

# IV USE AND AGENCY

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# Whose Agency?

## Impact of User, Appropriation, and Consumerism in the Built Environment

Gabrielle Schaad

The question of how architecture might learn from social science, specifically sociology, created and continues to generate, well beyond the 1970s, significant frictions in practice and academic discourse. The original texts gathered in the “Use and Agency” section of this volume show the extent to which their authors deemed the architects’ position within their more extensive field of practice to be relatively weak and subject to dynamics beyond their control. The texts implicitly negotiate a larger debate between the quantitative, system-oriented social sciences and the sociological deconstruction of meaning- and taste-making that marked the 1970s. All authors featured here — the building preservation activists Marianne (Janne) Günter and Roland Günter, architectural historian David P. Handlin, architect Jacques Blumer, architect Denise Scott Brown, and the AA.VV editorial collective — critically weigh in their texts, which span a five-year period from 1971 to 1976, the use of both sociocultural, anthropological analysis and specific (activist) tools to gain a better understanding of the building industry, the design process, the use-value of architecture, and class-related issues of taste by investigating and even resolutely blurring the boundaries between high-brow and low-brow (i.e., popular) culture.

The cybernetically inspired systems-theory-driven approaches to urban planning and architecture of the 1950s

and 1960s helped to establish technocratic top-down planning on a large scale by quantitatively analyzing the environment beyond the boundaries of East and West.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the supposed “user-adapted” flexibility of megastructures petrified, especially in the case of government-funded social housing in buildings and infrastructures that either cut into vital urban tissues or were not planned at all. In some cases, the spaces produced by the architects of postwar welfare societies in Western Europe and the United States seemed to turn against the people they were supposed to shelter. Charles Jencks provocatively regarded the example of the social housing complex Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis, Missouri, built by Minoru Yamasaki in 1951–1955 and demolished in 1972–1976, as ushering in the death of modern architecture.<sup>2</sup> The “soft” factors of architecture beyond the building, such as policy decisions, ownership models, and cuts to infrastructure and maintenance budgets gave way to criminal activities and decay in the built structures, which lacked identification and adaptability. In retrospect, they were a far more destructive force than the actual building. Nevertheless, Swiss design critic Rolf Keller included Pruitt-Igoe as a material witness in his early lampoon demonizing building with concrete because of its resulting “monotony.”<sup>3</sup>

The understanding of built “ecologies” as self-regulating systems (i.e., environments) oscillated between the poles of top-down control (i.e., surveillance) and bottom-up “participation.”<sup>4</sup> Frustrated by the limited capacity of architecture to better the environment and under pressure to achieve profitability amid soaring land prices, leading architects in the early and mid-1970s turned their attention away from social issues and back to form, claiming architecture’s autonomy.

On questions of form, they not only valued the autonomy of the quantitative social sciences but showed a renewed interest in cultural-historical building types and their embeddedness in society through the centuries. The architect was reestablished as a solitary ingenious author able to read these cultural traces. The interdisciplinary designer of social processes collaborating with linguists, sociologists, and engineers alike to understand environments cybernetically belonged to the

past. Analysis of form could also take various shapes through the lenses of sociocultural and anthropological methods and semiotics. With these the architects would focus on class-related constructions of taste tied to specific cultural artifacts and their dispersion throughout consumer culture. Practitioners of architecture and architectural theory framed both approaches during the 1970s as investigations into reality, or as “realism.”<sup>5</sup>

Another thread of history, one concerned with quantitatively rather than qualitatively based investigations in the field of architecture, led to the normalized, “neutral,” unmarked (male, white) user—a projection popularized by interwar twentieth-century European modernism. Architects reassured themselves that they were enabling users through their designs because their anthropocentric, anthropometric design process relied on idealized models borrowed from Ernst Neufert’s building design theory “Bauentwurfslehre” (Architect’s data, 1936), Le Corbusier’s “Le Modulor” (1942–1955), Henry Dreyfuss’s characters “Joe and Josephine” (1960), and Alexander Kira’s bathroom ergonomics (1966).<sup>6</sup> Kira’s manual featured a genuinely “user-centered” approach, based on meticulous observations and measurements of people’s behaviors and diverse needs in bathroom settings. Architectural historian Anna-Maria Meister reminds us, however, that “for Neufert, man was never the measure of all things; man needed to fit the system.”<sup>7</sup> And, even if the civil rights protests of the 1960s had led American industrial design pioneer Dreyfuss to publish a revised edition of *The Measure of Man* (1967) after becoming critically “aware that normate figures representing statistical averages were often [mis]taken as real bodies,” not all architects using his manual were likewise in the know.<sup>8</sup> As the (post-)Foucauldian assessment of architecture as a “political technology” of the body demonstrates, architecture’s concern with the idealized abstraction of a normative, nongendered, nondisabled user has not only shaped our behavior and physiques, but it operates through the bodies it claims to shelter and house and creates exclusions.<sup>9</sup> A design process exclusively concerned with form—or even with formal deconstruction—will consistently fail to deconstruct these ingrained biases of architecture

toward its subjects when the body as an idealized abstraction precedes all construction. Philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefèbvre became convinced toward the end of the 1970s that the term *user*, initially suggesting an orientation toward the “use-value” of space, instead dehumanized inhabitants, discounting their agency by turning them into passive, functional objects.<sup>10</sup> What about socio-anthropologically inspired observation and study of the inhabitants’ actual performance of “use” instead?

Architectural historian Kenny Cupers states in his collection *Use Matters* (2013) that “the interest in the agency of the user across many creative disciplines today delivers new promises for the social role of design.” He goes on to point out that “the user is both a historical construct and an agent of change, too often relegated to the margins of architectural history.”<sup>11</sup> However, understanding everyday use, and hence the production of users, simply as a function of planning and design does not go far enough. Even though “the user” has to be recognized and traced as a historical construct, it also proves fruitful to think about how users—precisely in the very diversity that the term tries to homogenize—transform and actively constitute “building,” understood here as both a noun and a verb.

Projecting a user brings up, if only implicitly, the question of “agency” within the built environment. But whose agency? The question is partly tackled by Isabelle Doucet and Cupers, who notice that the term is difficult to pin down: “Are we talking about the agency of the architect, and if so the agency to do what: to act in service of the client or to guide society to a better end? Or do we mean instead the power of the architectural project or the building itself, to convince its users about the virtuous lifestyle it hopes to instill, or its spectators about the beauty of its form?”<sup>12</sup>

Cupers suggests that participation be considered over a longer historical period that does not isolate it as an approach tied to 1960s/1970s politics of empowerment and democratization but instead understands it as “enmeshed” with “the bureaucratic development of the welfare state and burgeoning culture of leisure and mass consumption.”<sup>13</sup> If Italian architect Giancarlo de Carlo (1919–2005) called for citizen or “user” participation in all

relevant design processes of public space in the early 1980s, the editors of the volume *Participation in Art and Architecture* (2015), Mechtild Widrich and Martino Stierli, remind us that the process of participation has not only been theorized on a political level by authors like Jacques Rancière, Lefebvre, and Jürgen Habermas since the 1960s but also has been actualized in the discourse around (public) art by proponents of relational aesthetics in the 1990s, such as Nicolas Bourriaud, and contested by art historian and critic Claire Bishop.<sup>14</sup> The paternalism detected in functionalist ideas of “participation”—for example, Le Corbusier’s modernist *promenade architecturale* as a sequential progression of inhabitants through their built environs—was dropped by feminist initiatives toward the end of the 1970s. Their participatory workshops catered to community-oriented public buildings such as the London-based architectural design cooperative MATRIX’s (1981–1994) Jagonari Educational Resource Center for Asian Women (1984–1987) and the Dalston Children’s Center (1984–1985).<sup>15</sup> Political theorist Nancy Fraser’s feminist reassessments of Habermas’s thoughts on the public sphere after the fall of the Iron Curtain also shed a new light on “subaltern counterpublics,” complicating the debate around who is allowed to participate in and hence constitute the public sphere.<sup>16</sup> Queer theorists Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner later extended this concept to the marginalization of queer sexuality in urban public space.<sup>17</sup>

The interest shown by theory, history, and design criticism in the “use” of architecture has only further increased. From the late 1980s onward, paradigms and theoretical approaches from science and technology studies—for example, Actor-Network Theory—helped put the architect’s central role into perspective.<sup>18</sup> Understanding planners and designers as actors in a network of interdependent human and nonhuman relationships expanded architectural discourse to include various material, social, economic, and political actors within and beyond the built environment.<sup>19</sup> At least in history and theory the myth of a universal user has come under scrutiny, because more recent, decolonial accounts, following Donna Haraway’s work in the late 1980s, increasingly draw on “situatedness,” specificity,

and “partial perspective.”<sup>20</sup> Not least has the recent criticism of an anthropocentric perspective allowed for the ecological sustainability of building practices to take center stage.<sup>21</sup> The term *spatial agency* has in turn helped to decenter the agency of architects in the production of architectural space, allowing the “more-or-less formal and more-or-less welcome actors that produce, inhabit, maintain and destroy architecture in different ways” to enter the discourse.<sup>22</sup>

### **Cohabitation and Processes of Adaptation**

In his 1975 contribution to *archithese*, “Atelier 5: 1955–1975: Experiments in Communal Living,” Swiss architect Blumer looks back on two housing projects completed by the collaborative firm Atelier 5 (founded by Erwin Fritz, Samuel Gerber, Rolf Hesterberg, Hans Hostettler, and Alfredo Pini), where he worked from 1955 to 1963 and where he reintegrated in 1970 after a professorship at the University of Illinois Chicago.<sup>23</sup> Blumer exemplifies the promises and pitfalls of understanding the architect as an orchestrator of the social process through form by looking at the Thalmatt housing project (a 1974 follow-up to Atelier 5’s earlier Halen settlement of 1957–1960) near Bern and the Wertherberg housing project (1966–1968) near Münster (then part of West Germany).<sup>24</sup> He argues that the entrepreneurial social utopists Robert Owens and Charles Fourier in the early nineteenth century, as well as communal housing in general, tried to establish new rules and new people by proposing new forms of intertwining productive and reproductive labor in reorganized domesticities.<sup>25</sup> In contrast, Blumer frames Atelier 5’s approach as less ambitious because, while the firm offered playful variants to established living patterns, it did not expect new ways of cohabitation to emerge thanks to architecture. Aware that architects always work within the constraints of the capitalist, increasingly profit-oriented building industry, Blumer proposes that, despite these circumstances, architects should be able to create livable environments if they abide by a few hypotheses, among which: Free space within a settlement needs to be discernable as common public space and ideally co-owned by the inhabitants;



The inhabitants decide for themselves how individual/shared space is organized or transformed; Threshold-areas mediate between public and private; The building structure houses different social groups, allows for communal uses other than housing, and satisfies different economic ambitions.<sup>26</sup> Even though both of the projects discussed in Blumer's self-critical essay followed these axioms in the planning process, resulting in comparable if slightly different layouts, they differ in approach and with respect to their levels of "user participation."

In Blumer's view, 1960s consumer culture heavily influenced ideas about living and, more specifically, the representative character of the domestic setting. Beyond interior design magazines, he denounces then emerging DIY shops as players in an aesthetic economy of aspiration. By selling ready-to-use building elements, they cater to homeowners' desire for an individualistic lifestyle, allowing them to transform their housing entities into their own small, personalized utopias. As Blumer muses, a fake-brick cladding glued to a "poor looking" architect-designed *béton brut* structure embodies the lower middle classes' striving toward an aesthetics of higher economic standing—the aesthetic of the free-standing, suburban, nuclear family house. On the one hand critical of architects who tend to impose their choices of style and taste on inhabitants, Blumer on the other hand regrets the outcome of user-based retro-transformations. Being cosmetic rather than structural, the interventions miss increasing the use-value of individual entities and the overall settlement. While welcoming the inhabitants' engagement with their living environment, he finds a grain of sand in the aesthetic outcome. Nevertheless, Blumer eventually dismisses as naive any attempt to use architecture to control or guide broader efforts to emancipate society from capitalism.

### **Self-Portraits; Or the Symbolism of Idealized Individual Homeownership**

A different take—involving a different scale and geographic focus—is found in architect and architectural historian David P. Handlin's "remarks on recent approaches to town-planning" in his contribution "Group Portraits and Self-Portraits."<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, we find an intersection with Blumer's observation of how the social aspirations of class tie in with user-initiated adaptations of built structures, which Handlin compares to the more homogeneous town structures of precapitalist societies and cultures. He doubts whether settlements and towns can be analyzed extensively through or give real insights into their inhabitants' customs and culture, since such analysis tends to homogenize what always is and needs to be heterogeneous and diverse. Even if his preference is for a "situated" approach over universalist, unifying, and eventually dehumanizing architectural proposals — he cites Le Corbusier's *Ville Radieuse* (1933), for example — he doubts the adequacy of social anthropology as a valuable tool for architectural planning processes. He underpins his argument by bringing up what he deems the shortcomings of Herbert J. Gans's pioneering study in urban ethnography, *The Urban Villagers*.<sup>28</sup> Gans based his study on an analysis of parts of a Boston community in the West End district where "Italian-Americans made up the largest group, about forty percent, but the area also had [among others] sizeable contingents of Jewish-, Polish-, Albanian-, Ukrainian- and Greek-Americans." Gans argues that the so-called urban villagers' buildings and their use were proof of an overall, more or less consistent design resistance to modernism. The inhabitants, Gans concludes, were rejecting consumer culture because they wished to reproduce their "rurally based ancestors' living patterns."<sup>29</sup> If one would today denounce Gans's reductive view of an Italian-American community as rurally marked and hence "behind" in general, at the time it was published Gans's text offered a nuanced view of the community's dynamics, countering the simplistic portrayals often found in media and popular culture.

Handlin, on the other hand, points out that Gans cut short the diversity within the larger group of "urban villagers" when he overlapped and identified the community with a homogenous building "style": "There is a compelling temptation to claim that the community speaks with a single voice. It makes good rhetoric, especially if that rhetoric emphasizes the difference between 'insiders' and oppressive 'outsiders.'"<sup>30</sup> Handlin

is convinced that sociological “group images” do not provide an adequate and generalizable basis for planning. In his view, only an approach that assumes people primarily strive to express themselves rather than their membership in a collective would do justice to diversity and repetition. Handlin elaborates that even the dense and heterogenous urban population studied here remained committed to homeownership and individual expression. However, despite all the individualism in the mass, the houses often resembled one another like peas in a pod. When his text appeared in *archithese*, Handlin was an associate professor of architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design (1973–1978). In the text, he makes a culturally specific and ideologically marked diagnosis by stating that “the dream of homeownership” still broadly pervaded American households. He dismisses attempts at flexibilization and personalization of housing units (e.g., with movable wall partitions) as “accommodating the self-portrait in the collectivist ideal” and eventually amounting to nothing more than an expression of the childish playfulness of architectural students.<sup>31</sup> His polemic hence dismisses both “group and self-portraits.” He aims to devalue—or at least to call into question—the contemporaneous architectural discourse’s emerging investigative interest in the shantytowns of South American cities or so-called squatter architecture as models for future urban development.<sup>32</sup>

Handlin draws alternative urban patterns and so-called spontaneous architecture into the picture not only to contextualize his reasoning but to distance himself from such an approach.<sup>33</sup> When he argues that, in American society, the mobile home promised, despite its utopian mobility, customized specimens increasingly resembling the shape of individual houses, he quotes from an advertisement for a mobile home producer while blowing a poisoned kiss at Archigram’s 1960s radical utopias.<sup>34</sup> One wonders whose aspirations Handlin has in mind. In his view, a white, American, middle-class “user”—even more so if that person hails from a lower stratum of society that has evaded stereotyping because of its diversity—would continue to idealize individual homeownership and build accordingly, which would not negatively affect the practice of community-building beyond

domestic borders. His criticism of group portraits as reductive in their aim at specificity might be justified. Rounding his argument off, however, he mistakes individual homeownership for an almost preconscious, “innate” universal aspiration of large parts of the society, rather than denouncing it as the commodity it was ideologically advertised to be by state housing policies and the building industry in the United States.

The notion of “self-portrait” reappears in Scott Brown’s analysis under changed auspices as “the physical elements of suburbia—the roads, houses, roofs, lawns, and front doors—[that] serve practical purposes such as giving access and shelter, but they also serve as means of self-expression for suburban residents.”<sup>35</sup> That Gans’s work—although criticized by Handlin—informed Scott Brown’s approach may be less of a surprise.<sup>36</sup> Scott Brown complemented her studies in planning at the Department of City Planning at the Graduate School of Fine Arts of the University of Pennsylvania with social sciences courses, among them lectures by Gans. To study the Levittown settlements in Philadelphia, Gans had created a classic participant-observer framework that allowed him to portray working-class and lower-middle-class life in America.<sup>37</sup> Scott Brown took a particular interest in his nonjudgmental viewpoint, or the “new objectivity” of his urban sociological understanding, which brought together “social life, popular culture, and planning.”<sup>38</sup> Referring to Peter Smithson, she calls her own method an “active socioplastics.”<sup>39</sup> In the format of a “letter to the editors,” Scott Brown makes clear from the beginning of her essay that her exhibition project *Signs of Life* targets the matter of (American) taste.<sup>40</sup> In 1976, the French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu was still writing his pathbreaking, statistically based *La distinction* (Distinction, 1979)—an empirical, socio-anthropological analysis of class-related differentiation processes in the formation, performance, and embodiment of taste in the French middle-class bourgeois culture.<sup>41</sup> Scott Brown was thus untouched by this contemporaneous European push to deconstruct the category of taste as a symbolic system in which minute distinctions become the basis for social judgment. She nevertheless consciously sheds

light on everyday phenomena and realities and contextualizes her notion of “realism” in the editorial framing of her letter as “deriv[ed] theor[y] from specific examples and not the other way around.”<sup>42</sup> With “the other way around,” she seems to disagree with and gesture toward contemporaneous protagonists who affiliated themselves with Aldo Rossi when applying a theory knitted around archaic, seemingly universal building types as “realist” on specific urban contexts instead.<sup>43</sup> Focusing on the American suburb and commercial urban settings—for example, with a case study of the aesthetics of Levittown housing types, which she classifies as “Colonial,” “Jubilee,” “Levittowner,” “Rancher,” and “Country Clubber”—Scott Brown carves out the continuity and transformations of visual languages that signify and symbolize specific socially constructed meanings. Her method of iconographic analysis or “taxonomy” of the symbols of different housing types is empirically inductive and based in visual culture and vocabularies.

In her consideration and in contrast to Handlin, Scott Brown highlights the influence of advertisements produced by a housing industry seeking to plant style aspirations in the heads of its lower-middle-class consumers even as it reflects their subconscious desires and nostalgia.<sup>44</sup> Her dissection of space in *Signs of Life* can be considered another attempt at reconstructing vectors of agency in the built environment.

### **Activist Impacts—Formats of Education and Participation**

If the contributions of Blumer, Handlin, and Scott Brown make clear that their authors were shifting attention away from an idealized, abstracted mechanical user figure to a socially constructed inhabitant with desires and aspirations raised by consumer culture, cultural identification processes, and social standing, they still did not attribute to users much agency vis-à-vis the built environment or their impact on its planning. Authors like Handlin questioned whether assuming architects who promoted the concepts of flexibility or mobility had collective needs in mind or reflected their own privileged and playful perspective.<sup>45</sup> At the other end of the debate spectrum, we find an article by the couple Marianne Günter and Roland Günter.

Married since 1963, Marianne (Janne) Günter, a pharmaceutical graduate of the University of Bonn, worked during her secondary studies in sociology alongside her husband on citizens' initiatives fighting for the preservation of approximately one thousand workers' settlements in the Ruhr area.<sup>46</sup> Their *archithese* contribution, which concerns the impact of grassroots movements taking on architecture and urban planning projects, not only summarizes past initiatives in which they had been involved but also shares suggestions for how to make an impact; for example, by filing complaints. Their activist field guide forgoes the DIY activism of late-1960s counterculture "cookbooks" that argue for abandoning urban settings altogether in favor of building alternative (dome) communes.<sup>47</sup> Instead, the Günters cite the massive urban redevelopment projects throughout Europe and the United States in the late 1960s that turned old towns and derelict city centers into business hubs. While politicians and other decision-makers primarily supported these decisions with arguments about wanting to increase standards of safety and hygiene, renewal, and beautification, the Günters justifiably denounce such notions of "care" as a pretext for authorizing the clearing of cities' unwelcome populations (read: low-income and/or immigrant). This process often went hand in hand with the displacement of specific demographics and the erection of massive complexes (e.g., the Jordaan neighborhood in Amsterdam or the destruction of the Bonn Südstadt quarter) to either house the offices or staff of increasingly international corporations; for example, from the pharmaceutical and chemical industries.<sup>48</sup> The comforts such complexes offered to their inhabitants or to the neighborhood more broadly were reduced to a bare minimum so as to build "rationally" or more "economically." Often the town planners' and investors' interest in "mobility" meant new expressways to accommodate individual traffic rather than the interests of all inhabitants, especially pedestrians. The authors see the sprouting grassroots initiatives they describe as a symptom not only of the malfunction of town and urban planning processes but of mistrust in political representatives, who prove to be insufficiently critical of the interests of develop-

ers and the construction industry generally—or, worse, prove to be biased toward the interests of investors and building enterprises. In weighing the effectiveness of grassroots initiatives, the authors suggest the use of such proven tactics as involving children or other figures with whom the public can easily identify. However, they warn that exposure can result in block lists, since interest groups in cities are often intertwined, and targeted corporations have little to lose by sharing the names of opponents with third parties. Recognizing that marginalized individuals are already precariously situated and that activism would only further compound their exposure, the authors suggest that protagonists embrace multiplicity and diversity by working across groups and employing a variety of tactics so as to share responsibilities broadly within the collective. Better-earning citizens of higher social standing are summoned to join the efforts in a “mosaic” approach, thus presenting a unified front of constituents capable of putting pressure on policymakers.<sup>49</sup>

That denouncing processes of capitalization within the building industry can backfire is demonstrated by architect Janssen’s dismissal as a guest lecturer from ETH Zurich after he completed his project seminar (1971).<sup>50</sup> The self-organized, bottom-up learning entity understood itself as a (Marxist) collective, investigating the means and conditions of production in architecture under capitalism. More precisely, it scrutinized recent building projects by the Swiss private developer Ernst Göhner AG and the political and economic mechanisms and power-related frameworks at stake. In its contribution to one of the first *archithese* issues, the so-called editorial collective of students from the experimental seminar looked back on its case study of the Göhner housing estate in Volketswil, Switzerland. In a later interview, Janssen pointed out that his motivation for the seminar lay in the observation that “architects do not play the central role they attribute to themselves; instead, they are the interpreters of developments in the construction industry.”<sup>51</sup> By asking basic questions—“How does the hypothecary market influence city planning in Zurich? How are land prices and traffic planning intertwined?”—the collective geared its

analytical instruments toward “Göhnerswil,” a particularly instructive case because it involved a conglomerate. “Belonging to this conglomerate was a factory for prefabricated components for residential development and various buyers whose task it was to acquire land without sellers being aware that the different brokers were connected. Today it’s called ‘short selling.’ Göhner purchased these properties not as sites zoned for building but as agricultural land. That is a capitalist trick.”<sup>52</sup> For allowing the seminar to be partly organized by the students, who even issued a periodical mouthpiece called *Harte Zeiten* (Hard times), Janssen came under the scrutiny of the Swiss Secret Service, which at the time was keenly recording all supposed communist activity.<sup>53</sup> Bernhard Hoesli, dean of the architecture department at ETH, dismissed Janssen in spring 1971. Janssen’s replacement was the Italian architect Aldo Rossi. The impact of his decidedly different approach, theoretically focused on the continuity of historic forms while remaining informed by Marxist thought, and its contrast with Janssen’s tactics have been broadly discussed elsewhere.<sup>54</sup> What, though, is the significance of *archithese* giving his seminar a platform at a moment when it was being torn apart and denounced in the press by the Bund der Schweizerischer Architekten (Federation of Swiss Architects) as a potentially obnoxious aftershock of May ’68?<sup>55</sup> The commitment to the contents of Janssen’s seminar reflects the critical approach taken in other early *archithese* features, such as sociologist Eliane Perrin’s analysis of “immigrant worker housing” barracks, which almost killed the periodical in its infancy. Perrin’s article would later be followed by an entire thematic issue of *archithese* dedicated to the topic of *Hochschulpolitik* (higher education politics) and informed by a six-point questionnaire addressing educators as different as Alvin Boyarsky, Lucius Burckhardt, Kenneth Frampton, Roland Günter, and Charles Jencks.<sup>56</sup> *archithese* was a playground to negotiate and mediate the different positions. It hence proved its agency as a discursive architectural medium.



- 1 Ákos Moravánszky and Karl Kogler, eds., *Re-scaling the Environment: New Landscapes of Design, 1960–1980*, East West Central: Re-building Europe, 1950–1990, vol. 2 (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2016).
- 2 See Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-modern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977).
- 3 See Rolf Keller, *Bauen als Umweltzerstörung, Alarmbilder einer Unarchitektur der Gegenwart* (Zurich: Verlag für Architektur Artemis, 1973).
- 4 See Yuriko Furuhashi, "Multimedia Environments and Security Operations: Expo '70 as a Laboratory of Governance," *Grey Room*, 54 (Winter 2004): 56–79.
- 5 See Irina Davidovici, "From Idealism to Disenchantment: Realism in and beyond archithese," 123–40 in this publication.
- 6 Ernst Neufert, *Architect's Data* (1936; London: Crosby Lockwood Staples, 1970); Le Corbusier, *The Modulor: A Harmonious Measure to the Human Scale, Universally Applicable to Architecture and Mechanics* (1950; Basel: Birkhäuser, 2004); Henry Dreyfuss with Alvin R. Tilley, *The Measure of Man: Human Factors in Design*, rev. and exp. 2nd ed. (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1967); Alexander Kira, *The Bathroom: The Essence of Minimalism* (Ithaca, NY: Center for Housing and Environmental Studies, Cornell University, 1966). For an in-depth discussion of the different types and the development of standard graphic design "users," see Ellen Lupton, "Designing for People," in *Beautiful Users*, ed. Ellen Lupton, 20–31 (New York: Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, 2014), 24–25.
- 7 See Anna-Maria Meister, "Formatting Modern Man on Paper: Ernst Neufert's 'Lehren,'" *History of Knowledge*, May 21, 2018, <https://historyofknowledge.net/2018/05/21/formatting-modern-man-on-paper/>.
- 8 Dreyfuss and Tilley, *The Measure of Man* (see note 6). See also Aimi Hamraie, *Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 19–40, here 37.
- 9 See Paul B. Preciado, "Architecture as a Practice of Biopolitical Disobedience," *Log 25* (2012): 121–34.
- 10 Henri Lefebvre, "Space and the State" (1978), in *Henri Lefebvre, State Space World: Selected Essays*, ed. Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden, 223–53 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 235. See also Lukasz Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research and the Production of Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 71; Lukasz Stanek, "For and against the 'User,'" in *Use Matters: An Alternative History of Architecture*, ed. Kenny Cupers (London: Routledge, 2013), 139–52.
- 11 Kenny Cupers, "Introduction," in *Use Matters* (see note 10), 1–12, Where 1–2.
- 12 See Isabelle Doucet and Kenny Cupers, "Agency in Architecture: Reframing Criticality in Theory and Practice," in "Agency in Architecture: Reframing Criticality in Theory and Practice," ed. Isabelle Doucet and Kenny Cupers, special issue, *Footprint*, 4 (Spring 2009), 1–6.
- 13 See Kenny Cupers, "The Expertise of Participation: Mass Housing and Urban Planning in Post-war France," *Planning Perspectives* 26, 1 (January 2011): 29–53; Kenny Cupers, "The Infrastructure of Participation: Cultural Centers in Postwar Europe," in *Participation in Art and Architecture: Spaces of Interaction and Occupation*, ed. Martino Stierli and Mechtild Widrich, 13–39 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 13.
- 14 Stierli and Widrich, *Participation in Art and Architecture* (see note 13), 3–4.
- 15 See Matrix, "Working with Women," in *Making Space: Women and the Man-Made Environment* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), 89–105; Matrix Open: Feminist Architecture Archive, <http://www.matrixfeministarchitecturearchive.co.uk/>.
- 16 Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56–80.
- 17 Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," in "Intimacy," special issue, *Critical Inquiry* 24, 2 (Winter 1998): 547–66.
- 18 See Bruno Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications," *Soziale Welt* 47, 4 (1996), 369–82.
- 19 See Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider, and Jeremy Till, eds., *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2011).
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- 28 Herbert Gans, *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1962).
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Handlin, "Group Portraits and Self-Portraits," (see note 27), 356.
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- 32 In the same thematic issue that featured Handlin's contribution, *archithese* also published a more optimistic article on that very topic. See Praful C. Patel, Jeff Racki, and Reena Racki, "Squatters: The Seven Housing Systems of Nairobi," 450–67 in this publication. First published in *archithese* 9 (1974): 27–38. See also Samia Henni, "The Colonial Order of Things," 389–403 in this publication.
- 33 For a different take, see Henni, "The Colonial Order of Things," 389–403 in this publication.
- 34 Handlin, "Group Portraits and Self-Portraits" (see note 27).
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- 38 Charitonidou, "Denise Scott Brown's Active Socioplastics" (see note 36), 136–37.
- 39 Scott Brown, "Signs of Life" (see note 35), 378
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Keegan Paul, 1984). First published as *La distinction: Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1979).
- 42 Scott Brown, "Signs of Life" (see note 35), 378.
- 43 See Davidovici, "From Idealism to Disenchantment" (see note 5).
- 44 Scott Brown, "Signs of Life" (see note 35).
- 45 See Handlin, "Group Portraits and Self-Portraits" (see note 27).
- 46 See Roland Günter, Janne Günter, and Karl Wiemer, eds., *Die Arbeitersiedlung Eisenheim in Oberhausen*, Rheinische Kunststätten 541 (Cologne: Rheinischer Verein für Denkmalpflege und Landschaftsschutz, 2013).
- 47 See Leopold Banchini and Lukas Feireiss, eds., with text by Lloyd Kahn, *Shelter Cookbook* (Berlin: Spector Books, 2023).
- 48 See Marianne Günter and Roland Günter, "Citizens' Action Groups: How, Where, Why?," 338–49 in this publication. First published in *archithese* 1 (1972): 20–26.
- 49 Ibid., 346.
- 50 Even though the third-party parity council of the department of architecture had advised keeping them, the three German guest lecturers of the so-called experimental phase, Hans-Otto Schulte, Jörn Janssen and Hermann Zinn, were dismissed by the ETH board. Only the sociologist Lucius Burckhardt was allowed to keep his visiting lectureship for another year. In 1973 he left to become a professor at the newly established reform university Gesamthochschule (GhK) in Kassel.
- See Peter Sutter, "Lucius Burckhardt-Wackernagel," in Ueli Mäder, Peter Sutter, Markus Bossert et al., eds., *Raum und Macht: Die Stadt zwischen Vision und Wirklichkeit; Leben und Wirken von Lucius und Annemarie Burckhardt* (Zurich: Rotpunktverlag, 2014), 21–70, here 46–47. See Bruno Reichlin and Jörn Janssen in conversation with Anne Kockelkorn and Axel Sowa, "Zurich, 1971: A Conversation on the Housing Question, Academic Intrigue, and an Italian Maestro," *Candide: Journal for Architectural Knowledge* 7 (October 2013): 113–40. See Hartmut Frank in conversation with Andreas Müller, Beat Schweingruber, Jan Verwijnen, and Adolf Max Vogt, "Zeitzeugen über die 68er-Ereignisse an der ETH Zürich. Das Phänomen 'Göhnerswil,'" *Werk, Bauen + Wohnen* 87, 7/8 (2000): 32–35.
- 51 See Jörn Janssen, "Die Architekten im Arbeitsprozess der Bauproduktion: Scheinselbständig," in *Produktionsbedingungen der Architektur: Zwischen Autonomie und Heteronomie*, ed. Tilo Amhoff, Henrik Hilbig, and Gernot Weckherlin (Dresden: Thelem, 2017), 41–50; Bruno Reichlin et al., "Zurich, 1971" (see note 50), 118–19.
- 52 Reichlin et al., "Zurich, 1971" (see note 51), 118–19.
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- 54 See Aldo Rossi, Judith Hopfengärtner, and Ákos Moravánszky, *Aldo Rossi und die Schweiz: Architektonische Wechselwirkungen* (Zurich: gta Verlag, 2011).
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- 56 There were many more. Eliane Perrin, "Immigrant Worker Housing in Switzerland," 404–19 in this publication. First published in *archithese* 1 (1971): 2–11. See also "Hochschulpolitik," special issue, *archithese* 4 (1972).



# Projektstudium an der ETH: kritisch statt technokratisch

Dieser Text wurde von einem Redaktionskollektiv des Seminars Janssen an der ETH verfasst und erschien zuerst in der Seminarzeitschrift *Harde Zeiten* vom 5. Juli 1971. Wir geben hier eine leicht gekürzte Fassung.

Im vergangenen Sommer beschloss das ETH-Präsidium die Lehraufträge dreier Gastdozenten der Architekturabteilung nicht mehr zu verlängern, mit der Begründung, man hätte in ihren Seminarien linke Agitation betrieben. Es handelt sich um die Soziologen Hermann Zinn, Hans-Otto Schulte und Jörn Janssen; mit ihnen verloren auch zehn Assistenten die Stelle.

Das Ereignis hat Wellen geworfen. Fronten haben sich gebildet, und verhärtet. Das hat sein Gutes: es bringt einige der wichtigsten offenen Fragen der heutigen Architektursituation aufs Tapet. Es hat aber auch sein Schlechtes: gemein wird nun Information durch doktrinaire Simplifikate ersetzt — zu beiden Seiten.

Wir haben uns entschlossen, einige Texte aus den umstrittenen Seminarien abzu drucken; zunächst, um einen Versuch zu machen, den allgemeinen Informationsmangel abzubauen. Aber auch, weil wir überzeugt sind, dass sich Architektur nicht nur im technischen, organisatorischen oder visuellen, sondern auch im sozialen und politischen Raum abspielt. Sofern man von einer Hochschule wissenschaftliche Analysen gegebener Zustände erwartet, so gehören, scheint uns, derartige Untersuchungen in ihr Studienprogramm; sofern man von einer Architekturschule den Bezug zur Praxis fordert, so gehört (wenn auch nicht ausschliesslich!) die soziale und politische Praxis dazu.

Das sind Lappalien, die heute weitherum selbstverständlich sind. Vielleicht werden nur wenige Jahre vergehen, bis auch die obersten ETH-Instanzen stolz daran erinnern werden, dass im Jahre 1970-71 die ersten «kritischen Projektseminarien» durchgeführt wurden. Der erste Versuch ist gescheitert — nicht zufällig zum gleichen Zeitpunkt, wo in Paris die Schliessung des «Institut de l'Environnement» verfügt wurde. Aber die Arbeit geht weiter.

S.v.M.

Das didaktische Modell des sogenannten Projektstudiums wird seit längerer Zeit in vielen Hochschulen diskutiert. Diese Diskussion beschränkt sich nicht nur auf Architekturschulen. Ein Projektstudium kann auch in anderen Fachbereichen, z. B. der Soziologie, der Medizin und der Rechtswissenschaften durchgeführt werden.

Im Falle der Architektur geht die Diskussion über das Projektstudium vom traditionellen Berufsbild des Architekten und Planers aus. Die heutige Ausbildung des Architekten richtet sich noch weitgehend nach diesem veralteten Berufsbild. Es handelt sich dabei um den freischaffenden, selbständigen Künstlerarchitekten. Er erhebt den Anspruch, einzelne Fachbereiche zu koordinieren. Seine Forderung nach Selbstverwirklichung seiner Persönlichkeit findet ihre Grenze erst in den Schranken der finanziellen Möglichkeiten des Auftraggebers.

Die Entwicklung in der Bauwirtschaft fordert nun eine neue Berufsausbildung der Architekten. Die Bauwirtschaft verbindet sich nämlich zunehmend mit der Struktur anderer Industrie- und Wirtschaftszweige. Dies hat zur Folge, dass in jüngster Zeit Unternehmen der chemischen, metallverarbeitenden und der Elektro-Industrie, wie auch reine Finanzierungsunternehmen, im Bereich des klassischen Bauhauptgewerbes tätig geworden sind. Mit der fortschreitenden Wirtschaft- und Kapitalkonzentration vergrössert sich die Abhängigkeit der Architekten und Planer. Sie sind nur kleingewerblich-ständisch organisiert und können somit keinen Einfluss auf diese Entwicklung nehmen. Damit zeigt sich, dass das traditionelle Berufsbild nicht mehr der Realität entspricht, und somit die alten Ausbildungskonzepte neu gestaltet werden müssen.

Die Notwendigkeit einer Neugestaltung der Ausbildung wird in weiten Kreisen gesehen. Einmal ist die Bauwirtschaft selbst nicht mehr zufrieden mit der wenig wirkungsvollen Ausbildung der Architekten und Planer. Die Ausbildungskosten scheinen ihr zu hoch im Verhältnis zum vermittelten Stoff. Andererseits sind gesellschaftliche Widersprüche vor allem in der Stadtplanung vermehrt deutlich geworden. Die bisherige Ausbildung der Architekten hat jedoch diese Widersprüche bewusst ausgeklammert.

Es gibt zwei mögliche Reaktionen auf diese Entwicklung:

1. Die technokratische Hochschulreform, die von der Industrie und Verwaltung gefordert wird. Ihr Ziel liegt in einer Ausbildung, die den wach-

# Project-Based Learning at the ETH: Critical Rather Than Technocratic

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62–66

Translated by:  
Steven Lindberg

This text was written by the editorial collective of the Janssen Seminar at the ETH [Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich] and first published in the seminar's journal *Harte Zeiten* on July 5, 1971. We offer a slightly abridged version here.

Last summer, the ETH board voted not to extend the teaching contracts of three visiting lecturers in the architecture department, with the justification that they had engaged in leftist agitation in their seminars. The lecturers in question were the sociologists Hermann Zinn, Hans-Otto Schulte, and Jörn Janssen; along with them, ten assistants also lost their positions.

The event made waves. Fronts formed and became entrenched. That has its good side: it brings up for discussion several of the most important open questions of the current situation in architecture. It also has its bad side, however: now, information is often replaced by doctrinaire simplifications — on both sides.

We have decided to reprint several texts from the controversial seminars; first, in an effort to remedy the general lack of information, but also because we are convinced that architecture plays out not only in technical, organizational, or visual space but also in social and political space. To the extent one expects scientific analyses of given circumstances from a university, such studies, it seems to us, belong in their programs; to the extent an architecture school is expected to have a connection to practice, social and political practice is part of that (albeit not exclusively!).

These are trifles that again seem self-evident today. Perhaps only a few years will pass before the supreme authorities at the ETH, too, proudly recall that the first "critical project seminars" were held in the years 1970–71. The first attempt failed — not coincidentally, at the same time as the closing of the Institut de l'Environnement in Paris was decreed. But the work goes on.

S.v.M.

The didactic model of the so-called project-based learning has been discussed for some time at many universities. This discussion is not limited to architecture schools. Project-based learning can also be carried out in other disciplines; for example, sociology, medicine, or law.

In the case of architecture, the discussion of the project-based learning derives from the traditional profile of the profession of the architect and planner. Today's education of architects is still largely based on this outdated profile of the profession; namely, the freelance, independent artist-architect. He claims to coordinate several specialist fields. His demand for the self-fulfillment of his personality finds its limits only in the restrictions of his client's financial means.

The evolution of the construction business now demands a new professional education of architects. For the construction business increasingly joins with the structure of other branches of industry and business. As a consequence, companies from the chemical, metalworking, and electronics industries, as well as purely financial enterprises, have recently become active in the traditional mainstream construction sector. As the concentration

of business and capital progresses, the dependence of architects and planners increases. They are organized only as small businesses and professions and therefore cannot influence this evolution. This makes it clear that the traditional profile of the profession no longer corresponds to reality, and hence the old concepts of education have to be redesigned.

The need to redesign education is widely recognized. First, the construction business itself is no longer satisfied with the impractical education of architects and planners. The education's costs seem to them too high relative to the material conveyed. On the other side, social contradictions have become increasingly evident, especially in urban planning. Until now, however, the education of architects has consciously ignored these contradictions.

There are two possible reactions to this development:

1. The technocratic university reform demanded by the industry and the administration. The goal of this reform is an education that satisfies the increasing planning needs of the industry and the administration.

2. The critical university reform demanded by those affected by building planning. The goal of this reform is the education of architects and planners who are conscious of their growing political role. Only then they can act entirely responsibly toward society.

Both approaches call for a stronger connection to practice, which project-based learning might enable. They are referring, however, to two different forms of project study that hardly overlap—apart from the call for a connection to practice, specialization, and group work. These overlaps cannot conceal the different goals of the two forms of project study.

Technocratically oriented project-based learning serves only to consolidate the existing social conditions. Social contradictions are not addressed, much less eliminated. The technocratically educated architects serve above all the interests of those who invest their capital in the construction business.

Critically oriented project-based learning ought to consider the interests of the majority of the population. This necessarily happens against the interests of business and bureaucracy.

Critically educated architects are supposed to reveal existing injustices and study their social contexts. They ought to develop solutions that may also lie outside the realm of architecture. If the problem cannot be solved by means of architecture, political measures can also be proposed—for example, the *Recht auf Wohnung* [Right to Housing] initiative—as opposed to trying to lower rents by reducing the floor area.

Here, then, is an example to illustrate the contrast between the technocratic and critical project-based learning:

### **Example of Technocratic Project-Based Learning**

As part of a reform of the construction guidelines for the area around Tessinerplatz, the municipal council of Zurich voted in 1947 to eliminate Venedigstrasse. Because this area is part of the core area, this resolution meant that the adjoining properties could be used more intensely than before. In recent times, these properties have all been held by one owner, so nothing stands in the way of an extensive redevelopment following modern principles.

1. A search for alternative proposals for the use of the area described (i.e., an ideas competition; work required: ca. two weeks).

2. Compilation of a catalog of criteria for selecting the optimal proposal (to be performed as work in groups).

3. Selection of an alternative to be refined collectively, after establishing a binding space allocation plan.

4. Individual students work out their plans by the end of the semester.

5. Work in small groups to find the best designs based on organizational/functional, constructional, or formal/design criteria.

6. Final presentation of the groups' work in the presence of several interested representatives (i.e., of the city planning office, the *Rentenanstalt* [Pension Company], and the Hatt-Haller company).

### **The "Critical" Alternative**

In a critical project seminar, by contrast, such an assignment would have to look fundamentally different. A chair could not formulate it in advance or provide such



senden Planungsanforderungen der Industrie und Verwaltung genügen sollen.

2. Die kritische Hochschulreform, die von den Betroffenen der Bauplanung gefordert wird. Ihr Ziel liegt in der Ausbildung von Architekten und Planern, die sich ihrer wachsenden politischen Funktion bewusst sind. Nur so können sie gesellschaftlich voll verantwortlich handeln.

Beide Richtungen fordern einen grösseren Praxisbezug, der sich im Projektstudium realisieren liesse. Es handelt sich jedoch um zwei verschiedene Formen von Projektstudium, die sich kaum überschneiden — abgesehen etwa von der Forderung des Praxisbezugs, der Spezialisierung und der Gruppenarbeit. Diese Überschneidungen können nicht über die unterschiedlichen Ziele der beiden Formen des Projektstudiums hinwegtäuschen.

Das technokratisch ausgerichtete Projektstudium dient allein der Festigung der bestehenden gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse. Gesellschaftliche Widersprüche werden dabei nicht berührt oder gar beseitigt. Die technokratisch ausgebildeten Architekten dienen vor allem den Interessen jener, die ihr Kapital in der Bauwirtschaft anlegen.

Das kritisch ausgerichtete Projektstudium soll die Interessen der Mehrheit der Bevölkerung berücksichtigen. Dies muss notfalls gegen die Interessen der Wirtschaft und der Verwaltung geschehen. Kritisch ausgebildete Architekten sollen vorhandene Missstände aufzeigen und ihre gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhänge untersuchen. Sie sollen Lösungen suchen, die möglicherweise auch ausserhalb des architektonischen Bereiches liegen können. Lässt sich das Problem nicht mit architektonischen Mitteln lösen, so können auch politische Massnahmen vorgeschlagen werden — wie zum Beispiel die Initiative «Recht auf Wohnung», statt des Versuches, die Wohnungsverhältnisse durch eine Verkleinerung des Grundrisses zu senken.

Ein Beispiel soll den Gegensatz von technokratischem und kritischem Projektstudium aufzeigen:

### **Beispiel eines technokratischen Projektstudiums**

Der Zürcher Gemeinderat beschloss im Jahre 1947 — im Rahmen einer Neuordnung der Baulinien für das Gebiet um den Tessinerplatz — die Aufhebung der Venedigstrasse. Da dieses Gebiet zum Kerngebiet gehört, ist durch diesen Beschluss für die anliegenden Grundstücke eine intensivere Nutzung als bisher möglich. Seit kurzem befinden sich diese Grundstücke in einer Hand, womit einer

### **Etudes critiques ou études technocratiques à l'ETH ?**

Actuellement, la formation de l'architecte se réfère encore largement à une conception surannée de la profession: à l'idéal de l'architecte-artiste, indépendant et libéral. Or cette conception est de plus en plus contestée aujourd'hui. Le développement de l'industrie du bâtiment exige à cet égard, une réforme de la formation professionnelle de l'architecte, correspondant aux impératifs de l'industrialisation. L'architecte doit devenir en quelque sorte un expert technique qui concrétise le plus fidèlement possible les desiderata de l'industrie du bâtiment.

Tout ceci est d'autant plus problématique que la concentration du capital dans le commerce et l'industrie a eu des conséquences socialement irresponsables, en particulier quant au développement des villes.

Alors que la Direction de l'ETH présente un programme officiel de réformes qui entend avant tout tenir compte des exigences de l'industrie du bâtiment, nos auteurs proposent l'étude critique de projets architecturaux et urbanistiques. Cette étude offrirait à l'architecte un aperçu des mécanismes de décision qui déterminent actuellement la construction et lui permet d'assumer dans ce contexte une responsabilité active. Alors que la réforme technocratique tient essentiellement compte des intérêts de l'industrie du bâtiment, les propositions de nos auteurs s'efforcent de tenir compte des besoins réels de la population.

Les auteurs illustrent cette alternative en citant un exemple zurichois récent: en 1947, la Municipalité de Zurich décida de transformer l'ancien quartier d'habitation de la Venedigstrasse en zone de développement urbain. Dans le cadre d'une étude technocratique, on se limiterait de mettre sur pied, par un travail de groupe, un projet de construction de haute qualité architecturale pour remplacer l'ancienne zone d'habitation.

Une étude critique devrait, au contraire, s'efforcer d'abord les avantages et les désavantages que pourrait entraîner cet « assainissement » pour la population et envisager ensuite la solution la plus acceptable pour les gens du quartier, en tenant compte en particulier des croissantes difficultés des classes les plus défavorisées de se reloger.

De tels critères ont été appliqués à l'occasion d'un séminaire de Jörn Janssen, dans l'analyse de la construction d'un ensemble d'habitation dans la banlieue zurichoise. Il s'agit de l'ensemble réalisé par le consortium Göhner dans la commune de Volketswil.

Les résultats préliminaires de cette analyse montrent avec évidence que cet ensemble — en dépit de la crise du logement surtout des travailleurs étrangers — est destiné exclusivement à la couche supérieure de la classe moyenne; que l'on avait systématiquement éliminé les procédés démocratiques de décision; que la commune de Volketswil connaît maintenant de sérieuses difficultés, les moyens nécessaires aux installations subséquentes manquant. De plus, l'ensemble Göhner est en opposition flagrante avec les lignes directrices de la planification régionale.

Malheureusement, les spécialistes suisses jusqu'ici n'ont jamais examiné vraiment de tels procédés. De même la Direction de l'ETH semble-t-elle chercher également à éviter de discuter ces problèmes. Il faut d'ailleurs comprendre dans ce sens la décision des autorités de l'Ecole de renoncer à l'enseignement des deux sociologues J. Janssen et H. Zinn.

grosszügigen Überbauung nach neuzeitlichen Gesichtspunkten nichts mehr im Wege steht.

1. Gesucht sind alternative Nutzungsvorschläge für das beschriebene Gebiet (d.h. ein Ideenwettbewerb; Arbeitsaufwand: ca. 2 Wochen)

2. Aufstellen eines Kriterienkataloges zur Auswahl des optimalen Vorschlages (dies soll in Gruppenarbeit geschehen).

3. Auswahl einer Alternative zur gemeinsamen Weiterbearbeitung, nach Erstellen eines verbindlichen Raumprogrammes.

4. Individuelle Entwurfsbearbeitung bis zum Ende des Semesters.

5. Ausarbeitung der besten Entwürfe in kleinen Gruppen nach organisatorisch-funktionellen, baukonstruktiven oder formal-gestalterischen Kriterien.

6. Abschliessende Präsentation der Gruppenarbeit in Anwesenheit einiger interessierter Herren aus der Praxis (Vertreter des Stadtplanungsamtes, der Rentenanstalt und der Firma Hatt-Haller).

#### Die «kritische» Alternative

In einem kritischen Projektseminar dagegen müsste eine solche Aufgabenstellung grundsätzlich anders aussehen. Eine Vorformulierung durch einen Lehrstuhl und die Aufstellung eines so exakten Zeitplans wären nicht möglich. Die Arbeit müsste sich an einem Rahmenthema orientieren, das ein bestimmtes Problemfeld beschreibt. Dieses Rahmenthema müsste für mehrere Projektseminare verbindlich sein, d.h. etwa vom Abteilungsrat für mehrere Semester als Forschungsaufgabe gestellt werden.

Es könnte in unserem Beispielfall verkürzt folgendermassen lauten: Im Kerngebiet der Stadt Zürich sind deutliche Entmischungstendenzen zu erkennen. Die wachsende wirtschaftliche Bedeutung der Stadt und die damit verbundene Konzentration von Verwaltungsbauten in der City hat eine Verschärfung des Wohnungsmarktes zur Folge. Die Abteilung I beabsichtigt deshalb, in den nächsten Semestern die mit dieser Tendenz zusammenhängenden Phänomene sowohl auf ihre Ursachen hin als auch in ihren Auswirkungen zu untersuchen. Im Anschluss daran sollen Strategien entwickelt werden, die geeignet erscheinen, die gegenwärtig zu beobachtenden Widersprüche zu beseitigen. Alle Projektseminare sollen an diesem Problemkreis orientiert werden und selbstgewählte damit zusammenhängende Fragestellungen bearbeiten. Die für den Fortgang dieser Arbeit erforderlichen Grundkurse — z.B. über Bauwirtschaft und Konjunktursteuerung, Betriebsorganisation

und Kalkulation in Baubetrieben, Statistik, Sozialpsychologie, Soziologie u.ä. — werden von der Abteilung eingerichtet, sobald inhaltliche Vorschläge seitens der Projektseminare vorliegen.

Folgende spezielle Fragestellungen können beispielsweise Projekthalte darstellen:

1. Welchen Einfluss haben die Hypothekenbanken und Versicherungen auf die Zürcher Stadtplanung?

2. Welcher Zusammenhang besteht zwischen den Bodenmarktverhältnissen in Zürich und der Verkehrsplanung, insbesondere der U-Bahnplanung?

3. War die Bildung des Bewohnervereins Venedigstrasse ein Schritt zur Demokratisierung der Planung?

4. Müssen die aus der Innenstadt verdrängten Wohnungsmieter Nachteile in Kauf nehmen, z.B. hinsichtlich Grundriss, Grösse, Ausstattung und Preis ihrer Wohnung?

5. Ist die Bauproduktion der Region in der Lage, eine genügende Anzahl billiger Wohnungen in der erforderlichen Zeit zu produzieren?

6. Welche Sozialisationschancen ergeben sich aus der Wohnungsnot für die niedrigen Einkommensgruppen? Schaffen Notwohnungsamt und Mietgerichte genügend Abhilfe? u.a.m.

Seit einem Jahr wird an der Architekturabteilung der ETH Zürich in den jetzt liquidierten Seminaren systematisch an der Verwirklichung eines solchen kritischen Projektstudiums gearbeitet. Allerdings unter sehr erschwerten Umständen. Diese Seminare standen sehr isoliert da und mussten sich alle Grundkenntnisse intern selbst erarbeiten.

#### Als Beispiel: Das Seminar «Ökonomische Kriterien für Planungsentscheidungen»

Dieser Abschnitt wurde ebenfalls vom Redaktionskollektiv der Seminarzeitschrift *Harde Zeiten* verfasst und erschien zuerst in Nr. 6 vom 24. Juni 1971. Wir geben eine leicht gekürzte Fassung.

Als Projekt wurde die Zürcher Vorortsgemeinde Volketswil gewählt. Diese Gemeinde hat sich in den letzten Jahren vor allem «dank» der Bautätigkeit der Generalunternehmung Ernst Göhner AG von einem Dorf zu einer städtischen Vorortsgemeinde entwickelt. Zusammen mit Greifensee, Schwerzenbach und Fällanden weist sie, laut Volkszählung, zwischen 1960 und 1970 den grössten Bevölkerungszuwachs von allen Gemeinden des Kantons Zürich auf. Der Wohnungsbau in dieser Gemeinde geschieht in einem



an exact timeline. The work would have to be oriented around a framing theme that describes a specific set of problems. This framing theme would have to be binding for several project seminars; that is, set by the department committee as a research task for several semesters.

In short, in our example it might read as follows: The core area of the city of Zurich shows discernable tendencies toward a reduction of mixed use. The growing economic importance of the city and the associated concentration of government buildings in the city center has further aggravated the housing market. In the coming semesters, Department I therefore intends to study both the causes and the effects of the phenomena associated with this trend. Thereafter, strategies will be developed that seem suited to eliminate the conflicts that can be observed today. All the project seminars shall be oriented around this set of problems and work on related issues the students select themselves. The required introductory courses to pursue this work—for example, on the construction business and business cycle stabilization, company organization and calculation in the construction business, statistics, social psychology, sociology, etc.—will be established in the department as soon as proposals for the content of the project seminars are available.

The following special issues may, for example, be the subject matter of projects:

1. What influence do mortgage banks and insurance companies have on urban planning in Zurich?
2. What connection exists between the conditions of the land market in Zurich and transportation planning, especially subway planning?
3. Was the formation of the *Bewohnerverein Venedigstrasse* [Venedigstrasse Residents' Association] a step toward the democratization of planning?
4. Must the displaced tenants of urban housing accept disadvantages in, for example, floor plan, size, fixtures, and the cost of their homes?
5. Is construction in the region prepared to produce a sufficient number of cheap apartments in the required time?

6. What damages to socialization result from the housing shortage for lower-income groups? Are the office of emergency housing and the housing courts providing adequate remedies? And much more.

For a year, the now dissolved seminars have worked systematically toward implementing this sort of critical project-based learning at the architecture department of the ETH Zurich. Albeit under much more difficult conditions. These seminars are isolated and have to acquire internally, on their own, all the basic knowledge required.

### **An Example: The “Economic Criteria for Planning Decisions” Seminar**

This section was also written by the editorial collective of the seminar journal *Harte Zeiten* and first published in issue no. 6 of June 24, 1971. We offer a slightly abridged version.

The Volketswil municipality of suburban Zurich was chosen as a project. This municipality has in recent years—above all, “thanks” to the construction activities of the Ernst Göhner AG general contracting company—developed from a village into an urban-suburban community. According to the census, it had the largest population increase of all the municipalities of the Canton of Zurich from 1960 to 1970, alongside Greifensee, Schwerzenbach, and Fällanden. Housing construction in the Volketswil municipality employed prefabricated elements, and a factory was built in the municipality itself for their production. The factory was built by the construction companies Losinger and Göhner (51 percent) under the name IGECO Volketswil. Of its production volume during the first five years (3,400 apartments), around 30 percent (1,200 apartments) were built in Volketswil.

The fifth semester, the winter semester of 1970–71, served almost exclusively for the gathering of empirical data on the developments of the Volketswil municipality, the Canton of Zurich, IGECO-Produktion, and the Göhner group.

The wealth of material that was within reach and soon obtained alone demonstrated the impossibility of conducting a so-called objective analysis. There were two main reasons for this:

1. For reasons of methodology and time, it was necessary to establish priorities for

collecting and organizing the material. Some of the available material, as well as potential further information, had to be disregarded.

2. Other available material could not be processed because it was not accessible. The owners of the information could easily block access to it (and did so).

That means: An “objective” analysis is already impossible because the owners of the information have no interest in an objective study from the opposite perspective.

The above-mentioned monopoly that certain information owners had on specific important materials occasionally forced our seminar to perform a kind of secret-service activity that is difficult to reconcile with the idea of independent scholarly research. It did not so much produce new information as reassess existing, unfortunately inadequate information (e.g., Ernst Göhner AG’s cost estimate).

During the ongoing sixth semester, students began to analyze and problematize the material.

The overarching theme was now made more precise: “The influence of the construction industry on building planning.” This influence will be described provisionally in the following areas:

The building production group is concerned with the technical process of housing production at Göhner. It is studying, for example, the question of where specific savings and improvements exist in the production of concrete-slab elements using the IGECO process; whether it is not perhaps the case that, under the pretext of an imperative for industrialization, quite different objectives are being pursued. What do these transformed conditions of production mean, precisely, for the true producers of the apartments; namely, the Italian and Spanish foreign workers? What influence does the demand for a return on capital investment (increasing competition, concentration, monopolization) have on the extent and structure of housing provision and the necessary upgrade of infrastructure?

The site selection study group observed that all the larger housing developments in the Zurich region were always built precisely where they did not belong, according to the official develop-

ment plan of the regional planning authorities. On studying this phenomenon more closely, the group discovered the crucial role that land acquisition and the land market play in the housing production of a large company like Göhner. It therefore studied the origin and function of land prices and is currently working on various economic theories of ground rent.

We want to describe here in greater detail the work of the municipality autonomy group, because it played out in a way that seems typical of the development of project-oriented work in groups.

Initial studies and an interview with a representative from the municipal authorities made clear that satisfying needs had not been the primary planning motive, but had been integrated only so that the planning result—the built housing project—would be economically feasible (no exchange value without use value).

Consequently, the group described its theme as follows: It was decided to employ an empirical study in order to identify changes in the population’s income and employment structure as a result of the development of the municipality from a village to a suburb of the city. The municipality’s tax roll served as evidence to that end. Three years that exemplify the development of Volketswil were selected, and the relationships between income groups and professional groups as well as their shifts over the last seven years were studied.

Those and other preceding studies led to the following general conclusions:

1. Above all, the percentage of the upper middle class increased greatly in Volketswil; that is, the planning is for “high-income” classes.

2. Structures of democratic decision-making were completely steamrolled by the development, resulting in enormous difficulties for the municipality, which, both in terms of its powers and funds, struggles to cope with the accrued consequences of planning by private companies.

These results raised a question: What role does democratic decision-making play in the planning process? That is: the group now needs to look at the historical development of planning

Elementbauverfahren, für dessen Produktion in der Gemeinde selbst ein Werk errichtet worden ist. Das Werk wurde von den Baufirmen Losinger und Göhner (51 %) unter dem Namen «IGECO Volketswil» errichtet. Vom Produktionsvolumen der ersten fünf Jahre (3400 Wohnungen) wurden ca. 30 % (1200 Wohnungen) in Volketswil gebaut.

Das 5. Semester, Wintersemester 1970-71, diente fast ausschliesslich der Erhebung empirischen Materials über die Entwicklung der Gemeinde Volketswil, des Kantons Zürich, der IGECO-Produktion und des Göhner-Konzerns.

Schon die Fülle des erreichbaren und bald vorhandenen Materials zeigte, dass es unmöglich ist, eine sogenannte objektive Analyse durchzuführen. Dies vor allem aus zwei Gründen:

1. Aus arbeitstechnischen und zeitlichen Gründen war man gezwungen, bei der Beschaffung und Ordnung des Materials Prioritäten zu setzen. Vorhandenes und möglicherweise erreichbares Material musste also teilweise unberücksichtigt bleiben.

2. Anderes vorhandenes Material konnte nicht verarbeitet werden, weil es nicht zugänglich war. Informationsbesitzer konnten den Zugang zum Material leicht sperren (was auch geschah).

Das heisst: Eine «objektive» Analyse wird schon dadurch unmöglich, weil die Informationsbesitzer gar kein Interesse an einer objektiven Untersuchung von anderer Seite haben können.

Das oben erwähnte Monopol gewisser Informationsbesitzer über bestimmtes wichtiges Material drängte unser Seminar zum Teil in eine Art Geheimdiensttätigkeit, die sich nur schlecht mit der Vorstellung unabhängiger wissenschaftlicher Forschungsarbeit verbinden lässt. Es wurden weniger neue Erkenntnisse produziert als vielmehr vorhandene, nur leider unzugängliche, neu erarbeitet (z.B. die Kostenkalkulation der Ernst Göhner AG).

Während des laufenden 6. Semesters wurde die Analyse und Problematisierung des Stoffes begonnen.

Das Oberthema wurde jetzt präziser gefasst: «Der Einfluss der Bauwirtschaft auf die Bauplanung». Dieser Einfluss soll vorläufig in folgenden Bereichen beschrieben werden:

Die Gruppe Bauproduktion befasst sich mit dem technischen Verfahren der Wohnungsproduktion bei Göhner. Sie untersucht z.B. die Frage, worin bei der Herstellung von Schwerplatten-Betonelementen nach dem IGECO-Verfahren die konkreten Einsparungen und Verbesse-

rungen denn nun bestehen; ob nicht vielleicht unter dem Vorwand einer notwendigen Industrialisierung objektiv ganz andere Ziele verfolgt worden sind. Was bedeuten diese veränderten Produktionsbedingungen nun gerade für die eigentlichen Produzenten der Wohnungen, nämlich die italienischen und spanischen Fremdarbeiter? Welchen Einfluss haben die Notwendigkeiten der Kapitalverwertung (Verschärfung der Konkurrenz, Konzentration, Monopolisierung) auf den Umfang und die Struktur des Wohnungsangebotes und der notwendigen Ergänzung der Infrastruktur?

Die Gruppe Standortwahl machte die Beobachtung, dass alle grösseren Siedlungen in der Region Zürich immer gerade dort entstanden sind, wo sie gemäss offiziellem Konzept der Regionalplanung gar nicht hingehört hätten. Bei den näheren Untersuchungen dieses Phänomens erkannte die Gruppe die entscheidende Rolle, welche die Landbeschaffung und der Bodenmarkt für die Wohnungsproduktion eines Grossunternehmers wie Göhner spielen. Sie beschäftigte sich deshalb mit der Entstehung und Funktion der Bodenpreise und arbeitet im Augenblick über die verschiedenen ökonomischen Theorien der Grundrente.

Die Arbeit der Gruppe Gemeindeautonomie wollen wir im folgenden etwas genauer darstellen, weil uns ihr Ablauf typisch erscheint für die Entwicklung einer projektorientierten Gruppenarbeit.

Anhand erster Untersuchungen und eines Interviews mit einem Vertreter der Gemeindebehörde stellte sich deutlich heraus, dass eine Bedürfnisbefriedigung nicht der Anlass der ganzen Planung gewesen war, sondern nur deshalb einbezogen werden musste, damit das Planungsergebnis — die gebaute Siedlung — wirtschaftlich verwertbar würde (kein Tauschwert ohne Gebrauchswert).

Daher umschrieb die Gruppe ihr Thema folgendermassen: Es wurde beschlossen, mittels einer empirischen Untersuchung die Veränderung der Einkommens- und Berufsstruktur der Bevölkerung zu ermitteln, als Folge der Entwicklung der Gemeinde von einem Dorf zur städtischen Vorortgemeinde. Das Steuerregister der Gemeinde diente als Unterlage dazu. Es wurden drei für die Entwicklung von Volketswil exemplarische Jahre herausgenommen und die Relationen zwischen Einkommens- und Berufsgruppen und deren Verschiebungen in den letzten sieben Jahren untersucht.

Diese und die vorausgegangenen Untersuchungen führten zu den folgenden generellen Schlüssen:

1. Vor allem der gehobene Mittelstand hat in Volketswil prozentual sehr stark zugenommen, d. h. es wird für « kaufkräftige » Schichten geplant.

2. Demokratische Entscheidungsstrukturen werden von der Entwicklung völlig überrollt und daraus resultieren für die Gemeinde enorme Schwierigkeiten, die ihr überlassenen Folgen privatwirtschaftlicher Planung mit ihrer Kompetenz und finanziell nur einigermassen zu bewältigen.

Diese Resultate drängten die Frage auf: Welche Rolle spielen demokratische Entscheidungsabläufe im Planungsprozess? Das heisst: die Gruppe hat sich nun mit der historischen Entwicklung der Planung in dieser zürcherischen Vorortsregion zu beschäftigen, genauer, mit der Frage wo, wodurch bedingt, welche Entscheidungen gefällt wurden, die « Planungsergebnisse » wie Volketswil zustande gebracht haben; welches die rechtliche und politische Stellung der Gemeinde in diesen Entscheidungsstrukturen sei, und, ganz generell, welche politischen Konsequenzen der Einfluss der Bauwirtschaft auf die Bauplanung und welche Rolle dabei der Staat als « Krisen-dämpfer » zu spielen habe.

Solche Fragen und Probleme wurden — wie wir in den bisherigen Untersuchungen festgestellt haben — von den zuständigen Fachleuten überhaupt nicht bearbeitet, meist nicht einmal erkannt. Und sie sollen offenbar nach dem Willen der Schulleitung von den in Ausbildung begriffenen Planern und Architekten auch in Zukunft nicht erkannt oder gar gelöst werden.

### **Perspektiven zum 7. und 8. Semester**

In Entsprechung zu den bereits formulierten Zielen des Projektstudiums käme es in den folgenden Semestern darauf an, eine reale Planungsaufgabe im Zusammenhang mit der Fallstudie zu wählen, die geeignet wäre, die in der Analyse erkannten Widersprüche und Konflikte auszutragen und zu lösen.

Denn: Die Hochschulen haben keine Aufgaben an sich, sondern nur in Bezug auf die Gesellschaft. Ihre Entwicklung in Richtung « Massenstudium » wird mit Sicherheit zu Konflikten führen, die über den Rahmen der Hochschule hinausgreifen und nur gesamtgesellschaftlich betrachtet und gelöst werden können. Das heisst: in unserer Situation der allgemeinen Verschleierung gesellschaftlicher Zusammenhänge hat die Hochschule die Aufgabe, kritisches Bewusstsein zu wecken und aktiv mitzuarbeiten bei der Lösung gesellschaftlicher Probleme.

in this suburban region of Zurich, specifically the questions of which decisions were made where and under what conditions that have led to “planning results” like those of Volketswil; what was the legal and political role of the municipality in these decision-making structures; and, more generally, what political consequences did the influence of the construction industry have on building planning and the role the state plays as a “crisis manager”?

Such questions and problems—we have determined in our studies thus far—were not addressed at all by the responsible experts and usually not even recognized. And apparently the administration also does not want them to be recognized, much less solved, in the future by the planners and architects now being educated.

### **Perspectives for the Seventh and Eighth Semesters**

In accordance with the goals of the project-based learning already formulated, in the semesters to follow students will select a real planning task in the context of the case study that is suited to addressing and resolving the contradictions and conflicts recognized in the analysis.

Because: Universities do not have mandates per se, other than in relation to society. Their evolution in the direction of “mass studies” will certainly lead to conflicts that extend beyond the framework of the university and can be observed and resolved only by society as a whole. That means: In our present situation when social relations are systematically concealed, the task of the university is to awaken critical consciousness and to actively contribute to solving social problems.



# Bürgerinitiativen - wie

In der westdeutschen Hauptstadt Bonn existieren zur Zeit acht Bürgerinitiativen: die Aktionsgemeinschaft Tieflage Bundesbahn und Fernstrassenumgehung, das Stadtentwicklungsforum, die Arbeitsgemeinschaft Bonner Aerzte zum Umweltschutz (die erste Aerzte-Bürgerinitiative in Deutschland), die Bürgerinitiative Südstadt, die Aktion Nahverkehr, das Rote-Punkt-Komitee, die Planungsgruppe Kultur und die Bürgerinitiative Kommunales Kino.

Für eine Stadt von nicht ganz 300 000 Einwohnern, die bis vor nicht allzu langer Zeit zudem sehr konservativ und wenig lebendig war, sind Zahl und Bilanz erstaunlich. 1969 gelang es der Bürgerinitiative Stadtentwicklungsforum durch eine bundesweite Aktion, das Bundeskabinett zu veranlassen, die Fehlplanung für ein Regierungsviertel zu stoppen. Die Bürger erzwangen ein erheblich verbessertes Planungsverfahren (Expertenkolloquium Bundesbauten Bonn 1970, öffentliche Hearings, Diskussionen mit den Planern) und die Ausschreibung des bislang grössten bundesdeutschen Wettbewerbes. Bonner Bürgerinitiativen erreichten weiterhin nach zweijähriger erbitterter Kampagne, dass der Stadtrat seinen Beschluss aufhob, die Bundesbahn und eine Stadtautobahn mit einer 110 m breiten Schneise ebenerdig durch die Innenstädte von Bonn und Bad Godesberg zu führen. Sie sollen zumindestens in einen Tunnel kommen.

Zur Zeit kämpfen die Bürgerinitiativen gemeinsam darum, dass keine Autobahn durch die Zentren geschlagen wird: eine Umweltvergiftung und Stadtzerstörung katastrophalen Ausmasses soll verhindert werden. Zehntausende von Menschen würden das Opfer abstruser «Stadterneuerungsbestrebungen» werden: im

Rahmen der Hausabrisse und städtebaulichen Umstrukturierungen (Wohnquartiere zu Bürovierteln) droht ihnen die Deportation an den Stadtrand. Bonner Bürgerinitiativen setzten die Errichtung eines Abendgymnasiums durch, verhinderten eine Müllverbrennungsanlage, die ein Versicherungskonzern für seine riesigen Büros in der Innenstadt anlegen wollte, setzten eine Anzahl Modifizierungen von Stadtratsbeschlüssen durch, verjagten Spekulanten und wirkten vor allem als Ideenfabrik für die Stadtplanung: sie können in der Regel Schwarz auf Weiss nachweisen, dass nahezu alle wichtigen Verbesserungen in der Bonner Stadtplanung der letzten zwei Jahre auf ihre Anregung, ihren politischen Druck oder geschickte Einflüsterungen zurückgehen.

Bonn ist nur ein Beispiel für eine Stadt, in der Bürgerinitiativen zunehmend eine wichtige Rolle spielen — einerseits zur Erhaltung städtischer Substanz angesichts drohender Stadtzerstörung, andererseits zur Verbesserung der Lebensumwelt unter gesamtgesellschaftlichen Aspekten. Einer Leverkusener Bürgerinitiative gelang es im Jahre 1971 (u. a. mit Bonner «Nachbarschaftshilfe»), die Planung einer Grosswohnanlage für 16 000 Menschen im Abgasbereich der Bayer-Werke zu verhindern. Das Projekt war nach Aussage eines Gutachters «wie ein Bauantrag mittlerer Grösse geplant» gewesen. Es ist nur eines von vielen Beispielen dafür, mit welchem Mass an stadtplanerischem Dilettantismus unsere zukünftige Lebensumwelt angelegt wird. Eine Wiesbadener Bürgerinitiative, vorwiegend von Jungsozialisten getragen, sorgte dafür, dass die vorgesehene Umwandlung eines ausgedehnten Wohngebietes zum Kerngebiet nicht zustande kam. Teilerfolge in dieser Richtung hatten auch die Bürgerinitiati-

# Citizens' Action Groups: How, Where, Why?

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In the West German capital, Bonn, there are currently eight citizens' actions groups: the Aktionsgemeinschaft Tieflage Bundesbahn und Fernstrassenumgehung [Railway Tunnel and Highway Bypass Action Association]; the Stadtentwicklungsforum [Urban Development Forum]; the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Bonner Aerzte zum Umweltschutz [Bonn Physicians for Environmental Protection Working Association], the first citizens' action group of physicians in Germany; the Bürgerinitiative Südstadt [Südstadt Citizens' Action Group]; the Aktion Nahverkehr [Local Transportation Action Group]; the Rote-Punkt-Komitee [Red Dot Committee]; the Planungsgruppe Kultur [Culture Planning Group]; and the Bürgerinitiative Kommunales Kino [Communal Cinema Citizens' Action Group].

For a city with not quite 300,000 residents, which until not too long ago was also very conservative and not very lively, this number and balance are astonishing. In 1969, the Stadtentwicklungsforum citizens' action group organized a federal action that managed to prompt the Federal Cabinet to stop the misguided planning of a government quarter. The citizens compelled a considerably improved

planning procedure (the Bundesbauten Bonn expert colloquium in 1970, public hearings, discussions with planners) and the largest architectural competition ever in West Germany. Citizens' action groups in Bonn managed, after a bitter, two-year campaign, to get the town council to repeal its decision allowing the federal railroad and a highway to pass via a 111-meter-wide ground-level strip through the center of the cities of Bonn and Bad Godesberg. It should at least pass through a tunnel.

At the moment, the citizens' action groups are fighting together to prevent the highway passing through the town centers: this is to prevent environmental pollution and destruction of cities on a catastrophic scale. Tens of thousands of people were victims of abstruse "urban renewal efforts": as part of the demolition of buildings and urban restructuring (residential neighborhoods into office districts), they were threatened with deportation to the outskirts of the city. Citizens' action groups in Bonn managed to get an evening secondary school built, prevented a refuse-incineration facility that an insurance group wanted to build for its enormous offices in the center of the city, got the town council to modify several resolutions,

chased away speculators, and above all functioned as an idea factory for urban planning: as a rule, they can demonstrate in black-and-white that nearly all the important improvements in Bonn's town planning of the past two years can be traced back to their motivation, political pressure, or effective whispering.

Bonn is just one example of a city in which citizens' action groups are increasingly playing an important role—on the one hand, preserving the fabric of the city in the face of the threat of its destruction; on the other hand, improving the living environment for society as a whole. A citizens' action group in Leverkusen managed in 1971 (in part with "help from neighbors" in Bonn) to prevent the planning of a large housing development for 16,000 residents in an area exposed to fumes from Bayer's factories. According to an expert report, the project had been "planned like a medium-size building permit application." This is just one of many examples of the extent to which our future environment is being determined by amateurish town planning. A citizens' action group in Wiesbaden, largely supported by young socialists, saw to it that a planned transformation of an extended residential neighborhood into an inner-city zone was not carried out. Such partial successes were also enjoyed by citizens' action groups in the Westend district of Frankfurt and the Lehel district of Munich.

Citizens' action groups are sprouting from the ground not just in West Germany—they are in fact much older and more widespread in the Netherlands. For the most part, they are even more successful there: they have thus far succeeded in preventing the establishment of a chemical giant here, and in Amsterdam for twenty years they have prevented the threatened demolition of the large district of Jordaan (20,000 residents).

Citizens' action groups were initially viewed by the political parties with distrust, usually even as competition. In the meanwhile, however, it has become clear that they are by no means an "uprising of the apolitical community gardeners" but rather political enterprises: often they see the socioeconomic conflicts of interest far more clearly than the professional politicians; they distrust the pros because they have experienced on many occasions how, for them, money often

counts more than the voice and will of the voters. Citizens' action groups are essentially an effort by those affected to act politically on their own initiative and thus to take democracy seriously. In the Federal Republic of Germany, this "grassroots work" has already begun to have an effect on the parties: many young members of the SPD [Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, or Social Democratic Party of Germany] and the FDP [Freie Demokratische Partei, or Free Democratic Party] are actively involved in citizens' action groups because they see them as an opportunity to outmaneuver the party hierarchy, which is often no longer interested in "grassroots problems." The pinnacle of recognition: Recently, the FDP and its leading politicians organized a forum of West German citizens' action groups in Baden-Baden.

Town planning today pursues the same goals nearly everywhere. The trend is to make profits in housing construction just as in industry. Conflicts of interest are growing along with it. Slogans such as "economic construction" often conceal an economy whose profits grow to the same extent as the living conditions of those affected are reduced. Housing construction follows the motto, "As long as people are surviving, it can't be that bad." Or, "Length times width times money." Citizens' action groups have the task of pointing out the resulting psychological and social damage of such planning and buildings. They should challenge projects that include, for example, housing types that reproduce the low emancipation of women.

So-called urban renewal, in particular, often turns out to be social warfare. In many cities, such mellifluous language is a guise: it is intended to cover up the ongoing brutal conquest of land in attractive locations in city centers where the socially disadvantaged have been living for centuries. This social conflict is disguised by such philanthropic terms as *responsibility* and *welfare*: keywords such as *cleanliness*, *better toilet*, and *white facade* are used to carry out a downright deportation of thousands of people to city outskirts with inadequately planned infrastructure. Social connections, friendships and neighborhoods, memory, and identification are all sacrificed to it. Those affected also pay for this isolation,



↓ fig. 1 Bonn, Südstadt district. Urban destruction in a historical residential neighborhood near the center of the city. An office district is being built here. The citizens' action groups are defending themselves against it. (Photo: Waldemar Haberey, Bonn)

# WO - WOZU?



← fig. 2 Bonn, Südstadt district. Simrock-Strasse before its demolition. A bank headquarters swallows one hundred apartments. (Photo: Waldemar Haberey, Bonn)



ven im Frankfurter Westend und im Münchner Lehel.

Aber nicht nur in Westdeutschland spriesen die Bürgerinitiativen aus dem Boden — viel älter und verbreiteter sind sie in den Niederlanden. Dort waren sie grossenteils noch weitaus erfolgreicher: es gelang ihnen, die Ansiedlung eines Chemiegi-ganten und in Amsterdam den seit 20 Jahren drohenden Abriss des ausgedehnten Stadtteils Jordaan (20 000 Einwohner) bis heute zu verhindern.

Bürgerinitiativen wurden von den Parteien zunächst argwöhnisch, meist sogar als Konkurrenz betrachtet. Inzwischen ist sichtbar geworden, dass sie keineswegs der «Aufstand der unpolitischen Gartenläube» sind, sondern politische Unternehmungen: häufig sehen sie die sozioökonomischen Interessenkonflikte wesentlich schärfer als die professionellen Politiker; sie misstrauen den Profis, weil sie vielerorts erfahren haben, dass für jene das Geld häufig mehr zählt als Stimme und Wille der Wähler. So sind Bürgerinitiativen im wesentlichen der Versuch von Betroffenen, eigeninitiativ politisch zu handeln und damit Demokratie ernst zu nehmen. Diese «Basisarbeit» beginnt in der Bundesrepublik bereits in Parteien zu wirken: viele junge Mitglieder der SPD und FDP betei-ligen sich aktiv an Bürgerinitiativen, weil sie darin eine Chance sehen, die Allmacht der Partei-hierarchie, die sich für die «Basisprobleme» oft

↑ fig. 3 Bonn-Bad Godesberg. The FDP faction of the town council and the Bürgerinitiative Stadtentwicklungsforum demon-strate the planned effect of the inner-city highway along a fifty-meter-long firewall: its 120-meter-wide strip would destroy the spa town of Bad Godesberg with noise and exhaust fumes. (Photo: Roland Günter)

nicht mehr interessiert, auszumanövrieren. Höhepunkt der «Anerkennung»: Unlängst veranstaltete die FDP mit ihren Spitzenpolitikern in Baden-Baden ein «Forum der bundesdeutschen Bürgerinitiativen».

Die Stadtplanung folgt heute fast überall denselben Zielen. Der Trend wird immer stärker, im Wohnungsbau in ähnlicher Weise wie in der Industrie Profite zu machen. Damit wächst der Widerspruch der Interessen. Hinter einem Schlagwort wie «ökonomischer Bauweise» versteckt sich oft eine Ökonomie, deren Gewinnspanne in dem Masse wächst, wie die Lebensumwelt für die Betroffenen reduziert wird. Wohnungsbau nach dem Motto: Solange die Leute überleben, kann es nicht so schlimm sein. Oder: Länge mal Breite mal Geld. Bürgerinitiativen haben die Aufgabe, darauf hinzuweisen, welche psychischen und sozialen Schäden durch solche Planungen und Bauten entstehen. Sie sollen Planungen hinterfragen, z. B. wie in einer Wohnsiedlung die mangelhafte Emanzipation der Frau durch die Wohnform verewigt wird.

Vor allem die sogenannte Sanierung entpuppt sich oft als sozialer Krieg. In vielen Städten ist sie ein sprachlich gut klingender Deckmantel: er soll verschleiern, dass in den Cities eine brutale Eroberung des standortgünstigen Bodens stattfindet, auf dem seit Jahrhunderten die sozial Schwächeren wohnen. Diese gesellschaftliche Auseinandersetzung wird mit philanthropischen Begriffen wie «Verantwortung» und «Fürsorge» getarnt: unter den Stichworten «Sauberkeit», «besseres WC» und «weisse Fassade» wird eine regelrechte Deportation von Tausenden von Menschen an den infrastrukturell unzulänglich geplanten Stadtrand angeordnet. Ihr fallen die sozialen Bindungen, Freund- und Nachbarschaften, Erinnerung und Identifikation zum Opfer. Für diese Isolierung, ferner für die längeren Anfahrtswege zur Arbeit und damit für den Freizeitverlust bezahlen die Betroffenen zudem noch das Zwei- und Dreifache ihrer früheren Mieten.

In Amsterdam versuchen eine Anzahl von Bürgerinitiativen in vielfältiger Weise, sogar mit einem eigenen Sender («Radio Sirene»), das Bewusstsein dieser Situation zu fördern. Schreckbild aller Abrissbedrohten ist hier die neue Satellitenstadt Bijlmermeer für 120 000 Menschen, zuweilen als «Märkisches Viertel» von Amsterdam bezeichnet. Nicht die Betroffenen werden hier saniert, sondern Kapitalanleger

und Baufirmen. Der Blick in deutsche Samstagzeitungen zeigt, dass reiche Leute in Berlin ihre Steuern in ausgedehntes Wohneigentum plus hohe Verzinsung verwandeln können — dafür zahlen die Zwangsanierten des Stadtteils Kreuzberg das Mehrfache ihrer früheren Miete.

Neben missratenen Neubauplanungen und Sanierungen sind Verkehrsprobleme ein weiteres wichtiges Arbeitsfeld von Bürgerinitiativen. Die Folgen einer falschen Verkehrspolitik, die das Auto zuungunsten der öffentlichen Transportmittel begünstigt (Hand in Hand mit flächenextensiver Siedlungsplanung, die eine günstige Erschliessung mit Bahn und Bus nicht zulässt), Lärm, zunehmende Vergiftung durch Abgase und nicht zuletzt eine nur noch durch den Krieg übertroffene Stadterstörung durch breite Schneisen in historischen Altstätten und älteren Wohnvorstädten — dies alles hat an vielen Orten den Aufstand der Bevölkerung veranlasst.

In München protestiert sie gegen einen Altstadtring. Seine gebauten Teilstücke zeigen, dass jede Verkehrsmassnahme weitreichende Folgen für die Umstrukturierung ausgedehnter Stadtbereiche hat: Kampf um neue prestigeverheissende Standorte und Verdrängung der Wohnbevölkerung. Ganz besonders grotesk ist diese Fehlplanung deshalb, weil sie verkehrlich überhaupt nicht funktioniert: die seitlichen Strassensysteme halten die Verkehrsüberflutung nicht aus, häufig bricht der Verkehrsfluss zusammen.

Viele Bürgerinitiativen bleiben deshalb erfolglos, weil ihre Teilnehmer nicht wissen, wie man sie organisiert, wie und wo sie handlungsfähig werden — kurz: wie man Bürgerinitiative «macht». Bürgerinitiative wird anfangs oft mit Erwartungen überladen — werden sie nicht schnell genug erfüllt, fallen ihre Teilnehmer in Resignation zurück. Oder: sie wissen nicht, wie man sich Informationen besorgt, sie analysiert und verwertet. Viele moralisieren bloss mit barockem Pathosblick zum Himmel oder verlegen sich nach jahrhundertalter Sitte aufs Bitten.

Bürgerinitiativen wie z. B. in Amsterdam, Bonn, Frankfurt, München und Wiesbaden hatten Erfolg, weil sie, abgesehen von sachlich hervorragender Arbeit, die politischen Strukturen durchschauten und nüchtern benutzten, sowie sich in der Sozialpsychologie der Politik ausserordentlich geschickt bewegten. Dazu im Folgenden einige Hinweise.

Bürgerinitiativen brauchen Personen, über



↓ fig. 4 Amsterdam. The satellite city Bijlmermeer for 120,000 residents is the bugaboo of the residents of Amsterdam who are threatened with being forced out of the center of the city. (Photo: Roland Günter)

die die Bevölkerung sich mit der Aktion identifizieren kann. Das war z. B. im Münchner Lehel ein Lehrer mittleren Alters: «der Herr Lichtl». Die Aktionsgruppe im Amsterdamer Jordaan gewinnt vor allem über Kinder Sympathie. «Kinder sind sehr wichtig, um die Familien zu interessieren.» Die Gruppe baute eigene Spielplätze — einen unter dem Namen «Freiheitsgarten». Sie besitzt ein eigenes Café. Es dient als Kommunikationszentrum, in dem die Bevölkerung sich informieren kann, andererseits aber auch die emotionalen Faktoren findet, die für die Sympathie, den Zusammenhalt und die Energie einer Bürgerinitiative sehr wichtig sind. Auch weitere holländische Gruppen haben Informationszentren.

Juristische Fixierungen in bestimmten Organisationsformen (Verein u. a.) sind erfahrungsgemäss nur hinderlich. Wozu Menschen nicht wirklich motiviert sind, das erfüllen sie auch nicht, wenn sie es unterschrieben haben. Warum sollen Kräfte in monatelangen Satzungsdebatten und Satzungsänderungen verbraucht werden — an meist platonischen Problemen? Wenn Mitgliederzeichnisse existieren, ist zudem die Gefahr «schwarzer Listen» der Verwaltung gross: man darf nicht vergessen, dass in jeder Stadt vielfältige wirtschaftliche Verflechtungen herrschen. Wer hohe Risiken läuft, kann sich auch anders als mit «öffentlichem Bekennermut» nützlich machen: mit Informationen, Spenden u. a.

Viele Bürgerinitiativen scheitern einfach daran, dass sie ohne Rücksicht auf die sozioökonomischen Verhältnisse Rollenanforderungen an ihre Mitglieder stellen, die sie nur um den Preis des sozialen Selbstmordes leisten könnten. Die Bonner Bürgerinitiativen hatten nicht zuletzt deshalb so grosse Erfolge, weil sie sehr geschickt die Rollen differenzierten: Information — Expertenwissen — forensischer Auftritt — weitere Arbeit. Sympathisierende Verwaltungsbeamte, das sogenannte Frustrationspotential des Mittelbaues, können deshalb mitmachen, weil sie absolut vor Risiken geschützt werden: der jeweilige Informant darf nur einer einzigen Person bekannt sein. Experten, die oft in mannigfaltigen Auftragsverflechtungen stehen,



← fig. 5 Amsterdam, Jordaan. The citizens' action group built this playground with parents and children: the Vrijheidstuin (Freedom Garden). (Photo: Roland Günter)

↑ fig. 6 Amsterdam, Jordaan. Information center of the citizens' action group that has thus far successfully prevented the demolition of the district. (Photo: Roland Günter)

Fig. 7 Munich. Renters' radial march.  
(Photo: Dieter Hinrichs, Munich)



brauchen sich nicht zu exponieren, sondern liefern in Kleingruppensitzungen Wissen: die Fülle der sogenannten Gefälligkeitsgutachten wird analysiert.

Exponenten der Bürgerinitiativen sind nur die, die es sich leisten können, weil sie unantastbar sind. Politik kann nicht auf der Basis von individuellem Heldentum gemacht werden.

Da angesichts des wenig entwickelten Standes der Demokratie die Möglichkeiten formeller, d. h. institutioneller Machtausübung, für Bürgerinitiativen entfallen, müssen die informellen umso intensiver genutzt werden. Eine einzige Aktion hat nirgendwo Wirkung — nur eine Bündelung vielfältiger Massnahmen. Diese müssen oft über ein bis zwei Jahre kontinuierlich verfolgt werden. Die Analyse gelungener Aktionen, so der Baustopp verfehlter Regierungsviertelplanungen in Bonn, zeigt eine Art Mosaiktechnik: Ueber Teilerfolge an verschiedenen Stellen wurde die Entwicklung langsam in die Richtung verändert, in der der Gesamterfolg erst möglich wurde. Politik ist eben kein starkes, langsames Bohren von harten Brettern (Max Weber).

Der Katalog von Aktionsmöglichkeiten ist umfangreich. Erfahrungsgemäss ist es für einen Kommunalpolitiker, der auch in seiner eigenen Partei mannigfache Konkurrenzen hat, ausserordentlich unangenehm, wenn seine Bürgerversammlung umfunktioniert wird. Wenn dies mit schöner Regelmässigkeit geschieht, muss er um seine Kandidatur in der Partei und Wahl fürchten. Dabei sind nicht nur die tatsächlichen Risiken wichtig, sondern oft noch mehr die vorgestellten: in der politischen Psychologie spielen Fiktionen — z. B. die Möglichkeit eines viel weitergehenden Aufbegehrens der Bevölkerung — eine grosse Rolle. Bürgerinitiativen können häufig nur über solche Nervenkriege Erfolg haben. Mit gezielten Kampagnen sollte die Wiederwahl einzelner Abgeordneter verhindert werden — schon die Androhung einer solchen Aktion kann wirksam sein.

Die Aktionsgruppe im Amsterdamer Jordaan bestreitet mit dem Erlös eines Cafés den schmalen Lebensunterhalt für fast ein Dutzend junger Leute: sie sind eine Art städtische Entwicklungshelfer für das Quartier. Einmal in der Woche fahren sie mit den Kindern aufs Land, organisieren Ferien auf einem Bauernhof in Friesland, vermitteln Tausch — vom Teller bis zum Kaninchen und Möbeln, wenn sich eine Fa-

Fig. 8 Bonn. Protest against air pollution from a planned highway through Bonn's small city center. Beethoven is given a breathing mask.

as well as for longer commutes to work and hence a loss of free time, with rents that are two to three times their previous ones.

In Amsterdam, several citizens' action groups are trying in various ways—even with their own radio station (Radio Sirene)—to increase awareness of this situation. The local bugaboo threatening demolition is the new 120,000-person satellite city of Bijlmermeer, which is sometimes called Amsterdam's "Märkisches Viertel." The renewal here is not benefiting those affected but the investors and construction companies. A look at weekend newspapers in Germany shows that the rich in Berlin can transform their taxes into extensive property holdings and high interest rates—yet the residents of the Kreuzberg district who were subjected to forced urban renewal pay many times their previous rent.

Alongside misguided plans for new buildings and urban renewal, traffic problems are another important area for the work of citizens' action groups. The consequences of bad transportation policies that benefit cars to the disadvantage of public transportation (hand in hand with the planning of extensive housing developments that do not allow for affordable train and bus lines), are noise, increased pollution from exhaust fumes, and, not least, a destruction of the city, exceeded only by the war, by broad strips cutting through historical old towns and older residential suburbs—all of this has caused an uprising of the residents in many places.

In Munich, they are protesting a ring road around the old town. The parts of it that have been built demonstrate that every transportation measure has far-reaching consequences for the restructuring of extended areas of the city: a battle over new, prestigious locations and residents' displacement. This misguided planning is particularly grotesque because it does not work for transportation at all: the system of side streets cannot handle the inundation of vehicles, and the flow of traffic often breaks down.

Many citizens' action groups remain unsuccessful because their members do not know how to organize or how and where they can be effective—in short, how citizens' action groups are "made." The expectations of citizens' action groups are often too high in the begin-

ning—if they are not met quickly enough, their members become resigned. Or they do not know how to get information and analyze and evaluate it. Many simply moralize while raising their eyes toward heaven with baroque pathos or resort to petitions following a centuries-old custom.

Citizens' action groups such as those in Amsterdam, Bonn, Frankfurt, Munich, and Wiesbaden succeeded because, setting aside their objectively outstanding work, they saw through the *political* structures and soberly exploited them or maneuvered with extraordinary skill within the sociopsychology of politics. A few tips on that follow.

Citizens' action groups need people through whom residents can identify with the action. In the Lehel district of Munich, for example, that was a middle-aged teacher: Mr. Lichtl. The citizens' action groups in the Jordaan district of Amsterdam gained sympathy above all with children. "Children are very important as a way of gaining the interest of families." The group built its own playground and called it the Vrijheidstuin (Freedom Garden). The group owns its own café. It serves as a communication center where residents can get information but also finds the emotional factors that are very important for the sympathy, cohesion, and energy of a citizens' action group. Other Dutch groups also have information centers.

Experience has shown that legal entities in certain forms of organization (associations and so on) are merely a hindrance. When people are not truly motivated, they do not do something even if they have signed the form. Why waste energy on month-long debates over statutes and changes to bylaws—usually Platonic problems? When membership lists exist, moreover, there is also a big risk of administrative "black lists": One must not forget that every city has intertwined business networks. Anyone at high risk can also be useful in ways other than the "courage of one's convictions": with information, donations, and so on.

Many citizens' action groups fail simply because they do not consider socioeconomic circumstances and expect their members to play roles they could fill only at the cost of social suicide. The citizens' action groups in

Bonn had great success not least because they very cleverly distinguished among roles: information—expert knowledge—forensic evidence—other work. Sympathetic civil servants, the so-called frustration potential of the middle management, could participate because they were absolutely protected against risks: the information in question could be known only to a few people. Experts, who often have a complicated set of contractual agreements, need not expose themselves but can instead provide information to small groups in meetings: the wealth of “favorably slanted reports” is then analyzed.

The proponents of citizens’ action groups are not just those who can afford to do so because they are untouchable. Politics cannot be pursued on the basis of individual heroism.

Because in the face of the underdeveloped state of democracy, citizens’ action groups lack the opportunities to exercise their power formally—that is, through institutions—and thus informal paths must be used all the more intensely. Only a bundling of diverse measures will have an effect—isolated action will have no effect anywhere. They often have to be pursued continuously for one to two years. Analysis of successful actions, such as stopping the misguided plans to build a government district in Bonn, reveals a kind of mosaic technique: by means of partial successes in various areas, developments slowly changed in the direction that made overall success possible in the first place. Politics is precisely “a slow, powerful drilling through hard boards” (Max Weber).

The catalog of possible actions is extensive. Experience has taught that it is extraordinarily uncomfortable for a municipal politician, who also has many competitors within his own party, when his town meeting is taken over. When that happens with regularity, he necessarily fears for his candidacy in the party and in the election. What is often even more important than the actual risks are the imagined ones: in political psychology, fictions—for example, the possibility of a much-broader uprising of the people—play an important role. Citizens’ action groups can often succeed only through such wars of nerves. Through focused campaigns, the reelection

of specific members can be prevented—even the threat of such action can be effective.

The citizens’ action group in the Jordaan district of Amsterdam uses the profits from a café to provide a modest living for nearly a dozen young people who function in a sense as urban development aid workers for the neighborhood. Once a week, they travel to the countryside with children, organize vacations on a farm in Friesland, facilitate swaps—everything from plates to rabbits and furniture when a family grows. They organize transportation and help restore buildings. In addition, around forty people are active part-time. Workers in the trades form consulting teams to explain to people how to maintain the houses and apartments with little money but lots of self-help and help from neighbors, while their rent remains the same or increases only insignificantly. The restored buildings are symbols of neighborhood spirit and a successful battle against the resignation on which the interests of capital speculate in many places.

Many citizens’ action groups mediate expert consultation, press contacts, and “political channels.” Several of them also advise parties—almost always the opposition in the municipal parliament. One of the most important tasks of citizens’ action groups is providing clear information to the population: above all, memorable reminders of the consequences of planning. Together with the FDP faction on Bonn’s town council, the members of an action group painted the traffic system to scale on an enormous firewall, whose sixteen lanes of noise and exhaust fumes would mean the end of the spa town of Bad Godesberg. To protest the danger to the public represented by this 110-meter-wide, city-destroying highway, a breathing mask was placed over the mouth of the Beethoven monument at Münsterplatz in Bonn. Women and children from a citizens’ action group in Bonn wore breathing masks when protesting in front of the town hall. A magazine made the protests famous across the country. Photomontages of a highway spider with the cathedral of Münster as a rest stop and the Beethoven at its center illustrated the specter of the German capital as a transportation facility. Newspaper campaigns with articles, interviews, open letters, and letters to the editor, as well



mille vergrößert. Sie machen Transporte und helfen beim Häuser-Restaurieren. Ausserdem arbeiten rund 40 Leute einen Teil ihrer Zeit aktiv mit. Handwerker bilden Beraterteams, die der Bevölkerung erklären, wie sie mit wenig Geld und mit viel Selbst- und Nachbarschaftshilfe ihre Häuser und ihre Wohnungen erhalten: zur alten oder nur unerheblich gestiegenen Miete. Die restaurierten Bauten bilden Symbole des Quartiergeistes und der erfolgreichen Abwehr der Resignation, auf die die Kapitalinteressen vielerorts spekulieren.

Viele Bürgerinitiativen vermitteln Sachberatung, Pressekontakte und «politische Kanäle». Einige beraten auch Parteien — so gut wie immer die Opposition im Stadtparlament. Eine der wichtigsten Aufgaben der Bürgerinitiativen ist die verdeutlichende Information der Bevölkerung: vor allem der einprägsame Hinweis auf Planungsfolgen. Zusammen mit der Bonner FDP-Stadtratsfraktion malten Aktionsgruppenmitglieder auf eine riesige Brandmauer in Originalgröße die Verkehrsanlage, die mit 16 Spuren Breite, Lärm und Abgasen das Ende des Badeortes Bad Godesberg bedeuten würde. Aus Protest gegen die Abgasgefährdung der Bevölkerung durch diese 110 m breite, stadtzerstörende Autobahn wurde dem Beethovendenkmal auf dem Bonner Münsterplatz ein Mundschutz umgehängt. Frauen und Kinder der Bonner Aktionsgruppen demonstrierten mit Atemschutz vor dem Rathaus. Eine illustrierte machte die Proteste bundesweit bekannt. Fotomontagen einer Autobahnspinne, in deren Mitte die Münsterbasilika als Autobahn-Raststätte und das Beethovendenkmal stehen, führten das Gespenst der deutschen Bundeshauptstadt als Verkehrsanlage («programmierter Selbstmord») vor Augen. Zeitungskampagnen mit Artikeln, Interviews, offenen Briefen, Leserbriefen, ferner Broschüren, Plakate — auch in vielen Wartezimmern von Ärzten — sowie Sonderdrucke von Zeitungen und Zeitschriften und sogar Postkarten informierten die Bevölkerung. Hinzu kamen kleine Ausstellungen an Bauzäunen und bei Veranstaltungen.

Die Aktion Maxvorstadt in München organisierte einen Mietersternmarsch. Dabei führte sie einen Bagger mit, dessen Greifer ein historisches Haus, im Modell dargestellt, hochzog. Planspiele zeigen Problemalternativen und Folgen. Sie sollten nicht zu kompliziert sein, damit jeder damit umgehen kann. Kleinplakate im

WEERT DE SLOPERS UIT DE BUURT



SLOOPVERBOD VOOR:  
DILENBURG RAPENBURG VALKENBURG  
NIEUWMARKT BETHANIENBUURT

Openbare Vergadering

Maandag 1 juni 8 uur

Mozaïek op Aaronshuis Waterlooplein

gelegd door Sektie Woon en Leefklimaat  
Saneringskomitee Nieuwmarkt

← fig. 9  
Amsterdam.  
Sign prohibiting  
demolition.  
(Photo: Roland  
Günter)



← fig. 10  
Amsterdam. The  
Nieuwmarkt citizens'  
action group had its  
own radio station for  
a time: Radio Sirene.  
(Photo: Roland  
Günter)

DIN-A-4 Format finden auf jedem Laternenpfahl Platz. Die holländischen Bürgerinitiativen haben häufig Quartierzeitungen: um den Aufwand möglichst gering zu halten und um jedem das Gefühl zu geben, dass sie nicht von Fachleuten, sondern von Laien gemacht werden, verzichten sie auf jeglichen Anspruch auf Perfektion.

Zur Aktionsgruppe im Jordaan-Viertel in Amsterdam gehören auch Filmemacher. Ihre Streifen werden in ganz Holland gezeigt. Im Märkischen Viertel in Berlin wurden Filme zur Problemdarstellung und Solidarisierung der Bevölkerung mit bedrängten Mietern ausserordentlich erfolgreich eingesetzt. Ueber die Bürgerinitiativen im Münchner Lehel gibt es einen Fernsehfilm: «Herr Lichtl sucht die Wahrheit» — im Münchner Rathaus und hinter den Kulissen. Bürgerinitiativen erfinden oft sehr einprägsame Slogans. In Bonn taufen sie in einer Aktion das «Amt für Stadterneuerung» in «Amt für Stadtzerstörung» um — eine Bezeichnung, die sich seither beharrlich hält.

Die in vielen deutschen Bürgeraktionen lange Zeit praktizierte Verunsicherungspsychologie mit Bierernst und bedrohender Aggressivität hat sich als Fehlschlag erwiesen: sie bestärkte lediglich die vorhandenen Ängste der Bevölkerung und trieb sie weiter zur Resignation. Die holländischen Bürgerinitiativen stärkten mit emotionalen Mitteln, vor allem mit Humor, das Selbstbewusstsein und schufen damit bessere psychologische Voraussetzungen für die Handlungsfähigkeit der Bevölkerung. Eine wichtige Rolle für die Solidarisierung spielten dort z. B. Stadtteilstefest.

Bürgerinitiativen bestreiten das Monopol der politischen Parteien, für Betroffene zu sprechen. Sie bestehen darauf, dass jeder der beste Experte für sich selbst ist. Bürgerinitiativen sollten auch klarstellen, dass Stadtplanung eine politische Auseinandersetzung verschiedener Interessen ist — meist zwischen denen, die eine möglichst günstige Lebensumwelt für ihre Entfaltung wünschen, und den Interessen der Ka-

pitalverwertung, deren Vorteil in dem Masse steigt, wie sie an dieser Lebensumwelt durch Reduzierung der Bauleistungen (oft «Rationalisierung» genannt) Einsparungen vornehmen können und damit Gewinne machen. Den Betroffenen wird oft Sand in die Augen gestreut: Technische Argumente werden vorgeschoben, um Ziele und Interessenkonflikte zu verdecken.

Die Aufgabe der Bürgerinitiativen ist es, Grundlagen und Methoden von Planungen und Gutachten auf unausgesprochene oder tabuisierte Annahmen hin zu untersuchen, ferner die Rolle der Experten aufzudecken, die sich mit Gefälligkeitsgutachten in Priesterpose zur Absegnung missbrauchen lassen.

Angriffspunkte sind: schlechte Datenbasis, methodische Unzulänglichkeiten, isolierte Problemsicht, Mangel an Komplexität, spekulative Thesen, lineare Hochrechnungen, Scheinalternativen, logische Fehler, Beschreibungen von historischen, d. h. veränderbaren Tatbeständen als unveränderbare Norm, fehlende dialektische Analyse, vorgeschobene Risiken, die geringen Wahrscheinlichkeitsgrad haben, und selbstgesetzte Sachzwänge.

Bürgerinitiativen können in vielfältiger Weise Erfolge haben: sie leisten einen Beitrag zur Bewusstseinsbildung angesichts folgenreicher gesellschaftlicher Widersprüche; sie helfen, die Resignation abzubauen und das Selbstbewusstsein der Bevölkerung zu stärken; sie lassen sichtbar werden, dass der einzelne nicht bloss sein eigenes Interesse verfolgt (wie man ihn oft glauben machte), sondern ein gemeinsames, das sich nur in Gruppen durchsetzen lässt; sie zeigen, dass Planung kein unentrinnbares Schicksal, sondern teilweise gestaltbar ist; sie machen deutlich, dass Konflikte meist nicht durch den bösen Willen, die Unkenntnis oder die Dummheit anderer Leute entstehen, sondern durch unterschiedliche ökonomische und soziale Interessenlagen, in denen der Stärkere aus der schlechten Position des Schwächeren Vorteile zieht.



as brochures and posters—many of them in physicians' waiting rooms—and offprints from newspapers and magazines and even postcards, informed the public. Small exhibitions also appeared on fences at construction sites and at events.

The Aktion Maxvorstadt in Munich organized a radial march for renters. They brought along an excavator, which lifted a model of a historical house in its bucket. Planning simulations highlight collateral problems and consequences. They should not be too complicated for people to follow. Small posters in A4 format find room on every lamppost. The Dutch citizens' action groups often have neighborhood newspapers. To reduce the workload and give everyone the feeling that it is being done not just by experts but by laypersons, they do not even try to be perfect.

The citizens' action group in the Jordaan district includes filmmakers. Their films have been shown throughout Holland. In Berlin's Märkisches Viertel, films were used with extraordinary success to depict the problem and to foster among the wider public a sense of solidarity with the evicted renters. A television film depicts the citizens' actions groups in the Lehel district of Munich: *Herr Lichtl sucht die Wahrheit* [Mr. Lichtl seeks the truth]—specifically, at Munich's city hall and behind the scenes. Citizens' action groups often come up with very catchy slogans. In Bonn, for one action they renamed the Amt für Stadterneuerung [Office of Urban Renewal] the "Amt für Stadtzerstörung" [Office of Urban Destruction]—a name that has stuck ever since.

The psychology of creating uncertainty that has long been practiced by many German citizens' action groups with deadly seriousness and menacing aggressiveness has proven to be a misstep: it merely reinforces the existing fears of the people and drives them even further into resignation. The Dutch citizens' action groups build self-confidence using emotional means, above all humor, and thereby create better psychological conditions for the people to take action. For example, neighborhood festivals played an important role in creating solidarity there.

Citizens' action groups challenge the monopoly that the political parties have on speaking for the affected. They insist that everyone is the best expert when it comes to oneself. Citizens' action groups should also make clear that urban planning is a political debate among different interests—usually between those who want living conditions that are as favorable as possible to their development and the interest of capital investment, whose benefits increase to the extent they can save money on the living environment by reducing construction costs (often called "rationalization"), thus increasing their profits. Sand is often thrown in the eyes of those affected: technical arguments are advanced to cover up the real objectives and conflicts of interest.

The task of citizens' action groups is to study the principles and methods of planning and reports for unspoken or taboo assumptions and to uncover the role of experts who allow themselves to be misused by posing as priests while blessing favorably slanted reports.

The points of attack are: poor underlying data, methodological inadequacies, isolated perspectives on the problems, lack of complexity, speculative theses, linear projections, pseudo-alternatives, logical errors, descriptions of historical and hence changeable states of affairs as inalterable norms, lack of dialectical analysis, assumed risks with a low degree of probability, and self-imposed situational constraints.

Citizens' action groups can succeed in many ways: they contribute to building awareness of consequential conflicts in society; they help to overcome resignation and increase the self-confidence of the public; they make clear that individuals are not simply pursuing their own interests (as they are often led to believe) but a common interest that is best achieved by working in groups; they show that planning is not an inescapable fate but can in part be shaped; they make clear that conflicts usually result not from the ill will, ignorance, or stupidity of other people but from different economic and social interests in which the stronger take advantage of the bad position of those who are weaker.

# Group Portraits and Self Portraits

Author:  
David P. Handlin

Source:  
*archithese*, 9 (1974):  
45–52

## Some Remarks on Recent Approaches to Town-Planning

Until about ten years ago most architects and planners believed that it was both possible and desirable to formulate a single concept of urban development that could be applied everywhere and for everyone. They chose general names like *La Ville Radieuse* or *Broadacre City* to indicate the universality of their concepts, and they did not hesitate, if given the opportunity, to build projects in countries that had unfamiliar cultures.

A new generation has reacted against this notion. They rely on cultural anthropologists and sociologists to tell them something about the life patterns of the people for whom they are building. This concern is present not just when designing for a distant culture; architects and planners often feel estranged from sections of their own country, or even their own city.

As an antidote to this condition, the idea that populations are made up of enclaves or groups that have their own cultures and, therefore, particular requirements in their built environments has seemed especially attractive.<sup>1</sup> Some architects and planners have found it sensible not to devise an ideal and uniform pattern at, for instance, an urban scale, but instead to think

of the city as a set of separate “urban villages,” each with its own sub-culture and architecture. This view has had a particular relevance in the United States, which has been described as “a nation of nations.” Because Americans come from so many different backgrounds, it would seem appropriate, at least at first glance, to adopt a pluralistic approach to physical design and planning.

I have used the term “urban village” deliberately, because one way to understand whether there is any substance in these ideas is to examine an important work of sociology which has this phrase in its title.<sup>2</sup> In the late 1950s, when Herbert Gans did his research for *The Urban Villagers*, the West End—an area of 7000 inhabitants near downtown Boston—was scheduled to be torn down for urban renewal. To most superficial observers the West End seemed a slum, but Gans did not think so. If he could show that the West Enders had a culture that was different from that of most other Americans, but in its own way healthy and stable, it would be possible not only to correct the impression that the area was a slum, but also to indicate a set of criteria that could be used in future planning for the area.

# Group portraits and self portraits

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### Gruppenportraits oder Selbstportraits?

Eine frühere Generation von Stadtplanern ging davon aus, dass die modernen Planungsprinzipien überall anwendbar seien; neuerdings wird aber mit Recht gefordert, dass jede Region und jede Bevölkerungsgruppe einer spezifischen Planungs-

methode bedarf. Auf die universalen Konzepte wie *Ville Radieuse* oder *Broadacre City* folgte das Interesse für das soziale Geflecht städtischer Gemeinschaften. Jedoch bereitet die Analyse dieser städtischen Bevölkerungsgruppen grosse Schwierigkeiten, selbst für die erfahrensten Soziologen. Die berühmte Arbeit von Herbert Gans, *The Urban Villagers* (New York, 1962) entbehrt nicht der Widersprüche und Ungenauigkeiten, sind doch die unterprivile-

gierten Bevölkerungsgruppen weder stabil noch homogen. Infolgedessen sind auch ihre Bedürfnisse nur schwer definierbar. Auf welche anthropologischen Fakten soll sich in solchen Fällen eine Planung stützen?

Diese Frage wird von radikalen Planungstheoretikern häufig umgangen. Da die soziologischen «Gruppenbilder» keine adäquaten Planungsgrundlagen liefern, greift man auf die Idee des «Selbstporträts» zu-

sensible not to devise an ideal and uniform pattern at, for instance, an urban scale, but instead to think of the city as a set of separate "urban villages", each with its own sub-culture and architecture. This view has had a particular relevance in the United States, which has been described as "a nation of nations". Because Americans come from so many different backgrounds, it would seem appropriate, at least at first glance, to adopt a pluralistic approach to physical design and planning.

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The bulk of *The Urban Villagers* focussed on what Gans called the West End's peer group society, a close-knit set of people who seemed to reject the values of "middle-class" America. In fact, Gans found that West Enders treated the representatives of this "outside world", whether doctors, social workers, politicians, librarians, or teachers, with suspicion and hostility. Even consumer goods and the mass media were only partially accepted in this recreation of a village society in an urban area.<sup>3</sup> Gans, there-

fore, treated the West End as if it were uniform and unchanging. The only danger to the stability of the pattern of life there came from the incursions of outsiders. Of all possible perils, urban renewal, of course, was the most formidable.

Gans presented a wealth of information in *The Urban Villagers*, but it is still debatable whether his description was an adequate group portrait of the inhabitants of the West End. In composing such a portrait it was important to establish who, in fact, "the West Enders" were. Gans is a conscientious sociologist, so at the beginning of *The Urban Villagers* he had to come to terms with the fact that the West End was not at all homogeneous. Italian-Americans made up the largest group, about forty per cent, but the area also had sizable contingents of Jewish-, Polish-, Albanian-, Ukrainian- and Greek-Americans. To complicate matters even further, the West End contained other categories of inhabitants, which Gans listed as: pathological households, middle-class professionals and students, artists and bohemians, and staff from a nearby hospital.<sup>4</sup>

Faced with such a bewildering heterogeneity, Gans chose to write about the Italian-Americans in the West End, but his task became still more complicated because there were important distinctions even among these people. Gans acknowledged that Sicilian-Americans differed from Italian-Americans and also that, if "class" was defined by income and education, there was a broad spectrum within the group that he had decided to analyze. Nevertheless, Gans ignored these differences, partly because, in the case of Sicilian- and Italian-American traits, they were "not visible to the non-Italian observer", but mainly because he thought that "the major criteria for ranking, differentiating,

rück: d. h. man sieht die Lösung des Problems in der totalen Selbstbestimmung des Wohnraums durch die Individuen oder die Familien, die die Städte bewohnen.

Aber auch diese Lösung des Problems erweist sich bei näherer Betrachtung als eine romantische Fiktion. In den Vereinigten Staaten ist das Eigenheim ein volkstümliches Ideal. Jedoch: in den meisten Fällen gleichen sich diese Eigenheime wie ein Ei dem anderen, und es ist alles andere als eine erwiesene Tatsache,

dass ihre Bewohner sich dafür interessieren, die Architektur dieser Eigenheime zu "personalisieren". Sie interessieren sich kaum für veränderbare Räume: «Flexibilität» ist in ihren Augen bloss ein provisorischer Ersatz für Eigentum. Daher ist es auch fraglich, ob die architektonische «Spontaneität» der südamerikanischen «Squatters» und ihrer Bidonvilles als Vorbild für amerikanische Stadterneuerung dienen kann, wie das etwa Robert Goodman (*After the Planners*, New York, 1972) vor-

schwebt. Wer sich ein Eigenheim baut, der tut es, um den Status eines Hauseigentümers zu erreichen, und keineswegs, um sich der «bürgerlichen Repression» zu entziehen. Ähnlich utopisch und irrational ist die Verherrlichung des «mobile homes» als einer neuen städtischen Wohnform: in Wirklichkeit tun die Verkäufer wie auch die Eigentümer von «mobile homes» alles, um diese moderne Form der städtischen Behausung der traditionellen Form des Eigenheims anzugleichen.



↓ fig. 1 An early illustration showing urban "chaos." The urban renewal programs of the 1950s were the culmination of these early studies.



↓ fig. 2 Crowded housing conditions, photograph ca. 1860.



and establishing compatibility are ingroup loyalty and conformity to established standards of personal behavior".<sup>3</sup>

Using these criteria Gans outlined four categories of Italian-Americans: "routine-seekers" who wanted a stable way of life, "action-seekers" who tended to live more for the moment, the "maladapted" who were entirely unable to control their behavior because of alcoholism or other problems, and the "middle-class mobiles" who were striving to better themselves. Of these four groups Gans concentrated most of his analysis on the routine-seekers, because they were the people who seemed to reject the "middle-class values" that urban renewal was supposed to promote.<sup>4</sup>

Gans disposed of these ticklish questions about the composition of the West End in the introduction to *The Urban Villagers*. Once he had dealt with this definitional problem, he rarely mentioned the West End's heterogeneous composition again. In fact, a reader who skips the introduction might easily think that Gans was discussing the entire community. A telling transformation in terminology helped establish this impression. After the introductory chapter Gans only infrequently used the cumbersome, but accurate, term "routine-seeking Italian American". Instead he referred to the people he was describing as "the West Enders".

The continuing use of this term not only contradicted what had been discussed in the

introduction and, therefore, was misleading about the composition of the group portrait, but it also reflected upon the accuracy of Gans' description of the routine-seeking Italian Americans. If the West End had been homogeneous, then it would have been proper to discuss only the contacts that the area's inhabitants had with outsiders. Since it was not, however, Gans should have told how the routine-seeking Italian Americans interacted with other West Enders. Surely such contacts — whether at school, at work, in play, or casually in stores and on the streets — must have existed in such a small area.<sup>7</sup>

How they occurred would perhaps have revealed something significant about the routine-seeking Italian American's self-definition and, therefore, his attitude toward social mobility and residence in the West End. By ignoring these matters Gans presented an incomplete portrait of his subjects, so one should be skeptical about his conclusions. It is significant, for instance, that although he frequently mentioned the routine-seeking Italian-American's fear of suburbia, he never confronted the fact that the population of the area had declined from 18,500 in 1920 to 7,000 in 1957. A few demographic statistics about length of residence and change of occupation would have clarified many questions about mobility, but Gans never took the trouble to find them.

There are two lessons to be learned from

these contradictions and inconsistencies in *The Urban Villagers*. First of all, if a competent sociologist like Herbert Gans has so much difficulty in composing an adequate group portrait of the inhabitants of an area like the West End, then it is doubtful that architects and planners will be more successful in trying to establish a cultural or sociological basis for their designs.<sup>8</sup> More importantly, the inability to come to terms with the composition of the West End illustrates the inevitable pitfalls of the notion that a community is uniform and unchanging.

There is a compelling temptation to claim that "the community" speaks with a single voice. It makes good rhetoric, especially if that rhetoric emphasizes the differences between "insiders" and oppressive "outsiders". Besides, the uniform and unchanging community is methodologically neat. It would certainly be more complicated, if not impossible, to formulate a renewal plan or even a lay-out for a block of apartments, if several cultural patterns or interests had to be accommodated in a physical design.

Unfortunately, in the United States there are very few homogeneous communities in which, no matter what the issue, there is a clear-cut distinction between insider and outsider. Those who have tried to organize communities, for whatever purpose, have generally been unsuccessful, if they have not recognized this fact and learned how to deal with it.<sup>9</sup> To continue to believe the myth of the uniform and unchanging community has most often led to disillusionment and frustration. In the late 1960's this was a common syndrome in the United States.

The current interest in the personalization of housing can partly be explained as an attempt to fill the vacuum of social concern that was left by the gradual realization that community feeling, especially in the depressed areas of American cities, could not be crystallized and used as an input for design. In other words, if it is not possible to design buildings or reconstruct neighborhoods from the information provided by group portraits, then perhaps, as an alternative, individuals or families can compose self portraits by making an imprint on the place in which they live.

There are many complicated issues in this proposition, but, if the personalization of housing is truly an issue, it must first be discussed

in terms of home ownership. "The joy of home possession", a sentimental, but nevertheless telling, nineteenth century phrase, is still the dream of most American households and the means by which they can best feel an attachment to their everyday environments. This is the context in which the issue of personalization has generally been discussed. But this connection is now only infrequently made, because the embarrassing fact is that till recently most of those who disparaged home ownership also favored an architecture that denigrated any manifestation of "personality".

The classic critique of home ownership was made by F. Engels in his pamphlet *The Housing Question*. Engels thought that a desire for possession, whether for land or for housing, was an atavism. He encouraged workers to flock to large cities, where, unencumbered by their age-old bonds to the land, they would form a revolutionary group and produce a new social order. Housing reformers were among the enemies of this idea. Engels attacked them because the inexpensive homes they favored tied workers down with heavy mortgages, reduced their mobility, and, therefore, made it risky for them to strike against their employer. This was the case in America where — Engels learned from Eleanor Marx-Aveling, Karl Marx's daughter — "miserable wooden huts" with heavy mortgages were being erected for workers on the outskirts of large cities.<sup>10</sup>

Engels did not discuss what housing would be like after the dramatic transformation he anticipated.<sup>11</sup> But some American critics in the 1930's had specific ideas about this matter.<sup>12</sup> It would be too lengthy to characterize all the points of view that were involved in the debate that resulted in the formulation of a national housing policy in the United States in the late 1920's and 1930's. But at that time many architects, planners, and social commentators analyzed the housing question in terms that were similar to those that Engels had used. As an alternative to the system then operating in America, they envisioned a "collectivist" society that would combine socialist ideals and the spirit of an American agrarian tradition.<sup>13</sup>

This transformation would be accompanied by the evolution of a new individual who would not be interested in selfish matters.<sup>14</sup> Land and buildings in this society would, therefore, be held in common, and houses would not have

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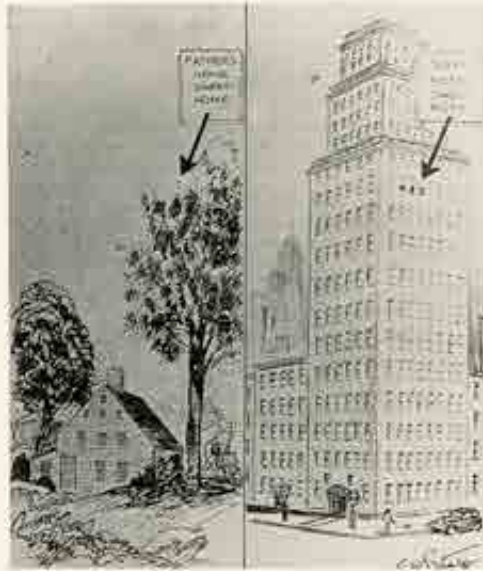


↓ fig. 3 Cartoon from an "Own Your Own Home" campaign, 1920s.

any of the quirks of "personality" that characterized the homes then common in America.<sup>15</sup> In arrangement they would be "mass": not detached, and in appearance they would be "objective".<sup>16</sup> The first projects of the Public Housing Administration, the same kind of buildings that are now called bleak and dehumanizing, were admired as examples of this "objective" architecture.<sup>17</sup>

In its own way this was a coherent vision, but few people liked it. In *Modern Times*, the quintessential statement of the 1930's, Charlie Chaplin's domestic ideal was a simple suburban house, and so it has been ever since. Whether this is wise from a financial point of view is still not clear. Not much is known about mortgage foreclosures in the United States, although the little evidence that has been uncovered does show that the loss of a home by foreclosure has not been a frequent occurrence.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, there has been a continuous, and unresolved, debate about whether home ownership is advantageous as an investment.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, there can be little question that home ownership is immensely popular in the United States. A better arrangement may be possible in some undisclosed future, but most people have wanted a home of their own in the here and now.

Despite its overwhelming popularity, many American architects still will not acknowledge the validity of home ownership and the suburban house. Instead they have devised a number of methods of accommodating the self-portrait in the collectivist ideal. Some believe that it is possible, for instance, to personalize what used to be considered "mass" and "objective" housing. It is not clear, however, that "people", whoever they are, truly desire such personalization. One should be skeptical of the universal applicability of such an idea when it is put forth mainly by architects, especially architectural students, who generally are known to enjoy such activities as taking out wall partitions and building furniture. It can also be argued that spatial flexibility, which is often considered a requisite for personalization, is bought at a great price. Movable partitions transmit sound easily and, because they cannot carry pipes and conduits, create house planning difficulties that may negate the advantages that such devices are intended to offer. Architects are becoming more familiar with these matters.<sup>20</sup> If such devices make living in anonymous buildings more palat-



able, then they should be encouraged. Nevertheless, I think most families would still prefer a home of their own and will always consider such attempts at personalization as substitutes for the ultimate state of home ownership.

This is the context in which the fascination with the compelling image of the self-built South American shanty town must be seen. At the end of *After the planners*, a broad critique of city planning and architecture in the United States, Robert Goodman points to such squatter settlements as hinting at "a more spontaneous, less



← fig. 4  
The ideal American home, as viewed around 1930.

1 fig. 5 Squatter settlements in Lima, Peru.



bourgeoise, 'aesthetic' environment".<sup>21</sup> These images, especially when photographed, may have a kind of visual complexity that appeals to an architect who is repelled by other kinds of "mass" housing, but I think few people in the United States would choose to live in such places, if given the possibility of owning their own home. Most self-built houses in the United States have been erected not so that their inhabitants can escape bourgeois repression, but instead, so that they can achieve the status of home owner.<sup>22</sup> The uniform texture of a squatter settlement may suggest a "people's" architecture, but in the United States the image of the suburban house still fulfills this purpose.

A similar point can be made about mobile homes. Many architects have seen these houses as part of a new world of anti-materialistic impermanency. The portability of these houses conjures up visions of a disposable architecture which would be part of a cultural or even a spiritual awakening.<sup>23</sup> But anyone who has read the literature put out by the mobile home industry or has visited a park of these houses knows that such a concept of flexibility or impermanency is exactly the opposite of what the purchaser of a mobile home wants.<sup>24</sup> Most Americans choose this kind of house because it is now the easiest way to live in that circumstance which approximates what they consider ideal. Consequently, mobile homes are styled, both by

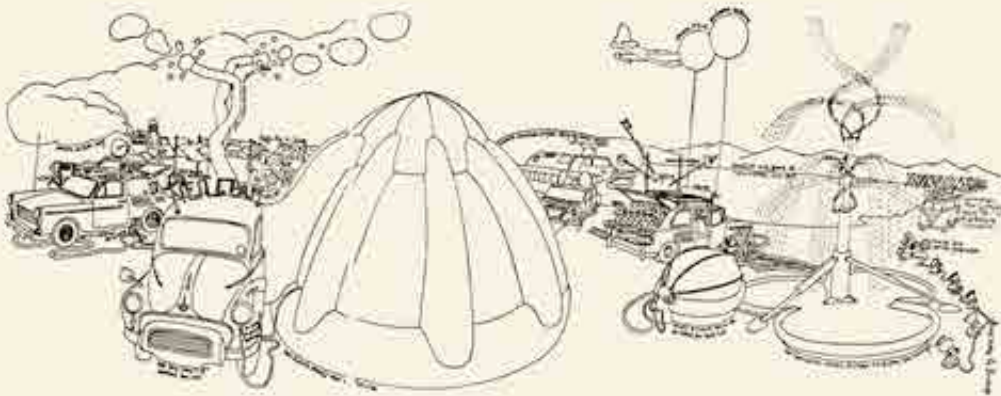


the manufacturer and later the purchaser, to look as much like the personal, detached house as possible.

Undoubtedly many former residents of the West End have now achieved a kind of self-portrait in a detached house, whether it is conventionally built or a mobile home.<sup>25</sup> By moving to the suburbs they have not shed all social pathologies, as many architects and planners in earlier decades predicted they would. But, by the same token, just because they live in individual houses does not mean that they have lost all



↓ fig. 7 Archigram's image of mobility and flexibility.



group affiliation. Americans have a long tradition of participation in a broad array of voluntary organizations, and there is no sign that this activity is abating. One might even be able to find evidence of specific group affiliations in the way that particular Americans choose their individual homes.

<sup>7</sup> The popularity of E. T. Hall's books is evidence of this interest.

<sup>8</sup> Herbert Gans, *The Urban Villagers* (New York, 1962).

<sup>9</sup> *The Urban Villagers*, pp. 45—228.

<sup>10</sup> *The Urban Villagers*, pp. 6—11.

<sup>11</sup> *The Urban Villagers*, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> *The Urban Villagers*, pp. 27—32. Of course, such a system of classification is by no means beyond dispute. I am sure many sociologists would disagree with the appropriateness of Gans' categories.

<sup>13</sup> For instance, on p. 8 Gans mentions in a footnote: "Most of the West End stores were owned by Jews, as were the medical, dental, and legal offices." Yet, there is no mention of the implications of this intermixing in the rest of the book.

<sup>14</sup> I will not discuss whether it is possible from good sociological data to extract a proper physical design. This is another questionable issue altogether.

<sup>15</sup> This, in fact, is what the most skilled politicians have learned to do. See, for instance: Edward C. Banfield and James O. Wilson, *City Politics* (New York, 1963), pp. 115—137.

<sup>16</sup> Frederick Engels, *The Housing Question* (London 1935), p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> The implications of this fact are discussed in: Leonardo Benevolo, *The Origins of Modern Town Planning* (London, 1983).

<sup>18</sup> I am referring primarily to Lewis Mumford because he was the most articulate of a group of critics concerned with housing in the 1930's.

<sup>19</sup> Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York, 1962), pp. 400—435.

<sup>20</sup> *Technics and Civilization*, pp. 321—363.

<sup>21</sup> The essence of "personality" was expressed in Emily Post, *The Personality of the House* (New York, 1930).

<sup>22</sup> *Technics and Civilization*, pp. 357—363. Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (New York, 1966), p. 126.

<sup>23</sup> *The Culture of Cities*, p. 126).

<sup>24</sup> Stephan Thornstrom, *Poverty and Progress* (New York, 1969), pp. 116—122, 199—201.

<sup>25</sup> John P. Dean, *Home Ownership: Is It Sound?* (New York, 1945).

<sup>26</sup> See, for instance, the recent survey of this subject in the November, 1973 edition of *Architectural Design*.



There's a little bedroom up under that eave. (Dorthea Home)

↑ fig. 8 Mobile home's image of stability and permanence.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Goodman, *After the Planners* (New York, 1972), p. 242.

<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, John F. C. Turner and Robert Fichter, *Freedom to Build* (New York, 1972), ill. 24.

<sup>23</sup> This seems to be the message at the end of: Martin Pawley, *Architecture Versus Housing* (New York, 1971).

<sup>24</sup> Al Griffin, *So You Want to Buy a Mobile Home* (New York, 1970).

<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the weakness of Herbert Gans' *The Levittowners* is that he does not explain why the inhabitants of the area he studied left their previous neighborhoods. Could they too have at one time been "routine-seekers?"

*Sources of Illustrations:*

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points of view that were involved in the debate that resulted in the formulation of a national housing policy in the United States in the late 1920's and 1930's. But at that time many architects, planners, and social commentators analyzed the housing question in terms that were similar to those that Engels had used. As an alternative to the system then operating in America, they envisioned a "collectivist" society that would combine socialist ideals and the spirit of an American agrarian tradition.<sup>13</sup>

This transformation would be accompanied by the evolution of a new individual who would not be interested in selfish matters.<sup>14</sup> Land and buildings in this society would, therefore, be held in common, and houses would not have any of the quirks of "personality" that characterized the homes then common in America.<sup>15</sup> In arrangement they would be "mass," not detached, and in appearance they would be "objective."<sup>16</sup> The first projects of the Public Housing Administration, the same kind of buildings that are now called bleak and dehumanizing, were admired as examples of this "Objective" architecture.<sup>17</sup>

In its own way this was a coherent vision, but few people liked it. In *Modern Times*, the quintessential statement of the 1930's, Charlie Chaplin's domestic ideal was a simple suburban house, and so it has been ever since. Whether this is wise from a financial point of view is still not clear. Not much is known about mortgage foreclosures in the United States, although the little evidence that has been uncovered does show that the loss of a home by foreclosure has not been a frequent occurrence.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, there has been a continuous, and unresolved debate about whether home ownership is advantageous as an investment.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, there can be little question that home ownership is immensely popular in the United States. A better arrangement may be possible in some undisclosed future, but most people have wanted a home of their own in the here and now.

Despite its overwhelming popularity, many American architects still will not acknowledge the validity of home ownership and the suburban house. Instead they have devised a number of methods of accommodating the self-portrait

in the collectivist ideal. Some believe that it is possible, for instance, to personalize what used to be considered "mass" and "objective" housing. It is not clear, however, that "people," whoever they are, truly desire such personalization. One should be skeptical of the universal applicability of such an idea when it is put forth mainly by architects, especially architectural students, who generally are known to enjoy such activities as taking out wall partitions and building furniture. It can also be argued that spatial flexibility, which is often considered a requisite for personalization, is bought at a great price. Movable partitions transmit sound easily and, because they cannot carry pipes and conduits, create house planning difficulties that may negate the advantages that such devices are intended to offer. Architects are becoming more familiar with these matters.<sup>20</sup> If such devices make living in anonymous buildings more palatable, then they should be encouraged. Nevertheless, I think most families would still prefer a home of their own and will always consider such attempts at personalization as substitutes for the ultimate state of home ownership.

This is the context in which the fascination with the compelling image of the self-built South American shanty town must be seen. At the end of *After the Planners*, a broad critique of city planning and architecture in the United States, Robert Goodman points to such squatter settlements as hinting at "a more spontaneous, less bourgeois, 'aesthetic' environment."<sup>21</sup> These images, especially when photographed, may have a kind of visual complexity that appeals to an architect who is repelled by other kinds of "mass" housing, but I think few people in the United States would choose to live in such places, if given the possibility of owning their own home. Most self-built houses in the United States have been erected not so that their inhabitants can escape bourgeois repression, but instead, so that they can achieve the status of home owner.<sup>22</sup> The uniform texture of a squatter settlement may suggest a "people's" architecture, but in the United States the image of the suburban house still fulfills this purpose.

A similar point can be made about mobile homes. Many architects have seen these houses as part of a new world of anti-materialistic

impermanency. The portability of these houses conjures up visions of a disposable architecture which would be part of a cultural or even a spiritual awakening.<sup>23</sup> But anyone who has read the literature put out by the mobile home industry or has visited a park of these houses knows that such a concept of flexibility or impermanency is exactly the opposite of what the purchaser of a mobile home wants.<sup>24</sup> Most Americans choose this kind of house because it is now the easiest way to live in that circumstance which approximates what they consider ideal. Consequently, mobile homes are styled, both by the manufacturer and later the purchaser, to look as much like the personal, detached house as possible.

Undoubtedly many former residents of the West End have now achieved a kind of self-portrait in a detached house, whether it is conventionally built or a mobile home.<sup>25</sup> By moving to the suburbs they have not shed all social pathologies, as many architects and planners in earlier decades predicted they would. But, by the same token, just because they live in individual houses does not mean that they have lost all group affiliation. Americans have a long tradition of participation in a broad array of voluntary organizations, and there is no sign that this activity is abating. One might even be able to find evidence of specific group affiliations in the way that particular Americans choose their individual homes.

#### ENDNOTES

1 The popularity of E.T. Hall's books is evidence of this interest.

2 Herbert Gans, *The Urban Villagers* (New York, 1962).

3 *Ibid.*, 45–228.

4 *Ibid.*, 6–11.

5 *Ibid.*, 27.

6 *Ibid.*, 27–32. Of course, such a system of classification is by no means beyond dispute. I am sure many sociologists would disagree with the appropriateness of Gans' categories.

7 For instance, on p. 8 Gans mentions in a footnote: "Most of the West End stores were owned by Jews, as were the medical, dental, and legal offices." Yet, there is no mention of the implications of this intermixing in the rest of the book.

8 I will not discuss whether it is possible from good sociological data to extract a proper physical design. This is another questionable issue altogether.

9 This, in fact, is what the most skilled politicians have learned to do. See, for instance: Edward C. Banfield and James O. Wilson, *City Politics* (New York, 1963), 115–37.

10 Frederick Engels, *The Housing Question* (London, 1935), 35.

11 The implications of this fact are discussed in: Leonardo Benevolo, *The Origins of Modern Town Planning* (London, 1963).

12 I am referring primarily to Lewis Mumford because he was the most articulate of a group of critics concerned with housing in the 1930s.

13 Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York, 1962), 400–35.

14 *Ibid.*, 321–63.

15 The essence of "personality" was expressed in: Emily Post, *The Personality of the House* (New York, 1930).

16 Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, 357–63; and Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (New York, 1966), (26).

17 Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*, (26).

18 Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress* (New York, 1969), 116–22, 199–201.

19 John P. Dean, *Home Ownership: Is It Sound?* (New York, 1945).

20 See, for instance, the recent survey of this subject in the November 1973 edition of *Architectural Design*.

21 Robert Goodman, *After the Planners* (New York, 1972), 242.

22 See, for instance: John F.C. Turner and Robert Fichter, *Freedom to Build* (New York, 1972), ill. 24.

23 This seems to be the message at the end of: Martin Pawley, *Architecture versus Housing* (New York, 1971).

24 Al Griffin, *So You Want to Buy a Mobile Home* (New York, 1970).

25 Indeed, the weakness of Herbert Gans' *The Levittowners* is that he does not explain why the inhabitants of the area he studied left their previous neighborhoods. Could they too have at one time been "routine-seekers"?



# Atelier 5: 1955–1975

## Experiments in Communal Living

Author:  
Jakob K. Blumer

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Translated by:  
Steven Lindberg

That form reflects contents seems self-evident to us. And that contents should result in special forms is a postulate well-known and almost venerable in architecture. It is much the same with the statement that the form of a settlement reflects a certain form of society or class of society. The proof of that is easy to offer and can also be extensively illustrated. One need think only of the villa neighborhoods and working-class housing developments of the nineteenth century or of medieval forms of buildings and cities and the associated feudal society of estates. A congruence between the nature of a settlement and its social content can thus be noted.

On closer inspection, however, deviations are revealed in specific cases. The social content of cities surely influenced their form, but the forms of the past have also continued to be used for new social contents. We must even recognize that explicit alternative proposals for a social order have adopted a traditional form of expression for their habitat. The congruence between the form and the social content is thus not always absolute. Such reflections are important today in the practical debates over housing development. They helped clarify the efforts of Atelier 5 in this area.

One of the tasks given to the architect, and in which he can develop and expand his ability as an architect, is the design of housing developments. To conceive an inhabitable structure that allows one to live well. The task he sets himself is to answer the question of “well-being.” He can do so only if he sets out from hypotheses that he must often formulate as assertions, since they are not always supported by the existing social reality. If we consider, for instance, the professional situation of the medieval carpenter or master builder and his relationship to the form of his own work, the parallel phenomenon for us today is not the so-called good architect but, say, the “National Association of Home Builders” in the United States, *Haus und Herd* [Home and Hearth] in Switzerland, and similar phenomena. That is, somebody who is in tune with their work, with widely accepted social behavior and the associated ideas of taste, form, and organization. The “medieval carpenter” today would help shape an image of the housing development centered on the individual as a mobile, interchangeable, transforming, but also isolated element. Single-family housing developments, disjointed apartment blocks, shopping



Jakob K. Blumer

# Atelier 5:

## 1955—1975

Versuche im gemeinsamen Wohnen



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† fig. 1 Atelier 5: Thalmatt housing development in Stuckishaus, Bern. Opening celebration in August 1974, with “newcomers” from the adjacent Halen housing development.

Dass Formen Inhalte reflektieren scheint uns selbstverständlich. Und dass Inhalte in speziellen Formen resultieren sollten ist in der Architektur ein recht bekanntes und schon beinahe ehrwürdiges Postulat. Aehnlich ist es mit der Aussage, dass eine Siedlungsform die Reflexion einer bestimmten Gesellschaftsform, resp. Gesellschaftsschicht, darstelle. Der Beweis dafür ist leicht anzutreten und auch umfänglich illustrierbar. Man denke etwa an Villenquartiere und Arbeitersiedlungen im 19. Jahrhundert, oder an die Haus- und Stadtformen des Mittelalters und die dazugehörige feudale Ständegesellschaft. Es wäre also eine Kongruenz zwischen der Art einer Siedlung und ihrem sozialen Inhalt festzustellen.

Bei genauerer Betrachtung zeigen sich aber im Einzelfall Abweichungen. Wohl hat der soziale Inhalt der Städte ihre Form geprägt, vergangene Formen wurden aber auch durch neue soziale Inhalte weiterverwendet. Es ist sogar zu beachten, dass ausgesprochene Alternativvorschläge zu einer gesellschaftlichen Ordnung für ihren Lebensraum auf eine überlieferte Ausdrucksweise griffen. Die Kongruenz zwischen der Form und dem sozialen Inhalt ist also nicht immer absolut. Solche Ueberlegungen sind heute bei den praktischen Auseinandersetzungen mit dem Siedlungsbau wichtig. Für die Anstrengungen des Atelier 5 in dieser Richtung waren sie klärend.

Eine der Aufgaben, die dem Architekten gestellt wird, und in der er seine Fähigkeit als Architekt entwickeln und ausbauen kann, ist der Siedlungsbau. Ein bewohnbares Gebilde sich auszudenken, in dem sich's wohl sein lässt. Die Aufgabe, die er sich selber stellt, ist: die Frage nach dem «Wohlsein» zu beantworten.

### Résumé Blumer

L'architecte chargé de préparer les plans d'un ensemble d'habitations se trouve en face d'un problème difficile. Il essaye de donner une réponse à la question: que faut-il pour que l'on se trouve bien? Pour arriver à cette réponse, il pourrait évidemment adopter les idéaux du bien-être tels qu'ils sont diffusés par la société de consommation, il pourrait s'adonner au nouveau «réalisme capitaliste» genre Levittown.

Mais il y a là un malaise. L'auteur croit que de créer un cadre de vie véritablement humain signifie formuler des thèses, des propositions qui ne sont souvent pas conformes à la réalité sociale donnée.

Ces thèses, dont l'Atelier 5 à Berne se fait le porte-parole, sont, entre autres:

Dies kann er nur, wenn er von Thesen ausgeht, die er oft als Behauptungen aufstellen muss, da sie von der gegebenen gesellschaftlichen Realität nicht immer getragen werden. Betrachten wir nämlich die Situation des mittelalterlichen Zimmermannes oder Baumeisters in seinem Beruf und sein Verhältnis zur Form der eigenen Arbeit, so ist für uns heute die Parallelerscheinung nicht der sogenannte «gute Architekt», sondern die «national home builders association» in den USA etwa, oder Haus und Herd in der Schweiz und ähnliche Erscheinungen. Das heisst, jemand, der mit seiner Arbeit im Einklang steht, mit einem weitgehend gültigen Gesellschaftsverhalten und den damit zusammenhängenden Geschmacks-, Form- und Organisationsvorstellungen. Der «mittelalterliche Zimmermann» hätte heute also ein Siedlungsbild mitzuformen, das auf den Einzelnen als mobiles, austauschbares, sich veränderndes, aber auch vereinzelt Element ausgerichtet ist. Die Einfamilienhausiedlungen, die unzusammenhängenden Mietsblöcke, die Shoppingcenters, alles schön addiert und einander nicht störend (sie taten ihm nichts, also auch nichts Gutes, heisst es in «Andorra» von M. Frisch), das ist heute ein ebenso natürlicher Ausdruck wie die Handwerkerassen mit ihren heute als pittoresk bezeichneten Häusern einer anderen Epoche. Na und, warum daraus nicht die Konsequenzen ziehen, warum diesen Weg nicht weitergehen? Resultate sind heute bekannt: Venturi & Rauch und ihr eher grotesker und oft alpträumhafter «kapitalistischer Realismus» oder die Quadratkilometervereinzelnung der Levittowns mit ihren organisierten Gemeinschaften.

Es ist hier offensichtlich ein Missbehagen

- L'ensemble n'est pas uniquement la somme de ses éléments; il est une unité comportant des espaces privés et publics — comme c'est le cas dans les cellules individuelles.
- Les cellules sont indépendantes et permettent des transformations;
- Entre cellules privées et espaces publics il y a une multitude d'espaces qui permettent une transition graduelle entre sphère privée et domaine public;
- A côté de la fonction d'habitation il y a possibilité d'accommodation d'autres fonctions.
- Etablissement d'un nouveau type de propriété coopérative comme cadre juridique de cette nouvelle forme d'habitat communautaire.



festzustellen. Und es könnte also etwa die Behauptung aufgestellt werden, die sich heute manifestierenden üblichen Siedlungsformen entsprächen zwar der gesellschaftlichen Situation, befriedigten aber nicht die echten Bedürfnisse der Bewohner. Oder, was das gleiche ist, die manifeste Umgebungsform zeige das Ungenügen der gesellschaftlichen Form und damit die Notwendigkeit von neuen Versuchen und neuen Umgebungen. Hier stehen verschiedene Wege offen. Man könnte neue Formen des Zusammenlebens suchen (die Regeln und die Leute) und neue Orte dafür schaffen. Das wurde und wird getan (Fourier, Owens, Kommunehäuser etc.). Man könnte aber auch neue Umgebungen schaffen nicht in Erwartung, dass dadurch zwangsläufig ein gesellschaftliches Verhalten geändert wird, aber doch in der Hoffnung, dass die Möglichkeiten zu einem anderen Verhalten teilweise genutzt würden. Hier liegt die Arbeit des Atelier 5. Also Modellansätze und praktische Erfahrung.

Oft wird nun das Argument ins Feld geführt, dass die Komplexität einer Umgebung von den Mitteln abhängt, die zu ihrer Realisierung zur Verfügung stehen. Das heisst, dass ein Zusammenhang besteht zwischen den effektiven Bauten und der sozialen Klasse, die sie überhaupt benützen kann. Das ist sicher richtig. Man könnte daraus folgern, dass es müssig sei, das Bedürfnis des Wohnens mit differenzierten Formen zu lösen, die sich allenfalls eine ausgewählte Klasse erlauben kann. Es ist jedoch leicht zu zeigen, dass der ökonomische Rahmen eine Funktion des grösseren gesellschaftlichen Verhaltens ist, und dass selbst innerhalb der marktwirtschaftlich-kapitalistisch organisierten Gesellschaften die Schwankungen sehr gross sind, so dass ökonomische Parameter für die Demonstration des «Gebildes, in dem man sich wohl fühlt» nicht absolut ausschlaggebend sein können. Man denke nur etwa an sozialen Wohnungsbau in Grossbritannien, im Vergleich zu den Vertikalghettos in den USA oder auch den Vorstädten von Paris oder Mailand. Auch hier liegt ein Ansatz der Arbeiten des Atelier 5. Also Demonstrationsobjekte, deren Klassenbezug zwar bestehen kann, deren Wirkungsmöglichkeiten aber darüberhinausgehen sollten.

... Ein Gebilde auszudenken, in dem sich's wohl sein lässt. . . Das war die Ausgangslage.

Die Frage nach dem Wohlsein ist nur zu beantworten, wenn Ausgangsthesen aufgestellt werden. Diese können nicht im «allgemeinen Volksempfinden» gefunden werden. Aber man kann auch nicht (zumindest in unserer heutigen Situation) ein neues gesellschaftliches Verhalten voraussetzen. Ausgangsthesen müssen so formuliert werden, dass Widersprüche und Gegensätze unter den Bewohnern (bezüglich Gemeinschaftsverhalten, Geschmack, persönlicher Ausdruck etc.) weiterbestehen können, aber im Rahmen einer Umgebung, in der diese Widersprüche gegebenenfalls auch aufgehoben werden können. Das heisst, dass die Hauptaufgabe, die man sich stellt, nicht die ist eine Umgebung zu schaffen, durch die eine bessere Gemeinschaft entstehen muss, oder eine Umgebung für eine bessere Gesellschaftsform vorzuschlagen, sondern Möglichkeiten zur Befriedigung von Grundbedürfnissen zu schaffen. Dadurch versucht man, einen höheren Grad von Gemeinsamkeit zu provozieren, ohne dass dies als Voraussetzung bei den Bewohnern schon vorhanden wäre. Es sind also in diesem Sinne subjektiv gesetzte Wegweiser und Versuche für Veränderungsmöglichkeiten.

Grundlage für die Arbeit ist also eine Reihe von Thesen, begründet durch Beobachtungen und Erfahrungen. Wir gehen davon aus:

- dass eine Siedlung mehr ist als die Summe der Einzelteile, aus denen sie zusammengestellt wird; das heisst, dass die einzelnen Elemente ein neues gemeinsames, auch räumlich erfahrbares Element bilden;
- wir postulieren also einen gestalteten öffentlichen Aussenraum, der ebenso intensiv und einfach gebraucht werden kann wie die einzelnen Wohneinheiten selber;
- dass die individuelle Abschirmung der einzelnen Wohneinheiten gewährleistet wird, und dass diese auch selbständig organisier- und transformierbar sein können;
- dass zwischen Wohnelementen und dem öffentlichen Aussenraum Uebergänge halböffentlicher Charakters geschaffen werden, die das Teilnehmen an der Öffentlichkeit graduell erlauben;
- dass verschiedene Wohnmöglichkeiten für verschiedene Bedürfnisse innerhalb der gleichen Siedlung und der gleichen Baustruktur auftreten sollen, ein maximal mögliches Angebot an gemeinsamen Funktionen realisiert wird und neben der Wohn-

nutzung andere Nutzungen ermöglicht werden;

- dass für die öffentlichen Räume und gemeinsamen Elemente eine gemeinsame Verantwortung besteht (z. B. Miteigentum);
- dass es möglich gemacht werden sollte, innerhalb der gleichen Baustruktur verschiedene ökonomische Ansprüche und Möglichkeiten zu befriedigen.

Es ist selbstverständlich, dass nicht in allen Fällen alle hier angedeuteten und daraus resultierenden Ansprüche erfüllt und mit gleicher Intensität angestrebt werden. An zwei Beispielen soll die Weiterführung der in der Halensiedlung realisierten Grundkonzeption gezeigt werden:

- Siedlung Thalmatt  
wo die Ausgestaltung des individuellen Elementes im Gesamtkontext der Baustruktur konsequent durchgehalten wurde.
- Siedlung Werther  
sozialer Wohnungsbau in der BRD in Westfalen, wo der Widerspruch zwischen den Aspirationen der Bewohner und der zur Verfügung gestellten Umgebung zu einer Transformation derselben führte.

### Siedlung Thalmatt

Die Siedlung Thalmatt begann als Experiment nach der Vollendung der Halensiedlung. Wir stellten uns damals, nachdem man Halen als eine Siedlung von grundsätzlich zwei Normtypen ausgeführt hatte, die Frage, ob es möglich sei, einerseits einen klar formulierten



centers, all accurately combined and not interfering with one another (they did nothing to him, so nothing good either, it says in *Andorra* by M. Frisch)—that is just as natural an expression today as the craftsmen’s alleys, with their houses from a bygone era, that we would now describe as picturesque. Well, why not draw the consequences from that, why not continue on that road? The results are known today: Venturi & Rauch and their rather grotesque and often nightmarish “capitalist realism” or the quarter-acre isolation of the Levittowns with their organized communities.

A sense of discontent is clearly evident here. And some might claim that the common forms of settlement that become manifest today correspond to the social situation but do not satisfy their residents’ real needs. Or, amounting to the same thing: the manifest form of the environment reflects the inadequacy of the social form and hence the necessity of new efforts and new environments. This opens up different paths. One could seek new forms of living together (the rules and the people) and create new places for them. That was and is being done (Fourier, Owen, communal houses, etc.). But one could also create new environments not in anticipation that doing so will necessarily result in changes in social behavior, but in the hope that the possibilities for different behavior may be seized at least in part. That is the work of Atelier 5: model approaches and practical experience.

It is now often argued that the complexity of an environment depends on the funds available to realize it. That means a connection exists between effective buildings and the social class able to use them. That is surely correct. One might conclude from this that it would be futile to solve the needs of housing with differentiated forms that only a select class is able to afford. It is, however, easy to show that the economic framework is a function of the broader social behavior, and that even within market-based, capitalist societies the variations are very large, so that economic parameters cannot be absolutely decisive for the demonstration of the “structure in which one feels comfortable.” One need think only of the council housing in Great Britain in comparison to the vertical ghettos in the United States or even the suburbs of Paris or Milan. Here, too, lies the approach

of the work of Atelier 5; that is, demonstration objects that can have a relationship to class but whose possible effects are intended to go beyond that.

... Coming up with a structure in which to live well ... That was the starting point. The question of well-being can be answered only when the initial hypotheses are established. They cannot be found in “universal popular opinion.” But neither can one (at least not in our present situation) assume a new social behavior. The initial hypotheses must be formulated such that conflicts and oppositions among the residents (concerning community behavior, taste, personal expression, etc.) can continue to exist but within the framework of an environment in which these conflicts can, if necessary, also be resolved. This means that the main task to set yourself is not to create an environment from which a better community necessarily results, or to propose an environment for a better form of society, but rather to create the means for satisfying basic needs. By doing so, one tries to stimulate a higher degree of commonality without this existing among the residents in advance. In that sense, they are subjectively developed guides and efforts to promote change.

The basis for this work is a series of hypotheses justified by observations and experiences. We assume:

- that a housing development is more than the sum of the parts from which it is assembled; that means, that the individual elements form a new, common unit that can be spatially experienced; we postulate a designed, public exterior space that can be used as intensively and simply as the individual housing units themselves;
- that the individual housing units are successfully screened off for privacy and that they can also be individually organized and transformed;
- that semipublic threshold spaces are created between the housing elements and the public outdoor spaces, permitting gradual participation in the public sphere;
- that various housing possibilities for various needs within the same development and the same building structure should be available,

a maximum possible number of communal functions offered, and uses other than housing be possible;

- that there be shared responsibility for public spaces and common elements (e.g., shared ownership);
- that different economic ambitions and opportunities may be satisfied within the same building structure.

It goes without saying that of the standards outlined here, as well as those deriving from the points above, not all can be achieved or aimed at with the same intensity in all cases. Two examples will demonstrate how the basic concept realized at the Halen housing development has been furthered:

- Thalmatt housing development, where the design of the individual elements was rigorously sustained in the overall context of the building structure.
- Werther housing development, social housing construction in Westphalia, Federal Republic of Germany, where the discrepancy between residents' aspirations and the produced environment led to a transformation of the latter.

### **Thalmatt Housing Development**

The Thalmatt housing development began as an experiment after completing the Halen development. At the time, having just built Halen as a development of basically two standard types, we asked ourselves whether it would be possible to create, on the one hand, a clearly articulated and cohesive public outdoor space and, on the other hand, differentiated housing units adapted to the various needs of individual clients. Or, expressed romantically: Can one create a new environment as coherent and organic as those we know from Mediterranean cities? (The Mediterranean city is a matter of taste here; one could also take another coherent form of settlement as the initial basis.) The answer would at first surely be: No.

The coherent settlements of the past are the result of many individual acts of building over an extended period and a consequence of repeated changes. Moreover, they were the expression of a clearly ordered social structure that was expressed in a regulated use of forms and materials. Today, the architect determines

the expression, and so a development is often more a picture of the architect's aesthetic taste than an expression of the fundamental needs of the residents.

Despite all these concerns, we continued to pursue the initial idea. The main argument for doing so was rooted in the observation that the most differentiated housing forms, which address somewhat more directly the needs of the client, are built as freestanding, single-family homes. They have no context and can therefore lack common public outdoor space, which in our view is an essential element for any living situation. The artificiality of a highly differentiated environment produced all at once seemed to us the lesser evil.

So as not to get lost from the outset in arbitrary and pretentious planning, we formulated a few principles:

- a) The coherence of the housing development should not be achieved by any refined composition of building volumes but rather by establishing a basic architectural and organizational structure. For that reason, we consistently chose a terraced housing scheme that could be adapted to the various needs of the clients (distance between supports, finished floors, interior organization, etc.).
- b) To handle the technical, organizational, and construction problems of the building process (all of the houses were built at the same time, after all), we dispensed with any overlapping of units. Every unit stands on its own land.
- c) The scale of the outdoor spaces of a housing development cannot be reconciled with the scale of motor vehicles. The housing development was planned as a pure pedestrian zone.

The development consists of two rows of houses with a public space between them. All of the houses are accessed from this public area. The houses are arranged such that the upper row can see over the lower one. That means the lower row had to be limited to two stories. The size of the house, its fittings, its interior organization, and so on, were determined by the residents' needs.

Such a procedure was possible only because fifteen of eighteen clients were known in advance.



Fig. 5 Atelier 5 with Niklaus Morgenthaler, Architekten: Wertherberg development, near Münster, Westphalia; 1966–68. View of the inner courtyard.



und zusammenhängenden öffentlichen Aussenraum und andererseits differenzierte, den verschiedenen Bedürfnissen einzelner Bauherren angepasste Wohnheiten zu schaffen. Oder romantisch ausgedrückt: Kann man eine Umgebung so kohärent und gewachsen, wie wir sie aus Mittelmeerstädten kennen, neu schaffen? (Die Mittelmeerstadt ist hier Geschmacksache, man könnte jede andere kohärente Siedlungsform als Ausgangsbasis nehmen.) Die Antwort darauf wäre zuerst einmal sicher: nein.

Die kohärenten Siedlungen der Vergangenheit sind das Resultat von vielen baulichen Einzelhandlungen über längere Zeit hinweg und eine Folge von immer wieder erfolgten Änderungen. Zudem waren sie der Ausdruck eines klar geordneten gesellschaftlichen Aufbaus, der sich in einem geregelten Gebrauch von Formen und Material ausdrückte. Heute bestimmt der Architekt den

Ausdruck, und so ist dann eine Siedlung oft ein Abbild der ästhetischen Geschmacksrichtung des Architekten, als der Ausdruck grundsätzlicher Bedürfnisse der Bewohner.

Trotz all diesen Bedenken haben wir die Ausgangsidee weiterverfolgt. Das Hauptargument dafür lag in der Beobachtung, dass die meisten differenzierten Wohnformen, die etwas direkter auf die Bedürfnisse des Bauherrn eingehen, als freistehende Einfamilienhäuser erstellt werden. Sie weisen keinen Zusammenhang auf und lassen somit den gemeinsamen öffentlichen Aussenraum, ein unserer Meinung nach wesentliches Element für jede Wohnsituation, vermissen. Demgegenüber schien uns die Künstlichkeit einer in einem Zug erstellten differenzierten Umgebung das kleinere Übel.

Um sich aber nicht von Anfang an in ein zufälliges und geschmacklerisches Projektieren zu verlieren, formulierten wir ein paar Grundsätze:

- a) Der Zusammenhang der Siedlung sollte nicht durch irgendeine raffinierte Komposition der Baumassen erreicht werden, sondern dadurch, dass eine bauliche und organisatorische Grundstruktur aufgestellt wurde. Wir wählten daher durchgehend ein

↓ fig. 6 Wertherberg housing development: site plan and section.

Reihenhausschema, das den verschiedenen Bedürfnissen der Bauherren angepasst werden konnte (Achsmass, ausgebauta Stockwerke, Innere Organisation etc.).

- b) Um die technischen, organisatorischen und konstruktiven Probleme des Bauvorganges bewältigen zu können (alle Häuser wurden ja zur gleichen Zeit gebaut), verzichteten wir auf eine Überlappung der Einheiten. Jede Einheit steht für sich auf eigenem Boden.
- c) Die Massstäblichkeit der Aussenräume einer Siedlung lassen sich mit dem Massstab der Motorfahrzeuge nicht vereinbaren. Die Siedlung wird als reiner Fussgängerbereich geplant.

Die Siedlung besteht aus einer Doppelreihe von Häusern mit dem dazwischenliegenden öffentlichen Bereich. Alle Häuser werden aus diesem öffentlichen Bereich heraus betreten. Die Häuser werden so angeordnet, dass die obere Reihe über die untere hinwegsehen kann. Das bedeutet eine Beschränkung auf zwei Geschosse in der unteren Reihe. Die Grösse des Hauses, sein Ausbau, seine innere Organisation etc., wurden nach Bedarf der Bewohner bestimmt.

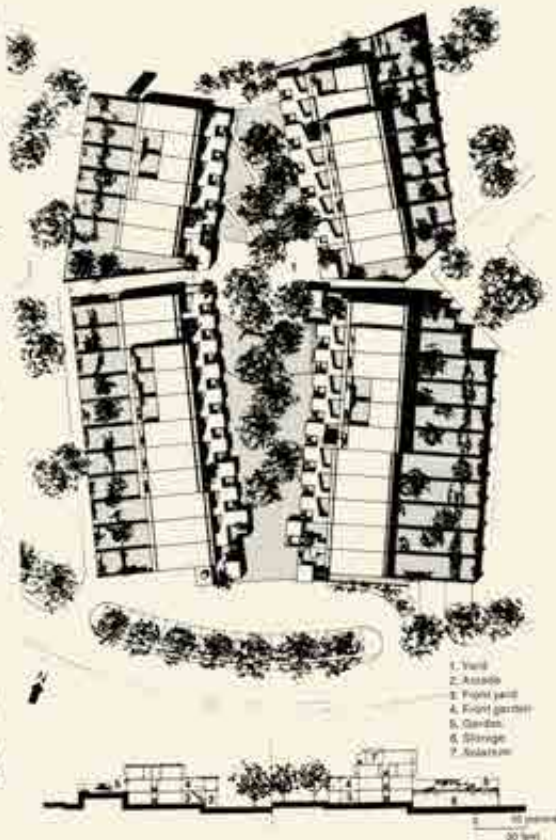
Ein solches Vorgehen wurde nur dadurch möglich, dass 15 von 18 Bauherren schon zum voraus bekannt waren. Die Eigentumsorganisation ist analog Helen gelöst. Das heisst privates Grundstück und Mitigentum. Die gemeinsamen Einrichtungen sind hier sehr bescheiden. Das Schwergewicht liegt auf der einzelnen Einheit. Die Siedlung ist eben erst bezogen worden.

## Wertherberg — einige Jahre später

### Schwierigkeiten bei der Mitbestimmung im Bauen

Der Stein der Weisen, der in regelmässiger Rhythmus alle paar Jahre wieder in neuer Form gefunden wird, liegt auf dem Gebiet der Architektur schon seit einiger Zeit da, wo von Mobilität, Austauschbarkeit und Mitformulierung der Umgebung durch den Bewohner gesprochen wird. Zweifelslos an einer schönen Stelle. Vor allem von unserem alltäglichen Standort aus gesehen, der bestimmt wird durch eine meist langweilige, uniform ausgerichtete, gebaute Umwelt. Wenn es hochkommt, findet sich etwas Architektur, aber dann oft als Manifestation persönlicher Gefallsucht des Architekten. Also sollen die Leute doch lieber ihre Umgebung selber gestalten. Daran könnte man sich sicher begeistern. Was dieses Gestalten aber sei, darüber herrscht dort, wo davon gesprochen wird, nicht unbedingt Klarheit. Besteht die Gestaltung darin, innerhalb einer Wohnfläche beliebige Trennwände zu verschieben, oder aus einem gegebenen Baukastensystem sich die individuelle Kombination zusammenzustellen, oder mit individuellen Mitteln, mit dem, was man «auf dem Markt» findet, so weit wie möglich seine Wohnung innen und aussen zu gestalten? Diese Frage ist sicher schwer zu beantworten; und ebenso schwer ist es, in der neueren Architektur Beispiele zu finden, wo eine «Mitformulierung» gewollt oder gegen die Absicht der Architekten stattgefunden hat. Ein Beispiel ist Wertherberg, die Siedlung, die das Atelier 5 dort geplant und realisiert hat.

Vier Jahre später sieht Wertherberg anders aus. Es wurde von den heutigen Bewohnern in seinem Gesamtcharakter wesentlich modifiziert. Geändert oder von



Anfang an individuell gestaltet wurden Räume und Elemente innerhalb des Hauses, geändert und modifiziert wurden die hofseitigen Vorplätze, die Eingänge und die Aussenhaut der Vorbauten. Nicht geändert wurde die kubische und funktionale Organisation der Siedlung. Zufrieden sind die Leute generell mit der Organisation der Häuser und der Siedlung. Nicht zufrieden sind sie mit dem Gesicht der Häuser: äusseres Aussehen, Materialien, Eingänge, etc.

«Es geht auch anders, aber so geht es auch.» Mit «Wertherberg heute» hatte man nicht gerechnet, die Möglichkeit der Veränderung aber war eingepreist. So hatte man es den Bewohnern von Anfang an freigestellt, ihre Küchen einzubauen wie sie wollten. Die inneren Trennwände der Wohnungen sind aus Holz konstruiert



↓ fig. 7 Wertherberg housing development:  
yard with greenery.



und können auf einfache Weise verschoben werden. Die äusseren Bauelemente wurden als Ständerkonstruktion mit Füllungen aus Betonbrettern konzipiert und machten so ein Ersetzen der Aufdachungen sehr leicht (Trennmauern, Eingänge etc.). Und schliesslich wollten die Architekten keinerlei Vorschriften für Änderungen an der äusseren Form der Bauten erlassen.

Die Siedlung wurde fertig. Ein sehr differenziertes, in seiner räumlichen Gestaltung sehr reiches Gebilde, in ihrer Organisation eine Anlage, wo die Privatsphäre des einzelnen Wohnelementes äusserst geschützt wird, und die gleichzeitig von einem räumlich klar formulierten gemeinsamen Aussenraum bestimmt wird. Eigenheime, die zusammen ein grösseres Ganzes bilden. Eigenheime, denen jedoch die gefälligen Kennzeichen

von Eigenheim fehlten. Die heutigen Bewohner waren zwar während der Planung der Siedlung dabei und konnten auf die Vorschläge der Architekten reagieren. Es musste aber gespart werden. Es musste vereinfacht werden. Die Architekten verfolgten konsequent und dadurch provokativ diese Richtung. Doch dann, als die Siedlung fertig war, da fehlte die Identifikation bei dem Bewohner, und es fehlte der Wille, das Ungewohnte kennen und gebrauchen zu lernen. Der Beton wurde als hässlich empfunden, die Gartenwände als schäbig und die Hauseingänge nicht auf der Höhe eines Eigenheimes. Der Eingangsgarten, die Visitenkarte, der Ort des gepflegten Rasens, die Tummelfläche der Gartenzwerge fehlte.

Modifiziert wurden die Vorbauten gegen den Platz hin. Gedeckte Sitzplätze wurden eingegliedert, offene Partien überdeckt, die Terrassen möbliert und behängt, immer liebevoll, manchmal ansprechend, öfters banal und geschmacklos.

Geändert wurden die Eingangspartien. Die Betonbretter wurden herausgenommen und durch durchbrochene Gitter ersetzt, oder durch Klinker oder hochpolierte Holzverkleidungen mit Eingangstüren und Frontbeleuchtungen, wie es sich für ein Eigenheim gehört. Materialien sind Klinker, Holzverkleidung, farbige und klare Glasbausteine, Wellplastik etc., alles was man normalerweise so im «Katalog» findet, und was nach üblichen Begriffen in den Eigenheimstatus hineinpasst.

Verändert wurde der Beton. Vordächer wurden gestrichen, und an einem beträchtlichen Teil der Siedlung wurde die Betonstruktur der Terrassen über dem Platz mit einer grauen Pappe klebt, gemauerte Konstruktion vortäuschend.

Die Siedlung Wertherberg sieht anders aus. Man könnte sagen: Individualisierung und Differenzierung durch die Eigentümer. Oder man könnte sagen: Orgie in Kitsch und Geschmacklosigkeit. Beide Aussagen treffen jedoch nur die Oberfläche, Wertherberg als strukturierte Wohnsituation, als komplexe Organisation von Gemeinschaft und Privatheit wird heute noch ebenso erlebt wie gerade nach der Fertigstellung. Das Konzept dieser Wohnform hat nach wie vor seine gleichen Vor- und Nachteile, Geändert hat sich das Gesicht der einzelnen «Teilnehmer» an diesem Untertanen. Oder man könnte auch sagen, erst jetzt habe sich dieses Gesicht herausgebildet. Und dieses Gesicht will nicht unbedingt gefallen.

Die Bewohner fangen an, ihre Umgebung zu gestalten, Darüber zu meckern, steht niemandem zu. Erschreckend ist nur die Art der Veränderung. Diese geht ja nicht dahin, den Gebrauchswert der Anlage zu steigern, etwa den öffentlichen Raum durch neue Funktionselemente zu bereichern oder die eigene Wohnsituation zu erweitern (hier gibt es allerdings Ansätze), sondern sie bemüht sich um das «make up», um eine neue Gesichtscrème und Perücke. Und der Spiegel, in dem sich der Einzelne schminkt, reflektiert die Aspirationen auf einen höheren sozialen Status und zeigt die Elemente an, die man mit diesem Status verbindet. Das, wodurch man die Behausung des ebesseren Gestellten zu erkennen glaubt, wird in verkleinertem (und billigerer) Form an das eigene Haus geklebt. Beton ist hässlich, Sichtbackstein ist entsprechender. Eine neue, ungewohnte Wohnsituation anzunehmen, sie zu gebrauchen, ihre Vorteile auszunutzen und sie zu ergänzen, diese Arbeit konnte in Wertherberg nicht geleistet werden. Es

← fig. 8  
Typical «arcade»  
with entrances  
to the units.

wurde für die Eigentümer wichtig, wieder diejenigen Werte in ihre Siedlung herein- und zurückzubringen, mit denen sie sich identifizieren konnten, Werte, die vom Fernsehen bis zur illustrierten, von *Schöner Wohnen* bis zum Versandhauskatalog angeboten werden. Bei diesem Angebot bleibt wenig Raum, um über eigene, wirkliche Bedürfnisse zu reflektieren.

Der Architekt steht diesen gesellschaftlichen Phänomenen etwas hilflos gegenüber. Er kann sich damit zufrieden geben, die Veränderung seines Baues mitteleingepflanzt zu haben. Die weitere Entwicklung kann er entweder als Zuschauer verfolgen oder versuchen, sie unter Kontrolle zu halten. Aus höherer Warte eine Umgebung zu formulieren und deren Gestalt als sakrosankt zu erklären, d. h. die Einwohner darauf zu fixieren, ist aber – abgesehen von der Arroganz einer solchen Haltung – wenig intelligent. Es wird wiederum ein Beispiel hingestellt mit dem Anspruch, sich darauf auszurichten, d. h. es unreflektiert zu erstreben. Dadurch wird ein ähnlicher Mechanismus gefördert wie er heute die Leute zwingt, unreflektiert einem als Beispiel hingestellten Status mit seinen entsprechenden Insignien nachzueifern.

Darüber hinauszukommen und echter Bedürfnisse bewusst zu werden ist jedoch ein Emanzipationsprozess, der nur im größeren gesellschaftlichen Rahmen gelei-

stet werden kann. Das Heil von der Architektur zu erwarten, wäre naiv.

Die Aufgabe des Architekten, die Umgebung zu gestalten und neue, heutige Wohnformen zu planen und zu bauen, bleibt bestehen. In der Auseinandersetzung zwischen einer neuen Wohnsituation und den Aspirationen der Bewohner verändert sich unsere Umwelt. In diesem Prozess wird die Architektur oft strapaziert, eine sorgfältig durchgeformte Umgebung verkleidet. Der Gebrauch einer neuen, richtig konzipierten Wohnform dürfte aber das Bild dessen verändern, was man als erstrebenswerte Umgebung empfindet. Es wird ein neues Modell hingestellt, auf welches später als bekanntes, und somit ebensso annehmbares Beispiel zurückgegriffen werden kann. Aus dieser Perspektive sind die äusseren Veränderungen in Wertherberg eine «normale» Erscheinung. Die Leute haben sich mit ihrer Umgebung auseinandergesetzt. Das ist erfreulich und kein Grund, sich die Haare auszurufen. Oder dann nur als «Architekt», der sich in seiner Tätigkeit darum bemüht, eine Umgebung zu formen, die intelligent organisiert ist, reich im Gebrauch und deren Formen und Materialien, kohärent mit dem Ganzen zusammenspielen. Da ist es einem in Wertherberg ob so vieler unnützer Kosmetik schon eher ums Heulen.



The organization of owners was dealt with in a way similar to Halen. That is, private lots and shared ownership. The common facilities are very modest. The focus is on the individual unit. The housing development is only now beginning to be occupied.

### **Wertherberg—Several Years Later Difficulties with Resident Participation in Construction**

In the field of architecture, the philosopher's stone that is discovered anew at regular intervals every few years, for some time now lies where there is talk of mobility, interchangeability, and resident participation in the design of the environment. A good place without a doubt. Especially when seen from our everyday position, which is defined by a mostly boring, uniformly arranged built environment. We find some architecture, at best, but often it is merely a manifestation of the architect's own vanity. Let people design their surroundings themselves, then. There surely would be much enthusiasm for it. Yet what design might mean in those instances where it is being discussed is not necessarily clear. Does design entail randomly moving partitions within residential space, or assembling an individual combination from a predefined modular construction kit, or designing one's own apartment inside and out as much as possible using individual means, with whatever one finds "on the market"? This question is certainly difficult to answer, and it is just as difficult to find examples in recent architecture where "participation" was desired or happened against the intention of the architects. One example is Wertherberg, the housing development that Atelier 5 planned and realized there.

Four years later, Wertherberg looks different. Its overall character was fundamentally modified by the current residents. The rooms and elements within each house were changed or designed individually from the outset; the front yards facing the courtyard were changed and modified, as were the entrances and the outer skin of the front buildings. What was not changed was the cubic and functional organization of the housing development. In general, people are satisfied with the organization of the buildings and overall

scheme. They are not satisfied with the face of the buildings: outward appearance, materials, entrances, and so on.

"It would also work another way, but it works like this too." We had not reckoned with "Wertherberg today," but the possibility of change had been planned into it. From the outset, residents were free to install their kitchens as they wished. The internal partition walls of the apartments are constructed of wood and can be easily moved. The external components were conceived as a frame construction with cement-board infills, allowing a simple replacement of the infill panels (partition walls, entrances, etc.). Finally, the architects did not want to issue any rules concerning changes to the outer form of the buildings.

The project was completed. A highly differentiated form of very lavish spatial design. In its overall disposition, it is a scheme in which the privacy of the individual housing unit is highly protected while at the same time being defined by a spatially clearly defined common outdoor space. Single-family homes that together form a larger whole. But they are single-family homes that lack some of the common characteristics of single-family homes. The present residents were involved in the planning of the development and could react to the architects' proposals. But costs had to be cut. It had to be simplified. The architects pursued that line rigorously and quite provocatively. But as the development was finished, the residents failed to identify with it, and they were unwilling to get to know and learn to use the unfamiliar. The concrete was perceived as ugly, the garden walls as shabby, and the entrances to the houses as not on the level of the single-family home. A front garden—the calling card, the place of the manicured lawn, the playground of garden gnomes—was lacking.

The front buildings facing the square were modified. Glass walls were installed in the covered seating areas, open sections were covered, furniture and hangings placed in the terraces. Always lovingly, sometimes attractively, often tritely and tastelessly.

The entrances were changed. The cement boards were removed and replaced by open-work grilles, brickwork, or highly polished wood panels with front doors and facade lighting,

as suits a single-family home. The materials are clinker, wood paneling, tinted and clear glass bricks, corrugated plastic, and so on—everything one usually finds in the “catalog” and that suits the ordinary image of the single-family home.

The concrete was changed. Canopies were painted, and in a considerable section of the development the concrete structure of the terraces above the square was pasted over with gray cardboard to simulate masonry construction.

The Wertherberg housing development looks different. One could say: individualization and differentiation by the owners. Or one could say: an orgy of kitsch and tastelessness. Both statements, however, apply only to the surface. Wertherberg as a structured residential environment, as a complex organization of community and privacy, is experienced just as much today as it was just after its completion. The concept of this form of housing had and has the same advantages and disadvantages. What has changed is the look of the individual “participants” in this enterprise. Or one could also say: only now has this look taken shape. And this look does not necessarily wish to please.

The residents are beginning to design their surroundings. No one is entitled to complain about it. Only the nature of the change is alarming. It is not about increasing the use value of the grounds, improving the public space by adding new functional elements, or extending one’s own living situation (though there are attempts to do that); rather, it is concerned with “makeup,” with a new facial cream and wig. And the mirror in which the individual applies that makeup reflects aspirations to a higher social status and indicates the elements that are associated with that status. That which is thought to identify the housing of the “better off” is pasted onto one’s own house in miniaturized (and cheaper) form. Concrete is ugly. Exposed brick is more appealing. Accepting a new, unusual housing situation, using it, making use of its advantages, and supplementing it—that work could not be done in Wertherberg. It became important to the owners that they bring in and bring into their development those values with which they could identify—values

that are offered from the television to the magazine, from *Schöner Wohnen* [Beautiful living] to the mail-order catalog. Such offerings leave little room to reflect one’s own, real needs.

The architect is rather helpless in the face of these social phenomena. He can be satisfied that he planned the possibility of change into his building. He can either watch the further development as a bystander or try to control it. Formulating surroundings from a lofty vantage point and declaring their form sacrosanct—that is, set in stone for the residents—is, however, not very intelligent, to say nothing of the arrogance of such an attitude. It holds out another example with the ambition of orienting oneself around it; that is, to strive for it without thinking. That encourages a mechanism similar to the one that now compels people to emulate unthinkingly a status that is held out as an example and all its corresponding insignia.

Getting beyond that and becoming aware of real needs is, however, a process of emancipation that can be achieved only within the larger social framework. To expect salvation from architecture would be naive.

The architect’s task of designing the surroundings and planning and building new, current housing forms remains. In the interaction between a new housing situation and the aspirations of the resident, our environment changes. In this process, architecture often strains to put cladding on carefully formed surroundings. The use of a new, properly conceived housing form, however, may be able to change the picture of what is perceived as surroundings worth striving for. A new model is held out on which one can later fall back as a familiar and hence “more acceptable” example. From this perspective, the outward changes in Wertherberg are a “normal” phenomenon. The people engaged with their surroundings. That is heartening and no reason to pull one’s hair out. Or, if so, only as an “architect” whose work was an effort to form surroundings that are intelligently organized, offer a wealth of uses, and whose forms and materials interact coherently with the whole. That is what really makes one want to weep about the many useless cosmetics in Wertherberg.





# Signs of Life

## Symbols in the American City

Author:  
Denise Scott Brown

Source:  
*archithese*, 19 (1976):  
29–34

Translated by:  
Steven Lindberg

### Letter to the Editors

*Asked to contribute to the realism issue of "archithese," I am sending photographs of panels we created for our current exhibition, "Signs of Life: Symbols in the American City," for the Smithsonian Institution. The exhibition is a critical documentation of American taste.*

*As this makes clear, we are studying the urban environment as we find it; we are trying to understand its symbols in order to establish a point of departure for our own work. You might say that our concept of "reality" is an empirical one, founded more on sociological and architectural perception than on philosophical trains of thought. We are, in a sense, simple sociologists*

*who gain insights from observing behavior and taste and combine them with observation of the environment we as architects make. Peter Smithson once called this attitude "active socioplastics."*

*We share an interest in the concept of "realism," but we approach it from our own, pragmatic standpoint. That means that we try to form our ideas about architectural reality by induction: by deriving theories from specific examples and not the other way around. We do not believe our path is the only one or the only right one to approach the problem; rather, it supplements the theoretical approaches that many of our European colleagues have chosen.*  
D.S.B.

### Signs of Life Symbols in the American City

I  
What makes a house look like a house, a school look like a school, or a bank like a bank? What makes a petrol station look like a good neighbor? The elements of architecture have symbolic meaning and give messages

about the environment that make it comprehensible and therefore usable by people in their daily lives.

The flashing electric sign on Route 66 tells us specifically, EAT HERE, and its design may suggest the kind of dining available—family, soft-lights sophisticated, country inn, etc. Off the main highway, however, the curving roads, well-tended lawns, colonial doorways,

# ZEICHEN DES LEBENS

## *Symbole in der amerikanischen Stadt*

### Brief an die Herausgeber

*Aufgefordert, zum Realismus-Heft von archithese beizutragen, schicke ich Fotografien von Tafeln, die wir für unsere gegenwärtige Ausstellung «Signs of Life: Symbols in the American City» im Auftrag der Smithsonian Institution ausgearbeitet haben. Die Ausstellung ist eine kritische Dokumentation des amerikanischen Geschmacks.*

*Wie daraus ersichtlich ist, studieren wir die städtische Umwelt (environment), so wie wir sie vorfinden; wir versuchen, ihre Symbole zu verstehen, um einen Ausgangspunkt für unsere eigene Arbeit zu gewinnen. Man kann sagen, dass unser Begriff von «Wirklichkeit» ein empirischer ist, mehr auf soziologische und architektonische Wahrnehmung gegründet als auf philosophische Gedankengänge. Wir sind, in einem gewissen Sinn, einfache Soziologen, die*

*aus der Beobachtung des Verhaltens und des Geschmacks der Leute Einsichten gewinnen und diese verbinden mit der Beobachtung der Umwelt, die wir als Architekten machen. Peter Smithson nannte diese Haltung einmal «active socioplastic».*

*Wir teilen das Interesse für den «Realismus»-Begriff; wir nähern uns diesem allerdings von unserem eigenen, pragmatischen Standpunkt aus. Das heisst, wir versuchen, unsere Vorstellungen über die architektonische Wirklichkeit durch Irduktion zu bilden: indem wir von den konkreten Beispielen aus zu Theorien gelangen, und nicht umgekehrt. Wir sind nicht der Meinung, unser Weg sei der einzige oder einzig richtige, um sich dem Problem zu nähern: er ergänzt vielmehr die theoretischeren Annäherungen, die viele unserer europäischen Kollegen gewählt haben.*

D. S. B.

### Zeichen des Lebens Symbole in der amerikanischen Stadt

I  
Was bewirkt, dass ein Haus wie ein Haus aussieht, eine Schule wie eine Schule oder eine Bank wie eine Bank? Was bewirkt, dass eine Tankstelle aussieht wie ein guter Nachbar? Diese Ausstellung soll zeigen, dass die Architektur-Formen symbolische Bedeutung haben und Mitteilungen machen über die Umwelt (environment), die diese für die Leute in ihrem

täglichen Leben verständlich und brauchbar werden lassen.

So sagt uns das aufleuchtende Schriftzeichen an der *Route 66* ausdrücklich EAT HERE und seine Gestaltung kann uns zu verstehen geben, von welcher Art das Essen ist: gutbürgerlich, vornehm oder ländlich. Aber abseits der grossen Autobahnen, in Suburbia, erzählen uns die gewundenen Strassen, die gepflegten Rasen, die Häuser mit Giebeldächern, die Eingänge im Kolonialstil und die mit Läden versehenen Fenster, ohne Schriftzeichen zu benötigen, dass

es hier Sinn für Tradition, Besitzerstolz und Landleben gibt.

Die Ausstellung ist auch ein Versuch, die pluralistische Aesthetik der amerikanischen Stadt und ihrer Vororte zu untersuchen und zu verstehen, was die Stadtlandschaft für die Leute bedeutet. Dies mittels einer Analyse ihrer Symbole und deren Herkunft. Wir haben unsere Aufmerksamkeit besonders auf die Ladenstrasse des 20. Jahrhunderts (strip) und auf die wuchernden Vororte (sprawl) gerichtet, weil in dieser Umwelt der Gebrauch von Symbolen seit dem 19. Jahrhundert andauert, während in anderen Gebieten diese Tradition durcheinandergebracht oder gebrochen wurde durch den Versuch der modernen Architekten, historische oder symbolische Anspielungen aus der Architektur zu tilgen.

Unsere Dokumentation von Vorort, «Strip» und Stadt, im Zusammenhang mit einander und mit der Stadt des 19. Jahrhunderts, ist Teil einer breiter angelegten Bemühung, den unterschiedlichen architektonischen Geschmack in Amerika zu verstehen und die Rolle des Architekten in Beziehung zu ihm zu bestimmen. Wir behaupten:

— dass die Durchwirkung mit Symbolen und Zeichen, wie sie in der historischen Stadt bestand, in der heutigen Stadt weiterlebt, wenn auch in anderer Form;

— dass Symbole und Zeichen in der Umwelt der Stadt allgegenwärtig sind, was aber nicht anerkannt wird;

— dass die «gewöhnlichen» Symbole und Zeichen der Umwelt der Geschäfts- und Wohnviertel bedeutsam sind für das tägliche Leben;

— dass wir uns und unsere Umwelt besser verstehen, wenn wir die Symbole und Zeichen zu verstehen lernen;

— dass ein notwendiges Vorspiel zur Verbesserung unserer Umwelt darin besteht, dass wir ihre raison d'être verstehen.

Ein weiteres Ziel dieser Ausstellung ist es, den Architekten und Planern vorzuschlagen, die heutige Stadtlandschaft mit offenen Augen zu studieren und besonders die symbolischen Bedeutungen, mit denen die Leute sie belegen. Wenn sie das tun, werden sie mehr lernen über die Bedürfnisse, die Vorlieben und den Geschmack der Leute, deren Leben sie beeinflussen. Das gilt vor allem für den Geschmack von Gruppen, deren Werte sich von ihren eigenen unterscheiden.

## II

Der Teil der Ausstellung, der «Das Heim» zum Gegenstand hat, untersucht vorstädtische und städtische Wohnviertel und Wohnhäuser. Seine Aufmerksamkeit gilt im besonderen dem Zierat, den die Leute ihren Häusern und Gärten hinzufügen, wenn sie sie einmal bewohnen. Die Untersuchung schliesst auch die Stile der von den Unternehmern erstellten Häuser ein und der Häuser, die in den Werbesendungen der Television, den Wohnjournalen, den Anzeigen der Automobilindustrie, den Karikaturen im *New Yorker* oder in den Versandhaus-Katalogen erscheinen. Der Grund dafür ist, dass diese Massenmedien ihren Markt zu erreichen suchen, indem sie die Symbole aus dem Bereich des Wohnens verwenden, die die gängigen gesellschaftlichen und persönlichen Wünsche spiegeln.

Die Elemente von Suburbia — die Strassen, Häuser, Dächer, Rasen und Haustüren — dienen praktischen Zwecken, sie bieten beispielsweise Zugang und Schutz, aber sie dienen den vorstädtischen Bewohnern auch als Mittel der Selbstdarstellung.

Sich windende Strassen, romantische Dachlinien, Haustüren im Kolonialstil und Laternen von Kutschen; sie alle sind zierende Elemente mit symbolischen Obertönen, die die Bewohner verwenden, um sich anderen mitzuteilen. Die Mitteilung betrifft hauptsächlich gesellschaftlichen Status, soziales Streben, individuelle Freiheit und Nostalgie für eine andere Zeit oder einen anderen Ort. Die symbolischen Inhalte dieser Elemente stammen aus Geschichte und Patriotismus, Leben auf dem Land und den Landsitzen der Reichen.

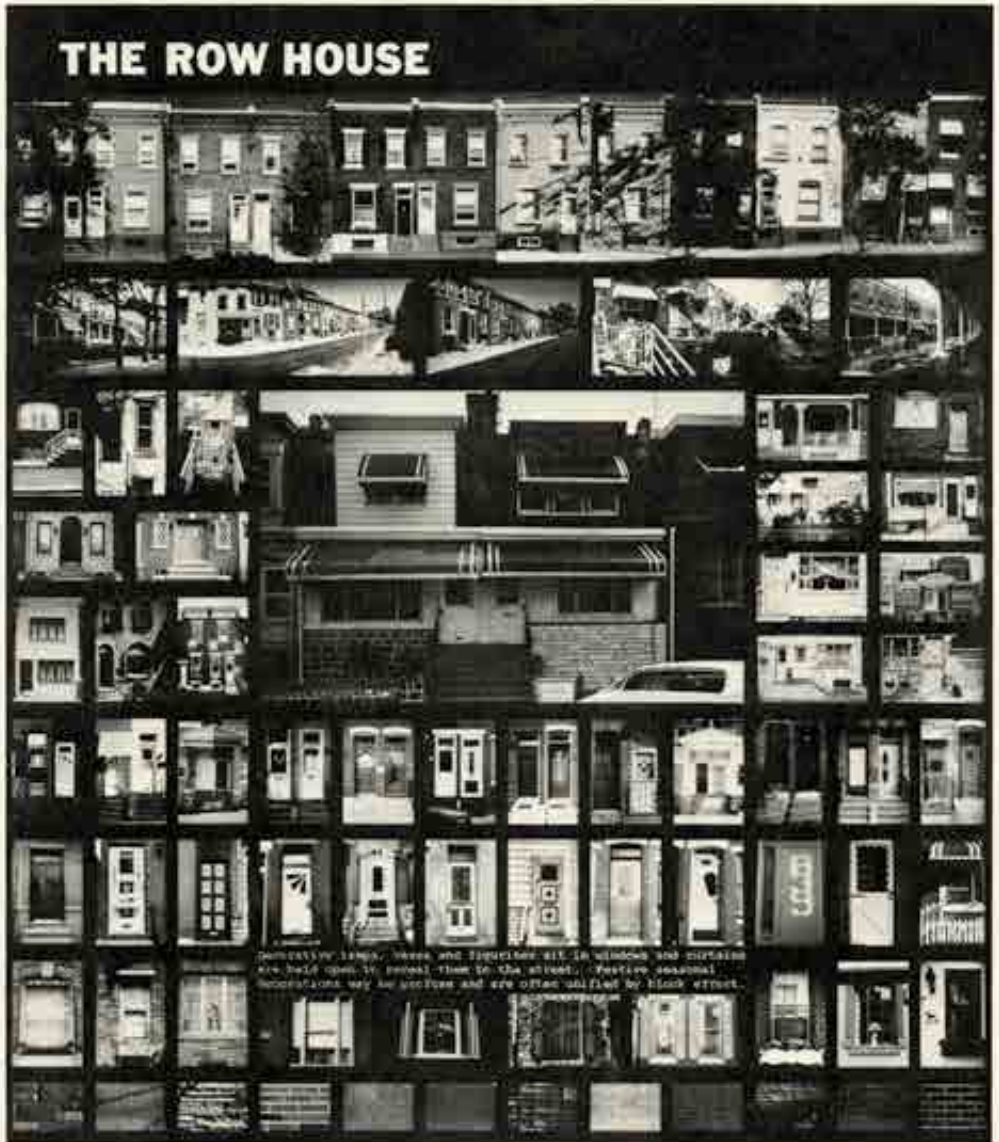
Eine Warnung: der Symbolismus im Bereich des vorstädtischen Wohnens gibt keine Auskunft darüber, *warum* die Leute in Suburbia leben, er verrät auch nicht viel über die Probleme, denen die Leute dort begegnen; er zeigt bloss einige der Wünsche an, die sie haben, während sie dort wohnen. Das gleiche gilt für das Wohnen in der Stadt. Und noch etwas: ob schon die Massenmedien interessante Aufschlüsse geben über die Haltung bestimmter Gruppen gegenüber dem Wohnen, dürfen diese Quellen nicht als der Weisheit letzten Schluss



↓ fig. 1 The visual language of Levittown. Panel from the *Signs of Life* exhibition (1976).



fig. 2 The visual language of the row house (*Signs of Life*, 1976).





↓ figs. 3-4 A popular row house; outside (3) and inside (4) (*Signs of Life*, 1976).



bezüglich der persönlichen und gesellschaftlichen Werte dieser Gruppen verstanden werden. Dennoch gibt die Selbstdarstellung der Amerikaner in ihrem Heim und darum herum einen wichtigen Hinweis auf ihre Haltungen, umso mehr, als diese Form der Selbstdarstellung von fast allen sozialen Gruppen praktiziert wird, von Jungen und Alten, Reichen und Armen, Mietern und Eigentümern, Städtlern und Vorstädtern.

(Diese beiden Texte gehören zur Ausstellung *Signs of Life: Symbols in the American City*, die diesen Sommer im Auftrag der Smithsonian Institution in der Renwick Gallery in Washington eingerichtet wurde von Venturi und Rauch, Architekten und Planer, Verantwortlich für Forschung und Texte: Denise Scott Brown; für Gestaltung und Einrichtung: Steven Izenour.)  
(Üebersetzung: Martin Steinmann)



↑ figs. 5-6 An elegant home of the elite; outside (5) and inside (6) (*Signs of Life*, 1976).

## Signes de vie, symboles dans la ville américaine

I  
Qu'est-ce qui fait qu'une maison a l'air d'une maison, qu'une école a l'air d'une école, qu'une banque a l'air d'une banque? Qu'est-ce qui fait qu'une station d'essence a l'air d'une chose familière? Cette exposition doit montrer que les formes de l'architecture ont des significations symboliques et donnent des messages qui rendent l'environnement compréhensible et par conséquent utilisable par les gens dans leur vie quotidienne.

Par exemple, l'enseigne lumineuse clignotante de la *Route 66* nous dit de manière précise, MANGE ICI, et son type de design nous suggère le genre de repas qu'on peut y faire, peut-être familial, ou sophistiqué à lumières tamisées, ou encore suberge de campagne traditionnelle. Mais, loin de l'autoroute, les routes sinueuses d'une agglomération suburbaine, les étendues de gazon, les maisons avec leur toit en pente, leur entrée coloniale et leurs fenêtres à volets nous disent, sans avoir besoin d'aucun signe, qu'ici il y a une communauté qui chérit les traditions, la fierté de la propriété et la vie rurale.

Cette exposition essaie également d'étudier l'esthétique pluraliste de la ville américaine et de ses banlieues, et de comprendre ce que le paysage urbain signifie pour les gens, ceci à travers l'analyse de leurs symboles, de leurs sources et de leurs antécédents. Nous nous sommes particulièrement concentrés sur les enseignes commerciales et les nouvelles agglomérations suburbaines du vingtième siècle, parce que dans ces environnements la tradition — qui existait dans la ville du dix-neuvième siècle — d'utiliser des symboles en architecture s'est perpétuée, alors que dans les régions où l'architecte exerce un contrôle plus direct la tradition est devenue moins nette ou a même été rompue par les efforts des architectes «modernes» pour éliminer de l'architecture toute association historique et symbolique et toute décoration.

Notre documentation de l'agglomération suburbaine, des enseignes commerciales et de la ville fait partie d'un effort plus large de comprendre les différents goûts qui existent en Amérique en matière d'architecture, et de définir le rôle de l'architecte en relation avec ces goûts. Nous soutenons que:

- le foisonnement des symboles et des signes qui existait dans la ville historique continue dans la ville d'aujourd'hui, quoique sous une forme différente;
- il existe partout des signes et des symboles dans notre environnement urbain mais ils ne sont pas reconnus;
- les symboles et les signes «ordinaires» de l'environnement commercial et de l'environnement résidentiel sont importants dans notre vie quotidienne;
- en apprenant à comprendre nos symboles et nos signes nous en arrivons à nous comprendre mieux nous-mêmes et à mieux comprendre notre paysage;
- comprendre la *raison d'être* de notre environnement physique est le préluce nécessaire pour l'améliorer.

Cette exposition vise également à suggérer aux designers, aux architectes et aux planificateurs d'étudier sans préjugé le paysage urbain actuel et spécialement les significations symboliques que les gens y mettent. Ce faisant, ces urbanistes apprendront plus qu'ils n'en savent maintenant au sujet des besoins, des goûts et des

préférences des gens dont ils influencent la vie, et particulièrement au sujet des groupes dont les valeurs sont différentes des leurs.

II  
La partie de l'exposition qui a comme sujet le «homas» étudie les quartiers résidentiels urbains et suburbains et les maisons individuelles. L'attention est centrée tout particulièrement sur les décorations que les gens ajoutent à leur maison et à leur jardin une fois qu'ils y viennent s'installer. Mais on y étudie aussi les styles des maisons construites par des entrepreneurs, ainsi que le contenu relatif au logement dans la publicité de la télévision, les «Home Journals», la publicité des automobiles, les dessins de la revue *The New Yorker*, la publicité des entrepreneurs de construction et les catalogues de vente par correspondance, parce que toutes ces sources de mass media essaient d'atteindre leur clientèle en utilisant des symboles du logement qui reflètent les aspirations sociales et personnelles.

Les éléments physiques des zones suburbaines — les routes, les maisons, les toits, le gazon et les portes d'entrée — correspondent à des nécessités pratiques telles que voies d'accès et protection, mais elles servent aussi comme moyens pour les résidents suburbains d'exprimer leur propre personne.

Les chemins qui serpentent, les toits aux silhouettes romantiques, les ornements dans le jardin, les portes d'entrée coloniales et les lanternes de café sont des éléments décoratifs avec des implications symboliques que les résidents utilisent pour communiquer aux autres quelque chose sur eux-mêmes. La communication tourne principalement autour du statut social, des aspirations sociales, de l'identité personnelle, de la liberté individuelle et de la nostalgie pour d'autres temps et d'autres lieux. Les sujets symboliques de la décoration du logement viennent de l'histoire, de la vie rurale, du patriotisme et des résidences des riches.

Un avertissement: le symbolisme du logement urbain ne nous dit pas pourquoi les gens vivent dans les suburbs et ne nous révèle pas non plus beaucoup sur les problèmes que les gens ont dans les suburbs; il ne fait qu'indiquer quelques-unes de leurs aspirations quand ils y sont. Il en va de même avec le logement urbain. Quant à la source des mass media, quoique fournissant une information intéressante sur l'attitude d'un groupe vis-à-vis du logement, elle ne devrait pas être prise comme le dernier mot sur les valeurs personnelles et sociales aux États-Unis. Cependant, l'expression personnelle des Américains à l'intérieur et autour de leur «homas» est un indice important de leurs attitudes; ceci d'autant plus que cette forme d'expression est pratiquée par presque tous les groupes sociaux, par les jeunes et les vieux, les riches et les pauvres, les locataires et les propriétaires, les habitants des villes et ceux des suburbs.

[Ces deux textes font partie de l'exposition *Signs of Life: Symbols in the American City*, qui a été préparée par Venturi et Rauch, architectes et planificateurs, pour la Smithsonian Institution à Washington (Renwick Gallery, été 1976). Responsable pour la recherche et les textes: Danise Scott Brown, Présentation: Steven Izenour.]

[Trad. Irène von Moos]

and shuttered windows of suburbia tell us, without need of signs, that here is a community that values tradition, pride of ownership, and the rural life.

The exhibition is also an attempt to survey the pluralist aesthetic of the American city and its suburbs and to understand what the urban environment means to people, through an analysis of its symbols, their sources, and their antecedents. We have focused particularly on the twentieth century commercial strip and suburban sprawl, because it is in these environments that the new symbolism has emerged since the nineteenth century. In areas more directly controlled by architects, the tradition of using symbolism in architecture has been confused or broken by their attempts to wipe the slate clean of all historical and symbolic associations.

This effort to document sprawl, strip, and city in the context of one another and of the nineteenth-century city is part of a broader effort to understand American architectural tastes and the role of the architect in relation to them. We argue that:

- the influence of the historic city's symbols and signs are still felt in today's city, but in a different form.
- symbols and signs are omnipresent in the city's environment, but this is not acknowledged.
- "ordinary" symbols and signs of the commercial and residential environments are significant in our daily lives.
- to better understand ourselves and our environment, we must learn to understand its symbols and signs.
- to improve our environment, we must first understand how and why it came to be.

A further aim is to suggest to urban designers, architects and planners, and the decision-makers they influence, that they shall study these environments, especially the symbolic meanings people ascribe to or invest in them. In so doing, they will learn more than urbanists now know about the needs, tastes, and preferences of the people whose lives they influence, particularly about the tastes of groups whose values and culture patterns are different from those of the professionals.

## II

The section of the exhibition titled "The Home" surveys suburban neighborhoods and individual houses, particularly the decorations people add to their houses and yards once they occupy them. But it surveys, too, the housing content of television commercials, home magazines, automobile advertisements, *New Yorker* cartoons, and mail-order catalogs, because these mass media sources attempt to reach their markets by using residential symbols that reflect current social and personal aspirations.

The physical elements of suburbia—the roads, houses, roofs, lawns, and front doors—serve practical purposes such as giving access and shelter, but they also serve as means of self-expression for suburban residents.

Winding roads, romantic roof lines, garden ornaments, and colonial front doors—all are decorative elements with symbolic overtones that residents use to communicate with others about themselves. The communication is mainly about social status and social aspirations, personal identity and individual freedom, and nostalgia for another time or place. The symbolic subject matter of residential decoration comes from history, rural life, patriotism, and the states of the rich.

A warning: Suburban housing symbolism, however, does not tell us why people live in suburbia or much about the problems they experience in suburbia; it merely tells us some of their aspirations while they are there. The same holds true for dwelling in the city. Moreover, although the mass media are an interesting source of information on group attitudes to housing, they should not be taken as the last word on personal and social values in the United States. Nevertheless, the use of symbolic decoration by Americans in and around their houses is an important clue to American attitudes because it is practiced by almost all social groups, by young and old, rich and poor, renters and owners, urbanites and suburbanites.

(These two texts are taken from the exhibition *Signs of Life: Symbols in the American City*, which was curated by Venturi and Rauch, Architects and Planners, for the Smithsonian Institution at the Renwick Gallery in Washington. Responsibility for the research and texts: Denise Scott Brown; for design and installation: Steven Izenour.)

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