

# Afterword

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## AFTERWORD

by Franz Oswald

The MAS LA 07/08 contributions to the design task of the Rhine Delta not only intrigue but move me very much. Both task and design solutions not only deal with a new architecture of the landscape but even more with an architecture of the dialectic tension between city and landscape. They represent an architecture of overcoming boundaries or, in other words, an architecture of the thresholds between water, land, rivers, territories of different uses, ownerships, communities, or countries.

In this sense, the main object of the task at hand is the 'Polis on the Water'. It represents the logical continuation of the preceding series of Waterscapes I to III: Chur, Rhone and Interlaken. It reveals how the urbanization of Switzerland is a history of man's extraordinary attempt to manage the forces of water with its springs, waterfalls, rivers, avalanches, reservoirs, floods or – difficult to forget – glacial drifts. The problem of the Rhine Delta is a unique one in the teaching of urban design. The focus of the design process becomes urban transformation that is realized directly through the dynamic of the water. The designer is forced to accept that he is only a bystander of this dynamic and, at the same time, a newcomer in the already established practice of designing thresholds. To this end, I would like to briefly address the following three observations.

### **On the water: The energy of dynamics and transformation**

Water is hardly tangible: a vital, changeable, but also dangerous force, a mirror or a wave, cloud or spume, the birthplace of Venus, a house of gods and demons. Without access to water, one is forced to live the life of a nomad. Urban sedentary tendencies flourish

in areas with adequate water reserves, predictable through climatic rhythms or renewed through technical supply chains, in order to be used in the production of energy or materials. Water transports waste and fertilizers and comprehensively cleans or soils the micro and macroscales of the biosphere.

Water dictates the connecting lines of tempo and geography, their cross sections and bearings. It brings together as well as divides, makes edges or transitions in the terrain visible, and continually creates and transforms complex networks from variously shaped rivers and nodes. Entities of water become models for movement patterns between sources or starting points and destinations.

Water is, together with light and air, the elementary power shaping the earth and man's environment. It brings them forth in one form in order to soon change them to another. In the service of such powers, the architect remains subordinate. He operates on their interfaces and is therefore, historically speaking, only another technician succeeding those who came before. Urban design on the water is like Sisyphus work, inexhaustible and simultaneously regenerative.

### **On the river: Intertwined flowing of different processes and scales.**

River, delta, and reservoir are inseparable components of the same watercourse. They form thresholds or stations, a part of the currently very dynamic urban system that has emerged from the Rhine's history.

In a very differentiated manner, from the Alps reaching to the Atlantik System flow in and through and auseinander of many different kinds of rivers. They are made up of spring water, snowmelt, wastewater, pollutants, till, and last but not least, a number of other

materials from the different peoples and cultures that move along it. Such polymorphic sequences of flow are made possible through water energy together with its power to transform.

The Rhine is not only an ecological but rather also a comprehensive urban scale boundary system of inflow and outflow. This requires, on the one hand, that the scales are in relation to one another along its entire course and, on the other, that the processes of flow of matter and people as well as their histories are examined.

### **On the delta: Building flowing boundaries to the open city and its gardens**

It requires courage to build on a delta. In the detailed or broad geography of a landscape is the delta, as a type a sponge made up of land and water masses, easy to identify. However, during the process of change and adjustment the forms of the constituent elements are so strongly coupled with each other that the world of water as well as the world of land multidimensionally and rapidly more often change to the disadvantage of the world of people.

Not every city that was historically built on a delta has survived such change and phases of adjustment. But, because of its territorial form of flowing boundaries – LandFlow – the delta offers a unique and attractive starting point for the fulfillment of a deeply rooted historic as well as contemporary vision: The open city and its gardens.

The design task of the Rhine Delta challenges us to grapple with this vision of our urban existence and, accordingly, design contributions have been produced that have the ability to slightly amaze the bystander observer.