

The **'Symbiotic Field'** is the space where **natural** and **artificial** systems intersect, producing the multilayer construct of landscape.

We live in increasingly mixed spaces. **Fluxes** of energy, matter, people, and societal interchange, transverse the **primordial natural platform**, its functioning mechanics interpreted by science, and the superimposed **infrastructural network**. The overall **cultural framing** of that ensemble is the foundation of our self-awareness.

Today we face the need to **design macro-ecologies** on a **territorial scale** in order to project a possible future for our species, but at the same time we are urged to **reinvent micro-ecologies** within the **city space** in order to re-naturalize the scenario of our days. In the end, the aggregate result is a general drift towards **novel regulations of space based on soft and living systems**.

**The Symbiotic Field .1** synthesizes the **first phase in a research project on landscape** started at the Universidad de Monterrey as part of the international doctoral program of the Università di Ferrara and Polis University.

The book tries to first build up a landscape construct, to then compare an anatomy of design cases. Moving from disparate starting points, a **number of internationally renowned contributors** cross the body of their work, tracing a bundle of feebler or bolder paths in the **novel geography of the expanded field of landscape**.

The **resulting multi-perspectival observation**, combining aggregates of artificial and living systems, psychological and physical spaces, and machinic and cultural landscapes, is an **attempt to fathom our relationship to nature**.

Roberto Pasini (Arch Florence, MArch Harvard) is an Italian architect. He teaches at the CRGS center for art, architecture, and design of the Universidad de Monterrey.

## The Symbiotic Field .1

natural / artificial mergings in design cases

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edited by Roberto Pasini

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François Roche / Camille Lacadée /  
new-territories / Antonino Di Raimo  
/ Kongjian Yu / Turenscape / Perry

Kulper / José Luis Vallejo / Ecosistema

Urbano / Besnik Aliaj / Mason

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# **The Symbiotic Field** *natural / artificial mergings* *in design cases* .1

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# ***The Symbiotic Field*** *natural / artificial mergings* *in design cases* **.1**

edited by Roberto Pasini

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***Alterate state /***

- *Withdrawal / title: Alterate State*  
... dissemination of cocktail of physiological pheromonal substances  
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# **The Contour of the Void**

*Antonino Di Raimo on:*



**What could happen  
a project between  
architecture and landscape,  
life and death,  
by new-territories  
Roche / Lacadée**

The shape of a naked male body is silhouetted against the ground's frozen surfaces. From the stance of the human body, extended as it can only be during the action of climbing towards a peak, it is understood that the man is running, busy reaching a goal. In the white background, surrounded by the rugged mountainsides, a point of arrival can be glimpsed in a valley: a semitransparent architectural object (fig.1). In the pulsating silence of the Alps, the only noises heard are those coming from the rhythm of the elements active in the environment: feet sinking in the snow and the adaptation of an architecture that seems



***Whatcouldhappen***

*Credits: Scenario-Structure-Movie-Texts / New-Territories / M4 / Francois Roche, Camille Lacadee, with Vongsawat W  
Mac Guffin / Pierre Huyghe*



*at Wongkijalerd and Daniela Mitterberger / 2015*



to owe its flickering form to those extreme physical processes observable during changes of state.

One senses that the man is in structural coupling with the environment<sup>1</sup> in a condition of reciprocal interactions that take place from the cellular level to his most complex biological units. Every time that the behavior of two or more units is such that there is a domain in which the behavior of each one is a function of the others' behavior, one may say that they are coupled in that domain, Maturana and Varela tell us<sup>2</sup>.

The surrounding environment, near the Diavolezza in Switzerland, with temperatures that can drop several degrees below zero, along with the nudity of man, other than constituting a relationship of an organism's complete reliance on an environment also presage its certain doom. Indeed, to the extent that the perturbations of the environment are articulated by the conduct of the organism, the latter will adapt to them. But, the lack of any action for surviving in those conditions, the story of the organism in its medium, would inevitably lead to its biological death and therefore its disintegration.

This apparently certain end is the result of a much more complex interaction in which different factors, including the lived history of this organism that ends up measured against an extreme environment, center around a topic, that of euthanasia, in the project of a landscape pavilion created by François Roche and Camille Lacadee - New Territories.

Among the words that describe reality and especially its possible transformations, even more than the terms architecture or environment, landscape certainly involves the presence of a living observer. In fact, while landscape on the one hand is always the reconstruction made by a subject or an agent, on the other hand, it is rather the objective description of a certain ecology. Above all, landscape happens and it is a fleeting and precarious event between cognition and perception: a place which objectivity cannot really reach (fig. 2).

This landscape happens through an interaction, which begins with a narrative, in which we are traveling in an old train crossing these valleys otherwise known only for the touristic activities that take place there. We are seated with other passengers in one of the train's carriages, and find ourselves near Lej Nair (The Black Lake). Along with the small crowd that, like in all journeys, fiddles with the food and the exceptional view, we are nevertheless informed that we are headed towards a sanatorium. Thus, a biotope pertaining to the Alpine environment is first investigated in its cultural dimensions even before the environmental ones (fig. 3).

Indeed, the sanatorium that emerges as the travel destination reveals a disturbing dimension of the disease, almost as if reevaluating our finding ourselves in an extreme environment in view of the need to be healed. The feeling is one that extends the context to the lived stories of which European literature is full: *Tristan* (1903) by Thomas Mann, and the crowd of sick people who in different times and narratives has cohabited with these places, certainly could coexist with the tormented wandering of Katherine Mansfield, who situates several stories in similar atmospheres reminding us of our fellow travelers<sup>3</sup>. The disease then, and especially the way we treat it, appears to be not so much a prerogative of an external check by the doctor but more of a living history or an experience able to act as a device for connecting a body, an environment, and an architecture.

In the meantime, in the train, a scene takes place right in front of us which, much like in an enigma, brings into play several languages and descriptions, in order to investigate a peculiar pathological relationship that is gradually revealed through the contents of a dialogue. A small artifact – a McGuffin – is manually passed around, only to be nervously groped by a boy, perhaps a victim of castration anxiety present when talking with his mother. The artifact, soft and transparent, thus seems to take shape throughout subsequent iterations, through the dialogue

between mother and son, as if that object embodied, through a process of linguistic teratogenicity<sup>4</sup>, the unspoken through the repetitions and the pathological in that dialogue. It seems to relate to its deepest dimension, otherwise animalistic, which, being impossible to express through the objective certainty of a diagnosis based on external observation, can be actualized solely through a creative act (fig. 4, fig.5).

We find ourselves in an architectural project and as observers who are an integral part of the scene and who contribute in building some of the shared cognitive domain, the fact of being within a performance does not change the discourse on architecture; on the contrary, it territorializes it, scattering the constellation of subjects who claim to hold its exclusive rights or the truth. As in all narratives, in fact, given a script, role playing, and an element of acting, the figures of an actor and an actress in their attempt to arouse genuine emotion also enable the actual feeling of architecture more through joint participation in a story which takes place in the context than in the mere appearance of a form.

Meanwhile, looking out the small window of the train, we understand that an ecology is unfolding in full before the eyes of the participants, as though the train itself was the only vehicle privileged enough to grasp its meaning even when remaining within its limits. While the small crowd remains protected in the train, thus detached from the action, we suddenly realize that the boy has abandoned the vehicle and is running in the snow entirely naked towards the pavilion. One observer even films this scene.

Subtracted, then, from 'real life', and having lost every adjective or articulation that is useful in the market, architecture can be questioned in terms of the pretense of trying once again to answer the most extreme questions, therefore, the more paradoxically authentic ones. In fact, the small architecture in the background, almost a frozen eruption, apparently a product of

fig. 2



fig. 3

the anomaly of the landscape itself, is the pavilion of euthanasia or, rather, of assisted suicide, where a tragic function takes place or, from a different perspective, absolute serenity is established.

In an attempt to frame not only life but also outline a broad view, which may also include the emergence of death - a subjective decision that is up to us- the landscape in this project of New Territories emerges via an architecture which creates questions emerging in a myth in order to be formulated. Ethics thus, behaviors and customs, are considered in their most individual aspect as well as their social one.

Indeed, the exploration of a theme, namely assisted suicide, legal in Switzerland, does not proceed through a medical protocol; on the contrary it is a mythical and literary element, already present in the history of the same Diavolezza, proposed as a device capable of grasping the aspects that qualify ecology. Thus, through a landscape reversal, one may even recall the Greek islands instead of the Alps, and with these one of the most famous suicides of mythical world. Written by Cesare Pavese, the dialogue between Sappho and the nymph Britomartis<sup>5</sup> centered on the reasons for suicide and the profound merging with a place until becoming part of its history or its ecosophy<sup>6</sup>, may – *mutatis mutandis* - take place between these same peaks.

Nothing would change even if the immaculate white of the Alps was changed into the bluish black of the Volcanic landscape found as an epilogue, or a new beginning in Pasolini's film *Teorema* (1968), in which a naked figure runs towards an end. But if these reversals do nothing but uncover, through a play of cross-references, the landscape as a cultural dimension subsumed in a broader ecology which also comprises the observers, the inclusion of architecture, as in the case of New Territories, produces further articulation of the system (fig. 6).

Thus, the touchy and hypocritical aspect of the question of euthanasia, which is nothing but a discussion on the power to prevent others what one would not do oneself, in the organization

of this project becomes one of vertices of a wider ecology in which an architecture organizes a structural coupling paradoxically designed to organize one of the activities that qualify living as such: one's own death.

Let us accompany the figure in the solitude of its journey; let us follow the silhouette as the only medium able to transmit the experience of the landscape that contains it. Let us hear the story, the bonds it claims to break, the self-description of its own



fig. 4

fig. 5



diseases, and above all the conviction of its decision.

Once in the pavilion, the figure finds a place to rest. The body is at the stage in which the chills caused by frost, tremor and numbness, are symptoms that typically precede hypothermia. Sleepiness causes a bend in the body, which, slowly reclining, seems to be embraced by the pavilion's bubble-dense morphology. An almost facile recline in one of the uterine cavities enables sleep, which will precede the end (fig. 7).

Yet this act, in which death is considered like a natural drift,



almost a new ritual apparently aimed towards the acceleration of the end is like almost all accelerations and several of the New Territories projects also an opportunity to produce in the subject a deep cognitive slowing down and thus a new awareness.

The decrease of the metabolic functions of the little body lying in the pavilion or the progressive loss of the senses, a shutdown almost, would be merely strategies, in hindsight, to arouse a being present to himself/herself, or perhaps even the possibility of entering into death with eyes wide open<sup>7</sup>. And perhaps it is precisely the investigation of this extreme point of the structural coupling, between lived life and cognition, which Roche wants to pursue in his project. The coupling, which would enable the gradual penetration of the boy by death until he can feel the final step, is perhaps a profound reason for an extreme architecture and environment which not only allow an elsewhere forbidden experience but also offer us a full restitution to ourselves, a passage within a landscape therefore, solely possible as an individual experience.

There is no judgment, then, on the pathology or the look given to a doctor, as there are no beds, sheets or medicine to be administered. Because for the disease to be understood and integrated into one's experience, one must be, first and foremost, present in his own conscience. The conclusion of this project, therefore, is an implicit criticism of the clinics of assisted

suicide, as they were expected to be by the regulations in effect, and, instead, seems to investigate the clinic in its etymological dimension, the word deriving from the Greek *klinikéa* which refers to the act of bending, reclining on something: almost the art of letting go.

However, assuming everyone is free and responsible, the morphology of the pavilion of assisted suicide, where the assistance is apparently a property of architecture, emerges from having thought not of one but of many bodies, which will be reclining there, almost an epic multitude of individual paths culminating in the one final experience (fig. 8).

The empty shell then, made of biodegradable plastic, is not the result of the determinism of the so-called bottom-up generative formal processes, but rather of having actually thought that this multitude can result in a collective falling, as if to say that a form for death must necessarily be also a form for love. Indeed, the collective falling, perhaps after progressive sensory deprivation can eventually inhibit one's ability to see the self, and consequently allow one to see the other, transfigures as in an additional joint in ecosophy, an experience apparently rooted in fear and oriented towards the dissolution of the body,

fig. 7





in a new beginning of happiness (fig. 9). There cannot be, therefore, any one typology for a project that, while mediating between organism and environment, allows an in-depth listening of one's mind, if not one's own conscience, through a gradual shutdown of one's body.

The emptiness is form, the form is emptiness, says one of the most beautiful Buddhist sutras<sup>8</sup>. If Francisco Varela<sup>9</sup>, had tried to introduce in the study of the mind, the study of consciousness through Buddhist meditation as a viaticum for restituting the lived life to the scientific model, François Roche introduces death as a summit of the life lived, to investigate and better understand the specific power of architecture's containment in its ability to create a void. The computational and intuitive processes, the interaction of a project's components in what we may call ecosophy, succeed in successfully articulating a chrysalis in the landscape, in which a rite of passage or a body's experience in going beyond, are architecture's abilities not so much in marking an end and perhaps preserving a memory but rather allowing for and accommodating the metamorphosis of a living being.

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> H.R.Maturana, F.Varela, *Autopoiesi e cognizione La realizzazione del vivente*, Marsilio, Venezia 1985

<sup>2</sup> H.R.Maturana, F.Varela, *ibid.*, p.166

<sup>3</sup> K. Mansfield, *Racconti, Una pensione Tedesca, Felicità e altri racconti*, ed. by A.Guidicci, BUR, Milano 1989

<sup>4</sup> Teratogenesis from teratology, the science that studies congenital malformations. Teratogenesis refers to malformations developed by the fetus during pregnancy.

<sup>5</sup> C.Pavese, *Dialoghi con Leucò*, Einaudi, Torino 1986

<sup>6</sup> F.Guattari, *Le tre ecologie*, Edizioni Sonda, Alessandria 1991

<sup>7</sup> "Per conto mio credo che mi augurerei di morire in piena lucidità, con un processo degenerativo così lento da lasciare che in qualche modo la mia morte entri in me, e di avere il tempo di lasciarla manifestarsi interamente. Perché? Per non lasciarmi sfuggire l'ultima esperienza, il passaggio estremo. Adriano parla di morire a occhi aperti. Ed è con questo spirito che ho fatto vivere a Zeno la sua morte." from: M>Yourcenar, *Ad Occhi Aperti Interviste con M.G.*, Les Yeux Ouverts, Bompiani, Milano 1988

<sup>8</sup> Il Sutra del Cuore

<sup>9</sup> F.Varela, E.Thompson, E.Rosch, *The Embodied Mind. Cognitive Science and Human Experience*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1991



fig. 8

fig. 9

