



## Toward a new continuity

### The linking of past to future in the city is an esthetic as well as economic and human necessity

It may be seen at this point that, beyond the plaster dust and the rending noise of the remodeler's crowbars, this issue of FORUM is attempting to look at the rebuilding of urban America in a new way—or at least in a way relatively new for most Americans. It is an attempt to see rebuilding not as isolated events of public or private enterprise, with all the haphazard charms or horrors of street accidents, but as an opportunity to relate rebuilding old or new to the living fabric of the city, its functions, flavors, neighborhoods, and economics, its past and its future. Underlying all this is the strong feeling that if order is ever to be drawn out of the present urban chaos, there must enter some governing elements of good taste and even esthetics, a reawakening to the over-all architecture of cities.

Next to language, as Lewis Mumford has pointed out, the city remains man's greatest work of art. Beside the city, all other arts and sciences are marginal or subsidiary, for the city in its focusing of human consciousness is the mother and habitation of all these. The roots of the city go deep in the human condition, and the city's physical growth through the centuries reflects all stages, triumphs, defeats, and crises of the human spirit. The very nexus of the modern crisis is in the cities.

In mankind's long transition from nomadic to communal being, the first pure expression of the now dominant Western concept of the city occurred in Greece, an ideal that man could not long live up to. Its next great expression was in the medieval city, a walled organic growth around cathedral and castle, which lost

in freedom what it gained in cohesion, through a warm, tightly knit warren of irregular streets. Modern research has established that the city of the Middle Ages was not the dungeon it has been painted but a balanced, homogeneous creation, held together by common belief, a city of rural-based trade and clean handcraft industries, wind- and water-powered. It existed in a world marvelously underpopulated by present standards, no major city of the fourteenth century exceeding 50,000 souls. Its vestiges may still be found in small, clean agricultural towns, to which men return with some refreshment.

In the great creative explosion of the Renaissance, the medieval city was opened out to new vistas, plazas, splendors, and growth, reaching a formal but humane order, with some echoes of the Grecian unities, in the eighteenth century and the Enlightenment. Hard on the heels of this, however, and stemming from one of the central forces of the Renaissance—experimental science—came what some have judged to be a new Dark Age: the industrial revolution. In its first raw stages, only beginning to abate, the new industrialism set the now familiar urban pattern of dark industrial towns and vast metropolitan conurbations, of mechanical riot, congestion, and population endlessly exploding. Behind these great and unprecedented new energies was the rise of private capitalism, based on individual judgement, which loosed a certain anarchic force upon the development of city and environs. Instead of the city being viewed as a work of art, designed for the enlargement and repose of the human spirit, it came to be seen largely and simply as a mechanism for making money.

On balance, industrialism so far has generated more good than evil, in the sense of having opened an entirely new epoch in human





*A quiet stressing of structural lines and arched brickwork over windows makes this new school wing in Turin, Italy, of uncompromising modern design, discreetly a part of the old edifice in the background. Architect: Giorgio Raineri.*

development, of making possible more and fuller life, of offering the only surcease thus far to brute labor and human poverty. And in the advanced technics of electricity, electronics, and chemistry lies the promise of a cleaner, more humane and effortless stage of physical well-being. But unless industrialism begins to solve its pressing urban problems, the residue of early clutter, ugliness, and waste, it too may be superseded by another order.

#### The saving principles

The difficulty is that, whereas the creation of cities in the past flowed out of a slow, almost instinctive molding of form to human use and aspiration, with time to heal all wounds, the modern city has come so fast so far, and on such a scale, divorced from nature, that any rebuilding of it closer to human dimensions demands a conscious effort, a conscious esthetic to guide it. No such esthetic yet exists—and it is never likely to come in the form of copybook rules or packaged formulae, so dear to the practical minded—but this issue of FORUM may point the way toward some few general principles of urban renovation, old and new, recognized in part, and already in practice here and there.

**ELIMINATION.** No rebuilding on the scale needed can be accomplished without a conscious policy of elimination. Elimination is at the base of all art, as it is of all healthy biological organisms. Much of the urban product of the earlier industrial revolution is hopelessly obsolete and not worth saving; e.g., old-law tenements, large patches of gray area, many marginal industrial buildings, most transportation systems. Many renovations of old neighborhoods or other areas cannot get started or begin to make sense without first eliminating dead tissue or applying the scalpel for entirely new developments—see the Hyde Park–Kenwood project in Chicago, page 98. Research and a planned program are needed to develop the instruments, economic, governmental, or otherwise, to make elimination a continuous civic process, so that new slums and gray areas are not being created faster than the old are cleaned out.

**SEGREGATION.** To bring more orderliness to the city, a conscious policy of segregation, not of the racial variety but of urban functions, needs to be developed. Absolute separation of vehicular from pedestrian traffic is now a fairly well-recognized goal of advanced planners;

segregation of residential neighborhoods from heavy industrial and others (new light industries may cleanly fit in) is likewise pursued; segregation may extend even to the design theory of new buildings (see page 138) to separate the mechanical from other interior functions for greater ease of operation, maintenance, and future change. Specialization is a powerful fact of modern life, and it may well be extended further into the structure of the city. The solution to such an area as New York's garment district, for instance, may be to divert through-traffic around or over it on elevated highways, leaving street level for truck deliveries and its own peculiar form of pushcart traffic, thus isolating the district to allow it to redevelop to its own specialized needs. An example on a smaller scale may be seen in Knoxville's newly integrated shopping block, page 135. What is needed to guide such developments is re-examination of what goes where in the modern city, what constitutes a neighborhood in modern terms, about which almost nothing is known today, again calling for a strong draught of research.

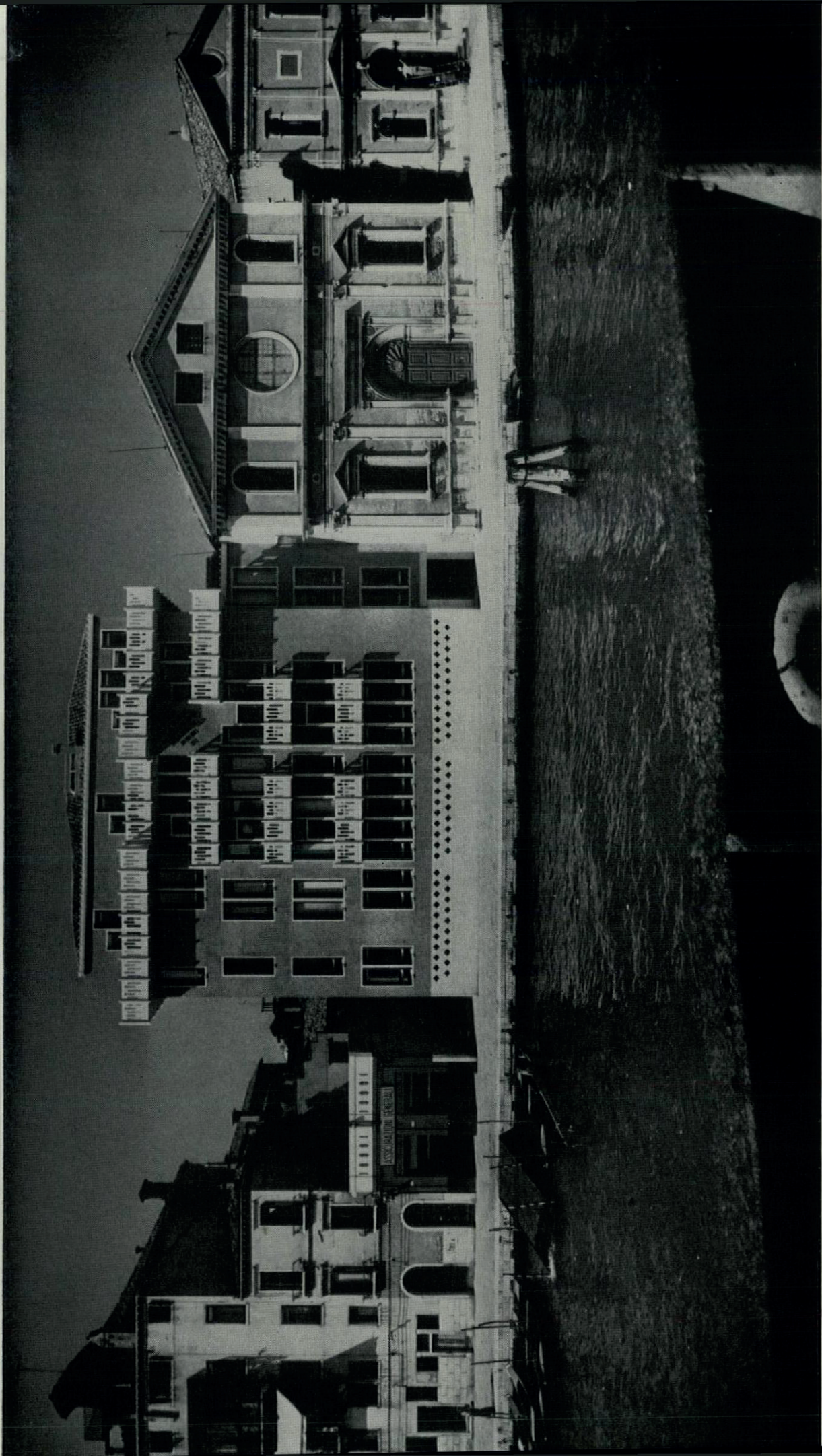
**CONTINUITY.** To knit all this together without too much rigidity, there is growing need for a new principle of urban continuity, a connective tissue of architectural design to remove raw edges, heal over scar tissue, and link past to present and to the future. To save what is best and salvageable from the past is not only an economic but a strongly esthetic and human necessity. The conviction, indeed, has been growing for some time that what is needed in the modern metropolis, scarified by over a century of industrial drive, is some of the medieval city's biological balance, the interpenetration of greenness and human-scale neighborhoods, some of the Renaissance city's splendors, the opening of space to a new order, without for a moment relinquishing the basic, hard-won advances of modern technics and design. For this new synthesis, to which many signs are pointing, research can be of little direct help. Only the development of esthetic judgement and desire can forward the design.

#### Of continuity and contrast

The new continuity needed on the city scene is of a subtle kind. It is not per se the slavish restoration of ancient forms or the dusty pursuit of a new eclecticism, which, wherever tried,



*This modern church house and school for century-old First Presbyterian Church on lower Fifth Avenue, New York, maintains continuity by simply repeating the church's Gothic quatrefoil parapet as ornament. Architect: Edgar Tafel.*



*On Venice's Giudecca Canal, this new apartment house next to the Church of the Holy Ghost (right) maintains a timeless Venetian air with its staggered marble balconies and deep-etched windows. Architect: Ignazio Gardella.*

has led in the main to a dead level of mediocrity or the lifeless air of a museum. Careful modernization of certain elegant city features and areas—the better New York brownstones, Georgetown's quiet, shaded streets, the colonial mews of old Philadelphia—can preserve a certain valid charm in cityscapes, but it does not begin to grapple with the major problems of industrialism's raw edges in the city, the vast deteriorating areas of no particular style or character.

Nor does the new continuity desired exclude contrast, the shock of the new, the quietly assertive statement of contemporaneity. The concept of foreground and background building is valuable here to divert the dullness of simple-minded sameness. Rather the new architectural continuity should seek to express a rapport between old and new in the echoing of a line, a detail, a texture of materials, on wholly modern terms; in cleaning up and emphasizing structure; in treating surroundings with respect; in, finally pursuing above all fitness, perhaps the most subtle and difficult element to achieve in the practice of the social arts.

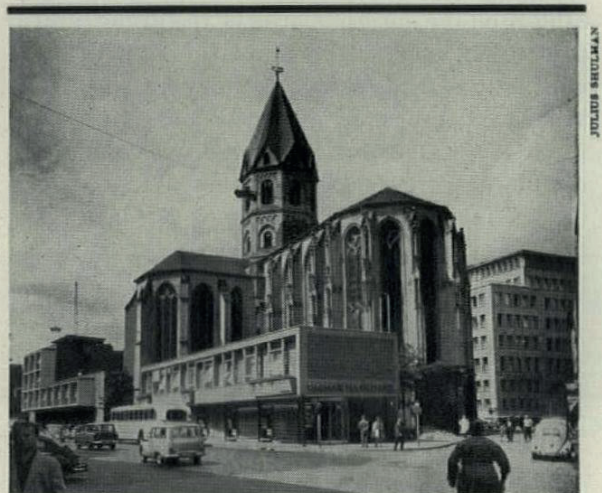
Few of these qualities have been particularly characteristic of America until recently. The frontier spirit and pioneer industrialism, with their contempt for the past, have only begun to give way to a subtler, more civilized spirit. Such a project as the Providence regeneration (page 90) would have been unthinkable a decade ago, and though it is yet but a dream, it is a hopeful one. However, nearly all the illustrations on these pages showing the quality in continuity to be striven for are European. Not that the European cannot be guilty of bad taste—see the picture at right, and much of the rebuilding of war-torn capitols like London—or that these examples are wholly faultless. But the European has had centuries of working and reworking the palimpsest of his cities into the loving symbols of the human community. Paul Schneider-Esleben's new office tower in Düsseldorf (page 143) and Ignazio Gardella's new apartment house next to the Church of Spirito Santo in Venice (page 148) may stand as shining symbols of that subtle art.

Perhaps the most articulate of European architects struggling with the problem of continuity in the city is Giovanni Michelucci of Florence, who went into near retirement under Mussolini to free himself from the "formal slavery" of academic training and Fascist ideals,

and blossomed forth in the postwar rebuilding of his native city. His most notable work is the new addition to the Cassa di Risparmio or savings bank in the heart of the old quarter, which manages, under a series of rolling vaults and sensitively handled glazing, to fit without break into the old façade and into the landscape of a quiet cathedral garden and famous cathedral dome to the rear. "What I esteem most highly," says he, "is a work which, when completed, will look as if it had always been there. It is a work like a public square where nothing subjugates man, and everything, even when apparently chaotic, is justified by an internal order."

Elsewhere Michelucci has said: "I feel a great melancholy when I see the foundations of old buildings weathered by time being steeped in a chemical compound merely to prolong their life, whereas a building which is being transformed to suit the current needs of men is always a source of delight to me. I should like each of my own buildings, from the day of their completion, to appear to be ready for any such future adaptations. But this attitude calls for a renunciation on the part of the architect of the habit of interposing himself between the design and the men who will eventually use the completed building, and a renunciation of methods and media that are too sophisticated for the client. . . ."

"I do not thereby mean to criticize the ration-



Unbuilding also goes on in Europe, as seen in this boxy bank on stilts, of an eye-stopping, horizontal, rectangular modernity, wrapped unfeelingly around the soaring vertical lines of one of Cologne's churches. Architect: Theodor Kelter.

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alist movement in architecture, which has been historically justified by the many positive contributions it has made; I am criticizing that vestigial rigidity of stand which can still be discerned in many of the works of architects of my generation. I am criticizing the lack of courage to let go and recognize the human and imaginative elements in design; I am criticizing above all the fear of 'yielding' something to popular taste. . . . One needs to sense the manner whereby traditional popular elements can be harmonized with the new, and one needs to uncover within oneself certain experiences common to all men. . . .

"Our purpose should not be for each architect to build his own triumphal arch but to contribute to the form of the city, as if it were a living being whose harmonious existence provides a justification of our work and of our lives."

#### The future discipline

It is an open question whether in the anarchy of modern art and times such idealism or discipline can flourish. Or whether in the individualism of the democratic process, the determination of real estate business to allow only that kind of zoning or control that squeezes out the highest rent per cubic foot of available site, and the general apathy of many government leaders to all things urban, whether men can go on to build more harmonious, homogeneous, and humane cities.

But the place, the only place to make a beginning is on the design boards of the architectural profession, and in the minds of men of good will and good taste. Democracy can work only thus, by persuasion, example, and the setting forth of good works. If this is well done, the rebuilding of cities may yet catch that tide of hunger for expression of the arts in which there are many popular and provocative omens of things to come.

*Continuity of closer vintage is shown in the strong, vertical stone facing and dark glass spandrels adopted to keep the new Time & Life Building, New York, in context with its Rockefeller Center neighbors. Architects: Harrison & Abramovitz.*

GEORGE CELEINA

