

Review of: "A Conceptual Review of Discontinuity in Urban Design: The Morphological and Ethical Dimensions"

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The article deals with the empirical field of urban planning and architecture, which is often considered to be of the nearest practical interest. There are not many philosophical or epistemological approaches to their problems, even fewer of a semiotic nature. We do have studies by Donald Preziosi (Semiotics of the built environment), Dean McCannell, Alexandros Lagopoulos, and of course, starting from Le Corbusier. Yet, this essay is a courageous effort to fill this gap in our knowledge and is thus a most welcome one. It is focusing on the concept of Discontinuity, which is given several diverse meanings. However, the author believes that it covers the whole problem involved, i.e., urban planning as such a pragmatic activity, the obvious disasters of some contemporary urban environments (well illustrated from an extremely 'modern' American city to a favela of Sao Paulo), and from this avenue going to ethical questions, and moreover, cultural contexts to colonialist practices, say, in Arab architecture and in general in how non-Western cultures are dominated by Western ideologies.

Thus, the concept of discontinuity is the umbrella notion under which all those very different phenomena are situated. In this multiplicity of its meanings, one may ask whether it has enough 'distinctive' power to function for all those sign situations of architecture.

Indeed, the study starts with linguistic definitions, and one may ask if in this context, discontinuity is almost the same as 'articulation,' used by linguists from Saussure to Martinet. Yet then it is given a philosophical meaning, and the author provides us with a broad synthesis of its traditions in the three main paradigms: Pragmaticism - which leads to the notion of design - Rationalism - which concentrates on functionality and technology - and Realism - dealing with history and culture. Moreover, references are made to thinkers from Marx to Foucault, who considered discourse as such a discontinuous phenomenon. A slight problem may be that we do not always know when discontinuity is merely a descriptive concept and when it is ideological and evaluative. The author speaks of ethical and unethical discontinuity. Furthermore, the writer considers some individual theories like Catastrophe theory by Thom and the Center and Periphery distinction, already used in semiotics.

It is quite obvious that the writer touches on problems with which everyone is familiar, like the contradiction among architectural styles, say, classical buildings vs. skyscrapers, which also influence the pedestrian experience, i.e., the 'consumers' of urban planning. A good example could be a city like Minneapolis where walkers have escaped from the streets to tubes in the air connecting the skyscrapers. Or the struggle concerning historic centers under threat of being eliminated and destroyed for modern supermarkets. Globalisation is seen as guilty of these negative aspects, and by it,

the author understands also the Western extremist dominance in non-Western spaces.

The great advantage of the article is that it interrogates, as said, a problem field which is often left to the worry of technicians, engineers, architects, and tries to constitute a metalanguage whereby we can deal with the entire phenomenon in all of its varieties, historically and contemporarily. Therefore, I consider this essay a valuable contribution to its problem and successful in its aspiration to theorize all these relevant issues. I thus warmly recommend it to be published.

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