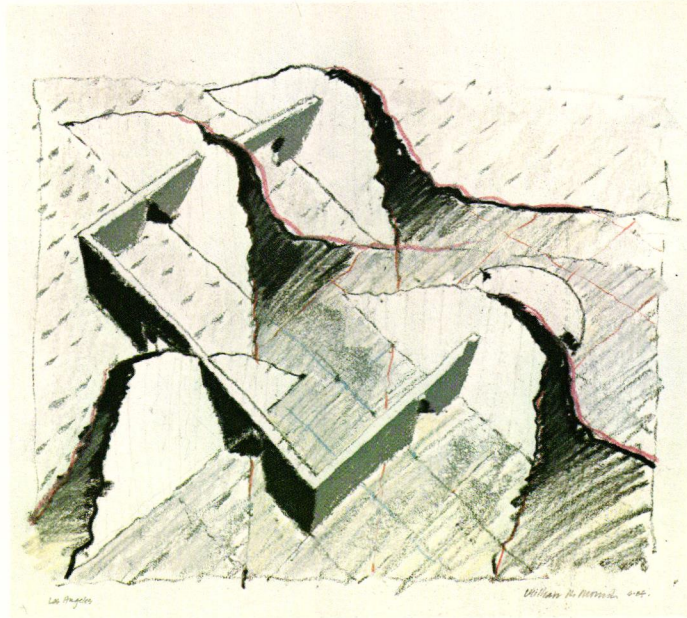


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Contents

Introduction 1

David Gobel

**Notes on the Urban Symposium: The Politics of
Design** 3

Nathan Glazer

**Architecture and The Public Works in Metropolitan
Amsterdam** 9

Helen Searing

Dams: Photographs from the Depression 35

Richard Guy Wilson

Urban Spring:

Formalizing the Water System of Los Angeles 45

William Morrish

Noble Structures Set in Handsome Parks:

Public Architecture of the TVA 75

Marion Moffett and Lawrence Wodehouse

Placing the Dead:

Burial Sites in Early Boston and Beyond 85

Richard Becherer

**Honor of Sacrifice: The Evolution of the Arlington
National Cemetery** 107

Jill Bretherick

The Defense of New Orleans:

Colonial Forts of the French and Spanish Regimes 121

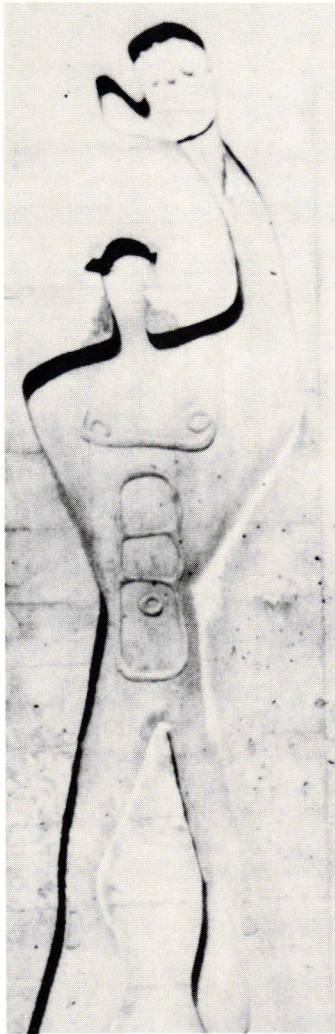
Willard B. Robinson

The Modern Medieval City:

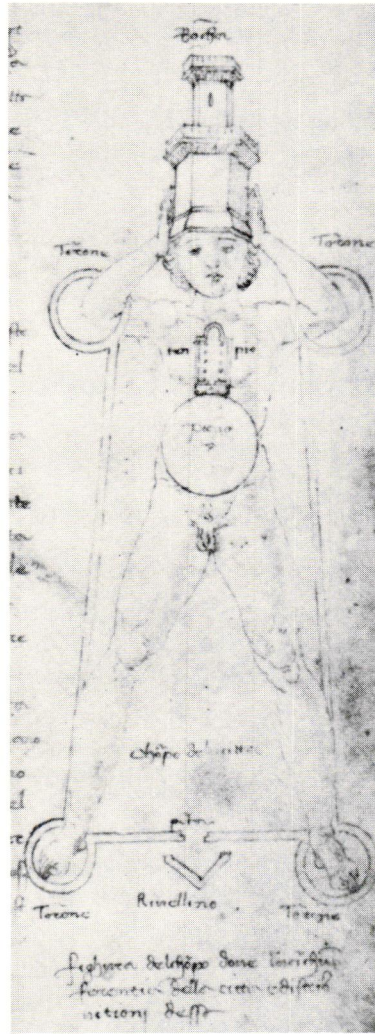
Public Space in Florentine-Founded Towns 143

David Friedman

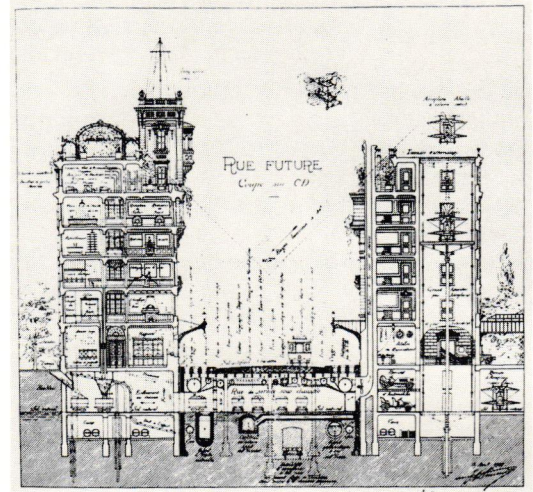
- 1 *Le Modulor, Unité d'habitation.*
 2 *"Figura del corpo", Francesco di Giorgio.*
 3 *Rue Future from Eugène Hénard, "The City of the Future" in Transactions Town Planning Conference, (London, RIBA, 1911).*
 4 *Ideal City Plan, Daniele Barbaro.*



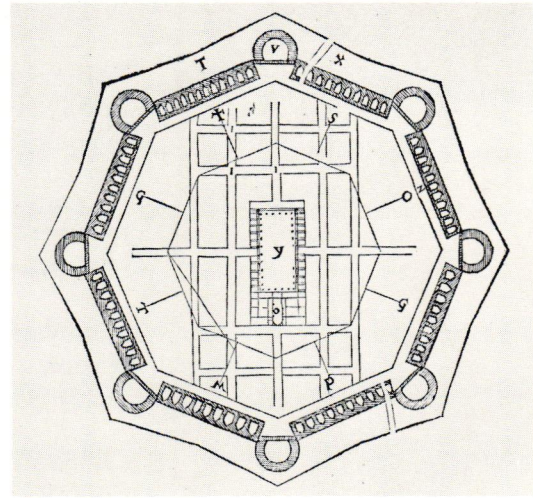
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Introduction

David Gobel

The city is a complex, ever-changing organism. In an analogy to the human body, the successful operation of the city depends upon a set of interactive, functional components. For example, transportation networks are akin to our circulatory system, communication networks to our nervous system. To describe these cohesive components of the city, we have, in the last 20 years, introduced the term *infrastructure*. This rubric efficiency accounts for the synthetic dynamism, for the technologies and complex overlays of function, of the whole. The modernist holistic idea of infrastructure is applicable not only to physical planning, but also to military operations, economics, philosophy, and linguistics. Like their colleagues in those fields, urbanists in the modernist city, regardless of ideology, are recognizing that infrastructural dysfunction must be addressed before problems of superstructural chaos.

The human analogy underlying this approach to modern city planning stems from the 19th-century notions of Herbert Spencer, which were popularized by his disciples, primarily Patrick Geddes and Lewis Mumford. Yet, 15th-century Francesco di Giorgio observed that “just as the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, large intestines, and other interior parts of the body are organized according to their own needs and wants, so too should the city be arranged.” While seemingly similar, di Giorgio’s analogy is quite unrelated to Spencer’s. Di Giorgio was concerned with proportion and disposition of material parts as they serve the city’s purpose. Thus, he wrote that “the city has the reason, proportion, and form of the human body.” This was the classical analogy inherited by di Giorgio from Plato, Aristotle, Vitruvius, Augustine, and Leonardo Bruni. Here, the human body and body-politic are different from those found in the modern analogy. Here, the bodies are important only to the extent that they clothe the soul.

Embracing the classical view as we do does not condone ignoring the modern problems of urban infrastructure. Instead, it forces us to question what the proper role of the infrastructure is. What is its relationship to the meaning of the city? If we were to follow Spencer’s analogy—or Marx’s or Chomsky’s—we would be led to conclude that the infrastructure *is* the meaning. Meaning, however, is purpose, and the purpose of the city cannot derive its meaning from the infrastructure—the water supply, sewers, bridges, or even the information networks. We learn from the classical city that these

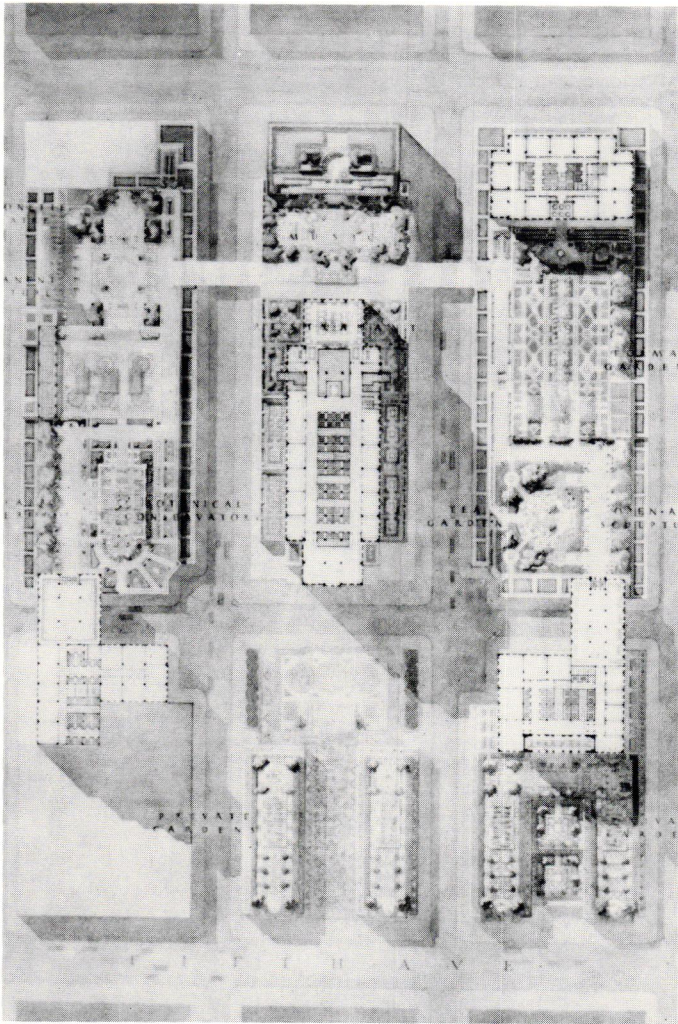
infrastructural components—while vital—derive their meaning from the city when they properly serve the end of the polis, which is to promote the common good. When they so serve, they are worthy of our attention.

When we abandon the modernist idea of infrastructure, we are left without a neat category for study. The closest classical equivalent is in the term *public works*. The ancients never clearly defined the term, but Vitruvius provides a sketch of what we consider public works. He states that the first division of building (*aedificatio*) is “the construction of fortified towns and works (*operum*) for the general use in public places.” He divides this category into three classes:

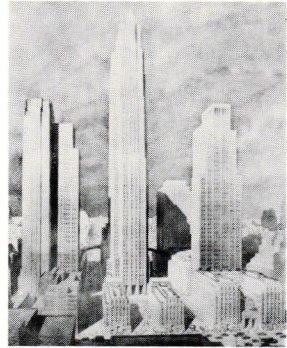
“. . . The first for the defensive, the second for religious and the third for utilitarian purposes. Under defense comes the planning for walls, towers, and gates, permanent devices for resisting against hostile attacks; under religion, the erection of fanes and temples to the immortal gods; under utility, the provision of meeting places for public use, such as harbors, markets, colonnades, baths, theaters, promenades, and all other similar arrangements in public places.” (I, iii [Morgan])

We have here used Vitruvius’s categories as a guide. Fortifications, for example, throughout much of urban history, were public works; these communicated the virtues of the city to its neighbors and itself. Today the physical presence of forts and outposts have lost their significance, and stop neither missiles nor the press. Architectural fortification has become technological hardware. Cemeteries, in a society of private religions are, perhaps, the only example of transcendental public works. The cemetery’s location and form reveals its meaning.

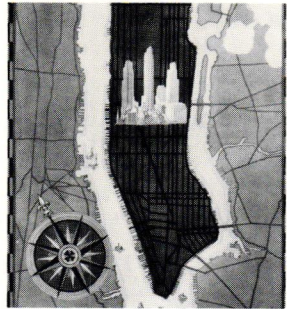
Public city planning has lost sight of the common good. The polis has become too large and fractured to function efficiently and economically. The means of obtaining and distributing water, for instance, plays a dominant role in shaping the material city. Yet it is not an evident presence. The meaning of our cities should not be allowed to evaporate. We should recognize the source from which they sprang. Our ability to control and reshape the natural order demands a sensitivity that will not divorce the city from its organic source.



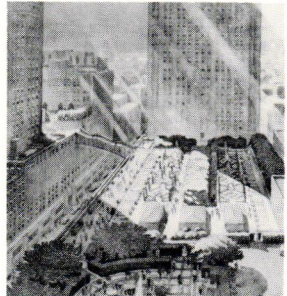
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