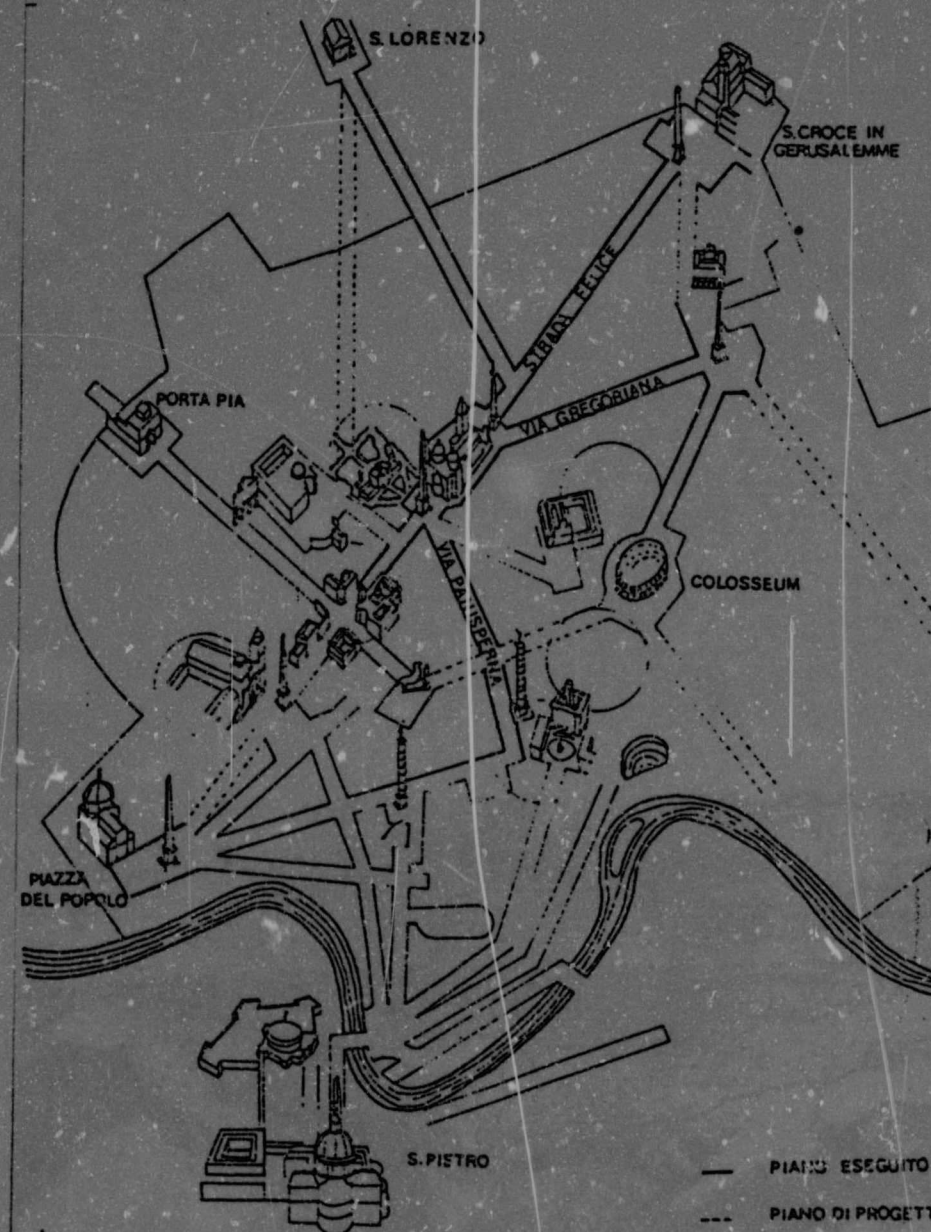




THE POLES AND TENSIONS
OF BAROQUE ROME FORMING THE
NON THEMATIC STRUCTURE OF THE
CITY

URBAN MORPHOLOGY

Maria Gebauer gives urban morphology as

" the study ... of the causes which contribute to
forming and modifying the physical structure of the city."

The physical form of the city is structure formed by a series of
components which relate to each other in different ways.

Gebauer & Samuels (1981 : 1)

The basic components of a city are built form and open space.
Open space is further divided into public and private space.
Generally speaking, public open space is urban space, the streets,
squares and green areas. Private space is usually that
" which is conditioned by land subdivision. " - the plots
and the blocks.

Physical structure is given as ,

" a manufacture, an artifact, a man made product."

Gebauer & Samuels (1981 : 3)

It subdivides into two categories, thematic structure and
non thematic structure. Thematic structure is a generic structure,
the pattern produced by recurrent elements of city components and
their relation to the city. These elements create the homogenous
city.

Non thematic structure is the unique in the city, the elements and
relations that are unique in the city. This is related to the large
organisation of the city, and relates and articulates the parts to
each other.

Non thematic structure, according to Gebauer, is then further divided into poles and tensions.

a) poles are " the concentric points of the structure".

They are identified by their " predominant physical form or attraction of activities", i.e. a church or a square.

Gebauer & Samuels (1981 : 5)

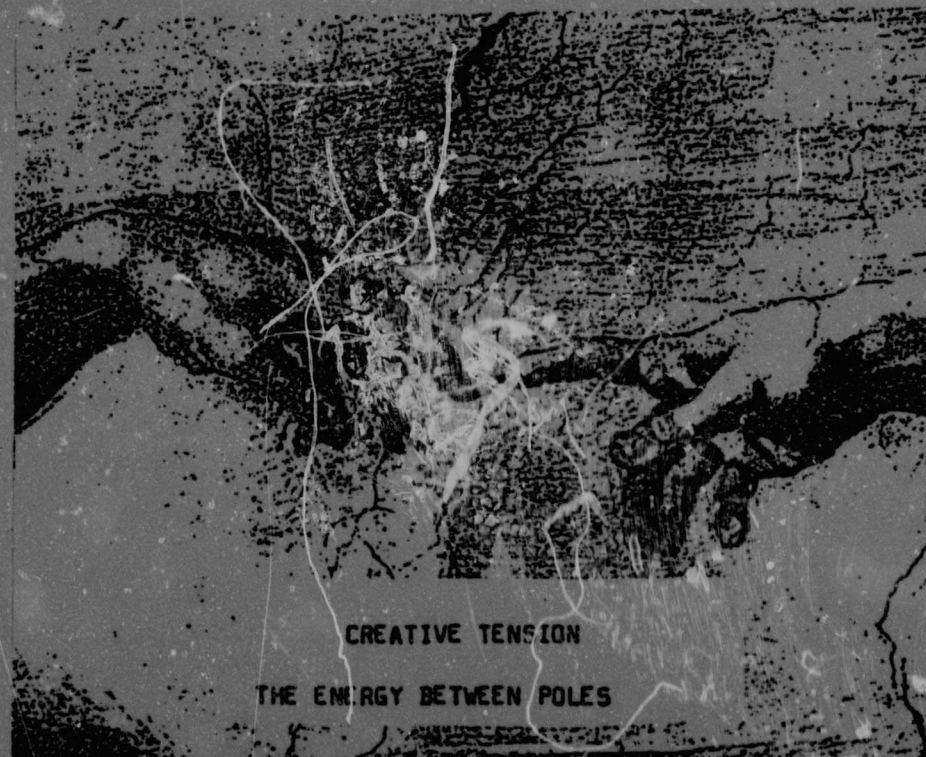
b) tensions are the " linear dynamic links " like avenues and boulevards. These have dual roles of connecting different parts of the city, and limiting the different areas that they support.

Gebauer & Samuels (1981 : 5)

Non thematic structure is the unique permanent primary structure of the city.

The formal public realm elements of the city are then the thematic and the non thematic structures. The thematic structure is then the district and the non thematic structure the limits of those districts. The major routes move along the tensions of the non thematic structure from pole to pole making the districts accessible. If the poles and tensions are harmonious spaces then life as a sequence of events in harmonious places is possible. The activity along the tension and around the pole generates certain responses, such as shops or markets.

Thematic and non thematic structure can then be viewed as the solid and void parts of the city. The voids are mostly public realm and the solids are usually private realm.



THE PRIVATE REALM OF CITIES

THE SOCIAL MAKEUP OF DISTRICTS AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

The making of the non thematic structure has been dealt with in enabling structures and simultaneous movement systems. The making of the thematic structure is dealt with next. The physical result is a consequence of social and economic networks of use and support and design considerations. Jane Jacobs states,

" A successful city neighbourhood is a place that keeps sufficiently abreast of its problems so that it is not destroyed by them. An unsuccessful neighbourhood is a place that is overwhelmed by its defects and problems and is progressively more helpless before them ".

Jacobs (1984 : 122)

She goes on to add that to search for criteria for success in terms of high standards of facilities, non problem populations or nostalgic memories of town life is a waste of time. The issue that is at stake in her view is that of what city neighbourhoods do, how they are socially and economically useful in cities, and how they achieve this.

For Jacobs city neighbourhoods are " mundane organs of self-government." Failures are failures of localised self-government and the successes are the successes of localised self-government. Self-government includes formal and informal societal self management.

Jacobs (1984 : 124)

Cohesive communities she argues grow out of connections between people who cross and recross one another's paths, friends, acquaintances and some people known by reputation only.

"... fluidity of use and choice among city people is ... the foundation underlying most city cultural activities and special enterprises ..."

Jacobs (1984 : 126)

The city is a great pool from which to draw skills, materials, customers and clientele. Self containment kills the social and economic activity. These are dependent on through movement and fluidity of use for existence.

Jacobs looks at neighbourhoods on three levels.

- a) The city as a whole.
- b) Districts of large, sub city size of about one hundred thousand persons each.
- c) Street neighbourhoods.

The City as a Whole, also the parent community or the community of communities.

This as the source of most public money in the form of taxes. It is at this level that most administrative and policy decisions are taken. It is also here that most welfare issues are dealt with as are conflicts of special interest groups and pressure groups.

It is also at this level that people with interests in the arts come together.

Bringing communities of interest together is one of the cities major functions.

Districts.

Districts need access to the political, administrative and special interest groups for their own well being. Districts Jacobs feels are where our cities are weakest and fail most. The districts chief function is to

" mediate between the indispensable, but inherently politically powerless street neighbourhoods and the inherently powerful city as a whole."

Jacobs (1984 : 131)

Cities at the top level are too big to comprehend detail.

The necessary detailed information should be supplied by the district. This is about reducing the big cities concerns to human scale. The district brings resources to the street and takes street problems to the city. It also maintains usable civilised areas for residents and other users of the district. For this to happen the district must be large enough to fight city hall. Districts must then be " integrated units of power and opinion."

Jacobs (1984 : 131)

Neighbourhoods.

At the level between the district and the street one finds neighbourhoods, "enclaves of distinct ethnic group." These usually work well at street level with eyes on self policing, but have little sway in city hall. These groups ally themselves to existing districts to voice their grievances.

Jacobs (1984 : 137)

Districts give rise to leaders who deal with their problems. These become the district governors and are not people elected by the state. Districts are an essential link in the "bottom-up approach" in dealing with city problems. Street neighbourhoods are the essential little parts that have an enormous role to play in self government. It is in streets that "webs of public surveillance" are woven. These protect both the street community and strangers passing through. To grow these webs a foundation of public life and trust must exist. The street neighbourhood must be able to draw on help when needed.

Jacobs (1984 : 129)

It is essential for streets to be equipped for city life if networking is to take off. Too many of our streets are "afflicted with the great blight of dullness". Dullness is dealt with by lack of sameness. Differences and diversity make for cross use, not sameness.

Jacobs (1984 : 131)

Jacobs has a four point plan for the creation of successful neighbourhoods.

- 1) To foster lively and interesting streets.
- 2) To make the lively street fabric a continuous network through the district.
- 3) To use parks squares and public buildings as part of the street fabric pulling together complexity and multiple uses.
- 4) To emphasise the functional identity of areas large enough to work as districts.

"A city is a collection of opportunities of all kinds, and the fluidity with which these opportunities can be used is an asset for encouraging city neighbourhood stability."

Jacobs (1984 : 130)

Jane Jacobs does not view districts in terms of limits as Gebauer does. She views them as social groupings that create and dissolve themselves as and when the need for them arises. As such they are living organisms whose boundaries are variable depending on need. These edges may be the non thematic material, but it is not necessarily so. Johannesburg is a grid of undistinguished thematic, repetitive, patterned structure. The only non thematic structures are the highway and the railway. The physical implications of these are separation of the CBD from the rest of town, and splitting the city into Braamfontein and the CBD. Districts in the Johannesburg CBD are smaller components of the city. They ride the grid as their needs alter, their growing being dependent upon need. Major movement systems do not form edges to the districts. They provide access through the districts, allowing for cross flow. Major movement systems in Johannesburg operate as edges in suburbs, where they separate groups and deny cross flow. Movement can be through districts but the district pattern is usually into or out of the district. District represents home to a community. It is the beginning or the end of the journey through the city along chosen routes that form the network of mutual support.



PARTICIPATION IN DESIGN

the community discuss proposals
for their neighbourhood with
the design experts.

PARTICIPATION THEORY

The city is about more than movement systems and generative routes. It is also a place. Place can be formless as a consequence of use or it can be formed by conscious design decisions. Bacon's work on harmonious spaces deals with this aspect. However, having a design is not enough. It has to be implemented. Implementation is far more likely to occur if the proposal has public backing. The proposal is far more likely to have public backing if the public have been involved in the design process and decision making. A look at public participation in environmental design follows.

" Since the industrial revolution specialists have become increasingly introverted, each developing their own objectives, ideologies, jargon and self-serving professional institutions. Simultaneously, ever-multiplying tiers of bureaucrats, controls and regulations have been introduced by governments to mediate between experts and the consumers. Taken in isolation the reasons for both may seem entirely logical. But the machine has got out of control. And the cumulative effect is a cumbersome professional environment industry divorced from peoples needs and numbingly frustrating for those who have to work in it. The mechanism has to be short circuited."

Wates & Knevitt (1987 : 117)

The current way of dealing with the complex environment is different: specialists being responsible for different aspects of the environment. Coordination between aspects is rarely adequate. In their attempts to deal effectively with complexity, bureaucratic hierarchies tend to over simplify their responses.

" The built environment is too complex and inter-dependent to be fragmented in this way. It has to be treated as a whole system."

Wates & Knevitt (1987 : 119)

The process of development is in question. According to Wates and Knevitt there are too often " the wrong decisions taken by the wrong people at the wrong time."

Wates & Knevitt (1987 : 119)

Participation has given rise to a particular movement in design. it is referred to as community architecture in Britain and as social architecture in America. It is the aim of this movement to "get the process right first." Once this is done the scope will exist for all parties involved to "explore their talents creatively and produce a better product." The participants are no longer "the consumers of what others provide, but are in control."

Wates & Knevitt (1987 : 118)

USER PARTICIPATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

According to Wates and Knevitt successful settlements when analysed have three common fundamental characteristics. They are given as:

- " 1) People willingly take responsibility for the environment and participate both individually and collectively in its creation and management;
- 2) A creative working partnership is established with specialists from one or more disciplines;
- 3) All aspects of people's environmental needs are considered simultaneously and on a continuing evolutionary basis."

These characteristics are given as the "essential truths". They are found to operate subconsciously in squatter communities where development is not affected by an official system of planning and development controls. They are found to be missing in current orthodox planning where a third party, the professions, the bureaucracies and the speculators have intervened in the development process.

There are two main reasons why people should be able to participate in their own environment.

1. To create an environment that fulfills human needs.

The built environment is complex. It consists of many physical objects. The relationships of the objects determine the spaces that people inhabit. Every one uses similar spaces in different ways. There is no direct relation between space and use. People generally tend to use certain spaces in certain ways, but there are no absolutes. Rules of thumb help but should be used only, "as a framework for action, never as blueprints." A detailed understanding of each location and its actors is needed.

Wates & Knevitt (1987 : 114)

Only people themselves know how they specifically respond and act in the environment. It is they who must present information to the experts and help them come up with satisfactory design proposals, or intervention is likely to be insensitive and unrelated to the needs and the aspirations of the people it is intended to serve.

- 2) The second reason is, the creation of a strong participating community.

Participation has a positive effect on society. Richard Hatch states "The paramount purpose of participation is not good buildings, but good citizens in a good society. Participation is the means."

Wates & Knevitt (1987 : 115)

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