

Intimate Anonymity **Breaking the Code of the Urban Genome**

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The beginning of the 21st century is a fitting opportunity to view the achievements in the field of urban planning and design of the last century.

The 20th century was the scene of the fastest technological advance humanity has ever achieved. We have witnessed the introduction of electricity as the chief means to channel and use energy. The first attempts at flight led to landing on the moon and exploring the planets. The primitive telephone developed into the cellular phone. The calculating machine and the typewriter evolved into the computer.

The effect of the technological revolution on all fields of human endeavor was immense. Modern medicine prolongs life expectancy. Modern agriculture provides nutrition to a fast-growing population. Modern communication and transportation turned the planet into a global village.

While we can view these developments overall as positive, we cannot escape their negative aspects. The use of energy and natural resources by a burgeoning population, threatens the life supporting eco-systems of the planet.

Technology became the new religion of the 20th century. Modern city planning was strongly influenced by technological utopias. Electric power plants were designed as temples. Russian Constructivists added radio aerials on the roof of many buildings. The car, train and airplane appear in Frank Lloyd Wright's drawings of Broadacre City and in LeCorbusier's images of the Ville Radieuse and the Ville Contemporaine. The fascination with technology went further in the 70's with the utopia of Archigram and further still with its latest manifestation – the virtual city.

In the mid 60's, it became apparent that all was not well with the modern city, the product of technological utopias. The book that marked the beginnings of disillusionment was Jane Jacobs', *Death And Life of Great American Cities*. With penetrating insight, Jacobs compared the modern city with cities of the past and brought back into currency issues like context, mixed uses, urban space, and the human activity within streetscapes. The effect of her criticisms created fertile ground for post-modern architecture, contextualism and "New Urbanism" to develop upon.

The aim of this paper is to present "Intimate Anonymity", a theoretical foundation for criticisms of the modern city, such as those of Ms. Jacobs. Its theoretical analysis could form a practical tool for each generation and culture to create their own cities without reverting to precedents based on the past.

At its core, this theory lays the claim that the city is as natural to the human animal as the beehive is to the bees. It is not required to form a utopia in order to understand why bees

produce these very special structures in which to produce honey. One must simply study the nature of bees in order to accept the beehive as the direct result of this nature.

All forms of life on this planet are motivated by an instinct of survival. This instinct forms the foundation for the theory of the evolution of the species. *Homo sapiens* is seen as the pinnacle of evolution because of our ability to transfer not only genetic information from one generation to another, but also intellectual information. As a result of this development, the instinct of human survival was transformed into an instinct of eternal survival. All human activities can be traced to this instinct. It is this instinct of eternal survival that explains the development of religion, the sciences, society, philosophy and art.

The city is an efficient environment for human survival. This can be deduced from the fact that urbanization is developing at a higher rate than that of the world's population. Humans are migrating in growing numbers from rural and dispersed living environments to densely populated cities.

It is commonly accepted that humanity is a social species. The eternal survival instinct can explain why this is so. One could say that it is in our best interests to become socialized to further the chances to satisfy the eternal survival instinct. The advantages of living in groups are obvious. In a group the chances to couple with a suitable mate for raising the next generation are higher. Groups are more capable of defending themselves against enemies. Groups can accomplish large-scale, collective projects. Groups can take advantage of specialization.

Humanity formed groups from its beginning as tribes and families to broader social structures, culminating with cities and today's mega-cities.

When we set out to plan a city we must first ask ourselves, "what is a city?" The German philosopher Max Horkheimer begins his book *Eclipse of Reason* with a sentence which (substituting the word "reason" with "city") may point to the basic problem facing urban planning today. He writes: "When the ordinary man is asked to explain what is meant by the term City, [reason], his reaction is almost always one of hesitation and embarrassment. It would be a mistake to interpret this as indicating wisdom too deep or thought too obtruse to be put into words. What it actually betrays is the feeling that there is nothing to inquire into, that the concept of City [of reason] is self-explanatory, that the question itself is superfluous." Many attempts have been made to define the city, ranging the spectrum between technocratic to mystical. Governments may define the city as "a habitation of more than 20,000 inhabitants". *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines the city as "a collection or aggregation of inhabited houses larger than a village". Lewis Mumford defined the city as a "special framework directed toward the creation of differentiated opportunities for a common life and a significant collective drama". While these definitions contain a grain of truth, none provide complete tools for understanding the City, let alone designing one.

This paper presents Intimate Anonymity as a theory of the city, intended to form such a tool. Intimate Anonymity is based on an original definition of the city that stipulates: **the city is a place that allows human beings to form relations with others at various levels of intimacy while remaining entirely anonymous.** A successful city is one in which, when exiting a private domain into the public domain, a person should see people around him but

know nothing about them. It is this situation which provides for the inhabitants of this special environment to be continuously surrounded by potential contacts.

The most common complaint against the contemporary city is the individual can get lost in it, becomes alienated and does not experience a sufficient sense of community. Popular logic has transformed this complaint into a backlash against anonymity. The individual can be too anonymous and lonely in the massive urban environment. On the other hand, the notion of community, in the popular view, is seen as opposed to this sense of anonymity. The notion of community is most readily expressed in the idea of a small, homogeneous and intimate village or neighborhood, where everyone knows everyone else and feels more or less comfortable in a familiar setting. The inevitable backlash against the village is that it can become limiting, claustrophobic and does not allow the individual to find full self-expression. The concept of Intimate Anonymity negotiates and bridges the gap between these competing conceptions.

In order to create a sense of self, the individual needs to develop an identity. To achieve this, there needs to be a part of a community with which to identify. The individual needs to form a community, so to speak, within the city. And, the city should provide the possibility of making contact with a variety of people and activities from which to develop an intimate community.

Architecture and planning combine ethic and aesthetic considerations. 20th century practice emphasized aesthetics over ethics. Until the 19th century, urban architecture served the purpose of defining public space, sacrificing individual character for a common good. 20th century architecture concentrated on the buildings as free-standing objects, expressing only the individual character of the architect, as an artist.

However, public space is the primary ingredient of the city. The city could be seen as composed only of public spaces, streets, squares, parks etc. The city is not, as commonly believed, composed of buildings. The primary architectural role of buildings in the city is to define public space. As an illustration, one could look at the way Manhattan skyscrapers, such as the Empire State Building, relate to the adjacent streets, in comparison to the way La Defense towers in Paris relate to the spaces surrounding them, spaces that can hardly be labeled urban.

Intimate Anonymity prescribes the intimate and simultaneous sharing of public space by anonymous people. In order to achieve this, urban public space should not be seen as an end in itself. It must be a part of a network of urban spaces that allow random movement of people through. It is the lack of random movement that renders the piazza of Saint Peter's Cathedral in Rome, although impressive in scale and aesthetic value, inferior urban public space, compared to the much admired Piazza Navona, composed of mundane urban architecture of little artistic value.

An urban space should rarely serve only a single use, such as a church, opera or municipality building. The recently completed Jerusalem Municipality Piazza, although beautifully detailed and proportioned, is a lifeless space because there is no random passage through, as it serves only a single use. Answering the question, "Why are you here?", a random passerby will answer: "To pay my municipal taxes", revealing citizenship of Jerusalem just by being there.

Urban theorists base their analysis on the form and proportions of urban space. What they often fail to recognize is that it is the relation between dimensions and proportions to the quantity of users of the space that matters. When a larger number of random users is expected, urban space may be a large square or piazza. A smaller number of random users may only require a street, sidewalk or alleyway.

Jane Jacobs observed the value of mixed uses existing in older urban fabric, and the ills of zoning, practiced in post-industrial planning. Intimate Anonymity lays the theoretical foundation to this observation. A person walking in a zoned "business district" reveals their occupation and social standing. A person seen in a university campus is probably a student. A person seen on a street of a neighborhood zoned for housing most certainly lives there. They all sacrifice a portion of their anonymity by being seen in these environments. Zoning is therefore, according to the tenets of Intimate Anonymity, an anti-urban practice.

The "floor" of urban space should always be ground level. The human animal uses energy efficiently just like goats selecting paths of least resistance on a mountain slope achieve minimal use of energy. Raising or lowering urban space to other levels, like in the World Trade Center Plaza in New York, result in diminished anonymity and an inferior urban space.

A conscious effort must be made to encourage people to use urban spaces. Spaces that are expected to be used by large numbers of random passers-by, should allow room for spontaneous use of a variety of activities and services. Urban spaces that serve a small number of passers-by, could increase their public activity by adding housing and workspaces with main access facing the urban space.

In many modern cities, efforts were made to separate pedestrians from motorists. In many instances, this created parallel movement systems, pedestrian and vehicular. The result, in most cases was that neither could contain a sufficient quantity of people to allow for Intimate Anonymity. Separation of pedestrian from vehicular traffic should be practiced when the vehicular traffic is not interested in the specific location but uses the route to pass through. It may also be practiced when the urban space is so successful that excessive numbers of both pedestrians and vehicles compete on the limited space.

Viewing the city with the concept of Intimate Anonymity in mind, it is not surprising that throughout history, city planning demonstrate an amazing continuity. It should not come as a surprise that the gridiron plan was used by civilizations like the Greeks in Miletus 466BC, the Romans in Timgad 100AD, through to the Spanish in Barcelona and the Americans in Manhattan. The gridiron is a pure mathematical creation of multiple routes from any point A to any point B. The choice of many routes promotes anonymity.

The formal expression of Intimate Anonymity is "diversity" because of the cultural, economic, technologic, geographic and variety of circumstances specific to every urban space. We should not revert to precedents of the past, as New Urbanism prescribes. If we design cities in the conditions of our era, based on Intimate Anonymity and not on yet another utopia, the result will be a true expression of our times that will best serve our human needs.

The concept of Intimate Anonymity, and its definition of the city, emphasizes an ethical approach to urban design by putting human contacts in the forefront and making esthetical considerations secondary. However esthetical, an urban space will fail if it is not based on

ethical considerations. The future of urbanism lies in the understanding that the city is not a sculpture. It is a human event.

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