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TOWARDS AN UNCOMPROMISED URBANISM

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The 'grid' city, based on a final academic project by Gerard Fischert and Han de Kluyer focussing on the Weeberian delineation of the interfaces between architecture and urban design

AUTONOMY-SYNTHESIS

The recently initiated, broadly defined debate on urbanism seems definitively to ignore the social relevance of the labour of the urban planner. With the ad hoc objective of filling an observed gap in thinking about form in urban design, this debate has re-emphasised the autonomy of the discipline and the individual artist. The fact that urbanism is drawing on an option which emphasises that the social origins of the formal are unknowable – and thus deliberately and voluntarily retreats as far as possible from reality – has its roots not least in the formalist approach developed by the postmoderns in the 1970s. In 1979 Carel Weeber, one of the Dutch representatives of this school, pointed out that the discipline of urbanism should be encouraged to shed the mask of other disciplines, in order for it to focus exclusively on designing formal structures on an urban scale. Alongside the autonomy of urbanism as a discipline, he advocated re-introducing urban design as an independent, formal level of planning, and thereby restoring the artistically motivated organisation of individual architectural projects to its rightful place. Urban design would then relate not only to the problem of the borders and limits of disciplinary design practices, but also to that of opting for an indissoluble link between urbanism and architecture. Because even though urban planners were no longer supposed to speculate about the visual qualities of the built environment, and even though architects, for their part, were no longer supposed to dream of cities that were actually buildings, it was still thought to be only through urbanism that architecture could flourish, and only through architecture that urbanism could be elevated to the status of a three-dimensional reality.[1]

On account of the fundamental malaise in which urban design work had become bogged down in the early 1980s, Weeber's half-formed, one-sided formal approach swiftly gained currency (in the Netherlands) in thinking about urbanism, and so, to a large degree, has come to dominate the current debate on urbanism. Increasingly, the contributions to that debate neglect the inherent social and political message of urban design activities, even though studies by Manfredo Tafuri, Bolte & Meijer and others have shown that architects and urban planners simply cannot afford the luxury of being apolitical.[2] Debate and research on the visual structures still possible at the urban level are thus degenerating into a highly neurotic formalism, which as such is no longer able or willing to advance and articulate its own practice within other, non-aesthetic practices. This becomes even more painfully apparent as we see separate, individual architectural projects succeeding one another faster and faster, driven by the winds of fashion, and as this fixation on form, without reference to actual content, is accompanied by growing independence and fragmentation in spatial design practice(s). When urban planners retreat into an ultimate autonomy and give their own specific field of knowledge a central role, the link – so crucial

1
See Carel Weeber, 'Formele objectiviteit in stedebouw en architectuur als onderdeel van rationele planning', *Plan* no. 11, November 1979; 27-35. My impression is that Weeber's preference for an urban 'grid' is a reference to Habraken's concept of urban 'carriers'. But while Habraken is referring to the mass of the city itself, in which the architect's role is limited to the constructive development of the carriers, for Weeber urban design remains no more than a two-dimensional grid, which is supposed to be indifferent to future patterns of use.

2
Manfredo Tanfuri, *Ontwerp en Utopie* (orig. title: *Progetto e Utopia*; Rome/Bari, 1973); Sunschrift 117 (Nijmegen, 1978). Wouter Bolte and Johan Mijer, *Van Berlage tot Bijlmer: architektuur en stedelijke politiek*, Sunschrift 167 (Nijmegen, 1981).

for contemporary projects – between architectural and urban-planning practice and its dialectical relationship to the social configuration of time and place can no longer take concrete form. From now on, the practice of spatial design will thus unapologetically disintegrate into its separate components – planning, urbanism and architecture – which, on the basis of a kind of closed learning and feedback loop, can each develop in a unique, idiosyncratic way. This parting of ways at the level of spatial action systems has, however, made it obvious that no part of current design practice is self-evident any longer; even its right to exist is no longer self-evident, according to Jürgen Habermas.[3] Because of the crisis of the multi- and interdisciplinary approach that is the inevitable result of this, and because of the more complex field of urban integration in which the discipline of urbanism has traditionally operated, this situation is, for the time being, most clearly visible in the domain of urban design.

Against this background, it seems to me that the above-mentioned restriction of personal responsibility to purely formal questions of urban design becomes somewhat problematic at the moment that the discipline of urbanism, as such, aspires to bring about spatial cohesion between the components of the (urban) plan, which have become isolated and autonomous, and thereby to make the city 'legible'. This is because the 'expression of unity' in any cultural concept – or, as Weeber puts it, the consensus effect of the objective, formal approach to design – is doomed to fail as long as the discipline of urbanism has not developed a position on the social significance of its design activities, and as long as this spatial consistency can, accordingly, be traced solely from the (relatively) autonomous discipline. In itself, this pursuit of both the formal autonomy of urbanism and the demarcation of one's own field of knowledge in relation to the other cultural action systems is diametrically opposed to the pursuit of the coherent and spatial synthesis of separate, individual architectural projects.[4] Given that under present conditions these design practices refer to nothing but themselves, one is much more likely to achieve just the opposite of what one hopes.

This duality between autonomy and synthesis, which informs the current debate on urbanism, is the focus of this article. As a contribution to what was conceived as a formalist debate, it attempts to locate the social nature of the 'expression of unity' in the history of three avant-gardes and their *Bauausstellungen*. In doing so, rather than focusing primarily on the political conditions and implications of urbanism, it tends to complement this political aspect, since it calls into question the inherent dialectics of the aesthetic interpretation of urban design and tries to present its conditions, possibilities and impossibilities, with the aim of clarifying the nature of design work in the field of urbanism. It thus seems sensible to begin by returning to that practice, which made the heuristic search for unity within architectural style(s) – for the

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Jürgen Habermas, 'Het moderne – een onvoltooid project', lecture delivered upon receiving the Adorno Prize, translated into Dutch by Cyrille Offermans, in *Raster* no. 19, 1981, 137; the opening words of Adorno's *Ästhetische Theorie* are quoted, see Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main, 1970), 9.

4
See also Jürgen Habermas, 'Moderne und Postmoderne Architektur', *Arch+* no. 61, February 1982; 54-59.

formal order within urban chaos – its central theme. This design code was adopted from the nineteenth-century Arts and Crafts Movement by the Deutscher Werkbund and, via the Bauhaus, eventually led to the Modern Movement. The subsequent developments within Team 10, Forum and postmodernism showed an increasing tendency towards autonomising artistic design practices, thus exacerbating the identity crisis within the field of urbanism, despite what were probably good intentions. This aesthetic falsification, which pushed ahead forcefully along the same lines in the 1970s, has arrived at its logical continuation in the current debate on urbanism: disregard for the practical content of form, so that the discipline of urban design now produces its own indecisions.

THE DEUTSCHER WERKBUND (1907-1914)

In the early years of the twentieth century – the period of the 'second industrial revolution' – the need to return to formal questions of urban design and rethink architecture's identity became the central theme of debate for the Deutscher Werkbund, an association of artists and architects. In a survey of the first five years of the Deutscher Werkbund (*Jahrbuch 1912*), Hermann Muthesius observed that while the Werkbund had helped to improve the quality of German industrial production – especially in the technical and material senses – this did not mean that it had achieved its goal. From the

Herman Muthesius: the factory floor at the Michiels & Cie silk mill

Werkbund's perspective, industrially manufactured goods had a conceptual value above and beyond their immediate practical value. Not only was it thought to be possible and essential for the new style of art to express this value, but it was in fact seen as the prior condition for all modern forms of design work.[5] The Werkbund code cannot, therefore, be characterised as a one-sided formal approach. It is much more accurate to call it a direct aesthetic confrontation between the ideal of individual freedom of artistic *Gestaltung* and the general economic laws of industrial utilitarianism. All forms of design work, as defined within the Werkbund's ideologies, were predicated on the creed that they could not be practiced as separate, individual projects, but could only succeed if the design process was inseparably linked to the social and economic circumstances from which it emerged. 'For art was not, after all, just an aesthetic force, but also a social one, which two together were meant to lead not least to the most important force of all, the economic one'.[6]

This contrasted with the 'negative thinking' of individuals such as Adolf Loos, who developed his 'compositions' from the inherent contradictions within the capitalist social formation. The Deutsche Werkbund thus tried to build bridges between art and industry, while Loos's theories envisaged vast gulfs.[7] This made the notion that was propagated of a relationship between individual artistic endeavours and scientistic economic practice – between artistic creation and the generation of norms – a political one, in the sense that it involved a new alliance between productive and spiritual forces, an alternative cultural and social use of mechanical means of production, which was ultimately expected to lead to social and artistic 'liberation'. But given that the political awareness of the pre-war Werkbund was inadequate to achieve this goal and still at a formative stage, the association could not maintain any kind of conceptual unity. It splintered into separate projects, which were either characterised by unreflective artistic utopianism (*Wiederherstellung des reinen Lebens durch die Schönheit*) or entirely dominated by the productive promise of the capitalist social formation (*Wirtschaft als Selbstzweck*). The debate between Van de Velde, Muthesius and Naumann at the 'Werkbund-Ausstellung' in Cologne (1914) is especially revealing of this clear inner contradiction within the Werkbund's ideologies.[8]

THE BAUHAUS (1919-1927)

After the First World War, the pursuit of not only the relationship between art and industry, but also of 'unity among the various languages of composition and views on art' was the central theme of the *Bauhauslehren*. Founded in 1919 by Walter Gropius and serving (at least initially) as a pedagogical complement to the Werkbund, it strove for the coordination of all creative work – for unification in art and design – in order to arrive at a progressive synthesis between and within architec-

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'Much more important than the material is the spiritual; above the goal, materials and technique stands the form . . . That is why the revival of an architectural culture is a requirement for all the arts and an absolute necessity for the general process of artistic renewal that we should expect to take place.' Hermann Muthesius, 'Wo stehen wir?, Vortrag gehalten auf der Jahresversammlung des Deutschen Werkbundes in Dresden 1911', in: *Das Jahrbuch des Deutschen Werkbundes* (Jena, 1912), 19-25.

6
Julius Posener, 'Der Deutschen Werkbund (1907-1914), Vorlesung gehalten auf das Fachbereich Architektur der T.U. Berlin', *Arch+* no. 59, October 1981; 24; quote from Schumacher's 'Gründungsrede des Deutschen Werkbundes' (Munich, October 1907).

7
See, for instance, Massimo Cacciari, 'Loos-Wien', in *Oikos: van Loos tot Wittgenstein* (orig. title: *Oikos da Loos a Wittgenstein*, Rome, 1975), Sunschrift 196 (Nijmegen, 1982), 20. A review responding to this article of Cacciari's was published in *O* no. 7 (Geert Hovingh, 'Loos-Wien; cultuurkritiek en architectuur; een bespreking', *O: ontwerp, onderzoek en onderwijs* no. 7, spring 1984, 28-36.

8
See, for instance, Julius Posener, ibid., 19-20; Niels L. Prak, 'Art and Industry: notes on their relations between 1750-1914', in: *Avantgarde und Industrie* (Delft, 1983), 8/9; Ludwig Hilberseimer, *Berliner Architektur der 20er Jahren: neue Bauhausbücher* (Mainz/Berlin, 1967), 8-9.

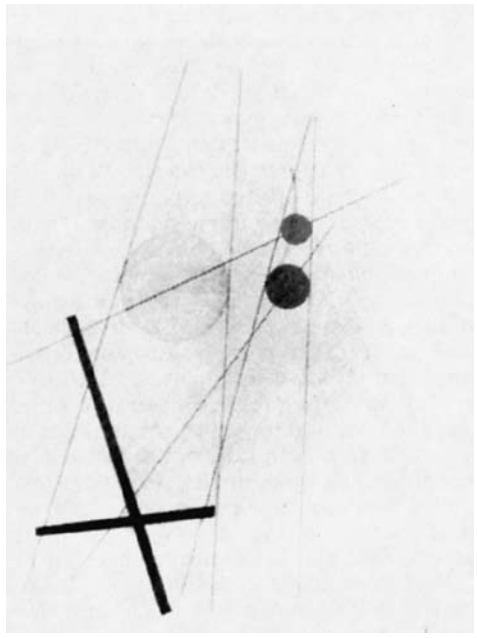
ture and society.[9] Accordingly, the Bauhaus ideology was based on a dual design code, at two complementary levels: the level of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (that of the unity of all arts in the vision of an all-encompassing architectural *style* of the future) and the level of *machine art* (the connection between the artistic and industrial production processes). Although the separate components of this two-part ideology had been developed earlier, the former within the Arts and Crafts Movement and the latter by the Werkbund, the Bauhaus, in bringing them together, gave them a specific social content and meaning.

In response to the social tendency that promoted growing specialisation and fragmentation of the various cultural action systems, and in response to the contradiction still present within the Werkbund between artistic dilettantism and economic determinism, the Bauhaus postulated the fundamental unity of all artistic expression as a necessary condition for any type of modern design work. Walter Gropius considered social and cultural theory necessary for this purpose. He reasoned that the progressive synthesis of modern architecture, collective construction, which involved communication both among artists and between art and society as a whole, could only be brought about if it was also the logical product of the intellectual, social and technical conditions of the 'modern era'.[10] Particularly with the arrival of Theo van Doesburg and Lazló Moholy Nagy and, later, its move to Dessau, the Bauhaus thus propagated the unity of all artistic work by virtue of its relationship to life itself, and from

9
See Walter Gropius, *Idee und Aufbau des Staatlichen Bauhauses* (Munich, 1923), 24.

10
Gilbert Herbert, *The Synthetic Vision of Walter Gropius* (Johannesburg, 1959), 11-21.

Walter Gropius, Bauhaus buildings in Dessau


Lazlo Moholy Nagy, *Z III*, a 1922 painting

1923 to 1927, it thereby laid the groundwork for a collectively shaped, intersubjectively oriented *Maschinenstil*.

The problematic contradiction between art and industry, between design and technology, was then resolved by mediating between the artistic potential of art and the processing potential of mechanical means of production at a particular stage in the design process. This stage was the traditional, artisanal development of the prototype, the standard, which – as both the artistic result of laboratory experiments and the foundation for mass production – made the art-industry fusion a logical one. The prototype, it was thought, would be the best possible representation of what the discipline could produce at a given moment; it would eliminate the incidental and individual while emphasising what was formally essential and intersubjective. In this respect, the tendency towards standardisation and prefabrication in Bauhaus thinking was not a step backward, but one of the most important artistic conditions – in both a cultural and economic sense – for moving forward with social development.[11]

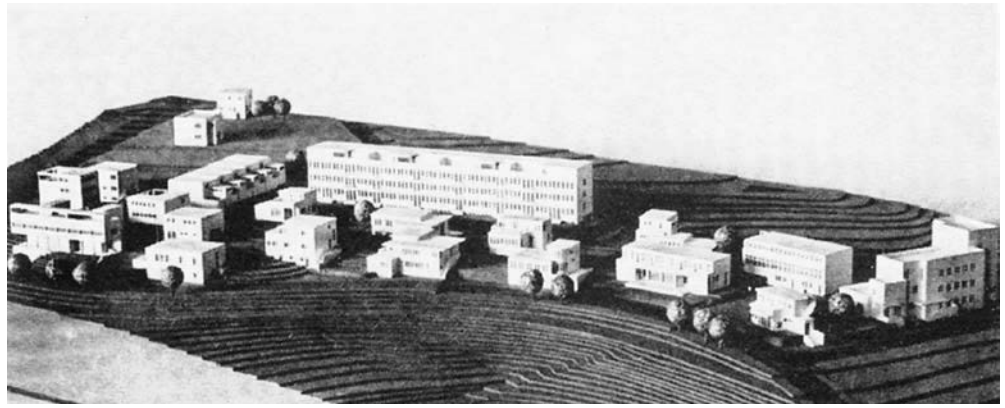
This postulate of cultural development was a philosophical borrowing from Hegel's definition of progress in terms of the dialectical sequence of thesis-antithesis-synthesis. Not only was the educational programme known as *Bauhauslehren* divided into the three separate stages of *Vorkurs*, *Fachstudium* and *Gestaltstudium*, but the Bauhaus code itself could also be characterised by an analogous series: art-technology-style. Alongside its above-mentioned views about the unity of all artistic views and compositional idioms, as well as those about the unity of the artistic and industrial production processes, the Bauhaus opted for 'multiplicity within this unity', for variation in the size and composition of the parts, in an attempt to avoid a looming sterility and uniformity in social and cultural development. The key concepts of the Bauhaus ideology (unity, prototype and style) were thus rooted in the paradox of variation (in reference to art) versus standardisation (in reference to industry), a seeming contradiction which was regarded not as a forced choice between two options, but rather as a productive 'conflict' that could lead to reconciliation (synthesis) and thus to a new and better architectural style. Under the protection of the intersubjectively created artistic codex and of industry, it was thought that it would be possible to safeguard the unity of the formal while also – in the other, sociocultural domain – leaving enough scope for personal, individual taste and the creative/intuitive approach. 'The final result would thus be a successful combination of consistent standardisation and far-reaching potential for variation,' Walter Gropius concluded.[12]

11
Walter Gropius, foreword to *The Synthetic Vision of Walter Gropius*, ibid., VII.

WEISSENHOFSIEDLUNG (1927)

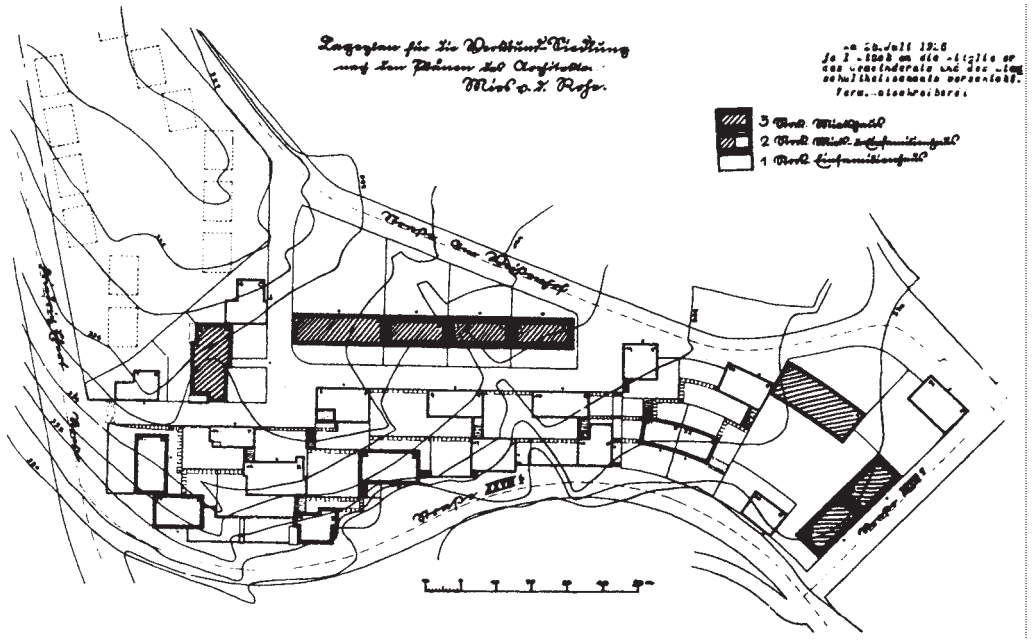
These modern formal principles, developed by the Bauhaus and others, formed the basis of the Werkbund exhibition *Die Wohnung*, which took place in the summer of 1927 in Weis-

12
Walter Gropius, *Die neue Architektur und das Bauhaus: Grundzüge und Entwicklung einer Konzeption (Neue Bauhausbücher)* (Mainz/Berlin, 1965 [1935]), 12-18.



Building model, Weissenhofsiedlung, Stuttgart 1927

Aerial photo, Weissenhofsiedlung at the time of the exhibition



Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, building plan, Weissenhofsiedlung, 1926

senhof, a suburb of Stuttgart. The Weissenhofsiedlung, as this model housing estate came to be known, departed in the following three fundamental respects from the Berlin Wohnsiedlungen, which had been developed in the preceding years:

1 its programmatic aspect;
2 its conception of urban development; and
3 its status as the first clearly international cooperative endeavour by the Central European avant-garde.

1 In 1926, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe became the general director of the Weissenhofproject, for which he designed both the urban plan and the first housing block. He described the problem of the 'new housing', and thus the programme of the Weissenhofsiedlung, as follows: 'The postulate of "rationalisation and standardisation", as well as the pursuit of profitability in housing production, are merely facets of the problem, which are very important, to be sure, but can only become truly significant when placed in the proper perspective. Alongside or, more accurately, above and beyond them is the spatial problem, which can only be solved by means of "creative force" and not by rational or organisational means.'[13] This principle thus highlighted the pursuit of rationalisation and standardisation in architecture, but also emphasised that this pursuit was only a means of getting at the modern formal aspects of the 'housing question'. On its own, the Weissenhof programme provided an open (or half-open) method, which gave individual architects the greatest possible artistic freedom, despite the modern requirement that the building process be unified and unequivocal.[14] Nevertheless, the avant-garde participants, who had previously worked in relative isolation, managed to jointly produce an astounding degree of formal unity. Through the intermediary of the socioeconomic conditions of modernity, the international avant-garde seems ultimately to have succeeded in finding a single artistic code and thereby rallying around a single collective style.

2 The unity shown at the architectural level was not, however, reflected in the overall plan. Although Mies van der Rohe attempted to create a free, organic and thoroughly green housing estate according to 'modern planning principles', and although, with the aid of his own project and the housing blocks designed by Le Corbusier and Peter Behrens, he aimed to make the intended organisation of the estate apparent to the eye,[15] these proposals could not undo the impression that the individual villas followed the contours of the Killesberg only in a haphazard way, and hence that, in urban planning terms, the Weissenhofsiedlung disintegrated into its architectural parts. This was because Mies van der Rohe's design initiatives were only meaningful at the level of reception, and thus did not conform to the newly introduced scientific methods, which made it increasingly clear that the problem of

13
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, 'Vorbemerkungen zum ersten Sonderheft "Werkbundausstellung die Wohnung Stuttgart 1927"', orig. published in *Die Form*, Heft 9/1927; reprinted in *Die Form: Stimme des Deutschen Werkbundes 1925-1934* (Güthersloh, 1969); 132-133. In this article Mies van der Rohe comes close to the option expressed 15 years earlier by Hermann Muthesius (see note 5).

14
See Jürgen Joedicke and Christian Plath, *Die Weissenhofsiedlung Stuttgart* (Stuttgart, 1968/1977), 16-41.

15
Ibid., 9-11.

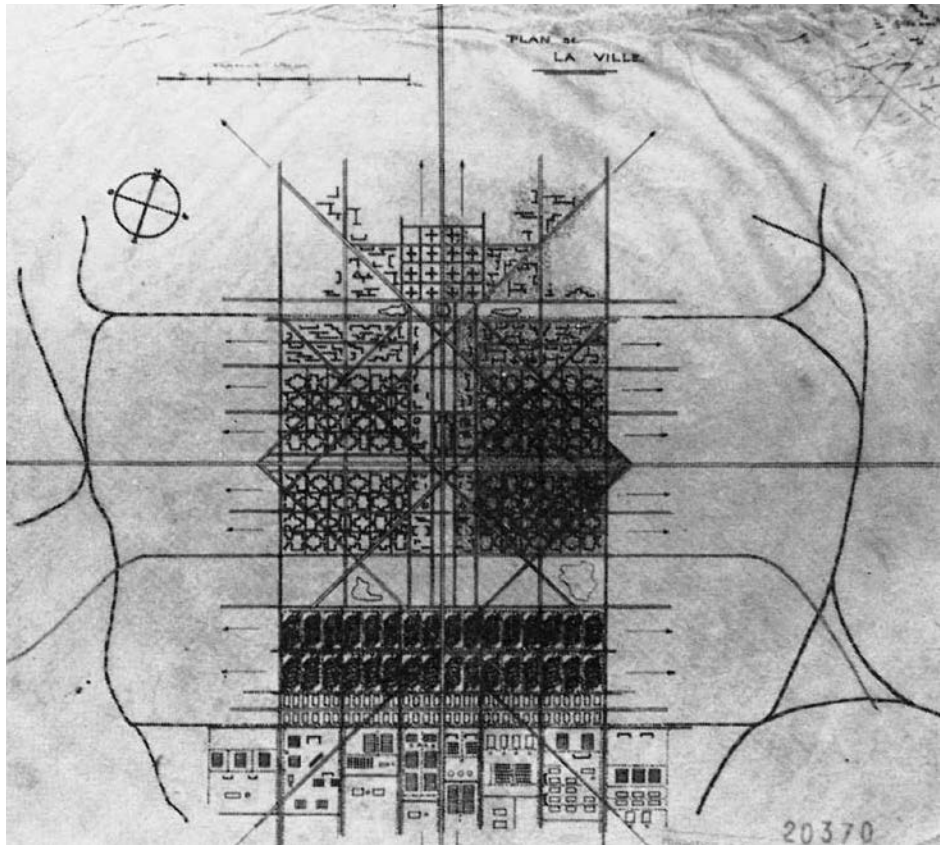
urban design involved not only formal, but also organisational and political coherence. Contemplating the initial results of the exhibition, Walter Gropius wrote, 'The Werkbundsiedlung thus clearly demonstrated the new potential of modern building and the possibilities of its architectural style, but at the same time, it clearly revealed the urban-design failure of Weissenhof and the urban problems that the avant-garde had yet to solve. . . . Instead, the new role of the architect-urbanist should be that of organiser, and thus oriented in multiple directions; it should be linked to research on biological, social, technical and aesthetic problems, which should be merged into an independent and more complex whole.'[16]

3 Given, however, that both the French and the Dutch avant-gardes had already come to a conclusion similar to that of Gropius, it was felt that the international nature of the Weissenhofsiedlung presented excellent prospects for this approach. Sixteen members of the avant-garde from five Central European countries,[17] working in collaboration, had not only produced an 'international style' – clearly demonstrated for the first time at the Weissenhofsiedlung – but had also taken the first step towards a follow-up at the Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne (known as CIAM; La Sarraz, 1928), which provided the Modern Movement with an authoritative institution at a political level that was capable of linking its architectural programme to urban planning. As soon as Bauhaus

16
Walter Gropius, 'Wege zur fabrikatorischen Hausherstellung', in ibid., 32.

17
The countries and architects represented were: Germany: Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, Peter Behrens, Adolf Schneck, Adolf Rading, Richard Döcker, Ludwig Hilberseimer, Hans Poelzig, Hans Scharoun and Bruno and Max Taut; the Netherlands: J.J.P. Oud and Mart Stam; France: Le Corbusier; Austria: Josef Frank; Belgium: Victor Bourgeois. The Weissenhofsiedlung also served as the model for a number of other model estates organised along similar lines. Examples include the Werkbund exhibition in Breslau (1929), the Neubühl estate in Zürich (1930-1932) and the Czechoslovakian experiments Brno (1928) and Baba (1932).

Le Corbusier, *La Ville Radieuse: une réponse à Moscou*, 1929-1930



ideology became political and the Modern Movement began to present itself internationally as the vanguard of an alternative, liberated society, it could take a stand against the reactionary criticism of the national socialists and the Deutsche Heimatschutz and thus prevent the impending schism, 14 years after a similar schism had struck the Werkbund-Ausstellung in Cologne. At the same time, the ideal of unity could thereby extend beyond the borders of architecture and, as a progressive synthesis at the architectural level, culminate in a more complex urban organism, which in turn created the conditions for comprehensive regional and national planning. That led to the emergence – starting from the prototype (developed in the Bauhaus laboratory), and by way of serial architecture and the international style (the Weissenhofsiedlung) – of the functional approach to urban planning and design (the CIAM code), which conversely influenced the design of individual houses and rooms and the relationships between architectural 'cells'. The first CIAM conferences, in the period from 1929 to 1933, are especially clear illustrations of this artistic postulate of visual continuity in the production chain from 'sofa cushion to metropolis'.[18]

THE PERIOD OF CRISIS AND RECONSTRUCTION (1929-1957)

The promise of this approach to urbanism, which CIAM believed it could promulgate on the basis of its social and

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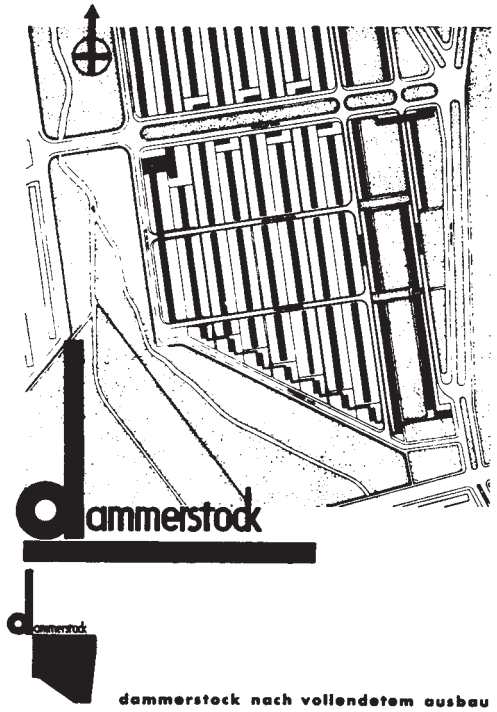
After the initial meeting in La Sarraz (1928), the following three CIAM conferences dealt with the themes of housing for people at the subsistence level (Frankfurt am Main, 1929), the functional housing estate (Brussels, 1930) and the functional city (Athens, 1933). In 1942, even before the Second World War ended, Le Corbusier established the Assemblee de constructions pour une rénovation architectural (l'Ascoral), which can be regarded as a first attempt to introduce 'a comprehensive architectural doctrine for spatial planning' at the national and even international level.



Walter Gropius, Dammerstocksiedlung, Karlsruhe, 1928

political message, was never realised. The international reorganisation of capital and labour resulting from the Stock Market Crash of 1929 made it impossible to sustain the formal ideology of the 1920s, whether in the Soviet Union with its five-year plans, Hitler's fascist dictatorship in Germany, or even the social-democratic West of the New Deal. Precisely as it reached its apotheosis, precisely in the first five years of CIAM, the period when the Modern Movement achieved public recognition and appeared to reach its apex at the Athens conference (1933), it became clear that it would have to revise its theories of planning substantially. Confronted with polyfunctionality, multiplicity and the disorganic character of modern society, urban design could no longer be viewed as the transformation of social forms envisaged in the artistic laboratory into new metropolitan spaces, but rather as a form of instrumental and programmatic consistency, of an entirely different nature from that which was taking shape in the unified architectural code. Given that the synthesising approach of Bauhaus philosophy referred directly to 'productive dialogue' between the individual and the collective, to the power-free dialectic between collective order and personal freedom, which characterised the ideal prehistory of civil society (that is, the ideal democracy),[19] it was by its very nature incapable of adapting to the new forms of state interventionism in the free-market economy that derived from Keynes' 'General Theory'. Its political and ideological message, along with its ideal of unity, thus rapidly lost its relevance, and the Modern Movement found that it could only sustain itself on the basis of technological and economic considerations, which allowed no more than minimal attention to aesthetic principles.

This inadequacy of the architectural thinking of the 'old modern masters' prompted the post-Second World War generation to rethink the formal tasks of the spatial design disciplines. Opposing the CIAM approach, which had become rigid and doctrinaire, they criticised the view of urbanism presented in the Athens Charter, arguing that it was spatially sterile and socially outdated, because it seemed to overlook something valuable, namely the existential and absolute values of human life. 'They [the old modern masters, ed.] cheated society by neglecting the essence of the contemporary age. No one can truly live in what they concoct, although they themselves think otherwise.'[20] Following the 1953 CIAM conference in Aix-en-Provence, in the firm belief that the Modern Movement's technological determinism was an anachronism, these 'angry young men' formed a relatively loose-knit group known as Team 10, which placed new emphasis on individual ideas and opinions – if necessary, even at the cost of the ideal of unity, which they saw as an unhealthy obsession. In its stead, they proposed interdisciplinarity, voluntary collaboration, which could make urban complexity manageable by marshalling greater expertise, and hence lead the way to the urban design of the future. No longer would any abstract 'master plan' stand between the spatial designer and the architectural object of his work, and no longer would any general, formal codex be permitted to organise the form and content of separate, individual architectural creations, because urbanism would be based on the 'core', that is, that which forms a community within the settlement (and the architectural discipline). The field of urban development was thus sidelined by 'an overgrowth of proportionally determined architectural, urban, and planning elements'.[21] Architecture was given the central role and expected to generate urban design from the bottom up.

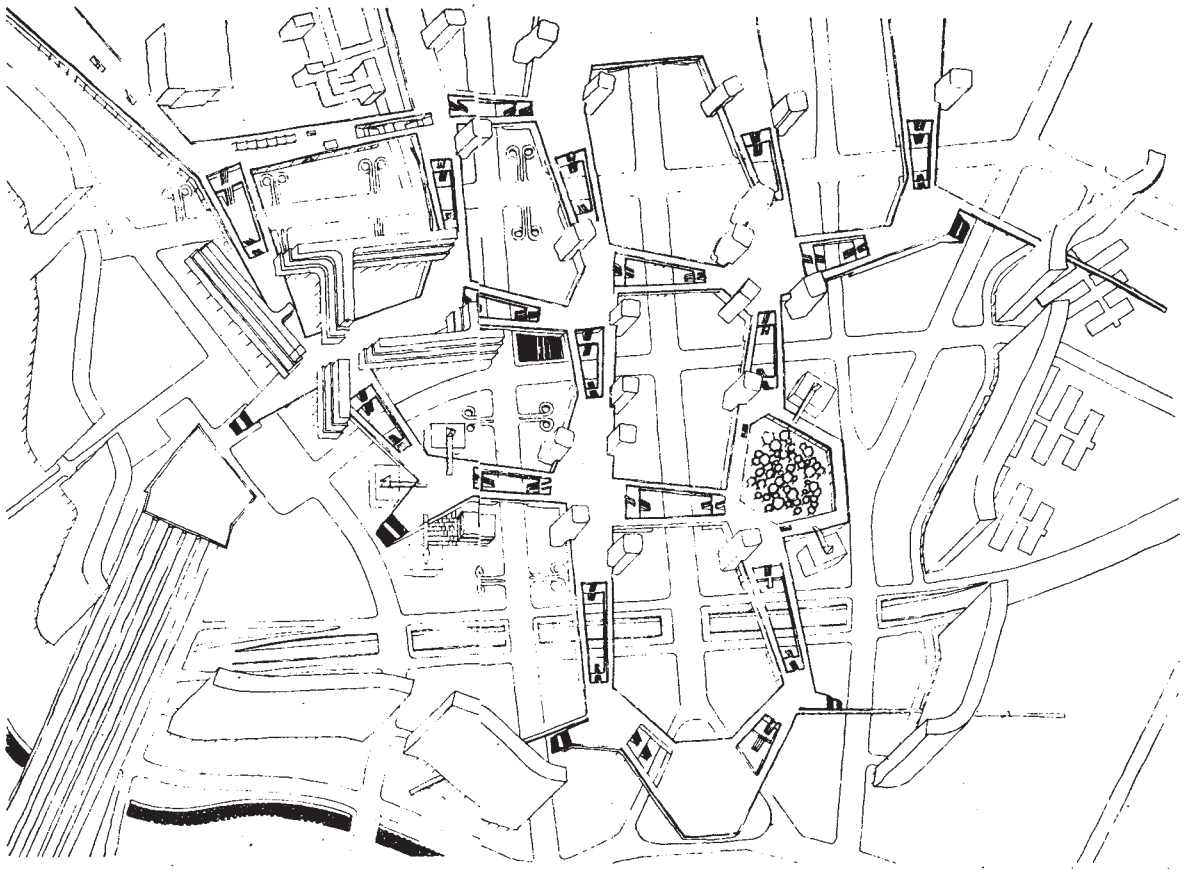
This same approach, with its individualist tendency, not only surfaced in Team 10's programme of work, but also informed its neo-humanistic approach to design work, which centred not on theorising, but on actual building.[22] Especially after the disintegration of the CIAM (Dubrovnik, 1956), it became possible for this 'pragmatic account of another way of thinking', this architectural urbanism that made reference to the core, the habitat and the kasbah, to become the dominant design code of the Modern Movement and thus dominate international architectural thinking during the revival that took place in the post-war reconstruction period.

19
'Democracy is shaped by two contrasting manifestations. On the one hand, it is founded on the diversity of the spirit, which results from an intense and individual action; on the other hand, it is based on a common denominator of regional expressions which, drawing on the cumulative experience of successive generations, gradually become able to distinguish the more arbitrary from the characteristic and essential. Although these two manifestations appear irreconcilable, I believe a merger will have to take place; otherwise, we will end up as robots.' Walter Gropius, *Scope of Total Architecture* (New York, 1935), XIV, as quoted in Herbert, *The Synthetic Vision of Walter Gropius*, op. cit. (note 10), 19.

20
Aldo van Eyck, address given at the Team 10 meeting in Otterlo, September 1959, in: Alison Smithson (ed.), *Team 10 Primer* (London, 1974), 20.

21
Umberto Barbieri and Cees Boekraad, *Kritiek en Ontwerp. Proeven van architectuurkritiek*, Sunschrift 169 (Nijmegen, 1982), 50.

22
See Smithson, *Team 10 Primer*, op. cit. (note 20), 3-24.



Detail, submission for the 'Hauptstadt Berlin' design competition by Alison and Peter Smithson and Peter Sigmonde-Wonke, 1957-1958

HANSAVIERTEL (1953)

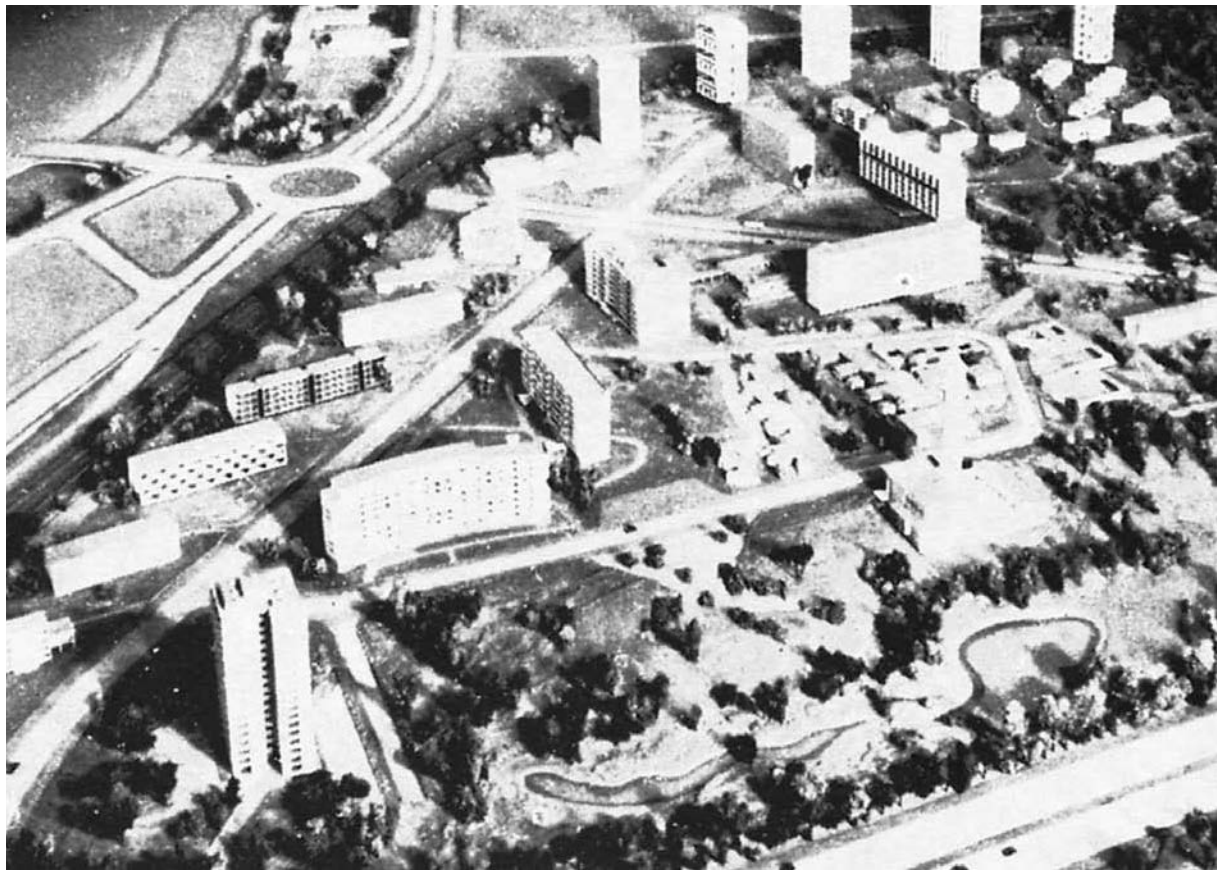
The fragmentation that inevitably resulted, however, could not express any message, social or otherwise, for an alternative

future practice of urban design. All too rapidly, the Team 10 code became capricious and arbitrary, and therefore antithetical to urbanism.

Less than a year after the CIAM became permanently inactive, the Hansaviertel in Berlin – a model estate intended as a euphoric example of the *Wirtschaftswunder* – once again clearly demonstrated this inability to make good, after 30 years, on the promise of the Weissenhofsiedlung for the field of urbanism. This project – which claimed to offer the 'architecture of freedom' and the 'planning of the city of tomorrow' and involved 48 architects from 13 countries[23] – was meant to win the world over to the progressive, modern spirit of Western democratism, as opposed to the purportedly conformist social realism of East Berlin in the reconstruction period.[24] On balance, however, it was a adverse development for architecture and urbanism, because the event overlooked the field's duties to society. Despite the propagandistic and pathetically demagogic pretensions of this excessively personalised architecture, there was little cultural substance behind its haughty exterior, and instead it seemed as though the avant-garde had turned their clock back to the earliest stage of the Modern Movement. Whereas the Weissenhof project had at least presented a single, international architectural style, the Hansaviertel exhibition had nothing to show but an uncoordinated, idiosyncratic collection of individual architectural personalities. True, they proposed intriguing solutions to particular problems, but

23
Including Alvar Aalto, Walter Gropius, Oscar Niemeyer and Van den Broek and Bakema.

24
See, for instance, Harm Tilman's article on Berlin, 'Berlijn, veranderende stad: De wederopbouw van de hoofdstad van de D.D.R.', *Wonen TA/BK* 6/7 1984, 41-53.



Overview of the building model for the Hansaviertel, 1956-1957

the district's green spaces were not enough to tie their work together into a coherent urban whole. 'What was intended to be a cultural prototype of Western society became, at best, an artistic exception, legitimated in ideological terms.'[25] The ideal of unity, the dialectic approach to art and society, appeared to have been utterly defeated, and the avant-garde as such could no longer take a stand against the impending unconditional surrender to the contradictions, imbalances and chaos that characterised the modern metropolis. In response to this alarming prospect, architecture and urbanism tried to regain their cultural significance through the semantic and procedural approaches, respectively, by retreating into a lasting autonomy. The fact that, in the process, they not only scrapped the social programme of the Modern Movement, but also exacerbated the growing division of labour and fragmentation of cultural action systems, was seen not merely as a banality, but as one of the greatest feats of modern architecture, accomplished with great difficulty after the rigid straitjacket of CIAM's functionalism. Now that 'practical content' had been dispensed with, once again anything seemed possible in design work, which could make its highest priority the pursuit of constant novelty and an ever-changing variety of forms and symbols.

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Vittorio Lampugnani, 'The Berlin tradition of architectural exhibitions', *Architectural Design* 53, 1/2 1983, 14.

POSTMODERNISM AND THE CURRENT DEBATE ON URBANISM

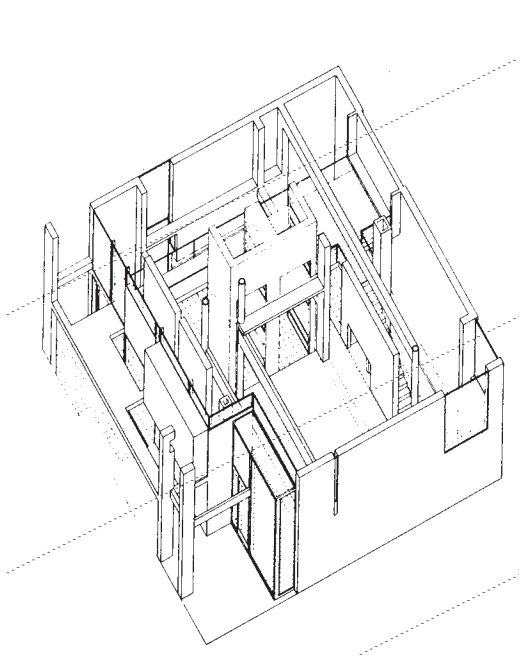
In highly simplified terms, this growing independence – and, consequently, the increasing specialisation of individual design practices – has characterised the last 20 years of the architectural and urbanist disciplines. While Team 10 and Forum were still trying to maintain some degree of connection to the social context of their design activities, the introduction of the linguistic method in the design process firmly categorised the spatial object of manipulation as a formal, independent, autonomous knowledge complex, which therefore went beyond the domain of everyday ideological, political and economic reality. In contrast to both the functional and the humanist approach to design, which attributed a message (social or otherwise) to architecture, the postmoderns showed an increasing tendency to distance themselves from the cultural and political ideas associated with traditional approaches to design, ideas which seemed overblown to them, and instead posited that modern (and postmodern) architecture was a 'formal language'. The focus was no longer on direct engagement with social and functional conditions, but on a 'theoretical discourse' relating exclusively to what the postmoderns claimed was the only objective subject matter at architecture's disposal: the architectural form itself. By concentrating solely on the communicative relationship between individual images and signs, between the form and the receptacle, they believed that they could transcend the functional meaning of form, instead ascribing an intrinsic value to architectural concepts.[26]

26
See, for instance, Peter Eisenman, *House X* (New York, 1982).

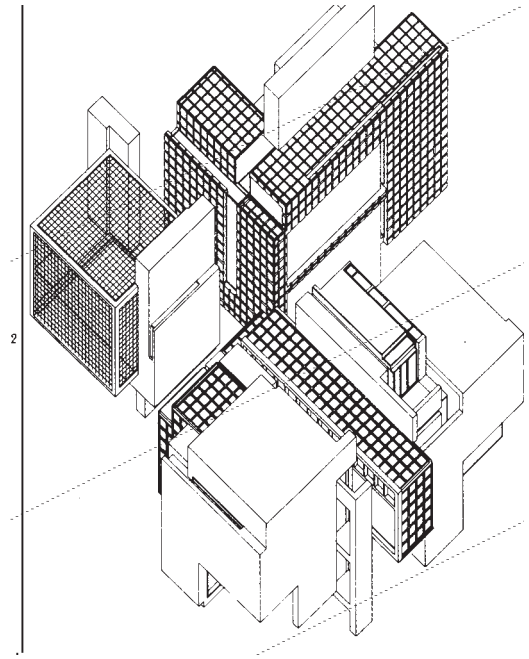
This obsessive quest for the ontology of architecture was, by its nature, drawn to the internal organisation and aesthetic proportions of the architectural object, to a closed and purely self-referential formal system which no longer had any serious connection to reality whatsoever. In this process, the means of design and techniques of production also became aesthetic objects in their own right, and thus no longer amenable to any functional or organisational interpretation.

This definitive sequestration of postmodern architectural thinking into autonomous spheres, cut off from the real world, thus became more painful for two reasons: first, the impending impoverishment of the avant-garde significance of traditional modernism and, second, the increasing specialisation and fragmentation of aesthetic thinking at the level of cultural systems. With the return of a practice espousing *l'art pour l'art* and the accompanying undialectical application of, and reference to, the history of architectural design practices, the postmoderns adopted 'the present of the past' as their principal theme, thereby betraying both their neo-conservatism and their unequivocal antimodernism.[27] The architect's position, the realisation of the past in the solidified present, is no longer the central issue; instead, a new type of formal historicism is emphasised, one which detaches the aesthetic effect of the historical plan from its original context and introduces this fact as new material in current design practice. Cutting across periods in this way may seem to restore the architectural continuity

27
See Habermas, 'Het moderne – een onvoltooid project', op. cit. (note 3), 126. It was this position that led Habermas to investigate the nature of the consciousness of the moderns. Arie Graafland, too, tried to use this as the starting point for a theoretical understanding of the postmodern conception of architecture, see Arie Graafland, 'Kritiek & Ontwerp; ontwerp-onderwijs', *0* no. 5, summer 1983, 19-32.



Peter Eisenman, House I, 1968



Peter Eisenman, House X, 1976

of modern building, but by disregarding the specific character of the knowledge involved, it also accelerates the process by which the practice of spatial planning and design disintegrates into its separate components, each of which can only define a value orientation in relation to one knowledge complex. While architects have gotten away with this exclusivity so far (because it is the built object itself, rather than the theorising, that legitimates social acceptance, the postmodernists tell us), because the discipline of urban design is directly linked to a more complex field with a *sui generis* unity, the tendency towards specialisation and autonomy has played a fundamental role in the recently generally acknowledged debacle in urban design work. The attempts now being made to preserve a degree of 'unity' in modern architecture, to preserve the integration of individual components, are problematic by definition within the framework of formalist thinking. In this context, Jürgen Habermas makes an interesting point in his Adorno lecture. Habermas, too, sees a direct link between the increasing segmentation of cultural spheres of value – the growing differentiation of science, morality and art – and the autonomisation of sectors adapted to specialised tasks, which have branched off from a path that has continued in everyday practice as if its rightness were self-evident. In this process of ever-greater autonomisation of individual practices with respect to those of the broad public, the aesthetic aspect, instead of being a means to an end, can become an end in itself. As a result, architecture may from now on have its own internal history, which shuts out social and other extrinsic criteria that could conceivably bring about communicative rationality and interaction between specialisms. This is because in the autonomous and specialised handling of specific problems, one only ever draws one's own intellectual positions and the knowledge belonging to one's own field, without recourse to other action systems or to social practice. Therefore, for Habermas, artistic deviation from everyday practice is not only the problem at the root of the fragmentation of the range of cultural action systems, but also, as such, forms the basis for the doomed attempts to do away, at this late stage, with the cultures of these groups of experts.[28]

It is precisely because the current debate on urbanism seems to have associated itself with the formalistic design approach of the postmoderns, thus demanding its own autonomy, that the discipline of urban design – viewed against this epistemological background – is farther removed than ever from its proclaimed objective of bridging the gap between the planning process and architecture. While in the 1920s and '30s urban design could take a socially engaged form, drawing on the intersubjectively created codex and mediating between art and industry, and as soon as it became political could, likewise, indicate the programmatic and spatial conditions required for national and regional measures, the return to pure elitist formalism seems to have ruled out any such communicative practice by definition. Because the current debate on

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Habermas, ibid., 133/1.

urbanism dispenses with the practical content, social integration and formal interaction that should characterise the artistically successful and socially responsible practice of urban design, it will, in all probability, also fail to mediate between the architectural fragments within the scope of a single code, let alone safeguard an aesthetic conception of urban design. The discipline as such is now producing its own aporias and can no longer hold any position with authority.

DIE INTERNATIONALE BAUAUSSTELLUNG BERLIN (1987)

The Internationale Bauausstellung (IBA) in Berlin, the end date of which has already been shifted to 1987, does not seem to present good prospects. Despite the central programme of this building exhibition, which emphatically faces up to the problem that individual architectural works and the city need to be brought into a positive, constructive relationship with one another, and despite the fact that the IBA – unlike the above-mentioned *Bauausstellungen* – is deliberately and voluntarily confronting existing urban structures, in this *Berichtsjahr* it seems reasonable to conclude that the IBA will achieve no more than the expansion of a few excellent works of architecture.[29] Given its exorbitant solutions and the differences between individual projects – a few fragments, such as Krier's project in Ritterstrasse and Baller's residences on the Fraenkel-ufer have already been completed – it appears more likely that the avant-garde aspirations of the IBA – which has also been called the Internationale Bluff Aktion – will result in the fetishisation of the formally incidental than that it will gradually set in motion a process that can turn the city back into an integrated whole. Because it focuses directly on the 'great masters' whose stars are currently rising,[30] and thus often relies almost exclusively on the one-sided, half-formed formal approach to design, the IBA escapade stands almost no chance of contributing meaningfully to Berlin's urban reorganisation. In my opinion, this impotence of the practice of urban design says a great deal about not only this particular international exhibition, but *the entire Western approach to design*.

Instead, this article has suggested the following conclusion about the problem of urbanism: *As long as the disciplines of architecture and urbanism do not formulate positions on the social message of their design activities, as long as they refuse to take up the practical content inherent in form, the avant-garde significance of the modern will progressively diminish and – by following fashionable trends and developing specialised working methods – inevitably disintegrate into its incidental fragments.* Against this backdrop, the future prospects for urban designers are anything but rosy. In contrast, however, a socially engaged approach – which takes architecture and urbanism to be two distinct but inseparable parts of a single spatial practice – still generates polemic. The right approach does not locate the link between form and content in a linear dimension, in which one follows logically from the other ('form follows function' or 'function follows form'), but rather in a dialectical relationship which shows that the fields of operation of form and content are inseparable – joined by an elastic cord, as it were. Once the content of spatial design relates not only to technical design issues, but also to social content, the form can absorb the historical and social postulates so essential to modern-day projects and make them inherent to itself. The more productive approach thus provides direct mediation between design and criticism, between artistic creation and the formulation of norms, and thereby operates in both the domain of the aesthetic and expressive, and that of moral and practical knowledge complexes. To arrive at a two-part design production process of this kind, however, it seems we must return to square one – that is, if we ever really moved beyond it.

Translated by David McKay

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See, for instance, Collin Rowe, 'Comments on the I.B.A. proposals', *Architectural Design 53*, 1/2 1983, 121-127. See also Maarten Kloos, 'Berlijn, stad van brede allees en straten die van niets naar niets leiden', *De Volkskrant*, 12 October 1984; 13/19. Furthermore, the special issue of *Arch+* gives a clear overview of the types of reservations one might have about the IBA, *Arch+*, no. 66, 'I.B.A. – Halbzeit', December 1982.

30
Including John Hejduk, Aldo Rossi, Rob Krier, Peter Eisenman, Oriol Bohigas and Oswald Mathias Ungers.

Rob Krier, housing block in Ritterstrasse, 1980-1982

Inke and Heinrich Baller, construction against a firewall of a tenement block