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Editorial Statement

The nature of building is letting dwell. Building accomplishes its nature in the raising of locations by the joining of their spaces. Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build.

Martin Heidegger

Building Dwelling Thinking

On Reading Heidegger

It becomes increasingly clear, as the utopian hallucinations of the Enlightenment fade, that we have long been in the habit of using too many synonyms; not only in our everyday speech but also in our more specialized languages. We still fail, for example, to make any satisfactory distinction between architecture and building, despite the fact that we are, at the same time, inconscionably aware that such a distinction should be made. We know, for instance, that Mies van der Rohe was at pains throughout his life to recognize this distinction and that in his own work he asserted the mediatory realm of *Baukunst* (the "art of building"), a Teutonic term for which there is no satisfactory English equivalent. All of this would be mere etymological speculation were we not constantly being reminded of the issue by those cultural and operational discrepancies that invariably arise between the generation of built form and its reception by society. This *lapsus* is sufficient to suggest that these everyday disjunctions must have at least some of their origins in our persistent failure to make such a distinction in building practice. There, in the physical realm of the built world, we seem to be presented with dramatic proof of the paradoxical Heideggerian thesis that language, far from being the servant of man, is all too often his master. We would, for instance, invariably prefer to posit the ideal of architecture—the monument in every circumstance be it public or private, the major opus—for situations that simply demand "building" and we are commonly led to realize the

irreducibility of this fact, fatally after the event.

As with that which we would fain idealize in the projection, so with that which we would rationalize after the misconception and here we find that the ironic mystifications of Candide have much in common with the deception of our own more recent ideologies. Surely this was never more evident than in, say, Daniel Bell's presumptuous announcement of the end of ideology or in Melvin Webber's ingenious celebration of the "non-place urban realm"; that apotheosis of late liberal capitalism posited, not to say "deposited," as the existing paradise of Los Angeles. In this last context, we are supposed (according to the received program of the ideologues) not only to recognize but further even to welcome with enthusiasm the utopian advent of this "community without propinquity," to quote yet another appealing phrase of more than a decade ago.

The intervening lapse of time has done little to neutralize such rationalizations. The actual phrases may have passed from our lips but the mental sets largely remain and it is these that unavoidably condition us as we go about our work. Should we choose, through some inner inadequacy or protracted sense of responsibility, to eschew autonomous art or the liberating promise of the poetic intellect, then all too often, we will find ourselves conflating in the name of populism the objects of elitist culture with elaborate rationalizations of the

environment as found. In such a vein, we will seek to sublimate the frustrations of utopia with the sadness of suburbia or with the enervations of the strip; and while we will self-consciously appeal, by way of justification, to an illusory vernacular, the true nature of our Western predicament will continue to escape us. Between the Charybdis of elitism and the Scylla of populism, the full dimension of our historical dilemma will remain hidden.

Nowhere are the turns of this labyrinth more evident, as Heidegger tries to make clear, than in our language, than in our persistent use of, say, the Latin term "space" or "*spatium*" instead of "place" or the Germanic word "*Raum*"—the latter carrying with it, as it does, the explicit connotations of a clearing in which *to be*, a place in which to come into being. We have only to compare the respective Oxford English Dictionary definitions to appreciate the abstract connotations of "space" as opposed to the socially experienced nature of "place"; to confront construction *in extensio* with the act of significant containment.

This, again, would be empty speculation could we not point directly to our present all but total incapacity to create places; an incapacity that is as prevalent in our architectural schools and in the monuments of the elite, as it is in "motopia" at large. Place now appears as inimical to our received mental set, not only as architects but also as a society. In our

ubiquitous "non-place" we congratulate ourselves regularly on our pathological capacity for abstraction; on our commitment to the norms of statistical coordination; on our bondage to the transactional processes of objectification that will admit to neither the luxury nor the necessity of place. We exonerate the strip, ever fearful to admit that we might have eliminated, once and for all, the possibility of ever being anywhere. We vaunt our much prized mobility, our "rush city," to coin Neutra's innocent phrase, our consumption of frenetic traction, only to realize that should we stop, there are few places within which any of us might significantly choose to be. Blithely, we exchange our already tenuous hold on the public sphere for the electronic distractions of the private future. Despite this, outside the "mass" engineered somnambulism of television, we still indulge in the proliferation of roadside kitsch—in the fabricated mirage of "somewhere" made out of billboard facades and token theatrical paraphernalia—the fantasmagoria of an escape clause from the landscape of alienation. In all this, the degeneration of the language speaks for itself. Terms such as "defoliation" and "pedestrianization" enter everyday speech as categories drawn from the same processes of technological rationalization. With "newspeak" overtones, they testify to a fundamental break in our rapport with nature (including our own), they speak of a laying waste that can only find its ultimate end in ourselves.

Against this, it would seem that the apparent universal triumph of the "non-place urban realm" may only be modified through a profound consciousness of history and through a rigorous socio-political analysis of the present, seen as a continuing fulfillment of the past. We have no choice but to reformulate the dialectical constituents of the world, to determine more consciously the necessary links obtaining between *place* and *production*, between the "what" and the "how." This reciprocation of ends and means binds us to an historical reality wherein the *tabula rasa* fantasies of the Enlightenment lose a deal of their authority. With the manifest exhaustion of non-renewable resources the technotopic myth of unlimited progress becomes somewhat discredited and, at this juncture, the *production of place* returns us by way of economic limit not to architecture but to *Baukunst* and to that which Aldo Van Eyck has already called the "timelessness of man."

Accepting the limits of our historical circumstance and the perennial conflict of ends with means and of freedom with necessity, that which remains critical is the process by which decisive priorities are established; for in the last analysis, as Jurgen Habermas and Giancarlo De Carlo have reminded us, design goals, as the motives of our instrumentality, may only be legitimized through the activation of the public sphere—a political realm that, in its turn, is reciprocally dependent on the representational and

physical embodiment of the collective. Place, at this juncture, irrespective of its scale, takes on its archetypal aspect, its ancient attribute which is as much political as it is ontological. Its sole legitimacy stems, as it must, from the social constituency it accommodates and represents.

The minimum physical pre-condition for place is the conscious placement of an object in nature, even if that artifice be nothing more than an object in the landscape or the rearrangement of nature herself. At the same time, the mere existence of an object in and of itself guarantees nothing. The cyclical processes of modern production and consumption seem to be more than adequately matched for the exhaustion of every resource and for the laying waste to all production irrespective of the rate at which it is generated. To rationalize this so-called optimization in the name of human adaptability and progress is to ideologize the self alienation of man. One has to recognize the dialectical opposition of place and production and not confuse the one with the other, that is, ends with means. For where *place* is essentially qualitative and in and of itself concrete and static, *production* tends to stress quantity and to be in and of itself dynamic and abstract.

Place, as an Aristotelean phenomenon, arises at a symbolic level with the conscious signification of social meaning and at a concrete level with the establishment of an articulate realm on which man or men may come into being. The receptivity and

sensitive resonance of a place—to wit its sensate validity *qua* place—depends first on its stability in the everyday sense and second, on the appropriateness and richness of the socio-cultural experiences it offers.

Production, on the other hand, clearly has its own laws, which are tied into a reality that none of us can escape. But the margin of choice that always remains, demands to be fully exploited, less we arrive by default at the government of nobody, at that so-called utilitarian tyranny of technique. Since the "what" is fatally tied to the "how," everything resides in how and to what end we choose to modify the relevant optimal sub-categories of production, not only those of the built form itself, but also those structurally productive forces that implacably shape the built environment as elements in the general economy of our relations to nature.

A state of affairs, in which on the threshold of famine large amounts of prime agricultural land are continually lost to urbanization and mining without the exercise of adequate restraint, can hardly be regarded as economic in any fundamental sense, just as the proliferation of suburban sprawl can have little significance beyond stimulating land speculation and maximizing the amortization of investment in certain lines of consumer production. Certainly the creation of place, in both an ontological and political sense, is generally ill-served by our persistent policies of laissez-faire dispersal, and what is true for the

essence of the *res publica* applies with equal force to the "catchment" limits of public transportation. All discourse on the built environment that does not make at least a reference to these kinds of basic contradictions, between the so-called short and long term interests in the society, tends towards a mystification of the historical circumstances in which we work.

At the more specific level of built form, production considered solely as an economy of method has the unfortunate tendency of inhibiting rather than facilitating the creation of receptive places. A case in point is the universal tendency towards stereometric high-rise flat slab construction where economy in erection is granted absolute priority over any other morphological consideration. By a similar token, the industrialization or rationalization of building, as the unavoidable consequence of the inviability of high craft production in a mass society, should not be regarded as beneficial in itself, particularly where such methods lead, through an abstract optimization, to a manifest impoverishment of the environment. And here, in this hypothetical confrontation between the *macro-scaled environmental desirability* of urban containment and *micro-scaled environmental undesirability* of high-rise construction, we have perhaps a convenient if highly schematic example of what one might regard as an *environmental dialectic of production*, that is, a state of affairs wherein the quantitative and qualitative gains at

one level should be evaluated against the quantitative and qualitative losses at another.

The necessary relations obtaining between *place, production, and nature* implacably suggest the biological concept of the "homeostatic plateau," wherein the energy feedback loops of an organic metabolism serve to sustain the steady state of its overall system—the "zero-growth" feedback syndrome in nature. Comparable structural models in the field of the built environment have long since been posited at varying levels of detail from N.A. Miliutin's linear agro-industrial city to Ralph Knowles' metabolic profiling of the built environment, as though it were a climatic and topographic extension of the landscape itself. The rooted ecological nature of such otherwise abstract models finds its reflection in the direct recycling of body-waste for the purpose of horticultural production, or in the conservation of the overall energy required for the tasks of heating and cooling. It should come as no surprise that up to now, despite the current fad for solar energy studies, short-term interests have effectively inhibited anything but the most limited application of such models and one may take it as a reflection of these interests that architectural schools have largely ceased to concern themselves with such matters.

This aloof critique of current design praxis and its pedagogical substance brings us to the question once again of the full nature of the art of building.

The present tendency to polarize the quintessence of built form as though it were of necessity one single thing appears to my mind to be nothing other than an ideological refusal to confront historical reality. The building task intrinsically resists such polarization. It remains fatally situated at that phenomenological interface between the infrastructural and superstructural realms of human production. There it ministers to the self-realization of man in nature and mediates as an essential catalyst between the three states of his existence: first, his status as an organism of primal need; second, his status as a sensate, hedonistic being; and finally, his status as a cognitive, self-affirmative consciousness. Autonomous artistic production certainly has many provinces but the task of *place creation*, in its broadest sense, is not necessarily one of them. The compensatory drive of autonomous art tends to remove it from the concrete realization of man in the world and to the extent that architecture seeks to preempt all culture it consciously divorces itself from both building and the realm of historical reality. This much Adolf Loos has already intimated by 1910, when he wrote with characteristic but understandable overstatement: "Only a very small part of architecture belongs to art: the tomb and the monument."

Kenneth Frampton

