Architecture schools are fundamental deposits of knowledge and abilities, which have contributed productively for a long time to the growth of studies on architecture and the city. The aim of this book is to share the results of research work carried out under the patronage of EAAE and ARCC in the main European and American architecture schools on the issue of the city and its recent transformations. Through the comparison of different points of view, the goal is to highlight the need for a broad and open discussion, appropriate to the vastness and complexity of the problems faced.

The well known sentence by Leon Battista Alberti, “The house is like a small city and the city is like a large house”, is a brief indication of the subjects of the volume: the widespread phenomenon of urbanization of large parts of the world, the problems of diametrically opposed so-called shrinking cities and the severity of the effects of climate change and energy issues. Architectural and urban contents are also main themes in EU policy where the crucial role of Architecture has been stressed in many documents concerning the development of European cities.

These arguments are developed in a thematic interweaving that goes from architecture and city’s analytical and design techniques to those connected with organization, construction, security, planning, conservation and practice of a profession whose role has taken on ever greater responsibility within the human destiny.
Cities in Transformation
Research & Design
Ideas, Methods, Techniques, Tools, Case Studies

edited by
Marco Bovati, Michele Caja
Giancarlo Floridi, Martina Landsberger

scientific supervision
Adalberto Del Bo, Ilaria Valente

VOLUME I
CITIES IN TRANSFORMATION
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The city spreads out in all directions, sunk in and by its traffic, in and by its pollution, in and by its endless absorption in its own commotion [...] Thus a diffusion of the city is produced, a dissipation of its functions and places into peripheral areas which become less peripheral insofar as the centre – without ceasing to be central – spills out into them. The centre is everywhere and the circumference nowhere; or the vice versa. [...] There was a time in which the tentacular city surfaced from the municipal and fortified city. Today a multiplicity of sprawling structures forms a spider web which both unites the city with, and separates it from, the surrounding countryside. And it does so in a fractured proliferation in which every node and every link of service and business, of administration and circulation, replicates and advances by penetrating into a rising number of interstices and openings composed of a spongy, fleshy, coarse-grained matter which is the mutation of the urban fabric, its laceration, its recomposition and fringing, and all of these together. The city is a scattered totality.1

With these words Jean-Luc Nancy describes the contemporary city: a city that finds in Los Angeles – one of the symbols of the anti-city – its materialization and one of its most striking examples. Today these same words seem appropriate for the description of the majority of contemporary cities. Indeed, the observation of any map permits us to understand how city design has changed and how it is increasingly difficult to recognize its real meaning because it is almost impossible to distinguish the places and parts which make up the city.

Is it possible to live without a place? Is it possible to inhabit where places do not exist? [...] the dwelling place is not the house. Only a city can be inhabited; but it is impossible to inhabit the city if it does not lend itself to living, that is, if it does not offer places to live in. The place is where we pause: a pause is similar to the silence in a musical score.2

Translated from italian by P. Sacerdoti.


PART ONE. NEW SCENARIOS OF THE CITY AND DWELLING

Massimo Cacciari asks himself and answers himself, thus establishing a sort of bridge with what Robert Musil wrote a propos of Vienna in *The Man Without Qualities*:

So let us not place any particular value on the city’s name. Like all big cities it was made up of irregularity, change, forward spurts, failures to keep step, collisions of objects and interests, punctuated by unfathomable silences; made up of pathways and untrodden ways, of one great rhythmic beat as well as the chronic discord and mutual displacement of all its contending rhythms. All in all, it was like a boiling bubble inside a pot made of the durable stuff of buildings, laws, regulations, and historical traditions.3

As Musil wrote, what gives sense to the compact city and permits its characterization is the so-called “urban void”. Otherwise, in the so-called “generic city”, the void does not exist (“Sound itself is not an independent phenomenon but it is in constant and inevitable relationship to silence. Put in this context, the first note does not represent the beginning, but it comes from the silence which precedes it”4). The inhabited territory of the contemporary metropolitan city – indeed we inhabit territories in which the various functions are scattered according to purely speculative interests and not according to a plan for the city – does not take “silences” into consideration, does not permit pauses and makes distances unrecognizable. In the contemporary metropolitan city what counts is time, not space: the time needed to go from one point to another, not the acknowledgement of the spatial character of a place or landscape traversed, as was the case in the “classical” city. The space is an obstacle to the time necessary to cross it.

At one time the city was built according to a hierarchy of places which radiated from the centre towards the exterior, according to a precise design which determined its shape – central public spaces, residential areas and the work/industrial zone on the edge of the city.

These cities, with their telegraph wires and their exhaust gases, with their noise and their dust, with their swarming hustle and bustle, with their architectural maze of buildings and their innovations which completely transform their appearance every ten years, are gigantic factories of forms; but the cities themselves do not possess any form.5

The so-called “classical city” could not, in its construction and founding, ignore the issue of form. The very place in which it was to be built had to have a shape and had to be distinguished from the surrounding territory; it had to have its own size and limit. From this stems the need to identify a centre – the *mundus*: a circular hole dug in the centre of the city in which earthen products were collected. The centre had sacred and “orientational” value for both individual and social behavior and, therefore, became a necessary element for determining the city’s axes of construction: the *cardo* and *decumanus*. These axes were marked out by land surveyors whose job was also to define the *limen*, or boundary, of the city – also a sacred place where the walls would be erected one day.

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The limen is the furrow, or track, marked out by the plough. Each time the plough is lifted, an interruption is produced in the sacred enclosure. Each interruption corresponds to the place where the city doors are constructed. The doors, insofar they are an interruption in the design of the enclosure, represent a weak point, a place of "crisis". They allow for a relationship with the exterior, expressing a sort of contradiction in the construction of an element which, by definition, should be closed (closed because it protects what lies within and has a precise form) and at the same time open, so as to guarantee the survival of its "contents".

Thus the old city has its own shape and its own precise dimensions. It establishes a relationship of separation from the territory to which it belongs and is developed from within, according to a precise hierarchy of either private or collective places depending on whether they are meant for residential use or public "functions" – those which express the idea of State. The city, however, is not destined to remain unchanged in shape and dimension over time.

The city grows in size, it expands into the surrounding territory and exceeds the furrow that once defined its original dimension. Only the Greek polis aims at maintaining a controlled size because, according to the theories of Plato and Aristotle, an excessive enlargement would lead to a loss in people's rootedness, followed by a collapse in democracy.

This describes the condition of the city up until the end of the eighteenth century, when city walls began to be torn down and the decisive issue concerning the relationship with the territory and with nature arose. From this point onwards the problem of city building grew more complicated. Perhaps it is the first time that in describing such a process, we witness the appearance of words suited for identifying particular parts, or areas, of the city which are recognizable by the different positions they occupy within the urban fabric. We witness the beginning of discussion of such terms as centre, periphery, territory, and nature – terms that need continual examination in contemporary debate.

As mentioned above, the contemporary city no longer has limits, as is demonstrated by the observation of any regional map: an indistinct city without form spread out over a territory and void of any comprehensible logic ("The city spreads out in all directions, "diffusion-evaporation-dissipation" of functions and of places are the terms, the physical features, which best describe this phenomenon"\(^6\)). This leads to the "impossibility", or difficulty, of identifying its parts. The lack of limits – intended as a term of comparison among elements – makes it difficult, from within the city, to identify the boundaries between the places which make up the city (something that was possible and evident in classical cities).

To this effect, let us consider the example of those American cities built on a repetitious grid design which never differed regardless of the character of the place. Physical and geographic varieties get cancelled out in the grid design. In the same way, within the grid, the city develops indifferently, both horizontally.

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as well as vertically, without questioning the character of the locations, “with neither centres nor borders”, making it, thus, impossible to distinguish its parts.

In all these models the centre does not, however, entirely disappear; instead, it expands and multiplies, it pluralizes in polycentric models. Today Rem Koolhaas’s “generic city”, whose indifference to place is considered a value, well expresses the tendency of many architects [...] who are moving towards a single “urban world”, finally free from classical constraints [...]. The password is mobility, speed, fluidity. Away from the centre, long live junk-space: “fuck the context!” exclaims the fashionable architect [...]?

Perhaps we must begin from this consideration if we wish to develop a conceivable “idea of city” that is the expression of our society, a place with which we can identify and in which we can orient ourselves.

Cities In Transformation, the title of this book, represents, from this point of view, a sort of “slogan” under which various points of view are grouped together (they are represented in the four sections of the book). These points of view belong to those, who through their commitment to the fields of teaching and research, are confronted daily with today’s city.

The first section of the book “New Scenarios of the City and Dwelling” is articulated in four thematic groups which include purely theoretical issues – the theory of planning and of composition –, typological issues, and the illustration of some problems through the analysis of specific urban situations or through the proposal of some examples of planning. The last section, which is repeated in each of the thematic parts into which the book is subdivided, is dedicated to some didactic experiences and exemplifications.

In the organization of this first section of the book an attempt has been made to assume that the issue of city transformation could be tackled by following a sort of methodological path: from the knowledge of the issues to their exemplification through the in-depth analysis of some theoretical and compositional issues necessary for planning.

The first chapter, “Theory and Tools for Design”, consists of a series of essays in which the issue of the project of the contemporary city is tackled by starting from the in-depth analysis of some theoretical issues, which stem from Leon Battista Alberti’s well-known definition: “The house in like a small city and the city is like a large house”.

Karel Vandenhennde takes inspiration from Alberti to describe a public experience which is being carried out in Flanders, which is related to the construction of houses and to the rapport they establish with the street, considered as an element which characterizes city parts. Streets and corridors combine in the city as in the house. The street has to be constructed in a way that is respectful of the context, in order that the inhabitants may recognize and identify themselves in it. Greater liberty may be given, on the contrary, to the planning of the house, especially in its interior layout.

*Ivi*, 23.
THINKING THE CITY

Streets have always defined the design of the urban structure. Their crossing, in the classical city, has permitted to distinguish its various parts: the space assigned to the collective and public zone of the city and the residential zone characterized by the fabric of the blocks. Raffaella Neri wonders whether it is still possible today to conceive of such a design and what should be the shape and size of the “fundamental parts” of the city. Today is the street still the public space of the city par excellence, as in the classical city? The quality of a house depends on that of the public space with which it relates, thus a decisive element in planning the contemporary city will be the “re-design” or rather the reinterpretation of the concept of the urban block, considered as the place in which the collective and private dimension naturally meet and establish a relationship.

Carlo Gandolfi deals with the issue of the contemporary megalopolis, of the endless and characterless city. “Somewhere” and “Nowhere” are the terms used to describe the new metropolitan reality. Here – “somewhere” – objects and events devoid of any peculiarity and character are set aside indifferently, and they thus define in an indistinct way, any place, thus no place – “nowhere”. San Paulo is identified as the emblematic example of this way of building the city. Here, Paulo Mendes da Rocha’s work, in its attempt to define the architecture of the collective building in rapport with the construction of public space, represents a valid alternative for the characterization of specific urban places.

The rapport with the territory and thus with the landscape is the issue Alessandro Isastia deals with.

On the contrary, Pellegrino Bonaretti, by analyzing the peculiar case of Lombardy, with specific attention to Milan and to the north-west route which connects the city with the 2015 Expo area, foresees the possibility of thinking of the construction of a new linear city as a hypothesis for a new design of contemporary metropolitan Milan.

Almost as if wanting to keep all these issues together, Laura Pezzetti’s essay entrusts the capacity to construct a new strategy for the management of the contemporary city to a peculiar compositional procedure that is endless. The concept of “picturesque” elaborated by Joan Soane for the construction of interior spaces may also be applied to the urban structure. The picturesque would indeed permit the transformation of the chaos of the contemporary city into a new order, in which landscape, urban fragments and infrastructures are able to establish a new relationship.

When defining the transformation of the city, special attention ought to be dedicated to the issue of typology. The chapter “Typology” contains some essays which tackle this issue in a direct way. In principle, the development of new housing typologies representative of the “new society”, itself undergoing transformation, appears as the central issue. Marc Roehrle deals with the type of the collective home, which has developed in Europe over the last few years, and with its more infrequent application in the United States. Here the Campus and the university college are the emblems of the construction of a collective way of living in which, as in the city, public and private space relate to each other.

The elaboration of a typology representative of the diverse composition of contemporary families – homes for singles and for various generations – is the focus of Sylvain De Bleeckere’s and Sebastian Gerards’s study. Catherine Daisy
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Gomes and Farida Nilufar deal in a similar way with the topic of the traditional Bangladesh house in relation to the modification of the role of the woman in this society. Manlio Michieletto, on the other hand, starting from the analysis of Ernst May’s project for the Niddatal siedlung, deals with the issue of the reproduction of the siedlung type for the construction of city parts.

“Town and City Projects” contains a series of projects which illustrate a possible planning and research attitude which could be adopted when dealing with the issue of the transformation of the city, and which is applied to specific urban situations. Some issues recur and are interwoven in the various contributions. Filippo Lambertucci, when describing a masterplan project for the city of Minsk and more generally for the post-Soviet city, introduces among other things the issue of density. Khrushchev’s and Brezhnev’s Soviet city had high density as regards the construction of buildings, and low density as regards the design of urban residential areas, formed by large empty green areas, repetitive and uniform. The design for the Minsk masterplan – Megapolis Minsk – is an attempt to give an alternative answer to this way of conceiving the construction of new neighborhoods, by giving the residential building the role of redesigning the city’s shape.

Also Farida Nilufar and Nuzhat Zereen deal with the issue of urban density in the case of the transformation of Dhaka’s Gulsham Avenue from a low-density residential street to a high-density commercial street. In this case the goal is to show how the transformations regarding the typology and character of the buildings leads to the creation of a new urban structure.

The possibility of attributing sense and character to specific underdeveloped areas such as the slums in Buenos Aires, through the planning and reconfiguration of the spaces for collective life, is the issue tackled by Ester Dedé. The construction of public space is also the issue tackled by Eamon Canniffe, although in a completely different way. Canniffe presents the case of two large management centres built in Manchester and in Salford: here the public space of the classical city – open and shared – has become a controlled space, thus hostile to any spontaneous expression of urban life. Otherwise, the project for Piazza Barberini in Salsomaggiore, presented by Emilio Faroldi, confirms the essentially civil role acquired by the square in the course of history. The rapport of some cities with history, and thus with the tradition of classical architecture and with the past, returns in the contributions by Isotta Cortesi (Tirana), Yuriy Volchok (Moscow), Sotirios Zaroulas (Athens) and in the project for a specific area of the city of Milan – Porta Genova – proposed by Marco Prusicki and Giovanni Cislaghi.

The last chapter, “Methods and Techniques”, specifically dedicated to the didactic experiences which have developed in various schools, is an attempt to compare teaching methods and techniques. In general, this chapter contains some examples of planning experimentation which have the goal of dealing with some specific and problematic local situations (Federica Visconti and Renato Capozzi, Rione Luzzati in Naples; Ariadni Vozani, Athens; Andrzej Piotrowski, Minneapolis) or of proposing experimentations in places that are often very different and distant, among which a relationship is established by the authors (Pasquale Miano and Giorgia Aquilar, Naples and Amsterdam).