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### **The Architectural Fragment as Space between Environment and Society**

When I left for Rome in 2003 as a scholarship holder at the German Academy Villa Massimo, friends asked me with a grin if it still made sense - a stay in Rome in the tradition of the "Grand Tour". This, since the obligatory Renaissance era educational trip of young European noblemen, ironically today, is financed by the German government and accessible to anyone who makes it through the eye of the needle of countless committees. "Yes", I then said, unshaken, and I am here again today, certain that this place challenges us to discuss the future of European urban space.

I am not sure why, while preparing to discuss the questions of fragmentary space and its relationship to the public sphere, which become legible in Rome along a timeline that spans more than two thousand years, I soon thought of the book "The Limits to Growth - Report of the Club of Rome on the State of Humanity", published in 1972. As a child I had seen it on my parents' table. Was it the magic of the red lettering "Club of Rome", or the gruesome cover image in its valid relevance, even to this day, that burned itself into my memory? The predictions of the MIT research team on the developments of the globally intertwined problems of industrialization, population growth, and scarcity of raw materials, resulted in the prediction that we humans will experience a collapse. New research shows we are on schedule.

Also in 1972, here at the German Academy, the writer Rolf Dieter Brinkmann did something very interesting in this context. He wasn't just sitting there ranting about the dying city and drinking wine out of jars, he was working on his "Materialbände", which resulted in the publication "Rom, Blicke". Through a collage-like combination of text and image documents, he brought together what physically surrounded him, the fragmentary in social and political space, in a new form. His Roman terrain maps describe an experienced everyday reality in an unbiased and unencumbered way. He also shows what we no longer perceive or dismiss as supposedly insignificant. Could this be a working model? What would it be like if we took a sober inventory of the fragments of space that surround us and did not distinguish between what we have valued up to now and what we have disregarded? Can we thus succeed in developing a broader attentiveness for existing spaces, by further actualizing them, and in spanning a new spatial reality between them? Not to exclude the gaps, but to charge the work within the synapses? In changing our perception of spaces, how do we ourselves [need to] change?

Are you familiar with the book "Fate of Rome - Climate, Disease and the End of an Empire"? Contrary to the reasons usually given for the fall of the Roman Empire - rampant decadence, religious and social upheaval and pressure from outside aggressors - this book elaborates on how the influence of climate change and associated infectious diseases were crucial in that collapse. How, in other words, nature with its inherent power and wisdom offered corrections to human ambition. Should not our discussion today about the fragmentary in architecture, and its influence on public space, focus on its relationship to injured ecosystems? Is not this where we experience splitting, sorting, and segmentation? Our human efforts at urbanization, especially those of the western world, have been destructive to natural spaces and their formative processes. The biomass has decreased, nutrient cycles have been interrupted. Protection and restoration measures are urgently needed. We architects know that the design principles and infrastructures we have created are largely inadequate to reverse this trend. And yet we act as if the thought has never crossed our minds.

Why do we stigmatize the topos of the fragmentary at all, and if so, why primarily on its formal level? Does not the desired "whole" fundamentally arise from the confluence of permanently changing components - the abandonment of locations, an influx of migrants, the overgrowth of existing space with new programs? Are not the formation of space and its dissolution profoundly natural processes? Are not we humans subject to the same forces as all of Nature? In it, everything is permanently striving for a balance. Should not architecture, in its physical presence as well as in its programmatic receptivity, exhibit a connectivity that it would possess only as a fragment?

In this context I would like to talk about a building that, in my eyes, functions in this way, and represents the possible realization of an architectural fragment. It is the design of the New National Gallery by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in Berlin. It was realized in 1968, at the same time as the first predictions of the "Club of Rome". It is not clear where this building begins and where it ends. On the one hand, it begins where the glass encloses the interior and the climate envelope is formed. At the same time, however, there is a wide overhanging roof, so one could argue that the interior actually ends below its edge. The terrace floor surrounding the pavilion well beyond the roof's edge is covered with the same stone and pattern that is found in the glazed interior. In this way, the exhibition space actually merges with the entire architecturally defined outdoor space and gets lost in the urban space. Or does it become urban space itself, as in Ann Veronika Janssens' 2001 installation, in which visitors become cyclists, moving freely through the exhibition hall?

It is not only the architectural elements, the walls, columns and ceilings of the building, that define its identity and extension. They are completed by the cityscape and the surrounding biotopes. An architectural fragment conceived in this way obviously possesses the facility of not conveying unambiguous ciphers with a fixed meaning. Its final formulation depends on how it is used and integrated into its environment.

It is also typical for this architecture that it is able to oscillate through its respective uses - between public and private space. This place can emphasize its interior spatiality to such an extent, that it seems to be completely absorbed in it, as in the 2010 staging "Live - But also Salon" by conceptual artist Rudolph Stingel, who activates the space into a defined interior with carpet and crystal chandelier. In 1978, as part of the exhibition "Circus", a ring was installed in this exhibition hall and used for live performances. The closed, floor-to-ceiling curtains on the glass façade, reinforced the introverted character of a tent. Since the publication of Fritz Neumeier's "Mies van der Rohe. Das kunstlose Wort: Gedanken zur Baukunst" (1986), it is considered demonstrable that this specific "architectural fragment" is based on a classical temple type. The free location of the building, the proportions, its placement on a plinth, the large open staircase, make this thesis understandable.

In the extreme case, this architectural form was developed into a pure container. At least that is how Rem Koolhaas perceived it, with a wink, when he filled the exhibition pavilion up to the hall ceiling in 2003 with his opulent work presentation "Content". Depending on what the viewer brings with him in terms of background knowledge, his own cultural imprint and horizon, and how the space influences the user and their environment, through its use and its program, this fragment combines to inform new readings. This fragmentary nature of the building allows high accessibility at different levels. It offers and invites spatial, technological and content reference systems.

It is spatially open because it reduces its architectural elements and expands its spatial boundaries. Typologically open, because it integrates

ideas and content in equal measure. This fragmentality of space is not only on the level of form and content, but is also realized through the co-design of the user and the surrounding environment.

Architecture conceived in this way provides conditions that are latent within it as countless possibilities. On the functional level, for example, the floor and ceiling are designed to enable the supply of infrastructure (lighting, hangers, sockets). In a similar manner, all architectural elements of the space are enabled at the theoretical-conceptual level. We humans can give different meanings to such a type of building. In parallel, such a building sets the parameters within which meanings can unfold. The key role is played by the viewer and his environment. This building does not react, it interacts. It is a productive architectural fragment, situated between the insights of social science, environmental planning and aesthetics.

Would this model of a 'fragment' succeed in creating the necessary balance between human action and its interaction with the environment? After centuries of expansion, we have flooded western ecosystems with our architectures. What if we reversed this trend, and defined an architectural identity by its ability to be compatible with vital biotopes? An architectural manifestation realized differently in the city than in the countryside, gradually passing from one state to the other. Extremely efficient in the use of resources, obvious in its implementation, always striving to dovetail with nature.

Is it not precisely the multi-voiced resonance between urban and natural space that creates relationships and interactions essential to building resilient societies and cities? Architecture has long been used as an instrument to instantiate, demarcate and segregate. But it can become a space that unites fragments, cares, listens, acknowledges, and celebrates.

How do we find the strength, the insight, and ultimately the reason to radically rethink and act as designers? For this, I would like to draw attention to the book "The Dawn of Everything" by David Graeber & David Wengrow. Vividly and convincingly, it encourages us to be bolder and more determined in advocating and realizing a different future for humanity.

Lecture at the symposium:  
fragmental\_ on the dissolution of public space

Symposium by 'Dortmund Positions', Prof. Heike Hanada, TU Dortmund  
Participants: Filip Dujardin, Job Floris, Simona Malvezzi, Oda Pälme,  
Uwe Schröder, Giuseppe Strappa, Rahel Whiteread, Imke Woelk

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