Jellicoe wants to achieve this with a grid, an abstraction that can be imposed virtually everywhere. The grid or checkerboard system has been used in all cultures and at all times as the preferred instrument to order space, it was in no ways confined to a Western civilization. Historically, as a technique the grid served two main purposes: facilitating orderly settlements, i.e. colonizing; and modernizing, putting in order what formerly, before the application of the instrument, has not been orderly. To refer to the original Greek conception of nature as physis, that what has the powers to grow out of itself, unfolding itself, the grid is a deeply 'unnatural' structure. The Romans used it extensively, the Renaissance and the Modern Movement as a matrix for the planning or re-planning of cities, for remolding what before has been unorderly grown (physis) and what has to be colonized therefore, to become re-structured in a literal sense.

With a look at the outcomes, is not the instrument as such but the way of how to apply it which has specific importance. And this is no matter of technique but a cultural issue, because it depends on the mind-set in question, the specific system of beliefs, habits and guiding ideas. In case of Western culture, it depends on the ideas of a second paradise (the Heavenly Jerusalem) and of an encompassing rationality, an idea rooted in that of a machina mundi. It culminated in the belief that a cosmos, a world of order, can be constructed, and that by no means it can be a 'naturally' grown one, at least not as regards the relevant belongings of human beings. Following ideas the Romans already had in modern times it was a machine driven by the need to provide infrastructural means, literally what lies beneath the visible surface, in order to assist individuals. Epitomized, the basic concept underlying such a machine was to create a relevant cosmos as a network, as grids of functions to finally serve individual purposes – of mobility, of sanitation, of energy supply. In its overall effect, it led to the non-places described by Augé and others, those anthropological conditions of a "super-modernity" under the aegis of which we still live, and to an urban sprawl of unprecedented magnitude, inter alias caused by the extensive use of cars, this modern auto-motive device in literal terms. To tell the whole story, it was before the advent of the internet, that other disembodied structure of individual auto-motion.

In accordance with such an occidental tradition of making a relevant world as a machine, what Jellicoe tries now is to overcome the effects generated by the idea of a machina mundi by applying that very idea – epitomized in a gridiron basic structure to be imposed, as cultura, on a 'world as it is' and to incorporate a new, park-like nature in its terms – referring to the concept of an altera natura, an "other nature", an idea that recurs to Cicero and originally denoted a garden. Again, it is not about grids as such but how to apply them. Jellicoe gives Greek examples of using grids in city building that were consciously adapted to their natural environments, in order not to supersede them but to still achieve a unity between nature and culture. To use his words, they were the cities of the pedestrian, not the modern ones of his time, driven by the infrastructural needs of a car-based individual mobility and the sheer masses of individuals.

Developments

A short overview on the historical context. What the 19th century has left in terms of cities, Jellicoe says, were agglomerations fragmented in either Victorian terraces or slums, the real and symbolic figure of the favela to come. And a 20th century that tried to solve this with a garden city movement was bypassed by the works of Le Corbusier who, standing as a pars pro toto, applied the grid in a vertical scale as well with his vertical city designs, performing a spatial concentration – in case of our exhibition, as then epitomized in the Babel IID-approach. As in that case to be presented, the solution was thought in vertical concentration, to avoid extensive land use and deterioration of human environment. But it remains doubtful if his constructions and unities of habitation that tried to pose huge, concentrated blocks in a park-like artificial landscape – thereby transforming the garden city-idea and the old archetypal idea of an altera natura – were suited to answer the problems of the individual. The terraces of the blocks are so high that they dominate everything, interlocking in their pattern of continuous flat roofs with the roads beneath them; and all this leads to overt simplification, he states. It is the artist's aesthetical view upon a world from above, disembodied as the one of Madanipour's divine creator, but not the one from the ground of a truly human being, that one of the pedestrian who actually has to live there.

It was the perspective to become so frequently criticized, in modernity's' further course, that of the God-like architectural view planning from above: a perspective following the needs of how to organize masses in coherent and abstracted functional systems (e.g., that of the city) – of individuals, materials, goods, energy, and information. And to map them down as processual flows, in networks of organized processes – to capture movement, according to Sigfried Giedion that guiding idea of modernity, inside the terms of fixed structures of organization. And on the other hand, it was a perspective in line with an old occidental tradition; and in its terms, to build a machine able of capturing the movements of life; an "absolute architecture" able of doing so.

To overcome matter and the frames of an existence bound to physical space and time can be seen as a deeply Christian issue; at the times of Jellicoe and in terms of individual movement, this was best assured by the car. The point in his construction of an ideal space, an artificial cosmos in itself, was to overcome the human and environmental side effects that had been elicited by the negative conditions of the extensive use of cars. A gridiron plan, he says, does not per se have to be identical with monotony, as was the typically modern grid of Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse, an "ultimate geometry" which would mean "the decline of individual man and the rise of a competent civilization similar to that of the bee." That a grid could be also used in other terms is shown by the examples of Chandigarh, a capital city for an Indian district made by the very same architect, Le Corbusier; and other examples (also from other cultures) where the grid is used more flexible, not in a rigid equidistance of its lines that remain always the same. What amazes is the fact that he uses exactly this pattern for his own utopia.

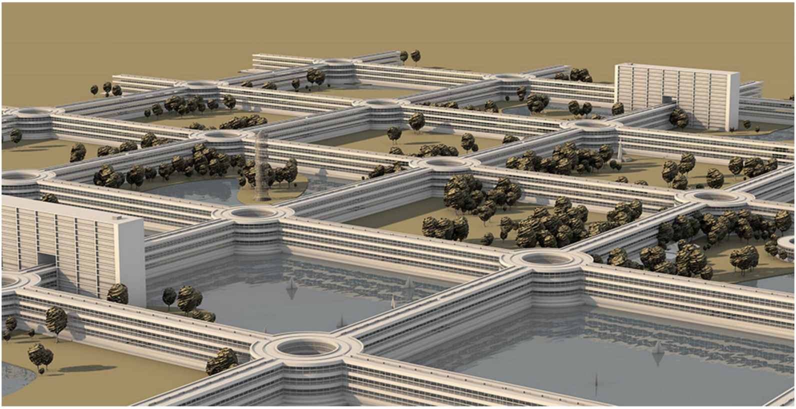
Motopia as Ideal Space

The straight line and the circle, Jellicoe says, are the rudiments of all geometrical patterns of landscape. It was the combination applied to Motopia, a regular gridiron pattern consisting of lines and circles. For Motopia, planned for a total population of about 30.000 inhabitants, he adopted a gridiron plan because, in his opinion, it combined two advantages: First, it is the engineer's simplest layout for a town, through history and even today. And second, its regular circular structures provide internal architectural courts that are in contrast to the open space of the rectangle, i.e. of Motopia's overall structure. The internal court, he says, is the center of its neighborhood; it contains the essential shops, the public house, infant's school, and so forth. Moreover, the quadrants of the rectangular grid provide additional individual spaces, shaped as naturally looking areas of greenery and water. They make up a contrast between individually shaped segments and an anonymous, abstract overall structure. Tall buildings are confined to the periphery of such a structure to ensure the impression of a continuous landscape. The horizontal structures, the lines of that grid, are at some parts standing on pillars, so that one could walk from one of these natural segments to the others. They are large enough to contain even “luxuriant indigenous forest trees”; some of them have lakes, and no landscape of a segment repeats another one. One can live in Motopia a full and happy life without a car, and in good weather, one can walk in any direction.

This applies as well to the town center which is located at the periphery, at the entrance of Motopia, a single huge structure one mile in length. It has been located there because it also has to serve a surrounding population five times that of the town itself – as a “concrete” utopia, Motopia is located in the vicinity of London – and it was essential to keep this service traffic from using the roof roads of the horizontal structure (we will see). The center has roof parking areas and allows for outside approach by road, rail, and helicopter. Its principle of design is that of a linear shopping street, and it has to be seen as a Stoa, as its historical precursor, the Stoa of Attalos in the Agora of Athens; also the Stoa of Motopia is a center for meeting friends and for leisurely discussion, and it is the complementary to the individuality of the home.

The latter one has been posed in the insides of the horizontal structures. There are the dwellings of the inhabitants (in addition to those in the circles), the social ”cell, the home which must be individual to each family and which must have absolute privacy.” These basic social units, apartments varying in size and all modernly furnished, are provided for middle-income people. They often have balcony gardens resembling those of the hanging gardens in Babylon, Jellicoe says. And, seen from below, standing on the ground of one of these natural segments described above – according to Jellicoe, the preferred position that world should be looked at from – this gives an impression of the horizontal structure’s silhouette (the structure making up the grid) that “is unusual and rather tranquil and beautiful in the summer light”, he says. Traffic noise from the roof roads on top of these horizontal buildings is fenced off from the apartments by technical means, as well as is that coming from the mews roads below the roof roads. In their entirety, these horizontal buildings of Motopia shall lead to an intensive, and direct contact to nature via the balconies, small gardens in themselves, and them looking upon a designed ‘natural’ garden in the respective segments.

The social idea of Motopia was a separation of mechanical and biological man, Jellicoe says. The only public transport is provided by water buses which travel on a canal system connecting the different lakes. Car traffic is confined to the level of the rooftops, those "roof roads" mentioned which are placed on the tops of the lines of the grid; and to the level beneath it where the cars can park. The latter is the mews road, a one-way street with specific parking space for one car per dwelling – the dwellings of the inhabitants are located inside the lines of the grid as well – and additional space for visitors. From the mews roads, large enough to allow also for delivery vans, ramps curl up to the transit streets of the roof roads which are located at the top of the horizontal buildings making up the grid in its total. In fact, the intended separation is achieved by placing car traffic on the top of that world, on its very roof, so that it does not disturb the world below which embodies an altera natura in a new dimension.



Other Nature

Interestingly, in the models available to us (which are from Jellicoe's original work) showing Motopia from a total view, there are no balconies, no hanging gardens. That very element which shall provide the tranquil impression Jellicoe mentioned is missing. Another interesting fact is that the very center of this world has been located at its rim, due to the affordances of infrastructural noise. Despite it shall refer to classic ideals of a zoon politikon, it became primarily a service and traffic station.

The new, modern political animal is not political any longer but lives detached, in individual units as an individual unit. Motopia has to be seen as a symbolic space, also for modern desires. In its symbolic traits, a space which could stand for many others. Utopias, says Jellicoe, have the advantage of crystallizing the ideals of the time. Motopia, he says, is such an idea. What the garden city movement tried, in fact a return to nature, and in its consequence, “the idea of the village was extended to areas covering several square miles” has been superseded by his construction, in responding to the needs of a modern mobilized mass society. In his words, his construction also satisfies the modern longing for coherence and unity – that what got lost during modernity’s course – and at the same time, the possibility of growth. Also his town, he says, could expand almost indefinitely, due to its gridiron pattern.

But first and foremost, according to our view at least, it expresses a dichotomy, if not a paradox: that between a pronounced individuality, symbolized very clearly in Motopia’s individual ‘natural’ segments vs. the abstract anonymity of an overall format, that of the grid. This is the modern frame for all variety present, and for all individualities to occur: a rational logic of the merely, and purely functional that literally (as expressed in his town) could expand everywhere, without limitation. What da Vinci had started with his functional city now became extended, formatted, and multiplied.

In Motopia, the idea (and ideal) of a relevant world as formatted functional network – the new machina mundi of modernity – is fully elaborated in its symbolical form. Therefore we concentrated in our presentation on showing this, and not to show his Stoa, or to invent hanging gardens. It is the juxtaposition between individuality and frame, format and life that fascinated us. Even nature has got its functional value, namely to serve as a resort. The ideal space to live in is (a) a completely constructed one and (b) it is constructed in the most simple and rational way, namely as a grid. As Jellicoe said it, it is a world of the engineer, endorsed with natural elements. As in case of Tony Garnier, engineers, people with ingenium, are destined to save the world. But in Garner’s case, it was still for a whole society if not for the human kind, and it had a clear political intention; in Jellicoe’s case, it is for the individual and for the sake of nature, that ontological dispositive mentioned. Political intentions do not occur. Either because they are clear in themselves, or because we refrained from having some.

The symbolic expression is of importance. Inside this rational frame of a system (the grid) that could be virtually world-encompassing, nature and culture are united in a final way: next to the inhabitants, the natural elements are the quadrants inside the grid. Aligned to this, the original individual being of a primordial ‘natural’ world became encapsulated in these segments. Nature is finally tamed, made obedient to human desires.

At the same time, the idea of the individual – next to the others addressed, a further central idea for modernity – is realized in a typically modern, that is, rational way: there are individualities because each segment actually differs, in its inner shaping, from the others around it. Nevertheless, all these individualities became tamed, they are encapsulated in this gridded world. In both a symbolic and practical way, the original idea of colere had been brought to its logical end.

An Outlook

In the same decade when Motopia was finally released (the 1960es), a series of conferences took place in Delos, Greece, amongst others with Marshall McLuhan and Buckminster Fuller. It was about networks and the possibility of designing maps of webs passing through any kind of particular space. One can enlarge this vision, referring to one of the worlds presented so far. What had been started with the cathedral, namely to construct an abstract space that refers to another abstract one to come (Heaven), and to do so by means of consequent abstraction, in the engineer's way, so to say, can be completed now. In two directions: of a consequent disembodiment and de-materialization, epitomized in The Net; and since humans are still physical beings with physical needs, of creating the final network to live in in physical terms.

Constantinos Doxiadis, another participant of the Delos conferences, proposed to construct a literal world-encompassing network able to inhabit the entire world population; at that time, an estimated 19 billions of people (to be expected in the very next future). How to organize these masses? By a gigantic grid covering the earth's surface, consisting of lines of cities, nodes of intersecting units, and natural paradises in between – nature and culture united, as in the case of Motopia, and principally designed in the same manner, but prolonged into infinity, destined to cover the entire planet. In his Ecumenopolis (as Doxiadis called this megastructure) the new oikos, the housing domain of humans and their households, became all-encompassing. In the words of its creator and in line with "the new biology of technology", it was "a global city as a physical image of an invisible order."

Doxiadis' world remained a physical construct, irrespective of its utopian dimensions. But now, we do not have to confine ourselves to physical space. The real ideal space now is everywhere, since the advent of The Net. Not just symbolically, but literally, in its quite actual terms of existence. An observer of the conference denotes that invisible networks seem to threat visible means of defining space. "Indeed, the idea of a space occupied by networks or superimposed by them has been replaced by that of overlapping networks within which physical space only appears as a fragile artifact or effect." What the Situationists of the 1960s still tried, to surrender the confinements of physical space – its 'absolute' architectures of power, control, capitalism – by superimposing their own individual flexible networks on it, the settlements of a New Babylon as they called it, it is no longer needed. As a liberated individual, I do not need any concrete physical space, except for reasons of bare material existence; instead, I can rely on webs of invisible networks. Or posed metaphorically, as a mythical aim, the Heavenly Jerusalem became obsolete as a city, as a fixed space for fixed communities – since meanwhile, free individuals interact with each other by means of an invisible, essentially immaterial infrastructure. In its technical terms, such an infrastructure became known as "The Net"; in its mythological terms, it comprises much more.

Motopia was just a precursor.