

# The Representation of Landscape through Drawings and Utopian Visions

Livio Sacchi

We open our reflection with an examination of the words or phrases that are the key of this third topic: 'representation', 'landscape', 'imaginary drawings' and 'utopian visions'. It seems rather superfluous to dwell on the first one, 'representation', since we architects and teachers of the disciplines of representation have already written and spoken so much about it. We know that it is a term of medieval origin that indicates the 'image' or the 'idea' or both. We shall therefore limit ourselves to recalling what Hans Georg Gadamer observed on this matter: "That the representation is a picture –and not the original itself– does not mean anything negative, any mere diminution of being, but rather an autonomous reality. So the relation of the picture to the original is basically quite different than in the case of a copy.

It is no longer a one-sided relationship. That the picture has its own reality means the reverse for what is pictured, namely that it comes to presentation in the representation. It presents itself there. [...] Every such presentation is an ontological event and occupies the same ontological level as what is represented. By being presented it experiences, as it were, an increase in being. The content of the picture itself is ontologically defined as an emanation of the original" [Gadamer 2006, p. 135].

With regard to the term 'landscape', however, it should be remembered that this is a polymorphous concept and, above all, one that varies over time. Leaving aside its literary meanings, but also those closer to us, proper to the visual arts or geography, it must be said that, as architects,

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our interests are mostly addressed to landscapes that are not necessarily natural, but mostly humanized and more or less homogenous –think about urban and suburban landscapes, whether infrastructural, industrial or agrarian– but also to various particular phenomena related to specific human settlements –slums, suburbs, the CBDs or Central Business Districts– at least partially shared with sociology and economics and increasingly shared with ecology and environmental sciences in general. Also variable over time is the aesthetic value attributed to the landscape, with the foreseeable repercussions on the concept of protection and with the introduction of the concept, theorized by Rosario Assunto, of the ‘wearing out’ [of the landscape] as culture, taste and sensitivity vary, with all the consequences on the concept of identity, and how the latter is the result of a more or less inclusive cultural construction. Finally, the relationship between landscape and design is of great interest: seen as an inseparable binomial on the one hand, for which landscape is nothing but a plan; but also with skepticism on the other; in a defensive and, in essence, anti-projectual logic.

As for the phrases ‘imaginary drawings’ and ‘utopian visions’, even if we take for granted that in our case the discourse should be limited to architectural aspects, the field of investigation remains so vast as to appear difficult to control. Drawings, particularly those in which the component linked to the imagination is most sensitive, have the advantage of enjoying absolute freedom, much greater than that granted to built architecture. Imagination is, in fact, properly “the possibility of evoking or producing images independently of the presence of the object to which they refer” [Abbagnano 1964], a fundamental condition for mental activity itself; and it is synonymous with fantasy, a Greek word that indicates the faculty of the mind to create images and therefore a creative, rather than reproductive imagination, even if romantic thought in the 19th century distinguished between fantasy (artistic) and imagination (non-artistic). As for the freedom inherent in imagination or fantasy, architecture, understood as the art of constructing buildings, clearly has much less, subject as it is to a series of constraints; certainly less than arts such as painting or sculpture. The expression ‘imaginary drawings’ should, however, be understood as something that is an ‘effect of the imagination’ and, as such, ‘has no basis in reality’, even though the work of us architects is precisely that of imagining for the purposes of construction, that is, for the purposes of transforming what has been imagined into reality.

Finally, more specific than ‘imaginary drawings’ is the term ‘utopian visions’, which evidently brings us back to the notion of utopia. This is a theme that architects have been dealing with for at least five centuries. In fact, the publication of the booklet *De optimo reipublicae statu, deque nova Insula Utopia*, a kind of philosophical novelette written by Thomas More, the great opponent of Henry VIII, canonized in 1935, dates back to 1516. Like Plato’s much older *Republic* or the later *City of the Sun* written by the Dominican Thomas Campanella in 1601, utopia has triggered endless and fascinating studies, conducted primarily on a graphic level, but also on literary and cinematic levels: just think of science fiction. The ambiguity inherent in the philosophical concept of utopia, mainly linked to the difficulties of its implementation, also recognized by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who distinguished between scientific socialism and utopian socialism, is also present in architectural and urban utopia. Karl Mannheim, on the other hand, in his *Ideologie und Utopie* of 1929, considers utopia as something that is destined to be realized; utopia is rather seen as a theory that is realized, while ideologies are understood as transcendent ideas that fail to implement the plans contained in them. Stating his opinion on the controversial issue, Nicola Abbagnano wrote: “In general, one can say that Utopia represents an ideal correction or integration of an existing political or social or religious situation. This correction can remain, as has often happened and happens, in the state of a simple aspiration or generic sign, resolving itself in a kind of evasion from lived reality. But it can also happen that utopia becomes a force for the transformation of existing reality and assumes enough body and consistency to transform itself into an authentic innovative will and to find the means of innovation. As a rule, the word is understood more in reference to the former possibility than to the latter” [Abbagnano 1964], recalling, among other things, the scepticism inherent in the thinking of philosophers such as Horkheimer, Adorno and, above all, Marcuse: “The critical theory of society possesses no concepts which could bridge the gap between the present and its future; holding no promise and showing no success, it remains negative” [Marcuse 1964, p. 257].

The imaginary drawings or utopian visions in the field of architecture deducible from history are nearly infinite in number. Limiting ourselves to the most important ones of the 20th century, we must mention Tony Garnier’s *Cité industrielle* of 1904; Otto Wagner’s *Unbegrenzte Großstadt* of 1910-1911; Antonio Sant’Elia’s *Futurist*



Fig. 1. Antonio Sant'Elia, *La Città Nuova, Studi per la stazione ferroviaria di Milano*, 1914. <<https://www.aboutartonline.com/un-architetto-provocatorio-antonio-santelia-e-il-manifesto-per-larchitettura-futurista-verso-la-modernita/>> accessed on 25 november 2024.

Città Nuova of 1914; Ludwig Hilberseimer's *Modern City* of 1924 and Le Corbusier's *Ville radieuse* of 1925; Frank Lloyd Wright's *Broadacre City* of 1935; and *New Babylon* by Constant (Constant Anton Nieuwenhuys), designed between 1959 and 1977. Also worth mentioning are the proposals advanced by architects as diverse as Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe, Adalberto Libera, Armando Brasini, Hugh Ferriss, the aforementioned Archigram group, Archizoom, Superstudio, Hans Hollein, Richard Buckminster Fuller, Yona Friedman, Paolo Soleri, John Hejduk, Maurizio Sacripanti, Luigi Pellegrin, Paul Rudolph, Kenzo Tange, the Japanese Metabolists, Aldo Rossi, Franco Purini, Arduino Cantàfora, Massimo Scolari, Franz Prati, Giangiacomo d'Ardia, Lebbeus Woods and many others. Finally, we cannot fail to mention Vema, the city imagined between Verona and Mantua by Purini himself and a group

of young Italian architects and presented at the 2006 Venice Biennale. What is the function of such representations of more or less man-made landscapes? Excluding that of an avowedly 'planning' type, that is, one that precedes or anticipates a building process, it is clearly a function of stimulating creativity, that is, of prefiguring what will only become possible much later, thanks to the development, over time, of building technologies and techniques: a function that we could define as 'prophetic', if it were not preferable to limit the use of this adjective to that which is, more or less directly, inspired by God.

Hence, there are three more questions, corresponding to an equal number of possible examples, to help us in our reflection. Did the aforementioned *Città Nuova* by Sant'Elia play a prophetic role, or at least an anticipatory one, with respect to what then was materialized in the



Fig. 2. Vincent Callebaut Architectures, Paris Smart City, 2050. Courtesy Vincent Callebaut Architectures. <<https://amazingarchitecture.com/futuristic-paris-smart-city-2050-by-vincent-callebaut-architectures>> accessed on 25 november 2024.

course of the 20th century? Perhaps it did, although it would seem to concern not so much our country [Italy], but rather what was determined and continues to be determined in other continents: in America or Asia, but also, more recently, in Africa. Can the Illinois, or Mile High Skyscraper designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1956 also be interpreted as a prophecy of what would happen in general in the future? More specifically, did it anticipate a tower like Adrian Smith+Gordon Gill Architecture's Kingdom Tower currently under construction in Jeddah? Perhaps so, not least of all because it looks very much like it, although the latter will be not a mile, but a kilometer in height, and although the construction site has been at a standstill for several years due to some unclear legal issues involving the project's financiers; completion of the building, which as we know will be the tallest in the world, is nevertheless scheduled for 2028. After all, Wright himself, with foresight, said that if we can't afford to build it now, we can't afford not to build it in the future". Was it that Archigram's Walking City and Instant City became a "force for transformation," that took on "body and substance" and "found the means of innovation," as Abbagnano wrote, to the point that it made it possible for Renzo

Fig. 3. Frank Lloyd Wright, illustration and data sheet for The Illinois. <<https://www.artbook.com/blog-frank-lloyd-wright-skyscraper.html>> accessed on 25 november 2024.

Fig. 4. Adrian Smith + Gordon Gill Architecture, Kingdom-Tower, Jeddah. <<https://citymagazine.si/en/the-tallest-building-in-the-world-will-be-1-kilometer-high-kingdom-tower/>> accessed on 25 november 2024.

Piano and Richard Rogers to build the Centre Pompidou in the centre of Paris in 1977? For the third time, the answer is, perhaps: yes.

The representation of utopian or invented landscapes has always interested architects. Italians, in particular, have dedicated themselves to it with passion and often excellent results: just think of some of Leonardo's drawings. But realized utopia has never really taken root in our country, apart from a few splendid urban plans, from Palmanova in Friuli to Grammichele in Sicily. Other exceptions are, for example, the European cities of Friedrichstadt, which Frederick I of Prussia had built just outside Berlin for the French Huguenots after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, or Herrnhut, founded by Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf in 1738 in Saxony for the Hussites of the Moravian Church. Not so in the New World, where there are numerous examples of utopian communities, of both religious and socialist inspiration, that were actually built and lived in. But in these communities, the impact with the built reality often defused the architecture of any subversive charge, leaving the revolution—more social than architectural—almost exclusively a matter of design. Think, for example, of Shaker villages such as Sabbathday Lake at Poland Spring in Maine, built between the end of the 18th century and the first decades of the 19th century; or the Shaker town of Pleasant Hill in Kentucky, or the Hancock Shaker Village in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, dating back to the early 19th century. But also to the seven linear villages of Amana in Iowa, built on religious, as much as openly communist ideological foundations, which survived in self-sufficiency until 1932. Or to Robert Owen's New Harmony in Indiana. Or to the village of Zoar, in Ohio, founded in 1817 by the *Society of Separatists of Zoar*, a group of German Pietists originally from Württemberg (the name derives from that of the village where Lot took refuge, with his wife and daughters, when fleeing from Sodom), still inhabited by some families today. Finally, it would be interesting to analyze the motivations behind the frequent didactic experiments on the subject held in many Italian schools of architecture. This choice of proposing to students the

**THE ILLINOIS**  
 MILE-HIGH CANTILEVER  
 SKY-CITY TO HONOR  
 THE STATE OF ILLINOIS  
 AND CITY OF CHICAGO  
 528 FLOORS FROM GRADE TO LAND-  
 ING OF TOP FLOOR ELEVATOR

**MEMORIAL TO**  
LOUIS H SULLIVAN SON OF CHICAGO  
 FIRST MADE THE TALL BUILDING TALL  
**ELISHA OTIS**  
 INVENTOR OF THE UPENDED STREET  
**JOHN ROEBLING**  
 FIRST STEEL IN TENSION ON THE  
 GRAND SCALE, THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE  
**LIDGERWOOD** NAVAL ARCHITECT  
 FIRST OCEAN LINER WHEEL, MAKES  
 IT WHAT IT IS TODAY.  
**COIGNET & MONIER** OF FRANCE  
 REINFORCED CONCRETE  
 THE BODY OF OUR MODERN WORLD

**SALUTATIONS**  
**EDUARDO TORROJA** ENGINEER, SPAIN  
**PROFESSORS BEGGS-CROSS** SCIENCE OF CONTINUITY  
**PROFESSOR PIER LUIGI NERVI** ENGINEER, ITALY  
**DR. J.J. POLIVKA** ENGINEER UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
**MAILLART** ENGINEER SWITZERLAND

**FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT** SON OF CHICAGO  
 HONORARY DEGREE OF ENGINEERING  
 TECHNISCHE HOCHSCHULE OF DARMSTADT, GERMANY  
 HONORARY DEGREE OF ENGINEERING  
 TECHNISCHE HOCHSCHULE OF ZURICH, SWITZERLAND

FIRST SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLE OF  
 CONTINUITY HORIZONTAL DERIVED FROM STEEL  
 IN TENSION APPLIED TO EARTHQUAKE-PROOF  
 CONSTRUCTION, THE PRINCIPLE OF THE CANTILEVER  
 VERTICAL APPLIED TO THE TALL BUILDING.  
 THE FIRST TAPROOT FOUNDATION.

**STATISTICS:**

GROSS AREA	18,462,000 SQ. FT.
NET RENTABLE AREA	15,047,000 SQ. FT.
PROBABLE COST	70% CONVENTIONAL COST PER SQUARE FOOT
OCCUPANCY	55,000 SEATSPER
TOTAL OCCUPANCY IN AUDIENCE HALLS	75,000 SEATSPER
GRAND TOTAL	130,000 SEATSPER
PARKING	15,000 CARS 100 HELICOPTERS

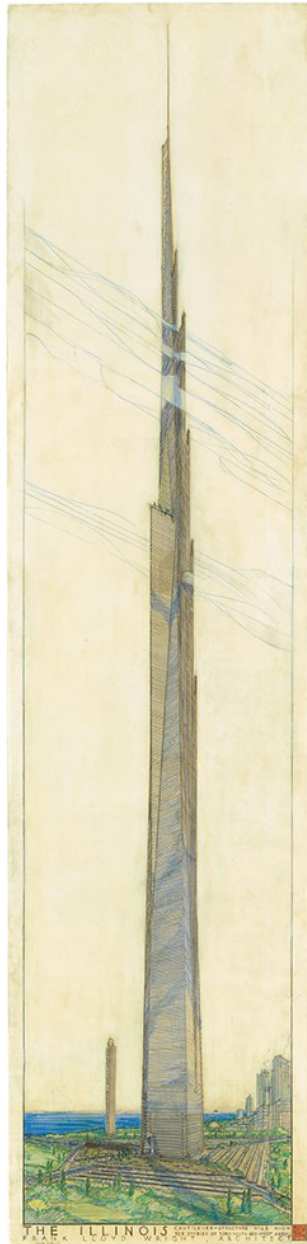




Fig. 5. Archigram visionary architecture. <<https://www.pencil.com/gallery/1.php?show=7204&p=687304273563>> accessed on 25 november 2024.

execution of imaginary representations is probably due to the practical difficulties they encounter when dealing with the concrete reality of the project, a reality made up, as we have already mentioned, of constraints, regulations, budgets, structural and plant engineering requirements, etc.; but which also appears to be interpreted as an escape from the profession of architect, an “evasion from lived reality,” as Abbagnano said, on whose psychological motivations we should perhaps reflect.

### New Horizons

New horizons for the representation of imaginary and utopian landscapes are opening up thanks to artificial intelligence and, in particular, to the widespread use of platforms such as, for example, the Midjourney AI image generator; a formidable text-to-image tool for the conception of imaginary landscapes and new utopias. But the same applies to *Dall-E*, *Adobe Firefly*, *Stable Diffusion*, *DreamStudio* or *Leonardo*, all platforms based on artificial intelligence, which help us explore new fields more or less pre-figured by our imagination; for example, issues as novel as they are, perhaps, a bit gratuitous: what would a feminist or anti-racist landscape, city or architecture look like? Or, moving to a different order, what would a parametric landscape look

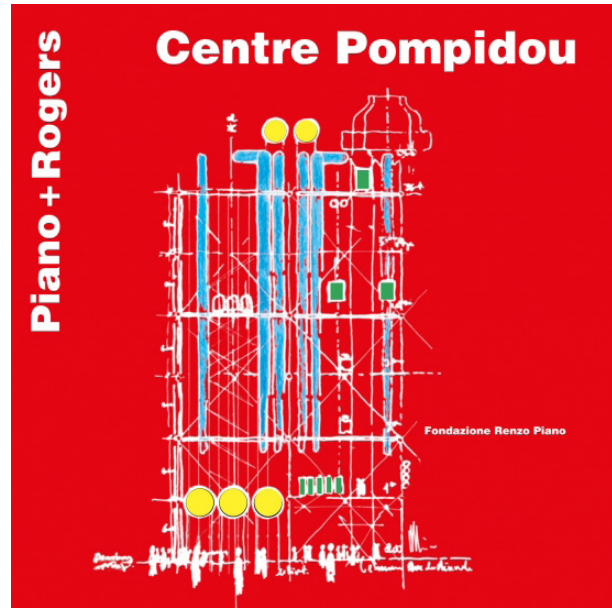


Fig. 6. Ninth monography cover of Renzo Piano Foundation. <<https://www.fondazionerenzopiano.org/it/book/centre-pompidou-piano-rogers/>> accessed on 25 november 2024.

like? Even if artificial intelligence produces new problems—from how one defends oneself against the visual garbage that constantly floods us from the web, to how one exercises criticism, in the etymological sense of the term, against such images—it nevertheless offers results that one can hardly fail to find interesting and, moreover, not too different from the scenarios outlined by the (non-artificial) intelligence of the best architects. In short, design has changed from what it used to be even just a few decades ago. We have moved from a phase in which our representations and the planning that went with them took for granted hierarchically ordered constructions within recognizable configurations, to a new phase in which control has, or at least seems to have, been lost, making way for the dynamism of increasingly experimental and destabilizing transformations. And this is not an updated re-proposal of what the avant-gardes had outlined at the beginning of the 20th century, or at least, not only. On the one hand, in fact, contemporary design cannot but be big data informed,

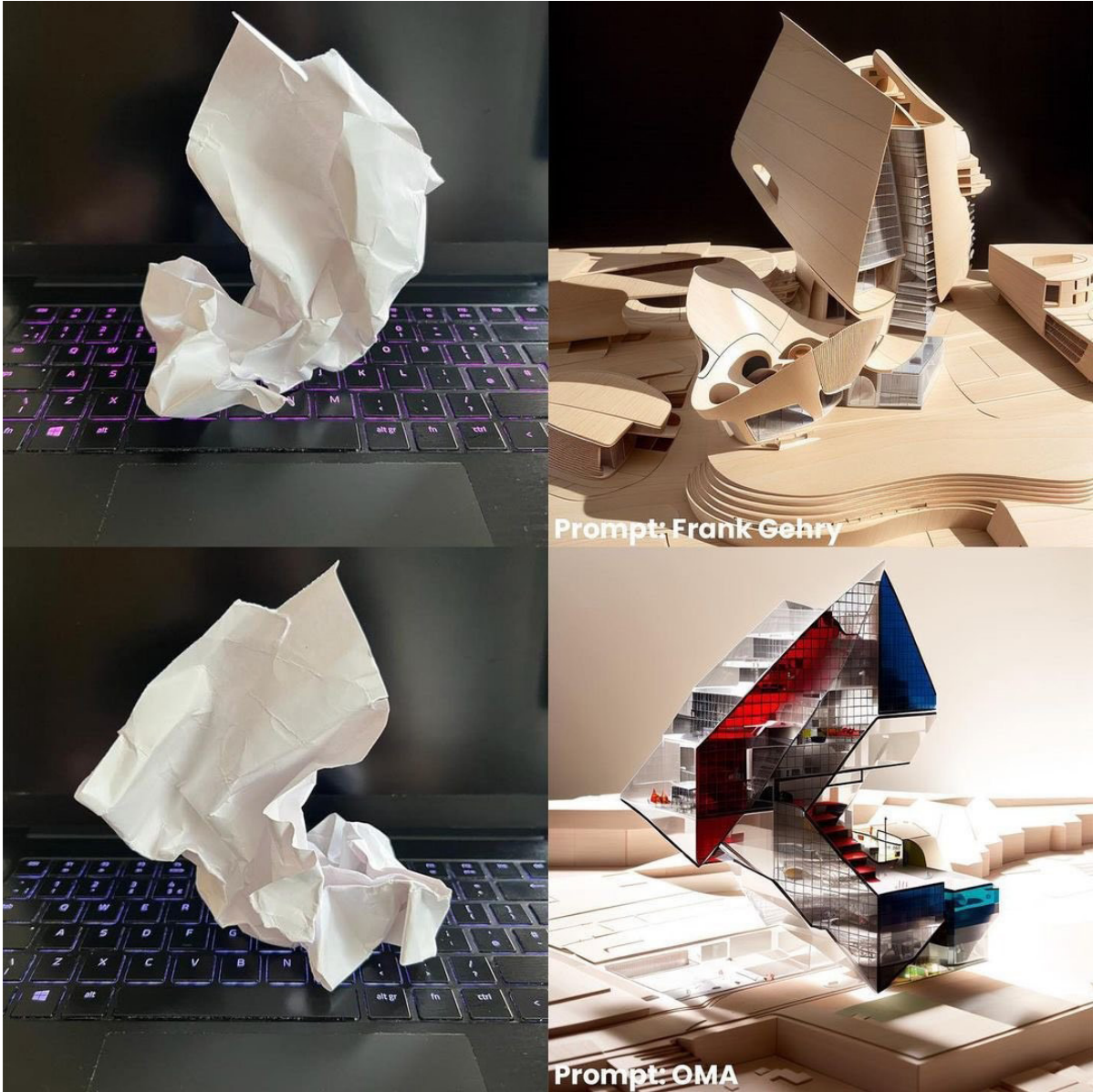


Fig. 7. Architectural concept works by Tim Fu generated from crumpled paper, massing, and sketch with using @lookx.ai\_official. <<https://x.com/parametricarch/status/1695114160944685484/photo/2>> accessed on 25 november 2024.

that is, based on the data that we all more or less consciously provide and that make such buildings and cities responsive, that is, responsive and interactive; on the other, smart technologies and machine learning, in turn, lead to different forms of cognitive design, in some way at the intersection between man and the environment, capable of managing complexity with the help of artificial intelligence and thus of directing planning and governance. But even if artificial intelligence were to start delivering the desired results in solving complex problems, it would not be enough. A technocratic perspective assumes that everything can be analyzed and solved, ignoring the human factor with all its unpredictability: the buildings, cities and territories in which we live are instead, first and foremost, complex anthropic systems, within which it is essential to intercept the desires and expectations of those who inhabit them, in ways that, in

addition to being scientific and rational, must also be emotional and participatory. This is a demanding challenge, which passes through a process of deconstruction, reinvention and re-signification. A challenge that, for us architects and for our schools of architecture, may not be too far removed from that taken up by painters in the second half of the 19th century when, with the advent of photography, they began to question what they were doing with it, and which forced them, in order not to be relegated to the sidelines, to take new paths, implementing different strategies from those they had been using until then, thus revolutionizing their art and, more generally, the whole of society. It was Renzo Piano, with his usual simplicity, who said: "In my job you have to be a bit of a utopian, always believing that our work will change the world. Even if it doesn't..." [Rampini 2002].

#### Author

Livio Sacchi, livio.sacchi@archiworld.it

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