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Urban environment

Garden restaurants – urban free space in a double sense

by Elsbeth Leisinger and Ruedi Jost
(Cf. P. 544)

At the present time, the city is caught up in a crisis, as so often in its history. People are even speaking of the end of the city. At the same time, however, what is primordial and essential about the city is being rediscovered. The city is being rediscovered not only as a constructed mass but also as a free space, in those places where it is not palpable, that is to say, in its open public areas.

Let us take an example of such an urban environment. Let's take the garden restaurant, the sidewalk café. Both represent free space in a double sense. In the first place, this is true optically, as an open area in the built-up mass of the city, and both are also open areas in the functional sense that they are public or semi-public.

Because the public free space and also the semi-public space has been sacrificed to traffic, the utilization quotient and rationalization, people nowadays simply live their lives in the private sphere. But the reciprocal relationship the public and the private spheres, which is so vital for the city, is thus disturbed.

On this point Hans Paul Bahrdt once wrote: "It is not disturbed because the big-city man is per se a mass man and therefore has no understanding for the cultivation of the private sphere, but because he no longer manages to see the ever more complex life of the metropolitan area in such a way that it is public for him. The more the city is transformed as a whole into an impenetrable jungle, the more he tends to withdraw into his private sphere, which is being increasingly elaborated, but in the end he begins to sense that the public sphere of the city is disintegrating..."

No matter how inconsequential, unimportant, unspectacular the garden restaurant, the sidewalk café, may be, it does constitute an important bit of urban environment, which ought to be protected and encouraged, for it is so vulnerable and so endangered, like everything else that is free. ■

The Swiss Federal Law on Protection of the Environment

The initiative of the Association of Swiss Architects (BSA) on the question of protection of the environment

(Cf. P. 548)

The Association of Swiss Architects (BSA) has followed up its demands in connection with the problem of environment protection which were formulated at the working session in Spiez in 1971 on the topic "The natural environment – planning and architecture". It has drawn the attention of the Swiss Federal Council to the realization that building activity too can be a factor in the destruction of the natural environment. The Federal Council thereupon gave the Association an opportunity to take part in the elaboration of the Federal Law on protection of the environment. In November 1973, the final draft of the expert commission on the Fed-

eral Law on protection of the environment was submitted. Hearings are now under way. Thanks to the initiative and the cooperation of the BSA representative, the expert commission has incorporated in the Law a section concerning environmental protection in the field of architecture. ■

Protection of the environment and political change

by Ruedi Jost
(Cf. P. 556)

From treatment of symptoms to preventive therapy

Measures to protect the environment have been increasingly applied ever since the beginning of the post-war period. These measures have been regarded, and continue to be so regarded, as technical correctives intended to mollify the effects of economic growth, of waste and of a naive optimism, and they have in fact created the preconditions for an ever more accelerated destruction of the environment.

Throughout the post-war period everything was regarded as politically settled, this attitude coming to an end in 1968 with the revolt of the younger generation.

Protection of the environment does not have a long history behind it. It starts with water. "Dying waterways" and the construction of hydroelectric power stations unleashed the first so-called environmental debates in Switzerland. The protection of water resources was constitutionally anchored by the voters and Cantons in 1953.

In 1962, 1969 and 1971 there were incorporated in the Swiss Federal Constitution by the voters and Cantons the following articles, and in this order: the article on the conservation of natural resources and historic monuments, that on land tenure and regional planning and that on protection of the natural environment.

Five theses on environment protection

While such beautiful gestures were easy enough to make, the destruction of the environment proceeded apace and laid bare with increasing plainness the chasm between theoretical realization and applied politics.

This yields our first thesis: The political change which had resulted from the ecological crisis was at the start only theoretical in character and did not manage to have any practical effects.

On the other hand, it may be objected that since the 50s more and more filtration and waste disposal plants have been built and continue to be built. Indeed, within a few years there has developed a whole «clean-up» industry, which is flourishing.

Second thesis: In actual practice, the ecological crisis has created a new industry, from the filtration plant to the processing of toxic substances, from the oropax to the oxygen vendor, which, treating mere symptoms, has repeatedly corrected the worst abuses, so that no fundamental change in human behaviour seemed urgent.

In keeping with this is the well-established planning method, which, as Lucius Burckhardt put it, rests on the belief that social problems can be resolved by structural means.

A good illustration of Burckhardt's thesis is the so-called ORL Institute guidelines. Here, for instance, the aspect "Health" is completely dealt with in the shape of a plan for a new hospital, and really ought, logically, to be labelled "Illness". The same thing applies to the other sectors; if no building plan emerges, there is at least a zoning plan.

Third thesis: Planning in general and the correction of obvious inroads on the natural environment (environment protection) have meanwhile become a kind of surrogate politics.

This pragmatic substitute for politics is eroding and disintegrating the traditional political ideologies to such an extent that the politicians are becoming increasingly unsure of themselves and have more and more to resort to the services of experts. The planning instrument called trend extrapolation, which as regards demographic and economic growth can do no more than reveal emergency situations that can no longer be treated on the level of superficial symptoms, is forcing the state, on a short-term basis, to proceed to particular planning measures without these measures being harmonized with any definite political concept.

The Swiss Federal Council is compelled by the force of circumstances to decree bans or building and demolition, urgent measures to protect imperilled areas or bans on Sunday driving. However, at least since the studies of Forrester and Meadows it has become clear that mere treatment of ecological symptoms would have to give way to a real policy of survival. There have been all kinds of fresh approaches, ordinarily taking the form of protests and alternatives from voters' initiatives and special movements.

This leads to the fourth thesis: The treatment of symptoms, seemingly so unpolitical, is degenerating increasingly into authoritarian short-circuits. As such they are half-therapeutic, but otherwise they are radical and seek to get at the root of the evil. The purely superficial therapies, however, are coming increasingly under fire from direct action campaigns on the part of the public.

Whereas the politicians seek help from the technocratic establishment and find it, many of the younger technocrats are now themselves intervening in politics.

And this yields our fifth and last thesis: A not insignificant number of younger technicians and experts are now beginning to lose their scientific innocence, are growing radical and are starting to orient themselves in accordance with political ideologies and are increasingly plunging directly into politics. But at this point it becomes imperative to reconsider our whole concept of environment. ■

Protection of the environment and energy crisis

by Theo Ginsburg
(Cf. P. 559)

The industrial countries, both East and West, are now in the situation of a drug addict who can no longer get a supply of his habitual narcotic. In the past we have grown so accustomed to using up, every year, more oil, more natural resources, more

luxuries, that a stabilization of our standard of living at the present level has the effect of a withdrawal of the drug which we want but cannot get.

Looked at from this angle, however, the energy crisis is actually a great opportunity for us! The past has shown that the industrial countries are too weak to curb, of their own free will, their urge to expand.

It would be a tragedy for the oil wells to be fully exploited from now on, as in the past, because in that way the inevitable crisis would only be postponed a few years and would then break out again even more destructively.

Unrestricted expansion creates dependence

What does the future look like? In our optimism about economic expansion we believed, like all the other advanced industrial states, up until recently, that economic expansion would have to go on undiminished in the decades to come. Thus the most recent energy forecasts for the year 2000 envisage a tripling of Swiss consumption, with oil imports and electric power production (via nuclear plants) having to be stepped up equally. Obviously no one has yet raised the question as to where we are to obtain so much oil 25 years from now; oil resources will be exhausted within a few decades with steadily rising consumption.

Alternative strategies for the future

Basically two alternatives are possible as a reaction to the increasingly visible shortage of conventional energy sources. There is the policy of plunging straight ahead with scientists and engineers being urged to develop new power sources as swiftly as possible in order to reestablish our independence of the oil-producing countries and at the same time to let our expanding economy function as before. Naturally, the nuclear power industry is taking this line.

Our line, on the other hand, is the development of a stable economic system in which the senseless squandering of resources is regarded as a deadly sin and the granting of top priority to the maintenance of optimum living quality and preservation of the natural environment ahead of any considerations of profit, increase in turnover and economic expansion. Parallel to this socio-political programme, new priorities would have to be established in the field of research and promotion of basically new techniques and power sources, which do not endanger man, society and physical nature.

Three distribution problems

A central task of the competent governments and authorities, therefore, must consist in preventing coming developments from leading to a stabilization or even to an intensification of social conflicts. At the present time, the rich countries with one third of the world's population lay claim to around seven eighths of all resources, while the enormous masses of people in the developing countries have to rest content with the other eighth.

Another distribution problem, which has hardly been recognized up to now, will become ever more urgent in the future. It has to do with the coming generations, who also have a right to the natural resources of our planet. Precisely because they cannot defend their own cause, it is our duty to advocate their cause. What we waste our children will some day lack.

Alibis in favour of economic growth

In order to justify continuing economic growth, the poverty of the developing countries and the vast means needed for environment protection are frequently adduced as alibis. With constant growth, however, these tasks cannot in the long run be coped with, since every problem resolved with the aid of new and ever more energy-intensive techniques gives rise to many new problems on the eco-

nomic, ecological and social planes. Steady growth, moreover, reinforces the unequal distribution of resources among the world's population and the generations and reduces the stability of our social and political systems.

The society aimed at, stable, and oriented more toward quality than quantity, will depend more on human creative powers than our present system, which seeks to resolve all problems on the basis of a materialistic philosophy of growth employing all possible technical and scientific means. ■

Constructed environment and human behaviour: A diagnosis of the situation (at the end of 1972)

by G. Barbey and Ch. Gelber
(Cf. P. 567)

Development of research

Some of the names associated with the emergence of "architectural psychology", beginning between 1968 and 1970, are Siegfried Giedion, Ernö Goldfinger and James Marston Fitch. These commentators on architecture, along with the psychologists, have revealed the nature of the multiple interactions between society and the natural environment surrounding it. They have drawn attention to the "experiential" connotations of architecture, that is to say, those that derive from the actual experience of using buildings.

There was an increasing interest in this complex of problems. In 1965, the Department of Psychology of the University of Utah was called on to examine the problem of architectural psychology. In 1966, a conference of investigators organized in St. Louis by the American Institute of Architects tried to reach some conclusions on such diverse subjects as residential ecology, systems analysis and the programming of urban installations. In the English-speaking countries in particular there was a considerable spate of studies, articles, anthologies and bibliographies between 1966 and 1972.

Analysis of sources of information

An analysis of recent publications implies the adherence to a certain order, the order obtaining in the regulation of the concepts involved. This scheme, both analytical diagram and table of contents, will serve as a guide during the analysis. The comparative study of the different systems of classification of topics permits one to get an idea of the progress of the project. Such an investigation, conducted with systematic rigour, would in itself be highly instructive.

The positive contributions made by psycho-architectural research can be made clear as follows. The given situation makes an optical impact on architects and the public; this clearly reveals the existence of automatic correspondences between the organization of the physical environment and the social equilibrium of the community; it shows also that good sense and respect for "functionalism" are not sufficient in architecture and planning to produce concerted effects on human behaviour...

Current studies conventionally refer to empirical situations where the individual observed is considered to be a totally neutral sample of society ("man" in the abstract), adaptable and malleable at will (the question of thresholds of tolerance and prejudices is left out of consideration). Under these conditions, it is understandable that the findings made in the course of similar studies are themselves also sufficiently inexact and give rise to widely varying interpretations, this rendering practical applications more risky.

Future perspectives

The main advantage of architectural psychology consists, in our opinion, in a better understanding of and forecasting of the whole range of possible human behaviour in the physical environment.

What is required is the verification of the findings and theories advanced, by way of practical experimentation. By multiplying the cases where research makes an attempt to "accompany" the actual practice of architecture over a prolonged period, we can expect real progress. This will in the end mean bridging the gap that separates the theoretical researchers and the practising architects. ■

Ecological aims in Swiss regional planning

by Beat Bürcher
(Cf. P. 572)

The aims of the regional planning are summarized essentially in the first Article, which in the National Assembly version reads as follows:

Regional planning shall:

- a) protect the natural bases of human life, such as soil, air, water and landscape;
- b) create the spatial preconditions for the development of personal, social and economic life;
- c) promote demographic decentralization with the formation of regional and supraregional centres of concentration and direct the growth of the large towns with these aims in view;
- d) realize a suitable limitation of residential areas with an eye to the future growth of the country and their proper utilization;
- e) promote a balance between rural and urban, economically weak and economically strong areas;
- f) preserve the unique character and beauty of the landscape and secure areas for recreational purposes;
- g) take into consideration the preservation of sufficient agricultural land to provide the country with its own nutritional basis;
- h) keep in mind the spatial requirements of national defence.

This list also contains ecological aims which to be sure are formulated in very general terms. Only their interpretation and concrete application can show to what extent they can modify global growth, the growth of different economic factors and the pattern of economic and regional growth.

The postulated protection of the bases of human life can be consistently interpreted only as the necessity of bringing about a state in which the regenerative capacity of the eco-system is guaranteed. This will have an effect on growth and rate of growth. The studies now under way on regional problems ought to show to what extent resources are even now being exhausted, which, once used up, can no longer be restored, and who, at least in the short run, profits from this development. They ought to show to what extent the reversible and irreversible regeneration deficit of the eco-system has already increased and to what extent a stabilization on a new level of lower-quality environment is possible. The postulated securing of adequate agricultural resources can only mean the necessity of covering the total foodstuffs needs of the population both quantitatively and qualitatively. The tying up of capital and labour in agricultural production could not fail to have its effects on other sectors of the economy.

As for demographic decentralization, options will have to be made that exclude extreme variants and also exclude extrapolation from earlier develop-

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ments. In this way, again, individual economic growth factors will be indirectly influenced without its being possible yet to derive the quantitative consequences.

However, the instrumentalities laid down in the regional planning law are not conducive to doing justice to these high aims.

The real cause of this discrepancy consists in the fact that the democratically organized community has no way of controlling the object of its planning projects. Control remains in the hands of a shrinking minority of property owners who are not directly subject to democratic processes. The public taxing power can operate only indirectly. And this entails an increase in often undesirable side effects, which cannot be checked.

Direct action on patterns of growth involves changes in the socio-economic system. The existing socio-economic system requires for the maintenance of its continued functioning a certain regional disequilibrium and it spontaneously generates new states of disequilibrium. The growth of metropolitan areas is, in view of present public policy, a vital prerequisite for maximum private capital yield, and this promotes still further the process of agglomeration. The growth of metropolitan areas, under present-day economic conditions, is also leading to a development in ground rents that creates specific private investment incentives and renders public investments more difficult.

Overcoming regional disequilibrium, the limitation of economic and regional concentrations, the prevention of one-sided functions, and the related restriction of traffic movements and energy consumption as well as the balanced use of agricultural land are, however, central ecological aims for the realization of which the necessary regional planning machinery has to be created. ■

Citizens participate in the planning of their community – The example of Avully/GE

(Cf. P. 583)

There is a great deal of discussion these days of the necessity for public participation in planning activities. The proponents of this kind of participation assert, and they are generally right, that planners in their work tend to overlook the real needs of those affected by the planning. Furthermore, the critics of present-day planning procedure brand it as technocratic, and they call for planning that takes account of human needs. To realize this demand, forums of citizens have already been established to deal with the working out of models and organizational schemes. With varying success initiatives have been launched in an attempt to convert public apathy into active participation. In Switzerland too experiments have very recently been carried out in this direction, mostly in the shape of planning competitions with public participation.

In this issue we are presenting a modest, but instructive, example: the competition for the planning of the new Centre of Avully, organized in the autumn of 1973. The people of this village in the Canton of Geneva were invited by the authorities – at the instigation of the actual planning office – to submit proposals for the site and ideas for the design of the Centre. The most interesting thing about this competition is the way in which information is evaluated and transmitted to the participants, the way possible working hypotheses are formulated and finally the way the competition material is kept to a minimum and simplified. Thus it was possible to get a larger number of people

interested than would otherwise be the case. To be sure, the planning measures of a small community like Avully are not very complicated, they are even simpler than those involved in an urban neighbourhood – we should like to stress this point here. It is therefore all the more easy to activate local public opinion. The modesty of this project, however, does not reduce the positive aspect of this initiative to overcome public passivity in connection with planning. ■

Art and ecology

by Peter Killer
(Cf. P. 599)

The changes occurring in the eco-system are engaging the interest of a large number of artists throughout the world. Changes have always been one of the most important inspirations of the artist. The artist has wanted to seize, to perpetuate, what is transitory: beauty, wealth, fame. The landscape painter has depicted the unique moment in the flux of seasons and weathers. Travel, that is to say, a change of place, has repeatedly been an enrichment for the artist, has been the instigation for engravings, pictures and drawings, which have been of the utmost value from the geographical and ethnographical standpoint as well. And the socially conscious artist seeks to represent social transformations that he has experienced or to unleash social changes that he wishes for.

The belief in the finiteness, the destructibility, of the world was just as strong up to the beginning of the industrial age as it is now; only at that time this belief had religious roots and did not, as now, stem from ecological and military-technical considerations.

In 1945 man learned that the world could be annihilated by pressing a button. How did artists react to this situation of a world on the edge of the abyss? – The figures of Giacometti, Germaine Richier, Marini became ever more fragile; the master of the world, man, had become a defenseless, feeble being. The ecstatic outbreaks of the Tachistes and Action Painters reflected the chaos that had replaced the old systems of order. In the mid-50s two art trends got under way which are managing to set the pace for the third quarter of the 20th century, Pop Art and its European variant, Nouveau Réalisme.

A sensitive awareness of ecological questions began in the cities. At the end of February 1972, Friedensreich Hundertwasser formulated his slogan: "Your right to a window, your duty to protect the trees."

The first artistic campaign to save the trees was Christo's project to package the trees lining the Champs-Élysées in Paris. Christo sought to transpose his working principle from the lifeless to the living realm. His plastic-foil packaging was not just packaging but also protection against mechanical destruction, against polluted air and polluted rainwater. Christo's project managed to make the public think.

The traffic juggernaut

The artist had already taken up a position against the automobile before it became everybody's whipping-boy. To be sure, the artists were more concerned with the car as a consumer fetish than as the environment-destroying means of transportation.

The car appears regularly in pictorial art, but only seldom does it assume a dominant role. An exception, for example, is the taxi which Salvador Dali presented in 1938 at the Surrealism Exhibition in Paris. His work, entitled «Rainy taxi», consisted

of a real car with two display-window dummies, heads of lettuce and live snails on the inside which were constantly sprinkled by a shower. In the case of Ives Klein, the car is not an art product but rather an art producer; in 1960 on a trip from Paris to Nice he exposed canvases on the roof of his car to the effects of weather and road dust, and then offered them for sale as ready-mades. The young German, "Macher" ("maker", as he styles himself) Schult did something similar a decade later, in this case a 20000-km race. He kept a precise record of his 20-day drive. ■

The city and its problems

At the 1st Biennale of Swiss Art, the Zurich artist Hugo Schuhmacher came forward with a "profit landscape". In still more drastic fashion he visualized problems connected with the ecological crisis. His works are not characterized by nostalgic mourning over what is threatened and has vanished, but by a challenge to the public to see the connections between destruction of the natural environment, economic growth and speculation.

Hans Gantert, also resident in Zurich, approaches ecological problems from an entirely different angle. Gantert deals with the organic, biological side. For the Biennale he very carefully covered a map of Switzerland with a crystalline overgrowth of drawn in concrete structures. Emilienne Farny, of Lausanne, deals with the same problem: the urbanization of the landscape and the destruction of its unique quality. The pictures painted from photos shot by the artist herself show the proliferation across intact landscapes of detached houses of average quality.

The relationship between art and ecology has for some now been overworked. Thus in New York John Gibson has put on an exhibition entitled "Ecologic Art", displaying works by Andre Christo, Dibbets, Hutchinson, Insley, Long, Morris, Oldenburg, Oppenheim and Smithson. Most of what was shown could be classified as "Land Art".

In the course of the last few years there has increasingly come to the fore the realization that self-discipline, renunciation of luxuries, etc. is the most urgent need if the equilibrium of the natural environment is to be preserved or reestablished. Only in this way can the wasteful exploitation of power resources and raw materials be reduced to a minimum. This realization has motivated the self-sufficiency experiments of young people throughout the western countries. Artistic activity has barely been affected by this principle of renunciation. The hypocrisy of the situation of the hermit artist who is dependent for the sale of his works on a well organized selling apparatus is all too apparent.

A very few artists have succeeded in an absolutely honest way in finding their way back to the simple life. One of them is the Dutchman Hans de Vries, a farmer's son, who for some time has been refusing to make works of art that entail inroads on the natural environment or disturb the natural rhythms of the physical world. ■