

‘NEW URBANITY’ AND CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF PUBLIC ART NOTES ON *CITIZEN FIREFIGHTER* (K. HUNTER)

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With 2 figures and 3 photos

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Summary: In the course of global economic restructuring, ‘new urbanity’ has become a key concept within German-speaking urban studies. Despite a certain ambiguity, the concept often conveys a positive image of the traditional European city and its supposed urban qualities. The present paper aims to challenge this image by drawing upon contemporary forms of public art. Taking Kenny Hunter’s sculpture *Citizen Firefighter* as a case study, alternative concepts of urbanity are explored. Using qualitative interviews with the artist, the relationship between artistic and academic imaginations of urban life will be discussed. In this way a more balanced image of the traditional European city can be achieved.

Zusammenfassung: Im Zuge des wirtschaftlichen Strukturwandels ist „neue Urbanität“ zu einem zentralen Begriff des akademischen Stadtdiskurses geworden. Trotz einer gewissen begrifflichen Unschärfe verbindet sich der Begriff meist mit positiven Bildern von den urbanen Qualitäten der alten europäischen Stadt. Der vorliegende Beitrag problematisiert diese positive Bilderwelt durch eine Auseinandersetzung mit Kunst im öffentlichen Raum. Am Beispiel des *Citizen Firefighter*, einer Skulptur des schottischen Bildhauers Kenny Hunter, geht er der Frage nach, welche Vorstellungen bzw. Konzepte von Urbanität in öffentlichen Kunstwerken verarbeitet sind und welche Schlüsse sich daraus ziehen lassen für eine neue Urbanität, wie sie in der aktuellen Stadtforschung diskutiert wird.

Keywords: New urbanity, European city, urban life, citizenry, public art, sculpture

1 Introduction

Just over twenty years ago the urban sociologists HARTMUT HÄUSSERMANN and WALTER SIEBEL published an attempt “to formulate our ideas of the city and of good living in the city in a new way” (HÄUSSERMANN and SIEBEL 1987, 7). The theme of their book ‘Neue Urbanität’ (‘new urbanity’) had a great impact on the general discourse on the city in German-speaking countries and continues to be a focal study for urban studies, town planning and urban policy today. Despite a certain ambiguity – it has never been wholly clear what the term ‘new urbanity’ is precisely supposed to convey –, discussions of *new* urbanity of necessity refer back to older, past forms of living together in the city. What is often evoked in these discussions is the idea of ‘urbane’ ways of life – ways of life which are associated with the dense and compact city of the 19th century and which are said to have largely disappeared in the anonymity and ‘facelessness’ of the contempo-

rary city. By speaking of ‘new urbanity’, therefore, a promise of healing is expressed or the hope of continuity with the ‘good old times’ of the 19th century city, bringing the latter back to life.

One of the main instruments for the hoped-for revitalisation of today’s ‘inhospitable’ cities is culture. Both urban theorists and practitioners of urban renewal seem to agree that revitalisation programmes cannot be successful today if they do not include culture. While culture has been inseparably associated with the city since the Enlightenment and, as SHARON ZUKIN writes, is regarded as “the urban product *per se*” (ZUKIN 1998, 27), it is in the context of the search for new urbanities that culture-led regeneration and development have gained a key role in strategies to deal with the urban crisis. These strategies range from prestigious flagship events (such as the European Capital of Culture) through various festivals and exhibitions to different forms of public art (e.g., MILES 2005; QUINN 2005; WOOD 2007).

In this context, major public art projects like *The Gates* by Christo and Jeanne-Claude or, more recently, *The New York City Waterfalls* by Olafur Eliasson have become prominent elements in the representation of urban spaces. Promoting a particular image of the city and attracting millions of visitors, such installations highlight the significance of art and aesthetics in the urban 'economy of signs' (LASH and URRY 1994). There are, however, less prestigious forms of public art which are widely regarded as instruments for solving not only the economic, but also the social problems of our cities. Thus time and again one can read that public art projects can help to develop a certain 'sense of place' and contribute to civic identity more generally (e.g., MCCARTHY 2006; GLASGOW CITY COUNCIL 2003). Participative public art in particular is said to be suitable for giving disadvantaged districts a new image and improving the self-esteem and social cohesion of the inhabitants, thus contributing to broader regeneration outcomes (see SHARP et al. 2005). Further benefits of art in public space are said to be a general improvement in the quality of life, the preservation of cultural diversity and the social inclusion of marginalized groups (e.g., HALL and ROBERTSON 2001).

As a consequence, public art has become one of the key features analysed in the academic discourse on new urbanity. Contemporary forms of public art in particular are widely regarded a 'natural' part of urban life, i.e. they are interpreted by urban theorists as an integral component of both urban lifestyles and settlement forms. However, although art and (new) urbanity go so well together from the point of view of urban studies, the present paper adopts a different, reversed viewpoint. Instead of conceptualising public art as an intrinsic feature of 'new urbanity', the phenomenon of urbanity will be explored by means of a critical assessment of public art. By deciphering the notions and concepts of urbanity that are embodied in contemporary forms of public art, the present paper aims to answer the following questions: what lessons can be learned from artistic engagement with the contemporary city and how can these lessons bear fruit for the more academic discourse on 'new urbanity'?

It is fairly obvious that these questions cannot be answered in the abstract or in a generalised, let alone representative way. Not only is the discourse of urban studies heterogeneous and rather indefinite, as indicated above. The forms taken by art in public spaces are also too numerous to be taken together (see LOSSAU 2006). In line with the interpretative paradigm of qualitative research, the following

discussion will, therefore, concentrate on a specific piece of public art: the *Citizen Firefighter* sculpture in the centre of Glasgow in Scotland. It was created by the Scottish sculptor Kenny Hunter in 2001 on behalf of the regional fire service, the *Strathclyde Fire Brigade*. Ethnographic data collected in several in-depth interviews with the artist in the framework of a research project on public art in Scotland will be used to demonstrate the perspectives on and concepts of urbanity that are expressed in this work of art.¹⁾ Context will be provided with an introductory section rehearsing some central aspects of the (new) urbanity debate.

2 'New urbanity'

'New urbanity' is one of the most complex concepts in the current academic debate on the city. This is not surprising given that the concept of urbanity itself, upon which the new urbanity debate is necessarily founded, has a whole series of different dimensions (see, e.g., BARTH 1998). The economist and sociologist EDGAR SALIN, for example, in a talk given to the German Convention of Municipal Authorities (*Deutscher Städtetag*) in 1960, used the concept to refer to a specific lifestyle associated with the civil city (SALIN 1960). His emphasis was more on socio-cultural aspects such as political participation, tolerance and cosmopolitan attitudes and less on the built form or physical-material structure of the city. Nevertheless, as the urban theorist THOMAS SIEVERTS points out, in the current debate the concept is "frequently limited to the image of the compact city of the 19th century [...]" (SIEVERTS 2001, 32). With regard to the particular case of the European city, 'urbanity' is as a rule associated with at least three qualities: firstly centrality, secondly compactness and density, and thirdly a mixture of land-uses (see SIEBEL 2000).

Centrality is generally viewed as "the essential characteristic of the city" (ZEHNER 2001, 25). It is associated with the idea of the city as a significant place oriented towards a hinterland, and in whose

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Fig. 1: The Rödingsmarkt in the centre of Hamburg in 1846 (artist: Christoffer Suhr; source: www.hamburg.de). The painting captures the ideal image of the European city, reflecting some of its classical features, i.e. density, compactness and mixture of uses

centre the most important economic, socio-cultural and administrative institutions of a society are to be found. The characteristics of density and compactness are not only related to the centrality of a city; they are also associated with the third element of urbanity. The city has traditionally been the place where different people live together in limited space and which is characterised by a tremendous and closely interwoven “coexistence and juxtaposition of rich and poor, young and old, newcomers and established inhabitants, of workplaces, homes, business and pleasure” (SIEBEL 2004, 16). From this mixture the condition of life that is often referred to as urbanity can develop; and this has been in decline for some time and now threatens to be lost (see Fig. 1).

Most observers agree that the characteristics listed above no longer persist under today's social conditions. Thus the Swiss urban design theorist ANDRÉ CORBOZ (2001, 53) writes: “Paradoxically, for what geographers have called central places, two things are now true: they are no longer central, and they are no longer places [but merely provisional ‘non-places’, JL]” (CORBOZ 2001, 53). In this respect, both the compactness and the density of old cities seem to belong to the past. ‘Blame’ for this has been ascribed in particular to the development of (individual and public) transport systems, which has led to the growth of cities well beyond their municipal boundaries and into suburbia since the end of the First World War. The central city loses out in the process of suburbanisation or de-suburbanisation. It not only diminishes in quantitative terms through loss of population; increasingly it is becoming a “focal point for problematic groups [...], the poor, the unemployed, the old and foreigners” (SIEBEL 2000, 29). This is a reference to tenden-

cies towards unmixing, which are also discussed under the heading of fragmentation in the “quartered city” (MARCUSE 1993).

It is in the context of these very trends that some authors have observed a change in (e.g., HERLYN 2004), but more usually a loss of urbanity. Although current developments are evaluated in a variety of ways, the idea of a new urbanity is often associated with the hopeful prospect of combating the facelessness of suburban sprawl and the decline of the central cities. This hope is expressed most pointedly in the New Urbanism programme (for the German-speaking context, see BODENSCHATZ 1998; BODENSCHATZ and KEGLER 2002). Although New Urbanism is popular in the US, where the level of decentralisation far exceeds the extent of suburbanisation in Europe, the old qualities of the European city (i.e. compactness, density and mixture of uses) are now being rediscovered in European town planning as well (see Fig. 2). As a consequence, the current trends of re-urbanisation – broadly defined as the ‘renaissance’ of the inner cities due to an increase in population and jobs – have attracted the attention of urban practitioners and policy makers alike.

However, the advocates of the compact city often seem to forget that urban qualities which are viewed positively today also had their dark sides. The urbanity of 19th century European cities also fed on unhealthy living conditions, sheer poverty, personal dependencies, poor transport systems, confrontation with the strange and unfamiliar, in short: uncertainty and disorder (see SIEBEL 2000, 29). Thus it has been argued from the perspective of critical urban studies that neo-traditionalist programmes such as New Urbanism



Fig. 2: The Quarter at Tacheles, Berlin, as imagined by the epigones of the New Urbanism programme, Andres Duany and Elisabeth Plater-Zyberk (design layout by Duany and Plater-Zyberk and Company; source: www.eurocouncil.net). The parallels with the Rödingsmarkt in Hamburg 150 years earlier (Fig. 1) are striking

ultimately aim to revitalise the supposedly positive aspects of urban life worlds without being prepared to accept the negative ones (e.g., RONNEBERGER 2001, 36). According to this critical perspective, new urbanity is expressed primarily in the creation of prettified islands of prosperity under video surveillance, where the wealthy classes can go about their daily business undisturbed by marginalised fringe groups (see RONNEBERGER et al. 1999; SMITH 1996).

3 'New urbanity' and public art: the case of *Citizen Firefighter*

Not least as a result of the increasing significance of the discourse of new urbanity in the last twenty years, rising attention has been paid to art in the public realm. Although not every artistic activity that is relevant in and to urban space can be automatically described as 'public art', the term has become accepted to describe art associated with the strategies of culture-led regeneration on the part of the competitive city mentioned at the beginning of this contribution. While a significant proportion of the art referred to under this heading is publicly funded, i.e. in the framework of state, regional or municipal programmes (MILES 1997, 5), public art in the broader sense also includes privately funded forms as well as art created in urban space on artists' own initiative. The term therefore encompasses a wide range of artistic products, which can be differentiated according to their permanence, their 'readability' or their institutional context, for example (see, e.g., LOSSAU 2006).

It is important, however, to differentiate not only with a view to the products, but also to the producers of public art. The profiles of the artists differ, for instance, according to the line of work or field they come from, the traditions they adhere to and their concepts of their own role and of the effect of their art (ibid.). Finally, differing national funding practices and historically-politically specific interpretative models and preconceptions determine the underlying conditions of artistic work in the public realm. In this sense public art in, say, Britain differs from public art in Germany – which of course does not preclude the possibility that casts of one and the same work of art may be found in both Manchester and Munich. The two copies, however, need not tell the same story and have the same effect in the different locations.

Against such a background, the examination of the question which stands at the heart of this paper – what concepts of urbanity are expressed in



Photo 1: *Citizen Firefighter*, a work by the Scottish sculptor Kenny Hunter, at the corner of Hope Street and Gordon Street in the immediate vicinity of Glasgow Central Station (Photo: Julia Lossau)

contemporary forms of public art – requires an approach that takes into account the distinctiveness and complexity of individual pieces of art. The specific art work which will be used as a case study in this respect bears the name *Citizen Firefighter* and was created by the Scottish sculptor Kenny Hunter (born 1962). The figure was unveiled in mid-2001 and is in a central location in Glasgow, on the corner of Hope Street and Gordon Street in the immediate vicinity of the main railway station (see Photo 1). It was commissioned by the *Strathclyde Fire Brigade* to celebrate both the 25th birthday of the fire brigade and, looking to the future, its 'entry into the new millennium' (WATERS 2001; see <http://www.strathclydefire.org/about/citizen.asp>).

For the fire brigade as a non-artistic institution, the project was challenging in both financial and logistical terms. Not only did it prove difficult to find funding for the project, it was also highly unusual for firefighters to deal with questions of sculpture

and the art world more generally. Therefore, when the project started it was felt that those responsible for the commissioning process "should all take a steep learning curve to educate themselves on the different forms of art that exist" (WATERS 2001, 30). Nevertheless, the firefighters were afraid that the work of art could ultimately remain unconnected with and incomprehensible to them. They feared that on the day of unveiling a weird, abstract object would appear, in which they would see neither themselves nor their profession reflected: "They [the fire brigade] are not used to commissioning art, obviously that is not part of their normal year in year out practice. And at the beginning they had a stereotypical view of artists. They thought that I would use unfamiliar language or that I would do something very oblique, strange. They always said that their darkest fear would be that, on the day of unveiling, a band would be there... the Mayor would be there... and they would put the cloth off, and there would be a big strange lump (laughs). That was their fear" (Kenny Hunter, interview 22.7.2002).

However, the artist who had finally been chosen by the fire brigade jury quickly managed to dispel these fears. Although Kenny Hunter himself says that initially he was not enthusiastic about the fire fighting theme, he began to study the work and responsibilities of the regional service intensively. He accompanied one of their units at work several times and in this way began to develop a conception of the way in which the firefighters wanted to be represented: "I wanted the firefighters to identify with the figure because, ultimately, they have to take ownership of it, it's *their* statue. They often said that they did not want to be elevated too much. But they obviously recognise that the work they do is important, special. One phrase they used was: We are just ordinary people doing a special job" (Kenny Hunter, interview 22.7.2002).

Hunter created a bronze figure that was enthusiastically received by the firefighters. The general public also accepted the black figure with its breathing apparatus; at least after the unveiling nobody tried to damage or deface it. The sculpture eventually acquired a special significance after the events of September 11th 2001, when it became a public memorial for the victims of the terror attacks and in particular for the firefighters of New York: "And after September 11, the whole thing, it is amazing what happened. I went down a few times, anonymously standing around. And later on, there was a service organised by the Scottish Fire Brigade. And I could see that the artwork had a social function at that point, allowing people to share their thoughts and reflect about how they felt about what had happened. So,

to some degree, it was very odd to see uniformed men saluting one of my sculptures. That is not that common these days – especially for somebody like me who is kind of a bit left field" (Kenny Hunter, interview 22.7.2002).

4 *Citizen Firefighter* and the European city

At a first glance the sculpture appears to transport an emphatic or even romantic understanding of urbanity. As the title – *Citizen Firefighter* – implies, the artwork refers to the citizen, *citoyen* or burgher as the classical political subject of the European city.² Following Max Weber, it has often been argued that the latter represents the place where this subject first came into being in that it represents the stage for a threefold emancipation: "The emancipation of the economic citizen or bourgeois as economically independent market participants from the closed cycles of the *oikos* economy, the emancipation of the political citizen or *citoyen* from the political system of feudalism, and on this basis, the emancipation of the individual in the polarity of public and private life from the personal dependencies and direct control of pre-modern social relations" (SIEBEL 2000, 268). By explicitly representing the firefighters as *citizens*, the artist thus – whether deliberately or not – alludes to one of the most central and traditional *topoi* of the academic debate on the European city.

It is not only with regard to the subject matter invoked by its title, however, that *Citizen Firefighter* appears to be quite a traditional work. The same is true of its more formal aspects. By explicitly celebrating – or commemorating – the fire brigade with a figurative sculpture, the artist refers to the tradition of the monument as it developed in the 19th century. Although there had been public monuments before, the 19th century witnessed a sheer 'flood' of them (*'statuomanie'*, in French; see DAUSS 2001, 81) when decorated memorials and statues were placed in the streets, squares and central places of many European cities (see MAI and SCHMIRBER 1989; MITTIG and PLAGEMANN 1972; NIPPERDEY 1976). The 'divine' role of such monuments, i.e. to transport a shared historical awareness and thereby to shape an identity, was described as follows

² With regard to etymology, there are interesting differences between the Romanic, French-influenced citizen or *citoyen*, on the one hand, and the German burgher (*Bürger*), on the other hand. While the citizen and *citoyen* used to inhabit a medieval town (*cité*), the burgher lived in a fortified place (*burgh*). What the terms have in common, however, is the implication that their respective referents are free individuals

by CHARLES BAUDELAIRE in a 'Letter to the Director of the Revue Française' in 1859: "You progress through a large city with an ancient cultural heritage, one of those which contain the most important archives of the world, and your eyes are drawn upwards [...]; for on the public squares, on the corners of crossroads, lifeless individuals, larger than those who pass at their feet, relate in a silent language magnificent legends of glory, war, science and martyrdom. [...] And be you the most carefree of men, the unhappiest or the lowest, beggar or banker, the stone phantom takes hold of you for a few instants and bids you, in the name of the past, to think of things that are not of this earth. That is the divine role of sculpture." (BAUDELAIRE 1989, 197–198)

In the course of the 20th century, however, the patriarchal and time-honoured statues fell into lasting disrepute. The modernisation of society, the break with tradition, individualisation and belief in progress meant that the 'divine role of sculpture' was increasingly considered obsolete. Today, the 'stone phantoms' are at best smiled at, if not overlooked or even vandalised. The art world has also become sceptical of the figurative tradition epitomised in the 19th century monument. As early as at the beginning of the 20th century, a belief in the renewing and liberating power of abstraction led to a rejection of figurative aesthetics (see, e.g., LANGNER 1989). While for many artists the latter seemed to represent historical convention and ennui, abstraction was regarded 'more or less as a reflection of the aims and objectives of belief in progress, embedded in aesthetics' (LANGNER 1989, 58). As a consequence, there are now relatively few sculptors like Kenny Hunter who produce figurative work and thereby to an extent resist the trend towards artistic self-referentiality.

By portraying the fire fighting theme in a figurative statue – and not an abstract sculpture – and by placing it on a pedestal, Kenny Hunter thus deliberately borrows from an unfashionable and rather antiquated form of art associated with ideas of identity, collective memory and shared experiences. Such monuments were not only put up by dynastic (and later national) sovereigns in order to express their power and legitimise their authority. In the 19th century they were also increasingly used by citizens throughout Europe to give expression to their social and political confidence (KAPNER 1972; MITTIG 1987; MEISSNER 1987). The civic monument in the city thus corresponds with the idea of the urban civil society as an emancipatory association of free individuals as it developed in the medieval European city. *Citizen Firefighter*, as a member of an institution dedicated to the common good and



Photo 2: A place to commemorate: *Citizen Firefighter* as public memorial (Source: CCA and Strathclyde Fire Brigade 2001, 48)

the principle of shared responsibility, can be seen as a symbolic reminder of this vision of urban society (see GALL 1993; REULECKE 1985 on the relationship between the city and its citizenry in the 19th century) (Photo 2).

At the same time, however, *Citizen Firefighter* breaks with the tradition of bourgeois self-representation in several ways. First of all, it is important to note that the granite pedestal upon which the statue stands is relatively simple both in terms of the material used and in terms of style. In comparison with the portentous, often highly decorated pedestals of traditional statuary monuments, *Citizen Firefighter's* pedestal appears rather unglamorous. Secondly, the sculpture does not commemorate an important personality – be it a famous artist, a renowned scholar or another 'great son' of the city –, but a mundane, everyday institution, i.e. the fire brigade which is represented by a masked, anonymous individual. Thirdly, it is the very anonymity of the figure which allows the artist to succeed in breaking the

rules of traditional monuments. The statue's black breathing apparatus and voluminous black protective clothing literally leave the beholder in the dark as to this firefighter's specific identity – including whether the mask hides a male or a female. In a brochure issued for the unveiling of the statue, the art critic RAY MACKENZIE writes: "The concealment of the face [...] allows the problematic question of gender – and with it the rooted masculinist bias of the historical tradition – to be disposed of once and for all. Underneath the protective visor there may be what we used to refer to as a 'fireman', but on the evidence presented to us we simply cannot say, and this is surely a relevant concern in a society committed to the ideal of equal opportunities for men and women alike" (MACKENZIE 2001, 11).

In this spirit the rounded contours of the sculpture also indicate a possible femininity foreign to the heroic statues of the 19th century, which aimed to portray dynamic masculinity: "And there is a softness to the form which is usually not considered a masculine trait, it is seen as a more feminine trait, rather than a kind of dynamic, hard form" (Kenny Hunter, interview 17.10.2002).

The external appearance of the sculpture creates further ambivalence. Unlike its elevated and heroic ancestors, it is unclear whether *Citizen Firefighter* is ultimately benign or actually malignant. On the one hand the figure's posture and equipment express the disciplined readiness for action associated with the fire brigade as a benign institution always at the service of the public. On the other hand the sculpture also evokes uncanny powers. The statue's face, completely hidden by helmet and mask, calls to mind *Darth Vader*, the 'dark father' of the science fiction epic *Star Wars*. However, other visual elements disrupt the iconography of evil or the superhuman. This is true of the round, cartoon-like splash at the figure's feet, as well as for its narrow, slightly rounded shoulders. The latter seem to express a feeling of dejected forlornness, so that, according to the artist, the figure arouses pity among some beholders (Kenny Hunter, interview 22.7.2002; see Photo 3).

Against this background, *Citizen Firefighter* can ultimately be regarded as a contradictory "anti-monument" (Kenny Hunter, interview 22.7.2002). Because the artist conforms with bourgeois monuments in terms of form and content, while simultaneously breaking with this tradition, his figure serves both as a public statue and as an artistic sculpture: "A statue tends to have to communicate or to be effective in the public realm, whereas a sculpture has to relate to the world of art and to form and surface and volume and those types of concern, which are kind of art con-

cerns" (Kenny Hunter, interview 22.7.2002). With regard to the concepts of urbanity expressed within it, this means that *Citizen Firefighter* is concerned with the classical political subject of the European city, but



Photo 3: *Citizen Firefighter* – hero or anti-hero? (Source: CCA and Strathclyde Fire Brigade 2001, 4)

brings it down from its pedestal through the means of art. In this way it questions differences between the committed urban citizen and the urbanite as consumer, between community and individuality as well as the quality of co-operation and co-existence in the modern city: "The intention was to open up that dialogue between citizen and resident, between the century of the self that we are living through and the receding idea of community, or collective life. In fact, it is a huge question, how we relate, how we work, how we live in the city. My intention was to present it as a question. And the anonymity of the figure is, to some degree, what holds the whole question in balance, really" (Kenny Hunter, interview 22.7.2002).

5 Conclusion

In the German-speaking context, the urban discourse today is characterised by a multi-layered debate on 'new urbanities'. In spite of the heterogeneity of its contents, this debate is inescapably linked with the European city of the 19th century which in turn is frequently associated with the hopeful vision of a better life. *Citizen Firefighter*, a work by the Scottish

sculptor Kenny Hunter, also refers to historic elements of the city. Following on from the tradition of the bourgeois monument, it portrays the classic subject of European urbanity: the political citizen or *citoyen*, who stood for the communal, emancipatory aspect of the European city.

In contrast to many of the voices contributing to the discourse on new urbanity, Hunter takes care not to romanticize his theme. The artist deliberately does not reproduce the image of the confident, heroic citizen, but contrasts it with experiences of uncertainty and isolation. By doing so, he creates an ambivalent work of art. On the one hand the sculpture represents the firefighters as “ordinary people doing a special job”, i.e. as fellow men (and women) who are ready for action and willing to help others. On the other hand, the artwork shows an anonymous, faceless and un-gendered being which can just as easily arouse pity for its isolation as fear of its darkness. In this way, Kenny Hunter refers to tradition and thereby reproduces the romantic idea of the European city as the place of communality and inclusion. At the same time, however, the artist can be said to translate this idea into modern times, bringing to the fore the ‘dark sides’ of the classical citizenry. Against such a background, the figure ultimately implies that life in the European city was never (solely) as emancipated and inclusive nor showed solidarity in the way that the academic discourse would have it.

It is this critical attitude in relation to the legacy of the European city which differentiates this work of art from other positions in the new urbanity discourse. This is especially true of neo-traditionalist programmes such as *New Urbanism* and their affirmative reference to urban qualities such as compactness, density and mixture of uses. However, more critical perspectives on new urbanism also reproduce unequivocal, positive images of the old European city. In hope of its resuscitation, many authors seem to overlook the fact the supposedly ideal world of the 19th century city also had its downsides. In view of these blind spots, *Citizen Firefighter* reminds the beholder to bear in mind the ambivalence of the European city. In the spirit of this message, this contribution concludes with a quote from two representatives of urban sociology who pointed out the ambivalence of urbanity twenty years ago: “The city is both home and machine, single-family house and hotel. The choice between appropriation and release, self-government and administration, activity and passivity must be kept open for everyone, likewise the choice between neighbourliness and anonymity. The appeal to endure ambivalence and contradiction

always remains unsatisfactory. But contradictions are constitutive of urban life. If they are suppressed, urban culture is thereby damaged at its core. [...] Life in cities is contradictory life: between distance and closeness, anonymity and identification, familiar home and supply apparatus” (HÄUSSERMANN and SIEBEL 1987, 249).

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