Psychology of Architecture of the Public Space

Introduction
Icelanders are known as poets, Germans as philosophers. The poet likes to sit on the roof and dream, the philosopher on the other hand digs after foundations down in the basement. I am half Icelandic and half German and I live in a house right between roof and basement ... like most people. Sometimes I climb on the roof and sometimes I step down to the basement. That’s the way I see myself as a psychologist and as a human being. In the same way I also approach the psychology of architecture.

The linchpin of architectural psychology – as I understand it – is the rather trivial insight that the environment created by architecture was designed by humans for humans (even if one designed it just for oneself.) The psychologist is concerned with mental processes and he usually is convinced that these processes take place in the brains of human beings. The psyche is for him something individual just as one’s soul is something that belongs to one alone. My soul is not your soul.

I am telling you this right now because I disagree with that idea and because I believe it is appropriate to say so in advance. I am convinced that psychic processes and events are not only an individual, but just as much a communal matter. We of the Western culture tend to place the individual into the foreground, to see ourselves chiefly as individuals. What is common to all of us, what connects, even unifies us, remains largely ignored.

My tenet is that we are both to the same degree: community and individual. I will even venture the claim that individual and community are two aspects of the same happening [development?]. But this would lead us to far into philosophy. On the other side I can’t raise such a statement without giving an explanation. Who, after all, would doubt that I am not you, and that You are not me. Isn’t it true? The answer is yes and no, but that’s not logical: nothing can be true and untrue at the same time tells us the logician. Our daily experience, however, tells us something different: something that we believed to be true yesterday has turned out to be untrue today, and tomorrow it might be true again, but the next day it might be ... enough! This search for a better truth than the preceding one, this progression and development from the best possible to the still better, this is the idea that has become something like a trademark for my thinking. It is the concept of poretics (the poretic complement to logic), which characterises my philosophy.

After this philosophical confession I should have no difficulty sharing my understanding of the community-related aspects of architecture with you ... I have shown you all my cards (except for a few aces up my sleeves.)

The re-valuation of the community aspect is by no means just a private whim. It is true that for about fifteen years I felt like a lone voice in the desert, but today the desert has turned into a populated savannah. Peoples with similar ideas migrate in from different areas, many of them from behavioural biology and neurophysiology. Keyword in this context are the so-called „mirror-neurons“. Their activity proves that when we observe other people up close we imitate [nachvollziehen] their actions in our minds. „To walk in someone else’s shoes“ – this sentence gets an entirely new meaning, because I am involved in what the other does. He acts with me and I act with him ... we act. His decisions influence my decisions and my decisions influence his decisions. That’s what I call interaction - a circular process that unifies the individual beings. Splitting it into a simple to and fro is just a simplifying symbolic-linguistic construction.
It is a common misconception that the psychologist of architecture tells the architects what to build or not to build. The often-cited analogy with statics is also inappropriate, because a structural engineer has a far better ability to predict the consequences of a decision (at least) for the building.

The architectural psychologist is researcher and advisor. He functions as a specialist to help the architect who is the generalist, and does so at the architect’s discretion. He may be deputed by the architect to take over special tasks especially in large and complex projects. Every architect should know at least as much architectural psychology as he knows statics ...enough to make a responsible decision where, when and how to delegate jobs. His role is to be the leader and creative head of the enterprise who is responsible for the whole. Metaphorically speaking, he is the captain of the ship ... but this does not devaluate the work of the machinist or of the navigator.

In supporting the architect, it is the special point of view of the architectural psychologist that matters. He is able to view the project from a different perspective then a structural engineer or a geologist for example. In other words: he is the specialist of a different perspective. Of course, he does not always know in advance what is right and what is wrong, what would be suitable and what wouldn’t. Very often he will not have a ready answer when queried by the architect. More likely he will just have a vague idea, how to proceed [with research] to find a suitable solution.

Unlike a structural engineer he will only be able to provide probabilities, even after longer studies on site. His expertise is based largely on procedures and methods for obtaining the relevant information, and at times also on the ability to mediate between architect and the future residents and users.

It is a difficult issue to explain the psychology of architecture to either psychologists or architects. Either side has a strong tendency to see the other’s subject matter as something exotic and strange. A fact that is hard to understand as some psychologist tend not to see how much their environment has been designed by architects and some architects do not take into account enough that their building forms the living space of people.

Since the audience for this paper is mostly architects (not exclusively of course) I will try to explain the thinking of a psychologist in some crude outline. (To be honest, I am this psychologist.)

The focus of the discussion is the **public space**.

Please note that I will not tell you how (from the point of view of an architectural psychologist) public space (whatever that will turn out to be) ought to be shaped. Rather I intend to give you a first idea how an architectural psychologist would approach the issue.

To put this in words is one thing, but to make you comprehend it is quite another. It is a little like riding a bicycle, swimming or singing: it cannot be learnt from books, it has to be experienced – jointly. I am convinced that this has to be shown. (Just talking about it would not be very credible).

This is why I have also prepared some simple exercises that demonstrate in a playful way what needs to be experienced, beyond the mere words.
Proximity and communication
Language forces one to put what one wants to express in chronological order. One cannot speak two sentences at one time, they must be carefully articulated one after another. It is (somewhat) different for paintings and buildings. As a rule the artist leaves it up to the viewer how to perceive the drawing. There is a lot more to tell about this particular issue, but at the moment all that matters is that I see myself constrained to discuss issues in sequence that theoretically need to be presented at the same time.
These subjects are „proximity and communication,“ on the one hand, and „community and individual“ (public and private, respectively) on the other. These topics need to be examined in relation to space (designed space). I prefer to use the term aspect instead of topic, in the same way as an architect treats and describes a building sometimes from the exterior and sometimes from the interior.

Proximity
All basic terms discussed in the following pages are selected to present the picture as focussed on architecture and not primarily on psychology or philosophy. I intend thus to remain close to architectural practise, even if that means that some theoretical gaps remain open. All terms function at the same time in a theoretical-abstract and a practical-concrete way, both difficult to define and self-evident. So self-evident, in fact, that one almost has to force oneself to examine them analytically.

Proximity is a very good case in point. Who would initially notice that a coffee pot could be as close (or far) as a house, a country, a star or another person? Someone can be very near to us, even be the closest person on earth, even if he is in a country far away.

If everything is fine, we love our neighbour and would like to keep him as close as possible (in terms of space) not only for the moment or for one hour, but forever. But that’s not all. Not only should he be permanently as close as possible, but also as far away from others. We should share an exclusive closeness: me yes, others no.

But what does „close“ mean if we put it in relation to space? A German proverb says that „a loving couple finds space enough in the smallest hut.“ I leave the exploration of its meaning to your fantasy, but venture a small hint: Even people that do not love each other, do not even know each other, accept at times close spatial proximity. Just think of an overcrowded public transport, a bar or a dance floor. A subject of its own is proximity in a professional relationship, for example with the doctor or the hairdresser.

Upon taking a closer look (which one rarely does) it turns out that even in close proximity there are precise borders and differentiations. For example, two passengers of an overcrowded underground train will avoid standing face-to-face; that would be experienced as embarrassing. It is hard to imagine that one would choose to stand face-to-face with an other and look into his eyes. It would be interpreted as rude or even aggressive behaviour and would cause violent reactions, most likely of an unpleasant sort.

One could investigate in further detail the character of spatial proximity between human individuals – for example the meaning of the different layers of the clothes we wear or the meaning of touches of different kinds. One thing would emerge clearly from this exercise, and this is the strong cultural relativity of proximity. It ranges from total isolation to unrestrained promiscuity.
The range that is typical for our culture lies somewhere in between these extremes. One might even go so far as to claim that culture essentially expresses itself in its differentiation of proximity relations.

One can find countless examples for this claim: rituals of greeting, seating arrangements or room layout. Generally stated, the question is: Who [does], what, with whom, for how long? If we think of a conversation in this context, then we have come already close to our next term „communication."

But before we discuss communication, we need to mention the behavioural and physiological aspects of proximity. This because it shows quickly that proximity cannot be measured with a pocket rule. The deciding factor is rather what entities, which feelings, and what events are at this moment of primary importance; in other words, what do we have to deal with urgently in order to stay alive.

A thunderstorm far away might make us nervous, but we can get scared to death when someone unexpectedly snaps his fingers next to our ears in the dark. We make violent defensive movements and are close to a heart attack. Sight is something different again: if something sticks to our nose it can hardly be seen, although it is, in terms of space, very close to our body. It takes a distance of about 30 cm for us to get an optimal visual impression of an object, a fact that makes sense when we consider that the average arm length is about 60 cm. The best focus of the eyes is thus exactly in the middle of the space we can manipulate. One could say, vision is in the service of acting. We see (even perceive) in order to act. But this is just one side of the coin. The other is, that we act in order to perceive. Acting and perceiving form a closed circular process.

**Communication**

The same principle holds true also for communication in behavioural psychology. We speak of interaction, of action and reaction. I act, speak, look... in order to influence someone else, in order to make him do something I can perceive. The other does exactly the same. We both act, react and perceive in a continuous circular process.

Communication requires a certain (sensory proximity) so I can perceive the other and a certain (motor) proximity so I can act on the other and make him perceive me. The best (and normal) proximity relation is not that of an overcrowded public transport, and also not the distance for reading a book, but a distance at which the whole person is in the field of vision. This enables me not only to see his facial expression, but also his gestures and overall behaviour. And I can still hear every sound, including the high “hissing” frequencies, and eventually also touch or grab him. If the ideal distance were only defined by the ability to understand spoken language, we might as well stand so close that we could whisper in each other’s ears at formal receptions. Obviously this is not the case.

I call this other communication which happens parallel to language „parasymbolic“. Communication based on language (spoken or written) will be called „symbolic“ to distinguish it from the other. Parasymbolic communication includes many aspects we usually don’t even count as communication. In the strict sense it includes every form of interaction, even some that do not seem „psychic“ at all. It begins with „seeing and being seen,“, „hearing and being heard,“ „feeling and being felt;“ even smelling can be a form of interaction.

All this may sound right now like so much physics, chemistry and psychology. Indeed mutual perception, that is, the way we perceive others and the way we react to it, is part of our genetic design along with, and this is important, how perception will change under the influence of later experiences. More precisely stated, not only is it largely predetermined how we will perceive others and how we will act on the other, but also how this process takes
place and what will be communicated in its course. It is a shared mutual adaptation, or to use terms from the new psychology, a joint development.

A very good example of parasympathetic communication is synchronisation, a phenomenon that has been researched by my team at Innsbruck University for several years. All behaviour requires a central time-basis; this fact is easily apprehended if one tries to beat time in three-fourth with one hand and at four-fourth with the other. Synchronization is found not only in the movement of extremities, but has been demonstrated also in speech and generally in all neuronal processes dealing with sensory and motor behaviour, more or less in the whole body. An immense number of oscillatory processes are coupled – again, more or less, to create one huge concert. (Disrupting this coupling will provoke an epileptic seizure.) But that is not yet the whole story. The complete environment (animate, inanimate, and especially human) is coupled rhythmically to us via our sensory and motor capabilities. This means that we adapt to one another and form thereby a new whole. And this not only at a rock-concert - but music is indeed a very good example for it!

With these two concepts „proximity and communication“ we have important paths to move towards our main issue, public space, and the architecture of the public space seen through the eyes of the psychologist.

**Community and Individual**

We still need to introduce two other important concepts, community and individual. I do not want to spell out the philosophical concerns that this raises. (They were briefly mentioned in the introduction.) I want to treat the topic rather from a practical perspective, and this is done best by starting with biology, more precisely with the biology of human behavior.

The difference between community and individual is easy to draw in the animal kingdom, at least it seems that way. A naive rendering would define community as the collection of similar individuals. But this definition quickly turns out to be in need of further refinement: one has to add, for example, that these individuals must have joined voluntarily (whatever that may mean) and did not merely fall into the same hole or meet by chance at the same watering place. One would have to add that they also have to communicate with one another to form a community and not just an aggregate. We recognize community insofar as its members voluntarily engage in the same behaviour at the same time, i.e. synchronously. Think for instance of a school of fish or a flock of birds. The members behave homogenously; one could say, they behave almost like an individual, but at the same time the social entity can be dissolved and reconstituted. If a flock divides into two, the members of one flock are relatively closer to another than to the members of the other flock, and relatively more coupled within one flock than across the two. One concludes that relative proximity is a key factor in the formation of individual communities. … and of course their relatively close communication.

Taking a generous leap of imagination we envision the development of more and more differentiated forms of symbolic and para-symbolic communication and arrive thereby at the emergence of organization and finally at the full-fledged organism. Individual members specialize and function first in loose association, then in a colony (for example, a termite colony) and finally melt into a new “meta-organism” – “meta” because the same process happened already once before, at the cellular level.

Biological psychology - and now we can finally see the direction of our journey – provides us with something like a set of spectacles, which allows us to look around. In other words, in this way we learn what counts, what might be important, and where we should focus our attention as we approach the architecture of public space.
But we have not reached the goal yet, we are merely within sight of it. Let us envision a piece of African wilderness, the Serengeti, and the cohabitation of different animals there. We would see small and large herds, bands of animals, families, and some, though very few, loners. We see the beginning of division of labor, leaders and guards for example. We recognize communication and coordination.

Communication is easy to identify if it is acoustic; we notice that it serves first and foremost to modify the relations of proximity – by calling the group together or keeping strangers out, by threatening, warning or instigating flight.

The distribution of individual animals in the communal space of the Serengeti is by no means random, but rather clearly ordered. There are highly coherent and very loose groupings. The closest connection is the one between a mother and her off-springs. It corresponds to the “strongest” of instincts, the instinct to care for one’s young ones, to preserve the species.

Altruism in general is not highly represented in the animal kingdom. Even homo sapiens has difficulties and has to be constantly reminded to love his neighbor or the fellow man farther away.

Community improves the chances of survival for the individual substantially – but why that is the case is not completely clear. In the relation of parents and off-springs it seems relatively obvious. In that case we can understand our relatives among the animals through empathy. Abandoned children are unhappy and the parents search desperately for their lost children. Under the protection of their parents, on the other hand, children are curious and playful and have the courage to explore the world.

The proximity to the parent is experienced in different ways. The highest degree of proximity would be for the child to be in the arms of the mother. Most of the time, however, it is enough when the child can see or hear the mother. Even that need not be the case: it may suffice that the child knows where to go to see or hear the mother, or can depend on her return. …or that it knows that it is at home, with the mother or close relatives. Knowing that the people one is (socially) close to are near, is really what defines home. It is the space where I or my family decide who can be close and who remains distant. This space we call private.

Consequently we would not speak of public and private space as two separate entities with nothing in-between. Rather spaces are public and private in degrees; in other words, every space is more or less public and more or less private.

Clearly we might have arrived at this insight without the detour into behavioral biology, but it was also meant to make us appreciate the theoretical and psychological foundation of this insight and develop our understanding from there. Already a simple one-family house is divided into clearly delineated zones of different privacy and publicity. It starts with the garden that ends exactly at the garden fence, where the design of fence and gate and the gate’s state, i.e. open or closed, signal the degree of privacy to every visitor.

The next zone is usually the entrance hall, notably the main door into the house, followed by the hallway, living room, (sometimes a foyer or office), then kitchen and bathroom (which has usually a special status), the children’s room, bedroom, and in it the bed.

If we move away from the garden gate we can easily delineate different zones of public usage. Streets as well as squares are open to everyone (unless one happens to be imprisoned). The same is true for restaurants, monuments or public transportation are similar, though with some restrictions. Schools, churches, sporting grounds and hospitals are usually subject to regulations that give access only to select, institutionally privileged persons. The same holds for clubs and companies of all kind. In these cases we deal with sub-communities of a larger community, that define themselves based on organizational rules. That is, they demarcate themselves against others by the institution of borders of sort, by a state border or national border….but also at times by membership of class, caste, or ethnicity. The latter examples of private and public space differ from the one-family dwelling mainly by the role that
regulations play. What we are allowed to do and what not – even if it is only about being somewhere - is symbolically and linguistically prescribed by the organs of the respective community and valid for all. We are not guided by our feelings, but by knowledge … it could be as simple as a sign that says “Authorized personnel only!”

The space that is ordered based on symbolic and organizational criteria and determines in this manner the concrete relationships of proximity and communication. If this sounds too abstract, it can easily be made more concrete: If you plan to take a trip by train, you must first make your way to the station and the ticket counter, then to the right train and the right platform. These steps will be the same no matter where you set out from, what the weather is like or whether you go there on foot or by bus. All this can not be intuited, one must know it and one must know where to acquire the knowledge, and so on… This is so self-evident that one only notices it if something does wrong. (For those who find the example too simple we recommend to imagine the labyrinth of a hospital or a state bureaucracy.)

Even when we are in the open, in places with maximal public usage like parks or squares, our behavior is influenced by numerous symbolic signs and instructions and para-symbolic conditions. Even the park constrains what we do, where and when. For instance, where we sit, eat, leave garbage, sleep, and so forth ..And it depends on who we are: a child, adolescent, senior citizen, employee of the park administration, and so on. Moreover, the whole network of conditions changes with the culture and over time.

Someone who is about to design a park, would be well advised to find out as much as possible about the prospective future users. But one will find out about them only if one goes to meet them, becomes a user, one of them, for a while. The open question is: who are those users, the users of a not-yet existing park?

This question about the user is central to the work of the psychologist of architecture. It is especially important because his methods are immersive ones, which aim to find out more about the people affected than can be gleaned from surveys and measurements. This methodology has sometimes also been called ethnography (see ……? )

Ethnography is our preferred method in Innsbruck and one I highly recommend. It is at times also called “qualitative” and opposed to the “precise quantitative methods,” but this would be a mistake: immersive methods, put simply, are merely the natural and meaningful complement to quantitative methods. The psychologist will not refrain from counting doors and windows, but he will also try to understand their meaning in the community.

A psychologist who works only with quantitative methods has really succumbed to a self-deception: he counts but does not account for what he counts. He asks questions and counts the answers, ideally received in digital form as check marks. He does not ask how his questions have been understood and how he should understand the answers, or if then only with hesitation. This is like trying to capture the behavior of a person with one single snapshot.

The Design of Public Space

Psychology of architecture views the design of public space first and foremost as an intervention into the complex order of proximities and thereby also in the communicative net of a community, specifically at the para-symbolic level.

This sounds far removed from architecture, but it can easily be hauled back to reality. We can demonstrate the principle briefly on the example of a dwelling with respect to the growing “privatization” of space in the course of Western history. (The demand for brevity calls for extreme simplification.) The houses of our forefathers were not built for single persons or nuclear families, but for the whole tribe with all that went with it. There was only one large dwelling and it contained everyone together with his property and next-of-kin. People slept,
ate and worked in the same space; everything except what happened outside, happened in there. Privacy coincided with immediate spatial proximity. What others were not supposed to know, was simply whispered into the ear of one’s confidante or communicated through immediate bodily contact. The large communal space was differentiated into zones and everyone knew what could be done where and how. Some areas were reserved for individuals or families, other areas were left unoccupied or could be used by all. The first architectural differentiation and intervention possibly had to do with the seat of the chieftain. His seat became elevated and marked as something special. His territory became different from that of the others; it was more decisively delineated and less accessible....

especially when he was sleeping. The chieftain got his private room before the others, and the others followed. It is quite interesting to find out who in a given culture or in its history had the private room first. In the old Icelandic farm, in which I grew up, it was the daughter of marrying age. It is also interesting to see which activities were carried out jointly, that is in public, and which ones were private. Such studies demonstrate clearly the cultural conditionedness of public and private space. One need not watch “The Discreet Charme of the Bourgeoisie” by Bunuel to be shaken in one’s faith in a natural shamefulness. Much more likely is the concept of an artificial shamefulness, of a culture, in other words, which structures the terrain by creating boundaries and attempts to do so as well as possible.

We are walking on thin ice here – or maybe it is a balancing act with two ways to fall off the rope. On the one hand threatens undifferentiated chaos and the relapse into primitive behavioral patterns. On the other hand threatens overregulation, coercion, the erosion of natural sociality and individualistic fragmentation. Today we are endangered by the disproportionate emphasis on the development of the individual. We increasingly lose the perspective of communal life. We are more and more concerned with our individual fate and well-being here and in the after-life. Other people are subjected to our value system and judged on the basis of their usefulness for ourselves. We eat as well as possible, steel our bodies, strive for a pleasant environment with an attractive partner in it, we gather knowledge and exercise artisanship .... And why? In order to enjoy life, that is, to enjoy these activities as intense and as long as possible..... And as good as possible compared to others! Many see their life’s purpose fulfilled if they know that they are better off than the others, be it only because they have a larger amount of money to their name when they die. The classical consumer is happy when he succeeds in grabbing something that someone else wanted urgently, and he never asks himself why this is so. He is only as rich as the other is poor.

An architect gets paid to build the ideal environment for this egoistic individual. Economics embraces individualism because competition frees creative forces, while the law tries to curb its worst excesses. Little wonder then that the public space, the space that is open for all, finds few advocates and becomes the step child of urban planning. Public space is usually dictated, planned and realized against the opposition of private interests. This is something of a birth defect. In reality no one is happy in isolation; why else would single confinement be used as the most severe form of punishment? Every mentally normal person fears loneliness and seeks the company of other people. Why then do we isolate ourselves from one another, live alone and isolated in honeycomb-like structures and approach others only when the need is most urgent? Even in the disco one is not sure any longer who dances with whom; the person closest seems the chattering disc jockey or the pop star flickering across the screen.
People are increasingly afraid of being close to others, to bind themselves, incur an obligation, even to fall in love! They do not trust each other and look for security not in the community but in anonymous, ideally state-held “insurance” organizations.

Yes, that’s bad, one might say, but what on earth is an architect supposed to do about the situation? He is merely cutting the clothes, and they are supposed to fit, not to correct the misshapen body. Not true! Precisely the architect is the one who models the landscape that determines the flow of life: the raging river and the calm broad stream or the quiet lake. He has only to turn his eyes towards the water, and away from the rivers, creeks and valleys. The psychologist of architecture can help him make the shift.

If once one has educated the eye to the different view, one recognizes everywhere the complementarity of water flow and landscape. One recognizes the features of the landscape that are determining the water flow and those with little influence. Most importantly, one sees the consequences of specific changes in the landscape … though the course of communal development is a lot harder to estimate than water flow.

Experience and an ability to empathize are the key precondition for the successful planning of public space, as well as a willingness to appreciate the communal aspects in all of life, not just in public spaces that have been declared formally as such, like streets and parks. Best one imagines the whole as a tree in which trunk and branches represent the community and twigs and leaves the individuals.

The architect builds more or less private or public spaces – and should be well aware of his power to influence the communal happening by his design. Of course, he can do so in a goal-directed, meaningful and responsible manner only if he understands the character of the communal events he is influencing. He has to pay attention to the culture, economy, and habits, to mention just a few of the most important factors. Here is where the psychologist of architecture enters the planning process and mediates between the one who plans and constructs the building and those for whom he plans and builds.

Each architectural decision constitutes an intervention into a complex web of proximity-relations. It influences a temporal development with more or less far-reaching consequences. One should not jump to the conclusion that spectacular consequences are due necessarily to spectacular causes. It is more important to recognize the disposition of a community for change – especially those dispositions that can be explored and exploited by architectural design.

Take for example the entrance hall of a multi-family dwelling. All residents must use the same stairway and the same door. This space is the communicative spine and main junction of the house community. It forces them to a degree of closeness: they meet in the stairway, they negotiate how to share in its cleaning, they may get to love or hate one another. But they can not change the condition of proximity that the communal staircase and the communal door imposes. Only an architectural change like the building of an external staircase could do that.

The same holds for the public traffic square. Park benches can be placed so that people can talk across the benches and look one another in the eye, or in such a way that the one can not see the other. Benches can be turned towards the stream of passers-by or away from them. Communal activity (if only that of watching) can be encouraged or discouraged. Someone who visits the park (specially at night) can feel securely surrounded by the community, or exposed and vulnerable. One can feel at home in the park or in foreign lands.

The third example is the school building. It is in some respect also a public space. We tend to forget that school is not only the place where individual students have knowledge pumped
into their heads – like cars in a gas station. It is – specially today - also the site where children acquire social competence in the interaction with their own kind as well as with adults outside the family. School buildings take little of this into account. Pedagogy is, according to common wisdom, the domain of the teacher, not of the architect. Rooms not dedicated to teaching are seen as waste of space. This is true especially for student break rooms. Students that are in school, yet outside of the classroom, are suspect.

Our fourth and last example of public space is the open plan office, the cubicle landscape – not least because the immersive method of psychology of architecture was originally developed and proven there. The office (in the broadest meaning of the term) is determined to the largest degree by the organization. Its main purpose is to be functional and enable (at least partially) measurable productivity.

Task of the architect in this context is to ensure the optimal communicative proximity of the members of the community. Optimally- that means that those are spatially close whose proximity is most important for the overall production. People who work closely together should also be able to communicate with the least difficulties. Ideally their work stations are next to one another. But they should not interfere with one another, and their communication should not interfere with the work of others.

The structuring of the space in the open plan office happens by means of walls of differing heights and style more or less mobile and transparent. The constellation and orientation of seats must be considered as well as the arrangement of teams and work groups, the walkways, meeting places and neutral zones.

In the end it looks like a landscape covered by a web of communication and paths, which reflect the community’s proximity net. Creeks, pools, rivers, lakes. One could carry out some thought experiments in this landscape, imagine a drought, for example, or flood or a break in a levee, a dam. In practice this may not mean much, but it sharpens the intuition for the communal happening, an intuition which ultimately informs the praxis.

One starts to think about the social meaning of an open or closed door, a door that is leaning or locked, and so on… which door, when, of whom, and so on …and one is in the midst of the events before one is conscious of it.

**Paralipomena**

Communal happening can not be adequately analyzed in its complexity in purely logical terms. The psychologist of architecture has to relativize his traditional objectivist-scientific distance and participate in the events. In a strange – poretic – manner he is close and distant at the same time. Scientific insight becomes in this way also insight into oneself, a reflection on or – if you will – philosophical recognition of self.

**Public space**

A very important and scientifically well-secured result of modern psychology is the fact that people will synchronize as soon as they perceive one another. The individual human being is like a gigantic orchestra which synchronizes numerous oscillatory processes. If two such orchestras meet, they also synchronize with one another – they interact and determine a common rhythmic basis. This is not only happening during dancing or synchronous swimming, but rather is an everyday phenomenon. It is such an everyday phenomenon that we are not aware of it; and if we are aware, we do not understand how it happens. For example, if two people yawn synchronously without seeing one another – something that happens so often that one thinks of telepathy ... in the absence of a better explanation.
If we accept the fact of this oscillatory coupling between co-present individuals, then we have to consequently apply it to all levels of our human reality. Not only do we think synchronously, but we think, speak and feel synchronously. The sameness not only concerns the time we do something, but also what we do and how we do it. We bond into something like a super-organism – rather, we are conceived to form such organisms. We are always part of a community, better, each and every individual is always also community.

Public space can be two things: space that everyone can use individually, like a public telephone booth. It can also be space which many people use at the same time. A place where therefore many people come together and are, as we said, co-present.

Dealing with the latter we find that there are different degrees of coupling between human individuals and human groups. We must speak therefore about „graded coupling.“ Two people who face one another are coupled to a much greater degree than two people with their backs to one another. We know the effect: it is responsible for the fact that we avoid one another „unconsciously“ on the sidewalk. We make a (communal) decision to pass one another on the left or right side. Problems arise, as we all know, when one tries to intervene in the process consciously, even only by becoming aware of it.

The populated public space is a population of coupled oscillators. The same is true for sports stadiums, churches, concert halls, and so on.
Graded coupling binds individuals into one chaotic system or into a kind of meta-organism whose behaviour can only be predicted with a certain probability. „Behaviour“ is really too weak a term for this situation, because every one is deeply touched by his experience of the communal happening. One could say, that „one is not oneself“ except in that case we ought to be able to say when and under which conditions one is „oneself.“

This said we can slowly begin to comprehend the strange, at times terrifying behaviour of masses. We also start to comprehend the task and responsibility of those who intervene in structuring and directing this behavior. This binds the architect and the psychologist of architecture to their task, beside a number of others. Not only do they guide masses of people into predetermined paths, gates and pools. Not only do they surround the social happening with impressive sceneries. They modulate and differentiate a communal psychic event structure. They have an influence on emerging public life, the atmosphere, peacefulness, togetherness, security ... they influence at the same time individual and community.

**Complement – Serengeti**

Animal researchers were surprised when they found that it is not only the lions that seek the proximity of the tasty antilopes; the antilopes run after the lions, too. They prefer to keep the lions within their sight. One might say that lion and antilope are in their hunting and fleeing behavior optimally adjusted to one another – and thus also in their proximity relations.