

The Space of the Other (Mantua, 27–28 Nov 25)

Politecnico di Milano - Mantova Campus, Nov 27–28, 2025

Deadline: Sep 26, 2025

Elisa Boeri

The Space of the Other. Architecture from Exclusion to Care in the Modern City / Lo spazio dell'altro. Architettura da esclusione a cura nella città contemporanea.

In the history of places of care, architecture holds a decisive and deeply symbolic value. It was the physical container in which the life of the “patient” unfolded, but also a device of control and exclusion of subjectivity. Space was designed to separate, isolate, normalize. It is in this nature of being both enclosure and boundary that the architectures of exclusion - across all eras and functions - engage in dialogue with one another, forming, together with the various human experiences inhabiting them, the “liminal” spaces of the city. These are architectures meant to confine the “other,” the “different,” whose functions often change over time, along with the evolution of the ideas that originally shaped their form. The words spoken by Giovanni Michelucci in Mantua in March 1990, during the conference “Cities and Concrete Alternatives to Psychiatric Hospitals,” expose the disconnect between the primary function of architectural space as a realm of relationship and freedom, and its gradual metamorphosis into an object of control, constructed to meet technical and economic management demands: “The very fact that space has been progressively placed under control, segmented, measured, and distributed like a true commodity, increasingly supports the idea that such a reductive use does not allow people to move through it or communicate by means of it. This is a condition common to both rich and poor, the so-called ‘sick’ and the so-called ‘healthy’ ”. The message from the Florentine master is crystal clear: it is impossible to think of reforming institutions without also reforming the space in which we live. Restoring architecture’s role as a medium of care, communication, exchange, and freedom is an essential condition for a more just and humane society. His appeal becomes even more urgent when we consider the historical moment in which Michelucci delivered these words - the early 1990s, a time when the actual closure of Italian psychiatric hospitals, as foreseen by the Basaglia Law of 1978, was just beginning to take place. Years later, it is now legitimate to question how contemporary society - in its professional and institutional components, including political actors, healthcare workers, architects, and designers — has truly embraced and developed this shift in perspective: from spaces of exclusion to places for the care of individuals and the society to which they belong. Through a series of multidisciplinary contributions—aimed at exploring the topic from historical, design, social, and political perspectives—the international conference “The Space of the Other: Architecture from Exclusion to Care in the Contemporary City” seeks to offer a moment of collective reflection on the timely and pressing issues surrounding the relationship between architecture and exclusion in the modern and contemporary city. Particular attention is given to the theme of care, interpreting the World Health Organization’s definition of health as “a state of complete

physical, mental and social well-being" (WHO, 1948). The initial questions - intended to spark further reflections over the course of the discussion - are as follows:

- In the history of psychiatric institutions, what responses and revolutions have been attempted within the paradigm shift in the relationship between architecture and mental health, both in Italy and abroad? What collaborations among doctors, architects, associations, and other entities have contributed to the process of deinstitutionalization, and with what results?
- What role do design disciplines - architecture, urban planning, and design - play in creating spaces of care that foster inclusion, autonomy, and meaningful relationships for people experiencing vulnerability?
- What policies, investments, and cultural strategies are necessary today to complete the transition from a custodial system to one that is truly community-based?
- How and why should the historical memory of these often-contentious places become an integral part of new design processes?
- What are the current challenges in rethinking spaces of exclusion through a new lens of care and physical, mental, and social well-being, especially within the ongoing transformation of hospital and local healthcare networks?

The call for papers aims to gather contributions from scholars and researchers at an international level, inviting interested individuals to share their work within the suggested thematic areas, while also welcoming additional fields of exploration. The conference seeks to build a scientific framework highlighting positive actions related to the paradigm shift in the way we view the architectural heritage of the space of the other.

From places of exclusion to spaces of care in the broadest sense: care for individuals, for society and institutions, care for the built environment of architecture and the city, and care for the tangible and intangible heritage contained within these spaces.

The Rationale Behind the Conference

The international conference "The Space of the Other: Architecture from Exclusion to Care in the Contemporary City," promoted by the ABC Department of the Politecnico di Milano, is part of a coordinated research initiative between the ABC Department and the Mantova Campus. In 2025, this collaboration led to the consolidation of several interconnected activities, including the exhibition "Beyond the Wall" (Mantua, Spazio San Cristoforo, May 2025) and the special issue "Heritage Cities and Exclusion: Places, Spaces and Thresholds of the Other" of the open-access Journal of Architectural Design and History (No. 4, 2025).

These initiatives highlight a comparative methodology from both thematic and disciplinary perspectives. The research subject is examined within a geographical scope that spans various Italian and European cities, through a multidisciplinary approach aimed at connecting fields such as history, design, management, and heritage valorization. The goal is to critically engage with these "other" spaces and their memories—spaces where even the most basic processes of collective life are, or have been, denied in favor of the principle of exclusion

Call for Abstracts

The abstract, written in either Italian or English, should consist of a text of no more than 500 words and 2 relevant images. Please also include the following information: Author (first name, last name, e-mail), institutional affiliation and role, essay title, short biography, keywords (maxi-

mum 5), and a selected bibliography.

Proposals should be sent to the following e-mail addresses:

elisa.boeri@polimi.it; luca.cardani@polimi.it

Timeline

Conference: November 27-28, 2025 - Curated by Elisa Boeri and Luca Cardani (Department ABC, Politecnico di Milano)

Location: Politecnico di Milano - Mantova Campus (Piazza d'Arco 32, Mantua, Italy)

Abstract submission deadline: September 26, 2025

Notification of selection: October 3, 2025

*The conference proceedings will be published in a collective volume.

International Scientific Committee

Chiara Baglione (Polimi-DABC); Stefano Capolongo (Polimi-DABC); Davide Del Curto (Polimi-DASTU); Gerardo Doti (University of Camerino); Roberto Dulio (Polimi-DABC); Jean-Philippe Garric (Paris 1); Raffaella Neri (Polimi-DABC); Eliana Martinelli (University of Perugia); Enrico Prandi (University of Parma); Marella Santangelo (UniNA-DiA); Giuseppina Scavuzzo (University of Trieste); Ana Tostões (IST – University of Lisbon).

Reference:

CFP: The Space of the Other (Mantua, 27-28 Nov 25). In: ArthHist.net, Sep 9, 2025 (accessed Sep 17, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/50559>>.