

Unitary Urbanism [Original in Dutch, 'Unitair Urbanisme,' unpublished manuscript of a lecture held at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam on 20 December 1960. Translated by Robyn de Jong-Dalziel]

The post-war years have witnessed tremendous activity in the field of urban development: villages have become towns, towns have turned into metropolises, metropolises have spread into such immense conglomerations that people have started devising ways of limiting the concentration of buildings, of decentralizing the city. In the underdeveloped regions of Asia, Africa and South America, industrialization has entailed the erection of a growing number of wholly new cities. But even in the already industrialized countries of Western Europe and North America, the continuing mechanization of life on the one hand, and population growth on the other, has resulted in a drastic change in the appearance of the big city. The huge influence over everyday life that this state of affairs gives to town planning accords it a central place in contemporary culture. Or rather: causes it to play a key role in the cultural crisis that characterizes the present age. For although town planning has become a more important factor in culture than ever before, it cannot be said to have enriched everyday life or culture. On the contrary, we must begin by stating that the influence town planning currently exerts on people's lives appears to be of a negative character, that the cultural crisis has intensified and that town planning has contributed to this, that the great deficiency of culture, of social life, is felt more acutely than ever. I would even go so far as to claim that the continued existence of culture currently depends on a revolutionary intervention in our everyday environment and in our way of life. For one of the prime causes of the cultural crisis is the manifest discrepancy between the prevailing way of life and humanity's biological development. The city, as the foremost exponent of this way of life, provides the clearest illustration of this discrepancy.

The failure of modern town planners can be attributed to their opportunism, their passive attitude to the problems confronting them, their uncritical deference to an obsolete cultural convention, to the existing image of society. What nowadays counts for town planning confines itself to the more or less aesthetic solution of current socio-economic problems; for the most part housing and traffic problems. For pragmatic reasons, that is for the sake of a quick provisional solution, town planners isolate these problems from

the totality of social life, they see them as detached from the cultural issue. The result is that town planners lag behind their times, that they are forever out of step with developments. For example, in looking for solutions to the housing issue, town planners almost invariably take the family as their starting-point. Yet the family has long ceased to be the most important binding factor in society, and changing morals are leading to the formation of new social groupings that are unable to assert themselves adequately in today's urban environment. This must certainly be seen as one aspect of the anarchism of today's youth, of the gangs of disaffected young people prowling our city centers, etc. Another function of town planning, traffic, is so dominated by the needs of the private car that no consideration is given to the possibility, indeed, one can already say the necessity, of socializing traffic. After New York, Paris too is finding itself forced to close off large sections of the city center, perhaps even the entire center, to private traffic, and to replace it with a dense network of small public transport vehicles. While town planners continue to attach exaggerated importance to the interests of private cars, Paris bus stops have in recent years carried a request to motorists from the Préfecture de police urging them to make more use of the buses so as to ease traffic congestion in the city center. But the most telling example of the extent to which the town planners' pragmatism has distanced them from the reality of life, and stands in the way of a creative approach to urbanism, is undoubtedly the Athens Charter. In this declaration drawn up in 1933 by the CIAM (with Le Corbusier in the lead) and since then neither updated nor amplified, urban planning is summed up in four functions: living, working, transport, and recreation, with total disregard for everything to do with culture. Here is a very clear demonstration of the town planners' deferential attitude to the mechanistic and commercial tendencies dominating this age. Here is the proof that today's town planners are indeed to blame for the failure of the modern city as a human habitat, for the disappearance of a social space in which a new culture could arise.

Are they perhaps aware of this? Is this why they are so intent on making up for the huge deficiency of the built environ-

ment with green belts and landscaping? Do they imagine that human beings, whom they have helped to rob of their living space, are to be fobbed off with a few bits and pieces of pseudo-nature? Where does this idea of the 'garden city' come from anyway?

When we examine the origins of this idea, we find that it is connected with such phenomena as the reform movement, vegetarianism, naturism, nudism, and so on, that it developed as a nineteenth-century reaction to mechanization, a manifestation of fear of the machine. A certain Ebenezer Howard thought he could curb the pauperization of the proletariat in the slums of the emerging English industrial cities with his garden allotments movement. This was the time when groups of laborers sought to defend their daily bread, which they earned with their own hands, by smashing machinery to smithereens. The time, too, of the new art, *art nouveau* or Jugendstil, which had its roots in the utopian socialism of John Ruskin and William Morris, which felt compelled to hark back to a past which had more to offer than the machine. But even though the machine has not let itself be checked, even though it has survived the ideas of Morris and Ruskin, even though it is presently opening up unlimited perspectives for humanity, for culture, the garden city idea lives on. Not Ebenezer Howard's garden city, however: the nineteenth-century rural garden city degenerated under the pressure of events into the traffic city, embellished with parks and trees, where social contacts became increasingly difficult, where human beings grew lonely. All that remains of the garden city in our own day are traffic-free enclaves, islands in a sea of traffic where the pedestrian leads a legally protected but languishing existence, comparable to that of the North American Indians on their reservations. What is understood by 'garden city' is a mere fiction! In reality the modern town planner regards the city as a gigantic center of production, geared to the efficient transport of workers and goods, to the accommodation of people and the storage of wares, to industrial and commercial activity. The rest, that is to say creativity, life, is optional and comes under the heading of recreation and leisure activities.

The fact that the constant growth in leisure time in this age

of automation poses an acute problem, that young people are protesting more and more vociferously against the interminable boredom of present-day life, must in itself be sufficient reason for us to overhaul those famous urban planning functions and to resist a view of the city as a machine for living, a 'machine à habiter' as Le Corbusier put it. Human beings are more than machine fodder; life is more than well-oiled participation in the production process. The slavish existence of living, working and recreation cannot possibly constitute the starting-point for building our living environment, the starting-point for a creative urbanism. These functions, however essential they may be, are subordinate to the all-embracing function of life: creativity, the urge to manifest oneself, to turn life into a unique event, to realize life as such. Town planning is not industrial design, the city is not a functional object, aesthetically 'sound' or otherwise; the city is an artificial landscape built by human beings in which the adventure of our life unfolds. Rather than comparing it to a workman's tool, therefore, it would be better to compare it to an artist's plaything. But a plaything is not really appropriate either because the city is, or should be, an active and integral part of our game of life. I deliberately refer to the 'game of life' here – thinking of Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* – rather than to 'culture,' because culture could easily be misunderstood; it has already been too much compromised by the disintegration of the traditional cultural forms of recent centuries and the attendant phenomenon of mass pseudo-culture. Literature, painting, music – these typically individual forms of creative play – are in the process of losing their meaning, together with the individualism that gave rise to them. But where should one expect new cultural forms to come from in this century of 'massification,' if not from the masses – lacking traditions, neither heir to worn-out cultural patterns nor prey to delusions of superiority? The city has produced the masses, only the masses can give shape to the city.

Who exactly are the masses? Are they the nineteenth-century proletariat, underpaid and dulled by mind-numbing labor and with nothing to lose but their chains? Or are they the people of the future, robbed of their occupations by automation and cracking up from boredom, who are already a source of serious worry for sociologists? No, if we wish neither to resign ourselves to the deficiencies of the

present, nor to abandon ourselves to fear of the future, we must rely on the enormous creative potential that still lies dormant in the masses. We must see the so-called masses as those who have succeeded in defeating nature, who have won unprecedented social freedom for themselves, who possess virtually unlimited resources. What I am going to propose as an alternative to the functional city where culture, a new culture, has no chance, is based on faith in humanity, in these elusive masses to whom everybody seems to feel superior but who are nonetheless destined to be the bearers of the coming culture. Culture can no longer rely on the exception.

The new culture will either be a mass culture, or there will be no culture at all. It is the masses, the burgeoning masses, who are becoming increasingly influential, who hold the future in their hands and who are also the main victims of the current state of affairs; it is these masses, to whom we all belong, who must achieve the unity between lifestyle and environment that is absolutely essential for a new culture – for unitary urbanism.

What is unitary urbanism? Unitary urbanism is neither town planning, nor art, nor style; nor does it correspond to concepts like integration and the synthesis of cultural forms, which are much discussed nowadays, not even when this integration concerns the totality of social life. For this integration presupposes the presence in contemporary culture of useful practices, of directly applicable concepts, like architecture, poetry, social ties, moral principles.

Yet there is nothing to integrate, because there is nothing! Which is why at this stage I would prefer to define unitary urbanism as a very complex, very changeable, constant activity, a deliberate intervention in the praxis of daily life and in the daily environment; an intervention aimed at bringing our lives into lasting harmony with our real needs and with the new possibilities that will arise and that will in turn transform these needs. So I am not simply opposing a different aesthetic, a different kind of 'form-giving' to static, material functionalism, to the aesthetic of the modern city. Unitary urbanism is flexible, it respects our freedom to change our way of life, it adapts to every situation, to every need, to every technical, geographical or psychological possibility, it is the objectification of the creative urge, the collectivization of the art work, the materiali-

zation of a dynamic lifestyle. A lifestyle, in other words, which recognizes no goal in life, which is not intent on giving life a meaning, but which makes life itself the goal, which looks for the fulfilment of this life in daily praxis, a lifestyle, which aims to be the creation of our life. This conception of life is essential to unitary urbanism, just as the conception that places the meaning of life beyond this life, in the super-terrestrial, the abstract, is essential to that fragmentation of human history which is determined by the struggle for material existence and which seems to be nearing its end.

There are consequently two distinct aspects to unitary urbanism: a transformation of our habits, or rather of our way of life or lifestyle, and, connected with this, a profound change in the way our material environment is produced, a dynamic urbanism. Since the first-mentioned condition is bound up with a process that takes time, it follows that the second cannot be realized immediately either. Hence, the New Babylon project, which you will have an opportunity to see after the interval, is an imaginary project; it anticipates history, it is a futuristic project; it is based on a desirable course of history and is therefore also in a sense a utopian project. Nonetheless, I prefer to call it a realistic project because it distances itself from the present condition which has lost touch with reality, and because it is founded on what is technically feasible, on what is desirable from a human viewpoint, on what is inevitable from a social viewpoint. Because it is a reaction to a declining culture and a response to facts that signal a crucial change in the notion of culture.

Let us take a closer look at these facts in relation to town planning. Human beings inhabit the earth's surface and exploit it; they change the earth from nature into culture. What are the circumstances under which they currently operate; what is the result, up to now, of humanity's presence, of its interventions? Where will those interventions lead? If we calculate the average habitability of all points on the earth's surface, the correlation between nature and human habitation, which so dominates contemporary town planning, presents a far less attractive picture than when considered exclusively from the relatively favorable climatological and geographical conditions prevailing in a densely populated, highly industrialized region like Western

Europe. This picture becomes even less attractive if we take account of climate, of seasonal change, of weather conditions and natural phenomena injurious to human beings. When we try to express the habitability of the earth — under natural conditions and during one seasonal cycle — as a percentage of the total surface area, we are forced to conclude that this figure bears absolutely no relation to the size of the earth's population and that it is most certainly disastrously out of step with the number of people estimated to be populating the earth in 50, 100 or 200 years' time. This disparity already manifests itself today and under the current manner of inhabiting the earth, in the overpopulation of climatologically favorable regions. But faced with the prospect of a world population estimated to exceed 7 billion a century from now, faced too with the prospect of needing to exploit the earth's surface more intensively in order to provide all these people with the basic necessities of life, we can no longer restrict ourselves to these few regions when it concerns town planning, that is to say, when it concerns not just housing but the very lives of these multitudes. Yet human beings are not simply faced with the necessity of inhabiting less attractive regions; they also have the means to make these regions habitable, to render themselves independent of nature.

The world has acquired a new dimension; nature's role is played out; nature now is simply raw material, controlled by human beings and used in accordance with their needs. And these needs can no longer be met by nature alone; technology already furnishes us with material conditions that are far superior to natural conditions; we are already completely dependent on technology for the bare necessities. And, owing to the force of circumstances, our needs are continually increasing, not just quantitatively, but also qualitatively, in the same measure as our connection with nature is declining. Technology replaces nature, technology becomes nature, becomes the medium, the sense by which we interpret nature. Not only are human beings, with the help of technology, preparing to leave the earth's surface and to go adventuring in outer space; they are even roaming, flying over, the earth's surface itself, in every direction, without omitting a single spot. And wherever they go, which is to say everywhere, nature gives way to technology. As such, the living space of each individual is getting bigger

and bigger, their radius of action is extending further and further afield, the tracks they leave behind them form an increasingly complicated pattern. Human beings are leaving the closed community for a nomadic existence that will cover ever larger areas. Their existence is becoming more adventurous, their impressions more varied, their horizon wider, their need for change, for excitement, greater. Should we deduce from all this, as some urbanists are doing, that the huge urban concentration has had its day? Those who think this forget that population growth keeps pace with the increase in the radius of action of each individual, and that when the inevitable saturation point is reached, individuals will be forced to indulge their greatly increased urge for expansion within a limited area. This will entail the formation of enormous, perpetually expanding conglomerations which, to a limited extent, must nonetheless permit a tremendous spatial expansion.

Taken to its logical conclusion, this means that the city might eventually expand to cover the entire surface of the earth, but also that this surface will have to be far more intensively used. What we lose in geometrical space, we must recover in the form of psychological space. By intensifying the use of space we will be able to increase the living space of every individual, despite the increase in the number of individuals. Where, in such an intensive exploitation of the earth's surface, is the contrast between city and landscape; where can we still expect to find untrammelled nature; where is the outdoor life? Faced with the certainty that nature cannot remain inviolate, we must use the means at our disposal not simply to replace nature, but to surpass her. Our planning must even now take account of a total exploitation of the earth's surface, with unlimited development. But also with an unrestricted freedom to move around, with an undisturbed (and undisturbing), unlimited increase in traffic, on the ground and in the air.

Faced with this prospect, even the prosaic problems of the town planner — traffic and housing — call for revolutionary solutions. But an even more fundamental and all-embracing question is: how are all these people going to live? How will they be able to express themselves, manifest themselves, develop; in short, what possibilities will they have to realize their lives? Before looking at this question in more detail, we must first mention a factor that is crucial to any

attempt to answer it: the so-called second industrial revolution, automation.

It is generally acknowledged that automation (by which we mean the mechanization of all routine work, including regulation and control of mechanical processes), the systematic automation of production, will lead to a colossal increase in so-called free time. Fear of the social consequences of this increased leisure time is one of the reasons why automation is progressing at a slower pace than is technically feasible. We may nonetheless assume that automation will not only remain a technical possibility, but that it will, with in the foreseeable future, become a social fact, and town planning should even now be addressing this fact. Whatever the case, the development of the robot to perform slave labor (Norbert Wiener compares the electronic machine to the imported slaves of antiquity), will sooner or later bring humanity, which is to say the masses, unprecedented freedom, an undreamt-of opportunity for the free disposal of time, for the free realization of life. For it goes without saying that it will no longer be possible to speak of 'free time' once essential work is so much in the minority, and so much less monotonous, that it is no longer experienced as an onerous duty. Thus, we also reject all theorizing about the use of leisure which springs from a worn-out ethic stating it a duty to 'earn one's daily bread by the sweat of one's brow.' When a major part, the greatest portion, of our life, is no longer taken up with non-creative work, it no longer makes sense to speak of free time as if it were a matter of spare moments that have to be spent one way or another. For it is in *this* time that the largest part of our life will be realized: this time will *be* our life.

Life is activity. The freedom won as a result of the disappearance of routine work is a freedom to act. Obviously, it will be a creative activity that replaces work. The fulfilment of life lies in creativity. We do not of course see this creativity in the same sense as a contemporary art work. The individual work of art, seen from the vantage point of an unsatisfied, unfulfilled life, represents higher things, the more fulfilled, the exceptional. The manifestation is based on permanence, on the ideal of eternity. Unsatisfied by the existing situation, it tries to drown it out, to surpass it. The lived art work, in the sense of unitary urbanism, is exactly the opposite: it exists in time, it is the activation of the tem-

porary, the emergent and transitory, the changeable, the volatile, the variable, the immediately fulfilling and satisfying.

Seen from the vantage point of unitary urbanism, the traditional art work is no more than a consolation, a surrogate that is no longer necessary. It is quite evident, therefore, that existing cultural forms have no role whatsoever to play in the realization of unitary urbanism. Returning to town planning, one can now ask: which urban function is essential for the development that we foresee, which urban form corresponds to the changes society is undergoing, how does this unity of lifestyle and environment, unitary urbanism, come about? Answering these questions leads us to a previously neglected function of town planning that unitary urbanism makes its chief and most characteristic theme: social space. While it is true that in recent years, and particularly in America, social space has been turned into a study – ecology – this study has confined itself to registering facts, to analyzing social space, insofar as it still exists in today's cities. Ecology is a static method that attempts to derive the laws of social space from statistical data. Ecology studies the conglomeration in its present form as if it were a quintessential rather than a fortuitous form of human cohabitation. But ecology takes no account of the fact that the city shapes its inhabitants every bit as much as the inhabitants shape their city. It takes no account of the fact that people are to a large degree determined by the environment in which they live, it disregards the psychological influence exerted by the environment.

For unitary urbanism, however, all this is of overwhelming importance. Indeed, unitary urbanism goes even further: having noted the psychological influence exerted by the environment, it resolves consciously to apply this influence, to use the environment to psychological effect, ultimately to achieve an interplay between environment and life. Which brings us to psychogeography. The concept of psychogeography distinguishes itself from ecology by its creative character. Psychogeography does not merely record facts, it also tries to identify and explain the unconscious influences exerted by the urban atmosphere and ultimately to use them as a means of activating our environment. It turns these influences into an artistic medium by which our environment is created. As an example of the fact that the

psychological atmosphere is independent of the ecological definition of an urban district, I mention here St. Germain des Prés. The atmosphere of this bourgeois quarter of Paris was so profoundly altered by a small group of intellectuals, the so-called existentialists, that it acquired international fame and even became a tourist attraction. For ecology this phenomenon is of only minor interest because the inhabitants remain the same and all the action takes place in the streets and in the cafés which are dominated by individuals from other quarters. But if the built environment is included among the psychological influences on ambience, it becomes clear that unitary urbanism has some pretty powerful resources at its disposal in its construction of social space.

Let us take a closer look at this concept of 'social space.' Historically, the street was more than a mere traffic artery. Its additional function, which may even have been more important than its role as thoroughfare, was as a collective living space where all the public events – markets, festivals, fairs, political demonstrations – took place, as well as encounters and contacts between smaller numbers of individuals, in short, all those activities that do not belong to the more intimate, private domain. The inn and the café, which sometimes spilled over into the street, were continuations of this collective space, public places where people were able to get away from the traffic on the street. The tremendous increase in traffic robbed the street of this social function. As a final refuge there remained the café, but the street itself became a traffic route and thus a sharp dividing line between isolated units of housing. This might perhaps account for the cultural significance of the café in the last century. The overriding importance that unitary urbanism attaches to social space, is related to the role of the frequent personal contacts which it considers vital for culture, for the mass culture that is to come. The realization of life in the sense of unitary urbanism, depends to a large extent on the place of social space in urban planning. It is here, after all, that most of the events that influence and determine daily life take place. It is here that a deliberate intervention in the material environment has most effect, only here can this intervention become a collective game aimed at the creation of our environment.

The cultural significance of social space makes it necessary

to isolate this function from the purely utilitarian functions, especially those of traffic and production, to which social space has been sacrificed in today's industrial cities. The creation and maintenance of an extensive social space is, given the prospect of mass culture, the prospect of more free time – or rather a freer disposal of life – given also the prospect of an as yet unlimited increase in population and traffic, an absolute prerequisite. This is why I based New Babylon on a strict separation of traffic and industrial space on the one hand and residential and social space on the other. This separation is vertical because I accepted the principle of a covered city, composed of layers and supported on pilotis, that leaves the ground level entirely free. The actual urban body containing living spaces and collectively used spaces is consequently raised above the ground, inaccessible to traffic, which for its part has 100% of the ground level at its disposal. Unconstrained by buildings, the traffic is free to take the shortest route, but visitors to the city will have to leave their vehicles and take one of the numerous elevators to the top. The factories, fully automated, are for the most part built underground. The plan of New Babylon reveals a decentralized, reticular structure consisting of an irregular stringing together of numerous sectors, each covering an area of 5 to 10 hectares, which stretches for hundreds of kilometers in every direction and in which a population of on average 10 million people resides. Each sector consists of several levels topped by a terrace roof which may contain an airstrip, a heliport or sports fields. In view of their huge size, the levels are largely inaccessible to sunlight, so the interior of the city is artificially lit, ventilated and air-conditioned. There is no attempt to effect a faithful imitation of nature, however; on the contrary, the technical facilities are deployed as powerful, ambience-creating resources in the psychogeographical game played in the social space.

The typically linear structure of the plan means that inhabitants are never further than a few hundred meters from free, undeveloped space. Yet it is also possible to spend days, even weeks, traveling on foot through the endless expanse of the urban body, from space to space, from ambience to ambience, experiencing the adventure of New Babylon, finding accommodation in the residential precincts that are present in every sector; or traveling by vehicle at ground

level from one quarter to another, traversing bits of landscape or passing beneath the city and coming up again somewhere else. Only 15% of the internal space of the urban body is taken up by permanent housing or hotels; the rest is social space. These social spaces must be thought of as gigantic halls, one above the other, hundreds of meters long, which can be subdivided into bigger and smaller spaces, varying in size from a room to a public square, highly diverse and differing in atmosphere. The movable walls are an active element of the psychogeographical game referred to earlier. They are used to construct veritable labyrinths of the most heterogeneous forms in which one finds special halls for radiophonic games, cinematographic games, psychoanalytical games, erotic games, games based on chance and on coincidence. Even a short trip through the social space of New Babylon is more fruitful than a long journey through the unified world we know. A long sojourn in

New Babylon would surely have the effect of brainwashing, erasing all routine and custom. There are no customs in New Babylon; it is obvious that a culture based on a dynamic game with life, that takes this life itself as its theme, that uses the activities of life as raw material for creativity, precludes all routine, all custom, all convention. The New Babylonian culture is based on the ephemeral, on the transience of an experience, and the contrast between this and new experiences. For this reason, even living and traffic cease to be purely utilitarian functions and become part of the game. Living becomes rest, the pause after a climax, the bridge between two activities; traffic becomes a means of increasing the pace, of accelerating action, of intensifying the contrast. New Babylonians play a game of their own devising, against a backdrop they have designed themselves, together with their fellow townspeople. That is their life, therein lies their artistry. They realize that it is the non-utilitarian ele-

ment of play that is important for life, their ethics are based on freedom.

As I was under no obligation to adapt my city to given socio-economic conditions, an obligation that has wrecked the plans of modern urbanists, I have reversed the roles and painted my city against the background of a society based on freedom. I have therefore taken no account of land subdivision, of land and home ownership, of the many speculative and commercial elements that play a role in the construction of a city. I have excluded everything that prevents a city from becoming a work of art. Nonetheless, New Babylon is just as real as any work of art. In essence it is the realization of an old dream, a dream that figures in all tendencies, all movements, all endeavors in the history of art this century, and which, in its simplest form, one could refer to by its Wagnerian name: *das Gesamtkunstwerk*, the total work of art.