

The Museum of Modern Art

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The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies:

No. 47F

The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies was set up in 1967 as an attempt to broaden the role played by professional architects and planners in determining the physical form of the public environment. It was established for the purpose of developing methods procedures and models which would be capable of being directly applied to the improvement of the existing urban context.

The Institute over the last five years has come to see its public role as one in which its energies should be directed toward arbitrating between conflicting interests, rather than toward advocating the interests of a particular group. In this, it has formulated its primary task as that of helping to reconcile and to formally synthesize the often opposed interests of many different constituencies from the large public agency to the individual client, from the sometimes stereotyped solipsism of a professional attitude to the highly pragmatic concerns of the contractor or developer.

The Institute's concern for maintaining the quality of the public environment and for the part that aggregate built form must inevitably play in determining this quality has led it over the past five years to finally focus its attention on two main issues. First the methodical development of objective criteria for the programmatic determination of the content of such aggregate form; and second, on the formulation of a method for the manipulating this form in a coherent, consistent and fruitful manner. Both these issues have naturally involved The Institute in research undertakings which have since led it to investigate not only the socio-economic base of particular building patterns, (such as low rise high density housing) but also the specific mediatory function that such a composite form may perform in restructuring of the immediate public environment.

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In our opinion the creation and maintenance of the physical form of this environment as a significant human realm can no longer be assured by the quality of the individual building nor can it be effectively determined by city planning at the macro urban scale, but rather it must depend on aggregation of building of limited extent, having an impact at an intermediary scale between these two extremes.

This belief in the relevance of aggregate form to the quality of everyday life, led The Institute to initiate this study in low rise housing and eventually to its present collaboration with the Urban Development Corporation in the development and realisation of prototypical housing. Without this support from a powerful public agency, The Institute would not have been able to bring these housing designs to the point of actual realisation, in both an urban and a suburban context. It is our intention to carry this research and design process a stage further, in which it will be possible to monitor the performance of the prototype as built, not only from the point of view of meeting actual user needs, but also with respect to the inherent capacity of the aggregate form to define spontaneously the natural hierarchy of public, semi-public and private space. It is hoped that the initiation of such feed back research will lead to the evolution of a more critical attitude towards public policy and eventually to the cyclical refinement of housing and planning policies to meet more specific needs.

Given the current state of regional urbanization and the constant escalation in overall urban growth, The Institute sees the maintenance of the physical form of the urban environment as a task of the critical urgency. Given the tendency of our present mode of production to erode and diffuse not only our existing urban centers but also their surrounding reserves of rural and open land, we feel that it is of the utmost importance to create and maintain compact forms of land settlement irrespective of where they are situated.

In our opinion this task calls for the creation of new mediatory institutions - of which The Institute is a potential example. These institutions should be capable of being both innovative and conservative at one and the same time. Innovative in the sense that a strong and sensitive ingenuity is required to meet the demands of a situation in which the environment is ever subject to the erosive pressure of industrialization; an ingenuity that should be capable of answering such pressure with new models for development. Conservative in the sense that it seems increasingly necessary to acknowledge that past patterns of settlement, such as the contained street, present experiential evidence of a significant human space which needs to be preserved not only as a fact, but also as an idea. Such patterns constitute in actuality or in potential a very large part of the public environment which is capable of being either maintained or re-established as a realm of human activity and significance.

From the forthcoming catalog, Another
Chance for Housing: Low-Rise Alternatives.
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