The State of the City

JON MICHAEL SCHWARTING
New York Institute of Technology

Urban design, like architecture, proceeds within a realm of multiple theories and directions. The history of architecture can be observed as, among other pursuits, having simultaneously had a traditional or reactionary discourse along with a progressive or future oriented polemic. It is quite easy to find this in every stylistic period including the modern movement when for instance, Edwin Lutyens was producing his principle houses into the 1920's and the Viceroy's house in New Delhi from 1919 – 29 (fig. 1) and John Russell Pope's National Gallery of 1938-9, while LeCorbusier created The Maison Domino, his "Five-Points" and the villa's at Garche and Poissy between 1915-29 (fig. 2). This idea of opposing directions was discussed in H.R. Hitchcock's *Modern Architecture*, distinguishing between what he termed, with obvious connotations, the "new-tradition" and the "new-pioneers."[1] The design of cities can also be seen to have these dualistic orientations. We only need to compare Walter B. Griffin's plan of Canberra of 1911 (fig. 3) to Le Corbusier's Ville Contemporaine of 1922 (fig. 4) to observe this.

Since the end of the 1960's, we have witnessed the creation of the "post-modern" with these same, if not more heightened, contradictory arguments. First, in the early 1970's we had the argument for a return to tradition. A new eclecticism of style was advocated in which any historical style was better to imitate than the modern movement, which was seen to have failed, almost destroying society, cities and architecture itself (fig. 5). This can be related to a post "60's" social, cultural and political conservative backlash, which continues today, evolving from American late capitalist theories such as Daniel Bell's "post industrial society."[2] One can readily observe in recent times that the affluent private residence or "gated" community; and the predominant corporation headquarters are most likely to be this version of post modernism. The return to tradition has become an icon of the grand, the monumental, and even the imperial.

Following shortly after the successes of this definition of "post-modern," was an alternative argument and visual style called deconstruction that began in the late 1970's in both architecture and urbanism (fig. 6). This was proclaimed to be progressive, derived from the structuralist, post-structuralist and finally, deconstruction theories found in European philosophies, linguistic studies and literary and cultural criticism. Although these had their origins in late Marxist theory, particularly the Frankfurt School, the architectural manifestation has had little interest in this ideological base or its application.

Both these late modern theories or directions have ideological origins or connections and meanings. One is related to the conquest of multi-national global capitalism, and the other avoids a late-socialist position for a liberal capitalists opposition or alternative to the theories of late capitalism.[3] This later position espouses an interest in less politically oriented concepts of social, scientific and physical fragmentation, indeterminancy and chaos as appropriate late 20th century representation. It presents a skepticism that is a result of a belief that rationalism and even knowledge itself have been ideologically exploited and could no longer be trusted.

There has been a third direction that emerged in the 1960's and was named "contextualism."[4] Although different arguments, Kevin Lynch's 1960, *Image of the City* (fig. 7), Gordon Cullen's 1961, *Townscape* (fig. 8), Colin Rowe's 1973, *Collage City* (fig. 9), and Rob Krier's 1979 *Urban Space* (fig. 10) are fundamental attempts to find ways to understand the existing historical city and to design projects that will fit into, and reinforce, the existing social and physical context.[5] Through its interest to fit into history, it broke with Modern architecture's polemic of the new functional systems, claimed to be derived from different criteria than previously pursued. Although the theories of Lynch, Rowe or Krier hint at, and at times suggest, a mimicking of history, it is less essential and consequential to their arguments than the New Urbanist theory. They have the capacity to derive contextual relationships from concepts and principles found in history rather than a mimesis of previous styles. Thus, though these theories would seem to be more conservative than the deconstruction position, the fact that deconstruction theory makes no claim to being avant garde or progressive, leaves them both in a kind of liberal middle ground. As late 20th century phenomena, it is interesting to note that all three are essentially formulated on aesthetic and visual principles rather than social, economic or political theoretical arguments. Contextualism is a chameleon-like, non-style, interested in amelioration, while deconstruction proposes a new image that is highly distinguishable in its juxtaposition to the existing city (fig. 11). Contextualism is inherently interested in the existing city while the New Urbanism is essentially interested in new towns located on open sites (fig. 12).

THE MODERN CITY AND SUBURB

As stated, the problematic situation of theories and developments in late 20th century urbanism have paralleled those in architecture, and perhaps for better reason. Although the Modern architecture "bashing" levied by both post-modernisms is far from convincing or accepted, 20th century urbanism has been more clearly problematic and susceptible to criticism. The developments of early 20th century C.I.A.M.; dominated by LeCorbusier; and the mid 20th century Team Ten, based proposals on the assumption that the city would or could go away, if it hadn't already, as a result of WW I and II. America developed its own version of this in the 1960's, with the government sponsored "Urban Renewal" program, proposing replacement of urban centers by buying them up, demolishing them and starting over. These movements were fueled by modern functional theory arguing the primacy of buildings being designed from

the "inside-out" and producing pure-form objects requiring "light, air and space."[6] Functionalism heightened the disdain as well as the crisis of not knowing what to do with the existing historical city.

The modern city attempted to address the economical need to save time. The non-spatial development of the telephone, copy, fax and computer addressed this need with little physical impact. The automobile and the high-speed road, however, required a physical resolution. Although integrated in early utopian schemes, the high-way in reality was overlaid or imposed on the existing city. The modern compositional strategies of collage could not, however, make this successful as a rational system that would modernize and improve the city.

The automobile was also crucial in creating another important 20th century phenomena of the suburb that addressed the perceived needs of the emerging middle-classes. They were no longer able to cope with the cities that they had flocked to in previous generations seeking economic success. The suburb originated historically in the ruling classes' interest to live in their ownership of both the city and the country. [7] This historical meaning fit the upward mobility of the middle class to own property and create a protected and secure private realm. In America with the announcement that the *frontier* was officially conquered after the 1890 census, the *myth* of this definition of Americana was recreated in the move to the suburbs. This was assisted by the federal guaranteed mortgage system and the developers economic exploitation of the new surrogate *frontier*, by buying large amounts of land and subdividing it. The dislocation of the dwelling from the place of work or from culture or entertainment was made palatable by the automobile and the other *mythical* necessity in America — mobility. In its exodus, it failed to recognize the importance of the proximity of cultural provisions in the public realm that existed in the populated city.

This depopulation resulted in the decay of the cities at the beginning of the 20th century, having grown and swollen from the promises of the industrial revolution. It was to be inhabited only by those who could afford to safely occupy the wealthy enclaves of protected areas in the center of the city or those who could not afford to escape; ie. the "underclass" of unprotected and exploited workers and "minorities." With the exodus of the residential component of the city, we now have a logical next phase of business and commerce also moving out of the city. This has not however moved to the suburb to create a new kind of urbanism. Rather, it has been located at the edges of existing cities, to affordable and available sites along existing transportation routes, in order to ease the suburban com-mute.

THE LEGACY OF MODERNISM

The progressive concerns of the modern movement operated on two fronts. One was to assume the historical city had amoratized and could and should be rebuilt to accommodate new functionalist needs of the modern age. The other was to assume that, while the city would crumble or be abandoned as obsolete, a new kind of city could be constructed on new alternative sites, to address contemporary society. The former was represented by the projects of Le Corbusier (post Ville Contemporaine) and his legacy of CIAM and Team 10, and American "Urban Renewal" (fig. 13-15). Of the latter, we have most notably, Ebenezer Howard's "Garden City," Tony Garnier's "Cite Industrielle," LeCorbusier's "VilleContemporaine," and Frank Lloyd Wright's "Broadacre City" (fig. 16–18). It is worth noting that none of these has been a critically acclaimed success as theory or in practice.

By the 1970's, modern urban design theory and production was considered to be more destitute than modern architecture. The two post-modern directions have proclaimed to be changing all that. However much they argue for a departure from the modern move-ment, they seem to be inextricably bound to it. The "New Urban-ism" which has now been endorsed by the Federal Government —

HUD Program — is overtly connected to the conservative post-modern interest in eclecticism as opposed to modernism (fig. 19).[8] However, like certain modern theories, it has taken the position of abandoning the city. It must be seen as a legacy whose lineage includes Ebenezer Howard's Garden City theory and its modifica-tion, from a socialist theory for self-sufficient towns, to its suburban American capitalist transformation by Clarence Stein and Henry Wright's New Town Movement (fig. 20). Unless the New-Urban-ism changes or expands its agenda, it distinguishes itself by its concern for new towns rather than an involvement in the existing city and its scale, which contradict much of its theory. To date, it has also not addressed the predictable impending crisis of *late-suburbia*, which may, like the existing city, become a problematic social condition.

The New Urbanism, or New Tradition therefore relates to the modernist "demise of the city" paradigm. As proposals for autono-mous development, it also shares the modern movement's enthusi-asm for the isolated object. Although it seems to oppose the Frank Lloyd Wright's modern transformation of the American town in his Broadacre City, it is never-the-less bound to his concept that Ameri-can democracy is anti-city and requires a fundamental connection to nature rather than culture.

Deconstruction, on the other hand, is related to the Team 10 and Urban Renewal concepts which propose enclaves of the new to be located unsympathetically, if not with disdain, within the existing city. Rather than purporting to be a system (as they are theoretically opposed to system), which can eventually replace all of the existing, these projects tend to be totally independent aesthetic objects sited in isolation to context, very much like the early 20th century modern functionalist objects. This seems to be the case with much of the urban work of Gerry, Liebeskin and, to some extent, Koolhaas, who are proponents of deconstruction. (fig. 21).

The New Urbanists have designed traditionally *composed* "gated communities" that imply the end of cities and propose to take law and order into the private realm. This is a more radical libertarian ideology than the deconstruction theory of fragmentation and chaos which may have a critical position on the existing physical order, but proposes no clear ideological alternative other than what might be concluded from a faint hint of anarchy. Contextualism has some of its roots in the theory and work of Camillio Sitte (fig. 22), and seems politically neutral beyond advocating the importance of the city and it continuity. While one proposes to abandon the city and the other to disintegrate it, the third, the contextual strategy, is to sensitively humanize the existing city for 21st century habitation.

So we appear at the end of the 20th century to be without a progressive theory for architecture or urbanism. But is there no possibility of the progressive use of tradition?[9] With all that we have learned about the problems of modern architecture's radical position to replace the city, is it a contradiction, and thus not possible, to have a progressive agenda to save it? The contextualist position suggests this potential?

THE HISTORICAL BASE OF CONTEXTUALISM

Contextualism as a theory, is based, to a large degree, on how cities have grown over time. There are numerous canonical ex-amples of urban projects that exemplified a sensitive understanding of the existing morphology of the urban fabric while creating new progressive developments. These can be seen as assessing the problems of the existing city and finding modern solutions to transform it to become useful and pleasurable for present society. The Romans additions to conquered cities and the Renaissance transformation of medieval cities are two examples. Both the ancient Vitruvius and the Renaissance theorists Alberti described the ideal city, but the real work of their times was to insert these theories into rethinking the existing city so as to both reinforce the existing structure and insinuate the ideal one.[10] They constructed

utopian paradigms which enlightened the transformation of the existing urban condition more than requiring literal execution. Cities conquered by Romans were transformed from their Greek or other origins by the principles described by Vitruvius for an ideal city (fig. 23-24). The transformation was an exchange between the existing morphology and the ideal program. Even the rigorous planning formula for the castrum, garrison town was varied by circumstances.

In the Italian Renaissance the same strategy emerged. Renaissance architects designed ideal or utopian cities and wrote treatises on their organization. Ultimately their significance was less the need to literally realize them, than to be influenced by them in the remaking of the existing medieval conditions. The potential to transform this existing reality in order to embody a "re-birth" of society and culture through changed social, political, economic and physical conditions, seems to have been the ultimate rather than compromised goal. This is like Karl Manheim's description of a utopian proposition as having the dialectical potential to transform existing reality, which in turn, transform the utopian construct to make it become more instrumental.[11] This can be seen to have occurred in Rome, Florence and other Italian cities that grew and were modified in the 15th and 16th centuries[12] (fig. 25-28).

These two examples suggest that progressive change is possible and might question the demand for starting over. Accepting the existing city certainly means that a totally different city cannot be made. There must be an amelioration between new ideas or structures and the existing. It does not mean, however, that the new must be compromised, or its intentions negated. Transformation is a powerful architectural concept that can be utilized to effect progressive change. The evolution of the Louvre in Paris from 1546 to 1878 with nearly two dozen architects involved, demonstrates the evolution of an urban building within its setting. St. Peters was transformed from its early 4th century Christian basilica (not to mention its Roman foundations), by the Renaissance plans for reconstruction by Bramante. Numerous other architects made plans before Michelangelo's was built. It then received Baroque modifications by others leading to Bernini's work on the church and the piazza to 1667. This kind of evolution is a characteristic of all cities. Growth and change are incremental and many significant urban complexes have rarely represented a single idea.

THE MODERN CITY AND THE HISTORICAL CITY

Even though there may be obvious reason to be critical of the Modern movement, a number of urban concepts were proposed that appear to still be relevant today. The city should accommodate modern speed through rational systems of circulation and transportation (Le Corbusier's 7 routes[13]). The residence and work place needs adequate light, air and space. Housing must be designed to accommodate and be affordable to the influx of the modern working class. Modern society must provide housing for everyone. 20th century work such as heavy industry, corporate offices, etc. must be accommodated in the city with their requisite needs to function efficiently. Modern materials and the science of construction should be utilized to reduce construction cost to create efficient, durable buildings. These modernist demands cannot be decried or ignored.

However, in its zeal to achieve these goals, the Modern means proposed required that significant elements of the historical city be abandoned. Elements such as the spatially defined street and open space, or mixed use were considered to be so obsolete that modern thinking and building could replace the whole city more economically than deal with it. We have subsequently questioned the loss of some of these. Perhaps the most significant of these is the street. The street provides a space for light and air, a space for circulation, a space that gives order to the city, and a space defined by building surfaces that express their particular existence and presence as well as the definition of the conglomerate public realm. In dialogue with the street, in the historical city, were other types of defined open

space. The plaza and open space park, were utilized for commemoration, light and air, recreation, leisure or communal interaction, as well as possible focus on buildings of public social significance (religious, civic, etc.). With the streets, these other kinds of open space created a hierarchical spatial order of the voids in the city.

The historical city had a system of separating uses vertically more than horizontally. Single buildings might have industry, business and housing layered vertically from the ground up. In order to accommodate the conditions brought on by modern industry, and the needs of housing, this concept has been lost to modern planning and replaced by horizontal zoning which separated housing from work.

The city typically also had a center and edges. According to Joseph Ryckwert, this was established through ritual and had symbolic significance as fundamental to its formal organization.[14] Until the 19th century, cities had centers for civic purposes of the town hall, the church, the market or the well. Its edges, most frequently established by fortification, with the gate, often as ceremonial as it was fortified, announced entry and distinguish inside from outside, even after frequently being transformed to boulevards.

These characteristics of street and open spaces, center and edge were the components of a hierarchically organized plan, both formally and socially, into a "fabric" in which the voids, as spaces, provided as much, if not more, of a structure as the solids of buildings.

THE PROBLEMS OF TODAY

Besides the need to right the wrongs of the Modern movement, there are critical conditions that have changed in cities since the end of WWII. These too require that we change even the concerns once held by the Modern movement.

With the development of the elevator, urban densities and the building fabric, which had been a more uniform walk-up height, changed in proportion and scale.

Zoning policies have succeeded in preserving light and air and have separated the uses that once were together. An evaluation is needed to access whether this separation has been beneficial and if zoning is able to reflect social and economic changes.

Heavy industry has become obsolete or moved to more efficient facilities on "green sites" outside the city leaving abandoned massive buildings in the city, once used for manufacturing or warehousing, vacant.

New unplanned privatized urban sub-centers, "edge cities" of unrelated office "parks" and shopping "malls" with their requisite parking lots have developed along transportation routes leading from cities or at highway intersections. Their physical and social organization has been created piecemeal by developers rather than governmental civic oriented plans. They have been realized before they could be known or understood.

With the middle class workplace having also moved out of the city, the suburbs have become independent entities, but remain without focus. The "planned unit development" concept has provided greater density but these ègated' communities are even more autonomous than the early suburbs and have not created a sense of neighborhood or provided the cultural and urban amenities that a greater density could provide.

Many cities whose historical centers were not erased by Urban Renewal are being revived for tourism to satisfy a nostalgia for a "sense of place" that cities once possessed. Tourism, which is rising higher on cities list of sources of economy around the world, however, doesn't require that anyone live there except the service industry that maintains them.

Contextualism is based on an understanding of the physical, social, economic and political structure of the existing city whether or not this structure is clear and has qualities or is latent and in need of clarification and reformation. It is the critical base and must be understood and analyzed. This goes to the heart of the endless debate and research of the relationship of the physical and the social, form

to meaning, the "shape of content". A broad based program is needed that includes a concern for all constituents and we must analyze its ideological content. Whereas present needs may be easily assembled and assessed, it is much more difficult to program the future, particularly as a singular scenario. In most general terms, a program must posit the significance and value of urbanism in present society and a continuum of concerns.

CONSTRUCTING A PROGRAM FOR TODAY

The following program could result from a re-evaluation of these outlined concerns of the modern movement and more recent urban developments, in relation to a progressive program that would address transforming the existing city into a vital social and cultural place. Many of these have been the urban program since the beginning of progressive city planning and must always be reinterpreted. Such a program must consider:
   • A comprehensive analysis and understanding of the existing city and its' regions physical, social, cultural and economic structures as the context.
   • A program should address the possibility of housing and work for everyone. This must include the city and its region as a symbiotic whole.
   • A program should address the provision of adequate civic institutions such as schools, libraries, medical facilities, community facilities, open spaces and parks, etc. with the understanding that they represent the ideology of the society.
   • A re-consideration for designing from the outside-in, in a dialectic with it's opposite modern functional polemic of designing from the inside-out. Although that might compromise geometric purity or 'objectness', it means an expansion of the concept of function to include context, rather than a compromise.
   • A program should address a re-examination of zoning to question its validity and effectiveness for appropriately protecting common good. What kind of work can rationally occur in the city where land is more expensive and the movement of goods is more costly. Perhaps vertical zoning of the historical city should be re-examined. Planning diagrams could be in section as well as plan.
   • A re-examination of circulation and transportation systems to be able to adequately provide appropriate mass transportation. Integrate all systems of movement from walking to flying. Also a system is needed for efficiently managing shipping and delivery of goods that are produced for export or needed to be imported.
   The "contextual" movement is premised and depends upon the existence of the historical city. It assumes that a latent or developed morphology of physical form, social organization, economic forces and political structure exists and these are open, through understanding and analysis, to reinforcement and/or transformation. Urban change is necessary if the program is to make the existing accommodate contemporary social, economic, or political and physical needs. Thus, we should be able to say that, except for the desire to abandon or destroy everything that preceded modern thinking, we can seek means to affect new concepts that respond to modern needs within the structures of existing urban conditions. This is possible because the historical cities themselves represent and present fundamental principles of human community.

NOTES

[1] Henry Russell Hitchcock, *Modern Architecture - Romanticism and Reintegration* (New York: Payson & Clark, 1929).
[2] Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (NY: Basic Books 1975) and *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (NY: Basic Books, 1976).
[3] Ernst Mandel, *Late Capitalism* (London, New Left Books, 1975).
[4] The term contextual was coined in 1966 at the Cornell Urban Design Program directed by Colin Rowe. Contextualism probably does not come into being until after 1968.
[5] Kevin Lynch, *Image of a City* (Cambridge: MIT, 1960). Gordon Cullen, *Townscape* (New York: Reinhold Pub. Corp., 1961), Colin Rowe & Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge: MIT, 1973), Rob Krier, *Urban Space* (New York: Rizzoli Int. Pub., 1979).
[6] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (London: Alec Tiranti, 1922).
[7] Lewis Mumford, *The City in History* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961).
[8] Andrew Cuomo, Interview "Housing Maverick," *Architecture* (8/97), pp. 45-49.
[9] "Progressive Uses of Tradition", Jon Michael Schwarting, *Precis* (Columbia University, 1980).
[10] "The Lesson of Rome," Jon Michael Schwarting, *Harvard Review II* (MIT, 1981).
[11] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London, Routledge & Kegan Pall Ltd., 1936), pp. 173-236. Mannheim chooses to limit the definition of utopia to, "that type of orientation which at the same time breaks the bonds of the existing order, ..." p. 173. "At the same time the "idea" which was at first only a vague prophecy is constantly being corrected and rendered more concrete as the present lives on into the future." p. 221.
[12] Schwarting, op.cit.
[13] *Oeuvre Complete 1946 – 1952*, Town Planning: The Theory of the 7V, Zurich Edition, (Girsberger, 1953), pp. 95-98.
[14] Joseph Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976).