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finding lost space

Finding lost space

• Trancik relates specifically to the problems of the spatial structure in the modern city

• An examination of the nature of traditional urban space reveals that these have been lost in most modern cities

• Resulting in what is referred to as ‘anti space’ or ‘lost space’
5 major factors:

- The automobile
- The modern movement
- Urban renewal and zoning policies
- The dominance of private over public
- Changes in land use in the inner city
The problem of urban design today:

• Challenges for designers is creating outdoor environments as collective frameworks for development. Too often the designer’s contribution comes after the fact in the form of cosmetic treatment of ill defined and badly shaped spaces for public use.

• The usual process of urban development treats buildings as isolated objects sited in the landscape and not as part of the larger fabric of streets, squares and viable open space.
• Decisions about growth patterns are made from 2D land use plans without considering the 3D relationships between buildings and spaces, and without an understanding of human behaviour.

• Urban space is seldom thought of as exterior volume with properties of shape and scale and connection to other spaces and therefore what emerges is unshaped antispace.
Newer concepts of urban design are conceived of as ‘urbanism’

- Urban frameworks rather than master planning of objects in the landscape
- Making figurative space out of lost landscape and redesigning the lost space
- Understanding the concept of anti-space as a spatial typology is essential in contemporary urban design practice.
What is lost space?

- Left over unstructured landscape
- Bases of high-rise buildings
- Parking lots, train yards etc
- No-mans land eg. Edges of freeways
- Abandoned sites
- Vacant blight areas
- Remnants after development
- Deteriorated parks

Generally lost spaces are the undesirable urban areas that are in need of redesign and antispace making no contribution to the surroundings or users.
The automobile


Figure 1-1. Västra Frölunda, Sweden. Aerial Photograph. 1975.
In this example of twentieth-century European development, traditional qualities of urban space have been lost. Buildings are isolated objects; spaces between them are vast and formless, without the coherent structure of historically evolved streets and squares. High vacancy rates, social pathology, and boredom plague many such Functionalist developments. (Courtesy: Göteborg City Planning Office. Photo by C-G Johansson)
Modern movement

Modern movement


Figure 1-20. Traditional and modern urban form. These drawings illustrate the spatial structure of traditional cities (above) and the fragmentary form of the modern city (below). In the traditional city, urban blocks direct movement and establish orientation; in the modern city, the fragmentary and confused structure creates disorientation. (Drawing based on diagrams by Rob Krier)
Regaining lost space

• Public institutions have been unwilling or unable to control the appearance and physical structure of the city which has resulted in the erosion of a public framework and visual literacy among the public.

• Designers should create site plans that become the generators of context and buildings that define external space rather than displace it.

• In a successful city well defined outdoor spaces are as necessary as good buildings
Developing expertise in urban design

• Studying historic precedents and the way in which modern space has evolved

• Developing an understanding of the underlying theories of urban spatial design

• Developing skills in synthesising and applying these in the design process
Figure 1-21. Le Corbusier. Figure-ground diagram on the Ville Radieuse compared to traditional block patterns of Paris, New York, and Buenos Aires. Le Corbusier's diagram dramatically illustrates the contrast between the traditional density of evolved cities and the freeflowing spatial structure advocated by Functionalist theorists. (Courtesy: Foundation Le Corbusier/SPADEM)
3 theories of urban spatial design

- Figure ground theory
- Linkage theory
- Place theory

The physical spatial structure of the urban landscape must be designed in response to these inter-related theories.
Figure 4-1. Diagram of Urban Design Theories.

In recent years there have been three major approaches to urban design.

(1) Figure-ground theory: In this approach, the starting point for an understanding of urban form is the analysis of relationships between building mass and open space. Figure-ground analyses are powerful tools for identifying the textures and patterns of the urban fabric as well as problems in its spatial order, but can lead to a static and two-dimensional conception of space.

(2) Linkage theory: In this approach dynamics of circulation become the generators of urban form. The emphasis on connection and movement is a significant contribution, but the need for spatial definition is sometimes undervalued.

(3) Place theory: Designers have increasingly become aware of the importance of historic, cultural, and social values in urban open space. Contextualists have argued strongly against the tendency of the Functionalists to impose abstract designs from the outside.

Figure 4-2. Giambattista Nolli. Map of Rome. 1748.
Nolli's map graphically illustrates the figure-ground relationship of a traditional city where public civic space is carved out of the private tissue. (See also fig. 3-2.) The predominant field is a dense continuous mass, allowing open space to become a figural void.

In contrast to Nolli's map, the predominant field is void in most modern cities. Buildings read as individual and isolated objects and the spaces between them are unformed. When buildings are principally vertical there is inadequate ground coverage and the intentional shaping of exterior space is virtually impossible. (Drawing: Victor Cadiandra)

Figure 5.60. Figure-ground of the central core of Göteborg.
This figure-ground plan reveals five distinct patterns of urban fabric.


Figure 2-15. Cornell Studio of Colin Rowe. Proposal: New Quarter Del Prato, Florence, Italy. 1980. Colin Rowe has looked closely at historic urban spaces, particularly those of Rome and Florence, in order to understand the values and expressions inherent in successful urban form. He stresses the need to fit individual buildings into the larger urban fabric, as well as continuous ground coverage and the effectiveness of powerful geometric patterns. (Courtesy: Department of Architecture, Cornell University)
Figure 4-20. Ed Bacon. Downtown Philadelphia Redevelopment Plan. 1964.

One of the major contributions of the linkage theory has been in the area of large-scale urban planning. Ed Bacon, planner in charge of the redevelopment of Philadelphia for over twenty years, emphasized the need for strong spatial corridors to connect important buildings and public spaces. Such systems for connection should be incorporated into urban design in order to clarify the total structure. (From Bacon, Design of Cities. Drawing: Irving Wasserman)
Place theory

• Understanding the cultural and human characteristics of physical space

• **SPACE** is a bounded or purposeful void with the potential to physically link things, it only becomes **PLACE** when it is given contextural meaning derived from cultural or regional context

• Space can be defined by categories or typologies but each place is unique taking on a character consisting of concrete things and intangible cultural associations given by human use over time
Place theory

- People require a relatively stable system of places in which to develop themselves, their social lives and their culture.

- Therefore designed space has an emotional content, a presence that is more than physical.

- Modern cities have failed to create a concept of place.

- Designers have felt compelled to complete every detail with no loose ends for transformation by individuals or accommodate changes over time.

- Over design and too much planning are as dangerous as allowing the marketplace to shape cities in a random, ad hoc fashion.
Role of designers

• to respond to and enhance environmental identity and the sense of place

• to have the humility to look at the historical context

• to respond to the self-perceived desires of the community

• to be flexible enough to allow the community present and future to alter its own environment
Theory of a living city

• Designers have become obsessed with one theory of urban design whereas a living city consists of a layering of elements of each of the 3 theories

• Contextual space is inclusive and multivalent, incorporating fragments of past artifacts, associations and events in a rich and layered blend