

L'ordre est dans l'individu, à la clef.
multiplie ses effets quand l'individu se multiplie.

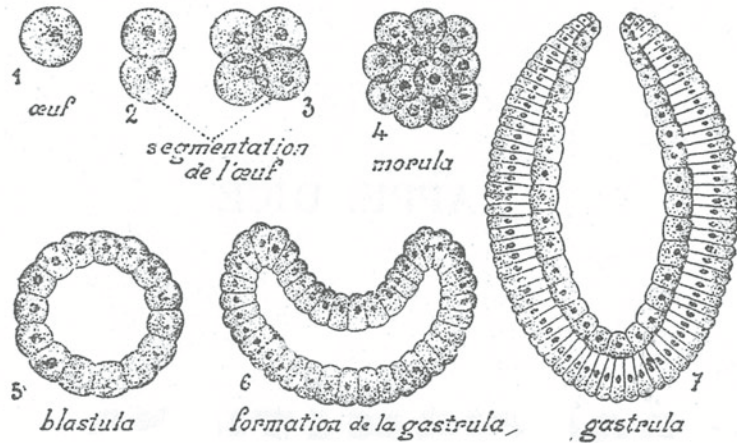


Fig. 49 à 55. — Développement d'une Éponge simple à partir de l'œuf; les figures 1 à 3 sont à un plus fort grossissement que les figures 4 à 7 (vu au microscope).

A HISTORY OF TERRITORIES, MOVEMENTS AND BORDERS POLITICS OF INHABITATION

Un principe clair apporte la complexité simple (évolution).

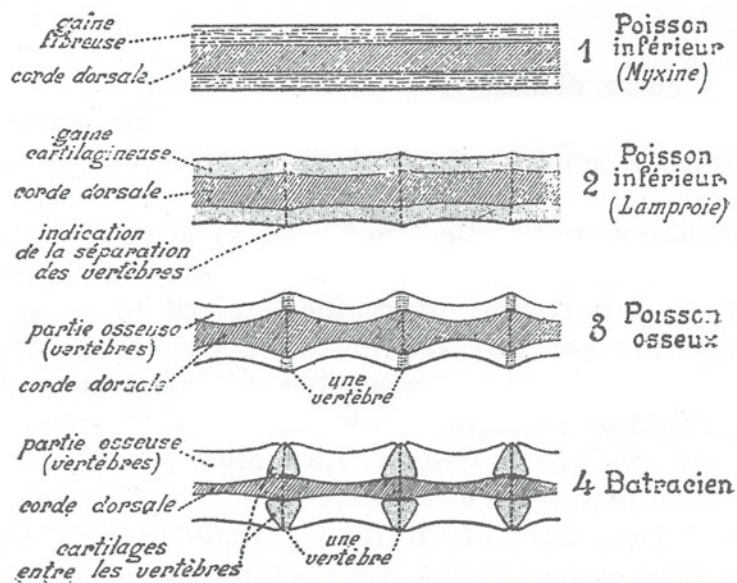


Fig. 167 à 170. — Colonnes vertébrales coupées en long, de plus en plus compliquées, chez les Poissons et les Batraciens.

Page from Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme* ('The City of Tomorrow'), 1924
 'Order is in the individual, the key. Multiplies its effects when the individual multiplies.' 'A clear principle leads to simple complexity (evolution).'
 In Le Corbusier's sketches, this organic metaphor becomes peculiarly appropriate for a better understanding of the idea of the elementary functional part of the urban whole.

If the city is as much about culture as nature, then a cultural understanding of the shaping of the urban is as essential as a scientific one. Here, architect and critic **Marina Lathouri**, who directs the graduate programme in History and Critical Thinking at the Architectural Association (AA) School of Architecture in London, describes how the concept of planning in the 19th century became intrinsically linked to notions of territory, borders and spatial organisation. She questions whether this might now be tested, and new design technologies used, to expose underlying emerging patterns of disruptive flows beckoning the possibility of the logic of a new social disposition.

When in 1926 the Swiss architect Hannes Meyer referred to the city as 'the most complex biological agglomeration' that 'must be consciously regulated and constructively shaped by man', and the dwelling unit (in this case the mass-produced house) as its 'living cell', the modern metropolis was already large and programmatically complex.¹ What architects and planners sought to develop at the time was a method to integrate the design of systems of inhabitation with processes of production of a larger territory; in short, principles and design techniques capable of operating across a number of scales. A number of specifically urban variables were recast as the fundamental problem of design, now supported by a new field of knowledge made up of disciplines ranging from statistics to sociology, economics to biology and design to engineering.

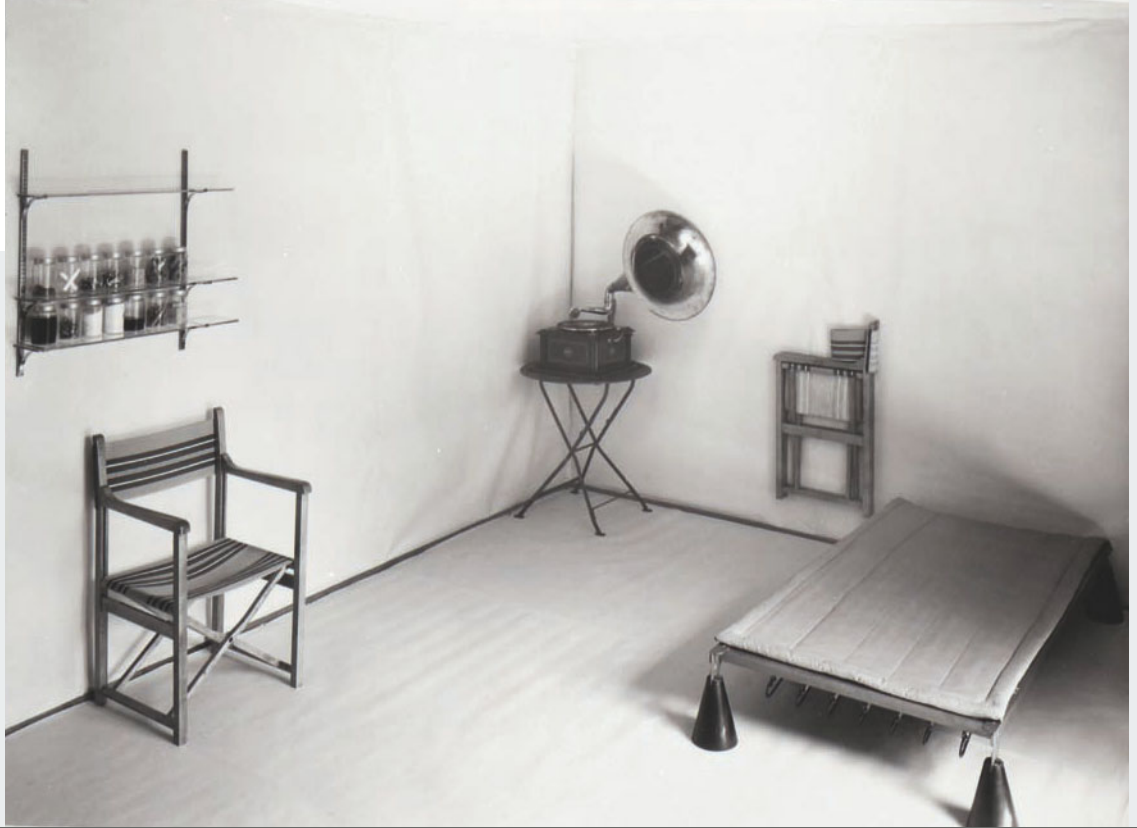
In this sense, many of the early propositions for the functional city, often discussed (and criticised) as statements of a utopian intent, were hardly iconic descriptions

of an ideal city; rather they provided analytical constructs of the ways in which programmatic and architectural elements on the one hand, and economic and technical variants on the other, could be unified around an idea of dwelling in the city. Urban dwelling, which was the programmatic heading, was not so much concerned with either the domestic or the urban in terms of spatial scale as it was with the economy and culture of the urban in the future. It projected the ideals of a different relationship between the individual, the social and the city, between the singular and an ever-growing multitude.²

What comes to us today, at a time when the urban enclave and rise of global alternatives coexist, producing different forms of urban inhabitation and notions of community, is the demand to find new ways of approaching the same questions. In fact, a particular challenge in the work of identifying current dynamics and practices is that it is too often absorbed into conceptual frameworks that obscure their historical settings.

Hannes Meyer, Co-op Zimmer, 1926

The framed view of an interior, to be inhabited by what Meyer described as the 'semi-nomad of our modern productive system', is an arrangement (rather than a defined architectural space) of a set of standardised objects, signs of modernity which project a new way of living in the city, namely the idea of transient domesticity.

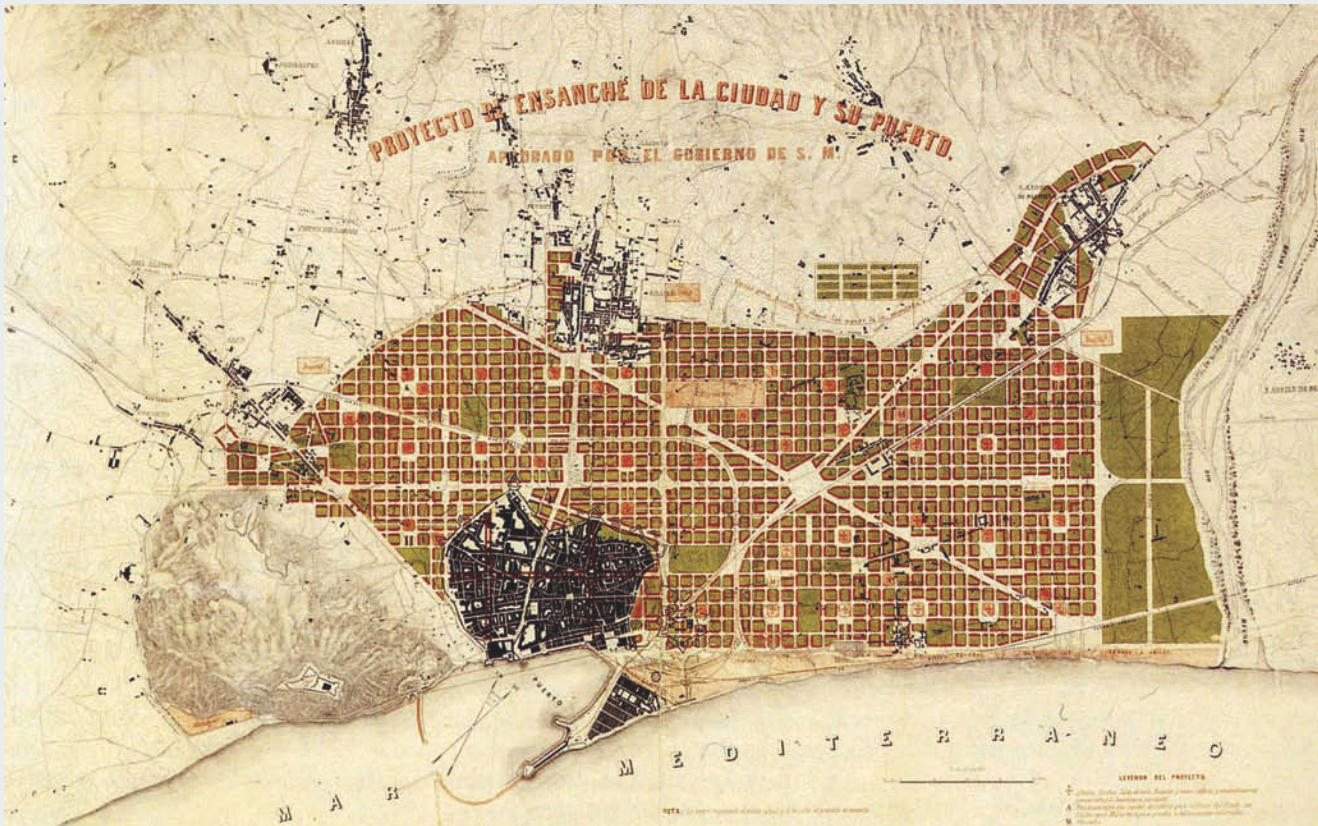


Systems

Reflection on the city was historically situated in a space of economic and administrative relations, and not solely on the basis of the symbolic relationship between a geometrical figure and the territory. Yet in the 19th century the city came to be thought of as an open and dynamic system, its planning essentially linked to patterns of distribution of land and population and forms of spatial organisation. This is in fact the meaning of the term 'planning' when it was first used by Ildefons Cerdà in his 1867 *Teoría General de la Urbanización* (*General Theory of Urbanization*) study, which he wrote to support his 1859 project for the extension of Barcelona.³ According to Cerdà, 'planning' (and 'plan') indicated not a form but an activity, the process of forecasting and regulating change and growth, a type of urban development based on the management through design of the indeterminacy of economic, social, cultural and environmental forces.

The term 'planning' was also associated with the French '*distribuer*', meaning 'to apportion between several', and '*disposer*', 'to arrange, to put things in a certain order'.⁴ These definitions may seem simple, but their implications are complex. Planning, as a practice and as a discipline of space, came to embrace everything from the tiniest physical entity to the whole territory; a range of scales that can be organised upon the same system of principles so that the effects of such ordering are potentially global. The primary rationale in these processes of expanding from the scale of the intimate to the geographical is 'capitalising a territory' over time rather than structuring space contained within a defined programmatic (functional) field.⁵ In the case of Barcelona, the objective was to develop a plan with no definite limits that would apply to the entire region while outlining the future growth of the city.⁶

Central to this way of conceiving and programming the city is the idea of mobility – geographical, social and economic. It is not a coincidence that the problem of circulation and, in particular, the imagery of flow integrating a natural given with economy and efficiency has been most instrumental in modern and current design technologies. Cerdà, for example, positioned human nature between residence (*séjour*) and movement (*mouvement*), two categories essential to contemporaneous disciplines, namely biology and philosophy, and eventually the two cardinal functions around which all the constituent elements of urban reality ought to be organised. From then on, one could argue, this fundamental dichotomy of inhabitation/mobility becomes a new semiotics of human topology in the sense that it does not simply describe particular places and infrastructures, but signifies the relationship between people and territory connecting patterns of use with forms of spatial arrangement.



Ildefonso Cerdà, Plan for the extension of the city of Barcelona, 1859

The plan, giving prominence to issues of spatial organisation of an expanding city, is no longer the representation of an ideal spatial, political or social order; it distributes, demarcates and organises individual elements formalising a type of urban development.

Borders

What if the history of modern planning was reorganised around the architectural question of connections and demarcations rather than uninterrupted flows and infrastructural systems? In fact, scholars have argued that making borders is an essentially modern gesture: ancient empires and medieval states had fluid and flexible borders, or none at all, and people lived and thrived in what were, in every sense, grey areas.⁷ The growth of the nation state made the border an indispensable bureaucratic tool of mind and body control. Borders tell us where we stand, and where to stand.

In many ways, the primacy of border is about terrain and territory, the identification and definition of areas of interiority and proximity. This point is made clear when we understand the role of *'termini'*, which could be translated as 'boundary stones', in the earliest narratives of the founding of Rome. These stones, which demarcated the *'limen'* (limits) within which all things were under the authority of Rome and subjected to Roman law, also

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Ildefons Cerdà, *The Space of residence (right)/The space of movement (opposite)*, 1859

The diagrammatic plans carefully engineer the connections that link the single units within the open urban system, establishing a spatial economy of the collective.



marked the boundaries of individual properties. The passage from the private sphere of the household (*oikos*) and its economy (*oikonomia* – the law of the household) to the common (that is, the sovereign field), and the constitution through the practice of law of the body of citizens and therefore of the territory of the city, poses the question of border less as an act of delimitation than as a process of articulation of a multiplicity of economies.

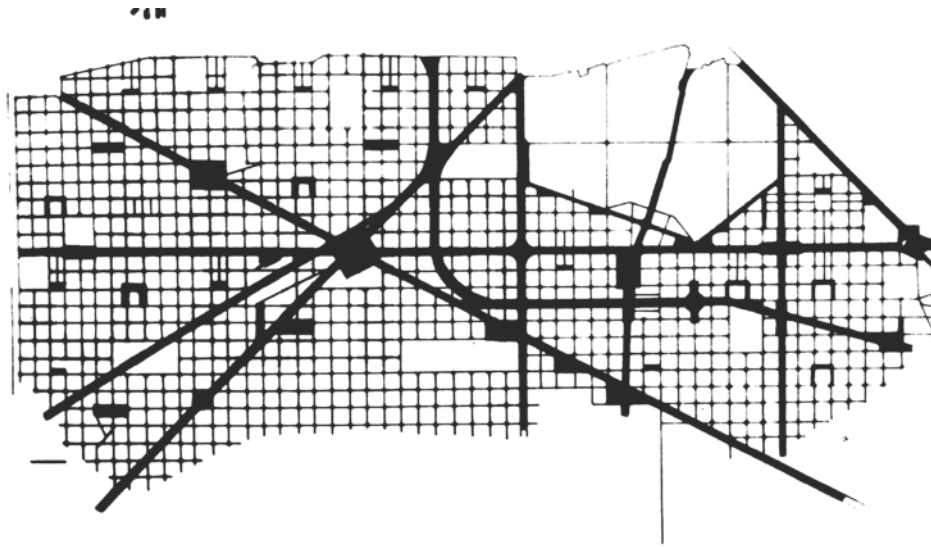
It is within the micro-geography of the diverse interfaces between the private and the public, and the individual and the collective, that the legal, spatial and biological intermingle. This becomes important when one considers the principle of flow, which, while resting on the open and dynamic nature of contemporary processes of economic and cultural activity, also engenders novel forms of citizenship and transforms the city paradoxically into a permanent frontier zone. Though the structuring function of both mobility and connectivity involves fastening together and mutually reinforcing a multiplicity of territories and operations,

circulation systems and flows are inscribed within these territories and therefore involve geographical and social divisions. Inherent to the imagery of flow is not a smooth continuity as often argued. On the contrary, it consists in the ceaseless moving of the boundaries, a repudiation of geography and a very literal disruption of the relation between people and territory.

Whereas the broader principle of distribution and flow systems enable, at least in their field of application and in the techniques they call for, the larger, potentially global terrain of urbanisation, specific programmatic and cultural configurations articulate often-contested representations of that globality. The question that needs to be posed in the context of new forms of urban research should therefore concern the varying demarcations of these configurations, the ways in which their internal economies constitute interrelated yet distinct systems.

It is precisely there that new design technologies can play a role, in the articulation rather than the management of

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the indeterminacy. This does not contradict the dynamic potential of these technologies; rather, it calibrates the need to define (rather than deprive of any limit) and to circumscribe accordingly the intimate, the proximate, the common and the social. Would this mean that the emerging patterns would underlie the logic of a new social disposition, one going beyond the politics of culture and identity? Old ideologies have been thrown out, geopolitical structures have been displaced and globalisation is at work, but the architectural possibilities and political ramifications of this question ought to continue to be systematically investigated. ▴

Notes

1. Hannes Meyer, 'The New World' [1926], in Tim and Charlotte Benton with Dennis Sharp (eds), *Form and Function, A Source Book for the History of Architecture and Design 1890–1939: An International Anthology of Original Articles*, Crosby Lockwood Staples in association with the Open University Press (London), 1975, p 108.
2. As Le Corbusier put it, the dwelling unit is 'the architectural model of a system of inhabitation, of a cellular unit susceptible to vitality which can easily develop into the urban fact'. Le Corbusier, *Almanach d'architecture moderne*, Les Éditions G Crès & Cie (Paris), 1925, p 111.
3. Ildefons Cerdà, *Teoría General de la Urbanización y aplicación de sus principios y doctrinas a la reforma y ensanche de Barcelona* (Madrid), 1867. A more recent edition was published by Nabu Press in 2012. Ildefons Cerdà (1815–76), engineer, architect and the designer of the 1859 extension plan for Barcelona (known as the Eixample), also coined the term 'urbanism' and was the first theoretician of the discipline as science.

4. See Pierre Merlin and Françoise Choay, *Dictionnaire de l'urbanisme et de l'aménagement*, Presses Universitaires de France (Paris), 1988.
5. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*, Picador (New York), 2007, p 17. First edition: Éditions du Seuil/Gallimard (Paris), 2004.
6. See Cornelis van Eesteren, *The Idea of the Functional City*, NAI Publishers (Rotterdam), 1997. The text of the book is based on a lecture that van Eesteren delivered at the Dutch De Opbouw architectural association in Rotterdam in 1927. For van Eesteren, designer of the Amsterdam General Extension Plan (1934) and chairman of the Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne (CIAM) from 1930 to 1947, planning was the necessary means to regulate and shape the continuing growth of human settlements.
7. See Alexander C Diener and Joshua Hagen, *Borders: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press (Oxford), 2012.