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## STANDARDISED ALEATORIK: AGLAIA KONRAD'S PICTURE BOOK OF PAST CITIES OF THE FUTURE

»The new magnetic or world city will be static and, just like the image symbol, all-embracing.«<sup>1</sup>

Set out full-bleed on the A4 pages of the magazine *Camera Austria* we are faced with photos of urban spaces, some in pairs on facing pages, others in groups of three. To all appearances this series of a total of thirteen pictures by Aglaia Konrad would not seem to follow any particular principle of organisation; lacking captions and, thus, designation, these sequenced images cannot be assigned to any tangible space or designable site, i.e. a city, and sometimes not even to a country or continent. (Even if we imagine the people traversing underground passages to be Japanese. And even if they actually were Japanese: in what passage, in what city are they moving?) International would thus appear to be the appropriate qualification for these pictures. An allocation that would seemingly cast us back upon the urbanistic models and stratagems of representation arisen from the so-called international style of classical modernism.

As familiar as these photos may appear to us for this very reason, what they actually depict can only be described as non-places in the meaning of Marc Augé's book of the same title; transitory spaces photographed from a wide variety of angles, displaying architectural ensembles, breaks or organisational structures of urban life; intermediate sites that we believe we have passed through and viewed many a time, even though the photographer has taken them from the secondary and thus merely projected pictorial realms of the cinema screen.

What then might the function of these beautiful, mute images be? – spaces that you would often not want to enter. What contexts can we integrate Aglaia Konrad's photographic undertaking into? What traditions does it build on, what associations does it evoke?

With the aid of the term places we can conjoin the various strata of manifest representations of the city – meaning both built architecture such as plans and urbanistic concepts but also photographs – with those aimed at reflecting the representation and representability of topography and urbanity in terms of theory. However, the designation places not only denotes its negation, non-places, conceptions of order and disorder, i.e. the major antipodes that are companion to all reflection upon organisational urban structures, are equally inherent to this notion.

### Order

The frame of reference divided into an axis of abscissas and an axis of ordinates, upon which all grid structures are based, is not only the recipient of topographies or a support for architectural or urbanistic constructions (cf. aerial photos illustrating the grid structures of urban planning). With the advent of structuralism, the horizontal was no longer merely understood spatially but was also designated as a syntagmatic axis in charge of time flow, i. e. all narration, while the vertical, the paradigmatic axis, was given the function of interrelating generic quantities and abstracts. This principle of a bivectoral reference of various systems of order turns up again in the conceptions of postmodern geography. »Geography may not yet have displaced history at the heart of contemporary theory and criticism, but there is a new animating polemic on the theoretical and political agenda, one which rings with significantly different ways of seeing time and space together, the interplay of history and geography, the 'vertical' and 'horizontal' dimensions of being in the world freed from the imposition of inherent categorical privilege.«<sup>2</sup> As a countermove to a dead, immobilised, undialectical and fixed conception of space which had been confronted with rich, fruitful, living and dialectical time – Foucault believed he could connect this split with Bergson<sup>3</sup> – geographers sought to reorganise both relations: For space had traditionally always denoted geography for them, whereas the prevalence of time (criticised by them) was postulated by historians. The central matter of concern for a new geography was to intertwine the making of history with space as the product of social interaction and also with the construction and design of human geography. It aims to conceive space, time and the social determinedness of existence simultaneously and as being equal in value: The temporal axis imagined in the vertical can thus no longer be viewed in detachment from a dynamic interaction with the spatial axis imagined in the horizontal (and vice versa), not only because this is the only model of describing contemporary landscapes (territories) but because understanding one quantity as a function of another would appear to be the only proven model of contemporary critical thought. The conceptions of postmodern geographies thus fall back upon Foucault's term heterotopias.

Although the author of a now classic work of architectural historiography, *Raum, Zeit, Architektur* (Space, Time and Architecture), separated these ordering words with commas<sup>4</sup>, for contemporary architectural theorists, urbanists and geographers these substantives are today only thought in their plural form and in their multifarious interweave. For as Foucault states: »We are in the epoch of the simultaneous, we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and the distant, conjunction and divergence.«<sup>5</sup> Heteronomous (heteroclitic or heterogeneous) relations, although still defining placements, but which no longer allow us to refer these to each other monovalently, determine the structure of our cities: Foucault not only designates »traffic sites«, roads, trains, i.e. vectors indicating movement, which are simultaneously traversed in motion<sup>6</sup>, as clusters of relations whose interrelations can be defined, but also »stop sites«.

To my mind, Foucault's short lecture text on »Other Spaces« illustrates the fruitful interaction of media theory and urbanism over the course of this century, particularly since the sixties. Or, to put it even more clearly: Urbanism, understood as thinking in communicative structures since Sitte (see below), is always media theory per definitionem.<sup>7</sup>

Urbanism: Conceptions of the city between geometry and chaos

City planners always saw the city as an aleatoric formation. Thus, it is hardly surprising that Sigfried Giedion sees the quintessential skill of the city planner in his ability to combine inhomogeneous parts to a homogeneous whole: »The touchstone of a city planner is to be found in his ability to bring order to the multi-piece complex with which he is confronted.«<sup>8</sup> According to Aldo Rossi, who wanted to see the city not only as architecture set into concrete, but rather as a process of restructuring in a state of continual development, i.e. as a building process inscribed upon the very course of time, two conceptions of urban development may be extrapolated from the literature: On the one hand the city appears as an architectural product of functions and, on the other, as spatial structuring. Models that strive to scrutinise the city according to functional entities are based upon social, political and economic facts. City constructs based on the spatial are in contrast founded upon genuinely architectural or geographical reflections.<sup>9</sup>

Every reflection on urban areas would either see them as being chaotic structures (as evidenced by the countless metaphors taken from nature – ant hills or plant growth to which Giedion compares them), or as a formation to be subsumed to geometrical order. Although it must be said that subjecting aleatoric structures to a system of coordinates was the starting point of reflection on urban development. Francesco di Giorgio Martini (1439 – 1502) had already suggested a third possibility of subjecting cities to structures, arranging them as polygons in a chessboard system. And up to Malthus' discovery of exponential growth, science strove to subdue the chaotic growth of the cities with the aid of ordering grids.

The reference of horizontal and vertical projected on to a plane surface in the end came to be the decisive factor for modernist architecture although the Cartesian system of organisation was later extended to include an at least three-dimensional space. I say at least three-dimensional because in modernist conceptions the two space coordinates and the coordinate of time were augmented by the coordinate of motion, the fourth dimension in their reflections on urban development: »Traffic is a vital function whose momentary state must be graphically represented. The determinant causes and the effects of its varying intensity will then be clearly evinced and it will be easier to recognise the critical points. Only a clear representation of the situation will permit us to realise two imperative progresses: to assign a precise purpose to each traffic route, be it intended for pedestrians, cars, lorries, or long-distance lorry drivers; [...]« [italics; H. W].<sup>10</sup>

Camillo Sitte, one of the first theorists of modern urban development with his 1889 paper »Urban development according to its artistic principles. A contribution to solving the latest issues of architecture and monumental sculpture with special reference to Vienna«, also falls back upon metric geometry, seeing the rectangular, radial and triangular systems as the basic figures of road construction. However, the aim of thinking road routes in terms of grid structures is to satisfy not artistic but rather communicative interests – much as the title of this work would appear to suggest otherwise. Although communication, seeking to regulate the road network – which is the point of interest for our reflection on the representability of city space – can only be taken in the abstract: For the road network itself, Sitte postulates, is never easily comprehensible and may only be grasped in its two-dimensional translation on the plan. But even if these links are analysed with the aid of cartographic plans, Sitte attaches a sensorial meaning to the communicative systems of the road system make-up. From a purely technical stance, the communicative function of the road network can hence be experienced both in the abstract – with the aid of a plan – and also in more concrete terms, i.e. with the senses.

Architectural and photographic modes of representation

With the advent of the Renaissance era, not only erecting manifest buildings came to be the field of action or work of the architect but equally so the representation of projects. The moment it became possible to construct spatial formations on paper and thus to develop them in two dimensions in the abstract – following the principles of order of coordinate systems – the space assigned to architecture was no longer merely sensitive but also intelligible.<sup>11</sup>

The continuous space of central perspective that was based upon Euclidean geometry was centred around Man himself. However, thanks to the privilege of sight and a unique principal point that had to coincide with the point of vision the new virtual space was conceived in terms that were too restrictive to allow us to think all the dimensions of space. Which is why since the Renaissance period philosophers and mathematicians sought to introduce new reference quantities of this space conceived in terms of geometry. Among others, towards the end of the 19th century, Henri Poincaré was occupied with topology, a »géométrie élastique« invented by Reumann under the heading of »analysis situs«. This new discipline maintains that two figures are equivalent wherever it is possible to obtain one from the other by means of a continuous deformation. In this way, a circle is equivalent to an ellipse or any other kind of closed curve, but is not equivalent to the segment of a line as this is not closed. If we now take an original drawing and an inferior, because inaccurate, copy created by an inept draftsman, in view of the deformed angles and proportions both figures may not be viewed as being equivalent in terms of metric geometry or even projective geometry, although they are according to the principles of topology.<sup>12</sup> All new forms of mathematical representation – from the kinaesthetic geometry of the Russell follower Jean Nicod, no longer

comparable to the experience of the world as we know it, to the conception of fibre bunching evolved by the mathematicians Serre, Steenrod and Milnor – resulted in the redefinition of concepts of space by anthropologists and psychologists. For example, the group centred around Jean Piaget at the end of the sixties sought to approach perceptive space with the aid of topological representations.<sup>13</sup>

As opposed to the city models of European modernism that were chiefly based upon finite and static conceptions of space, following World War II US urbanists maintained that space, or to be more precise, spatial design, could not be conceived without its dynamics, i.e. its experience in time. In contrast to all previous working hypotheses of architecture and urban development that had thought it possible to depict sketches as three-dimensional structures, urban planners at the »MIT Harvard Joint Center for Urban Studies« saw them as being manifestations of process sequences subject to a temporal dimension. Urban development was not to be conceived merely virtually as a process but was also to be represented materially as such. Along these lines, fascinating methods of applied urban development and its representation on a two-dimensional support – the plan – were evolved in the late fifties and early sixties: »These include Louis Kahn's sketches for Philadelphia with their specially developed hierarchies both for motor and pedestrian traffic, its metaphor of urban movement as a circulatory system based on water, its new mode of representing this new circulatory system, and its new typology of 'silo buildings' for cars.«<sup>14</sup> After Kevin Lynch of MIT had published a book on the image of the city in 1960, in collaboration with a group of researchers he analysed the systems of motion going to make up the city experience – calling to aid the latest findings of perceptual physiology and psychology.<sup>15</sup> On the basis of the three modes of motion: that of the perceiving body (moving along a path on foot or in a vehicle), the apparent movement of the environment (»the inhabitants may be in real migration and yet it is the physical form that appears to move.«<sup>16</sup>), and the real movement of the environment the aim was to evolve adequate models of orientation, i.e. representation, for these modes of movement, models that would allow us to subdue the road network with the aid of meaningful sequences.

The sequential structures resolved into sequential units were arranged from the viewpoint of image construction. For the driver's attention was to be directed by the intensity structure of the drive and by the pictorial information sequence of the road. This conception of city spaces perforce produced the development of new forms of architectural notation: »The city planner cannot go into the city and turn everything upside-down. He works with symbols and so he must avail himself of an appropriate language for creating and recording motion and sequence. [...] As things are today, the drawing is still the handiest instrument. Yet architectural drawing, as useful as it may be for capturing physical reality, proves to be inadequate for recording perceived reality. What is required is a language that uses symbols of experience. [...] Growing knowledge of sequences would enable us to read structures more clearly in rows of perspective [...].«<sup>17</sup>

In practical terms, the aim was to portray traffic routes and city spaces on a variety of strata: With the aid of vectors designed to mark off the different views of the driving subject and with the aid of roads drawn in three dimensions recording the various topological levels, motion was incorporated into the representation of physical space. In this way it was possible to sketch »the 'pictorialness' of city and landscape in connection with the effects of the new technological, social and economical realities«<sup>18,19</sup> The fact that the physically tangible outside world was to be depicted on one and the same support simultaneously with its being observed, or that this actually seemed feasible, was all thanks to the interdisciplinary debate taking place at MIT between artists, perceptual physiologists and scientists employing the universal machine computer with the aim of elaborating new modes of representation.<sup>20</sup>

All practical expositions of these scarcely developed theorems and all efforts aimed at finding models for representing the multifarious motility of city spaces in a suitable fashion fell foul of the international crisis atmosphere prevailing at the end of the sixties. The accompanying wave of repolitisation and rehistorisation of theory disavowed the US urbanists in the post World War II period not only as ahistorically acting normativists but also consigned their work on possibilities of dynamic representation on static supports to oblivion. All attempts to centre urbanistic investigations and plans on the inhabitant's perception of city spaces and the driver's perception of roads were countermanded thereafter.

Frederic Jameson's angle on the history of urbanism is a different one in that he starts from the assumption that the question of the spatial experience of the corporeal human being as dictated by phenomenology had in his opinion been supplanted in the sixties by structuralistic spatial analyses that had started to read urban space, meaning both the individual building and the city as a whole, as a text. To his mind, this has given rise to an interpretation of individual objects and ensembles based upon the various possible linkages, be it in that assumptions had previously been based upon a unified collection of codes shared by all architects of a particular period, or rather upon a collage system that could incorporate allusions to the past or ironic comments of the present and that would also permit us to conceive radical breaks or radically new notations. Where previously these positions had seemingly allowed new concepts of subversion for some time, today, he propounds, they have become obsolete as new utopias, mere variations on earlier ones: »Yet the city, however it is construed, is space-in-totalization; it is not given in advance as an object of study or analysis, after the fashion of the construed buildings. (Perhaps even the latter is not given in this way either, except to the already abstract sense of sight: individual buildings are then 'objects' only in photographs)« [Italics: H. W.].<sup>21</sup>

But was it not precisely this inference that had created the axiom of investigations carried out by urbanists at MIT? Had they not sought to wrest representation from the grip of statics along with the dynamics of the city that they aimed to take into account in their depictions – by founding their concept of representation upon Heinz von Foerster's model of the interactive weave of the environment and the process of observation and by analysing urban space according to structural segmentation.<sup>22</sup>

But if city always implies a complex space and if photography is able to represent static objects and to segment the city into static objects, what then is the function of Aglaia Konrad's pictures?

For the city planner, so Sigfried Giedion, cities had ever been aleatoric formations that had to be subdued with the aid of an abstract order. If it has been possible to subordinate these standardised aleatoric to other modes of representation in the course of this century, these methods of computation and representation certainly build on a two-dimensional support.<sup>23</sup>

But how then can these stases of space and time – that photographs always are – reproduce dynamic city structures?

»The motion that we perceive has nothing whatsoever to do with the 'reading' of perceptual objects as described by Wölfflin, i.e. reading them like a sentence, left to right. (In his 'Reflections on Art History, 1941, he proves that the meaning of images changes for this reason if viewed in a mirror). In view of the fact that we 'read' an image from left to right, Arnheim infers, movement in the image in this direction is perceived as being greater.«<sup>24</sup> But if reading (i. e. disciplined and disciplining sight) controls our perception, thus if the dominant sense »sight« (German »Blick«, also suggesting »view«), (our most primitive sense, being the only three-dimensional one), substantially shapes our experiences, then there is nothing to stand in the way of two-dimensional representation of entities (all other experiences can be simulated in perception). And it was in this way that the Hungarian artist, typographer and photographer Gyorgy Kepes, who had gone to the New Bauhaus in Chicago with Moholy-Nagy as head of the »light department«, before coming into contact with the normative urbanist architects at the »School of Architecture« at MIT in 1946, succeeded in reading »visual signifiés« in dynamic terms. »We look at a photo of two men sitting on a bench. Each element of the picture evokes associations. One of the men is dressed better than the other. They are sitting back to back. Their bodies, their posture allow any number of associative assumptions. We compare them with each other and we discover differences and similarities. We try to reconcile these differences with similarity. The picture becomes a dynamic experience. The differences we discover create a self-movement of the image.«<sup>25</sup> Not only do Kepes' writings point out that our contemporary reflections are still bound to classical modernism (not only in the abhorrent satellite towns) by illustrating the fact that the Vision in Motion (the title of Moholy-Nagy's last book) congenial to the status of cities as »space-in-totalization« cannot be conceived solely as the representation of dynamics on dynamic, i.e. moving, supports. (In a number of installations, Aglaia Konrad uses a combination of moving and static image sequences.) Because the co-interpretation cannot link up inhomogeneous components to form one integrated whole (cf. Giedion) nor can it enable the communicative structures of the cities to be recognised (cf. Sitte).

Art consists in not doing without the coordinate system (= plan) as an instrument of cognition but rather in integrating it into other modes of representation that allow us to represent dynamics with the aid of a plane, static surface – even though this would appear to be a contradiction within two systems of representation.

Aglaia Konrad's photographs – always pictures of urban places – follow the criteria of order traced out above that classical modernism owes to our modes of representation borrowed from the Renaissance. Order and chaos of city spaces, as manifested in the background and foreground, are augmented with views from the air that reveal the fact that urban spaces by and large cannot do without the criteria of organisation, abscissas and ordinates. With close-ups of people moving around in ubiquitous urban spaces following photos of modernist buildings or public waiting rooms and prestigious function rooms, the photographer seems to be presenting us with all the possibilities of representing urban space that have been acted out in the course of this century (at the latest): statics and dynamics, chaos and order etc. These then are the modes of representation that have been run through as possibilities of a modernist, dynamic urban development. Aglaia Konrad's photo series draw our attention to this history because they present us with places that we have walked through, seen, traversed and used.

1 Marshall McLuhan, (...) Understanding Media, Dusseldorf-Vienna-New York-Moscow 1992 (Ger. 1968; Engl. 1964), p. 54. Large parts of this paper are based upon my essay: »In which country would you expect to find these photographs? Heterotopical reading of city representations«, in: Georg Bossong, Michael Erbe, Peter Frankenberg, Charles Grivel und Waldemar Lilli (ed.), Westeuropäische Regionen und ihre Identität. Beiträge aus interdisziplinärer Sicht, Mannheim 1994, pp. 257 – 285.

2 Edward W. Soja, Postmodern Geographies. The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory, London-New York 1989, p. 11.

3 cf. Michel Foucault, »Andere Räume«, in: Aisthesis. Wahrnehmung heute oder Perspektiven einer anderen Ästhetik, Leipzig 1991, pp. 34 – 46. The »Des Autres Espaces« lecture was held at the Cercles d'Etudes Architecturales in Paris on March 14, 1967.

4 cf. Sigfried Giedion, Raum, Zeit, Architektur. Die Entstehung einer neuen Tradition, Zurich-Munich-London 1992 (Ger. 1976, Engl. 1991).

5 Michel Foucault, op. cit., p. 34.

6 cf. not only the works of Paul Virilio but also Vilém Flusser, e. g. the same, »Nomaden«, in: auf, und, davon. Eine Nomadologie der Neunziger, Graz 1990 [=herbstbuch eins], pp. 13 – 38. Also: Peter Sloterdijk, »Ist der Zivilisationsprozeß steuerbar? Versuch über die Lenkung von Nicht-Fahrzeugen, ibid., pp. 41 – 63.

7 Thus it is hardly surprising when McLuhan repeatedly falls back upon Lewis Mumford or that Virilio is an urbanist. Even attempts by the CIAM to conceive urban structures could not do without consideration of modern communication media and thus telematics.

8 Siegfried Giedion, op. cit., p. 117.

9 cf. Aldo Rossi, *Die Architektur der Stadt. Skizze zu einer grundlegenden Theorie des Urbanen*, Dusseldorf 1972 (Italian 1966), pp. 12 and 15. Rossi's much-received book made the city itself the focal point of urban development at the end of the seventies: The history of urban space started to become the model of reference employed in urban development. [Cf. Thilo Hilpert, »Der Historismus und die Ästhetik der Moderne. Eine Einführung«, in: the same (ed.), *Le Corbusier's »Charta von Athen«*. Texte und Dokumente. Kritische Neuausgabe, Braunschweig/Wiesbaden 1988 (1984), p. 9f. Although it must be said that this recollection of the historical dimensions and stories of the city did however cause all the dynamic models of representation evolved by urbanists in the sixties to sink into oblivion (see below). Only due to the fact that postmodernisms began to lay great stay by concepts of representation that it has become possible to recall them again today. In this context, it should also be mentioned that Foucault's model of heteropias is equally a product of the sixties, i.e. it was formulated before the rehistorisation of theoretical thought.

10 Le Corbusier, op. cit., p. 149.

11 cf. Jean Pierre Le Dantec, *Dédale le Héros*, Paris 1992, p. 93.

12 cf. Henri Poincaré, *Dernières Pensées*, Paris 1913, a. Jean Pierre Le Dantec, op. cit., p. 191.

13 cf. V. Bang, P. Gréco, J.B. Grize, Y. Hatwell, J. Piaget, G.N. Seagram and B. Vurpillot, *L'Epistémologie de l'Espace*, Paris 1964.

14 Alexander Tzonis, Liliane Lefaivre, »U.S.A. 1960: Die Erfindung der New Urban Landscape«, in: *Arch+*, no. 112/June 1992, pp. 72 – 78, p. 74.

15 cf. Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, Cambridge, MA, 1960. And: Kevin Lynch, John R. Myer, Donald Appleyard, *The View from the Road*, Cambridge, MA, 1964.

16 Donald Appleyard, »Bewegung, Abfolge und Stadt«, in: Gyorgy Kepes (ed.), *Wesen und Kunst der Bewegung*, Brussels 1969 (Engl. 1965), pp. 176 – 192; p. 180.

17 Donald Appleyard, op. cit., p. 192. Italics: H. W.

18 Alexander Tzonis, Liliane Lefaivre, op. cit., p. 74.

19 »For the sake of simplicity the diagram of sequence was drawn separately from the city structure. Its orientation is recorded with a kinetic band that swells when the road rises and shrinks when it slopes down, thus enabling a three-dimensional representation of the carriageway. Only those points are recorded that are visible from the roadway. Distant visible points are indicated with an arrow from the road, and spatial changes are indicated by means of clefts, overpasses, hills etc. [...] The main aspect of the sequential division is the rhythmic change of direction that is accelerated when the road slopes down towards the city centre. This movement is assigned to views of small sequential centres located near the axis which slide past reciprocally.« This is how Appleyard describes the sequential representation of a road of the city of San Tomé in replanning which he worked on around 1965. cf. Donald Appleyard, op. cit., p. 190.

20 These were manifested, for example, in the series of lectures aired by Gyorgy Kepes entitled »Vision + Value Series« (1-3). cf. Gyorgy Kepes (ed.), *Structure in Art and Science*, New York 1965 (=Vision + Value Series); the same (ed.), *Wesen und Kunst der Bewegung*, Brussels 1969 (Engl. 1965; =Vision + Value Series); the same (ed.), *Zeichen, Bild, Symbol*, Brussels 1972.

21 Frederic Jameson, op. cit., p. 35f.

22 cf. Gyorgy Kepes, »Introduction«, in: the same (ed.), *Structure in Art and Science*, New York 1965, pp. i-vii. cf. also: the same, »Introduction«, in: the same (ed.), *Wesen und Kunst der Bewegung*, Brussels 1969 (Engl. 1965), p. xi. cf. Heinz von Foerster, in: »Vom Reiz zum Symbol«, in: Gyorgy Kepes (ed.), *Zeichen, Bild, Symbol*, Brussels 1972, pp. 42 – 61.

23 The only exception to this are computer animations that let immobilised viewers in front of the screen traverse virtual city spaces.

24 cf. Martin Steinmann, »Form für eine Architektur. Diesseits der Zeichen«, in: *Faces*, 1991, pp. 1 – 4, here: p. 4.

25 Gyorgy Kepes, op. cit., 1972, p. 173.