

The Museum of Modern Art

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INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON URBAN ENVIRONMENT TO BE HELD AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Problems of evaluating and designing the urban environment will be discussed by a distinguished group of architects, planners, scientists and philosophers from 14 countries at an International Symposium at The Museum of Modern Art, January 8 and 9, 1972.

From France the sociologists Henri Lefevre and Alain Touraine and the philosopher Michel Foucault are attending. The English architectural critic Martin Pawley, and the English philosopher Donald Dworkin, Professor of Jurisprudence at Oxford University, are participating as well as the Mexican poet Octavio Paz, and the Italian critic Umberto Eco. Americans participating include, among others, the political scientist Rexford Guy Tugwell, the architect Christopher Alexander, and the mathematical biologist and theorist of general systems Anatol Rapoport.

The Symposium is part of a study directed by Emilio Ambasz, Curator of Design, The Museum of Modern Art, exploring the possibility of establishing in the United States a new type of institution centered around the task of evaluating and designing the man-made environment. The Museum of Modern Art and the Institute of Architecture and Urban Studies, on an initial grant from the Graham Foundation, have undertaken this project as a critical and prospective inquiry into the relation of man to the natural and the socio-cultural environment.

Entitled "Institutions for a Post-Technological Society -- the Universitas Project," it questions the adequacy of prevailing modes of thought and existing institutions to deal with the problems of the man-made milieu, and examines the idea of an experimental university in which a broad domain of inquiries would be integrated toward developing modes of thought and action which are better suited to dealing with those problems.

The symposium is being held under the auspices of the International Council of The Museum of Modern Art and with the co-sponsorship of the Brionvega Corporation of Italy.

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Emilio Ambasz, Curator of Design, The Museum of Modern Art, and Director of the Project, said:

"The problems involved in the design endeavor -- understood not as a narrow specialty but as the large enterprise by which man creates structures that give meaning and order to his surroundings -- are especially significant at this time of environmental crisis, when we have no reason to expect that the aimless actions of technology will accommodate themselves to some pattern of order. The Universitas Project starts from the recognition that, although more and more it is man's activity that gives shape to the milieu we inhabit, the shape being taken by this man-made milieu has so far escaped our control.

"The Project has been organized into two stages, covering a period of five years. The first stage, concerned with problem definition and the proposal of alternatives to the present situation, culminates with the January Symposium. At this stage the Project seeks, first, to specify objectives which are to be met in the evaluation, design and management of the man-made milieu; secondly, to question whether current modes of thought and existing institutions -- especially the universities -- satisfy these objectives; and finally to advance views on the new modes of thought and new or restructured institutions which could be developed to satisfy these objectives. In the second stage the possible ways of bringing such an institution into existence will be explored.

"As part of the first stage, a small research team worked for a year, with the consultation and active participation of an interdisciplinary group of research advisors, at preparing a basic working paper which brings into focus several critical issues of this project. This paper has been submitted to the participants of the January Symposium, who are contributing essays, each from his own point of view, commenting on the issues raised by the working paper and expanding on them.

"These essays will be distributed among the participants before the Symposium takes place. The Symposium, comprised of a two-day series of working sessions, will be open to a small invited audience of specialists to allow for free discussion of the views presented in the essays and a high level of exchange among the contributors. The essays will then be published in book form together with the Symposium's proceedings."

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