

The Car as Presence and Perception: Automobility and Welfare Landscapes

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Automobility and Welfare Landscapes: The Car as Presence and Perception

There is no actor that influenced welfare landscape as much as the automobile. The car affected not only the urban form but also its perception. At the level of the urban form, new figures emerged such as the parking lot and the parking garage. Tools coming from the domain of semiotics and semiology were activated by architects to grasp this new reality and to make sense of it. Concerning the experience of welfare landscapes, the car introduced a new rhythm, speed and regime of perception. This paper examines the ways in which the car, as a physical and perceptual presence, has influenced the design of welfare landscapes. Investigating cases from the UK, France, Italy, Sweden, and Norway the paper explores how architects and urban designers started taking the car into full consideration when designing new neighbourhoods and cities. Among the cases that are examined are the impact of the car on the work and thought of Alison and Peter Smithson in the UK, and the design of new towns in France such as the design for the the new city extension of Toulouse-Le Mirail by Georges Candilis, Alexis Josic, and Shadrach Woods.

The emergence of a new understanding of the citizens' sensibilities due to the generalised used of the car in the post-war society should be interpreted in relation to the welfare state. Alison Smithson's concern, in *AS in DS: An Eye on the Road*, about the impact of mobility on our social patterns and social needs is interpreted in relation to the design strategies that emerged within the context of post-war welfare state. The Smithsons' effort to address through their written work and their architectural and urban design practice the contrast between the new post-war society and the traditional one, is part of their aspiration to re-invent the role of architecture within a context that the civic aspect becomes primordial. The Smithsons conceive the car as an important means within this endeavour of architecture to respond to the welfare values of the post-war society. Another example that is scrutinized is the Järvalyftet in Sweden – a large-scale project that intended to renew a section of northern Stockholm with a population of ca. 60,000 – envisioned a renewed role for the motorways and their connection to housing design. Special attention is paid to the analysis of how the spaces for, and perceptions from the car can be considered as urban heritage – especially in an era in which automobility is questioned.