

Complete Urbanization Game: From CIAM to Corel Draw

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Every reader knows those strange moments when the certitude of a chronological order is interrupted by, say, stumbling upon Walter Benjamin's references to Henri Lefebvre—rather than the other way around—or when Lichtenberg appears to be quoting Wittgenstein. A similar would-be response of a writer to his future readers happens in the digitally produced images of the “Comic Strip on Open Form” by Oskar Hansen, drawn by him shortly before his death in 2005 and published in his last book, a testimony that took the form of a design manual *Zobaczyć świat* (To See the World).¹

Perhaps the only digital drawing by a member of CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne), the comic strip was produced by Hansen with the vector graphics editor Corel Draw by assembling images from architectural history books and magazines, which were scanned by his sons according to Hansen's instructions.² The comic strip presents the historical unfolding of two alternative urbanization processes, comparing the urbanization developed according to “open” and “closed” forms. It starts where everything started, on a “polana” (a clearing in the woods in Polish), from which, we were told in school, the tribe of Polans took their name. Taking it from there, Hansen's comic strip shows a sequence of bounded spaces—a medieval town, a Renaissance city, Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin—which set the stage for interventions according to “open” or “closed” principles. These principles, in Hansen's project, become a tool kit of urban operations that are not defined by an overall plan but, rather, by a response to local border conditions, not unlike *cellular* automata used in urban modelling today.

Thinking according to what Hansen called Closed Form means organizing spaces around monumental axes, clearing the ground for new monuments, and moving old ones, which Hansen saw in post-war Warsaw. In contrast to this monotonous rhythm of domination and demolition, thinking according to Open Form is focused on appropriation, topological modulation, copy-pasting, morphing, and sampling—tools offered by Corel Draw. Open Form means the activation of a background that puts to the fore individual actors but also joins them into a collective Gestalt; and it aims at the linear regrouping of urbanization elements by an intensification of the urban experience. Open Form procedures smoothen the flows of people and things, and allow remnants of the past to become islands within an archipelago located in a re-naturalized landscape. Since the truth of

1 Oskar Hansen, *Zobaczyć świat* (Warsaw: Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, 2005), 52–63.

2 From a telephone conversation with Łukasz Kozela, the graphic designer of *Zobaczyć świat*, on May 8, 2013.

urbanization is revealed in war, closed and open urbanization are defined by their response to specific catastrophes: destruction and rebuilding in the case of the former, and resilience and rebalancing in the case of the latter.

The villain lurking in this story is the Palace of Culture and Sciences in Warsaw, the high-rise designed by the Soviet architect Lev Rudnev in the socialist realist idiom, and completed in 1955. It was a target for Hansen since his earliest writings, where he opposed the hierarchical structure of the Palace as “sociologically and economically incorrect in a socialist country.”³ The centripetal Palace was a paradigmatic Closed Form and hence a pendant to dogmatic regimes, as Hansen suggested by juxtaposing in *Zobaczyć świat* a photograph of a 1960s celebration of Communist Party leadership in front of the Palace and the celebration of a Catholic mass in the same place after the end of socialism.⁴

In post-socialist Warsaw, a number of designs were drafted to cover up the Palace with a bigger envelope—and one of them found its way into Hansen's comic strip.⁵ Yet in accordance with Open Form thinking, Hansen opposed the destruction of the Palace or covering it, suggesting, rather, to “polemicize with it.”⁶ He considered the Palace not a monument to a compromised regime but a diversion from the socialist project, which had been hindered by outdated productivist logics, bureaucracy, and authoritarian rule. To correct this diversion by a radical reformist approach was what motivated Hansen's work from the 1960s onwards, and in this endeavor he found himself occasionally supported by Party technocrats eager to develop models of socialist governance and economy.⁷ Just like Hansen's urbanization schemes, these models mobilized cybernetic data processing and information feed-backs in line with Oskar Lange's project of “market socialism,” which he envisaged in the mid-1930s as based on a central calculation of prices within the national economy, and which he retrospectively considered as requiring the computational power of a machine.⁸ In the description accompanying the comic strip, Hansen came back to the work of Lange,⁹ yet when looked at today, the strip resembles less a promise of an overarching synchronicity, and more a low-res computer game that plays on the processes of complete urbanization, which have no outside and hence require that the rules of the very game are found inside it.

3 Oskar Hansen, “Linearny System Ciągły,” *Projekt*, no. 2 (1968): 45.

4 Hansen, *Zobaczyć świat*, 103.

5 *Ibid.*, 102–4.

6 Artur Zmijewski, *Sen Warszawy* (A Dream of Warsaw), film, Poland 2005.

7 Łukasz Stanek, “Oskar and Zofia Hansen: Me, You, Us and the State,” in *Team 10 East: Revisionist Architecture in Real Existing Modernism*, ed. Łukasz Stanek, (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art, distributed by University of Chicago Press, June 2014), 211–41.

8 See Oskar Lange, “On the Economic Theory of Socialism,” pts. 1 and 2, *The Review of Economic Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1 (October 1936): 53–71; vol. 4, no. 2 (February 1937): 123–42; and Oskar Lange, “Maszyna licząca i rynek,” in Oskar Lange, *Dzieła* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, 1974 [1965]), 2: 333–35.

9 Hansen, *Zobaczyć świat*, 61.

