

The Invisible in Architecture could be conceived as topos. But isn't a place visible? No, a place, a topos, is something you just feel. Perception of place operates through all the senses and depends on the memory too. Place is directly related to the subject of Being. In this, it is the human scale, the body, that matters. Or conversely, only that which we can directly experience can be a place. Place only arises in the mind of the person who is there. Under this conception, space, time and action merge. Place is a rooting in the ground, an existence that has become an essence.

The landsman has his own microcosm which is stationary in the universe, and this can give rise to the idea that the universe rotates around him. His place is the anchor of all identity and gives everything else its connotation. But the sedentary life is in decline and hence also the significance of place. The land, for millennia the bedrock of a belief in a Self, is now dominated by machinery. The enormous harvests are gathered without sweat or blood being shed. Few labourers are needed on the land, and even these travel from location to location, by car or by air. In the rest of the world, either the soil is so eroded or the small plots have become so untenable that the inhabitants are forced to move on or away: the land has too little to offer them. Thus there are two kinds of nomad – the wealthy, whose idiosyncratic home (or perhaps *Heimat*) is located in the individual brain, surrounded by communications equipment in office or living room, whose life consists of transfers of person or data by motorway, aircraft, television or fax; and the utterly destitute, whose place is in the shanty town or the immigrant boat, and whose life is a permanent hunt for the basic means of existence.

The dual nomadism, the universal diaspora, forms part of our 'global metropolis'. Between these contrasting caravans there is a *peau de chagrin*, a zone that is inhabitable but continually further degraded by the disruptive effect of the two nomadisms; crumbling suburbs where migrants on the way up, with a place to call their own at last, clash explosively with earlier cohorts

Topos

who have failed to find a place among the richer nomads. And then there is naturally still a forgotten canton here and there, untouched by modernity, which, once discovered, survives for a little while as a focus of nostalgia and hopeless resistance. Finally, there is the place as a historic relic, protected and smartened up by monument committees and CNNed to our TV screens as animated wallpaper.

The place cradles the function, weaves it into the existing fabric. But, whatever Post-Modernism would have us think, this fabric is exhaustively monofunctional; the function tends to instigate the place, which thereby loses many of its qualities. When we study the zoning plan of this world, we see that only now the Athens Charter of Le Corbusier's CIAM is globally paramount. We can pick out a) recuperative places, b) production places and c) recreational places. To these we must add d) places for storing information, e) infrastructure f) 'nature', and g) places for dumping the inevitable waste. If we are to believe the popular future scenarios, countless objectivised spots such as these are likely to be brought into line by computer technology. Living, working and recreation can then take place largely at home in a mainly virtual space: the 'electronic cottage' (Alvin Toffler). Whatever the case, this modernisation and functionalisation of the place has a number of far-reaching consequences.

In the West, the communal place has been banished from the city. The collective topos is being replaced increasingly by media that allow reception by but not communication between people of flesh and blood. The source of authority has shifted from the public physical space to the communicative media (especially television). The physical place is thus arguably dead, i.e. it no longer has a visible presence among our repertoire of life-determining forces. Accordingly, the physical place is losing its relevance to the social definition of the individual.



The less significant the place becomes as public domain, the more we see an adulation of the place as *sanctus sanctorum*. It has become a spiritual entity. Broadly speaking, this has become the most widespread notion of place among those who are seriously concerned about the consequences of modernity. Around the globe, in their vision, there is being drawn a fine-meshed network which eliminates all obstacles and delays, and which reduces every place to an A or a B between which the straight line is the shortest path. Thus the world will soon be flat after all. They wish to use place to bring the juggernaut of civilisation to a halt and create an island of resistance in which exemplary alternatives are possible. In these places, the ground can still be cherished, and a direct, tactile experience is still possible. The place can be restored to its former glory – a rehabilitation of authenticity amid the universal atopia of simulation and virtual reality. Thus the name-giving path appears in opposition to the anonymous grid, the depth of a trace to the flatness of the map, the centripetal topos of Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House to the isotropic space of Le Corbusier's Maison Domino. The abstraction of rationalism is challenged by the concreteness of phenomenology. Finally, this reaction to atopia can result in the celebration of the body, the only really autonomous place still left to us. The body is everyone's ark in the deluge of information.

216 Architecture is, by necessity, the creation of a place, even when the latter is delimited by nothing more than transparent curtain walls. The place is where the building touches the ground and comes literally into contact with mankind and the history of the location. The materiality of the built object is, a priori, an obstacle to modernity; it is an act of resistance against the modernistic passion for clearing away every physical and psychological barrier. The solidity of the foundations exacerbates this opposition. Nonetheless, the 'critical' attributes of architecture fall all too easily prey to modernity – if not as a demolition site, then as museum piece. This is because it has abandoned its competence to guide and critically interpret the act (architecture's legitimacy!) and has thereby become a willing victim of the dissolution of place. The action has been expelled to the private domain and to the electronic 'places' of the new media. The architectural place has thus become little more than an artificially preserved habitat. No wonder this predilection for topography is nowhere so clearly at the cost of action as in architecture. What is more, in as far as a social critique has actually been formulated in architecture in recent years, its touchstone has been the ideal topos rather than the sphere of human actions.

In this criticism, it is stressed that having a somatic identity will help us recreate a relationship between man and his built environment, a relationship with the material world around him. Architecture, by offering a helping hand in the reinstatement of somatic identity, comes to play a part once more in the development of man's capacity to either adapt to or distinguish himself from his environment. It is precisely the interplay of attraction and detachment that gives us a sense of place.

Still, this architectural strategy can never really become an alternative. After all, such things are only possible on remote, idyllic islands, and there are few of those left nowadays. Thus tectonic, place-defining tours de force are inclined to have more an air of provincialism about them, if not of nostalgia. The place that architecture thus offers does no more than distract attention from the fact that the destruction continues uninterrupted in other parts of the world. Moreover, this architecture becomes a tourist attraction even before the paint is dry. No sooner has a place been discovered than it is annexed by the wealthy nomads with their passion to perpetuate and fossilise the place in photos and videos. They re-experience the realness later, in the comfort of their homes.

Three strategies and three architects Architecture, by its nature as a delimiter and as a provider of habitation, creates place, but the extent to which this forms part of a conscious strategy varies. In this respect, we distinguish the following three strategies:

Archaism The first strategy presupposes a need to reinforce the place explicitly. It attempts to rediscover the genius loci; it cherishes the relationship between design and surroundings; it celebrates the materiality and the tectonics of the built object; it aims to respect the life-world of the users; and it appeals to the sense of touch as a medium for experiencing place. The place comes alive through a *promenade architecturale*. The body is respatialised by the creation of a place that stimulates the tactile sense. The place is a 'niche' for the human being, a sheltered spot in an overwhelmingly dynamic world. **Santiago Calatrava** never wavers from his belief in this notion of place. In designs whose function is mobility, in particular his bridges, he creates pauses where man and construction meet. In his designs for static programmes, his work is principally about the absoluteness and aura of the pure object.

Façadism The second strategy attempts, despite the phenomenological nature of the place experience, to create a topos by means of representative images. The relationship to the place develops largely through an iconography. Thus while Façadism can induce recognition, it is incapable of invoking direct perception, let alone supporting the growth of a somatic identity. Since the visual cortex has the sole responsibility here for the processing of impressions, the experience retains strongly discursive and verbal attributes. Perhaps language offers a house to live in but not a home. **Pietro Derossi** denotes place by means of a narrative image. Topos is for him an interplay of linguistic elements, a field of polysemic alternatives, a network of interpretations. Due to the indirectness of this approach, any statement it makes about place can only be narrative. The space is dominated by a treatment of the surface.

Fascinism The third strategy takes cognisance of the bankruptcy of the topos and prefers to become involved in the creation of non-place, often termed the periphery. Now that the place-experience is falling prey to speed, there is no alternative but simply to fall in with this historical tendency. Thus it seeks no *stabilitas loci*, nor a *corpus integritas*, but the furnishing of the atopia of the Now.

Julia Bolles and Peter Wilson accept the loss of the topos but are not prepared just to ignore the false re-enactment that has come in its stead. Therefore they operate with a kind of double morality in which references to the environment go hand in hand with ark-like constructions, vehicles of exile. They thereby create an autonomous topos in which a universal, atopic message is propagated. It is not the content but the form of things that determine the chance of survival in the maelstrom: 'the simple massing of autonomous objects'.

I want to be grounded. Therefore my buildings are somewhat larger on ground level. They are steadily standing. They want to be bound to the earth. I'm keen on having everything related to Mother Earth. **Ton Alberts & Max van Huut**

I want to create an architecture that is in harmony with the climate and other natural conditions of the land and is based on the character of place but at the same time is made self-sufficient by a rigorous logic of its own. **Tadao Ando**

We want to create spaces that make a person passing through them feel like an actor. He will straighten up and play. **Ricardo Bofill**

Architecture is both particular, because it is grounded, and universalisable, because it is a subject for memory and media. To deny place and experience is irresponsible, to resist universalisation impossible. **Julia Bolles & Peter Wilson**

In my work, the structural, tectonic device is most important, thus, I insist so much on the section. And for this reason the section plays such an important role, and not so much the plan.

Santiago Calatrava

In the initial stages I try to visualise the building as a place after it is built. I think of the people in it and the way they will look at it – find the sources in that. I use the sketchbook as a catalyst. I love the irrationality of drawing – just to draw a line and see what happens. It's not quite automatic drawing, but it's starting with something you know, such as the outline of a site. You draw it and very often it develops into something else and it's that development which you can't do simply by sitting down and analysing something and redrawing it using the usual logical processes of design. I much prefer a process which uses sequential operations to allow the unpredictable element to emerge.

It's a conversation between the mind and the paper.

Nigel Coates & Doug Branson

It is the specificity of the project, in the place, here and now, that opens us to reflection regarding the universal, the free vastness of the land.

Pietro Derossi

Consider the body stripped, stripped of cultural fixity, of gender codes, of ethnic and political codes... de-signed, the body as site: a primary surface for signification like the surface of the earth or a blank page. The body is a surface vulnerable to a surplus of meanings, constantly being rewritten...

The body is a site for transient texts of the marketplace.

Elisabeth Diller & Ricardo Scofidio

I myself am very fond of running, driving and flying. But if all buildings were designed to be seen from a moving car, the result would be nightmarish. Our buildings are usually always centred, set on an axis – very traditional in fact.

Norman Foster

In the interior of the Joan Miró Library, the reading room, defined by radial bookshelves placed along a curve, opens itself towards the park, yet maintaining a certain distance from it thanks to the sheet of water reflecting pool lying between the trees and the building. Here as well the natural light gets reflected by the water and filtered through the wide eaves. **Beth Galí**

I am interested in finishing work, but I am interested in the work's not appearing finished, with every hair in place, every piece of furniture in its spot ready for photographs. I prefer the sketch quality, the tentativeness (...) rather than the presumption of total resolution and finality. **Frank Gehry**

There is in any language, and certainly in architecture, a general language. At the same time, there must be a specific language. The Humana Building, for example, would be very awkwardly placed in any other location in that city. There are five or six-storey Victorian storefronts adjacent to the building and because of that, I've employed a reference to a loggia or colonnade in the building and on the face of the building, and hoped that the point will be caught that there is a similarity. Though one might find another site for those various references and activities, they do become more specific to Louisville and that particular site than to somewhere else. So there's where my 'take' on architecture becomes localised to the site. **Michael Graves**

Trying to incorporate in the Shonandai project all that had been excluded by modern planning, I discovered I was designing not so much a work of architecture as a topography. (...) My intention was to bury 'modern' architecture underground and to create above it 'topographical' spaces continuous with the site. **Itsuko Hasegawa**

Topos is constantly misunderstood and seen in a traditional way, not as the awareness of our own body, the awareness of being alive...

Jacques Herzog & Pierre de Meuron

Architecture is bound to situation. Unlike music, painting, sculpture, film, and literature, a construction (non-mobile) is intertwined with the experience of a place. The site of a building is more than a mere ingredient in its conception. It is its physical and metaphysical foundation. The resolution of the functional aspects of site and building, the vistas, sun angles, circulation, and access, are the 'physics' that demand the 'metaphysics' of architecture. Through a link, an extended motive, a building is more than something merely fashioned for the site.

Steven Holl

Architecture is not necessarily either a shelter or a monument. But one of its principal distinctions consists in the fact that a building is constructed or produced by whatever means are appropriate. A cave is not architecture, neither is a tree, whereas every sheet of steel erected in the desert is architecture. Architecture is a creation of space, created by men and for men.

Hans Hollein

Build in such a way that you and your loved ones can find pleasure at any time in using your buildings, looking at them, living, working, holidaying and growing old in them.

Leon Krier

We should never start inventing! When rationalists invented houses arranged in lines along a street plan, they robbed the inhabitants of all the reptilian habits that prevailed in the old urban spaces and in their articulations. When they thought up the tree model for functionally stacked dwellings, they robbed the inhabitants of their equally reptilian patrimony of old-style house plans that paraphrased the human body.

Let's get subjective, right now!

Lucien Kroll

Positive efforts to create intermediate zones is a way to rediscover and reclaim the valuable elements and mode of being that were excluded by Western dualism and binomial opposition. This is the reason that topos, regionalism, and the 'noise' of minor cultures have once again become the themes of architecture. A forced compromise between the two opposing elements of dualism does not create a new rapport (of symbiosis). Symbiosis involves the mutual inclusivity of at least some aspect of two opposing elements, and the creation of a dynamic stability. Such a dynamic, or symbiotic, relationship is achieved through the tentative establishment of an ambivalent, multivalent intermediate zone between the two elements.

Kisho Kurokawa

Town planning is just making places, places where people can sit in the shade or where children can play properly, protected.

Lucien Lafour & Rikkert Wijk

The city is an historical product which will also disappear into history, as it appeared in history. I'm often perplexed when people get so obsessed with the notion of the city as if it was the final and ultimate development of architecture. One should think of other things, not only of cities. Of a world without cities for instance. A world where cities are no longer the controlling power centres of society and culture. Where culture is independent of place.

Daniel Libeskind

The constructed world is our global heritage, our cultural and social topography, which is anything but artificial. Specifically addressing the situation in America, the newly transformed landscape, contrary to popular sentiment, deserves the same attention and respect as the one created by nature. I would venture that in the modern world the species of landscape that ecologists courageously struggle to preserve has the same value and deserves the same respect and attention as the environment that mankind has elected to create.

Rafael Moneo

It is not the clash between fragments of architecture that counts, but the invisible movement between them. This invisible movement is neither a part of language nor of structure. This movement is nothing but a constant and mobile relationship inside language itself.

Bernard Tschumi

In a building or city, universal elements can be combined in unique ways to meet the needs of a specific project or site. The unique may be suggested within the universal by symbolism. Symbolic allusion for today should, we believe, be representational. This is the essence of our notion of the decorated shed: you use the going building conventions of the society to produce the decorated shed, and on the front use representation to make the building unique.

The problem at its most extreme could be posed as: How would you design a McDonalds for the Piazza del Popolo? Is the only answer that one shouldn't do it?

Robert Venturi & Denise Scott Brown