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The shape of water

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[...] There is little to do, he continues; 'The water that descends on the slope in the basin - from which the spring comes out - comes from that gutter, which is upstream. The water just descends and it cannot trace a china or a tube [...] If the river is visible water, exposed to the sky and the eyes of men, the gutter is Danube.' [...] But who feeds the gutter, which hidden and ineffable river gods? Here the link fails, because the scientist believes in a rough gossip, which reports someone else's rumors. He tells that Maria Giuditta - who arrived first thanks to her long legs to look out the ground floor window - interrogated the old and grouchy mistress. She found out how water comes to the gutter from a sink, which is constantly filled by a faucet that no one can close, connected to 'a lead pipe - old as much as the house - which loses its way somewhere' (Magris, 1986).

Magris' fun story in "Danube" invites us not to take things too seriously when it comes to geography and landscape, since a "popular rumor" can become more convincing than any scientific theory.

In the last years riverscapes and, more in general, waterscapes have taken on an important role in the environmental rebalancing, within increasingly denser and extended cities. This is the case of many Chinese experiences that involve Turenscape landscape designers in river banks re-naturalization projects. Or, moving westward, London's Thames projects such as the bridge/park and the regeneration process of the areas where the Olympic Games were hosted. Not to mention, the ambitious and futuristic

Manhattan Landscape Plan designed by BIG, who proposes the creation of a park along the banks of the world's most famous peninsula/island.

Shared opinions recognize in these projects' nature the configuration of resilient landscapes. Without questioning the exasperated use of the adjective "resilient" - which appears in several landscape architecture, urban design and architecture office manifestos, and in conference lecture posters around the world - it seems that this term alone can label a project as "innovative".

The large use of this adjective suggests that the potential solution to all the landscape problems is the application of a resilient approach and/or methodology.

So it is worth to dwell a bit more on the meaning withheld by this word.

"From an etymological point of view, resilience comes from Latin 'resalio' - iterative of the verb 'salio', to jump. Somebody suggests a interesting connection between the original meaning of 'resalio' - which was mainly used to describe the gesture of jump again on a boat capsized by the power of the sea - and the current use in psychological language [Psychology has also been infected by the term]: both terms indicate the attitude of going ahead without giving up despite the difficulties." (Marzi, 2016).

In a period of serious socio-economical crisis, the concept of resilience seems to lay the foundations for a new balance, thanks to an attitude of adaptation and



Fig1 / Yanweizhou Park in Jinhua City by Turenscape Landscape Architecture
source / landzine.com, published on August 25, 2014



Fig2 / The BIG U project proposal for Manhattan by BIG Architects
source / archdaily.com, by Vanessa Quirk, published on April 4, 2014



Fig3 / The Garden Bridge project in London designed by Thomas Heatherwick
source / wired.com, published on January 1, 2014

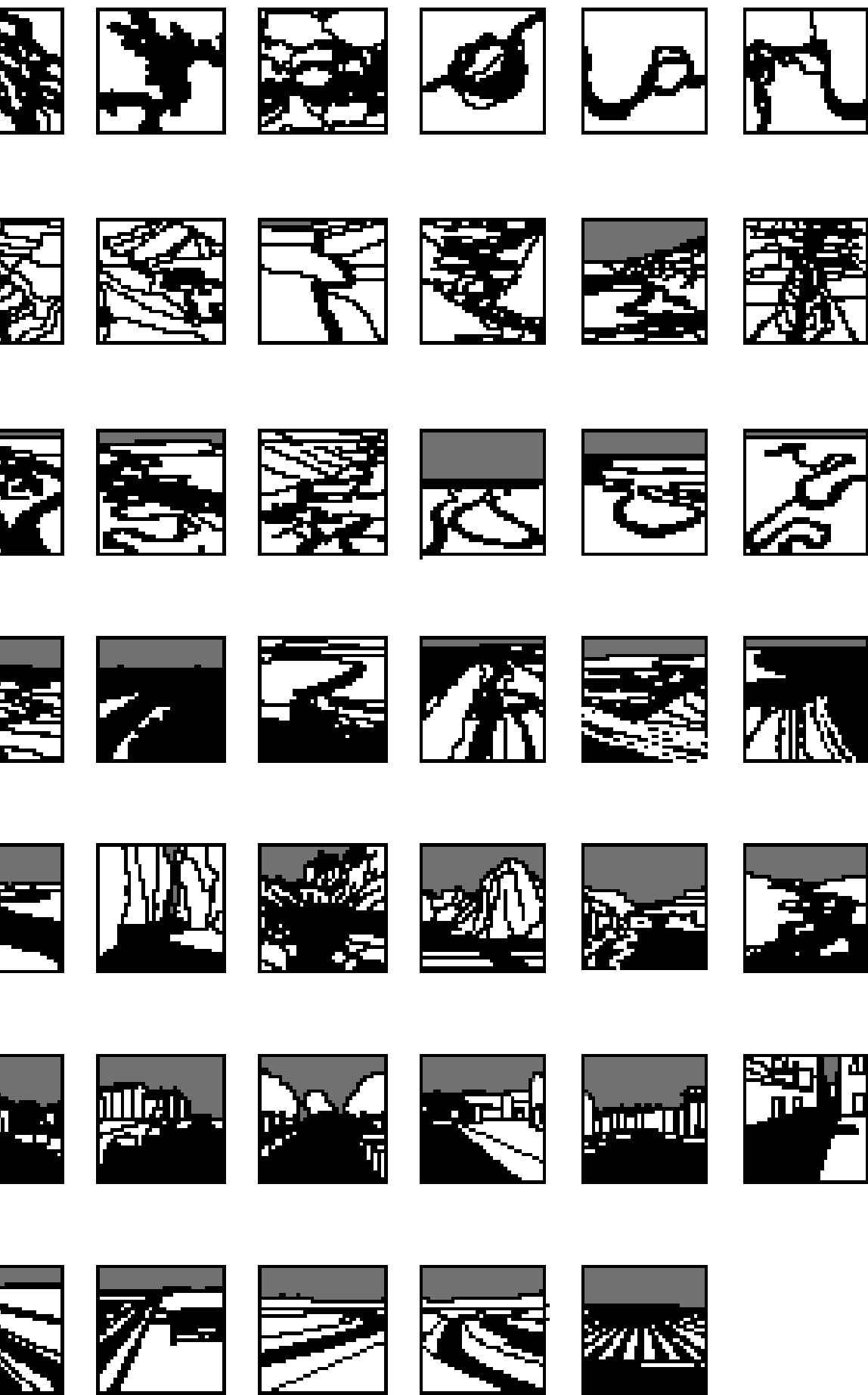


Fig4 / Example of re-drawn waterscapes
source / drawing by the author

resistance.

However in design terms, it can lead to a somewhat compliant and scarcely decisive approach that aims to welcome a "permanent deformation" of objectives by facilitating the "distortion" of a result.

This attitude neglects the existence of an inverse aspect to "Resilience", which nevertheless pervades many contexts of intervention: Fragility.

In particular:

- Fragility requires special care. In fact, we take care of the beautiful and valuable things.
- Fragility requires targeted and substantial attitudes (which cannot simply be labeled "resilient or fluid," as many now describe their projects).
- Fragility requires special attention, discipline and higher quality in the projects that will be realized.

Architecture must also guarantee a certain quality through the expression of forms that are capable of understanding situations, supporting a thought and suggesting a dream.

New appealing design trends often apply the image of Nature as a slogan – e.g. by covering new constructions with greenery (will future architectures be a large living vase?), but they actually neglect the high running and maintenance costs of such vegetation. In addition, these costs cause an excessive energy consumption (sign of great design fragility): could this architecture be resilient in the new urban landscape?

Architects should therefore renew their commitment to design projects that are able to improve our social and landscape context. I think it is very interesting to return to the physical gesture of drawing, after years of moving a mouse. The new graphic pens allow us to re-acquire a very important manual skill for our profession and they make us exercise the Art of Drawing.

Quoting Ruskin:

"For I am nearly convinced, that once we see keenly enough, there is very little difficult in drawing what we see," with an approach that stimulates and assists a "subtlety of vision". Also: "and I would rather teach drawing that my pupils may learn to love Nature, than teach the looking at Nature that they may learn to draw."

To apply the Ruskin's "Elements of Drawing" within a project means to

use a design methodology aimed at comprehending the landscape context in order to acquire it and understand it in all its nuances.

And now, going back to the starting point and the title of this article – the shape of water – it is only through the comprehension of the strength characterizing the fluid, and the consistency of the soil which wraps the latter, that we will be able to guide the hand in the drawing of form.

Moreover, the water movements can suggest a persuasive design thought themselves, both in natural contexts and anthropic landscapes (fig.4-5).

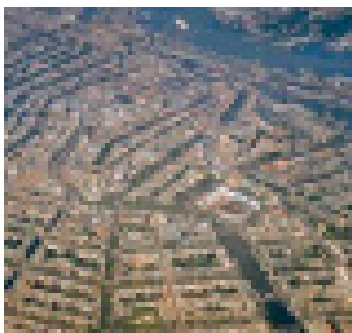
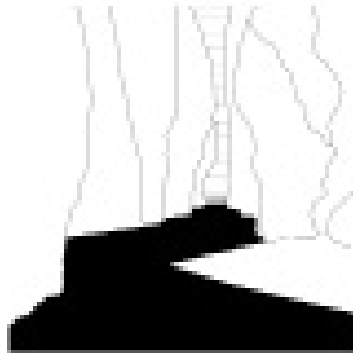
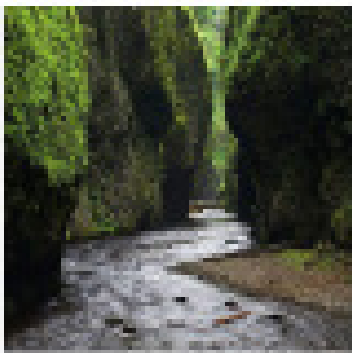
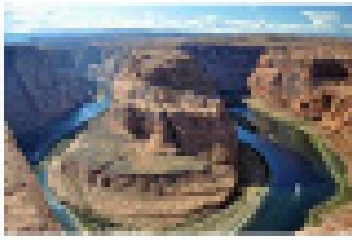
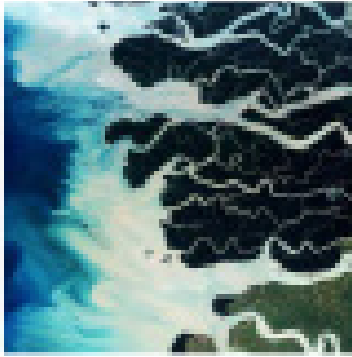
The re-drawing exercise will allow you to investigate and dwell the shape of water no longer as a "beautiful image", but as a system of relationships between lines and surfaces: a good starting point for a project.

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*Fig5 / Taxonomy of water in natural and anthropic landscapes
source / drawing by the author*