

Architecture, city and history

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Architecture, city and history

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Translated into English by Astrid Buys, the untranslated document can be found on the cd-rom.

Architects and historians have especially one thing in common: the city. The city, as a built reality, forms the physical and mental condition for architecture, while, at the same time, it can be regarded as a reflection of the course of history. The question whether architecture makes history or history determines architecture, can be answered with the predictable answer that it is a correlation, the city however, knows how many answers there really are.

However it is clear that the variation of architecture and history is not always of the same value, consequently there are typical 'historical' cities and cities in which the architecture made the city break with tradition and redevelop itself. An even stronger example are cities which explosively develop past their traditional growth, a growth on which neither architecture nor history, as normative disciplines, appear to have any influence.

Ever since the 19th century debate between Camillo Sitte and Otto Wagner about the city as a 'piece of art' and the 'unlimited city' respectively the city as 'Gemeinschaft' and as 'Gesellschaft' there appear to be only two cities left, the city of preservation and the city of progression. They could be seen as the 'intentional' and the 'automatic' cities.

However it is not this simple.

First of all, ever since antiquity a number of city types have existed, ranging from the organic cities up to the grid shaped city. Furthermore the current cities have a more metropolitan character, which goes hand in hand with the loss of centrality, i.e. the development of heterotopical cities. Within the growth of these complex cities it is clear that it is all about a layered reality in which architecture and history slide into each other in both a

physical and a contemplative theoretical way. The definition of the problem 'if-if' has in its dialectic lost its sense and the designer and researcher are, as Secchi put it, bound to 'work on a running engine'.

The impossibility to isolate these problems categorically does not exclude an analytical approach towards our own discipline, but it is at this point where the individual disciplines have to give up their own exclusive values i.e. informality. This means that the architect as well as the historian not only have to apply their touchable observations, but are also searching for specific reasons for existence, boundary conditions and qualities, which can be established in the field and furthermore are both via comments as well as via an intervention on their critical calibre to be researched if it sheds a whole new light on the problem, which allows it to be contemplated on an abstract level.

If for example the demand of architectural expression in the form of a symbolic action rises in a city like Rotterdam, it perhaps raises the question about 'ideal or dictatorial' control, or the question about architectural intervention because of transformation, or the question about 'lazy' architecture as a form of 'light' town-planning, which are all questions that make the general theme more specific in nature. Although in this case it concerns a relatively young city, history contains in its long continuation the combination of diverse city designs, that, attached to the material history of this water-city, provide a rich potential of answers to questions which have or have not been asked.



In the case that within the framework of general questions the specific features of this relatively vanished 'harbour-city' combines itself with the civil engineering nature of its construction as well as with the diversity of architectural concepts, the question will be reversed.

However this is more a case of learning to formulate the right questions, than to answer informal theses. To quote Libeskind, after all it is all about avoiding and disorganising the answers which the city hands itself over to singular disciplines such as economics, trade or technique. In this aspect it is more about researching the riddles surrounding the city, to put it even stronger, it is the art of architects and historians to enhance the enigmatic character of the city.

To come to a provisional conclusion with the bridge of Van Berkel, it is in this case all about an element, which is not really to be seen as a symbol, but consists mostly of the ability to bring the city with its numerous contradictions and slumbering questions into discussion, instead of mystifying the city debate with a mere symbol. To be concrete, Holland is not only the land of wooden shoes. It is all about a concrete myth, it is not about mystification. This means that questions that are heading towards a closed answer must be avoided and invalidated.

The Creative Architecture Platform puts itself in a position in which it acts as a catalyst in the cultivation of questions. With the knowledge of architecture and history, as well as the knowledge of the city, the debate can be brought to a respectable level as well as it can be made concrete, therefore they invite speakers who will meet up the expectations. By means of declamation, workgroups and publication, the debate with respect to its contents is brought up, in which the transition of knowledge and the giving shape to critical theses will be equally

important. Therefore we invite everybody to participate, ranging from insider to interested craftsman or woman in the subject of architecture or history.