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Architecture and the city: conceptual shifts in a time of change

Abstract

The majority of the South African population presently lives in mushrooming, unstructured cities. Such cities recognise neither their inhabitants' cultural and social needs nor the realities of their everyday lives. It is essential to create credible conceptual frameworks capable of integrating the complexity and diversity of the modern metropolis.

This article therefore discusses two aspects of the problem:

- The identification of criteria which urban contexts should meet in order to be experienced as meaningful and life-sustaining.
- An analysis of the approaches of current structuring systems in the light of these criteria. Comparison of these approaches leads to the proposal of a possible "key model" for the structuring of the contemporary multi-cultural city.

Keywords: Cities, South Africa, multicultural city.

ARGITEKTUUR EN STAD: KONSEPTUELE VERSKUIWING IN TYE VAN VERANDERING

Die meerderheid van die Suid-Afrikaanse bevolking woon tans in uitspreidende, ongestruktureerde stede. Hierdie stede neem nóg die kulturele en sosiale behoeftes van hul inwoners, nóg die werklikhede van hulle alledaagse lewens in ag. Daar is 'n behoefte om geloofwaardige konseptuele raamwerke te skep wat die kompleksiteit en diversiteit van die moderne stad kan integreer.

Hierdie artikel handel vervolgens oor twee aspekte:

- Die identifikasie van kriteria waaraan stedelike omgewings gemeet behoort te word om as betekenisvol en lewensondersteunend beleef te word.
- Die analise van bestaande struktureersisteme in die lig van hierdie kriteria. Die vergelyking van hierdie benaderings word dan aangewend om 'n moontlike 'sleutelmodel' vir die struktureering van die hedendaagse multi-kulturele stad voor te stel.

Sleutelwoorde: Stede, Suid-Afrika, multi-kulturele stad.

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Introduction

The main aim underlying this article is to explore the possibility of identifying frameworks that would accommodate the complex needs of the inhabitants of the present-day city - and specifically the dynamic trans-cultural African city - in a period of accelerating change.

It is postulated that there is at present no accepted paradigm from which to structure a city that is both sustainable and capable of being experienced as meaningful. This vacuum is of particular concern since poverty and deprivation in the rest of Africa are currently causing a disconcerting influx of illegal immigrants into South Africa. The Durban area and/or Gauteng may soon look like Mexico City.

In this type of expansion, South African cities are at present following the example of other erstwhile colonial cities whose urbanisation has one trait in common: "continuing speed of growth". This trend has been noted by the British geographer, Emrys Jones (1990: 17,18), in cities such as Calcutta, Manila and Lima. He is of the opinion that these cities, in spite of having "considerable elements of Western culture", were "part of an overwhelmingly indigenous society and culture" and as such "embody the achievements of distinctive local cultures". Historically, the order of a city was imposed by powerful rulers, often with the assistance of "cosmo-magical symbolism". This authority has, in the present day, been replaced by the profit motives of developers and the short-term objectives of politicians (Wheatley, 1963: 188 ff). It is commonly accepted that the philosophy of commodification, combined with the potential of modern technology, has been a major instrument in the hands of these groups. However, if the planning of our cities is to be based on anything more than the current hit-and-miss housing policies, viable structuring strategies which would allow cohesive local cultures the opportunity to flourish or coalesce need to be identified and explored.

The problem is that such structures cannot be invented *ex nihilo*. This could only lead to irresponsible utopianism. On the other hand, current Eurocentric rational and aesthetic models do not seem to have produced an authentic "key model" (Brümmer, 1993: 20) which could provide a coherent conceptual scheme for the modern city. Since experience has taught that new

concepts develop incrementally, the method applied in this article was to scrutinise the available philosophically based models in terms of criteria that may be seen to encompass the needs of the widest possible range of people and cultures.

Defining criteria for the structure of a viable city

Wisdom demands a new orientation towards the organic, the gentle, the nonviolent, the elegant and [the] beautiful (Schumacher, in Capra, 1988: 443).

The solution to any problem has "what to do" and "how to do" components. Selecting criteria to measure the relevance of a chosen approach forms part of the *what* aspect. The chosen conceptual structure for frameworks represents the *how* aspect. The initial requirement is criteria which may be used to measure whether an urban environment performs optimally and is life-enhancing for as wide a range of people of various cultures and backgrounds as possible. This idea fits this author's view that all authentic artefacts are tools to improve the user's life-experience, both physically and spiritually, and that man thus creates his own ecology wherever he settles.

In defining criteria for cities that are ecological in the above sense, two approaches were combined: one originating from Fridjof Capra and the other from the philosopher John Wilson. These approaches have been dealt with extensively elsewhere (Britz, 1990: 64-72, XII - XIII). For the sake of brevity, only the physicist Fridjof Capra's interpretation of the current global paradigm shift will be dealt with as a means of establishing such criteria, and they will be discussed only in outline. Capra uses the concepts of *yin* and *yang* as developed in the "I Ching" to explain this shift. The *yin* and *yang* deal with two opposing approaches to situations in life. Some of the properties of the two approaches can be listed as follows:

YANG	YIN
Masculine	Feminine
Demanding	Contractive
Aggressive	Responsive
Competitive	Co-operative
Rational	Intuitive
Analytical	Synthesising
Expansive	Conservative
Surface and heaven	Interior and earth

(Capra, 1982:21)

It is clear that the *Yang* column corresponds with attitudes characteristic of the recent past. However, attitudes in the *Yin* column are already asserting themselves, e.g. a concern for ecology, for the earth, for conservation and for female (and other) rights. Capra (1982: 13) sees a dynamic 'balance' of *yin* and *yang* values as heralding a period in which the "highest and noblest expressions" are possible, "producing balance, integration and aesthetic fulfilment in art, philosophy, science and technology". It is interesting to note that the renowned Swiss psychologist Carl Jung considered it essential to allow for a balance of these apparently opposite attitudes in individuals, in order to restore healthy communities.

Two important urban complexes, one very popular and the other distinctly unpopular, were analysed in the light of Capra's observations. It should be noted that the particular complexes were chosen on the basis of their urban scale and potential impact. The eighty-year-old Union Buildings (*Figure 1*) is revered equally by laymen and professionals. This complex, which is for South Africa what the Eiffel Tower is for France, was recently used for the inauguration of President Mandela. The Johannesburg General Hospital (*Figure 2*), by contrast, has been the subject of controversy since its inception and was at one stage voted "the ugliest building in South Africa"².

In investigating the qualities of these two complexes, certain criteria for a viable urban design emerged. (Brief notes elucidate the thinking behind the proposed criteria.)

1. The creation of a variety of meaningful existential spaces, allowing for complex interrelationships where needed

Norberg-Schulz (1979: 42) has stated that "the language of architecture expresses the existential structure called 'spatiality'". This is certainly also true of the city as a collector of architecture. The Union Buildings integrates three types of space. On an urban scale it displays classical space, articulating a concrete presence comparable with that of a Greek temple, rising out of and gathering the landscape. The second type of space, architectural in nature, is present in its wide variety of interior spaces, while the third type, to be found in the amphitheatre, evokes a special African quality. This complex orchestration of a variety of spaces agrees with the *Yin* quality of **interiority**.

The hospital "city" is a 350 metre long concrete box straddling a gracious historical neighbourhood. It has no articulated spatial relationship to the city. Its interior spatial qualities are restricted to an overly long foyer and hundreds of small cells. No spatial reference is made to the context. It is clearly a building where the outside **surface** constitutes the major design element.

2. **Empathy with the cultural specifics of the citizens and the creation of places that allow for and encourage the embodiment thereof**

Leading theorists like Rykwert (1988: 23), Jones (1990: 13) and Fathy (Steele, 1988: 129-30) all agree on the importance of correspondence and congruence between the layout of a town and the inhabitants' cultural image of themselves. Nyberg (1990: 9) talks of the "ethical bonding of community and place".

Herbert Baker, inspired by the local landscape, is known to have wanted to create a specifically South African style. In his building complex he combined the sober Dutch architecture of Wierda and De Zwaan with the English classicism of his own background. The two towers of the Union Buildings, linked by a colonnade, were to symbolise the unification of the two white tribes. They encircle an African amphitheatre which in size, symbolic function and orientation reminds one of the Tswana *Kgotla* (Irving, 1981: 279). It is reasonable to deduce that Baker's attitude was one of **conserving** elements of different cultures.

The hospital complex, by contrast, was conceived as a carefully proportioned geometrical volume. It is built in a bland, anonymous style, typical of buildings designed for similar purposes, the world over. It cannot be said to pay the slightest homage to the cultural understanding(s) of its users. The huge precast wall elements of which it is constructed can only be described as **expansive**.

3. **An understanding of the relationships between the designer, his audience and his work**

Both Gombrich (1980: 19) and Baxandall (1985: 48) have commented on the dynamic relationship between the designer, his audience and the artefact. The sensitive designer is very much in touch with the responses of his/her clients and directs his/her efforts to stimulate, to entertain and to satisfy their expectations. Irving (1981: 279) has documented how well Baker,

in designing the Union Buildings, anticipated the reactions of Smuts and Botha, appealing at once to their imagination.

The unpopularity of the Johannesburg General Hospital with staff, patients, visitors and neighbours indicates an insensitivity to the expectations of all concerned.

It would not be unreasonable to see these two buildings, respectively, as textbook examples of **responsiveness** and **aggressiveness**.

4. An understanding of the psychological and social needs of the inhabitants

Denyer (1978: 19) reminds us that "African villages usually expressed physically the social structure of the group of people living in them".

The popularity of the Union Buildings among the inhabitants of the city as a place to promenade on weekends as well as its success as a venue for the inauguration of presidents and for state funerals testify to its social fittingness. By the same token, the individual, moving through the amphitheatre, experiences a profound sense of equilibrium and tranquillity. It could be said that it is a place that is **responsive** to the user's social and psychological needs.

The same cannot be said of the hospital. Its inhuman scale and configuration makes it a place people go to only if they have to. It is instructive to compare it with the Zuid-Afrikaansche Hospital in Muckleneuk in Pretoria, on a similar site. Here site and aspect have been incorporated in a way that the buildings contribute to the healing process.

5. An appropriate response to problems through dialogue with and extension of the traditions of the discipline

Gombrich (1963: 96-97) argued cogently that in a living art form the work only speaks through "dialogue and extension of the traditions of the discipline".

Baker's astute combination of the Union Buildings' hill site with the gridiron layout of Pretoria indicates "an ability to combine familiar forms in unexpected ways" and so extend the traditions of city-making (Irving, 1981: 273). This could be seen as an **intuitive** approach.

By contrast, the General Hospital site was simply cleared and a huge box imposed on it, without considering any of the traditions of urban design. This represents a (so-called) **rational** approach.

6. The recognition and interpretation of the qualities of the landscape (the spirit of place)

Baker's success with the Union Buildings may be ascribed to the fact that the buildings grew out of the site and belong completely to it. An understanding of the quality of the local light, of the vegetation and of the geology combined with his skill in celebrating these properties. The configuration of the complex and the materials used to execute it gathered and focused the whole landscape. Hence one may speak of a respect for the **earth** and the **interior** of the landscape.

The bland storey-high pre-cast units of the hospital, enlivened by some bright colour splashes, do not indicate any awareness of the very special qualities of its Parktown site. The emphasis here is on **surface**.

Ashihara (1983: 118) has referred to landscapes with geographical and social significance as "primal settings", which serve as the "birthplace of the spirit". The urban designer can respect and contribute to them, or destroy them.

7. The reinforcement and creation of authentic frameworks

Rykwert (1988: 6-7) stresses the "inevitability" or authenticity of concept which is needed in creating urban frameworks. The "pattern" of a city should be "strong enough to survive all its inevitable disorders and other vicissitudes, and structure the urban experience".

The inevitable nature of Baker's landmark is such that one can as little imagine Pretoria without it as one can think of Cape Town without Table Mountain. On the other hand, and despite its size, the Johannesburg General Hospital is one of the most eminently forgettable buildings imaginable. It could be argued that the reason for the above contrast is that Baker **synthesised** his design with the context, while the hospital was the product of abstract **analytical** thinking.

Thus, it has been shown that a work designed by a "foreign" architect, coming from a vastly different landscape, but working

in a tradition as old as Vitruvius, makes a relevant contribution to an urban South African context. Baker's objectives may have differed from those of this article, which aims to define criteria for assessing the appropriateness of particular urban design approaches, but his end-product can be seen to reflect certain *yin* qualities.

It could be stated that many alternative sets of criteria could have been developed. However, the author believes that the majority of practising and teaching urban designers will accept that these criteria may legitimately be used to evaluate various conceptual approaches to structuring the modern trans-cultural city (the *what* aspect of this article).

If one relates the chosen criteria to the *yin-yang* characteristics mentioned by Capra, they all seem to emphasise aspects of *yin*. Thus, meaningful existential spaces relate to interiority; empathy with cultural specifics denotes a responsive and conserving approach; interaction between designer, audience and work reflects a co-operative and responsive attitude, and so forth. In trying to formulate how these criteria are to be used, Capra's "systems approach" (1988: 303) comes to mind. He looks at the organic world, which consists of many natural systems displaying both independent and interdependent properties. This is in contrast with the mechanistic view of the world, which would prefer to unify it under one universal truthful system. The problem which remains is to find an urban framework capable of structuring and nurturing a responsive, living, urban ecology in the current period of exponential growth.

Evaluation of current conceptual approaches

... of layering, of creating strata which can accommodate change as well as future needs, which enhance ... the interplay between transience and permanence, voids and layers, public and private, order and chaos (Hadid, 1989: 87).

It is normal for the human mind to think in metaphors or conceptual models (Brümmer, 1992:135). In the recent past it has been common to use certain conceptual models derived from the fields of science, art and philosophy as conceptual models for structuring the environment. The most influential models of the recent past, Modernism, Neo-Rationalism, Deconstruction, Post-Modernism, Symbiosis and Collage, have been chosen for

consideration as to their suitability for structuring our urbanising environment.³

1. Modernism

In considering Modernism, it is proposed that its two manifestations be separately analysed. Calinescu (1987: 41) has described how,

... at some point during the first half of the nineteenth century, an irreversible split occurred between modernity as a stage in the history of Western civilization - a product of scientific and technological progress, of the industrial revolution, of the sweeping economic and social changes brought about by capitalism - and modernity as an aesthetic concept.

1.1 Rationalist Modernity

This form of modernity is associated with

... the doctrine of progress, the confidence in the beneficial possibilities of science and technology, the concern with time ... , the cult of reason, and the ideal of freedom defined within the framework of an abstract humanism, but also the orientation toward pragmatism and the cult of action and success ... (Calinescu, 1987: 41) (See Diagram 1).

Comments on the evaluations in *Diagram 1*:

- (i) Ellis (1979: 4) notes that "... most modernists concluded that painting and single-building architecture were concerned with composition - that is, with relationships between objects - while urbanism was concerned with the typical nature of elemental objects themselves".
- (ii) Fathy was against Western-trained planners working in Arab countries. According to Steele (1988:124), he considered that they did not understand Arab cities and "... wiped out all the arts in Arab architecture which distinguished it as a presence, ... rationali[sing] this [by calling] it ... 'international' architecture".
- (iii) Richard Martin (1974:1031) complained that "keen, highly motivated young men develop models that are meaningless, Africanised versions of living patterns that are

- entirely European in their cultural values, ... and it is in their capacity for a meaningful dialogue that the young men are weakest".
- (iv) Designers with strong functionalist convictions normally pay some attention to this aspect. However, the highhanded approach of many modernist designers to the psychological and social needs of people is encapsulated in a reply by Le Corbusier to a question on priorities from the French sociologist, Chomard: "Who do you mean first of all? Certain particular clients or people in general? The first type is stupid and have bad habits. I don't care for them at all" (Steele, 1988: 125).
 - (v) Calinescu (1987: 4) has conclusively demonstrated that Modernism is in essence anti-tradition: "Tradition is rejected with increasing violence and the artistic imagination starts priding itself on exploring and mapping the realm of the 'not yet' ...". This explains Le Corbusier's wish to have historical Paris "cleaned off and carted away".
 - (vi) The similarity of large cities around the world can be attributed to "the influence of Modernism in architecture and planning [which] favour[s] a technological emphasis and expression" (Nyberg, 1988: 7).
 - (vii) The African (colonial) city is an extreme example of the lack of coherent structure to be found in the modern city: "... a pastiche of zoned functions, land uses and populations". It was "not a civic entity ... not created to meet the needs of the new urban dwellers, and little provision was made for their social and cultural requirements. It was merely an administrative area built up and run by Europeans and incidentally inhabited by Africans" (Blair, 1971 : 229).

The above comments are in one way or other applicable to the concepts that follow. This is so because all these concepts, even Post-Modernism (which "... engages the whole avant-gardist philosophy underlying the modernist project since the days of the Bauhaus ... "), are based on the same premises as classical Modernism (Calinescu, 1987: 281). In this battle of the styles, aesthetic concerns are very much to the fore.

1.2 Aesthetic Modernity

This kind of modernity has always seen itself as rejecting bourgeois modernity (the rationalist type) completely. Like Kant,

it viewed art as an autonomous activity with "purposiveness without a purpose" (Calinescu, 1987: 45). Urban design as an artistic composition, as demonstrated in Brasilia or Chandigarh, represents this kind of thinking. (See *Diagram 2*)

Comments on the evaluations given in *Diagram 2*:

Although the expression is different, the concerns are very much the same as with the previous approach. Because of an aesthetic bias, a strong framework (vii), such as is used to structure an interesting composition, is usually present, as in the two above-mentioned cities.

2. Neo-Rationalism

Two aspects of Neo-Rationalism call for consideration. One is the ascetic type of Tafuri and Rossi; the other is Leon Krier's neo-classicist version, which seems to be waning in popularity at present. Both have strong roots in the classical city and are primarily concerned with typology.

2.1 Neo-Rationalism (Tendenza)

This back-to-basics approach tries to connect the city once more with the (European) tradition of making cities. It sees the city as having evolved as generic "type elements" which would include "the quarter, the block, and a variety of urban-space types such as streets, avenues, squares, arcades and colonnades" (Gosling, 1984: 134). The elements of the cities of the neo-Rationalists are composed of "perfect cubes, perfect cylinders, perfect prisms". Thus Rossi's towns are populated by "idealised, abstracted, geometrized" buildings (Broadbent, 1990: 172-88). They do not seem to refer to people's customs or cultures, relate to specific landscapes, or indicate how present life-styles or movement systems are to be accommodated. (See *Diagram 3*)

Comments on the evaluations given in *Diagram 3*:

- (i) "Rossi deals ... with urban facts ... the actual physical objects of which cities are made ...". He is concerned with space and place-making. He states: " ... place is that which allows a particular architectural 'fact' [physical object of which a

city is made] to acquire its condition of being". "But place itself is far more than any mere physical environment. Place encompasses both that physical reality and its history" (Broadbent, 1990: 166, 169). Rossi's conception of space nevertheless remains rather narrow. Its meaning is interpreted mainly in the Western European context.

- (ii) Tafuri's way of thinking of people is "... a matter of regarding people as abstractions; units to be housed and so on" (Broadbent, 1990:165).
- (iii) Rossi's interest in cities is deep, but restricted. He looks at aspects of typology, at the structure of the city, at the architecture of the city and its locus and at the problems of urban dynamics. But he does it "... for its own sake without reference to outside disciplines such as sociology and other sciences, nor even, he says, to the history of architecture ..." (Broadbent, 1990: 166).
- (iv) Rossi's idea of the city as "... continuous mass into which large-scale elements [his monuments] ... can be inserted" could contribute to a legible city. The problem is that it does not fully recognise the extreme complexity of the modern city.

2.2 Neo-Rationalism (Neo-Classical)

Leon Krier is the main (and vociferous) protagonist of this approach. The influence of this kind of rationalism is generally restricted to England and the East Coast of the USA. Krier shares Tendenza's desire to restore historical European city-making techniques; in this instance with an emphasis on the type that Norberg-Schulz would call "Roman".

Krier believes that the "city and its public places: 'can only be built in the form of streets, squares and quarters of familiar dimensions and character', based on local and European traditions". He rejects zoning and advocates small self-sustaining communities ("the Quartier - an area up to 33 hectares within which there would be all urban functions", housing 10 000 - 15 000 people) (Broadbent, 1990: 195-6), huge urban monuments (an idea similar to Rossi's) intended to structure the city, and a return to conventional building methods by means of a revival of artisanship. He also has the very Eurocentric view that all building work should be executed in the classical language of architecture. (See *Diagram 4*)

Comments on evaluations given in *Diagram 4*:

- (i) Krier played an important role in focusing designers' attention on the positive qualities of traditional urban space. The problem, however, is that historically and spatially static conceptions of urban space do not allow for culturally divergent understandings. Kutcher (1973: 74) has indicated how Western-trained planners do not usually understand "middle-eastern platform space" as encountered at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. This accords with the experiences of Martin (1974: 1030-1) in Zambia, where planners misread the spatial conceptions of African people.
- (ii) Despite his Marxist leanings, Krier's empathy is more closely related to Classicism, which was not the style of folk architecture but ironically that of the ruling elite!
- (iii) Very little interaction and dialogue is possible, because of the attempt to revive a "scrambled version of an academic neo-classicism" (Nyberg, 1990 (2): 1) as the language for the new city. In the opinion of Collins (1965: 209), "As Leonce Reynaud puts it: '... the art of the Middle Ages is dead, and although one can galvanise a corpse, one cannot bring it back to life. It is precisely because thirteenth-century architecture was true in its day that it would be completely false now' ... " - the idea of reviving an historical language holds very little promise.
- (iv) This approach is a sincere attempt to remedy the social and psychological ills of the modern city. However, it makes a basic error in believing that by reshaping the city one can reshape society to some utopian model frozen in time.
- (v) The aim of connecting and extending the traditions of European city making is the most positive aspect of this approach. It has contributed considerably to an awareness of the positive attributes of traditional urban space. However, the need to extend the capacities of traditional urban space, to articulate the complexities of the contemporary city, was not addressed.
- (vi) The types of framework proposed by advocates of this concept are usually strong, but fall short as a result of the self-imposed restrictions mentioned above.

3. Deconstruction

Deconstruction is currently becoming very popular. While in philosophical terms its approaches can be considered an extreme extension of Rationalist Modernity, its manifestations can just as legitimately be read as a type of Aesthetic Modernity.

Despite the tendency of this mode to distortion, Wigley (1988: 19) claims that its adherents

... develop an architectonic coherence by confronting the basic problems of building structure and function even if they do so in an unconventional way.

Concerning its characteristics, he aptly describes it as follows: "... it is as if some kind of parasite has infected the form and distorted it from the inside". Also, "this is an architecture of disruption, dislocation, deflection, deviation and distortion ...". It "produces a feeling of unease, of disquiet, because it challenges the sense of stable, coherent identity that we associate with pure form" (Wigley, 1988: 17).

Tschumi (1988: 38-9), its leading protagonist, has the following to say about his Parisian project:

The Parc de la Villette project thus can be seen to encourage conflict over synthesis, fragmentation over unity, madness and play over careful management. It subverts a number of ideals that were sacrosanct to the Modern period and, in this manner, it can be allied to a specific vision of Post-Modernity. But the project takes issue with a particular premise of architecture, namely, its obsession with presence, with the idea of meaning immanent in architectural structures and forms ...

Deconstructivist projects generally leave one with an impression of one of the kinds of monumentality with which Colin Rowe worked: "... raw collision, which tends to emphasise the visual monumentality of discreet parts, not only through contrast, but also through contradiction, irresolution, and blatant visual simplicity" (Ellis, 1979: 24). This kind of monumentality could benefit a city, if present in the terms proposed by Rossi and Krier. In this way, Tschumi's "Mandarin Style" (Jencks, 1988: 61) made a functional contribution to Paris. In no other way could this elitist approach, which produces in the initiated "a kind of intellectual

joy or cerebral ecstasy", have any meaning for the majority of urban dwellers. (See *Diagram 5*)

Comments on the evaluations given in *Diagram 5*:

(i) (vi) While Deconstruction in a way reflects the complexities, contradictions and discontinuities of the modern city, it is in essence a dialogue among members of a very select circle, and, like other strains of Rationalism, it "ignores many real issues ... like the role of the automobile and recent electronic technology in a future urban life-style" (Boden, 1989: 34). In the typical avant-garde tradition, deconstructive projects withhold interaction with their context until it becomes the official style.

(vii) Certain techniques of Deconstruction may be relevant to the modern city, which has to reconcile many co-existing systems. According to Broadbent (1990: 316):

Tschumi superimposes three geometric systems: of points, of lines and of surfaces. Each system is clear and coherent in itself but, superimposed, they affect each other. Sometimes one reinforces another, sometimes they interfere to produce distortions and sometimes they simply co-exist.

4. Post-Modernism

The historic avant-garde ... tries to settle scores with the past ... The avant-garde destroys, defaces the past ... But the moment comes when the avant-garde (the modern) can go no further ... The post modern reply ... consists of recognising that past, since it cannot really be destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently ... (Umberto Eco, quoted in Calinescu, 1987: 283-4).

Gutman (1990: 120) criticised architectural Post-Modernism as "a discipline turning on itself". Although Calinescu has indicated that this concept, whose name was coined by the English historian Arnold Toynbee, finds expression in all the arts and humanities, no specifically Post-Modern urban design theory would appear to exist. Urban design schemes by architects like Charles Moore (Kresge College and Tegeler Hafen) and Arata Isozaki (Tsukuba Civic Centre) were not designed for others to execute – these designers were also the architects of the buildings.

Calinescu (1987: 282) has explained that " ... the postmodernist response to the utopian rigidities of the modernists was to call for a (modern) city with a memory. This explains the emergence of a new historicism". (Coming from the field of literary criticism, Calinescu would not be aware of Rykwert' s (1988: 7) criticism that we are dealing with "catalogue-history, devoid of narration".) Calinescu (1987: 276) also referred to Jenck's definition of this approach as "... doubly coded - part Modern and part something else: vernacular, revivalist, local, commercial, metaphorical, contextual ... ", claiming that it has "adopted a more flexible, interpretive and self-consciously 'dialogic' attitude". Thus it prefers Venturi's "both/and" logic to Modernism's "either/or" attitude.

A meaningful formulation of the Post-Modern concept has come from the Dutch landscape architects, Meeus and Vroom (1986: 301). As a result of the general discontent with functional approaches they developed practical Post-Modern strategies to deal with landscape designs. They see their task as creating "a spatial framework in which detailed functions can be filled in and substituted according to the (changing) needs of user groups". Central to the procedures described by Meeus and Vroom is the participation of users in the design process for "negotiation over the organization of space". Consultation with users in defining goals and priorities, and testing them, as well as the presentation of a catalogue of forms (usually very eclectic in nature) for discussion and choice all form part of this process of "consistent democratization". The result is often "a collage of elements taken from existing examples". (See *Diagram 6*)

Comments on the evaluations given in *Diagram 6*:

If the influence of theoreticians like Meeus and Vroom is discounted, no conscious Post-Modern concept of urban design seems to have evolved. Rather, as Rykwert (1977: 7) puts it, the "sins are now covered by a skin of ornament borrowed from the history books". Thus while buildings have become more conventional, resulting in more traditional urban spaces, with axial planning becoming more evident, there no coherent theory of urban design appears to underpin this practice. It could of course be that the concerns of Post-Modernism are taken care of (in a less aesthetic sense) by the established urban theoreticians. There would then be no need for a formal stance to be taken, as has

occurred in architecture. Where urban design schemes have paraded under the banners of Post-Modernism, as in the cases of Moore and Isozaki, it was felt that they did not deserve high ratings. Because the inhabitants and the existing urban structures were positively considered, criteria (3) and (7) received higher ratings. One scheme which is an exception to the general tendency to ignore the spirit of place (6), is Portoghesi's design for a group of villages in the Vallo di Diano, Salerno (Gosling, 1984: 37).

5. Symbiosis

The symbiotic approach is propagated by Kishu Kurokawa, a founder-member of the Metabolist school in the early sixties. Originating in a progressive, optimistic period, the members of this group are described as "mega-utopians" by Gosling and Maitland (Gosling, 1984: 36). The 1973 energy crisis brought about the movement's demise. However, the concept of Symbiosis, one of the pillars of the Metabolist school, was retained and extended by Kurokawa. He propagates a pragmatic, eclectic approach, combining the best from all cultures "under the wing of Japanese Buddhism" (Chaslin, 1988: 10).

For huge cities he propagates incremental open-ended planning, where as much as possible of the prime natural environment and cultural heritage is retained. In his *Shonan Life Town* he combined a farming community with urban dwellers. The New Tokyo 2025 plan, with which he is involved, is a 30 thousand hectare island proposed in Tokyo Bay and intended to house 5 million inhabitants in "a twenty-first century high-technology city in order to take the pressures off Tokyo and preserve the past and present Tokyo (Kurokawa, 1988: 115).

His ideas are sometimes sketchy, but he talks of the city of the twenty-first century as "invisible". He sees the task of the urban designer as designing those "invisible links and relations" and considers the city itself as a "network" (Kurokawa, 1988: 116) (See *Diagram 7*).

Comments on the evaluations given in *Diagram 7*:

Philosophically, Kurokawa's approaches coincide to a large extent with the balanced Yin-Yang principles discussed above:

- (i) Except for stressing the superiority of the street over the square, this aspect is not sufficiently developed.
- (ii) The concern for the preservation and nurturing of various cultures is arguably the main concern of Symbiosis.
- (iii) Functioning at a rather theoretical level, this aspect is not addressed.
- (iv) There is a definite concern for the needs of inhabitants, as in (2), but it is not clearly spelt out.
- (v) The idea of a different order of connectivity is important, but not sufficiently developed.
- (vi) Kurokawa's project for a desert city in Libya demonstrates a certain awareness of the *genius loci*.
- (vii) In looking at a new order of framework, Kurokawa's ideas are convincing, but lack clarity.

6. Collage

If the city is to be known to its citizens as a 'legible' one, they must be able to read it as comprising at least one, but preferably several, superimposed and easily recognized patterns (Rykwert, 1988: 7).

Colin Rowe (Ellis, 1979: 4) proposed that the pictorial techniques of collage painting may offer a paradigm for the making of cities. He intended this approach "to mitigate two perceived architectural images of the city: the traditional city with its open spaces carved out of a solid mass, and Le Corbusier's 'City in the Park', with its isolated buildings standing free in open space." By reconciling the two approaches, one of the past and one of the future, he wanted his city "... to be at one and the same time, quite explicitly ... both theatre of memory and theatre of prophecy". To do this he proposed a discourse "between type and context". This argument was to be "carried out through a range of compositional strategies: either a complete resolution of parts, or a collage of parts, or a collision between parts".

The character resulting from his approaches was

... usually (that) of a complex building or a coherent grouping that can be imposed upon a context, undergo a mutual deformation with that context, and become something new. It sustains a general typological identity, usually through geometrical regularity at its core, and promotes a local particularity of composition, usually through irregularity at its edges (Ellis, 1979: 7).

This process conforms with the characteristics of collage, where the fragments used retain their former identity, while at the same time assuming a new identity (that of the whole). A dialogue is thus set up among the various identities, allowing the work to reflect the complexities and tensions of the present-day world.

One problem with this concept is that, in comprising strategies for composing cities, it falls within the ambit of "aesthetic urbanism", and that function plays little or no role. The opportunity to superimpose the many functional layers of the city, as perhaps prefigured in Tschumi's *Parc de la Villette's* three superimposed geometric systems, opens up exciting possibilities in this regard. (See *Diagram 8*)

Comments on the evaluations given in *Diagram 8*:

- (i) The combination and the collision of various spatial types allow for "conditions of interdependence, independence and multiple interpenetrability" (Broadbent, 1990: 265).
- (ii) The cultural diversity of multi-ethnic cities in transition could be mitigated if one thinks of the city as a collage of cultures, overlapping and interacting.
- (iii) Interaction is an important aspect of Rowe's city:
We have attempted to constitute a fragment of ... a city of discreet set pieces and interactive local incidents, a city which represents coalition of intentions rather than the singular presence of any immediately apparent all-coordinating ideas (Rowe, in Gosling, 1984: 17).
- (iv) Some attention is given to social and cultural values:
"Societies and persons assemble themselves according to their own interpretations of absolute reference and traditional value; and, up to a point, collage accommodates both hybrid display and the requirements of self-determination" (Broadbent, 1990: 266).

- (v) Rowe's method of reconciling two urban design traditions by means of the techniques of collage is possibly his most important contribution.
- (vi) In his many projects, Rowe indicated how he would extend the fabric of existing cities. However, his theories did not include proposals for frameworks for new cities, which is a matter of great importance and urgency in a time of rapid urbanisation.

Diagram 9 summarises the preceding evaluations. No score is higher than 10 out of a potential score of 21. It should be noted that none of the conceptual approaches discussed considers the expression of the 'Spirit of Place' as important. Yet this is the element that assists man to dwell harmoniously in the landscape. Thus the "placelessness" and alienation of the modern city are not addressed. The theories of Classical Rationalism, Post-Modernism and Collage all attempt to come to terms with the problems of making urban life a more positive experience. Unfortunately, they are all still too much inspired by ideas of scientific progress and/or aesthetic avant-gardism.

Yet, if it is remembered that both Capra and Jung plead for a balance of *Yin* and *Yang* values, it would seem reasonable to permit the ordering element of the modern city to have *Yang* characteristics, as long as it encourages diversity and is used to accommodate change rather than to restrict it.

It is proposed that if elements of Collage, Post-Modernism and Deconstruction, as described above, were combined under the heading of Collage, a viable structuring system might evolve. What is meant here is not the two-dimensional model proposed by Rowe, although this could have value in the ordering of buildings as such. Rykwert (1988: 7) spoke of a preference for "... several, superimposed and easily recognisable patterns". This coincides with Tschumi's concept of the *Parc de la Villette* where he superimposed three geometrical patterns, each with its own identity. In an age where for many people the world of the electronic media is more real than the physical world, this concept allows for these media to form further layers. Such layers do not need to coincide. In the past, the correlation of services, movement systems and built accommodation according to certain so-called rational principles comprised the core of the town planner's activity. Here, a pragmatic approach, where

every system obeys its own rules with minimum interference, is propagated. Where structuring layers cross or coincide, densification may be expected. A wide variety of urban conditions may be foreseen, in order to allow for a diversity of choices. The Post-Modern techniques of Meeus and Vroom, combined with the systems principles (the seven criteria), could then be used to determine planning in each area, according to the specific needs of its inhabitants.

If this "key model" of a city were introduced, with its layered systems interacting and allowing an endless variety of lifestyles, cultures and opportunities, a richness and complexity unknown in the past might result. The most exciting aspect of the proposal is that neighbours within a single city may, according to their own personalities, habits and interests, choose to inhabit any (or several) of the many different superimposed cities.

2 [s.l.](s.n.)[s.a.] Style.

3 The evaluations are by the author. They have been submitted to a number of respected colleagues, who concur in principle.



Figure 1: The Union Buildings, Pretoria, 1910-12, by Herbert Baker. Watercolor: William Walcot. 1981. Irving R.G. "Indian Summer" p. 288.



Figure 2: The Johannesburg General Hospital. Photo: Professor Bannie Britz. UOFS.

Britz/Architecture and the city

KEY TO DIAGRAMS 1 TO 8

Very concerned	=	●
Concerned	=	◐
Some concern	=	○
No concern	=	·

Diagram 1

	Criteria	Evaluation
(i)	Creation of a variety of meaningful existential spaces	·
(ii)	Empathy with cultural specifics of citizens	·
(iii)	Interaction between designer, audience and work	○
(iv)	Understanding of psychological and social needs of inhabitants	·
(v)	Dialogue with and extension of traditions of urban design	·
(vi)	Recognition and expression of spirit of place	·
(vii)	Reinforcement / creation of authentic frameworks	·

Diagram 2

	Criteria	Evaluation
(i)	Creation of a variety of meaningful existential spaces	·
(ii)	Empathy with cultural specifics of citizens	·
(iii)	Interaction between designer, audience and work	○
(iv)	Understanding of psychological and social needs of inhabitants	·
(v)	Dialogue with and extension of traditions of urban design	·
(vi)	Recognition and expression of spirit of place	·
(vii)	Reinforcement / creation of authentic frameworks	◐

Diagram 3

	Criteria	Evaluation
(i)	Creation of a variety of meaningful existential spaces	◐
(ii)	Empathy with cultural specifics of citizens	·
(iii)	Interaction between designer, audience and work	○
(iv)	Understanding of psychological and social needs of inhabitants	·
(v)	Dialogue with and extension of traditions of urban design	◐
(vi)	Recognition and expression of spirit of place	·
(vii)	Reinforcement / creation of authentic frameworks	○

Diagram 4

	Criteria	Evaluation
(i)	Creation of a variety of meaningful existential spaces	◐
(ii)	Empathy with cultural specifics of citizens	○
(iii)	Interaction between designer, audience and work	○
(iv)	Understanding of psychological and social needs of inhabitants	○
(v)	Dialogue with and extension of traditions of urban design	◐
(vi)	Recognition and expression of spirit of place	·
(vii)	Reinforcement / creation of authentic frameworks	◐

Diagram 5

Criteria	Evaluation
(i) Creation of a variety of meaningful existential spaces	+
(ii) Empathy with cultural specifics of citizens	+
(iii) Interaction between designer, audience and work	+
(iv) Understanding of psychological and social needs of inhabitants	+
(v) Dialogue with and extension of traditions of urban design	+
(vi) Recognition and expression of spirit of place	+
(vii) Reinforcement / creation of authentic frameworks	+

Diagram 6

Criteria	Evaluation
(i) Creation of a variety of meaningful existential spaces	○
(ii) Empathy with cultural specifics of citizens	○
(iii) Interaction between designer, audience and work	●
(iv) Understanding of psychological and social needs of inhabitants	○
(v) Dialogue with and extension of traditions of urban design	○
(vi) Recognition and expression of spirit of place	+
(vii) Reinforcement / creation of authentic frameworks	+

Diagram 7

Criteria	Evaluation
(i) Creation of a variety of meaningful existential spaces	○
(ii) Empathy with cultural specifics of citizens	●
(iii) Interaction between designer, audience and work	+
(iv) Understanding of psychological and social needs of inhabitants	●
(v) Dialogue with and extension of traditions of urban design	●
(vi) Recognition and expression of spirit of place	○
(vii) Reinforcement / creation of authentic frameworks	○

Diagram 8

Criteria	Evaluation
(i) Creation of a variety of meaningful existential spaces	●
(ii) Empathy with cultural specifics of citizens	○
(iii) Interaction between designer, audience and work	●
(iv) Understanding of psychological and social needs of inhabitants	○
(v) Dialogue with and extension of traditions of urban design	●
(vi) Recognition and expression of spirit of place	+
(vii) Reinforcement / creation of authentic frameworks	○

Diagram 9

KEY TO DIAGRAM 9	Rationalist Modernity	Aesthetic Modernity	Neo-Rationalism (Tendenza)	Neo-Rationalism (Neo-Classical)	Deconstruction	Post-Modernism	Collage	Symbiosis
● = 3								
◐ = 2								
○ = 1								
· = 0								
Creation of a variety of meaningful existential spaces	·	·	◐	◐	·	○	◐	○
Empathy with cultural specifics of citizens	·	·	·	○	·	○	○	●
Interaction between designer, audience and work	○	○	○	○	·	◐	◐	·
Understanding of psychological and social needs of inhabitants	·	·	·	○	·	○	○	◐
Dialogue with and extension of traditions of urban design	·	·	◐	◐	·	○	●	◐
Recognition and expression of spirit of place	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	○
Reinforcement / creation of authentic frameworks	·	◐	○	◐	◐	◐	○	○
	1/21	3/21	6/21	9/21	2/21	8/21	10/21	10/21

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Britz/Architecture and the city

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