

between the “anthropological-primitive” of Rudofsky or van Eyck and Archigram’s “technological-primitive” rests. For the former, recovering the vernacular forms means returning to stable essences, to the implicit innocence of the craft landscape produced by cultures untouched by civilisation and by machine technology.

Archigram’s idea of landscape and its primitive connotations, apparently conservative, does not have to do exactly with the possibility of re-founding architecture on nature and place, but moving from an organic relationship with nature, which might ensure the design of architectural forms integrated into the place, towards a relationship of cybernetic symbiosis with it, which before had made the aspect of these architectural forms irrelevant. In the incipient cybernetic jargon adapted by Archigram, architecture is no longer a matter of hardware but of software; it is no longer the design of an artefact into nature, but the precarious prevision of a type of relationship with it, undetermined and transitory.

Andreas Huyssen noticed that, in the sixties, the anthropological notion of culture as a system of communication was re-written in the terms of communication technologies by Marshall McLuhan in *Understanding Media*. In essays widely spread in the art scene of the decade, McLuhan proposes a mythical pattern in which four stages of human development can be distinguished: oral/aural culture of primitive and tribal societies; visual culture of phonetic writing; visual culture of mechanic technology (with the invention of the press); and the present return to the aural and tactile patterns of primitive cultures, redefined by the

electrical and electronic technologies of the television era (Huyssen, 1995).

Archigram’s equipped nature is the realisation of McLuhan’s mythical model, in which technologies would be returning man to an integral and primitive culture, in a re-tribalized world by the ubiquitous and instantaneous presence of electricity. Man, the food provider of primitive societies, reappears as the information collector in a technologically sophisticated society, not any less nomad than his Palaeolithic ancestors (McLuhan, 1996).

Archigram took the debate between architecture and technology to the end. The former progresses from the metaphorical representation of an industrial world focussed on the production and consumption of goods, to its progressive dissolution in symbiotic landscapes of the electronic culture. The last step is consistent with McLuhan’s basically optimistic view: the model of demiurgic reconciliation among man, nature and technical culture. But it is also a point of no return.

The Principality of Monaco abandoned the project of the entertainment centre and shortly afterwards, Archigram published its last magazine, ARCHIGRAM 9 1/2, in 1974. We can see the idea of the green hill by the Mediterranean, marked just by service points of the size of golf holes, like the death of architecture, as its recapitulation in the face of the autonomous logic of technologies that depend less on matter all the time. But, we can also see it as Archigram’s last attempt to translate emerging realities into drawings and designs. Thinking the world through a project<sup>(2)</sup>. [m](#)

#### NOTES

(1) An architecture made before the event that the envelope (Archigram, 1972).

(2) This text is based on my doctoral thesis, Archigram Group 1961-1974: A fable of technology (UPC, Barcelona, 2002) conducted with the support of CAPES, Brazilian Government. Thanks to Josep Maria Montaner, director of the thesis, and Dennis Crompton (Archigram Group).

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## Flows, Patterns and Topographies: The Urban work of Landscape’s devices as revealed in the Open City of Ritoque

Jessie Marshall

"There are, then, different kinds of 'flow': [ ] And these flows leave different traces on the landscape. [ ] It is not so much that 'things' move in time and space, as if time and space were somehow a fixed template within which the world simply is. It is more than these flows- be they walkers on ridges or droplets in a water cycle - are produced different forms of time and space: for example, cycles, channels, reversals,

folds, scapes, interferences, inversions, convergences, divergences, expanses, details. And patterns."

Harrison, Pile y Thrift, 2004

*The languages of place give us our orientation in a territory. In the city we understand, through the perception of space, the separation of public and private or architectural hierarchies revealing locations of higher value, or greater political importance. The quality of sacred space is written into the tradition of its spatial construction and fully comprehended by its inhabitants without explicit representational elements or text.*

*Our lived landscapes too, be they rural or natural, have a culturally embedded set of understandings that can be read. J.B. Jackson, one of the pioneers of such readings, proposed an almost archaeological study of the American rural landscape, opening up for us the realization that open territories, even those with few obvious constructed artefacts, are, in fact, repositories of messages, of decisions taken through generations of cultural activity on the land, marking its orientation in the patterns of its occupation: field edges, the limits of cultivation, irrigation systems, paths, plantings and farmyards. Like the city, we can study the landscape to help us read our given world.*

*But let us take this discourse one step further. It is possible to imagine that we can undertake this "landscape reading" in reverse, and attempt to use its techniques to help us 'write' a way of living on the land. We design our cities cognisant of the understandings given by the urban techniques of enclosure of exterior space. Could we use landscape's techniques sim-*

*ilarly to structure space? And, perhaps, could such a way of writing, and then re-reading a territory, give us a potential new set of tools and techniques which we could then use when dealing with, not just natural situations, but the open, often bland suburban territories that surround our contemporary cities?*

*Architects continue to attempt to densify our suburbs; to make them more urban, easier to understand and inhabit as cultural artefacts, easier to orient oneself within. But might an alternative set of tools, drawn from the land itself, allow us to write, in a new and perhaps more delicate way, the orders of the suburban landscape?*

#### **Ritoque**

*The "Open City" at Ritoque is a large territory, sparsely inhabited by a series of small interventions: rough roads and paths, sculptures, structures, small buildings and sheds and a number of outdoor spaces of different levels of definition. The 'city' can be looked at as a series of relatively independent studies developed through the poetic methodology of design proposed by the founders of the School of Valparaiso (PUCV) and developed over a pair of generations. From an understanding of place developed through intense study and intuitive gesture; filtered through the word, the poetic text and through the artistic hand of the croquis, the constructed work emerges via the shared activity of living and making, practiced by the full community. But rather than look at the methodology that led to the works, I would like to look carefully only at the artefacts that now stand in the city, and analyse them for their given marks, and particularly for their seemingly scat-*

*tered and disordered placement on the open territory. I would like to show that there is are various levels of order that can be read in the urban work.*

*Although the architects and founders of Ritoque make little mention of the ideas of landscape in their discourse, I would like to argue that the "Open City" can serve as a potent example of a place in which techniques of making drawn from the landscape, if intuitively, can be seen to have served in the ordering of the site, to a much greater extent than the traditional tools and technique of urban form making; and that the territory as a whole, which on first glance at the plan appears to have a random scattering of individual structures, can instead be shown to be carefully, and indeed minutely defined, through a series of overlapping perceptual orders, orders which emerge, as do landscape's orders, through the inhabitation, use and participation with the daily and monthly life of the City.*

#### **Techniques of place making drawn from landscape:**

##### **1. Natural forces of flow: wind-scape & sun-scape**

*From the air, the curves and twists of creeks passing through the patchwork of typical agricultural landscapes are often marked by dark ribbons of deep vegetation. Gatherings of inhabitation around bridges, and mills create beads of density along the ribbon. More subtle, the cracks and cuts of the topography falling towards the stream is often revealed in the natural collection of vegetation in the deeper folds, or the waves of cultivation following the topography. Such a series of marks identify both the presence, and the flow of water*

across the land. The qualities captured are various: unlike an urban path, the flow of water through a landscape is always directional, and its flow follows a pattern of change from season to season, altering the sounds, depth and vegetation of the environment.

At Ritoque, several natural systems of flows across the site have patterns which can start to be perceived as given organising structures. One can then identify how these natural structures have been taken on in the constructed elements of the site. The organising structures become the 'scapes' or systems of the land, both followed by and also revealed by the built works.

One of the strongest natural forces at Ritoque is the powerful coastal wind. The dunes themselves carry the marks of this wind as a visible skin. Formed into waves, the marks, like stripes, alter one's ability to perceive the size of each dune. Within the wind's regular rhythm there is irregularity: the stripes are neither quite parallel nor straight. The curves of the wind-stripes do not follow the topography, but rather mark the path that the wind carves upon that topography.

In the lower regions of the site, the buildings seem to be positioned within the cover of dune protection, while only few tall sculptural elements rise above. One travels from a protected zone, across the open wind plain, guided by a sculptural cue, back to a further hidden zone. Close to the entry, for example one discovers a rough spatial gathering of inns<sup>(1)</sup> and work spaces, that are collected tightly around a semi-buried patio. Together they are protected from the ocean wind by the rising of the dunes

to the west, and then further protected by a constructed density of trees to the southwest, which also hide the buildings from the more open territory below.

The inns have their backs against the hill, further enfolding protected garden spaces, wrapped by trees, topography, and the buildings themselves. The gathering and the wrapping mark the organisation of place, and alter the experience of within and without, contrasting the open dunes with the protected plaza, patios, and gardens.

A second 'scape' at Ritoque can be identified through the patterns of the movement of light, particularly, through the identification of certain structures built on the edge of bright day-lit zones, and their contrast with a sequence of sites which receive long or low light at sunset. The identification of such difference culminates, most obviously, in the brick-curved site identified as the Palace of Dawn and Dusk, in which the play of evening shadows on the decorative floor bricks becomes tied into the identity of this open-roofed gathering space.

The amphitheatre too is a protected site, hidden from the sight and wind of the upper plateau by its topography. It is discovered, beyond a barrier of bushes, as a low, gentle, sun-filled space. Red brick segments, both sloped and stepped according to the topography of the hollow, are gathered around the low central performance space, which is organised on two levels. At different times, following the motion of the sun, one is drawn to sit in different parts of the sun-warmed circle. Through repeated use of this place one is made aware of the sun's rotation, not by the shadow-marks

of a sun-dial, but by this inhabitation of the gorge by the morning or afternoon sun-fingers.

The amphitheatre thus interconnects, beautifully, examples of the purposeful use of a series of natural organising systems. Wind protected, and, as above, with this quality of wind protection further inscribed in the new tree plantings, the site then further reveals the sun-vector understood in motion across the circle of the amphitheatre. Yet this circle is cut by a further vector of natural motion, the implied site of the motion of water through the gorge, drawn into the site in the deep concrete channel which separates the stage, and divides it into two levels. The deep cut by the path of the seasonal river, which can be argued to be a pragmatic necessity, is clearly intentionally figurative; both forming the space, separating the levels, and almost exaggerating, in the cantilevered detail of the two stairs, to reveal explicit separation in its role of connection.

Clearly there is a level of poetic meaning particular to the work itself, in the bringing together of water and light as the orientation of this poetic gathering place. This architectural quality need not, alone, imply any further landscape thinking. However the repeated perception of each theme, and its revelation through a repeated set of structural devices, begins to enable the user to read not just instances but flows, and to understand the beginnings of a web of patterns across the site structured by the flowing experiences of sun, wind and water.

## **2. Non-touch; the respect for, and celebration of the open field.**

In the natural communicative tools of landscape, there is a palette of silence which is as important as that of noise. Analogous, perhaps, to the creation of an urban plaza within a city, which can be described as an open territory carved into the city's density, another powerful order of landscape structure, or 'scape', can be found in 'non-touch', in the action of pulling back from the open field. Agricultural landscapes can clearly be read as systems of openness and gatheredness; but so too can a series of forest clearings, opening up along the path or a river or road. Suburban neighbourhoods, on the other hand, have relatively low density, but equally spaced structures, avoiding both the intensity of density and the generosity of openness.

At Ritoque in fact, most of the territory remains open, but in certain areas its openness seems to be figuratively celebrated. The largest open spaces are not framed by architecture but, in a way, the architecture is held back from these places, allowing the open territory to be read as its own horizontal space. I perceive two purposeful plateaux, both central, valuable land territories which would have been well placed for easy construction, and which one therefore starts to believe must have been intentionally left vacant. One is the open territory above the upper agora, the other the large space above the music room. Moreover, clusters of buildings on the edges of these two sites serve both to intensify their non-constructed nature, and to give to the inhabitants of these buildings, the breadth of a wide open view. Such a decision is certainly a landscape

as well as an architectural decision: the orders of the opened landscape beyond are brought into the context of the materiality and structure of the architectural work, allowing relations and patterns to be read. This was first pointed out to me by Ivan Ivelic who described the process as: "the house as a reading of the landscape". However this effort also creates structures of landscape inhabitation which can be read as a 'scape', rather than merely singular decisions. Again a cyclical pattern of site is developed.

## **3. Distant orientations and the play of parallax**

Across many of these open spaces at Ritoque, tall sculptural elements, have been positioned to visually reach beyond the curves and falls of the clearing. Such elements seem to me to take on yet another ordering role of landscape structure- that of distant orientation. Unlike urban density, in which one's ability to follow a route depends of a series of familiar elements, (pass the church on the left, turn right at the yellow café), moving through a complex landscape often requires the interconnected geometry of pairs of distant elements. To sail directly home across a bay, for example, I was taught to line up the dock on the distant shore, with the 'v' between the two tallest mountains beyond; or to come correctly down from the small mountain, to keep the view of the lake always left of the smallest of three peaks. At Ritoque the scale is smaller, but the complex and changeable landscape of the dunes still requires some orientative strategy, and sculptures created by Girola have been positioned, if intuitively, so that they assist in this work. As landscape devices, they work in motion. To cross the dunes

without a path, for example, one learns to keep the tall figurative sculpture to the left of the distant water towers.

On entry to the lower site one reads a re-arrangement in the patterns of the wind-pipes as they, through one's own motion, cross the visual pattern of the water towers. The parallax between moving subject, and distant fixed objects create a sense of orientation which, as in the strategies of landscape, is entirely dependent on motion and relative position. Powerfully, the City's entrance City is thus made into a process and not a place.

## **4. Scales of separation and rhythm: the rhythm of steps**

Urban orders are understood through repetition; solids and voids, streets and blocks. In landscape however, rhythm of scale depends on motion and time. This concept is very familiar to us in the way we read landscape's scale: simple devices like the measure of distance in terms of time :a day's walk, or more complex strategies like the repetitive structure of vine plantings, and our understanding of distance through their relation with the changing topography and the regular tread of footsteps. The built work of Ritoque itself shows little clear repetition; most architectural elements are individual, and even disorienting in their quantity of difference. But perhaps precisely because of this abundance of natural difference, repetition through motion, in time, become measuring devices for place. Clearly this happens through the diurnal motion of sun, for example in the Hospedería del Errante<sup>(2)</sup> (the house of wind), but such ways of reading scales of separation also develop in the bodies motion through the dunes, in the relation of the body to the

visible structures, their relative overlap through motion, and their relation to the distant, yet self-referential ordering device of the horizon.

### 5. Change over time

Cities survive the destruction and rebuilding of individual structures without losing the qualities of that city; however buildings themselves are constructed with intention to permanence. Landscape, on the other hand, is planted with intention to grow, to change over time, and from season to season. Change is inherent to wind, sun, and plants; and is manifest in the landscape at any moment. Clearly the designer inhabitants of Ritoque celebrate change, with an intentionally pragmatic view of the site's harsh weathering. It is accepted as part of the nature of the buildings that they will weather, are altered and re-built. However I will argue that the structure of change is taken further than this. Decay and reconstruction are not seen, at Ritoque, as troublesome necessities, but rather as integral steps within the continuity of place. The exposition of difference, be it in the sun's motion, the piling up of sand, or the new roof structure over a previous construction, is not momentary, but continuous. Change is constant, and that consistency is ordered by nature; the overlapping energies of wind, water, rain and inhabitation are revealed in the wear on the works and their orders on the land.

The Open City of Ritoque is not a landscape, it is a designed architectural work, intentionally structured and experimentally developed. My analysis attempts to show that qualities of the site, developed as they have been through an intuitive and poetic connection with the specifics

of place, and an intense spirit of investigation and observation, have many links to strategies and qualities that I also find in the natural and created structures of landscape. However, at Ritoque these structures have been used intentionally, if intuitively, to heighten qualities of place and experience.

This intentionality is most clear in the powerful experience of locations in the site in which the various 'scapes' or systems of landscape overlap, creating architectural or urban moments of high intensity, and connecting themselves with narratives and landscape patterns throughout the Open City.

### The gorge; an overlap of scapes

Wind protected, sketched by the long reach of the afternoon sun, the gorge is, at a primary level, inscribed onto the site through the occasional dramatic path of overflowing storm-water. The idea of the water path is powerful, linked to the simple necessity of water to build, to live, and to plant. The idea of the importance of water, and that given to its orders, it is a theme repeated at various scales in Ritoque, most dramatically, of course, in the icon status of the water-tower. The dynamic, dramatic architectural structure which rises above the lower territory, was originally built to create domestic water pressure, but beyond this, now forms one of the most representational, visual elements on the site. Over time, photographed from the highway dunes, the water tower has taken on an iconic role for Ritoque. Its representational power comes in part, from the delicate, ad-hoc, nature of its construction, but also, for the inhabitants, it can be tied to the idea of importance of the orders of water in the way one lives in Ritoque.

The Quebrada, similarly, is not really a water source, the flow is occasional, and fierce, however it too builds upon the dynamic importance of the 'scapes' of water in ordering the site. There is a distinct sequential structure to the places constructed within the upper frame of the gorge. One can identify them, cautiously, as spiritual, in some cases clearly so: the silent, sculptural cemetery, modestly marked by the stones of the graves of a generation of inhabitants, and the quiet, sun-lit, open air chapel, asymmetrically positioned against the slope. But the spiritual quality grows also from their quality of timelessness, hidden in the protected zone of the gorge. Again the issue of protection from the wind is revealed as a system of organisation of the landscape of the site, and this protection marks the character of these sites.

The chapel is discovered, by the visitor, without formal entry, after passing through bushes and down steep, rough steps. It is a private place folded into the gorge, and held separate. In a modest way, the chapel takes on the landscape structure of the open spaces, paved and open to the sky, neither outdoors nor indoors, neither garden nor building, a place both to be alone and to gather, it appears to be a place of continuity and transition, not a place for staying.

The cemetery-chapel gorge is clearly a place of sequence and journey, bringing together the landscape motions of water flow, wind and sun, time-change and continuity, and more, celebrating this priority of motion over fixity. It is impossible to draw the edge of each space. Fully interlaced, the chapel overlaps the meditative quality of the circle-marked grove of trees, and melts into the silent

*sun-lit edge of the amphitheatre, yet the connection is not ceremonial. Furthermore these found landscape qualities of flow are not just taken on as a character of site, but expressed in the structure of the built organisation, and in the architectural and material qualities of its making. Inlaid into the earth, curved brick patterns mark the ground, its paths and constructions, an implicit motion embedded in the circles. Architecturally, the constructions develop the character of flow, and allow change; the site appears both ruin and under construction; being made, and open to unmaking.*

*However, the greatest power of the gorge, as a landscape device, is understood only much later and after repeated visits to various parts of the site. Although so interconnected, in fact the chapel and the amphitheatre and other sites, are still perceived as quite separate structures, linked through the knowledge of their connected passage. For example, one's experience of sitting inside the depth of amphitheatre, is brought together, on a different day, with the experience of looking down at the dramatic cut of the Escultura del Foso (Girola), and with the orientation one gains from the territory below, looking up towards the fold of dark plant growth that marks the gorge, and using that difference as an orientation device to navigate through the lower dunes.*

*Again at a different time, visiting the well watered interiority of Pino's garden, one recalls that it too is planted within the hollow of the lower path of the stream flow, and that flow is, experientially, tied into the deep gathering space of the courtyard beyond.*

*Finally, far down the site on the lower plain, the tranquil protected quality of the 'patio' of the Music Room came to be understood, for me, as a continuity of this geography, shaded and wind protected, even in its open dune setting. Later I discovered that indeed, in times of great rain, the music room has a tendency to flood as the waters of the gorge reach to this distant path.*

*Vital, then, to more than a topographic role of understanding of the site, the device of the gorge creates for the Open City, an axis as strong as the imposed cut of the highway. This axis of the gorge becomes a lovely work of orientation because it is not a path, but a place that one comes to know over time, a topography to which one returns after a movement away. The connection between different parts of the gorge has to be made in memory, with each view or experience threaded together through the structuring device of the landscape, an order to which one always returns. [m](#)*

#### NOTES

(1) Hospederías (inns) is the name given to residences in the Open City.

(2) A series of drawings show the connection between the ideas for the design of this building and the flows of the wind, however in landscape terms, one also reads other flows equally powerful, particularly in the play of light through the coloured openings, and, once again, the way the house steps back from the open plateau and inhabits the edge of the gorge.

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