



Walter Titz

Urban forest electrified

It is not a new image. But it is good because it is useable - the image of the city as an organism. As a body with organs and limbs. Growing but sometimes also with rank growth. Beautiful and not so beautiful sides. Attractive views and nasty wounds.

In this image of a city called Graz, it would seem to suggest itself to define Jakominiplatz as the heart of the city. In this vocabulary the Hauptplatz would rather be the pancreas, the Stadtpark, of course, the lung, the „Bermuda triangle“ stomach (and liver). Or something like that.

Jakominiplatz, the heart. From here traffic energy is pumped into the city's body. And this is where it comes back. A trade centre for electricity, a substation. Stream is connected with current. Walt

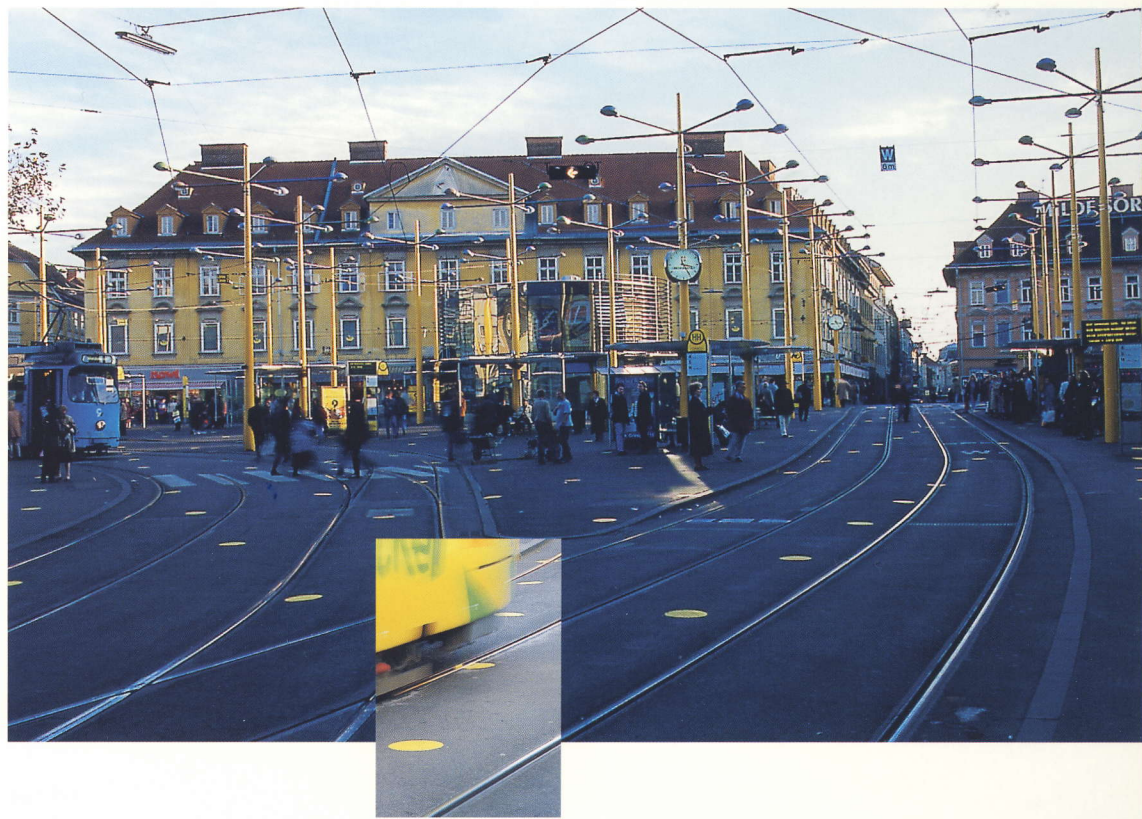
Whitman, the great American poet of early modernism is perfectly right when emphatically writing: "I sing the body electric". Although we can be sure he never set foot on Jakominiplatz.

Hence we can clearly deduce that Jakominiplatz is not Piazza San Marco. No refreshing health resort, no „green“ lung. In times where all squares are often misunderstood as spaces of relaxation beyond time, so called "Jacky" is a manifesto against the homely, because homely is what it definitely is not able to be.

"As architecture, the square is pointless, but perhaps even worse, as a traffic hub - as if someone wanted to create the biggest possible number of dangerous crosswalks - but as a surface with people walking upon it, it is unique ... And in this peculiar space unfolds the hustle and bustle of multi-coloured cars and coloured toilets, everything united,

veiled and brightened up by the veils of dusk and dawn." This is what August Endell, German (architecture) philosopher wrote in 1908 (!) in his beautiful text "The beauty of the big city", and not a statement on Jakominiplatz. I warmly recommend this text (available in a new edition), because it does away with wrong ideas of beauty in the context of urbanism. A text that understands the city exactly as that which it should be for those seeking homeliness - a provocation.

Jakominiplatz is a provocation. A slap in the face of all those who are only happy when a city is more rural than the tiniest hamlet. Those who want transport but do not want it to be seen and felt. In whose consciousness there is no differentiation of various needs and who subject everything to one single law - to prettiness. The syndrome of flower decoration competitions claims its tribute.



The user of the Jakominiplatz can perceive the force-field character of the square in various elements, e.g. in the "urban forest" of the 43 yellow light poles. But also the more decent grid of points on the asphalt tell us about the necessity of organising forces. Strollers with the capability to fly will be offered a thrilling birds-eye view of the lines of force drawn by the street car tracks and bus lines across the square. In all the unevenness that characterises Jakominiplatz and that makes it so difficult for its users yearning for harmony to like it, we can perceive a kind of urban aesthetics. A game of surfaces and building masses, the opening-up and closing of spaces. Expanse and narrowness in dialogue. Passengers who can only fall back upon locomotion at ground-level, will at least find a perfect system of orientation in the "pole-forest" of the Jakominiplatz - the loud and thrilling signal yellow is visible

from numerous "accesses" and hence this urban traffic centre is hardly to be missed. Nor at night, when the sky above "Jacky" is illuminated. That second sky, spanned by 43 by 5 lamps underneath the stars of the sky above the city of Graz.

So, as mentioned, Jakominiplatz focuses on the complex of "public transport". And hopefully there will be consequences for the entire city space and structure due to what becomes apparent here - a priority for a means of locomotion whose past is a component in the history of Graz.

In other words: The old system of public transport in Graz, dating back to the fifties and sixties, the one before the relentless transformation into a city more suitable for cars, was ahead of the present one. Jakominiplatz was actually to be seen as a symbol for development, as a promising image for a dominant public transport. Utopians are not reluctant to the vision that an accordingly

extended network of public transport in cooperation with the possibilities of the so called "telematic universe" would make the car useless as an individual means for transportation. We will see ... From this point of view, Jakominiplatz is a "modern" square. At the same time, however, it is old-fashioned as contradiction lies in its nature. Old-fashioned because it insists on being a "real" square. With "real" movement and the "real" exchange of human communication. In the era of virtual realities it is, however, only seemingly an anachronism. Because surely no data-highway will replace famous streetcar No. 6, for instance.

The ambiguous situation created by the collision of what is "modern" and what is "old-fashioned", is quite obvious to the user of "Jacky". If left with a buzz in the head by the hubbub of busy streetcars and buses - right behind the pretty market stalls (which surely will become



coated with patina as time goes by), he can leave modern times behind, just as if catapulted out of the present. Here, surrounded by the scents of traditional Styrian delicacies and fresh baked crusty bread, I feel so comfortable that the words of the Spanish architect Enrique Miralles spring to my mind, who said: "I love Graz. But there is one problem about Graz - it is way too pretty!" Señor Miralles would surely like the new Jakominiplatz.