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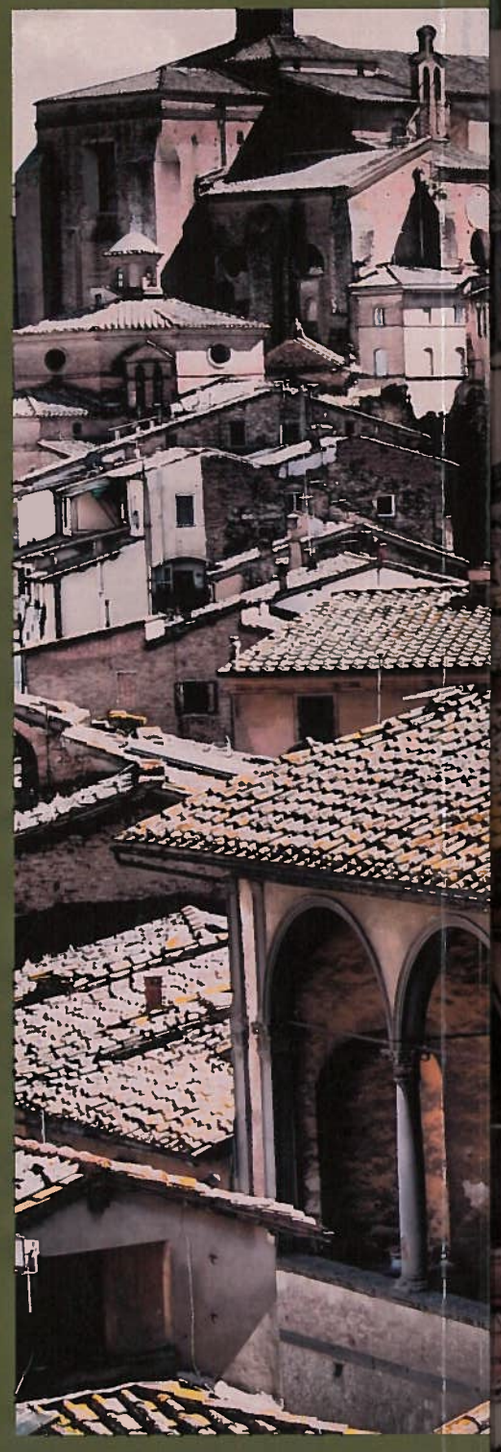
Spaces in-between goes beyond the emphasis on externalities signalled by the term 'environment' to address the isolation of modern technological culture from nature. Solutions require more than an awareness of 'natural surroundings' and human destructiveness. We think in terms of the re-conceptualization, re-design and re-negotiation of space. The book is concerned with social practices, belief systems, urban designs, the organization and representation of landscapes and modes of living. These aspects of 'spatiality' suggest how to conceive and practice the intermingling of nature and culture and how to develop public commitment to such practices. In the process we show how concern for the environment as an aspect of space helps us to reconceive and reinterpret what it means to be human.

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Spaces in-between

Cultural and Political Perspectives on Environmental Discourse

Edited by
Mark Luccarelli and Sigurd Bergmann







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VOLUME 2

Spaces in-between

Cultural and Political Perspectives on Environmental Discourse

Edited by

Mark Luccarelli
Sigurd Bergmann



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Contents

Acknowledgements VII
Notes on Contributors VIII

Introduction

1 **Reconsidering Environment: Spatial Contexts and the Development of the Environmental Humanities** 3
Mark Luccarelli and Sigurd Bergmann

PART 1
Lived Spaces and Political Contexts

2 **Strindberg's Modern Ecological Subject: "Swedish Nature" Viewed From a Train** 27
Linda Haverty Rugg
3 **The Romance of Reinhabitation: Jack London and Knut Hamsun** 38
Peter Mortensen
4 **A Cosmopolitan Sense of Place** 51
Carmen Flys-Junquera
5 **Hannah Arendt on Transcendence in the Public Sphere** 73
Firmin DeBrabander
6 **City Creeks: Lessons in Sustainable Environmental Discourse from a Florida Boom Town** 88
Thomas Hallock
7 **Allotment and Community Gardens: Commons in German Cities** 102
Werner Bigell

PART 2
Reconceiving Environmental Space

8 **Natural or Political Public Space? Spaces of Interpretation, Environmentalism, and the Sacred Depth** 133
Forrest Clingerman
9 **Reconstituting the Geographical Place: The Design of Public Spaces**

10 **Living in Bubbles: Peter Sloterdijk's Spherology and the Environmental Humanities** 163
Hannes Bergthaller

Conclusion

11 **Medieval Green Cities: Thirdspace and the Challenge of History** 179
Mark Luccarelli

Index 203

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Introduction

CHAPTER 9

Reconstituting the Geographical Place: The Design of Public Spaces of Exception in the Contemporary City (the Case of the City Park Waterfront Project in Porto)

Rodrigo Coelho

Abstract

Due to the fragmented and discontinuous spread of urbanisation, Portuguese and European cities have changed profoundly over the past four decades. This has resulted in the standardisation and disruption of public spaces and urban landscape around the main urban centres. Taking into account this situation, the general question that this article will seek to address (from the perspective of urban design and urban culture) is the extent to which it becomes possible to confer an exceptional character to urban public space in a time where urban societies seem to claim more individualised, more specialised and more enlarged forms of public space. Using a concrete case study – the intervention of the City Park Waterfront in Porto designed by Manuel de Sola-Morales, this paper will reflect upon the relationship between the city and its most important geographic elements, considering, in an innovative way, the relationship between geography, infrastructure and collective space.

Keywords

picturesque – place – architecture and urban form – Portugal – geographical landscape – landscape and architecture

1 Introduction

The idea of uninterrupted, but discrete and well defined open areas, categorised by type and system had up until the mid-twentieth century constituted the main point of reference to discuss public space; however such a conception is no longer relevant to significant parts of the contemporary city. Due to

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the expansion and fragmentation of cities, especially over the twentieth century, the most relevant fact is the progressive and unstoppable process of disaggregation (both physical and conceptual) of the city and public space. Until the beginning of this period, the city and its public space were organically related; public space symbolically and functionally condensed the political, economic and social spaces that constituted the architectonic understanding of the city.

Portuguese and other European cities have seen their urban condition change profoundly over the past four decades (due to the fragmented and discontinuous spread of urbanisation); this has resulted in the standardisation and disruption of public spaces and urban landscape around the main urban centres. Taking into account this situation, the general question that this chapter will seek to address (from the urban design and urban culture perspectives) is the extent to which it becomes possible to give an exceptional character to urban public space in a time when urban societies seem to claim ever more individualised, more specialised and enlarged forms of public space. From an urban and architectural point of view, what can make a public space exceptional "outside" the "traditional city" context? How can we design and build these exceptional public spaces in these parts of the city? Finally, to what extent are these singular public spaces relevant to the growth and consolidation of the city of the future by structuring new systems of public space in more distended and enlarged urban contexts?

2 Exceptional Public Space in the Contemporary City: The Rediscovery of Urban Waterfronts

It is in the context of the enlarged city that waterfront interventions can be relevant, as well as a reflection on public space projects that materialise these urban operations, and which in recent decades have been developed, particularly in the European context. It is especially interesting to look at examples where architects can recognise the architectural and urban attributes that lend a significant and memorable value to urban spaces. Such attributes suggest a way to rescue the disappearing collective dimension of traditional cities within the broader metropolitan reality of the present day; but architectural discourse is also interested in those examples and projects that, by considering the geographical landscape in their physical concrete dimension, allows the natural elements to be projected, once again, as an integral part of the development and structuring of the city while simultaneously rebalancing the relationship between man and his natural environment.

The first and possibly the most important problem that arises when architects intervene in a space of unusually great environmental value is the difficulty in adequately accounting for the morphological, urban and geographical characteristics of the area. The relationship with the natural and geographical elements asserts itself as the central problem, which, from an architectural point of view, should precede and influence the choices regarding the character of the programmed uses of these public spaces. As Carlos Martí reminds us, if there is something permanent in the city, it is the presence of places, which by being "*deeply urban*" simultaneously manifest a "*strong bond*" with geography (Martí Aris 2005: 56).

The second aspect, which is vital in the design of the "singular public space" is the affirmation of these spaces as "significant and strategic voids" (fig. 9.1), open to collective appropriation, the main attribute of which should be recognised in their urban, landscape aesthetic and spatial qualities. Finally, the third key issue to be considered in urban waterfront public space design is the ability of these urban projects to operate profound changes in strategic sectors of the city by trying to "shape" and "structure" the city (being aware of the impossibility of controlling the shape of the city globally and of the importance of giving

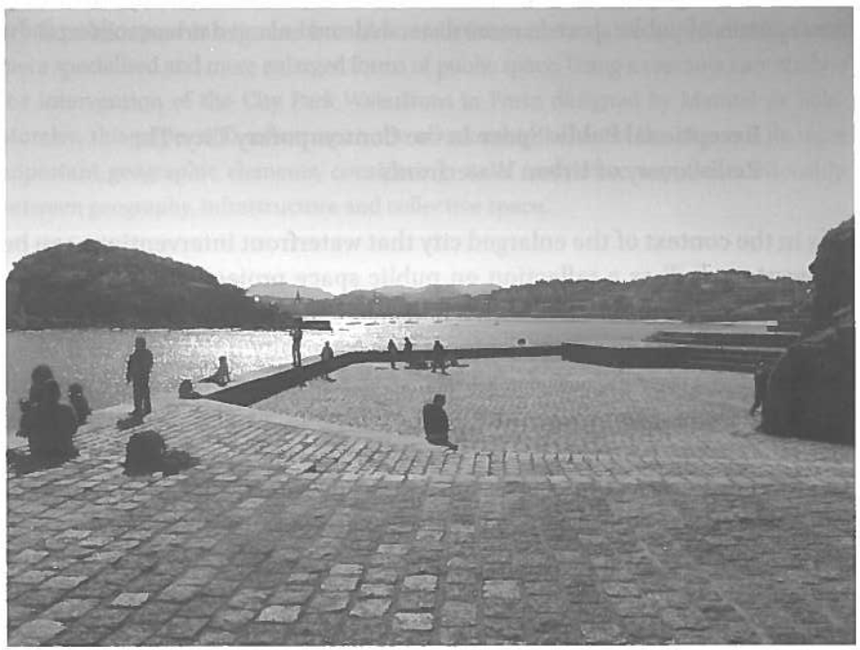


FIGURE 9.1 *Peine del Viento, San Sebastian designed by Eduardo Chillida and Luis Peña Ganchegui, 1977*
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

a shape and a structure to the city), while providing answers to the problems and concerns that each society poses to public space in particular.

3 The Redesign of the City Park Waterfront in Porto

This conceptual framework underlies the Manuel de Solà-Morales 1998 proposal for redesigning the City Park Waterfront in Porto, which differs in approach and results, from both the large retrofitting projects in major port cities and the environmental restoration projects in protected coastal areas (that have occurred mostly in special landscape or ecological contexts). I believe that in this case it is possible to assess and analyse the transformation of an urban coastal strip that enhances the conversion of a transitional and indeterminate space (with unique and exceptional characteristics in terms of the geography of the place) into a *public space of exception*, which will be able to restore the public dimension to a sector of the city by opening it to the use of its inhabitants.

The fundamental perspective that underlies this project is the simultaneous interaction of urban, architectural, infrastructural and geographical issues – a perspective that challenges the current conception of public space in the city. Additionally, this reconfigured coastal area, which is a fundamental part of a broader metropolitan system of public spaces (which has long been troublesome in the eyes of planners and architects, and has remained unresolved for more than a century) raises the problem of articulating the confluence of two different urban contexts: industrial site and border marker between municipalities.

Forming a valley bordered by the *Avenida* (Avenue) *da Boavista* to the south (by the hills of *Nevogilde*), and by the *Estrada da Circunvalação* (Ring Road) to the north, this place was, for several decades, a border that separated the cities of Porto and Matosinhos; these borders were gradually blurred by urbanising fringes, until they found two significant urban "barriers" – the *Estrada da Circunvalação* on the north side and the *Avenida da Boavista* on the south (fig. 9.2).

This place (which during the last century was a slag landfill) marks the meeting of two different urban realities. On its south side, there is a linear growth along the *Avenida do Brasil* and the *Avenida de Montevideu*, while the north side (Matosinhos) is characterised by the existence of a denser and more concentrated urbanisation, generated by a regular mesh blocks of industrial origin (Matosinhos Sul); since the last decade of the last century this area has come under a process of urban redevelopment.[1] This sector of the city is also

1 After the initial plan authored by the architect Paula Santos was proposed in 1994, it was updated under the direction of *Matosinhos Sul* and designed by Álvaro Siza.

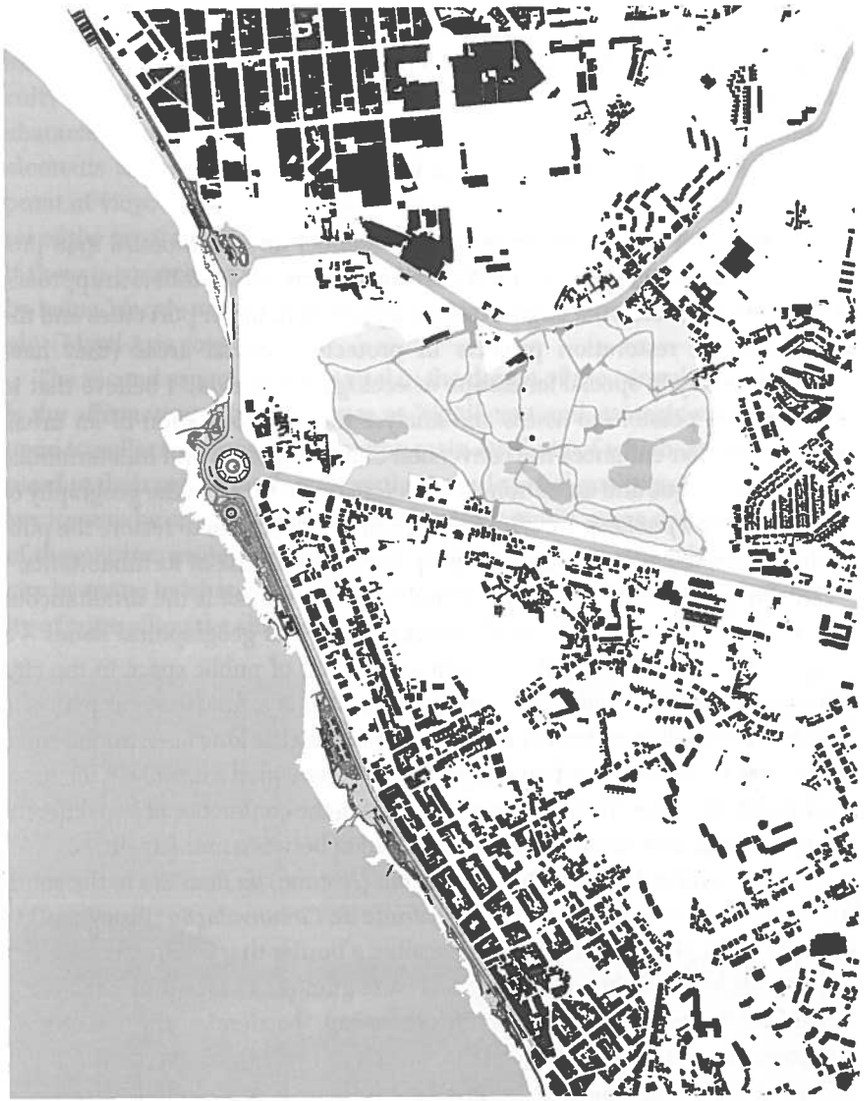


FIGURE 9.2 *The Porto City Park Waterfront before the intervention*
MAP DRAWN BY THE AUTHOR

marked by the presence of three significant urban elements, which confer it a strong identity and an increased importance in a wider urban context: the *Forte de São Francisco Xavier* (Fortress) – better known as *Castelo do Queijo*, the *Avenida da Boavista*, and the *Estrada da Circunvalação*. The *Forte de São Francisco Xavier*, which has a recognised heritage importance, was built in the mid-seventeenth century (presumably on the ruins of another pre-existing

maritime fortification), and defines the western end of the *Avenida da Boavista* (traced in the mid-nineteenth century and only arriving by the sea in the second decade of the twentieth century), which is the main structuring axis of the western section of the city of Porto. Finally, it should be mentioned that the *Estrada da Circunvalação*, completed in the late nineteenth century, established itself not only as the administrative barrier that defines the land border of the city of Porto with its neighbouring municipalities, but also as an important communication route in the Porto Metropolitan Area. The *Praça Cidade São Salvador* (Square), as the maritime border of the *Estrada da Circunvalação*, defines the boundary between the cities of Porto and of Matosinhos.

As a unique and pivotal urban location, marked by its character as a threshold and stabilised since the early decades of the last century, the area has spawned several potential projects for urban redesign (the first studies for the area date back to 1926), none of which have been fully carried out. In 1961 the Master Plan of the city of Porto, designed by Robert Auzelle, established that ultimately this sector of the city would serve as an urban park. From the early proposals on, the strategic importance of the area was reflected in the ambition to make this place a public reference for the city. Consequently, long processes of debate and discussion of ideas have indeed shaped and influenced the effective materialisation of the new design.

4 Drain to Rebuild: Maritime Topography as Civic Structure (the Proposal of Manuel de Sola-Morales)

Following unfinished proposals and plans (some of them carried out in the mid-nineties, and abandoned a few years later), which already reflected the political decision of "not to build" a waterfront park,[2] Manuel de Solà-Morales was invited in 1998 to undertake a study of the City Park front with the purpose of creating an urban front with a recreational character that would be designed primarily for leisure. The decision of the municipality to "liberate" the west front of the City Park from buildings reflects a new way of thinking about the

2 This should be recalled, as the purpose of this "political decision" of not to build at the front of the City Park corresponds to the period of the implementation of the first phase of the requalification of the Douro riverbanks between the Historic Centre and the *Alameda Basil Teles*, held for the reception of the Ibero-American Summit that took place in Porto in 1998. This event coincided with the opening of the Expo 98 exhibition area. During this period issues of public space and urban regeneration began to gain importance in Portugal and to be debated by the public.

role assigned to public space and character of landscape as the key components in the new Maritime Front. The recognition by Manuel de Sola-Morales of the open character of this exceptional place, marked by the presence of the "*great emptiness*" of the City Park (which the design strategy enhances by creating a continuity between the sea and the green expanses of the park) is undoubtedly the fundamental answer to the problem of accentuating the geography of the place (by underlying land forms as visually perceived and interpreted). The combined option of the re-naturalization of *Vale Galinheiras* (Valley) – to restore its original topography – by merging the sea with the Coast Park (made possible by the introduction of a suspended viaduct for motor traffic), is the point of departure for the determination of the proposed character for the urban front.

The built environment aspect of the proposal is based on the effective recognition of a (new) scale for the coastline front, and on the recognition, in various dimensions – landscape, urban topography, etc. – of the exceptional character of this particular urban sector, where the city meets the sea and where two diverse townscapes share a crossroads (fig. 9.3). Consequently, instead of buildings, streets and trees, land and water are the "major materials" with which the project seeks to work. In sum, by proposing the recovery of the emptiness of the park, by reaffirming the exceptionality of the coast (linked through the *Vale Galinheiras*) and lastly by recognising the particular condition of *hiatus* or discontinuity that defines this place, the design strategy actually presupposes an act of reconstituting the urban and natural geographies of the place.

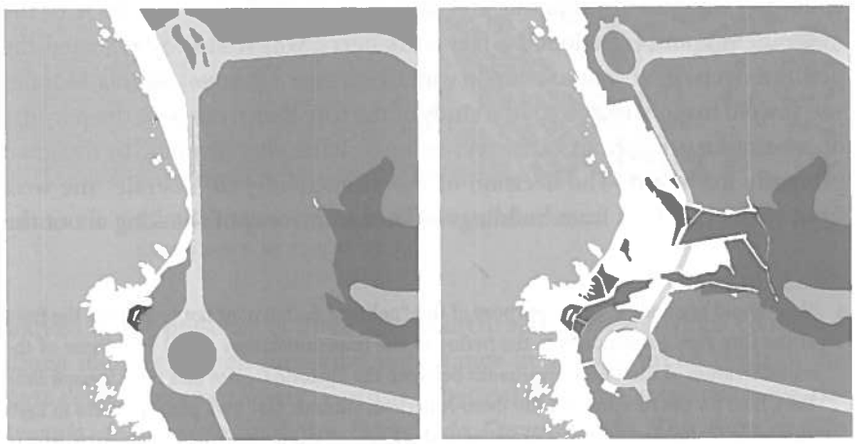


FIGURE 9.3 *The Porto City Park Waterfront before and after the intervention*
PLANNING MAP DRAWN BY THE AUTHOR

5 The Materialisation of a "New Waterfront": The Public Space as an Integrative System (from the Emptiness to Articulation)

If the proposed public space is seen as a truly open and connective system that is able to transform this stretch of the city into a *new landscape and recreational venue* (M. de Solà-Morales 2008: 46), the way in which traffic issues are considered may become decisive in the structure of the composition and construction of the newly proposed public spaces, as we shall see. In this context it is necessary to mention the importance of the traffic connection between the *Praça de Gonçalves Zarco* (Square) and the *Praça Cidade São Salvador* – understood in its dual condition of urban landmark and end point of urban roads with a territorial dimension – and the subtle way the proposed viaduct (fig. 9.4) resolves its articulation allowing differentiated but inter-connected pathways – at the various levels – and simultaneously opening the view to the main reference elements – the sea, the coastline, the Park, and the *Castelo do Queijo* (fortress).

As mentioned, the materialisation of this peculiar and distinctive "urban waterfront" refers to the emptiness of the City Park. However, the presence of the viaduct (designed as an infrastructural kneecap) is key; it is complemented,



FIGURE 9.4 *The Porto City Park Waterfront: the Viaduct at the beach level seen from the south*
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

formally and programmatically by the *Praça Cidade São Salvador* (to the north) and the *Praça de Gonçalves Zarco* (to the south), and especially by the presence of the *Edifício Transparente* (to the east). The location and volume of this new building seems to result mainly from the demand to create an architectural reference for the articulation of the public space (especially at the beach level), but it also counteracts at the linear and horizontal logic of the viaduct and its adjoining squares by creating an architectural landmark, which is able to focus collective activities and confers an urban approach to the *Praça Cidade São Salvador*. This building – originally conceived as a multifunctional collective structure – was designed as a wide and covered veranda that would provide different views (over the ocean and the *Castelo do Queijo* fortress) and offer different spatial experiences from the inside (fig. 9.5).

Regarding the redesign of the *Praça Cidade São Salvador* (main southern entrance of Matosinhos), the built proposal resulted from the conception of a large sculpture by Janet Echelman – known as *Anemona* – and positioned at the axis of the *Estrada da Circunvalação*. It marks the transition between land and sea, and consists of a metal ring (suspended from three masts) that supports a "fishing net" exposed to the wind, which metaphorically alludes to the fishing origins of Matosinhos.



FIGURE 9.5 *The Porto City Park Waterfront proposal: the functioning of the urban front as a whole by the articulation of independent urban pieces seen from the south*
PHOTOGRAPH BY PERMISSION OF CARLOS PRATA



FIGURE 9.6 *The Porto City Park Waterfront proposal area looking from the south; this illustrates the functioning of the urban front as a whole by the articulation of independent urban pieces.*
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

The third key element in structuring the "urban front" proposal is the set defined by the *Praça de Gonçalves Zarco* and the proposed underground car park. The main transformation operated on this square (which has reinforced its role as a focal and end point of the *Avenida da Boavista*) refers to its materialisation "as a volume", marked by the creation of a large terrace facing the sea, which acquires thickness by introducing a lower level – the car park (deployed parallel to the coastline over which it opens). Although these urban pieces acquire a formal and functional autonomy, they nonetheless are articulated in relation to the proposed public spaces thus insuring the structuring and the functioning of the urban front *as a whole* (figs. 9.5–6).

The recognition of the natural elements' uniqueness (park and coastline) and the desire of "dilution" of the built elements thus provide the enhancement of the voids between the singular urban pieces and the most important pathways connecting these particular points. The public spaces both generated at the high level or viaduct level, and at the low level or beach level, acquire importance as they constitute notable pathways from, to or between geographical or architectural landmarks. The design principle adopted brings us, in a sense, to a landscape design founded in the eighteenth century's picturesque tradition, which produces a decomposition of a unitary and globalising vision of the city and the coast by proposing a succession of articulated spaces

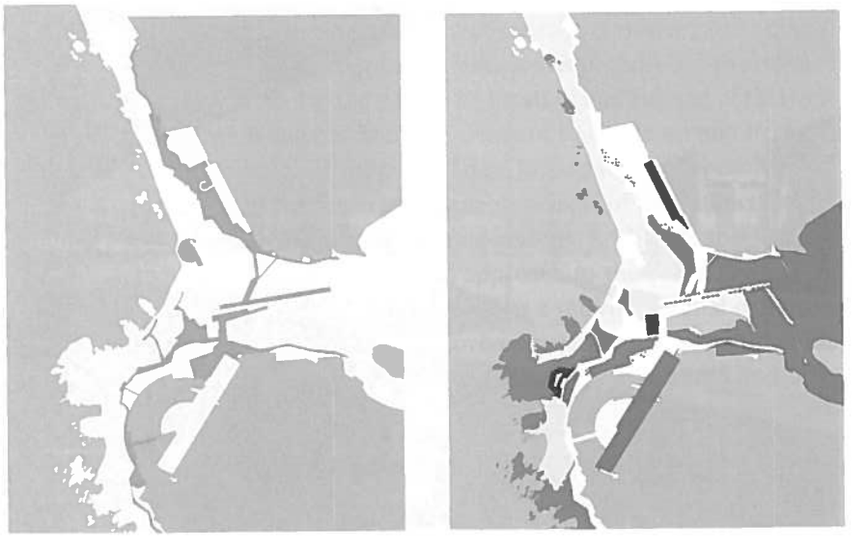


FIGURE 9.7 *The Porto City Park Waterfront proposal: pathways at the beach levels and the public space serve as structuring elements.*
PLANNING MAP DRAWN BY THE AUTHOR

and pathways that value the presence of scales, shapes and distinct episodes recognisable on-site.

This is the case of the intermediate sector of intervention (marking the transition between the beach and park), which is materialised as a public space of confluence of several important pathways in the context of the project, hence assuming the ambiguous condition of a borderspace. This space is constructed from resonances of pre-existing elements and of the artificial green of the City Park, which spreads over the shoreline (fig. 9.7). The expanses of green, treated as parterres, mingle with the natural elements, thereby reshaping the previously linear contact line of sight between the sea and the city.

It is, therefore, possible to detect a dynamic and fluid boundary in this intervention area, which results, on the one hand, from the interpenetration of the hard surfaces and green natural areas, which define pathways and more informal spaces for pedestrians, and, on the other hand, by the contrasting precise geometry of the viaduct. From a conceptual point of view, the assumption of this hybrid identity for the Porto City Park Waterfront public space is certainly one of the more stimulating topics that arise when thinking about public space in a time of uncertainty, both with regard to the concept of landscape and in relation to how we use and experience the city.

In this theoretical framework, one of the key concepts, as theorised by Manuel de Solà-Morales, concerns the impossibility of understanding urban

space as belonging to a collective stable whole, as had been the case in the conceptualisation and construction of the city until the mid-twentieth century. In fact, Manuel de Solà-Morales seems to be more interested in the notion of public space as "a landscape" (and in the idea of the city as landscape) – a concept that proposes a more individualised and subjective relationship with the urban space and with the city. This subject is intertwined somehow with the assumptions that underlie the picturesque landscape tradition, as an aesthetic exercise that proposes a "look from the outside", more personal and subjective, in which the public space, understood as a hybrid landscape, mutant and varied, ceases to be formalised as a neutral, well-defined, and stable background where urban spaces and architectural objects gain prominence.

In the case of the Porto Maritime Front, as in the picturesque landscape tradition, public space itself becomes an active part in the more individualised and unstable expression and affirmation of cityscape, in which a more random and (apparently) casual "order" prevails over a more stable and well defined organisation of urban forms (fig. 9.8). As Ignasi de Solà-Morales reminds us, the reinterpretation of this "picturesque landscape paradigm" in the redefinition of

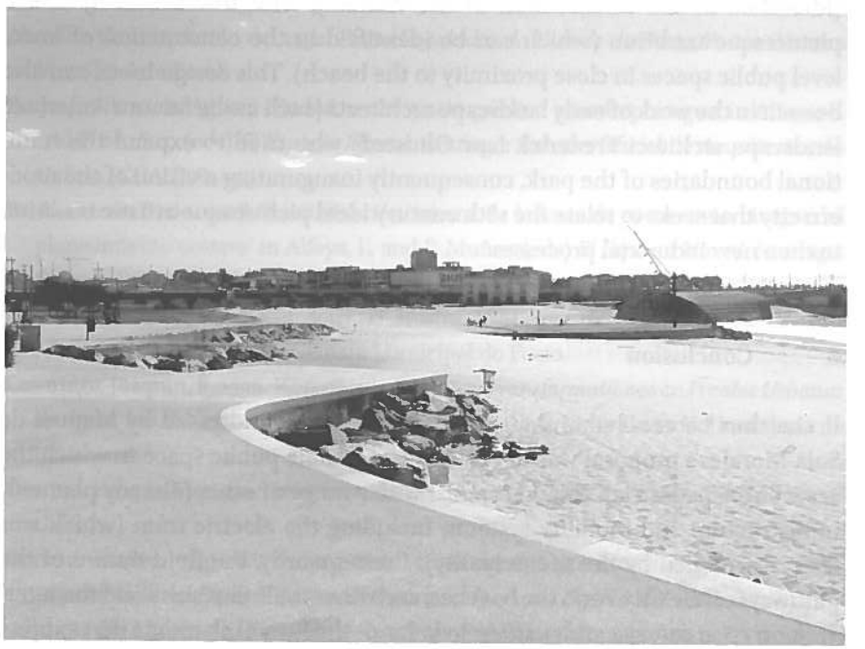


FIGURE 9.8 *The Porto City Park Waterfront: the beach level seen from the north*
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

contemporary public space is intimately linked to the dissolution and "decomposition of the limits of the vision". This means that in the picturesque landscape paradigm, how one experiences or reads the space is something that arises or results in a more subjective and casual mode, thus producing a personal and active appropriation of the public space (I. de Solà-Morales 2003: 155).

The incorporation of time and movement in the Porto City Park Waterfront design, assert themselves as strong and vital attributes that characterise the experience of the proposed public space. To this extent, the geographic qualities of this unique urban space are clearly enhanced by the experience of wandering through various paths, and through the shifting of visual perspectives, which we experience when crossing the spaces at the beach level. However, it should be noted that the public space design of the Maritime Front in Porto is not just a reductive reinterpretation of the picturesque aesthetic ideal. The effectiveness and urban sense that the project pursues stems from what one might call (borrowing the expression from Ignasi de Solà-Morales) the "dialectical relationship" that is established between the *rational* and the *picturesque* in the consideration of the proposed public space (193–194). In fact, in the Maritime Front in Porto, this dialectical relationship incorporates this dual sense, which relates a rational or pragmatic tradition that is *technically rooted* (identified in the construction of the viaduct), with the *artistically rooted* picturesque tradition (which can be identified in the construction of lower level public spaces in close proximity to the beach). This design motif can also be seen in the work of early landscape architects (such as the famous American landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted) who tried to expand the traditional boundaries of the park, consequently inaugurating a vision of the modern city that seeks to relate the 18th century ideal picturesque artistic tradition to then new industrial processes.

6 Conclusion

It can thus be concluded that the major challenge addressed by Manuel de Solà-Morales's proposal was to create a remarkable public space in which the scale of the pedestrian should co-exist with a range of other (already planned) infrastructure and mobility systems, including the electric tram (which was later abandoned by the municipality). Consequently, the fluid nature of the pathways of the City Park, the beaches, and other trails that surround the intervention area, co-exist and manage to balance the formal elements that express territorial hierarchy.

Moreover, this architectural intervention is an important contribution to a critical review and analysis of the public space design in exceptional areas, as well as a reflection on the definition of the shape and content of public space within the current city. In the particular case of the Maritime Front, by creating a new scale and a new shape for open space, the designer is simultaneously aware of the need to maintain the continuity, articulation and legibility of the urban form; in other words, it implies a design methodology and urban design which must be embodied in a coherent built form synthesis that does not deny or hide the many roots that "emerge" in the course of the project. The heterogeneous city emerges by creating, and simultaneously claiming, principles of order, diversity and vitality in urban public space, incorporating and reiterating the geography, infrastructure, topography and the pre-existing built environment.

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CHAPTER 10

Living in Bubbles: Peter Sloterdijk's Spherology and the Environmental Humanities

Hannes Bergthaller

Abstract

Everyday parlance assumes that the public is constituted as a "sphere," a "rounded" space encompassing all citizens within a singular horizon of rationality. When the environmental crisis is referred to as a "global" crisis, this is usually taken to entail the imperative to match the *public* to the *planetary* sphere, with the health of the planet as the ideal "res publica " around which a global polity must be assembled. This paper provides an outline of the alternative topology of public space which Peter Sloterdijk developed in his *Spheres* trilogy (1998–2004) and sketches its implications for the environmental humanities. According to Sloterdijk, contemporary world society is best understood as "foamy" or "froth-like": its structure is that of an aggregation of immunological "bubbles," i.e. small-scale spheres of shared concerns and risks, which are mutually constitutive but mutually impermeable. With its attempt to provide a "thick description" of the forms of human inhabitation in their material and semantic specificity, Sloterdijk's spherology makes an important contribution to the environmental humanities.

Keywords

Peter Sloterdijk – air conditioning – immunity – individualism – public sphere

1

Everyday parlance still takes it for granted that "the public" is constituted as a "sphere" – a term which, however vaguely, already implies a certain normative ideal with regard to the type of communication that is to occur within such a space, and with regard to the mode of social synthesis it is supposed to enable. The term suggests an imaginary round table, an amphitheatrical stage for the "public use of reason," in Kant's terminology, where all citizens meet on equal

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