

12.III.1970 The City (cont.)

This session is to supply vocabulary as related to the city & general ecology. Ecology is itself a synthesis idea, as we have seen with Carl Sauer (cited by Olson) & B. Fuller's environmental studies. The whole idea of this course, in fact, relates to environmental studies.

Modern city planners tend to produce predictive master plans; & once you predict, it tends to be put into action immediately. Herman Kahn & the Rand Corporation make predictive syntheses; they feed information into computers which produce master plans.

In music this is the difference between Milton Babbitt & John Cage. Babbitt feeds info into a computer which produces Musical form; Cage sees ~~that~~ the possibility of so organizing a structure that it includes the abandonment of controls.

City planners speak continuously of the efficiency of a master plan. Is it possible to produce an efficient city plan which guarantees against monotony of form and makes certain that the ratio between community & privacy doesn't prevent happiness?

When you think of the city as the polis, the synthesis of buildings and spaces where a man can become a "citizen", can the citizens be a part of cultural ecology and still maintain a balance between privacy & community? What structure can fulfil the requirements of participation, creation, privacy, group action, inside a limited area? Is this necessary? When one speaks of the morphology of a city, one means the structure of a city where human beings move together between privacy and a group.

The case against the city is usually put like this: in a city men are instruments of each other's lives, each man as an end in himself is disregarded, & therefor the basis of morality is weakened. This argument assumes that there is a structural definition of "the community" as a set of face-to-face relationships between "whole men"; i.e., that the possibilities in rural communities & very small towns are the bases of community morality. You may agree, but the assumptions must be kept in view. Either the nostalgia for ruralism leaks back into the argument or the two ideas (city & country) are held apart.

In Puritain or Virginian settlements in C17th & C18th America, daily face-to-face confrontation certainly didn't produce a community of "whole men". And the idea that life in Oshkosk is "community" is a very unfortunate suggestion. We do not necessarily know each other better in one structure or another. E.g., the city neighborhood must be one of a number of multiple environments & resources, not a fixed object. **I.e.**, community varies during the day and during the night and therefor there must be many environments through which you move, & which have different functions. So one must think of a city as an ecological structure of multiple environments in which the human being functions in different ways at different times.

Community might be the most intense when the city breaks down (e.g. N.Y. during the power failure, London during the blitz). Community feeling may happen intermittently, & there is no reason why it should happen all the time in a visible way.

Maybe there are different kinds of community feeling required in the ecological structure called "the city" at different times.

In favour of the city, one must also say that it is easier to live among strangers in a city than in a rural community, where privacy is a very rare commodity. Choice of privacy & group activity is easier in a city than in a rural community. (But not in a slum, where you may get community but not privacy!) What I'm trying to do is complexify the picture as a counter to city planners and their "efficient" structures. In London they have the nerve to call tower hamlets "vertical villages", attempting to take the curse off vertical slums.

In other words, a man operates in the city in a spectrum between anonymity and being known in his job, family, union, club, & his pub, all in different ways. This is what I mean by an ecological structure. "The crowded physical conditions under which urbanites live have led to an increased moral sensitivity," says one writer. It doesn't necessarily follow, but it's worth considering. Certainly some type of self-control & law control is central in areas of restricted movement.

One must also say that the cities have been the world's chief civilizing agents. As Lewis Mumford says, culture is "the culture of cities". Jane Jacobs in The Economy of Cities suggests that even agriculture was invented by the cities; which cuts across Frazer et al who say that we began as "herb-gathering" people. One must get away from the city vs. agriculture tradition.

The programmes of urban renewal end up as housing precincts which are accurately described in Hubert Selby's Last Exit to Brooklyn. Our case at the Old Bailey (Mottram was an expert witness) was that this book is documentary. (To which the prosecution replied, "But it contains swear words!") They couldn't believe that a new housing precinct created this kind of life. It was designed as slum clearance, but it created a new kind of slum because the structure within which it took place didn't change. The educational structure & life expectations remained the same; they only replaced the old buildings with a grid and a certain amount of dustbin clearance! What the book describes is a hell of community without privacy, which also means a hell without law. It is an eternal urban renewal "frontier" situation in the middle of a city! Letter 9 of Crevecoeur's Letters from an American Farmer could be reapplied to Brooklyn in the 1960's.

B Serge Chermayeff & Christopher Alexander, Community and Privacy, MIT, 1963. The authors demonstrate that the concept of community should include the concept of privacy. Their design for a city takes the form of the extreme opposite of the Jeffersonian grid or the printed circuit; rather it is a constellation or a mobile. A constellation consists of a series of morphologically designed units not necessarily in fixed geometric forms. It is a growing space which radiates from a center. A mobile is a space in which the parts move in an extraordinary variety of ways: it is infinitely varied & unpredictable, but within a space. A human being in a mobile would feel the security of

community, the sense of love & warmth, but not feel that he was moving in a rigid grid. The opposite is the Jeffersonian grid (or printed circuit, as in Pynchon's Crying of Lot 49). C. & A. envisage a physical environment made from "artistic intuition" & "technical capacity". "Civilized man must give high priority to the development of a unified field of environmental control in which art will once again be tempered by the purposeful discipline of science, and science inspired by the insights of art." Actually I don't think art can be adequately described in this fashion; it is as much an engineering of the body's capabilities as building a bridge. But the book as a whole is useful, as when it says, "only through the restored opportunity of the first-hand experience ~~xxxx~~ that privacy gives can health & sanity be brought back to the world." It understands also that the fear of being too private may<sup>be</sup> as much a part of the tyranny of the city as the fear of group pressures. It understands that a sense of privacy & community are to a great degree controlled by what the eye sees, & that the visual arts are central to a discussion of the city; i.e., the eye is the organ which takes in visual nourishment for health, or anti-nourishment for imprisonment, and that therefor scale and colour are basic controls. This is very important.

B In other words, the city is not just a tool which supplies a necessary evil & is counter to "landscape/nourishment". One must get rid of the backlog of anti-city intellectualism, as described in Morton & Lucile White, The Intellectual vs. the City, 1962 (Amer. PB) (subtitled From Thomas Jefferson to Frank Lloyd Wright) They discuss the line which perpetuates the deception that the place in which elementary values of self-development & community & communication can only be found is in environments of the past. "The wilderness, the isolated farm, the plantation, the self-contained New England town, the detached neighborhood, are things of the American past. All the world's a city now and there is no escaping organization, not even in outer space." Cf. McLuhan, Counterblast, 1969: "The farmer as "loner" no longer exists; he is a city man. Any highway eatery with its TV set, newspaper & magazine is as cosmopolitan as NY or Paris." (p. 12) McL's basic idea is that the city is an extension of the body, a technological event like any other. Chermayeff & Alexander quote C. Wright Mills, "The Man in the Middle" (in Power, Politics & People, p.374) "The consciousness of men does not determine their existence, nor does their existence determine their consciousness; between human consciousness & material existence stand communications and designs, patterns and values which influence decisively such consciousness as they have." This is fundamental. You may not talk about human beings without talking about designs, patterns, & all the things with which this course is concerned; i.e., the idea of synthesis, "what things are put together how". Explorations no. 6, July 1956: "Cities were always a means of achieving some degree of simultaneity of association and awareness among men. What the family and the tribe had done in this respect for a few, the

city did for many. Our technology now removes all city walls. The oral and acoustic space of tribal cultures had never met visual reconstruction of the past; all experiences and all past lives were now. Pre-literate man knew only simultaneity. The walls between men, between arts and sciences, were built on the written and visually arresting word. With the return to simultaneity, we enter the tribal and acoustic world once more, globally." Note particularly that this was written in 1956.

So we must now think of the city without walls. Given the organization of global space, it may be that the city extends; i.e., all the things that a city meant in the past may now be extending across the surface of the globe.

One criticism of Chermayeff & Alexander, & of McLuhan, is the use of the passive. (But then, I'm a political man.) Again & again, things "happen" "Mobility is encouraged. . ." By whom is mobility encouraged, and for what purposes? It's as if a man were a thing inside a destiny programme. They (the authors under discussion) are not aware of political economics.

B Kenneth Rexroth's introduction indicates a more accurate position: "Health cannot mean that we rest on a statement like, 'Man creates his own environment.'" (That sounds humanistic, but it's not. You've got to "unpack" that; you must know who controls, and for whose benefit. If urban renewal means Last Exit to Brooklyn, clearly this is a ludicrous idea. See Jules Henri, Culture Against Man, 1963 (PB)) Rexroth: Economists & sociologists speak too frequently as if "we were just vehicles for the evolution of our artifacts." (what Eleuil calls "autonomous technology") Rexroth calls for "the creative reconstruction of ecology", a phrase we will examine in some detail. The system of relative balances & controls within the materials on the earth's crust is being changed. "The creative reconstruction of ecology is ~~being~~ hindered by any programme which assumes static models of necessity." (and scarcity, conflict, competition, & national frontiers)

So "bio-technical engineering", unless it includes multiple-choice & privacy, is dangerous. But mutual aid can only succeed if it proceeds from the idea of the world's resources being organized together (as in B. Fuller). The problem is that the "drama" a man is trained to believe he is in totally controls his actions. You may be able to organize your resources, but if your dramatic programme includes certain assumptions (about conflict, the control of energy, etc.), they will determine how you organize your resources. For instance, McLuhan's popularity among American businessmen & adolescents alike is due to his elevation of the myth of laissez faire: a combination of laissez faire business & ecstatic libertinism, fusing together & sometimes even called the New Left! It is also fused with the myth that, when the "planner" or "manager" is left to function without interference, he operates as a dispassionate professional diagnostician. (It's the myth of the scientist/doctor who prescribes altruistic social principles.) McLuhan is the archetypal doctor, who has been under attack in American lit by Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Henry James & the other major American

writers for some time. But the awkward part is that this has been fused into doing one's own thing, which was Emerson's phrase in the first place. It's Emerson/Thoreau anarchism unfortunately combined with laissez faire economics and reliance on the planner as altruistic diagnostician. The contradiction is that you are left to "do your own thing" within somebody else's plan. The shamanistic expert (the "false shaman").

An example is Constantine A. Doxiadis, whose acclaim in America is part of the current mystique of grand-planning syntheses. His vocabulary is leaking into American discussion. His fame is largely based on his belief that you can put all data into a single structure, a single optimum design for the city; that planning infallibility is guaranteed if you insure it by computer. His ideal city is based on ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ computerized data. He believes in Master Plans, & so of course he appeals to Organization Men in power, because he is predictive (like the Rand Corporation/Iron Mountain). His basic book is Ekistics, 1968, in which he defines his work as "the science of human settlements". He speaks as if the choices between alternatives were not, finally, political. He coins terms to enshrine his science: Entopia = the city that works; dynapolis = the changing city (the large-scale version is dynametropolis or dynamegalopolis). It's all under control and it's big! And growing! Which people just love: the sense of belonging to something that's growing, and enormous. It's erotic as hell. The city is part of the study of man, which he calls anthropics (sounds like a disease). Ecumenopolis = the world city of the future.

For example: when he was called in to study Detroit as an urban area, he produced 49,000,000 alternatives! (He's not exactly careless) This he feeds into a computer structure, which gives him power. His "basics" are "nature, man, society, shells, networks". The next level is their relationships to "residence, commerce, industry, defense". The defense of Detroit appeals to local police & businessmen, because it means they can get federal funds for armored tanks, for defense against their own citizens! These relate in turn to "money, materials, labour, land".

To narrow down alternatives, he eliminates choice by means of what he calls the I.D.E.A method (Isolation of Dimensions and Elimination of Alternatives). So much for neutrality of data masquerading as techniques and planning.

Ekistics constructs 54 laws. My favourite is no. 34: "all communities and therefor all ekistic units tend to be connected to each other in a hierarchical manner. Every community of a higher order serves certain communities of a lower order, and the same is true of specific functions within ekistic units." This is why businessmen love him, and why Brazil got him in to do Rio; it's the familiar Darwinistic structure. The man's persuasive power comes from his Greek endings & the vaguely classical aura, & its sense of controlled size & growth. And his idea of eliminating things, which businessmen always like. Plus the "beautiful slides", with the sun shining & not a human being in sight. . .

One of the basic ways that planners talk about form is to use a "tree" image, the fake organic metaphor. This is exposed in a beautiful essay by Christopher Alexander, "A City is Not a Tree", 1965. If you use that image, remember that the connections between branches short-circuit the trunk constantly for adjacent needs, rather than going back along the tree lines through the centers: "Desire lines cut across tree lines". Overlap is the rule, and it cuts across compartments. Environmental overlap means choice. The key book on this is Alexander's Notes on the Synthesis of Form: "It is not possible today to escape the responsibility of considered action by working within academic styles, but the designer who is unequal to his task and unwilling to face the difficulty preserves his innocence in other ways. The modern designer relies more and more on his position as 'artist', on catch-words, personal idioms & intuitions. For all these relieve him of some of the burden of decision and making his cognitive problems manageable. Driven on his own resources, unable to cope with the complicated information he is supposed to organize, he hides his incompetence in a frenzy of artistic individuality. As his capacity to invent clearly conceived, well-fitting forms is exhausted, the emphasis on intuition and individuality only grows wilder." (p.10). Keep your eye on the relationship between individual style and irresponsibility, when information becomes too much to handle.

Doxiadis is, in fact, an authoritarian paternalist. His plans in Ekistics are evolutionist: cities are to be achieved by slow plod through various stages: new nations have to grow like old ones, under plans. The theory is as cruelly absurd as W.W. Rostow's Stages of Economic Growth, the sine qua non in Washington, whose language permeates American politics. Galbraith breathes it all the time.

Another book of Doxiadis is Between Dystopia & Entopia, his 1966 lectures at Trinity College, Hartford. It's perhaps more useful & less hierarchical than Ekistics. He contrasts the great static capitals of empires, Rome, Constantinople, Peikín with post-17th dynamic human settlements of the scientific & industrial revolutions. But the voice is passive: from city to metropolis to megalopolis, growth "happens"; "only now has it begun to be checked". He draws diagrams of human contacts in different population densities, but never asks whether people want to make contact with more or less people than they do. The murderous thing among planners & sociologists is that everybody wants to meet everybody. (It's perhaps an illusion that you can "know" more than a dozen people.) And half the time, "knowing" means "possessing". Again & again, "face-to-face" confrontation means control. . . He also says that cities of the past offered a more "human" life than cities of the present, and there you have the false romantic Ruskin/Morris tradition again. He uses phrases like "the intrusion of the machine" (undated) "which caused loss of human scale". The answer is Lynn White's Mediaeval Technology & Social Change, in which he discusses the stirrup, the plow, etc., of which Doxiadis is

very ignorant. He has no idea of technology & its effects; certainly no idea of Reich's concept of the relationship between energy expenditure in work, sex, & play. He doesn't discuss different income groups, occupational problems. In discussing the synthesis of his "basics" he leaves out discussion of moral priorities & income distribution. He talks continually of controlling city size, but never its population (or related matters such as contraception, religious prohibition, etc.). (But then, neither do "demographers".)

For Rio he produced a master plan which included elimination of the slums (who in Rio is interested in eliminating the slums?) re which he was asked, "If you eliminate the slums, who is going to write the sambas?" which he couldn't answer. City planners are frequently asked this: if you eliminate the city & agricultural slums, what happens to blues & jazz? Or even painting; it's notorious that there is an excellent school of painting in the Haiti slums. The master plan can't include the unpredictable, what J.Z. Young calls "the random quality & quantity in which the human is included". This arrives at the point where city planning meets John Cage's concept of indeterminacy, which we will go into next time. (Plato: "When the mode changes, the walls of the city shake".)

City equilibrium may phase out indigenous culture; one must make decisions on the relationship between art & poverty, without nostalgia for fixed art forms; otherwise you're back with Pound's aristocratic liberalism: the terrible fear that a socialized state would reduce the arts. (You can't predict, but if you must decide that eliminating poverty will eradicate jazz, the blues, & Haiti painting, then let it; human beings will produce something else. You must have faith in the creative ability of human beings. Do you keep people in slums so you can buy LP's of sambas?)

To summarize: one possible synthesis for the city is the idea of the mobile, a fixed spacial field with changing relationships of elements, which are unpredictable & indeterminate. Not the mobility of totally free form & movement, but ~~the~~ circumscription such that human beings are not dispersing their energies as waste. Outward dispersal in infinite radiation seems to be unsettling, a reaction which would appear to be related to the structure of the body. What we are concerned with is the ecology of nourishment & expenditure within some kind of boundary (cf. Brown, Love's Body). But not "roots": this may be a false organic image which doesn't fit the way we live, or want to live, particularly in America. Do we want "roots" in some remote village, or Harlem, or Bedford-Stuyvesant, or Los Angeles? The feeling that you can't get out of a place is a form of tyranny. Of course "rootless" is resented by the state because it can't "fix" people (cf. gypsies, the vagrancy laws, hippies). May not an urban situation be a grid imposed on people's lives? (I'm asking endless questions because I don't know the answers.) The basic question is, what are the controls imposed on living forms in general, which is the whole problem of this course.

Let's look at the history of living-grids as imposed by planners. The Penn/Jefferson grid certainly isn't a mobile; it's a form of imprinting on the earth, a reproducible image ideal laid on the earth in squares--forever. The earth, of course, isn't rectangular, & rectangles don't exist in nature.

B Jefferson was a member of the 1784 committee which first set up the system of rectangular survey, which was embodied in the land ordinance act of 1785. (See Christopher Tunnard, The Modern American City, Anvil, 1968) The alibi was characteristically ideologically spurious: the Old Testament was used to confirm ease of land transfer & land sale! "For the form of Babylon, the first city, was square, and so shall also be the last, according to the description of the Holy City in the Apocalypse." Weighty language makes the alibi for real estate. This is related to Jefferson's decimal money system; it had the advantage of being easily understood, but, in the case of the town grid, at the expense of simplification of human environmental relationships. From Babylon to Manhattan!

Opposition came from Pierre L'Enfant, who designed the original plan for Washington, D.C.. He objected to the grid for typically late 18th romantic ~~id~~ reasons: that geometrical regularity was boring & violated the landscape. His plan for Washington combined certain rigid features with following the land contours in others. He wanted to facilitate movement between parts of the city. But successive administrations, until 1911, modified his plan to conform to grid patterns.

Being a romantic, he used the image of a tree continually in his writings; he did in fact alter the landscape to the extent of digging a canal through the city. The importance for us is that it raises the question of the relationship of the city to terrain, and the relationship of conceptual ideology to images of city design. The Jefferson=L'Enfant controversy parallels a general tendency in 18thC America: the superimposition of romantic & neo-classical ideals. (Always look at the assumptions & check the ideology behind the image.) (See also intro to Lawrence Holland, ed., Who Designs America?, 1966)

But is the "organic" plan more or less imprisoning than the grid? The city is now frequently postulated in curves & cellular structures; but they aren't necessarily better shapes to live in because they correspond to basic morphology (or do they?). I suspect that high-density population problems tend to take place (pollution, etc.) not in relation to shape on the ground or in the air, but in relation to a much larger variety of factors. And remember that there is nothing more "organic" than Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, his design for a prison.

However functional a design may be in terms of its own efficiency and even beauty, it by no means follows that it is something you can live in. Norbert Wiener's The Human Use of Human Beings is closely related to this: an oversynthesized system may in fact be entropic. You may end up with an overloaded circuit. Chaos may come from overorganization (which is what Henry Adams was also concerned with). (Wiener suggests that "pockets of resistance" may be contained in a generally entropic



structure.)

(1937)

B W.C. Williams, "The Basis of Faith in Art", is a dialogue between the poet & the architect (W.C.W. & his brother). (In Selected Essays, 1954) p. 175 ff) It concerns poetry & architecture as "building", putting things together (B. Fuller: "The poet is the man who puts things together.")

B L.L. Whyte, "Atomism, Structure, & Form", in Kepes, Structure in Art & in Science, 1965. In this essay, Whyte defines basic terms which we need by this stage: form, structure, entropy, atomism, chaos.

We have inherited the great 19th heresy that unity for its own sake is organically healthy & "fertilizing". So the most pressing grids of the 19th are still with us: the Darwin/Marx/Freud myth of scarcity/competition. (material covered in first four seminars)

B F. Frazier Darling, "America's Changing Environment", in Daedalus, Fall 1967. A very useful essay. Ecofacts = facts of ecology, related facts. He reminds us that city & community are part of a much bigger ecology. Pierre Dansereau: "No specie encounters in any given habitat the optimum conditions for all its functions." One of the few laws I know that one can hang onto. The whole community, or "biome", has to be studied within this proposition.

Note that all these sources play back into the content of this whole course: you may not study anything linearly. Ecology may not be studied linearly because the earth isn't a sentence. Nor from a single point of view, as if life were centralized. It must be studied from multiple viewpoints, because it is changing; and it must be studied from inside: ecologists are part of what they are studying. (Cf. Wittgenstein, Tractatus, 5.631: "If I wrote a book, 'The World as I Found It', I should also have therein to report on my body . . .")

In music, constellatory composers such as Xenakis & Boulez offer invitations to move inside a sound area & live in it, so that sound structures become an environment. (also Cage, Feldman)

B L. Gérardin, Bionics, 1968: the science of systems whose function is based on living systems. This book cuts across the glib use of the term "organic", meaning valuable. E.g., the falacy that you can distinguish definitively between inert & living matter.

The final questions, of how you put whatever forms into the human environment semi-permanently, are political. The most important question is, what effect will they have on human beings now? Sacrificing the present generation for the future is a vicious predictive scheme: "War is good business--invest your son".