Narrating an Analogical Urbanism: Rooms+Cities

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Introduction

For a generation, economic dogma, market-oriented urbanism and the continued anti-theory narrative has shaped the form of cities and the collective urban imaginary. From Michael Speaks' "theory is an impediment" proclamation to Patrik Schumacher's "free market urbanism," there is sharp division between those who argue for the formal knowledge of architecture based on close-reading, historical process, deep analysis and speculative thought on one side, and those who urge a technical and application based approach tied to instrumentality and economic rationality leading to architecture that is all too often highly utilitarian at one extreme or no more than a narcissistic aesthetic object at the other. [1] Monetary value has superseded any other value. Green land and the public realm are everywhere under threat by squanderous development practices that favour suburban typologies and consumerist mentalities. We need to push back.

Architecture has the capacity to imagine new possibilities for dense city-making, new possibilities for inhabitation, new possibilities for private and public life, and new relations of cities to the land. There is a continuous line of architectural thinking from the Enlightenment to the contemporary avant-garde that recognises the power of architecture to imagine new forms of city and social life and which have proposed critical projects and counter narratives.

We propose analogical urbanism as a critical project of close-reading the city and a counter narrative to the dominant tendency of neoliberal thought and its architecture, which has instrumentalised the imagination. [2] This paper will circumstantiate the idea of analogical urbanism by drawing on three critical projects: Aldo Rossi's project of the *analogical city* as "logical-formal principle" of close-reading; Oswald Mathias Ungers' typological and morphological reading exemplified in the Archipelago City project, which condensed the structure of the city and its conceptual associations into singular *analogical islands*; and Mario Gandelsonas' linguistic readings of the city which bring subjectivity and

urban form into close relation, termed here *analogical figures*. Against the ethos of individuality, instrumentality and economic technocracy, projects such as these assert a counter narrative of collective, speculative and critical thought toward a renewed discourse on architectural imagination and the urban imaginary.

We organise the paper as two narratives in dialogue: a theoretical narrative that argues the possibility of an analogical urbanism elucidated by a reading of the projects by Rossi, Ungers and Gandelsonas; and a visual narrative using a selection of work from our Masters level architectural design research unit entitled Rooms+Cities. [3]

Analogical City

The canonical reference point for an analogical urbanism is Aldo Rossi's notion of the analogical city. At the core of the analogical city was a productive tension: on one hand the analogue as a formal principle that united analysis and design, composition and typological principles, and where "the history of architecture is also the material of architecture;" and on the other hand the analogue as a figure of thought that reconciled oppositions such as the individual and collective realm, architecture and city, the real and imaginary (Rossi said "the imaginary city is the real city") and thus engaged notions of individual and collective subjectivity.[4] Rossi was responding to debates on disciplinarity, questions of architecture's contribution to urbanism, the role of history, technology and questions of housing shortages, unruly development, expansion of cities and the socio-economic transformation from Fordism to post-Fordism in the 1970s – questions that, to a certain extent, read in uncanny resemblance to our present context, especially now that spheres once outside of the economy such as creativity, imagination and language are the fundamental modes of society. [5]

The most compelling demonstration of the analogical city is the collage project produced for the 1976 Venice Biennale by Rossi in collaboration with Eraldo Consolacio, Bruno Reichlin and Fabio Reinhart. [6] The Analogical City: Panel consists of projects by Rossi (San Rocco, Gallaratese, Segrate, Modena Cemetery, and many others) and canonical projects (including: Palladio's Palazzo Thiene, Le Corbusier's Ronchamp, Terragni's Danteum, Piranesi's *Carceri* and the *Campo Marzio*), which are montaged at different scales onto a background of urban fabric, land and sea, and organised within a square frame. The stability of the square frame is counterposed by the instability of the collage composition, yet

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the collage is not disordered. There is a vertical axis defined by the wall of Segrate, carefully positioned large and small forms as areas of intensity and a tension between the square frame and the circular form of the centralised Ideal City. While the squareness of the panel suggests a plan, the panel is not entirely a plan, with the lower half merging into an elevation then perspective.

A reference point is Piranesi's *Campo Marzio*. Both plans share a similar language of tight counterpositioning of architectural forms (Tafuri called Piranesi's project a *bricolage*), a combination of architectural conventions – *Campo Marzio* includes a plan of Rome etched onto a giant stone as if it is part of the city thereby destabilising ideas of scale and place – and both projects share a sense of historical consciousness, using the history of the city as the material of their architecture. While in Piranesi's project historical consciousness refers specifically to the history of Rome, in Rossi's Analogical City historical consciousness is broader in scope and unifies temporal space to connect all architecture as the sum of a multitude of authors and projects, passing from Knossos, to Palladio, Renaissance Ideal Cities, Piranesi, Le Corbusier, and others, of "every project imagined, designed or built" to quote Rossi from elsewhere. [7] Rossi puts a dialogue across history, montaging all projects into a singular project. By putting different architectural representations into a singular image, by combining fabric, object, opposing scales, there is a will toward a unitary reading of architecture and city.

The Analogical City collage is a demonstration of the accumulation of formal knowledge and a model of architecture as a critical project – a collective discourse across history that performs acts of close-reading upon architecture and the city as a way to generate new thought and form and link the agency of authorial imagination to the broader collective imaginary.

Analogical Island

Oswald Mathias Ungers' project of the Archipelago City with its associated concepts of morphological series is developed in texts such as "Architecture of Collective Memory," *Architecture as Theme* and *City Metaphors*, and shows affinity with Rossi's analogical city. Ungers argues for a "non-linear" process of architectural thinking and an understanding of the city as a "history of formation and transformation," a "representation of ideas and

thought, decisions and accounts," and an "ensemble of types and counter-types." [8] These ideas condense in the Archipelago City, a collaborative project with Rem Koolhaas, Hans Kollhoff and Peter Riemann.

In 1977 Ungers (et al) proposed Berlin: A Green Archipelago, which consisted of a constellation of dense urban islands within the limit of the Berlin Wall. [9] West Berlin was in crisis as a shrinking city and site of the Cold War. The Archipelago City project aimed to organise the city shrinkage and proposed a theoretical Berlin conceived by the intensification of areas in Berlin that were seen to deserve it and the abandonment of those areas of Berlin that did not, to paraphrase Koolhaas' reflections on the project. [10] The project articulated the latent "island" character of Berlin, from its history as two areas separated by the Spree, to a regional network of cities across a nineteenth-century industrial landscape, and a city divided by the Berlin Wall.

Having performed a plan analysis of West Berlin, abstracting the artefacts, infrastructures, forms and spaces of the city and drawing the geometric and axial relationships, Ungers and Koolhaas identified urban areas that already had a strong identity, which embodied "in a pure and legible form, ideas and concepts," and then proposed a series of scenarios to intensify those parts of Berlin. The scenarios compared the identified islands to other cases from the history of architecture and the city with similar typological characteristics. A selection of scenarios were as follows: "... The insertion of Leonidov's Palace of Culture into the Ernst Reuter Platz; The realisation of Mies' angular skyscraper as a multi-purpose social centre in the Theodor Heuss Platz; The placement of Adolf Loos' Chicago Tribune skyscraper in Scholzplatz; The transplantation of the Magnitogorsk plan along the street Unter den Eichen; The realisation of the Algiers project of Le Corbusier along the Spree. ..." [11]

At an exhibition entitled "The City in the City" the scenarios were presented with the analytical plans of Berlin and reference images to imply what Ungers and Koolhaas called "morphological sequences." [12] There is a dialogue between analysis and project: through the identification of urban islands, their abstraction from the urban fabric and proposed correspondence to other projects that share typological characteristics but are at different scales, different situations, and not necessarily built or related specifically to the history of Berlin. For example, the gridded structure and linearly extending organisation of Unter den Eichen corresponds to Leonidov's chequerboard grid for the linear city of Magnitogorsk and

thus could be substituted (Unter den Eichen Linear City); or the radial organised urban island in the district of Neukölln reads as potentially a void or solid leading to its analogue as either the piazza at Siena (void), or the amphitheatre of Arles (solid) (Neukölln Amphitheatre City); the gridded fabric and long park at Kreuzberg finds its analogue in Manhattan (Manhattan in Kreuzberg); South Friedrichstadt is an analogue of Karlsruhe (South Friedrichstadt as Radial City). The morphological sequences, with their substitutions and replacements read as an example of analogical thinking toward an analogical urbanism. The analogical islands refer both to the city of Berlin and more broadly to the collective discourse of the discipline of architecture.

Analogical Figure

In *X-Urbanism* Mario Gandelsonas explored the possibility of using architectural thought and methods of representation to investigate the "non-architectural" territory of the city and open up the city to a discursive and imaginary realm where the drawing itself articulates a "discursive surface" that links city and thought. [13] Gandelsonas puts forward the American City as an analogue of the European City where the Roman grid is transformed into the American one-mile grid, and the grid becomes a cartographic device to map the territory of space and thought. Gandelsonas follows Rossi's notion of the "city as an historical text" and proposes architectural form as a "textual construction" open to serial production and collective linguistic processes of exchange such as those seen in the morphological sequences of Ungers. [14]

The suite of drawings that concludes *X-Urbanism* present close-readings of seven cities: New York, Los Angeles, Boston, New Haven, Chicago, Des Moines, Atlanta. On one level the drawings develop techniques and a graphical language of architectural representation of cities. Gandelsonas identifies areas of "scriptural density," what we call analogical figures, as places of maximum intensity, permanence or radical change, and that deviate from the typical form of the city, a process not unlike the identification of islands as distinct entities in the Archipelago City. In order to identify these areas Gandelsonas uses operations of delayering, deletion, erasure, fragmentation. On another level the drawings transform the city to construct a new project. By reading the city they also write the city. They uncover formal conditions and develop formal strategies to redefine the idea of the city. The drawings do not propose a realist depiction of the city as it exists but a new

representation of the city, an analogical city, through strategies of substitution, amplification, reversal, disruption. Often what was in the background is foregrounded and what was formerly solid becomes void and vice versa. Against conventional discourse on the city, the practice of continuity and surface contextualism, which for Gandelsonas, leads on one hand to the homogeneity of the global city and on the other hand the nostalgic reproduction of the historic city, Gandelsonas instead articulates a latent discontinuity to link city and deep thought through close-reading to develop the city as a critical project.

Rooms+Cities: Toward an Analogical Urbanism

What is compelling about the work of Rossi, Ungers and Gandelsonas is their engagement with the city at large, their fundamental commitment to critique and their ability to articulate a strong authorial position in relation to collective consciousness. In Rooms+Cities, their work is a point of departure for developing an analogical urbanism. At a time when most urban design proposals are ordered to satisfy the private interests of the economy and are often no more than the production of a single building confined to the object itself with little to do with the public realm (the staging of politics that Hannah Arendt called "the space of appearance" in *The Human Condition*) our only option is the critical project. We propose an analogical urbanism as a critical project to counter the prevailing emphasis on individuality, instrumentality and economic-based narratives of architecture and the city. Such projects will only ever be individual visions, even if they involve teams of professional. Instead we propose projects that make space for collective, speculative and critical thought because, like the work of Rossi, Ungers and Gandelsonas, they draw on the knowledge and images that constitute an extended architectural and urban imaginary that we all share. We share it because this imaginary is an analogue of the cities we live in.

This selection of projects from Rooms+Cities, our Masters level design research unit, aims to develop an analogical urbanism to support the public life of the city and extend the critical narrative of architecture. The principal outputs of the unit are speculative city projects that narrate acts of critical reflection upon the city. Thinking is organised around the dialectic between the room and the city: the room as the locus of thought, desire, occupation and the interior of architecture as a body of knowledge; the city as the infrastructural and ideological field and expression of collective imagination. Rooms+Cities use strategies of close–reading

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of canonical city projects to accumulate the formal knowledge and critical intelligence of architecture and generate new forms and thought for architecture, the city and the territory.

Endnotes

[1] See for example Michael Speaks, "After Theory", *Architectural Record*, 193.6 (2005), 72–75; and Patrik Schumacher, "The Historical Pertinence of Parametricism and the Prospect of a Free Market Urban Order", in *The Politics of Parametricism: Digital Technologies in Architecture*, ed. by Matthew Poole and Manuel Shvartzberg (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 19–44.

[2] For a cogent critique of architecture's part in neoliberal capitalism refer Douglas Spencer, *The Architecture of Neoliberalism: How Contemporary Architecture Became an Instrument of Control and Compliance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

[3] As Vittorio Gregotti has said in *New Directions in Italian Architecture*, the schools are best placed to challenge establishment practices with avant-garde thought. While teaching is not the only way to change the narrative of architectural and urban thinking, it is one way. We thank our students at the School of Architecture, University of Dundee.

[4] Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City* [1966], trans. by Diane Ghirardo and Joan Ockman (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982), p. 179. Also refer the 1969 Preface to the Second Italian Edition where Rossi develops the analogical city in relation to Canaletto's painting of an imaginary Venetian scene constructed by a montage of Palladian buildings.

[5] For alternative readings on contemporary forms of subjectivity refer Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009); Christian Marazzi, *Capital and Language: From the New Economy to the War Economy*, trans. by Gregory Conti (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2008); Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. by Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2004).

[6] See Aldo Rossi, "La Città Analoga: Tavola / The Analogous City: Panel", *Lotus International*, 13 (1976), 4–9.

[7] Refer Aldo Rossi, "Introduction to 'Architecture, Essai Sur L'art'" [1967], *UCLA Architecture Journal*, 2 (1989), 40–49 (p. 43).

[8] See Oswald Mathias Ungers, "Architecture of the Collective Memory: The Infinite Catalogue of Urban Forms", *Lotus*, 24 (1979), 4–11; Oswald Mathias Ungers, *Architettura come Tema/Architecture as Theme*, trans. by Mara De Benedetti and Christopher Huw Evans, Lotus Documents (Milano/New York: Electa/Rizzoli, 1982); Oswald Mathias Ungers, *Morphologie/City Metaphors* [1982] (Köln; New York: Walther König, 2011).

[9] See Oswald Mathias Ungers, Rem Koolhaas and others, *The City in the City, Berlin: A Green Archipelago* [1977], ed. by Florian Hertweck and Sébastien Marot (Ennetbaden: Lars Müller Verlag, 2012). This publication compiles several versions of the Archipelago City project, including its initial draft manuscript and panels from "The City in the City" exhibition.

[10] See Rem Koolhaas, "Imagining Nothingness" [1985], in *S,M,L,XL* (New York, N.Y.: Monacelli Press, 1995), pp. 198–209.

[11] Ungers, Koolhaas and others, *The City in the City, Berlin: A Green Archipelago*, p. 20.

[12] Ibid., p. 52.

[13] See Mario Gandelsonas, *X-Urbanism: Architecture and the American City* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999).

[14] Gandelsonas, *X-Urbanism*, p. 66.

Image Captions

All the images in this article were produced by students in our Rooms+Cities design research Unit at the School of Architecture, University of Dundee.

Figure 1. James Basey, Re-imagining the Nolli City, Session 2014–15. The Nolli plan of Rome disarticulated and reversed from plan to section, void into solid and ground into figure.

Figure 2. Fergus Low, Robbie Miller, Elspeth Tayler, Analogical Ravenscraig, Session 2015–16. A montage of fragments of Nolli's Rome, Ledoux's Saltworks and Ungers' Archipelago City condense into city islands – analogical figures.

Figure 3. Caitlin Bowers, Kieran McAdam, Fennella Nkansah, Danielle Reid, Ravenscraig: Heterogeneous-Mat, Session 2016–17. A close-reading of a post-industrial site densified with Piranesian objects combined with Manhattan blocks.

Figure 4. Matthew Gadie, Kirsten Pont, Athina Ralli, Li Zhen Ng, Newbridge: Slabs and Frames, Session 2016–17. Long slabs mix with monumental infrastructural typologies to organise the horizontality of a city edge site.

Biographies

Cameron McEwan [100 word Bio]

Cameron McEwan teaches architectural design, history and theory at the Institute of Architecture, UCLan, and is a Trustee of the AE Foundation, an independent organisation for architecture and education. Cameron holds a PhD on Aldo Rossi and the Analogical City. With Lorens Holm, he led Rooms+Cities at Dundee School of Architecture. Cameron's research focuses on the relationship between architecture, representation and subjectivity to engage the city as a critical project. His work is published in *Drawing On*, *Journal of Architectural Education*, *Lo Squaderno*, *Outsiders* at the 2014 Venice Biennale, and elsewhere. He is presently writing a book entitled *Analogical City*.

Cameron McEwan [50 word Bio]

Dr. Cameron McEwan teaches at the Institute of Architecture, UCLan, and is a Trustee of the AE Foundation. Cameron's research focuses on architecture and the city as a critical project, and is published in *Drawing On*, *Journal of Architectural Education*, *Lo Squaderno*, at the 2014 Venice Biennale, and elsewhere.

Lorens Holm [100 word Bio]

Dr. Lorens Holm is Reader in Architecture and Director of the Geddes Institute for Urban Research at the University of Dundee. He runs Rooms+Cities, which uses architectural design and theory to open up a space for designing new forms of city and social life.

Publications include *Brunelleschi Lacan Le Corbusier: architecture space and the construction of subjectivity* (Routledge 2010) and, with John Hendrix, *Architecture and the Unconscious* (Routledge 2016). His papers have appeared in *The Journal of Architecture*, *Perspecta*, *Critical Quarterly*, *Architecture Theory Review*, and *Assemblage*. He is currently organizing an international interdisciplinary conference on cities and collective social formations.

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