

Hybrid Parks and *The Allegory of Good Government* or “*Comb your grasses at the end of the season...*”

Our topic is Hybrid Parks; in Italian, *Parchi Ibridi*. We can even push farther and think about translating the phrase from spoken language to a visual one, as did Ambrogio Lorenzetti when he painted *The Allegory of Good Government* on the walls of the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena, in 1338. Some sing and some dance, some go about their business. A city opens up to the countryside, the people go in and out, some hunting, some bringing in goods. The city changes into countryside through a strip of orchards and vineyards adjacent to the walls. It is the image of Peace, an image of diversity and harmony, variety and color. It is *The Allegory of Good Government*. On the opposite wall, an indistinct blot, the gray and brown of devastated woods and abandoned fields, is *The Allegory of Bad Government*.

The landscape becomes a way to represent the condition of the city. But, through the power of allegory, something more happens. The allegory is comprised of certain elements: the laughing, dancing girls, the open windows of the houses, the shops, the cultivated fields. We identify these things with Peace; they *are* Peace. The allegory establishes the shared identity of Peace and its Landscape, inspiring a sense of familiarity and belonging in us, the viewers. This is the power of the allegory: the creation of an indissoluble unity out of that Landscape and our basic needs. In that room in the Palazzo Pubblico of Siena, Peace and the city of the fourteenth century have found their perfect Landscape.

In Ferrara from the fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries, the great economic and military power of the Estense dukes assumed a double form. First, technologically advanced weapons to use and to sell to Europe's great powers; second, the *Delizie*, landscaped palaces in which the court lived during part of the year. The garden, in an age of war, grew out of power and came to represent it.

The presence of these green areas in today's city has remained, for the most part, intact. A bird's-eye view reveals the northeast part of the city colored in unbroken green. Here one wanders through a rare fusion of the sacred and the profane set amid medieval gardens. Within the perimeter of the walls, the countryside maintains its proper use, not only its formal persistence as a venerated area between the Christian and Jewish cemeteries that have protected its longevity.

Perhaps Ferrara is particularly suited to host a discussion on Hybrid Parks since it is familiar with ancient ways of managing public green spaces in such a way as to make them sources of inspiration. Here we find, almost incidentally, some roots of the idea of Hybrid Parks. This concept, fitting itself into Time, takes on a patina of normalcy, of obviousness, which restores to us the evidence of its most authentic character and

richness: *diversity*. Here the perception of normalcy in this regard renders the idea of the fusion of the urban and the agricultural more familiar, more customary, and therefore readier to settle into the minds of everyone crossing these fields. Thus, we aim to reach the end of the workshop with a sense of rediscovery regarding the visual and attitudinal obviousness around the meaning of *hybrid*, and, with it, the aesthetic need for this type of landscape. The plans and projects to be undertaken in light of this rediscovery, of course, must yet be invented.

A garden – and every Park is a garden – takes a form which represents the urgent concerns of he who creates it. Thus, the history of gardens is a continuous transformation of forms and ideas. We all know that the urgent concern of ecological change is the dominant idea of our time. And so it is that we must find an answer to the question: what is the form of garden suitable for performing this urgency? I like to think that the garden capable of performing the things closest to our contemporary needs has an uncommon form, following the plants during their natural development. Tall grasses... why not?! Why not weeds?! The beauty of it is, in accounting for ecology, one arrives at a point of never being able to forget it. On the 21st of December, 1978, the most adventurous of English gardeners, Christopher Lloyd, wrote that it is “A question of upbringing”: if you grow up running in tall grasses, nothing less will do. Nothing less than a Beauty coming to light in forms no longer traceable to a conventional idea of order, but synonymous with biological diversity... “Comb your grasses at the end of the season.” wrote the great Dutch garden designer Henk Gerritsen to his last client.

This involves the creation of a green culture open to solutions for the slow, progressive decline of climatic and ecological variety, addressing the trend of rising temperatures and the scarcity of water. Attention to the sustainability of plant choices, along with informed planning regarding naturally occurring biological systems, in the creation of ecologically based, designed urban long term, somewhat self-sufficient plant communities. Hardy and enduring plants set into the heart of a project which, mimicking natural landscapes, can conduct the dynamism of biological communities into the urban landscapes of our cities. The management of these spaces will yield, in autumn and winter, food for birds and insects which eat the heads of dead flowers, as well as the formal beauty of perennial grasses in their winter phase, intervening only in their pruning, resulting in reduced expenditures. And so even the grassland communities may be open to maintenance as no-mow zones, where public use permits it, leaving them to their natural development. In this case, too, expenditures are reduced by entrusting end-of-season mowing to farmers to use for grazing their animals. Sustainability in the choice of the species, sustainability in planning, and sustainability of management. Thus “sustainability” becomes synonymous with “diversity”, that same diversity which makes up the Landscape of Peace in the *Allegory of Good Government* fresco. The risk of not heeding ecological urgency, not translating it into the forms most consonant with it, is that the landscape in which we live might cease to represent anything for anyone, and instead presents repeating

forms that nevertheless do not contribute to a sense of belonging. And it is belonging which creates a City. If Good Government and its Peace had found, in the fourteenth century, the appropriate pictorial representation in that perfect Landscape, we must ask ourselves how the twenty-first century's ecological urgency, *our* Peace, can be adequately represented.

What will our allegory be?

Ferrara does not have great economic resources, but it is equipped with a tool for the management of public green spaces which allows innovation. It is called *Adozione Verde*; in English, Green Adoption: a non-profit association of private citizens who adopt from the City Council, for five years, an area from 20 square meters to 2000. Differentiated use of public space is thus spread throughout the entire city, enriched by the most varied contributions from private citizens. At this point we arrive to the importance of awareness and the culture of citizenship in protecting the quality of the adoptions and this workshop addresses the culture of citizenship since it can establish agreement for the building of broad public consent in different countries.

And so *hybrid* loses every connotation of size and becomes a habit of thought, and thus it can push beyond the idea of the Park to enter our homes, enriching our fragmented private green spaces in order to transform them and include them in a greater *unity*. If we imagine seeing a city from the air, blessed with the sight of its birds, the fragmented totality of its gardens reveals itself. Birds do not notice dividing walls between gardens, they fly above a *single garden* as large as the entire city, whose richness comes from the variety of the many smaller habitats which comprise it. It is not a question of scale so much as one of approach, and it has a name: once again, it is “diversity”. If this vision matures, Ferrara, like many other cities, may not need a Hybrid Park, because it is *already* a Hybrid Park, in that it already *functions* as such. It is only necessary for it to mature, that is, *diversify*, in the functioning of its green spaces as a whole, while each piece is valued for its unique particulars.

In Ferrara, multiplicity maintains the unity between the present and the medieval within an unexpected chronological jump. Perhaps we must think to a spatial multiplicity capable of perpetuating the little garden and the great park, making them work together, rendering intervention at every scale more fluid, more adaptable; or rather, making our *Allegoria* more attentive to the fragile unpredictability of our times.