

***L'urbanisme, utopies et réalités. Une anthologie.* By Françoise Choay.**

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With the Industrial Revolution, urban issues take on a dimension and an important impact over public life. They become the subject of studies and innovative proposals, identifying new problems of a different nature that were previously unimaginable, and seek solutions to design new cities or reorganize/rearrange the existing ones. The city is now treated as an entity with its own problems, which stems from its excessive growth, gathering a population that is socially and culturally very diverse, and increasingly coming from all over the world.

Thus, urban science is very recent as an autonomous subject. The city, the theories and practices of urban and territorial planning, are now perceived as a specific research and intervention field, to which contribute several specializations such as architecture, engineering, geography, anthropology, ecology, economy, law or political science.

The book *L'urbanisme, utopies et réalités* (Urbanism, Utopia and Reality) is a clear example of the significance of urbanism in today's world. Not as known as other books from Françoise Choay *Allegory of the heritage* or *The Rule and the Model*, from later



dates, this anthology is focused on the nineteenth and mid-twentieth century, and illustrates a variety of possible approaches, still dealing with the issues raised, and that are current and problematic. This collection of texts carefully selected, and usually inaccessible, gives us synthetically the ideas and proposals of each theorist through their own words, demonstrating how problems are equated. Choay states: «Urbanism does not question the need of the solutions recommended. It intends scientific evidence: according to one of its representatives, Le Corbusier, he claims 'the true point of view'. But the criticisms aimed at the creations of urbanism are also in the name of truth. What is this conflict of partial and antagonist truths based on? Which are the parallelisms, the judgements, the passions and the myths that reveal or conceal the theories of urban planners and the counter-proposals of their critics?» (page 9).

The authors presented here are numerous and diverse, providing a very rewarding overview. The severe criticism towards the existing city is common to them all, and they emphasize the concern and need to overcome the serious consequences in terms of deficient housing conditions, health, road circulation, adding misery and social degradation. We can find brief descriptions of several utopian solutions and proposals which were carried out (even if only partially). The author establishes a first distinction between pre-urban and urban planning, which is then subdivided into two parts, one more progressive and another clearly more cultural. They are distinguished by their essential concerns and objectives, in the first case the optimistic belief that progress and the new technologies brought by the industrial revolution will give us an undeniable better future, and opposing, in the second case, the values of a traditional city, the importance of memory and historical knowledge, which should be kept and considered the basis for future urban development.

In the set timeframe, pre-urban planning describes how cities should be, developing urban utopian proposals, in both social and formal context, inspired by the method followed in Utopia by Thomas Moore. It includes the reflections of Ruskin and Morris, as well as Robert Owen and New Lanark, Charles Fourier and his "Phalanxes" with a collective housing model, or 'Icaria' by Cabet and 'Hygeia' by Benjamin W. Richardson. The functionalist criteria propose, therefore, as its central theme the housing-types – a building, or a house with a garden; it is also important to define distinct building-types for each purpose: schools, hospitals, factories. Interestingly, authors like Jules Verne, Wells, or Marx are also included, concerned about social and urban issues.

With these first visionaries follow important contributions, fundamental milestones of the twentieth century urbanism. Developing a more technical perspective about urban problems, the political aspects are not included, and the building and health issues are valued. They are mainly the work of specialists, architects.

As for the culturalist current there is a continuity between the pre-urban and the urbanites, which does not happen with the progressist current. We have the theories from Camillo Sitte on the artistic qualities of ancient cities and the proposals of Ebenezer Howard creating a 'garden-city' – combining the amenities of urban life with the advantages of rural life, tranquillity, health and beauty. Choay states: «The historical scandal from the supporters of the culturalist model is the disappearance of the old *organic* unit of the city, under the disintegrating pressure of industrialization.» (page 21).

For the progressist current, the innovative technical components are the basis for the proposals as in 'Cité Industrielle' by Tony Garnier (1904), ideas implemented afterwards



in Lyon, and mainly with Le Corbusier and the 'Ville Radieuse' (Radiant City), and the Housing Unit model, - which appears as a vertical garden-city -, and the creation of Chandigarh. An important reference is the group C.I.A.M. (International Congresses of Modern Architecture), established in 1933 with the 'Charter of Athens' the principles of urbanism of the modern movement. In a separate category, in the naturalist option is Frank Lloyd Wright and 'Broadacre-City' made for the great American outdoors, promoting the usage of the automobile and individual mobility.

The evolution of urban planning is often taken from the diverse contributions of the various fields. Therefore we can find essential names such as Patrick Geddes, Lewis Mumford, Jane Jacobs or Kevin Lynch, who through a critical perspective of the proposals and urban accomplishments done by experts, propose new methods to address these issues, enriching them with new methodological concepts and giving special interest to humanistic values, devaluing the projects based exclusively on technology. Finally one chapter is dedicated to the philosophers of the city, exemplified with texts by Victor Hugo and Martin Heidegger, among others.

As the global population becomes increasingly urban, the strengthening of urban issues is without a doubt perceived as a continuous process of urban evolution, requiring a substantiated knowledge and appropriate knowhow when considering the wide range of current issues. The original synthesis given by this anthology is essential to achieve this goal.

"Inspired by Fourier, Godin built a Phalanstery in Guise, which still exists today (www.familistere.com)."

Bibliography

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