



Structure and transparent façade

The Necessity of Beauty

Renato Rizzi

THE CONTINUOUS GROWTH OF COMPLEXITY

The evolution of the economic, productive and administrative phenomena that characterise the process of transformation – those that manifest themselves and translate themselves into a region changing its physical appearance – are reaching such a level of complexity and articulation that they render the entire planning system comprehensible only with difficulty. It would be better to say with 'visible' or 'observable' difficulty within a complex horizon, difficulty in verifying with respect to the concrete, physical and material aspects of objective reality. So it is true that to control it this planning system is manipulated into a decomposition of parts (traffic, housing, services, industry, recreational) ramifying its homogeneous subsystems, in an attempt to reduce the complexity, which results, but into a fragmentation unable to restore formal sense to a general planning programme.

From this point of view regional planning, forming a hierarchy with respect to the diverse operative levels – provincial, district, communal, local – is forced to enclose, reunify or at least keep together within proper objectives, the complexity of reality. A reality that, tends to become diluted, ground down, rendered ever more inconsistent, almost transparent because it is seen, analysed, interpreted principally through the abstract filter of technico-normative instrumentation. A reality which shows the weaknesses of the planning system, unfortunately overworking foreseeable aberrations and consequently stressing the defects.

FROM THE QUANTITATIVE TO THE QUALITATIVE CONDITION

The state of crisis reached by the regional and urban arrangement only testifies, precisely through the factual evidence, that the bringing together of the urbanistic, economic productive programme with the effectual reality produces a great distance between the expectations and the intentions of development and their traditional practices. The phenomenon of the degradation of things in general – the environment, the countryside, the city – is stressed ultimately in these years because it has passed from a first quantitative phase, concerned with the development of primary needs (house, work, services) to that of a qualitative type

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which explores in the modes of use and in their representation its own value.

Up to the recent past, the region was still understood as a place of inexhaustible exploitation: productive, residential, agricultural. Today, however it is coming to be considered as a place of value for its intrinsic qualities: its own beauty. It is passing thus from a conception of property to be consumed to another, property to be conserved.

Above all this state applies to the city. Exhausted, the great phase of uncontrolled expansion has turned towards attaining internal requalification, seeking to recover a series of values and significances that were previously fought against or, at best, ignored.

From an idea of city as production, towards an idea of city as representation.

THE IMPERFECTION OF THE REGIONAL PLANNING VIEW

This important change which demands a further displacement of such limits – understood as conservation and representation – requires a revision of the planning codes and instruments. It requires a different approach, a different thinking which does not sour expectations by the normative grid, or stiffen the restrictive bonds exclusively. The theme of environmental quality, urban and rural, now demands the introduction of an aesthetic thought that concretely values questions of form – precisely in their figurative aspects, perceptible by the sensibility of sight.

The actual structure of town planning or of regulatory plans, is founded above all on a descriptive abstraction of reality that is entrusted almost exclusively, to the capacity or potential of numerical calculation – indices, relations, standards. An abstract interpretation that reduces and cancels out study of the physical and figurative materiality of the city and the region, rendering it in the end inconsistent, almost incomprehensible. Like a view almost of deprived of sight.

FROM THE FREEDOM OF CHAOS TO THE FREEDOM OF BEAUTY

An aesthetic programme that develops an 'idea of beauty' appears to be, today, the only possible response. To recover aesthetic thinking no longer as handed down from the historical tradition (for our intents and purposes the tradition that developed from the 19th century on: the knowledge, or more precisely the study of the perception of beauty and of the work of the art), but as a 'consciousness', as a capacity to interpret, to understand, to project reality through sensible forms. It means developing a thinking capable of 'seeing comprehensively', of re-unifying in the figure, or better in an entanglement of figures, the different aspects of the



1. F. Rella (ed), *Bellezza e Verità*, Feltrinelli, Editrice, Milan, 1990.

planning ideas: political, economic, technical, poetic. It means erecting a programme of 'figurative coherence' that establishes a great constellation of referential images that can reverberate – as in a process of expansion and concentration – at different levels: from those of the region to those of the community or neighbourhood.

The territory, the countryside, the natural environment and the built environment of the city, come to be interpreted then no longer separately, as facts in themselves, and thus bereft of their complex framework, but rather in their togetherness, in their fickle exchange of values and of relationships, in company with all the body of programmatic expectations.

The study of a 'beauty of form' which could embrace all ideas (defined by Hegel as 'the highest act of reason'¹) represents the struggle to attain that necessary quality, but pursued in vain (so they declared) by the regulations.

It is the breaking open, the surpassing of linguistic chaos expressed, for example, in architecture. An inevitable chaos, since, for all that, no objective to attain it exists. No aspiration towards representation – except as solitary or individual presence – exists any longer, since in fact, it is impossible for it to be inscribed in a wider horizon of meaning.

This is how the theory of the 'fragment' came to be. A weak strategy that has renounced its involvement and confrontation with a more complex idea of 'planning', and that, therefore, has justified and legitimated at present the 'particular in the absence of a general reflexion'.

The same holds for the theses sustained by 'planning'. These testify to the failure, it would be better to say the abandonment of town planning, compelled to renounce its own abstract strategies in favour of more concrete but limited formal observations.

If a great aesthetic thinking for 'producing beauty' is not reposed it means giving up any 'authentic project', thus, reducing the horizon of our destiny to the ordinariness of making.

The freedom of languages – which means freedom of ideas, of movement, of choice, and which represents one of the most important values by our social-historical epoch, has produced an enfeebling of quality in general, but above all notions of aesthetic quality, since it has subtracted from the great liberal progressive strategy its vital foundations: the ability to plan.

The absence of 'planning' leads towards chaos, it opens to the disorder of things, to the impossibility of recognising value, to incapacity and the indifference of choice.

The value of freedom, however, is a precious value, irrevocable, but which cannot produce paradoxes for pursuing an imperfect progress: the degradation of the environment, the squalor of the urban edge, the impoverishment of the urban, the chaotic disorientation, the destruction of the countryside.

Even for freedom – if we want it to grow in its value – the definition of limits, of thresholds is necessary, certainly not to repress or quash it, but to 'direct it', to unveil the complexity, leading it away from confusion, so that instead of dispersing and cancelling itself out in the indistinguishable chaos of the swarm of things, it is elevated to produce beauty, value recognised by all.

An idea of beauty that displaces, of course, the classical categories of harmony, symmetry, hierarchy, that abandons completely the absolutism and the rigidity of the styles or univocity of ideologies.

No longer an oppressive or conservative beauty, but rather a beauty that thinks out the becoming, the possible, the plural, difference, that cares for complexity and that contains multiplicity.

A beauty able to restore and elevate to aesthetic dignity what consider contradiction, bond, impediment.

A beauty able to produce a unifying force² demonstrating and exalting the tension of difference. A beauty that holds together freedom and quality: a cohesion possible only within dimension and an aesthetic consciousness.

SPLENDOR MUNDI

An aesthetic programme that derives its structure from images, its own projective sense, its own legitimation, in taking root in and entanglement in the other demands: political, economic, social. It itself becomes a normative programme defining the great figurative-formal thresholds capable of restoring to the region, the natural and agricultural landscape, to the city and its parts, to the great structures of communication their own specific beauty, as a representation full of our own well being and our own civility.³