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Between two shores, looking for a land in between

Arturo Lanzani

In the Italian landscape and in the forms of its government seem to consolidate two different layouts, sometimes in conflict, sometimes well set on two different shores. In between a point of view - which contains Alberto Clementi's itinerary, but also the author's one - that has a great difficulty of action together with some small internal weakness.

A building and a town-planning without any landscape or environment
A 'shore' of our sea, amazingly more and more strong and solid, is given by a powerful building activity, that, with no hesitation overlaps itself upon the inherited landscape, often erasing every trace, without making a 'new landscape', that is without creating 'new worlds' (urban, rural or hybrid), where old and new objects, activities and people are coexistent, yet with rules different from the past, out of a non proposable harmony and uniformity. To put it another way this building activity struggles to build new common goods and to create a common condition of liveableness and livability. This movement follows the impetuous building and planning development of the second postwar period. This activity is no longer linked to an epochal redistribution of population and the territory activities (from the country sides to the cities, from a region to another, from the mountains to the valleys, from the watered to the dry plain, from the inland to the coast...) and to the birth of new and distinct socio-territorial forms that drastically modify both economic geography and Italian development. It is neither linked to the

spreading of a residential liberation of many families from an old housing condition among the worst in Europe (on the contrary the enforced building activity is today strongly connected to the worsening of housing conditions). There are some other reasons at its base. First of all a report of individual consumptions and of the familiar investment strategies, quite different from the one of many European countries. Housing consumptions that implicate a higher per head consumption of private and individual residential volumes compared to a lower use/consumption of open urban, rural, public, collective or semi-collective housing spaces. On the other hand such a great number of buildings is related to the importance of real estate investment in Italy, compared to different forms of familiar investment. Second, this process seems to be linked to a revolution, delayed for a long time, but much more explosive, banal and ungovernable, of the commercial-distributive forms and the related spaces; to an original housing structure, with a lot of problems, of the Italian small and medium enterprise; finally to a recent tendency to an expansion of logistics spaces. Another reason of this urbanization is due to the great presence of second houses in Italy, and to some more general characteristics of the tourist development model in our country. Finally this process of building, that develops regardless of any valuation about reusable patrimony and the areas of a possible building improvement, is linked to a deterioration of Italian local finance, that powers the former processes. In our country that got into debts in the '80s, and where the incomes are untouchable, charging cannot finance important investments in

public works and territorial requalification anymore; at the same time the State and the towns debt cannot be acceptable. The selling of 'building land' has substituted the loan at the Caisse des Dépôts et Consignation or the ordinary charging in the towns, not only regardless of any valuation of the residual offer in the already urbanized areas, but also of environmental sustainability and the landscape impact of the new settlements. However it is not only a problem of quantity. Today some elements increase the difficulty of building a new landscape in the spread urbanization. First of all, this latest building cycle has often upset those weak signs of structure, those elements of minimal rationality that the first spread had. A more hardened action, from the landscape point of view, of the different rationalities of the sector has substituted that minimal rationality; urban facts more and more self-referential, not only in the internal organization but also in the location rules have substituted a dust of buildings standing on the inherited infrastructures and the historical signs of the territory... Second, the great importance of qualitative elements and of the 'contest' in the building process, the significance of the 'environmental quality' of the surrounding, the clout of some symbolic dimensions of the landscape in the building improvement process and in the residential housing strategies, have made this building cycle more and more rapacious in private appropriation and the following destruction of any strip of qualified urban and rural landscape, or naturally inherited, of any common good produced in the time. Finally, it is necessary to observe that, much strongly than in the previous twenty years, the last twenty-year period have seen a deep

falling apart of the rural residual landscape adding up to this most relevant and spread building, that has conquered many rural spaces, both for the abandoning of marginal lands, and for the development of a kind of agriculture that, in its main components and out of welfare rhetoric, has broken any link with care of the land and natural balances, being unable to foresee a rural, or better post-rural environment, environmentally sustainable and landscape qualified. Which have the positions of urban culture been, in the face of these processes? The positions at the 'extremes' are quite clear and the most influential, and we have to start from here. At one end, in a minor position but clear and paradigmatic, a denouncing activity has been developed to criticize the transformations in progress (often deserving). Such an activity of both denouncing and counter-proposal is however vitiated by a terrible interpretative deficit and by a vision of government of the land that is not only not acceptable, but also usually disastrous. At the other end the mercantile 'drift', mainly of the professional practice that supports and goes along with these dynamics. On one hand great part of town planning has been characterized by an exclusive confrontation or better the pure support to the reasons of the building field operators and to whom was about to realize the new infrastructures; with the following progressive unacceptableness of anyone else's reasons in building plans and politics. On the other hand, the renounce to any specific activity producing technical features on single problems has come out; producing critical considerations about some political-administrative choices beyond the

evaluation of their appreciation; producing an overall view of all the decisions to make and their sometimes difficult consequences; producing an attention and care to common goods reproduction and in particular of landscape and environment values; producing not banal representations and images of possible futures that go beyond the 'commonsense', yet aiming at meeting the 'acceptance'. A drift that tends to eliminate any reference to the landscape, the environment and the territory by the town planning action.

The short-circuits of cultural landscapes preservation and politics

The second shore comes out from the spontaneous convergence of the traditional politics of cultural goods preservation and landscape, promoting the so called cultural landscapes and territorial marketing, and sometimes, as already said, with the developments of the 'new landscape painting'. The inherited landscape preservation politics, for a long time thwarted and considered less important by economy development dynamics and by a wild liberalism in the use of the land, and in any case made ineffective by the lack of any economic resources for the preservation and maintenance, at the early 80's began to obtain some important success in a framework of interests totally changed; that is when it meets not only the perfecting of a reformist culture and a new attention of the government to common goods, but also when it meets (accidentally) a new and more segmented residential and tourist demand. The preservation of historical centers, already distinguished and perimetrical, as well as the preservation of many high

quality agricultural landscapes so often certified as Unesco heritage, does not interweave with an hypothesis of both defense and deep change of production and/or living methods parallel to the dominant ones in the modernization processes, but is congruent with the most homologating and privatizing dynamics, more than the main path of Italian modernization. In this way the scenery is preserved, but its sense changes radically, forms fixity more easily hides the radical metamorphosis of those landscapes. The preservation of the nice inherited landscape is not expression of care any more, not only of the most known expressions of high quality culture, but also of the less important material culture of the weakest classes; it is no longer a possible 'hold' to imagine and pursue a different development hypothesis, richer with civic dimensions, moments of self-consciousness and able to think itself in plural and contextual forms. The inherited landscape preservation tends to become the preservation of a scenography of global tourism or new niches of cultural tourism and in other contexts of more and more qualified segments of residential market. Processes of characterization, hypostatization, stereotyping lead the rules of convertibility; reducing the landscape image in a postcard, modifies radically its shapes, sometimes exaggerating some peculiarities, some other times homogenizing and responding a new 'international' of the rural. The economics formalism of territorial marketing and of the new researches about consumptions makes the landscape its own and takes the place of a substantive and socio-anthropologic

approach, which in the 70's had, for a short period, reformulated the issues of preservation.

A landscape first preserved as the expression of particular ways of producing in a short time becomes consumable. The experience of this landscape both by producing residential inhabitants and seasonable consumers, beco mes poor in the sense that it is standardized and reduced. In this sense the results of preservation produce some involuntary convergence with the new landscape planning which, in the more urbanized and changing places, proposes a renewing action linked to property logics to attract qualified labor, less and less linked to a spread promotion of the urban collective space and a socio-spatial requalification.

Open questions and background issues for a reformist approach to the landscape politics

Between these two strong shores of preserved or new-born landscape-postcard and of building clusters-without landscape, I feel as uncertain and difficult the navigation of those who put the requalification of the whole territory ordinary landscape at the centre of their work. An idea of town and landscape quality, as a common good, as a coexistence space, more and more often collapses under either a quantitative increase that keeps destroying environment and landscape or an idea that sees in the 'landscape' a patrimony or even worse a deposit to exploit in the cycle of cultural consumption or as a component of the integrated offer of goods (residential and complementary spaces) for the new voluntary communities, according the perspectives of a new liberalism in the territory government and of a landscape building that has

forgotten the reformist experience of the European urban park.

The difficulties of this line of action are mainly external and contextual. They have to do with the economic and socio-political evolution of our country. Together with them, anyway, there are at least three internal limits: - the lack of a disenchanting consideration about the several reasons why the issue of the limitation of the land consumption and of the more committing landscape has to be courageously accepted by local government bodies, and the lack of a critical judgment about that monetary and mercantile adrift of producing town planning, as said.

- the centrality given to planning practice of the plan and the great projects. We do certainly need landscape plans and architecture projects 'sensible to the landscape' or '0-volume architectures'. Nevertheless it is impossible to give a decisive role to landscape planning, mainly where its rules come out from the field of preservation management and try to lead the requalification of ordinary landscapes. Not in a country without any rules and so discredited in its technical cultures such as Italy. On the other hand it is unlikely. It is not probable that in the present cycle of territorial changes there is a lot of space for an active politics of the landscape, that is linked to a strong traditional idea and a one of synthesis of architecture project. Generally speaking technical culture has to produce landscape projects that can be meant as strategist constructions and images that give pictures that make sense (legitimate more than shared). At the same time it has to experiment and order a plurality of tools of governance that can be practically and operatively used to implement those 'projects of landscape', to

produce actions starting from those images. Together with landscapes plans and architecture projects we must consider the role of a politics of communication of possible evolutive scenarios far from planning exercises, the potentials of landscape-environment compensation measures of building and infrastructural changes, or of presumable forms of programming-planning integrated on the model of urban or quarters contracts for particular issues. Likewise it is necessary to start a more radical consideration about rural politics and its actual integration with the landscape and urban one, together with a deep reorganization of local severity in order to intertwine the building changes processes and of production of open spaces and to stop land consumption. The presence of misunderstandings, created by the European convention about landscapes. Undoubtedly the horizon of the European convention about landscapes offers a lot of hints for a politics of requalification of ordinary landscapes and for a more conscious management of quality landscapes; moreover it has the merit of considering the landscape as a common wellness element. However it presents some aspects that may be misleading. First of all the reference to local inhabitants and identity dimensions may lead to an undervaluation of the complexity of contemporary relationships between population and territories. It may be more fertile to think the landscape as a possible space of living together, rather than an identity space, as a means and support of reference for those people who live together without sharing the same cultures and values, more than material and symbolical expression

organically cohesive to a local culture and society. Second, the risks of a banal interpretation of the landscape perception issue (while, maybe, a consideration about the plurality of looks is fertile only if it regains its political value and its ability to integrate with the daily dimension of living and with the common sense). In this difficult research of a land-in-between a reformist approach has to focus on three main questions. The sewing up of the links landscape-territory-environment avoiding an exaggerated adrift of the three concepts, and accepting the contemporary centrality of the environment issue, even without making truly its own an arguable expulsion of human being from the environmental issue (as it happens in a lot of contributions of ecology of the landscape). From the centrality of environmental issue comes a necessary question (in the preservation, management, landscape requalification), about the way to guarantee environmental sustainability to some rural landscapes, historical or new ones. In this sense it is important to underline the great distance, in our country, between a conservative policy and not much careful of the landscape ecological-environmental implications and a more recent but equally weak environmental policy, less conscious of the artificial character of Italian land, of the totally built and projected character of its environment. In a more committing form the necessary weavings should be those between a necessary policy of reinfrastructuring the territories of spread and dense urbanization and a necessary policy of rebuilding the few open spaces left within a landscape project, that works on the relation between the elements more than on the allembicing

drawing, and that is able to organize moments of silence and noise in a wide city, of isolation and connection, of speediness and slowness of density and openness to wider horizons. A weaving that is not guaranteed at all by the procedures of environmental evaluations and impacts mitigation, but only by a co-design of the crossed environment structures and by the effective co-financing of both the interventions; The reasons for the crisis of an ancient system of relations that has built the urban and rural territory in the material configuration and in its image. This means to question about how to guarantee a new urbanity and a new care of the expansively inhabited territory with an active policy of the environment. The first (Urbanity) is not automatically linked to the traditional urban scene (with its squares, with an average dimensions city...) that today is often a misleading simulacrum of urbanity, but neither naturally emerging in the new non-places/hyper-places geography (commercial centers, multiplexes, airports...) that only at certain rare conditions become the home for a new urbanity. Everything avoiding a formalist comparison on these issues, too often polarized on the nostalgic and past images, first of an eclectic post-modern, then of the new urbanism and a kind of new ruralism or on a banal praise, now of an outdated come out modernity, now of a more original image of the generic/genetic city, that if has the merit of melting some constitutive aspects, does not explore some contradictions of it (and it seems intentionally to renounce to every intentions of reforms of some of its more difficult aspects). The second (Care) has no longer preferential links with agriculture (that often

'consumes' and urbanizes the land, just like other activities) and with the traditional rural scene, and that on one hand needs a deep consideration about these activities (not impossible, given their level of support, but only marginally outlined by the timid and still charitable rural policy in Italian regions); on the other hand it may weave also with different forms of residentiality (and so even with a strong government in the estate field) and with other economic activities dynamics (not only tourist). Finally, between urbanity and care, the 'third landscape' underlines a landscape field relatively new for European culture probably destined to improve in time and whose level of distinction (from the economic cycle, from the anthropic world, from the more controlled steps of urbanity and care) has just been outlined. The renewal of those two indications coming from two 'classical' authors of Italian research on landscape. The first is the one by Emilio Sereni who invites us to avoid every hypostatization of the past forms, but also to radicate the work of any reforming project, in those forms inherited from the past, so often ignored in their density from a kind of new landscape a bit scenographic and relaxing. The second is that of Lucio Gambi who invites us, as experts of the territory, to rediscover the lesson 'of those men of the Enlightenment who were both scientists and politicians', that should make us consider about that 'politics of the job' that Manlio Rossi Doria, another follower of Cattaneo, put in the centre of his work, out from any technocratic and command vision of the land government, but also far from what it was and still is a placid adapting to - under the rhetoric of administrative feasibility or of the multi-

actorial governance - to the will of very few actors even more powerful and univocal of those of the past. The bet of a reformist approach to the landscape is then, maybe, this one: not to lose the political dimension of the landscape as a vision, as in Humboldt, but to develop this political tension far from the great narrations of the past century in the daily dimension of living, in that ordinary and daily landscape that still is living environment for all of us, 'opening to the world' and 'dumb contact with the things, when they have not been said yet'.