

***Revolutionary landscapes as a chronicle of life:
Continuity in time and movements
(Milano, Italy & Plovdiv, Bulgaria- projects as case studies)***



What is a revolutionary landscape? Under our point of view a revolutionary landscape is the one able to enhance transformation and change. It is the one able to be open for a kind of 'permanent revolution'. However, 'revolution', is not understood here under its romantic approach linked with violent change from one day to another, but linked with continuous transformation and the quotidian events of everyday life of inhabitants. We would like to follow here the 'unbound pragmatism' defined by Brazilian philosopher R. Mangabeira Unger [1], which uses imagination as a tool for continuous change and permanent revolution, instead of using crisis as mandatory tool for change. This conforms the theoretical frame from which our approach to revolution and revolutionary landscapes emerges.

Where do we find these revolutionary landscapes, or their seeds, nowadays in our cities? We find the seeds of these revolutionary landscapes in the areas so called 'terrain vague' (Solá Morales, 1995) [2] or some others quite synonymous definitions: 'third landscape' (Clement, 2004), 'fourth nature' (Kowarik and Körner, 2005), 'nouvelle nature' (Giro, 2005), 'third wilderness' (Hofmeister, 2009) or 'second nature' (Geuze, 2010) [3]. What all these terms have in common is the reference to a successional nature or ecosystem, developed in a former urban or industrial site but within the sphere of influence of an urban environment. To definitely transform a 'terrain vague' or 'third landscape' into a revolutionary landscape, we consider also its overlapping with a quite dense and continue social activity that is produced with an important dose of immersion within the geography of this 'terrain vague' or waste ground. Only in this case, these landscapes can develop their full potential. These last questions set, for

our revolutionary areas, the following conditions: to be surrounded by residential fabric and to have the extension of some hectares- we don't consider here single small abandoned plots.

To define this study case of already existing revolutionary landscapes, we have taken as reference the city of Madrid –our homeland- which has a collection of around thirty areas, with minimum surface of approximately 90Ha- adding, a total of 2.000Ha within the city [4]. Through the direct observation of these places, walking along them, we have been recording the different alternative social practices of the citizens in their encounter with this geography. These practices encourage transformation of ecosystems, and diversity of social dynamics and politic of the space. We observe practices of 'radical imagination' [5] for a continue revolution. We find here a 'radical openness' [6] for reinventing our cities, and mostly, we find here the reality of time, a real time where we are conscious of changes and transformations. A short review of the practices that enhance the revolutionary character- being ready for on-going and uninterrupted transformations within plurality- would include mainly 'Civic Ecology practices' [7], but also playgrounds and popular sports or domestic extensions. It is interesting in terms of reinvention both, what is done here- unexpected programs- and how is done- unexpected implementations and associations. Revolutionary landscapes are areas of impunity and freedom that call for a non-habitual action.

But these revolutionary landscapes habitually appear in the margins, and their innovations remain there. Only sometimes, are able to transcend to more central spaces- in social, geographical and political terms. Let's put our attention in these spaces characterized by centrality...

What if we would insert at the central areas of our cities these revolutionary landscapes in order to re-imagine and re-invent the core of our urban ecosystems? Could we transcend the limits of the margins bringing revolution where centrality, power and stereotypes predominate? The answers to these last questions are linked to the two case studies of research through design I bring here: Central Square in Plovdiv, Bulgaria; and Piazza Castello in Milan, Italy [8]. In both cases, we put our attention in the central squares of these cities, some of the main public spaces of Plovdiv and Milan. Central areas where urbanity, public space, culture and history, also archaeology- mainly in Plovdiv- are intertwined. But both places share also the decay and obsolescence of their public space as it was conceived. After a long succession of chaotic and disconnected interventions that at the same time were trying to conserve and respect such representational areas avoiding strong changes, they are

not a chronicle of life anymore but just a void representation of it. For this reason, they can be just at the opposite place of the revolutionary landscapes we refer to, where citizen's life and the landscape evolve at the same pace. In the core of these cities time has been somehow adulterated and desynchronized of life. Vegetation there, lacks biodiversity, one cannot feel seasonal changes, and their public space respond only to stereotyped actions that are repeated once and again, without a real exchange or dialogue in between the alive organisms, human or not, and the environment. What we achieve once we integrate some sparks of revolutionary landscapes here, is to mix them with these enlarged dimensions of culture, history and centrality. This conjunction can produce under our point of view, the change of the entire urban ecosystem into a more integrated ecological program. Let's see which aspects allow the creation of this infiltration of permanent quotidian revolution in such a context.

We will move now in between *spatial cognition and movements*, and *embodied politics and performances*.

Spatial cognition and movements...

If the goal is to enhance continuous revolution and transformations, people involved in these landscapes must establish a strong dialogue with them. Actually, it is in the relationship with others and with our environments that we develop our ecosystem. In this sense we want to enhance plurality of individuals, trusting in their capacities and their own utopias to be realized. It is because of that, that these designs focus in the human being as an embodied organism- in continuous exchange with the medium- with a perceptive apparatus that correlates with the affordances found in the environment [⁹] and with a whole integrative system in which cognition, is related to the body-mind holistic structure- what is called "soma" [¹⁰]. These designs, are thought taking into account somatic interactions as a way of "awakening" the self, enhancing possibilities for development and transformation of both, inhabitants and landscapes, they evolve together [¹¹]. It is through movement that this embodied spatial and holistic cognition is produced.

Reached this point we cannot talk about these landscapes without talking about the 'self' and it is through the different kinds of self-knowledge that psychologist Ulrich Neisser conceives [¹²] that we will develop our considerations in relation to our two case studies of research through design.

First, he refers to what he calls 'ecological self', that would be the self as perceived with respect to the physical environment [¹³]. What do we propose in these revolutionary landscapes concerning the physical environment? Coming back to our reference model, one of the main things that emerge when you visit a 'terrain vague', almost always present, is a rough terrain, a hilly topography that on one hand, makes you to interact with your whole being with the physical medium, paying more attention, being engaged, and on the other choreographs somehow a different way of movement. A movement clearly distinguished from the automatic one that normally we are used to develop in the city and its public spaces. In addition, this produces also overwhelming and non-expected experiences, related to viewpoints and topological relations for observing the city in a non-habitual way. When we turn to look at Plovdiv Central Square in Bulgaria, we see clearly big opportunities to enhance alternative movements able to encourage transformations through topography. The nowadays square is full of different levels because of the presence of important archaeological ruins and layers coming mainly from the Roman Forum of Ancient Plovdiv (1st-5th centuries). All these levels are disconnected, creating a big chaos in the public space, which was conceived as a flat surface, now full of disruptions and holes. In this way, the creation of a *new topography* using the terrain coming from the archaeological excavations allows a more continue walking-through this environment, working with proprioceptive experience that 'delivers a corresponding sense of body position relative to the environment, or a corresponding sense of self' [¹⁴] in the sense that Neisser call 'ecological self'. The development of this new topography configured as a collection of hills, multiplies the possibilities in topological terms of how we relate to our environment in this public space. We can be under the small mountains, on top of the hills, in the valleys... a lot of proprioceptive relationships are created. And our movements produce shifting ways of intimacy, perception, or programmatic possibilities. We design atmosphere related to the whole somatic experience. Somehow, in this way we enhance also to pay attention to ourselves through awareness of what we perceive and feel, as R. Shusterman says 'many qualities that constitute atmosphere are perceived through the senses that are distinctively bodily- namely, our proprioceptive, kinesthetic, vestibular, tactile senses' [¹⁵]. Actually, in the second project for Piazza Castello in Milan, we follow the same strategy related to the organization of a choreographing topography- this time as we will see because of historical and memory reasons- and in addition, different textures, and tactile landmarks are included giving the possibility of perceiving using not only our far distance senses but also the ones linked to our skin and basic coordinates. Of course this information is always present but normally we don't give awareness to it. Hence, it is the aim of these landscapes to enhance our full

immersion in order to create a powerful engagement of our 'ecological self'. The other aspects that contribute to this are in relation with the non-human organisms on site. The aim of these new topographies, set in Plovdiv and Milan, is also to host a collection of autochthonous species enhancing biodiversity and following the 'behaviour' of the 'third landscape', able to show really different configurations along seasons, revealing a real time dynamic. As an alternative to short cut lawns and flower beds, often found in these public spaces and needed to be replanted every year, we tapped into the wealth of biodiversity of native, stress-tolerant species, having low water and nutrient requirements, present in rural areas or waste-grounds- our seeds for revolutionary landscapes. The annual and biennial chosen species are self-seeding which don't need to be replanted. The landscape design, hence, offers dynamic vegetation, changing with the natural seasonal patterns and transmitting the cultural awareness to appreciate the colours of the blooms and the winter shapes of "brown" vegetation. Most of the species are pollinators attractive. They are able to configure powerful experiences in terms of atmosphere and learning. They also qualify spaces giving the 'ecological self' a powerful awareness [¹⁶].

Embodied politics and performances...

Continuing with our trip within the self and the revolutionary landscapes, we can talk now about another kind of the self-knowledge: the 'extended self'. 'It is the self as it was in the past and as we expect it to be in the future, known primarily on the basis of memory' [¹⁷]. This is very important in our considerations about revolutionary landscapes and selves, as we are saying from the beginning that one of the main characteristics of this continuous revolution is the capacity to produce transformation from quotidian everyday events through imagination. To begin with, memory is a kind of imagination, and to be able to have expectations of ourselves in the future we need also to project, to imagine. How to enhance this through design? In our two case studies, we try to reveal the current of time both, through connection with history and culture, but also through the continuous transformation using a kind of creative cycle of destruction and reconstruction that each inhabitant can follow and be involved with. Let's focus for a while in the project for Piazza Castello in Milan. The soft mounds created as new topography have a strong connection with history. They recall several famous historical paintings of the site from the centuries XIV and XVIII [¹⁸], which show this kind of landscape surrounding the Castello Sforzesco- historical building that governs the square. But also the hills perimeter builds a memory and opens a big window for continuous transformation: surrounding the mounds, the pavement will be set anew in the whole area following different stages. In first row near the hills, is

proposed an “ornamental pavement” drawing a nature geometrical pattern. This drawing, somehow wants to remember that these hills are part of a “Second Nature” emerging under an urban and cultural process so it is a kind of different generation of naturalness able to combine living organisms and natural structures with some synthetic natures, the ornamental ones. This public ornament wants also to establish a dialogue with Leonardo Da Vinci “Salla delle Asse” inside the Castle, where an exuberant ornament linked to nature and vegetation is set. This ornamental pavement is made in rubber, printed concrete and some embedded pieces to configure some of the drawings. The embedded pieces will be recycled pieces of the existing elements on site, in this way, the traces of the “story” of the place will be host on its pavement, on its skin, allowing time to go ahead adding layers but also more wisdom to the relation in between humans, non human organisms and their environments, under an on-going process of dismantling and constructing the new from the layers of the reality on place. Melting memory, innovation and continuous transformation. Continuing this kind of ‘cradle to cradle’ daily revolution, this is extended in the project also to other kinds of pavement, public furniture, and different reconstructions with dismountable pieces, giving birth to seasonal rituals and celebrations, where memory and projections are overlapped.

This capability of transforming our environments is linked also to the capability of changing the relations of power and cooperation in between us. Revolutionary landscapes aim to enhance ‘innovative cooperation’- following Mangabeira Ungers- for citizens, building things together, experimenting over time, reinventing... and also observing, along time, these transformations... which bring us into the ‘interpersonal self’ but also into embodied politics and performances. Powering plurality and original selves, innovative cooperation creates practices and habits that reduce the distance in between our ordinary activities that conserve our social world, and the extraordinary activities through which, step, by step, we change that social world [¹⁹].

The ‘interpersonal self’ is the self as engaged in social interaction. Again like the other selves, most of the relevant information is essentially kinetic, in other words, consists of structures over time. But in this case come into existence only when two or more people are engaged in personal interaction [²⁰]. For this, both projects, Milan and Plovdiv set a collection of open, natural and spontaneous auditoriums or urban scenarios conformed by the topography. We imagine these platforms as areas for citizen’s expression, urban debate and social exchange. Once again the aim is to enhance plurality and reinvention, not only through spontaneous individual

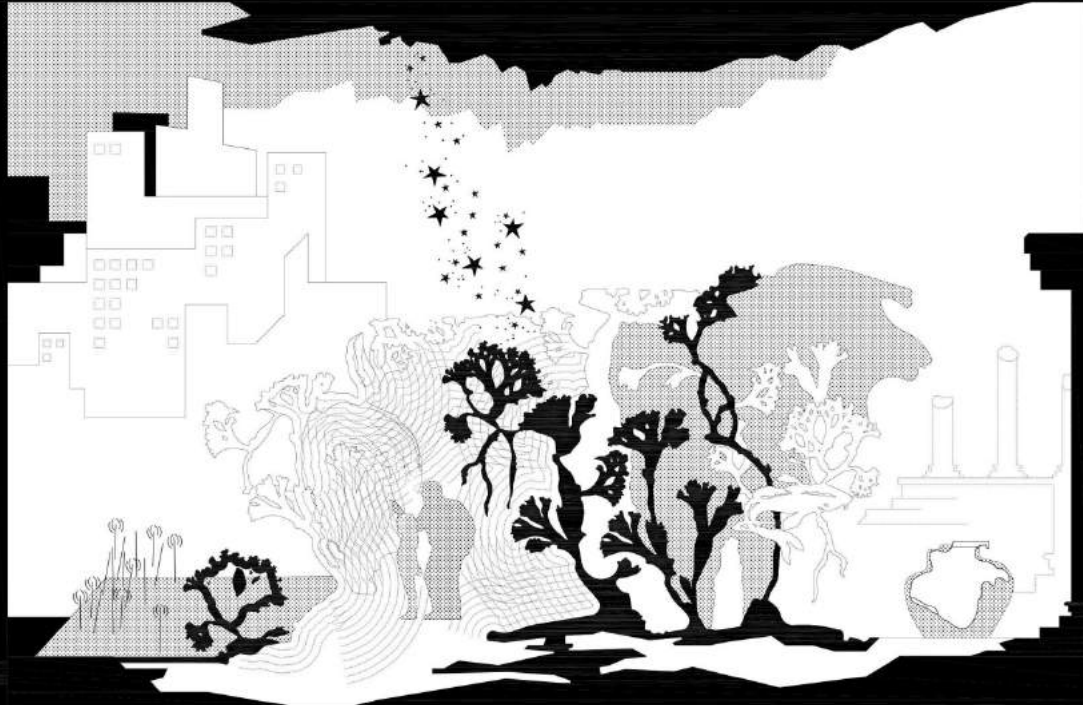
performances- we have talked about them concerning the 'ecological self'- but also through cooperative reinventions and appropriations. The designs open everyday life quotidian events to transformations and exchanges, and intertwine social life of an array of different individuals, with arts and cultural performances available to everybody and done by everybody. The scenarios are the places to be programmed either in a collective communitarian way, made by citizens associations or groups of people; either sometimes, under a public management. The combined management aim also to show how collaborative processes in between different layers of society can be an optimal way to train experimental politic evolutions. In this way environment –urban revolutionary landscapes- and people lives will continue evolving at the same time. Therefore, we think that revolutionary landscapes inserted at the heart of the cities, in their relation with each of us, can be the vehicle to achieve what Laclau and Mouffe call 'radical democracy' which has as one of its main aim to preserve one's own power for 'radical imagination', which means the capability for utopia, for thinking the other [²¹].

But how these more intimate aspects of us like citizens can be considered into our designs? The two last kinds of self-knowledge can help us on this: 'The private self' has to do with the 'conscious experiences that are not available to anyone else. Some of these are the inner aspects of perception and action; others- dreams for example- are quite independent of the individual's present circumstances' [²²]. 'The conceptual self' refers to 'the concept that each of us has of him or herself as a particular person in a familiar world' [²³]. These both are related to the radical democracy project that we have just mentioned above, and count with some spaces within the designed projects. In between the topography soft accidents, we can find intimacy, somehow, public spaces just for one, ready for own utopias... and in the flux of interpersonal, ecological, and extended knowledge, we hope to be able to open- to enrich- the catalogue of 'conceptual selves', but also of possible environments, further from the stereotypes to which sometimes we are attached.

Taking into account how the core of the cities are always maintained as something "untouchable", to consider their evolution, including a second nature containing the seeds of a revolutionary landscape at the core of the urban experience, can be a model to extrapolate to other cities bringing a much more imaginative and wise urban ecosystem and society. If our environments define us, these projects for continuous reinvention through imagination and somatic experience maybe, can add some other layers to our urban ecosystems, making them more vivid and able to promote the whole potential of individuals... individuals engaged in their revolutionary landscapes.

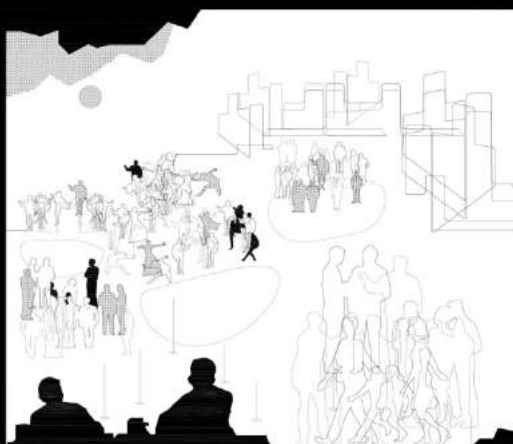
Graphic epilogue:

COLLECTIVE HUMAN AND ECOLOGICAL PROJECT



A revolutionary Landscape occurs as a transition between present and history but also, between today and a projected future as a collective human and ecological project.

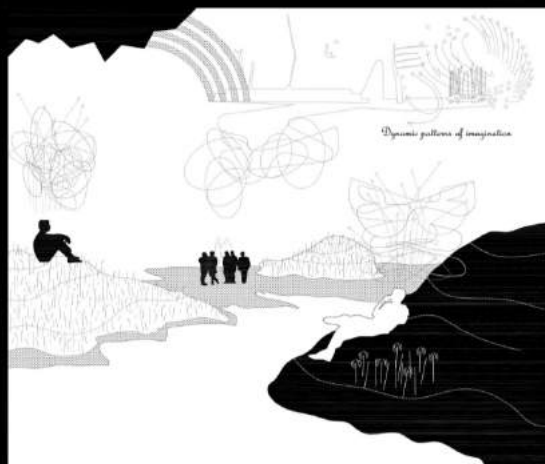
DIFFERENT FORM OF SPACE PRODUCTION



**"DIFFERENT FORM OF SPACE PRODUCTION:
... a production where lived space can prevail over conceived"**

Thomas H. Raftery & Christopher 2018

THE AIM OF A RADICAL DEMOCRACY PROJECT



**"ONE AIM OF A RADICAL DEMOCRACY PROJECT should be to preserve one's
own power for "radical imagination", which means the capability for
utopia, for thinking the other..."**

James H. Raftery 2018

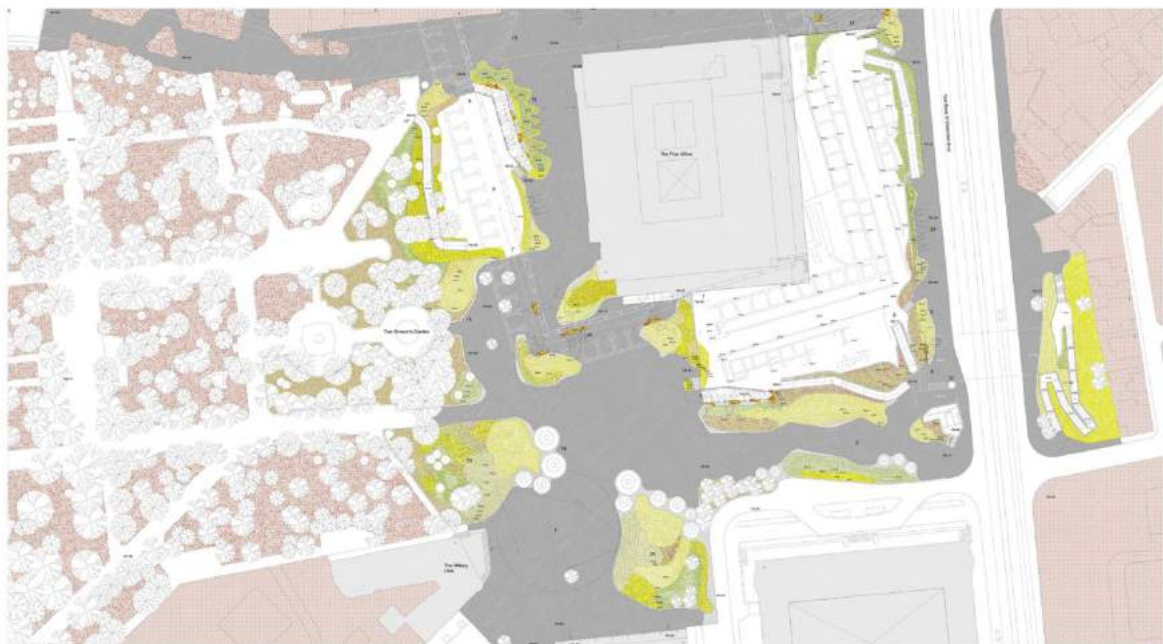
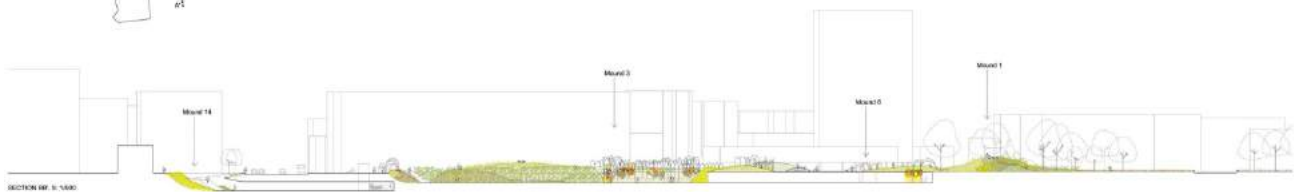
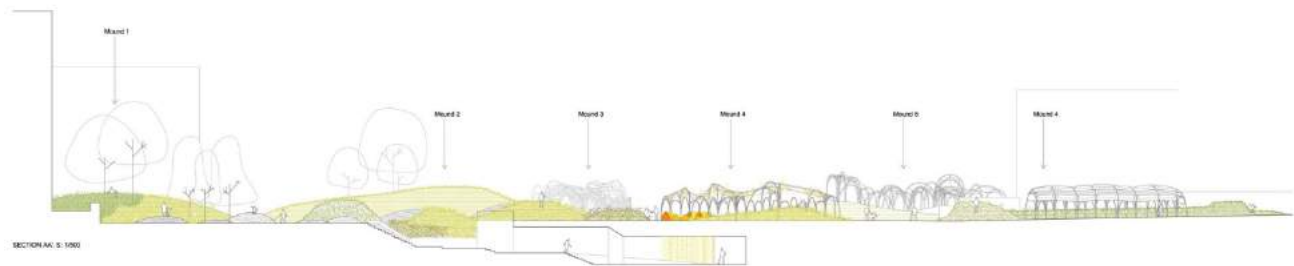
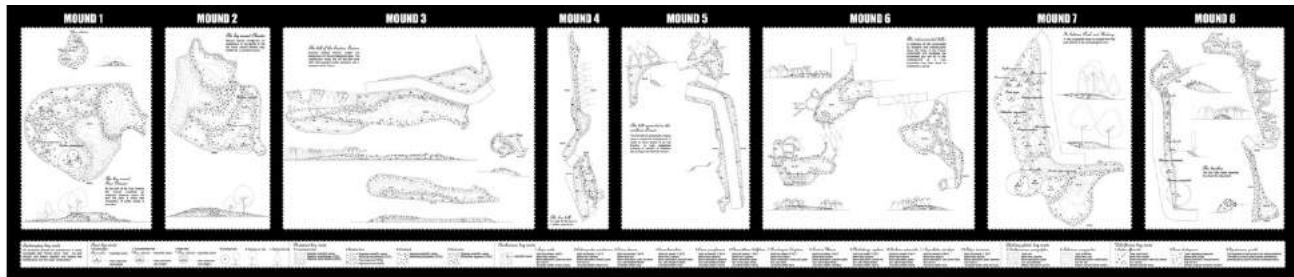
Nowadays Central Square, Plovdiv, Bulgaria; and Piazza Castello, Milan, Italy



‘Terrain Vague’ Study case: Madrid, Spain

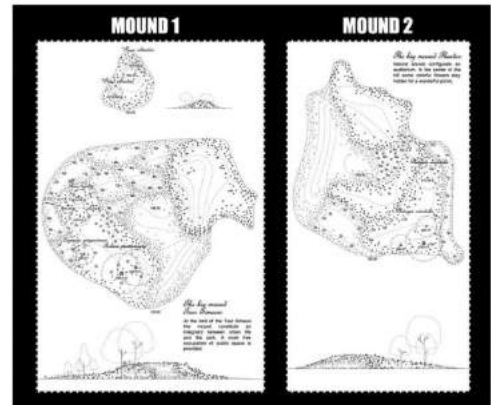


Plovdiv Central Square, Bulgaria:





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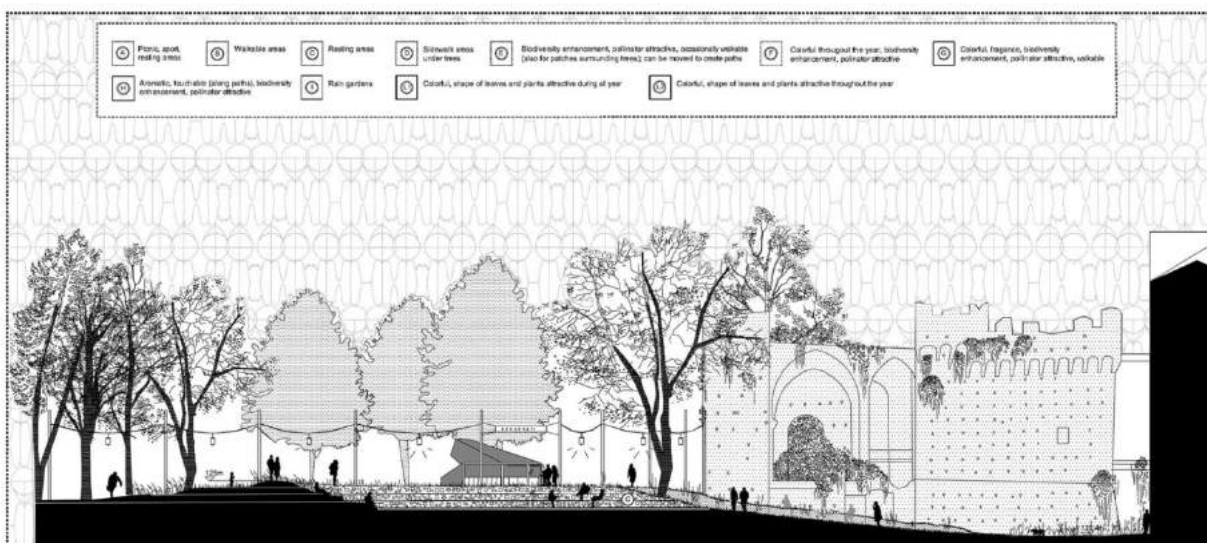
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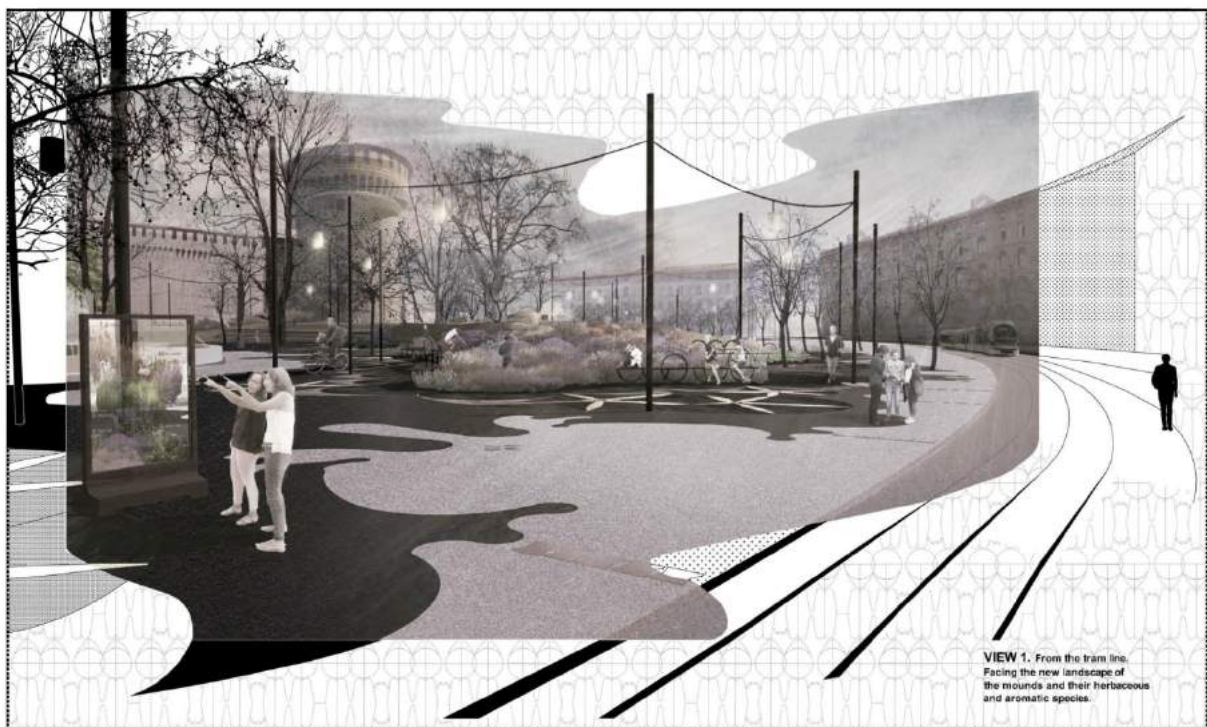
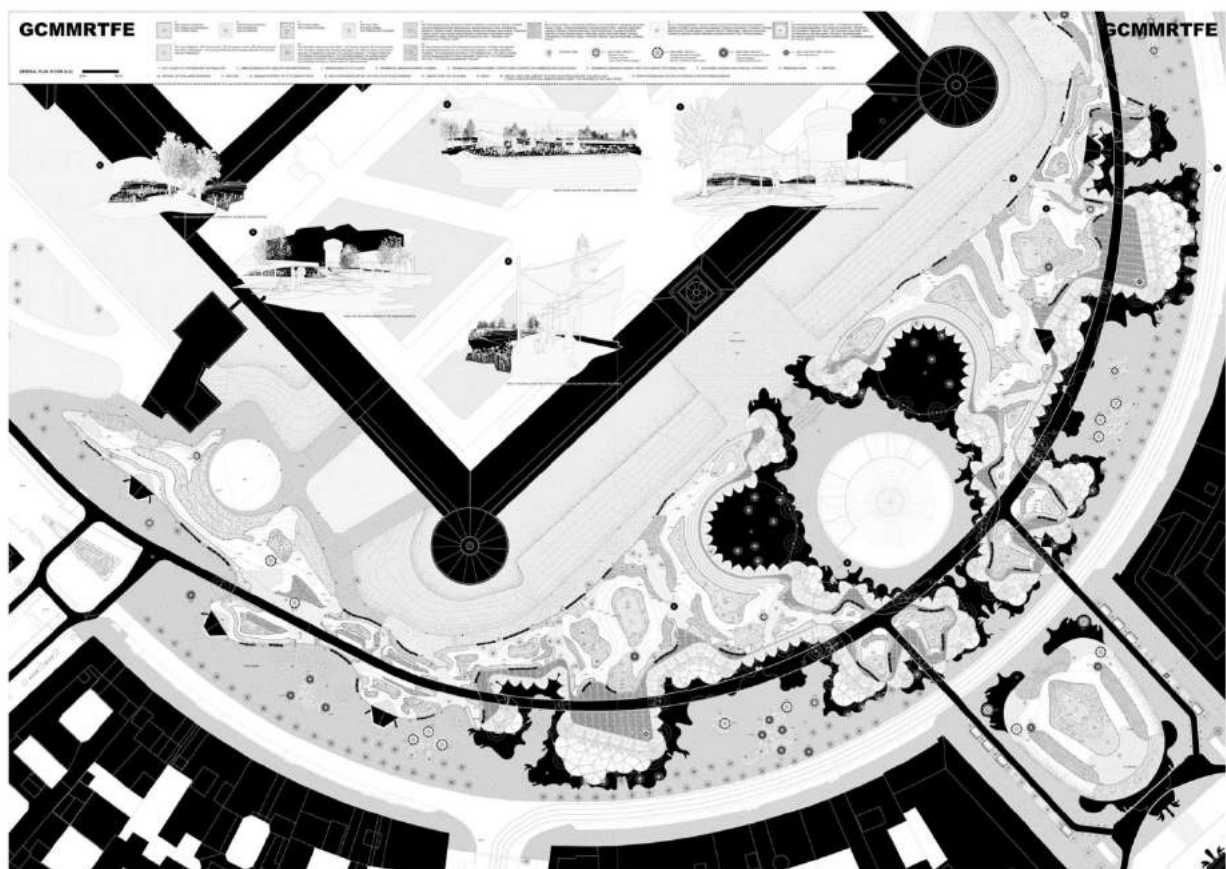


REFERENCES



Piazza Castello, Milan, Italy:





Notes:

[¹] Mangabeira Ungers, R. 2007. *The Self Awakened. Pragmatism Unbound*. USA: President and Fellows of Harvard College.

[²] De Solá Morales, I. 1995. *Terrain Vague*. In: *Anyplace*. New York: Anyone Corporation/ The MIT Press, p. 118-123.

[³] These terms can be understood and compared at: Barron, P. & Mariani, M. 2014. *Terrain Vague. Interstices at the edge of the pale*. USA: Routledge.

[⁴] From 2014- to nowadays- a group of studies was created by M^a Auxiliadora Gálvez in Madrid in order to know better the 'revolutionary landscapes' of the city. Together with Ana Fernández (Architect), Emilio Luque (Sociologist, participating from 2014 to 2015), Oscar Miravalles (Forestry Engineer), Víctor Moreno (Filmmaker), David Prieto (Sociologist, in the project from 2015), Alejandra Salvador (Architect) and Rocío Santo-Tomás (Architect, in the project since 2016) the group have been walking and studying these areas. Some of the discoveries can be followed and read in: Krasny, M. & Snyder, K. 2016. *Civic Ecology. Stories about love of life, love of place*. USA: Cornell University civic Ecology Lab, p. 110-120 and in the paper presented at the congress of FES (Spanish Federation of Sociology) 2016, *Espacios en espera. La ecología cívica como agente de transformación urbana y reinención social*.

[⁵] We refer here to 'radical imagination' in the terms that refer to it Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in relation with their ideas for a 'radical democracy project'. Laclau, E. & Mouffe, Ch. 1985. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. UK/ USA: Verso.

[⁶] We refer here to 'radical openness' in the terms that refers to it bell hooks. 1990. *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*. Boston, MA: South End Press.

[⁷] Civic Ecology practices are developed by citizens in broken places. They do so in order to recover their connection with the environment and in some way heal both, the environment and themselves. The principles of Civic Ecology are defined in: Krasny, M. & Tidball, K. 2015. *Civic Ecology. Adaptation and Transformation from the Ground Up*. USA: The MIT Press.

[⁸] Both projects have been developed within the frame of international competitions. Piazza Castello's project was finalist and exhibited to all the citizens at the Castello Sforzesco in Milan, in February, (2017).

[⁹] To go deep into this see: Von Uexküll, J. 1934. *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
See also: Gibson, J. 1977. *The Theory of Affordances*. In: *Perceiving, Acting, and Knowing: Toward an Ecological Psychology*. USA: Lawrence Erlbaum

[¹⁰] The term 'soma' has its origins in the Greek word for body. Nowadays it is used in philosophy to design 'the living, sentient, purposive body' it is a way of designating embodiment but without all the problematic associations of the terms 'body' or 'flesh'. It is referred to the 'sentient lived body rather than merely a physical body'. Quotes from Richard Shusterman, to go deep see: Shusterman, R. 2012. *Thinking through the Body. Essays in Somaesthetics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 3, 5.

[¹¹] To go deep into these ideas see: Ingold, T. 2000. *The Perception of the Environment*. USA: Routledge.

See also: Berleant, A. 1992. *The Aesthetics of the Environment*. USA: Temple University Press.

[¹²] Neisser, U. 1988. *Five kinds of Self-knowledge*. Atlanta: Department of Psychology, Emory University.

[¹³] 'I am the person here in this place engaged in this particular activity'. *Ibíd.*, p. 386

[¹⁴] Gallagher, Shaun. 2005. *How the Body Shapes the Mind*. New York: Oxford University Press, p.7.

[¹⁵] *Ibíd.*, p. 235

[¹⁶] It is interesting how through awareness and training of proprioception- taking into account the discoveries done in Neurosciences- we develop the body representations of our nervous system. We refer to 'Body image' and 'Body schema', both being the ones receiving nowadays more consensus about how the nervous system work talking about sensory-motor activities. 'Body image' is the conscious image or representation, owned, but abstract and disintegrated, and appears to be something differentiated from its environment. 'Body image' groups all the other representations about the body that are not used for action, whether they are perceptual, conceptual or emotional. 'Body schema' guide action and movement, operates in a nonconscious way, is prepersonal, functions holistically, and is not something apart from its environment. To go deep in these concepts see: Gallagher, Shaun. 2005. *How the Body Shapes the Mind*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Under our approach about imaginative continuous transformations, these continuous re-adaptations at the level of our nervous systems are fundamental to be enhanced through the immersion into the designed landscapes.

The 'Laboratory of Somatic applied to Architecture and Landscape' directed by the author- M^a Auxiliadora Gálvez- uses these same principles in pedagogy of architecture and landscape. The Laboratory is developed since 2016 at the San Pablo C.E.U University, E.P.S Faculty of Architecture in Madrid, Spain.

[¹⁷] *Ibíd.*, p. 395

[¹⁸] One quite famous is the painting by Bernardo Belloto: *Il Castello Sforzesco*, 1744. Some others, showing even more radical topographies are from unknown authors.

[¹⁹] *Ibíd.*, p.206

[²⁰] *Ibíd.*, p.391

[²¹] *Ibíd.*, p. 190

[²²] *Ibíd.*, p.398

[²³] *Ibíd.*, p.400