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The Echo of History

Henry Millon

more urbane notions — the Gothic quads of Princeton, the “yards” of Harvard, the “typologies” of Yale, the red-tile roofs of Stanford.

A Winning Formula

The idea for the Campus Guides series originated in 1995, with the first titles appearing in 1997. Since then, Princeton Architectural Press has produced, on average, two or three new volumes a year. According to Nancy Eklund Later, the current series editor, the guides are primarily intended to “give students and alumni a sense of the place. This sense of bonding is what a college is all about.”

Most of the books achieve this goal nicely. After a series of forwards and introductory essays, each proceeds to a series of walks. In most volumes, these are organized by precinct, but in others, such as that for Stanford, they trace the development of the campus through time.

At IIT (a small campus) there are three walks; at larger campuses there may be as many as ten or eleven. Each walk is generally preceded by a short thematic description, and each building along the way is credited and fully described. Graphically, each guide also contains a handsome colored axonometric of the entire campus, and important buildings and spaces are photographed, sometimes quite evocatively.

Many of the universities selected, Later explains, come from a wish list of campuses whose architectural and planning history have known merit. In other instances, however, universities and colleges have contacted PAP, asking that it produce a guide, sometimes in honor of a special occasion. Of the authors and photographers involved, some, like the campus historian Paul Turner, have been recruited from among known scholars. In other

cases, relatively unknown contributors — often professors at the college in question — have been discovered, who have already done much of the work needed on their own time.

IIT was selected for the most recent volume because PAP felt it had not paid enough attention to Modernist planning ideas, concentrating almost exclusively on more romantic and/or classical campus schemes. In this regard, an important part of the IIT book is a lengthy essay on the legacy of Mies Van de Rohe — from the Bauhaus to Crown Hall.

The book also corresponds with IIT’s own renewal of interest in its campus. For years the institute was content to rest on the laurels of the Mies plan. But it recently undertook a major landscape improvement program. Two buildings for a new century are also now complete — a student center by Rem Koolhaas, and dorms by Helmut Jahn — both occupying extremely difficult sites beneath and adjacent to elevated mass-transit tracks.

According to current plans, the IIT book will be followed later this year by guides to the University of Chicago and Smith College. Other campuses documented in the series include Harvard, Stanford, Yale, Princeton, Duke, Rice, Virginia, California Berkeley, Washington, UCLA, Columbia, Cranbrook, Cincinnati, West Point, Pennsylvania, Phillips Academy Andover, Vassar, Dartmouth and Oberlin.

The mid-1960s were tumultuous years for universities and institutions in much of the world. Increasing numbers of students sought entry to universities with overburdened and inadequate facilities. Students, reinforced by members of the staff and the general public, made clamorous appeals and demands that university administrations and government ministries institute structural and curricular reforms, in addition to expanding the university system. While the urgency of their appeals may now largely have faded into history, it is important to remember how seminal this period was in terms of reformulating the relationships between the university and society at large.

In 1966, in the midst of the turmoil, the Program in Urban Territorial Planning in the School of Architecture at the University of Venice undertook a research project to address some conceptual and physical aspects of the crisis in higher education throughout the world. The project sought to examine the planning and buildings that were needed in founding new universities and institutes, as well as enlarging those already existing. This multivalent research program eventually resulted in an influential book, *Pianificazione e Disegno delle Università*, edited by the architect Giancarlo De Carlo, who was in the midst of replanning the University of Urbino, a dispersed university, with residential facilities.

The volume was organized in four parts. The first was an urbane introduction by De Carlo to a full range of problems, issues and considerations that govern the planning and construction of new university buildings and campuses. The second, by Luciano De Rosa and Piergiorgio Semerano, presented illustrative materials — photos, charts, tables,

etc. — and comparative data drawn from information solicited from many diverse nations. A third part assembled a series of essays on directions and prospects for planning and architectural design found in the UK, USA, Soviet Union, Germany, Japan, Switzerland and France — countries where university design had been most forthrightly confronted. The last part gave a comprehensive indexed bibliography on urban and architectural planning and design of universities in both concept and form.

Today, it is the second half of De Carlo's pithy introduction that remains most telling and provocative as we continue to address the problems of university campus expansion. De Carlo's comments focused on the situation in Italy, utilizing when necessary the report of the commission of inquiry into the state of public instruction there. That report seemed to have overlooked important issues related to the location and construction of new university structures at various sites in Italy. De Carlo addressed these by posing a series of hypothetical questions. Following are some of the thoughtful nuanced responses formulated by De Carlo at the time.

- The structures that house Italian universities are overwhelmingly inadequate. There is no relationship between the location of universities and the distribution of population. Encased as they are mostly in ancient centers, existing universities have no possibility for development.
- Public investment in university buildings should seek to eliminate the congestion found around the urban centers in the north and center/south of Italy to produce a redistribution of activities in metropolitan areas

that gravitate around those centers. University activities should also be redistributed to reinforce the general policy of decentralization.

- A program of relocation of sites for universities should consider first the distribution of population in an area, the character of the area, the level of development, the scope of facilities, the accessibility of the site the surrounding conditions, and the qualities of the environment. The population should be large enough that the university may serve as an enhancement or reanimating force in the area.

- Which of the known models found in the organization of universities — campus, university complex, university dispersed by schools — is the most appropriate model for Italy? Not a question to ask, says De Carlo. Italy needs a new model that corresponds to the social and organizational needs of the contemporary university and to the relationship to be established within the enclosing physical environment.

- Support facilities can be divided into four fundamental categories in relation to the degree of interaction between them and the enclosing environment: shared, general, specific and specialized. A large city can offer many shared support facilities and even in some cases, general facilities.

- A program or plan for the university that is explicit about detailed and general objectives should be offered to the urban and architectural designer of a university. It should be equally detailed about the organizational structures that will govern the functioning of the university.

- Is it desirable to establish general, normalized criteria for urban and architectural design with the intention of unifying the results? No. Ensure the widest space possible for experimentation. Generalized norms are useless, and even dangerous, because they cannot have derived from study already undertaken and verified, and because they will inevitably be preconceptions.

Much has changed in the 36 years since *Pianificazione e Disegno delle Università* appeared. Nevertheless, the De Carlo volume remains a remarkably wide-ranging documentation of issues confronting the planning of buildings for higher education. A historical document prepared in the midst of a controversial period, it offered a critical yet optimistic examination of the ways to take advantage of university building to bring about complementary environmental and social change.

Giancarlo De Carlo (ed.). *Pianificazione e Disegno delle Università*. Rome: Edizioni Universitarie Italiane, 1968.