Architecture as Image of Landscape

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Abstract

The concept of paesaggio/landscape was born and develops within representation, within the mimetic practices of artists, the same practices that closely concern architecture itself, not only in its ideational and constructive process but also in its semantic mission. Thus architecture participates in the construction of the landscape in many ways at the same time: it contributes through buildings that ignore it or with buildings that instead imitate the image, the form or the processes that form the landscape itself. But designing the landscape means operating both on the tangible level of the territory and on the intangible level of the ideas that orient its perception. In this sense, architecture also participates through buildings capable of influencing individuals and changing their way of observing the environmental components. A general reflection on representation introduces first the birth and then the contemporary evolution of the landscape in order to frame the theoretical contribution implicit in some modern and contemporary designers who have adopted the landscape as a medium to re-establish architecture itself – from Le Corbusier to Rem Koolhaas or Enric Miralles – or to provide it with at least an apparent compatibility in terms of environmental sustainability.

Keywords: Le Corbusier, Rem Koolhaas, representation, architecture as landscape, imitation.

The question of representation

Western art is based on the imitation of nature, which has been practiced for centuries through a myriad of tools and forms that mediate and articulate its meanings. At its core is *mìmesis*, the ability of artists to reproduce visible reality through representation. For Plato (*Republic*, X), representation is above all a deception, a fiction, a falsification. Both in its version of 'copy' (*eikastiké*), which is faithful in all aspects, like a sculpture, and in its version of 'semblance', which is the picture under a given perspective, like a painting, a representation is nothing but an illusory evocation of the phenomenal world which, in turn, is an imperfect imitation of the world of ideas, illustrated in the famous myth of the cave. Aristotle expands the discussion by questioning the potential of poietic action, capable of recalling structuring forms

in their generality rather than in their particularity. In this way, he finds the possibility of bringing the spectator closer to the world of ideas and producing, through identification with the actor, 'catharsis'. He therefore suggests the possibility of imitating not so much, or not only, the form or image of nature but its principles and processes. In this sense, representation is intended as a combination of a technical component (*tékhne*), which is necessary for the reproduction of sensitive aspects, and a moral component (*areté*), which is necessary to evoke the world of ideas [Ugo 2004, p. 10]. This idea shifts representation from a purely sensorial level ('it looks like') to a hybrid one, which involves the mind on an analogical level ('it works like'), too. On the one hand, resemblance requires the spectators to know the
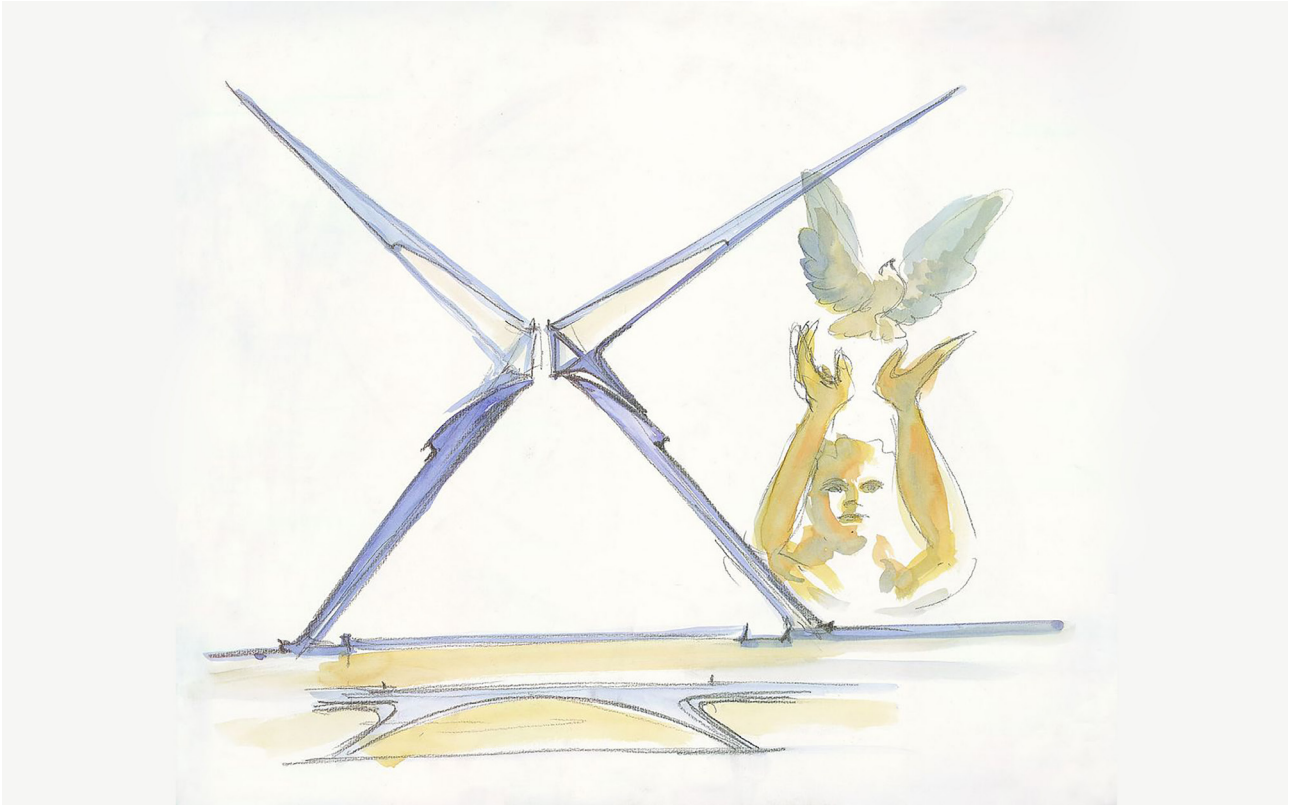
Fig. 1. Santiago Calatrava, Concept for the Quadracci Pavillion at the Milwaukee Art Museum, about 2000. Courtesy of Santiago Calatrava Architects and Engineers.

object evoked by the representation in order to recognize its properties – think of the Plinian foundation myth of drawing, the human profile traced by Calliroe to depict the image of his departing beloved, which has meaning only for those who know him [Mindeguia 2024]; on the other hand, analogy requires their cerebral involvement, that is, a sensitive knowledge that no longer investigates the 'truth' but rather the 'verisimilitude'; not only the 'apparent form' but also the 'structure' and the more or less visible 'relations' between the parts. In this way, analogy becomes the very foundation of creativity as: "the human capacity to integrate abstract ideas in order to perfect the entities of the real world" [Braghieri 2013, p. 104].

Imitation, which bridges the distance from the original through the artist's capacity for abstraction and the observer's capacity for interpretation, also plays a role of mediation between the built environment and the theoretical, social and cultural contents that underlie its development. In this way, representation orients not only the knowledge of the phenomenal world but also its project, which can tend towards: "concordance or discordance between the interior idea of the world and the world as it is, as a measurable entity" [Purini 1992, p. 57].
Architecture is obviously a privileged field of study to observe the infinite nuances of this conflict between subjectivity and objectivity. Architects have produced and keep

on producing forms that refer to nature both directly, through observation and study [1] (fig.1), and indirectly, through artistic precedents, above all to access their semantic basin. In this sense, more or less consciously, they have developed a sample of 'symbols', 'icons' and 'indexes', to borrow Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic triad [Sander Peirce 2003, p. 153], which refers to the natural world: the 'symbol' is the relationship that links a word to a precise meaning by habit, tradition or convention, like the text engraved on Roman monuments; the 'icon' recalls a meaning through visual similarity – the pyramids are mountains, the columns are trees, the windows are eyes and the dome is the sky [Ambrosi 1996, pp. 93-96]; the 'index' suggests a meaning in a metaphorical way, like the parts of the architectural order and their references to the human body or other natural elements [Hersey 2001]. These are therefore categories that communicate their meaning through a process that is preferentially connotative (the symbol), denotative (the icon) or a combination of the two (the index); at the same time, they are destined to be widely misunderstood and reinterpreted, since the nature of the architectural elements is polysemic.

The question of landscape

A particular case is that of architecture that not only questions the 'natural origins' of its elements and processes, like the famous hut-manifesto of Abbay Laugier [2], but that aspires to imitate more or less anthropized nature through its currently most successful cultural-perceptive incarnation: the *paesaggio* (landscape).
Much has been written about landscape in recent decades, both in the critical-literary field and in the Italian and European institutional field. This mass of studies has had the most obvious effect of broadening its semantic and operational field, almost as if landscape constitutes the key to accessing and making comprehensible the complexity of the contemporary world. The concept of landscape is today adopted in every kind of situation –'everything is landscape!' [3]– and includes every situation and adjective. It appears to be slowly pushed along a path of 'objectification' –the landscape as a physical object– that cancels out any qualitative value and ends up confusing it with different concepts and subjects, such as the territory and the environment, with which it obviously has
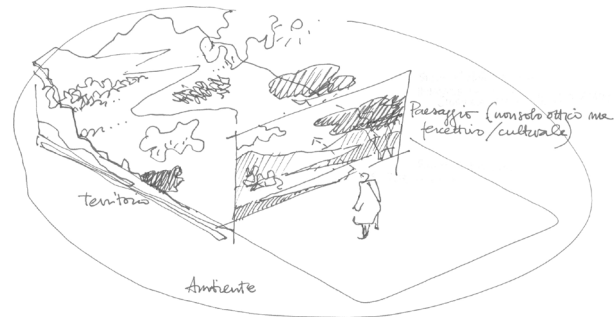

Fig. 2. Concept of relationships between territory, landscape and environment (drawing by the author)

fundamental relationships (fig.2) However, the landscape is above all the outcome of a perceptive act. It embodies the visual relationship (therefore cultural and functional) between the viewer and the territory that surrounds him, not so much for how it appears objectively but for how it is individually perceived; above all, the landscape acquires meaning for what women and men recognize in it or for what its 'signs' communicate to them.
On the other hand, the *paesaggio* –a term that in Italian evokes the villages inserted in the bucolic views of the Roman countryside painted from the late 16th century onwards– has a remote origin. The expression *facies locorum* (look of places) used by Pliny the Younger to contemplate the Lazio countryside through the windows of his villa in Laurentum is taken up by Petrarch and filtered through the experiences of Tuscan painting of the 14th century and the early explorations of linear perspective developed by Giotto [Tosco 2012, pp. 108-109]. The modern concept of landscape is therefore strongly fuelled by artistic practice.
In *Gremlins in the Studio* (1865-74 ca.; fig. 3), the American artist Martin Johnson Heade depicted the landscape of the prairie as a model placed on a wooden board on easels. In this way, he made both the pictorial origins of the concept and its inevitably fictitious vocation of representation and staging, explicit. Eventually, the modern landscape is grafted onto the concept of perspective, which finds one of its main applications in the theatre, if not even in *anamorphosis*, the 'constrained view'. As Franco Farinelli writes: "for a landscape to exist at least three […] things are necessary: […] a subject who looks and
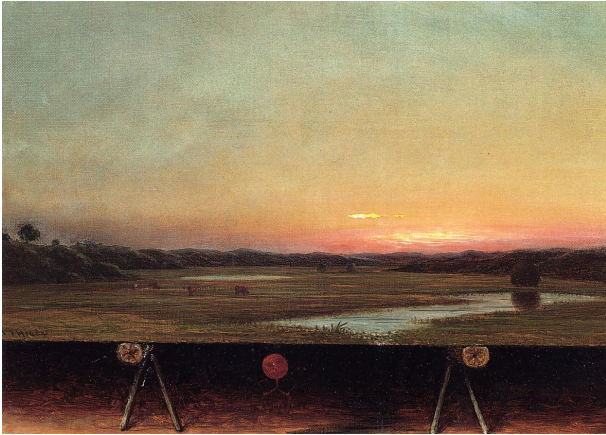
Fig. 3. Martin Johnson Heade, Gremlins in the studio, about 1865-74 [Stebbins 2000, p. 218].

Fig. 4. Rupestrian residences in the area of Goreme, Cappadocia, 2014 (drawing by the author).

something to look at but also the widest possible horizon, therefore a hill that functions as a vantage point" [Farinelli 2003, p. 41]. It is no coincidence that the bird's eye view spread in parallel with the creation of 16th-century gardens in suburban estates, whose geometric design of the ground, often a pure expression of power, required a high point of view to be exhibited [Colonnese, Schiavo 2023]. In this sense, the discipline of landscape is as close to environmental planning as it is to the theatre or media studied today by visual culture.

From this point of view, any presumed resistance to considering the city or other anthropic structures as extraneous to the concept of landscape falls away, as does the need to add adjectives to the landscape itself (natural landscape, urban landscape, etc.). At one extreme of this field of existence, one can consider the landscape of the Cappadocian rock-cut habitat, where human settlements are an integral part of the territory and it is difficult even to distinguish what is natural from what is no longer (fig. 4); at the other extreme, one can place, for example, some visions developed by the architect Luigi Pellegrin, where the modular settlement system seems to almost ignore the territory, indirectly demonstrating its universal capacity to colonize every place on the planet [Carpiceci, Colonnese 2021]. However, the possibility of recognizing the human presence, even in its signs on the territory or in the point of view of the image, is an inalienable

condition. It is precisely by leveraging this predisposition that the creators of *Star Wars* (1977) managed to transfigure the Alpine, Saharan and Amazonian landscapes into alien worlds, thanks to the simple addition of an actor in a space suit in the frame [4].

In semiotic terms, the landscape therefore manifests itself peculiarly in the form of an 'index' and requires recognition and cultural interpretation by the viewer. Here the Aristotelian approach to the question emerges. Similarity is not only the result of vision, the ancestral biological device that guaranteed the survival of our ancestors, but also a value judgment based on ideas and, therefore, on the cultural system that a certain civilization has developed and adopted, which obviously has equally interesting political implications.

Beyond exceptional cases in which absolute power dedicated itself to shaping the territory in its own image, before the industrial era a landscape was built over the course of generations. Its forms were therefore the outcome of processes carried out by an entire community, which was obviously able to decipher them and, to some extent, recognized itself in them. However, this phenomenon, which today is associated with the concept of local identity, was absolutely implicit, conditioned by the recurrence of daily activities, which attributed to places above all a value functional to their own needs. Instead, it was travellers who highlighted it. Foreign artists and travellers,

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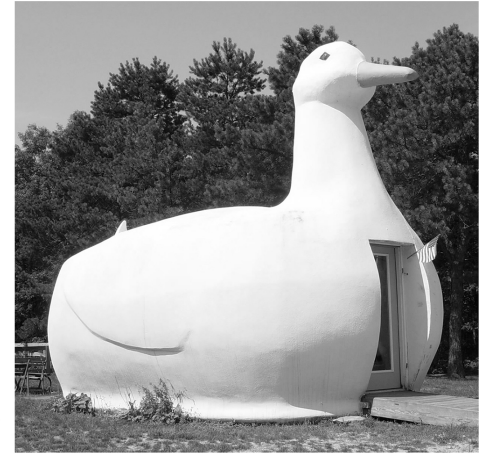
DUCK
Architecture parlante

Fig. 5. Formal categories defined by Venturi and Scott-Brown in Las Vegas and their relationship with the car speed (drawing by the author).

strangers to the territory, were often able to grasp, with an 'innocent' and 'aestheticizing' eye, the essential elements of a place [Urry 1990], even without understanding all the connections and processes. It is no coincidence that the role of landscape in the construction of cultural identity has been pursued from a nationalist perspective throughout the twentieth century, especially in relation to the construction of railway and motorway infrastructures and the development of mass tourism [Colonnese, Rosa 2021]. In this process, a central role has been played by representation or, better, by representations, which distil, elaborate and combine the elements of the territory until they are fixed in a shared 'image'. The different representations –they too can be oriented towards symbols (from description to cartography), icons (from landscape painting to many souvenirs) and indexes– operate a selection of the elements present, interpret them in a hierarchical and cultural key and combine them in a specific spatial configuration [Colonnese 2022]. This process is affected

both by the medium that welcomes the representation itself –from the snowball to the selfie– and by the medium that orients the perception of the territory by organizing its components in time and space. In this sense, theoretical devices, such as Leon Battista Alberti's 'perspective window', and mechanical devices, such as means of transport from bicycle to train, contribute to structuring the same territory in different forms of landscape. In the work of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown on Las Vegas and its exuberant 'architectures' [Venturi, Scott-Brown, Izeneour 2018], the categorization of the sign (symbol), the 'duck' (icon) and the Decorated Shed (index) acquire meaning and effectiveness in relation to the speed of the observer and the field of vision offered by the car (fig. 5).
The souvenir that distils the 'identity' elements into an image or icon –the postcard of the Gulf of Naples with the maritime pine in the foreground and the cone of Vesuvius in the background, for example– testifies to the final

outcome of this process in a touristic key. At the same time, landscapes themselves can become 'rhetorical figures' through which to interpret apparently distant natural phenomena and artistic expressions in an analogical way. Think of the collections of 'figurative stones' or of Leonardo da Vinci, who invited us to scrutinize: "the stains of mold on a wall, the stains of walls, or the ash of a fire, or clouds or mud" to find "compositions of battles, of animals and men, as well as various compositions of countries and monstrous things" [Leonardo da Vinci 1947, II, part 67]; or think of the landscape interpretations of Giorgio Morandi's still lives, which seem to have had such an influence on Aldo Rossi's projects, probably thanks to the architect's familiarity with models and multi-scalar perception. It is no coincidence that his concept of 'analogous city' has many affinities with that of landscape.

Designing the landscape

In operational terms, the holistic nature of the landscape, where near and far, artificial and natural, tangible and atmospheric elements merge together, calls for a multi- and inter-disciplinary approach that can be directed in at least two different directions. Being the outcome of human perception, the landscape can be modified by operating both on the subject ('who is looking at') and on the object ('what is looked at'). To operate on the latter, it is possible to intervene on the territory with all the architect's tools, from infrastructures to the ephemeral, but always taking into consideration the 'human' point of view, with all the ambiguities of this adjective. To operate on the former, it is necessary to intervene on his or her 'gaze', that is, on the culture and expectations of those who look at and use the elements that make the landscape.

That attitude can already be found in the architecture of Le Corbusier, who also took the landscape into great consideration in his artistic project, often implicitly. It is no coincidence that *Le Corbusier: An Atlas of Modern Landscapes*, the major exhibition Jean-Louis Cohen and Barry Bergdoll organized in 2013 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, certified the centrality of landscape in his research and used the rhetorical and analogical potential of landscape itself to present the materials into four sections – the landscape of *objets trouvès*, the domestic landscape, the architectural landscape of the modern city and that of the territory.
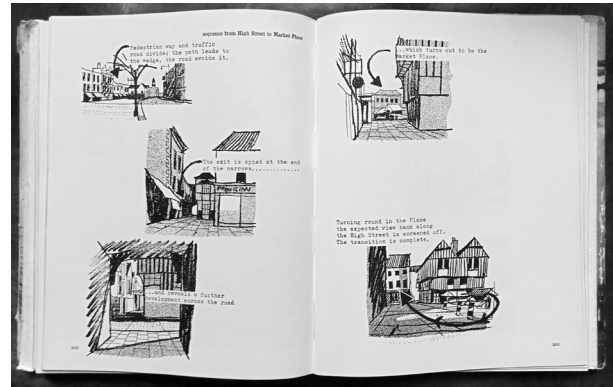

Fig. 6. Gordon Cullen, Sequence of sketches from High Street to Market Place, Evesham [Cullen 1962, pp. 200, 201].

The very idea of *promenade architecturale*, developed by Le Corbusier from his residential projects onwards, can be interpreted (also) in this way [Samuel 2010]. It is an evolution of certain kinetic devices of the picturesque garden, which has its origins in England in 18th-century and a lasting influence throughout the 20th century, eventually informing the concept of townscape developed by Nikolaus Pevsner [2010] and the group of *The Architectural Review* journal during the Great War years (fig. 6). In the picturesque garden, the 'pictures' set up from specific viewpoints to enhance the contrast between natural elements and eclectic, often ruined, follies were hidden until the last moment by zigzagging paths among the trees. Even in the famous houses designed by Le Corbusier, the trajectory of the path hides the destination until the end, to reveal the final 'picture', generally a view of the surrounding landscape, like an epiphany. In this sense, the sequence of spatial plastic events that precedes the final 'postcard' has the dual task of producing opacity and disorientation and of educating the visitor's gaze through original combinations of colours and plastic forms that will serve to interpret the landscape itself. Not to mention the fact that the final picture often also shows the path taken to reach the building, revealing from above (from a vantage point) a form that until that moment had remained hidden because it was an integral part of an individual experience lived in the limitations of one's senses.
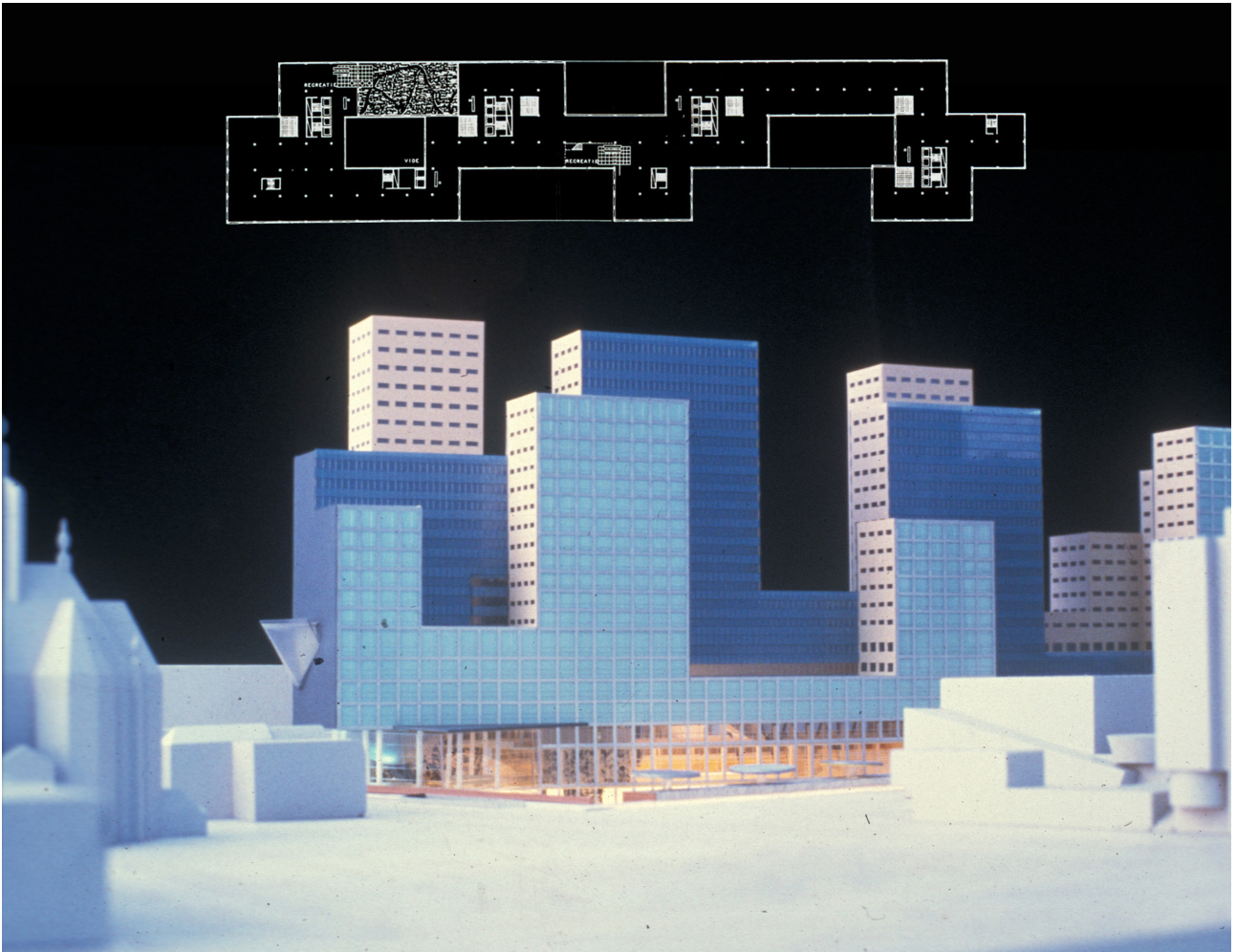
Fig. 7. Rem Koolhaas/OMA, The Hague Civic Hall, 1986. Maquette and third floor plan. Courtesy of OMA/AMO.

An essential element for experiencing this sort of 'gardens' in the form of a dwelling is the fluidity of the path. The continuity of the *promenade architecturale* is ensured by an original use of stairs and ramps which, combined with the *pilotis*, the *toit-jardin* and the *fenêtre en longueur*, contribute not only to staging the landscape but also to adopting its forms and materials. A similar attention to the 'mobile subject' is also found in the work of Rem Koolhaas, another architect strongly interested in the landscape [Colonnese 2021]. For Koolhaas, and for his already fundamentally post-modern gaze, the landscape becomes a 'figure' to transform the 'delirious' New York into design material and to break a whole series of modernist architectural categories. On the one hand, as in the Kunsthal in Rotterdam (1987-1992), he updates Le Corbusier's research, upsetting the measured and Cartesian nature of his buildings with inserts that refer to the natural world; on the other hand, it reduces the landscape to an icon and uses it as a design material and critical device. To quote Plato, in the former case, it imitates the 'form' of the landscape; in the latter, it imitates its 'appearance'.

The 1986 project for the City Hall of The Hague is emblematic of the latter approach (fig. 7). Koolhaas extracts the icon from the landscape of New York, from the skyline formed by the superposition of its towers seen from afar. The landscape is then interpreted through the spatial structure suggested by the experience of the train or the theatre, which reduces the territory to theatrical wings that run parallel. The City Hall is formed by the juxtaposition of three parallel buildings, each of which has an articulated profile, as if it were already the sum of different buildings. The study sketches preserved in the archive of the OMA studio, moved a few years ago to the Netherlands Institute of Architecture, reveal the designers' interest in the perceptive outcome of the volumes from points of view that rotate around them. Created by sketching views of the digital model, they seem to imitate the landscape-scale views of Manhattan along the trajectories offered by the bridges. While the external surfaces of the bodies present different façade solutions and colours depending on the orientation, to demonstrate the multiplicity inherent in the process, the internal spaces show a great spatial continuity, both at the level of the service plate on the ground floor and at the level of the different floors, where the offices are freely organized around the grid of pillars and elevators (fig. 8).

The Hague City Hall project is indebted to New York not only for its urban landscape but also for the 'schizophrenia' that
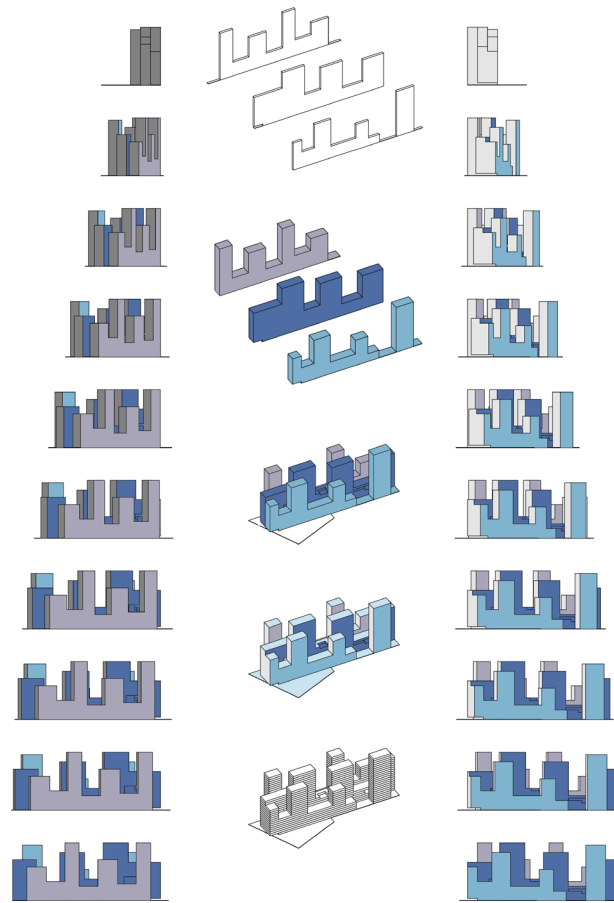

Fig. 8. Rem Koolhaas/OMA, The Hague Civic Hall, 1986. Genetic and perceptive analysis from viewpoints moving around the building by 10° steps (drawing by the author).

Koolhaas found in the internal organization of American skyscrapers. Analogously, the City Hall shows no evident relationship between the interior, extremely flexible, and the exterior, formally generic, as well as between the levels. The mechanical juxtaposition between the elements is only an expedient that serves to embody a certain idea of urban landscape and leaves no trace in the plan. Koolhaas seems more interested in enhancing the formal variety of spaces that are formed at each level through the interaction, more or less casual, of the three bodies.

Koolhaas had already experimented with something similar in 1982, in the project for the Parc de la Villette in Paris, which has attracted endless attention from critics. Here too, the horizontal surface of the park, as if it were a section of a skyscraper arranged on a horizontal plane, is divided into a sequence of long, narrow strips associated with a certain typology of vegetation and services. The overall image seems even more indebted to theatrical scenography, with the different strips forming permeable wings intended to look like an intricate forest. However, here too, Koolhaas appears particularly interested in the possibility of overcoming the schizophrenia of the reference model and observing the unpredictable interactions that should be generated over time between the strips.

On the contrary, Koolhaas imitates the 'form' of the landscape in a series of projects developed between the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. In the project for the Hotel and Conference Centre in Agadir, Morocco (1990), the architecture is generated by reproducing a portion of dune territory and inverting it to form the ceiling of an enormous box. The resulting covered and open square, pierced by columns of various sizes, houses generic boxes and includes streets and excavated patios around which the rooms and services are organised. As stated by Koolhaas himself: "The landscape, which is generated with its concave and convex domes, with the forest of columns, its wells of light, is a modern interpretation of Islamic space" [Koolhaas 2005, p. X]; an interpretation that moves from the Arab urban landscape to return to the natural one, almost to close a circle.

While in Agadir the architecture is placed in a natural context, the subsequent University Libraries of Jussieu are designed for the centre of Paris (1992). In this case, Koolhaas ideally encloses a fragment of natural landscape of surfaces with variable slopes inside an immense and generic glass cube that refers to the volume of a traditional building (Fig. 9). The project appears to be a tribute to
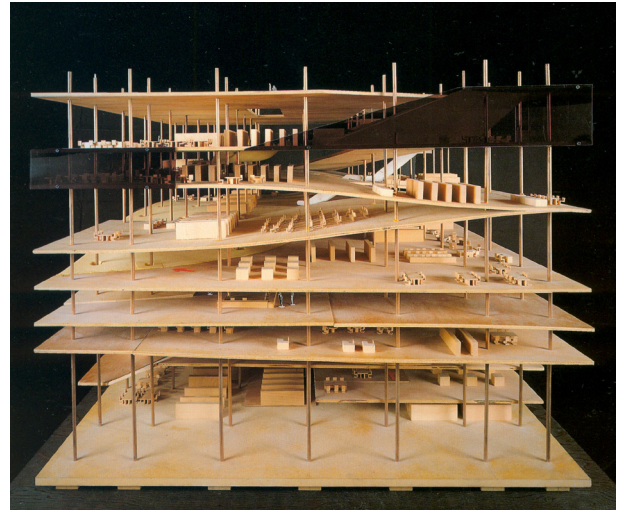

Fig. 9. Rem Koolhaas/OMA, Jussieu Libraries in Paris, 1992. 1:100 model view. Courtesy of OMA/AMO.

New York schizophrenia, to the surrealist taste for the *objet trouvé* and to the oblique utopias of Claude Parent [2004]. However, here too Koolhaas is not so much interested in the architectural form as in the way in which it is able to revolutionise construction, perceptive and housing habits. As in a process of colonisation of a natural place, it is the local slope of the non-horizontal surface of the libraries (about 35% of the total covered area) that determines the compatible functions. For example, the areas with slopes between 2 and 4% are suitable for hosting reading rooms, warehouses, bars and cafes, while those with a greater slope are equipped with horizontal floors or host amphitheatres and simple circulation spaces.

The spatial organization naturally reverberates on the movement and perception of people who must accord the apparent freedom of movement with the need to compensate for the slopes with their own body, accentuating their self-awareness. At the same time, the reference to the landscape also influences the design tools. In particular, the design communication combines traditional drawing with the contour lines used in cartography, urban iconography and the *à poche* technique developed by Giovan Battista Nolli in his 1748 Map of Rome with the sections of the geologists with non-homogeneous parameters.

Considerations

'The landscape', wrote Franco Zagari: "is a living entity that changes over time, a sum of infinite individual actions that interpret and modify a place in accordance with or in contrast to habits, rules, laws" [Zagari 2006, p.13]. Architecture is a fundamental ingredient of this entity that exists as long as there are people to look at it and to reflect themselves in it. With an extraordinary narrative stratagem, Petrarch, after climbing Ventoso Mount, had already expressed the need to leaf through Augustine's Confessions, almost to reflect the visual order captured in the territory in the spiritual order to which his being aspired [Tosco 2012, pp. 109-110]. This possibility of capturing the human dimension in an overall vision is one of the secrets of the success of the *paesaggio*, a term that, with its implicit reference to the village and the human community, underlines precisely this aspect much better than the Anglo-Saxon 'landscape'.

Architecture, a sophisticated sign of human presence in the territory, therefore contributes in a fundamental way to the construction of the *paesaggio*. It contributes directly, as a physical presence that indicates human activity and participates in the transformation of the territory, but also indirectly, as a spatial experience and observation point that orient and frame the gaze of the observer. This second aspect is particularly present in the architecture of Le Corbusier. The Swiss master grasps the possibility of educating the gaze and perhaps also the body of those who seek the landscape. Many of his buildings constructed around a *promenade architecturale* are the demonstration of how a thoughtful sequence of spatial experiences can play a central cultural function in this discourse.

At the same time, architecture can adopt the landscape as a 'design material'. It can be an attitude limited to a few and secondary elements or it can involve the very conception of a building. For example, Koolhaas has used landscape as a medium to undermine a whole series of conventions linked to the practice of making architecture, to dimensional issues, to the relationship between interior and exterior, to the centrality of function, movement and narration with respect to form, etc. While imitating its "appearance", as in The Hague, or its 'form', as in Agadir or Paris, Koolhaas appears attracted above all by the processes of mutual interaction that these compositions can generate, in an attempt to imitate the principles of nature in an Aristotelian way without them being subjected to a formal imperative. His *reductio ad iconam* of the urban landscape appears particularly original, obviously

Fig. 10. Enric Miralles and Benedetta Tagliabue, Extension of Utrecht Civic Hall, 1997-2000 (photo by the author).

favoured by his great sensitivity towards the media, especially the popular ones. An icon, or an explicit and evident representation, exalts the referent and, at the same time, the distance that separates it from it: a distance that can take on critical and ironic connotations as in the case of the City Hall of The Hague, which seems to underline the secret desire of the Dutch to compete with the American metropolises or simply to have a mountain, as in the case of the University Library of Utrecht designed by Mecanoo in the shape of a hill (on the other hand, it is certainly not a coincidence that Dutch architects, who tread on emerged lands that exist only by virtue of the prodigies of engineers, reveal a peculiar sensitivity to landscape themes).

Precisely in Utrecht, Enric Miralles, with the new City Hall (fig. 10), seems to suggest a third way towards the landscape, or an Aristotelian approach to architectural mimesis. It is not only the attention to the paths and the interweaving of geometric and structural patterns but rather the general formal indeterminacy and porosity of the layers that set up the expansion of the old building (and that constantly link the near and the far, the old and the new, etc.) that suggest an architecture built with the means of the landscape. It is an architecture that recalls the words of Massimo Birindelli [1983, pp. 121-162] regarding the 'irreducibility to object' of the works that he defines as 'non-bourgeois' because they do not enjoy well-defined limits or mobility, like a painting in its frame. These works, like rock-cut architecture, show a

Fig. 11. Ateliers Jean Nouvel, Shaaran Hotel in Arabia Saudita, 2018-. View from virtual model. Courtesy of Ateliers Jean Nouvel.

Fig. 12. David Chipperfield Architects, Assemble, and Jane Irwin, Dairy Road Residential neighbourhood in Canberra, 2022. View from virtual model. Courtesy of David Chipperfield Architects, Assemble, and Jane Irwin.

great complexity as they are inextricably intertwined with the physical context near and far as well as the intangible ones of memory and uses. The consequence is that they arouses annoyance and irritation because they elude pre-established categories and, above all, make it impossible to 'reduce' them to a 'bourgeois' dimension as well as to an icon. Ultimately, such a proto-industrial attitude is fully demonstrated by many examples of 19th-century architectural and urban representation, where the authors used to extrapolate the buildings from their context, 'perfect' them and even provide them with the missing facades to insert them into an ideal typological catalogue for the modern city [Colonnese 2023, pp. 122-130].

However, compared to these projects from just a few decades ago, the raise of the environmental paradigm on the agenda of the Western world (and not only) has drastically changed the scenario today. The critical success and the ability to penetrate the collective imagination of a building like Stefano Boeri's Bosco Verticale (vertical forest) (2007-2014) in Milan have indicated the possibility, or perhaps the necessity, of chasing the forms of the landscape through a direct use of natural materials. It is a form of camouflage that mitigates the visual impact of the architecture itself and also brings environmental benefits, albeit with very high management costs. Boeri himself was called to replicate the same approach in other places and on a much larger scale, effectively orienting the architectural research of many other colleagues towards similar horizons.

At the same time, the crisis linked to the energy transition has been suggesting the study and recovery of technical solutions for the control of temperature and humidity that belong to an ancient bioclimatic culture and that end up influencing the architectural form itself and the settlement criteria in places. For example, the Shaaran hotel (fig. 11) designed by Jean Nouvel's Atelier in Saudi Arabia (2018-) as an architecture carved into a mountain takes up technologies and camouflage canons explored by communities that in the past had the need to hide from the sun as well as potential attackers. In other cases, it is instead simple 'greenwashing', the exaltation of vegetation to respond to the need to give an environmentalist connotation to the project. This seems to be the case, for example, of the residential complex in Canberra designed in 2022 by David Chipperfield Architects, Assemble and Jane Irwin and presented by perspective views full of lush plants that eventually hide the architecture itself (fig. 12); however, such a ploy could find justification in the Australian context for which the project is conceived.

Years ago, in the practice of architecture design offices, the insertion of vegetation was often the last ideal layer to be placed on the project's illustrations, often to manipulate the apparent size of buildings or to hide the less resolved parts. Today this attitude seems to have become exasperated, migrating from the field of representation to that of the actual building. A result is that architecture is starting to be conceived primarily as a three-dimensional frame to support and encourage the growth of natural elements. In this sense, a populist 'exhibition' of nature seems to be gaining ground. Despite its environmental benefits, it in fact legitimises a certain widespread disinterest in the traditional aesthetic questions within architecture and risks devaluing centuries of subtle reflections and refined artifices designed to stage the complex relationship between architecture and landscape.

Notes

[1] Biomorphic architecture, which imitates natural forms, has taken on anthropomorphic zoomorphic connotations since the Renaissance but more recently has turned towards geo-morphism. In this context, it has also addressed processes, developing a series of approaches characterized by various key words (Green, Eco, Passive, Sustainable, etc. up to the holistic concept of Biophilic Design) that focus on the optimization of energy resources and natural materials in the architectural production process. For a brief review, see Ahmed and Rasul 2023.

[2] In the years of Giovan Battista Piranesi and Johann Joachim Winkelman, both Marc-Antoine Laugier (1713-1769) in 1753 and Antoine Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy (1755-1849) in 1788 emphasize the central role of analogy and reorient imitation from the forms of nature to the rules of its formation, while Wolfgang Goethe reflects on its dynamic and evolutionary value through the concept of ''morphology''.

[3] Not to be confused with the tout est paysage of the Belgian architect Lucien Kroll (1927-2022) who embodies his original holistic and participatory approach to the project.

[4] I thank Lorenzo Moneta for this 'image'.

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