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INNOCENT GAMES UNEXPECTED PLAYS¹

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Abstract

The game is never innocent. Neither is architecture. Their innocence is rather that of a weapon. The device is power. Game and architecture, both retain a strict relationship with the rules (of the game, of the architecture); they are generators of the happening, of openings and uncertainties, of possible (un)expected multiplications. Architecture as a game refers to the life of a work after design and construction, to the ability to be a tool that welcomes life. It is a way of designing open architectures which recycle the rules (and the memory) by presenting them with the apparent innocence of children's play, poised between the rationally fragile and the relationally shy.

The topic is expressed through design experimentation on architectures and infrastructures of war that constitute a complex system of visible and invisible elements, palimpsests on the move of both present traces and cancellations. The project suggests a new narration of the Eastern military border through the superimposition of heterogeneous contemporary strata. The *void* of the urban margin constitutes the context for trying to *live by playing*, by recycling the *in between* space that counterpoints invisible military fronts and so on.

Keywords: Architecture as a game, Design strategies and tactics, Urban regeneration, Marginal spaces, War landscapes

Streszczenie

Gra nigdy nie jest niewinna. Architektura również. Ich niewinność jest raczej niewinnością broni. Siła jest narzędziem. Gra i architektura – obie mają bardzo silne powiązanie z zasadami (zasadami gry, zasadami architektury), to one generują działanie się, otwarcia, niepewności, możliwe (nie)spodziewane multiplikacje. Architektura jako gra odnosi się do życia dzieła po jego zaprojektowaniu i realizacji, do zdolności bycia narzędziem przyjmującym życie. Jest to sposób projektowania otwartej architektury, w której zasady (jak również pamięć) podlegają przetworzeniu, przez zaprezentowanie ich z widoczną niewinnością dziecięcej zabawy, utrzymującej się pomiędzy racjonalnie delikatnym, a relacyjnie wstydliwym.

Temat wyrażony jest poprzez eksperyment projektowy związany z architekturą i infrastrukturą wojny, która konstytuuje złożony system widocznych i niewidocznych elementów, palimpsestów teraźniejszych śladów i usunięć. Ten projekt sugeruje nową narrację wschodniej granicy militarnej, poprzez superimpozycję współczesnych, heterogenicznych warstw. *Pustka* urbanistycznych obrzeży ustanawia kontekst dla próby *życia poprzez grę*, przez przetwarzanie przestrzeni pomiędzy, która stanowi kontrapunkt dla niewidzialnego frontów wojny itd.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura jak gra, strategie i taktyki projektowe, regeneracja miejska, przestrzeń marginalna, wojna, krajobrazy

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1. Game and architecture

The game is never innocent. Neither is architecture.

Their innocence is rather that of a weapon. The device is power.

Game and architecture, both retain a strict relationship with the rules (of the game, of the architecture); they are generators of the happening, of openings and uncertainties, of possible (un)expected multiplications. Architecture as a game refers to the life of a work after design and construction, to the ability to be a tool that welcomes life.

By playing are the rules made.

In architecture as a game, there are no fixed rules.

It is impossible to determine the final result in advance. It is the process itself, with its necessity, to give new life and forms). Architecture (as a game) constructs its own rules by experiencing the space of the rules. To adopt the rules as well as creating the experience always has consequences.

The purity and the radical nature of the rules can open new possibilities for architecture, as well as the architecture itself. It is a way of designing open architectures, which recycle the rules (and the memory) by presenting them with the apparent innocence of children's play, poised between the rationally fragile and the relationally shy.

Therefore, in order to balance the opposites, it becomes necessary to conjoin the game with technique, the case with the rule: the game of the project is a tool for knowledge and discovery of the world; it explores the possibilities; it can think over/through the rules, even if the rules do not always guarantee a single result.

This condition lives through all the architectural history, from the generous and sometimes unexpected architectures by Le Corbusier to the resilient and only apparently innocent spaces by Mies Van Der Rohe. It is a game of geometry and solids, a *recherche patiente* of proportions, relationships, choice of shapes, decomposition of space and multiplication of form. Like an intellectual game, the architecture's *raison d'être* in search of poetry. As well as the game of the flow of space, the sequence of elements-scene in the space.

Architecture (like a game) is only seemingly innocent, it always retains a high degree of reality; it is planned to be built. Architecture uses the methods of experimental ideas; it retains the ambition to achieve a goal with ambition, in some cases even with provocation, in defiance of the possibility of real application in the physical world.

But not all games can be effective and/or work as planned. Architecture can reason about what is prohibited or dangerous by finding that sometimes the solution is not what we might imagine at first sight. For this reason, these shall be designed to ensure a certain degree of freedom. It is necessary to define a space physically and conceptually incomplete, daring and certainly more dangerous as well as potentially effective at the time. What lies beyond the formal objective is increased and not entirely under the control of the project, *amazing*, fragile but hopeful, ingenuous and radical. Radical in the meaning that it puts down roots and is then born; it has the ability to endure, a structure with *cunning*, *indeed foolhardiness*, *play-entity essential-elements constitutive of the architecture* as defined by Le Corbusier in 1957.

The game is a mental place, hybrid, intermediate, suspended, experimental: through the rules' subversion, we can create new ones, giving life to a new dimension able to activate the real.

What is designed may be not immediately present, but returned in time and in the manner of use. In this sense, architecture as a game is always enigmatic, that is, it has to be travelled and experienced to be fully understood.

The more interesting rule is never quickly intelligible, it is one characterized by the condition that what appears may not be exactly what it is. At the beginning we may not understand exactly the contours and the final outcome, and in this sense it may even be absurd.

In the same way a rule can disorient or be seemingly mindless, directionless traceable, appearance, torque, vortex, a deformation of metaphoric mirrors where reality and illusion skim and merge. A labyrinth of reflections and refractions, the game of mirrors alters the visible space, a prodigy who creates new and precarious geometries.

Mysterious and inaccessible game rules play ingeniously by measuring our steps and directing our eyes, pushing them beyond where it is useless that they go, where nothing seems to match anything, along tracks that become unrecognizable and deleted.

Architecture is a game without-scale, as well as multi-scale. It represents a predisposition of the project, not by the desire of the form and of complication of the shape. Like a game, this architecture is made up of pieces – preferably different, which can be composed and recomposed, in friction or in continuity – and by rules, open to becoming something else.

A generous architecture, as a highly artificial game, but artificially made of natural elements. Architecture as a game is characterized by the strong integration with the landscape and the built nature. On one hand, this both outside and inside, through a continuous fusion between the furniture and the excavated and equipped spaces. In the other hand, the game of architecture has always required a distinction between the existing and the new, because to work it needs a *space between*, such as the clearance between screw and bolt which guarantees the availability in life.

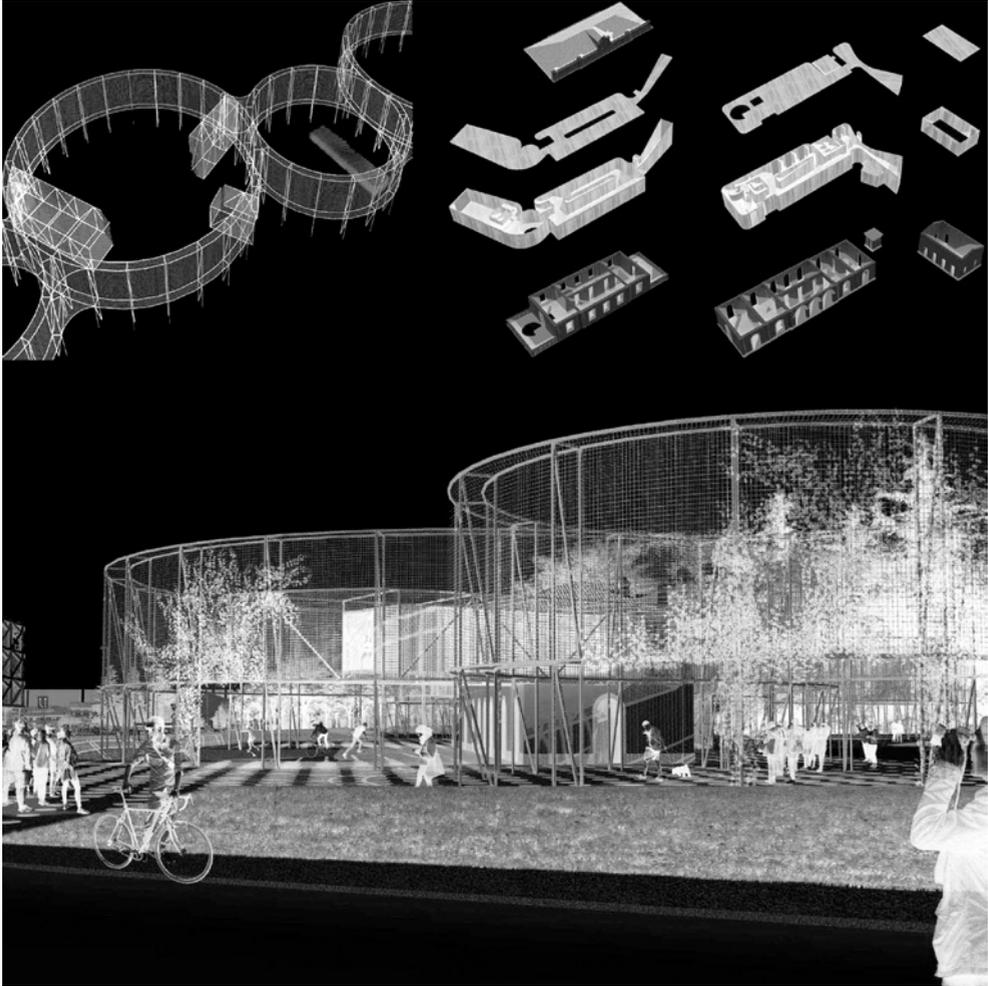
2. Enter the game

Architectures and infrastructures of war constitute a complex system of visible and invisible elements, palimpsests on the move of both present traces and cancellations.

The physical marginality of the places can be narrated through a special project. A ludic project should reflect on the memory, recombining the military survivors' tracks with urban elements of different origin. The game is the architectural ability to *measure* landscapes of war and to establish relations through military strategies and tactics enriching nature with artifice.

The project suggests a new narration of the Eastern military border through the superimposition of heterogeneous elements, strata of a contemporary palimpsest. Fortifications, field stations, funicular railways, galleries, tunnels and caves, blockhouses, powder kegs and bunkers, plants for water supply, camps, accommodations, and posts for the troops, carved deeply into the surface and defended by wide bands of cross linked by barbed wire, are divided along the border of Italy, but live on as significant remains only in the mountain areas not affected by urban development or agricultural exploitation.

Railways, carriage roads, mule tracks, and dirt patches constitute the dense network without which many of the mountain areas would still be inaccessible. Many fragments of this wide frame have been the object of reconversions and modernizations; others have been abandoned; many tracks are at risk of being lost to memory.



III. 1. Shares game in a border place of the North East Alpine region. A project for Cividale del Friuli

3. A game of relationships

The overlap of the different strata underlines a complex palimpsest, a game of war with different pervasive levels. The relationship with the terrain and consequently the relational ways with the contests changes continuously, drawing an architectural landscape of many dimensions. The interventions at the ground level are dominant. The works of war excavate the sides of the mountains, underlining, or denying the natural morphology of the terrain, producing by subtraction of material they compose spaces in the negative.

To the physical palimpsest there is the perceptive one, of the vision at long distance between the different permanent or temporary locations.

Game rules, mysterious and inaccessible, play ingeniously, by measuring our steps and directing our eyes. The reciprocal views draw an intense relationship that connects even today the artefacts across the landscapes. The relational structure so formed is the basis of a ludic project able to narrate the history of this exceptional construction of the mountain, to reactivate new life cycles to a geographic scale, to explain the different histories of the traces like a stratification stranded with the local identity of the contemporary territories.

A playful vision able to re-enter the entire war heritage in the wider landscape system, by linking places, architectures and infrastructures in relation to the opportunities and the peculiarities of the contests.

A mountain infrastructured by the war is a privileged place to observe from above, from below, on the move, and it is able to amplify the narrative images. A system of paths can reactivate the more significant points, the traces of the fortification and of the trenches, the rural architecture, the castles, the construction for hydroelectric production, the small religious buildings, the maso diffused in the territory.

The military infrastructuring is imagined as a reinforcement of the economic structure and of current tourism.

4. Reciprocal views

The infrastructures of the viewpoints are a game open to many possibilities. The cross sights between the forts, the embrasures between the galleries, the looks sliding outside from the trenches, could transform in dynamic performances.

Retrieved military strategies and tactics suggests light interventions aimed at making the system able of cultivating the imagination and untangling the narration by directing our eyes, such as an instrument of knowledge and reinforcing of the heritage of war.

Assuming the theme of military landscapes means to consider a complex system of visible and invisible elements, renovating them in a new relational system able to create new life cycles.

The resilience of the heritage of war is in its capacity to resist maintaining the position, to bounce into the future despite the experienced deformations, in the possibility to flourish again with a role and a decisive strength, against indifference, abandonment, the loss of identity.

5. Shares game. In a border place of the North East Alpine region

The project, winner of a competition of ideas, concerns the redesign of an *in between* urban space.

The marginal *void* of Cividale del Friuli in Italy is the context where to try to *live by playing*, by recycling a space *between* the old town and the recent urban areas, a space comprised by infrastructures and occupied by disused buildings.

It is useful to think of this architecture – a new city gate – as a game, a necessary empty space, a space *between* elements that allows movement, a space that distinguishes the existing and the new, a space for new practices from which different realities and possibilities take shape.

Within the ex-railway station, the empty spaces of the new museum of the Great War are imagined as a wooden craft, a treasure chest composed of a perceptual path that, from the entrance facing the city, is directed to the upper floor. Here two appendices/observatory select and put in scene the war landscapes.

An unexpected and serious game is made of wooden walls that tell of discarded places, of hanging rooms that penetrate in the containers, of devices that through telescopes reactivate the gaze of strategic invisible boundaries, border lost, margins as places.

Walls, floors and ceilings in wood, are an internal skin that abstracts the visitor from the enclosure of the existing building and directs the thoughts and views by giving new suggestions.

As a labyrinth, the new architectural narration allows short lenses, unusual camera angles, slow sequence plans.

Light environments, rooms suspended between the past and the future, are the air game for the support of the museum appendices. The sinuous fronts widen and shrink, by giving rise to transparency effects, flexible, diversified, that counterpoint to invisible war fronts and so on.

6. Pebbles in the pond

The surface of the new public space, drawn through an array of green dots, multiplies and reflects the game of the suspended rooms, designed through an essential rule. The image (the pebble in the pond) generates what is above (the rooms) and what lies beneath (the holes). A reverse game in which the strategies and tactics derived from military rules, the orientation and arrangement of paths, boundaries and impractical places, reveals and distinguishes in the present time existing and new margins, in a dynamic event.

The square-parking is a fascinating *playground*, a solidified pond made by an unexpected vortex among which we can scroll such as between the sequences of a film. A filmic game that is characterized by a continuous change of plans from the game, flowing like a movie, upsets, but do not deny some breath play, useful also to emotion.