
IDEAS FOR THE RICOVERY OF AN URBAN STREET

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ABSTRACT

It is not uncommon to note that urban empty spaces are thought of as mere void, as poor remains with no content, meant only for serving movement of people and cars. Depriving the road of its role as *agora*, as set of events and episodes of urban life and simply turn it into a movement space, or even into a cars domain, can cause large and dangerous outcomes on the urban landscape. The disappearance of pedestrian areas makes it difficult for them to move, causing the exclusion of those who cannot drive and voiding any broader use of social significance. Moreover, a road meant for cars is a dangerous scenario for pedestrians. This makes it necessary to think of the road as part of the urban landscape, not mere residual space or gap between “full” spaces. It should be considered as an event capable of giving a new and broader meaning to urban fragments, giving them new status, more fertile content.

Keywords: Urban Scenarios, Pedestrians, urban life.

INTRODUCTION

The urban street has recently become an empty, poor landscape pervaded with a sense of silent apathy, as it is easy to notice.

As Rem Koolhaas pointed out, a street is only “residue, organizational device, a mere segment of the continuous metropolitan plane” and “the exterior of the city is no longer a collective theater where it happens; there’s no collective it left” Koolhaas (1995).

This erosion of the urban landscape, which loses its status of *agora*, of setting in which, as Espuelas noted, the course of time and human creation transpose, is the outcome of an increased use of cars. A new *forma urbis*, the new scenarios resulting from this vast and powerful but far more harmful event seem to confirm the claim of considering urban setting as poor mere domain of wheels and engines. As noted by Federico Parolotto, “the progressive increase in car traffic has caused a sort of reversal of the traditional urban patterns in which density of buildings developed according to the mobility flows (...) The presence of cars and the need for fast movement introduced bypass systems and ring roads which have altered the shape of cities (...) This phenomenon is what John Withlegg called a Faustian compromise for which cities have given up on urban quality in favor of faster traffic flows.” Parolotto (2012). That is, cars allow an expansion of the urban realm, amend it of chains and constraints for a limited extension, based on movement on foot which characterized ancient cities. Moreover, cars exacerbate this phenomenon, claiming an increasing and more pervasive power on the urban realm and more and more space. Urban landscape expansion is sharpened and implies costly waste of soil.

As noted by Parolotto, the first “car landscapes”, urban segments designed focusing on cars and “vehicular accessibility”, were created in the United States, Parolotto (2009). Being the outcome of a city model based on pervasive use of private cars, this urban landscape is eroded by a continuous and voracious expansion of void and breaks. It should be noted that an exaggerated increase in void, preponderant on full, causes an erosion of the urban scenario and its texture, and weakens the cohesion of its parts.

Bridges, ramps, junctions, parking areas, driveways: they all evoke a sparse scenario, broken by poor acute empty ruptures, often unplanned, and prevent a real and strong cohesion between the parts of the urban realm. This expansion of breaks, parking areas, undefined segments of urban texture, echoes and causes the birth of an extensive network of urban spaces, of voids, with their dry anomie and lack of clear contents. Bruno Secchi calls it “lack of a meaningful experience” of the urban landscape, caused by a dull semantic poverty of an “open space (...) expanded enormously” which “seems to be pulverized into a set of episodic fragments linked by spaces lacking a clear nature”, Secchi (2008).

This mosaic of empty breaks, residue, separate, non-cohesive areas is pervaded by a sense of anomie, where, as noted by Rem Koolhaas analyzing “bigness” as a flaw of modernity – “beyond a certain critical mass,” the size of a building, but this theorem can be extended to urban areas as well – “can no longer be controlled by a single architectural gesture, or even by any combination of architectural gestures”, Koolhaas (1995).

The same author also notes that “the elevator--with its potential to establish mechanical rather than architectural connections--and its family of related inventions render null and void the classical repertoire of architecture. Issues of composition, scale, proportion, detail are now moot”, Koolhaas (1995). Extending this theorem to the urban realm, it can

be argued that cars censure and empty the rigorous and composed philosophy which used to permeate pre-modern cities giving them an essence of cohesive and well-conceived scenario, full of notes and content. In a modern, sparse urban area, cut with breaks which make a real and fruitful cohesion hard both in terms of composition and of movement, the only tenuous and poor cohesion is given by a chance of driving cars on large boulevards to overcome the breaks and voids which plough through the urban scenario, with little time waste. Cars and their capacity of quick “mechanical connection” are the only evidence, the only hint for users to be in a unique and consistent context, even with a poor meaning lacking coherence. Moreover, it can be seen that in a scenario excavated by large breaks, often empty and devoid of a strong character, moving by car, together with a new blurred and vague way to live the urban space, lessens the sense of anomie and boredom emanating from vast, empty and neglected areas, and giving a less poor and dull emotional content to the urban realm that can no longer summon any note.

That sense of anomie, the lack of content emerging from the urban landscape and from its voids, is sharpened by the claim to consider the urban area as a robot. This theory is the culmination of a faith in a utilitarianism as backbone of a new order with which modern thought tries to give a sense to the world, soothing its chaos.

Two harmful outcomes radiate from such acute faith in a powerful function. Thinking of an urban area as a robot implies that its parts are devoted to a single given main task. The road is so considered as mere “space for movement” and loses its status as a set of a large range of events. Moreover, a not uncommon tendency to regard the urban area as a car domain and a growing use of cars cause an sharp increase of dangerous phenomena (noise, noxious dust and gases, waste of soil, human deaths and injuries due to collisions with cars) which create an empty and poor urban landscape which users, i.e. pedestrians, consider unfamiliar and avoid lingering in it. As Appleyard noted, an increase in the number of cars causes a sharp drop in the number and type of uses and events which the urban landscape is setting for. This implies not only a poorer landscape, but also an extensive erosion of the social body. Moreover, considering function as predominant canon of the ideational path deprives the work of an important part of its meaning, reducing its poetic essence to mere vain ornament, therefore causing and sharpening the anomie which permeates the urban landscape.

Hence, thinking of a street as an urban element whose function is enhancing car movement, setting regulations and standards deriving from this view as the sole focus of the ideational path, is the cause of a chaotic, poor, drained urban landscape.

LANDSCAPE URBANISM

Restoration of urban voids implies healing their sharp and wide crisis as well as their anomie and lack of content as primary task. This task implies developing a new and far-reaching way of thinking, based on the landscape, in its truest sense as outcome of the forming power of people and nature, echo and proof of a permanent potential union of a site and its users, and from which the site borrows the vast range of possible content of which it is pervaded.

Chris Waldheim, quoting Stan Allen, notes that “landscape is emerging as a model for urbanism”, Waldheim (2006), and as the works by James Corner or Rem Koolhaas indicate, a model for a cultured restoration of voids, residual areas, scraps of a voracious urban expansion and for the elements of urban landscape which seem domain of chaos.

Landscape should claim a role as setting and meaning of a recovery action of the urban street. As background, it urges to consider a street as part of a vast and urban segment, dense of notes, content, echoing the perpetual changing of the union between people and the site.

This refers to a meaning of an urban area as a medium and as outcome of the constantly changing and maturing of a community and its true and pure essence. The true meaning of a street cannot be contained in the data regarding only shape and size, and it does not extend only from an alleged transportation capacity, from the number of cars it is supposed or expected to serve, or from the content and impact of the connections it creates within an urban area. The true meaning of a road emanates from its being part of an urban landscape with its own essence, its true and strong spirit, its story. However, this argument leads to think of the street as part of the true nature of an area, as an event belonging to the process from which the true and pure sense of the site derives.

Changing the status of a street, thus, implies changing the meaning of an urban area. It is not difficult to note that if a work, both as an event that changes the aspect of a site, and as promoting a certain range of possible ways of use, is regardless of the context, it prevails on it and makes it poorer and emptier. In case of requalification of an urban void,

the link between the work and the site is even stronger. Authors need to infuse spirit and poetic inspiration in their thinking of an urban void in order to give the site a new meaning, avoiding neglecting its real and deep essence. That essence is moreover reputed to be good starting point from which to infer the range of possible uses of which the void, the area recovered is expected to be the setting.

It is not vain to note, in this regard, that ways of use not suitable to the true essence of an area, will obscure it, emptying it of its meaning.

The ways of use of a void or a street should therefore derive from a deep examination of the site, and above all, should descend from the uses and events that thrive in the “full” parts of an urban area to be recovered; this allows the new realm to be given a status and a sense of positive event aimed at a broad interplay between privacy and urban landscape.

These theories about recovery of a void as an idea to give a site a new status consider these actions as a phase of the changing of an area, and therefore, consistent with its present state.

Morot exposes this theory by offering a metaphor, coined by Corajoud, of a conversation to which a person cannot take part without taking other people’s opinions into account, and without having the aim to bring new content, new arguments, in order to make conversation prosper, Morot (1999).

Thus it is right to consider a work project as a tortuous process whose starting point is a strict analysis of the true essence of a site. Authors need to be able to hear the voice of the site. This should pervade the vast number of possible phonemes and canons on which its poetic sense is based and from which the work needs to borrow a strict and strong meaning. In conceiving their work, authors should, therefore, hear the voice of the site and the voice of its future users with their claims and the ways of use they expect or wish, and mediate between these and the arguments and theories on which their philosophy is based.

Giving a new status, a new note or content to the spirit of a site implies making the connection between people and the site stronger and more fruitful. In this sense, the landscape is also the true meaning of a work. This means giving the work a suspended sense of temporary status, of open path, of a setting likely to give rise to an equally vast range of possible views and opinions, and primarily of open arena for a numerous fruitful ways of use. This opening, which does not imply a dull anomie but baking out of a claim to establish a priori the ways of use of each piece or part of an urban landscape, allows the enhancing of the union between people and the site giving users a chance to “interpret” the site, and to write its fate and stories. This gives the site a new status and a more extensive and fertile meaning, resulting from the vast range of possible contents with which people will wrap it, that is of the various ways in which they are its users and authors. An urban void should therefore evoke a sense of discovery, of open scenario presenting itself both as an entity to be explored, and as a medium through which the site can be experienced.

This new perspective and new meaning as open and versatile scenario give site new weight on its users’ lives, enhancing its sense as arena in which strong cohesion between the people and the true and pure essence pervading a city can ripen.

THE VOICE OF THE SITE

How can we understand the sense of a site? Girot thinks that we should first of all feel the site, experience a emotional and empathetic discovery of the area, and take note of thoughts and opinions in embryo, as they develop.

This phase should be followed by a rigorous analysis of causes and forces from which the site descends its notes and the contents of its essence. This is the Grounding phase, in which authors neglect neither history, nor economic or social ferment, nor soil or climate, nor the characteristics of the site, nor, as Girot noted, its more aerial contents, such as customs, rituals, events, beliefs and opinions of which the site is or was a setting, Girot (1999).

This examination should primarily ponder the state of the site. Therefore what the site, the streets, the voids winding in it are, should be identified, together with the meaning these scenarios seem to have for people who visit it or move in it, doing a deep analysis of the ways in which they use it, and therefore of the ways in which they are authors of its ways of use, its status, its sense. This analysis should therefore ponder both concrete data and the ways of use generated by the void. The first step should be a deep study of the content and impact of the “traffic flow” on the site during the day, paying strict attention to the extent of this phenomenon during peak hours. The objective is to determine whether the street considered is overloaded with flow rate (number of cars) and content (type of movement) unsuitable to the true essence of the site.

It is also important to take into separate account the number of heavy vehicles using the route, and whether it is used by local transportation, and, in this case, the type of local transportation (bus, bus, taxi, tram), where the stops are, and if there are any dedicated lanes should be considered. Parking is an issue worth of further deep analysis, in order to identify the areas in which cars are parked and also those in which cars invade pedestrians paths or areas.

The nature and structure of the road bed is also to be considered, analyzing materials, the scenic content it gives to the site, albedo and emissivity, which are important elements to evaluate heat exchange between humans and the site and the resulting sense of comfort experienced by users. A further element is the wear of the street, which not only represents a severe weakness from the visual point of view, but it also reduces users' comfort: an eroded, worn, wearing course makes pedestrians' movement difficult and uncomfortable, and bumps cause shocks to cars as well as a heavy increase in noise. Greenery on the site is also to be taken into account, identifying its "geometric connotations," the evocative data of nature and structure of trees, bushes and hedges, their scenic content or essence, as well as of the connection between greenery and covering of the soil. Urban furniture, if any, is also to be considered: it is important not only to consider where benches and sitting spots are located, but also what users can see from them when they sit on them. Analyzing the ways in which users exploit the urban void under consideration helps to understand the role of that void within the urban landscape.

It could also be useful to analyze the nature and content of the observed ways of uses, as well as which areas people linger in, the time of day in which the various events take place, taking into account how the number of people involved and duration of events change during different periods of the year. These elements may be extended considering data by the hour and in different periods of the year, including which gender and age groups of people are taking part in the way of use under consideration. Moreover, a further issue to be analyzed is knowing what users think of the site, including the opinion of people who do not stop in it in order to investigate the causes of such self-exclusion. If the outcome of a severe restoration action is to give an urban void the status of *agora*, thus promoting an extended inclusion of future users in the process may be useful, considering and weighing their opinions to get a full vision of their wishes, as well as a vast and profitable range of ideas and proposals. The aim is therefore to create a scenario that relates to and is the outcome of opinions, ideas, and proposals of its users, in order to reach a strong and fruitful union between them and the site.

Once the information on the site has been acquired, a second examination phase will help gather ideas and canons on which a severe and acute recovery action will be based, presumably aimed at understanding the true sense, the true essence of the urban void under consideration. The sections and a perspective of the urban area crossed by the street are elements from which infer trends, extension and opening of the route, and thus the essence of its connection to the urban area. These data allow a prediction of the traffic load and task a route can bear, that is estimating content and impact of a suitable transportation demand.

The true essence of a void not only emanates from the scope and content of transportation demand, which can overburden the street, but it descends from the urban area in which the void is inserted.

Therefore, it is important to set tables on which elements or areas of strong and broad historical, cultural or environmental value are indicated. It is thus advisable to make an exhaustive examination of these elements which represent the true essence of the site. Moreover, as noted by Girot, a deep analysis of the site implies a consideration of its corporeal exteriority, of what is visible, but also of its history, its shadows and hidden traces, the echo of events from remote ages, or even customs and myths emanating from these eras, Girot (1999). No less useful and fruitful is the analysis of uses and actions that thrive in urban area which surrounds the void under consideration. It is worth noting that it is right to think a broad and forceful recovery action as a changing aimed at giving the site the look and the status of connection, fostering a wide and strong interplay between privacy and the urban set. Therefore, schools, bars, cafes, boutiques, clubs, restaurants, and so on, which can be found on the site are to be considered.

This phase is followed by discovery. Discovery is both a result of an accidental event, that shines through a sense of wonder, and of careful study. What is found, whether something concrete or the memory of an event, becomes the essence giving a unique meaning to the site, something the authors pose as the basis of their conceptual path. Understanding the true essence of a site should therefore be the goal of recovery of an urban void or, in the wider sense, an act of founding. It evokes the period in which people makes up a vision and gives body to it, giving the site a new look and a new sense. It evokes a new phase, a new step in the perpetual evolution of an area and of its various contents.

Ways of use of a site

Once strict examination of the void and the surrounding urban area has been completed, authors need to derive ways of intended use to which the new urban landscape should give rise. Thinking of a street as part of an urban scenario and assuming that the ways of use it promotes descend from and are reminiscent of the true status of the site and of the uses and events it performs, giving it the status and the sense of inspiration to promote a wide and fruitful osmosis between privacy and urban setting, and to retrieve a new social cohesion, leads, as known, to hear the voice of the site and to borrow from its voice and tones, content and weight the ways of use should have within the void to be recovered. Authors should therefore be able find ways of use suitable to the site's true essence.

This theory also implies both to weigh out the role cars may have within the urban landscape, according to the nature and content of the site, and to enhance the role of pedestrians, considering humans as priority user of the urban realm. The aim is a recovery of broad new areas for pedestrians, according to the theory of depriving cars of the extra space in order to give it back to pedestrians. For example, it is not wrong to assume and expect that a street winding through an area of considerable historical value should be able to give the path a status of scenario in which users can and want to move and linger, in which they can pause or sit to let the gaze wander to the urban landscape, enjoying its vast and varied range of tones and hues.

Pedestrians should be able to hear the sounds emanating from the site, they should be able to talk or enjoy a pleasant and peaceful break. Pavement cafes and restaurants should take the place of the dull walls of parked cars. Loading and unloading areas should be allowed where refreshment bars and boutiques are located. Buses or residents' cars transit may be considered, but parking should be allowed only in rare cases, where the street is broad enough to prevent such uses from making pedestrians' uses difficult and hard. Transit and parking non-resident users' cars should be avoided.

A local street winding through an urban area in which uses related to dwelling are predominant should be conceived as a scenario of a full and fruitful life, therefore the source of a strong and rich sense of social cohesion. In order to achieve these outcomes, following the canons listed by the prototype of the Dutch Woonerf is considered a good rule; such canons descend from the theory of the street as a landscape in which cars are guests and where pedestrians linger, sit, talk, enjoy non brief breaks with leisure activities or sports, and where children play.

Effects on road networks

A new policy should therefore aim at encouraging less costly forms of transportation and at recovering the street as a pleasant landscape in which users will stop. This implies, however, recovering of large parts of the urban realm now occupied by cars. Following this theory, it is also useful to consider that the extended state of acute crisis of the road network may lead to fear that a decline in the capacity of the street will cause a worsening of the crisis itself and of its dangerous outcomes. This view and fear, however, are refuted by a positive phenomenon known as "traffic evaporation". Numerous studies confirm that this phenomenon is related to and is outcome of a strong and sharp change in the users' habits. Indeed, not being able to use cars is compensated by the extensive use of less harmful transportation modes and to an adoption of a less costly and more sober way of life and to move into the urban landscape, that is, a more sensible way to use it. It is not useless to note that a more conscious lifestyle heralds a more equitable, secure, healthy and pleasant urban environment, as well as a strong and fruitful relationship between *urbs* and *civitas*, between the city and its users, both outcome and source of a deeper emotional experience, whose climax and genesis is the discovery of the urban realm, enhanced by the fact people can enjoy it for longer time.

The case of Copenhagen can be an example. The Stroget, i.e. the backbone of the city road network which a use progressively more extensive of private cars had made a domain of cars, was freed by that heavy burden with what was considered a strong act, but, despite the early harsh controversy it caused, the outcomes were notable and positive. Cars no longer prevented people from enjoying a safe area in which to move and walk, linger or sit, talk or just watch the scene, and pedestrians were persuaded to change their way of using the urban landscape.

Parking areas

In order to achieve the desired positive outcomes mentioned above the damaging and pervasive use of parking on the road is to be avoided, or at least mitigated, providing parking areas external to it, that is making a new and severe parking policy in urban areas, leading to a wider and deeper analysis of a more equitable and thoughtful urban layout.

PROPOSAL FOR THE RECOVERY OF URBAN TEXTURE

It is not hard to see that freeing the road from the severe and pervasive burden of cars, or of a part of it, makes the urban area a landscape in which pedestrians need not fear for themselves, nor suffer the noise caused by cars, the sense of chaos, the opaque anomie cars give to the urban landscape, nor need endure moving on paths made tortuous by cars.

Moreover, reducing use of cars urges people to walk on a part of their regular routes, allowing them to observe the urban landscape, the magnificent range of tones and notes with the suggestions it proposes, the people who are in there, to converse with an acquaintance met by chance, to see and observe the merchandise displayed in the shops.

These episodes, although of limited capacity, are a starting point to enhance the union between two people, or to promote new partnerships, to restore a healthy and strong social cohesion, to make users' routine less dull and poor, and they foster a true and fruitful discovery of the urban landscape in order to recover a strong and fruitful union of the site and its users.

These positive outcomes help to persuade people to linger, to be users of the road in a wider and more fertile sense.

Reducing the burden of cars, as well as the reclamation of vast areas which are now their domain, however, is only the necessary beginning of a extensive work of restoration of urban voids, whose real purpose is to give them the essence as scene of a healthy and productive urban life, an *agora* where "pedestrian pass on the sidewalks, children play on front doors, people on benches or steps ... two people exchange greetings, others stop to chat", Gehl (1987).

The purpose of a careful and rigorous recovery action of an urban street should not only restore it as a scene where the ordinary ways of use are not made poor and onerous, but as a setting which encourage people to linger and spend there large and extended periods of time, devoting these pauses to a more varied and vast range of possible uses. Bringing a wide number of possible uses and events to the urban texture, therefore, can give it new meaning and contents, as well as a status of arena in which a common feeling will mature as truest meaning and backbone of a cohesive community.

This urges to provide a broad and acute transformation of urban landscape, aiming at transforming the areas recovered into a neat peaceful setting with an aesthetic content and herald of a sense of comfort, where pedestrians can and love to linger. This requires to ponder, as focus and cornerstone, canons and cautions emanating from a severe examination of phenomena which change the users' sense of comfort.

Once the ways of use a site is expected to generate and the number of its users are know, a deep analysis of their wishes is required in order to borrow fertile ideas needed to draft careful proposals. That is, the qualities of the site should descend from the expectations of its users, and cannot be frugal, stingy, or poor.

It is clear that the range of wishes to ponder is very large and varied; they are an outcome and an echo the speed at which people move, the height from which they observe the context, the causes and purposes of their staying in the site and being its user. This premise leads to noticing that drivers will consider as most significant, in their forming a positive opinion on a route, the state of wear of the surface as well as the opportunity of effortlessly understanding the site, the areas of which it is made up, its ways of use, or its weakness. These are the same wishes as cyclists'. Conversely, pedestrians wish to have wide and not tortuous paths, having pleasant views leading to peaceful emotional states. Moreover, pedestrians feel the need for smooth paths; this theory implies that the surface is free from harshness or from extended wear phenomena. Pedestrians should be able to linger and pause.

In order to make the urban voids a set where people will love to stay, pleasant scenarios need to be created, in which people with impaired movement capacity can easily move, emanating a calm and acute poetic note, in which noise and temperature levels are comfortable. It is worth noting that a pleasant and mild climate enhances a significant increase in the content and impact of ways of use to which the urban void is stage as well as the number of people who linger in it. Scandinavian studies show that in summer the number of people who linger and meet in urban voids increase by 200%.

In order to achieve this positive outcome, recovery of a void implies pondering a large number of possible useful "best practices." Care should be taken therefore to take direction and strength of winds and air humidity into account as well as, depending on the time of year, the exposure to the sun of the void, of the new urban landscape, and the exchange of heat and between people and the context, limiting the temperature of walls and floors of the site.

Areas designed for pedestrians or devoted to a broad and deep pedestrian use, should also be safe and persuasive in evoking this quality. Users will not feel a sense of comfort if they do not feel safe.

This theory therefore urges both to preserve the user from severe hazards caused by a wide propensity imprudent driving, and to consider the fear aroused by empty, dark and hidden areas, and to provide an oasis for pedestrians, where they can pause, evoking a sense of shelter and a comforting border effect. It is useful thinking of the sides surrounding a site as stage on which locate seats and oasis made for pedestrians to linger and pause.

It should first be noted, however, that people have a powerful and spontaneous willingness to take part in what happens on a site, even though as a mere observers.

Normally users opts for areas where many people can be found, both to get a sense of protection, and due to the large range of possible suggestions that a site full of events and people offers, from which users evoke a more fruitful experience. Users like to be where there are many people talking, sitting, looking at the surroundings, who devote their pause to a large number of possible uses.

In order to give a void the status as setting for urban life, therefore, it is not only useful but necessary to provide that it can be a landscape open to a vast range of possible events and uses and to favor a wide, abundant, fruitful interplay in the urban voids, between open space and privacy.

For example, it can be expected that the street is stage for far-reaching social and cultural events, such as exhibitions, markets, and concerts. But ensuring that the urban open space is adequate as a scene for a range daily rituals is no less cause of auspicious outcomes. It is not the content of the various events which seduces users, enhancing their spontaneous willingness to participate, but the chance of enjoying a lively, fertile, resounding landscape, full of people. At the same time, as Gehl notes, the urban void needs to be seen as a medium to promote a broad mutual exchange among the people in it; this implies creating dense scenarios, that is gathering and bringing people together in order to enable users to hear, see and gaze the events framed by the site and take part into them.

COMPOSITIONAL ASPECTS OF URBAN SPACE

As noted by Cullen in his argument quoted by Gehl, a site showing the traces of a severe and erudite philosophy leads users to develop a sense of “identity and belonging.”

The street should therefore give the urban landscape an aesthetical note and a strict and strong essence. In this sense, inspiration can be borrowed from the thought of Bernardo Secchi on the “soil project.”

The philosophy, the idea, pervading the work should lead to a capacity to create, while proposing an austere repertoire of severe and poor phonemes, a large number of new unpredictable findings, but sutured by a motivation, by a severe and consistent poetic rule. A philosophy showing through the new clothing, while not losing the cohesion of its primary sense, can give the urban landscape both a fruitful scenic status full of notes and tones, as well as a severe motivation. Moreover, a fertile talent, evoking a various but cohesive urban realm can be a starting point to heal the poor emotional content emanating from modern urban landscape, that is the “lacking of systematic and meaningful experience of the open space.” To do so, it can be useful to consider not only the areas that make up a void, but the various voids and pauses of the urban realm as elements of a single entity, as scenes of a cohesive and coherent narrative, thus giving the time users spends moving in the urban landscape, a tenor and flavor of perpetual discovery, tinged with a note of astonishment. A scenario suggesting a mosaic of winding streets and larger voids arouses a large range of emotional notes, as Secchi’s words, quoting Proust, show: he urges to note the strong emotional charge held by the sharp excursion between the “pressure exerted by the confined space of Venice ‘calli’ following each other, and the sudden widening of a ‘campo’ or of a view of the basin and the lagoon”, Secchi (2008).

It is worth noting that a healthy and wise philosophy needs to meditate when coining its phonemes and its canons of the site. Therefore, it is not difficult to note that if the context in which it operates denotes a profound *genius loci*, the philosophy pervading the work should choose a cautious and subdued tone, borrowing its canons and phonemes from a severe analysis of the site. The street shall then act as a medium for the discovery of an area, as an event that does not obscure the essence, but gives it a new voice and a higher tone.

Conversely, if the sense of the place is vague, the street should evoke a strong, sharp philosophical grounding. However, it should not be a pretext for becoming an ornate discharged from any obligation.

A deep analysis, but with a fruitful attention for detail, highlighting a full interplay between usefulness and beauty, leads not only to creation an urban setting giving a sense of comfort, but it is also evocative of a quiet euphony.

A thoughtful and severe use of the canons of harmony, proportion, and scale, and a deep and sharp study of details which is not vacuous hedonism, leads to coin a new and fruitful philosophy, and to give a site a real and pure essence.

This philosophy implies, as its forerunner, reducing the voids, the pauses which plough the urban realm, and creating dense scenarios, both favoring a larger range of possible uses, enhancing the weight of pedestrians and claiming areas which are now subject to a burdensome demand for transportation, and obtaining from the large gaps a theory of oasis, cohesive zones separated only by porous or only evoked curtains, but each having its own status in order to evoke a varied urban set, full of a vast and varied range of notes, of scenarios to be noted. As Parolotto highlights, “highway systems will be progressively abandoned in favor of a network of smaller interconnected roads”, Parolotto (2012). Martin Haas wishes, as an act on which to found a new city shape, that “infrastructure areas no longer needed will return to the city as public spaces”, Haas (2012).

Components of urban space

Giving urban voids new and wider meaning and weight within the urban landscape, means assigning new weight and meaning to each element of which it is composed. This leads to think about its components in a new way, probing thoroughly its ability to give rise to a large and varied range of positive outcomes.

Thus a study of the route and an extensive use of traffic calming measures should aim to promote drivers’ more cautious and prudent behavior, and at the same time to give a new meaning and a new poetic content to the site. So greenery is a phoneme having a sharp and powerful theatrical and rhetorical weight and power; a chance to evoke new cohesion between people and nature; and a tool to enhance users’ comfort, both evoking a sense of serene peace, and fostering a more pleasant climate scenario, dosing the wind, protecting the void from the sun, or mitigating the air temperature, by virtue of abundant and widespread phenomena of evaporation/transpiration. Moreover, the material status of the void, its structure, the soil, are a no less fruitful opportunity both to sharpen and give new notes and a new tone to the poetic code pervading the site, and to evoke a new code seeking to make users aware of the site sub-areas and the ways of use for which they were created. A thorough study of materials composing the soil and walls of a void is an important chance of determining the heat exchange between people and the site.

Fruitful examples of this can be both the *Rambla de la Ronda del Mig* by Jordi Heinrich and Olga Tarrasò, and the *Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes* by Andreu Arriola and Carmen Fiol. Pedestrians prefer areas suffused with a pure and staid beauty, with an essence both elegant and severe giving a strong and peculiar character to the site.

The *Gran Via* is an example of how a new way of thinking about the urban street, based on themes of comfort, harmony, and aimed at making the street a scenario for uses and rituals of urban life, can also be extended to the majestic city boulevards. It is useful to note that the trench type chosen avoids decreasing of traffic flow, while reducing the visual impact, the strong sense of break often caused by this kind of infrastructures.

This sense of break is made even more tenuous by the network of pedestrian crossing paths over the cutting, the hiatus of the Boulevard, forming what seems a suture of the urban scenario. The most important detail to be carefully considered, however, is that there are no places left, neglected and not designed. A dense network of pedestrian and bicycle paths run along the sides of the boulevard, large and extensive green spaces fill the gap in height between the urban texture and the paths winding along the edges. The slopes are syncopated by green oases and breaks where pedestrians can linger. These scenarios reflect an idea of an urban realm open to a large range of events, designed to persuade people to enjoy its empty spaces in the broadest and most fertile sense, and to make the street a shared place, as starting point to restore a strong and fruitful social cohesion, and a deeper relationship between humans and the context in which they live.

CONCLUSIONS

An urban area, if it is a pleasant scene pervaded with a sense of euphony, induces users to pause, offering itself as a scenario in which to enjoy a break and from which to borrow a serene sense of peace and wonder. In this sense, a new philosophy, giving a new meaning and a new weight to a strict examination of the site and to its compositional theme, and regaining a large range of notes and content within the urban landscape, is not a cult of vain beauty, or of traces and voices from remote ages, but is a necessary action to restore the urban connective tissue as peaceful and living setting, where a healthy and cohesive community grows ripening in its true essence.

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CREDITS

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