

VIRUS12

RADICAL MODERNS

a n o 2 0 1 6 y e a r
s e m e s t r e 0 1 s e m e s t e r

revista do Nomads.usp | Nomads.usp journal
ISSN 2175-974x | CC BY-NC
DOI 10.4237/virus_journal

MODERN AND LANDSCAPE: POSSIBLE CONTACTS

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How to quote this text: Schenk, L., 2016. Modern and Landscape: possible contacts. *VIRUS*, [e-journal] 12. Available at: <<http://www.nomads.usp.br/virus/virus12/?sec=5>>. [Accessed 00 Month 0000].

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'All Modernity is crisscrossed by this condition of Ulysses. Therefore modern man does not get lost in the garden, but recalls from it: garden and park, landscape and nature only make sense because there is the city along the harmony simulacra. The project to subsume in the nature means the intention to forget the pain of our real condition' (Silvetri and Aliata, 2001).

Nature and Landscape hold different meanings throughout the ages. What was Nature for the period of Antiquity differs substantially from the Nature of Christians, the fruit of divine will, or from Nature which objectifies itself from Descartes, at the birth of the subject who thinks, therefore exists. This process, which marks the Philosophy called Modern, begins in the seventeenth century, reaching full development in the late nineteenth century, when nature, object of domination and exploitation, will be made resource; in technical-scientific scenario, it will have lost almost all their aura. The remaining gap resists in different ways, being events such as Romanticism, or part of the environmentalist movement, witnesses of this resistance.

For participating in different fields of knowledge, Landscape is a polysemic definition term: literati, biologists, ecologists, geographers, architects and urbanists shall have different ways to crop and define Landscape. For the purposes intended here, we distinguish a strategic profile: that of being something that relates to the sum of the times that conforms places, which implies a historical-cultural construction, and a way to realize this relationship.

The proposal presented by the Silvestri and Aliata's book, *El Paisaje como Cifra de Armonía* (2001), which investigates the alternatives of *the human inhabiting that landscaping sensitivity enlightens*, seems to us important to recover, to sound once again the dimension of landscape, perceiving it as the great *articulator element of*



topics that apparently elapse separately. Landscape and its aesthetic valences weave, through the historical perspective, the gap between man and the world; Landscape presents itself in this context as a powerful medium that assists in creating the sense of our existence.

Thus, when one reflects on the Garden and Park figures, keystones of the Landscape Design related to cities, we have some arising questions. In the foreground, the fact that they are parts of a hypothetical Nature, cropped and prepared in a designing way, however natural they may appear. Simulacra of an idea developed long ago, of Classical origin to Western culture, they are places of refuge and encouragement recovering the soul and spirit from the city fraying routine. This valence will not get lost with time, being reactivated in different records and moments.

Complex are constructions that collate Modern and Modernity to the existence of a response or expression in the Garden and Landscape scope. The alleged disruption of what Modernism may mean would gain a possible development bound to the art of gardens in short duration: historiography is unanimous in dating the existence of formulations that relate Vanguard Movements said radical to a Modern Garden, in the period covering the first three decades of the twentieth century.

The paradigmatic exhibition held in Paris in 1925, *Exposition des Arts Decoratifs*, presents examples of the 'gardened' spaces amidst some revolutionary architectures. The intention was to locate garden in a new level; from the place associated with privilege to the expression of a life under the aegis of Modern, partially grounded on the same reason that would attack, at the CIAM (Modern Architecture International Conferences), the Culturalist Urbanism, the Garden Cities and the garden itself as a way of elitist affectation.

The Garden essayed this Modern record at that time, but it was not action that bore fruit: garden spatiality, except for those who survive on a number of artifices, relates to the place and its physical and environmental qualities, which conflicts, among others, with the expectation of Internationalization signed by Functionalist Rational key. The Landscape, especially the one related to Gardens, seemed destined to pass off the whole radical movement which erupted.

Nevertheless, it is possible to glimpse again in the cracks, in the work of those who flee the key if not dominant, at least the most vaunted, not an answer but the ways in which the Modern developed in Landscape. It is an object of this small writing to point out some issues that deal with this alleged impasse between Modern and Landscape, and that keep potential research areas for future developments related to the design of contemporary open spaces.

In the last two chapters of *Vienna Fin-de-Siecle*, Carl Schorske unveils the garden as one of the stages where it is performed the emergence of Western modernity between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For the author, the garden would have been able to express part of the sensitivity mutations of social and artistic elites in that context, and this experience takes from writers and painters, and not from those who were in charge of gardens design.

The form of such gardens roughly still echoed those of the so-called English Garden, a typology constructed as the one related to the Picturesque, resulting precisely of cultural contact with the representations, in painting, of sylvan and instigating landscapes of foreign overseas. In such landscape formulations, space is arranged in order to give vent to the main qualities of this unique aesthetic key of the eighteenth century; the controlled tension in the production of a place filled



with invitations while walking and discovering: surprise and mixing are design process strategies, at first glance more naturalized than those classically composed.

From this context of picturesque creation, it is noteworthy the figure of Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903), a pioneer of Landscape design, connected no longer to Gardens, but to Public Parks. His prolific production as a landscaper has as its starting point the Competition won with Calvert Vaux to the Central Park in New York, and develops towards the establishment of a practice which provides not a unique urban piece but a Parks System, with wooded streets and squares. Consolidated in the Boston experience, carried out from 1880, the Parks System intended to play in the city a vital role in linking infrastructure issues (such as drainage, air renovation and temperature decrease) to cultural and aesthetic issues as well as social and of public conviviality. His action when designing, witnessed by his many writings, also aspires metaphysical imprint perspectives that address the need for conviviality with Nature both as a way of learning and as generation of physical and mental health.

In the late nineteenth century, the Landscape Designer professional activities, through the Olmsted trajectory and his circle of partnerships, are outlined more clearly and attempt the clear intention to contribute to the planning of cities. This process matures throughout the course of this pioneer and is born from contact with European matrices of city planning and design. The Park Movement, which would seek to develop the city project from its parks, gardens and tree-lined streets, has a history in England, where the issue of parks emerges from the problems generated by the growth of cities and the unhealthiness caused by the densification phenomenon without proper planning and design.

Modernity is constituted in a industrial world, urban and moving. Public space in this context, especially in the figure of the park, had been the essential place of experimentation and innovation in mid-nineteenth century's Europe. Nearby the twentieth century, it stood at a standstill regarding its physiognomy and the formulas of the so-called landscape style:

[...] The *alfandismo* [sic], in a way a paradigm of this style, is found in the dogmatic and academic ossification way since 1875. In fact, the only neighboring creations in the formal field that escape this degenerescence are the north american proposals by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux's, which are supported by two very important differences: an urban spatial scale entirely different and the insert in a more open and democratic society than their European counterparts' (Le Dantec, 2000, p.100, our translation¹).

However, despite these qualities, the architecture of the landscape, even on American territory, was not able to maintain its participation in a major way in the course of the urban planning process in the twentieth century. Theorists argue that the invisibility of the disciplinary field of landscape architecture in that period is due to the fact of not having been performed a theoretical effort to consolidate a field of knowledge targeting urban planning. The education in Landscape Design, founded at Harvard in 1901, had Olmsted Junior, a collaborator of his father, as one of its creators and had its genesis connected to the Horticulture School. This located its

¹ **From original in Portuguese:** '[...] o *alfandismo*, [sic] de certa maneira um paradigma desse estilo, acha-se em vias de ossificação dogmática e acadêmica desde 1875. De fato, as únicas criações vizinhas no campo formal que escapam a essa degenerescência são as propostas norte-americanas de Frederick Law Olmsted e de Calvert Vaux, sustentadas que estão por duas diferenças importantíssimas: uma escala espacial urbana completamente diversa e a inserção numa sociedade mais aberta e democrática do que suas homólogas europeias' (Le Dantec, 2000, p.100).



emphasis on issues of the vegetable tract. Aesthetically, the course remained linked to the Fine Arts, which vouched for the History of Art and its canons: the picturesque was one of them.

In turn, Urbanism would be presented as a technical management novelty of the urban phenomenon; also emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, it would quantify the problems and record needs, replacing the terms parks and gardens by the abstract ones spaces and green areas. In an environment increasingly dominated by technical-scientific reason there would be no place, nor for images of the past, nor metaphysical perspectives. The arrangement should, rather, be the result of functional decisions.

The landscaping production of the early twentieth century was still Picturesque. What begins as a repudiation of the shape, perceived as a historical record to be despised by the Vanguards, carries a narrowing of meaning: by suppressing historical precepts and installing Modern prerogatives, the landscape as an aesthetic valence is lowered. Its strength is muted and transformed into neutral green and nondescript stage for avant-garde architectures to express their manifest uniqueness.

This does not mean, however, that this occurrence be given in the same way in all contexts and periods. Looking again through the cracks, we see arise a particular situation in Brazilian lands. Here, and by the hands of another pioneer, away from Olmsted one hundred years, we observe the relationship established between the Architectural and Urban production, and the landscape. Roberto Burle Marx (1909-1994) is the great personage to mark the History of Landscape as a distinct and important inflection; his references are frankly Modern.

It would be unlikely to infer *the invisibility of the landscape, as a field of knowledge and research*, in relation to Modern in Brazilian territory, since what can be seen here is precisely the opposite: dialectically, Modern made visible our landscape, taking part in its construction. At the hands of the designer Burle Marx, nature has never behaved as a mere and neutral stage: there is a *congruence* between architecture and landscape in the sense that, in his perception, the treatment of both *is defined in accordance with the natural environment*.

Although one of the great qualities of his projects is the fact that they are public, it is not the scope of Burle Marx' work to think about the city in the same way as Olmsted did, i. e., through urban perspectives related to the establishment of systems able to plan the city as a totality. The technical-scientific and artistic knowledge that dominates Burle Marx work is based on qualities related to aesthetic and environmental issues, and one of his great achievements is to update the drawing keys to Modern ideas. His production builds the meaning of place, while qualified space for the population's recreation and enjoyment, and falls within that context in which Modern and Landscape are accomplices.

In targeting to clarify certain issues that concern the relationship between Modern and Landscape, this text seeks to present contacts relating conflicts and convergences, seeking above all to uncover a possible dialogue established between those pioneers. Although they operated in different aesthetic keys, both Olmsted and Burle Marx had in their horizon the task of creating the Modern Man, civilized, emancipated, in which participates Landscape, not as a backdrop, but as a place of rest, meeting and life.

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