

## PREVENTIVE LANDSCAPES

*Alberto Bertagna*

Università IUAV di Venezia, Dorsoduro 2206, 30123 Venezia, Italia, bertagna@iuav.it

**ABSTRACT:** ‘Preventive Landscapes’ aims to re-verify the design practice compared to its effectiveness to anticipate and put in order the development of becoming. The design is drifting away, forced to run after a territorial evolution that takes place without its indications; so it wants to rebuild its original functions: forecast, interpretation and management of becoming. So that it happens it’s necessary to replace the design - with new forms - in its new and unique field: the landscape, the crossing between space, evidence of the time and immateriality of cultural processes. On this re-meaning of sense, the text aims to set up and propose new effective strategies that - up to date to new global context, its tensions and its inertia - can permit an ‘open’ and interacting control of transformations. An immediate goal wants to re-address the design, a foreseeing instrument that is restricting itself to solve problems and face deficiencies, towards a new progressive tension. So that it will again be a suitable tool for a contemporary reality that doesn’t permit any waste.

**KEYWORDS:** landscape, indeterminacy, to foresee, to control.

Today the objectivity of reality is increasingly subject to debate when not merely subordinated to a sensitive perception. The increasingly attentive specification of correlated elements linking all evidence, on the one hand - a multiagent system transforming each component into complexity - and the multiplication of perspectives, observers and observatories, on the other, seem to jeopardise every reinstatement that wishes to be collected by the givenness. At the same time the frequent errors occurring and apparent in various products of the human disciplines reveal the inadequacy of the hypotheses underpinning them as well as, in less guilty circumstances, the unpredictability of the conditions that concurred and continue to concur in the surrounding context, as well as revealing the need for a more careful evaluation of the fundamental premises on which to construct a review not so much of their current state but more in general of the approaches adopted by the project and its underlying meaning. Leaving aside the system to be adjusted it appears that proceeding by means of *errata corrige* is no longer consented: it is a tool that has not been optimised in the least given the reduction of available resources currently underway. We need to rethink our approaches and base all future forecasts and all preliminary organisation of the future upon premises that are more open and ‘possible’ (that is, neither univocal nor definitively resolved) and described in as much detail as possible (that is, complete and circumstantial); this means rethinking project possibilities and practices from *the ground up*. We must also remember that this issue, the question of the foundations on which management of the future is to be based, will come into conflict with the above.

The territory seems to offer us the most suitable field for testing the renewed ‘preventive’ role of the project of the future offering us an area where anthropological, social, political, technical, economic and environmental issues converge; at the same time this is also where the pressures in existence are felt most strongly and where immediate measures for their containment are most pressing. At a time when the urban population has overtaken the rural population in statistical terms the fate of the two poles involved seems more uncertain than ever: the future organisation of the city and of its counterpart is becoming more and more problematical, beginning with the definition of the condition of identity and otherness of the two entities. The conurbation of one pole and the depopulation of the other are already producing consequences that are waiting for forecasts and guidance rather than expectations or belated adjustments.

Leaving aside the economic crisis whose ‘territorial’ consequences we can already guess at (not just an increase in abandoned sites - industrial, commercial and above all residential, but also difficulties in managing sensitive contexts), this demographic turning-point is also accompanied by pressing political issues (refused landscapes, from rubbish dumps to ‘new forms of energy’, from certain infrastructures - civilian as well as military - to all those physical structures perceived by local populations as foreign bodies or dangerous or disturbing elements and requiring resignification in order to acquire a shared meaning),

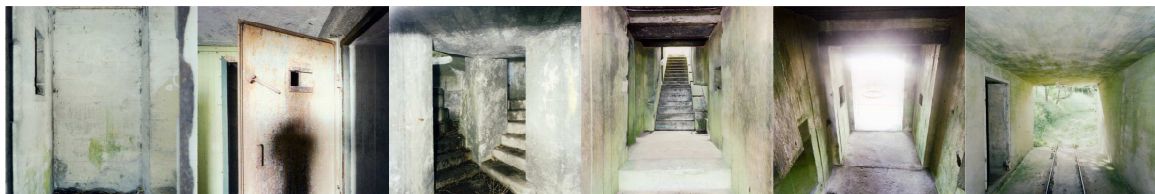
---

social issues (spaces of exclusion as well as spaces of insecurity), anthropological questions (individualisation that destroys the sense of community, technology that develops at a faster pace than consolidated patterns of living) and, last but not least, environmental matters, which can no longer be dismissed as mere catastrophisms (in fact the scenarios attributed to climactic changes in various scientific circles represent a series of further areas requiring prevention rather than cure).

Although Europe is hardly an emblematic place for these trends, and emergencies are making themselves felt in a less equivocal manner in other contexts, we still need to develop a new type of 'project' capable of reacting in advance before situations evolve, also with regard to issues that are less apparent. Thus, while the urbanisation process in Europe does not require urgent responses in terms of its numbers (the percentage has dropped with respect to the past), the phenomenon does need responses in terms of the new origins of its actors whose presence within the bounds but often on the periphery of urban life leads to potentially disintegrating needs and conflicts. So even if after all the population is distributed uniformly within the continental boundaries and depopulation processes are less incisive and restrictive than elsewhere, management of the 'natural' or non-urbanised territory nevertheless requires certainly attention, carefully constructed, open prospects. It is in the context of the territory - or of the 'landscape' - that we must summarise and organise the complexity and instability of the transformations that are already to some extent underway, the questions and the discontinuities. And the instrument capable of responding to the uncertainty of the future is based on their control, on realising their project, and on developing a 'pre-vision'. Or better the anticipated spatialisation of the solutions represents the only vector capable of composing a less problematic future. The purpose of the 'pre-emptive strategy', of the 'preventive landscapes project', is to discard the logic that still eventually refers to adaptive re-use, rehabilitation, renewal, rethinking or mitigation and therefore waits for problems to arise subsequently in order to intervene in favour of development that is truly preventive: capable of providing for his mistake, capable of immediately appearing as a harbinger of its own necessary variations.

In its subsidiarity and on its various levels, once the territorial project turns back to its own ontological roots and therefore to a redefinition of its own original meaning as a harbinger and organiser of the future (aware of the unpredictability of the latter), it clashes with the oscillations of the reality on which it must base its own pre-vision and of the infinite interpretations of its indications produced by an increase in individuals; it clashes with the end of certainty now apparent in all ambits. All the phenomena registered involve multiple correspondences and subjects with translations that are differentiated when not oppositional, making it extremely difficult to conduct them towards a specification consenting the necessary projection. Their reduction, the basis for every project, is a necessary operation and therefore heralds the same errors produced by the *subsequent approach process* adopted so far. The interruption of linear historical time, the end of the Deleuzian drift replaced by the Virilian incident and *substitute approach* implying that use becomes wear and tear and therefore abandonment, all this requires new instruments so that the refunctionalisation or redefinition of meaning no longer represent the only inexorable choice to be made *a posteriori*. What is required above all is a phenomenology that is capable of balancing representation of data and its re-production, or rather, to borrow Jean-Luc Nancy's distinction, of underlining reality and its sensitive interpretation. It is necessary to understand the subjectivity and relationalism within a design desiring to govern the complexity.

The landscape project, a project that is spatial and cultural as well as physical and territorial, bases its feasibility and durability upon the fact that it orders the future while being ordered by it (that is, by evolving needs and values); it is capable of anticipating its own obsolescence and resolving it in the same fact. The only landscape that can equip the contemporary world for an effective encounter with the future and construct a space not merely leaving it in a condition of being 'on hold' is a 'Preventive Landscape'.



**Fig. 1-6.** Guido Guidi, *Bunker*.

---

The 'Preventive Landscape' aims at establishing the premises required to restore the specific and exclusive original function of projects; i.e., their role of predicting, interpreting and guiding the future, by placing it, after adjusting its 'forms', into a new unique possible realm, the realm of landscape, that is found at the intersection between physicalness of space, time evidence, and the immateriality of cultural processes. It also aims at putting forward effective strategies, updated according to the changed global context, its tensions and possible drifts, so as to obtain an 'open' control, interactive and non-preclusive, over the transformations. The 'Preventive Landscape' takes the indeterminate as the backdrop and, at the same time, field of action; i.e., as the context within which to operate, marked by the end of all certainties, and as a complex system where the project is called on to perform its effective activity of evaluation and, therefore, guidance. It explores 'forms' of its current dissemination and seek the 'reasons' so as to reach its understanding. From a sectorial perspective, then, it verifies the logical consequences posed by the contraposition between the 'project' - control operator of space intended as architecture, as well as city and territory planning, able to exert control through principles and previsions - and the backdrop 'against which' the project is now forced to operate, characterised by unforeseeability and discontinuity. The 'Preventive Landscapes' are the outcome of the 'new project,' able to take up, ahead of time, its possible criticalities, the changes in the real and its significance, the transformations in value and ability of both physical and cultural contexts. The 'Preventive Landscapes' are spaces that express a new strategy, able to optimise the resources and time available, overcome the widespread tendency to consider project-making more and more as the correction of erroneous approaches, thus betraying its own founding objective, looking at the past to manage the present, rather than being projected towards the future.

If reality is difficult to define due to its relativity; if, after all, all this suggests the end of certainty that has been given as a precursor and, consequently, the field of curiosity represented by the relationship between order and chaos in physics, our aim is to find where the undetermined is, what it is, and what it means, as well as how the project establishes itself before it, towards what 'dynamic state' it evolves and within what scenario, what the project is when placed before the uncertainty in its establishment and development. Before the sense of the future in contemporaneity (the continuously 'expired' present in Cioran's existential reflections, Augé's 'halted' present and 'missed surprise', Prigogine's entropic time between causality and casualness...), before, in other words, a subtraction of the future dimension, we wish to understand what possible space there is for the 'pro-ject', providing that it still exists. The dimension of time increasingly flattened against the current rather than merely against the present (as in the definitions by Husserl and Deleuze), and, therefore, the condition of a contemporaneity deprived of its projective power is not the only one that undermines, from its etymological foundations, the project. This is a second variable that intervenes and compromises it as an operator able to exert control on the future. From Maxwell's discontinuity to Renè Thom's 'catastrophes', from Bohr's principle of complementarity to Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy, from the studies on management systems and casualness as the self-organising element proposed by Henri Atlan, to Severino's epistemological observations on the relationship between regulating elements and systemic anomalies, complexity and non-linearity ultimately threaten the principle of causality and determinism in physics as well. Chance is no longer admitted, and becomes the founding element of every reflection on the future. The principle whereby - in the architectural as well as city and territorial planning projects - fixed conditions correspond to a predictable outcome is no longer certain. With respect to all this, the reactions, at least those coming from certain segments of our sector, have certainly been ready to reframe codes that were too rigid. However, there is an evident gap between the possibility of accepting the 'chance' of an Event City, just to mention an example, and the outcome of transformations that dramatically influence the territory and landscape. 'Chance' - in our field; i.e., 'urban and territorial physics', represented by the variability of individual needs and the pressure of their quantity, that cannot be assimilated along definite directives and certainly differing from a mere 'event' - compromises in a new, potentially disruptive way the future of each project, which is increasingly often forced to run after rather than be ahead. It is not a matter of projecting into the future 'forms' that are flexible enough to accept the unpredictable, but one of projecting strategies that take the unpredictable as their own guiding operator; i.e., strategies that 'permit' their own crisis and solve it in advance within their structure.

The context and aim of 'Preventive Landscape' project are as follows: if the context in which contemporaneity has chosen to operate is increasingly becoming one that is merely "current", if it is more

---

and more weighed down by the irruption of chance and the unpredictable future, what can the evolution for the project, the evolution of the project, be?

The key steps forming the rationale underlying 'Preventive Passages' can be summarised in the following points. 1) Crises - i.e., the moments of discontinuity such as the one currently underway globally - impose a revision of systems and processes as well as of their organisation. Subsequently, they do not hint at the project's fallibility (by now accepted), but, rather, suggest the need of prevision and the essentialness of determining its 'tolerance.' The unavoidable opening towards probable future crises must start from the exact, upstream definition of the project's 'load capacity. 2) Even though it is an increasingly frequent practice it is useless to focus on the 'post-' we must focus on the 'pre-': the waste of resources implicit in every planning strategy of mere 'reversibility' is no longer acceptable; rather than proceeding by means of *errata corrige* we must adopt 'prevention.' 3) The project is experiencing ontological difficulties with regard to its own meaning: its crisis is more serious today when the difficulty of making previsions is increasingly evident due to the indeterminacy of the surrounding conditions and in defining the foundation on which to base the prevision of the future. 4) It is necessary to start again by giving a new meaning to it, recodifying the 'project' in its original meaning, structuring it as a system that can cope with crises by really predicting them and is open to them. 5) At the same time we must envisage decoding it by structuring it as a system paying increasing attention to interpretation. 6) It is necessary to consider the project in terms of landscape (a 'Preventive Landscape' is a relational system that deals, in physical and cultural space, with *all* time variables; it is a system able to re-exist or exist again, also strengthened by the crises it has to face because they are implicit in its organisational process).



**Fig. 7-10.** Damien Hirst, *Void*.

The most suited way to conceive landscape projects is not to view them in terms of objects but in terms of partnerships. This requires the creation of relationships among objects, space, and the meaning of the new entity, not only in its current context but also in relation to the past and the future. The project therefore bridges the gap between what existed and beforehand making adjustments with what it foresees in the future.

It seems perfectly logical to incorporate European Landscape Convention proposals with the hypothesis of a project-process. It must, from the very start, establish a bond with its context (any entity, be it biological or not, including memory) and its evolution. Nowadays however the project-process seems to have to tackle not so much the future it had forecast or anticipated, but a very different future from what was expected: the crisis of himself. Presently the project-process seems to have to imagine itself faced with transience rather than modifications, both context and the project itself. Currently the bond, the connection, and therefore the individual context of what is introduced in a territory do not seem to be all the physical aspects faced, but rather the immateriality of time and its ever increasingly fast acceleration. Today it seems necessary to look at the process not as a reception or exclusion (a mode that leads to progressively adjust a system to emerging needs) but as a system of leave, or even waste. Today it seems necessary to consider the process of transformation of the territory as a 'digestive process'. The digestive process first of all foresees conversion: seems appropriate to deal not to redefine what is rejected, but to anticipate the rejection of what is being to done, the waste that is about to be created, to propose Preventive Landscapes.