

Introduction  
by  
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*We know nothing of vast multiplicity -we cannot come to grips with it- not as architects, planners or anybody else.<sup>1</sup>*  
Aldo van Eyck

*This century has been a losing battle with the issue of quantity.<sup>2</sup>*  
Rem Koolhaas

*The role of metaphors, as we know, is to give meaning to what we are unable to fully comprehend. [...]*

*In the most advanced visions and projects we now begin to catch glimpses of the symptoms and potentialities of this transformation. They imply a return to studying the spatial structure of the city; that we recognise the importance to its constitution of the form of the territory, that we recognise the role of its capillary and isotropic infrastructural development, sufficient to give the city and the territory a greater and more widespread porosity, permeability and accessibility; that we design ambitious public spaces, taking into account the quality of those in the city that preceded us; that we return to considering the dimensions of collective society. [...]*

*There is a need to build new alliances between the city and various disciplines. Urban planners, as well as economists and sociologists, must once again speak with geographers, botanists, hydraulic engineers; they must immerse themselves further than they have in the recent past into the individual and collective imaginations.<sup>3</sup>*  
Bernardo Secchi

In 1953 in Aix-en-Provence, later in Dubrovnik (1956) and up to the epilogue in Otterlo (1959), the youngest generation associated with the CIAM began to question the functionalist categories of the Athens Charter, beginning with the delicate theme of public space. Despite the rightings to the course introduced by the old guard, to overcome the abstract nature of the functional city, Team 10 (in particular the Smithsons and van Eyck) presented an urban environment more adapted to the emotive and material needs of mankind. They invoked a complex spatial model with multiple relations between architectural forms and the social and psychological needs of its users.

1. A. van Eyck, in K. Frampton, *Modern Architecture: a Critical History*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1985, p. 276

2. R. Koolhaas, B. Mau, *S,M,L,XL*, The Monicelli Press, New York, 1995, p. 961

3. B. Secchi, *La città dei ricchi e la città dei poveri*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2013, pp. 9, 77-78

The disciplinary pluralism of Team 10's approach would later emerge above all in the work of van Eyck, entirely dedicated to the search for a locally suitable form, through "anthropological experience".

Speaking at the CIAM in Otterlo (1959) Aldo van Eyck stated: «Man is always and everywhere essentially the same. He has the same mental equipment though he uses it differently according to the particular pattern of life of which he happens to be a part. Modern architects have been harping continually on what is different in our time to such an extent that even they have lost touch with what is not different, with what is always essentially the same».

In 1998 Rem Koolhaas created AMO, the other face of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture. AMO is a multidisciplinary research laboratory that works beyond the confines of traditional architecture in order to "fertilize it". Koolhaas' think tank is substantially a tool for understanding the dynamics of contemporary society, the new "public", based on the conviction that bigness has definitively broken with the functionalist rules of Modernism.

What emerges is a certain multidisciplinary in the work of Koolhaas, which attributes the role of "mediator" to the figure of the architect, called on to interact with experts from different though complementary disciplines in the field of design. On many occasions, the Dutch architect has illustrated the complex relationship between democracy and architecture, representing the evolution of the concept of "public power" during the post-war era. If we exclude the private villas, the buildings for private clients and the Prada catwalks, almost all of OMA-AMO's work confronts contemporary public space, at a range of scales.

In 2014 the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid organised an important exhibition entitled *Playgrounds. Reinventing the Square*, shedding light once again on the playground strategy as a form of interaction between public space-inhabitants, in a collective and shared dimension. The show presented the utopias and realities designed from the mid-twentieth century onward, including the work of Aldo van Eyck who, during the "Glorious Thirty" designed hundreds of public playgrounds in Amsterdam, restoring life and quality to the streets of a city devastated by the Second World War.

The crisis of contemporary public space is a question of interest to all architects.

The economic, social and cultural crisis, in particular affecting the entire European continent, is clearly and originally reflected in the public spaces of our cities, more and more of which are now considered “heritage”. Beyond the phenomenon of “non-places” -always the work of the private sector- and considering the contraction in public spending and proposals, of interest here is the investigation of the growing number of manifestations of the bottom-up generation/transformation of public space. This approach clearly exposes the new demands related to uses and forms, but above all the crisis of architectural culture when speaking of its design. They include the reappropriation, by society, of abandoned spaces; the ecological/agricultural use of residual areas; the spontaneous configuration of undesigned, temporary and anonymous public spaces; phenomena of public art and urban activism that are often the result of the geolocalised network.

Public space and the public realm, due to their original facets, are once again a theme of interest for architects, but also for philosophers, sociologist and anthropologists (J. Habermas, D. Innerarity, Z. Bauman, M. Augé), as complex “spaces” to be decomposed.

Hence, a few questions:

Does the analysis of public space and an approach to design, in a reality that considers a different concept of “public” than that of the past century comport a new way of looking? A new urban-architectural nomenclature? An interdisciplinary approach to design?

The general situation described in this publication, in various authors from different disciplinary backgrounds, clearly expresses the tangible need to provide (or provide once again) positive responses to different questions before proceeding with the design – or analysis – of contemporary public space.

Beginning with the “surface of public space”, Paola Veronica Dell’Aira uses a sequence of important projects to effectively delineate a “return” in the design of open space to a non-dogmatic approach to theme of the “skin”. It is the surface, in a certain sense, atop which the discipline of architecture, when it breaks free of its autonomy, “overwrites” the contemporary meanings of public. The time has now

passed when it was viewed as “the space of capricious decoration”. The text by Dell’Aira explores structuring materials with “tactile, visual and audio effects” that serve to intensify the experience of public space, in need of a new type of observation, a new nomenclature (landscaping, texture) and an interdisciplinary approach, as architecture alone is unable to fully and effectively “control them”.

In this direction, the anthropologist Francesco Marano, utilising a selection of “key points”, indicates more than a few elements for “controlling” the design of contemporary public space. He outlines the potentials of an ethnographic approach and in particular that of visual anthropology, and how these specific disciplines establish a “dialogue” with those of architecture and urbanism.

After briefly retracing the evolution of the ethnographic method, Marano proposes a selection of key words, particularly useful for establishing a synergy between anthropology and architecture. First and foremost, *culture*, focusing attention on its diverse conceptual meanings to “comprehend how people use space to satisfy needs and realise objectives”. In fact, we have moved from a concept of culture comprised of identifying elements that modelled society (Tylor), to a concept in which individual and group practices construct meaning – a significance – in the space of dwelling (Cohen). It follows that if we recognise individuals as the true producers of culture, it is necessary, as a common ground, to adopt this latter concept of culture. Successively, *space* and *place*, concepts that can no longer be separated from either a theoretical or practical point of view, since post-modernity has “overcome the Cartesian opposition between the subject and object”, and bodies and places are now inter-animated and co-implied.

Concluding, Marano presents a selection of diverse models of an ethnographic approach, borrowed from numerous experiments, though always focused on the analysis and design of public urban spaces. *Participatory observation, praxeology and knowledge, incorporation and sensoriality, emotional maps, emplaced ethnography, place-telling, place-elicitation* and *visual methods* presuppose the physical presence of the researcher, interacting to a greater or lesser degree with members of local society. The stories told must be interpreted by seeking out their direct or implicit sensoriality; this means adopting a position from which to “register” events taking place in a given site, even using interactive maps. What emerges is that an ethnographic practice almost always

comports a multi-sensory involvement incorporated in others, and the need to restore the density and complexity of the materials produced in the form of a hypertext. This tool offers architects and urban planners important and innovative elements for creating designs more sensitive toward human lives.

Regarding the texts by Veronica Salomone and Francesca Heathcote Sapey it could be said that, despite examining geographically, economically and politically “distant” case-studies, they nonetheless touch on the symbolic meaning that certain public spaces – or that impose themselves as such – still represent to contemporary globalised society. Whether “distant” public squares or markets is of little importance; what interests us are the methods and phenomena that trigger a “return” within them, manifesting a sentiment of protest or celebration, as the “reappropriations” described by the authors indifferently presuppose an organisation through social media.

Salomone reminds us how the *Arab Spring* permitted many Mediterranean societies to capture spaces of declaration within different cities, triggering complex and unpredictable processes of de-colonization. The public spaces of some Mediterranean cities, for example Tunis or Cairo, became informal, configuring a democratic-geolocalised network of redemption. This original space (*of conflict*, *mediatic*), also in Arab-Islamic contexts, appears, however, to be both a concrete as well as symbolic space, where the *mise-en-scène* of a “project” has the power to re-organise the socio-economic context of the Mediterranean basin.

Heathcote Sapey, on the other hand, in a space where democracy is firmly rooted, highlights how Western society has rediscovered the space of the urban market through new forms of use and consumerism. In the heart of London or Madrid, the architecture of nineteenth and twentieth century markets regains a central role, less for commercial than for social and cultural exchanges. These markets, until recently abandoned and threatened with demolition, have returned, anachronistically with respect to the development of new digital technologies for the market of staple products, to being real spaces of encounter. This was made possible by offering of multiple cultural activities tied to the countless experiences of food and wine.

At a time during which there is a strong focus on welfare, there are studies and experiences of the effects of the intrinsic relationship

between food and city; with the result that, in recent years in many Western cities, above all on the Old Continent, many historic markets have been revitalised, drawing in their wake others created *ex novo*, and generating notable profits.

These two considerations “rest” on other measures and scales of intervention in public space with respect to those that preceded them, those typical of the traditional construction of capital cities, are examined with methodological rigour by Vito Fortini and Domenico Potenza.

The first contribution, oriented toward the theme of the *call*, offers us the current *social sense of landscaping in public spaces in Latin America*, referencing three extraordinary modern architectural events from the mid-twentieth century: the UNAM University Campus in Mexico City, the UCV in Caracas and the *superquadras* in Brasilia. Three outstanding examples in which important architects, landscape architects and artists (Barragán, Candela, Lazo, O’Gorman, Yañez, Ramírez Vázquez, del Moral, Villagrán Gracia, Costa, Niemeyer, Reidy, Villanueva, Calder, Arp, Lobo, Laurens, Pevsner, etc..) knew how to combine, often in the design of public space, the functionalist categories of the Charter of Athens with the multiple forms of using landscaped and lush outdoor space typical of South American society. In his final considerations, Fortini identifies the “research” of this important season as the source of the common characteristics of these public spaces which survive to the present day; an attentive approach toward cultural identity and modernity adopted by various professional figures in their projects continues to reveal a dialectic and concrete response to standardisation, accompanied by elements borrowed from local tradition (socio-cultural roots) and a capacity for architectural ideas to appropriate a site, while respecting the qualities and characteristics of the landscape.

The second text, by Potenza, sheds light on the impressive urban qualities that the city of Ljubljana has been able to valorise, “impressed in its structure”, and to build on following the break up of the former Yugoslavia, beginning with the legacy of the master of Mitteleuropean architecture Jože Plečnik. A unique legacy for the small-large capital of Slovenia, such that it can be termed “a sort of auteur city”.

Using chronologically structured thematic paragraphs, Potenza accompanies us through a discovery of the indelible and absolutely

original traces left by Plečnik in Ljubljana. He places us in a diverse modernity that dialogues with tradition and the “architecture of place”. A dialogue that, according to the author, still has much to say: this architectural-urban heritage continues to fascinate and conserve an evocative-inspirational strength that has oriented – and continues to do so – operations at the turn of the new millennium undertaken by generations of architects trained at the local faculty of architecture. In *City and Myth*, Potenza also presents a noteworthy model for the administration of the public realm. In other words, an “ambitious project” initiated by city government and involving businesses, banks and the private sector in the realisation of an articulated programme of interventions along the Ljubljanica River. From the centre to the farthest suburbs, this programme on the one hand offered occasions for many local young practices and, on the other hand, ensured that the river and the original projects left by Plečnik along its path, reassumed their role as the guide for a growing city; this *ambitious public* project earned Ljubljana the European Council of Spatial Planners Prize and the European Prize for Urban Public Space.

The text by Ugo Rossi looks back at the twentieth century urban-architectural critique of urban open space. Rossi carefully retraces the cultural references of the 1960s and '70s and the research of Bernard Rudofsky during the “American years”. Set against the backdrop of a number of guideline texts (Benjamin, Le Corbusier, Van Eyck, Jacobs, Lynch, Anderson, Chermayeff and Alexander, and Rudofsky himself), Rossi returns to a season of exceptional reflection and constructive criticism of the inherent value and potential of public space, considered the necessary hinge for organising urban forms and social relations within the city. According to Rossi the crisis of public space “is intrinsic to the mutation itself of the city and to the practice of planning the modern city”, as city planning has lost the palimpsests necessary to produce collective spaces, the author reminds us, from the Agora of antiquity to the squares of the *Ancient Régime*. The home remains the principal architectural event of a still too limited number of reflections on public space as the main device for organising urban life.

Rossi points out how modern canons, fixed on the one hand by nineteenth century health and safety standards, and on the other by the CIAM Congresses, are so strongly consolidated that practices of designing the city, “the directions taken by housing and city



construction”, continue to refer to standards. All of this despite the fact that since Otterlo (1959), Team 10 began questioning the globalising trend that, as we know, would attempt a change in direction through experimental research, drawing on primitive civilisations and informal architecture. Rossi introduces us to the figure of Bernard Rudofsky, at the heart of his text, though first taking us back to research into open space, in particular the street, developed at MIT and Harvard University during the 1960s.

The Bernard Rudofsky described by Rossi exploits a certain avant-garde represented by the work, the research and the exhibitions of this Austrian architect. Indeed, all of this work anticipates contemporary urban issues, when the design of the city has excluded the “drawing” of life outside a building, progressively more interested in the private realm.