

**Daniel Guischar** is seeking to be an architect and ideas man in the competition for ideas about "shrinking cities".

**Jan Brueggemeier:** Where exactly are we?

**Daniel Guischar:** Were sitting down at the bend in the canal at Plagwitz, Leipzig, on the roof of the former 'people- owned' earth- tilling toolworks factory. ...

**JB:** And what we see here is a "shrinking city"?

**DG:** Plagwitz is a quarter of Leipzig, and one could describe Leipzig as a "shrinking city".

**JB:** What interests you about such city neighborhoods in a city or region where some places are called a „shrinking city“?

**DG:** I find the concept „shrinking city“ difficult because it was stacked on top of reality after the fact. What interested me at first has in the foreground nothing to do with the current discussion. It was a matter for me of how to move or change power relationships in a space, or relationships generally of space, when a space loses its old functions or when one thinks of new functions and then meets and uses this space or begins something with this space.

**JB:** When and how did you reach this critical debate about houses and neighborhoods in such recently termed "shrinking cities"?

**DG:** Even before my studies in architecture there was a fascination for the materiality of buildings and spaces. What has always fascinated me is the transition when the city, occupied in so many places by certain behaviour patterns and demands of and on the users, steps into the background leaving us, or I, the liberty to move about in a spatial context which is still added to the city, yet at the same time is separate and released from that context, not necessarily seeking, but certainly finding, new definitions and thereby bringing new qualities to the city.

**JB:** Do you think that this raises new questions which normally are rather unusual for architecture?

**DG:** It raised in any event the questions, how we deal with our habits in the reception of space, how space is presented to us. What we accepted as the normality of city and urban regions has changed. Nowadays one moves in cities such as Leipzig, Weimar or many cities in the East - but also in other places in Europe - more freely in the spatial context, where one had encountered many more rules before. There were many more borders and violations there of where, formerly, one had to take very conscious steps before one could exceed these borders. The phenomenon, which one experiences in the shrinking cities with these open spaces, is a new experience, which many humans have participated in and continue to participate in. I believe that is completely ordinary in cities and one makes this experience again and again. Thus an exchange between completely different kinds of space and perception occurs because of this overlap and the result can be fruitful.

**JB:** What would be the consequence of tackling these open spaces?

**DG:** An architectonic consequence or generally?

**JB:** We are sitting here with a nice view on this roof of a rather dilapidated house and in order to enjoy this house one must establish a certain inhabitability or usability.

**DG:** Now I understand what you mean. Those are the overlaps of which I spoke. One comes to such a place with certain demands and quite naturally sits in the evening sun, like we now here on this roof, and drinks one beverage or another and looks around. That's a situation to enter into some building somewhere, to walk over some property and to sit down on the roof is not part of everyday life in the city. One can, if desired, develop this situation further if one asks themselves, what would one like to bring to such a space besides a bottle of beer and a cushion

**JB:** There's a starting point. What does one need here besides a bottle of beer and a cushion?

**DG:** Actually you don't need much more (laughs) at first. Everything else develops according to its own needs. Clearly, at some point, one poses the question, where is the next watering point so that I can wash my paws? Where can I lie down gladly when the sun goes down? I could sleep in the grass before the building or on an old floor or roof for two nights. But at some point I will want a small place to sleep. And so it goes on. One does not make a fire or prepare a meal just anywhere. So one must decide and these decisions have consequences in space.

**JB:** What do I do with the other people who spread out on their cushions and want to drink beer? That could lead to a conflict of interests much like that on the beach, where one would gladly be alone.

**DG:** A city naturally lives on these discussions and conflicts of interest. Without such conflicts it would be very boring, but those are naturally very personal decisions. I believe people have always lived together, so that these conflicts do not become too bitter by being openminded and flexible. Then one must see personally for oneself how these conflicts are graduated. Naturally there is always the possibility to take into account differentiations outside of exclusion. One is naturally dependent there on the sensitivity of one's surrounding. One does not have to see that so romantically however. There are situations which one would like to share with other humans. There are situations, which one would not like to share.

In this discussion or this experiment or soliloquy is laying the potential that these special urban regions and spaces, which are throwing off with all their regulation and regimentation and developing into just being material, meets with these spaces in the city which are so over-determined and which we accept very unreflected, as our daily living environment with all its restrictions.

**JB:** Do you think that that is a new phenomenon?

**DG:** That is absolutely no new phenomenon. I think that the story is already quite dated. Thus I also find the concept of the 'shrinking city' to be difficult. ... The city has always lived from conflicts of interests. That is a definition of the city. There have always been men who have tried to treat this differentiation of rights and needs of the known and unknown in a more sensible manner and others who quite often invoke the known and wall themselves off from the unknown in a very unreflective or harsh way.

**JB:** Where is your idea of architecture, when does for You architectonic

thinking and working start?

**DG:** The way one judges one's own possibilities depends much on the surrounding field, in which one moves oneself. If we are in a spatial environment which is very strict and clearly gives us what we are to take from it then it is rather difficult to break out from that. Therefore it is good to have sometimes one's very own regularities which are leading us on our own way through well-known or unknown areas because then one must ignore certain borders or other laws. In the architectural re-formulation of space it seems to be that one must reflect very elementarily over their own needs. Purely physical, human needs, which concern the laundry, or the watering point, the quiet space or resting space - not only for the body but also storage space for things. Perhaps one does not need that at all - or perhaps one needs it very much so in order to store thoughts and things. One can, through pulling apart spaces which we today associate in our homes quite naturally, become more conscious in our perception of these associations with the image of living-space. Thereby one can also produce this openness of conflict without needing to wall oneself off out of *amour propre* against difference, conflicts or stress situations. I think, however, that is also a matter of habituation through exercise.

**JB:** That which, in this light, still interests me is, as we see from the place we are sitting here, that we are in a residential neighborhood in which well-maintained inhabited houses stand side by side with other houses falling into ruins and one can perceive this post- or de-industrialisation. In how far does architecture allow itself to take in too much of the contemporary dominant ideology and its corresponding desire of representation?

**DG:** That is in any case a story that emerges whenever something is somewhat fragile. Thus only whenever representation loses its self-understanding must architecture hold, the monument must hold. But I do not believe that is a defining characteristic of architecture. It would be a shame to reduce it to that. I believe that the control of which we speak here - at least, what I believe that you mean here - lies in many habits and decisions about comfort, which concerns our own standards of living. One places comfort before the experience of other experiences is hidden under the cover of socialization. That is something which architecture dealt with 100 or 120 years ago. To find a compromise wherein a spatial solution could be made to offer to a broad mass of people a certain amount of luxury. That was also a process managed by certain interests. But perhaps that does not actually interest everything. Here at least it is not interesting.

**JB:** Not or no longer?

**DG:** Perhaps that's a personal thing, too, perhaps it does not or no longer interests me. One can write about it in any case, one can say something about it. In the end one must decide with which devotion one exposes oneself to certain conflicts. Like the conflict of the fact that one lives here cheek-by-jowl with areas which simply offend and are visibly dying. Where architecture dissolves and where only architectonic veils remain.

**JB:** What does homelessness or "heimatlosigkeit" mean for you?

**DG:** I have learned that "heimatlosigkeit" is a very difficult concept because the concept of "heimat" is also complicated. ...I would describe it rather as a

life in exile. I find homelessness or “heimatlosigkeit” interesting when the home at the same time is also an exile. It is a tense moment when one abandons the position in which one thinks to know everything quite exactly well, where one is conscious of the conditions which are fluttering about somewhere in the wind. When one rips out threads here and can stretch new threads there and is conscious that in principle one apparently always has “heimaten” respectively, if I may now simply take that concept - I think that one must then be allowed to use it quite unhindered.

**JB:** ... it is also enthralling when you speak of “heimaten” as plural respectively - as opposed to “the homeland” or “ur- heimat” ...

**DG:** Ur- Heimat?

**JB:** ... or the absolute truth. Pardon, I meant homeland. ...

**DG:** “... and truth. The one true homeland. Recently someone photographed his one true homeland: the belly of his mother. The idea is that one’s homeland or “ur- heimat” clearly has a lot to do with the place where one comes from. I would use the term there. Otherwise homes are all these places in which networks appear. The way these networks function is left up to everyone. That which always interests me... are basic bodily needs. It is there that networks stretch themselves out at a place in which one can carry out constructional conflicts with oneself and others.