

ON

REPRODUCTION

RE-IMAGINING

THE POLITICAL

ECOLOGY OF

URBANISM

**U&U - 9th International PhD Seminar in
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Department of Architecture and Urban Planning,
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After successful editions in Leuven, Venice, Barcelona, Paris, Delft, Lausanne, the next edition of the PhD seminars in urbanism and urbanization will be hosted in Ghent, Belgium. Like previous editions, the seminar seeks to bring together students writing their PhD thesis in urbanism, working within very different disciplinary traditions, combining historical research, design research and different forms of urban research.

The community supporting this seminar series over the years shares an interest in work that tries to speak across the divide between urban studies and the city-making disciplines, seeking to combine the interpretation of the process of urbanization with the commitment and care for the urban condition in all its manifold manifestations, and bring together urban theory and the theoretical grounding of urbanism.

The seminar welcomes all PhD students working in this mixed field. The call for papers of each edition foregrounds a set of themes that will be given special attention. We invite students to respond to these thematic lines, however, papers addressing other themes and concerns will also be taken into consideration.

On Reproduction¹ : Re-Imagining the Political Ecology of Urbanism

Each period of urbanization comes with its urbanisms. At times these are clearly defined and constitute distinct paradigms that fill handbooks, structure curricula and form schools. At other times they are contested and subject of vigorous debate. Today, urbanism is a field in flux, forced to engage in new urban questions and address pressing social and ecological concerns. As a direct result the contemporary list of epithets qualifying the notion urbanism has become virtually endless.

In this edition of the urbanism and urbanization seminar we want to think the urban question as a matter of political ecology, joining the transdisciplinary efforts to think nature inside the political economy of urbanization and to develop a perspective on urbanism that unites ecological and social justice concerns. In order to do so, we proceed from a notion which has defined urbanism within political economy, namely the question of 'social reproduction'.

Reproduction is a term rooted in Marxist vocabulary that provides an analytic lens to think the ways in which the logics of capitalist production have been socially embedded. Urban questions can be understood as questions of social reproduction, in which typically three concerns intersect: (1) the reproduction of life itself pointing to the bio-political core of urbanism; (2) the reproduction of value, thinking the division of labor, the role of paid and non-paid labor, the split between use and exchange value, internal and external economies, positive and negative externalities, etc.; (3) the reproduction of the institutional and infrastructural arrangements put in place to enable production processes, interrogating the fixed capital and infrastructure cities are made of. Urbanisms are specific propositions regarding the collective arrangements needed in order to address and organize questions of social reproduction in an urbanizing society.

Within the historical Marxist perspective 'social reproduction' has typically served as a critical lens to expose urbanism as an ideological project that provides the social support for capi-

talist production and uneven capital accumulation (Harvey, Castells, Prêteceille, ...). Beyond the ideological critique, starting from questions of social reproduction is also an invitation to think alternative urbanisms and imaginaries to this dominant story of uneven development, dispossession, gentrification and environmental injustice. Can we imagine urbanisms that do not treat social reproduction as an afterthought of production, as a necessary form of compensation. What do such reproductive urbanisms that renders the lives of people living in cities more just, more meaningful and more inclusive look like?

Revisiting the question of 'social reproduction', we find ourselves in the midst of discussions that are both new and old at the same time, discussions regarding the metabolic basis of our cities, the ways cities care for their citizens, keep them healthy or make them sick; the ways we share and distribute resources, both physical resources as well as social opportunities; the ways we feed our cities and fail to give citizens control over what they eat; the ways we make citizens mobile or not, car-dependent or blessed with multiple mobilities. The vigorous yet contested quest for alternative urbanisms makes us aware of the rather limited terms through which the field of urbanism has traditionally addressed questions of social reproduction, placing the emphasis on the reproduction of labor and the concomitant concern for housing and infrastructure. Thinking urbanism in the reproductive nexus is an invitation to think the biopolitical basis of urbanism in its full breath, reaching out to the key discussions that shape the urban agenda in the Anthropocene (or should we say 'capitalocene').

Alternative questions

Track #1

The return to questions such as water, energy, food, the circular use of resources brings back to the field of urbanism subjects that have been rendered absent by dominant urbanist discourse. The political ecology literature foregrounds the various ways in which processes of urbanization are deeply implicated in socio-natural processes. Urbanists are expanding their scope beyond the hard-wired questions of housing, producing an expanded understanding of the urban question. At the same time,

the operational translations that are made today of this new urban question herald a rather troubling reduction of the urban agenda within a functionalist framework. Today the discourse of urbanism is rapidly being taken over by the new-speak of the circular economy, smart use of resources, the shortening of supply chains, the reduction of carbon emissions, the balancing of ecosystem services, etc. Urbanists are making an effort to think the process of urbanization within the food, water, energy nexus, thinking urban services as eco-systems services, meeting the challenges of urbanization by nature-based solutions. These debates bring biopolitical questions back central stage, yet tend to produce a framing of these debates in a rather functionalist, technical and managerial manner.

We invite papers that reconstruct the intellectual itineraries urbanism has walked in addressing the seemingly new metabolic questions. How do we think key questions of social and environmental reproduction without falling back into a vulgar functionalist reduction of the city and urbanism?

Alternative movements

Track #2

The politics of the urban are defined by groups that join forces in addressing the specific conditions that the process of urbanization subjects them to. The process of urbanization literally moves and manoeuvres people into new positions, subjecting them to new predicaments that move them in turn. Urbanisms are defined by the intellectual mobilities and mental capacities that move people to not simply be subjected to the process of urbanization but rather to become the subject of their shared history. The reproduction of urbanisms is contingent upon the production of concrete experiences that make urban development part and parcel of a divided social consciousness and collective imaginary. This is true for the dominant urbanisms through which the urban condition is shaped, but also holds true for any effort to shape an alternative.

We invite papers that seek to think processes of urban formation and urban change in relationship to the urban movements from which they emerged and which defined their original

motivations. When were urbanisms part of food movements, housing movements, environmental movements, mobility movements, etc.? Which citizen groups, which political constellations, which communities of practice, which schools of thought, which disciplinary formations shape the urban project today?

Alternative sites

Track #3

Specific urbanisms typically define the dividing lines between what is internalized and externalized in the process of urbanization, between what is placed in the centre and what is rendered absent. Urban political ecology questions the social implications of the socio-political consequences of specific ecological choices and thereby forces us to rethink the specific positionalities and geographies that have undergirded the history of urbanism. Questions of social reproduction, questions regarding cooking, food growing, child rearing, education, maintenance and repair have, more often than not, been rendered absent, repressed and treated as secondary. The history of urbanism tends to reproduce the dominant geographies and territorialities of centre and periphery, here and overseas, production and consumption. Taking political ecology seriously requires us to write the history of urbanism from elsewhere. New food geographies invite us to think the urban food metabolism beyond the town-country divide. The metabolic perspective produces new geographies of waste but also new riches and resources previously neglected and undervalued.

We invite papers that move the history of urbanism to neglected historical sites. We welcome papers that actively seek to decolonize the field of urbanism and dismantle the core-periphery relationships, the geographies of uneven development reproduced by the urbanism.

Alternative economies

Track #4

The 2008 sub-prime mortgage crisis might be understood as a crisis of social reproduction, the crisis of the excesses to produce hou-

sing in the commodity form, packaged and repackaged as a financial product. The crisis produces at the same time a heightened awareness of the need to think the economies of cities beyond the market and imagine alternative economies that may save our cities from financial speculation, recover urban value as use value, re-localize the circulation of capital and that undergird the governance of the urban commons. Thinking alternative urbanism requires the construction of an alternative theory of value. The question of social reproduction is the obvious subject to think the transition from efficiency to sufficiency, to think urban development beyond growth.

We invite papers that reflect on the way in which urbanisms have served as the experimental growth for alternative reflections on the economies of cities, from the historical reflections of authors such as Henri Lefebvre, over Jean Remy, André Gorz, Jane Jacobs, Ivan Illich and others to contemporary efforts to think the economy of the commons, the role of community currencies, the sharing economy, the decommodification of housing, the pooling of resources. We invite people to think the role of design in defining the pertinent scales at which these new economies can be articulated, defining the collective units of interventions that articulate virtuous cycles of social reproduction and within the contours of which the balance between the quest for autonomy and the recognition of open logics of exchange can be articulated.

¹ The thematic focus of the 9th edition of the U&U seminars draws upon the collective work of Michiel Dehaene and Chiara Tornaghi and their joint efforts to mount the *International Forum for an Agroecological Urbanism* to be launched at the meeting of the AESOP sustainable food planning group in Coventry, UK, 14-15 November 2017 (<https://aesopsfp.wordpress.com/call-for-papers/>). See also: Tornaghi & Dehaene, Food as an urban question, and the foundations for a reproductive, agroecological, urbanism. (forthcoming). Dehaene, M., Tornaghi, C., and Sage, C. (2016) '5.2 Mending the metabolic rift – placing the 'urban' in Urban Agriculture'. In *Urban Agriculture Europe*. Ed. by Lohrberg, F., Scazzosi, L. Licka, L., and Timpe, A. Berlin: Jovis.

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Re-imagining the collective space

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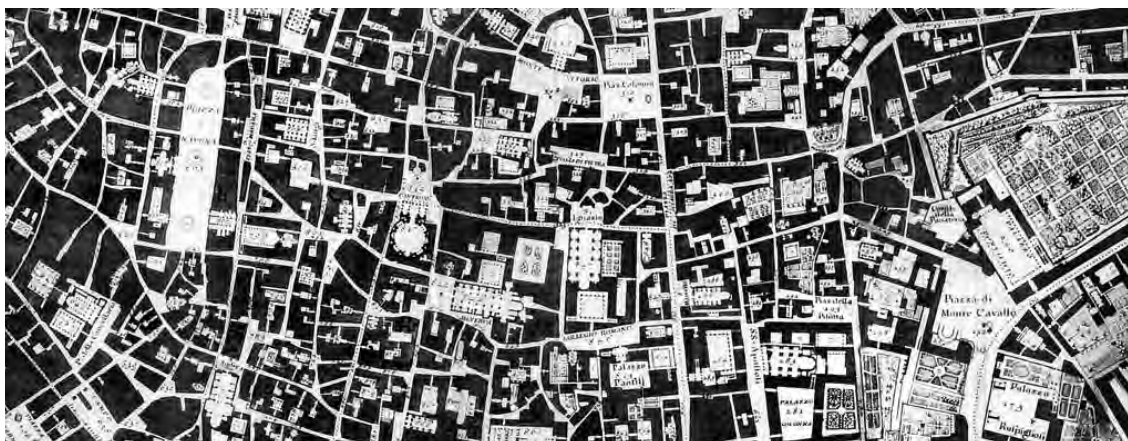
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A careful reading of the evolution of the central dualism opposing public and private domains reveals the relatively silent presence of a third entity: the collective space. In comparison with the importance of a third way in economic and political fields, architecture seems to suffer from a significant gap. This transdisciplinary approach brings to light, in the architectural domain, the theoretical discontinuity that has long been given to intermediate space, between public space and private property. The architectural challenge around its own third way has long been reduced to the gradual register, without asserting itself as a status, necessary and complementary to the other two components of urbanity. As a very ancient urban element, and relatively recurrent in the formation of cities, collective space presents both all the transcendent abilities of reproduction, but also a precious flexibility mainly linked to its absence of theoretical formulation. Let's give a new emancipated orientation to this underestimated component, overshadowed by a rooted binary reading of the city.

Producing and reproducing the city

Reproduction can be perceived in two opposite ways from the urban planning point of view, both as a driving force and as a slowing weight. *Driving force* because urban phenomena are precisely produced by reproducing, and especially by repeating the fundamental relation between public space and private volumes. This elementary continuity has given the traditional city its strength and longevity. Modern Movement has been particularly criticized for renouncing to the strong and fertile duality which opposed in a balanced way the public to the private. Then, this substantial quality was re-evaluated at the end of the 20th century. But both the principle of reproduction and the historical public-private duality could again be underestimated, at the beginning of a century characterized by reinvention, rupture and the search for alternatives. Nowadays, reproduction is widely negatively connoted: perceived as an obstacle to personal overtaking, and a resistance to overall innovation. But according to sustainability perspectives, there are probably still lessons to be learned from the capacity of such urbanity to last over time with the same intensity. Even in search of alternatives, historical depth can help to support vulnerable innovations. While keeping a critical attention, it may be appropriate, even today, to consider reproduction as an urban potentiality. As Bernardo Secchi noted in *La ville des riches et la ville des pauvres*, urban planning – but also architecture in the largest sense – should take advantage of the capacity of space to oppose the resistance of its own inertia to social change (Secchi 2015). He also attributes to space the capacity of proposing an oriented trajectory, linked to this pre-existing form. In this context, the ambiguous trajectory given by the powerful relationship between public and private space deserves to be studied with attention.



[fig.1] Extract from the Plan of Nolli: Rome, 1748. Source: Online interactive map University of Oregon

Modern attempts of circumventing

Historically the European city was based on a clear tension between the public and the private, mainly defined by sharing side walls and alignment on the street. Perceptions of the public-private relationship can be very diverse depending on location, time, gender or age, (Paquot 2015) but from an architectural point of view, reproduction of this founding duality has lasted through the centuries with a certain constancy [fig.1]. Persisting from Antiquity to medieval city, until the bourgeois city of the 19th century and even beyond. Still

today, the capacity of this efficient duality to generate urban situations is very clear. Especially the relationship between public and private produced by the *immeuble de rapport* continues to assert its relevance in most cities. In situations of lower density as well, models as 'terraced houses' lead to the same conclusions, considering it as an efficient confrontation. The various derivatives of these two architectural types have largely contributed to the spread and prosperity of this elementary and fruitful duality. Confronted with this strong legacy, urban historiography of the 20th century was enriched by a multitude of attempts to circumvent it. Modern overtaking of the fundamental duality between public and private spaces was based on social and political motivations, but also more directly on morphological arguments. The transition from the paradigm of texture to that of the object overthrew the traditional balance, considered outdated by the main leaders of the avant-garde. This architectural shift had immediate urban consequences, directly compromising the traditional definition of the street. Alignment giving way to an abundance of free spaces in need of definitions. The modern architects attributed to the large and continuous ground a universal tone, as well as the main common goods that are the sun, the air or the possibility of enjoying open views. It could reasonably have assumed a public character, if the experience of time, the social dysfunctions and the weakening of the welfare state had led to reconsider this initial attribution. The recent trend in France towards *résidentialisation* and clarification of domaniality in large housing complexes is undoubtedly the most striking illustration¹. In the chapter "Crisis of the object: impasse of the texture" from *Collage City*, Colin Rowe emphasized this problematic disproportionality: "there might be suggested the overthrow of one of modern architecture's least avowed but most visible tenets. This is the proposition that all outdoor space must be in public ownership and accessible to everybody; and, if there is no doubt that this was a central working idea and, has [...] become a bureaucratic cliché, there is still the obligation to notice that, among the repertory of possible ideas, the inordinate importance of this one is very odd indeed" (Rowe, Koetter, 1978, p.66).

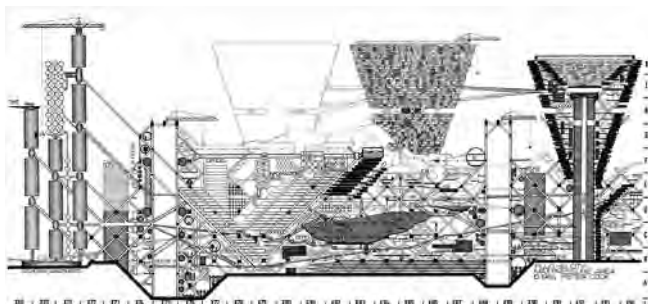


[fig.2] Le Corbusier, Paris, Plan Voisin, 1925, figure-ground plan. Source: *Collage City*, 1978

In the 1960s, megastructure supporters were facing the same difficulty by breaking free from the founding duality of the traditional city. They denied the impact of the parceling in the urban generation. The legal and technical chimeras they imagined evacuated the inescapable problem of the status attributed to spaces and built entities. In Metabolist images like 'Archigram' or 'Superstudio' a vague collective register prevails without clear attributions [fig.3]. Here is undoubtedly one of the main reasons for the obsolescence of such visions. In the shadow of these experiences among the most heroic of the Modern Movement, another modernity from North of Europe chooses more silently a completely different direction (De Solà Morales 1987). Less radical with its heritage, it fits in the historical trajectory given by the two main components of the urban. The street is preserved, as an elemental relationship between private building and public space. Rather than depreciate their relationship, it proposes and assumes the introduction of a third element: the collective space. Its most representative formalization is probably the block with central courtyard. In this device, the collective space is very clearly identifiable as a separate entity. It is physically dissociated and symbolically independent of the public space; as well complementary in terms of uses and self-representation. Cities like Copenhagen, Vienna, Hamburg or Amsterdam are full of housing complexes designed from this

¹ In France, the *résidentialisation* was one of the practices promoted during the first mission of the national agency for urban renewal (ANRU), between 2004 and 2014. As a tool mainly used for the renovation of social housing operations, its main aim was to personalize housing from resident's perception, but also to clarify maintenance responsibilities between social landlords and municipalities.

trptych [fig.4]. This position takes advantage of the potential offered by reproducibility, maintaining balanced and clear relationships between public, private and collective registers.



[fig.3] Left: Peter Cook, Plug-In City, Max. Pressure Area, Long Section, 1964. Source: Online Archigram Archival Project.

[fig.4] Right: Kay Fisker, Hornbaekhus in Copenhagen, 1923. Source: 'Dwelling in the metropolis: Reformed urban blocks 1890-1940 as a model for the sustainable compact city', Wolfgang Sonne.

The impasse of a binary reading

The victory of the street on majority of innovative visions of the Modern Movement is undoubtedly one of the most persistent assumptions of Postmodernism. It is enough to see with what determination the majority of current urban projects try to recover a traditional urban grammar. In the same way, the extreme violence still associated to Le Corbusier's *Plan Voisin* for Paris [fig.2] attests to the popular attachment not only for the historical thickness of the city, but perhaps also for its familiar structure. That should give the public-private duality a confident actuality at the dawn of the 21st century. The *îlot ouvert* characteristic of the 'City of the Third Age', as defined by Christian de Portzamparc, could be seen as a cautious return to the revisited efficiency of the traditional city. Being more composed and less systematic, it will difficulty reach the same susceptibility to reproduction. Of all the most daring morphological innovations, none has yet succeeded in surpassing the success still anchored throughout the world of aligning private elements along a public domain². From there, the street would still have promising prospects ahead. However, some recent dynamics could certainly disturb this clear horizon. The weakening of the welfare state regarding to the market weight could have a direct impact on the integrity of the public sphere. It could upset the fundamental balance with the private sector. In parallel, the successive crises - economic, social and environmental - engendered among others by contemporary capitalism change the scope of private register in the construction of the city³. These economic, political and social disturbances are also accompanied by architectural stigma. For about twenty years, the popular success and the enthusiasm of a new generation of architects for informal and participative architecture is one of its visible markers. The most archaic driving forces of the city are questioned – first of all the responsibility by private property⁴ – on behalf of citizen appropriation and revaluation of the collective value of urbanity. These recent attempts to circumvent the relationship between public and private would be like reminiscences of modern utopian visions previously described. Images produced by this informal orientation generally contain the same confusion of the collective register as projected by their predecessors 50 years earlier. Despite the announcement of a prolonged triumph of the street, all these pendular attempts of circumventing, and especially the last one – which we certainly do not yet know the full extent – alert us about the need to go beyond the binary reading of the urban, with which the city continues to be thought.

The renewed importance of a third way

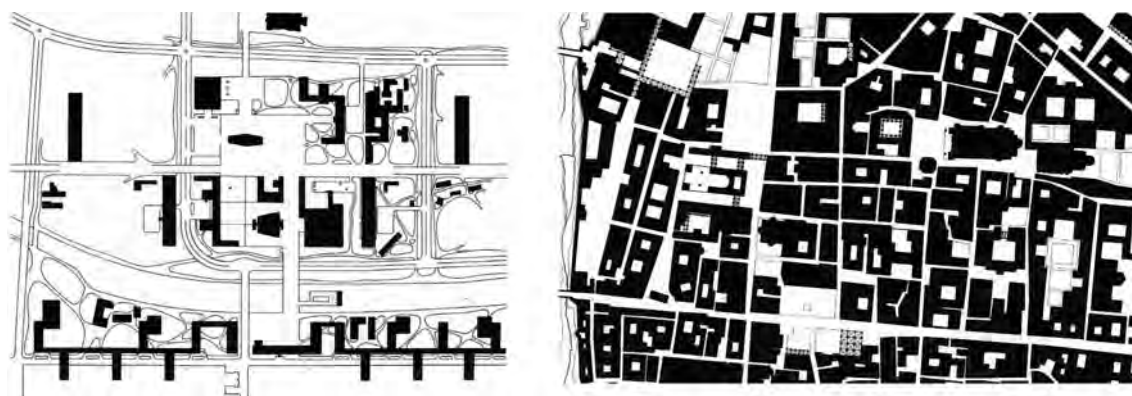
While the societal context is experiencing an unprecedented shift regarding to the environmental crisis and the awareness of transnational citizenship, the majority of disciplines are mobilizing in search of new balances. The political ecology of urban planning is also on the alert, in search of profound redefinition. Taking part in this effervescence, it searches for bearings beyond its own disciplinary limits. The recent enthusiasm for the notion of 'common' seems to have already reached a significant part of the protagonists of urban planning – in a more or less explicit way – both those who think the city as much as those who built it (Stavrvides 2016). Such a success, within the field of architecture, of a notion derived from the social sciences (Ostrom 1992) invites to specify its possible appropriations in spatial and conceptual terms. It

² Considering that despite all the cultural variations related to the interpretations of each situation, the fundamental relationship remains about the same on the architectural level.

³ Real estate consequences of the 2008 financial crisis can only fuel a certain mistrust of the private sector's ability to participate in the production of the urban in a balanced and sustainable report. Examples of aborted cities in Spain are particularly significant.

⁴ Could also be developed the calling into question of the role of experts and craftsmen, as defined in professional federation schemes. Participatory policies pushed to the extreme could lead to the denial of some specialization, in favor of the 'do it yourself principle'.

reveals a general transdisciplinary interest for the intermediate register, between the public domain and private property. It also invites to imagine architectural equivalents. Is the interdisciplinary actuality of the 'common' can be seen as an opportunity to bring new lights, and new dynamics, to the manipulation of the collective register in the architectural design?⁵ At least, it could help to define what is the collective space today.⁶ Unlike the majority of economic or political approaches, motivated by seeking alternatives to existing governance schemes (Coriat 2015), the architectural equivalent – strong of its previous experiences and recognizing the millennial capacity of the street to generate urban – could apprehend the introduction of the 'common' as the addition of a complementary element. A third component rather than a third direction. Recovering advantage of reproduction. As a very ancient urban element, and – in its variety of forms and intensity – relatively recurrent in the formation of cities, collective space presents the transcendent abilities of reproduction, as well as a precious potential, provided it is considered a full urban element. The challenge would be to leave the collective space of the gradual register, too long considered an intermediary and not as a status in itself. A status with its own theoretical substance, with its own questions of formalization, according to the two other major components of which it should be distinguished. The alterity of the collective space, respecting to urban surrounding, takes then on renewed importance. Its level of association with a building complex can be relevant, as well as its degree of neutrality confronted to the public space. It could be associated with architectural elements, even a language, which goes beyond the gradual question and that of simple programming⁷. The different social contexts and cultural traditions could also bring useful thicknesses⁸. It takes part of searches for alternatives to the individualist withdrawal. The persistent expectation of spatially experiencing the collective action – on localized scales and with materialized representations – also gives the collective space a new amplitude and current ambitions.



[fig.5] Le Corbusier, Project for Saint-Dié and Parma, figure-ground plan. Source: *Collage City*, 1978

Representing the collective space

Re-imagining collective spaces in urban terms involves rethinking their modes of representation⁹. For this purpose, the work of Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter is particularly enlightening. In *Collage City*, they propose a graphic interpretation of the founding urban duality between public and private components. Since then, this transcription by a graphic black and white dichotomy has become emblematic [fig.5]. In the same publication, criticizing the tendency – originally benevolent – of modern architects to consider any free space as a public domain, they also notice the need to introduce intermediate registers. Between the black solid equivalent to the private, and the white void of the public space (or inversely), it would be like imagining a new element: the grey. By introducing grey, it immediately raises the central question of the alterity of represented spaces, in relation to public and private spaces around. Under what conditions is the collective space capable of assuming an autonomous character, according to a different status than public or private one? Or why is it

⁵ This is the general research question envisaged for the thesis. The research explores different definitions of 'common' and their impact on the field of architecture, according to five entries that directly affect the architectural design.

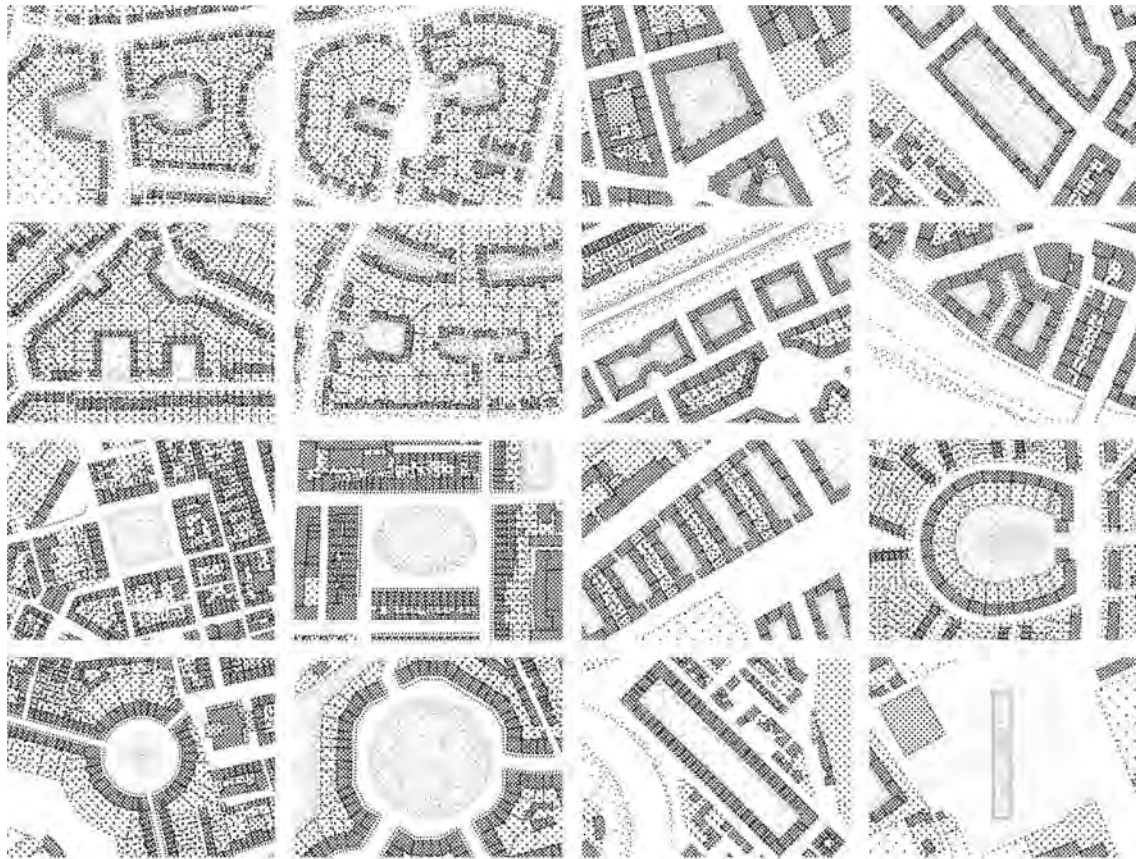
⁶ The study of the alterity of the collective space is one of the five working packages proposed in the thesis, along with authority, cohabitation, neutrality and typology. Each of these thematic sections will be developed according to its own aspects, and will assume its differentiations adapted to the specific requirements of addressed topics.

⁷ It is striking to observe the trend towards collective programs like 'shared gardens', which is placed with approximation, rather than thinking the whole in a broader spatialized vision. It could be the mark of a certain theoretical insufficiency around the collective space.

⁸ Interpretations of the collective scale can vary enormously from one culture to another. This is what we learn from reading *Faire Société. La politique de la Ville aux États-Unis et en France* (Donzelot, Mével, Wyvekens, 2003). The main distinctions deserve to be explored more precisely in order to identify some major categories of actions, useful for project design.

⁹ Developing a mode of representation expressing the formalization modalities of collective space is one of the objectives expected in the research.

often confined to a gradation of one or the other, which is more or less intense? The same question can be asked in terms of hue. For representing this third component, should grey be considered as a colour halfway between black and white? or is should it be perceived as a set of variable shades from one or the other? Such enlightenment would clarify the current and imprecise use of the distinction between the collective, semi-private or semi-public space. There are undoubtedly situations for which colour would more easily refer to an own status, asserting itself as an autonomous register. Others would be more directly perceived as declensions of public or private space. However, even relatively autonomous, collective space could also be prisoner of the polarity in which it is taken. This third register would be fundamentally blocked between two entities to which it can alternately and indefinitely tend. A first attempt tries to escape variations of nuances, using a single hue for the collective space [fig.6]. The challenge of representations of such spaces is to succeed in introducing several variables, by defining the criteria for varying indicators (surrounding architectural language, possibility of access to non-resident people, passage or impasse, etc.), without giving up the uniformity of the represented register. Here the variable retained corresponds to their degree of permeability. What is highlighted is the physical perception of their limits. In this case, variations are not expressed by changing hues but intensifying the pattern. Only one colour is used. It asserts itself as an entity. It is an entity held between two polarities, but which claims a certain autonomy. Introducing grey as a colour – between the black and the white of the historic city – would allow to fully re-imagine the role of collective spaces, in all their intensity and specificity.



[fig.6] Atlas of collective spaces (in progress). From left to right : *Raymond Plain* and *Raymond Close* in Welwyn Garden City, *Hands Green* and *The Quadrangle* in Welwyn Garden City, *Bebelhof* in Vienna, *Hornbaekhus* in Copenhagen, *Closes* on *Hampstead way* in London, *Dellcott Close* and *Brokett Close* in Welwyn Garden City, *Krugerhof* in Amsterdam, *Stengodset* in Stockholm, *Queens Square* in Bath, *Bedford Square* in London, *Dulsberg-North* in Hamburg, *Hufeisensiedlung* in Berlin, *The Circus* in Bath, *Moray Place* in Edinburgh, *Climat de France* in Alger, *Unité d'habitation* in Marseille. Elaborated by the author, from 'Google Earth' datas.

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