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ART VS  
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# **EDITORIAL**

## **#17**

# Towards a possible “liquid mapping”

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Like the sailors, who for centuries have crossed their ways and their destinies plowing through the Mediterranean, this editorial marks a possible route between the different reflections proposed by the authors. Their essays are dedicated to the closed sea in all its complexity of the landscape with fluid borders, which has always been a space for sharing and exchanges, as well as a place of subtle dividing lines and dramatic human movements.

Herein, the topic is investigated according to extremely varied critical approaches between art and design. Therefore, what brings together the authors is the attention to the complex and delicate space of the border and crossing, metaphorically furrowed in the essays from the points of view of authors, as contemporary Ulysses with skills and practices that were not easy to gather and at the same time distribute in chapters.

Sometimes, unexpected analogies and comparisons between different methodological approaches intertwine and manifest. It allows us to reflect also on the theme of the similarities between the sphere of design and that of the arts. The prismatic and abstract texture that fills all this #17 cover space refers to these intertwining lines that confirm the labile and fluid boundaries between design and art. At the same time the texture, as its blue chromatic reflections, simulates the liquid Mediterranean surfaces inspired by the flooring designs by Gio Ponti, the creative architect who in the early twentieth century perhaps has more than any other included the close relationship between the arts and space design.

Follow our personal historical and phenomenological reflection on Art, three chapters are proposed. The first brings together methodological reflections and design practices related to the creation of new cartographies to envisioning the complex cultural and human landscape stratifications of the identities that inhabit the Mediterranean. The second chapter gives voice to concrete experiences, in which the intertwining of artistic methods and design skills act together on the territory; at last but not least some significant actions give back all their complexity, thanks to the voice of the actors, artists, and protagonists after which we insert our reflections.

### **I. Mapping the Mediterranean. The Design Third Space**

In the contemporary time, it is accepted that Cartography is a complex discipline and not merely an objective transposition of the territory but a conceptual synthesis of it. From the reflections proposed in the first chapter “Mapping the Mediterranean. The Design third space” emerges the urgency to evaluate the role of design in focusing on strategies of self-representation of places and their inhabitants with the aim of an organization in possible renewed cartographic parameters.

The terms *identity*, *relationship*, *nomadic dimension*, and *fluid space* are frequent among the lines of the first four essays looking at possible alternatives to the static nature of the traditional geopolitical map, understood as an act of domination and taking possession. The ancient texts tell that Anaximander was the first to *build* a map in the 6th-century b.C., where the Earth appears as a disk surrounded by an ocean.

This fact was so daring and fundamental that the geographer Franco Farinelli (2007) did not hesitate to place it even at the beginning of all western culture. This kind of representation of an organized space allows us to categorize and know the phenomena of the world<sup>1</sup>. Among the first reasons for measuring soil, there is the need for political and military control of the territory, together with its ownership, making the map a constitutive act of the world, as we know it.

On the zenithal view of the map of Anaximander, therefore, would have been charged the weight of having reduced the *physis*<sup>2</sup> in a diagram, having crystallized the world that lives in a rigid representation, like a tomb.

From overcoming this prejudice handed down over the centuries, the need to design “communication maps” suitable for the contemporary “complex system” starts and, therefore, re-establishes the discipline of the “communication geography” that was reformulated through the data system design. The empirical research connected to these tools of interaction represents a stimulating challenge that finds similarities with the cartographic manipulations developed in artistic projects which we will be able to talk about later.

The new dimension that Information design achieves through the use of Big Data is based on conceptual syntheses according to a linguistic organization effort. Approaching this topic,

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1. In the book *L'invenzione della Terra*, Farinelli states “La mappa allora è davvero la nascita dell'occidente!” (Then, the map is really the birth of the Occident!) (2007, p. 51).

2. The term *physis* (Φύσις), that means nature, reality, was central in the Greek philosophy.



Vincenzo Cristallo and Mirian Mariani come to processes of abstraction and simplification for an immediate understanding, through the analogy with artists such as Keith Haring, although it is related to a very different communication context. On the other hand, we could find other analogies with many artistic projects in processes of cartographic reworking.

However, another storytelling is possible. The authentic explosion of cartography at the time of the great geographical discoveries revealed, among the reasons for the map, also the ability to highlight the relationships between the different components of the space it represents, making it possible to understand and explore it<sup>3</sup>.

This meaning of the maps seems pointed out by *Places en lieu*. The authors Alberto Bassi, Giuliana Califano and Tommaso Listo, compare the spaces of staying - solid and full spaces, belonging to sedentary populations - and the spaces of going - nomadic, fluid and empty spaces. The Mediterranean, as public and shared space, crossed by the multiple lines of trade and migration, is an emblematic and liquid representation of “void and nomadic spaces where people self-define themselves”.

The journey, the going, and the freedom of action, together with the ability to adapt, make what has been called *Mare Liberum* the place to imagine new possibilities of narration

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3. Italo Calvino recalls how “the first need to fix places on paper is linked to travel: it is the reminder of the representation of the stages, the layout of a path. It is, therefore, a linear image, which can only be given in a long roll ...”. Connected to the dimension of the journey, the map opens up to ever new adventures, to discover (and draw) the ever-new borders of the world.

and representation, in a sort of “sentimental cartography of people and their way of living and transforming places”.

How is it possible to put into shape the identity of a landscape through a shared communication code? How is it possible to shape its ever more multifaceted and constantly changing image due to the fluidity of space, the climatic oscillations, and migratory movements? The demands raised by Vincenzo Cristallo and Miriam Mariani, as well as the reflections of Matteo Aimini and Lucilla Calogero, respond to this need for interpretation and representation of different data, not only physical and landscape, but also human, immaterial, and constantly changing. Aimini and Calogero focus on the complexity of scientific data of investigation on the Mediterranean area, the simple analytical restitution of which would not account for the degree of interconnection of different knowledge, the stratification of a ‘palimpsest’ that appears essentially dynamic, liquid, and constantly changing.

Therefore, new methods of representation take shape through the articles of this first chapter, capable of responding to the fluid and dynamic dimension as well as contaminated by the human life of this territory. From these emerge sort of digital platforms that reveal a third space able to “constitute a heterotopy of information capable of revealing a new landscape” (as Aimini and Calogero write) enhanced by the various levels of information. A third-space and a third-landscape that echoes the name of an aesthetic category in the context of the philosophy, even if completely different in content. Otherwise, they similarly landscape pursue an epiphanic aspiration to sharing identity space, as we will deepen later.

Among these processes of participatory digital cartography, Landscape for developed by the Polytechnic of Turin offers a convincing model brought to a case study by Paola Menzardi and Pier Paolo Peruccio. The “AtlasFor” generates an “active landscape” collecting images and stories by those who live in the area. It is a platform based on observation, narration, recording and listening, therefore capable of working on qualitative and non-quantifiable aspects of places that favor collective and participatory processes.

## **II. Design vs art in the Mediterranean area**

The definition of new alternative maps, capable of recording the urban and social transformations of the Mediterranean landscape, can find resources in artistic experiences to which the design approach looks recognizing a special sensitivity and even a demiurgic action.

Then, the second chapter gives voice to concrete experiences, in which the intertwining of artistic methods and design skills act together and offer critical tools for the redefinition of Mediterranean space.

While the development of linguistic and digital systems attempt renewed mapping processes that seek to restore the complexity of the Mediterranean / liquid tabula, on the other hand, Borsotti and Pistidda observe how much the closed sea, despite the era of global and sophisticated connections, today escapes unpredictably from control and monitoring, in its jagged peculiarity as a fringe place, furrowed by infinite and indefinite anti-Ulysses. Therefore, the authors analyze numerous artistic projects and recognize new contributions and alternative ways to detect Mediterranean identity.

Art finds its subject in the migratory phenomenon in all its dynamics and stages, in the process of identifying oneself, in its environmental impact and the creation of communities and so it shows a “pluralistic approach” far from the rigid systemic cartographic expression. Focusing on these processes and behaviors based on transience and storytelling, as an epistemological device cannot be reduced to a geopolitical map but contributes to the creation of anti-atlas so defined by Oran-gotango collective. The systemic design thus arranges artistic projects that result in cultural mediation tools into different categories. These are laboratories for the active involvement of migrants; collections of travel testimonies, stories according to unexpected and plural “constellations”; iconic signs for new shared experiences like the *Porta di Lampedusa* by Paladino or the *Barca Nostra* by Christoph Büchel. Furthermore, an investigative tool appropriate to portray this widespread transience is the sketch, “a malleable transitional work” (as Borsotti and Pistidda write), an attitude that even Graça Magalhães seems to recognize in drawing as a detector of the place’s Soul in the Portuguese experience of landscape representation for Schist Villages.

On the other hand, through design empirical practices based on interpretation of data, it is possible to renew the complex map of visual communication elements of the Mediterranean identity both in the natural and anthropic landscape, as do by Raffaella Trocchianesi. Both when the designer takes the rule of an officer for critical and evaluative data towards the art system intended as perhaps the most effective current detector of the metamorphic and multi-ethnic Mediterranean

identity, as well as when he/she instead discerns the levels of a visual grammar through specific parameters (color, icons, objects), and generates a possible mapping technique in the awareness that it is not easy to extract identity features from this fluid environment.

However, as we have seen, the design approach attempts ways and strategies of delimitation on many levels. That confirms the possibility of angulating in so many ways such an elusive theme, an organism in transformation that is complex and at the same time open to multiple readings that together they give us back the identity richness of this space and enrich the topic with a lively and stimulating corollary of points of view, opening new avenues without authorial presumptions.

### **III. Living in the landscape**

Imagining and describing a space, and acting in it is often the practice adopted today by the artists, as well highlighted by the last section “Artistic projects for the Mediterranean area”, which give direct voice to concrete and exemplary experiences, in which the intertwining of artistic methods and design skills act together.

In 2019, its dense social and historical scenery made Palermo the ideal location for the extraordinary laboratory of artistic experimentations of “Manifesta 12”, the international itinerant biennial of contemporary art. Here the paths of the artistic duo Bianco-Valente have also crossed, as mentioned by Costanza Meli in her article “Landscape as a space of action and thought”, and of the third landscape militant gardeners of Coloco collective.

In the extraordinary guiding image chosen by Bianco-Valente for *Terra di me*, where “the ‘lines of destiny’ (in their diversity) on everyone’s hands intersect the routes of the navigation routes” (Adragna 2018), it is concentrated the sense of their articulated project.

Meli carefully reconstructs all phases of the several levels project: the study of some ancient maps of the Palermo heritage, the living and dramatic testimonies of those who have crossed this sea, to underline the importance of travel experiences in defining each one’s history and destiny.

New stories and new fates intertwine in the garden imagined by Coloco in an abandoned lot of neighbourhood Zen 2 in Palermo. Something very different from a “real garden”, built according to a design or from an art installation intended to revitalize a peripheral place. Coloco’s participated garden is rather an exercise in cooperation and sharing.

Taking charge of a residual space, what Gilles Clément (2005) calls third landscape, Coloco’s laboratory has been able to conduct the work with a declaredly indirect and shared approach: “The commitment was accepted when it was clear that the people on the field, in particular those who work with the local association Laboratorio ZEN insieme, had the desire and dedication to carry out this project in a collaborative way”. Therefore, the effectiveness of the operation has been in the logic of work in progress, with an attitude open to the opportunities and risks that this entails. No man’s land has been transformed, thanks to the activation of its potential resources and of those who for a time have chosen to take care of it, in space for rediscovering sociality.

In a sense, the Art House in Shkodër by Adrian Paci, a well-known Albanian artist transplanted to Italy for many years but still deeply linked to the land of origin, is based on a re-activation action driven by the desire to generate bridges and cultural exchanges.

Martina Marolda, through direct dialogue with the artist and his wife Melisa Ballata, sees Paci's entire poetics based on those characteristics proper that the migrant society reflected: the sense of the dwelling and its loss; the status of displacement, the attitude of nomadism and its cultural consequences; the search for identity and so on. All are features that become part of an environmental and functional spatial environmental project and in the emblematic opening of the Art House. In a space and its functions an entire poetic is reflected. Therefore, the opening of the family home in Shkodër as a residence for artists becomes a cathartic process of regeneration and cultural activation. The project represents a sharing perspective to generate culturally and symbolically bridges through the artistic residences for tearing Albania from its state of cultural exclusion. It regenerates spaces and encourages communication also through emblematic physical connotations such as the series of large windows that become a symbol of crossing the "four walls", of breaking down the edges in favor of connections and contaminations and the construction of an intercultural dialogue of which finally the Mediterranean becomes a paradigmatic seat.

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or both academic and informal public conferences. Exploration, strategy, activation, construction, transmission are the phases of Coloco's projects in order to support the relationship between people and the places where they live, all unique and all together. Situations and requests vary indefinitely, but commitment is the same: creating places whose quality is measured by their ability to accommodate the enormous diversity of life.

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Scuola del Terzo Luogo was born and developed during several editions of Incontri del Terzo Luogo, moments of research on the "undecided" spaces of the city, spaces in which not everything is totally chaotic and wild, but where not everything is already planned. Starting in the fall of 2012, an informal group of people started a journey within these spaces that has facilitated comparison, actions on public space, experimentation, relations with the context and various forms of life with special regard to the topic of the garden. The reference place that gave life to this path, supporting it with its own resources, is Manifatture Knos, an undecided space in the city of Lecce, that has been recovered after a long period of abandonment and returned to the city as an independent cultural center. Scuola del Terzo Luogo wants to deal with new forms of pedagogy by challenging conventional teaching models, where giving political dignity to indecision becomes the modality of intervention on the common good, or the practice through which we take care of places.

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<https://www.groundaction.eu/>

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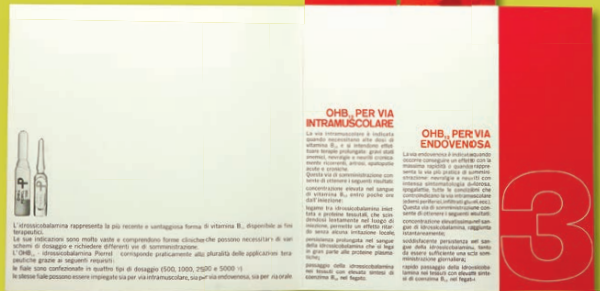
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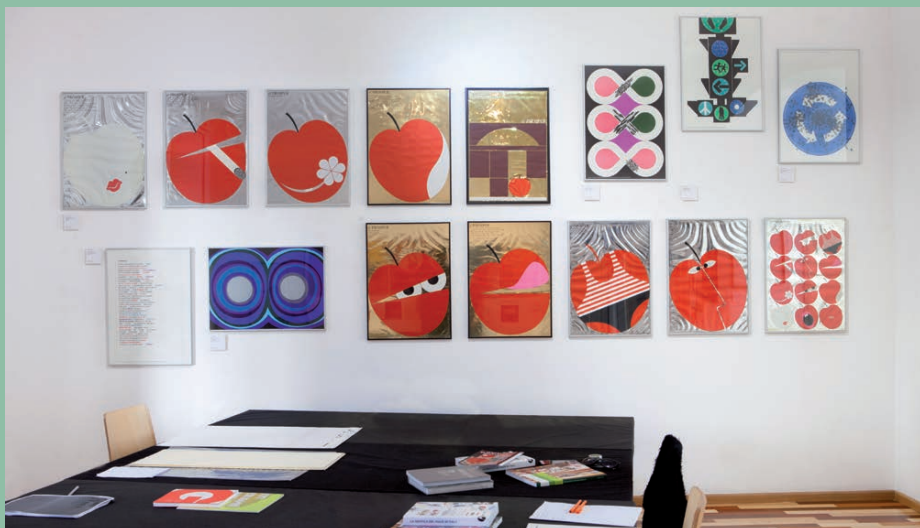
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