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Roberta Albiero

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WHAT IF OPEN WALLS? A STRATEGY FOR TADMOR

WAVE.
2017

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SYRIA – THE MAKING OF THE FUTURE FROM URBICIDE TO THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE CITY

W.A.Ve. 2017

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Incipit Editore ISBN: 978-88-85446-11-3

Università Iuav ISBN: 978-88-99243-19-7

Published by

Incipit Editore S.r.l.

via Asolo 12, Conegliano, TV

editore@incipiteditore.it

Co-published with

Università Iuav di Venezia

Santa Croce 191, Venezia, VE

First edition: November 2017

Cover design: Stefano Mandato

Book design: Margherita Ferrari

Editing: Emilio Antonioli, Luca Casagrande, Margherita Ferrari

Text editing: Teodora Ott

Photos: Rosalba Bertini, Gabriele Bortoluzzi, Matteo Grosso, Umberto Ferro, Letizia Goretti, Luca Pilot

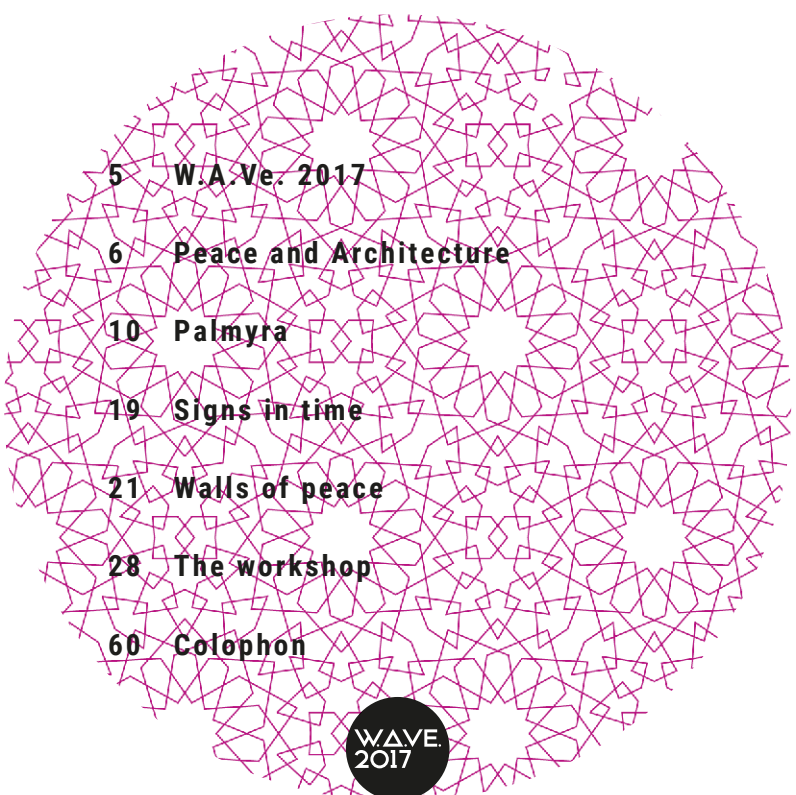
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Walls of peace

Roberta Albiero

The work of the W.A.Ve. studio explored the future of Syria, starting from a reflection on its extraordinary past. In its history, Syria has been a crossing place for exchanges, coexistence, flows of goods and, above all, of ideas. Palmyra represented, in particular, an important centre along the Silk Road for exchanges between the East and the West. The destruction of the archaeological heritage of Palmyra does not only represent an attack on memory, identity, and on a culture, but also a crisis of its resources: tourism and agriculture. The future has to start from here.

Water

Water is the resource that gave birth to the ancient town of Palmyra, which is close to a unique and spectacular oasis, rich in water and cultivated gardens. Currently, military and arbitrary management of water by the same population is impoverishing the territory and the food resources. The first intervention we suggest is therefore the rationalisation of the water system, once organised through a sophisticated channel and shaft system. The introduction of a new aqueduct will serve the city and the agricultural areas. A series of reconstruction works and a new settlement system will be developed along the aqueduct, which runs through the barracks (barracks and prison areas currently being destroyed). They will initially serve as a support for the population still stationed there or returning. Since it will take a long time to resume tourism, agriculture must go back to be its first leading force to restart the economy.

Wall

The wall is today considered as an emblem of separation, closure, exclusion, rejection, and denial of the "other". But the wall is also the archetype of the primary space of living: the fence. The W.A.Ve. studio re-interpreted the idea of the wall as an artefact, built as the first step towards a future of peace and coexistence. The aim is to give life to an open, aggregated, self-produced, flexible, self-sufficient, welcoming, and expandable structure.

Open Walls is a strategy.

The long list of separation walls existing today:

Bulgaria-Turkey, 2014, km 30

Saudi Arabia-Yemen, 2013, km 1,800

Israel-Egypt, 2010, km 230

Iran-Pakistan, 2007, km 700

Zimbabwe-Botswana, 2003, km 482

Israel-Palestine, 2002, km 730

United States-Mexico, Tijuana wall, 1994, km 1,000

Kuwait-Iraq, 1991, km 190

Ceuta and Melilla-Morocco, 1990, Km 8.2 e km 12

Morocco-Western Sahara, Berm, 1989, km 2,720

India-Bangladesh, 1989, km 4,053

Cyprus, Greek area-Turkish area, green line, 1974, km 300

Ireland, Catholic Belfast-Protestant Belfast, peace lines, 1969, km 13

North Korea-South Korea, 1953, km 4

India-Pakistan, line of control, km 550

Pakistan-Afghanistan, Durand Line, km 2,460

Open Walls is a new settlement system is generated from the wall concept: linear and horizontal, complex and sensitive to the pre-existent conditions. It will establish new relations with the landscapes of Palmyra: the ruins of the archaeological city, the oasis, the informal city, the military zone, and the horizon.

Open Walls is an infrastructural system, conceived as a new part of the landscape that will host functions variable in time and space. It is a sort of skeleton made of parallel walls (the permanent structure) that can be filled in different ways (temporary architectures). This brings to many adaptation possibilities of its functions over time and over the needs of the population. These primary functions are: houses, first aid centres, markets, archaeological centres, schools, religious buildings, gardens, and agricultural areas. The matrix of the parallel walls can be expanded, replicated, enlarged, or reduced. The pattern of parallel walls comes from a Timgad project by Valter Tronchin, freely interpreted.

Memorial garden

The areas in which the new interventions are located, structured by the territorial sign of the aqueduct, are contained in the military zone, between the prison and the barracks, both destroyed by ISIS in May 2015. The prison of Tadmor, built by the French in the 1930s, is a place where thousands of political dissidents were humiliated, tortured, and executed. As Amnesty International said, it represented a source of despair and degrading treatments. It is synonymous with death, horror, and madness. Among the most cruel prisons in the world, Tadmor Prison represents a place of collective memory. The destruction of Tadmor prison is

a demagogic attempt to erase a memory that cannot be cancelled. It would be a crime that covers crimes. We suggest preserving the memory of this history of death by transforming the ruins of the prison into a memorial garden, called the *Garden of the Soul*: a quiet place for the spirit, a place to not forget. The garden is structured as a sort of negative of the prison's morphology: a series of dug out squares representing the courts around which the prison was built. The debris of the accumulated ruins will form a ziqqurat, a sort of hill to climb in order to see the entire garden. The memorial garden will be planted with olive trees and will a museum of the prison in its dark and silent underground.

Working with time

The project is developed through a sequence of steps.

Step1 - Based on the construction of the aqueduct and of the memorial garden on the prison's ruins.

Step 2 - This phase involves the construction of the paired-parallel wall structure.

Step 3 - Walls begin to be inhabited. The spaces between the iterated walls will accommodate functions of immediate necessity: temporary houses, children educational areas, markets, medical offices, archaeological missions, public spaces such as a theatres, gardens, and agricultural areas.

Step 4 - When tourism will be present again, at a later stage, the system might be transformed into a museum complex comprising places for research, restoration, training, and hospitality.

Construction and technology

The parallel pairs of seven-metre high walls will be made of raw compressed earth blocks of the Adobe type. A Compressed Earth Block (C.E.B.), also known as a pressed earth block or a compressed soil block, is a building material made primarily from damp soil compressed at high pressure to form blocks. Compressed Earth Blocks use a mechanical press to form blocks out of an appropriate mix of fairly dry inorganic subsoil non-expansive clay and straw. It is an old and sustainable material, easy to make and infinitely recyclable. Placed on a base of local limestone, the walls are made with plastered 60 cm-thick masonry. Inside, the walls host the primary infrastructures: water and energy. We believe that this system can be self-sufficient from the energy point of view. The blocks will be made locally, by the inhabitants themselves. It is therefore an assisted self-construction process. This will incentive low costs, flexible times, and immediate adaptation to the needs of the inhabitants. Using small blocks of compressed raw earth, students physically experimented ways to actually build this wall. Adobe blocks used for these experiments and for the structure model at 1:50 scale, were kindly provided by Matteo Brioni.

The work was carried out by eleven groups of students who developed single parts of the programme. Starting from imaging and understanding the wall as an artefact made with Adobe blocks, they explored ways to break, open, enter, light, and climb the wall in order to inhabit it. All the proposals converged under a profound project unity. Two collective models resulted from the experiments. The first, a raw earth model (scale 1:50), shows

the construction of the permanent structure in the first step of the process; the second model, in which walls are transformed and filled in, demonstrates the potentiality of the matrix in accepting different ideas of architecture.

We dedicate this work to our dear friends Valter Tronchin and Antonio Jiménez Torrecillas, talented architects who died prematurely.

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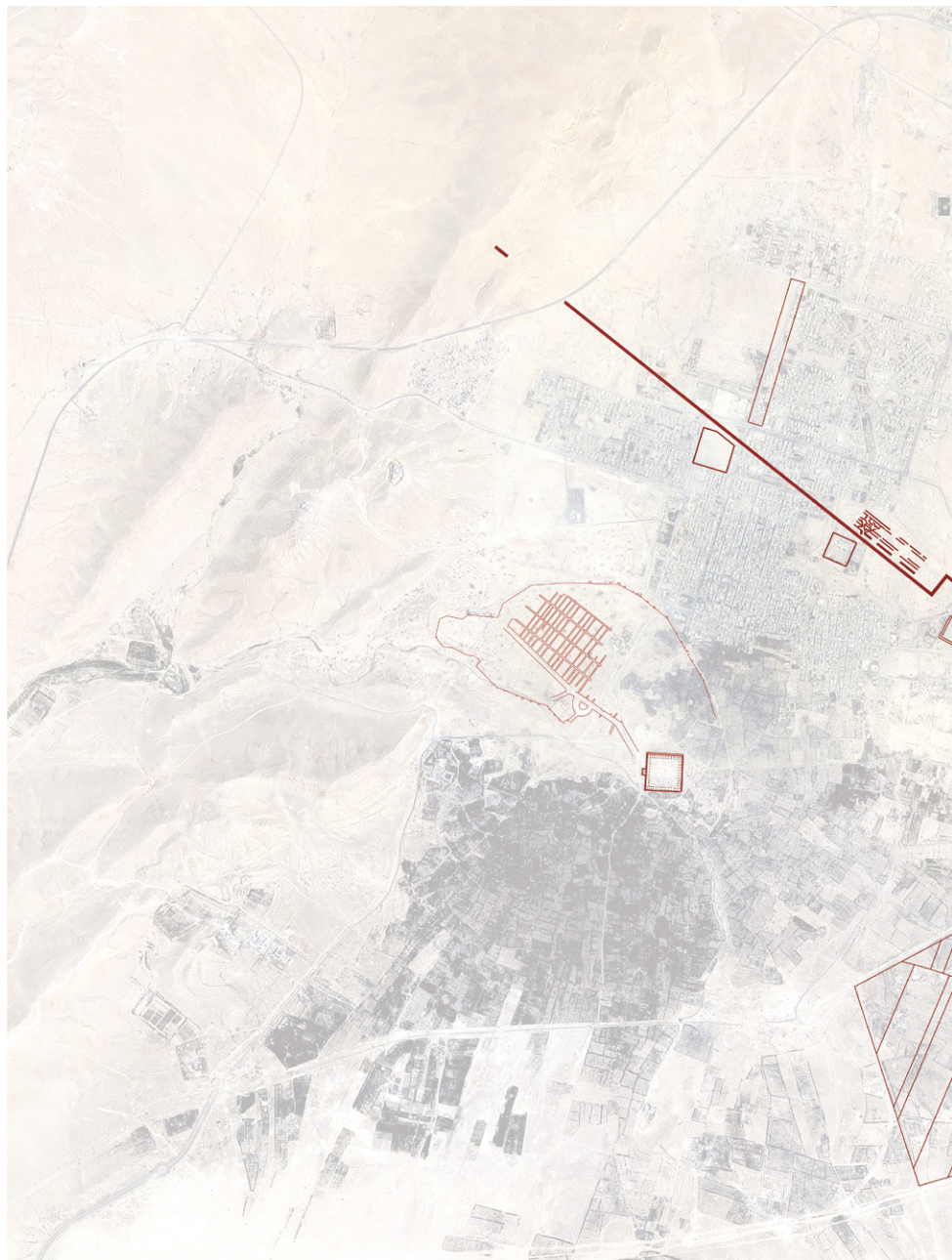
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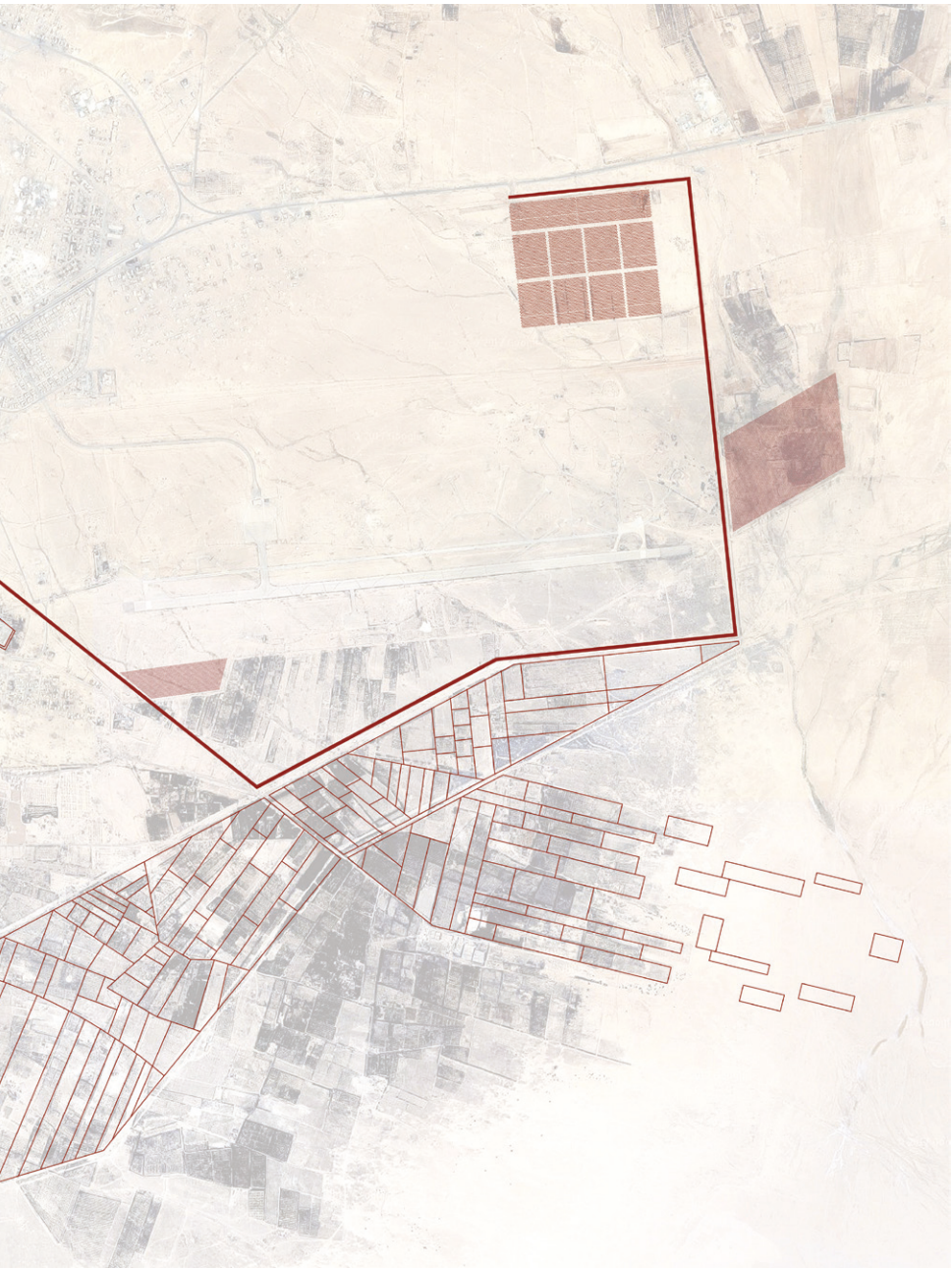
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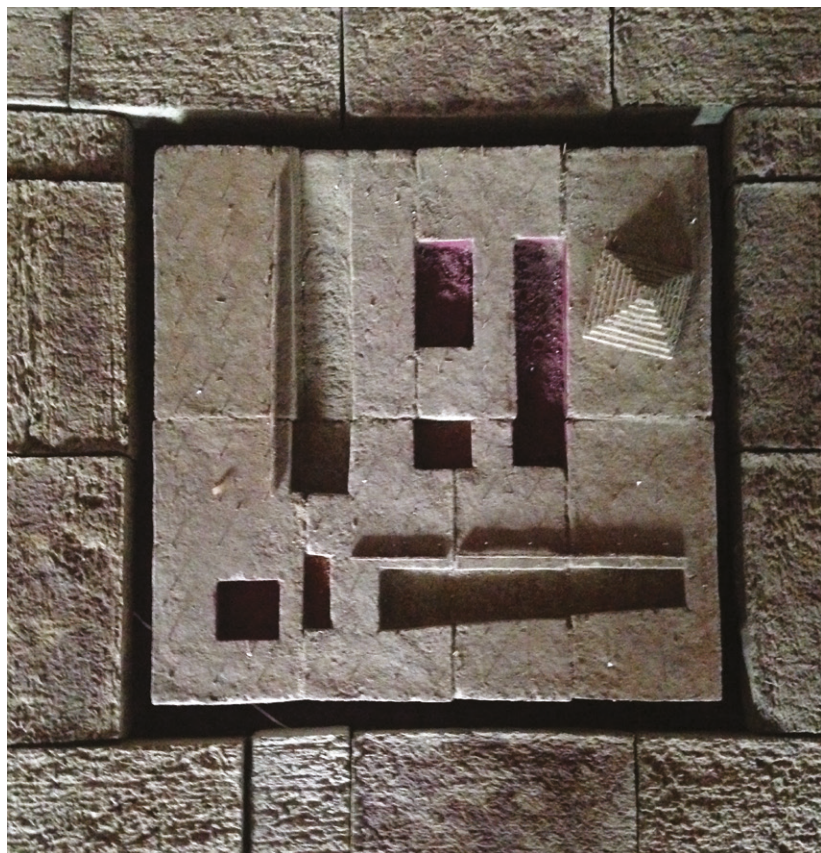


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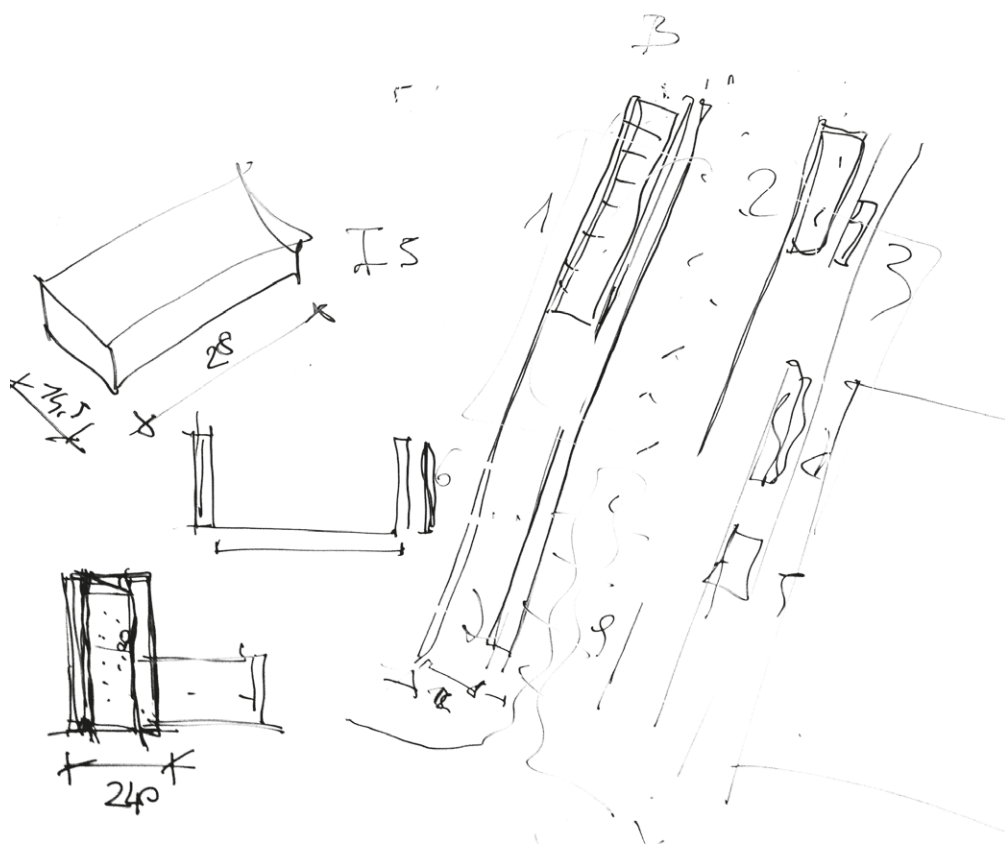
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Plan Collectif

Attilio Santi

TAMassociati

UNLAB

João Ventura Trindade

VMX Architects



Incipient Editore 10,0 \$ 8,5 €

ISBN 978-88-85446-11-3



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