The Cold War City: Functionality or Community?

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Engaging in the task of revisiting modern architecture and urban planning is nearly impossible without mentioning the master narratives still propagated by the major textbooks used in universities worldwide, and available to the interested part of the general audience. Their central, common, point is the celebration of the absolute victory after 1945 of what is generally called functionalism in the West, contrasted with the dominion of conservatism under the banner of socialist realism in what used to be called dismissively the "Soviet Bloc" during the early Cold War, at least until 1954.[1] In this exceedingly black-and-white picture, the intense conflicts within each national scene, and between the generations, and the many forms of hybridisation that took place between opposite doctrines are overlooked.

It is about time to digest the considerable quantity of historical research achieved in recent years, which is contained in hundreds of theses, monographs, and exhibition catalogues, and to shape new comprehensive narratives that will renew accepted representations of ideas, movements, and designs. In this difficult, but indispensable endeavour, the first stage should be perhaps the rewriting of the chronology according to which theories, policies and projects are inscribed in historical time.

The developments that took place in the second half of the 20th century cannot be isolated from the trauma of the Second World War, which was still to be felt in almost all of Europe. With its unprecedented and previously unimaginable destructions the war left urban planners with the daunting task of rebuilding bombed-out cities and accommodating the postwar demographic modernisation. This condition would have a direct impact on the growth of existing urban areas and the urbanization of vast territories, stimulating the imagination of social planners and designers alike.[2] Such a double programme was implemented on both sides of what Winston Churchill in his Fulton speech of March 1946 famously called the "Iron Curtain", albeit with varying intensity and through different types of relationships between the state and the private capital. A series of episodes need to be mentioned in this respect – from the ones featured in the main narratives of the history of urbanism (in the handbooks used in a great majority of schools) to certain more complex patterns which have yet to be brought to the light.

The shadow of the war years

Significant steps had been taken during the war years in most of the belligerent countries, where urban futures had been delineated in numerous plans established at the scale of the metropolis or at the level of the housing scheme. I inserted these concepts several years ago in my investigation of wartime design, entitled *Architecture in Uniform*.[3] Many scholars have proposed comprehensive analyses of national scenes such as Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands or France.[4] After 1945, in the shadow cast by the destructions of the war, the bold projections made during years of theoretical work would finally meet the conditions of their implementation.

In considering these projections towards widely different futures imagined for the aftermath of war, it is easy to brush away those made by the city-planners, the architects and the landscape designers commissioned by the Nazi regime to work on the so-called Generalplan Ost. Between 1940 and 1942 they imagined a Germanised landscape from which Slavic traces would have been erased. They went relatively far in sketching plans for colonial cities and villages, and for the redesign of the agricultural landscape.[5] In the case of Italy, the concept of "military cities" was developed by Luigi Cosenza and praised by modernist-leaning critics such as Giulio Carlo Argan because of its functionality and clarity of organisation.[6]

On the side of the Allies, intense planning work was undertaken to define the concept of the postwar city. As imagined by the Modern Architecture Research Society – or MARS – in 1942, the London region was meant to be replaced by a completely new urban system, the historical centre remaining only a vestigial component inscribed in an extended territory in which traffic infrastructure would have been the main determinants of urban form. The structure proposed the following year by Patrick Abercrombie and John Henry Forshaw for the County of London plan, on the base of a detailed survey of prevailing conditions, was a completely different one, in which the complexity of an urban fact not reduced to functions and flows was paid due tribute (Fig. 1).[7] The postwar new towns which had first been envisioned in 1940 in the report of the Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population and inscribed in the Town and Country Planning Act of 1944 would be based on hybrid solutions accommodating both strategies, according to a wide range of compositions.

The research done during the same time in the United States should not be underestimated. It is perhaps best represented by two issues the journal *Architectural Forum* devoted in 1943 and 1944 to "Planned Neighborhoods for 194x" (Fig. 2), in which a series of proposals were exposed. They dealt not only with extensive housing estates develop-

Fig. 1: Patrick Abercrombie, John Henry Forshaw, County of London, 1943, general zoning plan

ing concepts previously shaped for factory workers, but also with entire satellite cities, and the renewal of major urban areas in cities such as St. Louis and New York.[8] Alongside with modernist architects such as Walter Gropius, William Lescaze or Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, more conservative professionals engaged in a process of global rethinking, which aimed at the creation of new forms of suburban life supported by public facilities.

The concept of the Neighborhood Unit was by no means an invention of these groups, who took it for granted, inde-

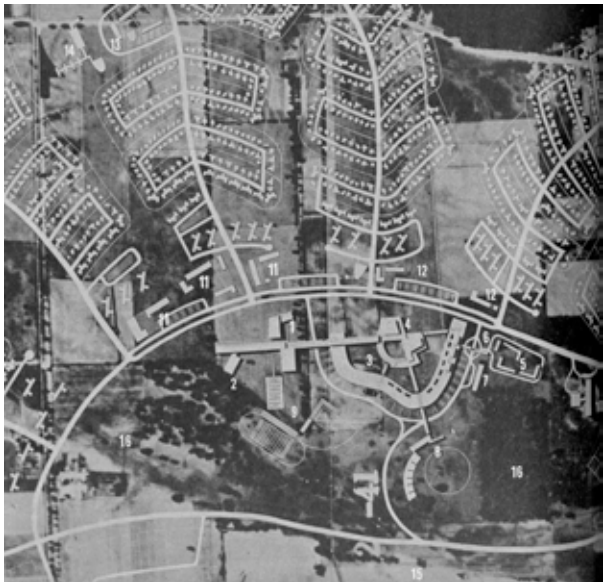

Fig. 2: Smith, Hinghman & Grylls, Satellite town near Detroit, in: "Planned Neighborhoods for 194x", The Architectural Forum, October 1943

Fig. 3: Clarence Perry, A typical neighborhood unit, 1929

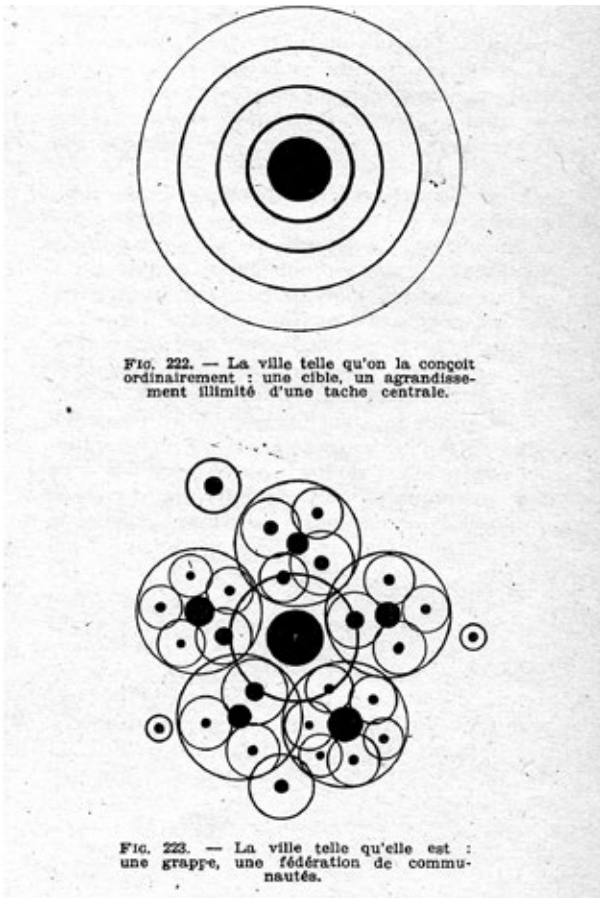

Fig. 4: Gaston Bardet, the city as target, or cluster of communities, 1941

pendently of their inclination in terms of design. It had been imagined in the 1920s by the sociologist Clarence Perry within the framework of the Regional Plan of New York, which was then prepared under the authority of Thomas Adams and published in 1929 (Fig. 3).[9] In its initial formulation, the unit was meant as the component of an urban entity in which the automobile was the main mode of transportation, but its relationship to models related to mass transit, such as some of the "Siedlungen" developed in Germany, or the Soviet "kvartaly", a result of the work German planners made in the 1930s in the USSR, cannot be overlooked.[10]

To continue with the East, the case of the wartime USSR is a particularly interesting one. In parallel to the plans made for the rebuilding of historic cities, which were derived from the structural model of the 1935 Moscow plan, great attention was devoted to the American schemes, which were the object of several publications. In 1945, a special sourcebook was devoted to *The Construction of America*, in which the focus was set on low-rise single-family estates based on the experience of the New Deal's Greenbelt cities, and on the schemes featured in *Architectural Forum*.[11] In the meantime, an exhibition produced by the Architects' Committee of the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, curated under the aegis of Harvey Wiley Corbett by Douglas Haskell, the editor of the rival journal *The Architectural Record*, was meant to introduce the Soviet audience to them. These attempts at building a low-rise Soviet Russia were abandoned when the campaign against "cosmopolitanism" was engaged in 1946.[12]

The elusive Gaston Bardet

In the west of Europe, the discourse of what Françoise Choay defined as "culturalist" in her pioneering anthology of 1965 *L'Urbanisme, utopie et réalité*, in opposition to the "functional" strategies, was endorsed by critics and architects. One of the most intriguing planners of that period to propagate a skeptical attitude in respect to the mainstream modernist dogmas was the French Gaston Bardet, whose activity extended from the mid-1930s to the early 1960s, and who had been trained in Paris, both at the École des Beaux-Arts and at the university's Institut d'Urbanisme. Related through his wife the urban historian Marcel Poëte, whose work in 1966 would be one of the sources of Aldo Rossi's *L'architettura della città*, he was an early and attentive reader of Patrick Geddes and Lewis Mumford, with whom he corresponded regularly. A biting critic of Le Corbusier's "Radiant City," he unmasked its overoptimistic consideration of sunlighting, nicknaming it cruelly a "Shadowy City".[13] He also proposed within the framework of the reconstruction programme of the Vichy government to rethink the entire city no longer as a sort of target with an oversized centre, but as a cluster of communities (Fig. 4).

An outspoken critic of functionalism, trashing for instance Marcel Lods' plan for the reconstruction of Mainz and his author, whom he called "the man with the steel jaws" because of his passion for metallic structures, Bardet was marginalised institutionally after 1945 because of his iconoclastic, often sarcastic writings. He created a city-planning institute in Brussels – Lucien Kroll, who was among his students, has dwelt upon his doctrine. He taught

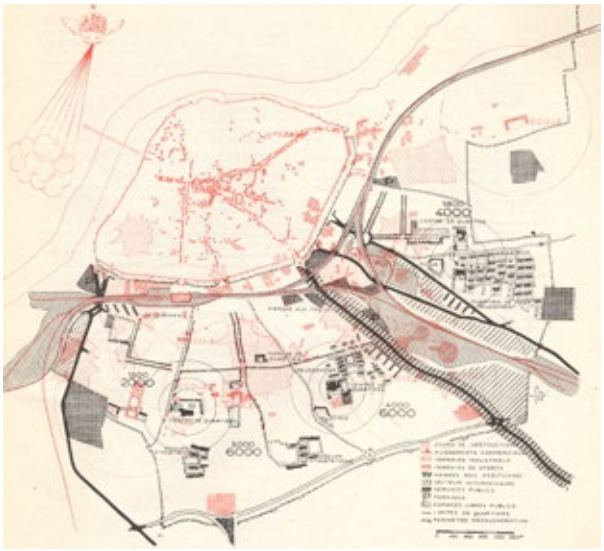

Fig. 5: Gaston Bardet, plan for the south of Avignon, 1946

in Algeria, Brazil and Argentina, where he made a lasting imprint. Bardet created a method for the study of "urban organisms" based on a "social topography", which identified each individual, each family, and each business. He used this "social topography" in his plans for the reconstruction of Louviers and Vernon, two bombed-out cities in the valley of the Seine (Fig. 5). Based on these findings, he defined the sociological "profile" of each city or each block, which led to the formulation of hypotheses for their foreseeable postwar evolution.

He could thus prepare new plans which would recreate or modify in a legible manner previous demographics and social conditions. Although he was a sworn enemy of Le Corbusier's arguments, Bardet was not hostile to every modern position. He proposed a model of local development that was sensitive to the local social fabric, which brought him close to the Économie et humanisme group, founded during the Second World War by the Dominican Louis-Joseph Lebret. This note in passing allows to mention the role progressive Christian groups played in the postwar period in countries such as Italy or France, where they enunciated an agenda for reform. As for Bardet, he defined a method of urban design in which he articulated three "echelons," or levels: "patriarchal", "domestic", and "parochial", which he combined to shape city plans. Bardet's approach has had many followers in Europe and Latin America and was still mentioned as a major source by Bernardo Secchi several years ago.[14]

Team 10, or re-identification in the city

Interestingly, the concerns present in the doctrine of Bardet, who was viscerally opposed to modern schemes, were also underlying the discourse of the young rebels who shook the established order within the International Congresses for Modern Architecture, the CIAM. This group was caricatured by Le Corbusier in a letter sent to the publisher Karl Krämer after the last congress held in Otterlo in 1959 as being made up of people who had "climbed on the shoulders" of the founders, without the least gratitude.[15] Like Bardet, these ungrateful youngsters had read Geddes, whose 1915 book *Cities in Evolution* had been reissued in 1949, drawing rather different conclusions from it. Alison and Peter Smithson – whose Robin Hood housing scheme has been demolished in the fall of 2017 – proposed a new

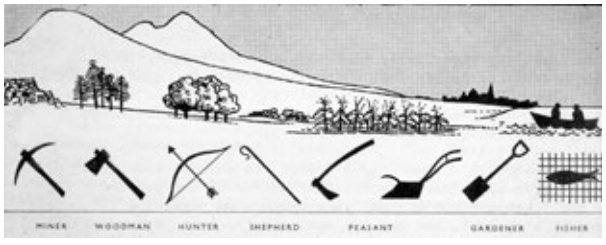

Fig. 6: Patrick Geddes, the Valley Section, 1909, as published in 1949

Fig. 7: Michel Écochard, housing scheme for Muslim workers at the Carrières centrales, Casablanca, 1952, air view

interpretation of the Scottish biologist's "Valley section" relating place, folk, and work (Fig. 6). This theoretical reorientation took place in 1954 at a meeting in the Dutch village of Doorn of the newly founded Team 10, which took its name from its engagement in the preparation of the 10th CIAM.

Two years before, at the Aix-en-Provence CIAM, the Smithsons had subverted the grid introduced by Le Corbusier in 1947, which had become a tool for an oversimplified presentation of functional city plans, by reflecting on what they called "urban re-identification". Their arborescent, hierarchical city diagram was a direct critic of schemes such as Le Corbusier's "Radiant City" of 1934, or his "Three Human Settlements" of 1945. In the Doorn Manifesto, Team 10 insisted on the notion of "community", discussing the relationships of dwellings with each other and with other scales of social organisation. The absolute primacy of function and the idea of a universal model valid in all countries and for all situations had finally been undermined, and some alternative had been sketched out.[16]

Besides Geddes, another significant inspiration for Team 10 was the work done in Morocco – a French protectorate until 1956, where planner Michel Écochard had concocted his own version of the neighbourhood unit, in contrast with the functionalism of his regional plans. In his implementation of a model meant to replace Casablanca's gigantic shantytowns by single-story patio housing, he left some space for experimental collective housing addressed to Muslim worker's families, which were designed by Georges Candilis and Shadrach Woods (Fig. 7).[17] Together with the grids presented the Moroccan group designed to describe Écochard's low-rise schemes, these buildings were considered by the Smithsons as the "eye opener" of the Aix-en-Provence CIAM and as a first step in dismantling the idea according to which there were "universal" principles of modernism, as embodied for instance in Le Corbusier's Unité d'habitation.[18]

With the sociology of Geddes and the anthropological premises of the work done in Morocco, or the study of African settlements as a background, a significant shift

Fig. 8: Aldo Van Eyck, "Tree is leaf; leaf is tree" diagram, 1962

took place in respect to the initial orientations of functionalism towards a dominantly hygienic definition of housing and the city. On this alternative conceptual base, new patterns of continuity were proposed between the dwelling and the urban ensemble, in which the hierarchy hitherto taken for granted was ignored. This is the meaning of Aldo van Eyck's "tree is leaf, leaf is tree" proposal made in St. Louis in 1962 (Fig. 8), which strangely seemed to echo Leon Battista Alberti's famous statement about the correspondence between building and city: "Tree is leaf and leaf is tree. House is city and city is house. A tree is a tree, but it is also a huge leaf. A leaf is a leaf, but it is also a tiny tree. A city is not a city unless it is a huge house. A house is a house only if it is also a tiny city."[19]

Another axis of Team 10's reflections was the attention given to the users, which would become the main position

Fig. 9: Giancarlo De Carlo, villaggio Matteotti, Terni, 1968–75

of its Italian member Giancarlo De Carlo. He had been engaged in the modernisation of Matera, in Basilicata, where Ludovico Quaroni had materialised his own interpretation of the neighbourhood unit, the village of La Martella. The bars he built in 1954 closer to the city centre in the Spine bianche scheme planned by Carlo Aymonino reused, like Quaroni's houses, linguistic elements from farmhouses and rural barns, in conformity with the strategies of neo-realism.[20] But in his later projects, De Carlo distanced himself from this attitude, and no longer played with imagined, fictitious versions of "popular" culture, engaging rather in a negotiation with the future users, as in the case of the Villaggio Mateotti in Terni, built in the early 1970s (Fig. 9). There the consideration for lifestyle and inhabitants' expectations could be paired with the use of his personal brand of concrete brutalism.

Besides the coherent, yet pluralist conglomerate of individuals gathered within, and around Team 10, other attempts were made at extending the principles of modernism without sacrificing the social dimension. One of these was the initiative José Lluís Sert promoted of defining a new field of theory and practice called "urban design". Introduced at a conference at Harvard University in 1956, it was based on the rejection of what planning had become after its takeover by economists and public policy makers, and aimed at engaging in choral work architects, landscape architects, social scientists and planners sensitive to spatial issues.[21] Specific programmes were created within the schools of architecture, whereas planning migrated to other departments at North American universities. This new discourse provided a scholarly background to the campaigns waged at the beginning of the 1960s against technocratic urban renewal, which found their herald in New York in the person of Jane Jacobs.[22]

Parallels

Another strategy aiming at articulating the social and the urban was suggested by the Greek architect Konstantinos Doxiadis, a graduate of the Technische Hochschule in Berlin-Charlottenburg, who conceived rigorous methods to articulate demographics and geometry, in the aspiration of setting up a science of human settlements which he called Ekistics.[23] Supported by American money, his large consulting firm was active in Africa and the Middle East, building new towns and large urban extensions, like today's Sadr City on the edge of Baghdad, but also imagined schemes for the development of the Great Lakes region in the United States, in particular what now seems to be a ridiculously ambitious plan for Detroit 2100. From 1963, Doxiadis organised for ten years summer sessions on the island of Delos, where survivors of the CIAM such as Sigfried Giedion, Jaqueline Tyrwhitt or Kenzo Tange met geographers (Walter Christaller), anthropologists (Margaret Mead), historians (Arnold Toynbee), critical intellectuals (Marshall McLuhan), and visionary designers (Buckminster Fuller)[24]

. Soviet parallels need to be mentioned at this point, which found their origin in the speech Nikita Khrushchev gave at the December 1944 Congress of Builders, after which Russian architects started sailing towards "new shores," as shown in a group caricature published in 1955.[25] On the base of experience gained through numerous study trips to Western Europe and North America, and of the critique of the kvartaly of the Stalinist period, new standards for residential areas were defined, centered around the notion of mikrorayon, which bore a number of relationships with the neighbourhood unit, but remained based on public transport and not the systemic use of the automobile. A first, widely publicised experiment was made at Novye Cheremushki, near Moscow, in 1956, which quickly set the canon for hundreds of developments throughout the Soviet Union (Fig. 10).

The emerging generation of young architects trained in Moscow were also aware of Western theories such as those of Doxiadis, and at the same time knowledgeable about the ambitious territorial schemes the Constructivist avant-garde had concocted in 1929–30. The "New Element of Settlement" imagined for their diploma thesis in 1960 by a team led by the architects Alexei Gutnov, Ilya Lezhava and a group of fellow students, with the support of the sociologist George Dyumenton, proposed a complete reorganisation of the country's territory, based on a thorough analysis of present and anticipated lifestyles (Fig. 11). It was not a celebration of function, or a mechanical megastructure like those which would be soon conceived by Archigram, but a complex intertwining of technological, spatial and social proposals, in which a provocative and extreme alternative to the existing cities could be envisioned. It goes without saying that these proposals, which were exhibited at the short-lived 1968 Milan Triennale, never left any mark on Russian land.[26]

Fig. 10: Nathan Osterman, Sergei Liashchenko and Gueorgui Pavlov, Novye Cheryomushki housing scheme, Moscow, 1956

Fig. 11 : Alexei Gutnov, Ilya Lezhava, et al. (NER group), New element of settlement, 1968

Conclusion

In conclusion to this too brief exploration, two aspects can be underlined. First, the phase of intense urban growth and social modernisation that followed the reconstruction throughout all of Europe led only in very few cases to the implementation of radical modernist solutions. The purest patterns only found a fertile ground in the peripheries of the city. On the other hand, the socially grounded projects, in which form was either strongly or mildly nostalgic, or purely ignored, remained an exception. In their majority, the completed projects were hybrid, and only very few of them managed to foster innovative form and successful community building in the same move.

The second aspect is the limit that historical narratives based only on the parallel investigation of national scenes and case studies have reached. There are already impressive investigations of the German-Soviet interactions in the 1930s, and the exploration of the export strategies of the so-called "people's democracies" has only started.[27] A broader investigation of the international patterns of exchange is indispensable. The need for what I would call a transurban history, i.e. research crossing the boundaries, in order to reveal the dynamic interactions between planners, designers and their patrons, and the patterns according to which the initial transfer of forms of the immediate postwar time has been replaced by the transfer of methodologies and modes of cooperation, has never been more obvious. This non-monographic and non-nation-centric type of investigation is one of the most productive strategies possible for writing anew a worn-out master narrative.

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Die Stadt des Kalten Krieges: Funktionalität oder Gemeinschaft?

Abstract

Der Zweite Weltkrieg überließ den Stadtplanern die gewaltige Aufgabe, die zerstörten Städte wiederaufzubauen. Sie stellten sich dieser Herausforderung mit großem Optimismus, aber mit widersprüchlichen Prinzipien – in einigen Fällen im großen Stil das Konzept der funktionalen Stadt erweiternd, das in den 1920er und 1930er Jahren von den Hauptfiguren des CIAM geprägt worden war, oder in anderen Situationen die Schaffung nostalgischer Stadtlandschaften bevorzugend, die manchmal von den durch Bomben zerstörten Städten inspiriert waren. Dieser Gegensatz dauerte bis zum Ende des sozialistischen Realismus in Osteuropa und der UdSSR, was offenbar zum einstimmigen Sieg der radikalsten Doktrinen führte. Es wäre jedoch stark vereinfachend, sich auf diese polarisierten Positionen zu beschränken. Mit dem aus Amerika importierten Konzept der Neighborhood Unit und der Wiederentdeckung der Theorien von Patrick Geddes wurde eine Vision, die sich mehr auf die soziale Dimension der Stadt konzentrierte, von einer wachsenden Zahl von Fachleuten geteilt, von Stadtplanern mit soziologischer Neigung bis hin zur jungen Generation von Modernisten, die den Gründervätern von CIAM kritisch gegenüberstanden und sich unter dem Banner von Team 10 versammelten.