

Is Space Political?
*or: Campus, the Architectural Form as
Critique of the Urbanized Polis*

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Thesis Proposal
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Prologue

It is not without a measure of intention that the title of Frederic Jameson's seminal essay forms the first half of this proposal's name. Jameson's polemical argument for the inherent social consequence of the built environment inveighs against contemporary architecture's seeming aversion to the earnest engagement of *Politics*.¹ While it may be worthwhile to search for the root of *New Architecture*'s collective political muteness, the evidence of this dire situation is present in arguably infinite abundance.² This thesis accepts the agnosticism of contemporary architecture as a condition that calls for an urgent critique.

Qualification 1: This thesis is not directed toward developing a utopian vision. *

"*Is Space Political? The Architectural Form*" is a thesis that seeks to define the limits of the contemporary city in supporting its own transformation. The project starts from a position that holds the city as a collection of artificial layers that organize and direct the flows of capital, production, and people that constitute the contemporary market-society. The thesis project will attempt to catalogue the constituent elements of the city, re-appropriating them as materials to be redirected toward the transformation of the metropolis. Broadly speaking, *Is Space Political?* is a project on the city.³

The project aims to investigate the potential of an architectural typology in reorganizing the meshwork relations that define the operation of the

* The author cannot be held responsible if any such utopian vision becomes evident.

¹ See Alejandro Zaera-Polo's *The Politics of the Envelope* for a reader on how to stop worrying about urbanization and learn to accept the marginal political agency of architecture.

² Refer to parametric architecture's relentless iteration of vapid forms. See also architecture's retreat to non-political, or politically agnostic domains—cf. Greg Lynn, Matias del Campo, Patrik Schumacher... continued on suckerpunchdaily.com...

³ Echoes of Rem Koolhaas' series of studios conducted at the Harvard Graduate School of Design 1996–, intentional.

city. This thesis holds that the future of ordering the city lies not in infrastructural intervention vis-à-vis Robert Moses or contemporary landscape urbanism-as-such, but rather through the operative potential of architecture to define the urban experience.

Qualification 2: This thesis rejects the notion that architecture is powerless.

Architecture has hitherto buried its collective head in the sand. Turning toward a series of -ism's in an attempt to escape direct confrontation with the pressing matters of the modern world, architecture culture has successfully avoided progress since 1927.⁴ Pier Vittorio Aureli's research on the political capacities of architecture begins to define a direction for an architecture of political agency. Aureli's framework rejects the notion of a meliorist architecture to save the world, but rather seeks to expand the relevance of architecture in society by operating directly on the cities of today. It is clear that the model of the architect as skilled craftsman is obsolete, increasingly irrelevant, and effectively marginalized. This thesis intends to expand the effective realm of the architect by eschewing rear-garde discourse on computational form, sustainability, *technics*, in favor of a discourse on the city.

Qualification 3: This thesis is about architecture.[§]

Specifically, this thesis intends to investigate a typological architectural/urban form, and its potential to reconfigure urban dynamics. Starting from the position that the market-driven process of urbanization has overrun the city—that is to say that the city is no longer a form in itself but rather the collective residue of urbanization—this thesis intends to investigate ways of redirecting urbanization, and operating on urbanized areas.



Weissenhofsiedlung Exhibition, 1927.

§ It might also be about: the city, urbanization, education, avant-garde history, Marxism, Neo-Materialism, collectives, forking paths, political activism, universities, Neo-liberalism, pedagogy, economics, the 1% (also the 47%, 99%, and all percentages thereof), schools, critical theory, cultural hegemony, Structuralism, precarity, postmodernism, Italo Calvino, Late Capitalism, potlatch, post-Critical, pluralism, post-Fordist, the creative class, cultural capital, Taylorism, non-linearity, Absurdism, reactionary modernism, *The Plague*, Foucault.

⁴ "There is no progress—like a crab on LSD, culture staggers endlessly sideways."[†]
1927 of course being the year in which Ludwig Mies van der Rohe curated the *Weissenhofsiedlungen Exhibition*, in Stuttgart.

[†]Koolhaas, Rem. *Junkspace*. 2001.

Subject/Object

The urban type to be investigated is the university.

No other institution, architecture, or urban form has transformed more dramatically in the course of its history. The university as an institution⁵ Tarak Barkawi recently outlined *The Neoliberal Assault on Academia* for al-Jazeera (April 2013). has been able, until very recently, to resist the destructive influence of the market. Until the early twentieth century the university has represented a center of bold thought, a refuge for difference of opinion. Very recently, the university has become yet another extension of the market.⁵

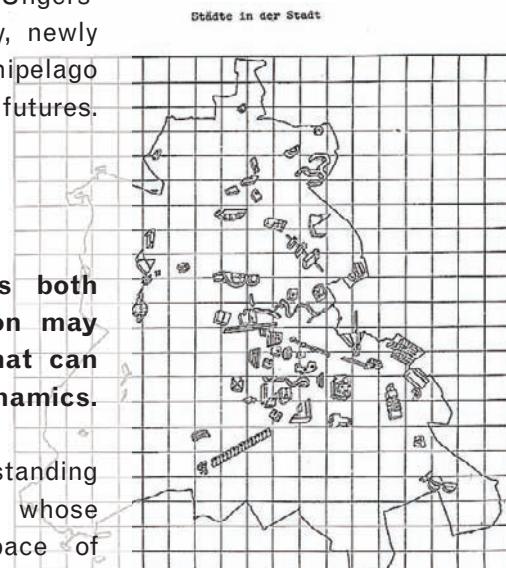
⁶ Learning for the sake of learning being in opposition to learning for the sake of service to the market.

The project argues the position that in order for the city to resist the apocalyptic forces of the market it must preserve spaces unsaturated by the market—the university must be re-imagined in its pre-Industrial Revolution state—an island for learning for the sake of learning.⁶ Grasping upon O.M. Uengers' definition of the archipelago, the university, newly free of market influence, may become an archipelago to re-direct the urbanized city to new futures.

Thesis

An investigation of the university as both architectural type and urban formation may yield a new morphological definition that can redirect urban, civic and educational dynamics.

The thesis is predicated on an understanding of the university as an institutional form whose presence in a society generates a space of argument and disputation. This thesis is thus aimed at the manipulation of the university-space as an integral part of the larger spatial formation that determines the political ordering of the city. The project will examine the respective grounds on which the institutions of the city and the university stand in order to put forth a new typological definition: **campus as urban field—an expanded territory of learning.**



O.M. Uengers, *Städte in der Stadt: Berlin as Green Archipelago*

Research Methods

Precedent Studies

A crucial component of the thesis preparation will be the creation of a body of precedent studies. Research will be conducted in order to gather a diverse collection of examples of universities whose relationships with their urban conditions largely determined, or were determined by, contingent processes of urban development: growth, or urbanization. Proposed and existing university plans will be consulted in order to catalogue paradigms of town/gown relations, campus growth strategies, and campus planning theories.

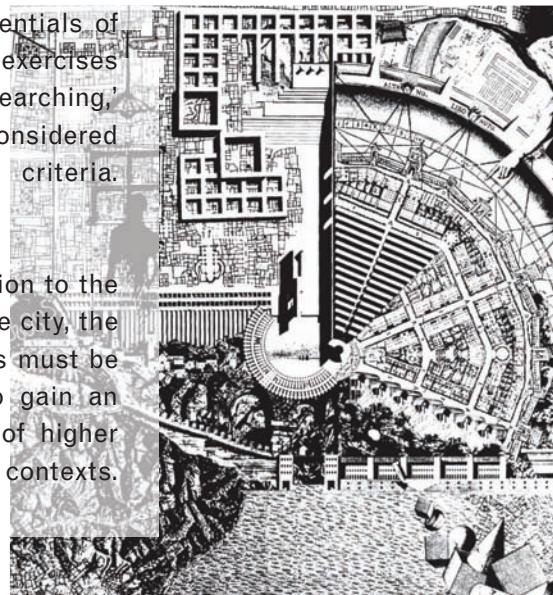


Plan for Harvard, AMO/OMA 2001.

Urban Analysis/Mapping

In addition to, and expanding upon the precedent studies, urban analysis will develop a more nuanced understanding of the contingent forces, theories, and frameworks that direct the development and expansion of a university campus or urban context.

A series of mapping exercises will develop a context within which to evaluate the operative potentials of urban forms. Additionally, the mapping exercises will be utilized in an effort toward 'site searching,' in which the final thesis site will be considered and selected according to emergent criteria.



Aldo Rossi, Città Analoga

Historical Analysis

In order to develop a meaningful contribution to the discourse on the role of the university in the city, the historical basis of the conversation's topics must be developed. Research will be conducted to gain an understanding of the origins and history of higher education in domestic and international contexts.

Appendix 1: Annotated Bibliography

Aureli, Pier Vittorio. *The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011.

Possibility elucidates the potentialities of architecture-as-form inherently imbued with political weight. Aureli examines the work of Mies, Boulleé, and Koolhaas as architects whose work functions within this paradigm.

Hilberseimer, Ludwig. *Metropolisarchitecture and Selected Essays*. New York: GSAPP Books, 2012.

Little studied, Hilberseimer's writing has recently become prominent in relation to the work of Pier Vittorio Aureli. The first English translation of his seminal *Großstadtarchitektur* (1924) appeared in 2012. Hilberseimer bases his theory of the city on the interplay between the scales of the individual habitation, and the organization of agglomerations of urban form.

Jameson, Frederic. "Is Space Political?" in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994. Jameson's *Postmodernism* dissects the conditions of the market-society, discussing a broad range of factors and relationships that have determined the outcomes, and positions of the cultural complex in the twentieth century. The essay *Is Space Political?* is a polemical call to engage the architecture of politics.

Koolhaas, Remment. *Delirious New York*.

New York: Monacelli Press, 1978.

Delirious New York is both a lucid observational account of Koolhaas' New York, and a model of postmodern manifesto crafting. A self-proclaimed *retroactive manifesto*, *Delirious* can be considered Koolhaas' first research-project, a paradigm of production that has characterized the work of his firm since 1978.

Tafuri, Manfredo. *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976. A student of architecture at Carnegie Mellon University once asked Manfredo Tafuri, "What can we do to make meaningful architecture in the face of the apocalyptic forces of capitalism?" To which the historian responded, "That's not my problem." This thesis project attempts to answer Tafuri's call to arms using Design and Capitalist Development as an intellectual starting point, a context from which to begin to understand the role of architecture in our market-society.



Ludwig Hilberseimer, *Hochhausstadt*

Sources List

Aureli, Pier Vittorio. *The Project of Autonomy, Politics and Architecture Within and Against Capitalism*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008.

Aureli, Pier Vittorio. *DOGMA, 11 Projects*. London: Architectural Association, 2013.

Cacciari, Massimo. *L'arcipelago*. Milan: Adelphi Edizioni, 1997.

Cerdá, Ildefons. *The Five Bases of the General Theory of Urbanization*. 1867.

Cuff, Dana and Sherman, Roger, eds. *Fast-Forward Urbanism, Rethinking Architecture's Engagement with the City*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011.

Foucault, Michael. "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" (1967), trans. Jay Miskowiec, in Joan Ockman, ed., *Architecture Culture 1943-1968* (New York: Columbia Books of Architecture and Rizzoli, 1993.).

Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991.

Hohenberg, Paul and Lees, Lynn Hollen. *The Making of Urban Europe 1000-1994*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.

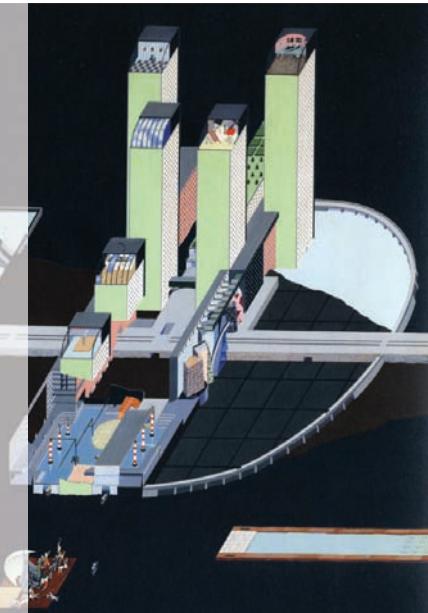
Koolhaas, Remment. "Bigness" in *S, M, L, XL*. New York: The Monacelli Press, 1995.

Koolhaas, Remment. *Exodus, or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture*. Thesis. Architectural Association School of Architecture, London. 1971.

Kwinter, Sanford. *Requiem for the City at the End of the Millennium*. Barcelona: Actar, 2010.

Lahiji, Nadir. *The Political Unconscious of Architecture*. London: Ashgate, 2012.

Lefebvre, Henri. *Introduction to Modernity*. London: Verso, 1995.



New Welfare Island, Rem Koolhaas, 1975-6.

Lefebvre, Henri. "The Right to the City" in *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.

Ockman, Joan ed., *Architecture Culture 1943-1968* (New York: Columbia Books of Architecture and Rizzoli, 1993.).

Negri, Antonio and Hardt, Michael. *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Smithson, Peter and Smithson, Alison Margaret. *Without Rhetoric: An Architectural Aesthetic 1955-1972*. London: Latimer New Dimensions, 1973.

Ungers, Oswald Mathias. *The City in the City: Berlin: A Green Archipelago*. Zurich: Lars Müller, 2013.

Wigley, Mark. Prosthetic Theory: "The Disciplining of Architecture." *Assemblage* 16 (1991) pp. 7-29.

Wigley, Mark ed., *Yona Friedman: Structures Serving the Unpredictable* (Rotterdam: NAI, 1999.).

Appendix 2: Schedule

08 August	08.12 - Thesis statement of intent submission
	08.26 - First day of classes
09 September	09.03 - Thesis proposal draft 1 submission 09.09 - Literature/source review, draft 1.1 09.16 - Thesis proposal draft 2 submission 09.23 - Thesis proposal final draft
	09.06 - 09.09 Studio Trip: Brooklyn & Queens 09.21 - In Pursuit of Architecture Conference NYC
10 October	10.21 - Mid-review, thesis book submission
11 November	
12 December	12.08 - Final review, Thesis 1 12.13 - Thesis 1, book submission 12.16 - Winter Break 01.12
01 January	12.22 - 01.02 - Thesis Site Visit TBD
02 February	
03 March	03.07 - Spring Break
04 April	
05 May	05.xx - Final review, Thesis 2 05.18 - Commencement
06 June	

Appendix 3: Colophon

Phillip Denny Thesis Student
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Thesis blog forthcoming.

Rami el Samahy Advisory Committee
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Alessio Rosati, MAXXI.
Raymund Ryan, CMOA.