

## Transurbi et transorbis Ole Bouman

As long as cities have existed, people have talked of how they are changing. They are change itself. While the countryside represented eternal sameness, the city was always the work of man and thus subject to the caprices of human nature. In this respect, any city is always a city in motion, a place of transition and in transition. The city is thus transurban.

Yet the city has also always been an entity, a place, a name that imparts identity. The city was the theatre for all aspirations to immortality. In the city, you were somebody. You were somewhere. The city gave you a platform from which to relate to the world. It was concrete enough to manage mentally, and abstract enough to be comprehensible to someone else. Cities change – there's nothing new about that.

Or maybe there is. For there is a degree of change that ultimately touches its reference base. That point always used to be the physical structure of the city, the material and geographical datum. The urban experience bore a one-to-one relation to that datum. You only had to design a city and the experience would follow of its own accord.

Now it is very dubious whether that still applies. The experience no longer needs stone and brick like it used to. You could say that the experience of the city now corresponds to an urban culture that far exceeds the boundaries of the physical city. The experience no longer stops, but carries on forever, mentally, globally, through the multimedia and through communications technology. The city is not a fact but a cultural condition, one from which nobody can escape. (Indeed, you might as easily stop calling it a city altogether.)

If this is true, how do you go about urban design? How do you practise transurbanism? This was the issue that the Rotterdam-based V2 Organization tackled during a recent conference. Having previously probed TransArchitecture it was now the turn of the city. Considering all the interest in cross-links, we may be forgiven for wondering whether this classical stratification of scale is still necessary. To the designers, at any rate, the difference is certainly no longer discernible; they move effortlessly between the large and the small in scale. What is most striking, however, is that they now no longer so much design things as stage them. Transurbanism presumes the achievable experience. It organizes not so much the space as the time in which that experience unfolds. This requires more than the erection of buildings or the paving of streets, it requires, indeed, an integrated communications strategy, for that is the only means to achieving 'the urban atmosphere'. The common denominator of space is no longer the design, but the individual for whom the design is intended. The individual as common denominator: is that really possible? Behold, the paradox of TransUrbanism!

Ole Bouman

1. The quotations below are from the Transurbanism symposium, organized by V2, that was held in the Netherlands Architecture Institute on 29 and 30 November 2001. The quotations were collected by Sandra Fauconnier and Martijn Stevens of V2.

The spatial term is leaving spatial disciplines behind and spreading towards disciplines that traditionally never thought spatially, such as archeology, anthropology and accounting.<sup>1</sup>

CONFERENCE QUOTE EDWARD SOJA