The Disciplinary City in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century

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The birth of city planning in the middle of the nineteenth century at first appears to have been a necessary response to population growth and to changes in modes of transportation. However, city planning may also be regarded as a response to the needs of established institutions to find ways of governing and surveying the population besides those of violence or the threat of punishment. This paper discusses three methods used to create the new disciplinary city: the increase in open space, the recourse to historicist styles, and the emergence of a transparent architecture.

A new awareness of the city as a spatial and architectural entity emerged towards the end of the eighteenth century. This awareness was complemented by the idea according to which forming citizens and constructing towns become nearly the same thing. In evoking this historical period, Michel Foucault draws attention to the development of "a reflection on architecture as a function of the objectives and techniques of the governing of societies," and claims that "every treatise which views politics as an art of governing people is necessarily composed of one or several chapters on town planning, community facilities, hygiene, private architecture" (*Dits et écrits*, IV 270-271). As he says in another interview, if "before, the art of building first responded to the need to express power, divinity, strength [. . .], at the end of the eighteenth century, new problems appear. It becomes important to use spatial planning for politico-economical ends" (*Dits et écrits*, III 192). Everything took place, then, as if political and economical order were no longer to be found without the prior construction of a spatial and architectural order. It is as if the exercise of power over the citizen necessarily entailed the appropriate reorganization of space.

Jeremy Bentham's architectural project of a prison (made public in 1791) provides an idea of what a politician at the end of the 18th cen-

tury would have wished to realize on the scale of a whole city. But if Bentham's system served as a model for numerous architectural reforms in prisons, hospitals, asylums and schools in Europe from 1840 onwards, the possibility of extending this system to an entire city died as soon as it was born. The fundamentally dissymmetrical vision on which this system was based would be difficult to conceive in a regime proclaiming itself to be democratic. More-over, the birth in the second half of the nineteenth century of city planning and modern architecture would allow the establishment to turn to much subtler panoptical and disciplinary methods. Instead of controlling the individual by the constant threat of punishment, these methods worked towards winning his confidence and reassuring him.

The mid-nineteenth century city was anachronistic. The industrial and transportation revolutions brought about such a demographic and vehicular influx that the city, often still walled in and fed by a network of roads and streets conceived as space for people to meet rather than one for traffic to circulate, appeared powerless to face these changes. The entire restructuring of the urban form was imperative. It is in response to this emergency that "the study of a completely new, intact and virgin matter," called "city planning" (81) by the Catalan engineer Ildefonso Cerdà, arose in 1867. Françoise Choay, who defines city planning as an autonomous field "born of the specific requirements of industrial society" ("Urbanisme" 176), as distinguished from "the previous urban arts by its critical and reflexive character and by its claims to a scientific basis" (*Urbanisme, utopies* 8), insists nevertheless on warning us: the discourse of urbanism is always ideological, it always presupposes underlying "ethical and political choices" that are neither made explicit nor acknowledged, and that "do not belong solely to the order of knowledge" (*La Règle* 16). Although these choices are not part of the order of knowledge of a given city, they nevertheless reflect a certain knowledge of man, that is, of the means to control and manipulate him in the most efficient way while allowing him to believe that he is entirely free.

Let us consider the example of Georges Haussmann, appointed prefect of Paris by Napoleon III in 1853, and whose methods rapidly traveled beyond France. Haussmann is often considered to be the first city planner, being "the first to have conceived the plan as a system by which the city as a whole is subjected to scientific treatment" (Wieczorek 9). Nothing was more indicative of Haussmann's desire for systematization than the brutal changes in spatial form that he imposed on

a city he considered to be choked with traffic. Whereas previous urban transformations had been undertaken little by little according to circumstances specific to different parts of the city, Haussmann did not hesitate to destroy the historical center, as well as the more densely populated zones of Paris, in order to make way for huge boulevards that cut through the city in straight lines.

Many historians and sociologists attribute the creation of these large trench-like breaches solely to Haussman's desire to create a fortified city capable of resisting revolutionary movements. Unlike tortuous, medieval alleys, these huge "empty spaces" made it possible to "cover Paris with machine guns" (Lefebvre 24) and canons. Who indeed would seek to question the fact that Haussmann was concerned with preventing riots, since he himself confessed in his *Memoirs* that the creation of grand boulevards must, "by an ingenious combination, render the people healthier and less willing to rebel" (Ragon I 127-128)? Nevertheless, I wish to question the assumption that in order to achieve this purpose Haussmann had only military strategies in mind (after all, he speaks of an "ingenious combination" and not just of one element). I wish to suggest, on the contrary, that his determination to put traffic at the top of his list of priorities conceals much subtler disciplinary intentions.

To destroy the relatively impenetrable parts of the city and dispel the threat they represent; to divide the town into districts with well-defined functions, to guarantee fast connections between them by means of grand rectilinear avenues; to canalize and expose to view, in these well-lighted avenues, the commodities and people that had before been lodged in dark, little alleys, or absorbed without a trace by the spongy body of a chaotic city; finally, to eradicate all that impeded fast and efficient traffic flow by leveling the soil and by constructing bridges and tunnels: these were some of Haussmann's objectives. To impose an urban development plan based on principles of visibility and abstraction could only lead to the normalization and homogenization of space, to a more efficient conditioning of the indeterminate mass that moved through it. Controlling traffic patterns and flow thus became an essential component of the mechanism of surveillance, even if people weren't aware of it as such. How could the vision of a geometrically remodeled city, purified of its insalubrious zones and opened to air and light, not arouse the admiration of even the most underprivileged sections of the population?

In what Foucault calls "quadrillage," the systematic restructuring of urban space into gridlike-patterns allows all individuals to be localized: what the pre-industrial period had accomplished by confining, fixing and systematizing into a hierarchy, city planning of the nineteenth century achieved by opening, clearing, favoring movement and guaranteeing the approximate equivalence of all spatial situations. The transformation of the city into an immediately legible and transparent space has always been part of the consolidation and implementation of power. For progressive planners including Haussmann, the success of this strategy lies in its capacity to give this same impression of legibility and transparency to those who "practice" the city. This impression was achieved by means of large divisions in the urban network, and by the presence of crude light uniformly illuminating beings and objects. Everyone could now see what the eye of power could see; a new form of discipline was progressively established by instilling in the urban population a moral code of self-control, along with the sensations of democratic experience.

The politics of what I will call piercing perspectives, though essential to the new science of city planning, is nevertheless just one aspect of it, another being architectural representation. Scientific research into the best possible form for the city also required the revision of the status of monuments and of the façades of dwelling houses. Although nineteenth-century Europe witnessed the birth of archaeological vision and the concept of the historical monument, the city did not yet exist "as an independent patrimonial object" (Choay, *Allégorie* 131), as is suggested by the transformations brought about by the first city planners. In their desire to adapt and restructure the urban organism, these planners relentlessly demolished the older sections of the city, regardless of their historical value, because of their insalubrious character and their failure to accommodate traffic flows.

Curiously, at the same time as these massive demolitions devastated the historical parts of European cities, there appeared the new cultural phenomena of "eclecticism" and "historicism." Paradoxically, the imposing constructions meant to replace the ruins of the past and to line the new boulevards were considered reminders of architectural styles of previous centuries. Neo-classicism, either discreet (as in Paris and Brussels) or excessive (as in Copenhagen and Vienna) – was the style commonly adopted for the façades of bourgeois residential buildings. In order to contrast with them, public buildings and monuments were often designed in gothic and neo-baroque styles.

It is as if the town had been amputated of its history in order to re-appropriate and emphasize this very history. Whereas the old styles lining the boulevards were displayed like various commodities in a store, the monuments, which in the past had been positioned so as to be discovered by surprise at the corner of a tortuous street, were now made visible from far off : their four sides were freed from the interference of minor buildings, and they were set in the middle of huge squares or made the focal points of long avenues.

The need to offer a semblance of stability meant that this display of history became most prominent in the very places where history itself was most scorned. To link the present to the artistic inheritance of the past through the plundering of ancient styles and the worship of a few preserved historical monuments, was to divert attention from the brutal changes inflicted by revolution, industrialization and urbanization. This display of history allowed the soothing and reassuring winds of pre-industrial and pre-revolutionary times to blow on the stormy present. Nevertheless, if the architecture of these new settings, made up of historical allusions and reassembled fragments of the past, provided a pleasant visual counterpart to the factory chimneys and towers that surrounded the city – it must not be forgotten that this architecture stemmed from a century of science, industry and mechanization. Indeed, whereas the artisanal building was appreciated because of its unique and exemplary nature, one observed in the modern city the proliferation of copies, in perfect illustration of what Benjamin has called the "age of mechanical reproduction." Where ancient houses and palaces were once erected to last for ever, now stood monumental, showy buildings, built with industrial, short-lived and removable materials. Adolf Loos, horrified by the "Ringstrasse" style, remarked: "These Renaissance and Baroque palaces are not actually made out of the materials of which they appear to be made. Some pretend that they are made of stone, like Roman or Tuscan palaces; others of stucco, like the buildings of the Viennese Baroque. But they are neither. Their ornamental details, their corbels, festoons, cartouches, and denticulation, are nailed-on poured cement" (Loos 96). Whereas the ancient buildings were of more fanciful and complicated forms, modern edifices, even those overloaded with decorations, were reduced to simple geometrical forms such as cubes and parallelepipeds, rigorously lined up and ordered according to orthogonal principles. While, in the past, building had taken place according to local circumstances and with no preconceived planning, town

planners transformed the nineteenth century city into a museum of historical artefacts that could be visited along a skillfully laid out and well-controlled route.

As a result of these developments, historicism went hand in hand with a disciplinary mentality. Under the cover of restoring continuity with a lost tradition, it manipulated the past, archived it, museified and froze it in stereotypical forms that were juxtaposed according to a visual and well ordered scenography. One can thus understand why, even if the historicism of the grand boulevards created a reassuring impression of the presence of the past, the same historicism froze the exercise of memory and of interpretation, having only their quantitative richness to measure against the more authentic historical and symbolic plenitude of traditional neighborhoods. The resulting city was one made for the sake of appearance. A Potemkin town, to use Loos's expression, whose artificial settings were intended to make us believe that "we are in a town exclusively inhabited by *nobili*," whereas the social reality was often much less glorious.[1] The modern city was nevertheless anxious about its appearance, precisely because it was at the same time a city of power. The historicist façades not only manipulated the people's thirst for the past; they also maintained the illusion of prosperity essential for the moral education of the governed.

I have been speaking primarily of the fashionable recourse to historicism in public and private buildings. These are to be contrasted with another set of buildings of the time: department stores and the structures created for international exhibitions. These appear like genuine laboratories where the boldest and the newest architectural experiments compete with one another. Entirely assembled with standardized elements such as metal bars and glass frames, they embodied a new type of building that rapidly put to use new techniques such as serial reproduction, and new materials of construction such as iron and glass. Moreover, these edifices formed the basis for a later stylistic debate launched in the twenties by the supporters of functional architecture. Among those taking part in this debate was Benjamin, who writes: "Giedion, Mendelssohn, Le Corbusier, are making man's dwelling place primarily a corridor, where all possible breath of air and light can circulate. What is

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[1] Loos designates Vienna as a city where "everybody wants to look better than he is [. . .] by means of the building he lives in" (96). He makes an analogy with the cloth and cardboard Ukrainian villages created by the Russian minister Potemkin with the intention of making the Empress Catherine II believe that the country was very prosperous.

coming bears the signs of transparency" (196-197). Benjamin's word "transparency" is the keyword of the esthetics of nineteenth century department stores and exhibitions. The transparency of an architecture of iron and glass contrasted with the opaqueness of an architecture of stone that was "a shelter [*Geborgenheit*] first and foremost" (Benjamin 196). Where stone closes space, iron and glass open it to allow air or light to penetrate. Where stone separates, iron and glass decompartmentalize and break down the borders between inside and outside. Where stone weighs down and monumentalizes, iron and glass create impressions of dissolution, volatility and dematerialization; where stone hinders visual freedom with its impenetrable surface, iron and glass favor the infinite circulation of the gaze. Iron and glass architecture therefore has the same qualities of visibility and demonstration as the grand boulevards that cut through the city. It is a matter of creating the conditions for the visibility of everything and everyone by everyone, so that everyone and everything contribute to the general circulation of a collective and anonymous gaze. It is a policy of security, but also of an underlying and unavowed policy of surveillance. This collective and anonymous gaze that constantly circulates is nothing other than the gaze of power in democratic guise. Its disciplinary imperatives are henceforth internalized by each individual.

Moreover, iron and glass are at once hard and smooth materials on which nothing, not even time, can leave its marks. This was John Ruskin's objection to the Crystal Palace, erected in 1851 for the Great Exhibition of London. An unconditional defender of an organic architecture that bears the traces of time, Ruskin believed that the Crystal Palace destroyed the ability of architecture to speak to the emotions or memory of an observer (Boyer 226). Similarly, in his pamphlet on the reopening of the Palace at Sydenham, Ruskin presents it as a mute and blank monument, as a white page on which nothing has been or can ever be written. It is worth noting that if the metaphor of whiteness linked to blankness seems, at first, to define the architecture of glass alone, in the course of the pamphlet, it begins to contaminate the other architectural practices of his time which, according to Ruskin, all commit the sin of lacking respect for the past: "white" are the "accuracies of novelty" with which "the upper part of [the Rouen Cathedral] has been already restored"; "whitened" is the city of Paris cleansed by the operations of Haussmann and henceforth "praised for its splendour"; finally, "whitewashed" are the "noble old Norman houses" deprived of their sculp-

tures and ornaments "in order to bring the interior of the town into some conformity with the 'handsome fronts' of the hotels and offices on the quay" (Ruskin 114-115). Whether the traces of time are erased, as in iron and glass architecture, distorted, as in historicist architecture, or museified, as in restoration – the ideology that governs all these acts is always the same. It is a matter of "swapping the status of the monument as sign for its status as signal" (Choay, *Allégorie* 16), a matter of emptying the monument of all deeply felt memories in order to transform it into a commodity for visual and intellectual consumption.

As a result, if the traditional monument is, by definition, what "shatters a living memory by the bias of emotion" (Choay, *Allégorie* 14)[2] and prompts the reactivation of stories of origins, the proliferation of buildings such as crystal palaces – buildings that seize the spectator's attention through their esthetic and technical values, to the detriment of memorial ones – could lead to a civilization with no history, no memory, no traditions and no identifying landmarks, and thus with no means of defense when faced with the manipulative and dominating practices of power.

The opening up of grand boulevards and the recourse to historicist or transparent architecture that characterized the modernisation of cities in the second half of the nineteenth century were thus disciplinary methods of extraordinary efficiency. By positioning the citizen as an observer without altering his status of being observed, power strove to normalize the citizen. The opposition that Foucault so carefully set between a society of spectacle, where what matters is the "render[ing] accessible to a multitude of men the inspection of a small number of objects," and a society of surveillance where, on the contrary, it is important to "procure for a small number, or even for a single individual, the instantaneous view of a great multitude" (*Discipline and Punish* 216-217), seems here to be resolved. The type of society we have inherited from the second half of the nineteenth century is at once a spectacular and a disciplinary society, one we could define by combining Foucault's two assertions: the problem that power wanted to solve through strategies of transparency and spatial rationalization is one of rendering acces-

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2 Choay reminds us that " the original meaning of the term 'monument' is that of the latin *monumentum*, derived from *monere*, a verb applied to something that speaks to the memory." She stresses that "the affective nature of the destination is essential: it is not a matter of giving neutral information, but of shattering the living memory through the emotions" (14).

sible to a multitude of persons the instantaneous view of a great multitude. On the one hand, this gives back to the masses the senses of security and spatial mastery sometimes lost in the brutal expansion of the city; on the other hand, it is a strategy that works surreptitiously towards the normalization of the individual and his conformity to the laws of a world based on productivity. The ideal of the disciplinary is that of a city of pure vision: a city that not only gives more importance to vision than to the other senses, but also one that favors the development of an abstract and intellectual vision to the detriment of a subjective and memorial one. There is, in short, a predominance of the optical over the tactile: "Look, but don't touch," say the objects displayed in museums, exhibitions and department store windows. The optical also predominates over the auditory: "Look at me, but don't speak to me," say the individuals who meet in the streets or who sit in the new modes of transport (tramways, trains). If the sense of sight has always had a certain monopoly in Western civilization, this monopoly has never been so overwhelming, it has never been so dissociated from the other senses, and it has never been so abstract. As David Michael Levin, a theoretician of modernity, writes: "Only in modernity does the ocularcentrism of our culture make its appearance in, and as, panopticism"(7).

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