

The City as an Aggregated Object: A Manifesto for the City of the 21st Century

POSITIONS

The city is gone. Urbanism no longer exists. What is left is architecture. Architecture has become the ground for architecture. The city has become an aggregated object.

The city was once the locus of *civitas*. The city's identity was created by means of our coexistence with one another, its ideal form materialized in the geometry of the circle. The circle's circumference described a political boundary between inside and outside. In the diagram of the city as a circle, architecture is simply an anonymous mass. No single building is identifiable. Architecture forms the ground for all common spaces. These spaces occur as figurative voids and seem to be carved out of the architectural solid.

Urbanism has replaced the city. An endless grid has replaced the diagram of the enclosing circle. Urbanism is understood here to be the area of the discipline of architecture dealing with the material organization of urban expansion. Within the paradigm of urbanism, the city has turned into an endless grid of circulation. The spaces in between the grid lines are subdivided into equally sized lots, turning architecture into the spaces of inhabitation that conform to, and are guaranteed by, the subdivision of land.

The city of archipelagos is the next step after the city as a grid. Modernism transformed the city into confetti. In opposition to expanding the city based on an endless grid, cities like Frankfurt expanded their fabric. Therefore the beginning of the twentieth century saw a multiplication of housing units called *Siedlungen*. Architecture became a figurative solid on a single piece of land. In Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation these architec-

tural figures were liberated from the ground, making the land underneath continuous.

Following the city as an archipelago, the type transformed into the city-as-solid. Starting as a specific variation of the modernist *Siedlung*, the Viennese Superblocks became prototypical of the city as a solid in the postmodern city. Archizoom's No-Stop City turned the city into a single, gigantic solid. With this project, the city becomes a building, a mega-form. Architecture becomes a generic figure without any ground: a city of pure interiorities. Alberti's project is realized: *The house is a small city; the city is a large house*.

Today, architecture is the only thing left that can comprise the city.

Within the paradigm of the city as a circle, owners of houses occupied their property, with land belonging to the aristocracy or the church. The house was not built for returns on investments. The city as a circle was the city of pre-capitalist architecture.

In the paradigm of the city-as-grid, owners of houses were also owners of the land on which the house was built. Each apartment of the house was rented. The house was designed to produce a return on the owners' investments. The city-as-grid becomes the city of capitalist architecture.

In the city of archipelagos houses, as well as the ground underneath, were owned by the city or the state. The people living in houses did not pay rent, since those houses were not built to yield a return. Instead, inhabitants paid the maintenance cost of the houses. The city of archipelagos was the city of social democratic architecture.

In the paradigm of the city as a solid, the houses and the ground were collectively owned. Houses were not meant to produce a monetary return. Each owner occupied her own house. Costs of investments were limited to an amount that would allow each owner to recoup all of her investments within her lifetime. The state supported becoming an owner of one's house by funding mortgages in order to decrease the interest rate. The owner would never give up her home. The city of the solid was the city of welfare architecture.

Today, banks own our homes. We own our banks. Houses and the ground belong to us. Even when we live in our homes individually, we collectively own our ground, our facades, our staircases and our floors. Every architectural element belongs to us. What does this mean for the form of our city?

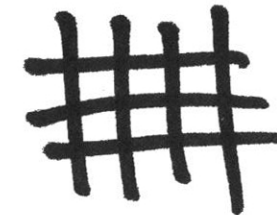
Until the eighteenth century, when the circular city died, architecture was part of a baroque ensemble. When the ground didn't belong to us but houses did, the form of the city was based on the fact that every building was considered to be part of a larger whole. Architecture was, according to Emil Kaufmann, a heteronomous element: an element that sacrificed its identity in order to serve the whole.

Over the last two centuries, the formal organization of the city has transitioned from the circle into scattered confetti made up of dispersed solids. When the ground and the house belonged to the same owner, architecture isolated itself from its surroundings. Architecture became, as Emil Kaufmann demonstrated, an autonomous element. Under this paradigm, architecture no longer serves the whole; it only serves itself.

Today, architecture belongs to everyone. Architecture has become the ground for architecture. Architecture is neither heteronomous nor autonomous. Architecture is both. It is discrete at the same time that it depends on its surroundings. The city, therefore, has become an aggregated object.

The bounded geometry of the circle was the model of the pre-capitalist city. The expansive grid was the model of capitalist urbanization. The archipelago was the model of the socialist city. The solid was the model of the welfare state. The city as an aggregated object is the model of late capitalism; perhaps it will be the model of post-capitalism.

Sketch diagrams, 2013. From top: The City as a Circle; The City as a Grid; The City as an Archipelago; The City as a Solid; The City as an Aggregate.



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