THE VOID THAT INHABITS THE CITY. THE REDISCOVERED TEMENOS OF AUGUSTA EMERITA AND THE WRITING OF THE URBAN PROJECT

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Abstract. Faced with the new permanent climate conditions, urban voids – palimpsests of memory and possibility – emerge as privileged areas for environmental measurement and modulation and, at the same time, as guardians of shared formal and cultural identities. These spaces embody the city's ability to reflect on and regenerate itself, offering surfaces where the past and the questions of the present intertwine. In this context, José María Sánchez García's project for the Roman temple in the ancient colony of Augusta Emerita (now Mérida) takes the form of an act of historical and symbolic reconciliation: a ritual of 'liberation' of the ancient monument, achieved through the precise definition of its boundaries and the deliberate incision of the void that surrounds it. By precisely tracing the boundaries of the enclosure, the architectural intervention reaffirms the sacredness of the temenos, translating the current needs related to systemic regeneration – circularity of resources, climate adaptation and urban resilience – into an urban gesture of a ritual nature. The void thus disciplined is not mere absence, but an operational area for environmental mitigation and cultural renewal: a space in which the re-emergence of ancient forms and values becomes an opportunity for collective awareness and the reconstruction of historical memory.

Restored to the dignity of a threshold, the 'rediscovered' temenos in the ancient heart of Mérida regains its original meaning: that of circumscribing its most important figure (the temple), allowing its intrinsic roundness to resonate in the new enclosed space, disciplining the gaze from every side. In this evidence, 'regenerative' design manifests itself as an urban sign: a form that connects past and future, nature and culture, fragility and durability, in a single, shared breath.

Keywords: urban archaeological void, temenos, architectural design, boundary and threshold, memory and urban identity

From urban void to archaeological scene

In the heart of cities, archaeological areas appear as paradoxical presences: not simple absences or indistinct fragments, but voids that emerge in contrast to the full mass of the contemporary fabric. The excavation is like a negative that thickens at the consolidated edges, a discontinuity that interrupts urban continuity and at the same time highlights it, showing the limits, finiteness and compactness of the buildings around it. This condition has a dual significance: on the one hand, it is a «wound» (Ricci, 2006), because it interrupts established flows and relationships and generates cultural alienation; on the other, it is a revealing opportunity, because it makes historical stratification legible and offers inspiration for new configurations of meaning. It is precisely this ambivalence – both injury and revelation – that constitutes the theoretical and operational node that design practice must address: not simply healing or closing the wound left by the 'void', but mediating this formal and temporal discontinuity, transforming it into a threshold capable of hosting meaning, a 'place' capable of bringing together contemporary life and practices.

Franco Purini's interpretation [1] contributes decisively to clarifying this distinction: the dichotomy between 'place' and 'void' is not merely an aesthetic value, but the measure by which the capacity of a context to accommodate a particular culture of living is determined. According to this perspective, place is what offers stability and cultural recognition, while emptiness remains suspended in transience, lacking the completeness that makes human permanence possible. It is precisely on this threshold – between reassuring fullness and fragile transience – that design practice must measure itself: understanding how the archaeological void, despite being formally disconnected from the urban density, can be redefined as a place capable of 'coexisting with' and enriching the present city.

In this context, it is worth noting how archaeology comes to the city through a radical gesture: a presence that opens up and at the same time tears apart more or less consolidated urban areas. These vestiges, emerging from the interstices of time, often do not follow the alignments and rules of the modern city; on the contrary, they appear foreign, sometimes in conflict with the order and relationships that organise the city on the surface. This gives rise to two intertwined questions: on the one hand, the loss of continuity in urban life with respect to that past appear, and on the other, the need to rethink, in terms of design, their reintegration. What, then, is the horizon of meaning that we can attribute to an archaeological fragment or inserted into a fabric whose rules are different? How can we restore vitality and function to what, in terms of form and history, appears to be an interruption?

To answer these questions, it is useful to recall, albeit briefly, the reflection that links the boundary to the becoming of space into place. Aristotle, in Book V of Metaphysics, defines the limit as the extreme that separates the inside from the outside, the frontier that establishes what belongs and what remains beyond. Martin Heidegger (1976), taking up and rethinking this legacy, shifts the emphasis to the role of the limit as a condition for space to become place, that is, a human sphere capable of recalling life and meaning. These passages suggest that emptiness, understood as ephemeral discontinuity, is not immediately suitable for habitation, precisely because it lacks the formal completeness that allows a place to accommodate bodies and shared practices. Applied to urban archaeology, this lesson suggests that, in order to become a place, excavation requires devices that rethink its boundaries and turn them into thresholds, forms of architecture capable of harmonising different times and materials. Thinking in these terms means conceiving the excavation as an opportunity to construct a sequence of passages that make citizens and visitors aware of the transition from ordinary life to the sacred place, reconnecting the fragment to its context and restoring it to the condition necessary to continue to be a source of knowledge.

This picture is overlaid by the aesthetic reflection put forward by Jorge Oteiza, who proposes a vision of emptiness that goes beyond mere deprivation: he considers it an intentional act, capable of converting «external space into internal spatiality, almost immune to the flow of time» (Oteiza, 1968, p. 41). Achieved by subtraction, this opening is not a mere negation of space, but a «presence of absence» (Oteiza, 2001, p. 26) that sharpens perception, invites silence and encourages contemplation. Transposed into the field of urban archaeology, Oteiza's intuition takes on meanings that go beyond simple aesthetics: the void that emerges brings with it a deposit of collective meaning that calls for design mediation. The excavation, as a temporal cavity, preserves a subtle trace that must be translated into a legible sign: not to restore an inert past, but to trace latent orders and conceive new ones, capable of making the gap habitable and communicative once again. If this potential remains unexpressed, the void closes in on itself and becomes a marginal residue, fenced off and devoid of any relationship with the living city. Conversely, the architectural project is called upon to transform discontinuity into a threshold, to articulate the boundary so that it Recalls collective memory and responsibility, harmonises disparate times and restores a renewed and recognisable function to the fragment for the contemporary community.

From this theoretical horizon, a conceptual triangulation emerges that guides the project: the archaeological interstice presents itself as a negative in relation to the compact mass of the city, as a «wound» that requires limits and mediation in order to be inhabited, and as a catalyst of meaning that, if properly rebuilt, restores practices and meanings to the community. The challenge of 'regenerative' architecture is therefore to conceive forms capable of establishing relationships: figures that reconcile the ancient past with the present, that transform the break into a permeable boundary, that intertwine memory and functions – climatic, social, cultural – in a coherent and productive way.

The following Section will examine José María Sánchez García's design for the Roman temple of Diana in Mérida as an exemplary case: an architectural intervention that acts on the margins and configuration of the gap to restore urban archaeology to an active role in the contemporary fabric, a place born of careful management of boundaries, capable of creating a dialogue between past and future, fragility and durability, silence and participation.

Typological reconstruction of the Temple of Diana in Mérida

With regard to these premises, the project developed by José María Sánchez García for the colony of Augusta Emerita – today's Mérida – is taken here as an emblematic case to investigate, through the typological and even archetypal reconstruction of the enclosure, ancient matter as the source of a new tense space, as a synthetic moment of those human reasons that shaped matter and informed the work of ancient architecture. However, this operation is not to be understood as a mere formal restitution, but rather as an attempt to read the intrinsic qualities of the place and translate them into a design gesture capable of bringing out their original charge, while addressing the needs and rhythms of the current city.

The Roman settlement of Augusta Emerita (figure 1), probably founded by Octavian Augustus around 25 BC, lies on an

almost flat plain, closely linked to the river in front of it: the Guadiana. The urban layout consists of quadrangular blocks, counterbalanced by two large central open spaces. In fact, within the dense domestic fabric, inscribed in the more general form of the civitas, there are two 'absences' that act as organisers of internal relations. The first open public space is the so-called 'municipal forum', developed near the intersection of the cardo and decumanus maximus roads. Set within the tapestry of insulae, the forum is divided into a double row of enclosures, creating a discontinuous but homogeneous sign capable of enhancing the convexity of some of the plastic figures that dwell within it, including the temple of Diana. The other communal space, the 'provincial forum', interrupts the residential row formed by the 'first' cardo. Located exactly in the centre of the street, the boundary here is formed by a continuous enclosure, inhabited in the centre by two monumental structures facing each other: the temple of the provincial forum and Trajan's Arch. Close to the defensive system, along the northern boundary of the city, further monumental structures emerge from the dense urban layout – the theatre and the amphitheatre – which project the overall meaning and richness of the fabric well beyond the boundary marked by the city walls: not far away stands the circus, a place dedicated to public life, games and competitions.

Under current conditions, some remains of the temple of Diana emerge from the ground as signs of a powerful but at the same time vulnerable history. These fragments are now devoid of meaning, as they are surrounded by a jumble of urban fragments of modest architectural quality that deprive them of their value and the original reason for their construction, namely to be a cleared space in which the controlled and intentional inclusion of its most representative architecture takes place: the temple consecrated to the goddess of hunting and purity. The sacred ground of the temenos is now crossed paths and buildings that obscure its boundaries, which in ancient times were very clear.

Sánchez García's proposal (figure 2) aims to restore the founding role of the μ by clarifying its contours. It seeks to reaffirm a place of sacred value that can condense the intrinsic qualities of the site and contribute to the redefinition of the urban layout. It is also possible to discern a desire to establish entirely new relationships between the fragments of ancient architecture and the forms of the contemporary city which, when placed in relation to each other (Sánchez García, 2017, pp. 28-39), can describe a new unity of meaning and form, expressing a nova sed antiqua antique Venustas that encompasses both past and present.

In order to relate the dimension of contemporaneity to that of memory, it is necessary to articulate a new boundary, a candidate for recalling those visible and invisible 'thresholds' that make citizens aware of the 'passage', the transition from everyday life to a consecrated space. The parterre is thus 'freed' from a number of dwellings that have profaned a land of the highest sacred and moral value with impunity, restoring the

continuity of soil necessary to showcase the uniqueness of the temple, which can still resonate in the concavity of the new enclosed space. Twenty-two new columns define the new hollow space, delineating an enclosed place that, on the one hand, is assertive – the one facing the temple – and, on the other, works in contrast with geometric precision to accommodate, with a broken line, the irregular building cluster on which it rests at the rear. Through the contrast between covered and uncovered areas, Sánchez García defines a platform suspended above the ground (figure 3), from which to view a broader reality, one built in its historical development and containing the different moments of form: from the past to the most recent, even incorporating a part of the future. It is along this edge that the two cities – the ancient and the contemporary – come into contact in a relationship that is not achieved through a generic and undifferentiated conquest of the two spaces, but rather by seeking the right blend of their respective identities, modulating the formal and spatial articulation of the enclosure by virtue of the presence of the temple (figure 4). Recognised as the main element of archaeological and urban value, the new cleared space can thus accommodate the most prominent plastic figure, the one dedicated to Diana, which is free to dominate the urban density against which it stands out.

In Mérida's experience, the project reveals a profound tension: recognising, in the essence of past and irretrievably lost

forms, a decisive moment – the Kairos – that re-emerges in the reaffirmation of typological values capable of restoring the «memory of lost order» – to paraphrase the famous title of José Ignacio Linazasoro's book (2015) – by introducing renewed qualities, the result of the gaze and hand of the contemporary craftsman. The moment of settlement should be understood as a primal and archetypal moment, resonating with the most general meaning of architecture and the foundation of the culture that produced it. Recognising this moment means grasping the structural elements that constitute the type – its invariants – and restoring its original function in the current urban scene. In the project for the Iberian city, this interpretation translates into an elementary and unified tectonic gesture: separating the exterior from the interior with a single elementary tectonic gesture by means of a clearly defined boundary. The new suspended platform, intended as a border that circumscribes and orders, records a geometric rule already implicit in the typological status of the place and establishes a precise syntax within the urban grammar. This is how the dialectic that underpins the intervention manifests itself: on the one hand, the permanence of the typological invariant – Kairos as the identification of the unchangeable elements of the type – and, on the other, the heterogeneity of the formal solution – Kronos as the temporal articulation of a new form. This tension, rather than a contradiction, acts as a link between past, present and future, allowing the renewed form to restore meaning and continuity to the urban scene (figure 5).

Ultimately, in order to depict the silent language of archaeology, Sánchez García attempts to understand not only the

physical and spatial order that architecture once expressed as form through construction, but above all its «essential» charge [2], i.e. those qualities which, reified in type, refer to a higher order. These residual stones, preserved in their documentary value, are therefore selected as the main material structuring the project idea: a form to be reactivated in order to grasp the idea of architecture underlying them. In this way, the shaped material conveys the reasoning carried out by the Spanish architect to describe, understand and comment on the idea contained in the ancient remains, with the hope of revealing the meaning of architecture in architecture itself. By questioning, on the one hand, the archetype as a superstructural element that gives meaning to the artefact and, on the other, the typological structure as a formal structure that evokes the lifestyle to which those stumbling ruins gave rise, space and measure, the project rediscovers typological structures rooted in original and eternal meanings. This rediscovery gives rise to renewed construction methods that restore form to ancient materials and transform them into a living presence: memory guides the formal gesture and stone once again becomes a meaningful body. In this way, the architectural project takes on the task of revealing the human and universal reasons that informed the compositional process and sublimated the constructed object, establishing itself as a dynamic principle that resonates in the contemporary urban fabric.

Notes

1. «[...] where emptiness is characterised by a temporal shift and a risky vastness, the place seems to suggest something

intimate and protected, inscribed in a narrative and therefore a temporality. The place is therefore emblematic of a settling, a confirmation through various eras, a progressive growth around a founding act. Emptiness, on the other hand, evokes crossings and incursions, as well as a genetic temporariness». (Purini, 2008, p. 52).

2. Term used by Elémire Zolla (1988) to confer unity on the set of types through the archetyp. This expression is taken up and reused here to emphasise the connection between an all-encompassing order – that of the archetype – which shapes human reasoning through a typological structure – in the relationship between the phenomenal world and the world of ideas – and artistic activity, where form becomes a moment of synthesis of material and spiritual instances, intercepting the needs and desires of society which, cyclically, appears in those forms and can continue to recognise itself.

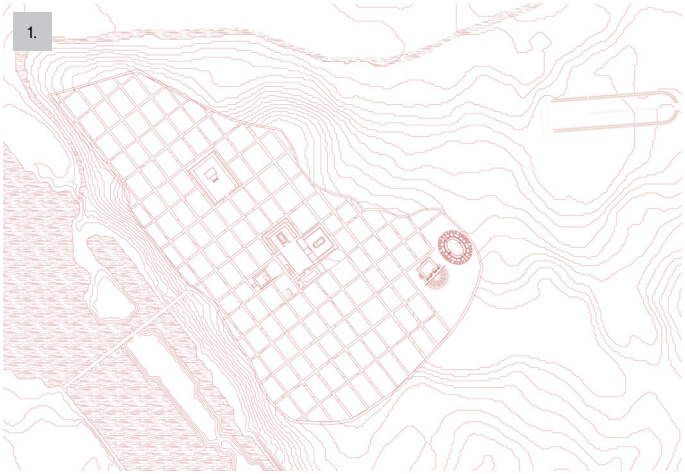
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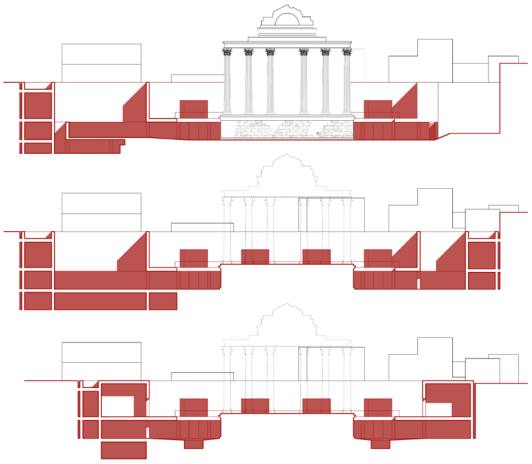
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Figures.
Figure 1 – Planimetric restoration of the ancient Roman city of Augusta Emerita. Drawing by the author
Figure 2 – From top to bottom: Planivolumetry, upper level plan and archaeological level plan highlighting archaeological features (in black) and new architectural forms (in red). Drawings by the author.
Figure 3 – Cross-sections. Drawings by the author.
Figure 4 – Axonometric exploded view: in black, the 'presumed' archaeological forms; in red, the 'rewritten' architectural forms. Drawing by the author.
Figure 5 – Perspective view of the 'rediscovered' temenos (in red) and the temple (in black) from the main access road to the site. Drawing by the author.

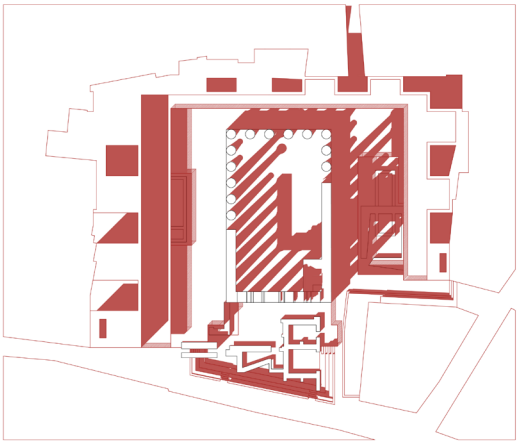
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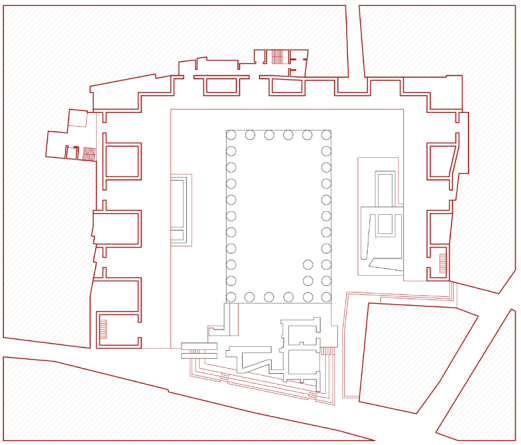


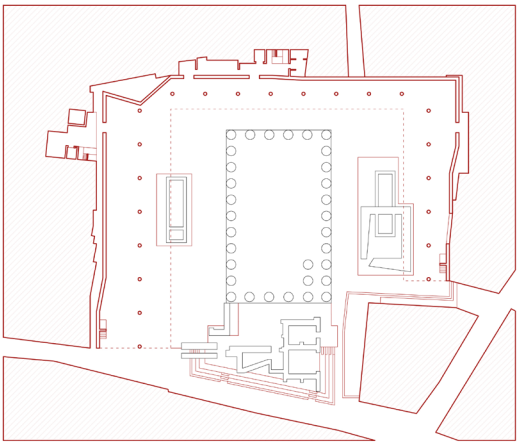
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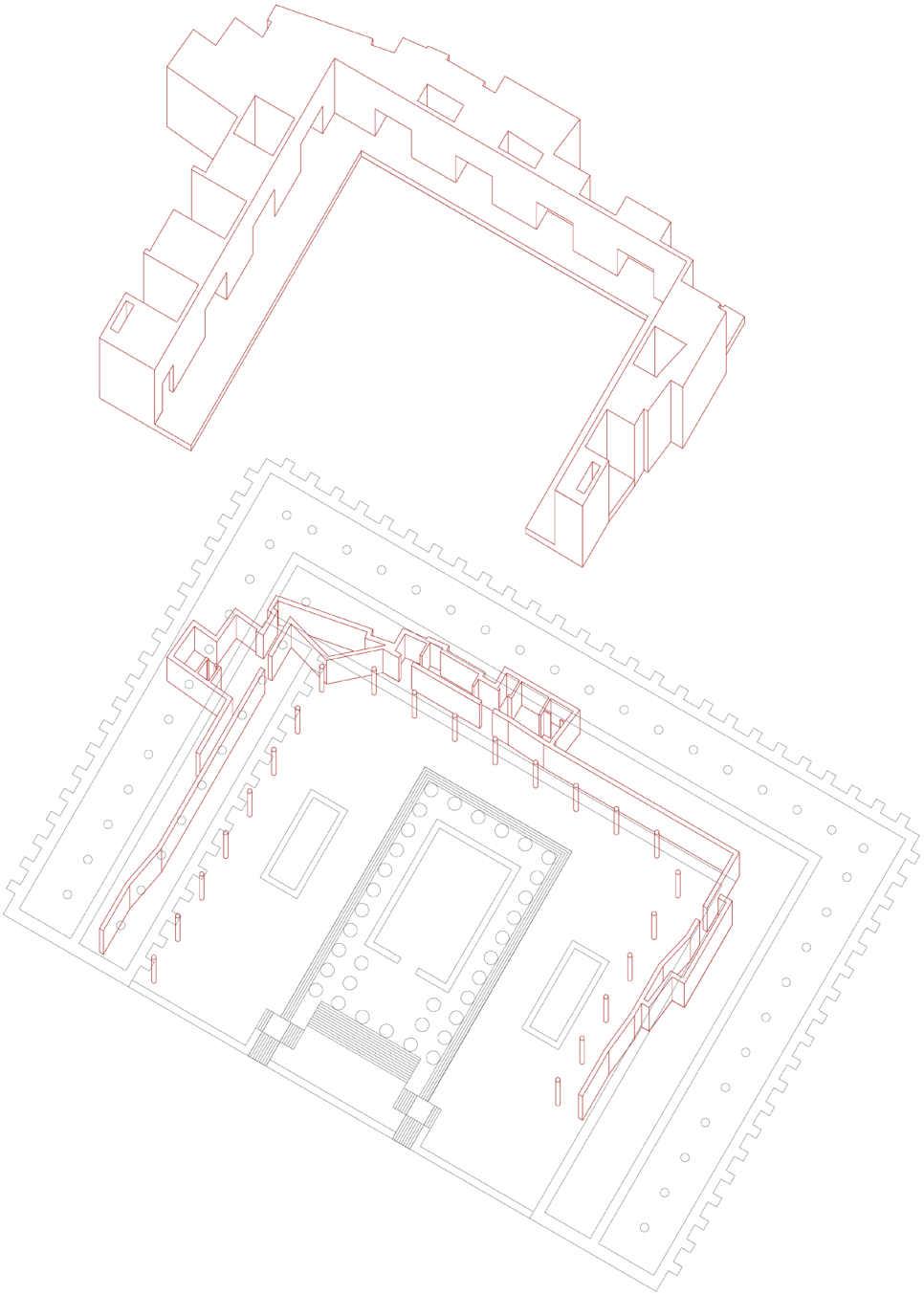
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SOIL AS MEMORY. ARCHITECTURE, DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION IN THE ERA OF CLIMATE CHANGE/

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Abstract. The climate emergency compels architectural research and design practice to confront issues that can no longer be deferred, particularly those concerning territorial fragility and hydrogeological instability. Within the disciplinary strands that interpret the territory as the cumulative result of centuries of anthropic transformations, the need emerges for intervention methodologies capable of addressing these vulnerabilities through approaches in which form assumes a guiding role. Rather than being treated as a secondary outcome of technical containment systems, form must orient design choices and shape project solutions in a conscious and proactive manner. In this way, regeneration interventions related to territorial fragility may be understood as the outcome of a process of morphological redefinition in which, through an act of cultural reappropriation, the necessity of consolidation becomes an opportunity to define new forms of landscape, meaning, and inhabitation of places. Intervening in the territory constitutes an inherently "violent" act, one that disrupts existing equilibria and rewrites the site's natural configuration. Such transformation entails a "sacrifice" that should be compensated by design strategies able to convert a technical necessity into an opportunity: the creation of new spaces, the enhancement of anthropised environments, and the redefinition of urban relationships. These challenges intensify when interventions occur in proximity to cultural, historical, or archaeological heritage. In these contexts, consolidation must be achieved through solutions consistent with the pre-existing fabric, ensuring not only the resolution of instability phenomena but also the recovery of the legibility of ancient contexts that have been compromised over time. The consolidation works conducted in the late 1980s along the ancient seafront of the Varano hill in Castellammare di Stabia (Naples, Italy) becomes the starting point of the critical-theoretical reflection of the research. Although deemed urgent and technically effective, the intervention compromised the perception of the artificial landscape shaped by the terraced substructures of the Roman maritime villas situated along the plateau's edge. Starting from this case, the research explores alternative strategies for reconstructing a meaningful relationship between architecture and landscape through soil construction, aiming to transcend the merely technical dimension of consolidation and to propose models that restore coherence, intelligibility, and design quality to fragile territorial contexts.

Keywords: Architecture for archaeology, soil, memory, substruction;

The invention of the landscape in the Ager Stabianus. Present-day Castellammare di Stabia is a city located within the geographical context of the Gulf of Naples, to the south of Vesuvius, more precisely at the junction between the Sorrentine Peninsula and the Sarno Plain, in a narrow strip of coastal territory squeezed between sea and mountains that expanded significantly following the eruption of 79 CE. Here, the city was built *ex novo*; of ancient *Stabiae*, which stood above the Varano hill — the third city buried by the Plinian eruption — only fragmentary traces of memory survive today.

From a morphological point of view, the hill constitutes the first escarpment of the orographic system of the Lattari Mountains on the side facing the Gulf, which in antiquity must have presented itself as a true cliff overlooking the sea. Its slope has a vertical development of about 35 metres and is characterized by a steep gradient that in some stretches exceeds 45°; at its summit extends a broad plateau rising above the present-day settlement of Castellammare di Stabia. Along its edge, archaeological remains have revealed a complex system of architectures that includes at least a portion of an urban layout and the presence of five *villae d'otium*, arranged so as to construct the edge almost without interruption over a total extension of roughly 1,500 m (Miniero, 1999). In addition to the so-called "Urban Complex" (B), the various excavation campaigns — conducted systematically from the second half of the eighteenth century — have brought to light the archaeological remains of Villa del Fauno (A), Villa San Marco (C), Villa del Pastore (D), Villa Arianna with the Second Complex (F and E), and Villa del Filosofo (G).

Between the end of the Republican period and the beginning of the Empire (1st century BCE – 1st century CE), the architectural type of the suburban *villa d'otium* constitutes the principal agent of the occupation of the extra-moenia territories around the Gulf; in the countryside surrounding the ancient cities of *Pompeii* and *Stabiae* alone, more than one hundred such villas have been identified (Kockel, 1985; Moorman, 2008). In this context, a new awareness of the relationship between architecture and landscape gradually takes shape: an idea of unitary composition in which artifice and nature concur in defining an organic structure in the making of the territory.

As Amedeo Maiuri (1959) has observed, while it is true on the one hand that the villa type initially derives from that of the *domus*, enriched with elements of Hellenistic architecture, it is also true on the other that it ends up overturning its compositional logic. Beyond the city walls, the architecture of the villa is no longer constrained by the morphology of an urban fabric in which it is inserted, and the arrangement of its architectural "pieces" no longer responds solely to intrinsic conditioning factors, but rather — and indeed predominantly — to extrinsic ones. Thus "a rational process of forms and structures" comes into being,

> "in which from the old and austere Samnite house with compluviate atrium, with all the living and reception rooms arranged around the atrium as the natural centre from which the whole house radiates, one moves to the villas in which the atrium has no more than the function of a grand vestibule, while all the living quarters and the great halls for entertainment and luxury are instead arranged with their entrances and their principal source of light toward the external terraces, along the ambulatories of the peristyle and other secondary porticoes, so as to receive directly from outside the vital current of air, all the light and warmth of the sun, and to enjoy from them the unobstructed view of the sky, the countryside, and the sea" (Maiuri, 1959, p. 295).

To understand the logic underpinning these villas, it is necessary to invert the point of view: their deep rationale is to be sought outside themselves,