DOI: 10.36340/2071-6818-2019-15-4-16-23

We are pleased to present an interview with an outstanding writer, urbanist and architectural historian, Chris van Uffelen, the author of a number of books on the history and theory of architecture. The space of the city in all its manifestations - from the history of architecture to the analysis of global street navigation, from current problems of adapting the urban environment to a man's personal space to the aggressive or positive impact of a person on a megapolis, is the sphere of his professional interests.

Chris van Uffelen is distinguished by his broadmindedness and takes an active position in the field of a professional and public conversation about architecture. His articles are presented in authoritative publications on architecture. He is an encyclopedist professionally analyzing both the architecture of the Middle Ages and the space of modern cities.

Editor-in-chief Maria Burganova talks with Chris van Uffelen about architecture - its purpose, its past, and the future. The topics that concern many of us today - the change in architectural and cultural space, a person who influences a city, and a city that changes a person, are reflected in this conversation.

We thank Sophia Romanova for professional support and assistance in arranging the interview with Chris van Uffelen.

Art Historian Chris van Uffelen's Interview with the Editor-in-chef of the *Burganov House*. *Space of Culture* Journal

Maria A. Burganova: *Mr. van Uffelen, a modern city is striving to become a metropolis, developing spontaneously in all directions - spatial, economic, social... All this affects the cultural space of the city, its humanitarian relations. In this context, it is obvious that the previously formed model of a city is no longer relevant. What future awaits the cultural space of metropolises?*

Chris van Uffelen

Chris van Uffelen: Such a prediction is difficult to make, because it certainly depends, on the one hand, on the spatial, economic and social demands placed on the city (and influenced by the city) and, on the other hand, on elements that we can

hardly assess yet: We can see, for example, that motorized individual transport, which has been one of the core elements of our cities for the past 60 years, can no longer continue to grow in this way. Other traffic concepts will lead to other cities and thus also to other cultural areas. The development of the Internet and especially of social media may also lead to completely different cities than we know them today. Instead of a sign «To the MoMA Museum», individual settings of navigation software with recommendations from friends and/or influencers could perhaps, in combination with augmented reality, create a network of virtual recommendations over the previously established urban structure: «17 of your friends, 36 contacts and 5 influencers you follow would rather go to PS1 than MoMA». Such devices might change the cities by changing their use.

M.B.: *Migration processes are strong in the world. People with their own cultural platforms arrive. To what extent is a city a space without borders? Is the cultural code of a city changing, or is it steadfast?*

C.U.: The cultural code of a city changes constantly - sometimes fast, sometimes slower, but always faster than in rural settlements. At the moment, however, the city (and society) is changing much faster than it did 20 years ago, and this probably scares a lot of people. But also the installation of wastewater pipes or street lighting has changed the city. These changes that happened to cities and cultures always included migration: when the Roman Empire came over the Alps, this form of migration (based on expansion) brought us roads and an ordered state apparatus. Only after the conquest of England by the Normans and their integration into the local population was the English language able to develop into today's language. The migration of religious

Monumental Postmodernism with a twinkle in the eye: Michel Graves' Disney Building in Burbank replaces the well known atlases by giant dwarfs.
Photo credit Sam Howzit www.flickr.com / CC-BY 2.0

refugees from Belgium and Spain to the Netherlands led to the Golden Age of art and economics there. All these waves of settlements and refugees have made Europe what it is today. And also in history the migrants first came to the cities and influenced the culture right there. I still remember the first pizzeria that came to the village where I grew up, a consequence of the Italian guest workers who supported the economic miracle after the Second World War.

M.B.: *The scale of a man has changed in relation to the scale of a city. What has happened to the space of culture in this context? Who controls it and who shapes it: a man or a city?*

C.U.: There are very different definitions of Spaces of Culture. On the one hand, there are state, public or even private (economically or philanthropic) subsidized theaters where the one who gives the money has the say and determines what culture is. Cinemas that only finance themselves through admissions and are usually dismissed as popular culture - but also many painters who ate on display in museums today had to sell their paintings at fairs in their time. Here, the extremely diverse economic success determines culture and redefines the current culture, one could also call this culture «fashion», with every purchase decision this culture is define different. But Rembrandt was also «modern» for a while, but towards the end of his life he was overtaken by contemporary

A Swiss architect, who worked in France most of his life, build the parliament of Chandigarh in India, one of the most interesting buildings of Brutalism – a style of the 1970s, that is having a comeback at the moment.

Photo credit :Eduardo Gulot, [www.flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com/photos/eduardogulot/) / CC-BY 2.0

The artist Frans Hals was born in Antwerp. His parents fled during the Fall of Antwerp (1584–1585) from the Flanders to Haarlem in the new Dutch Republic, where he became one of the most important painters of his age. The Buffoon playing a lute painted by the war refugee is in the Louvre in Paris today.

tastes: Is his late work therefore less culture? Or his early work, just because it was popular? Was Vermeer only culture when the Impressionists rediscovered the long-forgotten painter? Our cultural canon is also changing with regard to the past: at present, the long-hated art brut in architecture is rediscovered, while my generation for a long time associated only with knees broken on washed concrete slabs with the Brutalist architecture. Next to come could be the revival of Postmodern architecture, which never disappeared in US baseball stadiums. What I would like to say is that culture is a

Roman expats build amphitheaters throughout the Mediterranean and strongly influenced the different cultures. Centuries later, when the “foreigners” had long since become locals, the buildings were still in use: in Arles, for example, a district was created from their remains.

transformable construct and if it has to remain so by definition: When it becomes fixed it does degenerate into folklore.

M.B.: *It seems that architecture has exhausted all the artistic possibilities of building technologies. The joy of seeing a new skyscraper gave way to fatigue from their quantity and uniformity. Should we expect the return of monumental art to architecture or can we forget about the dialogue of sculpture and architecture, about the caryatids of the Erechtheion and the bas reliefs by Antoine Bourdelle on the Théâtre des Champs Élysées?*

C.U.: As I said, I think and hope it remains unpredictable, but there are signs - for example in furniture - that postmodernism is coming back and figurative building decoration would probably only be a consistent step. But such renaissances are never 1:1 copies of the past and so there probably won't be the seven dwarfs of the Disney Building by Michael Graves (1986). A more abstract form of the figurative, as in Romanesque or Art Deco, would just as well be conceivable, even without the humor that postmodernism often displayed, like when the architectural-historical function of atlases is exercised by (gigant) dwarves. In some countries there are also the «Percentage for Art» rules, but they are interpreted very differently depending on the current concept of culture. But I don't think architecture is exhausted. It is just becoming quieter and calmer again at

Portrait of Karel van Mander from his "Schilderboek", first published in 1604, it is one of the most important art theoretical writings on Art in the 17th century. The Flemish artist van Mander came as a religious refugee to the northern Netherlands.

the moment, phases we know from the history of architecture. On the other hand the experimental and «culture-creating» tendencies are mostly to be found in smaller and more inconspicuous projects: Whoever builds a skyscraper wants to have something representative. In addition, we always forget that hardly anything has been handed down to us from older epochs, perhaps 1% of the buildings of the Middle Ages, possibly 2% of the Baroque, everything else, the many weak or ordinary buildings have been eradicated by time. And so in 500-1000 years there will probably be only a few buildings of the 20th or 21st century.

M.B.: *What is the direction of development of modern architecture: does it remain in the field of the space of culture and art or move to a space dominated by machines for living in?*

C.U.: The concept of the machine for living in, as founded by Le Corbusier, was also a time-bound one, which also underwent major changes over the course of time. Like the entire housing construction of classical modernism, it was the answer to overpriced living space, too narrow urban structures and a decoration of the buildings that was perceived as monotonous and out-of-date. There were always the same sculptural elements: Cornices and capitals were produced on slagheaps and could also be ordered from the catalogue. Let me exaggerate a bit and use today's vocabulary: At the time, the art of building in the housing sector of fast growing cities had degenerated to a purely profit-oriented economic question whose building ornaments only served to make a profit. The outstanding architects did not deal with mass housing construction until 1900, this only became a topic for the profession shortly before classical modernism. But, as I said, a large part of the mediocre and epigonal buildings will have disappeared in a few centuries and our time will also leave an outstanding legacy. However, we cannot say today which buildings will survive, and even more we can only guess what the top buildings will look like in ten years' time. They are still architectural utopias and as such they are more products of our time than of the future.