"The City Vanishes"
The Post-Urban Condition

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We all assume that urbanization will continue; soon, 75% of humanity will be living in cities, and by the end of this century, it is widely accepted that the megacity will be the only form of habitation on planet earth. We are so certain of this prognosis that it has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. No other alternative seems feasible. Even those who are concerned about the dysfunctional aspects of the city delude themselves that the solution can only be yet another city and cannot think beyond it: all they can aspire towards is better cities, giving them reassuring adjectives, such as: “green”, “sustainable”, “smart”, etc. The prefix changes but the term city always remains, as if no other solution could ever be considered.

Yet, we must not forget that we have not always lived in cities. They are the relatively recent product of a particular period in history, a time when our modes of production and consumption called for massive concentrations of capital and labour, leading to captive sedentary populations. The industrial revolution changed the face of the earth, totally reshaping the natural environment. The post-industrial revolution has in turn altered every aspect of our lives, yet it has not affected the city itself which continues to expand as if nothing had happened, although it is now nothing but a dinosaur doomed to extinction.

While it is conceivable that it will still retain its momentum for a long period of time, the hypothesis of this lecture is that the city, at least in the form in which we have known it so far, will certainly come to an end. The city is an anachronism. It will inevitably disappear and will be replaced by other forms of human habitat. What these other forms might be and how the mutation will occur, is the question.

About the speaker

Colin Fournier, born in 1944, was educated at the Architectural Association in London. He is Emeritus Professor of Architecture and Urbanism at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London (UCL), where he was Director of the Master of Architecture course in Urban Design as well as Director of Diploma Unit 38. He is currently the Ong Siew May Visiting Professor at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

He was an associate of Archigram Architects in London and Planning Director of the Ralph M. Parsons Company in Pasadena, California, USA, responsible for Urban Design projects in the Middle East, in particular the new town of Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. He was Bernard Tschumi’s partner on the Parc de la Villette project in Paris and co-author, with Peter Cook, of the Gropius Haus, a museum of contemporary art in Austria. His “Open Cinema” project was realised in Guimarães, Portugal (2012), in Lisbon (2013) and in Hong Kong (2016).

He was Chief Curator of the 2013-2014 Urbanism and Architecture Bi-city Biennale for Hong Kong and Shenzhen (UABB*HK), responsible for the Hong Kong part of the Biennale. He is chairman of Tetra X, an architectural and urban design practice based in Hong Kong.