

spatial analysis in appreciating the urban historical past.

Ian Morley, *Department of History, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, NT, Hong Kong.*
Email: ianmorley@arts.cuhk.edu.hk

Il paesaggio delle differenze: architettura, città e territorio nella nuova era globale by Marco Maretto, Edizioni ETS, Pisa, Italy, 2008, 191 pp. ISBN 978-884672035-1.

Dans le développement d'une discipline, il est des moments où une synthèse, fût-elle en apparence prématurée, rend plus de services que beaucoup de travaux d'analyse (Bloch, 1931, p. 11).

This quotation indicates the kind of endeavour Marco Maretto has undertaken in this book. He has synthesized much of the material produced in his years of study, tuition, and design practice.

Son of the renowned architect Paolo Maretto, and himself an architect, Maretto has an interesting background. He has designed fine, contemporary structures based on the formative process of developing architectural types, has held courses in architectural design in the faculties of Rome and Parma, conducted research on built landscapes in different parts of Italy, and is very well travelled around the world. He is also well versed in recording the character of places; collecting together evidence on a diversity of types of sites, architecture, and people. The resulting study, *Il paesaggio delle differenze: architettura, città e territorio nella nuova era globale*, has a sound structure and deals with problems of analysing territorial form in an era when territorial structure seems lost, fragmented, and dispersed, owing to the effects of globalization.

The main goal is ambitious: the investigation of one of the most conspicuous problems (perhaps *the* problem) of built landscape reading – the knowledge of identity, its dialectical relation to the notion of difference, and its formation process. In other words, the thesis provided by Maretto is not only concerned with the problem of diversity in the physical description of different territories, but with trying to create a sort of metaphysics of that diversity; a theory in which every fact finds its place in a general speculative framework. The theme is thus a very wide one, involving different

aspects: philosophical, anthropological and architectural.

Edmund Husserl once explained the origin of phenomenology as being two phases of knowledge: the *empirical* intuition which considers the individual objects, and the *categorical*, which places any peculiar object in a universal context and in so doing giving common meaning. Maretto seems to employ the same concept in investigating diversity in built landscapes at different scales, starting with distinguishing the empirical knowledge of 'matter' from the categorical notion of 'material', which thereby allows for the collection of materials and their subsequent placing in categories distinguishable by their character and purpose. In a similar way the natural soil is transformed into a territory by the practical awareness of people. This is achieved first through the use of material, and secondly by knowledge of its individuality. Though these are topics well explored by researchers of the Muratorian School, Maretto places them in a contemporary context, thereby giving them fresh meaning.

The current Italian debate about the future of architecture is dominated by two opposing ideas. One is the transforming of the built landscape into 'spectacle', accepting the disintegration of territorial form as unavoidable and producing self-seeking objects unable to shape an urban frame. The other is the rise of so-called 'archistars': famous architects who impose, as in the visual arts or advertising, objects they invent through the iconic power of their images – objects noted by critics as being 'luxury architecture' because they are wasteful of resources. The recent success of the book *Contro l'architettura* (*Against architecture*) by La Cecla is a symptom of the broad interest in this second perspective, even if no real solution to the problem seems to be proposed at the moment. However, change is occurring associated with the crisis in the international stock market, the collapse of a number of major banks, and the first global trading recession since 1982. These changes have drawn attention to the need for the wiser employment of the planet's resources, and hence created a new climate for the work of architects. Now even the myth of virtuality, which has so fascinated the recent generation of architects, seems to be quickly decaying.

To understand the usefulness of Maretto's work, we must consider its place in this quickly shifting context: it is a small but precious indicator of how the present architectural generation is rethinking the role of contemporary design, reconsidering such long abandoned, powerful ideas as continuity in the

built landscape, and showing awareness of processes that form territorial organisms.

Following the main stream of the research conducted by Saverio Muratori, Gianfranco Caniggia and his father Paolo Maretto, and updated by a small group of Italian architects, Maretto suggests an almost forgotten way forward. This concerns the identity of reading and designing, and the recognition of the actual landscape as the consequence of historical processes still operating in a crisis of transformation. The originality of Maretto's proposal emanates from the starting point of his thinking: not 'identity', the sum of common characters distinguishing groups and classes, but its dialectical opposite and complementary notion of 'differences'. This notion seems to correspond to the postmodern condition of plurality of forms and languages, investigated by F. Lyotard. This allows a partial updating of the idea of 'continuity', which in Muratorian theories is based on historical and territorial homogeneity (the concepts of *fase storica* and *area culturale*). The tradition, itself a central topic in studies of the permanence of built landscape forms, could be regarded as a transmission of differences. The book first takes into account the origin of dwellings and then, in the following chapter, analyses the territorial organism. Avoiding the Muratorian School's consuetude of investigating in succession the four traditional scales – building, tissue, urban organism, territorial organism – Maretto emphasizes the forming of domestic space as the deepest possible relationship between a civilization and its environmental context. In this way the urban organism is explained as an individual interpretation of a common territorial language whose character is shown by its urban tissue and its monuments.

This is a timely book. Among its many qualities is the flowing style of writing which allows for easy reading even if readers are unaware of Muratorian theories. Among the very few possible weaknesses is the bibliography, which mostly reports the texts quoted: it is less 'dedicated' than one would expect in a work of this standard.

Reference

Bloch, M. (1931) *Les caractères originaux de l'histoire rurale française* (Belles-Lettres, Paris).

Giuseppe Strappa, Dipartimento di Costruzione dell'Architettura, Facoltà di Architettura 'Valle Giulia', via Gramsci, 53-00197, Roma, Italy. E-mail: gstrappa@yahoo.com

To scale: one hundred urban plans by Eric J. Jenkins, Routledge, New York, USA, 2008, 225 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-95401-3 (pbk), ISBN 978-0-415-95400-6 (hbk).

As a teacher, researcher or practitioner – or just someone who is interested in urban form – we often try to understand a place by comparing it to somewhere else that we know. To make sense, and to be of any use, such comparisons need some consistency and commonality.

To scale allows a quick, easy and direct comparison between places. It consists largely of 100 figure-ground plans, each covering a 500 x 500 m sample area of the centre of 78 cities worldwide. The page size (250 x 250 mm) is larger than standard to facilitate these reproductions. This is its novelty and major contribution for urban morphological study and teaching. The fact that the figure-ground plans are all drawn to the same scale is one essential asset, and the main point of the book; but the supporting text prompts the reader to think about what can be learnt from the representation of these spaces. It is therefore a resource for all environmental professionals interested in patterns of space and place – and it will be invaluable for students.

The figure-ground plans allow striking comparisons and contrasts; no more so, for example, than where various street and space patterns in Paris (nos 63-67) are viewed before Le Corbusier's intended *Plan Voisin* (no. 68). In the less familiar actual townscapes, the images make the reader contemplate the relationship between built forms and the spaces that are created in between, the significance of scale and the symbiotic relationship between the two. Moreover, these raise questions of how large, in terms of height, mass and volume, the buildings represented by the black shading should be in order to successfully and comfortably enclose and contain the white spaces, and what activities both building and void could accommodate. As well as a brief commentary, most plans have accompanying black and white photographs and line drawings to help with the visualization and understanding of the places.

This book can, and should, help all those interested in the built environment to enquire further about the interrelationship between space and built form, how certain conditions allow spaces to become inhabited and used – which, in turn, transforms them from spaces into places – and therefore recognize how important such graphic representations can be.