

On Mediation

Both the natural environment and the city can be recognized as a patchwork of differing elements and areas adjacent to each other. The resultant fragments and fields create a complex maze of boundaries and conflict. On the other hand, if we accept Structuralist ideals, the city can be regarded as a kind of "entire system" like the human body. Given such disparate interpretations, the way we go about recognizing the city must have much to do with our cognitive models. If we take the former model of the city and natural environment as being made of conflict, then it can be said that human beings have used 3 methods of alleviating those stresses I here call "alienation".

Alienation = discord: a situation created by the coexistence of two incompatible elements.

Examples include discord in color, scale, angle, culture etc..

3 Methods of alleviating alienation:

Separation: $(e1, e2) \rightarrow (e1 / e2)$

Refusing the adjacency of incompatible elements. By putting up barriers or leaving a great distance between them they have no contact.

Assimilation: $(e1, e2) \rightarrow (e1, e1)$

One or more element is forced to assume the identity of another element.

Mediation: $(e1, e2) \rightarrow (e1 / M / e2)$

Placing a mediator between 2 discordant elements. The presence of the mediator does not change the quality of either of the two elements in character or form. It is possible to have several kinds of mediators at once.

It may be said that this is just an extension of an analogy applied to human society. However, it can be applied to the city and the natural environment where we regard them as a series of conflicting areas. From the example of putting up hedges between houses to the example of zoning theory the idea of separation emerges.

Examples of assimilation are clear when new buildings are expected to meet minimal expectations such as maintaining an eaves height similar to adjacent properties or to adhere entirely to a set style. In assimilation there is always a kind of power at work. Whether it is economic, political or cultural it tends to force one of the components to follow the other. This is normally a method of preventing new situations of alienation from arising. However, in this there is the risk of creating another kind of alienation; one where the new destroys the parts of an otherwise harmonious patchwork.

Among the three methods, mediation has the most promise in the modern setting. It is more subtle and versatile in its application. Mediation has two categories, the physical and the semantic. Physical mediation is demonstrated in the balancing of difference between things like angle, shape, color, and scale. Semantic mediation occurs in clarifying differences of meaning and cultural. We should expect more development in the study of mediation concerning modern cities where physical and cultural entropy increases constantly.

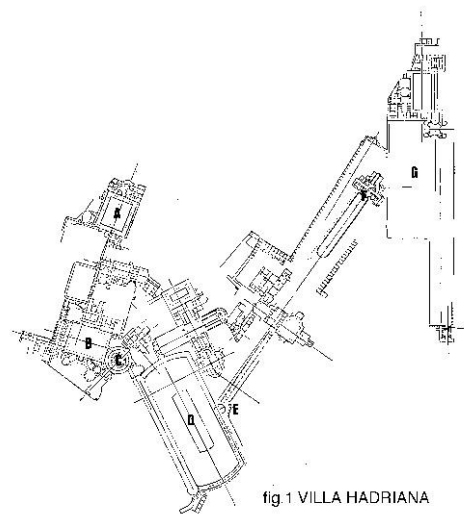


fig.1 VILLA HADRIANA

An example of mediation can be found in an analysis of cylindrical forms in plans of ancient Rome. Hadrians Villa, although not a city itself, has a quality of organization similar to that of a Roman City (See fig. 1). It is composed of differing angular systems. One group follows an axial system while others are angular. Where the two collide the composition becomes a series of several angular fragments. At any specific point of meeting there always appears a round architectural type as a physical mediator between the opposing angles. These round types enable the coexistence of many different angles to function as a system or patchwork.

In Constantinopolis on the other hand, there is another round type; one which acts at all times as a center point where many axis meet (See fig. 2). Under the rule of Constantine Constantinopolis became the first Christian City. Here, the round element began to play a more sacred role operating as a unique center integrating the whole city through centralization as a compositional tool.

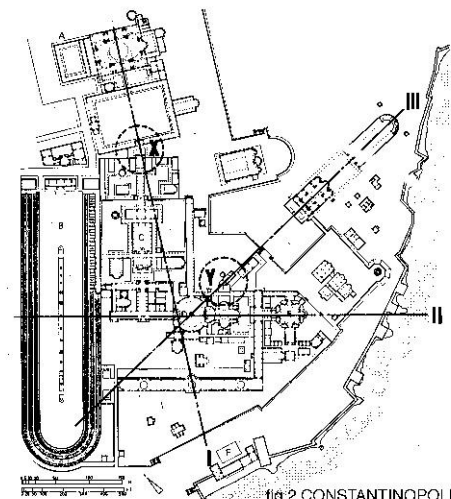


fig.2 CONSTANTINOPOLIS

Historically, before Constantinopolis, round form was typically used as a mediator alleviating potential physical conflict between disagreeing compositional forces. Interestingly, afterward, round type as a physical mediator was rapidly replaced by round type as center point. From the change in ideology, I could interpret the parallel change in the physical meaning of round type.

The city as well as the natural environment is full of conflicts created on the boundaries between different patchworks. Yet these conflicts evoke the emergence of the new relatedness between alienated fields. Even in the topics of Form and Function, we are now entering the new era of "Form and Function are mediated". From the word "Form follows Function" that represents the beginning of the 20th century.

I believe that as "mediation" is the only notion of today that could regard all those conflicts a positive energy to turn a harsh chaos into a more fruitful multiplicity.