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5-23 settembre 2011

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PIACENZA 2011



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Piacenza 2011  
**OC - Open City**  
**INTERNATIONAL**  
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from landscape to exterior design

**LIVING THE STREET**  
Landscape and public space  
in the places of metropolitan infrastructure

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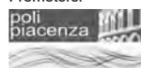
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## Living the street

### Landscape and public space in the places of metropolitan infrastructure

edited by: Guya Bertelli - Dipartimento di Architettura e Pianificazione  
Michele Roda - Dipartimento di Architettura e Pianificazione

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*from landscape to exterior design*

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***LANDSCAPE AND PUBLIC SPACE***  
***IN THE PLACES OF***  
***METROPOLITAN INFRASTRUCTURES***

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*Veduta di Strada Nuova*

## ARCHITECTURE AND INFRASTRUCTURE the road between trace and artefact

*Pasquale Mei*

The road's subject has attended, in the construction of the contemporary city, the gradual reduction of its historical complexity.

The continuous change of metropolitan, urban and territorial arrangement has assumed a greater degree of interdependence as well as for the development of the historical city, with the design of new roads, which were the main theme of other disciplines that have made it the subject of a sectorial specialization. For decades urban plans have been developed on road paradigm in its different categories: motorway, expressway, ring-roads, junctions, according to purely functional logic, without thereby being able to determine new arrangements with the urban context, resulting in rupture or in barriers within the city, but also in larger-scale contexts such as territorial. The question that arises is: can be the road a device capable to infrastructure the development of new scenarios not only urban but also territorial? And does the road manage to be an object of architectural nature that can be placed within the engineering discipline, capable of tracking new urban systems and new forms of landscape?

### **The street in the historic city**

We know that the road was for the historic city the relationship element between the morphological tissue of the built-up space, between the built-up and the void of the public space of its squares, in its different formal categories. It is a track that can show us the memory of the city not only through its spatial form, but also through its temporal form. Therefore the road has always been, in the history of the city, the main instrument

of order not only spatial, but also temporal: across the street, in fact, is also the historic time, as for example in the *medieval town* where the unit environment and simultaneously multi-faceted features a sequence in which the regularity of the architectural body that surrounds the road is forgotten, while are appreciated the *fragments* of Roman remains and their manufacturing, recovered to compose the façades. The city can be told even through its constituent elements: the cross section of the road, the buildings with their façades and with the elements that draw it, as halls, windows, loggias, basement, roofing. An on-going relationship of different measures that draws a double vertical palimpsest containing the road. A continuous relationship of different measures that draws a double vertical schedule that contains the road. Concerning this, famous is the *Strada Nova* in Genova by **Alessi**, as also are the drawings by **Filarete** representing the road in various geometric compositions: *network*, *ring-shaped* and *radial*. The road in the Renaissance emphasizes the central perspective referring to order and proportion. The streets of the historic city build the complex relationships of mankind, in which they took order, weight and measure, the rhythm of step<sup>1</sup> of those who pass through at low speed, resulting in a *time-space* relationship and the pace of thought with which received the inside and the outside becoming the instrument by which the Renaissance city is organized through network roads. However the elements of the road are not only of physical nature, but also social because privileged space of the relations between the inhabitants, as well as representation of the public power. The *Ring Strasse*, instead, marks the end of the period of the great neo-classical axial compositions of idealistic culture. The road will no longer be considered a cultural object predetermined by a single perspective: it becomes "*fragmented, through a system of conjunctions that can surround the old city*"<sup>2</sup>. The maximum period of rationalization of the road occurs with **Stüben** in his manuals of 1880, in which typological studies of the blocks also included the different types of geometry of the road sections and their intersections, classifying them into different categories of typological membership and in the "*Hausmannian*" demolition for the sanitation of the historic city. With the modernity, the streets are drawn according to new parameters of *movement*, *speed*, *simultaneity*, which find their clear cultural references in the artistic avant-garde of early last century, where the degree of *spatial-temporal* relationship is no longer the eye of the viewer of the historic city, but the new mental image one has of the modern city.

### The street into modernity

One of the consequences of modern culture of the 20th century, based on the IV Athens Congress CIAM in 1933 and resulted in the *Athens Charter* published in 1943, is the mutual independence of buildings from roads of communication: “the separation of pedestrian traffic from that of vehicles”<sup>3</sup>, in such a way that on each level circulate only some means of transport and not others. So the buildings have no degree of dependence with the connective tissue of the roads, so the urban morphology surrenders to the formal and stereometric content of the modern architecture by breaking down the relationship between figure and background that had marked the relationship of the historic city with its territory, but still before it breaks the relationship of individual architectural forms with all of the city determined from time to time the various degrees of complexity, stability and formal clarity of the figure itself. It was in 1922 with the project for the *City for three million of inhabitants*, by Le Corbusier, revisited in the project *La Ville Radieuse* of 1935 and through the *Plan Voisin* of 1925, that the concept of road in the classic sense was finally abandoned. In the modern architectural culture of the 20th century the word *road*, considered synonymous with clutter and confusion, was replaced by a functional definition: road corridor, while the urban land, the “ground floor” of the city, becomes a park without interruptions. In 1925 **Hilberseimer** wrote that the *City of the future* must have the character of a scheduled realization, of an organism studied in its entirety. The city had to be designed and constructed on the basis of its own elements, the plan had to be clear and orderly. New buildings hadn't to be built with closed courtyards, but open and airy blocks, while the width of the roads was proportionate to the height of buildings. In subsequent meetings of *CIAM 7* and *8* of 1949 in Bergamo and in 1951 in Hoddesdon, the road is again seen as crucial for the problem of the urban form of historical centres after the destruction caused by the war events of the second world war. But it is important to remember also the studies, that were conducted between the 50ies and 60ies at MIT Boston and the researches by the British group of *The Architectural Review*, which opened a broad discussion on the morphological features of the cultural landscape and among them in the foreground the theme of the road. Today the concept of road is different, intended as an element of communication on various levels and in different contexts, as well as in its different levels of use: *urban*

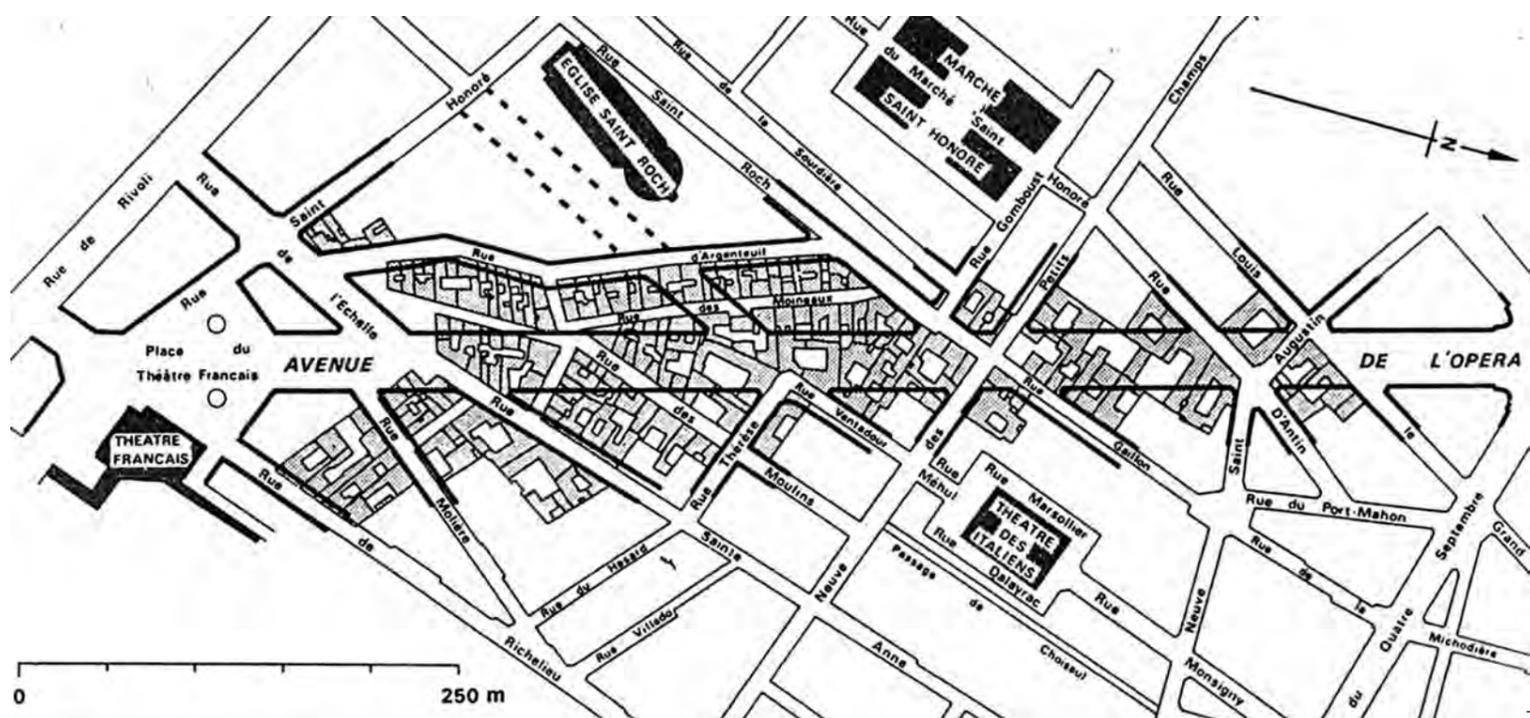
*street, freeway, expressway or highway*, of material or immaterial nature as the computer roads that put simultaneously in network events in different parts of the world. The contemporary city - under its various definitions of *global city, urban sprawl, post-metropoli, generic city, metropolitan area, conurbation* - is decomposed but mostly dispersed in space as according to the continuous process of liquefaction of the elements that constitute it. It is continually used during the day and night through simultaneous events on global scale, which determine tangible and intangible communication streams. So, which role can the road infrastructure (at least the material one that concerns the architectural discipline) still have as a tool for planning and design for new territorial structures? How can the road be the place of representation of the contemporary world? May the road come back to be an urban place, not only in its architectural nature, but also in its social exception as an area of relationship between inhabitants?

**Louis I. Khan** defined the road: "*As a meeting place, such as a meeting room, except that it does not have the roof. By corollary, a meeting room is like a road covered with a roof. The walls of a meeting room are similar to house facades, and streets are determined by the houses of the city. Today the streets are free from ties to the houses that line it: no longer roads, but modern and impersonal avenues. To revive the road, let it be animated by the movements of its inhabitants, from their trades. Make concise your plans and distribute conveniently houses at roadsides, give them back a human aspect*"<sup>4</sup>.

One knows that the road in the European historical city relied on the construction of the empty space through the design of its outline using the façades that delimited it, defining an urban inner space, while today the contemporary city lacks the architectural and spatial elements that has characterized the city in the past. Modern architecture, since the 20ies, is completely detached from the street and the demands of its major functionality have made it just a technical issue-functional, releasing from the relationship with the morphological urban fabric. But the logics that led to the development of the city do not allow a revival of composition belonged to historical contexts already passed. Maybe it's the overturning of the relationship of the empty space of the road into the built-up space of the city to develop a new complementary relation where the road infrastructure returns to be an architecture: *the architecture of the road*, where it becomes the full on the empty background, able to establish new forms of connection through the *perimeter, crossing* and *centrality* to define new *landscaping*, and capable of determining a necessary unity for the intelligibility of the new changed place. The dispersion that characterized the *urban sprawl*, has fuelled an interest in recent

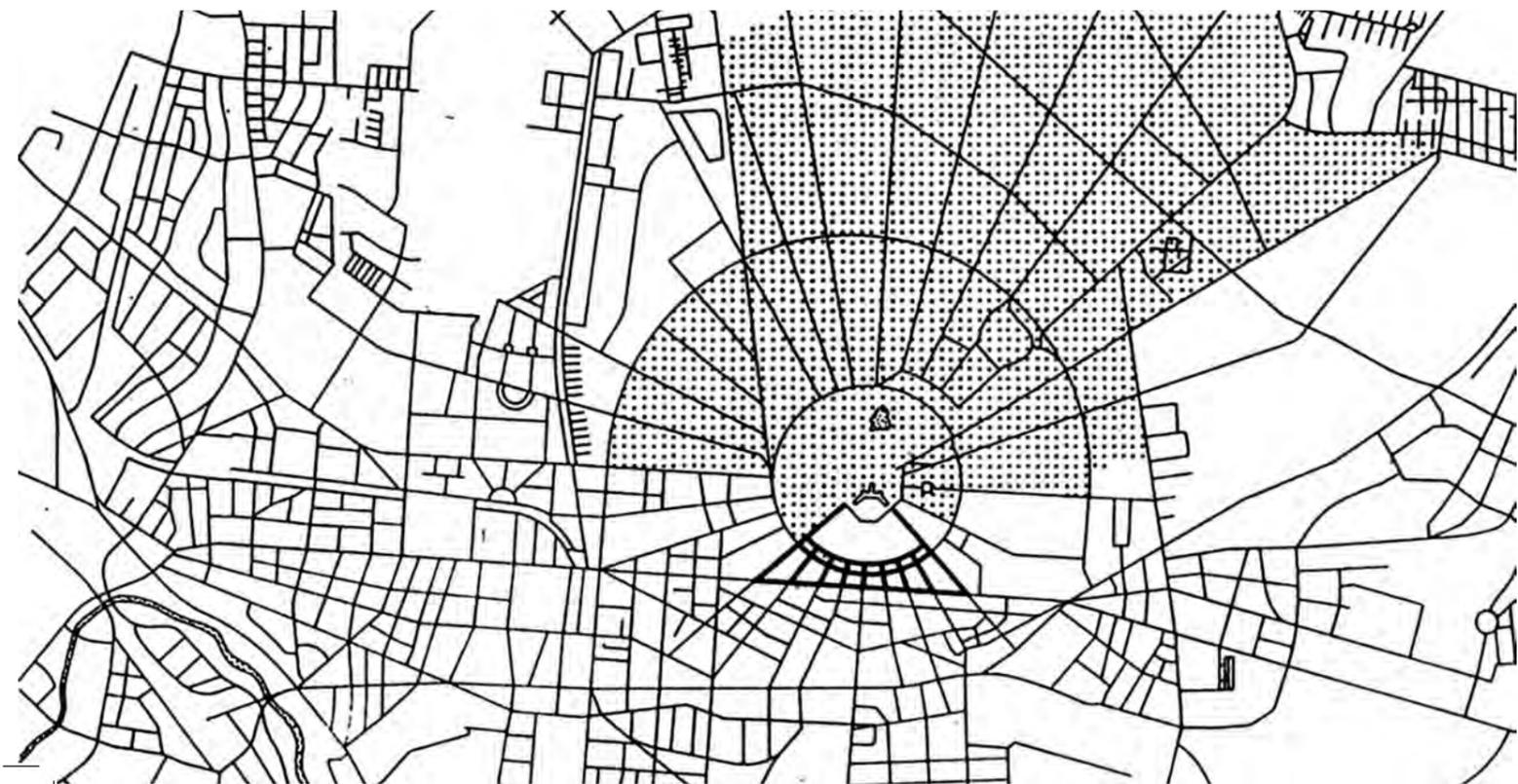
years for the infrastructure, as an element capable of opposing the process of fragmentation and disintegration of the built environment. In fact, the urban sprawl needs to be connected in all its individual points, determining, unwittingly, through its porosity a maximum degree of accessibility, where the road infrastructure is back to being the connective element of the city, this time under a new logic: the network. Consequently infrastructures are responsible for hiring the new architectural units according to an *adequate measure*, capable of structuring new forms of contemporary landscape. In this way the road, from pure engineering infrastructure in its broader use of meaning, becomes an architectural issue and instrument, able to interpret the new contemporary city: "in other words it means attempting to tackle a road project as the project of a building, from an architectural and functional point of view, trying to establish his identity and to solve the technical problem due to the presence of different, but also conflicting, functions; taking into account the relationship with the places that it crosses and in particular with the continuity of existing tissues"<sup>5</sup>. This new condition, shifted the focus of the architectural discipline from a tectonic condition to a condition of iconic nature, developing new projects and leaving behind all

Parigi, Hausmann Plan, rue de l'Opéra opening, 1853-96



the culture of urban morphological and typological studies that had characterized the Italian architecture school with **Saverio Muratori**. A great interest grows increasingly for new application in open and indeterminate areas, characterized by the presence of infrastructures that mark the territory almost always without determining a spatial quality, creating the basis for new forms of degradation of nature not only physically, but also compositional meaning unintelligible forms and social degradation. **Franco Purini**, remembering **Bruno Zevi**, says that being the infrastructure without an inner space, it cannot be defined as an architecture, although it produces spatiality and, still, it defines the nature of an infrastructure *unitary* and *serial* simultaneously. The longitudinal continuity of large-scale design acts as a counterpoint to the cross modularity of some architectural elements, that had been standardized at the detail scale. The perception of the product takes place for individual parts that determine from time to time new shots, while reading the territorial scale is impossible for the user. The

Karlsruhe, the layout of the city founded in 1715 overlapped to the contemporary infrastructural system



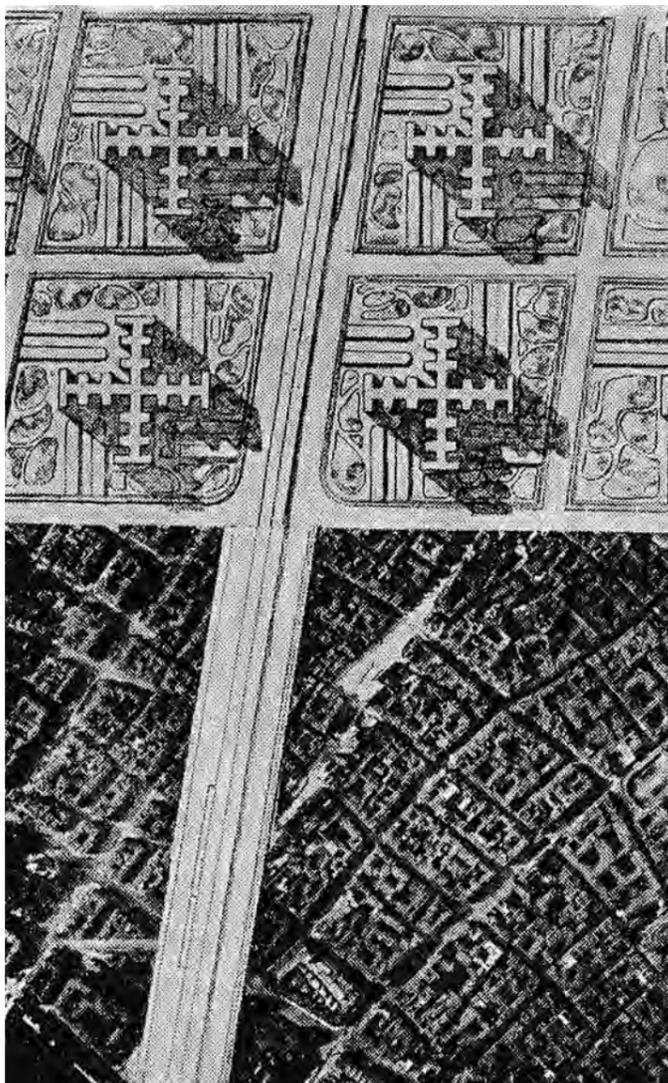
aesthetics of perception prevails over the quality of the given space and over the tectonic sense of the work<sup>6</sup>. Recovering a larger plastic dimension, no longer done with the use of prefabricated elements, may determine a different aesthetic value of the work within the tectonic context of architecture to determine a higher degree of relationship with the territory on which it depends the quality of the designed landscape. This leads to *"a kind of rejection phase that sees urban organisms refuse in many cases the infrastructure. This reaction has several causes. The first consists in considering the infrastructure that penetrate the building fabric main factors of their degradation. Hence the growing conviction that there is a genetic incompatibility between ramps, viaducts, interchanges and the landscape of the city. In fact this incompatibility is not only functional and environmental in nature, but also aesthetics (...) in the sense that introduce into the urban image violent waste and irreducible scalar contrast"*<sup>7</sup>.

#### **Inclusive time and exclusive time**

The concept of *fast time* in the modernity has determined the need for development of infrastructure connections as short as possible, according to the logic of speed without any kind of interference with the context in an independent way from the places it passes through, determining a model of *exclusive time* and a relative urban space, passive, forced to the logic of the functional hierarchy of roads. A new mental attitude for a culture of infrastructure project must be studied and defined, capable to turn the model of *exclusive time* in a model based on a complementary *inclusive time* as combination of different times of the city and of the country, and able to rebuild depleted cycles through intertwining, overlays, co-presences and also for substitutions and cancellations involving the theme of total, or even only partial, demolition of the infrastructures for transformation and reuse.

#### **Conclusions**

New project actions see infrastructure as a means to reach a possible improvement of the quality of life of the inhabitants, and this will only be possible if the matter does not reduce



to a fact of order only functional, but also and above all by order of architectural nature and thus *venustas* and civic status. We must be able to interpret new social values, to build a code capable to write a document of new human relationships in time and space and transcribe into a new system of spatial forms which can be an expression of a new world, in which the architecture and infrastructure become one thing: *the architecture of infrastructure*, as it has been for the ancient cultures in which the architecture was defined as the great "*nurturer*" of society<sup>8</sup> and this through two different levels, as defined by **Nicola Emery**<sup>9</sup>, the first that space as a therapy and the other as a social device. Finally, we must be able to give back a morphological value to the technical intervention of the road, sufficient to acquire a new ordering role, and to be able to return as part of the settlement. **Vittorio Gregotti** concludes in this way his editorial entitled "*Road: track and artefact*" published

Le Corbusier, Plan Voisin, 1925

in Casabella 553-554, dedicated to the theme of the road: "To do this you must first, respecting the specific skills, begin with the return to the realm of architecture, and compel our discipline to consider as its own and specific problems posed by it".

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Enrico Alfonso Corti, essay by Luigi Stendardo (edited), *La traccia e la memoria*, Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici, Napoli, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> "Il ritorno della strada urbana" by G. Shane, *Lotus international* n. 24, 1979.

<sup>3</sup> Le Corbusier, *Maniera di pensare l'urbanistica*, The four functions of life: living, working, nurturing body and spirit.

<sup>4</sup> Romaldo Giurgola and Jaimini Metha (edited), *Louis I. Khan*, Zanichelli, Bologna, 1981.

<sup>5</sup> Lilia Pagano, "The street, unifying element in the construction of cities", in *Lotus International* n. 64, 1989.

<sup>6</sup> The different weight given in architecture to the tectonic aspect and to the more purely perceptive aspect is confirmed by the fact that the same happens, from a certain moment, also in the various art forms such as films, that borrow their location to insert their characters in contexts in which the perceptual size-cinema becomes the privileged place for the story. *Paris, Texas* (1984) directed by Wim Wenders.

<sup>7</sup> Franco Purini, "Questioni di infrastrutture", in *Casabella* 739-740, Milano, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Plato in dialogue *Timaeus*.

<sup>9</sup> Nicola Emery, *Progettare, costruire, curare. Per una deontologia dell'architettura*, Edizioni Casa-grande, Bellinzona, 2010.