Dynamic Cartographies
Strategies for the Production of
Intermediate Territories
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"The intermediate city is almost solely readable as a topologically circumscribed field, portions of which
may be experienced either instantaneously or sensed as abstract relationships, as an accumulation of
partially discernible territories which occupy our consciousness — from which to extend them."
Thomas Sieverts, Zwischenstadt, 1997[1]

The 21st century is witness to the accelerated proliferation of post-
paradigmatic urban conditions marked by zones of indeterminate
physical definition. Having long ceased to adhere to the traditional
paradigm of a coherent spatial order, contemporary environments
annul the common distinctions of center, edge, or periphery relied
upon by prevalent discourses pertaining to the city. Questions of
morphological production underlie architecture's formal condition
within such contexts, necessitating research of design strategies
— concerning form-making processes — for the analysis and
construction of territory. How might innumerable forces at work
in the definition of the urban fabric be reconfigured as design
tools? A focal shift from formal propositions to their formative and
performative factors must be instigated. Subsisting largely as the
result of multiple procedures operating at a mostly non-visual level,
these intermediate domains might be understood as an operative
field unhinged from the coordinates of familiar spatial and typological
registers. Rather than as a license for the use of a priori determined
images of form, such investigations are concerned with circumstances
evolving from production. How does form emerge? How do multiple
and uncoordinated forces inflect upon one another within urban
configurations? How are its morphogenetic processes conceived?
A discourse is opened on the relationship between genesis and
form, between operative procedures and urban organization.
Form materializes through translation and transformation. Varying
parameters act upon one another to chart a differential field within
which development takes place, contributing at each stage of the
process to the crystallization of formal constructs.

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Having long ceased to adhere to the traditional paradigm

System

Open Systems

The deployment of methods for the exploration of specific propositions within design necessitates a consideration of open systems. The city is a complex, dynamic assemblage consisting of highly diverse material and immaterial structures, including those mechanisms exhibiting a tendency to undermine those structures. Design is suggested here as a model capable of anticipating a multiplicity of possible conditions without predetermining propositions. A performative profile emerges that consents to prospective transformation. Fields become identifiable, allowing for multiple interpretations. Through manifold references, a network of variable and simultaneous readings of a given situation is circumscribed. Rather than declaring unity as a predominant principle, a polyvalent domain of consistency is pursued, one including ambivalence and contradiction as well as continuity and discontinuity. Urban production remains perpetually open to unforeseeable events.

1. Field Assemblage

Accordingly, architecture's material presences cannot be manifested through the design of pristine objects, but by the organization of interlaced dynamic systems. Arrangements must be open in their structures, leaving room for the possibility of interpretative transformation. Architecture develops from within a network of oscillating relationships. Such an approach exposes formal concerns to procedural thinking. An unstable condition is maintained, one characterized by tension between notions of form and the undefined nature of impending occurrences. Such a method might be said to constitute an experimental field within which identity and difference become thematized. Interpretation of the respectively material or immaterial system of relationships determines to what extent identity is produced or differences are accepted.[2]

[2] Philippe Cabane, "Adidas "World of Sports", Städtebauliche Strategien der Gegenwart am Beispiel eines internationalen Wettbewerbs der Gegenwart," SI+A, Schweizer Ingenieur und Architekt, Zurich, February 2000, p. 8.

of a coherent spatial order, contemporary environments

2. Exhibition Installation

Object and Field

Assuming that the specific means deployed within design have a determining effect on the work produced, questions must be raised regarding explicit instruments required for demarcating urban assemblages. Which tools support the conception of the city as an open network? The exploration unfolds along two specific lines of inquiry: the first pertains to the formation of solitary architectural objects; the second addresses the formation of architectural fields.

Objects: As design processes are marked by multiplicities, by an almost endless array of exigencies, the architectural product in its physical form could accordingly be conceived as a multi-layered structure. As design revolves around questions of becoming, the
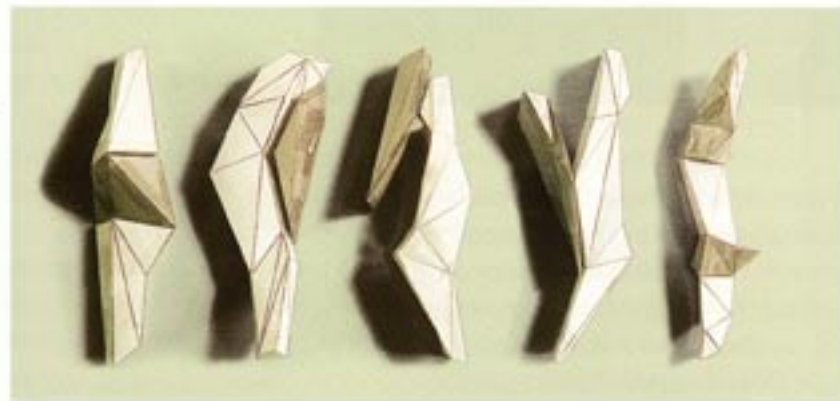
3. Transformation

architectural product could correspondingly be considered an object in a state of flux. Exposing form to genesis, a conception of morphology emerges where the object's discrete boundaries seemingly dissolve. The introduction of dynamic systems within physically defined enclosures undermines notions of formal stability as

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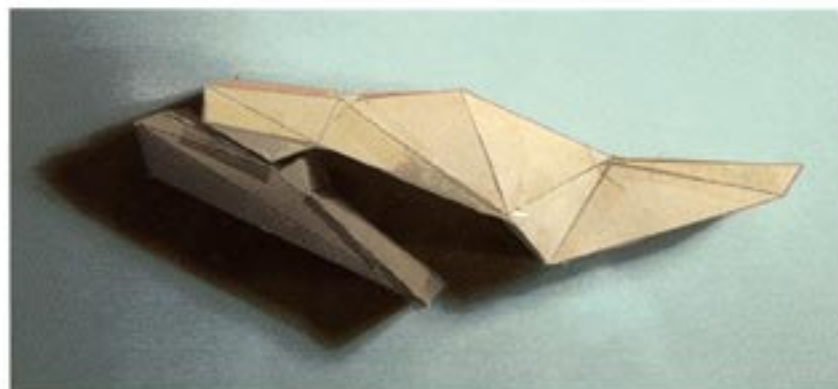
4. Formal development

a condition of rest. Fundamental to this understanding is the treatment of the object's surface as a figuration of fields. By conceptually offering a flow of perpetual motion and of continuous multiplicity, heterogeneous yet coherent architectural assemblies are suspended in a temporal dimension — in a perpetual search for possible form. Intrinsic to this is a tendency to transgress physical perimeters, or to blur contour lines — a strategy capable of serving divergent tasks. On the one hand, it aims for disjunction by weakening holistic masses; on the other hand it aims for coherence by linking disjointed organizations into a congruous whole. The effect of indistinctiveness is pursued by way of surfaces that contain but do not define.

Fields: The second vector of investigation departs from the convention of architecture as object to scrutinize the hypothesis of conceiving architecture as field. Design is typically associated with the mastery of the built artifact asserting the presence of the work in its undefiled condition, pure and undisrupted. Given by the characteristics of figure-ground relationships, objects are customarily localized within a context as figures to be grounded. Fields, in contrast, revoke the distinction between figure and ground, dismantling and decentering the idea of the project as a bounded entity. Objects lose their characteristics as figures and dissolve into a network of relationships. Linkages and connections delineate alliances of varying intensities suggesting loose systems of relations from which architectural assemblies evolve. Neither the maintenance of stable entities nor the reduction to simple elements characterize this procedure. Form assumes the role of a provisional marker of momentary and circumstantial conditions. Submitting to temporal characteristics of

5. Palimpsest

y relied upon by prevalent discourses pertaining to the

6. Field structure

process, form unfolds from transformation. Interpretative possibilities
are exposed, allowing for further progressions. Formal structures are
deployed as a possibility within a field alluding to other possibilities.
Design involves here the un-framing or de-framing of the very forms
produced.

Map and Palimpsest

With an exploration of field structures attention is drawn to a
mode of production through which open systems evolve. Such an
investigation bifurcates along two lines of investigation: the first
interrogates the map as a generative design agent, while the second
explores the palimpsest as a form of urban notation. The map and
the palimpsest both serve as instruments through which to address
how the production and reproduction of urban strata might be
considered as sets of information transferred over time, rather than as
representations of a fixed "city-object."

Maps: Why the term cartography? Of importance here is the notion
of a particular technique of information transfer. "Make a map, not a
tracing," wrote Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.[3] Contrary to tracing,

[3] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari,
A Thousand Plateaus, University of
Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987,
p. 23; *Mille Plateaux*, Les Éditions de
Minuit, Paris, 1980.

city. Questions of morphological production underlie arch

7. Building as strands

which reproduces an object as closely as possible, continually coming
back to the same, the map discloses properties of unlocked structures.
Attention is drawn to a mode of production accommodating change.
The map is not based on the replication of a given status but is
rather seen as a construction opening up new venues, provoking
diverse readings. It is less a representation than an extension of a
circumstance to another level, always susceptible to modification.
While the map serves as a tool to decode a particular condition, it also
operates as a design instrument, engendering information from which
structures might unfold. Read as a text, the map perpetuates its own
construction through successive interpretations. This procedure yields

itecture's formal condition within such contexts,
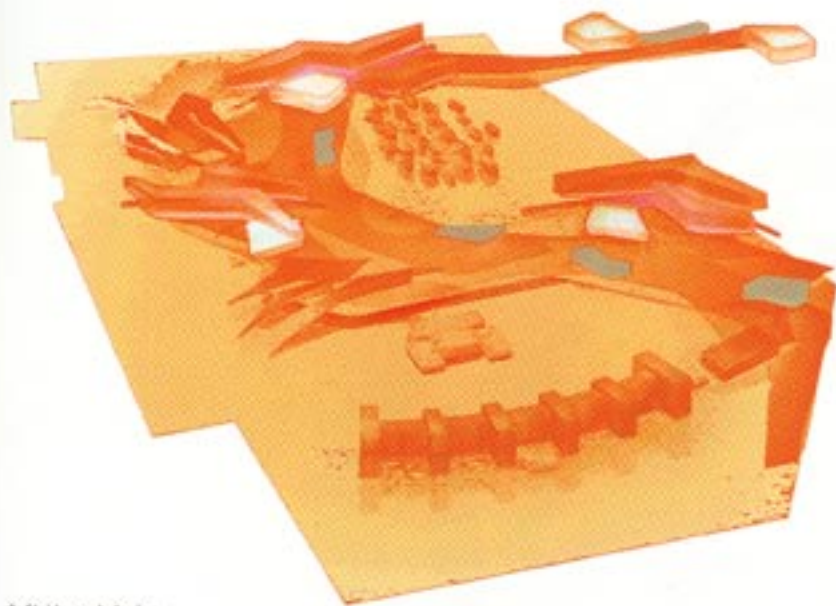
8. Fluid morphologies

a multi-layered product that in its architectural form does not comply
with the logic of a finite, closed object but exhibits characteristics
of indeterminate systems. The ensuing spatiality is due less to the
continuation of typologically delimited models than to the attempt to
circumscribe a topological field. A variable, constantly changing space
evolves defined "by a circulation of states."[4]

[4] Ibid., p. 21.

Palimpsests: The term palimpsest proposes a process-oriented, time-
based disposition of the city as a system in transition. Translations
of given urban conditions transgress mechanisms maintaining
them. The principle of the palimpsest opens a discourse on the city
focusing on its variability over time, one foregrounding the production
of territory as a function of mutative forces operating on its genetic
stock. From such a vantage point, traditional readings of the city
in pursuit of constants fall short when addressing the dynamics of
urban processes. In *The Land as Palimpsest*, André Corboz addresses
cartography as a methodological device to describe transformational
processes of urban form, in particular the changes in urbanization
patterns pertaining to the expansion of sprawl.[5] Understood as a text,
the map becomes a notation of prospective developments. Urban
territory may thus be read as a field of accumulated maps layered
onto one another. As in a palimpsest, defined as a parchment whose
text has been partially erased to accommodate a new one, each map
leaves traces affecting subsequent ones. Remains of former structures
are preserved as sediments within the fabric. The palimpsest catalyzes
the map as a design instrument. Corboz's method, in testifying to the
changing conditions of urban formation, foregrounds the transfer of
information from one state to another. The city constitutes a text, one
endlessly open to other forms of reading and writing.

[5] André Corboz, "The Land as
Palimpsest," *Diogenes 121*, Unesco,
1983.

necessitating research of design strategies — concerni
construction of territory.

9. Factor Time

Interpretative Fields

Traditional city planning morphology derives from a geometrical
legibility invested in urban structure. Formal compositional
principles, however, are insufficient to attend myriad conditions that
increasingly characterize territorial identity. The arrangement of
stable architectural ensembles structured by orthogonal grids, axial
or centralized ordering systems is no longer adequate to address the
complexity of the urban environment. Morphology is reconstituted
instead as a relational system of heterogeneous forces not describable
as known variables, but rather only discernable in relation to other
structures. Rather than through allegiance to predetermined
configurations, formal and spatial constructs emerge through the
interaction of perpetually changing processes. A domain of strategic
possibilities evolves, one engendering the constant renegotiation of
relationships between diverse structures. In this sense it is possible
to speak of formally indeterminate urban morphologies emerging
from reciprocal relationships with multiple forces. To the extent that
fields may be identified by the dynamics of process, the city manifests
itself as a system in motion, one marked by fluid states. Architecture
— within this dynamic conglomerate — loses its autonomy, thereby
deferring its status as a unified discipline. Suspending time-honored
taxonomies, dependability on hierarchical ordering principles gives
way to investigations of indeterminacy.

Architecture and urbanism develop out of relationships between
heterogeneous approaches, as multiple-coded systems whose
equilibrium depends on the interaction of all their underlying factors.
Such a network locates both within a differential field of possible
interpretations, one demarcated by manifold relationships between
architectonic form and allocations of probable content. This does not
mean to suggest the allowance of arbitrary interpretations. Urban
structural elements standing in relation to one another suggest
diverse trajectories of interpretation and varying correlations within a
network of possible propositions. Important is not the foregrounding
of any specific interpretation, but rather the condition of coexisting
interpretative potentials which immerse the contemporary urban
landscape within a perpetually transforming field of tension.

urbanism angélil

ing form-making processes — for the analysis and