

HOW MANY ROADS

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DEBATE

The Space of the Street

Alessandra Capuano

The street as a meeting place for public life appeared to have fallen into oblivion. Urban culture had announced its death, first with the apodictic proclamations of Le Corbusier, intent on separating pedestrian and vehicular flows and creating roads inside buildings or road-shaped buildings. Later, in the cybernetic era and the age of “non-places,” contemporary life seems to be constrained to virtual squares animated by social networks.

Despite this, the road remains a space of encounter and experimentation, a theatre of daily life and a stage for cultural events, once again in vogue as a tool for recovering sustainable and healthy lifestyles. The road continues to offer spaces for people and to nurture urban studies. Recent research, conferences and exhibitions are once again discussing this fundamental element of the city’s structure. The essay introduces, through an historical evolution of the space of the street, this issue of *Rassegna* dedicated to a reflection on what the street means for us today and how it has been transformed in contemporary projects.

In Praise of the Road

Alberto Ferlenga

The essay deals with the persistence and evolution over time of that fundamental form of the construction of the inhabited world which is the road. Of its evolution from track, to urban road, to highway and its progressive substitution of other figures of the urban composition as a representative, “social” and meeting place. Created by a need for movement, the road finds its maximum expression in a world, like the current one, in which mass mobility is the most evident phenomenon. Yet the road is not simply a place of flows or encounters, a container of network traits or a simple conjunction between places. The road has always been an exceptional store of memory. The streets of Paris, Benjamin argued, evoke the history of the city. However, roads do not remind us only of great enterprises; they also bring back personal, everyday moments each time we walk down them. Guardians of an ancient idea of territory and city, streets preserve many things over time—and do so with the same degree of “necessity” with which they cross space. This was clearly understood by Dimitris Pikionis, who entrusted the core part of his project at the foot of the Acropolis to a new pedestrian route. Roads are a basic feature of contemporary life, even if rarely the object of architecturally aware projects that, instead, would constitute one of the great opportunities to introduce quality and order to increasingly uncontrollable environments.

Cities for People. A Discussion with Jan Gehl

Alessandra Capuano, Andrea Valeriani

In the interview Jan Gehl traces some fundamental stages of his training and his decades of research and professional activity.

From the study trip in Italy in the early sixties’ the Danish architect’s main concern was to think about space and its ability to influence the quality of life of those who live in it.

Ingrid Mund, psychologist and wife, the Anglo-Swedish architect Ralph Erskine and the city of Copenhagen were the starting points for a reflection on the city and the way it is used by people.

Modernity has neglected the needs of citizens, their attitudes and desires. The Danish architect has worked all over the world to recover this error. From Melbourne and Perth to the recent proposals for New York, he applied the “Public Space / Public Life” method, which is a survey that is based on numbers and concrete data and that listens to the needs of citizens, offering adequate answers remembering that “life follows form.”

With a thought that always comes back to where it all started: Copenhagen, a pioneering city in the enhancement of public space as a space for people, which continues to be a global reference on the role that streets can take in terms of improvement the quality of life.

Architecture and Spaces Under the Road

Margherita Vanore

In the stratified city, elevated streets produce singular places where the use of spaces, either closed or confined by infrastructure, is reformulated over time according to various factors.

From the utopias of the early twentieth century to the scenarios of the 1960s, various proposals have been defined for the transfiguration of elevated road bodies into linear urban containers. Since the end of the last century there have been several examples of the transformation of terrains beneath viaducts into works of architecture and urban spaces. Their complexity interprets the residual areas and voids determined by the infrastructural constructions.

This text focuses on the space configured by the volume of roads or rail viaducts. Independent from the use of the upper part of the deck, the soil of the city below is transformed. This develops a certain ability to assimilate the formal characteristics of an invasive construction, often extraneous to the settlement logic of its surroundings.

The architecture and urban spaces generated in the body of those streets is often capable of reversing relations between interior-exterior and engage devices that mediate between the different levels of the city.

Bernardo Secchi's Approach on Street and Design

Cristina Bianchetti, Paola Viganò

In the field of urban planning, the problem posed by the street is both “a dilemma and a nightmare.” It is only apparently simple or technical. It concerns a space of many actions related to moving, accessing, interacting, being together, developing sustainable and healthy lifestyles. Functions and dysfunctions of the street do not consider exceptions and differences: they have the same implications on the privileged and the penalized, realising a caricatured version of that spatial equality we have insistently returned to deal with.

This short essay answers to the call issued by the *Rassegna di Architettura e Urbanistica* asking us to return to the broader discussion of the street developed by European urbanism in the 1980s. A tradition influenced and inspired by a 30-year-old article written by Bernardo Secchi for *Casabella*.

The attempt to answer this question produced a reflection on the functional, symbolic and pedagogical space of the street and its design in contemporary urban space. At the same time, it is a reflection on the way we refer to a past that appears both distant and familiar.

The Road: From “Streets-in-the-Sky” to “Regeneration” Agent

Gianni Celestini

For the reconstruction of the Golden Lane district in London, Alison and Peter Smithson designed “streets-in-the-air.” In lieu of traditional balconies, the street took on the role of a versatile and adaptable device designed to foster the connection between dwellings and outdoor space. The “streets-in-the-air” have a strong urban significance since they maintain a close relationship with housing, while developing a pedestrian system that integrates different levels and connects spaces to one another. This system establishes something akin to a projection of the building towards the city and makes use of spaces and places previously considered insignificant, recognising their potential value.

We can read this experiment as an attempt to place the road in contact with everyday and ordinary social life, yet still within a logic that declares the indissoluble link between street and architecture.

In recent years we can trace different lines of research that interpret the road as a relational field and theatre—certainly not passive—of behaviours, expressions and practices from which architecture can develop.

Healthy Corridors for Inclusive Urban Regeneration

Gonçalo Canto Moniz, Isabel Ferreira

With the urban sprawl of the second half of the twentieth century, peripheral areas of European cities were occupied by social housing neighbourhoods plagued by difficult connections with the urban centre. People arriving from rural areas or from poor southern part of the country were not integrated into city life. They became the active working force but were never granted the right to city, as claimed by the

1968 social movements. To this day, most of these communities travel each day to a city that doesn't belong to them.

The Healthy Corridor is a concept that will be created together with these communities to physically and socially integrate them with this desirable city. The project aims also to bring the consolidated city towards its own borders, where relevant things can emerge out of precarious conditions. The Corridor will promote the well-being of these citizens through a set of natural and human-based-solutions (NBS), co-selected and co-designed by citizens, municipal technicians and social scientists. Together, they will bring research and urban design to public space, activating a living lab and seeking out innovative solutions for an inclusive urban regeneration.

Superblocks as the Base of New Urban Mobility and a New Model of Public Space: Barcelona as a Case Study

Salvador Rueda Palenzuela

Superblocks are urban cells, the basis of a model of mobility and public space. Barcelona plans to free up 70% of public space, today related to mobility, reducing cars by only 13%. This liberation of space allows for an increase in urban quality (air, noise, thermal comfort, etc.). In addition, it includes a new green network and expands the public spaces offered to citizens. More than the base unit of a model of mobility and public space, superblocks can also be the basis of the urban model embodied in the *Charter for the Ecosystemic Planning of Cities and Metropolises*.

RESEARCHES

The Children's Street: the Example of Pontevedra

Francesco Tonucci

The street is the space for meeting friends, for playing, for exploring, for school, for shops, for activities. The road is an inclusive space, more than a school, because in the street the “others” are more skilled and competent than “us” and can teach us autonomy, real games and not just virtual ones. The city that is interested in responding to the needs of girls and boys, guaranteeing everyone's needs, returns the road to the people. This was the political choice and the administrative intervention that made Pontevedra a model city on the topic of public space. A space that becomes everyone's realm and of which everyone can take advantage for free, according to their own needs. A city that faces the problem of public space is a democratic, healthy and beautiful city.

Infrastructure as an Urban Artefact: the Rambla de Sants in Barcelona

Benedetta Di Donato

In 2002 the Barcelona municipal government launched a project for the urban renewal of the Sants infrastructural

corridor. Over the course of the past century, railways cutting across the urban fabric divided the neighbourhood into two distinct parts, a condition that remained unchanged until 2016. The project aims to reconnect these two parts. Nevertheless, unlike other similar projects in New York and Paris, the Rambla de Sants does not replace the railway, but incorporates the corridor to establish an innovative urban system. To achieve this result, Sergi Godia and Ana Molino flanked this infrastructure with two large glazed Warren trusses topped by a roof garden. In this way, trains can be observed but not heard from the street. This artefact has created a complex public space whose different elements define a new and unexpected type of urban landscape.

Interactions with the Public Space: Walking the Streets of Barcelona

Ines Aquilué, Estanislau Roca

The reference to the 1960's anthropological and urban studies of Kevin Lynch and Jane Jacobs has supported the project *Walking the City*, which aims to promote the teaching of urbanism through active perception and thoughtful understanding of urban experiences.

This educational project has been developed since 2004. Thanks to contributions from all parties involved, it has been consolidated as a singular academic experience at the Barcelona School of Architecture. *Walking the City* intends to develop new forms of learning about the city and its elements by incorporating itineraries through Barcelona. These itineraries enable students to learn from both the materiality of streets and the activity of social agents that model the city.

Since 2013, a new tool has been included in the project. The use of graphic art as a device of communication is used to approach the process of learning through a more sensitive language. Itineraries are recorded using sensitive drawings that link the language of graphics with sensitive perception, inspired by the thesis of Juhani Pallasmaa. The article describes how visual and haptic perception is represented in graphic registers.

The Renaissance of the Street. The Promenade du Paillon in Nice

Fabio Di Carlo

Born mainly as public spaces and radically transformed during the twentieth century into collectors of vehicular traffic, important urban roads are once again in search of a strongly collective character, enriched with new meanings. Boulevard, Ramblas, Avenida, promenade, avenues, linear urban parks, pedestrian paths or other, are a priority for many administrations. As a result, the design of complex roads occupies a significant role in the international panorama, despite current economic limitations and a general compositional and linguistic tendency that favours more elementary expressions. The case study of the Promenade du Paillon in Nice, completed by Christine and Michel Péna in 2014, offers a recent example. Here, the characteristics of public space extend to transform it into a large linear urban park and update the theme of the complex section of the boulevard toward a more social and ecological role.

A Locus Amoenus in São Paulo. The Nature of the Minhocão

Maria Argenti, Manuele Sansica, Claudia Zucca

This text explores the story of the *Minhocão*, the elevated street named after President *Artur da Costa e Silva*, in the city of São Paulo, Brazil. This unique urban planning and social experiment created an infrastructure with a double function and a double life: a vehicular artery during the working week and space for strolling and leisure (to some degree incongruous given its scale and that of other similar situations) on weekends and holidays. Because this infrastructure was neither created nor equipped to be used as a linear pedestrian park, and despite the total lack of any commitment from local government, its unexpected transformation each week depends less on political will than on the intense spontaneous participation of residents, on their diverse way of perceiving and brining it alive. Their actions resemble a sort of weekly victory of the slow over the fast, of collective sharing over utilitarian individualism.

This condition makes the street an example of participatory social urbanism, founded on the reappropriation of public spaces by the community. As an experiment in urban democracy it is almost without precedent; this for the fact that only the deeply rooted and constant desire of the local population could have initially created it, and guaranteed it would last over time.

The Porteño Corridor. The 9 de Julio Avenue Between Reality, History and Imaginary

Fabrizio Toppetti

The Avenida 9 de Julio in Buenos Aires is an extraordinary urban space for which there are no terms of comparison. Trying to understand it, in its morphological, social, functional, ecological and symbolic dimensions, means framing this singular phenomenon in the vision of Greater Buenos Aires that was formed at the end of the nineteenth century and at the same time understanding the meanings of the contemporary city.

This road is not the result of a unitary project, it is the extraordinary result, real and therefore imperfect, of the project that asserts itself at the end of the nineteenth century to give a plastic representation to the greatness of a city and a nation in strong growth.

Therefore, in addition to the evident function of primary artery of internal traffic flow of the city, it plays from the beginning a decisive role in the collective imagination with a strong social and political value: it is not by chance that we will find it as a privileged scenario of the representation of power and symmetrically of the various forms of protest and demonstration. At that time the economy was growing due to foreign investment and immigration, above all from Europe, a trend that, with the typical ups and downs of South America, will only come to a halt with the 1929 crisis. The construction of the new north-south connection, although with a troubled history that will lead to its completion well beyond the renewal season, fits within this process guided by three fundamental principles: making and connecting buildings and monumental public spaces, take off and encourage continuity with suburban areas, bring nature into the city.

The aim was to inaugurate the road in 1916, for the centenary of Independence to be celebrated precisely on July 9th, but work began in 1936 and will only be completed in 1980.

The 9 de Julio for the symbolic value that it has played since its origin and of course also for logistical reasons, lends itself as a privileged scenario of important public events. Among these it is worth remembering that of August 22, 1951, organized for the presentation of the joint candidacy of Juan Domingo Perón (in his second term) and his wife Eva Duarte in charge of the country. On this occasion Evita, now ill, in front of a million people who acclaimed her vice-president alongside her husband, will take time before taking the famous step back, postponing the response to the speech broadcast on the radio nine days later.

Linear Park Ferrocarril de Cuernavaca in Mexico City

Julio Gaeta & Luby Springall

As a result of an international competition, the location, size and social impact of this project make it one of the most important designs for public space in Mexico City in recent decades. The idea was to generate a 4.5 km-long urban forest alongside a historic railway line. Twenty-two neighbourhoods home to more than 50,000 people will benefit from this qualified space. The goal was to create a public place that enhanced identity and memory, generated a spirit of community and contributed to the feelings of appropriation and empowerment of neighbours and users in this part of the city. The space was conceived in a sustainable manner with a high environmental quality based on a multi-scalar order. Ten months after opening, the Park is considered a social and spatial success for having recovered and transformed a residual and dangerous zone into a democratic and safe place. People are delighted and have a feeling of pride and belonging. The idea was not one of embellishment: sophisticated furniture, overdesigned paving and expensive fountains were not part of the narrative of this park. The budget and social context obliged the adoption of an intentionally austere and sober posture.

Walking in New York. From the Gridlock to the Pedestrianisation of Times Square

Andrea Valeriani

New York is the paradigm of the twentieth century industrialised metropolis, wholly devoted to progress. It is

the vertical-city par excellence and the concretisation of Koolhaas' theory of a "culture of congestion." The streets of the Big Apple were hyper-crowded, unhealthy and the scene of unsolved social conflicts. However, increasing urban decay pushed various municipal administrations to an ever-increasing commitment to improve the liveability of Manhattan by triggering beneficial mechanisms, such as rediscovering the road as a place of well-being. The action of the mayor/tycoon Michael Bloomberg was incisive for the radical impact of his policies for mobility and the health of New Yorkers. He induced a profound rethinking even of places with such a strong symbolic significance as Times Square, the exhibitionist space where America stages all of its rhetoric and exuberance. It is exactly here that Norway's firm Snøhetta, following the general strategies established with Jan Gehl's office by the municipality, succeeded in putting into practice its principle of architecture as "collective intuition" that, through an inversion of power relations between cars and people, will see Times Square become a liveable and human-friendly space.

The Linearscapes of Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates. Between Aesthetic Experience and Environmental Ethics

Isotta Cortesi

In recent times, linear public space has undergone a great metamorphosis of form, function and meaning. This is also due to a greater awareness of the exploitation of natural resources and its consequent environmental costs.

In the past, the road was little more than a mono-functional linear place intended for the transportation of goods and people. Today instead, through landscape design, we interpret the urban road as a place of integration, home to a coexistence between the multiplicity and diversity of functions that privileges pedestrian and bicycle mobility in the presence of nature. *Public Nature* conceived as an active operating system contributes to the quality of the ecological habitats integrated within the project, transforming the road into a landscape infrastructure.

"The necessary tendency toward landscape in design" in our present is illustrated through the research and projects developed by Michael van Valkenburgh and his New York office. Their design investigation wisely strengthens the relationships between space, ecosystems and citizens.