

aiaVT



The aiaVT newsletter is published by AIA Vermont,  
the Vermont Chapter of the  
American Institute of Architects.

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## president's column

*David Epstein, AIA  
2005 President AIAVT*

Hanne Williams, Michael Hoffman and I attended the 2005 AIA Grassroots Conference in Washington, DC from February 9 -12. This is a yearly conference for component officers and directors that focuses on the three major themes of the AIA Strategic Plan:

- *Advocacy*
- *Community*
- *Knowledge*

AIA National has done a good job refocusing its mission into these three categories. Over the last few years, it has proven to be a simple and effective way to organize and communicate the goals and programs of the Institute. For more about AIA National's 2005-2006 Strategic Plan visit [www.aia.org](http://www.aia.org).

This month, I'd like to focus my column on *Advocacy*. As the voice of our profession, AIA is ramping up its efforts to shape public policy at the national level. The emphasis is much wider than buildings; it is on creating healthy, livable communities. Through the efforts of its in-house lobbyists, PAC (ArchiPAC), and grassroots advocacy, the AIA wants to expand its influence and stature in the decision making process as a way of improving our communities.

**cont.**

*excerpt from  
'Rem Koolhaas' Generic City  
- and a modernist dilemma of 'urbanisation' vs. 'urbanity' in avantgarde architecture  
- a recap of modernism's troublesome urbanism in the architectural sphere?'*

This text was written in 1997 and revised in June 1999 as part of the theses project  
"The Informational City and the Street as Urban Form"  
**Bo Grönlund**

### **Urbanism doesn't exist - it is only an ideology....**

Rem Koolhaas' is one of the more influential architects today. He is one of the leading European architects of the 1990s, carrying out large city projects like the new Eurolink station district in Lille, city development in Asia, redesigning of the Universal Studios in Los Angeles, and the extension of the centre of the new town Almere in his native country, The Netherlands. He is also an estimated lecturer at architectural schools around the world.

To me Koolhaas is undermining the interest for 'urbanity' in the architectural world in a tricky way, through his own contribution to a

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**3.05:1**

left to right: John Connell, David Epstein, Senator Patrick Leahy, Micheal Hoffman, Hannah Williams



## aiaVT welcomes

jesse robbins, assoc. aia of burlington

For Hanne, Michael and I, our indoctrination began well before we arrived. More than in the past, this year the AIA solicited input from members on what issues were important to them and matched those with the bills that are working their way through Congress. They also sent us Issue Briefs on these topics for review. At our first general session, we received pointers on how to be effective in our meetings with our legislators the following day.

On Thursday, we made our way to Capitol Hill to meet with Senator Leahy, Senator Jeffords and Representative Sanders. Although this is my second year making these visits, I still marvel at the access we all have to our legislators. Hanne, Michael and I joked that we had one of the easiest jobs of any component because our congressional delegation is so aligned with the values of architects and the AIA.

Our first meeting was with Michael Behan, a senior staffer with Bernie Sanders. aiaVT has had a great relationship with Rep. Sanders, co-sponsoring an energy roundtable in 2003 and testifying on behalf of windpower last year. As we did with all of our meetings, we began by reiterating our values, thanking them for their efforts and offering our assistance. We then asked them for their support for specific bills. We always related the issues back to Vermont and to the issues facing our home State. With Michael, this discussion included a National Trust for Affordable Housing Bill that their office is sponsoring and that the AIA supports.

We also had a great meeting with Senator Jeffords and his staff. Sen. Jeffords is no stranger to the world of architecture. His grandfather was and his daughter is an architect. He has also sponsored the creation of a national Office of Green Design

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further ideological mess about 'the urban'.  
When Rem Koolhaas in the 1990s in a witty way defies urbanism as ideology, he echoes Castells two decades earlier, though without Castells' clear ambition of scientific precision:  
"Urbanism doesn't exist. It is only an ideology in Marx's sense of the word. Architecture really exists, like Coca-Cola: Though coated with ideology, it is a real production, falsely satisfying a falsified need. Urbanism is comparable to the advertising propagated around Coca-Cola - pure spectacular ideology. Modern capitalism which organised the reduction of all social life to a spectacle, is incapable of presenting any spectacle other than that of our own alienation. Its urbanistic dream is its masterpiece." (Koolhaas and Mau: S,M,L,XL, 1995)  
Referring instead, not to urbanism but to architecture - which more directly can be seen, touched and 'consumed' - doesn't take you far, but Koolhaas doesn't stop here. In texts like 'The contemporary city' (1988), 'What ever happened to urbanism' (1994) and 'The generic city' (1994) he put forward views on the late 20th c. city, that is

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to promote sustainable building practices, which he reassured us would be re-introduced this session. We also received his support for the inclusion of a community based planning provision for TEA-21, a comprehensive transportation bill that will also be re-introduced this session.

Our final meeting was with Sen. Leahy and his staff. This was more of a photo opportunity session aptly named the "Green Mountain Coffee Hour." In our preparatory sessions, we had been warned to be brief, and this was a case in point. A vote was occurring on the Senate floor and Senator Leahy had to excuse himself. However, we were able to discuss our concerns and issues with his staff at length.

Our visits were but one kind of advocacy. There is much to do at the State and at the local level to make our communities livable. Architects are credible experts who can be leaders in shaping policy. At aiaVT, we will be reexamining our role and exploring ways we can engage our State government to make a better environment for architects to practice and better places for people to work and live.

## Did You Know...

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simultaneously a diffusion of what meaning there might be left in the words 'the city' (in definite form, as he says), a praise of the present condition, and a dream of a more consequent 'urbanism' - the Koolhaas' way.

#### 'The Generic City'

In Koolhaas' understanding, the contemporary city is 'the generic city'. The word 'generic', as it is denoted in standard dictionaries, has at least a double meaning: it is general for a whole group or class of phenomena or species, and it has no particularly distinctive quality or application. As I understand Koolhaas, he means that the urban is now so pervasive, that old ways of thinking about cities is not relevant any more. To Koolhaas The 'generic city', then, is an expression of general urbanisation. Some of its important aspects are listed below, including interesting, but highly generalised observations:

Koolhaas' 'generic city' is a displacement to the urban periphery, a territory that can no longer be called suburbia, distorted and stretched beyond precedent, big enough for all, and with a remarkable ingenuity in avoiding urbanistic rules. Density is on the decrease, moments spaced far apart, the calmer, the more 'pure' - in a way a voluntary house arrest. The skyscraper is the definitive typology, as towers can exist everywhere, spaced so not to interact. The generic city is the city without history, without layers, superficial like a film studio, in a process of never ending self-destruction and renewal. This city is liberated from the captivity of the centre and of identity. In this city you see homogenisation, endless repetitions of the same structural module, still more varied boredom, redundancy, and déjà vu, but also a city that is fractal, discontinuous, made up of enclaves, seemingly accidental and disorderly. Its most popular sites are associated with sex and misconduct. The generic city is also multiracial and multi-

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# 3.05:3

## project engages housing professionals on neighborhood development

*evan goldsmith, assoc. director  
Vermont Forum on Sprawl*

The Vermont Neighborhoods Project has wrapped up the design and feasibility phase of its work in three Addison County communities. Partnering with developers, realtors, landscape architects, municipal officials, lenders and the public; the Vermont Forum on Sprawl successfully created financially feasible neighborhood site design plans for three parcels of land within, or adjacent to, community centers in Middlebury, Shoreham and Vergennes. These plans demonstrate that development within or contiguous to already-developed areas can provide high-quality, desirable housing that enhances and enriches the existing community.

A 2002 Housing Market survey by the Vermont Forum on Sprawl showed that over 60% of people looked for homes or lots in a village center, city, or urban residential neighborhood prior to making their decision to buy or rent a home. Also, 24% of all people looking for housing would be willing to move to a home in one of these areas today if that housing option was available.

### The Public Design Process

Through a series of two-stage design charrettes, the team worked with the communities of Vergennes, Middlebury, Shoreham to get input on what each community envisions for the property and what is considered acceptable development. More than 100 people participated in these public design meetings in the three communities. Project partners used this as the foundation to create the site plans, and analyzed data for financial feasibility. Partners then created a set of plans that each community evaluated at a regional design charrette. Through this 'back and forth' process between the team and the community, we developed a set of financially feasible plans that met each community's needs.

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cultural, flexible diversity, aesthetic 'free style', and lots of mirrors. It may have mass tourism, but the streets are dead and the public realm has been evacuated in the favour of cars, highways and speed. In-transit condition has become universal. This city is made up of roads, buildings and nature. Supremely inorganic, its main carrier of identity is organic myth, where the vegetal is transformed into Edenic residue - at the same time refuge of the illegal, the uncontrollable, and subject to endless manipulation - its immoral lushness compensates for the generic city's other poverties. This city is everywhere. In America, Asia, Europe, Australia, Africa the city

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# 3.05:4



*Vergennes Site Design Perspective, Vermont Neighborhoods Project*

In talking about housing types and densities, community members enjoyed and understood comparisons drawn from their own village patterns. Although many communities have an 18th or 19th century village at its heart, contemporary zoning regulations have been adopted that promote (often unknowingly) suburban style development. Build-out plans reflecting existing zoning regulations were particularly useful in helping people think about how to develop a better site plan. Understanding the fundamental dimensions and relationships of historic village patterns often helps people question the common view that less development and lower density is always a better solution. Using examples from their own community and other Vermont villages was particularly effective in conveying this message.

Ultimately, each of these partner communities and developers will determine how to proceed in developing these parcels. The Vermont Neighborhoods Project has catalyzed this process and our partners continue to serve as a resource to the communities. The three site plans can be viewed on the Vermont Forum on Sprawl website under the Vermont Neighborhoods Project ([www.vtsprawl.org](http://www.vtsprawl.org)).

Project partners are now working with aiaVT and other housing professionals to explore neighborhood development opportunities around the State. Working together, we will analyze the latest housing market data, review successful approaches to neighborhood developments, examine financing options and explore solutions to regulatory obstacles

The Vermont Neighborhoods Project is led by Evan Goldsmith, the Forum's Associate Director and a Steering Committee. Members include: Kenn Sassarossi, Housing Vermont, Inc.; Nancy Nye Consulting, Inc. Community Development Consultants; Ken Perine, National Bank of Middlebury; Miro Weinberger, The Hartland Group; Michael Wenrich, Truex Cullins Architects; Robert Hill, Vermont Association of Realtors, and: Dave Adams, Vermont Housing Finance Agency.

To get a copy of the new Vermont Neighborhoods Project publication, or for more information about the Project, contact Evan at (802) 864-6310 or [egoldsmith@vtsprawl.org](mailto:egoldsmith@vtsprawl.org)

Design Charrettes: Shoreham; Vermont Neighborhoods Project



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has come to the country. The 'generic city' is what is left over after large sections of urban life crossed over into cyberspace. Koolhaas also says: "According to Derrida we cannot be WHOLE, according to Baudrillard we cannot be REAL, according to Virilio we cannot be THERE" ( 'Whatever happen to urbanism', 1994). According to Koolhaas this 'generic city' contain an unrecognised beauty worthy of further contemplation and he accepts the contemporary situation ('the generic city') as a starting point for architectural work. He also mentions the 'generic city' as a global liberation movement against definite character. In Wired (1996:7) he sums up: "People can inhabit

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**3.05:5**

Vergennes Ortho Photo, Vermont Neighborhoods Project



Vergennes Site Design Plan, Vermont Neighborhoods Project

anything. And they can be miserable in anything. More and more I think architecture has nothing to do with it. Of course, that's both liberating and alarming. But the generic city, the general urban condition, is happening everywhere, and just the fact that it occurs in such enormous quantities must mean that it's habitable. Architecture can't do anything that the culture doesn't. We all complain that we are confronted by urban environments that are completely similar. We say we want to create beauty, identity, quality, singularity. And yet, maybe in truth these cities that we have are desired. Maybe their very characterlessness provides the best context for living".

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**3.05:6**

## aia-sponsored conference a success: efficiency vermont's 'better buildings by design 2005' draws record numbers



Peter Romaniello talks to conference attendees about lighting technology.



Conference attendees gather to chat between workshops.



Architects, Engineers and Builders network during lunch at the conference

On February 9-10, aiaVT once again partnered with Efficiency Vermont to present the region's top conference on building durability, efficiency and value. Held at the Sheraton Burlington, the Better Buildings By Design 2005 Conference brought together more than 900 of the region's top design professionals and construction trades people to hear from industry leaders on high performance commercial and residential buildings. AIA members were well represented, with individuals attending from numerous firms throughout Vermont and from neighboring states. As in past years, conference attendees were eligible to earn AIA continuing education credits.

AIA was also well-represented among presenters, including keynote speaker Bert Gregory, AIA, President and CEO of Mithun, a Seattle-based architecture, design and planning firm and a national leader in resource-sensitive and environmentally intelligent design. In addition to his keynote address, *Making the Business Case for Sustainability*, Mr. Gregory presented a workshop entitled From Green Buildings to Green Neighborhoods: Better Health, Livability, and the Bottom-Line.

Marc Cohen, AIA, Senior Project Architect of California's CTG Energetics, lead a workshop discussing the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) design, documentation and review process. Mr. Cohen also presented a seminar on strategies for development of environmentally conscious lighting systems, with a focus on LEED compliance. Vermont's Donna Leban, AIA, of Light Space/Design presented a guide to lighting controlling, dimming and daylighting in a comprehensive range of commercial and residential applications. Presenting two sessions was Oregon's Nathan Good, AIA of Nathan Good, Architect. Mr. Good explored eco-charrettes as a means to achieving integrated design and sustainability as well as a case study of a net-zero energy home.

Information from this year's conference, including downloadable presentation transcripts, will be available through [www.encyvermont.com](http://www.encyvermont.com) in coming weeks.

### Let go of melancholic notions of loss of public space, loss of urbanity, loss of communication...

Globalisation will make us strangers everywhere, Koolhaas says, and the electronic onslaught tends to dissolve anything physical. He therefore thinks, that we maybe should stop looking for any kind of glue to hold cities together. His conclusion is that the only judgement that could be made, are judgements of taste and of aesthetics, and when architects recognise this, they can let go of melancholic notions of loss of public space, loss of urbanity, loss of communication, and so forth: "I think we are stuck with this idea of the street and the plaza as public domain, but the public domain is radically changing...with television and the media and a whole series of other inventions, you

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# 3.05:7

## truex cullins & partners wins energy efficient design competition for dubois and king corporate headquarters

Truex Cullins & Partners Architects received the Excellence in Comprehensive Building Design Award at the Better Buildings by Design Conference. The conference, sponsored by Efficiency Vermont, was held February 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> at the Sheraton Hotel and Conference Center in Burlington. The award was presented to the Burlington-based firm in recognition of the new DuBois & King Corporate Headquarters Office Building located in historic downtown Randolph, Vermont. The building successfully achieves an "innovative approach to integrating energy efficiency improvements into a comprehensive, high-performance design."

Truex Cullins & Partners Architects collaborated with the engineering firm of DuBois & King to implement sustainable design features such as special light-reflecting blinds that reduce glare while increasing natural light in office spaces, occupancy sensors and a lighting dimming system to reduce electrical use, and the location of skylights and windows to maximize daylight penetration deep into the building. Improved mechanical systems include an HVAC system designed to recover 80% of heating/cooling energy exhausted from the building and sensors located on the rooftop to limit the amount of air conditioning needed. Fiberglass windows with insulated frames and triple-glazing and a very tight, super-insulated wall and roof system work to reduce heating and cooling costs. All of these features enhance employee comfort and health, significantly reduce operating costs and conserve natural resources.

In addition to integrating sustainable design improvements, the building was also designed to respect the historic nature of its neighborhood. The building conforms



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could say that the public domain is lost. But you could also say, that it's now so pervasive it does not need physical articulation any more. I think the truth is somewhere in between. But we as architects still look at it in terms of a nostalgic model, and in an incredibly moralistic sense, refuse signs of its being reinvented in other populist or more commercial terms.... you can go to these cities and bemoan the absence of a public realm, but as architects it is better for us to bemoan the utter incompetence of the buildings." (Koolhaas 'Conversations with students' 1996 p 45, also see p. 41, 61 and 64) It is not quite clear, how much of Koolhaas' simplified but thought

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# 3.05:8

to the setbacks, rhythm and scale of its neighbors and blends in well with respect to its materials. The new structure recalls the memory of the old village school it replaced with the color and type of brick, the white color of the metal panels, the relative size and configuration of the windows and the overall scale of the building.

The design team included the following consultants, Owner: Randolph Area Community Development Corporation, Randolph, VT; Civil, Structural, Mechanical, Electrical Engineering: DuBois & King, Williston & Randolph, VT; Energy Efficiency Partner: Efficiency Vermont, Burlington, VT; General Contractor: Professional Construction, South Burlington, VT; Mechanical Contractor: Thomas Mechanical, South Burlington, VT; Electrical Contractor: Cole Electric, East Thetford, VT; Building Insulation: Foam-Tech, div of H.C. Fennell Co., East Thetford, VT; Masonry: HOK Masonry, Johnson, VT.

Truex Cullins & Partners Architects, one of Vermont's largest firms, has been doing business regionally, nationally, and internationally since 1968.

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provoking views shall be taken for face value. In Wired 1996:7 Koolhaas says "There is an enormous, deliberate, and - I think - healthy discrepancy between what I write and what I do". Koolhaas own large projects, like his competition entry for the district of Melun-Sénart outside of Paris preferably take landscape preservation and landscape architecture as a point of departure, not social relations or the city of built forms. He sees empty space and urban voids as principally important. They are easier to control, and they can draw general support from everyone. But, if you look for specific city qualities, in Koolhaas of the 1990s, as in Castells of the 1970s, not much of the urban is left at the end, I think, though there might be a gathering of diverse and partly contradictory forms and functions to create a deliberate 'congestion' and/or an interesting skyline.

#### **The death of planning.....**

In Koolhaas opinion, the 'generic city' also means the death of planning, because planning no longer makes any difference. Paradoxically, he says, urbanism (as planning practice) disappears at the moment of general urbanisation. To Koolhaas this happens because urbanism has been unable to invent and implement at the scale demanded by urban growth and demographic change. We are therefore now left with a world without urbanism, only architecture, ever more architecture. As a consequence university departments are closed, offices bankrupted, bureaucracies fired or privatised, he says, and we have a crises for urban planning and urban planning education. The last observations are simiklar to my own: Changes for the planning profession have been seen in many countries since the mid 1980s, including Scandinavia, as can be witnessed in different architectural an planning journals, difficulties in recruiting new

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students and the closing down, restructuring or privatisation of public planning and research agencies. Some of the one's I know about are: in England, e.g. The Centre for Environmental Studies and the London County Council was closed down, in Denmark the state planning agency was split up as well as and the Copenhagen metropolitan regional planning, the building research institute partly privatised, and planning and urban design departments closed in on of the two schools of architecture. In Sweden the state planning agencies were fused and de-centralised to a provincial town, The Stockholm metropolitan regional planning was partly privatised, and the building research institute dissolved.

#### **The post-modern planning of nostalgia, by architects like Leon Krier.....**

Not only the planning attempt of modernism has failed, but even more what Koolhaas calls the post-modern planning of nostalgia, by architects like Leon Krier.

Koolhaas' critique of Leon Krier et al seems to be built first of all on the claim, that the 1970s and 80s city building is based on a model of the premodern (Koolhaas calls it 'classical') European city that have not succeeded in getting very much done. The reasons for this, Koolhaas sees as the lack to recognise the determinants of what actually gets built (i.e. the contemporary conditions of economics, politics, technology, etc.). The Krier urbanism of perimeter blocks, walls, streets, plazas, images of order and continuity, etc. is therefore not credible. Attempts at pedestrianisation (e.g. Bofill's in Marne-la-Vallée), doesn't work either, according to Koolhaas. The post-modern urbanism builds on a nostalgic model, including simulated community and the illusion of involvement and control, that leads to irrelevance. Or as Koolhaas says: "For urbanists, the belated rediscovery of the virtues of the classical city at the moment of their definitive impossibility may have been the point of no return, the fatal moment of disconnection, disqualification. Dissatisfaction with the contemporary city has not lead to the development of a credible alternative. (See Koolhaas: The Contemporary city, 1989; 'Beyond Delirious' 1994; 'Whatever happened to urbanism' 1994) in Koolhaas & Mau 1995; Nesbitt 1996. Also see Koolhaas 'Conversation with students' 1996)

#### **Cities can no longer be made....we have only fragments of modernity...**

The profession persists in its fantasies, its ideology, its pretension, .... but will never re-establish control. Cities can no longer be made." According to Koolhaas, the chaos aesthetics of the 'Coop Himmelblau' kind doesn't work either, because chaos can't be fabricated. Modern architecture by the soviet constructivist Leonidov, Mies van der Rohe, and the USA of the 1920s and 30s is the starting point for Koolhaas architectural ideas, but he is also critical of modernism. His comments on outdoor spatial issues of modernism are rather few, though. In the later texts I comment upon here, Koolhaas mentions the residual green of early modernism as "controlled neatness with a moralistic assertion of good intentions, discouraging association, use", but otherwise there is very little. According to Nesbitt, a significant part of Koolhaas' critique (of modernism) is the idea that while 'purity' (for example, the closure or definition of the autonomous object) may have been desirable in modern buildings, it caused disorienting problems at the urban scale. (Nesbitt 1996 p 326).

Koolhaas himself says that the most visionary modern urban planing was Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City of the early 1930s, that to me did away with urbanity almost completely. On Mies, Le Corbusier and Leonidov, he remarks on the extraordinary incongruity between the perfection and instant completeness in their architectural plans, and the inflexible, nearly infantile simplicity of their urban projects on 'tabula rasa', imagined as if the complexity of daily life could be accommodated right away. To me, who think modernism dominates very large parts of our cities, it sound strange when Koolhaas claims: "Except in certain airport and a few patches of urban peripheries, the image of the modern city has nowhere been realised. We have only fragments of modernity. The urban program didn't come off." Thus Koolhaas insists on withholding judgement on modern urbanism's potential. As I understand Koolhaas, what didn't take off was modernism as an aesthetic program at the urban scale.

#### **Koolhaas' new urbanism**

Today Koolhaas says, he has become more critical of the aesthetic program of modernism, as the abstractions and repetitions of modernism seems both interesting and boring, and maybe more important, because modernism itself might be seen as nostalgia. Instead he seeks the openly experimental and new. In certain conditions it should e.g. be possible to build new like the Forbidden (and now destroyed) Chinese City in Hongkong - very dense, flexible and provisional. And concerning the suburbs, new towns, and edge cities in metropolitan areas like Paris, maybe Disneyland could be used as "an exaggerated metaphor for the potential of those towns - the entertainment, the freedom, the kind of life. ..In isolation, all those places are relatively underprivileged, but strung together, they could form an enormous battery of modern events, modern phenomena, modern conditions, that could be very attractive", although he doesn't give much clue to how it could be done. Taken together, Koolhaas seems to propose a new urbanism as a kind of reformed or improved modernism, understood at the urban level first of all as a process, and not as a stable, recognisable architectural setting. Koolhaas' urban dream is about architectural uncertainty, freedom from formal coherence, complexity, densification, flexibility, potential, diversification, redistribution, change, vitality, emptiness and congestion, as well as montages of incredibly complex programs. As key words, they are clearly interesting to me from an urban point of view, but rather empty if not further specified.

*"This text remains as published and has not been edited by aiaVT."*

# **3.05:10**