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On Ecocivility

From a Corbusien vision to any vast apartment building
to the 2000 foot tall structure in Dubai
Big Box Buildings are places
where each person enters at the bottom
and first by rapid elevation
then by traversing
a non-windowed hallway
reaches a mostly modest
sometimes opulent
public or private living or working space
These behaviors
repeated millions of times
normalize the social alienation
of Big Box Buildings
where the nature of the structure itself
determines that a community and/or a civil society
cannot take form in the populations within them
The loss of social capital is profound
Here we design a new structure
and a new use of space
based on an as yet untested premise
that a complex synthesis of
normal elements in everyday life
placed in an unexpected relationship
basically a vertically designed small town
following the definition of complex systems
but behaving as any small town might
with the help of two interlocking forms
that comprise this urban ecosystem
The first is a vertical promenade
perhaps four blocks long
with side streets
The work of this promenade
is to host an activity and to be a place
a stage on which people in a community meet and mix
It is a leisurely meeting and mixing
having different purposiveness and tempo

than daily activities in a workplace
And like any promenade
it is marked by people
physically tuning their walking
to a common movement and rhythm
as is typical in all urban ecologies
This is a basic homeostatic
or self-regulating mechanism
by which the community as a whole
maintains awareness of the well-being
of the individuals who comprise it
and by which the sense of community
is reaffirmed collectively
It is an arena
in which the communal drama is publicly enacted
Even the funicular
which acts as transport
shares the leisurely pace
contributing to
the experience of constancy and change
defining self and group in the context of society and time
In fact this is the urban metabolism at work
As in any small town
the ways to traverse it are many
On foot
on a rapid elevator
or a funicular and occasionally on an escalator
Streets vary between 15 and 20 feet wide
and everybody is within 5 to 10 minutes
in physical time
of anyone anywhere and anyplace
Traversing it becomes an adventure
in diversity of experience
Internal flexibility permits evolution
and over time new patterns will emerge
which may generate new permissions
to improvise new relationships
between people and people
people and place
place and place

On Structure and Design

The second system
equally complex interactive and diverse
as the vertical promenade
is determined by a space volume
of 96,537,535 cubic feet
created within a space frame
It becomes a self supporting external structure
as is already made for some skyscrapers
The work of the external structure is complex
it encloses a space volume
behaving metaphorically
like the skin on a living entity
or exoskeleton
taking energy into itself
and releasing used energy
It is a space within which
a complex field of play exists
and is the terrain of a small town
But the work of the frame
is to generate internal lighting
collect electricity
and hold hydroponic gardens and orchards
and carry water and electrical systems
and waste systems
For instance
the growth systems take up
approximately 1,200,000 square feet
or about a 30 acre farm
It can produce enough food
for a small farmers market
creating jobs and reducing input from the outside
The building generates
much of its own electricity
from its own skin
reducing the input needed from the outside
The building recycles almost all of its waters
reducing the input needed from the outside
The atmosphere
is cleaned by virtue of
the absence of the combustion motor
and the presence of plant material
and the 4 acre meadow within
and the forest without
which all contribute to health and well being

The stores and medical facilities
schools and civic operations
and the maintenance of public spaces and parks
are paid for by
all those who live and work on the site
And so the ecosystem
that exists within the exoskeleton
becomes an everchanging pattern
And as warmth moves upward
the ecotomes and fish farms
and other flat pastures develop
more rapidly
It is a slow dance between the lives
and the physical systems within
All in transaction
All in continuous states of creativity
And this 70 building serpentine
housing almost 500,000 people
with about 1,750,000 square feet of living space
weaves its way along the Lea River
connected by the two tiered local transit system
bringing all structures within
20 minutes of each other
Thus the diversity of a large city
becomes available
to the 70 small towns that comprise it
Somebody said
“How much will one of these buildings cost?”
I said or you said
Somewhat more than a Big Box Building
Somewhat less than
a small town on the ground
or the cost of many small towns
which over time cojoin
to become a city
A city that evolves further in
diversity and complexity
as each town develops its own identity