

Atlante urbano delle aree dismesse di Monza

a cura di Altragorà
con un saggio di Francesca Rausa

Ringraziamenti

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Introduzione

Le schede di approfondimento

1 L'ospedale (vecchio) Umberto I

2 L'ex Civica Scuola Serale Artigiana Paolo Borsa

The city of values

di Francesca Rausa

The urban situation of a population is strictly linked to the beliefs and culture of the community. The two are interdependent and interrelated as none of the two could transcend the other.



Figure 1: Laugier Essai sur l'Architecture, frontispiece by C. Eisen

Anthony Vidler, in his article, points out the first typology of architecture as a one directly inspired to nature, “imitative of the fundamental order of Nature itself”, which was reproduced with the filter of ideal perfect geometry; Laugier for example, says that the city resembles a forest.

Specifically, the first kind of shelter ever used by man of which we have witness was the cave: not only a place to take rest and refuge from the external environment, but also a place where to exercise beliefs and rituals linked to the basic needs. In fact, the motives that drove man toward the worship of nature were mainly survival and food, together with the fear of death and the celebration of it. This hasn't change through all these ages: our necessities are always the same, even if, in particular in Western countries, some of them are more complicated and some others are induced by the society condition (societal environment), that continues creating illusions and fostering unreal examples.

Architecture developed from a direct imitation of nature: columns resemble trees, for instance. Pyramids are an example of how an extremely organised society as the Egyptian was able to realise such a magnificent structure due only to the worshipping of Deities, as we know that the Pharaoh was believed to be in close contact with Gods.

In the Grecae polis the architecture was dominated by the laws of geometry. Temples were resized -compared to Egypt architecture- because they were done and used by men, but still, they were the most important and imposing buildings and had played a crucial role for the community inhabiting the city. They were places of exercise of religion, but they were accompanied by voids in the urban pattern with a specific role, i.e. the setting of the most important discussions and political confrontations. Although the polis is commonly described as the first democratic organisation, it can be instead delineated as

an elitist democracy, as we know that many inhabitants weren't taking part to important decisions, whereas the rituals in these cultural and religious places were accessible to anyone. People worshipped Gods as a natural behaviour, asking for mercy and prosperity, continuing to celebrate death.

The european city as well developed around these two poles, secular and religious. In the medieval city the main streets were going from the political and religious centres to the external walls, and residential parts developed all around as a consequence. Graham Shane tells us that Foucault detects two tendencies in each heterotopy, a compensatory and an illusory side: this is clearly visible in this poles that have a spiritual dimension – an illusion – and not only in the european ones; in fact Foucault cites the Islamic hammam, the Jewish bath houses and the Christian baptistery.

Being composed of a part of deviance-suppression codes and one of utopian illusion codes, these places are definitely Heterotopies of Crisis, the first kind pointed out by Shane. They can be considered as “*sacred or forbidden places reserved for individuals who are in a state of crisis in relation to the society in which they live*”.

Also Renaissance palaces, attesting the new cultural setting, i.e. the rising of the bourgeoisie, are considered an heterotopy by Shane, in the action of miniaturising and mirroring the society: “*the ideal beauty remained a self-closing system nested inside another such system*”.

With the conquest of reason, during the Enlightenment, mankind started to impose in a stronger way his rules on nature, recognising and reproducing its shapes thanks to the intellect and the instruments and tools he was able to produce. Laugier, in fact, says that the forest we spoke about before needed to be tamed and brought to a rational order by means of the gardener's art: the Garden city was the perfect model in the late eighteenth century. A rational order dominated over the layout of the city. Man was the maker of the world, but also builder/smith of the instruments from which the world was built, as Frampton tells us “*the homo faber is artificer and tool-maker*”; this till fabrication itself disappeared into the product and became an end in itself “*since pure science was not interested in the appearance of objects, but in the capacity to reveal the intrinsic structure lying behind all appearance*”. From the Renaissance, man separated from the material fabrication of its art, distinguishing himself from the craftsman and practicing a complete intellectual activity, followed only in a second moment by a material act. Frampton brings Brunelleschi as one of the main examples of a man of invention. The scientific field was the most important during the Renaissance and from this period on it started to condition and dominate arts.

After the Second Industrial revolution the society changed entirely, the values that characterised european culture shifted on a scientific plane: the new precise and efficient machines substituted the classical trinity of commodity, firmness and delight. These machines were complete, sealed and autonomous processes, closed to the environment.

These characteristics are clearly visible in architecture, since, as Vidler asserts “*architecture was now equivalent to the range of mass-production objects*”, the elements of the classical trinity were substituted by economy, modernity and purity. The building became a machine in itself, capable of satisfying the needs of the population, driven by economics.

In this period, till the rising of what Vidler calls Third Typology, buildings reflected the new tendencies and beliefs spread throughout the whole population. They're based mainly on a scientific approach on nature, since Darwin's studies on species in 1859, on optimistic definitions and calculations on reality: man believed he was able to have finally found himself and the capability to define its role on earth. This control was exercised on nature and on the places he lived in, buildings became sealed machines, complete and aiming to perfection in precision.

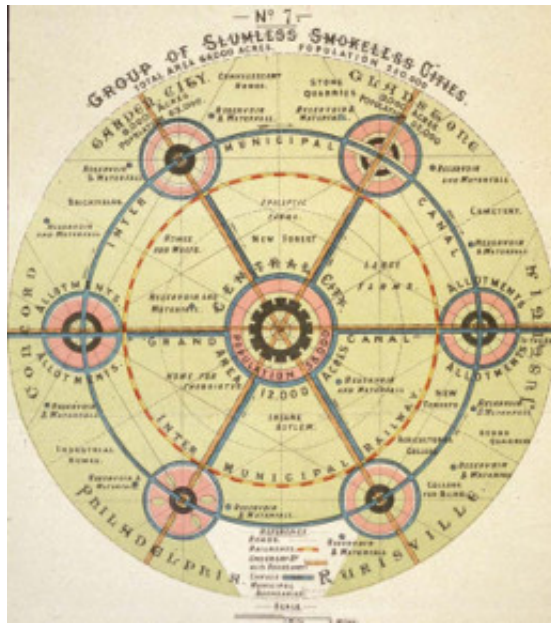


Figure 2: Sir Ebenezer Howard's Garden City Plan 1902

Tom Schumacher says that “*Modern architecture promised a utopia fashioned after the machine*”: the building is seen as a body with life of its own, with no references to the economic conditions, use or culture around it. According to the author's opinion, the general application of the principle of sealed building operated during the modern period is incorrect as not applied specifically. Modernist ignored all those constraints imposed by the context, both concerning volumes already present but also urban voids.

Foucault talks about Heterotopies of deviance (what Shane calls H2) as crucial instruments of change making the modernisation of society possible. People in jail were corrected to behave in a socially accepted manner, studied to be understood, hoping that “*these rigid rules and sequencing would become ingrained in the inmate's psyche, reforming his values and work habits*”.

Dominating actors were imposing their values to the society, confining those who chose not to follow their leads and acting psychologically to correct them. A series of rules established by the moral beliefs of the powerful ones were imposed as absolute in these heterotopies, and from these spaces to the whole city.

The urban setting is the Cine Città, in Shane's opinion, is ordering and sequencing urban functions in enclaves connected with efficient transportations. The Panopticon is a clear example of heterotopy as it miniaturises, mirrors and reverse the dispersive characteristics of the Cinecittà being closed, compressed and centrally controlled. The skyscraper directly derives from this jail, as it segregates its multiple functions along the vertical armature.

The optimistic modern approach led to a mechanism of continuous mass consumption: Frampton mentions Arendt reflections on mass society, as she recognises that the rise of the social impoverished private and public life, breaking down all shelters.

Those beliefs strongly related to science were eventually abandoned and a huge net of new ones was introduced in the society. None of them was strong enough to permeate

the whole culture as the use of illusions. Technologies have always been used to produce instruments and complex structures and it is true that their use in architecture underwent a fast development, but in fact they cannot be considered as values and beliefs.

Heterotopies of Illusion are the third category Shane talks about, where illusion dominates on deviance. Through illusions, dominating actors can regulate “*values and images in a urban system manipulating the icons within communication systems*”: this kind of heterotopy, so described, is clearly an evolution of the one of deviance, where citizens were conscious of being manipulated, though, but with a more subtle imposition of values and principles through illusions.

The process that led human being to identify himself or herself in the reality he/she lived in in this last heterotopy was mechanised. Lacan’s theory of the *mirror of society*, taken by Freud, described individuality as the act of distinguishing from the others with feedback mechanisms as the family.

“*Heterotopias of illusion allow the creation of virtual, mechanised mirror-spaces, embedded networks of communication*”.

Instruments introduced by man himself led to a mechanisation of reality seen through optical systems, creating cinemas and television, later on diffused not only in public spaces, boulevard and theatres but also in the domestic walls. The plagiarism of the world of values and images started acting directly in every house. Gilles Deleuze attacks the excessive automatism of this kind of society that allows too much communication, surveillance and control on public opinion.

The city built during Modernism is transformed, according to Deleuze, in a set of conceptual networks and constructions called rhizomes: a self-organising structure with different shapes and functions according to the environment and the needs. The rhizome represents the heterotopy of illusion, hosting multiple actors.

Heterotopies of illusion are regulated by the system of production and consumption, joined with the communication systems, developing in shopping malls, departments store and boulevards but also in private houses. As they are changing really quickly, according to dominant actors of society, their rhizomic structure lets this fast change happen and there is no time enough for any value to be rooted inside a culture.

Only when the organisation is not imposed by dominant actors, but organised from the bottom up, as in Christiania in Copenhagen, it is possible to produce and raise strong values as respect, love for nature and for the human being itself. These values were completely forgotten in the TeleCittà, in favour of economical progress, disregarding history and ideals of beauty and community.