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**Research working title:**

**A new meaning for the organic. The morpho-ecological approach of the organic city**

## **A new meaning for the organic. The morpho-ecological approach of the organic city**

*This research proposal introduces and elaborates a specific approach to urban design based on a redefinition and re-evaluation of the concept of 'organic' in a morpho-ecological and parametrical paradigm, assumed to unveil new ways of understanding and "planning" the city.*

The mechanization of various practices across the full spectrum of planning, production, processing, disseminated through consumption has made the purely formal planning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to have as result cities that many critics now consider over-determined. As they are too much the embodiment of one idea, too much the product of one system, too much the reflection of one moment in time and too inflexible, they have driven the city planning in a real crisis, the crisis of the planned city.

Architects and planners have always been forced to work with mechanical thought systems - simplified models of the city that imposed clear hierarchies, clear Cartesian geometries and the division of the parts and the whole, otherwise said: an order in dissonance with the complexity of the real city. This reductive way of thinking and working with the city brings forth important side effects in terms of ecology (pollution), social life (segregation and alienation), as well as being today in the center of the debates about the durability of the city.

Taking Latour's position, in the transition from the design based on matter of facts to the design based on matter of concerns, I build my current research on the belief that the objects that are surrounding us, the architecture and the cities we live in, aren't only material and objective, but with the help of the designers they can effectively participate to the urban life as actors - as hybrid beings. In our days, the awareness of the impact of urbanization on the environment seems to change the lens through which we look at the world, shifting from an external view to

an internal one, towards a perception of a smaller world in which *matters of concern* like inter-connection and the co-existence become important. In this new view, *the nature isn't that something vast and unreachable exterior to us* and thus, architects and urban planners seem to move their interest *from modernization to ecologization*. (Latour, 1998). The nature and human action are therefore unseparable because *there is no outside* (Sloterdijk, 2004), but only people, objects, technology and nature combined in a complex network of hybrid nature.

### **For a new organic approach**

*Human beings have a history because they transform nature. It is indeed this capacity which defines them as human. Of all the forces which set them in movement and prompt them to invent new forms of society, the most profound is their ability to transform their relations with nature by transforming nature itself (Maurice Godelier, 1986, The Mental and the Material).*

The majority of the historical cities are puzzles of fragments of premeditated and spontaneous arrangements, variously interlocked or juxtaposed. The two urban forms are always in a contiguous relationship; they metamorphose themselves making difficult their understanding. (Kostof: 1991). The reworking of prior geometries over time leaves urban palimpsests that make cities 'the result of a self-renewing power of design' (Braunfels: 1988). 'To say that everything has to be designed and redesigned (including nature), we imply something of the sort: it will neither be revolutionized, nor will it be modernized'.(Latour:2008) The typically modernists' separation of materiality and design is slowly being surpassed; the more objects are turned into things, the more 'matters of facts' are turned into 'matters of concern'. In this context, cities can be described as a hyper object, a hybrid emerged from the partition of our thought into different disciplines, *a monstrous explicit environment* (Sloterdijk) emerged out of our theoretical approaches which can be understood only through a similar, organic approach following Gideon's assertion that *only the organic can adapt to the organic (Mechanisation Takes Command)*.

In an extensive look through a sociological and philosophical lens, the city of today, this hybrid, hyper object, is characterized by an increased rate of change, it presents a powerful individualization of its social component, an ‘instantaneous world’. (Ascher: 2005), where because of the increased connectivity in the virtual space the inhabitant will live in connected isolation<sup>1</sup> (Sloterdijk: 2003) and where the mass production is replaced by the ‘mass customization’<sup>2</sup> (Stan Davis: 1996), a city in which the social contacts are visibly moving in the virtual space inducing a severe weakening of the urban space.

A new type of urban agglomeration made of multiplied, heterogeneous and discontinuous spaces and relationships produced by urban entities that are increasingly more loosely linked in terms of hierarchy and, progressively associated with dislocated and fluctuated dynamics constitutes the contemporary ‘metapolis’<sup>3</sup> (Ascher: 1995). The city is now a place of places, where numerous urban models coexist, each with its own qualities that make it different from the rest, an elastic and vibrant system defined by relationships between movements and events which are simultaneously interlinked and autonomous. A system that is similar - generic or recurrent - on a global scale and diversified – specific – scale - on a local scale. (Ascher: 1995) This new way of considering the city, not like an independent entity, but like an element in many networks brings forward a shift in the thinking about the city from the formal perspective to the process perspective, from the finite and defined towards the evolutionary.

In a time when *flocks* of fashionable metaphors *swarm* the domains of architecture and urban planning, this approach tries to raise the question of the organic as a method or as a metaphor? by situating the organic concept in a historical-materialist perspective that might offer a view of the "production of nature" that is more receptive to change, conflict and the evolution processes. By employing the thought image of *the foam* (Sloterdijk), this approach simultaneously surpasses the modernist binary interpretation of the world into two spheres, a social and a natural one, in dealing with a hybrid nature that follows the path opened by the Japanese Metabolists.

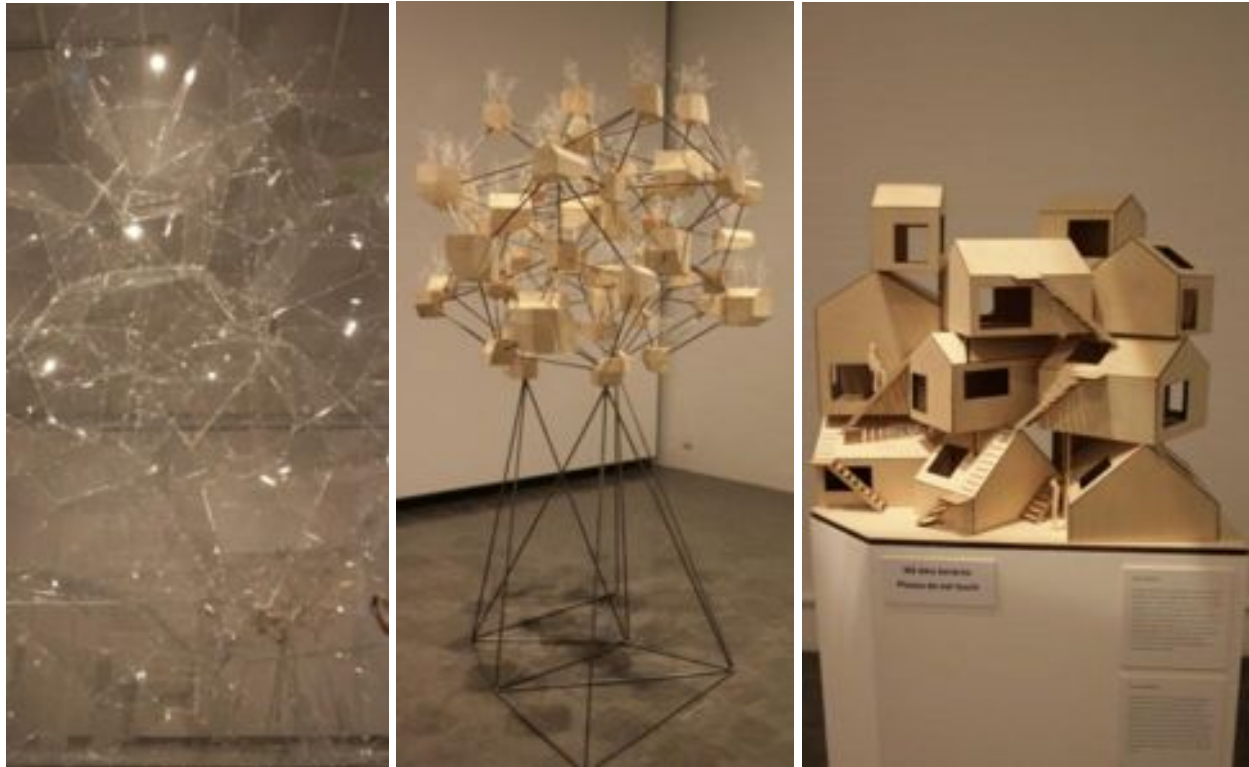
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<sup>1</sup> Peter Sloterdijk in his spherological theory uses the term “connected isolation” to define the condition of the man in the space seen as a immune system. The term was first used by the american architect Thom Mayne (Morphosis).

<sup>2</sup> Stan Davis: 1996 in Future Perfect and defined by Tseng & Jiao in 2001 as the production of goods and services according to individual wishes with almost the same efficiency as mass production.

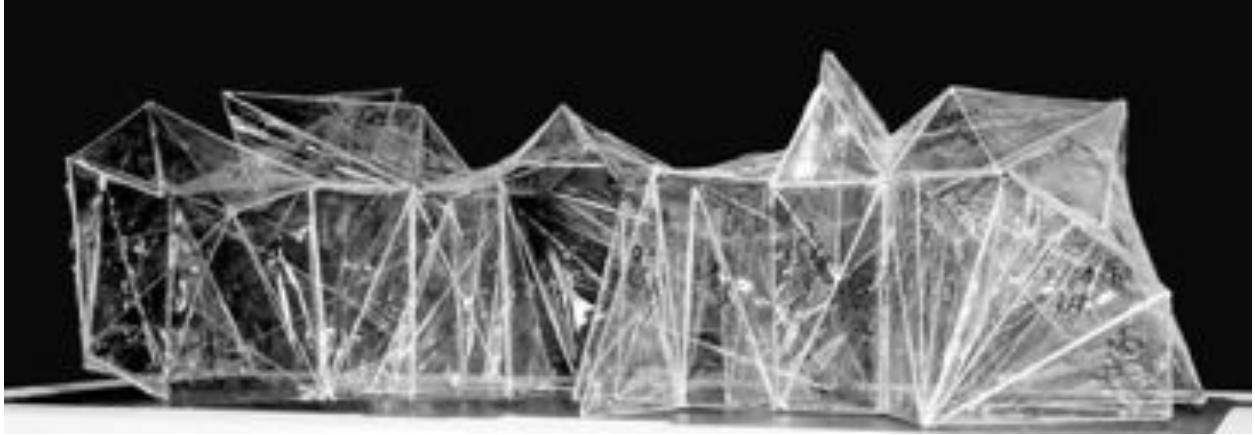
<sup>3</sup> The term “metapolis” introduced by the French sociologist Franchois Ascher, defines the new multiple and multifacetated dimension of the contemporary city.

## Illustrations:



*Louisiana Cloud- Sou Fujimoto (architect). From a furniture-like scale, to dwelling, and grand architecture to city-scale, the foam model projects possibilities across diverse scales - pictures from the Living exhibition – Catalina Ionita personal archive.*

„LIVING” exhibition, presented in the series FRONTIERS OF ARCHITECTURE III-IV, 1 June - 2 October 2011 at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen, <http://www.louisiana.dk/uk>; The cubes presented in the section Cells/Networks are built up as a cell structure, each of which represent a type of dwelling, a way of living. The cubes tell a story of personal choices, new building types, architectural visions and artworks, each of which reflects the way we live and dwell today.” This exhibition, curated by Kjeld Kjeldsen, centers on the way the development of the lifestyles and dwellings of the present and future draws on anthropology, which deals with human social behavior and mankind’s self-perception.



*Model of the Total Exhibition Structure, 'Living City, - Reproduced in Sadler, Simon, (2005), Archigram : architecture without architecture pp.55*

The Archigram group brought to the world 'a vision of the city as an environment conditioning our emotions' (Living Arts, no. 2), 'Living City', presented under the form of a manifest-exhibition in 1963. A manifesto for their belief 'in the city as a unique organism', which is more than a collection of buildings, but a means of liberating people by embracing technology and empowering them to choose how to lead their lives.(Sadler, 2005)



*left: Agricultural City Plan, Kisho Hurokava, 1960*

*right: Masdar City – Abu Dhabi, Foster + Partners, 2006*

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