

GLOBAL HUMANITIES

Year 9, Vol. 10, 2023 – ISSN 2199-3939

Editors Frank Jacob and Francesco Mangiapane

Aura in the 21st Century

Editorial by

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Texts by

Federico Biggio
Maria Giulia Franco
Francesco Mangiapane
Carlo Andrea Tassinari



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**Museo
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direttore Rosario Perricone

GLOBAL HUMANITIES

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Biannual Journal

ISSN 2199-3939

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Museo internazionale delle marionette Antonio Pasqualino
Piazza Antonio Pasqualino, 5 – 90133 Palermo PA, Italy
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REGIONE SICILIANA
Assessorato dei beni culturali
e dell'identità siciliana
*Dipartimento dei beni culturali
e dell'identità siciliana*

ISBN 979-12-80664-60-0

EAN 9772199393072 30010

DOI 10.53123/GH_10

Design and Typesetting

Francesco Mangiapane

Printing House

Fotograph S.r.l., Palermo, Italy

Cover

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editorial.....	7
FRANK JACOB AND FRANCESCO MANGIAPANE	
What makes a digital aura? Consequences for the “here and now” of Mixed Reality and Multitasking Interfaces.....	9
FEDERICO BIGGIO	
Falcone and Borsellino. The Aura of Symbols	23
CARLO ANDREA TASSINARI	
Vineyard’s Aura. Touristic discourse in Ridley Scott’s <i>A Good Year</i>	43
FRANCESCO MANGIAPANE	
University of Palermo during and after Covid. Auratic effects in a re-semanticized space	59
MARIA GIULIA FRANCO	
Contributors.....	75



https://doi.org/10.53123/GH_10_5

UNIVERSITY OF PALERMO DURING AND AFTER COVID

AURATIC EFFECTS IN A RE-SEMANTIZED SPACE

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ABSTRACT. The main objective of this paper is to focus the attention on the transformations occurred during the period conditioned by the Covid pandemic within the relationships between subjects and the public space.

The analysis will focus on the specific experiential practices registered in some green areas of the University of Palermo and Catania. Such external areas, initially considered as empty places, without an official destination of use, were reacquired and filled with furnishings that re-semanticized them into places of socialization. This paper will describe the emergence of peculiar processes of reappropriation of them, which actually had the effect of reshaping their meaning. Doing so renovating the aura of attending university physically.

KEYWORDS: Post-pandemic, reappropriation, domestication, urban reconsideration, landscape.

1. INTRODUCTION

The spread of the Covid-19 has led to peculiar transformations in the lifestyles of most human societies.

This article wants to focus on describing the spatial transformations that occurred during the pandemic, namely those concerning the community of students, researchers and teachers at the University of Palermo campus (Italy). An analysis of these transformations will be

carried out with reference to other urban cases and, in particular, through comparison with another Italian university, that of Catania. To this end, we will rely on the re-reading and re-consideration of Walter Benjamin's ([1936] 1968) essay *The work of art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, in the belief that this reflection can be useful for Semiotic research in topological species.

Benjamin's theories can, in fact, prove useful for understanding the transformations undergone throughout the pandemic, marked by the restrictive policies established by many governments in response to the spread of the virus:

Things change for an artistic practice as for a figurative practice, when the principle of the copy replaces the authority of the autographic copy" (Benjamin, 1939, Italian transl., p. 18).

Benjamin's words appear effective in indicating which problems to take into consideration to describe the effects that the logic of the pandemic and confinement, relating to both private and public spatiality, have caused in the daily lives of many.

One of the main effects concerns the transformation that the relational link between the physicality of the subjects and the physicality of the public space has undergone since the initial phase of the pandemic, in which spatial proximity was severely limited and, in some cases, denied. Since the beginning of the so called lockdown, most physical contacts between citizens have been replaced by virtual, hybrid and mediated experiences, leading to an increasing estrangement between people.

Despite this upheaval, the spatiality in which we have inevitably been immersed during the pandemic has allowed us to experience new opportunities for a relational contact.

As a result, foundations have been progressively laid for a hierarchical re-configuration of the value of authenticity attributable to the physicality of the place, its expression and direct experience of it. The analysis presented here therefore aims to demonstrate how the regime of isolation has been impacting in both social and urban relations. Indeed, as anticipated, every form of relation to the other was somehow feared to the point of extreme rejection of any form of human

contact (Esposito 2022). Such evenience set the conditions for establishing new forms of relational exchange, the indirect ones, which involved subjects in new perceptual experiences, during which their sensory and cognitive dimensions were virtually challenged by new demands for participation.

Once reached a new phase of coexistence with an increasingly less contagious virus, it has been possible to examine the new social processes by means of which external spatiality and bodily spatiality were reaffirmed as significant identities; external spaces considered more adaptable to the new social priorities of protection from all forms of contagion, as they were considered able to guarantee greater distancing and freedom of movement, as opposed to indoor spaces, considered dangerous and for this reason long denied and avoided.

A new pandemic and post-pandemic *proxemics*¹ emerges, made up of gestures whose expressive force derives from enhancing new dimensions of communication. Urban space, being dynamic by its very nature, is today articulated by a system of boundaries, characterised by physical and mental limits and thresholds (Zilberberg 1993), responsible for conditioning both relational and spatial modes of perception (Goffman 1973). Spaces were subjected to new reversals between the private and public dimensions, affirmed as the product of new resemantizations and re-articulations that altered their original textual configuration: their walkability, like their degree of perception and usability underwent transformations caused by the complex system of confinement induced by the Covid. Starting from this, those practices, made significant insofar as they were controlled by the new proxemic gestures acting in a space qualified as a common and shareable good, closer and more immediate, will serve as the object of analysis.

¹ Proxemics, a discipline founded by E. Hall in 1966, is the study of human use of space. Paolo Fabbri (2020, p. 185) specifies proxemic results attributable to the way in which humans structure and evaluate the distance between their space and that of others, "the study of how humans unconsciously structure microspaces" (Fabbri, 1969).

Therefore, the theoretical problem that the analysis intends to address emerges from the observation of what the logic of confinement has done to the semantic universe linked to spatiality, determining the decline of those “auratic” effects perceptible only from direct experience in a certain landscape. Furthermore, as a response to the pandemic effects described, the behaviors and practices of individuals aimed to renew every link with public space, urging its reappropriation and urban revaluation. In particular, the analysis will focus on the specific experiential practices implemented in different types of urban and university spaces, thanks to which it has been possible to recover the aura denied during the pandemic. The campus of the University of Palermo will be taken into consideration as a distinctive case of continuity between nature and culture² in which processes of re-appropriation and recovery of the external environment have been affirming, perceived by its users during the pandemic as closer and safer. These processes will be analysed with reference to the time frame characterized by the main phases of the pandemic: mainly, a first phase characterized by the progressive emptying of the social spaces whose use is limited or denied, up to a final phase in which the external spaces of the Campus were filled with new users and enhanced by innovative new practices. These spaces have been re-evaluated as places of aggregation, as a common good to be safeguarded and acted on using domestication³ practices, places where identification can be found.

2. METHODOLOGY OF ANALYSIS

This study has been approached with a Sociosemiotic (as the one traced by Marrone, 2006) methodology, which is considered determinant and pertinent

to bring out specific effects of meaning, produced by the signs, practices, and languages that are constituted in those places, selected as case studies. Indeed, it will be the Semiotic approach, through its categories, that will recognise a value identity to the new urban experiences, testifying to their significance thanks to a renewed auratic sense. In fact, the position of the semiotician is the bearer of a work of interpretation of what has been observed, returned to a value horizon, from which one can trace a renewed intensity and emotional-somatic grip given by the relationship with urban space.

Following the indications of Marsciani (2007), the course of the analysis was conducted starting from a direct observation of those spaces suspended for a period of time from any possible use, and of those practices responsible for reconsidering them as new social spaces; the observation of the new ways of inhabiting university and urban areas thus made it possible to grasp the processuality of the transformation related to the relationship and consideration of the inhabited space, grasping it from a dynamic point of view; this thanks to the practices, flows, relations and gestures present in them. In fact, the principle through which the case studies were selected is that they were involved, though according to different logics, in new processes of transformation that made them new significant spaces, restoring a renewed value to collective experience and living. The cases of spatiality are placed by the analysis in relation and comparison, thanks to a Semiotic observation that has recognised in them a coordination of relevant elements.

Thus, it is important to recognise the importance of the Semiotic methodology because it is the bearer of a particular gaze that grasps the new urban relations

² The pandemic has stimulated a reflection on the importance of a relational vision of the world in which nature and culture are thought of as interdependent poles. “Nature as an effect of meaning, as what appears as such, due to a series of social and cultural processes that have generated such habits, customs and codes” (Marrone 2012, p. 20).

³ In reference to those practices brought up to date by the new degree of perception and habitability of public space, made into a place to take care of.

in a horizon of meaning, from which to draw a renewed auraticity.

3. HOW TO RETHINK THE AURA TODAY

Latour's essay *Where are the missing masses? Sociology of a Few Worldly Artifacts* (Latour 2008) takes up the issue of the aura, surpassing Benjamin's definition by identifying those of its points that are open to criticism. For a work of art, being the original means nothing more than being the original of a long lineage. What has no reproduction is not called original, but rather sterile and arid stereotype (Latour, 2008, p. 60).

In his paper focused on the restoration of Veronese's *Wedding at Cana* by the Louvre in 2006, Latour recognizes how the copies define the "career" of the work. In light of this, Latour's theories are decisive today for understanding how the reacquisition and renewal of direct experience is acting in the culture of urban living.

Furthermore, epidemics and infections bring to light multiple underlying social and spatial logics. In fact, the conditions caused by the epidemic determine the emergence of renewed forms of spatiality and expression of new senses and values:

The virus does nothing but reproduce, materialize, extend and intensify the already existing dominant forms of biopolitical management for the entire population. Each society can therefore be defined by the epidemic that threatens it and by its organization when it occurs (Preciado 2020).

During the isolation, a reversal of the identity and value range of space emerged, caused by the denial (or reduction) of physical interaction in public spaces which were replaced by private, domestic ones:

The pandemic has brought out a map of spatial geographies completely different, determined by the new distances that we superimpose between us and the domestic universe

and between us and the collective universe (Bassanelli 2020, p. 2).

The internal space becomes that of representation and exhibition, made available by multiple digital platforms, with the aim of reintroducing new forms of media socialization to the detriment of the prohibited physical ones. All actions and practices are thus remodeled by a sort of widespread planning responsible for canceling that protective barrier relating to the domestic sphere.

In the light of the changes following the pandemic period, and therefore the overcoming of the phase described above, I recognise Latour's work as decisive in order to be able to highlight what is meant in the present study by a renewed auratic sense, captured by the new forms of both individual and relational urban experience. In fact, I consider this concept starting from Latour's overcoming of what was understood by Benjamin's thought, as original⁴, the only condition to be able to recognise an auratic sense. With respect to what has been said, I focus on direct as well as physical urban experience in order to understand the sense and orientation of the present study; experience from which to draw a passionate, cognitive, somatic intensity both individual and collective as a condition of existence in order to be able to rediscover a new value of auraticity in this field of investigation. Therefore, not to deny the conditions of reproduction of the urban experience, but on the contrary to start from this in order to be able to grasp all its significant transformation, which accounts for the constitution of an urban imaginary, characterised by a new idea of nature, sustainability and protection of inhabited space; from where one can perceive a potential 'migration' and diffusion of an auratic sense attributable to the new social and urban relations.

Therefore, taking what has been described – the effects of the restrictive measures that act on the identity of the

⁴ In reference to this, cf. Prieto 1989.

public and private dimensions – as our starting point, it is possible to reflect on their consequences, considering the evolutionary path of those auratic effects reconquered in other forms through the constitution of imaginaries, responsible for promoting processes of re-semantization and urban reconsideration.

4. REPRESENTATIVE CASES OF A NEW URBAN IMAGINARY: FROM VIRTUAL MEDIA TO REAL SPATIALITY

4.1. THE UNIVERSITY OF PALERMO

It is crucial for the orientation of the analysis to refer to the different phases characterizing the pandemic period. The period of lockdown will be taken into consideration, a time when the virtual and digital environment served as an “intermediate space” (Granata, 2020), by difference with respect to a following phase of stabilization during which we lived with the virus. In the latter period, a drastic change has taken place in the relationship with space, which has set in motion new processes of rethinking social spaces, resulting in overcoming the utopia of the physicality of public places and the impossibility of a corporeal reality. Thus, the physicality of places gradually returns to meet with that of the users, with their corporeity. Reappropriating it therefore becomes the heart of the multiple urban experiences put in the pipeline from here on in, valued with respect to a sense of authenticity given by being there *in praesentia*. The space, which has become fluid and dynamic, is therefore built, and enhanced with respect to the movements, perspectives, uses and programs of the subjects.

The external spaces of the University can therefore appear as particular cases of a more complex, general system: that of public spaces. These spaces, in the planning that gathers around them, become a real opportunity to rethink the entire urban configuration in a more sustainable, ecological, and community-based way, focused on a new intertwining between humans and the environment, from which to draw new sensitive, perceptive and cognitive. As such, from the direct

encounter with the new forms of spatiality, the auratic phenomenon is once again conceivable and possible, continuously, and potentially the fruit of every potential experience and practice in relation to a space invested with new values. In fact, as Latour (2011) teaches, this is the moment when the auratic dimension of a topological experience is renewable and in continuous migration through numerous cases of direct relationship with new forms of spatiality, as we consider the external areas of the University.

Following the gradual emptying of social spaces as a result of the pandemic, which caused the denial or limitation of their use, the external spaces of the University of Palermo (figg. 1–2) were gradually refilled and enhanced by new innovative practices. They were re-developed as places of congregation, as common goods which, by also activating the affective sphere in the subjects, represent areas to be safeguarded and on which to act using domestication practices, in order to identify the places to be adapted to the needs of those who live there.

Due to its physical configuration, the campus of the University of Palermo assumes the identity of a microcosm, of a university citadel longitudinally bordering the road on one side and green areas, areas of open peri-urban countryside (example of terrain vague) on the other, even though they are excluded from the proper university space. Traces of this configuration remain in the presence of sections of green areas, cut at different points by paths for cars and pedestrians. Areas which, once reacquired, were invested with multiple uses, becoming an integral part of student dynamics. I am referring in particular, as the first two images to follow show, to those bordering the external bar located in one of the most frequented points for the university community: an intermediate position between the Architecture pole, that of Letters and the “Polididattico” pole. Although there is close continuity between the refreshment area and the analyzed area, there is no conflict with both actu-

ally coexisting perfectly, with both having established themselves as two permeable and easily influenced areas. The green area is in fact dedicated to consumption and is also made into an independent place, a point of reference, a union on which to act according to the different uses.

Initially an empty place with no official intended use, employed only as an area of passage, proximity and expansion for the impromptu consumption of food and drink, it was in fact considered a neutral space, a frontier space which made possible a coexistence among different practices (Hammad, 2003). Instead, in this new post-pandemic phase, this same empty space has been reacquired by grassroots multiple daily practices, responsible for translating it according to other uses that were not established *a priori*⁵. It has therefore become a semi-determined space (Hall 1966), as it is structured according to an improvised logic that does not impose itself on the territory and appears therefore in harmony with an eco-sustainable project in which the subjects relate to each other and the external environment, rediscovering new lifestyles.



FIG. 1. OUTDOOR AREA, UNIVERSITY OF PALERMO (© MARIA GIULIA FRANCO).



FIG. 2. FIGURE 2 - EQUIPPED AREA (© MARIA GIULIA FRANCO).

Questioning, analyzing and reflecting on the current design trends may lead to recognize the importance that public outdoor space has assumed today, predisposed to multiple transformations and to constant re-semanticization and social reconsideration. The new green areas, once neglected and misunderstood, are nowadays invested with new values and meanings, qualifying as social and spatial actors, as Sender agents in the social and bodily dimension of the subjects and as referents of a new global imagination.

4.2 THE UNIVERSITY OF CATANIA IN THE FORMER BENEDICTINE MONASTERY

In order to verify these considerations, it may be useful to make a comparison between two different university spaces, that of Palermo and that of Catania, on which to be able to track the effects caused by the pandemic. A relationship of both similarities and differences emerges from the topological analysis: the first is recognized in what the multiple practices of re-appropriation and interaction have caused, enhancing and re-semanticizing those external areas in which to rediscover a possible effect of nature. The relationship of difference, on the other hand, emerges in the history of their identity and consequently in their physical articulation, conditioning the emergence of different modes of behavior updated by a de-

⁵ The phenomenon updates a case of enunciative practice (J. Fontanille, 1998), since the empirical subjects who interact with the described space do not correspond to the designated and imagined model users, as the type of fruition does not coincide with that originally proposed.

gree of perception and proximity of space that will vary according to where one is.

In Piazza Dante in Catania, one of the squares in the city's historic center, stands the former Benedictine complex, one of the largest in Europe, which today houses the humanities department of the University of Catania.



FIG. 3. BENEDICTINE MONASTERY, UNIVERSITY OF CATANIA (© MARIA GIULIA FRANCO).

This complex, as one of the most important and representative monuments in the city's history, is involved in the re-semanticisation processes brought about by the pandemic. The department sits within a complex spatiality, the result of a process of adaptation to an already established space which, despite keeping the link with its original identity as a religious institution alive, is reinterpreted by new uses and practices that endow it with a new *semiotic efficacy* (Fabbri 2017). The former monastery has therefore be thought of and experienced by the users as a space devoid of a stable identity, as it situates itself on a blurred boundary between what it is and what it was, a condition which never definitively excludes or narcotizes any of the two parties, neither past nor present identity. There will therefore be a continuous rebalancing produced by the different experiences of the subjects who will guide a potential destination and enhancement, activating different dimensions of meaning linked to action, passion or pure architectural aesthetics.

In this context, unlike the physical configuration of the University of Palermo, the external spaces are not distributed organically and as such, they are not immediately perceivable and traversable by the students, as there is no continuity between an external area and the other due to them not being connected. The original identity of the monument, which is linked to an undisputed degree of historical attachment to the city, is also confirmed by its current internal division, characterized by two external areas distinguishable by a certain degree of perception and proximity. The first, which can be reached from one of the corridors bordering the classrooms, is the Chiostrò di Ponente (fig.4), a space that serves as a concrete example of what the consequences of the monumental constraint entail, as it has become the subject of restoration in recent months is therefore not usable. This is a condition that reflects the university's more general reality, as there are multiple constraints blocking creative planning from both a monumental and an environmental point of view. The latter controls those external spaces which, as in the case of the Cloister, act as potential for a new interweaving of the external environment and student practices. The second area, which has become one of the main places for socializing in the university, is the Chiostrò di Levante (fig. 5). The Cloister, located within a garden, also consists of an upper zone, devoid of a specific function, which, as the image shows (fig. 7), takes part in the physical configuration of the external spaces on which the intentionality inclusive of the subjects acts through various socializing practices. Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize that the new subjects who take part in the space, are the pluralities, the groups the individual joins for the realization of precise activities, such as study or other recreational uses involving forms of identity recognition, which also involve the affec-

tive sphere⁶. We are therefore witnessing a process of transformation of the sense of place, as the spaces described become the product of an encroachment in which the boundaries that enclosed those practices relating to internal spaces of an instrumental nature, such as study rooms, or those of a purely recreational nature, open towards the external areas. The latter, now invested with a new set of values, are used today with a certain degree of openness and reassurance. They are thus considered by the university community as a common good and of the closest and most immediate value. It will, therefore, be the new conditions of use and social habitability updated by the new relational and community spaces that will re-establish the significant phenomenon of bodily, sensory and perceptive approaches with the other, from which the new auratic experiences originate.

It therefore emerges that the two external areas (fig. 4, 5) occupy two different perceptive and temporal lines, since in the first, a space of impossibility and consequently only qualifying for its past identity, any form of social interaction is suspended due to the recognition of the conservation priority which enhances its historical-monumental identity. In the second, however, the regime of possibility is in force since the historical identity of the place acts as a potential for its own re-semanticization. In light of this, the space, subject to a previous emptying due to online teaching, is reconquered and rediscovered by the multiple practices that, stimulated by the consequences of the pandemic, recognize its potential as not only monumental. In fact, space is modelled according to the impact that pandemic effects have on the relationship between subjects and the external environment. In the analysis moved by a readjustment of the concept of *aura*, updated today by new social practices, the phenomenon described will be recognized as pertinent to the affirmation of a

new environmental priority: the university's external, specific cases, belonging to a more complex and general system than that of public spaces, offer a real opportunity to rethink the entire urban configuration in a more sustainable, ecological and community-based way founded on a new interweaving between humans and the environment. In fact, following the consequences of confinement during the pandemic, the subjects act with reference to different priorities than to those of the past, thanks to an intentionality of planning oriented both to social and urban practices, the latter being no longer mediated but now unique, direct, unrepeatable and authentic.



FIG. 4. CHIOSTRO DI PONENTE (© MARIA GIULIA FRANCO).

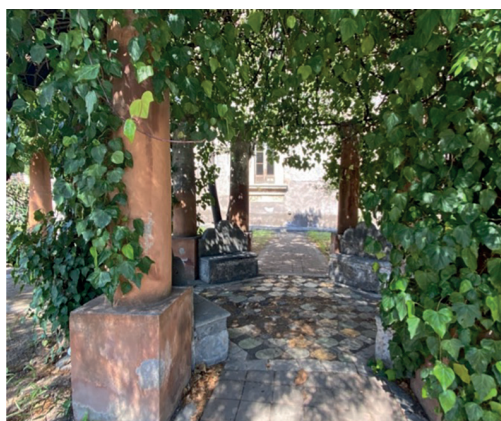


FIG. 5. CHIOSTRO DI LEVANTE (© MARIA GIULIA FRANCO).

⁶ Reference is made to the meta-semiotic system of enhancing procedures (Floch 1990), which includes utopian socialization which aims at the constitution of individual and collective subjectivities, cf. Marrone: 2010, p. 69.



FIG. 6. CLOISTER GARDEN (© MARIA GIULIA FRANCO).



FIG. 7. UPPER PART OF THE CLOISTER (© MARIA GIULIA FRANCO).

5. FROM VIRTUAL RELATIONSHIPS TO NEW URBAN TIES: DIRECT, SENSORY AND COMMUNITY

As a further demonstration of what is described, I have extended my analysis to another case, this time not a university but an urban one. The urban landscape, in fact, of which the university space is a micro-case, becomes an active and dynamic *semiotic* space, promoting new experiences, lifestyles and habitability of the social environment.

Therefore, I recognize as significant for this object of study both the new practices of reconsideration and reappropriation acting in university outdoor spaces, and the new practices of fruition of specific external areas of the city. Areas that, for the fact of not being semiotized – they served as *terrain vague* as they had no intended use – have been re-semanticized since the pandemic and reconsidered as part of new sustainable, education-

al and cultural redevelopment projects. The consequences of the pandemic have meant that those external areas previously reserved for passing through or deprived of an urban identity due to often being in a state of neglect, have, thanks to new design initiatives, become potential epicenters of social and cultural life. In particular, one of the projects that stands as a demonstration of how much the new culture of urban living is acting on the identity and physical configuration of the new cities is that intended for a future redevelopment of an area of historic value and identity in the city of Palermo. The designated area, the neighborhood of Vergine Maria, appears coherent with the initiative to act on a space where a possible idea of nature can be recreated, thanks to the presence of both the sea and an urban green area. The objective of the project launched during a competition, promoted by the local Order of Engineers in 2020, were to implement a sustainable regeneration intervention through the creation of a green area that serves as a place of congregation and a multifunctional area, the latter intended for multiple educational and cultural uses, such as open-air theatre workshops.

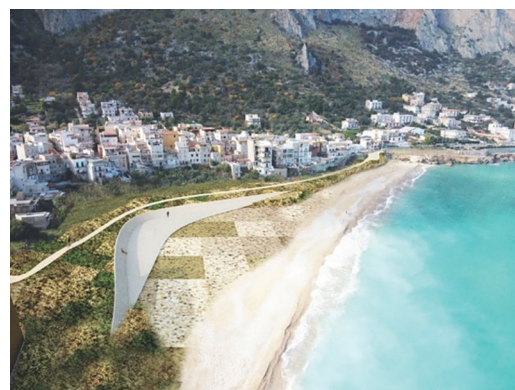


FIG. 8. URBAN PROJECT "A THEATER FOR THE VERGINE MARIA" PALERMO, (© MARCO BELLOMO).

Demonstrating the extent to which space is a continuous result of the rearrangement of heterogeneous entities, we will analyse another spatiality, one that has proven itself to be relevant to the objectives of the study and shows just how much the pandemic has affect-

ed both processes and relationships of habitability, both private and public. The space in question is the new square in Palermo co-designed by the students of the “Finocchiaro Aprile” Institute and created in the area bordering the school. It is a participatory co-planning grassroots intervention, as the idea was realized thanks to the student body, which gave life to an example of post-covid planning consistent with the values of urban sustainability and citizen wellbeing, rediscovering new models of proximity and new forms of sociality. In fact, the area has been pedestrianized and dedicated to a double subjectivity – that of the student and of the inhabitant, identities that act to recreate an urban microcosm on a human scale, in dialogue and in continuity with the rest of the neighboring street. Thus, the denial of the boundary of what distinguishes a public space, such as the street, from a social one, such as a garden or a park, becomes increasingly evident as new forms of behavior invite you to take possession of the area, transformed into a meeting place where practices attributable solely to “pass through” are distinguished from those inviting people to “stay”.

In fact, as the image show (Fig. 9), the re-semanticization intervention has acted in giving life to new forms of social domestication through the creation of urban furnishings⁷ – real eco-sustainable material artifacts, such as benches and seats in wood, whose function is to change the space by redeveloping it as a resting place where you can recognize yourself symbiotically. By redesigning the boundary between inside and outside, between the public and the private, the new micro-space favours new urban experiences in perfect synthesis with the environment, experiences which embody the possibility of rethinking the aura today. These experiences are playful, recreational or socializing ones that reconstitute a perceptive and sensory here and

now through the direct, and therefore bodily, relationship with the physical place that was denied during the confinement of the pandemic. The users are thus made participants of a new active and dynamic space.

It is therefore the body’s participation in spatial stimuli that affirms, as Marsciani recalls: “The somatic ability to respond to the here and now of presence, its ability to transform data into arrangements and sequences of meanings” (Marsciani 2022, p. 126, my transl.); corporeality conceived as never closed but dynamically open to the effects and new senses that define the new spatiality. A spatiality which today, once reacquired, takes on a new symbolic effectiveness, provoking passions and transformations in the subjects who experience, inhabit and come into contact with it: “Spatiality is a perfect case of symbolic effectiveness, in the sense of a communication that provokes reactions and passions in the subjectivities involved” (Marrone, 2001, p. 305); the identity of the space and its meaning will therefore be redefined in terms of the effective action that it provokes on the subjects who use it and who grasp its various motivations.

Thus, thanks to the new urban re-semanticisations, the here and now of the auratic experience is reconstituted, opening up the possibility of experiencing spatiality in a lasting, widespread and renewable temporality through the activation of the entire sensoriality, passionate dimension and affective sphere, all involved in active participation in new encounters and new habitable relationships.

“The aura is a gathering around a sensitive object that one experiences or has experienced” (Dondero, 2007, p. 57).

6. CONCLUSIONS

The city is a place of experimentation and innovation: inside it ideas are fluid and the urban space becomes a laboratory for the generation of interactions and combinations that can bring out new practices (L. Galluzzo 2021, p. 74).

⁷ Cf. Latour (1992), street furniture, objects as “missing masses” networks of objects capable of regulating our behavior and our relationships.



FIG. 9. URBAN FURNITURE DETAIL, PROJECT "FINOCCHIARO APRILE", (© MARIA GIULIA FRANCO).

This analysis of the transformations that have taken place in social spaces has aimed to demonstrate the emergence of a new culture of urban living, guided by the interdependence between spaces and bodies that are today involved in new processes of social and individual habitability. The pandemic, therefore, as the agent in the launching of a new "spatial biopolitics" (Mazzucchelli, 2021), has acted from the outset in re-establishing spatial systems guided by corporality which, as this analysis has described, have given life to the social rediscovery of a new proxemics. New experiential practices, new ways of use and new social and urban relationships have been observed and studied, demonstrating how it is possible today to rethink and rediscover possible auratic effects through a direct relationship with space. In fact, the semiotically analyzed cases of spatial transformation open themselves up to new reflections on how today's re-appropriation and re-functionalization of public space, once denied as it was replaced and only thought of as a hybrid, fluctuating and interconnected, is now made the destination of new values and effects of nature. Therefore, new models of residential proximity are established that enhance human and non-human dimensions, updating urban possibilities in which the community is directly involved and challenged by new spatial stimuli. And it is thanks to the latter that it is now possible to rethink the authenticity, the auraticity

of specific experiences during which the users are present in the physical place, activating the perceptive, sensory and affective dimension. In this way, new urban imaginaries, new social models, considerations and identity lifestyles are re-established which actualize sustainable habits, more humanised forms of daily, collective and inclusive behavior such as walking or stopping, which expose the subjects to continuous and renewed tensions and perceptive relaxations acting in recognizing an auratic value.

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88 years have passed since the first publication of Walter Benjamin's essay where he firstly proposed the notion of aura. Following the ongoing process of artification of daily life, the problem of the uniqueness of the work of art, as identified by aura, continues to be inspiring for understanding and criticizing the social world.

This issue of Global Humanities proposes the idea that the concept of aura may be considered as an effect of meaning which demands to be managed by social actors in the mediasphere. Such a move enlightens the relevance of a proper struggle for "authenticity" to be pursued as an added value of daily life: How do social forces construct such an effect? How do they capitalize on it, in their activity? How does it get recognized and valued?

€ 16

