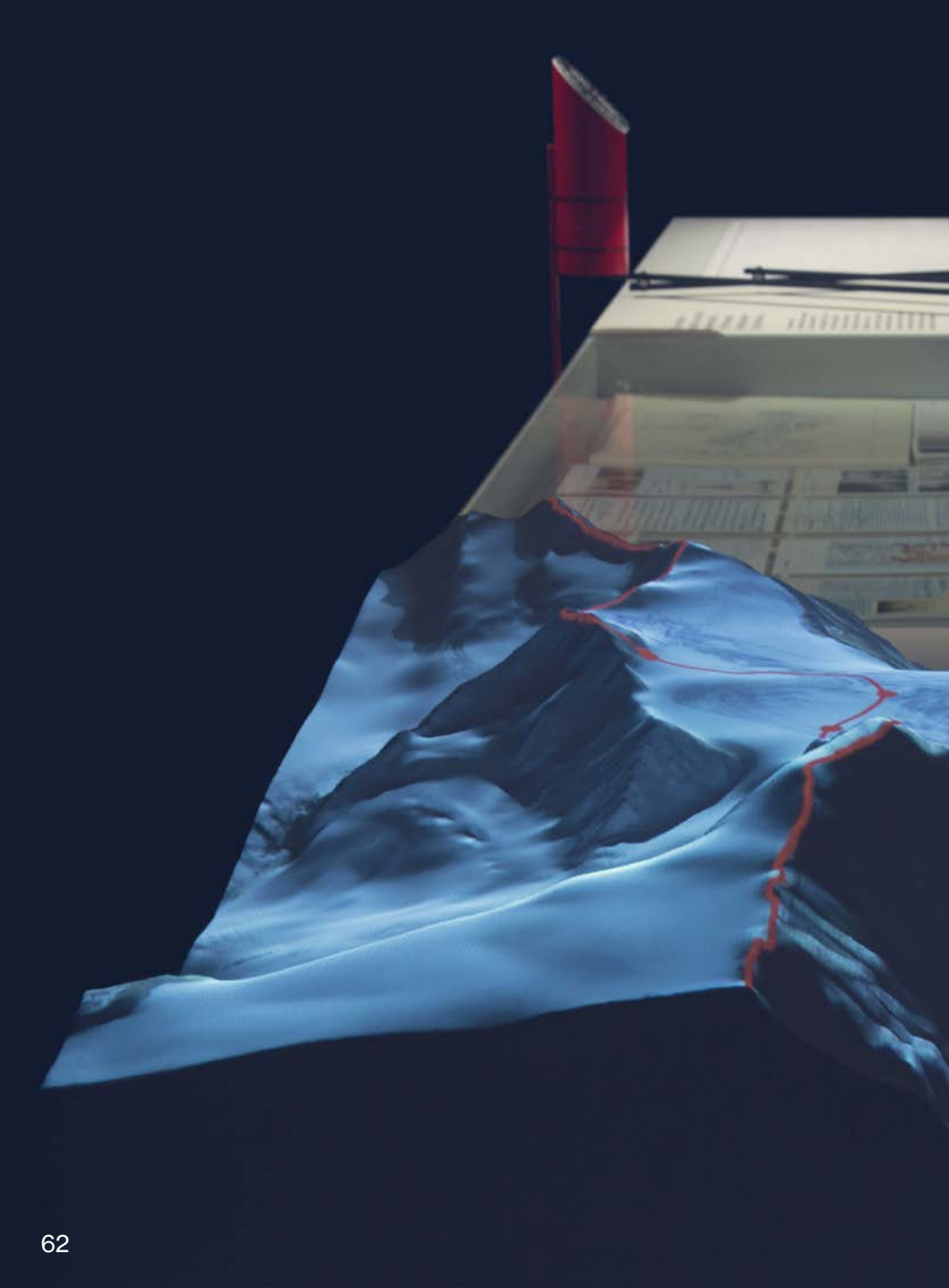
intended, can become a sophisticated instrument of power intentionality (Woods, Fels, Krygier, 2010). Mapping does not simply entail the recording of territorial information, it involves the construction of a theory of space. The map is a mode of thought – a visual grammar through which we interpret the relationships between physical, social, and symbolic dimensions. For this reason, every cartographic choice – whether of scale, symbol, legend, or orientation – reflects a cognitive, political, and ideological position.

In the present, marked by ecological crises and social upheavals and precipitated by violent conflicts, maps acquire renewed significance, once again asserting themselves as indispensable tool for giving reality a profound meaning. Within urban planning research, the Forensic Architecture group has, for several decades, exemplarily demonstrated how maps can be used to uncover hidden connections between seemingly distant phenomena, thereby transforming the map into a critical device capable of overturning established paradigms of spatial representation. Their mappings of conflict sites, intangible memories, and informal networks disclose alternative urban geographies that challenge and question dominant perspectives. In such instances, mapping becomes a political act – an intervention that interrogates what is worthy of being represented (Forensic Architecture, 2025).

Similarly, though addressing different concerns, Studio Folder has examined the fragility of national borders under the pressure of climate change. Environmental disasters, increasingly blurred physical and virtual demarcations, and the difficulty of unambiguously distinguishing between what is real and what is artificial are explored in the research project *Italian Limes* (Studio Folder, 2014–2019).

Conducted between 2014 and 2018, this study demonstrates how it is possible to monitor the shifting borderlines across the Alps in real time, produced by the melting of glaciers between Italy, Austria, Switzerland, and France. Th very notion of territory is reconfigured as a function of ecological processes that generate new geopolitical dynamics, inevitably triggering and redefining questions of spatial justice (Secchi, 2013). New and unexpected spatial relations thus emerge, with transnational tensions as a direct consequence.

The drawing of boundaries is transformed into an act that exceeds any purely physical or material gesture, entering a dimension of uncertainty and apparent control – one that must be continually renegotiated



Movable Borders. Italian Limes. Courtesy Studio Folder, 2014

through the lens of cartography and the perpetual redrafting of maps. The need for new maps is unavoidable, not simply to orient ourselves, but to interrogate the reasons why. As Massimo Rossi observes:

> Drawing the world means understanding it, containing it, giving it form, and at the same time bearing witness to the human awareness and desire to see it, interpret it, design it, organise it, to attempt to comprehend the relationship between human beings and inhabited places, (...). It also means striving to organise the world proportionally and geometrically, to scale, thereby creating an artificial device that enables us to approach it with less fear, in order to absorb and attenuate the immanent disorder of reality (2022, p. 9).

Piz Lat Mathaun and National borders between Italy and Austria. Istituto Geografico Militare, 2019. In: Ferrari M., Pasqual E., Bagnato A., (2019). *A Moving Border. Alpine Cartographies of Climate Change*. New York: Columbia Books on Architecture and the City

Due to global warming and shrinking glaciers, a considerable shift of the glacial watershed has been detected-and accordingly of the coinciding national borders. A new definition of “moving border” has thus been introduced by the Italian Parliament into national legislation.
(<http://www.italianlimes.net>, Studio Folder, 2014-2019)

BETWEEN AWARENESS AND UNCONSCIOUSNESS. PHASE TRANSITIONS OF CONTEMPORARY SPACE

Ludovico Centis

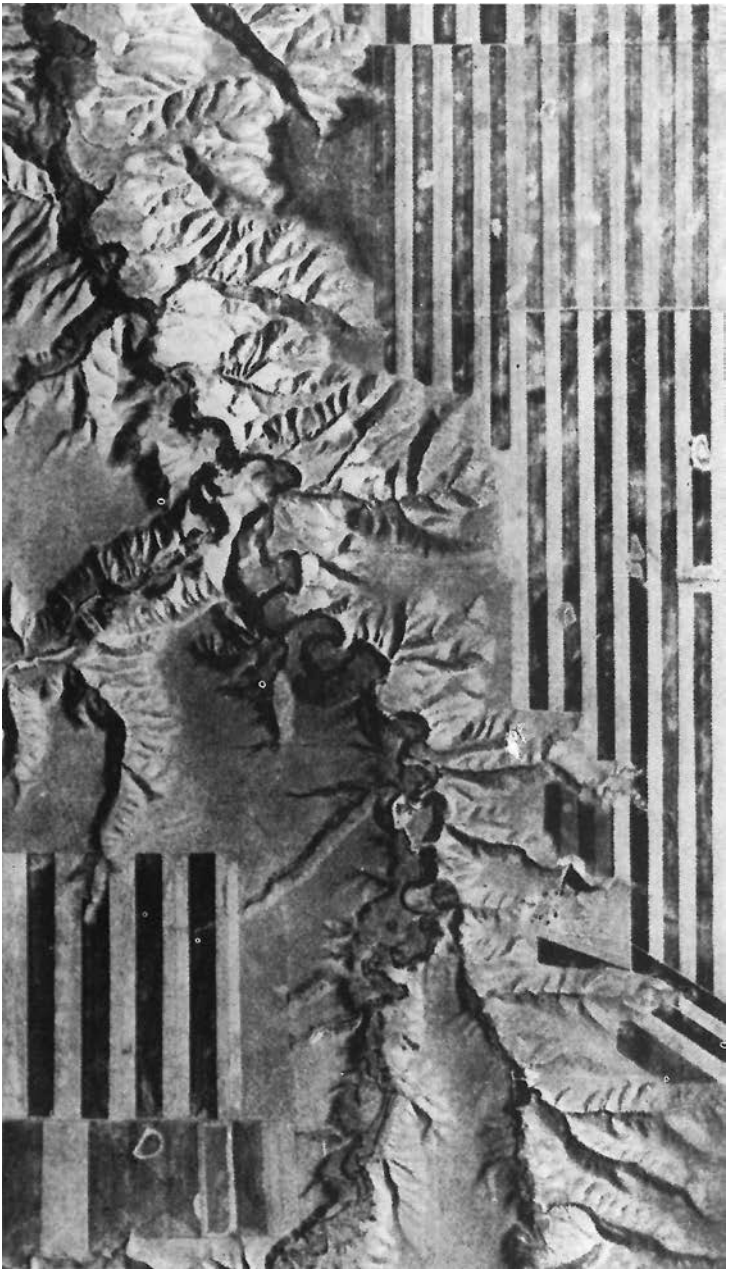
THE MODELLED SPACE

Throughout his prolific career as an architect, professor, and theorist, Christopher Alexander investigated complex themes such as structure, process, and values in urban and territorial contexts. In his four-volume work, *The Nature of Order: An Essay on the Art of Building and the Nature of the Universe,* developed and expanded over more than two decades starting in 1980, Alexander identifies fifteen fundamental properties in what he considers to be good structures and environments: levels of scale, strong centres, boundaries, alternating repetition, positive space, good shape, local symmetries, deep interlock and ambiguity, contrast, gradients, roughness, echoes, the void, simplicity and inner calm, and not-separateness.

In the chapter on positive space, which the Austrian-American architect says can be perceived "when every bit of space swells outward, is substantial in itself, is never the leftover from an adjacent shape" (Alexander, 2002, p. 173), Giovan Battista Nolli's *Plan of Rome* plays a central role. According to Alexander, "an almost archetypal example of this positive and coherent state of space may be seen in the Nolli Plan of Rome. In this plan, each bit of every street is positive; the building masses are positive; the public interiors are positive. There is virtually no part of the whole which does not have definite and positive shape. It is a packing of definite entities, each of which is definite and substantial in its own right" (*ibid*., p. 174).

His analysis continues by arguing that in the modern Western conception of urban space, a fundamental understanding and awareness of the role of open spaces has been lost. This was a central feature in almost all ancient cultures and is clearly communicated by a work like Nolli's map. Not only did this serve as a tool for control and display of power like many other maps of the modern era (Pelletier, 2001, p. 81), but it was also paradigmatic of how to represent and communicate an urban space that, thanks to certain geometric properties and relationships, can be read as a coherent and powerful whole. Nolli's work, while part of the tradition of providing a necessary written description to accompany a cartographic representation, departs from the more popular pictural perspective map —which implies subjectivity and a search for visual resemblance— to instead take a more objective, scientific, and abstract approach, inheriting the teachings of Leon Battista Alberti regarding proportions and the use

Crops and mountains in Montana. From 'La forma del territorio', Edilizia Moderna n. 87-88, 1966



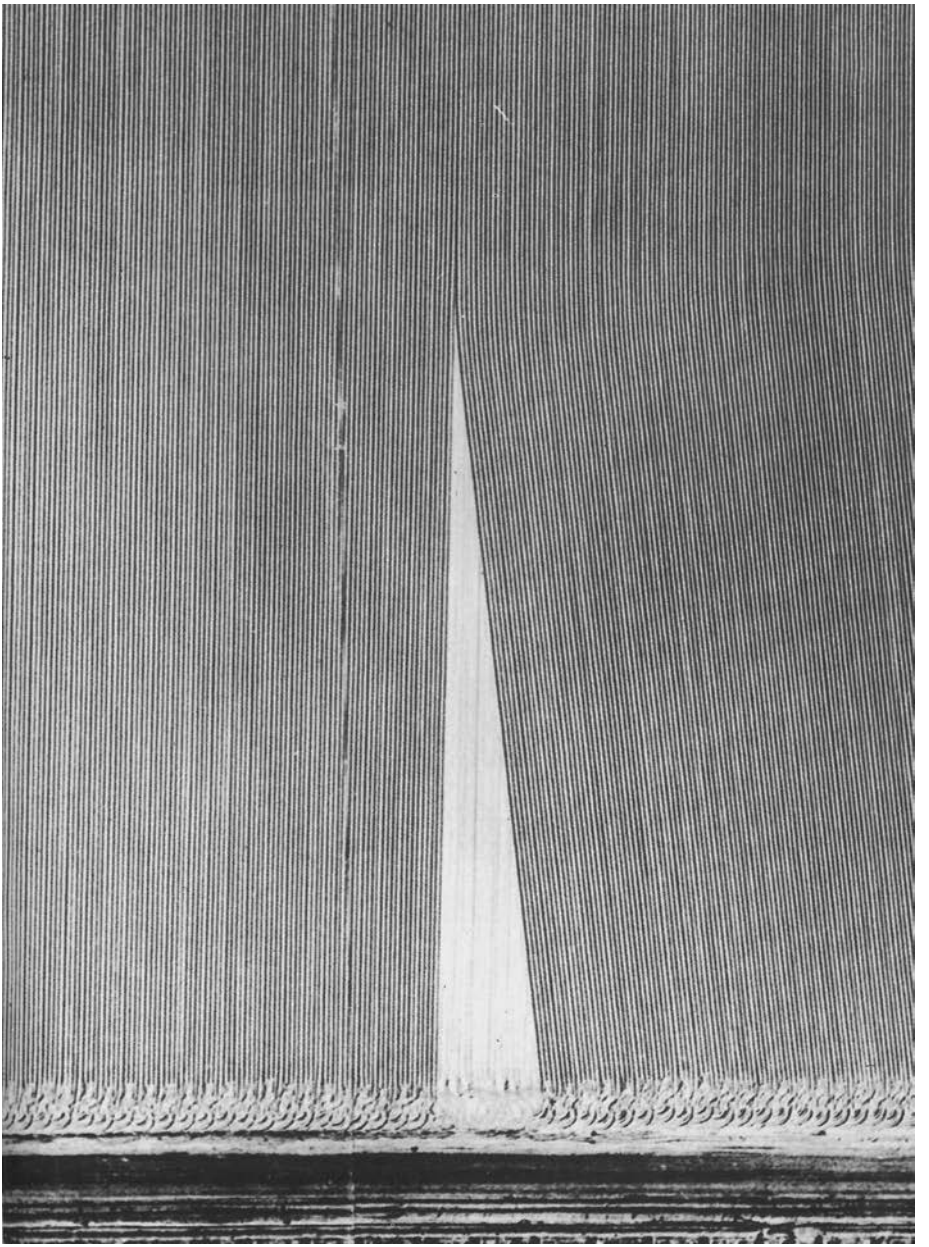
of orthogonal projections, particularly in ichnography.
In a stark contrast to 18th-century Rome, Christopher Alexander identifies a tendency in 20th-century architecture and urban planning to perceive and design buildings as if they were floating in a void – separated and isolated entities, almost as if the space between them was unimportant. This observation can undoubtedly be linked to the exponential growth of urbanization after World War II and the resulting crisis of scale relationships, but also to contemporary reflections like those of Stephen Kern (1983). As Paola Viganò notes of the historian, "in his *The culture of time and space*, Kern emphasizes the shift that occurred between the 19th and 20th centuries from an idea of space as inert emptiness containing objects to that of 'active and full' space. Space is no longer a negative element 'between the positive elements of floors, ceilings, walls,' but a positive element, to be 'sculpted'" (Viganò, 2023, p. 15, auth. trans.).[1]

THE CLASH BETWEEN GEOMETRY AND GEOGRAPHY

Underlying these reflections is also, undoubtedly, the crisis of the figure-ground relationship, both at the local scale of the street and square and at the territorial scale. It is precisely to this theme that Vittorio Gregotti dedicated a memorable 1966 issue of the journal *Edilizia Moderna,* titled *The Form of the Territory*. In the long introduction, which runs throughout the magazine interspersed with essays by invited authors, Gregotti clarifies that the aim is to address the question of how to develop a formal technology for the anthropogeographical landscape, understood as the architect's field of action at all scales. This is not presented as the theoretical approach behind the issue, but rather as set of problems related to the formalization of inhabited space, which includes both the built work and pre-existing environmental structures. The journal issue considers the problems of territorial planning as formalization processes, examining the extent to which they have redefined the spatial question of architecture at every scale, particularly the geographical one. Gregotti suggests that it will be necessary to develop specific operational tools at a later stage for each dimensional level, beginning with the territorial one. This need, according to Gregotti, stems from "the down-grading of the importance of 'place' in the interests of 'value' by means of technological

1 Unless otherwise specifed, quotations have been translated by the author.

Crops in the Napa Valley, California. From ‘La forma del territorio’, Edilizia Moderna n. 87-88, 1966



transformation of landscape – the impoverishment, in other words, of landscape's characteristics nature by methods that are relatively indifferent to it and which manifest such indifference both as multiplication of the areas affected by the anthropogeographic operation and as a concentration of the invading systems and consequent enlargement of the residual utilisable space; and so we arrive at the problem of the formal consequences of such an attitude to landscape itself, of which the urban environment becomes one of the especially characterised aspects" (Gregotti, 1966, p. 149).

It thus becomes clear that the combination of the acceleration and expansion of environmental transformations, particularly on a geographical scale, necessitates design tools that were foreign to the disciplinary knowledge of architects until the second half of the 20th century. Before this point, architects found themselves forced to entrust the formalization of changes to the territory to other professionals, without being able to fully govern their effects, let alone direct any processes. According to Gregotti, reversing this condition first requires recognizing, firstly, the landscape as an autonomous entity and, secondly, the possibility of an approach capable of translating matter into new forms that is directed towards a comprehensive figural invention that is radically different from the original nature of the elements. Alternatively, according to a more established tradition, the landscape can be conceived as a graphic continuum, although not entirely natural, to be taken as a background against which every intervention is inevitably configured. But the Italian architect goes further, opening up to reflections and studies like Kevin Lynch's fundamental contribution regarding the concept of perceptual clarity as the cornerstone of a methodology for reading and structuring space, alongside other work within the same period that focused attention on perceptual organization, which was being challenged by new dimensions, dynamic relationships, and the stresses resulting from the use of visual communication tools. Again, the theme of scale becomes crucial, and consequently, the distance from which spaces are viewed and measured: "If we stand at a long distance from things they become no longer recognisable; but our possibility of knowledge increases: the things dwindle to dots, to patches. The aggregation of the dots and patches provides the pattern of the soil distribution, the modes and directions in which introduction was made of marginal, tangential and counterstroke lines, the complete parts and

left-over parts, the clash between geometry and geography" (*ibid*., p. 150). An idea of landscape as a total environmental whole emerges, based not on the conservation or recovery of isolated natural values, but on the recognition of the materiality of the entire anthropogeographical environment as a field that can be operated on following a clear intention.

THE UNCONSCIOUS SPACE

As anticipated, the reflections of Alexander and Gregotti are not isolated episodes but are part of an international debate that saw figures like Kevin Lynch, Louis Kahn, and Robert Venturi analyse social communication and urban semiology, while Aldo Rossi and Colin Rowe focused on the symbolic value of monuments. These reflections – especially between 1960 and 1978[2] – were compiled into publications that became milestones in urban studies, testifying to the efforts made within architectural and urban culture to understand and control increasingly complex phenomena, such as urban growth, the imbalances brought by economic development, and conflicts between old and new. It was during these same years that the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, one of the most relevant figures on the global scene in recent decades, was trained at the Architectural Association in London. Through theoretical research and professional practice with the OMA studio, which he co-founded with Elia and Zoe Zenghelis and Madelon Vriesendorp, Koolhaas radically reflected on the relationship between measure and scale in the evolution of architecture and urbanism. Starting from studies like the one on the Berlin Wall (1971) and his graduate thesis *Exodus, or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture* (1972), and through projects like Euralille (1989-1994), the Dutch architect revives the concept of *Bigness* – used by Ludwig Hilberseimer in a series of books, including *The New City: Principles of Planning* (1944), published in the 1940s and 1950s to pinpoint the qualitative change in scale that requires new design approaches – and denounces its extreme consequences. While in

2 "The Image of the City" by Kevin Lynch was published in 1960; "The Architecture of the City" by Aldo Rossi, "The Territory of Architecture" by Vittorio Gregotti, and "Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture" by Robert Venturi were published in 1966; "Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form" by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown, and Steven Izenour was published in 1972; and "Collage City" by Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter was published in 1978.

Cover of the book ‘Lille’ by Rem Koolhaas, Pierre Mauroy, and Jean-Paul Baĭetto made on the occasion of the exhibition ‘Fin de Siecle - OMA Rem Koolhaas’ at the Institut Français d’Architecture, Paris, in 1990. This book features the maps and sketches that lead to OMA’s masterplan for Lille, realised in 1994. Courtesy of OMA

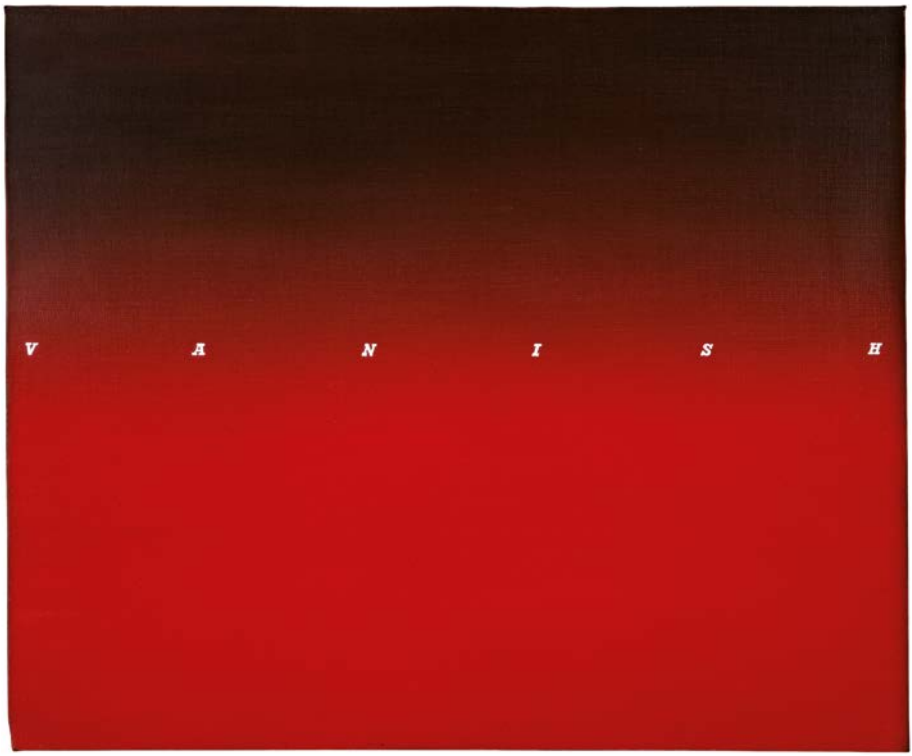
Delirious New York (1978) Koolhaas births the concept of *Automonument* for buildings that exceed a certain "critical mass" (Koolhaas, 2001, p. 92), borrowing from critical mass in nuclear physics, a breaking point beyond which a process becomes unstoppable (Biraghi, 2024, p. 61). In *S,M,L,XL* (1994), Koolhaas explains how Bigness undermines the foundations of architecture, generating a breakdown that leads to the separation between the exterior and interior of a building. Due to the mathematics that governs the relationship between volume (which increases by the cube) and surface area (which increases by the square), an increasingly smaller surface must represent an ever-larger amount of internal activity. Bigness is not just a dimension, but an entity that no longer needs the city: it competes with it, represents it, appropriates it, or rather, it is the city itself (Koolhaas, 2006).

Koolhaas seems to push Alexander's viewpoint to its extreme consequences, recognizing a growing tendency for late 20th-century buildings to be conceived as separate and isolated entities. He suggests that this condition is the distillation of capitalist logic and the incarnation of the "reign of quantity" (Guénon, 1982, p. 12). However, the Dutch architect goes even further, making a surprising logical leap, as is his custom, by declaring that if urbanism generates potentialities and architecture exploits them, Bigness pits the generosity of urbanism against the pettiness of architecture (Koolhaas, 2006). This concept, linked to a radical change in scale, would therefore not be merely quantitative but qualitative. According to Koolhaas, it requires new design procedures, open to welcoming and embracing the "unconscious energy" inherent in contemporary space, which is characterized by a "figure-figure" relationship, where in a condition of excess, figures and forms lose definition, flowing indifferently before us,[3] to the point they vanish.

The millennial paradigm of the figure-ground relationship seems to be losing more and more relevance in the face of the increasing discontinuity and a-contextuality of the globalized world, thus also requiring a revision of the tools and methods with which we measure, record, and shape space.

3 See in this regard issue 2 of the magazine *San Rocco*, *The even covering of the field* (2011).

Ed Ruscha, *Vanish*, 1972, oil on linen 20 x 24 inches © Ed Ruscha



RETHINKING PROXIMITY BETWEEN REALIGNMENT AND RETREAT. WHY SHOULD WE DEFEND OUR CITIES FROM THE RISING SEAS?

Matteo D'Ambros

Across the world, wherever anthropogenic pressure is significant, coastal areas are under increasing environmental and ecological stress.
The resulting processes of degradation manifest themselves at multiple scales and have become pervasive, as is particularly evident in the urbanised metropolitan regions of the planet. In many coastal zones, conditions of marked alteration have long been observed, where the management and control of risks play a central role in defining new relationships, both direct and indirect, between actors, functions and spatial uses, generating territorial configurations that are increasingly complex and articulated.
Within the thin crust of land that marks the boundary between earth and sea, transitional environments, which are dynamic and unstable by nature, display growing levels of vulnerability, exacerbated by even minimal variations in their already fragile ecological balances. In many contexts, these equilibria are progressively eroding, signalling the inability of coastal systems to absorb further pressures.
Observing the Italian peninsula, widespread risks and vulnerabilities clearly emerge (figure 1). Around 30% of the national population resides in coastal municipalities (Trigila et al., 2021) and just under seventeen million people live in direct contact with the sea. A significant proportion of them are employed in sectors connected to seaside tourism, which in 2018 recorded approximately seventy million visitors across the twenty-six main coastal tourist cities of the country (ENIT, 2018).
The impact of this phenomenon, in addition to its economic implications, is both environmental and territorial, deeply affecting the balance of natural resources and the quality of coastal ecosystems.
Another critical issue concerns coastal erosion processes, which currently affect around 46% of sandy beaches. Over the past fifty years, Italy has lost approximately five million square metres of beaches – an area equivalent to more than three hundred and sixty times the surface of St Mark's Square in Venice. Projections for the coming decades outline even more alarming scenarios: by 2050, a 20% reduction in Italian beaches is expected, a figure that could rise to 45% by 2100.
This forecasted land loss concerns not only the narrow coastal strip – which already contains the highest percentage of artificial and urbanised land in the country – but also the hinterland immediately behind the shoreline, where the presence of infrastructure, services and settlements continues to expand, fuelling an almost continuous process of land

Figure 1: italian coastal areas at risk of flooding by 2100. Most probable scenario: IPCC RCP4.5, 95th percentile; worst-case scenario: IPCC RCP8.5, 5th percentile. Source: elaboration by F. Vascotto based on Vousdoukas et al., 2018

	Water
	Land
	Most probable scenario
	Worst-case scenario

consumption. Unless accompanied by effective strategies of adaptation and containment, this dynamic risks irreversibly compromising the resilience of coastal systems, undermining their ecological filtering function and their role as a connective interface between marine and terrestrial environments.

According to the annual report of the Italian Geographical Society titled *Flooded landscapes* (*Paesaggi sommersi*, 2025), the most plausible scenario for the coming decades is one of progressive and increasingly pervasive artificialisation of the coastline, with wide-ranging landscape, ecological and territorial consequences. This tendency risks aggravating the erosive dynamics already underway, increasing the physical vulnerability of existing coastal defences and weakening the capacity of coastal systems to withstand the intensifying impacts of the climate crisis.

As an alternative to this logic of rigidity and control, the most advanced adaptation perspectives focus on *managed realignment* and *managed retreat* strategies. The former is based on a series of soft engineering interventions aimed at giving space back to the sea and promoting the natural realignment of the shoreline. These actions seek to enhance the intrinsic adaptive capacity of littoral ecosystems by encouraging sedimentary and morphological reconstruction processes and, when necessary, by removing or allowing the controlled breaching of artificial structures. The objective is to enable the coast to adapt to erosion in a dynamic, flexible and self-sustaining manner, according to a principle of natural balance and ecological resilience (Esteves, 2014).

The latter approach, known as *managed retreat*, involves the planned, intentional and coordinated relocation of people, assets and economic activities away from areas most exposed to risk (Siders, 2019).

This strategy represents a genuine alternative to traditional rigid and structural protection models, as well as to other adaptive measures such as the elevation of coastal infrastructure. It becomes particularly necessary in contexts where high settlement density or the presence of permanent works prevent lighter realignment interventions from being implemented.

Both approaches are grounded in the recognition of the coastline as a living and mutable system, in which the coexistence of natural processes and human activities can no longer be governed solely through defensive or oppositional logics. Rather, they invite the construction of new forms of cohabitation, based on gradual processes of adaptation capable of reconciling safety with transformation, protection with flexibility and loss

with regeneration. Within this framework, the design of transitional spaces becomes not only a technical but also a cultural tool, through which the relationship between society and the environment, between natural and human time, between the memory of places and their possible futures, can be redefined – where public space assumes an additional dimension and an essential role as a field of experimentation. Decisions about how and where to intervene imply a redistribution of risks and resources, raising questions of equity, environmental justice and collective responsibility. In the face of unavoidable transformation, the issue is no longer simply how to defend ourselves, but rather how to live in balance with change. If the climate crisis forces us to rethink the boundary between land and sea, between security and uncertainty, then we might ask ourselves the following question: is it still necessary to defend ourselves from the sea, or is it time to learn how to live with it – redefining the very concept of proximity?

Considering that since the early 2000s – alongside the worsening systemic transformations of the planet largely driven by climate change – the number of natural disasters worldwide has almost doubled, the perception of risk, understood as the set of processes through which individuals and communities assess the gravity and probability of a hazard (Slovic, 1987), has now spread well beyond scientific and institutional communities. It permeates society as a whole, in a context where global environmental policies show increasing uncertainty and signs of weakening, as evidenced by the recent attacks on the European Green Deal.

The climate crisis is making – and will continue to make – the existing crisis of coastal territories even more acute, acting as an environmental and territorial *stress multiplier* (Singer, 2019) that amplifies pre-existing problems and renders them more severe. It therefore becomes inescapable to strengthen measures and actions aimed at ensuring the safety of coasts, to be understood not as a narrow margin between land and water, but as a complex, interdependent and dynamic system within which tensions of various kinds – first and foremost ecological and socio-economic – are reflected and amplified.

A NEW IDEA OF BEAUTY. THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL COASTAL CITIES BETWEEN DESIRE AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Ludovico Centis

> It is in this sense, precisely, that I do not hesitate in proclaiming the Anthropozoic era. The creation of man constitutes the introduction into nature of a new element with a strength by no means known to ancient worlds. And, mind this, that I am talking about physical worlds, since geology is the history of the planet and not, indeed, of intellect and morality. But the new being installed on the old planet, the new being that not only, like the ancient inhabitants of the globe, unites the inorganic and the organic world, but with a new and quite mysterious marriage unites physical nature to intellectual principle; this creature, absolutely new in itself, is, to the physical world, a new element, a new telluric force that for its strength and universality does not pale in the face of the greatest forces of the globe.
> (Stoppani, 1873, p. 732).

More than a century before the diffusion of the term Anthropocene, introduced and then popularized by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer (2000), at the height of the age of Positivism, Antonio Stoppani coined the term *Anthropozoic era*. In particular, the Italian geologist's definition of human activity as "a new telluric force that for its strength and universality does not pale in the face of the greatest forces of the globe" has deep roots in the Cartesian vision of man as dominator of nature. This concept inaugurated a long tradition of dualisms: man-animal, organic-inorganic, culture-nature. These duos have shaped modern thought, drawing a clear boundary between humanity and the rest of the natural world: Galileo Galilei was the first to "put a fence around the terrain of nature", placing it outside the collective (Serres, 1995, p. 84). Following Descartes, Enlightenment philosophers not only took human independence from nature for granted but also theorised humankind's superiority.
This paradigm focussed attention on the inequalities and oppressions within human societies, neglecting the complex and indissoluble relationship that binds humanity to nature itself.
In recent decades, exponents of contemporary thought across arrange of disciplines have begun to question this anthropocentric vision.
The French philosopher Michel Serres records how "suddenly a local object, nature, on which a merely partial subject could act, becomes a global objective, Planet Earth, on which a new, total subject, humanity, is

toiling away" (*ibid*, p. 5). Similarly, the Indian historian Dipesh Chakrabarty has highlighted on several occasions (2009; 2016) the need to rethink the understanding of human action on a planetary scale. In an interview, he noted how climate scientists are challenging humanities scholars by attributing extraordinary geophysical impacts to humans. In fact, according to Chakrabarty, humanities scholars are used to interpreting action through the prism of autonomy and sovereignty, categories that are now inadequate in the face of epochal climate transformations (2016, p. 22). The Indian writer Amitav Ghosh, in his *The Great Derangement. Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), offers a penetrating analysis of this epistemological crisis, stating that climate change represents a direct challenge to the idea of freedom, a pillar of the modern idea of politics. Freedom is a concept as central as it is complex. It carries momentum towards the future, going beyond the boundaries of politics to profoundly influence the humanities, arts and literature. According to the Indian writer, climate change will therefore make it increasingly explicit that, in reality, humans has never been free from non-human constraints.
This awareness, increasingly widespread in the 21st century, has grown alongside the notion of the Anthropocene, whose tangible effects highlight the urgency of radically rethinking the Cartesian model of human exceptionalism.
The climate crisis, therefore, not only causes us to question our certainties, but imposes a revision of modern thought in all its manifestations. Freedom turns out to be not an absolute state, but an intricate and conditioned one, intertwined with a network of ecological and material relationships that we can no longer ignore.

SEA, COASTS AND GLOBAL IMAGINARY

The French historian Alain Corbin, in his book *The Lure of the Sea. The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World, 1750-1840*, observes how between the 18th and 19th centuries, during the height of the Enlightenment and around the emergence of Positivism, a radical transformation occurred in the Western collective imagination. The sea and the coast, associated with fear, danger and repulsion since ancient times, were starting to be perceived as sources of beauty, pleasure and desire. This change was not only aesthetic or cultural, but had profound social and economic implications,

inaugurating a new relationship between man and the marine environment, the most explicit manifestation of which would be translated into seaside tourism.
In many coastal cities – most of which were founded or prospered as a result of colonisation, such as Sydney, Hong Kong, Rio de Janeiro – proximity to water has acquired a symbolic value, inexorably becoming a global status symbol for the middle class, an expression of power, prestige and conquest. This aspiration is reflected in cities themselves, which have transformed into objects of desire, not only for those who live there, but also for global investors. Saskia Sassen describes such urban environments as frontier zones, places *par excellence* where power and impotence intertwine and collide (2014). These spaces not only become symbols of economic success but also make the inequalities and contradictions of contemporary capitalism extremely explicit. It has been recognized that the growing valorisation of coastal cities is historically linked to the unfolding of imperialism and capitalism, processes that Ghosh identifies as "among the principal drivers of the carbon economy" (2016, p. 10).
According to the Indian writer, climate change represents a radical challenge not only for the arts and humanities, but for contemporary culture as a whole. It undermines the foundations of our relationship with space, memory and identity. As he notes, our knowledge and memories are closely intertwined with the places we inhabit. This bond makes it extremely difficult to imagine the loss or abandonment of those spaces to which we are intimately linked. Ghosh reflects on the fact that this form of collective resistance to change is in fact a global phenomenon: "For most governments and politicians, as for most of us as individuals, to leave the places that are linked to our memories and attachments, to abandon the homes that have given our lives roots, stability, and meaning, is nothing short of unthinkable" (*ibid*, p. 54).
This attitude, although understandable, highlights one of the deepest contradictions of our era. While climate change makes explicit the limits of our presumed dominion over the environment, the economy, and in particular real estate as well as contemporary culture continue predominantly to be fuelled by an imagination based on control and expansion. Control and expansion in relation to territorial contexts which, as the maps on the following pages (90-101) highlight for the twelve global cities considered in this book – Abu Dhabi, Cape Town, Hong Kong,

Hong Kong waterfront. Courtesy S. Graziani, 2025

Los Angeles, Marseille, Naples, Oslo, Rijeka, Rio de Janeiro, Sydney, Tangier, Trieste – will see the pressure and effects brought about by climate change inexorably increase in the coming decades, beginning with a rise in average sea level. A phenomenon which, albeit with different degrees of intensity, will require important and expensive defence works, or alternatively a radical rethinking of the territory's functioning, up to the extreme remedy of abandoning large areas.
The transformation of the sea and the coasts into contexts in which symbols of prestige and power manifest reveals, therefore, not only a change in aesthetic sensitivity, but also the roots of an economic system that has accelerated the global ecological crisis. In this tension between memory and change, between desire and destruction, one of the most critical challenges of our time is played out: imagining and taking significant steps towards a future that recognizes the interdependence between man and nature, abandoning the illusion of invulnerability and absolute dominion.

CHANGES IN SIGN

If on the one hand the sciences are undoubtedly making progress to improve our understanding of reality, in the construction of virtual worlds and in the development of potentially revolutionary technologies such as artificial intelligence, on the other hand this same evolution paradoxically seems to make us incapable of dealing with our unhappiness and the problems that threaten us. The challenge posed by climate change is profoundly existential in nature, generating what psychoanalysts Miguel Benasayag and Gérard Schmit describe as a "*changement de signe du futur*", a change in the sign of the future (2003, auth. trans.). The future, which was once synonymous with opportunities and freedom, today appears as a looming threat, an unstable ground on which to lay the foundations to build a new paradigm.
Raising awareness about the evolution of climate change and its effects, in particular as regards the most extreme predictions, could trigger what the two psychoanalysts, inspired by the philosopher Spinoza, call sad passions, emotions that mark our era and give us a sense of impotence and disintegration. This state of mind reflects a profound crisis of the positivist paradigm, founded on the idea that the history of humanity is inevitably a history of progress, fuelled above all by the evolution of the

sciences. According to the two psychoanalysts, if in the past the Western world built its dreams and the search for happiness on the idea of endless scientific progress, today the very idea of the future appears imbued with negativity. Though science continues to advance our understanding of reality and to create increasingly sophisticated virtual worlds, it seems paradoxically incapable of addressing –if not actually exacerbating– the most significant challenges that humanity must face.

This positivist paradigm's moment of rupture can be identified in key events of modern history. One of the most significant caesuras in the field of pure science is the discovery of atomic energy and the subsequent development of nuclear weapons in the 1940s, making evident on a previously unknown scale the destructive potential of human knowledge. In the context of climate change, the turning point is linked to the introduction of the notion of the Anthropocene (Crutzen and Stoermer, 2000), which identifies the global and potentially irreversible impact of human activities on the planet. This carries profound ethical and political implications, highlighting the need for a radical rethink of global governance. Governing in an era dominated by the Anthropocene means rethinking economic, political and social models on a planetary scale, recognizing how sustainability and climate justice cannot be achieved according to a pure technocratic approach, based exclusively on rational thought and mere accumulation of data.

The climate issue, in fact, as Ghosh reminds us, is not just a technical or scientific problem, but a cultural crisis (2016, p. 9). It is a crisis that affects our collective imagination, our desires and our ability to conceive alternative futures. Our inability to tackle climate change is not because of a lack of knowledge or information, but rather a result of the difficulty of transforming our vision of the world, of reworking what we want as individuals and as a society. The challenge lies not only in reducing emissions or reforming economic systems, but even before that in transforming the collective imagination, redefining not only the very idea of well-being and happiness, but also that of beauty, starting from that of the spaces we walk through and inhabit.

POTENTIAL COASTAL FLOODING

Ludovico Centis, Matteo D'Ambros, Federico Vascotto

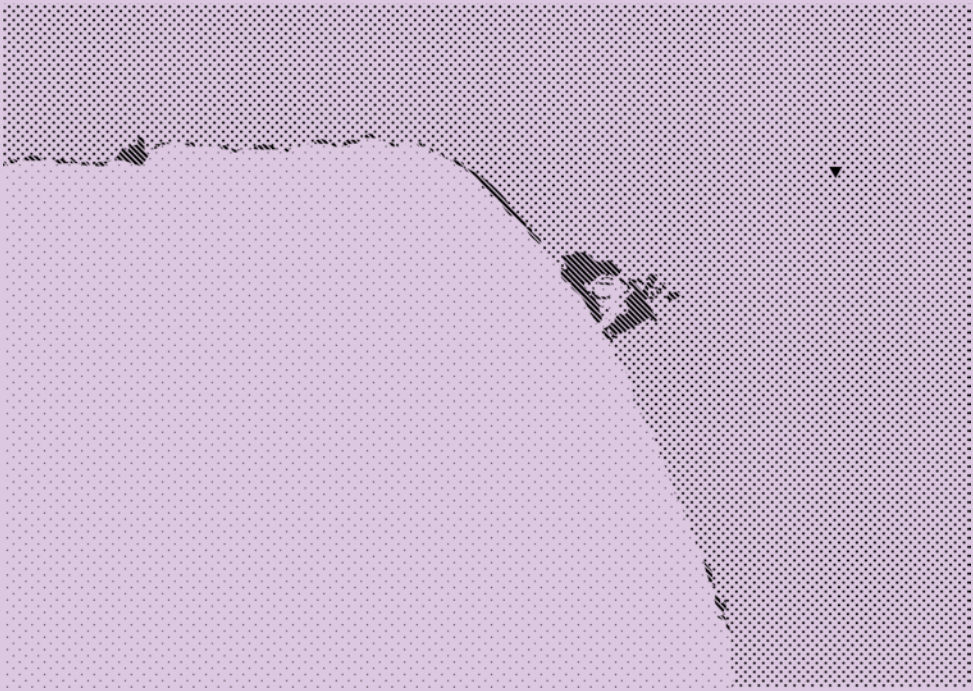
	Water
	Land
	Sea level rise
▼	Townhall

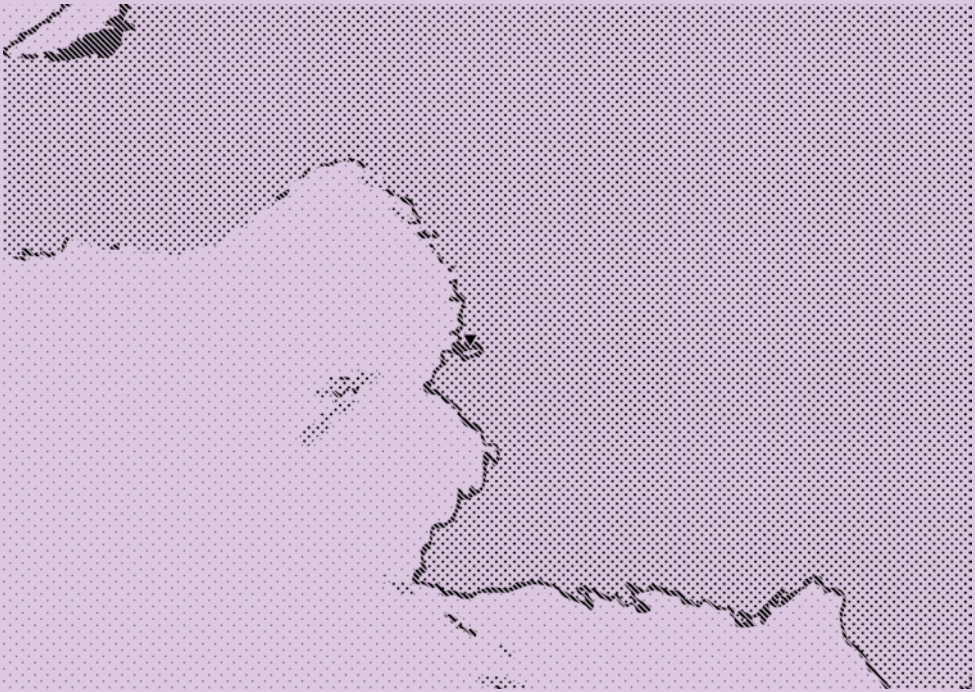
In the following pages (90-101) the twelve global coastal cities – Abu Dhabi, Cape Town, Hong Kong, Los Angeles, Marseille, Naples, Oslo, Rijeka, Rio de Janeiro, Sydney, Tangier, Trieste – and their surroundings are depicted in a hypothetical future scenario linked to the rise of the average sea level in the year 2100. The scale of representation examines a portion of territory larger than the administrative borders of each city (the black triangle identifies the seat of the municipality), allowing for a broader vision.

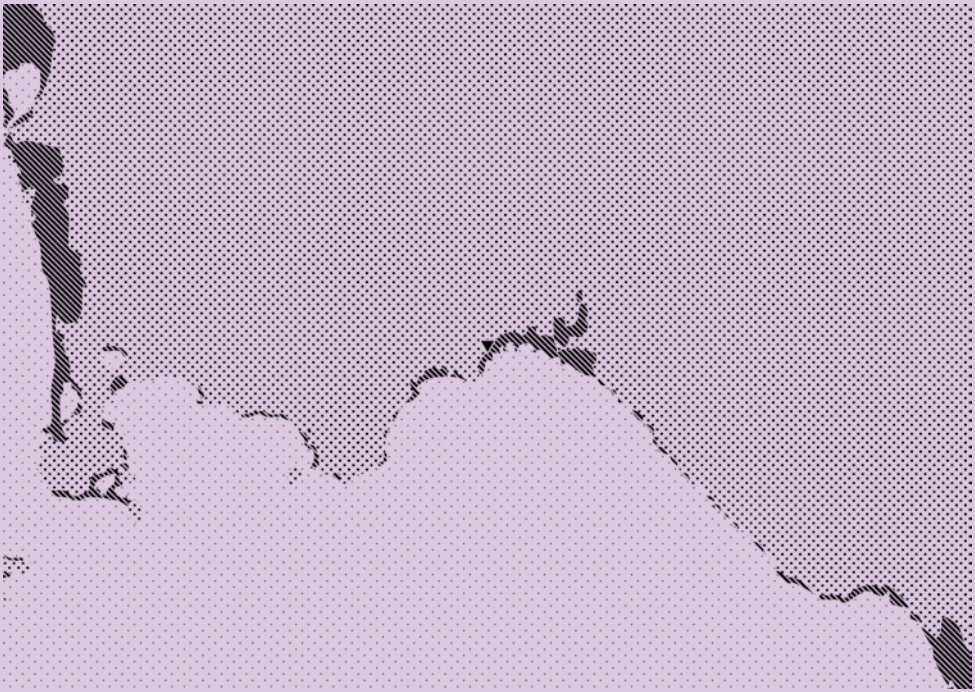
The data underlying these mappings comes from the Climate Central website (https://coastal.climatecentral.org), which generates interactive maps showing areas threatened by future sea level rise and coastal flooding depending on different parameters. The twelve maps, produced by Federico Vascotto, combine the planetary-scale model of coastal elevation with the most recent projections of future flooding levels.

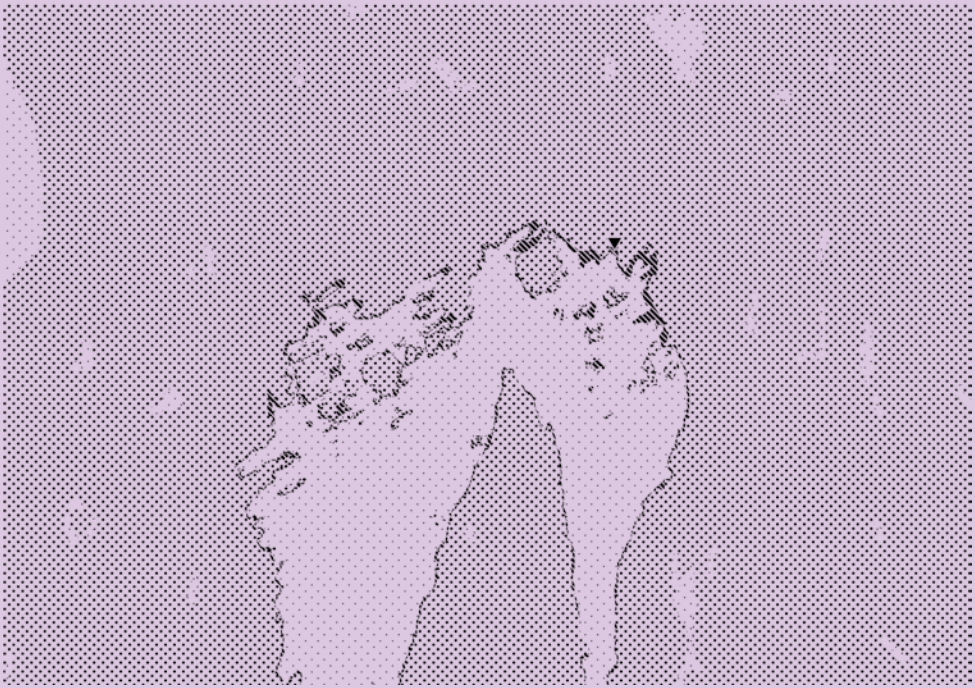
More specifically, the scenario taken into consideration is a forecast (Kopp et al., 2017) that provides local projections on a planetary scale (Kopp et al., 2014). These local projections provide different ranges of future sea level rise and are in turn based on the average global forecasts of the Fifth Assessment Report of the 2013 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). In the most adverse scenario, the possibility of an early decay of the Antarctic ice sheet is explicitly considered. In this case, annual global climate pollution would continue to grow consistently for most of the 21st century, with an increase of 3 or 4°C in average temperature.

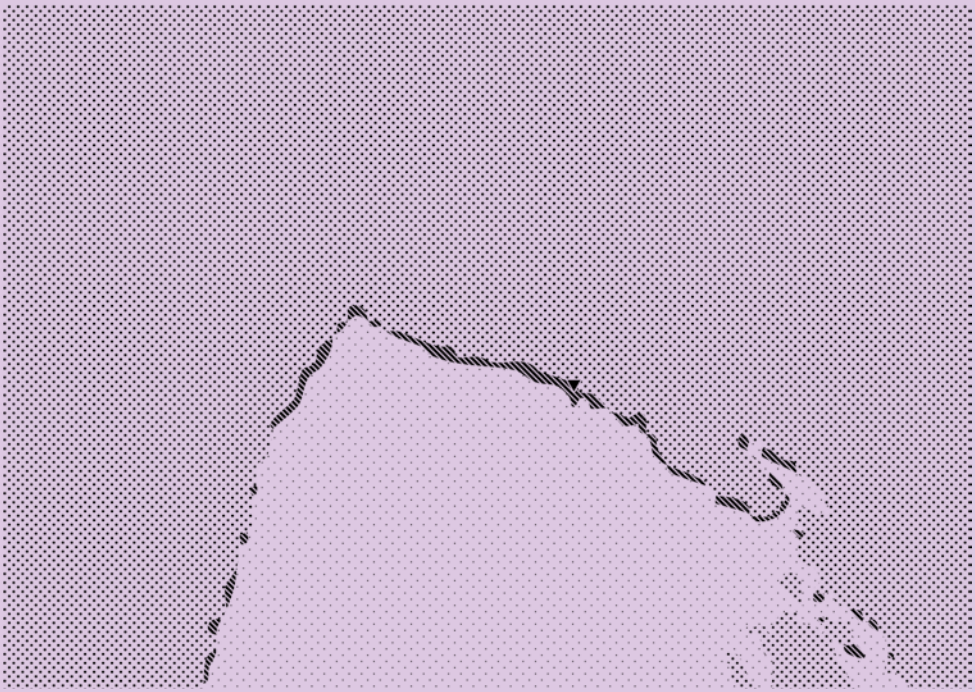
The hypothetical flooding represented in red in the mapping does not take into consideration the infrastructures that offer protection from this rise, such as embankments or natural ridges, therefore considering the height of the territories above sea level as the only parameter, albeit significant.

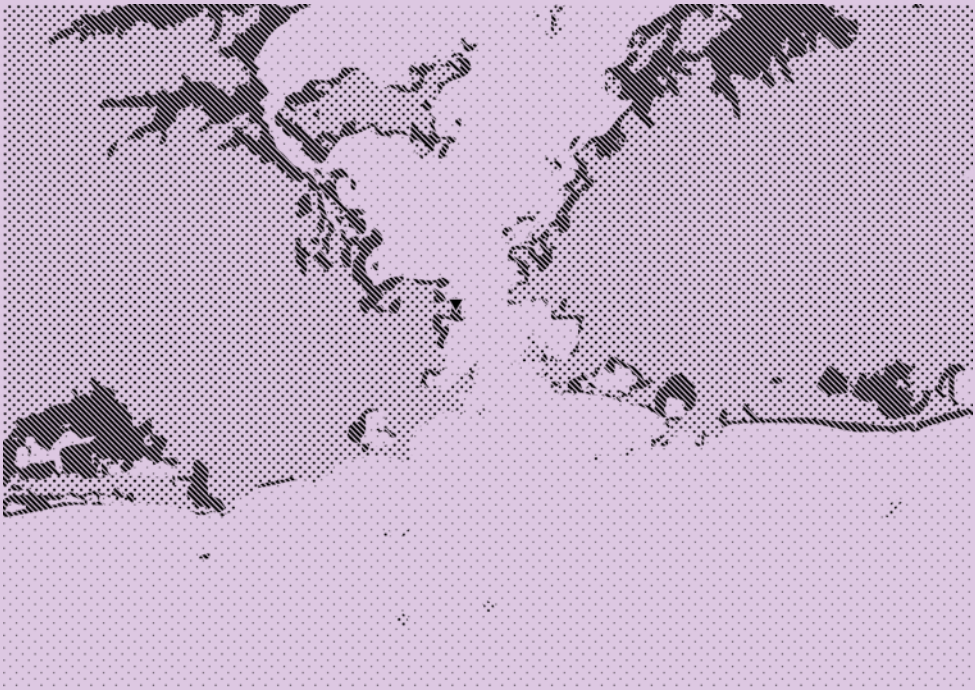


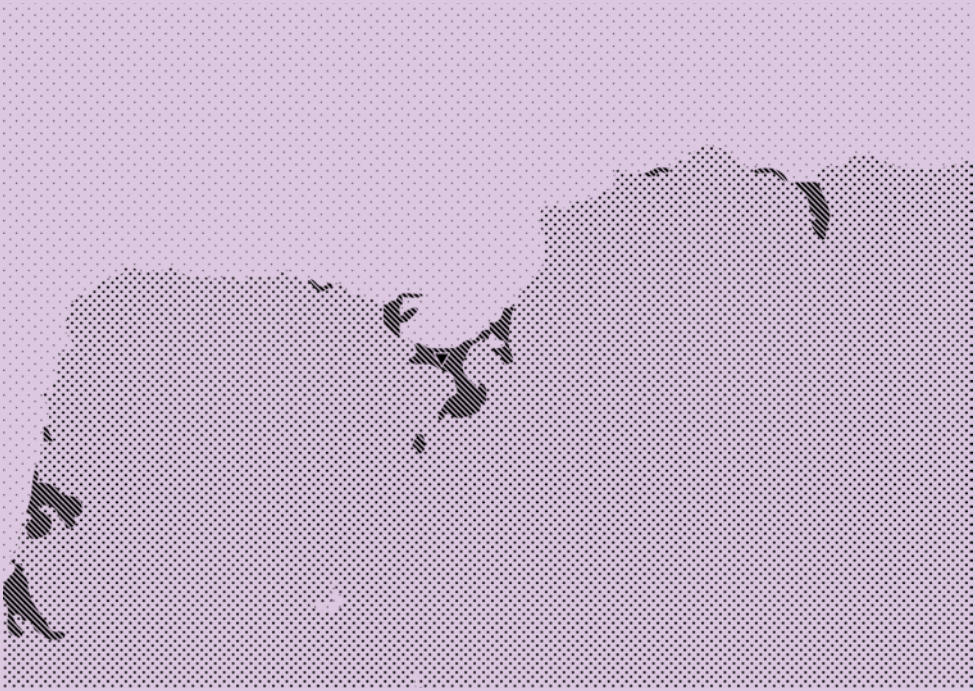


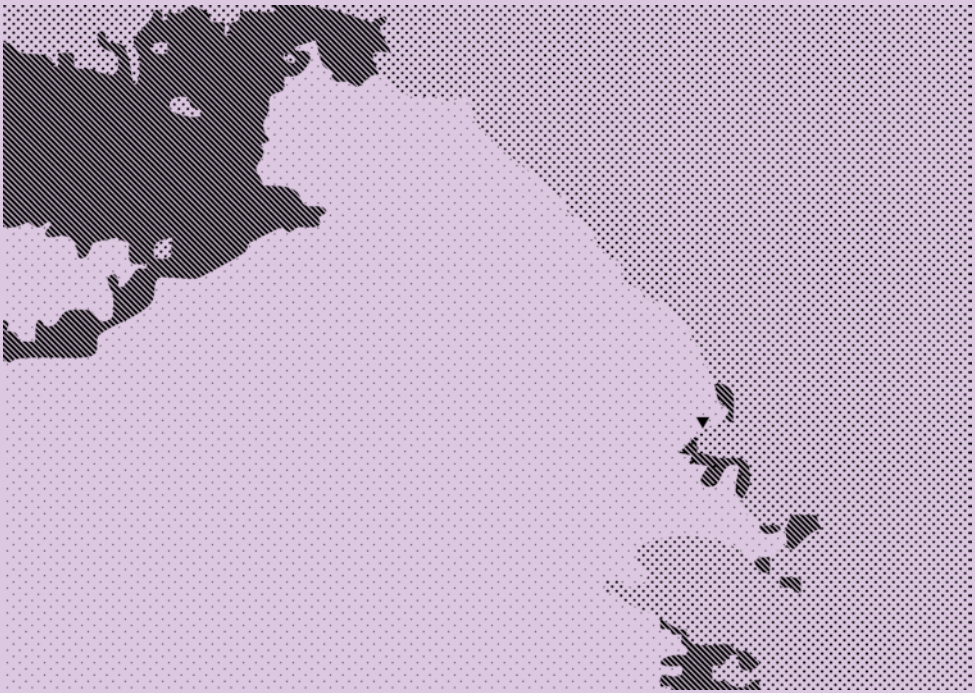




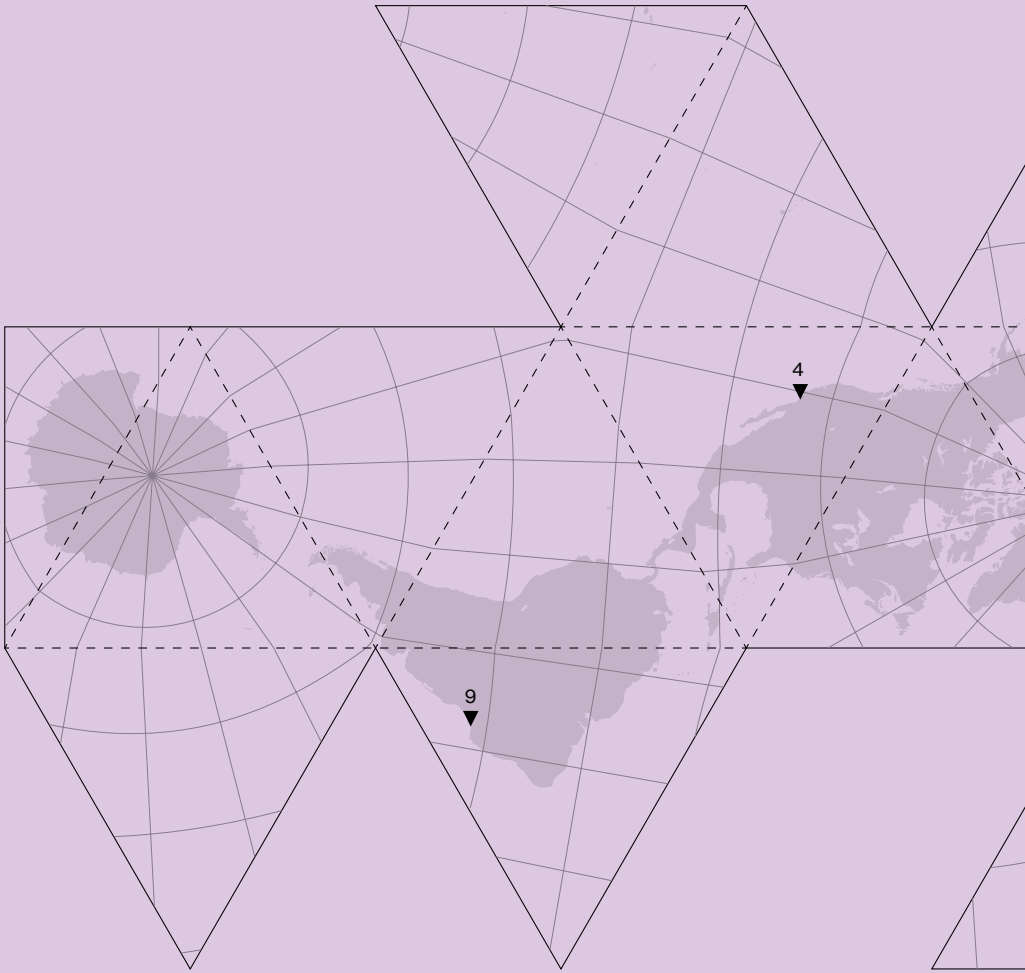




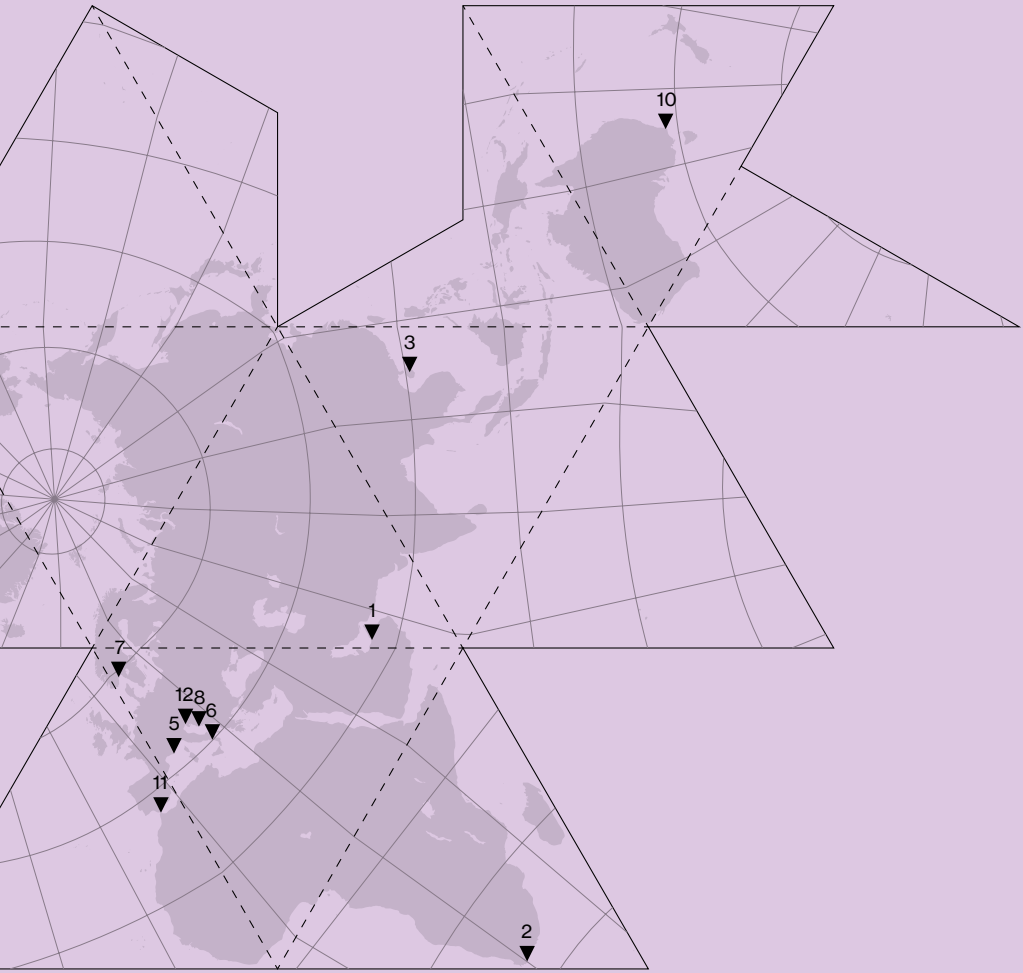




Map of the 12 global cities inspired by
R. B. Fuller, S. Sadao, Dymaxion Airocean World Map, 1954



1. Abu Dhabi, 2. Cape Town, 3. Hong Kong, 4. Los Angeles, 5. Marseille, 6. Naples, 7. Oslo, 8. Rijeka, 9. Rio de Janeiro, 10. Sydney, 11. Tangier, 12. Trieste



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Biographies

Ludovico Centis is an architect, founder of office The Empire and co-founder and editor of San Rocco magazine. He has been a partner at the architectural office Salottobuono from 2007 to 2012. Centis holds a PhD in urbanism (Università Iuav di Venezia) and is currently assistant professor in urbanism at the University of Trieste. His research focuses on the ways in which individuals and institutions, as well as desires and power, shape cities and landscapes. Centis has published numerous essays and scientific articles in Italian and international journals, including Domus, Town Planning Review, Landscape Journal, Log, OASE, San Rocco, Topos, Arch+, AA Files, Harvard Design Magazine. Recent monographs and edited volumes include *Reyner Banham: A set of actual tracks* (2024), *The Lake of Venice. A scenario for Venice and its lagoon* (2022, with Lorenzo Fabian) and *A parallel of ruins and landscapes* (2019).

Matteo D'Ambros is an architect with a PhD in urbanism (Università Iuav di Venezia) and is currently an Assistant Professor at the University of Trieste. He has previously taught at the Iuav University of Venice and the Polytechnic University of Turin. His academic and professional trajectory unfolds within the field of urban and landscape design, where his research and practice focus on the maintenance, transformation, and adaptive reuse of open spaces. Since 2008, he has been investigating the work of Roberto Burle Marx, editing with Barbara Boifava the books *Roberto Burle Marx. Verso un moderno paesaggio tropicale* (2014) and *Roberto Burle Marx. Un progetto per il paesaggio* (2009, 2010). He co-curated the exhibition *Up! Marghera on Stage* at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2016 and is founder of the environmental action group Ground Action.

Colophon

Speculations on the image of beauty
Public space and global coastal cities
Volume 1
Ludovico Centis, Matteo D'Ambros

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Ludovico Centis, Matteo D'Ambros
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Why are coastal areas so important? And, above all, why will they become even more crucial in the future? These are the fundamental questions at the core of the research presented in these volumes – questions that have guided the investigation of global coastal urban environment within the broader framework of contemporary spatial, ecological, and socio-economic transformations. The study outlines a synthetic profile of the physical and geographical dynamics of these urban contexts, examining their spatial, relational, and symbolic dimensions, in which nature, infrastructure, and huma settlements interact in complex and interdependent ways.

The publication in two volumes is dedicated to a reading – or re-reading – of the city, of open spaces, of the relationships between built spaces and of the ways in which space can be practised and transformed in the broadest sense. It is in these dynamic environments that the changes taking place in societies are revealed and become particularly evident.

This volume addresses a number of theoretical, historical, and interpretative issues concerning the relationship between public space and environmental change, in order to understand how coasts function both as thresholds and as potential laboratories of experimental design research. The essays of the authors endeavour to open the discussion, reflecting on the long-term transformation of our ways of perceiving, inhabiting and designing the urban environment at different scales. The commitment is to refocus attention on public urban spaces, seen as sensitive indicators and privileged laboratories for guiding policies of maintenance, preservation and adaptation. Included alongside these contributions is an interview with Ila Bêka and Louise Lemoine, artists and filmmakers who focus their research on experimenting with new narrative and cinematographic forms linked to architecture and the contemporary city.

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