CHAPTER 8

Architecture, Leadership and Systems Intelligence

Maija Ojala

Belief in the significance of architecture is premised on the notion that we are, for better or for worse, different people in different places – and to the conviction that it is architecture's task to render vivid to us who we might ideally be.

Alain de Botton

Architecture is a complex and fascinating phenomenon that daily touches our lives on many levels. This article first discusses the scopes of architectural occupation and outlines the ways our physical environment influences us. Furthermore, the parallels between architecture and leadership are traced through the similarities in the ways they affect our behaviour and shape our possibilities. After discussing some fundamental aspects of systems intelligent action, this Systems Intelligence perspective is then applied to the implementation of architecture.

Introduction

Thinking of architecture as a phenomenon inside society, I feel very much tempted to examine it as extending into the field of social sciences. This is by no means a novel perspective in discussing architecture; in fact the very roots of early Functionalism reach back to the chaos and inhuman living conditions of the people who filled the cities by the end of the 19th century, during the mass migrations caused by Industrialisation. Throughout the 20th century there has been a significant side stream in architecture that focuses on serving the people's needs. But just as the noble intentions of Functionalism turned into the formal straitjacket of modernism in the mainstream of architecture, many architectural aspirations that start with true insight of humanity turn far too easily into artificial and fashionable use of shallow forms. This is why it feels so important to return to the basics of architecture time after time, to keep the light in the lamp that signals: "Architecture is made for people".

Although there can be no true architecture without a great concern for – or at least an instinct for! – artistic values[1], in architecture itself this aspect only comprises one part of the phenomenon. It must be admitted that this part is essential and more often than not, this is the basis of valuing architecture, amongst the professionals as well as by the laymen.

Architecture is nevertheless no branch in the tree of free arts. A painter for instance can, lacking profitable commissions and unwilling to compromise her visions, go on working with cheaper paints and canvases in hope to gain appreciation in the future. Architecture, on the contrary, is far from independent; in fact, it must be one of the most bound activities ever. To be engaged in architecture – designing and building – means dealing with numerous aspects and restrictions in almost every field of science and social activities: physics, geography, meteorology, law, economics, culture, politics – you name it, and almost certainly it has a contact point with architecture. The "input" in architecture is thus vast and complex. No wonder then, that also the outcome of this activity has such widespread effects on many levels of society.

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Professionals in every field yearn for the appreciation of their colleagues. This inclination is probably present, at least on a subconscious level, in almost every professional activity we engage in. But the effects of architecture are not limited to those who "understand" it. Von Hayek (1974) speaks in his Nobel-lecture "Pretence of Knowledge" about economics, including it to the "phenomena of organized complexity", whose theories, whether they are right or wrong, have a great influence in forming the social environment we live in. Architecture is no less a "phenomenon of organized complexity", and it influences our living-world in a number of ways. We may well apply von Hayek's words also to architecture:

> But the influence (…) that mainly matters is an influence over laymen: politicians, journalists, civil servants and the public generally.

When the things we do have a very concrete influence on the everyday lives of people, we have in our actions a very different responsibility compared to those, who deal with mere academic theories or independent forms of art. The least we can do is to be conscious of this fact. To go a bit further, we could try to understand the nature of this influence. The ultimate goal is, of course, to be able to contribute to the forming of our built environment in a positive, inspiring and innovative way. These are the steps I will try to outline here.

Some Aspects of the Architectural Profession

The roots of architecture lie, as well as in the arts, also in the technical sciences and practices and, which is still far more demanding, in the needs, aspirations, hopes, possibilities and dreams of individuals, communities and even nations. The constituent parts of the architectural occupation have varied a great deal over the course of time and still vary to some degree both in the architectural education and in the practices in different countries.

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[1] The field of architecture comprises all the aspects of our built environment, which are designed and/or built with the intention to make a positive contribution to our living-world. Thus much of the vernacular building throughout the world naturally belongs to the denomination of architecture, although no actual architect was involved in the building process. On the other hand, the mere technical problem-solving-building doesn't achieve the status of architecture, despite its undeniable effect on us in our environment.

The oldest surviving texts illuminating the scope of the architect's tasks are based on the writings of Vitruvius, which date back as far as 30 B.C.[2] At that time the architect's work ranged from city planning to one family villas adorned with statues, from fortresses and ports to war machines and water clocks, from knowing the specifics of different materials and their proper use in construction to handling the whole building process (including the economy and hiring the people to do the jobs). Many of these tasks have since branched out to form their own specialised professions: today we have, for instance, many kinds of technical designers and engineers, construction firms and building masters.

Still the definition of architects' profession is not the same everywhere. In the Anglo-American world the architects' professionalism reaches much further to the fields of civil engineers and building masters than in the northern countries. In Scandinavia much of the technical expertise even in a one family house design task is provided by engineers, which specialise in construction, electricity, water systems and heating/ventilation. The design scope, on the other hand, stretches the whole scale from furniture to vast environmental entities, whereas the latter in many countries is separated to town or city planners.

With the rise of Industrialisation, construction possibilities started to increase considerably through the introduction of new materials and construction ideas. As a consequence the architect was given a much freer hand with the design of buildings. Nevertheless, apart from some decades in the 20th century, architecture has never been considered a free art form. Ironically, this phase started under the name of Functionalism, which from its very fine starting points developed to a kind of "architectural dictatorship". As the designer possessed the ultimate knowledge of how things ought to be, she could, would and to some extent was even expected to, ignore the needs, likings and even the financial resources of her client, all in the holy name of Art.

No wonder therefore, that architects today are still paying a high price for this folly. As the architects chose to concentrate on the artistic part of their profession and to a great degree ignore the social and practical sides of it, society in turn started to doubt the profession and/or the professionalism of architects and began to pass over their views. This is a true tragedy, because there is no other profession that could better deal with the complexity of both the material and immaterial aspects of our environment.

I am confident that architecture and architects will regain their position in the society. Not as arrogant dictators ("the house is so beautiful, that it does not matter, whether it works or not"), nor as snuffed out errand-boys of the number-crunchers ("we're not trying to make art here; just put a little architecture on this stuff, so we get the building permissions"). What is needed, is true professionals, who can tie together the many threads of the designing task (that more often than not pull to opposite directions!) and generate from this hurly-burly a meaningful, enjoyable and integrating environment for the people it's going to serve.

Outlining the Scope of Architectural Influence

We cannot escape from the presence of architecture in our lives. Other art forms are much easier to avoid: we can put down a book that does not please us, or leave a theatre, whose program annoys us. The more money we have, the more we can choose or influence the environments where we spend our time in. But we are born, we live and we die in buildings. We work, rest and seek for pleasure mostly in built environments. Even if we would escape to the wilderness, the

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[2] *De Architectura Libri Decem.* For an English translation see Morgan M.H. (1960).

first task after securing the water and food would be finding or constructing some kind of shelter against the weather and the beasts.

So the built environment and the ways the buildings and public spaces are designed, have an influence on us most of the time. Why then do we seem to let the knowledge of this impact into our consciousness only very seldom; mainly in the far ends of the scale *horrifying—fascinating*? Alain de Botton writes about our sensitivity to architecture in a very touching way (de Botton 2006, p. 13):

> But sensitivity to Architecture also has its more problematic aspects. If one room can alter how we feel, if our happiness can hang on the colour of the walls or the shape of a door, what will happen to us in most of the places we are forced to look at and inhabit? What will we experience in a house with prison-like windows, stained carpet tiles and plastic curtains?
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> It is to prevent the possibility of permanent anguish that we can be led to shut our eyes to most of what is around us, for we are never far from damp stains and cracked ceilings, shattered cities and rusting dockyards. We cannot remain sensitive indefinitely to environments which we do not have the means to alter for the good – and end up as conscious as we can afford to be.

Nevertheless, the influence is there, whether we are aware of it or not. The environment draws near to us in many ways. I tend to depict the levels on which we relate to our environment with the following hierarchy (FIGURE 1):

In the focus of this system is a person, who is interacting with her environment. The innermost, that is, the most intimate sphere around a person is drawn with **feeling** as a radius. In the English language the concept of feeling is very handy as it combines the physical, tactile world with the mental, more abstract ideas. The radius of this scope is not constant, far from it. It reaches from the touch of the hand to the comforting warmth radiating from the fireplace and to the enlivening colours of the room. The unifying factor is, that no matter from how far or through which mechanisms we get these impacts, they come to or under our skin; they influence our feelings.

This is the level, where our personal choices are dominant. The environment may suggest that we sit on angular sofas in a glasshouse, but our choice can be, that we drag in our grandfather's old easy chair and close off the darkness of outside with heavy curtains. This is also the level, where personal differences are great. The effects of the environment differ, not only from person to person, but also with the same person in different situations, times and moods. Nevertheless, there are rules and parallels that can be established and used in the design of our environment. This is a big part of the study field of Environmental Psychology (see for instance Bell et al. 1978).
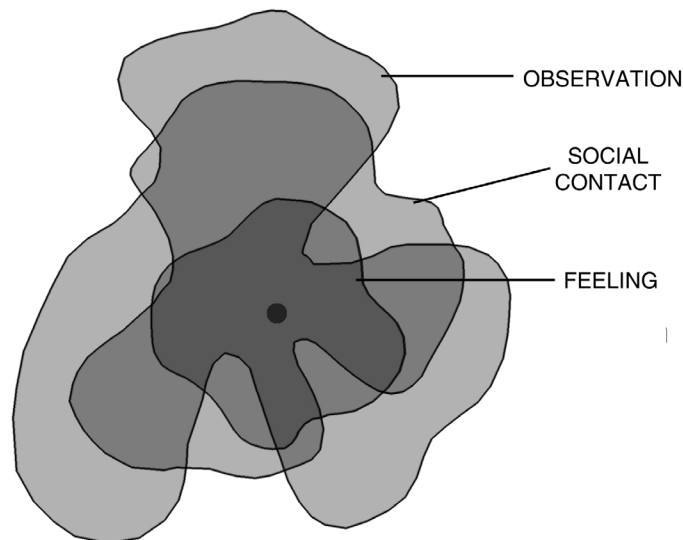
FIGURE 1. A diagram of the flexible spheres of human interaction with the environment.

The next scope is drawn with the radius of **social contact**. This radius also varies a lot, from the everyday occasions of the family life to coffee break conversations in the office and hailing to a friend across the street. This is the level, where the needs and habits of other people, organisations and officials come to play a greater part in our lives. The freedom to shape our environment diminishes abruptly, when we step outside the walls of our homes. Instead, the influence of the environment upon our actions increases considerably. We usually (with the exception of a few anarchists) accept this influence without even paying much attention to it. In every case, the environment has a great influence on **how** we do things with other people.

The third and widest scope is drawn with the radius of **observation**. And again, this radius varies from the details of the nearby furniture to the shapes of buildings around a square and to the distant landmarks of our cities. This is in a sense the most developed scope and assumes some degree of awareness. This also presupposes a certain "peacefulness" in the first two spheres: we are not very likely to admire the tiling in a room, where we are about to freeze. Nor are we likely to be impressed with the exquisite proportions of spaces where we have to fight every inch to gain a foothold.

The scope I am now interested in and which I try to take a look at in this essay is the middle one. This is the level where the environment has the most direct influence on our actions. Returning to de Botton's words: "We are different people in different environments". How are we different? Our appearance does not change (except maybe a difference in our posture), nor does our personal history. What really changes is our behaviour. And things that are powerful enough to change our behaviour deserve to be observed a little closer.

Where Does Leadership Come into the Picture and Why?

Leadership has many definitions and is a subject of a constant flow of writings, theories and books. Indeed, it seems that there is a new leadership slogan almost for every quarter. There must be a constant lack of leadership, if the old proverb "One speaks of the things one lacks"[3] has any truth in it.

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[3] The author's free translation of the Finnish proverb: "Siitä puhe, mistä puute".

For me the first inspiration to search for the parallels between architecture and leadership came from professor Hämäläinen[4]. The concept of leadership is understood here in a much wider sense than as "enlightened management". Some leaders are born to their position, and they fulfil the expectations that come with the job, all according to their abilities. Some leaders are chosen or elected, but many rise to their position by the forces of their circumstances: they channel the necessities, dreams and desires of their fellow citizens. The characteristics required from leadership may vary considerably depending on the era, world situation, the position of the leader in the society, etc. There are some aspects that recur, though, both in old and new writings about leadership (e.g. Goleman et al. 2002, Peters 2003, Burns 2003). Here are some very basic ones:

It is essential to understand that practising architecture also includes the exercise of power over others.

- – Leadership means working with and towards a vision.

- – Leadership means affecting people's emotions.

- – Leadership means creating opportunities.

- – Leadership means influencing people's behaviour.

So leadership embodies the will and ability to shape the world and make people act, at least to some extent, towards a better life as seen by the leader. It is actually very easy to see here parallels with architecture: we could in fact paraphrase the above list to start with "Architecture" and get an equally relevant list. Good architecture has and must exhibit the same properties.

It is essential to understand that practising architecture also includes the exercise of power over others. Leslie Kanes Weisman states this very clearly in her book "Discrimination by Design". She writes (Weisman 1992, pp. 9–10): "Our buildings, neighbourhoods, and cities are cultural artefacts shaped by human intention and intervention, symbolically declaring to society the place held by each of its members." Furthermore, according to Weisman: "The cognitive map or mental picture of the physical environment that each of us carries around in our head is largely dependent upon the social space we occupy." As there is "an ongoing dialectical relationship between social space and physical space", this conveys, that the places we have access to, and which we are able or not able to use according to our needs and wishes, tell us who we are in our society. We really are told a lot of things about ourselves merely by our physical environment.

Tracing the Quality of Leadership in Architecture

In searching for a way to characterize the quality of leadership in architecture, the Nobel-lecture of the economist von Hayek (1974) has been most helpful. Von Hayek uses the term "phenomena of organized complexity" when he describes economics, and many of his observations on this theme can be directly adapted to the social influence of architecture. Von Hayek writes:

> Unlike the position that exists in the physical sciences, in economics and other disciplines that deal with essentially complex phenomena, the aspects of the events to be accounted for about which we can get quantitative data are necessarily limited and may not include the important ones. (…) While in the physical sciences it is generally assumed, probably with good reason, that any important factor which determines the observed events will itself be directly observable and measurable, in the study of such complex phenomena as the market

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[4] Private communication with professor Raimo P. Hämäläinen in October 2006.

which depend on the actions of many individuals, all the circumstances which will determine the outcome of a process, (…), will hardly ever be fully known or measurable.

This could not be more to the point concerning architecture even if it was written in a totally different context. Everyone working in the field of architecture must submit to the fact that they are always dealing, not only with practicalities and clearly determinable things, but also with a large variety of immeasurable elements: visions, feelings, emotions, intuitions, artistic views, values and many other human dimensions. There is no "one right answer" in architecture. There may be dozens or hundreds of right answers, all responding to different evaluations of the attainable information. There may even be no right answer at all, if the starting points pull very heavily into different directions, but even then the architect just has to make a choice of the emphasis.

The uncertainty of such a working environment sometimes leads to the quest for simplifying theories: it would be so much easier and much less stressful to work with fixed formulas. But with "phenomena of organized complexity" there are no universally valid formulas to be found, as every situation varies from the former and the following in massively many ways.

Daniel Goleman et al. (2002) write in the introduction of their book "Primal Leadership":

> The fundamental task of leaders, we argue, is to prime good feeling in those they lead. That occurs, when a leader creates resonance – a reservoir of positivity that frees the best in people.

Boldly paraphrasing from this, I argue, that the fundamental task of architecture is to prime good feeling in those it affects. And to these belong not only the users – occupants, employees, visitors, caretakers – but also the neighbours, the passers-by, the onlookers and the environment in general. This is a huge task to try to accomplish, and combined with the lack of valid formulas and direct causal relationships it may well seem impossible. And yet we all know that there are places, where this has been achieved in reality. Places that resonate, places that "send a message that hits the right chords" – borrowing the phrasing from Goleman et al. (2002, p. 19) – are places that make us feel at home, relaxed, efficient, pious; whatever sentiment is appropriate for us at that time. Places that resonate with us make us feel good about ourselves.

I argue that the fundamental task of Architecture is to prime good feeling in those it affects.

Many other modern leadership writers share Goleman's perspective on leadership. This pursuit to enhance the lives of people, and by doing this, to evoke the inherent talents in them, seems to be a growing tendency. Another quotation from leadership writings, which I find very closely related to architecture, comes from Burns (2003, p. 3):

> Hence I would call for the protection and nourishing of happiness, for extending the opportunity to pursue happiness to all people, as the core agenda of transforming leadership.

In his book "Re-imagine!" Tom Peters (2003, pp. 320–342) lists 50 qualifications for leadership. He starts with "Leaders Create Opportunities" and ends with "Leaders Do Things that Matter". Self-evidently, as Peters' list is about persons and not about "leading through creating built environment", only a part of it is directly adaptable to my point of view. Nevertheless, a very important one to be singled out in this context is no. 46: "Leaders express their passion".

Expressing passion, and the ability to make this passion comprehensible to others, is a very vital component in all architecture that aims at having a positive influence on people. Environments that show no passion from the side of their designers influence people very much the same way as a still, rainy November day in the northern countries: it's not very likely to enhance your life. On the other hand, a passion that is intelligible to the users of spaces may even gain forgiveness to some impracticalities.

On the Nature of Systems Intelligent Action

A very natural framework to study the complex relations and impacts between people and architecture can be found in the concept of Systems Intelligence (later also referred to with SI). Raimo Hämäläinen and Esa Saarinen introduce the concept and open up the context in their article published in 2004. In a recent article they adapt Systems Intelligence to organizational life (2006). The perspectives of Systems Intelligence are just as feasible with all "phenomena of organized complexity" and in almost any context that includes human factors. And as professor Saarinen pointed out in a private conversation[5], the task of an architect is in fact fundamentally a systems intelligent function.

> The systems intelligence approach acknowledges the systemic nature of the external world, but its main emphasis is on the concept of a system as a part of the *human* experience and orientation. A 'system' is a generative frame within which a subject experiences her life as taking place. (Hämäläinen and Saarinen 2006, p. 17).

So with systems intelligence we do not put ourselves outside the systems we are dealing with; to analyze, theorize, dissect or make pretence to fully understand them. We participate in the system, learn from the things that work and put this knowledge in practice. We learn from the things that do not work and change our input in the system accordingly. As von Hayek (1974) writes: "I confess that I prefer true but imperfect knowledge, even if it leaves much undetermined and unpredictable, to a pretence of exact knowledge that is likely to be false. "

One primary aspect to emphasize here is that with SI we are really focusing on action, not on theories. If something works in theory, but does not work in practice, in this SI concept the reality overrules the theory and not vice versa. If the outcome is not satisfactory or, indeed, is contradictory to what we want, there has to be a change in the ways we do things.

In the following list I sum up some of the most important aspects that the systems intelligence approach comprises, regarding the topic of this article:

– Making decisions although we cannot know all the facts (and being aware of this fact!)

– Acting and adjusting according to feedback

– Understanding that even small changes can put great powers in action

– Furthering alternative ways to think and perceive

– Believing in the enrichment of life, in flourishment and in the possibility of emergence

For a thorough look at Systems Intelligence I refer to the above-mentioned articles. To end this paragraph and to give a further insight I just quote another basic attitude of SI: "We do not fear

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[5] E-mail communication with professor Esa Saarinen in November 2006.

the subjective or the emotional, the experimental or the phenomenological – indeed we embrace those things. Therein lies the source of emergence." (Hämäläinen and Saarinen 2006).

Reciprocity in Architecture

One fundamental motif in both leadership and systems intelligence is communication and reciprocity. This seemed at first to be a difficult thing observing architecture: not really limited by the possibilities of expression on the part of architecture, but by the shortage of the other party's opportunities.

There are as many ways of communicating through the characteristics of built environment as there are ways of dealing with people at large: we may e.g. suggest, encourage, ignite, force, suppress, forbid, tire out or – what is worst – even be totally indifferent. But the communication **with** architecture must consider the inherent sluggishness of this party. Architecture is a profoundly slow art. Time is an essential factor in every phase of architecture.

There are only some points, when a fruitful feedback to the direction of architecture is even possible. The first and most important of these is the predesign or programming phase. This should include, besides a thorough survey of the spatial needs and economic aspects, also a real participation on the part of the users. Or, if this is impossible, the design should be left partly "open" or flexible, to be adjusted to the users' needs at the time of introduction or thereafter.

The design phases should be slow enough to enable adjusting the designs according to the feedback and still keep the integrity of the design. And this actually goes for the construction phase, too; there should be no last-minute changes (usually due to problems in availability, pricing or schedules), that are not properly examined, to avoid hazardous surprises. All this is profoundly in discordance with the practices and the hectic pace of today, when everything ought to be ready at once.

The third possibility for architecture to respond to the users' needs and expectations is an inherent flexibility. This is by no means an invitation to design as neutral spaces as possible; rather the opposite. "Strong" environments seem to be much better able to adapt to the changes in use than those with a weak character. Moreover, contributing environments enjoy better maintenance and care, thus creating a better relation between the users and the environment.

One difficulty with this reciprocity is that many designers seem to find it unwanted, unnecessary or in any case too cumbersome. They do not see the participation of the other parties (at least after the starting point) as an asset, but sooner like a hindrance to their work. Or even if they would in principle be favourable to the idea, they may feel somewhat helpless in taking real action. This is where architecture could look for tools and endorsement in other domains, especially in sociology.

One recent approach towards the dialogue of architecture and sociology is made by the sociologists Ronald Smith and Valerie Bugni (2002), who in their writings adduce the concept of Architectural Sociology and survey the development, resources and potentiality of this field. They aim at "getting to a better future through architecture and sociology" and urge both fields to work jointly "toward the goal of connecting people to our designed environments".

Butterflies and Roses

Another unifying aspect in the concepts of Systems Intelligence and leadership is paying attention to details. They both acknowledge the trigger-effect of some seemingly unimportant things. For instance, the impact of attention that surpasses the bare necessities can be enormous. It can make people feel special, encourage them to develop themselves and make them contribute in unforeseen ways in the things they are doing.

In architecture I would interpret this to an absolute denial of offering the bare necessities. Our environment should be full of secret gifts; things that do not jump to our face but when we come to think of them, we notice that someone has thought this over. I love getting these subtle compliments: like when strolling on a Barcelona sidewalk you suddenly notice that the pavement tiles bear a motive from Gaudi. And I do not call for posh materials or expensive details here: it is more like shifting the emphasis from **what** you do to **how** you do it.

Our environment should be full of secret gifts.

There is one more theme I'd like to take a brief look at. Both systems thinking and leadership theories appreciate the "world of possibilities". There are countless opportunities that may be surfaced, even with such a small effort as a change in the point of view. There is a hidden surplus of energy to be put into motion, if we just find the right button. Behind all the drab and the commonplace there already exists a world of vigour, prosperity and gratification. And so, here we are again, in the deep sources of architecture. This is the very essence of the profession: to trace and unveil hidden possibilities inherent in our environment and to enrich our living-world by offering space for new interpretations of our existence.

Systems Intelligence Interventions in Architecture: Action!

What could Systems Intelligence induce, if we viewed architecture from this perspective? What kinds of systems intelligent interventions are possible in the practise of architecture?

I quote some points from the Systems Intelligence article of Hämäläinen and Saarinen (2006, p. 23):

> People thrive on meaning. As a result, the most forceful forms of systems intelligence intervention are likely to be those that touch basic human aspirations, especially:
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> 1. A person's sense of worth and desire to be respected
>
> 2. A person's desire to feel connected in the company of others
>
> 3. A person's desire to feel connected with something meaningful

Taking these basic needs as a starting point we could survey what their implementation in architecture could bring out.

Worth and respect

As Nancy Kline searches for the requirements to create a Thinking Environment, she finds one of the essentials to be "places, that say back to the people: 'You matter'" (Kline 2007, pp. 84–86). Kline tells a very enlightening story of this principle put into practice (the project is the London Lighthouse, a centre for people with HIV):

The architects were chosen, because they had no design plans, when they arrived for the bidding interview. They said that their strategy would be to talk with the people with HIV and with others who would be using the service and find out what they needed and wanted in the building. They said they would design the renovations to make it clear that the people who used the building were what mattered.

We all know environments that say back to us: "You don't matter". Sometimes it is in a form: "I am Art, I am Orthodox, you just better adjust". Sometimes it takes the form: "This is all you are worth, deal with it". And very often it's bluntly: "Couldn't care less".

Now imagine that these environments could be reshaped to say back: "What inspiring could I offer you today?" or "You are important and I will try to take care of your needs" or "The world is full of good things and possibilities". This could really make resound the "reservoir of positivity that frees the best in people", as Goleman et al. put it. If this "saying 'You matter'" was taken to a real guideline in architecture, very different environments would emerge compared to those, where the standard is derived from minimum input or where "showing off" rules. We would have environments that encourage us to participate, that offer incentive but do not overwhelm our senses. Districts where repetitiveness is spiced with lively variation and spaces with room for our own interpretations. And above all, environments that do not oppress us, do not force, undervalue or neglect us.

To respect someone means listening to her, paying attention and really "getting the message". It means asking the right questions, too, and placing yourself in the other's position. There are many practices in the fields of architecture and town planning that could be considerably amended regarding this. It is impossible to please everyone. But it is possible to hear people out and show them that they really count.

Feeling connected

Malcolm McCullough (2004, p. 39) writes: "Architecture consists of built social relations". When we design the environment we thus project, enable and mould certain patterns of social contact. This is done, not only by the design of actual spaces, but also – and maybe even more so – by the design and placement of furniture (in a smaller scale) and especially by the design of the spaces-between-spaces.

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A very clear large-scale example to visualize the last notion is to think of the patchwork quilt of an American suburb and compare it with the dwelling quarters of the older European cities. In the former pattern the social activities are divided into separate locations; dwelling takes place in their own districts, working in others and recreation and shopping etc. still in other areas. The connections between these activities are conducted with cars, where people sit in their solitude, possibly many hours each day. Compared to the structures in the old cities, where all activities intertwine in a compact manner, we find a huge difference in the possibilities to connect with other people. In cities there are apartments above stores and workshops mingle with public spaces. The streets form an organic network that offer meeting places in every corner.

The segregation of social activities leads to monotonous and lifeless environments. The natural "encounterability" in the environment gets lost. It is hardly a coincidence that the large shopping malls that are being built everywhere in the outskirts of modern cities try to imitate the lost main streets of country towns. But like all imitations that take the form and lose the substance – in this case the diversity of the activities, the human scale and the familiarity of the encounterings – it really does not work.

To create places that enable all kinds of meetings, to design environments that invite people to come out of their cocoons and connect with others; these are real challenges in a time, when more and more interaction between people is conducted through electronic devices. There is no going back to old country towns. But there are countless possibilities to interpret the essence of encounterings in the building of our modern environments.

Regaining meaningfulness

For the environment to become meaningful to a person assumes that she can identify herself with her surroundings. Herman Hertzberger writes (1980, p. 38 and p. 40):

> One becomes attached to things only when one is able to relate to them, when so much of one's own effort and feeling has gone into them that they become one's own, incorporated into one's own world of experience.
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> …
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> The more involved a person is in the shaping and maintenance of his surroundings, the more appropriate they become and the more easily appropriated by him; but just as he takes possession of his surroundings so will they also take possession of him.
>
> This care and solicitude creates a situation in which a person appears to be needed by his surroundings. Not only does he have some control over them, but they in turn are a reflection of him, and have some control over him, too.

These sentences not only tell us, how meaningful places come into being; they also give a vivid example of the constant interaction between a person and the environment.

To give our designs a possibility to become meaningful for their users we should maybe aim at "building the unfinished", as Lars Lerup titled his book where he surveys the people's approach to architecture. Architects tend to consider their buildings as "finished" when the construction phase is over, whereas Lerup finds this to be a starting point. He argues that change should self-evidently be within the designer's focus. "To expect fixity in the environment appears absurd against the facts of steady social and personal changes among dwellers."(Lerup 1977, p. 142). Lerup calls for a many-sided view and takes real-life examples of Swedish fisher villages: these have grown organically and developed a multitude of formal variations in the buildings, still keeping the integrity of the wholeness.

This same yearning after things to be meaningful and one's possibility to connect with things, comes up in many fields in our society. Brian Eno, a British composer, record producer and visual artist, puts this thought into words as follows:

> An important aspect of design is the degree to which the object involves you in its own completion. Some work invites you into itself by not offering a finished, glossy, one-reading-only surface. This is what makes old buildings interesting to me.[6]

Conclusion

The very obvious parallels that can be traced between architecture and leadership point to the

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[6] The original reference to this quotation is not anymore available to the author. However, Eno's lyrics and interviews can be found on the web pages http://www.enoweb.co.uk (accessed 10 March 2007).

need of a more people focused and socially responsible architecture. Unfortunately, the many openings that have been taken toward this direction often dry up or change into empty formalism in the pressures of today's economics and efficiency. New tools and perspectives are needed to really get better environments from the good intentions.

Taking the systems intelligence perspective in discussing architecture feels like "unfolding architecture in a different point". I find this approach very inspiring and hope to continue my quest at a later date. Right now I feel like just having found the treasure map and spotted the first landmarks; I am very curious about the contents of the chest!

To name a beacon, which should brightly guide us in designing our physical environment, I finish this essay with the words of architect Herman Herzberger (1980, p. 38), who states:

> It would be something if everything we made encouraged people to become more closely acquainted with their surroundings, with each other and with themselves.

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