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Places

Title

Free Plan and Open Form [Place Debate: Piazza d'Italia]

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5dm109zm>

Journal

Places, 1(2)

ISSN

0731-0455

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Publication Date

1983-10-01

Peer reviewed

Free Plan and Open Form

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building is less convincing. The tower makes its homage to its grown-up neighbors, but struggles to be big enough at ground level to make an effective gate. The Piazza fragment, unlike Lovejoy, is perhaps too incomplete and has not yet made a whole center and a strong "inside." Perhaps it depends *too much* on what happens next around it. And the materials are not really surviving well. Marble ears have broken off column bases and stucco surfaces have not gotten the attention they need either to remain clean and fresh or old and comfortable.

The Piazza d'Italia ought not so much to be judged as to be studied. A generous and useful attitude would be to see it as an event in our "archaic" period: strong, vigorous, evocative, and awkward. In the near future it will undoubtedly be partly restored as it serves as one of the entrances to the New Orleans World Fair and to the river front. It may then survive and be increasingly satisfactory like the Portland example. Meanwhile, whether awkward and incomplete or not, it deserves our attention for its inclusiveness about direct experience and memory, about local and distant reference, and about both spatial and cultural continuity. It is not so good or bad, as it is simply very much worth having been done.

Surviving late-modernists tend to consider the Piazza d'Italia a case of reactionary historicism, and thus a confirmation of the tenet that post-modernism represents a break with the modern tradition.

In my opinion this interpretation is superficial and wrong. If one looks more attentively at the solution, the Piazza d'Italia reveals itself as a work of *modern* architecture, although it certainly embodies a content that goes beyond the relatively narrow limits of early modernism (not to speak of the limits of degenerate late-modernism).

Modern architecture was from the beginning based on two fundamental principles: the "free plan" and the "open form." The free plan serves the purpose of making us experience the "simultaneity of places" that is characteristic of the new "open world." Physically we are, of course, in one place at a time, but existentially we may be in several places simultaneously. The free plan makes this experience possible through a "virtual openness," that is, a spatial organization that implies interaction rather than self-sufficiency. The open form serves a similar purpose by admitting the juxtaposition of qualitatively diverse elements to constitute a collage-like totality. Thus, modern architecture became capable of embodying a more complex and contradictory world than the

"closed" stylistic systems of the past.

The Piazza d'Italia is based on the concepts of free plan and open form. The spatial organization takes a series of concentric rings as its point of departure. Within these rings different space-defining elements are placed. These elements, whether floor-patterns or "walls," do not, however, form static rooms, but rather articulate an open spatial continuum. Well-known modern means, such as overlapping and transparency, are employed to obtain this result. Symmetries also appear, but are immediately broken to counteract any closed effect. The overall centralized organization, however, creates a strong sense of urban node. Spatially, thus, the Piazza d'Italia is simultaneously a defined place and part of an open world. (I recall Paolo Portoghesi's analogous interpretation of the free plan during the 1960s when he based his layouts on interacting, centralized "fields.") The formal solution of the Piazza is evidently a case of "open form." Historical motifs indeed appear, but they are not composed in a traditional way. Rather they form a large, tridimensional collage that is truly modern. Thus, the motifs are characterized as "memories" that evoke a certain "world." It must be emphasized that the open form makes this use of memories possible, and the solution, thereby, proves

the capacity of modern architecture for self-renewal.

Before the advent of post-modernism, the free plan and the open form were used to create a kind of empty stage for human action. The stage allowed for modern life to take place, but since it was "empty," it did not offer many possibilities of identification. In post-modern architecture the stage has become populated by memories. Freedom and openness still exist, but, in addition, we find those *images* that give us a sense of belonging and identity. The open world is thereby visualized not only as a structure, but also as a universe of meanings. Genuine post-modernism hence represents a development of modern architecture.

The Piazza d'Italia offers a major example of this development. Although spatially and formally it is modern, it also significantly widens the limits of architectural symbolization. I do not have to repeat its well-known references to the Italian world, but might add that it also gives a new interpretation of the colorful character of the city of New Orleans. The world that is "gathered" by the Piazza d'Italia is, therefore, local as well as general, and the solution represents a most important contribution to the post-modern reconquest of an authentic urban environment.