THE DIVIDING LINE OF PRIVACY AND THE SOCIAL PROJECT
The urban critique in Borneo-Sporenburg

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Cities also believe they are the work of the mind or of chance, but neither the one nor the other suffices to hold up their walls. You take delight not in a city's seven or seventy wonders, but in the answer it gives to a question of yours. Or the question it asks you…

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

The relevance of an urban project, from a critical point of view, lies in its capacity to pose questions about the city and its future, as well as about current and past practices of the discipline. The strength of a critical argument might initiate productive discussions within and outside the circle of practioners, and therefore a pedagogical role can always be assigned to it.

West8's masterplan for the redevelopment of Borneo-Sporenbug islands in the old industrial district of Amsterdam prompted important questions about urbanism, the contemporary city and the city dweller. The project raises so many of the issues that have been frequently posed by architects, generation after generation: how can many individual worlds be tied together into one greater and inspiring whole? How are individuals expected to live within a collectivity of other subjects? How can that be translated into spatial terms? What are the potentials and constraints of these different discourses? If the "home is a prime unexcavated site for an archaeology of sociability"[1], can we find a direct relationship between idealised ways of socialising in the home and outside it? How does the idea of home relate directly to an idea of urban?

Those questions, in turn, imply a rethinking of ongoing problems through drawing and the cross over between multiple scales. Housing can be understood to be a major element articulating the individual and society, the neighbourhood and the block. The spatial arrangement as a whole has a social content and therefore stands as an object of reflection.

HOUSING WITHIN A DISCOURSE ON THE SOCIAL

The theme of housing is situated at a major intersection of most of the main issues that shape contemporary life, focusing on a central issue of architecture - the definition of a human place within this universe. It therefore extends to a problematization on a larger scale. As a key element of the urban fabric and as part of our everyday life, involves a complexity that crosses varied fields beyond those of architecture and urbanism.

Acting as the smallest social unit, the way the house is founded is nothing less than the crystallisation of an entire socio-economic system, and its relationship to others constitutes the most crucial urban structure. The house defines the street and the district, which in turn shape the entire city, reflecting a vision of collective experience, as well as what is valued within a certain culture. Moreover, it enables a rethinking of the programme of the city as no other typology does because of its greater impact in the urban fabric. Hence, given the importance of its embedded discursive argument between architecture and the social, the formation of the subject and his ways of living, the model for the perfect home has been continuously reposed.

Urban utopias, between the 19th century and the 1960s, have, in many ways, been a response to the rapid industrialization of cities. That included not only hygienist or philanthropic concerns, but also concerns about the role of women within an industrialized society (feminists) or a concern with productivity (fordists) or even social equality (utopian socialists). Many issues have influenced theoretical debates about urbanism and architecture, from economics to politics. The rise of the social in the 19th century, engineered the formation of subjects through

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[1] Tim Putnam, *Postmodern Home Life,* 1999, p.144.

sociopolitical approaches that have shaped architecture in a continuous search for idealized ways of living. This constant re-evaluation of housing arrangements presupposes a new organization of society, a new order that expects individuals to follow. Therefore, architectural plans presume and reflect social arrangements through spatial systems that aimed to regulate the relationships that the individual, the family or society have with one another.

The aim, which was typical of the enlightenment in its scope and hopefulness, was to study man's moral, physical and intellectual existence so as to accelerate human progress and increase human happiness. Housing became to be regarded an instrument to bring both norms and forms into a common frame that would produce a healthy, efficient, and productive social order, and the city emerged as a new object of analysis and reform interventions.

Multi-residential housing and the idea of private house, appears in this context as an alternative to the conditions of existence in cities and society's injustices. This coincided with a series of biopolitical family reform campaigns, which merged into a related set of 'moralisations' that traced the advent of the concept of the modern family, as we know it today.

The creation of "mass produced" housing faced the problems of an anonymous subject and lack of contact with the ultimate users of architecture. Consequently, architectural production was dependent on abstract concepts about the relationship between the subject and the space. In order to overcome this difficulty, statistical enquiries became an extremely important administrative tool that served to inform the practice of architecture and urbanism and to reduce its new object – man – to a comprehensible one. Numbers were to be used to determine an average man with 'normal' behaviour according to the principles in force, and the artifice of the average, standard man was invented. Philanthropic and scientific reform efforts focused on the articulation of spaces of discipline and moralisation with the common intention of reforming a cautious worker, a monogamous family, and a conflict-free, hierarchical social order[2]. Typology started to be organised according to a system of classification that separated all kinds of programmes, offering a way for architects to apply a system of construction and expression. This cataloguing system privileged the nature of the building as an idea over its appearance, its construction and its site. There was an idea about what a building was that would, in its development, entrain all the subsidiary aspects of architecture to lead to the creation of a coherent and autonomous object that would fulfil a proper role within its social, ideological and physical context. Over time, this general scientific approach led to a form of codification that overwhelmed the development typology inherent in the definition of type within architecture. From this point, the architect would work with a fictitious programme of requirements based on statistical data that ambitiously aimed to reform an obsolete familial structure, to solve the problem of poverty and increase economic production. Society became the object of architecture, within which the average man and the standard family were to play a proper role.

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[2] Paul Rabinow, *French Modern. Norms and Forms of the Social Environment,* 1989, p.82.
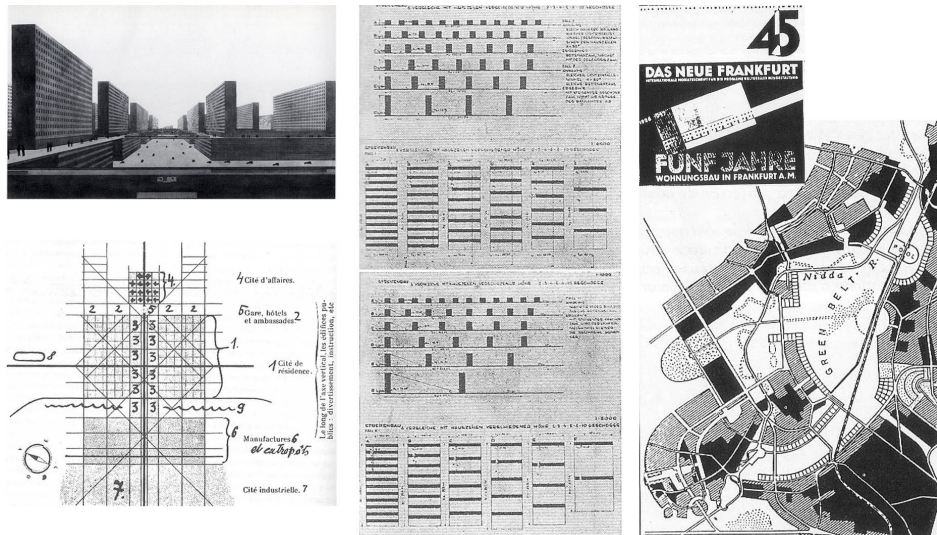
Figure 1   Top left: Ludwig Hillberseimer, plan for the Vertical City, North-South-Street 1924; Bottom left: Le Corbusier, schematic plan of La Ville Radieuse 1929-1931; centre: Gropius, block studies 1930; right: Ernst May in Frankfurt, cover no.45 of Das Neue Frankfurt and Plan of expansion of the residential district on the opposite side of the river Nida.

The invention of the diagram is a "modern product, a schematic instrument utilised by an age that believed in the realisation of utopia, in the construction of the 'good place' rather than the imagination of the 'no place'. In this sense is a product of the enlightenment, a vehicle of the philosophy of progress (…) It was in this form a design technique for the invention of what the 18th century called spatial machines – 'machines for curing' or hospitals; 'machines' for punishment or reform – prisons or schools; engines of community, or communes, and so on. Diagrams were essential in this process; at once the determined spatial relations of new functional needs and the calculated specifications of the new building machines, they could be, and more often than not were, invented not by architects but by the host of new professionals – doctors dreFw diagrams of hospitals, legal philosophers like Jeremy Bentham drew plans for prisons, social 'scientists' drew diagrammed communities. (…) At the same time, the diagram maintained its connections with utopia: we think of Charles Fourier's schemas for 'phalansteries', Ebenezer Howard's plans for garden cities, and, more recently Le Corbusier's diagrams of contemporary and radiant cities."[3]

It was with the advent of modernism, particularly in the years from 1920 to 1930, that the design of collective housing became part of a clear agenda for architects, urbanists and other professionals. Architectural typology was, to a large extent, bound up with the whole idea of the city. From Corbusier's *Ville Radieuse* to Hilberserimer's vertical city and from Gropious' studies for the sitting of the city dwelling to May's urban design in Frankfurt, the residential schemes of those years were indissolubly linked to radical perspectives for the renovation of the city. The new modern movement represented both a stylistic and social break; it assumed a symbolic role representing a real and emphatic shift in how life was to be lived.

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[3] Antony Vidler, *Diagrams of Utopia, 2001*, p.85.

The theme of collective housing became definitely linked to major concerns of social control, so much so that Corbusier regarded it as a way of controlling the proletariat and avoiding a revolution [4]; and industrialists expected to achieve from it greater industrial order:[5]
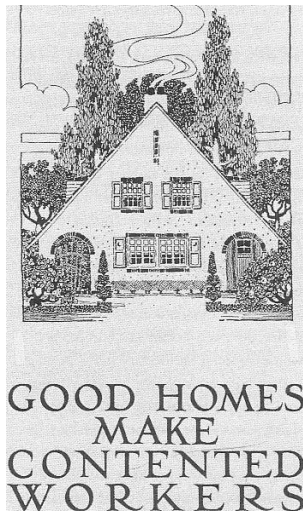
 Figure 2 Industrial Housing Associates, 1919

Throughout the course of modernity, visions of what a city should be aimed to address and resolve the social problem, resulting in a wave of criticism around the 1960s and a re-evaluation of the modernist discourse, on the basis of the discrepancy between its optimistic view of continual progress and the reality of the proposals. The period to come self-entitled of post-modernism, meaning by that everything that would stand against modernist practices, rather than a coherent or unique discourse. Nevertheless, with a few exceptions, European architects have remained faithful to the modern movement in one form or another ever since its emergence as a dominant force, so much so that "modernism has effectively become the vernacular in Europe"[6]. Although in a variety of ways architects draw upon the whole history of modern architecture and therefore in order to understand their work is necessary to understand the legacy of modernism that shapes the intellectual and physical context within which they build.

The focus on the individual that underlies all modern period makes housing a privileged source of investigation to unfold questions about the urban. What are the lines of transformation? Can we still identify housing as a basic unit, bound up with the whole idea of city? What is the relationship between the fragment and the whole, between the house and the city? How is the agenda of architecture translated into drawings and what are the repercussions in the urban?

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND URBAN CONTEXT

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[4] "if you do not build humanly bearable housing for them (you capitalists!), these people will be forced to make a revolution!", Le Corbusier, quoted in Karel Teige, *The Minimum Dwelling*, 1932.

[5] "Happy workers invariably mean bigger profits, while unhappy workers are never a good investment. (...) The man owns his home but in a sense his home owns him, checking his rash impulses... ", Industrial Housing Associates in their publication Good Homes Make Contented Workers (1919), quoted in Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*, 1982.

[6] Susan Doubilet and Daralice Boles, *European House Now. Contemporary Architectural Design*, 1999, p.8. In fact, the modernist legacy, mainly their research on housing, still has a tremendous importance in current architectonic practice, in terms of comfort parameters, ergonomic dimensions, functional issues, but also architectural language.

The redevelopment of the Eastern Harbour District of Amsterdam coincided with that of other major ports and industrial areas in European cities that have been abandoned and become redundant during the course of the 20th century. The industrial era provided the ground for an important theoretical debate about the urban form and its structure and a critique of the industrial city, which then led to revolutionary urban ideals from the *Garden City* of Howard to *Broadacres* of Wright or *La Ville Radieuse* of Le Corbusier. The so-called postindustrial era, on the other hand, can be described as a reaction to the failure of previous visions and models. While the tradition of modernity claimed for solutions for a society in the process of rapid and chaotic industrialization, contemporary European cities try to provide answers to the opposite phenomenon: obsolete infrastructures of abandoned factories, ports, yards and railways that proliferate in a society that increasingly provides services rather than industrial manufacturing.
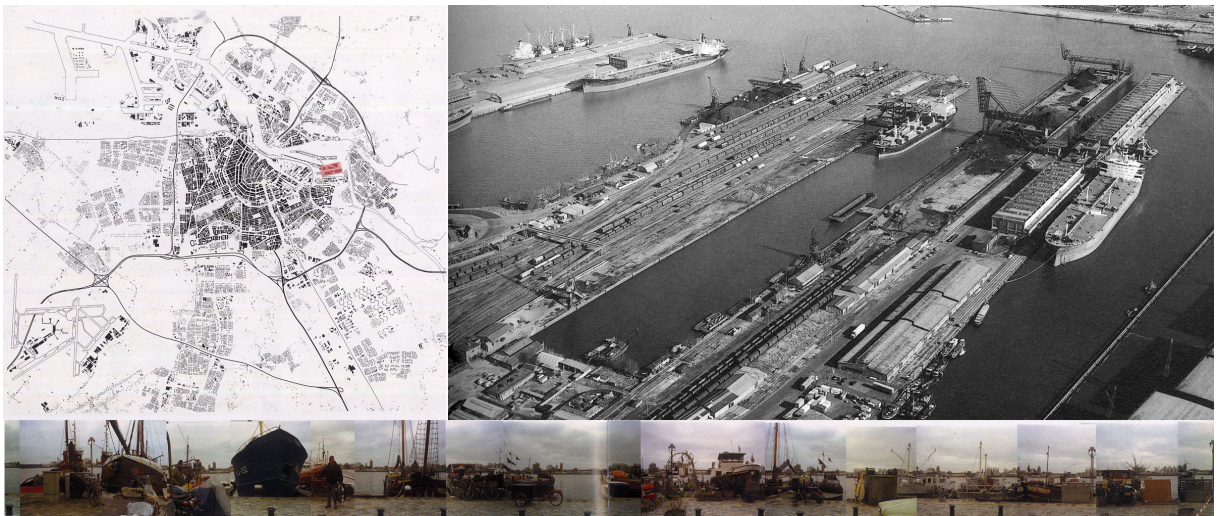

Figure 3   Site location and perspective before the redevelopment in 2003.

The site was the third extension of Amsterdam Docklands, included in a master programme of urban renewal of the port area. The District, which had been the subject of speculation about its future since the 1970s, was finally sold to the city authorities and a governmental programme designated the islands as residential zones (1978-1982).

In 1989 a policy document was created, which proposed considering the Borneo and Sporenburg islands (approximately twenty-five hectares) one area to be developed together. The development started in 1992, and the Eastern Harbour District project group decided that about 2,150 dwellings should be built. The New Deal (a collective of corporations) obtained permission from the city to develop an urban plan and build a large proportion of dwellings and facilities under a full profit and risk scheme. The basic principles of the urban plan, set out together with the Spatial Planning Department (Dienst Ruimtelijke Ordening), pointed to a clear market preference for single-family, suburban-style dwellings with direct access to the street, in order to offer different housing types from those being built on Java island (the third island of the District) at the same time.

In that context, a feasibility study was developed for the area with the goal of achieving a hundred living units per hectare in low-rise buildings. The study, formulated by Rudy Uytennaak, Claus en Kaan, Van Berkel & Bos,

Heren 5, Holnast and Van Woerden, resulted in very divergent plans, but all of them confirmed that it was possible to achieve the required density with a building height of three to four levels on average. This preliminary study was followed by a competition entered by three offices: Wytze Patijn, Quadrat and West8, the latter submitting the winning entry.

In 1993, West8 was commissioned by the Municipality of Amsterdam to masterplan the area according to the basic principles that resulted from the earlier study, responding to the demands of a large-scale residential operation in Amsterdam and in the Netherlands in general. Geuze proposed a dynamic repetition of an abstract housing model alternated with streets in a staccato rhythm through three architectural types: a tightly ordered repetition of low-rise dwellings in rows of back-to-back (multi-residential and single-family houses), single rows and three large residential buildings allocated among the low-rise dwellings, which allowed the increase of density (two of eight stores and one of fourteen). The streets have narrow dimensions with no space provided for public facilities. Besides the 'blue landscape' (water), the green diagonal strip and the small dock on Sporenburg, and the green strip in Borneo disturbing the general scheme, there are no other public amenities. The scale of the communal space is largely surpassed by that of housing, reflecting a greater emphasis being placed on the individual rather than on the collective.

This large and dense housing scheme, despite its monofunctional character, provides a certain degree of variety, an intention that was very clear in the physical model submitted. Done with different colours, it positioned the project away from the concept of a big masterplan of repeated and standardised living spaces or large suburban housing schemes.
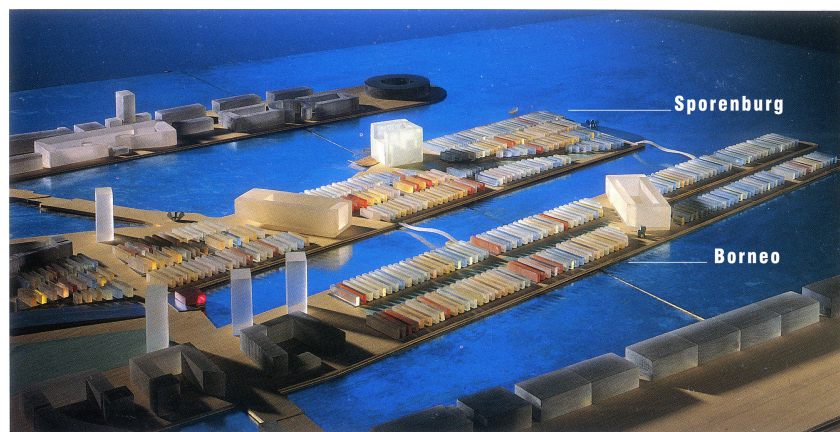

Figure 4   Model of the urban proposal.

In fact, more than thirty architects were invited to design a large number of patio dwelling types with flexible layouts based on a prototype that defined some common 'rules' that had to be followed: three levels distributed within a maximum of 9.2m height, 4m width, 35m depth, and the ground-floor was to be 3.5m high (providing room for split levels and galleries but also perhaps ensuring the versatility of the ground level, where roads and shops, cafes and offices could create a mixed urban pattern in future – the Dutch standard is 2.4m). In each house, 50% of the surface area is devoted to introverted gardens or patios ('gruyère solution'); the cars were to

be parked either inside the plots in private garages or in parallel car parks alongside the blocks; and the materials were to be mainly dark-red brick, western red cedar and hinged gates. Furthermore, the housing projects should meet the requirement that they be designed around a natural light shaft, offering a hidden, familial and introverted space. From the great variety of dwelling modes (from social housing to exclusive apartments) and with maximum architectural variation, an animated street variation emerges with a focus on the individual. Looking at the area as a whole, a balanced relationship exists between the repetition of the individual dwellings, the roofscape and the great scale of the docks.

On the north side of the Borneo peninsula (Scheepstimmersnanstraat), sixty parcels were allotted to buyers who, in association with an architect each could select from a list of candidates, were allowed to build their ideal house under the same strict specifications as the rest of the dwellings. They backed directly onto the water and surface areas would be up to 400sqm.

The physical constraints of the site (two 'islands' surrounded by water, except on the west side where they connect to the northern part of the city of Amsterdam) defined clear borders and a relatively enclosed space, which, if nothing else, distinguishes it from other settlements and the rest of the city. It is organised in five different parts, defined by the water and the positioning of the large blocks and green amenities. Thus different relationships with the surroundings are established, some of them physical, others only visual.
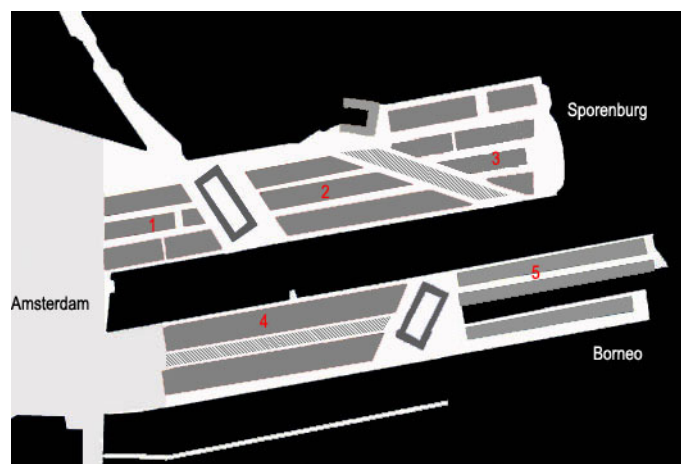

Figure 5   Distinct parts composing the whole of the masterplan.

The project questions the possibility to "think the very plurality of the real and to make that way of thinking the plural effective"[7]. The concept inherent to the proposed scheme challenges not only previous visions, but also current practices. There is a clear argument about the subject and his social relationships, about his lifestyle and identity, about privacy and intimacy. It proclaims a pluralistic society along the lines of post-modern thinkers like Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard, and shares the anti-totalitarian urban reasoning of Colin Rowe or Ventury. As Karl Popper had already stated, freedom is mined by totalitarian conceptions of society that aim to impose on man ways of living and thinking that are foreign to his choice and critical control,

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[7] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1984, p.94.

and every utopia that claims a perfect society and proposes instruments for social change should be condemned. The universal man does not exist, each one has his own specificities. He is unique and architecture should be a response to that. In that sense it appears to be a critique of modernist ambitions for one perfect project and an ideal society, albeit recognizing the potential of some of its architectural forms.

If the overall sociological trend in western metropolises and urbanised societies is towards individualization, it follows that the so-called self automatically becomes more elementary as a unit of perceptions and experience. Many of today's leading cultural sociologists have explicitly observed how the contemporary "urban self" amounts at most to a radicalisation of previous "urban selves". Similarly, general literature on architecture and urbanism has claimed a new urban condition shaped by an emergent new urban subject. Albeit some critical perspectives, most of the issues that have been claimed 'new' have a strong continuity with the experience of modernity. The reasons behind this discursive continuity in urbanism have to do with the pursuit of the right kinds of individuals and their improvement, and how they articulate themselves within social groups. This results in a constant re-evaluation of the subject, the space of the house and its interaction with the city. Geuze's masterplan provides both an interesting theoretical ground and creative propositions for opening up this discussion.

The dissertation seeks to analyze the residential district of Borneo-Sporenburg within this framework. It is organized into three main chapters that will look at the project at different scales: the neighbourhood, the block and the dwelling. The three are not independent discourses but instead reflect upon one another, and the way in which the urban is strategically conceived focus on housing as a central issue.

Figure 6   Aerial view of the redeveloped Eastern Harbour District: Borneo, Sporenburg and Java islands.

Site plans can reveal more about the social and cultural evolution of a city and its housing patterns than the stylistic features of their architecture ever can.
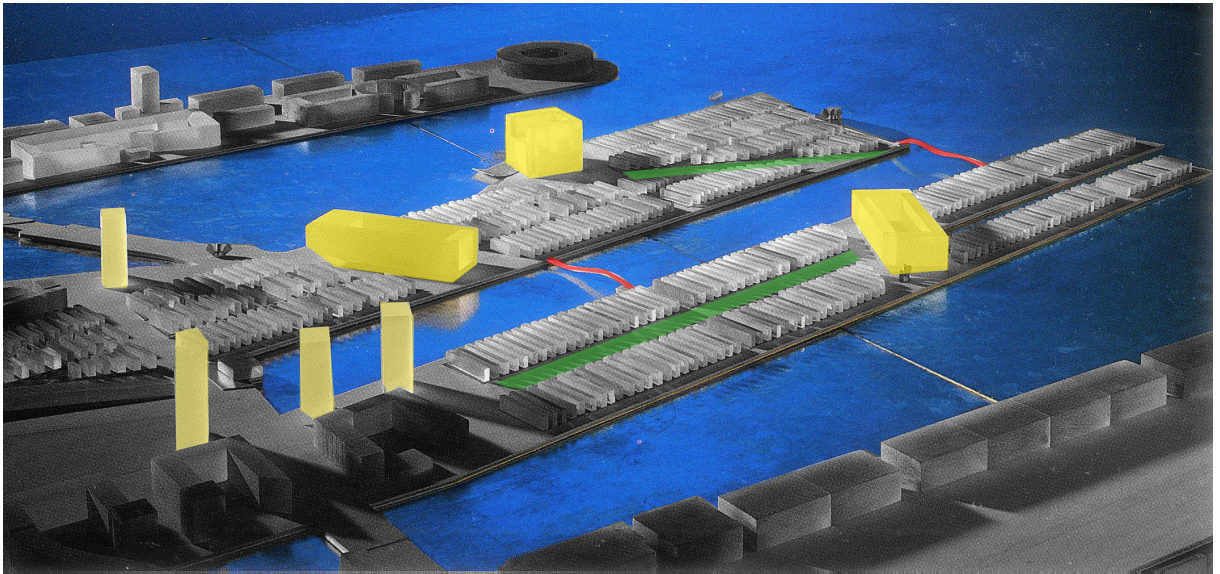
Karel Teige, *The Minimum Dwelling*

Figure 7 Variety within the district.

A project for a residential district with the scale of the one to be to analysed raises the question of how to govern communities of people through architecture. Its urbanism might be located in relation to the question of the neighbourhood, as a spatial way of grouping. The neighbourhood has been regarded to be an answer to social sustainability and, whatever its urban form, it should encourage social interaction[8], provide self-sufficient communities[9], and develop a strong local identity and control over local resources[10]. In that sense it seems to mean more the degree of autonomy a district has than its physical form. Geuze intentionally situates his work within a different theoretical reasoning, one in which community is not regarded as a place but rather as a "self of social ties", "an extra-spatial social phenomenon not to be confused with neighbourhood"[11].

Until the 17th century, neighbourhood grouping was relatively spontaneous, tending to disappear systematically in new plans like those of 17th century Amsterdam and 19th century New York, though never entirely disrupted by the more organic growth of a great city like London[12]. Utopian socialists of the early 19th century, such as Charles Fourier, Robert Owen and Henri de Saint Simon, who were drawing upon the tradition of Thomas More's *Utopia* and Plato's *Republica,* expressed the desire to overcome the physical isolation of individuals and families by grouping the community into one large family structure, envisaging not ideal cities, but ideal *communes*. Their work contributed significantly to the beliefs of Howard, Perry and Le Corbusier and to their great expectation in social progress through architecture and urbanism.

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[8] Elkin quoted in Mike Jenks et al., *The Compact City. A sustainable Urban Form?* 1996.

[9] Haughton and Hunter quoted in Mike Jenks et al., *op. cit.* 1996.

[10] Mike Jenks et al., *op. cit.* 1996.

[11] William Flanegan, quoted in Dirk De Meyer and Kristian Verluys (ed.) *The Urban Condition: Space, Community and Self in the Contemporary Metropolis*, 1999.

[12] Lewis Munford, *The Urban Prospect*, 1968, p.60.

20th century history, and its reaction to the evils of the industrial city, sought the ideal urban form and the ideal urban organisation of its various elements and actors. The common denominator was a desire to plan for communities in healthy and efficient surroundings, away from the diseases and congestion of the industrial towns. From Howard to Geddes, from Wright to Le Corbusier, from Mumford to Osborn, all envisaged an ideal relationship between a basic living unit and the ways in which it should be associated with other living units, as well as with other urban elements. All of them defined a unit of planning that reduced the social to what they believed would be an ideal entity to bring order and social justice to a city described as ill, unjust, congested and confused. Whilst for Howard the unit of planning was the city, Perry selected the neighbourhood, and Corbusier the architectural block. The dimension of the metropolis is unavoidably a problematic of the modern period that tormented utopic socialists such as Fourier, Owen and Godin; hygienists and their proposals for *Buckingam* or *Richardson*; Garnier and his unrealised *Ville Industrielle,* or Howard and his *Garden City* model. Some of them envisaged entirely new cities that would rescue the existing ones from their maladies; others projected new satellites that would shift residential areas without diminishing the importance of the city centre; and others proposed new districts that, as soon as they started to be reproduced would solve major problems faced by the contemporary metropolis.

The opportunity to redesign an entire site allowed Geuze to rethink major urban strategies. In this chapter the aim was to analyse the nature of his project and its embedded argument in terms of forms of social and physical organisation. What is Geuze's position within this most basic kind of problem solving (physical, social and moral) that has characterised modernity and that drew visionary architects to propose not only alternative built forms but also alternative societies? In which ways does he challenge previous models?

Modernity saw cities, quintessentially, as disordered places, infinitely harder to manage than small towns or villages. It aimed to produce an optimum social environment and to re-humanise the city through a new order of space and population, which has led to the reduction of the social and the collective to smaller entities that are easier to manoeuvre, and to the constant re-evaluation of strategies of grouping. The concept of neighbourhood, often related to a discourse on community bonds and values, and also to work production and economy, is tied to an idea of a social unit with a certain degree of autonomy and to a certain extent enclosure from the rest of the city. But the concept of neighbourhood was not always a creation of romantic sociologists, as Lewis Munford pointed out in his paper *Neighbourhood and Neighbourhood Unit.* The debate about whether cities should be planned by neighbourhoods or treated as a whole is a controversial one and addresses not only social questions but also questions of scale and form.

Neighbourhoods have been, historically, a natural consequence of the growth of cities. Munford mentions Paris and Venice to illustrate cities where neighbourhoods appeared spontaneously organized, according to medieval principles, in relation to a dominant church or square with a market place adjoined to it, , "facts that did not prevent the city to function as a whole"[13], and that not necessarily have consolidated the activities of the inhabitants in a limited local area. Sennet also refers the medieval city as a place where people could feel a "passionate attachment to the places in which they lived" and one which promoted an "experience of compassion

[13] *Ibid,* p.58.

for one's neighbours, based on imagining the sufferings of others as one's own"[14]. Echoing some of the claims of Jane Jacobs in the USA in the early 1960s, he applauded the dense and traditionally unplanned city for allowing men to "become more in control of themselves and more aware of each other."[15] While the church or the plaza would relate to the district, other spaces within the city were though of on a larger scale, bringing the different neighbourhoods together. Many of the functions of a city tend to be distributed naturally, and a church, a small park or a local library do not have the same role in the city as a cathedral, a 'Hyde Park' or a central library. The different scale of these elements structures the city in different ways and constructs a certain hierarchical order that was not always planned as such. Efforts to create undifferentiated districts such as the Manhattan grid have nevertheless developed distinctive entities like Yorkville, Chelsea and Greenwich Village. This suggests a certain inevitability of group formation that, despite not necessarily being social, can be physical, visual or simply temporal. Accordingly, neighbourhood could be defined in a broader sense as simply being people who live near one another. In this line of reasoning, Munford continues:

To share the same place is perhaps the most primitive of social bonds, and to be within view of one's neighbours is the simplest form of association. Neighbourhoods are composed of people who enter by the very fact of birth or chosen residence into a common life. Neighbours are people united primarily not by common origins or common purposes but by the proximity of their dwellings in space. This closeness makes them conscious of each other by sight, and known to each other by direct communication, by intermediate links of association, or by rumour. In times of crisis, a fire, a funeral, a festival, neighbours may even become vividly conscious of each other and capable of greater cooperation; but in origin, neighbourliness rests solely on the fact of local cohabitation. There is nothing forced in this relationship and to be real it need not be deep (…)[16]

Geuze does not stress the importance of intensifying a sense of collectivity, neither tries to draw people outdoors to share daily activities or co-operate in any sense. In the overall plan, collective spaces are minimal and, in a similar way to his project for the Shouwburgplein in Rotterdam (1992-97), do not have any function assigned. To the question of how much should be fixed and how much should operate fluidly and unpredictably, he answers with a designed void – the green diagonal - that stands as a positive and productive concept, an architectural instrument waiting for a definition. Because it plays no recognisable role, it opens up multiple possibilities, including that of occasional encounter. What seems to join Munford and Geuze's understandings about the meaning of sharing the same territory is also what distinguishes them. Munford saw in the principles of the *Neighbourhood Unit*, of which he was an advocate, an instrument to enable occasional association as well as to promote "freedom, pleasure, and effectiveness in meeting the needs of family life", "the only practical answer to the gigantism and inefficiency of the over centralized metropolis"[17], that, if nothing else, would be justified in economic terms.

The project for Borneo-Sporenburg simply sketches out a future without entirely fixing it, a concept that was broadly applied to the whole project. Unlike in medieval times, the space is not organised around a church or a plaza nor around certain common local and civic facilities such as the school, the café and the market that one finds in a modern neighbourhood unit. Neither there is a subjacent proximity or awareness of other inhabitants, on

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[14] Richard Sennet, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization*, 1994, pp. 157-158.

[15] Richard Sennet, *Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life,* 1971, pp. 198,

[16] Lewis Munford, *op.cit.*1968*,* p.59.

[17] *Ibid.* pp.70-72.

one hand because there are almost no communal spaces and on the other because private gardens or courtyards, which usually link (at least visually) the different dwellings, were displaced indoors. While what ties together the collectivity in the *Familistére* of Fourier is an idea of an industrial community whose existence is based on work and co-operative households[18]; in the *Neighbourhood Unit* of Perry are the daily and local activities, situated at the district level; and in the *Siedlung* of Martin Wagner is the workspace[19]. May aimed for the collective ordering of the elements of living to complement the work place, according to the Marxist tradition, and opposed the anarchist co-operative tradition of Howard. For modernists the idea of collectivity was fundamentally a result of the qualitative and distributive relationships between housing and local facilities[20].

In Borneo-Sporenburg, what ties together the inhabitants is a geographical territory, which in turn allows for a certain lifestyle that privileges the privacy of the home. Leisure defines the social outside it, even though a specific built place has not been assigned for it. What people can share in the unbuilt space is rather a lifestyle: riding a bike, roller-skating, rowing or sailing in a spontaneous appropriation that again resembles another of his projects, the Maas Plane in Rotterdam, conceived for purposes of imaginative mass recreation. The public that successfully colonizes the space illustrates how "its norm is no longer based on pre-programmed recreational facilities, but on principles of anarchy, exploration, self-expression. It is able to search out and occupy its own sites and provides its own meanings"[21]. That also reassembles Koolhaas's plan for the *Ville Nouvelle Melun-Sénart* in its contrast between built and unbuilt, between what is ordered and what is left to "chaos". This kind of reasoning, which unproblematically envisages the articulation of new social groups based on their lifestyles, also produces a wide variety of housing differentiation, unlike the fordist model of a minimum number of (residential) standards. Lubetkin's High Point, for instance, does not aim to be a complete community but its structural organisation in an L shape that separates an outdoor space from the street, defines a territorial sphere for the social life of the inhabitants – leisure – which does not coincide with the neighbourhood but with the collective housing (the same can be said about Corbusier's *Unité d´Habitation*). In Borneo-Sporenburg this territory is not confined and therefore does not imply, in any sense, sharing a space: "Within the mass culture he [the urbanite] finds his freedom and chooses his subcultures, annexes his surroundings."[22]

The project clearly argues against any form of social control as well as against any ambition to improve the quality of human relations. Geuze believes that "the classic city-neighbourhood of blocks and streets is not for the contemporary, who desires just a base, a unit from which he organizes his life and from where he jumps into the

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[18] "Before, we lived in six hundred households – six hundred kitchens, with six hundred miserable housewives tending the stove: so much wasted energy. Now we have one common kitchen, and those who desire company eat in the common dinning hall, while those who want privacy eat in their own room. This is true liberation of women from kitchen work" in Strindberg's novel *Student or New Construction* about the collective life in the iron foundry of the deputy Godin, quoted in Karel Teige, *op. cit.* 1932.

[19] The *Siedlungen* of Wagner grouped together housing around a factory but with no independent existence from the rest of the district and city. His best example is Siemensstadt, developed by a giant electrical company around their complex of work in 1929-31. The proposed modern apartment blocks were low and strongly horizontal rows of 3-4 storeys.

[20] Other activities such as services, industry, large scale facilities and other functions were excluded from the residential fabric and the city becomes ideally divided in four elementary areas: work, leisure, circulation and housing. As opposed to the Soviet plans where the point of departure was the needs of production, in Corbusier's plan for *Ville Radieuse* housing becomes central, organized around financial institutions, whereas both the industries and the commercial centre were pushed beyond the geometrical centre.

[21] Adriaan Geuze, quoted in Kristiaan Borret, *The "Void" as a Productive Concept for Urban Public Space,* 1999.

[22] *Ibid.*

world, works, travels and gathers social contacts" [23]. Munford counters this: "The fact that many of the significant activities of the city are occasional ones, and lie outside the neighbourhood, or that a large part of an adult's life may be spent far beyond his own domestic precincts, does not lessen the importance of neighbourhood functions. Nor does the coming and going of population of a big city lessen the formative result of good neighbourhood design."[24] We could argue that the housing differentiation provided aims to pre-empt homogeneous housing enclaves as a certain form of social segregation and obtain a wide mix of residents. But the very nature of its plan also misses the opportunity to provide the 'neighbourhood' with the local functions of the district and to relate housing to institutions that serve the local scale. "At the beginning, not every neighbourhood can be fully equipped with all the social apparatus necessary for a full domestic and communal life. It would seem, accordingly, a matter of prudence to allow, in the areas set aside for local institutions, a certain amount of undetermined space for latter occupancy. Thus, an occasional 'island', in a local street plan, might allow space for a church, a cinema, or a group of shops, whose existence could not be provided for in the original layout."[25] That seems to suggest the void as an urban tool, but in Borneo-Sporenburg's case, it does not have the proper scale to allow that kind of transformation. Within the discussion, whilst the city should be planned as a whole or by neighbourhoods with a certain degree of autonomy, Geuze's position is that the different parts of a city are what constitutes its diversity. If we want to have everything everywhere, everywhere starts to look like everywhere else. In this context it is interesting to refer to Georges Perec's comparison between a neighbourhood and an international airport, where he suggests that a district, provided with all local activities, can be as anonymous as an airport:

The activities essential to life, and most social activities, can be carried out without difficulty within the confines of an international airport: there are deep armchairs and bench seats that aren't too uncomfortable, and often restrooms even, in which passengers in transit can take a nap. You've got toilets, baths and showers, and often saunas and Turkish baths. You've got hairdressers, pedicurists, nurses, masseurs and physiotherapists, bootblacks, dry cleaners who are equally happy to mend heels and make duplicate keys, watchmakers and opticians. You've got restaurants, bars and cafeterias, leather shops and perfumeries, florists, bookshops, record shops, tobacconists and sweet shops selling pens and photographers. You've got food shops, cinemas, a post office, flying secretarial services and, naturally, a whole host of banks (…) Seen in this light, an airport is no more than a sort of shopping mall, a simulated urban neighbourhood."[26]

The first attempt to project the city as a whole was done by Ebenezer Howard and his vision became widespread not only in Britain but also in the rest of Europe and America, producing a series of variants that more often than not ended up being completely different proposals[27]. He inspired further investigations that drew upon some of his principles, criticising some and repositioning others.

Howard aimed to solve, or at least ameliorate, the problem of the Victorian city by exporting a large proportion of its people and its jobs to self-contained constellations of new towns built in open countryside, far from the slums

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23 Adriaan Geuze, quoted in Luca Molinari, *West 8,* 2000, p.10.

24 Lewis Munford, *op. cit.* 1968, p.73.

25 *Ibid.* pp. 75-76.

26 Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, 1974, pp.26-27.

27 "(…) almost everyone has got him wrong. (…) They confused his garden city with the garden suburb found at Hampstead and in numerous imitations – though it must be confessed, one of his principal lieutenants, Raymond Unwin, was originally to blame for that" in Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow,* 1988, p.88.

and smoke, and, most importantly, from the overblown land values of the giant city. He proclaimed radical hopes for a co-operative socialist civilisation, which he advocated could only be fulfilled in small communities embedded in a decentralised society, away from the ulcers of the existing cities. In his series of garden cities, linked by railways (forming a polycentric social city), all had two kinds of centres: the neighbourhood centres and the (one) civic centre. Neighbourhoods were "slices in the circular pie", each comprising one-sixth of the town. The basic unit in the neighbourhood was the family living in its own home surrounded by a garden, and the most important neighbourhood institution was the school. There are two cohesive forces that bring the residents out of their neighbourhoods and unite the city. The first is leisure (Central Park)[28], the other is civic life (located at the centre of the Park). Co-operation was expected to take place within the new building type that he developed, together with his associates Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker: the Cooperative Quadrangle. In essence it was designed to support co-operative housekeeping, its series of garden apartments dependent of a central dinning room and kitchen. Housing and domestic work were shared by co-operative tenants as the basic social unit of an ideal garden city.[29]

The concept of the *Garden City*, though very different in theory, anticipated the *Neighbourhood Unit* principle of Clarence Perry in the 1920s. Before being translated into urban terms, the *Neighbourhood Unit* was a sociological concept, conceived to enhance familiar relationships as well as community relationships. The aim was for residents to become aware of each other by sharing common facilities and daily life experiences. This was also to provide for family and community supervision.

Although not favouring the physical definition of neighbourhoods, if we were to compare the *Garden City* and *Neighbourhood Unit* diagrams, we could conclude that they did not necessarily contradict each other, and the *ward-and-centre* diagram for a garden city has a lot in common with the diagram for a neighbourhood unit. Both diagrams imply a variety of scales within the city and define complete units, one at the level of the city, the other at the level of the neighbourhood. The first because of its concentric form, closed off by a green belt; the second because the development was defined according to the number of families needed to support an elementary school. But while the diagram for a garden city has a pre-established limit for growth and extension defined by the very nature of its drawing, the diagram for the *Neighbourhood Unit* alone does not restrict change and growth, establishing a more dynamic set of possible relationships with other neighbourhoods or even with the civic centre. That is to say that this diagram creates a complexity that allows its translation to drawing in multiple ways that does not necessarily mean the reproduction of one fixed model but creates the possibility for overlaps and different formal approaches. Even if it would constrain the drawing to a rigid structure, the city itself was still allowed to expand and grow and therefore to coexist with proposals derived from distinct diagrams. Even though both drew upon social approaches, Howard's model appears to be a "closed" entity, while Perry's diagram establishes solely a set of relationships that could be spatially organised in different ways.

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[28] "Howard had little faith in the role of work – even if co-operatively organized – to provide the unifying force in society. This he left to leisure and civic enterprise" in Robert Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier*, 1999, p.42.

[29] This model found much opposition to its implementation, and most of the time this ideal garden city was transformed into conventional detached and semi-detached houses with gardens. *Homesgarth*, a complex of 32 kitchenless apartments in a Cooperative Quadrangle at Letchworth, was one of the few successful experiences, although without the scale envisioned by Howard.

The concept of the neighbourhood unit dominated almost four decades of urban planning as a means of a strategic and sustainable growth of cities through a fully developed social life, but its conceptual scheme was an incredible abstraction of the urban complexities and soon the reactions appeared. The idealised social life did not take place and it became obvious that social grouping cannot be imposed and social relationships within the city tend to patterns that do not have anything to do with the spatialisation of the neighbourhood.

Le Corbusier's first urban project, *La Ville Contemporaine* (1922), was essentially a reinterpretation of the *Garden City* of Howard, projecting a centre for 600,000 inhabitants that was circled by a green belt, around which would be situated a series of "garden cities". *La Ville Radieuse* (1930) already contains the organisational principles of his ideal city: housing units with the facilities in high-rise constructions to free the ground for green amenities, and creates the basis for subsequent projects. Both projects add to the *Garden City* of Howard the "language" of modern architecture. They were definitely influenced by the concept of the neighbourhood unit, but contrary to the English strand that developed research of the sociological model focused on the community of dwellers. Le Corbusier started with the architectonic typology and looked for the built model, simultaneously housing and integrating at the same time all the elementary facilities. The ideal of community, or social grouping, was in fact transformed, from the horizontal diagram of the *Neighbourhood Unit* into a vertical one (his *Unité d'Habitation* in Marseille being its best example) representing the morphological element of organisation and composition of the "collectivist city". Surprisingly, it was Corbusier himself who called his project a vertical garden city, but the scale and unit of planning was definitely closer to the *Neighbourhood Unit,* and can be understood to be the architectural counterpoint to it. As it has been frequently acknowledged, Perry was the mentor of modern planning, while Corbusier was the mentor of modern architecture.

Both Le Corbusier and Perry reflected on the work of Ebenezer Howard in terms of his ideas and their practical application, and both proposed antidotes to his influential views. Nevertheless, they all considered housing to be the basic urban unit, which when grouped together with social facilities and services would constitute the urban system, the latter being the means of social life polarisation. They all proposed to solve not only the urban problem but also the social problem, in the belief that architecture and urbanism could organise and structure society and, ideally, a community of mutual interests and aspirations. All of them, including Howard, foresaw the same vision: a social mix that would overcome class distinctions. The same happens in the Borneo-Sporenburg plan, but here the social is understood in different terms, not so much in terms of income, class or profession, but rather in terms of lifestyle. The plan aims to provide for the variety of dwellers a wide range of possibilities for living.

The advocates of the *Neighbourhood Unit* principle saw the spontaneous formation of neighbourhoods in the traditional city as potentially segregative since those tend to be grouped by income, race, religion or social class. They attempted to break down this specialisation through balanced social mixes. This problem is still current, difficult to overcome under the logic of a capitalist market, but more difficult even through drawing. That is the case, for instance, in the recent project by MVRDV, the *Silodam* apartment block in the IJ in Amsterdam[30] where

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[30] This project was developed and finally built between 1995-2002, comprising 157 housing units, offices, workspaces, commercial and public spaces. According to the authors, living spaces are grouped, as a counterbalance to the increasing individuality, in 'little

these political negotiations are visible in earlier studies but which architecture cannot 'prescribe' through its specific tools.

To what extent should urbanism be thought of in these terms? "How far should the neighbourhood, as well as the city, be planned as a mixed community with housing for both upper- and lower-income groups?"[31], asks Munford. Wouldn't that be a philanthropic approach to the social problem, aiming for the poor to 'learn' with the rich, and also the reverse?

The proposal for the Borneo-Sporenburg islands is definitely different in principle, but it also has a certain idea of neighbourhood, no longer as a partially self-sustained unit but rather, and to a certain extent similar to medieval ages, a result of a necessary expansion of the city, therefore with a certain aesthetic and formal unit. The notion that a sense of belonging to a space could be achieved through a certain coherence of architectural expression, both through the general plan and through the individual design of buildings, did not, nevertheless, result in a loss of diversity, as we shall see in the next chapter. It does not attempt to break down specialisation, neither does it reveal a concern with segregation. The argument within this reasoning about the neighbourhood is that it should, as far as possible, provide an adequate and representative sample of the whole, not in terms of income but rather lifestyles.

 The idea beyond the residential district reassembles the modern principles of zoning, a concept that comes from the logic of functionalism, which, although not being completely new (Vitruvius, Palladio and Viollet-le-Duc addressed functional concerns) became a primordial concept of modern planning. Modernists saw the evils of the 18th and 19th century cities as, to a certain extent, a result of a perverse functional mixture, and aimed to bring a new order under a functionalist logic in which the city would be separated into different layers according to its functions in independent systems that were to work as autonomous entities. This would result in the breakdown of spatial and formal relations, and in a new system of representation where different plans represented different systems, not always finding a common dialogue and oversimplifying the problems of the city and complexity of relations between the whole and the different parts. It would also undermine the creativity that comes from solving spatial and formal solutions when different functions have to coexist together. Furthermore, the mass production of housing, based on universal needs aiming to provide a fully developed social life, reduced society based on class to a society based on status. But even this concept provided for some communal facilities.

neighbourhoods' and groups of four to eight of the same house type can be recognized by the same use of material in their fronts and also by the specific colour of the hallways and galleries.

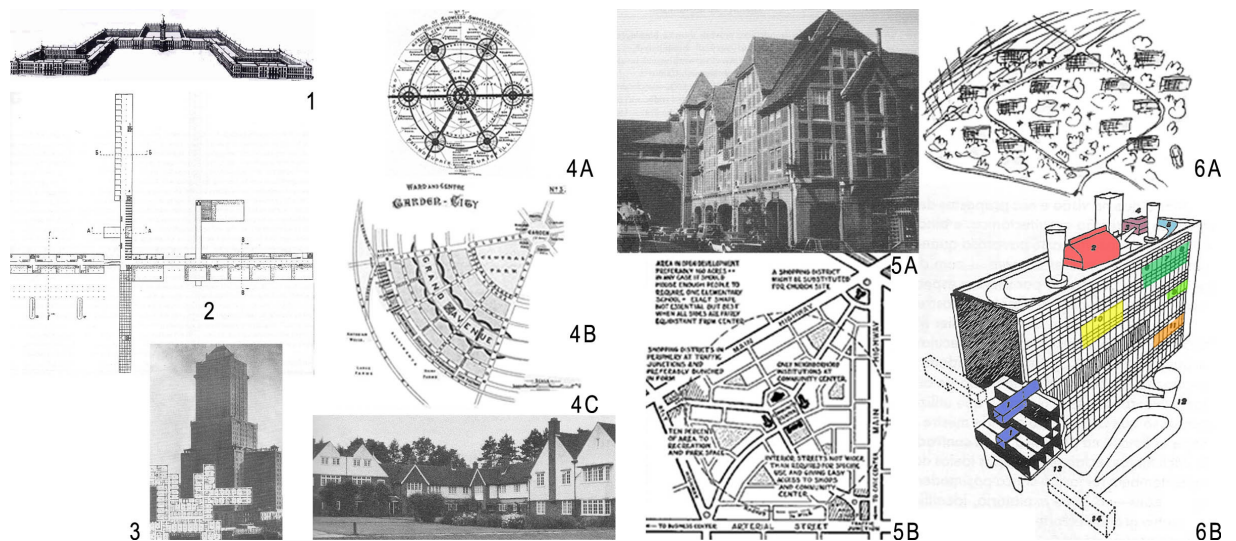[31] Lewis Munford, o*p. cit*. 1968, p. 75.

Figure 8   Different spatial proposals for the grouping of people and approaches to the concept of neighbourhood. 1: Main building of a projected Fouriesrist familistére; 2: *Dom Komuna*, second floor plan 1929; 3: Hotel Shelton in New York; 4A:Diagram of a group of *Smokeless Slumless Cities* by Ebenezer Howard, 4B;Diagram of a ward and centre of a garden city by Ebenezer Howard, 4C: *Homesgarth* – Letchworth Cooperative Houses; 5A: Forest Hills Gardens – the NY commuter garden suburb where C.A. Perry discovered the principle of the neighbourhood unit, 5B: Schematic plan of a *Neighbourhood Unit* by C. A. Perry; 6A: Plan for *La Ville Radieuse* by Le Corbusier and Jeanneret, 6B: *Unité d'Habitation* in Marseille by Corbusier.

Geuze's project does not follow a functionalist logic of this sort. In fact he does not try to achieve an ideal combination of work, habitation and leisure in a perfect, if not autonomous, environment, nor a non-segregated social equilibrium. Louis Wirth suggested that the city dweller is only a neighbour if forced, reinforcing the idea that the metropolis does not develop on the basis of proximity relations. However, the theme of the "urban village" remains an important issue in current analysis, theoretical debates and actual proposals. The urban is at the heart of an enlarged and ever-renewed sociability and needs to address and adapt to multiple lifestyles.

Sociology revealed itself to be unable to draw the city, in the same way that a single imagination cannot embrace the complexities of a multicultural city. Although this debate was brought to the stage some decades ago, the ghost of community is still obscuring urban debates and suggesting the return to old models.

West8's plan for the Borneo-Sporenburg islands is relevant along with the argument about spatial organisation because it moved in the opposite direction of a romantic ideal inherent in social utopias. The main conviction is obviously different - an individual and his imagination cannot change history and society, and develops an argument that suggests an answer to Robert Fishman's question: "The city is a 'social work of art'", "an interwoven structure product of thousands of minds and thousands of individual decisions. Its variety derives from the unexpected juxtapositions and unpredictable interactions. How can a single individual, even a man of genius, hope to comprehend this structure?   And how can he devise a new plan with the same satisfying complexities? (…) To appeal to everyone on the basis of universal principles is to appeal to no one in particular. The more

glorious the plans are in theory, the more remote they are from the concrete issues that actually motivate action. With each elaboration and clarification, the ideal cities move closer to pure fantasy"[32].

Geuze places the emphasis of the urban on the individual and his freedom to organise his life in his own particular way, engaging with whom he wants and opening up the city and all its diversity and multiplicity, instead of trying to condense everything into a single neighbourhood. In that sense, some parallels can be drawn with the Milton Keynes project in the UK. Half way between the New Towns movement of Howard and Melvin Webber's ideas of a plug-in city where modern citizens had access to education, private transport and communication technology, Milton Keynes does not have defined local neighbourhoods but is a city with a wide range of opportunities from which each citizen can select his or her ideal lifestyle. In the same way in Borneo-Sporenburg, a wide mixture of housing types is provided to allow for opportunity and freedom of choice that includes lifestyle quality and aesthetic appearance. The question of diversity becomes a question of scale. At what scale should diversity be thought of? At the scale of the building? At the scale of the neighbourhood? Or at the scale of the city? In Borneo-Sporenburg, diversity is a spatial composition understood on more than one scale, but also on more than one domain, ranging from private to public. The classic idea of conviviality is de-territorialized, as is the spatial distribution of economic and social activities. Hence, the forms of our cities and the "neighbourhood" become a simple contract of spatial cohabitation. The contemporary city-dweller is still a social animal, but his social contacts are by no means with his neighbours.

Figure 9   A: Distinctive aesthetic character of the district; B: Distinctive character / lifestyle of the parts; C: Individual character

The human being needs, by nature, to associate with others in different forms of group organisations. Throughout the history of western societies this kind of grouping has been related to some sort of sense of territory and different urban reasonings aimed at finding the ideal spatialization of associations. The project undertaken by West8 for the Borneo-Sporenburg islands in Amsterdam emphasises the individuality of each dwelling, and both the private outdoor spaces and the reduced public spaces in the rest of the plan suggest a de-problematization of the urban organisation of a certain sociability. Individualisation does not necessarily refer to individualism, but rather to the possibility of producing an identity-related space for all. This desire may even extend to a reconsideration of the boundaries between public space and private space. The question of de-territorialisation does not address simply the social question, by assuming a monofunctional territory it also expresses a will to

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[32] Robert Fishman, *op. cit.* 1999, pp.18-19.

extend the city to all its inhabitants and stresses the importance of an idea of diversity on a broader scale. In a sense it accounts for the unavoidable importance of the city centre and the impossibility of creating an autonomous district because of a contemporary way of living. What happens to local facilities when increasingly both partners in a couple work full time? Who uses those local facilities on a daily basis? Housing is conceived to be a refuge, an island in the literal sense of the word, but the district cannot be considered to be a satellite settlement on the periphery because of its scale and possibly because of the particularities of the city of Amsterdam, for many reasons, different from other European cities.

While the *Garden City*, the *Neighbourhood Unit*, and the *Unité d'Habitation* (and also *Silodam*) attempted to breakdown spatial segregation and specialization by "engineering" multiple cohabitations and neighbourly relations, West8's project attempts to achieve maximum spatial variation within the same programme at the same time as the whole has a certain coherence of architectural expression that gives a sense of unity to the district and, perhaps, creates a sense of belonging to its inhabitants simply by its aesthetics. Throughout modernity aesthetics have progressively lost importance in favour of perfect functional systems. Here aesthetics are recovered as a vehicle of a major idea about the urban and about man. But the question remains, if the plan is not simply a kind of urban sprawl, what is its organisational principle, in what ways does it establish different relationships of scale and hierarchy that provide for diversity beyond the internal living units?

The overall structure of the plan is defined by the relation established between the different blocks proposed, a concept that will be analysed in more detail in the following chapter.
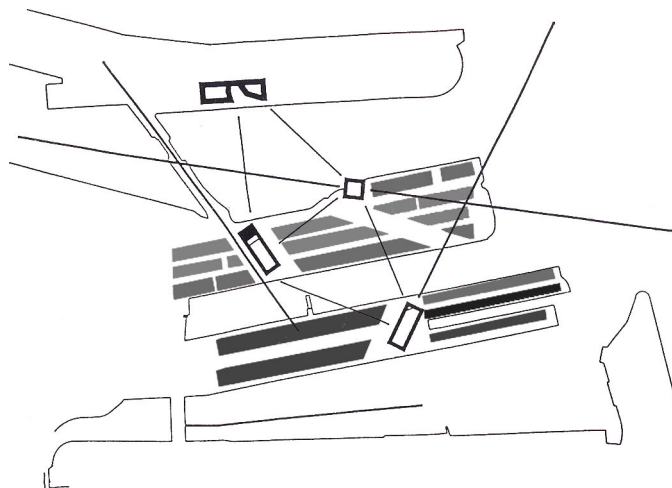

Figure 10 Different blocks structuring the site.

We have long forgotten the ritual by which the house of our life was erected. (…) Do not all the questions of our lives, as we live, remain behind us like foliage obstructing our view?

Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street*

The masterplan defined the block typologies, and organised them according to a rational arrangement of analogous morphologies that, at irregular intervals, were interrupted by a different one. The typologies proposed exemplify how pre-existing urban types can be interpreted to respond to the contemporary city and articulate a renewed discourse on freedom. It revises the early modernist row-housing system, as well as the traditional perimeter block, the open block, and the canal houses of Amsterdam. This reflects Geuze's aspirations and convictions for the entire project and an attitude of permanent dialogue with the forms of the past. It is within a framework of successive reforms and revisions, reinventions and reinterpretations of urban types that the relevance of the project is found.

The morphology of the residential quarter has undergone successive reforms through history, becoming the principal target of modernist reinvention. The *Plan Libre* was an incredible achievement against the rules of academic composition of *Beaux Arts*. Classical vocabulary entered into crisis in the 19th century when it ceased to be believed to be a natural divine order and it started to be questioned within the *Academie* what the most appropriate "style" for a modern society was given that it was not only concerned with beauty but also with making its function visible and legible as part of its structure. It was within this problematic that the need to catalogue architecture according to building types was born, as was the chronological organisation of styles to make them accessible for reproduction[33].

It was symbolically after the IV CIAM Congress and the publication of the *Charte d'Athenes* that the application of the functionalist premises led to the redefinition of building types[34]. Since functional promiscuity was not tolerated, each building should have its own function, clearly separated from others in different buildings and occupying a specific place in the city. The aim of isolating functions resulted in a drastic redefinition of the block which, in the case of residential blocks, posed the problem of the definition of the ground floor as that had traditionally been occupied by other activities.

The strength of modernism resides in the series of studies realised concerning housing. The traditional residential block was greatly challenged in terms of its formal constitution, its dimensions and scale, the relationships it establishes with the system of roads, streets, and collective spaces. Contrary to some of the criticisms that have been addressed to modernists, not all of them proposed rigid and unique solutions. They wished for a varied number of schemes, confirming that various housing types represent fundamentally different lifestyles. The difference between their premises and the project to analyse here is that their concept of lifestyle was dependent only on the financial means of the users[35]. In Borneo-Sporenburg the differentiation proposed does not relate directly to class, gender, economic capacity or profession. Instead, the decision about a pattern for the new settlement, whether it is a low-, medium- or high-rise block; housing rows; towers; or perimeter blocks is, above

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[33] This process is reflected in the production of architecture extremely historicized as *Art Noveau* that gave way to Neo-classic, Neo-gothic and Neo-baroque.

[34] This definition is still visible in so many architectural schools, where literature such as the architectural compendiums by Ernst Neufert is still a reference for students' projects.

[35] That is particularly clear in the case, for instance, of Le Corbusier, whose proposals differ dramatically whether they are for wealthy people or for the poverty line.

all, a matter of rendering different potentials, as well as solving different constraints whilst considering the wishes and lifestyles of the ultimate consumers.

Reforms, both in urbanism and architecture, have been justified on the basis of hygienist, moral, and social concerns. All these problematizations have shaped the ways in which the residential block is conceived, and the idea of how the block should perform evolved together with alternative visions for cities. They were the rule of very precise models and one could not describe a *Howardian* garden city with *TeamX* blocks, or a classic city with *Corbusian unités d'habitation*. The concept of how a city should be in order to provide what we should be definitely shaped the block and therefore it acquires an important discursive weight in the field of urbanism and architecture.

In the Borneo-Sporenburg project there is not a conception for a block that prescribes a rule for the rest of the development and in turn a proposition for the city. From the superblock to single-family houses, from the perimeter block to the low-rise multi-residential row buildings, a wide range of morphologies are represented. The blocks incorporate collective housing with shared access, collective housing with individual ground access, and exclusive housing. The multiplicity of block morphologies, and many ways of living echoes the principle that complexity is exactly what distinguishes the city from the countryside. But it also responds to the classic utopian dilemma, stating that a city, as well as a residential district, should incorporate numerous discourses and languages, rather than a singular or universal vision. The blocks define the streets very precisely, and while the rows give continuity and structure to the overall plan, the three big blocks provide for orientation, create visual relations with the surroundings and introduce variety into the urban fabric, thereby establishing a different system of hierarchies and relations. While the overall plan resembles early modernist schemes of parallel rows, unlike it (which progressively tended to abandon the traditional relation block-street to favour alternatively blocks placed on site according to sun exposure, rather than following an existent pattern) the blocks follow the system of streets that in turn follow the geometry of the site. Since conceptually the water was incorporated into the plan as landscape, the equivalent of the canal that flows between the two dykes of Borneo is repeated on the west side, thus defining the perimeter of the plots, which coincides with that of the buildings.

In a similar way to the functionalist premises, the block, clarifying the very nature of the district, is simply residential. But it is distinct from a later modern tradition of the freestanding block – it defines the street and the roads clearly, and the ground changes whether it faces the street (parking, individual access), a green area or the canal (domestic areas of the dwellings). Its conception can be read as a variant of pre-existing models in terms of the relationship they establish with one another and the unbuilt space rather than its actual form.

In order to proceed to an analysis of the block in West8's plan, four main block typologies have been identified (Figure 11) – perimeter block (A), open block (B), double row block or rows of back-to-back (C), and single row block (D) - which we will locate in relation to pre-existing block typologies (Figure 12).
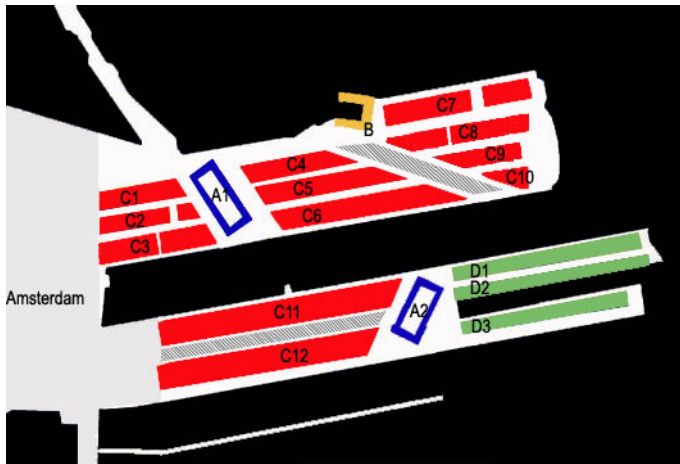
Figure 11 Different block morphologies. A: perimeter block; B: open block; C:
rows of back to back; D: single row blocks

As a point of departure, the scheme published by Ernst May in *Das Neue Frankfurt* in 1930 where he traces the history and evolution of the urban fabric and the block from the traditional city to the experiences in Frankfurt in 1930 is taken, along with that published by Antoine Prieur in *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* in 1947, where late modernist types are already represented. This process of evolution did not happen with chronological linearity, but rather in overlapping moments, with retrocessions, and new inventions. However, the synthesis of these two schemes recaptures into a single one the most relevant moments of reinvention.
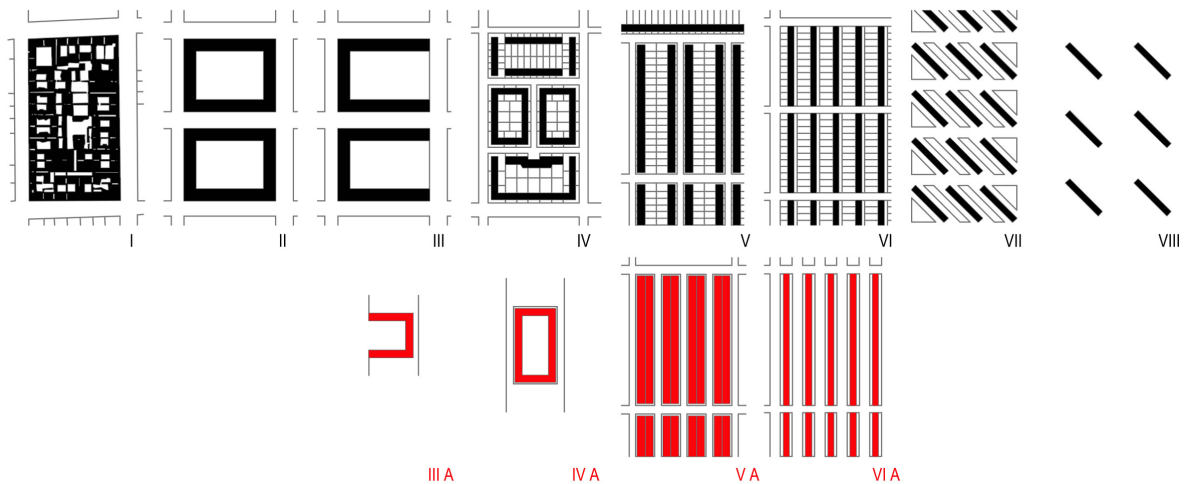

Figure 12   In black: Scheme of block evolution adapted from *Das Neue Frankfurt* by Ernst May in 1930 and *Habitation Colective et Urbanism* in 1947 by Antoine Prieur (Architecture d'Aujourd'hui, no.16, 1947); in red: the block in Borneo-Sporenburg.

The Middle Age block was irregular and closed, with inner courtyards that resulted from the need to make maximum use of small crowded sites into relatively small areas within the fortified walls of cities (I). The densely built block was partially a result of the technical difficulty of building vertically, and also allowed by the possibility of building right up against the edge of a parcel, because the absence of vehicular traffic allowed for very narrow streets. The residential block was regarded as unhealthy, without air, sun and light, but also morally reprehensible by 19th century and early 20th century reformers, whose projects were embodied of a social dimension. The

industrial city and the increase in population density were an unavoidable reference point for many of the ways in which the theme of collective housing has been approached. The unique task of redesigning the city often brought into question what the right kind of urban development was, resulting in progressive and utopian ideas.

The evolution of the traditional block has a first phase, motivated by a desire for progress and improvement of housing conditions, and the need to regulate population densities and moral norms. Alternative visions in the first half of the 19th century, such as the communal environments proposed by Robert Owen and Charles Fourier aimed to dissolve the dualism between city and country at the same time as calling for a more balanced and fair society. The few such settlements actually established (New Lanark, 1815, and Guisa, 1859-70) represented many failures to re-orientate the new industrial world in the direction of a structure based on small communities.[36]

At the end of the 19th century, the garden city model outlined poetic visions of rural life, completely green settlements without the urban density of the traditional city. The concept, although revolutionary at the time, was never able to be fully realised or to transform significantly any existing city. The model did not propose an alternative to existing collective block typologies, instead it found its translation in detached single-family houses with private gardens grouped together in the countryside around a central park.

The exigencies of traffic forced the widening and straightening of the crooked and narrow medieval streets, resulting in the creation of more or less regular and lineal traffic corridors aligned with the new house blocks of a more or less rectangular shape. Further developments led to the opening up of the formerly closed block for collective or semi-collective space. However, only in cases where it was possible to develop a whole block as a unified complex could the large inner courtyard be transformed into a garden[37] (II). In a second phase the block becomes half open with gaps on opposite sides at certain intervals and a further step eliminates an entire row on one side, leading to a block with a U shape (III). Another step in this evolution is marked with the elimination of the corner apartments, as well as the closed courtyard (IV). This model is still the prevalent site development type in many cities today, even in new districts[38].

The formation of the O.S.A. group (Association of Contemporary Architects) in the Soviet Union, under the direction of Moisei Yakovlevich Ginzburg, saw the group adopt as one of its primary objectives the study of prototypes for the *Dom-Komuna* communal apartment building and the *Strojkom cell*[39]. Many of these endeavours were debated and contrasted at the congress held in Frankfurt in 1929 and Brussels in 1930, the former taking the title of *Existenzminimum*, and the latter having the aim of forging ahead with the definition of rational construction methods. The fact that the congress was held in Frankfurt, where an immense display cabinet was filled with numerous constructions by Ernst May, determined the direction of debate around the

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[36] Pere Joan Ravetllat, *Block Housing. A Contemporary Perspective*, 1992, pp.7.

[37] This is the case, for instance, in the residential complex Karl Marx Hoff in Vienna (1927) by Karl Elm. The proposed morphology comes from the traditional urbanism but, as an instrument of a socialist policy, the plot division is eliminated and the ground is appropriated by the collectivity.

[38] The Goldstein Sud Housing development in Frankfurt by Frank Gehry, the housing complex in Dürer by Herman Hertzberger, Zone 5 in the Hague by Alvaro Siza Vieira are just some of the examples of reinventions or re-adaptations of this model.

[39] In 1929, M. Barshch and V. Vladimirov, developed a prototype of dwelling cubicle for one person (1.60 X 3.75m) to be part of a communal apartment building.

conception of minimal habitability. From his first project in Bruchfeldstrasse in 1926, in which a scheme of modules with a stepped plan delimited a carefully ordered interior space, May had painstakingly developed his ideas. Following the guidelines laid down by the *Neue Frankfurt* urban plan, this culminated in his work on the districts for Praunheim and Rommerstadt. The density of the block decreases and the sides of the block are suppressed, leaving a structure of blocks parallel with each other and the main streets. They comprise two façades: the main façade, which is more public, faces the street; the rear façade, which is more private, faces the interior of the block. There are still private backyards that will be abandoned in favour of gardens and public spaces. The definitive rupture with the traditional block comes with the double row type or linear block (V).

Increasingly, new proposals for blocks favoured the same orientation in the form of single row type (VI)[40] which, although not entirely new, was the object of exhaustive studies in the 1920s-1930s. In this model there is already a clear purposeful separation between pedestrian and wheeled roads. The lawns, together with blocks, support a collective lifestyle of dwelling and recreation. That will lead, later on, to the conceptual abandonment of the street direction to privilege the sun orientation (VII and VIII) and to further investigations such as the skyscraper, the cruciform and star-shaped block types.

The large-scale standardisation of housing projects and urban development in the 20th century was engineered on the basis of new planning principles and extensive urban surveys. Rationalisation and scientific approach were expected to deflect the proliferation of cities into more ordered tracks, as well as to control suburban sprawl. Construction in a green environment seemed to be the panacea for all urban ills. Thus a new dynamic form of urbanism would appear, proposing an alternative to the chaos and dirt of the typically modern 19th century city.

At the same time as the idea of residential districts was taking shape, other human requirements such as working and relaxing were located in different districts in contrast with the traditional city structure. Their relationship was to be made through a circulation system that would reduce the time needed to get from the workplace to one's dwelling. In a first period, this led to proposals such as *La Ville Radieuse* of Le Corbusier, where the separation of a residential area implied a conception of the block that was radically different from the traditional one. Although influenced by the socialist cities from the Soviet developments in which the needs of production are the leitmotif, unlike them *La Ville Radieuse* takes housing as the main element. Man as Inhabitant replaces the notion of Man as Worker, and leisure was to be regarded as the element to bring people together, rather than work. This was contrary to many of the experiences in Germany and the Soviet Union, as well as in the USA.

In parallel, urban sociology starts to take shape and the *quartier* was chosen as the sociological unit to combat disaggregation, which took form in the *Plan-masse* and *Grands Ensembles* in France. The 'diseases' of modern society, such as delinquency and social dislocation were to be solved through the articulation of facilities (schools; cultural and religious institutions; commercial, social and sanitary institutions; sports; green spaces; administrative facilities and parking) at the centre of the *quartier*. In the 1960s these principles led to the organisation of *zones d'habitation*, aiming to overcome social disequilibriums in an effort to combine work,

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[40] This type was considered to be the "most advanced site planning method of today" (Karel Teige, *op. cit.* 1932, p.308) because the differences between rear and street façades were eliminated, all floor plans could be rationalized and standardised and has equal access to light, air and cross-ventilation. Furthermore, by increasing the height of the rows, it would provide for suburban sprawl control.

housing and leisure in a perfect environment.[41] The result was to create micro-spaces of sociability that somehow echoed some of the principles underlined by Clarence Perry in his scheme for a neighbourhood unit. Similarly in the reconstruction of cities affected by World War in the Netherlands, the neighbourhood concept, which they called 'clusters' was an instrument for shaping society. This led to proposals for megastructures (architectonic complexes the size of an urban borough and even, on occasion, of a small town), which were designed to turn the housing block into a 'community'. Moreover, the return to the apartment block was intended to generate internal courts with an intimacy lacking in orthogonal row housing. The concept of architecture-urbanism, the combination of building and city, found many advocates at this time. Perhaps one of the most influential was Le Corbusier who, since the 1930s, was proclaiming the advantages of a vertical city[42]. His *Unité d´Habitation* tries to recover the complexity of the traditional block, but in a completely different form. Similarly, in L. Hilberseimer's skyscraper city (1924), the uses (housing, culture, offices) were superimposed on one another vertically, all grouped together in the same building in a new approach to the traditional homogeneous accumulation of activities.

During the 1980s a trend that became manifest was a negative attitude towards the city, which was increasingly seen as an inhospitable cement and asphalt jungle. Large-scale projects became the target of increasing criticism; distrust in the social, emphasis on the individual and primacy of the individual over the social. This was clearly opposed to the discourse of modernity.

It is within this discourse that we might situate the work of Geuze. The various residential blocks on the Borneo-Sporenburg islands draw upon the large amount of research on the urban form over the last century and a half, although through a critical lens the arguments were repositioned. He revisited different conceptions to take advantage of them in various ways.

A1 and A2 are both perimeter blocks. Traditionally, they belong to regular urban grids with repetitive blocks with the same dimensions. Here they are given an independent physicality from the overall plan and because of its character of exception, together with the other large block (B), they act as landmarks. It is interesting to note that, despite the pre-definition of the block, the actual project for A2 was able to combine both the advantages of the perimeter block and the open block through distortions that allowed a fluent access to the interior. B is an open block, but instead of opening onto a garden, it opens up to the "blue landscape" to take advantage of spectacular views over the IJ.

The four types include five variants that within the same morphology establish different relationships with the exterior and other buildings, allowing for different combinations and varied ways of reading the site. Variety was achieved within the district through the manipulation of scale, spatial relations and aesthetics. Looking at figures

[41] Paul Rabinow, *op. cit.* 1989.

[42] "Have modern times the right to create their own towns, to manifest their spiritual significance? I believe that this [suburban] tradition that we recognise as existing, is broken and smashed today by the paradox of a town immeasurably extended, and I believe that a new tradition is being born which will safeguard all that was the prime motive power of the preceding tradition. It will be the new tradition of vertical garden cities, made possible by modern technique. It will replace the horizontal garden cities by giving what those have ceased to give, bringing what they have ceased to bring; everyday joys, much more real than the illusions of today." (…) For a long time I have dreamed of executing dwellings in such conditions for the good of humanity." Le Corbusier quoted in Malcom Reading and Peter Coe, *Lubetkin and Tecton: an architectural study*, 1992

11 and 13, the plan can be described as a series of row houses with three large blocks. But we can also look at it from a different perspective: C11, C12 and A2 define a *quartier* that is significantly different from that composed by C1, C2, C3 and A1, but also from the one that comprises C4, C5, C6, C7, C8, C9 and C10. The first can be compared with the city blocks of Berlage plan in the first half of the 20th century with their three main elements: side blocks (C11 and C12), corner blocks (A2) and the interior. Accordingly, if we consider A2, D1, D2 and D3, we a get a reinvented open block with the inner courtyard transformed into a canal, a clear allusion to the traditional canal houses. In the second, the interior of the city quarter disappears to give place to a third row of housing that reinforces the urban character of the area. The green diagonal in Sporenburg is the outdoor space that is most often referred to, but in fact its scale is very similar to the green strip in Borneo. However, the relationship of C4, C5, C6, C7, C8, C9 and C10 with this outdoor space is not one of enclosure as in Borneo because the blocks are arranged perpendicularly to it, rather than parallel, therefore opening it to the whole site.

The block of Ernst May and Martin Wagner is adapted in three different ways. In the first example there are rows of housing with direct access from the street, but instead of being disposed in parallels defining semi-private courtyards, the privately owned outside space adjacent to the blocks is suppressed and the blocks are built in back-to-back rows (C, Figure 13). They define just one façade each, the one that faces the street. The separation between the collective and the private is not done anymore by the block but by the dwelling itself.
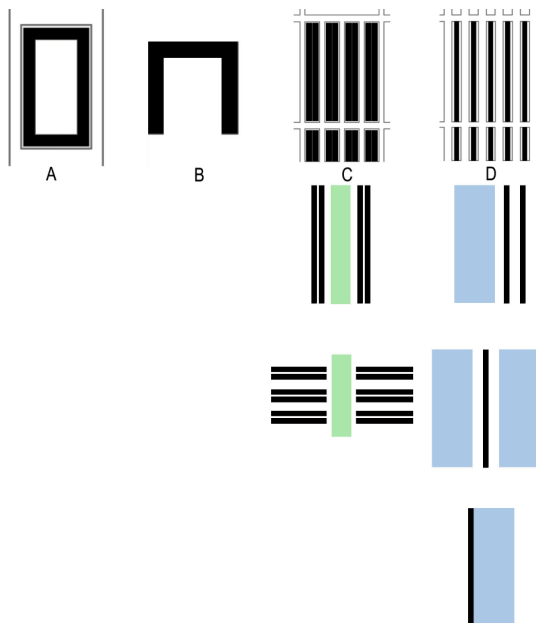

Figure 13 Four different block types and variants proposed in the masterplan.

In C3 and C6 the relation of the block with the surroundings changes. Half of the block only faces the street but the other half faces the canal, which acts as the "blue courtyard" of the block. It is not privately owned and it can be shared by the residents of the block and outsiders, a re-invention of both V and VI in Figure 12.

C11 and C12 are halfway between V and VA. Blocks are built in back-to-back rows, the outside ones are facing the "blue courtyard", while the inner rows define, together with A2, a block similar to the reformed block in the first half of the 20th century in the Netherlands.

D can be either a row of low-rise collective housing or a row of exclusive single-family housing. Both define what can be compared to the last step in May's analysis of block evolution - the space between the four streets of a traditional block becomes occupied by parallel buildings, disappearing the identification with the block, sharing a collective courtyard (in this case the space of the canal, where residents can row, windsurf, or simply enjoy the views.

The strength of the project's statement lies in its ability to create variety within a district recurring to old forms in new arrangements, but also in its capacity to generate a contemporary architectural repertoire and a complexity through the apparent simplicity of its plan.
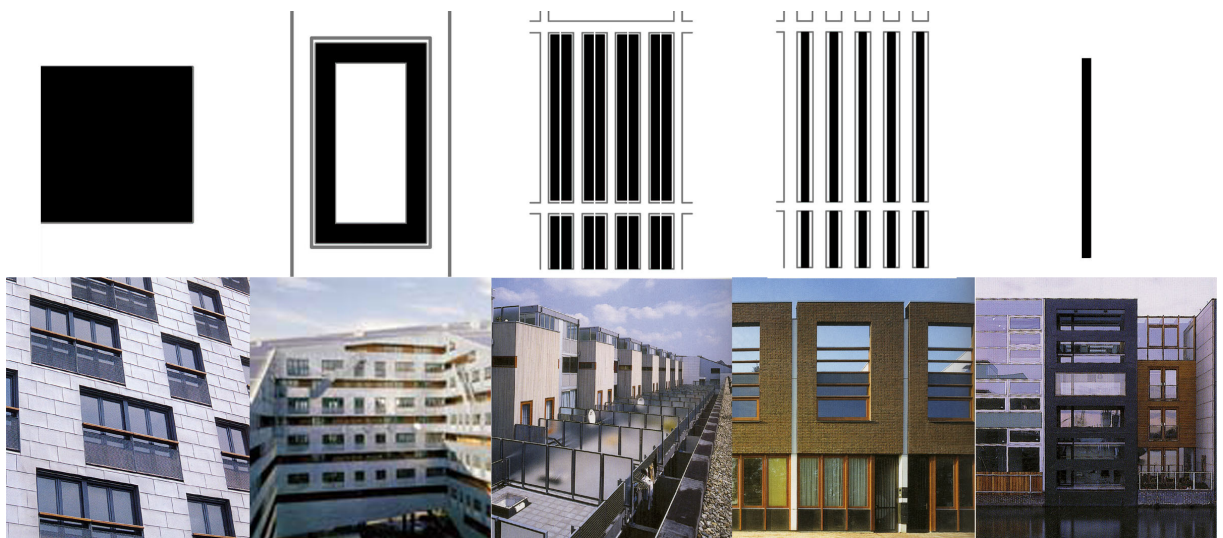

Figure 14 Different block types and built solutions (the U shape block was never built according to the original plan, instead, it was build a high-rise tower in a different location as well.)

Life doesn't simply happen to us, we produce it. That's what style is. It's producing life. Rather than accepting that life is something that we passively receive, accept, or endure, I believe that life is something we generate. We use our capacities. And that all boils down to style. Style may be presented as theory, serendipity, or happenstance. But fundamentally style is a decision about how we will live. Style is not superficial. It is a philosophical project of the deepest order. Style is intrinsically rhetorical, the expression of a serious of more or less convincing propositions about life and the way it might be ordered.

Bruce Mau, *Life Style*

The definition of the dwelling, of the block and the district are all interrelated and the concept of one cannot be separated from the others. Every time that a new idea is proposed for the basic urban unit – the dwelling - it implies a new one for the district. We can think about the opposition between the traditional collective dwelling of the 19th century and the models proposed for co-operative dwellings by feminists or utopian socialists. The simple displacement of the function of housekeeping outside the home implied a new concept for the block and therefore the district. In this last chapter we will look at the dwelling in Borneo-Sporenburg to expand on the nature of the interior organisation in relation to the exterior and how deeply this is connected with the idea of the district, in a circular reasoning. This will be done bearing in mind that the masterplan did not define the architecture, and for that reason we won't be analysing its particularities, but rather how the definition of the urban enabled different architectural discourses and prepositions to come together within a common framework.

A contemporary citizen with his mobile lifestyle and ever changing addresses and activities should not be pushed to live in a functionalist home with a view over Arcadian nature; the modernist ideal.
First, the base is an address, to be connected with the infrastructural networks, both mass media and physical transport systems. It welcomes the car, the bypass and the free-way culture. The base should be designed as a drive-in, a drive-on, a drive-over. The convenience of the car and the beauty of the car are an elementary inspiration for it's design.
Second, the need for individuality, intimacy and privacy. In the hectic contemporary life with hundreds of decisions and fragmented landscapes, it should be a safe and defined spot that prioritises enclosure before the view. The base is probably introverted and incorporates nature within instead of exposure to it.
The third potential character of the base is its undefined floor plan. Everybody demands a specific home, adaptable for different characters. One for the girl with two Harley bikes and no kids, another will be the focal point in the life of a single parent lawyer with three recalcitrant adolescents or the mountaineer with steep staircases.
Forth, is the entrance, the gate to the hectic life. The architecture is not a complicated composition but expresses simplicity and clarity and tries to catch the daylight without loosing privacy.[43]

The first characteristic to be pointed out in the overall scheme is the variety of domestic spaces proposed, a consequence of the co-existence of different block types, but also of different housing programmes (from social to exclusive housing), multiple plot widths, the number of clients involved, the differences in lifestyle proposed, and the number of architects invited (which exceeds the number of clients). It stands clearly as an argument against mass production and standardisation, as opposed to the ideal functionalist machine of standardised sizes and strict organisation of modernism. It does not necessarily follow a preconceived purpose where "a bedroom is a room in which there is a bed; a dinning room is a room in which there are tables and chairs, and often a sideboard; a sitting-room is a room in which there are armchairs and a couch; a kitchen is a room in which there is a cooker and a water inlet (…)"[44].
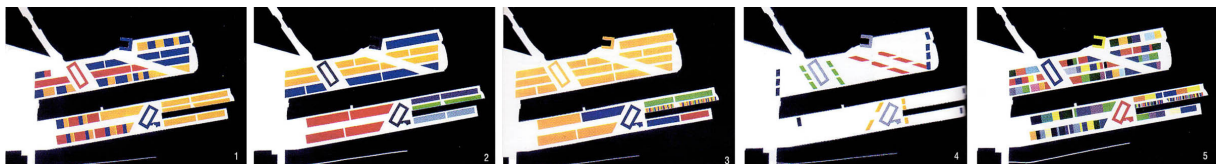

Figure 15 1-Program; 2-Width of the plots; 3-Clients; 4-Differences in lifestyle; 5-Architect's selection.

[43] Adriaan Geuze, quoted in Luca Molinari, *op. cit.* 2000, pp.10-11.

[44] Georges Perec, *op. cit.* 1974, p.27.

Variety is not understood as merely spatial. The decision to engage different architects with the project tries to recapture the dynamic potential and aesthetic power of architecture, but also recovers the idea of the house as a machine for enjoyment, rather than a machine for living. The aesthetic pleasure is held above the resolution of all functional concerns. The space of the house is not understood as mere lodging, it attempts to achieve the symbolic dimension of the word *home* as the place where we belong and to which we always come back to find ourselves. It looks for "la poétique de l'espace" and its comforting intimacy, the place to explore individuality.

The windows are oblong, vertical fortress-type, glass walls. They are not intended to extend the interior space visually into outside, as in the traditional house with a garden, but rather to merge the landscape with their interiors framing it as a Magritte painting in some cases, while in others it closes the domestic space as in medieval times. In that sense it would be sometimes a Corbusian window, "drawn with a picture already in mind"[45], in others a Loos window, "which is there only to let the light in" and "not to let the gaze pass through"[46]. But in essence, the Borneo-Sporenburg house is an introspective unit as opposed to so many of the contemporary approaches to the modern glasshouse (e.g. Double House in Utrecht by MVRDV; Maison à Bordeaux by OMA; Curtain Wall House by Shigeru Ban; Glass House by Michael Bell).

Figure 16 Different housing projects that resulted from a common framework within the urban project.

The spatial, functional, organisational and aesthetic variation within the residential district enables different lifestyles and therefore allows the formation of different subject identities. The most important characteristic of the modern private realm as an intimate realm is the idea of freedom or autonomy of the self as something rooted in the warmth and security of the intimate realm. This notion of freedom is at odds with more common notions of freedom grounded in the political or public domain. It is rooted, among other things, in an attitude towards the "world outside the family", the city culture, the world of labour and of public life, which has been radically altered since industrialisation.

A general belief that the city is instable and has not designated constant, stable meanings to the items of which it is composed prevail. Man is unpredictable and so its social bonds. We constantly proclaim a new city, a new society, in a constant reinvention of its parts. But how does architecture respond to the variety of lifestyles of city

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[45] Beatriz Colomina, *The Split Wall: domestic Voyerism,* 1992, p.56.

[46] Adolph Loos, quoted in Beatriz Colomina, *op. cit.* 1992, p.74.

dwellers? Contemporary architects have stressed the importance of incorporating variables into their work, and within the same background discourse different tools have been put into practice with different results in terms of their expression and spatiality. The question then is how does one draw an architecture that does not regulate, how to achieve a certain level of indeterminacy without falling into the trap that is precisely what is not drawn that liberates.

In *Mart Stam's Trousers*, Koolhaas addresses the theme of freedom, the leitmotiv of modernist discourse, and the paradox of the very nature of the goals and results achieved (in the Netherlands). His critique compares two distinct spatial strategies in the pursue of liberation:

Is there such a thing as freedom that fixes, and obversely, a fixing agent that frees? The first would be Rietveld, the second Mies (…) Fixing, naming, inflating, not being able to leave empty, or not wanting to — these are all hallmarks of Dutch modernity, whether it's Rietveld, Van Eyck, or Van Velsen. If modernity is a tug-of-war between submitting and standing firm, submitting to the maelstrom of modernization, or standing firm against that maelstrom, then Dutch architecture, even before the war, has done a minimum of submitting and a maximum of standing firm. [47]

A series of concepts emerges as a mechanism for compensating for the lack of connection between the architect and the unknown occupant, aiming to offer a diversity of ways of living and the promised liberation from current norms. The pursuit of a liberating response through architecture is probably what strongly marks the continuation of the debate and critique of the modern project. While the term flexibility has clearly been interpreted in a number of different ways over the last few decades, it has been a constant presence, given that flexibility is in a sense one of the goals of modernity. "There are different types of flexibility. We can distinguish between an initial flexibility and a permanent flexibility. The former relates to the possibility of offering certain choices prior to the occupation of the building (…) The second type, permanent flexibility, relates to the possibility of modifying the space in time, and can be broken down in three concepts: mobility, evolution and elasticity. Mobility here means the ability to change the interior spaces quickly and easily to adapt to different times of the day and [domestic] activities; evolution implies a capacity for long-term modification (…) and elasticity is a matter of the modification of the habitable surface area through the addition of one or more rooms."[48] Mies's patio houses, for instance, would aim to offer a permanent flexibility, while in the Rietveld house the initial flexibility is precisely what makes the space less flexible.

During the 1960s, flexibility was put forward as a kind of universal panacea, a solution by means of which the architect permitted and actively promoted a plurality, tolerance and informality in the matter of lifestyles. It was, then, a valid sociological response to the new spirit of freedom that was in the air. After the "flexible years", the concept was increasingly questioned, and accused of being unrealistic. However, it is now a basis for discussion once again. A common concern is shadowing architects throughout the world: how to conceive an architecture that frees the individual and allows residents change?

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[47] Rem Koolhaas, *How Modern is Dutch Architecture?*, 1999, p.162.

[48] Gustau Gili Galfeti, *Model Apartments. Experimental Domestic Cells*, 1997, pp.13.

Some have tried to create the maximum number of possible variables, while others have preferred to work with uncertainty and the unknown as a potential variable. The first has led to an increase of 'subject typologies', while the latter usually takes the form of open plans or open-ended drawings/plans. Another approach that can often be found is the attempt to incorporate the future inhabitants' participation in the definition of their space, such as the case of the urban project in Almere by Herman Hertzberger. In this project, the void becomes a productive concept, a design instrument to develop a contemporary idiom for urban space. It might appear to be an interrupted design, thus leaving open the possibility for interaction in time and with the inhabitants.
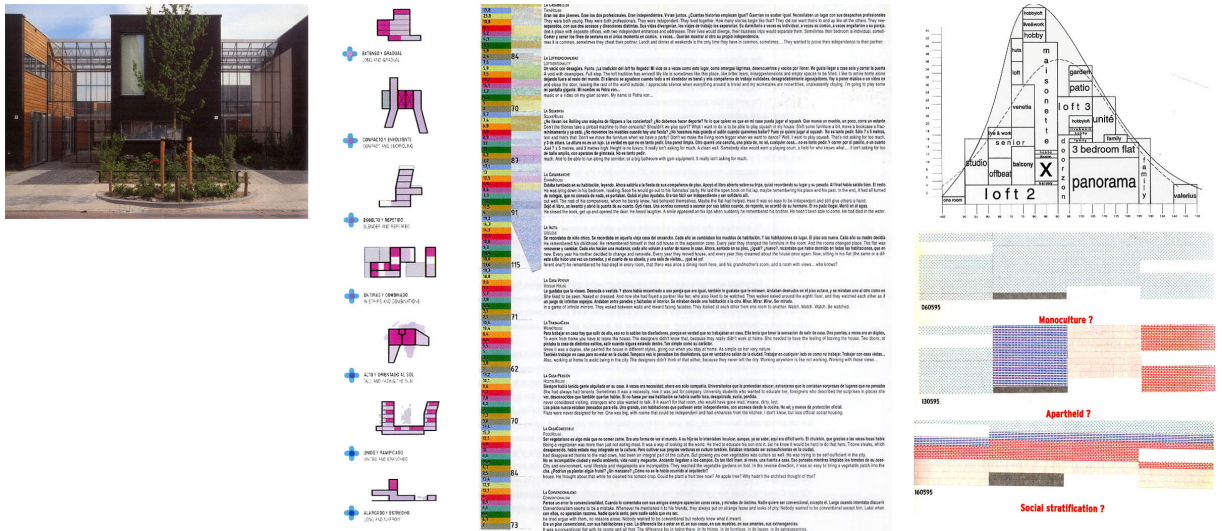
Figure 17 Contemporary housing projects addressing the problem of the anonymous subject. From left to right: urban project in Almere by Herman Hertzberger, residential district in Jyväskylä by Cero9, Galingo Houses by Soyano and Dollores, Silodam by MVRDV.

The idea that there is no architecture that can suit everybody has been some times perverted by a belief that there is a typology suited to each "person type" and that architecture should be conceived according to the premises of many possible occupants. This has always been the problematization of collective housing and its anonymous subject. The 19th century provided architects with a cataloguing of architectural typologies, while in many contemporary projects we can assist to the cataloguing of "subject types" according to lifestyles. That is the case in many projects, such as *Silodam* by MVRDV, the *Hydrid Building* of Steven Holl, the residential district in Jyväskylä by Cero9, or the *Galingo Houses* projected by Soyano and Dollores, just to mention a few. In all of them, architects have tried to imagine a maximum number of lifestyles and family types in order to provide "appropriate" typologies for each one. Geuze's masterplan did not try to "map" people. Through the different block typologies, different developers and different architects, he believes it is possible to reproduce the nature of a city, varied in the spaces it proposes, assorted in terms of its aesthetics, and numerous in choices and possibilities for an unpredictable subject.

Figure 18 Lifestyle in Amsterdam.

Although resisting a rigid ideology in terms of formal and spatial approaches, there were some rational rules that all architects had to follow, which attach a certain value to the collective. Some concerned the use of materials, dimensions, parking systems, and 'gardens'. Although not very strict (the dimensions suggested, for instance, are maximums allowed so that it gives architects an interval of manoeuvre, rather than a precise prescription), this common base linking all the projects creates a sense of collective identity at the level of the district that goes beyond that of the private house. The district is not distinct from others because it comprises an identifiable community, but rather because the people who inhabit those two islands might not be friends but share a certain lifestyle.

The other parameter common to all the projects was the obligation to include within the interior space of the dwellings all the outdoor areas, including the parking lots. This is one of the concepts that has the greatest impact on the overall scheme, as well as on the production of a certain urban culture. The dwelling aspires to the status of a small and self-contained unit with a life of its own, at a distance from the street and the urban grid, where one can find privacy and retreat. But what is the consequence of the interiorisation of landscape? And how does a patio or a garden become interior? What fundamental changes have to be made? Regarding this variation of an urban element, we can make a comparison to the purpose of both Le Corbusier and the Smithsons in creating an internal aerial street, in *Unité* and *Golden Lane* respectively, and its consequences on the urban. It represents a profound alteration of the concept of what a street is. The same comparison can be made with feminist proposals in the late 19th century and early 20th century for co-operative housekeeping. What happens when there is displacement of an urban element from where it traditionally belongs to another environment? What happens when a street becomes aerial, when the housekeeping moves outside the house, or, in the case that concerns us, what happens when the "garden" is interiorised?
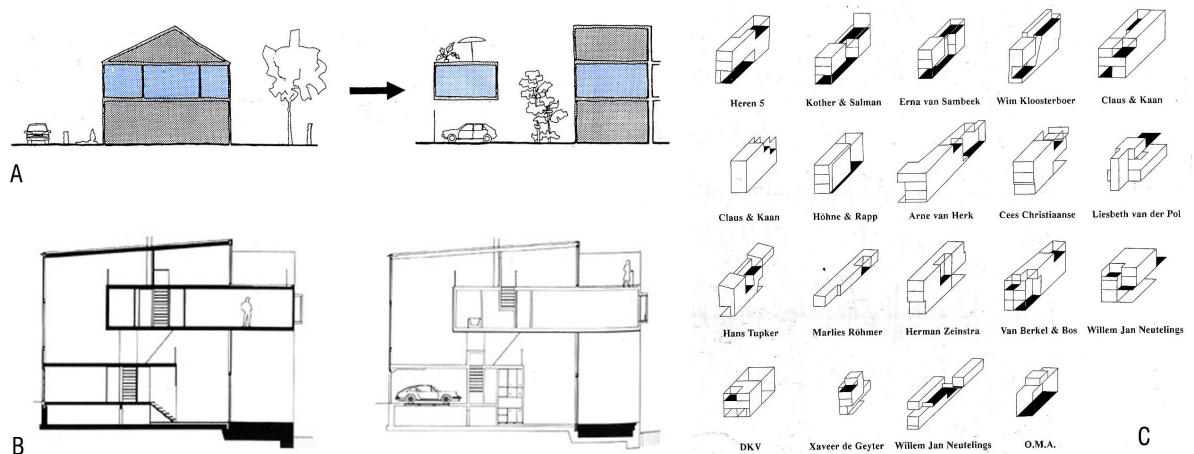
Figure 19   The 'Base' - A: outside space inside; B: an example of an housing unit; C: different solutions proposed by several architects

The outdoor space of the Base is an urban reinterpretation of the suburban gardens, it moves from the exterior to the interior of the dwelling. While the gardens of suburban housing schemes presuppose an interaction between the collectivity, the interior courtyards of the Base assume an ideal individuality. The metropolis as a vital and self-propagating organism and its urban culture is embraced with enthusiasm, in almost an attack on the middle-class Dutch suburbia of single-family houses with their gardens. Contrary to the tradition of regarding the city as being responsible for all the problems of modern life, the plan does not aim to offer any antidote. The city has great potential, and the house is the place in which rest and retreat from it.

The 'Base' is an introspective living unit that turns its back upon its neighbours. It is a mirror of its owner, his lifestyle, his way of understanding the world, and a refuge from the extremely fast daily life in the city. The 'Base' is a celebration of creativity, an explosion of diversity, with its private indoor spaces, its roofscape or balconies, with its inside garages or extraordinary windows looking over the water. It represents an age of individualism, personal ideas and choices, rather than collective standards and values, an inner-world of subjectivity.

To be inside this space is only to see. To be outside is to be in the image, to be seen, whether in the press photography, a magazine, a movie, on television, or at your window. It no longer has so much to do with a public space, in the traditional sense of a public forum, a square, or the crowd that gathers around a speaker in such a place but with the audience that each medium of publication reaches, independent of the place this audience might actually be occupying. But, of course, the fact that (for the most part) this audience is indeed at home is not without consequence. The private is, in this sense, now more public than the public. Privacy is now what exceeds the eyes. That doesn't include what we use to think of as the private.[49]

The space of the private house becomes more atomised and, as the desire for privacy grows, there is a displacement of the space that used to belong to the public domain, into the interior of the house[50]. This does not mean that the dividing line of intimacy is crossing the physical line of the house. The growing privatisation of the public space does not only move this dividing line, but in fact erodes the space of the public domain, understood as a political space.

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[49] Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity*, 1994, pp.7-8.

[50] Both Lynn Spigel in *The Suburban Home Companion: Television and the Neighbourhood Ideal in Postwar America*, and Rudi Laermans in *The Domestication of Laundering* reflected on the shift of what is traditionally public into the private.
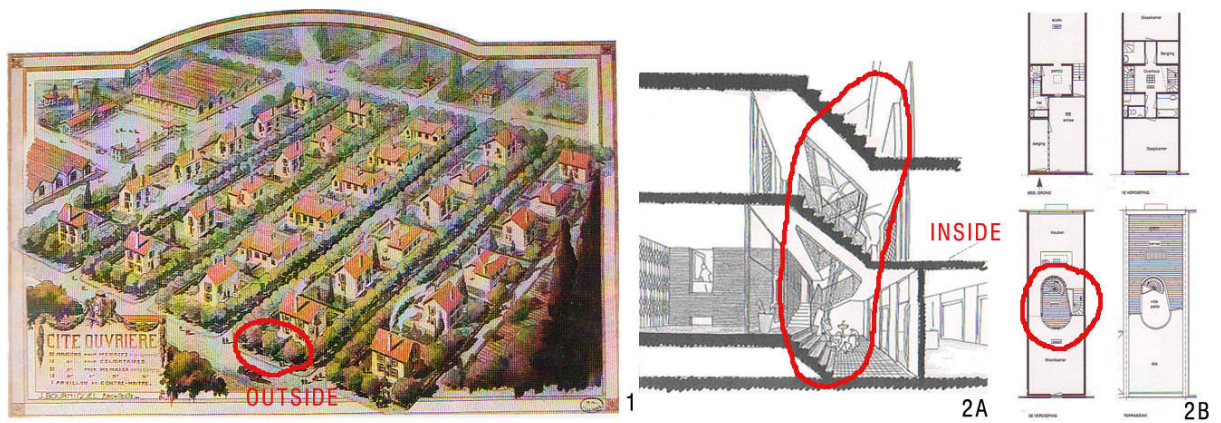
Figure 20 Inversion of the diagrammatic dichotomy inside outside. The suburban scheme is adapted to an urban scheme where the outdoor space is within the walls of the buildings 1: Cité Ouvriére; 2A: Project by Heren 5 for a plot in Borneo island; 2B: Project by Stepan Rektorik for a plot in the Borneo island.

The critique of the modernist approach to architecture coincided with the virtual abandonment of social and political ambitions and the estrangement of direct experience from architectural discourse.

During the 1960s visions of personal and social liberation entered mass consciousness, contributing to changes in social moves, sexual practices, family life, class distinctions, notions of gender and race, and to the emergence of identity politics in the decades to come. A group of visionary architects appeared at this time - the Archigram in England; Coop Himmelblau, Raymund Abraham and Friederich St Florian in Austria; and Superstudio and Archizoom in Italy – with projects for futuristic and monumental machines that were fundamentally lodged in a utopian image of the body, one animated by visions of the future yet bound by the concerns of everyday life. The particular formation of this body, technologically advanced but programmatically primitive defined a "New Man" who was ideologically committed to seeing the self as a safeguard of the values of ordinary life and the defence against the co-opting of the everyday.

Geuze's position is similar to that of Jean Nouvel in his housing project for Nîmes[51]. In that project, Nouvel reduced all the communal spaces, which he considers are always under-utilised, to favour the interior. The same happens in Borneo-Sporenburg, but in this case the outdoor space is not converted into more rooms, but rather into a new kind of outdoor space, more introspective and retreated. Both seem to acknowledge that there is often a discrepancy between architectural drawings and real life in terms of sociability.

The social is de-problematized and de-territorialized, it does not happen because it has been given a physical place for that to happen. The shift from a discourse on the social to the theme of privacy and privatisation, individualism and individualisation, has become a critical one for a generation of architects, sociologists, philosophers, and other practioners, since the 1960s, as Western societies seem to have shifted away from the social concerns and utopias that characterised that decade, towards an inner world and subjectivity. Many authors have proclaimed the advent of a new era, which they criticised as being an era of individualism, privatism

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[51] Nîmes, Nemausus 1, 1985-1987

and even narcissism – a political retreat to purely personal preoccupations and self-absorption, where private life is expected to provide a refuge against the aggressions of daily life, especially in big metropolis.

Post-modernity has been seen to signify the end of the public sphere, the destruction of face-to-face relationships and communities, and the emergence of fleetingly functional places (motorways, shopping malls, play centres, airports, interchanges, etc) called "non-places"[52] by the French anthropologist Marc Augé, in contrast with "anthropological places" that are socially and historically anchored.

Richard Sennett's critique of narcissism in his book *The Fall of Public Man* implies a devaluation of the personal realm because, in his view, the best things in western cultural tradition derive from the conventions that once regulated impersonal relationships in public. These conventions, now condemned as constricting, artificial, and deadening to emotional spontaneity, formerly established civilised boundaries between people, set limits on the public display of feeling, and promoted cosmopolitanism and civility. In 18th century London or Paris, sociability did not depend on intimacy. "Strangers meeting in the parks or on the streets might without embarrassment speak to each other."[53] They shared a common fund of public signs that enabled people of unequal position to conduct a civilised conversation without feeling exposed. In the 19th century, however, the balance between public and private became weakness, and public actions were seen as revelations of the inner personality of the "actor" and therefore belonging to an immoral domain. The private realm, idealised by the family, was conceived as being a refuge from society and its threats. The romantic cult of sincerity and authenticity eroded the masks that people once had worn in public and the boundary between public and private life. As the public world came to be seen as a mirror of the self, people lost the capacity for detachment and hence for playful encounter, which presupposes a certain distance from the self. Sennett stresses the importance of this interaction: "One's personal strengths might not develop if one did not expose oneself to strangers – one might be too inexperienced, too naive, to survive."[54]

In another book, *Flesh and Stone – the Body and the City in Western Civilization*, Richard Sennett sought an analogy of bodily form and experience, and urban form through western history. As in *The Fall of Public Man*, he finds in the 19th century the origin of today's passivity and lack of physical awareness between human beings. For him, mass media (as for Marc Augé the excess of imaginary references) as the effect of anaesthetizing bodily awareness, because the experience of our bodies becomes more passive than in other times, when people feared their sensations. In everyday life we can sense efforts to deny, minimise, contain and avoid conflict with strangers and as people became less and less aware of each other, the fenced, gated and guarded planned community is increasingly sold to buyers as the very image of the good life. "Today, order means lack of contact."[55]

But privatism does not necessarily mean individualisation. In one of his lectures, Geuze's mentioned the Vermeer paintings as a source of inspiration in conceiving the interior of the house. As in this Dutch master's paintings, the

[52] Marc Augé, *Non-places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, 1995.

[53] Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, 1974, p.17.

[54] *Ibid.* p. 24.

[55] Richard Sennett, *op. cit*. 1994, p.21.

colour, light, brightness, the dramatic nature of the shadows, and simplicity of motives and framings should be valued. The interior must evoke the qualities of the spatial construction, the tranquility of seclusion and contemplation. The everyday gestures, situations, and places recover its magic dimension and it is in this space that one can search for seclusion, privacy and, above all, the recognition of individuality. As in Vermeer's paintings, the house loses its social function, and instead expresses contemplation, meditation, and intimacy of feelings.

The interior plan of the 'Base', unlike in the modern apartment, is not highly differentiated, specialised, and individualised. In fact, the opposite happens: it is the individuality and differentiation of the individual that is emphasized rather than the space, and therefore this dichotomy is turned into a new preposition. The modernist domestic space became extremely specialised and directly related to certain functions – "the private house was to be conceived as a machine for living and the apartment house as a factory for dwelling"[56]. To every space is assigned a specific function: sleeping, cooking, bathing. The bedroom becomes a sleeping cubicle, the kitchen a machine to cook, the bathroom a hygienic unit, not leaving any choice for possible deviations. House and man became two machines working in synchrony. The space of the house in Borneo-Sporenburg recovers its architectural strength. The spatial experience is emphasised through the systems of views (control of landscape framing), the effect of perspective and fluid circulation is potentialised (open plan, double ceiling), and the quality of materials, the light and textures.

We could argue that architecture is rescued from the technological, functionalist, and scientific field to which it was left, and embraces the potential of its intangible qualities, against standardisation and mass-production. Through the dwelling, each individual is able to set up his own world to distinguish him from the collective body and ensure he is an autonomous and differentiated entity.

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[56] Karel Teige, *op. cit.* 1932, p.232.

The strength of the Borneo-Sporenburg project lies in its reflection on urban design as a discipline and the questions it raises about contemporary and past practices, rejecting any strategies derived from fixed assumptions. It looks at urbanism and spatial planning as a process of design, and as a tool to enable the architectural process. In spite of some of the limitations that we might find in its plan, it stands as a mature object of urban practice and a critical document. The definition of space sought for an ideal balance between fixing and living it open, and in that sense it can be seen to be an extremely relevant exercise in how to achieve freedom through urbanism and architecture. The theme of freedom is subject to revision, establishing a dialogue with modernity at the same time as reinterpreting some of its formal proposals, and challenging some of its propositions and ambitions.

The project addresses the unfinished task of imagining post-modern democracy, democracy in an age of mass media, technical instrumentality, commodification, and social heterogeneity, questioning how to conceive the urban responding to the irreducible diversity of identity, adequate to the connectedness of power, and the politically uncompromising consumer culture of global capitalism.

A major trend throughout modernity has manifested itself: the progressive isolation of architecture from planning, and the evolution of the latter from an "urban art" to a "scientific discipline" that was to work with other non-spatial disciplines (sociology, economy, geography, ecology, etc.). Although influenced by the early modernist repertoire, it is evident the critique of the principles behind the modern discourse. On the other hand, it also questions post-modern practices that, as a reaction to the rigid plans of modernism, proposed systems of relationships that could be changed infinitely. Geuze attempted to rethink the complexity of scales within an urban project and the relations those might establish with the architectural project. In that sense, it proved that a plan with a fixed set of relationships can assign a certain coherence and unity to the whole, at the same time as its general parameters allow for multiple variations to a predetermined conceptual model. Its plan, rather simple, hides the complexity of a discourse about an open-ended urbanism that seeks to enable freedom through a strategic fixing of built elements. The proposed built forms challenge the conception that a pre-established model might undermine the choices of occupation through a particularly intelligent interplay of determined and undetermined elements.

Geuze ascertains the impossibility of organising the city as a whole, as a finite object. And what is more, he accepts the hopelessness of aiming to organise society and regulate individuals. That does not mean that there is not a political discourse embedded in the project. He simply acknowledges the impossibility of thinking that society and the numerous individuals who are part of it could be improved - just as a machine could – through the appropriate adjustments to the urban. It does take a position about man and forms of spatial association, but the great expectation on urbanism as a way of improving society dissolves. The district challenges and abandons the moral tendency of modernity and its social utopian vision. The question behind the project involves a dialectic between strategies of social grouping and strategies to maximise freedom. Contrary to some of the arguments developed in the field of urban sociology regarding the increased concentration and diversity of people and ongoing activities as the major cause of an urban mentality and lifestyle characterised by an increased individualisation of stressed urbanites, and modern social disintegration, the project relaxes moral restraints and ascribes limited goals to the role of community. That there is a connection between architecture and behaviour

and the city can make better people through as yet unidentified methods. Are architecture and urbanism entitled to resolve the problems of contemporary societies? Geuze counter argues with a neighbourhood vision that is opposed to the close experience found in communities and asserts that many different sub-cultural groups are formed in urban areas. Residents tend to choose a limited number of them in which to participate, according to a logic that is foreign to spatial constraints.

At the level of the district there is an implicit critique of the principles of the neighbourhood unit. Neither work nor civic life is emphasised as a way of bringing people together. Accordingly, public space is neither a residue of private development, nor a dominant figure in the space. The qualities of the site, and more precisely its relations with the water are boosted and incorporated into the whole project to enhance an urban composition that only groups together a way of living that privileges the intimacy of the home and its intrinsic virtues. In that sense the project can also be regarded as a statement about the merits of spatial experience, the potential value of aesthetics, and the importance of a dialogue with existing structures, whether they are urban fabrics, historic nuclei or simply landscape. This dialogue is not, by any means, a nostalgic one, but it serves to inform the project in multiple levels and scales that go beyond the relationship with water, and extend to other decisions such as the position of the "meteorites" that establish a set of relations with Java Island, as well as with the city of Amsterdam.

Both the block and the dwelling revive old typologies and reinvent new formal responses. The block manipulates the early modernist row block as well as other pre-existing block types, finding in them the potential to innovate within typological norms. On the scale of the masterplan, there is a neutral and rational order of blocks that allows an overall unity in the scheme, at the same time that the architecture sets up the conditions and opportunities for differentiation to occur within each block. In that sense, it stands as a critique of the rationalist criteria of standardisation and mass production, and their monotonous aesthetics.

The dwelling acquires an important weight and closes the conceptual process. It questions cultural norms and engages issues that confront society at large, such as the suburban ideal. It proposes alternative social practices and ways of inhabiting the city and the district. The set of fixed rules that were to be followed at the level of architecture, set the project apart from an architecture of any previous era, and provided freedom of expression within an overall unity. This constitutes, in itself, one of the merits and goals of the project: the articulation of a variety of discourses and consequently of a diverse group of users.

That raises the ultimate question of whether multiplicity simply represents an amoral framework, or is in itself an ideology. An ideology that paradigmatically intends to give voice to the parts that would not fit into a holistic vision, an ideology that would be, in itself, a statement against ideology. But what does that mean? That as in every historical cycle one ideology has to be replaced by another one? More than representing a break, the project continues to pose questions about the complexity of linking different scales.

More than simply an ideological statement, the project stands as an object that unifies knowledge, imagination and praxis. And the outcome is an intervention where creativity, tradition, and critical perspective coexist together.

The figures included in this dissertation were from several sources, including my own pictures when visiting the site. In most of the cases they have been adapted by using different colours, collages and highlighting specific aspects to support the text in the best possible way.

Figure 1   Top left: Ludwig Hillberseimer, plan for the Vertical City, North-South-Street 1924, reprinted from *Dream City. On the Future of Urban Space, 2001,* Max Stemshorn;

Bottom left: Le Corbusier, schematic plan of La Ville Radieuse 1929-1931, reprinted from *The Minimum Dwelling*, 1932, Karel Teige;

Centre: Gropius, block studies 1930, reprinted from *The Minimum Dwelling*, 1932, Karel Teige;

Right: Ernst May in Frankfurt, cover no.45 of Das Neue Frankfurt and Plan of expansion of the residential district on the opposite side of the river Nida, reprinted from *Morfologia Urbana e Desenho da Cidade*, 1992, José M. Ressano Lamas.

Figure 2   Industrial Housing Associates 1919, reprinted from *The Grand Domestic Revolution*, Dolores Hayden.

Figure 3   Site location and perspective before the redevelopment in 2003 reprinted and adapted from *West8*, 2000, Luca Molinari.

Figure 4   Model of the urban proposal, reprinted and adapted from *West8,* 2000, Luca Molinari.

Figure 5   Distinct parts composing the whole of the masterplan.

Figure 6   Aerial view of the redeveloped Eastern Harbour District: Borneo, Sporenburg and Java islands, reprinted from *Eastern Harbour District Amsterdam: Urbanism and Architecture,* 2003, Jaap Evert Abrahamse.

Figure 7   Variety within the district, reprinted and adapted from *West8*, 2000, Luca Molinari.

Figure 8   Different spatial proposals for the grouping of people and approaches to the concept of neighbourhood.

1: Main building of a projected Fouriesrist phalanstère, reprinted from *Dream City: On the Future of Urban Space,* 2001, Max Stemshorn;

2: Dom Komuna, second floor plan 1929, reprinted from *The Minimum Dwelling*, 1932, Karel Teige;

3: Hotel Shelton in New York reprinted from *The Minimum Dwelling*, 1932, Karel Teige;

4A:Diagram of a group of Smokeless Slumless Cities by Ebenezer Howard, reprinted from *The Garden City; past, present, and future*, 1992, Stephen V. Ward;

4B;Diagram of a ward and centre of a garden city by Ebenezer Howard, reprinted from *The Modern City: Planning in the 19th century*, 1969, Françoise Choay;

4C: Homesgarth – Letchworth Cooperative Houses, reprinted from *The Grand Domestic Revolution*, 1982, Dolores Hayden;

5A: Forest Hills Gardens – the NY commuter garden suburb where C.A. Perry discovered the principle of the neighbourhood unit, reprinted from *Cities of Tomorrow*, 1988, Peter Hall;

5B: Schematic plan of a Neighbourhood Unit by C. A. Perry, reprinted from *Morfologia Urbana e Desenho da Cidade*, 1992, José M. Ressano Lamas;

6A: Plan for La Ville Radieuse by Le Corbusier and Jeanneret, reprinted from *Morfologia Urbana e Desenho da Cidade*, 1992, José M. Ressano Lamas;

6B: Unité d'Habitation in Marseille by Corbusier, reprinted and adapted from *Morfologia Urbana e Desenho da Cidade*, 1992, José M. Ressano Lamas.

Figure 9   A: Distinctive aesthetic character of the district; B: Distinctive character / lifestyle of the parts; C: Individual character.

Figure 10   Differences between blocks structuring the site.

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