disP 2017 Kolumne 2

March 29th 2017. I am writing this at University College London on the fateful day of the delivery at lunchtime of a letter from the British Prime Minister to the President of the European Council, precipating the departure of the United Kingdom from the Union. All around me there's an atmosphere of anger, gloom and exasperation at seeing the beloved country take such a wrong turning. How much better, thirty years back, was the spirit in which Klaus Kunzmann and Patsy Healey convened their friends from around Europe at Schloss Cappenberg to plan the launch the Association of European Schools of Planning. The success of their AESOP initiative shows what can be achieved by framing issues at a pan-European scale. And the Association's partner-journal *disP* is a constant reminder, thanks again to the advocacy of Klaus Kunzmann, that recognition of this regional unity doesn't by any means imply suppression of mother-tongue variety.

More of Prof. Dr. Kuzmann later, but let me continue this *Kolumne* where the last left off, ruminating on the many different ways in which a planning movement that's forward-looking by definition has construed its own past. We touched on the curious case of Sir Christopher Wren's baroque design for the rebuilding of London after the Great Fire of 1666, a document of marginal significance in the history of London, which somehow took on a life of its own in planning literature. The myth of the Wren plan came into currency in the early eighteenth century, was promoted by his descendants and admirers, and reigned supreme in the nineteenth century as an archetype of great collective vision frustrated by private greed. Not till the 1930s did it encounter serious revisionist challenge when a professional historian, T. F Reddaway, went back to the archives for a better understanding of London's resilient recovery after the catastrophe of the Great Fire.

The myth of the Wren plan illustrates a more general penchant for narratives that would justify Modernism's rupture with the past - *tabula rasa* - as

inexorable historical necessity. Wolfgang Sonne (another TU Dortmund colleague) and I once made an entertaining list of works that commence by chronicling the history of the city and end with the call for its destruction.[1] Our list of historicists included Ernst Egli, Erwin Gutkind, Siegfried Giedion, Frederick Hiorns, Arthur Korn, Marcel Lods, Lewis Mumford and Eliel Saarinen. Gutkind's case was prodigious. His *International History of City Development* – published in eight volumes and more than 4,000 pages between 1964 and 1972 – was the largest celebration of the historical diversity of towns and town planning. But he arrived at a conclusion of extraordinary pessimism, arguing that dense urban populations must be dispersed, and nature allowed to grow where streets and buildings once stood. A conception of the city that served for 5000 years had become obsolete. "It is our task, at once inspiring and terrifying, to begin a new chapter in the history of human settlement." [2]

Well, that historically-ordained task, as Gutkind perceived it, was thankfully overtaken by events. Fifty years on the Modernist avant-garde with its inspiring, terrifying sense of mission has marched into history and its legacy has become part of our shared past. They who scorned heritage have become heritage. Last November I participated in Docomomo Ibérico IX, a three day event in the Centro Carlos Santamaría of San Sebastian, Donostia to the locals. It was fascinating to watch younger urbanists engage passionately with the older generation of modernists whose life-work was up for discussion. One theme was the role of architecture and urbanism in the Iberian transitions to democracy towards the end of the last century. Another less obvious theme was the Modernist legacy from the mid-century epochs of Generalissimo Franco and Dr. Salazar, not least in those dense industrial valleys of the Basque Country. The conference firmly demonstrated the paradoxical claim of twentieth century patrimony to heritage status - as affirmed in ICOMOS's 2011 Charter of Madrid. [3]

Of course, there are tensions in the conservation within an urban fabric of designs that denied and sought to destroy it. In my Docomomo paper I talked particularly about the reorientation to streetscape and the pedestrian realm street of buildings conceived entirely around vehicle access, and about issues

arising from innovative forms and materials - flat roofs, asbestos insulation, reinforced concrete, *dalle de verre* glass - that have not stood the test of time. But there's no shortage of examples of successful refurbishment, conversion and reuse, including rehabilitation to modern standards of energy performance. Paradoxically, heritage methodology has revealed Vitruvian qualities of permanence in the work of an architectural generation who, in their day, made a fetish of 'obsolescence' and the 60-year life of buildings.[4]

In Britain protection of Modern Movement heritage falls to the Twentieth Century Society. They (or as a member should I say 'we') run a most impressive programme of visits, tours, lectures and publications, as well as casework on protection of heritage site and buildings. Seen from today's perspective, this branch of conservation evokes values as much as aesthetics. Whether in housing, churches, schools, factories or railway stations, Modern Movement enviornments embodied an optimism about societal choice, rational planning, and shared humanism. One of their most appealling aspects, to our eyes, is the continuing influence of the Bauhaus *Gesamtkunstwerk* through public scupture, stained glass, textiles, furnishings, murals and bas-reliefs: art at the service of a collective democratic spirit. Earlier this year the Twentieth Century Society issued its annual list of buildings at risk, with a warning that 'some of Britain's most remarkable buildings are in danger of being lost for ever as development pressures, dwindling budgets and short termism fuel an "out with the old, in with the new" mentality. We are witnessing the death of the idealism and public-spiritedness which underpinned so much of the best architecture of the last century'. [5]

Klaus Kunzmann has seen plenty of postwar buildings replaced by *ersatz* historical reconstructions in his own country, and more than enough consumerist pastiche on his travels through China. He knows his history and brilliantly communicates the virtues of idealism and public-spiritedness through planning. I am delighted that the present issue of *disP* is compiled in celebration of such a great European all-rounder.

[1] Michael Hebbert and Wolfgang Sonne, 'History Builds the Town: on the uses of History in Twentieth Century City Planning' in F Javier Monclús and Manuel Guàrdia eds, *Culture, Urbanism and Planning*, Aldershot: Ashgate pp.3-20

[2] Erwin Anton Gutkind (1964) *International History of City Development*, vol. 1, *Urban Development in Central Europe,* London: Collier-Macmillan, p. 6.

[3] ICOMOS (2011) *Approaches for the Conservation of Twentieth-Century Architectural Heritage*, Madrid Document of the ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Twentieth-Century Heritage http://icomos- isc20c.org/id13.html.

[4] Daniel M. Abramson (2016) *Obsolescence, an Architectural History*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press

[5] Twentieth Century Society (2017) *C20 Announces Top 10 Buildings At Risk.* Press release available at: http://us3.campaignarchive2.com/?u=7adb63f2f9ad941a4a0c08eb7&id=4d4adc6563&e=bf37be28cb