

bridging communities

the Cala del Sasso

BY

Grant Stewart

A Practicum submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

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Winnipeg, Manitoba

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contents:

preface	01
introduction	04
objectives	11
context	15
history	25
geomorphographics	36
flora and fauna	37
native vegetation	38
precedent studies	39
design development	47
project components	49
the follies	54
conclusions	89
list of figures	91
references	92

There is no architecture without program, without event. The events that occur are as important as the space itself. The space is activated by the motion of the bodies in it. Architecture is never static, just as certain spaces encourage or generate activities, so space is altered, literally transformed by the events that occur in it. Architecture is about designing conditions, rather than conditioning designs.¹

preface - parks and what they mean to me

This thesis project is about a Park. Its context, composition and concept may not fall within the typical defined boundaries of a Park, modern or historic, eastern or western, however the essential elements that create the Park are familiar.

When we take a look at the history of Park design we begin to realize that not only are Parks aesthetically pleasing and nice places to be, but they are places where elements of nature and elements of culture are brought together into a coordinated series of ideas and interventions where each element releases their individuality in attempt to become part of a whole. History tells us that inclusion of nature into landscape architecture was the primary motivation behind the 'art' of Park design, and the inclusion of culture was used as a tool to bring human qualities and characteristics into our work. The legendary painter Marcel Duchamp said that through his own work he wanted to 'put art back at the service of the mind.'² In this project I want art, the art that is landscape architecture, to question the very nature of the mind that contemplates it.

It can also be stated, and defended, that Parks serve the purpose of resolving conflicts, both environmentally and culturally, between humans and nature. The environmental problems we face today continually lead us to doubt the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature. In terms of culture, today's technological trends in society are resulting in a gradual detachment from our environments and the result is an increasing distance between humans and culture. The deterioration of our planet's health, and the role human's play in it is well documented

¹ Bernard Tschumi, 'Biennale Exhibition', 2000

² Davidson, 'Anyplace', p.34

and we no longer know how nature will respond to our interventions. We are now living in an age where the concept of nature and/or our position within it cannot be clearly defined. The consequence of this is significant both environmentally and culturally. The critical thresholds have still not been surpassed yet and at this point we are still evaluating our impacts. We may not have a clear understanding of the relationship between humans and nature, however we rarely question the role of culture in landscape design. We have continually regarded the relationship between humans and the environment/nature as a necessary condition for healthy living.

The physical composition of Parks has changed since their conception, however a repeating theme in Park design is the connection of a building to an open space. Historically the building acts as a focal point and the Park serves as a congregational or mediation space. Over time Parks continued to change and ever-increasing numbers of houses or buildings were attached. This was the beginning to the idea of the Park and the garden city suburb in the nineteenth century. In this scenario, Parks performed the function of cleaning up cities and counterbalancing the harmful effects of overcrowding due to extreme city expansion. It is during this time in landscape design where the park lost its artistic quality, when sterile strips of land or recreational areas became defined as Parks.

However, the Park as the city's 'metaphorical imaginary countryside'³ has remained in the minds of designers. A Park, in this sense, refers to nature and culture as a whole. In my opinion, the moment the Park is reduced to a recreational area, sports complex or green strip is the moment it loses its expression and meaning with respect to nature, and what remains is a utilitarian form that is arbitrarily related to culture. It is the imagination from which the Park derives the rationale for existence. Without imagination a Park becomes a dry space/place for people who come and go with no "real" interaction to the site.

The ideas/elements of nature and culture express themselves in landscape architecture in different capacities. Concepts of each are

³ Bosselman, 'Landscape Architecture as Art', p.10

continually included into the form and function of a Park. As we move from concept to construction these ideas are developed into legible interventions, where nature and culture thrive adjacent to one another. As I mentioned earlier, landscape architecture is the art of landscape design, this label suggests, I think correctly, that it is also a cultural activity. In this sense we can see how the relationship between nature and the culture bring added value to our designs.

'Parks are works of Art, rather than of Nature'.⁴

This abstract meaning is the essence of the Park. It is precisely for this reason that, through analysis and examination, this study seeks to identify the artistic aspects of landscape design, specifically Parks which I believe are potentially the most artistic products of landscape architecture.

⁴ Bosselman, 'Landscape Architecture as Art', p.44

introduction

The Cala del Sasso is an area within a proposed regional park in the interior of the Brenta Valley of Northern Italy, located in the foothills of the Italian Alps (see page 5 for location maps). The project site has been identified by local and national authorities as one of important historic significance, and has been designated as a high priority for preservation and rehabilitation. The area has recently become a competition site for the design of a National Park. The local government has welcomed this initiative, as they have been petitioning for the Park's creation and development for many years in the hope that it will help preserve their cultural history and increase tourism.

I have chosen this area of the Brenta Valley for my practicum research. The Valbrenta Regional Park, consisting mainly of the Cala del Sasso, will celebrate the rich cultural heritage of the people that inhabit the valley and will hopefully become a valuable economic and cultural asset for the surrounding communities. Programming for the park will ensure the physical and cultural preservation of this resource, while working to promote tourism and ecological and economic sustainability. Ecological activities such as horticulture, water-management, and organic farming will help the park maintain its historic significance while also becoming an integral component that ensures the future viability of the site. Recreational activities such as walking, hiking, biking, camping and climbing will help promote the park as a tourist area, working as an economic catalyst for the area and surrounding communities.

As a part of the study, I intend to identify and exploit the benefits and significance of rural national park systems as economic amenities rather than simply being eco-system sanctuaries. The traditional mindset of contemporary designers and planners has been to section off large landmasses, label them as national parks and then leave them to their own ecological succession and historical preservation. This philosophy is imbedded even deeper into the cultural belief structure of European nations, like Italy, who treat these areas primarily as historic sites. With this type of designation, the future of the park is determined at its inception as they become museums of natural history, and they rarely have any effect on the economic or cultural growth patterns of the

cala del sasso 4444 gradini

site - Valstagna, Italy



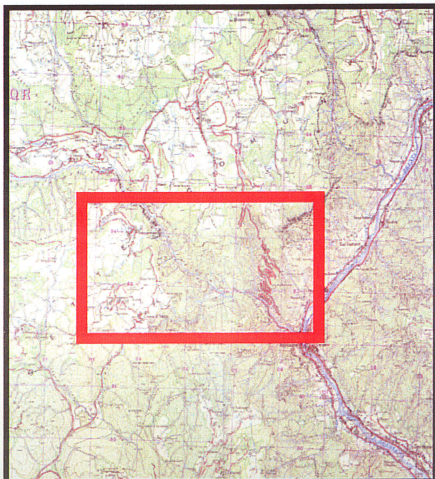
Italy - Veneto Region



Province of Vicenza



Brenta Valley



Comuni di Valstagna



Cala del Sasso - 4444 gradini



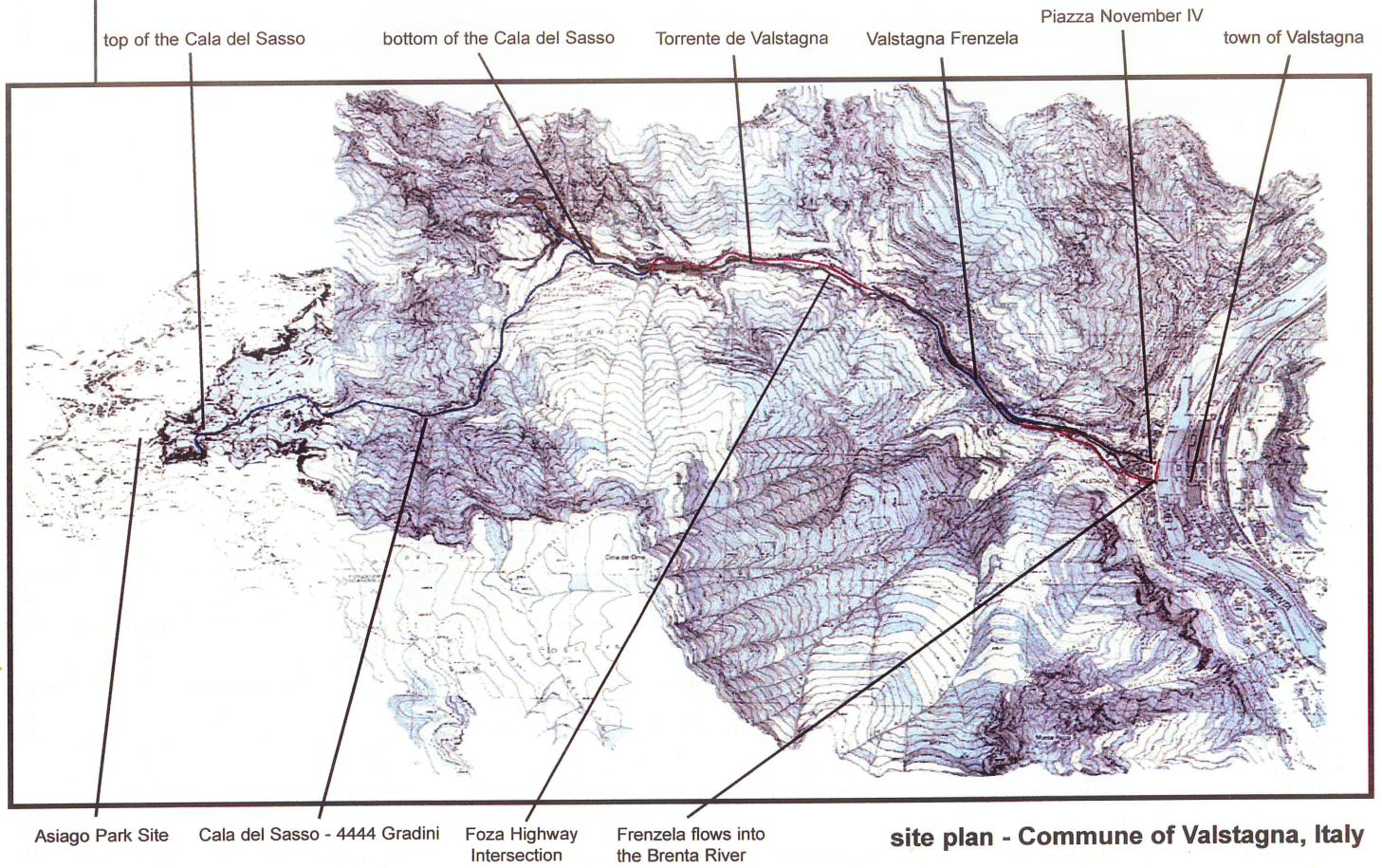
town of Valstagna

surrounding communities. Thus, they become pockets of cultural preservation. They also segregate urban and rural systems, preventing the integration and juxtaposition of cultural and nature.

I feel that the failure to identify or relate these parks to the surrounding environmental or cultural context severely limits the potential not only to the park, but the surrounding areas as well. You should not put limits on a park site during its conception, and by limits I mean potential benefits related to park development. I agree that the design mandate of a national park should consider the value the preservation of the historic and environmental aspects have for a region, but it must expand to include the economics and culture of adjacent and affected communities.

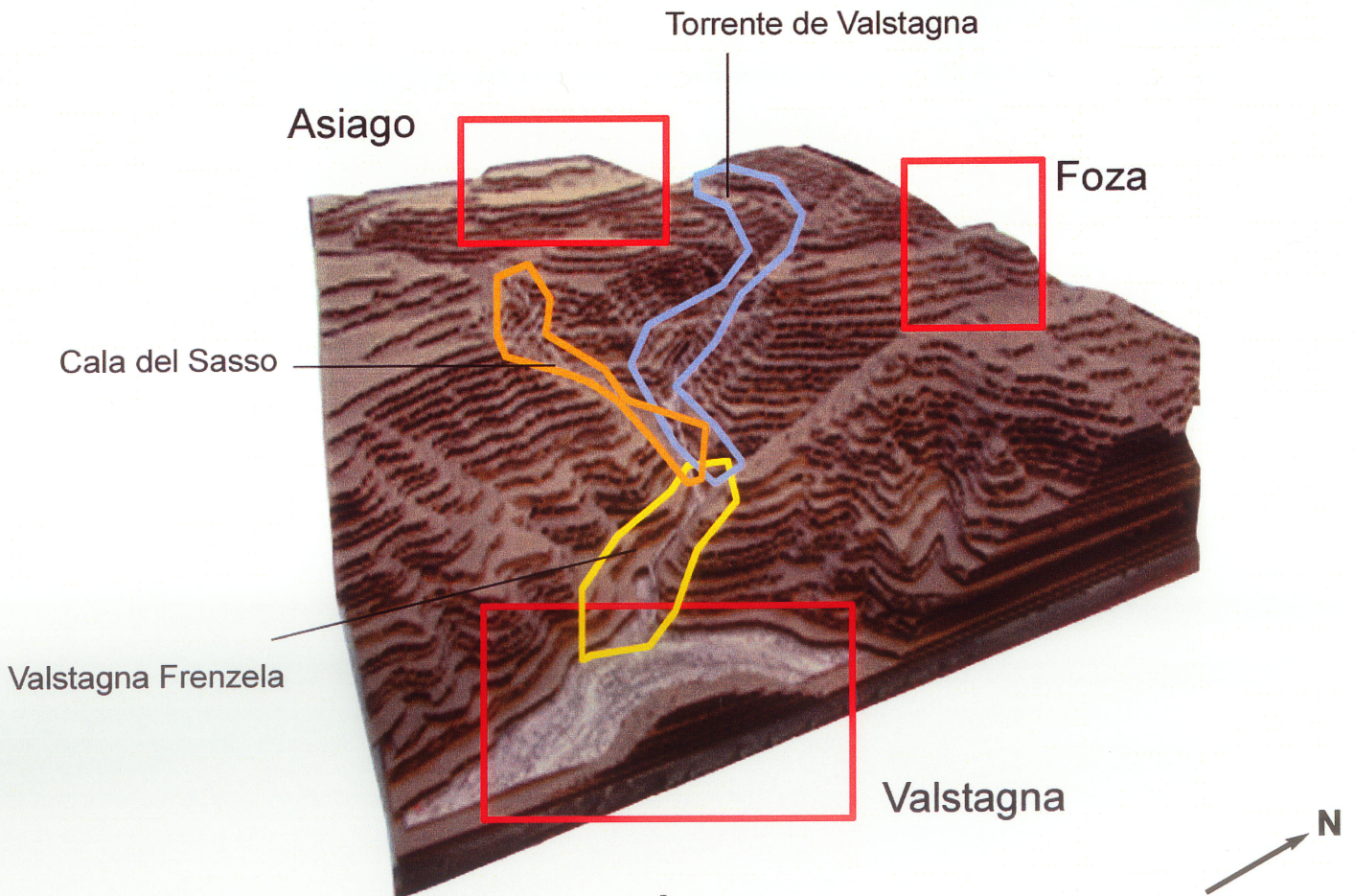
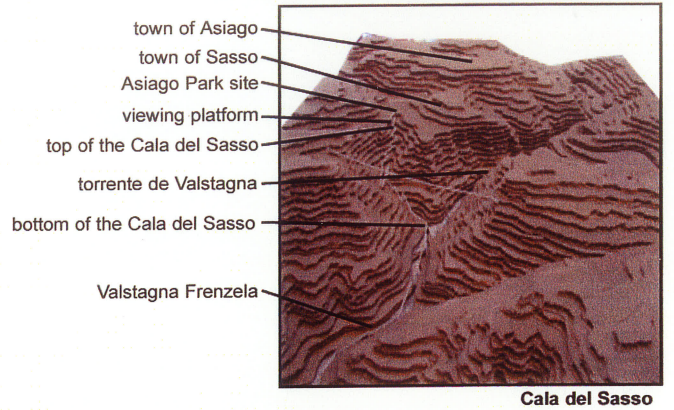
The majority of my work is to be focused on the link between Valstagna and the bottom of the Cala del Sasso, or 4444 steps (see pages 7 and 8). This is a three-kilometer linear link that follows an existing water runoff stream, the *Valstagna Frenzela* that empties into the Brenta River in the middle of the town of Valstagna. At present there is no path that leads one from the town to the bottom of the steps (*the Cala del Sasso*), there is only a vehicular highway that is maintained solely for automobiles, and it is not very pedestrian friendly or accessible. The area of land that links the town to the bottom of the steps is extremely beautiful. There are a series of engineered terraces that run along the side of the road in what is now a runoff ditch, *the Torrente de Valstagna*, which funnels the flow of runoff water from the mountaintops into the Brenta River. Several waterfalls cascade down the sides of the mountains into the *Frenzela* and *Torrente*. These terraces are much more impressive when they are full of water, which usually occurs after a good night's rainfall, but the area has a special presence when there are merely standing pools of water and the sheer rock faces of the mountains that run straight up from each side of this valley that both the *Frenzela* and *Torrente* run through. There are several species of plants along this route that attract the eye and make the link between the two spaces an interesting and pleasant environment.

c a l a d e l s a s s o
4 4 4 4 g r a d i n i



c a l a d e l s a s s o
4 4 4 4 g r a d i n i

commune de Valstagna site model



The park segment that includes the 4444 steps (the *Cala del Sasso*) will be included into the design solution, just not as extensively as first thought. The governments of Valstagna and Asiago have been working together in a project that has seen the recent rehabilitation of the steps. Several portions of the steps have been restored or completely replaced. My project will include the steps segment as part of the overall park site, but the designed pieces in this area will be limited and constructed in very specific places. Thus, elements of the design show up along the 4444 steps, in a disintegrating fashion the further you move up the side of the mountain. So as one walks down the mountain towards Valstagna, parts of the design will become more apparent as you approach the bottom. It is meant to mimic or reference the natural processes that created the valley in the first place, the ideas of erosion (glacial, water, wind, etc.) The inhabited areas along the edges of the Brenta River are of course the latest to have been exposed by these processes of erosion, therefore, the elements of the design (whether they are sitting areas, canopies, or monuments) will be the most obvious to the user, and the most detailed in terms of design. As you move up the side of the mountain and you enter areas that have been exposed and eroded for years, the elements of the design are less legible, less detailed, and less obvious to the user. The reason behind this is simple. The history along the valley floor is fairly evident, and most occupants and visitors of the valley understand the natural process that occur there, so in terms of the design concept, there is no real need to disguise any of the designed elements. But as you move up the side of the mountain, into areas that have been exposed for thousands of years, there is no evident history of any significance and their meaning to the user is lost. The design interventions will be placed there to mimic and reference the natural processes that carved out the valley, but only to the extent that the user is subtly exposed to them and the characteristics of those processes. Basically the vertical collection and positioning of the design elements are to be dictated by the geomorphologic processes that created the valley, and all the smaller inlets.

Simultaneous to the vertical manifestation the project has developed a horizontal layer that is intended to mimic and express the history of settlement and culture in the region. The elements of this part of the design will become evident and will take form at the community level and

along the lower level of the path. This will include parts of the surrounding environmental context and communities. The essence of the project is to attempt to represent significant points in the history of the valley, important cultural events such as wars, floods, economic booms, increases/decreases in population, etc.; into designed installations, which will manifest in the form of canopies, sitting areas, monuments, or floor patterns. The elements will be distributed throughout the site, in a linear horizontal fashion and not necessarily in three dimensions. Several elements are to represent certain cultural and historical events that are more significant than others, and will be developed in greater detail and have a stronger presence in the Park. They will indeed have a unique physical, cultural and contextual character, but that uniqueness will come from within the historical composition of the region. In three dimensions, these elements will pull themselves out of and erode their way into the surfaces of the valley walls and floor, the edges of the building fabric, the faces of the cliffs and the variations within the berms and swales of the upper meadows.

The intent is for the user to navigate along the path by acknowledging, reading, and interacting with the environment in a relatively legible manner, however somewhat semi-consciously. The place should make sense. People should be able to recognize that there is a path, but they do not necessarily have to understand why it is there, or what it specifically represents. Perhaps people will want to know, and learn about the place a little more intensely. Or perhaps they will use the discovered elements and experiences to develop their own personal meaning and connection to the place.

objectives

The main objective of this study is to contribute to the formation of theories of landscape design through the investigation of two architectural and landscape issues: (1) the idea and poetics of bridging communities, (2) the mediation between natural form and cultural context.

This is accomplished through a comparative design analysis; the intellectual decomposition and examination of precedent setting park designs, in combination with an analysis of relevant landscape and building architecture design theory and subsequent design interventions from the surrounding region of the project site.

Here is what I believe to be the direction and purpose of the project:

1. Explore the meaning of place – recognizing the history and function of the space in a specific context.
2. Expression of time – the definite contrast through the juxtaposition of new material or event and the existing site. Create a dialogue between the physical remnants of the past as they evolve in the present while acknowledging the significance and integrity of each aspect.
3. Realization of experience – the creation of a journey and the provocation of subjective memory.

The physical manifestation of the project will occur through:

1. (Re) develop a physical connection between two adjacent towns in northern Italy that exists, but is currently disjointed and rarely experienced.
2. Create new experiences / expressions of place that are relevant to the social and physical context.

This project is more than simply a specific response to a given program or chosen location. The project also represents an attempt to understand and convert design concepts and ideologies of our time into specific interventions. I have tried to move outside the 'BOX', referring to the introspective approach towards design in the Italian context. I have presented foreign theories and architectural approaches towards design and applied them to the Italian culture and environmental and building fabrics. Through this process I have not only created a solution for a

design problem, but also presented and expressed 'successfully' the issues of modern landscape architecture in a foreign context.

'It is while making that we must learn
how to make things'⁵

'The form of the things we make must', according to Dom van der Lann, 'aim to have a two-fold effect: functional, with a view to physical use, and expressive, with a view to mental use'⁶. In landscape architectural terms this means that not only do we create places and spaces for people to use, we are creating a designed experience where people can be engaged physically as well as mentally. Therefore, our designs are not just physical representations of our theories, they are a vessel that allows us to look at things in different ways.

Most design professionals look at each others work to help them gauge their position in relation to the rest of the profession. Looking at the world from this perspective helps designers broaden their understanding of design and propels them in different directions. If it is possible for designers to influence one another, it is then justifiable to say that our designs will have direct influence on the people who use them. We cannot assume that the ordinary person will be able to understand the concepts behind our interventions, but we can be fairly assured that the users of our designed spaces will have some sort of reaction to a project and will hopefully interact with the spaces in a way that we may have designed for. This interaction, no matter how small or insignificant, will influence the life of the user, and the context, in a very definite manner. This idea is explained quite nicely in the following story.

Lost Marbles-

One day, riding my bike down a cobblestone street in NYC, I noticed a pretty blue glimmer coming from the side of the road. I pulled over to see what it was and found a small pile of iridescent marbles. I wondered how they had gotten there, who had put them there, and why. And I wanted them, so I picked them up and put them in my bag, wondering why I had to have these marbles rather than just appreciating their existence, but anyway....

⁵ Van der Lan, 'Architecture as a Social Science', p.87

⁶ Van der Lan, 'Architecture as a Social Science', p.88

I rode on. At the end of the block I realized that I was in a different place in terms of time (and space) than I should have been, or would have been, if I hadn't seen the marbles, and hadn't stopped to pick them up.

My day was somehow changed, and maybe my life, because of that random incident. I began to think about the times when I actually have time not to have to be at a specific place or doing a specific thing at a specific time. I noticed that often, at those times and other times as well, I would be walking down the street or be somewhere and something really wonderful would happen, kind of randomly. Generally they would be interactions with other people- sometimes people I knew, sometimes strangers- but there would be times when I was low or confused or needed help or whatever and wonderful people or things would unexpectedly appear.

I decided to get more marbles and put 13 of them in 13 places where these types of things had happened (including the initial marble sighting area). There are 13 marbles in a game. I dropped them off in each of these places and photographed them, and I went back every day to each spot to see if they were there, taking pictures each time.

All the marbles eventually disappeared, except from one spot where they went unnoticed because of weeds. Most disappeared by the following day. I wondered who picked them up, if they wondered how they got there, if their day had been changed.⁷

We design our environments in an attempt to influence the world in ways that inform and involve the users. In my investigations I have found that this was the goal of Carlo Scarpa's designs. His work was a visual commentary on the world around us. Scarpa knew 'that which is living in the object dies before the object. That which is living in the language, lives with the language.'⁸

This comment suggests that the only true architectural experience is 'one that makes a true enigma of the solution'⁹, where the user chooses to question his/her reaction to a problem, or an event, or a place, possibly even differently, each time they interact with a designed experience. Scarpa also followed a rigorous, methodological approach to detailing a

⁷ Cornyn, 'Lost Marbles', pp.5-6

⁸ Murphy, 'Carlo Scarpa and the Castelvechio', p.4

⁹ Murphy, 'Carlo Scarpa and the Castelvechio', p.6

project that could be likened to nature, where pieces had a logical fit, a cadence and a pattern.

It is not my intention to provide definite statements of the past, or prescribe specific experiences. The intention is for the user to experience the designed spaces in a new and interpretive manner, to become aware of, and question their surroundings, and allow them the opportunity to make their own evaluations as to what they are experiencing. There is no right or wrong interpretation of the experience, people will experience the space in a new manner, and they will gain a new individual understanding of place, and of the natural and cultural histories that created it.

context – description of the region and site

As mentioned in the earlier section, the Cala del Sasso, the proposed project site, is located in Northern Italy, within the foothills of the Italian Alps. More specifically, the site is situated on the borders of the Communes of Valstagna, Asiago and Foza, set within the Veneto Region in the Province of Vicenza, about 12 kilometers north of Bassano del Grappa, 60 kilometers northwest of Venice. The project site has been identified on page 5. This map series outlines the specific location of the site in relation to all of Italy. A detailed site map can be found on page 7, followed by a site model on page 8. I have included 9 sheets of site photographs located on pages 16-24, they are laid out in a linear fashion, beginning in the town of Valstagna at the bottom of the project site, running up the Cala del Sasso to the top of the site and the town of Sasso. The photographs are intended to describe the varying conditions of settlement, context, topography and human involvement found along and throughout the project site.

The Brenta Valley



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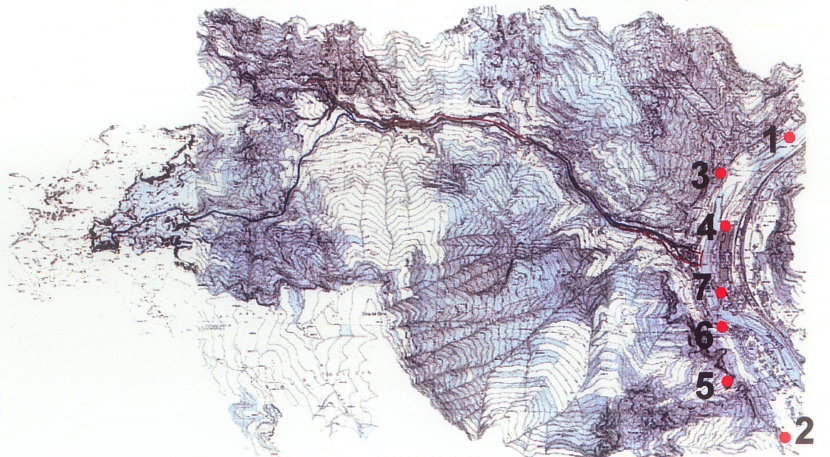
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Valstagna

piazza November IV



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Valstagna

the Frenzela



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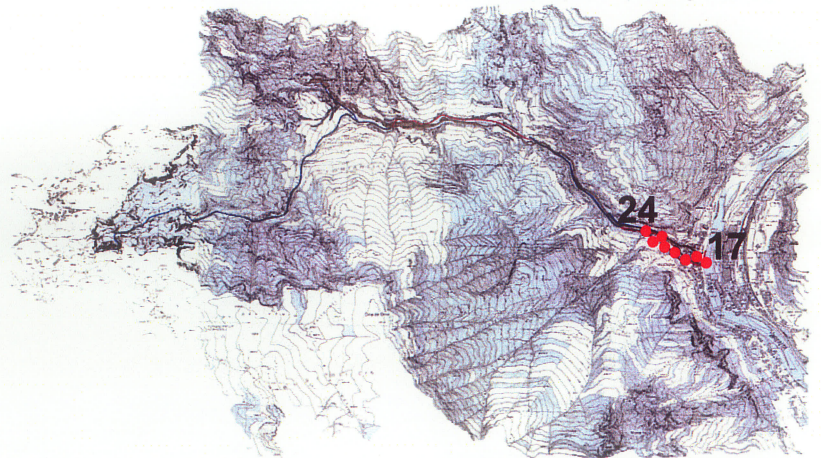
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The Frenzela



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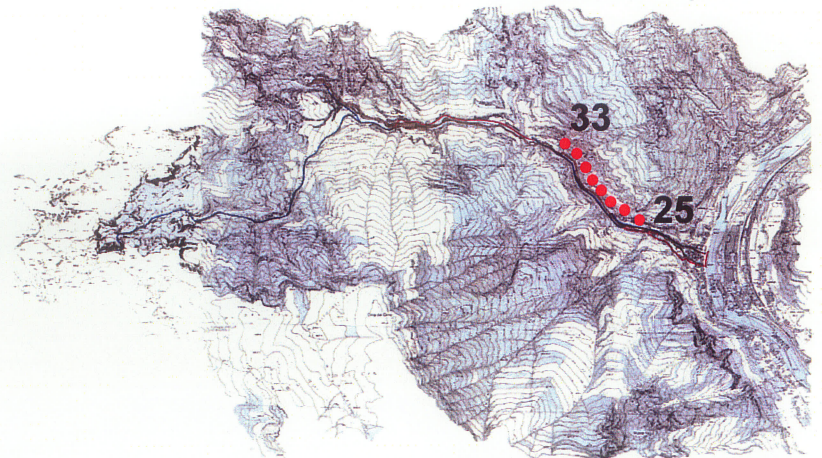
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The Frenzela



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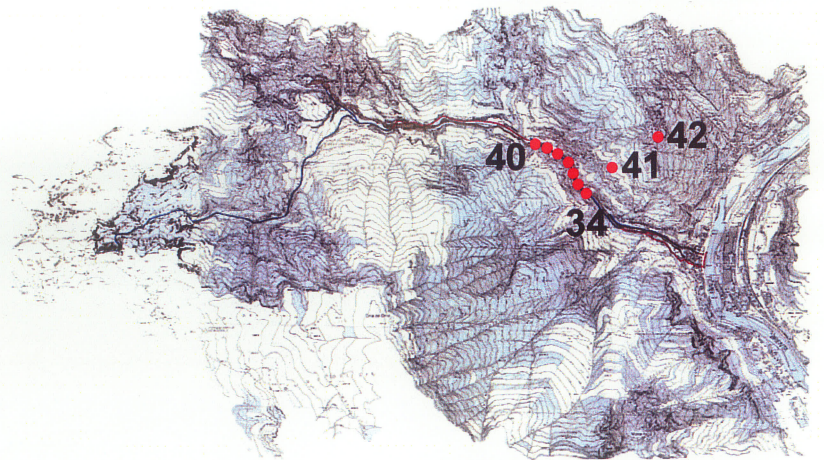
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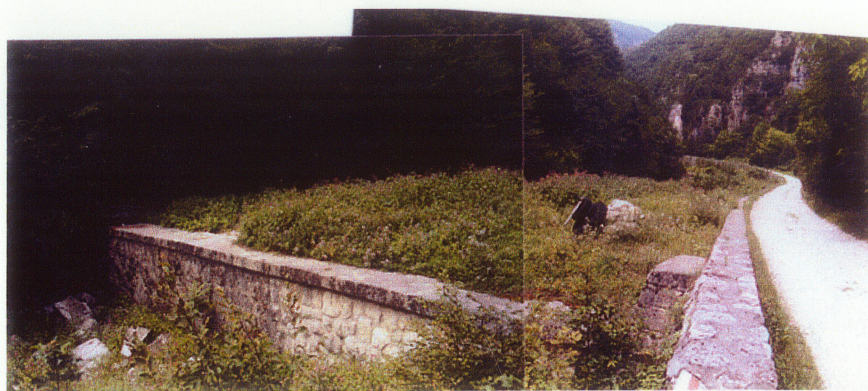
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The Frenzela



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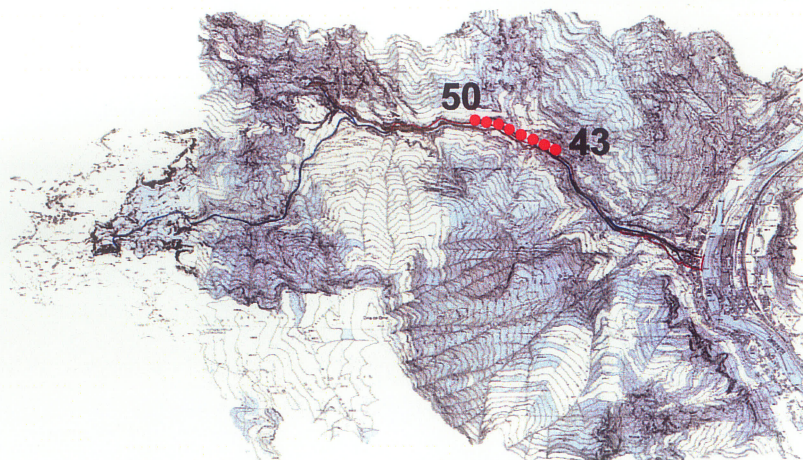
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The Frenzela



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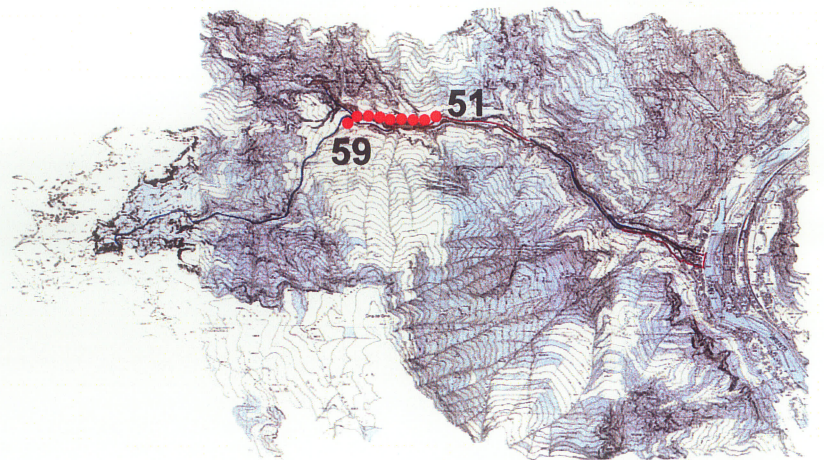
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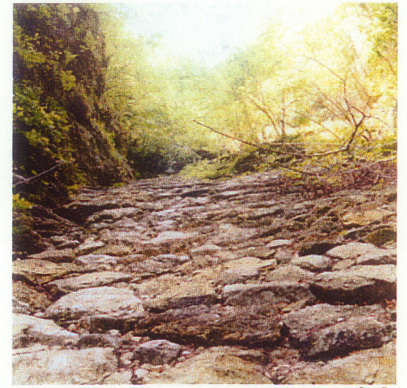
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The Cala del Sasso



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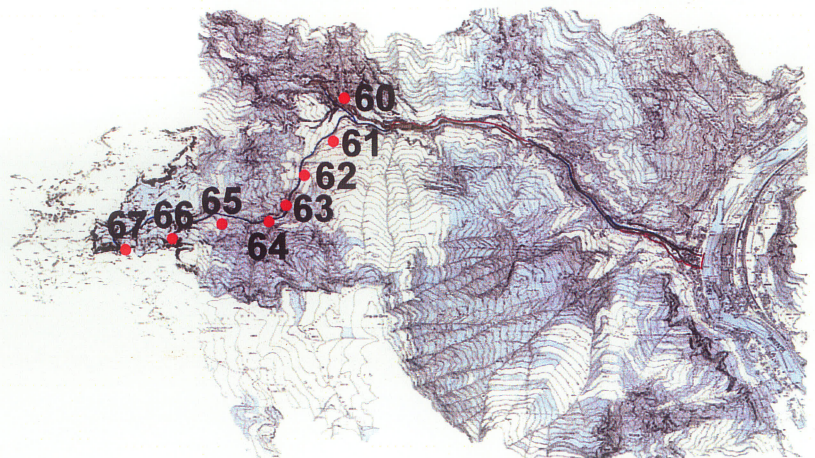
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The Cala del Sasso



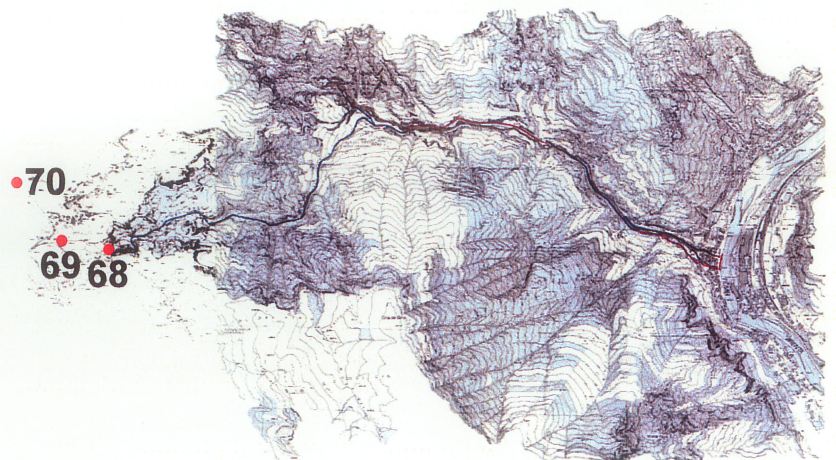
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history – a context for the Park

The context of the Park is essential. With the methodology and concept of how the Park will be designed in place, the history can now be woven into the fabric of the landscape.

the settlement of the veneto region and the brenta valley

Since its beginnings, the long and complex history of northern Italy has been connected to life along the rivers and their natural and cultural significance. On one hand, rivers created complex and delicate ecosystems, contributing to, and maintaining a variety of life forms for thousands of years. On the other, they create boundaries, and boundaries are inherently confrontational.

The settlement history of the Veneto region can be traced to the presence and location of its rivers and to the wars and power struggles that are directly related to them. The control of significant waterways, such as the Brenta River, has affected the economic and social well being of this area and culture. Thus, the lakes, streams and rivers that stretch across most of Northern Italy have historically been areas of great contention and military struggle between the conflicting nations that want to control and settle these lands. A general understanding of this power struggle is an essential step to understanding the settlement patterns of the Italian Alps, or more specifically, the Brenta Valley region, which is the study area for this project.

Among the four main rivers that serve the Veneto region, the Brenta River played a very important role in the development of the economy and settlement of the area, contributing in different ways to the land it flows through. Running down from the Northern lakes of Caldonazzo and Levico in the Trentino region, 174 km in length, the Brenta River unites the *Pre-Alpi* (pre-alpine region) with the Gulf of Venice, and runs through four provinces: Trento, Vicenza, Padua and Venice. After crossing the Valgusana, it enters into a narrow valley, 26 km long, known as the Brenta Canal, and flows along the valley floor until it ends at Vallisón, north of Bassano del Grappa. Between Padua and Stra, on the coast which takes its name from the Brenta, the river divides in two: the main branch flows into the Adriatic sea, south of Chioggia, while the

second branch supplies the Naviglio which, at Fusina, flows down to the canals of the Lagoon in Venice.

North of the fertile and industrious region of Central Veneto, along the path that leads to the Alps and northern Europe, the Canal established itself as a transport route of economic and military importance during the Venetian era. During this time, it became a transportation center and border crossing. It was known to have a settlement structure that had been imposed by the French, influenced by the arrival in Italy of Charlemagne in 774. A linear system of colonization occurred along the river. The region could be characterized as an environment of extreme agricultural productivity, but one with a volatile history with alternating cycles of development and decline.

In the following century a drastic transition occurred during the Longobard era, Longobard being the name of the sitting Pope. Villages and country parish towns emerged, or re-emerged in areas that had been previously settled by pagans prior to Charlemagne's arrival. The land was organized into jurisdictions ruled by counts and bishops, each of whom became true 'Signorie'¹⁰ (a form of monarchical, absolute government).

In 1224 the Abbey of Santa Croce di Campese was founded by Ponzio di Meigueil, this would prove to be an important event in the settlement history of the Brenta Canal. Ponzio di Meigueil was the seventh of the great abbots of Cluny (home of the dissemination of Western Christianity) and an important figure in the fight for investitures between the Papacy and the Empire. His presence in the region brought with it an air of excitement for the church patrons, but more importantly the interest of wealthy families in the area. Soon, there was an influx of money into the local economy. Noblemen and Venetian merchants caught wind of the economic resources in the valley, this spurred the construction of numerous mills along the waterway. There was much competition for the considerable monetary capital, but the powerful patrons of the church put a great emphasis on the importance of culture.

¹⁰ Spagnolli, 'La Montagna Oltre il Duemila', p.41

The cultivation of what little land there was available and the ever-increasing commercial trade in lumber and the harnessing of hydraulic energy marked the growth of the canal's villages. The transport of lumber was accomplished '*a Menada*'¹¹ (by logging), with rafts made of tree trunks, a valuable commercial commodity. This activity dates back to the early 1300's. Both banks of the Canal developed distinct economies. The road, which since Roman times has led to the mountain territory, runs along the west bank of the Brenta River. It aided in the system of defense and the breeding of sheep, which found abundant pastures on the mountains around Monte Grappa and the plateau of Asiago.

In the following two centuries, the farming economy was augmented by woodcutting and the transport and selling of lumber. As early as 1181, records indicate that there was a mill at Margnan, north of Bassano, which belonged to the Monastery of Santa Croce di Campese. Because of economic development, due in large part to the Monastery, other buildings were constructed, with hydraulic wheels that powered mills for varied uses, saws, forges, and later, spinning machines and paper mills. There was significant manufacturing development between the years 1600 to 1700.

During this period, the village of Valstagna was settled, located at the convergence of Val Frenzela (the natural path that leads to the Plateaux of Asiago) and the Brenta River. The lumber from the mountain tops represented a precious source of lumber for the region. At one time, workmen from the Shipyard of Venice would climb to 'Col dei Remi' to find trunks of oak, ash or beech. Having grown along the ridge, with their foliage outstretched towards the light, they would assume particular shapes, making it easy for the ship makers to fashion the curved and linear elements of the boats.

It is not until the year 1400 that the village of Valstagna became the most important marketplace for forage and lumber. One of the greatest feats of engineering of all the roads within the valley remains the Cala del Sasso (the project site). Its construction began in 1398 by the residents of Asiago to facilitate the transport of lumber to Valstagna. The Cala

¹¹ Spagnoli, 'La Montagna Oltre il Duemila', p.43

consists of a very long staircase with the symbolic number of 4,444 steps, flanked by a concave trough at an almost steady incline, to facilitate the sliding of the lumber from the peaks to the valley floor. Having fallen into a state of decay, it was restored in 1492 by all the towns concerned, especially Valstagna. Since then it has been efficiently maintained and remains in good condition today.

The lumber industry continued as an important part of these townships from 1300 to 1700. During its time in power, Venice carefully monitored the forests and the lumber trade, paying particular attention to the requirements of its great shipyard and fleet, for which it saved wood for oars and all lumber exceeding 11 feet (3.93 meters).

the historic military infrastructure

The success of agriculture and lumber industries in the valley was fast paced, with that success came the fear of invasion and attack from rival cultures north of the Alps. There was now a need to defend the region, its inhabitants and its resources from the potential of an attack. The development of a military infrastructure in the Brenta Valley would permanently affect the physical environment, it would also alter the settlement patterns for generations to come.

The canal's initial method of defense was entrusted to the bastions of Pove-Solagna to the South, to the Covolo of Butistone and Bastion of Enego to the North. The name 'Butistone' means 'wound in the rock'¹², while 'Covolo' refers to a 'cavity or cave'¹³. 'Covolo', such as the ones found in Upper Oliero, Lower Oliero, the Covoloni of Val Gardena, of the Val Frenzela, and the aforementioned Covolo of Butistone, would be used for refuge, defenseable spaces for valley residents or religious purposes.

The documented history of the Covolo of Butistone, and the Bastions of Pove-Solagna and Enego date back to 1002-1004. The Bastion was another line of defense, a fortress north of Valstagna on the banks of the

¹² Spagnoli, 'La Montagna Oltre il Duemila', p.54

¹³ Spagnoli, 'La Montagna Oltre il Duemila', p.56

Brenta River. Today it is a ruin, of indeterminate origin, dating back to the Roman or late Medieval periods, located north of a group of old stone houses, called 'Case Bastic'¹⁴ (Houses of Bastion). It resembled a square tower, strategically located to guard the Covolo of Butistone down below and the paths of entrance to the bottom of the valley. The Bastion controlled the system of communication between the Plateau and the Canal. Valstagna is connected to the Canal by two paved roads known as Upper and Lower Piovega (Piovega di Sopra and Piovega di Sotto). The term 'Piovega' dates back to publican times, to a path that recalls an ancient and important road¹⁵. The 'Piovega di Sotto' (Lower Piovega) reaches the Brenta Canal to the south of the narrow valley at Primoland, at the bridge called 'Delia Piovega', at Seghe. The expanse of land surrounding the tower would have contained the original enclosure of the Bastion.

The 'Piovega di Sopra' (Upper Piovega) was partially destroyed during the construction of the current carriage or transport road. It joined the road that led to the left riverbank at Primoland, in the direction of Borgo Valsaguna. The present-day ballast at Piovega di Sotto conceals the remains of more ancient paving work.

The system of fortresses, the connecting infrastructure, along with the religious sites and the fortifications along the riverbed and midstream, determined peculiar rules of settlement for homes and mills in the Brenta Valley. In addition to mountain borders and the position of the sun, these specific and related occurrences contributed to what was already known in the XVI century as a large city but that, according to some, presented similar characteristics even centuries earlier. Andrea Palladio had perceived the character of the Venetian metropolitan expansion that, as was proven, extended far beyond the canal.

In the central Veneto region, the modern large city was formed rather slowly and intermittently due to the development of initial manufacturing efforts, at locations equipped with sources of energy, primarily along the waterways. It gained strength through the transformation of land systems and the decline of the traditional agricultural economy.

¹⁴ Spagnolli, 'La Montagna Oltre il Duemila', p.55

¹⁵ Spagnolli, 'La Montagna Oltre il Duemila', p.56

In the region of the Brenta Valley, this model of settlement is precedent and, in a certain way, unique. Even today the environment and residential structure of the valley is considered a layer of the large Piedmont city. The Renaissance style of the 15th century was receptive to this form of theological exploration of settlement. The scholars of the 1500's persistently sought the ancient origins of their cities or their own lands by referring back to classical myths. Along the river and the surrounding valleys, not only have the historical, architectural and archaeological memories been entrenched, so too have the myths and stories of bygone days when mountains, waters, and woods were inhabited by pagan deities.

In the valley, the Renaissance erudite discovered the ruins of ancient Barentia, 'a city of great expanse, built on a mountain, with settlements that lead to the river'¹⁶, the river from which the city takes its name, Brenta. And Barat, biblical myth, is none other than its founding namesake. The name Brenta, of German origin, is probably derived from 'Bruntz', which signifies 'source', or from 'brunner', which refers to 'spring (of water)'¹⁷. Even the 'Tavola Asolana', going back to the original myth, defines the lands of the ancient city: undoubtedly imaginary, hence even more symbolic.

In time, the methods of defense became integrated with the system of roads, situating key locations at religious sites. In addition to Santa Croce, there were three other important religious sites: San Martino di Campese, Santa Giustina (the old parish town) and San Giorgio di Solagna. The two systems, one of defense, the other religious, vied for the production of legends: the former searching for heroic origins, the latter forced to contend with natural paganism and its extraordinary vitality. In the traditions of Campese and those of the right bank, San Martino was the ancient religious site where 'the dead were taken'¹⁸ and where the mythical golden bell was buried. Today, the place is represented by seventeenth and eighteenth century redevelopment. The surrounding city wall, particularly towards the valley walls, gives San Martino the aspect of a fortified church. The home of the Camoi or

¹⁶ Spagnoli, 'La Montagna Oltre il Duemila', p.65

¹⁷ Spagnoli, 'La Montagna Oltre il Duemila', p.67

¹⁸ Spagnoli, 'La Montagna Oltre il Duemila', p.67

Castelvechio is located near San Martino. According to tradition, it is the oldest house in the town and is said to contain underground tunnels.

remnants of industry

The valley has a complex history of industrial occupation, and it is quite interesting how the industries developed. At first, mills were used to grind cereal grain, then, sawmills became very important with the emergence of the lumber trade, hence a true industry began. These manufacturing sites were primarily located in Campese, Oliero, Valstagna, Carpane, San Nazario and Solagna.

Today, there are few remnants of the factories or mills, having been built over one after the other on both banks of the river. All that remains of these impressive Paleo-Industrial structures are part of the Parolini paper mill in Oliero. In Carpane, there remains the Guarnieri central hydroelectric plant, what is left of the Cappella artificial canal. The landowner's home, recently restored, has become headquarters of the Mountain Community (Comunita Montana). At Merlo, the old edifice, transformed into a cotton wool producing plant, still safeguards tools and machines of the era, the only evidence of industrial archaeology. At Solagna, the structure, which housed the Secco spinning mill, built during the second half of the 1800s, was turned into a tobacco storehouse. What remains of the old sawmill of Pove is the landowner's dwelling, by now crumbling from neglect, a few traces of the artificial canals, and the access points to the river. Of the lime kilns, at one time numerous along the Brenta, 'la Fornace'¹⁹ (the Furnace) of Solagna still survives, saved and restored by the Consorzio Progetto Ambiente, the Brenta Valley's Historic Preservation Committee, which now uses it as its prestigious headquarters.

the last one hundred years of the veneto

After the fall of the 'Serenissima' (Republic of Venice), activities associated with the exploitation and the manufacture of wood lost their importance, even though they continued throughout the 1800's. The inhabitants of the Canal were forced to look for other sources of income.

¹⁹ Spagnolli, 'La Montagna Oltre il Duemila', p.70

They decided to expand their cultivation of tobacco, which was already quite widespread.

It is not known when this tobacco reached the shores of the Brenta. Campese legend has it that a Benedictine monk brought back the seeds inside a cane and that the people of Campese are the oldest cultivators of the plant, called 'Grass of the Great Prior', 'Holy Grass', and finally, tobacco²⁰. Because of its medicinal qualities, it was probably initially grown in the gardens adjacent to the Monastery of Santa Croce and then, gradually, became more widespread within the valley. Its cultivation, already present in 1600, became extensive in 1700 under a state monopoly. Gradually, it substituted almost all other agriculture in the valley, until it became the only crop grown in the late 1800s. In the second half of the 19th century, all available land, even on the inaccessible mountain slopes, was cultivated with terrace and dry-walling structures for tobacco. These brick terraces were constructed by breaking rocks into pieces and then, reconstructing them in retaining walls with flat tops. They became sustainable plateaus, structurally sufficient to carry heavy loads and accommodate extensive cultivation. Tobacco farming even influenced the types of residential dwellings that were built. Generally narrow, the upper area, the 'Granaro', was used for drying the leaves²¹. Externally, small wooden terraces were located on the southern exposure. The houses formed compact nuclei so as to take up as little cultivatable land as possible, with small areas and walls that were accessed by wooden gates.

The most recent history of development in the Brenta Valley is once again tied to the strategic-military infrastructure, a vast network of defenses that rises from the bottom of the valley to the mountain peaks. During the First World War, the system of fortifications shifted from the bottom of the valley to the ridges between Como di Campolongo, Mount Caina and the coast of Campese, which were positions of defense and points of access to the plateau of the Seven Townships and to the Canal. Dotted with community land, summer pastures, woods and stone quarries, for much time it was witness to the endless and harsh battles

²⁰ Spagnolli, 'La Montagna Oltre il Duemila', p.57

²¹ Spagnolli, 'La Montagna Oltre il Duemila', p.58

with the bordering areas of Angarano and Asiago. During the First World War, the ridges and peaks became the home to an enormous network of fortified trenches: an imposing structure meant as a second line of defense and communication between the trenches, stations, and tunnels dug into the rock, which over the course of this century has remained relatively intact.

Recovery after both World Wars was slow. The exodus of people due to the war lasted almost a century and carried a heavy price as unique historical, cultural and environmental sites were abandoned. In the last decade, residents of the Brenta Valley have collectively appealed for support from local authorities to help them re-connect with the history of their settlements within the valley. There is now a strong voice working to save the priceless cultural infrastructure present in the physical patterns and fabric of the valley. At present, there are several significant environmental and cultural projects being undertaken by the 'Consorzio Progetto Ambiente'²², in co-operation with Italian and foreign universities. The mandate of this group imparts the idea of a cultural valorization, a reconnection with the planning, settlement, architecture, materials, local technologies, legends and myths of the Brenta. There is a concerted effort underway working to help identify and preserve life histories and traditions, in an effort to identify the impact of settlement in the valley, and thus hopefully preserving the physical and cultural history of the region, and working to create a more knowledgeable and active plan for the future.

Monte Grappa – historical notes

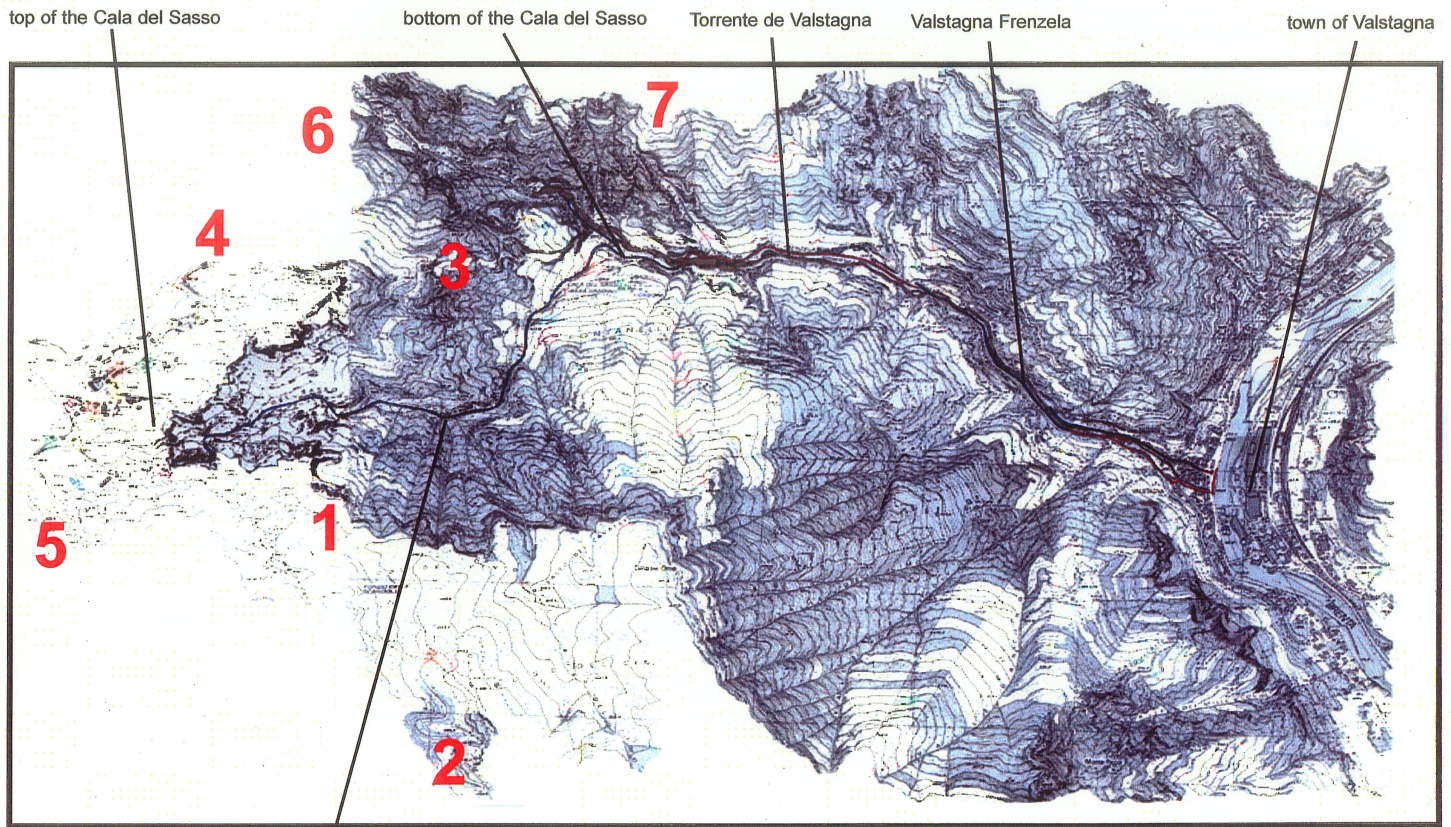
The Monte Grappa is the mountain that The Cala del Sasso is constructed on (see map on page 34), and as such, is the most significant mountain located within and around the project site. It stands 1,775 meters at its highest point, over 200 meters higher than the mountain group surrounding it, and makes up a large part of the Veneto Pre-Alpi region, isolated between the rivers Brenta and Piave. It's origin dates back about 10 million years resulting from the continuing collision between the African and European continents, putting pressure on the oceans *Tetilde* and *Mesogeo*²³. The collision raised the land and

²² Spagnolli, 'La Montagna Oltre il Duemila', p.110

²³ Spagnolli, 'La Montagna Oltre il Duemila', p.87

c a l a d e l s a s s o
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historic sites



Cala del Sasso - 4444 Gradini

Commune of Valstagna, Italy

- 1 Monte Grappa
- 2 the Cadorna Road
- 3 Caserma Milano
- 4 Gallery Vittorio Emanuele III
- 5 the Sanctuary
- 6 the Madonnina of Grappa
- 7 the Roman Portal and Observatory

the evacuating waters corroded what is now visible as mountain chains and hilly areas throughout the Italian territory. Monte Grappa gained significant importance during the First World War of 1915-1918 when, in 1917 it became the front-line of defense against the Austrian troops who, after the battle of Caporetto, were looking to conquest the river Piave and control the mountain area around Valstagna. Monte Grappa saw the first attacks by the Austrian troops on the 13th of November, and continued for 10 days.

The final battle launched by the Italians on Monte Grappa was on the 24th of October 1917, and lasted 4 days, during which time the mountaintop was won and lost on many occasions. In the end, the Austrians retreated, giving the victory to the Italians. This was the last time this area has seen significant military action.

geomorphographics – the geology of the site

The natural environment around the town of Valstagna is composed of two completely different sections, characterized by a system of mountains and valleys, and each of these systems have very different characteristics, depending on which aspect of the project site you are talking about. These two sections are divided into:

the southern section

The southern section of the site, including the mountain peaks, morphologically presents a structure similar to a high-plain environment in the way it is surrounded by high and steep escarpments, including the Valle di Santa Felicita and that of the Valle del Lastego, each of which comprise significant portions of the Cala del Sasso. Both of these are made up of a narrow valley floor that widens as it rises towards the peaks. Characteristics of the southern section of the site include the variety of the topology and the plateau fields located at higher altitudes.

the northern section

The northern section has morphology completely different to the southern section in the way that, other than offering a forest-based fauna and cliff-faces similar to those of the Dolomites, it is comprised of a system of ridges that have differing shapes to those found at the top of the mountain. The valleys found on this side of the mountain are nearly all river valleys, for example the Val Cesina, which feeds into the Brenta River, the Val Stizon which feeds the river Sonna, feeding the river Piave, the Valle delle Mure (river Calcino) and the Valle del Tegerzo. The mineral deposits typical of the mountain are dolomite, calcium and red ammonite²⁴.

²⁴ Spagnoli, 'La Montagna Oltre il Duemila', p.130

flora and fauna

The geographic position of Valstagna and the entire southern zone of the mountain range facing the Veneto Plains make for a very rich area in regards to flora and fauna. In fact, the climatic conditions derived from its position have favored the integration of shrubby type vegetation, typical of Mediterranean zones. The northern mountain zone formations occupy little space and we find forests principally of conifers and sub-alpine shrubs, just like zones frequently covered in snow²⁵. In correspondence to the cliffs of the lateral valleys, especially that of the Brenta River, plants capable of sustaining long periods of arid weather and significant temperature differences (arriving from eastern Europe and Siberia) have also found a home in the area around Valstagna.

Of great interest is the *Lytic* species, which have their largest distribution on the mountains surrounding the town of Valstagna; amongst these the rare *Centaurea rupestris* of the karst environment, the *Genista sericea*, the *Seseli gouanii*, the *Cytisus pseudoprocumbens* and others²⁶.

The presence of the *Centaurea alpina* demonstrates the role that the mountains play as a refuge for rare species. It is found in only two locations on the mountain slopes: in the valley of Valstagna and in the arid, rocky areas above Carpanè, just east of the project site. The mountain is also at the limit of expansion for various species: the eastern limit for finding the *Primula spectabilis*, and the western limit for the diffusion of the *Euphorbia kernerii* and the *Lilium carniolicum*²⁷.

Following the alteration of the natural environment, negative consequences have also resulted, such as the rapid spreading of new species and their dominance over vegetation native to the mountain area. One significant example is the *False acacia* that has infested many of the cleared or abandoned fields²⁸.

²⁵ Spagnoli, 'La Montagna Oltre il Duemila', p.135

²⁶ Spagnoli, 'La Montagna Oltre il Duemila', p.136

²⁷ Spagnoli, 'La Montagna Oltre il Duemila', p.138

²⁸ Spagnoli, 'La Montagna Oltre il Duemila', p.140

native vegetation on the project site

ravine forests: principally populated by maple, ash-grove, sharing with species from the group of *Latifoglie nobili* such as *Frassino maggiore*, *Tigli*, *Olmo montano*, *Acero di monte*, *Acero riccio* and, in lower quantities, examples of black and white *Carpino* underbrush: prevalence of *Tasso*, wide-leaved *Fusaggine* and the rare *Philadelphus coronarius*.

fields and pastures: variety of grasses, including the *Lunaria rediviva*, *Phyllitis scolopendrium*, ferns, *Aconiti*, the *Dentaria pentaphyllos*, and the *Asperula taurina*.

alpine forests: populated by pure or mixed beech with silver fir. In some parts, not affected by the presence of settlement, the underbrush is rich and well stratified. Most alpine-forested areas display a wide and articulated range of forest topology, with the significant distribution of forests and chestnuts.

precedent studies

Several design movements, ideologies and individuals influenced the formation of my personal ideas and theories on Landscape Architecture in the years previous to completion of this thesis. We cannot ignore the fact that the world and the way we view it, is influenced by the events and people that surround us. The development of a thesis is no different. The formation of this work has been influenced from many educational sources, individuals and personal experiences. There are three specific sources, or precedents that have driven this project the most significantly. I have included brief outlines of these precedents, and my opinions as to their respective achievements, to give you a better idea about what drives me, and this work.

park de la villette - paris

Parc de la Villette, designed by the architect Bernard Tschumi, is the largest park in the city of Paris, and was a piece of President Francois Mitterrand's *Grand Projets*²⁹ initiative that involved the development of several large projects throughout Paris to celebrate the bicentennial of the French Revolution. It comprises an area of 55 hectares, 35 of which are designated to open space, and 20 to buildings. It was the winning scheme in the French National Government's design competition that saw 472 entries in 1982. It was proclaimed to be the 'urban park of the twenty-first century'³⁰.

His design is a composition of three layers – a grid of points, a series of lines, and a set of flat geometric surfaces³¹. The park's design is based on an interpretation of the contemporary theory of deconstruction, not from traditional landscape or architectural methods and practices. It was said to reflect the current technological trends in architecture, specifically the computer.

Tschumi stated that his park 'could be conceived as one of the largest buildings ever constructed'³². His design and comments set off shock waves in the design community around the globe. Architects hailed him as a great thinker and mimicked his work at every opportunity, landscape

²⁹ Chaslin, 'Parc de la Villette', p.12

³⁰ Nesbitt, 'Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture', p.34

³¹ McKeefrey, 'Valid Response' p.119

³² Chaslin, 'Parc de la Villette', p. 36

architects were offended by his gestures and attitude and described the park as foolish, void of any real designed meaning, and dismissed him as a misguided egotist.

In his design, Tschumi decided to dismiss history and context, choosing to deal solely with his ideas and understanding of what the urban living condition had become. He chose the computer as his tool for design because he believed it to be the best way to represent the vector based qualities of the current societal trends. His design moves were motivated by contemporary theory, not cultural conditions. He chose sterility and efficiency, over aesthetics and experience.

I included Parc de la Villette as a precedent because of the park's inability to deal with the cultural situation, it is void of any contextual references, and dismisses the historical significance of the site and the people who use it. As much as I can appreciate the system Tschumi has created, a complex and coherent landscape of points, lines, and surfaces, I cannot accept or understand his total lack of contextual referencing or regard for the existing landscape. The users have little to relate or measure themselves to, and the surrounding community and its culture is severed off from the park. There is a total failure to acknowledge and deal with the living conditions and experiential quality of the local residents and park users. Navigating your way through this park is like walking through an airport, you can move from one place to another, but you don't remember what you saw along the way and worst of all, you don't care.

Tschumi was unable to decipher the meaning of the park, and that of landscape architecture. He produced an ultimately unsatisfying and sterile exploration of non place-specific architectural theories. In the end, he designed a metal and concrete environment that links the park buildings, but fails to mediate the spaces between them.

parc andre'-citroen – paris

In response to President Francois Mitterand's involvement in the *Grand Projets*, then Paris mayor Jacques Chirac launched his own attempt in 1985 to create a park for the 'twenty-first century'³³. Located on a piece

³³ Nesbitt, 'Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture', p.34

of land that had once housed the Citroen car manufacturing plant on the left bank of the River Seine in the southwest corner of central Paris, Parc Andre'-Citroen was intended to contrast the failed Park de la Villette. The park design was opened up to a European-wide competition (as opposed to the global competition for Parc de la Villette) in 1985. One condition stood out from the rest, all entries had to be a combined product from two teams of architects and landscape architects. The inclusion of this competition requirement was an obvious attempt to ensure that this park would not meet with the same mis-fortunes as la Villette, at the same time it allowed Chirac to take a shot at Mitterand and his attempts. The winners were announced at the end of 1985 – Alain Provost with architects Jean-Paul Viguier and Jean-Francois Jodry and Gilles Clement with architect Patrick Berger. In the end, two groups were chosen as their solutions seemed to be very similar in nature and the competition committee believed they could be combined together to create a joint final design.

The central feature of the park is a central rectangular green space, bordered by a narrow canal. The main space is 300 meters long and 100 meters wide and gently slopes toward the Seine. Six gardens line one edge of the green space, each of these has their own theme and greenhouse. Two 50-foot greenhouse structures become the focal point of the park, and are located at the top end of the main green space. They become a nice border at that end of the space and work well to scale down the transition between the taller buildings off the site.

parc de la villette vs. parc andre'-citroen

Parc Andre'-Citroen is included in my study to contrast Parc de la Villette and highlight some features that need to be acknowledged when designing parks. Even though Parc Andre'-Citroen is not revered to be the perfect example of 'a park for the twenty-first century', there are several important features and design considerations that should be recognized.

Firstly, after completely clearing the site in 1989 the developers recognized that they had a blank canvas to work with and an opportunity to remedy the situation that had been created when the factory was built. Once the buildings had been torn down, a hole in the community fabric was created by the vacated space. Unlike the solution at Parc de la

Villette, the designers realized the significance of this gap in the urban fabric and undertook a process of weaving it back together. The piece that became Parc Andre'-Citroen was able to connect the community back together and completed the urban planning process that the automobile plant had blocked³⁴. At la Villette, Tschumi disregarded the disconnectedness between the industrial site he was working on and the community that surrounded it. In fact he amplified it in his solution. At la Villette this was a point of major contention for landscape architects, urban planners and residents, a mistake that developers of Parc Andre'-Citroen were not going to make again. By acknowledging the fact that the gap existed, at that the solution must bridge this gap, they ensured a certain level of success on the urban planning/living level.

Second, the competition and rivalry between President Mitterand and Mayor Chirac pointed out some significant issues regarding design and planning intentions. President Mitterand was the driving force behind Parc de la Villette, and the main proponent of the *Grand Projets* initiative. His aspirations were lofty and his ambition grand, however his goals were self-centered and intentions mis-directed. The projects he sponsored were all conceived to represent national pride, and they were intended to do this through their grandeur and scale, a look at us we have arrived attitude towards urban planning. However bigger is not always better, and several of his projects failed because they failed to acknowledge living conditions and context (physical and cultural). Jacques Chirac countered with a smaller scale community oriented program that focused on the construction and restoration of streets, squares, parks and gardens. Parc de la Villette was designed to be a single entity like a computer chip with links only into itself³⁵. Parc Andre'-Citroen called for a park that would become part of a series of connected green spaces along the Seine River. Thus, Parc Andre'-Citroen was to become a park that would reflect the true nature of life in Paris, and echo the ideals of the great planners and designers from France's history.

Third, Parc Andre'-Citroen was not revolutionary in its design theory or content, but it did represent a new direction for urban planning and landscape design in Paris. It's ideological and material content was as contemporary as Parc de la Villette, but it weaved traditional ideals of

³⁴ Nesbitt, 'Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture', p.47

romanticism and culture into the mix. It suggested a new way of thinking about community life and planning in Paris by reversing the trends of historical preservation that have anchored and guided the design and planning profession in Europe since ancient Rome. It allows the planners, designers and citizens to explore different ideas about the living conditions. Redefining the problem makes it possible for the site to obtain a new feel, and a new life, one that can confront the problems and issues facing politicians and citizens today.

carlo scarpa

Carlo Scarpa was born in 1906³⁶. At the beginning of his career the architects of the world were in pursuit of a new form of architecture, one that was to become known worldwide as the International Style. This new architectural expression found its roots in technology and architectural expression. As successful as this movement turned out to be, it was void of emotion and continually plagued by a common thread of sterility.

Carlo Scarpa was different, in his projects he did not attempt to establish or promote the identity of modern architecture, Scarpa was more interested in developing his own language of design, one that dealt with poetics through the creation of a distinct architectural vocabulary and an unwavering adherence to context. His architecture, in contrast to modern architecture, included the ideas of culture and tradition, and promoted the juxtaposition of our place in time and the materiality of place³⁷.

Scarpa was able to develop an architectural vocabulary of his own, one which had the mysterious ability to redefine itself with the passing of time. Thus, in many ways his projects seemed timeless. He worked in the moment, but his designs were capable of catapulting themselves into the future and past simultaneously. Scarpa made this possible because he held no nostalgia for history. This is not to say he disregarded the past, rather he placed history into his architectural vocabulary and summoned it at will as a design tool.

Scarpa's projects continually address the relationship of the user and the involuntary memory. His explorations are capable of making use of memory as an essential part of the design process³⁸. Scarpa's work also addresses this role of visual memory, 'For the author who remembers, the main part is not played by what he has seen, but by the work of remembering'³⁹. These ideas provide the framework of Scarpa's works, which even before being formal events are acts of momentary fixations of experience. Thus, for Scarpa, it is impossible to know how someone

³⁶ Murphy, 'Carlo Scarpa and Castelvecchio', p.4

³⁷ Trancik, 'Carlo Scarpa: The Secrets of Poetic Imagination', p.112

³⁸ Trancik, 'Carlo Scarpa: The Secrets of Poetic Imagination', p.120

³⁹ Noonan, 'Carlo Scarpa and Castelvecchio', p.8

learns, yet however he/she learns, he/she will always do so through the experience of events.

In his day, Scarpa's ideas were not always met with the same excitement as my own. Scarpa was on the outside when it came to architectural design in Italy. He struggled to find people to support and listen to his ideas, however his work was powerful enough to challenge the Italian architectural culture to take notice of new ideas. Scarpa led the fight toward change, challenging the imbedded ideals of Italian design and culture. He lived in a country and a time where ideas involving architecture were commonplace in political circles. By asserting himself and his ideas, Scarpa risked his career and reputation in his attempt to breathe new life and change into Italy. Scarpa's position and 'theoretical direction'⁴⁰ put him at risk of being lumped together with 'right-winged dissidence'⁴¹.

In today's architectural community Carlo Scarpa is revered as a pioneer of great design. In his desire to ignore the modernist movement, he ended up creating his own international style. Through this tortured process he has found validation and acceptance. His work today even in Italy is understood as being very influential and culturally significant⁴². I include Scarpa, and his work, as an important precedent not only because of its high quality and unmatched creativity, but because it points at the problems that face architects working in historically significant countries having to deal with politically charged environments when dealing with situations and problems that face them. It is never easy suggesting something new, into something very old. Scarpa has proven that it may take time to be noticed and accepted but it can be done, and done very well.

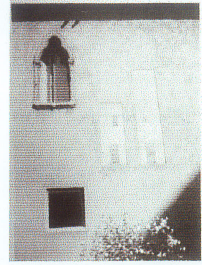
⁴⁰ Trancik, 'Carlo Scarpa: The Secrets of Poetic Imagination', p.126

⁴¹ Trancik, 'Carlo Scarpa: The Secrets of Poetic Imagination', p.127

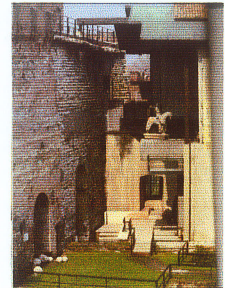
⁴² Vanderburgh, 'Time Is On His Side', p.175

scarpa and castelvecchio

I have had the pleasure of being able to visit Castelvecchio on two separate occasions. On my first visit I was ignorant of the castle's history and unsure of Carlo Scarpa's intentions for 1958-64 rehabilitation of the art museum within it. I have had the opportunity to visit many of Scarpa's works in Northern Italy, they are all unique because of their context, but a common thread in his works is always present. At Castelvecchio I was once again taken on a sensual and cognitive experience that he had created, this time created by the juxtaposition of new against old.



Scarpa has not only rehabilitated the castle, he has developed his interpretation of its complicated history through the addition of the new architectural forms. Scarpa's Castelvecchio has caused me to question the assumption (common in historic conservation) that the architectural preservation should take precedence over consideration of the social or political history of a place.



Scarpa viewed the past without nostalgia and was able to leave an impression on Castelvecchio that is more than a functional rehabilitation. Scarpa's commentary through design is a provocative and welcome alternative to the usual practice of preserving the architectural form and fabric of a historic place without considering that place's social and political history. His rehabilitation of Castelvecchio shows the force of preservation work that incorporates a critique of the past. And it suggests that projects that do not consider this broader historical and cultural context are conveying a message of their own. It seems important that sometimes clues to that memory are visible in the stone and concrete, awaiting the curious visitor willing to exchange myth for reality and to cast a critical eye on the visual history.

design development – the making of the cala del sasso

There have been earlier proposals for this site, parts of which have been constructed but to no form of completion. I have found that all of the proposals so far have been pretentious and overwrought with historical suggestions, somehow trying to show the wealth of the region rather than deriving sources of inspiration from the site itself. I have taken a much different approach. I want to interact with the imagination, more than the memory. I am not suggesting that the history of the Cala del Sasso and the surrounding area are not worthy of being reconstructed or rehabilitated in a traditional Italian manner. In contrast, I feel that the history and importance of the Cala Del Sasso can be brought out of the landscape in a much more subtle and interactive manner. I recognized early on that I could not carry out the practice of recovering history through the Italian way of reconstruction, this place requires a totally different attitude.

It is important for me to explain what I mean when I say the 'Italian Way of reconstruction'. Historically, Italian architects and designers have been taught to recover history by preserving it and reconstructing it to its original form. There is nothing wrong with this attitude, but I do believe that everything in our world has its life span. Landscapes are never finished or completed, they are an accumulation of events and stories, a continuously unfolding experience. I want to amplify this aspect of landscape, to highlight something that was already there. At the same time, I want to allow users to interpret their experiences however they see fit.

This site and path have been around for centuries, thousands of people have taken the journey to the top of the mountain. The path and history is already there, I want to explore the senses and emotions of the users who are going to walk it. I feel it is important to bring attention to the qualities of the everyday. I want the users to be attracted by the things themselves and not by any instructions. I have tried to highlight the existing landscape by pulling out its character through the juxtaposition of composition and materiality in subtle design interventions.

I am reminded of Scarpa here, who knew how to give landscapes and buildings a deep sense of place by adding imagination as an alternative to reconstructing. Scarpa gives to a site the opportunity to refer to the past and project your mind into the future almost at the same time, to find a renewed place and value in your imagination⁴³. To design for sites with this principle in mind is to perform an action that allows for the reflection on totally ordinary matters – a shift in sensibility. Perhaps the matters that are not noticed are those that are essential.

⁴³ Trancik, 'Carlo Scarpa: The Secrets of Poetic Imagination', p.116

project components

There are two main parts to this project; (1) a national park, developed around the historic *Cala del Sasso*, an ancient Roman road consisting of symbolic number of 4444 steps, (2) a pedestrian path, one that re-establishes the link between the valley town of Valstagna to its alpine partner, the town of Sasso.

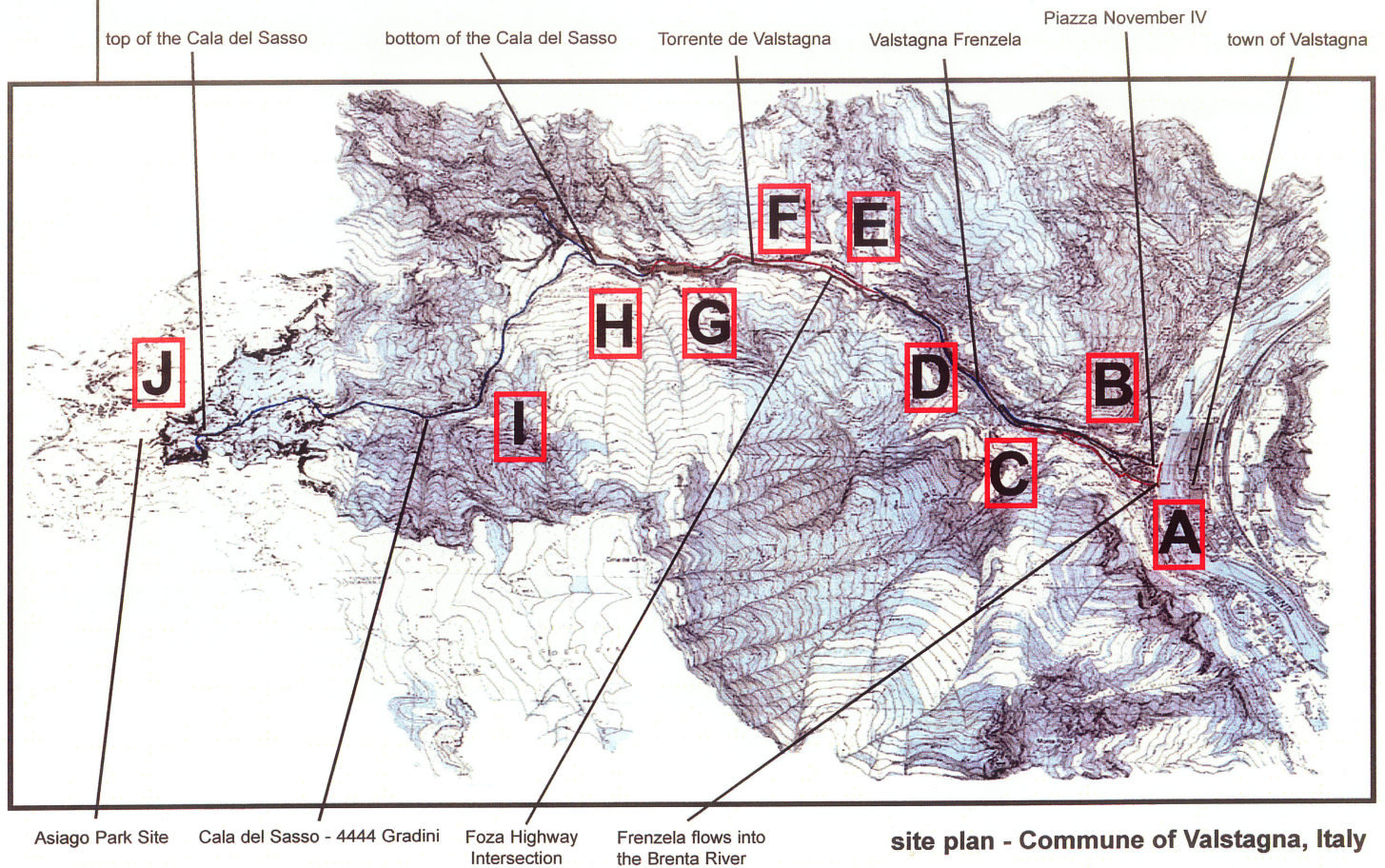
The development of this historic path/road, the *Cala del Sasso*, into a national park site has been the dream of the local communities (*Sette Comuni*) for many years. The *Sette Comuni* (seven communities) has been seeking historical designation for the *Cala del Sasso* from the provincial authority, hoping to make it the 5th park site in the province of Vicenza. This would bring an unprecedented level of attention to this area as it would put them into the same category as many of their more well known sister communities in the south and on the Mediterranean coast. A park-site in this area of the Italian Alps would acknowledge the historical importance the communities and settlers of the Brenta Valley played in the past millenia. More so, it would expose the role the *Cala del Sasso* has played in the settlement and political control of the valley.

The site has been broken down into a series of 10 components. Each are individual interventions or follies, and are unique to there location along the path (see page 50 for a map and page 51 for a model showing the project component locations). The actual park area will be confined to the middle portion of the path, the segment that includes the bulk of the *Cala del Sasso*.

The re-connecting of the two towns with a pedestrian path has historic and cultural significance. As mentioned earlier in the project, the *Cala del Sasso* has a very complex and complicated history, at times it has been used primarily for military and economic purposes (trade route), more importantly it has served as the physical and cultural bridge between the alpine and valley communities. At present the pathway exists, but is fragmented and does not completely link the two towns, physically or culturally. A complete pedestrian pathway system needs to be developed from top to bottom, 'bridging the gap'.

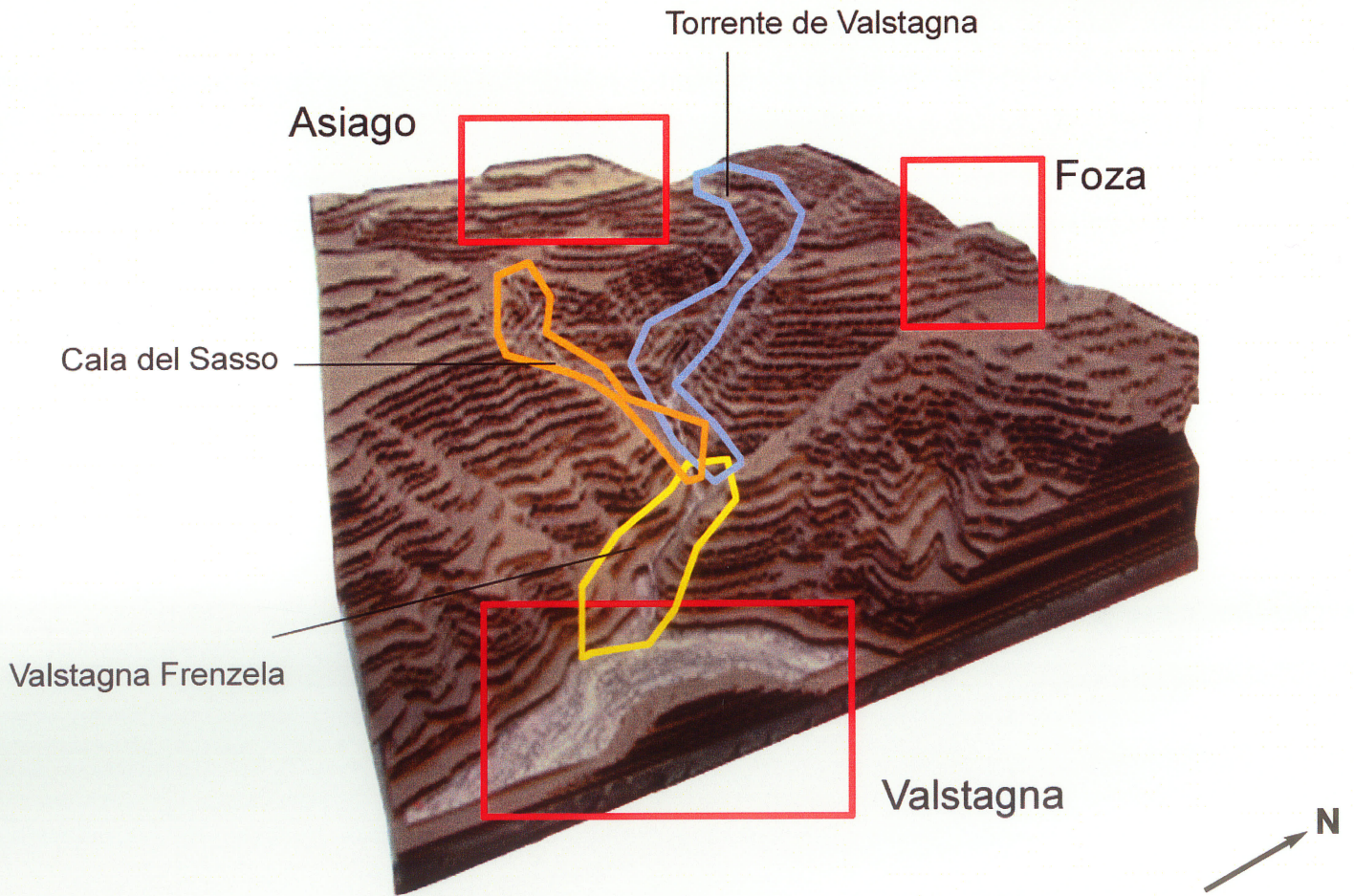
c a l a d e l s a s s o
4 4 4 4 g r a d i n i

project components location map



c a l a d e l s a s s o
4 4 4 4 g r a d i n i

commune de Valstagna site model



The longest and most meaningful piece, the *Cala del Sasso*, is completely intact, and has recently been retrofitted to accommodate heavy pedestrian traffic. There is an important piece missing at the bottom of the steps, as there is no path that connects the steps to the town of Valstagna. Currently users must share a highly traveled vehicular highway to get from the town to the bottom of the steps. The lack of a safe pedestrian path is significant as it has a two-fold effect. Firstly, potential users are not willing to share the highway in order to get to the steps, it is not a safe option and this limits the number of people who actually use the site. In fact, many people (residents included) are not even aware that the steps are there because no link exists. Secondly, the isolation of the *Cala del Sasso* reflects the present nature of cultural life in the valley and that of its residents. People are detached from their surroundings and the history of its development, as well as from themselves. If the park site is to be realized a designated pedestrian infrastructure on the valley floor must be developed, this segment of the path will comprise a major part of the overall project. It will re-establish the physical link between communities, and hopefully the cultural link as well. This bottom piece will be straightforward and practical as it is primarily intended to be a link, however it is part of the overall system and will thus be comprised of the same elements and character as the entire path. It is hoped that the community will engage and interact with the path and add their own history to it, at the same time exposing themselves to everything around them, free to make their own interpretations, uncovering something, somewhere about sometime, whatever that may be.

The top segment of the path is also missing, in fact the *Cala del Sasso* is virtually invisible to anyone trying to find its mountain top entrance. The top of the path is hidden, tucked away and void of any acknowledgement of its existence or significance. The top segment of the path will become a celebrated entry/exit into the park/path. It is also intended to be a departure point for the path and park. A path will link the top of the steps to the nearby town of Sasso. A monument, in the form of a viewing platform, will be designed and placed at the point where the steps currently begin. This piece will be the most detailed and tectonic piece of the entire path, its form and character is meant to embody life in the valley, its complicated cohesiveness, and the proud nature of its occupants and their love of life. It is intended to acknowledge the

significant role this path/road has played in the military, economic and settlement history of the valley, and that of the people who have used it for these reasons.

the follies

There are a series of events or interventions that line the path from the valley floor (Valstagna) to the alpine peak (Commune de Asiago). These interventions are inherently individual, but they are linked together physically by a path and perceptually by their content. In total they create a common/coherent link and thus work to bridge the two communities. I call these events follies because in many cases they exist in areas that you would not expect someone to highlight, and they are composed of elements that may or may not be contextual. These follies are then laid out in a linear fashion along the 5 kilometer long path, however they are not staged at equal intervals and they are not meant to be experienced in any particular order. Each folly or designed intervention is site specific and relates directly to the immediate context. They are located and designed for these places and are meant to acknowledge and highlight the significance and unique characteristics of the environment in which they sit. Individual follies are intended to invoke a reaction from the user, whatever that may be, with the hope that the user will interact with the place that they are in, and hopefully question the surroundings and the elements within it. The follies tell a story of the place; they are the place. The story may be experienced in any manner, as there is no prescribed order of the experience, but rather a collective of experience that may be appreciated on many levels. Each folly has its own distinct character, however together they form a series of events that each reveals site specific moments of the Brenta Valley.

a. town of valstagna – pedestrian path through the town of valstagna

The bottom of the path begins on the valley floor, in riverside town of Valstagna (see page 56 for design illustration). At present there is only one small sign within the town center of Valstagna that indicates the *Cala del Sasso* exists, there is no visible pedestrian infrastructure that shows potential users how to get from the town to the bottom of the steps (see site photos 9-16 on page 17). If one intends to visit the *Cala del Sasso* they are required to share a highway that leads up to the steps from the center of Valstagna, a distance of 2.5 kilometers. It is a very narrow and highly traveled road that requires a high level of awareness if you intend to use it as a pedestrian link to the bottom of the steps. Another option would be to drive halfway up the valley, drop off your car in a small parking lot, and then walk the remaining distance (approx. 1 kilometer) to

the steps. Neither option is sufficient in my mind, especially if you predict that the number of users will increase dramatically if the park gains its National Park designation.

I am suggesting that a designated pedestrian pathway be created to accommodate the pedestrian traffic flow for this segment of the path. The new path will utilize existing roads and paths within the town, they will be developed to allow for a safer and more pedestrian friendly environment. The new plan will incorporate two separate paths leading out of town, one running up the side of the *Frenzala del Valstagna* (a runoff corridor), the other will originate in the towns Piazza IV November). Each path is intended to be imbedded in the existing town fabric, and as such will not be constructed of elements or materials that will overpower or interfere with the existing town layout. However they will be constructed out of materials that contrast the existing context and will be easily recognizable because of their unique character within the town. Very simply, the new path will be imbedded into the existing ground planes, consisting of roughly cut Asiago limestone, slightly raised above the present road and walkway levels (see images 2 and 3 on page 56).

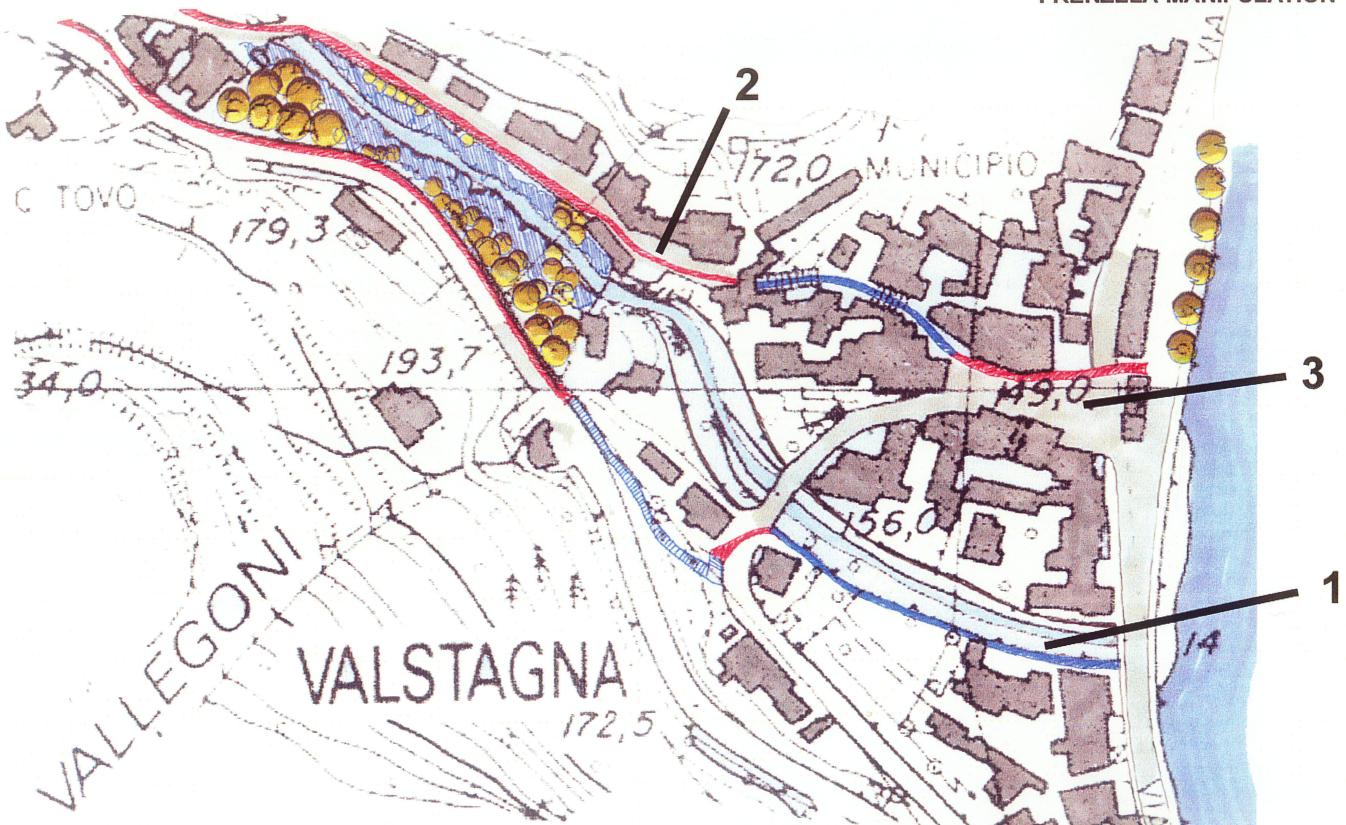
Another event planned for the town of Valstagna is an environmental art piece that will be constructed in the basin of the *Frenzela* (see image 1 on page 56). The *Frenzela* is an engineered runoff corridor that serves a very important function of containing floodwaters during heavy rainstorms and flooding periods throughout the year (see site photos 17-20 on page 18). Unfortunately, it is not very attractive in its present condition. It is rarely maintained and is usually littered with garbage. I propose that the *Frenzela* should be lined with small pieces of Asiago stone, arranged in a mosaic of different colored rock. The rock will be assembled into place, and then nature will be allowed to take over. The natural processes of erosion and disposition from the subsequent floodwaters will rearrange the rock into different patterns. It will become an ephemeral art piece, constantly changing throughout the year as the weather and climate dictate.

A

cala del sasso
4444 gradini



FRENZELA MANIPULATION



PEDESTRIAN PATH THROUGH THE TOWN OF VALSTAGNA



3

b. water terraces and rock path – torrente reclamation plan

The path will head west from Valstagna up into the Foza Valley, continuing to follow the edge of the *Frenzela* (see the Torrente Reclamation Plan on page 59). The next event occurs on the western fringe of the town. As you head up into the Foza Valley the rock walls become very narrow, and the *Frenzela* is tightly contained along the edge of the Foza highway (see site photos 25-36 on pages 19 and 20). At this point there are a series of small pools that have been eroded into the basin of the runoff corridor. They are very beautiful and almost always full of water, as they exist in an area that has many small freshwater springs and waterfalls that run down from the mountaintops. In this area I am proposing a set of rock pathways that lead you off of the main path down into the *Frenzela*. This is an area that you would currently walk past if you were not informed about its existence. I feel that it is important to get the user into an environment that they are not currently allowed to experience (see page 59 for design illustrations). I want the users to interact with the site and engage the materials and plants along the *Frenzela*. The first section of this tertiary path consists of a series of rocks that have been re-arranged to allow the user to walk across them (see image 4 on page 59). It is hoped that anyone choosing to walk along this path will be confronted with experiences they may normally pass-by without knowing they were there. The second piece of this rock path is a water channel that has been constructed out of finely cut and detailed Asiago limestone (see image 5 on page 59). This channel is intended to directly contrast the first part of this path in both form and intended experience. This piece has also been designed to highlight the engineered character of the entire *Frenzela*. People who visit the area may not understand the enormous amount of engineering and planning that went into the construction of this runoff corridor. The *Frenzela* is rarely maintained and is allowed to be overgrown with vegetation, and to the everyday user the *Frenzela* does not appear to be anything of significance. The water channel is intended to highlight the engineered quality of the environment that these people are in. It is hoped that the user will question why this water channel has been designed and placed in this spot, and thus question the place that they are walking through. The user might leave with a better understanding of what it is that they are experiencing and the effort it took to create it. By interacting with these elements, or events, hopefully the users will

question why they exist, and thus hopefully question the environment that they are in. There is then a chance that the users will take away a new understanding of the valley, including its natural and cultural history.

B

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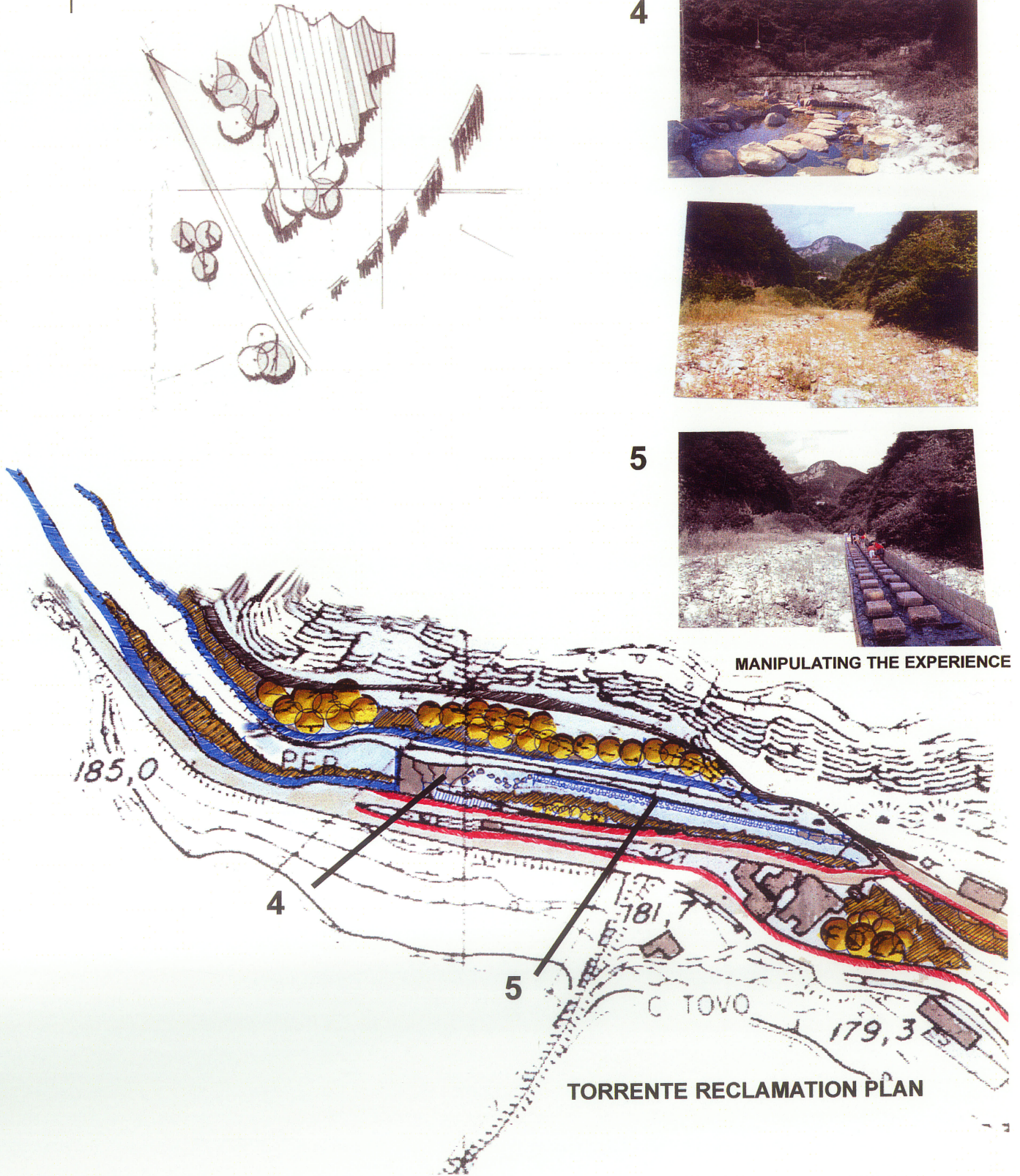
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5



MANIPULATING THE EXPERIENCE

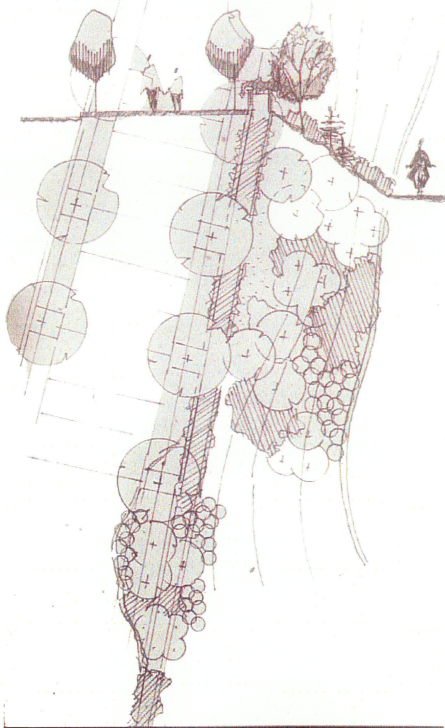


c. rest area – rock pathways through the frenzela

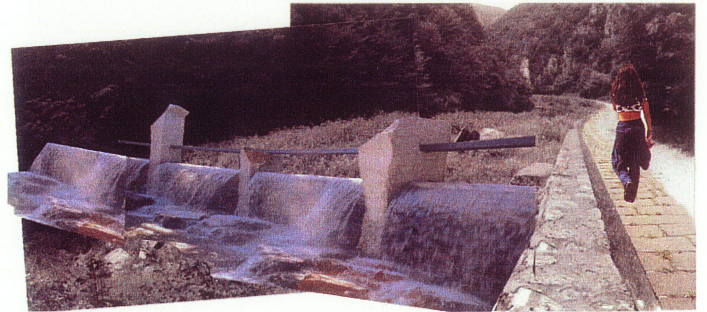
Several areas or points along the path have been designated as rest areas. At this point, approximately .5 kilometers from Valstagna, a small rest area has been created (see page 61 for design illustrations). Adjacent to this rest stop, a small section of the valley wall has been eroded away, this has allowed for a small parking lot to be carved into the rock. There are very few places along the path that allow for cars to be parked, that is why I am taking advantage of this natural feature to accommodate users who want, or need, to drive up into the valley. Anyone wishing to park here must also choose to cross the highway in order to get to the path. A crosswalk has been imbedded into the highway to allow for people to pass. Once again, Asiago stone will be placed into the highway. The contrasting surface and material are all that will be used to construct the crosswalk. A small patch of Asiago stone will also be imbedded into the highway 150 feet in each direction to inform vehicular traffic that the crosswalk is coming up.

C

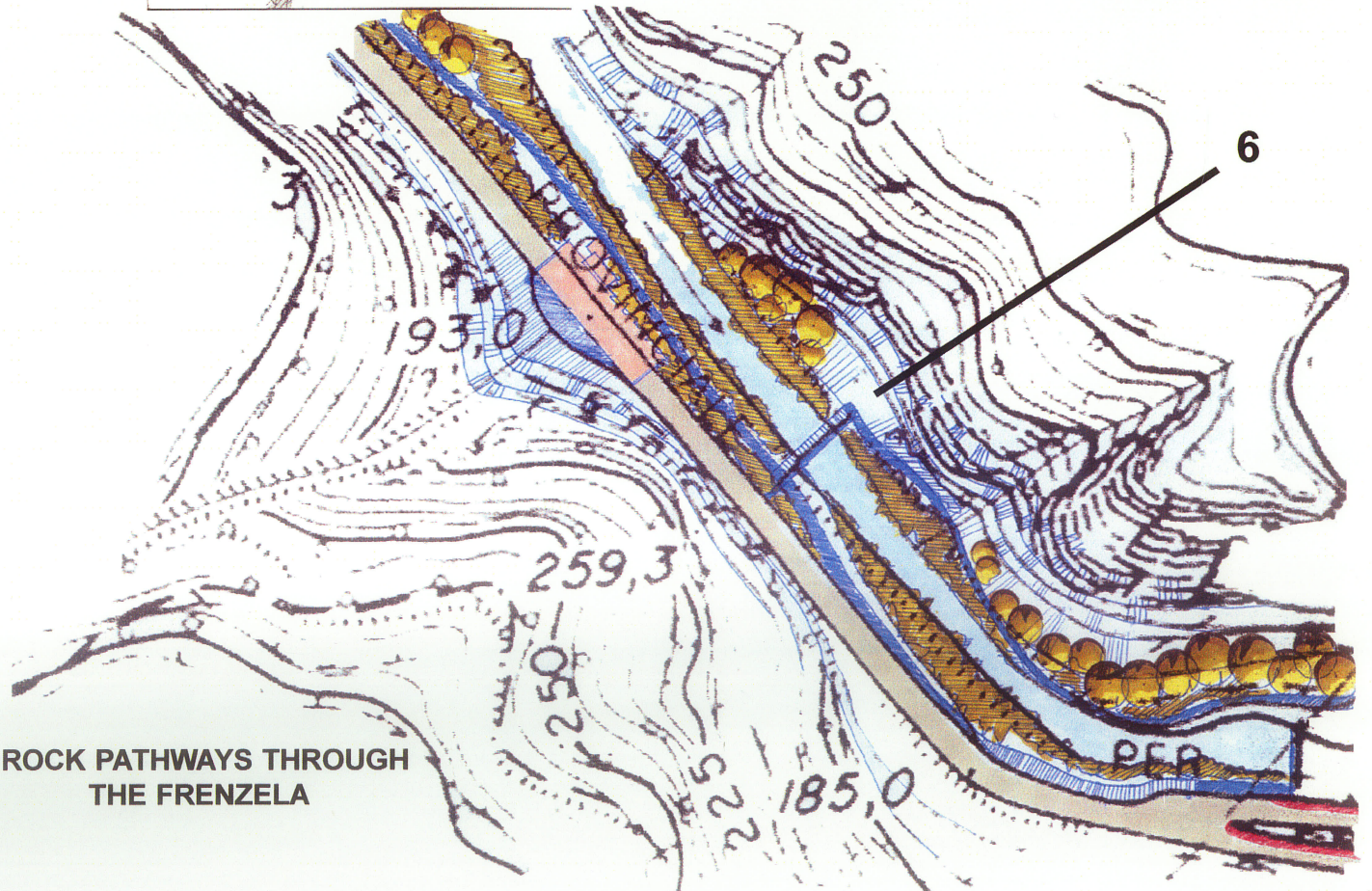
cala del sasso
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6



WATER TERRACES



ROCK PATHWAYS THROUGH THE FRENZELA

d. parking area – foza highway intersection

There is one existing parking area along the valley portion of the highway and path, it is located at a point where the Foza highway leaves the valley floor and begins to cut back up the side of the valley wall (see site photos 37-39 on page 20). It is capable of holding approximately 6 small vehicles. At this point I am proposing to maintain the parking area as is, while adding a small rest area and another crosswalk (see page 64 for design illustrations and page 65 for site model). Once again, Asiago stone will be imbedded into the highway to allow for people to pass, and to identify it as a pedestrian crossing. In addition, a small pedestrian bridge will be added to the north side of the adjacent bridge to allow pedestrian traffic to safely cross the *Frenzela*, which crosses under the highway at this point. The pedestrian bridge will be a suspension bridge and is designed similar to the numerous bridges that historically crossed the valley. The *Frenzela* was originally designed to contain runoff, however it was also engineered to accommodate the movement of logs from the mountaintops to Valstagna. Suspension bridges were used because they eliminated the need for columns and thus removed the possibility of the logs colliding into the supporting members. The use of cut stone embedded into the asphalt highway will create a contrast in materiality that will work to highlight that surface as a pedestrian path. There are very few design interventions at this point, but their juxtaposition of materials and contemporary nature of the composition will help to highlight them, and make them into features and destination points.

This is also an important point because it will become the entrance to the Cala del Sasso Park from the valley floor. The path below this point, that I have already discussed, will become the pedestrian link to this staging area. At this point, people will be forced out of their cars if they choose to drive to this area. Once they cross the road and the bridge they will be into the first stage of the Park. I do not plan on doing anything special or celebratory at this point because I want the trail to retain its subtleness and relative seclusion. As it is today, the Cala del Sasso is a fairly well known trail, but it also has an air of excitement to it because it is still somewhat hidden in the side of the mountain, difficult to get to, but worth the trip if you choose to make the effort. I feel it is important to give the Park a beginning point on the Valley floor, but one that is respectful of

the history of the site and the people that have used it and guarded it throughout its lifetime.

D

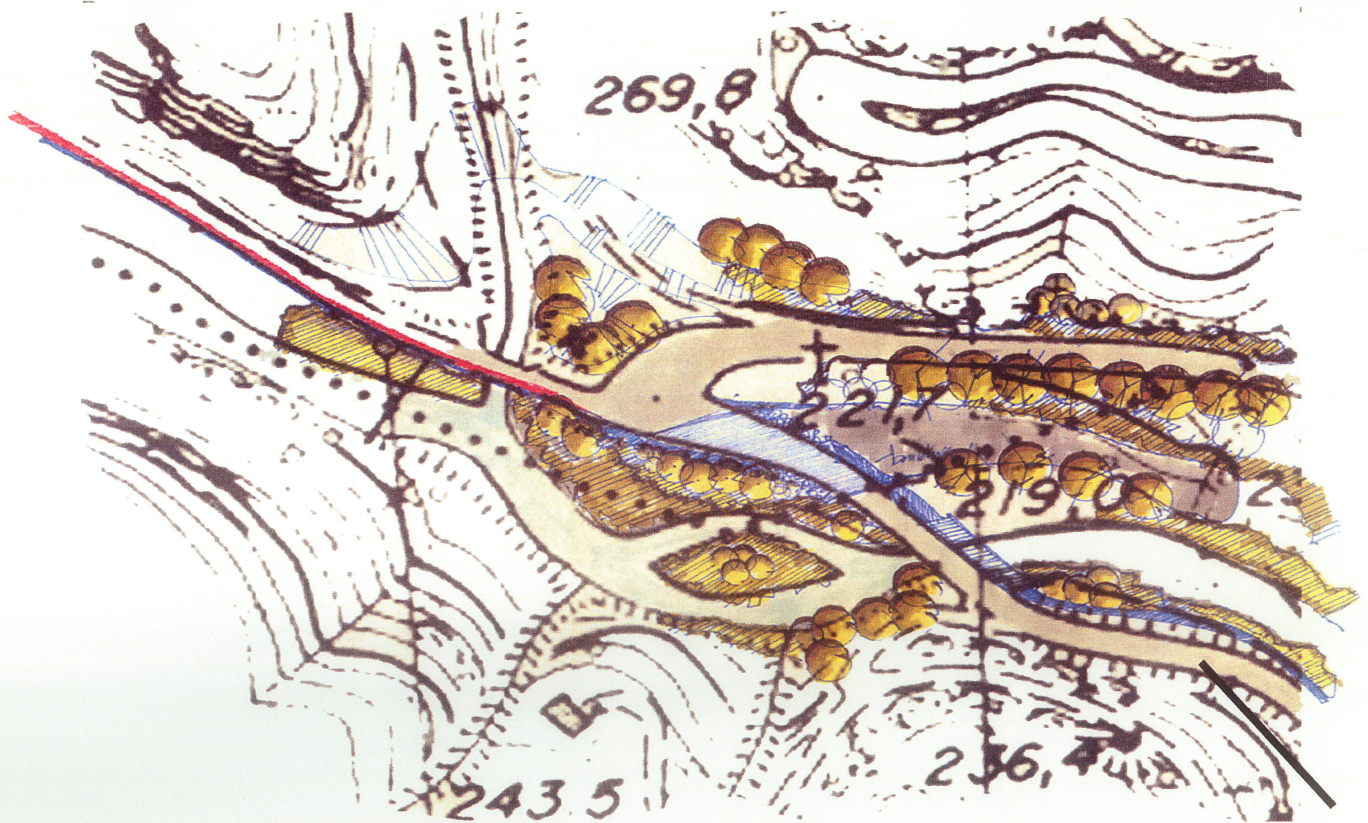
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7



ROADSIDE PEDESTRIAN WALKWAY

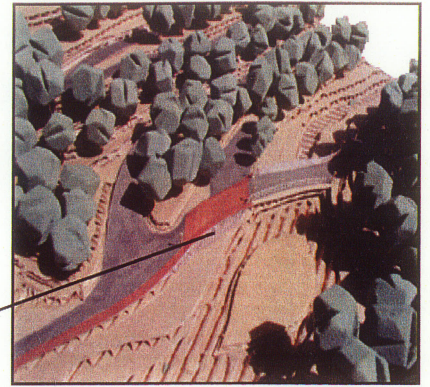


FOZA HIGHWAY INTERSECTION

7

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foza highway intersection



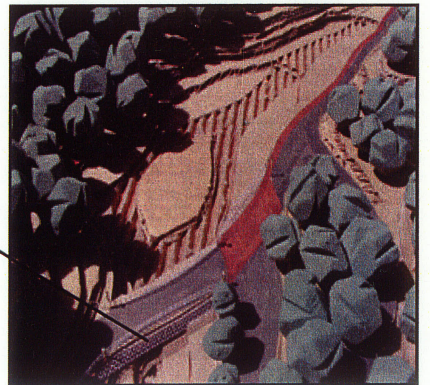
extension of walkway system
off the edge of the road

foza intersection



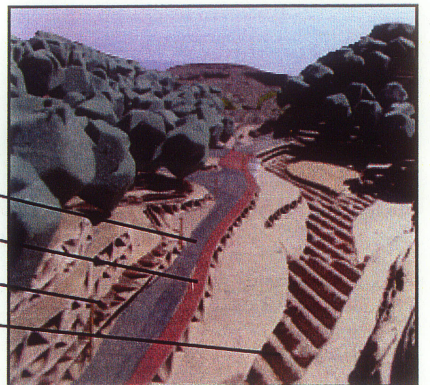
elements of path imbedded
into valley walls

steep valley walls



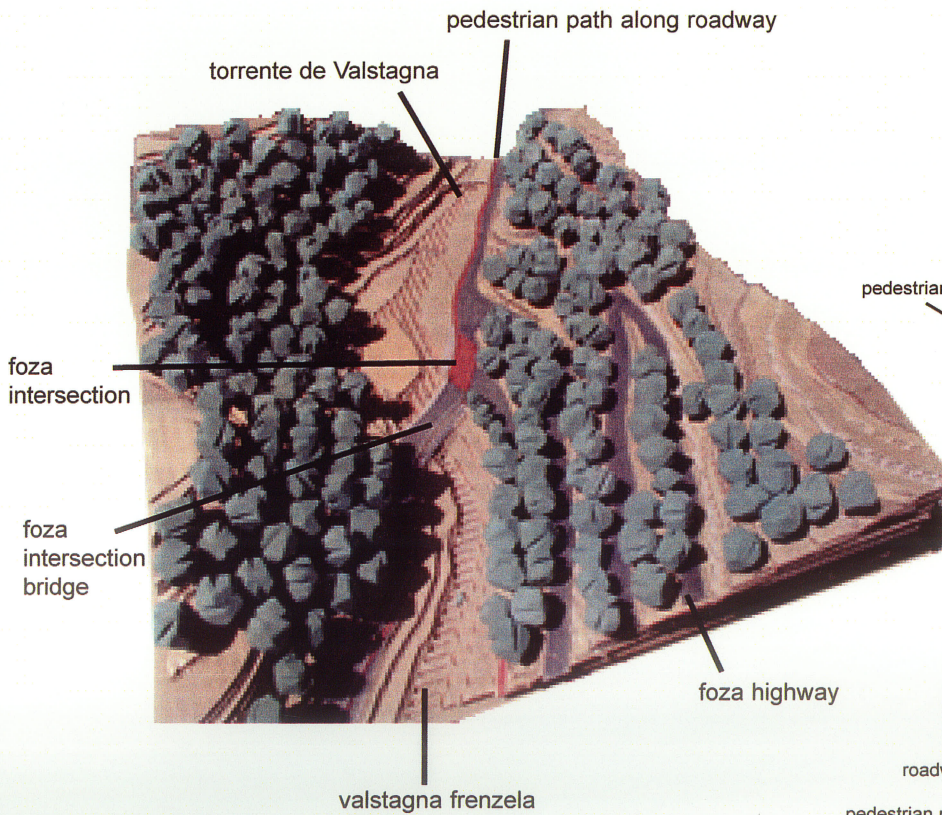
pedestrian bridge

pedestrian walkway system



roadway
pedestrian path
lighting
torrente de Valstagna

pedestrian path imbedded into road system



pedestrian path along roadway

torrente de Valstagna

foza
intersection

foza
intersection
bridge

foza highway

valstagna frenzela

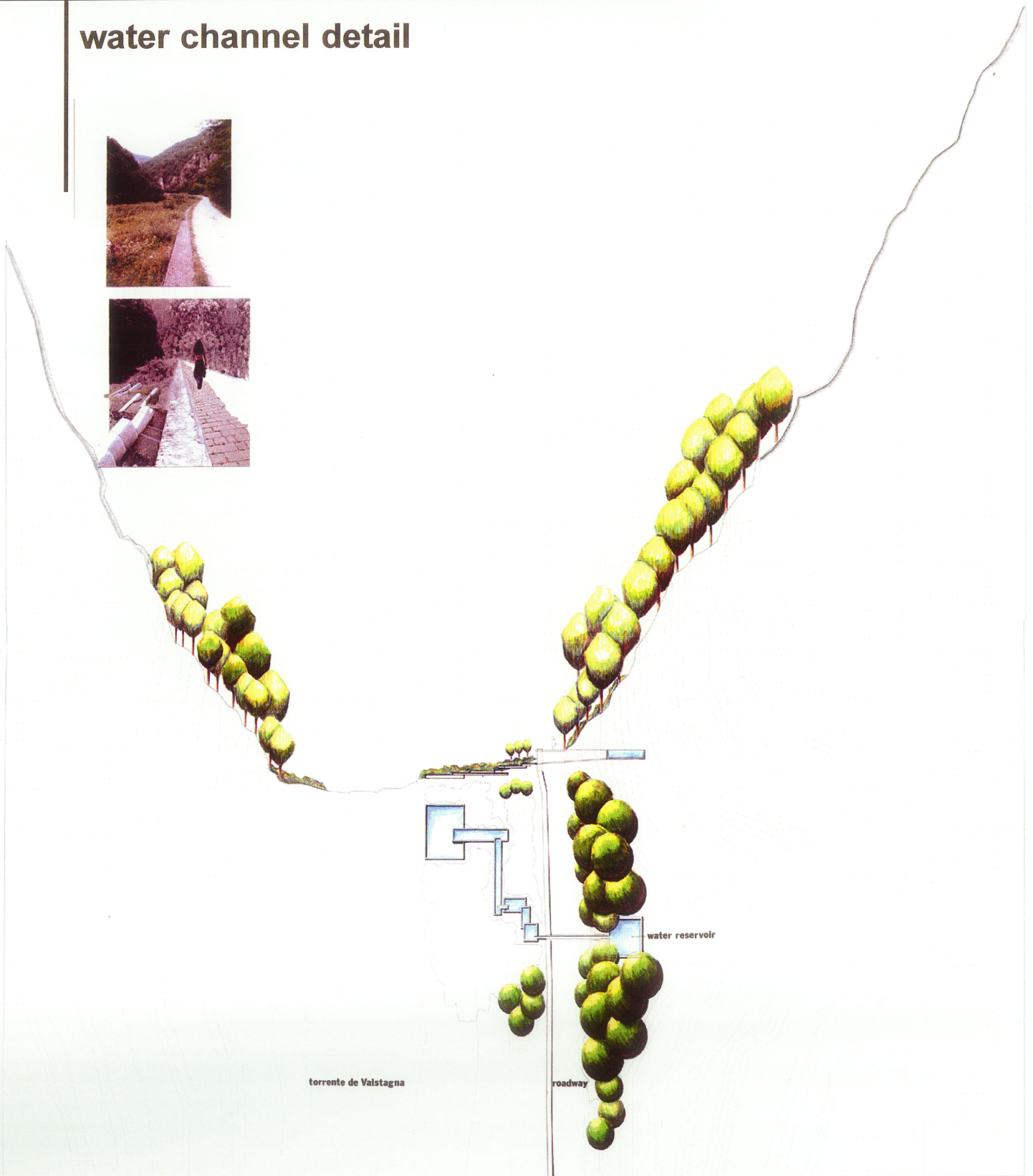
e. water channel

The water-channel is an in-direct reference to Scarpa and his work. This element is intended to be highly detailed and hydraulically engineered in a much more sophisticated manner than any other element that I have located along the path, aside from the viewing platform at the top of the Cala Del Sasso. Conceptually, this feature is intended to mimic the hundreds of water falls that currently occur naturally along the steep rock walls that frame the valley and path (see site photos 44-49 on page 21). These waterfalls come in many shapes and sizes, and in many cases you don't even know they exist when you walk past them, aside from hearing the water trickling down the faces of the rock. They are however, integral elements to the make-up of the area and the existing path, they add another layer of information about the natural process that worked to create this valley system. More importantly, they are important sensory elements that add a level of complexity to the site, and tune the user into the natural features of the site through touch, sound and site.

The existing waterfalls are hard to understand because their scale is so much larger than we are used to in our normal everyday lives. I have tried to mimic the natural process of these waterfalls by attempting to contain the natural systems in a tightly defined and detailed water channel (see page 67 for design illustration). My intervention here is also intended to scale down the space, the vastness of the valley, and allows the user to measure him/her against the site in a more meaningful manner. As well, in a continuation of the overall design concept, this intervention is meant to make the user question why it is there, why it is so detailed and different from everything else around it, with the hope that this self-questioning will lead to a new understanding and experience of the site they are in. I have purposely chosen polished marble as the material for channel and water basins because it is so much different than anything else on the path, thus creating a juxtaposition of materials which I hope will question the users mind as to why this intervention is there. If a user engages this intervention by questioning its existence, its purpose and its composition, then hopefully they are making a comparison to the existing context and its content and thus learning more about the everyday experiences.

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water channel detail



WATERCHANNEL PLAN AND SECTION

scale 1:200

f. boardwalk and bridge

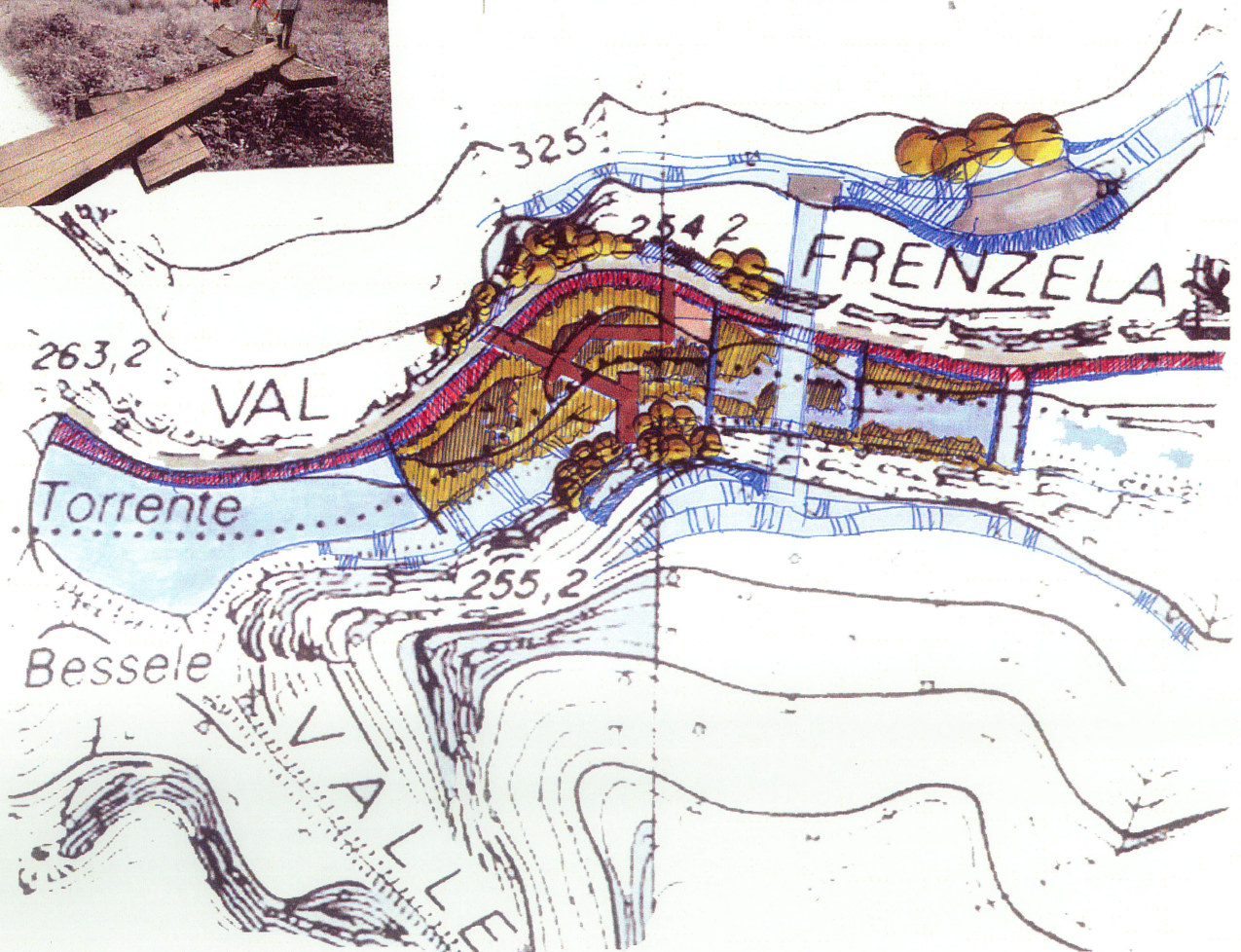
At this point in the bottom portion of the Park, the rock walls start to close in on the user as the path makes its way through a narrow part of the valley floor (see site photos 42-50 on pages 20 and 21). There is a different feel to this spot than any other on the valley floor. In this area I have proposed the construction of a short boardwalk that will take the user off the rock path and into the *Frenzala* basin (see page 69 for design illustration). They will be elevated above the floor of the stream and allowed to walk through areas of the *Frenzala* that they would not normally see. The design will allow the user to experience the site in a new way. It will set and frame views that the user would not normally see along the existing Cala del Sasso. It will allow the user to touch and smell flowers and plants that have previously been out of reach from the edge-side path. The boardwalk will be constructed in timber, as I want to introduce a new material to the path for the user to walk on, to add some contrast to the experience. In addition I have added an elevated bridge that crosses back over the *Frenzala* once you work your way across the boardwalk. The intention here is to give the user a new perspective of the site, to add a new experience. It is also meant to highlight on of the existing conditions of the path, one where you can see elements along the valley path but you don't know how to get to them to how they got here in the first place. I have tried to mimic this by making placing the bridge in a position that will be viewed from a good distance away, but the access points to the bridge will be obscured until you search them out. I want people to do the searching, to make assumptions about where they think they need to go, and to question the need for such a structure to be places in the area. It is my hope that the very nature of the self-questioning of the elements will work to bring out new meaning to the site.

F

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8



TORRENTE BOARDWALK AND BRIDGE PLAN

g. torrente trail manipulation

At this spot the trail crosses the *Torrente* (see site photos 51-55 on page 22). This is not possible in inclement weather, as the *Torrente* will swell up with runoff water within minutes. At this point I am suggesting to guide users up the basin of the *Torrente* into a dead end at the bottom of one the largest engineered terraces (see page 71 for design Illustration). Sharp edged cut limestone wedges will be embedded into the *Frenzela* floor in a linear pattern, the intention is to contrast the smooth faced weathered stone that exists today. I want to guide people up the narrow stream bed because so the user will experience the vastness of the site in this area, they will be surrounded by rock cliffs and mature planting, with no way out but to return the way they came in. I want them to feel a little uncomfortable at this point, my hope is that they will feel the true power and mystery of the natural forces around them. I feel that this experience is an important one for the users because as you walk along the existing path you are disengaged from most of the forces and natural elements going on around you. I want to bring the users out into the open and remove them from the sheltered path so they can experience the *torrente* from another perspective, and to get an understanding of what it must take to fill up that vast space with water within a few minutes, and to gain an understanding of why these terraces had to be built and the amount of hands on labor that must have gone into them in a much earlier time. It is easy for people today to just dismiss feats of engineering as commonplace. I want to change this perspective, if only for a few moments.

G

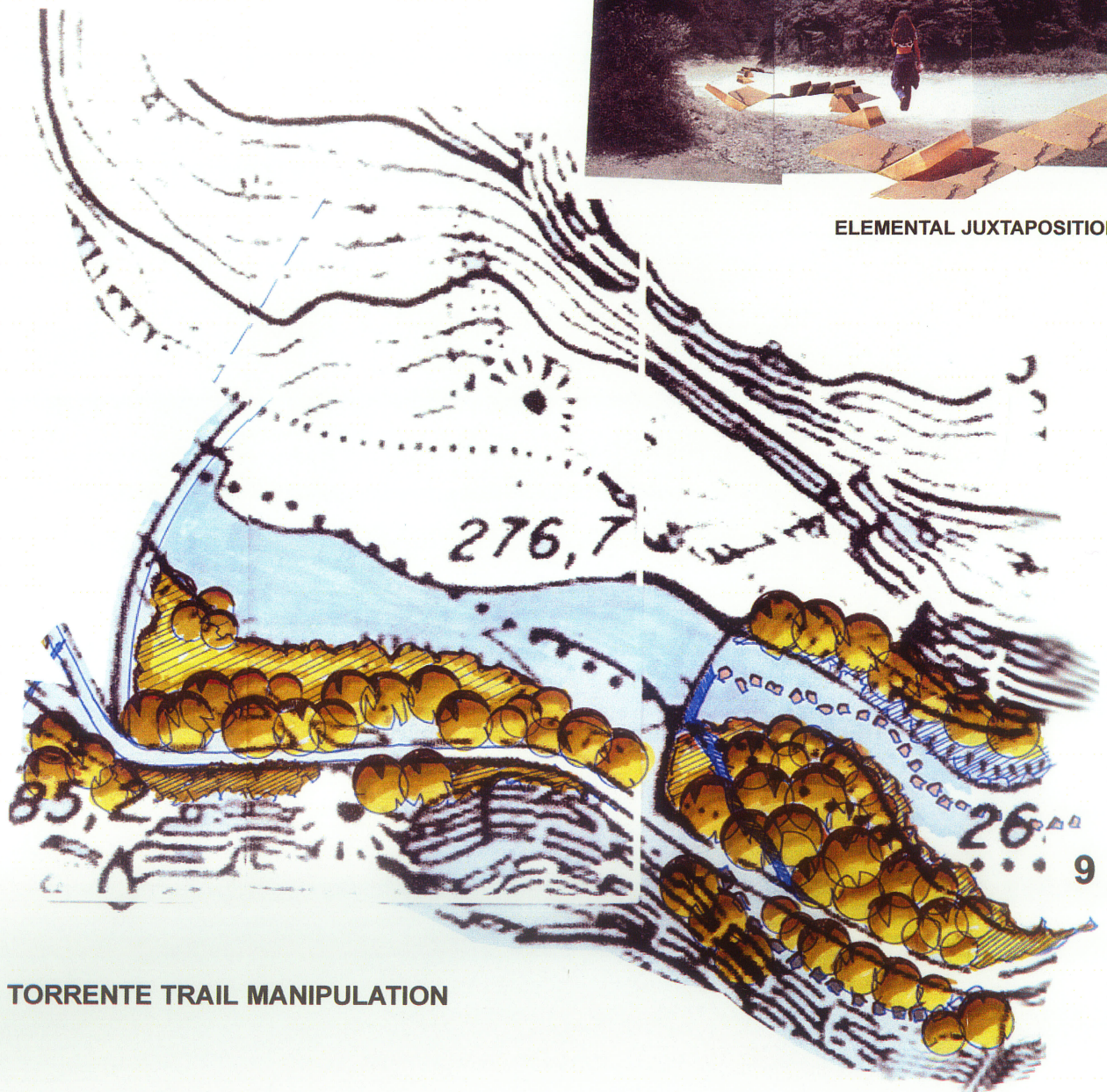
cala del sasso
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9



ELEMENTAL JUXTAPOSITION



TORRENTE TRAIL MANIPULATION

h. the valley floor entrance to the cala del sasso

This is the true beginning to the existing Cala del Sasso stairway, this is the point where the path leaves the valley floor and starts to ascend up the side of the mountain. Presently the bottom the stairs are not well defined and are relatively hard to find if you are not aware they exist (see site photos 59-61 on pages 22 and 23). However, the subtleness in the way the stairs start to rise above the valley floor is something that I do not want to lose. Therefore, at this point I want to leave the existing path as is, but I will install a series of translucent boards above the beginning of the path (see image 10 on page 73). These panels will be inscribed with historical notes and dates to help educate and instruct the user about the history of Cala de Sasso. They will also include an interactive map that will highlight areas of the path on the side of the mountain as the user will be instructed to stand in one place and looks through the translucent panels.

The area where the stairs leave the valley floor sits in a basin and is relatively flat and open in relation to the rest of the path. If you stand in the middle of the basin and look up the sides of the mountain the trees will hide the location of the path as it winds itself up the mountainside. I am suggesting to line the edges of the stairs with native plum trees, which are reddish in color and will help to highlight the path of the stairs (see image 11 on page 73). This is meant to show the user the direction they are about to take as they ascend the mountain, as well as being an environmental art piece.

The Cala del Sasso currently has no defined or designated rest areas. I am suggesting to locate rest areas at approximately every 250 feet of elevation change. These rest/sitting areas will be composed of existing natural materials only. The existing materials will simply be re-organized into compositions that will allow for user to sit and rest (see image 12 on page 73). I am trying to limit the use of new materials, re-arranging existing materials into new forms will hopefully compel users to engage the sites more intuitively.

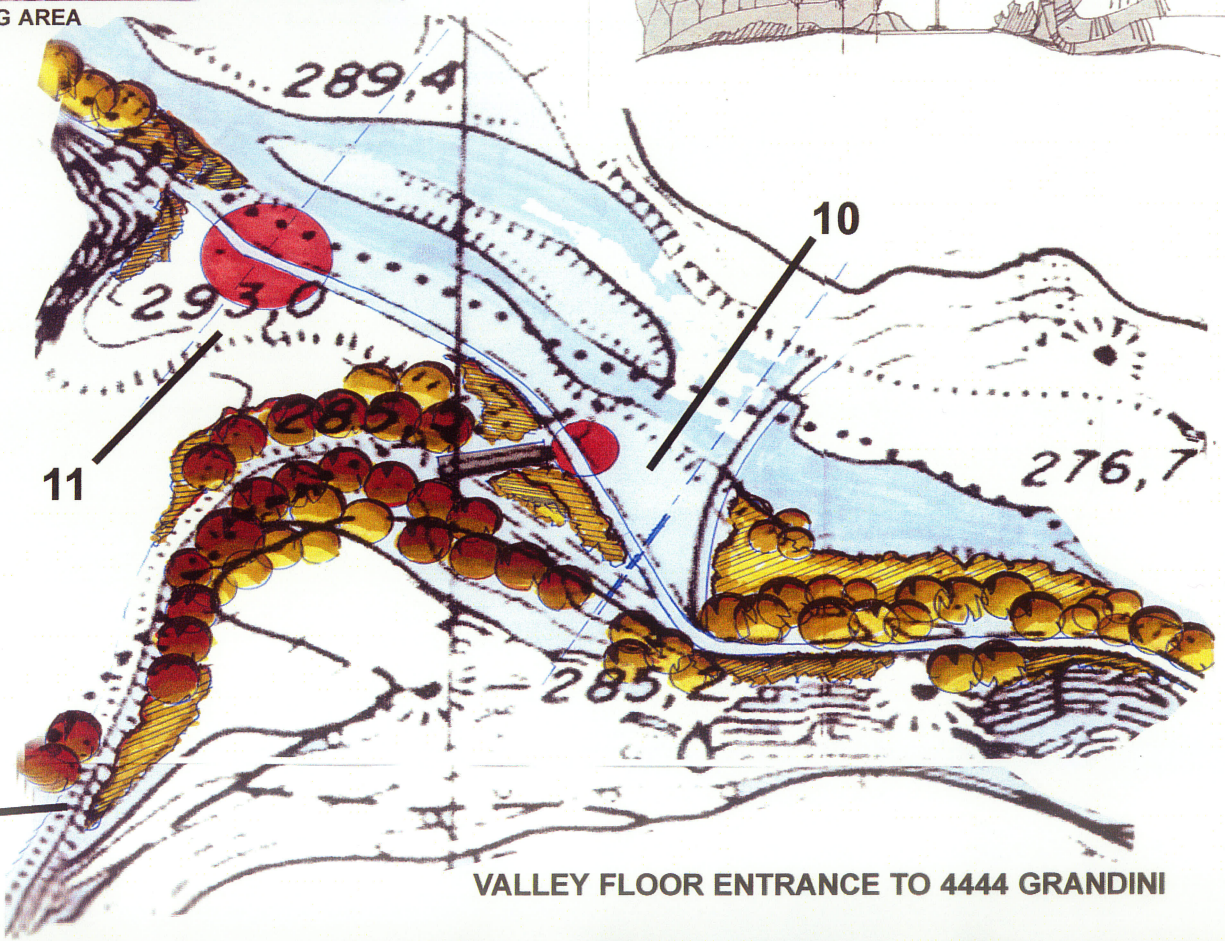
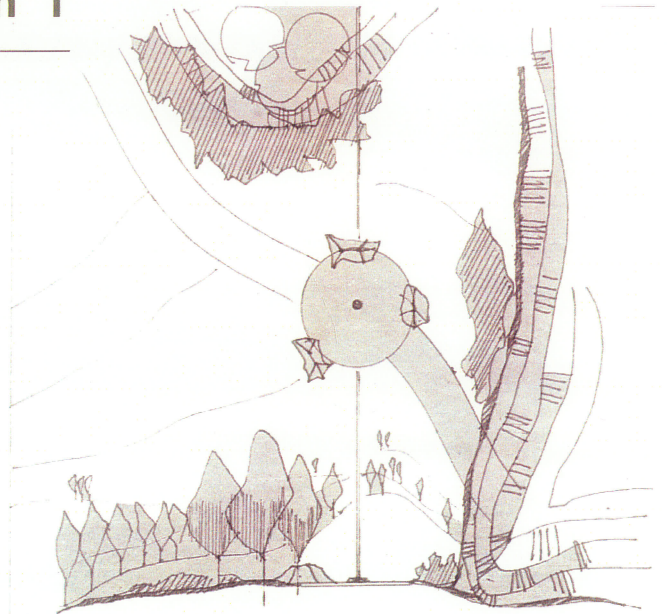
H

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12

TRAIL SITTING AREA



VALLEY FLOOR ENTRANCE TO 4444 GRANDINI



11



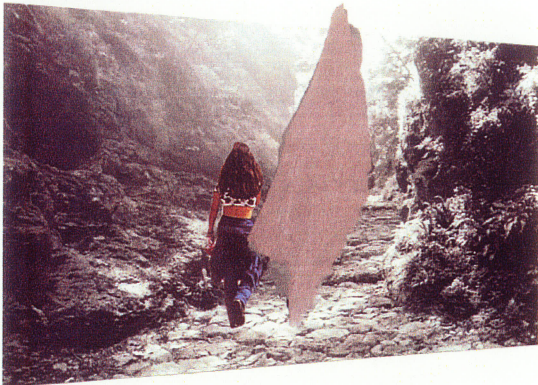
10



i. alpine trail manipulation

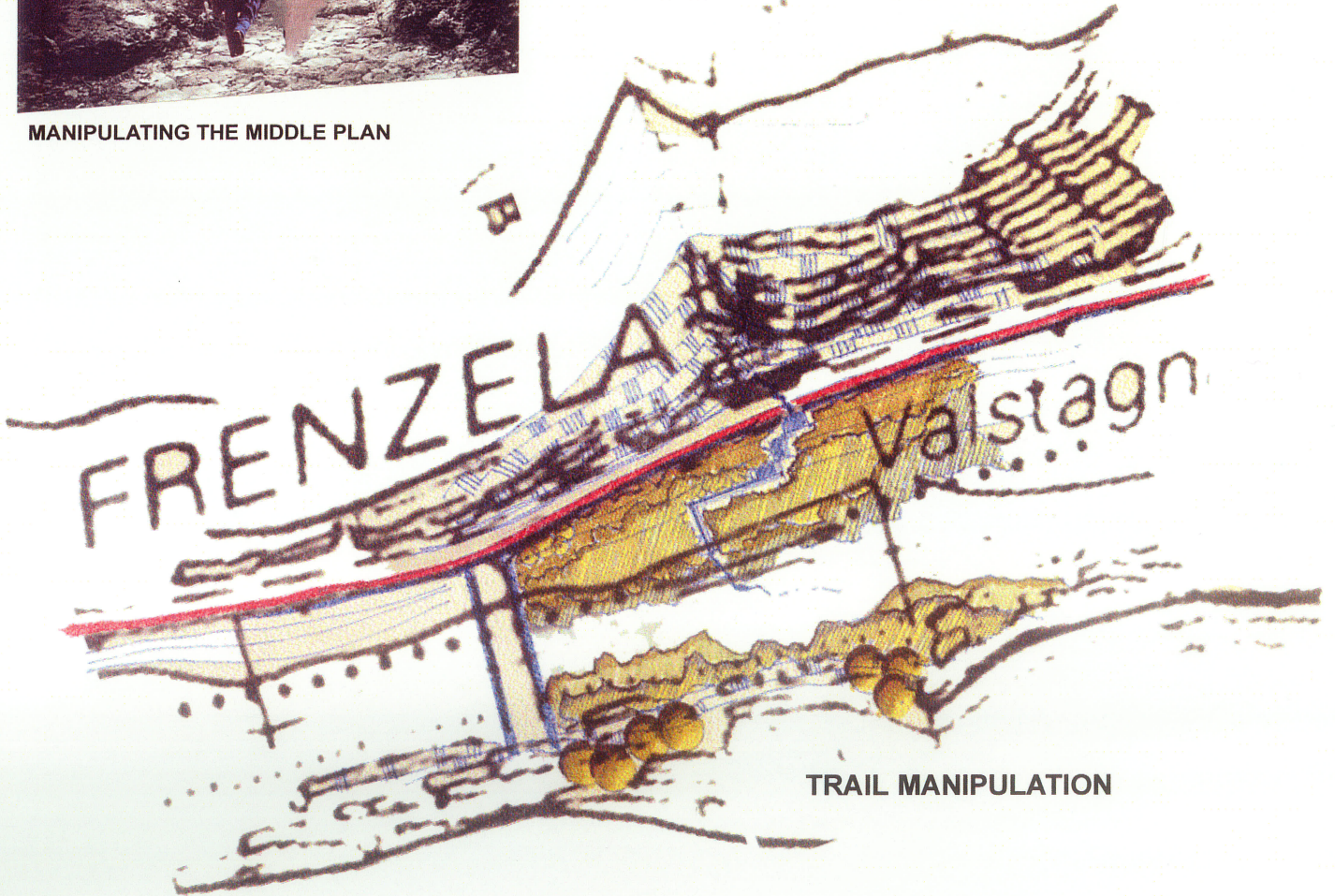
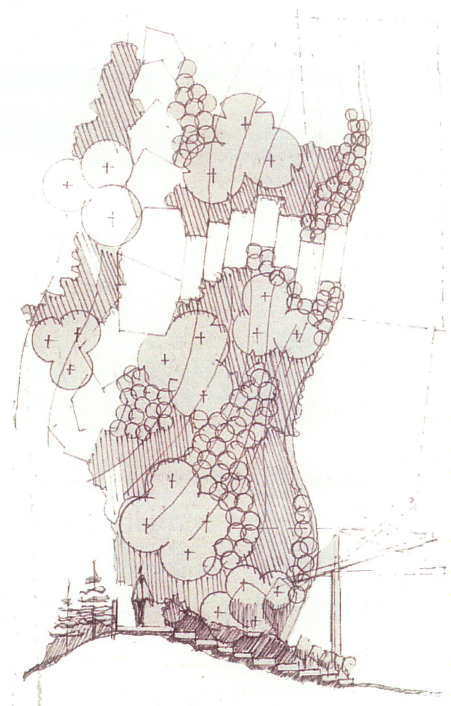
I want to make people make choices. As you walk up the Cala del Sasso you are always looking at the ground, looking for your next secure step (see site photos 61-67 on page 23). This is a necessity of walking up the side of a mountain on a steep trail like the Cala del Sasso. Unfortunately this condition limits the experience and interaction the user has with the site. At this point in the path I want the user to look up and see what is around them (see page 75 for design illustrations). I have placed a polished sheet of limestone in the middle of the path. It is intended to make people make a directional choice, nothing severe but nonetheless a choice that they normally would not have to make. Being asked to make a choice will engage the user and force an interaction with the site. Once the people look up, possibly stop, they will see and hear the water cascading down the sides of the rock, possibly making the effort to touch and taste it. I call this manipulating the middle ground, the middle ground being the area at the users eye-level on the path. Having people stop and look around at this point will also make them aware of the severity of the incline of the stairs. There is no doubt that at this point the users will be feeling the physical effects of the effort that it takes to walk up these steps. The intensity of the climb makes it is easy to keep going with your head down constantly, not taking the time or extra effort to lift your head because it can make for an awkward feeling if you can't see where your next secure step is going to be. I want the users to stand up and look around them, to truly understand the complexity of this trail.

cala del sasso
4444 gradini



13

MANIPULATING THE MIDDLE PLAN



TRAIL MANIPULATION

j. asiago park entrance – top of the mountain

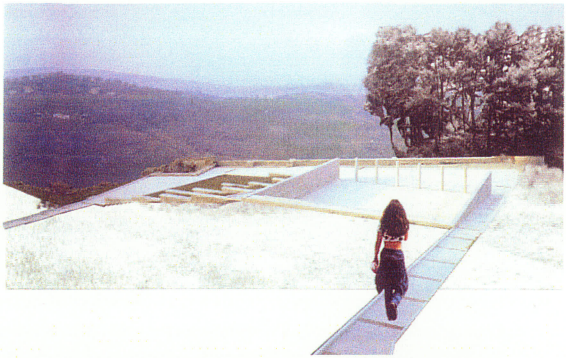
This is the point where the Cala del Sasso pulls itself out of the alpine forest and into an alpine meadow, alternatively it could also be said that this is where the Cala del Sasso dips into the alpine forest. I refer to it as the park entrance but it could also be called the park exit, depending on where you are in relation to the location of the park, and where you chose to start. There are two entrances to the park, one on the valley floor, referred to in an earlier section of the follies as 'the rest area. The top of the mountain is the second entrance. In terms of design it is much more celebrated and defined area because the meadow site is more appropriate for large-scale architectural interventions.

If a person were to have begun the walk in Valstagna, he/she would have taken 4-5 hours to get to this point. After walking up 4444 stone steps it is a magical feeling to walk out of the dark forest and into the bright, flat and open grass meadow (see site photos 68-70 on page 24). There is an existing presence to the alpine meadow, held together by a central soccer field and a few surrounding homes. I would not suggest removing these elements, however a new site plan is needed to bring order and structure to this meadow, and to create a suitable departure and/or arrival point for the new park system (see page 77 for design illustration).

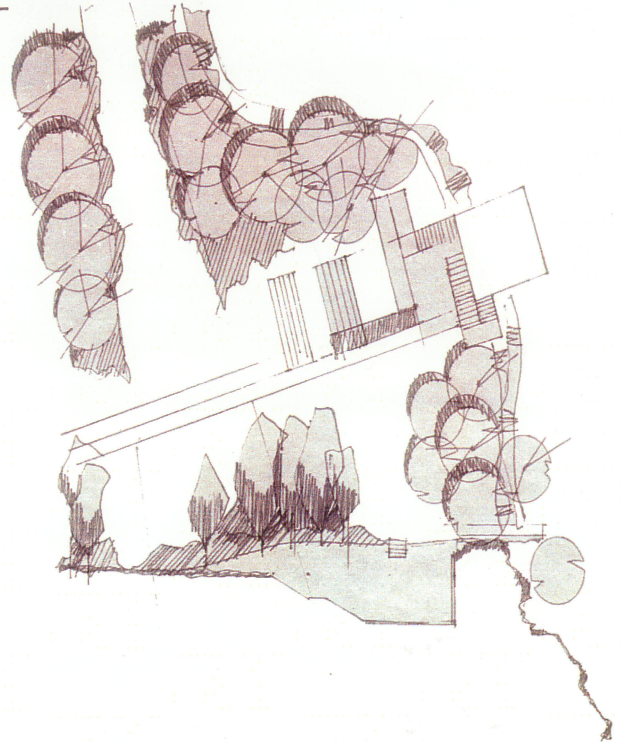
There are several design interventions and components in this area of the park so I have broken it up into three components for legibility's sake: (1) the overall site plan, (2) the Asiago park rest area and sports pavilion and (3) the viewing platform.

J

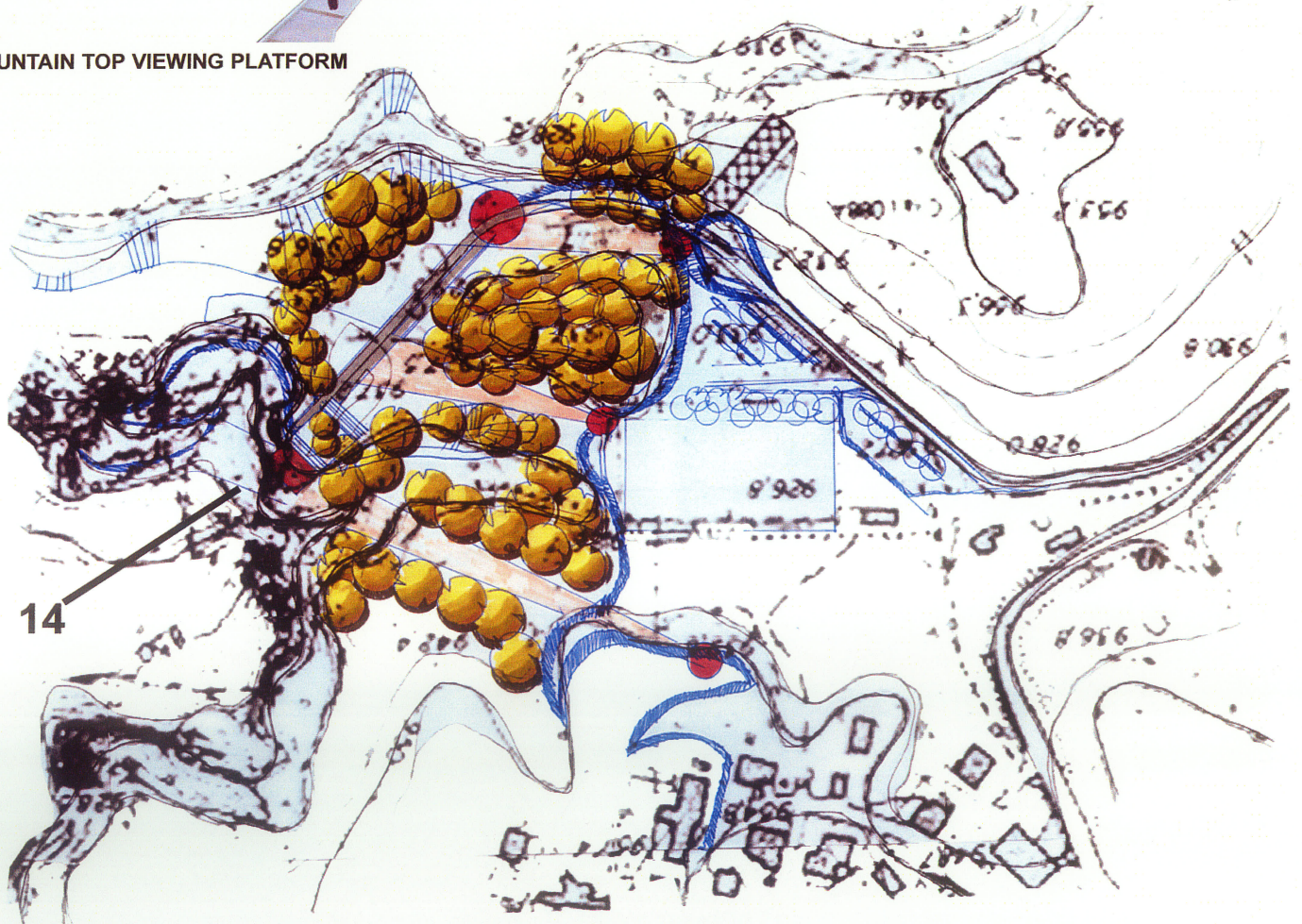
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14



MOUNTAIN TOP VIEWING PLATFORM



14

ASIAGO PARK ENTRANCE - TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN

the overall site plan

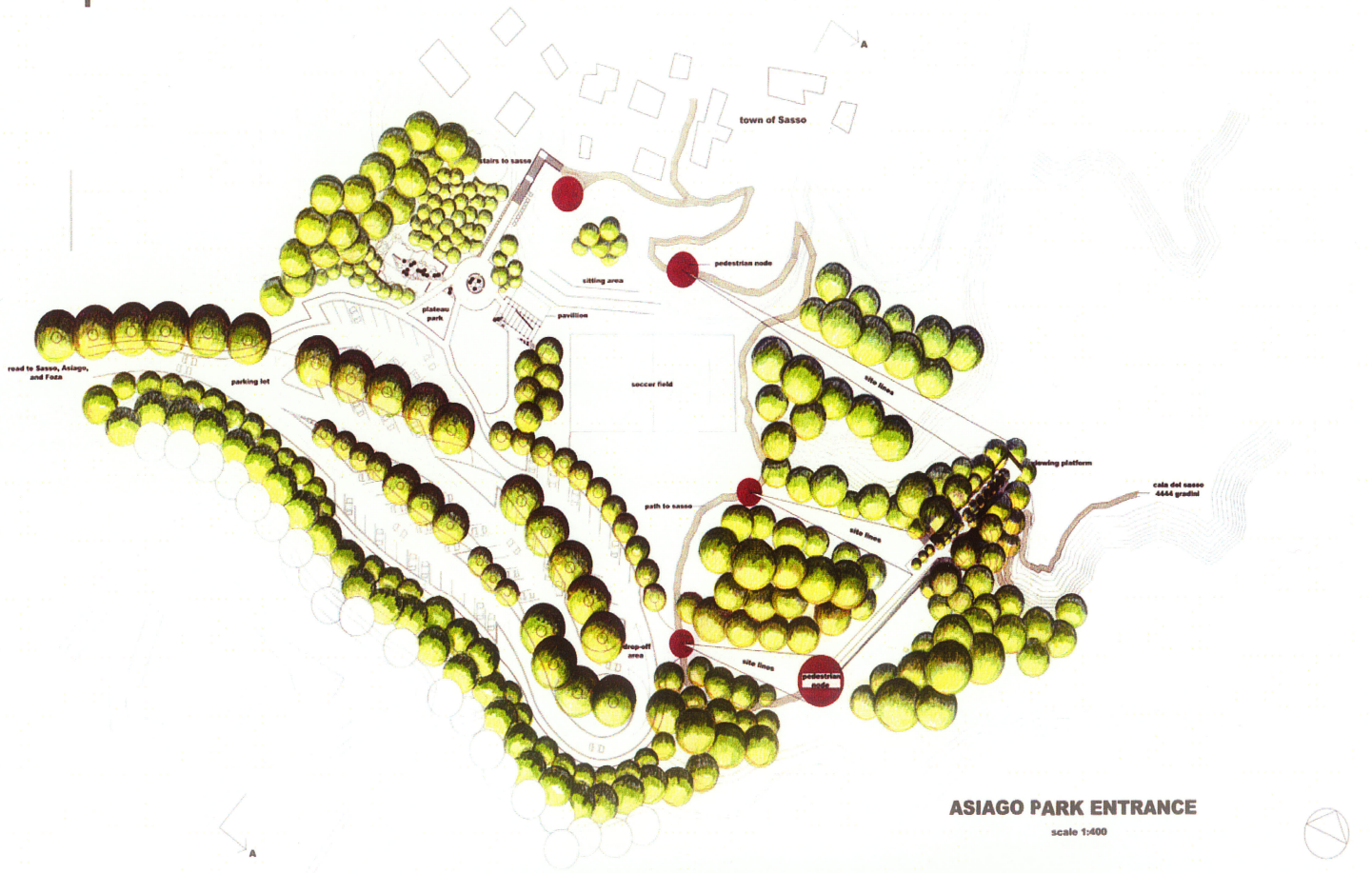
The overall site plan for the park entrance on the top of the mountain has many individual elements occurring within it, however they all work in a cohesive manner to bring order to this area of the park (see page 79 for overall site plan and page 80 for the model). A new vehicle entrance for site is one of the most important new features. The existing entrance is understated (see site photo 70 on page 24). All that exists today is a small sign set on the side of the roadway. A new entrance pergola/sign will be added to bring a presence to the site by creating a threshold.

As you can imagine, it is very hard to find significant areas of flat land on the top of a mountain. For this reason I am working hard to maintain the existing soccer field and sports complex within the new layout. I have added a new 100-stall parking lot to accommodate the traffic for the sports area and the Cala del Sasso. The parking lot has three tiers and is cut into the side of the meadow hill to take advantage of the existing topography and limit the amount of excavation and grading work needed to build it. The parking area will have drop-off points for both the sports pavilion and viewing platform.

There are a series of pedestrian trails that traverse the alpine meadow, they connect the individual elements in a unique manner because they follow the natural topography of the site. Thus, they are very sinuous and are designed to mimic the nature of alpine trails where you never get from one place to another in a straight line. For people who are unable to walk the full extent of the Cala del Sasso, this trail system at the top of the mountain will give them a little taste of what they could expect on the side of the mountain. One of the most important features of this trail system is the link up to the town of Sasso, which sits about a quarter mile from the meadow. Several portions of the existing forest canopy have been removed to allow for view corridors to be created, pedestrian nodes (red circles) have been located at the ends of the view corridors to emphasize the importance and intent of the framed views. This idea is intended to mimic the feeling of walking up an alpine trail where you have several glimpses of your intended destination which seems only a short distance away, but since the trail follows the natural topography of the mountain the journey is still quite extensive. Thus, everything seems to be within easy reach, but it is never as easy as it may seem.

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asiago park site plan



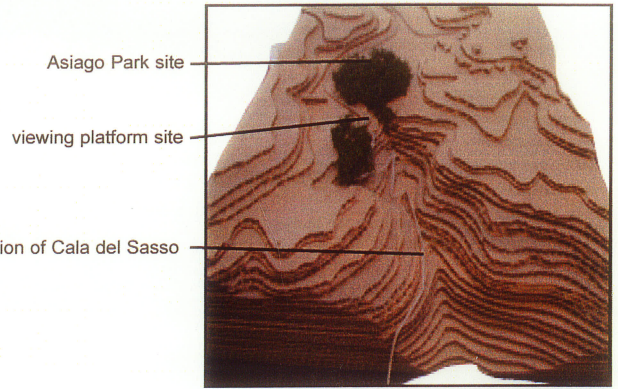
ASIAGO PARK ENTRANCE
scale 1:400



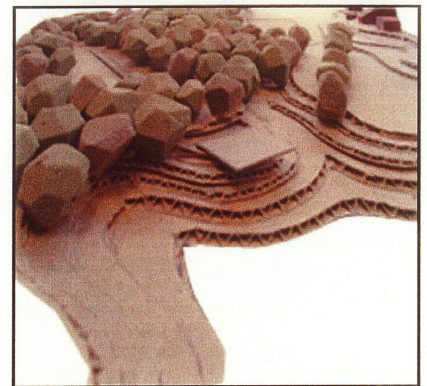
section A-A
scale 1:250

c a l a d e l s a s s o
4 4 4 4 g r a d i n i

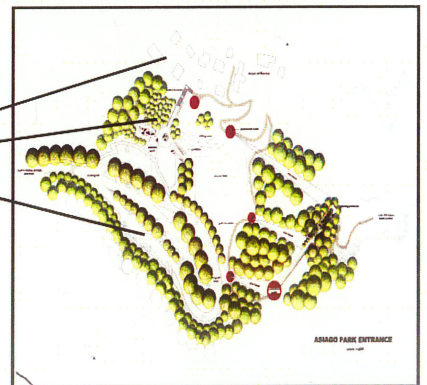
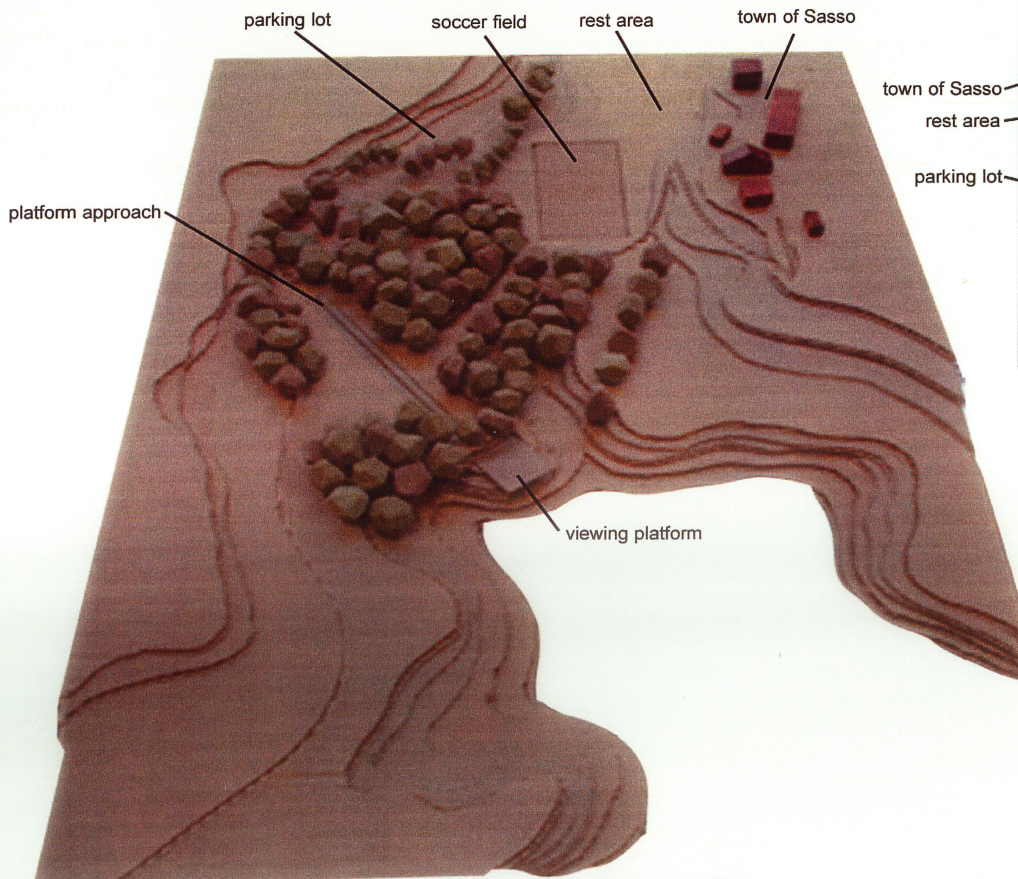
Asiago Park site model



Asiago Park site



viewing platform



Asiago park site plan

the viewing platform

The viewing platform is the most extensive and elaborate intervention within the park system. As I have mentioned previously, the existing condition at the top of the Cala del Sasso stairway is extremely understated (see site photo 69 on page 24), all that exists today is a small pre-fab enclosure, a bench and a wooden sign with a map. The top of the Cala del Sasso sits on the edge of the meadow only a few feet behind the sign where it drops off significantly from this point.

My intention here is to celebrate the Cala del Sasso and the long history to the 4444 steps. They are deserving of a more appropriate starting off point (you can see the location of the intended viewing platform on the site plan on page 79). I have developed two options for the viewing platform.

Option 1 is the more modest of the two designs (see page 82 for design illustrations). Its most critical element is the long narrow path leading up to the platform. Set on a straight line, and approximately 50 meters in length, the approach is designed to contrast the alpine paths found throughout the area. You rarely come across a straight segment of a trail in the mountains, this approach is meant to emphasize that feature and creates something unique for people to experience and question.

Another important feature is the removal of the trees on the edge of the meadow at the top of the stairs. The existing condition at the top of the trail feels very enclosed and does not do justice to the natural beauty of the site. Breaking up the forest canopy allows you to open up views across the entire valley, and they would be quite extraordinary. The viewing area would be broken up into three terraces connected by a series of stairs. The terraces are intended to mimic the historic military infrastructure that is carved into the sides of the mountain along the ascent/descent of the Cala del Sasso. A series of terraces are carved into the mountainside at varying points along the trail, they once served as platforms for military equipment to be stored or set-up for defenses.

This option would also uncover the top of the concrete flume that runs next to the Cala del Sasso, which once served as a method to shuttle trees from the top of the mountain to the Brenta River in the valley below.

c a l a d e l s a s s o
4 4 4 4 g r a d i n i

viewing platform option 1



current approach at the top of Cala del Sasso



viewing platform approach option



current rest area at top of the Cala del Sasso



viewing platform option

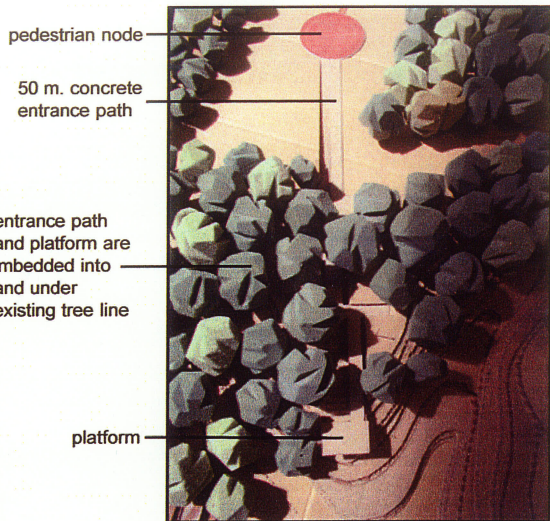
Option 2 was chosen as the more appropriate design for the viewing platform (see pages 84-86 for design illustration). As in option 1 there is a long straight approach run into the platform, however in this option there are two paths that run parallel to one another. One path remains on grade as the second path drops gradually into the ground and will finish 3 meters below grade in the bottom level of the bi-level platform. The on-grade path will create a link from the parking lot to the outer edge of the viewing platform, while the descending path is significant because it will link up with the top stair of the Cala del Sasso directly on the bottom level of the platform.

In this option the trees on the edge of the meadow are left as they stand today, in fact I want to add trees to this area to create more density in the canopy. The intention in this option is to cut a path through the existing trees and embed the platform into and under the existing tree canopy (see page 84 for design illustrations). Thus, the platform will sit cantilevered on the edge of the slope, and will be set into the tree canopy similar to a tree house. I feel that this approach is more site sensitive and takes advantage of the existing conditions more. A person approaching the platform will be taken on a short journey along a long narrow approach path that takes them into and through a canopy of trees before they arrive on a viewing platform that will have amazing views of the entire valley. The viewing platform itself is set on two levels, which similar to option 1 is intended to mimic the terraced nature of the military infrastructure embedded in the valley walls. As well, the layout of this platform is also intended to work in the same way as the meadow trail system in the sense that there are no direct links from one part of the platform to another, you are forced to make an effort to get from one point to another, as you would be if you were walking up or down the Cala del Sasso. However, there is one portion of the path that stays on grade from the parking lot to the edge of the platform, and will be accessible for any user.

In each option the intention is to finish the platforms in Asiago limestone, a non-traditional building material from this area. I want to use it because I want people to question its use, and to question where it's from, so they will discover that it is from the area they are standing in at that very moment.

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4444 gradini

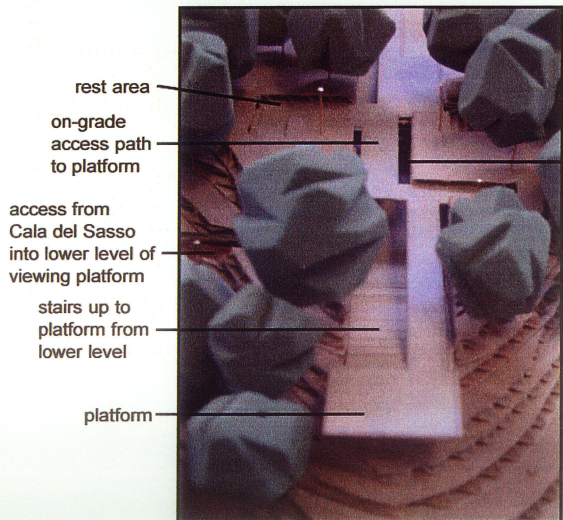
viewing platform final design



current approach at the top of Cala del Sasso



proposed viewing platform approach



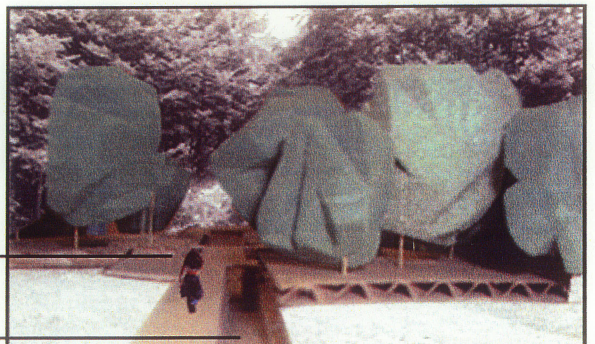
light wells to lower level



current rest area at top of the Cala del Sasso

one side of entrance path remains on grade - from entrance through to the platform

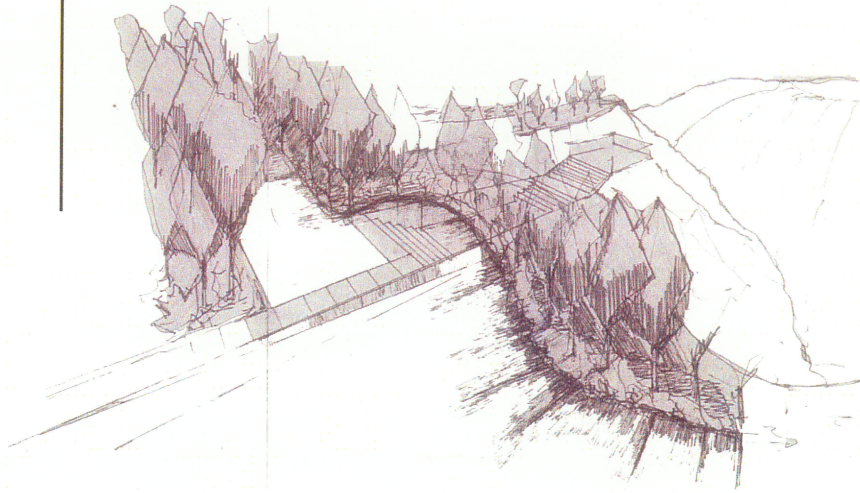
one side of entrance path drops 3m. into the lower level of viewing platform



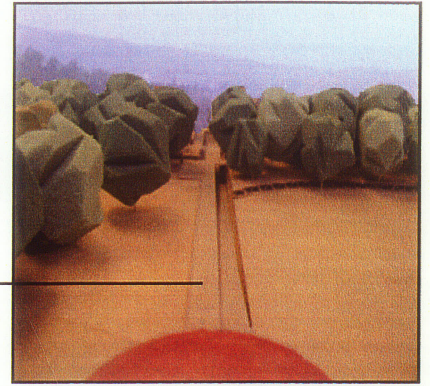
proposed viewing platform entrance options

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viewing platform model

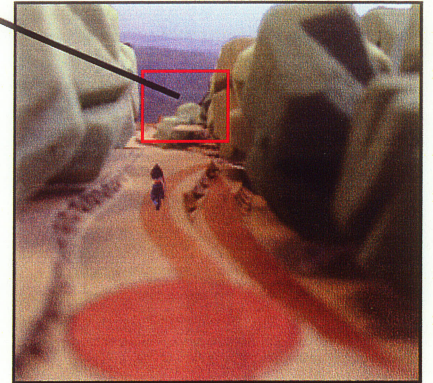


walkway into platform



platform approach

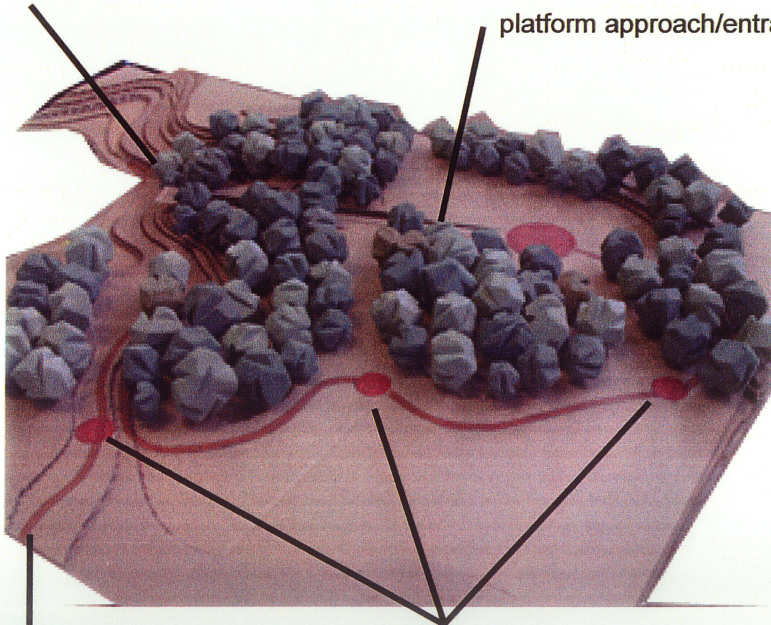
platform



constraining views and experiences

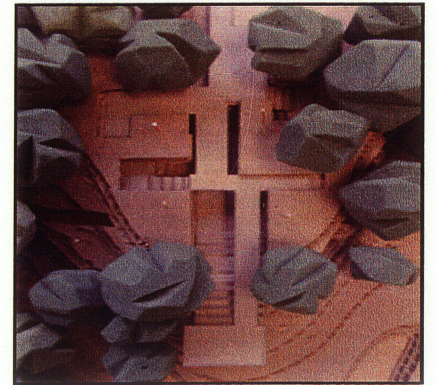
viewing platform

platform approach/entrance

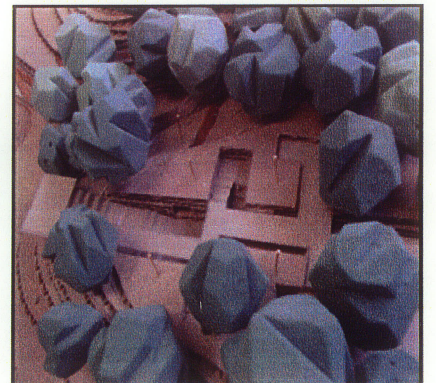


pedestrian walkway

sight/viewing lines



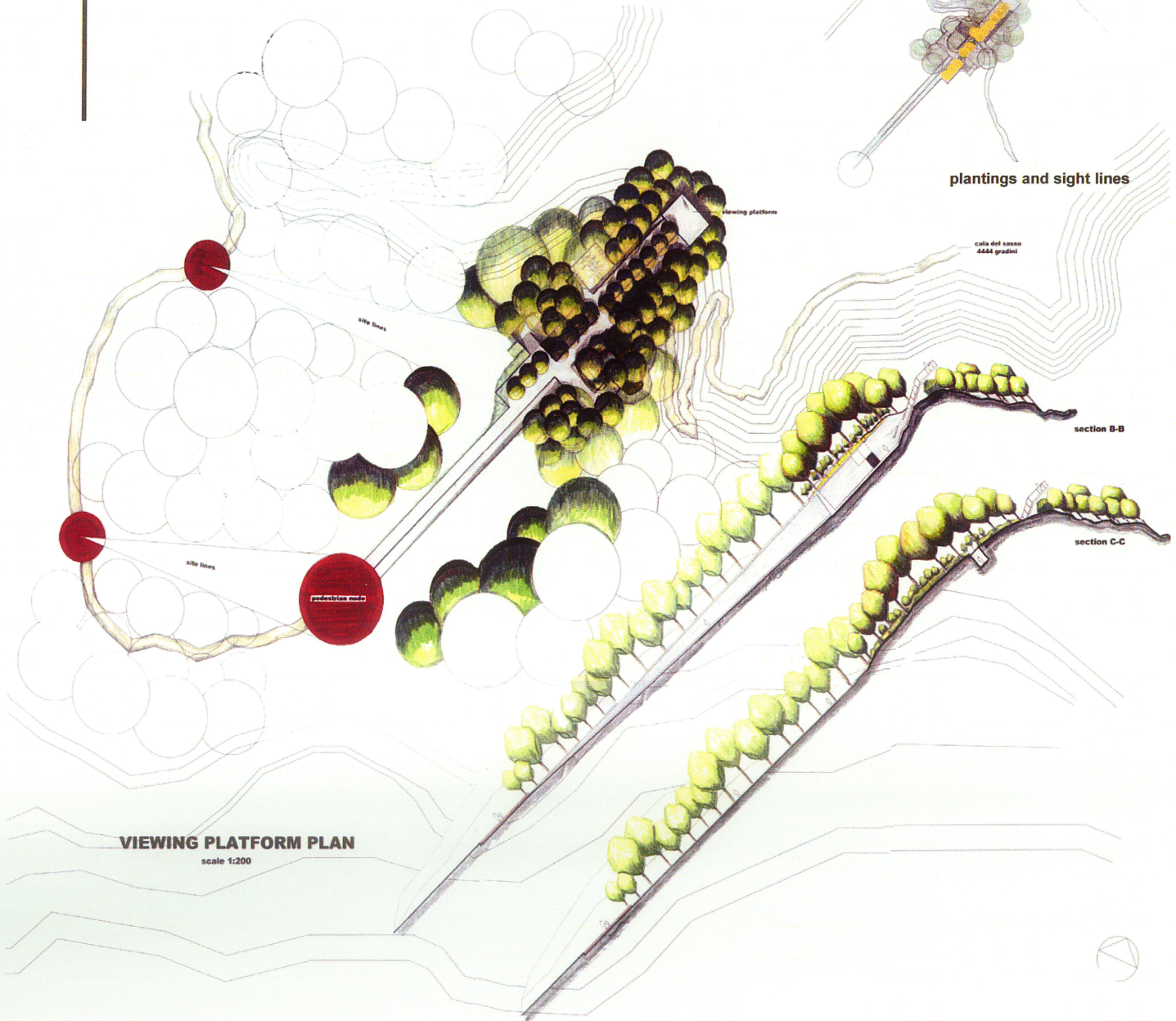
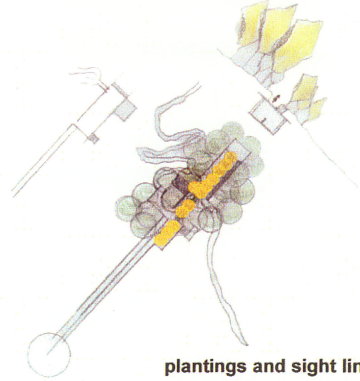
platform plan



platform set into the vegetation

cala del sasso
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mountain-top viewing platform



VIEWING PLATFORM PLAN
scale 1:200

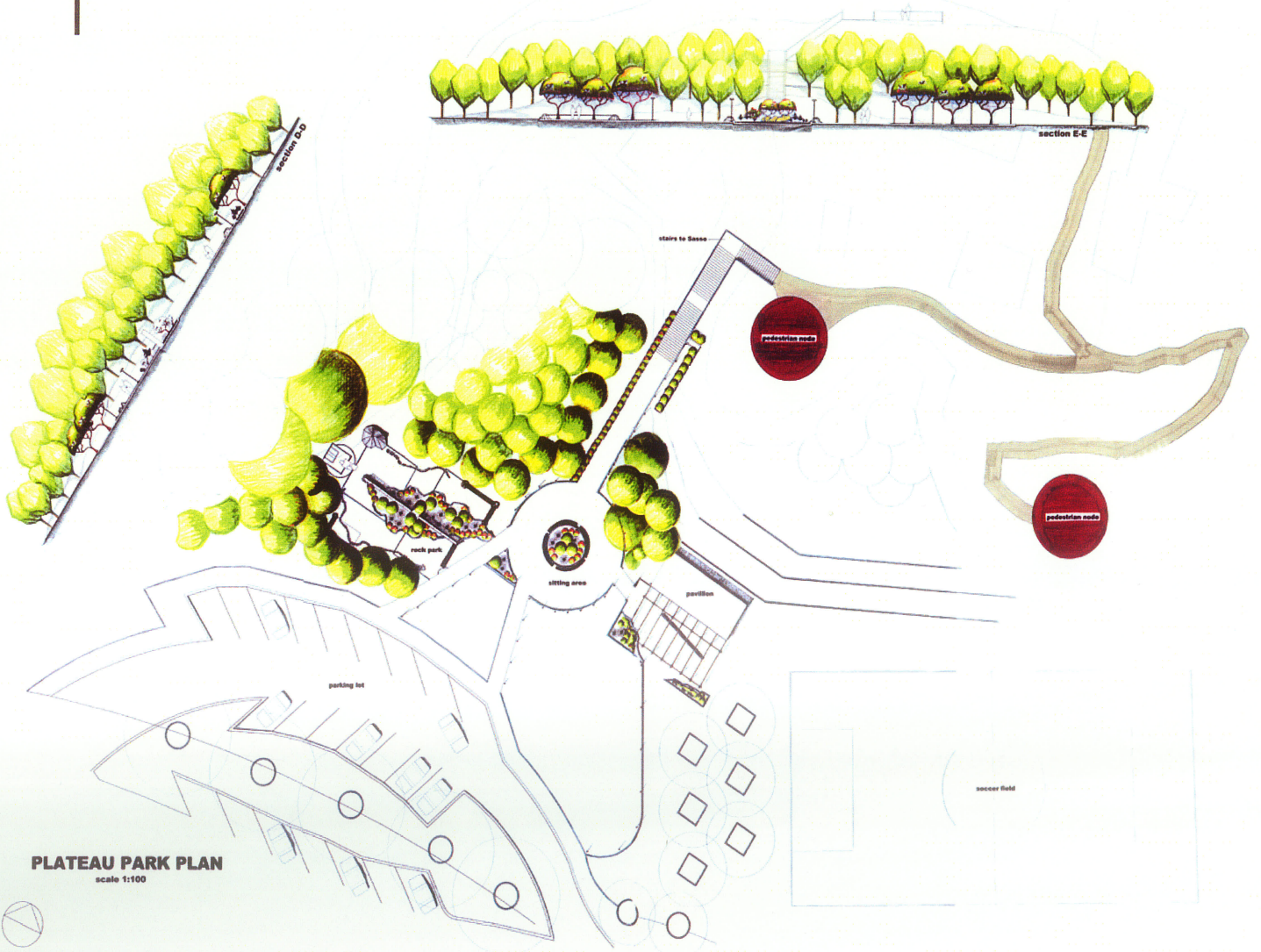
the sports pavilion

As I mentioned earlier in this section, it is hard to find significant areas of flat land on the top of a mountain. The existing sports complex and soccer field fills an important role in the alpine community of Asiago. Thus I do not want to eliminate it from my plan, in fact I am suggesting to redefine and highlight the soccer field as an important component of the overall site plan for the top of the mountain (see page 88 for design illustration). In addition, a new sports pavilion will be built adjacent to the soccer field and will serve as a community center for public events and a change room for the athletes. A grand staircase has been added to the site plan and will link the sports pavilion with the nearby town of Sasso. I feel this is an important feature because it is something that does not exist anywhere in the area and will hopefully add some interest and excitement to the overall plan.

In addition, a small rock garden has been proposed for the area east of the sports pavilion, near the bottom of the stairs. Like the viewing platform, this is an important feature for visitors who are not able to hike up and down the Cala del Sasso. The rock garden is designed in a Scarpian-like manner and will consist of a series of water features and planted area. The plant material will have symbolic qualities and will be selected from the native species in the area. Visitors will experience a brief look into life in the alpine environment.

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4444 gradini

asiago park rest area and sports pavillion



conclusions

“When you change the way you look at things,
the things you look at change.” (author)

It is my hope that walking into and along the Cala del Sasso will take the user on a physical, but more so, a mental journey. The layout of the path and the composition of the interventions address a range of issues centered around the nature of perception, in particular, the connection between the mind, the body, and his/her context.

Through each event users will be asked to participate in the formation of meaning through their individual reaction to the site. The user's preconceived ideas of what they think to be true are going to be challenged. They will be asked to alter their typical frame of reference to reality by reacting to the new elements and events, combining the experience into the formation of a new meaning. Being asked to identify with new and uncommon elements creates a new catalogue of meaning through this process of perception. The experiences in total suggest that the nature of meaning is embedded not in any data bank of knowledge, but in each user's interaction with the site.

An individual's discovered meaning of the place will evolve from their interpretations of the elements that are encountered along the path and how they place those elements in time. History is essentially endless in both directions, and, therefore, may be recognized and understood at various scales. History is relative – we base our present on what little we know of the past and it is through experience that we understand our place in history. Life is a series of small experiences and profound meanings.

The Cala del Sasso project is designed and presented as an exercise that challenges the user both physically and emotionally. In the Park you are asked to navigate along the Cala del Sasso and to make sense of differences in materials, scale, direction of the path, arrangement of familiar objects and images in unfamiliar ways. The work is intended to interact the senses and emotions.

The project is also intended to challenge the design ethics in Italy. It is my belief that all projects, no matter how historically significant, can include contemporary theory and element without sacrificing their importance. Landscapes are inherently temporary provisions with a life span, like all aspects of life they will take on different characteristics as time passes us by.

The project also suggests that complete agreement from all relevant parties, both public and private, is required for the success of a project to be assured. The governments and residents from the seven communities affected by this proposal must all agree on the course and action that will need to be taken.

The mind and body think together, form conclusions together and become connected to their surroundings. This process is implicit in the formation of meaning⁴⁴. Events along the path are designed to be as complex, or subtle, as the user wants them to be. It may take someone an hour, or another person a minute, to move from one event to another, and they may each live in a similar or completely different state of mind depending on their individual perception. Yet, they will each be involved in an experience of some type.

They will see. They will live. They will move on.

⁴⁴ Treib, 'Must Landscapes Mean?', p. 58

list of figures

- figure 1: page 5 - top left – **map of Italy** – (Uniroyal Map Book)
figure 2: page 5 - top middle – **map of the Province of Vicenza** – (World Atlas 1978)
figure 3: page 5 – top right – **map of the Brenta Valley** – (Commune de Valstagna)
figure 4: page 5 – bottom left – **map of the Commune di Valstagna** - (author)
figure 5: page 5 – bottom middle – **map of the Cala del Sasso** – (author)
figure 6: page 5 – bottom right – **map of the town of Valstagna** - (Spagnolli)
figure 7: page 7 – **site plan** – (author)
figure 8: page 8 – **site model** – (author)
figures 9-16: page 16 – **site photos 1-8** – (author)
figure 17: page 16 – bottom right – **site orientation plan** – (author)
figures 19-25: page 17 – **site photos 9-16** – (author)
figure 26: page 187– bottom right – **site orientation plan** – (author)
figures 27-34: page 18 – **site photos 17-24** – (author)
figure 35: page 18 – bottom right – **site orientation plan** – (author)
figures 36-44: page 19 – **site photos 25-33** – (author)
figure 45: page 19 – bottom right – **site orientation plan** – (author)
figures 46-54: page 20 – **site photos 34-42** – (author)
figure 55: page 20 – bottom right – **site orientation plan** – (author)
figures 56-63: page 21 – **site photos 43-50** – (author)
figure 64: page 221– bottom right – **site orientation plan** – (author)
figure 65-73: page 22 – **site photos 51-59** – (author)
figure 74: page 22 – bottom right – **site orientation plan** – (author)
figures 75-82: page 23 – **site photos 60-67** – (author)
figure 83: page 23 – bottom right – **site orientation plan** – (author)
figure 84-86: page 24 – **site photos 68-70** – (author)
figure 87: page 24 – bottom right – **site photos 68-70** – (author)
figure 88: page 34 – **historic sites map** – (author)
figure 89-90: page 46 – **castelvechio** – (author)
figure 91: page 50 – **project components location map** – (author)
figure 92: page 51 – **project components site model** – (author)
figure 93: page 56 – **design images folly A** – (author)
figure 94: page 59 – **design images folly B** – (author)
figure 95: page 61 – **design images folly C** – (author)
figure 96: page 64 – **design images folly D** – (author)
figure 97: Page 65 – **site model folly D** – (author)
figure 98: page 67 – **design images folly E** – (author)
figure 99: page 69 – **design images folly F** – (author)
figure 100: page 71 – **design images folly G** – (author)
figure 101: page 73 – **design images folly H** – (author)
figure 102: page 75 – **design images folly I** – (author)
figure 103: page 77 – **design images for Asiago Site Plan** – (author)
figure 104: page 79 – **Asiago Site Plan** – (author)
figure 105: page 80 – **Asiago Site Plan Model** – (author)
figure 106: page 82 – **design images for viewing platform option 1** – (author)
figure 107: page 84 – **design images for viewing platform option 2** – (author)
figure 108: page 85 – **design images for viewing platform option 2** – (author)
figure 109: page 86 – **site plan for viewing platform option 2** – (author)
figure 110: page 88 – **site plan for rest area and sports pavilion** – (author)

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