

## ARE THE ARTISTIC PRINCIPLES OF CITY PLANNING DEAD AND BURIED?

Richard Reid



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# ARE THE ARTISTIC PRINCIPLES OF CITY PLANNING DEAD AND BURIED?

Key note address by Richard Reid for the 5th annual Architectural Review conference "Masterplanning and the European City", held at the RIBA, London on 21 February 2006.

I'm sure the architects who designed this meant well! (Fig. 1) And this is part of the problem. Stanley Kubrick once said that, "The reason movies are often so bad ...isn't because the people who make them are cynical money hacks. Most of them are doing the best they can; they really want to make good films. The trouble is with their heads, not their hearts".

I like to think of masterplanners as moral and ethical agents measured by their ability to bring the various interest groups together in addressing political, social, economic and physical problem and possibilities, amongst other issues, in the process of formulating visions for the future. But too often masterplanning becomes just another form of bean counting!



## 1. A BUILDING PROGRAMME

There's a whole world out there where design is the least you can get away with for the lowest price, a world of big sheds - thousands of them - lining the primary routes along the peripheral edge of towns and cities (Fig. 2).

A "masterplanned" no-man's land of floor space so vast that, in the UK, it would be the equivalent of building several large towns and cities. Add to this a million new houses planned in four principle areas in the south midlands and the southeast by 2016, a population increase of between two and three and a half million people, and we've got problems ahead.



## 2. COMPARATIVE SCALES

Assuming the Government statistics are right we're talking about building a county town the size of Dorchester 178 times over; 30 cities the size of Bath; 9 cities the size of Cardiff, 2.5 cities the size of Birmingham or, dare I say it, a city the size of Rome - the whole programme to be built in a frantic ten year timescale (Fig. 3). Well, they say that Rome wasn't built in a day!

Most of this development, unless there's a fundamental change in the way we operate, will manifest itself as huge and often dreary housing estates tacked onto the side of some unlucky town or city. Yet the scale of this development programme is such that we ought to be thinking of building several new towns or cities, or even a super-city or two!

And who's going to design them? Architects, Nan Ellin suggests in Postmodern Urbanism, for they, unlike planners, have developed most of the urban trends because, "they have been the ones to generate visions for change".



Rome



Sitte, Grand Place, Bruges

FIG. 4A



Sitte, Rue des Pierres, Bruges

FIG. 4B



Vienna in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century

FIG. 4C



FIG. 5A



FIG. 5B

Piazza Erbe, Verona



FIG. 5C



FIG. 5D

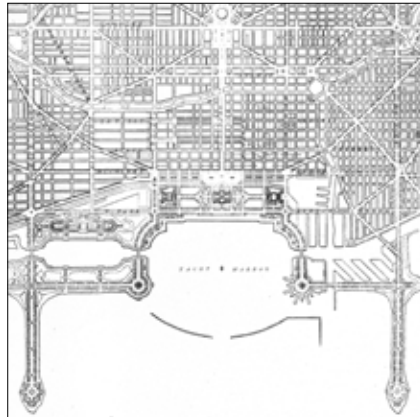


FIG. 6A

Plan of Chicago, 1909



FIG. 6B

Serlio's stage sets c.1537

### 3. THE ARTISTIC PRINCIPLES

In *City Planning According to Artistic Principles*, Camillo Sitte made the point that city planning was not merely a technical matter "but should, in its truest and most elevated sense, be an artistic enterprise". Outraged by contemporary attempts at modernising his beloved Vienna and in despair at the power of the "geometers!" - those accountants of city planning who know the price of everything, yet the value of nothing - he set out to show how it should be done, following an exhaustive study of traditional townscapes. (Fig.4)

The principle ingredient of the Sitte-esque model is continuity in constructed elements, enclosure, diversity, asymmetry, irregularity and connecting elements which are significant in themselves. He stressed the existential value of space and defined what might be called a behavioural space. (Fig. 5)

And if the modern gridiron plan had to be used, then the scenographic art of the theatre should be employed to humanize it (Fig. 6). For Sitte, the crooked street was aesthetically superior to the straight street.

### 4. THE CITY OF TOMORROW

In *The City of Tomorrow* (1925), Le Corbusier writes of how "... a modern city lives by the straight line; it's the proper thing for the heart of the city. The curve is ruinous... ..we must have the courage to view the rectilinear cities of America with admiration". (Fig. 7)

Le Corbusier's city "vision" for 3 million people consists of 10 - 12 storey residential blocks plus 24 sixty-storey office towers in the centre - the whole surrounded by a picturesque park - the vertical "garden city". (Fig. 8)

Apart from the joys of sunlight and green, Le Corbusier's concept was that "a city made for speed was a city made for success", and to demonstrate the seriousness of his ideas, he plonked a variant of the concept down on the historic centre of Paris.



Chicago, 1916

FIG. 7



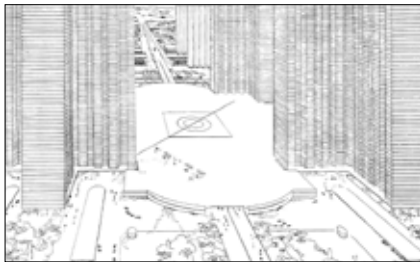
Le Corbusier, *Une Ville Contemporaine*, 1922

FIG. 8

## 5. CITY PLANNING AS BIG BUILDING

City planning as BIG BUILDING is primarily the result of demolition space planning, still one of the most influential of strategies - look at China and her expanding towns and cities (Fig. 9). A couple of decades ago, Shenzhen had a population of 20,000, now it tops 10 million.

The Pearl River Delta is the “engine” driving the Chinese economy and providing the means to create a better life for its people. But are the multi-storeyed, high-density cities being masterplanned and built at great speed the only option for a better life in China? (Fig. 10)



Le Corbusier, Plan Voisin, Paris 1925

FIG. 9A



Shanghai 2004

FIG. 9B



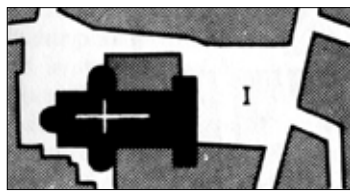
The Vernacular tradition, China

FIG. 10

## 6. THE WINDING ROAD AND PACK-DONKEY'S WAY

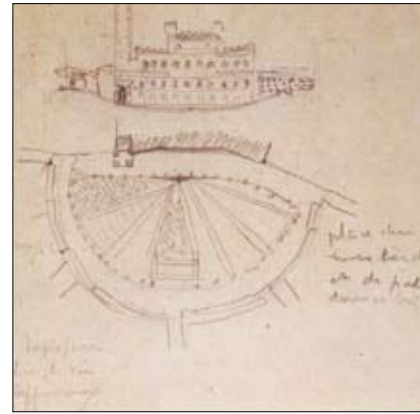
Before the First World War, Le Corbusier was an enthusiastic advocate of Camillo Sitte's townscape analysis, and made countless descriptive and analytical drawings on his travels studying the relationship of building and architecture in the place making process (Fig. 11-12). But after the war he became increasingly critical of Sitte's ideas. Whilst Le Corbusier's notions of place were influenced by Camillo Sitte's book, he began to hate the congestion and overcrowding of old cities describing Sitte's book as: “a most wilful piece of work; a glorification of the curved line and a specious demonstration of its unrivalled beauties” He wrote that, “The covered wagon lumbered along at the mercy of bumps and hollows, of rocks and mire; a stream was an intimidating obstacle. In this way, were born roads and tracks... ..the first houses and villages were planted along these tracks, along the pack-donkey's way.” (Fig. 13)

Later the village became a great capital - Paris, Rome, Stamboul, all based on the packdonkey's way. He'd forgotten that building and architecture were only a part of the place making process and that the dirt and the noise and the variety and the excitement and the spirit were all part of city living. But curiously, the key urban theorists of the last century and a bit (present company excepted) Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright and Ebenezer Howard hate the city, whilst Camillo Sitte, Kevin Lynch and Christopher Alexander love the city.



Camillo Sitte, travel studies

FIG. 11A



Le Corbusier, travel studies

FIG. 11B



FIG. 11C



Brogge, Rue des Pierres

FIG. 11D



FIG. 13A

“The nomad has taken root.....and this is the sort of small town or village which so delights the town planner! (site)”  
- Le Corbusier, City of Tomorrow



Camillo Sitte, travel studies

FIG. 12A



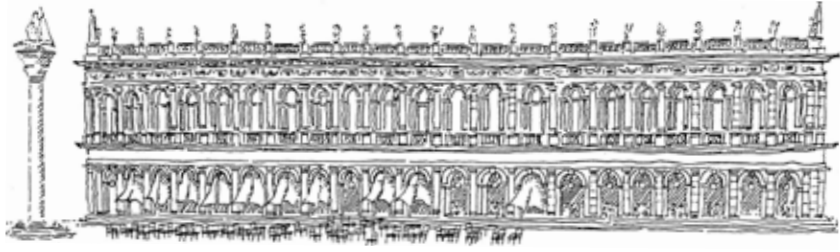
Le Corbusier, travel studies

FIG. 12B



Le Corbusier, Plan Voisin, Paris 1925

FIG. 13B



Piazza San Marco, Venice

FIG. 14A

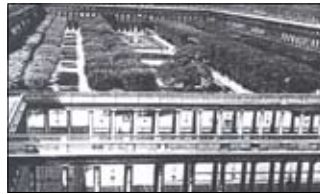
## 7. LE CORBUSIER AND HIS URBAN INTENTIONS

Le Corbusier was aware that his 1920's plans were unlikely to find political and economic support. But he justified his ideas by showing that they followed in the footsteps of an honourable tradition - the extraordinary town planning schemes of Louis XIV; the square gridded towns of the Roman colonizers; great European spaces such as the Palais Royal, Paris; the Campo Siena or the Renaissance town of Palmanova (Fig. 14-15). However, whilst he wanted to address the scale and complexity of the post-industrial city, the spaces he envisaged, like those of Camillo Sitte, were all based on pre-industrial models.



Le Campo, Siena

FIG. 14B



The Palais Royal, Paris

FIG. 14C



Palmanova

FIG. 15

## 8. THE HISTORIC TEMPLATES

The post-war world in which Le Corbusier's ideas were developed was one of "reconstruction" in every sense. It was a new world, demanding a "new architecture" with which to solve its pressing problems. So different was the 'spirit' of the times within which each developed their planning ideas, it is remarkable to realise how much in agreement they actually were.

They held similar views about a variety of planning prototypes such as the Acropolis, Athens; the Forum of Pompeii; the Piazza San Marco, Venice; the palace and town of Versailles; etc (Fig. 16-17). For Sitte, the Acropolis is "an artistic synthesis that has the grandeur of a ... mighty symphony...the most elevated poetry... the produce of centuries evolved into a genuine work of art!". And Le Corbusier points out the richly varied and subtle vistas and how, "the different masses of buildings create an intense rhythm... the whole composition is... ..massive, elastic, living, terribly sharp and keen and dominating"



The Acropolis, Athens

FIG. 17A



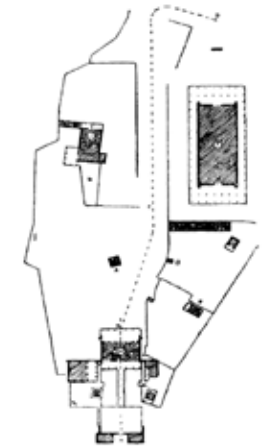
Piazza San Marco, Venice

FIG. 16A



Versaieis, Painting by Patel, 1666

FIG. 16B



The Acropolis, Athens

FIG. 17B



New York City

FIG. 18A



Vezelay, France

FIG. 18B

## 9. THE STRAIGHT STREET AND THE CROOKED STREET

Despite his immediate post war criticism of Sitte, Le Corbusier also began to see the need for a hierarchy of routes and wrote that: “the straight road or street is best for conditions of work... the winding road is more appropriate for recreation”. Later he acknowledges that the straight street is extremely boring to walk through, but that the “winding street is interesting because of a variety of succeeding shapes” and suggested we “adopt the curve if we want streets to walk in.” (Fig. 18)

This “sea change” in attitude became more marked following a trip to South America in 1929, when he began to “share with the Parisian avant-garde greater formal and aesthetic concerns for the folk and the modern”. He began to advocate a more humanistic approach to design, believing, as Marges Bacon points out that a second machine age would mediate between the machine versus man, industrial versus pre-industrial, the 20th Century versus the Middle Ages, a consumerist culture fed by capitalist pressures versus a folk culture with vernacular traditions and regional ideas, and the timely versus the timeless.

This myth was based on John Ruskin and pre-industrial concerns for nature and culture, as well as post-industrial concerns about progress in technology. He wrote of how, in his flight from city living, he ended up in places where society was in the process of organization, “I look for primitive men not for their barbarity but for their wisdom”. Out of this interest in primitive societies sprang a series of buildings constructed in a modern folk vernacular - the Errazuris house in Chile of 1930, the villa at Mathes (1935), the self-build housing for refugees of 1940 - all characterised by the use of simple materials ready-to-hand or found on site. (Fig. 19)



Le Corbusier, Les Mathes, 1935

FIG. 19A



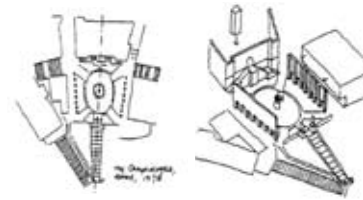
Le Corbusier, Errazuris House, Chile 1930

FIG. 19B

## 10. SPATIAL ILLUSION AND THE MEDIEVAL CITY

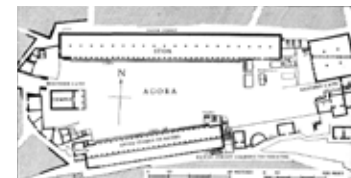
For the last seven centuries, the dominant theory of urban design has been the Renaissance concept of “spatial illusion” (Fig. 20) seen in varied urban “fragments” that Sitte and Le Corbusier admired, such as the transformation of the Campodoglio, Rome. This wasn’t a complete plan but a “scenographic strategy”, creating the first and one of the greatest spaces of the Baroque and which harks back to the Acropolis, Athens, the Agora at Assos, and the plan of Pienza, the first city of the Renaissance. (Fig. 21)

But amongst “the urban fragments” Sitte and Le Corbusier studied, there was one example that didn’t create space at all, but, in a sense, occupied or filled space and this was the Cathedral group at Pisa. Unlike the other urban fragments where you walk within a defined space, at Pisa you walk around the group, as if it were a giant series of sculptures filling a gallery space. Sitte described the cathedral group as a “masterpiece of city building... ..an acropolis... ..almost unique”.



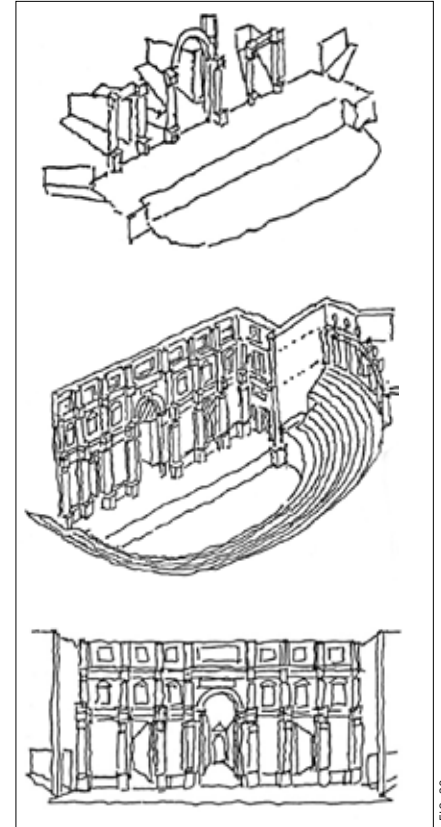
Analysis of the transformation of the Campodoglio

FIG. 21



Agora at Assos

FIG. 22A



Teatro Olimpico, Vicenza - analytical study of the scenographic strategy

FIG. 20



Plan of Pienza

FIG. 22B

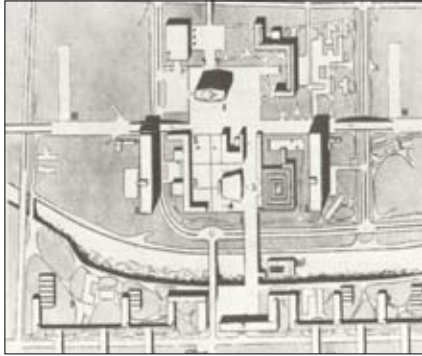


FIG. 24A

Le Corbusier, Civic Centre, Saint Die

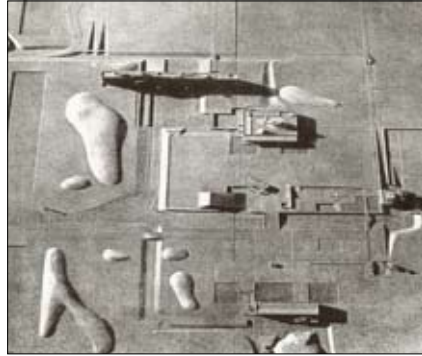


FIG. 24B

Le Corbusier, Chandigarh



FIG. 22A

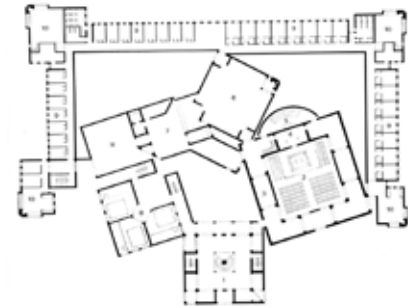


FIG. 25A

Kahn's plan for the Dominican Sisters Convent



FIG. 23A



FIG. 23B

Le Corbusier, Piazza del Duomo, Pisa



FIG. 25B

Sanctuary of Asklepius at Pergamon

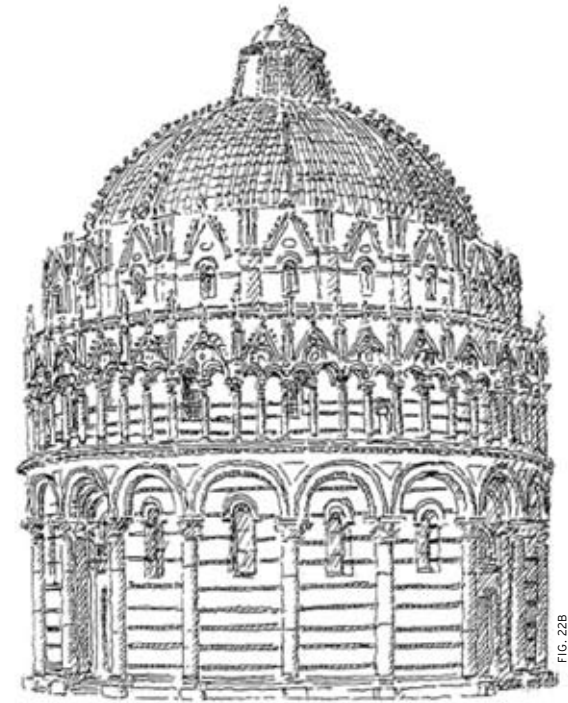


FIG. 22B

Piazza del Duomo, Pisa

But not only is the Pisa ensemble the antithesis of Pienza, or the Campidoglio, Rome, in that it occupies space whilst the others “define” space, it’s also very different to the block-planning fabric of medieval planning. (Fig. 22-23)

Yet Pisa is surely the single most important influence on Le Corbusier’s designs for the civic centres of Saint Die and Chandigarh. (Fig. 24). In both plans, “architecture” is seen as buildings surrounded by space and, in that sense, have more in

common with the earlier medieval world of Rome where the great works of “architecture” were also detached fragments. As in Pisa, the urban strategy of the Saint Die plan promotes the architecture of objects.

But following in Corb’s footsteps, and inspired by Pergamon, Khan, in the proposal for the Dominican Sisters’ Convent (1968) takes the idea one step further by creating a frame around three sides into which a series of skewed volumes are shoe-horned to “engage” the frame. (Fig. 25)





FIG. 26A

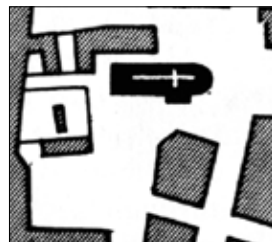
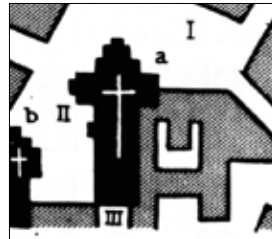
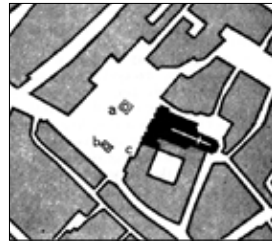
Two of the four chest panel paintings from Urbino, c1470. The panels represent the ideal city as envisaged by Alberti

## 11. ALBERTI'S URBANISM

In his urban ideas, Alberti, contradicting his notion of perspective space developed for painting, accepted the idea of an urban strategy that could dispense with spatial illusion and saw space as a property of objects, the form of each thing registering all the ties and properties of its environment (Fig. 26). These ideas, as with the medieval negation of spatial illusion, herald not Renaissance space, but the post-industrial space of modernism.

However, when Camillo Sitte sought the highest tower from which to make his observations of a town or city, it was not a medieval plan that he looked down on, but a far more compact, carved and moulded fabric with buildings added and spaces infilled in the more recent centuries.

But on the eve of the Renaissance, the image of the medieval town was strikingly different to the image of the medieval townscape portrayed later by Sitte and other contemporaneous writers. The former was characterised by an incongruity of building scale, large open spaces and wastelands, a tight but disorganised plan of streets and small scale buildings and monasteries of considerable scale, generally detached from the main town, as in early 15th Century Rome. Apart from the Bastide towns, there was none of the compact carved townscape that is the archetypal image of the medieval city of received opinion.



Studies by Camillo Sitte

FIG. 26B



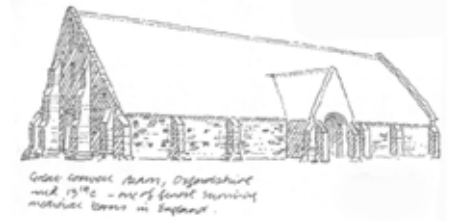
Vicola di S. Pietro, Siena

Vicenza, Italy

Henry Street, Chislehurst



Kaysersberg, Alsace



Great common room, Dispersburg mid. 15<sup>th</sup> c. - one of finest remaining medieval rooms in England.



Wealden House



Kaysersberg, Alsace

College, Appleton Court 17<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> c.

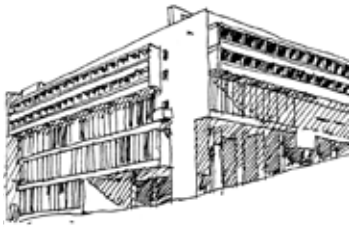


Kaysersberg, Alsace

## 12. BUILDING AND ARCHITECTURE

Not far from our studio in Kent is the birthplace and home of Sir Henry Wotton, the 17th century diplomat, and one of the first of the great European amateur architectural critics celebrated for his work *The Elements of Architecture* (1624). Ambassador to Venice (1604-1623), Wotton immersed himself in the classical theories from Vitruvius to Palladio, and his writings were instrumental in paving the way for the English enthusiasm for

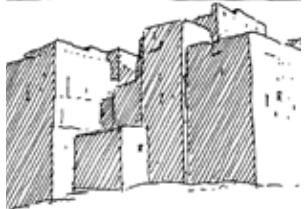
Palladian architecture a century before Colen Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus* (1715-1725). His importance to architects and planners today, however, is the distinction he made between building and architecture (Fig. 27-28). He stated that architecture must fulfil three conditions - firmness or robustness (that it had to be soundly built of good materials); commodity or utility (that it had to be conveniently planned for its purpose); delight or beauty (that it had to give pleasure to the eye of a discriminating beholder).



Le Corbusier, La Tourette



Greek Monastery at Mount Athos



Fortified village, valley of the Dades



Khan, the Salk Institute



Siena, Italy



Kaisersberg, Alsace

FIG. 28

Architecture is something you "experience"; building is something you can specify. However Lethaby warned that, "It was the gravest mistake to foster the idea that there was a sort of building called "architecture" superior in kind to ordinary building; the serious problem was how this ordinary building might be well done, for without that as a basis no higher building or "architecture" would be possible".

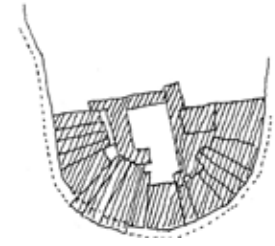
Camillo Sitte and Le Corbusier were quite

clear that building and architecture were distinctly different, yet related. They were also aware that the bulk of the fabric of the city was building and that architecture is the civilizing presence in the city.

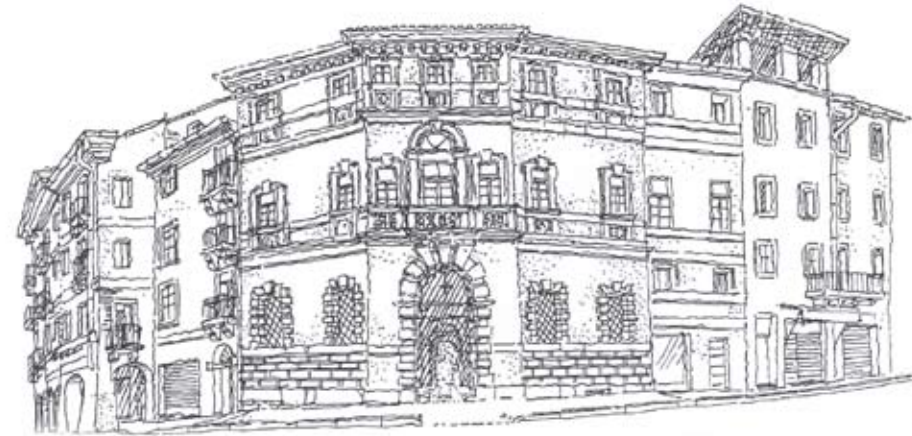
These quite basic ideas, combined with an innate sense about the hierarchy of streets and spaces were the essential tools for their "placemaking". But much of this they learnt by empirical observation. There was not an art simply of head and heart, but of hand as well.

### 13. SUPPORT STRUCTURES IN THE CITY

John Habraken's Supports: An alternative to Mass Housing, (1972), in which a basic framework containing key utilities could be infilled and extended by each and every occupant over time (Fig. 29), rationalizes a phenomenon characteristic of countless city structures down the centuries - the infilling of ancient Roman amphitheatre structures and other redundant ruins, for instance.



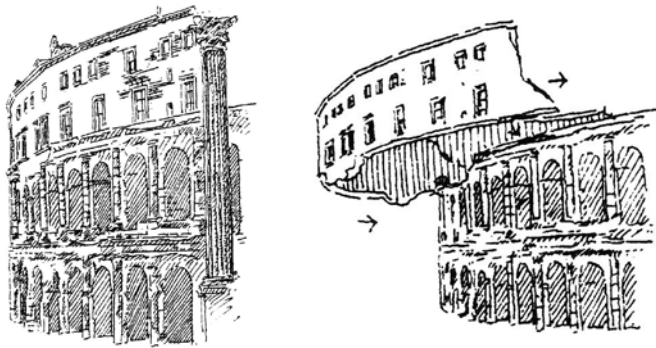
Old Roman theatre site, Vicenza



View of inserted dwellings



FIG. 29

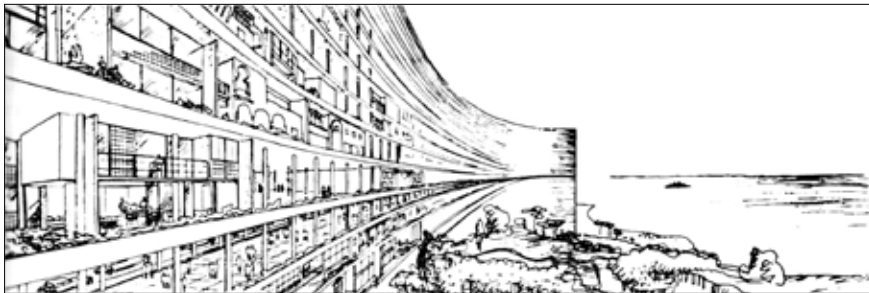


Theatre of Marcellus, Rome



Abbey Ruins, Bury St. Edmunds

FIG. 30A



Le Corbusier, Proposal for the corniche in Algiers, 1930

FIG. 30B

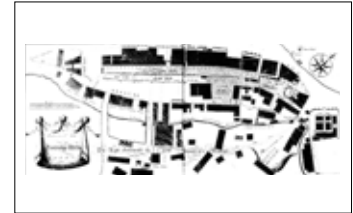
Le Corbusier's proposal for the corniche in Algiers of 1930 took such ideas further (Fig. 30). The concept, consisting of a mega-structure with six floors below and 12 floors above a motorway is the idea of the "viaduct city". With floors set 5 metres apart, it was envisaged that individual owners would construct two storey units "in any style they saw fit", thus allowing each occupant to take possession of their dwelling by the very act of building, a precursor to the ideas of Habraken.

But this synthesis of architecture and building has an earlier planning precedent - in The Pantiles, Tunbridge Wells, where a largely 18th century plan of a curving colonnade and wide promenade has been re-built incrementally throughout the 19th century. It's really Greek Agora meets Algiers plan. But what is interesting is that it's not the work of architects, but the work of local builders. Originally a set of market stalls aligned around a walk through the woods to a natural spring, discovered in the late 17th century, it's Eric Reynolds' meanwhile uses writ large. (Fig. 31-33)



Kip's engraving of The Pantiles, c.1718

FIG. 33



John Bowra's map of The Pantiles (mid C18th)

FIG. 31



FIG. 32A



FIG. 32B

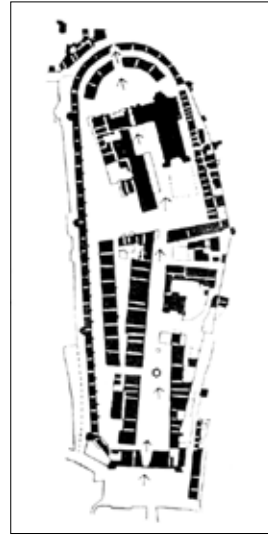
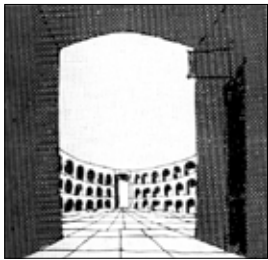
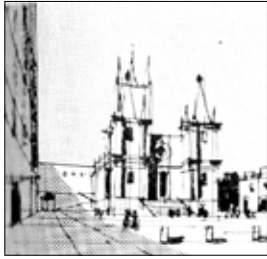
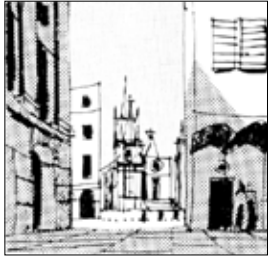


FIG. 32C



FIG. 32D

The Pantiles, Tunbridge Wells



Gorden Cullen, Townscape

FIG. 34A

Gorden Cullen, Townscape

FIG. 34B

### 14. ENGLISH TOWNSCAPE AND ITS INFLUENCES

The work of Gordon Cullen defines the essential "Townscape" (Fig. 34). However, it's Kenneth Browne, the then townscape editor of the AR, whose work for the publication *Civilia* (1971) is particularly interesting (Fig. 35). Using photomontages to describe the proposed town, the scheme has elements of Sitte's proposed summer resort project located at Marienthal, Lower Austria (Fig. 36). Browne's proposal is on a vaster scale -an idea for a new town to the north east of Birmingham for a population of 750,000. It

is a very congested and chaotic townscape of contemporary architectural fragments. But what is remarkable is that a version of it exists in the university town of Louvain-la-Neuve, a town planned following the language split at Louvain University in 1970.

Masterplanned by Professor Lemaire, it climbs a hill in a series of winding pedestrian streets and squares. And although wholly contemporary in style and cannily like *Civilia*, the crooked streets and enclosed squares are also reminiscent of the old Beguinage, Louvain, the restoration of which was another of Lemaire's projects (Fig 37).



FIG. 35A

Kenneth Browne, *Civilia*, 1971



FIG. 35C

Kenneth Browne, *Civilia*, 1971



FIG. 37A

Old Beguinage, Louvain



FIG. 37B

Old Beguinage, Louvain



FIG. 36A

Camillo Sitte, Marienthal, Lower Austria



FIG. 36B

Camillo Sitte, Marienthal, Lower Austria



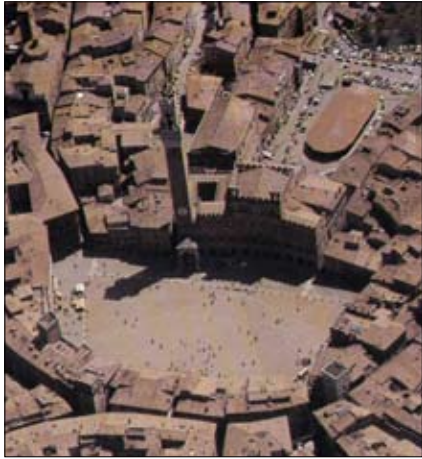
FIG. 37C

Louvain-la-Neuve, late 1970's



FIG. 37D

Louvain-la-Neuve, late 1970's



Siena, townscape views

FIG. 38A



Addison Mizner, Boca Raton

FIG. 39A



Addison Mizner, Boca Ratan

FIG. 39B



Final design model

FIG. 40A



Weissenhof Seidlung, Stuttgart

FIG. 40B



FIG. 38B



Siena, townscape views

FIG. 38C



FIG. 38D

## 15. CODING

But how can you wrap this up in some kind of urban design cookbook? - That's the billiondollar question.

In the UK, the Essex Design Guide is the most well known - a very prescriptive regional wide coding that transformed a whole county into a neo-vernacular haven. What this particular code understands about vernacular building and planning you could put on the back of a postage stamp, yet it provides a comfort zone for the developer and their architects. They know what they have to do.

The most intelligent of recent design codes are those by the New Urbanism Movement who've created more pragmatic frameworks or guides for development on a project-by-project basis. However, the idea of coding is not new. Several examples spring to mind such as the design codes established by the city fathers of Siena in the 13th century (Fig. 38), whilst Palmanova (1593) is the exemplar of town codes writ large or, of a more referential character, the Florida resort architecture of Addison Mizner's Boca Raton development of the 1920's, where he set out to create a Spanish style city at the beginning of the short lived Florida land boom (Fig. 39). The Mies van de Rohe masterplan for the Weissenhof exhibition in Stuttgart of 1927 is another example (Fig. 40). Located on a terraced hill it was initially planned as a continuous urban form, like a medieval town,

but in the final version Mies divided the site into rectilinear plots on which "free-standing" display houses were erected ... because the city wanted to sell the dwellings". There was no programme of requirements so Mies encouraged his colleagues to freely present their current researches. The codes, as such, included variants on the rectangular box, a flat roof, hole-in-the-wall windows and the use of render.

The masterplanner, I believe, is a cultural detective sifting through the clues, trying to make sense of events and all the time, with an "ear to the ground" listening and learning before offering their thoughts on the possible ways ahead. As Lethaby writes: "Behind is custom as ahead is adventure". At the most conservative level, urban codes should be anticipatory and accommodating "frameworks" that provide zones of comfort for the developer. But in order to accommodate the "adventure" it's important that a degree of uncertainty be accommodated within such plans for therein lies the possibility for "Architecture" to exist.

The styles of building and architecture per se, are unimportant. When Leger was asked what was good painting he replied: "What is known as an abstract picture does not exist. There is no such thing as "abstract" or "concrete" either. There is a good picture and a bad picture. There is the picture that moves you and the picture that leaves you cold". It's the same with urban design.

## 16. RENDERING THE VOID

As Rappoport, Brunskill and others point out there are two principle traditions that city planning encompasses - the first is the vernacular tradition, which tends to reflect the life and activities of people directly. The second is the grand design tradition, more influenced and concerned with theories of architecture, fashions, impressiveness and the like, reflecting the pomp and ceremony of public occasions.

The first tradition generally employs tight intricate spaces of high visual complexity and with hidden views. The second is associated with vast open spaces, long vistas, grand axes and continuous frontages of excessive regularity (Fig. 41). The first tradition has a richly modelled fabric and less clearly defined structure, or low definition image, whilst the second has a clearly structured and high definition image (Fig. 42).

High Definition is where the distinctness in the outline of an object is intense, extreme, great, aloft or abstract, where it is acute or detached - a reflection of corporate mindedness. Low Definition is where the degree of distinctness in the outline of an object or image is less ritualistic and acute where it is humble and unpretending and a reflection of everyday social life (Fig. 43).

The image of High Definition is where the arrangement of elements, the manner of their organization, is clearly defined along a predominantly undeviating street or edge. The Low Definition image has a predominantly mosaic like character, its structure composed of individual elements - roofs, windows, arches, etc - related to a common ground, the twisting frontage of street or path (Fig. 44).

The properties of High Definition are those buildings and voids that are predominantly clearly structured, ordered, monochrome, linear, uniform, repetitive, continuous, and non-involving. The properties of Low Definition, on the other hand, include elements that are multi-form, disordered, non-linear, multi-coloured, non-repetitive, discontinuous, and involving (Fig. 45).



Carcassonne, France

FIG. 41A



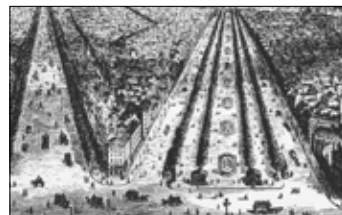
Piazza San Marco

FIG. 41B



Italian townscape

FIG. 42A



Hausmann's Paris

FIG. 42B



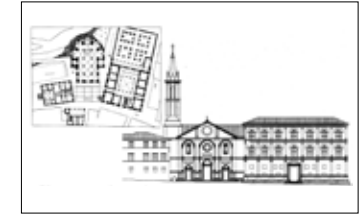
The Vernacular tradition, Pienza

FIG. 43A



Falda engraving of the Piazza di Spagna, 1675

FIG. 43C



Pienza transformed

FIG. 43B



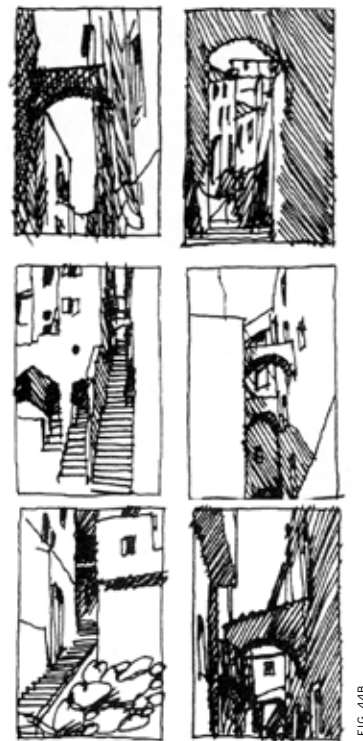
Piranesi engraving of transformation of Piazza, 1754

FIG. 43D



High definition

FIG. 44A



Low definition

FIG. 44B

## 17. SUSTAINABILITY

So, you build a city and then you've got to work out how to feed it and that's a big problem, for cities tend to grow. Cities like Rome had to import. It seems nothing in comparison with today's problems, but it required 10,000 ox-carts (top speed 3 km/hour) each and every day, travelling on roads which, although impeccably straight, were too narrow for two-way traffic, John Reeder points out in his book, "Cities" (Fig. 46). Feeding Rome was a daily logistical miracle, achieved, as the city grew even larger, only by the maintenance of a fleet of grain ships, the invention of temperature controlled grain silos, the construction of a new harbour and the annexing of crops from as far away as Egypt. But Rome outgrew even this formidable supply system, which collapsed within the larger catastrophe of her empire.

Over the centuries, cities came and went, until the beginning of the 19th century when they began to stay, and forever growing. Cities sprang up everywhere, sometimes in the most

inappropriate places. Tokyo's growth has not been checked by its lack of an adequate water supply, nor Los Angeles by a similar shortage compounded by its history of earthquakes. "And throughout the 20th century, cities have ballooned in size whether they possess the infrastructure to support their population or, like Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam, patently do not.

Cities, despite their polluting, parasitic, overcrowded and often violent character, have always been popular with humans (Fig 47). From the Sumerian capital of Ur, with a population of 35,000, forty centuries ago, to the current chart topper, Tokyo, with a population of 26 million, cities have, to quote John Reeder, "consistently buried more people than they have produced ...eat more food than they grow, drink more water than they collect and the inevitable consequence, excrete more sewage than they knew what to do with". But for all their faults, we like these greedy incontinent monsters. Half the world's population lives in cities and that share is growing (Fig. 48).



The Appian Way

FIG. 46



Bao Steel, Shanghai 2005

FIG. 47



Tokyo, Japan

FIG. 48

## 18. THE ANALOGUE CITY VERSUS THE DIGITAL CITY

An interesting option, and a salutary one for the European city - what happens when the power runs out and where's the water going to come from? In Europe many have hardly grasped the implications of the energy crisis and problems of global warming when we're hit with bleak warnings about an apocalyptic water shortage at a time when a flushed lavatory in the developed world equals one persons daily use for drinking, cooking and washing in the third world. In Shenzhen (Fig. 49-50), there're hundreds of acres of air-conditioned shopping malls and thirty - forty storey residential towers built on what were once fertile rice fields. Such developments are creating huge environmental pressures on a country already short of water - 1000 inland lakes have dried up since the war and they're



Townscape studies of traditional cities

FIG. 49A



Shenzhen, China

FIG. 50



FIG. 51A



FIG. 50B



The vernacular tradition, Canal villages, China

FIG. 50C



Townscape studies of traditional cities

FIG. 49B

losing 20 such lakes each year whilst 70% of mainland lakes and rivers are polluted. Is this the price of progress? Power cuts in the analogue city aren't exactly helpful either, but at least you can walk up the stairs, and if you're an architect, presumably you can always go back to hand drawing. (Fig 51)

But despite the environmental concerns, these digital cities are exciting too (Fig. 52). Think of it - a city of 10 million built in twenty years! Awesome, yes, but sustainable...! Artistically it's nothing to write home about, like most frontier towns or edge cities, but then it's still a work in progress. And if traditional urbanism has little to offer here, perhaps, with L.A. in mind - one of the most filmed of Downtowns - art or cinema might have more to contribute as a source of inspiration for a kind of "team painting". (Fig 53-55)



Shenzhen, China

FIG. 52



Los Angeles skyline

FIG. 53

## 19. THE FUTURE

As Thomas Bender points out in *The Unfinished City*, the degree to which Roman Imperialism exported and unified an urban culture in the form of a grid of streets and the location of a few buildings such as the theatre, the forum, the baths and the stadium in every town, is astonishing (Fig. 56). But tempting though such a universal "rubber stamp" is, too often it's employed to steamroller all those cultural irregularities that make so distinct a particular "sense of place".

There's an interesting book published recently by Christopher Hope entitled *Brothers under the Skin; Travels in Tyranny*, of how he would cross over into East Berlin "for the pleasure of not believing what I saw". As it was dangerous to utter truths out loud he "began to understand architecture as a



Ambrogio Lorenzetti - Fresco, Piazza Pubblico, Siena, 1338-1339

FIG. 54A



Ambrogio Lorenzetti - Fresco, Piazza Pubblico, Siena, 1338-1339

FIG. 54B

form of speech. It told you what a country was thinking and, since buildings were an expression of power ...they told you more clearly than newspapers or political talk about the way things were ...Buildings couldn't shut up. Like music, buildings went straight to the point" (Fig. 57).

I'd like to think the artistic principles of city planning are still rattling around out there somewhere. In any event, wherever they are, they've dropped way down the list of key concerns. But whatever the arguments concerning its form and content, the LOOK of the city certainly matters because it does tell us so much. However, to understand what it can tell us is not a question of looking but of "seeing". We ignore the "politics of perception" at our peril. We've come a long way since the modernism of the immediate post-war years, but the global economy and



Giorgio Morandi, 1929

FIG. 55A



Giorgio Morandi, 1941

FIG. 55B



The Coliseum, Rome

FIG. 56

culture that they aspired to represent visually, is still being built all around (Fig. 58). Yet the modishness and tyranny of that earlier modernism no longer holds sway in the way it once did. We're beginning to celebrate and incorporate difference and diversity and develop a respect for the local and vernacular as well as to accommodate the corporate and civic alongside the family and individual. It's a great moral and practical challenge. And yet, whilst embracing the cultural irregularities of contemporary society we must beware of what is on offer. One suspects the ubiquitous cafe culture or arts project, rendered so colourful in countless urban visions, of being used to paper over the fault lines in numerous development projects with a veneer of conviviality (Fig. 59). As the Trojan prince and priest of Apollo warned the city "Whatever it may be, I fear the Greeks, even when bearing gifts".



The Future: Fact or Fiction: (The Imperial City in Attack of the Clones)

FIG. 57



The Future! (Shenzhen - present day)

FIG. 58



The Future - The convivial city! (Auguste Renoir, 1876)

FIG. 59





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