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sort of golden age of the past. The other is to ana-
lyze this emerging context
with the hope that as de-
signers and theoreticians
we might be able to shape
it (perhaps, in part, on the
basis of our knowledge of
the history of city, town
and suburb) in a more
palatable way.

I am not so disheartened
about following the first
course of action as I might
be, because I know there
are profound problems
in following the sec-
ond. One of the most
important has to do with
language. We simply do
not have the words or
phrases to describe or con-
verse about, in part or in
whole, this emerging city
(if that is the right term).
We seem to be trapped by
our language.

Taking photographs in
Tampa, I found myself
trying to frame composi-
tions according to conven-
tions established by
photographers of the
urban scene. I was remind-
ed of this recently when I
saw some Berenice Abbott
photo-prints. They are
wonderful images but I
have found that the con-
ventions on which they are
based do not seem to be
useful in describing this
emerging city.

What is needed is the
artistic imagination both to
create and represent this
emerging city. Before that,
there has to be a certain
amount of faith or will. I
can guarantee you that
simply disparaging it is not
going to make it go away.
Amazing things, many of

them amazingly bad, are
happening in every part of
the American city — in the
central cores, in the aban-
donned areas where the
nineteenth century indus-
trial infrastructure was
located and on the far
periphery.

Designers and theoretici-
ans, especially in the last
20 years, have had virtually
nothing of consequence to
say about how these inescapable and measurable
waves of change should
and can take place. By
focusing on a narrow idea
of what is desirable, we
have rendered ourselves all
but impotent.

Architecture
as a Universal
Language

Marshall Berman

Within a number of differ-
ent occupations, my gen-
eration — the ’60s or New
Left generation — prac-
ticed a form of what plan-
ners came to call advocacy
planning. Planners lent
themselves to the com-

munity movement, assuming
not only that it was possi-
bale to determine what “the
people” wanted, but also
that one could think in
terms of the interests and
welfare of “the people” as
a whole. Then, during the
’70s and ’80s, what we had
thought of as “the people”
disintegrated into an infi-
nite number of distinct
interest groups.

In a recent New York
Times Magazine article,
“The Secession of the
Successful,” Robert Reich
wrote that today, when
people talk about their
community, they use the
’60s rhetoric of community
control and power to the
people, and that to a great
extent language that origi-
nally expressed a challenge
to traditional political sys-
tems has now been incor-
porated into practical
reviews. But today, Reich
notes, “community” almost

Is placelessness
a problem, and
if so, what sort?

— Marshall Berman

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always means "people of my ethnic group and income level," whatever those happen to be, and the people must skilful in using this language tend to be those in the highest income sectors.

The idea of recovering the sense of connection between the immigrant city and the advanced urban economy touches upon a perennial moral as well as political question. How can we see the connection between ourselves and other people who are less well-off than we, who speak a different language and whose lives we do not immediately understand? It seems to me similar to the question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" As such, I think it must be asked anew in every epoch, maybe in every generation, and translated into a different language of immediate social practice.

How to rediscover the sense of connection? The building in which we are meeting is built along one of the places where these connections are most visible: 14th Street — one of the best public spaces in New York and a place that really does bring together people of different classes and ethnic groups.

An interesting feature of this building is that it is like a bunker. Nearly impermeable, it neither opens to the street nor connects with it at all; it could be in Nebraska, Brazil, or even underground. Its impermeable and pliable qualities embody a twisted notion of the aesthetics of the International Style. Yet that aesthetics and its accompanying metaphysics were meant to, and in some ways really do, bring people together. Placedessens can create the possibility for people to come inside a building anywhere and forget where they are, yet in some way it also enables people to talk together.

Accompanying the International Style was the idea of an international language in which people who had not communicated before now could, and in new ways. I admire that aesthetic and its implicit goal of world communication. So while I am perfectly happy to criticize this building, I still think it is important to remember the goal its peculiar bunker feeling was meant, and I think failed, to fulfill.

Were there to be a consensus in architecture and planning now, it should be to help forge some new world culture and communication. But we cannot fully do that unless we can get out to the street.