

I have chosen to talk about the city - what for me constitutes its living matter - and the cities of tomorrow. I might have entitled my lecture “passages”, “surreality” or “drift”, in reference to the city imagined by Nerval, Baudelaire, Benjamin and the surrealists; but I have preferred to entitle this lecture :

## **IMAGINARY , IMPURE , EVERYDAY**

The architecture of revelation is a thing of the past - we can say goodbye to Progress, Ideal Cities and architectural heroics. Our world no longer admits the magnificent play of light on pure form. Instead it chooses indeterminacy and change. We live in a world of flux and transition - regularity and stability have been replaced by hybrid, impure entities, forcing a new acceptance of reality. The problem today is to engage the real, with all its inertia and its imperfections, in an improbable hand-to-hand combat. Architectural gesture has to find its way amid a tangled web of problems by evolving patient, perhaps craftsmanslike strategies.

Many of today’s approaches are rooted in simplification. They take their inspiration from Minimal Art, “architectural engineering” and the work of Mies van der Rohe. But though I find much to admire in these works, I feel that architecture is infinitely more complex. As builders, we can never propose solutions as simple as those of the sculptures of Donald Judd or Carl André. A nuclear power station can be a beautiful object as the resolution of a few simple problems, but a house can be extremely ugly. What happens there is a thousand times more complex than nuclear fission, which can be expressed in a single equation. Though I understand the current fascination with Mies, it seems to me to reflect an abdication of responsibility. In its obsessive quest for purity, a Mies residential tower is invariably beautiful but can hardly serve other functions (and denies the essentially hybrid reality which it is supposed to serve). On the other hand, Frank Lloyd Wright’s Price Tower at Bartlesville creates a studied opposition between housing and offices. Its impure, Baroque quality risks ugliness in an uncompromising expression of complexity. For me buildings, like individuals, must reflect multiple facets, say several things at the same time . Individuals who resemble Mies’ towers may well be good-looking, but they are probably uninteresting. In people, opacity and contradiction are more attractive than transparency.

As blind navigators, we have to accept complexity and ambiguity. Even if their grey matter has little market value, architects compound space and significance, colour and use, nature and society, beauty and the ineffable, form and function. All these elements are actively involved in this inexact science, which no computer will ever master.

II

Pure, austere, ascetic forms are boring, even mortifying. Buildings that can be read at a single glance impoverish our cities instead of enriching them. If cities are to live and breathe again, we need variegated, kaleidoscopic buildings, multiple articulations reflecting an essentially complex reality, a careful mix of forms, colours, rituals and uses. We also need texture, depth and movement.

I have always treated urban scenographies as a means of tackling these problems. My architecture is made up of walks punctuated by a multiplicity of attractive or repellent elements leading from one surprise to the next; the notion of pleasure is ever-present. The walks are also narratives. In a sense, my projects tell stories. On the boulevard de Belleville and rue Oberkampf, in the theatres of Albi and Dreux, blank, cliff-like façades are broken up to reveal solids emerging from the void. Objects have to be freed of their terrible complacency, pushed to their limits and exploded. Then we must put the fragments carefully back together, by inventing subtle, almost invisible articulations, and by using discontinuity to reassess continuity.

### III

With the disappearance of the old craft industries - which used to be vectors of typological variety - our cities are becoming poorer. The quality of a city like Prague, Istanbul or New York is proportional to the variety of its activities, scales and populations. . We must fight uniformity through patient formal research and invent new prototypes for public space.

It is no longer possible to design cities only for cars travelling at forty miles an hour or televiewers interacting with their telecommunications interface. Only too often, city streets are seen as trafficways for active populations. But when we walk around the city we meet old folk, children, tourists, the unemployed, the homeless. For all these, public space needs to be a living focus for relationships. Most of today's models are incapable of answering such needs. When I am faced with a brief and a site, I begin by asking myself: What specific space should the city give to the passerby at this point? Architects should be as selfless as doctors. They should concern themselves with people's right to civic space, just as doctors guarantee their right to good health. It is important to create havens of calm - breathing spaces accessible to all. On boulevard de Belleville, the small square retreats away from the bustle on the street and generates intimacy, though it also permits movement and intercourse. Similarly, the entrance to rue Oberkampf is a belvedere overlooking the garden below - a space to pause and look. In Albi, the space in front of the theatre forms an open-air stage (the void corresponds exactly to the solid forms required by the brief).

### IV

Photographs of Paris in 1900 show that public spaces were large open-air rooms entirely at the public's disposal. Despite the presence of multiple contrasts, an

impression of continuity predominated. Contrast within continuity is what creates the riches of the city. In the same way, Breton's narratives of walks in the city and suburbs describe a fabric so subtle and complex that anyone could stroll through unknown streets in the manner of the poets. In today's increasingly homogeneous cities, associations and correspondences are becoming increasingly rare, and the "poetic" quality of pedestrian walks ever poorer. . Where possible, we should promote the surrealist principle of the "chance encounter between a sewing machine and an umbrella" - the emotion generated by a factory chimney seen from a street corner, or the surprise of a gigantic warehouse or workshops found at the heart of a city block. We need mixity (of forms, activities, colours and materials); we must inject imagination into the emotional deserts of today's cities, temper the formal invention of the "garden of delights" with social realities of the street, rediscover the incredible density of a Bosch painting, and remain receptive to what is common, vulgar and everyday.

## NETWORKS

Today's networks transcend the city. The street is no longer relevant; the key agents are métro corridors, cellphones, television ... We simultaneously inhabit a homogeneous continuum of virtuality and discontinuous fragments of space.

Architecture no longer has to organize continuity, forge relations or create an urban backcloth - a function entirely devolve to the networks. And the networks that organize our existence (the métro, the telephone, television) are closed circuits. Architecture should therefore palliate the homogenization of networks, affirm singularity and create autonomous free zones.

It is both urgent and necessary to build architectural events, poles of identity around which inhabitants of the city can find their bearings, establish specific identities and thus promote encounters. Radio waves are the reference pole, the city must now enter into dissidence and assert its identity as a patchwork of differentiated places. The right and duty of every designer is to promote the city of tomorrow as a variegated, multipolar field of architectures, forms, sensations and intensities.

## EVENTS

The Andy Warhol theorem

Like many of my contemporaries, I remain fascinated by Andy Warhol's premonitory mot to the effect that, in the year two thousand, everyone will be able to be a star for at least ten minutes of their lives. My view is that this should be taught as axiomatic in schools of architecture everywhere.

No one is commonplace, and commonplace architecture interests no one, given that we are all exceptional.

Much has been said about ,commonplace architecture, an architecture "without qualities" This æsthetic discourse, which is absolutely legitimate and invokes Robert Musil (The Man Without Qualities) and the nouveau roman, from Alain Robbe-

Grillet , nonetheless brings with it real transformations which are far from poetic. Cities are becoming more and more commonplace - at a rate that can only be described as exponential. Only offices, housing and shops remain, while small industries and crafts, which brought life and colour to the city, have been exiled. . Faced with this invariant trend, we have to propose the idea of asserting singularity, exception and the architectural event.

### The Exception Is the Rule

I take the exemple of Paris

In fact, Paris is a city of exceptions, which reproduces itself not in continuity, but by accident.

In the seventies and eighties, (architects and town-planners) believed in the possibility of symbiosis between the city and its architecture. But they were deluded: whole districts built on these disastrous ideological lines have become as many faceless graveyards. The places we love are in conflict with these two close yet distant instances. As Spreckelsen so rightly remarked, monuments most closely associated with the identity of Paris - the Eiffel Tower, the Sacré Cœur, the Arc de Triomphe, the Pompidou Centre, the Louvre Pyramid - are anything but not Parisian. This reflection also holds for its most everyday, banal architectural productions...

### Sep Janiak

I have always been fascinated by the visions of the painter Sep Janiak - for instance his images of Notre-Dame cathedral in a jungle setting, or of the Ministry of Finance building guarded over by an Egyptian sphinx. Like a seismogrph, Janiak succeeds in recording the impact which these buildings have on our "imaginary". Somehow, they are always elsewhere, out of frame, in a dreamlike reality, rather like the doors of science fiction which open onto the cities of analogy. Each Urban space should possess monuments of this type, thus affording the ceaseless transition from real to imaginary...

To be inhabited, travelled, looked at and loved, the city has to be appropriated - and it must contain surprises. We need buildings that are both discreet and named (perhaps even decried) - buildings that welcome the onlooker and at the same time stand erect, calm and serene like the deities of Easter Island and elsewhere.

We need scenographies capable of transforming our districts into villages of the future. Contemporary megapoles want the hollowed-out forms of as yet unnamed public spaces, and must erect belfries, steeples and other salutary presences to keep watch over the destinies of occupant and passerby alike. I believe that any and every street corner can furnish the pretext for an architectural event.

## PROJECTS

Now , I should like to say a word or two about my own projects, which I place in three categories:

### **“Free Spaces”**

These are built voids; spaces that fracture closed blocks and are offered to the passerby, the pedestrian. They furnish protected commercial enclaves, breathing spaces, and parvis or passageways for all who inhabit the city.

At 100, boulevard Belleville I created a small square - an open courtyard - and overhanging gangways. This concavity creates a protected, intimate space set back from the street, freed of the busy atmosphere of the street while remaining a cosmopolitan space of dialogue and movement .

At 113, rue Oberkampf I imagined a belvedere overlooking a sunken garden, a covered patio prolonging the post office entrance. ( bucolic horizon ) .

I myself suggested adding a sequence of workshops and offices for craft industries and the liberal professions, so as to enrich the diversity of a complex designed for a homogenous population in rapid rotation (young post office workers). In the same way, I wanted to design a wide variety of housing units so as to meet the requirements of difference, the exception I consider essential. In these spatially qualified places, requiring little or no material investment, the empty spaces permit immediate appropriation. They also take their legitimacy from their situation within the project as a whole.

This device can also be seen at Albi, where the problem was not the treatment of irregular party walls, but of a ravine marking a cesura in the urban fabric. The space in front of the theatre follows the slope of the valley in the manner of an open-air proscenium (the proffered void corresponds precisely to the solids stipulated in the brief).

### **“Polarities”**

These interventions are attempts to absorb oversized spaces that pose a threat to the city. They are also figures that rearticulate fallow land within the city. The crèche at rue des Recollets articulates the entrance to the Parc Villemin and the aligned façades leading to the canal Saint-Martin.

With rue Pelleport, the case was somewhat different. The problem was to confer a common scale on groups of buildings of contrasting dimensions: neo-Hausmannian street façades, a seventies low-rise block, and the small town houses of the rue des Pavillons. The monumental character of the figure overlooking the crossroads (“the Watch” (or: “the Lookout”)) is palliated by the composition of the building (a succession of folds dilating toward the outside and condensed at the centre).

### **“Accumulations”**

I also design non-urban proposals. These schemes, which do not create urban promenades, are so to speak autonomous compositions.

At the theatre in Blois, fragmentations and accumulations prefigure the city to come. On the banks of the Loire, colourful volumes set on a gigantic stage constitute a festive setting for theatre and music.

Set amid pylons, metal boxes, aeroplanes and motorways - an embryonic suburban landscape - the restaurant at Roissy constitutes an additive composition of blue blocks in levitation, creating a shelter related to reinvented nature.

## ATHENES . ROMAINVILLE

Finally, I should like to speak of one of my earliest projects, “The Itinerary as a Constituent of Space”. To respond to the brief of this national competition for young French architects - “Building the suburbs”, I had to tackle several pressing problems. In the absence of urban density, how can one recreate the densifying effect of the street? How is it possible to crystallize spatial relations without mechanically reproducing traditional urban configurations?

In the course of my many visits to the site, the theme of an eventful itinerary became obvious to me, as did the notion of working with sculptural forms - a relative betrayal of the official brief, yet reflecting a precise analysis of needs. The punctuations (bus shelter, market...) constituted a recital of forms.

Though I have never built this project - and though I have never built anything like it - my architectural realisations have always been inspired by its principles. 113, rue Oberkampf and 100, rue de Belleville were both conceived as narrative structures involving visual and physical itineraries - compact fables of form and colour.