

Fitting the Lava: polyphonic assemblages in the Bosco di Aci

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The Bosco di Aci, a residual forest grown on the lava flows of Mount Etna, is approached here as a troubled fragment of an ecological relic, rather than as a space to be restored or reinterpreted. Embedded within a fragmented suburban condition, the site expresses an unstable coexistence between vegetal succession, anthropogenic pressures, and geological substrate, where lava continues to exert a specific agency in shaping ecological processes and spatial configurations.

Drawing on the notion of “polyphonic assemblage” as articulated by Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, the forest is understood as a more-than-human system in which heterogeneous temporalities, species, and practices intersect without converging into a unified order. This perspective challenges conventional approaches to landscape design, often oriented toward coherence, control, or ecological optimization.

Within this framework, fitting is reframed not as the formal adaptation of design to a given context, but as a situated and ongoing practice of management across scales. Operating within the XS–S–M spectrum, the project engages the forest as a small yet ecologically dense fragment whose effects extend beyond its physical boundaries. Design becomes a process of attunement to an already active assemblage, working through partial agreements, selective maintenance, and the careful negotiation of disturbances. Rather than stabilizing or resolving the system, the intervention aims to sustain its capacity to host multiple forms of life and use. Through the case of the Bosco di Aci, the paper proposes a shift from design as form-making to design as the maintenance of plurality. In conditions of environmental fragility and territorial contraction, fitting emerges as a critical practice capable of engaging uncertainty, embracing incompleteness, and supporting the coexistence of heterogeneous agencies.