Towards
Another
Utopia of
The City

Towards Another Utopia of The City
(Vers une autre utopie de la ville)

by Klaus Schäfer

The following text originated in the time between summer 2003 and autumn 2004 as a draft for discussion at the university and at forums on the development of urban design and architecture.
The French subtitle is derived from similar titles of various polemic papers by Le Corbusier, although a comparison with his work is in no way intended. The emphasis is rather on the need for a benchmark of widespread influence as a 'carrier of the utopian'.
It should also be pointed out that the ideal presented here is not meant as a final state to be achieved in the future, but as the 'onset of a course of development'.

Prologue

The city is the most civilised form of human existence. It is the spatial forum of social interplay. It is artificial: human in origin. The city is the image of the physical and spiritual existence of mankind in the world. It is embedded in a natural world that is subjugated, named, exploited and cultivated from a base in the sites of human communality that we today call cities.
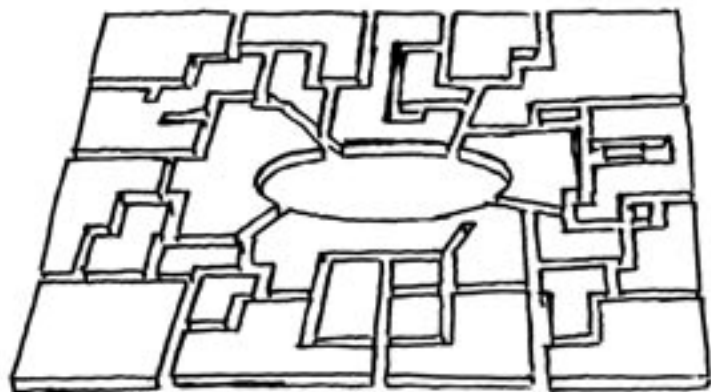
This antagonistic movement of a cultural development of city and country is described here and on the following pages. The ideal image is both a process and its direction.

City and Nature

The city uses what people utilise and/or waste. It is cultivation that is ecological, not cities. Wallowing in excess and squandering things are both culture and misuse at the same time; they are followed in a cycle by thriftiness and constraint. This compensation may well always be one aim of technical progress, but it is not suitable as a motive of social development.
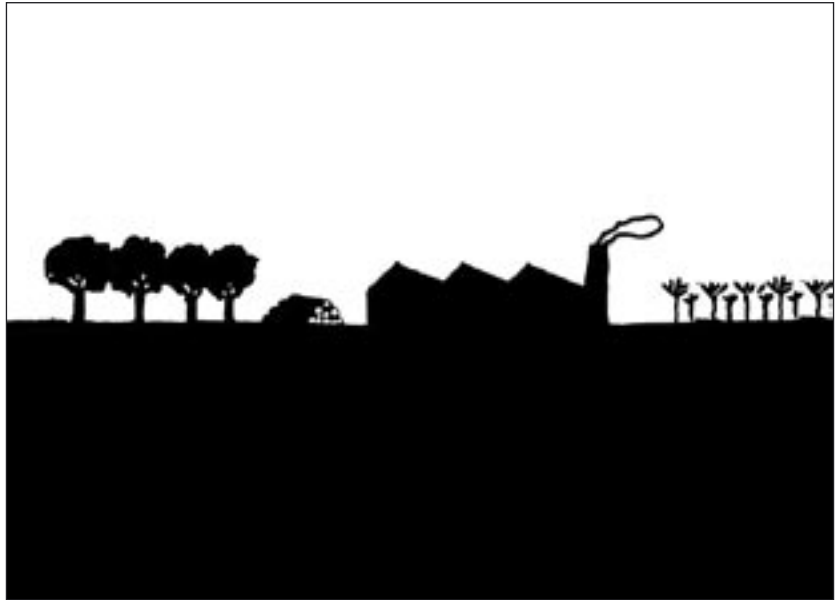
The argument in favour of cities should not draw upon their technical conditions; rather, a social and cultural rationale must be common knowledge – otherwise, every analysis falls into a technology trap. The original meaning of "sustainability" contains holistic pretensions that include the cultural level, for example, but the way in which it is used nowadays refers exclusively to what can be proven 'empirically'.

To see the city, in essence, merely as a mechanism with high or low efficiency goes against human nature. Sustainability is the dictum of a functionalism that tries to reduce the city to technological aspects yet again.

City and Country

The city and the countryside are different from each other. Just as the countryside is kept from the outgrowths of the city, so the city is kept from the inroads of the countryside. Everything that the city in its artificiality needs beyond the natural world finds room within its boundaries. This occupation of space is an innovative component of urban development, aiming for a culture of self limitation. The boundary as a cultural value becomes the ideal (with multiple connotations) of a Gestalt concept.

The tree in the city is the sign of a 'world outside' and it is this alone that makes it a carrier of meaning.
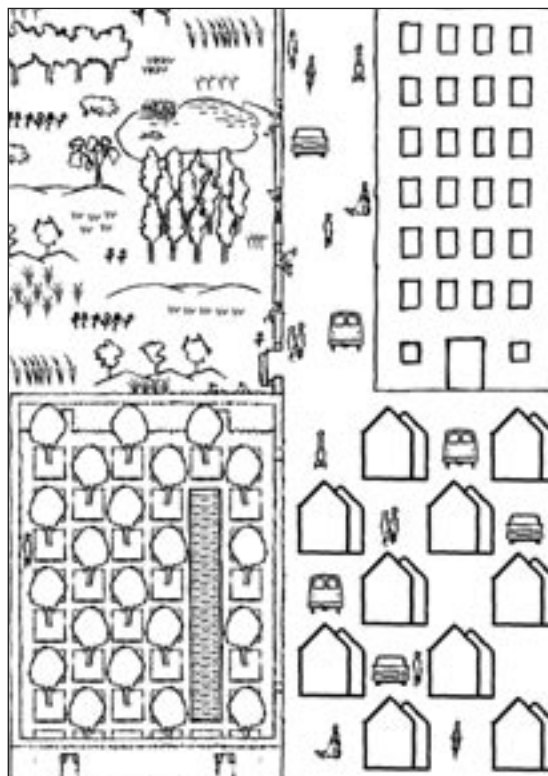
It is a visual wish of symbolic power to interpret the work of mankind as being the counterpart of nature. Our humility towards the environment and our admiration of it is part of this secret, on the basis of which we try to see our nature (artificial) as part of another nature (world), although it is we who shape both to a great extent.

The dissimilarity of city and country is seen as a property of their beauty. Thus the chosen form of the one highlights the form of the other. Inherent in the degree of the contrast are both a quality of the countryside and a quality of the city. Dichotomy becomes an aesthetic category of space.


The Form of the City

The boundary of the city becomes the recognisable limit of settlement. It is here that inside and outside are defined and become a compositional theme. Farmland and parkland adjoin the settled area.

In the city, density and proximity are both form and social intent. Anonymity allows physical closeness, while views onto everything and everyone create distance.

Transparency, social proximity and parity of conditions are criteria of social debate that are in constant need of renegotiation. They are unsuitable as determinants of the form of the architecture of a city.

Linguistic metaphors are already, in themselves, the results of a figurative translation, and the way in which they are meant has to be experienced and defined repeatedly; they do not become any more 'manifest' for having built forms 'generated' from them.
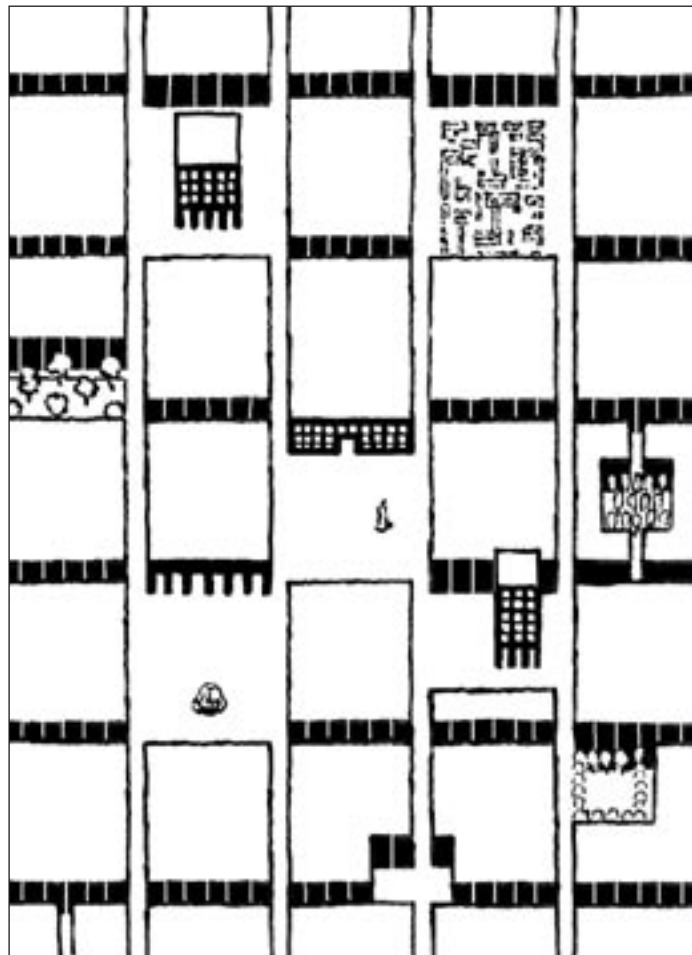
A window facing north is as good as a window facing south. A garden behind the house is as good as no garden behind the house. Not all days are the same; only on the 21st of March does the sun follow the same path as on the 21st of September.

The city is seen as a warming entity in winter and a provider of cool shade

in harsh sunlight. There is always something, somewhere, that has found an opening; the hard paving of the squares has its counterpart at any moment in the city parks, in the prominent (or hidden) pearls of the art of gardening. Thus we stride along streets and alleys and stroll through the (urban) rooms and void monuments of weekdays and Sundays, the gardens and squares.

The special stands face-to-face with the ordinary. The monument has its place, its form and function. Its setting is uniform, a multiple of buildings and their stimulus of profanity – for in everyday surroundings, a feat of architecture remains seldom and unexpected.

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City and Machine

Industry is accommodated in the city as an essential component of it. In a „world that is getting smaller", what is exhaled must be inhaled. The available technology is used to get round the difficulty and becomes the criterion of a development; for example, airports are constructed in the midst of the city to be easily accessible. The supersonic jet switches its engines over to landing

'Free areas' that can be put under pressure without reducing the quality of life for somebody do not exist. Such things cannot be played off against each other by majority decision in favour of the urban population (so as to give them peace and quiet). The city must be in control of everything that it needs and produces within its boundaries – and we like looking at it all, too.
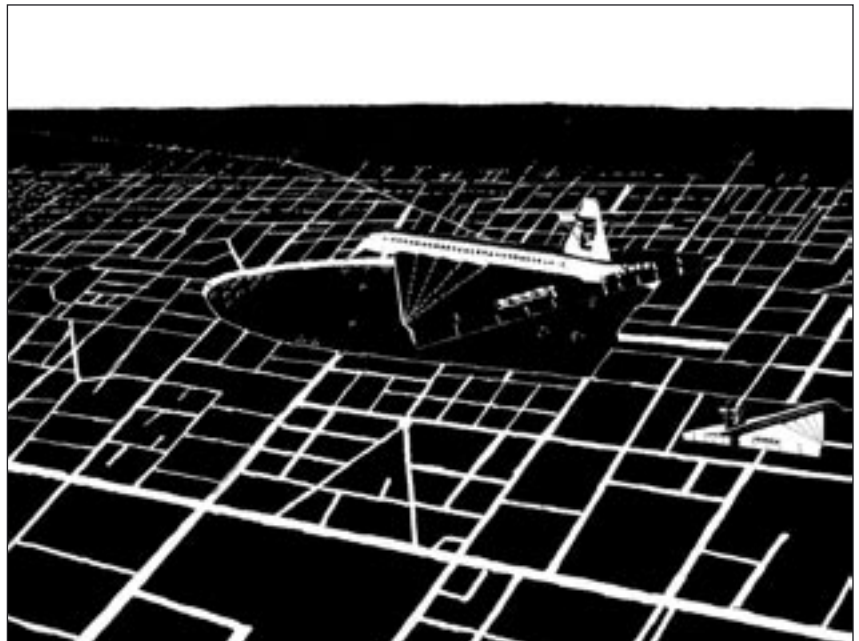

mode before it reaches the outskirts and thus glides silently, with wing-flaps extended, down to the airport.

We find commerce and production wherever we need them, because we live next door. The view of a blast furnace is as beautiful as that of a museum.

City and Noise

The city makes noise incessantly. It is considered a sign of people's lively expectations of time. The sounds of each day are superimposed on those of the day before. At night, the city slumbers in purring thoughtfulness: should a tyre squeal here or there, it casts the seed of the next morning.

Noise in the air is the echo of movement in urban space. Urban space forms the sound-box of its social and technical environment. The way in which we perceive ourselves and those around us is closely dependent in a multiplicity of ways on sounds consisting of the indoors and the outdoors together: a constant ‚looking and feeling‘, boundless and constantly penetrated.
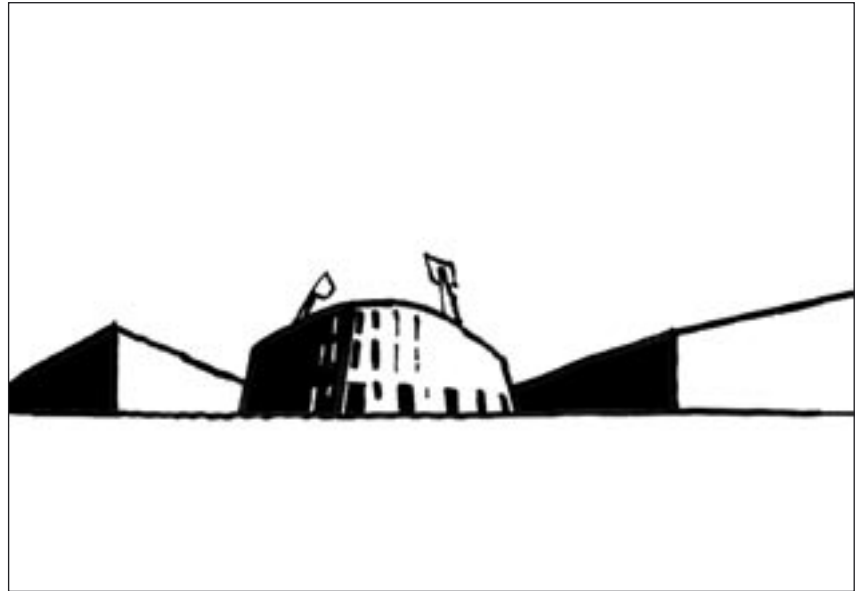
The football stadium fills the middle of the city, so that everybody knows the score. The hushed quiet of the countryside is, for most people, only the howling of the wolf in a vacuum: a frisson of excitement, suitable only for the holidays.

City and Light

The city is set in the landscape like a crystal, for it is here that human achievements are bundled and brought together. The many and varied forces that result spring from the energy of trade and change, of activity and production. Deposits, exhaust, and crystallisation mark the success of this dynamism, which does

Wherever we find light, there is life; this is a trait of the city. Light, however, is used in order to induce a feeling of liveliness (exorbitance) or to simulate it (medialisation), with the consequence that the ‚authentic experience‘ turns into its opposite: the parts of the night world in which social life takes place avoid the light.
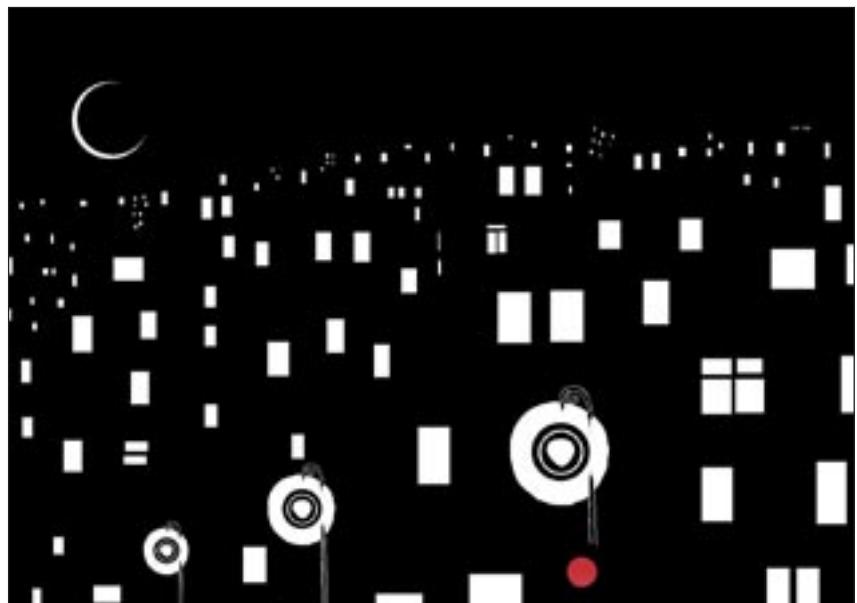
not need additional illumination – it glows of its own accord, when its activity makes it a source of light. Iridescence occurs wherever people work, live, or dance; a reflection of the void appears dishonourable and is thus left undone.

City and Traffic

Trafficking with each other means exchanging relationships, therefore the way of communication is traffic first of all, in all its embodiments. In physical terms, traffic functions unrestrictedly and without barriers via public space. All forms of traffic exist next to each other on an equal ‚footing'. The pedestrian is as free as the cyclist or car driver; they all pay attention to each other and the stronger party gives way. The car has lost its priority and highways have been abolished; everywhere people walk and drive, casually and at a decent speed. We measure out the city in paces – and in that lies the highest value of its space. The city of short distances is precious and our daily tasks are habitually done on foot. Children play in back streets and on pavements. Everyone finds his own

The disintegration of the city creates a 'one-sided' traffic problem. The designation of spaces does not solve this problem; it rather produces a self-justifying logic that demands ever more control and organisation of a segregated system. People live with their backs turned to the space of ‚greatest tension' – for what is more entertaining, what represents the stage of public life, better than circulation space?
Along the arterial roads of our cities travel the vehicles of those who do not want to live there, because there are too many cars.
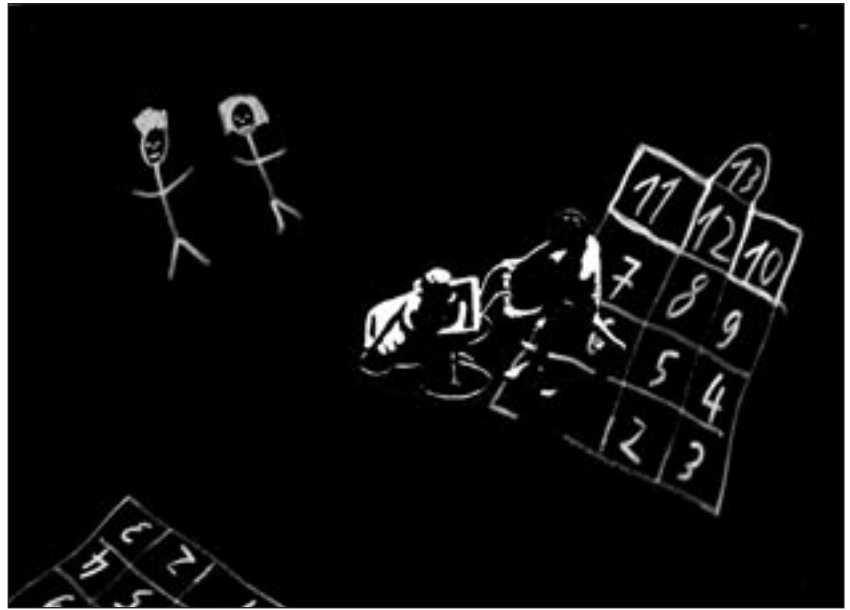
way and regulation is kept to a minimum. Parked cars prevent motorists from speeding. Juggernauts are prohibited. Local public transport is easy to reach wherever you are and it runs at all times. Broad mobility is seen as a communal property, available to all.

City and Ownership

The urban theorist Hoffman-Axthelm takes the Marienplatz in Munich as an example of how investors on the lookout for centrally located squares end up destroying the favourable aspects of a location by appropriating it. This comprises a process that in due course gives rise to land prices that would once again make

Urban policy is constantly occupied with bringing accumulated ownership of land to the people again. It is an eternal cycle. On the plots stand buildings: old, new, or none. Their location strives to incorporate the value intrinsic to public space. The favourable characteristics of a location (derived from the value of public space) are destroyed by those who gather and strive for them. After bankruptcy and decay, land has to be divided up anew. An urban development plan regulates the layout of the plots. The city is continually being democratised by partition and the surrender of property and responsibility.

The plot layout (module: 8 x 20m) of the bastide city of Monpazier (today and as envisaged) as an example of urban property ownership by around 530 inhabitants: contrast this with any randomly chosen estate of detached housing, or a long terrace of flats with the same number of inhabitants.

The feeling for the whole is complemented by the identity of the cell. The city structures itself in manageable units of all forms of life and we experience the heart of the private sphere in murmuring courtyards.

City and History

The destruction of Europe, the crisis grown out of the catastrophe, remains present as a void in our midst. In the radical images expressive of the new beginning, the tabula rasa, a different approach will be inserted: one that aspires to replenish what cannot be filled; to stand in place of that for which no real

When urban space is (re)constructed, when architecture oriented towards public space is designed, it is not long before the accusation of ‚historical misrepresentation‘ is made. This approach does not equate with looking back to the past; it is rather orientated towards a (re)creation of space that expresses communal qualities. In Germany, the trauma of guilt for wartime destruction created a climate of particular alienation from the urban tradition.

replacement can be found; to keep building on a shape that will always bear the mark of the join. Horror is not suitable as a continued leitmotif of everyday life, and the attempt to upgrade the diagnosis of world torn apart to an aesthetic concept remains autistic.

Tradition in the City

Generations maintain the city and pass it on. History does not have to obtrude. Things that are part of everyday life do not need to be signposted by the building conservation officer.

When the momentary, the instant, the vague and the ephemerally transient become aesthetic goals alongside the questioning of stability, resistance begins to stir: one that strives to express permanence. Building conservation is an indicator of mistrust in the ability of contemporary architecture to build up things of lasting worth and to build on the worth of what already exists. When the new stands face to face with the old on an equal footing, it is no longer necessary to concentrate on preserving ‚every old stone‘.
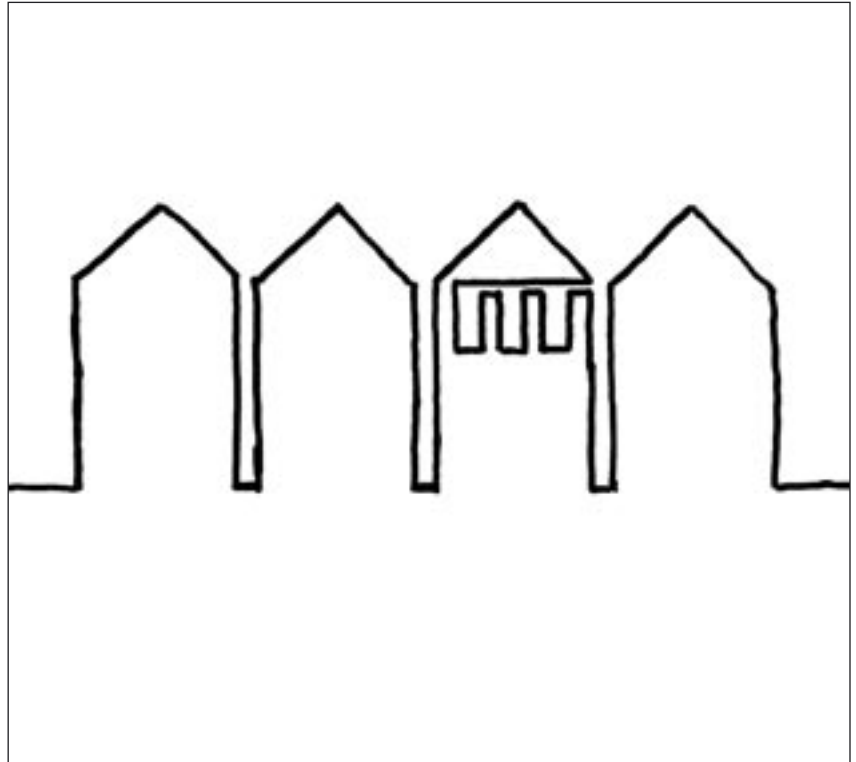
Things with a short lifespan are not considered immobile. The new stands next door to the old with an equal status and strives with every step for an improvement. Durability and stability is the goal of the development and precisely for this reason no damage is done when dilapidated structures are replaced.

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The Education of the Architect

The primary, self-evident and unspoken theme in the universities is the extension, conversion and refinement of existing stock. The spatial conditions of the city are examined according to the unifying criteria of its building blocks and their continued development. Only the HOW? (of urban space) is posed, while

With the urban criticism (mistaken for social criticism) of the late 19th century, the back-to-nature movement and then the modern movement, the very existence of the city itself was called into question; the ‚mechanical breaking-up‘ of wartime promoted a wholly object-related attitude in architecture, in contrast to the contextual relationship of an orientation towards (urban) space.
The complex nature of urban structure would be abandoned, it was thought, in favour of a simplified and Taylorized (and thus apparently controllable) image of the city (landscape).
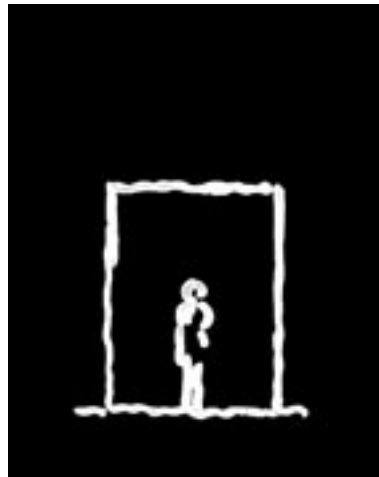
the WHY? has become the folly of a past epoch, with defects that it is taking generations of architects and sociologists to remedy. From being the plaything of fashions, the city has again become the stage of fashions.

Urban Design and Architecture

Architecture is once again urban design and urban design is once again architecture. The city has a shape and continues to gain shape. We perceive the sum of its spaces physically.
Buildings are of stone; their walls are thick and the ceilings are high. The shapes of the buildings, spaces and openings are anthropomorphic and are extended by the human aura. The dynamics of architectural form find, after a creative search

Human beings grow with the (surrounding) space given to them: if the first space reflects our immediate physical contours (similar to Modulor), the se-

cond picture leaves us ‚additional space‘ and in the third figure, it can be clearly seen how the human body ‚grows in tandem‘, acquiring a space that is extended by our ‚aura‘.

for shape, their well-balanced, stable, and regular equivalent. The "stone of the city" stores within itself the breaths of the happiness and the suffering of its inhabitants; it appears nonetheless as lively and as dead as its present human counterpart.
The architecture that one approaches on one's way through the city is narrative and informative. If it constitutes a particular place through its situation and function, it increases that place's dignity and, if not charged with any particular

task, it radiates relaxation.

From a distance, it demonstrates gravitas, and its equilibrium offers a fixed counterpart to the dynamics of our movement. As it is approached, it reveals grace and charm in its details – and when touched, architecture becomes stone: shock-proof and immovable.

The delight in „pure form" ended in a craze for images of an aseptic world of eternal youth. Now all of the elements of architecture wait to be drawn upon and tattooed, so that they will be able to speak of time: the time that it needs to carry the traces of violence and love towards the artefacts of the city. Freshness attracts change; modern means today again and may mean yesterday tomorrow.

Bodies in different states of equilibrium:

| stable	unstable	indifferent

Not only do these different states of equilibrium correspond to the initial premises of any structural calculation, they are also instinctive preconditions of action in our daily dealings with gravity. They are an evident part of our bodily sequence of motion, a perception of what is ‚outside'.
We interpret the built environment outside analogously via its direct statements, or its inherent signs: a construc-

City and Construction

The construction of the building blocks of the city takes as its subject the sensory mediation of the brief. The buildings tell of bearing loads and providing shelter, and their material nature is expressed according to the scale of the units used.

Correlation: statics, purpose and graphic potency

affirmative	metaphorical
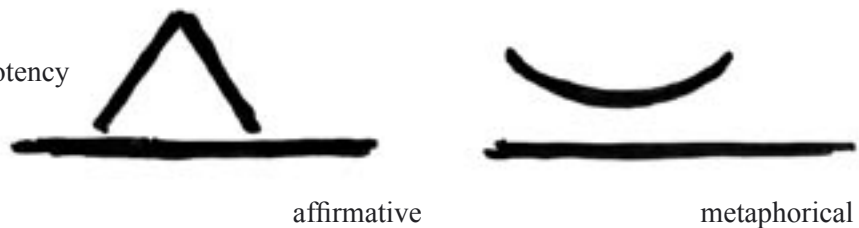
tion first confronts its own immobility, so consequently its architecture either expresses this simple fact, or else it goes further and contrives additional symbols that are conveyed, are translated (i.e. are to be decoded), and that do not confirm themselves in the form of a cycle of interpretation; in contrast to this, the left-hand illustration pursues a reinforcement of the statement, a positive redundancy.

Aesthetic pretension becomes an instrument of social intervention in order to create a comprehensible (urban) environment. The whole and its parts become a task centred on material and artefact, on the physical and representational. In a structure built by hand, that same format is evident to the touch; the industrial construction process is complex and permeated by the requirement in the brief to convey a sense of scale.

City and Planning

Every existing and new quarter of any city aims for an urban quality: a task for the planners, the builders and the critics. In striving for this, the planners set out to initiate and preserve the complexity of the city. Permitting a multiplicity of layers requires trust in the anarchic and irrational part of the urban polity. The

merging of density and functions in the new must induce the urban reaction. It is necessary to pursue the (self-perpetuating) independent process of existence as a city until it materialises in an independent form (diversity). Urban planning practises a strategy of stimulating relationships.

Planning withdraws; it does not inter- fere, it stimulates. It does not assign functions, but rather supports a mixture (according to the use of the term "diver- sity" by Jane Jacobs, writer, U.S.A.).
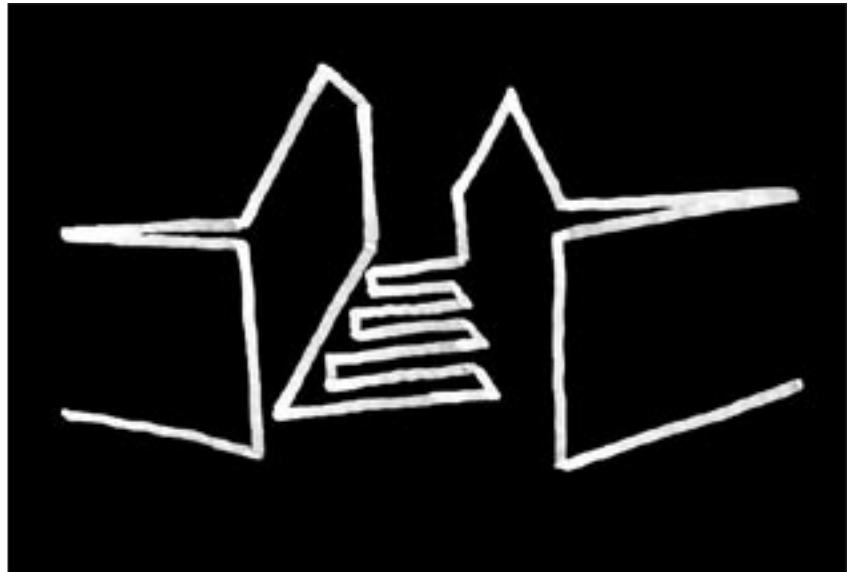
Urban quality is not destined to be an added value that kicks in when enough areas have been settled. It arises on a small scale, wherever two buildings stand facing each other.

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Language of the City

It will be intimate, in closed buildings and rooms, its components talk of giving shelter; only its public spaces are open. Doors and gates restrict access to public and private buildings; only the use of bolts and doorknobs controls their acces- sibility. It is nice when doors stand open – and closed doors are seen as a sign. The concealed has become, without exception, a sphere of privacy; only some of its secrets can be found out. Here the city dweller finds the space for which the responsibility lies primarily with him.

City is only designated as city where city is present, and the part that gave it the name is as urban as any other. Suburbs are considered to be outdated and uncultivated.

Just as the city and the countryside differ to the senses, so the private sphere separates itself sensorily from the public sphere within the city. Resistance is demonstrated to exterior space and the intimate is concealed. This resistance is effected by boundaries of bricks and mortar: words for legibility and ease of comprehension. We sense our own movement because of the restrictions

After a motif by Daniel Chodowiecki, „Long Lane in Danzig", now called „Mariacka" („Women's Lane").

of friction and solidity. Narrow spaces do not make us afraid and a wide-open space is a wasteful exception. In the same way that a gate grants entry into a space, it is enclosure that first creates a sensation of relaxation. To cross over a threshold is a gesture, an act of will and a symbol. We are familiar with encountering the unfamiliar: at a distance, a stimulation; close-to, casual curiosity.

Our body language and our perceptions are the dynamic elements of architecture as a spatial stage. What it creates are places of quiet, harmony, equilibrium and self-reassurance in the ever-moving human world.

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Translation by Richard Toovey, Berlin 2006