

Mapping a genealogy of the in-between the buildings starting from post war CIAM reflections

Original

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Since the beginning of the third millennium, the rapid changes that contemporary societies are facing are radically transforming the perception and the structures of our cities. New topics seem to dictate the political agenda, suggesting alternative options to manage the emerging urban mutations.

An increasingly "data driven society" is forcing the migration into an almost immaterial world, prompting Information and Communication Technology together with the Smart City.

The crisis of the traditional real estate industry, propelled by the global finance system, is contributing to re-evaluate the theme of Public Space as a "space of encounter, sharing, experience and inclusivity", mapping the everyday life to discover unexpected Urbanities, through the application of innovative strategies and tools.

As an immediate consequence, new "forms" of cities are strongly brought to our attention: the "city of sharing", the "city of temporariness", the "city of Life between buildings", giving an unexpected impulse to incremental Urbanism of evolving cities.

In such a way, the very idea of the city is radically under discussion. We are then required to answer these numerous questions in order to define the scientific coordinates for the City of the 21st century.

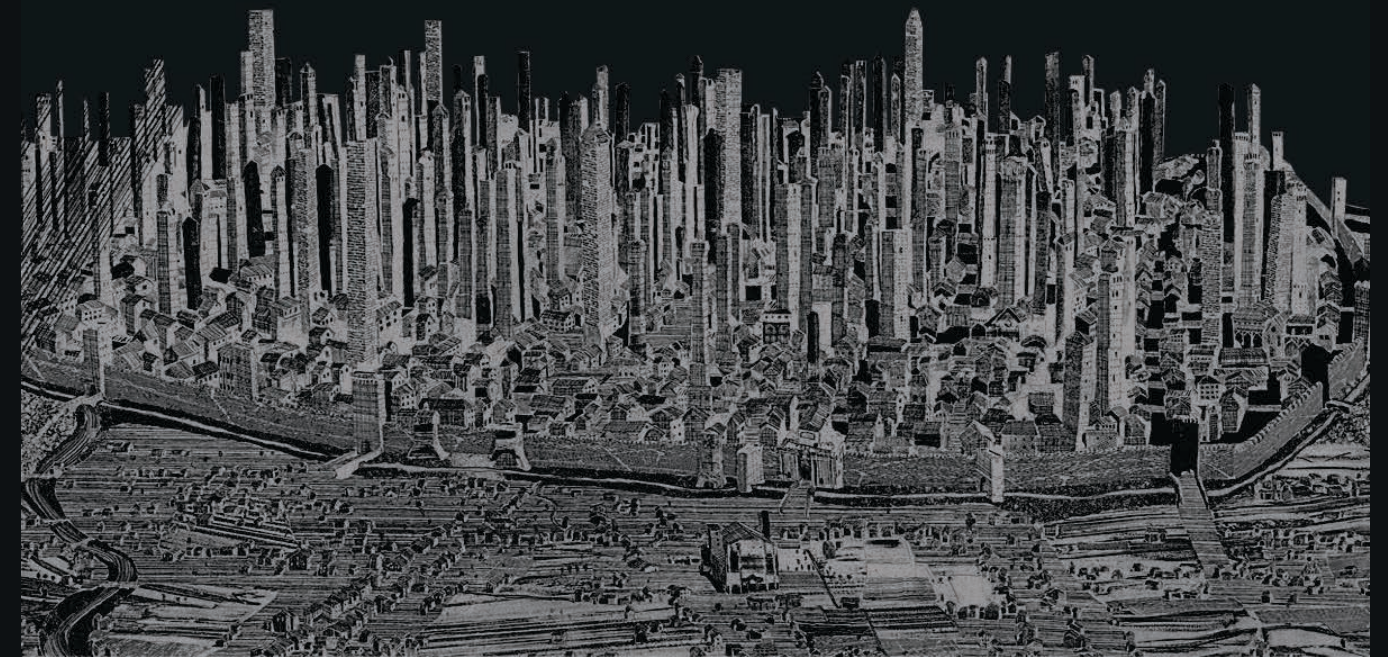
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Marco Maretto, Nicola Marzot, Annarita Ferrante



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new strategies for a changing society

PROCEEDINGS

edited by

Marco Maretto, Nicola Marzot, Annarita Ferrante

with the collaboration of

Silvia Tagliazucchi, Francesco Scattino, Greta Pitanti

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Four points for a genealogy of the in-between starting from post-war CIAM reflections

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Keywords: *in-between, relational space, threshold, genealogy of terms*

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Abstract. *The paper deals with the concept of in-between and the way it entered the architectural discourse from the post-Second World War period through a series of specific occasions of its discussion.*

Positing the postwar CIAM cultural milieu as a reference one, the research identifies nodal moments of the concept's emergence within a constellation of diverse professionals, disciplines, and audiences.

Observing diverse but cross-contaminating platforms of knowledge production and networks of protagonists involved, the paper aims at retracing possible trajectories of a discourse in-evolution that can still have transformative potential, both in its utopian message for a city shaped for human encounter and in regarding the in-between as an element allowing cities' transformations in time.

Focusing on the experimentations of the British artistic collective Independent Group, the Smithsons' research for a Relational Theory of urban forms, and Aldo van Eyck's philosophical reflections, the in-between concept is regarded as one both having a specific meaning in relation to the socio-political and historical conditions of postwar Europe, and still being relevant within contemporary urban design discourse in dealing with psychological and symbolic needs of re-identification and belonging of communities.

In its final part, as a first conclusion, or better as a way to catch a glimpse from the described events, the paper opens a reflection on the concept of liminality and the possible role of the in-between space in the contemporary city, questioning its contribution to cities' adaptative capabilities and in engaging people in an active relational public life.

Introduction

This paper¹ aims to present a preliminary investigation of the concept of in-between and the particular way it emerged within the architectural discourse during the postwar years in Western Europe. Indeed, starting from the end of the 1940s, the idea of in-between acquired specific meanings as an object of discussion, primarily in the framework of CIAM meetings, also acting as a key term in the process of critical questioning of its ideology and being conceptualized and re-conceptualized several times².

Within that framework, the in-between concept has also been discussed using different expressions, such as threshold and doorstep, revealing a continuous process of terminological shifts, which from time to time could also imply different spatial references and epistemological approaches. The concept has been central to the definition of crucial ideas developed by many Team 10 Group's members, notably, as part of the philosophical theory of twin phenomena for Aldo van Eyck and of the Smithsons' research on the Scale of Human Association and Reidentification Process. More generally, on a meta-level, the idea of the in-between also constituted a widespread approach within the specific postwar context, since the figure itself of the architect at the period had to mediate in-between several aspects: in-between trauma and reconstruction, in-between the willingness to build a new better world and a certain nostalgia for the community dimension³, in-between the growing reality of a mass society and consumerism and the call for preserving local identities, in-between ethical and aesthetical principles.

This paper aims to retrace possible trajectories of the emergence and influence of that in-between idea within the postwar architectural discourse, identifying some nodes when protagonists and reflections significantly coalesced around the concept. Those occasions work as epicentres⁴ whose punctual manifestations reflect the slipping values and evolving knowledge in postwar Western society and whose subsequent reverberations can be observed in the terminological, rhetorical, and epistemological shifts that the concept encompasses.

Despite the choice to present them following a chronological order, the intention is to suggest a constellation of episodes where different ideas, professionals, and disciplines intersect, exchange, and cross-pollinate rather than pretend to portray a linear evolutive description. In

¹The paper is based on a reflection exposed during the 6th ISUF International Conference held in Bologna in June 2022. The issue has been discussed under the title "Mapping a Genealogy of the in-between from Postwar CiAm Reflections." The following text broadens the initial contribution on the basis of the comments and conversation born on the occasion of the Congress. Moreover, it benefits from the privilege of a certain temporal distance, thus reframing it within the author's ongoing research about the migration of urban design concepts in postwar Western society.

²Concerning the word history within the context of architecture and urban design, the two main references are: Forty, A. (2000) *Words and Buildings a Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*. (Thames & Hudson, London), and Topalov, C. (2010) *L'aventure Des Mots De La Ville [à Travers Le Temps, Les Langues, Les Sociétés]*. (Robert Laffont, Paris).

³Considering the figure of the architect at the time as one mediating in-between a differentiated set of geographical, linguistic, cultural contexts the publication of Reto Geiser, Giedion and America *Repositioning the History of Modern Architecture*, framing the figure of Sigfried Giedion as perfect example of those dynamics has been particularly inspirational.

⁴The term Architectural Epicentres is used quoting Petra Čeferin, but undoubtedly simplifying the theoretical complexity of the original formulation of the concept, to a reductive, albeit very expressive rhetorical figure. Čeferin intends with AE the architectural productions that [...] correspond to the definition "architecture is architecture". [...] These are productions that are organised around the moment X, and that work as epicentre - that is, as (what appears to be) the centre-point - of an architectural tremor, which has effects on both the architectural and wider reality, and triggers and produces various changes within it.

Čeferin, P., Požar, C. (2008) *Architectural Epicentres Inventing Architecture, Intervening in Reality*. (Architecture Museum of Ljubljana, Ljubljana), 14-15.

particular, the paper intends to explore the migration of the in-between concept from anthropological, biological, and ecological studies to the architectural discipline, questioning the shifts in meanings, epistemologies, and approaches it acquired traversing and, especially, laying in-between these different kinds of borders. For each of the identified moments, there exists a vast iconographic apparatus which at the time constituted an essential part in representing the multilayered, ambiguous concept of the in-between. Although many of the images coming from exhibitions, publications, or urban surveys will be mentioned (and, as far as possible, also included) within this paper, those few pictures, abstracted from their original contexts, could evidently not contribute to nuancing the meanings of the in-between, as they did at the time. However, as for the oral presentation in Bologna, where the weight of words and images could probably have found a better equilibrium, the intention is to sketch a network of mental correspondences, where images of biological organisms, architectural diagrams, and evocative drawings are displayed as found⁵ without specific captions justifying their juxtaposition - a practice and methodologies shared by many of the figures whom the paper will address.

Point one

In-between the cogitating mind and the emotional expression

The first significant postwar moment when it is possible to observe the presence of the in-between concept within the architectural discourse is the Bridgwater VI CIAM, in 1947. Held in a little village near London and led by the English MARS Group, the most active and participated CIAM delegation at the time, it was the first CIAM meeting after the war⁶.

On this occasion, Sigfried Giedion, secretary of the Congress at the time, introduced a reflection that questioned the allegedly too rationalistic principles of Modernism, calling for the reunion of logic and emotions and, more broadly, of the object and the mind. Exposing his concerns, he referred to a reconciliation that already occurred, for instance, in the field of modern physics, where the experiment and the experimenter were regarded as deeply interdependent⁷. Building his considerations on the in-between theory of the philosopher Martin Buber, he intended to overcome the so-called one-sided rationalism that widened the gap between the cogitating mind and the whole sphere of emotional expression⁸.

Martin Buber was the father of a philosophical theory grounded on the notions of relationships and dialogue and based on human encounters, whereby the sphere of the in-between was considered the primary category of human reality and the fundamental condition of human beings. Buber himself declared that architects must be tasked to build for human contact, shaping an environment that encourages human meeting and exchange.

Less than ten years after the Bridgwater Congress, Giedion himself wrote a book, *Architecture You and Me*, first published in 1956, with explicit reference to Buber's masterpiece, *I and Thou* (1923). With these reflections, Giedion inaugurated a period of burgeoning critics of the

⁵The reference is to the as found aesthetic approach developed within the Independent Group, as one observing the objects of reality as they were, appreciating the rawness of their material aspects and without the intention to assign them any pre-conceived meaning or interpretations that could transcend their actual existence and encounter with a subjective observer.

⁶For a detailed and comprehensive reconstruction about the CIAM (Congrès Internationales d'Architecture Moderne) history and protagonists see Mumford, E. P. (2000) *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960*. MIT Press, Cambridge).

⁷Giedion, S. (ed.) (1951), *A Decade of Contemporary Architecture*. (Editions Girsberger, Zurich), 40-41.

⁸Ibid., 41.

functionalist assumption based on relation theory and in-between concepts, which the Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck, present at the Bridgwater's Congress as one of the youngest participants, would further explore.

In a first step, Giedion applied that approach of re-conciliation to the idea of synthesis and cooperation of the Arts. Also influenced by the British philosopher and mathematicians Alfred North Whitehead, he considered that art would be able to reconcile architecture and life, giving both a concrete and symbolic form to the emotional world of human beings, thus sewing the connection between inside and outside, between the individual and his environment.

In particular, Giedion regarded Modern Art, Primitive Art, and the World of Childhood as all forms of art characterized by transparency, simultaneity, superposition, and abstraction, elements conferring the capacity to transform emotions into symbols and signs⁹.

This first branch of reflections profoundly influenced Team 10's subsequent focus on the forms and modes of associations and the favorable spaces where these encounters could occur. In search of those which will be considered the most vivid examples of those processes, many of Team 10's members attentively regarded primitive, traditional, and vernacular cultures, far away from the Western context.

Point two

In-between photography, biology, and mathematics

The second episode, identified as of particular importance in grounding the discourse about the in-between, occurred four years after the VI CIAM Congress. This time, the in-between topic entered the architectural and urban design discourse mainly from the fields of science and biology, suggesting to observe the shapes and functioning of the world's natural objects of the world through the lens of analogical theories.

In 1951 the Institute of Contemporary Arts (from this point in the text, ICA) in London organized an exhibition titled Growth and Form. The name was in honor of the book of the Scottish mathematician and biologist D'Arcy Thompson, *On Growth and Form*, a scientific study on animal morphology, which was rising its popularity in those years, even outside its specific disciplinary field.

D'Arcy Thompson's book was an invitation to regard objects' shape as resultant of reciprocal relationships between different forces and thus representable through mathematic diagrams . Therefore, for the Scottish scholar, the study of morphology should address and privilege the dynamics aspects and effects between forms rather than looking at forms (and objects) in themselves.

Among the others, Giedion again played a central role and was a partisan for this exhibition, while it was the artist and photographer Nigel Henderson who introduced D'Arcy Thompson's book to the colleague and artist Richard Hamilton, another revelatory exchange of the growing interdisciplinary crossover and cooperation at the time. Hamilton, from his side, had a penchant for photographic reproduction and diagrammatic depiction, which he regarded as a scientific and objective way of representation. Consequently, as the leading exhibition organizer, he explicitly promoted the collaboration between artists and scientists .

⁹Deyong, S. (2014) 'An Architectural Theory of Relations: Sigfried Giedion and Team 10', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 73.2, 226-247.

¹⁰Thompson, D'Arcy W. (1948) *On Growth and Form*. (Cambridge UP MacMillan, Cambridge New York).

¹¹Haram, K. (2017) *Growth and Form Exhibition 1951* (<https://medium.com/@hhkim/growth-and-form-exhibition-1951-7561090e91d5>) accessed May 2022.

Point three

In-between intimacy and the outside world

The third identified moment is the ninth CIAM congress in Aix-en-Provence, France, in 1953. The objective of this congress was to create a Charter of Habitat, which would embrace the legacy of the famous Charter of Athens but overcome its allegedly reductionist functionalist perspective¹². Conceiving a Charter of Habitat (whose precise meaning would continue to be the object of discussion for years to come) required, first of all, a shift from the topic of dwelling as an isolated function to one of the thresholds between the human beings and its living environment.

This means from the focus on the space of the dwelling to the one of the dwelling and its extensions and the spaces in-between, where relations with every other kind of interacting organisms could be observed¹³. The premise was that while engaging in relationships with their habitat, human beings directly shape and transform the spaces where they live, not only adapting to them.

This other genealogical branch of the in-between concept, as part of a growing ecological approach in the field of architecture, had its origins in the biological, sociological, and ecological pioneeristic studies of Gilbert White, Thomas Huxley, and Patrick Geddes. As for D'Arcy Thompson's publication, the works and ideas of those latter not only rose their popularity within the architectural debate in the second half of the twentieth century but also affected the architectural practices and modes of representation.

There was, in fact, an emerging branch of sociological research building the idea that the success of a rebirth of urban architecture would begin with the fostering of meaningful encounters at the threshold between intimacy and the outside world¹⁴. From the first half of the century, sociological movements of those kinds, such as Mass Observation, were using field research techniques to record and investigate people's daily activities, particularly in the places in-between their habitations. Indeed, the conception of the human habitat as an in-between space preannounced Team 10's research on the shape of the in-between in the 1950s and 1960s.

The most popular and mediatized document presented at the Aix-en-Provence meeting, directly engaging with the theme of the threshold, was Alison and Peter Smithson's Urban Reidentification Grid. Here, communities and human settlements were analyzed as constructed through a hierarchy of association on different levels. Entirely in line with the profound reflection on the in-between concept, the Smithsons were convinced that the relations shaping a community begin precisely at crossing a threshold. In fact, in those places, neither inside nor outside, individuals engage in voluntary and involuntary relationships with others, and those relationships shape urban forms. This also consisted of an in-between condition of the subject, experiencing the threshold between his emotional world and the world outside: for these reasons, participation in the life of the city requires multiple crossings of those thresholds¹⁵.

Starting from their 1950s reflections and works, the Smithsons developed an entire doorstep philosophy whereby the psychological condition of in-between places constituted also a decisive moment in the expression of fundamental continuity across the various scales of association of a habitat. The grounding and analogies with the biological studies are evident

¹²Mumford, E. P. (2000) *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960*. MIT Press, Cambridge), 225.

¹³Zuccaro Marchi, L. (2020) 'Between Habiter and Habitat. CIAM and the Sigtuna Meeting of 1952', in van den Heuvel, D., Martens, J., Sanz, V. M. (2020) *Habitat: Ecology Thinking in Architecture*. (NAi Publisher, Rotterdam).

¹⁴Steiner, H. (2011) 'Life at the Threshold'. *The MIT Press*, October 136, 133-155.

¹⁵*ibid.*, 144.

here. The threshold has a very similar meaning for environmental biologists, constituting this crucial point at which organisms become aware of the subtle diversities in quality that differentiate the states around them¹⁶. In the Smithsons' hierarchy of association, if the threshold between the house and the street facilitates more instinctive social activities, each subsequent shift in scale negotiates transitions increasingly linked to the state of culture. Thus, individuals have different degrees of consciousness and control over social connectivity in different places in the city.

The Smithsons were interested in creating an architectural space that offers margin for individual appropriation and occupation by spontaneously emerging living patterns. They understood the contemporary city as a many-layered field, a heterogeneous, non-continuous space defined by non-linear interactions. In this framework, infrastructures (such as landscape and mobility) played a prominent role in the resulting design production, leaving room for growth and modification, while the new urban space would be the interstitial one. Therefore, for the Smithsons, the in-between not only represented an urban reality allowing to differentiate of the various levels of association but also an open and interstitial space to design and appropriate, which gave the occasion to shape permeable boundaries within the city and thus encouraging human interactions.

Those theories, which the Smithsons contributed to bring into CIAM's discussion, also converged in two influential publications. The first, *Team 10 Primer*, was intended, as evident, as a primer grouping the different theoretical and design contributions of Team 10's leading members and was published for the first time in 1962 on the journal *Architectural Review*, and then republished as a complete volume curated by Alison Smithson in 1968. The second, *Urban Structuring*, was published 1967 and displayed a significant quantity of schemas and diagrams representing diverse human settlements which were intended to translate in visual form the relations existing between the different elements of a habitat and the behavior of people within it and among each other.

It is significant to note that in the *Team 10 Primer*, one of the four thematic sections is devoted to discussing the concept of *Doorstep*, acknowledging the continuing centrality of the in-between theme in the period, as one leading different voices and protagonists to intertwine, confront, and hybridate.

Point four

In-between the parts and the whole

The fourth and last moment that this paper identified is the XI CIAM meeting, held in Otterlo, the Netherlands, in 1959. During that congress, which marked the end of CIAM, the Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck presented his theory about *The Greater Reality of the Doorstep* for the first time, a discourse on the need for architecture to reconcile spatial polarities. Van Eyck intended to propose a definition of a whole architecture of the in-between, developed from an array of heterogeneous literature, including ethnographers and anthropologists such as Franz Boas and Marcel Griaule and, again, the philosophical theories of Martin Buber¹⁷.

According to van Eyck's thesis, the in-between must be conceived in the image of man, understanding architecture as a living organism. To make clear his idea, the Dutch architect illustrated an analogy between the respiratory activity of human beings and the necessity of

¹⁶Steiner, H. (2011) 'Life at the Threshold'. The MIT Press, October 136, 145.

¹⁷Teyssot, G. (2011). Aldo van Eyck and the Rise of an Ethnographic Paradigm in the 1960s. *Joelho-Journal of Architectural Culture*, (2).

architecture to be shaped by inhalation and exhalation processes, in which the openings (windows, doors, entrances, etc.) had not only the function to allow the passage but would inspire and guide the conception of the entire architecture. Space in the image of man implies the necessity for modern architecture to interiorize through its forms the perceiving, moving, and relating subjects inhabiting it, so that buildings themselves could be brought to life by their inhabitants.

Aldo van Eyck translated Buber's ontology of the in-betweenness into aesthetic and architectural terms with its famous issue of Forum journal Door and Window in 1960. In this text, he declared, Whatever space and time mean / Place and occasion mean more. / For space in the image of man is place, / And time in the image of man is occasion. So, space was turned into place by being constructed in the image of man, and since man was conceived as dual and dialogical, places should be too¹⁸.

For Aldo van Eyck to establish an architecture of the in-between was to create places where existing polarities, such as the individual and the collective, the outside and the inside, can be reconciled. Those places should transform from barriers to membranes that could be crossed and inhabited, providing important occasions for increasing human consciousness, both of oneself and the living environment. Architecture's task was then to extend that narrow borders (not regarded as delimiting elements, but as places of possibilities) and make them part of an articulated realm that can be inhabited. Similar to Smithsons' conception, van Eyck thought that from the scale of the house to the one of the city that kind of place of interaction would stimulate significant encounters between real people, thus increasing personal and community identity.

Taking the reflection on the in-between to its extremes, van Eyck conceived a whole architecture made of creative configurations of intermediary places. The notion of place and the idea of in-between have thus great affinity, both taking place between the polarities of inside and outside, here and there, small and large, part and whole, house and city, and so forth.

Nevertheless, unlike the Smithsons, van Eyck refused a hierarchical conception of the modes of association of a community, affirming the idea of a reciprocal determination between the part and the whole (the small and large, the house and city, etc.), as contributing on a same level of importance to the shaping of human environment. However, if there existed a difference in the quality of the relations (hierarchical on one side, mutual and peer-to-peer on the other), both Smithsons and van Eyck were crucial to shift the main focus on relations - that is, on the in-between¹⁹.

(A first) conclusion

The few described points traced so far are but a small part of what would be a much more extended and intricate constellation about the in-between and its influences within the architectural discourse, starting from the postwar years. Yet they already provide innumerable insights still relevant to contemporary architectural design and practice, and they, in turn, seem to constitute promising nodes of numerous other ramifications, crossing disciplinary, geographical, and chronological boundaries.

Since it would be impossible to describe how the presented trajectories arrived in our contemporary discourse, this paper sketches a first conclusion opening two kinds of possible

¹⁸van Eyck, A. (1968) 'Doorstep' in Smithson A. (ed.) (1968) Team 10 Primer. (Studio Vista, London), 101.

¹⁹Steiner, H. (2011) 'Life at the Threshold'. The MIT Press, October 136, 133-155. // Strauven, Francis. (1998) Aldo Van Eyck the Shape of Relativity. Amsterdam: Architectura & Nature, 345.

paths of reflection.

The first, on a more theoretical level, considers the concept of liminality as one able to shift the focus of the in-between from a prominently spatial dimension to a temporal one, characterizing moments of passage and evolution, and it mobilizes the in-between as a particular human condition during specific historical contingencies. Thus, the concept of liminality, referring to moments or periods of transition, during which the normal limits of thought, self-understanding and behavior are relaxed, opening the way to novelty and imagination, construction and destruction, enables us to take a step back, observing the four episodes described in the paper altogether, as symbols of an era, that of the postwar period, characterized in itself by crises, upheavals, and the need to re-adapt to a profoundly changed reality. Particularly during these in-between periods (these liminal moments), human beings experience changes that challenge their certainties, destabilizing the previous system of ordering reality but, in so, also allowing new interpretations of human life and expanding and redefining the boundaries of knowledge production.

The second path of reflection considers three stimulating concepts for urban design practice in suggesting the role that the in-between space could still play today, both in contributing to the adaptive capabilities of our contemporary urban environment and in engaging people in relational public life. Those are concepts taken from the reflections of Richard Sennet about the Open City.

The first one is the idea of ambiguous edges, underpinning a shift from the design of walls and boundaries to one of the borders, membranes, porous but resistant places which allow a visual and social exchange. The second is the concept of incomplete form, whereby a dialogue and a dynamic relation are always in place. Incomplete forms allow ambiguity, superpositions of functions, and mutating interpretations of the urban space. The third and last is the conception of the urban space and the people inhabiting it as part of an unresolved narrative, capable of embracing twin phenomena, non-rationality, and conflictual forces intended not as opposing polarities but rather in their potential to constantly question our reality.

In light of these last reflections, it could appear even more clear how, as the Smithsons affirmed, participation in the city's life requires and happens thanks to the crossing those multiple thresholds.

²⁰Thomassen, B. (2018) *Liminality and the Modern. Living through the In-Between*. (Routledge, London), 1-2.

²¹Sennett, R. (2017). *The open city*. In *In the Post-Urban World* (pp. 97-106). Routledge.

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Illustrations and tables

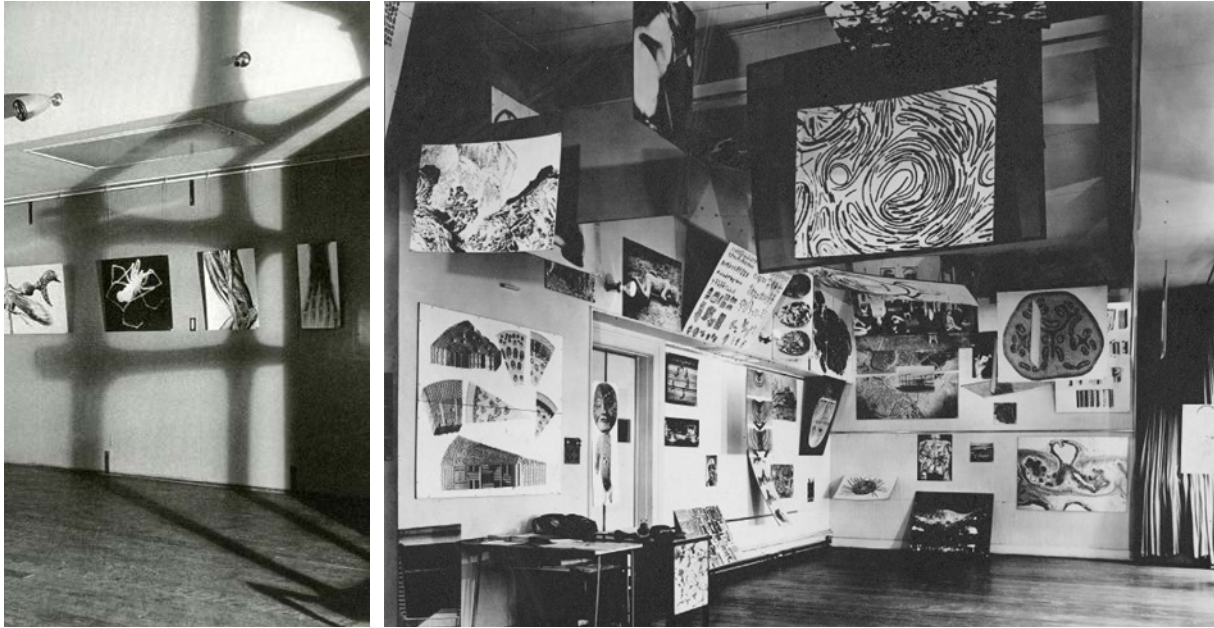


Figure 1. (Richard Hamilton et al., Growth and Form Exhibition 1951, London at ICA. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/@hhkim/growth-and-form-exhibition-1951-7561090e91d5>)

Figure 2. (Photograph of installation view of Parallel of Life and Art exhibition, September 1953–18 October 1953, Tate Archive, TGA 9211/5/2/89)

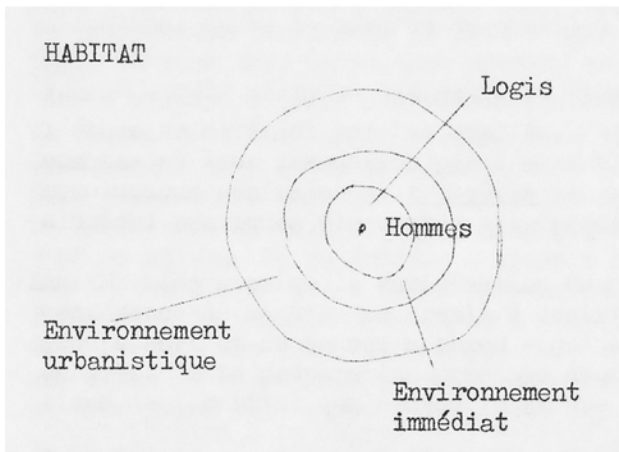


Figure 3. (G. Candilis, Habitat diagram for the 1952 CIAM meeting in Sigtuna, Sweden. CIAM Archive, gta/ETH, Zurich).



Figure 4. (A. and P. Smithson, Urban re-identification. Reproduction of the “Urban re-identification” grid, presented at the ninth CIAM congress in Aix-en-Provence, 1953. NAI Collection)

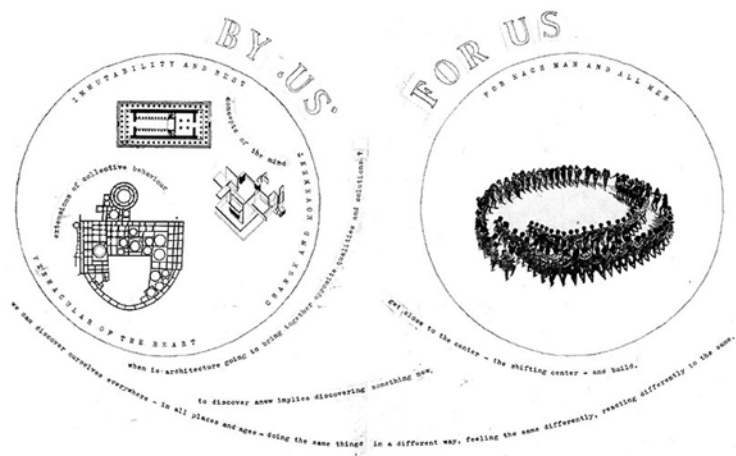


Figure 5. (A. Van Eyck, The Otterlo Circle, presented in Otterlo, Netherlands, 1959).

Figure 6. (Children in the Sculpture Pavilion from A. Van Eyck, 1965-66, in Arnhem, Netherlands).