

Glatt!
From Suburb
to City?

1m2/sec 08/15

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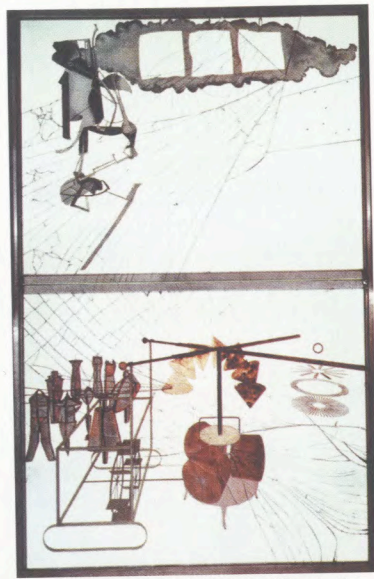
Thank you for the invitation and introductory remarks. It is a great pleasure to participate in this symposium at the Summer Academy in Zurich. My intervention is entitled 1m2/sec 08/15. 1m2/sec stands for the speed of urbanization processes that are generally associated with what has been termed *urban sprawl*, a process using one square meter of land per second. 08/15, an idiom in colloquial German to describe run-of-the-mill phenomena, stands for the mediocre standards associated with urbanization processes. The norms are given and the mechanisms at work precisely determined. The formula 1m2/sec 08/15 addresses the *modus operandi* of contemporary urban production and combines the velocity of land consumption with generally agreed upon standards. What follows below are a few observations on the formation of current urban territories.

First observation: We are shooting with gunfire at the territory—possibly in analogy to a technique used by Marcel Duchamp in his work *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, known as *The Large Glass*. \nearrow Fig. 1 Duchamp's art piece was created over a long period of time, from 1915 to 1923, and could be read as a snapshot of a process, with time momentarily standing still. The work could be considered unfinished. As with a palimpsest, one encounters here a process of layering. Duchamp added one layer on top of the other. Occasionally, some parts were erased to add another layer. While doing so, he experimented with different techniques, which left their marks—as deposits—within the space of the painting. When, for example, the glass pane broke during transport, the cracks were accepted as part of the work. One technique, in particular, shall be foregrounded: just below the cloud, on the top right corner of the glass, one detects a zone with dots. These are the shots of the nine bachelors. Duchamp used a toy gun and matches dipped in paint as ammunition to create a representation of bullet holes on the painting's surface.

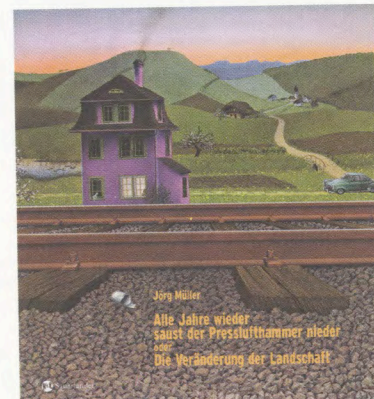
Second observation: A children's book by the illustrator Jörg Müller entitled *Alle Jahre wieder saust der Presslufthammer nieder* offers another take on the matter. \nearrow Fig. 2 The book was published in 1973 and subsequently translated into several languages, including French, English, and Chinese. Expressions such as *Die Veränderung der Landschaft*, *La mutation d'un paysage*, or *Changing Countryside* point to the very transformation of territory—from a more or less rural state to what we might call today an urban landscape that is neither rural nor urban.

The book consists of seven panels each covering a period of three years and depicting, through a type of time lapse technique, the conversion of a specific place starting at a specific moment in time: the village of Gullen in May 1953. \nearrow Fig. 3

1956: signs of a transformation are barely visible, for *change* is only slowly creeping in. A street is widened and covered with asphalt, a creek straightened and canalized in concrete pipes. 1959: the idyllic atmosphere seems to be still intact. Upon closer look, one discerns what a few changes and erasures of the existing entail, without leaving any traces of time: a farm is demolished, a forest cleared. 1963: the frequency of interventions accelerates, that is, the number of recurring events per time unit. The forest has been replaced by large tanks and the farm by



1 Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, 1915–1923



2 Jörg Müller, *Alle Jahre wieder saust der Presslufthammer nieder oder die Veränderung der Landschaft*, 1962



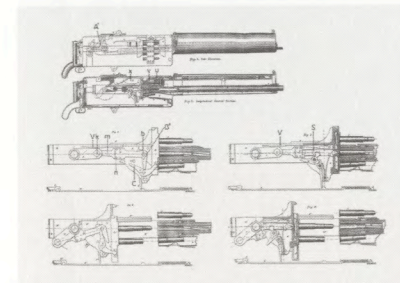
3 6 May 1953



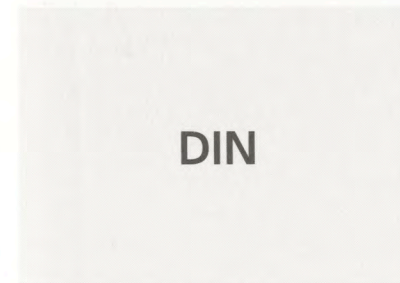
4 19 January 1963



5 3 October 1972



6 Hiram Stevens Maxim, patent drawing of the machine gun 08/15, 1888



7 Deutsche Industrie Norm (DIN)

a factory building. \nearrow Fig. 4 1966: The autonomy of each event evades any possibility of coordination. One never really knows what might happen next, when and where: a high-rise building is built in Gullen; the old railroad crossing at grade is replaced by an underpass; a suburban development with cookie-cutter houses emerges outside the village. 1969: despite the fact that every intervention is meticulously planned down to the last detail, the resulting urban entity nonetheless looks like an accidental assembly of isolated incidences. A street is relocated, the underpass widened, a new church built. 1972: nothing is left to chance. Every intervention follows clearly established and generally accepted norms and protocols, applied again and again—standard 08/15 family houses, normative 08/15 freeways, typical 08/15 shopping malls, and so on ... \nearrow Fig. 5

Third observation: Few know that 08/15 was originally the designation of a machine gun of the German infantry during World War I. \nearrow Fig. 6 The model with the serial number 08/15 stood for a new system of industrial production, a system requiring well-tuned coordination between the public and private sector. The institutional network that was established had all the characteristics of a machine, or *megamachine* to use an expression coined by Lewis Mumford. Megamachines are organizations put in place to achieve a specific purpose—in our case, the making of an automatic weapon. They require an efficient bureaucratic apparatus. Minute changes within the system set a chain of administrative procedures in motion. Most importantly, assemblies of this type tend to take on a life of their own.

The machine gun was made up of a series of parts that were manufactured in different factories. In addition to State agencies and university laboratories, more than 100 firms were involved in the production of the weapon. In order to facilitate communication, specific norms had to be established, including uniform measuring techniques, standardized templates, material specifications, and agreed upon tolerances. The definition of such guidelines ultimately led to the establishment of the German Institute for Standardization, the *Deutsches Institut für Normung* (DIN). \nearrow Fig. 7

The machine gun is made up of components that are added to one another to form a closed system (1+2+3+4+5). Each part performs a limited number of binary functions: open-closed, on-off, engaged-disengaged (0-1-0-1-0). The individual components are produced in series and are entirely identical (1/1/1/1/1). \nearrow Fig. 8 In other words, the addition of precision parts, the performance of predetermined functions, and the logic of mass production are key characteristics of the machine gun 08/15.

Efficiency, combined with the logic of rational thought, is at the core of the development. The objective is to maintain control. Complex technical requirements and organizational effectiveness are merged to achieve order, or to use a term from system theory, to build up negentropy. However, the norm was not as perfect as originally planned. The machine gun had its problems and was soon discredited by the soldiers as flawed and uninspired, which explains the current use of the term 08/15 as denoting something bland and banal. But that is not all: the deployment of the weapon on the battlefield led to the exact opposite of order, exposing the dark side of the war machinery. The gun was named *L'arrosoir du diable*—the devils watering-can. At the front, in the battle zones, instead of order, a high degree of entropy arose.

Fourth observation: The photograph *The Bridge* by Jeff Wall shows a typical condition encountered nowadays at the edges of cities, a trivial space that demarks the dullness of everyday life in contemporary suburban territories—the physical manifestation of what could be called a form of 08/15 urbanism. ▶ Fig. 9 Urbanization entails the deployment of normed products. The urban fabric is made up of components that can be applied again and again in different situations. The development of each element follows precisely determined norms that manifest themselves in prototypical forms. These are genetically ingrained in local zoning plans and ordinances. And so, one encounters today always much the same kind of housing and retail developments, with similar densities, identical setbacks, and given typologies. The colorful appearance of zoning plans is deceptive. Instead of differentiation: a featureless substance framing the reality of contemporary agglomerations. ▶ Fig. 10

Rotaries, for example, are typical elements of the contemporary urban fabric. They are hailed by traffic engineers and municipal authorities as unprecedented in their efficacy—wonder machines far surpassing the performance of traditional street junctions. A near endless number of manuals and regulations clearly outline when and where to use rotaries. The norms are given. And so it is that the city is formed, according to a body of objectively justified rules that regulate collectively adopted practices, which are endorsed—in the case of the rotaries—by the public hand.

The private sector operates according to similar procedures. Here as well, norm rules. A deep-rooted mentality, driven by rationally justified efficiency, guides all operations, as in the case of the big box discount stores, which have literally taken the urban periphery by storm. “Make it simple” is the motto of this industry. The number of procedural steps is kept to a minimum and the logistical protocols are standard issue. They determine, as blueprints, the siting of buildings, their size, organization, construction, and the make-up of their interior spaces.

Fifth observation: If the land is the target, then the ammunition comprises standardized type forms, which are, literally, shot at territory, as depicted in an aerial photograph of a recently developed tract of land in the State of Arkansas, in the so-called Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers Metropolitan Statistical Area—the official designation of this region. ▶ Fig. 11 A patch of city or a piece of conurbation that sprung from the ground within just a few years through additive, step by step procedures—the principle of and, and, and. In chronological order: the Interstate 540 with two exits and their typical on- and off-ramps; a private hospital; the Mercy Medical Center; a Walmart store in close proximity to a planned and never realized suburban neighborhood; a business park for the regional branch of Morgan Stanley Smith Barney; a mega-church; a hotel with conference and convention center; a Target department store; the shopping center Pinnacle Hills Promenade. ▶ Fig. 12

All components follow standardized rules. One always knows exactly what and how to build: Samples taken from the fabric of the contemporary urban landscape point to the consequences of such processes.

On the one hand, territorial development is controlled by rules aimed at establishing order. On the other hand, this order cannot be found. Quite the

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5
0 - 0 - 0 - 0 - 0
1 / 1 / 1 / 1 / 1

8 Characteristics of assembly, performance, and production: the principle of addition, binary functions, and serial fabrication



9 Jeff Wall, *The Bridge*, 1980



10 Montage of zoning plans of the Zurich region, 2004



11 “Seewenmarkt,” Schwyz, 2007



12 The Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers Metropolitan Statistical Area, Arkansas



13 Alluding to Stendhal's novel *Le rouge et le noir*, colors are used to identify the subsystems of the urban terrain

opposite, the greater the claim for order, the more disorder is encountered.

Notwithstanding all planning efforts, the city eludes orderly measures. Inherent to the urban aggregate is the tendency to progressively increase its entropy. Whereas each intervention is logically justified, the territory seems more and more to display the characteristics of a battle field.

What we come across here is a strange reversal of phenomena: order lapses into disorder, negentropy into entropy. The rationality of procedures leads to irrational assemblages.

This undercuts the principles propagated by traditional urban discourse, undermining its biases in favor of logically deduced objectives. Those convoluted mechanisms that likewise regulate the conditions of the 1m2/sec 08/15 city are beyond its field of vision.

Sixth and seventh observation: Let us dig deeper into the subject matter: the following observations address space and time and their design potentials

Concerning space, the proposition: Form instead of Norm. 08/15 urbanism must be radically transformed ... away from its anonymous conformity ... towards the specific form-gestalt of space.

Concerning time, the proposition of its rediscovery: instead of the rate of consumption 1m2/sec, an entirely different way of conceptualizing time in territory.

Initially, three colors shall be distinguished to address the territorial organization of large agglomerations: red, black, and green—*le rouge, le noir, et le vert*. The colors represent different subsystems of the urban landscape. Red stands for the built fabric, black for infrastructure, and green, as one would expect, for landscape. ▶ Fig. 13 Red, in its tendency to sprawl, always displaces green. Black calls the shots, insofar as development always follows the lines in black. Green as background and hinterland is permanently on the defensive. We encounter here a kind of machine, a *ménage à trois* of unequal players. These must be brought, according to the recently published *Spatial Concept Switzerland*, into a new and more balanced relationship. The demands are bold in their potential consequences. Red must be tamed: *contain sprawl—do not encroach on landscape—densify the fabric and increase functional interaction*. In short: no additional red patches. Black must be sparsely applied: *contain mobility—maintain existing networks—increase capacity without additional infrastructure*. In short: no additional black lines. Green as the weaker partner must be protected: *“contain land use—maintain the landscape as resource—promote agriculture and safeguard biodiversity.”* In short: do not touch green. With this, a great deal could be achieved for the quality of space at the territorial level.

But let us add a few additional colors, possibly in reference to Andy Warhol's *Paint by Numbers series*. ▶ Fig. 14 Here, the colors could represent spatial attributes, atmospheres, images, i.e., properties that qualify space. We are talking here about the identification-potential of

space, made possible by characteristics inscribed in territory. Take, for example, the region of Zurich, and subdivide it according to the paint by numbers method into districts, neighborhoods, or boroughs with distinctive traits, as suggested by berchtoldkrass for the Metropolitan Conference Zurich. **Fig. 15** What would emerge is an intriguing mosaic, rather than a zoning plan, something closer to an identification-map registering not quantities *per se* but formative qualities.

Each metro-neighborhood has site-specific characteristics. These need to be recognized and their differences fostered. A kind of butterfly collection would arise. Rather than encouraging monocultures, the city would be formed by a diversity of species. The reading of space is framed here by visually perceived distinctions, as put forth by Vittorio Lampugnani's *Manual on the Periphery*. Critical herein is the ease with which particular spatial elements can be discerned and the ability to combine them to form comprehensive image-patterns. The design of recognizable elements is thus a precondition for a collective appropriation of space. Thus far, observations on space: These must be broadened to include the element of time, as space always comprises a temporal dimension.

Urbanity, as we know, encompasses the production of space in time, or to be more specific, the creation of organized space-time relations.

Called for is a rediscovery of time in space. A sketch by Paul Hofer illustrates the issue. Superimposed onto the plan of a pedestrian underpass at the Bern train station are the fortifications of the city dating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—a type of double exposure of different moments in time.

André Corboz, in his essay “The Land as Palimpsest,” correspondingly describes the city as a process in which parts are successively erased and added. A key characteristic of a palimpsest is its transformation: per definition, palimpsests are manuscripts from which the text has been scraped off in order to be re-used again.

Corboz appropriates this concept to describe transformation processes encountered in cities, as shown, for example, by Aldo Rossi's analysis of the city of Split. The urban fabric is read as a form of writing modified by time. While some elements and structures change, others remain; for example, those of the Palace of Diocletian, which are literally inscribed within the urban text. **Fig. 16**

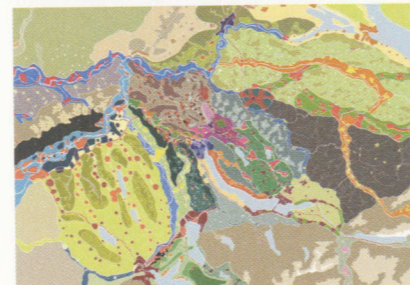
“Every territory,” writes Corboz, “exists only once. ... It must therefore continually be reclaimed.”

An installation, for instance, by a Boston group of architects and artists—appropriately entitled *Drawing on Site: Pathways for Reclamation*—depicts different time-layers physically engraved in space.

Urban structures are written by means of cartographic notations transposed onto the territory. However, this process is not unified, but is marked by ruptures, a-temporalities, conflicts, and contradictions.



14 Andy Warhol, *Do It Yourself* (Landscape), 1962



15 Identification map that registers formative characteristics of the urban landscape, 2011



16 Illustration from Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani's and Matthias Noell's publication *Handbuch zum Stadtrand*, 2007

Notwithstanding the notion of the city as an entity, as generally promoted within the history of architecture, the city has always been a conglomerate composed of fragments

—a palimpsest resulting from a space-time stratification, whether by subtraction or addition.

Such accumulation processes have design potential. Instead of *tabula rasa* as exclusive planning principle, one could consider the possibility of inscribing time in space. Temporality within our discipline has visual properties as well. One not only reads space *per se*, but space in relation to time. The city fabric is formed by space-time compressions.

We are talking here about a literal densification ... a densification not only of the built fabric ... not exclusively of functional relations ... but most importantly, a densification of time, with identity-forming potential.

And it is in this sense that one could continue to work, in order to tackle the contemporary urban landscape, not only as a phenomenon, but as a possible design endeavor. To paraphrase Robert Musil: in order to transform what could be termed “a city without qualities” into “a city with qualities.”

Text based on lecture delivered on July 26, 2012 at the International Summer Academy Zurich