

The Visualization of Landscape in Urbanism in France (1960-1970)

Frédéric Pousin

Ph.D. in Language Sciences,
Professor at Paris-Belleville
National School of Architecture,
Paris, France.

frederic.pousin@wanadoo.fr

Abstract | The present research with historical and epistemological dimensions, firstly studies the perception of urban landscape and its position in environmental interventions and also as a tool for analyzing the city during three temporal periods from 1960 till 1980; then by surveying the works in the fields of photography and cinema, studies the position of artistic visualization in urban landscape. This research is based on three groups of documents: The first group includes professional journals (architecture, urbanism, landscape) and several textbooks and dissertations; the second group is a collection of landscape design projects on which design cases have been identified; finally, two photographic collections and a selection of films made between 1957 and 1974. Photography and cinema are perfect indicants for the position of image in urban landscape via various ways such as landscape documentation and reading, developing creativity, playing a role as a tool for increasing people's participation and also making the city readable for the unprofessional population. The study of the connection between these artistic methods with professional fields in urbanism and landscape is an important step in the understanding of urban landscape history.

Keywords | Landscape visualization, Urban landscape, Photography, Cinema.

Introduction | The science of urban landscape as it affirms itself in the 1950s England represents an undeniable reference of urbanism since it incorporates the landscape dimension. Indeed the "townscape", the urbanistic doctrine formed by the London's architectural magazine »Architectural Review« was intended as a new architectural tradition defined by an overall environmental understanding and placing emphasis on the vision. Perception and motion are at the center of this philosophy and methods developed it (Pousin, 2007).

This thematic of the urban landscape subsequently spread in Europe and across the Atlantic during two decades (1960 – 1970), in the areas of architecture and urban planning as well as the fields of photography and cinema.

The research titled "perception of urban landscape" (Pousin et al., 2007) proposes a hypothesis that during the years 1960 to 1970, three types of interventions have considerably modified the French territory including landscape of large complexes, estate complexes linked to tourist resorts and road infrastructures. Despite the fact that landscape architects were not directly involved in the mentioned interventions but because of the experts and artists point of view towards the created forms, the urban landscape theory emerged and developed in the organized context. In this regard we must have an analytical – critical approach to this famous quote that the landscape interventions in France is far from and even in contrast with the three decades of architecture¹ after the Second World War.

Methodology and Research Framework

The notion of circulation is at the heart of this research: At first circulation is considered between cultural contexts; from the British "townscape" to the urban landscape as it's explored in professional milieus in urbanism and landscapism in France and then in Italy. Then circulation is among disciplines and techniques, also between illustrated appearances, from photography to audiovisual media. This research shows a dual historical and epistemological dimension which is based on 3 main document groups: a group of professional journals (architecture, urbanism, landscape) and multiple textbooks and dissertations; a group of projects from landscape specialists in which "design figures" have been identified; and finally, two photographic collections and a selection of films² made between 1957 and 1974.

Perception of the Urban Landscape in France

The concept of urban landscape is at times operating directly in the environmental interventions, and sometimes is the only tool for analytical and critical views towards the contemporary city. We have distinguished three stages in the assertion and dissemination of this notion.

The first period (1960- 1966), in which the rise of the cityscape concept is heavily associated with residential



Pic 1: Ito Josué, Firminy-Vert project, (André Sive, Marcel Roux, Charles Delfante and Jean Kling arch. 1961-1953) Overall view of the site. Photo: Ito Josué.

estates. This association is found in several subject areas such as urban planning, architecture, landscape and even geography. From 1960 to 1964, in the urban landscape architects discourses, the concept of urban landscape developed in connection with the form and composition of residential complex volumes. Governments also mentioned the aesthetic argument from their point of view. Outdoor spaces of residential complexes became a new subject for landscapers as reflected in the special issue of "Urban landscape" in "Urbanisme" journal (1965). After 1965, urban landscape appears in texts as a form of response to the inadequacies of housing complexes. It effects the second phase of these constructions through the qualitative improvement of external communal areas. Meanwhile, the discourse on the shape and composition of these large sets are increasingly important considering the site (Pic. 1). It is also stated as a means of analysis and criticism, in the writings of geographers³ that connects residential complexes to the notion of urban landscape, in regards to these new landscapes. In this period of the Italian cinema⁴, a topographical approach of urban space can be identified meaning a descriptive and visual idea of places where action takes place.

The second period (1967-1973) is focused on the development of landscape design interventions regarding outdoor spaces of housing estates. Interventions that find not only a broadcast medium but also a testing ground in "Espaces Verts" journal along with the development in visual debate for criticizing these contemporary spaces. While at multiple scales of pedestrian walkways or roads around the city (Pic. 2), displacement becomes a central theme, for landscape designers and also for film makers.



Pic 2 : Les Mureaux. G. Stoskopf, arch. Photos by Y. Guillemaut, In *Technique&Architecture* 21st serie, No. 4, May 1961, p. 129.
Source: Stoskopf, 1961.



Pic 3: Cover of *Espaces Verts*, No. 15, August & September 1968, Jacques Simon as editor-in-chief.
Source: *Espace Vert*, No.15.

During the years 1968 to 1973, landscapers define their competence to intervene in urban issues by generalizing the poetic of pedestrian movement and designing pedestrian pathways in housing complexes. But this poetic movement is also at the center of new readings of the city during this period. A profound perception of British townscape in France, and especially between 1967 and 1973, analyzes of Kevin Lynch provided a new reading of the city, including city centers and road areas (Appleyard et al., 1964). This change of view point is also evident in different films during this period. These movies clearly show the impacts of the new infrastructures on the city image (Paris, Rome) and circulation methods. There is no more visibility to housing areas in movies; urban renewal and increasing urbanization are now seen from road infrastructure standpoint.

The art of urban landscape photography from mountain viewpoints which is known as the "experimental forms of urban landscapes" according to the critic and photographer Pierre Joly (Joly, 1974) changes by dedicating public spaces to

other land use. The problem of ownership and development of the "lived space" (Bailly, 1977) and participation in the built environment is evident in the next period.

Finally, the last topic we have identified for this period is the criticism of urban renewal. The urban landscape of that time, which is probably under the Italian influence, was associated with heritage and refers to the urban context of historic centers in a perspective of conserving the urban texture and not the "monuments". It is also a tool for criticizing urban renewal.

In the last period (from 1974 to the early 1980s) the term urban landscape seems to spread more widely about new types of operations such as rehabilitation and pedestrianizing city centers in particular. However, the concept is less stable with a more descriptive approach and less operational power. The values of the urban landscape are focused on the social aspects and values of "urbanity" and traditional city centers (consistent with the protests against functionalist urban planning in previous decades), concentration and



Pic 4: ZUP des Chatillons in Reims, Source: Espaces Verts, No 22, January, February & March 1970, p. 123.
Photos by Jacques Simon.

participation. The American influence on art (Wolf, 2004) and the disciplines of development continues to permeate in the readings of the city. In cinema the dynamic point of view that develops through displaying staged road scenes becomes the main issue: development of motorway journeys and highlighting functional road areas like parking lots, gas stations, etc.

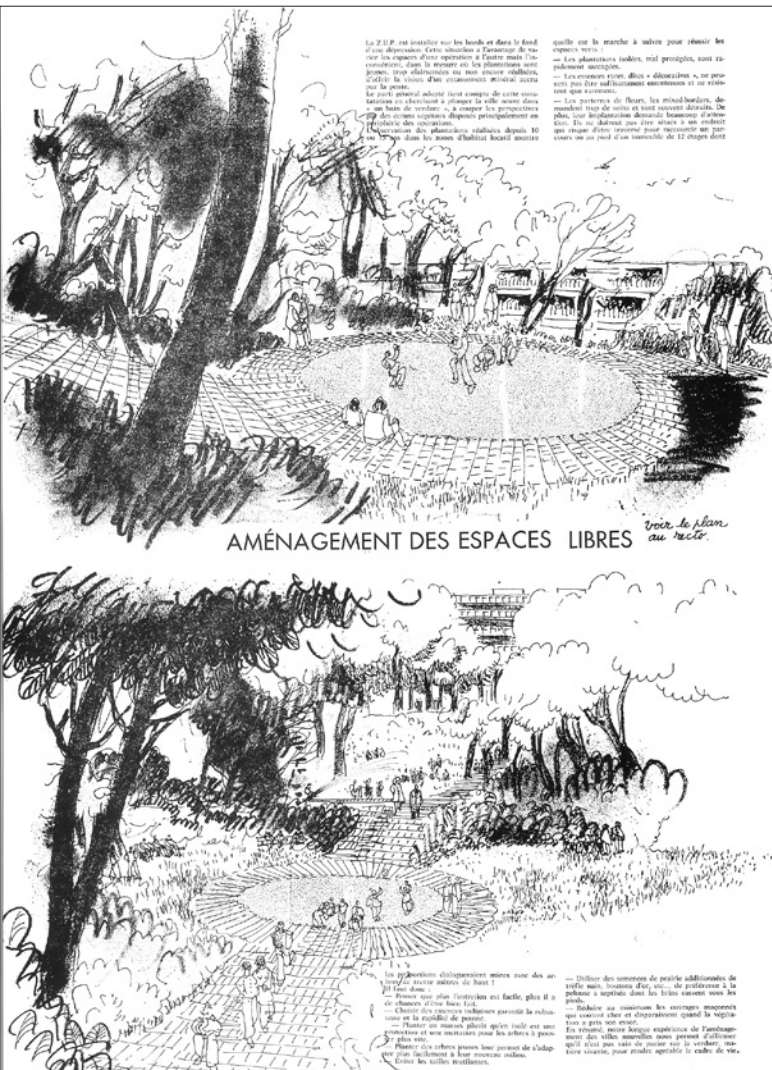
The Vectors of the Landscape Setting

Throughout the two decades that we have studied, photography appears as a perfect emblematic showing the importance of the image in the urban landscape definition and serves different purposes: It documents the achievements that reconfigure the land, it participates in professional strategies through the establishment of archives and reference books, occupying a key place in professional landscape publications for affirming true visual debate in this field. Photography is for many years, in the heart of the professional works of geographers, especially when they offer their first readings of achievements that transformed urban landscapes (Pinchemel, 1964). In the field of landscape, the "photographic" practice in mood sketches was one of the subjects of the new French landscape education led by those who at that time most clearly owned

the urban landscape concept (Routaboule, 1976). In the 1970s emphasis on people's participation and creativity enhanced day by day.

Moreover, photography is emerging as a large-scale communication material (distribution of books, "large public" magazines and postcards). Finally we see, during these two decades, a transformation of the photography profession, under the influence of a progressive social crisis and the emergence of a "non-subjective" photography. It should follow the mutation of artistic practices in North America and its manifestations in Europe, which the change of time and change of subject is an integral component of it and paying attention to the influence of this topic on the photographic methods of those who sometimes even help produce new urban landscape is significant. Among the service description from the employer, the artistic look of the photographer and the production of unique photographic documents appropriate for distributing among the people (The magazine as a cultural or political genre) and also the landscape photographer's point of view in relation to the development play a key role.

This idea is shown in the productions of a photographer named Ito Josué (Milo, 2005 & Pousin, 2012), who has worked with some of the planners and architects that marked



Pic 5: Mood Drawing, ZUP de Fontenay sous Bois, Source: *Aménagement des Espaces libres*, No. 7, "Les gens vivent la ville", 1976.

Copyright: Jacques Simon.

the period of reconstruction⁵.

In the Firminy-Vert project which received the planning price in 1961 because of its exemplary quality, by his special point of view, Joshua shows the effect of sky scraper's monumental and the silhouette of their cutting in a photographic series with modernist connotations. The public space in this project is only seen from the inside, by transparency, like the American city that was apprehended from the lobby of skyscrapers. Finally, it shows the implementation of this new method of planning in landscape that occupies an important place in the discourse of designers and was relayed by the mayor, Claudius Petit, former Minister of Reconstruction (1948-1952) and friend of Le Corbusier.

Photographic productions of the French landscape architect Jacques Simon⁶, represents a more conceptual perspective. Photographer, Jacques Simon engaged in landscape architecture (Assassin, 1997) alongside a professional journal

editorial activity. He collaborated with *Urbanism* magazine in the late 50s in the "Green Spaces" section, and later in 1970 became the editor-in-chief of "Espaces Verts"⁷ landscape journal created in 1964 and there was in charge until 1982. The editorial activities of Jacques Simon also reflect the evolution of the role of landscape towards a more social one. In issue 15 (August and September 1968) of *Espaces Verts*, fully supported by Jacques Simon an iconographic strategy is created which became the "brand image of the journal" (Pic. 3). Afterwards the photojournalism acquired a new status; a new visual discussion appears, within which the images are manipulated according to logic other than that of their spatial sequence (Pic. 4). Other issues of the journal will explicitly appeal photomontage. During the 70s the focus on public participation and creativity is increasingly evident.

- From Photography to Mood Drawing, a Project Discourse about the City

Photography is ubiquitous in articles and publications of J. Simon and plays multiple roles that while integrating together highlights the uniqueness of his work. Simon first uses photography as a recording tool for the city, like the English townscapers. He traveled to every continent, and created reports to describe the rapid transformation of the city at that time.

In another status, photography has a monitoring role for urban issues in which Simon notes his personal impressions of the city which of course is never for evaluation. In one of his works "People live the city" (1976), he inserts comments and speech bubbles in his photographs and photomontages, to get people to talk about the city. The result of this action is introducing dynamic spaces, suspending the assumptions towards it and is an opening for the project work.

Landscape designers of the 70s wanted to develop the atmosphere sketches in their work. The term "ambient sketch" means perspective sketches drawn quickly, and paying less attention to the physical description of a place or a project than the restitution of its atmosphere (pic. 5). In fact it should be noted that the notion of "ambiance" was also the subject of a real promotion from the second half of the 1960s, particularly through the reflections of landscape architect Bernard Lassus, which also plays a vital role in the formation of the renewed profession of landscape architecture (Lassus, 1975).

As the "photographic" method in atmosphere sketches was one of the objectives of the new French landscape education, how did this evolution change the ways of drawing the landscape projects?

In the 70s, with the global trend of forum registration facing the central authority the citizen associations themselves are transformed into the main audience. Moreover, the power of mayors and authorities who are often minimally trained in

urban and public planning issues tends to decline slowly. In the early 1980s, through decentralization laws local elected councils were placed instead of the project managers. We now understand the strategic importance of a landscape project that comes to make it readable for non-experts that are inhabitants and also citizen forums and local councils.

- Cinema

Cinema, meanwhile, gives a subjective point of view, which is part of a collective imagination and the movies document this imagination.

Displaying urban landscapes, from the inside or outside of the road, needs technical, justifiable, geographic and aesthetic

powerful strategies and reflects personal and collective memories. For retaining the fundamental change presenting the urban landscape would be the matter of transition from topographic approach of the urban space towards a topological approach with a subjective vision, using sites that determine the action or result.

A change of road paradigms is detectable in both films of Jacques Tati, *Playtime* (1962 to 1967) and *Traffic* (1971). *Playtime* shows the characters and human activities such as trade, tourism and the nearby habitat mostly considers the citizen based features of city roads; while in *Traffic*, the cars are essentially occupying the roads, and the characters are present in spaces such as car parks, traffic jams, accidents and etc.

Conclusion | From the beginning of the 1960s that the concept of urban landscape developed in association with residential complexes and their interior spaces till the early 1980s which the urban landscape possessed stronger social dimensions and conjoined to the social participation, landscape illustration has always played multiple roles in close relation with this concept. This research shows how the

knowledge of urban landscape in France during decades of 1960 and 1970 was determined in the fields of architecture, urban planning, photography and cinema. Contemplating about the encounter of these artistic methods with professional fields of environmental improvement is one of the main pillars of landscape history in this era and even the architecture and city history from the landscape point of view.

Endnotes

1. Trente Glorieuses, from 1945 to 1973.
2. From certain French, Italian, German and American directors.
3. From Philippe Pinchemel (1963) to Sylvie Rimbart (1973)
4. Modern Italians
5. Charles Delfante, emulator and collaborator of Le Corbusier.
6. Born in 1928, studied at the Horticulture School of Versailles
7. 1964 -1982.

Reference List

- Appleyard, D., Lynch, K. & Myer, J. R. (1964). *The view from the road*. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press.
- Bailly, A. (1974). La perception des paysages urbains. Essai méthodologique. *L'Espace géographique*, (3): 211-217.
- Joly, P. (1974). Tignes, la fête urbaine. *L'Œil*, (224): 53.
- Lassus, B. (1975). *Paysages quotidiens: de l'ambiance au démesurable*. Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou.
- Pinchemel, P. (1964). *Géographie de la France 2. Les Milieux: campagnes, industrie et villes*. Paris: Librairie Armand Colin.
- Pousin, F. (2007). Du townscape au "paysage urbain", circulation d'un modèle rhétorique mobilisateur. *STRATES*, (13): 25-50.
- Pousin, F. (dir.), et al. (2007). *Saisir le paysage urbain: Du rôle des publications et figurations architecturales, des pratiques photographiques et cinématographiques (1960-1970)*, rapport de recherche finale. Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, BRAUP.
- Routaboule, D. (1976). *La communication graphique en architecture du paysage*. Montréal: Éditions Georges Le Pape.
- Stoskopf, G. (1961). Les Mureaux. *Technique&Architecture*, 21(4): 129.
- Wolf, S. (2004.). *E. Ruscha and photography (catalogue d'exposition)*. New York & Göttingen: Withney Museum of American Art et Steidl.