Urban Landscape Perspectives

Landscape Project, City Project

Giovanni Maciocco

1 Two Conceptual Worlds

Due to its numerous meanings, the term landscape cannot be reduced to a definition that lays claim to conceptual unity. But the title of this article comes to our aid in that it enables us to limit the field of possible definitions to the sphere of relations existing between the landscape project and the city project.

When we state the two terms city and landscape separately, we are implicitly acknowledging a detachment between two figures that tradition has considered inseparable, as if reality were inseparable from the representation of reality. But the city is difficult to represent, while the landscape becomes an “additional figure” that takes on the role of revealing the city in situations where it is possible to “see it”.

But what is the landscape for modern people? What is meant by designing the landscape today?

These questions match up with two conceptual worlds: one is the “environmental image”, the “cover” (Kaijima and Tsukamoto 2006) for the unavoidable dynamics of the metropolis, the other in some ways the “counter-space” of the metropolis, the space available for the project, the space that still enables us to design the city.

The first one contains the classic concept of landscape that we have inherited from tradition, which underlies a representational conception of the landscape as “environmental image”, having impressed on it the acknowledgement of the separability of contemplation of the landscape from living in it, a notion of landscape-object constructed and made an institution by modernity, a type of landscape with which a relationship of equality is never established.

The second conception takes the landscape as an eminently projectual figure. It is a concept of landscape as a subject, which sets itself up as collective intelligence of the territory. A concept that implies a “willingness for the project”, as a propensity to take on new meanings in the city territory, different from the conventional ones. Understood in this sense, the landscape is the place of retrieval of ethos, of
everything that was not in the centre, not in the _polis_; the deep matrix of the primary elements of inhabiting, of the signs of nature and history that remain in the process of human settlement. It is a matter of drawing attention again to the landscape as the origin of the sense of man’s home and of the reasons for the city, in the form of a search for the primary elements of its construction, of its _public sphere_.

This role can only be carried out by projectual intention that will reconstruct the link between city and landscape and this is why we combine the _landscape project_ with the _city project_.

In this perspective, the landscape project may be imagined as a complex process towards understanding contemporary public space, a new concept of public space as a space for reflection, far from the habitual circuits, to escape from the hegemony of the communication flows that produce standardisation of spatial experiences, a modality of public space in which we can move without feeling manipulated (Abalos 2004).

The landscape project is the project for contemporary public space. In this sense, the landscape project is the project for the city.

### 2 Detachment Between City and Landscape as Detachment from Reality of Place

Since we have begun by implicitly acknowledging the detachment between city and landscape, we may try to sound out some interpretations, departing indeed from an initial study of the meaning of the concept of _detachment_ in the spatial sphere of our organised life.

A basic worry of architects and town planners is, for example, the danger of detachment that may be hidden in the mutation or metamorphosis of the city from being an organic, corporeal one to being virtual. In this sense, _detachment_ from corporality produces – as Silvano Tagliagambe (Tagliagambe 2000) writes – forms of mental nomadism, an outcome of the tension between anxiety over inclusion in an absolute space and the aspiration of surpassing all boundaries. In this detachment from corporality, from a life we have considered to be characterised by _proximity_, is measured our capacity to reconstruct urban ethics also in a condition of distance from place. This condition arises just as spatial forms of the urban change and different ways of considering the space of settlement open up, a mutation characterised by the dilation – above all mental – of the urban onto the territory; thus, what Massimo Cacciari (1990) defines as the contemporary contradiction between the need to maintain a relationship with places, and the demand for mobility which is indifferent to them emerges.

But the destiny of “practical reason” in our society also targets more radical horizons, which have as a common premise the assumption that our organised life is more and more affected by relations independent of physical distance. Though sharing these premises, the positions of Antony Giddens and Zigmunt Bauman (Giddens 1990; Bauman 1993) are at the two extremes of a range of positions varying from the “radical modernity” of the first to the “post-modern ethics of