

The image is a cover for a book. It features a high-resolution aerial photograph of a city's urban grid, showing a complex network of streets and buildings. A prominent white horizontal band runs across the middle of the image, serving as a background for the title and subtitle. The title 'Urban Morphology and the Resilient City' is written in a large, bold, black serif font. Below it, the subtitle 'Proceedings of the 23rd International Seminar on Urban Form' is written in a smaller, black serif font. At the bottom of the cover, the editors' names and the publisher's information are listed in a smaller, black serif font.

Urban Morphology and the Resilient City

Proceedings of the 23rd International Seminar on Urban Form

edited by Wowo Ding, Youpei Hu and Pengyu Guo
Digital Media press of Nanjing University



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Proceedings of the 23rd International Seminar on Urban Form
July 8-10, 2016 Nanjing China

Edited by

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Published by

Digital Media Press of Nanjing University
Hankou Road No.22 Nanjing City, Jiangsu Province, P.R.China
Post Code: 210093
<http://www.njupco.com>

Publisher

Xinrong Jin

Executive Editor

Shu Jian
Tel:+86 025-83685411

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ISBN 978-7-900799-98-2



Nanjing University

ISUF
International Seminar
on Urban Form

Chinese Network of
Urban Morphology



School of Architecture and Urban Planning,
Nanjing University

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Re-claiming the urban space: Urban Morphology, the crisis of Modernity and the regeneration of the city

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Abstract. *Urban Morphology systematically reflects on urban phenomena, with the aim of describing city formation and transformation over the time. Since the end of the XIX century onward, in the western city we had been witnessing a dramatic shift in perspective. Ought to the appearance of Modernity and its ideological Project, the city form is not anymore regenerated, but mostly destroyed and substituted according to new principles, considered not compatible with the existing fabrics and infrastructures. Le Corbusier's theory of the city clearly expresses the new strategy: the modern city is envisioned as a problem to be solved through the use of technology, intended as a value in itself, for the sake of the industrial civilization. This is an unprecedented change in the history of Urban Form. In fact technology had always been considered merely instrumental to the definition of a precise idea of the Public and not vice versa. Not by chance Urban Morphology starts, after the second world war, as an explicit reaction to that ideological background. The different proposals therefore reflect on the crisis of the pre-industrial city, highlighting its transformation and development to underline the cultural fracture prompted by Modernity. The new economic-financial crisis we have been witnessing over the last years still claims for a radical revision of the Modern perspective, which seems not anymore compatible with the current condition. This paper intend to develop a reflection on Urban Morphology, in order to discover methodological devices supporting the urgent need for urban regeneration.*

Key Words: crisis, vacancies, critical consciousness, spontaneous consciousness, urban regeneration

Introduction

Urban Morphology systematically reflects on urban phenomena, with the aim of describing the city's formation and transformation over the time. Since the end of the XVIII century onward, in the western city we had been witnessing a dramatic shift in perspective because of the Enlightenment. Ought to the appearance of Modernity and its ideological Project, the city form is not anymore regenerated, but mostly destroyed and substituted according to new principles, considered not anymore compatible with the existing building fabrics and infrastructures. Le Corbusier's theory of the city clearly expresses the new strategy at its climax: the modern city is envisioned as a problem to be tackled and solved through the use of technology, intended as a value in itself, for the sake of the industrial civilization. This is an unprecedented change in the

history of Urban Form. In fact, technology had always been considered merely instrumental to the definition of a precise idea of the Public and not vice versa. Not by chance Urban Morphology starts, after the second world war, as an explicit reaction to that ideological background. The different proposals therefore reflect on the crisis of the pre-industrial city, highlighting its transformation and development to underline the cultural fracture prompted by Modernity. The new economic-financial crisis we have been witnessing over the last years still claims for a radical revision of the Modern perspective, which seems not anymore compatible with the current condition. This paper intends to develop a reflection on Urban Morphology, with a special focus on the Italian debate, in order to discover methodological devices supporting the urgent need for urban regeneration, to be used for both theoretical and practicing purposes.

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The crisis of Modernity

The crisis of Modernity is somehow a challenging double-side issue. Considered as a “subjective genitive” (from the latin expression *genitivus subjectivus*), it implies the crisis prompted by the raising Bourgeoisie to get rid of the Ancient Régime and its set of values; intended as an “objective genitive” (i.e. *genitivus objectivus*), it identifies the crisis of the bourgeois society itself, starting from its historical climax, reached in correspondence of the paradigmatic shift from industrialization to financial development (Sassen, 1997). This paper intends to focus on this crucial interval, considered as a deconstructive in-between space-time condition (Eisenman, 1988), in order to make explicit its aporias in the field of Urban Form and Building Types, still to be fully understood and explained. The main aim is therefore to define an innovative disciplinary position from which it is possible to fruitfully face the current situation of disorientation and strangeness, thus originating a new typological process for the time being.

To do that we will consider the two above mentioned interpretations of the word “crisis” (from the old greek verb *krino*, which means “to choose”, “to decide”), as the extremes of an unconventional domain which has to do with an even radical transformation and change, not necessarily limited to materials aspects but also encompassing ideas and “significance production”, in compliance with the latin *signatura rerum* (Agamben 2008). However, before entering into the specific field of Urban Form and Building Types, we do consider fundamental to preliminary identify the methodological foundation of the crisis itself, literary tracing back the “path through which” the crisis unfolds its impressive and inaudible power over the centuries. To be more explicit, the crisis is assumed in this paper as a subtle and subversive device, alternatively swinging between a state of consciousness and unconsciousness, constantly used in history, in order to put into an harsh discussion the “official conditions” (Zizek, 2000) into which a specific society has been grounded and developed, creating the premises under which it is possible to regenerate society itself, not to found again the “identical” but to rediscover the “same” (Badiou, 2016). Whether we will succeed in the task, we will get appropriate instruments to exit the current “real condition”.

The philosophy of Life and the transformation of Urban Form

There is a long lasting modern tradition, inaugurated by Schopenhauer (Schopenhauer, 1819) and further on developed by Nietzsche (Nietzsche, 1883-85), Simmel (Simmel, 1918), Freud (Freud, 1930), Husserl (Husserl, 1936), Heidegger (Heidegger, 1989), Marcuse (Marcuse, 1955), Foucault (Foucault, 1966) up to Derrida (Foucault, 1968), which is consciously emphasizing the role of life as the unavoidable telluric substratum upon which any society is grounded. Independently from the specifically offered interpretation of it (whether intended as originating nature, physiology, psyche, being, eros etc.), the so-called *Lebenswelt* (literary “world of life”) is always assumed as the underlying matter conditioning any aspect of the social reality. While the latter is historically constructed, the former is always preexisting and somehow affecting human being choices independently from their intentions. From Modernity onward, the struggle between “life” and “form” becomes pivotal in all aspect of the public discussion, involving politics, economics, society and culture. Life is even more intended as the unpredictable, the unexpected, the unstable which is obscurely questioning the planned, the conventional and the stable, upon which the “societal” is fiercely established.

From these assumptions derives the instrumental and therefore conscious use of life to deliberately destabilize any system and the related set of values. This is explicitly evident in the field of Urban Form and Building Types. Manfredo Tafuri is the one who made this process explicit for the first time (Tafuri, 1976). Through the sudden irruption of “wilderness” and “landscaping” in urban design strategies from the XVIII century onward, the new American continent becomes the political laboratory of the radical change occurred in the Old Continent, where the revolutionary premises prompted by the French Philosophes had been taking places, fuelling the Bourgeois society’s impressive raise. In that respect, it is not possible not to mention the preempting role of L’Abbé Laugier and his forerunning “tumultus within the ensemble” (Laugier, 1753), which unfolds his pioneering vision of the “new city” as an endless park into which buildings were distributed random wise, reaching an ultimate effect similar to a countryside. This vision was too radical even in a politically burning Paris and therefore not put into practice there, but its seeds were scattered elsewhere, literary nurturing the imagination of those who expatriated, searching for optimal condition of development. Life, assuming the semblance of Nature, immediately becomes the “destabilizer” of the traditional urban form, inherited from the medieval time through the Renaissance’s and Baroque’s partial metabolizing activity, which still made use of it, however weakening its “processual” premises, substituting them with planned ones (Gallarati, 1994). The Unity of the conventional urban Form implodes into a fragmented Multiplicity of architectural objects, which are still individually recognizable, but coexisting into an unprecedented condition of “estrangement”, due to the sudden substitution of the connecting building tissues with an all-encompassing generic green turf. The derived displacement therefore embodies the “subjective” power of the modern crisis, and its capacity to literary subvert the existing “official condition” into surprising “experimental conditions” to work with. From this moment onward Europe will be even more subject to a reverse colonization. In fact, from the mid of the XIX century onward, architectural Eclecticism will represent the reaction of the originating American colonists, coming from all all over Europe and having established a sort of melting pot culture overseas, to them mother countries. While the national building “languages” have been interpreted in America accordingly to local material availability, carefully selecting familiar climate conditions, but preserving the building

site organization and the original craftsmanship body of knowledge, Eclecticism is absorbed in Europe as the most pure result of the bourgeois unlimitedly unfolded entrepreneurial capacity, even if guided within the traditional urban block, reestablished from political Restauration as a sort of superimposed formal order, coherent with the role of an accomplishing Monarchy, similar to that played by the urban “Grid” overseas, once it has been introduced and codified after the Religious Order renaissance premises (Gandelonas, 1999). Notwithstanding the story of the mutual exchanges between Europe and America is still to be written, it is highly interesting to remind that the vitality implicit within the architectural Eclecticism phenomenon, as summatively described, it is just a different way to name that “Life” which at its originating state, the Bourgeoisies consciously identify at a strategic device to destabilize the old political order, embodied by its “Form”. But this also appears as a first manifested aporias of the Modernity itself, from its Enlightenment appearance. In fact, what becomes completely lost within the trans-continental translation is the relation between the Architecture and the City. While the former succeeded to preserve its processual capacity to regenerate economy, community and even culture, but it is completely deprived of any political stance, not succeeding to reach any clear formal unity, this is claimed by the latter, but deprived by its originating “substance”, being this literary abstracted by the City Planning, which is simply intended as its rhetorical image. As a consequence the Form (from the old greek term *eidos*), always founded on its conditioning “matter”, is substituted by its Simulacrum (i.e. the old greek term *eidolon*), completely abstracted from the matter itself. This divorce produces an unprecedented “alienation” at a disciplinary level: that of the house, expression of the *Oikos*, from the city, expression of the *Polis*. The aforementioned struggle between “Life” and “Form”, once it is used to subvert the established political order, is not anymore capable of generating a new one. From that moment onward, the western city will experience the apparent impossibility of redeeming its inception, project and realization from this unforeseen prejudice.

It is very interesting to notice that even when Le Corbusier launches his own proposal for the Plain Voisin in 1922-25, he pursues a clear attempt to legitimize the industrial city putting into crisis the Hausmannian Paris and its rue corridor (Le Corbusier, 1946). To destabilize its structure, explicitly quoting L’Abbé Laugier’s vision, he literary depicts a deconstructive process of the building block and its street pattern, at the conclusion of which architecture is freed from any constrain and thus can autonomously articulate within the ground, transformed into an endless gorgeous park. Again “Life”, assuming the semblance of Nature, becomes the instrument of the urban form criticism. In addition, it also affects the form of architecture, since its eclectic accepted conventionality is destabilized by articulating the building slabs in order to catch the maximum benefit from the sun and wind orientation, not anymore accomplishing the street pattern. However, even Le Corbusier did not succeed to invert the “alienation” between the Architecture and the City: while the former is meant to unfold all the innovations deriving from industrialization processes and the Machine Age, effectively supporting its driving forces, the latter enters in the domain and control of the Planning. In such a way the industrial capitalism confirms its inability to claim a transparent political stance through the definition of a formal unity of the city, resulting from the multiplicity of its social, economic and cultural interests.

It is not by chance that, around the mid of the ’50 of the XX century, the discipline of Urban Morphology and Building Typology will progressively start a consistent process of self-

legitimization by strategically focusing on the manifested aporias of a crisis which is not anymore “subjective” (i.e. the capacity of the Bourgeois society to destabilize an existing order) but is clearly become an “objective” one: in fact the crisis of Modernity is now affecting Modernity itself in its inability to regenerate “Form” from “Life”. In that respect, the debate developed in Italy will be affecting the discussion on a worldwide perspective. Once again, as a result of it, a new correspondence and cross-fertilization between the old and the new continent will appear, which is still going on. To fully elucidate it, we need to start from the contribution of some key-figures. Regarding them, the main focus will investigate those aspects, in both theory and practice, that had explicitly been facing the crisis of Modernity in the aforementioned double perspective of interest.

Saverio Muratori and the search for a “*storia operante*”

Saverio Muratori is fully aware of the fact that, since the Enlightenment onward, Modernity succeeded to progressively undermine the existing Aristocracy’s system, consciously acting on the subversive capacity of “life” to destabilize the Institutions upon which the Ancient Régime’s power was grounded and established. However, he also recognizes that what was initially intended simply to be instrumental to a revolutionary intention, very soon became a goal in itself, enhancing that condition of “nihilism” Nietzsche already considered the unconscious plague of the XIX century Bourgeoisie. Moreover, life was additionally pursued as a “value”, contradicting the originating principle upon which the western civilization was grounded since its Greek inception, which considered the “value” literary “what distinguishes (from the old greek to idion) within a condition of coexistence and co-belonging (from the old greek to koinon)”. In fact, according to Saverio Muratori, the problem is not the crisis of values as such, which is unavoidable through the different epochs, but the unavailability to re-establish new set of values, which requires the search for a new “form”. If modernity was willing to leave the problem unquestioned and thus unresolved, post-modernity should have to make it at least explicit to move further. In that perspective, in his mind philosophy should have to define the problem architecture would eventually have been asked to solve. Phenomenology and Existentialism were therefore the approaches mutually combined by Muratori (Muratori, 1963). The former was used to re-introduce the role of the human being as the necessary mediator between “life” and “form”, because of his specific character. In fact, the human being, in its all-encompassing psycho-physic unity, has always to literary transcend nature, because of its instinctual inability to operate within it. The latter was elaborated to theoretically clarify that the human being, intended as an end in itself, according to Kant’s Ethics, is always the result of a process of emancipation from a state of indeterminacy, which is the originating condition into which he literary comes to the world, being forced to face its reality through a process of trial and errors. By making this conflict, implicit in the human nature, methodologically explicit, Saverio Muratori brings to let it explode the contradiction present within the Enlightenment sketchiness, still oscillating in between a Cartesian dualism, mutually opposing *res cogitans* and *res extensa* (Muratori, 1967). This justify why, according to him, the supporting principle and foundation of any process of civilization is always the “phenomenological” relation between the human body, in its limited concreteness, and the environment into which it operates, in its finite uniqueness. The territory is intended to be the ultimate result of this struggle, reached through a continuous experience made of conjectures and confutations (Muratori and Bollati, R. and Bollati, S. and Giannini and Marinucci, 1968-73). This relation also leads to the construction of

the human being as an anthropological “type”, obtained via a sequence of attempts eventually leading to habits. Humanity is therefore a site-specific identity, which questions the abstract definition the Enlightenment gave of it. Saverio Muratori defines this unstable, unpredictable and unexpected phenomenological-existentialistic process as “*storia operante*” (i.e. “working history”) to emphasize its dynamic and tentative quality (Muratori, 1960). Therefore, the “type”- being, as the Bible reminds us, the “announcement of the truth”, from the old greek verb *tipto*, to hit- embodies and preserves the traces of the process in its unfolding, becoming its legitimized project, to be applied for the time being as a societal set of rules, or its “form” (from the old greek noun *eidos*). In such a way, Saverio Muratori succeeds to indicate a method to exit the aporias of Modernity, not willing to recompose the broken unity of “form”, according to a nostalgic *restauratio urbis*, but regenerating the form production through the critical inheritance of the existing conditions. This assumption also confirms how much the notion of “work”, in its endless transformation, appears important in Saverio Muratori’s approach to architecture and urban design, in both theory and practice. In fact, the term “work”, corresponding to the old Greek *praxis*, always implies a relation of reciprocity and interdependence between “things” and “human being”, through which both of them become univocally meaningful. Even more important, “work” expresses the essence of the process in itself: in fact originally it acts as an “emancipating process” from the indeterminacy of the world, tentatively made via trials and errors; then it acts as the possibility of shared habits to be stabilized through conventions, eventually established “by law”; finally it becomes the reality of its potentially endless application.

Carlo Aymonino and the study of urban phenomena

In the study of urban form, Aymonino puts a special emphasis on the role of its driving forces, or actors of change. As a consequence, the city becomes the field into which the conflicts among them manifest, becoming evident through the construction and the transformation of the urban space itself. As a consequence, architecture and the city, assumed as historically changing “formal themes”, always tend to be representatives of those values which their active subjects are consciously carrying on (Aymonino, 1974). His investigation method focuses on the relation between Urban Morphology and Building Typology he inherited from Saverio Muratori, explicitly paying homage to him. However, by questioning its possibility of existence, he keeps a critical distance with respect to a presumed automatism that should be always verified. In this respect he considers more realistic Aldo Rossi’s position (Rossi, 1966), who assumes the relation visible not within the totality of the city, but limited to parts of it, he calls “urban artefacts”. Pursuing this perspective and applying his analysis on the modern city, he furthermore hypothesizes that building types do not succeed anymore to affect urban form, since the latter is subject to a planning activity and set of rules which are abstract and independent from the real occurring building phenomena. Even more, not necessarily architecture succeeds to achieve the status of a building type, explicit evidence of shared habits, leading to conventions and eventually to public institutions (Aymonino, 1970). This twofold divorce between “life” and “form”, visible at different scales, prompted and additionally unfolded by the Enlightenment, leads the author to develop to its extremes the unprecedented premises elucidated by Manfredo Tafuri’s analysis of the new bourgeois society, where the former aspect is under the control of the pioneering “industrial capitalism”, offering to its exponents the possibility of fully exploiting their entrepreneurial capacity, while the latter is

designated to its democratic authorities. To theoretically support this result, Aymonino makes a systematic application of the premises of Marxism and its Historical Materialism, by applying the distinction between socio-economic structural aspects and cultural super-structural ones to the modern urban form. This justifies his prejudice with respect to housing, which embodies the inner logic of the capitalistic exploitation of the land value in relation to functional zoning distinction- identifying the Private domain of architecture- and the main attention deserved to urban planning and public buildings, which represent the Public domain of urban design. Aymonino underlines the importance of representing the new political role claimed by the emerging Bourgeoisie. However, since new institutions are necessary, which have no precedence within the urban phenomena, those are projected and constructed as prototype never appeared before, alien to the city itself. Therefore, while Urban Morphology becomes the discipline which investigates urban form's capacity to represent and vehicle the society's set of rules, relying on an almost symbolic level, because of the above-mentioned divorce, Building Typology analyzes the capacity of its driving forces to increase and embody their socio-political power. In such a way the possibility of reconnecting Architecture and the City is practically inhibited by the epistemological premises of Urban Morphology and Building Typology which are implicitly grounded on the principle of a particular historical period, the Enlightenment, assumed of a general validity, even when applied to previous time. The unique exception to this dualism, according to Aymonino, is the Socialist City. In fact it embodies the possibility of an all-encompassing Public City, where even housing and its logic is literary "institutionalized" (Aymonino, 1974). Outside this possibility, almost remote within the western civilization cultural horizon, the city remains as an archipelago of "privateness", the endless housing, punctuated by islands of "publicness", the institutions of the democratic society in its multiple and heterogeneous manifestations. This conflicting model, while assuming the aporias of Modernity as non resolvable contradictions, will be further developed by Aldo Rossi, Aymonino's former assistant at the IUAV in Venice, and widely diffused within the European debate up to nowadays (Ungers and Koolhaas, with Reimann and Kolhoff and Ovaska, 1977; Aureli, 2011; Gandelonas, 1999). However, it is important to remind that it represents, with respect to Manfredo Tafuri's elucidation of the phenomenon, a strategic retreat from the political responsibility architecture had been claiming over the centuries and, in this respect, not succeeding to offer any concrete solution within the perspective of bridging the gap between Architecture and the City.

Aldo Rossi and the architecture of the city

The Enlightenment, in its revolutionary climax, literary unchains the classical relation between the "thing" vocations and the "human being" expectations in its unpredictable unfolding and uniqueness, upon which is grounded the notion of "work", whose "object" represents the concrete historical embodiment any process of civilization aims at. Therefore, the implicit all-encompassing correspondence between "working" and "thinking" activity comes to be replaced with a reinterpretation of the Cartesian dualism, by opposing the "rational", in its universality, to the "material", in its singularity. Sharing this perspective, Aldo Rossi seems to pay respect to the political project prompted by Diderot and D'Alambert through the Encyclopedia: to distinguish theory from practice; to make the former an explicit form of knowledge with its autonomous dignity; to subvert the strategic role of craftsmanship reduced to its logical explanation and making of it the epistemological foundation of the bourgeois industrialization

processes. As an immediate consequence of this reciprocal independence, both the terms are reciprocally alienated: life falls into “subjectivism” and form becomes “objectivism”. We have already described how, quoting Manfredo Tafuri, this divorce was initially intended as a subversive strategy, put into action in order to undermine the set of values established by the Ancient Régime, bringing them from being specific to become generic. However, after the originating phase, this effect was not intended anymore as a temporary condition but as a permanent one, dramatically manifesting those aporias of the Modernity which are still present. Aldo Rossi focuses on this aspect, and systematically questions, in both theory and practice, within architecture and urban design, the “permanence” of the universal quality of form, opposed to the ephemeral and unstable quality of the matter the former is made of. Notwithstanding this permanence seems somehow to be assumed as problematic, following this reasoning Aldo Rossi manifests a prejudice against any activity implying construction, compromised with capitalism and its logic, preferring to it the apparent purity of the intellectual “work”.

His implicit ideological position becomes evident in the way he approaches History. Following Manfredo Tafuri’s claim for “history as a project” opposed to “history as explanation”, labeled as “historicism”, non being experienced in the light of the present (Biraghi, 2005), he starts looking backward to the architecture of the city in the “perspective of crisis” inaugurated by the Enlightenment, coherently with the debate of his time, not corresponding to the specific set of value history was grounded on before. This justifies why *The Architecture of the City* (Rossi, 1966) immediately appears, within an international audience, more a design proposal and a theoretical manifesto than an essay on urban history, where the critical analysis about form as an “object” or an “artifact”, using Rossi’s words, in its interrelation with socio-economical and political aspects, is mainly focusing on transformative aspects. It is not by chance that his originating concern on the city form “deconstructive” process, privileging the *pars destruens*, polemically acts in clear opposition to Saverio Muratori’s preference for the *pars construens*. As an immediate consequence he comes to identify “conditions of permanence” through transformation, naming them “*elementi primari*”. This notions simply expresses the “logical-syntactical structure” to which architecture is reduced, according to analytical experience, after any process of abandonment and decay, independently from its causes. This reduction survives any request of change- into practice, values and program- and any constructive possible appearance. Becoming a neutral substratum of any imaginable future proposition, or the “generic and valueless” in architecture, it claims the capacity to affect any new project, independently from site specific constrains and historical limitations,. In such a way, not solely Aldo Rossi aims to find confirmation of Durand’s radical *Précis des leçons d'architecture* (Durand, 1809) in the concreteness of the architecture of the city, but he also puts the basis of a strategic alliance with the American Five Architects group, whose members were almost simultaneously pursuing a similar program: to disconnect architecture from any ideological value, identifying its semantic quality with its syntax, i.e. to reduce the architectural “sign” to its signifier. Being deeply affected by the project of the Enlightenment, this evidence also offers to him the possibility of supporting the “project of the crisis” prompted by Tafuri, as something which seems implicit in both “life” and “form” (Biraghi, 2005). Especially, it offers to him the possibility of embodying the so called “negative dialectic” theorized by Massimo Cacciari and supported by Tafuri himself: to literary put “into brackets” the effects of the crisis prompted by Modernity, turning them from simply being expression of the crisis’s power to become the

ultimate representation of its incapacity to evolve into the production of new values, resulting therefore into an irresolvable Nihilism (Cacciari, 1969). Therefore architecture sacrifices itself to inutility just to offer a theatrical “necrotic” manifestation of Modernity’s contradictions and aporias. But it is fundamental to underline that, in opposition to Saverio Muratori, “life” and “form” in this case are not intended in their continuous “becoming”, but in their endless “being”. This justifies Aldo Rossi’s fascination for metaphysics, universal rationality and the “eternal”, where architecture is reduced to meaningless fragments literary suspended into a timeless condition, whereas Muratori is interested in Ontology, particular rationality and the “transient”, where architecture is continually regenerated through a carefully repeated process of selection and combinations of elements critically inherited from the past to be projected into an expected meaningful future.

Antonio Monestiroli and the architecture of the reality

Antonio Monestiroli plays an important role within the Italian debate. He literary succeeds to establish a possible fertile dialogue between Saverio Muratori and Aldo Rossi. From the former he derives the definition of the building type as the social-historical conventional character of architecture, progressively obtained through a process of trials and errors, subsequently repeated and disseminated through the architecture of the city. From the latter he recognizes the critical function of the rationality, from the Enlightenment onward, with respect to the existing city, intended as a field of political conflict enhanced through the continuous reclamation of the urban space by the different driving forces acting on it. However, he is also aware of the fact that this function, dramatically manifesting the power of Modernity, risks to become the *raison d'être* of the failure of the project prompted by the Modernity itself, if simply used to overcome an existing condition and therefore not producing a new different state. This is why he starts analysing the history of urban form as an endless process of architectural reclamation, pursued by literary changing the significance of the inherited building structures, inscribed into an unprecedented cultural horizon. Due to changed structural conditions, affecting both the economy and the society, the city is therefore invited to reflect upon itself, by adapting the existing building structures accordingly to the new political condition. The adaptive reuse of the existing city is therefore the method through which the city regenerate its form, expressing the raising of new subject active role. This process is never neutral, but constantly witnesses the political condition under which it occurs (Monestiroli, 1999).

Compared to Saverio Muratori and Aldo Rossi, to him the theme of the architectural “language” becomes crucial, overwhelming both “work” and “think”, whose distinction is encompassed through an idealistic perspective. In fact, the language is neither intended as historical/particular nor as rational/universal, but simply processual, i.e. the changing condition under which what exists is constantly metabolised into the material offered to what will be existing in the near future. Its own task is therefore to free architecture from its limitations to generate unexpected possibility to take advantage of, i.e. the continuous struggle between “necessity”, or history, and “freedom”, or revolution, of which the language expresses a positive dialectical relation. In such a way the “negative dialectic” proposed by Cacciari and heavily supported by Tafuri is overcome. According to Monestiroli, this shift in perspective is particularly evident in the transition between the medieval and the renaissance society, especially experimented and manifested in the housing domain. In such a way his focus is always on the transition from a

state to the successive one, whose essence becomes the ideal language of a scientific but relativistic rationality, looking at the processes from the outside.

Some proposals for the contemporary city

“Life” in the contemporary city appears under the semblance of a multiplicity of vacant buildings and waiting lands delivered by the unprecedented crisis of the financial capitalism, widespread on a worldwide perspective from 2008 onward, even if mostly affecting the western civilization process. They potentially offer themselves as a challenging en plein air laboratory of endless experimentation at disposal of new subjects claiming a role in building the future. However, the struggle regarding the related “Form” is twofold. On a formal level, it appears by the fact that the entirety of the city is still under the managerial and bureaucratic control of the City Planning’s activity, notwithstanding the crisis and its delegitimizing effects, which is forcing the architectural process to pay respect to a set of rule at least old fashioned when not, even worst, completely out of the real, however resisting to change and transformation. On a substantial level, it is emphasized by the fact that those rules are completely abstract, since they are not produced by the driving forces of a former society, even if fallen into decay, but have been heavily superimposed to that society by an autonomous technocratic power whose aim is to clearly separate politics from economy, society and culture, consciously pursuing the aforementioned strategy of “Alienation”. Even worst the apparatus embodied by the Plan, by addressing those vacancies with improbable roles, because of the crisis of the working capacity upon which the social reality should be grounded, preserves their balance sheet value, pursuing the interests of a generic financial capitalism which is systematically estranger from site-specific conditions, additionally exacerbating the contradiction of the urbanistic law which generate the Plan itself.

If one is willing to exit the crisis, emancipating people from the state of indeterminacy and anxiety it widely generates, all available vacancies should be made accessible, at incentivising conditions and rates, to all those who are interested, in order to extract from them unexpected possibilities. This implies to let experimental practices autonomously develop, via a transparent process of trials and errors, prompting new set of rule derived from the experience. In such a way architecture, under the responsible guidance of new subjects claiming the urban space, will result from the critical process of selection and combination of materials inherited from the past, simply as it was up to Modernity. This will ultimately result in the possibility to recompose the so-called “broken unity” between the agents of change and the form of the city, opened by the Enlightenment, according to which practices will start again generating new kind of law, and not vice versa (Marzot, 2014). This will be possible only by enhancing the importance of the “work” as the foundation of any project of community and by launching a new urban Renaissance, supporting a necessary new alliance between praxis and theorein, where the latter is not independent from the former.

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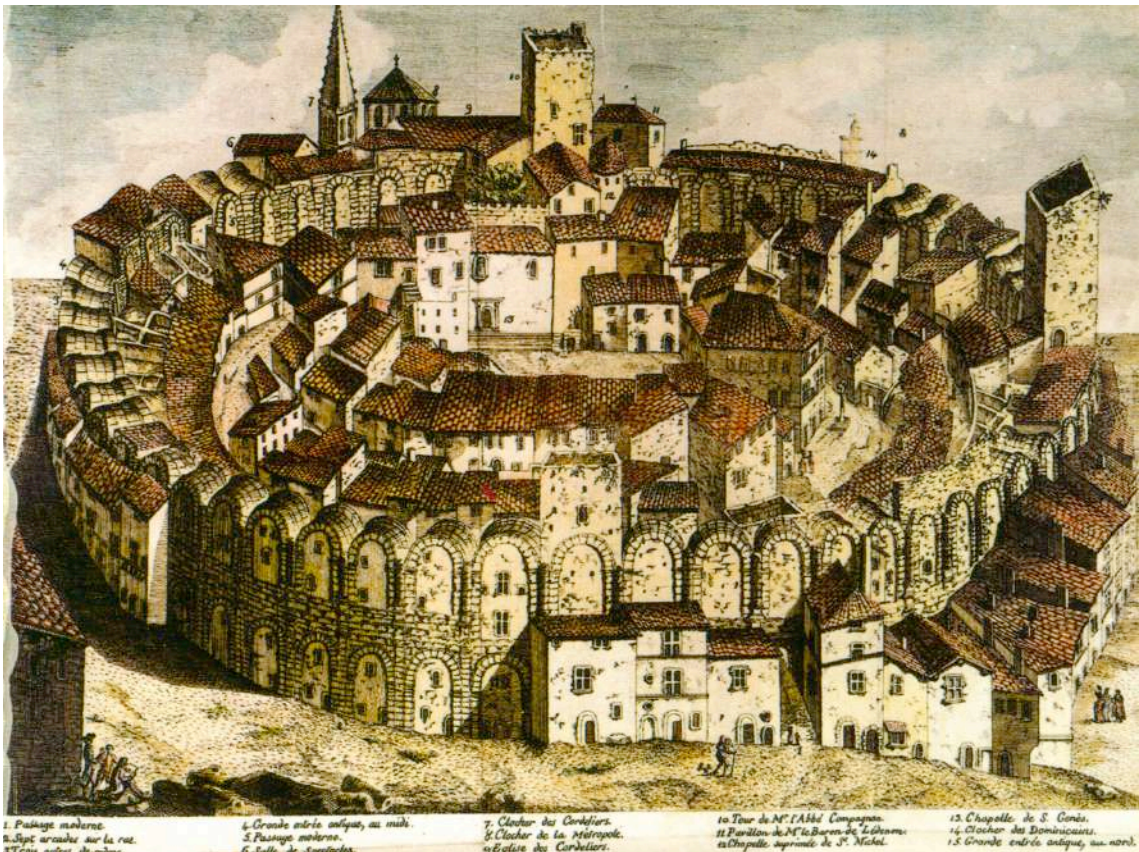


Fig. 1 The Arles' amphitheatre after the roman empire fall was progressively transformed into a self sufficient town. A building finally deprived of any conventional value, because of its driving force inexorable crisis, and thus reduced to inert matter and its intrinsic logic, has been unconsciously metabolized by newly emerging dynamics to host the unexpected. Through a parasite methodology and an experimental process of selection and combination, the remain has been fragmented and rearranged, up to achieving a new material condition, eventually leading to a conscious form. Because of this process, new subjects become aware of themselves by progressively claiming from their own present perspective what was inherited from the past to be projected in the future.

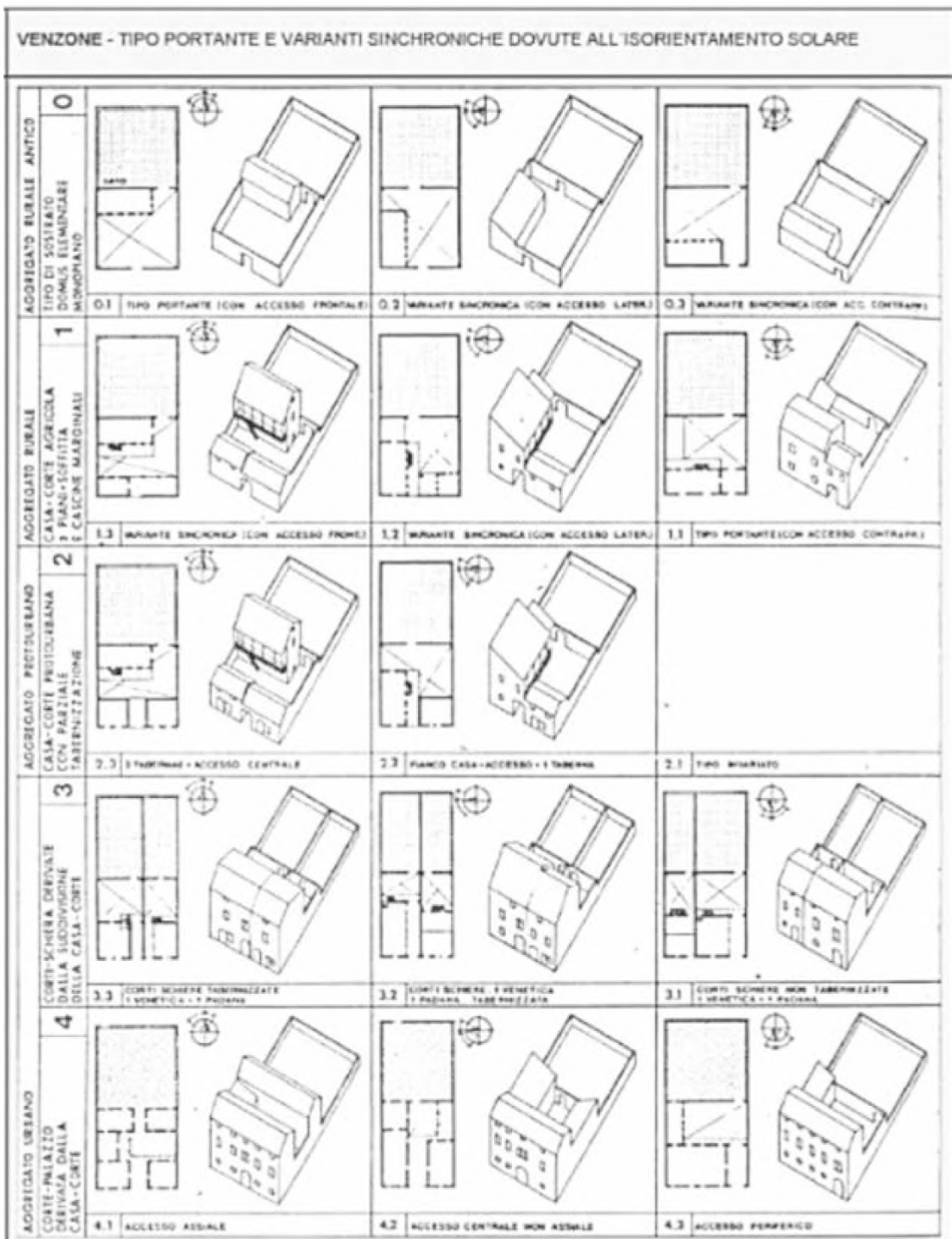


Fig. 2 Gianfranco Caniggia, the typological process in the city of Venzone, Italy (from top to bottom). The building type is the “idea” of the house (from the old greek *eidos*, meaning “form”). It comes to existence through a phenomenological process, made of trials and errors, which eventually leads, via habits and conventions, to be institutionalized and legitimized “by-law”, producing site-specific set of rules. Whether or not explicated, it always remains implicitly acting as a working project within the constructing phase, guiding the building site development and leaving traces within the architectural work, which represents its ultimate embodiment.

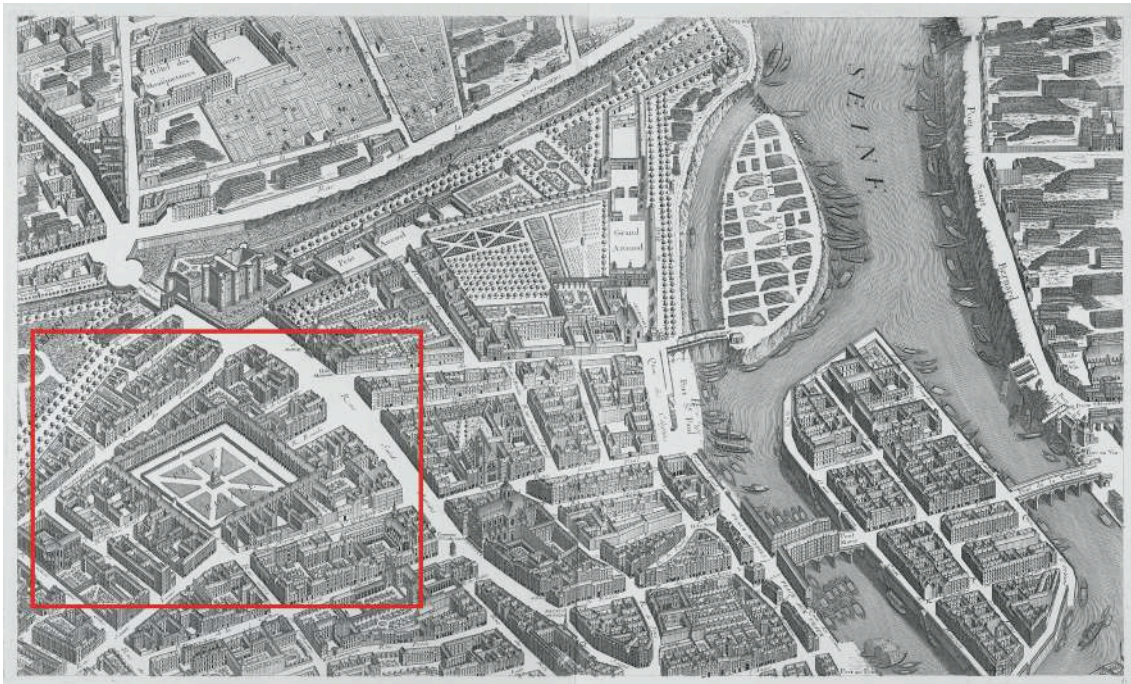


Fig. 3 Place des Vosges, Louis Métezeau, 1605-12. The axonometric view in 1739 De Tourgot's map of Paris, perfectly conveys the ideal of the renaissance culture. It emerges through the tight coexistence between the still processual building tissue, on the background, and the new rational *place royale*, on the fore, which is literary superimposing its own geometric proportion, simultaneously extracted and abstracted from the site, onto the medieval urban matter. The new public space establishes a new hierarchical order not disregarding the urban premises, which seem to legitimize it.



Fig. 4 In the “Campo Marzio dell’Antica Roma”, Giovan Battista Piranesi pushes to its extreme a fictional process of fragmentation of the Roman legacy, transforming the *Urbe* into a congested “landscape of ruins”. In such a way, what was initially real originates a virtual condition potentially supporting new experimental approaches. Architecture, reduced to particles suspended into a limitless time, awaits for a possible claim. As such, it was interpreted by the Italian historian Manfredo Tafuri, according to Cacciari’s “negative dialectic”, as a forerunning manifesto of the contradictions of Modernity, unable to produce any possible value, reducing itself to a condition of purely logical “eternal vagueness”.