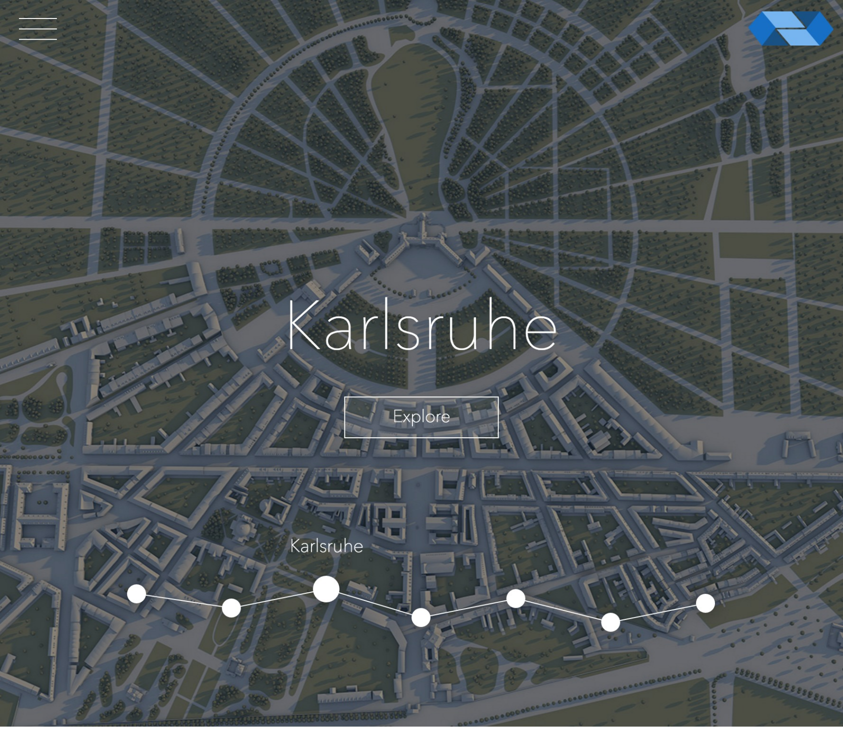


The World as a Plan

Karlsruhe

The city was founded 1715, in an era called absolutism. As the other worlds from da Vinci to Babel IID, the city of Karlsruhe is made in a tabula rasa-mode, constructed on the bare ‘natural’ ground of nature and history alike, that is, without having to consider anything that has been built up or grown up before.

Instead, a new model for a new way of being shall be installed; first and foremost, of being human, as a designed space for a designed human condition. This is what the city of Karlsruhe has in common with the other worlds. But in addition, by being an ‘ideal' space, it represents another old utopian idea: that of the ideal state.

We have to understand the idea of the state in order to understand the construction underlying Karlsruhe; because it is not about the city of Karlsruhe as a specific city in time and space, but about the principles underlying its construction, as a symbolic space.

Ideal States

The Western relation of the utopian to the heavenly always remains problematic, investigators of Western utopian thought Manuel and Manuel say. The two strains of Western utopia, the "Judaeo-Christian faith in a paradise" and "the Hellenic myth of an ideal beautiful city built by men for men" without the assistance of the gods were deeply embedded in European consciousness, they say. How to harmonize these two strains? The conception of a heaven on earth that underlies Western utopian thought presupposes an idea of perfection; but we are mortals, living on this earth. So, they conclude, it needs a simulacrum of the transcendental here on this earth.
The best simulacrum would be the one that is the most encompassing: a literal state of affairs where everything of importance is regulated, cast in the frame of an organizational architecture assuring this. In these regards, two central aspects have to be addressed: that of nature, including human nature, and that of the best organization.

From the mid of the 15th to the early 18th century, Manuel and Manuel state, the utopian constellations, on the one hand, still were united by their total commitment to Christianity; and on the other, they had a common driving purpose, namely the transformation of the Christian world. The main line of this utopia, they say, reaches back to Alberti and Filarete in the Italian Renaissance,

also with the rediscovery of the symbolic radial form of the ideal city, and it runs from Thomas Morus to the seventeenth century, all of them initiating "the modern utopian world." This is reflected, inter alias, in Leonardo da Vinci's modern plan for a modern world, not only as a utopia; since an ideal space, a space both conceived and perfected, does not necessarily have to remain utopian in the word's common meaning but can be realized, also in quite secularized forms. What started with the "aristocratic Christian fantasy that is conscious of two levels of social existence", expressed in the two-layered city of Leonardo (Manuel and Manuel), can be enlarged – not just applying to singular constructions of ideal cities as cities, but in a more encompassing manner of an organizational architecture regulating human affairs: as a state.
From Plato to Thomas Morus (whose construct is said to embody the first truly modern utopia, as a state), from Francis Bacon via Campanella to many others following, the prime matter of an ideal space is not physical architecture, not even the city. It is the invisible, 'immaterial' one of the state: a 'perfectly' planned, organized, regulated and controlled system of affairs serving as the frame for human conduct, with all its necessary functionalities. First formulated in explicit terms in case of Plato's utopia, the underlying conception is that of a constructed environment. It is serving as the relevant world for a relevant human condition, as an environment encompassing –in its non-physical aspect as well – 'abstract' terms: a state, a literally embracing state of being. Seen from such a background, it has its reasons that many ideal cities were not so much expressions of a city – of a utopia as a concrete place, no matter if just imagined or actually built – but of an ideal state. Plato's utopia is located in an imaginary city, but what he is after is an ideal state, not a single ideal city. For Morus, it was an island anywhere, as well as for Francis Bacon who combined the ideal of the best state with that of best science. A milestone: human organization and science help, in their combined impact, to tame nature, both that of humans and that of the natural forces. Parallel to the rising of 'absolutist' states, a rise in the so-called natural sciences took place, of measuring, controlled experiments, physics and taming of natural forces. It was the era of a "mechanistic" philosophy and world view.

Irrespective of whether they follow a destined Christian version (as in case of Campanella and others) or they are secularized – in Morus' utopia yet, everybody could have the religion he or she wanted – the relevant world for

human affairs is a world as a plan. It is epitomized in an organization which is truly embracing and rational, serving predestined functionalities to be followed in management's daily conduct (to keep the construction alive): the state. Seen in this perspective, and as regards ideal spaces, architecture is not primarily about cities but about organization, the embracing architecture for human affairs. As Thomas Morus already said, describing his utopia: If you know one city, you know them all because they are all similar.
There is a long line of tradition, with intermingling strains. For Plato already, it was evident that nomos, the law, should direct human nature and not physis, the natural in its original state. Absolutist thinker Thomas Hobbes formulated that the natural state of human beings is a war of all against all. In this condition, humans would behave like wolves, he says, fighting against each other. Expressed in terms of the imagery underlying our exhibition, it means that the 'natural' state of being human is not a paradise but anarchy; a mess of constant struggle, fight, violation and conflict that has to be avoided. Thus it needs cultura in form of a state, an embracing order regulating all relevant human affairs under the conduct of an embracing and strict management. As mythical figures and imageries, anarchy, state and utopia (Robert Nozick) belong together. The basic idea presented here is that the best state of being human is a regulated one, and the ideal form of doing so (and of course, of living so) is an ideal management of affairs, both guaranteed and symbolized by an ideal state. In terms of a mind-set it means: You cannot leave humans and other 'natural' entities the way they are, but they need to be governed. Here, an additional aspect comes in: already Morus' conception of the good society "did not require a conception of a perfect man", as Manuel and Manuel state. But, as could be added, it would require just that of a proper organization. Opposed to medieval conceptions, it needs no final state of salvation, but just a state one where the best in humans "is elicited by appropriate institutional arrangements." For Morus, "utopia was a society that provided for the natural desires and authentic needs of man on earth", to arrive "at the optimum state of commonwealth in this world."

In its ideal terms, seen as a conception, a state is equivalent to the attempt of imposing a universal, institutionalized order valid for all relevant belongings, and for all its inhabitants, the 'subjects' of that state. As a construction, a state is an abstract space independent from specific localities. Of course, it needs territory, concrete people etc. to do so, but this does not inflict the principle: to embody an abstract, embracing order. In contrast to other "place"-bound constructions we look at as ideal cities in our exhibition, a state, as an ideal space, is primarily the space of abstracted human relations. A state is a question of organization and management, first and foremost, and then (afterwards, so to say) one of concrete physical belongings: of territory, individual people, cities and so on. As an 'ideal' space of own rank, a state, in its first instance, is a mode of organization.

In its practical terms, the state as an idea is very old. It goes back to the Mesopotamian origins of Western culture, representing, in its diverse practical outcomes, the idea of a machine, acc. to Lewis Mumford, of a machina mundi for a regulation and centralized ('managed') conduct of all relevant human belongings; and according to him, it does so until modernity. Historian Paul Kennedy who investigated the rise and fall of empires from the onset of a 'modern' Western Culture around 1500 A.D., the time when Leonardo planned his city, says that since 1450, warfare between European states and the evolution of the modern nation state were closely linked. Before it could turn into a myth of the modern state as Jacques Ellul termed it, the modern state stood for the will of unified, and simplified organization, summarizes historian Ch. A. Bayly, "the longing for embracing power and territorial supremacy"; in the name of the people, of 'the nation', or independent from them, he says. This is because the state, as he concludes, was an idea, in its practical terms as well. These are important aspects for the following: A state, as a will to organize in an embracing manner, does not really need some proven justifications; and it centers on organization – a unified one unifying all issues of relevance, and a simple one, clear-cut, bringing things to their core. There is no matter which things: human relations, relations to the outside world, material, financial or human resources. All this has to be performed and managed according to a predefined set of rules and regulations. The world of relevance becomes ordered, it is the world of a stately cosmos.

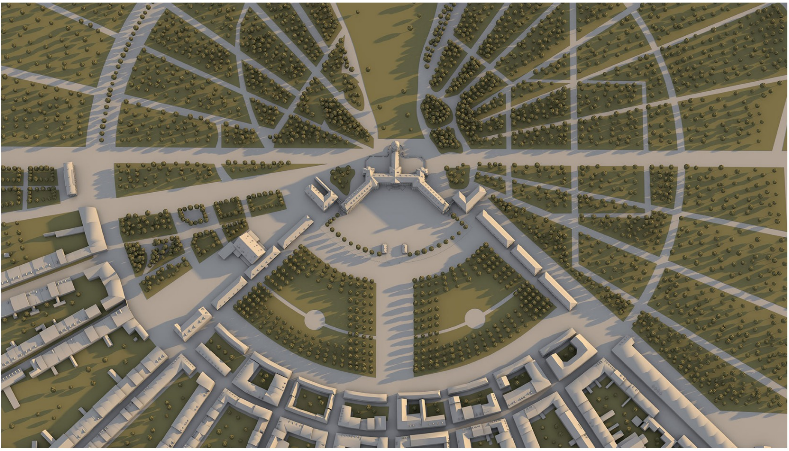
In both its practical and ideal terms, the simplified and unified organization Bayly mentioned also means a formatted one. What the cathedral started with the use of modules for construction, but for a symbolic and future world order, what da Vinci exercised in case of a city as a concrete inner-worldly order can be enlarged now to cover entire territories. The relevant 'ideal' space becomes a formatted one; in its essence, it is an abstract entity, an aspect to reappear in the worlds following.

In its practical terms of historical development, the need for such kind of ordering became more and more apparent since da Vinci's time. In the course of the 16th century, single cities became more and more obsolete as a constitutive political entity, says Ruth Eaton, also in Italy, the homeland of Renaissance. During that century, governmental power was passed over into the hands of less and less individuals reigning over more and more increased territories with more and more human subjects. Amongst others, one result of this was that the concept of an ideal city became that of a military fortress, reflected in the many drawings of ideal "cities" of that time with their star-shaped patterns. These are no longer ideal cities but just planned ones, Kruft denotes, being just some units of a larger organizational unity called "the state". These territorial state-unities then became the "absolutist" state of an absolutist era – indicated by its naming already, a final since absolute state of being, an ideal space as such, both in terms of imagination and (even utopian) perfection.

Of course, the states of the absolutist era were not the fully developed "nation states" of the 19th century and after, but this is not our point here. It is the idea of an abstract ideal space instead, that of a rational organization, a kind of spatiality that could be erected anywhere in physical, 'real' space, also inside a formerly natural environment. As regards the aspect of nature, in 1717, two years after Karlsruhe, an ideal city was planned in the New World, in Azilia, today's Georgia. Constructed by Robert Mountgomery, self-acclaimed margrave of Azilia, it was a construction that gave rise to an "entirely new ideal", says Günther Feuerstein: "The dream of the city – the New Jerusalem – and the dream of the garden – Paradise – are to be unified here." It was an idea that became a guiding ideal in modernity's course, that of the garden city as, inter alias, reflected in Motopia.

But as regards human nature, it needs more than just some ideal spots scattered in the landscape. It needs a construction really embracing, a state. Yet Mountgomery claimed to be a margrave, the head of a territory and not just of a city, even if this territory is just wilderness at his time, full of Indians and forests.

In mythological translation: just bare ground to be cultivated yet. When Karlsruhe's founder, the margrave Karl Wilhelm, had his dream sleeping under a tree in the forest – the area of his future city – he, too, dreamed not just of a city but of a residence, the future center of a state.



An Artificial Cosmos

The circle and the straight line, says Motopia's constructor Jellicoe, are the basic elements of defining a geometrical landscape, that means, in its final (and mythological) terms of understanding, a world as artifact. In the case of Karlsruhe, both elements have been combined.

The ground plan of the fan, which became so characteristic for the city, rests on an older structure, a radially ordered system of passages of a hunting ground, a so-called hunting star. From its overall outer appearance, the entire structure of Karlsruhe had the shape of a circle, embracing both nature and culture, with the actual urban part stretching also outside the inner circumference, ordered in a fan-like manner with 9 of the 32 diagonals and then transforming into a grid. Symbolically, an artificial world is made on the base of a natural ground, and this world is ordered in a cosmic closure. In the midst of the circle, in the very center of the former hunting star, stood the tower of the emperor's castle, the very center of the entire structure. The 32 streets that make up the entire construction virtually meet in the center of this world, indicated by the tower. Also symbolically important, the two symmetrical wings of the castle, unfolding in equal length from its central part with the tower, were opened towards the city. The castle's back side is looking at nature. Later it was partially transformed into a so-called English park, i.e. into an artifact looking as if it were natural. In his description of that ideal space, Vercelloni emphasizes its circular structure. It is first and foremost a symbolic expression, he says, and only secondly a real city: The castle is the center of the domain of power and, in addition, the very center of the surroundings, "in their real as well as in their symbolical meaning." According to him, the combination of different perspectives is interesting, also in a symbolical sense. As an additional figure, a square is inscribed in the circle; and we cannot help thinking of Vitruvius's and Leonardo's human being inscribed in the circle and square, Feuerstein says.

The circle as a whole is organized differently in its different segments, with its urban parts ordered in a fan-like manner. Their radial streets continue beyond the circle's outer circumference, virtually stretching into infinity. The circular line, says Vercelloni, is the ideal limitation of an ideal plane, with the circle as a symbol for consolidating power and possession. At the same time, a prospect of infinity remains, and one can easily imagine that the fan could stretch out for some more miles than it is actually doing. So, absolute order and confinement is combined with infinite longing, a symbol for a stately system having a clear center, being precisely ordered and reaching everywhere. When one takes geometry from its literal meanings as measuring of, or measure for the earth, it is a geometrical world unfolding here.

In addition to the structure presented so far, there is a longitudinal axis in the North/South direction, running virtually through the tower and cutting the circle into two halves. Represented by this long axis as it is called, once more we have the combination of confinement and infinity. The long axis, according to Delfante a rather apparent symbolization of absolutist power, equals the new central perspective of a baroque or absolutist era. A line stretching into infinity is like the infinitesimal mathematics of that epoch and, at the same time, as

Delfante states, it is an expression of a balance between nature and culture, "reason and nature" that only much later appeared again, he says, with the ideal of the garden city. It was an era that began with constructing the void, in Vidler's words, the absolute space of absolutism, also in geometrical terms. Following Leibniz, it was the application of a mathesis universalis; translated from its etymological roots, a universal purification to recur in modern zoning, endless grids, the overall shape of a world as function. It is the space of Descartes, empty, abstract, to be filled with anything one wants – in prolongation of Renaissance humanist Pico della Mirandola's tale, albeit with a different outcome. It became the space of Enlightenment then, at the end of the 18th century, a space easy to describe, Vidler says, and a base of modernism. The Enlighted space is "geometrical, rational, gridded, and above all transparent, universal and seamless, equally illuminated and illuminating."

The plan of Karlsruhe also influenced the plan of d'Enfant for Washington D.C., a new capital city in the New World for a new state, and Bruno Taut's drawings for a New Jerusalem, a new world to be built. Karlsruhe, said poet Heinrich von Kleist, is built up like a rule, clear and full of light. And when one enters the city, he said, it is as if an ordered intellect would speak to us. The founder regularly met with companions to discuss and to decide relevant issues. They met in the tower, the cities' geometrical and symbolical center, shaped as an octagon, since its Christian times being a symbol for a harmonized cosmos, the ideal space in itself. The margrave and his companions (many of them are said to have been freemasons, as the founders of Washington) formed an order of knights, and the nine streets of the fan first had their names. The entire construction of Karlsruhe, Jens Möller states, has to be interpreted as a kind of cosmological system, the ideal space of an ideal state referring to the myth of the city of the sun as Campanella, Leonidov, Bruno Taut and others did it; like the Heavenly Jerusalem, it is an epitome for a final state of being. At the same time, the radiant streets symbolize the power of an absolute state, also in its practical and earthly terms. And also in these regards, the streets of the urban fan are parts of a triangle having its apex in the castle's tower.

Space as a Symbolic Scenario

The founder is buried in a pyramid, located in the market place, the center opposite to that of the castle, also in political terms. The market place is part of the mentioned longitudinal axis in its built parts, an axis stretching from the castle to one of the city gates in the South, a distance of about half a kilometer. It has been called via triumphalis, a naming adopted from antique Roman forerunners. In Christian liturgy, it was the axis running from the cathedrals' West portal to the sanctuarium in the East, i.e. was a passage with a high symbolic content. Conceptualized by Friedrich Weinbrenner, who was put in charge in 1797 as the inspector for planning, it became the cities' central axis, an ensemble of a symbolically ordered sequence of places and buildings ending at the southern gate. Weinbrenner, who had studied Rome's classical architecture, placed 'Roman'-style buildings alongside that street as well as in other parts of the city. Beginning south of the "long street" running in the West/East direction, the central spatial elements of the via triumphalis are first the market place with the pyramid, flanked by two Roman-styled buildings with arcades, located in the East and West. They are followed by the town church in the East, which is built like a voluminous temple with Corinthian columns in its front; and opposite to the church, in the West, the Roman-styled town hall. Both church and town hall have towers, counterpoints to the castle's tower. South of them comes a rounded place with an obelisk in its midst, a symbol of the constitution; and then the southern gate, a voluminous construction in the style of Roman architecture setting a decisive end point.

The entire ensemble is unique and carefully molded in its overall aesthetic appearance, with prescribed heights of profane buildings ascending from the gate to the castle. On the other hand, the via triumphalis is a new element in the former baroque architecture, Delfante says, integrating new ideas into a former structure which, nevertheless, is not violated. With the market place, the church and the town hall a deliberately planned counterpoint to the castle as the symbol of the former absolute power is set.

Traces of a modern mind-set are coming up, the burghers having not just a symbolic building, their town hall, but a political counterbalance as well. Since 1718, the citizens could elect a mayor by their own, they had their own parliament, and a civil legislation. The letter of privileges (issued by the margrave) granted more freedom to the burghers than comparable instruments of that time did; the new settlers were liberated from serfdom and compulsory labor, received ground and materials free of charge to build their houses, had their own civil justice, later on their own constitution (the most modern in the German domain at the beginning of 19th century) and the right of making proposals to the margrave. In 1822, the first state parliament was installed, in a building designed by Weinbrenner, having real political functions.

Summarized and seen in its total, the ideal state is reflected in its residential capital. Everything was ordered under a central government (even the houses for the burghers were normed), but at the same time it should allow for freedom and development – an ideal state of being, indeed. It is an ideal space that can further unfold, which is not confined to the narrow boundaries of a prefixed entity that cannot change any more. But it remains ordered. For instance, Weinbrenner developed model plans for an explicit enlargement of the city area; that is, translated into terms of a world view, even growth had to happen in an ordered and preplanned way, directed down to the detail.

As we all know, such an ideal of a universal order was swept away by modernity. But the ideal remained, clearly visible, for instance, in the city constructions of Le Corbusier and others with their “longing for unity”, as Vidler says. They lost the idea of a state but this is still a mandatory premise. For a modern mind in particular, the existence of a state became so self-evident that it is not even thought of, as a premise. The modern utopias of Garnier, Motopia and Babel IID, yet the utopia of da Vinci presuppose a functioning state, providing the embracing entity in the conditions which they are embedded in; otherwise, they would not function at all in their claim to represent concrete utopias.