Summary

Conditioned Openness
Florian Riegler and Roger Riewe in discussion
with Otto Kapfinger
p. 18

Otto Kapfinger: Let's start with a housing project, a design which, it's true, dates from 5 years ago but which represents a basic theme of your work — your contribution to the 1989 Europan competition in Amsterdam. Alvaro Siza, a member of the jury, regarded your entry as the best of all those submitted on account of its flexibility of use and also because the architecture did not propagate a certain life-style but offered functionally neutral spaces. Within the context of housing construction today, what do you understand by the term 'functionally neutral space' — does such a thing in fact exist?

Riegler/Riewe: Europan 1 aimed at defining forms of housing for a new market which is moving away from the traditional, settled small family. One of the aims was to make it possible to integrate dwelling and working. The whole thing was to be very inexpensive: 'low-cost' was the motto. We developed a unit sixteen metres deep and four and a half, five, or six metres wide. It was important to us to keep the fixed points in the entire space as small as possible. The service and waste ducts and the sanitary rooms are placed together and located so that they form an 'internal lens' in the floor-plan: a minimal core which, however, allows the most diverse interpretations of use and indeed directly provokes them.

If I understand correctly this core consists of a standard bath-tub and the w.c., their short sides facing each other, (with, in each case the service duct behind), they are separated by an intermediate space with the wash-hand basin in it. As it has sliding doors, this space can also be crossed in the short axis. The point is that the bath-tub can be closed off completely without a gap — like a kind of free-standing wardrobe, the entire height of the room. When open this bath-wardrobe activates a part of the side passage i.e. the doors become walls which create a temporary space across the width of the corridor.

As an introduction perhaps it sounds somewhat banal to talk about these details. But they illustrate a principle which is very important to us. For us the quality of a building is largely measured firstly in the extent to which it 'determines' use and secondly in the potential for use which it allows, either implicitly or openly, in both cases over a longer period. In the housing type for Amsterdam the narrow, deep room is so conditioned that the internal fixed points referred to form this minimal double focus within a pattern of strips by means of which the rectangular floor plan can be organized and divided up in a variety of ways, both laterally and longitudinally, without those straight-jacketing decisions which nowadays usually culminate in precisely fixing the location of the double-bed through the positioning of the electrical sockets.

Perhaps a look back at a legendary characteristic confrontation can help us make a more precise analysis. In the history of classic Modernism Hugo Häring was the only one who took the claim of Modernism — the space tailored to fit a specific requirement — literally. Mies van der Rohe, who shared an atelier with Häring in 1923/24, is said to have commented on these efforts to achieve precise specific forms as follows "Ah Hugo, make it more flexible, more open, just make the box a little bigger!" Your floor plans do not exactly express the contours of particular functions but they also differ from the neutral, open space which Mies propagated.

To stay with the design for Amsterdam: the 'box' could not, unfortunately, become 'somewhat bigger', the areas had to fit the proscribed categories. Through certain measures the room for manoeuvre within this framework is greater than in an orthodox functionalist concept. To be more precise: this side passage, for example, has more than one function. It can be sectioned off quickly as a bath-room. Various functions can, in the course of time, accumulate in this one area and at the same time alternative routes develop in the space. The linking of the spaces to each other is ambiguous and variable. This is where the difference to classic Functionalism lies, which generally adds unambiguously conditioned spaces together in a linear fashion.

In contrast to contemporary Postfunctionalism with its tendency to 'freestyle' or 'destroyed' forms you — like Mies — employ a very strict geometry.

With good reason. This Europan project — and several of our subsequent housing projects — are 'low cost' concepts. That means we wish to and we must achieve maximal spatial freedom with minimal means. Therefore the volume and the building surface area must be as small as possible, the ceiling spans must be economic as must the amount of circulation space. This is the reason for the simple geometry. This geometry is broken up in such a way that it produces a very complex range of spatial possibilities and ways of experiencing — a differentiated spectrum of interconnecting views and figures of movement, sideways, lengthways, diagonally. In the classic Japanese house geometry also dominates, not as a constraint but as the basis of a free way of dwelling of which we, here and now, can only dream. Also, unlike Mies, we do not want the 'loft', the isotropic space which, in the final analysis, is 'ordered' (in a subtly monumental way) through the proportionality of the dimensions and of the details, what we want is precisely this conditioned openness.

If I understand you correctly your aim is to achieve an equal distance both to organic and to geometrically abstract rhetoric. I am reminded of a text by Alison and Peter Smithson — 'Without Rhetoric' — in which they wanted to pay tribute to the example of Mies but also distanced themselves from any constructivist or machine-like expression in building.

In many current standpoints — for example in Switzerland, in England or in Holland — there is doubtless more of the Smithsons 'Brutalism' than one might think. But, apart from this, our relationship to the Anglo-Saxon world is perhaps more direct. We admire the attitude which exists there, the apartment — much more radically than here — is treated as a ware with considerable fluctuation. The typical apartment there has many built-in cupboards and neutral space: location and cost are the decisive factors and people move apartment much more often than here.

To return to the question how one can nowadays, with limited resources, make the small room large, make the box 'somewhat bigger'. I don't mean the formal expression — making the box optically 'richer' — I mean the potential for use, the energetic dimension of the building. We have referred briefly to the debate on this theme which started in the 1920's. At that time there were already alternatives to the 'organic', 'geometric' and 'rationalist' approaches. For example: Hans Adolf Vetter built a very simple house in the Viennese 'Werkbundsiedlung' in which the stairs leading to the upper level is not placed in the functionally and rationally correct place — in the entrance area — but rises at the far end of the living room. Vetter reacted to criticism with the comment: "In very small houses the staircase must not and should not start directly in the hall because the path through the living room forces one to move through thus concealing the shortage of space and the tightness." This statement reveals traces of a spatial-psychological economy founded by Loos and expanded by Strnad and Frank: it is not the shortest route which is the best, sheer spatial size is no criterion for usability, movement in space is recognized as an independent qualitative factor. Movement and the freedom to move make space larger. The variety of paths is also the force which makes your spaces (which seem so severely laconic) dynamic.

In the case of the housing in Mautern the 'public' areas — kitchen and living room — are separated and placed at opposite ends of the floor plan. A wide corridor lies between them. In this small apartment one is automatically led to use everything (due to the placing apart of the 'poles'). In addition, the corridor is 2,20 metres wide, the width of a room, and when the doors are opened it is linked visually and functionally to the adjacent small rooms. Also it has quite a low horizontal window under which — as part of the basic fittings — there is a sixty centimetre wide sill. By means of the deliberately low window and the table-like window sill, this 'corridor' invites one to sit down and offers various uses which go beyond the usual atrophied pattern. To us 'neutral in use' does not mean an 'open, single space'; by this phrase we mean a subtle precise articulation, an offer which we define very precisely but which nevertheless can be interpreted in a very free and individual manner.

Another characteristic of your work is this striking severity, the Spartan simplicity of the materials, the simplicity of the workmanship, the 'Brutalism' in the detailing and in the form in general. Recently the international scene has also shown, as a reaction to the lavish Post-modern phase, a tendency towards reductionism. Marcel Meili defined this new minimalism (as illustrated in the work of Peter Märkli) as follows: the reduction to a few materials used as purely as possible, to 'simple' elements serves to recapture a basic clarity: what does the architecture do, what happens between the building and the ground, what happens at each junction, how important is light for the room, for the perception of texture, of close and distant, what happens at the junctions of different elements etc.

We certainly see parallels and Peter Märkli's approach is very close to our own. Reduction helps to establish clarity but makes no moralizing claims. That would still be the traditional pathos of Modernism. We use simple materials and elements for two reasons. Firstly, because they are cheaper, secondly because these materials are, in our opinion, 'more open': formally and culturally they are less 'occupied', so to speak. The housing in Mautern was a special case. We used plastered surfaces there – Eternit sheets and fair-faced concrete – and wanted in this way to illuminate the theme of 'flushness' – the smooth surface in one plane - with the further intention of bringing the difference in shade of the grey tones under various light conditions into play. When the sun shines there is a range of violet tones, when the sky is overcast the range shifts to pale grey values. In Mautern we had to do a lot of detailing. We would no longer do this today. The 'beautiful detail' is of absolutely no importance to us. We regard the detail as subordinate to the total concept, we do not design new window profiles or anything of that kind.

I would like to return to the question of materials. I have noticed one particular thing about the new 'Minimalism': buildings are pointedly handled as autonomous objects – that is, the building does not fit into the landscape, it does not attempt to integrate with its surroundings but asserts its independence. We note nowadays a preference for rather hermetic 'blocks and bars'. Does this have a background in 'Zeitgeist' – the new cocooning, the collapse of social solidarity, the general increase in egocentricity, the decline of the public space – or is this simply a return to the Platonic aesthetic of early Modernism and to its critical dichotomy between architecture and nature?

In the case of Mautern we can answer that right away. When seen as a whole with the nearby mountain slope the 'bar' forms a new spatial field. We left the immediate surroundings bare. We did not want a manicured environment. The ground floor is deliberately raised above the meadow. There are hardly any front gardens – in the housing project in Straßgang we did not envisage any – they would not, in any case, function properly as they could be seen into from above and would further emphasize the ground floor (which anyhow receives somewhat preferential treatment – no stairs to climb). Also, front gardens would unnecessarily 'privatize' the surroundings of the building. This front area left open can – we think – do more than the 'occupied' front garden. In other projects we have also treated the ground floor zone more openly, more generally, as it is precisely the seam between building and site which is essential for future developments and changes, in the sense of a long-term perspective.

If we look at traditional housing, the so-called anonymous building, don't we find there also simple stereometric building types, modules, which initially stand 'hermetically' by themselves and which only through the cumulative interlinking with each other and with the natural topography make a 'built landscape' out of this differentiation?

The front garden, indeed the private flower garden is a wretched form, a caricature dating from the 19th century. The problem nowadays is that too much is asked of the dwelling place. The dwelling's relationship to nature is important but this does not mean that we have to pave the landscape with allotment gardens.

The term 'new Classicism' crops up in some commentaries on your work. This term contains implied criticism on your use of orthogonality. Euclidean geometry with its right-angled grid is, for Postmodernism, a clear antagonist, i.e. it represents a certain logocentric and anthropocentric view of the world which (due to new discoveries) is regarded as outdated in various branches of knowledge. Orthogonality and the grid are also characteristic of that modern Cartesian rationality which 'white' architectural Modernism continued and from which 'black' Modernism – Expressionism, Surrealism, Dadaism etc. – polemically distanced themselves.

For us this is very simple: every geometry apart from the grid involves limitations. Orthogonality is the most open spatial concept – in the long term – which we know or which is known to history. But we do not wish to make an issue out of the right-angle. This issue, indeed any issue, becomes suspect for us once an attempt is made by means of this, or any other geometry to promote an ideology or anti-ideology. Also we work less with the rigid grid and more with this rhythmic pattern of strips.

Could one put it like this: your starting point is not primarily form but the organization of space, the layering of spatial networks, a step which comes before form. For this type of open spatial organization you employ orthogonality as a relatively neutral tool. Rem Koolhaas once explained his spatial starting point for the OMA project for Parc de la

Villette in Paris very clearly. He referred to the manner in which landscape is divided up in Holland where long parallel strips of ground with very different uses lie directly next to each other. In a similar manner OMA wanted to separate the area of la Villette into strips: a strip of wood, beside it a strip of tennis courts, beside them meadow-land, beside that another wood, beside that playing areas, a street etc. The aim was to make it possible to experience for a long time, while moving in one direction, a single kind of urban park landscape and, on the other hand, to experience a rapid transition from one pattern to another by moving crossways. Of course other, more complex and larger scale overlayerings and interruptions were involved but this strip pattern was the underlying basis. I immediately thought of the example of the 25 TV channels where I can remain for a long time with the one channel – the linear progression – or can switch rapidly from one channel to another. The woven structure of textiles is also similar: the warp threads in the linear direction and the woof threads in the cross direction. I believe that a similar principal is illustrated in your housing projects, more clearly perhaps in the urban designs, for example in the competition project for the Information Technology and Electro-Technical Institute in Graz/Inffeldgründe.

The network there is not a schematic grid, it has these important and significant interruptions – the internal spaces. The entire structure does not merely permit a highly diverse interlinking of the various spatial layers but is also unproblematically open to changes in the programme and to variations in use.

A new version of what Josef Frank meant with his analogy between the city and the house – the city as a house, the house as a city, the 'House as a Path and a Square'...

It is a building split into layers of spaces and zones of movement without any façade...

In fact the façade is merely the top view...

We went right up to the boundary of the site with the structure. The historic duality of building and site, of figure and ground does not exist here. The structure fills the entire site and produces the 'public' space within itself from the dynamic of the internal circulation. We also see this very consciously in an urban sense. Therefore we do not make any sign, any implant which might assert the existence of an overriding therapy for the entire area. We set no premises which might demand that the system be continued outside the borders, the boundaries of the site. That would be dogmatic and modernistic.

You mean that Modernist (or Postmodernist) urban interventions in existing systems would have merely produced fragments, which would constantly require to be completed, would thirst for totality and which, on that account, would have produced places of mourning – to put it poetically.

It is obvious that, once again, we could only place a fragment, but perhaps one which does not attempt to create a style out of this fact, which is content with itself. We want neither the aesthetic of the fragmentary, nor the demands of total harmony.

Modern, without Positivism?

Yes, perhaps.

Your competition project for the Inffeldgrün-de Studies Centre — on a neighbouring site — employs a similar spatial structure in a very different way, more vertically.

These are different themes. When we planned the Studies Centre the Institutes had not even been mentioned. When we were planning the Institutes it had long become clear that we were not going to build the Studies Centre.

I regard the Studies Centre as one of the most interesting designs, also within the entire Austrian scene of recent years. When I look at the plans I cannot help thinking of, for example, Mies' design for 'A Museum for a small City' or the Smithsons 'Hunstanton School'. But I do clearly see the difference.

The difference is this: in the projects you mentioned everything is unequivocal, unmistakably clear or definitely determined. Our spaces are not unequivocal, because we set up more than, for instance, the 'plan libre' and because we balance this extra amount of determinism with additional flexibility.

What is the starting point for your design work, where does your analysis of the brief start? In analysing the topography, or examining adequate typologies, with geometry, or with construction?

We always start with the question of use: how will what is supposed to occur in this building actually happen? We hardly ever think in architectural terms. Topos, location and lighting have an effect on this analysis. And then we choose the material, the construction. We definitely do not want to deliberately build in a 'poor' way — although we could be superficially understood in this way. We want the completely normal things, the most reasonably priced items (which are also usable) from the catalogue. The materials, the details, the construction should not become a problem of any kind, not in the design phase, not on the building site, not in use. In the case of the airport it was almost suggested that we redesign all the logos. We did not want this. This would have had an artificiality, a totality which seems to us, today more than ever, to be dated. A raw concrete wall leaves us in peace. It shows and it is what it is. A metal cladding does not leave me, does not leave anybody, in peace. It is 'as if'.

We have arrived again at the question of materials and their treatment.

We recently looked at the concrete work of Gigon/ Guyer and Märkli in Switzerland. The concrete is the same as ours. But in the case of Gigon/Guyer it is elevated to a programme.

One does not see this in photographs. But in the museum in Davos the concrete is so smooth, the joints are so celebrated, that it seems forced. The reaction is that you start to look for faults, thinking there must be a mistake somewhere. Märkli is much more subtle and relaxed, more agreeable. In our housing project in Straßgang we aimed to build with the most simple possible pre-cast elements, without any 'ennobling', any celebrated junctions etc. The locksmith construction of the sliding shutters in front of the bare structure produces, in any case, the contrast of fineness, lightness. We did not want the 'beautiful' locksmith construction either. We clarified everything beforehand with the people who were to carry out the work and then drew hardly anything more.

The Brutalism of the 1950's was a reaction to the smoothness and abstract quality of the International Style. 'Brut' had nothing to do with 'brutal' but meant raw, not beautified, tactile, touchable, understandable etc. Is your simplicity a reaction to the blossoming of decorative Expressionism in the 'Grazer Schule' in the Eighties?

We don't react — not consciously. We seek to take the path which we believe to be right. The simplicity of our buildings is not a self-sufficient goal but the interim result of a development, a process.

In your lectures you use, among other things, an object by Bertrand Lavier from the exhibition 'Bildlicht'.

Lavier formed a square with lighting tracks and fixed floodlights to it. The light which they cast modulates the area of wall surface framed by the tracks and the surrounding area. The light (the lighting) takes the place of colour. The frame does not separate the picture from the surroundings, as is usually the case, it actually incorporates its surroundings and makes them part of the picture. The surroundings — the wall — is no longer the display surface (the base) for the picture but becomes itself the picture. The conventional, hierarchically ordered basic elements of the easel painting are linked to each other in a new way. Here they are of equal significance and interdependent.

In the history of architecture, which can be seen as the artistic elevation of the art of building, there are perhaps three basic positions: Architecture as an image of the function (functionalist); as an image of the technology (constructivist); as an image of the cosmos (anthropomorphic, biomorphic). On other levels of interpretation we also speak of building as a framework, as the interface between man and environment, but also as background, unobtrusively serving the processes of life:
The reference to Lavier's picture reveals a principle where the frame - in itself a traditional classical element — is torn out of its traditional role and fitted into a new, open, puzzling field of forces between signifier and signified.

So, in a completely different sense to normal one can say: the frame makes the painting. The building as an image of use — not functionalist, not constructivist, not anthropomorphic, not biomorphic — is the result of the energetic potential of its framework — a structure whose relative simplicity, whose objective rigor offers a surprising variety of use, of individual interpretation. This sounds somewhat difficult but I am merely attempting to describe your approach to architecture in contrast to other positions.

We don't design 'built images'. We arrange structures, open and yet precise: frames for the complex flow for the images of use.

Translated from the German by:
James Roderick O'Donovan

Mobile elements in social housing in Austria
Peter Allison
p. 36

In recent years, participation in the design of housing projects has been subject to serious reconsideration due to the pressure to reduce building costs and accept lower space standards. Even in the work of a pioneer in this field, Eilfried Huth, there has been a retreat from the position developed in earlier projects, such as the housing at Deutschlandsberg of 1975-84, where the residents were involved in decisions on the site layout, as well as on the external and internal configuration of their future homes. In the housing in Graz Ragnitz completed in 1991, Huth was responsible for the site layout and the design of the shell of each unit and participation was restricted to a choice between certain options in the organization of the interior.

Despite the sense of a general retreat in the face of the personal and economic demands which are an inevitable consequence of any programme of full participation, the desirability of ensuring a degree of individual choice within the provision of housing remained an important consideration. In the recent housing on Karl Spitzweg Straße in Graz by Volker Giencke, the residents had some control over internal layout and the fenestration, especially on the garden facades. In this case, the cost of any additional work, beyond the basic design, had to be paid by the individuals concerned and is therefore of limited relevance in other situations. The parallel reduction in space standards also undermined the possibility of providing a choice of different arrangements and contributed to the need to investigate alternative means of achieving similar objectives. After a period of development the first real signs of an alternative line of development began to appear in 1994.

In this situation, an example which may have given a clue as to how to proceed appeared in Ernst Plischke's 'Ein Leben mit Architektur', his complete works published in 1989. As well as the classic Modernism for which he is noted, such as the Labour Exchange in Vienna Liesing of 1932, the book also covers his work in New Zealand, including the Lang House where the extended living space can be sub-divided at three different points by folding screens. Even more relevant is a house he completed in Graz towards the end of his career: the ground floor

of the Frey House of 1972 includes seven large sliding panels which may be used, at will, to open up or close down the three main areas, for dining, study and living, so that they can be independent or continue into one another, as well as connecting with the central hall and staircase. When open, each story height panel is contained within a fixed wall and, when in use, they always close against a wall or column. With sliding windows of similar dimensions towards the garden, the result is a generous and comfortably articulated interior, incorporating three different levels, which may be completely open with a wide variety of views, or the zones may be successively enclosed to meet the requirements of different circumstances.

Whereas the Frey House is a private dwelling, the apartment block on Heinrich Leffler Gasse in Vienna Stadlau which was completed by Michael Loudon in 1994 is an example of low-cost social housing in which sliding panels of the type used by Plischke play a crucial role in the design of the flats. Another significant innovation, given the restricted floor area, is the inclusion of a winter garden to compensate for the lack of open space for recreational use elsewhere on the site. With their cubic proportions, each winter garden is divided from the rest of the apartment by glass walls, which slide open if required, and the main living areas are positioned so as to look into or have access to the internal courts which are formed in this way. The only hinged doors are at the entrance and on the bathroom and WC, otherwise all spaces may be open up or closed off using sliding panels.

With all the panels open, the full extent of the space which is available to the occupants is easily seen and may be occupied in many different ways. Closing certain panels may strengthen the preferred pattern of use at certain times and, similarly, the space of the winter garden itself is available for a range of activities from outdoor functions to serving as a spare bedroom. But, just as the Frey House gives no hint of its internal dynamics on the front facade, Loudon's building gives little idea of the diverse lives behind its facade. Beyond communicating something of its basic organisation, it maintains a deliberate neutrality which is intended to continue a longer tradition of building in the city.

It is also interesting to compare the means of transformation employed in the Frey House with those of the Schröder-Rietveld House of 1924. On the upper level of the house in Utrecht, unlike the one in Graz, the central circulation area lacks permanent architectural definition apart from the staircase itself, its timber balustrade and the wall it happens to stand against. As a consequence, the screens which are required to close the space down, again on a orthogonal grid, are considerably longer and, in order to fold away unobtrusively, are divided into a number of hinged sections. The end panel to each screen wall may then be used as a door between adjacent spaces when they are closed off. The stair itself is also surmounted by a cubic glass roof light within which a plywood flap may be opened or closed, using a rope and pulley, in order to control whether light is admitted from above or not. In combination with this device, the folding

and sliding screens of the Schröder-Rietveld House can be used to control the lighting levels in different parts of the plan, quite separately from whether they are needed in order to give privacy. The different effects of the mobile walls are also visible from outside and the upper story may be perceived as more or less transparent, depending on their use. As the openings in the street facade of the Frey House are of limited size, there is no noticeable change in overall transparency, in this case, with the opening or closing of the internal panels.

The L-shaped block of flats completed by Dieter Henke and Martha Schreieck on Frauenfelder Strasse in Vienna Hernals, also in 1994, is located in a more dense urban environment than Heinrich Leffler Gasse but their design is based on the possibility of maximum exposure to the surroundings coupled to the possibility of a high degree of control over the immediate consequences. To the west, five stories of flats above shops at ground level overlook a sports ground whilst, to the south, sixteen maisonettes in two rows of eight located one above the other, with one story of flats above and below, match the scale of the neighbouring buildings. As in the Loudon building, the interior of each unit is designed to be as open as possible, whether on one or two stories: all openings extend to the ceiling and possible changes in use are marked by differences in level or built-in furniture rather than enclosing walls. Overall, there is a strong sense of orientation away from the more solid wall, with access from a central court, towards the periphery which is fully glazed. As a result, the interior is largely open and continuous and may be used in a variety of ways depending on its outlook and lighting.

In this case, the design of each unit focuses on the inclusion of a generous loggia, one story high in the flats and two stories for the maisonettes. On the outer face of the loggia, framed panels of adjustable aluminium louvres provide a basis for controlling the level of illumination throughout the interior whilst giving an appropriate degree of privacy from the street. A characteristic of this arrangement is the manner in which the position of the sliding and adjustable louvres effects each interior in a manner which appears to relate directly to the personality of the occupants whilst, on the exterior, the appearance is more schematic and relates to the architectural organisation of each facade. This aspect of the louvred panels is reminiscent of Lazlo Moholy-Nagy's Space-Light Modulator of 1930 in which the components and movement are completely mechanical in character but the resulting patterns of light and shade are very varied and highly atmospheric.

The low-cost social housing completed by Florian Riegler and Roger Riewe in Graz Straßgang, once again in 1994, makes use of mobile elements within the plan, in combination with a permeable circulation and service core, and on the face of the building. Their first use of this type of core was in their entry in Europan 1 for a site in Amsterdam where a generous gallery space along one flank wall is served by small cubicles

containing a bath and WC and this combination, in turn, suggests various sub-divisions within the plan which, in relation to use, may then be interpreted in a number of different ways. The intention was that the basic layout should support a number of distinct possibilities but remain neutral in character to give the possibility of an unbiased response by the occupants. At Straßgang, in the majority of units, these possibilities are developed further with the kitchen taking the form of a series of island units along a route which connects the entrance to the bathroom.

In effect, this layout can be read as a small labyrinth within which each occupant can select those connections which most suite their individual requirements. At a larger scale, the theme of multiple choice and individual selection is continued by the short fins which mark each bay of the insitu concrete structure; as in the Frey House, they also support floor to ceiling sliding panels and may be seen as free-standing piers or transverse walls, depending on whether the panels are in the retracted position or pulled out. Folding panels may also be used to close certain gaps on the long section.

Externally, there are two basic window types, separated by precast concrete panels, and the windows can be protected by a system of sliding screens, each of these components being of one story height. On the west elevation it was important to avoid the possibility of the screens radiating heat through the windows which they are intended to protect and the material used is a grey-blue nylon fabric because of its low thermal capacity. On the east elevation, inward radiation was not an issue and expanded galvanized steel could be used; on the west it is also used for the upstands in front of the larger openings. With the appropriate conditions established as a result of adjustments to the exterior, the residents are free to develop an internal settlement pattern which best suits them and make use of the spaces on both sides of the building as they choose.

Comprised of a limited number of repeated elements and containing a wide range of alternative configurations, Straßgang fulfils two of the main characteristics of classic Minimalism: non-relational composition and systematic order. But in terms of its role when occupied, it is perhaps more reminiscent of certain dance works by Merce Cunningham. Following his use of chance elements in 'Suite for Five' of 1956, Cunningham's work is marked by a tendency to separate the conception of the various elements which will eventually comprise a specific dance, as in 'Summerspace' of 1958. The choreography is developed independently from the composition of the music, the only common requirement being that both are of the same duration. Similarly, the designs for each dance were also created separately and only brought together on the occasion of a performance. This relative independence did not, however, detract from the possibility of strong, unifying relationships occurring during performance.

Within the choreography itself, Cunningham devised patterns of movement which, in common with his collaborator John Cage's directions to his performers, left considerable initiative to each dancer. As a result, Cunningham's dances often focus on events which happen in parallel, sometimes moving together before separating into disconnected detail. In a similar manner, Strassgang is conceived of as a systematic response to the requirements of low-cost housing, a mechanism which is capable of limited movement and whose variations are capable of a degree of coincidence with the wishes of each resident. The plan of each unit, whilst sharing some characteristics with other, is free to proceed through a series of independent shifts and these, in turn, may be reflected in movements on the exterior. Perhaps it is no coincidence that Frank Stella's set for 'Scramble', choreographed in 1967, consisted of six rectangular panels of painted canvas stretched on steel frames and mounted on wheels. As described by Cunningham in conversation with Jacqueline Lesschaeve (published as 'The Dancer and the Dance' in 1985), they were located in parallel and could slide into various positions, transforming the performance space but not disturbing its use, as we have also seen in the Frey House and in the projects by Michael Loudon and Henke Schreieck.

Architecture of Movement
Patrik Schumacher
p. 56

"To see the system of movement as a key to space remains an exception in architecture. In other areas, e.g. dance, such ideas have been conceived."[1]

Can there be a theory or a conception of space beyond the 'arch-architectural' space of modular control?

Is there an alternative tradition, an alternative paradigm of space or at least the theoretical possibility of defining space through movement alone, without an independent and prior system of reference? How do I design a system of circulation without presupposing points to be connected? A system of connection that defines its points of destiny from within itself? The circulation-system runs in circles and turns into its opposite, a dance: a movement without motivation, ultimately to be understood as the escape from the architectonic system. How does dance define itself and its space without the cartesian grid? Not without fundamentally subverting the whole notion of definition, of rationality and objectivity as resting on regularity and reproducibility. The 'definition' of space through movement becomes the solipsistic fiat of gratitious subjectivity. Per definition such escapist 'architecture' must remain exceptional. This escape from Architecture – to be traced historically – becomes a revolt against architecture and attains a philosophical as well as political dimension, in as much architecture as "the system of systems"[2] remains the original reference of any notion of structure and order. (Here emerges the problematic of a selfconscious deconstructivism.[3])

The idea of an 'architecture of movement' depends on an architecture of (modular) order being presupposed logically as well as historically.

Logical: A-rhythmic, creative movement is only identifiable through its negative definition as deviation from the algorithmically compartmentalized space. The perception of space becomes 'subjective' as deviation from the objective order of space. Time becomes 'subjective' as deformation of the objective relations established by mechanically produced time: the hand traverses the modular space of the clock's face.

Freedom/subjectivity registers and thinks itself against the framework of an institutionalizing 'architecture'. The technology of architecture gives birth to such concepts. ('Architecture' signifies not any kind of built something, but first of all a formal system, postulating a structure as an ordered whole conceived and erected in reference to such a system.)

Historical: The space of movement and experience of the picturesque English landscape garden emerges in the 18th century as the artificial reconstruction of the natural. It offers itself as the unknown and confronts us with the unforeseen. It does this playfully and comfortably, embedded in the familiar and transparent order of architecture that has already conquered the unknown alien. Baudelaire's flaneur whose dis-tracted and desire-driven movement dis-figures the architectural space of the 19th century city seems more existential than playful. Guy Debord's psychogeographical 'derive' continues this dis-membering anti-tradition in the 20th century: The disoriented drifting within the body of the city has (anti-)method as it expects unexpected spaces of encounter, potentially revolutionary 'situations' that re-open the possibility of the 'Other'. Debord's Situationism is Anti-CIAM, Anti-planning, Anti-architecture, an architecture of movement. All those architectures of movement are comprehensible only as attempts to suspend the territorialized architectural space. This counter-movement is always also part of a political movement, because the order of architecture is always also a political order. This is also true for the movement of the English landscape garden, which was part of an aesthetic revolution carried forward by the ascending bourgeoisie of the 18th century. The landscape garden validated and took part in the unrestrained usurpation of space by early industrial capital. Considering parallel developments in France, Manfredo Tafuri[4] identifies in Laugier's naturalizing architectural theory the urban ideology of capitalism, which aestheticizes as vital 'uproar and tumult', the dynamism of urban growth which can no longer be contained within the formal system of baroque planning.

In the case of Debord the political dimension is absolutely selfconscious and explicit, and his movement becomes part of the movement towards 1968. The same applies to the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari[5] which is the basis for the recent American architectural debate around the notion of folding: A political critique as critique of a

rigid, hierarchical and 'territorializing' order is put forward in the form of a quasi-geometry. Deleuze and Guattari are sketching open, flexible and fluid anti-architectures, permanently moving in and out of shifting networks of relation. The space of the nomads – a 'smooth space' defined in opposition to modular 'striated space' – is the paradigmatic metaphor.

Here, within the ambit of 1968, one finds also the political and philosophical origin of Deconstructivism, probably the most extreme and selfconscious anti-architecture of movement in the 20th century. But before deconstructivism makes sense, a long historical process of construction has to be presupposed.

The Production of Space as Elimination of the Other

Architecture is geo-metry, the founding technique of man's appropriation of space. Following Mark Cousins, the history of mankind, in relation to space, might be described as a successive internalization, in real as well as in conceptual terms, an integration of the surrounding into the interior of the city. Athens still had an edge-condition, whereby it met the unknown and uncontrolled Other. Greek cosmology can still ask questions concerning the end of the world. The whole middle ages exist within aristotelian cosmology. The city remains a closed circle, departure from it being adventure, and the map stops at the white terra incognita.

Architecture's formal systems start to conquer the landscape during the Renaissance. The Italian villa emerged as the castello which could shed its fortifications and control over the hinterland was completed and asserted by way of extending architecture's geometry – the order of the city – all the way to the horizon, thus placing all of nature under its spell. This finds its pendant in the representation of space through perspective construction which, according to Alberti, starts with the gridded horizontal plane, thus domesticating everything in advance. Everything that might happen to occupy space is always already safely positioned. The medieval realms are transcended. City, landscape and villa are unified into the 'integrazione scenica'. Venice's reclamation of the Veneto in 16th century was the politico-economic agenda setting the task for the Palladian villa. The villa transposes the urban architectural order into the hinterland, formally seizing upon the colonizing grid imposed under the centuriatio system that divided the land relentlessly into squares of 625 sqm. The villa was placed at major crossing points within this system, formally enhancing the intersecting axes. Palladio recommends raising the axial streets against the fields and lining them with a regular rhythm of trees, while the piano nobile was again raised above the intersection. This was the first precise articulation of a comprehensive modular and hierarchical order. Here emerges the space of the controlling perspective, which found its historical peak in the service of 17th century French Absolutism, as the land was built into a state.

(This historical process of appropriation is traced by Clemens Steenbergen and Wouter Reh's 'Architecture and Landscape'[6], a brilliant study attentive to the various formal strategies by which the ever-resistant geo-morphology is forced under the rule of architecture.)

Toying with the tamed Other

18th century England: The period in which Palladianism and its dialectic extension — the English landscape garden — proliferates in England is the period when the land is finally brought under the total jurisdiction of private property and made accessable through a comprehensive transport network of roads and canals. This process of territorialization leaves no space for ambiguity. All formerly common land is turned into private property according to a parliamentary act regulating this so called 'enclosure'. This process of appropriation is accompanied by a rationalization of agricultural geometry. The resulting chessboard pattern was marked by hedges and drywalls. Canals imposed a horizontal datum: an architecture of dykes, tunnels and aqueducts defined the hilly topography as deviation. Roads were straightened and their surface hardened. Signposts and milestones were introduced, effectively subsuming space and movement under the modular order of the map. Manufacturing industries, accompanied by new settlements, spread out into the country, utilizing the water-energy available along the rivers. A whole new class of country nobility (with bought titles) settled on country estates crowned by Palladian villas. This massive urban colonization of the countryside was the framing context of the emerging landscape gardens, those artificial zones of nature's irregularity and freedom, playful escapes from the architectonic system. The picturesque garden was a labyrinthine, mythically charged space, without visual boundaries, impenetrable by the controlling gaze, only to be revealed through movement. But this movement was no longer measured by milestones and signposts. It followed another drama, allowing for surprise and even sublimated horror. Such sublimated experience of the danger of untamed nature was theorized in Burke's 'Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful' (1756), postulating a new aesthetic category.

If the Sublime and the Picturesque signal moments of relief, moments of freedom from and a reaction to architecture, they also pave the way for an urban development which is no longer fully controllable by (baroque) architectural formalism.

Modern Modularity

One might argue (with Tafuri) that the sublime as an aesthetic value became a means by which the emerging bourgeoisie could sublimate and aesthetisize its chaotic industrial urbanization, unbearable to a classical sensibility.

In this respect one might then interpret Modern Urbanism as a late attempt to finally bring the chaotic capitalist urban landscape into the domain of architecture. The urban models of Tony Garnier, Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, Ernst May, Ludwig Hilberseimer etc., are based on the classical geometric canons of modularity, conceived as tabula rasa structure. The more complex and open spatialities emerging through suprematism, futurism, surrealism, cubism, and neoplasticism are assimilated into (anti-)architectural spatial experiments on the scale of the villa. This new sensibility and concept of space, which Siegfried Giedion[7] termed 'space-time', did involve subjectivity and movement, whereby the identity of a spatial

unit (a 'room') would shift with the respective position of the moving subject. The spatial units — or rather no longer units — would enter into successive alignments, dissolving the possibility of unitary identity implied by the notion of the room or module.

Giedion discovers within the 'Parkways' around New York an architecture of movement on an urban scale. "The fundamental law of the parkway: there must be unobstructed freedom of movement."[8] Because the highways neither follow straight lines nor any algorithm, but are rather lead by the natural topography, they convey to Giedion the illusion of a totally free movement: "A feeling like nothing else so much as sliding swiftly on skis through untouched snow."[9]

Despite Giedion's claim that 'space-time' represents the essence of the modern epoque, it remained marginal within overall 20th century construction, which, based on the fordist mode of production, was bound to be relentlessly modular. The history of 20th century urbanism between 1920 and 1980 was following the paradigm of the modular 'Siedlung', being reproduced on an ever extending scale throughout this period.

Movement within the module

Within and against this modular mass production Le Corbusier develops the seemingly unproblematic idea of an architecture of movement, best exemplified by his classic icon of modernity: The villa Savoye, one of the few built experiments in modern 'space-time'. Within his Oeuvre Complete, edited by Le Corbusier himself, the photographic sequence through the interior of the villa is inconspicuously subtitled 'promenade architecturale'. If the suggested analogy to promenading through a park, landscape, or urban environment is taken seriously, one faces an uncanny paradox: The inhabitant of such an environment would have to be conceived as a flaneur, a stranger in his own home. In his own home, where he once knew himself safely kept and reassured of his identity, the scene should constantly vary, offering change, surprise and the unknown, re-emerging over and again as the unfamiliar and never becoming a home.

A similar spirit haunts the villas of Adolf Loos: Spatial sequences merging across the shifting levels prevent fixed identities from taking root anywhere. Communism could move through such spaces, if the exterior were not secured architecturally as a discrete, hermetic unit. The same is true for Le Corbusier's villa, the landscape-like quality of which is constricted into a cartesian envelope, thus clearly and objectively defined as object and property. Only within the four walls does spontaneous movement extrude its space from the given, inexhaustably ambiguous spatial substance.

Movement beyond the module

Such a conception of space as generated by spontaneus movement entails an understanding of Being and Dwelling at its point of disappearance. Architecture can only approximate or simulate its implied disappearance. The work of Zaha Hadid and of van Berkel & Bos might be interpreted as such an anti-architecture. Two residential projects point up the most radical challenge to the question of Being (and being at home).

Ben van Berkels multi-storey housing project for Borneo-Sporenburg radicalizes the dissolution of the stable, modular framework of orientation that would locate one's home within the structure. Ten maisonette units — three-dimensionally complex figures — are entangled in one another, thus constituting a rectilinear mass. Within this tangle the single unit looses its identity and integrity. The dweller is no longer able to see where his property starts and ends. He disappears into an inconceivable burrow-geometry. The public outer space penetrates and 'erodes' the block. The three-dimensional jigsaw conjures a continuous labyrinth of interstitial spaces, which, while operating as access and lighting space, allows for a strange 'promenade architecturale'. A potentially liberating space, which comes as surprise within a multi-storey building, a type that has hitherto been the paradigm of modularity.

Zaha Hadid's design (1991) of a villa for the Hague ('spiral in the box') proceeds from what seems at first to be a purely formal contradiction or contrast: between a violently dynamic interior and a strictly modular exterior. The envelope is prefigured by the setback rules and rigidly positioned within the grid of Koolhaas' masterplan. This given volume is conceived as indivisible continuum. Any form of division into levels or cells is suspended. The dichotomous distinction between programme areas and circulation areas is erased. Everything seems to be shot through with movement. This dynamic thrust seems caught and fixed within the given cubic grid, yet remains unsettling in as much as the cube itself is undermined and distorted by the thrust of the 'movement'.

The internal anti-geometry touches, twists, and cuts the architectural envelope. The façades seem to follow the spiralling drift as they transform along a sequence from opaque, translucent, to transparent. The spiral is the means by which the whole three-dimensional field of the volume remains open and continuous. It is not to be understood as a geometric figure. It does not follow any geometric rule but bends and twists out of pure 'willfullness'. Endless design variations bear witness to the indeterminacy of the morphology, within limiting parameters like maximum incline, smoothness of curve etc. Exact geometrical determination — a constant or algorithmically controlled radius — is excluded, like anything that would lead to uniformity. Everywhere variations within the field are offered as local (and temporary) possibilities of identification, without ever implying an unambiguous territorialization of the space. A dynamic of inhabitation is thus suggested that radicalizes Adolf Loos' 'Raumplan' and further enhances the fluidity of the relational play.

This 'topography' of movement deterritorializes — potentially — the hierarchical structure of the family as well as the related rigidity of the functional zoning of the house. The creative play — the (anti-)principle of the 'soft' free-form furniture of the sixties — swallows the whole house here. The inescapable identification and labelling of the

standard territories like 'living room', 'master bedroom', etc. is always possible and can even utilize certain valences or latencies offered within the free-form morphology. Nevertheless, such labels remain subject to the destabilizing forces of movement and subjectivity. Those inscriptions mutate into absurd stipulations. The spiral-house remains an unhomely bundle of open questions, born from willfullness, lust and an urge for freedom. This overstretched architecture tears at a brittle social edifice and sets it in motion.

Notes:
1) 131 ARCH+, 'InFormation. Folding in Architecture', p. 14, Joachim Krausse in conversation with ARCH+
2) Denis Hollier, 'Against Architecture', M.I.T. Press 1989, S. 33
3) Mark Wigley, 'The Architecture of Deconstruction', M.I.T. Press 1993
4) Manfredo Tafuri, 'Architecture and Utopia', M.I.T. Press 1976
5) Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, 'Mille Plateaux', Les Editions de Minuit, Paris 1980
6) Clemens Steenbergen, Wouter Reh, 'Architecture and Landscape', Prestel 1996
7) Siegfried Giedion, 'Space, Time and Architecture', Harvard University Press 1941, Fifth Edition 1967
8) ibd. p. 824
9) ibd. p. 825

Urban Living: Diversity in Homogeneity
Werner Sewing
p. 84

The lamentation over the disappearance of urbanity is linked in public debate as a rule to the invocation of the lot as the guarantor of urban diversity. Even the current master plan for the centre of Berlin (November 96) is unable to do without this rhetorical reference. A look at the plans, however, gives the lie to this rhetoric and a different basic form emerges: the large block in the tradition of Haussmann. It represents a central theme of the city planning which formulated its prototypes in the nineteenth century and, after the turn of the century, it became the real paradigm of big city architecture. Already in the city planning of the nineteenth century codified in the Beaux Arts tradition and in the City Beautiful movement, the urban building block was the large form with the potential to be amplified into a monument. Peter Hall is right to speak of a 'City of Monuments.'

The nineteenth century's monumentalizing gaze — which also led to the novel exposure of Gothic churches, revealing what had hitherto been concealed — would, much later, be directed by Aldo Rossi at the entire Western European history of building, thereby becoming the basis of the 'European city' construct. However, this conception of monumentality, on the surface historicizing, has its roots in precisely that context from whence the modernistic, technicizing idea of the large form with its machine metaphoric also issued. It is to be found as we know in

the utopian big city project for the centre of Paris, Aerodomes, by Henri Jules-Bories (1865-67), a radical contemporary of Haussmann. There, the technical rationality of big city architecture becomes a neutral shell for social diversity, the city as machine.

This motivation for considering the large form — as homogeneous form — not as destruction but as increase of urban density, intensity and variety, has strongly influenced modern housing construction since the turn of the century. In addition to the trend from block to row, there was a no less significant trend toward intensifying the block concept, instances of which were the Wagnerschule in Vienna, 'red' Vienna, the apartment blocks from New York to Montreal, Stalin's Moscow or the Milan of the Novocento, so paradigmatic for present-day Berlin. In contrast to the way the rhetoricians of the lot would have it, it was historically not only 'das Große Kapital' that, in its extensive exploitation of land, did away with parcellized diversity in the form of city lots. It was the theories of architecture since the turn of the century, for example Karl Scheffler (Der Architekt, 1907) or W.C. Behrendt (Die einheitliche Blockfront als Raumelement im Städtebau, 1911) that saw in the new socialized programmes of use the opportunity to give renewed impetus to building by drawing on its monumental, rational and sculptural strength, to free the core of its husk of style (Oechslin). The claim to "the whole, the new, the large, the sublime" (Kollhoff in Casabella, 564, 1990) stems from that time as well. The heritage of architects' reception of Nietzsche around 1900 is unmistakably still at work; without it the monumentalism of the 'Halbzeit der Moderne' is incomprehensible.

Presenting Kollhoff's residential block in the eastern harbour of Amsterdam, already a classic in the large form debate of the Eighties, becomes almost superfluous in view of the justifiedly rapturous reception it has received in the last few years. Although it was only completed in the Nineties, his design dates back to the year 1989, and is thus the culmination of a long development in which a younger generation of architects used the compact bodies of buildings above all as identity-instituting interventions in town planning problem areas of the periphery. The increase in the sculptural expressivity of the large form achieved this goal in Amsterdam and, through its irregular form, enabled a multitude of types of dwelling and floor plans. One disadvantage of this very creative interpretation of the rather schematic, traditional block layout prescribed by Jo Coenen is the courtyard areas left in shadow.

In actual fact, even in this ideal location on the waterfront — to which Kollhoff does justice with a generous shopfront — a problem of the compact large forms becomes evident. It poses itself more insistently in regard to Jean Nouvel's modernistic large form in the Parisian suburb of Bezons and also in regard to Patrick Chavannes smaller-dimensioned building in Paris and that of Marzelle/Manescu/Steeg in Bordeaux: a generous variety of dwellings with maisonette and duplex units, a buffer zone between the dwelling and the exterior just as generous (winter garden, etc.) is confronted with a rather undeveloped public space. The strained 'uncompromising' quality of the courtyards may be urban, but they are of limited utility.

The quality of living, herein derived from the ideas of Le Corbusier, is optimized in all the projects, winning as many features of the one family house as possible for multi-storey residential buildings (immeuble-villas, Unité d'habitation). Nouvel is exemplary in this regard; his motto, "a beautiful apartment means a big apartment," links up the rationalist maisonette typology with access balconies all of a piece with offices, shops and smaller apartments in the large form. In Nouvel's work, the large form as point of crystallization in the suburban sprawl dispenses with large sculptural gestures, as do the other French projects. The coherence of form, the hermetic of the object as solitaire that is maintained is paradoxically guaranteed in Kollhoff's work by the brick façade reminding one of artisanal work and, in the work of Nouvel and Chavannes, effected by the horizontally structured glazed curtain façade entirely in the unbroken tradition of the technoid rationalism of the Seventies.

The textile logic of the façade protects the filter zones of the winter gardens and assures the privacy of the living area. However, in contrast to what Hoffmann-Axthelm called for a short time ago, this buffer zone does not appear to shift the private sphere toward more extensive interaction with the outside world, but rather underlines the inaccessibility of the enclaves of private withdrawal. The message coming from France appears principally to be that urban living as aggregation of private spheres is not suited to formal instrumentation of the sublime. The coherence as object proper to the large residential building is not, as Kollhoff suggests, "collective expression," but instead the neutralising shell for plural life styles that are no longer to be expressed through the claim to representation of traditional façade programmes. The façade cloaks more than it reveals. Kollhoff's sculpture in Amsterdam and to an even greater extent, his older project on Berlin's Luisenplatz (1983-1987), which had already been subjected to the neutralising glazed curtain façade of the wintergardens over all four storeys of apartments belong still to this programme of the Eighties. With the return to the 'European' conventions, i.e. the town planning of Haussmann already implied by the man from Amsterdam, with the turning away from the technoid or sculptural large form as solitaire, the dialectic of structure and monument of the nineteenth century has returned to Berlin again: City Beautiful. On closer inspection, though, people will live on the outskirts of the city. In little houses.

Translated from the German by:
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108