

## Summary

The three concepts of urban design presented in this issue are in the tradition of Modernism. In different ways, they attempt to redefine modern urban design, which went into crisis at the end of the 1960s. The destruction of public space, the separation of functions and the attempt to predict and manage the future development of whole cities with an idealistic vision of order were the causes of this crisis. This critique was first formulated in CIAM congresses after 1945, where new bases for solutions were sought. Postmodernism emerged from this discussion. (Eduard Föhr, "Die CIAM-Debatte um den öffentlichen Raum," p. 95). Its apologists, Aldo Rossi, Colin Rowe and Rob Krier rediscovered the city's public space as a theme for urban design. But Postmodernism understood the question of public space as a formal problem to be solved with the help of traditional typologies. A Potemkin architecture arose which attempted to restore the urban fabric using building blocks and allotments in small housing units. It is not surprising that the only well functioning urban space in the last twenty years – Place Beaubourg – is modern. Because of its concern with functions, Place Beaubourg succeeds in collecting the most divergent activities in one place and thus produces an urban life entirely in contrast to, for example, Charles Moore's Piazza Italia.

But classical Modernism's attempt to determine future urban development with masterplans for whole cities has become a basic problem in contemporary urban design. Not only society's disintegration into subgroups, but above all the dynamics and unpredictability of technical-economic developments put such visions of order into question. Attempts at order become fragmented in city regions with uncontrollable growth and urban sprawl.

After the collapse of the socialist planned economies, a complete laissez-faire seems to dominate present economic policy, while the uncontrolled power of corporations, as in the USA and Great Britain, becomes increasingly popular. Likewise, after the failure of traditional masterplans, there is growing sentiment among architects to give up city planning altogether, to replace urban design with architecture. Atlanta, Houston and the London Docklands are the disheartening results of this attitude. But just as in the social market economy, where state interventions are necessary to control monopolies and protect the socially vulnerable, the preservation of public space and the hindering of further urban sprawl call for state planning to define an ordering frame for free urban development. Manfredo Tafuri formulates a third way, an open plan. (Die Krise der Linearität, p. 99):

*From the last half of the 18th century on, the American urbanists have operated with new instruments of urban planning which expressly support the powers that lead to morphological change in the city and which control these forces with a pragmatism completely unknown in Europe.*

*Regular grids of traffic arteries used as the simple and flexible foundation of urban structure ensure continual mutability, a goal unattainable for European urban design. The absolute freedom granted to individual architectural fragments is precisely interpolated into a context which is again not formally defined by the individual fragment. It is thus possible for the American city to grant maximal freedom of articulation to the secondary elements which form it and simultaneously to maintain strictly the laws which determine it as a whole.*

Urban design and architecture are thus definitively separated.

*At the beginning of our century, there was an attempt to tie architecture to the fate of the urban form. Architecture was reduced to a moment in the chain of production: from the standard element to the cell, to the single block, to the housing estate, to the city. But alongside the oases of order, the housing estates – true constructed utopias bordering a distant reality – the contradictions of historical cities accumulate and multiply.*

*With his Plan Obus for Algiers, Le Corbusier destroyed the linkage of architecture – district – city. Corbusier's design seeks to be an open structure, not a formal model: Traffic networks which are merely suggested, with zones defined only with regard to norms, and primary places where architectural planning as such is specified. Louis Kahn's plan for Philadelphia and Kenzo Tange's for the new Skopje derive from the methodological lessons of Corbusier's Obus plan and define an open form which is free for additions and even for counteraccents from later architectural interventions.*

Today, Rem Koolhaas advocates the concept of the open plan, which he first formulated in his book *Delirious New York* (p. 59):

*The Grid's two-dimensional discipline also creates undreamt-of freedom for three-dimensional anarchy. The Grid defines a new balance between control and de-control in which the city can be at the same time ordered and fluid, a metropolis of rigid chaos.*

*With its imposition, Manhattan is forever immunized against any (further) totalitarian intervention. In the single block – the largest possible area that can fall under architectural control – it develops a maximum unit of urbanistic Ego.*

*The Grid is the neutralizing agent that structures these episodes. Within the network of its rectilinearity, movement becomes ideological navigation between the conflicting claims and promises of each block.*

*The more each "island" celebrates different values, the more the unity of the archipelago as system is reinforced. Because "change" is contained on the component "islands", such a system will never have to be revised.*

*This indeterminacy means that a particular site can no longer be matched with any single predetermined purpose. From now on each metropolitan lot accommodates – in theory at least – an unforeseeable and unstable combination of simultaneous activities which makes architecture less an act of foresight than before and planning an act of only limited prediction.*

In his interview with ARCH+, ('Die Inszenierung der Ungewißheit', p. 68), Koolhaas describes the concept of the open plan in his projects:

*Architecture gives the contemporary world structures for which it has no more use. Where*



there is nothing, everything is possible. Where there is architecture, nothing (else) is possible. People like Corbusier and in particular the Smithsons deal with this problem of indeterminacy all the time. In this sense, our newest projects are a dialogue with the Smithsons. Their projects – above all the plan for Berlin as capital city – can be very different things simultaneously. But they do not succeed in simultaneously equipping them with an architectural specificity. For us, the great challenge is to combine these things.

One of the most disturbing aspects is the persistent attempts to control large parts of the city by systems of urbanistic or architectural composition – even if they are “deconstructed” – that clearly have absolutely nothing to do with the forces that now operate. In my designs for La Vilette (1982–1983), Expo 89 Paris (1983) and Melun Sénart (1987) I looked for elements that can be controlled, with these forces rather than against.

If there is to be a new urban design, it cannot be based on the twin fantasies of order and omnipotence; the new city planning will be a staging of uncertainty. In our project for Melun Sénart (p. 78), we developed the following argument as an act of voluntary capitulation, a strategic reversal of a defensive position: since the constructed becomes uncontrollable, we must try to control the void.

As opposed to this concept of two dimensional city planning, in which the abstraction of the determination frees architecture, there is a counter model which attempts a different balance between planning and indeterminacy: In place of a comprehensive plan with only limited determinations, the architectural intervention appears. (Konrad Wohlhage, *Das Objekt und die Stadt*, p. 51):

Controlling an intervention with architectural objects is partly effective. The implantation functions as a breeding ground for new urban developments. Impulses emerge and spread like waves through the surrounding waters of the city. Used strategically, the object becomes a counter design to the complete city model, which often has totalitarian features. In particular, the object's experimental capacity surpasses the urban concept, because it is manageable, controllable and thus less dangerous than a comprehensive urban vision.

The city network, in which fiber glass cables or radio frequencies have become more productive and important than streets, can no longer be represented. In the growing agglomerations which seek no meaning in an outer semantic order and in which the network is also invisible, all forms are levelled to the large mass, to plankton, as Koolhaas calls it. Without striving for a higher order, the city expands. Such weak structures, which have become increasingly characteristic of our cities, can only be saved by the architectural design. In the general improvisation, it supplies order. It supplies the complete, whole object. It supplies the antithesis to the urban hodgepodge.

This concept of urban planning through architecture follows the tradition of Sixtus the Fifth's Rome plan and Martin Wagner's plan for Berlin in the late 1920s. Both attempted to modernise an historical city with limited architectural interventions and to create new focal points for social life. Richard Rogers continues this tradition with his plan, “London as it could be”, insofar as he recreates a continuous public space with few interventions. (Richard Rogers, *Streets for People*, p. 85):

In our project, “London as it could be” a study on two axes shown at the Royal Academy in 1986, we illustrated an approach based on limited change of the existing area to create a new heart of the city.

The primary function of the City as a meeting place for people is being eroded by a wide variety of developments such as the invasion of the vehicle; the introduction of private activities into the public realm; the separation rather than the overlapping of working, living, playing and shopping.

The architect's vocabulary should include both the design of buildings standing singly and proudly in space in the classic manner, as well as buildings which create a compact matrix which encloses space. We need an architecture that strengthens and enriches the grain of the city fabric by filling in empty spaces so that streets and squares become dynamic rooms without a roof. Projects such as the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Stag Place, Lloyd's, Marseilles Alcazar, the Financial Times Bracken House building near St. Paul's are based on the principle of a continuous solid matrix of building enclosed spaces.

With his designs for London and Marseilles, Richard Rogers, along with Norman Foster and Jean Nouvelle (p. 93), applies Colin Rowe's contextualism. However, Rogers does not interpret contextualism conservatively. Rather, contextualism becomes a concept which attempts to create a new balance between the modern architectural object and public space. Rogers' contextualism is not a formal principle, but emerges from his interest in public space, the focal point of his ideas about urban planning. Unlike this concept of urban design through architecture, with its concern for public space, the architecture of the great form pursues no total urban vision. It rejects all overarching ideas in favor of the complete autonomy of self-sufficient objects. Hans Kollhoff who represents this position here, along with Kazuo Shinohara, discusses his understanding of the city in an interview with ARCH+: (*Architektur contra Städtebau*, p. 41).

In the periphery, the capitalistic speculation creates, in a seemingly uncontrolled way, the image of a city with a totally different aesthetics, to which, due to content and expression immediacy and coherence, one cannot deny a certain charm. Here, in the periphery and in the disused areas of the historical centers, the unknown can be rethought. Here, faraway from any nostalgic historicism, we are not confronted with the aggravating mystification of day-to-day life, the folk-like, the small, but rather with an attempt to realize the poetry of the big size.

Chances of experimentation open up, fields of tensions among empty spaces and isolated bodies, which are not subordinate to any anachronistic concept of order, but accept separateness and divergence.

Even with the best intentions, no city in Colin Rowe's sense can develop from the material available in the periphery. This leads – in America, it is attempted with all the fitting embarrassment – to the shopping mall or to Disneyland. If one rejects that, it is necessary to accept that part of what was traditional city space shifts into the buildings.

In this sense, the Nantes project asserts itself as the manifesto for a compact and functional architecture of the great form and for a planning of objects communicating within the landscape.

For a long time, I tried to develop designs from sites. At some point I realized it was not enough. Today, I think that a building must first come alive from inside out, before it can be related to its surroundings. And because a building has a life of its own, it can begin a dialogue with the city.

What Koolhaas does is not that far away from what interests me. The essential difference is that he accords the urban infrastructure and architectural power of expression which even dominates the architecture, as for example in his project for Lille. For me, however, this infrastructure no longer has any urban visual power. The vividness, the structure of the quarter which Hobbrecht could still create with his squares and churches in 19th century Berlin, and which still exists in Manhattan, is missing. Now, architecture must take on this quality of constructing forms. Two buildings that are big enough and stand somewhat apart begin a dialogue with each other which orders everything between them in a certain way.

In his essay, *The Atlanta-Experiment*, (p. 73) Rem Koolhaas describes how the complete renunciation of planning has produced a new typology of big buildings:

We still believe that it is our duty to create order in chaos, to create compositions that have a certain coherence, to create entities. What is happening here is a surrender to completely different forces, a complete abandoning of those pretensions of architecture. It is on the contrary an architecture that celebrates the opposite almost – that celebrates chaos, disorder, and that discovers after abandoning those earlier claims a vast new area of potential and freedom.

The center of the city; the classical downtown, can only exist if it is a collection of buildings that are, to some extent, complementary to each other. In other words, each building in itself is not enough to carry the idea of the center, but together as a group they acquire the density that you could call really central. What is happening in buildings like this one of Portman is that the buildings themselves acquire such an amazing quality of completeness in themselves, such ambition to present everything to everybody, to become completely interiorised, only concerned with their own performance, that by this very ambition they are no longer complementary but start competing with each other. In that sense, at the moment when downtown buildings are in direct competition with each other, the whole idea of downtown, of assembling the buildings on a very reduced place, which is the idea of center, also falls apart.

So what you have in Atlanta now is a collection of these buildings, each and everyone becoming more radical, more complete in what it presents, and together, curiously enough, destroying the idea of what a center is.

If you look at the original ambitions of modernity, there were of course very radical, not to say destructive, elements and I think that in a certain bizarre way, buildings in Atlanta come close to being the actual implementation of that kind of modernity, which actually did destroy the city, started all over again, and celebrated revolutionary autonomous forms that were not justified by any other reason than their formal abstract qualities.

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