FOREWORD

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Few architects ever get the opportunity to radically transform the nature of practice. And that's probably how it should be, given that continuity and evolution, rather than reinvention, are the hallmarks of architecture. Unlike art, where freedom of realization is constrained only by the medium chosen (whether painting, sculpture, video, or installation), architecture and its allied design fields are systematically shaped by contingent conditions: those of client, site, program, materials, and budget. Buildings are complicated artifacts that invariably take a long time to realize. And architecture is a slow profession—a profession unaccustomed to change.

Every so often, however, someone exceptional comes along and helps to alter our conception of architecture and its practices. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe is one such person. Another is Le Corbusier, whose highly effective and sustained global impact can be attributed not just to the achievements of his projects and publications, or to the influence of CIAM (International Congresses for Modern Architecture), but also—and perhaps above all—to the organization and diverse geographical composition of his office. Le Corbusier's collaborators came to Paris from all over Europe and from India, Latin America, and Japan. Many of them took their experience of working in the office to new locations. They made his architecture somehow site-specific, and in the process made it their own.

A third transformative figure is Josep Lluís Sert (1902–1983). The long connection between Le Corbusier and Sert, a Spanish member of CIAM, is reflected in Sert's writings and projects. He championed, and subsequently supervised, Le Corbusier's only commission in the United States, the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University—a project that Le Corbusier himself had little direct involvement with in the early 1960s. Despite this friendship and professional homage, Sert remained in many respects a Mediterranean architect. The culture of his native Barcelona was ingrained in his soul, informing even the projects he designed long after he had moved to the colder climate of Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Like many of his contemporaries, Sert built a number of residential projects, single-family homes for private clients, but his architecture is essentially urban in character. For him there is an inseparable bond between architecture and its public, and his projects are invariably imbued with a focus on social interaction.

At the Center for the Study of World Religions, his first project at Harvard, Sert used the concept of open-access galleries to link what are essentially studio rooms. At Holyoke Center he transplanted the idea of the galleria to the heart of Harvard Square. The disruption caused by wind and weather to the proper functioning of these buildings seems to have been secondary to the sense of urbanity he was seeking. Peabody Terrace, a large and primarily highrise graduate housing project in Cambridge, is another example of this attitude. Scale, color, window modulations, and orientation are all used to create a metropolitan feel for this architecturally significant project along the Charles River.

Alongside this incorporation of urban elements, there are other ways in which the reference to the urban is manifested in Sert's U.S. projects. One involves the idea of the city being in some sense ingested into the body of some of his larger buildings, such as the Science Center building at Harvard. The building's four entrances/exits help set up its capacity to act as an interior thoroughfare connecting the campus east-west and north-south, the experience of

passage enlivened by the large cast relief by the sculptor Constantino Nivola on one of the long walls of the building.

In addition, the expansive ground floor is articulated as an interior plaza, a meeting place for large groups of students going in and out of the surrounding lecture halls, as if they were buildings on the edge of a public square. Harvard University's recent decision to create an exterior plaza adjacent to this building has reinforced the interconnections between the inside and the outside and brought a greater number of people to this location, emphasizing the urban dimension of Sert's architecture.

A further aspect of the interrelationship between architecture and the city in Sert's work is manifested through the concept of the urban fragment. In the postwar period many government agencies and academic institutions expanded the scale of their construction projects, buoyed by the optimism and confidence that came with the need to rebuild the economy and society. This middle or intermediary scale, between architecture and the city, is the domain of urban design.

Urban design provided the opportunity for these types of large civic projects to be considered as a whole or, as Sert put it, a "complete environment." Such an ambitious challenge required the bringing together of a diversity of design fields. To train professionals who could address these issues, Sert established the first urban design program at the Graduate School of Design in 1960. From its inception the program was seen as a way of integrating planning, architecture, and landscape architecture, and of operating in the space between them.

For Sert, urban design made it possible to reintroduce into city planning the measure related to human scale and social interaction. Historic cities or towns, he argued, were the physical manifestations of the "life of a community," but the rationalization of building for the service of capital had led to an increasingly homogeneous approach that undermined the distinctive identity of many areas. His report on the neighborhood unit offered a means to regain that sense of identity, presenting the *cuadras* of many Latin American cities, with their square blocks and big patios, as examples of the type of multifunctional public space that acts as a significant place of recreation and gathering for the community.

A key component of Sert's approach was to consider the various functions of the city in terms of their connections. His call for the integration of residential areas into cities is a warning against the dangers of isolated, monofunctional programs. For Sert, the neighborhood provides a specific logic of measure, of proximity of activities and relations, that is tied to the human body. But the concept of the neighborhood is also an argument for urban density, social values, and pedestrian networks, and a warning against the consequences of suburban sprawl.

Given Sert's repeated calls for an architecture of social relations, it is ironic that many of his larger buildings, though recognized for their programmatic innovations, have also been criticized for their aesthetic and material harshness. The choice of concrete as a building material, together with the relative mega-scale and programmatic diversity of Sert's institutional buildings, was bound up with his belief in the importance of a new type of urban architecture. The "toughness" of concrete, its "brutality," was seen to be necessary to produce a resilient form suited to metropolitan life.

Sert, Jackson & Gourley, Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University, 1959. View of interior courtyard galleries.

Sert, Jackson & Associates, Harvard University Science Center, 1968-73. Plans and sections.

Contantino Nivola, untitled plaster casting on sand, Harvard University Science Center, 1972. Originally installed in the BBPR Olivetti showroom, 584 Fifth Avenue, New York, 1953. The polychrome decoration was added in 1972.

While the freshness of the original materials and surfaces has diminished with age, the negative reaction to Sert's buildings is not simply based on their physical presence, but is a manifestation of our society's changing attitudes. The optimistic confidence of the postwar period, its willingness to embrace the new, has given way to an increasingly risk-averse sensibility.

The specific manner of appreciating and renovating Sert's architecture is particularly important as Harvard begins the important task of making architectural modifications to both the Science Center and Holyoke Center buildings; the latter will accommodate the university's new Smith Campus Center. How will the architects charged with this task respond to Sert's architecture? Will they attempt to "soften" it, to make it more appealing to a wider audience? Sert's architecture was designed with incredible bravura. At Harvard, the sheer scale and number of his projects represent the aspirations of an academic institution willing to lead and to take on the risks that this leadership entails.

The texts in this volume provide the background and the narrative structure to Sert's urban architecture. It is inspiring to see an architect take a position on such a diverse range of topics—and with a clarity akin to a manifesto. The reciprocities between these writings and his architecture are invariably in the service of the collective and the community. And the buildings, even though large and visible, are perhaps the closest a modern architect has come to producing what were historically thought of as "background" urban public buildings—their performative role as urban artifacts for the citizens overriding their claim to formal and aesthetic uniqueness.

But there is no one-to-one correlation between writing and building. One of the many values of Sert's essays lies in the impact of their critical rereading by the next generation of architects, planners, and landscape architects. In that sense, this book contains valuable seeds for renewed discussion about the future of our cities. There is much that we can learn from both the aspirations and the failures of the recent past as we imagine new ways of transforming our communities. Equally, Sert's writings provide the platform for reimagining the tasks of the practitioner and in turn the responsibilities of the academy as the place for the articulation of the pedagogy and discourse that will reshape practice.

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