

## From the place identity to scenarios for the valorisation of the territory: Design as an interpreter of new vocations and languages to the fruition

### Da identidade de lugares à cenários para a valorização do território: Design como intérprete de novas vocações e linguagens para a fruição

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#### Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to focus on the design action for the valorisation of cultural heritage from the site's identity to the development of new methods and new tools and languages for building design scenarios. The critical interpretation filter is a linguistic-narrative, with an approach in line with the project director component. We propose and illustrate (with project examples) a path which goes from the word as "minimal unit", through maps as a visual synthesis structured with a system of relationships between units-words, to narrations implicit as a way to use the territory and cultural heritage and as "sequences of relations between units." This track of interpretation strengthens the connection between design structure and narrative structure, identifying in this relation an important tool for creating and building design scenarios.

**Key words:** design for cultural heritage, identity, storytelling, communication.

#### Resumo

A proposta deste artigo foca na ação de design para a valorização do patrimônio cultural e da identidade do território, a fim de desenvolver novos métodos, ferramentas e linguagens para a construção de cenários de design. O filtro de interpretação crítica é feito por meio da narrativa linguística, com uma abordagem de acordo com o componente diretor do projeto. Os exemplos de projetos buscam ilustrar um caminho que vai desde a palavra como "unidade mínima" - através de mapas como uma síntese visual estruturada como um sistema de relações entre as "unidades-palavras", às narrações implícitas como uma maneira de usar o território e patrimônio cultural como "sequências de relações entre as unidades". Esta linha de interpretação reforça a ligação entre a estrutura de design e estrutura narrativa, identificando nesta relação uma importante ferramenta para a criação e construção de cenários de projeto.

**Palavras-chave:** design para o patrimônio cultural, identidade, narrativa, comunicação.

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#### The identity of places. A complex issue

It is very important to approach the theme of design identity for the valorisation of territory and cultural heritage. The identity is a complex issue because it involves a layering of data, themes and characters that make up an important set of tangible and intangible accumulated (and handed down) values. The study of the place's identity (especially in the Latin tradition) becomes the starting point for understanding this stratification through a reading that includes the "memory" (past), the "awareness" (present) and the "potential" (future). This declination rela-

tive to the future is crucial because the place's identity (for its valorisation) is focused on the ability (of the designer) to explain the territory's vocation as basis to identify new opportunities and potentialities. Bauman argues that the "desire" of identity originates from a need for security (Bauman, 2008), which highlights the social character of places and safety achieved by the sharing of goods and values. In this way, the valorisation of a common heritage becomes an important cultural and social platform through which to put into action processes of growth and development. There is no valorisation without exchange, without sharing, without legitimizing the value, but above all there is no valorisation without relation.

We identify ourselves with the people with whom we are in relation (Bauman, 2008). A difficult task is reserved to the contemporary designer: to be able to build connections and scenarios for the valorisation, extrapolating from all territorial, urban and cultural material the significant elements. The complexity is a major and inevitable element in the current interpretation of the urban images, not only because the cities have become more complex, but also because of the enormous variety of physical-material and virtual-intangible overlapping connections, which are often not congruent with the knowledge systems that now apply to the human settlements.

The "meta-city" becomes a fast place that excludes and compresses the body and the value of subjects. The citizen becomes a passenger and the architecture, subject to the vehicle system, transforms the city from "the place of choice" to a "place of ejection" (Virilio, 2004). The horizons of interpretation of the urban phenomenon will then enrich the scientific metaphors not only because they are relevant in many different registers, but because they are able to activate extremely effective visual intuitions (Villa, 2006).

The contemporary city found new places that can generate and host creativity also activating processes including self-empowerment. The creative and interstitial flows establish themselves: fluid dynamics reverse the concept of proximity and distance, giving rise to practices of the space that allow unexpected juxtapositions, innovative opportunities, and multiplication of the key moments for the urban development and also for the proliferation of new "ideas of space".

In this complex landscape of the urban variables it is interesting to propose an interpretation model of places highlighting a sort of "gradient of local identity". If we place on one hand the *genius loci* of Norberg-Schulz (1979) and the other *non-place* of Augé (1993) we create a range of meaning between these two poles. On one side, we find the centrality of the "place's spirit" (which can be represented by the Delphi Temple) where the identity and the relationship between object, environment and people, are at the heart of all spatial devices classically studied by anthropology; on the other side, the tendency to multiply the points of transit and temporary occupations, to live the transit of places as colonisable crossings represented by the airport, proposed by Augé as a paradigm of a non-place. Between these two extremes we can find various architectural places

with a different "gradient of local identity", starting from the "genius loci-Delphi Temple", we find the Colosseum (both exemplis of high-density local characterization) and then get to the Eiffel Tower as example of architecture/sculpture which became a symbol of Paris, passing through the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao in which the identity of the site has been strengthened thanks to its "architectural object" and its globalized buildings such as Mac Donald or Disneyland with a structure and an image that are independent from the territory, and finally, the airport as infrastructure-passage of new contemporary urban behaviours (Figure 1).

The place and the non-place are elusive elements: the first is never completely erased and the second is never completely fulfilled, they are palimpsests where the game of identity and relationship are constantly rewritten.

### Valorising the identity. The design goes through the territories of language

Representing the identity also means finding a network of reference points that generate a "unicum", a visual synthesis that communicates a set of values which aim for the territory's valorisation. The territory can be read as a place of storytelling and code identity: colors, signs, materials are key elements to produce a synthesis that represents the identity together with the potentiality (Trocchianesi, 2006). If we consider the territory as a text, we can identify a syntactic structure much more readable as clear is its natural and anthropic consistency. In this regard, Turri talks about *coremi* and *iconemi* identifying the first as minimum territorial units and the latter as basic perception units with iconic character within a system of signs that can represent a wider territorial and symbolic concept (Turri, 1998).

The reading keys for the territory's interpretation are in constant evolution: from the principle of layering to the palimpsest and to the hypertext; from each of these metaphors the image of a "territory-container" of stories (legible or illegible), vehicle of signs and meanings reveals itself.

The territory condenses the living body of a society, with all its contradictions and its drivers, but also it has its own individuality that cannot be read only in the present time, without taking into account its history and its complex stratification. For Cannavò the place's understanding occurs through reading of this stratification, with a historical approach:

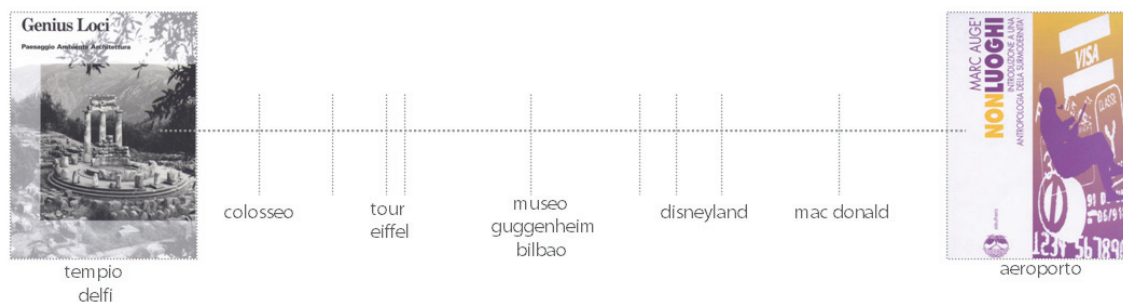


Figure 1. Gradient of local identity (by R. Trocchianesi).

*"The territory is saturated with signs, evidence of large drawings, fragments of structures that have had a significant meaning when they were drawn, and that now, erased by new signs or integrated into other structures, have lost their original meaning [...]. We need to read traces of time on the territory, identifying those that will be invisible, understand them as fragmented and complex elements, we need to establish our research of the sense of places on trace's incompleteness" (Cannavò, 2004, p. 39).*

The palimpsest's concept, which in part replaces the stratification's concept, is an important "key brick" of the territory. The palimpsest's image (Corboz, 1998) shows a process of site construction as a continuous activity, in which traces of the past are being reused for new purposes, and where the changes are pursuing a purpose of adaptation in relation to natural background sediments. From a construction concept, as accumulation and overlap of signs, we move to an interpretation concept. As Spagnoli affirms, the cultural heritage, always placed in its proper territorial context, can be analyzed as a text, from a semiotic point of view. The text has in fact the following main features (Spagnoli, 2008):

- The territory is a text, etymologically a fabric, and a network of elements of meaning in connection with each other.
- This is a complex text, stratified in time and variable on space.
- It is also a living text, ever changing, never identical to itself, which preserves traces of the past, but it rewrites itself tirelessly throughout, albeit at different pace.
- It is easy to see stratification in the different mobility of its various aspects, which is not only a hierarchy of importance, but also of sense.

This is an extraordinarily rich and complex text, which poses enormous problems of design and interpretation.

Any presence, any artefact, any colour, any smell, any building states its own belonging, in competition with other presences, with other inscriptions. There is a semantic conflict that is realized not only at the level of individual messages, but also of codes.

- It is also a "war of interpretation", of material rewritings. There are different looks that capture and valorises different aspects of the same text (Volli, 2002).

Through the filter of semiotics Eco identified the cultural phenomena as communication's facts: cultural heritage, as individual message, organizes itself and can be understood through specific codes (the structure and the context within which it is included) (Eco, 1968).

The cultural object is therefore to be considered as "artefact" that needs to communicate (because without this communication there would be no valorisation process) and to be communicated (one of the main points of valorisation).

Below we propose and illustrate (with project examples) a path which goes from the word as "minimal

unit", through maps as a visual synthesis structured with a system of relationships between units-words", to narrations understood as a way to use the territory and cultural heritage and as "sequences of relations between units." This track of interpretation strengthens the connection between design structure and narrative structure, identifying in this relation an important tool for creating and building design scenarios.

### **The words as "unit". Towards a new, infinite linguistic landscape**

We are currently witnessing a phenomenon that on one side involves contemporary design that goes towards the hybridization of languages and functions (buildings as product design, museums as places of consumption, commercial spaces as entertainment spaces...), thus blurring the boundaries of the "immediately recognizable and legible". On the other side, we are assisting to a multiplication of words to describe the territory, the city and the reality of the project in terms of content but also in terms of representation of the project (metaproject, scenario, vision, concept, brief...).

The stratification of definitions and meanings is an interesting and investigable signal of complexity that involves the city and how the project relates to it. It is possible to highlight significant emergencies useful to build the new landscape design by analyzing this dense, new terminological landscape, creeping into the folds of the language (which always highlights the crisis of modernity).

The same design concept is based on several new meanings becoming "multiverso" (manifold) (Bertola and Manzini, 2004) and including complex phenomena about the project and articulated definitions in relation to the areas in which it operates as a discipline at many levels.

Starting from definitions about design approach and coming to languages of representation of the project itself, new techniques and digital tools open to endless applications where the phase of concept's visualization partly coincides with the concept's development, because of the great potentiality of these new tools's representation.

In this context, the paradigm of the *dictionary* becomes an important reading key for transformations of the contemporary age. Koolhaas (Koolhaas *et al.*, 2000) proposes an update of the disciplinary dictionary as a tool which allows picturing the transformation; the exhibition *Mutations* displays neologisms, acronyms, readymade words, and repeated words, which outline a new imagery of the terminological context where design and the designer move. This approach finds confirmation in the text *Ex Libris. 16 keywords in contemporary age* (Corbellini, 2007), which poses problems and issues that gravitate around contemporary architecture through the identification of 16 key words that work as interpretative filter (some of them tautological, because they reflect the structure the book itself: "words", "dictionary", "plot", "density"...).

*"A discipline such as architecture has always used words, giving the text a unique role, complementary to that of other representative languages, and comparable to that of building itself, particularly in determining specific directions of research" (Corbellini, 2007, p. 10).*

The trend to move in a nonlinear and hyper-textual way seems to connect to open systems with which we cover the territories of knowledge. That same knowledge is theorized by Baricco, and requires an action of horizontal surfing from one experience to the other, from a piece of information to the other (Baricco, 2006). The paradigm of the dictionary, of the glossary, of the cluster's definitions is becoming increasingly dynamic, fragmented and hyper-textual instrument. In part this is due to the influence of electronic media and their fast accessibility, of zapping and other forms of new media. This is a "situazionista" approach to the project, which reveals itself through a diagrammatic character, not a linear one.

The territory and the city are under terminological investigation as well. There is a continuous proliferation of definitions that adjective the term "city", declining endless problematic and visionary aspects: from the "hyper-text city" made up of different densities and interconnections of flows (Fiorani, 2005), to the fragmentation of the "collage city" and "puzzle city" (Viganò, 1999) up to the "panic city" (Virilio, 2004) and "archipelago city", "where elsewhere" spaces spontaneously form themselves: in this case spaces are islands of the great sea, formed by the journey spaces (Careri, 2006), or finally to cities with strong cultural vocation as the "light-city" in perpetual progress (Altarelli, 2006) and the "culture city" (Carta, 2004). Many others, infinite definitions, are a labyrinth of meanings and images around the city. The richness and density of this panorama of definitions around the contemporary city is clearly visible thanks to the A12 Group by "Parole.aporee.org" project. This website offers a dictionary in progress, which collects words about the city (expressions, neologisms, verbal images...) to create an infinite landscape of values around the new urban contemporary territorial reality; the visitors can add definitions and words to raise this sort of Wikipedia related to the city.

### Maps as "relations between units." Towards a visual hypertextual synthesis as tool of the project

From the scale of the word as a *navigator* that explores in detail the new "spaces" of the contemporary city and the world of the project, we move on to a synthetic test which sees in the construction of maps an instrument of urban and territorial valorisation. We will hereby, focus on maps that use words to tell the identity.

Maps are used to guide the community on the basis of their awareness, to generate a shared perspective. They are an expression of collective subjectivity and allow the activation of the recognition process and the sharing of values and reference points (physical and conceptual) that we mentioned before.

In special, the identity maps for the valorisation of the territory convey the identity in a logic which is to result in the design potential of valorisation starting from nature, the vocation of a place and its opportunities. The reading and interpretation of the site are filtered by the designer's eye. These conceptual maps show correlations of meaning between signs and concepts by providing an order that reflects their hierarchical nature, in order to seize the most important elements, those apparently marginal and their functions.

Maps are not a mimetic reproduction meant as iconic transcript that uses an alphabet of similarities (with reality), but a synthetic representation i.e. a symbolic transcription that does not correspond to the metrics of the territory but requires them to be decoded. The basis of this important project tool can be summarized in three-points: the reading of the territory as a text; its (synthetic) representation; the deduction of strategic and communication guidelines for its valorisation.

We can in fact read the material and intangible culture in the narrative of a place. To construct a narrative of the territorial identity through maps means to develop and display the collected data, preparing a story functional to the recognition of values of a place and its potential.

In the Oltrepò Mantovano's word map are identified "macroareas" significant for understanding the territory (food and wine, river, architecture...) which are linked to certain ways of living these vocations (states of mind, a way of living, values...). In this "macroareas" are placed verbal returns (words and phrases) extracted from different types of literary sources (of art, information, tourism, narrative...). Thus we obtain a density of meaning that is the geography of values and meanings that tells the territory and its identity. These thematic densities can be grouped into evocative moods: middle land, water and earth, indistinct toned down, "padana" metaphysics, culture of the pleasure (Figure 2).

The *Not stop City* by Archizoom is another interesting representation of the city in which they recounted fluid scenarios, residential parking areas, storage places, residential woods. The urban area is represented as an indefinite surface. In this case, this is not a real map (because there is not a system of reference) but an interesting language that introduces new interpretations of reality.

Also, the ritual *Walkabout* is an interesting case: it is a system of itineraries through which the Australian Aboriginal peoples have mapped the continent. Every mountain, every river belongs to a system of itineraries that, interweaving continuous, forming a single story: the way of the chants.

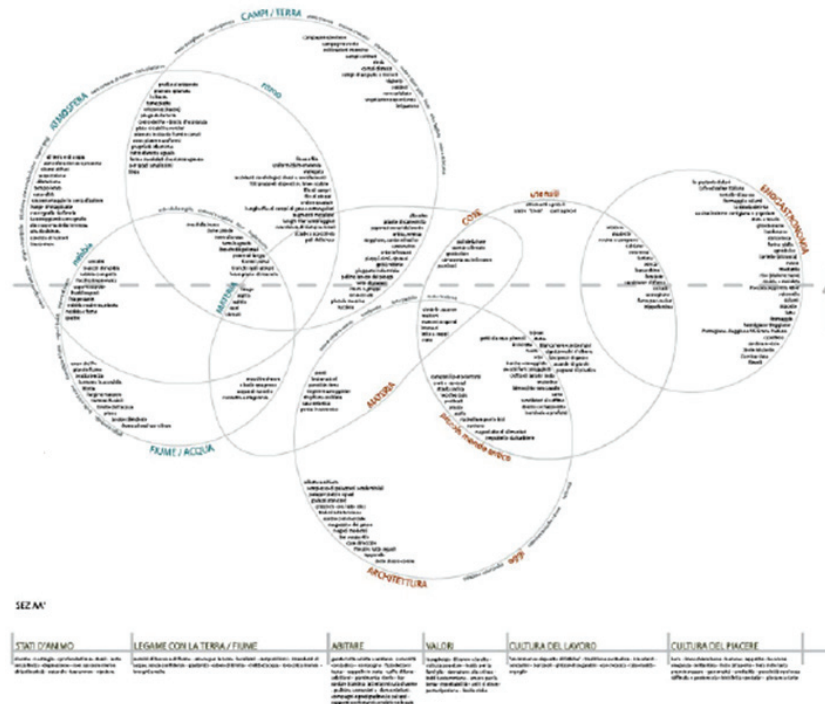
### The narration as "sequences of relations between units." Towards an experiential fruition

In this context, the practice of "storytelling" has taken a key role in the relationship between cultural heritage and user. It can be regarded as the substratum of all active projects around the theme of valorisation.

Thus, the "storytelling practice" as a tool that renders, communicates and reflects the vocation of every cultural "artefact", understood as a choice to explain one or more a lot of stories that the cultural heritage has in itself; and understood as the staging of an "open history" because the communication is never finished when arrives to the user, but is completed only with a re-interpretation.

The narrative structures are universal forms through which people understand the reality and walks on it. The narration allows constructing meanings that allow people to interact with the system of cultural conventions in which they live. In the action, telling is a form of social, cognitive and affective consciousness.





**Figure 2.** Project of communication identity by Raffaella Trocchianesi with Anna Cavalleri, Carlo Franzato, Eleonora Lupo, *The word identity map of Oltrepò Mantovano territory*, 2005 (one of the communication products of research *Strategic marketing for l'Oltrepò Mantovano territory*, Politecnico di Milano, Polo Regionale di Mantova: reserach direction: F. Schiaffonati, C. Stevan; Direction: E. Mussinelli; scientific coordination: F. Celaschi, D. Fanzini; unit research managers: G. Casoni, R. Trocchianesi).

In his hermeneutics narrative Ricoeur proposes a proportion:

architecture/design<sup>1</sup>: space = narration : time.

In the first part of the proportion there is the attention to build in the space, in the second to weave through time. But Ricoeur tries to go beyond this analogy to define as a network between the project configuration of the space and narrative configuration of the time and then to produce a reversal of parties: spatiality of the story and temporality of the project. The analogy with the narrative structure continues scanning three phases in which the structure is built: the phase of "*prefigurazione*" which outlines the setting of story (also the project relates to a particular context), the "*configurazione*" is the phase in which emerges the dialectic between what exists now and what the project will shape, and finally the "*rifigurazione*" that involves the reading/re-reading, in the territory and in the city in fact is required to re-reads the tracks as evidences of the identity (Riva, 2008).

*"The myth, the foundation, the theatre, the storytelling, they are useful elements of a trend to take back and dispose in the future: designed again if we want to propose solutions"* (Venturi Ferriolo, 2009, p. 248).

*"Stories cross and organize places; select them and connect them with each other, make sentences and itineraries [...] narrative structures have the value of*

*spatial syntax [...]. Each story is a spatial experience"* (de Certeau, 2001, p. 173-174).

The identity and relationships are central to spatial and anthropological dynamics and the narration becomes simultaneously an instrument of recognition and valorisation, is the structural basis on which to build the project for the valorisation.

Also the exhibit design (outdoor in the city and indoor in the museum) is going towards the direction of narrative itineraries that make the user a share of the visit (either a city, an exhibition or event). We see in fact models of fruition that follow the paradigm of the theatre, of the game, of the script, models that promote almost total immersion into the cultural heritage system. These include some set designed on the basis of a narrative structure borrowed from a theatrical and film world: *The city of k.. Kafka and Prague*, 1999.

After *James Joyce in Dublin* (1995) and *The Lisbon of Pessoa* (1997) is proposed, *Prague told through the eyes of Kafka*, or the installation *Expedition Titanic* in Hamburg where the journey into the vessel with the tragic fate is accompanied by the storyteller voices of passengers on board in ancient times. The *Voices Museum* in London explores, reflects and celebrates the vast diversity of London through the voices, memories and opinions of citizens.

Turning to the urban scale we include *Audiowalk-errare*, a soundtrack produced by Fandango where a not common itinerary is in the city is "guided" by the voice of a

character who generates affection to the place and how to find out and that includes the possibility of losing because purposes an unconventional itinerary.

Finally *Chronicles Gonzagas. Errant narratives with 8 tarot cards*: a project of a system-product that aims to valorise a net of shops located in the historical centre of Mantua, and some artistic buildings through a system of artefacts that include a game (tarot cards and rules for play), a soundtrack (with 8 narrations) and signs near the shops. The game is designed to promote a thematic and immersive experience allowing a commercial and cultural exploration of the city. The eight tarot cards, which are eight-urban itineraries (paths and narrated by a soundtrack with an original text) represent characters, rituals, values of the city's history (Figure 3).

To reinforce the idea of this synergy between logics of the narrative and of the project we can see a strong parallel between the typical terminology of representation (film or theatre) and that of the exhibition. Words and concepts such as "subject", "script", "treatment" are clearly and immediately declinable also in the exhibit design in terms of "object to display", "director practice of the times and sequences of visit" and "graphic language" with which to shape the story (Trocchianesi, 2009). As Barthes would say "In a story there is nothing insignificant, all serve to something" (Barthes, 1999, p. 25). "In a staging in fact (as in a project of curatorship and exhibition), there are some "central points" (which are carrying the story) and "informant clues" (of the state, of the action... that add useful elements for the representation).

### Scenarios with variable horizon

Through words, maps, stories this conceptual itinerary is designed to highlight synergies between the director practice of the narrative structure and the design when there's objective is to valorise a site (or a set of assets) from its identity.

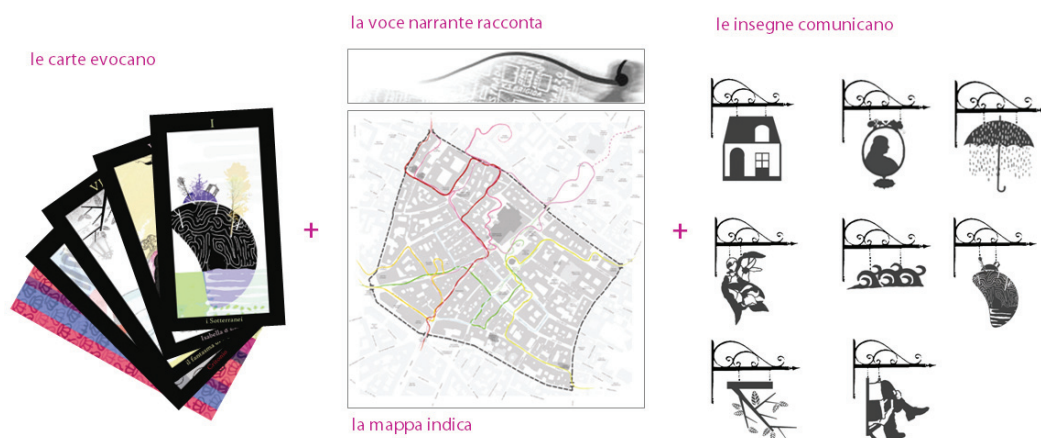
Work on innovation and ability to identify new scenarios for development and valorisation means changing the way we look at problems, that is analyzing the orga-

nizational, productive, social system, or to find new languages to arrange imaginaries, stories and narratives that have in itself a potential project and implementation. The scenario is the overall view of complex something photographed in its transformations: the vision of a hypothetical state of reality that someone has been able to conceive and describe in a comprehensible and communicable way. In particular, the scenario consists of three components that support the structure: the vision, motivations and proposals (Manzini and Jégou 2004).

This approach offers new "metalanguages" to test methods of valorise the cultural heritage and to design new models of fruition.

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**Figure 3.** Project by Raffaella Trocchianesi, Elena Enrica Giunta, *Chronicles Gonzagas. Errant narratives with 8 tarot cards*, 2008 (in the research *Mantua\_Commerce & Culture City*, Politecnico di Milano, Polo Regionale di Mantova: scientific manager: F. Schiaffonati; scientific coordination: G. Casoni, D. Fanzini, E. Mussinelli; design processes: F. Celaschi; project coordination: A. De Marco; Arch. I. Bergamini).

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