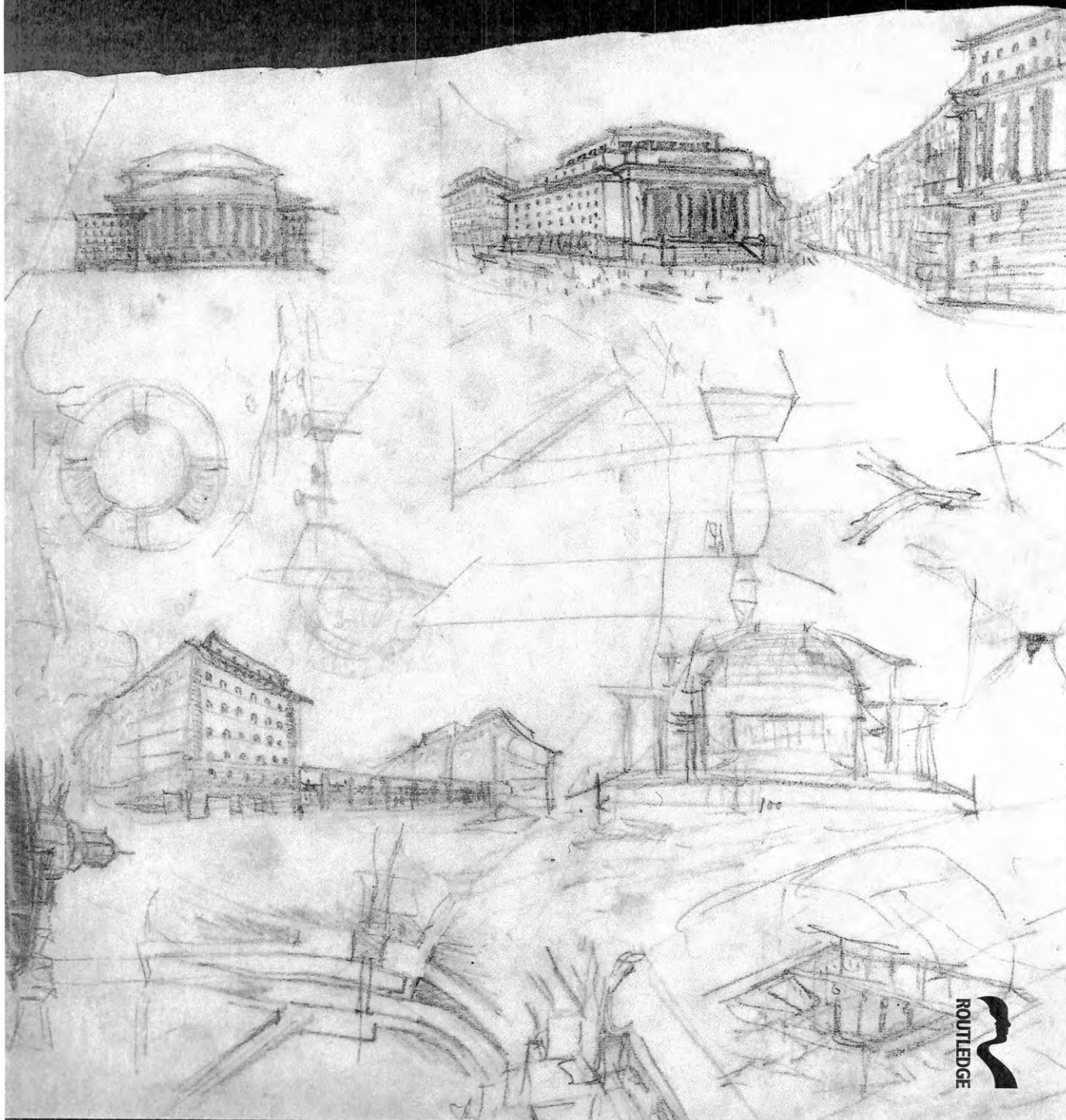


Sitte, Hegemann and the Metropolis

Modern Civic Art and International Exchanges

Edited by
Charles C. Bohl and Jean-François Lejeune



ROUTLEDGE

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exchanges

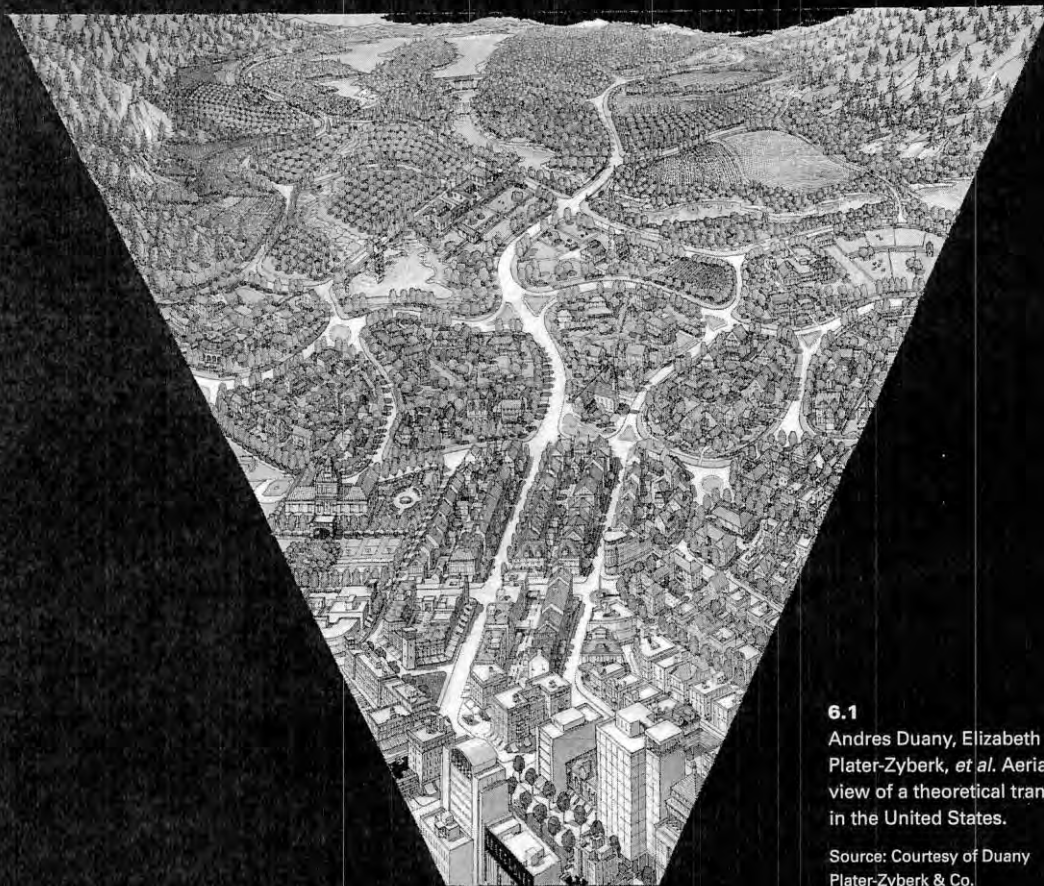
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Contents

List of contributors	vii
Acknowledgments	xii
Introduction: The Never-ending Debate <i>Charles C. Bohl and Jean-François Lejeune</i>	xiv
Civic Art Then and Now: The Culture of Good Place-Making <i>Charles C. Bohl</i>	1
Part I Camillo Sitte and the Picturesque: Precedents and Perspectives	23
Vienna Fin-de-siècle: Between Artistic City Planning and Unlimited Metropolis <i>Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani</i>	25
Camillo Sitte as “Semperian” <i>Ruth Hanisch (with Wolfgang Sonne)</i>	39
Camillo Sitte, Architect and Planner. The Project for the Civic Center of Privoz/Oderfurt, Moravia <i>Marco Pogacnik</i>	53
Schinkel, Sitte, and Loos: The “Body in the Visible” <i>Jean-François Lejeune</i>	69
Camillo Sitte: Orders in Reception <i>Stanford Anderson</i>	99
Forced Spontaneities: Camillo Sitte and the Paradox of the Picturesque <i>Ákos Moravánszky</i>	109
Political Connotations of the Picturesque <i>Wolfgang Sonne</i>	123

The Pack Donkey's Revenge: Sitte and Modernist Urbanism <i>Alan J. Plattus</i>	141
Artistic City Planning versus Junk Space <i>Bernhard Langer</i>	149
Part II International Exchanges	159
Handbooks of Civic Art from Sitte to Hegemann <i>Donatella Calabi</i>	161
Camillo Sitte across the Atlantic: Raymond Unwin, John Nolen, and Werner Hegemann <i>Christiane Crasemann Collins</i>	175
Jacques Gréber's <i>L'architecture aux États-Unis</i> : A Companion Piece to <i>The American Vitruvius</i> <i>Isabelle Gournay</i>	197
The Latin American City and its Viennese Planning Approach: Karl Brunner in Chile and Colombia (1929–1948) <i>Andreas Hofer</i>	211
Camillo Sitte and Werner Hegemann: Challenges for a Contemporary Transatlantic Bridging <i>Harald Kegler</i>	227
Part III The Metropolitan Context	235
The Art of Street Architecture: The Case of Manchester <i>Michael Hebbert</i>	237
Dwelling in the Metropolis: Sitte, Hegemann, and the International Dissemination of Reformed Urban Blocks 1890–1940 <i>Wolfgang Sonne</i>	249
Paris Seen By Hegemann: Classicism, Reform, and Bad Taste <i>Jean-Louis Cohen</i>	275
Hegemann and Modern Public Spaces <i>Corinne Jaquand</i>	285
Hegemann's <i>Das steinerne Berlin</i> : A Misunderstanding <i>Hans Stimmann</i>	295



6.1
Andres Duany, Elizabeth
Plater-Zyberk, *et al.* Aerial
view of a theoretical transect
in the United States.

Source: Courtesy of Duany
Plater-Zyberk & Co.

- 1 Camillo Sitte, *Der nach seinen künsts Grundsätzen. Ein Lösung moderner Architektur und in Plastik unter best Beziehung auf W.* Verlag von Carl G.
- 2 Stanford Anderson Behrens and a *New Architecture for the Century*, Cambridge 2000.
- 3 Fritz Hoeber, *Peter* Munich, Müller ur 1913.
- 4 Hoeber, "Peter Br *Hamburger Nachr* 14, 1918.
- 5 Hoeber, "Stadtba *Verkehr*," *Der Arc* 1916-18, pp. 73-8

Camillo Sitte: Orders in Reception

Stanford Anderson

Despite the enormous success of Camillo Sitte's renowned book that propagated the concept of *Städtebau* (city building according to artistic principles), his ideas also fell under negative scrutiny by architects and critics of a more classicizing bent in the first decade of the twentieth century.¹ I enter the realm of this debate through the thought and work of Peter Behrens.²

The figure and teaching of Sitte do not figure prominently in Behrens's career, but one finds a few important conjunctions. The interlocking inner courtyards of the AEG factories on the Humboldthain in Berlin might be seen to offer a sympathetic acceptance of the urbanistic principles of Sitte. On the one hand, this fascinating complex of courtyards includes a water tower, a series of disengaged stair towers, as well as a composition of asymmetrically laid out building ground plans that in turn define necessary paths and places within this working environment. On the other hand, the street facades of the buildings are uncompromisingly rigorous in their regularity and repetition. It was as if a severe modern urbanism framed an industrial village. The street facades are certainly more characteristic of Behrens's work, and thus appear quite consistent with his overall rejection of Sitte's thought.

One source for our knowledge of Behrens's attitude about Sitte is Fritz Hoerber, the author of the early and first monograph on his work.³ In 1918, on the occasion of Behrens's fiftieth birthday, Hoerber wrote a critical review of the architect in which he particularly emphasized his past and future contributions in the design of housing groups and in city building projects.⁴ Hoerber assures us that Behrens's strong artistic sensibility precluded all painterly qualities such as Sitte had recommended to architects. On the contrary, with his "consequent symmetry, his delimited clarity of space, his self-contained building forms," Behrens distinctly followed the fundamental principles of Albert Erich Brinckmann, thus seeking and searching for, as he always did, the universal solution. Here Hoerber easily dismissed the influence of Sitte through the simple equation – *Sitte* = *painterly*. In contrast, he championed Behrens for his pursuit of the typical and the universal.

The route back to Brinckmann continues with another article by Hoerber written during the First World War in the periodical *Der Architekt*.⁵ Sitte was not addressed overtly, but the two parts of the title, *Städtebau und Verkehr* (City Building

1 Camillo Sitte, *Der Städtebau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen. Ein Beitrag zur Lösung moderner Fragen der Architektur und monumentalen Plastik unter besonderer Beziehung auf Wien*, Vienna, Verlag von Carl Graeser, 1889.

2 Stanford Anderson, *Peter Behrens and a New Architecture for the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2000.

3 Fritz Hoerber, *Peter Behrens*, Munich, Müller und Rentsch, 1913.

4 Hoerber, "Peter Behrens," *Hamburger Nachrichten*, Apr. 14, 1918.

5 Hoerber, "Stadtbau und Verkehr," *Der Architekt* 21, 1916–18, pp. 73–83.



6.3 Peter B. Humboldtha of the site

Source: Courte

and Traffic) suggest the differentiation between Sitte and Behrens. Hoerber associated the form of the medieval town with pedestrian traffic and the particularized building type of the vertically organized, narrow house. In modern times, to the contrary, he perceived the rushing tempo of our modern means of transportation – of streetcars and city railways as leading analogously to the broad, horizontal walls of larger building blocks and the modern predilection for straight streets. As a matter of fact, Hoerber borrowed the kernel of his article from a well-known essay by Peter Behrens of 1914.⁶

Behrens's essay *Einfluss von Zeit- und Raumaussnutzung auf moderne Formentwicklung* discussed the influence of contemporary experiences of time and space on the development of modern form. His first sentence directly reflected a particular cultural realm: "When the issue of the development of modern form is addressed, this reflection rises from the longing to possess our own formal expression of our time."⁷ Beneath the surface of the sentence is the construction of a *Zeitgeist* and the demand that the artist provide forms that give expression to that very *Zeitgeist*. Indeed, the next sentence invoked Alois Riegl's concept of the *Kunstwollen*, though without attribution. Behrens's beliefs derived from the time of his first works at the Darmstadt Artists' Colony at the beginning of the twentieth century. But here, following the major achievements of his comprehensive oeuvre for the AEG in Berlin, and clearly addressing issues of urban design, his general argument was used to pursue specific ends.

6.2

Peter Behrens. Berlin AEG factories on the Humboldthain, 1909 aerial view

Source: Courtesy AEG

6 Peter Behrens, "Einfluss von Zeit- und Raumaussnutzung auf moderne Formentwicklung," in *Der Verkehr (Deutscher Werkbund Jahrbuch)*, Jena, Diederichs, 1914, pp. 7–10.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

8 Hermann Muthe "Städtebau," *Kl. Künstler* 8, 1910



1. Berlin
on the
1, 1909 aerial

2. AEG

3. s, "Einfluss von
mausnutzung auf
nentwicklung," in
*Deutscher
hrbuch*, Jena,
1914, pp. 7–10.

**6.3 Peter Behrens. AEG
Humboldthain, internal views
of the site**

Source: Courtesy AEG



Behrens acknowledged that a new style has not yet emerged and that such a new style could only be recognized with hindsight. Furthermore, only a complex of conditions, both ideal and material, would allow the definition of form that, in turn, would eventually yield a style. Nonetheless, Behrens proceeded to argue that the contemporary commitment with time and space was doubtless of great importance for modern form. The use of time and space might be considered the rhythmic principle of form making – both a temporal measure and a measure of movement. Modern men and women have recognized a different rhythm than in the past, a rushing and faster time. They can no longer absorb themselves in details. As they move rapidly through the metropolises they cannot observe the details of the buildings, but rather only silhouettes. An architecture that responds to these circumstances must be one of maximally closed and restful planes that, on the basis of their economy of form, offers no obstacles to the modern and moving glance. If, under these conditions, something special is to be recognized by the traveler, it must be at the focal point of the direction of movement or be achieved by the repetition of detail.

Now comes the implicit rejection of *Sitte*. According to Behrens, in contrast to the painterly principles of crooked streets and the idyllic organization of places, the layout of new towns, or parts of towns, must employ broadly conceived plans employing long, wide and straight streets. The modern urbanist must not follow the painterly idylls of the Middle-Ages, but rather the axial layouts of the Baroque era. Behrens concludes that haste is a given of the rhythm of our time, as well as a psychic fact. This new time presents a new project for Art that will lead to great and unified fulfillment only if one recognizes the rhythmic beauty of our time. Clearly, Behrens spoke of modern form, formal expression of our time, *Zeitgeist*, *Kunstwollen*, a different rhythm, and a rhythmic principle of form making.

In these days of the burgeoning development of international city planning around 1910, Hermann Muthesius, in an article titled *Städtebau*, summarized the new sense for city building advocated by a new generation of young architects.⁸

⁸ Hermann Muthesius, "Städtebau," *Kunst und Künstler* 8, 1910, pp. 531–535.



6.5 Peter Behrens
AEG Turbine Factory
1908–1909, street view

Source: Photo by Peter
© MIT Department of Architecture
Cambridge, MA

In Muthesius's analysis, Peter Behrens occupied a significant place. A fundamental fact was that city building had come to be recognized as an artistic enterprise. Muthesius was generous in his recognition of Sitte as the architect who had won that battle. But twenty years later, as Muthesius wrote, Sitte's advocacy was perceived as too one-sided – the problem could not be merely a choice between straight and crooked streets.⁹ Still worse was the then current and naïve attempt of developers and city builders to march supposedly in the vanguard of development by laying out curving streets even on flat ground.

Muthesius realized that artistic and urban development in Germany had moved beyond such naïvety. One must, he argued, put the design of cities in the hands of men who embody the capacity for harmonious form-making. These new architects were driven by "Order, Rhythm, and Harmony, guiding their form-making hands such that, even with the closest attention to practical needs, these masters cannot do other than to create artistically."¹⁰ According to Muthesius, the entire problem of city-building was, eventually and primarily, one of form: "What we have now to do is: Introduce order to create that higher agreement of form and purpose without which every human work appears unsatisfying, ugly, and disgusting."¹¹

6.4

Peter Behrens. AEG
Humboldthain, Small Motors
factory, 1910–1913, street view

Source: From *Die Spannung*,
40 (1929); courtesy Deutsches
Technikmuseum Berlin

⁹ See David Frisby, "Straight and Crooked Streets? The Contested Rational Spirit of the Modern Metropolis" in Iain Boyd Whyte (ed.), *Modernism and the Spirit of the City*, London, Routledge, 2003, pp. 57–84.

¹⁰ Muthesius, "Städtebau," p. 534.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 534.

6.5 Peter Behrens. Berlin,
AEG Turbine Factory,
1908–1909, street view

Source: Photo Paul Birnbaum,
© MIT Department of Architecture,
Cambridge, MA



In a few words, Muthesius evoked the advocacy of the so-called *Raumkünstlern* (spatial artists) who had won the high ground of German architecture in the first decade of the twentieth century. Without naming them, the artists who could perform according to Muthesius's prescription were the artists and architects who were members of the contemporary and then highly dynamic *Deutscher Werkbund*. And both the words – order, rhythm, harmony – and the mission fit no one better than Peter Behrens.

Two alternatives and the question of precedents

In the present context, it is important to recall that the protagonists of this story all defined their positions in opposition to Camillo Sitte. There are in fact two open paths of inquiry to follow – paths that also bifurcate. First, there is Behrens's *Zeitgeist* with his assertions about the force of modern haste, and its implications for new architectonic and urban concepts, and for the modern occupation of time and space. And then there might be an alternative to the self-imposition of a *Zeitgeist*. Another path would be to question what precedents should inform competing visions of the modern condition, and more specifically of modern city building. Still more important, in what way does one employ precedent?

If the modern *Zeitgeist* invokes continuous building forms of repetitive units deployed on straight streets, the foil must be – how could it be otherwise – Sitte's medievalizing idyll of curving streets and closed squares formed by individualized building units. But such a dichotomy is definitely too simple if not



AEG
Small Motors
1913, street view

Spannung,
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simplistic. In his book *Competing Visions: Aesthetic Invention and Social Imagination in Central European Architecture*, Ákos Moravánszky gave an open-minded and unprejudiced reading of the position taken by Sitte in his *Städtebau*.¹² Following Moravánszky, Sitte did recognize the changes in contemporary urban life, the relation of such changes to fundamental developments in economic and social conditions, and the impossibility of altering these processes or results by decree – not to mention by aesthetic predilection. Conversely, for all his affection for the medieval street or place, Sitte was fully aware that the complex history of these environments, their “accidents of history,” could not be recreated.

Despite the differences in their formal preferences, Sitte’s position did not fundamentally differ from that which I have elsewhere claimed to see in the modernist critique and advocacy of Adolf Loos.¹³ I suggested there that both Sitte and Loos rejected the universalizing and romantic promulgation of a modern Zeitgeist. They simultaneously spurned the form-giving artist’s self-imposed requirement to invent a system of form correlated with that Zeitgeist. Loos, like Sitte, turned rather to a critical examination of the realities of contemporary transformations. Through this analysis of present condition, they found both a complex and differentiated environment as well as contemporary initiatives, which were often without precedents. In a second stage, they called on formal strategies, obviously different for each of these architects, through which they sought to act and react in a manner appropriate to these complex conditions. For Loos as for Sitte, the “modern” was already present; it could not be avoided, but neither was it the whole and prime definer of the contemporary condition.

What, then, were the sources of the competing formal strategies of those who dealt with a “forced modernity” versus those who saw themselves as process-oriented agents of change in the here and now? Let us begin with the seemingly necessary confrontation of urban theory and historical precedents offered by A. E. Brinckmann in comparison to Sitte. It is no accident that Hoeber, Behrens, and architects of their circle endorsed the position taken by Brinckmann in his renowned book *Platz und Monument* of 1908.¹⁴ It was Brinckmann who, toward the end of his book, embraced the Behrens and Muthesius circle. Perspicaciously, he did this at a moment when accomplishments such as those of the Deutscher Werkbund and Behrens’s work for the AEG were in their infancy.

Brinckmann spoke admiringly of the architects of his day, using their much-favored term of *Raumkünstler*, and seeing them as innovators in step with modern times. He specifically argued that Sitte was not in resonance with modernity and that he offered mere recipes that were only half-truths. As for Sitte’s asserted principle of “painterly Gothic,” it had to be recognized as a mere shadow of a shadow, or literally and merely, “a representation of an effect.”¹⁵ Through the works of the *Raumkünstlern*, on the contrary, architecture was again becoming an art. Brinckmann contended that, prior to any theory, it was necessary to define a feeling for space, and he did offer certain principles that were in harmony with his favored exemplars in eighteenth-century and classical architecture. With the *Raumkünstlern*, he claimed, the use of the straight line and the right angle yielded an organization that simultaneously involved *Gliederung* (articulation), *Steigerung* (intensification), and *Rhythmus* (rhythm). In the end, the goal was to realize a fusion between “precedent” and “innovation.” “*Neues in entwickelter Form schaffen*” – create the new in developed form – could be interpreted, with useful ambiguity,

16 *Ibid.*, p. 167.
17 *Ibid.*, p. 170.

12 Ákos Moravánszky, *Competing Visions: Aesthetic Invention and Social Imagination in Central European Architecture*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1998, pp. 34–35.

13 Stanford Anderson, “Sachlichkeit and Modernity, or Realist Architecture” in Harry Mallgrave (ed.), *Otto Wagner: Reflections on the Raiment of Modernity*, Santa Monica, CA, Getty Center, 1993, pp. 322–360.

14 A.E. Brinckmann, *Platz und Monument: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Ästhetik der Stadtbaukunst in neuerer Zeit*, Berlin, Ernst Wasmuth, 1908.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 169.

6.6 Peter Behrens
Düsseldorf, Mail
office building,
street view

Source: Foto Stoe

as to create the new through the development of form, but also to create the new with (already) developed form.¹⁶

Brinckmann's writings and the works of his favored architects already followed Sitte's *Städtebau* by almost twenty years. As a result, a new sophistication in the discussion both of modernity and of precedent could be expected. But was Sitte merely the naïve foil for these new ideas? Thanks to Moravánszky, Sitte's concerns for urban transformation were already discussed. As to precedents, the exemplars that Sitte discussed included not only the medieval "accidents," but also many important works of Baroque formalism, equally praised by Brinckmann.

Consequently, I argue that the differences between the two schools of thought were not so much related to their respective choice of precedents (even though they differed), but rather they were the result of their different methods of embracing precedent and innovation. Consider again their contrasting attitudes to the modern condition. For Behrens there was an artistic imperative to define the underlying trends of his time and to give them appropriate form. Our modern haste must yield efficient movement systems; broad and straight streets should suffer as little interruption as possible; our rapid movements change our sensory relation to the environment; architectural detail then falls below a threshold of perception. Appropriate form becomes large and easily recognizable silhouette; if there is to be detail, it must be repetitive. These were for Behrens the universal rules for his time.

As such a vision was universal and relied emphatically on the concepts of continuity and repetition, the definition of *type* became a central concern. Behrens sought to define these types with his factories, office buildings, and housing estates, thus following Brinckmann's assertion that "to build cities means to form space with the fabric of building units."¹⁷ While this way of thinking appeared to move toward a rationalistic or perhaps even functionalist definition of types and their organization, the architects, theoreticians, and historians of 1910s were in no way ready to renounce the value of precedents.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 167.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 170.

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6.6 Peter Behrens.
Düsseldorf, Mannesmann
office building, 1910–1912,
street view

Source: Foto Stuedner



For Brinckmann, the classical system of the eighteenth century (*Um 1800*) to which he along with many of his contemporaries made constant reference was an important model of fusion between precedent and innovation. It was thus possible to reflect upon and further study these examples in order to, in his words, “*Neues in entwickelter Form schaffen*.”¹⁸ Likewise, following Moravánszky’s reading of Sitte, is it possible to argue that for Sitte as well the goal was “*Neues in entwickelter Form schaffen*”? The response is a strong yes. Sitte’s decisive precedents were mostly medieval, but is that a problem? After reflection, do we need or want a universal system of straight streets and right angles any more than uniformly curved streets or acute angles? Furthermore, Sitte emphasized Baroque exemplars as well. And if my comments on Adolf Loos can stand, eighteenth-century classicism also offered precedents that were applicable to an informed understanding of the complexity of contemporary urban transformations. Therefore, rather than the very precedents of reference, there was a more fundamental difference between the system-world of Brinckmann-Behrens and that of Sitte.

To one side are the universalizing and type-making instincts of those who would constrain choice through the assertion of a *Zeitgeist*. They confront those who are ready to recognize, and bring a critical perspective to, the historic complexity, the uneven patterns and sequences of change, and the diversity of problems and opportunities that make up the here and now of the modern city. If, under these circumstances, precedent is to be embraced, a limited palette seems an unnecessary constraint. Why not learn from both Sitte and Loos?

If all of the discussed actors embraced the use of precedent, were they concerned to find rules that might also serve in the present? When Muthesius called for order, rhythm, and harmony; when Behrens called for the identification of types and the use of elemental forms and repetition; when Brinckmann criticized Sitte for “half-truths,” all these protagonists were looking for truths and rules. That such aesthetic predilections should attain the force of universal rules was, however, something that could only be embraced by those who already shared the faith. I would not like this comment to be understood as dismissing the study and employment of typologies or other rational approaches to design. What I reject are arguments for a *Zeitgeist*-inspired vision that considers its predilections as deserving universalization. My rejection is both of envisioning a *Zeitgeist* and the tendency to make of such visions imperatives for thought and action.

A coda toward New Urbanism

Turning to Camillo Sitte, his book that advertised “artistic principles” in its title was in fact replete with commentary on laws and rules, yet it did not draw any clear conclusion. Sitte chastised Reinhard Baumeister for saying that positive precedents could not be reduced to rules.¹⁹ To the contrary, Sitte claimed that his own book achieved this very thing, providing a whole textbook of rules. Yet he also proudly claimed that the old masters had no dogma or stuffy rules.²⁰ He spoke of moving from tradition to rules for today.²¹ Yet, elsewhere, he argued that giving rules for development would not suffice to avoid negative results.²²

Sitte’s ambition was to draw principles and rules from his examples, but this intention was restricted in several ways. A perusal of the illustrations in the

18 See for instance, Paul Mebes, *Um 1800, Architektur und Handwerk im letzten Jahrhundert ihrer traditionellen Entwicklung*, München, Bruckmann, 1908.

19 Camillo Sitte (Collins and Collins edition), p. 83, concerning Reinhard Baumeister, *Stadt-Erweiterungen in technischer, baupolizeilicher und wirtschaftlicher Beziehung*, Berlin, Ernst & Korn, 1876.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 163.

23 Plater-Zyberk & Lexicon of the Version 3.2, M Plater-Zyberk & illustrations als the journal of t *New Urban Ne*
24 Editors’ note: “raw “catalog” ideas submitted individuals; it is document and assembled by not scholars. A publication to contrast with Brinckmann w Duany, Robert François Lejeu *New Civic Art. Town Planning*, Rizzoli, 2003. (and critical app *Places*, Spring and in particular: “Counterpoint Transgressions

original edition reveals that style was in no way a limiting factor for Sitte and, even where he focused on a more particular issue, he relished a diversity of exemplars. Furthermore, Sitte demonstrated ambivalence about rules that I think was entirely appropriate. It is better to think of Sitte's and Brinckmann's books as collections of interpreted exemplars, which are neither exhaustive nor systematic. Any precedent worthy of sustained consideration invites multiple interpretations, complementary or not. The way in which a precedent is suggestive at a later time is governed by new conditions both of interpretation and of application. In the end, neither Sitte nor Brinckmann codified his exemplars or insights. The fruitful exemplar will outlast, or better, outperform any rule.

The preceding observation invites a final coda. Contrary to the use of historical precedents by Sitte or Brinckmann, consider the current New Urbanism movement in the United States. New Urbanism propositions draw on multiple sources, not always with attribution. One acknowledged borrowing is a key urban form in Sitte's thought: the so-called *turbine square*.²³ Another concept owing at least in part to the advocacy of Sitte is the "Urban Vista" as described in the "Lexicon of the New Urbanism", with its sub-categories of "Terminated Vistas," "Deflected Vistas," and "Layered Vistas." Such urban design fragments are comprehended within ever more inclusive New Urbanism constructs. Indeed, there is not only an array of squares, streets, and urban spaces, but rather all of these are gathered in a total system of inclusions and exclusions. In "The Lexicon of the New Urbanism", a broad organizing concept is the "Urban Transect," a compressed plan diagramming the characteristic issues of density from the rural environment to the central city. Each stage of the Transect is recognized to favor or preclude certain sub-systems, for example alleyways associated with urban places but not rural settings.²⁴

Overall, I am deeply wary both of elaborate systematization and of what I perceive to be an engrained resistance to architectonic innovation. Nonetheless, there is something impressive about the seriousness of the New Urbanist enterprise – from careful study of reasonable dimensional standards for streets and other urban forms to broad social and environmental issues. One hundred years later, their thought owes much to figures such as Sitte and Brinckmann. In their systematization, they go where those earlier authors did not go. New Urbanism is more precise and determined in its rulemaking. It also goes further in the codification of urban design. I return, however, to my earlier thought. The promulgation of worthy examples is a fruitful enterprise. But to act in the complexity of the here and now, codification risks being a stifling constriction. We need critical examination of the conditions in which we find ourselves, innovative interpretations of valued exemplars, and critically conceived formal innovation as well. Such a critical approach can embrace typological study that may well be fruitful or even necessary to address effectively many problems of society and of design practice. But a critical use of typologies will also address the complexity of different times and places.

I have argued that Camillo Sitte played in that arena, with certain modesty in the interpretation of his exemplars and in their application – a strategy that gave and continues to give his thought great influence.

²³ Plater-Zyberk & Co, *The Lexicon of the New Urbanism*, Version 3.2, Miami: Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co., 2002. The illustrations also appeared in the journal of the movement, *New Urban News*, 2001, J5.2.

²⁴ Editors' note: The Lexicon is a raw "catalog" of terms and ideas submitted by dozens of individuals; it is not a published document and it was assembled by practitioners, not scholars. A much better publication to compare and contrast with Sitte and Brinckmann would be Andres Duany, Robert Alminana, Jean-François Lejeune, et al., *The New Civic Art: Elements of Town Planning*, New York, Rizzoli, 2003. On the transect and critical appraisal of it, see *Places*, Spring 2006, v.18, n.1, and in particular, Jaime Correa, "Counterpoint: Transect Transgressions," pp. 24–25.