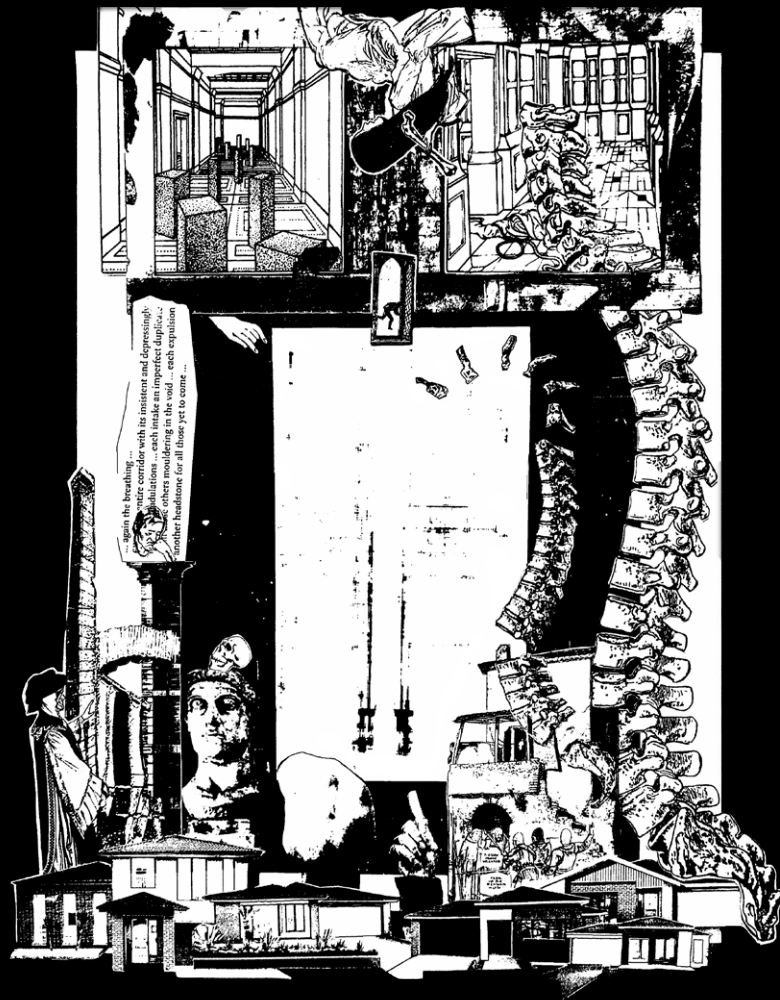


# URBAN CORPORIS

## TO THE BONES



Guest Editor  
**ANNA RICIPUTO**

Edited by  
**MICKEAL MILOCCO BORLINI**  
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# URBAN CORPORIS TO THE BONES

## **URBAN CORPORIS - TO THE BONES**

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M. Milocco Borlini, A. Califano, A. Riciputo

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# URBAN CORPORIS - TO THE BONES

## Table of Contents

**9**      **SERO VENIENTIBUS, OSSA**  
Those who are late get bones  
*Mickeal Milocco Borlini, Andrea Califano*

**11**     **TO THE BONES**  
*Anna Riciputo*

## SKULL

**16**     **Architectural Bodies in the Flowing Time**  
Ruins and Zero Degree of Architecture  
*Gregorio Froio*

**24**     **Anatomy of a Landscape**  
Processes, Approaches, and Methodologies for a  
Spatial Regeneration  
*Christina Conti, Ambra Pelice*

**32**     **Expected Adjacencies and Common Ghosts**  
Fossil and Ruin in the Financial House  
*Laura Szyman*

**40**     **House-Work**  
Towards an Occupation of Care, or, New Bones for Old  
*Hugo David Moline*

**48**     **Designing Togetherness**  
Rethinking the Structure of the City from In-Between  
*Arianna Scaioli*

**58**     **Locus Vertebralis**  
Exploring Analogies Between Anatomy and Architecture  
*Simon Comptoi*

**64**     **The Agency of a Half-Finished Building**  
An Active Ruin  
*Sebastian Gatz*

- 70**     **Disinterring the Architectural Drawing**  
*Linda Matthews*
- 78**     **Urban Carcasses**  
The Reinterpretation of Unfinished Spatiality  
*Lorenzo Bagnoli*
- 86**     **Permanence and Continuity of the Project**  
Relations Between Persistent Structures and Contemporary Interventions  
*Valerio De Caro*
- 94**     **Ceci N'est Pas Béton Armé**  
Unveiling the Backbone Behind the Bricks at Det Danske Institut in Rome  
*Angela Gigliotti*
- 104**    **Bones as Traces**  
Towards a Nonviolent Architecture  
*Tommaso Antiga*

## TORSO

- 114**    **Dorsum**  
Topography and Tectonic as Lenses of Inquiry for Architecture in Mountain and Rural Contexts  
*Francesco Airoldi, Giulia Azzini*
- 122**    **Stones Sinking Like Bones**  
Notes on Italian Modern Architecture into the Desert Sands  
*Giuseppe Felici, Antonio Schiavo*
- 130**    **The Industrial Remnants: Memories of the Past, Assets for Urban and Territorial Re-design**  
The Case Studies of Nantes and Saint-Ouen in France  
*Varvara Toura*
- 138**    **Kandovan's Morphology**  
Unearthing the City's Architectural Skeleton  
*Ghazaleh Tarkalam*
- 146**    **Essentials in Face of (Climate) Change**  
Venice as a Planetary Metaphor  
*Francesca Dal Cin, Cristiana Valente Monteiro*
- 156**    **The Reciprocal Interplay of Body and Space: a Phenomenological Exploration of Time as the 'Backbone' of Architecture**  
*James Acott-Davies*

## LIMBS

- 164**    **X-ACT**  
Desire Lines of a Healing Bone  
*Demet Dincer, Belinda J. Dunstan*
- 172**    **From Rubble to Ruins**  
The 'Cavalleggeri Christs' of from Isolated Elements to Urban System  
*Michele Astone*
- 180**    **Infrastructure for Informal Inhabit**  
[In]Visible Paradoxical Cities Around Global Urban Skeleton  
*Maria Fierro*
- 186**    **Lagni Regi**  
Photo-Carto-Graphic Exploration of a Layered Spine  
*Francesco Stefano Sammarco*
- 194**    **More than Bones**  
Lisbon Infrastructural Footprints  
*Pablo Villalonga Munar, Stefanos Antoniadis*

## Afterword

- 205**    **TEMPORAL OXYMORON**  
*Lelio di Loreto*



01. Mostra d'Oltremare cableway in action courtesy by Antonio Sasso. © Roma magazine n. 110 – 07.05.1940.

# From Rubble to Ruins

## The 'Cavalleggeri Christs' of from Isolated Elements to Urban System

**Michele Astone** PhD in Architecture. Theories and Project at the DiAP of the Sapienza University of Rome and research fellow in Architectural Design at the DiCEA of the Federico II University of Naples.

**Keywords:** Ruin, Rubble, Trace, Cavalleggeri Christs, Overseas Exhibition

### Abstract

*The Rione Cavalleggeri d'Aosta in Naples features the remains of a cableway, designed by architect Giulio de Luca and inaugurated in 1940, that connected the Posillipo hill to the Fuorigrotta district. After its decommissioning in 1961, the two stations and the three cable pillars can still be seen among the buildings. These pillars, because of their shape, are called by the Neapolitans "Cristi" (such as "Christs"), changing their "urban status": they are "sculptures", rubbles of a disused infrastructure whose linear relationship is now imperceptible becoming isolated elements whose systemic significance is now lost.*

*Only a bird's-eye view can reveal to us a hidden trace among the neighbourhood's built-up area, allowing us to understand the relationship that holds together these different isolated elements.*

*This study-case of "The Cavaleggeri Christs" makes it possible to highlight the ability of the project design to bring order to the "rubble" of contemporary abandoned architecture by re-relating the remaining elements, turning them into "ruins" with an historical value and recognition. The trace that the city can hardly reveals is the bet to win with design actions, re-proposing new urban meanings through which useless elements, once structuring the form of the city, can emerge.*

*We set our states of consciousness side by side in such a way as to perceive them simultaneously, no longer in one another, but alongside one another; in a word, we project time into space, we express duration in terms of extensity, and succession thus takes the form of a continuous line or a chain, the parts of which touch without penetrating one another (Bergson, 1910).*

## **Introduction**

The Three Christs of Cavalleggeri stand like sculptures in the western suburbs of Naples. These crumbling grey pylons, wedged between the buildings of the Cavalleggeri Aosta district, are nothing more than the remains of the cableway that connected the Fuorigrotta and Posillipo districts, designed as part of the larger context of the Mostra d'Oltremare (Siola, 1990). Of the daring infrastructure designed by Giulio de Luca and inaugurated in 1940, only these three pylons remain today, which the Neapolitans call "Cristi", both for their iconic shape due to the "open arms" that recall Rio de Janeiro's Christ the Redeemer, and with a critical intent to emphasise the presence of dilapidated infrastructures of whose use only or very few have memory and awareness. The three Christs, with the valley station on Viale Kennedy at one of the entrances to the exhibition and the mountain station along Via Manzoni, constituted a linear system that projected onto the ground a route at altitude that the two cabins set up for travellers repeated every six minutes.

## **The Fuorigrotta-Posillipo cable car for the city of Naples**

The orographic conformation of Naples connotes it as a city that rises from the sea towards the hills, where the built-up area is positioned according to intervals dictated by variations in altitude. Many are the ascent systems that characterise the historic city, where stairs and ramps constitute a privileged and unusual point from which to observe Naples from above (Amirante and D'Agostino, 2002). Alongside these fundamental infrastructuring elements that history still gives us today, outlining an urban form whose profound understanding can only be achieved through the study of its section, there is also a system of transport that Naples is equipped with that runs vertically through the city, starting in 1881 with the Montesanto funicular. Together with lifts, funicular railways, ramps and staircases, the Fuorigrotta-Posillipo cableway is part of the broader plan to create connecting elements transversal to the city's metropolitan transport system and orthogonal to the contour lines (that ideally outline the territory). In particular, to simplify the connection between Fuorigrotta and Posillipo is one of the benefits that fall within a vision of the infrastructure as the "glue" between the then Parco della Vittoria (now Parco Virgiliano), up on the Posillipo hills, and the Mostra Triennale delle Terra Italiane d'Oltremare, down to the sea. The park, inaugurated in 1931, outlines a portion of the Posillipo hill and dominates the Gulf of Naples with its terraces offering a panorama framing landscapes from Cape Miseno to Punta Campanella. For a short time it was thought to organise the exhibition centre there, where many of the sites were already in the municipality's possession, but then the choice fell on Fuorigrotta, next to the new Campi Flegrei station on the Rome-Naples railway. The Parco della Vittoria, by means of the cableway, thus became an appendix to the Exhibition, whose radius of influence was thus extended to the hilly part of the city thanks to a facilities system - reminiscent of the one created in Vienna for the Universal Exhibition in the 1873 with the Kahlenberg facility. What has just been described is part of a process that had an impulse in and from the Ventennio Fascista (the twenty years of Fascism) but is also the outcome of a broader process started since the Unification of Italy: entrusting Naples by turning it into the "privileged Italian host" for national and international exhibitions and shows which, in new forms and different visions, partly still persists till today (Mangone, 2021).

Thus, the cableway was a brand new idea: it traced a desire to improve the efficiency of local public transport and a satisfied the tourist vocation of the western area, which would gained both a direct link between the new Mostra d'Oltremare and Parco della Rimembranza and an evocative viewpoint over the panorama of the Phlegraean Fields, characterised by a strong landscape quality.

Within the contemporary architectural historiography, the cable car stations and its pylons - united to the Swimming Pool, the Greenhouses, the Aquarium by Carlo Cocchia and the Arena Flegrea by De Luca - are an important legacy of the teachings from the Modern Movement to the "Neapolitan School" carried out by those who were then new graduates of the School of Architecture (Gravagnuolo, 2021).

### **Nowadays distopia: from Pylon to Christ**

In terms of construction and form, the difference in height that the cable car allowed was 104 m, while the distance separating the two stations was 1629 metres. Compared to the valley station, the first pylon is very close (about 130 m), a length that can also be related to the distance between the first and second pylons. The second and third pylons are about 400 metres apart, while the third from the top station is 945 m (a bold measurement considering the technology of the time). The two cabins, apart from the conductor in livery who also took on the role of driver, could accommodate up to 20 people (Capasso, 2002).

The development of the Cavallegeri Aosta district led to the construction of a series of buildings adjacent to the cableway, which entailed obvious safety problems that led to its decommissioning as early as 1961, while ten years later the cables supporting the cabins were removed, one of which is preserved in a dilapidated condition inside the mountain station. In addition to the presence of the built-up area, the current maintenance conditions of stations and, especially, pylons make the reuse of this infrastructure an unrealistic utopia.

Not only that, between the complete activation of the cableway and its total demolition there are no political choices and investments aimed at a regeneration of this architecture that could configure an intermediate solution between the two extremes. This makes these elements nothing more than urban rubble, witnesses to a past known to few and, today, just support for posters.

In spite of this, the architectural quality of the infrastructure, its technical boldness and its intrinsic historical value, may prove to be an opportunity to make a conceptual shift that takes the remains of the cable car from the idea of rubble to that of ruin. Ruin is understood as an element of current urbanity that refers to a non-contemporary and undated time, something selected from the chaos generated by the "entropy of rubble" to acquire a new order. It is the ability to produce an image that does not belong to the actual reality but has the aptitude to stimulate memory in everyone. This has less to do with the truth of things and more to do with bringing forth fragments from the past that interrogate by their presence (Augé, 2004).

The conceptual transition from rubble to ruin through the instrument of the project is only feasible through an understanding of the antecedent variation from Pylon to Christ: the pylon is a structural element whose urban significance is only revealed in relation to the elements of a larger apparatus - pylons, stations, the movement of cables and cabins. The removal of the linear elements and the approaching constructions deprive the pylons of their systemic value that makes them "infrastructure", automatically acquiring the iconic value of "Christ". The irony of the Neapolitan photographs with their sense of the opposite, configures a sort of pseudo-Christ (of Rio de Janeiro): it identifies the single emergency as similar in form to the brazilian monument but deprived, precisely, of the character of the memory that the monument etymologically contains.



02. The central Christ aligned with the one closest to the mountain station. Michele Astone.  
03. The central Christ decorated on the occasion of the Napoli Scudetto. Michele Astone.



The return to a vision of the *Cristi* as a system may prove to be a perspective on which to base a revaluation and an element of regeneration for that part of the city of Naples. The changes that the city has undergone since 1940 have not led to the erasure of the trace on the ground of the cable car route, which is more perceptible from an aerial view (from the hill of Posillipo, for example) than by walking along the streets of Cavalleggeri neighbourhood. In addition to the pylons, therefore, this trace is configured as permanence despite the presence of more or less unauthorised buildings that occupy it: a strip dotted by the station on Viale Kennedy and the three *Cristi* that gradually dissolves as it approaches the hill of Posillipo and the disused sports park that draws its valley edge.

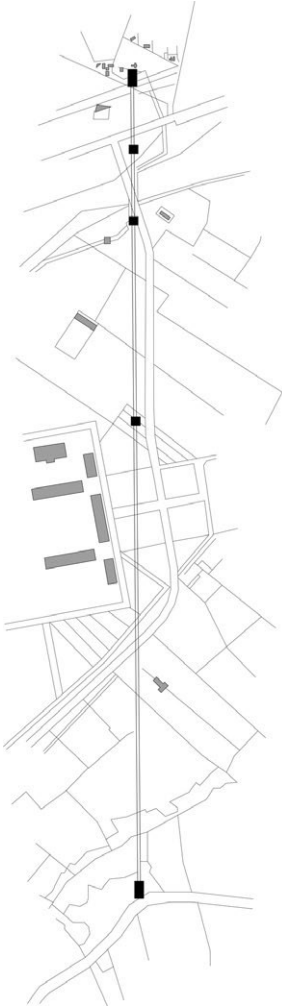
A design project could bring out these traces and reveal the quality of the *Cristi* to become a propelling element (Rossi, 1966). This action does not concern the desire to bring to light presence from the past as in an archaeological excavation, but rather the opportunity to generate the image of a presence that dislocates itself by finding new meanings in terms of use, urban, landscape and (why not?) history (Derrida, 1973). The urban project thus becomes the means through which to create narrative devices in which traces become elements on which to generate different levels of meaning. The surrounding context becomes the palimpsest on which to construct new narratives and re-construct memory, and the project becomes the act through which to operate a revision that produces a revisiting of works and traces from the past that enables the production of unique works (Capuano, 2020).

### **The Park of Christs. An idea of signification**

From the earliest drawings, the cable car ran parallel to Via Cavalleggeri d'Aosta, which is the arterial road along which the entire district of the same name runs and which connects part of the Fuorigrotta district to Posillipo hill. In fact, an aerial view shows this track as a strip parallel to this artery. With an average thickness of about 17 metres and interrupted by the transversal road axis of Via Diocleziano and Line 2 of the Naples Metro, this strip continues until almost the end of Via Cavalleggeri.

Endowed with singularity and simplicity of form, the ability to contrast with the background through their figure, to be pre-eminent in relation to their context, Christs possess certain characteristics that make them potentially landmarks. The dissolution of their relationships, a distorted relationship with the void, the difficulty of lining them up through the depth of their gaze weakens them of this role (Lynch, 1960).

The design of a linear park would reconstitute a double axis no longer at two different elevations but on the same plane, flanking the vehicular framework of Cavalleggeri with a second pedestrian spine configured as a place to be; a public space therefore that could unite at least the central Christ and the one closer to the station upstream; a green spine in the heart of the district as a collective place in an area lacking one; a segment that would give centrality to its vertices, which in addition to the Christs are certainly the Cavalleggeri underground station to the north and the defiladed and isolated parish of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, which would acquire a real new urban role thanks to a renewed proximity; a link between the Mostra d'Oltremare and the Virgiliano Park as the glue between the new (and as yet unactivated) sports park on the slopes of the Posillipo hill and the city; a real space of pause but at the same time a hinge between different paths; a furrow that physically and visually connects the *Cristi* that from isolated elements return to their significance as a stage whose reciprocal relationship takes them from the architectural scale to the urban and landscape scale; no longer the rubble of an almost unknown past but a system of ruins whose behaviour is almost comparable to the



04. Planimetry of the realised project, 1940. Graphic rendering by Michele Astone.

05. The Cristi park. From isolated elements to an urban system. Graphic rendering by Michele Astone.

romantic architectural *folies* that prop up English and French gardens; a versatile place open to multiple uses such as that of a market or a space for artistic experimentation.

The rethinking and design of the empty space between the Christs makes it possible to “diminish” their distance since the void separating them is made habitable by a designed space that triggers a system of relations in a transversal sense – as a seam between the east and west portions of the Cavalleggeri district – and in a longitudinal sense – as a junction that puts the three Christs back into reciprocal relation. The acquisition of a deep perspective view makes it possible to line them up one behind the other so that they are perceived as a single entity even though they are three (Bruni, 2016).

The trace thus becomes emergence, a new framework. The project is a mean by which not to juxtapose, to place side by side on the same plane, different stratifications, layers, but on the contrary it is a tool to resurface signs, objects, architectures buried in time (Saggio, 2000).

No longer rubble but ruins, elements that the project rearranges and reintroduces into the city, giving them new meaning, status and memory.

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A BOOK ON ARCHITECTURE, ART, PHILOSOPHY AND URBAN  
STUDIES TO NOURISH THE URBAN BODY.

The second volume of *Urban Corporis*, titled "To the Bones", compiles reflections from architects, artists, and scholars who have extensively delved into the fundamental themes of contemporary architecture. By navigating a constant interplay between past and future, memory and innovation, and the realms of the natural, artificial, and virtual, these contributions put forth strategies for architectural, artistic, urban, and landscape projects that resonate with the fundamental principles shaping our built and perceived environment. They advocate for design approaches that synchronise with the foundational elements, referred to as "the bones", that structure the landscape while promoting forward-thinking considerations.